

BELLE HARPER

Harlow

OMEGA
CHOSEN

HARLEY

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CHAPTER 1

HARLEY

“**F**an-fucking-tastic,” I mutter under my breath, reacting to the news I’ve been dreading since I arrived at the Omega House.

My Choosing Day is next. Or, should I say, it’s the government’s Choosing Day. I have no choice in the matter.

Veronica, the “house mother,” a sturdy older beta with graying hair, shakes her head and gasps at me. As if my language would be different than any other day. I’m sure as hell going to curse at this news. Especially when there are older pure Omegas here. And it goes by age. At least, it usually does.

“All you beta-born omegas are the same.” She turns to the younger beta—Kiera—who only joined the house a few weeks ago. “It’s as if they don’t care about their designation as an omega.”

I scoff at that. Oh, I care all right. I care about having all my rights, my family, my friends taken away from me in one moment. Because that’s exactly what happens when you perform as an omega after being raised as a beta.

“So many betas dream of being in your position, Harley. So, remember your training and start acting like a true

omega.” Veronica gives me a stern look, and I just roll my eyes.

I know for a fact she wishes she was in my position. That’s why she works at the omega center, and most of the betas here feel the same way. This is the closest they will ever get to being an omega and around any alphas.

Not all of us beta-born wanted this. It’s on the tip of my tongue, but I bite my cheek. I didn’t want this. At sixteen, I was too busy thinking about boys and parties to worry about something so unlikely occurring. My best friend and I were just talking about our plans for the weekend when I felt a cramp . . . what I thought was my cycle finally coming. Finally becoming a “woman.”

I was wrong.

I didn’t expect to present as an omega in the middle of physics class, with my fellow students watching on as I doubled over with cramps and my *perfume* flooded the room.

It had only happened one other time at my school, back in the fifties. It’s so rare for a beta to present as anything but beta these days, they don’t even teach us about it anymore in designation class. So, this was a huge surprise for everyone. Especially me.

It only happens if there’s omega or alpha blood in your family tree. Your family is supposed to “talk” to you about it. My father had no idea that my mother’s bloodline wasn’t pure beta. And if she were still with us, she would have told me if she had of known. But a drunk driver took her from us when I was only three. So I grew up with my father and older brother Aero.

We lived in an all-beta town. Most betas do. Alphas and omegas tend to live in the city, never straying far from there.

I'd never visited the city before. Betas also rarely stray far from where they grow up. Up to that point in my life, I'd never seen an omega in person. Neither had my classmates, so they were in just as much shock as me when it happened.

In that moment, of me perfuming and scaring my old balding teacher, Mr. Wicks, I thought of the alphas I'd seen only days before. The first ones I'd ever encountered. But one in particular . . . his scent. I'd been drawn to him as a beta, and I hadn't understood why.

Did he somehow awaken the omega in me, or was this always going to happen? I wondered. Most omegas first perfume at sixteen, so chances are, this was bound to happen. He just might have sped up the process with that scent of his. If only I knew who he was, maybe I could have asked him if this was normal.

The bell over the door dings as someone enters the diner. The smell of blueberry pancakes hits my nose, and I practically moan at the aroma. I look up to see where Nichole is with my order, but I'm met with a wall of men wearing black leather cuts.

Not just any men—bikers.

Not just any Bikers—alphas.

My father shifts beside me as the energy in the diner changes. It goes from the usual Sunday chatter to deadly silent. A fork clatters on a plate, and everyone turns to the person who dropped it, including the alphas.

My brother, Aero's, eyes widen as one of the men sits at the counter and orders coffee.

My father taps my leg, and I glance at him. "Don't look at them, Harley," he whispers.

I furrow my brow. Why? Are they bad bikers? Or is it because they're alphas? My father looks over my shoulder and quickly turns to glance out the window.

Their scents are so strong in the room, I feel like I'm dizzy, but no one else seems as affected as I am. Why? Can't they smell them? They don't smell bad . . . but they make my head swim a little. In a good way.

I don't listen to my father's advice. I just can't. When has this ever happened before? Never. I've been coming to this diner with my father and Aero for as long as I can remember. It's our Sunday tradition.

I look over at the alphas again, only now, they're all looking at me. And I feel a tingle down my spine at their intense gazes.

I swallow the lump in my throat. Why are they staring at me? A quick scan of the room tells me I'm the only beta here who is dumb enough to look at them. Well, I never claimed to be smart.

Is this one of those Medusa-type situations I've gotten myself in? If I stare too long, will I turn to stone? Maybe... but it won't stop me from looking away.

The one with the bushy gray beard nods at me, and I can't help but nod back in greeting. It would be rude if I didn't. He seems nice.

Their scents are all different, yet similar. It's fascinating. Why are they out for a ride in Riverton, of all places? We

never get alphas here. Ever. We are a beta-only town.

I wonder if they have an omega? Omegas are rarely seen out. I've heard it on the news enough to know they are so rare, that the government is trying to get packs to have more children in the hopes of boosting omega numbers.

There are at least ten packs per every omega. That's a lot of packs missing their omega. And a lot of alphas going feral. About sixty years ago, the government took over the rights of an omega to choose her own pack. Packs in the city have to place their names in a lottery to even get the opportunity to have an omega in their pack. They pay a lot of money for that chance. Nothing is for free. . . especially omegas.

They call it Choosing Day, and it's a fully televised event every month. The omegas go on stage and draw the name of a pack. Then that's it; she bonds to them and leaves, never to be seen again. Omega kidnappings are a serious problem in Crescent City, so those packs hide their omegas. I feel bad for the omegas. Not only do they not get to choose their packs, but they have to hide from the world just to be safe.

It isn't until one of the alphas shifts to the side that I see him. Those pale blue eyes, framed with dark lashes, find mine, and all the air from my lungs whooshes out. I can't breathe. He stands straighter, his broad shoulders and the way his tight shirt stretches across his chest, gives me butterflies. He takes a step in my direction, and it hits me.

Blueberry pancakes.

He's my favorite food. He smells like comfort and home.

He tilts his head as his lips lift into a sexy smile. Oh those butterflies are back. No boy has ever smiled at me like that before. He's young. The youngest of all the alphas here, and I

watch as he turns back to the bushy beard one. I realize then that they share similar features. Is that his father?

My heart races as he takes another step toward me. He's coming to talk to me. I want to go to him and inhale his scent. Is this the reason everyone looked away? Because alphas draw you to them like a bee to honey? Or is this just me?

The bell above the door dings, interrupting the moment as the sheriff and a deputy enter the diner. We all turn to them.

"We're not looking for trouble here, alphas. We're a beta town, and some of the folk here get nervous around your kind. So, I'm going to have to ask you to move on to another diner outside of Riverton. There are alpha-friendly towns out east. We're not one of them."

There's a low growl, and Deputy Michaels puts his hand to his holster. The bushy bearded one stands and pushes on the chest of Blue Eyes. My mouth drops open. He growled at the cops? My chest lights up in a way it has never done before. I like that. I like that he growled at them.

The sheriff has had to take me home to my father many times over the years. I get into a bit of mischief. This town is boring, and what's going down right now is why. Let the alphas stay. I want to know what Blue Eyes was going to say to me.

They all start to move out, and I feel my father shift beside me as I stand. Why am I standing? Blue Eyes turns back to look over his shoulder as he leaves the diner. I catch his eye for a split second before Deputy Michaels follows him out, his hand never leaving his holster.

The growl of motorcycles revving drowns out the sound of chatter as the diner's patrons seem to begin talking at once. I

find myself rushing outside, watching as the alphas peel away from the parking lot. When they pause at the stop sign at the end of Main Street, Blue Eyes looks back at me again. In those few seconds, it feels like so much is communicated between us. But when his father claps his hand on his back, he turns away from me and rides away.

I feel like I just lost something.

Him . . .

It's evening at the Omega House, and I've had all day to obsess over my Choosing Day. That's too many hours. I thought of him again . . . the blue-eyed alpha. But the man I spent most of today thinking about is waiting for me outside.

Storm is playing games with Frankie, the guard. He blushes as she teases him. I can't even smile at her antics; I need to see *him*. Gage. I'm just biding my time until I can slip outside to the garden, where he protects us from alphas trying to get in. Or from me trying to get out.

Mostly the getting out part.

Who knew caging me up was gonna cause so much drama for the Omega House. They'd never encountered an omega who didn't want to be here. I'm the first escape attempt . . . And the second, third . . . you get the picture. I didn't want to be here. I wanted out. Now I have the chance to get out with my Choosing Day, all I want to do is stay in. Isn't that a bitch.

When I see the beta minder Kiera watching Daisy—the most precious pure omega in the whole house—I make my move and slip out into the cold night air. I wrap my arms around myself as the chill from the day's rain leaches into my bones. I should have worn warmer clothing, but someone

likely would have noticed and figured out where I was going. So, my thin cardigan and jeans will have to do. At least I get to wear jeans, something the pure omegas aren't allowed to do. But we beta-born "don't know anything else." I'm not going to fight them on that.

Outside, I can just smell him on the breeze . . . vanilla beans. My whole body relaxes as I follow the scent to the guardhouse in the back corner. I can't sneak up on him, since the cameras display my every move. I smile up and wave at one.

The other guards who can see the cameras probably just think I'm messing with them. I know they follow my every move out here. After I tried to escape multiple times, they set up a permanent guardhouse. Funny enough, that's the best thing that could have happened to me here. Because Gage works there now and has for the past six months.

Guess how many escapes attempts I've made in the past six months? *None*. One of the things I want is now on the inside with me.

As I round the corner, the light from the small guard room illuminates him. He leans against the doorway with his arms crossed and a huge grin on his face. "Trouble. What brings you out here tonight?"

He asks the same thing every night I visit him. He works four nights a week, and I know which are his. They are the only nights I come out here... it's too cold otherwise. And lonely without him.

"Thinking about jumping over that wall," I reply. That's not what I usually say in reply but today has really shaken me up.

He pushes away from the doorway and takes a step toward me, mindful that the cameras are always watching. “What do you mean?” His hand reaches for me, but it drops to his side as he quickly thinks better of it. I want to run into his arms and hug him. Want to hear him say, *everything will be okay*. But I know I can’t do those things. I can’t risk it.

Betas can’t be with omegas. It’s illegal. Which means any guards working at the Omega House are under strict rules. If one happened to even touch me, he would be gone. If the alpha’s who run the Omega House knew what I wanted to do with Gage . . . well, he would be dead.

“My Choosing Day,” I murmur, choking back tears.

I didn’t expect to get like this over it. But seeing the way Gage stands there, wanting to comfort me . . . I need his touch. I want his touch. Omegas need touch and I’m touch starved.

He comes closer, and I shake my head, taking a step back. Looking up at the camera, his shoulders drop. “It’s next?” he whispers under his breath.

I nod and hear him let out a deep exhale. He runs a hand through his brown hair, revealing the tattoos on his forearms. When he talks about them, I can tell how much they mean to him. I want to know about them. About everything. But now, we don’t have enough time. After my Choosing Day, I’ll never get to see him again.

I glance out the corner of my eye to the camera. “We should run. Jump this wall and run away together,” I whisper.

It’s a romantic idea, and I know as soon as it’s out of my mouth that it’s impossible. We can’t run away. We wouldn’t make it very far before being discovered. My scent alone

would give us away. Even with the blockers, it's still here. Just muted.

“I would, you know. I would run with you. If only I could protect you from packs. I wish I could. Wish I was enough to keep you protected. But I'm not.”

I give a half smile. He's always thinking about me, never what would happen to him. I won't jump over that wall with him, because I know what will happen to me. I will be right back here, as if nothing happened.

Gage . . . he wouldn't be here at all. I couldn't live with myself if I knew that there was even a small chance of that happening. I wouldn't risk him.

“You want to take a midnight stroll?” he asks, and I nod. I love when we walk. It's the only time we can be close. We talk about so many things. He doesn't treat me as if I'm an omega. He treats me like I'm a person. When we are together, our designations slip away and it's just a boy and a girl . . .

Gage leads us to the darkened path of the gardens. It's funny how the city is so close, yet the large walls here make us feel like we're the only people in the world out here late at night.

During the day I can hear cars every so often, but I can't see them. They can't see in here. No buildings are permitted to be tall enough to look in on this side of the Omega House. But that just means we have a better view of the stars.

Walking ahead, I look up. Maybe I can wish on a shooting star. I could really use a wish to take me away from here and back to my home. Dad. Aero. I miss them so much. I need my family.

I feel Gage come up beside me. I watch his face as he looks up at the sky, not speaking. Just standing there with me. His body warmth comes off him in waves, and I suddenly don't feel cold anymore. I rest my arms by my sides, and his finger traces up the inside of my palm and to my wrist and back down again.

My breath seeps out of me, and I look to the ground, trying to keep myself from floating away on this piece of affection. This is all we have—small, stolen moments. Just little bits to get me through the next day until we can do this again. But it's not enough anymore. I need more . . . I want more.

Wrapping my hand around his finger, I lift my head. Even though he's not that much taller than me, I have to look up to meet his deep chocolate eyes peering down into mine. He licks his lips, and my heart starts to race.

I didn't get to kiss Nicolas Rowe at that football party in tenth grade like I'd planned. Never even got to attend the party. I've never been kissed, and I want Gage to be my first.

I don't care what alpha pack gets me; I want to give Gage all my firsts. As I scan the dark path, I wish the cameras couldn't see us in the dark . . .

What about the small garden on the side path? No one goes there. No one but me. The cameras there, but under the trees and shrubs. No one would be able to see us.

Without additional thought, I let go of his finger and take off running. I want him to chase me... catch me and give me the most amazing first kiss ever.

"Harley?" he calls out, and I hear his feet echo behind me off the walls.

Laughing, I run as fast as I can. Brushing past the green foliage of the bushes and the rose bushes, avoiding their thorns.

“Harley,” he says right on my heels, and I spin to the side and duck under the big trees as my feet crunch on sticks and the wet leaves squish under my feet. It’s cold and damp, it smells nice. Fresh. And it hides us from the world.

“Harley?” Gage whisper-yells. “Ouch,” he grunts as a branch smacks him in the face. I giggle as he follows me under.

Then he’s standing in front of me, and those butterflies are back.

He doesn’t say a word as he looks down at me. The sliver of moonlight trickling in through the leaves casts this beautiful glow around his face. My chest is pounding . . . from running? Or from the fact we’re alone—no one is watching us—for the first time?

“Harley.” He reaches out, claiming my hand, and I take a step into him. My body presses against his as I reach up with my other hand and stroke the side of his jaw. He leans into the touch, and my heart sings.

“Gage,” I whisper. “Kiss me.”

His eyes dip to my mouth as he leans down and brushes his lips over mine, soft and gentle, then he pulls away. I grab the back of his head and pull him closer. I want to feel him. Want to crawl up his body and chase this kiss.

“Harley.”

I can see he’s worried. I am too. But I don’t care in this moment. This is ours. They can’t take this from me. From us. I choose Gage.

“Fuck, I always knew you were your trouble.” It’s all he says before his lips are on mine again. Only, they’re no longer soft. They’re harder, more demanding, as his tongue sweeps over my lips, and I gasp. I cling to him, not letting go as we say all the things we can’t with words.

Words would hurt so much more when I’m gone.

The radio on his hip turns on. The white noise is deafening as we jump apart. Pressing my fingers to my swollen lips, my heart races. Did they see us? Gage’s eyes widen as he takes a step back, shaking his head.

“Emmett, did you find her? Do we need to call in the alphas?”

We both look at his radio. He doesn’t move, and the only sound is our breathing as I wait for him to respond.

“Gage? Do you have Harley with you, or do we need to call it in?”

That snaps him out of it. He grabs the radio. “I have her. She was looking for a leaf, and her shoe got stuck in the mud. I’m bringing her out now.”

I look up at him once again, as he puts the radio back on his hip. They saw us, but at least they only saw us come in here. They don’t know about the kiss. This is ours. One kiss... one chance to tell him how much I have fallen for him and how I wish stars would align and we can be together.

Nothing hurts more than a forbidden love.

Gage steps closer and wraps his arms tenderly around me. “Harley,” he whispers into my hair. “You’re the best kind of trouble. And now that kiss . . .” He sighs. “I promise you, I will find a way to keep us together. Even after your Choosing Day.”

He pulls back slightly and runs his thumb along my lower lip to my chin. He tilts my head up and kisses me one last time before taking my hand and leading me out of the shrubs and canopy of trees. Out here we can't be two lovers. We have to go back to guard and *prisoner*... because that's really what I am here.

I look down to my shoes as soon as we get on the path. They're not muddy, but I pretend to stomp off dirt as he lets go of my hand. I know they are watching us... always watching. So I cross my arms and make a mad face so it looks like I'm angry with him for pulling me out. The corner of his lip twitches and I know he wants to say something that will make me laugh. So he quickly looks away. As we start walking side by side back to the guard house.

I hold my hand over my mouth to stop myself from smiling. Because after that kiss I know I will be walking around with a permanent smile.

"Best first kiss ever," I whisper under my breath so only he can hear.

He turns to me.

"I promise—it won't be our last."

If only the world wasn't stacked against us.

CHAPTER 2

HARLEY

His pale blue eyes, such a contrast to his dark hair, meet mine. I can't look away from his handsome face and those lips . . . those oh-so-kissable lips. As my alpha stalks toward me, Gage grips my hips.

"I promised you it wouldn't be our last." He kisses me, then turns me to my alpha. Blueberry pancakes and vanilla bean surround me, and my slick runs down my thighs in anticipation.

"Harley," Veronica yells, and I jolt up in bed, my chest hammering. I can smell my perfume in the room. It's strong. *Fuck.* No hiding that from anyone.

That was a new sex dream . . . I've never had one like that.

"Dahlia is preparing for her Choosing Day, Harley. You might want to see what goes into it. Or at least get ready, since your announcement is tonight after her ceremony." Veronica opens my blinds, and the sunlight streams in. I'd almost forgotten I'm next. *Almost.*

I wish the house betas pampered the beta-born omegas as much as the pure omegas. But we get no such treatment.

It's not like there's anyone I can complain to. The head alpha of the Omega House—because having an omega as head of the omegas would be “such a waste.” His words, not mine, when I complained to him that he shouldn't be in charge—is no help. He doesn't like beta-born omegas. Even if he did, he really doesn't like me, and not because of my complaint. His disdain is due to my multiple escape attempts. Apparently, I'm the only omega who “wants to be kidnapped by omega traffickers.”

I'm sure there are other people out there. The chances of me being kidnapped by traffickers are low. The risk of being taken by a desperate pack of alphas is much higher. The chance to not be in here... well as soon as I make it over that wall.

“No, I'm good,” I say as I roll over and grab my blankets, covering my face. Sulking the day away sounds better than watching a pure-blood Omega get ready for the day she doesn't get to choose. Not that she likely feels that way. The pure omegas are bred for this. They are the elite. This is their families' legacy. All elites stick together, so she'll get herself an elite pack and have a heap of pure alpha and omega babies.

Not like me. As a beta-born omega, my value is low. The packs that will buy tickets for my lottery won't be the elite. Not that I care, but my tickets cost half the price of a pure bloodline omega. That's how much value I have here. My children won't ever be pure and could end up as betas. Not that there's anything wrong with being beta. I think it's better to be honest.

“But you need to learn these things for your day,” she continues.

I sit up and throw my blankets to the floor, watching her eyes roll as she goes to my closet. With an arch of my brow, I taunt her to say something about my attitude. But she holds her tongue. Omegas tend to have attitudes... so I can get away with a lot more sass than I would have if I was a beta.

“What do I need to learn? I’m supposed to get dressed in whatever you tell me to, go up on stage and pull a name from the barrel, and whatever name is in there, that’s my future, whether I like the alphas or not.”

Veronica shakes her head. “If you had listened during class, you would know there is more to it than that. Dahlia has already done her meet and greets, where she meets the alphas and their packs.”

She what? Meet and greet? My puzzled expression must give away what I’m thinking.

“It’s not just a pack you don’t know, Harley. You will draw out a pack that you have chosen to be in there.” Veronica huffs as she picks up my bedding.

I’m so confused. I’ve watched the Choosing my whole life. I’ve completed the classes here at the Omega House. Not once has anyone said I get to choose. The only choosing part is when I pull out a name, and even then, I didn’t choose to be up there or in here.

“So, I meet packs, and I say what? Yes to them? What if I only say yes to one pack?” I always just assumed they bought their tickets and entered the lottery without meeting the omegas. Because Choosing Day is really a lottery. Only, no cash prize. You win yourself an omega.

“You must select a minimum of fifty packs. If you don’t, they will be added at random. So, it’s important that you select

the ones to be in there. This way, it's fair to the alphas of Crescent City."

Fair . . . yeah, that sounds fair to me.

It's exactly what I expected. Shaking my head, I drop back onto my bed. Veronica comes over and hands me my pills for today. Scent blockers, and one to stop my heat from coming. I take them willingly.

Two years ago, I didn't take any of my medications in protest of being locked up here and not being able to see my father or my brother.

The alpha in charge, Jonathan, didn't seem to care. He told me I could do whatever I wanted. If I didn't want to take my medication, I didn't have to. I thought I was winning. That I had made a point and he actually cared. Then my heat came in.

I was begging for a knot by the end of the first day and was in so much pain, I thought I would die. I understood then that he knew this would happen. He didn't care; he wanted me to learn my lesson. Never go against an alpha. It was my first heat, and I suffered for a whole week, even with the toys they supplied. I've taken my medication every day after that, but only because I don't want that to happen again while I'm here.

I grumble when she hands me the clothes she selected. Not that I get much of a choice in the clothing I wear, but I prefer oversized hoodies and my black band tees. Some old, worn-in jeans and my black combat boots. Not this fancy dress shit. I hate it. I was never a girly girl and liked my style before being forced to wear the shit they make us don here.

"Come on." Veronica snaps her fingers. "Storm is waiting for us."

Why is Storm waiting for us? She's my best friend in here and the only beta-born my age. We both just turned twenty last month. There aren't many of us beta-born, so as soon as we met each other, we became instant friends. She hates her designation, and she messes with the guards and staff as much as she can. She regularly doesn't take her meds and will perfume for days before Veronica, the beta house mom, clues in.

"This makes no sense; they've never had two omegas do a Choosing Day together. Do you think that's why we can't watch the news anymore? There's something going on, and we seem to be caught up in it," Storm whispers closely into my ear.

About three months ago, they started restricting the shows we could watch in our free time. One of them being the news. It was our only connection to the outside world, and they took it away from us. I assumed we'd done something wrong in the house and were being punished.

"Something's going on. Something that they don't want us to know about." I've had this feeling for a while. I just didn't want it to be true.

I can't believe two of us are going up for Choosing Day. It's never happened before in the sixty years it's been running. Is it because we're both beta-born?

Storm's dark chocolate scent washes over me with a tinge of fear, setting off my Omega instincts. Nothing like the hormones of an omega, making me want to flee and retreat to my nest. Or scratch out the eyes of my best friend in some

weird territorial move. Neither is what I want, but I don't get to choose these feelings. Or be rational about them.

I quickly look over and see Daisy glaring at us from across the room. Her perfect, glossy black hair is done up as if she's going somewhere to meet alphas. She isn't. But that's all the elite omegas think about—meeting alphas.

“Think there's going to be a war?” Storm asks almost too low for me to hear. “I hope they overturn the government and stop this Omega House bullshit.”

I knew Storm doesn't like the way the government runs the country. Heck, neither do I. But I also worry about speaking my thoughts aloud. If the wrong person hears us, we'll be in big trouble.

“Let's talk about this later.” I move away from her before my hormones lash out at her scent. She's perfuming, and it's setting me off.

She flicks her wild, curly auburn hair over her shoulder and stands tall, with her hand on her hip, as she stares daggers at Daisy. I hear Daisy squeak and run off. Storm turns and takes a cookie, like she didn't just scare off Daisy.

I shake my head and grin at her. She's unbelievable.

“What?” she asks around a mouthful of cookie, and I laugh.

“The bitch wouldn't quit staring at me.” She shrugs and stuffs another cookie into her mouth. One thing I learned early on with Storm—don't get between her and cookies. You might lose a finger.

The beta bitch in charge this morning glares at the two of us. I watch as she approaches and then remember to lower my head like I've been trained, not making eye contact with her as

if she were an alpha. It's bullshit, but it keeps me from getting into trouble . . . unlike Storm.

"Miss Harley," she says, and I look up at Miranda. Her lips are pursed tight like she sucked on a lemon. "A little too late. As soon as you see me, you must acknowledge my status. Not wait for me to approach you."

I wish I could tell her what to do with her fucking status. She can shove it right up her ass, but I hold my tongue and give her a small nod. I don't want the alpha in charge to come down. I never know which one it's going to be, and I don't want to find out.

I glance over at Storm and instantly realize my mistake. I have to bite my lip to stop from bursting out laughing. Storm has finished all the cookies, and she twirls around on the spot with a grin. Oh gosh. I see her gum wrapper on the table.

She's chewing gum in front of Miranda. Storm has to get Frankie, one of the guards, to sneak it in for her, since it's banned in the Omega House.

"Miss Storm, I don't have words for your manners. It's like you don't even want to try to be a good omega." Miranda looks like she's about to have a coronary, the way her eye twitches.

"Miranda, what crawled up your ass?" She grins and winks over at the beta.

A snort passes my lips, and I quickly slap my hand over my mouth as Miranda's eyes land on me. I pretend to cough, but it's too late.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Storm go one step further and blows a bubble with her gum. My mouth drops

open. She's going to lose all her gum, and Frankie will get in so much trouble if they find out he snuck it in.

Miranda surprises me when she reaches out with her index finger and pops the bubble. I bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from bursting out laughing as Storm's eyes widen.

"All right, Miss Storm, this is your final warning." Veronica's voice booms through the room as she stomps over to us.

I tilt my head down at her entrance. There's messing with the Omega House betas in charge, then there's messing with fire.

"What happens after my final warning? Do you spank me?" Storm teases.

That's it for me. I can't hold on. I double over, gripping my knee as I bark out a laugh. Holy shit, my best friend has omega balls.

"That's it. Neither of you will be going today." Veronica stands straighter as she hands down the best news of the day. She doesn't get it. What she thinks is a punishment is so much better than what's coming for us when we're left with a bunch of alphas who only want to use our bodies.

"Thank fuck," I mutter, and she gasps at my language.

Her eyes narrow at me, and I hold her gaze. I was a beta longer than an omega. I curse. Hell, I have more where that came from, if she wants the truth.

But I want some truths of my own. Why are Storm and I sharing a Choosing Day? We'll be the only two beta-born to go up on that stage in at least two years. It would make more sense if eighteen-year-old Goldie and her twin, Angel, went up together in a few years. Not us.

I turn my back on Veronica and Miranda. Storm closes the distance between us, and I feel her happiness coming off her in waves. Wow, she hasn't been taking her meds for a while. Her scent is strong.

We start heading toward the common room, where the TV is.

"You wanna watch *Friends* again?" Storm is practically skipping, and I have to shuffle to keep up.

"What about movie first? How about—"

"Stop." A deep voice cracks through the air, and I gasp as I come to a sudden stop. Storm freezes only a few steps in front of me, her hands curling into fists.

An alpha's bark. As if we didn't have enough shit thrown at us, now we get this, proving how weak we truly are. Who really holds the power in this world.

"Turn," he barks again.

The power of his bark is too much, and I can't stop myself. My instincts want to please him, but my mind screams to stop. He's one of them, one of the government alphas who run the Omega House. We don't see them very often. Hell, I think I have only seen one this year, and it's October. But that's because I've been very careful not to attract attention, since there's something I've been hiding, even from Storm.

But if Jonathan is here, then something really is up. They never come into the house before a Choosing Day. Shit.

I glance over at Storm. Her smile is absent as she stares down the alpha in defiance. But her scent says otherwise. Even though she would never admit it, and she pokes and teases all the betas in charge, the government alphas scare her. They scare all of us.

“Look at me,” Jonathan says. It’s no longer an alpha bark, but there’s a warning tone to his voice. I hear the rumble in his chest when I don’t look at him. There’s no way I’m looking this alpha in the eye without him barking at me.

“Look at me,” he growls out again, and I visibly shake.

Did he hear what we were saying earlier about the uprising? What would he do to us if he did?

“Look at me, Harley,” he barks.

My eyes snap to his, and I’m met with deep green eyes. His apricot and nectarine scent washes over me, and it isn’t unpleasant. I hate that. This—the power alphas have over me—is the part I hate most about being an omega. And it’s why Choosing Day scares the shit out of me. I wasn’t raised in this world. I’d never seen alphas up close until that day in the diner. I was brought to the Omega House, and I’ve seen how they use their bark. The wrong type of alphas . . . I didn’t even want to think about what they could do to me with their barks.

“You will stop teasing the betas. You will both show respect. Do you understand?”

I nod at his words, letting him know I understand. I could smell my own fear leaching out into the room, and I hated that. I hated that he could tell I feared him.

“You both will be coming today and be on your best behavior. It will be your Choosing Day in two weeks’ time.”

My mouth drops open.

“Two weeks?” I hear Storm whisper under her breath.

Both of us in two weeks? Not one omega a month. I only have fourteen days to prepare for my own Choosing Day. Hell,

I've had four years to come to terms with this, but with a date set, the countdown is really on.

“Let's go.” Veronica snaps her fingers to get my attention.

I nod my head and look over at Storm, whose brows are raised.

Something is going on, and somehow, we're a part of it.

CHAPTER 3

ACE

“**I**t’s getting worse, Ace,” Jax mutters over his morning coffee.

I know exactly what he’s talking about. Our pack member Knight. Every day, he grows closer to becoming completely feral, and there’s nothing I can do. Knight is only twenty-three. It’s too young for him to be going feral.

Most alphas start the transition when they hit forty. By the time they’re forty-five, they’re completely gone. The alpha you once knew is no longer there. But for it to happen to Knight . . . it breaks my heart. And we don’t know how to stop it from getting worse.

Zayd has spent many months researching. Why is it starting now? How can we slow it down? The only answer he’s come up with is impossible—a scent match. If an alpha finds his scent match and doesn’t bond to them, he turns feral. But Knight has never met a scent match.

The girl he talked about years ago, when he came back from a ride with his father and his pack, was only a beta. One he said smelled like honeycomb and toffee apples and *his*. We all went back to the diner to find her the following Sunday, but no one would talk to us about her. It’s as though she vanished.

I run my hands down my face and through the scruff of my beard. We don't have enough money for a ticket in the omega lottery. And even if we did, how would we hide Knight's feral status from them? They would see—hell, smell—him, and we'd be disqualified from any future Choosing Days. Even worse? They'd take him from us.

And yet, it's our only hope. We'll have to find a way. To get the money. To hide Knight's status. All of it.

"I'll sell my bike. Sell anything of value and enter the Choosing Day lottery." I let out a deep breath. At least fifty other packs will have their name in that barrel too. The odds are not in our favor.

Jax grunts. "I know how much you love your bike, Ace. I feel the same about my own. But I'll list them both today. Maybe we'll get enough to buy a second ticket. They said on the news that there's gonna be two beta-born omegas up this round, so our odds might be better."

I don't know about that. If our odds were better, Knight wouldn't be going feral.

"He's getting worse, and I don't know how long he's got left. If we don't get chosen this round . . ." I don't say the words. I don't have to. He already knows what will happen to Knight.

Jax traces his fingers over the handle of his mug. We don't know how much time our packmate has left, and I refuse to take him to a hospital. They will know, they will label him unfit for the lottery, they will take him from us, and he will live out his days in an alpha facility. And by *live out his days*, I mean that they'll determine when those days are up.

I won't let that happen.

Jax sits up straighter and glances out the window. Fuck, he can sense my doubts through our bond. I try and shut it down to the rest of pack, but somehow, Jax always knows what I'm feeling. Even when I don't know what I'm feeling myself.

It's raining again, and it's fucking miserable, just like the situation we're in. I fucking hate this so much, and there's nothing I can do. We need more time, more money. More omegas in this fucked-up world.

“Should we wait, just a little longer?” I ask.

The uprising is gathering steam, and I know they're hiding more omegas than they say they are in that house. Hell, it's not even a house. It's a fortress. The only people who come and go from there are the beta guards and the alphas who run it. *Elites*. They think they're so much better than us because our bloodlines are muddied with beta blood.

The tension in the air is high. It's time for us to take on the elites. They have everything; their alphas never go feral. They have enough omegas to make sure of it, leaving the rest of us packs with a few omegas a year. Last year, there were no beta-born. Hundreds of packs—a few thousand alphas—all vying for one thing.

Their omega.

I don't care about pure, and I don't care about money or fancy cars or my bike. All I care about is saving my packmate. Saving all the alphas who go feral. I smell him. His scent is thick, tarnished with the smell of burned pancakes. Fuck, Dash and Zayd are in there with him. I can feel them through the bond, trying to calm Knight. But he can't control it. His growl rips through the house . . . rips through my chest.

Jax stands. “We can’t wait any longer, and you know it.” Moving around the kitchen, he places his mug in the sink as he goes to the door where Knight is losing his mind.

My shoulders drop. I’m pack leader, and I just feel useless. I know the only way we can help Knight is with an omega’s bond . . . at least, in theory. If he really found his scent match that day in the diner, no other omega will ever be able to heal him.

“Maybe go back to that diner?” I could see if anyone knows this girl. The one with the big brown eyes and the sweetest smile. I’ve heard Knight talk about her so much, I feel as if I already know her.

Jax hesitates for a moment as we feel the fear and anger leach through the bond Knight tries so hard to shut down when he comes back to us. He hates us knowing that he’s scared.

“I’ll set up the meeting day for the omegas,” I tell him. “We’ll watch tonight’s Choosing and see which omegas will be up.” I know it’s a formal meeting to make sure the omega likes your scent. And only then will they accept your name in the lottery. But if Knight is like he is now, I don’t think we can even attend as a pack.

Jax nods before he slips into the room. I see Dash lying on the bed beside Knight, running his hands over his turned back, trying to comfort him.

“Just let me leave. I can’t do this to you all,” Knight growls out.

The door clicks shut, and my heart splits open as I grip my hair.

“Fuck.” I slam my fist onto the table, the wood under it groaning at the force.

When alphas turn feral, they sever ties with their pack. It hurts those left behind. A piece of your soul leaves with them. But I'm a year off forty. I will be gone in five years. I'm okay with that. Came to terms with it years ago. I've lived a pretty good life.

But Knight?

His life has only just started.

CHAPTER 4

HARLEY

The black town car pulls up to the sidewalk where the red carpet is laid out, ready for the Choosing Day ceremony. Nausea threatens to overtake me. I'm not ready. I can't do this.

I place a hand over my heart and feel it racing. I feel . . . *wrong*.

This is the first time I've been out in years. I'm barely allowed in the garden at the Omega House after my escape attempts; that's why I sneak out more often than not. Yet, here I am, about to be surrounded by the elite. And alphas. I forgot about all the alphas.

But then I feel a hand on my knee and look over to Storm. She's touching me. Omegas thrive off touch. It's the one big change I noticed when I first presented. I love touch. I want to touch. But Omegas are territorial, so Storm would never go into my room. I would never go into hers, either. I've never hugged her or touched her in any way.

Despite that, she's offering her comfort in the only way she can as an omega. Reaching down, I touch her hand and give her a small nod. We're in this together.

The door to the car opens, and Frankie, a beta guard from the Omega House, smiles in at us. I can smell Storm's perfume

grow stronger, and my eyes widen. I think Storm has a secret like mine.

“Harley and Storm, it’s time.” Veronica calls our names from around Frankie, and I watch as the smile on his face drops.

My heart races at the thought of another face with the same expression back at the Omega House . . . *Gage*. I’m going to lose him.

Before I can think any more about what I’m going to miss, I hear yelling, cheering? No, it’s the opposite. I step out onto the red carpet, and the flashes of cameras race off as I hear the shouts loud and clear. It’s a protest. Against the elites. I turn to Storm as she holds Frankie’s hand to help her out of the car and she freezes.

It’s true. There is an uprising.

Veronica ushers us inside, and I can barely keep up in the heels she’s made me wear. As soon as we enter the large theater, I freeze. The scents of hundreds of alphas hit me like a truck, and I gag at the sickly scents. I scrunch my nose as I try to breathe through my mouth. All eyes are on us now, including the cameras, and I feel like a fish out of water.

“We’re on TV,” Storm whispers under her breath beside me.

“Girls, smile,” Veronica hisses from behind us. “They’re announcing you as the next omegas. You might want to use those manners we taught you, so you can show all the alphas what good omegas you’ll make.”

Storm reaches for my hand and squeezes, smiling over at me before letting go. She spins on her heel and winks. Fuck. I can’t contain my giggle. I can’t believe Jonathan wanted us

both at this thing. Oh, we will show them our manners, all right. We have two weeks to show them all what good little omegas we are.

Storm spins back around and is walking down the aisle between the alphas seated, her gold dress glittering in the spotlights, and all eyes are on her. She waves to the camera, then proceeds to run her fingertips over the shoulders of the alphas sitting along the aisle. She's perfuming hard, and I grin as the alphas begin to notice too. They start standing up and scrambling over each other to get closer to her.

"Fuck," Frankie curses as he takes off, and I realize I haven't moved from where I'm frozen, and alphas are now looking at me.

"Oh my gosh." Veronica panics and starts chasing Storm down the aisle, but it's too late. I can't keep the grin from my face.

When Veronica turns to look at me, I quickly reach down and pull off the heels she made me wear and kick them to the side. I dare her to say something. Because if I have to walk down there, I'm not doing it in those heels. I grab the heavy fabric of the dress and hitch it up, so I don't trip over it as I follow Storm.

I had no idea that alphas reacted this strongly. But Storm obviously knew. She's playing with fire.

My humor fades as I notice alphas moving right into my path, blocking me from Storm, and turning their gazes on me. I take a step back, and a strong hand wraps around my wrist as guards from the Omega House rush beside me. Some of them are alphas that wear the Omega House uniform but I've never seen before. I gasp, trying to pull from the person's grip, but that's when I hear his voice.

“You’re safe. I’ve got you, Harley,” Gage whispers in my ear.

I can’t smell him over the alphas here. He’s here. I almost let out a sob. I should have realized. They always bring omega guards to these events. That’s why Frankie is here. I relax under his touch. I feel safe with him. *Always.*

Hearing the deep rumbles of alphas around me, I realize my scent blockers aren’t working anymore, and I perfume for Gage. Shit, that’s never happened. I took the blockers this morning.

A few guards start to push the alphas back to their seats, but Storm riled too many of them up. It isn’t until someone gets on the PA system that the alphas start to listen.

“If you do not return to your seats, your names will be taken from the barrel, and you will no longer be permitted to enter any future omega lotteries.”

It doesn’t take long for them to return to their seats. During the entire ordeal, Gage never removed his hand from me. He held me close, and I could feel how tense he was. He’s not as large as an alpha. He’s actually one of the smaller guards on duty back at the Omega House.

I think he’s there so we don’t feel intimidated by his size. Or so I don’t go scaling over the wall again, because he’s a sweet talker. Either way, I’m glad I met him. He keeps me from wanting to go over the wall . . . but now everything’s changed, with my Choosing Day so close.

I lean into him. I tried so hard not to, but he’s my comfort. He’s my beta. I breathe in his vanilla bean scent. Even though he’s a beta, and doesn’t smell like an alpha, his scent always does something to me.

“Harley.” I look up to see Veronica waving for me to come down to the front. Her eyes narrow at where Gage holds my wrist.

I look up at him and give him a small smile. “Thank you so much for helping me back there.” But what I want to do is kiss him in front of them all and let them know I don’t want to choose a pack of alphas if I don’t get to keep him.

His eyes dart to Veronica. He nods and removes his hand from my bare skin. I almost whimper at the loss of touch. I’m so touch starved. I want his hand back the moment it leaves.

Soon, I tell myself. *Soon*, this will all be over, and I will claim Gage as mine. I’ll just need to work out how to escape from a pack of alphas in a city full of them and find where Gage lives and break into his bed and never leave.

I quickly hurry down the aisle, trying not to trip over my dress while alpha scents assault my nose. So many pheromones in such a small space, it makes me feel sick.

“What were you doing?” Veronica scolds me, looking back over her shoulder to see Gage followed me down to the stage.

“I felt dizzy. I thought I was going to fall. There were so many alphas, I was overwhelmed, and Gage saved me from collapsing.” I blink a few times, holding my hand over my chest, and cast my eyes to the floor, giving her my best omega act.

“Oh, I shouldn’t have left you. Do you think you’re well enough to sit through the Choosing?”

I look up at her through my lashes and nod slightly.

“How come you didn’t take your scent blockers?” she asks, hurrying me up the side onto the stage.

“I did. You gave them to me this morning. I don’t know what happened.”

I really don’t know how that happened. Gage being there when I needed him seemed to be all I needed to break through the blockers. It didn’t happen last night when we kissed.

Spotting Dahlia standing alone on the side of the stage, my thoughts turn to her. She is the nicest of the elite omegas I’ve encountered at the house. Not that we spoke much, but I want to tell her now that I hope she gets a pack that will take care of her.

She doesn’t even have her family here. I always thought all elite get to see their families. But now I think about it, she never left the house. Not like Daisy or any of the others have.

She looks so beautiful. Most elite choose their wedding gown for their Choosing Day, and she has done the same. The dress has silver threads that just glitter in the lights. I know if I have a choice, my dress will be black. Because I don’t believe in all of this. I think we should have the right to choose. But I don’t even get to choose my dresses.

I move to her, and her brown eyes widen, but then she gives me a small smile.

“Dahlia, you look beautiful.”

“Thank you, Harley. So do you.” I look down to where my dress is bunched up around my feet. “I hate heels too,” she says, and I chuckle.

“I’m so sorry I never got to know you better at the house, but I hope this day is everything you dreamed it would be. I hope you get a pack that will treat you well and let you have the freedom to be yourself. Paint some of those amazing

watercolors you do. You should sell them. They are so gorgeous.”

Her eyes water a little, and I feel the need to hug her. But the omega in me can't.

I know she feels the same as she moves toward me and smiles softly. “I didn't know you saw my paintings.”

Her statement makes me realize I really haven't spoken to her before now. And now I never will. She's not like the other elite omegas. I shouldn't have lumped them all into one box. Dahlia is different.

She's always been nice and pleasant, but she never spoke much. Since she never had anything bad to say about beta-born omegas, I always considered her to be nice.

I reach out my hand, giving her the choice of receiving some comfort from me. She hesitates at first, but then she reaches out and cups my hand. I feel some paper pressed against my palm. I look down to our hands, but she makes a sound and holds me tightly.

“Sometimes, we have to *make* our dreams come true,” she whispers, and she pulls her hand away slightly, and I see it's a ticket in her hand. A lottery ticket.

I gasp . . . Pack Kingston.

I look up at her, and she nods. “Make your dreams come true on your Choosing Day, Harley.”

The announcements are being made when she takes the ticket back into her hand and walks out on stage, leaving me stunned.

Did I really see that? Did she show me how she will make her dreams come true by cheating the system? How did she get

that ticket? Did they give it to her? Is this how all omegas get the pack they want? No . . . I watched Marigold cry and scream a few months back, and they had to drag her off the stage.

This is Dahlia showing me the way she's making her dreams come true. She's figured out a way to rig the system. The ticket looks legit. There's no way they would think otherwise, but how?

Storm moves over to me. "Are you okay? What did she say to you?"

Instead of responding, I look over to Dahlia, and she glances back at me as she spins the barrel on stage, mixing up all the lottery tickets while the room buzzes with conversation. She turns back to face the crowd of alphas as the barrel stops, and the announcer opens the door for her to reach in and pull out a ticket.

The whole room grows quiet as she reaches in, one hand closed around her ticket and the other open. As she shuffles the tickets around, all I can do is watch. She pulls back a closed fist. The same closed fist as she put in there. I hold my breath. This is going to work. She has the name in there . . . It will be Pack Kingston.

She opens the ticket and smiles down at it, then looks out to the crowd with the same smile on her face as she places a hand to her chest. It's an act. She's giving them the show that's expected, but she has used the process to get the pack she wants.

"Who are the lucky winners, Miss Dahlia?" The announcer asks in a drawn-out voice.

She takes a step back and shows him the name. He looks down at the audience with a huge grin on his face. “Come on up, Pack Kingston, and claim your omega.”

My mouth drops open as six large alphas and their beta run up to the stage. She did it. She cheated the system.

Dahlia smiles up at the first alpha who makes it to her. He gently touches her arm, and she leans into his touch. We all move on stage now, Veronica gesturing to clap our hands and giving us an exaggerated smile.

“I didn’t doubt for one moment that you would be ours,” the large alpha says to Dahlia, and I hear him. He *knew* . . . they all knew what she would do. She chose her pack, and she showed me how to do that same.

To take charge of my own destiny.

“There you have it, ladies and gentlemen. Another complete pack, thanks to our amazing government for giving us the Choosing Day. They’re the reason we have a safe place for omegas to go and the lottery to give every pack a chance of finding their omega.

“Now, before you all leave, we have the two beta-born omegas here who have been chosen for the next lottery. Their Choosing Day will be in two weeks. We have sped this up, as we have so many unclaimed omegas looking for their packs, it’s only fair we give them their Choosing Day sooner.

“You’ll be able to meet these omegas over the next week, giving you a chance to put your name into the lottery.”

There are a lot of murmurs around the theater, and I think the alphas are just as surprised as Storm and I were this morning. But if the protest outside didn’t alert them that

something is up, the fact they are speeding up our ceremony does.

Veronica ushers us up to stand with the announcer as my ears start to ring with panic. The announcer is saying my name, and I'm frozen on the spot.

“Harley likes to take walks in the gardens and enjoys watching the TV series *Friends* with her Omega friend Storm. Storm is—”

I can't believe what they're saying about me. I sound boring and like some meek omega who doesn't do anything fun. I blink and look to where Storm is now, what is she?... Oh fuck. She just grabbed the microphone from the announcer before he says the exact same boring rehearsed stuff about her, and Veronica gasps beside me. My mouth drops open in surprise, but really... when Storm is involved, you better know there's gonna be some mischief afoot. But this really takes the cake. This is a live broadcast.

“Just so you know, Harley is so much more than that. This girl is one of a kind. She's caring, sweet, and has the mouth of a sailor. So, you better get used to the word *fuck*, as she uses it a lot.”

My mouth drops, and Storm winks over to me. *Holy fuck.*

As I start to laugh, Veronica and the announcer try to peel the microphone from her. I wish I had her confidence, but what I really dream for is a pack who will treat me right. An alpha with pale blue eyes who smells like blueberry pancakes.

Fuck it. I've got to make my dreams come true too.

When I reach out, Storm somehow wrestles the microphone away from them both and gives it to me. I can't wipe the grin from my face as I turn to the crowd and the

cameras. “I want to find a pack that won’t mess me around. I love the scent of blueberry pancakes, sleeping in, and yes, I like to be in the garden.

“I want someone to watch movies with me and try to beat me at chess. I want someone who will sit and read quietly and want to snuggle. I don’t like being told what to do, and I don’t want to be a sex toy that you lock away between my heats. I want a pack that knows I won’t change. This is me. Take me or not. Love is love.”

With Veronica hot on my heels, I trip over my dress and fall as I run from her. Gage is there to catch me, and I pause, smiling up into his gorgeous face. He wears a look of concern, like I’ve gone crazy. And maybe I have, but if this gets me the right pack, I know they will have room for my beta. I won’t change who I love, and I can feel it deep inside.

I love him.

Because I know my fate, no matter which way I choose. Alphas will always be a part of my life. As long as I can keep Gage . . . that’s all I care about. Love is love. I don’t care that it’s illegal for betas and omegas to be romantically involved. It’s a bullshit law and one that needs to be abolished.

I look back to the cameras and over to Storm, who’s holding the announcer and Veronica back. With a laugh, I do for her what she did for me.

“Storm is just like her name. She will sweep you up and toss you around a bit. But it’s worth it, I promise. Thunder and lightning. Tornados and hurricanes. Nothing in your life will be the same once she’s a part of it. But you will be so grateful she is, because once you get to know her . . . you get rainbows.”

I don't know who the perfect pack for Storm would be, but I hope they're out there and that she gets her dream. Because as soon as we're somewhere private, I'm going to tell her what I now know.

The microphone is ripped from my hand, and Gage pulls me away to the back of the stage, where Storm is with a few guards, Veronica, and—*fuck*—Jonathan.

“What was that?” he demands, and she shrugs her shoulder and cocks her hip out. Shit. I watch his eyes grow harder and shrink back.

“Harley,” he growls at me, my instincts telling me to not anger this alpha any further. He looks like he's about to pop a blood vessel in his eye, the way his jaw clenches and his face grows red.

“I'm sorry. I just wanted the alphas to know I like more than walking in the garden and watching TV.” But was it really just that?

It's only then that I hear the protesters outside, louder than before.

We might not have been willing participants in the uprising, but Jonathan made us ones when he put us up here today. If anyone is to blame for our behavior, it's him. What did he expect with me and Storm?

We're not good omegas, and now the entire city knows it.

CHAPTER 5

JAX

“**W**hat the fuck is happening?” Dash sits up on the sofa, staring at the two beta-born omegas as the one with wild hair grabs the microphone and starts listing the qualities of her omega friend.

“That’s new.” I admit, I’m just as intrigued. They never, and I mean never, let the omegas talk at these things. Well, I guess in some ways they didn’t let her talk. She’s just taken it upon herself to do so while fighting off the beta and announcer.

I love it. I chuckle, that omega is gonna make a pack very crazy... in the best ways.

“Hurry up, Ace,” I call out, and Zayd taps my leg and points to the omega now on the screen. It’s the friend—Harley.

I smile at her name . . . I sold mine this morning, and we made enough to get a ticket for the lottery. It’s a sign. This is going to work. She’s beautiful, with red lips and long dark chestnut hair. The outfit she’s rocking doesn’t suit her. It’s not her choice, I can tell that by the way she move in it. She’s not comfortable.

I want to reach into the TV sooth her... okay that’s new. The alpha in me wants to make her feel safe and comforted. I feel itchy under my skin.

“I want to find a pack that won’t mess me around. I love the scent of blueberry pancakes, sleeping in, and—”

I jump off the sofa and turn to Ace, who is frozen behind me, his beer lingering near his lips. He heard it. I heard it...

“Blueberry pancakes.” Dash stands and waves his arms my chest is pounding is this... is this the girl from the diner?

“Get Knight.” Ace yells. I can feel him down the bond, he doesn’t feel like us. He doesn’t have the same hope as us.

Zayd is on his way to get him already and I turn to him and open my mouth to tell him to stop being so negative. I can feel it. She’s the one.

“This isn’t going to be her. Don’t get his hopes up,” Ace warns, but it makes sense not to get Knight’s hopes up. I don’t want to do that to him. But it also makes sense that this is her... its too much of a coincidence that she loves the scent... not the taste. She said scent of blueberry pancakes. And there’s only one alpha I know who smells like that.

“It’s her. I can feel it in my soul,” I tell him. “It’s why we didn’t find her there all those times we went back. She’s an omega. Only, she wasn’t when Knight was there, he said he was drawn to this beta... her scent. He’d never smelled an unclaimed omega before.

“That might have been why he was so drawn to her... a beta only town. No one would have picked up her scent. Only an alpha. She had to be just on the edge of her designation. It’s the only thing that makes sense.”

Knight stumbles out, wearing only his jeans. Yawning, he rubs his hand down his chest and scratches his belly. He’s attractive. What can I say? I like men and women. Knight is the perfect specimen of man to me. That dark hair and olive

complexion, mixed with those eyes. Ugh... pity he doesn't like to play with men.

“What’s going on?” he asks wearily. He looks wrecked. It’s just getting worse and I feel bad we dragged him out here, but he needs to see her... Harley.

I take a step to the side and point at the TV. Praying to the Gods this is the omega he met.

Moving closer, he holds on to the back of the sofa and blinks a few times. “Toffee apples.” He gasps, and his scent changes instantly. No more burned pancakes . . . blueberries. Everyone watches him as he moves to the TV, reaching out to touch it, as though he could touch her through the screen. Just as I had felt only moments before.

“Fuck, Knight,” I say. “Do you know what this means?”

He looks back at us, his eyes wide with a hint of sadness but through the bond... *hope*. He has hope.

“We found her. And her name is Harley.” I move over and place a hand on his shoulder, feeling as all the tension leaves his body and he sits down in front of the TV. Touching her face as she’s ushered away off the screen.

We found her. Now we need to win her in that lottery, we need more tickets. What else can we pawn? Knight’s fathers and mother might be able to help. He’s the only one of us who had an omega mother, so his fathers are still here with us. They are a great fathers and his mother is so sweet. The only omega I’ve ever met.

Zayd grins over at us, I can feel his happiness down the bond and Dash wraps his arms around me. I can feel him too... there’s no hiding emotions with Dash.

“She said love is love,” he whispers in my ear, and I grin before I kiss him. I heard her say that... That was very controversial what she said their and I hope there’s no repercussion. But in two weeks... she will be coming home with us. There’s nothing the government can do when she’s here. As our omega

Dash is our pack’s beta, but he’s more than that. He’s my beta first. I’ve always feared that an omega would change our dynamic. Wouldn’t accept the relationship between us when she was here in our pack.

But, now, I know she’s the one for us.

I look out the window as rain pelts against it. It’s been a gray week. Hell, it’s been a gray year. I feel Zayd come stand beside me. Smelling his coffee, I take a sip from my own. It’s cold and bitter. I’ve bene standing here too long.

He doesn’t say a word; he hasn’t spoken a word since he was seven when his lost his alpha fathers and beta mother. But he leans into me, barely touching his shoulder with mine, and I know that’s his way of saying *I’m here*. He can speak to us through sign language, but he’s not a fan of communicating that way. More often, he tells us what he’s feeling through the bond and other ways.

He grew up in the foster system... so for him to speak to us through the bond. Its taken a lot longer than the rest of us. He doesn’t trust easy so once he believed we wanted him in this pack. It took at least six months before he let the walls down. He holds them up a lot more than I wish. But he often

comes and just leans on me for emotional support. I love that I'm the person he goes to.

I enjoy his company. He might not speak, but he can talk for hours about the things he's passionate about. He's smart and always thinking of everyone in the pack first, then himself last. Which Dash always makes up for making sure Zayd is always first on his list. Zayd does all the research and tech stuff for us. I'm good with a wrench, but he's good with computers.

"We got the invite," I tell him. *Finally*. We applied before they even showed the omegas on the TV, but apparently, we're not the only ones who like an omega who speaks her mind.

Zayd doesn't move, but I feel his fear down the bond, and I shake my head and turn to him. I know what he's thinking. He doesn't like going out in public. He hates when people draw attention to the fact that he doesn't speak. Not that you notice that at first.

First you see his size, because he's not only the tallest of us all... but the biggest all over. Other alphas seem to see him as a challenge or a way to test themselves against a larger alpha. When he doesn't talk... they see that as his weakness. But it's his strength. He's always listening and caring. He is a big puppy and just wants everyone to be happy and safe.

"You're coming." I bump his shoulder.

He grunts and turns away, but I grab his arm before he can leave the room. Shaking his head, he pulls away from me and takes a few steps, his coffee spilling over the edge of his mug.

"The invite is for Pack Bentley. You *are* Pack Bentley."

He shrugs, but now I feel him again. He's letting his emotions flow through the pack bond. He's worried. He thinks

that the omega—Harley—will see he's different and reject the pack. He's said this before, and it's not true. I can tell already that she will love Zayd as much as we do.

“No, listen to me. If you don't go, we all don't go.” I see his eyes widen a little, but I don't look away. He needs to know. We all do this as a pack. He shakes his head, and I put my hand up stopping him.

“I'm not going to listen to you think about yourself like this. We are a pack. We all go, or none of us go.”

I know he wants us to go without him; he doesn't need to speak aloud to let us know that. He's been pushing us away all week. I let him have his space, but no more. We have the invite. This is happening.

Knight emerges from his room and pauses to look at us. He's a little less feral and more himself since seeing Harley. He has a recording that he plays over and over. It's like seeing her is helping him for the first time in years.

“You have to go, Zayd.” Knight smiles over at him. “We need one good-looking alpha in attendance.” He winks over at Zayd, and I can see his cheeks darken in a blush. Well that's new.

Zayd shakes his head with a shy smile and points at Knight, who chuckles.

“Yeah, I know. The second-best-looking needs to be there, but I can't. I don't think I will be able to hold this back for that long.”

Fuck, I didn't think of his scent, since he's improved so much this week. I've barely smelled the burn in the air. But if they scent that outside with all those guards and government

there... they will take him from us without a care. He will be gone forever.

“You’ve been doing so well,” I tell him.

Knight shakes his head. “I won’t risk the pack. So many alphas and government officials there. They’ll catch one whiff, and I’ll be gone. The chance to ever get an omega for the pack is taken away. Hell, you’ll all be charged for hiding my status.”

I know it’s true, but I don’t want us to do this without him. As soon as Ace is back, I’ll let him know it’s today. Minus Knight.

Seeing him like this breaks me. When he first came to us, it was for a job interview at my mechanic shop. He was young and cocky . . . *good looking*. It didn’t take long for him to worm his way into our hearts. After a year, we made him pack.

At twenty-three, he’s the youngest of us all. Hell, I’m three years off forty. I’m practically an old man. It was months after that trip to Riverton with his fathers that we started noticing subtle changes. He was losing his temper easily, and the cocky swagger deflated. It was almost as if he’d changed overnight. He was scared, but he was never alone. For the last four years, we have been caring for him. Hiding him from the authorities. But it’s hard on the whole pack.

One of us has to stay home with him, help care for him. That’s two fewer incomes, fewer tickets for the lottery that can save him from this. It’s a double-edged sword.

Dash quit his job. He was a delivery driver, but pay equality is bad here in the city. Betas get paid less than alphas. We didn’t even put in a vote; he just did it on his own and told us that he would take care of Knight.

Dash had only been with us for a few months at that time, but in that moment, I knew we'd made the right choice in our beta. He's one very special beta.

I hear a door open, and I don't have to look. I know it's Dash. I'd know his scent anywhere. His warm body meets my back, and his arms wrap around my torso, hugging me to his bare chest as he places a kiss on my spine.

"Good morning," he mutters.

I place my hand over his and squeeze. Taking a deep breath, I turn in his arms, noticing the dark rings under his eyes. Last night was a long night. I've been so worried about the invitation, Knight, and Zayd pulling away that I barely slept. And Ace has been working in the shop overtime, trying to make as much money as he can. Plus trying to keep busy while we waited for the invite. And Dash has been up with me, fussing as he always does.

I tell him not to fuss and he will wave his hand at me as if I've just wasted my breath. Which really... I have. Because as much as I tell him not to... I secretly love how much he takes care of me and the others. Especially Knight.

"We got the invite," I whisper down at him, nodding toward the coffee table, where it sits in the red envelope with the gold foil lettering. Hell to even apply for this meeting it cost us. But its one step closer. To buy a ticket and meet our omega.

Because I know she's gonna be ours.

I feel his happiness through the bond. It's not the same for the others. I bit Dash one night when I was in a rut, claiming him as my mate. I felt terrible. We hadn't talked about claiming bonds, it happens between alphas and betas who have

an intimate relationship. It doesn't stop an alpha going feral but it gives you a stronger connection with your mate. While you still have time... waiting for an omega or the end. Mostly the end.

But with Dash, I did it without asking. Dash wasn't upset with me. He'd told me. But now I feel the bond between us. It's weaker compared to the others, not that I had to bite in my alpha pack. Those bonds just form from the connections we have with each other, until all I can feel is them. But Dash, he's mine alone.

"Do you think the uprising is still gonna happen?" he asks.

With everything else going on, I'd almost forgotten all about that. The fact that two beta-born are in the lottery makes me think the government is trying to stop something from happening. But the crackle in the air has had me tense for months, and I don't think their plan is going to work. It's too little too late.

"When we bring Harley home, then they can have their uprising," Ace says as he enters the room, dropping his gym bag.

"I like the sound of that," Dash says, and I agree.

It's not an *if* . . . it's a *when* we bring her home.

Because we will.

CHAPTER 6

HARLEY

I smile at myself in the mirror. My red lipstick is on point. My earrings, my necklace. My old favorite jeans and my Black Sabbath tee cut at the midriff, showing off my belly piercing.

I can't believe they let us have our old clothes back. And that they still fit. Even though my body has changed slightly since my designation, I can still squeeze my ass into these jeans.

"Ugh, I don't get how you can like that," Veronica sneers at me.

I run my fingers through my hair and smirk at her. "You're just jealous that I look better than you." Her plain white shirt and black slacks give nothing away. No style, no taste. It's boring. She doesn't even have to wear a uniform here. She's supposed to blend in with the omegas and make it not feel like a prison but a house. But if she keeps on wearing those outfits, people will start to think this is a hospital.

"Jonathan's only letting you do this because you set off all the alphas in Crescent City. The lower-class packs are up in arms over your little impromptu speech, demanding to meet with you. Wanting you to be allowed to be yourself.

“So, I don’t know why you’re smiling. Most of the packs you’ve been seeing don’t have the money to take care of an omega. The requirements for what a pack must have to even enter the lottery has been scrapped. Most don’t even have a nest for an omega.”

It’s obvious that the change in rules is a consequence of the statements Storm and I made on Sunday. But I don’t care what the rules were before. The packs I’ve met have been so much better than the elite get. Hell, one was a pack of elite alphas. But if she’s saying the requirements have been scrapped, then they probably saw this as their only chance of an omega. Not that I accepted their bid, as such. I passed on them.

I’ve passed on them all, waiting for my blueberry pancakes to come. But today is the last day. Jonathan will put any names he wants in the lottery, and even though I know the way to make my dreams come true, I won’t be able to do it without their name and a ticket.

The other Omegas in the house have made themselves scarce. I’ve been so tired after meeting so many alphas, my eyes have been shut before I have a chance to sneak out and see Gage. The only time I saw him this week was Sunday. I didn’t even get a chance to tell him about what Dahlia did. But I’ll tell him tonight.

This morning, I found a leaf on my pillow, and I know it was him. He snuck in to let me know he’s still here. He’s still thinking of me. I hold it now in my pocket.

“I guess that means I’m going to get the perfect pack, then. I don’t need a nest. I just need the pack that’s perfect for me.”

Veronica laughs, and I can see she’s enjoying herself.

I walk out of my room to where Storm is waiting for me. She's wearing a gold glittery off-the-shoulder top and large hoop earrings. I wolf whistle, and she spins on the spot.

"Not bad yourself, girl." She winks over at me, and I spin too. "Your ass looks hella fine."

"Both of you, stop," Jonathan yells, and we turn to him as he strolls into the room wearing that dark tailored suit that shows off every inch of his body. He's huge. Dark and handsome. Ugh . . . he knows how he looks too. He glances at me and grunts at my outfit choice. Whatever, Mr. Pompous Asshole. His eyes find Storm, and I watch as they lazily roll over her body.

"Like something you see?" she teases him as she runs her fingers down her side, hip, and the top of her thigh.

He growls low and deep, and she whimpers. "Storm," he barks out in warning, but it's too late. Her perfume floods the room, and she reaches out and touches his chest. My eyes widen, and I hold my breath; the pheromones coming off him are intense, and my instincts to run are high.

What the fuck is happening? He's . . . he's head of the Omega House with the rest of his pack. They're an unmated pack, but they have to be, working around so many omegas. If they were to bring the scent of another omega home to their own, they would be in a lot of trouble. But they're not to touch us. They sure as hell can't be as close as he is to her right now.

He's an elite. She's beta-born. But in this moment, I don't think either of them cares.

I know, for a fact, he can't enter the lottery while he runs the Omega House. But with the elite, the rules never seem to matter. He moves into her space and grabs her hip. She

whimpers again, nuzzling into his chest, and I watch him as he dips his head down to her. He's going to scent mark her. I gasp.

“Jonathan?” Veronica squeaks, and he freezes.

The whole room grows silent, and no one moves. I don't even breathe until he steps away. He looks back at Veronica, then me, and strolls out of the room like nothing happened.

I'm not sure what I just witnessed. Is Storm into Jonathan? Sure, she messes around a lot and gets into trouble, and Jonathan is usually the one handing out punishments. But maybe she wants him to punish her in a different way.

Maybe she flirts with Frankie as a way to push Jonathan's buttons, and the whole time I thought there was something between the beta and her, it was just a coverup.

“Girl,” I whisper as I draw closer to her. “What the fuck?” I mutter under my breath. For the first time, I see a look on her face that's never been there before. I don't even think she knows what the hell just happened.

Then she shakes her head and pushes her hair behind her ears. “Let's go, before he comes back.”

I nod in agreement, and Veronica comes up behind us, ushering us along.

“I should really take my blockers,” I hear Storm mutter to herself.



As we arrive at the meet and greet, the black town car does a loop around the block until we're at the back entrance. I can

see the alphas lining the streets, waiting to get in to meet me and Storm.

“Fuck, there’s more than yesterday.” Even though today’s the last day, why does it look like triple the alphas than the day before?

“That’s what happens when you don’t have fifty packs in that barrel, Harley,” Veronica chides. “You have all day to meet and greet, but if you don’t have names, I will put in the ones I see fit.”

I swallow the lump in my throat. What if they don’t come? What if I don’t find him? I will have to draw a name from the lottery, and that’s it. I haven’t even let any pack get their ticket yet. I have a list of my back-up choices, but there are only a handful of names there. Not the fifty needed.

Veronica laughs and shakes her head. “I can see the wheels ticking over now. You think you’re pretty smart, messing around with the way the Choosing Day works. But we have the last say. No matter what you think, you will have fifty names in there.”

I don’t answer her. I can put fifty names in there. As long as the one I want is in my hand come Choosing Day, it doesn’t matter.

I look out as we pass more alphas, searching for his dark hair, those pale blue eyes, and coming up short. Maybe he’s not from Crescent City? After all this time, he might be from Lakewood City. Shit. That might have been why they didn’t know Riverton was an alpha-free town and why they stopped.

“It’s okay. You’ll find the dream today.” Storm takes my hand and squeezes. “I can just feel it.”

“You too. I hope today brings your dream,” I reply with a small smile. I don’t know if I can feel as optimistic as Storm. I don’t know what I’ll do if he doesn’t come.

She winks over at me. “Oh, I’ve found my dream.”

He didn’t come. He wasn’t there. I now have fifty packs that I didn’t choose in the lottery for next Sunday. Veronica didn’t even add my back-ups said I was too late to give her the list. I have a whole week to prepare for the day I still don’t get to choose. It’s not fair. I had a way, but no pack to choose. But when has anything been fair since the day I found out I’m omega?

“I’m sorry, Harley.” Storm holds her breath and moves in to hug me.

At first, I’m confused, but I quickly hold my breath and return the hug. I’m hugging her . . . Holy crap. We can hug. I feel a tear slip down my face as I pull away and wipe it. I don’t want to cry.

“But you have found them. The ones you want,” I ask.

Storm wiggles her brows and nods. “I can’t wait for Choosing Day, it’s gonna be... *wild*.”

Oh no. What does that mean? Which pack she’s gonna choose.? I can’t ask her... we can’t be caught so I bite my lip to stop myself. But I really want to know.

She pokes her fingers into my jeans’ pocket and winks at me. “Just in case, I got you one too.”

I look down to my pocket and reach in, and she grabs my wrist just as my fingers hit the paper in there... *the ticket*.

“Don’t. You know what it is.” She winks and looks up at the camera watching us. Then she pokes out her tongue and skips over to where Frankie has set up a card game for the two of them.

I look up into the camera and wonder if he can see me. I don’t know if Gage has access to the cameras inside, but I feel my pocket to where my leaf is and now, beside it, sits a blank ticket for the Choosing Day lottery. If only Gage had a pack that I could put in there. At least then I know for sure I could keep him.

I turn to my room and grab my black denim jacket and reapply my red lipstick. I purse my lips and blow myself a kiss. Placing my lipstick on the side table, I walk right out of my bedroom door and march past the other guards and one omega—Jasmine—and out into the garden, slamming the door behind me. I don’t care now. They can see me out here; they’re always watching me. I’m never alone.

My nose is instantly cold, but I don’t care. I’m going to find my beta and kiss him under the leaves again. I skip my way to him, unable to wipe the smile from my face. I haven’t seen him in days, and I miss him. I’m so busy thinking about all the things I want to do to him, I don’t realize I can’t smell him until it’s too late and I’m hit with the scent of an alpha. I come to a sudden stop, and my smile drops from my face.

Jonathan is standing in the guardhouse. His suit jacket is gone, and his tight baby-blue shirt is stretched tight across his chest. Ugh this guy knows how to dress to show off his body. I hate the way he looks good in that shirt. When I meet his face, he doesn’t look happy to see me. Fuck. Where’s Gage? Shit, shit, shit.

Jonathan raises an eyebrow, and I relax my body and act like this was planned. I'm not out here looking for a beta who I have fallen for.

“Hey, um . . . was just out for my usual nightly stroll. Not climbing over the wall.” *Yet.*

When he doesn't say anything, I start to grow nervous. I scuff my boot over the gravel and look up to the stars. Only, the night is cloudy, and I can't see them. I look back over to him, and he straightens.

“The guard who works tonight has been relieved from his duties,” he says as he shifts his weight on his foot. Making himself look even larger.

My heart starts to race. I can't breathe. What does that mean? Relieved? When I don't answer he continues.

“I'm not a bad man, as much as you think I am, Harley. But I see it all. I have let it go unchecked, as there was nothing more. But after reviewing some tapes, I thought it would be best that we let Gage Emmott go. He wasn't suited for the job.”

He saw . . . he knows. My throat closes, and I feel like I can't breathe.

“What . . . what are you going to do to him?” I ask, my voice barely a whisper. God, please don't let them kill him. I know that's the law here... I just. No.

“I guess that depends on what you do at the Choosing Day. Your actions speak loud, Harley. *To everyone.* Everyone will be watching after your little improvised introduction. Don't think I didn't hear what you said. Love is love. You set some things into motion that shouldn't have. And now my warning

here tonight is clear. You behave, then Gage is free to come back to work.”

“And if I don’t?” I try and swallow the lump in my throat.

I need him to say it. Threaten him. It’s the only way I will pull a name out of that barrel on Sunday.

“Then, not only will he not have a job here, but he’ll also be arrested. And you know what they do to betas who fraternize with omegas.”

Death.

CHAPTER 7

GAGE

I haven't been to a bar in so long on a Friday night, I almost forgot what it was like. Hell, I still wish I could forget. But Jonathan saw me . . . the leaf. I don't know what possessed me to sneak into her room while she slept. I missed her. Her scent, her smile when she sees me. I have no idea what Harley sees in me, but she's everything to me.

Fuck. I missed talking to her, and she had been meeting alphas all week, and I got jealous. I know I have no right to be. I know I can't be hers. As much as we tended to skirt around the fact that we could be together, it's not going to happen, and I need to come to terms with the fact that the woman I love will never be mine.

It was all a dream, a fantasy that we both lived in for too long.

I nod at the bartender for another shot of tequila. How much tequila do I need to forget about her? I think I'm gonna need the whole bottle at this rate.

I don't have a pack. I don't have anyone. My parents disowned me the moment I decided to come to Crescent city. They didn't understand my need to get out of that beta only town. Where the prospects were love. We have a coal mine... I had a dream to be better than that. My father and brothers were

content on being miners. That's the life for them. But for me... I wanted it all. I wanted a pack with alphas and an omega at its centre. I wanted to experience love on a whole deeper level.

But now... I fucked it all up. I have no job. Jonathan can report me to the authorities, and what will happen then? It's just a leaf . . . on the pillow of an omega in the Omega House, and I'm not permitted to be inside. Yeah, that looks bad.

"It's fucking bullshit. They didn't let half the packs in before they closed the lines," an alpha yells loudly to another at the bar. I know what they're talking about. Most of the alphas here went to the meet and greet and never got past the front doors. They issued more invitations than they normally do. It was bound to happen.

I wonder if Harley found the alpha with the pale blue eyes. Did he get to see her today? She spoke about him to me once, and the way she did . . . he meant something to her. Even though they didn't say a word to each other in that diner, and it was just a chance encounter. He was important to her. I could tell by the way her scent changed when she spoke of him.

Her scent... oh god. I'm going to miss her. I shouldn't have let her into my heart like that. I knew it was gonna hurt, but it's killing me that I didn't even get to say goodbye. But in some way maybe that's better. She wouldn't have let me go without a fight, and I know I would have kissed her. I would rather be dead than without her anyway.

Wait... What if I could find out who he is—the pale blue eyed alpha— and join his pack? They might not have a beta yet. Maybe they have their name in the lottery already, and by any luck, she'll pull his name. Then we can be together.

Yeah, that's a pipe dream.

I touch my lips in memory of that kiss. Her first kiss. I was her first . . . *fuck*. I slam my fist down on the bar. Why did I do that? Why did I put the leaf on her pillow? Why did I sneak into her room? I knew they could see me. There's no getting past the guards in that place. I thought we were all friends. I guess not.

“Hey, you're that omega's guard.” An alpha rests his arms on the bar beside me. I look up at him; he's got at least a foot on me. The guy is huge, with salt and pepper hair and a beard most betas would envy.

I shake my head. “You got the wrong guy, buddy.” I say and take my shot. It burns, but it warms my body and will help me forget about Harley. If only this alpha leaves me alone and stops reminding me who I was.

“No, I don't. I'm not gonna say nothing loud, but I seen you. With her. *Harley*.” He whispers her name and I freeze. *Fuck*.

I look over at the guy again. He's holding the neck of a beer as he signals the bartender.

“A round of shots for us.”

I go to protest, but he just waves it off, his large hand landing on my shoulder, and I shrink down a little. What does he want from me? Hell, was it that recognisable? I didn't think anyone paid attention to the guards at the Choosing day ceremonies.

“I can't do anything about the meet and greet, if that's what you think. I was fired today.”

Hell, none of the guards are allowed to be out in public like this. We live in a shared dorm together. Other than to

escort omegas on Choosing Day, this is the first time I've been out of the Omega House in almost seven months.

They put me up in a hotel for a week . . . at least, until Harley's Choosing Day. At that time, I'll have to find a place of my own. If I'm still here then.

The shots come, and the alpha pays for them and gathers them up on a tray. "Come with me, boy. My pack is waiting over there. And we all like to drink our problems away . . . or solve them." He gestures to a group of older alphas in a booth in the back.

I realize then that they're much older than the other alphas in this bar. To be this old, these alphas have an omega already. They wouldn't have been at the meet and greet, anyway.

I follow him, since I need to save every dollar I've got. My focus should be on finding a place of my own before I end up homeless. But first, I need to drink Harley from my mind. At least, until tomorrow . . . then I'll do it again and again until I have forgotten her.

I flop onto the leather bench with the other alphas and nod to them in greeting. They wear leather cuts and all take a shot from the alpha who invited me over here. Bikers, huh? Well who cares, free drinks and all.

"Name's Teddy. And we're Pack Williams."

I give him a tight smile and nod. "I'm Gage." I take my shot, and the others follow. "If you happen to know of any work going, I could really use a new job."

"Can I ask about the security at the Omega House?" the man in the corner asks. He's lying back against the booth as he runs his fingers through his bushy beard as he watches me. I

can't even grow a beard like that. The scruff on my jaw is the best as I can do.

“Ask away, but there's nothing I can say. NDA.” I shrug. If I'm not going to prison for what I did, at least I can keep out of prison by not telling alphas how to break into the Omega House.

As much as I hate Harley being trapped in there, I don't want these guys breaking in and stealing any of the omegas especially her. Fuck, are these guys traffickers? I shift to leave when he speaks again.

“Our son . . . his pack. They were supposed to meet with Harley today. It's very important that they get their name in that lottery. Our son needs . . .”

I shake my head. Not traffickers, just caring fathers. I can't help him.

“What he's trying to say is that Knight met Harley four years ago. They're a scent match.” Teddy says.

I pause and process what he just said. The alcohol is already affecting me and making it longer than usual to register what he just said. Scent match?

“Where did they meet?” I ask. Because there's no way. A scent match is so rare and impossible these days. No alpha's can get near the omegas to even see if they're a scent match.

But then I've only heard this story once, but I remember all the details. Where her town is and her brother, Aero. Her life back there. As soon as you enter the Omega House, that old life is dead, and no one can know about it. It's to protect from threats and kidnapping of the families in hopes they might find another omega.

So, in the Omega House, the women only go by their first name. They're not allowed to use their surnames or speak of where they were from.

“Riverton,” he answers, and I sit up a little too fast. He nods. “You know? She told you?”

Fuck. I need to play it cool. I shrug, trying to play it off. “Anyone can be from Riverton. You just guessed a beta-only town.”

“At a diner,” another says. “She was there with her brother and father.”

Fuck.

“What does his scent smell like?” I run my hand down my face. This can't be. Her alpha's fathers are sitting here with me and he didn't get to meet her?

“Blueberry pancakes,” they all say together, and my heart drops into my stomach. He tried to meet with her, he's her scent match.

“His name is Knight,” Teddy says. “He's part of Pack Bentley. He went back for her, you know. Many times, they all went back to that diner, and she wasn't there. It's important that he get to her. He's her scent match and . . .” He trails off.

My mouth feels dry.

“And what?” I ask. I feel like something else is going on too.

“Can you get us inside? Do you know a way?”

I can't believe he's her scent match. But what I can believe is that he never got to meet her. He's right here—Pack Bentley

—and she has no idea that he went back for her. Maybe this is my chance to find a pack... and get the girl.

“I know a way.” I smile over at them all. “But I need to meet Knight first.”

CHAPTER 8

HARLEY

“J ust leave her,” I hear one of the guards say to the other. “She’s not going anywhere. She just sits there. It’s strange, but she’s a beta-born omega. Maybe this is normal for them?”

I hear the shuffling of feet as the guards change over for the evening. But I don’t care what they think of me. I don’t care if this is strange. This is the last place I saw him. The last place Gage and I were together . . . kissing. My first kiss was here, under these leaves, as I hid from everything Omega House. And now, it seems like the only way to ever be close to him again.

I shift on my blankets, the ones I stole from my bed and laid down here two days ago. I haven’t left, even for food. Storm has been bringing me snacks, and Veronica has yelled at me many times to get out from under the tree. She can’t touch me. None of them can. It’s the one rule they haven’t broken yet. But I know it’s coming. Come Choosing Day, Jonathan will use his alpha bark to drag me out of here.

But I will come willingly. If it protects Gage, I will do anything Jonathan says. I never meant for that to happen to him. I shouldn’t have kissed him. I know that, but I can’t stop

thinking how, if I never had, I wouldn't be able to leave here without knowing his taste on my lips.

I hear the first drop of rain, then another. The weather feels the same. I sniffle and wipe away a tear. How did all of this get messed up before I even had a chance to tell him my plan. I don't know what pack I'm going to pull out on Sunday. But I have a feeling they won't like the fact I kissed Gage, let alone agree to find him, so I can have him as part of their pack. I'm not supposed to kiss betas. It's against the law. No one is going to want to break the law for me, in fear they might lose me if we are caught.

"Are you going to be okay in there?" one of the guards whispers. It's Frankie, and I let out a sigh. At least he's nice. I don't mind him being here.

"Yes, the rain doesn't matter. I won't leave or jump the fence. I just want to be left alone until Choosing Day."

There's a moment of silence before he answers.

"I'm sorry about Gage," he whispers. "I will leave you alone for a few hours, but then will you promise to come inside where it's warm? With how cold the nights are, I'm worried you're going to get sick."

A drop of cold rain hits my nose and I shiver. It's been cold and miserable out here the last two days. But it wasn't raining, at least. I wrap my blankets around me tighter.

"Thank you, Frankie." I hear his intake of breath.

"You know who I am? You can't even see me," he stutters, and it just makes me miss Gage even more. Frankie is so quiet and sweet as hell to Storm, which is a feat on its own. But she makes it easy on him. He's similar to Gage, being the smallest of the beta guards. But Frankie is . . . *innocent*. At least he

seems that way. The other omegas don't acknowledge the guards. Hell, if you asked Daisy their names, I'm sure she wouldn't know a single one.

"You are the sweetest beta here now, Frankie. I will never forget you." It sounds like a goodbye, and in reality, it is. After Sunday, I won't see him again. I won't see Storm, either. My heart twists. I need to spend what little time I have left with her.

"Miss Harley," he starts and make a sound in the back of my throat at the 'Miss.' "Sorry. Harley, I will never forget you either. It's a pleasure being a guard for you. You are so kind, and I hope that, whatever happens on Sunday, your *dream* comes true."

I freeze at his words. *Dream?* Oh my god. Why would he use that word if he doesn't know what it means? Storm . . . Frankie. He knows. He knows about the ticket. Does Frankie have a pack? I'd always thought the I reach down into my pocket and hold the ticket between my fingers. The one still missing a pack name.

"Just a few hours, then I promise I'll come inside."

Frankie disappears and it's just me . . . my leaves, trees, and the memory of him.

I just need to say one last goodbye to Gage. I didn't get to do it in person. I didn't get to tell him that I love him. Even though it's forbidden, I fell for him. But love is love. I don't care about any rules that say otherwise; I just love him.

In the past six months, he's made me feel more alive than I have in the last four years. He's what made me get up every day, made me believe there are good people out there. Betas who would treat me as more than my designation.

I close my eyes and remember the way my body felt against his . . . the way his lips devoured mine. Hearing a growl, I freeze. Then the scent of apple pie and strawberries hits me, and my eyes flash open. I look around me, but it's so dark. The rain keeps coming, and my blankets are wet and heavy. I shiver a little in the cool breeze.

I must be imagining things. I thought I could smell an alpha. My clothes are now damp from the downpour, and I shake under the blanket, which isn't doing much to keep me warm. I should go inside. But then I hear a branch on the tree groan, and I look up to see a large dark figure . . . falling.

“Fuck,” the figure grunts, landing with a thud on the end of my blanket. It pulls from my shoulder, and my scent reacts to the now close alpha's. Holy shit.

My mouth hangs open as his deep green eyes shine in the low light. His large beard looks rough and curly, and I want to stroke it. His hair is up in a man bun, but I can tell it's the same strawberry blond as his beard, curly and thick. As he licks his lips, I'm drawn to them. My heart starts to race as he holds up his hand.

“Harley,” he breathes out my name like it's a sigh. My eyes widen. He knows who I am. His scent is dizzying, and I don't know what I want to do first. Run away from this crazy alpha who has jumped the fence of the Omega House. Or run my hands under his black Henley and rub myself against his scent, so I can wear it forever.

“I'm Ace, from Pack Bentley. I've been trying to see you all week,” he starts, and I am a little surprised. Looking up into the tree, I can't figure out how he got in here and that he seemed to know where to find me. Did he scent me? I haven't taken my meds in two days. My blockers are well and truly not

working right now, and the way he shifts toward me, I can tell it's taking everything in him to not react to my scent. I know, because it's taking everything in me not to react to his.

"I know this is crazy and you don't know me, but I have something for you. Something that will explain this more than words can." He grabs a plastic bag that he has with him. He opens it, and the scent hits me instantly.

"Blueberry pancakes," I whisper as I dive for it and inhale the scent on the dark tee, burying my nose against it. My alpha, the one from the diner. But . . . "How? Where is he?" I ask, moving closer to the alpha, worried he's a figment of my imagination. Maybe I did get sick waiting out here, and now I'm seeing things. Smelling things. But the fabric between my fingers is real.

His hand cups my face, and I nuzzle into them, and he starts to purr. My body wakes up. Oh man, is this a sex dream too? If so, I don't ever want to wake up.

I hear a deep rumble in his chest, and I whine at the loss of his purr. Is he laughing?

"This isn't a sex dream, Harley. I'm here. So are you. But Knight isn't. He needs you. I'm here to take you to him."

I sit back on my heels and look up at him. His thumb brushes my lower lip, and I lick it.

He growls and shakes his head. "Your scent . . . it's even better than he described. I'm already drunk on it, and I was the one who said I could keep a straight head. That's why I'm here and not the others."

Others? How many? No, I don't want to know. I can't.

"You can't take me to him, as much as I want you to. The beta I love will be killed if I'm not there for Choosing Day.

You'll all share the same fate if I'm found with you."

The omega in me whines. I want to go with him . . . my mind is telling me he's my scent match. My pack. *Mine*.

"Gage?" he questions, and I suck in a breath. My eyes meet his deep green ones, and he nods. "He's the one who told us where to find you."

My mouth drops open. Gage found my scent match pack and brought them—well, at least Ace—to me.

"Knight . . . he needs you. You're his scent match, and being apart for so long has . . ." He lets out a deep sigh. "Harley, he's turning feral without you. But with you . . ."

He doesn't finish that. Knight—my blue-eyed alpha—is turning feral because of me. He needs me. The unspoken words are there. I didn't pay much attention in the class that covered feral alphas. But I know they will die without their omega.

"If I leave here, Gage will be killed. I've been warned. But if I stay . . ." Knight will die. But . . . the ticket. They're a pack.

"I have a ticket. I have a way." I grip Ace's forearm, not wanting him to leave me. But I know can't touch him for long. His scent will be on me.

Noticing his puzzled expression, I try to explain. "Can he wait until Sunday? Gage will be safe, and I will draw your name out of the lottery on Sunday." I run my hand over his wet tee; it clings to him, and I can feel every ridge of his abs. Fuck. I need to keep a clear head. My omega hormones are clouding my judgment.

"You have a ticket?" he asks, and I realize I haven't explained this right.

I reach into my pocket and pull out the now-damp paper. Fuck. I need to get it inside, so I don't ruin it. I show him and his eyes widen.

“Those tickets are worth fifty thousand dollars each. Where did you get that?”

My mouth drops open. They are worth that much? No wonder the divide between the elite and the rest of the world grows bigger each day.

“Harley?” he asks again.

I shake my head. “Don't worry about that now. I can pull your pack. Pack Bentley. Just be there when they announce you. This will work. I promise.”

It has to. Or I will lose Gage and my scent matches—Knight and Ace.

He rubs his cheek against mine, scent marking me, and I sigh. I'll have to wash this off as soon as I get inside. But right now, I love that he's marking me. He moves away, ready to climb back up the tree and over the brick wall.

“Here.” I push the blankets off and lift my tee over my head, my hair catching on it. It's my favorite. “Take this to Knight. Maybe it will help?” I have no idea if it will, but I want him to have something with my scent on it.

“I'll give it to Knight.” He presses a kiss to my hair, and I sway.

“Thank you, Ace.” I breathe in his scent one last time . . . until Choosing Day. Then I will be able to smell him every minute of every day.

“Harley,” he growls, not in warning to me, but to himself. Like he can't leave me. He tugs on my damp hair, his eyes

piercing mine. The look that passes between us does something to my insides . . . the omega in me reacts so strongly to him.

“Ace,” I reply, and his body sways to mine.

“Harley,” he repeats one last time. Then he’s gone before I can even register that he’s moved away.

I love the way my name rolls off his tongue.

CHAPTER 9

ZAYD

Choosing Day.

Tension fills the air in the house. Ace told us what happened when he met the omega. Harley.

She had a ticket—a blank ticket for the raffle—in her pocket. He told us all to trust her. That he trusted her. But it's hard for me. I don't trust many people. I want this omega to come, to heal Knight. But I'm scared she will see me and leave.

“Zayd, I can smell you from here. You can block us out of the bond as much as you want, but you can't hide that.” Knight waves his hand at me, and I take a step back toward my room. I'm going to screw everything up. She will see me and want to draw out another pack's name.

Knight hasn't had an episode all week. He needs Harley.

“You need to take a deep breath. Harley will be here with us at the end of the day,” Jax says. I grunt, and Jax's eyes are on mine. “She will, I can feel it. Have faith, Zayd.” Jax resumes flitting around the room. Rearranging pillows on our sofa, as if it's going to make our house more enticing to this omega. Once she's here, there's no turning back. At least, I don't believe they can take her away.

But I understand—this is Jax’s routine. He’s like this when we have visitors. Only, this won’t be a visitor . . . if she even gets here. I don’t have my hopes up, and even if she does come, she’ll take one look at me and know I’m broken and won’t want to be near me.

“Can you move that chair into the corner, Dash?” Jax asks our beta.

Dash just smiles and does exactly as Jax says. We live on the outskirts of Crescent City, in an area that is less than ideal. Unlike the elite, we don’t have the money to live in a fancy, sterile apartment in the city. Our house is old, and Ace has restored all our furniture from Goodwill.

But this house? It’s a real home. The oven doesn’t heat evenly. The heating is on the fritz, and it gets cold in the bedrooms at night. There’s a burn mark on the countertop, where Dash set the frying pan after making bacon his first morning here. There’s a hole in the wall near the front door, where Ace shoved Jax playfully after he called him an old man. We’ve made memories here.

Then there’s the creaky floorboard in the hall outside my room. The guys all know where it is and avoid it unless they want to come speak with me. I don’t like to be startled. I can’t cope with sudden knocking on my door.

“I think that looks good, Dash.” Ace strolls in, his hair down and past his shoulders. It’s beautiful, with wavy curls. He gathers it up and ties it with the elastic on his wrist.

“Zayd, do you need to smell her top before we go? It might help your alpha,” Ace suggests, and I shake my head. I haven’t wanted to smell it, but a small bit of the scent has been drifting around the house for days. I don’t want to get my hopes up for something that might not happen. If I smell her top up close, I

know what I will smell. My scent match. Hell, there is no denying she is; I can smell it already. Even Jax said she's his as soon as he took a hit of her scent.

This has been the most stressful week. I have spent most of my time locked in my room. I look down at my hands and they shake. My hands are shaking, because if this doesn't happen, if she doesn't come back with us . . .

I will lose them all.

Outside the hall, hundreds of alphas, a few dozen betas, and their packs gather. There are too many people—too many alphas—and my heart starts to race.

“Zayd, you can hold my hand,” Dash offers, but I shake my head. I don't want to look weak in front of everyone.

Ace turns to me, and I realize I let that thought through the bond. He doesn't say anything. He doesn't have to for me to know what he's saying—it's not weakness to need others.

He's told me a million times, but it's a hard one to remember. I'm twenty-nine, and I still struggle to lean on my packmates when I need help.

I let out a deep breath and take Dash's hand in mine. He squeezes it, and I almost sigh. How do they know what I need, even when I think I don't need it?

Because they're my pack.

“Only packs who are in the lottery, come up to the front,” someone on a speaker system announces, and Ace starts pushing through the crowd. Dash squeezes my hand and Knight grins wildly. Hell, he might need Dash more than me.

“Come on, good-looking,” Knight teases me as we try to keep up. He always calls me good-looking. I know it’s not true, I see the way people stare at me. I’m big and scary. But when Knight tells me, I like the feeling I get. It makes me feel . . . desired.

We get up close to the front doors, where barriers block everyone from moving into the hall. The guards at the front—alpha guards mixed in with betas—are yelling. The betas wear the Omega House uniform. All guards at the Omega House are betas.

“Pack name?” one asks an alpha next to Ace.

“Pack Presley.”

He looks down at a list and marks the pack’s name off the list. “Come over this way to wait.” He opens a gate, and the pack of seven alphas and their beta walk past us.

The guard looks at Ace, and unease slams into me. Our name won’t be on that list.

“Pack Bentley,” Ace says before the guard can even open his mouth to ask.

He looks down his list, then gives it a second look. He shakes his head. “You’re not in the lottery today. Move aside.”

Knight’s fear starts flowing through the bond, and we all shift toward him. I’m worried that he’s going to turn feral in this crowd. He couldn’t bring Harley’s tee with him. Her scent could have set off all the alphas here.

Dash grabs onto Knight and starts whispering soothing words to him. But he never lets go of my hand. That’s just who Dash is. Always looking out for us, being the pack beta. Even if we told him that didn’t matter, that he doesn’t have to conform to the norms of pack hierarchy, it’s just who he is.

“There must be a mistake,” Ace confronts the guard. “We have our name in that draw. We put in for Harley.”

The guard dismisses him with a wave of his hand. “If your name was in there, it would be on my list. No matter what you say, I’m not going to let you pass this gate. If you continue to protest, I will have you arrested.”

Fuck.

CHAPTER 10

HARLEY

My palms are so sweaty.

What if I'm caught? What if they see this scrunched-up ticket and know I wrote the name on there? Oh god, why didn't I think about the fact it's in my handwriting?

I can't do this . . .

Storm grips my hand, and I take a deep breath.

"It's going to be okay. Trust me."

I do trust her.

And yet, I didn't tell her about Ace visiting me in the garden of the Omega House. I didn't tell her the name on my ticket, and she hasn't asked.

Just like she hasn't told me who is on her ticket. What pack she's selected.

We might be best friends, but we hide more from each other than we should. It's not that I don't trust her. I just don't trust all the ears trained on us from overhearing. But if there was ever a time to tell her, it should be now. But in a few moments, the ceremony will begin, and she will see when I get my alpha and his pack.

It's a different announcer than usual. I don't like that already. Why is everything different for us? Is this uprising really changing it all?

He starts the ceremony. I can hear him talking, but my ears are ringing, so don't know what he's saying. I feel sick to my stomach, and my hand is so clammy holding on to my ticket, it's going to be unreadable by the time I get to pull it out.

"Harley," Storm whispers from beside me as she nudges me forward.

I look out at the large hall full of alphas as a spotlight flicks to me, and I slowly move toward where the announcer is standing. The lights on me are warm, and I feel myself start to sweat.

"Harley, come spin the barrel," he says as he gestures to the large wooden barrel at the front of the stage. My feet move, one in front of the other. Like I'm not in my own body.

This isn't me.

I stand up straighter. I can do this. Two weeks ago, I grabbed that microphone and announced who I am to the world. Why is this scaring me more? Because it's more real? Once this happens, there is no turning back. No safety of the Omega House behind me. There will be alphas and knots and heats . . . babies. Oh, god. I didn't think about babies. I can't bring them into this world . . .

My hands start to shake.

I get to the wooden barrel, the one that holds the names of fifty packs. Each pack spent money for the ticket in there, and I feel bad—I truly do—that they spent so much to get their names in there, and their tickets won't even be touched.

I reach with my left hand to spin it. It's much heavier than I thought it would be, and it only turns once, then rocks gently, as it can't make a second cycle around. I look over at the announcer, realizing his moustache makes him look much older than he is. I would have thought he was in his fifties. But he appears to be in his early thirties, now that I'm up closer. He's a beta. A large one you would almost mistake for an alpha, if it wasn't for his scent.

"That's okay. You can spin it again." He smiles at me. It's friendly, and he isn't teasing me or being sarcastic. He's genuine, and I feel safer with him here. If he was an alpha, I might have thought he was mocking me. A weak omega.

"It's heavy. Can you spin it?" I ask, my voice small in the large room.

He smiles and nods, turning to the crowd. "She has asked that I spin the barrel for her. What do you all think?" The room erupts into loud noise as the alphas all cheer him on. I don't like how many alphas are in here, cheering for me. To win me.

He just chuckles and spins the barrel. He takes a step back, and I watch it go round and round.

This is it. My future.

It finally stops, and he moves forward one more time, opening the hatch. I look inside and see hundreds of tickets. Not just fifty. I look back at Veronica, and she grins over at me. What a bitch. I stand taller and peer back out at all the alphas watching me. Their scents are thick in the air, woven in with the scent diffusers. There are just too many for the blockers to work.

I smile as I reach both hands in and move all the tickets around, never letting go of my ticket. I slowly shift my ticket

to the tip of my fingers, so it looks more like I've pulled it out, and remove my hand. I hear the collective pause as I slowly open the ticket, already knowing what it says.

Like Dahlia did, I play this out how they want. I smile sweetly and look out, as if I can see this pack in the crowd. I really wish I could see them, but there is too many of them, and the stage lights make it hard to see.

“Harley.” The announcer takes the ticket from me and glances down. “Pack Bentley,” he proclaims to the room.

A chorus of disappointment rings out from the packs that weren't chosen. This crowd of alphas is wildly different from the elite who sat in this room only two weeks ago. These alphas aren't quiet and understanding. They don't like losing. I know the feeling.

Shouts reach my ears above the crowd, and then I see them and him . . . I almost collapse at the sight of Knight. My knight in shining armor. He comes running toward the stage, the rest of the pack behind him, but all I see is him. His pale blue eyes, that olive skin and dark hair. He looks older . . . I guess I am too.

My heart races at the sight of the boy from the diner. He's here. I feel myself choke up at the sight. He's mine.

Reaching the stage, he doesn't stop. Wrapping his arms around me, he lifts me. I wrap my legs around his waist—thankfully, wearing jeans was the right choice—as I suck in his scent, and he instantly purrs for me and everything around us disappears. It's just us and I feel safe. *Home.*

Blueberry pancakes and cinnamon. Oh god, he's even better than I remembered. I don't see what happens as the others join us on the stage, but there's a commotion. I hear

Ace warning someone to stand back. I look over and it's Veronica.

"They weren't in the lottery," Veronica hisses under her breath as she rips the ticket from the announcer. She looks down at the worn-out ticket.

"It's correct, and I think this is one happy match," the beta announcer says to the crowd. They're still loud and unsettled, but Storm has yet to choose. One of the packs out there still has a chance.

Ace wraps his arms around me and Knight, ushering us off to the side of the stage, so I can see Storm but not have the prying eyes of the crowd on us.

I can't believe it worked. They're mine.

Only, as I look at each of them. I realize I don't know them at all. Each one of them is unfamiliar. Ace the only one I have ever spoken to and briefly. Are they all good alphas?

I push away from Knight and drop to my feet to look up at Ace. His scent washes over me. Apple pie. I can touch him now. But I don't. It feels like I need to get to know him more. I need to slow down and not rush this.

He cups my cheek. "You did it, Harley. I will do everything in my power to make you happy every day. I will bring *him* to you."

I know that he's telling the truth, it's a weird feeling to have so much trust in someone so fast. . . this alpha is honest. I sensed this the first time we met. He will bring me Gage. My heart swells with the knowledge I will see him again soon. Gage is mine.

I look over to the alpha beside Ace. He's tall, and his dark eyes watch me as my gaze roams over his golden skin. Tattoos

run up his arms, creating a picture. I look up again at his clean-shaven jaw, and his lips turn up into a warm smile. Though his hair is short, it suits his face.

He smells like cherry blossoms in the springtime. That's when it hits me . . . he's a scent match too. I perfume for him, and I blush when they all groan as my scent floods around us. I try to stop it, but I can't. Even the blockers won't stop me perfuming for scent matches.

"Hi, Harley." He clears his throat. "I'm Jax. And this is Dash . . . *my* beta."

My eyes drop to the man next to Jax. Dash. He's gorgeous, with an olive complexion. I move in closer to smell his scent. All betas have a scent, only they're very mild, and it's hard to smell them if they aren't close. Mint and . . . "Lavender?" He smiles, and I realize I've said that out loud. I blush.

"Love is love," he whispers as he reaches for my hand and kisses the back of it. My heart races at his touch. Holy shit. He was listening to me. They all must have been listening to me that night or they wouldn't have known I was going to be next.

"Your beta?" I question Jax. I raise a brow curiously. Normally, a pack has one beta. I'm unfamiliar with alphas having a beta to themselves. Is this beta not part of the pack?

"Our . . . the word you're looking for there, Jax, is that Dash is our pack beta." Knight chuckles under me, and I hug him tighter. I don't think I will ever be able to let go of him, now that I've found him. All of them.

"I just love him a little more than all you guys." Jax winks over at me, and my eyes widen a little. Ah . . . that's what he means by *mine*.

“I hope you like to share?” I wink back at Jax, and he chuckles deeply. Happiness bubbles up. I love that I can make him laugh like that.

“What’s mine is yours, Harley.” He places a hand on his chest. My whole body heats up at those words and that sexy grin of his.

Ace clears his throat, and they all turn to the tallest alpha of the pack, who’s standing a few feet away from the group. Dash reaches out and takes his hand, and I watch them. Is Dash his too?

“Harley, this is Zayd.” Dash gestures to him.

Zayd. I love his name, but his expression is hard to read. Still, his scent . . . *mine*. He smells like summer rain and lilacs. His eyes bore into mine, but he doesn’t say anything, and I’m not sure if he’s scared of me or hates me. I quickly change the subject when no one speaks.

“This can’t be real,” I say mostly to myself. It has to be impossible. Scent matches are rare, and I have a whole pack of them. All of them are my scent match.

Knight quickly adjusts me when I smell . . . *him*.

“No, it can’t be real. It’s too good to be true,” Jonathan says from behind me, and I shrink into Knight. I feel the others shift around me, blocking me from Jonathan. I feel protected in the arms of my blue-eyed alpha.

“It is true, we won. You seem to have something to say about that,” Ace growls lowly to Jonathan. I peek out from where I’m hiding. The expression on Jonathan’s face makes me smirk. He doesn’t like the way Ace is challenging him.

“This just seems a little bit too convenient. Considering Harley has never left the Omega House and comes from a

beta-only town. Yet you all seem to know each other so well.” Jonathan cocks his head to the side, as if taunting Ace to challenge him.

Fuck.

As soon as I saw Knight, I didn’t even question it. I forgot about the whole act; I just needed him. He needed me just as much. I messed it all up. I shouldn’t have jumped into his arms.

Veronica appears to the side of Jonathan, her eyes narrowed. Fuck. She knows too. She muttered it before, but I thought she would drop it.

What are they going to do about it? It was just announced to everyone on national TV that pack Bentley is mine. They can’t take that back. Everyone will know the lottery was rigged, and they would have to go back and look at all the lotteries before mine. How many omegas took the chance to get the pack of their dreams before me? Dahlia can’t have been the only one. It seemed like she knew . . . maybe even her own mother shared how to circumvent the system?

“I know something is going on here. I have a list of every single pack in that barrel. Your name is not on my list. You didn’t even get in for the meet and greet. So, there is no way your name could have come out.” Veronica stands tall.

Jax steps forward. “We did come to the meet and greet. We had an invitation. We came here, and we met Harley, just like every other pack in that draw.”

Veronica shrinks down a little before straightening herself back up. “I know you were not in that lottery. I’m the one who handpicked every single pack in there. I will be the one

assigned to you, until the first heat and figure out how this happened and once I do....”

“The first heat?” Ace questions, parroting my thoughts. What is Veronica talking about?

She gives us an evil grin. “You would have known this if you came to the meet and greet. For the first heat or about a month, one of the betas from the Omega House is assigned to make sure you don’t accidentally kill your new omega. Stop you from going into rut and hurting her. But I will do everything I can to prove that you somehow rigged the lottery.”

Jonathan nods his agreement. “This seems too *convenient*. Something is going on here and it will be looked into.” He eyes me before turning back to the stage, where Storm is with the announcer, drawing her pack.

I tap Knight’s shoulder, and he reluctantly sets me on the ground. I want to watch Storm and support her.

I can feel the power coming off Jonathan. Ace doesn’t seem to be reacting the same way, and I like that. He has a more calming nature. Or maybe he is trying to be unaffected by Ace.

Storm pulls out her ticket, and I hold my breath as I wait for the announcer to tell us who her pack is. I know they’re going to be amazing, because she would only choose the best pack for her.

The announcer looks down at the ticket, and I watch as his brows furrow. He clears his throat as he looks out to the crowd, then back to us. I’m frozen. Did she also draw Pack Bentley? Did she want my pack?

But then I realize, his eyes aren't on us. They're on Jonathan as he reads, "Pack Henley."

Veronica gasps.

Who's Pack Henley?

Where there was silence only a second before, the whole venue erupts into chaos as Jonathan runs toward Storm and the announcer. He grabs the microphone, and I don't understand what's going on. Who the hell is Pack Henley?

"This may come as a shock to you all, but my pack and I are retiring as the alphas of the Omega House. We entered our name in the hopes of finding our own Omega. And we have now found that with Storm." Jonathan says to the crowd, and they continue to boo and curse at him.

My mouth drops open at his words. The crowd isn't happy. His a pure alpha... an elite.

"What the fuck?" I mutter out loud.

Storm looks over to me and winks. No fucking way. She put Jonathan's pack in the lottery. Why the hell does she want him? He's an asshole. But then I think back to that moment . . . that very heated moment. Maybe there was more to that than I realized. I was too caught up in my own stuff to see what was going on with my best friend.

Alphas start storming the stage and I suck in a breath at all their scents... they're angry. This is bad.

"Let's leave now." Ace reaches for me, and I grab his hand as he pulls me away. I don't have a chance to say goodbye to Storm. There's no time as alphas start jumping up on the stage, and the guards can't hold them back.

“Bye,” I whisper as Jonathan hauls Storm over his shoulder and runs off with her. But just before she completely disappears, she looks over to me and waves with the biggest grin on her face.

Oh, Storm . . . you’re much more like a hurricane.

CHAPTER 11

DASH

Getting Harley back to our home is harder than we thought it would be. As we left, her scent drew in more alphas than we expected. So many were outside, protesting Storm's match to an elite pack. And the fact no other omega was listed as the next was fuelling the uprising even more. We needed to leave as fast as we could before this turns into a blood bath.

We've been driving around for a while now . . . not wanting to go back to our home. Worried alphas would try to steal her. Our address isn't listed anywhere, but Ace wanted to make sure we lost all the alphas who have been following us for the past hour before we drive to our home.

Harley doesn't say much. She stares out the window as we drive through the streets, Knight never once letting her off his lap. I don't think he will ever let her go.

I reach out, wanting to touch her as I see her eyes closing. I shouldn't touch her . . . by law, I can't. But Knight doesn't say a thing as I stroke the hair away from her face and push it behind her ear. She lazily opens her eyes and sees it's me. I'm not sure if she's going to yell at me or what her reaction will be. I didn't mean to wake her. I shouldn't have touched her without her permission, either.

I just couldn't help myself. I'm drawn to her. Even though I'm not an alpha and she can't be my scent match... I just can feel it in my bones that she's the missing piece to my heart. Harley is the piece that makes it complete. For all of us.

She gives me a sleepy smile, and I return it. All the tension in my shoulders leaves as she sighs.

"That was nice. I miss touch . . . nothing's like this back at the Omega House," she mumbles. I can see the day has wiped her. Hell, I'm exhausted, but I can't rest. Not until she's home and safe.

"Don't worry, we'll be home soon. Close your eyes and rest for a bit," I tell her. Knight holds her tighter, his scent not once letting off burned pancakes.

From beside me, Zayd tries to ignore the presence of the omega in the car. But it's pretty hard not to. Her scent is intoxicating, and I'm a beta. I can only imagine how much she is affecting the alphas in this confined space.

Like Jax can read my thoughts he turns to me and winks. I must be letting off some emotions that he can feel down our bond that alerts him to how I'm feeling. Hell if her scent had me this hard... Jax must be breaking the zipper on his jeans.

She closes her eyes again, and I watch as her jaw slackens, and she falls asleep on Knight. He looks over at me, as if he wants to ask—am I dreaming? This is an unbelievable sight. Never in my wildest dreams did I envision this. Did I want this? Yes. But I never thought it could be like this. Her full trust in us to keep her safe while she sleeps against Knight is something I will remember forever.

"We have to let Gage know that he can't come back tonight," Ace says from the driver's seat.

“On it.” Jax pulls out his phone and starts typing a message to Gage. Her beta. There’s only one beta per pack... we are already registered with me as the beta for pack Bentley. But when have we played by the rules. We have hidden Knight for this long, and no one has ever suspected that Zayd doesn’t speak. If he did we would not have been allowed into the draw to begin with. A defective pack.

“My parents—he’ll be able to stay there. Until it’s safe for him to come,” Knight adds.

When that will be, I don’t know. I had no idea that someone would be watching us for the first month. Is this like a test, and if you fail it, you lose your omega?

Shit. I’m pretty sure once Harley sees our house, she might want us to fail. Nothing leaks or is broken. But it’s a not a house for an omega. They deserve so much better than what we can offer. I hope she understands that we want her to have all the nice things, but we just can’t afford them. I could never repay her for the way she’s already saved Knight. Saved them all . . .

Ace is a year off forty, and Jax is right behind him. I would have lost them both in the next five years. Zayd is younger, but I don’t think he would last without the others. I know I wouldn’t.

We only have five bedrooms, and in the past week, we have scrambled to make my room a nest for Harley. Gage has been sleeping on the couch and helping us get things that he knows she likes. He painted a mural of a tree and stars behind it on the wall.

He’s a very talented artist. I wasn’t too sure what I was expecting when he said he was going to paint it. But it turned out so much better than I thought.

“He’s not happy but warned us that Veronica is the toughest of all the betas in that house. And she will do everything to see us fail. She hates Harley.”

Zayd growls low, and I grab his hand. He doesn’t like people in his space. I know having Harley with us is a change for him, and he’s okay with that. But having this other beta, dissecting all our flaws and searching for any excuse to take Harley away from us?

That’s going to be too much for him.

Knight carefully carries Harley into our home as the rest of us rush around as quietly as we can, switching on soft lights and turning up the heater in her new room. It’s a cold night, and the chill in the bedrooms is enough to freeze my nose off.

“We really need to look at the heater. This is not good enough,” Ace mutters to himself. I can see how much it takes out of him to be the leader of this pack. And it’s not his fault that the heater doesn’t work. We have been fine without it. Only now we have Harley here we need to fix it. It’s just gonna cost money... something we never have enough of.

I shake my head. “It’s okay, she will be warm under all the blankets we got her and the little heater we installed.” Although, I doubt Knight wants to let her go . . . I’m sure she’ll be more than warm enough with him holding her all night.

But if she wakes up, I think it best we have the conversation about sleeping arrangements. She might want to be on her own for the first night. We are all out of our comfort zone, having her here. We all want her to like it. Like us. Want

to keep us. And there's a bit of fear from us not knowing what to do right now.

"She has no bags . . . no stuff." Ace grumbles

I run my hands through my hair and curse myself for not thinking about that. I'm pack beta. I'm supposed to have my head screwed on . . . not letting myself get dizzy on the omega's scent and forgetting things like her belongings.

When we were preparing for her, we didn't think much more than her nest.

"She can wear one of our shirts to bed, and we did get toiletries. So, we have a toothbrush and a few other female products." Ace nods as he paces the room. He looks out the blinds and returns to pacing. I don't think he's going to sleep much tonight.

I look over to Jax, and he doesn't seem any better.

Without conscious thought, I move toward Knight. He's on the couch, stroking his hand up and down Harley's back as she continues to sleep. His purr hasn't stopped, and I think it's not only calming her . . . but healing him. It's strange to hear... I've never heard any of them purr. It's just something that happens around omegas.

"She's beautiful," he whispers to me as he places a kiss to her temple. She stirs a little, and he freezes and I hold my breath. As much as I want her to wake, so I can ask her about sleeping arrangements, I want Knight to have this moment just a little longer.

"She is, and soon, we will have to wake her," I say. "Just to see how she wants this night to go." He grips her tighter, and she makes a small sound, which has him flooding the room with his worry. Fuck. "That's my job, as the beta," I add

quickly. I'm not going to take her from him. I don't want him upset, either.

"I want this night to keep on going like this . . . only more," she whispers, and Knight's purring kicks up a notch.

Ace moves in and takes a knee on the floor in front of them. He places a hand on her back, and she sighs. "More what?" he asks, and the whole room grows quiet, except for Knight's purring, as we wait for her answer.

"Touch . . . I've been touched starved for so long. I just want to be held." Her big brown eyes look over to me. "By all of you."

I suck in a breath. She wasn't just playing around and teasing me. She was serious about sharing me. I reach out and cup her jaw; her skin is silky smooth under my palm. I want to kiss her, but I know I can't. Not yet. That's for one of them to kiss her first. Knight will most likely be the one.

"Do you want a tour of the house? Or for us to take you to the nest?" I ask her. I'm happy with either, as long as she's happy. I watch her eyes grow wider at the word *nest*. But the scent that comes from her has all the alphas, even Zayd, moving closer to her.

What did I say? I didn't want to upset her. She can stay with Knight for ever. I just thought she might want a tour of the house.

"It's okay," Jax says. "We just want you to be comfortable, that is. So, if you don't want to sleep in there . . . you can sleep here on Knight or in any of our rooms. We will stay out unless you need or want us. We won't do anything you don't want us to do. We are not ruled by our pheromones." Jax soothes her,

and I realize where my words might have been taken in the wrong way. That wasn't my intention at all.

"I'm sorry, Harley. That came out wrong. Your nest—your room—is all yours. We won't go in there unless you invite us in." I brush the hair from her face again, and she gives me the sweetest smile that has my insides turning to mush.

"It's not that," she starts and pushes away from Knight to look around the room. Her eyes land on the kitchen, and Jax is already up.

"Would you like some water? Something to eat?" he asks her. I groan and curse myself. Food. Drink. Basic things I'm supposed to remember as the pack beta. I'm not good at this at all. I bet Gage is much better . . . he should be here too. It might make her feel a little more comfortable with a friendly face here. Someone she's known for a long time.

"Water?" she asks, and Jax narrows his eyes on her.

"Would you like a beer?" he asks as he pulls one from the fridge, and her eyes widen. She nods.

"Yeah, I could go with a beer. Thanks, Jax."

At the mention of his name, I see the tips of his ears turn pink. He likes that. He likes his name being said by this cute little omega. Oh, all the teasing we can do to him between us . . .

Jax's eyes are on me, and he must know what I'm feeling. Our connection isn't as strong as the one between the guys. But when Jax bit and claimed me, we bonded. And I can oftentimes feel him down the connection . . . and he can feel me the same way.

I readjust myself, after all the blood went to my cock at the thought of Harley and I sharing Jax. Which is the complete

opposite of what we're trying to do here. A safe and no sexual space for her right now.

He hands Harley the beer, and she takes a swig, her face screwing up as she swallows. She looks down at the beer then back up to Jax.

"That tastes bad," she says, handing it back to him. But before it can get into his hand, Knight takes it and has a taste. His brows furrows

"Nah, babe. It tastes good to me." He has another mouthful before handing it to me. Harley looks at the bottle as if it offended her.

"Then beer is gross," she says as I take a sip. It goes down smooth. It's a good beer. Not bad at all. Maybe she's never tasted beer before?

"Blasphemy." I wink at her, and she giggles. But then she stops as she looks over my shoulder. Her face drops, and I can tell what she just saw. Zayd left the room. It's normal for us, he just leaves without saying a word.

"Don't worry about Zayd, babe. He's just a little shy . . . he's . . . fuck, help me out, guys." Knight gestures for help on how to word Zayd. Hell, you can't. The guy is complex.

"Zayd, he'smute," Ace finishes for Knight.

I can see the wheels turning in her head. "Mute?"

CHAPTER 12

HARLEY

It's so weird being in their space. Their house smells like them, like they've lived here forever . . . without me. Pack Bentley has a past that I don't have with them. Getting to know them is going to be interesting. They're all so different, from what I've seen, and not like the alphas I met at the meet and greet, who wanted to claim me and breed me. At least, that's the vibe they gave off, with their beady eyes and aggressive interest.

These alphas seem more scared of me than I am of them—well, not so much Knight. He hasn't let go of me once since he met me up on that stage. But the others . . . they haven't made a move to touch me or demand I touch them. Things that I was sure alphas would expect. But from what they have shown me so far, these alphas and beta just want to hold me. Feed me. I can sense it—that all they want to do is take care of me.

Even though this pack is my scent match, I need to be careful. I don't want to lose my heart in here and have it broken. If Veronica figures out how I cheated, then she will take me from them. I know that she would do anything to see me unhappy. I wouldn't survive if they sent me back to the Omega House or to another pack.

Noticing the tall one—Zayd—leave the room as we are all laughing, I worry that I've said something wrong. He's been silent since I got here, and I don't know if it's because he doesn't want me here. I can understand if he doesn't. This pack seems to have been together a long time before I came along. I don't want to cause issues between them.

“Don't worry about Zayd, babe. He's just a little shy . . . he's . . . fuck, help me out, guys.” Knight waves his hand around to where they are all standing.

This room is small to house so many alphas. But I like it. I love cozy spaces. It reminds me of my home with my dad and brother. Ugh, I need to get those thoughts out of my head. I'm never seeing them again, and it saddens me that I didn't get to say goodbye to them. Not really.

Zayd is just shy? And what? My heart races . . . does he hate me? I don't want to live here and upset the balance in this pack. I would never want to be the cause of a rift.

“Zayd he's . . . mute.” Ace's eyes are on me. It's obviously not something he says often about his pack member. But I can tell he doesn't mean it as a weakness. Ace doesn't want me to think differently of him.

“Mute?” I question. I've never met someone who is mute, so I want to make sure I get this right. “He can't talk?” I whisper, not wanting Zayd to hear us talking about him. I don't want him to feel like we are going behind his back when he's just down that hall and can't speak up to defend himself.

“Yeah.” Ace runs his fingers through his beard. “Zayd can't speak. Doesn't mean he's got nothing to say. He can sign, but he's not a fan of talking that way. He's . . .” Ace trails off, trying to find the right words. But I understand what he's trying to say. That just because Zayd doesn't voice his

opinions doesn't mean he doesn't have them. It doesn't make him less than. I love that they all care so much for him. The way they all look to where he just left.

"He's just Zayd." Dash adds. "He will talk to you in other ways. He's the best listener. He bakes amazing cookies. But I won't say more . . . you'll find out. Just give him time. He's . . . Zayd." Dash shrugs, and I give him a smile, but it doesn't reach my eyes.

I can't help feeling like my being here is already pushing him away. I don't want him to feel like he can't be in here when I'm around. I would never think of him any differently just because he can't speak.

"He lives in his room more often than not, so it's not unusual for him to go there without saying a word to us," Knight says, seeming to read my mind. "That's normal for us, but for someone who doesn't know Zayd, it might look rude. He works from home, so he's probably catching up on his job." Knight strokes my back again, and I look into those eyes of his. I can't believe this day is real. I'm here. Not at the Omega House.

"Okay." I nod to them all. He's just being Zayd. No need to overthink it.

"Just, know that if it got out. We would lose you. No one knows that he can't... Just if it was known we would be labelled differently. And wouldn't have been allowed to enter the Choosing Day." Ace adds, and I understand what he's saying.

I have heard the rules, they are strict. They don't want omegas with alohas with disabilities that they can pass down onto offspring. That's okay with me... until the world changes

I have no intention on bringing children into this fucked up world.

God, Knight is beautiful, and all I can think about is how much I want to kiss him. I shouldn't. I want to get to know them all better before we step over that line and go into the nest. I don't think I'm ready to be knotted just yet. Hell, I only had my first kiss last week, and that was with someone I had spent six months getting to know. This . . . I don't want to rush something and regret it later. I want Gage to be here. He will know what I need. I miss him.

“What’s going through that head of yours?” Knight tips his head to the side. “You can talk to me, Harley,” he whispers as his eyes roam my face, landing on my lips.

His lips are so pink and plump. They look soft. Kissable. I need to stand up before I do that and it goes further. I shift my ass on his lap and freeze when I feel his hard length under me, and he makes a pleased sound in the back of his throat.

The omega in me is thrilled with his reaction to me. My scent. Hell, I've been perfuming non-stop since he came to me on that stage, and I'm struggling to think straight with his scent . . . all their scents in one room.

I don't want my hormones to get the best of me. Don't want my heat to come early and I lose all control of myself. I'm feeling like the room is much smaller than it is . . . like the walls are closing in on me.

Dash gently touches my back. It's a sweet gesture, but it's all too much, too soon. I scramble off Knight's lap and have to bite my cheek to stop myself whining at the loss of touch, which is silly. One moment of touch in four years, and I'm addicted already.

They all shift toward me, and the omega in me freezes. Too many alphas, their scents more than enticing, and I was not prepared for this. I wait for the alpha bark, forcing me to stop. But it doesn't come. I should have known it wouldn't. They're not Jonathan and his pack. They have proved that already.

"Sweetheart, is everything okay? Did we say something wrong?" Jax asks softly, and my eyes flick to him. He hasn't moved from where he's standing, and I'm grateful. His eyes roam my body, but not in a sexual way. More like he's looking for an injury. He won't find one . . . on the outside, that is. I let out a small breath at that. He just wants to make sure I'm okay.

I shake my head and quickly look to Knight. His expression falls, and I can tell he thinks I'm rejecting him. I didn't mean to do that to him. Fuck. I'm fucking this all up.

"I'm sorry. I didn't . . . I . . ." How do I say I've been touch starved for so long that, now, it's more overwhelming than I expected? Even though I just told them all I want more touch? I wasn't thinking straight. Touch-drunk?

I look to Knight's hard length in his jeans—fuck, it's huge. Oh, god. He's so big and I'm so small. How will that even fit? I didn't think about this until now. He lets out a groan as he cups it through his jeans. Oh, shit. *Shit.*

I squeak and stumble backward, away from him. In a flash, Dash is beside me. Not touching me, but just there. What happened to the confident me? The one who told the world I don't want to be locked away and become a sex toy?

"Harley. My job as the pack beta is to make sure you're taken care of, and I'm fucking that up immensely."

Looking up into his big, brown eyes and sad smile, I feel terrible that he thinks he's doing a bad job. He's not. I just don't know what to do, myself. There are just so many scents, and touch, and all of it is more than I imagined. I'm overwhelmed.

"I'm fucking it up, not you. I just—" I let out a deep breath. "I don't know, I'm happy to be with you all. I'm glad you are my pack. It's just, before I was at the Omega House, I was a beta. Then I was whisked away and spent four years with other omegas and betas. The only alphas I knew in that time were Pack Henley."

Growls sound around the room, and I still. I look to Ace, the pack leader.

"Sorry, Harley. Just the mention of that pack has us reacting. You're not fucking anything up. We understand all this must be new and different for you. It is for us as well. I'm sure there will be hiccups at the start, but if we communicate with each other, we can hopefully get on the same page. Do you think that sounds reasonable?"

I nod and swallow, grateful he doesn't think I'm some silly omega. I like how he understands me.

"I think I'm just a little overwhelmed, and I didn't mean to upset you, Knight. I just freaked out and I overreacted. I felt your . . . and I realized I'm not ready for that. Not tonight."

I don't look at Knight when I speak, not wanting to see that expression on his face again. I didn't mean to upset him. Instead, I look to Dash. I feel safe with him. I don't know if it's because he's the beta and smaller . . . less *alpha*.

"Babe, fuck." I chance a look at Knight, who's raking his hands through his hair. "I'm sorry. My body reacts like that to

your scent. I never wanted to do anything but hold you. You keep my mind here . . .” He taps his temple. “You have no idea how long I have waited for you. I would never do anything to hurt you or rush you. Take all the time you need, Harley.”

A lone tear rolls down my cheek. Ace said he was turning feral. That my scent triggered it when we met that day in the diner. I’m the one who started all of this. I caused him so much pain. And now I did it again with my actions. *Fuck.*

“I’m so sorry I did that. My scent . . . I think. I believe when you came into that diner, you awoke something in me. Days later, I was an omega, lost and confused. All I thought about was you finding me and claiming me, and now that you’re here . . . I’m scared.” I whisper the last part. I’m scared of this all being taken away again.

I watch as he crawls to the floor, keeping low and less intimidating to my small stature. He reaches his hand out and leaves it for me there on the rug.

“Don’t be sorry. You have nothing to be sorry for. I wish I would’ve known what was going to happen. I wouldn’t have left you behind, Harley. Please believe me when I say that I never wanted you to feel lost or confused. Then or now. This is new for all of us, like Ace said. The alpha in me just wants to hold and protect you. That’s all. I’ll try to keep my body more under control.”

I shake my head. Gosh, he’s just too perfect. Better than my dreams.

“No.” I reach for his hand and place it on top of his. “I was reacting to you as well, and I just . . . I should have said something, not jumped off your lap like you were on fire.” He chuckles and so does Dash. I look to Jax, who has a huge grin on his face, and I smile.

“It’s not that funny.” I giggle a little. Maybe it was.

“Knight is used to being the second-best-looking here. So, it was good for his ego when you jumped off him.” Jax rounds the couch and ruffles Knight’s hair.

Knight just rolls his eyes.

“Yeah, yeah, old man,” Knight says as he flips off Jax.

“So, who is the best-looking if Knight is second?” I ask, and the room grows quiet all of a sudden.

Did I say something wrong? Ugh, I feel like I’m going to keep failing.

“How about you tell me who is the most handsome of all?” Dash breaks the silence with a wiggle of his brows at me. I know he is just trying to help me out of whatever I walked into.

Well, put a girl on the spot. I don’t want to tell one of them is better looking than another. Hell, they are all attractive in different ways. In my mind, I’ve known Knight the longest, but in reality, I’ve only known him for a few hours. And for most of that, I was asleep on his lap.

“You know what? This is a trick question. I think I’m going to get some sleep.” I shake my head and smile.

Dash smiles over at me and nods. “That’s a good idea. I’m worn out too after a long day.”

Knight turns his hand under mine and gives me a light squeeze before shifting away. I look to the others. They’re standing there, as if they want to pounce on me to keep me from running away. I won’t be running from them. Not today . . . not ever.

Dash clears his throat. “I will show Harley to the bathroom and let her get ready for bed, then to her nest. And we can *all* give her some space to breathe, collect thoughts, and unwind. It’s been a long day for us all.”

“Thank you,” I tell him and he grins . . . ugh, he’s so cute. Is that a dimple?

I stand, and everyone moves when I do. It’s strange, but I think it’s just the way they are. All in sync. Though Dash is still taller than me, his body mass isn’t as large as an alpha’s. He’s thinner—not as wide as the others—but I can see his muscles under his tight blue shirt. He might be only a beta, but he’s just as attractive as the others.

I look around the room for my suitcase, but I can’t see it. I wonder if it’s in the nest already?

“My bag?” I question. I feel almost naked without it. It holds all my things from the life I had before. The few mementos I was able to take from home are packed in there.

Dash shakes his head, and my stomach drops. Jax and Ace shift on their feet, and I realize my scent has changed. I’m not used to others noticing. Not like this. I need to keep myself in check more.

“I will call first thing in the morning and track them down, Harley.” Ace nods to me. “They will be here tomorrow, I promise you.” And I believe him, I know he can do anything. He jumped over the Omega House wall to break me out. I know he will find my bags.

“Thanks.” Giving him a small smile, I reach into my pocket and feel my leaf. It grounds me. *Gage*. I can do this. I shake off the uneasy feeling of not having my things and put on a smile.

“I don’t have anything to wear to bed.” I look down at my black combat boots, black skinny jeans with holes in the knees, and the thin gray sweater I’m wearing. It doesn’t hold back the chill in the air.

“Could I borrow one of . . .” Before I get a chance to finish, all four of them have pulled their shirts over their heads. Oh god. Jax did it one-handed, and I feel slick start to pool between my legs... shit. My heat blockers have started to wear off much faster than last time. *Fuck.*

Jax is covered in tattoos. I lick my lips at the sight. I want to rub my hands down those abs. Oh god. I’ve never reacted to abs like this before.

Dash chuckles as he leans toward me. He’s close, and I can smell his scent. I lick my lips at that, plus all the pheromones swirling around in the air.

“You have no idea how hot it is, you watching my alpha like that. Your scent flooding the room has them all worked up. Look at them . . . the way they react to you,” he whispers.

And I do look. I watch the way they hold themselves there, like they want to run over and claim me. Knot me. But they don’t. Desire floods through me, and Ace cracks. He starts to purr, and even that seems to surprise him. *Oh shit.*

“I promise you they won’t ever touch you without your permission. You hold the power here, Harley. You are the one in control,” Dash whispers again, so they can’t hear us.

My lips tilt up at those words. Words I never thought would be true until now.

I hold the power.

CHAPTER 13

JAX

I still can't breathe. The way Harley perfumed when we all took off our shirts, it took everything in me to stand still while my dick tried to punch right through my jeans. God, she's beautiful and she chose us. She really chose us, and not because she randomly drew us from the lottery. She cheated and made us hers. We are the luckiest pack in all of Crescent City.

When Dash whispered into her ear, I couldn't keep still. It took everything in me not to go to her. I didn't want to scare her, so I quickly excused myself and moved straight to my room. Dash, the little shit, knew he was playing with us. Stirring her up and getting her all hot and heavy. He was playing with us . . . *me*.

I rub my cock through my jeans, waiting for him to come to bed. Since we had to move everything around, Dash now shares my space. It's not that much different to how it always was. He slept in here most nights of the week. Just now, it's a bit more crowded with all his belongings.

When the door finally opens and Dash pops his head around the corner, I growl. He just grins wildly.

"You'll be the death of me." I shake my head as he chuckles and slips into the room, closing the door quietly.

behind him.

“But it would be the best kind of death. Did you smell how turned on she was for you?”

I rub my hands over my face and into the scruff of my jaw. “You already saw how hard Knight was taking this. Do you really think that was a smart idea, with three alphas as scent matches in the same room as her?” Dash is young and has never been around an omega before. So, I don’t think he knows how bad this could have turned out.

Dash runs his hand down his bare chest and into the front of his jeans to cup his cock.

I lick my lips. *Fuck*. “Stop trying to distract me. You can’t do things like that. Testing our restraint like that is very hard, especially for Knight. You can’t test him like that. He might be okay right now, but who’s to say he won’t go full feral and into a rut? Take Harley against her will. He would hate himself for that, and you know it.”

Dash pauses for a second, and his expression drops. I didn’t want to upset him, but he needs to know he can’t do that. Not until Knight has claimed her and his feral side is healed.

“I’m sorry, you’re right. I just loved to see the way you reacted to her . . . I didn’t mean to hurt anyone. I almost forgot that, only two weeks ago, he’d practically disappeared into his mind.” He pulls his hand out of his pants, and both his shoulders drop.

Knight held himself together. I honestly don’t know how, as I was struggling. We don’t know much about scent matching and how it can cure his feral side. All we know is from old textbooks Zayd has found.

I can tell Dash is upset with himself. We've told him over and over that he's not here as a pack beta. He's more than that. But he genuinely enjoys taking on the role. It's who he is . . . he cares for us all. And that's why I love him. I can't sit here and let him feel bad. He did a great job with helping her to her nest.

I lower my voice until its deep and husky. "You really worked her up . . . what did you say to her?"

He cracks a smile and moves toward the bed. He eyes my chest the same way Harley did, and I growl a little at him. I can see his cock twitch in his jeans.

"I just told her she has the power and to look how her perfume affects you all. It was true . . . you looked as if you were about to come in your pants." He chuckles now as he crawls on the bed toward me.

I slap my hand on his chest, and he sits up on his heels.

"Yes, alpha?" he cocks his head and I groan.

"Little shit. I almost came in my boxers like some teenager when you teased her." I can smell him now . . . his minty scent is mixed with her toffee apples. *Fuck.*

He merely chuckles again. "You like that? She hugged me before going to bed."

Oh, fucking hell. I want to punish him for being a cheeky minx. But first . . .

"I need to kiss you." I reach for his neck and bring his face to mine. Our lips crash together hungrily, and his hands landed on my chest. I pull him on top of me until he's straddling me. I bite his lower lip, and he rubs himself against me.

Holding him to me, I slide one hand down his smooth back and under the waistband of his jeans to cup his hard ass. Dash isn't soft; he's hard in all the right places as I grind our lengths together through our jeans. Fuck, if I keep going like this, I will come like a teenager. I can feel my knot swelling already.

I lick over my bite mark on his throat, and he shivers beneath me. I can feel how turned on he is through our bond. I'm not gonna last long tonight, and I hope he knows what's in store for him. My hand isn't going to cut it tonight.

I flip us over and sit up to watch him squirm beneath me. He moves to sit up, and I press him back down on the bed.

"Hands above your head." Even though he isn't typically a good little beta in bed—he loves to be bad—he still obeys me, reaching behind to hold on to the rails of the bed.

"Good, beta." I move in and trace my tongue up the side of his throat and to the shell of his ear before nipping it. He moans, bucking his hips beneath me.

"Take me, alpha, please." His lip turns up at the side in a smirk. Little shit's gonna be the death of me . . . I just know it.

He knows how to appeal to my alpha dominance. I rarely show this side of me, since Ace is the dominate alpha in our pack, and I'm his second. But Dash knows just how flip my switch. Make me lose control. And with him wearing her scent all over him, he knows I can't hold back. He's playing with fire . . . lucky for Dash, know he loves to burn.

"Kiss me." He reaches up to my face and strokes down my cheek. Harley said she was touched starved all those years . . . I've had Dash. I love touch, I thrive off cuddling with my beta. I can't imagine not being touched.

I look down at him, his chest rising and falling rapidly, his pupils blown as he tries to rub himself against me. The misbehaving beta's hands are no longer above his head. He tries to unbuckle my jeans, and I slap his hand away and do it myself, freeing my cock and letting the heavy weight of it slap onto his taut stomach.

He looks down at it, licking his lips.

“Fuck, your knot is so swollen, Jax.” He breaks from our usual alpha-beta play and uses my real name. It's just as hot, but it's true. My knot is swollen. More than it's ever been before. Harley's scent is affecting me. He cups it in his hand, and I see stars.

“Fuck,” I hiss out between my teeth. I want him to stop . . . but I want him to continue.

“You thinking of her? Her soft tits, her smooth skin, that ass.”

I see the smile in his eyes as I wrap my hand over his mouth. “I'm thinking of you . . . and your mouth on my cock. But first . . .”

I slide down his body and rub the palm of my hand against his hard cock through his jeans. He presses up into my hand, demanding more. I unbutton his jeans and slowly peel down the zipper. He never wears boxers, always ready for my mouth.

When his cock pops free, I grab it and stroke it a few times. I press my other hand on his stomach to stop him from moving.

Dash lets out a small whimper when I let go of his hard length. His eyes are hungry and needy as I run my tongue

along the head of his cock. Fuck, the taste of him is like a drug to me.

Dash moans loudly, and I pull away. *Fuck*. I didn't think this through.

“Shhh . . . her room is just across the hall.” I should have thought about how loud Dash is and how she probably doesn't want to hear us. I know she said love is love, and I made it clear he's with me. That Dash is mine. But I doubt she wants to hear a live sex show on her first night here.

The guys know to put headphones in or they get the Jax and Dash show most nights. They never complain, but I don't want to scare Harley as I pound my cock deep in Dash's ass.

“She will want to hear how good you give it to me, need to know at least one of you is good at this. Maybe she will want to come in and join us. You could be her first knot.” He chuckles, and I roll my eyes at him. I don't think she wants that. Right now, she seems scared of the nest and knots.

“She's a virgin, Dash. One look at my cock, and she's gonna run scared.” Not at the size but at the hardware it's rocking. I love tattoos, but piercings are my first love. My tongue is pierced and my cock too—Jacob's Ladder and a Prince Albert.

“Think the first cock she sees will be yours, Dash. You have such a pretty cock.” I watch his cheeks pinken before I wrap my lips around the tip, groaning as I suck him down deep. His hands grip my head. Though I keep my hair fairly short, it doesn't stop him from grabbing on to whatever he can to try fuck my face.

He has no patience tonight. Most nights are the same, but he's usually a little more restrained. I love it; Harley's scent

must be affecting him too.

I watch him come undone as I work him. He moves and writhes beneath me as I pull back and replace my mouth with my hand. He curses me as I slowly stroke his length, teasing him and not giving him what he wants, staving off the orgasm that was so close.

“Fuck me. Please,” he whimpers. “I want your knot.”

I pause for a moment. Betas aren't designed to take knots. It's something Dash and I have spoken about in the past. But we've never done it. I might like to be an alpha in the bedroom, but I enjoy giving pleasure . . . not pain. He's never asked me for it before. And now I'm worried he wants this because he feels like he's being replaced now that Harley is here.

“I'm not knotting you,” I growl down at him. His face falls a little as he nods.

Fuck, tonight's been a mess. I sit up and run my hand over my face. I knew having Harley here would change things, but I expected that to be because she's a female and our omega and her presence would alter the pack forever. Not that she would change the dynamic between me and Dash.

“It's not that I don't want to knot your sexy little ass, but I won't do it because you feel like you have to now that Harley is here. Nothing will change between us . . . she knows you're mine. The idea of us together turned her on. But knotting you . . .” I shake my head.

Yeah, in the past, I'd wished I could have knotted him. It takes everything in me to hold back each time. But I never would. He's not built for my knot, and even though we could

have tried, I didn't want to cause him any pain or make him feel less than if it didn't work out.

“Okay,” Dash whispers. “I’m sorry. You’re right. As much as I wish I could take your knot, I don’t think I can.” He runs his fingertips over my swollen knot. It sends shivers up my spine, and I moan.

“Grab the lube and get on your hands and knees. I’m gonna teach you how to be my good little beta.”

He flips over and grabs the lube before wiggling his ass at me. I slap it.

He’s such a tease.

CHAPTER 14

HARLEY

This room smells like Dash and Jax. More Dash, though. He told me that this was his room, but he barely stayed here. That there are only five bedrooms, and I need a nest more than he needs somewhere to store his stuff.

So, he gave me his room for my nest. I was about to protest and tell him that it's okay—I don't need a nest—but I knew that's a lie. And if Veronica stays true to her word, we will need a nest to help prove to her that this pack can treat me right.

Gage apparently painted one of the walls for me, and it's perfect. I'm beneath our tree at the Omega House. Only, I'm still missing my beta.

There are so many blankets in here, and I have all their tee shirts. I brought them all to my nose and inhaled them one by one as I lay here in this dark room. It was warm from the little heater in the corner, but now . . . I'm cold. After all the touch I received, I now feel sad to not have anyone in here with me.

Just one night. Just tonight to get used to being in a new place, without any of my things. Without being able to talk to Storm or seek out Gage in the garden to chat with him. I should have asked Ace if I could borrow a phone to call him. I

think, just hearing his voice would help me settle a little more here.

I didn't expect my reaction to them to be so extreme. I can't believe we're all scent matches. I always thought it was a myth, but now, thinking about it, it all makes sense. But just because they're my scent matches doesn't mean I have to jump into bed with them.

Because I haven't taken my heat suppressants, the slick between my thighs is warning me that a heat is coming sooner rather than later. I'm wearing Dash's T-shirt and my panties. They're drenched and it's uncomfortable. I roll around a few times, trying to get comfy, but I can't seem to be able to settle.

I'd never had a nest before. Since I didn't want to be an omega, I'd ignored the classes on the subject. Like, I thought not participating in my classes would somehow change my designation. It wouldn't, and I should have known that. Now, it's as though something's under my skin, itching at me. I need to make this nest. I just didn't know how.

That's when I hear them. Dash told me he'd moved into Jax's room, and if I need him for anything, he's just across the hall. But this is a small house, and I can hear the moaning coming from their room. And it's hot.

I hear the Jax's grunts and Dash's moans as my imagination runs wild with what they're doing in there. I reach down between my legs and circle my slick through my panties. I'm so wet, so horny. It doesn't take long before I see stars, but it's not enough. I'm definitely in the pre-heat stage now, which is frustrating more than anything. This won't be good for my plan to get to know them before jumping into bed with them.

Because all I can think about right now is how much I want to get to know their dicks and knots.

I try block out the sounds from across the hall as best I can, but when Jax roars his release, I wish he'd done that in me.

Wait, no. I don't want that. I don't want to bring children into this fucked-up world. Any children I have will most likely be alphas or omegas. I wouldn't do that to them. I couldn't watch my sons turn feral when they don't find their omega mate. Or watch my daughters be used by a pack, if she's unlucky. Hell, I might have an omega son. That's worse. They lock them away. They are never matched with a pack. I don't know what they do with them, but I don't ever want to find out.

Sitting up, I move around the room. There are soft, fluffy pillows and silky sheets. I snuggle deep into the warm blanket that's absolutely perfect and wrap myself into it as I continue to move around my nest. I guess I have the instincts of an omega. No class can teach me this.

I spend a good amount of time moving everything around and making it perfect. There's a scratchy blanket I don't like, and I throw it near the door. But then I get the T-shirts I line them around the head of my nest. There's one missing, but I don't know how to go ask him if I can have it. Maybe, later, I can sneak into his room and see if he's left any dirty laundry on his floor and snag one.

It's late . . . I don't know how late, but the whole house is quiet. I can't sleep, but I don't want to disturb Dash. He's probably very tired after his activities with Jax.

Maybe a glass of milk will help me sleep. I get up and move my way to the door, my bare feet on the cold floorboards sending a shiver up my spine. It must get cold here at night. I wish I had big, fluffy socks. I look around the room

to see where I threw mine earlier, but it's too dark in here, even with the soft warm glow of a night-light, and I don't want to turn on the main light.

I'll just have to run out there, wearing nothing but Dash's tee and my still soaked panties, and hope I don't run into any of them. I open the door and pause when it makes a creaking sound. Shit. I hope I didn't wake anyone. I slide out through the small opening, so I don't make any more sounds. I look left then right. It's dark out here, but I know the kitchen is to my right and so is Ace's bedroom. The bathroom is to my left, along with Knight's room and Zayd's.

I feel this itch under my skin . . . I need his scent. I know I won't be able to sleep without it. Milk won't help this craving. Ugh, being an omega is so weird. I shift my weight between my feet, contemplating what to do, knowing what I really want and what I can't have. He won't be happy if I go knocking on his door in the middle of the night and demand he take off his shirt and hand it to me.

But my feet don't care. I walk down to his door. The floorboard squeaks under my foot, and I freeze. *Fuck*. What am I doing? I'm being a demanding omega bitch is what. He doesn't have to give me anything. I shake my head. *Get a grip, hormones. You can't have it all*. I turn on my heel, and that's when I hear the door crack open. I shut my eyes. *Fuck*. I spin slowly and inhale through my nose. His scent has my mind spinning, and I feel more slick as I perfume for him.

I open my eyes and he's there, staring at me in disbelief. I'm in just as much shock as him as my heart races and my breathing picks up. I go to open my mouth then think better of it. Nothing that comes from there is going to sound rational.

Instead, I just stand here like a deer in headlights as he does the same.

The whole house is still quiet. Not a sound, except some gentle snoring coming from Knight's room.

I shiver at the chill in the air, and his eyes drop to my bare legs. His eyes darken, and I watch as his nostrils flare at my perfume. I couldn't stop it even if I wanted to. My body reacts to his in a way I never thought it would. Until today, I didn't think a scent could send me into heat. But all of their scents are doing just that.

My breathing picks up. Zayd is so big . . . so broad and strong. His hands are just as enormous. When his body sways a little closer to mine, I suck in a breath. If he were to take me into his room and knot me, I wouldn't say no. Not right now.

I'm a complicated omega.

Knowing that actions speak louder than words, I reach out my hand to him, giving him a chance to stop me. He eyes it curiously as I grab the hem of his tight white tee. It's warm with his body heat.

He sucks in a breath, and I chance a look at his boxers, which are straining from the hard length hidden behind them. We barely move. The only thing I hear is our staggered breaths. He opens his door a little more, and a night-light casts a dull yellow glow into his room. I look at his bed, and it doesn't even look like he slept in it. Has he been awake the whole time?

I don't know if he's inviting me in or if he's letting me decide what I want. I look up into his face. His expression is impossible to read, but those eyes speak a thousand words. If I walked away right now, it would crush him. His spirit has been

broken before . . . I see the fear. He's opening up to me, letting me in just a little, and I can't walk away. I couldn't even if I tried.

I place my hand over his stomach, and he sucks in a breath. He's so hard. Like . . . everywhere. I slip under his arm and into his room. It smells like him. Rain. I love the smell of rain on a summers day. And lilacs. I move to his queen bed and pull back the blankets. I turn to see him still standing in the doorway, like he can't believe I just came into his room and I'm about to get into his bed.

Neither can I, buddy.

CHAPTER 15

ZAYD

The omega is on my bed. Her perfume floods my small room, and my body reacts. As my knot swells, it takes everything in me to stand where I am and not go to her.

I hover near the door as she makes herself comfortable on my bed . . . *mine*. How is this possible? That she wants to be in my bed? I let out a deep, shaky breath and close my eyes. When I open them again, she's under my blankets on the other side and pats the bed for me to come. I don't understand.

She hasn't said a word. I know the guys told her about me. I knew it had to happen sooner rather than later, especially if that beta Veronica will be here asking questions.

Only, I didn't want to be around when they did. I hate it. I don't like people asking questions about it. Or talking like I can't hear them; just because I can't speak doesn't make me deaf. So, I left the room, knowing Ace or Jax would do it. I came into my room and put on headphones and listened to classical music while I coded a website for a client. But that was then . . . and now.

She smiles softly at me and then lets out a yawn. She's tired and wearing Dash's shirt. She smells like heaven. I take a deep breath and regret it the moment her scent hits me. Fuck. I can't do this. I look away, outside into the hallway. No one is

awake. I can feel them all through the bond. They're all sleeping happily. Today has been a long but happy day.

"Zayd, I . . . I wanted your scent for my nest, but then your room . . . it smells like you." Her voice is so sweet behind me and I love the way she says my name, but I can hear her nervousness under it. Like me.

She might present to the world that's she's this badass, take-no-shit, confident omega. But underneath, she's just a girl, trying to make it in this fucked-up world.

I turn to see her sitting up now. She's wrapped her arms around herself, her big brown eyes peering over at me full of anxiety. I don't want her to feel this way.

"But I . . . is this okay? I can leave." Her soft voice sends a jolt through me, and I rub my chest where it aches and close the door to my room. No. I don't want her to leave. I don't ever want her to leave.

She chose my room, she came to me.

She wants my scent for her nest. She rubs on Dash's tee, and I realize now that's why she was pulling on my tee. She wants my tee to add to her nest. Did the others give her their clothes already? Is that why she came to me, because she didn't have mine?

Something in my chest comes to life. Something I've never felt before. My heart. I'm worried. I don't want to mess this up. Don't want to scare her with my size. And if I take off my tee... she will see my scars. My past.

I take a tentative step toward the bed, and she tilts her head, watching me with those eyes. *Is this okay?* I want to ask. *Am I doing this right?*

This is more than I thought she would give me. I thought, as soon as she learned I don't talk, she would want to leave. She didn't.

Even if she didn't leave, I assumed she wouldn't want anything to do with me . . . I'm defective. At least, I heard that enough times in my childhood that I withdrew from the world.

"Zayd?" she whispers and I blink. I was lost in thought. "I can leave if you want me to."

As she lifts the blanket, I swiftly move over to her. Her eyes widen and she lets out a small gasp. The alpha in me wants her wrapped up in my sheets. I want to keep her warm and protect her. She came to me. She must trust I wouldn't do anything to hurt her. My chest swells at the thought. She chose me on the first night. She wants to be close to me, my scent.

I gently place the blankets back on her, and she nestles down, never taking her eyes from me. She sighs and brings the blanket to her nose, inhaling my scent. My cock leaks at the sight. Shit. I don't want to scare her. Hell, I think I'm scaring myself. I've never reacted this way to anyone.

She watches me with those big eyes . . . waiting for me to, what? Her eyes glance to the spot beside her. Ah, yes. Get into bed with her. I can do that.

Since I've been told my size intimidates people, I move slowly. But when I rushed to her just now, she didn't seem scared of me. Still, I don't want to risk worrying her. I'm a large alpha, and I'm always cautious of the way I move around others. I sink down slowly beside Harley. She's so small, and she holds the blankets to her chin, watching me.

I pause. How am I supposed to do this? I'm used to lying sprawled out on my belly. But I can't do that while she's in my

bed—it's not big enough. Do I lie facing her? Oh god, my cock is so hard and swollen, I can't face her. I don't want her to think I only want to knot her when, in reality, I just want to hold her. Yeah, I do eventually want to knot her and give her pleasure, but that's not what this is about tonight.

Do I stare at the roof and lie on my back? Ugh . . . she will see the tent in my boxers. I wish I had something more constricting on right now. Should I give her my back? Maybe she will take offense to that, like I can't stand to see her, when all I want to do is look at her.

I wish Knight was here right now. He would be good at this. He has a way with words and a charm about him that has always drawn in beta girls. I've only ever scared them away.

But with Harley . . . I don't want to scare her away.

“Zayd, this is a first for me as well. Do you . . . want to, um . . .” It's like she can read my thoughts as she shifts and looks up to my looming figure frozen beside my bed. “Lie on your back? Maybe start there?”

She's so beautiful and understanding. She's the perfect omega for this pack. I grunt my reply, shocking myself. I don't usually do that—people find it rude. But Harley grins. My chest swells that I can make her smile like that.

I let out a deep breath and lie on my back, my fingers laced together, and I place them over my stomach outside the blankets, so she can see where they are. I look down at the tent I'm pitching and curse myself.

I can't read her feelings, not like the bond I have with the guys. Even though I don't have a bond with Dash, I can usually tell what he's feeling. I don't know how she feels about me, and I don't want her to be scared I'll touch her. She

told everyone earlier that she's not ready for that. And I wouldn't know what to do, even if she did want me to.

Turning my head, I find her looking up at the roof as well. Nothing there but some peeling paint. We really need to renovate this house. Yeah, I'll think about that, and it will help my hard cock to go soft. A big renovation is a great idea, especially now that she's here. Too bad the house isn't big enough to raise a family. Besides, it's in a shit part of town. I wouldn't even want children here. It's not safe.

Taking a deep breath, I inhale her scent, and my cock twitches. I grip my fingers tighter, so I don't touch myself. Fuck . . . I think I need to go rub one out, then come back to bed.

I feel her touch on my shoulder and glance over to see her fingertips are touching me. Her creamy skin looks amazing against my own darker complexion. She hesitates and I tense. Did I do something wrong? I'm not good at this. I have no idea what I'm supposed to do.

"Is it okay? That I touch you here, Zayd?" My cock leaks at the words and my chest starts to purr. I suck in a breath, I didn't know it would do that so fast. Her eyes widen slightly and then she giggles. I raise a brow and she shakes her head.

"Maybe it's best we sleep now," she says.

I nod in agreement. Otherwise, I will be coming in my boxers without even touching my cock, and I didn't think it was possible to orgasm just from her scent and her fingertips on my skin.

"Can I hold your hand?"

I shift and take her small, soft hand in mine. It's not the most comfortable position, but I watch as she settles in beside

me and closes her eyes.

“Night, Zayd,” she whispers.

There is no way I’m going to be able to sleep. I have the little omega in my bed, and I feel an overwhelming need to protect her. I didn’t think it would be like this. But I’ll lie here for as long as she wants, holding her hand and listening to her soft breathing.

It doesn’t take long before she’s asleep. I can tell by the way her hand falls slack in mine. But I don’t let it go; I hold it a little tighter, so it won’t slip away.

I take the chance to really look at her. Her dark chestnut hair is splayed out on my pillow. It’s dark and looks soft to the touch. Her lips are parted, and I hold myself back from tracing them with my finger, wondering how it would feel to be kissed by those lips. Has she ever been kissed? I haven’t.

I know she’s in love with that beta, the one who helped us get her here. I want to tell her that I’ve been saving all my kisses just for her. I hate that I can’t tell her that.

Harley lets out a deep sigh and snuggles in close to me, her face pressed up against my shoulder and her body pressing against mine. Her bare leg touches mine, and the purring in my chest grows louder. It hasn’t stopped.

It surprises me. I never thought it would be possible to have a pack—a family—and an omega. Harley is everything I’d only ever dreamed of. I’d been lost in the foster system for so many years. Always told I’m useless. But look at me now.

I’m so grateful for everything that has led me to this moment.

When I aged out of the system, I had nowhere to go. I found a room to rent, and it just so happened to be here, with

Ace and Jax.

They didn't question why I couldn't speak. They accepted me as one of the pack almost instantly. At first, I thought they were playing me. Even though I felt a connection with them, I'd been told so many times that a pack wouldn't ever want me. So, why would they want me? They wouldn't want to jeopardize their chances at an omega with a defective alpha like me.

They didn't care. They took me in and even learned sign language to speak with me. I found my family with Ace and Jax. Knight and Dash. I know they have my back, and that's why I have theirs. I wanted to leave the pack, so they could have an omega. I was worried I would be found out.

But nowhere on my medical records does it say I'm mute. In the foster system, you get lost and go under the radar. So, that works in our favor.

At least, for now, it does.

Tomorrow? That's another day.

CHAPTER 16

HARLEY

I hear a commotion outside the room—what the hell is going on? I wanted to sleep in for the first time in years. Somehow, I have ended up on my side, facing away from Zayd, who is also on his side, spooning me. His back is to the door, and his arm is draped over my waist as he softly snores.

Despite being woken too early, this was the best night's sleep I've had in forever. Being in here with Zayd wasn't what I'd been going for when I came to his door last night. I'd wanted his scent to put in my nest, but the source was so much better.

I felt safe with him. I thought his size might frighten me. And, yeah, I'm sure his cock will terrify me. But not him. There's just something about Zayd that makes me feel comfortable and safe. Like with him by my side, I will be safe from the world.

I shift under him a little, and he grunts, holding me closer to his chest. I let out a sigh as he starts purring again, and I can feel his now hard cock nudging against my ass. I freeze, unsure of what I'm supposed to do. He tenses under me, like he just realized what he did.

I remember from sex ed that guys get morning wood. But is that a teenager thing or an every guy thing? Hell, how old is

Zayd? Oh . . . how old are they all? I never thought to ask.

There's a banging sound and someone yells, and I start to wonder if this is a normal morning, and that's why Zayd is so content to just lie here. Or if he just doesn't want to let me go. I don't want to get up. I want to stay in his arms all day.

That is, until he suddenly stops purring and pushes himself up onto his elbow and looks at the door. I hear a growl in his chest, and now I'm scared.

I sit up and stare at the door. Oh, god. Are they coming to take me back? Did they see how I cheated in the lottery? I look up to Zayd. *Bite me . . . claim me*, I want to scream out to him. If I'm claimed, they can't take me back, right? Or maybe I should hide . . . my heart is racing.

Yeah, right. Like I could hide with how much I perfumed in his room last night. You can tell we shared this room last night. I shrink down into the bed. Oh, god. It hasn't even been a day, and they're going to take me away.

There's a knock at the door, but they don't wait for a reply as it bangs against the wall. I flinch and try to hide farther into Zayd's chest, and he holds me tight, ready to protect me from whoever is at the door.

“Zayd, wake up. She's gone.”

It's Dash. I peer up and see his face. He looks stricken. The pain on his face is so upsetting, I want to comfort him. What is gone? Do they have a pet? A cat? Their house and yard don't seem big enough for a dog.

“Do you have a cat?” One can only hope. I've always wanted one, but my dad is allergic.

Dash's eyes meet mine, and he stumbles into the room. I try to move, but Zayd won't let me. I tap his shoulder and he

peers over at me. Those eyes speak the same kind of worry I only had moments before.

“I’m okay. But I think Dash needs a hug,” I tell him, and he only grunts, not letting me go. That’s okay with me . . . I like being protected by Zayd. I love how big he is and how tiny I am in his arms.

The next thing I know, the small bedroom is filled with three large alphas . . . though not as large as the one in bed, hugging me tightly. I watch as their nostrils flare at my perfume and Zayd’s own scent mixed in his room.

“Harley, you’re here,” Ace says, letting out a deep breath. He paces the same small area a few times before locking eyes with me and nodding.

“Yeah,” I squeak. Are they mad I shared the bed with Zayd? “I kinda barged in on Zayd and stole his bed and cuddles.” I don’t want Zayd to get in trouble for what I did. But I don’t understand why he would be; he is part of their pack.

Jax holds his forehead and shakes his head and chuckles. Knight, on the other hand, moves straight to my side of the bed and drops to his knees.

“We thought you had gone,” he says as he reaches out to touch my cheek. He hesitates, and I cover the distance as his thumb brushes over my jaw.

“Gone?” I question. I look back over to Dash, who’s hugging Jax while Ace just stands there, watching me. His expression is the hardest to read.

“We thought you had left,” Ace answers me. *Leave?*

“Why would I leave?” That makes no sense. I only just got here. Why would they think I would want to leave?

“I . . . I couldn’t find you, and I thought maybe . . . maybe you saw how fucked up I am and left.” Knight stumbles over his words, the cocky attitude from yesterday long gone.

I reach out to cup his face. God, I want to kiss him right now. Want to kiss his worries away. But Zayd’s arms still hold me to his chest. That’s a good thing, as I think, maybe, we need to talk. All of us. If they think Knight turning feral is going to make me run . . . they don’t trust me.

Trust is everything to me.

Knight shakes his head. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have thought that. I know you wouldn’t leave. But the rational part of my brain left the moment I saw your bedroom door open and you missing.”

“Knight. Nothing’s gonna scare me away.” It’s the truth. I don’t want to leave. I’m attracted to them. . . their scars, fears, and all. I wouldn’t leave unless someone dragged me away. “I knew all about you. It didn’t change my mind when I wrote Pack Bentley on that ticket.”

I feel a hand, large and heavy, on the blankets just over my foot, and I look over to Ace.

“I think it’s gonna take a few days to get used to everything. Get us all into a routine. I’m glad that you’re safe and that you spent the night with Zayd. Did he cuddle you enough? Or do you need more?” Ace asks and my heart flutters. Ace is the only one who hasn’t tried to hug me . . . or asked anything of me at all. Only that I came here to save his pack. Jax has hugged me, only briefly. But Ace seems to be keeping his distance.

“Knight would love to have some cuddles,” Ace quickly adds, and my heart falls a little. Doesn’t he want to touch me?

Is he not attracted to me? We might be a scent match, but that doesn't mean he has to like it, or me.

“If that's okay with Zayd.” Knight looks over my shoulder to Zayd. His hand is now splayed over my bare belly. My tee must have ridden up when we shifted, and now I can feel the warmth of his hand branding my skin. I look down to it, and he tenses again.

He slowly removes his hand from my skin. It's not what I want, but I can tell Knight needs me right now. If claiming me will heal him, I need to let that happen sooner rather than later. Especially if Veronica is coming here.

I glance at Ace, and he nods once before leaving the room. I feel cold when Zayd fully extracts himself from me.

I practically fall onto Knight's lap, and he wraps his arms around me, inhaling my scent. I feel him start to relax under my fingertips.

Dash clears his throat. “We will leave you to it and go start breakfast.” And I hear them leave the room.

It's only the three of us here now in Zayd's room. He hasn't left the bed. Knight's purr starts up, and it rattles a little at first, then it's soothing. I relax into him.

“How was it having her in bed all night?” Knight asks over my shoulder to Zayd. I tense, waiting for the answer. I hope he didn't mind me barging in here. God, I did, didn't I? He was shocked to see me, and then the look on his face when I got into his bed. I hope I didn't overstep boundaries. I just really needed to be in here.

I don't look around. The guys said he doesn't like to sign, preferring to communicate in other ways. I don't want him to

feel nervous to answer if I'm staring at him, but I really want to know.

Knight chuckles, and I take the chance to look back over my shoulder at Zayd. He wears a cute grin as he smiles down at us. When he catches my eye, his widens, then his smile grows until it reaches his eyes. God . . . he's gorgeous. That smile has me feeling hot and tingly. I feel the slick. Fuck. My perfume hits the air like a freight train.

"Ah, so that good?" Knight playfully teases him, and Zayd blushes as he turns away. I playfully smack Knight's shoulder. But yeah, it was that good. Even though we didn't touch in that way, it was perfect.

"Hey. How about you ask me that same question?"

Knight's pale blue eyes land on me, and I want to get lost in them. But first . . . "How was it having him in bed all night?" He winks at me and I chuckle.

"I think I made the right choice in where I slept last night. Zayd is a gentleman and gives the best hugs." Turning back to Zayd, I smile at him. I notice the way he looks all coy . . . oh, I like this. I like the way my big alpha is all shy and cute.

"I bet he does. He is the best looking one of us, after all," Knight admits.

I glance back at him to see if he's messing around, and he winks at me. Then I look at Zayd again. His mouth is dropped open and little, and he shakes his head. It's the first time I've seen him actually answer a question. He points at Knight, and I can feel the rumble of his chest under me as he laughs.

"You keep saying that, but you are pretty boy. I will forever live here as the second-best-looking." Knight makes a dramatic sigh, and he sits me up on the side of the bed.

I then look to Zayd once more, and I realize this isn't the first time Knight has said this to him. He must say it a lot.

“Well, you better move over, second-best-looking, because you have officially slid into third place.” I poke Knight's cheek and turn to Zayd.

“And you, Mr. Good-looking.” I poke Zayd in the chest. “I can't deny you were number one, but that was before I got here.”

I love the way Zayd lights up at the teasing. Like he's changed from the stiff, quiet guy from last night, to a shy sweetheart who's working his way deep into my heart. I can't mess this up. I need this to all work out, because it would kill me if they took him from me . . . Same goes for Knight and the others.

Zayd sits up and leans forward. He pushes strands of my hair behind my ear and drags his thumb across my cheek. He looks at Knight, and I watch as he must speak to him down their bond. I don't like that I can't feel what Zayd is thinking or feeling. I feel like they have a whole secret language and I'm not included.

“Hey . . . that's not fair. I can't feel you down the bond. Talk to me, Zayd.” His dark eyes flick back to mine, and when he tries to look away, I reach out and grip his jaw between my fingers and bring him back to me. “This won't work if we don't try to talk to one another.” I wait for him to point or nod. But instead, I'm surprised when I see him sign. *Fuck*, I don't know ASL.

I drop my shoulders and let out a deep breath. I wish I knew what he just said, but I need to have someone translate it for me.

“I’m sorry. I should know what you are saying, but I don’t.”

Zayd doesn’t look upset by it, but I am. I’m the one who demanded to be brought into the conversation. Zayd points at Knight, so I look to Knight, and he gives me a small smile.

“Zayd, I love you, big guy, but my mind isn’t the best, so I’m a little rusty . . . considering you haven’t signed to me in how long?” Knight hugs me, then turns me to look at Zayd.

Zayd tilts his head shyly and signs again.

“I really want to kiss you,” Knight whispers in my ear, and I let out a small gasp. My thighs grow wet with my slick and both alphas groan. Fuck. Who knew asking for a kiss would turn me on so much?

“You want to kiss me?” I ask.

Zayd nods at me, and I feel butterflies.

“Yes, I want to kiss you and lick that sweet pussy. Taste all your slick with my tongue and—” Zayd throws a pillow at Knight’s head, just missing mine, and Knight chuckles.

“Okay, I might have added a little bit extra there,” Knight admits.

I raise my eyebrows to Zayd, as if to say, *really . . . I couldn’t tell*. He nods and waves his hand at Knight.

“Hey, you were totaling thinking it,” Knight says to him. And then he moves in closer to my ear, his breath warm on my neck. “He said yes. But be careful with my big guy. He’s been waiting a long time for you . . .”

What does that mean?

But I don't think about further. I just act, crawling toward Zayd as he sits against the headboard. He's still wearing that tee, and the blankets have bunched up around his waist.

As he watches, I place a leg over him and straddle him. He lets out a small gasp and starts purring. I bite my lower lip. That's my favorite sound now. Sliding up a little, I feel his hard length tucked beneath me. I rub myself against it, and sparks go off, and I slick more.

That's not what I'd been planning to do, but it just feels so good. His hands go to my hips, gripping me just right. My tee has ridden up, and I'm sure Knight is getting a good look at my soaked panties. But I don't care. I feel so turned on right now. And all I want to do is kiss this big, beautiful alpha.

Zayd reaches one hand up to my face, placing his thumb on my lower lip and pulling it free of my teeth. I lick the tip of it, and he shifts, groaning as he rubs against my clit. I groan. *Fuck*. It's just supposed to be a kiss, but my skin itches to remove all this fabric between us and sink down on his cock.

As one, we both move in. My hands grip the fabric of his tee, and I lean against him. His chest rises and falls rapidly beneath me, and I can feel his heart racing. Mine is too. His hot breath fans over my lips before he claims my mouth.

At first, it's soft, gentle.

His hand slides up under the back of my tee, his hand splayed on my back as he pulls me in closer. I let myself fall farther into him as our mouths grow hungry and we can't hold back.

I swear fireworks erupt as I kiss him deeply. Everything in the world fades away, and it's just Zayd and me.

Oh, god. I rock against his length, chasing an orgasm. Zayd's hand wraps around my ass cheek as he grinds me into him harder. I pull away and gasp for air. I'm so hot. I've never been touched like this . . . I didn't know this was possible.

Zayd kisses my jaw, my throat, moving down to that place where my throat meets my shoulder. The place I will one day be marked with his bite. The omega in me whines, and I tilt my throat, exposing it to him. I want him to claim me. I can't think about anything but him bonding me as I reach the peak. He nips me, and I come undone. The bomb within me explodes, and all I can do is gasp for air and ride out the most explosive orgasm I've ever had. But it's not enough . . . I need more. I need to be filled by an alpha. I need a knot.

I don't want to stop. I want more. I want to taste him. Want his knot locked deep inside me.

"Knot me . . . please," I whimper. "I need . . ." I beg.

It's not me, yet it is. I never thought I would beg for a knot.

"Harley, how about my fingers?" Knight says from where he now sits on the edge of the bed. I had almost forgotten he was even here with us. If it wasn't for the blueberry pancakes scent mixed with lilacs, I wouldn't have even known he was still here.

"Yes," I breathe out. "Use your fingers."

CHAPTER 17

KNIGHT

Mine, the alpha in me screams.

Harley's my mate. My omega . . .

The fog I've been living in for so long has passed enough to see—she's my cure.

Since she's been here in our home, my mind has been clear. Her scent is calling to me to mark her and claim her as mine, but I hold back. Just to touch her is enough. How is it possible that I found my scent match in a little diner in a beta-only town . . . and all this time, as I slowly lost my mind, she was locked away in the Omega House, waiting for me? So close but out of reach.

She remembers me . . . blueberry pancakes. The guys always laugh at my scent, because if there is one thing I hate, it's blueberry pancakes.

But Harley must be the opposite. She loves my blueberry pancakes scent. And I love her sweet scent so much, especially as she's perfuming. It's been stuck in my mind since the first time I scented her. And now that I'm so close to her, it's like a drug. I'm hooked.

Her perfume floods Zayd's small room as she comes down from that orgasm. I have to bite my tongue to stop myself from

sinking my teeth into her lush ass. Fuck, my girl has the hottest ass, and I know where I want to leave my mark. I'm surprised Zayd held back. Hell, I'm in shock that he's the first of us to kiss her. I'd wished it would have been me, but I have a feeling that beta Gage was her very first.

Instead, I get to use my fingers on her, and that's the first I'm looking forward to.

"Knight," she whimpers. "Please."

I growl deep at the way she says my name. Never, in my wildest dreams, did I think this would ever happen, and now she's here, begging me to fuck her slick pussy with my fingers. I want to do so much more, but I know she wants to take this slow. I do too. As much as I long to claim her, no other match would ever compare to my scent match. I want to give her time to get to know us. And us her.

I'm happy to wait as long as I can. As long as my mind stays clear, I will wait forever.

I shift up behind her and straddle Zayd's legs. When he raises a brow, I smirk and wink at him, and he blushes. I've always wondered if he would like it if I used my fingers on him too.

But I can't think about that right now. The others are out there, cooking breakfast for us all. After the scare this morning, we're all wide awake.

Harley drops her head back to my shoulder, and I feel her body heat through the tee Dash gave her. She turns her head slightly, peering up at me through those dark chocolate eyes. Her pupils are blown, and I'm concerned she's going into heat.

"Pre heat?" I ask her. I don't think she's in a full-blown heat, but she's not far off. Does it normally come this fast after

Choosing Day? I learned about it in my alpha studies in high school, pre heats and then full-blown heats.

I'm the only one of the guys who has an omega for a mother. So, I know more about these things. Growing up was . . . well, I learned to wear headphones and stay away from my mother's nest when she was in heat.

"Yes, I think it is. *Fuck*. I hate this. I hurt, Knight," she whimpers to me, and a need to help her floods through me. Just as much as a need to knot her . . . claim her and make her *ours*.

Fuck, maybe I'm not the best choice for this. I don't know if this will make me worse. What if I'm in danger of losing control? I might bite and bond her, and I don't want to do that to her until she's ready.

But I can't walk away. I want to kiss her, but as she tips her head away, exposing her throat, I growl. My hand snakes around her waist and up to between her breasts. My fingers drag over her sensitive skin on her collarbone and wrap around her throat.

I run the tip of my nose up over her ear and feel as she submits under my touch.

"Good girl," I purr.

She shifts under me, trying to get friction on Zayd. But she's not going to have much luck. She needs more than my fingers, but we don't have toys here. The only thing I can give her that's not a knot is Dash. He can't knot her, and I know she wants him just as much as Jax does.

But I want to be the one who helps her through this. Just to ease off the need for a while.

I slip my free hand down under the hem of the tee and to her panties. They're so wet with slick. I move my finger under the fabric and over her silky-smooth mound. I wasn't expecting that, and I feel my knot grow.

Fuck, claim, bite.

Oh, god. Not now. I feel my mind start to slip and have to force it back. I feel Zayd under us. His hand on my thigh. I glance down at him, and I see the worry in his eyes.

"Knight?" Harley whispers, and I shake myself out of it.

"I'm good," I tell them both.

My fingers slip through her silky folds, and I meet her little nub with the tip of my finger. She practically bends in half with a moan, and I've barely touched her.

"Oh, god. Yes . . . more," she begs, and I run my finger down to the heat of her core. So much slick . . . I can't stop. I pull away and bring my fingers to my mouth. I suck them in and groan as my cock weeps at the taste.

"Holy shit, Harley, babe. You take like honeycomb." I look at Zayd. I bet he wants a taste.

"Fingers . . . you promised me fingers, Knight. Now."

I chuckle at the way she demands me to finger her. I move swiftly, my fingers finding her heat again, and I do everything to resist knotting her as I rub myself up against her sexy little ass. Pressing my finger inside, her heat sucks me in. Fuck, I'd read about this stuff, but never once did I expect it to feel like this. The way she's milking my finger. I can imagine what it would feel like with my cock in there. Milking me, She whines, needing more, and I press a second finger in.

“You okay, babe?” I ask her. I feel that spot . . . where my knot will go, and I do everything I can to make her feel full as I rub and press the heel of my palm against her clit.

“Oh, god,” she moans, her whole body shaking. She’s so close.

I nip her ear and growl. “Come for me, Harley.”

And I watch her eyes as she gazes up at me. Those eyes, full of trust and need. She trusts me to get her there, and I will. I nip the soft skin of her throat, and she gasps. I watch her eyes roll back, and her pussy squeezes my fingers, trying to lock me. I know it’s not gonna be enough, but it will take the edge off and give her time to start to get to know us over breakfast.

I feel fear down the bond and Zayd sits up, grabbing Harley.

“We have company,” Dash says through the close door.

Fuck.

CHAPTER 18

HARLEY

The way Veronica's eyes roam the room, I know she's not impressed by Pack Bentley in the same way I am. I love their house; I love everything about them so far. But I know she's judging them. Trying to find fault in them.

Veronica shakes her head as she writes notes on her clipboard. Dash sits beside me, and I can tell that he wants to comfort me, but we can't, not in front of her. She will know there is already something brewing between us. And I don't want her to find another reason to take me from them when I only just got here.

"Can you take me to the nest please, Harley? I need to inspect it."

I want to roll my eyes at her. The way she's talking doesn't seem like the Veronica I knew back in the Omega House. I nod and stand. Knight's hiding in the kitchen, busying himself with washing dishes. Ace stands beside me, holding his hand out for me to take.

I let out a deep breath, grateful that he's here with me. He's so strong, and I can see he really cares for everyone in his pack. He carries a huge weight on his shoulders with Knight. But he didn't take him to the Alpha Center. He has been trying to help him this whole time. I feel safe with Ace beside me.

We walk down the hall, and I push open the door to my nest. I smile proudly to myself. My nest. I worked hard on it last night. I still need a tee from Zayd, but I just love the blankets and pillows they got me. So soft, and I love silk. Mixed in with the guys' shirts, it's an amazing nest.

Veronica can't complain about that, as an omega made it. That's got nothing to do with the guys. This is my space and how I want it.

"This is not acceptable, Pack Bentley. This isn't up to omega code. There aren't any blackout blinds. There are no fairy lights. You don't have a full-size nest mattress on the floor. It's just . . ." Veronica kicks my blankets to the side and something in me snaps. She touched my nest.

I grip Ace's hand tighter. And I feel his shift into me, giving me his strength.

Looking closer, I can see the thin mattress under there she's referring to. I didn't have an issue at all. At least I don't think I did. I just didn't feel right in there because I was missing Zayd's scent . . . right?

"It's fine," I grit through my teeth. I want to claw her for messing with it. I

"No, this is not fine. There are rules, Harley. If they got the pamphlet at the meet and greet, they would have known what to do. But they didn't. Did they?" She looks over at Ace, not even threatened by his size, and eyes him up.

"We did, but I unfortunately lost it," he answers and she eyes him for a moment. Like she can get him to crack and admit they weren't there. I don't know how good my poker face is right now . . . I'm still reeling that she touched what was mine.

“Mmm, conveniently lost,” she hums.

She moves from that room and makes her way down the hallway, opening the other alphas’ rooms and having a sniff. Ugh . . . I really don’t like her in my space and smelling my alphas. I make a sound in the back of my throat, and Ace steps in front of me.

“You are upsetting our omega. Are you done?” he asks.

I peer around him and watch the way she scribbles words on her notepad. I don’t think any of them are good.

“No, I haven’t finished. I will prove you weren’t there and that, somehow, you entered your names into the lottery. I don’t know how you did it, but I will find out.”

Fuck. There are so many ways to prove it. For one, they never paid for a ticket. There would be bank transactions and receipts. So far, she hasn’t thought of that, so I won’t be putting that into her mind.

Ace clears his throat. “If anything, you should be looking at the Henleys. They caused a bit of an uproar when Storm pulled them on Choosing Day. They’re elite, and they entered the draw of a beta-born omega. There’s gotta be rules about that.”

Veronica shakes her head. “No, any packs can enter the lotteries. There are no rules about who can enter. If the pack is fit and healthy, they can enter the omega Choosing Day. The Henleys entered that lottery, just like any other. I know they did.” The way her eye twitches gives her away. She didn’t know. She couldn’t have.

But I can’t tell her that I know that she’s lying, because that would prove both Storm and I rigged the draws. I still don’t know why Storm rigged it for Jonathan, though. I hope

he is treating her right. She must have caused a huge mess for them all. I'm surprised they didn't say there was a mistake and make her choose again. Unless they wanted her . . . and they knew she was going to rig it. They would have had to organize a new pack to take over the Omega House.

Veronica clears her throat. "Anyway, it was their first time in the lottery, and I assume they were trying their hand at entering. Like most packs do, but not Bentley. They have never entered a draw. I would know . . . I've monitored all the entries for the past ten years."

Ugh. She seems to think she's the superior one here, but she's not. She's got no power in that Omega House, except what the alphas give to her.

Someone clears his throat, and I look over to find Dash, his hands behind his back and his eyes lowered. "Excuse me, would you like something to eat or drink, Veronica?" he asks her. I find it odd that he's asking her that now.

But she turns to him. "Ah, the pack beta . . . Dash, was it? You should have offered that to me as soon as I sat in your living room. You didn't offer refreshments, and I marked that down. Now is too late, and I failed you."

My mouth drops open. Was this a test? If we don't pass . . . what happens?

"Veronica, can I ask, what is the purpose of your visit? Like, are you supposed to check that I'm okay? And that I'm happy? Because I am. So, you don't need to be here anymore."

The faster she leaves, the faster I can breathe. I feel like I've been holding my breath since the moment I walked into the living room and saw her there.

“No, Harley. I’m here as part of the omega program. We need to make sure all your basic needs are being taken care of before we officially sign off. If not, we will redraw—in private, of course. And you will get a more suitable pack that can accommodate an omega. That happens more often than you realize,” she says to Ace.

She looks down at her clipboard again and writes something down. My chest grows tight, and I feel like I can’t breathe. She can’t take me away. I won’t let her do that.

“No, I want you to leave.” My voice is shaky as I hold on to Ace tighter. I need her out. I have always hated the woman. For the past four years, she has done nothing but make me feel worthless and disposable. Like being beta-born is the worst thing that could have happened to me. I thought Choosing Day meant I didn’t have to see her again.

“You need to leave.” Ace’s voice is close to a bark, commanding and deep. The hairs on my arms raise as I watch Veronica waver for the first. Back at the Omega House, Jonathan and his pack were on her side. Here . . .

The alphas are on mine.

“Fine. I just need to speak to the last alpha, and I will be on my way.” She glances at her clipboard, and I know who she means. The one who is hiding in his room.

“Zayd. Where is he?” she asks.

I feel Ace stiffen a little, then he hides it behind a low growl. “This way.” He gently tugs me behind him as we all go to Zayd’s door. Ace knocks and we wait . . . and we wait.

“He is working right now. Can this wait?” Ace adds.

Veronica shakes her head.

“Zayd, the beta from the Omega House needs to see you,” Ace calls through the door.

I don’t know what Veronica needs to ask him, but I hope it’s just his name, so he can nod. If she knows he can’t talk . . . that will be a fail in her eyes.

The door clicks as it opens, and my tall, gorgeous alpha appears. His dark eyes find mine, and I see his shoulders relax a little.

Veronica takes a step back, and I see fear in her eyes for the first time. Zayd grunts at Ace, then his eyes land on mine. I smile up at him. I want him to know I think he’s perfect just the way he is. And I might like him a little bit extra for making Veronica scared.

She clears her throat. “Zayd Heart. You are twenty-nine and a programmer. And the third member to enter Pack Bentley?” she asks and he nods.

My heart races as she marks something off on her form.

“Very nice. Can you tell me how you did it?” she demands, and even I suck in a breath.

“Did what?” I yell at her. I don’t want her speaking to him anymore. I feel very protective of my alphas, especially Zayd. She can’t just come in here and demand answers from him like that.

“Cheat the system. Rig the draw. And now I can smell you in there . . . has he claimed you?” Her voice is raised, more like the Veronica I know. She looks to my throat, and my hand goes there to hide it from her. Not that I have anything to hide.

“It’s none of your business what I do with my alphas. Get out,” I yell again, pointing to the front door. She came in here

and ruined the best morning. I had the best orgasms, and she's just taken that from me.

Veronica gives Zayd a once-over and walks past us to the front door. "You cannot bond until I have signed off. So, yes, Harley. It is my business." She stomps down to the front door and turns to me. "Someone just burned your breakfast, Harley. I'll be back, and I will prove you cheated."

And with that, she leaves, the front door slamming behind her, and Dash quickly locks it behind her. I let out a deep breath as soon as the lock clicks into place. Thank God she's gone.

"Who burned my breakfast?" I call.

Knight was in there, but he was doing dishes. I smile—was it Jax? I put my hand on my hip and smile over at Dash; he would know. I've seen his bite where Jax claimed him. But he has no smile in return. If anything, his face is pale.

Ace drops my hand and rushes past me. "Knight," he yells, and there is fear in his voice.

Confusion swamps me. Knight was just in the kitchen, washing dishes. Was he supposed to watch the food?

As I move down the hall, I smell it . . .

Burned pancakes.

That's when I see him. He's hunched over on the floor, shaking and holding himself into a small ball. It finally dawns on me . . . Knight. He smells like burned pancakes.

"Oh, no," I whisper, my hand covering my mouth as Knight turns to me. His eyes are so dark, it almost doesn't look like him. He jumps up and launches toward me, and I

stumble back over the rug and land on my ass as Ace and Jax try to hold him away from me. He snarls and growls.

“Mine,” he grits out. “Fuck, claim, bite.”

“Dash, take her to Zayd’s room. Lock yourselves in there while we take care of Knight.”

Oh, god. I did this to him. My scent. He needs me.

I scramble to my feet and step toward him.

“No,” Ace barks out, and I stop. He used his alpha command on me. “Harley, he won’t want you to see him like this. Please go to Zayd’s room and wait for us.” Not an alpha command, but a command none the less.

“But . . .” What can I say, do? “He needs me.”

Jax shakes his head as Dash grabs hold of my arm.

“Knight is gone right now. He would be upset with himself if he claimed you against your will, especially while he’s feral,” Jax tells me. Knight tries to bite him, trying to break free, and my heart breaks for him.

A lump forms in my throat, and I don’t know what to say. I want to cry. This is how he has been the past four years . . . this is what he’s been going through daily?

As a tear slips free, I take a step away. Dash lets out a sigh as he helps lead me out of the room.

“Mine. Stay,” Knight growls as I turn away, and my heart breaks even more. I want to stay; I want to help him. But what if what they said is right? That he will bite me?

“We’re sorry, Harley,” Jax adds. I know he is.

I wipe the tear away as Dash hugs me.

All those nights in the garden, I'd been happy while flirting with Gage and dreaming of a life with him . . . and my blueberry pancakes.

And all that time, Knight was suffering . . . they all were. And it was me.

My fault.

CHAPTER 19

ACE

If I had known about this whole test-after-ceremony thing, I would have asked Knight's fathers more questions about what to do and expect. It's been a good twenty-five years since they got Maggie—Knight's omega mother—but some of the help they gave us with the nest and all wasn't enough. I didn't know there was a special mattress we were supposed to buy. Hell, we should have gone to that expensive omega department store. I was just trying to save some money to help with repairs around here.

I'm still waiting on the guy to come fix the heater. But then there's the leaking tap in the bathroom. The peeling paint in so many of the rooms. Jax has offered to paint the house, but he never has the time. Neither do I.

Between the garage and home, we are buried. We work extra hours just to keep a roof over our heads, and it's been too many years since we've had even a day off.

Veronica is right. This house is not up to the standards of the Omega House. Hell, it's not even up to my standards. Heating is the first thing I should have had fixed a month ago when it went out. I was just saving every penny we had to try to get our name in the next beta-born omega lottery that I overlooked something so basic as heating for my own pack.

“Don’t,” Jax says as I pace the room.

Knight has gone and crawled into his bed and doesn’t want anyone, especially Harley, to come see him while he comes down after his episode. He’s upset she had to witness that. I could feel it down the bond as soon as he came to. He shook us off and promised he was fine.

He’s not fine.

Fine is the word you use when you’re not fine. And Knight’s second favorite word these days is “fine,” and his first most used word is “sorry.” I tug on my bond connection with Zayd to check in with him, hoping he will open up more now that Harley is here with us.

He sends a mix of feelings down the bond. He’s concerned. For Knight? Or Harley?

I run my hands through my hair and tie it up into a knot. I need to go apologize to Harley. I never want to use my alpha bark on her. I never wanted to be that type of alpha.

“She will understand,” Jax says, and I realize I left my bond open. Not that it’s hard to tell each other’s thoughts by now. After being together for almost twenty years, he knows what I’m thinking before I even say it. That’s just who Jax is. He read emotions; he can sense how others are feeling.

“I just . . . I never wanted to do that, but I was scared,” I admit. Scared that Knight was lost as Harley stood there, the tears in her eyes and the omega inside her wanting to comfort her alpha . . . her scent match.

And I used my bark to stop her from doing something ingrained in her, probably ruining what had only just begun between us. It’s amazing how, after one night, this little omega has already wormed her way into my chest.

“Go talk to her. I bet she needs to hear from you. Let her know that Knight is okay. That she can see him now.”

I look at Jax. He heard Knight. He made it very clear he didn't want Harley to see him. But maybe it's for the best. To get him back to the way he was. I have no idea what set him off, but I'm so glad that Veronica only smelled him . . . that he held back for so long. Knight is the strongest alpha I know. And now that Harley is here, we need to get the Omega House off our back and claim her as our own.

I nod to Jax.

I'm not as good with emotions as he is. And around Harley . . . my mind gets clouded with her scent. God, the way she was perfuming this morning with Zayd and Knight, I'd been sporting the biggest hard-on . . . until Veronica knocked on the door.

Dash answers Zayd's door, looking relieved to see me. He steps to the side, and I see my little omega crying on Zayd's shoulder.

Okay, this is really a moment for Jax to shine. He knew what Zayd was feeling and sent me. I don't want to alert her to my presence, so I sign to Zayd instead of talking.

“Crying? The whole time?” I hope not, as it's been almost an hour. He nods.

Fuck.

I watch the way Zayd strokes her back, and she shivers under his touch. I don't know what to do here. I didn't do alpha studies. Never thought I would need it. But fuck, I wish I had. Knight would know what to do now. Maybe I should have gone to him first, checked in on him again. I could go to him

now . . . tell him that Harley is crying. But that would only upset him more.

“Harley?” I say softly as I approach the bed. I round it and see her blotchy red cheeks. God, I’ve really messed up.

“Harley, I’m so sorry. I never wanted to use my alpha bark on anyone. Especially you. I never meant to upset you.” I crouch down beside the bed; her scent is still as enticing as ever . . . honey and sweet.

I reach out and stroke her hair away from her face and brush away some tears. Her cheeks are soaked. I put those tears there. *Me*.

I want nothing more than to comfort her and make her happy again. I want the Harley from this morning back.

“You didn’t upset me.” She hiccups and she reaches for my hand. “You care for your pack. I understand why you used your bark.”

I sigh. She’s too good for me . . . for us.

“No, Harley. I never wanted that for you. I never wanted you to experience an alpha’s bark.”

“I’ve had it happen before—” she starts, and both Zayd and I let out a growl.

“Who?” I try and calm myself. I didn’t mean to scare her again.

“Jonathan Henley. He would bark at me when I did things . . . I wasn’t the best omega at the house. And he tried to get me to be.” She tries to shrug like it’s nothing, but it is. I can see it’s affected her. He never should have done that to her.

I never want her to think that’s okay. To have complete control over someone like that is wrong and never should have

happened.

“I promise you, this day going forward, I will never use my bark on you.” And I do.

“You are perfect just the way you are, Harley,” Jax says from the doorway, moving into the room. She turns to see him and smiles. God, what I would do for a smile like that. “I love your sailor’s mouth, and I promise you, we won’t lock you away. We want you to have the same freedoms everyone else gets in this world. But with the uprising now in full swing . . . we need to wait before we take you out.”

I want to take her to the garage. To show her my shop and the bikes we work on. Maybe she can give me a hand . . . or I can bend her over one of the bikes and eat her pussy like it’s my last meal.

I shift my cock in my jeans. I need to stop letting my thoughts drift.

“The uprising is happening?” She sits up and shifts her feet off the edge. I smell her again . . . I want to reach out and kiss her, but I know now’s not the time.

“Yes, after your friend, Storm, picked the Henleys. That’s all they needed to tip the scales. The uprising is happening, and it’s not great out there. Not for anyone. There are a lot of angry alphas out there, demanding to have their mates. And Storm added fuel to the fire by choosing them.”

I can tell she’s thinking, taking in what I said, as her eyes flick around the room.

“Storm did that, didn’t she?” Jax asks. “She had her winning ticket, just like you had ours?”

“I don’t think she did that because of the uprising.” Harley’s shoulders fall.

Damn it. It wasn't our intention to make her feel bad about her friend. I look at Jax, and he shakes his head sorry. He didn't mean to upset her again.

“Jax isn't saying she did. Just that her actions helped their mission.”

Harley leans back into Zayd, and he starts to purr. I should have done that the moment I walked into the room. Zayd is a better alpha than me. He wraps his arms around her, and she falls against him with a small sigh.

“No, Jax is right. Storm does like to play close to the flame. I've seen her. With Jonathan. It was . . . intense. I've been questioning why she rigged it for them. But maybe, even after all these years, I never really knew my friend. Nothing was private. There were cameras everywhere, watching our every move.”

I let out an angry growl, along with Zayd and Jax. Dash stumbles a little and Harley freezes.

“Cameras?” I ask, shaking myself out, and she nods.

“Even in my bedroom. They watched us all the time. That's how Gage and I got caught. Can I see him? Can he come here?”

The way her eyes light up makes me want that. I want him to come here for her. The guy is the only reason we have Harley here in the first place. But I'm worried that, since Veronica seems to know we weren't in that lottery, if they see him here . . .

It will be game over for all of us.

And the last thing I want is for Harley to be taken from us.

“Did you want to call him?” I hand her my phone, and her spirit deflates.

“I’m sorry. It’s just, one wrong move, and it will be the end of us all. They will know Gage helped us.”

She nods. “I know. I just wish . . .” She trails off.

I wish too, little omega.

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