

In Doubt

ONE OMEGA. FOUR ALPHA. ONE HEAT GONE WRONG...

HANNAH HAZE

IN DOUBT


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FOREWORD

You say tomato and I say tomato

Firstly, an apology to all the historians, archeologists and Egyptologists out there for corrupting your perfectly respectable and serious field of work. But, hey, this is an omegaverse romance story in a fictional world! I may have bent the rules of good historical research a little in the name of love! Please forgive me!

And yes, I know I should have called this book *In Denial* (In De-Nile) but sometimes these ideas come too late!

I'm a British writer and use British English spelling and grammar. If you do spot any typos in this book, please drop me a line so I can make it right: hannahazewrites@gmail.com (Or just drop me an email anyway. I love to chat!).

You can find a guide to my omegaverse at the end of this book. If you're new to omegaverse, you may want to take a look.

This book is a sweeter 'why choose' (reverse harem) omegaverse with one omega and a pack of alphas. Two of the male alphas are engaged in a longstanding emotional and physical relationship. The main female character has experienced an abusive relationship in the past. For more detailed content warnings, please visit [my website](#).

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And finally, a huge thank you to all my incredible readers for reading and loving these stories. You voted for Georgie's story, here you go ...

Enjoy ♥

PROLOGUE

Giorgie

The floorboards creak and my footsteps ring out as I trot down the steps in the draughty lecture theatre and halt by the front row.

Mellow autumn light drifts through the high windows that run below the ceiling and illuminates the chalk dust that hangs in the air. The huge blackboard that lines the back wall has been scrubbed clean and the projector screen remains coiled up on the ceiling, yet to be lowered. The lectern stands before the blackboard with one lone microphone and heavy ancient curtains wait in the corners to be yanked across the windows, plunging the hall into darkness.

It's the first day of term and the hall smells of lemon cleaning fluids and dust. The usual intermingling of stale scents was scrubbed away at the end of the previous academic year.

I'm early. The first one here. Far too eager. But I'm excited and I can't help being early when I'm excited.

I scoot my way along the wooden bench, hard against the back of my thighs, and lower myself onto a seat right in the centre.

I fish the brand new notepad out of my rucksack and stare at the front cover. My brother's omega bought me this as a new term gift. Across the cover is a tangle of ivory white

lilies, the tips of their petals a shocking pink and their sticky pollen a vibrant orange. I trace over the stems with my finger.

She'd be proud, my mum, Lily, and I wish she was here to see me. She always said I could be whatever I wanted to be. That nothing and no one could hold me back. I only had to dream it and believe it.

I fold over the cover and press my fingers down on the fold, creasing the pages open. Then I flick the nub of my pen down and write across the top.

Masters in Archeology.

The letters make me grin. To my surprise, I'd passed my exams with flying colours, with actual merits, and a place on the masters course had been offered to me without having to apply. I'd accepted with enthusiasm and disbelief.

Maybe my mum was right.

I dream of being an archeologist. Of uncovering the secrets and mysteries that lie in our pasts. I dream of digging my fingers into the cold, damp soil and drawing back the layers of time, discovering treasures that lie forgotten.

It had seemed like an impossible dream for the last three years of my course. I knew the reality. Most of us archaeology undergraduates would end up as history teachers, accountants, or librarians. Very few would land their dream job in our field.

But now that dream seems as if it could be within reach. Whoever finishes top of this Masters class will be offered a PhD placement with Professor Weaver.

And Professor Weaver is my hero. An inspiring teacher and a groundbreaking archeologist. She's challenged the status quo. Changed our ways of thinking about the people of the past. Shown a woman can be as influential in this field as any of the men.

I add the date to the top of the page, then drum my fingers on the wooden ledge in front of me, watching as the hands spin slowly around the clock on the far wall.

Eventually, other people enter the theatre too, and the hall fills with the sound of chatter and the aroma of beta scents.

I'm the only omega. I was on the undergraduate course and I will be on this Masters course. There are few of us these days. Rare beings compared to our ancestors, and most omegas choose to go to one of the omega colleges that will help them find a suitable mate.

I'm not interested in that, not for the time being anyway.

With a few minutes to spare, my friends Sia and Carl arrive in the hall and I wave at them from the front, removing my bag and coat from the spaces I'd saved for them.

Sia squeezes me, as excited as I am, but we've no time to talk before the lights dim, the curtains draw, and the professor steps up to the lectern, ready to start the very first lecture.



I should be scribbling away and making notes, recording all the important points the professor is making, but I'm too entranced, too drawn in by all she has to say. I rest my elbow on the wooden ledge across my lap and lean my chin into my hands.

I'm sitting like this, listening enraptured, when something niggles at the back of my consciousness. I don't register it at first, but it keeps on nudging me and nudging me until finally I jerk up straight.

A scent.

An alpha scent.

Like warm, freshly brewed coffee. Deep and rich. It makes my insides rumble. Sia glances at me and I offer her an apologetic smile, leaning back on the bench and trying my best to ignore the intriguing aroma.

It's too tempting, though. As subtly as I can, I glance around the room, trying to pick out the owner. The hall is dark

and the frames and faces of the other students are bathed in shadow.

It isn't until the end of the lecture, when I've wriggled out along the bench, my bag on my shoulder, heading down to the lectern to say hello to the professor, that I meet the alpha.

Suddenly, his scent is stronger, so much stronger in my nose, and I halt as a large, unfamiliar man stalks towards me. He's taller than me by a good foot at least, his frame broad and muscular, his entire presence domineering and intimidating. But his face ... golden hair flops into his murky blue eyes as he grins at me with soft lips.

Instantly, my spine stiffens, my blood running cold in my veins.

The way he's looking at me, predatory, self assured, as if he knows without a shadow of a doubt that he's going to snare me in.

It's familiar, so familiar.

I can feel my hands begin to shake, and I clutch them together in front of me.

"Omega," he says, and the name makes me freeze. "I'm Jake." He offers me his hand and I jolt. He's shining the full beam of his alpha charm in my direction. It's dazzling. He is beautiful.

And maybe if I was seventeen I'd have fallen for it, been fooled by the easy manner, the arrogance, the charm, and walked willingly straight into the waiting trap. Just like I had done. Just like I did with the man I thought loved me. The man now in prison.

But I'm not seventeen anymore. I've learned my lesson.

I know the dangers of an alpha like this.

"Mr Grantham!" the professor calls, and I jerk my head around to see her stepping down from the raised platform, a wide, welcoming smile on her face. "So glad to have such an outstanding student join us here at Crestmore."

I peer up at the alpha as his piercing gaze swings from me to the professor and watch as he skips down the final steps and greets her, the conversation flowing between them easily. As I hang back, pretending to fiddle with the straps of my bag, I learn that he studied at Cambridge, came top of his year, and I shrink back clutching my bag to my chest.

But I don't miss their words as I scurry away.

"You've got a rival for the top spot on this course, Mr Grantham. The research spot isn't guaranteed to be yours."

"It will be," he says firmly, no doubt in his voice.

Giorgie

Rain drums on the windscreen as the wipers swish left and right, sloshing the water away. Beyond the window, the grey road is empty and the lush green fields running away towards the horizon are sopping wet.

I wriggle on my cardigan, shivering a little in the cool air, cursing another chilly June day and turning to peer out my passenger window. Tiny gullies of water run down the pane, smearing my view and blocking the road sign announcing the number of miles until the airport.

We're sloshing through the puddles at speed. I'd usually berate my brother for it.

Not today. Today I'm keen to arrive. Yet even at the speed we're hurtling, the journey takes ages.

I shuffle on my seat, tugging at the seat belt, flicking through the radio channels impatiently. Finally, I snatch off some jazzy song we can't really hear over the beat of the wipers anyway and twist in my seat.

"You really didn't have to drive me," I say, grinning at him. We both know he did. He knows how much this trip means to me and how much I want him to see me off.

Ric snorts.

“You’ve packed your blockers?” Ric asks me for the one millionth time. I’m surprised he didn’t inspect my luggage before we left the house.

“Yes,” I answer. “And before you ask, I already took one today. There’s only one alpha going on this trip anyway, Ric, and trust me, he hates me as much as I hate him. Everyone else is a beta.”

“Yeah, but you don’t know who you might meet out there, and Egypt is a long fucking way to come and rescue your sorry arse.”

This time *I* snort. The archeological dig is literally in the middle of the desert. The nearest town is an hour’s drive away. Apart from the other archeologists – who are going to be more turned on by the bits of broken pottery they’re digging out of the ground than some omega girl – there won’t be anyone else around.

“I’m going to be fine,” I tell my brother, resting my hand over his on the steering wheel. “I’m not a baby anymore. I can look after myself.”

“I know you can, Giorgie,” he says softly, his eyes flicking from the road to mine for a moment. “It doesn’t mean I don’t worry. It doesn’t mean I won’t be wearing away the floor as I pace back and forth, waiting for you to return to Studworth.”

“It’s only two weeks! And you know it’s what I’ve been dreaming of since I was little.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m happy for you, Cucciola, and proud.”

My stomach warms at his compliment and I flop back against the leather seat of his sports car, grinning to myself in disbelief, and shaking my head a little. Ten days working on the archaeological site and then a mini tour of Egypt. I’m going to see the Pyramids. I could almost weep tears of joy.

Ric pulls off the motorway and weaves through the maze of roads that lead to the glass structure of the airport. Jets thunder over our heads, making the car vibrate, and I tip my head back and watch them soar up into the clouds.

Goodbye rain and hello sunshine.

My smile widens.

“Could you grin any harder?” Ric says, observing me with affection as he slides into a drop-off space outside Departures.

“Nope! My cheeks already ache.”

I hop out of the car and grab my bag from the boot, swinging my rucksack on my shoulder, and hurrying to Ric’s door before he’s climbs out of his seat.

“Bye then.” I reach up onto my toes to kiss his cheek as he stands up. “I’ll call you when I arrive.”

Ric grabs my arm.

“Slow down, Cucciola.” He glances at his watch. “We’re fifteen minutes early. I’ll walk you to the meeting point. Make sure everything’s in order. You remembered your passport?”

“Yes.” I laugh.

“Shame,” he mutters with mischief, and I elbow him in the ribs. Together, we walk through the sliding doors and into the busy terminal. I scan the cluster of check-in desks and coffee shops until we find the book store we’d been instructed to meet outside of.

We’re the first here.

“I told you we didn’t need to leave this early,” Ric says as we order a coffee each from a kiosk and go to stand outside the shop.

“I didn’t expect you to drive quite so fast.”

He winks at me and sips his coffee.

“You will call me,” I say, leaning my head against his arm. “If there’re any signs of Connie going into labour. I don’t want to miss the arrival of the new baby.”

“It’s a month until her due date. You’ll be back in plenty of time. You’re not going to miss the birth.”

“Right.” I let out a huff of air.

“Are you nervous?” my brother asks.

I cringe. I hate to admit it. “Yes, this is a big deal. Our last assignment. If I blow it, I’ll blow my shot at the place on the professor’s research team.”

“You won’t blow it, Giorgie. You’re awesome at this stuff.”

I take a sip of my coffee, the aroma stirring my stomach in a pleasant way. I wish I could smuggle my brother with his reassuring words into my suitcase.

“You’re right,” I say. “There’s no need to be nervous.”

“You’ll smash it.”

“Giorgie!” someone screams and I look up to see my friend Sia racing towards me, her long jet braid bouncing against her shoulder as she races towards me.

“And that’s my cue to leave.” Ric downs the last of his coffee, crushing the cup in his giant paw. “You know I can’t stand the squealing.”

I elbow him again. “We don’t squeal.”

He scrunches up his face. “You do. Some of it’s so high pitched only dogs can hear.” He tosses his cup into a bin and turns to face me. “Bye, Giorgie. Take care of yourself and call me, alright?”

“I will,” I promise. “I’ll miss you.”

I’ll miss him, his packmates and his omega. They’re like family to me and it’s one of the many reasons I want that spot on the professor’s research team. I want to stay at Crestmore, stay in Studworth. I don’t want to move away.

Sia skids to a halt right as Ric releases me and he gives her a quick peck on the cheek before strolling away.

“Ready for this?” she asks.

“Hell, yes.” I grin back at her and we drop down to sit cross legged on the floor as we wait for the others from our course to arrive.

Soon my friend Carl joins us and by ten o’clock, there’s a large group of us crowding around the entrance to the

bookshop and causing the staff inside to throw us disgruntled looks.

“Is everyone here?” the professor glances at her wrist watch, then runs her gaze over the list of names on her clipboard.

I don't know why she's asking. It's obvious one person isn't here yet. His presence is so dominating his absence is always noticeable. Plus, he's the same person who's late for every class: Jake Grantham. Somehow, though, he gets away with it every time. Just flashes a half-apologetic smile at our usually formidable professor and all is forgiven.

It's that alpha charm. That dangerous alpha charm.

I bounce on my toes, eager to get going.

The airport's relatively empty, a few business men and women wheeling their suitcases and a cleaner filling rubbish bags. I tip my head back and watch as rain streams down the cavernous glass roof and another jet thunders overhead.

“Perhaps Jake's not going to make it,” I whisper.

Sia rolls her eyes at me. “Of course he's going to make it, Giorgie. Jake wouldn't miss this trip any more than you would.”

She's right. Jake and I are competing neck and neck for the spot at the top of the class. Neither one of us is going to let those extra marks slip through our fingers.

“Anyway,” Carl says, scratching at the scruff on his chin and leaning around Sia to survey the airport entrance, “You know the professor wouldn't leave without her star pupil. She'll keep the whole plane waiting for him if she has to.”

I groan, knowing he's probably right.

“Here he is!” Sia declares, and both mine and the professor's eyes are drawn to the parting glass doors. Jake Grantham strolls right through as if he doesn't have a care in the world and hasn't been keeping the rest of us waiting for the last twenty minutes.

The professor sighs in relief and smiles widely.

I frown harder, unable to drag my gaze away. His presence is definitely domineering. Six feet and god knows how many inches tall with more muscles than should be humanly possible, golden hair and seductive blue eyes. It's not surprising that as well as acing this course, he also has a spot on the varsity rugby team.

He's the kind of guy who's had everything land straight in his lap. Rich parents. Good looks. The right connections. And now possibly the research spot I want.

I hate him. I really do.

I turn back to Sia. "He made it," I mutter.

She bumps her shoulder back against mine. "Come on, Giorgie. You don't need him to do a no-show to beat him. You can win the top spot on your own merits."

She's right. I lift up my chin. Top spot means a guaranteed place on the professor's research team next year, and her team is the hottest right now. They are doing the most interesting work in our field in the UK. It's why Jake transferred to Crestmore. It's why I've been working my arse off to guarantee that spot for the last four years.

"What the hell is Jake's pack doing here?" Carl mutters, snapping me out of my thoughts.

I turn back around to follow his gaze and find Jake is flanked by three of his rugby team mates. They're all equally big, equally intimidating and equally alpha. And that treacherous little omega inside me can't help but be impressed by all that testosterone on display.

His team mates are also good looking. Levi Smith's long black hair is hooked up in a messy bun at the base of his skull, a web of tattoos crisscrossing over his dark skin. Dylan Evans strides alongside him, fair complexion with a mop of curly black hair and emerald eyes. And on Jake's other side, Aiden Colt bounces along, streaks of copper and rust catching in his short brown hair and freckles sprinkled across his arms and face.

"They've probably just come to say goodbye."

“Aww, that’s so sweet.”

“Then why do they have luggage?” Carl asks. “Are they coming too?”

“Looks like it,” Sia whispers as we watch the professor greet the four men. “But Professor Weaver doesn’t have a problem with it so I assume they OK’ed it.” She shrugs.

I flick my gaze Jake’s way and immediately catch his eye. Those deeply blue eyes that have my insides spinning. His scent curls into my nostrils. Crap!

He scowls at me in that way he always does. Then his eyes linger down my form, the crease between his brow deepening.

Yeah, I get it. He disapproves of what I’m wearing. It seems he always does. I assume it’s not cute and omega enough for him. But screw that, I’m going to wear what the hell I like. And if that means my very own interpretation of Indiana Jones, cargo pants and khaki shirt, then so be it. This is the twenty-first century and omegas can define what it means to be a member of our designation now. We’re no longer ruled by alphas and their expectations of us.

And I know all about Jake’s expectations. He brags about it to the boys in our course. Carl told me.

I scowl back at Jake.

“What are your band of merry men doing here? Did you need someone to hold your hand on this trip?”

Jake’s packmate, Aiden, hooks his arm around Jake’s shoulder and frowns at me in an almost mirror image of the expression on Jake’s face.

“You think we’d miss out on a trip like this?”

“I can’t believe Professor Weaver let you come!” There were plenty of disappointed students on our Masters course who couldn’t afford the trip and would be selling a kidney right now to grab a ticket.

But I guess it shouldn’t surprise me. Jake’s pack is wealthy and entitled and probably paid their way onto this trip. Not that Jake did. His good grades guaranteed him a fully funded

place like me. It's always the two of us at the top of the class. A fact he reminds me of every time he nips me to that top spot. Which isn't as often as he'd like. And that's the reason he hates me. Alphas don't like to be beaten. Especially by omegas.

"You don't even study archeology," I mutter. Aiden's enrolled on the economics course, or something equally dull.

"They're not coming on the dig," Jake tells me. His scowl morphs into a frown. These are two of Jake Grantham's favourite looks. Not that it matters. The man is good-looking and knows it. He has the kind of chiselled bone structure reserved for the catwalk.

"We've booked this awesome luxury villa with beds to spare," Aiden tells me. "Plenty of room for anyone who'd like to join us."

What? Are they going to try to change the scientific assignment of a lifetime into some boys' trip?

"You know there were people who really wanted to come on this trip who missed out on a spot," I snap, glaring at Jake and trying to ignore the way the blue in his eyes sparkles like the sea in sunlight, even under the neon strip lighting of the airport.

"I really want to come on this trip," Jake snaps back. "That doesn't mean I'm not going to have a bit of fun while I'm there. I know you don't understand that concept ..."

My fists land on my hips automatically, my natural posture for dealing with Jake Grantham. "Archaeology *is* fun," I remind him, pushing my glasses up my nose with my middle finger. Aiden bursts out laughing and Jake's lips twitch as if he's suppressing a smile.

"Whatever turns you on."

Yep, and there we go. Typical alpha, turning everything into a sexual innuendo.

"Why are you even coming on this trip if you're not going to take it seriously?"

“Just because I’m not dressed like some extra from *Romancing the Stone* doesn’t mean I’m not taking this seriously.”

“This outfit is what people wear in the desert. You know it’s going to be over 40 degrees out there?” My gaze runs down his body, assessing his own choice of clothing, shorts, a vest and flip flops. As I do, I try not to notice the tightly packed muscles bulging in his crossed arms or the little twang of something that sparks in my gut. “Flip-flops?” I point at my own sturdy boots. “There are scorpions and snakes.” Doesn’t he care that they could kill him?

“Which is why we’ll be sticking to the villa,” Aiden says. “Don’t get your knickers in a twist, little Geek. We won’t be ruining your important work.” Aiden lifts up his hands and turns to the two other packmates standing behind him.

By avoiding Jake Grantham for the past year, I’ve avoided his pack too. Now it looks like I’m going to be stuck with them for the next two weeks.

I toss my hair over my shoulder and turn my back on them.

Sia’s pouring over the itinerary for the trip and hasn’t paid any attention to my conversation with Jake and the other alphas. But Carl was listening.

“They’re going to try to turn this trip into some fuck-boy excursion,” he mutters with disapproval. “You know about all the stuff those boys get up to.”

I swallow, buffing my glasses on the hem of my shirt. If I’d suspected Jake Grantham was the kind of alpha who used and discarded girls when I first met him, unhappily I’d been proven correct. The exploits of his pack quickly filled the gossip column of the student paper. It seems they are all players, using their star status on campus to sleep with as many girls as they can.

I peer over Sia’s shoulder to read the schedule.

“Who is?” Sia asks.

“Jake and his ninja turtles,” I whisper.

Sia snorts at my joke. “Professor Weaver won’t allow that.”

“Professor Weaver has never had to deal with a group of alphas.”

“Exactly,” Carl lowers his voice. “And we know what their reputation is like.”

The professor may be a battleaxe of a beta, but she has no experience when it comes to a pack of alphas. I live with one. My brother’s. It’s a hell of a lot of testosterone.

This trip means the world to me, and securing my place on the professor’s team means even more. I can’t believe Jake’s prepared to turn such an important trip, a once in a lifetime trip, into a lad’s tour.

“Well, more fool him,” I tell my friends. If Jake’s going to be distracted by his packmates and girls, that leaves me more opportunities to impress the professor.

This is my opportunity to impress.

I’m not going to let a bunch of boys ruin it for me.

Jake

Aeroplanes always give me a bloody migraine. The scents swirling in the recycled air are spearing right up my nostrils with no hope of a breath of fresh air for the entirety of the flight.

This flight is going to be a thousand times worse. In fact, this whole fucking trip is likely to involve a level of torture I'm frankly unprepared for.

I stare out the window at the endless bank of clouds reaching all the way to the horizon.

This is probably a bad idea. A very bad idea. It's what I've been saying for the last six weeks, but somehow my goddamn pack talked me into going. They know how much this trip means to me.

The Ancient Egyptian temple they've unearthed on the edge of the Sahara desert is the biggest archeological find in several decades. The pictures I've seen blew my fucking mind and had my blood buzzing with excitement. It's untouched, buried under layers and layers of golden sand, unvisited for centuries. Who knows what will be found inside its shadowy halls?

Every archeologist worth his fucking salt is heading out there over the next few weeks for the initial dig. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, not only to see something truly

awesome but to make connections and secure my future. Secure that spot on Professor Weaver's team. Prove to my parents that I can be someone.

It's why my pack is tagging along on this trip. It's not something I can afford to miss and they want to provide the moral support I need to make it through this. Plus, the dickwads wouldn't miss an opportunity for a holiday at a five star villa if it meant missing their grandmothers' funerals.

I cough, trying to force the scent that's driving me insane from my nose and my throat. Aiden rests a hand on my shoulder.

"Hanging in there, mate?" he asks with sympathy. He's no doubt suffering too – Levi and Dylan as well – but none of them as badly as I am right now. It's something about this goddamn scent that gets right up my nose – literally – and burrows under my skin.

I shake my head and my gaze floats down the aisle and lands on the omega who's the cause of all my problems.

She's sitting happily, unaware of the agony she's putting me through, her book perched on her lap and her long tanned legs tucked underneath her. Her fingers tap playfully against her rosy, plump lips as her caramel eyes scan to and fro over the page behind her glasses. Shit!

She's beautiful, smart and as passionate about archeology as I am. Plus an omega. With a scent that smells like ripe watermelon. Like paradise. She should be my dream woman.

But she's the one thing standing in the way of achieving my dream. The opportunity to work for Professor Weaver next year. The professor is the best in the country and the work she's doing right now is the most interesting.

I came to Crestmore University with the express ambition to claim that prestigious spot. Only to find this little omega standing firmly in my way.

It's not all bad, though. I struck up a friendship with Aiden and found my place in this pack.

Aiden squeezes my shoulder, and I tear my eyes away.

“How much longer?” I ask through gritted teeth. My packmate taps on the screen in front of him.

“Half way there. Two more hours. Sorry, mate.” I groan and bite down hard on the knuckles of my fisted hand. “I’ll get you a drink.” I’ve already downed three straight whiskeys. I doubt the air stewardess will give us another. But as usual, I underestimate my packmate and his ability to charm the hind legs off a donkey. And the underwear off most women.

The air stewardess pours the honey coloured liquid into the glass, ice clinking against the sides, and I spot Giorgie peer over her shoulder and roll her eyes as I take the drink.

Screw her, I think, as I toss back the burning liquid in one gulp. Screw her and her fucking stupid decision to never use scent blockers. Every other omega and alpha I know uses them. It’s only fucking polite. Scents can drive an alpha and omega out of their mind and blockers can mask that scent, making them almost untraceable.

It’s one thing to make it clear she isn’t interested in me. To make it crystal clear she’s unattainable. But does she have to rub it in my face?

I’ve heard her telling her friends that her brother is very protective of her, but if that was actually the case, I have no idea what the tosser is doing letting his omega sister walk around unblocked and unaccompanied.

And on a fucking field trip. To the fucking desert.

The woman is clearly intelligent. The only reason I can deduce for her actions is that she’s trying to throw me off my game. She thinks that her scent will be enough to distract me. Well, it hasn’t worked so far this year, and it isn’t going to work on this trip.

I thank the air stewardess and hand her my empty glass. Then I tip back my seat and try to tune into some mundane action film.

We picked seats in first class thinking it would put some distance between me and the omega causing me to fidget like a bloody toddler in my seat. But I’d forgotten her brother

belongs to a pack with money to burn. And so here she is too, along with those two friends of hers who never leave her side.

I'd tried to talk the others into finding some lucky passengers back in economy to swap seats. That idea went down like a lead balloon.

I twist around and tug the earbud out of Aiden's ear. "I don't see how I'm going to make it through this trip," I moan to him. Feeling the beads of sweat beginning to coalesce on my brow. "It's worse than usual."

"It's just the confined space." Aiden's brown eyes peer into mine and with a look of bewilderment, he shakes his head at me. "I don't know why you don't just screw her and get this whole thing out of your system."

"Because she doesn't want to screw me."

Aiden sighs. There's no denying it. You'd have to be a fucking fool not to see the hatred in her eyes when she spoke to me out there in the departure hall. Except you could hardly call it talking. It was more like sniping.

"And unlike you, I'm not interested in screwing women I don't actually like."

And Giorgie Martinelli is one woman I thoroughly dislike. Her scent — and yes, goddamn, the way she looks — may have my inner alpha drooling like a starved wolf, but the omega irritates the hell out of me. All that lively chirpiness, the way she thinks it's acceptable to lecture the hell out of me, and all the while she's playing me.

I've considered going to the professor and lodging an official complaint. But what would be the point? I'd only end up labelled as some misogynistic alpha. No one would believe me. I'd end up looking like a sore loser.

I close my eyes and concentrate on my breathing. If I let this scent get the better of me, my cock will be rock hard in a matter of seconds.

The breathing doesn't work. I snap my eyelids open and catch the gaze of the stewardess again. She smiles at me in a way that definitely tells me she'd make good use of my hardon

if I wanted her to. But my cock is crying out for omega pussy and no beta one is going to tame the beast raging inside me.

Ruffling through my bag, I pull out my emergency suppressant and jump out of my seat, strolling straight for the bathroom. Suppressants help to dull the bodily reactions we alphas and omegas are slaves to. Helping to regulate and modulate an omega's heats and prevent an alpha from going into rut. Thank fuck for them. They're the only thing that's dragged me through class after class with the omega.

Once inside the cubicle, I snap shut the door and yank the bolt across. Then I sag against the sink and spray a fuck-load of the foul tasting suppressant into my waiting mouth. It's the third time I've done this during the flight, the suppressant only lasting so long when I'm gulping down lungfuls of that sinful scent. I gag a little and my eyes water, but then I feel my muscles relax, my cock softens and some of that tension melts away. Not all of it, but enough to stand up straighter and look at myself in the mirror. I look a fucking mess. My hair ruffled, my pupils blown wide, and my skin coated in a fine film of sweat.

I tug on the tap and plunge my hands under the cold water, letting it flow through my fingers and cool my blood. Then I cup my palms and splash the liquid over my face, running it around my brow and down the back of my neck.

It feels good, like I'm washing the sweetness of that scent off my skin. And for a minute it feels like I can breathe again. Would it be strange if I stayed in here for the rest of the flight? I sigh. Yeah, the air cabin crew would probably suspect me of some dubious shit and I'd end up arrested. Not the greatest of starts to my trip.

I take a paper towel and dry my face, then bin it, and pull open the door.

Immediately that scent slams into me, so strong I almost stagger backwards. My eyes land on Giorgie, standing outside the cubicle, clearly waiting for it to become free.

For the love of Jesus.

She looks up from her phone to give me what I suspect was going to be a smile, but it descends straight down into a frown when she realises it's me.

“A little space,” I growl, and she does that goddamn infuriating thing with her eyes, rolling them in a way she seems to reserve purely for me.

She steps aside in an exaggerated manner and I stumble past, holding my breath as best I can and falling back into my seat.

It's worse. Aiden is wrong. That scent only seems to grow stronger.



By the time the plane comes into land, I've downed another four whiskeys and the world is blurry around the edges. But at least those edges aren't as sharp and are a hell of a lot more bearable. Even if I can hear that my words are slurring and it probably isn't the plane swaying when I stand up. Aiden has the stewardess brew me coffee so strong I could stand my spoon in it and whispers a lecture in my ear about putting on my best sober face if I hope to make it through passport control and immigration.

He helps me off the plane and down the steps, the force of the outside's heat making me wince. From behind me, I hear that familiar voice whisper.

“Is he drunk?”

“No,” Aiden says firmly. “He's fine.”

“He is. I can smell the booze from here.” There's disapproval in her voice and I frown.

“I had to drink to get through the fucking flight,” I growl but it comes out as a bunch of nonsense.

Levi grips my elbow and leads me away. “Come on mate, no use torturing yourself any longer.”

“She smells so goooooood,” I moan into his ear. “Why does *she* have to be the one to smell like that?”

“Because life is a bitch.” Levi grins, but even with my blurring vision I can see he isn’t looking so great himself.

Somehow my packmates steer me through the security and immigration checks, collecting our bags from the luggage belt, and out into the lobby of the airport to a waiting driver. There is no way I’m sitting on a coach with that omega and her fucking scent for the next two hours. We’re making our own way there.

The journey is sweltering and bumpy, but with all the windows wound down the unhindered air is like a miraculous tonic. I’d been excited about soaking up all the sights on the trip but instead I close my eyes and don’t open them again until we pull up outside the five star villa Aiden booked.

It’s like an oasis in the middle of the desert, literally, a cool pale building with a flat roof and arched windows. Long drapes hang in the doorways and tall palm trees circle the property, casting spikey shadows. At the front, a deep swimming pool glitters in the bright sun and sun loungers with accompanying umbrellas wait by the side. It looks like something right out of paradise.

“Shit, how did you find this place, Aiden?”

He gives me a wink and then all three packmates usher me towards the shower. I do stink of booze and an ice-cold shower would help to sober me up. Unfortunately, ice cold isn’t an option as I turn on the blast of water. Not surprising in a climate like this. I have to make do with tepid. Still it helps to wash away that scent from my skin once and for all. Groaning, I lean against the ornate tiles imagining I can see the bright, luminescent particles of her scent wash away down the plughole.

Even the thought of that, the thought of her, has my cock stirring. I swear, taking it in my hand. Aiden is probably right. If I just screwed the fucking omega, this torture would end. But I don’t see how that is ever going to happen. I could be the last man on Earth and she the last woman, and we would

probably choose to live on the opposite sides of the planet, just to be as far away from each other as we could possibly be.

Still, it doesn't stop me from fantasising about it though. Imagining taking a handful of her hair and twisting it around my fist, then forcing her down on her knees and fucking her until she's moaning and mewling my name, admitting that she wants my body as much as I want hers. It's a fucking erotic picture, and I run my fist up and down my shaft, imagining my grip is the grip of her tight fluttering walls, imagining exactly what that would feel like, sound like, taste like.

The water from the shower splashes into my eyes, and runs down my chest and I imagine it's her fingers trailing over my body, her eyes hooded with lust, her mouth parted and panting. My pace increases, my hold on my cock tightening, and I come with a powerful tortured grunt, thick ribbons of my seed hitting the shower floor and turning the water a milky white. It swirls down the plughole and I frown. Such a fucking waste.

I snap off the faucet and shake the water from my face. Fucking hell! Wanking in the shower like I'm some pubescent kid!

I need to get a grip.

Giorgie

My nose is pressed to the window of the coach. I gasp and coo and snap blurry photos on my phone. We don't head right through the centre of the city, skirting the edges, but there is enough to capture my interest.

Skyscrapers and tower blocks intermingle with magnificent mosques, their domed roofs shining in the bright sunlight, and around them flat sand coloured buildings squat. The roads swarm with traffic, motorcyclists and pedestrians weaving in and out of the slow-moving traffic. Dust hangs in the air and I can smell sun and spices through the closed windows of the coach. We pass a busy market, stalls set out beneath colourful fabrics, trinkets spilling from displays on the walls across the ground. And here and there straight backed palm trees fan their leaves above the people below.

After an hour we leave the suburbs behind to the sounds of the call to prayer and hit the road that follows the Nile River. My breath catches in my throat when I first catch sight of it, wide and flowing with life. The blue of it is familiar and the clear sky hangs wide above it. Tall green grasses swamp its banks and sailboats and small cruise liners bob in its swirling current. It is truly awesome.

“I can't believe we're really here,” I whisper to Sia.

“I know,” she smiles back. Wrapping her arm through mine and resting her head on my shoulder, we both continue to watch the scenery rushing past the window. “I really hope we get to do some of the interesting work while we’re here and won’t be assigned all the dog’s body jobs.”

“I don’t care. I’d happily shovel camel shit for the week if it meant I could just see everything.”

“Camel shit?” Sia scrunches up her nose. “I hope not. Those animals are revolting. You know they spit, right?”

“No camel rides for you then?” I tease.

“No way.”

“I think it would be kind of romantic, trekking through the desert, camping under the stars.”

“For someone who’s sworn off men you are a hopeless romantic, Giorgie.”

“I haven’t sworn off men forever. Just for now. Just until I’m ready.”

“So you don’t hate men, then?”

“No,” I laugh. “Why do you say that?”

“Erm,” she lifts an eyebrow at me. “You don’t hate Jake Grantham? Because you’ve told me often enough that you do.”

“That’s one man.” I lift my phone to capture a shot of a sail boat, its sails billowing, floating out on the river. “And hate is a very strong word.” I groan. “Just because he is an alpha and I am an omega everyone seems to assume we should already be happily married or something.”

“No, everyone finds this rivalry thing you have going on a bit ... weird.”

“It’s not weird. We’re competing for a place in the professor’s research team.”

“Yeah, but you’re a little obsessed with it.”

“Of course, I am. You know how much this spot means to me. It could make my name, my career in archeology. I’m not giving that up without a fight.”

“That’s exactly what I’m talking about. I get the competing thing, but the fighting ...”

This isn’t the first time Sia and I have had this conversation. She thinks our rivalry is fueled by sexual tension and I should just screw the dude and get the whole thing out of my system. But I’d rather eat camel shit than sleep with Jake Grantham. I’m not being used and abused again.

Sex hasn’t always worked out well for me – Sia knows that – and I am perfectly happy as I am. With my family, with my friends, with my studies, with pursuing my dream career.

There is plenty of time for sex and finding my alpha, perhaps finding a whole pack of alphas, later. When I can give it my full attention. When I can be careful about finding a man who won’t use me.

“Oh, come on, Giorgie. The first thing you did when we boarded this coach was scour all the rows of seats looking for him and then theorised for the next ten minutes about where he could be.”

My cheeks heat a little. Maybe that is true, but it’s not because I’m interested *in* the alpha, but what he is up to. I know there’s every possibility he can win this spot away from me. And what grates me the most, is he probably doesn’t even want it. This is all sport for him. A chance to play and beat the little omega.

In fact, Carl overheard him bragging about just that, about the fact he has his trust fund and doesn’t need to do an underpaid PhD but would like the opportunity to put me in my place all the same.

I wouldn’t be surprised if he beelines straight to the dig site to start hobnobbing with all the great and good in the archeology world ahead of me. He’ll probably make several great connections before I’ve even shown my face.

It's late afternoon by the time the coach pulls up outside our hotel, that dazzling sun, turning hazy as it sinks towards the horizon. The hotel looks basic, a square sort of building with a swept yard out front. My assumption is proved correct as we stroll inside the foyer. A fan revolves slowly on the ceiling shifting warm air and a few tired, wicker chairs stand scattered across the place. We drop our bags on the floor and accept a cold drink that tastes of bitter lemon from an elderly man as Professor Weaver checks us all in.

When she's done, she turns to face us, peering through her tortoise-shell glasses to read a piece of typed out paper.

"Right," she says. "We have four dormitories--"

Terse whispering breaks out among the group.

"Dormitory?" someone asks sceptically.

"Yes, dormitories. It was on your itinerary. Where did you think you'd be sleeping, Anderson? A luxury suite?"

I think of Jake, his friends and their luxury villa. I bet he's never roughed it in his life.

"So there's four girls' dormitories and four boys'." She starts to read out the names and I'm relieved to find I'm sharing with Sia and two girls I get along with.

"Go get some rest tonight," Professor Weaver says when she's finished with the names and has shut down any complaints. "We have an early start tomorrow. 5am down here in the foyer." Everyone groans. "You'll thank me tomorrow when we aren't working through the heat of the day," she tells us, then turns back to the man behind the desk.

The hotel doesn't seem to own a lift so we lug our bags up the stairs and into room 15. Another fan rotates above two sets of metal bunk beds and one worn wardrobe.

Sia sprints straight for the beds nearest the window and flings her bag on the top bunk. "Bugsying this one!" she declares, leaping up there herself.

"Should we venture out for some dinner? Go out exploring a bit?" I ask the others.

Sia throws a lumpy pillow down at my head. “Stop being so bloody enthusiastic, girl! Didn’t you hear the professor? We have to be out of here by five. I need my beauty sleep.”

I turn to the other two who have begun to unpack their bags.

“Sia’s right,” Maya says.

Reluctantly I flop down on my own bed, yawning. I’m half tempted to go out exploring by myself, but it probably isn’t wise and if my brother found out, he’d never let me out again.

“Tomorrow, then,” I suggest. I don’t hear any of them answer because I’m drifting off before I know it.



I wake much later that evening, the others all sleeping around me, their soft breaths and the whirr of the fan breaking the silence of the night. I strip out of my clothes and munch on an energy bar I pull from my bag. Then I set my phone to wake me at dawn and try to fall back to sleep.

It’s hopeless though. I’m too excited, my mind racing a million miles an hour. Plus it’s hot. Down here on the lower bunk none of the air from the fan is reaching me. I fling off the sheet and try to find a comfortable position. How hot will it be tomorrow if it’s this hot now in the middle of the night?

My brother’s omega, Connie, gave me a lecture before I left about taking care in the sun. Omegas are vulnerable to overheating and dehydration, and our thin skin burns easily. Ric forced me to pack at least ten bottles of suntan lotion.

I twist and turn some more, my usual trick of counting sheep failing me. Finally I must drift off because I wake to our alarm.

Once we’re dressed, we go to meet Professor Weaver and the others in the lobby..

“Right,” she says, addressing us all as Carl passes us some pieces of buttered toast. “Now we are all here,” I scan the

group, doubting we are all here but finding I'm wrong when I spy Jake at the edge of the group, arms crossed, eyes focused on the professor. "I'm going to run through what is happening today before we take the bus out to the site. We have been given a section to the west entrance of the temple. Several trenches have already been marked out and dug, and your task will be to continue this work, recording any finds you discover. I will be working there too along with several other supervisors so you can alert us immediately to anything out of the ordinary or of particular interest. You'll be working in pairs."

I smile at Sia and give Carl a sympathetic shrug. He shakes his head and continues to chew on his breakfast.

"So," Professor Weaver says. "Here is the list of pairs and sections you'll be working on for the next five days. There is a map to show you where the different sections are located." Paper rustles as sheets are handed around the group. I take one from Carl, studying the details as I continue to munch, the butter melting on my tongue. The section we're working on is much bigger than I imagined and I assume it was the path leading up to one of the main entrances to the temple.

Next I scan the list of assigned pairs, twisting my long hair into a messy bun while I do. My eyes halt on my name and my hair tumbles from my grasp. My gaze snaps up to the Professor in horror.

"Oh no," I gasp a little more loudly than I'd intended, the professor hearing me.

"What's wrong, Giorgie?" the professor asks, peering at me over her spectacles.

"Erm," I shift on my feet, adjusting my glasses, feeling uncomfortable. "You've put me with Jake Grantham." Surely that is a mistake, everyone knows we don't get on. I don't look Jake's way but I'm aware of his hot gaze focussing my way, my skin crawling with the awareness of it.

"Yes, I wanted my top students to work together. You've been assigned a very interesting section where there's already been a number of exciting finds."

“That’s great,” Sia says, nudging me in the ribs.

It’s not great, it’s not great at all. Working with Jake Grantham, confined in a small space with Jake Grantham and his scent. I’ve done my utmost to avoid him this past year. To steer clear of his alluring charm. I won’t be snared by him.

“But ...” I stare at the professor in horror, noting the way Jake scowls at me from the corner of my eye.

“What?” the professor asks, with a hint of irritation in her voice now. “We are already behind schedule, Miss Martinelli.”

I open my mouth. No words come. I swallow, peering to Sia for help. She simply grins at me.

“I ... I ...”

“Good, that’s all sorted then.” The professor spins around and motions for us all to follow her. “Let’s get going.” She marches us towards a waiting coach and ushers us all onboard.

Carl hooks his arm around me. “Are you worried about being with that creep?” he whispers to me.

I chew my lip. “I’ll be alright.”

“I’ll come check up on you, keep an eye on you. And if he tries—”

“Thanks,” I tell him, positive it won’t come to that. I’m no longer a naïve little girl.

I grab a seat with Sia near the front, trying not to notice the disgruntle look Jake throws me as he saunters down the aisle. He’s obviously as unhappy as I am about this pairing.

“Oh Giorgie,” Sia mutters, wrapping her arm around me. “It’s not the end of the world.”

“Maybe not to you—”

“It isn’t. Just take a professional approach and I’m sure he will too. It sounds like there is a real chance you might find something special out there.”

“I doubt he can be professional. He’ll probably sabotage our dig just to get at me.”

“Jake really isn’t that bad.”

“He is!”

“Really? Why? What has he actually done?”

For the second time this morning I open my mouth and no words come out. “He ... he...”

“Yes?”

What exactly has he done? Scowled at me a lot? Directed snippy comments my way? Muttered under his breath whenever I answer a question in class? Threatened to snatch that prestigious place on the professor’s team from my grasp?

None of those *do* sound earth-ending when you put it like that.

Then I remember the words Carl had overheard, remember those gossip columns in the paper, remember who exactly he reminds me of.

I bite my tongue and turn towards the window.

I wish I could believe her but experience has taught me otherwise. Experience has taught me to be on the lookout for alphas who will take advantage of an omega like me.

The landscape here is lush from the Nile’s waters, but at the lightening horizon I can see the shifting dunes of the desert. The temple sits between the two. At the edge of fertile land, where the desert begins. No good for farming and hence undisturbed until recently.

We weave through the dense green shelter of the palm trees and grasses and drive out into the sunshine. Already bright enough to make us squint despite the ungodly hour. As we turn a bend, driving between an outcrop of golden rocks, we see the site in the distance. The bus fills with excited chatter. It’s so much bigger than I had pictured in my mind. The size of a cathedral easily and covered in makeshift tents, diggers and other machinery waiting silently to one side.

“This is it, folks,” Professor Weaver says, standing in the aisle and grinning like everyone else on the coach. Her whole

body seems to buzz with energy, and it's clear she is as excited as the rest of us.

I can hardly sit still, the metres between us and the site taking an age to close. All my worries about my unsuitable partner vanish as I stare open-mouthed at the tip of the temple peeking out above the sand. Sia squeals beside me, squeezing my hand, and for a second I can hardly breathe.

It's not until we're climbing out of the air con coach and the heat of the desert slaps me straight in the face that I remember.

My suppressant. The medication I take to control my heats.

In my rush this morning, I forgot to take it.

Jake

It's magical out here. Only the top of the temple has been exposed so far, the rest buried beneath the earth. Regardless, it is still a sight to behold. Men work painstakingly to remove the desert's sand that over the decades have shifted to cover and, hopefully, preserve this temple. It's believed to be an offering to Rah, God of the sun, the first, the Egyptians believed, of the alphas.

I can picture the alphas of Ancient Egypt travelling here to leave offerings to a god who gave them their power, their strength, their knots, their omegas.

The ascending sun warms my skin and I tip back my head to breathe the dry air of the desert, unchanged, I'm certain, in all this time.

A sweetness melts across my tongue and I snap open my eyes in frustration. That scent again; doomed to torture me for the next ten days. There isn't much I can do about it today beyond my emergency suppressant. Tonight I'll discuss with the others what additional measures I can take to try to reduce the impact of her goddamn stench.

My gaze flicks to her now as the group listens to one of the head archeologists explain what has been discovered so far and how the site is operating. She stands right at the front, her eager face tilted upwards, soaking in every detail in obvious

delight. Her body hums with enthusiasm and she rocks back and forth on her toes like she always does when she's excited.

I rub my hand along my jaw, wondering how the hell I know that.

Because you spend far too much of your time watching her, you creep.

When the man finishes his lecture and Giorgie leads a round of appreciative applause, then Professor Weaver motions for us to collect our equipment from the nearby tent and get to work.

I shove my hands into my pockets and reluctantly follow the crowd. Not that I'm uneager to start – I can't wait to plunge my hands into the dirt, to feel the sand shift through my fingers, to unearth whatever lies hidden beneath. This is what I've always dreamed of. Maybe I spent too much time as a kid watching movies like Indiana Jones and The Mummy. But I'd fallen in love with the adventure and mystery of archeology. Now after years of hard work, I'm finally here. Ready to begin my own. I want nothing more than to start – I'm just not keen to spend any more time in the vicinity of that scent than I have to.

Standing in the warmth of the sunlight, I continue to watch the men work, noting the way one man brushes away grains of sand from the structure as if he were caring for a newborn.

“Are you going to grab your stuff?”

I jolt and immediately that scent floods my nostrils.

How does that omega manage to sneak up on me as often as she does?

I shake my head, surprised to find she is actually smiling at me in giddy delight. For a fraction of a second it knocks me for six and I stare at her. Then I remember it's all an act. Her continued, fake chirpiness is bloody grating.

“Uh, yeah.” I duck inside the tent, give my name and am handed a bag with a trowel, several brushes, a map and a clipboard as well as a reminder of the instructions. Then I

stroll back out to meet her. It's clear she is forcing herself to wait, eager to sprint away and get started.

"I think it's this way," she points and I follow her through the maze of trenches where several of our course mates are already busy examining their plots. She waves to her friends as we pass.

"Good luck," the one with long black hair calls. And we follow a path further around to the west and into the shadow of the exposed parts of the temple.

We're to one side, a little separated from the other trench sites, but at least it will be cooler here. I don't want the omega overheating.

My foot hangs in mid air as I halt.

Why the hell am I worrying about this woman's welfare? A woman who deliberately drives me around the bend.

"OK?" she asks, noticing I've stopped and stopping too.

I nod and bend down to pretend to tie my shoe lace.

She's grinning at me when I stand up straight.

"What?" I snap suspiciously.

"Nice outfit, Indie. You decided to ditch the flip flops, then?"

"Of course. I just didn't want to look like a film extra on the flight. Not like some people."

She tips her hat at me and continues on her march to our trench.

Number 69.

We both stare down at the number in silence.

I wonder if that was some kind of perverse joke by the professor.

Then dismiss the idea.

The trench here is much further advanced than our peer's sites and I can see immediately the chances of us finding something are much greater than theirs. It's almost enough to

forget the fact I've been partnered with Rainbow shine for the next five days.

Almost.

"I think we should start at opposite ends," she says as I jump down into the belly of the trench. "Then we won't ..." she screws up her nose, "get in each other's way."

"Agreed." This is in direct opposition to how we've been advised to work but at least it will keep me as far away from the omega as it is possible to be in a ten by six foot trench. I point my trowel to the end closest to the temple. "I'll take this end."

"Oh no," she says, her hands landing back on her favourite place, her hips. Hips I've imagined grabbing as I ... "Why should you get the best end?"

"We can swap tomorrow."

She eyes me. "Fine, then I'll take that end first."

She peers down into the trench, assessing the drop and hesitating to jump.

"Where's the ladder?"

"I don't think there is one. Here," I say, offering her my hand.

She flinches as if I'm about to strike her and with an irritated huff, I drop my hand and turn my back on her. Fine, she can find her own way down. The woman seems to think I'm some kind of psychopath half the time. I'm not blind to the way she takes tiny steps away from me or flinches like she just did.

It's ironic considering she's the one playing me with her scent.

A minute later, I hear her squeal and twist back to find her tumbling on her arse into the hole. She lands in a heap.

"Alright?" I ask, unable to keep my lips from twitching in satisfied amusement.

“Fine,” she says, scrambling to her feet and dusting the desert muck off her backside. The action makes the globes of her arse wobble ever so slightly and I have to look away.

If I can just lose myself in the work, concentrate on the task at hand, everything will be fine.

Despite what she may think, I am not some feral alpha unable to control my temper and my passion. It sickens me that an omega would possess such prejudices, convinced any moment I’ll rip off my shirt and go on some violent, lust-fueled rampage. I guess that’s what she’s counting on, hoping I’ll lose control, be expelled and hand the spot to her on a plate.

I suppose it doesn’t help that in the past alphas didn’t see fit to control their urges like we do now. They did what they wanted to whomever they wanted. The ancient Egyptians included. If I’m completely honest, there are still alphas who act like that today. Luckily, most of them end up behind bars.

These thoughts swirl around my head and irritate the hell out of me and as best as I try to let the work distract me, I can’t help but probe her on the matter.

“What exactly do you have against alphas?” I snap out. When what I mean is, what exactly do you have against me? She’d taken an instant dislike to me, right from the start. No matter how often I recant our first few meetings, I can never understand why. What I did in those very first moments for her to take against me like she did.

“They’re arseholes,” she responds without missing a heartbeat.

“Most people are,” I retaliate.

“Some betas maybe,” she peers over her shoulder at me, grinning. “All the omegas I’ve met are lovely.”

“All the ones I’ve met are brats.”

She frowns at me before refocusing on her work. But I’m not done talking about this. Her attitude pisses me off more than it should.

“You live with a pack of alphas, right?”

“Yes,” she says, and I can hear the scrape of her trowel against the coarse ground. “A *real* pack.”

I pause, my own trowel hovering in the air. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” she says, not pausing her work. “That there are alphas out there posing as packs, trying to lure omegas in with certain promises when all they’re really after is a gang bang with their friends.”

I spin on my haunches to face her. She’s on her hands and knees and that image from the shower comes hurtling into my mind. Fuck!

“What alphas?”

“Carl’s shown me stuff on the internet. Discussions between alphas about how they can lure omegas in.” Her lips curl. “It’s really sick.”

“And you think that’s what me and my pack are doing?” I say in shock.

She shakes her head. “I didn’t say that. I don’t know anything about your pack.”

She rocks backwards and twists around to face me.

“Exactly, so what the hell would give you that idea?” I say, battling hard not to lose my temper; the vein in my neck thumping with blood.

She sighs as if she is going to have to explain something difficult to a child. I grind my teeth together.

“I don’t have any ideas. I don’t know if you’re doing that or not.” She hesitates. “But you have to admit that your pack does have a ...” her eyes swivel up towards the sky as she searches for the word. “Reputation.”

“You shouldn’t believe everything you read in that stupid paper,” I mumble, cursing those damn gossip columns about the pack’s exploits earlier in the year. Sure we partied a lot, went a bit wild when we first formed our pack – we were

fucking riding high – but most of the stories were grossly exaggerated. And it was months ago. We've mellowed since then. Not that it matters. The labels about us have stuck.

“It's not just the articles,” she says, staring directly at me. “Girls talk.”

I snort at that. “I've hardly looked at a girl this year.” If you discount Giorgie Martinelli and her delectable arse. “I've been too busy studying, training, and playing rugby.”

She raises her eyebrows, telling me she doesn't buy that one bit.

“You're incredibly judgemental sometimes, you know that?”

“You asked me,” she says, throwing her hands up.

“We're a real pack,” I insist. “It isn't some ruse to gang bang girls,” I add, my lips curling with disgust at the thought. “These men are my brothers. There is a bond between us and we're committed to our pack, to each other.”

“How long have you known each other?” she asks with a hint of curiosity in her voice.

“Coming up a year. I met them when I moved to Studworth.”

She halts, her trowel hovering in the air above the ground. “Less than a year? Is that enough time to form a bond like that?”

“I think there are some people you meet and the bond is there almost immediately.”

“Like fated mates? You don't believe in that nonsense stuff, do you?” She chuckles.

“I don't know,” I say. “I've honestly never given it much thought.” I look up to the lip of our trench and the dust swirling in a lone beam of sunlight. “Maybe it's something you can't understand until it happens to you. Pack life hadn't even occurred to me until I met my mates. Now I can't imagine living any other way.”

She examines my face, then seems to dismiss whatever thought she was entertaining in her mind. Instead, she starts scraping away again, lifting her arse up into the air as she does and god if I'm not tempted to sink my teeth into it. "People don't always turn out to be what you expected," she says quietly.

I still. Does she have first-hand experience of that? Something about the weariness of her tone leads me to believe she does.

I decide there is no use in pursuing the conversation. No matter what she might say, Giorgie Martinelli is clearly not one to change her opinion about someone or a whole pack of people for that matter. What do I care what she thinks? I know the truth. Deep in my heart and in my gut. I've found my brothers, my pack. We have each other's backs.

We work in silence, scraping away layer after layer of dirt and finding nothing for our hard labour. I don't feel frustrated by it – no, that emotion is reserved purely for the woman with whom I'm sharing this trench – this is how the work of an archeologist goes. You need bucket loads of patience and a hell of a lot of concentration. I'm pretty unusual for an alpha because I happen to possess both. Or I usually do.

But her singing...

Not loud enough for me to hear the words. Just this incessant whispered noise under her breath. Cheerful and happy.

I wipe at the sweat forming on my brow and sweep my hair out of my eyes and back under my hat. The ground is hard against my knees and my back aches.

And that fucking noise.

"Do you think we could give the one-woman performance a rest for a bit?" I grumble, half under my breath.

"Huh?" she asks, dragging one of the clipboards into her lap and scribbling some notes.

I eye the writing, wondering if she's found something of interest she's not sharing.

“The singing. Could you give it a rest?”

“Singing?” She frowns at me with confusion.

Is this another of her plays to break me?

“Yes, the singing. Could you please stop?”

Comprehension dawns over her face. “Whoops, sorry. I don’t realise I’m doing it. It drives my brother crazy.”

“Me too. Please stop.”

She glares at me. “Now who’s the killjoy?”

“There’s absolutely no joy in that singing.”

“Well, I’m sorry but the conversation is seriously lacking and I don’t do well in silence.”

“I do.”

“And yet you live in a pack?”

“Part of being in a pack is knowing when to give each other space.”

“If only we both had some now!” She attacks the board with her pen, then tosses both to the ground. “I swear this trench is ten degrees hotter because of your presence.”

I smirk at her. “You think I’m hot?”

“That’s not what I said.” I keep on smirking and she shuffles on her spot. And I know it’s wicked, but I like seeing her squirm. I know she doesn’t really find me hot, but it’s fun to tease her. I just wish I could tease her in more enjoyable ways, the idea making my cock stir. “I said you’re making this trench hot.”

“Same thing.”

“Trust me, it’s not. You may be in love with yourself, doesn’t mean I am.”

Oh yeah, she’s made that abundantly clear. Again. And again.

“Just quit the singing, will you?”

“Fine!” she snaps, snatching up her trowel and attacking the ground with it.

I pick up my own and spin round, relieved at last to have some silence.

“Except, it’s not!” she blurts out a minute later.

I sigh and turn back to find her glaring at me, her face all hot and sweaty and looking exactly like she’s spent time tumbling around in bed. Fuck, I need to get my mind of the gutter. But it’s that scent and her arse and hips and..,

“I told you I don’t like the silence,” she adds.

“Can’t you talk to yourself in your head?”

Her eyes flick to the side. “I’d rather not.” She chews on her lip, weighing up her options. “We could play a game while we work?”

“Jesus Christ,” I mutter. “What you want to play? Eye spy?”

We both examine the confined space of our cell with its dirt walls and dirt floor.

The corner of her mouth twitches. I’m reminded of her smile from earlier this morning. The way it dazzled me. The way being here seemed to light her up from the inside. Something I can understand.

“Why are you so goddamn determined to win the spot on the professor’s research team?” I ask her.

It’s a question I’ve wanted to ask her for a long time. I’ve never met such a driven omega. Single handedly dogged. Prepared to stoop to anything to get what she wants – including torturing me.

There will probably be no better time to ask.

“Same reason you are,” she tucks a strand of hair that’s come loose behind her ear and adjusts her glasses on the bridge of her nose.

I squint at her through the gloom. “And what’s that?”

The strand of hair slips free of her ear and she twists it around her index finger. “Professor Weaver is the best.”

I snort. “That isn’t an answer. There are plenty of other highly respected academics in the UK and abroad. Why Weaver? Why Weaver’s team?”

“Because ... she’s prepared to run with new ideas, test new theories. She’s not wedded to the current way of thinking. She looks at everything critically and stands up for what she believes. She’s a woman in a field of stuffy, old men and she’s been prepared to go up against them when she has to.”

I nod. I can respect that too.

“I’ve wanted to work for her since the first day I met her. She breezed into the lecture hall and blew me away with her welcome speech. Showed us all these things she’d discovered. How they’d turned existing theories about how prehistoric people in Britain lived. I knew I wanted to be like her.” She shuffles along the trench and starts to scrape at the next patch of earth. “I’ve taken shitty internships every Summer. I even did one in the freezing cold up in Scotland over one Christmas. I’ve worked my butt off for this spot.”

“And you don’t think I have?”

She drops her gaze to the ground and I’m taking that as a yes.

“When I was six, I got dragged on a holiday to Greece with my parents. I remember being bored out of my mind. We were holed up in some luxury resort. There were no other kids and nothing for me to do. I kept getting yelled out for being too loud or touching stuff I wasn’t allowed to. In the end, I guess my dad realised he had to provide some form of entertainment for me so he took me to some ruin nearby and sat taking work calls while I climbed all over the thing. I don’t even remember what it was. I don’t think anyone actually told me. But it fired up my imagination. After that holiday, I wanted to visit old castles all the time. I’ve wanted to do this for as long as I can remember.”

“Digs mean actually having to get your hands dirty.”

“I’ve been on plenty of digs before. I do know.” I scowl at her. “That comment is pretty rich coming from the princess who lives in the mansion.”

“I didn’t always live there.”

She’s impossible. I don’t know why I’m even trying to make conversation. I pick up the discarded clipboard, checking what she’d scribbled on the sheet, before marking off the section I’ve just finished and turning to the next.

After a few minutes, she starts singing again. I grip the trowel so hard, I’m surprised it doesn’t snap.

How the fuck am I meant to get through the next few days without strangling the woman?

Giorgie

I'm hot and cramped in the trench. The scent of the alpha tickles my nose as I try to work. His scent is always domineering, just like him. Overpowering every other scent in the vicinity. Not that it is unpleasant. The opposite really. His scent is rich and flavoursome, sending unwanted tingles through my body. But it's also imposing.

And, yes, I'm frustrated too, his scent making my skin tingle and my stomach swoop.

I squeeze my thighs together and huff out air through my nostrils, then rub at my nose with the palm of my hand.

The air is dusty too and stings my eyes. I try to blink it away. Then rock back onto my bottom, stretching my arms upwards to try to release the tension in my spine.

I glimpse towards Jake. He's crouching forward, his left arm is braced against the ground as he works with his right. The sleeves of his linen shirt are rolled up and I can see the tight muscles of his biceps and the tendons in his arm, the trace of a tattoo peeking out from the material. My breath hitches a little.

He's still pissed at me. I can tell by the angry creases lining his brow. That's nothing new, though. He's always pissed off with me. Just because I don't simper up to him like every other girl on campus.

“Can you pass me my bottle of water, please?” I ask. My bottle’s rolled to his side of the trench and I don’t want to squeeze pass him to retrieve it. Don’t want to come too close to his body.

He harrumphs like I’ve asked him to lift half a dozen camels before hooking up the bottle in his big paw.

He holds it out to me and I’m forced to move towards him, leaning in to take it gingerly from his grasp, smelling his sweat beneath his scent and feeling his breath whistle close to my neck.

I snap off the lip and watch him as I bring the bottle to my lips and swallow several mouthfuls of warm water. He watches as I do, his gaze not leaving my face and in this dark, confined space, it feels strangely intimate. Like I’m stripping off my clothing in front of him and not simply taking a drink. My skin warms with the feeling and I have to force myself not to shiver.

I snap the lid back down and throw the bottle to the ground like it’s dynamite.

“You should drink more,” he tells me in that stupidly authoritative manner of his. The one that has the omega within me wanting to lie down on the ground for him. I shove her stupid ideas away, reaching for my sarcasm.

“Yes, Daddy,” I chime. His eyes widen and realising my mistake, my cheeks blaze.

“I ... you should ... dehydration.”

“I’m fine,” I gulp. “Maybe you should worry about yourself. I don’t want to have to haul an unconscious alpha out of this trench when you faint from lack of water.”

He splutters. “Faint? I don’t faint.”

“Everyone faints. It’s a biological process. Alphas aren’t immune just because you’re big and tough and burly.”

“Big, tough and burly.” He’s smirking again. I can hear it in his voice. Goddamn it. He has a way of making me say

stupid things, things I don't mean half the time or things that can be misinterpreted. "I've never fainted in my life."

"Well, me neither actually and I bet I've had more cause than you to!"

"Oh yeah, you ever dislocated your shoulder?"

"No, but a cervical smear is no joke I'm telling you that."

He's silent and I realise I just invited this alpha to start thinking about my cervix. What is wrong with me? Why can't I think straight today? Sometimes I wish I could keep my mouth shut.

But I wasn't lying. I don't like silences. Not when it's dark and cramped like this. My mind has a tendency to lead me to places I don't want to go. Dragging me back to times I want to forget. To that room. To that voice.

"I once fell out of a tree though, and got knocked unconscious," I offer up, wanting to change the conversation away from my womb.

"It's strange isn't it? I've been knocked out three times on the rugby pitch. Woken up on a stretcher with all these faces peering down at me wondering where the hell I am. Once I lost my short term memory for a few hours through concussion."

I wince. It's why I hate that stupid game. "I remember," I whisper.

I feel his hot gaze snap my way. "What?"

It was the only time I've ever been to a match. My friends had wanted to go and perhaps I was a little curious, wanting to see him play. To understand all the fuss.

He'd been jumping for a ball, reaching high into the air, his team mate lifting him off the ground. Then there'd been a clash of heads. He'd fallen and lain there unmoving. Limp. Lifeless. And for several long minutes I hadn't been able to breathe.

I blink the memory away. Opening my eyes to find his on me. Their murky blue depths dragging me in.

“It’s a stupid game,” I mumble. “You should wear helmets. Like they do in the States.”

“Rugby and American Football are not the same thing,” he says with disgust.

“No, the Americans are sensible and actually wear protective clothing.”

“We don’t need it.”

“You just told me you’ve been knocked out three times, Jake!”

“And you got knocked out falling out of a tree.”

“I was racing my brother and I slipped. He felt so guilty afterwards that he brought me sweets and did all my chores.” I giggle. “It was nice to feel pampered while it lasted.”

“I always wanted a big brother,” he tells me. “Someone to play with, kick a ball around with.”

“You’re an only child?”

“Yeah.” He grimaces, a shadow passing over his face.

“Well, it’s not all sunshine and rainbows. We used to fight a lot when we were little and he’d tease me. Now he’s pretty protective. It took a lot of persuasion to convince him to let me come on this trip.”

“Why?”

I arch my eyebrow at him. Is he seriously that clueless?

“He worries about his little omega sister heading off to a strange country to work in the middle of nowhere.”

Jake mumbles something under his breath.

“What?”

He looks me straight in the eye. “Using scent blockers would keep you safe.”

I cock my head. “I know.”

He frowns at me and as usual I have no idea what I’ve done this time to piss him off. He could try using stronger

scent blockers himself. His are pretty hopeless. I've always been able to smell him.

Thinking about his scent has me inadvertently sucking in a lungful, setting the gland at the back of my neck tingling in response and everything pulsing between my legs again. Stupid omega responses. His alpha scent, the richest and darkest of coffees, does smell good, and the way it makes my body feel is undeniably enjoyable. So, so what if occasionally I can't resist a little sniff? A teeny tiny one. No harm in that, right? It's like going to the toy shop and looking but not touching. Because touching, you know, will lead you to more harm than it's worth. Burnt fingers and broken hearts. That's all you get for playing with an alpha like Jake Grantham ... Like *him*.

I peer over at Jake, catching his nostrils flaring. Did he... No, that can't be right.

He swipes the back of his hand over his damp brow and I notice the way the hair around his temples has curled ever so slightly. It makes him look more boyish. Sort of ... cute. I bet he'd hate that. Which means I can't help smiling to myself.

"What?" he says with suspicion.

"Oh nothing," I say innocently.

"What?"

"Nothing!"

"Why do women always do that?" he grumbles, dragging his trowel across the ground in a temper.

"Do what?"

"Clearly have something to say and then when you ask them what it is, reply with 'nothing'. Do you do it to wind us men up?"

"Not everything women do is about men."

"My mum used to do it to my dad in the middle of an argument, just to needle him, just to frustrate him even more." He shakes his head in disgust.

“It was a thought in my head that was private and that I didn’t want to share. It was not intended to annoy you.”

He eyes me with further suspicion. “What thought?”

“A private one,” I mumble, twisting away from him and pretending to be very interested in the ground I’m scraping. I’m not letting Jake Grantham know that for one flicker of a moment I thought he looked cute. His ego is big enough already. And he isn’t cute. Not one bit.

He’s an arrogant, grumpy, player ... who happens to be witty, intelligent and good looking as well. With a scent that makes my skin heat.

“Now I really want to know.”

“Tough. I’m not telling you.”

“You enjoy annoying the shit out of me, don’t you? You embark on it like it’s an Olympic bloody sport.”

“Believe it or not, I don’t actually give you much consideration. In fact, I hardly think about you at all.” And how good you smell. And how cute those little curls are. And how you could snatch my dream right out of my hands.

“Right,” he says, swallowing.

And for a fraction of a second he almost sounds hurt. That can’t be right.

Jake

The next morning, the professor stops by to see how we're getting on and to let us know they are serving cold drinks and snacks in the main tent.

She wags her finger at us when she sees how we're working at opposite ends of the trench and reminds us that it isn't the most efficient way of doing things. Giorgie nods along but I know neither of us are going to change things up.

I strip off my gloves, rest my hands on the edge of the trench and hop out of the hole. Giorgie peers up at me with those big caramel eyes of hers behind her glasses, chewing her lip and eyeing the climb out.

I harrumph and hold out my hand. I spent the whole of yesterday watching her struggle in and out of the trench. It's ridiculous. She's so bloody stubborn, refusing my help every time. But we removed several layers of dirt yesterday and the trench is even deeper now. As much as neither of us particularly wants to hold hands, I suspect she doesn't want to stay trapped in the trench either and I'm not so much of an arsehole that I'd leave her there.

She reaches out her hand and for a moment her palm hovers over mine before I wrap my fingers around hers.

Immediately, electricity seems to spark between our skin, and I nearly drop her hand in alarm. It's the first time we've

touched. The first time our skin has connected. And that's never happened to me before.

But then I realise it's only static. The air here is bone dry after all.

With a heave I haul her out of the trench, ensuring she lands neatly on her feet.

As soon as she's out, I drop her palm, and she jumps away. I flex my fingers, that strange sensation in my skin still there, and notice she's doing the same as I follow her towards the tent.

I stare down at my hand, wondering what that can mean. Wondering if it means anything at all.

We don't talk as we walk; the tension that hangs in the air between us is even denser than usual, and as soon as we reach the shade of the canvas, she spots her friends and hurries away.

I grab myself a can of coke from a stack on a trestle table, the tin cold against my tingling palm, and I crack back the pull. Then I take a long gulp. This morning wasn't as bad as I'd feared, the air had frisked in my favour and whipped most of Giorgie's scent away from me. And yet it was still there, ever present, still is now, tugging at the corners of my mind, stirring my consciousness. Stirring my cock!

Stalking to the other side of the tent, I pull out my phone and check my messages. My packmates rarely emerge into the land of the living until mid-morning on the days that we don't have training so I'm surprised to find they've already sent me a string of pictures of them lounging by the pool, looking relaxed and happy. Arseholes. I step out into the sunshine and snap a few photos of my own. Of the half exposed temple and the never-ending desert, both shining radiantly under the fierce sun.

"It's really beautiful, isn't it?" Her voice is a whisper, sort of reverence and I can't help but look at her. Those goddamn eyes sparkling in a way that has my stomach flipping.

"It is," I whisper back, noting the way the light catches in the strands of her hair making them almost golden.

She shakes her head, dragging her eyes away from the site and offers me a small package of food. “Here,” she says. “I have no idea what it is, but it tastes divine.”

I take it from her with a little suspicion. “Did you lace it with laxatives?”

The corners of her mouth twitch. “Perhaps. Although it wouldn’t be very smart on my count, seeing as I’m sharing a trench with you all day. I think you’re safe.”

I give the package an exaggerated sniff, then take a tentative bite. I chew and swallow then freeze, clutching my stomach. “Urgh!”

“What?!” she cries.

“Nothing.” I grin at her and she swipes her fist against my bicep.

This time I freeze for real, trying really hard not to stare down at the point where her knuckles grazed my arm, at the point where my skin is tingling all over again.

What the fuck?

“Can we get back to it?” she asks, not seeming to notice. “You can eat on the way, right?”

I peer back at the tent. Most of our colleagues lounge on chairs, enjoying their break. I have to hand it to her, Giorgie is ambitious and hardworking, and that is something I can respect. I agree and soon we’re back at the trench. I jump back into the hole and once again lift my hand to offer my assistance.

She stares at my hand, her own twitching by her side.

“I’m really not going to pull you in and break your neck,” I say with more softness and less sarcasm than I’d intended, knowing I want to pull her in and rut her senseless.

“It’d be about the only way you’d steal that spot from the professor’s team from me,” she says with a teasing smile.

“I don’t need to resort to underhand tactics like murder to beat you, smartarse.” I smirk at her, shaking my hand in her

direction. “Come on. I want to get to work.”

She nods and starts biting at her lip again. Then with a little hesitation she takes my hand in hers and that same buzz of energy flies across my skin.

I gasp and the sound is echoed from her own mouth, her lips forming a perfect oh. But we both ignore this.

“Jump,” I tell her, maybe unable to stop myself from squeezing her fingers a little, “and I’ll cushion your landing.”

“Sure.” She gulps and then steps off the ledge and into the air, leaning her weight through her arm and onto mine. I take it and automatically my other arm wraps around her waist, ensuring her landing is soft.

We stumble as her feet hit the ground and her body, warm and pliant, falls against mine, sparking every one of my nerves.

“Alright?” I grunt, my arm still locked around her soft middle and refusing to move.

“Yes,” she squeaks, a delicious blush blossoming across the apples of her cheeks. The pupils of her eyes widen, her wet lips part, and her chest rises and falls.

My arm still won’t move and all I can do is stare at her like a damn fool, completely hypnotised by that intoxicating scent, by her beautiful face.

Then, she wriggles free of my grasp, and, quickly, scuttles to the other end of her trench, tugging on her gloves.

I watch her for a moment, before shaking myself out of my damn trance and finding my own gloves.

Without another word and without meeting my eye she squeezes past me in the trench, her scent and her warmth drowning me as she does even though she tries her best to make sure no part of her body connects with mine. She steps to the end of the trench where I’d been working yesterday.

That had been a pleasant surprise. I thought she would renege on our agreement and there’d be an argument about me

working that end today. But, no, she'd swapped ends without me even reminding her.

We're silent again as we work, although my progress is hampered by the glances I throw at her over my shoulder every other goddamn minute. I have the strangest sensation she's looking at me too, but every time I check, her eyes are locked on her work.

The breeze shifts carrying her scent directly to my nose. I remember Aiden shoved a bandana in my pocket the night before and I tie it around my nose and my mouth, noting my packmate has bathed the material in some kind of perfume. The fucker can be a royal pain in the arse sometimes, but on discovery of that stroke of genius, I could kiss his feet.

"You're right to be suspicious, you know?" she chirps up when the silence must finally have gotten to her.

"Huh?"

"About the laxatives."

"You were considering it then."

"No, I hate to admit but that clever plan hadn't occurred to me. If you'd kept your mouth shut, you could've used it yourself."

"Sabotage isn't really my style. I believe in fair play."

"Right," she says with a whole heap of sarcasm. "It's such a fair playing field for rich alphas."

"You're rich!" I remind her.

"Not me, my brother. And I'm an omega. Do you know how many teachers and even other pupils have told me I don't need to worry about studying hard because I can find myself an alpha and be looked after for the rest of my days? Like that's all I should ever aspire to in life!"

"I told you before. People are arseholes. And they have their own bullshit theories about alphas too." Including you, I think, but bite my tongue. We had that argument yesterday and it got us nowhere.

“Anyway,” she says with frustration. “Laxatives can backfire.”

I snort at her choice of words and she giggles.

“Go on then,” I tell her. “You’re obviously dying to tell me this story.”

“OK.” She manoeuvres herself into position so she can dig at the ground and talk at the same time. “My brother’s pack is pretty big on pranks when it comes to April’s Fool Day. They’re always trying to ‘outdo’ each other. Last year, Ric convinced me to help him. We made a chocolate cake, ground a load of laxatives and mixed them in. Ric’s chocolate cakes are heavenly, even better than my mum’s.” She pauses, swallowing for a moment. “Anyway, only his packmates were meant to eat it. But Connie—”

“Connie?”

“Their omega. She invited some of her friends round and before we knew it loads of people had eaten that cake and there weren’t enough toilets. It was carnage. Connie made Ric scrub every inch of the house with bleach afterwards and I think he slept on the sofa for a week.”

“She forgave him though?”

“Of course! They all did.” She pauses to tie her shoelace. “Logan shaved off Ric’s eyebrows the year before. He looked permanently shocked for about a month. Connie bought him some fake ones to wear, but he refused.” Her face brightens with affection and she laughs. “It was so funny.”

“That’s what I like about pack life. The feeling of family. I couldn’t go back to living on my own. It was lonely as hell.”

“It was?” she asks, crinkling her brow like she’s attempting to reorder her thoughts.

“Yeah,” I mumble, cursing myself for saying something so prattish.

“Why?”

“Money attracts people, lots of people. It doesn’t mean they’re your friends. Your real friends.”

“How about your family?” she asks. Her caramel eyes are locked my way behind those ridiculously cute glasses.

“My parents divorced several years back. It hasn’t really felt like a family since then. They’re off doing their own things, building their new lives.” And their new families. They barely acknowledge my existence any more.

“That’s sad,” she says softly.

“I suppose you’ve never been lonely,” I mutter defensively, thinking of the way she’s always surrounded by her little posse of friends, thinking of the brother she clearly adores.

“Everyone feels lonely sometimes.”

“I haven’t since I joined my pack.” Our pack may be new. We may be working out how to make this thing between us work. Sometimes getting it wrong, but still learning. Yet I know with every bone in my body it’s the place I belong. Even if sometimes it feels like there is something missing. Something we haven’t quite figured out yet.

I adjust the bandana around my nose. Her scent is becoming denser and denser in this trench. “Anyway that laxative stunt was irresponsible,” I quip. My irritation spiking.

“For such a so-called party animal, you are a serious killjoy.”

“Who said I’m a party animal?”

“The gossip columnist, Jakey.”

Jakey? Is she teasing me?

“Reputations aren’t always fairly earned. You’re the one poisoning innocent people.” Including me, with your goddamn scent.

“It was pretty dumb.” She shrugs. “My brother hasn’t always made the right choices in life. I guess I haven’t either.”

“Yeah,” I mumble, wishing I hadn’t partied so hard at the beginning of the year, wishing I hadn’t earned that reputation, seeing now how it’s tainted her view of me.

The temperature continues to rise, our trench like an oven slowly cooking us. Sweat trickles around my collar bone and down my back, soaking through the base of my shirt. The smell of it mixes with her potent scent, with mine too and with the salty aroma of her sweat. Her skin shines with it, her hair damp around her neck. How the hell does she make even that look good?

A bead of sweat rolls down her neck and pools at her collar bone. I want to reach over, drag her towards me and run my tongue down her throat. I want to unbutton that shirt of hers and run my tongue all over her sweet, little body. *Shit!*

I twist my body away, focussing with all my might on the sandy earth.

My hands are damp inside the gloves and it soaks through the material, making the trowel's handle slip in my grip. I hold it tighter, concentrating with determination on every scrape of the earth.

Scrape, scrape, scrape.

Watching the layers of dirt strip away, sinking lower into the ground, further back in time.

And then with a clink, my tool hits something hard.

Giorgie

“**S**hit!” I hear him gasp at the same time a loud clunk rings out in our trench. I spin around on my toes.

“What?” I say, unable to help but crawl towards him.

Has he found something?

“My trowel, it hit something hard.” His voice brims with excitement.

“What is it?” I ask, creeping closer still and trying to peer over his shoulder. To my surprise, he moves to one side to let me look. I’d have expected an arsehole like Jake Grantham to keep any find to himself.

“I can’t tell yet. It could be nothing.”

“Or it could be something. Should I go get the professor?”

“No, we should see if it’s actually worth reporting first.” I note his use of the word we, and my mouth drops open in surprise. “I don’t want to look like a tool if it turns out to be an old coke can.”

“True,” I laugh.

He digs his finger into the dirt, attempting to feel the object, get a sense of its size.

I wait, crouching beside him, my heart hammering in anticipation, my gaze flitting between his face and his hands. They are strong hands with long fingers, and I'm reminded of that strange spark when he took my hand.

Not an unpleasant sensation.

"Well?" I ask, impatient to know.

"It feels pretty big," he says with even more excitement in his voice. His voice is usually full of sarcasm and cynicism and I realise I like this sound of his voice much more. Like it belongs to the real him.

"Not a coke can, then," I joke.

"No," he says, turning his head towards me and nearly knocking me backwards with the full force of his smile. The man is so bloody good looking it's hard to look at him sometimes, especially when he smiles like that. His row of straight teeth framed by plump lips, one side of his cheek dimpling and his eyes even bluer. "Shall we see what it is?" He sounds just like a kid who's found an early Christmas present.

I can't help grinning back. "Yes!" I nod.

He explains to me where he thinks the object starts and ends, and then together we scrape at the soil. Even more gently than before.

"Good job, Giorgie," he says. "I think we're getting there." Usually a comment from him like that would set my teeth on edge, but today his compliment warms my belly in a way I try not to examine.

It's the excitement, that's all. Of being here, of actually finding something.

Finally, we reach the surface of the object and swap our trowels for brushes, sweeping away the sand and the dust, the edge of whatever lies beneath becoming clearer and clearer with every sweep of our hands.

"Look!" I tell him, as the first hint of colour becomes visible. He stops his own work to come closer to mine, and I

notice that warmth of his body again and the depth of his scent. It's always smelt good to me, much better than I'd ever admit out loud to anyone. Sometimes in class, I'll suck in mouthfuls of it and let it melt onto my tongue. So rich, like the darkest, bitterest of coffees.

With a feather light touch, he traces his fingertips over the hues.

"Egyptian?" he asks. "From the New Kingdom era?"

"Yes, I think so too."

"Shit, I can't believe it."

"I think we should go and fetch the professor," I say, feeling strangely sad to break this moment and also a tad jealous that he will gain all the credit for this find. It's fair enough. He found it.

"I want to uncover some more first," he says, sweeping sand away with his brush.

"But we were told to fetch the supervisors as soon as we got the slightest hint that we may have found something."

"They'll drag us out of this trench quicker than you can say Bob's your uncle, and dig it up themselves. This was our find. I want to lift it out of the earth."

Again with the 'we'? Is he trying to win me over to his way of thinking with flattery?

"I don't want to get in trouble. I don't want to be fired from this dig." I stand up, and strip off my gloves. "I'm going to fetch Professor Weaver."

I step towards the edge of the trench.

"Omega! No!" he barks and automatically every muscle, every tendon, in my body tenses. I freeze in my tracks.

Then my rational brain kicks in and I compute what the hell he just did.

He fucking *barked* at me.

Jake Grantham and I have exchanged plenty of cross words. But never, ever, has he barked at me.

I spin on my heels, and glare at him so hard it surprises me that my eyes don't pop out of their sockets.

"Oh no, you didn't?" I snarl at him, so angry my blood feels like it's boiling in my veins.

"Didn't what?" he asks, meeting my pissed off tone with his own.

"Bark at me!" I'm so outraged I'm shaking, my nails pinching my palms as I ball up my fists. I won't let an alpha do that to me again; control me, play on my subconscious instinct to obey.

I was beginning to think ... an inkling that maybe ... I'd been wrong about him. This day and a half together is the first time we've ever really talked, ever actually spent time in each other's company. He's been grumpy, true, but kind, sweet, funny too.

But now it's clear I'd just been falling under the spell of his charm.

I was right about him all along.

He clambers to his feet, towering above me, and I'm reminded how big he is, how vulnerable I am.

My throat constricts, and suddenly this trench is very small and the air is so hot.

"Bark?" His face pales. "Giorgie, I didn't—"

"You did," my voice falters as I say the words and I'm shaking for a different reason now. Fear.

This is why I've kept the fuck away from this alpha. I can't trust him.

I turn around and reach up to the top of the trench, my fingers sinking into the earth as I attempt to pull myself out. My boots scrape against the edge and I hardly move. I slide back down to the bottom. My arms are shaking. The first tear skids down my face.

I want to get away. I need to get away.

“Giorgie,” the alpha says. “I really didn’t mean to snap at you...a bark...it isn’t something I would ever ...” His words trail away as I try once again to heave myself out. “Let me help you out.” I can feel him draw closer.

“No!” I cry. “Keep your hands off me. I’ll scream.”

He steps backwards. “Shit!” he mumbles, “Giorgie, I’m sorry, I really didn’t mean to.”

I kick my toe into the wall of the trench. Soil tumbles to the ground. I kick a second and third time until I have enough of a hole to rest my foot in. This time I can reach higher and I scramble over the edge of the trench, landing on my stomach with a harrumph. I don’t give myself time to recover, swinging my legs and scuttling away.

He doesn’t call out to me. Doesn’t try to convince me not to find the professor. I stumble along the path, the sun fierce on my head even through my hat. My breathing and my pulse calm as I walk, and I inhale the fresh air, driving away that oppressive scent, and wiping the tears from my face.

Did I overreact? My mind can’t help snapping back to that other time. That bark. That scent. That betrayal.

That alpha.

I shake my head and try to focus on the surrounding wonderment. I don’t want one stupid decision, one awful moment in time to colour everything that comes after, to ruin everything else in my life. Yet it always does. It *always* does.

Professor Weaver is talking to a pair of students in one of the shallower trenches, a flask of water in her hand, that she pauses to drink.

With another deep inhale, I march towards her, fixing a smile on my face.

“Professor Weaver, Jake found something.” He did. It is his find. I’m not taking credit from him, even if he is a giant dickhead.

The professor's eyes widen with excitement and she's practically jogging in the direction of the trench before I can say another word. I follow her, finding Jake sitting on the edge of the trench when we arrive, his long legs dangling into the hole.

I thought he'd still be attempting to dig up this treasure on his own, but he clearly hasn't touched it since I left.

His shoulders are slumped and I avoid his eye as Professor Weaver addresses him.

"What is it?" she asks, slightly breathless.

"We're not sure. Looks New Kingdom, about so big." He holds out his hands to indicate the size, then points to the spot where the find lies half exposed.

The professor scrambles straight down into the hole, dropping on her knees and bending her face right up close to the treasure, inspecting it closely.

"Yes, I'd agree with that assessment. The detailing looks like it's from that era." She blows gently across the object's surface. "Congratulations, Mr Grantham. This is a superb find."

"It was a joint effort. Miss Martinelli and I found it together." My gaze flicks to his, but he isn't looking my way.

"Well in that case, congratulations Giorgie. Can you run along and find Professor Lichenstein? He'll need to see this immediately. Jake jump back down here and help me remove more of the sand."

I shift my weight to start walking away. Disappointment spreading through my body.

"I'll go." Jake jumps to his feet. "Do you need a hand down?" he mumbles to the ground and not me.

"No," I tell him, dropping to my bottom and sliding down in a haphazard method. When I look up, he's already gone.

Jake is right, as soon as the more senior archaeologists arrive, we're pushed to one side, resigned to watch from the side lines. We don't talk to one another, keeping a good foot between us as we sit huddled in the shade. Instead, we listen to the excited chatter of the more senior researchers and my indignation grows. They could've let us help or included us more. They could even have left us to lift the find from the ground ourselves. But it seems the engravings and pictures on the artefact are causing much excitement.

We crane our necks, catching glimpses of figures dancing across the decorated surface.

Eventually we're ushered away and slump back to the main tent.

"They could've at least let us stay and watch," I mumble.

"It's a cut throat profession," Jake answers pointedly, as if that explains the rudeness and unfairness of it. "Everyone wants to grab the accolade and the prize for themselves."

"It shouldn't be." I fold my arms across my chest. "More is always achieved through cooperation and teamwork."

"I don't think that's true," he says quietly as if he's feeling his way around me. To be honest, I'm doing the same. I still feel unsettled from the incident earlier. "Some of the biggest breakthroughs in science and technology have come about in war time, when mankind was literally competing to stay alive."

"And pulling together, working together, to defeat the enemy."

"Hmmm," he says, his gaze flicking over my face.

There he goes again dismissing my opinion.

"You alphas, you think everything is about competition, and beating the other guy. Being on top and screwing everyone else." My frustration with our dismissal leaks into my words.

"There you go again with your damn opinions on alphas. I live in a pack, Giorgie. I literally compromise and cooperate

every day. I'm in the fucking rugby team. That's all about working as a team."

"And competing for your spot on the team," I insist, although I'm a little less sure of my argument.

"And what have you been doing this whole year? Competing against me for the spot on Weaver's team!" He huffs through his nose, and picks up his pace, ducking inside the tent, and slumping down on a chair.

I stand, frozen watching him go. He's right. We've been competing – of course we have. Yet working together back there in the trench, removing the dust and uncovering the artefact together, had felt a million times better.

It isn't in my nature to compete, not really, and maybe this setup has been pulling me all out of shape.

"They could have given us another section to work on," he grumbles as I duck under the flaps of the tent.

"I could see if Sia and Carl would let us work on their site."

"It's not big enough," he sulks.

I drop down into a chair a couple away from his, not wanting to sit too close. He looks at his watch. "Lunch isn't for another hour. Then they'll be packing us off for the afternoon when it's too hot to work."

"I'd happily work through the heat if it meant I could keep digging."

"It's not healthy for an omega," he says off hand, then his eyes widen in horror. "I'm sorry, I didn't–"

I lift my hand to dismiss his concern. After that incident earlier, he obviously thinks I'm super sensitive or something. Maybe I am, but I don't want him to think that. Omegas have a reputation for being vulnerable and pathetic. I don't want him to think of me like that. "It's not going to be an option anyway."

"Yeah."

He sighs, leaning back in his chair, swinging on the back legs and hooking his arms behind his head. The fabric of his t-shirt stretches taut as he does, the muscles across his chest becoming clearer and the ones in his upper arms bulging and the hem of his shirt lifts flashing a strip of toned abdomen.

I flick my gaze away, heat crawling over my skin. Tucking my hands under my knees, I swing my legs and chew the inside of my cheek.

Well, this is super awkward. Stuck with Jake Grantham for the next hour with nothing to do.

There is something you could do, that sneaky omega voice pipes up. God!

I peer out at the bright sunshine. I could go and watch the others at work but I don't really fancy that. I'd end up feeling jealous.

"You know what," Jake says, tugging his phone out of his pocket, "I might just skedaddle. I was taking my pack on a trip out to the Rulox temple this afternoon anyway. Maybe I'll just get them to meet me there earlier."

"The Rulox temple?" It's a temple to Isis, the Goddess of Omegas. A temple I've read lots about. Much to my disappointment, the temple isn't considered important enough to make it onto our tour of the tourist sites. Carl and I had spoken about possibly going together in our free time, but I don't think he was serious. It isn't like he's interested in the life of omegas during the period. Not like me. "You're going to see Isis' temple? The omega temple?"

"Yeah, I have a few theories about the place. I want to see it for myself."

"I didn't think you'd be interested."

"I'm writing my final paper on alpha and omega dynamics in the New Kingdom."

I gape at him. Of course he is. A mixture of emotions swim through my veins – trepidation, admiration, curiosity.

"Me too," I tell him, swallowing.

“I know.”

“Wh-what?”

“I’ve read some of your papers.”

“You have? Why?” I lean forward. “Are you hoping to steal my ideas?” I say half in jest, half deadly serious.

“I have my own, thanks.” He rocks on his chair, eyes locked on his screen. “I was interested.”

“Oh.” My cheeks warm and I feel strangely ashamed I never read any of his. Partly I was too scared. What if they were better than mine?

Jake jabs at his phone. “You’re welcome to come to the temple,” he says in a tone that makes me think I’m not.

I stare out at the bright sunshine again, watching several people hustle past with sacks of earth.

The Rulox temple. The temple dedicated to Isis. Built for omegas.

I want to see it so desperately. To test my ideas. To plant my feet inside a temple, a temple omegas like me once worshipped inside. My skin itches to go. This is what I’m here for after all. This is my chance.

But spending an afternoon with Jake and his pack? Alone? Didn’t I experience some kind of panic attack only an hour ago? Isn’t his stupid scent doing stupid things to my body? It hardly seems sensible.

Jake clambers to his feet, reading the screen of his phone.

“Yeah, they’re going to meet me there. I’m going to see if one of those guys out there will give me a ride.” He points to a group of men, sheltering in the shade of the coaches, smoking cigarettes.

“I’ll come,” I say, the words popping out of my mouth before I can stop them.

He swings his head in my direction, genuine surprise scrawled all over his face.

“You wanna come?” he asks with scepticism. I’ve never willingly volunteered to spend time with Jake before.

“Yes,” I squeak, lifting my chin. I can’t let a chance like this slip through my fingers. Today has already been a disappointment, watching as the senior researchers have taken our find from us. Maybe it isn’t too late to salvage something. Ok, so it means spending more time with Jake, Jake and his pack, but I can handle that. The incident in the trench was just a silly mishap – the culmination of too much time in a cramped space, hot, dusty and smelly. “I’d really love to see the Rulox temple. In fact, it’s the thing I want to see most.”

I spring up. He swallows.

“Right.” He straightens his shoulders as if bolstering himself for battle and strolls out towards the men, me trotting behind him.

He spends the next fifteen minutes haggling until he finally comes to an agreement on price and then an older man walks us over to a Land Rover covered in dust and grime.

“Do you think he can even see out the windscreen?” I mumble.

“It’ll be an adventure,” he says. Jumping up into the open back and once again holding out his hand to me. For such a jerk, the guy does have some *manners*.

I wave his hand away, quite capable of climbing into the cab myself, and sitting on the bench opposite him.

It takes our driver a few attempts to start the vehicle and I throw Jake another sceptical look, but then we’re off, bouncing over the sand. The wind tugs at my hat and I grab at it, holding it tight to my head. The air continues to lash at it though and eventually I give up and clutch the hat to my chest. Jake does the same. And for a minute we grin at each other like idiots. Then he whips his gaze away and I content myself with watching the shades of the dunes shift as we travel along.

By the time we catch our first glimpse of the temple on the horizon, my body and my head ache from being jostled around so much in the vehicle. All that’s forgotten though, as the

shape of it comes into focus, golden and magnificent, even ringed by a cluster of ugly, modern buildings.

“I don’t think I could ever get tired of looking at sites like this,” I say more to myself than Jake.

“Me neither. This is the best fucking job in the world.”

If we get one, I think. And only one of us will land that spot on the professor’s team. The other ... It’ll mean leaving Studworth and trying to find a role somewhere else.

“Do your packmates actually care much about history?” As far as I can tell they are a bunch of what the Americans would call jocks. They’re all studying for Masters like Jake, but it’s clear it’s a ruse to stay for the team. “And shouldn’t they be training or something?” I know I’m sounding bitchy, but as we draw closer and the temple begins to leer over us, I’m nervous.

Alone with a whole pack.

You’re OK, I tell myself, tapping my fingers against my thigh. *You can do this*.

Jake seems not to notice, too entranced by the temple. “Season ended a few weeks ago. We’re encouraged to take a holiday before training starts again.”

“When’s that?” I ask.

“End of July.”

“Sounds exhausting, studying and training and playing and stuff.” He often rocks up to our classes in his sports gear, clearly on his way to or from a match.

I remember that game again.

All that alpha aggression, the fierce mix of scents, sweat running down muscular frames, had set a fire burning in my belly, forcing me to rub my thighs together. And then there’d been one scent in particular searing through the air to my nostrils.

“Nah, when it’s something you love, it’s energising, not exhausting.”

He laughs and, like his smile did earlier, it has my stomach spinning.

What on earth? Perhaps this excursion wasn't a good idea after all.

Levi

We're waiting outside the Rulox temple as instructed, tickets already purchased.

Jake said he'd be here half an hour ago. He's late. It's kind of standard for Jake. The alpha usually completes ten extra sets of pushups every training session as punishment for his tardiness. We're not overly concerned.

Aiden checks his phone.

"No message, but the reception here is pretty whack." He lifts his phone above his head, rotating it left and right while examining the screen. I scan the warren of streets with their tall, narrow shops and shaded pathways that surround the temple instead, watching for Jake.

Finally, I spot his head of golden hair rounding the corner.

"Took your time, mate," I call out, patting Aiden on the shoulder. Then I spot the little piece of ass trotting along by his side. And not just any piece of ass. I turn to look at Aiden, his eyes land on me, then swing back to Jake, before flipping to mine again. His mouth drops open.

Giorgie?

You cannot be serious? What in the hell is she doing here? With Jake?

I jump down from the wall and stalk towards them, unable to help from grinning. I don't know what's going on here but it's going to make for a fun afternoon.

Giorgie Martinelli is beautiful. Stunningly so. The kind of girl who has men turning their heads to watch her walk by, exactly what every man on the street is doing now, much to Jake's obvious discomfort. The dude's throwing the stink eye out left and right.

Of course, she's beautiful. No omega could smell as good as her and not be. And while I may not find that scent as all-consuming as Jakey-boy does, it's still fucking irresistible to me.

I barge past a few tourists milling at the temple entrance and stop in front of Jake and Giorgie.

"Hey Giorgie. Decided to tag along?" I ask, examining both their faces and trying to work out what's going on here. Jake raises an eyebrow warning me not to interfere. I can smell his scent on her, and hers on him – not strong enough to suggest anything has happened between them – yet something has obviously occurred. Usually you couldn't get the two of them within twenty feet of one another. For good reason. Giorgie is a brat. A brat who hates my packmate. She makes him suffer day in and day out with her bloody unblocked scent.

She hangs back a little, twisting her hat in her hands.

"I'm writing a paper about this temple. I wouldn't miss it for the world," she whispers with a serious lack of brattiness.

I cock my eyebrow straight back at Jake, as if asking him who the hell this girl is and what happened to Giorgie Martinelli.

"Sounds like you're an expert then." That little compliment has her smiling at me in a way that makes my skin tingle. "I think you'd better give us a guided tour." I offer her Jake's entrance ticket and then signal for her to lead the way. She takes it from my hand as if it's a treasured artefact and not

some measly piece of paper, examining the print as she heads for the man checking tickets.

“Grantham,” I say to Jake over my shoulder, giving him a wink, “you’re gonna need to buy yourself a ticket.”

“Oh,” Giorgie says, peering between us with pink cheeks as the man stamps her ticket. “Did I take Jake’s?” She starts to scramble around in her purse.

“Don’t worry,” I say, ushering her through and handing my own ticket over. “He’ll catch us up.” Aiden and Dylan look between me, Jake’s face of thunder and then Giorgie. With half-hearted shrugs aimed at Jake, they follow Giorgie and me through the entrance. We step down into a sand coloured courtyard sunk low into the ground, wide circular columns line its edges and tower above our heads, and on the far side stands the main temple itself, rhombus in shape, gigantic carvings scribed into its walls and huge rectangle entrances waiting in darkness.

Giorgie practically squeals beside me (sending my hindbrain places it shouldn’t go) her hands rising to cover her mouth as she bounces on her toes.

“Is it how you expected?” Dylan asks and I note he’s playing up the melodic tones of his Welsh accent. I can’t blame him. A squealing omega in our midst who smells this damn good? What alpha wouldn’t be turning up the charm?

“Better,” she gasps, unable to tear her eyes away from the sight. “It’s so much bigger than I imagined, and the carvings of Isis? They look almost like they might come to life and step right out in front of us.” She scrambles in her bag and pulls out her phone, lifting it and then dropping her arms back down. “There’s no point, is there? I’ll never be able to capture the majesty of it.”

“Not on your phone, no,” Dylan tells her. “You didn’t bring a camera?”

She shakes her head with a hint of disappointment.

“Don’t worry, I’ll treat you to a print from the souvenir shop on the way out,” I say. She doesn’t hear me though, she’s

stepping into the courtyard with awe written all over her face. And for the craziest, stupidest of minutes, I have a strange desire to have her look at me in that way.

That's what omegas can do to you, if you don't keep your head screwed on straight. Whip away your senses and before you know it they're making demands on you to give up your pack.

I run my hand through my hair and follow in her footsteps.

"So what can you tell us about this place?" I ask Giorgie, my gaze on her face and not the temple.

"It's a temple dedicated to the Goddess Isis," Jake says from behind me.

"Did you write a paper on this temple?" I ask him, not taking my eyes off Giorgie.

"No," he grumps. Giorgie smothers a smile before launching into an excitable history of the place, hardly drawing breath as she walks towards the temple interior, the light shifting from bright to dark as we walk through the shadows cast by the pillars.

Her enthusiasm is infectious. Even Jake is captivated and keeping his mouth shut for once, even if I assume he knows all this stuff already. I'm not a history nerd by any stretch of the imagination, but I have to admit this place is special. Or perhaps that's the influence of the omega's intoxicating scent.

It's sweet. Crackling on the end of my tongue and tickling every nerve in my nostrils. It's like it's alive, curling through the air and entwining me in its gasp. Heating my blood like a warm embrace. Relaxing and calming all that usual energy that buzzes through my body.

No wonder Jake's been busting a gut every time he's in a class with her.

This scent would have me chasing Giorgie all over campus. Just for a hit of it.

Inside, the temple is cool and dark and it takes my eyes a moment to adjust to the light. Then I see the inscription on the

walls. In some places it has worn away completely, in others it's as deep and intricate looking as the day it was carved. We pause by some of the drawings, Giorgie explaining their meaning and then we wander deeper inside. Here some of the original paint work remains, the colours muted by time, yet the vividness of the shades are still obvious.

"I never met someone who loved this shit as much as Jake," Aiden says as a particular carving captures her attention and her words wither away.

"I guess it's one thing we have in common," she says absentmindedly.

I look between the two of them. I'd say those two have quite a bit in common. After all, Jake can be a giant brat when he wants to be too.

My packmate comes to join her, bending over to examine what she's found and the two of them whisper to and fro in excited tones.

I motion with my head to the others and we walk back out into the courtyard finding a step in the shade to sit on.

"Is that the same omega from the airport?" I say to the others.

"She certainly seems a lot less pissy than she did," Dylan says, stretching out his long legs.

"And even more fucking potent," Aiden mutters.

"You think she's really as bad as Jake's been making her out to be all this time?"

Aiden shrugs. "According to him they fight all the time."

"Unresolved sexual tension," Dylan says.

"Since when has sexual tension ever been unresolved between an alpha and omega. We're not like that. We're made for the rutting and the knotting." I huff out a puff of air, realising my own body is taut with sexual tension, watching as Giorgie steps back into the courtyard and she fiddles with the neck of her blouse.

“Yeah,” Dylan says dreamily, his own gaze drifting that way too. “I wouldn’t mind finding a sweet, little omega like her for our pack. Someone who’d build a nice little nest in our home and let us rut them through their heat. Someone who I can snuggle up with at night. Someone who’d bind us all together.”

Dylan’s always been the most sentimental out of the four of us, the most romantic. Must be that bloody Welsh poetic blood of his.

I kick at the dusty ground. “We don’t need that kind of turmoil. Not when our pack is so new. We need to get ourselves sorted first before we start worrying about any omega.” An omega like the one out there who none of us can keep our eyes off. Yeah, it’s easy to say all that stuff, another to mean it. I shake the thought away. “Besides, I’ve got too much playing the field to do before I settle down.”

“You’re not settled down with us?” Dylan asks, with mock hurt.

I rest my hand on his thigh, squeezing gently.

“You know what I mean.”

“I don’t know,” Dylan says. “I think an omega for our pack, an omega who belonged to us all, that we would share and love together, would be a good thing.”

I have to admit, the nest and the heat thing sounds pretty damn good. Maybe even the snuggling bit too. It’s been a long time since I held an omega in my arms and purred until she fell asleep. And I’ve never shared an omega with another alpha, with my packmates. It’s the ultimate fantasy.

Giorgie points to one of the pillars and Jake follows her over. They pour over an inscription and then the bickering starts. Giorgie’s hands fall to her hips and Jake’s brow falls over his eyes.

Yeah, maybe I was wrong about all that stuff.

“Should we intervene?” Dylan asks.

“I like watching the way that woman makes him squirm.” Although the whole business in the aeroplane was a bit bloody extreme. I wondered at one point if we were going to have to hold our packmate down. The effect of her scent is definitely lessened by the fresh air and a bit of a breeze. Lessened but not completely removed. I wonder if that’s why she gets under his skin so much.

Eventually, Jake shakes his head and stalks towards us.

“Everything OK?” I ask, trying not to grin.

“Fine,” he snaps, flopping down beside me. “It’s been a trying morning, let’s just say that.”

“Why did you bring her then?”

“Fuck knows,” he says, his gaze flicking back towards her.

“Really?”

“Yes.”

I chuckle. “Bullshit.”

“She did the thing with her eyes, OK?”

“What thing?” Aiden asks.

“Made them all big and wide and pleading. Went on about how much she wanted to see the temple. How important it was to her.”

“And you couldn’t resist.”

Jake kicks at a loose pebble on the ground.

We watch as Giorgie makes some scribbles in a notebook before eventually turning to find us.

She smiles at us all with a hint of shyness, then peers at her watch as she walks towards us.

“It’s getting late. I guess I’ll make my way back to the hotel.”

“On your own?” Jake asks, sounding like a grumpy kid.

“Yes,” she says, lifting her chin.

I decide this could spiral into round two of whatever the previous argument was about. So I leap to my feet.

“I’ll escort you back, Giorgie,” I tell her. I’m looking at her, not my packmate, but I can guarantee he’s staring daggers right through my back.

“We can all escort you back,” Jake says, and it doesn’t escape my notice how she pales at that and takes the tiniest of steps backward.

I cock my head to one side, examining her. “All of us a bit overwhelming?” I ask her.

“I ... it’s ...”

I knock my fist against Jake’s shoulder. He can be an oblivious asshole sometimes. If we find one omega’s scent overwhelming, what does he think it’s like for her when there’s four of us?

I motion with my head towards the exit and the small gift shop waiting for us there.

“Come on. I think I ought to buy you that print as a thank you for the tour.” With the smallest of hesitations, she follows me. “I understand your hesitation about climbing into a car with a bunch of alphas,” I say, staring straight ahead and trying to show this isn’t a big deal. “But we’d be pretty shit alphas if we sat back and watched you climb into a car with some stranger.”

“You’re a stranger,” she points out.

I clutch my hands to my chest. “Fuck, I’m wounded. We just spent several hours together.”

She giggles a little, a sound I find I really like, and pushes her glasses up her nose as she steps inside the gift shop. For the next half an hour, I pretend to browse the shop, when really I’m browsing her.

I watch as she examines a row of miniature temples, picking each one up carefully and cradling it in her palm like it’s a precious jewel. When she’s done, she moves on to a collection of statues, her fingers dragging along the shelf, then

reaching up onto her tiptoes to stroke her finger down the cheek of a bust. Next, something on the ground snares her attention, and she crunches down to drag it forward and look at it too.

She's captivated by everything and, damn it, I'm captivated by her.

Resting back against the wall with my arms folded over my chest I can't help imagining all the things I'd like to do to her if this shop were empty.

The other three wave to me through the window, Jake giving me the finger, before disappearing off to find a ride.

I don't care. I'm perfectly happy where I am, enjoying the view.

I saunter up to the omega. She's hovering in front of a cabinet of necklaces, each one laden with an Egyptian charm. She captures one in her hand and lets the small figure dangling from the chain rest on her fingers.

"You like them?" I ask.

"They're beautiful."

I unhook the chain and take it from her hand.

"Here, you should try it on." I undo the clasp and motion at her with my head, she creases her brow in puzzlement. "Lift your hair," I say it softly with a hint of command. Her long, chestnut locks are twisted in a knot and pinned to the back of her head, leaving her neck bare, aside from a few stray strands. The tissue-thin skin of her gland is just visible at the base of her neck. It's provocative as hell and my own gland tingles in response.

The omega lifts the messy bun and now I see the whole of her gland. The tissue-thin skin quivers and this close to her it smells heavenly. I come to stand behind her, hearing her breath hitch as I wrap my arms around her, the charm falling against her chest and nestling into her cleavage. Then I draw my arms around the back of her neck, fixing the clasp together. I let it fall against her skin, against her gland. She peers down at the

charm, her fingers caressing it, and I stand there transfixed by the place where an alpha could claim her.

I inhale her, and, shit, I'm getting hard. I step away.

"You going to have room in your suitcase?" I ask gesturing to the pile of items she's collected.

She sighs as she removes the necklace and hangs it back on the shelf. "Probably not. I wish I'd brought a second bag. It's all too beautiful. I may have to throw out my trainers to make room."

She walks over to the counter and hands over her treasures.

I stare down at the collection of items and chuckle. "I thought we agreed I'd buy you one print."

"Oh no ... I didn't mean for you to ..."

She reaches for her purse.

"Hey, I admire your gumption. I said I'd pay," I tell her, pulling out my wallet.

She frowns at me. "I can pay for myself." There's that tone again, Jake would call it snotty. But I'm not sure. It sounds more defensive to me.

I hold up my hand. Unlike Jake, I'm not going to get into an argument with this omega. There are far better things I'd like to do with her.

"OK, but I'm one to stick to my side of a bargain so I'm buying this." I take down a photo of the temple, one taken above, showing the full perspective of the place, glittering gold against the blue sky.

"Thank you," she says, when we've both paid and the shop assistant has wrapped our items in grey tissue paper.

I ask the shop assistant about a taxi and he makes a phone call, telling us a car will be with us in ten minutes. Buying us a couple of cold cans of coke, we go and wait on a small wall.

She crosses her long legs as she pulls back the tag and takes a swig of her drink, her elegant neck, elongating as she tips back her head.

“So top of the class?” I say, grinning at her.

“Most of the time,” she grins back. “Occasionally Jake nips me to that spot.”

“You like the competition?” I ask, noting the gleam in her eye.

“Urgh,” she says, seeming like she’s going to deny it. “Your friend—”

“Packmate,” I correct.

“Is a giant pain in the neck.”

My eyes automatically float back to her neck.

I flick my gaze away before she catches me looking.

“How about you?” she asks.

“How about me what?”

“Are you top of the class?”

I snort. “No, sports have always been my thing. I’ve never been that academic.”

“But you’re studying for a Masters?”

“Yep.” I study her. “Have you ever come to watch us play?”

Rugby’s huge at Crestmore. Bigger than football or any of the other sports put together. Every match sells out pulling all the townies into watch as well.

She flicks her finger against the opened tag of her can, a metallic sound ringing out. “Once.”

“Not a fan, then?” I smirk.

She squints up at me. “It was a bit much.” I frown, intrigued by that answer. “I guess you love playing it.”

I laugh. “Yep, more than anything else in the world. All the other boys wanted to be football stars. But my dad and my grandad, they were rugby fans. They had me in a pair of boots before I could walk, toddling along with a ball bigger than my head.”

“Awww,” she says. Then giggles.

“What?” I ask, shifting closer towards her on the wall.

“I can’t imagine you all small and tiny.”

“Oh yeah,” I say, perhaps flexing my biceps a little. Jake will wring my neck for flirting with this girl. But fuck it, I can’t help it. It’s that big encouraging smile of hers and her damn scent. She has me wanting to impress her, just so I can claim more of those smiles. “I was a pretty big baby too. You should see the photos. Looks like I ate all the other babies for lunch.”

She bursts out laughing, and I grin back at her, a stupid feeling of pride in my chest.

Jakey-boy only receives frowns from this girl. She’s beaming a ten watt smile my way.

“Your poor mum,” she says, swinging her legs slightly in her glee, her skin brushing ever so slightly against mine, making every nerve in my body alert. “Is she an omega?”

“Yep.”

“Evolution has got it all wrong. Asking pixies like me,” she points to herself. “To give birth to giants like you!”

“Omegas are hardier than they look,” I say, trying hard to keep the growl from my voice when she’s just planted an image of herself, belly rounded and ripe, in my head. “They can take a lot from us alphas.”

She blushes bright crimson at those words and rolls her eyes.

I chuckle, raising my palms in defence. “You brought up the topic, not me.”

“Yeah, I guess I did.” She sighs. “Just ...” She fixes me with her intelligent eyes. “Why does everything always have to be about sex between alphas and omegas?”

“Honestly,” I say and she nods. “Because the sex is so good, it’s hard for it not to be.” I keep my eyes locked on her face, fighting the urge to let my gaze swim down her body.

“Hmmm,” she says, taking another swig of her coke. I wonder what kind of sex she’s been having for that kind of response. Her voice is laced with sarcasm when she speaks again, “I suppose you’ve had a lot so you’d know.”

Maybe I have. But I haven’t had her.

Giorgie

Balancing my collection of souvenirs in my arms, I climb out of the taxi.

“Do you need a hand with all those?” Levi calls as he scoots over to the seat I’ve just vacated.

“No, I’m good,” I say, tucking them under my chin. I hesitate. “Thanks for seeing me home.”

“My pleasure,” he says in a way that has my insides fluttering.

I spin on my toes.

Today has been confusing. Very confusing. I need to lie out on my bed and try to untangle my thoughts.

I had a stupid little freak out in the trench and had our dig find snatched from our hands by the more senior researchers. Yet I feel like I’m walking on air as I cross the empty foyer and climb the stairs.

I stepped inside Rulox Temple! My mind bubbles with the carvings and pictures I saw there today, forming new ideas and connections. I’m excited to curl up on my bunk, study the sketches I made and scribble down all my ideas.

But when I push open the dormitory door, I’m pounced on by Sia, a towel wrapped around her body, her hair wet.

She grabs both my elbows as I enter the room and drags me down to sit on the edge of my bunk.

“Details now!” she shrieks, her eyes hungrily roaming my face.

“It was amazing, Sia.”

“Oh my God, Giorgie! I’m so happy for you.”

“I know! I’ve never seen anything like it!”

Sia’s eyes widen. “Was it big?”

“Huge. Far bigger than I thought it would be.”

“I always thought it would be big,” she mumbles with a sly smile.

“Yes, but the carvings—”

“Carvings?” Sia’s lip curls in disgust.

We stare at each other. “Yes, Sia, the carvings of Isis on the front of the temple.” I scowl at her. “What did you think I was talking about?”

“Jake Grantham.”

“What about him?”

“Giorgie! Did you not spend the afternoon on a sightseeing trip with Jake Grantham?”

“Well, yes. And his pack.”

“His pack?! Two days ago you couldn’t stand to be within a foot of that man. Now you’re swanning off on dates with him and his pack.”

“It wasn’t a date. They were going anyway and Jake said I could tag along.”

“But you went ... willingly. And here you are returned with an armful of gifts and a huge grin on your face.”

“From the temple, Sia. Not from Jake Grantham.”

My words catch the interest of Zoe and Maya who both look our way.

“Are you dating?” Maya asks.

“Who? Jake Grantham? NO!” I shriek, perhaps a little too loudly because Maya’s eyebrows shoot up in alarm. I cough. “No, Jake Grantham is the last man on earth I’d want to date.”

“Really?” Zoe asks, her nose wrinkled like I’m slightly deranged. “Half the university and the city wants to date him.”

“Or at least screw him,” Maya chimes in.

“Why?” I ask in genuine disbelief.

“Errr.” Zoe laughs. “Have you seen the man play rugby?”

“Have you seen him without his shirt on?”

“Once and no,” I reply, trying really hard not to think of Jake Grantham with his shirt off. “Have you?” I ask them. I wouldn’t be surprised if Jake’s plastered topless photos of himself all over the internet. Or perhaps they’ve seen the real thing. My stomach drops.

Sia grins. “Shit, Giorgie, you’ve seen the calendar, right?”

“What calendar?”

Maya starts tapping on her phone. “The rugby team did this calendar for charity at Christmas time. It’s super hot.”

She passes her phone to me and I peer down at the screen. Then shriek, dropping the thing in my lap.

“Oh my god, Giorgie.” Sia bumps her shoulder against mine. “What?”

I gulp, then pick the phone back up and squint at the photo. “I just wasn’t expecting ... *that*. He’s naked.” And by the looks of things all oiled up, the dark lighting making his skin gleam and accentuating every contour of his muscular body. A small towel hangs between his legs but a fair patch of curls is visible just above it.

“Nah,” Zoe says. “Unfortunately, you can’t see his junk.”

“Why didn’t I know about this?”

Sia shrugs. “You don’t usually want to know about Jake and his rugby team.”

“True,” I say, wanting to drag my eyes away from this photo but finding it almost impossible.

“There are more ...” Sia sings, reaching over to flick her finger across the screen.

Another image appears, this time of Levi. I gulp. He’s laid out on his back, long dark hair tumbling around his face, arms tucked behind his head, legs dangling either side of a bench, looking like he’s about to do a situp. Every muscle in his stomach is bulging. And there are a lot of muscles in his stomach.

“Holy shit,” I whisper, flicking through several more shots. One of Dylan holding a leek provocatively and laughing at the camera, and the last one of Aiden, a huge Christmas present balanced in his strong arms and protecting his modesty.

Maya coughs and waggles her hand at me, and with reluctance I hand over her phone.

“Oh, come on,” Sia says. “You knew he was hot.”

“I guess,” I mumble.

“Has he asked you out?” Maya asks, staring at the pictures herself.

“God, no!” I reply. “He hates me as much as I hate him.”

“I genuinely thought there was something going on between the two of you,” Zoe says, rubbing her wet hair with a towel.

“Nope,” I say.

“Not even today?” Sia asks, bumping my shoulder a second time.

I think about my mini-panic attack in the trench. I think about the strange spark of electricity I felt when he held my hand. I think about how he told everyone that we both made that find.

“Nothing at all,” I answer and then hurry into the shower before she can quiz me anymore.

A cold shower is certainly in order after those photos. I need to dampen any raging ideas before they take hold. Ideas like what it would feel like to run my hand down Jake's oiled chest. What it would taste like to run my tongue over Levi's abs. And what the hell lies behind that Christmas present?

Just because I'm not interested in getting screwed over by an alpha, doesn't mean I'm some born-again virgin. I'm still an omega after all with desires and needs. I've just found safer ways of satisfying those needs since ...

Safe, respectable beta and omega men who are slightly terrified of my brother and his pack. Safe is what I want. Definitely not raging desires and unruly feelings. That only leads to trouble.

I fling my head back and let cold water flow over my face. Those photos have stirred something inside me. Or maybe it was being around alphas all day. Between my legs a pulse begins to throb.

Maybe if I were to give into it, then these desires would vanish as quickly as they've appeared.

The image of Jake Grantham keeps barging its way into my mind, tempting me with that stupid towel. The electricity from earlier simmers at my fingertips and my gland tingles. This is not good. Not good at all. I shouldn't be allowing myself to get all hot and bothered. I certainly shouldn't be considering relieving the aching need between my thighs.

Relieving the ache while thinking of Jake.

I bite my lip.

If I indulge ... for a moment ... just this once ...

I hook the shower head from the wall and allow the jet of water to race between my legs. The temperature is cool, making me gasp. I close my eyes, forbidden images of those alphas, of what they could do to me, taking over my mind.

For once I give in and let them. As the water massages everything sensitive between my legs and the pressure builds, I give way to it.

Once, can't hurt, can it? Indulging in a teeny weeny fantasy – of tongues, hands and teeth, exploring my body, of deep groans and blunt growls, of strong bodies and firm grips. Of being held down, of being pleased, of being rutted. It isn't dangerous.

The idea of a pack may seem appealing but a pack has always seemed way out of my league. Something I could never handle. I'm not like Connie. Assertive. I'm damaged.

So what's been the point of entertaining these ideas? Why allow myself to fall into this fantasy?

Except now I can't resist.

But now I do.

I bite my lip harder, swallowing down my moans as I come, body jerking in the water and the showerhead nearly tumbling from my grasp.

When I step out of the cubicle and peer at myself in the mirror, my cheeks are pink and my eyes hooded in lust. I hope no one will notice.



A table has been set up in the yard behind the hotel, lanterns hanging on the trees and candles flickering on the ground now the hot sun has finally sunk away. I find myself somehow sitting at the end of the table, with who right beside me?

Yep, Jake Grantham.

I'm surprised to see him here this evening. I thought he would have dumped this communal dinner in favour of hanging out with his pack. But here he is dressed in light coloured chinos and a blue shirt that makes the colour in his eyes even more vibrant. He's left the top few buttons undone flashing a stretch of bare chest, and that damned photo keeps popping straight back into my mind.

That photo and what I'd done in the shower.

I cross my legs and ignore him as best I can.

I can hardly look him in the eye knowing I've seen that photo. I'm certain he must know I've seen it by my burning cheeks. Which is a ridiculous notion because that photo has been published for the last six months or more.

Luckily, he's not talking to me, instead recounting the story of his find to the two men sitting the other side of him.

How I ended up sitting next to him, I'm not entirely sure?

We all wandered to the table together as a group after some very weak cocktails in the hotel foyer. I grabbed a seat next to Sia, sinking into my chair before I realised Jake was doing the same beside me.

We'd both clocked our mistake at the same time and then it was too late to move.

Sia is talking about an archeologist she got talking to today at the dig. But I'm not listening. All my attention is homed in on Jake's words beside me.

"Congratulations again, man," the beta with the short brown hair says next to him. His name is Peter.

"Yeah, but it's not like we're going to get any of the credit for it. It was just luck who ended up in which trench." I'm surprised to hear him being so modest about the find. "And I'm not sure what it means for tomorrow, I don't want to be sitting around on my arse all day. That's not why I came out here."

"What was the artefact like?" Peter asks.

"It looked like some kind of decorated box. It was covered in carvings and artwork. They looked like people."

"Omegas," I blurt out. He swings his head around and those murky blue eyes land firmly on me. Once again it seems to whip the breath from my lungs, leaving me dumbfounded by this strange reaction. But hadn't those same stupid eyes featured heavily in my little shower fantasy? "I think they were omegas."

“What makes you think that?” he asks, his attention now focussed on me.

“They were similar, don’t you think, to some of the carvings we saw in the inner sanctum of the Rulox temple.”

He thinks about this, nodding. “Yeah, they were a bit. But how do you know they were omegas?”

“There are some new theories that the inner sanctum of Rulox was reserved only for omegas. Omegas in heat. And that the hieroglyphic for fertility is the one used for omegas as well.”

Peter laughs behind Jake. “But omegas were no better than slaves in ancient Egypt. There’s no way they would’ve been allowed inside the most sacred part of the temple.”

Jake scrapes his chair around to face me more, waving Peter off with his hand. “That’s such bollocks. A society doesn’t give a Goddess as important as Isis to a section of its people that it abhors.”

“Exactly!” I say, holding his gaze.

“And the Pharaohs were alphas. Omegas would have been treasured to the most important people in the kingdom.”

Is he right? My brother and his pack treasure their omega. They treat her like the most precious thing on earth.

Other alphas? That one alpha? He treated me like dirt.

I’ve always believed Jake Grantham would be the same.

But when he speaks like that, I can almost believe he means it.

“It’s a shame we can’t excavate that patch of land to the west of the main path,” I say.

“What do you mean?”

He’s leaning closer to me now, and I receive the full force of his scent as well as the warmth of his body.

I push away my empty plate, and rest my forefinger on the table. “The Rulox temple is situated to the west of the Rah

temple.” I move my water glass into place, representing one temple, and then Jake’s to one side, representing the other, “If the Rah temple was built for the alphas as they suspect, I think there would’ve been a link with the Rulox temple. A connection between the two. I believe the alphas would have visited the Rulox temple in some kind of fertility ritual.”

“When the omegas were in heat?” Jake traces his finger between the glasses and my heart beats a little faster.

“Probably. Did you notice that grand door to the east of the Rulox temple?” I point to the side of my glass. “It’s so much larger than the others and far more decorated. Yet no one has ever been able to properly explain why.”

“Here?” he asks, tapping the place I pointed to.

“Yes.”

“Hmmm.” He rests back in his chair. “You could be right.”

“Of course, I’m right,” I tell him, rolling my eyes.

“You’re not always right, you know.”

I resist the urge to roll my eyes harder. “Most of the time I am though, aren’t I?”

He actually chuckles. “For once,” he emphasises. “You may be. This theory is good, Giorgie.”

I smile and lean back in my chair. “Not that it matters.”

“Why not?”

“They’ll never let us excavate it.”

“They might.”

I shake my head.

“Come on,” he says, scraping back his chair and, taking my hand in his, tugging me to my feet. I smother a gasp as the touch of his skin against mine has that electricity dancing through my body. “We might as well ask.”

He pulls me along behind him, halting by the professor’s chair.

“Professor Weaver?” he interrupts, and she peers up from her wine glass.

“Mister Grantham?”

“I assume we won’t be returning to our trench tomorrow.”

She smiles at us with sympathy. “I’m afraid not. They’re still working on removing that artefact from the ground. But don’t worry, we’ll find you both something useful to do.”

Her gaze rakes over the two of us landing on our clasped hands. I wrestle mine from Jake’s grip.

“We were hoping we might be able to excavate the earth in another part of the site—”

“Oh I don’t know about that.”

“See, Giorgie has a theory about a possible side entrance to the temple towards the West and—”

The professor stares at me over the rim of her glasses. Once again I’m amazed Jake has handed the credit for this idea to me, instead of trying to pinch it. Or perhaps he actually thinks it’s a ridiculous theory and is hoping to show me up.

“And what makes you think that, Miss Martinelli?”

I run through my reasoning, Jake nodding with enthusiasm beside me and spurring me onwards despite the professor’s blank expression.

When I’m done, she spins her glass around in her fingers.

“It seems unlikely to me. The position of omega’s in Ancient Egyptian society is well documented.” She thinks some more. “But I suppose there is no harm in testing your theory. Let me speak with the site director tomorrow morning. Personally I don’t see any harm in you digging there. I suspect it will be a waste of time but—”

“It won’t be,” Jake insists. “I think Giorgie is right about this.”

“Do you?” Professor Weaver says with a slight twitch of her lips. “I had a feeling pairing up my two best students

would pay off. You can come with me to make your case tomorrow.”

“Thank you, professor,” I say, looking up to beam at Jake when the professor turns back to her conversation. “Thank you too,” I whisper as we step away from the table.

“No need to thank me,” he says, still staring into my eyes. His are darker, the blue a midnight colour like the sky.

The chatter of dinner has died away. The conversations are quieter, several people drifting away from the table, small groups gather together under the boughs of the spindly trees.

A lantern floats above our heads, casting us both in flickering light.

“I probably wouldn’t have had the guts to ask her,” I admit.

“I thought it best to grab her now, when she’d had a few drinks and was likely to be in a good mood.”

His gaze has fallen to my mouth and my heart seems to leap around sporadically in my chest. I curl a lock of my hair behind my ear, my hand shaking ever so slightly. His scent grows stronger, more delicious, in my mouth.

“Good thinking,” I croak.

A spoon clangs against a glass behind us and the noise rings out through the night like a muted bell.

“You know you’re not that bad, when you aren’t being an arsehole,” I whisper, noticing how soft his lips look.

“Yeah, neither are you.”

Our bodies are a foot apart, yet I can feel that electricity crackling in the air. Tingling against my skin.

The rich taste of his coffee scent races across my tongue.

“Hmmm,” he says, drifting towards me, my body seeming to do the same, a warmth spreading through my belly.

The candle stutters above us, and his image flashes in and out of darkness.

I part my lips.

I close my eyes.

He's so close now. So warm. So intoxicating.

"Giorgie?"

I jump straight out of my skin. My eyelids leap open.

"Huh?" I ask, in a daze.

Jake stands right in front of me, appearing just as dazed, his arm caught in midair as if he was about to reach for me.

The candle extinguishes with a hiss, plunging him into darkness.

What the—

"Giorgie, there you are," Carl says, hooking his arm through mine and pulling me away. "Sia and I were looking for you. Where did you go?"

"To talk to Professor Weaver about tomorrow," I tell my friend.

Carl hooks his arm around my neck, leaning into me as we walk away. "I thought you needed rescuing."

I glance over my shoulder at the alpha lurking in the shadow as Carl leads me away.

Was I just about to kiss Jake Grantham?

Jake

I watch her go, standing there like an idiot. Dazed and probably half-deranged.

What the fuck is going on?

If her friend hadn't whisked her away, I'm pretty certain she'd be wrapped in my arms right now, my mouth ravishing hers.

I groan quietly.

Shit!

It's the way she fucking floors me with her thinking. With her ideas. With her bloody enthusiasm. She wraps you up in it, pulls you along and before you know it you're nearly kissing her.

It's also that fucking red dress. A light, flowy thing, tied around her neck in a bow and skimming over each and every one of her delicious curves. I want to reach out, tug that goddamn knot, and watch the whole thing sliver away to the floor.

I knew the omega was beautiful, but I've never seen her without those cute glasses of hers. Never seen her dressed in a dress like that. Something I'm sure was designed purely to snare an alpha like me.

Was that her plan? Did she hope to snare me?

Surely not. She hates me. Doesn't she?

I let out a huff of air. The car's not coming to collect me and take me back to the villa for another hour. I'm going to have to socialise. I can't hang about here in the dark looking like a would-be flasher all evening.

I wonder why I came at all. I wonder why I ended up sitting right next to the girl I do my best to avoid. I wonder why the hell I very nearly kissed her.

Because I wanted to.

I slouch back to the table and drop into a chair next to a guy called Peter. A beta I am not blind to have noticed has been checking Giorgie out all evening. Like just about every other man at this dinner. Including her friend. The one with the scraggly hair and the equally scraggly tuft on his chin. The dude needs to shave. And keep his hands to himself. I see the way his hand lingers on the skin of her bare back. At the way he stands a little too close.

I bet he's one of those creeps who pretends he's a girl's friend in the hope of worming his way inside her underwear.

My hands ball into fists and I kick at the earth under the table.

"What do you think, Jake?" Peter asks.

I drag my gaze away from Giorgie and find Peter and the other two guys he's talking to and gaping at me. Two out of these three dudes have borrowed my lecture notes or asked for my help with assignments. Sucker that I am, I've helped them out. Another of my actions Giorgie would probably disapprove of. She disapproves of everything I do.

Would she have disapproved if I'd kissed her? Everything had told me she wanted to be kissed. But did I dream it? Was I caught up in the moment?

She looked so fucking beautiful. Her face flushed with excitement, her eyes shining with admiration.

Peter glances in Giorgie's direction.

“Are you two dating?” he asks me.

I snort.

“She’s fucking hot,” the skinny one called Tobias says. “I wouldn’t mind...” He arches his eyebrow with a knowing smile.

“You think that’s any way to talk about a woman in your course,” I snarl, knowing I’m being fucking hypocritical and not giving a shit. For some reason, I don’t mind my packmates talking about her like that, but these dudes? No way.

“You are dating, then?” Peter asks, looking confused.

“No, we’re not fucking dating. Where have you been the last year, man? We can’t stand each other.”

“Didn’t seem that way earlier,” Peter mumbles.

“You betas,” I shake my head. “It’s not all about shagging between alphas and omegas, you know.”

“Isn’t it? I thought all you alphas had to do was click your fingers and the pretty little omegas would open their legs for you.” The skinny one laughs at his own joke and I have to use all my self control not to smash my fist into his jaw. I lean forward, getting right up close in his face and he stops laughing immediately.

“Let me catch you talking disrespectfully like that again, dickhead, and I’ll be breaking both your legs.”

The man pales, mumbling some pathetic apology, and I push my chair back and march away, not sure where I’m going until I walk straight into the path of the omega in question.

Seriously, how the hell does she do that?

“Oh sorry,” she says, her cheeks blazing crimson.

“No, it was my fault,” I say. My shoulders heave up and down and my jaw is so tense it might snap.

She stares into my face with a look of dismay. “What’s wrong?” she gasps, shrinking away from me.

And the tension, the anger snaps away. I feel ashamed, my body sagging. “Dudes talking shit. It got up my nose.”

“What shit?” she asks, peering behind me.

“It doesn’t matter.” I don’t want her to know about the crap men say about omegas. For some reason, I don’t want to hurt her feelings. She probably likes those guys. She probably considers them friends.

She nods, hugging her hands around her middle and we both stand there in silence. I feel that need to take her in my arms again and decide I’d better avert that course of action before it’s too late.

This girl is my competition. The one thing standing between me and my place on Professor’s Weaver’s research team. My opportunity to undertake the research I want to. To prove my ideas and theories. To make a name for myself. To prove to my parents I’m worthy of their attention.

I’d do well to remember that and get my head back in the game. Stop being distracted by her intoxicating scent, and the softness of her lips, and the way her bare shoulders rise and fall or her hair rustles against her collar bone...

And ... shit shit shit!

I need to stop being such a giant dickwad. Stop being so goddamn nice. Treat her like the opposition. Be ruthless.

I shove my hands into my pocket.

That’s going to be easier said than done. Especially when she peers up at me through her eyelashes.

“I’ve got to go,” I lie. “Car’s waiting.”

She smiles at me. All wide and genuine. She’s had two glasses of wine. That’s all it is probably. She wouldn’t usually be smiling at me like that otherwise.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, then.” She curls her hair behind her ear, wrist brushing against the slender column of her neck. I fucking gulp. “Thank you again for sweet talking Professor Weaver.”

“It was nothing,” I mumble, trying my best to ignore the warm sensation blossoming in my chest at her thanks. I stride away quickly before I give it too much thought, before I give in to the temptation to reach out and kiss her again.

Kissing her is a bad idea. Then she’ll meld herself well and truly under my skin and that ruthlessness I need to secure my spot will disappear in a puff of smoke.

You can’t kiss a fucking girl, then be her cold-hearted opponent the next moment. At least I can’t. That’s not how I operate. The alpha instincts to care, to protect, to defend, kick in and I’m well and truly doomed.

I’m not handing this research place to her on a plate. I’ve worked hard. It’s been no easy feat juggling a Masters degree and my position on the rugby team. Most of the men don’t give a shit about their studies. I’m competing against them for my place. I have to work twice as hard for mine.

I storm through the hotel lobby and out to the front of the hotel. It’s silent here and empty. No one else about. I lean against the wall and breathe. Then I stab at my phone, instructing the driver to get here as fast as he can. Ten minutes later, he’s swinging into the hotel drive and I don’t waste a minute ducking inside the vehicle and speeding the hell away.

I’m thankful to find my packmates still up when I arrive at the villa.

They’re gathered around the pool nursing glasses of whisky. I pour myself a large measure and knock it back before slumping into a chair next to Aiden.

All three of them wait for me to speak and when I don’t, Aiden kicks my foot. “Good evening, then?” he asks.

I open my mouth to speak, then shake my head and swipe the whisky bottle from the table, chugging two long gulps straight from the neck.

“That bad, huh?” Levi says.

“Probably worse,” I mutter, flinging back my head and staring up at the sky. Stars litter the black blanket in such volume they merge into one long smudge of white light,

streaking across the heavens. On any other night I'd be lost for hours looking up at that sky. Tonight I'm too lost inside my own head, in the contradictory emotions crashing through my body.

"Are you going to tell us about it?" Aiden prods. "You'll probably feel better if you do."

I squeeze the bridge of my nose. "I feel like I'm losing my mind."

"Probably," Levi jokes.

I give him the finger for the second time today. If it wasn't for the crazy sense of jealousy he'd stirred in me as he was riding off in that taxi with Giorgie this afternoon, I would never have bothered turning up for that dinner.

Jealous? I haven't felt jealous for a long time. It was an emotion that sat raging in my chest when the wounds of my parents finding their new lives were fresh. But those wounds are old now and the jealousy faded long ago.

I've never felt jealous towards one of my packmates. Not when they've been picked for the team and I've been left on the bench. Not when they've scored the winning try. Not ever over a girl.

But the idea that she could like him, while hating me, had driven me half mad. Had had me dashing to that dinner faster than a cheetah on steroids.

Things seem to have shifted between us in the last few days. Our animosity has cooled, reformed into something resembling respect. I needed to know if I'd imagined it all. If it was real.

"I very nearly kissed Giorgie Martinelli."

There's silence for a moment, and I drag my gaze down from the sky to peer at my friends. They are all examining me with keen interest.

"Nearly?" Levi asks.

"Nearly," I repeat.

Silence again.

“Oh, come on, mate!” Levi tosses a balled up napkin my way. “How can you nearly kiss a girl? What the hell actually happened?”

I duck the missile and rub at my chin. “I don’t know. She was looking up at me with big wide eyes, giving me that damn kiss me look.”

“You sure you interpreted that right?”

“Fuck knows,” I mutter. “I went in for the lean and then ...”

“And then ...” Dylan says.

“And then ...”

“Shit, Jake, then what?” Aiden snaps.

“Some dude interrupted us and dragged her away. That dude who is always hanging out with her and I suspect has his eye on her.”

“Probably. She’s fucking hot, Jake.”

I slump back in my chair. “You should’ve seen her tonight. Every guy there had his tongue hanging out. I wanted to throttle the lot of them.”

The others exchange looks. “So what? You’re feeling sexually frustrated or something?” Dylan asks.

“He’s always felt sexually frustrated when it comes to Georgie Martinelli.” Levi chuckles, shaking his head. “That’s not new.”

“Never got so goddamn close to kissing the wench before though, have I?” I mutter, wondering if that’s what this is. Just sexual frustration. The very real need to rut the woman senseless.

I look away towards the shimmering swimming pool. A dragonfly hovers above its surface, skating from one spot to another.

“Are you developing feelings for this girl?” Aiden asks me, the joking tone gone from his voice, replaced with something more serious. “Because I always thought it was just a sexual attraction thing.”

“I don’t know,” I say, which is the truth. “But I can’t afford to. She’s the only thing standing between me and my dream. I can’t get soft now.”

Aiden slaps me on the shoulder. “Come on, man. You got this. You made it this far. You can see it to the end. Keep your shit together. Don’t be swayed by that pretty smile and that fuck-me scent. That spot is yours.”

“Yeah,” I say without enthusiasm, knocking back the rest of the whisky. Easy for Aiden to say. I’d like to see him resist an omega like that, all wrapped up in a present of a dress, her body so close I could feel the heat of her damn skin. Could practically taste her.

“Want us to come along tomorrow for moral support?” Dylan offers.

“I can distract her again if you like?” Levi offers.

I glare at him. Poking at this crazy-arsed jealousy of mine would not be helpful. Then again, with them there, their scents diluting hers, all my attention won’t be zoned-in completely on her.

I point a finger at Levi. “You can come if you promise to behave.”

Levi winks at me. “Nah, I can’t come anyway, mate. You know that. Got my physio to run through tomorrow morning.”

I nod, more relieved than I’d admit, and turn to the others.

“We’ll be there,” Aiden tells me. He’s my wingman. He’s always been there when I’ve needed him.

Dylan nods too. “Got nothing better to do.”

“Except sleep,” I tell him. “It’s an early start.”

“Hey, I wanna see this temple – the one that’s given all you nerds such boners.”

“Thanks,” I say, the combination of their reassurance and the warm whisky in my belly calming me. I lumber to my feet, scrubbing my hand through my hair. “I’m going to hit the sack then. I want my head in the game for tomorrow.”

I have a feeling about tomorrow. That it is going to be life changing. An opportunity not to be missed.

It also means spending several more hours in her company. And that scares the shit out of me.

Giorgie

I watch Jake Grantham practically sprint away from me with an odd sort of disappointment residing in my chest. One minute he's almost, very nearly, kissing me and the next he can't stand to be near me.

I touch my fingers to my lips.

At least I think he was going to kiss me. Something in his eyes, the way his gaze lingered on my mouth, the manner in which he leaned towards me.

But perhaps it was the glasses of wine, the floral fragrance in the air, the flickering candle light in the darkness.

Maybe the fantasy in the shower has confused me.

Maybe I imagined it.

Which would be a good thing. I certainly do not need to be kissing Jake Grantham. Or thinking about that calendar photo of him. Or his three hot packmates.

Tomorrow is a big day. A huge day. If my hunch is right and we actually find something of interest, then this could be the difference that clinches that place on Professor's Weaver's team for me. I need to be professional. I don't need to be worrying about some alpha and his intentions and his wandering hands. His electric, skin-tingling hands.

What is wrong with me?

It must be the heat as well as those glasses of wine. I march to the table and pour myself some water, avoiding several men trying to catch my eye.

I'm not interested in hooking up.

It has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that Jake has now left. Nothing to do with the fact he won't be here to see me draped over some other guy. Nothing to do with the fact that I can't get his stupid picture out of my head, or his scent from my nose. Or stop thinking about the way his eyes seemed to heat locked on to my mouth. Or the way he'd listened to my ideas. Praised my theory. Convinced the professor to let us test my hypothesis.

I slam the water glass down on the table and walk back towards Sia. I'm definitely a little wobbly on my feet. I didn't drink that much, did I?

I swing my arm around Sia's neck and plant a big sloppy kiss on her cheek. She hooks her own arms around my waist, helping to steady me.

"OK, there, pal?" she asks me.

"Absolutely." I grin. I am *absolutely* fine and not obsessing at all about why Jake nearly kissed me and then didn't. Not just didn't, but ran away. I am not mulling over how good his warm body felt against mine when he helped me down into the trench or wondering why he was happy to claim the find as ours and not his.

"Are you drunk?" Sia asks.

I hold my hand up and squint towards a gap between my finger and thumb.

"Maybe just a teeny, weeny bit."

"You are such a lightweight. How much did you drink? Like two glasses?"

"Exactly," I say, trying to focus on her face as it sways from side to side.

“Let’s get you up to bed.”

“I’ll walk you up if you want?” Carl says. “I was heading up to bed myself.”

I yawn and rest my head on Sia’s shoulder.

“I think I’d better do it,” Sia tells him. “I should get to bed as well. We don’t want to oversleep.”

I let Sia guide me into the hotel and up the staircase.

“He’s really very frustrating,” I murmur as she fiddles with the key in the lock.

“Jake, again?” she asks, her lips twitching into a smile.

“I really don’t understand the man. It’s infuriating.”

“And here was I, thinking you two were getting on so well tonight.”

“Too well,” I mutter under my breath.

Sia pushes the door, eyeing me with suspicion as I walk through. Immediately, I shed my hot sticky dress and climb on top of the bed, my eyes growing heavy as soon as my cheek hits the pillow.

As my eyelids fall shut I remember. My suppressant. My pill. I need to take it. But it’s already too late, I’m drifting into sleep.



It’s not an alarm that wakes me the next morning. Or one of the other girls in the room. It’s the sound of a fist hammering on the door. Followed by the professor’s angry voice.

“Ladies, are you joining us this morning?”

“Shit!” Sia shrieks, leaping down from the bunk and sprinting to the door. I sit bolt upright and hit my head on the bunk above me. How did we miss our alarm?! I swear I set it.

Although last night is a little hazy. Still is, to be perfectly honest. And now I probably have a head injury too. Great.

“Yes, professor, we’ll be right there. Sorry.”

“Oh my God,” I mumble as I scrabble out of my bed, and toss clothes from my bag trying to find a shirt to wear. “This is so unprofessional. The professor isn’t going to want me within a mile of her team.”

“You’ve never missed a lecture or a class in your life. You’ve never even handed in an assignment late. She isn’t going to change her opinion on you just because we’re late.”

“I don’t know,” I say, chewing my lip as I dash to the bathroom. There’s no time for a shower, so I wash in the sink as best I can, swiping yesterday’s mascara from around my eyes. I pull on my clothes, lather some deodorant under my arms and jam my feet into my boots. This time I remember my pills, swiping them out of my washbag. I examine the package.

Two pills? Oh my goodness. *Two* pills missed!

I’ve missed one in the past but never two in a row like this. I swipe at my brow, wondering if I should take a double dose or something to make up for it. I do not want to go into heat. But taking a double dose doesn’t seem very sensible either. I have no idea what it could do to my body. Best I take one tablet as normal and hope it resets everything. I’m pretty sure it will be fine.

I crack the silver foil with my thumb nail and push the pill through the break, pinching it between my two fingers.

“Come on, Giorgie!” Sia calls from the doorway. I shove the pill into my pocket and chase her out into the hallway. There’s no time to even tie my laces as I race down the stairs in the wake of Sia and climb onto the coach. Everybody else is already there waiting, some looking amused, others pissed off. Professor Weaver is definitely in the latter camp.

“Nice of you to join us, ladies,” she comments as we skulk past her to claim our seats. At least Jake isn’t here to see my shame this morning. He is obviously heading straight to the site from his villa. Probably to get a head start on me. I wonder

if all that niceness yesterday was one big ruse and today he will screw me over. Try to claim the idea of this new trench location as his own.

That's what some alphas do. Pretend they like you. Pretend to be kind, and charming. Pretend they'll take care of you. And then they screw you over. Is Jake one of them? I'm not sure anymore.

"Are you alright?" Sia asks, tucking her shirt into her harem pants as I plonk down into the seat next to her.

"Fine," I say chirpily. Jamming my hand into the pocket of my khaki trousers, I hunt about for the pill. At first, I can't find the wretched thing, sweat pooling at the nape of my neck in panic. I scissor my fingers backward and forward, knowing it must be there somewhere. Then finally, with a sigh of relief, I locate the little round disc lodged right in the corner. I hook it out and unscrew the cap from my water bottle with my palm, I tip some water into my mouth, lifting the pill to my lips. At that moment, the coach jerks to a halt, and I'm flung forward in my seat.

The pill slips from my fingers tumbling towards the floor. I gasp in horror, swiping my hand to try to catch it. It falls right through my fingers, bouncing once, twice on the coach floor before rolling away.

I yelp, swinging into the gangway, but it's too late. I've lost sight of the tiny thing under all the pairs of feet, rucksacks and seats.

Why do they make the things so small!!

I flop back against the seat, flinging my head against the cushion and repress a loud screech.

It seems fate is determined to keep me from taking these stupid pills.

"What?" Sia asks, now busy braiding her hair, an elastic caught between her teeth.

"I just lost my pill."

“Your contraceptive pill?” Her eyebrows wiggle. “I thought this was a business-only trip. I strictly remember you saying when I listed all the guys coming on the trip, that you weren’t interested in hooking up with—”

“I know what I said,” I say through gritted teeth. “It was a suppressant pill, not contraception.”

“Oh,” Sia says. This stuff always makes her uncomfortable, no matter how hard she tries to hide it. It makes all betas uncomfortable. They get all squeamish at the mention of heats, and as for knotting ... I once brought it up in a conversation with Sia, Zoe and Maya and all three of them looked like they might vomit. “Is it a problem?” Sia asks me.

No, it’s not going to be a problem. Because I won’t let it be. Confusing alphas. Missed alarm clocks. Lost suppressant pills. Nothing is going to stop me today.

Apart from the chief archeologist on this dig.



Professor Weaver spends 30 minutes in his tent arguing with him before he will even deem to see Jake and me.

And then it’s with obvious reluctance and scepticism. As well as a healthy dose of sexism. The older man addresses all his questions at Jake, barely throwing a glance my way. Jake obviously isn’t feeling as generous today, because he’s quite happy to answer despite this being my idea.

After five minutes of this, my patience is wearing thin.

“And what gives you the impression that such a temple as this would possess another entrance?”

I bet Professor Weaver has already gone through these details with him but he wants to hear it from us. Jake opens his mouth to answer. This time I beat him to it.

“The temple at Rulox has a grand entrance on its eastern wall that would line up almost perfectly with an entrance on the west wall of this temple. I think it would’ve been an entrance reserved specifically for omegas.”

The older man sniffs. “Highly unlikely omegas would have been permitted entrance to such a temple,” he says.

Jake bristles beside me. I ignore them both.

“I’d have to disagree with you there. New theories suggest it was a much more egalitarian society – at least between the various designations – than what came after. Alphas respected omegas back then,” I say with a hard stare at the professor.

He’s one of those betas who fancies himself an alpha. He probably believes he should have been born one. I meet his stare. It’s easier with a beta. Going eyeball to eyeball with an alpha when you’re an omega is almost impossible. A skill that requires practice and determination. Luckily, I have an older brother who I’ve spent plenty of time glaring at over the years.

Eventually, the man snorts a little. “I’m not sure I agree with that new theory. Omegas have always been at the bottom rung of the social ladder, throughout history and across cultures.”

Beside me, Jake’s scent spikes, but I ignore him, about to tell this stuck up academic exactly what I think of that opinion. This time Jake beats *me* to it.

“Depends on whose perspective you are viewing things from. To alphas, omegas have always been prized above all else. They aren’t even on the ladder, they’re too far high above it!”

“Where on Earth did you read that idea?”

“I didn’t *read* it. I’m an alpha. I live with a pack of alphas. I feel it in my very soul.”

I gape at Jake in amazement. Did I really hear those words right? I know he said something similar last night. But now I’m beginning to suspect he really believes it.

His jaw is tight and the older man is experiencing what it’s like to meet one of those fearsome alpha’s stares. He’s obviously not as well practised as I am because I see the man gulp, a bead of sweat pearling on his bald scalp.

“Yes, well,” he turns to me with a pat smile. “I think we can spare you a digger to break the ground on the trench.”

“Thank you,” I say, keen to keep him on side.

“You two will be responsible for working it though. And if you find anything—”

“We’ll come straight to you,” I say with what I hope is a winning smile. I motion with my head towards Jake, thinking we’d do best to leave asap, before the chief archeologist can change his mind, and before Jake takes a swipe at him.

Although, why do I care? If the guy lost his temper for real, then that would be the end of his career and a clear path to that coveted research spot.

“Jake?” I nudge, when he doesn’t move. I don’t want him to lose his temper on my account, though, and the funny feeling is I think he is angry on my behalf. Maybe that is a silly idea. He is probably upset on behalf of alphas and omegas generally. The prejudice we endure can be irritating to say the least. Either way, I can’t seem to let him blow this, even if it would help me out.

Sia is right. I’m too nice for my own good sometimes. Well, there are worse things to be.

I rest my palm gently on Jake’s elbow and his gaze flicks to mine, the anger seeming to drain away. “Let’s go get started,” I say with a grin.

His gaze falls to my mouth and that memory of last night floods my mind, with it a warm buzz through my body. I drop my hand away and hurry to the door.

Why is everything so complicated when it comes to this alpha?

Aiden

The four of us – me, Jake, Dylan and Giorgie – huddle in a speck of shade watching as the teeth of a digger rake through the pale earth.

“You really think you’ll find something here?” Dylan asks. We’re some distance from the top of the temple searing through the sand dunes, or the other archeologists at this site beavering away in their trenches. It turns out, despite Giorgie’s obvious annoyance when she first realised that we were tagging along today, we’ve proven quite useful, helping Jake and Giorgie to measure out exactly where they think the digger should work. They haven’t been assigned anyone else to help them and it definitely required more than two pairs of hands. Especially when those two pairs of hands belong to an alpha and omega who can barely make eye contact today.

It’s almost fucking comical. You’d think by the way they are acting they’d done something incredibly sordid with each other last night, not simply nearly kissed each other.

That’s if Jake’s being completely upfront with us. But I think he is. It’s usually pretty obvious when an alpha and omega have been up to that kind of shit, they absolutely reek of one another.

The omega just reeks of herself. That sweet juicy scent that reminds me of watermelons.

Shit, I love watermelon. I can devour the things, my fingers all sticky and my face all wet. Reminds me of eating pussy. And eating pussy is one of my favourite pastimes.

My eyes roam over to the omega. She sits cross legged, leaning slightly forward to secure a better look at the digger's work.

The woman is fucking cruel. I swear her scent is even stronger today. Jake is right. It wouldn't hurt to use some goddamn blockers.

I peer at Jake and surprise, surprise, his eyes have also wandered to her.

All that talk about concentrating on the job at hand and I'm not sure he can. But I know how much he wants that place on the professor's team. Our plan for the next few years is dependent on it. Levi has a trial with the Studworth Rugby team in a month and as long as he's fit, they'll snap him up. Jake will secure his place on the research team. I will find a job in the city, and Dylan will set up his business. Our pack will be secure and settled in Studworth for the next few years.

Just as long as Jake doesn't blow it now. In that, he's going to need our help.

I meet Dylan's eye and raise an eyebrow, jerking my head slightly in Jake's direction.

Dylan nods slowly, in the way he does when he's thinking. He scrapes his hand over his mop of curly dark hair, then jumps to his feet.

"This is going to take a while, right?" he asks Jake, who drags his gaze from the omega.

"Err ... yeah, an hour probably."

"How about a tour then?" He gives Jake a hard look which tells him this suggestion is not for fun, but for his own good.

Jake glances anxiously at Giorgie. I know what he's thinking. He doesn't want to leave her out here on her own. I feel exactly the same way. It's isolated in this part of the site

and when the omega's scent is this vivid, it activates all those ridiculous alpha instincts.

"I think I'll stay here," I say pointedly. "It's too hot for a tour.

Giorgie's gaze flutters between the three of us. "Is it me or is it even hotter today?" she fans her hand in front of her face.

"Alright," Jake says to Dylan. "I'll show you around." He seems almost a little relieved as if an excuse to remove himself from the omega's presence is exactly what he needs.

I'm beginning to understand why he's been bitching about this situation for so long. The plane ride was tortuous. I can't imagine having to sit in class day in, day out with an omega who smells this good. Damn.

My two packmates trudge off towards the main temple site, leaving me with her and the digger.

She fidgets on the hard ground beside me, rolling her shoulders, fanning her face and scratching at her neck.

"Did the mosquitos get you last night?" I ask her, although to be honest I haven't seen any since we arrived.

"I guess," she mutters, fiddling with her glasses.

I stretch my legs out in front of me, leaning back on my elbows. The woman continues to fidget.

"You keen to get started?"

"Huh?" she says.

"On this dig, or whatever the correct phrase is?"

"Uh huh," she says.

I regard her. She doesn't seem pissed off today, more ... distracted. I wonder if it's to do with the work going on or whatever the hell is going on with her and Jake.

I decide to do some digging of my own. It may piss Jake off but someone's got to take a grip of this messed up situation. To understand what the omega is actually thinking. Jake's always been convinced she's toying with him, trying to

throw him off his game. It's the way some of the opposing teams play things. Taunting and bad-mouthing us. Trying their best to get a rise out of us, hoping we'll lose our concentration and fuck up.

I don't think Giorgie's like that. I think there's something more going on.

"So you and Jake are friends now or something?"

She turns her head to look at me, swiping at her damp brow. Her eyes are wide with surprise. "We're partners ... I mean, Professor Weaver paired us up ... for this dig. We're not ... We're..."

Clear as day.

She gulps. The little wispy pieces of hair around her forehead look even damper.

"I think he'd like to be friends," I say, keeping my eyes locked on the digger as the driver swings the arm around and dumps more earth on an already growing pile. "This rivalry thing you two have going on is sort of ridiculous."

Her tone is a little tighter when she speaks again, "Is it ridiculous that we both want a spot on Professor Weaver's research team? She's renowned in her field. There isn't anyone else *I'd* want to work for. Plus she's at Crestmore which means I get to stay in Studworth where all my friends and family are."

It's hard to argue with all that. It's what Jake wants too.

"You can compete without getting right up each other's noses."

"He said that?" she asks, sounding perhaps, maybe, just a little ... hurt?

Shit!

"No." She frowns at me. "Not in so many words. Are you saying he doesn't irritate you?"

Her face flushes a pink and she snaps her eyes away from me. "No, he irritates me."

“Why?” I ask, wondering if I’m finally going to get to the bottom of all this, and also intrigued by that colour sweeping across her skin.

“I told you,” she picks up her water bottle and throws back her head to take a long gulp, the action elongating her slim neck. “He’s my academic rival. Tell me.” She snaps the lip back on the bottle and drops it to the ground. “Are you all pally with players from other rugby teams? I mean, your opposition?”

“Hell, no.” I laugh. “Coach would probably string me up by my balls if he caught me being friendly.”

“Exactly,” she says, then pauses. “Why would your coach be that outraged?”

I sigh, smiling at her. “I’m not very good at keeping quiet about things.” She tilts her head to examine me more. “I have a big mouth. He’d be concerned I’d spill all our secrets, tell them all our tactics.”

She meets my smile with her own. And yeah, well, it’s clear as day why this one has been driving Jake crazy. “I like that. I like straight talkers. Sometimes I get all tangled up with what I want to say and it comes out sounding all wrong.”

“It doesn’t always work out in my favour.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I got friendly with some dude around Christmas time. He seemed solid, you know. We went out for beers a few times and we swapped stories. The way guys do. Then those stories ended up in the student paper. Turns out he was a gossip columnist, looking for stories about the rugby team.”

“Wow, that’s really—”

“Shitty,” I finish for her. “More than shitty. It pissed off both my packmates and team mates and nearly had me booted off the team.”

“It hurts when you trust someone, when you think they care about you, and then it turns out they were only using

you.” There’s something about the tone of her voice that makes me think she understands.

“It’s happened to you too?”

She pauses for a moment, then nods sharply. We’re quiet for a moment, although she continues to scratch at her neck.

“You’d have thought I’d’ve learned my lesson,” I say, finally. “I got permanently kicked out of one of my classes as an undergraduate because me and the lecturer didn’t see eye to eye.”

“In what way?”

“He was talking a load of crap and I told him so.”

“Oh,” she says, her eyes gleaming in amusement. “I wish I had the guts to do that more often.” She fiddles with the sleeve of her top. “You should’ve heard the bullshit the head archaeologist just spouted at me about alphas and omegas.”

My spine stiffens. There’s nothing I hate more than all the shit we get told about ourselves, about our natures. It’s why those stupid articles were so infuriating. He’d targeted me because I was an alpha and part of a pack. People love reading juicy stories about both those things.

Perhaps we had been a little wild when we’d first found each other and formed our pack, enjoyed partying together. But most of the things written about us were figments of that man’s twisted imagination.

“You didn’t put him to rights?” I ask.

“I was about to, but Jake beat me to it.” Her gaze flicks momentarily to meet mine as if she’s wondering what I’ll make of that.

“Good,” I say simply. Then pause. I probably shouldn’t say what I’m about to say next but then when has that ever stopped me. “I hear you don’t exactly have the most enlightened opinions about alphas yourself.”

“That isn’t true,” her shoulders tighten. “But I haven’t exactly had the most enlightened experiences with them.”

“Yeah, most of them are giant knobheads,” I agree. Her head snaps my way and her mouth hangs open in surprise. I shrug. “I grew up in foster care. So I came across a lot of dicks back then. My big mouth got me into trouble with a lot of them. I used to be a bit too honest with my feedback. Got moved on more times than you can imagine.”

“I’m ... I’m sorry,” she says.

I shrug.

“It was lonely. It’s why the idea of a pack always appealed to me. I wanted to find a pack, a family of my own.”

“And you think a pack will give you that?”

“Your brother’s in a pack, right? Doesn’t he have it?”

“Yes. The bond between them is so strong.”

“Exactly, the bond. That’s the thing that’s hard to find. A real, genuine connection with other people. It’s hard to find because like I said most alphas are giant arses.”

She laughs. “You know I don’t think I’ve ever heard another alpha admit that.”

“Probably because they haven’t tried to form a relationship with one. I’ve dated my share of knobs.”

“Can I ask you something personal? You won’t be offended?”

“Depends what it is.”

“Are you gay?”

“Bi,” I say, holding her gaze.

“Doesn’t that get kind of complicated when there are four of you?”

“I guess it could. I guess it did with some of the other guys I hooked up with for a while. But so far it works well with Jake and the others. We have this connection I’ve never felt before. I finally feel like I belong.”

She smiles at me warmly, hugging her arms around her legs, resting her cheek against her knees. “But how can you be

so sure? It's so new?"

"It's a feeling deep down in my gut."

"But feelings can be wrong. The other guy, the journalist, you trusted him."

"I did. You're right."

"So how do you know this time it will be OK?"

"I don't. And I've been stung many times. My own parents ..." I shake my head. "But I can't live my life never trusting anyone again. At some point you have to let that fear go."

She chews her lip and adjusts her glasses. Beyond her, the digger scrapes its teeth through the ground, dust spiralling up into the air.

"Are you ..." she hesitates.

"Am I what?"

"Sleeping with Jake?" She can't quite look at me when she asks that question.

"No," I tell her simply. "Jake is only interested in girls."

I swear she lets out a little sigh of relief. Interesting.

"How does it work in your brother's pack?" I'm curious to know. We all want a pack omega. In the future. When we're settled and established. The idea excites me, has me glancing towards this omega. Her skin soft, her eyes bright, her chest rising and falling as she breathes. I wonder. I wonder what it would be like. To have an omega for our pack. An omega like Giorgie Martinelli.

"Oh God," she says, screwing up her nose and making her glasses wobble, "It's my brother. I don't ask and he doesn't tell."

"They have an omega?"

"Yeah and she's expecting a baby." She grins proudly.

"You're going to be an aunty?"

"Already am – the best aunty." She swipes at her brow. "It's funny. I didn't really think they would ever find an

omega. They seemed pretty happy as they were. They're incredibly close. But now they have Connie, I see that there was something missing. They are all walking around in this sort of blissful bubble."

Something missing.

I glance at her, thinking about the way she's stoked Jake up. He's usually so calm, so considered. The man had the wind knocked out of his sails by his stupid parents. It left him all feelinged out. But Georgie, she stirs all sorts of emotions inside him.

"Probably the sex," I say and her cheeks redden.

"Hmmm," she answers noncommittal. There's obviously a lot of sex involved. Lucky bastards. But there's time for that. We're in our early twenties. There is plenty of time to settle down with an omega later. Our pack is still fairly new and the dynamics of bringing in an omega could unsettle what we're working hard to build.

"Have you ever looked for a pack of your own?" I ask her. She must have considered it, seeing as it's the way her brother has chosen to live.

"It's ... complicated."

And to my surprise, my heart sinks at those words.

I shake my head, wondering if she'll ever be able to let go of this bad impression she has about alphas. Wondering where it came from.

"What happened to your parents?" she asks, before adding quickly. "If you don't mind me asking."

I stare up at the cloudless sky and let out a huff of air. "Don't know. Don't care. They never bothered to try and see me the day I got taken away and I've never bothered trying to find them."

I can feel her looking at me, probably with pity. I can't stand that. I hate sympathy, but from her it somehow feels different.

I turn my head and meet her eyes, noting the way her thumb traces over a tattoo of a flower on her arm.

“What does it mean?” I ask, sitting up and resting my forearms on my bent knees.

“It’s a lily,” she explains. “My brother’s omega did it for me.”

I nod, impressed. “It’s pretty good.”

“She’s really talented.” She skims her thumb across the tattoo again. “Lily was my mum.”

“Was?”

“She died. Things got pretty shitty after that until Ric stepped in to take care of me.”

I reach out and stroke her cheek gently with my knuckles and she lets me, her eyes meeting mine. They are a brown colour, lightening closer to the irises, turning almost golden like the sea of sand around us.

“I’m sorry.”

I guess we have more in common than we thought. Except she had a brother. I had to find mine.

The noise of the digger deepens and I drop my hand away even though I have a temptation to pull her into my lap. We sit listening to the growling noise until Jake and Dylan return.

“I thought they’d be done by now,” Jake says, peering at his watch. “It’s nearly lunchtime.”

“The ground seems pretty hard,” I tell him.

“I just want to get started,” Giorgie mutters, kicking at the ground with the toe of her scuffed boot.

“It’s going to be too hot,” Jake says firmly.

“I know,” she responds with irritation. “It’s too hot now. I’m baking.”

“How about we go back to the villa for a swim?” I suggest. Inviting her is probably one stupid idea. Wasn’t it my idea to

help Jake out today? And here I am inviting the omega to our goddamn villa?

But omegas are prone to overheating and she looks so hot. I don't want her keeling over.

Another damn temptation. To care for her. To look after her.

"Sounds like a plan," Dylan offers up.

Giorgie looks severely tempted, if a little unsure, as she runs the back of her hand around her wet brow. However, before she has an opportunity to make up her mind, someone calls her name.

We all turn our heads as a group of her friends make their way towards us.

"We thought we'd come and find out how you were getting on," the one with her hair in a plait down her back says.

"Nowhere fast," Giorgie replies. "It's taking them forever to build the trench."

Her friend peers in that direction. "Bummer. We're about to grab some lunch before we head back to the hotel. Wanna come?"

"Actually," I say. "We were about to decamp to the villa for a swim."

"Really?" the friend asks in surprise, her gaze immediately swinging towards Jake who is examining his boots.

Giorgie shuffles on her toes. "Well, I hadn't ..."

"You guys wanna come too?" I ask, ignoring the distressed looks Jake is throwing my way. Giorgie's more likely to come along with her friends.

"A pool does sound good," the friend says, the other two girls by her side nodding enthusiastically. It's the kind of response I'm used to when we invite girls around.

"I think I'll head back to the hotel," her male friend with the scraggly facial hair mutters.

“But I didn’t bring a swimsuit, Sia,” Giorgie says.

“You can come back with me.” The guy throws Giorgie a knowing look with those beady eyes of his like he is offering to rescue her from a swim with sharks.

“There’s a drawer full of suits in all shapes and sizes back at the villa.” I smile at him with a hard stare. “Plus a room full of towels.”

“Sounds great,” Sia says, weaving her arm through Giorgie’s. “Jees you’re hot!” she tells the omega. “Doesn’t a pool sound good?”

Giorgie nods.

The guy-friend leans in towards Giorgie and Sia, whispering. What he doesn’t realise is us alphas have a heightened hearing. I can make out every word. “I think it’s a bad idea. Alone in a villa with those dudes.”

I keep that smile of mine fixed to my face, pretending I haven’t heard.

“Tsk, we’ll be fine,” the other friend says. I like her. “Let’s go!”

Leaving their friend sulking, we follow the girls through the site, back towards the waiting transport, and I pat Jake on the shoulder.

“What the fuck,” he mutters.

“Look,” I say. “She’s practically expiring out here in the heat. What did you want me to do?”

“Not dangle any more bloody temptation in front of my nose. Where’s your loyalty, man?” he grinds out between his teeth.

Dylan laughs. “You know Aidie can’t resist the whole knight-in-shining-armor act.”

“It’ll be fine,” I insist, hoping as her seductive scent wafts our way that I’m right.

Levi

I'm sipping cold water by the pool when the car pulls up, my packmates piling out. Jake has a face like thunder and I wonder what shit's gone down this morning. Then another car swings into the drive and Giorgie and her three friends climb out.

Right. Giorgie again. For the second day in a row. For a girl he claims to hate she sure shows up a lot.

Jake storms through to the pool area as Dylan and Aiden show the girls into the villa. They are all squealing in that excitable way girls do. Which is hardly surprising – this place is fucking impressive. As they skip inside, Giorgie's gaze drifts in the direction of my packmate and she catches my eyes. I lift my hand in salute and she smiles at me brightly.

Seems I made a good impression on her yesterday. For some reason that leaves me feeling rather smug.

“Can I assume you didn't OK all this?” I ask Jake.

“What do you think?”

“I thought you two were getting on better.”

He grunts. “I swear that girl smells more fucking intoxicating by the day.”

“Nah,” I say. “You just get more sexually frustrated by the day.”

My friend’s dilemma doesn’t prove any easier when the four girls come swanning out in their swimsuits. Giorgie’s dressed in some red bikini, and while it isn’t one of those stringy contraptions that remind me of dental floss, in fact it’s pretty modest, there’s still acres of her bronzed skin on show.

Jake can hardly look at her. The rest of us, we’re staring like a bunch of perverts. Doesn’t matter that there are three other pretty girls lining up by our pool. It’s Giorgie who catches our attention.

The girls chatter to themselves, dipping their toes in the water, until the one with the dark braid dives in and the others follow, the blue water suddenly alive with movement. Giorgie remains by the side, sitting on the edge and kicking her legs through the rippling water.

“Are you coming in?” I ask Jake.

“No,” he says, climbing off the lounge and stalking inside.

My gaze is pulled back to the little omega, her hands tucked neatly under her thighs.

I shrug my t-shirt off, twist my hair into a bun, and head for the water. Jake wasn’t lying. Somehow she smells even more potent this afternoon.

“Hi,” I say, coming to sit down next to her.

“Hi,” she says, squinting against the bright sunshine.

“Aren’t you getting in?”

She chews on her lip and gazes out across the water.

“Not yet.”

I tilt my head in question.

“I ... I can’t swim,” she says. “So I’m always a bit nervous about getting in.” She shrugs like it’s no big deal.

“How come?” I ask her. “How come you can’t swim?”

“I don’t know really,” she says, her long legs scissoring through the water. “I never learnt as a kid. My parents worked a lot – they ran their own restaurant – and we never really had time to go to the pool or whatever.”

“Huh,” I say. I know Giorgie lives in some big mansion on the exclusive side of Studworth. I’d just assumed her parents were rich. I’m guessing not. Rich parents like Jake’s may not have time for their kids but they pay others to have time. Rich parents would’ve had nannies chaperoning their omega daughter to swimming lessons. “You should learn.” For some reason, I don’t like the idea of her not owning this skill. Without it, she’s at an unnecessary risk.

“I keep meaning to.”

I jump down into the water, the cold making me gasp. Then I hold my hand up to her.

“Come on, in you get. I’ll make sure nothing happens to you.”

She gazes longingly at the gleaming surface and removes her glasses, folding in the arms and resting them beside her. Then with an intake of breath, she slides in after me, her fingers tight on the side of the pool behind her.

“Ahhhh,” she moans as the water swallows her up and she bends her knees sinking low until her chin kisses the surface. “That is so good. I’ve been boiling all day.”

I keep my eyes locked on her. Any sign of her losing her footing, of going under, and I’m fishing her straight back out.

“How was the site today?” I ask her.

“A bit disappointing. They’re still working on our trench. I don’t think we’ll be able to get in there until tomorrow.”

“Shame.”

“Yep, especially as we only have limited days here.” She looks up at me and smiles. “Although this isn’t too bad. I wonder if I could convince my brother to build a pool.”

“Then you’d definitely have to learn to swim.”

“Yeah.” She meets my eye and I can’t help smiling at her. It’s something about her countenance. Infectious. “How come you didn’t join the rest of the motley crew this morning? I thought you guys were inseparable or something?”

“We’re not joined at the hip,” I say firmly.

“Really? Jakey couldn’t even come on this trip without you.”

“Jakey?” I raise an eyebrow at her and she grins with mischief. “I couldn’t come this morning. I had my physio exercises to run though.”

She glides her hands through her wet hair. “Physio exercises?”

“Yeah. I’m injured. You didn’t know that?”

“Not every girl at uni is glued to every snippet of news about your team.”

“I got taken out a couple of weeks ago. It was big news,” I say, sulkily. Most people do know about it. I’m the linchpin in the team. Everyone was devastated. It’s been all anyone’s wanted to ask me about, to talk to me about, since it happened.

“I’m really not into rugby,” her eyes sparkle with amusement.

“You should be. It’s the best game in the fucking world.”

“Better than football?”

“Bunch of pussies,” I tell her.

“Cricket?”

I scoff.

“Hockey?”

“Please!”

She laughs and skims her hand across the surface of the water, a spray of water hitting my face.

“Hey now,” I warn her.

“You’re so full of shit.”

“I’m speaking the truth!” I splash her back and she giggles. A noise that I’m coming to like a lot.

“So how bad is it?” Her gaze runs over my body as if she’s searching for signs of an injury and I like that too. Like the interest I see spark in her eyes.

“My knee. And it’s pretty bad. But getting better. Just need to keep plugging away at the exercises. The pool really helps it actually. It’s one of the main reasons we decided to tag along on this trip. I needed to find somewhere with a pool. So it seemed to make sense to follow,” I pause and smile. “Jakey out here.”

“Oh,” she says, for a moment looking embarrassed, caught out. I’ve heard plenty about her assumptions of our pack. Bet she wasn’t expecting a legitimate reason for this trip. She bobs around in the water. “What were the others?”

“Other what?”

“Reasons?”

I simply smile at her. I’m not about to confess that we’re also here for moral support in Jake’s daily battles of frustration when it comes to her.

“Mysterious,” she purrs.

“Always a good idea to retain an air of mystery in my experience.”

“So you’re not one of those sports stars who shares everything about your life on social media.”

I frown. “No, I’m pretty private.” I swallow. “We had some issues with a journalist poking about in our business. They always love a story about a pack especially if they can land dubious shit on us.”

“So you boys never get up to dubious shit?” This time she raises an eyebrow at me.

I lift up my hands. “Like I said, air of mystery.”

“Maybe I should try a bit of that. Sia says I’m too open. Lay everything out on the table.”

“I don’t think that’s true,” I say. “Is it?”

She holds my gaze, the water around her sparkling and reflecting moving patterns across her skin.

“Maybe,” she says and I realise I want to get to know this omega a whole lot more.

I’m just not sure how Jake is going to feel about that.

I bob towards her. If she were any other omega, I’d reach out and take her hands in mine, tug her through the water towards me. But there’s something skittish about this one, something I can’t quite place my finger on. I’m always half convinced that there is nothing she wants more but to reach out and touch one of us. Fuck, she clearly wants to touch Jake. Yet something is holding her back.

“See,” I say, “You’re already getting the hang of it.”

She laughs and I can feel the eyes of her friends, laid out across inflatables watching us.

I move around so my back is to them.

“The first step to swimming is to learn how to float,” I tell her.

“Erm I’m not sure I want swimming lessons right this minute.”

I crook my finger at her. “It’s easy. Trust me.”

She jolts a little. A tiny movement, so small I could have missed it if I weren’t observing her so closely. It only confirms that theory I’m forming about this omega. Gently, gently with this one.

“I’ll show you,” I lean right back in the pool, letting the cool water coalesce around my ears and staring straight up into the infinitely blue sky. I bring my feet up, ignoring that twinge in my knee, and lie floating on the surface.

“See,” I say.

“You make it look easy...”

“I’ll help you.” I swing my feet back down to the surface and beckon her closer.

“How?” she asks me, chewing her lip.

“Lie back like I did.”

“I’ll sink!”

“And if you do, I’ll catch you.”

She peers down through the depths and I can’t help doing the same, the outline of her body, of her curves, shimmering under the rippling surface. Then she glances over to me.

“I’m not sure.”

“Come on,” I say. “I can tell you want to.” I bet it kills a woman like Georgie Martinelli that she can’t do something so many of us can. She likes to prove herself. It’s probably what all this animosity with Jake is all about. She needs to prove to the world she’s as good as him.

“OK,” she says. She smoothes down her hair and then with a steadying breath, tips backward. As her feet leave the bottom, she yelps, her hands thrashing through the water.

“It’s alright,” I tell her, reaching out and gently touching the curve of her back, lifting her through the water towards the surface. Her arms settle and her wide eyes land back on me.

“Alright?” I repeat. It’s far too sexual, her laid out beneath me, dressed in only this bikini. My cock stirs in my shorts.

“Uh huh,” she says, although her voice sounds tight.

“Just relax. I’ve got you. Straighten out your body, tip back your head, and spread your legs.”

Her eyes grow wide in alarm. “It will help you float,” I say with a wink.

She rolls her eyes at me but to my delight does as I tell her. It feels fucking amazing to have this omega balancing on the palm of my hand, floating below me. Far more erotic than I realised it would be. I’m a fucking creep. A fucking creep who can’t help but enjoy the view. That bikini, all wet and clingy and the tight little bud of her nipple, clear through the material.

Fuuuccckkkk!

What I'd give to capture that between my teeth!

"How does that feel?" I ask her, my voice more husky than I'd like it to sound.

"OK," she says, still looking nervous.

"I'm going to remove my hand then."

"Oh," she squeaks.

"I'll be right here if you sink." I sweep my thumb across the flesh of her back, reassuring her, her skin goosepimpling at my touch. "On the count of three, alright? One ... two ..." I slip my hand away.

Immediately her body stiffens, and she sinks through the water, her eyes growing wide in panic. I catch her with my palm and float her back to the surface.

"It's alright. I'm right here like I promised."

"I'm not sure about this," She screws up her face.

"Just relax. Don't go all rigid like that. Let your limbs float, your body float, and then you will too. OK?"

"OK," she chimes, not looking convinced at all.

"Good girl." Hey, I know I'm pushing my luck but it was too damn tempting. Her eyes dart to mine and I smile down at her. "Let's go."

I remove my hand and this time she forces herself to relax, a little crease of concentration forming between her brows. "That's it," I tell her, beaming down at her. She bites her tongue between her teeth as she bobs up and down on the surface. Then she swings her legs down and lands on her feet.

"Well done."

She shrugs her shoulders. "It wasn't that hard really."

I wink at her. "No, I told you it wasn't. And now if you ever fall into the water, you'll know how to float." She nods. "But," I add. "You should learn to swim."

She rolls her eyes. "Maybe one day."

“If you were my omega, I’d insist.”

Her shoulders stiffen. “Insist?”

“Insist,” I repeat, holding her irritated gaze and I swear she shivers a little despite herself. Omegas can protest all they like that they want things their way. That they want an equal footing with an alpha. And I’m all for that. But sometimes appealing to those primitive instincts to submit, to obey, can be fun. Especially in the bedroom.

And the more time I spend with this omega, the more I want her in my arms and in my bed. The more I find I’m falling for her. Bright, beautiful and witty. I can’t help myself.

If only I can convince Jake our bed is where she belongs.

Jake

I can only skulk about inside for so long, my book lying open on my lap, the pages hardly turned. I can't concentrate on the words.

Not when Giorgie Martinelli is out there in her swimsuit.

She looks fucking sensational, and it's too much of a temptation. My eyes flick continually from the page of my book to the door. I can hear excited voices from outside by the pool – the high pitches of the girls and the deep growls of my packmates.

I slam the book shut.

I can't stand it.

I want to know what's going on out there.

My pack was meant to have my back today. Keeping me focussed on my work and out of the path of the omega. Instead, they invited her back to our villa and into a bikini.

What the actual hell? Are they falling under her spell too? And what does that mean? For us? For me?

I fling the book to one side and change into my swimming shorts. Grabbing a beach towel from the rack, I fling it over my shoulder and pause in front of the mirror. I stare at my reflection and ruffle my blonde hair. Does Giorgie even look at

me the way I look at her? Has the thought of being with me ever entered her mind or is she too consumed with her obvious dislike for me?

Although, she certainly didn't look at me with disgust last night when I'd nearly kissed her. Her eyes had been brimming with longing. The thought of it makes me shiver, and kept me awake thinking about it all night. God, I want her to look at me like that again and that is a dangerously foolish idea.

I stomp through the villa in the direction of the pool.

I stop in my tracks at the sight of her bobbing on the surface of the pool with Levi beside her, his hand on her back.

A spike of jealousy spears through my gut and I want to dive into that pool and drag him away from her by the scruff of the neck.

I force myself to turn away and walk back into the hallway.

Breathe.

What the fuck has gotten into me?

He's hardly touching her.

Where has this jealousy come from?

Because I want to touch her like that. I want her to *let* me touch her like that. It's becoming clearer and clearer by the minute.

I want Giorgie Martinelli and I want her badly.

But do I want her for myself?

Or for my pack?

I stand there trying to work that out, jealousy and longing bubbling in my gut, when that arresting scent sweeps my way, followed soon after by Giorgie, a towel wrapped around her middle, her long dark hair wet against her head, her glasses missing.

She squints into the shadows and her caramel eyes find me.

“Hey,” I mumble.

“Hey,” she responds. “I was looking for the bathroom.”

“There’s one that way,” I say, trying not to notice the fine droplets of water racing down her bronze neck towards the delicate outline of her collarbone. A collarbone I want to trace with my tongue.

“Thanks.” She smiles up at me.

I thought Giorgie’s frowns were toxic. They’re nothing like her smiles. They are a million times more potent. My hands shake by my sides and I fold my arms over my chest, trying not to breathe in the scent.

We both start walking again and then she pauses, spinning round to face me.

“Are you ...” She chews on her lip and I practically groan with the need to capture it between my own teeth. “Are you mad with me?”

“Mad?” I swallow. I’m definitely losing my mind here.

“You just seem a little...”

“A little?” I step towards her, unable to help myself.

She looks up at me, examining my face, her gaze like fire across my skin. Her sight flickers momentarily to my bare chest before she checks herself, shaking her head. “Never mind.”

Her scent is so sweet, arresting every taste bud on my tongue and every bone in my body sings with the need to have her.

I can’t control it any longer.

I stalk towards her, our bodies drawing closer and closer. Her eyes flicker up to meet mine through her lashes, and her teeth capture her bottom lip, tugging it taut.

I come nearer still, closing the space between us until our bodies touch, her skin warm and wet against mine. Her stiff beaded nipples brush against my ribs. She issues a pleading

whimper and my fingers flex, my heart thudding in my chest, every cell of my body tingling with anticipation.

I step forward again, pressing my body into hers, forcing her to step too, backing her up against the wall, and she comes willingly, following my lead, her fingertips resting against my chest. Her back hits the smooth white wall with a gentle thud and a silent oh. I curl my palm around her neck, feeling the excited quiver of her gland against my fingers. I pause, closing my eyes and bringing my face close to her neck, inhaling her sweet, sweet scent as my breath brushes across her skin.

Then I peer up at her, her lids now heavy with lust and I kiss her. I kiss Giorgie Martinelli, swallowing her mouth with mine.

She gasps, her warm body stiffening for a fraction against mine, then melting as I devour her mouth, her arms coiling round my neck, her fingers tangling in my hair. Her lips are soft but I'm not gentle with my kisses. In this moment, I'm all alpha. Sucking on her tongue, nipping on her plump lip, exploring every part of her mouth, wanting to taste and feel it all.

Electricity spirals across my skin, every part of me sparking alive.

A mewl escapes her throat and it's the most delicious noise I've ever heard. I want to grab her arse, wrap her legs around my hips and take her right here against the wall.

I also want to see her face.

I draw back, peering down into her eyes. They're swirling with passion.

With my free hand, I yank away the towel like it's fucking gift wrap and as it falls away, I trace my knuckles against the flesh of her stomach, goosepimples forming as I do, and her body shivering with desire. I find the jut of her hip bone and sweep my thumb along it.

I've dreamed of grabbing a hold of her hips and now I finally do, gripping her firmly and pulling her closer until she's flush against me, my cock hardening against her

stomach. Then I reach down and squeeze that plump arse of hers through the damp fabric of her bikini bottoms. I can smell how wet she's getting already and I'm so fucking hungry for her.

"Giorgie," I groan.

She takes a shuddering inhale and without the towel I receive a close-up view of her. She's dressed in that red bikini I could remove with a simple flick of my fingers. My cock twitches against her and she fucking shivers.

I lean down and suck on her neck.

"Jake?" she mumbles.

"Yes," I breathe into her ear, ringing my tongue around the shell before nipping on her lobe.

"This is ... this is ..." she moans, a noise she immediately tries to stifle.

I like that. Like she's a little shy. I want to break straight through that shyness and have her screaming my name without caring who hears. "This is moving fast."

I pause. What? I blink, my brain slowly computing what she's said. Then with every ounce of self restraint I possess, I force myself to pull away from her, giving her some space.

"You don't like fast?" I ask her.

"I don't know," her eyes flicker to my chest and then my abdomen, her fingers still buried in my hair. I think she wants fast as much as I do, but something is holding her back.

I remember that moment in the trench.

"It really wasn't a bark," I say. Is that what it is? It's been on my mind. Bothering me the whole night long. I don't want her to think I'm like that. Usually I couldn't give a rat's arse what Giorgie Martinelli thinks of me as long as she stays out of my way. But now... now I don't want her to hate me anymore. I don't want her to think badly of me. And I really want to keep kissing her. "I got irritated and snapped at you. If it came out sounding like a bark, then I'm sorry. I would never

do that to you. And I didn't mean to upset you. I wouldn't ever want to hurt you."

"Really?" she asks, with a slight smile on her lips and a twitch of her eyebrow, her arms falling away from my neck to hang by her sides. "Because we spend most of our time going out of our way to be shitty to each other."

"Not always," I say thinking of the moan I just forced from her throat. I smile back, mesmerised by the curl of her lips, drunk on her scent. "But anyway it's lighthearted. A bit of competitive banter."

"Not always, Jake."

I bow my head. "No, not always. I don't want to fight with you anymore, Giorgie?"

Her fingers raise as if she's going to touch me again. Then they fall away. "Why?" she asks.

I open my mouth, try to find the words to describe all the turbulent feelings crashing through me. But I can't even get a handle on them myself, let alone explain them to her.

Why don't I want to fight?

Because it hurts. Hurts every time she says something dismissive or cruel, when she underestimates me or makes assumptions about me. I'm not the man she thinks I am. But somehow I've never been able to make her see that.

"I would never intentionally hurt you," I whisper.

She peers deep into my eyes as if trying to read my very soul. "Wouldn't you?" she says quietly, and her voice sounds so broken the need to gather her into my arms and hold her close is almost overwhelming. "Because someone else, someone who reminds me of you, said that to me once," she looks away to the doors that lead to the pool, "and then he did."

I almost bend, double over, the force of her words punching me right in the gut.

Fuck!

Why had I never seen this? It's obvious. Her preconceived ideas about me, her weariness, her fear.

Someone hurt her.

I want to demand who. I want to take her by the shoulders and shake that name from her mouth. I want to find the piece of scum and rip his heart from his chest and stamp on it until it's nothing but dust on the ground.

But the desire drains from her eyes and it's as if she's somewhere else. Her brows crease in discomfort and I know she's revisiting some memory.

I take a step back. "Giorgie?" I prompt. "Whatever—"

She snaps her face back my way, a smile forms on her lips but her eyes are dulled.

"I really need the loo," she chirps, bending down to retrieve her towel.

I want to press her more but she's already turning away, walking in the direction of the bathroom.

I stand there, catching my breath. Unable to understand what the hell is happening to me. My heart hammers in my chest, every alpha fibre in my body yelling at me to fix this for her, to make this right, to protect her, care for her, make her mine.

I stumble backwards.

What the actual fuck?

If all this is is sexual attraction, lust, passion, desire, why the hell do I feel this way?

I force myself to pick up my feet and storm through the villa to the shelter of the palm trees around the back. It's silent and empty. No one else about. I lean against a tree trunk and breathe.

She's always been such a firecracker. Spitting sparks and bright as sunlight. She's enthusiastic to a sickening degree, and, other than when she's talking to me, cheerful as a bird at dawn.

Yet underneath all that ...

And why has that stirred me up like this? Why has that piece of information stoked the alpha within me?

I'm not some stupid dude, ruled by his cock and his temper. Not since I found my pack. Not since I found my brothers and my place. They've helped me to become the man I am: rational, intellectual, considered.

Except when it comes to Giorgie Martinelli. Except right now.

Right now I don't feel any of those things.

Right now I feel fucking murderous.

Storming back through the villa, I'm thankful to find Dylan in the kitchen, rustling up some snacks and cocktails for our guests. Reaching for a bottle of beer, I flick off the cap before slumping onto a stool next to him.

He looks up at me and frowns.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" he asks.

"I just kissed her."

"Giorgie?"

"Giorgie."

"And what happened? Because you don't look happy about it."

"She kissed me back."

"It was disappointing then? No fire after all."

I let out a puff of air. "There was fire alright."

"Then, what is the matter? This is good, right?"

"Yes. No. The fuck knows," I say, throwing my arms in the air, sending beer splashing over the rim of my bottle and splashing against the countertop.

Dylan picks up a cloth and reaches over to wipe away the spillage.

“I know you’re worried about becoming mixed up with a girl you’re competing against, but this situation has been driving you crazy, mate. Something had to give eventually. I say you go with the flow.”

“That’s because you are a sentimental knobhead, who believes in true love.”

“And you don’t?”

I shrug. “My belief in true love died with my parent’s fucked up divorce.”

“You don’t love me?” Dylan teases.

“Yeah, I love you,” I concede. “But you know that’s different.”

Dylan grins and I twist the beer bottle in my hands, tearing the damp paper stuck to the glass.

“She told me something.” Dylan raises his eyebrows, sensing I’m finally reaching the crux of the matter. “She told me she wanted to take things slow because someone she trusted hurt her. And I just...” I look away towards the window, sunlight flooding through the glass, the air con whirling in the background.

“Who hurt her and what did they do?” Dylan asks with venom in his voice.

“I don’t know,” I say. “But when I find out ...”

Dylan watches me as he sprinkles sugar over a tray of flat circular cakes. I wonder how he manages to knock up a feast even when we’re staying in the middle of nowhere. Then again the man is a genius when it comes to cooking. I’ve never eaten as well as I have since I joined this pack.

“And how about you?” Dylan says, brushing the sugar from his fingers and into the sink.

“Me?”

“She was kissing you back and then she told you this. What does it mean for you and her?”

“I don’t know. I think ...” I think back over all our interactions, to the very first time we’d met. I’d come bounding over to her like a puppy dog who’d just tracked down his first bone. Here was this beautiful omega, smelling divine, top of the class, passionate about my passion. I’d turned on the full power of my alpha charm, believing she’d fall straight into my arms. Instead, she’d recoiled. Physically recoiled away and things between us had been antagonistic ever since. “I think she’s afraid.” I swallow down the uncomfortable truth and it scratches all the way down to my stomach. “I think she’s afraid of me.”

I look up from my beer bottle and meet Dylan’s sympathetic green eyes.

“And that matters to you because?”

I take a deep breath, rubbing at my temple. “I want to be with her.”

“Then what’s stopping you, Jake?”

I drop my gaze back to the bottle, spinning it between my palms. “I don’t know.”

“I think you do.”

He’s right. I do but it’s hard to admit it to myself, let alone to him. I let out half a chuckle, knowing I’m going to sound stupid. “I’m afraid falling in love will fuck me over.”

It’s bloody ridiculous. I expect him to laugh at me.

He doesn’t. Instead his tone is deadly serious.

“Why?”

I let out a long puff of air, placing the bottle down on the counter.

“Because I saw it happen to my parents. They didn’t always hate each other. Once they were madly in love. But it became something twisted, something ugly, and it made them miserable and bitter. And it broke our family apart.”

“You’re not your parents, mate.” I swallow, letting that realisation sink in. “Just because it happened to them, doesn’t

mean it will happen to you. You get to choose your own story. It isn't written in the stars."

"You think?"

"Jake, you're a good packmate. Loyal and caring and fiercely loving. I know it."

It's funny. This fear has been niggling at the back of my mind for so long, I'd no longer recognised it for what it was. But talking it through with Dylan has shown it for what it is and I feel like a weight has lifted from my shoulders.

"Thanks Dylan."

He smiles at me gently. "You need to show Giorgie that she can trust you."

I nod, wondering how the hell I'm going to go about doing that.

Dylan

I want to say more to Jake. To tell him that it's been clear to me how he feels about this girl for months. To ask him if he wants to make her his alone. Or whether he wants to make her our pack omega.

But at that moment, his phone rings in his pocket. He snatches it out and looks at the screen.

"It's the professor," he tells me, accepting the call and walking away.

I watch him go, rubbing at my forehead. The scent of the omega weaves through the air and I can smell it even above the aromas of the cakes I've just baked in the oven. Fruity, juicy, sweet. It's a good match for her. She's all those things.

It's always amazed me how closely a scent seems to match its alpha or omega owner, hinting at the person beneath the aroma.

That first day at try-outs, Levi's scent had caught my attention above all the others. The smell of it was like a coming thunderstorm. I knew from the moment I smelled him that he'd be fiery and passionate and me quieter, a silent observer, had been drawn to him almost instantaneously.

He says I smell like wet grass after the rain.

He is the storm and I am the calm that follows.

I chop tomatoes and cucumbers, toss them together in a ceramic bowl with a drizzle of olive oil, and walk the plate over to the long elegant dining table at the other side of the kitchen.

As I do, Jake walks back through.

“Looks like me and Giorgie are heading back to the site this evening.”

“You OK with that?” I ask him, examining his face with concern.

“I’ll be fine,” he scratches at the back of his neck. “It’ll be fine,” he repeats. “I’m just going to need a fuck load of suppressant to get me through this. I’m surprised I haven’t overdosed on the stuff already.”

“Are you going to tell Giorgie the news?”

He nods.

“OK, I’ll come with you. The food is ready.”

Stealing a handful of crisps from my spread, Jake strides towards the pool and I follow after him.

We find her lying on a sunlounger in the shade, eyes closed, dressed in a red bikini.

I swallow hard. She looks like a model out of a playboy magazine, with her long dark hair falling over her shoulders and her waist cinched in giving way to her curved hips and then her honey coloured legs stretching on for miles. And the glasses. I’ve always had a weak spot for a girl in glasses.

I have the urge to scoop her up into my arms and carry her to my bed.

Her nose twitches and her eyes drift open. She finds Jake hovering at her side and her mouth curls into a smile.

“Professor Weaver just called me,” Jake says.

She sits up, wrapping her arms around her bent legs. “Really?”

“The trench is all ready for us and she’s arranged for us to go work on it this evening. We have to be there by five.”

“In the dark?” Giorgie asks, tipping her head to one side in confusion.

“The Professor’s arranging some lighting for us.”

“Wow!” She chews on her bottom lip, thinking.

“Seems she wants to show Professor Lichenstein he’s wrong. I’d like to show that turd he’s an idiot too.”

“And me,” she grins. “Let’s do it!”

I look between the two of them, resting my hand on my packmate’s shoulder. These two would make a good team if they’d just work together. I’m happy for him. I squeeze his shoulder reassuringly, then yell to the others.

“Who’s hungry?”

“Me,” Giorgie grins and her friends all nod in agreement.

“Come and get it then.” I wink and they all follow me inside like I’m the pied piper.

They say a way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Well, I’ve learned the way into a woman’s bed is through hers. Handy, seeing as I love to cook.

As expected, there are lots of delighted squeals when the women spot the food and cocktails I’ve spread out across the long, elegant dining table.

I instruct the women to grab plates and help themselves, and us alphas stand back and wait for them to finish.

“This looks like it came straight out of a five-star restaurant,” Sia says. “Are you sure you made it?”

“Dylan could run his own five-star restaurant if he wanted to,” Levi tells her.

Maya sinks her teeth through one of the Welsh cakes and closes her eyes, moaning loudly. “Oh my god, that tastes illegal.” She opens her eyes and flutters her eyelashes at me. She’s been flirting with me all afternoon and I’m not blind to

how Sia comes to stand next to Levi and engages him in conversation. However, it's clear as day to me that my packmates only have eyes for Giorgie. Their gazes drift to her frequently, watching as she moves along the table examining the food and selecting what she wants for her plate with more consideration than the others.

"You don't seem quite as impressed by the food," Aiden says to her.

"My parents ran an Italian restaurant. I ate like a princess growing up and my brother is a pretty amazing chef. I'm hard to impress," she glances at me with a tease.

Aiden twerks an eyebrow and smirks at me. "Well, that's a challenge?"

"It is," I cross my arms over my chest and nod. "Try away, princess."

Maya giggles but Giorgie frowns at me in consideration. Her gaze hovers across the food and then lands on the Welsh cakes the others devoured. She picks one up daintily between her finger and thumb and examines it before giving it a sniff.

"Hmmm," she says, before snapping her teeth straight through the hard sponge and taking a big bite. Crumbs of the cake splinter off, some sticking to her plump, bottom lip, the others tumbling down her front. She chews, her eyes growing wider as she does.

"Well?" Aiden asks her. We're all watching her, everyone waiting with bated breath for her judgement.

She nods as she continues to chew and then swallows. I can't help a smug smile, but Jake was right, Giorgie Martinelli is hard to impress.

"Not bad," she says finally.

"Tsk," Aiden says, shaking his head and taking a cake himself. "Let me try." He gobbles the whole thing quickly. "Mate, it's fucking delicious!"

"I'm not saying it isn't," Giorgie protests.

“You think it could be better?” I ask seriously, walking around the table to stand beside her. I’m not used to constructive criticism when it comes to my food – my packmates are all too grateful I want to cook for them.

“I’d say it needs a tad more spice.”

“Omegas have very sensitive taste,” Levi says.

“And smell,” Giorgie says. “My mum was an omega, and she tasted every single dish before it went out. It’s why the food was so good. But it can be a hindrance too. If there’s a pair of smelly socks in a house I can smell them a mile away.”

“Any smelly socks here?” Sia asks her with a grin.

“No,” Giorgie says, her cheeks turning pink as she stares back down at her plate.

I catch Levi’s eye and I know he’s thinking the same thing as me.

What the hell can she smell that’s making her blush?

I lean against the table, crossing my arms over my chest.

“What else?” I ask. Behind me, I hear my packmates load their plates and then together with our guests they wander back outside, leaving me and Giorgie alone.

She hesitates, then takes another bite.

“Close your eyes,” I instruct her and she frowns. “It will help you taste better.”

She does as she’s told – surprising for an omega I’d been told is a brat – and the alpha in me stirs with excitement. I have to remind him that this is Jake’s girl, not mine. A girl who would never be interested in a pack.

As she chews, I take the opportunity to soak up her face. She has clear, soft-looking skin the colour of honey, full pink lips, and long dark eyelashes that fan across her apple shaped cheek bones.

“You’re staring at me,” she mutters with her eyes still closed.

“I’m waiting for your response. Because this is an old family recipe.”

“Oh!” Her eyes snap open and her hand covers her mouth catching more crumbs from her lips. “I didn’t mean to insult—”

“Ah, don’t worry. I’ve been experimenting with quite a few of the recipes, working out ways to improve them.”

“You really do love to cook.”

“Yeah, it’s what I want to do.”

She cocks her head to one side as she nibbles on the cake and rests her hip against the table top. “I thought you were studying business management or something like that.”

“I am. My plan is to open a restaurant.” I grin. “Actually, more than one. I have ambitions for an entire chain.”

“You should talk to my brother then. You know that’s what he does?”

I nod. “Maybe you could introduce us.” Her eyebrows leap up her forehead. “What?”

“Probably best you make your own introductions. If I introduce you, he’ll think...”

“He’ll think what?” I tease, loving the tiny dash of pink that spills into her cheeks.

“That you’re a prospect or something and he’s your typical big brother. I once had a date pick up me from the house. By the time I’d made it to the door to greet him, Ric had grilled him so efficiently he knew his whole family history. The guy never asked me out on a second date.”

“Fool,” I whisper, leaning in to her. Her eyes flick up to mine. “What else?” I ask. “You didn’t finish your verdict.” I take the last bit of cake from her fingers. “Come on.” I nod, holding the piece up to her lips. She hesitates. “No one ever gives me honest feedback.”

“Fine,” she says, opening her mouth. “But you can’t be all grumpy if I hurt your feelings.”

“I’m tougher than I look.”

“You look pretty rough,” she mutters under her breath, her gaze darting down my form and my lips twitch. I place the food inside her soft mouth, her tongue brushing fleetingly against my fingertips.

“Close your eyes,” I repeat. She does and my fingers hover in front of her face. It would be so easy to trace her lips, to cup her jaw, to kiss her sugar coated lips.

Her scent deepens like she can sense my closeness. How has Jake resisted her all this time?

“So?” I ask her.

“It’s ...” she swallows, licking her tongue along her bottom lip. “Good. Just a tad more spice to compliment the sugar.”

“Thank you.”

She opens her eyes and smiles up at me.

“I’m not scared of big brothers,” I tell her. “I have two of my own, plus two younger ones and three sisters.”

“Wow. That is a big family.”

“Yep, my mum spent most of my childhood cooking up huge batches of food just to keep us all fed. I guess it’s why I fell in love with cooking. Helping her in the kitchen was my way of claiming a bit of her attention. Her cooking would probably be considered a little old-fashioned but I love it.”

“My mum was an amazing cook too. Ric is pretty good. But it’s not the same. I miss her cooking.”

She brushes the crumbs off her fingers and onto the plate. Hesitates, then takes another cake.

“They can’t be that bad if you’re having a second.”

“I never said they were bad,” she says with a grin that’s almost flirtatious. “What does your mum think of the pack?”

I sigh, helping myself to one of the cakes. I break it in half between my fingers and give it a sniff. Giorgie is right. They need a tad more spice.

“She’s about as traditional as her cooking. She would like me bonded with an omega by now. She doesn’t understand why I’d want to be in a pack.” I pick out a raisin from the sponge, squeezing it between my finger and thumb. “Or why I’d want to be with a man.”

“Oh.”

“She’s not disowned me or been awful about it. My mum isn’t like that. But she is disappointed and continually tries to set me up with a nice little omega.”

“And you don’t want a nice little omega?” The distance between us seems to be shrinking and her scent is potent in my nostrils, warming my belly.

“Oh, I want an omega,” I say, lifting my gaze to meet hers. “But I want one for our pack.” There’s heat in my eyes and she finds it too much, dropping her gaze to the cake in my hands. “I loved my big family growing up,” I continue, wanting for some reason to make her understand. Maybe it’s because I see this potential between her and Jake, see how it could grow into something between all of us. “Loved the noise and the chaos and the feeling of being loved in all directions. I always knew pack life would be for me.”

“I think I’d like it too,” she murmurs.

My heart stops beating and my breath catches in my throat. “You would?” I croak.

“Eventually, yeah.”

I shift against the table, feeling strangely giddy. I clear my throat as she nibbles on the cake.

“You like caring for people,” she says. I lift my eyebrow and she smiles in reply. “It’s why you like to cook for everyone. It’s why your mum liked to cook. It’s why my brother likes to cook too.”

“I guess, you’re right.”

“I am,” she giggles and my gaze dances all around her bright face. Jake always made this woman out to be difficult, argumentative, but I find her surprisingly easy to talk to.

My gaze falls automatically to her lips. A lone crumb hangs in the corner of her mouth.

“You’ve got a ...” I point to her mouth and ducking her head, she brushes her lips with her fingers. “No, it’s ...” I reach out and gently guide her chin upwards, her eyes drawing wide as I do. Then I brush away the crumb with the pad of my thumb, feeling the soft texture of her lips, and the thud of her pulse.

I want to kiss her. If she were any other girl, I would. But I remember what Jake told me, remember how skittish this omega has been, and I drop her chin and step away.

“I’d better ...” she mumbles, hurrying from the door, and my heart drums in my ears as I watch her go.

Giorgie

We're silent on the drive back to the temple, and I can't decide if the space between us in the back seat of the car seems infinitely wide, like a giant chasm, or far too close, like I can almost feel the heat of his body. We've drawn down all the windows, each doing it automatically without a word to the other. His scent is almost drowning. It's all I can smell, all I can taste, all my little brain is determined to fixate on. I guess mine must be bothering him too. Best to have the windows open.

I try not to look at him either, keeping my eyes locked out the window. Looking at him is just as overwhelming. The man is too beautiful. The angle of his jaw, those bottomless eyes, the cut of his cheek bones. It's like he was chiselled from marble by some master craftsman. Peering his way has my stomach spinning and my mind lingering on that moment from last night, that moment in the hallway.

And other moments too. Aiden brushing his knuckles against my cheek. The pressure of Levi's hand in the small of my back. Dylan's fingers against my lips.

This is completely inappropriate. Jake and I are colleagues. For this trip we're practically work mates. Thinking about kissing Jake Grantham, dreaming about what lies beneath his

clothes, remembering how it felt to be held in his arms, lusting after his packmates, is wrong.

Pull your head out of the gutter, Giorgie Martinelli. You're a professional.

Besides, he obviously feels the same way. He's made no further moves to renew that kiss. It was simply one moment of madness. One we can both forget about.

The site is almost empty when we arrive. The buses and line of cars that usually wait by the outskirts are gone and there are only a few men steadily working at the main temple, removing with painstaking care more and more layers of sand.

It's meant to be cooler now, the red disc of the sun sinking lower against the horizon and bathing everything in a golden light. But I'm just as hot. Sweat pooling at the base of my spine and around my brow. I fan my shirt, attempting to drive air down my top.

There's no one here to greet us so we collect our tools from the main tent and walk around the temple towards our newly dug trench.

The temple looks even more magical against the sunset, the sandstone structure glowing like gold in the fading light and the never-ending sand dunes in the distance glittering.

"I think this is the time of day when the alphas would have come to pray, to offer up their thanks to the God of the Alphas and the Goddess of the Omegas," Jake says, the scarlet disc of the sun dancing in his pupils. "To be mesmerised and enchanted by the stars. To have claimed one another under the watchful gaze of the Heavens."

"Hmmm," I say, wondering for a moment if this is some dream. His scent curls into my nose and it's almost as if my footsteps drift towards him, being pulled there by some unseen force.

The Ancient Egyptians were all about fertility and breeding and it's as if that magic hovers in the air, pushing me towards him.

“I know it’s silly, but I was really super excited about coming on this trip, and also a little nervous.”

“Because of me?” he asks, his voice tight.

“No!” I shake my head, and plant my palm over my face, peering at him through my fingers. “You’ll think I’m an idiot.”

“I don’t think you’re an idiot, Giorgie,” he says, his voice deep and serious.

My belly warms.

“I was nervous because of all those tales about Egyptian curses. I’m only 23. I don’t particularly want to die some gruesome death.”

I expect him to laugh. Instead, he considers my fear. “Latest research suggests the researchers opening some of those tombs, the ones that died later, were probably exposed to toxic fumes. Nothing to do with curses.”

“It makes sense I suppose, but now I’m here I’m less afraid.” I peer up at him, painted by the scarlet light. “It feels like there is something in the air, don’t you think, but it isn’t sinister.”

“Something in the air,” he repeats, and I watch as the Adam’s apple in his throat bobs up and down, a fine layer of fair stubble covering his chin, stubble I want to scratch my fingernails across.

We round the corner of the temple and reach our freshly-dug trench. The digger has gone and here we are completely alone. Not another living soul in sight.

I should be afraid.

It’s how I’ve felt in the presence of alphas ever since ...

But I don’t feel afraid of Jake. I don’t even feel wary. Despite the incident yesterday, I feel calm and safe. A feeling I only usually feel when my brother and his pack are nearby.

I asked Jake to stop earlier and he did, despite the fire I could see in his eyes. Despite how turned on I knew he was.

He stopped when I asked him to and he pulled away. As a consequence, I find I trust him.

Maybe he won't hurt me. Maybe he won't betray me. Maybe Aiden is right. At some point you have to let go of that fear and trust.

Some flood lights have been wheeled to the edge of the trench, but there's no need for them yet. Jake clambers down and then we're here again, his hand reaching up for mine, an earnest look lingering on his face.

I don't hesitate. I take his hand and let him pull me down into the pit. This time I land perfectly and to my surprise I'm almost disappointed not to fall against his strong body, not to have his muscular arm curl around my waist.

That isn't why we're here.

The final rays of light streak across the vast sky and my breath catches in my throat with the wonder of it. We stand side by side staring up at it, open mouthed.

"It's so beautiful," I mumble.

"It is," he murmurs and I have the craziest urge to grab two handfuls of his shirt and tug him towards me, to crush my mouth against his, to drag him to the cool ground. To give him my body, and my heart. To stop fighting and start loving instead.

That kiss was electric and I want to do it again so badly.

What the hell?

I stumble away from him.

It's this place. It's his scent. It's the fact he's so damn attractive.

"I'll start over here," I mumble, scurrying to the far side of the trench and he jolts, striding over to the opposite end.

"Great," he says without enthusiasm.

The scrape of our tools against the ground is the only sound for the next hour until I realise I'm squinting through my glasses.

I look up and find the sky has grown a dark grey, the sun gone completely.

“We should turn on the lights,” I say and Jake places down his tool, jumping out of the trench and striding towards the two lights.

“You think we’ll find anything?” I say as he switches on the bulbs and I blink against the blinding rays. I can’t see him, he’s lost in the shadows, while I’m illuminated like an actress on the stage.

“Yes, Giorgie, I think we will. Maybe not an artefact or anything like that. But I think we’ll find signs of a path. Proof of your theory.”

His words are like praise and they warm my belly, filling me up like a good meal. I could get fat on words like that.

He slides down into the pit and steps into the beams of light.

“Better?” he asks, his eyes locked on mine.

“Better,” I tell him, managing a smile.

Then we set back to our work.

After an hour, the texture of the ground I’m scraping away alters. No longer soft and crumbling. Now hard and solid. I pause, running my fingertips across it. It’s different. Coarse. I gasp, my pulse suddenly pounding in my throat.

“Jake?” I croak.

“Huh?”

“Jake. I think I ...”

He’s crouching beside me in the next moment, his warm body close to mine and alive with excitement.

“Have you found something, Giorgie?”

“I don’t know, maybe, sort of. I could be imagining it.”

“What is it?”

“Touch the ground,” I say and he reaches down to rest his fingertips next to mine. “It’s different, right? Coarser, harder,

as if it could be—”

“A path!”

I grin up at him. “Do you think so?”

“Yes, Giorgie! Yes this could be it.”

I clap my hands together in excitement, my smile pulling wide across my face. “You really *really* think so?”

“Yes, Giorgie,” he chuckles. “I do.” He falls back onto his backside and reflects back my wide smile. “I knew you were right.”

“I am. I mean it isn’t enough to prove anything yet.” I tug out my phone and snap a few pictures of the compacted earth I’ve exposed. Jake watches me, that damn smile of his still playing across his face. My stomach spins madly and I have that crazy urge to fling my arms around him and kiss him again. “We need to find more.”

“We do.” He picks up my notebook and offers it to me. “We’d better get back to work then.”

I grin. “Yes, we had.”

My heart bounces around in my chest as I continue to dig, finding tiny bits more of what could be the path that connected the alpha and omega temples. Jake comes to work beside me and the scrape of his tool against the ground is strangely comforting. I’m so excited, I can’t help but chatter on to him about my theory.

He listens, nodding, and offering his own opinions, occasionally a justified challenge to my ideas.

Finally I run out of steam and we work silently. Only it’s not oppressive anymore. My mind doesn’t wander to those dark places. It’s occupied with the here and now.

After another half an hour, I hear his tool halt.

“Giorgie?” he says, and I twist around to peer his way, wondering if he’s found something else. “What you told me earlier... back at the villa ...”

“Oh.” Nausea bubbles up from my stomach. I hadn’t meant to tell him. Nobody apart from my family and Sia knows. But it had slipped out before I’d even realised I was uttering the words.

I don’t want Jake Grantham to know the truth. It seems as if I’m finally winning his good opinion and I don’t want to lose it so soon. He’d consider me a fool.

And I was, wasn’t I?

A fool to trust.

I’ve tried so hard not to make that mistake again. And yet I’d trusted him enough to tell him that much.

“What happened?” he asks.

I ignore him, scraping at the sandy earth.

“You don’t need to worry about it. It’s something that happened a long time ago.”

“I can’t ...” I hear him swallow but I keep digging. “I can’t help thinking about it, Omega. I need to know.”

“Why?” I say. “It’s nothing to do with you.”

“Then why did you tell me?” he says in a pained tone. “It’s in my head now, swirling round and round.” I peer over my shoulder at him, watching as he drops his trowel to the ground. “I need to fix this, to put it right for you.”

I stare at him in disbelief. What does he mean? What is he trying to tell me?

He wants to put it right because we’re, what? Friends now?

Or is it some paternal alpha need?

Or something more? Something ...

I think of that kiss again. The pure passion of it.

“It’s not your business,” I whisper, dust and sand swirling in the beams of light, “I’m not your omega.”

He opens his mouth to speak, then stops, his jaw snapping shut. “You’re right,” he growls through gritted teeth.

I wait.

I wait for him to say the words. To change everything between us. To tell me that he wants me. That he wants me to be his. His omega.

Every fibre in my body is taut with tension, waiting, hoping he'll say it. Hoping he'll give me that opportunity to trust again.

He doesn't.

He picks up his trowel and turns his back on me.

Fine.

That's just fine.

I'm fine and my heart isn't aching in my chest.

At ten o'clock, a man dressed in a security uniform and brandishing a torch stops by our trench and tells us it's time to leave.

"We'll just pack up our stuff," Jake tells him and the man swings his torch between us with suspicion before stalking away.

I gather up our tools as Jake climbs out of the trench, pulling me out silently after him. There's that same crackling electricity when our flesh connects. Familiar now.

We ignore it and I wait while he goes to switch off the lights.

At first we're lost in the dark, picking our steps carefully as we stumble back to the main tent. But soon my eyes adjust and above me one by one by one stars illuminate the heavens until they form a vibrant line across the sky, curling like the river Nile.

"Look!" I say to Jake and we stop, tipping our heads back to stare enchanted. There's no light pollution here, no city glowing in the background. There's only the temple and the desert.

And us.

If I thought the sunset was beautiful, well it was nothing compared to this.

“Makes you understand why the ancient people were so obsessed with the stars and the sky, doesn’t it?”

“Yes. I bet they never slept, just stared up at the sky all night long.” I glance towards him. “I’d happily stay here all night.”

He laughs. “Not sure it’s the best idea. We’d probably get arrested or something.”

“It would be worth it,” I mumble.

The night breeze flutters around our heads, lifting pieces of my loose hair, a tendril sticking to my wet lip.

His gaze falls that way and he reaches out to remove it, tucking the lock behind my ear. His fingers brush my skin.

My heart stops beating. That electricity races around my body. My breath stalls.

“Omega?” he says softly. And I know what he’s asking.

He leans closer. I close my eyes. And this time there’s no interruption, nothing to drive us apart.

His warm lips meet mine, his arm slides around my waist and I sink into him, into his scent and his warm body and the magic of the moment.

I sigh a little as his lips move gently against mine and his grip on me grows tighter, his other hand coming to cup the back of my neck.

My gland tingles, my stomach flutters. I part my lips and his tongue slides inside seeking mine. I fist his shirt in my hands, wanting him closer, as close as he can be.

I swear I can hear the stars singing around us. Or is it the blood in my ears? The pound of his heart?

For several long delicious minutes I have not a thought in my head.

Until I do.

I'm kissing Jake Grantham.
Again!

Jake

I can sense the security guard hovering behind us in the background. It's time to go.

For a moment, I consider inviting the omega in my arms back to the villa – I would give anything to spend the night with her – but she asked me to take it slow. And Dylan is right. I need to show her that she can trust me.

I'm not ready to let her go yet though.

I take a hold of her hand and walk us to our waiting car, diving into the back, pulling her in after me. Unable to resist, I claim her mouth and she makes another of those little whimpers. I draw away, her eyes are closed in pleasure as I turn from her to the driver.

“We want to do some star gazing,” I tell him. “Can you take us some place?”

The look he gives me in the rearview mirror tells me he's not buying any of that shit, but I don't care, tugging Giorgie in close beside me as he starts the engine.

“The sand dunes are the best place,” the driver tells us.

“What do you say?” I ask her. “Want to see more of those stars?”

She nods with a wide smile, and I can't drag my gaze away from hers until the car stops fifteen minutes later.

We stumble out of the car, leaving the road and heading out across the sand, our feet sinking through the dunes.

Giorgie laughs and I yank her along, the two of us stumbling more than once as the ground sucks at our shoes.

By the time we make it to the peak of the dune, we're both breathless and panting.

Giorgie pulls her hand from mine and strides along the rim of the peak, throwing back her head to stare up at the heavens.

The stars are even brighter here and she looks celestial framed against the glittering sky, her hair dancing around her face, being carried by the light breeze that ruffles the surface of the sand.

"Come here," I tell her, my voice gruff.

Her eyes don't leave the stars. "What are we doing here, Jake?"

"I'm hoping you're going to let me kiss you again, Omega."

"And then what?"

I growl, letting her know exactly what I'm hoping will come next.

"This is crazy," she says, finally dropping her gaze to mine. "We don't even like each other."

"I like it when you kiss me, Omega. I like it when you make those sweet mewling noises. I like it when your body is hot against mine."

She draws in a breath.

"Shit," she mumbles and I know she can't resist this anymore than I can. It's been building for too long. I take a pace towards her.

"It's not like this can mean anything, though can it? There's only one spot on the research team and..."

“Let’s not think about that now,” I tell her.

The thought of it makes my stomach hurt. Only one of us can claim that spot. It suddenly seems like a bittersweet pill to swallow. If I win it, Georgie will be leaving Crestmore. And if she wins, I’ll be leaving. Either way we can’t be together.

I take another pace and another, and she watches me come closer, her shoulders falling and rising with anticipation.

“You know I’m going to beat you to that place,” she says with a hint of a smile, as I curl my arm around her waist and draw her closer.

I chuckle.

“We’ll see about that,” I say, reaching down to pinch that delectable arse of hers.

“You’re so sure of yourself.”

“And so are you.”

A car horn blasts through the night, and somehow I’m not even surprised.

“I think that’s our cue to leave,” she says, wriggling free of my grasp.

“I’m paying the dude a lot of money. He can wait.”

“You’re paying him. So what, that means you can click your fingers and he and everyone around you has to do as you say?” She frowns at me.

I frown right back.

“Did I say that? You have a really special way of twisting my words into something unrecognisable.”

“He probably has a family he needs to get home to. It’s late, Jake.”

She trudges away from me, leaving deep footsteps in the shifting sand.

I follow her silently, unable to decide if I’m pissed off or turned on. Probably both.

Half way down the slope, she loses her footing stumbling over her feet. I leap towards her, catching her elbow, the electricity sparking in my palm. I prevent her from tumbling to the ground, but her bag drops from her shoulder, the contents scattering across the sand.

“Oh no,” she mumbles, scurrying after her belongings on her knees, and scooping everything back inside.

I crouch down beside her, catching the pens and pencils that go rolling over the dunes and hand them to her.

“Thanks,” she says.

Then I catch sight of something else on the ground, shining silver in the starlight. I pull it out of the sand and as I do, I realise what it is.

A pack of scent blockers.

I clamber back to my feet, staring down at the small rectangular packet in my hand.

“Your blockers?” I say, turning the half-used packet over in my hand, a crease forming between my brows as my thumb skids across today’s empty pouch.

She holds out her hand to me, repeating her thanks.

I blink at her, then drop them into her palm, staring at her in a way that makes her blush from the top of her head to the tips of her toes.

Blockers?

Giorgie Martinelli is on scent blockers.



When my alarm rings the next morning, I’m awake. I’ve been awake the whole damn night. Staring at the ceiling, hearing the peaceful breaths of my packmates all around me.

I didn’t tell them about the second kiss or the blockers when I returned last night. In hindsight, a stupid mistake. I

wanted to keep it private, something of my own for a time while I mulled it over.

OK, not mulled, relived. Relived it over and over like some love-sick teenager.

And tried to make sense of it. Giorgie Martinelli is on blockers. Yet I could smell her scent as vividly as ever. What the hell does this mean?

I'm going to tell the pack. Only not yet. They'll be a whole host of questions and excitement. It's obvious the others are interested in her too, and while I'm not averse to the idea of sharing an omega with my pack (hell, no, that's the dream), I'm still struggling to line up my feelings when it comes to Giorgie. Despite wrestling with them all night.

To say I'm confused is an understatement.

She's my academic rival. Up until a few days ago we hated each other.

Then there's the jealousy that keeps rearing its ugly head, anytime Levi's captures her attention, and there's no room for jealousy in a pack.

And the pack is a complication in itself. Giorgie Martinelli won't want to mess around with a pack of alphas. Not when she's been hurt before.

Of course, it would all be so much easier if she'd told me how she'd been hurt. If she trusted me enough to share her secrets. But I haven't earned that yet.

Then finally, there are those blockers.

This hangs over my head like a heavy storm cloud, threatening to block out the memory of those kisses.

Of the feel of her lips, the taste of her mouth, the softness of her body.

I take a quick shower, dress quietly as the others continue to sleep, then bundle straight into the waiting taxi. The rest of my class are already at the temple, and I see them pouring out of the bus as we pull up.

I climb out of the car, and stalk towards the group, eyes scanning for Giorgie, stomach rolling with anticipation.

I'm eager to see her this morning but cautious too. Will she give me the cold shoulder? Talk to me as if nothing happened? I need to talk to her. To ask her about those blockers.

I stifle a groan, searching for her in the crowd.

Then I spot her, stumbling as she climbs off the bus.

Immediately her scent hits me, nearly knocking me straight off my feet.

Every muscle in my body tenses and my dick stirs in my pants.

It can't be, can it?

But as I examine her, I'm pretty sure it is.

Her eyes are glazed, her glasses missing, her skin clammy and flushed, and she's scratching at the back of her neck, fidgeting on the spot.

I bowl my way through the crowd. Not caring about the irritated looks and mumbling obscenities. They can all go to hell as far as I'm concerned.

She senses me before I reach her, turning and meeting my gaze, a look of relief washing over her features and only confirming my suspicion.

When I reach her, her scent is so strong, I'm surprised every other alpha in a ten-mile radius isn't by my side, fighting me for her. Then there's that aroma of slick about her too. Fresh, wet, delicious slick. It takes me every damn ounce of restraint not to groan and drop to my knees, burying my face between her legs.

I yank her to one side, ignoring Sia's outraged, "Hey!"

"You're in heat!" I grunt in her ear when we're out of ear shot.

"What?!" she says, shaking her head, her hands drifting up to rest on my chest. "I'm just ... it's so hot and ..." She grimaces.

Fuck! Fuck! How the hell could she let this happen?

We're on a fucking field trip, miles and miles from the safety of her nest. There aren't any other alphas about yet, but it won't take long when she smells like this!

"Why the hell did you time it for now?"

She looks up at me with big, wide eyes of confusion and my insides practically melt. She sniffles. "I didn't time anything. I'm not in heat." Her face screws up in pain and she clutches her stomach. "This wasn't meant to happen." She looks up at me and all of a sudden she seems so small, so helpless, so frightened. "Alpha?" she pleads.

"It's OK," I say, even though my head is roaring like a fucking hurricane and I'm finding it hard to stay rational. "It's going to be OK."

She needs to get away, to somewhere safe. Away from me and away from other asshole alphas who'd just love to land their paws on an omega in heat.

The rest of the students are heading towards the main tent, but I spy the professor lingering to talk to a colleague. The omega's friends are also lingering, watching us with suspicion, clearly debating whether they ought to intervene.

I stride up to the professor, pulling the omega along behind me despite her squeals.

"Professor," I interrupt.

"Mr. Grantham," she says with irritation. "I'm in the middle of a conversation here."

"This is an emergency!"

The professor frowns at me but places her hand on the other woman's forearm, "Excuse me, Anette, I'll catch you later."

The woman nods and walks away and once she's out of earshot, I address the professor.

"We have a situation here, Professor," I say sternly.

“A situation?” She peers at me and then Giorgie through her spectacles.

“Giorgie has gone into heat unexpectedly and—”

The professor’s face turns visibly green, and she takes a pace away from the two of us. “Mr Grantham this is—”

“She needs to be taken to a place of safety and—”

“This is not any of my—”

“You’re responsible for her welfare,” I growl. The professor, always such a formidable woman, shrinks before me, her gaze flitting about desperately as if she’s searching for help. She spots Giorgie’s friends. “Sia!” she cries. “Yes, Sia is Giorgie’s very good friend. I’m sure she can—”

“Giorgie needs—” My grip is tight on the Omega’s shoulder as I hold her an arm’s length away. She struggles against my hold though, trying to wiggle her way closer to me, pawing at my arm.

“Mr Grantham, I make it my rule not to get involved in my student’s personal lives,” the professor says and before I can argue she spins on her heels and sprints away.

Fucking great.

I growl and the omega whimpers beside me, the smell of fresh slick hitting my nose.

God help me.

I turn my sights on Sia and Carl.

“Hey,” I yell at them and they both jump. “Come here.” They do as I command, both looking terrified.

“What’s going on?” Sia asks her friend, arms wrapped around her middle, looking about as comfortable as a snowman in a heatwave.

“Giorgie’s gone into heat. Why the fuck she let this—”

“It wasn’t deliberate!” Giorgie sobs and the distress in her voice has me purring. Purring? I’ve never fucking purred in my life. Not even when the sex was fucking amazing.

Sia fidgets with discomfort, but that bastard Carl eyes her up as if she's an abandoned sundae ice cream waiting to be claimed.

"I need you to take Giorgie back to her room and look after her," I say to Sia.

"Me?" Sia says in alarm. "I wouldn't know what to do and we're sharing a room with two others and ..."

"I'll take her back to the hotel," Carl offers, stepping towards Giorgie.

I yank her away.

"Like hell you will!" I growl and he shrinks back, Sia following him.

"Can't you look after her?" Sia asks. "You're an alpha, isn't that what you're meant to do?"

"That would be highly inappropriate—"

"I want to go with you," Giorgie whimpers, breaking free of my grip and curling her scorching hot body against mine.

I pry her away from me, holding her at arm's length and staring down into her heat-hazed eyes.

"You're just saying that, Omega, because you're in heat. It's not what you really want and you'll fucking regret it." She shakes her head adamantly. But I know how a heat addles an omega's brains, has them pleading and begging for things they would usually balk at. She thinks she wants this, wants me, but in the cold light of day, when the heat has passed, will she regret it? "As well as hating me forever afterwards," I mumble.

"I won't, I won't, I promise. I want you!"

I groan, my eyes heading up to the cloudless sky.

"If she says it's what she wants..." Sia says.

I snap my head her way. "Of course she's saying that. She's in heat. An omega in heat is a mess. They don't know what they want. She'd be offering herself up on a plate to any

alpha nearby. It's why you need to take her back to the hotel and keep her safe."

"That's not true, Jake Grantham!" Giorgie says, her voice suddenly sounding clearer. "I'm not some mindless sex zombie. That's not how it works. I'm still capable of making my own decisions. Of deciding what's right for me."

I peer down at her. "I don't think this is right for you, Giorgie," I protest. "You said you wanted to take things slow. You said there was no future in this."

"Slow? Future? This?" Sia asks, swinging her gaze between the two of us.

"I ... I want ...!" She hesitates and I'm right, she can't think straight. "It's just sex, Jake, it doesn't have to mean anything if you don't—" She halts and hurt floods her eyes. "Unless...unless...you don't want to help me, is that it?" Her bottom lip trembles and I think she might cry. Shit! A crying omega in heat. It's soul destroying. I'd do anything, practically anything, to stop those tears from falling. "Last night didn't mean anything to you."

"Last night!" Sia yelps.

"We only kissed," I mumble.

"But you wanted to do more," she declares to me and her friends, and I cringe not loving the details spilling out in front of these two.

I turn back to her friends in desperation, hoping they'll offer me a way out.

But there's no way I'm handing her over to Carl and Sia is clearly on her friend's side.

"Are you saying you don't want Giorgie?" Sia says, standing a little straighter now. "Because I've seen the way you look at her, man. Like all the time. It's obvious you've been into her since day one. And it sounds like you wanted her last night." I'd like to dispute that version of events, but what's the point? "And I've seen the way she looks at you too. She never shuts up about you. You're all she ever talks about."

“I am?”

“It’s clear as day that you both want this!”

I stare at the omega, trying to determine if all this is true, searching for a glimmer of truth beneath the haze of the heat.

“Look, Giorgie is stunning and intelligent—”

“And witty and caring and everything a man could want!”
Sia adds.

“I still don’t think this is appropriate.”

“Me neither,” Carl says.

And that fucking decides me.

“But I don’t see any other reasonable solution here. I will keep her safe.”

“You’d better do, Grantham!” Sia says, glaring at me hard.

“Give me your number,” I say. “And I’ll give you mine. You can check in on her.”

Sia nods, then steps towards her friend, smoothing wet strands of hair from her face. “Are you really sure this is what you want?”

“Yes,” Giorgie says, those big caramel eyes finding me and heating every inch of my body. “Yes, I trust him.”

Something catches in my chest. She does?

Jake

Regardless of the omega's reassurances, I feel like an asshole as I bundle her into the back of the car. Am I doing the right thing? Am I taking advantage of her? Will she hate me after this?

"Alpha," she mumbles, curling her body against mine.

Shoving aside my trepidations, I bark at the driver to take us home. He eyes us with interest in the rearview mirror as the omega attempts to climb into my lap, and I tug across the curtain that separates the front seats from the back.

"Alpha," she moans into my ear before nibbling my lobe. "I need you."

"I know, I know you do, Baby Girl, but you're going to have to be patient for me."

Her little hands slide under my shirt and caress the planes of my abdomen and my chest. I close my eyes, hands tight fists beside me, trying not to think about that kiss, that spine tingling kiss.

But then her tongue swipes up my neck and her mouth meets mine and any reason I had, any reason I was hanging onto to, flies out the fucking window.

"Turn the radio on," I yell at the driver. "And turn the volume up loud."

I pull her into my lap and cup the back of her neck with one hand as the other unzips her trousers.

She smells so goddamn fine and I have to taste her, I need to taste her.

All this time, all those long months, dreaming, fantasising, wanting nothing else but to taste Giorgie Martinelli's sweet slick on my tongue, to swamp my whole mouth with the stuff, to drink from her like she's my own personal tap.

This can't be happening, this can't be.

But as I slide my hands into her underwear over the fine line of curls at her mound and to the apex of her sopping wet folds, I know it's real, because this, this is a million times better than I ever imagined. Especially when the pads of my fingertips skate over her clit and she bucks in my arms like I hit a live wire.

Ahhh, Baby Girl is a sensitive one. I like that. It opens up a million possibilities. A million ways to pleasure and play with her.

But not now, no matter how desperately she pleads in my ear, begging me to get her off.

I need to taste that slick. To feel her. To sink my fingers inside her.

I glide my fingers through her folds, discovering her entrance and halting.

This is it. *This is it!*

"I can't wait to see this pretty cunt of yours, Baby Girl. I can't wait to spread you open for me and soak you up," I whisper in her ear, loving the way my words make her whimper. "You like that?" I ask, as I circle her entrance. "You like it when I talk dirty to you?"

"Hmmm," she mutters.

"No, Baby Girl, we use our words. Come on. Tell me if you like it. Then I can reward you with what you need. Good girls get rewards, don't they? And I know you're a good girl."

“I do, Alpha. I do like it,” she says, her eyes wide as if she’s only just realising it.

She gasps as I slide my forefinger inside her, her warm walls gripping my finger.

“Shit,” I groan, sinking in deeper. One knuckle, two knuckles. All the way. Deep inside her.

I find that sensitive spot on her front wall, and she bucks against me as I stroke at it.

“Oh yeah, you like that? You know how good my dick is going to feel inside you, working this spot of yours? You know how many times I’m going to make you come?”

Her little hands grip my shoulders, her head falls back, lengthening that delicate neck of hers. I lean in and lick a stripe right from her shoulder blade to her ear, making her shiver, and then I find her pulse point and suck on it as I work my finger inside her.

A beautiful crimson flushes across her golden skin, and her thighs shake.

I’m going to make Giorgie Martinelli come. I’m going to *see* Giorgie Martinelli come.

This is my fantasy come true. Giorgie in my arms. Wanting me as much as I want her. Trusting me to see her through her heat.

I’m enraptured by her face, as I massage that spot, the heel of my hand stimulating her clit.

She tenses, biting down hard on her lip, her whole body rigid.

And then she comes, slick gushing down my hand and drenching my lap, her body going fluid, her face relaxing, her mouth falling open on a soft sigh.

I can see it, see the ecstasy that seeps right through her body, and for a moment she’s like a rag doll in my arms.

But then the aftershocks of her orgasm strike and she moans and groans, as her body jolts and bucks with each fresh

wave.

“Fuck,” I mutter. “Fuck Giorgie. That was...”

Her eyes flutter open and her blissed-out gaze meets mine.

“That was what, Alpha?” she asks, with a satisfied smile on her lips.

“Beautiful,” I tell her. “So beautiful. Giorgie, you—” but the rest of my words are lost as I nuzzle into her neck, drawing her body close against mine.

I’m so high on her, on all of it, that I almost forget what I wanted most.

She whimpers and I withdraw my digit from her and bring my finger to my mouth. Her juices run all over my hand, over my wrist and down my arm. It glistens in the light that streams through the window and smells like ripe fucking watermelons.

She watches me wide-eyed as I suck on my finger, groaning so loudly as her flavours hit my tongue that the sound vibrates through my chest. My head falls back against the headrest, my eyes roll in their sockets and my dick stiffens harder than it ever has.

Nothing, it’s nothing, nothing, nothing like I imagined. Too good for words, too good for thoughts. Like fucking nectar from the gods.

I’ve eaten pussy before, plenty of pussies, not one has tasted like this.

“Good?” she asks, with a hint of a giggle.

“You have no fucking idea. I may never get round to fucking you, Omega, because I’ll be too busy eating you out every second, every minute, every hour of the day. Just sit on my face and I’ll be in heaven.”

She giggles again, sedated and calmer now she’s had an orgasm. For now, anyway.

“I never took you to be one to exaggerate, Jake Grantham.”

“I’m not exaggerating,” I tell her sternly as I continue to lick her slick from my hand. Every last drop of it. I’m not wasting a molecule. It would be a crime.

Giorgie drifts off to sleep, perched right on top of my throbbing cock, her head resting on my shoulder, and I hold her, stunned beyond belief. Not thinking about where we’re going and what will come next until the wheels of the car crunch over the gravel on the villa’s drive.

Then I remember I’m taking this omega in heat to my pack. Something I haven’t discussed with Giorgie.

Maybe she was wrong to trust me after all.

Giorgie

I'm half asleep, when I feel the alpha lift me from the car and carry me out into the sunlight and then through into the cool inside. Male voices murmur around me but I'm too sleepy to understand the words, too tired to open my eyes. I nuzzle against the alpha's hard chest, loving the feel of his strong arms cradling me and eventually he lowers me onto a soft mattress.

"I'm going to fetch you some pillows and blankets, Baby Girl?"

"No," I murmur, attempting to hang onto him, but he slips away and I drift into sleep.

Stabbing pain in my gut wakes me later. I grit my teeth together, moaning as I clutch my stomach and roll from side to side.

When the spasm subsides, I open my eyes, panting. I'm lying in a darkened room, heavy drapes pulled shut against the bright sunlight that spills into the room around the edges. I'm hot, caked in sweat, my clothes damp and sticking to my skin. Around me are pillows, sheets and blankets and I'm marooned in a humongous bed. A bed big enough for several people.

For a moment fear curls around my throat.

"Omega?" comes a familiar voice.

Jake.

Instantly I remember where I am and what happened, the fear slipping away, warmth filling its place.

This heat came out of nowhere, and while this isn't how I intended taking things with Jake, I'm glad I'm here, with him.

I manage to prop myself onto my elbows and find him, leaning over his knees, on a chair in the corner.

He's fully dressed and that seems somehow criminal when right now I'd like his skin pressed to mine.

Another contraction tears through my gut and I cry out, flopping back down on the bed.

"Alpha," I plead.

The mattress bows and then his cool hands rub at my back. "Giorgie, are you awake, properly awake?"

"Yes, but it hurts. I need you, Alpha." I scurry towards him, hands scrabbling at his belt.

Two strong hands take hold of my wrists.

"Giorgie, I need to talk to you. Do you know where you are?"

I struggle against his grip, lifting my hips, fighting to grind myself against him. Anything for relief. Anything to end this need pounding between my legs, to cure this pain deep in my womb.

"I can't talk now," I sob, "It hurts too much. Make it stop, Alpha, please make it stop."

Those light eyes of his turn to fire and he lifts my wrists and pins them above my head, coming to kneel over me.

"How can I resist?" he asks, "How can I resist you, Baby Girl, when I know how delicious you taste, and how perfect you look when you come. You want to come now?"

"I don't *want* to come," I say, my lip jutting out in a pout. "I *need* to come."

Why is he talking so much? Why isn't he inside me already? Rutting me, breeding me, knotting me!

"Hmmm," he says, lowering his head to nibble at my neck. It has every part of me sparking, but it's not what I need right now.

I growl at him, and he lifts his head and peers down at me.

"Are you growling at me, little Omega?"

"I need to come," I tell him, trying not to be cowed by his fierce alpha glare.

"Ahhh there's my girl." He chuckles to himself.

"It hurts!" I insist.

"I'm going to make you come, Baby Girl, and then for once in your life you aren't going to argue with me. You're going to do what you're told and we're going to have the talk we need to have."

"Fine," I say, scowling at him.

He chuckles again and then he's wriggling down my cargo trousers, taking my underwear with them, and spreading me wide.

Usually, this would be too intimate for me, to be laid bare like this, but I'm so desperate to come, I'd do anything he asks if he just—

And then he does, his hands now gripping my thighs apart and his warm mouth meeting my pussy.

"Ohhhh," I squeal, my hips lifting off the mattress to greet him.

"Fuck," he groans into me, kissing my folds, sucking me into his mouth and swallowing my slick as it pours from me.

It's intense, crazy intense. The few men I've let do this to me, have been polite about it, methodical. It always seemed like they were doing it out of a sense of obligation.

Not Jake. He's loving every second of this. Kissing my cunt like he's the luckiest man alive, like he's honoured to

have his face between my thighs. It's passionate and obsessive.

I grip the sheets, struggling to hang on, sensing the coming release. Knowing it's going to blow me away, wondering if I can handle it when it does.

His tongue slides along my folds, one minute flicking at my clit, the next plunging into my hole.

I cry out, head thrashing from side to side, tears spilling down my cheeks.

"Alpha," I cry, "Alpha!"

"You want to come, Baby Girl? Then come for me."

I tear at the sheets, panting for air, gasping every time his wet tongue hits my clit. Hits it again and again and again and ...

I scream, my spine rigid, the orgasm ripping from my core and blasting through my body. The world blinds white. The air stops in my lungs.

I'm nowhere, nowhere, suspended in nothing.

And then I fall back down, sparks flying through me as he laps at me, not giving way even when I place both hands on his scalp and push him.

He growls at me, his hands tightening on my thighs.

"No," he says. "I'm not done, not done yet."

"Ohhh," I moan, that rushing sensation stirring, building in my core. "I'm going to come again," I mutter.

"Yeah you are, Baby Girl, going to gush all over my face, going to drown me in it so I can lap every drop from this sweet-smelling pussy of yours."

His words are as filthy as what he's doing to me and I've never been so turned on. This isn't how it's meant to be between omegas and alphas is it? We're their fuck toys. A possession to be rutted and knotted. And hell that's what I wanted when I chose to come here, to be with him through this heat. I'm not a fool. I know it's preferable to going it alone.

But this? This is more pleasure than I've ever known before.

"I'm com—I'm com— Fuuuuuccckkkk!" I scream as it happens all over again.

"That's it, pretty Omega, come all over my face. Like a good girl. Like a good little omega for your alpha."

And I do. I gush all over him, slick flowing from my cunt too, the bed wet beneath me.

It should be excruciatingly embarrassing, but he purrs with such contentment as he licks me clean, I feel ... proud.

No man has ever been into me like this.

Maybe instead of fighting with each other for the last year, we should've been doing this instead.

I think that's going to be it. He promised me an orgasm, and he's given me two earth-shattering, mind-rearranging ones.

But he's not done. He's not done with me at all. He's going for round three.

There's no way I'm stopping him.



He gives me more orgasms in the space of an hour than I've had in whole relationships before.

When he's finally done with me, I'm a wreck, tossing around on the surf and left limp and half-drowned on the rocks.

I have no voice left and no energy to move. He stumbles to his feet, wiping his hand over his face, glistening with my juices and his spit.

I'm so exhausted I don't even have the energy to close my legs and his eyes flutter down from my face back to where he's been feasting.

For a moment, I think he'll dive straight back in, but he stands there staring instead.

"You taste so fucking good, Omega," he tells me.

"Hmmm," I manage to mutter in response. "Will you fuck me now?"

"Uh uh, not yet. We have a deal."

"Deal?" I say, slipping my hands down my body, ready to plunge my fingers inside me. The pain is gone, the orgasms soothing that away. But the need to be filled remains.

"Yeah, a deal. Time to talk."

I dip a finger inside myself. I'm wetter than I've ever been and swollen too. Everything is sensitive, every touch divine.

The alpha watches my action, licking his lips.

"Fuck that looks good," he says, forgetting all about talking. "But I need to see your tits, Omega. Want to see you squeeze your tit while you fuck yourself with your fingers."

I bite my lip, his words lighting little fires of desires in my core.

"Omega," he repeats.

With my free hand, I unbutton my shirt, letting it fall open. His gaze is now locked on my chest, the pupils of his eyes dark discs floating in the whites of his eyes, the coloured irises entirely swallowed up.

He jerks his chin at me as he shrugs his shirt over his head. I'm rewarded with the view of his magnificent chest, all tightly packed muscle, hard grooves and smooth planes. I sigh, thrusting my finger in and out of my channel.

"I want to see your tits," he tells me. Unbuckling his belt, the clank of the metal making my mouth water.

I tug down my bra, releasing my breasts, my nipples already stiff peaks waiting for his attention.

"Don't stop, Baby Girl." He drops his trousers down his long legs and then he's standing there in only his boxers, the

outline of his hard cock clear as day.

He's big. I'd always suspected he'd be big, but not that big.

"Omega," he warns, dragging my gaze away from his crotch and back to his face. "Your tits, play with your tits."

"You're very bossy," I mumble as I squeeze my breast between my fingers, wet sloppy noises emanating from between my legs as I drive my fingers in and out.

"Yes," he says. "I am and I like it when you do what you're told."

I shiver, not quite able to admit that *I* like doing as I'm told when he asks. It seems somehow naughty, knowing that usually I'd resist, I'd argue, but for now he has me under his control.

He hooks his thumbs into the waistband of his underwear, and I moan as he slips them down his thick thighs, his cock springing free.

It's beautiful.

I've never found a cock beautiful before – and I know I'm in heat, my brain muddled by hormones – but his is. Curved, deliciously girthy, and a darker colour than the rest of his tanned skin.

He wraps his hand around the base, exactly where his knot will expand, and takes a step towards me.

"I thought we were going to talk," I tease.

"Later," he says, swallowing hard. "Later, Omega. I'm sorry but I can't ..." He swallows again. His jaw is taut with tension, his brow furrowed. "I have to have you. I've waited so damn long. I've wanted this for so long."

I look at him in shock. Has he really? Or is it his rut driving foolish words from his mouth?

I don't get the chance to ask him. He's stalking over me, tugging my fingers from between my legs and holding them up to his mouth, wrapping his tongue around my forefinger

and licking. I shiver hard, nearly orgasming right then and there.

When he's had his fill, he lowers his head and kisses my nipple next, teasing the stiff peak between his lips sweetly, reverently.

"You don't have to be sorry," I whisper, my fingers tangling in his hair. "I want this too, Alpha. I want it so badly."

It's been so long, so long since I've been able to let go, to trust anyone enough to give myself over. And I realise now how much I've missed this. The feel of his lips against my breast, the weight of his body on mine, the nudge of his cock between my legs.

"I want it so bad," I repeat. My eyes fall shut as his arms slip underneath me, cradling my body as he slides inside.

I gasp at the stretch, at the sheer size of the man, and he whispers in my ear.

"It's OK, Baby Girl, you can take it. You can take it all."

"Y-y-yes," I mutter, even though I'm not sure I can.

But I'm so wet, so turned on, so primed, somehow it works. I relax around him, emitting him inside. Deeper and deeper.

Despite how badly he wants this, he's patient, careful, and I'm grateful for it.

I think I've taken him all, that there can't be any more of him. I'm wrong, another inch and another and another, reaching places no man has ever reached before. Then finally he bottoms out with a grunt, panting slightly as if it's taken all his control to go this slow.

"Are you alright, Baby Girl?"

"Yes, Alpha." I run my nails down his back, nipping at his shoulder, encouraging him onwards.

"Giorgie," he moans, drawing his hips back, his heavy cock dragging through me and sparking everything inside.

The friction is delicious. Even more so when he thrusts his way back, less gently now, more forceful, and I get a first taste of his strength and his power. Both things that frighten me usually. But here and now I see how good he's going to make this for me.

I cling to his shoulders, my nails sinking into his flesh as he gains a rhythm, holding me as he pounds me into the mattress. All that careful restraint finally snaps. It's like all the tension between us has been building and building to this point and now it's exploding. The electricity I feel whenever he touches me crackles, shooting across my body, igniting my insides and I'm climbing towards another orgasm before I know it.

"So good," he pants by my ear, his breath warm and tickling my skin, "So good, Omega, feels so damn good."

A tiny smile skims my lips. I want this to be good for him. I want it to be as good for him as it is for me.

"Yes," I agree, "Yes, Alpha, so good."

His teeth graze my neck and my gland sears, desperate for his teeth, for his bite, to make this all real and permanent. That need grows and grows as I near my orgasm. It takes every ounce of my control to bite down hard on my lip and stop from begging him to claim me.

My release crashes through my body

"Oh fuck," he says, eyes locked on me as I buck in his arms, cunt convulsing around his cock in wave after wave. "You're milking me, Baby Girl, milking my cock. You want my come, don't you?"

"Yes," I gasp. "And your knot. Really need your knot."

My words seem equally potent as his. His thrusts stutter, the tension falls away from his face, and, with a loud grunt, he sinks deep, warm liquid flooding inside me, followed by the stretch of his knot at my entrance. I gasp as I'm stretched wider and wider, his knot expanding to lock inside me. But there's no pain. This is what I needed, what my heat-crazed

body desired. An alpha knotted inside me, pumping me full of his seed.

This alpha.

He falters, catching himself before he crushes me, and groaning with the pleasure of knotting me.

“Knew you could take it, Baby Girl. Knew you could take my knot.”

I stare up at his beautiful face, locks of his damp hair falling over his bottomless eyes.

And the overwhelming emotion flooding my body is one of safety.

I trust this man. I feel safe in his arms.

Levi

My leg won't stop jiggling as I sit on the sofa, chewing my nails. Trying not to smell that scent and hear those noises. Beside me, Aiden can't keep still. Sitting one minute, then jumping up the next and strolling to the window. Even Dylan's distracted, scrolling through his phone, his thumb rocking backwards and forwards, before he casts the thing aside.

It's that scent. The scent of an omega in heat blasting through the villa and stirring every lustful alpha bone in our bodies. I suspect we're all halfway to rut as it is. I suspect it's only a matter of time before one of us cracks and breaks down the door of the master bedroom.

This situation is fucked up.

What the hell was Jake thinking bringing her back here?

To his pack. An omega in heat. If he isn't prepared to share.

He's been locked in the bedroom with her for the last two hours, enjoying himself if the delicious noises coming from the room are anything to go by. The omega's little whimpers, her moans and groans, her cries of ecstasy are nothing short of torture. I want to see that. I want to drive those noises from her mouth.

Shit!

This isn't how a pack operates. Packs share. Packs work together to look after an omega through her heat.

One alpha doesn't get to call dibs. They can't dominate her time and her attention.

If that's what Jake wanted then why the hell did he join the pack?

"Doesn't sound like they're talking to me?" Aiden mutters, as the rhythmic sound of a headboard hitting a wall pounds from the bedroom.

"He said he'd talk to her, explain the situation, find out what she wanted. And he will," Dylan insists, but he doesn't look convinced, his eyes keep flicking towards the bedroom.

"And what if she doesn't want to be rutted by a pack?"

"I think she's beginning to mellow towards us," Aiden says, striding to the window. "Hell, I think she may even like us."

"She likes Jake!" I snap.

"Up until a few days ago she hated him," Dylan scrubs his hand through his dark curls.

"She never hated him," I say. "She wouldn't be fucking his brains out now if she hated him."

"I don't know," Aiden shakes his head. "In my experience hate sex is some of the best."

"That's because you're a pervert."

Aiden grins before an especially loud moan has all of us glancing towards the bedroom. The noise permeates straight to my dick. I'm rock hard and if I'm not getting invited in soon, then I'm going to have to take care of things myself.

"I'm going for a walk," Aiden snaps. "I can't stand around here waiting for a golden ticket to paradise. It's going to drive me crazy." He doesn't wait for a response, storming from the room, the door slamming a minute later.

Dylan coughs, then strides to the kitchen cabinets flinging them open and dragging pots and pans from the cupboards.

“What the hell are you doing?” I ask. My skin is crawling with irritation, the knot at the base of my cock throbbing with the need to lock into omega pussy.

“I’m going to make the omega a snack. We need to keep her hydrated and well fed.”

“I know that, dickhead,” I mumble.

Dylan stares at me, then drops the bowl he’s holding onto the counter, and walks around to me, placing his hands on my shoulders and massaging the tension he finds there.

“You’re all tense.”

I nod. “That smell. It’s driving me into rut.”

He drags me closer, smoothing his palm against my cheek.

“You need to come?” he asks me, his other hand trailing down my body to cup me through my shorts.

“More than you could ever know.” There’s desire sparking in my packmate’s eyes, the kind that has my own blood heating.

“Want me to help you out with that?”

I grip his hand on my shoulder, squeezing his knuckles, and pulling him closer for a kiss.

“What do you think, Alpha?” I growl when I let him go.

“I think you need to ask me nicely, Levi.”

I scowl at him. Dylan likes his little flirtatious games but my patience is running thin, especially when the moans from the bedroom seem to grow louder.

“Please,” I manage to spit out through gritted teeth.

Dylan licks his lips, fondling with the fly of my shorts.

When he frees my cock and takes me in his hands, I groan and watch as my packmate, an alpha, drops to his knees in front of me.

“You know I’m going to return the favour,” I say, as he strokes his fist up and down my length, a stream of precome dribbling from my tip.

“Or maybe the omega will,” Dylan says, making my cock jerk before wrapping his lips around me and sucking me into his mouth.

This isn’t new. We’ve been sleeping with each other ever since we formed this pack. But my dick in his mouth still sets me alight. Every time feels like the first time. I never tire of it.

I close my eyes as he hollows his cheeks and takes me deep inside his mouth, and I grab a handful of his hair, steadying his head in place. Omega pussy is divine, but an alpha’s mouth? We’re built of solid stuff, I can fuck my packmate’s mouth hard and deep, right into his throat, and he can take it all. There are no tears, no panicked gasps, just moans of pleasure and eyes sparkling with desire.

He loves this as much as I do.

“Fuck, you’re such a whore,” I grunt, “Letting me fuck your mouth, letting me pump my spunk down your throat.”

I thrust myself in and out of his mouth, showing him no mercy, using him. I’m tipping into rut now, everything hazy and scarlet around the edges of my vision, my reason slipping away. I couldn’t go easy on him even if I wanted to.

He grips my thighs so tight it’s going to leave bruises, more of his little games. But the pain only heightens my pleasure.

His mouth isn’t omega pussy. I can’t lock my knot into tight tissue, but it’s the nearest thing to it.

He flicks his tongue against my head and sucks me hard. I yank on his hair, pulling him flush against my groin and emptying into his mouth, watching him chug it all down, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallows my come.

“Fuuuuccckkkkkk,” I groan as he takes a hold of the base of my cock and squeezes against my expanding knot.

He slides his mouth off me and I slip out with a pop.

“Better?” he asks, licking his lips.

“Better,” I confess. My still hard cock jerks against his grip and he brings his mouth back to my head, catching more of my come as it streams from my cock.

“So much come,” he says, almost with admiration. Forget pissing competitions, the amount of come you can pump into an omega’s belly is the true test of an alpha.

“And all gone to waste,” I mutter.

“No, not to waste,” he says with a grin. “You know I like the taste of your come.”

Truth be told, I like his too. It’s the polar opposite of omega slick. Alpha come is salty. Omega slick sweet. And I like both. Even better when they’re mixed together.

My ultimate fantasy, eating an omega out once my packmate’s come inside her.

I groan thinking of that and more of my come spurts from my cock, this time hitting the floor.

Dylan stumbles to his feet, releasing my cock, much to my disappointment. My knot remains expanded, will be for at least another 15 minutes, and the constriction of his hands felt good.

“My turn,” he says, shoving down his pants and fisting his cock. Curls, even darker than the ones on his head, lie at the base of his stiff cock and I’ve always found them erotic.

I drop to my knees, my hands landing on his arse, and drag him towards me. He moans with pleasure, legs shaking as I feed him into my waiting mouth. I can’t help smiling around his shaft. It takes a certain amount of skill to give good head to a man and a woman, but I pride myself on always delivering my best. And my packmate certainly enjoys my skills.

He’s moist at his head, and I slurp that shit up, the salty taste permeating into my tongue. Then I tease him a little, even though I know he must have about as much patience as I did, ringing my tongue around his head, then fluttering down the

length of his shaft, following the outline of the vein that runs his length.

“Fuck, Levi, just suck me off already. I’m about to explode here.” I don’t blame him, the omega’s cries ring through the villa. Jake must be delivering her straight to paradise by the sounds of things.

I give Dylan a playful slap on his arse and then I suck him, pumping him in and out of my mouth, taking him as deep as it’s possible to go, down my throat until I’m struggling to breathe, black spots dotting my vision.

I don’t stop. Jake and Giorgie’s sounds are blocked out now, overridden by Dylan’s as he grunts loudly above me, his hands gripping my shoulders.

He’s not a talker in sex. No words or encouragement. No dirty talk. Just appreciative groans. Groans that get more feral and animalistic the closer he nears release. His cock throbs against my lips and I give him an extra hard suck.

He hisses through his teeth and bucks his cock straight down my throat, warm come pumping from him a second later.

Yeah, that stuff tastes good.

I swallow it down, returning the favour and gripping his knot.

It’s hot and throbbing in my hands and different from my own in a way that’s hard to explain. A slightly different shape and angle. And impressive. It would stretch any omega wide open.

And that’s my other fantasy. The one I’d give a lot to make reality. Fucking an omega with my packmate, knotting her together. Showing her the power of both our knots.

I wonder if there’s any chance a girl like Giorgie Martinelli would want to do that.

Afterwards, we lie out on one of the giant sofas together, Dylan’s head resting against my shoulder, his dark curls spilling across my chest.

I feel better now, but it's a temporary relief.

"That was good," I tell Dylan. "But I can't handle being shut out of that room for the next three days and subjected to all those pornographic noises. If this is a Jake only thing, then I'm going to need to find somewhere else to stay."

"Same," Dylan mutters.

I sigh. "It's fucking ironic, don't you think? He's the one who's always said we need to be careful when it comes to omegas. That it was too soon to find one for our pack, and then here he is, rutting one through a heat."

"But he's fallen in love with her, hasn't he? It changes everything."

I peer down at my packmate. "He told you that?"

"He didn't need to, Levi. It's bloody obvious."

I run my fingers through his hair. "You think he'll want to leave the pack?" I say, trying to keep my words steady, when the thought has my heart cracking in my chest. Our pack is so young, barely a year old, but it's been the happiest year of my life. If Jake leaves, will Aiden too? Will everything fall apart? I can't imagine life without them.

"I think that's going to depend on Giorgie. What she wants. What she decides."

"I couldn't make that decision. I couldn't choose between my omega and my pack." I hold my packmate tighter.

Dylan shuffles against me, crooking his head up to look at me. "You like her."

Dylan knows me better than any of my packmates, intimately. He can read me like one of his recipe books. Yet, I can't quite admit it to myself, let alone him, so I mumble, "I hardly know her."

"With some people you don't have to." He stares at me.

And I know there is no use arguing with that. We'd fallen into bed with each other on the first day we'd met. Someone had suggested drinks after training, we'd got chatting, and I'd

been instantly seduced by those emerald eyes of his, his pale skin, and his dark hair. Seduced also by the fact we'd held similar philosophies about life. We both knew pack life was for us, that we had the capacity to love and commit to more than one person. It was bloody intoxicating to find someone who thought like me. I'd fallen hard. We've been pretty inseparable ever since.

And he has a way of making me see reason. I'm all red hot fire, passionate about everything I do. But that spills into hotheadedness sometimes. I've been sin-binned more than anyone else on our team and when I see the red mist like that it's only ever Dylan who can talk me down.

"What do you like about her?" he asks.

"Are you jealous?" I ask him earnestly, genuinely concerned. It's one thing to theorise about these things, another to enact them, and I'd never want to hurt Dylan.

"No," he answers firmly. "You know I'm not like that."

"Yeah," I say, kissing the crown of his head. "What do I like about her?" I mull it over. "The girl has attitude. She's smart and beautiful, and she gives Jake shit." Dylan chuckles. "But there's something vulnerable about her too, delicate, it makes me want to fix her. Shit, man. That probably sounds really fucked up."

"No," Dylan says. "You're an alpha. It's in our blood to want to look after omegas."

"I've never felt that compulsion before."

"Because you've never fallen for an omega before."

I sink further into the sofa, eyes floating to the ceiling. It's quiet in the bedroom and I wonder if they're sleeping or finally having that conversation.

"It's all happening so quickly though," I say.

"That's life. Sometimes things don't happen the way they should. But you can't moan about it. You have to go with the flow and hope it'll take you where you're meant to go."

Jake

The omega is a sleepy, floppy thing in my arms, my knot buried deep in her cunt, her stomach bloated with all the come I've pumped inside her.

I should let her sleep, an omega needs rest and recuperation in between rutting. I don't want her to fall ill from exhaustion. But I also need to talk to her.

I can practically see my packmates pacing outside the door, cursing my name.

"Omega," I say, sweeping my knuckles along her cheek bone. She peers up at me, her skin flushed pink from all those orgasms I've given her. "We need to talk." Alarm flashes in her eyes. "It's OK," I purr immediately.

"What is it?" she asks, the rumble in my chest relaxing her, but the concern still audible in her voice.

"My pack," I say simply, not really knowing how the hell to explain this to her.

"Your pack?"

I stare back at her, struggling for the words as I brush the hair from her forehead.

I'm such a bloody asshole. I should never have brought her here.

She studies my face, her hands hooked around my neck. “They’re out there,” she says, her gaze sliding to the door. “I can smell them.” She inhales and shudders, and I’m unsure if it’s from fear or lust. “Do they ... do they want to come in?”

Fuck, I finally have Giorgie Martinelli in my bed and now I’m going to blow it.

I cup her face in my hand and force myself to say the words.

“You’re an omega in heat. Yes, of course, they want to come in.” I pause. “But that’s irrelevant. What do you want?”

I’m asking too much of her. I’m putting her in a compromising situation.

I don’t want her to feel pressured.

I also really want to fuck her with my packmates.

Yeah, I’m an asshole.

“I think,” she nibbles her lip, “I’ve always been curious.”

“Curious about what?” I ask quietly, not daring to hope.

“What it would be like to be with a pack.” She blushes.

“You have?” I ask.

“I live with a pack. I see the huge smile on their omega’s face every morning.” She cringes. “I’ve heard stuff.”

“Right.” I swallow, my heart stuttering in my chest.

“Tell me about them, your pack?”

“What do you want to know, Baby Girl? You already met them.”

“How’d it happen? How’d you form your pack?” She tickles her fingers against my scalp. “What’s special about them?”

“That’s,” I gaze into the richness of her eyes, “a difficult question to answer. Like trying to explain what makes a sunset special or a rainbow. Words can never do those things justice, can never capture what it’s like to stand before one.”

“Hmmm,” she murmurs sleepily and I capture a lock of her hair in my hand, stroking down its length, loving the way the strands run through my fingers.

“I was a lonely little rich boy before I met them,” I cringe. It sounds so pathetic but I want to give her the truth, thinking about Dylan’s advice, knowing she needs to trust me. “I was near to losing myself in a pit of self-pity. Drinking too much, messing around with any girl who looked my way, wasting away my trust fund. I was closed in on myself and alone. My parents were too busy tearing each other apart in the divorce courts, too absorbed with their new lives, to notice. If this pack hadn’t swooped in and claimed me as one of their own, fuck knows where I’d be now.” I close my eyes, feeling every inch of her warm skin against mine, drowning in her sweet scent. “It was Aiden really who saw behind the mask, and you know how he is with his straight talking. He brought me out of his shell. I guess we’re alike, the two of us. We were both alone in different ways, looking for love and connection.”

“And you found it? With this pack?”

“Yes Giorgie.”

“Then I want to.” I bring my forehead down to rest against hers, the emotion of this making my body shake.

“So does that mean...”

“I’ve had bad experiences in the past—”

“I wouldn’t—” She lands her palm on my chest.

“It’s stopped me from trusting, fully trusting another person – trusting alphas especially. It stopped me from letting go for a long time. A very long time. And I think maybe that was a mistake, because it meant he won. He took more from me than I should have let him. He took away my chance to find someone and build a real connection.”

“Whatever he did,” I growl. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“I know,” she smooths her hand across my chest. “I thought I’d moved on from it, but being here with you, I realise I hadn’t. Because this is the first time in a long time that I’ve really,” she smiles, “trusted someone enough to enjoy

the sex.” Her gaze falls to her fingers as she strokes them across my skin. “I want to ... I want to move on. I want to be free from what happened, from him. That means letting go of all my fears. It means trusting you. It means trusting myself and following my desires. I have to be brave and honest with myself. And that means exploring this curiosity.” Her gaze flutters up to meet mine again and my heart pounds in my chest, right beneath her fingers. “I know pack omegas can be cherished and loved. I know they can be the person that binds the pack together. I think I might want that. So if you are happy to share me, Alpha, then I want to try.”

I growl low and tug her closer, nibbling on her neck. My heart expands so violently in my chest, I’m surprised my ribs don’t crack. She wants to try this. With me. With us. She trusts me.

“I want nothing more than to share you, Omega. To have my whole pack pleasuring you and taking care of you. We’ll make this so good for you, I promise.” I kiss the tender flesh of her neck, smelling the deepening of her scent. This conversion is turning her on and her cunt flutters around my knot.

“But,” I add, drawing back and lifting her chin so she’s gazing straight into my eyes, “are you telling me you might want to be ours? Permanently? Do you want to be a part of this pack?”

She smoothes her thumb across my lips. “Slow down, Alpha. One step at a time.”

I nod. I’m rushing ahead of myself, giddy with excitement at the possibility. I take a steadying breath.

“OK,” I say. “We’ll give this a try, but if it isn’t what you want ... if you don’t like it ... if it’s too much. You only have to say the word.”

“A safe word?” she asks.

“Yes, Omega. A safe word. You utter it and I’ll make it all stop. OK?”

“Yes, thank you,” she says. “I like that idea.”

“It’s new for all of us. We’ve never done this either.” She smiles at me and I mirror the expression. “Fuck, Giorgie, you’re the firecracker I always knew you were. Always curious, always pushing me. Willing to experiment and see if this will work for us.”

Maybe I knew that all along. Maybe that’s why this situation was so damn frustrating because deep down I knew she was the perfect omega for our pack.

“So what’s the word?” I ask her.

“Hmmm.” Her lips twitch in amusement. “Professor Lichenstein.”

I screw up my face in disgust. “Yeah, fuck, that’d stop me in my tracks.”

She laughs. “That’s what I thought.”

I laugh too. “You’re really something, Baby Girl.”

“You have to stop flattering me,” she says, hitting me softly on the shoulder. “I’ll start believing you.”

My brow creases. I don’t know what she means by that. But then she’s yawning. “Enough talking, snuggles and sleeping now.”

“I need to talk to my pack.” Although, I’m not going anywhere knotted to her and she knows it.

“Later,” she mumbles, slotting her head beneath my chin, and then her eyelids fall shut.

It takes another ten minutes for my knot to deflate. It’s never been hard for that long. My body is reluctant to let the omega go as if it’s terrified this is all some delicious dream. A dream I’ll be ripped from soon enough.

Carefully, I roll away from her, arranging the blankets around her body, and finding my boxers on the floor, then tiptoeing out of the room.

I find my packmates lounging around on the sofas.

Levi looks as if he might strangle me. Aiden’s face is taut with pain and Dylan has a curious glint in his eyes.

I smile at them sheepishly, combing my hand through my dishevelled hair. I stink of sex and the omega. There's no doubting what I've been doing for the last three hours.

"How did the talk go?" Levi asks, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Good," I say, dropping down next to Aiden, who can't help shuffling towards me and sniffing my body.

"Shit!" he groans.

"The talk was good?" Levi repeats, frowning hard. Forget strangle, he might knock me out judging by the fists resting on his knees. "So you didn't get somewhat distracted?"

"A pleading omega, fingering herself and begging for cock is pretty damn distracting," I mutter. "I'd like to see how you'd fare, mate."

"Shit," Aiden repeats, eyes glazing over as if he's imagining that scene. "Shit, you lucky bastard."

Levi looks away from me in disgust.

"But we did talk and..."

"And?" Dylan asks eagerly.

"She wants to give this a try."

"Us?" Dylan asks, his eyes wide as if he can't believe what he's hearing.

"Us. Our pack. All of us."

"You sure it's what she wants," Levi glares at me. "She wasn't drunk on your cock, trying to please her alpha, saying what she thought you wanted to hear."

"No." I say firmly. "She wasn't. I'm not some teenage dickhead who can't understand consent, Levi, and I wouldn't ever want to put her in a position she regretted." My eyes dart to Dylan. "She's been hurt before."

"Hurt?" Levi asks, jaw stiffening, flexing his fingers.

"I don't know the details, she hasn't told me. But we have to go careful. She's given me a safe word and I suggest we

take this slow.”

“Slow,” Aiden, cackles. “She’s in heat.”

“And if you don’t show her respect and constraint, I’ll fucking rip your balls from your body and stuff them down your throat!”

Aiden throws his hands up in surrender, frowning at me. “And I’m not a dickhead either. Of course I’m going to show respect. I’m just saying, when she’s in the throes of her heat, she won’t want to go slow.”

I shrug. “We’re guided by her. Agreed?” They all nod.

Aiden slaps his hand on my shoulder. “We’re really doing this?”

“Yes,” I say. “We are. But we’re going to go slow. Introduce you one at a time.”

I can tell they’re not delighted by that idea, but they aren’t going to argue with me.

“Levi. You first.”



An hour later, I creak open the bedroom door expecting to find the omega asleep. Instead, she’s on her knees in the centre of the bed, the pillows and blankets I found her earlier scattered in a haphazard nature around her.

“Out!” she cries.

“Out?” I say, unable to keep my eyes off her bare bottom, the way it curves deliciously and jiggles every time she moves.

“Yes, out!” she repeats, shooing me with her hands. “I’m making my nest and I’m not done yet.”

“A nest?” A growl rumbles in my chest. The omega is making a nest in our bed. This keeps getting better and better. “Are you going to let us into your nest?” I ask, stalking closer. It smells wonderful, of her scent and her slick and all I want to do is knock her onto her hands and knees and fuck her.

But I'm stopped by the disgruntled look she throws me over her shoulder.

"Call me when you're done." I take one last longing glance at her arse. "Do you need anything?"

"No," she chimes, a pillow in her hands.

I shut the door softly and find my packmates gathered around me.

"What's going on?" Levi demands.

I groan. "She's building a fucking nest in there."

"Fuck," Levi breathes. "Fuck."

"How long is she going to be?" Dylan asks.

"No idea. I've never had an omega build me a nest before."

"Me neither," Aiden says and the other two nod in agreement.

"It smelt like heaven," I tell them. "Nearly as good as she tastes. Wait until you try that."

We pace around her door for another fifteen minutes listening to her hum to herself, before she calls out, "Jake?"

"Here, Baby Girl," I tell her.

"You can come in now."

Taking a deep breath, I turn the handle and draw back the door. The omega has arranged the pillows and blankets around the bed in a complicated pattern which I guess makes sense to her. She perches in the centre, smiling at me proudly.

"Wow," I say. "This is a beautiful nest, Omega." Her grin grows impossibly wider. Satisfaction blossoms in my chest. "In fact, it's the prettiest nest I've seen. Especially with you in the centre." I take a step into the room, Levi waiting in the hallway for my word. "Can I come into your nest, Omega?"

"Yes, please, Alpha," she says.

"And the others?" I ask cautiously.

She glances at the door, then nods. “Yes.”

I walk over to the bed and sit on the edge of the mattress before I call out to Levi, “You can come in.”

He enters, squinting against the dim light, his nostrils flaring. He flashes a smile the omega’s way, his cheek dimpling in the way women find irresistible, his long black hair loose around his shoulders.

“Hey, gorgeous,” he says, striding to the bed and bending down to peck her cheek. “Did you build this nest?”

“Yes,” she says blushing.

“I love it.” He stands there staring down at the omega and her mouth parts in a little oh, the cover falling from her hands.

I lean in and kiss the point under her ear.

“Are you sure you still want to do this?” I say.

“Yes,” she whispers back, her eyelids falling shut as I lick a line down her neck. She hooks her arms around my neck and tugs me towards her and I climb over the piles of cushions, pushing her down into the bed and hovering over her.

“How are you feeling, Baby Girl? You need to come again?”

“Hmmm,” she moans as I tweak one of her nipples.

“Is that a yes?”

“You know it is.”

“You heard the woman,” I instruct Levi. “What you waiting for?” I lie down by the side of the omega and kiss her mouth, gently nudging apart her thighs.

Levi climbs onto the bed.

“Can I lick you out, Sweetness? Make you come all over my tongue?” he asks.

She pulls back from our kiss and meets Levi’s gaze.

“Yes,” she says, her voice betraying her nerves.

I squeeze her thigh, before stroking my hand up her soft skin and cupping her tit in my palm.

My packmate lowers his face to her sex. The jealousy I felt when he touched her the day before has vanished. I understand why I felt that way now. I was scared she wanted him and not me, and that cut me deep in my heart.

But she wants me. She wants us both.

I'm torn. Wanting to watch as Levi eats her out, but also wanting to kiss her again, to swallow up all her erotic little noises as she falls apart.

She decides for me, her right hand cradling my jaw, her thumb gliding across stubble, her other hand tangling in Levi's hair.

As Levi pleasures her, she flinches and whimpers. I capture her bottom lip between my teeth nibbling on it as I circle my thumb around her pert nipple, the skin there as soft as velvet.

Levi groans between her legs.

"What does she taste like?" I whisper.

But Levi's too busy to answer, his head bobbing up and down as he laps at her folds, and in return the omega mewls like a cat.

"Like honey and sugar and all the sweetest things you can possibly imagine," I tell her.

Her eyes open at the sound of my voice and I gaze straight into their caramel depths, watching as her pupils eclipse the hues, and she becomes a woman possessed, taken over by pleasure. So damn beautiful.

I knew sharing her like this would be erotic. I knew it would turn me on to watch her be pleased by one of my packmates. But I hadn't counted on the aroma, on the sounds, on the way tiny bumps race across her flesh, on the pinch of her tightening grip on my chin.

I see it, the very moment her release hits her and as her lips part. I kiss her, sliding my tongue deep into her mouth, the

tight bud of her nipple becoming impossibly hard.

When she finally falls back down, I pull away and Levi is right there, leaning down to claim her mouth next, his face glistening with her slick.

He falls down to lie by her other side and she rolls with him, her hands searching under his shirt as he explores her body in return.

I nip her shoulder and trail a line of kisses towards her sweet smelling gland, licking at it with my tongue and wanting nothing more than to sink my teeth into it. I know it would be the ultimate high, like nothing I've ever tasted or experienced before. I hold back, though. Biting her there would bind us together forever and it's too soon for that.

So I drag myself away, instead, tracing the curve of her beautiful spine, pausing at the dip before her arse.

I nudge her legs apart and she complies willingly, letting me come up flush behind her and thrust my cock inside her cunt.

She gasps and Levi's hand clutches at my hip. Dragging me deeper into her, then slipping to her clit.

"This OK?" I whisper into her ear, smoothing her hair away from her neck. She's trapped between two powerful alphas and if she's going to find it too much, this would be the moment. "It's not too much?"

"Alpha," she pleads. "It's not too much, it's not ... it's not ..."

"It's not what?" I ask her, nipping her earlobe to get her attention as she writhes between us.

"Not enough," she squeals.

Not enough? And here I was going gentle on her? I don't need any more invitation. I grab her by the hipbone and thrust into her, using the full power of my body to fuck her hard and deep. The friction drives her wild. She thrashes around like a live wire, pleading for her next orgasm, begging for a knot.

I'm not going to give it to her just yet.

Over her shoulder, I catch Levi's eyes, dark with desire. He winks at me, then bends low to suck on the omega's nipples.

"You want to suck his cock, Baby Girl?" I ask her.

"Oh," she whimpers.

"You don't have to, but if you want to ..."

"I want to," she mutters.

"Levi," I say. "Our girl wants your cock."

"Does she?" he purrs, her nipple leaving his mouth with a pop.

He swivels around on the bed, so his face is lined up with her sex again and his stiff cock bobs in front of her mouth. He grips it around the base.

"You want me to come in your mouth, Sweetness?"

"Yes," she gasps, opening her lips to receive him. My view from behind isn't the best, but it's enough.

"Fuck, you look good with your mouth stuffed full of cock. You'd look even better if you suck on him, Baby Girl. Go on."

She does as I say, and even though her ministrations are sloppy from her hazed state and the way her body bounces around from the fucking I'm giving her, Levi still dips his head back and groans.

Then he nuzzles his nose between her folds and eats her out again.

"Giorgie," I pant, knowing this is all too damn erotic for me to last much longer, "Giorgie, you're so incredible. I should've told you long ago. I've wanted you like this for such a long time."

My balls tingle and soon that sensation sweeps across my body, my thrusts stuttering, the tension draining away from my body, and my seed emptying into her womb. I pull her flush against me, sinking my cock as deep inside her as I can as my knot inflates. The squeeze of her warm cunt around my knot

has me coming again. And she comes with me, her body like putty in my hands.

Giorgie

I come with my mouth around Levi's cock. I can't give him any rhythm, no real attention. What the two men are doing to me is too much and the ecstasy blasting through my body too strong. So I simply moan, licking at his head. It seems to be enough for him though, because soon his cock is twitching against my tongue and with a deep grunt his seed hits the back of my throat.

Levi's come tastes strong, like his scent, like storm clouds and thunder. And I gulp it down willingly, loving the way it warms my gullet and then my belly. As I drink more and more, I see him take a grip of the base of his cock and wrap his fingers around his growing knot.

I wait for that feeling of panic, of fear to creep in the way it always does these days when I go to bed with someone. That regret after the deed is done, and that unsettling feeling that it was a mistake and I've fallen for the same stupid trap.

But it never comes. It's gone. Nowhere to be found. There's only deep satisfaction and desire swimming through my veins and a comfortable contentment as Jake nuzzles at my gland and Levi laps languidly at my clit.

Being with two men, two alphas, is so much more intense, overwhelming, and all consuming than I could ever have imagined. Connie tried to explain this to me but it has to be

experienced to be understood. Being cared for by more than one alpha has my little omega heart singing and every single part of my body pleased.

I close my eyes, let them carry me away, knowing I'm prepared to go further. That I trust these men to take more from me.

"I want Levi to knot me too," I whisper, before I fall asleep.

It's much later when I wake again, the room dark with night and the two alphas sleeping beside me, our legs tangled, both their arms wrapped around my body. For a moment, I simply marvel at them. They both possess bodies that have women drooling; well built, honed, strong. But where one alpha is fair, the other is dark, and then here I am, somewhere in between, my own skin a honey colour.

Levi has a tangle of inks scrawled across his body, far more than Jake, and I study them, curious about what each one represents. While Jake's chest is smooth, Levi has a small patch of fuzz at the centre of his chest that trails down his abdomen to the jet curls that frame his heavy cock. It's half hard despite his sleep. Like Jake, he's in rut, ready in an instance to service me. All I have to do is ask.

I kiss Jake's shoulder gently, then Levi's, before carefully slipping from the bed. I find a discarded t-shirt of Levi's on the floor and I tug it over my head before going in search of the bathroom.

On my way back down the hallway, I see the light from the kitchen and hear the clink of cutlery against china. Immediately my stomach rumbles with hunger, and despite my unsteady footsteps, I walk towards the kitchen.

I blink as I step through the ajar door and into the room, finding Dylan at the counter, surrounded by packets and jars of ingredients and a large mixing bowl.

He looks up as I enter and lowers the whisk he's holding.

"Omega, are you alright?" he asks, with concern.

“Yes,” I say, coming to lean against the counter. “I heard a noise ... it’s late, isn’t it?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” he explains, “Cooking is what I do when I can’t sleep.”

I wonder if I’m the reason he can’t sleep. It must be hard knowing his two packmates are rutting me and not having his own invitation. But we agreed to take this slowly.

I rise up on my tiptoes and peek into the bowl.

“What are you making?”

“Chocolate mousse.”

“Chocolate mousse? Where on earth did you find the ingredients for that?”

“This villa is luxury, it’s stocked with all sorts. But actually the ingredients are pretty simple. Cream, eggs, chocolate. Bit of sugar and butter.”

“The people who stay here probably have chefs with them.”

“Yeah, but I like to cook.”

“I know you do,” I grin. “Can I try?”

He tips his head to one side, giving me a hard stare. “You weren’t exactly convinced by my cooking yesterday.”

“I told you I have high standards.”

“So you should.”

I lean my elbows on the countertop and rest my chin in my hands. “I think so.”

He crooks his finger and beckons me forward. I stroll around the counter top and stop in front of him, struck by how tall he is and intrigued by his scent, like the air after it’s rained.

“I just melted the chocolate,” he says, dipping a wooden spoon into the molten liquid and brushing it against my lips.

Immediately I swipe my tongue along my bottom lip, tasting the bitterness of the dark chocolate.

“Hmmm,” I say.

“Too bitter?” he asks.

I nod and he drags a bowl of whipped cream towards him, scooping a stiff peak out with a spoon and bringing this to my mouth. I part my lips and consume the cream, letting it melt into my mouth.

It’s sweeter than the chocolate.

“Better?”

I tip my head from side to side in indecision.

“You have a sweet tooth.” He grins at me.

“When in heat I do.”

“Well then.” He pops his forefinger in his mouth, wetting the tip, then opens the bag of sugar and plunges his finger inside. When he pulls it out, it’s covered in a dusting of white crystals. This time he offers his finger to me. Holding his gaze, I stick out my tongue, and glide it along the length of his finger, the sugar melting onto my tongue as I do and the hit striking right at the centre of my mind.

His green eyes darken, his nostrils flare. I take his hand in mine and guide his finger into my mouth, sucking it clean before nipping at the pad.

“Jake had us believe you were all work and no play, Georgie. But I think you like to play.”

I feel my cheeks warm. I guess I do like to play. Have I kept that hidden from Jake? I wanted him to take me seriously. I didn’t want him to think he could push me around or take advantage of me.

But the truth is, I do like to play. I do like to have fun. I’m beginning to think I could have a lot of fun with this pack.

“I do.” I peer up at him, hoping he’ll see the invitation in my eyes.

He takes a small step towards me, pinching the front of my t-shirt between his finger and thumb.

“This isn’t yours,” he says.

“No, I’m guessing it’s Levi’s.” I sniff. “It smells like him.”

“It looks good on you,” he says, tugging me ever so gently towards him. “And your scent combined with his is pretty intoxicating.”

I rest my fingertips against his taut stomach, brushing the fabric of his own t-shirt.

“He’s your boyfriend?” I ask, wondering if he’s jealous at all, wondering how all of this works.

My only experience is my brother’s pack and while I know they all sleep with their omega, they don’t sleep with each other. Their relationships have never been like that. Would a pack like this one, with everyone loving each other, be more or less complicated? Would jealousies rip the pack apart? Could I happily share my alphas? Surrender them to each other?

Yes, I think I could. I’ve always had room enough in my heart, so much love I’ve been wanting to share.

“I guess you could call him that. We love each other and we sleep together. We have a strong bond. I’m closer to him than the others. But we’re not exclusive. He’s free to sleep with whomever he likes. Free to fall in love with whomever he likes.” He twists the shirt bringing me closer still. “And so am I.”

My pulse jumps into my throat and slick slides onto my thigh. It’s been some time since my last orgasm and I’m becoming needy again, that ache building between my legs.

“I haven’t,” I whisper, “slept with him yet.”

He nods.

“Tell me what you have done with him. I want to know.” His free hand comes to rest casually on my right hip and as I speak he slides it under the t-shirt and brushes his fingers against my bare stomach.

“He went down on me,” I whisper, shivering against his soft touch.

“He made you come?”

“Yes, lots of times.” His fingers trail upwards, over my ribs and find the curve of my breast.

“Hmmm,” he says with satisfaction as he takes it in his hand. “He’s good with his tongue, isn’t he?”

When I don’t reply, he tweaks my nipple and I squeak in alarm.

“Yes, very,” I murmur and he lifts the shirt, ducking down to kiss my nipple tenderly.

“What else?” he asks me.

“I sucked him off. He came in my mouth.”

He groans against my nipple, the vibration of his lips sending shock waves through my body. Then he stands and cups my jaw in his hand. “He came in my mouth too, today.” He meets my gaze, searching it for any sign of discomfort or jealousy. But all he must find is desire, and I shiver as the image of them together flashes in my mind.

“He tastes good, doesn’t he?” he adds.

“Yes,” I say, and as my lips part on the word, he leans in to kiss me, plunging his tongue deep in my mouth.

I capture his tongue between my lips and suck on it, and he growls, yanking me flush against his strong body, his hard cock pressing against my belly.

It makes me needier still and I have an intense desperation to take him inside me. Before I can tell him though, he swings me into his arms and walks me over to the couch, dropping me onto its cushions.

“You’re so wet,” he murmurs against my ear. “I need to taste you.”

“And I need you inside me,” I admit.

“After,” he says, ripping the t-shirt from my body and halting for a minute to let his gaze run all over me. “God,” he groans and then he flips me onto my stomach, my knees on the floor.

His thumb connects with my clit and he sweeps the calloused pad through my folds, skimming around my entrance, then continuing between the cheeks of my arse and teasing my puckered hole.

I gasp as sparks fly through my body.

“You like that?” he whispers in my ear.

“I don’t know.”

I feel him nod behind me. “You never tried that before then?”

“Not for a long time.”

“Do you want me to keep touching you there, or stop, Giorgie?”

“Don’t stop.” Placing aside my demons and living in the moment, I listen to my body and go with what feels good, what feels right.

I take a deep breath as he continues to tease my hole with his thumb while coming to nuzzle his face between my folds. At first he kisses me there gently, then the kisses become deeper and more searching, his tongue swiping along my folds and hitting my clit, making me moan.

“Hmmm you’re so wet, little Plaything,” he says in his lilting Welsh accent, an accent that could give me my first auditory orgasm. “I could play with you all night, especially when you taste this good. I can see how you’ve been torturing Jake all year.” I frown at his words, unsure what he means. I’ve no time to digest them because next he plunges his tongue inside me, all the while stroking at my hole. Everything between my legs tingles with pleasure and a pulse beats in my clit.

“I need to come,” I plead, wiggling my behind in his face, writhing with his tongue inside me, needing friction.

He squeezes the globes of my arse and then turns his attention to my clit. His technique and skill is different to his packmates and I can see the advantages of having these

different alphas pleasuring me, each in their own unique way. Which one is best? I don't think I could decide.

Dylan likes to tease. He flickers his tongue against my clit, driving me towards release, then pulls back, giving me long, careless slurps, not enough to push me over.

It's both delicious, and torturous. Tears race down my cheeks and the words streaming from my mouth are all desperate pleas.

"You wanna come?" he asks. "You wanna come, little Plaything, then come for me now." Pinching my clit between his lips, he hums violently, thrusting his thumb inside my hole as he does. I come so hard my legs shake, my vision whites and my ears buzz.

I'm still surfing the wave, his thumb still inside me, when he pulls back and I feel the nudge of his cock between my folds.

"Omega, do you want this too?"

"Yes," I gasp, jolting with the aftershocks of my release. "Yes, I need your knot, Alpha."

"Yeah, you do," he grunts as he thrusts his way in.

He's as big as the others, and although I'm looser now and wet, the combination of his thumb in my arse and his cock in my cunt is intense. Like nothing I've ever experienced. I know it's the ultimate. That pack omegas rave about the insane pleasure of taking two cocks. The idea seemed just that to me: insane. Uncomfortable, possibly damaging. Perhaps I was wrong. I've never felt so anchored, so possessed, and I have a longing for the other alphas to be here with us. For me to take more than one of them. To pleasure more than one.

Dylan may seem like the sensitive quiet one of the pack. He's anything but when it comes to rutting.

He pounds into me, his grip tight in my hair, the sounds of our skin slapping together brutal.

Maybe sex this rough would have had me running for the hills a day or two ago. But I'm too lost in my body, too taken

over by feeling, for the fear to find me. Besides, I feel safe, especially when he whispers,

“Is this OK, Omega? You want me to stop?”

“No! Don’t stop, please don’t stop.”

He continues to pound me until I’m spiralling upwards. My walls convulse around him and he falters once, twice, tugging his thumb from my hole as he comes, his knot expanding and the stretch tripping me over into my release.

With his knot locked into me, he tugs my head backwards and kisses me over my shoulder, my body shaking from the adrenaline.

Then he scoops us up and settles us both down on the sofa, purring for me as I snuggle against him.

“Good game, little Plaything?” he asks.

“Yes,” I hum, smiling as I drift asleep.

“Then I hope we can play it again.”

A heat has never felt this good. Sex has never felt this good. Perhaps I’ve finally laid the ghosts of my past to rest.

Dylan

I watch the little omega sleeping in my arms, transfixed by the rise and fall of her chest, the slight quiver of her lips, and the flicker of her eyes beneath their lids.

I've dreamed of having an omega for our pack. As much as I love my mates, it always felt like there was something missing. An omega shaped hole in our lives. The foundations for the home we've built. It seems to me like Giorgie might be the perfect fit for us. She's bright and bolshy. She wouldn't take any shit. She'd challenge and push us to be better people, for ourselves, for each other, for her. But she's also playful and witty, willing to indulge in a bit of fun. She'd pull us out of our dark moods, bring out our lighter sides.

Can we convince her that this is where she belongs? With us in this pack.

When my knot deflates, I slide carefully from her and slip from the sofa, lifting her into my arms. She murmurs, shifting to rest her head in the crook of my arm, but she doesn't wake. As quietly as I can, I carry her back into the room.

Levi's lying out on the bed and I shoo him off, laying the omega in the centre of her nest and drawing the sheet over her body.

"Everything alright?" Levi asks me.

“Fucking amazing!” I grin at him and his gaze flicks back to Giorgie. “God, it smells bloody incredible in here.” I take a deep inhale, my blood tingling and my cock hardening.

“You had fun then, mate?” Levi returns my grin.

“She’s something special.”

He chuckles. “What happened?”

“I was making her some chocolate mousse and she fucking jumped me.”

Levi chuckles harder. “That does sound fun.” He climbs back onto the bed, kissing the omega’s shoulder and then lying out alongside her.

I watch them both for a moment, admiring how good they look together. My heart warms at the idea that this man I love so much may have found his omega. Our omega. New ideas and fantasies blossom in my mind. Then I remember why I was making that mousse. We have duties as alphas to keep our omega healthy and well fed. She needs to keep up her energy and I’m not letting her fall ill on my watch.

Levi’s eyelids start to droop and I drag myself away and back to the kitchen.

I stand under the cooling breeze of the air conditioner for several minutes letting it sweep away the beads of sweat on my brow. Then I return to my work, my lips twitching when I find the spoon the omega had licked clean and the bag of sugar standing open.

When I’ve mixed all the ingredients together, adding several more spoonfuls of sugar to the mousse to cater to Giorgie’s preferences, I grab a clean spoon and carry it through to the bedroom. I can hear Jake and Aiden talking softly in one of the other rooms, but I don’t interrupt them. I’m too keen to return to Giorgie and Levi.

When I open the door, I find the two of them tangled and kissing on the bed, Giorgie’s golden arms wrapped around Levi’s dark body, her fingers combing through the strands of his long hair.

Perhaps I ought to turn around and give them some privacy. But they're even more beautiful like this, like a painting. Except this is no still life, there is movement and sound and smell. The sweet, sweet aroma of Giorgie in heat.

I lick my lips as if I can taste it and step through into the richly bathed air.

Levi hears me, and pulls back, Giorgie chasing his lips with a whimper.

"You left her all wet and messy for me, mate," he tells me, his fingers lost between her thighs. He drags them from her and her whimpers turn to a cry. His digits glisten with the mixture of my come and her slick and he tells her to take a lick, before plunging them into his mouth and sucking them clean.

"I have something more fulfilling for you to eat," I say to Giorgie, holding up the bowl.

"Nothing could be more fulfilling than that," Levi says with his eyes closed.

But Giorgie spies what I have. "The mousse?" That wide smile curves her cheeks.

"Yep."

I offer the bowl to Levi.

"Aren't you going to join us?" he asks, taking it from me.

I shake my head and drop into the arm chair positioned at the other side of the room. "Not yet."

"More games?" Giorgie asks and I tap the side of my nose.

Giorgie examines me for a moment, then her attention is captured by the mousse. She goes to dip her finger in the chocolate mixture, but Levi swipes the bowl away at the last moment.

"Uh-uh, Sweetness. I'm going to feed you."

"I can feed myself."

“Yes, but this will be more fun. Trust me.” He winks, before gently rolling her onto her back and scooping out a spoonful of the mousse from the bowl. “Let’s see. One spoonful for you ...” He motions with the spoon above her mouth and she parts her lips. He dips the spoon between them, their gaze locked on each other the whole time. She moans as the flavours hit her tongue and my chest swells with pride. Maybe my cooking isn’t so bad after all.

She sucks every scrap from the spoon and then Levi dips it back in the mousse for more.

“And one for me ...” He pauses with the spoon in front of his mouth, then drops the spoon to hover above the Omega’s chest.

“Alpha?” she asks.

He winks again, then drizzles the mousses over her breasts, the cool foam making her squeal.

“Wh—”

Before she can finish, Levi bends over her, his tongue following the pattern of the spoon, licking away every molecule of the mousse from her body. He lingers at her nipples, and the sight of him with the peak between his teeth has my cock hardening.

I like porn as much as the next man, but it pales in comparison to this. This is real, their scents, their moans, the movements of their bodies all portraying how much they want each other. It’s dizzying to watch and I dip my hand beneath my boxers and take my cock in hand, stroking along the shaft as I watch Levi feed Giorgie another mouthful before drizzling more mousse down her navel.

He grips her hips and weaves his tongue languidly down her stomach. Her breaths come in little pants and she parts her legs for him, everything glistening with rich slick between.

“You’re so beautiful, little Plaything,” I whisper. “So wet and welcoming.”

“She is,” Levi agrees, “and she tastes better than your cooking, mate.”

He drags his tongue through her folds, his hands still gripping her in place, preventing her from wiggling away at the intensity of his attention. He reaches her entrance and plunges his tongue deep inside, and I grunt, reliving how good she tastes, increasing the rhythm as I stroke my cock.

“So messy,” Levi murmurs against her. “So much come inside you, Sweetness. You going to let me add mine?”

His words have her moaning and in three quick flicks of his tongue he has her falling apart, dragging her to the end of the bed and standing between her legs.

My packmate is hard as rock, his cock standing proud before her and I watch in awe as he thrusts inside her, his hands never leaving her hips. Her spine arches and her head falls right back. She loves this, the sensation of being filled, of taking all of my packmate’s cock inside.

Levi’s no gentler with her than he was with me, finding a steady, punishing pace, holding her in place so she’s forced to take every powerful thrust. She responds with pleads for more, her fists bunching in the soiled sheets around her.

She wants more?

I’m not going to leave our omega wanting.

I climb out of the chair and pad towards them both. I lean over the bed, squeezing the omega’s tit and pinching her nipple before kissing her hard on the mouth. Next, I turn my attention to Levi. Standing behind him, I nibble on his shoulder as I run my hands up and down his broad back. He peers back at me, eyes glistening with passion, lost in the rut.

“Can I join you?” I ask.

“Fuck, yes,” he pants out.

“Giorgie?”

The omega whimpers in response.

I try again.

“Omega, can I join you?”

Her eyes widen. “H-h-how?”

I grin at her. “Can I?”

“More!” she cries out as Levi hits the spot inside her.

“That’s what you want?”

“Yes, both of you!”

I reach around Levi, smearing my hands in the slick that flows down the omega’s thighs, smothering my cock in it and lathering Levi’s tight hole. He groans as I touch him there.

“You want this, Alpha?” I wiggle my finger inside him and he clenches around me.

“I already said I did,” he snaps.

“Then hold still.” I tug my finger free, pinching the globe of his arse.

He halts his thrusts, the omega hissing and cursing when he does.

I rest one hand on his waist and one on his shoulder and enter him from behind, sliding deep inside his hole. One long groan spills from his lips, his hands tightening around the omega.

“We’re going to do this together,” I tell them, smiling over Levi’s shoulder at the omega.

I slide out of Levi, then plunge back, my motion thrusting him forward into the omega’s pussy. All three of us moan in tandem and I drop my hold from Levi’s waist, gripping the omega’s calf instead and encouraging her to wrap her legs around the both of us. I find a rhythm, my thrusts driving Levi deep inside the omega.

I can’t drag my eyes from her as she looks back up at us both, her lids drowsy with the heat, her skin flushed and her body writhing in pleasure. She can hardly control herself. Every syllable that rolls off her tongue nonsense, her hands scrabbling for purchase. She’s so close to coming and I want to make sure she does before I lose it myself.

“Touch her, Levi,” I tell him.

He's finding it hard to focus himself, lost in the combined sensation of me rutting him while his dick is pleasuring the omega's pussy. I nip his shoulder with my teeth and he responds, reaching down to circle her with his thumb.

It's enough to carry her over. Her body rising off the bed and freezing for one ever-lasting moment, before she crashes straight back down into ecstasy, a deep blush rushing across her flesh before she bucks and jolts with wave after wave of pleasure.

"Fuck, you're milking my cock, Sweetness. I'm going to —" Levi grunts long and hard and his hole squeezes around my cock, so hard my own orgasm hits me fast and furious. My vision whites as pleasure courses through my veins, straight to the tips of my toes. I pull out of him, my come spurting in ribbons on the floor. I stride to the side of the bed, telling the omega to open her mouth and feeding her every last drop as I squeeze my knot.

"You didn't knot him." She licks her lips clean, looking up at me, as Levi collapses over her, showering her body in appreciative kisses.

"He's an alpha, little Plaything. Not built for the knot like you are."

She smiles with pride at that and I bend down to kiss her, letting her pull me onto the bed. Soon the three of us are snuggled up together, my packmate knotted to the omega.

I want to talk to them both. To tell them that was the most incredible moment of my life. To express how much I love my packmate. To explain that I'm falling in love with the omega. To convince her to be our pack omega.

But I'm exhausted, physically and emotionally spent, and the sound of my packmate's soft purrs has me falling into sleep with my arms wrapped around them both.

Aiden

The morning light ripples across the swimming pool as I sit hunched over my knees watching. The warm breeze rustles dust around my ankles and there's the hiss of insects from the brush.

Feeling an outsider isn't new. I've spent more Christmases than I care to remember with other people's families. Tagged along on other people's vacations. Been the only kid without a parent cheering on from the side lines.

I've never belonged anywhere. Not until I joined the Crestmore Rugby team and found my pack. Finally owning my place shoved aside those feelings.

It seems it was only temporary. Because here I am back nursing them.

I squint up at the sky, turning bluer by the minute, watching as a lone aeroplane cuts a path across the expanse.

I'm trying to be patient here, to wait for my invitation. It's becoming increasingly more difficult. This feeling mixed with the irritation in my skin, the tingle in my gland have me right on the edge.

I don't know how long I can stand this. I've waited patiently before. For my invitation to join the game, the meal, the hug, the fun. It was always excruciating. But to be

excluded from the pack? My pack? It's worse than anything that came before. It's as if I can sense the small lines of fissure forming in my already bruised heart.

There's only so much rejection one man can take.

The villa door clicks open and the slap of flip flops on the flagstones have me looking up into Jake's face.

"What you doing, mate?"

I shrug. What can I say? Waiting? Sulking? Falling apart?

"Giorgie needs water."

"Right." I stare back out at the pool. A bug's fallen into the water and it struggles on the surface, driving round in circles as it flaps its wings.

"Are you going to fetch her some then?"

I snap my gaze to him. "She wants me to get her some?"

He grins at me and nods.

"Shit, this girl."

He drops down on a lounge next to me.

"I didn't really believe it could ever be this way." He lowers his voice, leaning in to whisper in my ear. "Levi and Dylan just rutted her together."

I stare at him in disbelief and he pats me on my shoulder.

"Go on, go get her that water. She's making mutterings about you avoiding her."

I tug him in for a hug. "Thank you."

He hugs me back. "I know you'll take good care of her, mate."

Then he pushes me on my way and my feet can't carry me quick enough, through the villa to the kitchen and then to the bedroom, a glass of cool water in my hand.

I pause outside the door and run my hand through my hair. I knock.

"Come in," her bright voice responds.

It's dim in the bedroom, the curtains pulled shut, but I see she's alone, sitting up in the nest, dressed in Jake's shirt.

"I brought you some water," I hand it to her but her hands shake as she grasps it, water splashing over the rim. I notice the sheen of sweat on her brow, the frenzied look in her eyes. "Here." I sit on the bed beside her, gripping the glass to steady it and bring it to her lips. She parts them automatically and I tip the water into her mouth. Her skin is scorching hot, I can feel it even though we're not touching. As I tip the glass back upright, her face scrunches up in pain and she moans.

"It hurts?"

"Yes."

"You want me to make it better," I stroke her cheek, "little Geek?"

"There's nothing wrong with being a geek," she pouts at me, her face taut with the pain.

"No, there's not. There are certain things that I think it pays to be studious about."

A drip of water cascades down her chin and I capture it with my thumb, drawing it pack up to her lips.

"Like what?" she breathes, her eyes transfixed by my alpha gaze.

I smirk, trailing my thumb down her throat and the curve of her breast, full beneath the cotton of the shirt, down her stomach. There I halt. She's not wearing underwear.

I want to touch her, but I have to be sure that this is what she wants.

I continue staring into the caramel of her eyes. "There's one thing I studied harder than anything else." I drift my thumb a little lower, feeling curls beneath the shirt.

"What?" she asks again.

"How to make an omega come."

She smiles at this and I smile right back, lifting the hem of the shirt and gazing down at her.

“May I?”

She giggles. “You may.”

“Good.” I growl as I touch her. She’s all hot and swollen and wet as can be.

I’m going to make her come, make her feel better. First on my fingers and then on my cock.

I swim my digits through her folds, closing my eyes so I can focus all my attention on feeling her.

I didn’t own a lot as a kid, and I realise in this moment that there is one thing above all I want to own. Sweet omega pussy. Pussy that belongs to me and my pack. Pussy I can spend all day and all night pleasuring.

I discover her stiff little nub and toy with it, hearing her breath come in needy pants, her folds becoming wetter as more slick flows from her core.

Her clit quivers against my fingertips and I know it wouldn’t take much to have her coming. I want to feel her cunt first though. I find her entrance, and tease her as I circle it.

“You see,” I whisper to her. “Most girls, omegas especially, are just a bit greedy.” She harrumphs at this and I’m not surprised, even in the depths of her heat, Giorgie will call out what she suspects is bullshit. I pursue my point. “They want to come quickly.”

“I need to come. It hurts,” she whines.

“I know, my little Geek, but if you let me take the time to do this properly, it’s going to be a lot better. I promise you.”

“You have a lot of experience with women then?” she says with another pout.

I’m not answering that.

“Knowledge doesn’t always have to be gained first hand.”

I continue to tease her, and she tenses every time I stray close to entering her. I continue this torture, flicking against her clit with the pad of my thumb. She’s so soft down here and so warm. Like a home should be. Like an omega should be.

I can tell my actions are working without having to open my eyes. She swallows more desperate sighs and her legs tremble so hard the bed rocks.

“Alpha,” she begs.

And it’s the invitation I need to slide two fingers inside her. Higher and higher until I hit that point inside her that makes her gasp so loud, I blink open my eyes. Bingo. It’s swollen like the rest of her, all ready for my attention.

“Have you ever gushed, little Geek?”

She shakes her head as she bites down hard on her lip, the flesh turning purple with the pressure.

I stroke at it. There are benefits to being a straight talker. People talk straight back to you. Women will open up and tell you exactly what they want. And I’m a good listener. I’ve paid attention. This is where so many men go wrong. Those with the skills to actually find this point, probe at it like a fucking burger on a barbecue. That’s not what a woman needs. The action is gentler, varying between caressing strokes and some good old fashioned jiggling.

Yeah, that has her sucking in air so hard, her chest expands and she arches right off the bed.

“Oh God ...” she mutters, “I can’t ... it’s too ... much Too ... good.”

“You want me to stop?” I tease, pausing my movements.

Her hands clamp violently around my wrist as she wails out a pained, “No!!”

Immediately I resume the stimulation she needs, but that pause has heightened everything for her. And she screams, her cunt pulsing around my fingers, and liquid gushing from her.

I don’t stop, continuing to pleasure her right through her orgasm as I bend down to lap up the sweet liquid all over her thighs and the bed sheets.

“Fuck!” she mutters when I’ve wrung two more orgasms and another gush of liquid from her body. “Fuck, you weren’t lying.”

“I told you I’m not a bullshitter.” What I am is hard, so hard it’s becoming painful. I want to fuck her now. Fuck her, seed her, knot her. I’m the only one who hasn’t.

But as I gaze down at her flushed face, her eyes all dazed with pleasure, her eyelids falling closed, what I want to do more is kiss her. To claim that deeper connection with her. I may be a straight talker but it doesn’t mean I’m any good at explaining how I feel. A kiss would though. In a kiss I can show her better than any words how grateful I am to be here with her, to be seen by her. And her kiss in return will tell me if all this is real. If she feels anything for me at all.

It’s too late though, she’s falling asleep. Gently, I pull the sheet around her, plumping up the pillow around her face and lie out alongside her.

I stroke her soft cheek, intrigued by the way her dark eyelashes fan across the brow.

I guess I’m going to have to wait that bit longer.

I fish my phone out of my pocket and scroll through my messages.



One moment I’m floating in bliss, in her sleep the omega has curled up against me, her head resting on my chest, my arm wrapped around her body.

The next a blood-curdling scream hollers from her lips and she struggles in my arms.

“Omega?” I say, as Jake sprints into the room three seconds later, his eyes full of alarm.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know!” I say, trying to soothe the distraught omega.

“Did you hurt her?”

“No!” I growl, the omega struggling and screaming in my arms.

She’s like a wild thing, thrashing about, swiping at me and then Jake with her nails, and finally, with strength I didn’t know she possessed, yanking herself away from me.

She scurries away from me on her hands and knees, jumping down from the bed and fleeing from the room. We both race after her into the kitchen. There she hits the wall and, with nowhere else to go, slides down it, curling herself tightly into a ball when she reaches the floor.

From above her tightly clutched knees, her scared eyes bore into me, then Jake.

“Stay away from me! Stay the fuck away from me,” she sobs.

Jake has his hands around my throat in the next second. He squeezes hard as I gasp for air, and I scrabble at his fingers as he shouts in my face,

“What did you do, you piece of shit?! What did you do?”

“Nothing,” I gasp, “Nothing.”

“I said take it slow, gently, on her terms. You pushed her! You pushed her too far.”

Footsteps thunder down the hallway and skid into the kitchen. Levi and Dylan stand in the doorway, eyes wide with shock as they take in the scene.

“What the fuck ...” Levi says, racing towards the omega and dropping down to crouch in front of her. “Omega—”

“No!” she screams, “No, stay away! Stay away!” She turns her face away from him, not even able to bring herself to look at him.

“What happened?” Levi growls, turning to Jake.

“I walked into the bedroom and found our packmate,” he spits the word, glaring at me the whole time, “fucking the omega and she was screaming, trying to get away—”

“It wasn’t like that,” I yank his arm away, pulling myself up to my full height. “You’ve got it all wrong. I wasn’t fucking her!”

“How was it then, mate?” Dylan squares up next to Jake. “Because it looks like you fucked her over pretty bad.”

I scowl at him as anger courses through my veins.

How could they think this? How could my packmates think I’d do anything to hurt an omega?

Because I don’t belong. I don’t belong anywhere.

I drag in a long breath, trying to calm the fuck down. This bullshit is stopping us from caring for the omega, from understanding what the fuck freaked her out. I know it wasn’t anything I did. Know that with every part of my heart.

But they think I did. My own packmates.

“Omega.” Levi tries again, his voice so soft I hardly hear him. “You’re OK, You’re OK. You’re safe here. I won’t let anything happen to you. Did he ...” he swallows and I can’t even bring myself to look at him, “did he hurt you?”

Her arms are wrapped so tightly around her legs, I can see every taut tendon running down her forearms and into her hands.

She shakes her head. A tiny movement but there.

I breathe a deep sigh of relief, stumbling backwards a little.

Jake continues to glare at me but I pay him no heed.

“I want to go home,” the omega whispers.

“Back to the hotel?” Levi asks.

“It’s not safe—” Jake begins but Levi holds up his hand to halt him.

“Home,” the omega sobs. “I want to go home.” Her whole body shakes violently, her teeth chattering as more tears stream down her pale cheeks. I want nothing more than to gather her into my arms and purr for her, to make her feel

better. I can see how Levi is fighting the same urge. He swallows a second time, his hands fists by his sides.

“Baby girl,” Jake whines and she visibly flinches.

What the fuck is going on?

“I thought I could do this,” the omega mumbles to herself, not us. “I thought I could do this. But I was so stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid to fall for this again. To fall for the same trap. You alphas are all the same.”

The four of us exchange glances unable to make sense of her words.

Jake locks his angry glare on me again. “I will fucking beat the shit out of you, Aiden. You pushed her too far!”

“I didn’t.”

I walk assuredly to Levi’s side and drop down beside him.

“Omega.” I whisper gently, “We would never hurt you. Never. Can you see how Jake nearly strangled me just thinking I hurt you?” Her eyes flick to me, red raw and glazed.

“You were filming,” she suddenly spits with venom and such hatred it’s like a punch to the gut.

“Me?” I say, tumbling backwards onto my backside.

“All of you! You scumbags! I want to go home. I want my brother.”

“You’re mid heat,” Dylan says in exasperation. “It’s not safe for you to go anywhere.”

“I’m not safe here!” she screams. “I know what you were doing. I know what you’re going to do.”

“Omega, Omega,” Levi tries to rest his hands on her shoulders, but she squeals, scurrying further away. “What were we doing?” he asks, examining the terrified omega in the corner. “What are we going to do?”

She opens her mouth to answer him but she can’t get the words out. Instead, her whole body convulses as she dry heaves into her hands.

“Fuck,” Jake mumbles, scrubbing his hands through his hair.

“Omega,” Levi says more firmly now, appealing to her deep omega instinct to obey. “Answer me. What are we doing here?”

She heaves violently once more but this time, forces the word out. “Filming.” she shudders, “Filming me.”

My gaze drops to my lap and the phone still gripped in my hands.

“Filming?” I repeat, the phone crunching in my tightening grip.

Silence hangs in the room, the only sound is the sniffles of the omega. Dried come and slick is plastered to her legs, her hair dishevelled around her face, several strands stuck to her wet cheeks. I’ve never seen someone look so lost, so vulnerable.

“Is that what he did to you?” Levi whispers. “The man before. He filmed you.”

She meets his warm eyes and it seems to pull her out of whatever hell she’s entered.

“Yes,” she whispers.

“What did he film?” Levi asks, reaching out to take her hand in his, careful not to scare her.

She shakes her head, like she can’t bring herself to tell us.

“Something intimate?” Jake offers and this time she nods.

“I was in heat.”

“That’s not what I was doing.” I whisper, “I swear on my life. I would never, ever ... I was checking in with your friend, Sia, like Jake agreed. Letting her know you were OK.”

The omega buries her face in her knees. This time her body shakes with her sobs. Levi squeezes her hand.

“What can we do, Sweetness? What can we do to help?” She doesn’t answer him. “Do you want to go back to the

nest?” He pauses for a response. “Or we can stay here and I’ll just keep on holding your hand.”

I stare down at her, shame, rejection and self-disgust hurtling through my body. Nausea of my own sloshes in my stomach and I taste bile at the back of my throat.

I did this to her.

Me.

I need to fix it.

I walk from the room, returning a moment later with a blanket in my arms that I pass to Levi. Levi drapes it carefully around the omega’s shoulders, clearly trying his best not to spook her. She takes a hold of the edges and pulls the material taut around her body.

When she’s done, we’re all silent again. The hiss from the swimming pool, lit up beyond the window, the only sound now.

I hold out my hand.

“Phones,” I grunt.

The omega stares up at me with frightened eyes, yanking the blanket more tightly around her small frame.

“What?” Dylan asks, glaring at me like he wishes I would keep my mouth shut.

“Everyone give me your phones,” when none of them move, I bark, “now.”

Jake hands his over immediately and Dylan scrambles to his feet, finding his phone on the counter and passing it to me.

“Where’s yours?” I ask Levi who seems reluctant to pull his hand from the omega’s.

“In the bedroom.”

I go in search of it.

One of the floor lamps is lit casting mellow light across the giant bed. Pillows and cushions lie scattered in strange patterns and I stare at the nest the omega built. It stinks of her.

A stink that has every inch of my skin tingling and my cock stirring. Sex, sweat, come and slick. I have to fight the urge to climb into the bed and roll around in the soiled sheets.

Fuck. How did events go from what went down in here to the mess out there in the kitchen?

I rub the heel of my palm into my eye socket, suddenly exhausted.

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I pushed her too hard. I knew she had a history of some sort. Maybe if I hadn't teased her like I did, she wouldn't have reacted like that when she saw the phone. Then again, I'm not so sure. It was like a switch. One minute she'd been blissed out in my arms, the next shaking and screaming uncontrollably.

What was on that video? What did the dickhead film? Who is he? And most importantly where can I find him?

Spotting Levi's phone on the bedside table, I grab it and take it back to the kitchen.

They've moved the omega to the sofa, and she sits sandwiched between Jake and Levi, sipping from a glass of water. I breathe a sigh of relief seeing the colour returned to her cheeks.

I pile more devices in my arms. The phones, Jake's laptop, Dylan's kindle and Levi's iPad. I walk over to the large picture that hangs on the wall, the pyramids at sunset, swinging the painting to one side to reveal the door of the safe behind. I punch in the code and the door flings open. Our passports and other travel documents sit inside. I add all the communication devices, then hold my thumb down on the reset button.

"We're locking these in the safe and you're going to set the new code, Georgie. That means only you will be able to open the doors. We won't be able to access our devices."

Now she seems a bit more rational. I wonder if she'll argue, insist there is no need. She doesn't. Gingerly, she climbs to her feet and hobbles towards the safe. I take several steps away and turn my back, hearing the beeps as the omega inputs the new code, the door slamming shut afterwards.

I twist back around.

“Better?” I ask her.

“Yes,” she says. “Thank you.” She chews on her bottom lip. “I’m going to go lie down.”

“Do you want me to come with you?” Jake asks. “Or one of the others?”

“No, I ... I need some space.”

Jake looks as if he might argue but Levi silences him with a jab of his elbow.

We all watch as she hobbles from the room. She’s obviously sore from all the rutting and knots she’s taken. I want to make that right but now isn’t the time.

The bedroom door opens, then shuts, and the key turns in the lock.

I turn to the others. They look as if they just witnessed a car crash.

Fuck!

Giorgie

The next 24 hours are some of the worst of my life. Flailing about in my now empty nest, enduring the agony of my heat without any means of relief.

The contractions in my womb rip through my body, and I scream in agony, clutching onto the covers, and my whole body drenched in sweat. Slick flows from my core soaking the mattress, and my skin is too tight. I scratch at it, at the gland at the back of my neck and soon my skin is marked by red welts.

I bite on my knuckles, pull at my hair, try my best to suppress my screams and cries, knowing I'm provoking the alphas out there.

Alphas I don't want anywhere near me. I don't care that their phones are locked away. I don't care that they've promised to take care of me.

This was a mistake. A stupid, stupid mistake. And I am a stupid, foolish girl for ever believing it would be otherwise.

Because I'm damaged. Permanently and irrevocably damaged and scarred by what happened to me. Seduced by the charms of an alpha, fooled into sharing my heat with him, only to be taken advantage of. It changed me, and this is who I am now. I shouldn't pretend I'm something I'm not. An omega who can enjoy her heat, enjoy her body, explore her desires.

I need to stick to safe and simple.

Jake Grantham, Jake Grantham's pack, are anything but.

It doesn't stop my traitorous body from wanting them though. Their scents hang heavy in the room like delicious, tempting fruit. Their come stains the sheets. And I can't stop myself from taking large lungfuls of those aromas or from rolling in their mess, wanting it all over my skin. It does little to relieve me, only drives me wilder. But I hardly know my own mind, barely able to hang on to that thread of truth, remembering who I really am.

My feverish mind keeps delivering up flashes of memories that have me sobbing. Jake kissing me under the stars, Levi's fingertips brushing my skin in the swimming pool, sucking Dylan's sugar-sweetened finger, even the way Aiden had taken control of the situation out there in the kitchen.

And the sex too. So good, I make my lip bleed when I bite down on it to stop from calling for those alphas, begging for more.

I can't trust myself not to fall apart again. And no matter how bad this is now, that dark place, that terrifying black pit, is a million, million times worse.

Time bends and warps, the light in the room bright one moment, dark the next. Shadows shift, the air warms and stales. The pain never stops.

Until finally, it does.

I jolt awake, tangled in the bed sheets, the light in the room a dull grey.

I blink up at the ceiling. The ache between my legs has dulled and the pain subsided. For the first time in days I feel cool air rush against my skin and I am no longer boiling hot.

It's over. At last, it's over.

I roll onto my side, hugging my body.

I allow myself to cry a little with relief and, because, if I'm honest, I feel miserably sorry for myself.

After a few minutes of this self indulgence, I wipe my face with my palm and scoot to the edge of the bed. It's completely trashed. The sheets and blankets will have to be burnt and the mattress binned. I will cover the cost of the damage, I can't ask the alphas to do that.

At the edge of the bed, I wrap one of the less soiled blankets around my frame, and pick up my phone from the side table. It's been turned off for the whole of my heat. Only I have the passcode to switch it on.

Holding my thumb down on the button, I watch as it lights up, chirping in my hand.

Several messages spring up. A conversation between Sia and Jake, with him giving her updates. Those stopped a day ago and there's a string of anxious messages from Sia as well as missed calls.

Guilt swims through my stomach making me sicker than I already am. I need to let her know I'm OK, but first I need to talk to my brother.

I dial his number, wondering how he's going to take this news.

But it's not Ric who answers the call, it's his mate, Connie.

"Giorgie," she squeals down the line. "Is that you?"

"Hi Connie. It's me."

"Oh my god, I'm so glad you called. Ric's been driving us mad here because you haven't been in touch for like, what, two day's or something ridiculous. I've told him you're too busy having fun but you know how he is." I can practically hear her rolling her eyes. "So are you? Having fun?"

"I'm ..." I try to keep it together, to keep my voice calm and collected. I don't want her to worry. But the sound of her kind voice has my bottom lip trembling and a sob breaks free from my throat.

"Giorgie?" she gasps, her voice suddenly alert with tension. "Giorgie is everything alright? What's going on?"

“I want to come home.” I’m properly crying now and I’m sure she can tell. I know I’m cutting short a trip of a lifetime, blowing off my chance to claim that research place I’ve been working hard for. Throwing away the future I’ve been dreaming of. But right now none of that matters to me. I just want to be home.

“Oh sweetie, what’s happened?”

I meant to be vague about the whole thing. I know Ric and his pack already worry about me as it is. I’m also sure no matter how many times I reassure them otherwise, they’re going to hold Jake and the others responsible for this mess and things could turn ugly. The truth comes tumbling out anyway. It’s hard to lie to Connie.

“I got my heat.”

“Your heat? Ahhh shit! Sweetie. You poor thing. Is it over? Are you OK?”

“No,” I say, sniffing. “It all went horribly wrong. I’m such an idiot, Connie, such a giant idiot. Do you think Ric could change my ticket so I can come home early?”

“Shit, Giorgie, you know your brother would move heaven and earth to get you home if that’s what you want.” She pauses, clearly picking her words. “Did something bad happen? Did someone hurt you?”

“No,” I shake my head. “No it wasn’t like that. I thought I could handle more than I could. I had ... I had some kind of flash back I guess and it triggered a panic attack.”

“You were with an alpha then?”

“Hmmm.” I can’t bring myself to tell her I was experimenting with a pack.

“Did he push you too far?”

“No, I pushed myself too far.” Nausea swims through my gut and panic bubbles there too. “Connie, I don’t want to talk about it. I just want to get home as quickly as possible.”

“Of course you do. I’m just ... when I tell your brother you know he’s going to have questions—”

“Please don’t tell him the truth!”

“Giorgie, seriously? Why? This isn’t your—”

“He already thinks I’m some pathetic baby who can’t take care of herself.” And maybe he is right.

“Giorgie, he thinks nothing of the fucking sort. You’re smart and brave and amazing, Giorgie. Do you know how intimidating you are to us mere mortals?”

I smile despite myself, wanting nothing but a hug from my brother’s omega.

“Please, Connie. Just for now. Tell him I got food poisoning or something and want to come home.”

“I’m sending him over there to fetch you, Giorgie.”

“I don’t want to cause any trouble.”

“You haven’t caused any trouble,” Connie insists, but I’m not sure she’s right as I gaze towards the bedroom door. “Where are you now?”

I swallow. “At a private villa.”

“On your own?”

“No,” I screw up my face. “There are alphas here.”

“Are you safe?” Connie asks, her voice more anxious than before.

“Yes, Connie, I’m fine, honestly. They didn’t do anything to me. It was me. Getting lost in my own head.”

“I’m so sorry, sweetie,” she says with sympathy. “Where’s Sia?”

“Back at the dorm.”

“Dorm?” She hums to herself. “I’m going to find you a fuck-off five-star hotel. Get you and Sia checked in and send Ric over to come get you. Just hold tight, OK, sweetie? Let me sort this for you.”

I sniffle, wiping away more tears from my cheeks. “Thank you, Connie.”

“I know how much you were looking forward to this trip. Being an omega really sucks sometimes.”

“It’s OK,” I manage to say with false bravado. “I can always come back another time.” Although they’ll never be another opportunity to impress Professor Weaver and the other researchers like this.

“Are you going to be alright, sweetie? Do you want me to stay on the phone some more?”

“No, I just want to leave.”

“Leave it to me then. I’ll call you back as soon as I’ve sorted everything.”

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“Love you Giorgie,” Connie says, making me cry all over again. “We all do. We’ll get you home as soon as we can, don’t you worry about that.”

She hangs up and I place my phone down on the bed. I need to call Sia next but that conversation has drained me. I’m tired, hungry, thirsty and filthy. I at least need something to drink before I do anything else. Omegas are meant to be careful about keeping hydrated during a heat, but I’d downed the bottles of water in the room early on and had been too scared, too screwed up, to ask for any more.

When I rise up onto my feet, the room spins and I have to clutch the headboard and wait for the dizziness to pass.

Gingerly, I pad across the room. I’m sore between my legs and I want nothing more than to sink into a cooling bath.

I turn the key and draw back the door, finding Jake sitting by the entrance. He jerks awake, scrambling to his feet immediately. He looks about as bad as I feel. Dark shadows ringing his eyes, his hair a matted mess around his head, and days’ old stubble sprouting on his chin.

“Giorgie?” he croaks.

“Hi.”

“Are you OK?” His gaze skims anxiously over my face and my form.

“I am.” I chew my bottom lip. He’s slightly blurred as I squint at him and I force down a choke realising I have no idea where my glasses are. “It’s over.”

His shoulders sag in relief. “What can I do? Do you need anything?”

“A drink,” I say, clutching the wall as that faint feeling returns. He peers over his shoulder as if he doesn’t want to leave me to go fetch water. “I’m going to use the bathroom.”

In the bathroom, I splash warm water over my face and wash away as much of the dried slick and come on my thighs as I can. I need a proper shower, but I don’t trust myself not to faint under the water. Drink and food will have to come first.

I don’t love the idea of parading myself in front of the alphas looking this way and smelling the way I do too. There isn’t much I can do about it though.

Swallowing my pride and wrapping the blanket more securely around my body, I enter the kitchen. Jake’s waiting in there for me with a tall glass of iced water and some bread and jam.

“Where are the others?” I ask him as I take the water gratefully.

“They wanted to get out of your way. They’ve gone for a walk.”

“They didn’t have to.”

“They did,” he says, crossing his arms over his chest and perching on the edge of a stool.

I sip the water, not appreciating how thirsty I am until the cool liquid hits my parched mouth.

It’s awkwardly quiet and I don’t know what to say to him. I can barely look at him, not when my eyes wander inadvertently to those lips of his and I think about how good they felt on my mouth, on my skin. Thoughts like that are dangerous things. They are what landed me in this mess in the

first place. It's strange though, that hours ago our naked bodies were entwined together and he was doing dirty, truly intimate, things to me. Yet now it is as if we're miles apart, as if that impregnable wall has reformed between us.

My heart aches thinking about it. But I ignore it. It's clear this thing between us, this thing that was blossoming and blooming, can't work. I was a fool to think it ever could.

All along I thought that I couldn't trust alphas because they were untrustworthy. Now I know the truth. It's not them. It's me. My ability to trust has been broken forever by that man.

"I'm sorry," he says and although I can't look at him, I know he's looking at me. His gaze is like something heavy.

"You don't need to say that." I stare into the rim of my glass, the ice cube slowly dissolving into the water. I spin it between my fingers. "This was my fault."

"Giorgie!"

I don't want to cry. Not in front of Jake Grantham. I don't want him to pity me. Hate me all you like. But don't pity me.

"I thought I could handle this. But I was wrong."

"A pack?" he asks. His voice cracks a little as if he's trying to hold back an emotion I can't read. Resentment? Probably.

"Alphas," I say, finally raising my gaze to meet his.

He opens his mouth to speak, and a pain seems to flicker in his eyes before he halts. "What happened Giorgie?"

I don't want to tell him but those blue eyes of his suck me in and the words slip right off my tongue.

"I was young. Just a teenager. And he was ..." I cringe. "Older, charming, wealthy. He made me feel so special with all his clever words and his gifts. I thought I was in love. I thought he was in love too. He wanted to see me through my heat. I wasn't sure. I'd never shared one before. But he was so keen, so persistent, so in the end I agreed." I take a sip of my water, the rim shaking against my lip. "He filmed me. Without my knowledge. I didn't know for a long time. Not until things

started to fall apart between us. Until he started to try to control me. He used it as an axe over my head.”

The tight hand around my throat. The harsh words snarled in my ear. The pitch black of that room.

I blink it away, force it from my mind before it sucks me down again.

“I’m sorry, Giorgie,” he whispers and I’m dragged back to the here and now by the sound of his voice. “Where is he now?”

“Prison. Turns out I wasn’t the only one.”

A dark shadow passes over his face and I look away.

“I think you should eat something.” He slides the plate of bread and jam towards me.

“Yes,” I say. “Then if it’s OK, I’m going to take a shower and head back to the hotel. Would you call me a taxi?”

“Of course.”

The picture of the pyramids draws my eyes. I should unlock the safe and return their phones and devices. I’m not ready to do that yet though. Even if I know it’s irrational. That I’m not in heat anymore. Not vulnerable. The thought of those phones in that safe still make me irrationally sick.

I’m so screwed up.

I reach for a piece of bread and snap my teeth through the soft dough. The jam is black current flavour, a mixture of sweet and tart.

“I’m going home,” I tell him.

“How about the dig?”

I shrug, trying not to show him how much it hurts to abandon this trip.

“There’s still a day left. Still time to prove your theory. And then there’s the tour.”

I close my eyes. “I want to go home,” I whisper.

“Home,” he repeats. “I’ll find us flights. I’ll take you home.”

“My brother’s going to arrange it.”

“You can’t travel home alone.”

“Why not?” I say, jutting out my chin. Maybe this is what we need to do. Argue. Fight. Return to what we’re best at. If I provoke him enough.

It doesn’t work. He scrubs his fingers over his jaw. “Whatever you want, Giorgie.”

I pick up the second slice of bread. The food and the water already make me feel more normal. If I can take that shower, wash away the stench, I’ll be fine.

We can forget any of this happened.

I bite through the second slice of bread. “It is,” I tell him.



I feel a little better after the shower, clean, refreshed. But as much as the water can wash away the slick, come, sweat and scents, it can’t remove the scratches I made across my skin, or the bruises at my hips and thighs where alphas held me tight. It will take time for those to fade. Reminders in the meantime that I’d rather forget.

Yes, I want to go home and forget this mess ever happened, forget all about this pack.

The clothes I wore the day my fever started are ruined, so I help myself to a pair of shorts and a t-shirt from the wardrobe. They swamp me and I have to pull the drawstring on the shorts as tight as it will go to keep them at my waist.

Something flashes in Jake’s eyes when I step back out of the bedroom and he takes me in. He’s hovering by the doorway as if he’s been there the whole time I’ve been getting ready.

“The taxi’s here,” he tells me. “Do you have everything you need? Can I fetch you anything?”

“I should unlock the safe,” I tell him and he winces, causing unease to swim through my belly.

He leads the way to the picture on the wall and for a moment I’m filled with regret staring at the painting. I’ve wanted to see the pyramids ever since I was a little girl and we first learnt about the ancient egyptians in class. I’d been obsessed, forcing Ric to take me to the city library on the bus and checking out every book I could find on the subject. Now I’m going to miss seeing them.

Jake catches my gaze lingering on the picture, seeming to understand my emotions.

“Giorgie, you should stay.”

“I can’t,” I say simply, my voice breaking. I swing the picture away, punching the code in the lock and waiting for the door to pop open. When it does, I stand to one side and let Jake pull the devices out.

“I want you to browse through the pictures,” Jake says. “So you know we didn’t—”

“There’s no need,” I explain. “I know I freaked out for no reason.”

“It wasn’t no reason.”

“Jake,” I say, my tone conveying my reluctance to discuss this again.

“OK.” He places the devices on the counter, dragging a pad of paper towards him and scribbling a note across the page. “We’ll go then.”

“We?”

“I’m not letting you travel back to the hotel alone.”

I sigh. I’m exhausted, no energy left to argue with him. We climb into the waiting car and I try not to think of the last time we were in the back seat together, of all the things he did to

me. I stare out of the window, sure his eyes are on me the whole journey but unable to meet his gaze.

At the hotel, he's out of the car and opening my door before I've even grabbed the handle.

He reaches inside taking my hand and helps me out. When I'm standing before him, he squeezes my fingers.

"Giorgie," he says softly and I swallow down hard, staring at the tip of his ear and not his face. "Please stay."

I swallow again, tugging my hand from his grasp and scurrying away before he can stop me.

As I do, as the distance between us grows, I feel something yank deep in my chest, tugging me back towards him. I ignore it, ignore the gnawing emptiness building inside me. This is for the best. The hotel doors part and only when I pass into the hotel foyer do I pause, peering back over my shoulder.

He's still there, standing by the taxi, his hands deep in his pockets, his gaze trained my way.

His mouth moves, forming the word 'Omega' and it takes every bit of my will power to drag my eyes away and keep walking.

Aiden

When we return to the villa, we find it empty. Our phones are neatly stacked on the counter along with a note from Jake.

Taking Giorgie back to the hotel. She didn't want me to come. I didn't take no for an answer.

I read it over Levi's shoulder, shaking my head and flopping down onto the sofa. What a complete fuck up.

The omega spent the remainder of her heat locked in the bedroom. We could hear her through the door, writhing and moaning in agony. She needed an alpha knot, she needed to come. Nothing else would ease her pain. But the door remained locked.

And despite the fact we nearly gnawed our knuckles raw, none of us were going to plead to be let in. Nor demand it. We didn't even gently suggest it.

There was no way we were laying a finger on her again after what went down.

It needed to be her choice and she had chosen to remain alone.

After she locked herself away, we sat on the sofa going over events for an hour, me explaining again and again what had happened.

We should've been better prepared. We should've taken our responsibilities towards the girl more seriously. Quizzed her more about her obvious trauma. If we'd known ...

I'd never seen my packmates look so devastated, all of us racked with guilt, our attention pulled frequently to the bedroom door, our hearts wrenching knowing our omega was in pain. Pain we could ease if she only asked.

Jake wouldn't leave the bedroom doorway once she disappeared inside, sitting with his back against the door and torturing himself with all her noises. I'd never seen the man look so fucked up. He usually exudes an aura of disinterest, like nothing can rattle him – not a fist in his gut, or a threat to his face.

He looked anything but those things right then. Like he'd been hit by a train and then reversed over by a truck.

Levi spent the hours in the garden, ranting at the rising then setting sun, kicking furniture and punching walls. At least he didn't break anything. Although if he ever gets his hands on the turd that did this to Giorgie, I think he'd break his neck.

Dylan threw himself into his cooking, making dish after dish he said the omega would like. Although nearly every single one ended up in the bin accompanied by a string of expletives. It seemed nothing he made was good enough.

And then there was me, sitting on the sofa and watching my pack fall apart.

It's not a situation I ever thought possible. Sure our pack is new and we're still finding our way but we seemed a solid, unbreakable unit to me. The most security I've had in my lifetime.

This is why we'd made the decision to wait for an omega. Omegas are difficult, emotional, troublesome. They enter a pack and unbalance everything until you find all of you are toppling to the floor. And while we all want one for the pack – of course we do, a pack is incomplete without an omega – we'd agreed to wait. Give ourselves time as a pack to establish

ourselves, to make something of ourselves, to ensure we were ready.

Then Georgie flips all that on its head.

We'd have been better off staying the fuck away.

Especially me.

Because this is my fault.

I'm always the one fucking up. The one letting this pack down.

First the damn journalist and those articles.

Now Georgie.

I can't get the image of her out of my head, curled up like the world was falling in around her.

I did that to her. My carelessness. Of course an omega would freak out if they caught an alpha wielding a phone in a heat, regardless of past history.

We promised Jake, promised her, we'd look after her, and I had failed.

I peer up at my packmates, Levi's typing frantically on his phone and Dylan's staring out the window, hands in his pockets.

"You think Jake's going to be alright?" I ask. It's him I'm most concerned about. He's always insisted he hated this girl. I've always suspected he's been in love with her. They say there is a thin line between hate and love and maybe they are right.

This whole situation is really screwed up.

My fault.

I can't decide what's worse. That I've hurt him or her.

"I don't know," Dylan says, wiping at a smudge on the glass with the heel of his hand. "I still feel fucking awful. Like we actually did the thing she suspected us of. Like I am a sicko, an abuser."

I cringe at his words. Dylan shouldn't be blaming himself.

“You’re not,” I tell him.

He turns around and stares at Levi. “Am I?” he asks him. I’m not privy to what goes on in the bedroom between those two but it seems he needs Levi’s reassurance right now.

Levi rests his phone on his thigh. “No, Dylan, you’re not.”

Dylan nods a little but doesn’t look convinced. And that feeling, that feeling of being the outsider, the intruder, comes flooding back. Where are my words of comfort? My reassurance?

Is it because they hold me responsible? They jumped to conclusions, hadn’t they? Immediately, assumed the worst of me when they found us together, her screaming.

I screw up my eyes.

The sound of tyres on gravel has us all turning to the window and we go to meet Jake on the driveway.

He looks no better than when we left him as he climbs out of the car. I’m reminded of the last time we got properly beaten on the rugby pitch. No, not just beaten. We got our arses served up to us on a plate. We’d been humiliated, tired, sore and most of all fucked off with ourselves.

Jake had stewed for 24 hours before pulling himself out of it and throwing himself into training.

This time I don’t think it will be as easy.

“Alright, mate?” I ask, resting my hand on his shoulder, searching his face for what I’m sure must be blame.

He still smells of the omega and the aroma has my stupid gland tingling in my neck.

Has me remembering how beautiful, how vulnerable, she looked when I made her come.

“Fuck knows,” he mutters.

“How was she?”

He takes a deep inhale, dragging his hand down his face. “Better, better than she was, but still ... fuck I’ve never seen

her like that. I've never seen anyone like that."

"It was some kind of panic attack. There was nothing we could do," Levi says.

"No?" he says, shaking his head. "I shouldn't have let her lock herself in the bedroom like that. It wasn't right."

"I think we had little choice."

He sighs again. "Anyway, she's going home. Called her brother to come fetch her."

We all stand around in silence, the hiss of insects somewhere in the scrabbly undergrowth suddenly loud.

"Let's get a drink," Dylan says finally. "Fuck knows I need one."

We walk around to the sun loungers and Dylan returns a moment later with the bottle of whisky and four tumblers. He pours us each a generous measure, the amber liquid catching in the fading sun, and passes them around.

I take a long sniff, driving away all the other aromas from my nostrils, then I sip at the stuff before resting it on my thigh.

"When are you heading back to the site?" I ask Jake, wanting to change the subject away from the thing that's haunting us all.

"I'm not sure," Jake says, swirling his whisky around his glass.

"What? You still have a couple of days to impress, mate. Why would you throw that away?" I question.

"Because I'm not sure it's what I want anymore."

I place my glass on the ground and stalk over to my packmate, hands on my hips, I tower over him perching on his lounge.

"Fuck, no, Jake. You're not throwing everything away over some stupid fuck up with a girl." My stupid fuck up. I scowl down at him, wagging my finger. "You deserve that spot on the professor's team. You've worked hard for it. You're not blowing it now. You're hauling your arse to that site tomorrow

and working until your hands bleed.” He glares up at me. “Don’t look at me like that. You’re being a pussy. Having a little sulk because some girl hurt your feelings.”

“You really are a tosser sometimes, Aiden,” he growls.

And though those words sear right through my heart, I manage a nonchalant smirk.

“Yeah, but a tosser who speaks the truth.” I rest my hand on his shoulder, holding on when he tries to shake it off. “I’m not letting you throw everything away because of this. What do we do on the pitch when we get beat? When one of us fucks up? Do we all sit around and cry about it? Did Levi bitch about his injury? No. We get back out there. We train hard. We do the physio every day even when it’s agony,” I say, pointing to Levi.

Jake stands, squaring up to me. He’s angry now, his jaw ticking and the vein on his forehead pulsing with blood.

Good.

I’d rather he beat the shit out of me than sitting around looking like he got his heart ripped from his chest. I can’t look at him like that, knowing it’s all my fault.

“It isn’t the same,” he says. “I don’t want it anymore. Not if it means taking it away from Georgie.”

I stumble back, my mouth falling over. What? This has been Jake’s dream since I met him. He’s always wanted to grab that prestigious spot. Show those stupid parents of his that he is worth their time and attention.

Out by the trees a buzzard cracks its wings and lifts into the sky, circling over our heads.

“You think there’s any hope for us with her, then?” Levi asks, squinting up at him. There’s eagerness in his tone.

“Honestly, I don’t know. I never do with Georgie. I think I’ve misunderstood her. I think I’ve misunderstood the situation.”

“Yeah?”

“I think ...” Jake runs his hand through his hair, damp with sweat. “I think Giorgie’s been on blockers this whole time.”

We all stare at him.

“What?” Dylan mumbles

“I think she’s been taking blockers this whole time,” he repeats. The buzzard swoops low over the tops of the trees, its high-pitched whistle ringing out.

“No, mate.” Levi grins at him a little. “That’s not possible. We’d know. You wouldn’t be able to smell her. And her scent ... her scent is as clear as—”

“I saw her packet of scent blockers. A pill missing for each day. Including that day’s. Yet she smelled as strong as ever.”

Levi shakes his head, still not believing him.

“It makes sense,” he persists. “Giorgie’s too fucking sensible and organised not to take blockers. Besides which, she doesn’t trust alphas. Why would she leave herself exposed to every alpha in the vicinity?”

“She’s not that organised. She fucked up her suppressants, didn’t she?”

Jake sinks down on the lounge, considering that. “OK, so maybe she screws up and doesn’t take them every day. But that day’s pill was missing from that packet and she smelled like fucking heaven.”

I tip my head back, the aroma materialising in my nose, and my eyes falling shut as my gland tingles.

“It isn’t possible,” Levi insists. “You wouldn’t be able to smell her if she was on blockers.” He takes a long swig of his drink. Then swings his gaze back to Jake’s. “Unless ...” he says.

“Unless,” Jake repeats.

“I can smell her too,” Levi says, “and you guys as well.” He motions to me and Dylan.

“I know.” Jake looks up at us all.

“You don’t believe in that shit, man,” I say to him.

“It doesn’t matter if I believe in that shit or not. I love her either way.”

“You love her?”

“Yeah, I think I do.”

I step towards him and push at his shoulder.

“What are you saying, Jake? You’ve found your soul mate? So what? You’re abandoning the pack? Does she even want to be with you?”

“I’m not abandoning the pack.”

I stare at him incredulous. “This makes no sense.”

“Aiden,” he says. “You can smell her too. We all can. She’s meant to be ours.”

My heart spasms. She’s meant to ours. But she won’t want me.

“She’ll blame me,” I whisper. “I had the phone. It was my fault she panicked. She’s never going to forgive me.”

Jake stands and places his hand on my shoulder, squeezing. “She doesn’t blame you.”

I fix him with a stare, meeting those dirty blue eyes of his. “But you do?”

Jake’s grip on my shoulder falters. “What?”

“You blame me for this.”

“Aiden, no, I don’t. I blame the psycho who did this to her.”

“You came running into that bedroom and immediately,” I swallow down the bitterness and the hurt, “you jumped to conclusions. You thought the worse of me, mate. You all did.”

Jake hangs his head, his palm still resting on my shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I’m sorry, Aiden.”

Another hand lands on my back, rubbing along my tensed shoulders, Dylan’s scent in my nose.

“Shit, Aiden, I’m sorry too.” he leans his forehead against the back of my skull.

“In that moment, everything went to shit,” Jake whispers. “I wasn’t thinking straight. I know you’d never hurt her.”

He drags me in for a hug, Dylan hugging me from behind and then Levi wraps his long arms around us all, squeezing.

“We’re a bunch of tossers sometimes, mate. Can you forgive us?”

In their arms I feel sated, loved, but their words of apology don’t removed all my concerns. One lingers in my chest.

“If she does blame me? If you have to make a choice, Jake ...” I hear my voice break, feel my heart splinter. So many times when it came to the choice, I wasn’t picked. By my parents, by the numerous foster families, by other alphas. I thought it would be different with my pack. Was I wrong?

“What choice?” Jake asks, frowning.

“Between me and her.” Deep down I’ve been waiting for this, for the point when they reject me too. It’s why I’ve been so reluctant to find an omega and unbalance our pack.

“Mate, that isn’t going to happen.” Jake rests his palm over my heart. “I’m not leaving the pack. I’m going to make Giorgie a part of it.” He squeezes me again and whispers in my ear so the others don’t hear, “Don’t pretend you don’t have feelings for her too.”

For once, I’m lost for words.

Because I can’t stop thinking of her curled up against the wall, looking more broken than anyone I’ve ever seen, and all I want is to burn down the whole world to destroy the man who did that.

I grip my best friend back, hoping he’s right, hoping we can win Giorgie over. We stand hugging each other as the buzzard whistles and the dust sweeps against our shins.

When we break apart, Levi shields his eyes, squinting at us.

“Are we going to make this woman ours then?”

“Yes,” I say. “We’re going to try.”

Giorgie

“**W**hat flavour ice cream do you want, Giorgie?” Sia asks, surveying the room service menu as she sits propped up against the cushions in the oversized bed we’re sharing.

The room is just as oversized and plush, the decor a mixture of garish red velvet and gold decor. There’s a giant TV pinned to the wall and the air conditioning unit pumps out cool air.

Sia twists her long dark braid around her fist absentmindedly while she waits for my answer.

“They’ve got cookie dough, salted caramel, chocolate brownie, peanut butter, and strawberry.”

“Seriously, Sia, if I eat any more ice cream, I’m going to turn into some.” She’s been feeding me the stuff non-stop since we checked into this five-star hotel yesterday.

“Mishti is the perfect medicine for a broken heart, but as they don’t serve that we’re going to have to make do with ice cream,” Sia tells me. She looks up from the menu. “Of course, finding the next dude is an even better cure. You know what they say, the best way to get over someone is to get under someone else.”

“I’m not heartbroken,” I squeal, my glasses sliding down my nose..

“Hmmm,” Sia says, peering over the menu at me. “But you’re moping. You’ve been letting me feed you ice cream. You chose Titanic for us to watch last night–”

“It’s my favourite film!”

“And,” she gives me her best school teacher disapproving look, “You pretended to be asleep when I left for the dig site this morning.”

“I just don’t feel like going out right now.”

“See!” Sia says, pointing at me. “These are all classic signs of heartbreak.”

I snap my teeth in Sia’s finger’s direction.

“You just like to make everything over dramatic.”

“And you don’t?”

“No,” I say, straightening my glasses and folding my arms across my chest.

“So you aren’t the little sister who’s dragging her big brother halfway across the world to come pick her up?”

“Sia,” I whisper.

Sia sighs and drops the menu on the mattress beside her. “I’m sorry Giorgie, it’s just you still haven’t told me what happened and I’m worried about you.”

She rests her head on my shoulder, taking my hand.

“You don’t have to tell me what happened if you don’t want to, Giorgie,” she says, stroking my fingers. “But you might feel better if you do.”

Sia’s way more street smart than me. I always feel like such a naïve baby beside her. But it’s sorely tempting to tell her about what happened. It’s weighing over me. And I don’t like keeping secrets from the people I love.

I take a deep breath.

“OK,” I say. “But I’m going to need ice cream first. And vodka.”

“On it!” Sia says, leaping to her feet and sprinting to the door.

“Don’t they have room service?” I call after her.

“Always takes too long,” she calls back.

She returns several minutes later balancing a bottle of vodka, two glasses, a tub of ice cream and two spoons in her arms. She drops them all onto the bed, then tugs off the cap from the vodka bottle with her teeth and pours me almost half a glass.

“Bottoms up,” she says, passing my glass.

“Cheers,” I say, taking a long swig. The alcohol hits me right at the back of my throat sparking a coughing fit and my eyes to water.

Sia peels back the lid of the ice cream and plunges in a spoon, taking a huge scoop before passing it on to me. I take a much smaller scoop and nurse it for a few minutes.

“Ready?” Sia asks me, resuming her position beside me on the bed.

“I guess ... you’re just going to think I’m such an idiot.”

“You want me to remind you about the fuck up with my last boyfriend?” She chuckles, then prods her spoon in my direction. “No one who knows you would ever think you were an idiot, Giorgie.”

“Well, you might now,” I lick at the spoon, my eyes flicking momentarily to the blank window. “I fucked up my heat suppressants. I mean, you can’t get more stupid than that.”

“Hey,” Sia says, throwing up her hands. “Wasn’t your niece a result of your sister-in-law fucking up her birth control? And I once dropped my week’s supply off the side of a boat. I have no judgement.”

“What?” I shriek.

“Long story,” she says, waving away my inquiries with her hand. “It happens to the best of us. It doesn’t make you an idiot.”

“Going into heat on a really important field trip? One that was meant to set up my career?”

Sia snorts. “Fuck ups always happen at the worst time. Did you plan your heat for now?”

“No,” I say emphatically.

“Then stop beating yourself up about it.”

She tilts the ice cream tub my way and I take another spoonful.

“So what happened?” she asks. “I mean something happened while you were in heat, didn’t it? You said you had a panic attack. Has that ever happened when you’ve gone into heat before?”

I shake my head. “Never, but ...” I look at Sia.

She nudges my glass towards me. “Drink up, then spit it out.”

I do as she says, this time finding the vodka more warming than choking.

“So ...”

“So ...” she repeats.

“Jake Grantham ...”

“The dude you bitch about day and night. The one you’re competing against for top of the class. The one you pleaded with to see you through your heat.”

“Yes, that one,” I mumble.

Sia considers me for a minute.

“Giorgie,” she says gently. “Did he force you? Coerce you in any way? Because that is not OK, heat or no heat.”

“No, no. It wasn’t like that. I wanted to spend my heat with him.” I feel my cheeks warming with the memory of that kiss, with how badly I’d wanted him to rut me. It had been more

than hormones and pheromones. Even those wouldn't compel me to sleep with someone I truly hate.

"You did. It was some kind of turnaround," she says, stroking my arm.

"Yeah, I guess so, but something changed out here and, well ..."

"You wanted to fuck him."

I poke her in the gut. "Yes," I grin for the first time in days. Sia was right. Talking about this stuff, being able to laugh about it is like a tonic to my battered soul. I already feel that weight easing.

"So what went wrong? How did he fuck up?"

"Jake didn't fuck up." I swallow. "I think I did." She waits for me to go on. "I ... I didn't just sleep with Jake."

Sia chokes on her vodka and the ice cream spoon falls from her fingers onto the bed, ice cream splattering the sheets.

"Are you saying ... did you sleep with his pack?"

My cheeks burn so hotly, I'm sure she must feel the heat. "Yes, Connie's talked about it so much and I was curious, so I told him I wanted them to, you know ..." I roll my hand to indicate what I mean.

"No, I don't know," Sia snorts. "Cook you dinner, read you bedtime stories, massage your feet, or rut you senseless as a pack?"

"Sia!" I squeak.

"But you were curious ..."

"Yes," I say, chewing my lip. "But," I sigh, "I don't think I'm cut out to be a pack omega. Not that that's what I was angling for here," I add quickly. "It was only sex."

"No problem with that," Sia says, poking me back. "Sex is the best." I smile at her weakly. "Oh, I'm guessing the sex wasn't the best."

"No, actually it was ..."

“Yes?”

“So good.”

“Maybe it’s being out in the sun all day making me all befuddled, but I’m not understanding this story. If it was good—”

“Jake’s packmate had a phone and—”

Sia’s face darkens, and she looks like she might be about to murder someone. “The shithead was filming you! What is wrong with these knobs?! Why are they all deviant perverts—”

“No, no,” I say, worrying she’ll send a witch hunt over to Jake’s villa. “He wasn’t filming. It wasn’t anything like that, but for a moment I thought it was and it ... it brought it all back. And I ...” I shake involuntarily and Sia squeezes my hand. “I freaked out big time.”

“That’s hardly surprising, Giorgie. In fact, it sounds completely rational.”

“It wasn’t. I was a mess.” I manage a self-assured smile. “But it’s fine. It made me realise that that just isn’t for me.”

“What isn’t?”

“Sex, I guess. At least sex like that.”

“Are you swearing off sex?” Sia asks, looking frankly disgusted.

“No, well, maybe for a bit at least. But sex with packs, sex with alphas. It’s too much. I can’t handle it. Not after what happened.”

Sia gives me a big hug and kisses my cheek.

“But what about Jake?”

“Jake?”

“Jake.”

“Urgh,” I say, flopping back against the cushions. “Maybe Carl was right. I’d’ve been better off steering clear of Jake and the others.”

Sia snorts, curling up beside me. “Carl doesn’t have a love-life. He’s just jealous.”

“Of Jake?”

“Yes!” Her dark brown eyes skim across my features. “Oh, come on, Giorgie. You’re head over heels in love with the dude.”

“What?” I gasp, staring at my best friend. “I’m not.” Am I?

“Yes, you are, sweetie,” she says.

“But I hate him.”

“Do you?”

“He’s arrogant and argumentative ...” And sweet and caring and intelligent and sexy, really sexy and ... I am. I am in love with him. Completely and utterly in love with him.

“And he’s completely in love with you too,” Sia adds.

I burrow my spoon into the ice cream, scooping out a huge lump.

“He hasn’t said that.”

“Because for two highly intelligent people, you are both incredibly stupid.”

I lift the ice cream to my mouth, then lower it again.

“It doesn’t matter though. It won’t work out between us.” My heart aches with the realisation.

“Why not?”

“The sex thing. The way I freaked out.”

“You can work through that, Giorgie.”

“And we’re competing for the same spot. Only one of us can win it.”

“So what? One of you wins it. The other doesn’t. It doesn’t stop you from being with him if you don’t want it to.”

“And his pack?”

She shrugs. "I think you need to talk to them, Giorgie."

I stare back out towards the window, to the cloudless sky beyond. A smidgen of hope glimmers in my chest.

I want her to be right. I want to have my happy ending. The time I spent with the pack, before it all went wrong, was truly amazing. I could see a place for myself with those men. Building a home together. Loving and being there for one another. Like my brother has with his pack and his omega.

I've always coveted it while never truly believing it could be mine. Because alphas couldn't be trusted. I couldn't bring myself to trust them. To trust one in particular.

I want to believe Sia that what happened at the villa was something we can work through and past.

I want to trust in myself and the pack.

I'm just not sure I can.

"When's your brother arriving?" Sia asks me.

"Later tonight."

Sia sighs. "Are you sure you won't stay, Giorgie? Work things out with Jake. Get yourself back to the dig site."

I drop the spoon into the ice cream tub. "I don't know."

Jake

“**Y**es?” a male voice with a blended Italian and London accent answers. I assume it’s Giorgie’s brother.

“Hey,” I say. “Is Giorgie there?”

The intercom goes dead.

“Friendly,” I mutter to the others with a smirk. Dylan manages a tight smile in return but I can tell he’s tense.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Aiden asks me. “Rocking up at her hotel unannounced like this.”

“I need to talk to her. We need to talk to her.” I call the receptionist over. “The line went dead. Please could you try the room again?” He takes the phone from me and starts tapping on the numbers.

In front of us, the lifts groan and one set of silver doors draws back. A tall alpha with bronzed skin comes marching through into the grand lobby. There’s a look of murder on his face.

“Shit,” I mumble, stepping back from the reception desk.

The man storms straight up to the desk and slams both his fists down, making the receptionist jolt.

“Don’t think he’s pleased to see us,” I mutter, swinging around to face him as the others do too.

“Sir!” the receptionist stutters. “Please!”

The man slams his fists down again so hard I’m sure he’s going to bend the wood. “Be thankful it’s not your heads,” he growls at the four of us. “Because if you ever come within a yard of her again ... if you ever look her way, I’m going to crack your skulls and use your brains to make omelettes.”

I snort a laugh and he rounds on me, his caramel eyes burn with fury and I notice they’re the same colour and shape as Giorgie’s.

“You’re Giorgie’s brother, Riccardo, right?” He glares right at me, his nostrils flaring like a bull about to charge. “I’m Jake and this is Levi.” I point to the others behind me. “Dylan and Aiden. We’re friends of Giorgie’s. Is she here?”

In the next flash, Ric has me by the scruff of my collar. “Are you fucking deaf? You’re not going anywhere near my sister.”

I wonder if every suitor of Giorgie’s receives this treatment or whether we’re the lucky ones.

“Why?” I growl.

“Why?” Ric spits back. “WHY?!” he repeats, his face turning purple. “I don’t know what you did to her, but I had to fly all the way out here to pick her up. She left for this trip so excited she could hardly contain herself, and then she begs to come home a week early, and looking like her whole world ended.”

“I would never hurt her,” I growl. “I’m in love with her.”

Ric’s grip on my shirt falters for a moment, then tightens. “There are plenty of people, of alphas, out there who hurt the people they claim to love.”

“But I’m not one of them,” I hiss. “And I’d rip the throat out of anyone who tried to hurt her.”

“Then do you care to explain to me what the hell happened here? Why the hell she wants to come home? Why she looks like someone broke her heart?”

“I think you ought to ask your sister,” I say softly.

“I have but she won’t tell me,” he says, his voice cracking slightly. He knocks me backwards, and steps away. “All she will tell me is that she had some kind of panic attack and it shook her up.”

“She thought someone was filming her,” I explain not wanting to betray Giorgie’s trust, but needing to give him enough to understand we have his sister’s best interests at heart. “They weren’t,” I say, lifting my palms as the murderous intent returns to his features.

He scowls at me.

“We would have brought her home, escorted her I mean, if she’d’ve let us,” I add. “It nearly killed me to let her go like that.”

“We?” Ric asks.

“We’re a pack,” I tell him.

His brow furrows. He examines me, then Levi and the others before drawing himself up to his full height, his legs planted wide, his arms drawn against his chest, blocking our access to the lifts.

“It seems you had your chance with my sister and you blew it. She doesn’t need a bunch of fuck boys,” he emphasises the word ‘boys’, making every hair on my body bristle with annoyance, “messing her around.”

“We’re not fuck boys,” I growl. “And we’ve no interest in messing around.”

Giorgie’s brother scoffs, pointing to my face. “My sister told me about you, about all the crap you’ve got up to. It was in the fucking student paper—”

“That’s all bullshit! Some fucker twisted what really happened,” Levi snaps.

“Look at you,” he says, sweeping his hand in front of him and taking us all in. I peer at my packmates. We’re all covered in dirt and grime, our shirts damp with sweat.

We haven’t shown up looking like the most suitable set of suitors.

But dammit, I know she's meant to be ours.

"You're right," I tell him. "We look like shit and we've fucked up." He nods and I take a deep inhale. "But I love her and I know this pack is where she belongs. We can undo all this crap and make it right. We can keep her safe and protected. We're determined. We will work our arses off, every one of us. When we put our minds to it, nothing can stop us. And we'll plough every ounce of that grit into making Giorgie happy."

"Too fucking right," Levi adds, the others nodding.

Ric tilts his head to one side, peering straight into my eyes. I meet and hold his stare, not flinching for a moment.

Finally, he says, "Well, if that is the case, what the hell are you going to do to put things right? Giorgie should be out there on the dig of her life. Instead, she's curled up in bed, begging to go home."

He's right. Getting mixed up with me and my pack has landed a whole heap of trouble on her head and messed up this trip and her chance to claim that prestigious research spot.

"You're right." I turn toward the hotel exit. "Come on," I tell the others. "I know what we need to do."

Giorgie

“**A**re you sure I can’t convince you to stay?” Sia asks me as we watch Ric load my bag and his into the boot of the taxi.

“No,” I answer her with what I hope is a convincing smile. “I think this is for the best.”

I tried calling and messaging Jake. For precisely three seconds, I even considered messaging one of his packmates, Levi perhaps.

But then reality came crashing down. He’s ghosting me. Of course, he is. Which means his packmates will be too. I know how packs work, pulling together.

I can hardly blame him or them. After the chaos I laid at their doors, after my stupid idiocracy with my suppressant pills, after my heat lost him precious days away from the dig site and then went spectacularly wrong.

He doesn’t want anything to do with me.

Sia was wrong.

I was wrong.

Sia wraps her arms around me. “I think this is a big mistake, Giorgie, and this trip will be shit without you.”

“Send me loads of photos OK?” I tell her, although I know each one will make me sick. Regret twangs in my gut. But it’s too late to change my mind now. Not when I’ve dragged Ric all the way out here to take me home.

“Ready?” Ric asks, and I pull back from Sia. She squeezes my hand one last time. Then embraces Ric.

“I’ll see you when you get back,” I try to say cheerfully before climbing into the car.

I try not to think about how happy I’d felt on the journey from the airport. Excited, thrilled. My whole body buzzes with energy. I’d lapped up every sight beyond the window.

On the journey back everything beyond the window is a blur. I hardly see it. And I think I’m the saddest I’ve ever felt, my heart like a heavy, painful weight in my chest.

Ric wraps his arm around my body and I rest my head on his shoulder.

“Are you OK, Cucciola?” he asks me, kissing the crown of my head.

“I will be,” I tell him.

I’ve gotten over heartbreak and disappointment before. I can do it again.

Only this feels worse. Deeper than before. That man had hurt me – left me unable to trust and full of doubt. But the pain hadn’t been like this. A pain that sears right into the very heart of me. That leaves me struggling to breathe.

Is it the disappointment? Of abandoning the dig, and my research? Of potentially kissing goodbye to that research spot? Is that it?

I don’t think so. I think it’s the alphas I’m leaving behind. The ones who don’t want anything to do with me.

At the airport, Ric fetches our bags and we stroll inside, scanning the information boards until we find the right desk. We’re booked into first class so there’s no waiting in line. We check in our luggage and collect our boarding passes.

The airport bustles with people, families crowding around with piles of suitcases and business people hurrying in all directions. The bright Egyptian sun streams through the window and reflects off the metal desks, dazzling my eyes, and the aroma of a million different scents hangs in the heavy air.

“We might as well head through security to the first-class lounge,” Ric says. “They’ll be champagne.” He bumps his fist against my arm, trying his best to cheer me up. “Or I can get them to make you a strawberry milkshake. You used to live on those when we were kids.”

I manage a smile. “I haven’t had one in ages. Think they’d add a shot of tequila to it?”

He chuckles. “How about we get wasted on this flight home, Cucciola?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

The queue through security is a long line of people curling around staked out dividers. We can’t skip this line so we join the back, behind a couple with a screaming toddler. I catch the little boy’s eye and screw up my face, sticking out my tongue. He stares at me in shock, stopping mid scream and shoving his thumb in his mouth.

I wave at him and he waves back shyly.

The line moves slowly and Ric tugs out his phone to check his messages. Connie is nearing her due date and I know he’s anxious about the baby arriving early and missing the birth. It makes me feel even worse about dragging him out here.

We shuffle forward, and I finish the last of my water, checking for the third time that all my liquids are tucked safely inside the zip-up plastic bag.

The toddler’s eyes drift shut, and he falls asleep in his father’s arms, snoring softly.

Ric checks his watch, grumbling about how long the line is taking.

Finally we reach the front. The couple step forward, the woman helping to empty her partner's pockets.

We wait for our turn.

A security guard issues us forward.

“Giorgie! Giorgie!”

I snap my head around. Did someone call my name?

I must be imagining it.

But it comes again. Louder this time.

“Giorgie! Wait! Don't go!”

It can't be! Can it? My heart leaps.

“What the hell,” Ric mutters beside me.

“Ma'am,” the security guard motions for us to walk through the scanner.

But I rise up on my tiptoes, craning my head over the sea of people, my heart hammering against my ribs. My breath catches in my throat.

Is it them?

I spot the pack immediately, towering over everyone else.

Jake, Levi, Dylan and Aiden.

They push their way through the line, people cursing as they do, one old lady swinging at Levi with her hand bag.

“Giorgie! Wait!” Levi calls, waving at me frantically.

“What do you want to do, Cucciola?” Ric asks softly beside me.

I peer past the security guard to the waiting lounge beyond. Then swing my gaze back to the pack.

“I want to wait. I want to hear what they have to say.”

My brother takes my elbow, and ignoring the guard's cross words, he manoeuvres me to one side, just as the pack halts, gasping for air, in front of us.

“Giorgie,” Jake says, relief and excitement flooding his face. “I thought we were too late.”

“What are you doing here?” I ask.

“We found more, Giorgie,” he pants. “We found more of the path, evidence to support your theory. You need to come back to the site. Right now.”

My brow screws up in confusion as I struggle to follow his words. I don’t know what I was expecting him to say, but it wasn’t that.

“You were digging without me?”

“No, we were digging *for* you,” Levi says firmly.

“We?”

“Yes, all of us, Giorgie. Jake was sure your theory was correct and he asked us to help him prove it.”

“You found proof?” I ask, my heart beating a million times faster, my head dizzy. “Really?”

“Yes, Giorgie,” Jake says, stepping forward and taking my hands in his. “You were right and this is going to prove it.”

All four alphas are grinning at me madly, and their joy and excitement floods straight into my heart.

“You did that for me?” I ask, tears pooling in my eyes.

“Of course, we did, Baby Girl,” Jake says. “That’s what packs do. Help each other to succeed.”

I hiccup a laugh, then I can’t help myself, I fling my arms around Jake Grantham’s neck and hug him close. Soon I’m drowning in the bodies of the whole pack as they join us, standing in the sea of people, our arms wrapped around each other.

“Cucciola?” I peer through the mass of limbs at my brother. “What do you want to do?”

The others step back giving me some space, although Levi still has a hold of my hand. I glance down at the boarding passes in Ric’s grip.

“I’m really sorry, Ric—”

“You want to stay.” I nod and a grin cracks across his face, relief flooding his eyes. “That’s great, Giorgie.”

“It is?”

“Yes. It’s not like you to give something up.”

“But I dragged you all the way out here, away from Connie when she’s—”

He rests a hand on my arm and kisses the crown of my head. “It doesn’t matter. You know I’ll always be here whenever you need me. But,” he says, motioning behind him with his thumb. “It seems like you no longer need me, so I’d better catch this flight. Are you OK with that?”

“She’ll be fine. We’ll take good care of her,” Levi says.

Ric’s gaze flicks to the tall alpha beside me. “You’d better. This woman is very precious to me and if—”

“She’s precious to us too,” Levi interjects and his words have my insides fluttering. “Very.” He squeezes my hand.

I don’t know what all this means yet. But it’s like I can see my happy ending glimmering on the horizon, tempting me to join it. All I have to do is reach out and claim it with both hands.

Jake

The tent is reserved for the senior researchers and is crammed full of fold up tables and chairs. Piles of papers, maps and books are scattered across every available surface and a generator chugs in the background powering an array of laptops, their cables snaking across the matted floor.

We spot Professor Weaver in the corner and hurry towards her armed with the photos and notes Giorgie and I have spent the last couple of hours making.

The pack had helped me spend the previous day excavating the trench. It had been bloody hard work. Four alphas crammed together in a stupidly small hole. If it had been any other group of alphas, we'd probably have murdered each other. But we've always worked well together. As a team and as a pack. And so in the ten hours, we'd managed to unveil the remains of a path across the trench floor. Even finding a tiny discarded amulet known to belong to alphas and omegas.

Giorgie had burst into tears when she'd seen it and hugged me so tight I thought my ribs might crack.

A warmth has been sitting firmly in the centre of my chest ever since. The result of pleasing my omega. It seems making her happy is the key to making me happy.

I thought it was success. I thought it was proving to my parents that I was worthy of their attention. It isn't, it's caring for this woman.

Maybe if my parents had spent more time trying to please each other, rather than themselves. If they'd fought for happiness, instead of with each other, things would have been different. For them and me.

In a way, I feel sorry for them. But I'm not going to make the same mistakes they did. Heartbreak isn't inevitable. Not if you fight for the one you love.

The professor hears our scuffing footsteps and glances up from her laptop screen, blue light reflecting in the lenses of her spectacles. She sweeps them off the bridge of her nose and into the tangle of salt and pepper curls on her head.

"Ahh, so you're back, then?" she says.

We stop before her, both a little out of breath from racing here. Our excitement carrying us along.

"We are," Giorgie says, beaming at me. "Professor Weaver, we found evidence of the path that connected the two temples – connecting the alphas' and the omegas' places of worship. My theory was correct!"

My eyes are locked on Giorgie, unable to drag them away. Her whole body buzzes with excitement, her eyes sparkle, her smile is radiant and she bounces on the balls of her feet, unable to contain all her enthusiasm.

Fuck, I love her.

How could I not? I could listen to her talking about the things she's passionate about every day for the rest of my life and I'd never bore of it. There's something about it that lights my soul, blows away all the cobwebs and shadows. Happiness could be as simple as Giorgie Martinelli.

"I see," the professor says, and her tone has my gaze flicking to her. She doesn't sound as excited as I expected. "Talk me through what you've found."

Giorgie scurries around to join her on the other side of the table and spreads out her notes. She talks the professor through what we found, showing her the pictures on her phone, and explaining like the intelligent academic she is why this backs up her ideas.

I stand transfixed by this woman. Pride blooming in my heart and I know I've made the right decision. Giorgie deserves the spot on the professor's team more than I do. She's earned it fair and square.

The professor leans back in her canvass chair, tapping her fingertips together. It's clear she is thinking. Finally, she slides her glasses back down onto her nose.

"Congratulations, to you both. This is great work and excellent research."

Giorgie nods, that smile drawing impossibly wider.

"We can start writing it up as soon as we get home," Giorgie says, glancing towards me. I grin back at her. I can't think of anything better than spending my days with this omega, working together.

"Giorgie," the professor coughs. "I would strongly advise against that."

I blink and the smile falters on Giorgie's lips. Did I hear that right?

Behind us the generator keeps chugging away and someone taps loudly on a keyboard.

"What?" I say.

"I would advise against you publishing this discovery."

"But why?" Giorgie gasps.

The professor sighs and leans back in her chair, her hands falling into her lap. "You're both still so young and relatively inexperienced. You haven't discovered yet how cut throat and political this field can be."

"I don't understand what you're saying," Giorgie says, her hands hovering over her notes.

“This theory directly contradicts Professor Lichenstein’s.”

“So what?” I growl, anger stirring in my gut.

“His reputation, his whole career, has been built around his work on societal hierarchies in Ancient Egypt. He has always maintained that alphas were dominant and omegas submissive, rarely seen, barely tolerated. This discovery of yours will place you in direct opposition to him.”

“But the theory is right,” Giorgie whispers.

“Exactly. It’s right, and he is wrong,” I snap. “So who gives a rat’s arse.”

“You will, Mr Grantham, when he destroys your career.”

I scoff.

“I’m serious. The man controls funds and institutions. He’s on the editing board of many of the academic journals. If you make an enemy of him, he will make your lives incredibly difficult.”

“But his theory is wrong. If we show him the evidence and—”

The professor shakes her head. “I’m very sorry, Miss Martinelli, that’s not how it works.”

“But it should work that way. It’s what you taught us. New evidence comes along and we have to re-evaluate, amend our theories. You’ve done it yourself. Breaking new ground. Changing the way people think.”

“I have. But I had to tread my path through this career carefully. Decide which theories were worth pursuing and which I would be better off dropping quietly.”

I stare at the professor. I can’t believe what I’m hearing. She’s always been so bullish, so radical. She’s encouraged us to be the same.

“You said we are working for the pursuit of truth,” Giorgie says, the enthusiasm draining from her voice, and my anger rising tenfold hearing her disappointment.

“The world is a more complicated place. I’m sorry to disappoint you both. There will be other opportunities. Other discoveries. It’s clear one of you will earn top spot on this course and when you work for me—”

Giorgie snaps up her notes. “I don’t want to work for you.”

She strides away.

The professor watches her go.

“I’m sorry, Giorgie feels that way,” she sighs. “But it means that spot is wide open for you—”

“I don’t want to work for you either. Not if it means sacrificing my integrity, not if it means throwing away Giorgie’s discovery.”

And before she can answer, I follow my omega straight out of that tent, blood pounding in my ears.

Giorgie

“**G**iorgie, wait up!”

I spin on my toes and find Jake jogging my way, swerving around trenches in the ground and men wheeling wheelbarrows of dirt.

“Are you alright?” he asks as he halts in front of me.

“No!” I spit, my blood bubbling with rage. “No, I’m not. Everything I worked for, everything I believed, it was all for nothing.” Hot tears sting at the back of my eyes, threatening to fall down my cheeks.

“It wasn’t for nothing, Giorgie—”

“It was, Jake, you can’t sugar coat this into something it’s not.” I swipe at my cheeks. “My theory is right, we both know it, so does the professor. Fuck, probably even that dick Lichenstein does.” He nods, his brow crinkled in concentration, his gaze locked on mine. “But this is what life is like for omegas like me, Jake. We get fucked, fucked over all the time. No matter how hard we try, no matter how closely we follow their rules. We always get fucked.”

A sob breaks free of my throat and with it the whole unfairness of the situation comes crashing down on my head. I bury my face in my hands and let the next sob rattle through my body.

I'm suddenly so tired, tired and bitterly crushed. I thought we'd discovered something. I thought realising my dream was on the cusp of the horizon.

How can things have fallen apart so quickly? Only minutes ago I was walking on cloud nine, high as a kite, on top of the world. Now I've crashed back down to earth and every bone in my body aches.

"I know, Omega," his warm voice whispers as he pulls me against his chest, wrapping his strong, warm arms around me. And he doesn't have to say anything else. It's as if in this action he's telling me that he'll shield me, he'll protect me from this shitty world. And right now it's exactly what I need. For him to hold me tight. "I told her I don't want to work for her either."

"What?" I say, peering up at him through my wet lashes, his face blurry through my tears. "You can't do that, Jake? You can't throw away—"

"Giorgie," he says, squeezing me tighter and I don't argue with him. I let him hold me as I cry into his chest, his shirt soon a wet mess.

"I want to leave," I tell him when I have no more tears to shed.

"Let me find the others. Wait here, OK?"

I nod, hugging my arms around me. Dusk is falling, the tents all lit up like light bulbs around me, the roof of the temple scarlet in the fading sun. The air is still and warm and stale with too many scents. Further away the sinister hiss of the night insects begins.

"Giorgie?" I turn and see Carl picking his way towards me in the fading light. "Is that you? I thought you'd gone home?"

I shake my head, fearing any words that stream from my mouth right now will be bitter and regrettable ones.

"Are you doing OK?" he asks, bending a little closer to peer into my eyes. The closeness makes me slightly cross eyed.

He's wearing his usual powerful cologne, the type marketed to betas as smelling like alpha scent. It's nothing like it. Too chemical and synthetic, and I have to lean slightly away before it gives me a headache.

"I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" He rests his hand on my forearm. "You know if you ever need to talk ..."

I rest my hand on top of his. It's a generous offer and one I know comes from a place of kindness, but right now I want to lick my wounds with the pack. I have a funny feeling that they are the only ones who will make me feel better about this situation. If I hadn't pushed them away like I did at the villa, if I'd let the alphas in to care for me as they wanted, would all the shit I went through afterwards alone in that bedroom never have happened?

Carl captures my hand in his and squeezes my fingers and then before I know what's happening, he's backing me up against the wall of a tent, and leaning down to ...

"Carl, no!" I screech, snatching my hand away and pushing hard against his chest, catching the whiff of beer on his breath.

He blinks open his eyes, surprise painting his features. His mouth remains frozen in its puckered state.

I swallow, trying to avoid breathing in that disgusting cologne. His face sways a little in front of mine. Where is Jake?

"I'm sorry Carl, but I'm not interested in you in that way."

"Why? Because I'm not an alpha, Giorgie. I can give you everything an alpha can." He leans in, resting his palms either side of my head, preventing my escape.

"No," I say, wondering what the hell he can mean by that. He's a beta. There is a lot he can't give me. "You're my friend and I'm not into you in that way."

"Exactly, we're friends. Very good friends. The perfect foundation for a relationship. We'd make a great couple,

Giorgie. Don't I always look out for you?"

Does he? I screw up my face, feeling way too exhausted for this conversation.

"I'm sorry, Carl. I just don't see you in that way."

"And who do you see that way? Jake fucking Grantham?" His top lip curls in disgust. "After what he did to you?"

"He didn't do anything to me, Carl."

He laughs bitterly. "That's obviously not true, Giorgie. One minute you're running off to his villa, the next you're cutting short your trip and your brother's come to fetch you home."

"You don't know what you're talking about and it's none of your business." I see how it may look that way from the outside but he's wrong. How many other rumours about the pack have been based on twisted distortions of the truth and propagated by people like Carl?

I remember Sia's warning. *Carl's jealous*. I remember all the times Carl has poured poison about Jake into my ear over the last year.

"I'm trying to watch out for you. Men like him will take advantage of an omega like you. Fuck, he already has." He scowls at me and his eyes turn lecherous as they swim down my body. "He's already had his dirty alpha paws all over you."

I plant both my palms on his chest and push with all my might. He doesn't budge. He's stronger than me. Instead, he presses his body against mine, trapping me more firmly.

"Carl," I say, trying to keep my voice even, not betraying the fear that's seeping through my body or the way my skin crawls with his proximity. "Let me go."

"And what if I don't want to?"

His hand comes to grip my jaw, twisting my face up towards his.

"Let me go," I hiss. His lips curl into a bitter smile and his eyes seem so dark, there's no longer any colour to them.

“You heard the woman,” a voice thunders from behind him. “Let go of her.”

Carl holds my face forward, but I flick my gaze to the side as I peer towards that voice.

Aiden.

“This is none of your business, pal. Piss off,” Carl spits and I’m guessing he must have had a drink. Squaring up to an alpha is a suicidal thing to do.

“It is my business. You’ve got your dirty hands all over our pack omega and if you don’t release her in the next second, I’m going to break that arm of yours and every bone in your hand.”

If my jaw was free to move, my mouth would be falling open.

Pack omega? Am I?

We’ve been so busy, caught up in the whirlwind of the dig and the find, we haven’t talked about what all this means. I wasn’t sure if their work to dig up the trench was about helping Jake with his research, or whether it was to do with me?

Do they want me for their pack?

Carl takes a step back, turning to face Aiden front on, his hand sliding to my throat. My hands spring up to grip his wrist, and I attempt to tug him away.

“I know you,” he says and I can hear the alcohol clearly in his voice, his syllables slurring together. “You’re one of those alpha dogs from Jake’s pack.”

Aiden takes a menacing stride forward. The strands of his hair catch a beam of light from the tent, blood red and rusty brown crowning his head. His face is bathed in shadow but I can make out the stern set of his jaw, the tight pull of muscles on his brow and around his eyes. He growls and the noise seems to rumble in the open space, making my knees twitch in a bid to buckle.

Carl's fingers loosen. With the fierce alpha in front of him, he seems less sure of himself, more afraid.

Aiden has a foot on his height easily, and while Carl is no weed, he looks puny in comparison to a forward from the university's rugby team.

Carl opens his mouth to speak but before a word leaves his lips, Aiden speeds forward and his hands squeeze around Carl's throat as he pushes him back into the tent, the fingers around my neck slipping free.

There had been no real pressure there, but I gasp for air anyway.

The world darkens and I feel that tug, that tug towards the blackness. Soon my body will be shaking uncontrollably, my heart racing, my lungs rasping for air as I'm whisked down to that pit, that pit where those memories are buried away, where they can scratch at me, taunt me, hurt me.

Another hand around my throat. Another man with his threats. Another man with cruel eyes. I gasp for air.

"Giorgie?" I blink, my gaze focussing on warm brown eyes, a steadying hand on my waist. "Giorgie, just breathe. It's OK, it's OK. You're safe. You're completely safe."

Beneath his honey voice, I hear the soft purr in his chest.

He takes my clammy hand and rests it over his heart and I feel the vibration of that purr, the steady beat of his heart, racing up my arm and into my body.

I breathe, the darkness fading gradually as I'm pulled back to reality, pulled back by those eyes that never leave me.

"OK?" he whispers.

I manage a nod. "Thank you."

We stand like that for several more long seconds. His scent is like bread pulled straight from the oven. A reminder of home. Of safety. Of a full belly and laughter and protective arms.

I wonder what all this can mean, but my thoughts are interrupted.

“I thought you were different, Giorgie. Intelligent, clever. Not another omega whore.”

Carl still lurks against the other tent. Blood trickles from his nostrils and he glares at me with hatred. For a moment, I’d forgotten he was there.

Something inside me snaps. I’m no longer afraid. I’m pissed off. So fed up with this bullshit. So over it.

“And you are just another asshole who spews a whole load of crap he knows nothing about. I thought you were my friend.”

Aiden takes a menacing step towards him, but I hang on to his hand, holding him back.

I’m not wasting another breath on this knob. I can’t believe I never saw him for who he truly was before.

I tug on Aiden’s arm, attempting to pull us both away, but he won’t budge.

“Stay away from our omega,” he says to Carl, his voice full to brimming with disgust. “Don’t even look her way. If you do, I will fucking kill you.”

Aiden takes my hand in his and we walk away, leaving Carl to his shadows.

I’ve had this all wrong. The whole time. All these months.

Safe and comfortable turns out to be a ruse. An asshole lurking behind the reasonable mask.

The stars begin to twinkle above me and I think of another starry night. Of another man.

A man who seemed like an asshole but isn’t. Grumpy maybe. Arrogant, definitely. But kind, caring and good.

I draw my gaze down from the sky, to Aiden. All my doubts vanish as he meets my gaze with his warm brown eyes.

Giorgie

The night has now fallen completely and we sit outside the villa bathed in glittering starlight, mulling over our situation.

“I know fuck all about archeology, but your evidence seemed pretty convincing,” Dylan says. “And aren’t there more tests and research you can do to prove you’re right?”

“It doesn’t matter,” I mutter. “My theory isn’t palatable to the people who count. The professor told us to drop the whole thing.” My stomach churns and I feel like I might vomit.

“But I thought Weaver was radical and progressive? Why would she care what others think?”

“It seems she’s only radical when it’s safe to be. Giorgie’s theory stands in direct opposition to one of the most high profile archaeologist’s in the world. Weaver’s not prepared to put her neck on the line.”

“What does this mean?” Aiden asks, dropping into the seat beside us.

“That I don’t want to work for her,” I spit with venom. “Fuck, I’m not sure I even want to work in this field any more.”

“Me neither.”

Everyone is silent and the anger and hurt come crashing through my body again. I don't know whether I want to scream or cry. The people I thought I could rely on, who I trusted and respected, have let me down. Professor Weaver. Carl.

"You shouldn't give up so easily," Aiden says quietly and I lift my gaze away from the rippling swimming pool to meet his. He's leaning over his knees, fingers laced together, brow drawn.

"What other choice do I have? I'm not prepared to forget about this theory. To just work on some other project. And none of the other researchers will be any better than Weaver. There won't be anyone who's prepared to let me study this – not if it puts them in the path of Lichenstein's wrath."

"But your theory is right, Giorgie. You know it and Jake knows it." My gaze flicks to him, standing behind Levi, his arm hooked around his packmate's. "I'm so fucking tired of people telling us how alphas and omegas work. Telling us it's been that way since the dawn of time. One meek little omega bowing and submitting to her all powerful alpha. I'm sick of being told living in a pack is wrong. That sharing an omega is wrong. That loving my packmate the way I do is wrong. I want you to publish your theory, your evidence and show the world you're right."

I stare back at him. I want that too. I want the world to know that omegas have a say. They have a choice. And they always have done.

Jake is right. We've never been despised and abused by alphas – not the majority anyway. Alphas have always worshipped us as we have them. As equals. With respect. With love.

But I don't see a way I can publish my theory.

"He's right," Jake says beside me.

"But without an academic institution funding me—"

"Aren't there private investors?" Dylan asks.

"I don't know ... I never ..."

“I have money,” Jake says. I twist around to stare at him.

“What?”

“I have money.”

“He has fuck loads actually,” Aiden confirms.

“I’ll fund you.”

“It ... you can’t ... it would be a lot of money ...”

I stare at him in disbelief. Is he serious? He looks it, his jaw set in that determined way.

“I have a lot. One advantage of having parents who are too busy with their new lives to care about me: they thrust a fuck load of money my way to alleviate their guilt.” He laughs bitterly.

“I couldn’t let you do that, though.”

He takes my hand in both of his. “You could, because there would be a condition.”

“What?” I ask him with a sudden dread.

“I’d want to work with you.” My mouth falls open, but he continues, my heart lifting. “I’m interested in this work too, you know I am. It aligns closely with my own interests.”

“And,” Levi says with a teasing grin, “you two work well together.”

“We don’t,” I say, rolling my eyes. “We argue all the time.”

“We do work well together,” Jake says, dragging my attention back to him, and stroking his fingers over mine. “We discovered this stuff together, Giorgie. And,” he smiles, one dimple forming in his cheek, “you’re the cleverest girl I know. The person who challenges me. The person who spears me on to work harder, be better. I’ve been trying to impress you this whole time. I’ve certainly never worked so hard in a class before. And I think I challenge you too.”

I stare down at our hands, at how his large ones engulf mine and that feeling of safety, of trusting him, blossoms

through my chest once more. I don't just trust him with my body. Or my heart. I trust him with my work too. I trust that he'll tell me when I'm wrong. I trust that he'll encourage me when I'm right. I trust that together our work will be more than the sum of its parts.

"Yes," I say, laughing. "I've been trying to impress you too."

"So it's a deal, then?" Levi asks, leaning his head against Dylan's chest. "You're doing this?"

I want to show the world the truth and I know Jake Grantham is the man to help me do it.

"It's a deal." I tell them.



Levi is pretty adamant we have to toast the arrangement properly, not taking no for an answer and after several minutes discussion on the best beverage to toast with, Levi and Dylan disappear in search of champagne.

Aiden and Jake sit listening to me as I wheel through suggestions, proposals, and plans for our future research, Jake offering his own ideas, and finally kissing my shoulder and laughing.

"Slow down, Giorgie. There's going to be plenty of time to work this all out."

"I know," I beam at him. "I'm just super excited."

I bet my eyes are sparkling with it because his seem to do the same in response. Then he glances at his packmate and stands up, squeezing my shoulder this time.

"I'm going to see if Levi and Dylan got distracted." He pats Aiden's shoulder as he walks past and then it's the two of us.

"I think this arrangement is better," Aiden says. "Better than only one of you winning that spot."

I lean back, my hands sinking into the cushion behind me. The stars in the blanket above us are like glittering diamonds.

“Hmmm,” I say, knowing he is right. The thought of being separated from Jake pulls at something in my heart. The something has taken root in my heart, growing stronger every moment. And I trust that this time it is real.

“He would’ve given up his spot for you.”

“He said that?” I ask, hoping it means something similar is blossoming in Jake’s heart too.

“Yes. He’s crazy about you Giorgie.” He pauses, wetting his lip with his tongue. “We all are, actually.”

My heart leaps a little in my chest. These last few days have been such a collision of emotions and I’m still untangling them all, trying to work out what each one means. Some of those feelings are definitely connected to the members of this pack, to each alpha. These men are certainly drawing me in. It’s my choice if I let them.

Aiden stands up and comes to sit in the spot Jake’s vacated. He takes my hand in his and I let him. I sense he needs to say something to me and I wait.

“You know I speak my mind.” He runs the pad of his thumb over the backs of my knuckles.

“I had noticed,” I tease.

He chuckles. “I have to ask you this, Giorgie, before we’re swamped by the others again and everything becomes ten times as complicated ...”

My brows tug together at his words. “What do you need to ask me?”

“We want to make you ours, Giorgie. We want you to join the pack.”

My heart does a somersault and for one long second I can hardly breathe, certainly can’t speak.

“I’m ... I ...”

“I know you’re scared about that. I know you have your reasons for holding back.”

I shake my head. I’m not. I’m not frightened anymore.

“I can see with my own two eyes the strength of the pull between you and Jake, the growing pull between you and Levi, you and Dylan.” His words make me grin like a cheshire cat, lighting up every space in my heart. “This is going to happen. It’s inevitable.”

I nod, feeling right in the centre of my heart the truth of his words.

“And then there’s me,” he says, his walnut gaze falling to our entwined fingers. Already I miss the warmth of his gaze.

“You,” I whisper.

“I won’t stand in the way—”

“You don’t want me!” I gasp, wondering how he can tell me how much I belong to this pack in one breath, and then crush that possibility in the next.

“No, fuck! Giorgie,” the corner of his mouth lifts in a one-sided grin. “I want you a lot.”

“Then...”

“If I’m a barrier, if I’m the thing stopping you being with this pack, then I’m prepared to step aside.” He attempts to speak these words with determination, but they crack, betraying the heartbreak.

He loves his pack. A man who has never had a home or family has finally found his, and he’s willing to give that up for me, for the men he loves, so we can be together.

I shuffle into the space between us, resting my palm against his cheek, encouraging him to lift those warm eyes back to mine. They’re shining wet with that heartbreak too.

“Alpha,” I whisper. “You’re not standing in my way. I wouldn’t want to be in this pack if you weren’t in it too. You’re the heart of this pack, the foundations of it. It would crumble without you.”

“But every time you look at me, you’ll see him, you’ll think of that moment back in the villa and—”

“No, every time I look at you I see a man I could fall in love with.”

I lift my face and press my lips to his.

He sighs into my mouth, my eyes drifting shut as he does, and his arm snaking around my waist.

I kiss him with feeling, wanting to smooth away all the pain lurking beneath those eyes, knowing he wants to do the same for me. We are two broken individuals who have been hurt, who’ve given our hearts and watched them be trampled. Who had to learn to trust again. We will fix each other.

He pulls me in closer, kissing me greedily now, with hunger. I remember he never kissed me during my heat. How long has he been waiting to do this?

I stroke my hands around to the back of his head, his shorn hair like velvet against my fingers, the heat of his gland pressing against the tender skin of my wrist.

His scent curls around me as he kisses me more deeply, his tongue sliding into my mouth and his teeth nibbling at my lips.

I could sit here and kiss him all night, lose myself in the movement of his mouth.

But other scents nudge at my consciousness. I pull away, turning to find the rest of the pack watching us.

“Did you mean that, Baby Girl?” Jake asks, peering at me through the dark.

“Which bit?” I ask, my lips curling into a smile as my gaze darts back to Aiden.

“The bit about wanting to join this pack.”

“You want me to?”

“That isn’t an answer.”

Levi slaps his packmate on the back, laughing. “For fuck’s sake you two, don’t start bickering again. Of course, we want

you, Giorgie. It's all we've been able to think about these last few days."

His gaze slips back to Jake, and he jerks his head, encouraging Jake to say something more.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Omega, are you on blockers?" The pack takes a collective inhale of air, holding it as they wait for my answer.

I throw them all a puzzled look.

"Blockers?" Why the hell are we talking about blockers right now? I stand up, stepping towards them and tilting my head in confusion. "Of course, I take blockers." I don't know an omega on the planet who doesn't.

"Did you take them today?"

"Yes," I say slowly, confused about where this is going.

"Because we can smell you, smell your scent."

I laugh. "Obviously." Everyone knows they're not 100% effective.

"How do you think we found you at the airport, Giorgie?" Aiden asks from behind me.

I pause, considering this answer. I'd been so caught up in emotions, I'd never considered how they found me. The airport was vast and crammed full of people.

"I don't know," I answer.

"We followed your scent," Dylan says.

"What?"

"We wanted to find you and talk to you. You haven't been answering your phone," Jake says.

"You're the one not answering your phone," I jibe back. Levi raises his eyebrows warning us both and I sigh. "I had it on silent. I guess I forgot to turn it back on." I shake my head. "What do you mean you followed my scent?"

"When we couldn't reach you, we called Sia, and she said you'd already left for the airport. At the airport, we caught a

whiff of your scent at the main entrance and followed it until we found you.”

“That’s ... that’s impossible.”

“It isn’t,” Jake says, taking a step closer to me. “I’ve always been able to smell your scent, Giorgie. Always. Clearer and stronger than anything else. It’s been driving me mad, pulling me towards you, every second of every day.”

“We can all smell it, Sweetness.”

“Like ripe watermelons.”

“Do you know what that means?” Dylan asks gently.

“Y-y-yes.” My voice shakes as the realisation dawns over me and I’m shaking. Not from fear this time, or some dark place, but from a warmth that sparks in my belly and spreads all across my body. A realisation. A possibility.

Perhaps I’d known this all along.

“Soul mates,” Jake says, “That’s what the Egyptians thought it meant.”

There are newer theories today. Suggestions that two people who can smell each other over blockers – an incredibly rare phenomenon – must be perfectly matching biologically, their offspring destined to be healthy and strong.

I prefer the ancient explanation.

“Soul mates,” I smile, my cheeks stretched wide.

Jake steps forward and somehow we’re standing in the circle of his pack, those stars winking at us like they knew this secret all along.

“Giorgie, I’m in love with you,” he says, drawing me into his arms.

“Is that what you call this?” I ask.

“Damn right,” he whispers in my ear.

“Then, based on all the available evidence, there can be no doubt that I love you too.”

He laughs, removing my glasses gently from my face. Then he kisses me, my cheeks, my forehead, my eyelids and finally my mouth, lingering there, kissing me deep, making my knees buckle.

I'm engrossed in that kiss but it doesn't mean I don't feel the others draw close. Jake does too.

He leans away, cupping my face in his hands.

"I'm sorry," I say to all of them. "I'm sorry I shut myself away, that I ran away—"

"Baby girl—"

"No, Jake, I need to say it. I messed up. It was the wrong thing to do."

"You know the best thing about packs?" Dylan asks. "We're here for each other. We help one another. You don't need to suffer these things alone. We can help you."

I glance at Aiden. Dylan is right. Aiden had helped me back there at the site. Not only saving me from that scumbag Carl, but pulling me back to myself.

"You're ours now, Omega. All of ours."

It isn't a question but I nod anyway, as they push me down onto the lounger.

Jake

I follow her down onto the cushion, my mouth never leaving hers, as Levi unbuttons her blouse and Aiden unties her boots.

We never got to do this, all of us together during her heat, and now I want it more than ever. To love every inch of her with them, as a pack, together. To taste and rut her, knot and fill her. Each one of us claiming her, showing her how much we fucking care for her.

Our words have always fucked things up between us, but if we'd listened to the hum of our bodies, followed the aroma of our scents, looked more closely at one another, we'd have known. We'd have known it all along.

Her blouse falls open and Levi yanks down her bra, pawing at her full breasts, groaning as he does and Dylan leans in to kiss the soft skin of her stomach, drawing lower and lower to the waistband of her trousers. Aiden's already there lowering the zip and wriggling the material over her rounded hips.

I can't help but pause, even though her fingers are in my hair and she's trying to drag me down for more kisses. I want to see, see what they're doing to her. I watch Dylan swirl his tongue around her belly button, her skin goosepimpling even in the warm air.

“I’m going to fill that belly,” I whisper to her. “One day I’m going to fill that belly.”

It’s the alpha in me speaking but the omega in her loves it and she whimpers in response. They’ve always wanted each other, always been drawn together.

Aiden has his finger in the waistband of her cotton knickers now as he licks up the inside of her thigh. He tugs at the material and Dylan follows it down, burying his nose in her soft curls and inhaling deeply.

“If you want to stop ...” I say as Dylan and Aiden begin to eat her out together, tongues sweeping and circling, their heads bumping together in their eagerness to taste her.

“Don’t stop,” she whispers, her fingers pinching my scalp.

“We won’t, Baby Girl. We got you now.”

Levi glances up at me, his mouth on her nipple, nipping and nibbling it, and I join him there, taking as much of her tit into my mouth as I can.

She moans from all this attention, her spine arching. Four pairs of arms hold her down, not letting her go anyway, forcing her to take the full power of her orgasm like the good little omega she is. The muscles in her stomach tighten and release beneath her tender skin when she does.

“Fuck, little Plaything,” Dylan mutters, his head still jammed between her thighs. “I could play with you all night long.”

She shakes her head frantically, her nails sinking into my shoulder.

“Fuck me,” she whispers.

“Who?” Levi asks. “Who do you want to fuck you?”

Her eyelids drift open and she peers down her body, eyes locking on my packmates.

“Aiden,” she mouths, her eyes not leaving his.

“Omega,” he mutters, his face full of an emotion that’s almost pained, as if he can’t quite believe how fucking lucky

we all are.

Why did we wait for this? Why did we ever think that was a good idea? We believed an omega would break apart our pack. So new, so young, when really an omega, no Giorgie, is the cement to bind us all together.

Aiden draws back stripping off his clothes while the rest of us continue to kiss and suck and bite our omega. When he's naked, he lifts her up into his arms and onto his lap, her knees falling either side of his thighs. He holds her tight and lowers her down onto his waiting cock, a long, low groan bellowing in his chest as she takes all of him.

“Aiden,” she gasps.

“It's OK, little Geek. I got you. I'll always have you.”

“You will.”

She rests her hands on his shoulders and he grips her by the waist and grinds her into his lap. She rolls into him, her tits pressing forward and he's mesmerised by her, by her movement, by her beauty.

We all are. I can't tear my eyes away.

“Omega. Fuck. You're incredible. Incredible.” I hover above her, leaning down to kiss her and she cups my cheek, and as she continues to ride Aiden.

Then Dylan and Levi join us too, stripping off their clothes. We help her along, pinching at her clit and guiding her movement.

“How does she feel, Aiden?” Levi asks.

“Wet and tight and ...” His words fall away as he bucks up into her, fucking her hard from below.

Then she's coming again carried away in bliss and Aiden follows straight afterwards, the convulsions of her cunt too much for him. Levi lifts her away before Aiden can knot her and, lying down on the lounge, draws her against him, thrusting inside her cunt before she's settled. She tries to sit up, to ride him like she had Aiden, but he drags her back down and his fingers tickle at her arsehole.

“Can Dylan join us, Sweetness?” he asks, dipping his finger in and out of her hole as he fucks her from beneath.

“Levi,” I warn him. I don’t want to push her, to rush her. There’s plenty of time for all this.

But she glances up at me and then Dylan, smiling.

“Yes, I want him to.”

“It’s—”

“It’s a fantasy of mine. It’s how it should be. You want me. You want me to belong to you all. Then share me, share me properly, Alphas.”

Fuck. I underestimated her. I fucking underestimated her big time.

I can’t help rubbing myself through my shorts as Dylan stalks forward, coating his cock in her slick and leaning down to kiss her neck. Then he’s pushing inside.

But it’s not her arse. It’s her cunt. She’s taking them both in her tight, little cunt.

I groan and she lifts her head finding me again.

Her mouth hangs ajar in a stuttering ahhh as Dylan pushes deeper and deeper, Levi’s eyes swivelling in their sockets.

“Fuck, that feels ... fuck,” he rambles.

For a moment, they all just lie there together, catching their breath, but then Giorgie’s whining, pleading for friction. Dylan slides out and Giorgie and Levi groan together. When he thrust back in, Levi rocks back and they find a rhythm, slow and careful, loving our omega with care.

It’s too much for me, watching her pinned between my packmates, taking both of them, taking everything they give her. I undo my fly and take my hard cock in my hand, rubbing my fist up and down my shaft. When I glance towards Aiden, he’s transfixed too, his hands tighter around his knot.

“Next time,” I tell him. “Next time you and I are going to share her.”

“Fuck yes,” he says.

Their slow steady dance continues, a thin film of sweat forming over their bodies, glistening in the starlight, and their moans become deeper, more possessed, as if it's just the three of them and nothing else matters in the world. And when they come, they come together and I'm so turned on, I'm fucking close myself.

“Giorgie,” I plead, and she lifts her head to find me, her hair damp and dishevelled around her face. I step towards her, claiming her from the others. They snuggle up together on the lounge, eyes locked on us, waiting to see how I'll take my turn.

“Are you sore?” I ask her. “Can you take me—”

“I want you too, Alpha.”

Gently, I pull her towards me, taking a seat on the lounge behind me. She goes to climb onto my lap, straddling me like she had done Aiden. But I twist her around, lowering her down on to me this way.

“I want them to see you, Omega. I want them to see how beautiful you are. I want them to worship you like the living goddess you are. My Isis.”

I grip her by the hip and grind her down onto my stiff cock, her head falling back onto my shoulder with a moan. She's so perfect, made to fit me, designed right out of my fucking fantasy. I trace her curves with my palms, trail my fingertips along her spine. Her hair's come loose and I sweep it over her shoulder, revealing her mating gland at the back of her neck. It quivers, thrums with the beat of her heart, and I lean in to rest my nose against it and inhale. Her scent rushes through my nose, into my mouth and down into my lungs, warming everything as it does. So sweet. Like I'm tasting ecstasy itself.

And I realise in that moment it isn't the scent that I love, that I've always loved, that had been irresistible to me from the very first moment. No, it's the woman it belongs to. My destined mate. This is why it has always smelt like home to

me, like belonging, like a new life, a new beginning, a beginning and end all at once.

“Alpha,” she murmurs, arching her back and rocking against me, three pairs of eyes watching us. “Bite me. Make me pack.”

I close my eyes, my teeth so close to her gland, scorching hot with need now.

“I can’t Giorgie. It’s too soon.” We’ve only just confessed our feelings to one another, barely had time to soak up this new reality, and though I want to sink my teeth into her flesh and make her mine, I can’t.

She twists her head, meeting my gaze over her shoulder.

“Someone once said to me that time was irrelevant. Sometimes the bond is so strong you know.”

“Giorgie—”

“I’m meant to be your pack omega. It’s going to happen. Why waste another minute? Haven’t we wasted enough?” She smiles, circling her hips and making me groan. “It’s fated. Written in those stars.” She glances up at the glittering sky. “I’m not afraid. Claim our destiny. Make me yours.”

I can’t argue with that. With this bright, intelligent woman in my arms who wants to be ours.

I grip her waist and thrust up into her, growling as I swipe my tongue over her gland. Her whole body shakes with the pound of her heart beat, a rhythm my own will follow forever more.

“Do it,” Aiden whispers through the darkness and I rest the edges of my teeth against the skin of her gland, feeling how fragile it is.

I pound into her again and again, gripping her tight to me until she’s coming, until I’m coming. And then as my knot expands, binding her to me, I rip my teeth through her skin. She screams, wriggling in my arms for a moment against the pain, and then she goes limp, melting into the warmth that spreads through us both, gasping with me as something heavy

and permanent locks into place deep in the very centre of us both.

Our bond.

Her blood and her sweet taste flow into my mouth, but I don't remove my teeth. I want to stay like this, buried in her neck, buried in her cunt, til the end of my days. But the others are circling us, their chests rumbling with deep growls. I know I have to give her up, to share her with my brothers. It's the way of the pack.

Reluctantly, I withdraw my teeth, lapping at the fresh wound I've made in her skin as I do and Aiden joins me, licking at it too.

She whimpers and I rock back, my arm still encasing her waist, giving him space.

He runs kisses up and down her throat, making her shiver, and then he's back at her gland, hands cupping her jaw. His bite is more gentle than mine, sinking his teeth in slowly, but she still screams and I feel the pain of his bite through our bond. Pain that melts into a pleasure less than a second later.

"Omega, my little Geek," he murmurs against her skin, kissing his bite mark before giving up his place to Levi.

Levi kneels down before her parted thighs, and he rubs at her clit, eyes locked on hers, watching her face as he brings her to orgasm. When she's bucking against his fingers, twitching around my cock, he leans forward and she tilts her head, inviting him in. His bite is hard, brutal, and he snarls as his teeth sink deep into her neck. The pain is blinding but the ecstasy that follows all the more sweet.

Dylan hovers over Levi, hands on his shoulder. He kisses Giorgie with Levi's teeth still in her neck.

"I think this could be my most favourite of all the games to play, Omega."

"Mine too, Alpha," she says, her eyes shining wet with tears.

Levi rocks back, licking the omega's blood from his lips and kisses Dylan. "Our omega tastes so sweet," he tells him and Dylan leans down, biting her too, her neck a criss-cross of ripped flesh.

It will heal. It will heal but our bites will never fade. Always there. Declaring to the world that this omega is claimed, is ours.

I lean into the freshly created bond between us, this pulsating line that connects us, and realise it isn't a line at all. It's a web. Weaving between us all, holding us together as a pack.

I laugh. We were worried an omega would blow our new pack apart. What fools we were.

Our omega is what will bind us together. Now. Always. Forever.

Five years later

A *iden*

Sunday mornings are my favourite.

When the light is hazy, the air heavy with our scents and the bed full of our bodies.

There's no rush, nowhere else to be, no reason for the six of us to part. Maybe later we'll wander along to one of the restaurants Dylan and I own and run together, enjoy a pack meal but for now there is no need to move.

The omega lies curled up against me and we're the only ones awake. Levi passed out straight after his match like he always does and no doubt will remain that way for the next sixteen hours. Giorgie still hates coming to watch, closing her eyes and wincing every time Levi makes a tackle, but she knows he wants her there, so she is.

Jake and Dylan are sleeping too, curled protectively around Luca, our son, who dozes in the centre of our giant bed.

We watch him together, entranced by the beauty of him. He has his mothers honey skin, her caramel eyes but I swear

there's a hint of auburn in the little tuft of hair on his head. Jake argues it's more the colour of straw, Dylan and Levi insist it's dark.

I don't care really. He belongs to us all.

Luca murmurs in his sleep, snuggling against Jake's arm and for a moment his bottom lip bobs up and down.

"He's dreaming of boob," I whisper to her and she giggles. "I can't blame him." I stroke my palm up her stomach and cup her tit, squeezing it.

"He's probably hungry," she whispers, "and so am I. Let's get some breakfast before he wakes up."

"In a minute." I hold her to me. "Let's watch him for a little longer." He's so beautiful, our boy, beautiful and brave and strong like his mother. And nearly one already. Where did the time go? "Let's make another." I whisper into her ear, grinding my cock against her arse.

"Breakfast first," she insists.

We leave the others sleeping and creep out of the room. In the kitchen, I flick on the kettle and slide bread into the toaster.

Giorgie hops up onto the counter watching me and when I'm done I come to stand between her thighs, leaning down to kiss the point where her shoulder meets her throat, where the criss-cross of our claiming bites shine white in the grey light of morning. They are so vivid, and I press my lips against them.

"Giorgie," I mutter, tasting the sweet flavour of watermelon.

"I have some news," she says, as I continue to nibble her throat and she brushes her fingers against my scalp.

"Are you going to tell me you're already knocked up again?"

"No." She tugs my hair a little. "The Dean from Crestmore College called me up this week."

I lean back, peering at her. "Really? What did he want?"

“*She* is interested in the college funding our work. She wants me and Jake to go and work at the college.” Jake and Giorgie have been working together on their research – the study of omegas and alphas in Ancient Egypt – for the past five years. At first, Jake funded their research, our pack trips out to Egypt and some minor digs. But the last few years, as they’ve published their findings and become more known, more respected, in the academic world, others have backed them too – several wealthy alphas who believe in their theories.

“I haven’t told the others yet. I wanted to see what you thought of it first. Do you think it’s a good idea?”

I smile. I’m still the one she seeks out when she has those moments of doubts. When dreams drag her under or her thoughts drift to unwelcome places. She’ll lay her hand on my chest and I pull her back, back to the here and now with us. It happens less and less often these days, good therapy and the support and love of our pack have washed away those dark places.

“What do you think, my little Geek? What do you want?”

“I would like to work there, it would mean less travelling around. It would mean more time here with the pack and with Luca,” she smiles at me teasingly, “and our future children. How do you think Jake will feel about it?”

“That man lives to make you happy. Wherever you go, he’ll follow.” Her smile turns into a beam. “Now about those future children ...” I nudge her legs further apart and she shuffles forward, unhooking my cock from my sweat pants and guiding me inside.

I sigh, pausing there for a moment, soaking up how good she feels, how good she always feels. So soft, so warm. Like home.

There were so many times, so many days and nights, I sat in strange rooms, in stranger’s houses. Wishing for a home of my own. For a family. Never really believing I could have those things.

But now I do. Now I have both.

“Alpha, move,” she whispers and I plough into her. Wanting to tell her. Wanting her to know how much she means to me. How much this pack means to me.

“I want lots of children. I want to fill this house with our children,” she moans as she starts to come undone.

“Me too.” I say as I rest my forehead against hers and fill her belly with my seed.

We’re going to have so many children, a family spilling over with love and noise, and many, many more Sunday mornings together just like these.

Long ago

The alphas step out of the West entrance of the temple, their hands laden with the gifts they've begged the God of all alphas, to bless. The day is late and the sun races towards the horizon, drawn there on Ra's chariot. Around them, the dunes turn scarlet and the golden ball of light reflects in their eyes like flames of fire.

In the distance lies the temple of Isis. They strain their eyes to see, but it is too far, and it will be long into the night before they reach their destination.

They can smell her though, the omega, the sweet tang of her scent alive on their tongues. She's in heat. Waiting for them. Waiting for her pack of alphas to mate her, breed her, claim her.

They growl, their feet carrying them swiftly along the sacred pathway with ease, the heavens morphing crimson then purple and finally a blue so dark it is almost black.

Soon the temple greets them, crowned by the bright stars in the sky. They pound on the door with their fists, demanding to be admitted.

She cries out softly in response and they push open the great doors, climb through the sacred doorway, passing deeper and deeper inside the temple's belly, finding her lain out on her back, her thighs glistening with her slick.

Waiting for them.

Around her a hundred candles flicker and her richly brown skin looks almost golden.

She is a goddess, so sacred they barely dare look at her.

But they can't resist. She is too beautiful. Too sweet. So ripe.

They fall to their knees, lay before her feet their offerings. Offering themselves.

They are not worthy of her.

And yet she accepts them, accepts them all. Her alphas. Her pack. Binding them together through the days of their lives, and beyond, into the eternity of the afterlife.

~~The End~~

Thank you so much for reading. If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review or rating — it's a great help to indie authors like me!

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A GUIDE TO HANNAH'S OMEGVERSE

I write soft and steamy omegaverse romances — stories that are on the sweeter side — mixing the sauciness of omegaverse dynamics with contemporary plots.

My omegaverse stories are set in a modern world just like ours, except people can be one of three kinds — Alphas, Betas and Omegas. Betas are just like you and I, but Alphas and Omegas are slightly different biologically. In my stories, the characters are often battling with their biological urges, needs and instincts, and trying to fit into a modern world which can be judgemental and sometimes prejudiced.

A *LPHAS*

Alphas are generally larger, stronger and more aggressive. Their instincts can make them domineering and controlling. Alpha males are also a little anatomically different where it counts the most. Yep, I'm talking the peen — at the base there is a knot which expands when an Alpha comes, locking him into his partner where they remain stuck together for a period of time. Biologically, this increases the chance of pregnancy. Some Alphas can control the expansion of their knot, others can't.

O *MEGAS*

Omegas are smaller and their instincts can make them more submissive — especially towards an Alpha. Only an Omega can ‘take’ an Alpha’s knot. An Omega has regular heat cycles where they are especially fertile. During this period they become hot and horny and very uncomfortable unless they are fucked and knotted frequently by an Alpha.

H *EATS, RUTS AND BITES*

Similarly to menstrual cycles, the Omegas in my world have differing heat cycles. Some have very regular heats, some have them less often, and others control or suppress them with medication. A heat typically lasts three or four days. When an Omega falls into a heat, their scent alters and they become especially alluring to any Alpha close by.

An Omega in heat can drive an Alpha into rut. An Alpha in rut isn’t hindered by the usual biological restraints that your average guy is. I’m talking about permanent erections, no recovery, and the ability to come multiple times! (Sounds like fun, huh?)

Both Omegas and Alphas have glands at the back of their necks, the source of their scents. These glands are especially sensitive when the Omega or Alpha is turned on. Biting this gland is known as claiming and binds the pair together, often irreversibly. It also leaves a scar and changes the Alpha or Omega’s scent which signals to others that they are ‘taken’. During a heat, when an Omega is at the mercy of their biological urges, an Omega can often beg for an Alpha to ‘claim’ or bite them.

S *CENTS, BLOCKERS AND SUPPRESSANTS*

Both Omegas and Alphas have heightened senses of smells and distinctive scents. An Alpha and Omega can recognise another Alpha or Omega by their scent alone, often over great distances. Their scents can also signal how they’re feeling — especially when they are aroused or aggravated. Omegas and Alphas can mask their scents using blockers.

They can also try to quell their Alpha and Omega instincts with the use of suppressants — for example an Alpha might take an emergency suppressant to stop themselves responding to an Omega in heat.

S *OFT AND STEAMY OMEGAVERSE*

In my world, Alphas and Omegas are rare and viewed as a source of fascination by Betas. Alphas are often struggling to fit into a society where aggression and violence isn't tolerated, and Omegas are torn between their desire to be independent and their instinct to be controlled. It is often true love and the perfect partner that allows them to find the balance, acceptance and happiness they need and deserve. Happily ever afters guaranteed!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm a British romance author who loves writing soft and steamy omegaverse romances, sure to get your pulse racing and your heart fluttering. My couples are destined to find each other - and when they do, oh boy!

My other loves include long romantic walks in the countryside, undisturbed soaks in a hot bath and even hotter stories. I have one husband, three children and a very naughty cat. When I'm not writing stories, I'm thinking about stories, listening to stories, reading stories or dreaming about them. Come follow me!

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