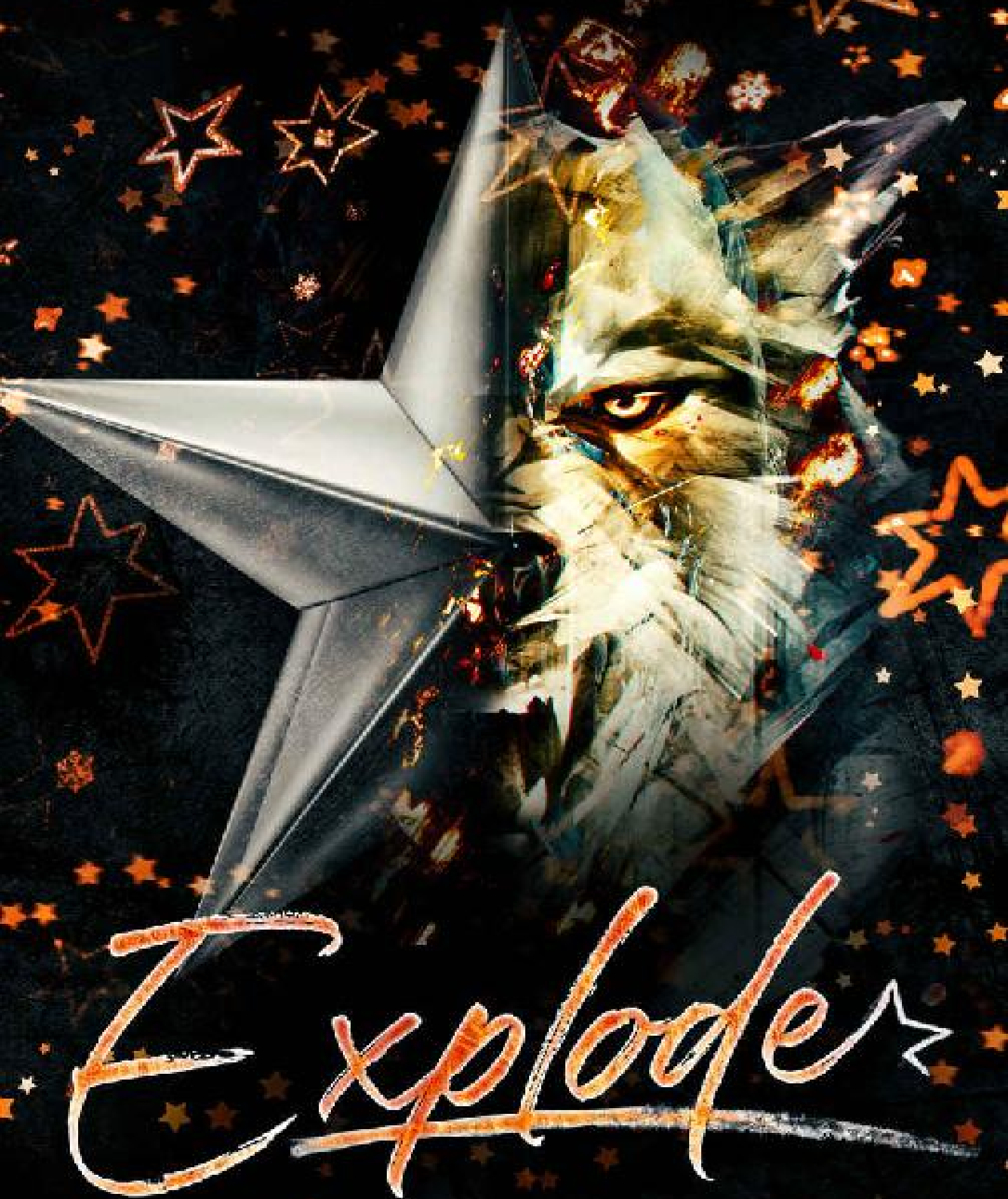


E. K HUNTER



Explode

HOLLOWS BAY TRILOGY BOOK THREE

Explode

Hollows Bay Trilogy (Book three)

E. K Hunter

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To everyone whose heart was broken by the ending of
Implode.

I hope I redeem myself.....

Foreword

Readers should be aware that this is a dark romance with morally gray characters and contains the following topics that may be triggering for some readers:

Murder

Torture

Sexual assault references (Not detailed on page)

Kidnap

Dub-Con

Animal abuse (Mild reference, not detailed on page)

Playlist

I'm Gonna Show You Crazy- Bebe Rexha

My Immortal- Evanescence

Sending Light (For Lucas)- Skyechristy

Try Sleeping With A Broken Heart- Alicia Keys

Lie To Me- 5 Seconds Of Summer & Julie Michaels

Psycho- Taylor Acorn

Supernova- Nic D & Loveless

Praying- Kesha

Loud- Sofia Carson

Jokes On You- Charlotte Lawrence

Head Above Water- Avril Lavigne

Rise Up- Andra Day

Angel Of The Morning- Juice Newton

Love The Way You Lie- Eminem & Rihanna

Cinderella Snapped- Jax

Prologue

Hendrix

“Where the fuck is he?” I growled, pacing up and down the length of the warehouse, and checking my watch for the hundredth time.

“He’ll be here soon, Boss. You know Jacob is shit at timekeeping,” Alex said, blowing his last puff of cigarette smoke out and stubbing the butt on the floor. I fucking hated the stench, but it was a small price to pay to have someone as loyal as Alex by my side.

He had a point. Jacob had always been shit at timekeeping. Every time I arranged to meet him when he worked for my former boss, Kai Wolfe, he’d turn up late. Even if it was just one or two minutes.

Drove me fucking insane.

But what he lacked in punctuality, he made up for in enthusiasm. From the day I met Jacob, I saw the potential in

him, and it was only too easy to get him in my pocket instead of Kai's.

I supposed I could forgive the inability to keep to the time in exchange for having a faithful servant.

There was a little part of me though that worried his tardiness wasn't *just* because he was incapable at telling time. In the last week, bodies of my men had turned up, and I was beginning to think the tides were turning on the run of good luck Max and I had been enjoying these past six months.

Six months.

Six months since I'd shot and killed Kai Wolfe, the man who thought he was indestructible. Six months of showing the people of Hollows Bay that *I* was in charge, even if it wasn't strictly true.

To the people of Hollows Bay, whether they worked for the Wolfe organization, or were just a resident, I was now their king.

It was a tough few weeks to start with, especially as Kai had put the word out that I betrayed him. But I'd been making waves *months* before that, and I had enough people on my side to take the throne. Those who didn't want to work for me, well, they learned the hard way, and there were more than a few who refused to cooperate.

Thanks to the shootout at the warehouse where I shot Kai, there were only a few survivors left on our side, meaning only

a handful of trusted people knew the truth: Max Thorne was the real King of Hollows Bay.

It wasn't always going to be this way, with me in charge. Max intended on killing Kai and claiming the throne for himself, but after Kai almost beat him to death, he needed time to recover. He was barely clinging onto consciousness when I dragged him from the warehouse, so I made a decision. A decision Max approved of when he came to from his injuries.

The night of the shooting, I took control of the city, and I would remain in control until Max recovered. But Max and I slowly realized the benefits of him remaining hidden in the shadows. He was the Chief of Police, he had access to valuable intelligence, contacts across the country, hell, across the world if we wanted to take our control that far.

And so we decided. He would carry on playing his role as the chief, pulling strings from behind the scenes for a while longer, while the masses of Hollows Bay would believe I was in charge.

The problem was, I was enjoying being in charge a little too much.

Everything had been going well until a week ago, when over several nights, the bodies of five of my men turned up dead. All five of them had once been Kai's men but had since proven their loyalties to me. I didn't know if it was a coincidence that these five men had been killed, or whether the attacks were targeted.

Either way, it wasn't good news.

Each of them had met their fate in rather grotesque ways, and the most recent body had been dumped outside Sapphire, the club I now owned, just like I owned all of Kai's businesses.

As the club was closing and customers were leaving, the body was tossed from a speeding van. It was the body of Vince, who once upon a time had been Kai's bodyguard until he joined my side. He'd been gutted, his bowels hanging on the outside, and the smell was so bad I'd vomited all down myself.

I thought I had issues, but whoever was wiping out my men was seriously deranged.

Where the fuck was Jacob?

I paced up and down the warehouse, the men I had brought with me watched on silently, but they knew better than to speak. They thought Kai was ruthless, but he was nothing compared to how bad I was.

My mind churned with questions as to where the fuck Jacob could be. Yes, he was often late, but it was getting on for nearly an hour, and he fucking knew better than to keep me waiting this long. I ground my teeth in frustration, the apprehension that something had happened to him growing deeper in my gut.

Had Jacob met the same fate as my other men?

I didn't know who was responsible for killing my men, but I had a damn good idea. Under Max's instructions, I stopped

paying the Bianchis the 5% fee the Wolfes were meant to pay them as part of the peace treaty. A treaty that had been in place since the war old Theodore Wolfe started with them years ago.

I always thought Kai should have challenged the treaty, it wasn't his fault his great-grandfather was an arrogant prick and started a fight he couldn't win, but Kai was too much of a coward. He didn't want to start an unnecessary war.

Max, on the other hand, didn't give two fucks about the treaty. His view was that it wasn't his deal to keep because he'd never grown up as a Wolfe, and as soon as we took over Hollows Bay, one of the first things Max did was order me to stop the 5% payment to them.

If I was honest, I was surprised it had taken this length of time for them to retaliate. But it didn't matter if they did, we were prepared for a war. On the night I killed Kai, Max's gang, The Stags, were on standby to storm the city and take over Kai's gang, The Shadows.

Within an hour of news breaking that Kai had died, I gave the order for them to strike, and they successfully claimed the streets.

Every single gang member of The Shadows was given an option- work for me, or die. Suffice to say, most chose the sensible option to work for me. The gangs combined, and under the name of The Stags, I now had a powerful street gang at my disposal.

So yeah, we were ready if the Bianchis wanted to bring a war to the city.

It was possible that other families were behind the murders. Now word had spread to other cities that I was in charge, any number of Kai's old enemies could be behind the deaths, making a play for my city. I was only too happy to let them bring the war to my door.

It was time for the world to find out just how powerful I could be.

Another few minutes passed, and there was still no sign of Jacob. I cursed under my breath. The fucker better have a good reason for his lateness. I pulled my phone out and tried calling him, but like the last four times I'd tried, there was no answer.

"Fucking hell," I roared, my voice echoing around the large space of the warehouse.

I'd just taken a large delivery of cocaine that was being cut and separated in the back. The sooner Jacob got here, the sooner we could get the product moving, and the sooner money would come in.

I resisted the urge to throw my phone against the wall, settling instead with firing a text to Jacob telling him to phone me as soon as he could or expect to be having a one way conversation with my gun.

"Maybe he's busy fucking one of those pretty girls at Sapphire," Lawrence, one of my men, sniggered. He annoyed me, he always had to make a sarcastic comment or a joke, and quite frankly, he'd tested my patience once too often.

He was one of the original Stags, and not someone Carlos Rigby was a fan of either. Fuck knows why Carlos, the head of The Stags, put up with him for as long as he had.

I stopped my pacing in front of him and smirked as if laughing at his comment. After all, Jacob did like to spend most nights at the club, fucking one of the whores who worked there.

Without warning, I whipped my gun out. Lawrence's eyes widened in fear before the light was snuffed out. The bang from my gun reverberated off the walls as Lawrence's body crumpled to the floor, blood pooling from the gaping hole in his head.

The few men who had chuckled at Lawrence's witty remark fell silent and stood to attention, their gazes anywhere but at me or the dead body, not wanting to end up like their comrade.

"About fucking time," Alex muttered under his breath, smirking at the blood oozing from the hole in Lawrence's forehead.

As I was putting my gun away, a loud screeching noise came from outside, the sound of wheels spinning. Instead of putting my gun away, I held it firmly in my hand, safety off, and ready to fire again. Storming over to the door, I yanked it open in time to see a dark van come to a brief stop at least twenty feet away. I raised my gun but everything happened quickly.

The side door of the van slid open, and a body was thrown out by a masked figure. The van took off before the door was even closed. I fired my gun at the retreating vehicle, but all my bullets did was ricochet off the bodywork as the van sped out of the compound.

There was no license plate, no marks on the van, nothing to identify the black van from any other black van in Hollows Bay. It was eerily familiar to the time me and some Stags delivered the dead body of Isaac to Kai all those months ago.

The men who had been standing behind me leaped forward the second I'd fired my weapon, and they too had drawn their guns but lowered them when the van disappeared.

“Go check!” I ordered Alex.

He scanned the area before approaching the body, his gun poised ready to fire if needed. When he reached the body, he kicked it before rolling it over. Even with the distance between where I was standing and the body, I could see it was Jacob.

Alex's face paled. “Boss, you better come and see this.”

I crossed the lot, the closer I got, the easier it was to see exactly what had happened to him. I swallowed down the hint of disappointment as I reached Alex's side and looked down at the body. Good men were hard to find.

Jacob didn't have a top on. Instead, his torso was covered in black and blue bruises, along with dried blood. Lots of dried blood from slash wounds which had started to scab over,

implying they had been caused at least several hours ago, if not longer.

The last time I spoke to Jacob was over twenty-four hours ago when I'd arranged to meet him at the warehouse. Whoever had done this to him had tortured him for at least the duration of a day.

His injuries were obvious- dislocated shoulders, smashed kneecaps, fingers chopped off. But those injuries weren't what made the bile rise in my throat.

Carved into his forehead was the word:

'COWARD'

The blood in my veins turned into a raging inferno as I stared down at the carving. The word held only one meaning, but before I had time to process it, the shrill ring of a phone sounded, making both Alex and me jump out of our fucking skins. It took a few seconds to realize the ringing was coming from Jacob's pants.

"Get it out!" I barked at Alex.

He knelt and patted Jacob's legs, finding the phone and pulling it out. He handed it to me, and as he did, I saw it wasn't his usual phone, which meant whoever did this to him had his personal phone, and therefore now had access to a lot of information about my business.

“You little cunt,” I growled when I answered the phone, not giving whoever was at the other end a chance to speak. “I will cut off your balls and shove them down your throat for what you have done!”

I was met with silence for a beat before they spoke. “Nice to speak to you too, Hendrix. What makes you think someone with a set of balls sliced and diced young Jacob?”

My heart stopped beating in my chest at the voice I hadn’t heard in six months, but one I’d never forget.

The one that got away.

If things had gone the right way, Riley would be chained up in my penthouse right now, used and abused as my own personal sex doll. The things I had planned on doing to that girl, *Christ*. But I’d had to make a choice, save Max or take Riley, and at that moment, I needed Max more.

I’d done what I could to track her and Miles down when they ran from Hollows Bay after a video was sent to a number of key figures. The video showed Dr. Harris attempting to bring Kai back to life as he was strapped to a number of machines. One machine beeped long and loud, indicating no pulse was to be found.

The video in which the doctor called Kai’s time of death.

I wanted to see his body as proof that he really had died, but by the time my men got to Dr. Harris’ surgery, the place had been cleared out. There was no sign of Kai’s body, Miles, or Riley. When Max was well enough, he’d examined the video

in great detail, dissecting the digital information behind the video, and he eventually concluded it was real.

The great Kai Wolfe was no more.

As for Miles and Riley, they were nowhere to be found. Wherever they were, they'd done a damn good job at staying hidden. I didn't know if they had anyone helping them, but I doubted it. I'd put out a warning to all my contacts that if anyone was found helping them, they'd face the same treatment Miles was going to get when I got my hands on him—his head on a spike.

“You expect me to believe *you* killed Jacob, Riley?” I replied through gritted teeth, trying my fucking hardest to remain cool and not at all affected that she was on the end of the line. Even after all this time, just hearing her voice was enough to make my dick twitch. I'd fucked most of the girls in Sapphire while imagining they were Riley, but none of them lived up to the fantasy.

I still itched with the need to get my hands on her.

“Believe what you want, I couldn't give a shit either way. There is something you should know though,” she paused, and I couldn't help but keep my mouth shut to hear what she had to say. “I'm coming for you. And when I do, by the time I'm through, you'll be wishing Kai was still alive to have tortured you instead of me. Consider this a warning.”

The line went dead before I had a chance to reply, and as white-hot rage coursed through my body, the sound of a ticking clock started somewhere nearby.

I stared at Alex, looking him up and down. Stupid really, he wasn't fucking ticking. But he was looking at me in exactly the same way, as if he thought *I* was ticking.

Seemingly coming to the same conclusion that neither of us were ticking like a fucking clock, we both glanced down at Jacob. I raked my eyes down his body, looking for what the source of the noise was, and it was then that I noticed a wound roughly stitched together, disappearing under the waistline of his pants.

I reached down and lowered the band to find a flashing red light going off under the skin, and it became crystal fucking clear the ticking was coming from a device implanted there.

It took less than ten seconds to realize the little cunt had put an IED in his gut.

“Run!” Alex shouted. We both turned and ran towards the cover of the warehouse, and as we reached the door, I turned back just in time to witness Jacob's body being torn apart from a small explosion.

I lifted my arm to cover my eyes, trying to protect my face from the heat of the raging fire now burning where Jacob's body lay moments ago.

Mutters came from all around me, and Alex was talking, but I couldn't hear what he was saying. All I could focus on was the roaring in my head, my thoughts consumed with a little girl who thought she could come for me.

It was laughable.

I hope she did come for me because I was going to have a lot of fun finally making Riley Bennett mine.

Chapter 1

Riley

“**A**gain,” Miles barked as he held the boxing mitts up to cover his face.

Sweat dripped down my back, my little pinky throbbed from where it had been curled into a fist inside the boxing gloves for the last hour, and the muscles in my arms ached.

Despite that, I still raised my hands, ready to strike Miles again. It didn't matter that my little finger hurt like a motherfucker, thanks to Max Thorne dislocating it. If anything, the pain in my finger distracted me from the pain in my heart.

Six months. Six long-ass months had passed since the night my heart didn't just crack, but shattered into a million pieces, leaving no hope of it ever being repaired.

It's funny, when I met Kai Wolfe, the man who changed my life, I'd agreed to his stupid deal to be his for six months. At

the end of that time, I was going to walk away with my sister, Angel, and the promise of a better life for her.

Never in my wildest dreams did I consider that I'd fall head over heels in love with the man, agree to marry him, only to wind up losing him several days later.

In the past six months, I'd lost count of the amount of times I lay in bed wondering what life would have been like if I hadn't met Kai. Or, if I hadn't fallen for him, and Angel and I had walked away after our agreement had come to an end.

But I never allowed myself to think how different the last six months would have been had Kai survived being shot in the heart by someone he had once considered a friend, *a brother*.

I focused on my breathing as I punched the pads, watching Miles' footwork as we danced around the garden I trained in. I had several trainers, but Miles was by far the hardest on me.

I wish I could say that after Kai died, I developed superhuman badass powers that meant I could take on my enemies and bring them all down with a single punch, it simply didn't happen. What did happen though, was the instant Miles told me Kai was dead, something inside me switched.

If I was honest, the switch was already halfway to being thrown by that point anyway. I'd lost so many people I cared for thanks to Max fucking Thorne, and that traitorous asshole, Hendrix Becker, and the minute Miles uttered those words, all I could think about was vengeance.

Vengeance for Danny, the man who had become like a brother to me and Angel. For Diana, my old boss who'd died when Hendrix tried to kidnap Angel. For Jacqueline and Thomas, the loyal staff members who'd both tried to stop Hendrix from getting to me, and of course, vengeance for Kai.

The man who stole my heart.

It wasn't just vengeance though. Until the threat had been dealt with, I couldn't risk going near Angel. She was safe, for now at least, living her best life on the other side of the world, and that's where she would stay for the foreseeable.

I hadn't once seen or signed to my sister in the time that had passed. I knew the second I saw her, I'd want to walk away from everything Miles and I had planned. Miles was in contact with the security team protecting her, but I'd told him that unless something happened to her, I didn't need to know how she was doing. I didn't even speak to her on Christmas Day, the first time ever, and that wounded me deeper than any knife could.

Instead, all the anger and pain I was feeling at the loss of Angel and Kai, I used it to keep me focused on the one goal Miles and I had in mind.

Kill Max and Hendrix and take back Hollows Bay.

In truth, I didn't give a shit who ruled Hollows Bay. As far as I was concerned, I was going to help Miles take back the city, and as soon as the gruesome twosome were dead, Miles could do what he wanted with it. Angel and I would disappear, start a new life, and figure out a way to live without Kai.

But apparently, it didn't work like that.

A few nights after Kai died, I'd told Miles that as soon as I helped him take back Hollows Bay, he wouldn't see me for dust. That was when he dropped the bomb.

On the evening of our wedding, while Kai was waiting for me to make an appearance so we could exchange our vows, he'd told Miles that if anything were to happen to him, he wanted to leave everything to me.

And I mean everything.

Including Hollows Bay.

Of course, the asshole didn't bother telling me that part when I said 'I do.' If he'd told me he planned on making me his heir to Hollows Bay if anything happened to him, I would have thought twice about going ahead with the wedding. But then, that's why he hadn't told me, because he knew damn well what I'd say.

Despite the seriousness with how Miles delivered the news, and the fact I was grieving for my dearly departed husband, I'd doubled over laughing. But laughter turned to tears when Miles didn't laugh with me, and I realized he was being serious.

Deadly serious.

Tears turned to anger. Anger at Kai's stupidity. Anger at the fact he had made such an important decision on a whim. Anger at him for fucking dying in the first place. Miles watched helplessly as I smashed up the hotel room we were

holed up in after getting out of Hollows Bay hours after Kai died.

After that, I sat in stunned silence for hours until I came to the conclusion that it didn't matter whether I was destined to rule Hollows Bay or not.

It was *never* going to happen.

I was a runaway pole dancer until I met Kai, I hadn't been brought up in the life Kai and Miles had, and I certainly didn't have visions of ruling a goddamn city.

It was an insane idea.

When I finally found my words again, I told Miles that I didn't give a fuck what Kai had left to me, as soon as the dickhead duo were dealt with, I'd pass the reins to him. Miles clasped my shoulder and said we'd talk about it another day.

We'd ignored the elephant in the room ever since then.

Miles threw a punch at me, but I quickly ducked and jabbed him in the gut. He let out an '*oomph*,' but it wasn't hard enough to do any damage.

That was the problem. Miles could teach me how to throw a punch, he could teach me how to restrain a grown man, even teach me how to shoot a gun and hit my target, but I wasn't a fighter. In fact, unless I was backed into a corner and *had* to fight my way out, I'd never really been one for violence.

When we'd arrived at the house we'd lived in for the last six months, Miles insisted on me learning how to defend myself. I'd entertained the idea purely on the basis that I never wanted

to be in a position of weakness where Max or Hendrix were concerned ever again. But fighting Miles, I just didn't have it in me.

“Come on, Riley, you can do better than that,” he wheezed.

Since leaving Hollows Bay, Miles had cut his hair short, and his muscles were bigger than before. I supposed spending every spare minute working out his anger in the gym would do that. Plus, not having any women around to fuck his frustration out didn't help.

It wasn't like Miles could waltz into a bar and pick up a woman, he was a wanted man. Keeping his head firmly on his shoulders was more important than Miles getting his leg over.

I threw a punch at the pad, but Miles twisted and my punch connected with thin air.

“I've told you before, you have to watch your opponent and predict what they are going to do next,” he grumbled.

Frustration coursed through me. I was trying my fucking hardest, he just didn't grasp that I wasn't a fighter unless I really had to fight my way out of something.

The frustration turned to anger when I didn't step out of the way of his incoming punch. It wasn't hard, thankfully the padded mitts on his hands prevented the blow to my face from causing any damage, but it was hard enough to feel a throb in my lip.

“Come on, Riley, put some effort in!”

“Fuck off, Miles, I’m trying my hardest here!” I yelled, breathless.

“You’re not trying hard enough,” he shouted back, and clocked me on the face again with the other hand.

The antagonizing asshole.

My blood spiked in fury when he jabbed me again. This time it hurt.

“What are you going to do if Max or Hendrix, or one of The Stags kidnap you off the street, huh? What are you going to do then, cry like a little bitch and hope someone comes to your rescue?”

His words struck a chord.

After all, that’s why Kai died.

If I hadn’t been so fucking weak and walked straight into Hendrix’s trap, Kai never would have had to rescue me, he never would have been at the warehouse for Hendrix to fire his gun at.

Blinding rage seeped into my bones. Suddenly, it wasn’t Miles standing there, but Hendrix. He was wearing that smug grin he always had on his face, and he was eyeing me up like I was his next meal.

The pretty garden we were in faded into the distance, and the only thing I focused on was the man standing in front of me. The man who killed my husband.

I launched myself at him, fists plowing into his gut with all of my strength. This time, the wind was knocked out of him, and he stumbled back, distracted. Seeing an opportunity, I threw a punch into his nose.

Blood sprayed everywhere as my glove came away, but I wasn't done, I had too much rage vibrating through my body, desperate to explode out of me. Hendrix was blinded now, blinded by blood and pain.

Using my knee, I struck him in the thigh, just like Miles had taught me, and he collapsed to the floor in a heap. But he still wore a shit-eating grin on his ugly face, and I was overcome with the need to wipe it off.

Leaping on top of him, I straddled him, and brought my gloved hands down over and over again, pounding his face. He tried to cover his head with his hands, but my punches were relentless.

"I'll fucking kill you!" I cried. Tears sprung in my eyes, and a sob erupted from me as anger turned into something else.

Heartache.

The only time I allowed myself to miss Kai was when I was alone at night. But right then, Kai's face swam into my mind, and amongst all the rage and venom I was pouring into every punch, my heart broke from the weight of how much I missed him.

The man underneath me managed to get his hands up, and in the moment I was distracted by the pain of missing Kai, he

grabbed hold of me and rolled me onto my back, pinning me down with all his strength.

“Riley, chill. It’s me,” Miles said, blood streaming down his face.

The haze of anger cleared as Hendrix disappeared and Miles’ face came back into focus. My chest heaved with the sudden bout of exertion and it took a minute for my entire body to stop shaking.

“You good?” Miles asked when I’d finally calmed down, his brows pulled together in concern, blood smeared on his face.

“Yeah,” I croaked. Now the adrenaline was fading, I was left with nothing but the ache in my heart. Miles rolled off me, falling to my side and laying in the grass next to me, both our chests heaving.

Neither of us spoke. Instead, I let the tears come, letting myself have a moment to miss Kai. To allow myself to remember him, to wish things were different, and he was still here.

“Talk to me, Riley,” Miles said, breaking the silence when my sobs slowed.

“What is there to say?” I replied when I was sure I could talk without being a blubbing mess.

“Tell me how you are feeling, you keep everything bottled up.” He was right. I barely spoke about Kai, and even when Miles tried to bring him up, I always shut the conversation

down. I turned to look at him, he was lying on his back, looking up at the warm sun beating down on us.

“What do you want me to say, Miles? You want me to tell you how much my heart hurts every day? Or that most days I miss Kai so fucking much I can barely breathe?” My voice broke. I took a deep breath and turned away, looking up at the blue sky. “Talking about it won’t change what happened, he’s gone, and that’s all there is to it.”

He didn’t reply because there were no words to say back to me. Kai was gone, talking about it wouldn’t bring him back.

Nothing would bring him back.

We lay in silence, both lost in our thoughts. After a while, he sat up and wiped the blood from his nose. Following suit, I sat up and started pulling the gloves off. I was so done with our boxing lesson for the day.

“Is your nose okay?”

He chuckled. “It’s not broken, reckon it’ll be sore for a few days, and no doubt I’ll have some shiners under my eyes.”

His nose had stopped bleeding, and he’d wiped the majority of the blood away. But it had begun to swell, and traces of dried blood smeared his face.

“Sorry,” I muttered, feeling fucking terrible.

“Don’t be, I knew you had it in you, you just had to find it.” My head snapped to his, my eyes narrowing in anger. “Don’t get pissy with me, Riley. You did good. I’m guessing you were picturing Hendrix when you went to town on my face?”

I ground my teeth at the mention of his name, anger starting to swirl in my belly again. When I nodded, Miles smiled.

“Good. Next time you need to get out of a situation, picture Hendrix’s face, and do exactly what you just did. Hopefully, one day soon, it really will be Hendrix’s face you’re pounding.”

Swallowing down the lump in my throat, I grinned at Miles’ words. Grinned at the thought of spilling Hendrix’s blood. A wave of determination crested through me, and I locked the overpowering heartache away again until I was alone to unleash it.

Miles stood and offered me a hand, and when I accepted, he pulled me to my feet.

“You okay after yesterday?” he asked as we started walking back towards the house.

“Yeah. It’s not like I haven’t seen anyone die before.”

“I know. But it was the first time you were actually involved.”

My mind flashed back to twenty-four hours previous, when Jacob Wells had begged us to spare his life, offering to turn tail on Hendrix and give up all his secrets.

Funnily enough, both Miles and I agreed not to take him up on his offer. We couldn’t find it in ourselves to trust the little snitch. Besides, his phone held a wealth of information, and the idiot was stupid enough not to have better security on it.

The fingers that Miles cut off were now on ice in the freezer, ready to unlock the phone and spill all of Hendrix's secrets whenever Miles wanted to interrogate it.

Miles was the one to torture Jacob, but I'd been there for the whole thing. Just like I'd been there at the murders he'd committed in the last week. Every single man he'd killed had at one time been loyal to Kai, but had since declared their loyalties to Hendrix.

It took a lot to stomach the damage Miles inflicted, and at times I'd had to look away. I never would have believed Miles could be more savage than Kai was until I witnessed it with my own eyes.

Jacob was different though. He'd been the one to hold me in the room at the warehouse while Kai and Max fought. Jacob had every opportunity to change his mind and help us instead of running away like the little coward he was. Sure, Kai would have killed him for his betrayal, but his death could have been quick. Certainly not drawn out in the way Miles made it.

When Jacob reached the point of taking his last breaths, I decided I wanted to send Hendrix a little message. It was time he found out who was behind the deaths of his men.

I won't lie, I found a sick satisfaction when I used the knife to carve the word 'Coward' into the flesh of Jacob's forehead. With every line I carved, it felt like a small step towards victory.

"I'm good," I told Miles. He glanced over at me, his brows pulled together as if assessing me. He gave me a nod, clearly

deciding I was being truthful.

“Miles, Riley,” a voice called as we approached the porch that wrapped around the house. We both stopped and waited for Jack to reach us.

Jack Ericson was the head of a team of mercenaries who worked for Apollo, a private security company Kai had hired the services of. Initially, it was to protect Angel and me when I made the stupid decision to leave him. When I came to my senses and returned to him forty-eight hours later, Kai hired their services again to protect his family home while we were staying there. But as things started developing with Max, they'd taken our side.

After Kai died, the head honcho of Apollo agreed Jack and his team were at our disposal for as long as we needed them. There were only eight of them, but they were savage, and quite frankly, I would never want to get on the wrong side of them.

When news spread that Kai had died, we'd been forced to run, despite my protests. Kai had drummed his mantra into me- Wolves don't run, and they don't hide. So when the news broke, and Hendrix ordered The Stags to move in, I'd been determined to stay in Hollows Bay and fight back.

Miles, however, he'd been more sensible. He knew the danger we were in if we stayed. Not only had he seen firsthand how many of Kai's men had switched sides after the shootout at the warehouse, but he started receiving calls from his informants telling him Hendrix had put a hit out on both him and me.

Apparently, the word on the street was Miles and I had been having an affair, and Miles had killed Kai in a jealous rage. It was laughable, but people bought it, especially when Hendrix offered ten million dollars to whoever hand-delivered me to him alive, along with Miles' severed head.

Miles knew we needed to get out of the city if we stood any chance of fighting back in the future. With the help of Jack and his team, we went to ground. A week after leaving the city, we arrived at the house we were now at, miles away from Hollows Bay, and completely off grid. We knew we couldn't take on Hendrix and Max and the entire gang they had created without a plan.

The problem was, we only had Miles and me, and the team of eight mercenaries, and even though none of us wanted to wait, we bided our time. We watched as Hendrix took over all of Kai's assets. We watched Max Thorne emerge from wherever he'd been hiding to recover *weeks* later.

We watched, we waited, and we planned, because we weren't just going to kill Hendrix and Max, we were going to destroy them first. And now, six long months later, we had taken our first steps in reclaiming the city.

"What happened to your nose?" Jack asked as he reached us, noticing the crusted blood on Miles' face.

"Someone went psycho on me," Miles retorted, smirking.

Jack's eyes whipped to me, an impressed smile creeping on his lips. "I'm impressed, Riley."

“Thanks,” I muttered, trying not to be too happy with the compliment, I wasn’t exactly feeling great about busting Miles’ nose.

“What’s up?” Miles asked, returning to why Jack had called us.

“I’ve just had some information come through, thought you’d ought to know,” Jack replied, his features turning serious.

Jack was a handsome man, he was ex-military, and had the build of a soldier. With emerald green eyes, and stubble growing along his chiseled jaw, you would have thought he’d be a hit with the ladies, but Jack was married to the job. Or at least, that’s what he had told me one night.

There was a story behind his eyes, one that told of loss and regret, the same look that was no doubt in my eye, but it was none of my business, and ultimately, I had no more room for extra heartache.

“Go on.”

“It’s the Bianchis. They’re fed up with Hendrix refusing to pay the 5% as per the treaty. They’re planning on launching an attack on Hollows Bay, and when they win, they’re going to claim ownership of the city.”

Chapter 2

Riley

Bollocks.

This was the last thing we needed.

It was hardly surprising though, the Bianchi family earned 5% from the sale of the Wolfe supply of drugs and weapons. Kai used to make a fortune from these ventures, and the Bianchis took their share without lifting a finger. They wouldn't like being cut off from that.

I didn't know much about the Bianchi family other than what Miles had told me a few weeks ago when rumors started swirling that Hendrix had refused to pay them, no doubt under Max's instruction. Apparently, Kai's great-grandfather, Theodore, got too big for his boots and thought he could take on the Italian Mafia, which only resulted in lives being lost.

When his grandfather, Nicholas, took over, he'd managed to get the head of the family to agree to a kind of peace treaty.

Both families agreed they'd never step foot into the other's territory or all hell would break out. It was also agreed that whoever was in charge of the Wolfe family would continue to pay the Bianchis 5% as an ongoing apology for Theodore's arrogance.

It all seemed like bullshit to me, or rather, a lot of politics I didn't understand, and had no intention of ever understanding. It sounded very much though that Max and Hendrix were taking a leaf out of old Theodore's book, and their boots had gotten too big.

But if the Bianchis were planning their own war, there was a chance that when all was said and done, there would be no Hollows Bay for the Wolfe family to rule over, and the realization sat heavily on my shoulders.

Not because *I* wanted to rule Hollows Bay, fuck no, but because it was Kai's legacy, *Miles'* legacy. Whether I agreed with one family ruling over a city or not, it didn't matter.

But my husband's legacy?

Yeah, that mattered.

"Fuck," Miles said, running a hand over his head. "Any idea on when they are planning this?"

"No, but from what our intelligence indicates, it's likely to be soon," Jack replied.

Although we'd been working with Apollo for six months, it still amazed me how they worked. I didn't know how, but they had ways of getting intelligence on what was going on in the

city. Their sources weren't close enough for us to know *exactly* what Hendrix and Max were up to, but the information they provided was enough to help us plan what our next steps were.

"Fuck, we need to act fast," Miles said.

"What's the plan?" Jack replied, looking from Miles to me.

Why the fuck he thought I'd know the answer to that question was beyond me. This was not my show.

"Don't look at me, I have no clue," I snapped when Miles too looked at me as if I held a crystal ball with all the answers. He glared but quickly shook his head.

"First things first, I need to sort my nose out. Let's reconvene in half an hour and we'll go over our options."

Jack nodded before walking away and leaving us alone.

"This isn't good," Miles said, watching Jack's retreating figure.

"You can say that again," I replied. Miles grimaced at me and then opened his mouth to reply. Whatever he was going to say though didn't come out. He promptly shut his mouth and took a breath.

"Get cleaned up and we'll talk," he said instead, and with that, he left me standing on the porch, wondering what fresh new hell we were about to face.

A short while later, Miles and I were gathered in the war room with Jack and two of his men, Tank and Ash.

I'd met Tank previously when Angel and I had flown to France. He'd been manning the safe house we arrived at, but Jack had flown him to the States after Kai's death, claiming that Tank was one of his best men, and we would need him when we started taking action.

Tank reminded me of Danny in a lot of ways. He was a unit of a man, but underneath all his muscles and scariness, he was a teddy bear. He'd spent hours teaching me how to shoot, and had been nothing but patient. He was also a funny guy, and he always found a way of making me laugh, even on my darkest days.

Ash had arrived at the house about a month after we did. He'd been deployed on a mission somewhere in Asia which is why he hadn't joined the team straight away. He tended to keep to himself, but he was one of those guys who, when they spoke, you listened to because he didn't speak often. I didn't know much about Ash, other than he was an ex-marine and a shit-hot shot with a sniper.

When he arrived, he made a point of seeking me out to say he was sorry for what happened to Kai, that he knew Kai personally, and that he was as determined as anyone to get revenge against everyone who had hurt him and me. He instantly earned my trust.

The five of us sat around the table in the war room, Miles swigged from a bottle of beer while mine sat untouched in front of me. The other three didn't drink, apparently, constant sobriety was essential when you worked for Apollo.

In my humble opinion, I thought it was ridiculous the guys called the room, the *war room*. But it was where we convened every time we put our heads together to plan how we were going to take back the city. And seeing as we were waging a war on Hollows Bay, I had to accept the name was fitting.

In the middle of the room was a large table, big enough to seat twenty people. Huge television screens hung on the wall that connected to computers, and other fancy technology that I had no clue about.

When Jack first showed me the room, he told me he had previously watched teams deploying into war zones across the globe from the comfort of this room.

It all felt very much like a scene straight out of a *James Bond* film, but it was impressive. Miles thought so too, he almost jizzed his pants from excitement every time he set foot in this room.

“So, what’s the plan?” Tank asked when everyone was up to speed with the intelligence.

“We don’t have many options, we can’t go to war against the Bianchis, we don’t have an army fighting in our corner,” Miles said glumly. “Unless we can bring in more men from Apollo?”

“Won’t happen,” Jack replied. “The boss couldn’t spare any more men for this deployment, hence why there are only eight of us.”

“This latest development might change things though?” Tank added, his question aimed at Jack.

“Even if it did, it wouldn’t be enough to take on the Bianchis *and* The Stags,” Ash added. “Besides, taking out the Bianchis will only bring more trouble to your door, and that’s not what we set out to achieve.”

I rubbed my hand over my forehead. This was a fucking nightmare. If we did nothing, the Bianchis would attack, and then what? Would we go to war against them? But we weren’t ready to launch our own attack on Hollows Bay. Not without more men in our corner.

My head pounded as I tried to think, tuning out the conversation going on around me. But then, an idea popped into my head. A crazy, stupid idea that burst from my mouth before I had time to stop it spewing out.

“We need to get them on our side, try to get them to work *with* us as opposed to *against* us,”

Every set of eyes snapped to where I was sitting, and my cheeks heated in embarrassment.

I was a fucking idiot.

“Riley, the Bianchis aren’t a family we can trust,” Miles huffed, my body recoiling into my chair from the withering glare he shot my way. “They hate us. For a start, we couldn’t set one foot in Forest Point without our heads being blown off, and secondly, even if we did get as far as getting them on side,

we couldn't trust them. They're likely to stick a knife in our backs as soon as they're turned."

"It was just a suggestion," I muttered, resisting the urge to storm out of the room.

Why was I even here anyway? It's not like I had experience in this sort of thing. Ask me how to hold onto a pole with only your thighs and I'd be able to tell you, but strategies on how to deal with the Italian Mafia, not a damn clue.

"Actually, it's not a bad idea," Jack said, his eyes finding mine from across the table and offering me a kind smile. "We have contacts who could reach out and arrange a meeting."

"You're kidding, right?" Miles barked, turning his wrath on Jack.

"No, I'm not," Jack replied calmly. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend, right?"

"And Hendrix would never see it coming. Like you just said, the Bianchis hate the Wolfes, he'd never consider for one moment they would work with you. Get them on board, and if the rest of the plan doesn't go the way we want it to, you've got a ready-made army," Tank said, also offering me a reassuring smile.

Huh. Maybe it wasn't such a stupid idea after all.

All eyes fell on Miles, and I was surprised to find his brows pulled together like he was trying to solve the world's hardest math problem. It was his thinking face.

He was considering it.

“They’ll never go for it,” he eventually said.

“They might, if you offer them something worth their while. Nicholas got them on board all those years ago, there’s no reason you can’t. Especially if you tell them the *whole* truth.”

Jack held Miles’ eye, an indecipherable look passing between them. I looked from one to the other as they silently communicated, and got the distinct impression they knew something I didn’t.

“What do you mean, the whole truth?” I asked, curiosity finally getting the better of me.

Miles broke away from his staring competition with Jack and turned to face me. He paused, choosing his next words carefully.

“We tell them you married Kai, and he left Hollows Bay to you. We tell them that you are the real heir to the city.”

Not this bullshit again.

“Miles, I’m not-” I started, but the asshole rudely interrupted.

“Riley, you can deny it all you like, but Kai left Hollows Bay to you. If you want to do something as crazy as making a deal with the Bianchis then you need to make it damn clear what your position is. Otherwise, neither of us hold any weight, and we may as well roll over now and let them take the city.”

“Why can’t we tell them you will be in charge of Hollows Bay once we reclaim it?” I said, getting fucking frustrated that we were having this conversation again. Jack, Tank, and Ash

stared from across the table, watching the argument unfold between us.

“Because Kai never left Hollows Bay to me,” Miles snapped.

“But you are literally the only person on this planet who knows what Kai said. Why can’t we just tell them he left everything to you,” I fired back in frustration, my fists clenching under the table.

If Miles didn’t shut the fuck up, he was likely to get another bloody nose.

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a moment before opening them again.

“I know you don’t understand it, Riley, but without an appointed second in command or a child to take over the line, you became Kai’s heir the minute you married him and took his name. Whether he said anything to me or not it doesn’t matter. Your marriage was binding. There’s a marriage certificate to prove that you married him, you can’t deny that, nor should you want to.” He paused to let the words sink in, and a heavy weight descended over me.

Of course I didn’t want to deny my marriage to Kai, in fact, I wanted every single person on the damn planet to know Kai had been my husband, even if it was only for a few days.

“But surely I can appoint you as my second in command and hand control over to you?” I said feebly.

Miles shook his head, his features softening. “It doesn’t work that way, Riley. Once you are appointed the head of the

family, that's it. You can't just hand it on to someone else. There's only one way someone else will ever be able to take your place."

"Which is?" I asked through gritted teeth, not really needing to ask.

He swallowed nervously but held my eye as he spoke. "For someone else to take over, you have to die. Even if you decided to run away from Hollows Bay, and years passed, you would still technically be deemed as the head of the family. You'd be fair game if anyone decided to stake a claim."

The knot of anxiety that had been building in my stomach since this meeting started grew to the point it was about to burst out of me. No wonder Miles hadn't dropped this little bombshell on me all those months ago when he first told me about Kai's wishes, it was likely to push me straight off the cliff into insanity.

Right then, I wanted nothing more than to bring Kai back from the dead so I could murder him all over again. Why the hell hadn't he made Miles his 2IC the minute he found out the truth about Hendrix?

I stared back at Miles, the weight on my shoulders growing to epic proportions as reality sank in.

I didn't have a choice in the matter.

Even if I decided to leave Hollows Bay after this shit was dealt with, I'd be forever looking over my shoulder, waiting for someone to come for me. My future reunion with Angel

crashed down before my eyes. If I was always at risk, then she was too.

I'd said it before, and I would say it again, but damn Kai Wolfe. Damn him straight to the pits of hell for putting me in this situation.

I broke away from Miles' intense stare and looked over at Jack, Tank, and Ash. The three of them stared back with sympathetic looks on their faces. Sympathy wasn't going to help though, I was *way* out of my depth and backed into a corner.

And there was only one thing I would do when I was backed into a corner.

I would come out fighting.

"Miles, I don't have the first fucking clue about running a city or Kai's businesses," I said with a shaky voice, trying to hold back the tears that threatened.

Disbelief romped through me that I was even entertaining this ridiculous situation. I grabbed the beer and took a long swig, relishing the cool liquid as it slid down my throat.

When I put the bottle back on the table, Miles scooted his chair closer and took my hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. "You can learn, Riley. And I'll be right by your side."

"What if I fuck it all up," I asked, closing my eyes and taking a steadying breath as the weight of the monumental task being asked of me sank in.

“You won’t. Do you think Kai would have wanted Hollows Bay left to you if he didn’t think you were capable? Why do you think he didn’t appoint me as his 2IC when he had a chance?” When my only reply was a small shake of the head, Miles continued. “Riley, Kai saw in you what I see. You’re a good person, a strong person who fights for what is right, and you want to make lives better for people. Kai knew that, and that’s why he wanted you to look after Hollows Bay. He was striving to make it a better place, and he knew you were the right person to pick up where he left off.”

A ball of emotion clogged painfully in my throat, I had no words to say back. It never occurred to me why Kai would’ve left Hollows Bay to me, but now Miles had said it, it dawned on me that with the money and resources available, I’d be able to make a difference to people’s lives.

Even though Joe Mason, the man who helped me all those years ago, turned out to be a raging pedo, he’d still helped us when we had nothing and no one, and I’d vowed to repay the favor someday.

Maybe that day was now.

There was just one problem. Standing in the way of me being able to help anyone were two gigantic assholes.

Taking a deep breath and swallowing past the lump, I met Miles’ gaze. “So what do we do about dumb and dumber?”

Miles chuckled. “Which one is dumb, and which one is dumber?”

“They’re interchangeable,” I replied, as a tear slid down my cheek despite the smirk playing on my lips.

“It’s your call, Riley,” Miles replied, dropping my hand, his features hardening. “If you think a deal can be made with the Bianchis then I’ve got your back.”

I thought it over as everyone stared at me, awaiting my decision. But the answer was staring me in the face. We needed the Bianchis on our side. Even if Mr. Bianchi refused to give us his men to help with our war, we at least needed him to give us some breathing space to move forward with our plan.

Coming to a decision, I looked over at Jack. “Can you really get a meeting set up with the Bianchis?”

“It’ll take a couple of days, but yeah, I’m sure we can do it.”

I nodded, resolute in the decision I was making. “Do it. What’s the worst that can happen, right?” I chuckled nervously.

“Death. That’s what could happen,” Miles piped up, rather unhelpfully if you asked me.

Chapter 3

Riley

Later that night, I lay in bed, my mind in overdrive and wishing for a time when life had been simpler.

When we left the war room after Jack agreed to set up a meeting with the Bianchis, Tank clapped me on the shoulder and told me I'd make a good queen. He'd been joking, at least, I thought he was, but he hadn't been smiling when he said it.

The comment churned over and over in my mind. I didn't see myself as a queen, for fuck sake, this wasn't a *Disney* film. I was a nobody whose path just so happened to collide with the man who ruled the city.

And yet here I was, lying in bed thinking about all the ways *I* would rule the city. Everything I could do to make people's lives better.

To say I was overwhelmed would be a fucking understatement.

Deciding there was little point in stressing about what I would or wouldn't do when I was in charge of Hollows Bay, I pushed it out of my head. I had a few hurdles to jump over before that occurred, and there was a damn good chance I would fall at the first one- meeting the Bianchis.

That's if they agreed to it in the first place. I probably needed to come up with a backup plan if the head of the family, Georgio, told us to get stuffed. But if they did agree, it was possible we wouldn't live to walk away from the meeting.

From what Miles told me about the Bianchis, I knew they were ruthless bastards who despised the Wolfes. Perhaps I was being naive in thinking they'd agree to another treaty, but we didn't have any other option. If they attacked first, not only would we lose our opportunity to deal with Max and Hendrix, but we'd never get another opportunity to reclaim Hollows Bay. I didn't want that for Kai's sake. Miles' too. He was the only living Wolfe now, aside from me, and if we failed, that would be it.

The Wolfes rule over Hollows Bay would be no more.

Ever again.

Surprisingly, I wasn't scared about going to the meeting and potentially meeting my fate. If anything, I found the slightest bit of comfort in it. Not because I believed Kai and I would be reunited in the afterlife, I didn't believe in that for one second. But it would mean I wouldn't have to live with the constant pain in my heart. The pain that grew every damn day,

an unbearable weight that felt like it was going to explode out of my chest any time now.

A pain I carried around with me wherever I went.

Sure, if I died, Angel would be left alone, but I'd achieved what I set out to do- give her a better life. She was currently living in luxury with unlimited pots of cash, and being cared for by a bunch of scary bastards. She had a decent future ahead of her, far away from any danger.

In fact, now I thought about it, I wasn't sure it would ever be safe to bring Angel home. If I'd learned anything from Kai, it was that being the ruler of a city brought a lot of unwanted attention and a shit load of enemies. Much like I had been used to exploit Kai's weakness, Angel would be used to exploit mine.

With a heavy heart, I accepted that from here on out my relationship with her would be very different from what it had been, and I silently cursed myself for ever agreeing to the deal with Kai in the first place.

But wasn't that a bitter pill to swallow? If I'd never agreed to the deal, I never would have fallen head over heels for Kai. I never would have found a family. I never would have known that somewhere deep inside of me, I had the strength to keep going, even when my world had imploded.

When I rolled over for the hundredth time and gave in to the knowledge that sleep wasn't coming, I threw back the covers and got out of bed. Wrapping my robe around me, I

tugged open the balcony doors and stepped outside, relishing the feel of the cool breeze on my heated skin.

My room was on the first floor of the three-story house and overlooked the gardens which backed onto towering mountains. The house was in the middle of nowhere, and a two-hour drive from Hollows Bay. It was a little inconvenient every time we went to take out one of Hendrix's men, but it was far enough from the city that it was unlikely we'd be found.

Who knew, maybe if the Bianchis agreed to the deal and were feeling really generous, they might offer to let us lay low on their turf so we could be closer to Hollows Bay.

Or maybe we had more chance of finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow with a leprechaun dancing on it.

Although night had long since fallen, the moon shone bright, lighting up the grounds enough to make out the shapes of trees and brush. I took a deep breath, inhaling the fresh air and hoping it would help calm the noise in my head.

From the minute Miles broke the news about Kai, my head filled with chaotic din, and it was relentless and exhausting. I craved peace, but no matter what I did, the noise wouldn't shut off. I suspected my head would only find the silence I desperately wanted when Max and Hendrix were nothing but rotting corpses in the ground.

Or wherever Miles planned on disposing of their bodies.

When I reached the edge of the balcony, I propped my elbows on the ledge, held my head in my hands, and stared out into the night. The fresh air did nothing to stop the noise, but being out in the open instead of cooped up in my room wasn't as claustrophobic.

What the fuck was I going to do?

I had to offer the Bianchis something to convince them to hold off from taking any action, and find a way to convince them to give us their men for a fight that wasn't theirs in the first place.

But what would it take for them to agree to that?

I had money, granted it was Kai's money, but even if I offered them every cent he left me, would that be enough? Besides, Miles was right, we couldn't trust them. If they didn't kill us on sight, there was nothing stopping them from killing us at any point.

I needed to take a leaf out of the Kai Wolfe book of blackmail. He'd convinced me to agree to his deal on the basis of making Angel's life better. Ultimately, we needed to find something to offer the Bianchis that would make their lives better.

But what did you offer a Mafia family who already had piles and piles of cash, more power than anyone could ever dream about, and control of their own city?

Movement across the grounds caught my attention, and I snapped my head to where it had come from. Seconds later, a

figure dressed from head to toe in black clothing emerged from the treeline in the distance. It was too far, and too dark for me to see who it was, but it would be one of the guys.

They were only a small team but worked like a well-oiled machine.

They rarely slept, and when they weren't being badasses by helping us to capture and torture our targets, they were either in the gym pumping iron, or teaching me how to shoot or fight.

I'd gotten to know them over the time they'd been living with us, and they were all decent guys. They were all ex-military but had left their jobs to join Apollo. Apparently, the working conditions were better.

Aside from Jack, Tank, and Ash, there was Dan, who was the youngest of the group but just as skilled as the others. His best friend was Travis, who would spend most evenings playing his guitar, which would have been enjoyable had he not been so fucking terrible at it. Then there was Oz, which wasn't his real name, but nicknamed that as he came from the land down under, and finally, the twins, Seb and Liam.

The best thing about the team was they all held the same values- rid the world of evil, and every single one of them was committed to ridding the world of Max Thorne and Hendrix Becker.

It was somewhat ironic. Kai hadn't exactly been an angel, yet they hadn't batted an eye when it came to his crimes. Miles' too for that matter. Come to think of it, it wouldn't be

long until they were turning a blind eye to *my* crimes, because how on earth was someone supposed to rule a city without committing the odd crime?

It wasn't unusual to see one of the guys patrolling the perimeter. In fact, I was used to it by now. Kai's penthouse had always been protected by armed men, and when we stayed in Kai's family home, he'd hired the Apollo team for protection. For me, it was now a source of comfort knowing the house was constantly being protected. That was without mentioning the crazy security measures in place.

What was unusual though was the way this person stopped in amongst the tree line, and appeared to be staring up at me. It was too dark to tell if he really was staring, but the feeling of being watched swept through me, and a chill ran down my spine that had *nothing* to do with the cool breeze.

I took a breath and shoved the paranoia back down. That's all it was, paranoia. The security around the house was tighter than Fort Knox. No way could anyone waltz onto the grounds without someone knowing.

But given a number of Kai's former employees had turned tail while he was still alive, paranoia that someone would betray us was at its highest, no matter how much Jack assured me his men would rather die than betray the man who was behind Apollo.

Ignoring the fear, I raised a hand and waved to whoever it was. But when he didn't wave back, didn't so much as move a muscle, but continued to stare in my direction, the fear grew a

little bit more. Like the chicken I was, I retreated back into the safety of my room, shut the doors, and triple-checked the locks.

Debating with myself as to whether I should tell someone, I eventually climbed back into bed and told myself to stop being so damn silly. No one was trying to get me, no one was going to get past those big, scary mercenaries without being pumped full of bullets. I was just on edge because of the latest news with the Bianchis, and because Hendrix now knew Miles and I were behind the murders of his men.

With that thought in my head, I finally drifted off to sleep. It was anything but peaceful though, like every night for the last six months, nightmares plagued me.

It was always the same, a constant replay of what happened the night Kai was shot. We'd be back in the warehouse, Kai would beat the ever-living shit out of Max, and Hendrix would barge in and fire two shots at Kai. Hendrix would drag Max out, leaving me to do what I could to plug the holes in Kai, and my entire body would become soaked in Kai's blood. The worst part though was when Kai turned his eyes to me. Eyes usually filled with nothing but love, but in my nightmare, his eyes were always empty.

Dead.

I'd wake up dripping with sweat, and would have to turn the light on to check that I wasn't covered in his blood. After, there'd be no chance of getting back to sleep.

But for some reason, tonight the nightmare was entirely different.

There was no warehouse, no fight, no shooting. Instead, I was lost in the dark woods, scared out of my mind because I didn't know where the fuck I was or how to get back to safety. Someone was following me, twigs snapped behind me, owls hooted under the glow of the moonlight, and the sound of footsteps gained on me.

Tremors consumed my body. I spun around to find where the footsteps were coming from, but a figure clad in black slammed into me, knocking me off my feet. My ass hit the ground hard, and my head smashed painfully against a rock. I lay on the rough ground, dazed, and staring up into the night sky, trying to call for help but paralyzed by fear. I didn't know what hit me or where it had gone.

Seconds later, footsteps sounded again, and fear coursed through my entire body. I held my breath and squeezed my eyes shut in hopes whoever was coming wouldn't see or hear me, even though I was exposed in the open.

The footsteps grew closer and stopped next to me. I didn't dare open my eyes, fear of what I would find stopped me. That was until the softest words were spoken by the voice of someone I thought I'd never hear again.

"Star, open your eyes," he whispered before the lightest touch of a finger ran down my cheek, warming me from within.

Butterflies erupted in my stomach, my heart beat wildly, and my brain tried to make sense of what the hell was going on.

I refused to open my eyes because I knew the second I did, he would be gone, and my heart would break all over again. When they didn't open, his lips brushed delicately against mine, his intoxicating scent wrapping around me. It took all my strength not to reach up and grab him, and hold him against me forever, but even in my dream, I knew it wasn't possible.

As quickly as he had appeared, he was gone again. My eyes slowly opened, my dark room coming back into focus.

I was alone.

I was always alone now that Kai had gone.

Chapter 4

Riley

Two days later, and with no word from the Bianchis, Miles made me decide if it was time to move on to stage two of the plan. There were three names on our list of people we wanted to wipe out, three people close to Hendrix, who, without his minions, would be vulnerable. They were Carlos Rigby, the leader of The Stags, his Deputy, Markus Powell, and finally, Hendrix's sidekick, Alex Barnes.

But we needed better intel on their movements. Intel that Apollo sources couldn't provide. We needed people closer to Hendrix's inner circle, and stage two would hopefully achieve that.

If I didn't fuck it up, which was a very big if.

The next stage of the plan was something I liked to call, *Operation Put All Our Fucking Trust Into Four People, And Hope Like Hell They Don't Turn Against Us.*

I accepted the operation name needed some work, but the point remained. We were putting all of our trust into four people, people close to Hendrix who would be able to provide us with key intelligence. As long as they didn't run squealing to him the second they knew our plan. Max too for that matter. If things went the way we'd planned, we'd soon be getting a stream of intelligence on what the fuck Max was up to.

So, no pressure, but I *really* couldn't fuck this up.

At least we had a starting point, and it was all thanks to the Apollo guys. Over the last few months, they'd been keeping tabs on four people Miles and I thought could be trusted, and by keeping tabs, I mean they were spying on every inch of their lives.

Literally *every inch*.

No phone call went without someone tapping in and listening to it. Their phones and vehicles were tracked so we knew everywhere they went. Their houses were bugged, so even if they tried to have a sneaky conversation in the middle of the night, we'd know about it. Miles worked his magic and cloned each of their computers so we knew what they were searching for on the internet.

It was a miracle these poor people could take a shit without us knowing about it.

It was scary how much we were able to intrude into their personal lives, and it didn't sit comfortably with me, but we had to make sure that when the time came, these were the people we could trust.

And that time was now.

By monitoring every minute of their lives, we found that not only did these four believe Miles and I weren't having an affair, but they also believed Miles wasn't responsible for killing Kai. We also discovered other vital information.

Like how some members of the gang were on the verge of a rebellion.

How a handful of police officers were secretly working together to find a way to remove Max from his position.

How a number of Kai's old business associates were growing tired with Hendrix's tyrant ways, and were slowly taking their business elsewhere.

And how members of the city council were fed up with the way Hollows Bay was becoming a dump.

Hendrix and Max were doing a fantastic job at ruining everything Kai had worked hard to build, but really, the blame laid with Max. After all, he was the one pulling the strings in secret, Hendrix was just his puppet.

Before Kai died, Max had been dead set on claiming Hollows Bay, so it was somewhat of a surprise when Hendrix emerged as the leader, and Max reappeared weeks later in his position as chief. He was still sporting injuries from the beating Kai had given him but claimed he'd received them after he single-handedly stopped a burglary. Obviously, people saw him as a hero instead of the maniac he was.

Really, he was distancing himself from Hendrix and the showdown at the warehouse so no one would be any the wiser that *he* was the one in charge of the city.

It was part of the reason we had waited six months to put our plan in motion. We wanted to see what moves both Max and Hendrix made. We wanted to give them time to think we had disappeared, and that they were untouchable, and then we'd show them how wrong they were.

But one step at a time, and for now our focus was on convincing four people to put all their faith in me, which is why I found myself walking into a bar on the outskirts of Hollows Bay.

The bar had once been a hot spot for truckers on long haul journeys, but after the owner was killed in a robbery several years back, no one had bothered to reopen it, and no one paid it any mind when passing by. It was the perfect place to hold a clandestine meeting.

By the time we reached the bar, night had fallen. There were no lights on this stretch of road, the only source of light was from the bright moon lighting up the derelict bar which now looked more like a rotting shack.

The twins, Seb and Liam, had kept surveillance on the bar during the day to make sure there would be no surprises, such as a squatter taking up residence inside. Ash, Tank, Oz, and Dan rounded up those we were due to meet, and Jack and Travis stayed with Miles and me until Seb gave the signal that everyone was present and accounted for.

The four of us entered the derelict building. Rotting floorboards creaked as we crossed the threshold, and dust hit my nostrils, instantly making me want to sneeze. The guys had set up several lights inside, bright enough for us to see each other, but dim enough not to draw any attention from anyone passing by.

My heart raced as we entered. Reality had begun to sink in, and the pressure on my shoulders to prove to these people I was the right person to rule over Hollows Bay felt insurmountable. This did not feel like my life in the slightest, and yet here I was.

We entered the area which once upon a time would have been the main bar, but was now a large dusty space with overturned tables, smashed chairs, and wooden slats covering the windows. I found myself staring at four people sitting in a row at a table, their arms tied behind their backs, and hoods covering their faces.

Fuck sake.

That wasn't exactly the best way of building trust.

"Are the hoods necessary?" I asked, glowering at Ash, who stood with his massive arms folded across his chest, and a surly look on his face.

"We didn't want them seeing where they were brought to," he replied gruffly.

"Okay, but they're here now, so how about we take them off, yes?" I replied, folding my own arms across my chest and

trying to sound confident.

Ash's face broke into a grin under his bushy beard before he nodded at Travis and Dan, who promptly whipped the hoods off.

"Hey girl," Kimmy said as soon as her hood was off, her face lit up into a beaming smile, and I couldn't help but return it.

I met Kimmy during the only time I'd been to Sapphire. She was the manager, and was under Kai's instructions to look after me. We spent the entire night talking, and I had grown to like her. Kai trusted her too, which is why she was one of the first people who sprung to mind when we were discussing who we could trust for this next step of our plan.

When Hendrix took over Hollows Bay, Kimmy remained working in Sapphire, but we knew from the information we had gleaned over the past several months that she hated him. The only reason she stayed working at the club was because she didn't want to leave the girls who also worked there to deal with Hendrix on their own.

Kimmy working in Sapphire gave her the perfect excuse to eavesdrop on conversations. A lot of Kai's old business partners socialized in Sapphire. If Kimmy agreed to help us, I'd be asking her to listen in on conversations to find out who was ready to cut ties with Hendrix. Then we'd swoop in and convince those people to work for me, thus cutting off several streams of income for Hendrix.

The next two people who had their hoods removed were people I had never met before, but thanks to Miles filling me in on every little detail about Kai's businesses, I knew who they were.

The first was Ernie Joyce, the once leader of Kai's gang, The Shadows. He'd grown up in Hollows Bay, and had been nothing but loyal to the Wolfe family. Again, from prying on every element of Ernie's life, we knew he despised working for Hendrix, and had been trying to recruit other gang members to rebel. If he agreed to help, the plan was for him to work his way into Carlos and Markus' good graces so he could feed us intelligence on their movements.

The man sitting next to Ernie was Graham Shaw, who, once upon a time, was in line to be the next Chief of Police. He was trumped by Max though when he somehow managed to bag the position. Since Max took over, Graham found himself demoted from Deputy Chief to Desk Sergeant. Although he'd been patiently waiting for someone to make a move against Max, his patience was rapidly wearing thin. He was in the perfect position to keep tabs on Max and tell us what the asshole was up to.

The final man to have his hood removed was Colin Andrews. He was the officiant who married me and Kai, and given that he had kept his word to keep our marriage a secret, I believed he was someone we could trust.

Miles, however, did not trust Colin, and we'd been at loggerheads over whether we should involve him. Colin had a

gambling habit Kai had written off in exchange for him to marry us, but in the last six months, Colin's gambling habits had increased again. Miles feared all it would take for his loyalty to be tested was the right sum of money. I knew Miles had a point, but Colin had seemed trustworthy when he married Kai and me, so I was backing him.

Plus, he regularly sat in on council meetings where both Max and Hendrix attended, so he'd be a good person to tell us what was happening at those meetings in case there was something that might help us destroy both Max and Hendrix.

"Girl, you are a sight for sore eyes," Kimmy said, shaking her head to dislodge a strand of hair that had fallen across her face when the hood was removed.

"Urgh, can you untie their hands as well, they're not my prisoners," I huffed.

"Sure thing, Boss," Ash replied with a smirk.

"Don't call me that," I snapped, only to get a withering glare from Miles.

He'd lectured me the whole way here about making sure I let everyone know who was in charge, but my response was, how can I make people think I'm in charge when *I* don't even think I'm in charge?

He also lectured me about making tough decisions, and at some point, accepting that I would have to get my hands dirty. A conversation I promptly shut down.

I wasn't ready for that.

“Miles, what the fuck are you doing here?” Graham snapped. “I thought you were in Europe.”

“Nope, and Riley will explain everything,” Miles replied, and a wave of nausea rushed through me when four sets of curious eyes landed on me.

Chaotic thoughts ran through my head, and I didn’t know where to start. That was until Miles put a reassuring hand on my shoulder.

“You’ve got this, Riley,” he whispered in my ear, low enough so only I could hear. “Just be you.”

With that, he walked away to take up a place at the back of the bar, leaving me alone to figure out what the heck to say.

Taking a deep breath to calm the noise in my head, I let the image of Kai come to mind. Usually, just thinking of him would send me into a spiral of depression, but right now, I needed the image to channel some of the bravado he always showed when it came to dealing with his employees.

“Honestly, I don’t know where to begin.” I took a step forward, everyone watching me intently, including the Apollo guys and Miles, all waiting with bated breath as to what I was about to say.

My mouth opened and closed several times before anything would come out. It’s funny, my brain and mouth had a tendency not to work together, resulting in me saying stupid shit at inappropriate times. It seemed now though, they had decided to get on the same page and work together.

Talk about crappy timing.

“First, I want to apologize for how you were brought here,” I started, figuring that maybe I should do what Miles told me to do, *just be me*. If I was in their shoes, I’d be mighty pissed someone had kidnapped me off the street, blindfolded me, and tied my hands up. In fact, if it was me, I’d have been bitching and moaning the second my hood was removed.

Tank, Oz, Jack, and Dan were under strict instruction to make sure that when they rounded everyone up, they made it clear they were going to come to no harm. I doubted the hoods and hand ties had done much to convince them they would be safe. The least I could do was apologize.

“Save the apology, and tell us why the fuck we are here,” Graham snapped, sending daggers at me from across the broken table.

“Why don’t you shut the fuck up and give the girl a minute,” Kimmy hissed, coming to my defense.

“Who the fuck is this girl?” Ernie chimed in, looking at me like I was nothing but a bit of dog poop on his shoe.

Fucking hell, this was all going to pot. I peeked up at Miles, about to ask him what the hell I should do when somewhere in the back of my mind, I remembered what he said to me when we were discussing the Bianchis.

Do you think Kai would have left Hollows Bay to you if he didn’t think you were capable? Kai saw in you what I see.

You're a good person, a strong person who fights for what is right, and you want to make lives better for people.

Kai had believed in me. Believed that I could do good, and make the city a better place. To do that, I needed to find the strength Kai believed I had. The strength that had got me through my parents' deaths, the strength that had got me through five years of looking after Angel all alone. The strength I found every day to carry on breathing without Kai by my side.

From somewhere deep within, courage and determination bubbled up. Standing tall, I propped my hands on my hips and held my head high.

“Ernie, I apologize for not introducing myself. My name is Riley Wolfe, Kai was my husband.” Ignoring the gasps, I took a deep breath and carried on. “I believe all of you know Miles was not responsible for killing Kai, nor were we having an affair. The truth is, Kai had a brother whom he didn't know about, and he plotted to ruin Kai and take over Hollows Bay with the help of Hendrix. When Kai died, he left the city to me, and I give each of you my word right this second that I will do whatever the fuck I need to do to take back control.”

Four mouths dropped open as they stared back at me. From behind them, Miles gave a subtle nod of his head, reassuring me I had said the right thing.

“Kai had a brother?” Kimmy asked, shock lacing her voice.

“Yeah,” I replied, dropping my hands from my hips.

“Who?”

“Max Thorne.”

“You’re fucking kidding,” Graham barked, slamming his hands down on the wooden table and sending a puff of dust into the air.

“I wish I was,” I said, slumping into the chair opposite the four of them.

I gave them a few seconds to digest the information because I knew what a head fuck it was to make sense of everything.

“You and Kai got married?” Ernie said skeptically, breaking the tension in the room.

“It’s true,” Colin said, speaking for the first time. “I married them in secret a few days before Mr. Wolfe passed away.”

Kimmy whistled. “Congratulations Mrs. Wolfe, that’s one hell of a ring you have there,” she said, her eyes falling to my finger where my wedding ring was. The ring I refused to remove after Kai died.

“Thanks,” I replied, giving her a small smile back, and refusing to let the memories of our wedding day seep in. I didn’t need the tears right now.

“And Kai left Hollows Bay to you?” Ernie asked, although it wasn’t in a way that said he was doubting me. I nodded in response. “Mrs. Wolfe,” he started, but I held up my hand.

“Riley, please.”

He bobbed his head once. “Riley. I’ve lived in Hollows Bay all my life. My father worked for Christopher Wolfe, and I had a lot of respect for Kai. Hollows Bay belongs to the Wolfe family, so if you’re telling me Kai wanted you to run the city, then I give you my word, I will do whatever you need me to do to reclaim your throne.”

He held my gaze, nothing but sincerity etched on his face. A warm feeling of gratitude and relief flushed through me. The insurmountable mountain felt a fraction smaller.

“Me too, babe. Whatever you need,” Kimmy said.

“Thank you,” I replied, giving them both an appreciative smile.

“Hold up,” Graham said, scowling at me. “No offense, Riley, but I don’t know you from Adam, and what? I’m just expected to trust you? Trust you know what you are doing, and can bring Thorne down?”

“No, I don’t,” I replied, holding his eye. “I don’t expect you to trust me instantly, trust takes time to build. But you trusted Kai. Did he ever do you wrong?”

I waited for him to reply. The cogs whirled in his head as he ran a finger over his lip. Eventually, his shoulders slumped.

“No,” he replied begrudgingly.

“Kai trusted me to do what was right for the city, so yeah, it will take time to build your trust, but I’m asking you to take a leap of faith and trust me, just like you trusted Kai.”

“I want to be promoted to Chief when Thorne is dealt with,” he said with no hesitation.

“Done,” I replied. I wasn’t sure if it was as simple as that, but if that’s what it took to gain his loyalty then I’d find a way. Another subtle glance at Miles told me I had done the right thing.

“In that case, I give you my word. I’ll do what you need to bring down Max and Hendrix.”

“Thank you.”

All eyes fell on Colin. Aside from confirming he had indeed married Kai and me, he’d kept quiet, and now my attention was on him, I realized he wasn’t quite able to meet my eye.

“Oh, yeah, sure. Whatever you need, Riley, I’ll do,” he replied, with absolutely no conviction at all. My eyes narrowed on him, my spidey senses tingled, telling me he was in no way shape or form being truthful.

“Whatever I need?” I asked, raising a brow.

“Of course,” he replied, but still couldn’t meet my eye.

“Great, at your next council meeting I need you to steal Max’s phone,” I said cheerfully.

I didn’t. I wasn’t that stupid, I was totally winging it. But something in the pit of my belly said maybe Miles was right, Colin couldn’t be trusted, and now I had shown my hand. If I didn’t trust him, I couldn’t let him walk out of here and risk him blabbing to Max or Hendrix.

“Oh....erm....yeah, I think I can do that,” Colin replied, looking anywhere but at me.

I cast a look at the other three who had all turned their heads to look at Colin. Graham looked like he had sucked on a lemon. Ernie was resisting the urge to snarl but failing miserably, and Kimmy looked like she was ten seconds away from snatching a gun from one of the armed men behind her, and blowing Colin’s brains out.

Evidently, I wasn’t alone in thinking the man couldn’t be trusted.

I met Miles’ gaze on the other side of the room, his face was completely unreadable. I knew what he was doing though, he was waiting for me to make a decision on what to do with Colin.

I hated to accept it, but there was only one option from here. If I didn’t trust Colin, I couldn’t let him live. It would risk ruining every step of our plan, and we’d worked too hard to fail now. Not to mention I’d lose the trust of the other three who were watching me like hawks.

In the back of my mind, a little voice told me if I showed the slightest hint of weakness, I wouldn’t stand a hope in hell of gaining their trust to defeat the dynamic duo.

A heavy resignation settled over me. This was the weight I had to bear thanks to Kai and his enormous stupidity. Taking a deep breath, I took several steps to where Colin sat, his eyes tracked me, but he wasn’t the only one.

Miles, Ash, Travis, and Dan watched me carefully, and if I hadn't been facing them, I wouldn't have seen them place their hands on where their guns were hidden underneath their jackets. Despite not liking the idea that the fate of a man's life was in my hands, I'd be lying if I said it didn't feel good to know every single person in this room had my back.

All except Colin, of course.

"Here's the thing, Colin, I'm not sure I believe you," I said, parking my ass on the table next to him, and scowling. Now I was closer to him, I could see a light sheen of sweat coating his forehead, and his hands trembling in his lap.

Yup, this one was full of lies.

"I...I don't know....I mean," he said, stumbling over his words. He at least had the good graces to look at me, but all I saw in his green eyes was guilt.

Despite everything, my heart filled with my own guilt. It had been easy to condemn the gang members to death, they'd all betrayed Kai by taking Hendrix's side, but if I got this wrong, I'd be sentencing an innocent man to death, and how could I live with that?

But if my gut was right, that Colin was hiding something, then I couldn't let him walk away.

Channeling every ounce of Kai I could find, I gave him my best death stare. I wasn't sure if I looked intimidating or constipated, either way, he withered under it.

“Riley, please,” he begged quietly, his eyes turning pleading, and that was enough for me to know that the second he was free to walk out of here, he’d go snitching.

And that’s why I met Ash’s eye and gave a nod of my head, silently ordering him to seize Colin.

Ash didn’t hesitate. Within a second, he had yanked a terrified Colin to his feet. Colin, who had not expected to be suddenly grabbed, started trying to wriggle his way out of Ash’s grasp and protesting his innocence. But there was only ever going to be one winner, Ash was the size of a tree.

If I ever needed more conviction as to why I should order a man to be killed, it was right at that very moment I received it. As Colin grappled, something fell from his pocket, thudding on the floor and grabbing my attention.

Everyone in the room froze, including Colin.

“That’s not mine!” he cried as I reached down to pick the object up.

Like the fool he was, Colin tried to break free from Ash’s grasp, but Ash was too strong. Within seconds, Colin was pinned to the wall, held in place not only by Ash’s huge hands, but with both Travis and Dan’s guns aimed at him.

Miles, however, hadn’t moved a muscle from the wall he was leaning against. He was still watching, still assessing, waiting for my next move.

Grabbing the silver item, I stood back up, and a wave of anger surged through me as I realized what I was holding in

my hands.

A fucking recording device.

“Riley, I promise, that’s not mine! Someone planted it on me,” Colin begged, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

Quickly pressing the rewind button followed by the play button, my voice echoed around the room where I had announced my marriage to Kai, and my claim to take back control of the city. Colin whimpered the entire time, tears springing to life and rolling down his cheeks.

When the recording finished, he met my eyes, his filled with sorrow.

“Please believe me, it’s not mine! I have a family!” Ash’s big hand covered Colin’s mouth, silencing him.

But it wouldn’t take back the words he had just said.

Why did he have to tell me he had a family? It was easy to imagine he was just a lowlife with nothing and no one, but now he’d said it, my head filled with pictures of a faceless wife and their children.

I stared back at him, a war raging in my head about what the fuck to do. The logical part knew the answer, but the part of me that was just a human, the part I thought had died after witnessing Kai’s death, was still there, telling me not to give the order to end this man’s life.

Miles must have known I was facing an internal battle. He finally left his place against the wall and walked over,

stopping next to me, and speaking low enough so only I could hear.

“You can’t let him live, Riley, you’ll never be able to trust him. It’ll be a Blaze situation all over again.”

I hated that he was right. I’d made a deal with the devil in exchange for saving Blaze’s life, and she repaid me by handing the location of Angel to Hendrix after Danny had taken her. Colin might not have been a drug addict like Blaze, but he had his addiction in the form of gambling.

If I let him go, I knew full damn well all it would take would be the offer of money to sway Colin’s loyalties. Quite frankly, I’d had enough of people turning into traitorous little bitches.

Did that make what I was about to say easier?

No, of course it didn’t.

But there was no other choice.

Swallowing past the knot of emotion lodged in my throat, I kept my eyes fixed on Colin, refusing to show any sign of weakness as I found the words that needed to be said.

“Kill him.”

There was no time to take back the decision. Within a second, Miles’bullet had found its target.

Chapter 5

Riley

It was another two days before Georgio Bianchi agreed to meet us.

Two days of giving Miles the silent treatment.

He'd pissed me off.

Epically.

When the meeting with Kimmy, Ernie, and Graham ended, and I'd told them what I needed from each of them, Miles and I headed home. I was riddled with guilt over giving the order for Miles to kill him despite the fact I was sure he would have sold the recording to the highest bidder the second he could.

It was then Miles confessed that Colin was never going to survive past the night regardless of my decision.

Colin wasn't lying. Someone, namely one of the assholes who collected him, *had* planted the device on him under Miles' orders. Apparently, Miles had hacked Colin's bank

records and found that his debt had spiraled out of control, followed by a series of visits to a well-known loan shark. Miles was convinced Colin would have gone straight to Hendrix or Max the second he left the meeting with the sole intention of selling the information.

Instead of leaving Colin and not bringing him in for the meeting, Miles thought it would be a fan-fucking-tastic idea to give me a little test. A test to see if I had the minerals to order a man to his death.

And guess what?

I passed.

As well as giving him the silent treatment, I spent two days wishing I'd given him more than just two black eyes when I pounded his face.

But when the news came that the Bianchis were willing to meet us, I had to get over it.

We'd asked to meet Georgio on neutral grounds, but his response was that if we wanted to meet, it had to be on his turf. The other stipulation was that we came alone and unarmed. Miles did not like it in the slightest, but accepted when Georgio gave his word that we would walk out of his grounds unharmed on this one occasion.

Turns out Georgio Bianchi was interested in what I had to say.

“Have you thought about what you're going to offer from our side?” Miles asked as we crossed the border into Forest

Point, the land the Bianchis owned. It was at this point our entourage, made up of Ash, Tank, and Dan left us to go on alone.

“I guess more money from the sale of weapons and drugs?” I replied, although it was more of a question because the truth was, I had no fucking clue what to offer the Bianchis to make them hold off.

“That won’t be enough,” Miles said, rubbing his thumb over his bottom lip.

“What do you suggest then?”

He shot an annoyed look at me, before returning his eyes to the road. “You know, if you hadn’t given me the silent treatment for the last two days, we could have discussed this.”

“Well, if you hadn’t been a dick and set me up, I wouldn’t have given you the silent treatment,” I huffed back, glowering at him.

“You needed to make that decision, Riley. You can’t shy away from your responsibilities anymore. Whether you like it or not, you are now the head of the Wolfe family, and the decisions on who lives and who dies rests with you.” When I opened my mouth to reply, he shut me down. “Look, we can discuss this later, right now we need to focus on this meeting.”

Urgh, he was right. Everything we wanted to do depended on this meeting going the right way, and if Georgio didn’t agree, his men would storm Hollows Bay before the end of the night

and claim ownership, and everything we had worked towards would have been in vain.

Kai's death would have been in vain.

"Fine," I grumbled. I wasn't anywhere near done with berating Miles over his shitty test, but it could wait.

For now.

"You could owe them a debt," Miles said, turning the car onto a road with very neatly trimmed oak trees.

"What the hell does that mean?"

"It's like a favor. They do something for you, you owe them one," Miles replied, as if it should have been obvious.

"That's the best you can come up with? Fuck sake, Miles, I can't exactly go in there and say, *'Oh, hi George. Can ya do me a favor and hold off destroying the gruesome twosome, and I'll owe you one. Cheers pal!'*"

Miles snorted. "First of all, don't call him George. Especially when his name is Georgio. In fact, don't call him anything but Mr. Bianchi. Secondly, in our world being owed a debt is a huge deal. It means they can call in a favor any time they like, for anything they want."

"Anything?"

"*Anything*. They want the president dead, they can call in that favor. They want to use every single one of our men to wage a battle against another city, they call in the favor. It's

not something to offer lightly, Riley, but at this rate, I don't think you have much else to give."

And it wasn't like we were going to have much time to come up with anything else. Miles turned the car onto a gravel driveway, and immediately we were met with four men, armed with scary-looking guns pointed directly at us.

Miles wound down his window and explained who we were, every man giving us evil eyes as they made us get out of the car to search it, and us. I can't say I particularly appreciated the guard who blatantly copped a feel of my tits as he searched me for a weapon.

When they were happy we were unarmed and didn't have a ton of explosives strapped to the car, they let us on our merry way.

"Tell me again why we agreed to come unarmed?" I said to Miles as we pulled into a courtyard, only to be met with another ten men, all armed with what looked like machine guns. Despite Georgio's word, I suddenly feared we may not be walking out of there alive.

"Because we asked for the meeting. He gets to dictate the terms."

I swallowed nervously, my eyes roaming over the armed men who were scarier looking than the Apollo guys. Standing in the middle of them was a suited middle-aged man with an angry scowl on his face.

When Jack told me Mr. Bianchi had agreed to the meeting, he gave me a folder with pictures of key members of the Bianchi household. The man standing in the middle of the armed men was Antonio Bianchi, Georgio's brother, and second in command.

Withering under the glare of Antonio, I took a deep breath and stepped out, Miles following and taking his place by my side.

"Mrs. Wolfe," Antonio said, his features hard and unwelcoming. "Mr. Wolfe," he nodded to Miles. "Please, follow me."

He turned and strolled away without any further pleasantries. I cast a look at Miles who shrugged before waving his hand, indicating we should follow.

Silently, we followed Antonio through the house. In fact, house wasn't the right word, it was a fucking palace. I always thought Kai's penthouse was grand, but it was nothing compared to the Bianchi home.

White marble floors lined the house, the cream walls were adorned with elegant oil paintings, and glistening chandeliers hung from the ceiling. The entire place was lit up by the sun streaming through ginormous stained-glass windows, and every room we passed through felt airy because of the sheer size.

Antonio led us along a hallway until he reached an oak door. He didn't knock, just tugged on the ornate gold handle and

pulled the door open. Stepping aside to let me in, he met my eyes, nothing but hatred reflected in them.

Pushing down the nerves coursing through me, I stepped inside the huge room. In the middle was a long oak table, long enough to seat twenty people. Tall windows surrounded the room, all dressed with royal red drapes. An oil painting of a man hung on the end wall, big enough that it took up the entire space. I didn't know who he was, but evidently, he was someone important to have a painting of such grandeur.

My hands shook, and I balled them into a fist to stop the tremble trying to take over my body, damn glad Miles was with me for this. I seriously started regretting this stupid idea. I was unbelievably out of my depth.

“You must be Riley Wolfe,” a deep voice said which did nothing to settle the fluttering of butterflies in my belly.

For an older man, Mr. Bianchi was a handsome guy. I knew from the information Jack gave me he was approaching sixty, but if I didn't know that, I would have put him in his mid-forties. It was clear, even underneath his tailored suit, that he was an athletic man, his shoulders were broad, and his shirt was tight across his chest.

He held his hand out, and when I gripped it, he gave it a firm shake. “Mr. Bianchi, thank you for agreeing to meet us,” I said, giving him what I hoped was a friendly smile.

One he didn't return.

“Yes, well. I never thought I’d see the day I’d meet with a Wolfe, but it would seem we have a common enemy, and I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t intrigued by what offer you are going to bring to my table. After all, business is business. Please, let me introduce you to my family.”

Okay, so he wasn’t going to promptly throw me out on my ass. A little pang of hope shot through me, but I shut it down not wanting to get ahead of myself.

“This is my son, and my heir, Raphael,” Georgio said, pointing to a young man who was sitting at the table, but upon being introduced, stood and offered his hand.

Thanks to the information Jack gave me, I knew Raphael was the only son of Georgio, and was a twin. His sister, Sofia, who was also in the room, was born twenty-two minutes after him. They were both my age, twenty-one, and their mother had been killed when they were seven, murdered by a rival who had suffered the most horrific death when Georgio tracked him down.

I won’t lie, Raphael was hot. Not Kai hot, but you know, hot enough that I felt my cheeks warm when our eyes met. He was the type of guy you would find on the cover of a magazine, olive skin, muscles for days, chiseled features. His hair was shaved right down to his scalp and his lips were pulled into a beautiful smile.

I took Raphael’s hand, and his hazel eyes heated as they met mine.

“Call me Rafe,” he said as we shook, his eyes roaming lustfully over my curves.

I gave him a small smile, hating the feel of his eyes on me. There was only one man’s heated gaze I wanted on me, and that was never going to happen again.

He took Miles’ hand after mine and they shook before Georgio pointed to the girl. “And this is my daughter, Sofia,”

Sofia was beautiful. Aside from the olive skin, she didn’t look like Georgio or Rafe. Her long chestnut hair cascaded down her back, and her eyes were as blue as the Caribbean ocean. She had a stunning figure, her tits and ass perfectly in portion, and with her slim waist, she had the perfect hourglass figure.

She too stood, and I found she was the same height as me. She didn’t offer her hand, instead just gave me a warm smile. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Wolfe,” she said politely, her voice soft.

“Please, call me Riley,” I replied, returning the smile. She nodded her head and turned to face Miles. When she met his gaze, her eyes turned wary. Turning to him, I saw why.

For some bizarre reason, he was scowling at her, his eyes filled with hate, and even though we were in a room with the Wolfes arch-nemesis, Miles hadn’t shown any hatred towards Georgio or Rafe, so I was somewhat bemused as to his sudden hatred towards Sofia.

“Milo,” she said, giving him an ice-cold smile.

“It’s Miles,” he replied through gritted teeth.

“Oh. My apologies,” she replied with zero sincerity, before returning to her seat.

I caught Miles’ eye and raised a brow, silently questioning what the hell that was about. He subtly shook his head, and in an instant, the scowl disappeared, replaced with a completely emotionless expression.

“Please, take a seat. I don’t know about you, but I’d rather get straight down to business,” Georgio said.

Miles and I took our seats on the opposite side of the table to Georgio, Rafe, and Sofia. Antonio, who had loitered by the door since he brought us here, remained in his place, and the scowl was ever-present.

He really didn’t like fraternizing with the enemy.

“Mrs. Wolfe, I understand from our mutual friends that when Kai died, he did not have a child or a nominated second in command, and therefore left the reign of Hollows Bay to you, correct?” Georgio said.

“Yes, that’s correct. And please, call me Riley.”

“Of course. And am I to assume you know about the treaty we have in place with the Wolfe family?”

“Yes, Sir,” I replied, beginning to wither under the intense stare Georgio was casting my way.

“Good. Now, I would be very grateful if you could tell me why the fuck Hendrix Becker is parading around claiming *he*

is the King of Hollows Bay, and why the fuck he has stopped paying me my money,” he growled, and instantly tension filled the room.

I took a deep breath and hoped like fuck this was not going to come back and bite me on the ass.

And so, I launched into the tragic tale that had led us to this point.

How Kai had a brother he didn't know about who was the current Chief of Police, and we were pretty sure he was bribing government officials into doing his bidding. How Max claimed he'd spent twenty years plotting the downfall of the Wolfe family. How Kai had beaten Max to a pulp when Hendrix shot and killed Kai.

And finally, how we believed Max and Hendrix were still working together, but Hendrix was effectively a placeholder until Max was ready to take the throne from him.

“There's more to it, but those are the headlines,” I said, wrapping up my story of woe. Credit where it's due, none of the Bianchis interrupted me, the three of them, four if you included Antonio, had listened with interest and no doubt a heap of questions on their lips.

“Do you know why Hendrix betrayed Kai?” Georgio asked, breaking the silence that had descended.

“He claimed it was because he wanted to take the organization wider than Hollows Bay. His father had spent his life working for Christopher Wolfe and the pair planned to

take over other cities, but when Kai took over from Christopher, he wanted to focus solely on Hollows Bay, something Hendrix didn't like. It basically boiled down to greed, and I suspect that's why they have stopped paying you your money," I replied, recalling the information Hendrix had told me when we were alone in the warehouse before Kai arrived to rescue me.

"Hmm, we'll come back to Hendrix," Georgio said with a hint of venom. I wasn't surprised. Georgio really didn't like it when men betrayed their boss, it's how his wife, and the mother of Rafe and Sofia met her fate.

One of his men, someone he thought he could depend on, was working for a rival, and had kidnapped Maria. Sadly, Georgio didn't get to her in time before she was killed.

"Let's talk about this Max Thorne. If what you are telling me is the truth, then Max *is* the heir to Hollows Bay if he was born before Kai."

My eyes narrowed on him as a spark of anger ignited under my skin. "Max is not, nor will he ever be the heir to Hollows Bay," I hissed. "Kai was the one who had to deal with Christopher Wolfe right up until that bastard died, he was the one who put up with his father's tyrant ways. Kai was the one Christopher left Hollows Bay to, not Max." My voice became angrier as I spoke. How dare Georgio claim Max was the rightful heir. Hollows Bay was Kai's legacy.

Under the table, Miles put a calming hand on my knee, stopping me from telling Georgio *exactly* what I thought of

him and where he could shove his claim.

“Mr. Bianchi, you and I both know that’s not how it works. Just because Max was born first, does not make him heir to Hollows Bay. Christopher left Hollows Bay to Kai, and Kai left Hollows Bay to Riley,” Miles said, thankfully giving me a moment to compose myself.

Georgio paused, before resting his elbows on the table and lacing his fingers. “So, you want me to hold off from taking any action against Hendrix and this Max Thorne. Tell me, what’s in it for me?”

This was the part I was dreading. Truth be told, I hadn’t actually expected Georgio to give me the time of day, but he had. Fuck, why had I been so stubborn and ignored Miles these past two days?

“Once we reclaim Hollows Bay, we’ll up our payment to you from 5% to 15%,” I said, crossing my fingers and hoping like fuck he’d go for it.

He snorted. “Don’t patronize me, Riley,” he said, glowering at me from across the table. Won’t lie, I wanted to cower at the way he shot daggers at me. “Look around, does it look like I need your money?”

He had a point. Now I’d seen where he lived, it was clear the man and his children had more money than they could ever spend in a lifetime, and he no doubt made a fortune from his own business interests.

Remembering what Miles said on the way here, a heavy weight settled in my gut as I opened my mouth to speak again. “We’ll owe you a debt.”

Georgio’s brows rose in surprise, and for a second, he was quiet. But then he broke out into a malicious smile, one that sent a chill down my spine. “I don’t want to be owed a debt, Riley. I want something permanent.”

“Something permanent?”

“Yes. It’s time the treaty between the Bianchis and the Wolfes was renewed. Times have moved on, and I believe we could be a very powerful force working together instead of working against each other. I want an alliance.”

Miles tensed beside me, and the smirk that played on Georgio’s lips told me that what he was about to offer wasn’t going to be anything good.

“What does that mean?” I asked tentatively.

“An alliance between families can only be through marriage,” Miles whispered from beside me. I twisted to look at him, my mouth dropping open in horror.

“That’s correct. And seeing as you are far too young for my liking, you will marry Raphael, and our two families will join as one.”

Like hell I will.

My head whipped from Georgio to Rafe, who was looking at me with heated eyes, and when his tongue ran over his bottom lip, I snapped out of the shock.

“I’m sorry, that can’t happen. I’m already married.”

“You’re married to a dead man, Riley-”

“It doesn’t matter,” I said, interrupting him and so done with pleasantries. I wasn’t going to marry Rafe, I wasn’t going to marry anyone ever again. It didn’t matter if Kai was dead, I was married to him. I *belonged* to him, and there was no way I was letting anyone into my heart ever again. “I’m not marrying anyone, there must be something else we can agree to.”

“I’m afraid not. Take the deal or get the fuck out of my house,” Georgio snarled. His eyes narrowed on me, his nostrils flaring. Suddenly, I understood why Georgio Bianchi was a feared man.

I was about to tell him to fuck his deal and hot foot it far away from Forest Point while we had a chance, but Miles stopped me in my tracks.

“Marriage is the only way you’ll agree to hold off?”

Georgio’s narrowed eyes turned to him. “It is.”

“Then we’ll take your offer,” Miles said, surprising the ever-living shit out of me. A surge of rage crested through me. He was throwing me under the damn bus, just like he’d done with Colin. But this was something I wasn’t going to take lying down.

“Miles, I’m not marrying anyone,” I lowered my voice which was fucking pointless given that everyone was staring at us.

“You’re not the only Wolfe sitting at this table,” Miles replied, before turning back to face Georgio. “I believe you have a son *and* a daughter.”

Holy shit.

I chanced a peek at Sofia, who until now had remained quiet and uninterested in the conversation ongoing around her. Now, she was staring back at Miles, horrified at his suggestion.

“Papa, no! I don’t want to marry Milo!” she cried, her shrill voice echoing around the room.

“It’s Miles,” Miles snapped, glaring at her. She met his eye from across the table, agony written all over her face.

Christ, did my heart break for the girl. No one should have the choice of their future husband forced on them.

“Silence!” Georgio barked. She fell silent but continued to glare at Miles from across the table. “Hmm, interesting. Has Riley promoted you to 2IC?”

No. I hadn’t.

I still hadn’t really accepted that *I* was the boss. But Miles had been by my side from day one, he had guided me through everything, and even if I hated the way he taught me some lessons, I couldn’t deny that he had taught me for my own good.

I turned to look at Miles again who met my eyes. A silent conversation passed between us in one look. He was telling me to listen to him, to trust that he knew what he was doing.

“He is my second in command, yes,” I said, facing back to Georgio and ignoring the daggers Sofia was throwing at both of us from across the table.

Georgio paused for a second and everyone fell quiet, the only sounds coming from Sofia, who was now sobbing quietly behind her hands.

“In which case, I will give you one month to deal with Thorne and Becker. I will give you my men to use as you see fit to bring this to an end. In return, Miles will marry Sofia, and the Bianchis and the Wolfes will reign together.”

Chapter 6

Riley

Miles was silent as we made our way through Forest Point, heading back to the house. After Sofia stormed out, he asked to have a private moment alone with Mr. Bianchi to discuss the *intimate* details of the marriage.

I argued and said that surely it was up to Sofia, but Miles gave me his look that said, *'We'll discuss this later,'* before asking if Sofia was a virgin. At that point, I promptly left, more than prepared to give him the silent treatment for another few days.

Who the hell did he think he was discussing his sex life with his future wife's father? It was bad enough that the poor girl didn't get a choice in who she was marrying, but for her father to say who she fucked? It was wrong on so many levels.

In fact, fuck the silent treatment, no way I was keeping quiet about this.

“That was a real shitty move back there,” I said, turning to glare at him. He kept his gaze on the road ahead, his hand clenching around the steering wheel.

“We didn’t have a choice, it was the only way Bianchi would agree to the deal, and as you said, you’re married to Kai.” He still refused to look my way, and even though his tone was calm, he was grinding his teeth, quietly simmering.

“Not the part about the marriage, the part where you kicked me out so you could discuss whether you got to fuck her or not as part of the agreement,” I hissed angrily. “That was a douchebag move, Miles, only Sofia should get to decide who she wants to fuck, not her father.”

I folded my arms across my chest and turned away, unable to look at him any longer. Over the last six months, I had come to love Miles as if he were my brother, but there were times when he was a complete dickhead.

“Are you quite finished?” he said, pulling his eyes off the road to look over at me. When I didn’t reply, he carried on. “Did it occur to you that Bianchi might have been expecting me to have that conversation with him? That maybe arranged marriages in the Cosa Nostra are tradition, and the kind of expectations that come with a marriage are discussed at great lengths between the interested parties. Do you not think if I had just walked out of there, Bianchi would have questioned whether I was being genuine or not? Look at me, Riley. Do I look like the kind of asshole that would force anyone into fucking me? Give me a break, I’m not a fucking rapist.”

I uncrossed my arms and looked back at Miles, meeting his angry eyes. Guilt filled me for my accusations. He was right, I hadn't considered that he might have been playing along.

"Sorry," I muttered, my cheeks heating with shame. I should have known better than to think Miles would force himself on anyone, he despised rapists as much as Kai had.

"Forget it," he said softly, returning to look out the windscreen. An awkward tension filled the air, making me feel even fucking worse.

"She's a pretty girl," I said, trying to lighten the mood.

"She's a brat. She couldn't even get my name right."

"Yeah, well, I think she's entitled to be a brat, she just had her free will taken from her, something I can relate to."

Miles' jaw clenched, and I instantly felt guilty again. He'd agreed to marry her to save our bacon, not for any other reason. His free will had been taken away as well.

"I feel sorry for her," I said, making sure he could hear the humor in my voice. "You know, having to marry you. *Milo*."

Miles turned to face me and I gave him my best mischievous smile. After a beat, his face broke out into his own smile and he chuckled, and just like that, the tension evaporated.

At that moment, the phone Jack had gifted me a few days ago rang, scaring the absolute shit out of me. I wasn't used to anyone calling me. I'd only ever had a cheap phone which I used to text Angel when we lived in East Bay.

Aside from Angel and my old boss, Diana, no one had my number, so I never got any calls. But Miles had insisted I had a phone, and so Jack had presented me with an all-singing-all-dancing encrypted phone. Half of the things it could do, I had no idea. So long as it could make a call and send a message when I needed it to, that was good enough for me.

“Hello.”

“Riley, it’s Ash.”

They’d taken to calling me Boss or Ma’am after I conceded and accepted the responsibility placed on my shoulders. But after about an hour of them calling me that, I snapped and told them never to call me that again or I’d slice their balls off. They listened, they’d called me Riley ever since.

Placing the phone on speaker so Miles could hear, I held the phone in the palm of my hand. “Hey, Ash. We’re on our way out of Forest Point. We should be hitting the city border in about ten minutes. And guess what, Miles is getting married!”

Miles glared at me, and I chuckled.

“He is?” Ash replied, confusion in his tone. “Wait, we’ll come back to that. Riley, we’ve just had some hot intel. Alex Barnes is at Club Sin waiting for a drug drop.”

My mood darkened in an instant.

Alex Barnes was the prick who killed Jacqueline when Hendrix convinced me to leave the panic room all those months ago. He lured me out claiming he would kill Jacqueline, and then my friend Kendra if I didn’t leave the

panic room. When I did leave, knowing full well I'd be walking into a trap, I stupidly thought I'd saved Jacqueline's life. That was until we reached the staff lodge where I found Hendrix had killed Thomas, the butler, and then he instructed Alex to kill Jacqueline.

Jacqueline wasn't just Kai's maid. She looked after me from the very minute Kai brought me home. She helped me shower and dress when my arm was in a sling after my shoulder had been dislocated. She convinced me to go ahead with the wedding to Kai. She was willing to sacrifice her life to keep me locked away in the panic room. Not to mention the years she had spent looking after Kai.

She was so much more than a maid.

In the days after Kai's death, and when Miles and I started our planning, I made it crystal clear that Alex would die painfully for what he did to Jacqueline. Until now, we hadn't had an opportunity to snatch him off the street and make him pay, he was always glued to Hendrix's side.

It looked like our luck had changed.

"How many?" Miles asked, turning serious and entering badass mode.

"Ten in total. With the three of us and you two, we could easily take them down," Ash replied.

Miles looked over at me. "What do you think?"

"I think the fucker needs to die," I replied without hesitation. I'd seen these guys work, killing nine gang members and

kidnapping Alex would be a walk in the park.

“We’ll head to East Bay then,” Ash said. In the background, the engine of his truck rumbled to life. “We’ll get obs on. RV on Sand Street.”

In the last few months, I’d learned all about their codewords which was a good job otherwise I wouldn’t have had a fucking clue what they were on about. They were going to set up observations near Club Sin so they could keep tabs on the comings and goings. When we were near, we’d meet them at the rendezvous point so we could all head in together.

Pulling off the freeway an exit earlier than anticipated, we headed for Hollows Bay. Nerves sprung to life in my belly. If we were successful, it’d be another step closer to destroying Hendrix.

It would be risky, more so than usual. When we’d made previous appearances, it was in the dead of night, and we had the rest of the team with us to ensure we could go undetected. Now, it was the middle of the day, and we only had half of the team, but this was too good of an opportunity to pass up. Besides, we were heading for East Bay, the land that time forgot.

If East Bay was a dump when Kai ruled, it was like a shanty town now Hendrix was in charge. Poverty was at an all-time high, drug dealing and prostitution was rife, and The Stags ruled with an iron fist. Hendrix had put so much effort into conquering West Bay that he forgot about the people of East Bay.

Kai always said you had to have the rich and poor factions for a city to work. There could be no Yin without Yang. Under the guidance of Max, what Hendrix had achieved was putting all his efforts into the Yin, and now the people in the Yang were suffering. And that only meant one thing. They were turning against the hand that wasn't feeding them.

As for Club Sin, the girls who worked there tried to keep it running after Diana died but they didn't know the first thing about running a strip club. The only one who did have some business sense was my only friend, Kendra, but when Hendrix used the threat of hurting Kendra to lure me out of the panic room, I feared he would threaten her again to lure me out of hiding.

Using some of Kai's money, I moved Kendra, Zara, and Kendra's boyfriend, Dion, out of Hollows Bay under the guise of Kendra inheriting a house from a grandma she'd never met. They were currently living a life of luxury somewhere in South America.

Hendrix gifted Club Sin to Carlos when he took over Hollows Bay, and Carlos turned Club Sin from a semi-reputable club into the pits of hell. Girls were forced to fuck clients or face not just losing their jobs but their homes too. In order to get through fucking vile and dirty men, they'd take a shit load of drugs to forget what they had to do. They'd then get addicted and need more drugs to survive, resulting in them getting into debt with Carlos who would make them work doubly hard to pay off their debt.

It was a vicious circle, and one I was determined to end.

As we made our way through the streets of East Bay, I kept low in my seat. I need not have bothered, the windows of the SUV we were in were tinted, and it wasn't a vehicle that would stand out of the ordinary in East Bay. No one gave us a second look as we headed toward the club.

Miles finally turned the SUV into Sand Street, and into an alley opposite the entrance to Club Sin. Parked in the alley was an innocuous white van that no one would give a second thought to being parked there. Inside was a different story.

Miles and I jumped out of our SUV, and as we approached the side of the van, the door slid open and Tank offered his hand to pull me up. Even though I'd seen the inside of the van dozens of times, I was still in awe at how impressive it was.

The back of the van had been turned into a mobile war room. There were computers and screens showing camera footage and maps, radios used to talk to those who were outside the van on whatever mission they were on, and a huge locker filled with weapons. On one of the screens was aerial footage of Club Sin.

“Jack got the drone up as soon as we got the intel,” Ash said, seeing me watching the screen. “We've had eyes on for the last two hours, and aside from Alex and the others, no one has been near or by.”

“Any clue where they are inside the club?” Miles asked.

“The heat sources are in the middle, here,” Ash replied, pointing to the screen showing a large orange blob. “There’s been some movement from this area to here.” He pointed from the group of orange blobs to a single blob in the back of the club.

“That’s the main stage area,” I said, pointing to the area in the middle. “And that’s Diana’s old office.” I pointed to the office in the back. I’d worked in Club Sin for the best part of three years, I knew the place like the back of my hand.

“Thought so. And aside from the front, is this the only other exit?” He pointed to the back of the club where there was an exit.

“And here,” I replied, reaching up and pointing to the emergency exit at the side of the building.

“No exits from the cellar?”

“Nope.”

“Good, makes life easy,” Tank said, taking one of the guns Dan handed him.

“What’s the plan?” Miles asked, also taking a gun from Dan. Ordinarily, Miles was always armed, but because we’d had to go unarmed to the meeting with the Bianchis, he’d forgone it.

As for me, I’d so far managed to go without carrying a gun. I’d had plenty of lessons, and I wasn’t the worst shot after months of practice, but if I could avoid shooting a gun, I would.

Sensing my reluctance, Miles shoved his gun in my hand. “Time to step up, Riley.”

Having no choice but to take the weapon from his hand, I stared down at it like it had personally offended me. I always knew it was a matter of time before I’d have to use a gun outside of target practice, I just hadn’t realized it would be today.

“Tank covers the back,” Ash said, pointing to the screen so there was no mistaking where the back of the club was. “Dan and I take the front. You guys cover the side exit. We’ll approach from all angles, and take them by surprise.”

“What do you want to do with Alex?” Miles asked me, taking an earpiece from Ash and putting it in his ear.

I didn’t feel the slightest hint of guilt. Alex was responsible for his own actions, he’d chosen to become Hendrix’s little bitch. He chose to pull the trigger and kill Jacqueline. He had to realize actions had consequences.

“He doesn’t die. Not yet. He’ll get the same treatment as everyone else and then we’ll return his body to Hendrix like we’ve done with the others.”

A look of pride crossed Miles’ face as he gave me a nod.

“Let’s do this then. You ready?” Ash said, his dark eyes burning into mine.

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

With that, Tank fired up the van and hit the gas. Adrenaline flooded me as we shot across the main road and pulled into the

parking lot at the front of Club Sin. The second the van came to a stop, Dan slid the door open, and jumped out, followed by Ash and Miles.

I didn't have time to consider what was happening or what I was about to do. Ignoring my racing heart, I jumped out, following Miles as he broke away from Dan and Ash who headed for the front door. As we sprinted down the alley that ran alongside the club, I briefly saw Tank disappear down the other side, heading towards the back.

"Stay close," Miles instructed as we reached the side wall. He led the way, and I stayed right behind him.

Miles and the others had trained me for moments like this. I knew to stay close, to let him clear the way. My responsibility was to make sure no one attacked from behind. If they did, I couldn't hesitate, I would have to fire.

But practice was a hell of a lot different from reality, and I couldn't stop the gun from shaking in my hands.

When we reached the door, Miles paused, waiting for the signal that the others were in place. We didn't have to wait long.

"Let's go," Miles said, kicking the emergency exit door open. It flew open with a bang, and Miles sprinted forward.

How Kai used to enjoy doing shit like this, I would never know. I was fucking terrified. My legs felt like jelly as I followed behind Miles, and within seconds gunfire echoed from somewhere within the club.

I ran behind Miles along the hallway that led us passed the old VIP rooms, and we burst into the main stage area. Miles immediately joined in the gunfight.

One body was already on the floor, bleeding from a hole in his head. Two men were hiding behind tables, firing back at Dan and Ash. Another three turned towards Miles as soon as we burst in and started firing at us. Tank was nowhere to be seen but gunshots echoed from the hallway that led to the back where Diana's office was.

Movement from my left caught my eye as Miles shoved me back in the doorway we'd just come from, protecting me from taking any bullets. I turned in time to see Alex standing behind the bar and looking back at the commotion in the main area, his mouth open in horror, and then like the coward he was, he turned and ran.

I didn't stop to give it a second thought. The instant I saw his face, the image of Jacqueline's head exploding from his bullet flashed in my mind. Rage sprung to life and thumped through my veins, and every lesson Miles and the guys had drilled into me went out the fucking window as I took off after Alex.

"Riley!" Miles yelled as I ran toward the bar, ducking as a bullet whooshed past me and hit a bottle, glass and liquor going everywhere. The door at the end of the bar slammed, but not before I saw the back of a figure heading through it.

Keeping low, I ran the length of the bar. Many nights I had worked behind here, covering shifts when the bar staff were short. Never in my life did I imagine that six months later, I'd

be behind the bar with a gun in my hand chasing after a douchebag, intent on killing him.

The door swung open as I barged into it, and gunshots echoed around me as I ran down the stairs into the dimly lit cellar, gun held out in shaky hands in front of me, cocked and ready to fire. As I reached the bottom step, I paused.

The cellar hadn't changed much since the last time I was down here. Barrels of beer and boxes of wine were stacked almost as high as the ceiling, and in rows that ran the length of the cellar. There was ample opportunity for someone to hide down here. I held my breath, listening to any sounds of movement, but I was met with the deafening sound of silence.

Tentatively, I took the last step into the cellar, my pounding heart thudding against my rib cage. Now I was here alone, I was really starting to regret my decision to chase Alex. But with gunfire still raging above me, I couldn't walk away with my tail between my legs and ask one of the guys to come and hold my hand.

It was time for me to grow a pair of lady balls.

My hands shook as I peeked around the first row of beer barrels. When there was no one waiting for me, I tiptoed across to the next row and again peeked around. My brows shot up, and my hands dropped at the sight of Alex's body on the floor. It was too dark to tell whether he was dead or unconscious, but either way, he wasn't moving.

It was then I realized my mistake. My gun was lowered as someone pressed up from behind me. One hand wrapped

around my waist, while the other covered my mouth preventing me from screaming, and I was pulled back against a solid body.

My heart almost stopped as words were whispered in my ear.

“Hello, Star.”

Chapter 7

Kai

I shouldn't have been alive. I was damned to spend all of eternity in the deepest pits of hell, tormented by the fact that I would never get to see my girl again.

Yet here I was.

One lucky son-of-a-bitch.

She froze as I pulled her against me, her luscious scent of sunscreen and strawberries engulfed me as I held her against my chest where she belonged.

I hadn't intended to let her know I was alive, not right that second anyway. But then, I hadn't expected her to come running down the stairs chasing Alex fucking Barnes like she was *Wonder Woman*. The second I saw her, I knew that despite the can of worms I was about to open, I couldn't *not* reach out and touch her.

Six months without my wife had been worse than the deepest pits of hell, but now I had her back in my arms, she wasn't going anywhere.

“Hello, Star,” I whispered in her ear before burying my head in the crook of her neck and brushing my lips over her delicate skin. I'd almost forgotten what she tasted like, and I couldn't fucking wait to get reacquainted with every inch of her perfect body. I was going to spend *weeks* worshiping her, making up for every second we'd lost.

As if coming to her senses from the touch of my lips, she started wiggling out of my grasp. I let her go, desperate to see her beautiful face. To stare once again into her gorgeous chocolate eyes that had a way of seeing through all my bullshit, and right through to my soul. She spun around, her brows raised, her jaw almost hitting the floor.

She didn't say anything, and I gave her time to take me in, letting the shock settle. Her eyes roamed from my head to my toes, tears welling as an array of emotions played out on her face, before settling on a look of disbelief.

My heart beat wildly in my chest, the heart that had worked so hard to keep me alive when I lost so much blood. The heart that had to be restarted three times, but didn't fail.

The heart that belonged to her.

Riley's eyes narrowed on my face, making sure she was really seeing what she thought she was seeing. I didn't look like me anymore. My dark hair was longer, and as much as I

fucking hated it, I had let my beard grow which was now thick around my jaw and mouth.

When her chocolate orbs met my dark ones, comprehension dawned and she finally found her voice.

“Kai?” she said, her brows pulled together in question, bewilderment heavy in her voice.

“Yeah, baby.”

“Oh my god!” she choked on a sob, and then before I had time to prepare, she launched herself into my arms, jumping up, and wrapping her legs around my waist.

It was a good job I’d spent time recovering and building my strength up because she barrelled into me with the force of a hurricane, it almost knocked me off my feet.

“Kai,” she whispered, her cheeks soaked with tears. Her hands found my face and she cupped my cheeks, running her hands all over my beard as if not believing I was there.

And then her mouth was on mine.

Kissing her for the first time in six months was like coming up for air after years of being held underwater, powerless to do anything but drown in the darkness. Riley was my everything, she was the reason my heart refused to give up, and now she was back where she was meant to be, I was never going to let her go.

I wrapped my arms around her, holding her tight against my chest, and spun us around before slamming her against the stack of boxes which swayed unsteadily. Riley kissed me as if

she had been just as starved of oxygen as I was. Her hands stroked over my cheeks and my jaw, but it wasn't enough, I wanted her hands all over me. I *needed* her to touch every inch of my skin like I planned to do to her.

Needing a minute to get my breath, I pulled my mouth away from hers, and as I did, a pained sob left her throat, hitting me in the very core of my heart.

"I thought you were dead," she whispered against my lips, her tears soaking both our faces.

"You should have known I'd never leave you, Star. I told you, it's you and me for eternity." I slammed my mouth down on hers again, craving another taste.

For the first time in six long months, my cock stirred, and I was desperate to bury myself in my wife. And with the way she was grinding against me, I would have said she felt the same way.

"Baby, I've missed you so fucking much," I moaned against her lips as my cock strained painfully against my zipper. It didn't fucking matter that Alex Barnes' unconscious body was laying mere feet away. It didn't matter that the sound of gunfight was dying down above us. It didn't matter that there were so many unspoken questions she had. I needed her now, everything else would have to wait. "Six months has felt like a fucking lifetime, Star. I've thought about you every damn day we've been apart, resisting the need to come back to you."

But like a bucket of ice had been poured over me, Riley froze in my arms, before tearing her mouth away, her eyes

hardening.

“Put me down,” she mumbled before dropping her legs and becoming a dead weight in my arms. I had no choice but to let her go, and as soon as her feet hit the floor, she twisted out of my grasp, her eyes now filled with something far from lust.

Hate.

Taking two steps away from me, her face contorted into a sneer. “You were dead,” she hissed, her voice full of choked emotion. “You died. How the hell can you be standing there?”

My wife stared back at me with such despair in her eyes, that my heart broke for her. I raised my hands to placate the little ball of fury that was growing bigger the longer she stared at me.

I knew at some point the anger would hit her, and I couldn't say I blamed her. When I found out Miles told her I had died, I was fucking apoplectic with rage, to the point I had to be sedated for another week. When the doctors brought me around again, I was ready to fly out of my hospital bed so I could find my girl, but Miles begged me to hear him out.

That's when things changed.

“Baby, there's so much to talk about, and we will, but right now, I just want to fucking hold you.” I reached for her, but my little firecracker slapped my hand away. A spike of anger swept through me, and I had to remind myself that every day for the last six months, she believed I was dead. Of course it

was going to take her some time to come to terms with it all being a lie, even if it was for her own good.

“Do not fucking touch me. How fucking dare you,” she bellowed, her voice wavering as more tears slid down her cheeks. “Do you have any idea what I’ve been through, Kai? Any fucking clue how much pain I’ve been in every single minute of every single day thinking you were dead?”

“Star, it’s not been easy for me either,” I growled, beginning to lose my temper in frustration at not having her close to me. “Do you think I’ve enjoyed being away from you for this time? Do you think I haven’t worried about you every goddamn minute, knowing how much you would be suffering? Wishing every night that I could hold you in my arms? I’ve suffered too, Star.”

I knew I sounded like a selfish prick, and I knew it was the wrong thing to say, but I wasn’t thinking straight. Now that I had her firmly back in my sights, the only thing I could think of was my next fix of my wife.

I was a fucking addict for her.

I should have predicted her fist coming towards me. It wasn’t like I didn’t deserve it. It was a credit to how far she had come from the time she’d slapped me all those months ago when she first found out I had taken Angel. Instead of a slap now though, Riley punched me in the jaw, hard enough for my head to whip to one side, and hard enough for me to know there would be a bruise tomorrow.

Miles had taught her well, and despite the fact I was at the receiving end of her wrath, I couldn't help but be proud of my Star.

“Fuck you, Kai,” she roared, her eyes wild with rage. “Don't you dare play the innocent victim here.”

She launched herself at me again, but much like before, I would only ever give her one free shot. I grabbed her wrists, spun her around so her back was to my chest, and held her hands in front of her.

But Miles had taught her a little too well, or maybe I had underestimated my wife. Either way, I didn't anticipate her foot coming up to kick my knee backward, making my leg buckle. Or the elbow to my gut, catching me in the scar from where I had my spleen removed thanks to one of Hendrix's bullets. And I didn't anticipate the shove once she had broken free from my grasp, making me stumble back a step.

“I told you not to fucking touch me,” she snarled.

“Fuck, Riley,” I hissed, rubbing the dull ache in my side. I was mostly healed, but if I overdid it in training, or I received an unexpected jab to the side, the old wound would kindly remind me that I wasn't quite recovered.

Her eyes dropped to where my hand moved over my scar, and a brief flash of worry crossed her face, but it was gone in an instant.

Before either of us could speak again, the door leading from the bar to the cellar crashed open, and heavy footsteps

pounded down the wooden stairs.

“Riley!” Miles yelled, panic lacing his tone.

I braced myself for the shitstorm about to come my way. Miles had been very vocal about making sure Riley was ready to find out that I was still alive, and we’d been deceiving her all this time. He knew as well as I did that it would be hard for her to take.

Miles’ worried face appeared around the corner, his shoulders slumping in relief when he saw Riley was safe, only to instantly tense when he saw me standing opposite her.

“Kai. What the fuck?” he yelled angrily. But the fact he wasn’t surprised to see me alive and breathing told Riley all she needed to know.

It took less than two seconds for the penny to drop. She looked from Miles to me, and then back to Miles again, her lips pressing into a thin, disapproving line.

“You knew, didn’t you?” she said, the hurt evident in her voice.

His shoulders slumped again. “Riley, I can explain-”

“Explain?” she said, cutting him off, as more tears welled in her eyes and slid down her cheeks at the depth of our betrayal. “How can you explain this, Miles? You told me he died. You’ve witnessed my heart breaking every damn day. There’s nothing you could say that can explain-” Her words faltered as grief took over.

Guilt flooded me, and even though it hadn't been my decision to take this route initially, I still went along with it when I should have insisted she be told the truth at the first opportunity. I felt like a grade A cunt. I'd hurt my wife, one thing I vowed never to do.

"Riley-" I started, ready to throw myself down and grovel at her feet.

"No," she snapped, turning her hate-filled eyes on me. "No. I don't want to hear it. The pair of you can get fucked."

And with that, she stormed past the two of us. A growl started in my chest and I stepped forward, ready to go after her.

"Save it, Kai," Miles said, stepping in front of me. "She won't get far, the guys upstairs won't let her out of their sight."

I ground my teeth but I knew he was right, she would need time to cool down. I knew my Star well, whenever I'd done shit to piss her off, she needed time to think things over. Granted, she'd probably need more than a few days given the enormity of this fuck up, but she'd come round.

She would have to, it's not like she could leave my ass, she was my wife. Even if she tried to run from me, I'd hunt her down to the ends of the earth before bringing her home and tying her to my bed until she saw fucking sense.

"Kai, what the hell were you thinking? What are you even doing here?" Miles barked, snapping my attention back to him

after it had been fixed on the door Riley had stormed through.

I turned my angry gaze on him. “I was thinking I was done with not being with my wife anymore.”

“We had a plan-”

“I don’t give a fuck. We’ll come up with a new one.”

“Come up with a new one? Kai, for fuck sake, we’ve spent six months planning this!” Miles yelled.

I can’t say I cared for his tone, and with the anxious knot growing bigger in my gut over how Riley had reacted, his attitude was enough to make me snap. Leaping forward, I gripped him by his shirt.

“Listen here, fuckwit. You might not understand it, but I couldn’t stay away from her. I didn’t fucking know she was going to be here, I thought you two were at the meeting with the Bianchis. But the second she ran down here, I couldn’t not touch her.”

The anger faded as a rare ball of emotion clogged my throat. Riley was my weakness, the only person on the planet who could bring these feelings out of me. Miles’ scowling face turned into one of sympathy as he knocked my hands away, and straightened his shirt.

“You’re wrong. I do get it,” he replied with a sigh. “But I hope you know what you are doing, ‘cos this could ruin everything we’ve been working towards.”

“She’ll come around,” I replied confidently, because Riley would have little choice in the matter.

A pause passed between us before he sighed, resignation etched on his face. “You could have gone about telling her a little better.”

“Probably. But when have you ever known me to do things the right way?”

He stared at me in disbelief but then chuckled. “Never. You really think she’ll come around?”

“She has no choice, I’m her husband,” I replied, earning a groan from Miles.

“You really are something else,” he grumbled before his eyes fell to Alex. “He dead?”

“Nope, just unconscious. I’ve got a few questions I’d like to ask him before he meets his maker,” I replied, thinking of all the ways I was going to extract information from the cunt.

“Come on then, let’s get him out of here. There’s a club full of dead stags, and we need to be out of Hollows Bay before they’re discovered.”

“Or we could just stay here until Thorne shows his ugly face?” I suggested as Miles grabbed Alex’s arms and rolled his eyes at me. As much as I’d have loved to stay for the Chief of Police to come and inspect the shootout scene, it wasn’t an option.

But his time would come.

“Are you going to tell me what you’re even doing here?” Miles asked, as between us, we heaved Alex’s dead weight up the stairs.

“I broke into the club to look for information on Rigby, it was pure luck Alex and his crew arrived for a drop-off,” I replied.

“Fuck sake, Kai. You can’t just go walking around East Bay. Someone could have seen you,” Miles huffed. “Just because you’ve grown your hair and now have a beard doesn’t make you incognito.”

“I wore a cap as well.” He met my eye, glaring, and in response, I gave him a smug smirk, only to be met with another eye roll.

Reaching the door, I followed Miles into the heart of the club, the place where I first saw my girl dance. I would have given anything to see her up on the stage right now, twirling around her pole, showing off her gorgeous body.

For my eyes only, of course.

The thudding of Miles and I dropping Alex’s body captured the attention of Ash and Tank who were checking the pockets of The Stags they had killed.

“Kai, what the fuck are you doing here?” Ash said, glowering at me from across the club. Blood spattered his arms and his black clothing, but he didn’t appear hurt.

“I wanted to surprise my wife,” I replied nonchalantly.

Ash and the Apollo team knew I’d survived so it wasn’t a complete surprise that I was strolling through Club Sin. It was thanks to them and their expert medical team that I’d made a recovery as quickly as I had. I owed them a lot, especially as

they'd been helping Miles to keep my Star safe all this time. I was sure when Riley found out they knew, they would receive the same treatment Miles and I were going to get- the dreaded silent treatment.

Poor bastards.

“Speaking of which, have you seen my girl?”

“She came through here a couple of minutes ago. Wait, did she see you?” Ash asked, his brows pulled together in a frown.

“Oh, she saw him alright, needless to say, she wasn't a happy bunny,” Miles chuckled, earning a scathing look from me.

“Shit,” Ash replied, heading towards the door that led to the back of the club. I followed, dread forming in my gut.

“What?”

“I asked her if she was okay, and she muttered something about getting some fresh air. I thought she needed a minute to compose herself after seeing all the dead bodies. I told her to go out the back so no one would see her.”

“Fucking hell, it wasn't the dead bodies she needed air from, it was the damn ghost that appeared,” Miles said as the three of us broke into a run along the corridor toward the door that stood wide open.

We burst into the back alley, sunlight scorching my retinas from where I had been hidden in the dark cellar for hours.

“Fuck,” Ash barked as it became apparent that Riley was not there. He pulled his phone out and started jabbing at the

screen. I barged past him and started heading down the side of the club, intent on finding her.

“Kai, where are you going?” Miles shouted, running up to my side. “You can’t let anyone see you.”

“I don’t give a fuck who sees me,” I growled as I stepped out into the front of the club.

The abandoned Apollo truck was parked at the front of the club, and as my eyes tracked up and down the street, people went about their daily business.

But as for my wife, she was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter 8

Riley

I couldn't breathe. My lungs constricted so much from the pain that no air could get in. With every step I took away from the cellar, *away from my husband*, the crushing weight of betrayal settled deeper into my bones until it consumed every inch of my being.

Blood thundered in my ears. I barely heard Ash ask if I was okay as I walked through the club. My garbled response of needing air appeased him, and when he didn't stop me, I walked my ass straight out of Club Sin. I was desperate to put distance between me and all the lies and deception that lay within the walls of the club.

Did Ash and the others know Kai was alive?

Probably.

I was the only moron who had been none the wiser. An array of sympathetic looks from Miles and each of the men I'd spent

the last six months with flashed before my eyes, only now they weren't looks of sympathy for a grieving widow. They were looks of pity because they knew the truth and I didn't.

My lungs loosened fractionally the further away I got from Club Sin, enough for me to breathe easier. That was until the sobs started. Deep wracking sobs that took over my body, making me tremble so violently that I stumbled and grazed my arm along a wall. The pounding of blood in my ears roared louder, and everything around me faded away, all I could focus on was the agony coursing through my body.

Every second for the last six months I had spent grieving for Kai had been for nothing. Every minute I spent feeling guilty with the knowledge that Kai died taking a bullet for me had been for nothing. The anguish and despair that had taken root on that fateful night and festered inside me until it was the only thing I could feel had all been for nothing.

The pain tearing through my body became too much. My legs buckled, and I fell to the floor, banging my knees on the hard concrete of the sidewalk. I didn't have a single fuck to give that I was in the middle of East Bay where anyone could have recognized me and delivered me straight to the men who had started this war. But right then, I would have taken Max and Hendrix over facing my lying, deceitful husband, and every other fucker who had strung me along.

But not one person gave me a second glance as I moved to lean against the wall of a closed down store. I was a mess, my clothes were filthy from the cellar, my hair was disheveled,

and tears stained my face. To the people of East Bay, I looked like another homeless kid, clucking because they didn't have the cash to get their next fix, and it was easier to ignore people in a crisis than to help them.

I pulled my knees to my chest and buried my head in the crook, trying my damned hardest to regain control over my breathing, but instead, a memory of *that* night took over.

"Riley....I'm sorry....Kai, he didn't make it. Kai, he's dead," Miles says on a choked whisper. *His eyes are red raw, his face pale, and his clothes are soaked in blood.*

Kai's blood.

I close my eyes as the words echo around my brain, and even though I knew what Miles was going to say before he uttered those words, I don't want to believe it. Kai can't be dead. He is Kai Wolfe, he's indestructible. But the blood coating my skin proves he is only human after all.

Was.

Was human.

Now he's nothing.

I need to see him. I need to see him with my own eyes before I can accept the truth.

"I want to see him," I say, holding back the tears threatening to fall. I leap from the chair, intent on going through the door Miles came from, but he blocks my path.

“Riley, no,” Miles says firmly, gripping my shoulders and stopping me from going anywhere. His touch burns, and it’s enough for something to snap inside of me.

“Let me go,” I roar, shoving his hands away. “I need to see Kai!”

“Riley, listen to me,” Miles shouts back, grabbing me again and holding me in place. “You don’t want to see him like that, Riley. You don’t want to remember him that way.” His voice cracks and his eyes fill with remorse and guilt, and I know instantly he blames himself for not getting to Kai in time.

His pain breaks me, my knees buckle and I fall, but Miles catches me and holds me against his chest. “It’s okay, I’ve got you, Riley,” he whispers, his arms banding around me as he strokes my back soothingly. I wrap my arms around him and let the pain consume me.

Kai’s dead.

I’m never going to see him again.

I’m never going to hear his voice again.

I’m never going to feel the touch of his hands on my body again.

I want to see him, but I know Miles is right. It’s been five years since my mom died and I still see her face most days. Her gray face, the white foam around her mouth, the smell of death....

No, I don’t want to remember Kai like that. It’s bad enough I’ll remember the moment I realized he had been shot for the

rest of my life, and how his warm blood seeped into my clothes. I don't need the image of him stone-cold in a mortuary.

Miles holds me as I sob and sob until the tears dry up. It's just us two, everyone else has left us so we can be alone with our grief. Time creeps by as we stand there, but how much time passes, I don't know. Miles gently pulls me away from his chest and looks down at me, his own eyes filled with unshed tears.

"Riley, we have to go."

"Go where?" I reply, confused. I don't want to leave here because that will mean leaving without Kai.

"We have to get out of Hollows Bay," he says, his voice filled with choked emotion.

"What do you mean? We can't leave Hollows Bay." Kai's words echo in my head, 'Wolfes don't run, and we don't hide.'

He takes my hand and gives it a reassuring squeeze. "Riley, the news has already broken that Kai didn't make it. The word on the street is that Hendrix has taken Kai's place, and he has issued an ultimatum to either join his side or face the consequences."

"How is that possible, Miles?" I ask, my brows pulling together in confusion. "What about Max? Is he dead? Kai beat him pretty badly, there's no way he would survive the injuries."

“I don’t know if he made it or not, Riley. It doesn’t matter either way, the orders are coming from Hendrix, and people are already declaring their loyalty to him,” Miles replies, anger creeping across his face.

“Then fight back, Miles! Hollows Bay doesn’t belong to Max or Hendrix, it belongs to Kai.” Tears prick at my eyes again, a wave of anger rolling through me that Kai’s legacy could be taken away so easily.

Miles pulls me against his chest again and rests his chin on the top of my head. “We can’t, Riley. We don’t have the men to fight with us-”

“We’ve got Kai’s men! They’ll fight for Kai,” I reply, interrupting him. The determination to take back Kai’s city grows fiercer inside me by the minute.

“We don’t know who we can trust. Half of the men fighting us at the warehouse were Kai’s men. They turned against us, Riley. Besides, Hendrix has issued a reward of ten million dollars to anyone who hands you over to him.”

I take in his words but they don’t really register. My brain is sluggish trying to comprehend what the hell is happening right now.

“Hendrix also wants me dead. He’s put the word out that it was me who killed Kai,” Miles says, and his words hit me like an arrow to the heart. Miles would never hurt Kai, surely people know that?

“No!”

“Yeah. That’s why we have to go, it’s not safe for us to stay in Hollows Bay. We need to get out, and we need to get out now.”

“Wolfs don’t run, Miles,” I say, repeating the mantra Kai drummed into me.

He chuckles, but there is no humor to it. “Spoken like a true Wolfe.” He pulls away from me again, but cups my face in his warm palms, a look of determination glints in his eye. “We aren’t running, Riley. We’re gonna lay low and come up with a plan, then we’ll take back Hollows Bay.”

“Riley?” A familiar voice pulled me from the memory, and as it faded away, my eyes focused.

I’d been so lost in the memory that I had no recollection of standing up and walking through the streets of East Bay, but somehow I had. Somehow, without me being consciously aware, my feet moved. I was now standing in the foyer of Carter House, the apartment block Angel and I had lived in before Kai bulldozed his way into my life.

“Riley, girl, get in here. It’s not safe for you to be out there,” Mrs. Henderson said, grabbing my arm and pulling me into her apartment.

Mrs. Henderson had lived in Carter House her entire life, and given she was now in her late 70s, that was a long time. She was a sweet lady, if somewhat nosey, but she was always kind and friendly to Angel and me.

When we first moved in, she made sure to tell me which residents to avoid if I didn't want to be felt up on the stairway, and she always asked how Angel was doing. There'd been a few times when I'd picked up groceries for her, but she wasn't someone I'd sit and have long conversations with. I had always kept myself to myself, focused solely on keeping Angel safe.

Still dazed from the memory, I let her pull me in, and before she closed the door behind us, she poked her head out, presumably to check no one had followed me.

"Riley, what in the name of god are you doing here? Don't you know you're a wanted girl?" she said, giving me a disapproving glare over the top of her glasses.

"Yeah," I mumbled, not having it in me to care that she was scolding me.

"Where's Angel? Is she safe?"

The mention of my sister's name snapped me out of the daze, and for the first time in months, I was overcome with the need to see Angel. I knew she was okay. In fact, she was better than okay. She was thriving in her new life, which was one of the big reasons why I had stayed away. I would only end up pulling her down into the depths of my depression. But now, with my heart lying in tatters, I wanted nothing more than to hold her in my arms.

"She's fine, she's in Europe."

Mrs. Henderson's eyebrows rose in surprise, and a flash of regret washed through me. How did I know I could trust this woman? I didn't know how long I'd been wandering around outside before she pulled me into her apartment. What if she'd already picked up the phone and alerted someone that I was here?

"Oh, don't give me that look," she said, reading my thoughts and scolding me yet again. "I'm not about to squeal to anyone where your sister is, or that you're here for that matter."

"You're not?" I asked skeptically.

"God no, not for all the tacos in Mexico," she said before leaning in and whispering conspiratorially, "and I happen to *love* tacos."

Despite myself, I laughed and relaxed a little. I'd always liked Mrs. Henderson. "Thanks."

"But, just because I wouldn't, doesn't mean others won't. There are plenty of people in this apartment block who would give you up in a heartbeat to get their greedy mitts on the kind of money that's being offered in exchange for information on your whereabouts, so I'm going to ask again, what the hell are you doing here?"

I sighed. "It's a long story, and honestly, I don't even know where to start, Mrs. Henderson. But I don't want to drag you into my mess because that will no doubt end badly for you."

She was a sweet lady, and if Hendrix or Max got wind she was withholding information on my whereabouts, they'd

torture her to get what they needed. The less she knew, the better.

She reached out and patted my hand. “I understand, dear. But it’s not safe for you to stay here, have you got a way of getting out of Hollows Bay? Somewhere you can go?”

Now the shock of finding out Kai was alive had begun to settle, I started thinking a bit clearer. Mrs. Henderson was right, it wasn’t safe for me to stay here. I needed to get the hell out of Hollows Bay. Not just because it would eventually get back to Max and Hendrix that I was here, but because Kai would be looking for me.

There was no way that man would let me walk away from him, not a single chance on god’s green earth. So yeah, I needed to find a way to get the hell out of here, and sharpish.

But how? I damn well wasn’t going to go back to the house with Miles and the others, I wasn’t going to spend one more night under the same roof with a bunch of traitorous assholes. And there was no one else I could call on to help me. I had no one, not anyone who wasn’t connected to Kai in some way.

Except, that wasn’t true anymore. A week ago, it would have been, hell, when I woke up this morning, it would have been true. But not anymore.

Pulling out my phone, I wasn’t in the least bit surprised to see a gazillion missed calls from Miles, Ash, and Jack. I really must have been in a daze not to hear it ringing when I walked here. At least they couldn’t track me.

Quickly pulling up the number I needed, I held the phone to my ear and held my breath as I waited for it to be answered.

“Riley, I didn’t expect to hear from you so soon. Missing me already?” Rafe said, chuckling down the line.

He’d given me his number when we stepped out of the room so Miles could discuss the marriage to Sofia in private with Mr. Bianchi. While we waited, Rafe gave me a tour of the Bianchi mansion, doing his best to flirt with me. He gave me his number, telling me that now we were family, I could ring him if I needed anything. Granted, he’d eyed me up as he said it, and I’d told him there was little chance I’d need anything.

But here we were.

“Believe me, I didn’t expect to be calling you so soon,” I replied, riddled with doubt that I was doing the right thing, but in the absence of any other choice, I closed my eyes before adding, “I need a favor.”

He chuckled again. “And what exactly can I do for you?”

Opening my eyes, I found Mrs. Henderson watching me closely. She gave me a small nod, urging me on.

“I need a ride out of Hollows Bay.”

Chapter 9

Kai

It took a lot of restraint to not plunge a knife into Alex's unconscious body. Not for betraying me. But for hurting Riley. He never laid a finger on her, but he was the cunt who shot Jacqueline in the head, and I knew how much witnessing that would have hurt my Star.

For betraying me, Alex would die a painful death, but for hurting my wife, he would die an *excruciatingly* painful death.

As much as I wanted to end him, I wanted him to be awake to feel every little thing I was going to do to him. But I was struggling to hold onto my control.

I didn't know where Riley was.

I wanted to kill Ash for letting her walk out, but as he rightly pointed out, if I hadn't sprung my surprise return on her, she wouldn't have had a need to walk out, and for pointing that out, I wanted to kill Ash even more.

Reluctantly, Miles and I had left Hollows Bay with Alex tied up in the back of the car while Ash, Tank, and Dan went to look for her. I'd wanted to go with them and had almost come to blows with Miles when he tried to stop me.

Eventually, I'd had to relent and accept it was a suicide mission if I went marching around the streets of East Bay trying to find her, even if I did think my disguise was suitable. So despite my need to find my wife, I agreed to take Alex back to the house ready to interrogate him.

At least I'd be able to take some of my frustration out on Alex.

Fuck, I was mad at Riley. I knew she was pissed, but she was putting herself at risk strolling off like that, what the fuck was she thinking? I'd just got my girl back, I wasn't prepared to lose her again.

Thoughts ran wild as to where she might be. What if one of The Stags had grabbed her while she was walking brazenly through the streets? What if Thorne or Hendrix had spotted her?

I paced up and down the room we were holding Alex in, resisting the urge to punch my hand through the wall. It was probably a good job he was still unconscious, I wasn't sure I'd have the restraint to take my time with him with all the pent-up anger I had swirling inside of me.

Just then, the door swung open and Miles marched in. "We found her," he said, and relief flooded my body at his words.

“Thank fuck. Where is she?”

He didn't answer straight away, and relief quickly turned back to fear. “She's at the Bianchi house.”

I stopped in my tracks. Of all the things I thought Miles would say, that was not one of them.

“Come again?”

“You heard, she's at the Bianchis,” Miles said, amusement glinting in his eyes. Why the fucker thought this was a laughing matter, I had no clue.

I knew all about the meeting Miles and Riley were due to have earlier with old man Bianchi, hell, I'd signed off on it. Like Miles, when he first told me Riley had suggested trying to get the Bianchis on our side, I'd been against it, but when I thought about it, it made a whole lot of sense.

Hendrix knew better than anyone how much the Wolfes and the Bianchis despised each other, the last thing he'd think was that we would ask the Bianchis for help. It was something I'd never considered when I'd been informed the Bianchis were preparing to attack. My answer had been for us to strike before they had the chance, even if we weren't ready. There was no fucking way I was going to see the Bianchis rule over my city.

But this was *exactly* why I wanted Riley to be part of my reign. She was my calm in the storm, she saw things from a different angle. Her answer would always be to help people, my answer would always be to kill people. Together, we balanced each other out.

It was part of the reason I agreed for Miles to not tell Riley the truth the second I woke up after my surgeries. I needed my wife to believe she was in charge of Hollows Bay. I needed her to see that she had the strength in her to make those difficult decisions when she needed to. I needed her to fall in love with ruling the city and see the difference she could make.

But Riley didn't grow up in my world, and she would have always been content to take a back seat and let me deal with things my way. But I didn't want that, I wanted her by my side, I wanted us to make decisions together.

I wanted Hollows Bay to be ours, not just mine.

Unfortunately for Riley, it meant she had to break before she could come back stronger, but fuck me, had she risen to the challenge. She may not have wanted to accept her position, and she may not have realized it, but over the past six months, she was the one who was making all the decisions.

Sure, Miles was making some of the suggestions, but when she eventually looked back on their time together, she'd see *she* was the one who decided on what course of action to take.

And that's why I backed my girl when she made the decision to make a new deal with the Bianchis. If she thought she could make a deal, then I trusted her. If anyone could get the Bianchis to agree to a truce, it was my Star.

"Care to tell me why my wife is at the Bianchi house?" I growled, losing my patience.

“Well, cousin. If you hadn’t pulled your little stunt earlier, I would have had a chance to contact you and tell you Georgio agreed to a deal,” Miles replied, smirking.

“He did?” I asked as pride in my wife took over some of my anger.

“What were the terms?”

“Oh, you’re going to love this,” Miles said, folding his arms across his chest, and losing the smirk. “Bianchi wanted an alliance.”

For the second time in as many minutes, Miles stopped me in my tracks. An alliance between two families meant marriage, and there was no fucking way Riley was marrying one of the Bianchis. Not that she could when she was already married to me, she just wouldn’t have known I was still alive at the time she made the deal.

“Cool your jets, she made it crystal clear she wasn’t marrying anyone. She was loyal to your dead ass,” Miles said, correctly sensing I was about to explode.

I stared at him as the cogs turned, and then realization dawned on me that if Riley wasn’t going to be the link between us and the Bianchis, it must be him.

“You’re going to marry the Bianchi girl?” I said, a sly grin spreading on my face at the thought of Miles getting married.

“You should be thanking me instead of smirking at me, Kai. Riley was about thirty seconds away from telling Georgio to

shove his deal up his ass, and you know how that would have ended.”

My smirk grew wider until I couldn't keep it in any longer. For the first time in six months, I laughed. I threw my head back and laughed, a real deep belly laugh at Miles' expense.

Miles never wanted to settle down. He wasn't a commitment type of guy, he was too in love with his technology and snooping into people's lives to focus on a woman. Not to mention he had certain kinks not every woman was happy to fulfill.

“Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, dickhead,” he hissed, glaring daggers at me.

“Oh, come on, surely you can see the funny side of this?” I replied, wiping the tears from my eyes.

“No, I can't. She couldn't even get my fucking name right, Kai. It's going to be a fucking nightmare. But I didn't have a choice. Anyway, it bought us time, and we have the use of Georgio's men to help us so it went in our favor. With any luck, Thorne or Hendrix will put a bullet in me before I have to actually say ‘I do,’” Miles said glumly.

I slapped him on the shoulder. “I'm sure it won't be that bad,” I said, still grinning at the scowl Miles was wearing. “I'm so fucking glad I survived, just to witness this moment.”

“You're a real asshole, you know that?”

“I know. Still doesn't explain why my wife is currently at their house though,” I said, turning serious again.

“She called Rafe and he picked her up,” Miles replied.

Instantly my mood darkened, and it was Miles’ turn to laugh at my expense. I knew who Rafe was, and I knew he had a reputation for turning on the charm with women.

“Right. Let’s go,” I said, my mind churning with how many weapons I would need to single-handedly storm the Bianchi mansion, and what I would do to Raphael if I found out he even thought about touching what was mine.

Miles sighed before stepping in front of me and putting his hand on my chest, stopping me from going anywhere. “Kai. You need to give her time. She’s hurting, and the last thing she needs is you going there and demanding she leave with you. Give her the night.”

“Miles, I’ve spent the last six months away from her, if you think I’m spending another night away from my wife, you’ve got another thing coming.” I shoved his hand away and started for the door.

With quite possibly the worst timing ever, Alex fucking Barnes chose that moment to regain consciousness.

“Wh...where am I?” His groggy voice echoed around the room, stopping me from bolting out the door. I turned back, cursing my fucking luck that the cunt had chosen now to wake up.

As much as I hated to accept it, Miles was right. Riley needed time to cool down, and seeing as we now had a truce with the Bianchis, she’d be safe at their house. For whatever I

thought about the family, I had to admit they were true to their word, just like I was. It's why the treaty my grandfather negotiated all those years ago worked because we were all true to our word.

I'd give her the night to cool down, but after, Riley was coming home with me, no matter how pissed off my lovely, stubborn wife was.

Seeing as my plan to spend the night worshipping Riley had changed, I could at least spend the night teaching this prick a lesson.

Alex was tied to a chair, his hands bound behind his back by cable ties that were attached to a rope hanging from the ceiling. He'd find out soon enough why he was tied like that. Moving back to face him, his face paled when his eyes met mine. He wasn't seeing a ghost though. He was seeing the devil.

"Hello, Alex," I said, giving him a menacing smile.

"Mr....Mr. Wolfe," he replied, stuttering his words. "You're....you're alive?"

"Not for lack of trying by your boss. Although, here's the thing, I thought *I* was your boss."

Miles came to join me, and the two of us glared down at Alex. His throat bobbed as he swallowed looking between us.

Surprising the shit out of me, Alex found his balls. "You were never my boss," he hissed, his eyes narrowing on me.

“You’re a fucking pussy whipped bitch, and Hendrix is going to destroy you when he finds out you’re still alive.”

Stupid, stupid man.

“You dumbass,” Miles chuckled, shaking his head before walking over to the locker where an assortment of torture tools awaited for us to use.

“He’s right, you really are a dumbass. You could have saved yourself a world of pain, Alex,” I said, smirking down at him. “See, you’re gonna die no matter what. But you hurt my girl-”

“I didn’t touch your whore,” he roared.

Smack.

The sound of his nose breaking echoed around the room. Fuck, that felt good. It had been a long time since I had inflicted pain on anyone. I’d been training lots as part of my recovery, but a fight with trained ex-SAS soldiers didn’t feel quite as good as inflicting pain on my enemies.

Blood streamed down Alex’s face, but he had the good sense to keep his mouth shut.

“You may not have touched her, but you hurt her deeply when you shot her maid. For that, you will pay with your blood before I end your miserable existence.” His response was garbled thanks to the blood running down the back of his throat. “Here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to ask you some questions. You’re going to answer them-”

“I’m not answering shit,” he interrupted.

Perhaps he didn't have good sense after all.

"I figured you'd say that." Miles returned to stand by my side, a pair of bolt croppers in his hand. Alex glanced down at them, and a flash of fear crossed his face. "Please don't interrupt me, Alex. I loathe it when people interrupt," I said calmly.

Smack.

This time, I punched him in the gut, knocking the wind out of him, and ensuring he wasn't able to speak for a minute.

"I'll start again. I'm going to ask you some questions. You're going to answer them. Every time you refuse to answer my question, we're going to hurt you. We'll start with removing every one of your fingers, and if you still refuse to answer, we'll remove every one of your toes."

As if to demonstrate my point, Miles snipped the bolt croppers, and a wicked smile took over his lips. Alex's eyes darted to the bolt croppers and then to Miles' face as he tried to regain his breath. The flash of fear returned, only this time it stayed put for a little longer.

"Then I'm going to put a bag over your head and suffocate you. Not to kill you, mind, enough so that your lungs are on fire and you *think* you are going to die, only then I'll cut the bag open, just so I can do it all over again."

The fear on his face settled deeper.

I moved to the side of the room where the other end of the rope hanging from the ceiling and connected to Alex's wrists

was. This end was connected to a pulley. I gave it a small tug, and Alex's wrists jolted up slightly behind his back.

"If you still refuse to answer my questions, I'm going to yank this rope," I paused and tugged again, "really fucking hard, hard enough so that both shoulders dislocate."

His face paled as I walked to stand back in front of him.

"Then, I'm going to take a hammer to your kneecaps. Now, I've never had that done to me before, but I hear it hurts. A lot. After, I'm going to take the hammer to your ribs."

His eyes darted nervously between Miles and me, and even with the blood streaming down his face, I could see his cheeks had turned from pale to green.

"And if you still refuse to speak, I'm going to take a blow torch to every inch of your skin, starting with your cock. You'll be conscious for all of this, of course. Wouldn't want you to miss out." I beamed at him, giving him the best sadistic smile I could muster. I was going to enjoy every second of torturing him. "Shall we start?"

"Fuck you," he hissed before spitting blood at my feet.

"You know what, Alex? I was really fucking hoping you'd say that," I replied, more than ready to get my hands dirty.

"I bet he doesn't get past his toes being removed before he's squealing like a bitch," Miles said.

"Nah, I reckon it'll be after the shoulder dislocation," I replied, ignoring the panic on Alex's face.

“Want to make it interesting? \$50 says he’s talking after the last little piggy comes off,” Miles said, moving to behind the chair and positioning the bolt croppers onto Alex’s little finger. Alex tried to pull away, but his attempts were futile, as were his cries of protest.

“You have a deal,” I replied.

And then we got to work.

I won the bet. After his shoulders snapped, Alex sang like a bird.

“I rather enjoyed that,” I said to Miles as we left the room where Alex’s dead body lay.

“That’s ‘cos you’re a sick fuck,” Miles replied, shoving a \$50 bill into my hand.

“Says the man who squished Alex’s eyeballs with his thumbs.” Watching the blood stream from his eye sockets had turned even my stomach.

Miles shrugged, not in the slightest bit fazed by his own fucked up torture techniques.

As we made our way across the garden to the house Miles, Riley, and the others had been staying in, I churned over the information Alex provided about Hendrix and what his plans were.

Hendrix was a stupid prick.

I just didn’t realize he was *that* stupid.

Chapter 10

Riley

The four-poster bed in one of the many guest rooms at the Bianchi mansion was quite possibly the most comfortable bed I had ever slept on.

Well, not slept. Lay awake fretting would be a more accurate description because, of course, I couldn't sleep.

I couldn't get my asshole of a husband out of my head, like most nights that had passed. Only now, the reason was entirely different.

I'd been on emotional roller coaster rides before, courtesy of Kai, but this was the worst of them. It was like I was riding *Space Mountain* in the dark, backward, without any safety restraints, and it was never-ending.

I wanted to kill him.

I wanted to kiss him.

I never wanted to see him again.

I never wanted to let him go again.

It was fucking ridiculous.

Rolling over for the gazillionth time, the urge to jump out of bed, run to the middle of a field, and scream in frustration from the top of my lungs was all-consuming.

Fortunately, a knock on the door prevented me from doing exactly that. Figuring it was either the maid who came by last night to deliver some new pajamas or Rafe coming to see me, I pulled the covers around me and called for them to come in.

After sneaking out of Mrs. Henderson's the day before, somehow without being seen, Rafe had been waiting in his car, and whisked me out of Hollows Bay, back across the border to Forest Point.

I was in too much of a state to not tell him the truth, and so I blurted everything, only for him to tell me he already knew.

Turns out not only had Miles discussed his marriage to Sofia with Georgio, but had also filled him in on his sneaky little secret.

The asshole.

My mind had flashed back to the meeting we held with the guys in the war room when Jack had said to Miles about telling Georgio everything. The pointed look they shared across the table held a whole different meaning now.

As soon as Miles and I had left, Georgio filled Rafe in on everything. As heir to the Bianchi line, the fact Kai was alive would impact on his future running Forest Point. Rafe joked

that he was disappointed because he was certain at some point, he'd convince me I should forget all about my dearly departed husband and marry him. I promptly told Rafe I was swearing off men for the rest of my life, and that included my not-so-dearly departed husband.

Rafe offered for me to stay at the Bianchi mansion for a few days until I got my head straight and my stupid heart sorted. I'd been reluctant, wanting to get as far away as possible from Hollows Bay and the traitorous assholes in my life, but the truth was, I had nowhere else to go.

Sure, I had access to money, *Kai's money*, which would no doubt be tracked by Miles. The only place I would head to was Spain where Angel was living her best life, but I knew damn well it would be less than a few hours before Kai turned up. Even if I figured out a way to get to Spain without being caught, what then?

Given only a handful of people knew that the Wolfes and the Bianchis had made the alliance, I figured I would be safe with the Bianchis until I came up with a plan. Rafe promised he wouldn't tell Kai or Miles I was there. Gratefully, I agreed to stay for a few days to give me a chance to sort my life out.

At this rate, I'd probably need more than a few days to sort the mess out that had now become my life.

Aside from Rafe, I hadn't seen any of the other Bianchis. Georgio and Antonio were out doing whatever Mafia bosses did, and Sofia was out with friends. Rafe and I spent the rest of

the day, into the evening talking, and the more I got to know him, the more I grew to like him.

First impressions weren't always accurate.

Rafe was funny and kind, and like me, family meant everything to him. He was easy to talk to, and over a bottle of wine, I couldn't help but tell him everything that had happened to lead me to sitting in his grand lounge. It could have been a mistake telling him everything I knew about Max and Hendrix, but something about Rafe told me I could trust him.

When night fell, and my eyes grew heavy, Rafe showed me to the guest room and said he'd arranged for the maid to bring me some clothes. She appeared shortly after we said goodnight to deliver me some new pajamas, telling me more clothes would be arriving in the morning.

So I'll admit I was surprised when Sofia opened the door and stepped in with a pile of clothes in her hands, and a heavy scowl on her face.

"Rafe said you needed some clothes," she said coolly, placing the clothes down on a table. "I hope they fit, I figured you were about the same size as me."

"Oh. Thanks," I said, not meeting her eye. I felt terrible for the poor girl, it was kinda my fault she'd been forced into an arranged marriage.

"Right, well. I'll leave you to it," she said, turning and heading back to the door.

Guilt consumed me to the point I threw back the covers and jumped out of bed. “Sofia, wait.”

She paused, before slowly turning around with her arms crossed over her chest, and met my eye with a raised brow. Sheesh, even when she was pissed she was still gorgeous. Miles was fucking lucky she’d one day be his wife.

“You probably hate me,” I said awkwardly.

She dropped her arms as her shoulders slumped. “I don’t hate you, Riley. You’re not the one who came up with the preposterous marriage agreement.”

“I know, but if it wasn’t for me coming here in the first place....” I trailed off when her brows pinched together in a frown. “For what it’s worth, Miles is a good guy,” I added, hoping that would put her mind at rest a little.

“If he’s such a good guy, then why are you hiding here?”

Fuck. She had a point.

Miles was top of my shit list. Well, second place to Kai, and it would have been so easy to let rip into how much I hated him at that moment, yet for some reason, I felt the need to defend him.

“I didn’t say he wasn’t a douchebag from time to time,” I replied, grinning. She held my gaze for a minute before a small smile crept over her lips.

“Is Kai really alive?” she asked tentatively. “Rafe told me this morning.”

Great. I can't say I was loving that my life was turning into a soap drama that everyone was gossiping about.

"Yeah."

"Wow," she replied. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

No.

Maybe.

Urgh. I was so done with talking about it, and yet I still had so much to get off my chest.

And so, after a shower and changing into the designer dress that Sofia brought, I poured my heart out to her. There was something about the Bianchi twins that made it easy to talk to them. She sat there in stunned silence as I recounted the same version of events I had told to Rafe not twelve hours before.

"Holy fuck," she said after I had run out of words to say.

"You can say that again," I muttered.

"But aren't you glad he isn't dead?" she asked, curiosity heavy in her voice.

"I mean, yeah, of course I am," I replied, because of course I fucking was. I loved Kai, even if he was a grade A prick. But it was possible to love and hate someone at the same time. "I don't know how to explain it." I paused and looked around the room before returning back to face her. "I don't wish to upset you, but how would you feel if your mom walked through the doors after all this time and said, *'Surprise, I'm back, it was all just a ruse'?*"

I didn't want to bring her mom into it, but it was the only way I could get her to understand how I was feeling.

She was thoughtful for a moment, and I was grateful she was taking a minute to consider the question.

"Heartbroken," she replied quietly, her eyes filled with sorrow.

We sat for a few minutes in silence, thoughts swirling in my head.

Every time I said out loud that Kai was alive, the more heightened my emotions became. Happiness warred with fury. Relief warred with resentment. Love warred with hate.

"What are you going to do?" Sofia asked, breaking the silence.

I blew out a breath. "Honestly? I don't know," I said, falling back against the pillows when the weight of indecision became too much. "I guess I'll figure out a way to get to Spain and meet Angel, but after that, who knows? We'll have to relocate somewhere and try to start over again."

"You want to walk away from everything? What about Kai?" she asked in surprise.

I closed my eyes. Could I walk away from Kai? Yeah, I was pissed at him now, but could I spend the rest of my life without him? But hadn't I spent the last six months believing that I *would* be facing the rest of my days without him?

"I don't know," I murmured because right then, I had no answers.

“Well, what about Max and Hendrix though? What about getting retribution for Danny and Jacqueline, and every other person they have hurt or killed?”

“I guess that’s up to Kai. It was never my battle, I just got thrust into it without much of a say. Now he’s back, it’ll be up to him,” I replied, staring up at the canopy.

Instead of the relief I thought I’d feel at passing the buck to someone else, it took me by surprise to realize a heavy weight had settled in my gut at the acceptance that it would no longer be my problem.

Funny really, I never wanted the responsibility of running a city, yet now I could happily hand it over, I wasn’t so sure I wanted to.

“Erm, Riley. I don’t think it works like that,” Sofia said. I sat up, my eyes snapping to hers.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, Kai named you as successor. It’s not something you just walk away from. There’s only one way to hand the torch over to someone else,” she said, echoing Miles’ words from when he first told me I couldn’t just up and walk away.

“But Kai never died,” I protested.

She shrugged her slender shoulders. “I know. But if people have been swearing their loyalty to you, I can’t see them switching back to Kai, especially when they find out he was alive all this time. It wasn’t just you he lied to.”

I hadn't thought of that. The faces of Kimmy, Ernie, and Graham swam into my mind from the meeting where they swore their loyalties to me. Sofia was right, people believed Kai was dead. When they found out he wasn't, would they feel the same sense of betrayal I felt? And if they did, could they go back to being Kai's faithful servants?

Before either of us could give it any more thought, another knock sounded at the door. Georgio didn't wait for a response before he opened the door and strolled in.

"Ah, I thought I'd find you both here," he said, looking from his daughter to me. "Sofia, there's someone waiting to see you in the South garden."

"Who?" Sofia said. The question in her tone made me think she wasn't expecting anyone.

"You'll see when you get there," Georgio replied, glaring at his daughter, and making it clear she had no choice in the matter, nor was he going to tell her anything else.

Her sigh was barely audible. "I'll catch you later, Riley," she said before hopping off the bed and walking out of the room without another glance at her father.

"I trust you slept well, Riley?" Georgio asked, turning his hazel eyes on me.

"I did, thanks," I replied, knowing he didn't actually give two hoots about how I slept.

"Good. Mr. Wolfe is here to see you."

Fuck me.

Thanks for sugarcoating it, Georgio.

The pit of my stomach plummeted to the floor. I wasn't ready to see Kai, I wasn't ready to hear *anything* he had to say.

But could I find the words to tell Georgio that as he promptly turned around and walked to the door? No, of course I fucking couldn't.

And I couldn't find the words to tell Kai to get lost when he stepped into the bedroom and shut the door firmly behind him, leaving the two of us alone.

Chapter 11

Kai

Threatening to decapitate one of the Bianchi guards unless he let me in the house probably wasn't my smartest move, but desperate men do desperate things, and I was desperate.

I needed my Star more than I needed my next breath.

It was a good job Miles was with me. Using his new status as the future son-in-law, he convinced the guards to bring us to old man Bianchi.

It was clear within a few minutes of meeting Georgio that he didn't like me, but the feeling was mutual. If it hadn't been for Riley making the deal, there was never in a million years I'd ever consider making a deal with the prick.

But here we were.

After a brief meeting in his office where he made it clear he wouldn't tolerate me threatening his guards to get my own

way, something I paid zero fucking attention to, he went on to make sure I understood in no uncertain terms the deal he had made was with Riley, not me.

It suited me fine. Not that Riley was going anywhere, but if she thought about running, then I'd simply guilt trip her into staying for the sake of the city.

Knocking on death's door hadn't made me any less manipulative, especially when it came to keeping my Star right where I wanted her.

After instructing his second in command, Antonio, to take Miles to the South garden where he could spend some time getting to know his future wife, something Miles had not been happy about, Georgio led me through his enormous house after relenting and agreeing that I could see my wife.

His view was that he couldn't give a damn about our marital woes. He didn't give two shits whether we sorted things out or not, he only wanted to make sure we upheld our end of the deal. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't suspicious as to why Georgio was so keen to make the alliance. He seemed dead set on making sure it was going to happen.

"Why did you make the alliance?" I asked when curiosity got the better of me.

"I have my reasons," he replied cryptically.

I hadn't expected an honest answer. Georgio was a smart man and knew to hold his cards close to his chest. He didn't want to give me a reason to use against him, but his caginess

made me wary. Not because I thought he would double-cross me, but his whole demeanor made it seem like he *needed* this alliance to happen. It wasn't something he'd agreed to out of the goodness of his heart.

I'd find out his reasons at some point, right now, it didn't matter.

The deal was done, the reason could wait.

Georgio's house was a never-ending maze, and as we entered another hallway, anticipation of seeing Riley pulsed through me. She'd be pissed at my sudden appearance but I didn't give a fuck. I was done with her sulking, she was coming home with me whether she liked it or not, even if it meant kidnapping her.

"I'd like to host a party to announce the engagement of Miles and Sofia when Thorne and Becker have been dealt with," Georgio said, pulling me out of my thoughts on what I would do to Riley if she was tied up with nowhere to go. "The sooner we make it official, the better."

I kept the suspicion off my face. "Sure," I replied nonchalantly, making a mental note to ask Miles to dig into the Bianchi finances to see if anything was amiss. Plus, a party announcing the engagement would fuck Miles off, and I was quite enjoying winding my cousin up about his planned nuptials.

"Great. I'll start making the arrangements," Georgio said, stopping outside a closed door. "Perhaps you could give me a moment to get my daughter?" He indicated to the room behind

him and I nodded in agreement before Georgio disappeared through the door.

Less than a minute later, the door opened and a young woman stepped outside. Her brows rose in surprise to see me standing there before they pulled into a frown. She was a pretty girl, not a patch on my Star of course, but she was still a beauty.

“You must be Mr. Wolfe,” she said, her emerald eyes raking over my face. I needed to shave this fucking beard off. I’d kept it as it helped hide my identity when I was snooping around Hollows Bay, but it was beginning to piss me off.

“And you must be Sofia,” I replied, offering her my hand. Her delicate hand was tiny in mine, but for a petite girl, she had a firm grasp.

“If you’re here, I’ll take a guess and say my mystery guest waiting for me in the gardens is Milo?” she huffed.

I couldn’t stop the grin from spreading on my lips at her getting Miles’ name wrong. “Yep, *Milo* is waiting for you.”

“Great,” she replied solemnly before taking off down the hallway, her shoulders slumped in defeat. I didn’t know what Miles had done to piss her off, but it was as plain as the nose on my face that she couldn’t stand him. When the time came, their marriage was going to be an interesting one, and one I was more than happy to sit back with a bucket of popcorn and watch.

As she rounded the corner, the door opened again and Georgio stepped out.

“Good luck,” he said sarcastically, and with that, he followed in his daughter’s footsteps.

Not waiting another second, I stepped into the room to find Riley standing in the middle, her face ashen. She quickly composed herself though, and her beautiful face twisted into a scowl.

Despite the daggers she was throwing my way, the sense of peace I always felt when I was near Riley descended. I ached with the need to reach out and hold her. Now I’d laid eyes on her again, I had no idea how I’d made it through the last six months without seeing her, or hearing her voice, or touching her silky soft skin.

There were no two ways about it, Star was coming home with me and I’d make damn sure she forgave me.

“Hello, Star,” I said, giving her my best charming smile. Her eyes narrowed on me, but I didn’t miss the way her pulse beat harder in her delicate throat. I never missed anything when it came to my wife.

“How did you know I was here?” she snapped, planting her hands on her hips. The sparkle of her diamond wedding ring caught my eye, and a smug feeling washed through me to see she was still wearing it on her ring finger, giving me hope.

I smirked as I took a step forward. “Rafe might have promised not to tell anyone you were here, but Georgio

promised no such thing. He's taking this loyalty to us *very* seriously."

She cursed under her breath and her hands dropped from her hips.

"What do you want?" she said, hatred reflecting in her chocolate orbs.

"What do you think I want? I want my wife back, I'm fed up with being apart from you," I said, taking another step closer. I expected her to step back, but my Star was always so brave when it came to facing the wolf. She stayed right where she was.

"Well, maybe if you hadn't lied to me for the last six months, then we wouldn't have been apart in the first place," she sneered, a flash of contempt passing over her pretty features.

Guilt twisted in my stomach. While the decision to tell her I was dead wasn't my idea, I had to accept my part in drawing out her grief. I hated that I was part of causing her so much hurt, but there were reasons behind the decision, I just needed her to fucking listen.

I took another step forward, but still, she held her ground. "Riley, there's so much you don't know--"

"And I don't want to know either. I don't want to hear anything from your deceitful mouth, so why don't you get the fuck out of here and leave me the hell alone," she spat, her nostrils flaring.

“I’m not leaving here, wife, unless you’re with me,” I replied through gritted teeth, my temper beginning to spike at her petulance.

“I’m not going anywhere with you.”

I tipped my head and gave her a wicked smile. “I recall you saying that once before, and look how that ended.” The memory of throwing her in the trunk the first time she refused to willingly come with me sprung to mind.

“Get. Fucked,” she hissed, making my temper spike a little bit more. I was done with her attitude. Done with her not listening. Done with not having her near me. But before I could do anything about it, she pushed past me. “Fine, if you won’t go, *I’ll* go.”

I didn’t think. My hand reacted automatically as it whipped out and curled around her forearm before pulling her back to stand in front of me.

“Don’t touch me,” she hissed as she yanked her arm out of my grasp, but I didn’t miss the flash of lust in her eyes at the touch of my hands on her, or the way her breath quickened.

My wife might have hated me, but she also wanted me.

And that was the only sign I needed to put my hands back on her.

Grabbing her hips, I pulled her toward me, but she shoved my chest, trying to make me step back. Of course, it didn’t work. She was trying to move an immovable object.

“Get the fuck away from me,” she bellowed, her eyes wide with rage, but that was never going to happen.

“No.”

“I mean it, Kai, get your fucking hands off me!” She tried to shove me again, but instead, I moved my hands from her hips and grabbed her wrists before pulling her closer to my chest.

And then I did what I wanted to do from the moment she stormed out of the cellar at Club Sin. I slammed my mouth down on hers, holding her firmly in place by her wrists. She tried squirming out of my grasp, and she refused to kiss me back, but I wasn't giving up easily. Tearing my mouth from hers, I looked down at her with hooded eyes to find anger swirling in hers.

“Kiss me, my beautiful, stubborn wife.”

“Fuck you, Kai,” she snarled, her cheeks flushed with rage at my audacity to kiss my wife.

To kiss what belonged to me.

“With pleasure,” I smirked before slamming my mouth on hers again and holding her tighter to me. My cock pulsed to life, it had been too long since I'd been buried in my wife's sweet pussy.

She fought against my hold, but I refused to let her go. I bit down on her bottom lip, and when she opened her mouth to no doubt tell me to fuck off again, I took the opportunity to sweep my tongue inside her mouth.

She resisted at first. Christ, did she try to resist, even going as far as biting down on my lip and drawing blood. But when I rubbed my hard cock against her core, something switched inside her. Her frantic attempts to break away from me changed into something else entirely, and before I knew it, she was kissing me back.

Her kiss was filled with her wrath, but she was still kissing me, so I'd take whatever I could get from her.

Our teeth and tongues clashed in a furious battle, and even though I was restraining her wrists, her hands managed to grip my shirt so she could pull me closer, instead of pushing me away. Suddenly, it felt like there were too many layers of clothes between us, and all I wanted to do was feel her naked body pressed against mine.

But I didn't have the time or the patience to remove our clothes. I needed inside of her.

Right now.

Freeing her wrists, I grabbed her thighs and lifted her up, her legs wound around my body as I pushed her against the dresser. My cock ached where it was pressed against my zipper, and keeping one hand on her ass, I used the other to unzip my pants and pull my cock free.

"Fuck, baby, I've missed you so much," I breathed against her mouth before licking her lips.

"Don't fucking talk to me," she hissed. "Just fuck me."

Who was I to argue with my wife? I pushed her dress up and slid her panties to one side, and with one brutal thrust, I was inside her.

My beautiful Star was soaked, ready and waiting for me like she always was. She could pretend she hated me, but her body betrayed her. She could be mad all she liked, but there was no denying the physical reaction she had to me, and I would use that to my advantage. If I had to fuck her until she forgave me, then so be it.

We groaned in unison at how fucking good it felt. Her tight cunt gripped my cock, and after being deprived of her for six months, I felt like a starving man finally getting a feast.

“Fuck, you feel so damn good, Star,” I said as I found my rhythm, thrusting into her. Her hips ground in time with me, and with every thrust, the dresser banged against the wall. At this rate, every person in the entire Bianchi mansion would know I was fucking my wife, but I couldn’t have cared less.

“I told you, shut up, and fuck me harder.” She tugged my hair before meeting my mouth with hers.

Happy to oblige, I slipped out of her, pulled her off the dresser, and spun her around. Pushing her forward so she was leaning over the dresser, I kicked her legs apart and thrust back inside her. I wound her hair around my knuckles and pulled her so her back was arched, and her hands gripped the edge of the table to hold herself steady. With my other hand, I gripped her hip tightly, making sure to leave my prints on her delicate skin.

I wanted this moment to last forever, but I was powerless to slow it down. Riley's warm pussy convulsed around me, and it felt too damn good.

It didn't matter that this was going to be a quick fuck. Now I was inside her again, surely she'd remember how fucking good we were together and come home with me. Then I could spend hours worshiping her body like I'd intended to in the first place.

I thrust harder as she cried out for more, the dresser thudding loudly from where I pounded into her.

"Fuck, yes," she cried throwing her head back, and I couldn't stop myself. I clamped my teeth down on her delicate neck and sucked. Riley needed to wear my mark. I wanted everyone to know I had reclaimed my wife, and not just with the ring she still wore on her finger.

Her pussy began to tighten around my cock, and I knew I couldn't hold back for much longer, I was ready to explode inside her.

Freeing her hair, I pushed her shoulders so her chest was lying flat against the dresser, her nails digging into the old oak wood. I reached between us and found her clit, rubbing it in time with my thrusts. Her pussy clamped down around me as she cried with her release. The feeling of her juices gushing around me was enough to push me over the edge, and with another thrust, I spilled my load.

I stayed inside her as we both took a minute to regain our breath. Her hands were still gripping the dresser, and I leaned

over her to kiss the spot where I had marked her.

“Come home with me, Star,” I whispered.

Her body tensed before she pushed up, giving me no choice but to step back, and as I did, my cock and our combined release slid out of her. She spun around, her face devoid of any emotions as she straightened her panties and dress, before turning and giving me her back.

“Baby?” I questioned as I put my cock away and zipped my pants.

“Leave me alone, Kai,” she said quietly, but I didn’t miss the regret in her voice. Regret for what we’d just done, and fuck, that hurt. I didn’t do well with being hurt. Not emotionally anyway. Her words cut deep, deeper than Hendrix’s bullets could have ever penetrated.

“If you think I’m leaving you here now, Riley, you’ve got another thing coming,” I said, letting her hear how fucking serious I was. She was out of her fucking mind if she thought I was going to walk away. Not now I was a step closer to getting her back.

She spun around, tears welling in her eyes, adding to the pain already pumping through me.

“Just leave me the fuck alone!” she roared, her words ricocheting off every surface in the room.

“Riley-” That was as far as I got before the door slammed open and Rafe stormed in, thinking he was some kind of fucking savior.

He barged past me to take his place in front of my wife as if she needed protection from me. To rub salt into the wound, Riley cowered behind him.

My eyes narrowed on the little prick.

“You heard her, get the fuck out of here,” he snarled. The threat in his tone was unmissable.

“Or what?” I said, stepping forward menacingly. I had no fucking clue who he thought he was trying to stop me from taking my wife home. If he thought he had a chance with her, he had another thing coming. He’d find himself missing both hands if he dared to touch her.

But then the little punk did something that signed his death certificate.

He pulled his gun out and pointed it at me.

“You really want to find out?”

Riley gasped.

I smiled.

This cunt was a dead man. To hell with the deal.

I stepped forward, the nozzle of the gun pressing into my gut as I glared at Rafe, silently daring him to pull the trigger.

Tension filled the air as the two of us stood glaring at each other, neither willing to back down. He wouldn’t shoot me, there was too much at stake if he did such an idiotic thing, but I could tell he really fucking wanted to pull the trigger.

Stepping out from behind him, Riley placed a hand on his arm. The fact she was touching another man made me see red, and a muscle began twitching in my jaw, but I didn't break my stare away from him.

“Kai, please just go,” she pleaded softly, breaking my damn heart. She pulled his arm and he lowered the gun but still held my eye. When after a minute no one said anything, Riley snapped. “Kai! Please, just go, I don't want you here.”

“You heard her, Wolfe. Get the fuck out of here, all you're doing is hurting her.”

My eyes flashed to Riley to find devastation etched on her face. It was a kick in the gut to realize I was hurting her more than I already had. I stared at my wife as a lone tear slid down her cheek, and as much as I wanted to reach out and swipe it away, I resisted.

Indecision weighed heavily in my chest. I hated to accept it, but Rafe was right, the longer I stayed, the more I was hurting her. But fuck, I didn't like the thought of leaving her here.

When another tear slid down her cheek, I swallowed.

“I'll go,” I said begrudgingly. But this wasn't over, it was *far* from over. Ignoring the prick who was standing there doing his best not to smirk, I kept my focus on my wife. “I'll give you time, Riley, but this isn't done. *We* are not done. So I'll give you time, but mark my words, you'll be coming home with me soon.”

She held my eye, nothing but hatred staring back at me.

It tore my fucking heart to shreds.

Giving Rafe one last look, a silent warning to watch his back for the little stunt he pulled, I turned and walked out, ignoring every part of me that said I should have thrown Riley over my shoulder and taken her with me.

Chapter 12

Riley

Never a truer word was spoken when someone said ‘misery likes company.’ Sofia and I spent the rest of the day fucking miserable, thanks to the assholes in our lives.

She’d managed to spend a grand total of five minutes with Miles before they got into an argument, during which he called her a spoiled brat, and she understandably stormed off. Of course, I was firmly on team ‘I hate Miles,’ so Sofia had my vote when she spent a solid hour calling him every name she could think of.

As for me, I spent the day hating myself. What the fuck had I been thinking jumping Kai’s bones like that? The truth was, I hadn’t been thinking. My brain had switched off, and my body was under the control of my greedy pussy, who, the second Kai put his hands on me, wanted nothing more than to be filled by him.

The worst part was, it had felt so damn good that the second he left, I was craving him again. I was beginning to get tired of the constant roller coaster Kai kept putting me through, and yet I was like a fucking addict when it came to that man.

I saw the hurt on his face when Rafe told Kai that all he was doing was hurting me. While that was true, a part of me wanted to walk into his broad chest, wrap his arms around me, and stay like that forever. But my heart was hurting too much to forgive him, and honestly? I didn't think I'd ever find it in me to move forward from the pain I had suffered believing Kai was dead.

No matter what his reasons were.

And so, Sofia and I locked ourselves away in her room for the day, refusing to speak to any person of the male species, including Rafe, because I wasn't overly impressed with him pulling a gun on Kai. We spent the entire time eating our body weight in snacks in a pathetic attempt to deal with the anger we were both feeling.

"That should do it," she said, having finished applying another layer of foundation to the bite mark Kai left on my neck.

Despite our anti-man protest, Georgio had strolled into Sofia's bedroom uninvited, to tell us we were to get ready for the party he'd arranged to celebrate Antonio's birthday. Sofia protested, but Georgio was hearing none of it and ordered her to get her ass ready. He also made it clear that if I was staying with them as their guest, I was to attend too.

I had it a little bit easier. As Georgio was leaving, he dropped the bomb that Sofia's date, Miles, would be in attendance. I genuinely worried Sofia was going to throw herself out the window to avoid spending any more time with Miles.

I'd waited for Georgio to drop the next bomb that Kai was going to be my date, but I breathed a sigh of relief when he informed me Kai was not coming, and Rafe would escort me to the party. At least I wouldn't spend the entire night wanting to throttle the man by my side.

I stood in front of the mirror and admired her handiwork. She'd done a good job covering up the hickey, if only I could do a good job at forgetting who had put it there in the first place. Casting my eyes down the mirror at my outfit, I took a breath, not in the slightest bit prepared for spending the evening being polite to people I didn't know.

The red strapless dress that had been delivered to Sofia's room fitted me perfectly. The silk material hugged my body and flowed to the floor elegantly, and the slit up one side was high enough to show off my thigh.

The dress had arrived with a pair of silver strappy stilettos that would have been impossible to walk in had I not been well-versed in walking around in insanely high heels, thanks to my time at Club Sin. Sofia styled my hair in curls so it trailed down my back, and had finished off the look with simple makeup.

Her own dress was a gorgeous silver cocktail dress with thin straps and tucked in at her waist. It had a wide slit at the front

which went up to her knees, allowing her to show off her tanned legs. She'd paired the dress with a pair of silver peep-toe heels.

I'd repaid the favor and did her hair and makeup, styling her hair so it was tied up in an elegant braid, and much like she'd done for me, I kept her makeup simple. The only difference was, I'd convinced her to wear a bright red lipstick which made her lips look fuller than what they were.

Even without makeup, Sofia was beautiful, but with makeup, she was breathtaking. Miles ought to buck his ideas up, he was fucking lucky to be marrying someone as gorgeous as Sofia. Not to mention, she was actually a decent person.

When I first met Sofia, I didn't envisage her becoming my friend. But in the short time I'd spent with her, and over our fury towards Miles and Kai, we'd bonded, and I was finding myself enjoying being in her company.

It was still an alien feeling to me. I'd spent so many years keeping my distance from other women, focused solely on doing what I needed to do to look after Angel, I'd never allowed myself to have a friend, but it was nice to have someone I could talk to.

We stood side-by-side staring at our reflection in the mirror, all dolled up and ready to party, with the exception of the scowls we both wore. I wasn't particularly looking forward to the evening, but at least I didn't have to spend it all night on the arm of an asshole.

“Maybe we could run away,” she said glumly, meeting my eye in the reflection.

I snorted. “If only. I doubt we’d get far with your dad and Kai on our trail.”

She sighed heavily, and it was something I felt in the pit of my stomach. There was no escaping our lives. Kai had made it clear he wouldn’t let me walk away, and Sofia had grown up knowing she would always have a duty to her family. It sucked, but at least I could try and divorce Kai’s ass and attempt to move on, she couldn’t walk away from her father and brother.

A soft knock drew us from our pity party. Sofia called for whoever it was to come in, and Rafe opened the door. He was dressed in a tux, his head and face freshly shaven, and the smell of his cologne hit me as soon as he stopped in front of us. It didn’t stir the same feelings I had whenever Kai’s scent wrapped around me, otherwise, it might have been a smidgeon easier to get my husband out of my head.

“Ladies, you look beautiful,” Rafe said, beaming. His eyes met mine before he raked them over my body, and heat instantly lit up in his hazel orbs. I had an inkling that Rafe was attracted to me, and I knew I needed to shut it down. Husband or not, I was done with men.

“Thanks,” Sofia and I muttered in unison.

“I’m sure you don’t want to hear this, Sofe, but your date’s here,” Rafe said, his face softening as he shot her a look of pity.

When I spent the previous evening with Rafe, it became clear how much he loved his sister. He confessed that he hated the idea of her having to be married as part of her family duty, whether it was to Miles or someone else. But he knew, even when his time came to take over the family, there wasn't a single thing he could do to change the tradition.

"I can hardly contain my excitement," she replied before sucking in a breath and composing herself. "I best not keep him waiting. I'll catch you later."

"Good luck," I said feebly, knowing she needed a lot more than luck to get her through the night with Miles by her side. Maybe he'd do us all a favor and self-combust.

"Riley, you look stunning," Rafe said when Sofia's door closed.

"Thanks, you look good too," I replied. He did look good, but there wasn't even the tiniest hint of attraction towards him.

He beamed at me as if I'd just made his year before holding his arm out. "Shall we?"

Knowing I couldn't tell him I'd rather spend the night sticking pins under my nails, I took his arm and let him escort me to the ballroom at the rear of the Bianchi mansion.

I wish I could say the party wasn't hell on earth, but I'd be lying. Rafe spent the evening introducing me as his date, careful not to tell anyone my name. I didn't like the way his hand kept lingering on my lower back, or how he insisted on

holding my hand whenever he led us to get a drink from the bar.

Every so often, I caught Sofia's eye. She looked as if she was enjoying herself as much as me, and the one time we'd briefly managed to speak, we'd both reconsidered what our chances were of successfully running away. That was before Rafe swept me away to introduce me to another group of friends.

Luckily, I managed to avoid Miles for the entire evening, but I hadn't missed the glares he cast our way every time Rafe's hand rested on my back, or anytime he brushed a hand down my arm. I felt for Sofia, I really did.

Miles practically spent the entire evening ignoring her, and it had pissed me off so much that I had to resist the urge several times to go over and slap some sense into him. If I'd been on speaking terms with him, without a doubt, I would have given him a piece of my mind.

"Will you dance with me?" Rafe said, pulling me out of my thoughts on all the ways I'd like to hurt Miles.

"Erm...I'm not sure that's a good idea," I replied, looking around the ballroom. I'd been skeptical when Georgio said Kai wasn't coming, and half of me expected him to miraculously appear at some point, but he hadn't.

I didn't know if I was relieved about that or not.

"Why? It's not like Kai's here," Rafe said, reading my thoughts as to why I didn't want to dance.

“Yeah, but Miles is. He’ll report back to Kai.”

“So?” Rafe said, quirking a brow at me. “He won’t be able to do anything about it. Besides, I thought you were angry at him?”

“I am. But-”

“Then dance with me. Fuck Kai,” Rafe said, pulling my hand toward the dance floor before I really had a chance to think about it.

He was right though. Fuck Kai. If me dancing with another man hurt Kai half as much as I was hurting, then so be it.

When we reached the middle of the dance floor, Rafe grabbed my hips and pulled me close to his body. He rested one hand on my lower back, much like he’d done throughout the night, but held my hand in his other. I placed a hand on his shoulder and took a subtle step back, not wanting to be pressed too close to him.

As he twirled me around the dancefloor, I felt Miles’ angry gaze on me the entire time, and I knew damn well he’d report back to Kai, but I didn’t have it in me to care. The more I thought about it, the more I hoped Kai would be pissed at another man putting his hands on me.

Served him fucking right.

As the next song started playing, a throat clearing had me looking over my shoulder.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but I need to borrow my son for a minute,” Georgio said, his brows pulled into a frown.

“Can’t it wait?” Rafe huffed.

“No, it can’t. Now, Rafe,” Georgio replied, leaving no room for Rafe to argue, before he disappeared as quickly as he arrived.

“I best go see what he wants,” Rafe said, running a frustrated hand down his face. “Will you be okay for a few minutes?”

“I’m sure I’ll survive,” I replied, secretly glad to be having a break from him.

Rafe took my hand and led me off the dance floor, giving it a reassuring squeeze before he disappeared into the crowd.

Figuring now was an opportunity for a bathroom break, I turned to head in the direction, only to spin straight into a hard body.

“Can we talk?” Miles said, angry eyes meeting mine. Why he had the audacity to be angry was beyond me.

“Not a fucking chance,” I hissed, my temper sparking to life.

“Come on, Riley, you can’t be mad at us forever,” he replied, doing his best to keep his voice low and not draw attention to the inevitable argument we would have if he didn’t leave me the fuck alone.

“Wanna bet?” With that, I shoved past him, heading in the direction of the restroom. He didn’t stop me from going, but I heard him curse under his breath as I stormed past.

Doing my best to remember where the bathroom was, I eventually found it. The entire Bianchi mansion was grand, and the restroom was no exception. Locking the door, I rolled my eyes as I passed the fucking sofa that dominated the area, as well as the three sinks, before locking myself in a separate cubicle.

Despite living in some darn pretty places since the minute I agreed to the deal with Kai, it still amazed me just how much people could spend on their houses when just down the road, families were living in poverty. I mean, why on earth did they need three sinks?

Lost in thought about how ridiculous this house was, I took care of business and stepped back into the main bathroom area to wash my hands, only to freeze at the man leaning casually against the row of sinks.

The second my eyes landed on him, my heart jumped into my throat and my mouth dried up. Kai had shaved off his beard, and he'd had a haircut. He was back to how I remembered him, and *fuck*, was he gorgeous. For a minute, I forgot why I was mad at him, and my entire being wanted to run to him and climb him like a tree.

"Hello, wife," he said. His voice snapped me out of the stupor I'd been lost in, and I shook my head, reminding myself that this man was the root cause of all my pain.

"Hello, liar," I said, stomping towards him.

I stopped at the sink next to where he stood and started washing my hands, ignoring him and refusing to meet his eye.

Guilt washed through me when I wondered how long he'd been here. Fuck, had he seen me dancing with Rafe?

He moved to stand behind me, close enough for me to feel his presence, but not close enough for him to touch me.

“You looked like you were having fun with Rafe,” he said, answering my unspoken question. His eyes blazed with fury, and the hint of venom in his voice was unmissable.

“What are you doing here, Kai?” I asked, ignoring his statement. Nothing good would come of discussing Rafe and me dancing.

“I told you earlier, Star. We're not done. I gave you time, and now you're coming with me.”

Kai's ability to move fast was something that always took me by surprise. He was such a unit that it didn't seem possible for a man his size to move so quickly, yet he did. Within seconds, he had pulled my wet hands behind my back and had a set of handcuffs wrapped around my wrists.

“What the fuck do you think you are doing?” I shrieked, meeting his eye in the mirror, furious to see the gorgeous bastard smirking at me. Panic, fear, and anger rolled into one as I tried to pull my hands out of the cuffs, but all I managed to achieve was digging the metal into my skin.

“I figured you wouldn't come willingly, baby. And I know all about the ninja moves Miles has been teaching you, I'm not taking any chances. I like my cock too much.” With that, he

spun me around, crouched down to grab my thighs, and threw me over his fucking shoulder.

I swear to god, if anyone ever handled me like this again, I was going to rip their balls off with my bare hands.

“Put me the fuck down!” I yelled, trying to kick and squirm out of his grasp, but with my hands cuffed behind my back, and Kai’s firm grip over my legs, I could barely move.

Kai chuckled as he strolled out of the restroom and down the hall, ignoring my cries to put me down and pleas for help.

“About time,” a familiar voice said. “I need to get back to my unhappy future wife.”

“Miles!” I cried. “Help me, please! Make this asshole put me down!”

As Kai stopped in front of his cousin, Miles peered around Kai’s body to find me looking at him upside down.

“Sorry, Riley. The sooner you forgive us, the sooner we can all get on with our lives,” he said, giving me a sympathetic smile before returning his gaze back to Kai. “Everything’s set.”

“Keep in touch,” Kai rumbled before starting to head down the corridor. “We’ll see you in a few days.”

“Miles!” I screeched as Kai led me away. From upside down, I watched Miles shake his head before letting out a chuckle. “Miles, you traitorous bastard!” I roared, only to be met with his chuckles growing louder before he turned and disappeared through a door.

Fucking asshole!

Kai carried me through the house and out into the courtyard like I was nothing but a sack of potatoes thrown over his shoulder. The cool night air hit my skin as he walked towards a parked car, and with his free hand, he pressed a button on the key fob. To my horror, he didn't open any of the doors.

No, the bastard flicked open the trunk.

“Kai, I swear to god, if you put me in there-”

But of course, my words fell on deaf ears. With ease, he pulled me off his shoulder and lowered me down into the trunk. With my hands behind my back, I was powerless to do anything.

“Kai, don't put me in this fucking trunk!” I bellowed, only to be met with his grinning face. He pushed my head and I had no choice but to lay down.

“For old times, baby,” he said, giving me a fucking wink, before slamming the trunk and leaving me in total darkness.

Chapter 13

Riley

I made a mistake. A *huge* mistake, and I didn't mean marrying Kai Wolfe. No, I stupidly thought I could loop my cuffed hands under my ass and legs to have them in front of me when the time came for Kai to open the trunk. It would give me half a chance of keeping his grubby hands off me.

I'd seen it done in films and it looked easy. Especially being as small as I was. But I hadn't anticipated the amount of space I would need to wiggle my ass and legs up through the gap between my arms. Space I didn't have confined in the fucking trunk of the car Kai dumped me in. Despite my best efforts, I managed to get as far as lowering my arms to behind my knees, and then my ass got stuck.

I kid you not.

I couldn't move my arms any lower, and I couldn't move them back to their original position, no matter how hard I tried. Giving up when I nearly popped a shoulder out of joint, I

had to lay on my side, with one arm going painfully numb, and wait for my asshole husband to free me.

And I knew, I fucking *knew* he would take great delight in my failed escape attempt.

Urgh.

On the plus side of being locked in the trunk, I didn't have to talk to Kai, the dickhead. I mean, seriously, how did he think kidnapping me, locking me in the trunk, and whisking me away to fuck knows where was going to get me on his side?

Oh. Wait.

He'd done it once before where he *did* get me on side.

Well, if Kai thought he was going to blackmail me into forgiving him, he was in for a nasty surprise. There was nothing he could say or do that would make me forgive him for his treachery.

Nothing.

Except maybe threaten Angel. Fuck, Kai wouldn't stoop that low, would he? The truth was, with Kai, anything was possible.

Fuck my life.

I had no idea how long we'd been driving when the car finally slowed and came to a stop. The engine switched off, followed by a door opening and slamming, and the sound of heavy footsteps grew closer.

Nerves mixed with fury as I braced for the trunk to open. I'd seen the jealousy burning in Kai's dark eyes when he said he saw me having fun with Rafe, and I suspected I was going to feel his wrath for letting another man put his hands on me. Or rather, my ass was going to feel his wrath.

I didn't know whether that made me more angry or turned the hell on.

The lock clicked, and less than a second later the lid opened to reveal Kai hovering over the trunk, glaring down at me. But the second he saw my position, his face cracked from an angry scowl into a beaming grin.

The fucker.

"Wife, you seem to have gotten yourself into a bit of bother," he chuckled.

Let me rephrase that.

The patronizing fucker.

"Get me out of here, Kai," I said through gritted teeth, my anger at him growing by the second. "This fucking hurts."

"Well, if you weren't so damn stubborn, I wouldn't have had to cuff you in the first place," he said, fishing into his pocket and pulling out a key.

"Well, maybe you should have left me alone like I asked you to," I snapped back, rotating my wrist when he leaned over and undid one of the cuffs.

“Or, maybe you should give me a chance to explain like I asked you to,” he retorted, his anger growing more apparent by the second. Grabbing my arm, he yanked me into a sitting position before helping me out of the trunk, without undoing the other cuff.

“Or, maybe you shouldn’t have pretended to be dead in the first place!” I shouted, my voice swallowed up in the night air. It was only now I was out of the trunk that I realized where we were. “Why the fuck are we at an airfield?”

I twisted my head to look around. It was only a small airfield which made me think it was a private one, similar to the airfield Angel and I had flown from when we went to France.

“Have you two finished flirting? We really need to get going,” a familiar voice said. I turned to find Ash standing in the doorway of a small plane, a big grin in place under his bushy beard.

I hadn’t seen him since I walked out of Club Sin after discovering Kai was alive, and although no one had confirmed that the Apollo guys knew Kai was alive, I knew deep down that they did. My bad mood plummeted further if it was possible.

Using my moment of distraction, Kai grabbed my free wrist and locked the cuff around it again.

“What the hell are you doing? Let me go!” I shrieked. At least my hands were cuffed to the front this time.

“No.” He grabbed my forearm and started pulling me towards the stairs leading up to the plane. I tried to shrug out of his grasp and when that didn’t work, I started dragging my heels, something that wasn’t easy to do in the stupid shoes I had on.

“Kai! I am not getting on that plane!”

He abruptly stopped, and his hand moved from my arm to the chain in between the metal bracelets where he gripped it and pulled me against his chest.

“Let me assure you, Star, you *are* getting on the plane. Now, you can either walk or I can carry you, the choice is yours,” he hissed menacingly, irritation shining in his eyes.

It was obvious I didn’t have a choice. Not only was I handcuffed, but I was in the middle of nowhere, and had no clue where I was. At best, I could have kicked Kai in the shins and made a run for it, but that wouldn’t have got me very far. But Kai could get fucked if he thought I was going to make life easy for him.

“I’m not getting on the plane,” I said through gritted teeth, making sure he heard the venom in every word.

A delighted smile pulled at his lips as he towered over me, but I didn’t protest when he chucked me over his shoulder again and stormed up the stairs. What was the point?

“Hi, Riley,” Ash said jovially, stepping aside to let us through.

“Fuck you,” I hissed, flipping him off as we passed, but like most of the assholes in my life, he just chuckled. I really needed to get some better insults.

Kai carried me through the plane, but instead of stopping at the seats, he carried me to the rear where he kicked open a door, and the next thing I knew, I was thrown down on a bed.

Before I had time to scramble off the bed, Kai pounced on me. He straddled me, and grabbed my hands before yanking them above my head. I tried to fight when I realized what he was trying to do. The bastard was trying to uncuff one wrist so he could cuff me to the headboard.

No fucking way I was going to let him do that without a fight.

I thrashed underneath him, trying to throw him off, but Kai was a lump of solid muscle.

“Stop fucking fighting, Riley,” he hissed when I managed to free my hand from his grasp, fully intending to throw my fist into his face. My victory lasted for all of two seconds before he grabbed it again and slammed it down on the pillow.

“Get the fuck off me!” I shouted as he used his knee to pin my arm down and managed to hook the cuffs around the headboard.

“You could have done this the easy way, wife, but instead, you had to be a stubborn little minx,” he said, successfully clasping the metal bracelet around my wrist again.

My heart sank when I tugged against the restraints to find both wrists were in the cuffs, and I was tethered to the damn bed. Kai stood, his chest heaving from restraining me, and he towered over me, fury glinting in his dark eyes.

“I’ll come back when we are in the air and we can talk,” he said and even though his voice was calm, I knew he was furious.

“Don’t fucking bother, I’ve got nothing to say to you,” I sneered, frustrated tears pricking the back of my eyes.

He stared at me for a beat, his eyes raking up and down my body where my dress had rucked up in our tussle, before he shook his head and stormed out, leaving me alone with my anger.

Soon after Kai left, the engines roared to life. The small blind in the bedroom was closed, preventing me from seeing out, but I didn’t need to see to feel the plane start rumbling along the runway before we eventually took off.

It took several minutes for my breathing to calm from where I was so damn angry. Why the fuck couldn’t Kai respect my wishes and leave me alone? I didn’t want to hear what he had to say, I didn’t care. I was adamant that no matter the reason behind the ridiculous decision to pretend he was dead, I wasn’t going to forgive him.

Did that mean I could walk away from Kai? Probably not. There was no way the man would agree to a divorce, and if I tried to run, he’d find me. But the alternative was accepting what he had done, and he’d hurt me too much to do that.

A frustrated sob left my throat at the helpless feeling coursing through me. I hated feeling helpless, hated the feeling of being backed into a corner with no way out.

But I was so tired. Tired of constantly feeling like I was fighting against the world. Tired of carrying the weight of the pain and anguish in my heart every damn day. For once, I wanted someone to scoop me in their arms, carry me out of the corner, and tell me everything would be okay.

I knew I could make it all go away if I forgave Kai, yet I couldn't find it in me to even consider forgiving him for his deceit.

How could I?

It was too extreme. The worst part though was that I still loved Kai. Of course I did, you couldn't just switch your feelings off, and that man had buried so deep under my skin and taken root in my very core, that there was no way of removing him.

Try as I might.

I squeezed my eyes closed and tried to relax as the plane finished its ascent and leveled out. Once my breathing was under control, I managed to pull myself into a sitting position against the headboard, which wasn't comfortable with the way my wrists were chained, but it was better than lying there and feeling helpless.

A few minutes later, the door opened and the cause of my current head fuck walked in. I hated how my heart rate spiked

at the mere sight of him. I hated how the second his scent wrapped around me, I felt like I was home. I hated how much I wanted him to pull me into his arms and tell me he loved me.

“You okay?” he asked, his tone cautious. He’d obviously had time to calm down since walking out.

“Wonderful,” I muttered, refusing to meet his eye.

“Riley, it doesn’t have to be like this,” he said, braving a step forward.

“You’re absolutely right, it doesn’t. Why don’t you have the plane turn around and take me back to Rafe, and leave me the hell alone like I’ve asked you time and time again.”

I knew mentioning Rafe’s name would rattle him, I knew it was spiteful, but I wanted him to hurt as much as I was. Sure enough, pain flashed across his face, and for a moment, guilt flooded me. That was until the bastard swooped down on me, grabbing my legs and yanking me down the bed so my arms were stretched above my head. Kai straddled my hips.

“Is that what you want, Riley? You want to go back to Bianchi so he can fuck you? So he can put his hands on what’s mine?” I turned my head away from him, but he grabbed my chin, yanking it so I had no choice but to look at him. “Answer me!”

Boy, was he pissed, a vein in his neck twitched as his eyes hardened.

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I want,” I taunted. I couldn’t help myself. Kai had a way of riling me up, and even though I

wasn't attracted to Rafe in the slightest, and even though I felt a smidgeon of guilt for taunting Kai, I still couldn't stop the words from tumbling out of my mouth. "I want him to put his hands all over me and make me feel good."

His eyes narrowed on me, but instead of getting angry and storming off like I thought he would, a malicious grin spread across his lips. He lowered his face, his nose an inch away from mine.

"Then maybe I need to remind you once and for all who you belong to," he growled, and before I had time to react, his teeth clamped down on my throat where he sucked the delicate skin, marking me once again.

"Get the fuck off me!" I squealed, but without the use of my hands, and with his weight straddling me, I was helpless.

"No, wife. It's time you remembered who the fuck you are married to, and I promise you now, Star, no matter how pissed at me you are, I'm not letting you go. You're mine, mine to do with as I please."

His mouth trailed down my body, eliciting goosebumps over every inch of skin his lips and tongue brushed against. As he moved further down my body, I tried to buck my hips to get him off me, but he yanked my thighs apart and kneeled in between my legs, preventing me from closing them.

Despite my brain telling me that I needed to make him stop, my body had other ideas. My core fluttered to life, starved of attention over the last six months, and my pussy began to

throb, desperate to be filled. I hated knowing that if Kai shoved his cock in me now, he'd find me wet.

Not just wet, *soaking*.

But Kai could read me like a book. When his mouth reached my belly, he looked up and gave me a wicked smile, before tugging my dress up and ripping my thong clean off with his hands.

“Kai, stop,” I whined with a shaky breath, but his wicked smile only grew wider.

“I’ll stop when you ask me to and actually mean it,” he replied smugly, before lowering his head. The next second, his warm tongue ran up my slit. I squeezed my eyes closed, relishing in how fucking good it felt to have his mouth on me.

“This pussy belongs to me, wife, and if you dare give it to another man, I’ll fuck you in front of him before gutting him, do you understand me?” he sneered, before his teeth clamped down on my clit, sending instant pleasure to my core. His words should have frightened me because I knew Kai was a man of his word, and yet, all they did was make my pussy grow wetter.

“Fuck,” I whined, unable to keep the word in. Logically, I told myself not to let him affect me, to let him do what he wanted to me, and remain unaffected, but I wasn’t in control of my body’s response. He played my traitorous body like a musical instrument, knowing *exactly* what chords to pluck.

Knowing the effect he was having on me, he chuckled darkly, before his tongue brushed over my clit again, trailing down to my entrance and pushing inside. My hips bucked automatically against his face, and he groaned as he moved back to suck on my sensitive nub.

When Kai shoved three fingers into me and hit that sweet spot, I couldn't stop the plea from bursting out. "Fuck, please, Kai!"

He laughed again, the vibrations hitting me straight in my pussy as he thrust his fingers in and out of me, his tongue lapping relentlessly at my clit. Pleasure built up inside me, and I was barreling straight towards an orgasm I was powerless to stop. But by this point, I didn't want it to stop, I *needed* it.

"Please what, baby?" he said, and with his free hand, he reached down to undo his pants before pulling his cock out.

"Please, I need to come," I begged.

"I thought you wanted me to stop?" he replied, thrusting harder with his fingers and bringing me so close to the edge.

"No, don't stop," I said, squeezing my eyes shut as the need to climax became too much. Just a few more thrusts of his fingers and swipes of his tongue and I'd go over. "Please."

"Are you close, baby?"

"Yes! Fuck, Kai, yes!"

And then he stopped.

He pulled his fingers from my pussy and sat up between my legs, my juices glistening around his mouth. He grabbed his cock and started stroking rough and quick.

“Wh-what are you doing? Why did you stop?” I asked, confused in my almost orgasmic state.

He didn’t answer immediately. Instead, he threw his head back, letting out a deep groan as ropes of come shot from the tip of his cock, covering my pussy and my dress.

“Fuck,” he growled, before standing up and putting his semi-hard cock away.

“Kai! What the hell?” I roared, anger taking over now the impending climax I had been deprived of started to fade.

He quirked a brow and tilted his head, shooting me a smug grin. “What does it look like, wife? Maybe Rafe can come and finish you off, apparently, you’d like that.”

He turned and strolled out, leaving me covered in his come, and desperate to find my own release.

Chapter 14

Kai

“Fucking bastard!” she roared as I slammed the door shut. I wish I could say I felt smug about bringing her to the edge of coming, only to deprive her, but I didn’t.

The truth was, it was taking all my strength not to go back in there and throttle her for telling me she wanted to go back to Rafe fucking Bianchi. The prick had eyes for my girl. I’d watched from the wings the entire night of the party, watching him watching her. Watching every time he held her hand or put his hand on her back.

If it wasn’t for the fact I had my plans in place to kidnap her, I would have lost all control, and Rafe would have found himself bleeding out in the middle of the goddamn dance floor.

As it was, I still hadn’t decided if he was going to die or not. After his little stunt of pulling the gun on me, he was already on my shit list, but now he’d put his hands on my wife, things were looking bleak for young Raphael.

“How’s she doing?” Ash asked as I made my way back to the cockpit after stopping in the bathroom to wash Riley’s juices off my face. She’d been loud enough for him to hear what I was doing to her, but that didn’t mean I wanted him to see or smell her scent on my face.

“She’s not happy,” I grumbled, sitting my ass down in the co-pilot seat. Not that I had a fucking clue how to fly a plane, that’s why I had Ash with me.

“You can’t blame her, Kai. She’s lived with her heartache every day for the past six months, it’s going to take her time to come to terms with everything. Remember how you felt when she came back from France?”

He had a point. She’d only been gone two days and I’d convinced myself she was never coming back. The pain of thinking I’d never see her again was like nothing I’d ever experienced before, not even when Theo died.

When I woke one morning to find she’d returned, I was furious. Not because I wasn’t happy to see her, but because I was terrified of losing her again.

So, yeah, I could understand how Riley was feeling. Not only was she having to deal with learning we’d all lied to her, but she would also be dealing with the fear of losing me again because she’d experienced the pain firsthand as to what it was like.

“Give her time, Kai. That girl loves you, but she needs time, that’s all you can do right now,” Ash said. Fucking smartass.

He was right though, I just needed to find it in myself to be patient. Ride the wave until she saw sense.

One thing was for certain though. She wasn't leaving my ass, not for Rafe Bianchi. Not for anyone for that matter. I'd give her time, but she'd have to get over herself or she'd be miserable for the rest of her days.

The five-hour plane journey to Florida passed by in the blink of an eye. I checked on Riley several times but was rewarded with the silent treatment, and rather than rattling her cage even more, I left her to stew.

When Ash informed me that we were due to start our descent in the next thirty minutes, I prepared myself for the next battle I was going to have with my wife. Knocking on the door, I entered when she didn't reply to find her sitting on the bed scowling.

She'd managed to push her dress down so her pussy was covered up, but she must have been uncomfortable with my come now dried on her skin.

Dropping the pile of clothes I'd brought with me on the end of the bed, I walked to where her wrists were cuffed to the headboard. She watched me with uncertainty etched on her face as I undid both, letting her pull her hands free.

"We're starting our descent soon. Go wash and get changed," I ordered, pointing to the door leading to the ensuite. The jet we were on was owned by Apollo, it must have cost a fucking fortune, but it was worth every penny.

“Where are we?” Riley asked quietly, surprising me when she picked up the pile of clothes. Maybe she’d had time to do some soul searching.

“Florida.”

“Florida?” she repeated, her brows raised in surprise.

“Yeah. We’ve got a couple of leads to follow up on, might help to deal with Thorne,” I replied.

“Oh.”

She disappeared into the bathroom, and moments later, the shower turned on. Part of me wanted to go in there and watch her shower. Fuck, not just watch, but get in there with her and clean her up. But Ash’s words rang in my head, and instead of doing what I wanted to do, I left her to get ready.

Twenty minutes later, as the plane started to descend, she came out of the bedroom with wet hair and fresh clothes. No matter what my Star was wearing, whether she had makeup on or not, she was always the most breathtaking woman I had ever laid eyes on.

Hesitantly, she walked down the aisle to where I was seated and slid into a chair opposite me, warily eyeing the cuffs lying on the table next to me.

“Are you going to put them on me again?” she asked, breaking the silence after a minute.

“I haven’t made up my mind yet, it depends if you’re going to try and run away,” I replied. I didn’t intend on putting them

back on her, but she needed to know I would if she tried anything stupid.

She snorted. “Where am I going to go, Kai? I don’t have my phone or any money, and all you’ve told me is that we are in Florida. Florida is a big state.”

I studied her for a minute, looking for the truth in her face. As much as I wanted to believe her, there was something in my gut that told me to hold back. She’d had the best part of five hours to come up with a game plan, and it’s not like she hadn’t played me once before.

When Riley and Miles had been trying to find the proof that Hendrix was the one to betray me, she’d manipulated me into spending the day fucking her. Sure, in the grand scheme of things, she’d done it to keep me away from Hendrix. But it didn’t change the fact she had manipulated me in the first place.

But looking at her now, I couldn’t help but see the resignation on her face. Or maybe, it was what I wanted to see. Either way, I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt.

“Jacksonville.”

“Excuse me?” she replied, her brows pulled together.

“Jacksonville. That’s where we are landing,” I replied.

“Oh.”

By the time Ash expertly landed the plane, and with the three-hour time difference between Forest Point, where we’d departed, and Jacksonville, the sun was just beginning to rise.

Despite a new day starting, the three of us were in desperate need of sleep. There was shit we needed to do while we were in Florida, but it would have to wait until we had caught up on some sleep.

Surprisingly, Riley didn't put up any resistance as we got in the waiting car Ash had arranged. He drove us to an Apollo safe house about an hour north of the private airfield, and she was quiet for the entire drive. I knew it was only a matter of time before her stubbornness reared its head again, especially when she found out about the sleeping arrangements.

When the towns disappeared, and we headed off the beaten track, the safe house eventually came into view. Or rather, I should say *safe cabin*, because that's what it was. A small, two-story log cabin in the middle of nowhere protected by a number of safety measures, meaning it was highly unlikely anyone would stumble across it.

Once Ash parked the car and disabled all the security systems, the three of us got out. From the corner of my eye, I watched Riley scan her surroundings. I couldn't help the hint of triumph that washed over me when I saw the realization dawn on her that it would be pointless for her to run. We were surrounded by nothing but trees, miles from any form of civilization.

Ash let us in, and the scent of pine hit my nose as we stepped into the cozy living area consisting of a small sofa, a TV, and a bookcase. Off the living area was a small kitchen, and next to

that was a bathroom. The place was too small for the three of us, but we wouldn't be staying here long, so we'd make do.

"I'm beat, I'm gonna crash," Ash said, heading in the direction of the wooden stairs that would take him to the only upstairs bedroom.

"I think I could do with some sleep as well," Riley said through a yawn, and watching Ash's retreating figure. "Where's my room?"

"We're in here," I said, pointing to the door behind me.

"We?" She froze.

"Yeah, we," I replied, trying not to let the smirk grace my face.

"There's only two bedrooms, and you sure as fuck aren't sleeping next to Ash."

"Fine. I'll sleep on the sofa," she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest.

Yep, here came my stubborn wife.

"No, you won't. I don't trust you to not sneak out," I said, opening the door to the downstairs bedroom. My smugness turned to outright glee when I caught sight of the size of the bed. It was a small double, meaning she'd have no choice but to snuggle in close if she didn't want to fall out.

"Are you serious? We're in the middle of nowhere, where the hell do you think I'm going to go?" Her voice was shrill with exasperation, only adding to my growing amusement.

“Like I say, I don’t trust you. So, you can either sleep in here willingly with me, or I can cuff you to the bed and you can sleep next to me, but it won’t be very comfortable for you.” I pulled the cuffs from my back pocket and shook them to indicate my point.

She glared at me, her eyes narrowing as she thought over her options.

“Gah!” She threw her hands up and stormed into the bedroom, cursing under her breath about how I was the most infuriating person on the planet. But she knew that when she married me, so it shouldn’t have been a surprise.

“You’re kidding, right?” she said, stopping when she saw the size of the bed.

“No, baby. You’ll have to scooch up real close if you don’t want to fall out,” I replied, letting a grin take over my face.

“I hate you.”

That only added to my resounding chuckle.

As much as I had successfully managed to get Riley into bed, she refused to take her clothes off. Instead, she dived under the covers still wearing the clothes I’d given her on the plane.

It was fine by me. As much as I wanted to spend hours reacquainting myself with her delicious body, I was too exhausted, and if she was lying next to me naked, there was no way I’d be able to keep my hands off her.

That didn't stop me from stripping off though, and as much as Riley tried, I caught her watching me as I undid my buttons and took off my shirt. Her face paled when her eyes fixed on the scar I now wore between my pecs.

It was about eight inches in length, but to be fair to Dr. Harris, he'd done a neat job in stitching me back together and leaving minimal scarring. It could have been a whole lot worse given he had to open me up to stop the bleeding and restart my heart.

As part of my recovery, he'd offered to bring in a plastic surgeon to tidy the scar up, but I told him no. I wanted to wear that scar for the rest of my life with pride. It was a constant reminder that someone had tried to kill me and failed.

A reminder that I was a lucky fucker to be alive.

If it bothered Riley to look at it, then maybe I'd consider a tattoo to cover it up, but I'd know it was there.

"Is...erm...is that where Hendrix shot you?" Riley said, finding her voice and pulling herself up so her back rested against the headboard.

I ran my hand over the scar. "Yeah."

"Jesus," she replied, her voice barely a whisper. "How did it not kill you?"

"Another inch to the left and it would have done, it wasn't for lack of trying on Hendrix's part. They had to restart my heart three times." I said, anger spiking in my blood at mentioning the cunt's name.

I couldn't wait until the day vengeance was mine. I was going to enjoy every minute of ending Hendrix.

Thorne too for that matter.

When tears welled in her eyes, I risked her wrath by moving over to the bed and sitting down next to her.

"It's okay, Star," I said, swiping a stray tear with my thumb. She didn't tell me to fuck off, so I'd take that as a win.

"Does it hurt?" Riley asked, her voice choked with emotion, and guilt swept through me for all the pain I had caused her for letting her think I was dead. Not that I'd had a choice at the time, but I could have ended it any time I wanted, yet I didn't.

"Not really. This one hurts more," I said, turning to the side to show her the longer scar where I'd had my spleen removed.

She gasped, and her hands flew to her mouth. "That was where the other bullet hit you," she stated through her hands covering her mouth.

"Yeah, that bullet hit my spleen. Doc Harris had to remove it as I was bleeding internally."

Tentatively, her hand reached out, and she gently traced a finger over the scar on my side. The touch of her fingers on my skin felt like heaven. Riley was the only calming force in my life, her simple touch always placated the storm brewing inside me.

"Kai, I...I don't know what to say," she replied, her chocolate orbs meeting mine.

“There’s nothing to say. I survived, that’s all that matters, and those that hurt us will pay.”

She was quiet for a minute as her finger lightly stroked over the raised skin, and I let myself enjoy the feel of her touch on my body. I wanted her hands to touch every inch of me, but this was better than nothing, and I would take what I could get right now.

“Does it hurt all the time?” she asked, her gaze fixed on the wound.

“Not all the time. If I overdo it when I’m training, or my angry wife elbows it, then yeah, it hurts.” My lips pulled up one side in a grin, but her eyes snapped to mine.

I instantly regretted my words. I’d hoped to break the seriousness of the conversation, but all I’d done was remind her of the moment she discovered I was alive. She withdrew her hand, and in an instant, the walls that had been down a few moments ago sprung back into place. Her eyes hardened and she turned away from me.

“We ought to get some sleep,” she said, any hint of emotion now void from her tone. She moved down the bed onto her back before rolling over to face away, and shutting me out once again. My shoulder slumped in frustration, it was like taking one small fucking step forward and two ginormous steps back with her stubborn ass.

Lying down next to her, I scrubbed my hand over my face. Temptation to force Riley into my arms was all-consuming, but I damn well knew if I laid a finger on her, it

would cause an argument, and I didn't have the patience right now. It would only result in me snapping and taking my temper out on her.

Ideally, with my cock down the back of her throat.

But when it came to Riley, I knew my wife better than I knew the back of my own hand. I knew her breathing pattern when she slept, and the second her breaths became heavier, and her body relaxed into the mattress, I carefully wrapped my arms around her and pulled her so her back was to my front.

Burying my head in her hair and inhaling her scent, peace finally consumed me and I drifted off, knowing that as soon as her eyes opened, I'd feel her wrath for daring to touch what was mine.

Chapter 15

Riley

Holy shit. I was having the best dream ever. It was a good job it was only a dream because there was no way I'd let Kai touch me the way he was in my dream.

We were in bed at his old penthouse, the two of us were naked and he was teasing me with a hand between my legs, his thumb running over my clit as he fucked me with two fingers. He hit that sweet spot inside, and with the pressure of his thumb on my clit, I couldn't stop from grinding against his hand.

"Kai," I breathed as his hand moved faster, pushing me towards my release.

"That's it, baby, ride my hand." His warm breath brushed against my neck, and his soft lips elicited a shudder down my spine as pressure built in my core. I grabbed his wrist to stop him from withdrawing his hand, something in the back of my

mind told me he was about to stop me from coming like he did earlier.

On the plane.

After he kidnapped me.

My eyes flew open and my body froze.

“What the hell are you doing?!” I shrieked, when in an instant, reality hit me. I wasn’t fucking dreaming. At some point while we’d been asleep, Kai had pulled me against his chest, and now, my legs were spread and his hand was shoved into my pants, his fingers all over my pussy.

Which was wet.

And aching.

“Morning, wife,” he rumbled next to my ear. I heard the amusement in his voice, and as I tried to pull away, I realized Kai had me pinned down with his legs. With his heavy arm thrown over me and reaching into my panties, I couldn’t pull away.

“Get your fucking hands off me!”

“Not a chance,” he said, increasing the speed of his fingers as they rubbed against my sensitive nub. Once again, my traitorous pussy didn’t resist his touch, and although my brain was telling me I could easily get out of his hold if I wanted to, my body just wouldn’t follow the order.

“Don’t worry, baby, I’ll let you come this time,” he whispered in my ear, and then promptly bit down on my neck,

marking me like he had done *so* many times before.

I was torn. Torn between holding on to my pride and not giving in to Kai, but I needed to come so fucking badly.

After he left me high and dry on the plane, I'd tried to finish the job he'd started when I went into the bathroom to shower, but could I get there? Could I fuck. My body wanted Kai, so no matter how hard I rubbed my clit, I just couldn't finish.

When he thrust two fingers inside my pussy, pride took a backseat over the pleasure pulsing through me. I'd regret giving in to him after, but I'd worry about that once my head was clear and not fogged with the heady bliss I was now experiencing as he brought me to the brink.

"Do you want me to stop?" he whispered, his fingers slowing down.

"Don't you fucking dare." The words tumbled out before I could stop them, my mind not in control of logic anymore. From behind me, his chest vibrated as a chuckle left him, and as much as I wanted to slam my elbow into his ribs, I refrained, not wanting to give him any reason to stop.

"Come for me, wife," he said, pinching my clit between his thumb and finger, and pushing me into a violent climax that consumed my body, his name on my lips.

It was pure heaven.

In the minutes it took me to recover, Kai placed little kisses along my neck and shoulder, and it was only now that I wasn't distracted by his magical fingers that I felt his hard length

rubbing against my ass. Even though I'd just orgasmed, my pussy clenched with the desire to feel him inside me.

But that was never going to happen. Now the lust-filled fog had cleared, my brain was back in charge and anger seeped in. Grabbing his hand, I ripped it from where it rested on my hip and kicked my legs, breaking free of his grasp as I jumped out of bed, and almost tripped over my own feet.

I needed to get away from him.

Rage and lust mingled together to the point I couldn't find any words to say. It was a damn good job I'd gone to sleep in my clothes, because right then, I couldn't think straight, and I probably would have strolled right on out, naked as the day I was born.

"Riley," Kai called as he propped himself up and watched as I marched around the bed and headed out, slamming the door behind me.

"Morning, how are the happy couple?" Ash said, grinning as I stomped past where he sat eating toast.

"Bite me," I hissed, heading to the tiny bathroom, and again, slamming the door.

Love and hate warred deep inside me. I wanted to hate Kai, the pain I'd felt every day I thought he was dead had been unbearable, and there were days when I didn't know how I could ever consider getting through life without seeing him again.

But there was no point in trying to deny the love I felt for him. Every time my eyes landed on him, I couldn't believe he was really here, alive and breathing. But the two emotions clashed within me, resulting in me wanting to rip my stupid heart out so I didn't have to feel anymore.

Taking a deep breath, I stared back at my reflection, furious at myself for not having more self-control and letting Kai make me feel so good. I needed time, time to process his return, time to come to terms with the fact he wasn't dead. Time to heal from his betrayal. But he was Kai Wolfe, it didn't matter if *I* needed time. It didn't matter what anyone else wanted, what Kai wanted, he took.

But if there was any chance of us reconciling, he needed to understand that I needed time to get my damn head straight. Time for my broken heart to heal. Surely he understood if he kept pushing and forcing me into moving past this, all he was doing was pushing us to a point where we'd never recover.

The only way I could begin to heal from the heartache was to get as far away from Kai as possible, I just needed to make him see that.

Splashing cool water on my face to ease the burning anger bubbling under my skin, I took a deep breath before unlocking the door, determined to make my stubborn husband take me back to Forest Point and give me the time away from him that I needed.

Kai and Ash were deep in conversation as I stepped out, but as soon as the door shutting alerted Kai to my presence, he

broke off, his blazing eyes roaming over every inch of my body. And damn it if my core didn't heat at the way he was looking at me.

"I want to go back to Forest Point," I said, holding my nerve.

His eyes instantly darkened, and fury flashed across his face. I opened my mouth to tell him I didn't mean I wanted to go back to Rafe, I knew that's where his mind would go after I taunted him on the plane, but before either of us could say anything on the matter, Ash spoke.

"We'll be going back in a couple of days, we've got shit to do here first."

Fuck sake.

Although, I kinda expected that to be the answer. Of course the assholes weren't going to bow down and do what I wanted, and it wasn't like I had the power to make them do anything. It sucked, but seeing as I didn't have the means to get my own ass back to Forest Point, I knew I'd have to wait it out.

"Fine," I huffed, sitting down on the sofa. "But can you please hurry the fuck up and do whatever you need to do so we can get out of here?"

"We, Riley," Kai said. "That includes you."

My eyes narrowed on him. "What makes you think I'm doing anything to help you?"

"Why does everything have to be a fucking argument with you?" he barked, stomping over to stand in front of me, his

best menacing glare etched on his face which only rattled me more.

“I don’t know, dear husband, maybe it has something to do with the fact you pretended to die-”

“I did fucking die!” he boomed. “Three goddamn times the Dr had to bring me back to life!”

“Perhaps they shouldn’t have bothered after the first time!” I regretted the words as soon as they were out, especially when Kai flinched as if I’d slapped him.

I didn’t mean it, of course I didn’t. But my whole body vibrated with anger that was about to explode out of me, and him forcing me to be in his presence was only making it worse.

“Fuck sake,” Ash grumbled, coming over to where Kai and I had entered into a glaring match. “This isn’t helping, and the longer you two fight, the longer this is going to take.”

“Then maybe my wife needs to stop being so fucking stubborn and get over herself,” Kai growled, low and deadly.

“Get over myself? Are you fucking serious?” I said, jumping from the sofa to confront him, my face mere inches away from Kai’s snarling one. “What the hell is wrong with you, Kai? What did you expect, that you’d return from the dead, and I’d drop to the floor and worship at your feet?”

“I thought you’d be fucking pleased I wasn’t dead,” he replied, his tone harsh.

“Enough!” Ash bellowed when I opened my mouth to retort. I’d never heard Ash raise his voice before, and with the sneer of disgust on his face, I suddenly lost the need to say anything. “I get there is a lot of hurt and upset between the two of you right now, but this constant bickering and slanging matches aren’t helping either of you. Riley, I know you’re pissed, and you have every right to be, and for what it’s worth, I’m sorry for the part I’ve played in adding to your pain.”

His apology took the wind out of my sails, and my shoulder slumped. It was the first time someone had actually uttered the word ‘sorry.’ After all of Kai’s protests that he wanted me to forgive him and he’d never meant to hurt me, he hadn’t once apologized.

“Kai,” Ash said, turning his angry attention to my husband who was still glaring at me. “I tried to tell you to give her time, but you have to do things your way, so now you can fucking live with the consequences. But right now, there is a bigger picture at play. Every day we waste, Thorne and Hendrix’s hold on Hollows Bay gets bigger, and every day that passes is another day they get away with what they’ve done to you. To both of you. So please, for the love of god, can you stop fucking arguing for five minutes so we can get on with what we need to do.”

Urgh. I felt like a school kid being told off by a teacher. But here’s where Ash had made a mistake. He tried to make me feel bad about the city going to pot when I had no fucks to give. Hollows Bay was Kai’s problem now, it was his fight,

and quite frankly I was fed up with being used as a pawn in this fucked up game.

“And like I said, what makes you think I’m doing anything for either of you? Hollows Bay is not my problem anymore,” I said coldly.

“So that’s it? You’re going to turn your back on everything Thorne and Hendrix have done?” Kai growled, folding his arms over his chest.

“That’s exactly what I’m going to do,” I replied.

“No, it’s not. If you want to get back to Forest Point, you’re going to help us.”

“Or what?” I challenged, folding my arms.

“Christ,” Ash said in resignation. “Good to know you both listened to me.”

“You want to play this game, wife?” Kai said, ignoring Ash and glaring daggers at me.

“Let me guess, if I don’t help you, you’ll take away the security protecting Angel?” I raised a brow and folded my arms across my chest.

“No, I wouldn’t do that to her,” he replied, but then a smirk graced his annoyingly handsome face. “But your friend, Kendra, seems to have adjusted to her new life of luxury quite well, it’d be a shame to take that away from her.”

His words were a reminder of Hendrix’s threat when he used her as bait to lure me out of the panic room, and the anger

bubbling underneath me threatened to burst out of me like a volcanic eruption. “Low fucking blow, Kai.”

He shrugged a shoulder, and with his cold eyes staring back at me, it was a stark reminder of who Kai was when he wasn't showering me with his love and affection. “Do you really want to find out?”

I paused. I wouldn't put it past Kai to stick to his word, and as we glowered at each other, resignation washed over me. He'd pull the plug on the funds I was using to keep Kendra safe if it meant he got to keep me by his side, and where would that leave her? Unprotected and at risk, and I didn't want that on my conscience.

Like many times since my path collided with Kai, I was in a position where I had no damn choice but to do what he wanted.

For now, at least. When we got back to Forest Point and I could get away from him, I would figure out what in the fuck I was going to do.

Tension hung in the air as Ash looked between Kai and me before I sighed heavily. “What do you need me to do?”

Kai's smirk turned into a look of triumph making my fists clench by my sides. The sooner we got on with things, whatever they were, the sooner we could leave this fucking place, and I could get away from my asshole of a husband.

Chapter 16

Kai

The neighborhood we were driving through had seen better days. It was clear that poverty was rife in this part of the town. But Leonard Jenkins hadn't fared well in life, so it was a miracle he could afford somewhere to live in the first place.

The old man had lost everything in the fire that claimed his and the Browns homes years ago. Sadly for him, he hadn't bothered to pay his home insurance so was left penniless. It was only because he'd been at work at the time of the fire that he walked away with his life.

The Browns weren't so lucky.

Ash stopped the car a few blocks down from the house Leonard resided in, and I twisted in the seat to look at Riley who had been quiet for the entire journey. Meeting my eyes, I saw the anger still bubbling under her skin.

I got it. Of course I did. I wasn't stupid enough to think Riley would have welcomed me with open arms once the truth set in, but was I hoping her love for me would have snuffed out the anger by now?

Yes, yes I fucking was.

The logical part of my brain knew Ash was right. I needed to give her space to come to terms with everything, and let her come back to me the way she had done when she went to France. The problem was, Riley hadn't been my wife then. As much as I believed she was mine at the time, I didn't have a claim on her.

But now I did.

Riley could demand all the time and space she needed, but she wasn't going anywhere. She was my fucking wife, and when she returned from France, I promised her that if she ever tried leaving me again, I would end her, and then myself so I could follow her into the afterlife.

Well, I'd since been to the afterlife, and it was fucking miserable. As much as my heart was beating in the six months we were apart, I lived every day in hell without her, and there was no way I was returning. So my beautiful wife would just have to suck it up because she wasn't going anywhere.

But my stubborn Star was fighting a battle against herself. I saw it every time she spat her venomous words at me because as soon as she said something spiteful, she immediately regretted it, knowing it would hurt me.

And I'd seen it in her eyes when she saw my scars for the first time. They'd filled with a mix of emotions- concern for me, anger for those who had caused them, relief that I was breathing, and love. Love had shone the brightest until she remembered she was pissed at me.

That's why I had to push a little bit harder. Push her to purge the anger so she could let herself feel the love I knew was inside her. We'd come close earlier when she snapped and told me the doctor shouldn't have bothered resuscitating me after the first attempt. I knew she didn't mean it, and if it hadn't been for Ash interjecting, I would have pushed her a little bit harder and gotten her to break.

It was a cuntish thing to do, but I never hid who I was from her, and one way or another, I'd make her see that her place was by my side.

"You ready?" I asked, although it's not like she had much choice in the matter.

If she didn't do what I had asked her to do, I would have pulled the plug on the funds keeping Kendra and her family safe. Riley wouldn't risk it though, she really was too good for me and this life.

But it was too late for her now, she was a part of me as much as I was a part of her, and I'd make damn sure we were never separated again.

"Yeah," she replied solemnly, unstrapping her seatbelt.

“Anything you want to go over first?” I asked, making sure she was confident she remembered all the information Ash and I had briefed her on before we left the cabin.

“I’ve got it, Kai. I’m not stupid.”

“I never said you were, baby,” I replied, giving her a charming smile that earned me a scowl in response.

The three of us got out of the car and walked silently to the rundown blue house where Leonard was. No doubt the man was getting himself ready for an evening at the local bingo hall. He ought to spend less time wasting money on bingo, and more time fixing his house up.

Every single window at the front of the property was damaged in some way, be that a smashed glass pane or boarded up completely. Evidently, Leonard wasn’t overly concerned about his safety if he was happy to live like this.

Apollo resources had spent *weeks* monitoring Leonard’s movements, making sure he wasn’t linked to Thorne in any way. We needed to make sure it would be safe to approach him.

I wasn’t holding out much hope of gaining information from him. It had been seventeen years since the Brown’s house had burned down, and even longer from when they fostered Thorne, or as he would have been known by then, Michael Tucker.

Still, it was good sense to cover the basics, even the slightest hint of intel could prove useful in bringing the cunt down. And

I wasn't just going to bring him down.

I was going to destroy him.

Reaching the house, Riley hesitated for all of a second before she opened the gate and walked up the path that ran through the overgrown garden. As we approached the front door that looked like it would open with the slightest nudge, both Ash and I scanned the area, making sure there was no threat.

Riley knocked loudly on the door, and it didn't take long for the old man to open it. Leonard was in his late sixties, but years of smoking and drinking had weathered his skin, making him appear years older than his actual age. Dark spots marred his face, the whites of his eyes were tinged with yellow, and his dirty clothes reeked of cigarettes.

A kind smile crossed his face when he saw Riley, before a look of caution took over when his eyes landed on both Ash and me standing protectively behind her.

"Erm...how...how can I help you, miss?" he said, fixing his attention to Riley.

"Are you Mr. Jenkins?" she said, warmth in her tone.

"Yes, who are you?" he replied, his eyes darting to Ash and me again.

"My name's Claire, I was hoping you'd be able to help me with some information about my brother, I believe he used to live next door to you. He was fostered by Carol and Anthony

Brown years ago,” Riley said, the lie rolling easily off her tongue.

She’d been against pretending to be John Anderson’s sister when I told her who we were going to see, but she also knew the risk if we revealed who we really were.

“Oh,” Leonard replied, his tone turning from wary to jovial. “Yes, I remember the Browns well. Please come inside.”

Without giving us a chance to protest, he turned and walked down the hallway. Riley twisted to look at me, her brow raised in question, but I gave her a nod and gently nudged her back to follow. She had nothing to fear. Not that I thought for a second Leonard would cause us problems, but he’d be dead if he even tried to lift a finger toward her.

The house reeked of stale cigarettes, and the interior was in need of a makeover more than the outside was. Wallpaper was falling from the walls, the carpet was threadbare, and when he led us into the living room, the sofas were moth-eaten and covered in stains.

Riley grimaced at the seat Leonard offered her but quickly composing herself, she smiled and sat down with Ash and me flanking her sides.

“Who, erm, who are these?” Leonard asked, his eyes once again turning cautious as he took in the size of the two of us.

“Oh, sorry. This is my fiancè, James,” she said, resting her hand on Ash’s thigh and instantly pissing me off.

The little minx would pay for that.

Ash stiffened momentarily, but not wanting to blow our cover, he went along by placing his hand on top of hers.

He'd also pay for that.

“And this is a friend of mine, Barney,” she said, indicating to me.

Fucking Barney. Of all the names she could have picked for me, she went with Barney?

“Well, it's nice to meet you,” Leonard said, smiling at the three of us before turning his attention to Riley. “So, who is your brother? Carol and Anthony fostered a number of children during the time they lived next door to me.”

“Was,” she said, doing a damn good job at sounding remorseful that her fake brother was dead. “His name was John. John Anderson. He was fostered by Mr. and Mrs. Brown when he was nine.”

“Ah, yes! I remember John,” Leonard beamed, sitting back in his armchair. “He was a quiet boy, didn't speak much. Did something happen to him?”

“He was shot on duty about six months ago,” she replied, a hint of venom in her voice that you would only hear if you knew Riley like I did.

“Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that,” Leonard replied, giving her a sympathetic smile. “I have to say, out of all their children, I was most surprised he joined the force.”

“Thank you,” she replied through gritted teeth. Subtly so Leonard didn't see, I put my hand behind her and placed it on

her lower back, hoping it would keep her calm. She stiffened, but after a beat, her body relaxed as if my simple touch was grounding her, and she finally removed her hand from Ash's thigh. "I didn't get the chance to meet him so he never knew he had a sister. But I've been tracking down people who might have known him, I wanted to know what he was like. I've managed to speak to some colleagues, but you're the first person I've been able to find who could shed some light on his childhood."

It should have worried me how easily Riley was maintaining the lie, but I was proud of my girl for not batting an eyelid as she reeled old Leonard in.

"Hmm, well I'm afraid I'm not sure I will be much of a help. Like I said, John was a quiet boy. You'd do better at tracking down the other boy who was fostered with him, they were as thick of thieves. I can't think of his name now." Leonard paused and rubbed his chin. "Simon! Simon Evans, I think his name was."

It was the first time we'd heard this kid's name, but that wasn't surprising. Someone, presumably Thorne, had done a fucking excellent job deleting all records of the names of kids the Browns fostered. Michael Tucker was the only name Isaac, my private investigator, had found when he'd first started trying to find out who John Anderson was. Sadly for Isaac, his quest to find information had resulted in his death at the hands of Thorne.

“Was Simon the only other kid who lived with Carol and Anthony when John lived with them?” I asked, sitting forward with piqued curiosity. If this Simon kid was still alive, he would be a better source of information on Thorne than Leonard was.

“No. There was a girl, she was a year or so older than John, but she kept to herself, very studious girl, always had a nose in a book. She moved as soon as she was eighteen, went to study abroad, and didn’t come back until a few months ago. She lectures at the university, right here in Jacksonville. And there was Michael of course,” he paused as a somber look crossed his face. “Michael, Simon, and John were as thick as thieves, they were all a similar age. Where one went, the other two were bound to follow. They were inseparable. Tucker, that was his last name, but I’m afraid to tell you, he’s dead.”

I’d been rubbing my thumb against the soft skin of Riley’s back, but at his words, I froze.

We knew from the minimal information Isaac found that Michael Tucker had allegedly died in the house fire that claimed the Brown’s lives, but with information missing, it proved difficult to piece everything together.

Isaac had found a death certificate for Michael Tucker showing he’d died as a result of the fire, but later we’d been given the deed poll showing the name change from Michael Tucker to Max Thorne, along with the DNA test showing Tucker was my half-brother.

Thorne had enjoyed playing his little game, dropping enough pieces of the puzzle along the way to keep us guessing what the fuck was going on. My guess was that he'd somehow forged his own death certificate to make it look like he'd died in the fire. It was his way to stop us from finding out the truth until he was ready to reveal who he really was.

But if he'd forged his death certificate, why the fuck was Leonard of the belief that Michael Tucker had actually died in the fire?

“How did he die?” Riley asked, playing her part in not knowing anything about the history of Anderson and Thorne.

“Well, it's not a nice story. There was a fire at Carol and Anthony's house, I think it would have been about seventeen years ago now. The investigators believed it to be arson but they never caught anyone for it. But the fire was devastating. It happened in the middle of the night, and Carol and Anthony were found dead in their beds, they didn't stand a chance.”

His eyes glazed over as he recalled the memory, and I couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for the Browns, burning to death was not a nice way to go.

“The fire spread to my house,” Leonard continued. “I was at work, but when I got home, half my house was on fire. It was a miracle the firemen were able to put it out before it claimed the entire place. I managed to salvage some belongings but I lost a lot. Of course, I shouldn't grumble, if I hadn't been working, who knows what would have happened.”

“What about Michael?” I asked, growing impatient. I didn’t want a trip down memory lane of what he’d lost, I wanted information.

“Ah, yes, Michael,” he replied, snapping himself out of the memories. “Well, he was caught up in the fire as well.”

“Are you sure?” I replied quickly, the feeling that something wasn’t adding up grew stronger the more he spoke.

“Oh, I’m sure. I watched them bring his body out myself. Such a shame, he’d only just turned eighteen. He was the only one who still lived with Carol and Anthony. Stephanie, John, and Simon had all moved out in the months leading up to the fire, but it was definitely Michael’s body they brought out. It’s a sight that has stayed with me all this time,” Leonard said.

Riley’s body tensed next to me, and Ash and I shared a look over the top of her head, both of us thinking the same thing.

If Michael Tucker really was dead, then who the fuck was Max Thorne, and why was he pretending to be Tucker?

“You know, I think I might have an old picture of the family before the fire claimed them, give me a minute.” With that, Leonard wandered out of the living room, leaving the three of us dumbfounded.

“What the hell is going on right now?” Riley whispered after a minute of tense silence, only broken by the distant sound of Leonard rummaging down the hallway.

The pieces clicked together in my head. “If I had to take a guess, I would say Thorne has pulled the wool over our eyes

once again,” I replied through gritted teeth.

“You think Thorne has claimed Tucker’s identity?” Ash said, coming to the same conclusion I was slowly coming to.

“Holy shit,” Riley whispered. “But if Max isn’t Michael, who the hell is he?”

That was a good fucking question.

Before I could respond, Leonard stepped back into the room, smiling at the photo he held in his hand, and unaware of the confusion he’d caused.

“I found it, my box of photos thankfully survived the fire. Here,” he handed the photo to Riley, who took it, and held it so both Ash and I could peer over her shoulders.

The photo was an image of a family. The mom and dad, no doubt Carol and Anthony, a sullen-looking young woman, likely Stephanie, and their three boys. Even though the photo was at least seventeen years old, if not older given their young faces, it was easy to pick out who they were. John Anderson, Michael Tucker before he became Thorne, and a third boy, likely Simon Evans.

“That’s Michael?” I said, pointing to the evil face of the child who would grow up to become my arch-nemesis.

“No,” Leonard said, confirming my fears. “That’s Simon. This one,” he pointed to the boy I’d initially assumed was Simon. “That’s Michael. He died a few months after this photo was taken.”

Chapter 17

Riley

By the time we got back to the cabin, darkness had fallen. The hour drive back passed quickly with the three of us discussing the latest development.

I'd expected Kai to be furious, but surprisingly, he'd taken the new plot twist rather well. When Ash questioned him on why he was being so calm about it, Kai simply shrugged and said he didn't give a shit. Either way, Max Thorne, or whoever the fuck he was, was going to die.

The conversation continued as we tucked into the pizza we'd picked up on the way back to the cabin, and when we couldn't eat anymore, the three of us fell silent, lost in our thoughts.

“Well, I guess the only way we find out who the fuck Simon Evans is, and why he's pretending to be Michael Tucker is if we do some digging,” Ash said, stretching as he stood from the sofa. “There's an Apollo office in the next town over, I'm going to head there and start doing some research.”

Apprehension pooled in my belly. If Ash was leaving, I'd be left here alone with Kai, and I wasn't sure I was ready for that. I'd almost forgotten about our argument this morning, what with everything we'd found out, but with Ash gone, I knew Kai would use the opportunity to his advantage.

"Speak to Miles," Kai said, standing too. "He'll be able to help."

"Sure thing, Barney," Ash said, smirking. At Kai's growl of displeasure, I couldn't help the snort that left me. Kai's head snapped to where I sat, his dark eyes narrowing on me.

"You might want to stay out for the rest of the night, Ash. My wife and I have some unfinished business."

Yup. There it was.

"Believe me, I've had enough of your marital woes to last me a lifetime. I'll catch up with you guys in the morning, try not to kill each other while I'm gone," Ash replied, still grinning.

Kai glared at me as Ash grabbed his jacket and walked out, his dark eyes burning into me, but I couldn't tell if they were flaring with fury or lust.

Either way, the intensity blazing from his dark orbs was enough to make me jump to my feet and take several steps away from him, hoping I'd be able to offer myself some form of protection from the wolf I was sure was about to come out to play.

At the sound of the car's engine growing fainter, Kai took a step closer, the heat in his eyes now burning like an inferno.

Lust.

It was definitely lust.

And I was in so much trouble because from the look he wore on his face, my core clenched with need.

“What are you doing?” I asked as he took another step closer. His tongue darted out and swiped over his bottom lip, and damn it if I didn't want his tongue running all over me.

But I refused to give in to him. If he thought he could fuck his way to forgiveness he was shit out of luck.

“Like I said, we have some unfinished business,” he replied. His tone was one I'd heard before. It was his ‘Don't fucking mess with me’ tone.

“I don't want to talk. I have nothing to say to you, and I don't want to hear any bullshit excuses that come from your mouth,” I replied, letting him hear the spite in my tone.

“That's just as well, baby, I don't want to talk either. You owe me something.”

That made me pause.

“What the hell do I owe you?” I snapped.

His lips curved into a wicked grin. “Remember the deal we made all those months ago when we were at the warehouse with Blaze?”

My heart leaped into my throat.

“Wh-What?” My voice shook, and even though I knew what he was talking about, I opted to play dumb.

“Come on, wife, you remember. We made a deal. I wouldn’t kill Blaze in exchange for one night to do whatever I wanted to your tight little body.”

Oh, holy shit.

“You’re joking?” I said, propping my hands on my hips, trying to ignore all the filthy images that suddenly burst to life in my head.

“Does it look like I’m joking?” He took another step forward prompting me to drop my hands and take another step back, and fuck me, did my pussy start throbbing.

“But you did kill her!” I shrieked, throwing my hands in the air, and trying to ignore my body’s reaction to my husband.

“Not then I didn’t. Not when we made the deal. I held my end, now you are going to uphold yours.” The wicked smile on his lips grew wider as a devious glint appeared in his eye. Kai always prided himself on being a man of his word, now he was testing to see if I would be a woman of *my* word.

And hell, did I want to be. Pride and stubbornness stopped me from wanting to go back on the deal I’d stupidly agreed to, even if the circumstances had changed significantly since the time we’d made it. But that didn’t mean I was just going to roll over and take it.

Literally.

“And if I say no?”

“You can say no all you like, it’s still going to happen,” he threatened.

“So you’ll force yourself on me?” I challenged.

“What did I tell you on the plane, Star? I’ll stop when you actually mean it.” He took another step closer, and I swallowed nervously.

My heart raced because despite my brain telling me to hold firm and not give in to him, my whole body was *begging* me to let him do whatever the fuck he wanted.

“But don’t forget, Riley. I know you. I know every inch of your body. I can tell when your pulse is racing. I see when your eyes dilate with need. I know when your cunt is getting wetter at the mere thought of my cock pounding it. Your mouth might be saying no, but your body says something entirely different.”

Shit.

He was so fucking right. Everything he had just described was happening, especially the part about my pussy getting wetter. Right now, my panties were positively soaked.

An internal war raged. Kai was right, there was no denying my physical reaction to him, and if I was honest with myself, I wanted nothing more than for him to ravish me.

But so much of me was still furious with him, and that part of me, the part that dominated my emotions wasn’t ready to hear his reasoning for putting me through six months of hell.

But let's face it, this was Kai Wolfe I was dealing with. I could protest as much as I liked, and all the time my traitorous body was reacting the way it was, there was no way he wouldn't follow through on his threat.

I had no choice but to accept the truth of the matter.

I was about to get a damn good seeing to, and I'd be lying if I said it was the worst thing in the world.

Seeing the resignation wash over my face, Kai took another step forward as I took a step back, not realizing he'd been slowly pushing me back against the wall. With nowhere for me to go, Kai took a final step forward, crowding me in as he raised his arms and pinned me against the wall.

"We can do this the easy way, or the hard way, Star," he whispered against my ear, his scent wrapping around me and sending my hormones into overdrive. "It's up to you. But I warn you, baby, if you take the hard way, I will take it out on your ass, and you won't get to come."

Well, that was a no-brainer.

No way I was being deprived of orgasms.

Again.

"I guess I'll take the easy way then."

The words barely left me before his mouth slammed down on mine, his hips thrusting forward where his hard length pressed against my belly. As his tongue invaded my mouth and started battling with mine, my pussy clenched, and I couldn't stop the wanton groan from escaping.

As if that was the cue Kai had been waiting for, he grabbed my thighs and lifted me into his arms, my legs wrapping around him as if they had a mind of their own. His mouth didn't leave mine as he carried us over to the sofa where he lay me down. My legs spread, accommodating his huge frame to nestle between them.

His mouth broke away as he started kissing down my neck, his hand massaging one of my breasts, making my nipple pebble underneath the material of my bra. I squeezed my eyes closed, relishing in the feel of his lips against my skin.

How many nights had I spent praying for this moment to happen again? Too damn many, that was for sure.

“Fuck, wife, you have no idea how much I want to slam my cock into your tight pussy and fuck you until you can't walk,” Kai whispered against my throat, his warm breath skating over my racing pulse point.

Christ, had I missed his filthy words. To my utter disappointment, he pulled away and sat up to kneel between my legs. He gazed down at me with so much fucking love and adoration on his face that it made my heart hurt.

Only this time, the ache felt good.

“And I will fuck you, Star. I'm going to fill you with my come all night long. But first, I want something from you.”

“W-What do you want?” I asked, my voice husky where he'd kissed the life out of me. He grabbed my arms and pulled me so I was sitting too, our noses only an inch apart.

“I want you to dance for me,” he whispered, staring longingly into my eyes.

“What?” I replied, my brow quirking in surprise because of all the things I thought he would say, that was not it. “Here?”

“Yeah, baby. Here,” he replied, pulling out his phone. I stared down at it as he selected an app, and within seconds, the opening beat to a song I knew *oh so well* started to fill the cabin.

Love on the Brain was the song that played when Kai first saw me dancing at Club Sin. We’d danced to it after we got married, it was *our* song.

During the months when I thought Kai was gone forever, I hadn’t been able to bring myself to listen to it because it would hurt too much, but as the beat became familiar once again, I couldn’t stop my lips from curling into a fond smile.

As I met Kai’s eyes, the anger I held towards him started to abate as memories flashed through my head in a montage. Memories I hadn’t let myself think about for months.

The first time we spoke.

The time he saved me from being raped in the alley.

Him offering to pay for Angel’s cochlear implant in exchange for me being his for six months.

The first time we kissed.

The first time we fucked.

The first time he told me he loved me.

The heartbreak of leaving him to go to France.

The realization that I wanted to be by his side and leaving my sister to be with him.

The way his mouth dropped open when I told him I loved him for the first time.

The way he looked at me with so much love as I walked down the aisle.

And finally, the love I held for him as we exchanged our VOWS.

Staring into his dark eyes, the gold flecks seemed brighter than ever, and for the first time since finding out he was alive, I let myself think about a future with him. The future I'd once dreamed of before Hendrix shot him, a future that almost never happened, could now happen.

The realization hit me like a freight train.

"I'll dance for you," I whispered, reaching up to stroke a finger down his cheek, barely able to get the words out because of the heavy ball of emotion stuck in my throat.

His lips pulled into the smile he only ever wore for me, and overwhelmed with the love I had for this man, I had to look away. Don't get me wrong, the anger was still there, we still had a shit load to talk about, but right at that very moment, I didn't want to think about it.

There was only one thing I wanted to feel with Kai, and it wasn't anger or hurt.

I wanted his love.

Slowly getting to my feet, Kai settled back on the sofa, his legs spread wide, and his dark gaze fixed firmly on me. As if his stare was the boost I needed, my hips started swaying in time with the beat, and Kai's tongue darted out to wet his lips.

Closing my eyes, I let the beat take over. My hips moved with more sway, my hands ran over my body, cupping my breasts and giving them a delicate squeeze, before trailing down over my curves to stroke my pussy.

“Fuck,” Kai's husky tone hit my ears, and when I opened my eyes again, I found he'd undone the button on his jeans to ease the pressure against his hard cock.

I smirked, loving the effect I had on him. Rolling my body in time to the music, I savored the feel of Kai's heated stare roaming everywhere. I turned, giving him my back as I carried on swaying my hips, letting him see my ass. As I heard him shift on the sofa, I reached for the hem of my top and pulled it over my head before throwing it on the floor.

My bra followed, and when I turned back to face Kai, his eyes immediately landed on my taut nipples, and just to tease him, I reached up and pinched both buds. In the time my back was turned, he'd pulled his jeans and his boxer briefs down his legs, and his hand was wrapped around his thick cock.

There was every chance that come tomorrow, the anger would have taken over again, but I knew no matter how powerful that emotion could be, I'd never forget the sight of

him sitting there, his dark eyes burning with his need for *me* as he stroked his length.

Rolling my hips to the beat, I lowered my leggings, leaving the lace panties I had on. Kai had planned my kidnap well, he'd surprised me with a small suitcase of clothes when we first arrived at the cabin. I wasn't in the slightest bit surprised to find the most provocative underwear packed in the case, but with his eyes fixed on my lace panties, I was damn glad he had.

"Christ, Riley," Kai said as he thumbed the tip of his cock and threw his head back against the sofa. The head of his cock glistened with pre-come when his thumb slipped off the tip, and I licked my lips. It had been far too long since I'd tasted him, and I wasn't going to wait any longer.

Lowering myself to my hands and knees, Kai watched me, his lids hooded as I crawled to him. When I reached his spread legs, I sat on my knees and knocked his hand out of the way. Looking up at him from under my lashes, I leaned forward, poking my tongue out to lick the tip of his cock, lapping up the slither of pre-come. The taste of Kai burst to life on my tongue, but it wasn't enough. I wanted everything he could give me.

"Fuck!" he hissed when I licked the length of his shaft, before flicking the tip again. My pussy grew wetter, which was fucking insane because it had been dripping before I'd even had a taste of him, and as I lowered my mouth around Kai's cock, my entire core clenched with need.

“Baby, I almost forgot how good it feels to have your mouth around my cock,” Kai groaned, grabbing the back of my head as he thrust up into my mouth. His cock hit the back of my throat, almost making me gag, but I didn’t care. I wanted all of him.

I was vaguely aware the music had changed to something more upbeat. In time to the rhythm, I moved my mouth up and down his length, licking and sucking as Kai’s thrusts grew faster. With one hand, I cupped his balls and started massaging, and with the other, I gripped the base of his shaft, squeezing tight and earning a hiss from him.

I knew he was getting close to exploding in my mouth when his cock throbbed against my tongue. I was more than ready to taste him, but with his hand still wrapped in my hair, he pulled me off his cock, a trail of saliva following as I moved my mouth away.

“I need your sweet cunt, wife. I can’t wait anymore,” he growled, his pupils dilated.

My body seemed to agree that it needed Kai’s cock as well. Before I knew it, I was on my feet and shimmying out of my panties. As soon as I stepped out of them, Kai grabbed my hips and pulled me down into his lap. His mouth was once again on mine, tasting himself on my tongue.

Needing to feel his firm body under my hands, I pulled away to rip his t-shirt over his head, forgetting completely about the scar that now ran between his pecs. But the second I saw it, my gaze fixed on it, momentarily forgetting I was about to be

railed by Kai, and the venom I held for Hendrix sparked to life.

Kai noticed where my mind had gone. He grabbed my chin, moving it so I had to look at him. “Don’t think about it, baby. Not right now. He didn’t take me away from you. I’m here, I’ll always be here, no one will ever come between us again.”

His gaze held so much promise, and in that moment I knew wholeheartedly that no matter how powerful the anger might be at times in the coming days, and no matter his reasons for pulling such a cruel trick, I’d find it in myself to move on, and together we’d destroy Hendrix.

Pushing Hendrix out of my mind, I met Kai’s mouth again, only this time, he let me take control of the kiss. I devoured his mouth, and as I did, I shifted in his lap so his cock was poised at my entrance. Kai moved forward on the sofa so I could wrap my legs around his waist, and as he did, his cock pushed inside of me.

We moaned together, and the feeling of being home consumed me.

Kai was my home, *my world*, and I never wanted to be without him again.

Wrapping my arms around the back of his neck, I ground my hips into him, meeting his thrusts. My pussy gripped his cock as I writhed in his lap. When I threw my head back, instead of biting and leaving his mark like he usually would, Kai kissed the hollow of my throat. A bolt of lightning went straight to

my core and pushed me head first towards what I knew would be a powerful climax.

When his hand moved between us and he found my clit, I couldn't stop the needy cry from leaving my lips. I moved faster in his lap, chasing my release, and as he pinched my clit between his thumb and finger, I fell over the edge, screaming his name before my forehead fell to rest on his shoulder.

My pussy clamping down around Kai's cock pushed him over with me, and as he emptied his load into me, he grabbed the back of my head and tugged to make me meet his eyes.

"I love you, Star. I love you so fucking much." He didn't give me a chance to respond as he slammed his mouth on mine again.

Chapter 18

Riley

T rue to his word, Kai spent the night doing whatever he damn well pleased to my body. True to my word, I let him. He fucked me every which way he could, including my ass.

As early morning rays started to stream through the cabin windows, we showered together where he fucked me again before we fell into bed. Exhausted, we drifted into a deep sleep, wrapped in each other's arms.

For the second night running, I didn't have the blasted nightmare where Kai died and I was powerless to stop it.

When my eyes fluttered open several hours later, I couldn't stop the enormous smile from taking over my face, even if my entire body ached. But within seconds of being awake, confusion struck as memories flooded my brain. Memories of me sobbing my heart out, begging to a god I didn't believe in

to bring Kai back to me. Memories of the bone-crushing grief I carried around with me.

Memories of the moment when I found out it was all a lie.

And as predicted, the anger I'd been harboring for the last few days sprung to life.

I'd be lying if I said there wasn't some part of me starting to soften towards Kai, ready to throw my hat in with my anger and move on. But the bigger part of me, the part that had been hurt by his deceit, was leading the protest in my brain, demanding I didn't forgive him so easily.

Gently turning over to look at him, my heart swelled with love as I watched him sleep. For a long time, I thought I'd never get to see this image again, but here we were, and yet, it still didn't make the anger dissipate.

Sunlight streamed into the room hitting the metal of the handcuffs attached to the bed, the reflection catching my eye. I stared at the innocuous item, not in the least bit embarrassed of all the things Kai did to me only hours ago while I was chained up.

Who would have thought I'd grow to love being handcuffed?

With the image of Kai pounding into me from behind while I was restrained, a lightbulb switched on in my head, and a devious smile crossed my lips.

Slowly, oh so slowly, so I didn't wake my husband, I grabbed one of the metal bracelets and pulled so the cuffs slipped silently down the headboard as far as it would go,

which just so happened to be near to where Kai's hand rested on the pillow.

His heavy breathing told me he was fast asleep, so quick as a flash, I grabbed his hand, shoving it into the bracelet and clasping it around his wrist, my heart racing at the fear of being caught. Satisfaction rolled through me when Kai's eyes shot open, and he tugged against the restraint.

"What do you think you're doing, wife?" he growled, sleep heavy in his voice.

Giving him a sultry smile, I climbed over his body to straddle him, lowering myself to whisper in his ear. "Having my wicked way with you, husband."

Kai's eyes darkened as lust and want filled them. "Does this mean I'm forgiven?"

"We'll see. Let me cuff your other wrist and it'll be another step closer to forgiveness."

Like a kid in a candy shop, his lips curled into a salacious smile, and he eagerly lifted his arm above his head, willingly letting me restrain him. As I leaned over to cuff his arm, he reached forward to nip my breast.

"Do your worst, baby," he grinned.

If only he knew I planned to do exactly that.

Moving down his body, I licked his torso, looking up at him from under my lashes as I went. When I reached his cock, which was already hard, I ran my finger over the tip, before gripping his shaft firmly.

“Fuck,” Kai hissed as I pumped twice, his cock swelling in my hand.

“Does that feel good?” I whispered, before running my tongue along his length and kissing the tip.

“So fucking good, Star.”

I didn't wait any longer to take him fully into my mouth. Kai groaned as I took as much of his length as I could without gagging, hollowing out my cheeks to accommodate him. Taking my time, I licked back up, before sliding right the way back down again, the head of his cock hitting the back of my throat. Kai's hips thrust up as he groaned louder.

“Fuck, Riley. I've missed waking up to your talented mouth sucking my cock.” His cock twitched in my mouth as I hummed my response.

Wrapping my hand around the base of his shaft, I found my pace, twirling my tongue around the sensitive head, before taking him deep in my throat. His groans turned needy, and I knew it wouldn't be long until he erupted.

“Are you close?” I asked, popping my mouth off his throbbing length.

“Yes, baby. Fuck, I need to come down your throat so badly.”

I let a wicked smile take over as I peered up at him, before rising to my knees, earning a confused look from Kai.

“Maybe you can ask Rafe to finish you off when he comes to finish *me* off,” I said, jumping off the bed.

“Riley, what the fuck?” Kai roared, his mood instantly souring.

He glared daggers at me as I grabbed my clothes and threw them on, the feeling of satisfaction growing stronger as he tugged against the restraints, cursing as he tried to free himself, his cock still standing proud, waiting to get its happy ending.

“Karma’s a bitch, *baby*. You might want to remember that next time you play with me.” I blew him a kiss, grabbed the handcuff key from the sideboard, and walked out.

“Riley!” Kai bellowed, making my smile grow wider.

“Oh, hi, Ash,” I beamed when I found the man mountain sitting at the kitchen table, a puzzled look on his face.

“Do I want to know?” he said with a raised brow.

“If you want a good laugh,” I replied, grabbing a bowl and pouring myself some cereal.

Ash thought about it for all of a second before he stood from the table, and walked to where I’d left the bedroom door open. Taking a mouthful of my cereal, I watched Ash freeze in the doorway, taking in the sight of the big bad wolf chained to the bed, naked as the day he was born.

Expecting Ash to tell me to undo the cuffs and grow the fuck up, I was somewhat surprised when he threw his head back and let out a deep, hearty laugh that reverberated throughout the cabin.

“Fuck you, Ash!” Kai barked. “Let me out of here!”

His words were followed by the sound of the cuffs scratching against the headboard, no doubt from where he was tugging against them. Milk dribbled down my chin from where the laughter bubbled out of my mouth.

Ash twisted to look at me, amusement evident under his beard. “Say, Riley. If I don’t let Kai out of those cuffs, will you forgive me for not telling you this asshole was alive for all those months?”

On any other day, the mention of Kai’s betrayal would have darkened my mood, but I was having too much fun. Besides, Ash *had* apologized, he’d been the only one to say he was sorry, and that went a long way. Plus, me forgiving him would only piss Kai off even more.

“Sure. You’re forgiven.”

Ash smiled at me before turning his attention back to Kai. “Sorry, dude, I tried to warn you that kidnapping your wife would only end in disaster. You reap what you sow,” Ash said jovially, before closing the bedroom door and muffling Kai’s pointless threats. “You know it won’t be long until he breaks out of them, right?”

“Yeah,” I replied, knowing it would only be a matter of time before Kai broke the bed in order to break free. I knew without a shadow of a doubt there’d be consequences for what I’d done to him, but I didn’t give a shit. I was sure I would later when he was tanning my ass, but I’d worry about that then.

“Want to get out of here? There’s someone we need to see,” Ash said cryptically.

At the almighty bang that rumbled from the bedroom, I put my unfinished cereal in the sink and gave Ash a nod. “Let’s go.”

It wasn’t long until once again, we found ourselves driving through towns. Ash filled me in on the research he’d been doing overnight. There wasn’t much to go on. Like all the files relating to the Browns, Michael Tucker, and John Anderson, Ash and Miles had struggled to find any information on Simon Evans. No doubt records had been hacked by Max and deleted to stop us from finding out the truth.

But Max could delete all the files in the world, it wouldn’t stop the truth coming from the horse’s mouth. At least, that’s what we were hoping for from Stephanie Knight, the girl who’d resided with the Browns when Michael, Simon, and John lived with them.

Ash had found her working at Jacksonville University, lecturing in psychology. He’d compared the picture Leonard had given us to her photo held on the uni website, and Ash was certain we had the right person.

Miles then worked his magic and obtained her financial records, phone records, and social media accounts, and found she’d been living in England for the past ten years. On the face of it, she’d had no contact with either John or Max during that time.

Miles was as sure as possible that she didn’t have anything to do with her former foster brothers, so we were hoping like

mad we'd be able to get information from her without it getting back to Max.

Ash warned me that if we got even the slightest hint she would report back to Max, it wouldn't end so well for her. It lay heavy on my shoulders at the thought that yet another innocent person might get caught up in this war. As much as I hated to accept it though, we couldn't risk our secret squirrel mission to Florida getting back to Max.

Ash had called ahead to make arrangements for us to meet Stephanie. He'd changed the sob story I was to give from John being my brother to Michael being my brother, in hopes I could play on Stephanie's heartstrings.

It worked on Leonard so maybe I wasn't a bad actress.

Entering the reception area, Ash informed the receptionist we were here to see Stephanie, and minutes later, she led us through hallways to an office where she knocked on a door and a stern 'Come in' sounded from inside.

"Professor Knight, you have some visitors," the receptionist said, stepping to one side so Ash and I could enter the office.

The woman sitting behind her desk was clearly the girl in the picture we'd been given. Aside from now being years older, she looked exactly the same as she had done seventeen years ago. Her auburn hair was pulled up into a tight bun, her thick-rimmed glasses rested on her nose, and her thin lips were pursed as if she'd tasted something bitter.

When she stood from behind her desk, her frame too was as it had been seventeen years ago. Petite shoulders, slim waist, practically no boobs. She reminded me so much of Jane. Her mousy features were almost similar, but the main difference was that Stephanie had an air about her, one that said she wasn't someone who would lie down and take any bullshit.

I instantly liked her.

“Yes, of course. Please come in,” she said, stepping from behind her desk and pointing to two chairs. “You must be Claire Tucker?”

“Er, yeah,” I replied hesitantly. I didn't like the idea of lying, even if there was a reason behind it. At Ash's scowl, I cleared my throat and quickly accepted the lies I had to tell if we wanted information. “This is my fiancè, James. Thank you for seeing us on such short notice.”

“It's my pleasure,” she said, closing the door and returning to her seat behind her desk where she peered at us from over her glasses. “Your fiancè contacted me this morning and said you were due to leave Jacksonville this evening, so I'm pleased I had time in my diary to see you. I understand you want to know about Michael.”

I briefly wondered if we would be leaving tonight or if Ash had said that to get her to see us today. I refused to acknowledge the tiny part of me that was a little sad to think we'd be leaving. Returning back to Hollows Bay would mean returning to the war, and who knew who would live to survive.

Shaking the thought from my head, I met Stephanie's dull blue eyes. "Yes, I only found out recently that I had a brother. It's been difficult to get information about him, but Leonard Jenkins gave me your name."

"Ah, Leonard," Stephanie replied fondly. "He's a good man, I haven't seen him in a long time, how is he?"

"He's well. He told me about the fire," I replied, trying to make sure I had just the right emotion in my voice to make it seem I hadn't taken the news well.

Stephanie's face hardened, and I regretted mentioning the fire so soon. The Browns were her family. "Sorry, I imagine it must be difficult for you to talk about."

She took a breath. "It's easier now. Carol and Anthony may not have been my real parents, but they took me in and gave me a home. They were good people."

"I'm truly sorry for your loss," I replied, earning a small smile from her.

"Thank you."

"Do you mind if I ask how it happened?" Ash said, probably knowing I wouldn't want to ask because I didn't want to upset the poor woman.

"Arson. It happened several months after I moved to Europe to study," she said, her face hardening once again. "Accelerant was poured through the letterbox followed by a lit rag. The house went up in flames within minutes. Carol, Anthony, and

Michael didn't stand a chance," she said, surprisingly cool given the nature of the conversation.

"But the police never found who was responsible?" Ash said.

Stephanie's face twisted into a scowl. "No. They didn't."

"But you had your suspicions?" Ash prompted, hearing the same thing I did in her voice.

She knew who was responsible.

"I have my suspicions. Not that it mattered, there was never any proof."

"Can I ask who you think is responsible?" Ash asked.

A heavy tension filled the air as she glared from Ash to me, her jaw twitching as she thought.

"You're not really Michael's sister, are you?" she said calmly, meeting my eyes.

Shit.

"Erm, yes, I am," I replied feebly.

Her lips pursed again. "Please don't patronize me. I'm a professor in psychology. I've spent many years studying and reading people, I know when I meet someone who isn't being truthful. Now, if you want information from me, I suggest you tell me the truth. Who are you?"

Her tone was cool, and didn't that make me feel like I'd just been scolded by a teacher? Swallowing nervously, my eyes darted to Ash, hoping he'd give me a clue as to what I should

do, but the fucker just stared back at me, an unreadable expression on his face.

I met her eye once more. I didn't know what it was about her, but there was something that said I could trust this woman. My instinct hadn't done me wrong so far, so once again, I put my trust in my gut.

“No, I'm not. My name is Riley, and I'm trying to find out some information about the man who was involved in the plot to murder my husband.”

She flinched momentarily but composed herself. “I see. Well, thank you for your candor. Who do you believe is responsible, and what do they have to do with Michael?”

“I'm hoping you might be able to answer that. Does the name Max Thorne mean anything to you?” I asked, waiting for any sign of recognition.

“No, I can't say I've heard the name before. Is he the man you believe was responsible for murdering your husband?”

I didn't correct her by telling her Kai was very much alive and still the pain in my ass he'd been since the day I met him, quite literally in this case thanks to how hard he fucked my ass last night. “Yes. But we believe he used to be called Simon Evans.”

At the mention of her foster brother's name, her face darkened, and her entire body tensed. She pulled her glasses off her nose, squeezing her eyes closed as she took a breath.

“I always knew he’d kill again,” she muttered quietly, more to herself.

I looked at Ash to make sure I heard right, his brows too were raised in surprise.

“Again?” he asked.

“Yes, again. There was never any evidence, but I always suspected Simon was responsible for the fire that killed our family.”

Oh, holy shit.

“What makes you think that?” Ash asked when I sat there with my mouth open, unable to form any kind of comprehensible response.

“Because that man is a psychopath,” she said, hatred evident in her tone. “From the minute Simon came to live with us, I always knew there was something off with him. He was manipulative, always lying but charming his way out if he got caught. He was impulsive and lacked empathy. I’d become interested in the world of psychology by the time he arrived, and I’d already done some studies on psychopaths, and Simon, well, he hit all the traits.”

I couldn’t get my mouth to shut. The more she spoke, the more my jaw dropped. She stood from her chair and took several steps over to look out the window. “Within days of coming to live with us, Simon had Michael and John, the other foster boy living with us, eating out of the palm of his hands. They lapped up everything he had to say, convinced them he

was going to be something spectacular one day, and it would be in their best interest to stick by his side, and they did,” Stephanie said, her gaze fixed outside the window as she disappeared into her childhood memories.

“He tried to charm me, but I kept my distance. He didn’t like that, so he tried to bully me. It started off with him doing things like destroying my books or burning my homework. When I didn’t retaliate, he resorted to hurting me physically, be that pinching me under the table at dinner, or pulling my hair when no one was looking. It put a strain on the family, they thought I was being difficult, but the truth was, I saw Simon for what he was, and I feared he’d hurt me. That’s why I moved to Europe to study. I changed my last name as soon as I graduated and settled in England.”

Ash cursed under his breath and I turned to look at him to find he was fixated on Stephanie.

“I caught him once, he killed a cat. I told Carol and Anthony but Simon convinced them the cat was already dead when he found it. I knew then he would kill again. To their faces, Simon pretended he loved Carol and Anthony, but I often caught him looking at them like he wanted to hurt them, and that’s why I believe he killed my foster parents.”

She turned to look at us then, a deep scowl set on her flushed face, and her eyes filled with hatred. If I had any worry that she would squeal to Max, or Simon, or whatever fucking name he wanted to go by, the look in her eyes said it all.

She'd rather slit her own wrists than spend a second talking to that man.

Silence descended as my brain went into overdrive trying to make sense of what she had told us. I knew a little about psychopaths, I'd seen the odd documentary about notorious ones, *Ted Bundy*, *Jeffrey Dahmer*. But I didn't know enough about the traits of someone to know what made them a psychopath. But given Stephanie was a professor in psychology, if she believed Simon was a psychopath, then I'd take her word for it.

"Do you know anything about Michael's biological parents by any chance?" Ash asked, breaking the silence.

"A little," Stephanie said, her face softening. "Out of all three of the boys, Michael was my favorite. On the rare occasion when he wasn't following Simon around like a lost little puppy, he would come and talk to me. I often wondered if Michael was scared of Simon, but if he was, he never said. Anyway, he came to me one day to tell me he had found his father. I don't know how he had tracked him down, but Michael was devastated because he'd reached out to tell his father of his existence, but his father didn't want anything to do with him. Told him to never contact him again or he wouldn't live to see another day."

Yep, that sounded like Christopher Wolfe alright, he was a cold-hearted bastard.

"I remember that clearly," Stephanie continued. "After the day Michael confided in me about his father, Simon changed.

He became obsessed with finding out as much as he could about Michael's family. Michael wasn't interested after a while, he'd made peace with the fact his biological father didn't want anything to do with him, and he just wanted to get on with his own life.

“But Simon was like a dog with a bone, he wouldn't let the subject drop. I remember he'd spend *hours* on the internet with Michael, trying to find out whatever he could about Michael's family, even though Michael told him time and time again he didn't care. By the time I moved out, Simon's behavior had become extreme, to the point where it seemed like Simon wanted to *become* Michael and take over his life.”

Yet again, my jaw dropped open as the pieces slotted together. Had Simon killed Michael and the Browns so that he could take Michael's identity? He wanted what Michael could have had if Christopher hadn't rejected him. It was Simon's fault Michael had died, never getting the chance to meet his brothers.

“Do you know anything about Simon's childhood?” Ash asked.

“Simon told us his parents had been killed in a car crash,” Stephanie said, returning to her seat. “But I overheard Carol and Anthony talking one evening a few weeks after Simon arrived. Apparently, his mother was a prostitute, and no one knew who his father was. I don't know the full details, but the reports Carol and Anthony received before Simon came to us

was that he was abused as a child by one of his mother's boyfriends."

Silence once again descended, and everything Stephanie had told us churned in my head. The one and only time I'd met Max was at the warehouse on the night Kai was shot, and memories popped into my head. The way he bragged about everything he had accomplished. How he wanted Kai to be present before he revealed everything. How he shot John without any hesitation, a man who had been by his side since they were kids. How he started losing the plot when his big reveal was spoiled by gunfire.

Maybe Stephanie was right, maybe the man really was a psychopath.

"May I ask a question seeing as I have answered all of yours?" Stephanie said, looking between me and Ash.

"Of course," I replied. She had, after all, helped us with a lot of unanswered questions.

"When I first moved to Europe, I was able to keep tabs on Simon in case he left Jacksonville and came looking for me. But he disappeared several years ago. I hired a private investigator to track him down before I moved back here, but they were unable to so I took a chance to return. Truthfully, I live in fear that one day, he'll come back for me. So I would be very grateful if you could tell me where Simon is currently living," she said, her concern evident in her voice.

Not that I blamed her, if I'd grown up with a psychopath, I'd probably live in fear of them coming back for me, especially if

I was only one of a few people who knew his real identity.

“Why did you move back to your hometown if you are scared of him?” Ash asked, taking the words out of my mouth. I’m not sure I’d want to return to the place where my psycho foster brother could find me.

“Several months ago, I tracked down my biological mother. She lives close to Jacksonville, and I wanted a chance to get to know her before she passed away, and I wasn’t going to let Simon stop that.”

“Have you ever heard of the city of Hollows Bay?” I said.

“Yes, that’s where Michael’s father lived,” she replied, her brows pulling together.

“He’s the current Chief of Police there.”

“Simon’s the Chief of Police?” she exclaimed, her voice rising an octave. Once again, she looked between Ash and me, her brows furrowed in concern. I shared a confused look with Ash, seeing the moment when realization dawned behind his eyes.

The same realization I was coming to.

“Yeah,” I replied slowly. “He’s been in the police for fifteen years. Joined the academy here in Florida when he was twenty, and worked his way up the ranks before taking the top job in Hollows Bay.”

Stephanie’s lips pursed again as she shook her head. “That man is many things, manipulative, a murderer, a psychopath to

name a few, but one thing I am a hundred percent sure of is that he is *not* a police officer.”

Chapter 19

Kai

To say I was livid was an understatement. Riley thought she was funny, but she'd soon learn just how *un-funny* I thought she was when she found herself over my knee, and her ass red raw from the spanking I intended to give her.

It took me over two hours to break free from the solid oak bed. A bed I would have to pay to be replaced at some point because there was no way anyone was sleeping on it now that it was in pieces. Not that I gave a shit about the money, it was more the point. Riley was not going to get away with treating me like that.

Ash too, the cunt.

As much as I'd managed to break free from the bed and put some pants on, I'd searched high and low for the key to take the fucking bracelets off my wrists, but could I find it? Could I fuck, which meant Riley had taken it with her.

Pissed off didn't come close to explaining how angry I was as I sat waiting for the pair of them to return from wherever the hell they'd been, more than prepared for them both to feel my wrath.

The second I heard the rumblings of the car, I flew out the door, snarling as Ash pulled the car to a stop outside the cabin.

"You're in a world of trouble, wife." I glowered at Riley as she stepped out of the car.

"Not a fan of tasting your own medicine, huh?" she said, smirking.

Her attitude made me snap. I stormed off the porch, intent on bending my wife over the hood of the car and spanking her right there and then, when Ash stepped in my way, placing a hand on my chest to stop me.

"You're going to have to deal with your domestic issues later, Kai, we've got shit to discuss."

I slapped his hand away when behind him, Riley blew me a kiss.

"It can fucking wait," I boomed, my voice echoing into the surrounding forest as I glared at her to let her know just from my look how much trouble she was in.

"Trust me, Kai. This can't wait. Thorne's not a cop, he's got everyone fooled while he laughs at how stupid we all are."

That got my attention. Dragging my eyes away from my beautiful, devious Star, I turned my head to look at Ash. "Say

that again?”

“You heard right. He isn’t a cop. A psychopath maybe, but not a fucking cop,” Ash replied, his tone full of disdain. “Come on, let’s go inside and get Miles on the phone and we can fill you both in.”

Ash waved his hand, indicating for me to lead the way, evidently not prepared to leave Riley and me out here when there was shit that needed dealing with.

“Can I at least have the fucking key?” I growled, raising my hands to show the metal bracelets on each wrist.

Riley fished in her pockets, and seconds later, brought the key out.

“Oops, must have forgotten to leave it behind,” she said, full of fucking sass as she slapped the key in my hand and walked off into the cabin.

I undid the cuffs, all the while imagining the shades of red her fuckable ass would be by the time I was finished with it.

The three of us gathered around the table, phone on loudspeaker with Miles at the other end, as Ash and Riley filled us in with the information they had gleaned from their meeting with Stephanie, my earlier fury forgotten about for now as I took in their words.

“Let me get this straight. Simon kills the Browns and Michael, assumes his identity, and then what? Spends twenty years planning the Wolfes downfall? I don’t buy it, it sounds too fucking far-fetched for my liking,” I said, turning the

information over in my head and not believing a word I'd just heard.

“I would say it's highly possible, Kai,” Ash said, rubbing his beard. “Stephanie has spent years studying the psychology of psychopaths, she's a smart woman. We'd be wise to listen to her. And from the little bit of information we gave her, she agreed it's a strong possibility that he has spent so long pretending to be Tucker, he's convinced himself he really *is* Tucker. To him, the vendetta against you and your family is personal because he *believes* he is the real Michael Tucker.”

“Fucking hell,” Miles' shocked voice rumbled through the phone. “It makes sense. The deed poll showing the change of name from Tucker to Thorne looked damn real, but there is every chance it could have been fake. Either that, or he changed his name from Simon Evans to Michael Tucker, and then changed it again to Max Thorne, but only gave us the deed poll showing the latter change. I guess anything is possible with the cunt. I'll give it to him, he's a smart psycho wack-job.”

I swallowed and reluctantly accepted that maybe everything we'd discussed was a possibility. That maybe Thorne had become so obsessed with Tucker's life that he had come to believe he was my real brother.

A shot of regret coursed through me. I'd hated the name Michael Tucker from the minute I heard it because of the shit Thorne had caused, when actually my real half-brother had

been an innocent young kid, whose life was taken from him before he even had a chance to live.

Had he not died in the fire, there may have come a time when he decided to reach out to me or Theo, and if he had, things could have been very different for him.

For all of us.

“How does Stephanie know for sure he isn’t a cop?” I said. There was still a little part of me that was skeptical though, it all sounded so fucking unbelievable.

“When she moved to Europe, she stayed in contact with several friends who lived in Jacksonville. They kept her updated with what Simon was doing over the years,” Riley said, meeting my eye across the table. “The years he was allegedly a cop in Florida, he was really working as a handyman in a local shop. Apparently, he was arrested a few times on assault charges, but he always managed to weasel his way out. Her friends said he was a loner, with the exception of one person whom he saw regularly, John. And then one day, a few years back, he just disappeared.”

Fucking hell.

Disappeared, no doubt to put his plans in motion.

I ground my teeth in anger. I hated that I’d fallen hook, line, and sinker for all of Thorne’s lies, especially about him being a cop. It never once occurred to me he could have somehow faked his way into the force. The paperwork Miles found had seemed legit, but we should have known. It was just another

part of the game Thorne was playing with us. He wanted Miles to find information about his make-believe career to throw us off from finding the truth.

“You’re right, Miles, he really is a smart psycho wack-job,” I grumbled, agreeing with my cousin’s observation.

“Don’t beat yourself up too much about falling for his trickery, he’s even got agents in the bureau fooled,” Ash said. “My contact there has said Thorne’s got several agents under his spell. From what my contact thinks, Thorne is paranoid something is going to happen to him so he’s already primed the agents to start sniffing around Hollows Bay if anything does happen.”

Riley’s brow rose in surprise at Ash’s mention of his source within the bureau, but she kept quiet, listening intently to the three of us.

Despite the severity of what was going on, I couldn’t help but sneak peeks at her. She’d been engrossed in everything, and it occurred to me that as much as she might protest, she was invested in this sorry saga as much as anyone else around this table. It gave me hope that she wouldn’t be walking away easily.

“I can’t see the Feds giving a fuck if he disappears when they find out he’s been impersonating a cop all this time,” Miles said, taking the words right out of my mouth.

“No, I can’t imagine they would,” Ash agreed.

Thoughts whirled in my head as everyone waited for me to make a decision.

“What are you thinking, Kai?” Miles rumbled.

“I say the fucking gloves are off. Thorne thinks he’s fucking clever tricking everyone. He’s got everyone believing he’s a real cop, and he’s got Hendrix believing he’s a Wolfe. I say it’s about time we showed the world the fucker is a nobody. We prove Thorne is Evans. We deal with the cunt as we intended to, and then we present the evidence to the bureau that Simon was impersonating a cop all this time. We give them Michael’s death certificate and the deed poll showing the change of name, along with the photo we got from Leonard. If we can get Stephanie to go on record that Simon and Micheal were two different people, that would help. With the evidence proving he was never a cop, they won’t give a fuck when he disappears, they’ll just assume he’s gone on the run. You think Stephanie would do that?” I directed my question to Riley as it sounded like she’d built a good rapport with the woman.

“I think if she knew there were no repercussions, she would.” Riley shrugged. “She said she was scared of Simon, but if she didn’t have to worry about him turning up on her doorstep at any time, she’d be likely to help.”

I nodded, glancing at Ash. “See if you can get her to make a report.”

“Sure. But if she doesn’t, there is something else you can do,” Ash replied.

“Go on.”

“Do a DNA test. You and Tucker were half-brothers, we’ve got the legit test proving Tucker was your father’s son, we compare your DNA with Thorne’s and prove it’s not a match to yours.”

I thought about it for less than a second, it was a no-brainer. DNA didn’t fucking lie, and I wanted everything in my arsenal to use against Thorne when the time came.

He’d spent years planning this, whether he believed he was Tucker or not, it was irrelevant. He wanted everyone to think he was smart, that no one could outsmart him, and I was more than fucking happy to be the one to correct him and deflate his ego.

“Let’s do it, can you get it set up today?”

Ash grinned. “Who do you think you are talking to? It’ll be set up within the hour. All you gotta do is figure out how to get a sample of Thorne’s DNA.”

I turned back to Riley, her eyes narrowed in suspicion. “That’s where you come in, baby.”

“How?” she said skeptically.

“Graham Shaw. You need to call him and get him on board. He’ll need to get a mug or a glass or something Thorne has used so we can compare DNA.”

“And how do you expect me to convince him to do that?” she snapped, glowering at me as if I had asked her to climb Mount Everest in a pair of high heels.

“You’ll figure it out, you charmed him once before when you got him on your side, remember?” I winked at her, letting her know that I knew all about her meeting with Shaw, Kimmy, Ernie, and the recently deceased Colin.

She scowled at me and tore her gaze away, but to my surprise, she didn’t refuse, another sign she was invested in this war.

“Does this change the plan with regards to getting Thorne and Hendrix to turn on each other?” Miles asked, causing Riley’s head to snap back to mine, and her brows furrowed in confusion.

“Yeah, he won’t go down without knowing the truth, but this changes things. We’ll deal with Thorne, take him out of the equation, and then we’ll focus on destroying Hendrix,” I replied.

“Understood. I best go, I’ve got a date with my future wife,” Miles sighed.

My lips twitched at the resignation in his voice. “How’s that going?”

“Don’t fucking start. Seriously, I’d rather spend the afternoon having a prostate exam without any lube than spend any time with the brat,” he huffed, promptly hanging up the phone. From across the table, Riley smirked, no doubt firmly in Sofia’s corner.

“I need to make some calls,” Ash said, pulling his phone from his pocket, and disappearing out of the cabin, leaving me

and my brooding wife alone. Like mine, her mood had darkened since she'd returned from the meeting with Stephanie, and as much as she seemed on board with the plan, it was clear her anger towards me was back with a vengeance.

“What was Miles on about? What truth?” she asked after a beat of silence passed between us.

“Hendrix planned on double-crossing Thorne,” I said.

She gasped. “What?”

“Yeah. Although it shouldn't have come as a surprise given he betrayed me,” I replied, bitterness lacing my tone. The man had no loyalties to anyone but himself.

“How do you know that?”

“Alex Barnes.” Riley's mouth dropped open as I stood, needing to stretch my legs. Everything about this damn cabin was too small for my build.

“I forgot about him,” Riley muttered. “Did you kill him?”

“Of course I did,” I replied. “He killed Jacqueline and he hurt you.”

“Technically, he didn't hurt me. He didn't even lay a finger on me, but he did deserve to die for what he did to Jacqueline,” she replied, and the hint of pain in her voice hit me straight in the chest. She loved Jacqueline, the maid had become a friend to Riley, and I was sure she missed her.

“He did hurt you, Star. He killed Jacqueline. He might not have hurt you physically, but I know that would have hurt you

emotionally.” She held my gaze for a moment, her eyes softening as her lips parted to reply. But she closed her mouth and cast her eyes down at the table.

I ached with the need to reach out and pull her into my arms, but something told me to keep my distance because my wife was currently a silent ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

“What did he tell you about Hendrix?” she asked, her voice cool, void of the emotion that had been present only a moment ago.

“That Hendrix was slowly taking control of the gangs, the city council, and some cops behind Thorne’s back. Thorne had plans to announce himself as the King of Hollows Bay once they’d made connections across the country, but Hendrix planned on killing him before he could breathe a word that he was secretly the man behind the mask.”

I recited the information that Alex had finally spilled after hours of torture, and I hadn’t been surprised by the information. Of course Hendrix had it in him to betray Thorne, he’d betrayed me and I’d known him all our lives.

Little did Alex know that when he made his confessions, I’d recorded the conversation. I’d planned to get the recording to both Hendrix and Thorne and watch them go to war against each other. They would have fought to gain the upper hand with the gangs, control over the city, my businesses, and ultimately, the knowledge of Hendrix’s deceit would have weakened them both. That’s when we would have swooped in and destroyed the pair of them.

But this new plan was better. Remove Thorne from the equation, and then I could focus all my attention and savagery on Hendrix.

“Christ. The pair of them are something else. They deserve to rot in hell together,” Riley said, glowering at thin air as if Hendrix was likely to materialize there.

“Yeah.”

An awkward silence descended between us, and I fucking hated it. I thought we’d made progress last night, but after her little stunt this morning, and all this shit with Thorne, it felt like we had taken two steps back, and her walls had sprung firmly back into place.

They were two steps I wasn’t willing to take, and walls I was determined to smash down.

“Riley-” I started, but Ash walked back in, stopping any conversation I needed to have with my wife.

“Right, blood test is set up, we need to be at the clinic in an hour so we should get going. And I’ve spoken to my contact in the bureau, once I explained everything about the imposter cop, he agreed that once he had the proof in front of him, he’d buy us some time before issuing an arrest warrant, so you’re good.”

“Blimey, Ash, you move quick,” Riley said, awe in her voice.

“Perks of being the head of Apollo,” he shrugged.

My mouth dropped open at his confession. I mean, *I* fucking knew he was the head, we'd been friends since we were teenagers, and I'd watched him build Apollo up from the ground.

It was the reason I'd reached out to him all those months ago to ask for his team, and the reason he was willing to let his men help me. The other reason was because he hated Hendrix.

Ash knew Hendrix from when we were kids, but the two never got on. When Ash went off to join the military, Hendrix never knew I'd stayed in contact with Ash. At a time when I wasn't sure which of my men I could trust, I knew I could rely on Ash.

It's why I had called him to ask for his men to watch over the most precious thing I had in my life when I thought Riley was leaving my ass. I didn't know at the time just how invaluable his help would come to be.

Only a few people knew who he was. Miles did, but not even Ash's own men knew his real identity, so I was somewhat surprised he'd brought Riley in on his little secret. Then again, Ash knew how determined I was to have Riley ruling by my side, so it made sense in case she ever needed his help.

"*You're* the head of Apollo?" she exclaimed, glancing between Ash and me.

"Yeah. But not many people know, so I'd appreciate it if you kept it to yourself," he grinned under his beard.

“But...but, you’re part of the team!” she said, her voice full of question.

“What can I say, I like to get my hands dirty from time to time, it gets boring sitting in the office, and stuck in meetings all day. On the odd occasion I like to get back out in the field,” Ash replied, shrugging again.

She paused for a moment, and as I watched the cogs turn in her pretty head, a feeling of dread grew in the pit of my stomach.

“But you were on a deployment in Asia before you came to us,” she said, her eyes narrowing accusingly on Ash who was now tapping at his phone and not paying much attention.

“Nah, I was sat by this asshole’s bed making sure he didn’t die on us,” Ash said, looking up to nod in my direction, and making my fucking heart sink.

It took him all of two seconds to realize his mistake. Sure enough, Riley’s face soured as if she had just sucked on a Lemon.

“Course you were,” she replied stoically. She squeezed her eyes shut, and I shot Ash a death glare at seeing the betrayal wash across her features. When her eyes opened, they were once again filled with hate.

May as well make that three fucking steps backward.

“If you’ll excuse me, I need some air.” With that, she jumped from the chair, moving so quickly it fell back and hit the

wooden floor with a thud. Seconds later, the front door slammed.

“Good going, dickhead,” I huffed. “You can kiss goodbye to her accepting your apology.”

Ash sighed. “She would have found out eventually. It’s about time the two of you stopped pussy-footing around and talked about everything.”

“Don’t you think I haven’t been trying?” I growled, my hands curling into fists and my jaw grinding.

“Yeah, but your wife is a stubborn mare. You need to get her to listen and put us all out of our misery. I’m not sure how much more of your moping I can cope with,” Ash replied.

He wasn’t wrong. She could be a damn stubborn minx when she wanted to be.

“Why the fuck do you think I brought her here?” I snapped, getting angrier with the dick by the second.

“You’ve done a lot of talking about what happened in between the fucking and the arguing,” he said, sarcasm dripping from his tone.

“Fuck you, Ash,” I sighed, taking a breath to calm the building storm, frustration at Riley’s stubbornness getting the better of me. “I don’t know what more I can do to make her listen.”

“Don’t fucking ask me,” Ash huffed. “See, this is why I don’t get involved with women.” Seeing the resigned look on my face, he crossed the kitchen and stopped in front of me. “I

don't know, Kai. She's too stuck in her head over everything. You need to distract her, get her to think about something else so she's not constantly in her head with her anger, and then try to explain why we decided on this course of action."

His phone rang cutting off my response, and as I watched him walk away to take the call, I let his words resonate in my head. He was right, she was so focused on being angry, allowing her hurt to consume her like it had done every day since being told I had died. She needed something different to think about, something that would take her mind completely off everything that had happened in the last six months.

I churned it over in my head, thinking of every little thing I knew about my wife, and it didn't take long before a grin spread on my lips as an idea formed in my head.

I knew *exactly* what I needed to do to win my wife over again.

Chapter 20

Riley

The scent of pine and fresh air calmed my racing heart as I walked away from the cabin, desperate to put some space between me and the two assholes. Ash's words rang in my head on a repetitive loop that made anger churn in my belly. Not the words he'd just said inside the cabin, but the words he'd first said when he arrived at the safe house all those months ago.

'I'm sorry for what happened to Kai. I've known Kai for years, he's a good friend. I promise you, you'll get revenge on every cunt who hurt you and him.'

He's a good friend. That's what Ash had said. Not, he was a good friend. I didn't give it any thought at the time, just assumed he hadn't quite come to terms with Kai's death, but now I knew why he'd used those words. He'd known at that very moment Kai was alive.

Not just known, but had spent the month beforehand by his bedside.

For some reason, that betrayal cut deep. Deeper than Miles' betrayal, Miles hadn't left my side from the minute he told me Kai had died, but Ash, he'd been *with* Kai, and had the barefaced cheek to lie so blatantly to my face.

As far as I was concerned he could take his apology and stick it up his ass.

Reaching a huge tree, I sat down and rested my back against the trunk, taking several deep breaths in hopes my hands would stop shaking. Leaning my head back against the tree, I closed my eyes.

I was so tired.

Tired of harboring this constant anger. Tired of Kai trying to force me to forgive him. Tired of the confusion that lay heavy in my heart. Tired of one minute wanting to picture a future with Kai, and then the next minute wanting to get as far away from him as possible.

My head was a mess, and my heart hurt.

And I didn't want to feel anything anymore.

I was *done*.

I pinched the bridge of my nose. I needed to get away from here, away from *them*. But as I'd deduced before, I had no means of getting my ass back home on my own.

Wherever home was nowadays.

Besides, on the way back from meeting Stephanie, Ash had said we would be flying back to Forest Point this evening. I just had to survive a few more hours with Kai and Ash, but as soon as we were back in familiar territory I would come up with a plan.

Maybe Sofia had figured out a way we could both run away without being found by the dickheads in our lives.

With the recent developments surrounding Max, and with emotions running high, my head had started pounding and was slowly turning into a migraine, which wasn't helped by the sound of approaching footsteps. My heart rate spiked to a gazillion beats a minute when a familiar scent that made my core clench hit my nostrils.

When the footsteps came to a stop, I opened my eyes to find Kai staring down at me.

“Riley, I know you're upset-”

“Kai, stop,” I said, resignation heavy in my tone. “I can't deal right now. I just need to be on my own.”

His jaw clenched, but he gave a nod of his head. “Look, I can't give you time on your own now, we need to go to the clinic so I can have my bloods done, but after, we're flying out. I promise to give you some time on your own on the plane.”

He held my eye, letting me know he was serious. The fact that he'd promised meant he wouldn't go against his word. Reluctantly, I got to my feet, accepting that I would just have

to suffer through the next few hours until I could finally get some peace to think things through.

What happened at the other end of the plane journey though, that was another matter.

“When we get back, I want to stay with Sofia again,” I said.

Kai’s eyes darkened, but to my surprise, he didn’t flatly refuse me. “We’ll talk about it when we get back,” he replied gruffly.

It was the best I was going to get.

For now.

By the time we reached the clinic, as predicted, my thumping head had turned into a migraine, and I wanted nothing more than to lie down and go to sleep.

On the drive over, Kai made me call Graham, and after some persuasion, mainly in the form of assurances that he would be made chief once Max was dealt with, he’d agreed to ‘see what he could do’ with regards to getting Max’s coffee mug. We’d agreed he’d contact Miles once he had obtained it, and as I’d hung up, I’d found Kai watching me with pride shining in his eyes, and a warm feeling had cascaded through me.

And didn’t that make me feel even more fucked in the head?

As soon as we stepped inside the clinic, we were ushered into a room by a nurse, who aside from confirming she was there to take blood, remained quiet.

Why the hell I needed to be here, I didn't know. But Kai had made it clear he wasn't leaving me alone in the car, so here I was, watching as the nurse tied a tourniquet around Kai's bicep before tapping his arm and inserting a needle into his vein.

I was no stranger to blood. Hell, I'd seen someone's fucking insides after Miles had disemboweled one of Hendrix's men, so the sight of blood didn't bother me. But the second Kai's blood started running into the vial, I froze.

Images of Kai bleeding out all over me swam in my mind, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't tear my gaze away from the bright red blood trickling out of Kai's body.

The blood that was his life force.

The blood that his heart pumped around his body to keep him alive.

His precious blood that he'd lost so much of.

My heart raced like a speeding train. Somewhere in the room, a noise echoed, a sound like someone letting out a choked sob. It was only when a figure came to stand by my side, that I realized the sound came from me.

"Riley, you okay?" Ash said. He crouched down so he was at eye level with me, his brows furrowed in concern.

I couldn't answer. My throat was tight, like a snake had wrapped around it, and was squeezing so hard that I couldn't breathe or form any words. The only thing I could do was stare where the nurse continued to take more blood from Kai.

“Ash, get her the fuck out of here,” a voice rumbled. It sounded like Kai, but he was far away, or my head was trapped in a bubble. Either way, the voice was muffled to my ears.

A warm hand landed on my arm snapping my attention away from where the nurse was withdrawing the needle, not made easy by Kai attempting to rip it out himself.

“Come on, Riley,” Ash said, lifting me out of the seat, and practically carrying me out of the room, back into the fresh air. I went willingly, needing to get away from the sight of Kai’s blood.

As soon as the evening warmth hit me, I sucked in a deep breath, my burning lungs expanding once again, and my entire body shaking. Ash didn’t let me go. Instead, he held my arms, making sure I didn’t fall.

“Better?”

“Yeah,” I replied when I was sure I could speak again.

I glanced down to where his hands held me, and I took a step away, my skin tingling as if it had been stabbed with a thousand needles. Ash frowned when his hands dropped, but before he had a chance to say anything, the whirlwind that was Kai Wolfe stormed out of the clinic.

“Baby, are you okay?” Kai asked, grabbing my face in both his big palms, and making me look into his worried eyes.

Tears welled as the realization dawned on me that he was okay. He wasn’t bleeding out. I wasn’t desperately trying to

stop blood from oozing from bullet wounds. He was alive and breathing, and a pang of relief shot through every inch of me.

“I’m fine,” I said, pulling my face out of his grasp.

He took a step forward. “You’re not fine. You’re as white as a fucking ghost, and you freaked the fuck out back in that room.”

“I said I’m fine,” I snapped, blinking away the images of Kai’s bloodied body, my pounding head getting worse by the second. “Can we please go?”

My voice broke as tears threatened to fall, but I turned away, unable to look at Kai anymore. He wanted to argue, I knew him well enough to know he wanted to stand right here until I admitted that I wasn’t okay, but thankfully, Ash saved the day.

“Kai, we should get going. We’ve got a long flight ahead of us. You guys can talk about this later.”

Kai’s dark eyes burned into me for a few seconds, before he shook his head. “Fine. Let’s get out of here.”

He grabbed my hand, gripping it tightly as he marched me back to the car. When we got in, instead of getting in the front like he’d done on the way to the clinic, Kai sat in the back with me, holding my hand and stroking my knuckles like he used to do.

I refused to acknowledge how good it damn well felt.

When we reached the airfield, night had fallen, and the jet was ready and waiting. My head thumped, but true to his word, Kai led me to the bedroom at the back of the plane. He

told me to get some rest, and that he would be back for me when we were due to land. With that, he left me alone.

I didn't hesitate to dive under the covers, enjoying the comfort of the bed now that I wasn't handcuffed to it, and within minutes of my head hitting the pillow, I was fast asleep.

In the blink of an eye, Kai was gently waking me up. My eyes fluttered open to find him watching me with a wary expression on his handsome face.

“We're coming in to land, Star. How's your head?”

I sat up, pleased the migraine had gone. “It's okay. Have I really been asleep for the whole flight?”

“Yeah,” Kai replied, giving me space to stand. He led me out to the seating area and gave me a bottle of water which I gratefully sipped, watching out the small window as Ash landed the plane on a small runway surrounded by hills and thick trees.

“Where are we?” I asked as the plane rolled to a stop. The longer I stared out the window, the more certain I was that this was not the airfield we took off from. Although, I couldn't be sure.

When we left Forest Point a few days ago, it was dark. Now, the morning sun was rising, which didn't make much sense to me, there wasn't a huge time difference between Jacksonville and Forest Point, and if we'd only been flying for five hours, it should still be dark.

“There’s something we need to do before we head home,” Kai said cryptically, before taking my hand and leading me to the front of the plane where Ash was coming out of the cockpit.

I didn’t bother to ask any more questions. Now I was awake, emotions flared to life, but I pushed them away. Whatever shit we had to do in wherever the fuck we were, I’d go along with it. The sooner we got it done, the sooner we could get going again.

Kai nudged me forward with his hand on my lower back once Ash opened the plane door, and stepped out onto stairs that had been placed against the plane. Following like a little puppy, I walked down the stairs to a waiting car, surprised to find a man standing next to an open door.

Although I’d never seen him before, if I had to guess, I would have said he was an Apollo merc. He was the same build as all the guys who worked for Apollo, and he had that mean motherfucker look about him.

Ash shook his hand, and he nodded to Kai and me in greeting as Kai ushered me into the back of the car, clambering in next to me, and once again taking my hand. Ash jumped in the front passenger seat, and the man got in the driver’s side. Within a minute, we were turning out of the airfield onto a road.

I stared out the window, wondering where in the fuck we were going. Or rather, *who* in the fuck we were going to see. I

wasn't sure my brain could cope with any more twists and turns in the Max Thorne saga.

Lost in thought, I tuned out the conversation that had started between Ash, Kai, and the driver. I rested my forehead against the window and stared out at the passing scenery but I wasn't really looking.

My brain was in overdrive, my body wound tighter than a coiled spring, not helped by the flutter of butterflies in my belly every time Kai's thumb brushed over my knuckles, or when I felt his heated stare burning into the back of my head.

We had only been driving around twenty minutes when the driver pulled the car off the road, turning onto a dirt track, and it was only then that I paid attention to where we were going.

The dirt track was surrounded by acres of fields, and as we crested at the top of a small hill, a huge farmhouse came into view in the distance. It was a beautiful house, surrounded by even more fields, and in one of them, several horses were grazing in the morning sun.

Whoever lived here wasn't shy of a few dollars, that was for sure.

"Who lives here?" I asked, curiosity getting the better of me the closer we got to the house.

Kai gave my hand a gentle squeeze. "Patience, Star."

I glowered at him, his lack of information pissing me the hell off.

Turning away from him again, I looked out the window, taking in the beautiful gardens as we drew closer to the house. As the car turned into a courtyard at the front of the house and rolled to a stop, the front door flew open, and I almost stopped breathing when the most beautiful sight I had ever seen came running out of the house.

“Angel!” I cried, yanking my hand out of Kai’s, and shoving the door open.

Almost tripping over my own feet as I leaped from the car, I met my sister as she came barreling into me, her arms wide as she collided with my body. I wrapped her in my arms, holding her to me as uncontrollable sobs wracked both our bodies. For god knows how long, the two of us stood there, holding onto each other for dear life.

Having her back in my arms, I was overwhelmed with how much I had missed the little brat. For the first time in months, I felt like I could breathe again, and I never wanted to let her go.

Burying my head in her hair, I inhaled deeply, goosebumps pebbling my flesh as the familiar scent of raspberries hit my nose. In that moment, I forgot everything. Forgot about my anger towards Kai, forgot about the pain in my heart, forgot about the fuckers who wanted to ruin our lives. It was just me and my sister, my best friend.

One of my reasons for living.

Reluctantly pulling out of her embrace, I pulled away to take a good look at her. In the months we’d been apart, she’d grown almost as tall as me, her hair was longer, her figure

fuller, but the most noticeable thing that had changed was how bright her eyes shone.

For years, Angel's brown eyes held a haunted look to them, but now, they were vibrant, full of life, and happiness.

'*You've grown,*' I signed, the language momentarily feeling alien on my fingers. I hadn't had to sign in months, but it was ingrained into me, and the second I started signing, it was like riding a bike.

Angel didn't sign back. Her teary eyes widened as she grabbed my hand, pulling it closer to her to stare down at my ring. My wedding ring that I still wore on my ring finger.

The ring I hadn't once considered taking off no matter how pissed at Kai I was.

'*Did you get married?*' Angel signed after she had a good look at the rock on my hand.

She turned her head, and it was only then I noticed Kai had come to stand by my side. Upon seeing his face, her cheeks blushed furiously.

Fucking hell. I hoped to fucking Christ that my sister wasn't crushing on my husband.

Kai held his hand up to say hi, before turning to me. "Baby, we've got twenty-four hours before we need to be in the air again. I've got something I need to do, so I'll leave you ladies to have some time together. You'll be safe here, this is an Apollo house."

“Okay,” I replied, briefly wondering what Kai had to do in Spain because now I knew that’s where we were.

Kai leaned forward and placed a delicate kiss on my lips and I didn’t stop him. In fact, I welcomed it. He had, after all, reunited me with Angel, even if it was only for twenty-four hours. Waving his hand at my sister again, and giving her one of his charming smiles, he turned and got back in the car. Moments later he was driven away by the guy who brought us here, along with Ash, who had stayed in the car the whole time.

‘Seriously, did you marry him?’ Angel signed when I turned back to face her, her smile getting bigger by the minute.

‘It’s complicated,’ I signed back. *‘I’ll tell you all about it, but first I want to know everything you’ve been doing.’*

Chapter 21

Riley

After Kai left, Angel led me inside the house where Jane was waiting with a beaming smile on her face. The woman was practically unrecognizable from the woman I'd left behind in France.

Gone were the baggy clothes she used to wear, replaced with clothes that showcased her curves. She always wore her mousy-brown hair in a tight bun, but now she'd had it cut and styled into a pixie-cut that suited her heart-shaped face, and she'd ditched the thick-rimmed glasses, I assumed for contacts.

Jane had always been a timid woman, but now, she had an air of confidence about her, one that said she wasn't scared to take on the world anymore. I couldn't help but wonder if, as much as her time in the cell had been soul-destroying, it had actually shown her that she was more resilient than she ever thought.

The second I was within reach, Jane threw her arms around me, and more tears were shed from me, Angel, and Jane. Jane had done an incredible job of looking after Angel since I'd left her, she'd become a mother figure, and I would be eternally grateful to her for the love and care she had shown to my sister.

When happy tears turned to laughter, Angel and Jane gave me a tour of the house, and I couldn't help but notice several of the Apollo guards watching Jane's every move. No wonder her confidence had bloomed when she was surrounded by big, beefy men who weren't at all bad to look at.

If I thought the house we'd been taken to in France was impressive, it didn't have a patch on this place. It had everything a young girl could possibly want, a cinema room, bowling alley, an outdoor lagoon swimming pool, complete with its own lazy river, and a dance studio, where Angel informed me that she wanted to follow in my footsteps and take up pole dancing when she grew up.

I didn't know whether I was proud or mortified. Either way, I told the little brat that when she eventually came home, I'd give her some lessons on the basis she *never* ended up working in a strip club. She quickly agreed, pulling a face at the thought of pervy old men watching her dance.

Between Jane and Angel, they filled me in on how she was doing with all her schoolwork. Jane had continued to homeschool Angel, but all her work was being sent off and graded, and to my surprise, Angel was getting top scores in all

her lessons. Despite everything that had happened since the day I made the damn deal with Kai, at least my sister was getting the education I had desperately wanted her to get.

Angel had always liked computer games, but in the past few months her love had changed from playing games to decoding and hacking databases, thanks to one of the mercs who was a tech-whizz, and according to Angel, she was going to give Miles a run for his money.

Again, I didn't know whether to be proud or mortified.

When the tour inside came to an end, Jane left Angel and me to have some time together, and Angel begged me to go with her to meet Edgar.

Panic coursed through me at the thought of my baby sister developing an interest in boys, so I couldn't help but laugh when she led me to the stables and introduced me to Edgar, her favorite *horse*.

Edgar was a beautiful chestnut stallion who'd been found neglected on a farm not far from the house, and had been rescued by one of the Apollo mercenaries. For Angel, it had been love at first sight.

A look of sadness crept over her face when she signed to me that she knew she'd have to leave Edgar one day if it meant coming back to Hollows Bay.

As I stroked Edgar's nose, and watched my sister sign, telling me all the things she did each day to look after Edgar, thoughts rampaged through my mind.

Would it ever be safe for Angel to return to Hollows Bay?

Maybe I could stay here with Angel.

Maybe I didn't have to go back to Hollows Bay with Kai.

But could I really leave Kai?

Sure, I was pissed at him, but I couldn't deny the love I held for him.

And did I want to walk away from the war with Max and Hendrix?

Could I just walk away from everything we'd achieved so far?

Angel tapped me on my arm, and I realized I'd zoned out, lost in my own little world. *'What's wrong?'*

'Nothing,' I signed back, giving her a smile I knew didn't reach my eyes.

I forgot how perceptive my little sister was. Her brows pulled into a frown, and she tugged my arm, pulling me down to sit on a bale of hay.

'Somethings wrong, I know you. You're not happy.'

Christ.

How could I explain to a twelve-year-old that over the last six months, I'd had to deal with heartbreak, betrayal, and a roller coaster of emotions? Here she was worrying about a horse, while around me, my world felt like it was falling apart. Yet, as I met my sister's eyes, eyes that held nothing but love and familiarity, I found myself telling her everything.

Okay, not quite everything. Not about the murders I'd had a hand in planning, and certainly not about the bedroom activities Kai and I had been engaging in, she definitely did *not* need to know about that.

When I finished, her mouth dropped open. I grimaced before lying back on the hay bale, staring up at the wooden beams, and wondering how the fuck this crazy story had become my life.

That was until she pulled my arm and made me sit up to face her. *'Why did he let you believe he was dead?'*

I sighed. *'I don't know.'*

'He hasn't told you?' she signed, her fingers moving quickly.

'He tried, but....' I shrugged, not wanting to admit the truth, that I hadn't given him a chance.

She raised an eyebrow and pursed her lips, giving me a disapproving look. *'You haven't let him explain?'*

'No, there's no explanation for what he has done,' I signed back, trying my best to temper the growing anger that always made an appearance when talking about Kai's deceit.

'That's just stupid,' she signed back, rolling her eyes dramatically, and earning a scowl from me. As I lifted my hands to sign back, she stopped me. *'How do you know he hasn't got a really good reason? Maybe he was in a coma or something, and then as soon as he woke up, he came to find you.'*

If only it was that simple.

'That's not what happened,' I signed back, shaking my head.

'How do you know? Maybe he did it to protect you?' she protested, her face twisting in frustration.

'How is pretending to be dead protecting me?' I replied, angry tears pricking my eyes at how she was defending Kai when I was hurting.

'I don't know. But even if his reasons were stupid, you should at least hear him out, and then if you decide his reasons aren't good enough, you can dump his sorry ass, but at least get the full facts.' She threw her hands in the air in exasperation and glared back at me.

Again, I raised my hands to reply, only this time I stopped myself. The truth was, I didn't know why Kai had taken six months to tell me he wasn't dead. I hadn't stopped to consider the reasons behind his deceit, too wrapped up in my anger. I mean, was there *any* excusable reason to let your wife think you were dead, and let her experience the heartache Kai had made me feel?

My mind flashed back to the argument we had when he found me at the Bianchis. He'd said, *'There is so much you don't know,'* but I'd cut him off, refused to give him a chance to explain anything, and I'd been too angry with him since to even consider hearing him out.

But maybe Angel was right. Not that I believed there was a justifiable explanation, but at least if I heard his side of the story, I would be fully armed with the information before I

made any decisions that impacted my future. Sighing, my body slumped as resignation washed through me.

'When did you get so wise?' I signed to Angel.

The little brat smirked at me. *'What can I say? You got the stubborn gene, and I got the smart one.'*

I rolled my eyes and pulled her in for a cuddle, decision made to *finally* have a conversation with Kai. But not now, now was my time with Angel, and I was going to make the most of every second I had with her.

It's funny, there were moments in my life when time passed painfully slow, yet now there was a time limit on how long I could spend with my sister, time sped up. Before I knew it, the day was over.

If I'd had it my way, we would have stayed awake all night to enjoy as much time together as possible, but as night fell, Angel couldn't stop the yawns from falling from her mouth. Deciding enough was enough, I ordered her to bed, intending to sleep next to her.

After she showered and started getting ready for bed, I took my turn to shower, but when I came out of her ensuite, she was nowhere to be seen. Throwing on my clothes, I headed downstairs on the hunt for the little brat. Honestly, she said I had the stubborn gene but I think it was one we'd both inherited.

The house was quiet as I made my way through, that was until I heard a deep laugh rumble from inside the lounge. A

laugh I'd know anywhere.

Kai.

I hadn't seen him since he left after we first arrived, he hadn't even made an appearance at dinner, and quite honestly, I was grateful for the break.

After my conversation with Angel earlier, I'd had time to think about everything, something that had been hard to do over the past few days with Kai stifling me. But now, having had time to get my thoughts in order, I was determined more than ever to find out his reasons why he thought it was a good idea to pretend to be dead.

As soon as we were on the plane home, I was going to get some answers.

Kai laughing was such a rarity that curiosity got the better of me, and creeping to the door that was ajar, I bit my lip to stop the gasp from escaping at the sight before me.

Angel was sitting on the sofa with Kai, and they were talking. Not talking by writing things down or her lip reading.

They were talking in sign language.

Kai was signing.

Kai Wolfe, the man who liked to murder and torture people was signing to a deaf girl.

My mouth fell open as I watched his hands move. It was by no means perfect, but he'd learned enough to have a conversation with Angel, and my little sister was lapping it up.

She beamed at him as she corrected some of his signs, calling him a doofus when he got it wrong, earning another belly laugh from Kai.

If it had been anyone else calling him a doofus, they would have found themselves staring down the barrel of his gun, but no, like most people, Angel had him wrapped around her little finger.

I watched her smile at him fondly as she corrected another sign, and he repeated the movement with his own heartfelt smile on his handsome face, and in an instant, all the anger and hurt I'd been harboring vanished. It was like the fog I had been wading through cleared, and finally, *finally*, I could see again.

This was my family.

My world.

Kai and Angel.

My knees nearly buckled from the tidal wave of love that crested through me, and I had to grip the doorframe to stop myself from hitting the ground. With a clear head, for the first time in days, I didn't care about any of the lies and deceit, it didn't matter. All that mattered were the two people sitting in front of me, and the fact we could have a future.

Kai was alive, Angel was safe, and deep in my heart I knew he would do whatever he needed to do to protect us.

Whatever that took.

Even if it meant pretending to be dead in order to defeat enemies.

The realization was startling.

My heart raced as the need to go in and tell them both how much I loved them took over, but I didn't want to disturb the sight. It was too precious.

A sight that would be locked away in my memories for all of eternity, along with the only other memory I had of them together- when Kai carried Angel out of Club Sin after he rescued her.

The moment when my worlds collided.

I didn't know how long I stood watching, but I was transfixed, unable to turn away as Kai told Angel all about our wedding, and how beautiful I looked, and Angel correcting his signs every so often.

It was only when she yawned for the umpteenth time that he told her it was time for bed, and that they would talk again, that I scarpered, not wanting to be caught watching them.

Sneaking back to Angel's room with tears in my eyes, I waited for her, and when she walked in, she was wearing a warm, contented smile on her cute face.

'What are you smiling about?' I asked, feigning ignorance.

'I'm just pleased you are here,' she signed. I was about to call her out on her lie, but I couldn't, too overwhelmed with love for the pair of them to ruin the moment.

Angel got into bed and snuggled under the covers, signing '*goodnight*' as she settled. I lay down next to her, watching her eyes droop as she fell asleep with a little smile on her lips. Within minutes, the light sound of snores emitted from her side of the bed.

As much as I had planned to stay next to her all night, my mind raced, refusing to stop replaying the images of Kai signing. Before I knew it, the need to see him became too much, and I was back sneaking through the house again. Only this time to track down my husband.

He was in one of the guest rooms Angel had shown me earlier. I pulled open the door to find Kai standing in the middle of the room, his brows furrowed as he tapped away at his phone. When our eyes met, he chucked the phone on the bed.

"You learned to sign," I said as a way of greeting, still dumbfounded by what I had seen.

For a moment, guilt flashed across his face as if I was accusing him of treason.

"Yeah," he replied before an affectionate grin crossed his lips. "She wasn't supposed to tell you."

"She didn't. I saw," I replied, stepping further into the room, and closing the door behind me. Kai's eyes raked over my body, his eyes heating like they always did. "When did you learn?"

“When I was bedridden for months after being shot,” he replied softly after a brief pause. His words hit me in the gut, and my own guilt washed through me at the thought of Kai being unable to move from his bed.

“Why?” I hadn’t realized until I was standing directly in front of him that I had walked across the room and tilted my head back to look up at him.

Fucking hell, he was gorgeous. My core clenched with the need to feel him inside me. The only man who made me feel the way I did.

Loved.

Adored.

Cherished.

“Because Angel’s my family. I wanted to learn for her. For you.”

Like when I had been watching him sign, I was hit again with a tidal wave of love for the man standing in front of me, and I was powerless to stop myself from showing him just how much I loved him.

“Kai.” His name was a whisper on my lips as I threw my arms around his neck and pulled his head down so my mouth could meet his.

He hesitated for a second, but unable to resist, his hands gripped my hips and pulled me closer as my mouth opened to allow his tongue entrance. But as our tongues started twirling in a sensual dance, Kai pulled away, dropping his hands from

my hips, and taking a step back so I had to lower my hands from behind his neck.

“I’m going to really fucking regret saying this, but we can’t.” He wavered between us as disappointment crossed his face. “We can’t keep fucking and ignoring our issues, Star. We need to talk.”

I took a step forward, once again closing the distance between us. “I know, Kai, and I promise you, tomorrow, on the plane home, we’ll talk.”

Lifting my hand, I placed my palm on his chest between his pecs, right where his scar was, but I quickly withdrew it when his jaw clenched as if my touch had burned him.

“Did that hurt?” I asked, worry creasing my brow.

“It’s not what you think,” he replied, stroking a finger down my cheek, his eyes filled with adoration. “I was going to wait to show you.”

“Show me what?”

He paused for a moment but seemingly coming to a decision, Kai unbuttoned his shirt, and as he opened it up and pulled it off, he revealed a large, medical dressing taped to his chest, covering right where his scar was.

Fearing the worst, my eyes shot up to meet his, but he smiled down at me. “Take off the dressing, baby. It’s nothing to worry about.”

Nervously, I peeled back the tape holding the dressing in place, and when it came away from his chest, my jaw dropped.

In the center of his pecs, covering his heart, Kai had a huge new tattoo that covered the scar line that ran between his pecs. On one side of the scar was half a silver star, the other side was half a white wolf's head, and where the two images met along the scar line, they merged, making them whole.

To say it was stunning would be an understatement.

"Say something," Kai said, after a minute of silence passed, uncertainty lacing his voice.

"It's...it's beautiful," I said, tearing my eyes away to meet his dark orbs.

He smiled, a rare shy smile that warmed my heart. "It's us, baby," he said, stroking a finger down my cheek again, and eliciting a path of fire on my skin. "It's you and me, together for all of eternity, just like I promised."

Tears welled in my eyes, and I couldn't find any words to say. My heart swelled to bursting point with the love I had for this crazy-ass man. Instead, I placed my hands on either side of the tattoo and reached up to kiss him. This time, there was no hesitation as he met my lips and swiped his tongue inside my mouth, his teeth lightly nibbling my lip.

Kai devoured my mouth, but I was just as hungry for him. Although we'd fucked several times in the last few days, this was different. Passion and need took over, it was a kiss that rivaled the kiss we'd shared on our wedding day, and right then, there was no hate or anger towards him, only love.

So much love.

Kai found the hem of my vest, and breaking the kiss for a moment, he ripped it over my head before his mouth slammed back down on mine. My fingers fumbled with the zipper on his pants, a desperate need to get him naked so I could see every inch of him consumed me. His thick cock sprung free when I yanked his pants down, and my sleep shorts followed, along with my soaking panties.

My core clenched as Kai picked me up and carried me to the bed. He laid me down, hovering over me, but I had other ideas. Tonight, I wanted to be in control. Pushing against his shoulders, Kai rolled willingly onto his back. I didn't waste a second before I straddled him, positioning his cock at my entrance as I met his eyes, finding them blazing with his need for me.

“Christ, Star,” Kai hissed as I lowered myself down, impaling my pussy on his length.

His fingers gripped my hips as I began to move, my eyes glued to the tattoo of us as his words echoed in my head.

‘It’s you and me, together for all of eternity, just like I promised.’

“Kai,” I breathed as my hips rolled slowly, his hands controlling the pace I moved at.

“Play with your tits, wife, I want to see those hard nipples,” Kai groaned, and I immediately obeyed. I was putty in his hands, unable to refuse anything this man asked me to do.

My hands shot to my breasts where I cupped them and squeezed, before my fingers and thumbs found each nipple and tweaked, sending bolts of pleasure straight to my core.

My pussy clenched around Kai's cock as he thrust up, and my hips moved faster, the need to come growing stronger.

"Riley, fuck, you're so fucking beautiful. I promise I'll make things right between us, baby," Kai whispered with a raw vulnerability in his voice that hit me straight in the chest.

"We'll work it out, Kai," I panted, holding back a sob, because in that moment, I knew we'd find a way to work things out. I didn't want to imagine a future without him in it.

He squeezed his eyes shut, and when they opened, they were filled with relief. His thrusting quickened, bringing me closer to the brink, and with a final tweak of my nipples, my pussy clamped down on his length, and I threw my head back as I climaxed.

"Star!" Kai roared as he thrust once more, emptying his load deep inside me.

I stayed where I was for a minute, with Kai's cock twitching inside me as we both regained our breaths. My eyes landed on his tattoo again, and for the first time in a long time, a sense of peace washed over me.

We had so much to talk about, and forgiveness wasn't going to be easy, but we had love. A love so deep that it ran through our veins and into the marrow of our bones, and that would be enough to get us through any storm.

“Tell me you love me, wife,” Kai whispered. I met his dark eyes, filled with nothing but his usual affection for me.

The words lodged in my throat. It wasn't that I didn't want to say them, but they were buried under a ton of emotion, and I just couldn't get them out. Instead, I raised my hands and held his eye as I signed.

'I love you.'

Chapter 22

Kai

When I made the decision to bring Riley to Spain to visit Angel, I knew it was a risk. There was a strong chance she would beg me to leave her behind while I returned to end the war, and if that had happened, I wasn't sure I'd be able to deny her.

I only ever wanted Riley to be happy, and seeing as I was the sole cause of her misery, it would have been fucking hard to drag her back to Hollows Bay knowing I was making her even more miserable.

But then, I was a selfish cunt, and I needed Riley by my side, so even if she had begged, there was just as much chance of me saying no, as there was of me agreeing.

So, it's fair to say I was damn well relieved when Riley didn't so much as utter a word asking to stay behind when the time came to leave. Instead, she hugged her sister, her eyes brimming with unshed tears as they said their goodbyes.

Angel, on the other hand, sobbed her heart out, despite Riley promising her that it wouldn't be long until they would be together again.

I silently vowed to myself to end this fucking saga with Thorne and Hendrix as soon as possible, just so my girls could be reunited for good.

Passing Angel over to Jane, who to my surprise had not avoided me during this trip, but had gone out of her way to ask how I was, Riley got in the car with a determined look on her face. It was only because I knew my wife well that I could see the heartbreak she was trying to hide.

Holding it together as the car pulled out of the courtyard, Riley waved to Angel all the way until the house and her sister disappeared from her view. When a sob erupted from her, and tears slid down her cheek, I undid her seatbelt and dragged her over to my lap. She nestled into my chest and stayed there for the ride back to the private airfield.

Ash was already waiting, prepping the plane for the flight back to Forest Point. Giving him a watery smile as she boarded the plane, she took a seat in one of the leather chairs in the cabin.

"I'm assuming I'm okay to sit here, or did you want to chain me to the bed again?" she said, her voice filled with humor.

Fuck, I loved her sass.

"Maybe. If you misbehave I'll have to consider it," I replied, meaning it in jest, but when her eyes darkened, and my cock

twitched at the thought of her chained up and at my mercy, I regretted the words.

“On that note, I’m going to get us up in the air,” Ash said, clearing his throat. “See if you can make the whole nine-hour flight without fucking or fighting.”

With that, he disappeared into the cockpit, shutting the door behind him, and leaving us alone. I took the seat opposite Riley, resisting the urge to pull her into my lap. If I did that, it really wouldn’t be long until we were fucking, and we needed to talk.

It was about time my wife and I cleared the air once and for all.

When the engines roared to life, it wasn’t long until the plane was rumbling along the runway. Moments later the plane took off. Riley watched with her nose pressed against the window as the ground below us grew further away, and I didn’t miss the lone tear sliding down her cheek. A tear I knew would be because she was leaving her sister again.

But if things went to plan, their separation wouldn’t be for much longer.

Once the plane leveled out, and we were lost amongst clouds, I decided it was time to bite the bullet. Undoing my lap belt, Riley watched with curiosity as I got out of my seat and walked over to the little bar that stood in the corner of the cabin. Grabbing a bottle of whiskey and two glasses, I put them on the table between Riley and me and took my seat opposite her again.

“We’re gonna need it for this conversation,” I said when Riley looked to me with a raised brow.

Her shoulders slumped in resignation, and with a shaky hand, she reached out and opened the bottle before pouring the amber liquid into the two glasses.

“Nothing like alcohol to numb the pain, right?” She raised the glass to her mouth and gulped it down, grimacing as she did.

“Right,” I replied, following her action, the whiskey burning my throat as I swallowed. “Before I start, I need you to promise me something,” I said, pouring another glass each.

“What?” she replied, hesitance in her tone.

“I need you to promise you’ll listen to me.”

“I promise I’ll listen,” she replied quickly, but I wasn’t finished.

“And I need you to promise, no matter how pissed off you get, no matter how much you think you hate me after I’ve told you everything, you’ll forgive me for what I’ve put you through, and you won’t leave me, because I can’t live without you, Star.” I let her hear the vulnerability in my voice, needing her to know my biggest fear, that she’ll never be able to move past this, and somehow find a way to leave my selfish ass.

To my relief, her face softened. “Kai, I can’t promise I’ll forgive you straight away, you have to understand the past six months have been hell on earth for me.” Her voice broke, but

she took a deep breath and continued. “But I promise I’ll try my hardest to understand, and I promise....I won’t leave you.”

I stared at her beautiful face for a moment, knowing she was being truthful, and hoping like hell she would fucking understand why I had to go down this route.

I nodded before picking up the glass and downing my shot. “I know you’re going to have a shit load of questions, but let me get this out of my system, and then I promise, I’ll answer anything you want to know.”

Her jaw clenched but she nodded before copying me, downing her drink, and sitting back in her seat, her eyes fixed intently on me.

Taking a breath to calm the storm beginning to swirl in my gut, I gripped the armrests to stop my fists from clenching as memories began to surface.

“I don’t remember much about that night. I remember fighting Max, I remember you screaming, and I remember feeling pain rip through me, pain like I’ve never felt before,” I said, doing my best to keep my voice steady, because any time I spoke of that night, rage boiled under my skin. “I remember being in the car with my head in your lap, and I remember telling you I loved you, and you saying that it sounded like I was saying goodbye.”

I reached over and grabbed her hand, running my thumb over her knuckles like I always did when I needed her comfort. “The truth is, Star, I thought I *was* saying goodbye. I could feel the life draining out of me, and all I could think was

that if I died, I would die happy because your face would be the last thing I ever saw.”

Her eyes welled, and a tear trickled slowly down her cheek. I resisted the need to brush it away, determined to get my side of things across.

“The next thing I remember is waking up in a room, connected to a shit load of machines, and every inch of my body felt like it was on fire. I remember looking around for you, but Ash was there, and it confused the hell out of me. He doesn’t live in America, so I couldn’t understand why he was there. Within about five seconds, I realized you weren’t with me, and a fear so strong that I couldn’t breathe gripped me. Ash had to calm me down, but all I could think was that I needed to get out of bed and find you, but my fucking body wouldn’t cooperate.”

Anger was taking over, my voice getting rougher as the words flowed from my mouth, memories of the moment when I woke up in a place I didn’t fucking know growing stronger by the second. But now I had started, I needed to purge the words from my system.

“The doctors had to sedate me because the machines were going fucking wild, my heart was beating so fast, but I didn’t realize I was doing more damage than good. I didn’t know then that they’d already had to restart my heart three times.”

I paused for a beat, pouring another glass of whiskey for us both. Never for one second did I think talking about what happened would be as fucking hard as this. I’d spoken to Ash

about it, and to Miles, but it hadn't been this hard to get the words out. Maybe it was because of the heartbreak on Riley's face that made it near fucking impossible to speak.

“I'd lost too much blood. That was the problem. The bullet that hit my chest missed my heart by an inch, but it did enough damage to make me lose so much fucking blood. Dr. Harris was ready to call time of death when my heart gave up a second time, but Miles held a gun to his head and made him carry on resuscitating me.”

Riley gasped, and I hoped that knowing Miles refused to give up on me would help her find forgiveness for him.

“When he got my heartbeat back, he started giving me a transfusion, but he kept telling Miles to prepare himself for the worst. He genuinely believed I was gonna die, but Miles, he never lost hope.” More tears rolled down Riley's face, and I could tell she already had a number of questions, but true to her word she remained quiet.

“That's when calls started coming into Miles. Hendrix had made his move and had ordered The Stags to claim the city. He spread the word Miles had shot and killed me, and had gone on the run with you, and as my 2IC, he was taking over. It didn't fucking matter that I had already put the word out that he was a wanted man for betraying me, he'd been working behind the scenes, turning my men against me, and by then, he had enough support.”

My jaw clenched with blind fury at what my former friend had been doing behind my back. His betrayal had run deeper

than I ever knew.

The majority of men who turned tail were killed by Miles and the Apollo team on the night of the shoot-out, but there were five men who lived to tell the tale. The five that Miles killed and returned back to Hendrix in several pieces.

“Doc Harris was still working on me when Miles took a call. It was Ernie. He told Miles that Hendrix had put out a reward for you to be brought to him, and for Miles to be killed on sight. The reward was for ten million dollars, and people were going crazy wanting to find you. Miles had less than ten seconds to make a decision. He knew he had to get you out of there, but he also knew you wouldn’t go anywhere all the time you knew I still had a pulse. That’s why he told you I had died, it was to get you out of there. He was trying to protect you.”

She gaped at me, her mouth wide, her brows raised, and I gave her a minute to digest what I had said. When she picked up the glass and threw back the whiskey again, I carried on.

“Jack was in the room with Miles, and he got straight on the phone to Ash who helped coordinate everything. Ash sent another team to the surgery. They’d been on standby to relieve Jack’s team from guard duty at the house. It was by sheer luck they were in Hollows Bay. Two of the team were ex-medics who knew what the fuck they were doing. While Miles was outside comforting you after telling you I had died, the team came in round the back and moved me out. They had all the equipment they needed to get me to a helicopter that had

landed not far from the surgery, and I was airlifted out of Hollows Bay.

“It was fucking risky, Miles knew there was a strong chance I wouldn’t make the journey, but he knew if he stayed put with you, it was only going to be a matter of time before Hendrix’s men arrived, and then not only would I have been killed anyway, but they would have killed Miles, and hand-delivered you straight to Hendrix.”

“Why didn’t he just tell me what was happening?” Riley whispered, her hands shaking as she clutched her empty glass.

“He knew you’d put up a fight and refuse to leave my side-”

“I wouldn’t!” she protested, sitting up straight in her seat, but when I raised a brow at her, she sank back down. “Yeah, okay, I probably would have.”

I snorted at her admittance, Miles knew Riley almost as well as I did.

“Let me finish, baby, and you can ask as many questions as you like,” I said sternly. She nodded in response, and I took a breath before carrying on. “Miles was going to get you out of Hollows Bay, and once I was stable, he was going to tell you the truth. But I crashed again in the helicopter, and this time, it took longer for the team to bring me back. They were in contact with Jack who relayed everything to Miles, and he made the decision to not tell you anything until he knew for certain I was out of the woods. He didn’t want to tell you I had survived only to have to tell you again that I hadn’t made it.

“When we landed, I was rushed to a private facility, owned by Apollo, well, Ash, seeing as you now know he’s the man behind the organization. He had a team of the best fucking doctors there, and they managed to stabilize me, but they didn’t know whether I would survive the next twenty-four hours.”

“But you did, so why didn’t Miles tell me then?” Riley asked, unable to hold back her question.

“Because although I’d survived the day, the doctors knew I was nowhere near out of danger. Plus, with the amount of time they had spent resuscitating me, they didn’t know if I’d suffered any brain damage from lack of oxygen, so Miles made the decision to not tell you until I regained consciousness. You have to understand, Riley, he was doing what he thought was best for you. He didn’t want to give you false hope only for it to be taken away again.”

She opened her mouth to reply, but for whatever reason, she closed it again, instead tearing her eyes away to look down at her hand, her eyes fixed on her wedding ring which she was twirling around on her finger.

“What happened next?”

“They kept me sedated for three weeks. When I woke up and found Ash there instead of you and reacted the way I did, they sedated me for another week. The doctors were worried my body wasn’t strong enough to cope with the stress I’d put on it once I found out what had happened. When they brought me round a week later, Miles was there, along with Ash.”

“Miles came to see you?” Riley asked, her body tensing. “I didn’t think he left me?”

“The facility wasn’t far from where you were living. The doctors had planned to bring me round so they did it at night when you were asleep and none the wiser. Miles wanted to speak to me first before he made any decisions to tell you I was really alive.” I paused to take another shot of whiskey, the warm liquid calming the bubbling anger underneath my skin.

“When I woke the second time, Miles explained you were safe and being looked after by Ash’s men. Knowing you were safe, it meant I could listen to Miles without worrying about you. When I was fully coherent, Miles filled me in on everything that had happened over the time I’d been sedated.

“When he told me you thought I was dead, I went fucking ape-shit. I demanded they tell you straight away that I was alive, and you be brought to me. But both Miles and Ash refused until I’d heard them out. Ash even threatened to get the doctor to sedate me again unless I calmed the fuck down.”

Riley stared at me from across the table, engrossed in every word I had to say. I only hoped she’d carry on listening as intently when I told her the next part.

“When I eventually calmed down, Miles told me I needed to consider my options before he told you I was alive. He said he hated seeing you hurting the way you were, but something had changed in you. Even though you were breaking, he said you had this new determination running through you to take back

everything that had been taken from us. Then he said *‘Sometimes people have to break to come back stronger.’*”

Her face paled in an instant. “He said that?” she said, hurt evident in her voice.

“Yeah. And again, I went fucking ape-shit at him. But then he asked me to hear him out, and if by the end of everything he had to say I was adamant I wanted you told, he promised he would go straight to you and tell you.”

Guilt washed through me because after I heard what he had to say, it was my decision to not tell her. Seemingly coming to the same conclusion too, her lips curled into a snarl.

“You went along with it. You could have ended my suffering, but you went along with it,” she hissed, ripping her hand out of my grasp.

“Riley. You promised to hear me out,” I reminded her, trying to keep my cool, and not let my desperation for her to understand why I made the decision to shine through.

Her jaw clenched, and she swiped away a tear, but I took her silence as a nod to carry on.

“As you know, Hendrix had been threatening people, either get on board with him taking over or die. People had no choice but to declare their loyalty to him, so there was no way of knowing who was truly loyal to him, or who had just declared their loyalty so they didn’t face death. At that time, no one knew where the fuck Thorne was, it was only a few weeks after I woke up the second time that he reappeared and

resumed his role as the chief, but for all Miles knew at the time, he was out there plotting revenge while Hendrix ran the show.

“We needed time, time to see what Thorne and Hendrix’s next moves were, time to seek out people we could rely upon when the time came to take back the city, and time for me to heal because there was no fucking way I was going to sit back and watch from a distance as you and Miles sought revenge. But I also needed time for you to learn to protect yourself.”

Her brows shot up but I continued before she had a chance to say anything on the matter. “Hendrix had been reaching out to contacts across the States, he’d sent your picture to every single contact he had, demanding you be located and brought to him. I trusted Miles and Ash’s men to keep you safe, but if something happened, I needed you to know how to defend yourself because there was no fucking way I would be in any fit state to help you. You needed time to learn. Needed to know that if you ever got caught by some fucker, you could do what you needed to do to protect yourself.”

Riley’s face paled. “I didn’t know Hendrix had been putting my picture out across the country.”

“Miles didn’t want to scare you. Especially by that point, you were begging Miles to take Hollows Bay back, he didn’t want to frighten you off. He told me you were the driving force behind taking retribution against Thorne and Hendrix, that you were coming up with ideas on how to reclaim the city. It was you who demanded he did something-”

“Yeah, because I thought you were dead!” she snapped, interrupting me. “Kai, if I had known you were alive, I would have sat back and waited until you were healed so you could deal with it.”

“Exactly. You would have sat back and waited.” I stared at her for a minute, waiting for her anger to ebb, and when she calmed a fraction, I proceeded. “Star, the doctors said my recovery was going to take *months*, maybe longer. The longer we waited, the more of a hold Thorne and Hendrix would have gotten over the city before we even started planning to bring them down, and who the fuck knew what damage they could cause in that time. But you, you were on a one-woman mission to reclaim our city-”

“*Your* city,” she huffed, scowling at me.

“*Our* city, Riley. It became *our* city when we got married.”

Despite her wrath, her face softened, and her voice shook when she spoke. “Kai, I never wanted the city. I only wanted you.”

“I know, baby,” I paused to take a deep breath, knowing what I was about to say next would rile her more. “And that’s why I told Miles not to tell you I was alive. I needed you to come to want the city as well as wanting me. I needed you to learn to love controlling Hollows Bay the way I do, needed you to learn how to rule it so that when I recovered, we could take it back and rule together.

“On our wedding day, while I was waiting for you to walk down the aisle, I told Miles that until we had a child, and until

he or she was ready to take my place, if anything were to happen to me, I was leaving Hollows Bay to you. I knew you had it in you to carry on everything I was doing to make Hollows Bay a better place, you just had to see it for yourself, and that's why you had to break, so you could come back stronger."

"Are you hearing yourself right now, Kai? You wanted me to break? The woman you claim to love? You wanted me to shatter into a thousand pieces, and somehow put them back together without any help? That's not love! That's fucked up!" she hissed, and if looks could kill, I'd be a dead man right now.

Instead of replying straight away, I stood and crossed over to sit in the seat next to her, grabbing her hand, and holding it firmly in mine. She tried to pull away, but I wasn't letting her go.

"Baby, I know what it sounds like, but look at what you've achieved. Things you *never* would have considered had you thought I was still alive. You've learned how to defend yourself, you've learned how to fire a gun, those two things alone make me so fucking proud. But on top of that, you convinced Kimmy, Ernie, and Graham to trust you when they had no reason to. You made the decision to end Colin's life when your gut told you he was a traitor. You chased after Alex in Club Sin, intent on ending his life because he killed Jacqueline. And you made a deal with the Bianchis, something that has given us the upper hand in this fucking war,

something I *never* would have considered doing, and something Hendrix will never see coming.”

She'd fallen into a stunned silence, so I chanced my luck and pulled her into my lap, and to my surprise, she came willingly.

“Riley, all of that would never have happened if you knew I was alive. You said so yourself, you would have sat back and waited, but instead, you fucking bloomed. Even though your world had fallen apart, you bloomed. You put your own pieces back together, and you came back stronger. You bloomed into someone who isn't afraid to do what she needs to do for the sake of her city, for the people who live in her city, and I couldn't be fucking prouder of you.”

She gaped at me, her eyes wide as realization dawned on her.

Realization that she was stronger than she ever gave herself credit.

Realization that she could thrive despite going through her own personal nightmare.

Realization that before we were married, she was my life, but now she was more than that.

She was my queen.

Her mouth opened and closed several times, but no words came out. There was no anger in her eyes anymore, just a look of shock and disbelief etched over her pretty features. I cupped her cheek, and she nestled against the palm of my hand, needing my contact as much as I needed hers.

“Baby,” I said, staring deeply into her chocolate orbs which shone with unshed tears. “You’re a good person, you try to see the best in everyone. But you had to see it from the other side too. You had to know that you could make those difficult decisions when it came down to it. You had to know that you could survive no matter what was thrown at you. And you know what? You haven’t just survived, but you’re fucking thriving. You were willing to go to war for me even though I was just a memory. Even if it meant you wouldn’t survive, like a true fucking warrior.”

When she looked down, I gently took her chin and lifted her face so she had to look at me. “Star, I always said there could be no Yin without Yang, and that’s us. You’re the Yin to my Yang, we both want the best for the city and the people in it, even if we come at it from different sides of the coin. You make me stop and think that there are other ways to deal with issues rather than with my fists or a knife in my hand, but now you see that sometimes, wars have to be fought with violence. You keep me calm during the darkest storms, but now you know that sometimes, the storm needs to be unleashed. Baby, we balance each other out, and together we’re going to rule so goddamn beautifully over our city.”

Her breath hitched as she held my eye, peering right down into my soul as only Riley could. “Kai.....I don’t know what to say.”

I kissed her nose, stopping her from speaking. “There isn’t anything to say, Riley. You’re my wife, *my queen*, and when

we reclaim the city, we *will* rule together, and believe me when I tell you, you're going to make one hell of a queen."

She chuckled as a fat tear rolled down her cheek, but then a smile spread over her lips, growing bigger by the second. "When Miles finally made me accept that I would rule over Hollows Bay, I had all these ideas. I could use some of the profits from the businesses to help people. I don't know, maybe a shelter for the homeless, or a school for deaf children," she shrugged, her cheeks blushing. "I didn't want the city to start with, but when I started thinking about everything I could do that would make people's lives better, I started liking the idea."

"And now you can, baby. Once we take our rightful places, you can do all those things. Together, we'll make Hollows Bay the best fucking city in America." I kissed her nose again as a warm feeling flooded through me.

Even though I knew she hadn't quite found forgiveness, she would eventually. I had my wife back, and she would be by my side when we reclaimed our city.

We stayed silent for a minute. I knew she had a shit load of questions, but I enjoyed the moment of holding her in my arms where she belonged. After a few minutes passed, she shifted, pulling out of my embrace to look at me.

"What happens now?"

That was an easy question to answer.

"Now? We end this fucking war."

Chapter 23

Kai

For the rest of the flight, Riley questioned me about what happened in the months following the shooting.

I told her everything.

How I demanded Ash join the team so he could personally keep an eye on her. How I could barely move for the first few months because I was too weak. How I was resigned to bed rest and spent hours teaching myself sign language in a bid to stop my brain from torturing myself over how she was coping.

I told her how I kept getting lectures from the doctor about overdoing it when I eventually got out of bed and started training again. She called me a stubborn ass for ignoring the doctor's advice, but I told her the sooner I got back to full health, the sooner we could kill Thorne and Hendrix and be together again.

She asked why I decided to make an appearance at Club Sin, and I told her I thought she and Miles would still be at the meeting with the Bianchis. I hadn't expected her to run into the cellar, but the second I saw her, I couldn't stop myself from touching her.

That's when I told her it was me who watched her from the woods the night she stood on the balcony and saw a figure in the shadows. Tears streaked her face when I told her I snuck into her room later that night, and how I had brushed my finger down her cheek, but managed to resist waking her. But when she was standing in front of me in the cellar, I couldn't walk away a second time. I couldn't stop myself from pulling her into my arms where she belonged.

By the time the plane landed, I was certain Riley was well on her way to forgiveness. If only the same could be said about Miles. She was still pretty pissed with him, but being the selfish cunt I was, I figured I'd let him worry about making amends with her, all I cared about was that I hadn't lost her.

I wasn't expecting to find Miles waiting to greet us at the airfield when we landed. If I was hoping my cousin was here to welcome us back with open arms, I was sorely mistaken. I took one look at his face and knew something was wrong. Riley too, her face contorted from a sneer at seeing him into one of concern.

"What's happened?" I said as soon as I walked down the stairs off the plane to meet him, Riley and Ash following behind me.

He glanced from me to Riley before sighing. “Hendrix has taken Kimmy in retaliation for us killing Alex.”

“What?” Riley cried, stepping up to my side.

Fuck.

There was always going to be the risk Hendrix would retaliate once Riley indicated she was the one behind the murders of his men. Kimmy would have been an easy target seeing as she was still working in Sapphire. Hendrix would have known the second Riley got wind he had Kimmy, she would want to help her, just like she had done when he threatened her friend Kendra.

“When?” I said, my fists clenching. I liked Kimmy, she wasn’t just a good employee, but she was a friend. A loyal one at that to both me and Riley.

“The night you guys flew to Florida. It took some time for the intel to reach us, we only found out a few hours ago. And that’s not the worst of it,” Miles growled, his own wrath evident. “He’s claimed the only way he’ll let her go is if Riley hands herself over, and for every day that passes and she doesn’t,” he hesitated, before briefly closing his eyes, “he’ll beat and rape Kimmy.”

My lips curled into a snarl.

I fucking despised rapists.

Riley gasped, and her hand flew to her mouth. “We have to do something,” she said, looking between Miles and me.

Talk about *deja fucking vu*. It was the whole Jacqueline scenario again, and much like Jacqueline had been collateral damage in the war, sadly Kimmy would be too, not that Riley would take it lying down.

“We will,” I turned to her, and pulled her into my arms before meeting Miles’ hardened gaze. “Do you know where he’s keeping her?”

“No. I’m pretty sure she’ll be in the basement, but it’s not confirmed. We’re working on it though.”

I ground my teeth, thinking. Like everything that belonged to me, Hendrix had claimed my penthouse for himself and had been living there, guarded around the clock by Stags. Miles had been trying to hack the security system he’d put in place, an upgrade on the system I already had installed, but so far, he hadn’t been able to.

Of course it was never going to be as fucking simple as walking into *my* home and killing the cunt, a problem we would face when the time came to deal with my former 2IC.

But for now, Hendrix had access to the cell in the basement where I’d once kept my prisoners until the time came to deal with them. It was the most obvious place to keep Kimmy, especially if we couldn’t bypass the security system. Not to mention the entire apartment building was surrounded twenty-four-seven by armed Stags. Hendrix was taking his security very seriously, he’d want to make sure he was a step ahead of any plan Riley and Miles came up with.

Thoughts span a million miles an hour before I came to my conclusion. “Keep working on it. Until then, the plan doesn’t change.”

“Kai, you can’t be serious!” She pulled back, glaring at me with tear-filled angry eyes. “We can’t leave Kimmy to be beaten and raped!”

“Believe me, baby, the thought doesn’t sit well with me either,” I said, hating that I was condemning Kimmy to the abuse Hendrix was threatening, but until we got further intel on where she was being kept, and until we figured a way to get into the building, there was no other option. “But our hands are tied.”

“No, they’re not,” Riley said, determination set on her face, and I fucking knew what she was going to say before she even opened her mouth. “I can hand myself in to him.”

“No,” both Miles and I said at the same time.

“Kai-”

“No, Riley. It’s not happening. Not a fucking chance in hell. We stick to the plan. The pair of cunts have been two steps ahead of us this entire time, but we have the upper hand, and if we react without a plan, then we risk losing everything, and we’ve come too fucking far to lose now.”

She scowled at me, but as if to prove my point on the plane about how far she’d come with making difficult decisions, she sighed heavily and nodded her head in agreement.

“Fine,” she replied, resignation in her tone. “But we need to move the timeline up. Deal with Thorne now, and then focus on Hendrix. I can’t bear the thought of him hurting Kimmy.”

Pulling her into my arms once again, I kissed the top of her head. “That we can do. Now we know the truth about Thorne, and I have the proof the fucker really isn’t my brother, it’s game on. The cunt dies tonight.”

“You do?” Riley said, pulling back to look up at me.

“Yeah, the DNA results came through last night. That’s what I was reading when you came to my room.”

“Oh,” she replied, her cheeks blushing when Ash snorted behind me.

“Right then, let’s head back to the house and get a plan together, ‘cos I don’t know about you, but I’m itching to spill that psycho’s blood,” Miles said, turning to head to the car parked in the distance.

Taking Riley’s hand, I followed behind my cousin, because like him, I was more than ready to shed some blood.

The next few hours were spent in the war room working out a plan to get inside Thorne’s house. Or rather, *my* house, because the fucker had taken up residence in my old family home.

He really was fucking deluded that he was a Wolfe.

Over the last few weeks, the Apollo team had conducted surveillance at the house, but Thorne was taking his security measures as seriously as Hendrix was.

It was fucking laughable. To the public he played his role as the law-abiding Chief of Police, yet to the unseeing public eye, his home was guarded around the clock by gang members, armed to the hilt with guns. On top of that, he had installed the same security system Hendrix had, meaning Miles couldn't hack it.

Miles had managed to establish the system was on its own power supply, meaning even if we cut the power to the house, the system would still work. The second we tried breaking in, Thorne would be alerted and would no doubt run and hide his cowardly ass in the panic room, and we couldn't risk that. Unlike Riley, Thorne had no one we could use as bait to lure him out.

We had the option of the tunnel that led from the staff lodge to the house. The same tunnel Hendrix used to get Riley out of the house without the Apollo team knowing. But we were all in agreement that if Thorne had half a brain cell, he would have blocked the tunnel up. Given we'd established he was a smart psycho wack-job, we figured he would have done exactly that.

There were no two ways about it. Covertly breaking into the property was never going to work.

But arrogance was always going to be Thorne's downfall. He was arrogant enough to think that no one would get past his security measures, just like he was arrogant enough to think no one would see through his web of deceit, and that went in our favor.

With a plan formulated, me and Miles, and the team, minus Ash, loaded up the van ready to head off to finally deal with the thorn in my side. After the long flight, Jack, who was none the wiser that his boss was working alongside him, ordered Ash to stay at the house with Riley so he could get some rest.

He hadn't grumbled, he was exhausted. Besides, him staying put went in our favor. Once we had Thorne secured, Ash was going to reach out to his contact in the bureau and provide him with the information proving Thorne wasn't a cop.

Stephanie had come through for us. She'd been more than willing to provide a statement confirming Max Thorne was not Michael Tucker. With the DNA proof confirming he wasn't related to the Wolfes, Ash was confident an arrest warrant would be issued within minutes of his contact getting the information.

Sadly for them, they'd never get to arrest the cunt for impersonating a cop because Thorne wouldn't live to see another day, and come morning, everyone would know the web of lies Thorne had been weaving.

It was a shame I wouldn't get to see the look on Hendrix's face when he realized he'd fallen for Thorne's lies like everyone else.

I said goodbye to a sulking Riley. She wanted to come with us but accepted I wouldn't intentionally put her in harm's way. Tank drove the van with me, Miles, Oz, Dan, Travis, and Liam, while Jack and Seb followed behind in a car, the two of them dressed as FBI agents.

When we established the only way past the security system was by getting someone inside the house, Miles had a brainwave, hence the reason the two mercs were playing dress up.

Subterfuge at its finest.

The journey to Hollows Bay was quiet, every one of us focusing on the task ahead. Adrenaline thrummed through my veins at the thought of getting my hands on the cunt, and my mind ran rampant with all the pain I was going to inflict on him.

That was until I looked over at Miles who was staring blankly at the back of the chair in front of him, his jaw clenched tightly. As much as Theo was my brother and we were close, it was nothing in comparison to the relationship Miles had with him. The two of them were inseparable, had been since they were kids, and Miles hadn't been the same since Theo died. He was slowly coming back to himself, but there would always be a part of him that died with Theo.

As I stared at my cousin, a realization dawned on me. I could give him something that would help him find closure. As much as Thorne had been hellbent on destroying me, and as much as I itched with the need to see his blood spilled, Miles needed the kill more than me. He needed to be the one to end Thorne's life.

Besides, I'd get Hendrix.

"He's yours," I said. Miles' head snapped to where I sat, and when his eyes met mine, there was a darkness in them I'd

never seen in him before.

“What?”

“Thorne. He’s yours.” Miles held my gaze before giving me a nod, and when the tension eased fractionally from his body, I knew I’d made the right decision.

Night had fallen by the time Tank pulled the van off the road. With a final radio check, Jack and Seb continued on their way to my family home. It would take them a few minutes to arrive, so we used the time to load our weapons and strapped them to our bodies, ready to move when we got the nod.

And then we waited.

The air was thick with excitement. The Apollo mercs lived for this shit, and Miles and I were desperate to get our hands on Thorne. Seconds ticked by, and we waited with bated breath until the radio sprung to life.

“Evening,” Jack’s voice came through the speakers. He had a microphone hidden underneath his uniform so we could hear everything that was happening. “I’m Special Agent Clarke, this is Special Agent Diaz. We’re here to see Chief Thorne.”

“What do you want to see him for?” the voice of a Stag came through.

“I’m afraid that’s confidential information. But I assure you, it’s very important, and urgent,” Jack replied, his voice calm, unwavering.

There was a long pause before The Stag’s voice sounded again. “Chief Thorne, sorry to disturb you, but there are a

couple of Feds here. Says it's urgent.”

Another pause, and all of us in the van held our breaths, waiting to see if Thorne would go for the bait. A smile spread over all our faces when The Stag spoke again. “Boss says go on up.”

The rumbling of the car along the driveway filled the van, and I pictured Jack driving up the driveway that would lead to the courtyard.

“Fucking amateurs, they didn't even check our ID,” Seb chuckled, and I couldn't help but smirk. Thorne's arrogance really would be his downfall.

Less than a minute later, the car came to a stop.

“He's at the door,” Jack said, his voice low.

The sound of car doors slamming came next before a voice I never wanted to hear again spoke.

“Gentleman, to what do I owe the pleasure of this late night visit at my home?” Thorne said, and it was hard to miss the skepticism in his voice.

“Chief Thorne, apologies for disturbing you, but we've had some intelligence about the whereabouts of Miles Wolfe and Riley Bennett. A colleague of ours, Special Agent West, asked us to update you immediately,” Jack said, the lie coming easily off his tongue.

Thanks to Ash's contact in the bureau, we knew Special Agent West was one of the Feds Thorne had made connections

with, and by name dropping, it would add credence to Jack's lie.

“Well, in that case, do come in. You have no idea how badly I've been wanting to get my hands on those two,” Thorne replied, unmissable glee in his voice.

For someone who spun a web of lies, he wasn't so fucking clever at detecting when he was being lied to.

The sounds of footsteps echoed from the radio, followed by the thud of the front door closing. More footsteps followed, and I tracked in my head which room Thorne was likely taking Jack and Seb to.

“Do you know where Wolfe and that little whore are?” Thorne asked, my hands clenched into a fist at him calling Riley a whore.

“Yeah, we know where they are, fuckface,” Jack said, before a scuffle sounded and then the thump of a body hitting the floor.

“He's down,” Seb panted. “Go, go, go.”

We didn't need to be told twice. Tank fired the van to life and floored it from where we were parked. It took a minute to reach the turning to the driveway, and a Stag came into view.

Miles' bullet hit him in the head before he even knew what was happening. Another Stag appeared, firing a round which narrowly missed the side of the van, but my bullet hit him directly in the chest, taking him down.

Within seconds, gunfire filled the air. Stags came from all directions, firing their weapons. We were outnumbered, but that didn't stop us. What we lacked in numbers, we made up for in skill.

Every one of our bullets hit their targets, while the Stags shots went wide, with the exception of one that hit the windshield, and if it wasn't for the fact the van was bulletproof, we all would have been sprayed with glass.

When dead bodies of The Stags littered the ground, Tank floored the gas, and the van sped up the driveway. Miles, Oz, and I took out another three Stags when they came running out of the woods that surrounded the house, no doubt on perimeter patrol.

As Tank pulled into the courtyard, two more Stags appeared, but before any of us could take a shot, Seb shot from the front door, hitting his targets with ease. Tank stopped the van, and as we all piled out, every one of us scanned the area for further threats, but none came.

“He's out cold,” Seb said, keeping his gun raised, but flicking his head towards the house.

“Keep your eyes peeled for more Stags,” I instructed. “We'll get him secure and get the fuck out of here before anyone realizes he's missing.”

“And search every inch of the house, there must be something here that will give me a damn clue as to how to breach the fucking security system Hendrix has,” Miles added.

The second I walked into my family home, I was hit with memories, like always. Only this time, they weren't memories of my father being cruel, of him beating my mother, or Theo and me hiding in the panic room. No, they were memories of Riley. The morning I woke to find she'd returned from France. The minute she stepped out in her wedding dress.

I'd never wanted to live in this house after my father died, but at that moment, I was hit with the image of me and Riley living here, making it *our* family home.

Shaking the thought from my head for now, I followed the sound of movement coming from the lounge. Miles followed behind as we entered to find Jack tying up an unconscious Thorne, a bright red mark on his neck where Jack had jabbed the syringe to drug him.

The sight of Thorne alone made my hand twitch with the need to grab my blade and slice him open.

Standing back to admire his handiwork, Jack towered over Thorne, grinning. "I have to say, that was fucking easier than I thought it would be."

"It's about fucking time we had some luck on our side," Miles said, kicking Thorne's side, but the cunt didn't stir. With a menacing grin spreading on his face, Miles met my eye. "Ready to see what the psychopath's insides look like?"

My own menacing grin took over my lips.

Max Thorne was about to die.

And it was going to be fucking glorious.

Chapter 24

Kai

Miles and I deserved a fucking medal for the restraint we showed as we transported an unconscious Thorne to the spot in the woods we'd picked out. If it wasn't for wanting the cunt awake to feel every slice of our blades, every bone we would break, he would have been dead long before we arrived.

We weren't gentle with him as we yanked his unconscious form out of the van, and dragged him through the woods. We were in the middle of nowhere, and once we were through with him, the only people who would know where his dead body was would be me and Miles.

We'd left half the team searching my family home in hopes they could find what Miles needed to hack the security system. Jack and Tank drove us to the location we'd picked out, but they'd stayed by the van as we dragged Thorne deep into the woods to a spot where no one would ever discover the cunt.

A fitting end for an egotistical psychopath.

After dragging him through the dark woods, we strapped the fucker up to a thick tree, removing every stitch of clothing he wore, bar his white briefs. Neither of us needed to see the asshole's junk. Heavy chains wrapped around his chest, preventing his upper body from moving. His arms were pulled behind the tree trunk as far back as they would go, and tethered with more chains preventing his hands from moving. His feet were also chained around the base of the tree.

By the time we were done, there was zero chance Thorne was breaking free.

He started to come around in the van, but until we were ready to deal with him, we didn't want him awake. No doubt he'd press every one of our buttons to get us to snap. With the way both Miles and I were struggling to hold on to our temper, it was a strong possibility we wouldn't have made it anywhere near the woods before one of us broke.

To keep him quiet, Miles shoved a chloroform rag over Thorne's mouth, and the psycho fell back to sleep. Once he was chained to the tree, his head drooping in slumber, Miles and I set to work, digging a deep hole in the ground which would soon become the final resting place for the fucker.

We worked in silence, and by the time we were done, the two of us were covered in dirt and sweat. It wouldn't be too much longer until we were covered in his blood, and I was only too happy to get my hands dirty for a worthwhile cause.

With the hole dug, and the early morning rays beginning to light up the sky, we were ready for the bastard to wake up so we could begin.

“You good?” I asked Miles, realizing he’d been staring at Thorne for a few minutes, his jaw clenched tightly, his body vibrating with a rage that rivaled my own.

“I will be when this fucker takes his last breath,” Miles replied through gritted teeth, never taking his eyes from Thorne’s limp form. “I want him to hurt, Kai, I want him to feel nothing but the pain I feel. But I also can’t stand the cunt breathing for another second. It’s taking *everything* in me not to slice him open right now.”

The pain in his tone was evident. No matter how much Thorne screamed, it would never bring Theo back to us. While I missed my brother, missed him more than I would ever admit, I’d made peace with his death. If Theo hadn’t been killed, I never would have met Riley. Now that I had her in my life, the hole left behind by Theo’s death wasn’t as gaping as it had once been.

But Miles, he didn’t have anyone. Maybe things with him and Sofia would work out, or maybe he’d find happiness some other way, but for him, there’d always be a piece of him buried with Theo.

I put my hand on his shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze, and he met my face with wide eyes. There was only one person I showed affection to, but she was the one person

who made me less of a cold-hearted bastard and able to show affection to those I loved, and I fucking loved my cousin.

“Do what you need to do, Miles. If you want to drag this out for the next few days, I’m with you. If you want to end him quickly, I’m with you. Whatever you need.”

He held my gaze, and unless I was mistaken, his eyes appeared to water. But composing himself, he took a breath and gave me a nod.

“Let’s get this over with. If I have to look at his face for much longer, I’m likely to slit my own throat,” he said, determination etched on his face.

As he moved towards Thorne’s body, knife in hand, I stepped behind the tree and out of Thorne’s line of sight so Miles could take the lead.

“Wakey, wakey, psycho cunt,” Miles growled before slapping Thorne’s cheeks hard several times, the sound of his palms crashing against Thorne’s face echoed into the forest. I chuckled at Miles’ little rhyme.

There was the briefest movement of Thorne’s body as he came to and tried to move his arms, but when he realized he couldn’t, he raised his head.

“Wh...where...am...I?” he said, his voice disoriented.

“About to start your journey to hell,” Miles said, his voice emotionless. Miles usually wore his heart on his sleeve, but I knew he wouldn’t want to give Thorne any satisfaction in seeing how much he was hurting.

There was a pause as Thorne looked around, twisting his head as he took in where he was. He coughed several times to clear his throat.

“Hello, Miles. How *lovely* it is to see you,” Thorne said, amusement in his tone. What the fucker thought was funny about his predicament, I had no clue. The man really was a fucked up psycho.

“I wish I could say the feeling is mutual,” Miles replied, keeping his cool, but from where I stood, I could see the rage simmering under my cousin’s skin.

“Where’s the little whore? You’ve done a good job of keeping her locked away,” Thorne said, the amusement growing stronger. My fists clenched at hearing him call my wife a whore for the second time, and I couldn’t fucking wait to start inflicting pain on the fucker.

“I have to say, Hendrix has been going out of his mind looking for her. Personally, I never saw the fascination, she’s too much of a mouthy bitch for my liking. Have you had a go on her pussy while you’ve been on the run, Miles?” Miles’ jaw clenched but he didn’t reply. “As a little tip from cousin to cousin, you’d do well to keep her hidden from Hendrix, the things he wants to do to her turns even my stomach.”

It took all of my strength not to let the growl out that was forcing its way from my chest.

“You aren’t my fucking cousin, you took my cousin from me,” Miles said, not rising to the taunts about Riley the way I

was, even though I knew he'd fucking hate hearing Thorne speak about my girl that way.

“Actually, in a way, you could say I took *both* cousins from you. I might not have been the one to shoot Kai, but Hendrix was acting on my orders.”

Miles' eyes met mine behind Thorne, and I gave him a nod. A smug grin pulled onto his lips. “You sure about that, Maxi-pad?”

I stepped out from behind Thorne, more than fucking ready to face the man who thought he could take everything from me. As my feet hit a twig, making it break, Thorne's head snapped to where I was, his eyes widening in surprise, before his mouth pulled up into a sadistic smile.

“Kai!” he chortled, his dark eyes tracking me as I came to stand next to Miles. “You're alive! What a pleasant surprise! I did *not* see this coming, bravo!”

I glared at him, the delight on his face was un-fucking-real. The psycho didn't seem to give two fucks that he was tied to a tree about to meet his maker. Instead, he was smiling as though he was about to go on his favorite ride at a theme park.

“I have to say, you had me fooled! If I could move my hands, I'd give you a well deserved round of applause.”

“He really is a fucking nutjob,” Miles said, the two of us staring at Thorne in disbelief.

“Tell me, how did you do it? I saw the video of them working on you, Kai. I saw it when they pronounced your

death, it looked very real to me,” Thorne said, still beaming as he looked from me to Miles.

“You know how easy it is to manipulate technology, Max. It wasn’t hard to make it look convincing,” Miles shrugged.

“Oh, I do! I had a lot of fun hacking databases and amending reports over the years. You know, Miles, you and I should work together, we’d make one hell of a team.”

“Is this fucker for real?” Miles hissed, his fists clenching.

“It looks like you had a lot of fun making it look like you were a real cop,” I said, ready to move this shit on.

His grin grew wider. “You found my secret! Again, bravo! You pair, you really are smarter than you look!”

“We know a lot more than that, dickhead,” Miles growled, his body becoming rigid the more Thorne spewed shit from his mouth.

“Do enlighten me!” Thorne beamed.

I turned to look at Miles, stunned at how Thorne was behaving. “What the fuck is wrong with this asshole?”

Miles didn’t break his stare from Thorne as he replied. “Stephanie was right, he is a psychopath. Doesn’t get stressed in risky situations, manipulates everyone around him, narcissistic. He’s spent years pulling strings, and he gets off on hearing how everyone fell for his lies. He doesn’t give a fuck whether he lives or dies, Kai, all he cares about is that people know what he’s done.”

“Oh, Miles, I’m impressed. I can see you’ve done your research on psychopaths. And by Stephanie, am I to assume you tracked my foster sister down and paid her a visit?” Thorne said.

“It wasn’t hard to track her down, fuckface. She still lives in the town you grew up in,” Miles replied.

“Does she? I didn’t know she had returned from England. My fault for being preoccupied with claiming my throne,” Thorne muttered, almost to himself.

My mood soured further if that was at all possible. “It was never your throne to claim though, was it, *Simon?*”

The grin dropped from his face.

“Don’t fucking call me that,” he hissed through gritted teeth.

It looked as though we had just found what made the psycho tick.

“Not a big fan of who you really are?” Miles said, coming to the same conclusion as me. “I wonder why that is, Simon. Maybe because your life was so fucking pathetic you had to pretend to be someone else? Tell me, was it the fact your momma was a whore and didn’t know who your daddy was that fucked you up, or was it what one of her boyfriends did to you?”

“Shut the fuck up!” he roared, before yanking against his chains, but he was going nowhere.

“You don’t like hearing the truth, do you, Simon?” I added, taking a step forward to find his eyes wide and wild.

“I’m not Simon, I’m Michael Tucker!” he bellowed, spittle flying from his mouth. “I’m Michael! Me! No one else!”

I leaped forward, closing the distance between us as I wrapped my hand around his throat and squeezed.

“You’re not Michael Tucker. You are *not* my half-brother.” Keeping one hand around his throat, I pulled out a piece of paper from my back pocket. The DNA results showing he was not related to me or my father. “You killed my real brother, and claimed his identity, you fucked up crazy piece of shit.”

His eyes raked over the paper, reading the information. When a smirk tugged at his lips, I couldn’t stop myself from wanting to avenge a brother I didn’t even know I had. I threw my fist into Thorne’s face as hard as I could. The resounding *pop* that followed indicated I had successfully broken his nose, and as I stepped away, blood poured down his face.

And then the fucked up psycho laughed harder.

“I suppose I can’t deny DNA results. You’re right, I’m not Michael. That boy was a pussy. He could have had so much but he was too much of a coward to take what was rightfully his,” he spat with venom in his voice. “When he found out who his father was, he should have listened to me. I would have helped him claim his throne to Hollows Bay, but he was too chicken-shit to go against his family! But I wasn’t, I wasn’t a coward! And look what I’ve achieved! Everyone is under my command!” he laughed maniacally.

A look of pride took over his face but with the blood smeared over his mouth and chin, I’d never seen anyone look

so demented before.

“Not everyone is under your command,” I said, ready to deflate the fucker’s ego. “You think Hendrix is under your control? You couldn’t be more wrong.”

“You lie!” he barked, the grin disappearing from his face again.

I didn’t reply. Instead, I fished in my pocket for my phone and tapped on the recording I made when we’d tortured Alex. As I pressed play I never took my eyes from Thorne, enjoying a moment of beating him at his own twisted game.

“Alright! I’ll tell you, please....stop!” Alex screamed. A memory flashed in my mind of the moment he caved, it was just after I’d dislocated both his shoulders, and his arms hung at awkward angles as tears streamed down his face.

“What’s Hendrix’s plan?”

“He....he wants to rule Hollows Bay,” Alex cried. Even on the recording, I could hear the agony in his voice.

“He’s already got Hollows Bay,” Miles said.

“No. Thorne pulls the strings and Hendrix follows. But Hendrix is going to kill Thorne before he gets the chance to reveal that he is really the one in charge of the city.”

I stared at Thorne as I put my phone away. His face was emotionless as he learned about Hendrix’s betrayal.

“Hurts doesn’t it,” I said, keeping my tone neutral. “When someone you thought you can depend on turns out to be a

traitorous cunt.”

For the first time in his pathetic life, Max Thorne had nothing to say.

“Face it, Simon, you’ve lost,” Miles said, stepping forward to stand by my side. “By the time the sun sets tonight, everyone will know you are nothing but a pathetic con artist.”

Thorne met our eyes, and in a second his dark orbs filled with malice.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said, grinning. “You can’t deny what I’ve done, the effort I put into fooling everyone. And they all fell for it, even the great Kai Wolfe fell for my trick! It took me twenty years to do it, but look! You were knocked off your throne, and I claimed it!” He threw his head back and let out a chilling laugh. “All the people of Hollows Bay will remember me for my greatness, I may be a con artist, but I’ll be legendary!”

Honestly, the ego on this cunt was unreal.

“Believe that all you like, but I assure you, when I reclaim *my* city, your name will be banned on every mouth in Hollows Bay. Any document that has your name on will be destroyed, and you will be forgotten about. And as for your rotting body, you will be here, in the middle of this forest, and the only two people who will know where you are buried will be me and my cousin, and I fucking assure you, we will *never* give you another thought.”

But my words fell on deaf ears. Thorne threw his head back again, looking up at the sky growing lighter as the sun rose, and laughed, a chilling sound that left goosebumps on my skin.

“He’s out of his fucking head, Kai. We need to end this,” Miles said, taking a step toward Thorne.

The movement got Thorne’s attention and he stopped laughing, his frenzied eyes meeting both Miles and me.

“Before you kill me, there are some things you might want to know,” he said, grinning.

I should have told him to take his secrets to the grave, but curiosity killed the damn cat. “Go on.”

He smiled, and my heart dropped, knowing I’d just walked into his trap.

“Firstly, you ought to know all the things Hendrix has planned for your girl,” he said, menacingly. “And he will get her, Kai. He’s nothing if not determined.”

I don’t know if it was fear or rage that kept me rooted to the spot. Either way, I didn’t move from where I stood.

“He’s spent months planning what he is going to do to her. First, he is going to fuck her in every hole until she bleeds. Then he is going to do it all over again, and once she can’t move because he has fucked her so hard, he’ll rape her again. And then-”

I’d heard enough. I wasn’t even aware of my body flying forward until I was in front of him, and my fists were plowing

into his ribs. He grunted as I hit him over and over, but his grunts were broken up by peals of laughter ringing around the forest.

I carried on hitting him, using him as my personal punchbag. Unwanted images of Hendrix touching Riley swam into my head, but instead of pushing them away, I used them to keep the rage burning through my body. Ribs cracked under my fists, blood coated my knuckles, but it still wasn't enough.

Raining down blow after blow, much like I had done in the warehouse before I was shot, Thorne's body started to slump. It was only for the bolt of pain in my side from where I had my spleen removed that I stopped. Taking a step back, my breathing heavy, my hands shaking, I glared at the fucker.

His face was distorted, eyes swollen, lip busted. Bruises were already beginning to form on his body, and yet the cunt was still laughing.

“What the fuck is wrong with him, is he fucking *Superman* or something?” I panted as Miles stepped up next to me.

“A trait of a psychopath, Kai. They have a higher tolerance to pain than most. It's probably why he didn't die when you beat him at the warehouse. We could stand here all day and inflict pain on this cunt, and he'd lap it up,” Miles said, his voice cool compared to the rage pumping through my veins. “It's time to end this fucker once and for all. Let's put him in the ground and be done with the crazy cunt.”

I couldn't have agreed more.

Nodding my head, I took a step back, more than prepared for my cousin to finish the job. I'd had my pound of flesh, now it was time for Miles to find the closure he needed.

Laughing like a hyena despite his appearance, Thorne held his head up to look at us. One eye was swollen shut, his lips were fat and bloodied, and when he opened his mouth to speak, his teeth were smeared in blood.

“One more thing,” he wheezed. Miles paused as he pulled out a second knife from its sheaf. “Before you kill me....you should know....I didn't kill Theo,” he burst out laughing again as both Miles and I froze. “I gave the order, but your buddy, Hendrix, he was the one who slit Theo's throat.” More laughter followed as he looked me dead in the eye. “All those months you were looking for Theo's murderer, and he was living under the same roof as you!”

A roar erupted from Miles as I remained frozen to the spot. Miles slashed one hand through the air, his blade ripping open Thorne's stomach, and his guts instantly falling out. With the other knife, he plunged it straight into Thorne's throat, silencing the menacing laugh that rang out into the trees around us.

Pulling his knife out of Thorne's throat, blood poured from the gaping wound. The two of us stood silently as we watched the life drain from his body, and he took his last shuddering breath.

It's funny. For most kills, I normally found a sense of satisfaction in ending someone's life. But watching Thorne

die, I didn't feel an ounce of satisfaction.

I didn't feel anything at all but the rage pumping through my body.

Chapter 25

Riley

From the minute Kai left, I paced around the house to the point where I practically wore a hole in the carpet. Ash insisted I went to bed to get some rest, I insisted I wouldn't sleep until I knew Kai was okay. Miles too, for that matter. As much as I was pissed at him, I loved Miles like he was my own flesh and blood, and I didn't want anything to happen to him.

To either of them.

My mind ran wild with thoughts of things going wrong. That Max wouldn't fall for the ruse, that The Stags would outnumber Kai and the team. Memories of Kai being covered in blood were at the forefront of my mind until Ash got the call confirming Max was secured, and The Stags guarding the house had been killed.

It did nothing to calm the worry brewing in me.

Max had always been a step ahead, outsmarted us at every turn. A little voice in the back of my head told me it wouldn't be as easy as just strolling into Max's house and grabbing him. Until Kai and Miles were home and confirmed Max was dead, I wouldn't let myself believe it really was that easy.

Hours passed. At some point, half of the Apollo team returned home, regaling tales about The Stags they'd killed, and how stupid Thorne was for falling for the scam, but with no sign of Kai, I couldn't breathe easy.

Despite Ash being exhausted from flying us home, he stayed awake with me. We barely spoke, but I appreciated his silent company more than he would ever know.

When the sun began to rise, I sat out on the porch, watching the sky turn from a dark blue to a dusky pink, and then into a bright orange morning. My eyelids grew heavier with every passing minute, but I refused to close them.

I knew it could be hours before Kai returned home. In fact, Ash had said it might even be a couple of days, depending on how long they wanted to draw out torturing Max. But still, no matter how tired I became, I refused to give in to sleep, knowing that as soon as I did, my dreams would be filled with nightmares of Kai dying.

After my fourth cup of coffee, the sound of tires approaching had me throwing the blanket Ash brought me in the middle of the night off my shoulders, and I was on my feet, holding my breath until the van came into view.

When it stopped, and the side door opened, air wooshed out of my lungs, and my blood turned to ice as Miles got out first, followed by Kai. The two of them were covered in dirt and blood, and even though they looked uninjured, fear gripped my chest that it was their blood they were caked in.

It didn't occur to me not to approach either Wolfe as they started walking towards the house, Jack and Tank following in their wake with solemn looks on their faces. I started to run toward them, desperate to check Kai was okay, but Ash grabbed my arm and stopped me from going anywhere.

"What the hell, Ash?" I hissed, looking from where he held me to his face, surprised to find his eyes were full of caution.

"Give him a minute, Riley. He looks murderous."

My head twisted to where Kai was almost at the porch. Ash was right, his face was twisted into a scowl, and he looked like he was ready to snap the neck of anyone who got too close.

But this was Kai.

He was my husband.

He wouldn't hurt me.

Right?

"Kai," I said, shrugging out of Ash's grasp. His dark eyes snapped up to meet mine, and I couldn't help but recoil at the murderous intent reflecting back at me.

"Not now, Riley," he growled, and with that, he stormed past me, disappearing into the house. A pang of hurt shot through

my body as Miles followed silently behind, refusing to meet anyone's eyes as he passed me and Ash, and the others who had come to gather on the porch at their return.

“What happened?” I asked quietly as Jack stepped onto the porch. Contrary to Kai and Miles, he didn't have a speck of blood or dirt on him. “Is Thorne dead?”

“Yeah,” Jack replied gruffly. “He won't be causing any more problems.”

“Then what's wrong with those two?” I said, wondering what the fuck could have happened to make the two of them as pissed off as they seemed. I didn't understand it, they'd achieved what they set out to do. Max was dead, surely they should be jumping for joy.

“Before they killed him, he made an admission,” Tank said, joining his team on the porch.

“What?”

“It was Hendrix who killed Theo. The whole damn time Kai was searching for the murderer, he was living under the same roof.”

My jaw dropped open.

Holy shit.

We'd always assumed it was Max who had wielded the knife that ended Theo's life. He'd made it seem like *he* was the one who had killed Theo, no one else.

“Was he telling the truth?” Ash asked as I stared blankly at Tank.

“From what Kai said, I’d say he was being truthful. Apparently he was laughing like a madman as he bragged about it,” Jack said, and then in a lower voice, he added, “Fucking psychopath.”

“Fucking hell,” I muttered, turning to look through the door where Kai had disappeared through, a trail of mud following in his wake. “No wonder he’s pissed.”

“Yeah. If I were you, I’d give them both some time to calm down,” Jack replied.

I stared helplessly at the trail of mud, not paying much attention to the guys as they exchanged stories of what happened at Thorne’s house, or Jack ordering them to the war room to debrief. My mind raced and my heart hurt for Kai.

It pissed me off to know Hendrix had been waltzing around without a care in the world knowing he’d killed Theo all along, so I could only begin to imagine how Kai was feeling.

Without conscious thought, my feet started following the trail of mud. There were two sets of footsteps, and as I reached the top of the stairs, one set went towards Miles’ room, and one set went towards mine. For a moment, I wished I could split myself in half so I could check on both my Wolves. Miles would be hurting as much as Kai, if not more, and he had no one.

But when the sound of glass smashing echoed along the hallway from the direction of my room, my heart made its decision. Creeping along the hallway, I tentatively pushed the door to my room open, following the tracks of dirt as they crossed the cream carpet and disappeared behind the closed door to the ensuite.

Bracing myself for what I was about to find, I opened the door and stepped inside. Kai was leaning over the sink. His arms were rigid as his hands gripped the bowl, and fresh blood trickled from one knuckle, the mirror above the sink cracked from where he'd evidently punched it.

At hearing the door close behind me, Kai's head whipped up, his eyes meeting mine in the shattered mirror. It took all of my strength not to flinch at the hate reflecting in his beautiful eyes.

“Kai-”

“Leave me alone, Riley. I need to be left alone right now,” he growled, his voice low and deadly, a tone I'd heard many times. The pang of hurt I felt outside hit me again, only this time harder. I hated that he was hurting, but I hated that he was closing down on me even more.

Swallowing down the fear creeping up my throat and reminding myself that Kai would not hurt me, I stepped forward. His lips contorted into a snarl, but he didn't move.

“Don't push me away, Kai,” I whispered.

His eyes closed, but when they opened they were full of determination to get me the fuck away from him. “Riley, I won’t ask you again.”

“And I won’t tell you again. I’m not going anywhere.” I held firm, refusing to leave Kai when I knew he needed me the most. He squeezed his eyes closed again, his shoulders heaving as he took calming breaths.

Taking the opportunity while he wasn’t looking, I reached past him and turned on the shower. The noise of the running water made him open his eyes and meet mine in the mirror again. I held his gaze as I lifted my shirt over my head.

He swallowed as his eyes dropped to my bra-clad tits, and softened fractionally.

“Don’t push me away, Kai. I know you are hurting, so let me be there for you.” I undid my bra and tossed it on the floor, never taking my eyes from where they met his in the mirror.

Slowly he straightened his back and turned to face me. He didn’t speak, but that was fine, I didn’t need him to say anything. He didn’t need to speak for me to know how much he was hurting. Reaching out, I grabbed the hem of his dirty shirt, and careful to avoid his bleeding hand, I pulled it over his head. To my surprise, Kai didn’t stop me.

His torso was covered in dirt, blood, and sweat, the colors of his new tattoo dulled by the mess. With shaky fingers, I undid the button on his jeans and lowered the zipper before pulling both his jeans and boxer briefs down. As Kai kicked them off,

I lowered my own pants and panties, and then taking his uninjured hand, I pulled him into the shower.

As soon as he was under the hot stream, the water turned from clear to dirty as the grime washed off Kai's body. He watched me like a hawk, his jaw clenched, and his body stiff with tension. In the time I'd known Kai, I'd never known him to be as rigid as he was right then.

Grabbing my sponge and body wash, I lathered up the sponge and started running it over Kai's chest. He still didn't speak, just watched my every move intently as I brushed the sponge gently over his new tattoo.

Gradually, the vibrant silver of the star and wolf shone through, and when that area was clean of dirt and blood, I leaned forward and placed a little kiss right along the scar line. His breath was ragged, but I felt the slightest bit of relief as some of the tension drained from Kai's body.

Ignoring his thickening cock, I moved on to the next area, wiping the grime from the rest of Kai's chest and over his shoulders, before moving on to his arms, taking my time to clean every speck of dirt and blood from his skin.

When I reached his injured hand, I dabbed the sponge over the cuts. I hated the way his skin was torn over the knuckles, but with the bruises already forming, I didn't think the damage had been caused just from punching the glass. I imagined these knuckles had caused some damage to the now-deceased Chief of Police.

Smiling at the thought of the damage these powerful hands could cause, I placed another kiss over each gash once they were clean, and again, relief flooded me when more tension eased from Kai's body.

His breathing quickened as I lowered myself to my knees, but he didn't move a muscle. Didn't try to grab my head and guide me to suck his cock like I thought he might, he just stood, watching.

Waiting.

Ignoring his now fully erect length, I carried on wiping the sponge down both legs, stopping every so often to add more body wash to the sponge, and watching the blood of the man who tried to hurt us swirl away down the drain.

When the front of him was clean, I stood. His heated eyes gazed down at me, and instead of the murderous intent that was in his dark orbs before, they now shone with something else, the gold flecks brighter than the sun.

Pouring soap into my hand, I reached up and used my palm to wash his face, delicately swiping over every inch to make sure I got all the dirt. Cupping his cheek, Kai nuzzled into my hand for a moment as he closed his eyes, relishing in my touch.

When his face was lathered in soap, he moved his head back to wash the soap off, and when he pulled back out of the stream, I was met with the face of my husband instead of the angry wolf.

“Turn around,” I whispered.

Doing as he was told for once in his damn life, Kai turned, giving me his back. I started the process again, stroking the sponge over his defined muscles and impressive wolf tattoo, the emerald green eye of the snarling beast watching me as I cleaned the dirt and blood away.

When Kai’s back was clean, I placed a delicate kiss on the nose of the wolf, and as I stepped back, Kai turned around to face me once again.

For a minute, neither of us moved. He stared down at me with an unreadable expression on his face. The tension had ebbed from his body, but the longer he stared, the more I worried I’d made a mistake in making him let me clean the blood off him. But then, his hands reached out, and he grabbed my hips, taking a step forward to lean down and rest his forehead against mine.

“I don’t know what the fuck I’d do without you, Star,” he whispered, his hot breath caressing my lips.

“And you’ll never have to find out. It’s me and you for eternity, right?” I whispered back, lifting my hand to rest it over his heart, over the tattoo of us. “I love you, Kai. With all of my heart, I love you.”

It was the first time I’d said those words aloud since he’d reappeared, seemingly risen from the dead, but as they tumbled from my mouth, I knew how true those words were. Even when I was blinded with rage at his deceit, I still loved him.

How could I not?

He owned me. He owned every single part of me. But I owned him too, I owned his heart, and I was more than happy to spend my life guarding his precious heart until death parted us, and beyond.

Kai took me by surprise when he moved his mouth over mine, pressing a soft kiss to my lips. But a single, delicate kiss was never enough for either of us. His mouth pressed harder against mine, and he moved closer, his hard length pressing against my belly.

As a moan escaped me, Kai's tongue plunged into my mouth and stroked against mine. My core clenched with the need to be filled by him, and only him. As if reading my thoughts, Kai's hands slid to my thighs, and with ease, he lifted me into his arms. My legs wrapped around his waist as he pushed me back against the wet tiles, and shifting his hips, Kai lined his cock up with my entrance.

With one quick thrust, he was inside me.

"I fucking love you, Riley," Kai said, as he pulled almost all the way out of me, only to thrust back in. "You're my world. My fucking sun, my moon, my goddamn everything."

Tears pricked my eyes hearing his words. I'd never get enough of Kai's beautiful words. I loved his filthy mouth, I loved it when he was rough with me, but I loved this just as much, when he made love to me.

“Kai,” I whispered, before meeting his mouth again to stop the tears from falling.

He kissed me deeply as he began thrusting. My hips rolled in his hands, meeting his thrust for thrust. I wrapped my arms around his neck as he pulled away from my mouth and nuzzled into the crook of my shoulder. He stayed right there as he continued to pound into me, building me higher and higher. The familiar feeling of needing to find my release grew as Kai’s cock swelled inside me.

“Oh, shit!” I cried, digging my nails into his thick neck as my orgasm crashed into me without warning. He pumped a few more times, and as his teeth bit into the skin on my neck, leaving his mark as only Kai ever would, he came on a roar deep inside me.

We stayed like that for several minutes, him buried in my pussy, me clinging to him like I was a monkey in a tree as we regained our breaths.

“You know what I thought about when I was lying in the damn hospital bed after getting shot?” Kai said, finally pulling out of me, and helping me to stand. A loving smile was on his face, and all the tension had evaporated from his body.

“Oh, I don’t know. I wonder what else I can get Riley to believe with my cunningness?” I said, letting him hear the humor in my voice.

He grabbed my hips and pulled me to him again. “No smartass. I was thinking that when all this shit is over, I want to take my wife on a honeymoon.”

“Yeah?” I said, my voice going up an octave in surprise.

“Yeah. Somewhere warm where I get to watch you parade in a bikini all day and fuck you whenever I damn well please,” he placed a kiss on my nose, one of his favorite things to do when I was in his arms.

“I like the sound of that. So long as I get to see you parade around in a thong.”

He threw his head back and let out one of his rare genuine laughs, a sound that warmed me to my bones.

“I’m not sure about that. How about we both agree to go without any swimsuits?” His eyes darkened as his cock twitched against my belly.

“I think you have a deal.”

His mouth crashed down on mine, and as he took me again against the wall, this time from behind, he whispered in my ear all the things he would do to me while we were away on our honeymoon.

I couldn’t fucking wait.

Chapter 26

Riley

Two days later, I found myself in the car with a rather pissed off Miles heading to Forest Point. He was pissed off for two reasons. The first being it had taken him the best part of two days to hack into the computers that were taken from Max's house after he was killed. Having finally succeeded about an hour ago, he begrudgingly handed his work over to Ash, who unsurprisingly knew his way around a computer.

Which led to the second reason Miles was pissed. It was Sofia's birthday, and he'd been ordered by Mr. Bianchi to attend their house for her birthday dinner, thus dragging me along with him. Not that I minded, I was looking forward to seeing Sofia and Rafe, I happened to like the Bianchi twins, even if the timing was a bit shitty.

Kai, on the other hand, was not so happy with me going. Especially as Mr. Bianchi barred him from coming along on

the basis that there would be associates in attendance who would know who Kai was, and it wouldn't look so good if the man everyone thought was dead was sitting at the dinner table.

He let me go with a stern warning though- if Rafe dared to even look at me the wrong way, Kai would have no issues with plucking Rafe's eyeballs out. I think he was still a little sore that Rafe had pulled a gun on him all those days ago.

I gave Kai a reassuring kiss and told him he had nothing to worry about, before Miles and I headed off.

I hadn't had a chance to talk to Miles after Kai told me what happened in the weeks after he was shot. As much as Kai had been the one to agree to the ruse continuing, it had been Miles' idea in the first place, along with the bullshit about me having to break and coming back stronger. Something I was still a little bitter about. But being stuck in the car with him would give us the opportunity to clear the air.

For the first part of the journey, we chewed the fat over what had happened since he and Kai killed Max. The FBI had indeed issued an arrest warrant and had stormed Hollows Bay HQ looking for Max, only to be told he hadn't turned up for work. They went to his home, and lo and behold, he wasn't there, and so he was now deemed a wanted man. Funnily enough, they weren't putting a whole heap of effort into looking for him.

As soon as Graham Shaw got wind Max was 'on the run,' he blew up my phone demanding to know what was going on,

and as soon as I told him Max had been dealt with, he demanded to be made chief.

Patience was a virtue, but that man had none. He refused to wait, claiming he'd waited long enough. No matter how much I tried to tell him he had to wait a little longer, the man wouldn't listen. Cue a late night visit from Kai warning Graham to watch how he spoke to his wife, and that Kai would tell him when he would be made chief.

Kai had returned back to the house, laughing his ass off at how he scared the living shit out of Graham with his ghostly appearance.

Ernie, who had been working damn hard behind the scenes, had taken a step closer to joining Hendrix's inner circle. He wasn't quite at Hendrix's side yet, but he'd impressed Carlos and Markus enough to be clued in on a lot more of what was going on. As a result, we had regular intelligence coming in that would help us take the next steps in our plan.

We were putting a lot of faith into Ernie, something which took a lot seeing as we'd all had our hand bitten once before, but Miles and Kai were confident we could trust him, and figuring they knew best, I put my worries to one side.

From the intel Ernie passed to Miles, we knew Hendrix wasn't a happy bunny at learning the depth of Max's deception. In fact, that was putting it lightly. He was downright *murderous*.

You'd think he would be jumping for joy with Max out of the way, after all, he intended to bump him off at some point,

but it seemed Hendrix was not impressed at learning Max had been stringing him along.

What a shame.

My biggest concern though was that Kimmy would be the one to feel Hendrix's wrath, but until Miles had figured out a way to disable the security system, our hands were tied. But now he had managed to get into the computer, with any luck, by the time we returned from the dinner party, Ash would have figured out the rest.

Then we could start formalizing a plan to get Kimmy the heck out of the hell she'd been living, and deal with Hendrix once and for all.

As Miles drove us across the border into Forest Point, an awkward silence descended on us. I stared out the window, knowing now would be a perfect time to clear the air with Miles, but before I had a chance to say anything, Miles beat me to it.

"Things seem good with you and Kai," he said, not taking his eyes off the road.

"Yeah. We're getting there," I replied. He nodded his head, but when he didn't say anything else, I bit the bullet. "Kai told me what happened on the night he was shot, and what happened in the following weeks."

I paused, and Miles finally pulled his eyes away to meet mine, a grimace pulling onto his face as if he was waiting for me to go postal on his ass. A small spike of anger flooded me,

but memories of how worried I was for both him and Kai when they were off murdering Max sprung to life. I took a deep breath and swallowed the anger down.

“Miles, I can’t pretend I’m not pissed off about it, and honestly, it’s gonna take some time for me to move on, but I get it. At least, I get why you told me he’d died to get me out of Hollows Bay. I know you did it to protect me. As for continuing with the lie when Kai woke up? I’m not sure I’ll ever understand that line of thinking, but,” my voice wobbled as a ball of emotion started creeping up my throat like it did anytime when I thought about the days, weeks, and months I spent thinking Kai was dead. “I don’t want to be angry about it anymore.”

I turned to look at him, holding his eye. “Miles, we’re family. Sometimes family does fucked up shit with good intentions, and deep down, I know you and Kai had good intentions. You wanted me to learn to survive even the toughest storm.”

Silence descended once again, and just when I thought Miles wasn’t going to respond, he reached out and grabbed my hand, holding it tenderly in his.

“I hated seeing your pain, Riley. Every day I wanted to tell you, but every day you got stronger, every day you became more and more determined to take back the city. Even if you were in denial about taking the lead,” he paused with a smile on his face, and I snorted because there was still some part of me that was in denial even now. Miles turned serious again,

giving my hand a squeeze. “You were the only woman to tame Kai Wolfe, Riley, and that means you are the only woman fit to rule at his side. You just had to learn that for yourself. You had to know you could survive with or without him.”

Miles’ words settled deep in my bones, and a feeling of pride washed over me. Both Miles and Kai believed in me. No matter where I had come from, the fact that I was just a runaway pole dancer without a pot to piss in when Kai and I first met. The two of them believed I was so much more than that. So yeah, I couldn’t help but bask in the warmth of their trust in me.

“So,” Miles said, his lip curling into a mischievous smile on one side. “Am I forgiven?”

I gave him an exaggerated sigh. “I suppose so.”

“Thank god, ‘cos quite frankly, I can only deal with one moody woman in my life, and I have a feeling I’m gonna have my hands full with this one,” Miles replied, taking a turn that would lead us to the Bianchi mansion.

“Why do you hate her so much, she’s actually really nice when you get to know her,” I said, leaping to Sofia’s defense.

“She’s a brat,” Miles replied, his mood souring.

“You keep saying that, but I don’t see it,” I folded my arms across my chest and glared at him.

He sighed. “She’s a typical spoiled Mafia princess, Riley. Doesn’t want for anything, and thinks everyone is at her beck and call. She’s not my type.”

“Gorgeous and sassy aren’t your type?” I said, cynicism dripping from my tone because I’d seen the girls who worked at Sapphire who Miles used to regularly fuck. They were stunning, but they weren’t a patch on Sofia.

“No. Kai might like his women to give him shit, but I don’t. I like mine meek and mild. I like them doing as they are told,” Miles replied, pulling the car to a stop as a Bianchi guard approached us.

My eyes narrowed on him. “Woman. Singular.”

“What?” he asked in confusion.

“You said Kai liked his *women* to give him shit. There’s only one woman, dickhead.”

Miles smirked at me. “*Woman*. Can we drop it now?”

“Sure, *Milo*.” I grinned when the smirk on his lips turned into a scowl.

As we got out so the guards could go through the routine search of us and the car, I couldn’t help but smile as the conversation replayed in my head. For the first time since finding out Kai was alive, it felt like Miles and I were back to how we were before.

It felt like I had my brother back.

Satisfied we weren’t going to try and blow up the Bianchi mansion, Miles drove us the rest of the way to the house. Although it had only been a week since I was last here, so much had happened during that time I’d forgotten how beautiful the place was.

Miles stopped the car in the courtyard, and as we stepped out, Rafe and the Bianchi 2IC, Antonio, walked down the steps to meet us. The two men were a complete juxtaposition of one another. Rafe had a beaming smile on his face, happy to see us, whereas Antonio scowled, looking like we were his arch-nemesis.

“Riley, it’s good to see you,” Rafe said, and before I had a chance to protest, he threw his arms around me and pulled me in for a hug.

“Oh, good to see you too,” I replied, tentatively putting my arm around his shoulder and ignoring the way Miles was smirking at me. The fucker would tell Kai another man put his hands on me, no doubt in revenge for me calling him Milo.

“Mr. Wolfe,” Antonio said, his voice stern. “Mr. Bianchi would like to discuss arrangements for the engagement party before dinner. Perhaps you could follow me.”

He didn’t give Miles a chance to respond before he turned and walked away, leaving Miles glaring at his retreating figure.

“Guess I’ll see you at dinner, Riley. Stay out of trouble,” Miles grumbled, before following in Antonio’s wake.

“Come,” Rafe said, taking my hand and leading me to the side of the house. “I’ll make sure your dinner outfits are taken up to the guest rooms so you can change later. Sofia’s looking forward to seeing you, she likes you, and my sister doesn’t have a lot of friends.”

I smiled at the fondness in his voice. It was clear as the nose on my face that Rafe loved his sister, and as for her not having many friends, the same was true of me. At least if the poor girl was going to be forced to marry Miles, she'd have a friend in her cousin-in-law, or whatever the hell relation we'd be once they were married.

“She was worried about you after you disappeared at the party last week,” Rafe continued. “But our father told us Kai had come for you.” There was an unmistakable hint of venom in his tone, and he practically spat Kai's name.

“Yeah,” I replied, feeling guilty that I had disappeared and not given Sofia a second thought.

“You've forgiven him then?”

My feet faltered at the bitterness in Rafe's voice. I stopped walking and pulled my hand from his, causing him to stop and turn back to face me.

“It's been a rough week, but yeah, we're working things out.”

His brows pulled into a frown. “After what he did?”

“Rafe, he's my husband, and I love him. I know what he did was-”

“He hurt you, Riley,” Rafe interrupted, and I couldn't help but be taken aback by the way this conversation was going. I thought Rafe might have liked me, but I'd made it clear I wasn't interested, even before I knew Kai was still alive.

“With all due respect, Rafe, it’s mine and Kai’s business. Kai had his reasons for doing what he did. Yes, he hurt me, but that doesn’t change the way I feel about him. That man is my life.” I trailed off as hurt seeped into Rafe’s hazel eyes.

After a short pause, Rafe gave me a sad smile, seemingly coming to a realization. “No one stood a chance against him, did they?”

“No. He had my heart from the minute I met him,” I replied softly.

There was another pause, and part of me wanted to reach out and take Rafe’s hand, but I didn’t want to give him false hope. After a minute, he shook his head and took my hand again before leading me around the side of the house.

“I’m happy for you, Riley. I really am,” he said, giving me a genuine smile.

“Thanks.”

As we walked around the side of the house, the grounds opened up revealing a beautiful, huge garden. Every hedge was neatly trimmed, the bright green lawn had stripes mown into it, and flowers in every vibrant color were in bloom.

“Wow, this place is impressive,” I said, taking in the stunning grounds.

“Yeah, my mother always loved her gardens, and father makes sure they are maintained all year round in her honor,” Rafe said sadly.

I squeezed his hand, knowing how hard it was to lose a parent. “That’s sweet of your dad.”

“Yeah. He’s an asshole most of the time, but he loved our mother.” Rafe paused, and for a minute, we stood, looking out at the grounds.

Clearing his throat, Rafe dropped my hand. “I’ve got some stuff to take care of. Sofia’s waiting at the fountain, follow that path, and it’ll take you to her.” He pointed to a stone path that led through the garden and disappeared between two thick hedges. “Catch you later, Riley.”

I watched him disappear the way we’d just come before heading down the path he’d pointed out, enjoying a moment of peace. The sun was warm on my face, and the fragrant flowers that lined the path surrounded me. Even with all its over-the-top grandeur, the Bianchi mansion was a beautiful place to live.

As I neared the hedges, arguing voices loomed in the distance. I was too far away to make out what they were saying, but one was definitely male, and the other was undeniably Sofia. Upping my pace as the argument became more heated, I briefly wondered if I should go back to get Rafe, but when Sofia screamed in pain, I broke into a run.

Bursting through the hedges, I paused for a split second to take in the scene. A man, no older than mid-twenties, and dressed in the Bianchi guards uniform had Sofia by the throat, his snarling face inches away from hers as her delicate fingers

desperately tried to rip his hand away. Tears streamed down her beautiful face as she struggled for breath.

“You’re a little cock-tease!” the man spat in Sofia’s face, evidently not hearing my entrance.

I didn’t hesitate. I sprinted to where they were and grabbing his arm, I dug my nails into his exposed skin, drawing blood. I’d caught him off-guard, and in the second he was distracted, I ripped his hand off Sofia’s throat and shoved him back before standing in front of her.

What I thought I could do to protect her, I didn’t know. Now I was in front of the dickhead, I realized just what a unit he was, but there was no way I was going to stand back and let him put his hands on Sofia.

Sofia stumbled backward, and behind me, I heard her gasp for air.

“You must be the Wolfe bitch,” the man hissed at me, spittle flying from his mouth, his eyes wide with fury.

I held back the shock that he knew who I was. “Yeah, I am. And if you know who I am, then you should know you’re in a ton of shit for hurting my friend,” I replied, holding my nerve.

“Oh yeah, what are you going to do about it?” he taunted, smirking at me as he looked me up and down.

I took a step closer, not giving a shit he had a gun and I didn’t. I’d faced bigger assholes than this dickhead and lived to tell the tale.

“I’m not going to do anything about it. But her fiancè,” I nodded to Sofia who was now quietly crying behind me, “he won’t like knowing that some cunt hurt his fiancée, and I’ve seen what damage he can do when he’s angry. Tell me, do you like your intestines inside your body?” Using the same deadly tone Kai used when he told his enemies they were about to die, I held the fucker’s eye, letting him know how serious I was.

His face paled as he stared at me, before taking a step back and looking over my shoulder to Sofia.

“You’re going to regret this,” he said after a beat, although I wasn’t sure if he was talking to me or Sofia. It didn’t matter, as soon as Miles, Georgio, or Rafe got wind a guard had hurt Sofia, he was a dead man.

Giving us one last menacing glare, the asshole spun and stormed away. As soon as he disappeared through the hedges, I let out a sigh of relief. Miles may have taught me how to look after myself, but it didn’t mean I was happy to pick fights.

Turning in time to find Sofia’s knees about to give out, I helped her over to a stone bench and sat down next to her.

“Are you okay?” I asked, moving some of her long, brown hair to one side to find red fingerprint marks on her throat.

“I’m okay,” she replied tearfully.

“Who was that?”

Despite her cheeks already flushed from her tears, they turned a deeper shade of red, and she couldn’t meet my eye.

“Owen. He...we...we were kinda dating.”

Oh fuck.

I stared at her until she lifted her head, her gorgeous blue eyes filled with tears. “It wasn’t serious. At least, not on my part. We were just having some fun, but he wanted to take it further. He wanted to tell my father.”

“I can’t imagine that would go down well?”

“Of course it wouldn’t, he’s hellbent on me marrying Milo,” she sniffed as a tear slid down her rosy cheek.

A pang of guilt filled me. While the whole marriage deal hadn’t been my idea, the reason it came about in the first place was because I made the stupid decision to make a deal with the Bianchis in the first place.

“I don’t blame you,” Sofia said quickly, sensing my turmoil.

“Do you think there is any way your dad would change his mind?” I asked, but I knew what the answer would be before she even opened her mouth.

“No. I don’t know why, but he needs the alliance to happen,” she replied glumly. Despite her being upset, I couldn’t help but be intrigued by her answer.

Why did Georgio need the alliance to happen?

Pushing that to one side for the time being, I took her hand. “Does Owen know about the marriage?”

“He knows about the marriage, but I didn’t tell him anything about why the deal was made. I just told him it was an

arranged marriage. He knows arranged marriages are a tradition in the Italian Mafia. I tried breaking it off with him the minute my father agreed to the deal, but he wouldn't take no for an answer. He knew you guys were coming here today, and he was threatening to tell Milo we'd been fucking so Milo knew he wasn't marrying a virgin. But...that's a lie. We haven't fucked, I'm...I'm still a virgin." More tears slid down her blushing cheeks as I scooped closer to her on the bench and put my arm around her.

"Surely, your dad would believe you over that dickwad though?"

"I doubt it, he never listens to me. Owen thought my father would disown me if the deal fell through and we could be together, but, Riley, I know my father, he wouldn't disown me. He'd punish me." She broke out into sobs, her body shaking as they consumed her. I stroked her hair as she cried her heart out, my mind racing with what to do next.

When her tears slowed down, I pulled her out of my arms and looked at the bruises now starting to show on her throat. "We need to tell Miles before that fuckface spews a bunch of lies. Miles will listen if your dad won't, and there's no way that dickhead should get away with hurting you."

"Milo won't care," Sofia said, pulling out of my arms.

I grabbed her hand again, and her eyes flashed to mine. "Look, I know you and Miles aren't a big fan of each other for whatever reason, but there's one thing I know about Miles, he won't stand for you being hurt," I said, a million percent sure

Miles would be apoplectic if he found out someone had hurt Sofia.

Miles might not like her, but he wouldn't be happy with someone hurting her. And if I was wrong, and Miles didn't give a fuck, Rafe would. He wouldn't stand for his sister being hurt.

She stared back at me, nibbling on her bottom lip in thought. After a pause, she nodded once. "Okay."

Not wanting to give her an opportunity to change her mind, I pulled her to her feet and started walking down the path, not letting go of her hand. She walked behind me quietly, sniffing every so often.

As we reached the house, and I wondered if Miles was still in his meeting with Mr. Bianchi, a loud bang erupted in the distance, followed by shouting. Seconds later, the air was filled with a noise that sent fear through every inch of my body.

Gunshots.

Lots of gunshots.

Someone was attacking the Bianchi mansion.

Chapter 27

Riley

“Sofia! Riley!”

Rafe screamed our names as he ran out of the house, panic written all over his face which eased fractionally when he saw us frozen on the spot. He had a rifle in his arms, and his head whipped from left to right as he ran towards us, looking for any threat.

Gunshots rang out around us, growing louder by the second, and Sofia squeezed my hand, her whimpers had turned from sadness to something else entirely.

She was terrified.

She wasn't the only one.

“What the hell is going on?” I screamed to Rafe as he got closer.

When he reached us, he tugged Sofia into his arms, before pulling back and checking to make sure she wasn't hurt.

“I’m okay, Rafe, just tell us what’s happening,” she said, gripping onto her brother’s arm for dear life.

“We’re under attack,” Rafe replied. His eyes scanned the gardens, as did mine, my heart racing wildly in my chest. “I don’t know who it is but there’s a load of them, they’re all wearing masks. I need to get you both to the panic room.”

He started pulling Sofia along, the other hand holding his gun.

“Rafe, where’s Miles?” I asked, trying to keep up with him while looking around the garden, and expecting the Grim Reaper to appear at any minute. The gunshots were getting louder, only now the air was starting to fill with screams of pain.

“He’s in the house, he’s got access to our weapons, and he’s fighting with us. He told me to get you both to the panic room,” Rafe said, pausing at the doorway to the house to check the room was clear.

When several bursts of gunfire sounded from the front of the house, fear gripped me. Whoever had decided to attack the Bianchi mansion meant business.

A huge part of me wanted to tear away from Rafe and Sofia to find Miles and see for my own eyes that he was okay. Hell, I could have helped to fight back. I wasn’t the best shot with a gun, but I wasn’t bad, some help would be better than nothing, right?

But if Miles had told Rafe to get us to the panic room, he'd only worry about me until he knew I was safe, and he needed to focus on looking after himself.

A gunshot rang out from behind us, sounding like it was damn close, and when I turned to look behind me, it was to find a group of men, all dressed in black, and wearing black balaclavas sprinting towards us.

"Fuck! Let's go," Rafe shouted, seeing the group descending on us. Sofia saw them too, and the shrill cry of terror that left her throat was enough for me to grab her hand and start pulling her along with Rafe. Adrenaline pumped through my veins, and I tried my best to hide my fear, not wanting to spook Sofia more than she already was.

Checking the hallway was clear, Rafe pulled Sofia behind him and took off, keeping his gun raised for any threat.

"Sofia!" A deep voice roared, and seconds later, the dickhead who had his hands wrapped around Sofia's throat moments ago appeared, another guard following in his wake. The two of them had their guns raised. As soon as his eyes landed on Sofia, relief washed over Owen's face.

"Oh, thank god," he sighed, stopping to meet the three of us in the hallway. Rafe's brows furrowed when Owen's hand cupped Sofia's face, but now wasn't the time to discuss his sister's love life.

"I'm taking these two to the panic room, go join the fight," Rafe ordered. His tone was stern, one I'd never heard from

him before, but right then, he wasn't my friend Rafe, he was the future heir to the Bianchi empire.

"Your father sent us to get you, Antonio's been hit, he needs you with him," Owen said, looking from him to Sofia. "Let us take the girls. We'll get them there safely."

"Fuck!" Rafe roared. He stared at Owen and the other guard for a few seconds, before looking to Sofia and then to me. Indecision weighed on him, but when he reached his decision, his angry gaze landed back on Owen. "You get them to the panic room, if anything happens to either of them, I'm holding you responsible."

Owen nodded, and his eyes softened as they landed on Sofia, who, by now, was almost hyperventilating, fear consuming her.

Rafe pulled her into his arms and kissed the top of her head. "I'll come for you when it's safe." Giving me a final look, one that begged me to keep his sister safe, Rafe took off, sprinting back the way we'd just come.

"Let's go," Owen said, grabbing Sofia's hand and pulling her alongside him. The other guard grabbed my arm, but I shook out of his grasp. I didn't need to be manhandled to get my ass to the panic room.

As we made our way through the house, I tried to ignore the roars and screams coming from all around, trying my damned hardest not to worry about Miles. But when we rounded a corner, and the dead body of a Bianchi guard came into view,

the reality of what was happening outside hit like a sledgehammer. My lungs turned to stone.

What if Miles didn't make it out of this?

Upon seeing the dead body, Sofia gasped and stumbled over her own feet, making Owen come to a stop. Tears streaked down her pretty face as she stared at the body.

“Come on, Sofia! Stop fucking around,” Owen yelled angrily. His fingers were wrapped so tightly around her arm that the skin underneath his fingertips was turning a deep shade of red. Sofia would no doubt have bruises there come tomorrow.

“She's scared, you asshole,” I hissed, only for Owen to turn around and glare at me. His eyes were filled with hate. Hate aimed solely at me.

Whatever. I wasn't exactly his biggest fan.

Owen started tugging on Sofia's arm again. “Let's go,” he said, his voice hoarse. He dragged Sofia around the body, heading towards a door at the end of the hallway.

“Wait, Owen. This isn't the way to the panic room,” Sofia said, confusion in her tone.

It took a few seconds for her words to register. If we weren't going to the panic room, where the hell was Owen taking us?

Sofia must have come to the same conclusion, she started pulling against Owen's hold, shouting at him to let her go, but he was too strong. He carried on pulling her by her arm, her

cries of panic growing louder, and a feeling in my gut took root, telling me something wasn't right.

Instinct kicked in. I bolted forward intending to somehow get Owen away from Sofia, but the other guard grabbed me, stopping me from reaching them.

Remembering everything Miles had taught me, I spun around, and without hesitation, I threw my weight behind my punch, hitting the guard square on the nose before kneeing him in the balls. He fell to the ground, squealing in pain, his nose pouring blood.

Spinning back around, I froze at the sight of Owen's gun pressed against Sofia's head, her eyes wide with fear as an anguished sob left her mouth. Behind him, the door opened, spilling sunlight into the hallway, and a masked figure appeared, his gun raised. Dread pooled in my belly at the sight.

We were all about to die.

But the feeling of dread grew when the masked figure lowered his gun.

"Owen, hurry the fuck up, we need to get out of here," the masked figure shouted.

As comprehension dawned, the guard whose nose I'd hopefully broken, grabbed me. "You'll pay for that, you little bitch," he hissed in my ear.

"Don't worry, she'll get what's coming to her when Hendrix gets his hands on her," Owen sneered.

Oh, fuckety fuck.

Owen had sold us out.

A weight as heavy as a lead balloon landed in my stomach.

“Come on, we need to go!” the masked man roared, holding the door open.

Once again, Owen started dragging Sofia, and the dickhead holding me followed. Despite the panic clawing its way up my throat, I didn't resist his pull. How could I? Not with the gun pressed against Sofia's head.

Memories of the time Hendrix dragged me from the panic room sprung to life, and the image of my former maid's head exploding circled in time with the nausea churning my belly.

This was how the night Kai 'died' started. With me coming out of the panic room because I didn't want my friends getting hurt, and now here we were again, like lambs to the slaughter.

I prayed Sofia wouldn't meet the same fate as Jacqueline.

As we reached the door, the masked man held it open to reveal the dying sunset in the distance behind him. The lead balloon in my stomach doubled inside at the realization Owen was taking us outside.

Fuck. That wasn't good.

Owen pushed Sofia through the door, and I heard her terrified gasp. It didn't take long to see why when I was pushed through the door, following in her steps.

A van was waiting, the back doors wide open ready for us to be bundled in, and there were two more armed men wearing balaclavas. They stepped forward, one grabbed Sofia, and one grabbed me, roughly pulling us out of Owen's and the other guard's hands.

"Wait," Owen shouted, trying to grab Sofia back. "She wasn't part of the deal. Hendrix agreed I could keep her if I brought you the Wolfe bitch!"

"He lied," the man who had held the door open said with zero remorse in his tone. The next second, he raised his gun and fired a bullet into Owen's head, his body crumbling to the floor in an instant. The man turned, and in quick succession fired another bullet into the head of the guard who'd dragged me.

"No!" Sofia screamed, more tears streaming down her face. Funnily enough, I didn't feel an ounce of sympathy for Owen, or the other asshole.

"Get them in, and get the fuck out of here, the boss is waiting," the man who'd just shot Owen barked.

The two men holding Sofia and me lifted us off the ground, and within seconds we were thrown in the back of the van, and the doors slammed shut, plunging us into darkness. Moments later, the engine roared to life, and the van started moving.

My heart beat frantically in my chest as the sounds of gunshots echoed around outside. When a couple of bullets hit the side of the van, Sofia squealed. Moving to sit next to her, I

pulled her into my arms and held her. Her whole body trembled as sobs wracked her body.

My own fear had turned to numbness. Numbness with memories of how all familiar this felt. The last time I'd been taken, Kai had come to my rescue and he'd died, or at least, I thought he had. But what if he came to my rescue again and this time, he really did die?

I didn't think my heart could take losing him a second time.

"I'm...I'm so..sorry, Riley," Sofia sobbed, her tears soaking my top.

"Sssh, it's not your fault," I said, stroking a hand down her arm.

"It is!" she cried, pulling out of my grasp. "I...I lied earlier." I could barely make out her features in the dark, but I could see enough to know she'd turned her head away in shame. "I did tell Owen about the deal. I was so angry with my father that I told him everything. About how you refused to marry Rafe because you were married to a dead man, how Milo put himself forward to marry me. And...I told him about Hendrix, about why you were asking for the deal in the first place."

I closed my eyes as disappointment filled me. Not that I blamed her, she had every right to be angry with Mr. Bianchi. If I'd been dating someone and been forced to end it because my dick of a father had given my hand in marriage to someone else, I'd probably have blabbed too.

“He doesn’t know Kai’s alive though. I only found that out after I tried to end it with him. And then we spent that day together, and I started to like you...I didn’t want to betray you. I thought we could be friends,” she added, her voice wavering. “I’m so sorry, Riley, I had no idea Owen would do something like this. I trusted him.”

She burst into tears again, her wails ringing around the confines of the van. I pulled her back into my arms and started stroking her soft skin, whispering words of comfort to her. There was no point being pissed, what was done was done, and the poor girl was beating herself up enough as it was.

As the sound of gunshots died away, the van seemed to pick up speed as we hurtled towards our destination. Sofia sobbed for the rest of the journey, and I was too lost in thoughts about how the hell to get out of this situation to speak.

I knew without a shadow of a doubt that as soon as Kai got wind of what had happened, he’d want to come to my rescue. It wouldn’t matter if Ash had cracked the system or not, and that was if we were being taken to the apartment building in the first place. It wouldn’t matter whether Kai had enough manpower on his side to take down Hendrix and The Stags. It wouldn’t matter if he died again, so long as he got me free. There would be no stopping Kai.

A deep-rooted fear took hold, strong enough to make my body shake.

I couldn’t lose Kai.

Not again.

No. I wasn't going to be a damsel in distress, waiting to be rescued.

This time, I was going to save myself so Kai didn't have to.

How the hell I was going to do that though, I had no fucking clue, but there had to be a way. Taking a deep breath to stop the tears that wanted to fall, I exhaled slowly, reminding myself who I was.

I was a Wolfe.

Kai believed in me.

Miles believed in me.

I just had to believe in myself.

The van started to slow, and outside, bangs sounded before the van came to a stop.

"Riley, what's going to happen?" Sofia asked, her voice hoarse from where she'd been crying so much, but the panic was obvious.

"I don't know," I said, gripping her hand as the doors were flung open, and a bright light filled the van, making me squint.

"Get them out of there," a deep voice bellowed, and a second later two men jumped into the back of the van, aiming straight for where Sofia and I were huddled. From the clothes they were wearing, I knew they weren't the men who had bundled us in the back of the van at the house, and they weren't wearing balaclavas.

Recognition dawned on me as soon as the second man approached me.

Ernie.

He grabbed my arm and yanked me up at the same time the other man pulled Sofia to her feet.

My mind raced.

Had Ernie known about the attack? If he did, why hadn't he warned us it was going to happen?

Had Ernie double-crossed us?

The familiar feeling of betrayal seeped through me, followed by a deep sense of helplessness. Could we fucking trust anyone?

The man who had grabbed Sofia pulled her out of the van, ignoring her cries of protest. Her legs gave way, and she fell to the floor, wailing. My heart broke for the poor girl, she was petrified of what was going to happen to her.

“For fuck sake, get her up!” a male voice boomed.

Suddenly, I felt my t-shirt being tugged up at the side, and a cold metal object pressed against my skin before being tucked into the waistband of my jeans, and my t-shirt pulled back down. My head whipped to the side where I met Ernie's eyes.

“It's the best I can do for now, but I'll come back for you,” Ernie whispered, his voice drowned out by the wails of Sofia.

My eyes widened as a pang of hope shot through me.

“Ernie, get her the fuck out of there,” the same voice yelled. Ernie tugged me forward, and I let him. I didn’t know what Ernie had tucked into my waistband, but the pang of hope I’d first felt when he put it there was spreading like wildfire.

I wasn’t entirely alone.

As Ernie pulled me out of the van, it took a second to recognize where we were, and a memory crept into my head of the time Kai first brought me to his apartment.

He’d opened the trunk of the car and was looming over me, his three friends standing behind him. As I’d sat myself up, I had taken in the underground garage where he kept his flashy cars. The garage was the same now, even some of the cars looked familiar.

Carlos Rigby, the leader of The Stags glared menacingly at me. “So this is the bitch the boss has lost his head over?” he said. His voice was the one who had ordered Ernie and the other man to get us out of the van, it was apparent he was in charge here.

“Looks like any other whore,” a man next to Carlos said. His face I knew too, just like how I knew who Carlos was. The gang leader and his deputy, Markus Powell were on our list of targets to kill before we moved on to Hendrix.

Next to Markus, a man I didn’t know was holding Sofia up, her face was flushed from her tears. She was doing her best to hold in her whimpers, but she looked about ten seconds away from passing out from fear.

“Markus, you and Wayne take the Bianchi bitch to the cell. Put her with the other slut,” Carlos instructed, looking from his deputy to the man holding Sofia.

“Sure thing,” Markus said, eyeing Sofia like she was a prime-cut of steak.

My stomach roiled, and I hoped like mad I would figure a way out of this mess for the both of us before Markus had an opportunity to do anything to Sofia. The way he was looking at her told me that he couldn't wait to get his claws into her.

Markus grabbed Sofia's other arm, and her quiet whimpers turned into screams.

“Come on, Ernie, let's take this whore to the boss.” He looked at me, a devious smile curling on his lips that sent a shiver down my spine. “He's been looking forward to your arrival.”

Holding his eye and refusing to show any fear, I didn't flinch when he grabbed my other arm, and he and Ernie started pulling me toward the elevator.

“No! Please! Let me go!” Sofia's cries echoed through the parking level as she was dragged in another direction.

I didn't know what the hell to do. It would be pointless trying to break free from Ernie and Carlos' iron-clad grasp to help her, even if I thought Ernie was on my side. Carlos was armed, and he wouldn't think twice about killing Ernie and wounding me.

Even if I did get free from him, Ernie and I would have to get past Markus, and the other guy, Wayne, and then find a way out of the apartment building which was locked down tighter than Fort Knox, and no doubt surrounded by more armed men if Hendrix had been planning this attack.

Hating that I was leaving Sofia to fend for herself, I let them pull me to the elevator I'd been in so many times.

If I'd learned anything from Miles and Kai during the time that I knew them, it was that I needed to keep calm, keep my cool, and not act without thinking. Hendrix was always a step ahead, but I needed to be two steps ahead of him.

Besides, the metal pressed against my skin might be my only shot at defending myself against the man who wanted to do all sorts of fucked up shit to me, and I couldn't blow the opportunity by acting without a plan.

The elevator door slid shut with the three of us inside, and I closed my eyes as it began gliding up. Once upon a time, the elevator had taken me to a palace in the sky where my dark prince lived, now it was taking me to the deepest pits of hell.

I knew what my fate would be if I didn't figure out a way to escape Hendrix's clutches.

It didn't bear thinking about.

Unfortunately, it was less than a minute later when my worst nightmare became my reality. The elevator came to a stop and the doors slid open, and as they did, the blood in my veins turned to ice.

Hendrix was waiting in the foyer, his hands on his hips, a scowl on his face which transformed into the biggest, lecherous smile known to man the second he laid his eyes on me.

My feet were glued to the floor, knowing if I stepped outside, danger waited. But I had no choice but to walk when Ernie and Carlos tugged on my arms, forcing my feet to move. Hendrix's blue eyes darkened as I approached, and when I was in front of him, Ernie and Carlos pulled me to a stop.

Hendrix's eyes raked up and down my body, his tongue darting out to swipe over his lips. Without warning, he raised his hand and smacked me hard across the face. My head whipped to the side as pain crashed through me, and the metallic tang of blood filled my mouth.

Fucker had split my lip.

“That was for killing my men,” he hissed. When I refused to look at him, he grabbed my chin, twisting my head so I had no choice but to look at his ugly face. “I see you're still as defiant as ever. Don't worry, princess, I'll soon knock that out of you.”

He leaned forward, and to my disgust, he licked the blood from my bottom lip. “I've waited a long time to get my hands on you, Riley, and I'm going to enjoy hearing every scream I rip from your mouth.”

From next to me, Carlos chuckled.

Asshole.

I bit my cheek to stop the retort from tumbling out, knowing if I antagonized Hendrix, I'd pay the price, and right now I needed to get away from him so I could have time to think about what the hell I was going to do.

When I didn't respond, he chuckled and released my chin. "Put her in her old room, I'll deal with her in a bit once I've had a progress report," he ordered his men before looking at me with a malicious smile spread on his lips. "The last update I had was to say that cunt Miles was riddled with bullet holes."

No.

My heart jumped into my throat.

Miles.

I couldn't lose Miles.

My legs buckled as a sob tore from my throat. If it wasn't for Ernie and Carlos' firm grip on my arms, I would have collapsed into a heap on the floor.

He had to be lying. Miles couldn't be dead.

Hendrix's chilling laughter followed us as Ernie and Carlos pulled me away. Despite trying to hold them in, my cries echoed through the halls of Kai's old penthouse, and with every room we passed, memories fought their way to the surface. Memories of times I'd spent getting to know Miles, laughing with Danny.

Falling in love with Kai.

Before I knew it, we'd arrived at the door that would open up into my old room. Through watery eyes, I watched as Carlos placed his thumb on the pad that was on the outside of the room, and pushed the door open.

My heart sank. Evidently, the security system Hendrix had in place was still in full force. Any hope Ash had managed to disable the system faded as Ernie and Carlos pushed me into the room. Miles was an excellent hacker, he would have figured out how to get past the system eventually, but if Hendrix wasn't lying....

The door slammed closed as Ernie and Carlos left me alone to await my fate. My knees finally buckled, and I slid to the floor, tears streaming down my face as my newly repaired heart cracked down the middle.

Chapter 28

Riley

When the sobs finally stopped, and my teary eyes cleared, I stood on shaky legs to look around my old bedroom, only to find it had been emptied, with the exception of the bed.

The first time I'd been locked in this room, I'd been damn relieved to find it was a bedroom and not Kai Wolfe's sex dungeon. Unfortunately, the same could not be said now.

Tied to the headboard were two leather straps, and at each end were leather cuffs. At the base of the bed, were two more straps, and between them was a long metal pole. My breath caught in my throat. I knew what the pole was.

A spreader bar.

As if seeing what Hendrix had planned for me was the kick up the ass I needed, I took a few deep breaths and wiped the tears from my eyes. Hendrix could have been lying about

Miles, for all I knew he was fine, and busting his balls to get to Hollows Bay. And if he had died in the gunfight, then my tears wouldn't change that. They could come later, but right now, I needed a plan.

Whatever happened, I could not let Hendrix strap me to the bed.

Looking around the room to find anything obvious that might help me escape, my eyes drifted over to the door that opened up into the walk-in wardrobe. Only now, the door had been removed. I walked to the wardrobe wondering if the second door, the one that led to the bathroom, had also been removed, and sure enough, it had.

There was nowhere to hide.

Stupidly, I walked back to the door and put my thumb on the electronic pad, but the angry beep I'd heard before told me my fingerprint was not registered on the system. I pulled the door anyway, not in the least bit surprised when it didn't open.

That's when my eye caught on the new addition to the door. A keyhole just below the handle. Running my finger over the hole, it dawned on me why Hendrix had added another lock to the door. Even if someone was able to override the security system, he could keep me locked in here with just a key.

He really had thought of everything.

Turning around and leaning against the door, my hand went to my waist where the metal object was still pressed tightly against my skin. I was about to pull the object out to see what

Ernie had shoved into the band when my hand stopped, and I dropped it down by my side again.

There were cameras in here.

In fact, there were cameras in most places throughout the penthouse. I'd known about the camera in my room after Miles told me about it when we were in France, but I'd also seen the blueprints for the entire apartment block when Miles and I were in the early stages of planning how we would attack Hendrix.

The cameras had been labeled on the plan, and from memory, I knew the one in my room was above the door that led to the walk-in wardrobe. There was also one inside the wardrobe, but Kai had respected my privacy enough to not install one in the bathroom.

I doubted Hendrix would afford such privacy.

Taking the chance that Hendrix hadn't put any more cameras in the room, I made my way to the side of the bed furthest from where I knew the camera was. I sat down and pulled my knees to my chest, and buried my head in them to make it look like I was crying.

Keeping one hand wrapped around my knees, I dropped the other to my waist, and without lifting my top, I moved my hand over the object hidden in my waistband, running it down the length.

It wasn't big, but cupping my palm over it, I felt the shape of it. It was rectangular and solid, and when my finger brushed

over a small lump on the side of it, I knew in a heartbeat what the object was.

A flick knife.

Aside from teaching me how to shoot, Miles hadn't taught me how to use any other weapons, but how much training did I need to use a knife? Surely it was a simple case of sticking the knife in, and hoping for the best, right?

As much as I'd been present when both Kai and Miles had taken people's lives, I'd never been the one to deliver the fatal blow. It looked like that was about to change, or at least, I was going to do my damn best to end Hendrix's life.

Adrenaline pumped through my veins, and my heart raced like a speeding train as I waited for what would come next. Taking calming breaths, I reminded myself of everything Miles had taught me when teaching me how to defend myself. Don't hesitate. Trust your instincts. Predict what your opponent is going to do next. Use the element of surprise.

I repeated his lessons over and over again, doing my best to slow my pounding heart. There was one thing Hendrix had on his side that I didn't though, and that was his strength. He could easily overpower me, and if he did, I would be in all sorts of trouble. But with the knife tucked securely in my waistband, I had the element of surprise.

I only hoped I didn't fuck it up.

I didn't know how much time went by, my only indication time had passed was the view from my room. The curtains

were open revealing the floor-to-ceiling windows that showcased the city stretched out for miles. It was a view I'd always found breathtaking, but now, I couldn't focus on anything but my impending doom.

When I'd first been thrown in here, the evening was dusk. Now, night had fallen, and the city was lit up with bright lights as far as the eye could see. The sounds of the city reached my ears as people went about their lives, clueless that I was locked up here deliberating on how I was going to save my own ass.

In a way, the hum of the traffic below was soothing. That was until a loud bang had me jumping to my feet, and looking out the window. Below, flashes of light caught my eye, followed by the unmistakable sound of gunshots.

A pang of hope zapped through me.

I was too high up to make out what was going on, the only indication of a gunfight was the flashes of light and echoes of shots. I assumed it was Kai and the Apollo team fighting The Stags, and the pang of hope took root.

Racing over to the door, I pulled it in hopes Ash had figured out a way to override the system, but it didn't open. Again, I put my finger back on the pad, but all I was met with was the angry bleep telling me I didn't have permission. Ignoring the disappointment, I crossed back to the window to see what was going on.

Pressing my palms against the glass, I was so focused on trying to make out what was happening that the lock on the door disengaging took a second to register. Spinning around,

my heart dropped to my stomach as Hendrix closed the door behind him, a devious grin on his lips.

“It seems your men have come for you, Riley,” he said as he reached into his pocket and pulled something out. “I don’t think they’ll cause too many problems for my Stags, there aren’t many of your men, and even if they do get past my Stags stationed outside, they won’t get into the building. Max’s security system is unbreakable.”

I swallowed nervously, my feet rooted to the spot as he put the key he’d just pulled out of his pocket into the lock.

“But, I’ve waited too long to risk anything going wrong, I’m not taking any chances. Tonight, I’ll make you mine, once and for all.” He twisted the key, and the deafening sound of the lock clicking into place echoed around the room. He put the key in his pants pocket, smiling menacingly at me the entire time.

“How do you like your new room? I made some improvements since you were last here, I hope you don’t mind. I know it looks a bit basic, but you really won’t have a need for anything other than the bed. And you certainly won’t have a need for any clothes, I plan on keeping that fuckable body on show at all times.”

His eyes raked over my body, and he licked his lips. Nausea churned in my belly, and my hand twitched with the need to grab the knife from my waistband and jump over the bed so I could plunge it into his eye. But patience was a virtue, and I needed my timing to be right.

“Cat got your tongue, *Star*? You’re awfully quiet. It’s most unlike you.”

Urgh. I hated it when he called me *Star*. That name was reserved for Kai, and Kai alone.

“Yeah, well, my mom always said ‘If you don’t have anything nice to say, then don’t say anything,’” I replied, unable to resist keeping my mouth shut.

His lips quirked. “Ah, there she is. For a minute, I was beginning to think I wouldn’t have anything to beat out of you.”

I refused to let the fear show on my face, My lip was still throbbing from his earlier whack, and dread pooled in my belly, but I let my mind go to the knife tucked in my band, knowing it was there when I needed it.

“So, princess. I hear congratulations are in order. I must say, I was somewhat disappointed not to receive an invite to your wedding,” Hendrix said, a smirk creeping over his lips as he took a step forward.

“Must have got lost in the post,” I replied, watching his every move and trying to predict what he would do next.

He snorted. “Shame. I bet it was a lovely affair. Pity you found yourself widowed so soon.”

“Courtesy of you,” I said, ignoring the smug satisfaction bubbling under my skin at how wrong he was.

“I aim to please.” He took another step forward, closing the distance between us. “I’m impressed you managed to get old

Giorgio Bianchi wrapped around your little finger, I honestly didn't see that one coming. Of course, you have to understand I couldn't let that go without retaliating?"

Fucking Owen. This was all his fault.

I didn't reply, instead just shrugged a shoulder as I took a step to my left, trying to increase the distance from him. The bed was still between us, but the more space I could create the better.

"So tell me, who else have you got working for you? Who are the men out there on a suicide mission to rescue you?" Hendrix said, taking a step forward, almost reaching the bed.

"Just some friends."

"They must be good friends if they're willing to die for you."

"The best," I replied as I cast my eyes down his body looking for weapons. He wasn't holding anything, and there were no obvious bulges under his shirt, so I didn't think he had any weapons strapped to him. There could be one behind his back, but I had a feeling Hendrix believed he wouldn't need a weapon to deal with me. A feeling I was holding on to, and hoping like hell I was right.

"Rumor has it you're under some delusion that you are going to claim the city for yourself," he said, the smirk on his face growing bigger.

"It's no delusion, that's exactly what I'm going to do," I replied, trying to hold onto every shred of confidence I could

find.

He let out a chuckle. “You amuse me, Mrs. Wolfe. I think we will have a lot of fun together.”

His eyes raked over my body again, looking at me like I was his prey. But he was in for a shock, this prey would bite back.

“I hate to break it to you, princess, but you are delusional. Your pitiful army won’t get past my Stags, and if they did, what do you think is going to happen? That you can take the city from me?”

Taking a breath, I mustered every ounce of courage I had in me, knowing the next words that came from my mouth would push us to a point of no return. “That’s exactly what’s going to happen. Hollows Bay is mine, and I won’t be going down without a fight.”

“Is that so?” he replied, rubbing a finger over his lip.

“You bet it is, motherfucker,”

He held my gaze, but I saw the moment something inside him snapped. His eyes darkened, and he bared his teeth as he suddenly leaped forward, bounding across the bed towards me. Even though I knew he would attack, I couldn’t stop the piercing scream from leaving my mouth.

My feet moved as fast as they could in the opposite direction, but Hendrix predicted my move, he quickly turned and jumped off the bed. I wasn’t fast enough to get out of his way, he grabbed my arms roughly and threw me face-first onto the bed.

I scrambled to get away from him, but in an instant, he was on me. He flipped me over so I was on my back, and he crawled over my body to straddle my thighs, trying to pin my hands down. He leaned forward, his snarling mouth inches away from mine, and I didn't hesitate. I snapped my head forward, my forehead smashing into his nose, and catching him off guard.

He sat up. His eyes watered, but I hadn't been able to get enough strength behind my headbutt to do any damage. His nose hadn't broken like I'd hoped to achieve.

"You fucking bitch!" he roared, and I had less than a second to prepare myself for the almighty smack he delivered to my face. He punched my cheek, and my head whipped to the side, my brain rattling in my head from the force.

Disorientated, I tried to lash out, but my eyes couldn't focus. He used my confusion to his advantage, his hands wrapped around my throat, and he started squeezing.

My eyes bulged as my lungs grew tighter, panic bubbling to the surface. He sneered down at me, his eyes wild with rage, but in his focus to choke the life out of me, he didn't notice my hand lowering to my waist.

Knowing I'd only have one shot at this, I fought against the black spots dancing in my eyes, and the tightness in my lungs as my hand reached the knife and wrapped around it. Holding it as firmly as I could, which was damn impossible with the strength seeping out at me with every passing second, my finger pressed down on the button.

The blade sprung from its holder. With as much strength as I could muster, I lifted my hand, and without giving it a second thought, I plunged the knife into Hendrix's side, ramming it as deep as I could into his body.

There was resistance at first, but I kept pushing until the blade wedged in his side, right to the hilt, before I pulled it back out again. Warm blood spilled all over my hands, and the metallic tang of blood hit my nostrils.

Hendrix's booming roar echoed around the room. His hands left my throat as he twisted to see the damage. I sucked in precious air, ignoring his angry curses. I prepared myself to plunge the knife in a second time, but Hendrix saw my hand coming towards him, and he rolled off me before the blade made contact.

Taking the opportunity, I scrambled off the bed. I bounded over to the door, putting space in between us, the knife gripped in my hand. Momentarily forgetting about the damn lock, I tried the handle and pulled the door, but it wouldn't budge. Spinning back around, I found Hendrix was off the bed, his hand holding his side, and blood seeping between his fingers.

I sincerely hoped I'd hit something vital.

"You stupid fucking cunt," he hissed venomously. His rage-filled eyes were wide, his nostrils flaring. "You'll fucking pay for that."

I held the knife by my side, holding on to it like it was my lifeline, but in a way it was. If Hendrix disarmed me, I'd be fucked. My heart thundered in my chest, and adrenaline made

my legs shake, but I held my nerve. He was wounded now, that surely went in my favor.

“Give the knife to me, Riley, and your punishment won’t be as severe,” he growled.

“Get fucked,” I replied, bracing myself for him to launch at me.

Movement from over his shoulder caught my eye, and my brows pulled into a frown when it seemed like the wall was moving.

I wondered if Hendrix had given me a concussion when he hit me because there was no way the wall should be moving. But then, my breath caught in my throat as from behind the wall, a figure stepped out.

A dark knight coming to rescue his queen.

My lips pulled into a relieved smile when a murderous-looking Kai silently stepped into the room. I’d always wondered how he’d managed to sneak into my room during the time I’d been sulking after the incident with Toby. I’d put the chest of drawers across the door to stop him from coming in, yet every morning I’d awoken to his scent filling my room. I’d never figured out how he was getting in, but now I knew.

“What the fuck are you smirking at?” Hendrix said, my eyes snapping back to meet him.

Behind him, Kai gave me a small nod, letting me know it was okay to tell Hendrix he was there.

“My husband,” I replied with smug satisfaction.

Chapter 29

Kai

As soon as Miles stopped the car, I marched over to the passenger side and dragged Rafe out by his collar. “This is your fault, you little fucker! If anything happens to my wife, I’m going to gut you, and feed you your intestines!”

Rafe glowered at me, his fingers trying to tug my hands away from his shirt. The twenty Bianchi guards he’d brought with him had all aimed their guns at me, but I had no fucks to give.

I was a walking volcano about to erupt.

“My sister’s been taken as well, dickhead,” Rafe growled back, feeding my fury. I slammed him against the car, knocking the wind out of his lungs.

“And whose fault is that, huh? You were the cunt who handed Riley and Sofia over to the guard,” I roared.

“I didn’t fucking know he was working for Hendrix!” Rafe bellowed back, his voice echoing into the night sky.

“Kai, let him go. This isn’t going to solve anything,” Miles grumbled.

He looked like he’d been in World War Three with the amount of blood and grime he had on him. But from what he’d said about the attack on the Bianchis, it sounded like World War Three *had* landed in Forest Point.

I let go of Rafe. As much as I wanted to throttle him, we needed all the manpower we could get if we were going to go up against The Stags. I would deal with the cunt later for his incompetence. I stepped back, and slowly the Bianchi guards lowered their weapons.

Taking a breath to calm the fire burning inside me, I checked my watch. It had already been two hours since Miles’ call informing me of the attack. By a stroke of fucking luck, I was already halfway to Hollows Bay when he called.

After Miles and Riley left for the dinner party, we headed for the city. Ash had stayed behind to figure out how to override the security system, but the rest of the team and I intended to take out two priority targets, Carlos and Markus, before we moved on to Hendrix.

I hadn’t told Riley of the plan knowing she’d worry, just like she did on the night we killed Thorne, so to let her enjoy her evening, I’d kept it quiet. Miles knew the plan, but I’d sworn him to secrecy.

But when Miles phoned with the news of the attack, our plans changed. He told us that about fifty armed men attacked the property with semi-automatic weapons and grenades. They'd hit hard and fast, taking out half the Bianchi guard before they even got a single shot off.

Whoever attacked weren't trained killers though, and within a few minutes, Miles, Rafe, Georgio, and the remainder of the guard gained the upper hand, killing a number of the men before the rest fled like the pussies they were.

Once the dust settled, Rafe went to check on Riley and Sofia, who'd been taken to the panic room, only to discover they weren't there. Upon checking the camera footage, Rafe and Miles watched as two Bianchi guards handed the girls over to two balaclava-clad men, before a third put a bullet in the heads of the Bianchi guards.

When the dead bodies of the men who attacked were searched, it didn't take long to discover the stag tattoos, and it didn't take long to put the pieces together. Hendrix was behind the attack, meaning my wife had been hand-delivered to him.

Miles, Rafe, and a number of the Bianchi guards were already en route to Hollows Bay, and despite my demands that we went straight to my old building and launch an attack, I saw sense. It would be a suicide mission if we didn't have a plan, especially as Ash still hadn't gotten past the system.

Reluctantly, I agreed to wait for Miles so we could RV, and come up with a plan. Knowing my family home was close enough to the city, and had been abandoned now that Thorne

had been dealt with, we made our way there. Waiting for Miles to arrive was sheer torture, my mind running wild with all manner of thoughts about what might be happening to Riley at that very moment.

No one dared talk to me as I paced up and down, waiting for my cousin to meet us. As soon as the cars arrived, a red mist clouded my vision when my eyes landed on Rafe sitting in the passenger seat. Hence the second Miles stopped the car, I had dragged Rafe out to let him feel my wrath.

“Any news from Ash on hacking the security system?” Miles said. At least one of us had a cool head right now. Rafe glowered at me like he expected me to launch at him again, which there was every possibility if the fucker did or said anything to piss me off.

“Not yet, but he thinks he is close,” Jack said.

“Fuck. Without that, it’s pointless attacking,” Miles replied.

“It’s not fucking pointless, there must be a way in. One of The Stags must be able to get us in,” I growled, my body buzzing with the need to shed blood.

“Kai, you know Hendrix will be one step ahead of us, he isn’t going to be stupid enough to let anyone have access to his building,” Miles said. His jaw ticking was the only sign of just how fucking furious he was.

I knew he was right, we would be signing our own death warrants if we didn’t have a way to get into the building, but

the rational part of my mind wasn't thinking straight right now, all I cared about was getting to Riley.

“We can't just stand here with our thumbs up our asses while that fucker does whatever he likes to my wife!” I roared.

“Kai-” Miles started, but whatever he was about to say was cut off by his phone ringing. “It's Ernie,” he said, jabbing the answer button and putting it on loudspeaker. “Ernie, tell me you have some fucking news for me.”

“Hendrix has Mrs. Wolfe. She's locked in her old bedroom. He's put a lock on the door in case someone breaches the security system, and the place is surrounded by Stags. Hendrix thinks you'll attack,” Ernie spoke quickly, his voice low like he didn't want to be overheard.

Snatching the phone out of Miles' hand, I held it to my ear. “Why the fuck didn't you warn us about the attack on the Bianchis?” I hissed.

There was a stunned pause before he answered. “Mr....Mr. Wolfe? You're alive?”

“Answer the fucking question!” I roared.

“I didn't know the attack was going to happen. Hendrix planned it with Stags from Huntsville. He only told me, Carlos, and Markus minutes before the van containing Riley and the other girl arrived.”

“Was she hurt?” I gritted out through clenched teeth, hating how fucking scared Riley would have been.

“She was holding it together. Your wife is a brave woman, Mr. Wolfe. I managed to slip her a knife, but I couldn’t do anything else with Carlos and Markus there,” Ernie replied.

Fuck, at least Riley had some way of defending herself, but I wanted to get there before she had the need to use the knife.

“Too fucking right we’ll attack,” I replied, my hand curling around the phone and squeezing it from the amount of anger coursing through me.

“Mr. Wolfe, we’re ready,” Ernie said, distracting me from my rage. “I’ve been recruiting men loyal to the Wolfe name, loyal to your wife, and now to you. Say the word, and I can have them rallied within the hour.”

A sense of gratitude rushed through me at Ernie’s words, hearing there were men still loyal to the Wolfe name.

“How many?”

“Thirty,” Ernie replied. “We lost quite a few when Hendrix took over, and they refused to conform. There might be more I could recruit if I had more time.”

Fucking hell. Before all this shit went down, I had over a hundred gang members. But this was another reason I hadn’t revealed I was alive, I needed to clean house after the amount of turncoats who went to Hendrix and Thorne’s side. I needed to know who was loyal to the name, not just me.

“There isn’t any more time,” I replied, meeting Miles’ gaze. He gave me a nod, knowing what I was about to say. “Rally

the men, we attack within the hour. Anyone fighting on Hendrix's side dies."

"Yes, Mr. Wolfe," Ernie said, his tone resolute. "And if you don't mind me saying, it's damn good to have you back, Sir."

A smile tugged at my lips. Ernie was a good fucking soldier to have on side.

"It's good to be back." I gave him our location and hung up.

"All we need now is a way past the fucking security system. Without that, we can kill as many Stags as you like, but you won't be getting up to the penthouse," Miles said, reminding me of the next fucking problem.

As if on cue, my phone rang, Ash's name flashing up. "Tell me you've figured it out."

"Sort of," he said, sparking the tiniest bit of hope in my chest. "I've got into the system but to get control of it, I need to input a master code, six digits long. I imagine it'll be something only known to Hendrix seeing as it's the code to control the whole system."

"Fuck, it could be a combination of anything," Miles said.

I paused, racking my brains. There was every chance it was six random digits, but something in my gut told me Hendrix would use a number that would mean something to him, but no one would think of. A number that every time he inputted it, it would remind him of something.

What meant something to him?

Riley's face flashed into my mind. My wife meant something to him. He was fucking obsessed with her, as sickening as it was to think that.

"Try 051599," I said, interrupting Miles and Ash deliberating ways to crack the code.

There was a pause on the line before Ash blew out a breath. "I don't fucking believe it! It worked!"

Motherfucker.

"What's the code?" Miles asked, his brow pulled up in surprise.

"Riley's birthday," I replied through gritted teeth, hating the cunt knew everything about my wife.

"Keep the security on for now, we don't want to give the fucker any indication we're on our way," I said to Ash, who murmured his agreement.

"Let's get a plan together, the sooner we deal with this fucker, the better," Jack said, his tone all business. It was clear to see why he was one of Ash's team leaders.

By the time Ernie arrived, we had a plan. With me and Miles, the Apollo team, Rafe and his guards, and my former Shadows gang members, we were still light on numbers, but it was a chance we were willing to take.

The men Ernie had recruited were fired up, ready to fight for the Wolfe name, and after we'd briefed them on the plan, I thanked every single one of them for their loyalty before we hit the road.

Adrenaline coursed through me as we made our way through the streets of West Bay. I'd contacted Graham Shaw and told him to make sure there were no cops in this part of the city for the rest of the night, and any reports of gunfire were to be ignored.

Stopping short of my building, Seb and Liam sprung from the van, ready to take their places, while the rest of us waited for the signal from Ernie and my men.

The beauty of the plan was that The Stags who guarded the outside of the building thought Ernie and the others were all on Hendrix's side, they wouldn't see the attack coming until it was too late.

Sure enough, less than a minute later, gunfire erupted from around the corner. Tank hit the gas and the van sped through the last few streets, followed by Rafe and his guards. As soon as we turned the corner, it was to find dead bodies littering the street, my gang having successfully taken down every Stag who had stood guard outside.

As predicted, the second wave of Stags ran from the building, their guns raised and firing back. The second Tank stopped the van, I gave Ash the order to take off the security as all of us jumped from the van, not hesitating to join the fight. With a gun in each hand, I fired at the men attacking us. My bullets hit the targets easily, as did Miles' who was next to me.

From above, Seb and Liam, who were poised with sniper rifles on the building behind us, picked off more targets, clearing a path for us to enter the building. Several of the

Bianchi guards went down, but Rafe held strong. Credit where it was due, he was a damn good shot.

Miles, Rafe, and I entered the ground floor lobby flanked by Tank, Jack, and several Bianchi guards. The rest of the men stayed outside, fighting off more Stags. Heading towards the stairwell that would lead us to the rest of the building, three Stags burst through, but before they even raised their weapons, they were dead.

Fucking amateurs.

“Don’t get shot,” Miles said, slapping me on the back.

“Same goes for you,” I replied, watching as he, Rafe, and the Bianchi guards took the stairs down to the basement intent on getting to Sofia and Kimmy.

I started making my way up the stairs, Jack and Tank behind me. Keeping my gun raised, I fired back when several shots were fired from above.

“Fuck, I’m hit,” Tank said, clutching his shoulder. I turned to find blood seeping between his fingers. “I’ll be alright, keep going.”

I nodded and carried on running up the stairs. The penthouse was on the twentieth floor, and my legs burned from the burst of energy. I’d trained hard when I had recovered enough from being shot, but my fitness level wasn’t as good as it once was, and my heart thudded heavily against my chest.

Taking out another five Stags who appeared in the stairwell, we finally reached the door that would open into my

penthouse.

I didn't hesitate, but as soon as we burst through the door, shots were fired. I ducked behind a wall, but Jack managed to get a round off, taking down Carlos Rigby who'd been waiting for us. Jack's shot had got the fucker straight between the eyes. As we passed his body and started making our way through the penthouse, shouting echoed down the hallway indicating more Stags.

"We'll deal with them, you go get your girl," Tank said, who was doing a damn good job at ignoring the blood pouring from his shoulder. I didn't need to be told twice.

Ignoring the ache in my legs, I sprinted through the penthouse to Riley's old bedroom, when her piercing scream stopped me in my tracks. Fear crawled down my spine at the thought of what the cunt was doing to her. Remembering what Ernie had told us about the extra lock on the door, I didn't bother trying to get into her room that way.

Instead, I sprinted to my old room, bursting in and checking the room was clear before making my way to my closet where I slid a panel across to reveal a small passageway that led to her room.

I'd had the secret passageway built in case enemies managed to breach my security systems and get as far as my bedroom, and I needed an escape route. An idea inspired by my great-grandfather after he had secret tunnels put in at the family home.

I was the only one who knew about the passageway in my room, not even Miles knew. I'd used it when Riley was pissed at me after I killed Toby, and I'd been desperate to see her even though she thought she had locked me out.

Reaching the panel, I slid it open. Immediately, my eyes landed on Riley who was pressed against the door, knife in hand, and with a determined look on her face. Fury swamped my body when I caught sight of her split lip and the bright red mark on her cheek.

Hendrix's back was to me, his hand clutching his side, his shirt stained red. I looked at the knife in Riley's hand to see the blade was covered in blood, and pride filled me that my girl had protected herself when she needed to.

But now I was here to take care of her.

Hendrix hadn't noticed I'd snuck into the room. But Riley had. Her chocolate orbs landed on me, and her brows pulled together in confusion before a relieved look took over her face, and her lips pulled into a smile.

"What the fuck are you smirking at?" Hendrix said.

I gave her a nod. It would have been easy to kill the cunt on the spot right this second. I could have reached out and snapped his neck without him ever knowing who was responsible for his death. But I wanted him to know.

I wanted my face to be the last thing he ever saw before his eyes closed forever.

"My husband," Riley said, the relief evident in her tone.

“Oh, princess. It’s going to be a long time before you join Kai in the pits of hell,” Hendrix chuckled.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that, fuckface,” I said, grabbing his shoulder, and spinning him around. I saw the briefest glimpse of surprise on his face before I threw a punch, putting my full body weight behind it. His nose exploded in a burst of bright red blood, and he stumbled backward, disorientated.

“K-Kai, you’re alive?” he said through his hands which had come up to cup his nose. Disbelief shone in his watery eyes as he stared, looking at me as if he’d seen a ghost.

“No thanks to you,” I replied, throwing another punch to his face. The sound of bone cracking told me I’d just shattered his eye socket. He fell against the window, his eye swelling instantly.

My hands shook with the need to end him. I had spent months planning on ways I was going to torture the cunt, but now I was in front of him, I wanted nothing more than to rip his heart out.

“You died! You were gone!” he bellowed, dropping his hands. Blood poured down his throat, and his nose was bent where my punch had broken it. “I killed you!”

“Did you really think I’d leave my wife?” I chuckled before I hit him again, this time to the jaw, and several teeth flew from his mouth.

He fell to the floor, and when I reached over to grab him, his jaw hung at a sickening angle. Evidently dislocated, he tried to

speak but his words came out garbled.

I held him by the throat and slammed him against the window, squeezing hard. His eyes bulged, and he tried to pull my hands away, but with the blood loss from the injury Riley had caused, and the damage to his face, he didn't have the strength.

"I had so much planned for you," I snarled, my face only an inch away from his. "But you don't deserve to breathe for one more minute. Knowing your body is rotting six feet underground will be enough for me." He tried to speak, but my grip around his throat was too strong to force words out. Staring into his eyes, there was nothing but hatred in them.

They were eyes I never wanted to see again.

"Riley, give me the knife."

Without taking my eyes from my former 2IC, the man I'd grown up with and considered my best friend, I waited for Riley to bring me the knife.

"For Danny and Theo," she whispered as she handed the blade to me. I took it from her, and instead of stepping away like I thought she might, my brave Star stood right by my side.

"For Danny and Theo," I echoed. Taking my hand from Hendrix's neck, and not giving him a second to move, I pressed the knife against his throat, and swiped it across, pressing as fucking hard as I could so the blade went in deep, exposing his vocal chords.

The same way he'd killed Theo.

When I moved the knife away, his body fell to the floor, a crimson river pouring from the wound, and within a few seconds, his lifeless eyes were staring up at the ceiling.

I threw the knife down on his body, and for a minute, neither Riley nor I moved. We stared down at the body of the man who had brought so much fucking misery to our lives, all because he was a greedy cunt.

“Is it really over?” Riley whispered, her voice hoarse.

I turned to her and cupped her face, my eyes landing on her split lip and bruised cheek. The need to bring Hendrix back to life and kill him all over again was all-consuming. But as a tear slid down my Star’s face, I brushed it away, reminding myself the fucker was dead and he’d never be able to hurt her again.

I kissed the top of her head before meeting her beautiful eyes. “Yeah, baby, it’s really over.”

Chapter 30

Riley

‘*W*e need to go,’ I signed to Angel, who was ignoring me. Instead, she was stroking Edgar’s nose, beaming at the stallion like she couldn’t believe he was here. In fairness to her, she’d gone weeks without seeing her best friend, as she called him, so I wasn’t surprised that dragging her away from the beast was hard work.

I had a feeling I’d be spending a lot of time at the stables with her in the coming days. As much as she couldn’t believe he was here, I couldn’t believe *she* was here.

But we needed to go. Kai had a surprise for me, and I’d promised we’d be back by now. Moving to stand in front of my sister, I folded my hands across my chest and glared at her. Still, she refused to look at me.

It would have been a hell of a lot easier to get her attention had she agreed to have the cochlear implant, but when the little brat arrived back in Hollows Bay a few weeks ago, and

Kai offered to pay for the procedure, she announced she had changed her mind. She claimed she liked being deaf so she didn't have to listen to dickheads.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. The whole damn reason I'd agreed to Kai's deal in the first place was so she could get the cochlear implant she so badly wanted, although knowing Kai like I did now, he would have found something else to blackmail me with.

'We can come back tomorrow,' I signed when she eventually looked at me. Her bottom lip jutted out, and her eyes filled with tears, making my heart crack down the middle.

"I can stay with her if you like, Mrs. Wolfe. I'll bring her back when she's ready," Dean said. He was Angel's personal bodyguard, and one of the few men Kai had working for him who knew ASL.

He'd been assigned by Kai after Ash recommended him. He was ex-military, and Ash had wanted to recruit him as an Apollo mercenary, but Dean hadn't wanted to go into that line of work. He was a good man, and both Kai and I trusted him with Angel implicitly.

"Are you sure?" I asked. Knowing Angel, she'd be out here all night.

"Absolutely, it's no problem," he replied, a kind smile playing on his lips.

I only had to take one look at Angel with her arms now around Edgar's neck to make my decision. Giving my sister a

kiss on the head, I said goodbye to the two of them and headed out of the stables, passing Tyler, Angel's other bodyguard who was checking the perimeter. The second I walked out, I was flanked by James and Adam, my own bodyguards.

I was still getting used to having the two guys follow me everywhere any time I left the house, and there were moments, like now, when it felt like overkill. But it made Kai feel better knowing both Angel and I had protection when he wasn't with us, and really it was a small price to pay.

Besides, the emotional scars Hendrix and Max had left behind were still raw, and I never wanted to find myself in a position of vulnerability again, and I certainly didn't want anything to happen to Angel. But with the life we now lived, there would always be a risk, so if having bodyguards meant keeping us that little bit safer, then so be it.

Adam opened the door to the car. I got in and settled in the back for the short ride home.

In the days after Kai killed Hendrix, we moved back to Hollows Bay and into Kai's childhood home. I thought it would be weird living in the house Max Thorne had claimed for himself, but it wasn't. The minute I walked through the door, it felt right. It was the place where Kai and I declared our love for each other, and the place where Theo was buried.

It was our home.

A place where we would make happy memories as a family now Angel had returned from Spain. Miles had also moved into the house with us and had taken Angel under his wing. He

was teaching her all about hacking and coding, something I wasn't overly impressed with, but it made my sister happy, and that was all I ever wanted for her.

The house was nestled on the edge of the forest overlooking the city, and as we drove along the roads that would take me back to Kai, I stared out the window, catching sight of the city below.

Two months had passed since the night Kai killed Hendrix. Two months of Kai working his ass off to repair the damage Hendrix had caused. For the most part, people were pleased Kai had returned from the dead. It transpired Hendrix was a lousy businessman.

He'd made people's lives a misery, and had fucked up not just Kai's criminal businesses, but his legitimate ones too. He'd lost contracts, and therefore hundreds of thousands of dollars, and it took Kai a lot of time and effort to rebuild his enterprise.

But Kai was nothing if not determined, and gradually, associates came back to him. Two months later, businesses were booming, and Kai was once again King of Hollows Bay, and I was right by his side. Kai kept me involved in all his business plans. Not that I had the first clue what I was doing, but under his guidance, I was learning.

Slowly.

As James turned into the driveway, a cop car pulled out, and the driver held his hand up in acknowledgment. I waved back to Graham, the new Chief of Police. He'd taken up the

position after Kai visited the Mayor, and told him in no uncertain terms that if he ever dared go against the Wolfe name again, he wouldn't live to see another day.

The Mayor knew he'd fucked up by giving Max the job in the first place, regardless if he knew Max wasn't a real cop at the time, so he was only too happy to make amends with Kai.

Now Graham had finally got the position he'd been after for so long, he chilled the hell out. He was a good ally to have on side, turning a blind eye when Kai needed to bring in a shipment of weapons or drugs. He'd also started providing Kai with intel, such as which cops could be trusted, and if any gang members from other cities were trying to sell product on our streets.

Kai hadn't said anything about Graham coming to the house so I wondered what his visit was about. Once James stopped the car outside the house, I went inside to find Kai.

Even though we'd lived here for nearly two months, I still wasn't used to the grandeur of the house, it was a far cry from the crappy apartment Angel and I had lived in only a year ago.

"Kai?" I called when I walked through the foyer, only to be met with silence. I carried on through the house intending to find Laura and ask her if she knew where Kai was.

Laura was our new head maid. She'd worked for Kai previously but quit when Hendrix took over and was one of the lucky ones to get out of Hollows Bay and not lose her life

for going against Hendrix. When she heard Kai was still alive, she returned to Hollows Bay.

Because of her loyalty to him, Kai had offered her the head maid's job. She'd snapped his hand off accepting it.

As I was about to walk into the kitchen, two arms wrapped around my waist, and I was pulled back against a firm body. Kai's scent, my favorite smell in the world, wrapped around me, and I couldn't stop the smile from breaking out on my face.

"You're late," he whispered in my ear, the promise of a spanking for my tardiness evident in his voice. He nuzzled his nose against my hair and took a deep inhale.

"Angel didn't want to leave Edgar. I let her stay with Dean, he said he'll bring her home later." I spun around in his arms, immediately looping mine around the back of his neck. "I missed you."

Kai smirked. "Don't try and flatter me, baby, you know your ass is going to be punished later."

"Why wait until later?" I said, my voice husky. I reached up and pressed my lips lightly against his.

His eyes darkened and his hands moved round to grab my ass. "I'd love nothing more than to take you upstairs and fuck you until you've learned your lesson, Star, but there's something I want to show you."

Kai moved out of my arms but grabbed my hand and led me through the house. Nervous excitement zapped through my

body. With Kai, I never quite knew what I was going to get, he could surprise me with a bouquet of flowers or my enemy's head on a platter, it really could go either way.

He walked us to the door that would lead us outside, and as he opened the door, he gave me a gentle push so I had to walk into the garden first.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” The shouts from all around made me jump back, but Kai's hands grabbed my waist to steady me.

“What the hell?” I asked in a daze, looking around the garden to find it had been decorated with bunting and balloons, and all the people I loved were here. “It's not my birthday until next week.”

“I know, but we have plans, and I wanted you to celebrate with your friends,” Kai said from behind me.

“Our friends,” I corrected him as my mouth watered from the delicious smell of the barbeque that had been set up in the garden.

“Hmm, not all of them,” Kai grumbled, and although I couldn't see him, I knew he was glaring at Rafe, who was glaring right back at him.

There was no love lost between Kai and Rafe, but the two of them were going to have to sort their shit out sooner rather than later. Rafe had earned an early promotion to Georgio's 2IC after Antonio was shot dead during the attack at the

Bianchi mansion, and was now working closely with Kai and me on securing business deals.

The two of them bickered like cat and dog during negotiations, and I'd come close to banging their heads together on more than one occasion, so it was in everyone's interest that the pair of them grew up.

"Go enjoy your party, baby," Kai said, kissing my neck before giving me a light slap on my ass. I didn't need to be told twice.

I couldn't remember the last time I had a birthday party, certainly not in the years after Angel and I had run away. In fact, I hadn't even celebrated my birthday during those years.

My face ached from where I was smiling so much as I spent the rest of the afternoon catching up with all the people who had come to celebrate with me.

Sofia and Rafe kept to themselves for the majority of the party, mainly because Sofia was avoiding Miles, and after she was kidnapped, Rafe rarely left his sister's side.

You'd think Miles taking a bullet for Sofia would change their views of each other, but no, the two of them seemed to hate each other even more. On the night Kai waged the war on Hendrix, Miles and Rafe had separated from Kai so they could rescue Sofia and Kimmy from the cell in the basement. They'd got the two women free, but as they were leading them to safety, they were ambushed by a group of Stags.

By then, Rafe had run out of ammo so ended up fighting two of the Stags, while Miles took on another three. But when Markus appeared and pointed his gun at Sofia, Miles knocked her out of the way and took the bullet.

Thankfully, Markus was a shit shot and only got Miles in the thigh before Miles fired his own shot straight through Markus' head. The bullet went straight through Miles' leg, avoiding any main arteries. Miles was damn lucky, and he now had an impressive scar on his leg to show for it. But after, his hatred toward Sofia increased. It was almost as if he blamed her for him being shot.

His attitude toward Sofia only served to piss her off. She spent most of her time going out of her way to avoid him, something which had been easy to do while Georgio was grieving the death of Antonio. But in the last week, Georgio declared he'd grieved enough, and now plans for Miles' and Sofia's wedding were in full swing.

It was going to make an interesting marriage, that was for sure.

Miles spent the majority of the party talking to Kai and avoiding having to spend *any* time with his future wife. Every so often I caught him glancing over at Sofia though, most of the time with a scowl on his face, but at times there was a look of something else.

Want.

As for Rafe, he was focused on being a good 2IC to his father. He'd told me he wasn't ready for the promotion, he was

hoping to have a few more years of messing about before he got bogged down by the family business. But he accepted his duty with his head held high, and no matter what Kai thought of him, I thought he was doing brilliantly.

It was the first time since Kimmy had been rescued that she'd felt up to seeing people other than me and Kai, and I'd given her a massive hug when I saw her standing next to Sofia. The two of them had built a bond having been shoved in the same cell.

Despite the ordeal she'd suffered, and the injuries she'd received, Kimmy had tried to protect Sofia from Markus after he tried to grope Sofia. Seeing how terrified Sofia was, Kimmy had intervened, earning Markus' wrath. After he nearly knocked her out, he left the two locked in the cell, but undoubtedly, Kimmy had stopped Sofia from being subjected to a sexual assault.

Kimmy and I had spent the last few weeks managing several projects. Both had been my idea, but Kai was more than happy to back them.

The main project was opening a rape crisis center in the heart of East Bay, and Kimmy was going to be the manager. She said helping others through traumatic experiences was her way of dealing with what had happened to her. She had a long way to go with her own recovery but Kimmy was a fighter. She was strong and determined not to let what Hendrix did to her ruin her life.

She didn't stay at the party for long, but the fact she felt up to facing a social gathering spoke volumes of the progress she'd made. Even more surprising was that she agreed for Ernie to take her home, it was the first time she'd been alone with a man since Hendrix subjected her to his abuse.

Ernie had earned Kai's trust with the loyalty he showed to the Wolfe name. He had resumed his position as the head of Kai's gang, The Shadows, but Kai had entrusted Ernie to recruit new members, something he was doing a damn good job at.

The gang was responsible for the sale of Kai's drugs, and since we'd taken back Hollows Bay, The Shadows had doubled in size.

As much as it didn't sit well with me that drugs were being peddled on the streets, I accepted it was part of this life. It was also an area of business I kept well out of, that was for Kai to run, just like his dealings with weapons.

Halfway through the party, Angel joined us. It was the first time she met everyone, and Jane, who had returned with Angel, and was now living in the staff lodge on Kai's land, helped Angel talk to everyone at the party.

I watched from a distance as Angel wrapped everyone around her little finger, much like she had done with Kai. He doted on her. In his eyes, the little brat could do no wrong. I figured he'd learn the hard way. Besides, I was wrapped around Angel's little finger more than anyone.

For the rest of the party, I spent time catching up with Tank, Jack, and Ash. In the days after Kai killed Hendrix, the team flew out on new assignments, and with the exception of those three, we hadn't spoken to the rest of the team since.

Tank had been out of commission for the last two months after he got shot in the shoulder, but he told me he'd spent the time recovering at his cabin next to a lake where he fished most days. He was chomping at the bit to get back to work though, all he needed was the all clear from the doctor.

But Tank was the lucky one. He'd walked away with his life. The same couldn't be said for Dan. Sadly, he'd taken a bullet to the head, killing him instantly. Oz had also been shot, only the bullet he took hit him in the spine, paralyzing him from the waist down. He was in a rehab facility on the other side of the country receiving specialist treatment, but he'd never walk again.

I'd been riddled with guilt when I'd found out about Dan's death and Oz's injury, but as both Ash and Jack assured me, the men knew the risks when they signed up to work for Apollo, and they'd willingly give their lives if it meant their target had been rescued.

The guilt still sat heavy in my heart.

Jack, who was still none the wiser that Ash was the head of Apollo, had just come back from an assignment somewhere in the world. He didn't say much about it, not that I would have expected him to, but something about him had changed. When

Tank made a comment about Jack meeting a woman, Jack told him to fuck off, but I caught the hint of a blush on his cheeks.

Ash had stuck around in Hollows Bay for a bit, helping Kai and Miles to clear up the mess at the apartment, and track down the remaining Stags who had fled after attacking the Bianchi mansion. Needless to say, they didn't live much longer. But Ash was due to fly home, wherever in the world that was, at the end of the week.

I was going to miss having him around, he'd taken to calling Kai 'Barney' at every opportunity which usually resulted in the two of them trying to beat each other up. Ash brought out a playful side to Kai I'd never seen before, and I knew Kai was going to miss him as well.

Still, duty called, and Ash had a mercenary organization to run.

The party rolled on into the night, and by the time everyone left, I was more than a little drunk. Kai carried me to bed, but before he could extract my punishment for being late to my own party, I passed out. I woke several hours later, desperate for water.

Leaving Kai slumbering next to me, I went to the ensuite and poured a glass of water, downing it before pouring another. My cheeks were flushed and my body hot, so deciding to get some fresh air, I stepped out onto the balcony. The chilly night air instantly cooled my heated skin.

Leaning against the balcony, I stared out over the city. Although it was the early hours of the morning, streetlights lit

the city up, and headlights from cars navigated their way through the streets. If I strained hard enough, I could hear the distant music from the clubs drift to my ears.

The view was stunning, and a feeling of contentment swept through me, magnified when two arms wrapped around me, and a firm body caged me in.

“What are you doing awake, baby?” Kai cooed in my ear.

“I needed some fresh air,” I replied, leaning back against him.

“Did my wife celebrate a little too hard?” he asked, humor in his voice.

“Maybe,” I admitted. “I didn’t get a chance to thank you for my party earlier. So, thank you. I had a really good time.”

He kissed my cheek. “You’re welcome, Star.”

We were silent for a few minutes, the two of us just looking out at the city.

Our city.

“You know, last year for my birthday, I spent the night dancing at Club Sin. I had no friends, Angel was the only family I had, and we lived in that shithole apartment.” Kai’s arms tightened around me at the memory of me dancing in Club Sin. He didn’t like to be reminded that I once worked there, but for me, I’d never forget. It was where I met the man who changed everything. “Every day I woke with a weight on my shoulders wondering how the hell I was ever going to give Angel a better life. Give *us* a better life. And now look.”

I smiled, picturing the faces of the people I'd spent the evening with. Kai and Miles, Angel and Jane, Kimmy and Ernie, Sofia and Rafe, Ash, Jack, and Tank.

“Now I have friends. I have a family, and it's all thanks to you, Kai.” My voice caught as I was suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling of love, a love so powerful it wanted to explode out of my chest.

He kissed my cheek again. “You deserve the world, Star, and I'll never stop giving it to you.”

I laced my fingers with his, and the smile on my face grew. As I looked out at the city, with my husband pressed up against me, I couldn't help but wonder if *Disney* did get it right after all. Maybe life was more like a Disney film than I ever believed.

Right then, I felt like a princess.

No.

A queen.

A queen and her king ready to take on the world, so long as they had each other.

The End.

Epilogue

Riley

I rolled over in the ginormous bed, kicking off the sheet, and letting the cool air from the air conditioning brush over my heated skin.

We'd flown to the island in The Maldives on my birthday nearly three weeks ago, and I still hadn't gotten used to the heat.

It was a damn good job the villa we'd been staying in was secluded, seeing as Kai and I had spent most of the time without a stitch of clothing on, although that wasn't necessarily just down to the heat.

But then, we were on our honeymoon.

In the time we'd been here, the only people we'd seen were the staff who arrived each morning with three freshly prepared meals and anything else we needed. Every day they'd clean

the villa while Kai and I swam in the sea, and then they'd disappear again until the next morning.

It was heaven.

Of course, we checked in with our family back home regularly. Angel, who was thirteen going on thirty, gave me a heart attack every time I spoke to her. First, she had developed a crush on Dean, who had been *mortified* when Kai gave him a lecture about not giving Angel any wrong impressions.

The poor man had protested that he was not a pedo, and did not fancy young girls. Had I not been so worried about Angel's sudden interest in men, I would have found it quite amusing how Dean was shitting his pants at the look Kai was giving him.

Thankfully, she lost interest in Dean quite quickly, much to everyone's relief, but that relief didn't last long when she came home from her new school, a school for deaf kids, telling us she had a boyfriend. I don't know who was more horrified, me or Kai.

The last time I spoke to her, she'd broken up with her boyfriend because he kissed another girl. Apparently, Angel wasn't bothered though because his breath tasted like biscuits when he kissed her. It was a good job we were in The Maldives because Kai was ready to hunt the little shit down and give him a taste of the Kai Wolfe torture treatment. Thirteen years old or not.

The worst part was, I'd have been right behind Kai.

Needless to say, I was on edge for the next time I checked in with the little brat.

The other person we spoke to was Miles. He was keeping an eye on the city while we were away, making sure deals were struck, agreements were kept, and overseeing the development work going on in East Bay.

Aside from the rape crisis center that had opened just before we flew to The Maldives, Kai had pumped millions of dollars into a new homeless shelter for teenagers, my second project, and it would be opening in a few months.

East Bay was slowly turning into a better place to live, thanks to Kai Wolfe, the man who once upon a time barely ventured into that part of his city.

I wish I could say things were on the up for Miles. Sadly for him, his impending wedding was drawing nearer, and his mood was getting worse. I didn't know what the hell was wrong with him and Sofia, they seemed to rile each other up no matter what they did. You'd think him saving her from Hendrix's clutches would have softened the pair of them, but nope. I thought Kai and I bickered at times, but those two were the champions.

As I stretched my arm across the bed, hoping to feel the hardness of my husband's body, I was disappointed when my hand landed in the empty space next to me. Sitting up, and wiping the sleep out of my eyes, I heard Kai's muffled voice float in from where he was sitting outside on the balcony.

Unsure whether the staff had been yet, I grabbed my bikini and put it on, before tying a sarong around my waist. It wasn't like the staff hadn't seen me naked before though. On the second morning we were here, they'd arrived earlier than expected to find us butt naked, and Kai eating my pussy over the kitchen island. Funnily enough, they now called out *very* loudly before they stepped foot inside the villa.

Like metal to a magnet, my feet moved in the direction of Kai's voice, unable to resist the need to see my husband.

Since retaking Hollows Bay, Kai and I had gone from strength to strength. We worked well together, the Yin to the Yang just like he'd always said.

The smug bastard.

But like any married couple, we still argued, and boy, could our arguments be explosive. It's what happened when two forces of nature collided, and the two of us were both as stubborn as the other, neither of us backing down. Our arguments usually resulted in hot angry sex, and then we'd talk like grown-ups and come to a resolution, before having hot makeup sex.

What can I say? It worked for us.

Reaching the door, I froze on the spot, the warm sun hitting my body. The sight before me was nothing but perfection. In the background, the turquoise blue water stretched as far as the eye could see and shimmered from the sun's glare. But the most beautiful sight of all was my husband.

He really was so damn handsome.

Kai was sitting at the table wearing his dark aviators, his laptop open, and although I couldn't see who he was talking to, Miles' dulcet tones were coming from the laptop.

I could only see the top half of Kai, but that was enough to make my mouth water. He was shirtless, his bronzed skin glowing with a light sheen of sweat, his beautiful tattoos on display, and his muscles bulging.

Since arriving here, we'd fucked like rabbits, and still, I only needed one look at my husband for my pussy to start throbbing with the need to be filled by him.

How the hell I got so lucky, I'll never know, but every day I thanked my lucky stars that Kai walked into Club Sin and changed my life, even if it had been a roller coaster of a ride to get to this point.

As if feeling me watching him, Kai's head lifted. He paused mid-sentence, and even though his eyes were hidden behind his dark glasses, I knew they were raking over every inch of my body. He shifted slightly in his seat, but he didn't say anything. But then, he didn't need to, I was so in tune with what Kai wanted, and Kai wanted me in his lap.

And who was I to deprive my husband?

Not waiting another second, I walked over to him, adding extra sway to my hips, knowing Kai was watching my every step. As I reached him, he grabbed my hand and pulled me down into his lap.

“Good morning, wife,” he said, his voice smooth like melted chocolate.

“Good morning, husband,” I replied. Kai’s mouth was on mine in an instant, his hand coming up to cup my face. I wrapped my arms around the back of his neck as his tongue plunged into my mouth. Wiggling on his lap, his cock started twitching underneath my ass, and a growl rumbled low in his chest.

“Don’t mind me,” Miles said from the laptop. “I’ll just be here, jabbing pins in my eyes.”

I broke away from Kai, much to his annoyance, and turned to face the screen. “Hi, Milo.”

“Don’t you fucking start, it’s bad enough my future wife can’t get my name right,” he grumbled.

“Milo suits you better,” Kai said stoically, but I knew he was trying to get a rise out of Miles, and sure enough....

“Fuck off, Barney.”

Kai’s body tensed underneath me.

“How is Sofia?” I said before the cousins could start bickering.

“A delight,” Miles deadpanned. “I love being with her, and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with her.”

Seemingly growing bored of the conversation, Kai’s hand moved up my thigh where he untied the knot holding my

sarong together, and opened the parting, before slowly tugging on the strings holding my bikini bottoms together.

I gave him a look that said ‘Not now,’ but this was Kai Wolfe. What Kai Wolfe wanted, Kai Wolfe got.

“Fill me in later on what you found out about old man Bianchi,” Kai said as he successfully undid one side of the bikini bottoms.

“You don’t want to hear it now?” Miles said, his brows raised in surprise. To be fair, if it wasn’t for the fact that I could feel how hard Kai’s cock was, I’d wonder why he wasn’t interested in what Miles had to say about Mr. Bianchi.

“No. And unless you want to watch me fuck my wife right in front of this screen, I suggest you end the call,” Kai replied as the other string came undone.

“Fuck sake. Honestly, how have you not fucked each other’s brains out by now?” Miles mumbled.

“Don’t be jealous, Miles. You’ll soon have your wife to enjoy moments like this with.” With that, Kai closed the screen just as Miles was cursing him.

“You’re mean to him,” I said, shifting in Kai’s lap so I was straddling him, his hard cock pressing against his shorts.

“He’s a big boy, he can take it. Besides, the sooner he admits he’s fucked in the head for Sofia, the sooner he can start trying to win her over instead of pushing her away.”

“You think he’s hot for her?” I replied, skepticism in my voice.

“Baby, I know my cousin, and that man has been obsessed with her from the minute he met her. I should know, I know what it’s like to take one look at the woman you know you are going to spend your life with and become instantly obsessed.”

A wry smile tugged at my lips. “Obsessed, huh?”

“You fucking know it, Star. You know you’re the first thing I think of when I wake up, and the last thing I think of before I go to sleep. You know you’re my reason for breathing.”

He kissed me on my nose, which was probably a good thing as it gave me a few seconds to swallow down the lump of emotion that had crept up my throat like it did whenever Kai whispered sweet words to me.

Taking off his aviators and throwing them on the table behind me, I cupped Kai’s face and stared into his black orbs. Under the golden sun, the gold flecks burned brightly, and his eyes were filled with nothing but love.

It was my favorite look on Kai.

“I love you,” I whispered, before brushing my lips over his, and placing the palm of my hand over his heart, covering the star and the wolf tattoo.

The same tattoo I now had, only mine was tattooed on my ribs. I’d wanted it in the same place as Kai, but it had meant the artist tattooing across my boob, and Kai refused to let another man put his hands on me, even if it was in the name of art.

Kai buried his hand in my hair, holding me in place as he took my mouth. With the other hand, he undid the strings holding my bikini top in place, and the flimsy material fell to the floor. Kai devoured my mouth, and as my pussy grew wetter, I couldn't stop the wanton moan from leaving my mouth.

Abruptly, Kai stood, breaking our kiss but wrapped my legs around his waist.

“Aren't the staff due here soon?” I asked as he carried me into our bedroom.

“They've already been,” he said, lying me down, and hovering over my naked body.

“They have?”

“Yeah, they came while you were asleep. I took our meals and told them not to bother cleaning today, and to come back tomorrow. You looked so peaceful sleeping, I didn't want to wake you,” Kai replied, staring down at me with so much love in his eyes that my heart hurt.

Kai was still a ruthless bastard, if you crossed him, you'd know about it, and the chances were, you wouldn't live to tell the tale. But there was so much more to Kai. He was caring and considerate, thoughtful and kind, even if it was only his family who got to see this side of him.

I didn't reply to Kai, mainly because he started kissing and nibbling the skin on my neck, leaving a path of fire over every

inch he touched. Kai reached over to straddle me, making sure to hold his weight on his knees so he didn't crush me.

He grabbed my hands and pinned them above my head in one of his big hands before he pulled his mouth away from where he was leaving his signature mark on my throat.

“There was something I wanted to talk to you about,” he said, turning serious, his face hovering inches above mine. If I hadn't been so damned turned on and needy, I would have paid more attention to what his other hand was doing.

“What?” I said, confused as to what the hell Kai would want to talk to me about at a time like this.

He leaned down lower, his lips next to my ear, his breath caressing my flushed skin.

“I still owe you for what you did to me at the cabin in Florida,” he whispered.

By the time his words registered, my hands were locked in the metal bracelets that had been cuffed to the headboard.

The fucker must have planned this, and it was only by sheer luck I hadn't noticed the cuffs hanging from the headboard when I first woke up.

Kai sat back up, a triumphant smile on his face.

I didn't bother asking him to let me out, and there was no point tugging against them, I remembered all too well how much the metal bit into my wrists from the time he cuffed me on the plane.

Besides, I quite liked it when Kai cuffed me.

“Are you planning on depriving me of orgasms?” I asked, lifting my hips to grind my pussy against his length.

“On the contrary, Star. I’m going to make you come, over, and over, and over again. And when you don’t think you can take any more, I’m going to make you come again.”

A grin tugged at my lips. “You sure you’ve got the stamina for that, old man?”

A growl rumbled from Kai’s chest, and in a flash, he jumped off me, flipped me over to my front, and lifted my hips so I had to pull my knees under my body. Bracing myself for what I knew was coming, Kai’s hand came down and cracked against my ass, the sting sending a bolt of pleasure straight to my core.

“Oh, baby, you’re going to regret calling me an old man,” he said, sliding a finger into my wet pussy.

I very much doubted I would regret it.

In fact, I was already dreaming up ways I could get my husband to punish me again.



Kai

I left Riley sleeping, her ass glowing red from where I'd spanked her.

Pausing at the door, I stared at my wife. Her lips were pulled into a sated smile, her hair fanned over the pillow, and her body marked with my come.

She was breathtaking.

I was one lucky fucking bastard.

Leaving her to recover after I proved to her that I did have the stamina to make her come, again, and again, and again, I slid the door closed and walked back to my laptop.

Dialing Miles on the video app, I waited for the call to connect.

"Nice of you to call me back," he grumbled. His sour mood was beginning to piss me off. I didn't know why my cousin was being such a miserable cunt about marrying Sofia, I knew he was fucking obsessed with her. Why he was denying it though, I had no clue.

"What did you find out about old man Bianchi?" I said, wanting to get straight to the point. I was trying to keep Riley away from the business while we were on our honeymoon so I wanted to hear what Miles had to say before she woke.

"I found out why he wanted the alliance so much," Miles replied.

"Go on."

“About a month before Riley and I met with him, he was involved in a deal with a Mexican cartel that went tits up. Apparently, at the exchange, a local gang turned up. There was a huge shootout, people died, but the cartel lost some significant players. They believe Bianchi tipped the gang off about the deal.”

“Why would he do that?” I said, letting Miles’ information sink in.

“He denied it. He blamed the cartel for tipping off the gang. Either way, it doesn’t matter. The cartel have declared war on the Bianchis and anyone in partnership with him.”

Fuck.

My jaw clenched as anger that had been kept at bay since I’d killed Hendrix began to bubble under my skin.

“A lot of his other partners have turned their back on him, not wanting to get involved in the brewing war. That’s why he was so keen to make an alliance with us, we’re the only family he has on his side.”

I scrubbed my hand down my face in frustration. “Fucking hell, we’ve just ended one war, only for Bianchi to drag us straight back into one.”

“That’s not the worst part,” Miles said.

I didn’t think it could get much worse.

“The cartel have threatened to kidnap Sofia and sell her on the black market.”

Miles' tone was emotionless, but the flash of anger in his eyes didn't go unnoticed.

"Which cartel?" I asked after a minute of staring at my cousin's face. With his hair cut short, he looked so much like Theo.

"The Herrera cartel," Miles said. The second the name left his mouth, my heart sank.

I had a little knowledge of the Herrera cartel, enough to know they were an organization who played dirty.

"What do we do?" Miles asked. It was a good fucking question, and one I didn't have an immediate answer to.

"Nothing for now. Keep your ear to the ground and see what you can find out," I instructed.

"And Sofia?"

I paused for a minute, and even though this was no laughing matter, I couldn't stop my lips pulling into a smirk. "Bring the marriage forward. The sooner she is on our turf, the easier it will be to protect her."

Miles froze. After a beat, he opened his mouth to reply but promptly closed it, coming to his senses. He damn well knew what he needed to do.

"You best hurry up and come back from your honeymoon then, it looks like there is going to be a wedding."

Find out what happens next for Miles & Sofia!

Coming 2024.....

Acknowledgements

So, did I redeem myself? Of course I couldn't kill Kai off! That man will always have a place in my heart! I did have a lot of fun seeing all your messages though, there was a LOT of anger coming my way that I'd killed him off (Insert laughing emoji!).

I can't quite believe Kai and Riley's story is over. I wrote book 3 when I was *really* struggling with my mental health, and as a way of coping, I poured a lot of my emotions into what Riley was feeling, especially with regards to losing someone you love.

I lost my dad when I was 22, and not a day goes by when I don't think of him, so as much as I dedicated this book to all the readers who gave me shit for 'bumping' off, Kai, I actually want to dedicate this book to my old man. I miss you, and I hope I've made you proud.

Enough of the morose shit....

There are several people I need to thank, so here goes....

Sandra, thank you for being my alpha reader. Thank you for telling me what your honest thoughts were. I'm so grateful that you could give your honest opinion about this book, even if you knew it would hurt my feelings!

April and Emma, thank you for being such amazing beta readers. I was so nervous about this book, I wanted to make sure I did justice for Kai and Riley, and your comments gave me the confidence I needed to go ahead and publish this book. You guys are awesome, and if I can ever return the favor, all you need to do is shout.

To my street team and ARC readers. Thank you for supporting me. Thank you for promoting these books on social media and helping me to get the Hollows Bay Trilogy out in the world.

To my fellow bitch tits (BT). Thank you for listening to my incessant droning on about my books. Thank you for buying my books and believing in me. Thank you for listening to me when I needed someone to talk to. You are awesome, and I can't wait to be your bridesmaid at your wedding next year. Mr. J is an incredibly lucky man.

To my mum. What can I say other than a HUGE thank you for always believing in me. Even when I was at my lowest. Even when I didn't think anyone cared. You were always there for me, and I can't thank you enough.

To my Bummy (Yes, you read that right. He is my bummy, I am his bummy), what can I say, other than I fucking love you. You always joked that Kai was modeled on you.....I hate to

say that he wasn't, BUT, he is modeled on the way you love me. Every day, I am eternally grateful that you found me on that dating website, and that you reached out to me. Even if I didn't quite grasp that you were asking me out on a date the first time you messaged. I know I annoy the hell out of you, but I love you. You are my Kai, it's you and me until eternity, and even when we check out of this life, I'm going to follow you into the pit of hell ('Cos let's face it, that's where we are going), just so I can carry on annoying you...mwahahahaha!

Finally, to every reader who picked up *Collide*, *Implode*, and *Explode*. I cannot express my gratitude to you. As a baby author, your support means more to me than just a simple 'thank you' on this page. You guys are awesome, and I genuinely will always be forever grateful that you took a chance on me. If I could ask one thing of you though, please, please, please leave a review of the books, you wouldn't believe how important it is for newbie authors to get reviews!

What's next I hear you ask? I'm working on a few projects at the minute, but I haven't decided which one I'll be publishing next, it will all depend on where my muse takes me! But I promise, you WILL get Miles & Sofia's story at some point in 2024.....I cannot wait to write it! Who doesn't love Miles? The geeky Wolfe cousin who has a HUGE heart...and may or may not be in to certain kinks! He may seem like the sane cousin, but I assure you, he really isn't!

You are going to get so much more of Miles, and a hint of Theo before that bastard, Hendrix, murdered him, and there may just be a cameo from Riley and Kai, so watch this space!

If you want to be kept updated with how my writing is progressing, get exclusive sneak peeks, and take part in giveaways, then please join my social media groups:

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About the Author

Elizabeth-Kate lives in Oxfordshire with her Husband and two Sprocker Spaniels. She spends a lot of time with her nose in a book, usually the kind with morally gray characters and feisty female leads! When she isn't reading, you'll find her in her writing cave dreaming up new ideas for plots and characters.

Elizabeth-Kate likes to take her Spaniels, known as the Smelly Weasels, on long walks. She can't start the day without coffee otherwise she turns into a monster, and her party trick is devouring a pack of cookies in one sitting!

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