

LUCY SCOTT BRYAN

KNOT

*Letting You
Go*



KNOT
*Letting You
Go*

LUCY SCOTT BRYAN

Copyright © 2023 by Lucy Scott Bryan.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without the express written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any means without permission.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities are entirely coincidental.

Lucy Scott Bryan asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

This book is available exclusively through Amazon.

First Edition.

Cover Design by Marie Mackay.

Edited by Bookends Editing.

Formatted by The Nutty Formatter.

Contents

Reader Consideration

Part One

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Part Two

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Coming Soon](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Keep in Touch](#)

[Books Lucy Scott Bryan](#)

Each scar serves as a
reminder of
Who I am
Who I can become
and
Who I will never be again

Reader Consideration

Knot Letting You Go is an omegaverse romance. And while omegaverse shares designations with shifter books such as alphas, betas and omegas, these characters are not animals. Sure, they growl and hiss at times, and act a lot like their furry counterparts, but they remain human.

The world of omegaverse is heavily influenced by designations, smouldering instant connections, scents, and smells. Both alphas and omegas undergo physical and emotional changes during a heat cycle including heightened mating instincts with a drive to claim, and the ability to knot. When everything come together, it's perfectly sinful and hot as fuck.

Knot Letting You Go is recommended 18+ due to mature language, adult situations, sensitive content, and the level of spice. There is age gap and reverse age gap between characters along with suggested off page mentions of physical, mental, and sexual abuse, gaslighting, manipulation, use of an infant in a blackmail situation, along with on page death and violence.

There is also a relationship between two men in the pack. Because love is love!

Your mental wellbeing is worth more than any book, so please consider if this book is right for you. If it is... enjoy.

xxx Lucy



Part One



CHAPTER

One

The polite chatter floating from Jenn's side of the garden is in complete contrast and contradiction to the rough banter and crude jokes that come from Dad's side. There's even a row of chairs straight down the middle of the lawn separating them, which is where I've been hovering, in no man's land.

The two opposing sides of my party are a pretty good representation of my parents and the way they live. Honestly, how these two hooked up, I'll never know. But they did; I'm proof of them having sex at least once. And they're living proof that opposites attracting is a genre in romance novels. Never once since they split, did I ever see these two getting back together.

Mom is no longer Mom—she's Jenn. Our relationship has never really been one like you usually see between mothers and daughters. Not that it matters because I love both my parents. Although, I love Dad more. He's been there for me every day since Mom walked out on the life she thought she wanted and returned to the one she was born into. Dad's the one that showed me what family and loyalty means, and it's got nothing to do with the DNA you share.

Jenn's name change was her choice, much like the garden party for my birthday was too. I'm more of a grill person. Sitting around and relaxing with friends, as opposed to spending the day with people I barely know, nibbling on mini quiches and smoked salmon blinis. But we're in Jenn's world

now, and I'm happy to be here. Except even in Jenn's corner of the world, dad is pretty sure he rules here too.

"And now my favourite part of the day. Listening to the bullshit these cocky shits come up with about being ready to date my daughter is such a highlight. Pretty fucking weird the moment I'm not here, they start breaking the promises they just made thinking I don't know. But, yep, here we fucking are again." Dad talks to the crowd on his side of the garden but loud enough so it intrudes on the chatter on Jenn's side.

"Pretty sure they think they only have to live by their rules," Joker smirks, giving me a quick wink as he walks to stand next to Dad.

Dad nods his head, "I don't give a shit how many tennis coaches mommy has or how much money's in daddy's trust, we're talking my baby girl. Since she's *my* daughter, she's going to live by *my* fucking rules."

"King, really?" Jenn scoffs. Even without the volume, you can't miss her discomfort. She moves farther away from us, not even attempting to hide her souring mood. Personally, I gave up being embarrassed by either of them years ago.

I don't even bother twisting around to catch the glare they share.

"Raney, ass here now. And not one fucking word, yeah?" Dad's voice matches the look on his face: pissed off. I get it, I do. He's about to leave me here and return home.

Dad's style of parenting is full black-hawk helicopter mode. He has his own small army at his beck and call too. Seriously, if I do anything wrong, the whole lot of them report to him within minutes.

It's embarrassing. But so is the fact that we're about to do what we do every goddamn year. Without exaggeration, it's like Groundhog Day. Every time Dad brings me up to Jenn's, everyone who's anyone gets rounded up and made to listen to him lay down the rules. Even though we celebrated my

twentieth birthday before we arrived, it could have been my fortieth and I'm sure we'd be doing the same.

Without causing too much of a scene, I take my spot next to Dad and twist around to glare at all my uncles standing supportively next to him. None of them would ever go against his parenting style because these assholes adopted the exact same style of raising me.

Assholes, the lot of them. Good assholes, just covered in tats, with a propensity to say fuck more often than any other word in the dictionary. They're unapologetically loud and abrasive. They live and love hard, and ride often. And all of them emphatically worship the ground my dad walks on. My dad being Roland Grady, aka King. As in King, founding member and president of the Northern Sector for The Fallen.

I know without a doubt that everything he does is to keep me safe. Although, I'm not sure it should extend to my love life. But none of my uncles will listen to my pleas to get him to be more understanding. No one goes up against King. Especially when it comes to me.

"Every fucking year I want to have a quick bite to eat before I hit the road again. But instead, we have to listen to these little turds who want to date my daughter. Bullshit promise rings." His voice thunders over the party, making it impossible to ignore him.

Smirking at the side of his head, I spin the three solid gold rings on my thumb, because even though Dad said no to us dating, I was allowed to keep the birthday gift from them last year. Go figure.

"Happy Birthday, Lolli," Talon says confidently before even looking at Dad or any of the other guys who rode with us. Risky move, but Talon's always had a point to prove. And that point is he's strong enough to face anything my dad throws at us. And as much as I love him calling me Lolli, a private nickname to do with my sweet kisses, he also knows how much dad hates it.

“Yeah, happy birthday, Sweets. We’re very happy you’re back.” Reid follows straight after Talon’s greeting. The cockiness of his tone is as obvious as the smug look in his eyes.

Since I’ve visited last, he’s gotten taller. His attitude has grown too. Of course, I can’t help the small purr of satisfaction that bubbles from my chest. I mean, give me credit, these two are fucking gorgeous.

The noise I make is barely audible, except somehow Dad hears. A noise like a dog growling comes from behind his clenched teeth. Of course, once he does it, each of my uncles follow suit. And I realise how busted I am, so does everyone else now.

Reid stays where he is while Talon takes a step closer to me with a heated tip of his lips, I seriously think he’s going to rush in and kiss me. He flicks his chin dismissively at the noise my dad and his team keep making, but also at the encouraging nod he gets from his best friend to keep making a statement.

Talon’s always stood head and shoulders above me, but now it’s like I have to crane my neck to find his midnight blue eyes, his trademark left dimple just dimpling adorably. And shit, I really do think he is going to come over and kiss me.

A shuffle of movement behind Talon saves us all. Hayes averts everyone’s attention to him, and it diffuses the situation. He’s my third boyfriend, and my first lover. He’s also the giver of the other promise rings, and much like Talon and Reid, he’s undergone a noticeable transformation since I last saw him. His deep chocolate brown eyes are just as intense and breathtaking as always. His warm brown hair is longer now too, framing the angles of his face, amplifying how good looking he is. His presence is the most noticeable though, it’s like an intimate brush over my skin.

“What the hell...” I hiss, my fingers swiping over my lips as his presence pushes against me without him lifting a finger.

Dad turns and glares at the side of my head, oblivious to the rest of the world. And I know it's his warning to pull myself together. I push my tongue against the roof of my mouth until it hurts, but at least it stops my mouth watering. Of course, Dad puts his back to them and faces me.

“Raney, I’m not sure about this...”

“I’m here because I want my time with them. Plus, they’ll watch over me while you’ve got the Chapter Assembly,” I say, moving in for a quick cuddle, hoping I throw him off his game.

“Jesus, Raney, I don’t give a shit about the Assembly back home.” He squeezes an arm around me, talking quietly in my ear because there’s too many ears around here.

“I’m okay, I promise. They just... you know we’ve only been Face Timing and it always throws me seeing them.” I push out of his arms.

“I swear, if I find out you’ve all been fucking sexting, I’ll shove your phone up their asses.”

I laugh at the absurdity of his comment, “You do know that I’m twenty, right?”

“Do I look like I give a shit? Not when it comes to them.”

Them. Their. He doesn’t need to expand upon who he’s talking about. Them or their—being Reid, Talon, Hayes, and Colt—like it has always been. But I haven’t seen Colt. Yet. The five of us have a killer connection, and no one can dispute that. The issue is we live on different sides of the tracks, and their parents aren’t my most loyal or loving fans.

Add in the small issue of designations... and yeah, I’m allowed to bitch. For the record, designations suck ass. More accurately the lack of my designation is definitely worthy of the angst that lives inside me.

While people around me are emerging like they should, I’m stuck in a weird hiatus. My genes are like a bear in hibernation in the middle of winter: completely dormant.

In our society what you are plays a big part of who you will be. Alphas are the most predominant designation, and they usually blast into their power in their late teens, early twenties. Omegas are the rarest and they blossom the earliest, usually before a person reaches their teens. And betas are when nothing happens in terms of your designations, you stay the same.

Our society is structured around those designations. Alphas traditionally hold the power in our community and in our home units. Alphas live in packs, or perhaps a better way of putting it is: they circle protectively around their omega. It's pretty much their life objective—having an omega that is. Because while an alpha is full of surging emotion and possessive protectiveness, omegas are the sponge that soaks up their powerful emotions. They have a natural born ability to anchor an alpha, and a whole pack. Omegas keep their alphas sane.

And while dad is a super strong alpha, and mom is a beta, the reality is designations don't always follow your parents. The only sign so far that I'm probably following in Mom's footsteps more than Dad's is the delay in my designation.

As opposed to Talon and Hayes who have blasted into theirs. I knew they had. Reid is so close you can feel him pressing against you, plus he's been especially moody lately. But it's the first time I've felt and seen Tal and Hayes in person since they've presented. And that's what I was responding to. Like any other person would.

My lack of designation is definitely something that plays on my mind when it comes to them. Omegas are also the only ones able to take an alpha's knot. While not always necessary for breeding, an omega's ability to take an alpha's knot is a requirement for an alpha's pleasure. And alphas are certainly about that—quite simply they like to fuck. Betas can have sex with alphas, but everyone in our world knows alphas need the satisfaction and pleasure only an omega's body can provide. Of course, another thing that happens between alphas and

omegas is instant compatibility, a little sniff of ‘your’ omega and promises, relationship, and life plans change.

Hence my angst. What happens if I’m a beta? What happens if my alpha boys meet their omega and that magical connection snaps in place... they’ll forget who I am in an instant.

Since the day we met, they’ve said they want me, and not my designation. We definitely have a connection, and we’ve always felt right. But we’ve never experienced that paralysing connection packs talk about after meeting their omega. King constantly bandies phrases around like immature views of the world and naive to the point of being stupid. I guess we’re full of hope that we’re going to be one of those packs that thrives without an omega.

“Raney!” Colt calls my name, and I swing my head around searching for him. The second I find him; I feel all dizzy in my head like I’m floating or falling.

For a long time, I was confused about Colt. Not him. Colt has never once questioned us. Considering he’s younger than me, I had to be the one putting the brakes on where he kept trying to take our relationship past the point of what society views as right. A large part of the confusion was centred around age which is weird, because I grew up in an environment where people focus on who you are as a person, not when you were born.

Colt and I have always had crazy intimacy to our friendship and that was never a stumbling block. The physical thing was a difficult part to terms with, and in truth that was a very, very recent change to our relationship and one that he initiated with a tenacity beyond his years, and one he vehemently refused to drop.

Dad completely ignores Colt, which pisses me off. I go to mouth off, but he talks over the top of me.

“Every fucking year you stand there, Reid, and try to tell me my daughter is meant to be with your not yet formed pack.

It's a bit of a fucking joke, kid, particularly when I notice your mother once again declined Jenn's invitation to be here. Anyway, let's focus on my daughter. You know the rules, we've already done this a few times, but give me your best shot as to why you should be allowed to date her. Remember, you only get one chance."

For the past few years, Reid, Talon, and Hayes have stood in a similar way they are today. This year Colt, Reid's younger brother, is standing there with them.

"We'll be here every year, sir, until we get your approval. We're not going anywhere, and neither is Raney. Yeah, we're young..."

"You're shitting me, right?" Dad laughs, sounding stunned. He's not. He's being an ass.

"No, sir." Reid answers with a barely hidden tone of contempt. He's egging dad on with his attitude for some reason. Or this is another one of those impending alpha change things I've missed picking up on during our endless phone calls or live streams during the last few months.

"Young, huh. At least you got that shit right, I'm pretty sure you just climbed out of your diapers. And I bet Colt still takes his mother's sour tit before bed."

My eyes jump straight to Colt. There's no disputing his age, it's the one thing you can't argue. Saying that though, he's got more maturity and courage than a lot of the guys that ride with Dad. I stare at Colt. Even across the patio I can see the mood in his eyes. I keep his attention locked on mine so he doesn't start showing everyone how much courage he has.

Reid ignores King and starts talking again. "We've done exactly what you said you wanted us to."

"All right, fellas let's give this little soon-to-be alpha a fucking pat on the back. We're done, Reid, the answer is still no."

"No," Colt snaps, "We're not done. It's Raney's birthday, and this is what we do. We're going to keep doing it too, until

you say yes.”

There’s a moment of silence as everyone looks in shock at Dad and Colt before a wave of noise follows. A couple of the older members of The Fallen look ready to give Colt an ass whooping.

My dad is frozen, his eyes hard, his scent getting all bitter and nasty. Which isn’t a good sign for anyone. And the vein that pops out on the side of his neck isn’t a great sign either.

Hayes jumps in to pacify the situation, “Sir, we are doing what you said we had to. All of us. I got a job, and we’ve got a plan now.”

“What about Reid, huh?” King looks to Hayes, but Reid interrupts and answers.

“I’ve been learning my father’s business.”

King shrugs, making the movement overexaggerated and clearly condescending as hell, “Yeah, well that ain’t work, is it?”

“Working for my father is work!” Reid bites back, his eyes narrowed. He’s failing at King’s test today. I know it, everyone knows it, and it adds to Reid’s crappy mood.

King’s eyes lock on Reid, and despite the easy smile on King’s face, it’s clear he’s pretty pissed off. He doesn’t answer straight away, he just watches Reid struggling not to squirm under his stony gaze. “And that’s the issue, it’s his business. Which for the record, he’s fucking shit at doing. Being in an elected position is one thing, but the whole world knows what he did to get elected.”

From either side of the garden party comes a clash of conflict at Dad’s obvious slur. It’s not wrong, though. No one could dispute the desperate shady games Reid’s father is renowned for. He takes being a slimy politician to a whole new level; corruption, dishonesty, and intimidation are words regularly associated with him. Sadly, it’s Reid’s mother who is worse.

Dad takes his ‘don’t give a fuck attitude’ even further. “In my books, I reckon that means he should be representing all the people in his electorate, but the picky fucker can’t see past his inner circle of rich golf buddies. So, while those numb skulls get richer, and your daddy gets fatter, all the other people are left wanting.” Dad takes a moment to watch Reid’s reactions before he gets more direct in the way he speaks to Reid. “You get that’s what I have issue with, right? That’s the life you want my daughter to be a part of? And before you try to bullshit to my face, I want you to at least admit you realise there’s no way your parents will let you or your brother deviate from the life your family has planned for you both. No shit, yeah? They would have started planning your life, since the time you were still sitting in his hairy ball sack.”

Some people actually take a visible step back like they don’t want to be here anymore. But King ignores it all, his attention still locked on Reid.

Reid does an angry slow exhale before standing up to King and ignoring his comment about his family. “You said we needed to provide for her. Me going into his business would mean I could. So yes, I’ve been busy learning every part of it, so I can take it over one day.”

“Interesting you’re living in his shadow, Reid, but so is the fact those two turds next to you came into their alpha designations. And junior here is looking like he’s about to too,” King jabs his finger in Colt’s direction before taking a physical step back towards Reid, Talon, and Hayes, “but none of you bothered to pick the phone up to let me know. Did Daddy tell you how to handle that too?”

Hayes throws his hand out to try to placate the rising tension. “Sir, we thought it better to do that face to face.”

“Yet, it wasn’t the first thing you did man to man, was it, Hayes? What about you, Talon? You’ve been here eyeing my daughter like she’s a tasty fucking treat, but you haven’t come up and taken me aside, told me you’re a big alpha now.”

Talon's shoulders roll back, not too much, but I'm watching the four of them closely so I see it. "I thought it was more important to say hi to Lolli again, instead of telling you something you already sensed the second you took your helmet off," he says. The lack of emotion in his voice and on his face is a clear indicator of how pissed off he is.

"Kudos mini alpha." King smirks sarcastically before he glares at him. "You played it wrong. You need to remember, until *Raney* is packed, she is mine. And no shit, I've told you so many fucking times to be straight up with me. If anything impacts her, you tell me. Straight up. None of these bullshit games Reid's pa is known for. The second I arrived you should have been waiting to talk to me. Not arriving late and doing it this way," Dad's eyes are dangerously half-mast, his anger's swirling all around him as he stands to his full height. It's hella intimidating.

And this is the other side of living in a world of designations. Alphas are the top of the society pyramid, and if you're not strong enough to go toe to toe up against one, then it's a slippery slope down to the bottom where power plays are a way of life. Add in my dad is King, and yeah, no one challenges him like Talon just did.

"Dad, he didn't mean any harm. Please," I say, dropping my gaze to my scuffed Vans.

"You're apologising for him, Raney?" King laughs. And yeah, I know I'm currently dealing with the alpha asshole who rules over all the other assholes in *The Fallen* and not my dad.

And this time the sound that falls from my lips is loud enough to let him, and the world know how I feel about him making a scene. But one of the things Dad taught me was to own the moment.

I turn to him, flicking one eyebrow up. "You both want the same thing, and that is for me to be happy."

He glares at me, but he also pulls back his surging alpha-ego. "I'm leaving you here with them. I'll keep fucking

grilling them forever if needs be.” And then he swings his attention back to the boys who stand waiting, though his finger jabs at Reid. “Pretending to work for your daddy is not enough in my books. You need to know how to survive without the handouts you keep waiting for.”

Colt scoffs, trying to hide it under a shuffle of his feet, but they’re all under the microscope, where every movement and word is a test. King zeroes his foul mood on him, trying to push him to a breaking point. “Colt, you old enough to wipe your own ass yet?”

“Only just, sir.” As soon as Colt answers sarcastically, he locks his jaw shut. I can feel his frustration from here. But we also knew King would be coming hard at them.

King keeps his attention on the youngest of our crew. “What do you bring to the table, huh? Seems like you’ve got a lot to say there.”

“No, sir.” Colt though isn’t afraid of conflict or confrontation. He never has been. He stands a little straighter before he gets ready to answer.

King’s impatient though, “No, sir, what? Nothing to say, or nothing to bring to the table?”

“Not my year to talk, sir. Supposedly I have to turn eighteen before I’m allowed to stand and say my bit. As soon as you say I can, I will be. And I’ve got no doubt you’ll be listening to what I have to say.” Colt’s being pretty dominant, but at the same time, he’s careful to keep his eyes away from the challenge in Dad’s.

“Big man, huh?” King smirks.

“Will be.”

Dad starts laughing, and the entire deck of the patio shakes under the intensity. But it’s not nice, it’s mocking and teasing. I hate it when he laughs like this, it grates against my skin and makes me instantly bitchy.

King's taunting is like dumping gasoline on a bonfire, completely unnecessary. And it's the final straw for me. I push off to storm inside. Slamming the door behind me, sick of his shit.

Of course, the door opens behind me a spit second later, King's thundering steps chasing me through Jenn's place.

"Don't you fucking dare, Raney. Your ass is staying next to me, so every fucking person gathered will hear what I'm saying whether they're wearing a cut or a damn Chanel suit. I literally don't give a fuck who they are, but they will listen to me. You wanted this so get your ass out there and you listen too."

The thing with both dad and me is we can share the same fiery temper.

I swing around and go at him. "Why? Why do you always make fun of them?"

He's right up in my face, returning the favour. "You think that was me making fun of them? You know I was going fucking soft. Colt standing there like a cocky sonofabitch looking me in the eye saying bullshit about I'll be listening to him; he's not even fucking eighteen! He needs to learn some fucking respect. He's lucky I didn't knock his head clean off his fucking shoulders, Raney! And Jesus, his brother is standing there looking like he's won the fucking prize already. Which, for the record, he hasn't! I rule here, and he will give me the respect I'm due."

"In case you didn't notice, we're not in Kansas anymore!" I spit back at him sarcastically. Trying desperately to rein in my emotions at the same time. The both of us screaming our dirty laundry is food for the nosey neighbours and guests.

And all it does is confirm to everyone here, how wrong it is for me, and Dad, to be in their world. Because while King rules back home, the snobs that live here can make my life miserable with a raise of their sculptured eyebrows.

I try. I swear I try. But it doesn't work. I've still got a lot to say, but I do stop screaming.

“Every year you make them come here so you and all your guys can stand around teasing and mocking them, trying to get them to snap.” I swing back around and start moving away again. The walls around me feel like they're closing in, the air is suffocating. But it's him mainly. His alpha is rising because apparently every fucking thing in his eyes is a challenge today.

I put my hand on the door to my bedroom, or suite, because the way mom and dad live is as different as night and day. And I get it nearly open before he buckles and barks at me. “You are not permitted to step one foot in that room until they know the rules. I fucking mean it.”

He alphas me. His words and command make me stumble and fall to my knees. I barely have the wits to fight through his compulsion and not whine. But the second he sees what he did, he gets control of himself and his alpha command falls away.

“Nice one, Dad,” I hiss back, climbing to my feet and sharing with him the universal gesture for fuck you over my shoulder before slamming the doors to my room shut.

The other thing about King is his sense of privacy is non-fucking-existent. Except when he says he needs privacy, and then he's like fortified steel. He has my door open but doesn't cross the threshold. Colour me surprised.

“Raney... baby, I didn't mean...”

I know he didn't mean to alpha me into submission, but it doesn't detract from the fact he did.

I keep my back to him. Talking quietly because I know he'll hear. “Never heard you not say a word you haven't meant. I guess I learned that from you because I mean what I say too. Don't you dare step a foot inside until you come to me with an apology. You want to keep treating me like I'm three years old, Dad, that's on you. Not me.”

“You’re fucking twenty, Raney!” he roars in response, losing a handle on his control again.

I nod, refusing to turn around. My eyes are blinking away the tears of frustration. Honestly, we’ve been through this so many times recently it’s not funny. “Yeah, I am and don’t you forget it. In some places in the world that makes me an adult. How about you think about that? I’ll be back before the cake comes out. Don’t send anyone to come get me or I won’t be attending at all. I’ll get there without an escort.” I use my foot to kick the door to my room closed.

Of course, he uses my biggest weakness against me. “Raney, don’t make me ban them from seeing you.”

I shake my head but refuse to open the door for him. “Yeah, pretty sure that’s what you said last year, King. Think of something else, hey.”

Moving through the suite, the recent remodelling mom did has changed the whole layout and now more than ever it doesn’t feel like my space, despite all my stuff being in here. I grab a bottle of water and sit on a gigantic armchair facing the only window in the room. The view is of the crashing waves down below. I’m sure it is cathartic to some, but I’m more of a city person. I get lost in the view though. The constant roll of the ocean is a good reminder that no matter what happens, some things stay the same. Like my dad going ballistic with his protective urges.

I finish my bottle of water, and using one of the blankets, I snuggle down to watch the day move on without me. Outside I can hear my party happening still, but that’s cool. It’s not really for me, it’s for Mom and her friends. And it’s for King of course.

A sharp knock on the door, and the door opens before I manage to twist around.

“You didn’t want to wait to see if you were invited in, King?” I smirk, before dropping my head back to stare at the waves again

“Nah, Raney, you know I’m not one to wait for permission,” Dad says as he kicks over an ottoman. “What the fuck is this thing, anyway? Your mom can’t afford chairs now?” And then he sits smack bang in the middle of my view. Smart man, really, because he knows I’m pretty good at ignoring shit, him included.

He drops one of his meaty hands around my feet and tugs on it repeatedly until I quit ignoring him. My hand glides out, and he nabs that too.

“Come on, Raney. You owe your dad a drink, and I owe you an apology.”

I shake my head, all shocked. “Holy shit, are you okay? Like, did the great King just admit he fucked up?”

“Watch your language, kid.” He chuckles before leaning his head against my hand. “I can’t lose you, Raney. I really couldn’t.”

“You know I’m not living with you until I die, don’t you?”

He chuckles, and it’s not nasty, it’s just my dad being my dad. “Please kid, one day at a time. Let me survive the next hour and we can talk about you walking across the road all by yourself next week, yeah?”

He reaches out for a hug, and I squeeze him tight, taking in a big breath of his scent. He smells like home and always has. Even if home smells like cigarette smoke, bourbon, and motor oil.



CHAPTER

Two

“All right, settle down, dickheads. First up, I owe my girl an apology. She knows what for. Fuck, half the world knows why. I’m a better man because of this girl next to me so raise your glasses and the first shot is to her. Happy birthday, baby, you’ve made us all proud.”

Dad taps our glasses before the both of us take the shot, slamming the empty shooter on the top of Mom’s polished table. And then it’s like a chain reaction, with my uncles and my guys following suit. Someone stomps and yells happy birthday, and that’s all it takes until it sounds like a herd of wild beasts running straight at us. A final roar echoes through the neighbourhood, and all mom’s champagne swilling buddies look mortified.

Dad ignores them and does the expected, taking centre stage again. “Shut the fuck up!”

Four words and you’d be able to hear a bee fart. It’s so quiet you really would. But my whole being is distracted, my senses out of whack. Every part of me tingles because I can feel them as they come to stand right next to me.

“Today.” My dad looks at me, and from his position in front of everyone he looks a lot like Zeus ruling over all of us. And then I get jolted by a bolt of realisation rendering me speechless as he points at Reid, Talon, Hayes, and Colt.

“Today, I’m letting everyone know that these little upstarts are allowed to start dating my girl.” He winks at me before swinging to face the guys standing next to him. “Even though

I won't be here, you've got all the fucking eyes of our club on you. You make her cry and, trust me, you'll be the ones weeping. You do her wrong and you'll be answering to me before you answer to each of her uncles. And I do not need to tell you what will happen if she is hurt. I literally don't give a flying fuck how, but if Raney ever shows up in front of me with one scratch on her, you fuckers will be given ten minutes to gather your shit before we hunt you down. And that's even with all the scullions of dollars your family has, nothing will stop me from ripping your arms off your body."

A slow smile spreads over Hayes's face, a twinkle of promise in his brown eyes. But Dad's still not finished laying down his rules. "Let's be fucking real, fellas, you better not look at another female from here on out. And yeah that's not me saying you're allowed to touch my daughter like that, because she'll be..."

The birds and the bees talk! I thought I was embarrassed before. Now I'm praying for the earth to swallow me up. "Dad! Please... in front of everyone?"

"Easy done," Talon interrupts me and King. "Raney is ours. Always has been, always will be."

There's a whole lot of noise; Mom's group of friends shuffle nervously while my uncles start razzing, but of course with a wave from Dad, the noise settles down again.

"And I don't want no fucking trouble from the cops about him," Dad jabs his finger in Colt's face, "don't touch my daughter until you're legal."

Colt shakes his head, and his gaze falls to his feet before he shrugs, dropping one of his smiles on the world. And yeah, for someone his age, he should not know how to bespell every woman in the place, but he does. Colt, irrespective of his age, has this depth and wisdom in him. When you look in his eyes, a very old soul is looking back at you. One that likes to push boundaries and have fun. But he's also stubborn and obtuse as a mule, and making a point is something that drives him.

He takes a step, walking until he's in front of me. And much like the others, over the past few months Colt has transformed into a different person. He's nearly taller than his brother now, his shoulders starting to widen. His presence is the most different; his designation will be known very soon. "Happy Birthday, Raney. Since we're now allowed to be official before much else... I need to get this sorted out now."

"Get what sorted out?" I ask him softly.

But then he kisses any further question off my lips and pushes King to the breaking point.

"No fucking way, Colt! That's the last..."

Colt smirks into my lips before leaning in again, like he's got all the time in the world to kiss in front of the entire world. And then he grabs my hand and leads me closer to where Dad looks like he's about to have a coronary.

"King, I respect you and..."

My dad decks him. Like, full uppercut from out of nowhere. And Colt staggers backwards, making me stumble. But somehow Colt sweeps me back to my feet, pushing me behind him. Protectively.

I'm not shocked when instead of retaliating Colt stands in front of dad, his arms loose by his side not one drop of threat in his presence. Just this crazy self-assurance that brings another level to his imminent change. "That's your one shot, King. Right here with everyone watching. Right now, because you said we could date your daughter. You had to get that out of your system and I know that. It's why I purposely pushed your buttons, but we're done now, yeah?"

King is locked up tight, staring at Colt.

"I'll keep on respecting you, but with Raney involved, everything is different. I'm young, but I won't let any shit fall on her shoulders. Besides, you'd think I was the laughing stock if I didn't do what I just did too, so let's cut the cake, because we're taking Raney out on a date for her birthday, like you said we could."

It's like a wave of shock goes from one side of Mom's yard to the other. Most of Dad's men take a step closer, like there's danger lingering in the air. They're getting overly protective of their president, ready to fight. Completely unnecessary, and I cut off every one of them with a glare that would stop traffic. Well, that's what dad tells me all the time, and it works.

Dad steps forward, his hand out like he's going to shake Colt's hand. And he does. Except he tugs him into him, whispering viciously in his ear, and I only hear because I'm there too. "Colt, where I live, things are different. Here, these people will report my daughter for being involved with a minor quicker than they can say, pass the fucking baked camembert. What you do behind closed doors I don't want to know about, but you risk her again, and I will gut you. Before I cut you up in pieces and feed you to my pigs."

We don't have pigs. For the record. I mean, we've talked about getting them but as of this minute we don't. Colt shrugs, "Easy. Hey, sorry, King, about the kiss thing, but you know I wasn't wrong. You'd give me shit about not being man enough for the rest of our days."

"You're a cocky little cunt, Colt. Lucky Raney likes you," Dad growls, but there's this little twinkle of respect in his eye too. Still, no one pushes the subject.

"Apparently, young Colt here was explaining what happened. It won't happen again, and I'm sure you all agree nothing actually happened. Jenn, as always, you've laid it on thick for our girl. Thank you. And to all Jenn's friends, I appreciate you being in my ex's life, because fuck knows I can't be."

Fake laughter fills a small gap in Dad's speech. Either way, he successfully steers everyone away from Colt's epic gesture and turns their attention back to my birthday.

"On that note, Raney, you are incredible. Happy birthday, baby! Jenn and I are super proud of you and wish you nothing

but success. Now, apparently someone here was hoping for a neat ride instead of the shit box Joker's been letting her use."

Dad digs in his pockets and throws up a set of keys.

"But I couldn't bring your new car because your mother would have a screeching fit."

I walk over to mom first, because seriously, she's got these big tears rolling down her face. "Hey, Jenn, thank you so much. It's amazing!"

"Yeah, well you know your dad. I wanted to get you a silver BMW. Anyway, happy birthday, Raney."

Making my way over to her, I lean in and give her a giant hug before returning to Dad.

"You promised me..."

"Well, you know how your mother is. Except we had to compromise, there's no way my girl is driving some imported piece of shit. There's a white mustang back home with your name on it. And a Fallen logo for tax purposes, which means anyone in the club can drive it."

"Errr... doubtful. You just gave me the keys, Dad, she's mine now." I laugh a little crazy before giving him a huge squeeze. "I'm going to miss you so much."

"Enjoy your time here, kid. You've got a lot coming up when you get back." He gets all serious and turns me away from the crowd, walking us away from the celebration. "If you feel your designation stirring, and you want to be home when it happens, you let me know. In the meantime, make sure you do what you *want*. Or I'll come down with Joker and crack some fucking heads."

Dad says the same thing every year. I stay cuddled in his arms, my eyes moving over to Reid, Talon, Hayes, and Colt, who are waiting. Dad knows too, and he gives me a final squeeze before announcing it's time to cut the cake.

And much like every year; I cried like a baby when he left. I stayed glued to the pavement until I couldn't hear their bikes anymore.

I knew I wasn't alone. His scent might be missing but Hayes's presence is more than enough. Once I stop being such a sook, we make the rounds saying goodbye to everyone else.

Jenn left with her girlfriends, to have a late dinner. Supposedly, to cry about having a twenty-year-old daughter. But we all knew what was really going on—she was giving us privacy.

Hayes stays with me as I lock the house down.

Locking the door to my suite, I take a running leap at Talon. Stretching his arms up over his head, trying to pin him down, "You look good naked in my bed, alpha," I whisper before leaning in for one of his kisses. Now we're alone it gets way, way deeper.

"I never thought the day would end." He smiles against my lips. His hands snaking up my legs, moving under the hem of my dress. He groans deep when he finds me bare. But he doesn't stop. His hands race over my body, cupping my breasts. "Shit, Raney, you can't walk around without panties on."

"Yeah, I can." I smirk before my hands start discovering all his physical changes. His body is harder, his skin warmer.

I feel the moment Hayes re-joins us. And I twist around to watch him without being worried about how hungry I must look. The towel hanging around his hips accentuates the drops of water running down his tanned chest. Instead of coming closer, he leans against the wall watching me dry hump his best friend. And it does all sorts of things to me. I roll my hips over Talon's thickening length but move so Hayes can see the

tip of Tal's cock poking out from under me. Talon uses his hands on my hips to set our pace.

"Yeah, like that," I whisper. "It's my birthday, Talon, pretty sure I can do whatever I want. I want you."

"You've got me." He purrs, leaning up to kiss and lick his way up my body, nibbling over my collarbone to bite under my jaw. "God, I want inside you so fucking much," he growls softly before he leaves a burning trail over my skin with his mouth, paying extra attention to my nipples.

"Where's Colt?" I moan, holding him closer. He bites down around my nipple, dragging the flesh through his teeth.

"He had to go home. Mom called him back," Reid answers as he walks out of the bathroom completely naked. And ready to join us.

Yeah, we're doing shit we shouldn't be doing. Including signing and sending off the forms needed to set up our pack. Go us.

"Raney, have you got new perfume? It smells incredible, it's hard to figure out what it is," Hayes says as he lets his towel drop, his dick already hard too.

"We are not talking my body wash when we're about to fuck." I moan, Talon sucks on the fleshy part of my boob, stealing my ability to talk. It feels incredible, and like always, we're so responsive to each other.

Hayes crawls over the bed. I twist to watch, but Talon bites down hard, giving me a bruising hickey, his midnight blue eyes ablaze with desire. Hayes doesn't say a word, pushing me down onto Talon, my butt and pussy on full display. He immediately rubs the head of his cock over my crack.

"One day, I want to see if my cock will fit inside you with Talon at the same time," Hayes says, biting the side of my neck.

"And Reid?" I whimper as Hayes teases by pushing the tip in.

“Will be coming down your throat,” he speaks for himself.

I twist my head up, and he’s already holding his cock out.

“Put that in my mouth, right this second,” I pout.

His fingers race through my hair to hold me still, while he wipes his dick over my lips and face. “I missed you, Raney. It’s not enough to watch you come on your little dildo every night.”

“Best gift you’ve ever sent me. Along with the lollipops.”

Reid’s fingers dig in my hair, his impatience making him pull my hair too hard, “Won’t need any fucking toys now you’re with us, Sweets. Open up, I’ve been dreaming of fucking your mouth.”

“And I’ve been dreaming of your tight pussy,” Talon growls against my nipple.

Hayes dips down below and plows his fingers inside my body. “And I say we stop talking and start doing. We’re going to pack, now your dad has given us his approval. He’d have to be fucking stupid if he didn’t think we’d be claiming you before we send you home.

“Have you told your parents yet, Reid?” I whimper, as Hayes starts pumping his fingers in and out of my pussy.

No one answers.

Sex is definitely better than trying to figure out that bullshit. Although it’s pretty simple, Reid and Colt’s parents do not like me, and they definitely don’t like me being involved with their boys. Supposedly, I don’t fit their bill of who a shady politician, and his stuck-up bitch of a wife, think I should be.

I think it’s got more to do with the fact my grandfather didn’t rub shoulders with theirs. Dad and I definitely don’t have the same old money filling our numerous bank accounts.



CHAPTER

Three

RANEY

“Raney...” Colt murmurs softly in my ear, coaxing me out of a deep sleep. His fingers brush the hair on my face, and I reach up for more. “Come watch the sunrise. I have to go to practice, but you’ve got to see it outside.”

“Wrap her up, Colt. It’s fucking cold. I’ll meet you in the truck in ten.”

In the dark I can see the way he answers his brother, with a shake of his head and a roll of his eyes. Climbing out of bed, there’s already a pair of Colt’s grey high school sweats for me to pull on, a pair of Uggs for me to slide my feet into, and then Colt is dragging one of his jersey’s over my head. I know it’s his. I can’t smell anything but him.

Linking our fingers, he tiptoes through the house. There’s no need. Mom texted last night and said she was staying at her girlfriend’s, after too many glasses of wine. In her own way, she’s giving us space too. I know that. I even thanked her for it.

“Come on, sleepy. I’m not wasting a second of you being back.” He squeezes my hand, leading the way through the garden to the back stairs. He sits first then drags me onto his lap, wrapping me up. There’s no way I could get cold snuggling in his arms.

“It’s pretty here,” I say, resting my head against his chest, looking at the view he’s got us facing. The sun is starting to

rise but it must still be a little while off because the birds haven't started to chirp.

“Not as pretty as you are.”

I cuddle him before digging under his hoodie, making him hiss when I press my cold hands against his skin. I last about three seconds before I start exploring his body some more. He groans but stops me.

“Raney, I have to go to practice. I cannot train with a hard on.”

I chuckle but stop feeling him up while we wait for the sun to rise. But I also know Colt's got something to say—it feels like he's nervous.

“Just tell me,” I say. A flutter of nerves descending over the both of us.

“Let me see you alone tonight? I mean, we'll catch up with them later anyway.”

“Why? Are you going to break up with me?”

“Seriously? You know I'm never breaking up with you. Not in this lifetime or the next. No, it's just... you know what your dad said about me being young, you being not as young, and some people are watching us closely.”

“What are you saying, Colt?”

“I want us to fuck.”

“Really?” I swing a look at him, climbing up so I can straddle his legs and cup his face.

He shakes his head enthusiastically. “Yeah.”

“But you... I mean.” I get tongue tied, because while Colt and I have been tentatively exploring our physical side, we haven't had sex. He's been busted watching while I had sex with the guys. He's started inserting himself more into whatever we do, despite the arguments. But it's definitely never included him in me. “Are you sure?”

“Am I sure?” He barks out laughing. “It’s all I think about.”

I’m at a complete loss for words.

He holds my face so I can’t hide from him. “I want you to take my virginity.”

“There’s no rush. We’ve got forever.”

“Yeah, I get that. But I need my dick in your pussy, Raney. I need it. I can’t fucking think about anything else. Like, literally, all I can think about is doing it. Or how it’s going to feel. Or what your face is going to look like when I do it. My dick fucking hurts even talking about it.”

I drop my hands inside his pants. His eyes are dilated, like glossy ink, and when I wrap my hand around his straining cock, he groans, and a small smile spreads over his face, making his white teeth sparkle.

“See how much I want you?”

Leaning up I kiss him on the edge of his lips, but he pulls back as he keeps pumping his hips, making my hand run up and down his length.

“Fucking hell, you know how to get me going. I’m about to come.”

“At least then you’ll be able to train,” I joke, leaning in to get a better grip.

“I so did not bring you out here to do this.”

“Doesn’t it feel good?”

“Whenever you touch me it feels like I’m going to blow. I already told you how close it was for me when I kissed you in front of your dad, nearly came on the spot,” his hips buck up, “and then talking about putting my dick inside you.”

Colt groans softly, and I can feel how close he is.

“Raney,” he praises, opening his legs wider so I can stroke him faster. “I woke up and you were all I could smell. I had to

go rub one off in the shower. I got back from running with a raging hard on, and now I bring you out here to ask you on a date and you end up with your hands in my pants, and I can't help thinking this is the best fucking morning ever."

I use one hand to pull his sweats open. And with the extra space I can go faster. My thumb swipes over his leaking head and all of a sudden, I want to put my mouth on him. Before he can argue, I shuffle off his lap and put his cock in my mouth. My tongue swirls around, lapping at the pooling pre-come and his unique taste coats my taste buds, making me moan in appreciation. Colt leans back and both his hands drop to the back of my head and he helps me bob up and down faster and faster. His touch is always so much gentler than Reid's.

"Yeah, like that. You're so fucking good at giving head."

I am now. I wasn't when we all started this, it was pretty funny how bad I was at it, but I've got four very willing subjects to practice on. And after the time they showed me what they liked, Hayes sent me a box of giant Chupa Chups. Trust me, I licked and sucked on them all—in front of them, of course.

Dropping my hand to cup his balls, my fingers massage over where his knot will be. There's no mistaking that Colt is going to be an alpha, I can see it in everything he does. And if there was any indication that he was ready for us to go further, that would be it. The reality is we're like pretty much every other person in the world, once you discover sex, you don't undiscover it. We were lucky we found it together. Add in our desire to pack as soon as possible... well, the four of us spend more time undressed than we do dressed. And that's also considering the distance that separates us. Seriously, we could open our own porn channel with the images and clips we've shared.

There's nothing better than being with the person you really, really love, and Colt is one of those people for me.

A low rumble spills from his chest before his hips buck up, and he pushes into the back of my throat, his hands holding me

so I can't move as he explodes. I gag, and it's super messy, and Colt holds me, his fingers digging into my hair until I swallow. Until he realises, then he lets me go.

“Shit, sorry, Raney. I... I mean, it was... I was. Fuck, I didn't hurt you, did I?”

I shake my head before I start sucking on his cock again. His freak out changes to a deep groan, as his cock keeps pulsing in my mouth.

“Raney, seriously, I have to go to practice. Coach is going to whip my ass as it is.”

I finish with a loud pop before I pull my hands and my mouth away from him, and he lifts me up to sit back on his lap. I lean in but he laughs and pulls away.

“Yeah, I know where that mouth has been.” He smirks before he kisses me, slowly, dirty, and so goddamn right. “If I put my fingers in your pussy, how wet would you be?”

And he's such a fucking smooth talker. “Save it.” I growl playfully. “What time tonight is our date?”

“Starting early. I'm coming here at four because I know Jenn has power yoga and then meditates over a glass of wine. Wednesday traditions are hard to break, even when your daughter comes home,” he teases, because my mom is a little rigid in her schedule. “Come watch me train? We're on the ice till ten.”

I lean in to kiss him. “Of course I'll come.”

“I fucking know that. By my guess you'll be coming about five minutes after I get here this afternoon.”

I laugh at him being a dick. “Does Sharlene know I'm here?”

“I don't care. I don't listen to her bullshit anymore. You are our girl and that's all that matters.” He leans in close. “I'm not letting you go ever, Raney.”

“So, tonight, we're not going out? Just staying in?”

“You got that right. Reid and I have to be home for dinner. Mom’s demanding it, and apparently Dad has an important family he wants us to meet. After that, I’m not leaving your bed for days.”

“Ahh, so she does know I’m back. Let me guess, they have daughters just perfect for both the Anders boys.”

“Raney, you got to listen, it doesn’t fucking matter what they think, they won’t be the ones to break us up.”

And it’s not the first time his parents have tried to force a wedge between me and their precious sons. Since the first time I met her, she’s made it very clear what she thinks of me, continually ridiculing me openly but also behind the boys’ backs. Except, I’ve always told the guys what she does and says. Maybe she didn’t think I would, but I do.

“You want me to pick you up some food for after practice?”

He quips up his eyebrow, answer enough. Colt can eat. “Wear my jersey.”

“You know I never take it off when I’m here.”

Colt stands up, hiking me up with him so I’m wrapped around him. “All right, the sun is still not up and I’m so late. But best blowie ever from my forever girl, sounds like the perfect day to me.”

He carries me inside and drops me back into bed before racing out. I hear Reid’s truck drive off right about the same time that Hayes hisses when I put my cold hands on his naked butt.



CHAPTER

Four

There are so many butterflies taking flight in my stomach that I feel sick from the waves they make. Which is weird because Colt and I have seen each other naked, but today is so different. I'm so nervous, it takes him knocking on my door a few times until I realise he's here.

The moment I see him though, all my nervous energy evaporates. And it most certainly helps that Colt pounces on me as soon as I open the door. His hands dig into my hair and he groans loudly as his tongue assaults mine. Each kiss gets longer and harder. When we come up for air, we're both panting and grinning against each other's lips.

"This is fucking happening." He laughs. His pupils are fully blown in his sky-blue eyes, making the colour deeper, and the rumbles spilling from his chest make a trillion goosebumps dance over my skin. Without letting me go, he walks us to the bed.

"All day, Raney, I've been thinking about putting my dick in you. I know how quick the first time is going to be, so I'm just going to keep fucking you until I'm coming again."

I go to say something, but a flash of irritation crosses his eyes. "You'll take everything I give you. Including my virginity."

His self-assurance has always had a gentle cockiness about him but that's just being Colt. He's also impatient, obnoxiously generous, and so confident of our fairy-tale ending.

Ripping my pants down my legs, he doesn't even notice the baby pink lingerie I put on for him. Our tops disappear next. He checks that I'm close enough to the mattress before shoving me backwards, making me fall without having the chance to catch myself.

There's something in his eyes that I've never seen, a mix of hunger and raging impatience, and it's almost predatory. His usually steady hands shake, and he hisses in frustration as he keeps fumbling the waistband of his sweats. But once he frees himself, he lunges, covering me in every part of him. And while his touches aren't rough, they aren't exactly soft either. The more we touch, the quicker he settles.

Holding me against him, Colt rolls over me, nudging my legs wide open with his knee. "I have to fuck you," he says suddenly, sitting up and dragging my legs over the tops of his thighs, lining us up so his dick sits at my entrance. He locks his eyes on mine, and as he tries to push inside, his eyes flare wide as he looks down. And that half-crazed look from before is back.

He growls at the situation, his teeth grit together in frustration. I can see his needs and his logic clashing, and I also can't miss the moment it all comes together and Colt sees what the issue is. He shuffles away from me before he reaches down and licks me out really fucking dirty, lubing me up. His desperation feels incredible.

Dropping my ass back to the bed is the only warning I get before he surges forward, capturing my mouth for an equally punishing kiss. But everything is happening now like it should. He spreads my legs wide again, drops his forehead to mine, and then he slams himself inside in one wickedly punishing thrust.

The noise he makes will be in my head for a long time to come. He fills me so full, his hips moving with a confidence only he could pull off. He's thicker than my other three lovers, but the stretch and burn is sweetly perfect. Colt makes me feel like parts of me are on fire.

His hips slow. “I’m never going to forget our first time,” he says sincerely. But Colt has always been so honest about how he feels. “Nothing better than being inside your body, telling you how much I love you, Raney.” Leaning down, he kisses me with all the truth in the words he just spoke as our bodies start to move at a more natural speed.

Wrapping my arms and legs around his waist, he groans. “I’m in you even deeper.”

“Yeah, you are. Feel good?” I ask, kissing the side of his throat. His body locks up as he moans into the side of my neck. “You’re going to make me come, baby.”

Colt pulls back so he can see me and so I can watch him. The sparkle of amazement makes the blue of his eyes deepen as he comes. And then like he said he would, Colt continues thrusting through his first orgasm and onto his next. He’s watched enough porn to know how to do it too. Honestly, he doesn’t miss a beat. Rising up to kneeling, he lifts my ass at the same time, holding all my weight in his hands as he starts to thrust harder, faster. This time, instead of being quiet, he makes a lot of noise.

“Fuck, Raney. You’re so tight around me. Hell, you feel good.” His stomach muscles contract, his face awash with shimmering awe and burning pleasure.

“Colt...” I groan as he uses me like a pro.

“I didn’t think this would bring us closer, but I can feel you. You’re deep inside me, and I never want this to end.”

He lets my legs fall back down to the mattress before he lies over me again, pushing my knees to my chest, to move faster again.

“Play with my clit, too.”

I barely finish speaking, and he is hitting all the right spots. His finger on my clit has been there a thousand times but never when he’s been inside me. Colt is going to be one serious lover; his touch is like the best kind of magic: mind-numbing.

I pull him down, but he nuzzles against my throat instead of kissing me. And there's a heaviness to what is happening between us. I swear to god, I can feel his presence drenching me. "I'm going to come again, so fucking soon. This is incredible, baby, so good..."

I lose the end of his words when he turns his head; it's like everything is heightened so all our movements are monumental. His hips pick up speed, and my body responds, squeezing around him. My orgasm is right where his is, and when he bites my neck, I nearly detonate.

Colt moves like an animal. He uses his arms to cage me still against him as we get swept away in a frantic need. Every grunt he makes, his teeth bite harder. And it literally takes no time at all until the undeniable climax sweeps us both up to a shattering release.

In the frenzy, I feel Colt's teeth biting down, cutting through my skin right on that special spot reserved for mates.

The both of us scream as we get blinded by an explosion of pleasure as we come together. And then it's like nothing I've experienced. I feel all Colt's emotions and sensations along with mine. But a second later, I get caught up in an insatiable need for more of him. Although, the way Colt responds it's clear he, too, is affected by the frenzy.

It feels like we fall into each other, like literally. I feel him inside of me, almost like he is a part of me. And without a doubt, I feel the moment something in Colt snaps. He changes and becomes who I always knew he would be, way sooner than he should, which means his alpha is going to be way stronger than anyone I know too. His alpha designation adds another intensity to the moment.

But something in me responds. Colt's designation frees mine, and it is a beautiful moment.

Before I can tell him, something in my house interrupts us.

But the something isn't anything we can ignore no matter how precious and incredible the occasion is. The door to my

bedroom smashes open.

And the afternoon light falls on Colt's mother, highlighting just how fucking crazy she is. Everything about her screams danger.

"MOM!" Colt roars, scooping up a blanket to cover me as he pulls out. A deep sense of loss hits on so many levels. Colt's eyes fly back to mine, and it's easy to see he's as confused as I am, but at the same time he knows he has to do something to help, to save me from her.

"Get the fuck out of that whore's bed, Colt!" Sharlene yells. The piercing of her voice literally hurts my ears, but it's nothing compared to the desolation of Colt being dragged from me.

Colt stands up to face her, "What the fuck is wrong with you. Get out! Get out of Raney's house!"

"Fucking whore! Trying to trap my son with your body. You're not fucking good enough for him, you gutter tramp. You never will be!"

Sharlene races out of my room.

"Christ, Raney, call one of the guys. Stay here, baby, she's fucking lost it. I'm so sorry." He leans down to kiss me quick before he pulls his sweats on and chases after her.

It's absolute chaos inside my head and in my goddamn house.

Sharlene has always had it out for me. Since the first time she saw me, she made no bones about it either. She's always trying to get her boys to leave me or stay away but this is next level bullshit. I'm so glad my mom isn't here to see this. So thankful Dad isn't too, he'd unapologetically rip her to pieces.

Dressing as quickly as Colt did, I swipe my phone trying to reach Talon as I race after the two of them, hoping to catch Colt before he hurts his mom. My call rings out.

Rounding into the kitchen ready to help Colt, the most unexpected sight stops me. Sharlene. Not Colt.

She stands in my kitchen, right in front of me, an awful look on her face. The level of hatred I see makes me feel sick. And scared.

“Where’s Colt?” I ask, trying to figure out what she’s done to her own son, what she’s going to do to me.

I take a step backwards, and her eyes narrow on the movement and her lips lift as she goes to say something, but we get interrupted by desperate banging on the outdoor sliding glass door.

My eyes jump to the noise. I’m relieved but at the same time realisation hits. He’s locked out, while I’m locked inside.

Now I’m terrified. I take a step away.

She laughs abruptly before taking a step towards me, “No one can stop me from killing you now. You are nothing but garbage, Raney. You are a disgusting piece of trash, and you’re done with my family.”

The adrenaline flooding my system makes my reactions sluggish and my thoughts out of alignment. Looking down to see if I have anything to protect myself with, it takes a moment to register my phone, but the second I do, I’m calling Reid. Thankfully, he answers. “Reid, I need you to get to my house, right this minute!”

“Stay away!” Sharlene shrieks over the top of me.

Ignoring her, I try to talk again, but my panic makes my words rush out unintelligibly. “Reid, your mom’s here.”

Before I can repeat myself again, she launches towards me and I fucking haul ass.

Colt smashes his fists against the glass, yelling frantically, but I have no option but to bolt in the opposite direction. She’s clearly intent on chasing me down. And she’s fucking fast. Whenever I can, I check over my shoulder, but she’s so much closer than I expected. And it’s pretty obvious she’s done talking.

My arms are pumping, and in the midst of trying to run for my life, I forget I have Reid on the phone. I can hear him screaming from my handset and, behind me, I hear the glass shattering before Colt's voice gets louder too.

I feel relieved that they're coming. It's short lived when I get shoved in the back. She's so freaking strong.

Her shove sends me sprawling, and I bounce off the dining room wall, managing to catch myself from falling, and race away. Except she's on my tail again. This time she grabs a handful of hair to stop my escape.

She's got me trapped, but it's pretty clear I need to get as far away from her as possible. Swinging around blindly, I manage to hit her hard enough to free myself. We end up in my room, and one of Colt's hockey sticks trips me up. She shuts the door behind her, locks it too.

I can't get up; she nabs the stick I tripped on and towers over me. All I can do is roll over to try to protect myself.

I can feel Colt's feet pounding over the floor as he thunders towards my room, yelling that he's coming to help. Reid's on the phone, but I can't understand a word he's saying. I'm so relieved they're both coming, but at the same time it's pretty clear that they're both going to be too late. Way too late.

I watch in terror, frozen on the spot as Sharlene swings the hockey stick. Like a ninja does a sword, it sails through the air in an arc.

The first hit against my ribs is so fucking painful I swallow the scream. The second she spins the stick to drop the heel against my knee, I bellow out as pain explodes. Unable to move a muscle, I watch helplessly as she swings the stick again. It happens in slow motion but even then, I only get to raise my hands. It's pointless, the blade slices right through my defences.

But Sharlene's not done, she pins me down with a knee on my chest to scream and slap my face. "You are not fucking good enough for them, you piece of fucking trash."

She stands up, and I think she's done, that I might be okay. Except she's not done, and I won't be okay. Laughing as she raises the stick, she waits until her arm is pulled right back, "You're nothing but a dirty used cunt."

Blistering pain steals everything from me. It's like an explosion, a collision of screaming pain, so extreme I can't do anything. Not a thing. I'm lost in a state of terror and a whole world of pain as a black tunnel of light appears. The darkness sucks Sharlene away. The hole expands until it's the only thing I see.

It consumes me, which is good, because I'm done hurting.



CHAPTER

Five

KING

A part of me wants to rip these kids to pieces and scatter their remains to the corners of the globe. But that's the fucking issue, isn't it? This shouldn't be happening, and the crap people do to each other is also something they should not have to be dealing with at their age, but it is.

Clear as fucking day, I remember the moment they looked me in the eye and swore they'd protect her with everything in them. And they fucking didn't. I'm not blaming them entirely, but the fact remains, my baby girl is broken and barely breathing.

Nothing has ever stripped me powerless nor tested my strength as a father or a man the way hearing Talon tell me Raney was hurt did. Although admittedly when the doctor explained the severity of my baby girl's injuries I was tested again. I don't know how I didn't slam the words the doctor kept using right back in his educated mouth.

I know the man was just doing his fucking job. Still, it was pretty fucking hard not to punch each and every word back into his mouth when he explained how fucking broken my daughter was. Without a doubt though, I still want to hang him on my trophy wall at the clubhouse for what he's managed to do so far; he is my fucking hero.

Everything in my head has been a twisted, dark mess since Talon's call. If my daughter wasn't lying there with fucking machines keeping her alive, I'd be hunting down the cunt who did this before the authorities find her.

But all that is for later. Right now, everything is about Raney.

I'm still a bit shocked I haven't kicked the boys out of her hospital room yet. They and Raney have a connection that doesn't make sense to some, but it makes a lot of sense to them. The thing is, they have more issues in front of them than what we're currently facing. I wish I was exaggerating, but it's fucking true.

Although, I was fucking grateful none of them were around when the doctor pulled me aside to let me know that in the middle of fucking everything, that Raney's designation came in. And yeah, I still have zero regret telling the doctor to put her on blockers straight a-fucking-way.

"We need to talk." I stand up, my hands rubbing down my face. Supposedly, it's a new habit I've picked up. I didn't notice until Jenn, in her new age BS, pulled me up for it. Apparently, she thinks I'm trying to scrub away seeing my daughter hooked up to machines battling to pump blood through her broken body. She's fucking spot on. I am. But I'm also fucking struggling with the rage continually building inside me. I'm overtired and sick of drinking this bullshit pod coffee these rich motherfuckers whine over.

I point the boys towards the small soundproof room adjoining Raney's. The glass window divider is meant as a place everyone can keep watch but speak privately. It also acts as a place to avoid radiation exposure when they wheel in the portable x-ray machine to check all her breaks and fractures. Talk about soul destroying.

Jenn and I have stood inside the tiny room way too many times to hear the doctor's update. And since she's survived the first forty-eight hours, the most critical, I want to say my girl has done the hardest, but that's just a fucking lie. She's got months and months of therapy ahead of her. But before we can even talk about that shit, we need her to wake up.

I get it, the doctors are being cautious. Optimistic, but careful. I've heard endless experts talk about the difficulty of

caring for patients with head injuries. Progress can go backwards in the space of a few hours. And I've seen it with my own two eyes. They want me to keep her here until she can walk out herself, but that ain't happening. The second she's stabilised; I'm calling in every favour I'm owed. This place is not her home, these people are not her people, not if they couldn't protect her.

The boys, and that's what they fucking are, follow me inside, and I shut the door, locking us in. Because I'm one of those believers that even though Raney's currently in a drug induced coma, she's still listening and absorbing everything we say. And I've got a lot to say to these boys.

Reid especially. He's the one that tipped my hand just now. The fucking look on his face when he ambled back in covered in another woman's scent and acting like his shit don't stink sets every internal alarm off.

Facing away from them, I keep watch over her. The dark room, and the shitty artificial lighting means her face looks like a hollow mask. Gut fucking wrenching.

"Any sign of your mother?" I aim my question at Reid, who point blank ignores me until he chooses to. The little shit looks down his nose at me too, and it takes a lot not to make him submit, but a check on Raney is the reminder I need to pull my mood back in. I can't afford to tip my hand with this smug asshole, considering what Colt did.

"Not yet," Talon answers quickly. "Colt's already told the police ..."

Reid scoffs, and everyone ignores him. Which surprises me.

"I know, mate. I know." I swing around and lean against the window. Talon, Hayes, and Colt look as shattered as I feel. I know they are distraught. That's not what this is about.

Hayes goes to say something, and I stop him, holding my hand up. Taking the floor.

“This isn’t going to be easy for me to say. And I won’t have you interrupting me ’til the end.”

Reid doesn’t move a muscle, but Talon and Hayes nod. Colt’s in his own world, and knowingly or not, he shuffles to stand next to me, his forehead leaning against the glass. It’s not nice to see the real difficulty he’s having in accepting what’s happened. I rub his shoulder, and he turns to fall against me. Which only reconfirms what I’m about to do is the right thing.

Colt’s pain is plain as day. So is his recent transition. Though, I’m not at all worried about the kid dropping into an alpha meltdown. Never really have been with him, it’s weird.

Over the past few days, I’ve seen him sleep less than I have. He’s not eating much, hardly saying a word. Initially, he did a whole lot of talking—to the police and to me—and a fuck tonne of screaming at Reid. Since then, he hasn’t said a word to anyone but Raney.

“I know how much Raney loves you lot. Blows my mind she does, but it’s not my business. What is my business is my daughter’s welfare. It should be yours, but you have to fucking realise...”

“We’re not ready,” Colt says, breaking away from me and returning to watch over her. It’s like he’s already broken away from them in the way he’s completely ambivalent towards them.

Hayes closes his eyes and drops his head, perhaps he knows what I’m doing. Talon’s catching on too; his eyes flash with a whole lot of anger directed at me. “You can’t keep us away from her.”

“I’m going to *ask* you to stay away instead. But let’s be fucking real, if I wanted, I could keep you away from her. One word and every chapter in the country would know who you lot were. They’d make sure you stayed away.”

“Doubtful. Anyway, go on, say your piece,” Reid says, trying to hurry me along. And for the time being, I let his

disrespect roll off me.

I look him square in the eye, keeping a lid on my emotions and focusing on the facts. “You are not ready for someone like her.” And yeah, I make a point of looking at the obvious hickey on his throat.

He smirks when I lift my eyes off the mark, but he waits until he’s ready before he speaks. “You’re a cunt. You’ve never thought we’re good enough for her. Honestly, it’s a bit of a joke if you think about it.”

I triple check the door is closed before I fucking scream at him. “Look at her, Reid! Look what *your* mother did to my daughter!”

Hayes shuffles into the path between Reid and me, while Talon goes closer to Colt who’s still looking at the reason we’re here. Completely ignoring his brother.

“You think all these years I’ve been giving you shit is because I was a cunt? Grow the fuck up! I’ve been pushing you to be the man you need to be. And maybe it would have been plain fucking sailing with your pack if this hadn’t happened. But it did! And yeah, I’ve always fucking pushed you hard. Because life is fucking hard, Reid. You think me giving you shit about getting jobs or an education has been for you? Nah, bud, everything is for her!” I swing an arm in her direction.

Taking a long, loud exhale I close my eyes again and calm down. Me losing my shit at these kids is completely fucking warranted but without purpose. Once I have myself under control, I start again. “You got nothing. I’m not saying that’s the way it will always be, but right this second, the only money you got behind you isn’t yours. You haven’t worked a day in your fucking life. And let’s be fucking real, you really think your family’s going to give you their money now? Colt’s working with the police at every chance he can. He’s going against your family. And for some reason you keep pretending this is not your issue.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Talon tries desperately, not wanting what they have to end. I get it, I do, but my patience is fucking done.

“Talon, it does. You still don’t get it, Reid,” Colt says, interrupting all of us, his eyes closed as he talks. “King’s right. The first thing they’re going to do is say it was Raney’s fault.”

“Maybe it was,” Reid taunts.

But it’s like Colt doesn’t hear a word his brother says. “I know they’re out there doing that already. Telling me to do the same or my trust is gone.” He shakes his head. “By the time it goes to trial they would have twisted everything like they always do. And then what? I haven’t finished school; you’ve got years ahead of you too! We’ve got nothing for Raney. Nothing to give her.”

“Perhaps she shouldn’t get anything. Have you thought of that? And let’s not forget our pack was looking for an omega. Raney was fun for a bit, but even if we continue the fun now, it’s not like she’ll be anything but a bit on the side. We all knew her being a beta would be an issue, let’s not lie about that.”

“Her designation was never an issue, Reid. You said it yourself,” Hayes hisses.

Reid’s arrogance turns my stomach, and the stuff he keeps saying about Raney, I want to murder the prick. He looks at me fucking smiling. “And now it’s not just her designation that doesn’t sit well. She’s not exactly going to be model material by the looks.”

My eyes jump to Colt. I know he’s heard what his brother’s said. But I’m not sure the words have registered yet. And Reid uses that to his advantage, the gutless prick.

“Dad was right, we should have finished this bullshit years ago. King, your daughter is a ruined tramp and you’re a fucking asswipe.” Reid smiles at me before he moves like his ass is on fire.

He slows once he's out of the room, walking towards her with his fucking head held high like he's not the cunt he is. He stops at the foot of her bed, checking over to make sure we're all watching.

Me in particular. I want to gut him on the spot, but the sooner he gets out of my sight, the sooner I can get my daughter away from him and his fucking parents. And keep her secret safe.

Reid's mask falls away when he looks at Raney. "Since King thinks you can hear me, Raney Grady, we don't want you. You have no future with our pack, and honestly, you never did. None whatsoever. You were a fun fling that went on way too long. The forms we filled out were because, well, how do I put it? It made it easy, Raney. As the head of my pack, I speak for Talon, Hayes, and Colt too," he waves his hand around dismissively, "we want nothing to do with you. There is no you in our pack, or our future."

He turns to face me, "I think that covers all the bases? Or do I actually have to say we reject her? Either way, you can explain it to her if she wakes up. And let her know if she tries to make contact, she will be hearing from our lawyers."

Colt snaps out of his stupor and hears what his brother says. "No!" he bellows, punching a hole through the wall at the same time. I catch the back of his shirt and make him stay in here with me, not trusting his brother now more than ever.

Reid laughs before he speaks, not even bothering turning around. "I finished whatever this shit is, boys. All of you get changed then back to my place by dinner, Sharlene has graciously arranged for us to start meeting more suitable pack mates. Do not keep her, or me, waiting," Reid barks back, before walking out of the hospital room and answering the phone that keeps ringing in his hand.

Every part of me is vibrating in fury. The other two take a visible step back, but Colt doesn't move. As soon as Reid's presence disappears, I feel better. But not by much.

“Say your goodbyes,” I bark out, wiping the need for violence off my face. Focussing on my girl lying there, hoping she missed what the little turd just said and did.

“For how long?” Talon says quietly. Like Colt, he’s completely and utterly broken, and entirely focused on Raney. Hayes is more frenetic in his panic, his trembling but not in fury, the tears rolling freely down his face are those of sadness.

“I’m not the judge of that. You are. But Reid just made his thoughts on the matter pretty clear, in his actions before he got here and his fucking words.”

“If you love someone, set them free...” Colt says, his head whacking against the glass of the window. He stops mid-sentence; his eyes flick open and straight back on her, and it’s like something in him changes. He rolls his shoulders, and if I didn’t know these kids the way I do, I’d probably think he was going to challenge me.

He kind of does. When he turns to face me, it’s clear by the look on his face that he’s straddling that line between being a boy and becoming a man. He holds my stare. “I claimed her.”

“Yeah. I saw that. And then by the looks of it, Reid made his thoughts obvious on the matter.” I grit my jaw, nearly snapping my fucking molars. The little shit did claim her, and Reid being the eldest in the pack just made his feelings known by rejecting her.

Colt spits on the floor in disgust. For the first time since this started, I think he might have a chance if he decided to challenge me. I don’t know what pushes me to ask, well that’s complete bullshit, I know. It’s her.

“Did you ask her, Colt?” I growl. I have to know. I want to believe he did, but Reid just did a fucking swifty on my daughter, so I’m not exactly full of faith.

His eyes drop, and his emotions scent sourly before he raises his eyes to mine and says in both acceptance and defeat, “Fuck you for being so disrespectful to her.” He opens the

door quietly and walks straight to her, making me feel like a right cunt.

Colt drops the guard rails and climbs up next to Raney. I want to rip him off her. I want to flay him alive. Instead, I keep my feet glued to the fucking spot and watch. His hand shakes as he strokes over the thick bandages wrapped around her face. I can hear him talking, but he's purposely keeping himself quiet so what he says stays between him and her.

It might be minutes later that Hayes guides Talon out of the room. I shut the door on them and lock myself away so I can't hear what they say to my girl. I don't fucking want to know what sort of bullshit excuses they do—or don't—make.

Reid acted on behalf of their pseudo pack. While also hiding the truth about where Sharlene was until she was safely hidden away in her house.

I keep fucking watch though. And while they say goodbye, I start making plans.



Part Two

FOUR YEARS LATER



CHAPTER

Six

“Raney,” Tris snorts, so loud it echoes right down to where Omega Beatrice is leading the class. All the other students turn around and look back at us.

And as usual, the sea of faces staring at our work bench ranges from mild horror to all out terror. Although, let’s be serious, the opinions of these pampered omegas has no bearing on us. None at all.

“Cake making was never going to be my forte,” I snicker as I stand back and admire my handiwork, which for the record is pretty fucking spectacular. “And for the sake of the stupids in the front, the arsenic is a prop.”

Of course, one of our classmates whispers back. Her voice even cracking a little with her nerves, “I’m pretty sure it’s illegal to poison alphas!”

“Actually, Bella, it’s illegal to poison anyone. Now pay attention to Beatrice, she’s getting to the part about how to manage excess cream. And let’s face it, you need all the help you can get.” Simona smiles sweetly before pushing me out of the way and setting up her portable lighting stand to get a couple of images before we get shut down.

“Sim...” Tris groans softly.

Normally if her heat wasn’t coming up, she’d be bitching right along with us. But Tris gets overly emotional in the run up to her heats.

Simona rolls her eyes before leaning over and giving Bella a side hug of apology, which Bella accepts in an instant. Which is pretty much the norm when you diss an omega, most of them accept an apology even if it's half assed and not sincere. Just another one of those genetic fuck ups that go hand in hand with the rest of the omega lifestyle. Honestly, the way some of the omegas at Unity roll over and show their belly is truly horrific.

“Thank you, Simona,” Tris says, visibly relaxing before she leans down to look at my practical project, Baking For An Alpha. “You’re wrong about not nailing this cake shit, Raney. What you’ve achieved is a master stroke of beautiful malicious genius.”

“Yeah, well it’s amazing how being rejected helps you find your creative side,” Heidi smirks before I can reply, as she drags her finger down the back of the cake before sucking all the whipped cream clean off it.

“And your tribe,” I say, slapping her hand away when she goes back in for seconds. “Mess up your own cake, Heidi Ho.”

Simona tsks softly, “If the both of you get your fanny out of the shot, I’ll have this wrapped up before Beatrice finishes edging.” In the next second, her mood evaporates, and she becomes a calmer version of herself behind her camera.

We all laugh quietly to not distract her, except for Tris who guffaws because honestly that girl does not have one quiet bone in her body. She was born with one volume: fucking loud. It’s lucky we adore her, or she’d be muzzled and tied up under our workstation like the pig we used for last semester’s practical on Preparing Feasts Fit For Your Alpha.

These girls and I have survived the gauntlet of all the brainless trials and tribulations of omega schooling at the highly commended, Unity Collegiate. Although, our attendance here is not by choice but by government requirement. Because supposedly the second you present as an omega you need a whole new skillset on how to survive and thrive in the world where alphas rule. The mandatory

curriculum isn't expensive, attending Unity is. In King's mind, me being here and socialising with these girls was as important as passing the endless omega courses on offer. Life without that glossy endorsement on your identification is pretty much non-existent for an omega.

I'm not sure if the whole omega schooling was made better or worse because I had to spend the first few years of my new designation in rehabilitation. I was way older than most of the students here. But the flip side of my late start meant that from the second I limped in the front doors, I was roomed with Tristan, Simona, and Heidi which was amazing for me, not so good for the Omega Mothers. Somehow, the four of us were all older, wiser and a lot more cynical than the rest of the cohort which made life here better than I could have ever envisaged.

Lessons ranged depending on what year level you were and included how to look at an angry alpha while speaking to them respectfully, how to iron a shirt, how to bleach safely (Tris and I were completely horrified this course was about laundry, and not personal grooming). The one course I refuse to even sign up for is alpha biology. I cannot for the life of me understand how Omega Gail's course about alpha genitalia including having one show up and display his knot to the class is so popular. There is no chance in fucking hell I would sit through that humiliation.

Besides, I know my way around an alpha.

Unsurprisingly, it's another oddity that makes me stand out at Unity more than the scars that decorate my body. Not only am I older than all the students, but on the sly, I'm the only omega in attendance that has been rejected.

I like to believe I'm not hiding from *them*. Which is a little funny, considering since the moment I woke up in hospital, Reid, Talon, Hayes, and Colt have been hiding from me. They've collectively maintained a clear and intentional absence from my life. Like a deep abyss absence, not even a card after Jenn died. Although that's not quite true, I have had

communication, just not from them. Their lawyers keep refusing all my lawyers requests for communication which is why in a few short hours, I'm leaving to go back home to sort this shit out once and for all. And to pack.

I'm not into the miscommunication trope but fuck them. If they don't have the common courtesy to meet, call, or communicate with me, I see little reason why I have to disclose that I'm now an omega. If they had kept in touch, they'd know that after Colt bit me, my designation bit my ass, but they haven't, so I don't think it's their business at fucking all. Which is why my designation has not been mentioned on any of the numerous forms we have provided requesting the dissolution of their pack claim. It seems like the boys from my childhood don't want me, but judging by the games they keep playing they don't want anyone else to have me either.

Despite all that, there was more good than bad during my time at Unity. Hands down, the girls were the absolute best thing. We always had each other's back; we were there to wipe away the tears and provide all the snacks in the world when one of us goes into heat.

Triple checking the time, it's a relief to see I have less than an hour to finish up Omega Beatrice's class and get ready for the other part of my long endeavour in reclaiming myself, Kozantine Siderno. In that regard, the saying it's easier to get over your exes by getting under a new lover, is not fucking wrong at all.

Koz is the type of alpha you definitely do not want to take home to daddy. Although, in my case it was King's business at the Fallen clubhouse that made our paths cross in the first place. And despite the thousand or so lectures I got from King about Koz being too old for me, his excuses have fallen on deaf ears. Amusingly, the fact that Koz is an international arms dealer has never been an issue for King.

Before being rejected, I was an ardent believer in the concept of twin flame lovers where souls are split into other bodies, the love between those souls is eternal and nothing

stops them from being reunited. Reality bitch slapped that notion out of my head, with a fucking hockey stick. Meeting Koz, the concept of fated lovers wasn't hard to accept. He was a necessary part of me and looking back, our paths were destined to cross. My healing to date might not have made me strong enough to go looking for answers as to why the boys were so set on pretending I didn't exist. But it has made me strong enough to accept Koz as mine.



CHAPTER

Seven

“You’re limping, micina.” The hiss that accompanies my comment is most definitely unintentional, but her pain is literally the only thing in this world capable of hurting me. Though, drawing attention to her injuries is not without risk. Raney does not like being reminded. Her jade-coloured eyes lock on mine as they harden and darken at my observation. Her bitchy attitude does not detract from her flawed beauty.

I stop for a moment, fighting against closing the distance between us and just standing back and admiring everything about her. The way she unwittingly owns me is overwhelming, and instead of moving to her, I watch transfixed, again both questioning and thanking the universe for making our paths cross. From the instant I scented her, I knew she was mine.

Before I can take another step toward her, my driver, Lew, does, and he mutters a hurried greeting before he takes her bags right from her hand, retreating back to the car to wait. But much like me, Raney is too caught up in our reunion to pay him more attention, not from disrespect though, no it’s our connection.

And like every single time I see her, I feel myself respond as I get drawn under her spell. First, it’s her mouth-watering scent that crashes over me. Her scent is exotic and full of freesia spice, mixed with the sultry tones of jasmine and the heady notes of tuberose that scream at me over and over that Raney is my woman. Her scent is so fucking jarring. It’s like sticking your finger to a live wire at the same time as being so

turned on. She always makes my alpha genetics rise up like a cobra in challenge and urgent need, but my micina's scent is also like taking a Xanax and washing it back with a finger of scotch. It's a complex thing being around her; I'm calmed by her presence, hard as fuck, and ready to re-stake my claim on my omega while wanting to wrap her in my arms and keep her safely cocooned from the world.

Usually, that's exactly what happens—we lavish each other physically and emotionally before I get to spoil her rotten. Tonight, she flicks her chin up, her irritation evident, but my need to feel her under my hand means once I start, I keep walking until she's backed against the security gate of her college. "I'm not fucking apologising; I'm pointing out the obvious. Don't get fucked off. Open for me."

Her lips twist up before they part, and I bury one hand in her hair to hold her still. My foot kicks her legs wider, and the scent that rises up is like standing under a wisteria sky on a warm summer's night. The rush of her scent is sweeter and thicker than usual.

"You should have called me sooner," I growl against her lips, before I take everything she gives me. Like always, she gives me all I need, and so much more.

Sucking on her tongue feels like heaven, and home. I pull her head to the side, so I can remind her of my intentions by bruising the faded claim left behind from years ago. I do it for me, but I do it to emphasise to her over and over again, that she is most certainly mine and there is nothing that will tear us apart.

Rubbing my scent over her face, I leave a trail of nibbling bites over her skin before I press a hundred kisses over the long-ragged scar on her cheek, repeating the process down the other scar, quicker than I want. Twisting my fist in her long hair, I tug her head back and manhandle Raney so she's arched up in front of me, her back against my chest as I walk her to my car, but it's that or we'll be arguing in moments.

“On your hands and knees, micina. I’m going to be inside your body before Lew even starts driving.”

She stumbles. I grip her waist with my hand, ready to sweep her up to safety. Of course, it would be better for us if I didn’t have to catch her because one thing Raney does not like is people helping her. I get it, I’m the same. And while I definitely love her using my body in a fit of rage, I fucking adore it more when she’s taking her time, destroying me with her sweet demands. And Raney is not a shy or demure lover.

Even before the door shuts behind me, she’s on her hands and knees waiting. I take my time as I open my suit pants and let them fall down around my ankles. As soon as they are gone though, my hands glide down her ass, squeezing her through the confines of her skirt before I search out for more. I find the split in her tight skirt and my hands wrap around her bare ass. The heat rolling off her skin has me groaning. On my way down her body, I collect the trail of slick already running down her thigh with my finger.

“All of this for me?” I ask as I suck her off my fingers. Dragging her skirt up over her hips, I drop my hand on the top of her shoulders pushing her face to the floor of the limo. “Present,” is barely out my mouth, and I’m inside her body.

Leaving my hand on the back of her head, I thrust deeply into her, driving her need with mine, keeping us both on the edge of a frenzy. The car rolls off and the momentum adds to the strange headspace where gravity and reality flows, but it’s probably just being with Raney, she has this knack of making me feel like I’m free falling.

My body feels heavy and my cock aches being back inside her. There’s nothing like Raney. Her body squeezes around mine, like she’s trying to trap me deep inside. Reaching over for the car light, I slow down the way I move in and out her body, so I can watch the way her pussy all but devours my cock.

“Koz.” Raney’s whimpers while her body quivers, those small vibrations adding even more fuel to our passion. And the

way she says my name is pure fucking fire through my veins.

Spreading her ass cheeks, I watch the dribble of my spit wet her asshole, my thumb following it inside. And like always, I nearly fucking come when she bears down on me. Her head drops forward, a low moan lets me know how much she enjoys it. And while I'd love nothing more than playing her all-fucking night, I have to first give us both some much needed relief.

Without warning, I spread my knees wide, clamp my hands around her waist and haul her backwards, right at the same time as I rise up and drive my knot straight inside her.

Raney screams, her body fighting the intrusion, but I hold her down, whispering in her ear as I keep thrusting inside until deep groans of her satisfaction fill the car. Banding my arms around her waist, I keep myself buried so far inside her tight little cunt, even as I pound into her from behind. My lips are on her throat as I whisper against my bruising claim on her skin, "Can you feel how fucking full I am? All this is yours, micina. Take it like a good girl."

Her head hangs, her fingers twist with mine, and the both of us toy with her body. With one hand squeezed around her breast, the other she uses against her clit, driving both our pleasure.

I growl, and she leans her weight against my chest, reaching her arms behind her to link them behind my neck, holding us as close as close can be. Wrapping my arm around her waist again, my fingers fill her mouth. She sucks on them before her teeth bite down at the same time her pussy starts milking me, her body taking whatever I give.

My hips drive up in a frenzy, her spicy floral scent is heated, the air in the car thickening like being in a sauna, but it's her whimpering, her desperate pleas that push me over the edge.

I lose my fucking sight. My orgasm is the same every time I come inside her, blinding. And Raney's body seizes up tight,

squeezing the circulation off to my cock and knot, the pain is exquisite as she comes on a shuddering groan. I can feel the moment her orgasm peaks, and I keep holding her close, driving my body past the stranglehold she has on me, my finger rubbing over her clit softer, less frantic, but with no less spectacular result.

Bending her over the bench seat, I keep playing with her body with my cock, knot, fingers, and teeth. She is so beautifully responsive and unashamedly needy, her pleasure flows from her. Time seems irrelevant as I take her to peak after peak.

“No more, Koz,” she mumbles as she unsuccessfully tries to wiggle off my knot. Her head is resting on my shoulder, and she’s calmer as she floats in the headless rush of endorphins flooding her system. She puddles against me, the sweetening of her scent, the deep sighs in my ears confirmation of how well I’ve fucked my woman.

But she’s not finished with her needs, “One more for me.”

“No, I can’t. Honest, I’m not being difficult, Koz. I’m one very happy and satisfied girl. And we’re probably nearly there.”

“You’re still squeezing me so tight, kitten, your body needs more of my come doesn’t it? Lew will drive for fucking hours if we need.”

“I missed you, that’s the only reason I won’t let you go.”

“I know you missed me. I missed you too.”

I kneel up with her still embedded on my knot and reach over to the hidden compartment under the seat.

“Pick one, micina. You are not finished, not by a long shot. But since you’re so insistent...”

“Koz, you’re the one that made the call on an early dinner.”

“True. Dinner before we fly out. Which one are you going to wear while I feed you?”

Raney's hand goes towards the bigger dildo, but at the last moment, she picks up the smaller one.

"I wasn't joking. You know how to look after me, Koz. This will keep me nice and full until we're flying, and then I want you to lick..."

I slap my hand over her mouth. "I know what you want. Stop fucking talking." My hips thrust a little quicker. Just her speaking about me licking her out has my balls drawing up inside me, ready to empty inside her again.

Instead, I bury my hand between the both of us and massage my knot enough for me to pull out. Pushing her forward so she's on all fours, she twists around to see what the hold-up is. Her eyes hood when she sees me sucking on her dildo until it's nice and warm before I push it inside. And yeah, she was fucking lying about her being done, it's not hard to miss the way she rocks back and forward as I put it in.

"You're having a heat spike, micina."

After a small moan, she answers, her voice dipping low suggestively. "Well, lucky it's a long flight home then, isn't it? You can help me manage it."

Sitting back on my heels, I admire the view in front of me. I wish I could stop touching her, but it's hopeless to try. I glide my fingers through her ripe pussy, scooping up her slick and taking the time to lick my fingers clean before I answer.

"We can skip dinner if you're still hungry, Koz," she purrs.

"You say that now, Raney. I know you; you eat more than I do, and you've been eating that organic and balanced vitamin shit they serve at Unity. I'm taking you to eat, and then I'm dining on your slit all the way back to finally sort this pack bullshit out. Seriously, the second our signatures are on those pack forms, I'm bending you over and putting my claim on your skin before I saturate your womb with my seed. I'm breeding you, pure and simple."

"What about what I want?" She laughs.

“It is what you want. It wasn’t the right time before, it is now. The charges the Central Bureau of Investigation and Justice were trying to pin on me were dropped overnight.” She goes to spin around, but I stop her. “I’ll update you when you’re sitting next to me and I’m feeding you,” I say as I dip down for a quick bite on the fleshy part where her ass meets the top of her thighs. She squeaks, though the noise changes as I twist the dildo, making sure she’s comfortable. “Is that okay?”

Nodding her head, she turns to look at me. As I smooth her skirt down, her eyes are nearly black. “I might need some underwear, baby, you’ve got me so wet.”

I rumble into her ear as I help her pull on some panties. “This is practice for very soon, micina, because aside from the way that dildo keeps you nicely stretched for me, it’s keeping all my come inside you. And I like that a lot.”

Raney laughs, it’s low and breathy. Once again confirming her heat is fast approaching, “I never would have guessed the first time I met you, you were a stuffer. You enjoy keeping me full and stretched, don’t you?”

“Strange, but I seem to remember you suggesting that before I could.”

“Well, we quickly discovered how bad you are at making smart business decisions when you and I are locked together.” She laughs because it is in fact very true. That one slip up cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars. Worth it. Every cent I lost was worth it, but she’s right, when we’re together, my focus is fucked up.

She wiggles that pert ass of hers in my face like the little demon she is, not disputing my answer. And it’s impossible to argue. Raney’s heats, when they are handled properly, are full of days of exhausting but immense pleasure.

Before I can say another word, the both of us feel the slowing of the car. And a moment later, Lew informs us we’ve arrived. Of course, like I suspected, Raney’s tummy growls.

The slap of her hand over it doesn't hide the sound it makes either.

Her eyes fly to mine, full of humour. I shake my head.
“You get us a table, I'll order.”

“I want onion rings, Koz.” She grins again as she walks off, her limp not as pronounced.

“No chance, micina.”



CHAPTER

Eight

Of course he ordered onion rings. And my favourite burger, a side of fries, a super sipper full of cherry cola, and a chocolate shake.

It's one of those things that makes me stupid happy—us doing normal stuff.

Society has this preconceived idea that omegas should be pampered princesses and only live the spoiled life. Koz with his shirt sleeves rolled up, my nickname tattooed on his forearm for the world to see, sitting next to me at the beat-up old tables overlooking the crashing surf at Belles Bay is all I want. Lew sits with us, keeping watch. Either way, it's times like these when Koz is relaxed that fills my omega heart to overflowing.

The day is perfect, well it would be if every damn woman that walks past us stopped doing a double take when they see him. I get it, he's one of those people that you do need to look at longer than a second or two.

I used to tease him mercilessly when we first got together about him being the beauty, and me being the beast in our relationship because he really is stunningly handsome. Black hair like the deepest ebony and almost as glossy too. When he's dressed for business it's always slicked back. When it's me and him, it flops over his forehead like he knows I love. His eyes are ice blue and coupled with his black hair, everything just pops. Including his year-round deep golden tan. There is no denying that Koz has this presence to match his stunning looks, it drags attention to him.

He's like an inked god hanging with us normal beings on earth. He doesn't look out of place, he's actually the only thing you see. And both women and men are not subtle at all about checking him out. They get that look in their eye, and I swear I can hear all their dirty thoughts about my man.

It gets worse when people smell him. Honestly, it's like people go batty when they catch a whiff of him, or maybe it's just me who gets a little fucking territorial. It wouldn't be an issue if we were packed, people would be able to scent we were together, like our scents would scream, *fuck off, I'm taken*, but until my bond with the boys is severed it's damn near impossible to bond to another alpha. Colt could do it, but... well, that is exactly what going home is all about. Sorting this bullshit out. Not today though. Today is my time with my good-looking future, it's a time to be replacing old memories with new ones.

Even over the delicious smells of our greasy dinner and the salty freshness of the ocean, I can always scent his cherry and dark chocolate smell. And depending on his mood, those cherries are either sweetened, like cherries warmed by the summer sun or so sour it makes my jaw ache. The dark chocolate, while it isn't his primary scent, it adds the bitter decadence, a sweetness that makes my mouth water.

He pushes over a couple of his left-over chicken nuggets—see, that right there is one of the things he does to make me swoon. A powerful underworld businessman who sources weapons for bad people, but can share with his girlfriend his nuggies?! It's seriously no wonder I love him as much as I do. Although, let's be real, he's got some real skills in the bedroom too.

“Did you see the returns coming in from the short-term rollover I did? I'm a little disappointed that the mutual fund outperformed the index. I really thought I had that projection pegged to go higher. Either way, the compounding interest from the Hayman account will offset the small loss,” I say as I double dip into his sauce.

“Raney, I do not need to double check your decisions. I have complete faith in you looking after our money. You are the smarts behind this operation, I just speak Italian.” He laughs as he licks the aioli from my fingers.

It’s pretty funny that I am in fact Koz’s money maker. And have been from the night we hooked up. And I wish I could tell Omega Mother Jane that her accounting class ignited my passion for numbers. While the rest of the Scorned Girls got off on their own pleasure projects, I dived deep into forensic accounting, shelf companies, and legal money laundering. The most poetic part of it, no one has a clue who Koz’s accountant is, and they would never guess it was an omega only just graduating. Omegas generally stick to less risky professions like cooking for their alphas.

I get distracted from telling him about the earlier transfer I did, by a chick in a bikini who struts past our table, again. Koz completely ignores her, and my growling, instead he dunks his fries in my thick-shake before feeding me.

“Eat up, micina,” he coos, kissing along the edge of my jaw. “Did you tell King what time we should be arriving? He keeps messaging.”

I go to answer him, but the wench in the non-existent bikini does a slow dramatic spin at the edge of our table. “I know you!” She basically purrs at him.

“No, you don’t,” he says without looking away from me.

“I’m sure I do,” she says leaning her hip on the table, accentuating the long lean lines of her body.

I shuffle on my seat, and go to say something, but Koz beats me to it. “Leave. You’re embarrassing yourself after I clearly said I don’t know you. I’m happy to belittle you in front of the whole world, or you can read the signs on display that I’m feeding my mate, or you can scent my happiness, or you can ignore it all and keep doing what you’re doing.”

She scoffs. And it’s not a nice sound. “You can’t be serious that she’s with you.”

His attention returns to me, and he smiles at me when he answers her, “I assure you I’m very serious about our relationship.”

“You’re dating her?”

He closes his eyes, and rubs his face, “As opposed to you? Is that where you are going?”

“You need a woman, not a banged up little girl.”

He turns to glare at her then, “I’m struggling to see what gives you the right to interrupt my date. Leave.”

She scoffs again, and you know, I fucking hate that noise. It’s patronising and passive-aggressive bullshit, and of course she spins around and goes full fucking aggressive-aggressive. “And sweetie, you might need to get better concealer out of mommies handbag, your scars are showing.”

I shrug as I finally turn to watch her instead of the horizon, “Hey, thanks for the tip. And you’re probably right, I can get better concealer but, honey, you can’t do a thing about your ugly. It’s bone deep.” And I stuff another nugget in my mouth before I start mouthing off and giving her more ammunition.

Koz though has other ideas, and he basically chases that nugget down, kissing and laughing into my lips and sweeping me backwards like he’s the main character on a Mills & Boon cover. He pulls back an inch, his blue eyes twinkling more than the afternoon sun on the waves. “Fucking hell, I love you. Come on, let’s go fuck on our private jet.” And he talks loud enough so everyone using the picnic tables hears us.

Helping me up to standing, Koz keeps his back to the bikini witch as he collects my super sipper and my chocolate shake. I take my time to pick up all our litter, refusing to be hurried by someone like her. And honestly, the desperation I have seen in some people makes me not at all surprised when she slides her business card over to Lew.

And you know, it constantly gets me that our society teaches us to be most untrusting and wary of the opposite sex, and I get it’s for valid reasons, but honestly people need to

know that women are just as opportunistic, vindictive, and violent. Physically and mentally too. Bitches.

“He’ll be calling me as soon as you turn your back. You’re a pitstop, junior, nothing more, and you are a whole lot less than a man like him needs. He’s all alpha.”

I feel Koz’s arm tense up. And I know every part of him wants to rip this woman a new one. It’s in his very nature to protect me from any and every storm but some things don’t matter. And she is one of those things.

Instead, his hand drops over my ass, and he squeezes it, leaning down to scent me up. Reinforcing once again, that this thing between him and me is solid.

“Look at you, micina, getting me all territorial. You need to come with a warning label.”

Wrapping his hand in my hair again, he pretty much whistles the whole way back to the car.

“Hey, Koz, thanks for my dinner. You sure know how to spoil a girl.” I smirk as I climb in the back again.

And the dirty schmuck doesn’t say a word which has me worried. He sits down, calmly places my drinks in the cherrywood panel cup holders before he drags me onto his lap. Like my skirt is made of fucking tissue paper he tears it right up the seam so he can spread me wide open, his fingers down the front of my thick padded panties a second later before he’s teasing me.

“Now, I’m going to show you how very good I am at spoiling my girl.”

“Koz... Koz, wake up, we’re landing soon.”

He goes from dead asleep to moving so quick I can’t escape. He holds me against his chest, his hand between my shoulders like a boulder trapping me to him. And the warmth

wafting off him, honestly, it's like sleeping next to an open fire, so warm and delicious. After my initial startle it's not like there's anywhere else I'd rather be. I rub my face over his chest, drinking down his scent and snuggling against warmth.

"I don't like it when you use the blockers, micina. I like being able to fill my lungs with your fragrance," he mumbles, his stranglehold on me exactly what I need.

"I'm nervous," I confess even before he can ask me what's wrong. "What if..."

He rolls us, looming over the top like he can shelter me from any storm, and he probably can. His face is wrinkled from the pillow and it makes my chest tight seeing him like this: relaxed, protective, and mine.

"I've already said I'm more than happy to hunt down the little cunts and sever their claim on you the old way, don't make me regret agreeing to do this your way." He chuckles as he comes closer, giving me a very sweet kiss, his morning breath and all.

Except let's be real, very little about Koz is sweet, everything about him is overwhelming. The blockers and the suppressants are working overtime right now as he starts to perfume. Like always, Koz demands my full attention—body, mind, and soul. The cheeky shit, keeps perfuming though, making the air in my lungs taste like his cherry chocolate scent. It's toe curling, and highly addictive.

I get side-tracked until I close my eyes and do a quick recap of our conversation. "No killing. I haven't seen them in years. I doubt they will show."

"They will show, or I will hunt them down and kill them for not fucking showing," he says, snuggling down, unconcerned about my minor melt down, or his violent threats.

I lay against him, breathing us in. "Koz, what if they do show up and still flatly refuse to let me go?"

"Then, micina, without your permission and with no further discussion on the matter, I will be going on a killing

spree. Nothing too alarming. I promise not to toy with them. Four bullets and voila, a severed pack claim.”

“You make it sound so simple.”

“It is.” He rolls on to his back, making me roll with him so I’m lying on his chest. Koz grabs my hand and guides it under the sheet to his hard cock. With my hand under his, he jacks himself off.

I fucking love the way he goes with it too. He’s not quiet, he doesn’t want more, and he’s almost lazy in the way he runs our joined fists up and down his length. And there’s no way, I’m not watching him properly. Dragging the sheet down with my feet, his cock and knot look so fucking tasty, and even though he doesn’t ask and even though he’s happy just to come like he is, I give him a quick love bite on his chest before I leave a trail of kisses and nibbles down to lick over his velvety head.

His eyes hood low, his mouth falls open, and he stares into my eyes so fucking intently I nearly go back up to kiss him. Except of course, he curls one of his eyebrows up in expectation before he holds his dick up for me to suck on.

His cherry scent is on his skin, even his beading pre-come tastes like it. And even though a second ago he was relaxed and unhurried, now when I look up at him I instantly know what he’s going to say.

“Open that pretty fucking throat for me, micina. You’re going to be taking everything I give you, like a good kitten,” his voice is still rumbly and deep, but now there’s a feral edge to it. I love it when he lets go of the tight restraint he has on his alpha.

Turning slightly, I give him access to my hair, and he bundles it into his fist, before he cups my throat with the other. I hold him in my hand, teasing him with a few licks from his knot up and over his wet knob. I go to repeat the same route until he hisses at me before pushing inside my mouth.

His dark chocolate cherry scent burns over my tongue; he makes it so the only thing I can taste and breathe is him.

“Raney, open...” he warns. His playful mood evaporates when he feels my tongue wiggling around, trying to catch all his tasty precome. He surges past my throat. His thumb trails gently over the top of my larynx as he holds me still so he can drive the speed and intensity.

There’s nothing that gets me off more than seeing how much he wants, how much he needs, me.

“And it’s a fucking lot.” He groans as he pushes his hips up higher making his ass hover off the bed.

How he knows what I was thinking, I’ve got no idea, but he does. The man is more in-tune with me than I am. He holds his hips up as he continues to pump in and out of my mouth. I swear I start to see spots in my eyes, but who needs air when you have Koz Siderno.

“Drink me down, micina,” he grits, his voice strained as he talks through his teeth. But Koz is only getting started in his peak. He throws his head back and holds me still. My nose gets squashed against his knot with each deep inhale I make. And he fills my mouth as his orgasm explodes out of him. I massage his knot, hard, like he showed me, and his fingers dig harder in my hair as I choke on him.

It feels like forever—my head is light, and I do a couple of struggling heaves because his come doesn’t stop filling my mouth, but then as hard and fast as his orgasm was he pulls out and blows the rest of his load over my face. With his hand holding my hair, I’m at his mercy as he massages his release into my skin. “You can’t wear my pack claim yet, but you will wear my mark and scent so every fucking person we meet knows who you truly belong to, whose cock you had in your mouth.”

His fingers don’t stop rubbing his come in my face, especially around my mouth. He sits up, so intent on doing it right, but there’s no need for him to be so primal. If anyone

asks who the other half of my soul is, I'd scream it at them. Maybe we're both a little primal.

Koz twists so that he's lying over the top of me, his chest basically holding me hostage on the bed as he goes between smiling like a twisted fiend and blowing, making his come dry quicker.

"You're a fucking monster, Koz," I smirk up at him. "I have to kiss King, you know."

"Yeah and all those other fucking stupid cunts. Not playing around anymore, Raney. We're here to make us official, and that starts now."

"Why don't you just tattoo 'property of Koz' on my forehead?"

He recoils for a moment before a slow smile spreads over his lips. "See, that's why I love you with every fucking cell in my body, micina, you've got all the good ideas." He drops all his weight down on me, in case I wanted to get ready, while he searches for his phone.

"What are you doing?" I ask, laughing, but he ignores me for a few minutes, his fingers flying over his phone before he turns that demon smile to me. A moment later he throws his phone down near my head.

"What did you do?" I try to buck him off, but he's like a slab of concrete. Impossible to shift.

He looks at me weird, well weirder than he usually does. But in the depths of his blue eyes the only thing my romantic heart sees is my future and that no longer scares me in the slightest. All our chatter disappears; it's like he's inhaling the rest of the universe so that we're the last stars glittering in an almost starless sky. He oozes such a conviction he could tell me I was an alien, and I'd believe him. And then he shocks the shit out of me.

"Raney, will you do me the honour of wearing my name?"

Even though I'm taking an exorbitant dosage of suppressant tablets, overlaid with the most expensive and most successful scent blockers available on the market, there's no hiding my scent as every part of me screams yes. His nostrils flare, in the next second, he fucking beams like a lighthouse.

"If we pack, I'd take your name."

"That's true."

"Micina, I'm going to tattoo my name on your body, and yours on mine. We should find a way to marry, like they used to do."

"What about King?"

"You want me to take your dad aside and ask him? Been there, done that already. The only promise you need to remember is that I'd love you. My pledge to King is man to man, and I'm not being a chauvinistic prick. I told him I'd always look after you and nothing is going to change that."

"And you acting like this has nothing to do with us going to see them?"

"Fifty-fifty, really."

We get interrupted when Lew, Koz's right hand man, chauffeur, and co-pilot's voice echoes through the snug bedroom suite.

"Don't wash your face, micina. We are what we are."



CHAPTER

Nine

“Eyes on the prize,” Cap’s sharp directive echoes in my ears. It’s unnecessary, we’ve been working hard at nailing this bastard.

Kozantine Siderno is a big player in the criminal world, making him a big player in ours. Supposedly for the past decade he’s been feeding enough weapons across the globe to start a damn revolution in nearly every continent. And yeah, there’s a whole lot of satisfaction when we heard he was making his way through our city.

Cap’s distinctive grunt forces us to hold our position while the surveillance team continues to feed update after update. It’s a hard ask not to burst into action, we’re frothing at the bit, ready to bring this pompous fuck to his knees. His arrogance is like a kick in the teeth, honestly, it’s like this guy is made of fucking Teflon and coated in oil, nothing sticks. Nothing at all.

Other members of the team are dotted along various positions in almost every damn suburb, all of us hiding like roaches. But we’re ready to do anything to nail this asshole. The feed in my ear is busy, it’s like the noise continues to add fuel to the excitement that is descending over all of us. Through my earpiece, I can feel the way it’s drumming up the rookies. And that’s the last thing we need. Because not only is Siderno a master at dodging allegations he’s also sharp as a fucking tack when it comes to his rights. He is well versed with phrases and words to make our assholes twitch, while making our job damn near impossible, malicious prosecution and intimidation.

A quick check on the time, and I'm not surprised it's only two hours since I climbed into position. It feels longer, but at the same time, I've felt every damn minute tick past slowly. I don't mind waiting, shit, it feels like it's all I've done for the past few years. Waiting until I've got all my ducks in a row before I take extended leave and find her.

Since that fucking awful first week that was full of heartache, hospitals, and King's wrath, I have done nothing but focus on a future that definitely includes Raney. The first few days after they left it was clear there was shit we didn't understand going on. Eventually, what they did was force my hand. I met with Hayes, told him some fucking hard truths involving me and him while I also disassociated us from our juvenile dreams. In fact, I ripped those romanticised goals to shreds, burnt them to ashes then scattered them in the wind before I sat our asses down, and stepped it out again. No shit, it was in the next hour we were gone. And from then, all we did was study and work. Since then, it hasn't been all plain sailing, but it's been not as murky either.

I can feel my private phone buzz against my chest, but I don't risk answering while I'm on surveillance. A moment later, it's like a parting of clouds in the biblical sense, when I see Siderno's white Escalade hit the lights a couple of blocks down from me.

Tapping open my mic, I keep it short and sweet. "I have visual. Good clean visual of our target, Cap."

There's an echoing silence in my earpiece, which makes my adrenaline spike. Tapping my earpiece to hopefully hear Cap tell me to take what's on offer, instead, I get him screaming blue fucking murder. No one in our unit makes a noise, waiting for him to give us the update.

"Investigation and Justice dropped their charges. They've told us in no uncertain terms to keep our distance. Jesus, fuck!"

In the background we can all hear him lose it. Shit, I know my team will be feeling the same level of frustration as Cap is

too. It's impossible not to. I stand, already knowing the next instruction will be to meet back at HQ for a debrief. And in my ear, I can hear Tommo, our 2IC starting to bark out commands. One minute I'm with them in that discussion, next I'm dragged into a separate comm with Cap and fuck knows who else.

"Jeffers, I want an address for him here. Fucking Justice can kiss my ass. This is my city." Cap talks a mile a minute before he disappears from my comms unit. The silence after makes me question if I imagined him.

A moment later, I get an official direction from Tommo on the open comms channel. "Jeffers, I believe you have a Escalade approaching. They ran a red light. Please proceed with caution. Report in the second you can, but let's do this straight down the line like the perfect gentleman we are. Don't fuck it up."

Opening up my jacket, I let my badge hang on my hip and shuffle around my holster so it's more visible, and then I take a step out of the shadowed alleyway. And right into the path of Siderno's Escalade, waving his vehicle down, directing it to the side of the road.

And as we anticipated, his driver is compliant. But that's the thing with Siderno and every person associated with his empire, they are always compliant. He knows the boundaries and so does anyone who works with him, and they all follow the law implicitly, making it near impossible to pin anything on any of them. Although that's the other mystery to all this, you only ever see two players, him, and his driver. No one can even get a name of who manages his money, but someone does. To date, they've managed to be as elusive as the actual accounts that hold his money.

I'd be lying if I said my pulse wasn't hammering hard, I manage a steady exhale before the car rolls to a stop, the rear passenger door is positioned right at my feet. The windows are blacked out, and I can literally feel his eyes as they sweep over me. But it's not just his eyes, it's his presence.

It is like pulsing energy pushing against my defences, it's a fucking weird sensation.

Flicking my chin up, I wave at the window. Like I figured, he's been watching me the whole time.

Siderno's file is full of the usual statistics; he's about to turn forty-three, he's six foot four inches and weighs 200 lb, his BMI is 12%. He's fucking cut. An alpha, black hair, tanned complexion, weird ice-blue eyes, tattooed. I could list the tattoos if I needed to.

As soon as his eyes lock on mine, all the training, the years I have put into this future I've worked so fucking hard for evaporate, and I'm left shaking like a rookie coming eye to eye with my first celebrity criminal.

"How may I be of assistance, officer? I presume you pulled us over for a reason?" he asks overly politely, a conceited smile on his lips.

"Have you got some ID?" I ignore him trying to drive the conversation.

"Ahh, routine traffic stop, is it?" he offers dismissively before he holds out his ID. His hand hovers as he turns his full attention to someone sitting in the car with him, completely ignoring me.

"You busy there, buddy? Be good to have you focus on me for a couple of minutes."

"My apologies, Officer?" He snatches his ID out of my hand.

"Detective."

It's fucking weird, but his smirk spreads over his fucking face until he's full-blown smiling. Like he's enjoying himself.

He drops his hand out of sight and a moment later the door opens, and my hand drops to my firearm.

"Don't get twitchy there, Jeffers. I was thinking perhaps you'd like to hop in. I'm in a hurry and I don't like to keep my

woman waiting. Perhaps we can drop you to your car or your office as we chat, because it seems you've got something you need to speak with me about."

I shake my head, stunned at him, "You think your what... girlfriend is more important than my questions? I'm an officer of the law."

"Detective, apparently." Siderno laughs. It's low, it's deep, and it's fucking menacing. In the next moment, he sobers up and shows me exactly how menacing he can be. "And I know she is more important than you. Your questions can wait, Jeffers. But there is nothing in this world, or the next one, worth more to me than my woman. She'll never wait, she'll never go without, ever again. It makes me sick when little pups like you think being an alpha gives you the right to make a woman wait. Is that something you do? Make a woman wait? Make the one person who owns your heart and soul... wait?"

"I'm not sure what game you're playing at, Siderno."

"Ah, games. I've heard all about the games you like to play." He snarls back. But everything he does is considered, thought out, slow.

"What the fuck. Get out the car!" And this time I purposely take a step back, draw my weapon, and take fucking aim. "Everyone in the car, out now."

Siderno's eyes glitter, and he seriously looks like he's won the fucking prize. He smiles as he talks. "Are you sure you want us all out? Seems a little extreme considering you've not even alluded to what the problem is, Jeffers."

"Last warning."

He turns his attention back into his car, and I can hear the addition of both a male and female voice. The next moment the driver's door opens, and out steps Lew Higgins. Much like Siderno, Higgins is conviction free despite being well known as Siderno's go to man. He comes towards me, hands up like this isn't the first time he's done this. He's hard to read but a

lot easier to be around. His presence is nothing compared to his boss's.

Higgins is all eyes, scouring the scene waiting for danger, but at the same time, he's got this mask of indifference going on that blazes brighter and brighter the longer his boss takes.

When Siderno climbs out of his car, I have to step back. To give him room, because not only does he tower over me, but he also commands every bit of my attention and focus.

“Come on, darling, Jeffers...”

He's cut off by a woman's voice. It's different than what I expected his woman would sound like. I was expecting a practised, demure socialite soprano, but it's not like that at all, it's husky and barely audible. And there's this part of me that fucking bounces all over the place when the reality I'm going to be one of the first people to see who his elusive partner is.

Her hand comes out. And much like her voice, it's not what I expected. I thought she'd be polished nails and perfect tanned skin. I had this mindset that she'd be a willowy supermodel, unworldly in her perfect beauty, dressed in runway fashion, but her polish is chipped, her hand marred by nicks and faded scars. As the woman climbs out, her hair catches the afternoon sun, and it's like the deepest chestnut brown, with hints of red and cinnamon. Her long hair hangs like a curtain in front of her face. And she has fucking legs for days, wrapped in black leather that looks butter soft but painted on. She's also wearing a long sleeve white top, covered in angel wings up the sleeve—classic Fallen MC logo.

I can hear her grumbling under her breath as she makes her way out the car, her fingers intertwined with his. He doesn't let her go. He fucking crowds her, his hand firmly in hers. He intentionally steps a foot in front of her too, protectively, while his other hand settles on her back, fucking lovingly.

When she flips her hair back, my whole being is flipped ass over tit.

“Raney...” The rush of air out my lungs squeezes so hard it hurts.

The pressure I felt before is nothing like this. Honestly, I stumble under the weight of realisation of being face to face with her again.

Raney was always breathtakingly stunning, now that she’s grown into a woman, she is all that and more. So much more.

Instead of greeting me in any way, she looks at me like I’m someone she vaguely used to know. The nonchalance blinking back at me from her green eyes is like an arrow through my throat. I can’t utter a sound; I can barely breathe.

“Now, you have dragged *my* beautiful woman out of the car, perhaps you can explain what the issue is?”

Lew is already on his phone; I should be cautioning him to hang up. I should be doing a lot of things, like searching Siderno’s person and his car for contraband. I should be reading him his rights; I should be finding one fucking thing that Cap could use to give us an inch in nailing something on him. Instead, all the fast-track training, the endless support of my superiors pushing me hard and helping me blitz through years of that training, my ability to think under pressure, to read the scene for possible risk or danger, vanishes completely.

I’m left in the same bone deep mess of emotion I was when she was hooked up to every machine the hospital had when she was barely alive.

“Ahh, Jeffers keeping people waiting seems to be your forte. Let’s hope this time it doesn’t do real damage. Because, between me and you,” he comes at me like a ravenous lion, and I’m stuck under his spell, frozen on the spot, “the past I have no control over, but if Raney hurts because of you ever again, I will end you with my bare hands. And yes, Detective, that is an explicit and valid threat on your life. I’ll repeat it for a court room full of witnesses too. Your time with Raney is finished, and by the time we leave this town, the bullshit claim

you have on her will be terminated one way or the other. Which is, for the record, my preferred outcome.”

She steps up, and all these reactions and responses that have been ingrained in me are slowly coming trickling back into my subconscious, but it’s like I don’t matter. None of it matters. This was all for her, and even though I’m standing in front of her, it’s like she can’t even see me.

“Koz, let’s go. We’re done here.” Her hand catches his elbow, and Siderno becomes a different version of himself. Without hesitation, I know he’s still damn near feral, I can feel his emotions like pin pricks over my skin, but his focus too has shifted. To her and only her. In a lot of ways, he mimics her nonchalance, her gut-wrenching indifference, making me feel as relevant as a nipple on a skateboard.

His driver walks off without being told they can leave; the car is driving away.

I should be telling Cap about this. I should be writing every part of this interaction down, recording every word we exchange so someone other than me can review it. Because let’s be serious, I can’t focus on anything but seeing Raney again. And that’s so fucking hard to comprehend—she looks like a different person, but she feels like the same girl I fell head over heels in love with. Fuck.

The only thing I can do is dig through my vest and pull out my phone. It’s ringing again, but I was already going to call him.

“Hey, babe. How did it go? I’ve been so fucking nervous for you all day. I’m so proud of you. Talon? Babe? Are you there?”

Hayes.

His voice is like superglue, binding me back together. He’s been my reason besides Raney, for living. And once again, he guides me back from the epic shit show that just occurred in front of me. Back to him, back to me.

I rub my chest. I'm fucking shaking and sweaty all over. And I have to clear my throat a couple of times so he can hear me. "Hayes... she's back."



CHAPTER

Ten

RANEY

My eyes are squeezed shut. I'm trying to get rid of the image of seeing Talon. I'm trying to exhale the ghosts from yesterday from my goddamn lungs.

"The tabs aren't working," I say, falling against Koz's chest.

"They are, micina. It's the shock." He kisses the top of my head, rocking us against the movement of the car, and it's soothing. Although, so is being with Koz.

I rub my nose, trying to get rid of Talon's lingering spice infused campfire and leather scent. "Seriously, Koz, the blockers are not doing a good job. God, I suck at this."

"No, you do not."

"How am I going to sit in the same room as them?"

"With me by your side if you need. But Raney, you don't need me, you don't need them... you are fierce and most certainly can command the attention of those boys in that room to get the resolution you want. You pave your way. You always have, micina."

"You see me differently than the way I see me, Koz," I mumble, my hands rubbing over my face. All of a sudden I'm questioning everything.

He turns me so I'm straddling his lap and then his hands nab mine, making it impossible for me to hide. "Raney, look at me."

Of course, he waits until I do.

“We’re partners and have been for a long time. I know every inch of your body; I understand almost all your emotions. You blow me away constantly with the way you think and perceive things. No one has ever made me as much money or protected it so well. Though it all pales in comparison to who you are as a person. You can do anything you set your mind to. When you love, you love heart and soul. When you fight, you do it with a passion that makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. The next few days are going to be hard, at times you’ll question why you are doing this, you’ll feel like it’s too difficult, it will hurt and it will take you backwards through time, but you will do it. You are the strongest person I know. You have to be, to have come from where you did. But your strength is deeper than that. Look at the way you keep handling me even though I constantly beg for you to be mine. Everything you and your Scorned Girls do, the way you handle King, the way you live each day is not something that spineless, weak women do.”

I know emphatically I could do all this without him by my side, but that’s making a mockery of who we are. And honestly, why would I do it without him? Even after today’s literal trip down memory lane, I know I’m just having a moment.

“King did not raise a dainty daughter; he raised a warrior. And I thank the universe you are mine.” He growls as he slams his lips to mine. It feels like a possession, or maybe it’s an exorcism because he takes my moment of questioning and replaces it with what was there all along, a very real sense that I am enough.

Koz’s lips twist up. “Still taking you to tattoo you as mine before we go have dinner with King.”

“Good. If we hurry up, I might sneak in a...” My eyebrows do the talking.

“Do you need reminding of what a strong woman you are? You need to ride my knot until you see stars?”

I smirk at him. “Well, I was just going to say have a bath, but yeah, maybe I could be persuaded.”

He shakes his head, chuckling as he kisses me hard again. And most intentionally, because it is Koz we’re talking about, he chases out Talon’s lingering scent, dousing me in his mouth-watering chocolate and cherry scent instead.

“Yeah, I think I need you to put these lips of yours all over me.” I moan as he nips along the edge of my jaw.

His phone rings, and it has that ringtone that makes it impossible to ignore.

“Sorry, micina,” he says briskly. And I know he is, but I also know he’s a businessman, and this is our business.

I climb off his lap to sit opposite him. Watching Koz work is pretty cool, he gets overtaken by a different persona to the one that treats me like his queen. As he speaks in Italian to his contact, I go to curl my legs under me, but my knee catches and twinges, making me wince in pain.

His eyes narrow, and he shuffles along his seat, sitting on the edge to put my foot on his knee. Changing his phone to hands-free, he balances it on a ledge to his side while he massages the kink out of my knee. And it’s not the soft, sugary sweet massage of timid hands, no of course not. Koz had to learn from my rehab guy, because for one he didn’t like the guy touching me, making me hurt, and two... well, let’s be serious, it was for that reason alone. But he did learn how to dig in and stretch the tendons, how to work the joint so it doesn’t lock up and he learnt how to ensure the fluid gets properly moved around. I love him for it, but shit, I really wish sometimes he did go to the fluffy school of massage instead. I grimace, and he glares at me. And if he wasn’t on the phone, I’d be kicking him in the shin to show him how good my knee is.

Even though I don’t understand a word he says, I know him well enough to interpret his smaller mannerisms and pick up on the different cadence of his voice. When he talks private

life with Diego, as opposed to when he talks actual business, his tone is softer, less abrupt, plus he drills those icy blues of his at me. Koz is and always has been an open book for me to devour.

The smile falls off his face after a few moments, and he flips to work mode. He shakes his head like he's frustrated and takes the call off hands-free before sliding back on his seat. His focus switching to whatever is going on with Diego.

Opening up my group chat with my Scorned Girls, I give them the update on arriving home and being hit by a giant stick called fate once again. I guess the four of us have always had a healthy appreciation of fate, and generally whenever we talk, one of us always has a story to back up the concept again and again. It never gets old.

And then I get a run down in the space of four minutes—Tris is deep in heat in one of the clinic suites at Unity, Simona is finalising her photography project, and Heidi is avoiding her life as best she can.

Clearly, I lose track of time talking with my girls because the next time I look up, we're parked in front of a tattoo parlour—Deluge Ink. For a tattoo shop, it's more in line with the new funky studios as opposed to the one The Fallen would visit. Except there's a row of bikes parked out front.

Koz is still on the phone, looking pretty fucking pissed off, but he barks out something at Diego, shutting the call off. As soon as he hangs up, Diego is calling again, but Koz switches his phone off.

Needing the time to cool off, he nabs a bottle of sparkling water, pouring us both a glass as he puts himself back to being my Koz instead of an international businessman with dubious connections and a shitty temper. We sit together, shooting the shit and talking about nothing at all until the bottle of mineral water is finished and my man is out of his head and back with me.

“I have a sketch that I’ve been playing with, can I show you, micina?”

“Of course.”

“I took everything...”

“Koz, do you like it?”

“I love it.”

“I’m all in. Actually, let’s do this like that tattoo show on television. Don’t show me until it’s done.”

“Yeah, no chance.” He hands it over without any further chance for me to argue.

I get it, it’s a permanent tattoo, but in the same sense, Koz is a tattoo snob so I trust his judgement. Plus, you know, laser tattoo removal is available if it is craptacular. Of course, it’s not. It’s big, and so fucking pretty, I’m going to cry.

Koz has gone full old school. A swallow holding a ribbon with my name on it. Bold, oversized, and impossible to miss.

“Now when I wank, your name will be wrapped around my cock,” he stares at me, seeing my emotional wobble at his declaration, he’s distracting me in a sense. It’s not like he hasn’t been grand in the past telling those important in our world about me. I don’t know, maybe it’s because I’m being overly sentimental after seeing Talon, but it hits harder today. He tells me constantly he is my forever partner; I know and I believe it, but I thought I knew the direction of my life before too and I got kicked in the face. It makes me overly sensitive still. And I hate that. “Raney, get here now.”

He doesn’t wait, he nabs my wrist and drags me over to his lap. “No doubt. No regrets. You’ll be the first to know if that changes. You know that. Now come on, let’s get this done so I can show you exactly why I want your name on my hand.”

Only because Lew’s waiting at the door already does Koz let me climb out of the car first. His hand drops on my hip in case my knee gives out. It used to drive me fucking crazy he

didn't think I was strong enough, until I realised he also just likes to touch and hold me whenever he can.

“Did you tell King we were stopping here? That's Jasper's bike,” I say, pointing to the gunmetal grey chopper. “Unless he lost it in a bet again.”

There's a few things guaranteed growing up in a MC and seeing men lose their bikes over stupid shit is one of them. But the other thing you see is this bear-minded logic for them getting it back.

Koz wraps his hand in mine and his gaze narrows at the bikes lined up. Neither of us are expecting trouble. If they're Fallen, it's going to be a loud reunion instead, but of course trouble is standing at the counter when we walk in, looking fucking stunning too.

Hayes must have grown another foot since I last saw him. His hair is a deeper brown, long too, but it's all bundled up on the top of his head. The tats are new. So is the nose ring.

The biggest shock, he smells like a fucking hot cinnamon donut. My mouth waters, and I feel like a herd of elephants are thumping around in my heart. He was on the phone, but he drops the phone and all but pole vaults over the sleek desk he was leaning on.

He comes at me, fast like that herd of elephants running rampant in my chest. Hayes is charging right at me. Still holding my hand, Koz swings around, positioning himself in front of me.

“And who the fuck are you?” Koz barks.

“Hayes,” I answer, rubbing Koz's back. Not for his benefit, but for mine.

Hayes throws his hands up, instantly trying to ease the skyrocketing tension. He takes a very visible step back, taking him in line with the desk. And all my uncles.

“Sorry,” he says, loud and clear. “I meant Raney no harm.”

Jasper, Twinkles, JB, and Grinder slide closer to Koz. The five of them going full alpha protective mode together.

“Yeah, well, you rushed up like you’ve got all the damn right in the world to touch a woman without fucking asking. Stand there and don’t fucking move,” JB snaps before he leans over to Koz and shakes his hand. Before he says hello to me.

I used to get so fucking caught up in this macho bullshit. Honestly, I don’t give a crap how these Neanderthals greet each other, it’s how they interact after that I focus on. And these men have seen me on some pretty horrific days; they’ve held my hand and stood watch over me protectively while I have battled shit they couldn’t see. They’ve also kept my rather large secret away from the world, despite them all being worse than a bunch of gossiping girls.

“Koz, King said you and Raney weren’t far off. Asked us to come down and welcome you into town.”

Koz nods, which in a way is his acknowledgement of what he said but also his appreciation.

“Raney, Koz looks like he’s treating you good.” He double checks with Koz before coming in for a kiss. Although at the last minute he has a change of heart and kisses my hand instead. “Fucking hell, Raney, King will go fucking ballistic if you show up with Koz all over your face.”

“Oh my god,” I hiss, touching over my lips, completely forgetting that my own suit wearing cave man basically rubbed his come all over my face not that long ago.

“Don’t put your fucking lips near my woman and there’s no issue.”

“You shitting me? You know me. So does she,” Twinkle asks, glaring at Koz. And Twinkles, despite his name suggesting he is a ray of sunshine, is as far from that as possible. He looks like he’s been cast from a block of concrete, with a temperament to match. He also has a mean left hook, but that’s beside the point.

Koz drops my hand and steps up, facing the wall of The Fallen. “And I don’t give a fuck. Back off, Twinkles, and don’t disrespect Raney like that again. I’m sure once you’ve all thought properly about the situation, you’ll remember I have a lot more respect for Raney than you just gave both her and me credit for.”

Before any of them can say a word back, Koz swings his attention to Hayes. His posture is too relaxed, his voice too calm. “You have three seconds to explain why you are here.”

“What? I work here!”

“Since when?”

“Since none of your goddamn business,” he replies, but it’s not loud and aggressive, it’s soft and assertive. “You’re the ones that walked in the doors, not me. I’m allowed to react the way I did! I got blindsided seeing her and overstepped.”

“Yeah, well, you’ve obviously got no survival instincts. Did you not notice me standing in front of her?”

“Koz, it’s okay,” I say, and he glances over his shoulder. The glimmer in his eye is pretty telling that everything is okay, he’s being funny in a Koz way.

“Actually, why are you here, Raney?” Hayes asks, pushing the envelope further.

I guess though the question catches me by surprise, because I’m not the one who arranged the meeting here, it was my pseudo pack.

“To finalise the pack dissolution before I pack, Hayes.”

“What?”

“Yeah, your lawyers keep changing the goal posts.”

He shakes his head in disbelief. He does it again and again too. Looking more confused and a lot more pissed off.

“Yeah, no.”

“What?”

“No, please!” He grabs his phone and sprints out the rear of the shop.



CHAPTER

Eleven

Of course, the second King hears we were here, all the Fallens' phones go off. One by one too. It's pretty funny, giving Koz and me no time to talk about Hayes. But then again, I'm done talking about them. I'm here, like I said, to fix this once and for all.

Rudely, mine's the last phone Dad tries. Naturally, I hit ignore and focus on sitting still and getting the pretty tattoo running down the side of my neck finished. Whenever I walk into a tattoo shop, it's like I get bit by the ink bug. My mind runs wild with ideas and visions which means I end up getting more than one tattoo. This scripted one is for me—*sono tutto con te, Kozantine* (I'm all with you, Kozantine)—and the artist made it run from my ear down to the top of my collar bone. Goddamn, it's going to be gorgeous.

Niche is as unique as her name suggests. She's also insanely good and well respected in the fine line black style that I personally prefer. Koz's swallow was done by Mr. Ink himself and in a completely different style. He opted for the thick line and bold colour traditional style that suits my sexy man to a T.

Niche stopped talking about Hayes after a few easy to answer questions I had to know. He does work here and has for the past few years while he finishes up art school. Aside from that, she tells me to relax and get in the moment. And then she stops talking.

Zoning out and breathing through the pinching sting of a few deep lines, I miss the moment the chatter behind me dies

down. Not that there was much, Koz's not a big conversationalist. Before long, I can feel his attention on me. Not that it wasn't before, but now he's watching me without anything distracting him, and it's different.

It's hard properly explaining what it was like first meeting Koz. I'd actually done a lot of healing; I was pretty broken about the boys abandoning me, but in the same breath, I knew I was strong enough to survive. It just took a little while to come to terms with the change of what my life would be. Throw in my newly acquired omega designation, and clearly, during that time of my life, I often felt like I was on a spin cycle. Inside me, things were all out of alignment; my thoughts were mashed up, making me crazy irrational. My body didn't seem like my own, my aspirations were blown up, and the pieces of my dreams were floating in tatters around me. But like every other person who's been screwed over, I took one day at a time.

Some days were completely shit. I wanted to park my ass on a chair and watch the seasons pass like Bella did when Edward disappeared. I didn't for a second attribute Twilight as being my motivator, but I remember it being a pivotal moment. I climbed off the chair—metaphorically—and I got on with chasing down the life I wanted.

After my Bella inspired moment, I figured out a few harsh truths. I was a people person, always would be. But I wasn't an extrovert that needed to be the centre of everyone's universe. I needed to be a part of something more than just me—not bigger or better, just more. I also found out that my independence was important which for some alphas was a hard pill to swallow. King's reluctance to see I needed to be free after being broken was hard to deal with. I had to move halfway across the country to break away from him and his love. I needed him, without a doubt I did, but I needed me too.

Koz gave me the sense of freedom and safety I craved. He gave me what I needed without being asked. Yes, he was a moody bastard sometimes. He was abrasive, possessive, and freakishly obsessive. And most certainly he was demanding

and sometimes acted without thinking in the moment, but at the same time, I can say, hand on heart, he consistently makes me his priority.

He's patient when I question if he is going to leave me. He is patient with all my newly acquired needs, and he is impatient when I need to let go and trust. And fuck me, he keeps catching me when I fall.

Koz might be an anomaly in that he didn't have a pack already, but I don't think he'd looked terribly hard either. I guess together we were our own pack, but the both of us were also aware we needed more. Alphas had an inbuilt need to protect and provide, to shield and tend, to love and cherish—which for some alphas was hard to do. Letting go of their dominance to allow another part of them to flourish—maybe they were softer, gentler, or they were allowed to be even more dominant but they handed the reins of their freedom and happiness to their omega. Which is where omegas came to their own, ironic omegas, the softest designation, were the only ones strong enough to pacify a feral alpha.

And have fucking mercy, the Omega mothers at Unity were spot on when they talked about scent matches and instantly knowing you'd met your match. I can smell Koz and my worries disappear. Today is no different, over the top of the antiseptic, the astringent chemicals of the studio, all my uncles, I smell him. But I feel his presence too.

I play rabbit, pretending I'm asleep, but even with my eyes closed I can feel the way he's looking down at me. And he's getting a little freaky deaky—I can feel the smallest change in his mood. But then again, we're equally responsive to each other.

“Okay, let me get a mirror to show you, but we are finished,” Niche says as she steps away.

The twitch of my lips is impossible to hide as he dips down to whisper in my ear, “I like my name on your skin, micina. More than I should. You writing that for the world to see makes me want to rip your leather pants to your ankles so I

can ram my cock in you and show everyone how you were made to take my knot.”

“You like?” I say, rolling over, coming face to face with the irrefutable evidence of how much he does like it.

And call it inappropriate, call it what you will, but I rub my man over his expensive tailored pants. His hand snaps out, and he squeezes my fingers tightly around his length. He closes his eyes, sinking into my touch; half a heartbeat later, his eyes snap open.

“Let’s go. Your suppressants are wearing off, and way too many unknowns around for that. Back at King’s it doesn’t matter what you smell like or how I act, but here it does.”

He goes to walk off, unperturbed that he’s walking back through the shop with a raging boner. His swagger is such a sight, it constantly gets me hot and wound up.

“Koz.” I stop him. Maybe the tabs are wearing off, although I guess I just love seeing him wild and free too. “Do you really like it?” I ask, pointing to my neck.

“Don’t,” is the only word he growls at me, before he stands in front of the reception desk, impatiently tapping a wad of cash on the bench to hurry me along.

“Niche, this is spectacular,” I say, climbing off the bed and standing in front of the mirror. And even though the reflection is bouncing back the opposite, it’s easy to see how beautiful it is. It is also very easy to read the words, and anyone speaking Italian would see the declaration I’ll wear for the rest of my days.

She does a sly half smile, looking like she can’t take the compliment, but I give her one of those weird taps you give people you kind of feel comfortable with. “I’m serious, I love it.”

“Looks like he does too,” she says, flicking her eyes nervously at Koz.

“Yeah, you could say that.” I laugh with her. “Hey, we’re going to the Fallen clubhouse if you want to come and have a drink later. Can’t promise you anything but cheap booze, bad music, and a whole lot of biker humour which is generally inappropriate.”

“Not sure that’s my scene, but I’ll suss out what’s going on. I could see if Hayes was interested in coming...”

I look at her, “You know we’ve got history? I’m not sure of the reception he’d get if he came with you.”

“From them or you?”

She’s not being insensitive or nosey, and the vibe I pick up from her is more peaceful than intentionally nasty. Her question raises lots of questions I’ve always wanted to ask; how would I feel if I saw them again? Did what happened, really happen? Why haven’t they reached out?

“Raney, you look like you’re searching for answers. Maybe Hayes could help you out. I’ve got no clue what happened, but all the same, I know Hayes and he’s a good person. A really fucking good person.”

“Well, I don’t know who he is anymore, so I can’t...”

“What about your partner? Is he going to let you find the answers?”

“That’s why we’re here, Niche,” I say, shrugging.

Behind us, Koz is getting more impatient, but he’ll get over it.

Niche is obviously getting over being laid back in our chat and comes pretty direct in what she wants to say. “When I want to chill, I watch TikTok. I know, don’t give me shit about it,” she says quickly when she catches my eye roll. “Anyway, you know how sometimes things just make sense. Well, I watched this woman, and this is word for word what she said, because it just stuck—*I don’t give a single fuck about who you were yesterday. What I do care about is how you show up today. Way too many of us are living our lives like our fucking*

past is on a billboard that we carry around with us for every single human to see. Reminder, you are not your past, you are who you choose to show up as today.”

She bleeds sincerity, but the thing is, I’ve seen sincere. I’ve felt it, it’s kissed me before it left me broken.

Waiting a moment to school my emotions, I go for bland. “I’ll keep that on board. Maybe don’t bother coming past tonight, because while I’m down with all that positive affirmation and self-ownership, I’m also a big believer that your actions speak louder than your words. For the second time in my life, Hayes did a runner. Let’s leave it at you being an incredible tattoo artist.”

She flicks her chin up. “Cool. I get it.”

I should have been more aware of how much time we were here because the next minute, chaos descends on their tattoo parlour when King barges his way inside. His impatience, and frustration, like a physical weight that settles on my shoulders. His dominance display might work on the members of the Fallen, but I grew up with it and can easily shake it off. Which pisses him off even more.

“Raney! What the fuck! A tattoo is more important than coming down and seeing your dad?”

I spin around, “Well... I was looking forward to catching up with Joker and all the sweetbutts...”

He glares at me so hard, I swear to god, he’s going to pop a gasket. I make it into his arms before he implodes, although he’s still wound up tight which is not like King.

“Are you okay?” I ask, pulling him away from all the eyes currently watching our reunion.

“Raney, it’s always a fucking shit show. You good, my girl? Is he still treating you right?”

Koz is already behind me, while King keeps his arm around me when he shakes Koz’s hand.

“Of course,” I murmur, leaning against Dad and breathing him in. Dad’s scent is so ingrained in me, I swear some nights in my sleep I catch the barest whiff and wake up. His unique scent of cigarette smoke, bourbon and motor oil is settling even when his aura is a little manic.

“We’re having issues with those pricks at the Bureau of Making my Life Fucking Hard again. Last night they thought they should do a raid on my fucking strip joint to check our liquor license. Last week they raided the chop shops, dragging the fucking environmental cunts down to check on how we dispose our grease. They’re grasping at fucking straws.”

Koz grunts, his hand wavering up as he gets caught up knowing what he wants, warring with what’s right. He’d never pull me away from Dad, but he’s also always said he won’t share me with anyone. Makes for fun times.

“They’ve been riding my ass too, desperate for an opening,” Koz says under his breath as he slings his arm over my shoulder to hold me against his chest.

Koz’s confidence is like being in front of a warm heater. His intuition is also never wrong.

“Something doesn’t feel right,” he snaps, grabbing my hand. “King, no one followed you, did they?”

Famous last words.



CHAPTER

Twelve

RANEY

King and Koz freeze.

Perhaps they both picked up the exact moment when things weren't right. Barely a second later we're completely surrounded, ready to fight mind you, as agents from Central Bureau of Investigation and Justice swarm the place.

And it's no wonder there's bad blood between the divide of good and evil in our society. CBIJ have zero manners and a tonne of aggression. Of course, the Fallen are reactive. Koz is still, which is far scarier.

He holds me against his chest; I can feel the tension rolling off him. I use my body against his as a grounding tool for the both of us. The noise around us is at fever pitch level and continues to grow, matching the unease of trouble brewing. And there's nothing I can do to stop the rising tension feeding my panic, I just hope I can keep Koz from going off.

After what happened, it's no surprise that some noises and sounds, or sudden movements can trigger me. Aggression is another thing that locks me up. People being up close in my space is another. The person standing in front of me, with his face hidden by his mask and glasses gets so close I can see the brand he's wearing, makes me scared. I can see his mouth moving, but my fear is making it hard for me to understand what it is he is saying.

Koz's hand on my hip is like an anchor and it's the way we work together; he helps me, I help him.

I manage to keep it together, but King goes off. He shoves the guy away before following through with a wicked jab to keep the guy at a safer distance. There is not even a second to think before the three of us are slammed to the floor.

“Identification check. Do not fucking move until we tell you to. We will get your ID out. If you don’t have ID we will escort you back to the department to sort out who the fuck you are.”

“Get your fucking ape to take his foot off my daughter’s back.” King’s words are accompanied by an unspoken threat. I go to turn my head, but a hand gets slapped against my head, pinning me down.

I start talking loud enough for King and Koz to hear. “I’m okay. I’m okay,” I repeat over and over again.

“I’ll say it again, so we all understand each other, don’t move until we tell you to move. You don’t do anything until I say so. We are armed, we have jurisdiction to use whatever force necessary. And I decide what force that is. Right now, you all have officers on you. Each of them are being spotted by more agents and each of them have their weapons out, safety switched off. We are not playing for candy today.”

I keep still and watch the boots step in a march in front of me.

“Raise your right foot if you work in this fine establishment,” the head agent patronises. Around us there’s a small shuffle of movement as those that do work at Deluge identify themselves.

They get hauled to their feet and led out. I try to figure out who the agent is going to target next, when the man suddenly squats in front of me.

“So, I’ve got the President of the Fallen about to go postal, and a man we all fucking know as a lawyered-up cunt, about to go feral... which makes me all sorts of intrigued as to who you are?”

“My identification is in my purse.” Although it comes out all garbled because my head is still being pinned by someone. And yeah, they’re roughing me up.

The agent tsks sardonically before he drops his head to my level. His shit-coloured eyes flare as he looks at me, not hiding either his mock or derision. This man is full of hatred, and right now he’s focusing it all my way. He leans down and talks softly, sarcasm rolling off each syllable. “That wasn’t the question, sweetheart. I asked who you are?”

Next to me, Koz releases a guttural noise in warning. It doesn’t take much imagination to know that he’s been forcibly restrained, making it near impossible for him to use his words.

“I told you already, Agent Fuckface, she is my daughter,” King barks.

“Dad, I’m okay,” I reply. It’s hard to not reply to Koz, but he’s spent a lot of time coaching me for when we run into a situation like this. Keeping my focus on the man in front of me, I try to exude a different level of confidence to the way I feel. I also try not to think about spitting in his face because I think shit will really get ugly then.

“I’m Raney Grady. I also use my mother’s name Jones. I have identification from Unity Omega Collegiate, I am one of their students. I have permission...”

“No pack?” He tips his lips up in a cruel smile as he speaks.

I drop my eyes from his. He’s an alpha, not a strong one, just a malicious one. “It’s complicated,” I answer.

“Well, sweet thang, why don’t you un-complicate it,” he replies. Flicking his eyebrows up impatiently, he’s definitely not shying away from sharing his asshole tendencies with the room.

“I’m here to sign Pack Dissolution Forms.”

He laughs, and again it’s patronising and thick with mock. “In this tattoo shop?”

“No.”

“All right, Fucknuts, I’m calling harassment now,” King snarls as he struggles against the agent holding him. Even without looking behind me, I know dad’s trying to buck free. Another handful of agents swarm towards him.

“Have I touched your precious daughter?”

“She just told you she’s an omega. She gets special privileges, irrespective of relationship. And I heard her tell you...”

“No offence, but I’m not quite believing any relation of yours. She could be the Queen of Sheba or Siderno’s fucking accountant for all we know.”

His knees fall dangerously close to my face, “You’re a bunch of fucking criminals who make a living by lying and cheating to get what you want. Which means I get to ask any damn question I want to ascertain if she is indeed who she says she is. But since you’ve got so many issues with her being here, she’s going to the station to sort this bullshit out. Barrett, cuff her and take her downtown. No special privilege.”

A noise like a low roar echoes through the room, but they all pointedly ignore Koz, although a couple of the agents swivel and pin their weapons in his direction.

“Raney, you know your rights. Keep repeating you want to make your call and don’t stop till they listen. Call the club, whoever answers, tell them King said to get Puck. You got me? And don’t leave with anyone but Puck. Right?”

Before I can answer, I get dragged up to my feet, literally. Someone from behind hoists me up using my bad shoulder, and I lock down the scream as I get frogmarched away. Koz’s voice follows me out. “Ti troverò gattino. Hai accesso ai miei soldi e al mio avvocato.”

I twist around to catch Koz getting a kick to the side as the agents around him spit angrily, the same, “Talk English, cockhead.”

Both Koz and I refuse to translate. And even without Koz telling me he'd find me, or that I have access to everything that is his including his money or lawyer, I still want to stay here to fight with them. It's easy to see that shit is about to get ugly. These cops are clearly after blood.

A commotion pulls another rush of the agents over as I trip on my bad knee. And the noise behind me gets worse as I'm carried out of the tattoo parlour. Like the agent said, there's no consideration for me being an omega, if anything, I'm unnecessarily manhandled out of Deluge Ink, coming face to face with both Hayes and Talon again.

The fact that Talon is wearing a protective siege vest is not lost on me.



CHAPTER

Thirteen

I used to hate this house. And King. I've grown to not just appreciate them but love them in a strange way.

King took way too much inspiration from bad movies. The asswipe followed me around parroting, "Wax on, wax off," whenever I moved into a new room because apparently there was a lesson in me fixing a goddamn dilapidated two bedder down on the furthest corner of the compound. The house, by rights, should have been burnt down years ago. Instead, he made me fix it.

Even now, walking in my bedroom, I can visualise the prick with his six pack of beer at his feet as he rocked on a seat looking like his namesake. But let's be real, there's nothing royal about King. Except he's a royal pain in my ass.

He was relentless too, goading me as I patched holes so big you'd think they were windows. He'd get this tone in his voice, schooling me fucking constantly with all these quotes and bullshit. And man, did he get stuck on a few. "*Life will knock us down, but we can choose whether or not to stand back up,*" was one of his all-time favourites. Shit, thinking about him, I can see the cock-sure look of amusement on his face. I can seriously hear the mock in his tone, and I can feel his encouragement under all the bluster and asshole tease.

I think I surprised us both, that I never raised my hand at him. Despite him taunting me every minute, of every day. I came close on a few occasions, but I never touched him.

I knew the lessons he was ramming down my throat; I'm not an idiot. And I also recognised he was giving me a reason. Somewhere to hone all the fucking pent-up emotion in me. Fixing floors, replacing leaking faucets, moving walls, and plugging tiles on the roof, ended up being that. And the backbreaking work still proved easier than talking.

Just because I didn't talk much, didn't mean he let up. He went on, and on, and fucking on. He also wouldn't let me drop doing other shit because apparently '*you always need a fall-back plan*'.

The fact is though, I owe him a lot, everything really. Some days I'm not sure I would be here without him. I fell down so many black holes I wasn't sure what was up and what way would take me further away from where I wanted to be. But every time I dropped in my grief and despair, he was there to put me straight.

The drill in my hand drops to the floor the moment I see my mobile ring. The deal is, no one calls me unless it's an emergency.

"Yeah?" I answer.

"Got a message from King. You're in charge of his baby. Get one scratch on her, and he will hunt you down. You will not be able to hide if she gets a scratch... and he will make it hurt."

"Where?"

"Precinct Six. Corner of West and..."

"Yeah. I get it."

"Take the truck and make sure you've got blankets. Not one fucking scratch."

The line goes dead in my ear. Which works. I don't need endless fill in words. I don't need much actually. Especially not this.

Grabbing a hoodie and nabbing my sunglasses and wallet, I'm climbing in the truck within a few moments. The gate is

already open when I drive past, the prospect on duty waving me through.

I take a sharp right coming out the gate, instead of going straight, but at this time of day the traffic downtown is going to suck ass. Once I get driving at a steady speed, I turn on the scanner, listening for a hint of what is going on. It's pretty fucking strange that I get called out. King has an army of men at his disposal. During the week, he leaves me be, which works well for me. I don't get involved in any of his business, but that doesn't stop him from getting involved in mine. It's lucky he called today, tomorrow I leave for an intensive training camp that promises to be nothing but painful.

Of course, today's the fucking day that my radio gives up. King told me there was water sitting in the wire, I told him to jam his fucking comments up his ass. The rest of the drive in, I spend the time arguing with King in my head. I can even hear his deep derisive laughter as I try to counter that I was busy and was going to fix the wires when I got back. Sitting at a set of lights, I realise how pointless it will be trying to win another argument against him. I should just man up and concede that once again he's been proven right by something neither of us did, but by something I did not do, which is trust.

It's not trusting him I have an issue with. I can't trust myself.

From the first memories I have, I remember being able to see situations and people's motivations as plain as fucking day. I'd walk into a room and be able to point out the usual cast of characters—the traitor, the lover, the dreamer, the realist. I could read a play before the person even thought it through. But now, I barely believe in myself. Well, that's not quite right. I just have a small issue with faith.

Checking on the clock on the dash because King does not like to be kept waiting, I throw the truck in park and am out of the cabin without a backwards glance. I pull on my hoodie, hiding my Fallen white t-shirt, because the judgemental fucks

at the police station are not the kindest when it comes to the 1%.

Shoving open the door with enough force to slam the door against the wall behind it, the fucking thing hits me in the back when I come face to face with King's baby. And there goes my fucking faith in myself again.

I was not sent to pick up King's 'baby', I was sent to pick up King's baby. And the woman who rewrote my entire life.

Raney.

Her arms are wrapped around her, she looks smaller than I remember. She's pale as fuck compared to the way she used to glow. Trust me, I've got a library of images of her stored in my head so I know all her looks. I've pretty much obsessed about her for the last forty-eight months, two weeks and two days. Her clothes look like she's been dragged through bushes and that sets my teeth grinding.

It's like something in her shakes her out of her rocking and she looks up but not at me. Jesus-fucking-Christ she steals the air out of my lungs.

Instinctively, unthought out, unplanned, you fucking name it, my feet take me to her.

And then she must realise something's different because her jade eyes rise like the morning sun... yeah, all of a sudden I'm fucking filled with a thousand extra and unnecessary words to describe her.

No shit, it's like every part of me comes back online after being in deep, deep hibernation for the last fourteen hundred and fifty-six days.

"Colt?" she asks. Though let's be real, to me her question sounds more like an exhale. Her hand hovers in the air as she looks like she's waking from a dream, stuck in that state of limbo where you wonder what is real and if you're still imagining.

And then I know how fucking real the situation is when I am saturated by her scent. Jesus, it's like I am standing in a tunnel where the walls are made of wisteria flowers.

I've been obsessed with those tiny blue, pink, and indigo flowers for years. I even tried growing them. I definitely walk into florists whenever I see them just to fill my scent bank back up, but now I realise how fucking watered down all the other wisteria in the world is. Raney is wisteria, she embodies it too. The scent wafting from her is concentrated tuberose, jasmine, sweet-pea, and freesia; unique, heady, sultry.

"Puck," I bark back absently.

I left Colt the second I left her hospital room. How could anyone go back to the way life was before I had to walk away from the most incredible person, the only person who knew me better than myself? From that moment on, who I was no longer existed.

"Fuck you too, then," she snaps, as she climbs to her feet.

I'm struck on the spot, completely torn between defending myself and obsessing over every part of our interaction. Storing her voice, how she looks, the way she smells, in my memory in case I don't ever see her again.

Her shoulder clips against my arm as she storms off. Turning, I expect to see her already out the door, and my gut seizes when I see her limping so heavily she's not even six feet away yet. Her arms aren't wrapped around her defensively, she's in fucking pain. And I had my head up my ass making everything about me.

"Far out, Raney, hold up! You misheard, I said Puck, not fuck. Let me help." I go to offer her an arm to lean on but quickly divert the offer of help to holding the door when the look on her face is pretty evident about what she thinks of me touching her.

She hobbles, like fucking hobbles, to the closest wall, leaning against it for support. I stop behind her, not quite sure

if she wants me to follow, if she wants help, or if she's having an episode of some kind.

"Hey, what's up?" I ask as she leans closer to the wall, her body hunching in on itself. My ego reads her uncomfortable posture as her wishing anyone else in the world had walked into that room, but the fucking voice of reason, the one that has been as dead inside me as my dick has been, wakes up.

"King said Puck. Puck would help me," she says, her eyes squeezed tight, her voice breaking.

What she said hits me in the chest. "Yeah, that's me," I offer.

Her eyes squeeze tighter. "He never said anything about you, Colt. Why?"

"Puck."

"Okay, sorry." She grits her teeth as she takes another shaky breath, still keeping her fucking gorgeous eyes locked away from me. And you can plainly see she's about to say more, but the next moment, instead of talking, her face contorts.

It's lucky her eyes are shut because I freak the fuck out. "What's wrong?"

She takes a few slow measured inhales and exhales before she talks quieter. "I need my medication and I think I left my bag on the seat back there."

"I'll get it. Then we can go," I say. I want to reach out and comfort her, but she needs medication, not me.

I go and am back. Without a word of a lie it takes me four, maybe five seconds. Not fucking quick enough though. Crowding around her, demanding an explanation are Hayes and Talon.

And as clear as day I can read the waves of discomfort rolling off her. I can also understand what her hand up means as she insists on space. But they want answers and they want them now. And that shit doesn't cut it with me.

“Read the situation, Talon, and take a fucking step back.” I slam them both back, spitting my words over my shoulder at him. Before the anger taking hold makes me nasty as fuck. “Hang on, are you reading Raney her rights? Fucking typical.”

“What! No!” he says.

I scoff at him. Not fucking concerned about him or Hayes because all my attention is on the way she’s swaying on her feet. Before anyone can say another word, I scoop her up into my arms as Talon rushes closer at the same time. “Talon, I will kick your fucking ass if you don’t move out of the way. Look at her! Someone in your department did this. She just told me she needs medication. I bet they didn’t even get her a glass of fucking water!”

Hayes, always the voice of reason, asks, “Raney? Are you hurt?”

She half fights against me, but I take a step away from their crowding, with her firmly in my arms. And she must be feeling bad because instead of fighting, I realise she was curling in on herself. Her head slumps against my chest as she whimpers in pain.

The noise she makes pierces something in my brain. I respond to Raney on a different level. Talon takes another step closer. My eyes lock on his mouth, which I know is about to start spewing all these fucking excuses, but I stop him with the noise that spills from mine.

I one hundred percent growl, shutting everything down. And it feels so fucking good. I let the rage of my alpha out because it feels just as right.

For the first time in my goddamn life, I stand up against Hayes and Talon. I push back against their presence with my own stronger presence. And then I do what I should have done years ago: I take Raney and leave.

She’s quieter, calmer almost as I juggle her weight to dig out my car keys. She doesn’t look at me. It doesn’t matter

though because I can feel her. And back there, she relaxed in my arms.

Placing her gently on the back seat, she's still quiet and withdrawn as I crowd around her before I pass over her bag. Her hand shakes when she tries to open it, but I lean down to help her, spilling the contents on her lap so we can find what she needs faster.

We move without talking or even looking at each other. I pass over some water as she tries unsuccessfully to open her pill bottle. Taking it out of her hand, I spill the tabs into her waiting palm. She takes a few before she points to a foil packet. I crack them open into her hand too, my brain taking in all the names. Later, I will see what they are for, but for now, I'm focussed on helping however I can.

She waves me away when she's got what she needs, keeping her eyes closed, but now she's shivering. Nabbing the blankets I bought to protect King's bike, and let's face it they're generally better than the blankets available at five-star hotels, I wrap her up in a bundle before stretching around her to put her seatbelt on.

"Raney, are you still cold?" She shivers her answer. Ripping my hoodie off, I'm helping her arms slide in my sleeves before she can protest.

I triple check if she needs anything more before I move on to dealing with the issue behind us. It's fucking weird, everything in my head is condensed to the simplest of thoughts—protect Raney. Shutting the door on her, so she's safe and secure, I turn to face them.

I'm like mid spin and Hayes is there again, right up in my face and way too close to her for my liking.

"Fuck off," I say clear as day, not budging an inch in case they try to open it on her.

Hayes looks wired. "Is she okay?"

But I look past him to Talon because he's got something he needs to say. Apparently. I can feel his anxiety pushing down

like the pressure before an electrical storm.

“What?”

He makes a weird noise, his eyes dropping to the Fallen logo on my t-shirt before he shakes his head. Like he’s fucking disappointed.

“What?” I take a step closer to him. And yeah, it’s intentional and it’s not friendly—big fucking deal.

“You know she was taken in for questioning because she’s with a known criminal, who’s wanted internationally? Twice today, she’s been with him. A fucking criminal, Colt. Of course, I’m going to ask her what the fuck is going on.” Talon’s angry. He’s throwing his arm around and jabbing his finger to make his feelings known.

I nod my head, listening to him lose his shit. The second he finishes mouthing off, I do what he just did, I make a point of staring at the badge on his hip and rub in his face his own judgement. “Must fucking grate you that she’d rather be seen with a crim, than even say a fucking word to you even with your little badge on full fucking display.”

His eyes flare, and I reckon if we were anywhere but standing out front of the local cop shop, he’d probably go at me. But with too many witnesses to pull him up, he wouldn’t.

And that’s when I turn and laugh, like throw my head to the sky and let it rip. Once I stop, I look him square in the eye. “You’re jealous, Talon. Get over it.”



CHAPTER

Fourteen

RANEY

I'm ready to murder someone. Namely every goddamn person working at CBIJ. All of them are disgusting and have been assholes the entire time to me. I'm going after them for brutality, for failing to read me my rights, you name it, I'm doing it. As soon as I can get my headache and fucking heat cramps under control.

And seeing Colt / Puck has only made my situation worse. Honestly, my ovaries nearly exploded. Colt was hot as hell when he was younger. Now, he is on another level. Complete other level.

I'm not sure what I was expecting if I ever saw Colt again, but... wow.

Everything about him has changed. I get it's to be expected after years not seeing him, but I'm still blown away by how drastic his transformation is.

It felt like he towered over me, and I can't say I didn't like it. Size usually triggers me, and in a way, I guess he did trigger me just not in a fear-based episode.

Colt's presence: well, there would never be any doubt about his designation—his alpha genetics are in him bone deep. The raw power and energy that radiates off him ignites a fast-burning fuse inside me. And what I saw in his eyes shredded the time that we've lost; it was like looking at half of me.

My head is quickly filling with the memories of us and what we went through. His amazing scent adds another

dimension in blowing my control. For the record, it's really hard to look put together when you're having a very omega response to a compatible alpha. I'm a blubbering mess on the inside.

I must have looked absolutely nuts. I should be worried about a whole lot more than what I'm currently obsessing about—him—but the heat cramps riding my ass have obliterated any common sense I have or had.

“Raney, are you in trouble?” Tris's voice scares the shit out of me. Confirming how out of whack I am.

“Tris... I'm calling a Scorned emergency!” I whimper into the handset.

“What! Wait, Sim, Ho...” she screams in my ear, and a moment later I hear the call go over to hands-free.

“Right, slow down, what's going on?” Simona's gentle voice of reason and her calmness radiates through the phone. And keeps on flowing right past me.

“I'm freaking out! Honestly, hold up, I've got like three seconds to tell you everything. No interrupting,” I give everyone a moment to settle in. “I got a new tattoo, Koz fucking loves it. But guess who works at the studio?” I don't wait for their response. I barely take another breath. “Hayes! Oh, shit, hang on, first go back before the tattoo...”

Tris snarls my name. “Raney! Calm the living shit down, and go slow...”

“I can't because Colt is here. Except Colt is not a boy anymore. He just swept me off my feet and is currently going full alpha-boss on Talon and Hayes who are also here.”

“Excuse me?” They all scream. Because my girls know all the sordid details of my teenage love, including who's who, plus my hellacious sex life.

“I'm about to go into heat!” I whisper desperately, side eyeing out the window to watch the altercation between Talon,

Hayes, and Colt. “They’re arguing out next to the car right now,” I whisper again.

“Who?” Simona asks.

“Oh shit, you guys need to be in my head. I’m having a thousand conversations with myself at once. Talon, Hayes, and Colt are still here.”

“Where is Koz?” Heidi Ho interrupts.

“Well, the tattoo studio got raided. I’m pretty sure I already told you that, Ho!”

“No, you didn’t! You started rapid firing about them. Girl, you are so far out of sorts! First up, if you’re hovering in a heat peak, I’m couriering a Unity pack to you. Are you going to the club house? I can’t remember if you and Koz were staying with King.” Heidi gets her serious momma-bear vibe going on, which helps me chill. Another confirmation that my heat is coming. If it wasn’t, Heidi and I would be bickering lovingly at each other.

I blow a big steadying breath out before answering, “Yeah. I guess I’m now. I never asked where we were staying actually.”

“Where’s King?” Tris asks. No crap, she’s always asking me how King is. I’m starting to think she has the hots for Dad which is not something I really want to think about.

“Koz and Dad are being held for questioning. Actually, I better go, I need to call our lawyers.” A slight edge of panic hits again.

“Pfft, girl, you are way more important. Shit, if those men can’t manage on their own for half an hour while we sort this crap out, I’ll come down and give them a right bloody talking to.” Heidi gets all blustery in her spike of protectiveness.

“Okay, momma-bear, what do I do?”

Sim gasps, but Heidi is the one who keeps dishing out directions. “First up, fucking eat a box of suppressants at least

until you've got your heat survival pack. Holy shit. What are they doing now? Are the three of them still there?"

"Hang on, what do the three of them look like?" Tris interrupts, and you can hear excitement in her voice. She barely finishes speaking and Heidi and Sim are backing her up, wanting all the deets.

"Talon is a police officer."

"Serious? Does he wear a uniform?" Heidi asks all breathy. She's not called Heidi Ho for nothing.

"Kind of. Well yeah, mostly."

"Hot or not?" Tristan interrupts before I can say another word.

But then I interrupt her. "Tris, he's an asshole. Kind of hot though."

"Raney..." Sim moans.

"Okay, smoking hot, but I'm not lying about the asshole thing."

"Hayes?" she asks, and I can hear the smirk on her face.

I relax back in my seat, getting distracted feeding all the guy goss to my girls. "Hayes is a little fucking cutie, actually. He's got this edgy look now, taller, covered in tattoos."

"But?" Tris asks, picking up on my slight hesitation.

"He did a runner as soon as he saw me. Like straight out the door. Gone."

"Okay, so Talon and Hayes are in the Wanker Bin at least until we figure the rest out. But Colt?" Tris goes on, getting more insistent in her quest for finding out about the guys. And I can hear the girls waiting with bated breath right next to her too.

"Puck." I say.

"Fuck?" she snaps back.

"Yeah, that's what I said."

Simona gasps in shock, “You asked him to fuck, Raney? Holy shit, that’s a little forward, don’t you think? Slow down, girl!”

“Oh Jesus, take the wheel, you bitches are crazier than I am. You guys are acting nuts.”

“Err, no, we all just got back from inner reflection and Kegel meditation,” Tris snorts and I can imagine my other Scorned Girls nodding their heads agreeing with her.

“I thought you were in heat.”

“Spiked it, baby.”

“Tris, you can’t keep doing that.”

“Settle down, Mother Vaginamite. What the actual shit... we’ve got more pressing things to discuss, like Colt,” she says tartly.

And that sets us back on track. “Oh my god. You should see him.”

Heidi interrupts, “Where’s he been?”

I do an epic eye roll before getting all comfortable and ready to tell them everything. “Yeah, well you’re not going to believe this... King’s been keeping secrets from me.”

“Holy fuck! Are you serious?” they shout over the top of each other before they start laughing hysterically.

“Well, it seems Puck is, shit I don’t know, but he’s currently wearing standard Fallen denim slim jeans and a white t-shirt that looks painted on his goddamn fucking body. He’s got muscles on muscles, and trust me, I know how big he is because I’m drowning in his damn hoodie.”

“And?” Heidi asks, all dramatically too.

“It’s lucky I’m wearing leather pants, or I would have puddled like a tube of leaking toothpaste. No shit. His smell... yeah well, you know rain...”

There’s a beat of silence before I hear a collective gasp.

“Don’t fucking say it, Raney,” Sim screams over the top of me.

“Like imagine sitting outside on a deck, overlooking a...”

“Raney, I mean it...” She yells again trying to shut me up, but I keep talking over the top of her.

“Lake and watching a thunderstorm come over the horizon and it opens up and covers you. Petrichor.”

“NO!” Sim screams.

We’ve got a list of ultimate alpha scents and falling rain is one of my top four. Weird, huh.

“Petrichor, baby. Colt smells like rain falling from the sky. Rain that saturates a field of wildflowers. His scent is everywhere too. It rises and falls like the individual bounding drops of rain. I can close my eyes and taste those little droplets on my tongue.”

“Even now?” She asks seriously once I stop rambling.

“Yeah, it’s fucking weird.”

Tris does her weird squawking laugh, “No, you dumb bitch! You just said you were wearing his hoodie. You know the one he’s been sweating and living in. His scent is ingrained in every fibre and now your little omega nose is going full fucking Dyson Hoover mode. Sucking all those scents up and feeding your greedy omega knot-trap, and we know how fucking needy you are. I seriously hope Koz looked after you...”

“Yeah, trust me, he did. In the plane over there. Oh, far fucking out, I forgot to tell you...”

“No, Raney, remember you already told us about the bimbo in the bikini. We got you. Your man is all yours, as if he would ever leave you. What’s happening now?” Tris asks calmly, trying to steer us back to sensible.

I risk a look out the side of Colt’s hoodie, and Hayes’s eyes are on me. My lungs contract sharply and a little whine falls

past my open lips.

Heidi gasps again, “Babe... double dose on the suppressors, I can hear you panting from here. Shut your fucking mouth, cross your legs. And wait up, I just got an email. You’ll have your heat pack delivered within four, maybe five hours.”

I keep watching him, whispering harshly, urgently to the girls. “Google how many tabs I can have. I just had a handful or two, maybe eight...”

Sim cracks up laughing. “You dickhead. Only you could walk straight into scorned pussy haven territory. Don’t you crumble. They did you dirty.”

“I’m thinking I can forgive as long as they can fuc...”

I stop mid-word when the driver’s door opens and Colt climbs in, “Raney, let’s get going. Do you want to sit up here with me?”

There’s quiet in my ear. Well, that’s a lie, my pulse is like a bass beat of a rave party in Berlin—hardcore techno beats too.

“Girl, was that Colt?” Simona whispers, breaking the weird pause in our phone call.

I cup my hand around the speaker on my phone. “Yeah.”

“Babe, that is not a boy,” Tris says way too loudly.

“That’s what I was telling you,” I whisper back, and as I do a weird grimace in Colt’s direction when he looks over his shoulder at me.

“You are so screwed. Take another four tablets, but make sure you eat something in the next few minutes. Ask him now!”

“Hey, do you think we can get a burger or something, I haven’t...”

“Yeah, Raney, I’ll even get your favourites, onion rings and a chocolate shake. Just this once though.” The impact of Colt’s response is instant. No shit, the way his voice drops low

and gravelly, is like dropping a vibrator in my pants. I'm a hot horny mess.

The girls squeal excitedly in my ear, like so fucking loud I have to hang up and do a series of fake coughs to try to cover up their laughter. These bitches are meant to have my back in these situations, not feed my omega heart and get me in more trouble.

A second later, I get a text from Sim. Heidi Ho says we need photos.

My fingers fly over the screen. "I might sit here if that's okay. I need to call the lawyers in a second," I answer him while I shoot off a text message to the girls: You remember they all left me. Him included?

SIM: And he was super young.

Me: Four years of pain.

SIM: What if he's been suffering too.

Me: What if he hasn't?

SIM: Lucky you're so fucking intuitive then isn't it. I'm not saying forgive him or THEM this second but what if what happened needed to happen to make you all the people you need to be, so you can...

SIM: Soz, my fat fingers. I'm trying to tell you how insightful I am. YOU ARE NOT STUPID OR OUT OF TOUCH. I'd trust you with my soul. You've got this.

TRIS: Your life, you decide who is allowed in your life. You. No one else.

Leaning my head against the window, there's still so much noise in my head. But I need to make more, I can't stop and wallow just yet.

“Any news on King, Puck?” His name gets stuck, like it’s hard to say it. He’s Colt. But obviously there’s a story as to why he’s changed his name.

“I guess we’ll get an update when we get back. I’ll swing through the drive-thru and grab you some food first. Are you good now? You didn’t look so great before.”

I squeeze my eyes shut, the reminder of how I was feeling and acting, makes my head pound again in cringe. At least, it feels like my heat tabs are slowly starting to work. “I’m getting there. I need to make a call.”

Not waiting for his approval, I flick through my contacts until I find Koz’s lawyer, Giuseppe Florentino. Evidently Giuseppe knows who I am because he answers on the first ring.

“Ms. Raney, what do you need?”

“Central Bureau of Intelligence and Justice have Koz for questioning. I don’t know where the office is or where they’re holding them. God, sorry.”

Puck interrupts quietly. “Processing is Building D, on Beach Road.”

“Giuseppe, hang on, I’m getting the address for you.”

Puck repeats himself slower, and I pass on the information to Giuseppe.

“Don’t worry about Koz, he’ll be fine. I, however, will not be if you are in any danger or hurt or...” Giuseppe is very different from the Scorned Girls in his anxiousness.

“I think I’m okay. I’m sore. I got thrown to the ground,” I interrupt, eager to get this all done so I can concentrate on food, and Puck.

Except, I have to stop talking when a fury-filled noise makes it impossible to hear anything. Puck keeps growling as he slows the car, flicking the indicator on aggressively. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out he’s about to turn the car around and go back to the police station.

“I’m okay,” I say a few times, trying to be heard over the noise he keeps making. It’s not the first time I’ve heard an alpha losing his shit, but it is the first time I’ve heard the noise coming from Puck. I go with distraction as a way to calm him, it usually works on Koz. “Puck, I need food.”

He stops snarling almost as soon as the words leave my mouth. As confirmation, my tummy gurgles at that perfect time.

And then I watch as his shoulders slump, and I can feel his disappointment. It kind of hits me in the chest, in the way he folds in on himself. I’m not surprised in a sense, the Puck I used to know was such a sweet, genuine person.

Muting my call, I barely stop from reaching out to him, “Puck, I’m good, I’m telling Giuseppe the details because he is our lawyer and I want him to file a complaint. You might not like what I say but focus on me being fine. Okay?”

“King will,” he growls through his teeth, his anger clear in his words and posture.

“King will go off,” I agree with him, “and you haven’t met Koz. I promise they won’t let what happened to me go. But the both of them will go absolutely ballistic if anything happens from this point on.”

I let my words sink in. Giving him a task to do as opposed to endless reminders of what happened. And it works.

He blows out loudly, nodding his head, like he’s pepping himself up. “You’re right.”

He’s still skating a fine line and it probably won’t take much for him to start rethinking about turning the car around, but I have to talk to Giuseppe and get the ball rolling. I watch Puck closely and go in for a sneak attack, “Hey, you said onion rings...”

The lines around his eyes go from tension to something else. “You still eat them? They’re disgusting.”

I laugh and keep the mood light, thinking we're over the worst of his frustrations. "Wash your mouth out. They're delicious and you know it. I'm going to finish up with Giuseppe."

He nods once, and then pulls back out into traffic. And I return to my phone call.

"All okay?" Giuseppe asks.

"Yeah," I say, watching Puck closely. "I'm fine. Like I said, I'm okay, just sore now. And tired."

"Did they designate you?" Giuseppe restarts his questioning. There's no hiding this man is a lawyer.

Risking a look at Puck to make sure he can't hear; I answer, turning away from him for more privacy. "Yeah."

"Public designation? Did they grant you special privileges?" Giuseppe's mannerism and tone is all professional. Even though we haven't met, I can visualise him writing every word I say down.

"Yes to the first question. But it was only Fallen and Koz left then, and they all know anyway. Special privileges were not granted in any way, shape, or form."

"Noted. Did they get Lew too? I'm in the process of wiring some money."

"Yes to Lew. I don't need money."

"I will feel a lot more comfortable knowing you have enough cash on you in case you need to disappear, Ms. Raney. I'm also going to send Rhodes as a replacement bodyguard for you. I suspect it will take him twelve hours to get there. I'll send you his photo ID so you've got it on hand. He will find you and will have cash on him."

"How long do you think Koz and Dad are going to be held?"

"I suspect they will hold them for the legally approved period of questioning. The CBIJ are getting more and more

desperate in trying to incriminate Mr. Siderno. Their lack of ability to find anything substantial to pin on either of them will have them be as aggressive and insistent as they can be, in a legal sense. Not that I know your father, but I have worked with Mr. Siderno for a long time. With the charges they've been trying to make stick, they will hold them for the full seven days and do the standard sleep and food deprivation along with endless questioning.”

“Seven days?!” I shriek.

Puck's head tips slightly.

“What do you need?” Giuseppe follows my panic.

I drop my voice low again. “Medication. The girls have already got the most urgent, but if I don't have Koz, I will need more.”

“Do you want me to make arrangements for you to stay with the local Unity Collegiate?”

I risk another look at Puck, hoping he doesn't have supersonic hearing. Inevitably, he's going to find out I'm an omega, or he might already know, but I want to be the one to actually tell him. If I choose to.

“I'd prefer you get in touch with them and let them know I'm stuck somewhere with him, or they could potentially lock me up there until I graduate, which is at nine am tomorrow morning.”

How ridiculous, it really does come down to a date and a time when I go from being a student to being a registered omega. All my classes are done, I passed with flying colours, but the processing of my official capacity and my government identification doesn't occur for a few more hours. Which means if I got stopped right this second, I could end up being deported and held at the Collegiate. I was incredibly lucky to be able to walk out of the police interrogation with my freedom.

“Koz has me listed as your lawyer everywhere already. I'll contact them immediately. What about a place to stay?”

“I think I’ll stay at the compound.”

Puck nods his head. I’m not sure he even realises he’s eavesdropping or if he cares that I know he’s listening.

Giuseppe juggles the phone, and I can hear him typing on a keyboard. “Okay. Rhodes is on his way, you have enough money but he will bring more. I will also arrange medication and speak with the Collegiate. Anything else?”

“Get Koz. I need him,” I say loudly. Not to be a dick, but because simply Koz is an important part of my life, and I do need him. “Oh shit,” I gasp, “I’m meant to be signing the Pack Dissolution Forms tomorrow.”

And this time Puck isn’t subtle in his listening. He stomps the brakes so hard I fling forward, he looks over his shoulder at me in complete disbelief, his eyes full of rage. “What. The. Fuck, Raney?” he hisses.

Except Giuseppe is talking again, telling me Rhodes will stand in Koz’s place at the lawyers and he’s sending another lawyer since he won’t be able to make it. He hangs up, telling me he’s going to organise everything, and I’m left with the beep of the terminated call in my ear, and the dark suffocating press of Puck’s emotions again, and a car full of his stormy petrichor scent.

Apparently, I take too long to answer. He starts driving again. Way too fast.



CHAPTER

Fifteen

I watch Puck's reflection in the rear vision mirror. He's angry. Really pissed actually. But I'm not worried about my safety or his mood. He doesn't lash out, he just keeps scenting up the cab of the truck with his anger while his eyes stay locked and focused on the road. It's impossible to miss the frustrated set of his shoulders or the lines of tension around his eyes. I put them there, and I want them to go away.

And this time instead of distracting him, I keep my voice as flat as I can as I feed him the truth. "It's why I'm here, Puck, to sign the Pack Dissolution Forms."

His eyes pull together as he glares harder down the road. I go to say something but he beats me to it. "I signed them fucking years ago. Why didn't you?"

There's no denying the sudden rising and growing anger in his voice. And I know I should tread carefully around alphas, but it's not something I've got a complete handle on.

"Yeah, no, that is not possible," I growl back. His insinuation that I'm the one who fucked up the pack forms is like waving a red flag in my face. This pack bullshit has been a bane of my existence for too fucking long.

Puck ignores my snark, hissing back at me. "I filed for Pack Dissolution. I used fucking legal aid to do it, the week after you left." He flicks a look out his side window away from me. Well, that's what it feels like. He keeps his gaze averted before rubbing his hand down his face.

He's angry, like seething fucking angry. Not about to lose control, but he's also not holding back on his feelings.

I respect that, in so many ways. I can't stand fake ass bullshit on any level, and he has always known that.

He really lets go of that anger too, not hiding anything from me. His emotions seep out of him. It's like getting caught up in a sudden and surging thunderstorm; anger, guilt, and deep, deep sadness falls like rain down on me. And yeah, I can feel all his emotions and him, as clearly as I can feel my own. Perhaps it was because he was the one that bit and claimed me, or perhaps it's simply because of the insane connection we always shared. And still do.

"I'm sorry," I say after a few tense moments. And I needed those to get myself under control, after being caught up unexpectedly in his storm.

But I am also fucking sorry on so many levels. It makes me sad, all of this. What happened was so fucking shit and unfair. That's one side of it, the other is that I struggle on a personal level watching him hurt, and always have. To see Colt / Puck, a boy I used to love with all my heart going through something that clearly upsets him, of course I'm going to be empathetic of his pain.

"What?" he barks. In the reflection of the mirror, I watch his eyebrows scrunch together. His anger makes his face angular; his voice is like cut glass as he hits his hand against the steering wheel while he speaks. "I'm the one that is sorry, not you! So fucking sorry, Raney."

And he must be. Because his shoulders lock up, and he plants his foot down on the accelerator, driving straight past the burger joint. He blows through all the lights. He doesn't say another word, although it's not like he needs to, his stress makes his sweet rain scent bitter and it continues to fill the cabin in warning.

He's one hundred percent spiralling or caught inside his thoughts. But like he always did, he traps me in the moment

with him. Everything else kind of disappears, and honestly, I'm stunned when the car slows and we get waved through the gates of the Fallen compound. Puck parks out the front of the clubhouse, slamming the door shut behind him before even turning the truck off.

Joker appears at my door looking pretty fucking angry himself. He opens my door, and I basically fall into his arms. Shivering and feeling like shit again but that's the nature of my new designation. Alpha emotions can build me up or drag me down.

"Come on, Raney, let's get you warmed up," Joker says tentatively, immediately taking stock of the situation. But he's an alpha, so he'd be able to sense the bitterness without me explaining.

"I need something to eat," I offer quietly. My eyes are locked on the ground as I try to stop the waves of nausea from surging up and making me chuck. In a normal situation I might be able to deal with Puck's mood, but my heat spike and the tablets are adding to the mess.

"Puck! You didn't stop for fucking food?" Joker yells. Sounding very much like an angry parent.

I jolt in his arms, not realising he'd be pulling that bullshit on me. My eyes jump to Puck's back as he stops mid stride in his angry escape. It's lucky Joker's got an arm for me to hold on to because I nearly get knocked to my knees by a violent spike in Puck's emotion. It explodes out of him and the fallout from it is impossible to ignore.

"Walk it off, Puck," Joker says bluntly. His voice is icy cold, and he talks so loud it hurts my ears when he speaks too closely to me. But it hurts more when Puck disappears into the night.

"King never told me," I say, dropping my head to my uncle's chest, sounding as broken as I feel. Joker smells like my childhood, and I use him to claw my way back to normality.

“Yeah, well in Puck’s defence, he knows nothing about your life either, Raney. We made a conscious decision to keep you both separate in every possible way. It’s not just on King you’ll have to go off at, we were all in on it.”

“Tomorrow, I will be so fucking angry with you all for deceiving me. What you guys all did is pretty fucking huge. Tonight, I need food.” I push out of his arms, because while I love my uncle, he does not have what I want or need.

He takes a step back, seeing me struggle to be myself. But my stubborn independence in the face of adversity is nothing new. And I must look bad, because instead of giving me shit about it, he flicks his head in the direction of the clubhouse, “What happened?”

“Honestly, it’s been an absolute shit show since we landed. Everything that could go wrong, went wrong, but it finished with me telling Puck why I’m here.”

Joker’s head drops a little, and he sighs in understanding. “I’ll get you settled with the others then go see him. He won’t be doing well, but that’s on us, Raney. Not you. He’s a Fallen now, and we look after our own.”

He steps away, like he’s going to leave me to chase after Puck, and yeah, that stings.

“And what am I?”

“Tired and bitchy.” Joker stops and turns, pointing towards the clubhouse.

And like always, all my uncles, and the pack omegas and sweet butts, greet me as I walk in. They all blatantly ignore the way my foot drags and how heavy my limp is. If I called for help, they’d all rush over and do whatever they could, but until I ask, they’ll keep on ignoring me. The last time one of them tried to help, I screamed like a fucking sea-hag. A tad embarrassing for all of us.

“Hey, everyone. Sorry, I’m in a bitch of a mood. Let me eat and have a beer before we start the reunion. I’m actually

happy to see you all,” I offer the whole room with a half-smile.

Someone restarts the music to the usual level which is loud, and the chattering restarts like I didn’t just walk back in here after a few months away.

Climbing to sit on King’s empty seat in front of the bar, because I’m the only person in the world allowed to, I’m presented with a plate of food someone has hastily put together, and a soda. Downing the soda in one mouthful, I wave over to Molly the barmaid on duty, asking for a beer.

The food instantly settles the nausea from the suppressants in my stomach. Nothing is going to calm the tempest in my head except time.

“Molly, did you go on that holiday down to see the Vegas Chapter?” I ask, although I have to yell to get heard over the noise.

She turns down the volume, giving a one finger salute to a couple of prospects who moan at the drop of music. “Yeah, caught up with Mama Brown and Cass. It was good.”

“And everyone is treating you good here?”

She laughs, coming to lean up against the bar to chat. “Yeah. You know it. I even got a pay raise.”

I should have known me talking would be a catalyst. Joker, Ibis, and Hambone come over. Without being asked, Molly turns and leaves, ending our catch up before it even starts. The rest of the crowd get up, with drinks in hand, and follow her to the other bar area. Once the door closes, the interrogation begins.

“So, what happened?” Ibis says, leaning against the bar.

“It was clearly a set-up, maybe it was because they found out Koz was coming or, I don’t know. Have you heard from King?”

“Nah, we got word out from one of our sources though. Both King and Koz are being held at the same place, separate

cells, along with the others. I've spoken with Janice but she won't be able to see King until the morning. She'll lodge a fuck tonne of paper, but without a doubt, they'll be in there for seven days at least."

"Yeah, Giuseppe thought the same."

"Giuseppe?" Joker, asks impatiently.

"Koz's lawyer. Which reminds me, a man named Rhodes is coming as my bodyguard since Lew and Koz are out. And that's not in disrespect to anyone here, but you all know the way Koz is."

Joker tips his head agreeing. "Yeah. It's good. I'll go see the guys on watch tonight and let them know. I want you down at King's house, Raney. We're getting raided too many fucking times at the moment. It's just the usual bullshit, and it looks like you do not need the stress."

"About that." I pull a weird face, before pulling my hair up in a messy bun. "I've got emergency medication coming from Unity. Can we please be discrete about it? My heat's coming up, but with the medication and the supplies they send, I'll be able to spike."

"Okay, we'll keep a couple of prospects on watch down the back perimeter too and Rhodes will be with you," Joker says. And as King's VP he's the one that makes all the decisions.

"What about Puck?" I ask.

"Not your concern, Raney. You focus on you, and we'll focus on him. Anyway, I'll probably go down and stay with him at the stadium for a day or so."

"What?" I bark out.

Joker points his finger at me, staring me down like I'm about to argue. "Not my business to tell you what Puck is up to. And on this one I only answer to King, not either of you two. What else?"

I don't get my back up because he's not wrong. And I'll find out myself without my meddling uncles getting involved.

"Talon was there today. Twice. He's going to find out about my designation if he goes snooping through my file."

"Might be unavoidable, but we'll deal when we have to. However, we have to, too." He pumps his fist, being threatening, making me roll my eyes at him.

I look away for a minute, coming back to their watchful and overprotective gazes. "I also have to go down to their lawyer's office tomorrow, to sign the forms."

"All right, you take your guy, and two of ours. You don't go anywhere by yourself. They go everywhere with you, Raney. Including if you need to snap one off." He jabs his finger at me again in case I didn't understand his words apparently. Douchebag.

I grit my teeth and swallow the bitchy words on my tongue as I start to feel like all my freedom is being stripped away because I've been naughty or something. But the more sensible side of me acknowledges I'm more than happy to have as many people as I can get to go with me tomorrow. Although, his reaction isn't necessarily just about me, I get that; King would have lost his shit because of the cops sniffing around.

"I'm okay," I say softly. And if I don't arc up, they'll relax too. It's a win-win situation. "Any chance you can come with me, Joker? It's just I don't know Rhodes."

Joker stands up. "Come on, let's get you settled in King's place, and then I'll suss out the finer details with Puck about what he's got going on."

I go to follow, but my knee locks up. A split-second later pain screams through me, and I can't hide that from them. I breathe through the worst of it. There's no way I'm going to be able to walk down to the house after the day I've had. "You'll have to drive me down. I can't walk that far."

“I thought your dicky knee was getting better,” Hawk says, holding an arm out for me to hold onto too.

“It was, until one of the lovely agents at CBIJ decided I was taking too long to get up, or down. Both probably.”

And much like the noise Koz, King, and Puck made, my uncles’ anger sounds the same.

Hawk goes full mom mode on me. “I’ll get you some better pain meds than what you’ve got.”

“How do you know I don’t have good pain meds?”

Ibis grins, looking a little crazy, “Because you’re still looking like you’re itching for a fight. Don’t you fucking forget we know you, no matter where you live, you’re still our pseudo kid. I’ve got just what you need, some wicked buds just arrived. Have a smoke before you go to sleep.”

“Yeah, that would be good, actually,” I answer.

“You should have come here before you went to Deluge, Raney.” Joker swings around suddenly, not hiding how pissed off he is. I knew this was coming. Despite all the other shit, all of them will be itching to have a go that I didn’t come see Dad and them as soon as we got in.

“Nah. I had heaps more important things to do,” I grin, pointing to my new tattoo.

“Clean that up and put some cream on that before you get stoned.” Ibis pulls me to a stop and pushes my head to the side so he can read it properly. His finger goes to touch it.

“Not sure Koz would like you touching his name on my body, Ibis,” I say quietly because everyone here knows how possessive Koz is.

The touching thing is a weird one. If I initiate it, Koz doesn’t have an issue. It’s a different story if the other person initiates touching me. Apparently, it’s an alpha thing, though I’m pretty sure it’s a Koz thing. If I didn’t like it, I would have cut off all ties with him by now, but the thing is I fucking love

the way he owns me. His possessiveness feeds my soul if truth be told.

“Don’t you fucking dare tell him I even looked at it, Raney,” Ibis snaps, not even bothering to hide his trepidation. “And Joker’s right, the deal is you come see your family first before you start doing all your other shit.”

“Aww, are the widdle bikies upset...” I tease.

“Fuck, Joker’s right, you are tired and bitchy. Grab a couple of extra blunts for her or she’s going to be snarking on us the whole time she’s here.” Hawk laughs.

And then I lean on him, putting my arm over his shoulder while Joker takes the other side, and the two of them carry me out to the car. My car, the one dad got for my birthday years ago. Obviously I’ve never driven it, way too many memories tied up with it.

The guys set me up in my old bedroom at King’s place; they leave me with enough weed to make a dealer jealous, and a promise to check on the house during the night. By the time I’ve had a shower, the omega pack from the girls still hasn’t shown up. I’ll probably freak out in the morning, but instead, I climb into my childhood bed, fluff up all the blankets I can find making, an ad hoc nest before I burrow under and float off to sleep. Like literally, I’m so fucking high and happy as I cuddle into my nest of blankets and Puck’s rainy scent drenched hoodie, I’m glad no one can see my stupid grin.



CHAPTER

Sixteen

God knows what time it is, but a constant banging wakes me. Like it's one, two, three, four, BANG. One, two, three, four, BANG. It's not like it's unusual because at the compound, something is always going on. Unless bikies are doing a 'job' that requires them to be stealthy, they only have one volume—loud. But this is different.

Pulling on a pair of sweats from the closet, I stumble around my bedroom. The night is fading, but it's still cold, so I nab Puck's hoodie from out of my nest before sliding into a pair of old boots to find out what the hell is going on.

The banging starts and stops. Following a pattern, but you can hear it's not mechanical or electrical.

Opening the front door, I walk face first into the back of somebody. The black suit, irrespective of the time of day, gives him away.

"Shit, sorry," the male voice answers before the man swings around and backs up a bit, explaining who he is. "Rhodes, ma'am."

"I figured. You don't have to stay out in the cold, Rhodes. Please knock next time, and never call me ma'am again. It's Raney."

He nods but doesn't make a move to shake hands. I've met a few of Koz's bodyguards, I know the type. I also know it's fruitless to try to get them to change their ways, or the rules of their employment. Koz's thing about people touching me is included in all his staff. It's pretty funny really. Anyway, if

Rhodes and I are going to be together, I want him comfortable and us on friendly terms.

“Any idea what the noise is?” I ask, looking out into the yard, hoping for a clue so I can figure it out and go back to bed.

He nods before pointing over towards the old shed where King stores his shit.

“Anything I need to worry about?”

“No, ma’... Raney,” he says with another nod of his head.

“Cool. Want to put the coffee machine on? I’ll be with you in a few minutes and we can...”

“I should come with you,” he interrupts.

I stop, hold his gaze, because even though he’s an alpha, he’s not in the same parallel universe as the one I’m used to talking to. Holding his stare while I talk to him is easy. “I’m not being a cow, okay, but you just told me everything was fine. We’re at the Fallen compound, and I suspect you know a lot about me, which also means you know I grew up here.” I don’t wait for an acknowledgement because he’d be interrupting if I was wrong. “If you really perceive I’m walking into trouble, then yes, by all means, come with me but otherwise, make yourself some breakfast. I’ll have a macchiato if you’re doing coffee, please.”

That’s the other thing about Koz, he’s a little coffee obsessed and everyone who works with him has to know how to make a good, proper coffee.

Leaving Rhodes there to decide his move, I take my time walking towards one of the older buildings on the property. King banned me from coming over here years ago, I can’t remember the exact reason why. As I round the corner, I guess I figure out the reason.

The whole place has been set up like a shooting alley. Except it’s not guns that’s being fired off, it’s pucks. I only know one person in the world who plays and right now he’s

off in his own world. He's also wearing nothing but a pair of athletic shorts, the logo of the local ice hockey team, the Wolverines, stretched around his thick thigh, which should be criminal.

The visual brings a similar response to my body like watching porn does. I get all warm and tingly. Puck is worthy of my instant reaction. He is utter, delicious perfection. The muscles on his back bunch up and his arm swings back as he batters his stick. For a person his size, he moves with speed and dexterity that is both impressive but insanely hot too. I shouldn't sexualise him... but fuck that, I do. Every part of me gets overly sensitive the longer I watch too.

He lines up shot after shot and doesn't miss a single one. The sweat drips off him, making all the peaks and troughs of his sculptured body stand out in the low light. Even before the last one hits the barrier, he's off racing after them and to collect all the fallen ones. And watching his ass fill his shorts as he squats down, I need either Koz for some relief or another box of suppressants stat, because honestly, I don't just tingle anymore, I burn.

I swear I don't make a noise, but when he turns, his eyes instantly find me. And maybe I'm foolishly imagining or wanting everything to be the way it used to be between us, but I'm sure I see nothing but deep, deep need in his eyes. I stay stock still—I'm not sure I could move away even if I wanted to. I'm under his spell.

Everything drops to the ground, and then he's in front of me so close I can count the beads of sweat on his chest. Or lick them.

"Raney," he whispers my name. He pulls my attention off his chest, and what I see in his eyes is as real as what I imagined.

Something in my chest lets go. How fucking desperate is that? My ego and broken heart was pining to know that he hadn't forgotten me and still wanted me after all this time.

Not looking away, because like I said, Jesus-fucking-Christ, Puck is all alpha now. I swim in his deep cerulean blue eyes as he smiles at me with a confidence that could set panties on fire around the world. I get completely lost watching him and miss when he starts slowly trailing a finger over the scar on my cheek.

It's hard not to flinch. And that's not because of his touch, because that feels like heaven. It took a long time for me to accept the fact I was left scarred, physically, and spiritually. I was pretty fucking bitter and angry for a long time. Shallow minded or conceited were labels I often used to describe myself because the reality was my ego had been blown to bits. I thought no one would ever consider or call me pretty again. I'd say for anyone, that's a really fucking hard path to walk, when you go from being attractive to being marred. But Koz changed all that, and he keeps making sure I remember my beauty isn't defined by the scars I wear on my face. Puck, in one touch, makes me believe it too.

"Raney..." His voice is so calm and quiet. The pain he leaks as he touches my face is the complete opposite. It's impossible not to feel how hurt he is.

Grabbing his hand, I hold his fingers against my face. "You didn't do it. I never blamed you," I say.

"I've done nothing but cause you pain," he says, his eyes falling away as he gets sucked up by the guilt that holds us all hostage.

I shake my head. And take a step away. Because otherwise, I'll be climbing up his thick thighs, reassuring him how fucking perfect he is, and always has been. I might be there physically, but... I'm an omega, on the downward spiral to a heat spike or an all-out heat. My wants are a little skewed by my needs.

"Come have breakfast," I say, stepping away further, holding my hand out.

He hasn't moved an inch. And in a way that's okay. I know I'm pushing hard. But he eventually takes a step. In the wrong direction, and I berate myself for being so demanding as I turn to walk away. Rejection once again nipping at my heels. And I fucking hate how small it makes me feel: desperate and lonely too.

I keep my eye locked on the path back to King's.

"Hey, wait up. You can't seriously invite me to breakfast then walk off!"

And in a handful of words, he makes me feel such a sense of relief I can't help the smile that bursts over my face. Twisting around to look at him, the sneaky shit is right up close behind me too. He'd walked away to grab his t-shirt, sadly. Luckily too though because his near nakedness is like honey on toast: de-fucking-licious.

"I owe you a chocolate shake and onion rings, Raney. Last night I got thrown seeing you. But today we can grab some food."

When he speaks, a light breeze blows bringing me a nose full of his scent. And today it's like the falling rain on a summer's day, the one that promises new growth and energises everything around it.

I have to play dumb and pretend I'm considering his offer. I'm completely scent struck. The softer side of me is happily lost in actually seeing Puck again. The way he smells keeps me in that sweet haze, letting memories of our happy times rule the moment. I fob off my stupor with a shrug, trying to maintain a little bit of my cool, while waiting for my more practical side of my personality to come back online. "It's no worries. I got super stoned and passed out anyway".

He laughs. And I wasn't expecting it. Nor was I expecting the transformation of his face, or his presence when he smiles. It's like standing in a sun shower after being caught in a rainstorm. I melt, completely and utterly too.

“Puck! Give me some fucking warning, would you,” I joke. And it’s crazy how easy and natural it is that we fall back into the way we were headed years ago.

Except it seems the day is full of endless surprises, fucking good ones too, because he slings his arm around me like he always used to do. His step falters, and I swear I hear him groan, but he hides it well. Or perhaps I really did imagine that part but Puck is muddling everything up inside me.

“I missed you, so fucking much, Raney,” he affirms softly, leaning his head on mine.

“I missed you a lot too, Puck,” I say back, digging myself deeper into his snuggle.

We stay wrapped up in each other as we walk slowly back home, neither of us wanting to hurry the intimacy we share. Puck compensates for my steps by taking absurdly small ones. The both of us come to a screeching stop when Ibis is standing at my door holding a parcel.

And fuck the local collegiate. I know they did this on purpose, because without a doubt my girls would have covered their ass, and mine. The parcel should be discreetly wrapped, but it’s not. The Omega designation logo is emblazoned all over the offensive peach coloured post pack right alongside the Unity Collegiate logo. In case anyone was slow or missed where it came from, the assholes addressed it to Omega Raney Grady/Jones.

I go to say a million things, but Puck covers it better than I could. He holds his hand out for Ibis to pass over the parcel, and then he nods at him as he walks us inside. “Breakfast, huh? You know I eat like a horse; you do remember that, don’t you?”

My phone interrupts me before I can answer. I point him towards the kitchen and race to my bedroom where I left it. Miraculously, I manage to grab it before it rings out.

“Micina... I’m on a timed call. So many things to say to you.” Koz’s voice is like a warming blanket on my strange

mood. “I love you, sweetheart. I’m coming to get you very soon, but these fucking imbeciles are playing school yard games. Rhodes will be glued to your ass. Giuseppe’s told me he has organised everything you need, and you will call him if you need anything else. Today when you go to that meeting, if you don’t feel safe, I want you to walk out, and we can resolve that outstanding issue my way.” He chuckles at his implied promise of murder, and I roll my eyes.

I’m one of those people that walks and talks, and I find myself in the kitchen watching Rhodes handle the coffee machine like a trained barrister, while Puck is unloading the fridge by the looks.

“Raney, jump online and book that holiday we were talking about,” he starts slowly, and I look around for a pen and paper. Koz has always been an open book when it comes to his business. I don’t often get involved on the order side of things, but I know what to do in an emergency. If it was the accounting side of things we were talking about, I could list off his ten highest grossing money streams like listing off what I want on a burger.

“Hang on, just getting a pad of paper. Since, I got those train tickets wrong last time,” I say to fill in time while I get everything organised. “Okay, good looking, I’m ready for my holiday please.”

I can feel him smile through the phone. “I’d like you to triple check your calendar again, my preference is we go for ten nights, flying into Bora Bora by private helicopter, not the fucking sea plane. Then perhaps after that we could just go for a quick trip down to Alaska so I can claim you properly under the Aurora Borealis. Not the other way round, micina. I want your skin tanned honey gold while I knot you senseless in a winter wonderland until you can’t talk.”

The call clicks off. And I burst into action.

“Rhodes, did you bring a laptop?”

“Yes, ma’am, it’s in the car.”

“Can you grab it for me, please?”

He stops making coffee without being asked twice and moves through the house to retrieve it.

“All okay, Raney?” Puck asks, stopping his food gathering to take a step towards me. And I don’t miss the way he can read my anxiety, or his rising need to help.

“Yeah, I won’t be a minute.” I scribble down all of Koz’s coded message, triple checking over my notes before turning my attention back to Puck. “What are you making?”

His eyes search my face for more, but it’s not coming. If Koz wants to share with Puck the intricacies of his business and life, I’ll leave that for him to do. Much like if Puck would like to share with Koz, and me, what the hell he’s doing living at King’s.

We keep watching each other until Rhodes returns, placing the laptop bag on the bench in front of me. Rhodes stays close, leaning down to whisper in my ear. “Joker is waiting outside with two people asking to see you. Hayes and Talon, ma’am.”

My eyes fly to Puck, who’s still watching me. His eyes have narrowed, and they keep darting down towards the front door. Clearly, he heard Rhodes. He goes to storm past. I grab his arm on the way though, pulling him to a stop. “They are here to see me.”

“Why though, Raney. Why?”

I swing around on the chair and stand in front of him, blocking his path. “I’m not that sure, but that’s for me to work out. You were getting everything out for breakfast, so why don’t you keep doing that. If Joker and Rhodes are here, I’m not terribly fazed if we ask Hayes and Talon in, are you? I think they’re pretty fucking stupid coming here, but hey, I’m also busting to know why they think they have the right to be here at this time in the morning.”

Rhodes waits for my answer. And Puck searches my face for more too.

“Puck, give your hoodie to Rhodes for him to hold.” I smile sweetly. In my head it makes sense, but now I say it, I really don’t know what I was thinking.

Puck doesn’t say a word or move a muscle. He just keeps staring at me, and it’s completely unnerving. I go to say something, but he interrupts me, and then he screws up my earlier assumption that he’s being tentative in our reunion as we get to know each other again.

“Fuck off, Rhodes. Go do your thing. It looks like Raney and I need to chat,” Puck barks out. His voice isn’t loud but there’s no misconstruing the expectation that comes from an alpha giving a command.

Rhodes looks to me, and I smile as I answer. “It’s good, we won’t be a second.” He walks off but stays close.

Puck doesn’t move a muscle, and somehow, he purposely slows everything down, acting as if we’ve got all the time in the world. And we do.

“Does Koz like you telling him what to do?” He asks quietly once we’re alone. There’s a hardness to his voice, similar to the tone Koz gets when he’s dancing the fine line of being an alphahole and being a gentleman.

Puck stays leaning against the fridge, waiting for an answer, his eyebrows hovering high suggestively but also with a hint of... predatory entitlement peeking through. My head is immediately full of visuals of a lion stalking his lioness, or a sweet gazelle, to devour. Both work. Definitely both work.

As he waits, he scents the air. I look at him stunned, wondering if he caught onto my thoughts telepathically about him being a lion or if it’s our bond. He keeps watching me closely, while a thick heady cloud of his rain scent floods the kitchen. A smug as fuck smile changes his face when I have to grab a hold of the bench so I don’t slide off my chair as I keep getting hit by his scent.

I don’t need a mirror to know how I look. I can feel the way my body responds to him; a rush of energy races all the

way up my spine, while goosebumps dance over my skin.

“I’m glad I woke you up, it saved me the time because I was coming over anyway. Make no mistake about my intentions. I spent all night talking with Joker about my freak out last night. Seeing you, hearing you talk about those forms stirred up a shit load of feelings inside me, about a whole fucking lot too. But it doesn’t change anything between us, and you yourself already know that.”

Puck maintains this really calm, and insanely confident way of talking, not rushing out what he wants to say for the sake of our waiting visitors. In all honesty, I’m thrilled he’s taking his time. The world can fucking wait. Right here, right now I’m getting some answers, some understanding about him. I think. He’s got me all thrown for a loop being as direct as he is but it’s such a good loop.

Puck takes a few slow deep drags of the air, sniffing it in and closing his eyes. A slow smirk pulls his lips up, as he opens his again. Even over the distance that separates us, you can’t miss the different light in his blue eyes, or maybe that’s what resolution looks like. He’s got all my attention, that’s for sure.

“I made the decision I’m not letting you go so easily this time. If our connection burns out, so be it.” He holds my gaze with his. “But it won’t”.

“And I have no say in the matter?”

His lips draw up more, but he ruins my underwear when he bites his lip before answering in a deep husky voice. “I mean, you can argue all you like, but you respond to me on a baser level, Raney. You always did and nothing is going to change that.”

“I’m not the same person.” I argue futilely. For some fucking reason I think I have to argue this.

His eyes flick to the omega package sitting on the kitchen bench between us, before his eyes inch slowly up my body, like really fucking excruciatingly slowly until they settle on

my face again. And Puck doesn't hide his reaction either; his eyes hood and even without me directly looking at his dick he pulls my attention down to it as he squeezes himself. Good god, Koz and him share the same cocky confidence, and yeah, it's my weakness.

"I'm not the same person I was either, Raney. King kept us separated for a reason, but now we're both here again, I want you to know I'm not going anywhere. And... I'll be doing everything possible so you understand that in time I will be calling you mine again."

I gulp. Or perhaps it's one of those breathy moans. I hide it, or I think I do with the first thing that pops into my head, "I thought you were leaving today."

Instead of slowing him down, it feeds him. He chuckles under his breath, and his happiness oozes off him. "Makes me feel almost indestructible knowing you were talking about me and also remembering I was going. Confirmation again of how right we are. And you're right I was going, but you changed all that. I've spoken to Coach and I've been given special consideration, because our time is now, Raney. Nothing will stop us from happening."

Behind me, I hear hammering at the front door. Joker's always been pretty fucking impatient, so it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out he wants in.

"Rhodes." I go to say more but the man disappears and a second later, I can hear his dismissive shut down on the dramatics at the door. Instead of returning, he stays down there.

"What about Koz?" I ask Puck.

"What about him? He knew you were coming here. The boys told me last night a little bit about you two."

I huff a very unimpressed laugh.

"Don't worry, your uncles are just as protective as they've always been. It doesn't change anything. You get that? You

being with him, King doing what he did, none of it matters except you and I are together again for a reason.”

“And what about me being an omega?”

He laughs, and yeah, it’s one of those deep, sexy ones before he all but purrs at me. “My guess is, that is just going to give us the reason why we make perfect sense, Raney. And always have.”



CHAPTER

Seventeen

PUCK

I feel like a bit of a cock making a play for her now, especially after running from her last night, but nothing is holding me back anymore. It can't. I already lost her once, and I will not let it happen again.

What happened to us was so fucking wrong. And I refuse to let Raney think for another second that I wanted to leave her. So today is the day I return all the power to her. And where we hopefully restart us again.

It's so fucking obvious her heat is coming up, and in a lot of ways that is what's driving me; her nature is calling to mine, and mine is nearly fucking feral with a need to protect, and fucking ravish her. Every time I breathe in, her sweet, spicy wisteria scent fills my lungs, that primal side starts screaming over and over, 'Do not let her go.'

Being around Raney, knowing she was sleeping a few hundred yards from me last night was a lesson in restraint. The second I saw her yesterday, I was rendered pretty much tongue tied, but the time overnight has given me clarity along with a million words I need to say.

My alpha pines for her.

It's not like it's a surprise. From the first time I saw her, I knew Raney Grady was mine. But since the moment I saw her again, I've been hard pressed not to go fucking ape-man, flip her over and fuck her until she screamed I was hers too.

Talon and Hayes showing up pushed my hand, but at the same time it's fucking Raney I'm talking about! This woman

has been my only motivator for years, and before that she was my sole reason for living.

Never once in the time I have known her have I hid the way I feel about her. Yeah, when I was younger every fucking man and his dog gave me shit and said I'd grow out of my infatuation. It hasn't happened. It won't ever happen. If Raney doesn't want me, that is not going to change the way I feel about her.

And nothing I've said is a lie, or an over exaggeration. I haven't slept since I saw her, except I've never felt more awake. I did talk with Joker for hours on hours, and not for the first time did the conversation revolve around me and her. But with Joker I know bullshit doesn't cut it, so it wasn't a night of sharing fairy-tale endings. It was me running through with him again, asking for his blunt guidance in a few areas. Which he gave. He might be one of Raney's uncles, but all the Fallen are my brothers too. I trusted the wisdom they've each shared with me over the past few years.

Watching her responses as we stand off staring at each other now, I know I did the right thing. We've got a lot of fucking ground to cover, but us being together is not going to be one of those obstacles. I'm not going to pretend we haven't got hard discussions in front of us, Raney deserves to hear my truth, and that's what she'll be getting.

As easy as it is to see that Raney is mine, it's also easy to see what my girl has been through. Or it might be Mother Nature showing me that I'm looking at a part of my soul because even though she damn well glitters in her beauty, I can also see how fucking battered she is on the inside. I'll make it my mission to make sure she never fucking doubts herself again. This isn't about me, it's about me restoring her faith in herself.

“Is that all this is, Puck? You want to try my omega body out?”

“What?” I stammer for a moment before I get overly pissy. “Raney, what the fuck?”

Her chin rises. I'm no expert in omegas, but once upon a time I was an expert in all things Raney. With her designation as obvious as the hair on her head, I drop my shields and flood the kitchen with my presence, and my scent before I lock my knees to stop myself crowding her.

“Sure, I want you in my bed, but not as much as I want you in my life. I said it before, and I'll keep saying it again until you believe me: I let you go once, I will never do it again.”

“And that means?” Her eyes harden but the rest of her is relaxing. I can see her responding, and scent it too. Feeling bolder, I take a step closer to the only person in the world who could ruin me.

I stop close to the counter, putting my hand next to hers, so our hands touch. “That means, I want to prove to you that I can be who you need. It means, you get all the parts of me no one else does.” Sure, King knows some, but he doesn't know all of it. And I think we both know how fucking shit things got for the both of us.

She looks at me, and just as I expected, Raney doesn't puddle to water at my veiled confession of how close I came to succumbing to my own version of hell. I can see her thoughts jumping a million miles an hour. But I wait for her to talk. I've said all I need to say. For now.

I can see her working through everything, but I wait. She surprises me when she climbs off the seat she was on and closes the distance between us. “No secrets between us, Puck. Joker said you're Fallen but...”

I drop my hands to her waist and pull her so her chest is touching mine. “Raney, I'm yours first and foremost. You've always owned every part of me. The Fallen have had my back until I got my chance to stand in front of you and be who you needed me to be.”

“No apology?” she asks softly, her hands falling to my waist too.

“I don’t think you’re after an apology, and I don’t think you need one either. Look at you, you’re shining bright like a diamond.” I drop my voice low, trying to keep from picking her up. I’d love to touch her, to push the hair off her face as I speak to her, but I stay put, hoping she hears and believes my sincerity. “It gutted me to know that I wasn’t strong enough to protect you. What happened destroyed me for a fucking long, long time. I can say sorry if that’s what you want, but words are words. So instead, I’ll prove I’m who you need me to be now, I’ll show you that no matter what happens to us, we can’t be separated. They tried once, they’ll never get the chance to again.”

I dig in my shorts, of course, it’s not as smooth as I thought it would be in my head, and I drop the fucking ring. She laughs softly, but when I pop back into view, nabbing her hand, I hold her eye when I suck her thumb into my mouth. My tongue circles her thumb a couple of extra times too because, fuck me dead, it shouldn’t turn me on, but it does. “Instead of an apology, I thought a promise would be better. I never got to give you a promise ring, Raney, but I am now. I promise you so many things, but most of all I promise to take my time falling back in love with you. I don’t want to waste a minute of our second chance at this.”

I don’t really need her answer, because the rapid rise and fall of her chest, the glittering emotions in her eyes are pretty fucking clear. But in case I don’t get those two obvious signs, the smile on her face matches the one in my dream when she said yes.

Miraculously, the ring fits and it looks so fucking right, I nearly tear up myself. “You know, I actually bought this for your twentieth birthday. And yeah, I worked my ass off for the thirty bucks it cost me.” She laughs softly at that, but it’s true. I did whatever I could around the rink to scrape up the money needed, anything when you’re seventeen is back breaking.

She looks at it a few times. And then she fiddles with it, twisting it until it feels right. “Thanks.”

“But?”

Raney spins the ring again. “I want the Pack Dissolution forms signed, Puck.”

“And I’ve already told you, I lodged the forms myself. But those forms won’t dissolve our bond. The pack thing can go, but this thing with you and me, no.”

“And if I do want this thing between you and me done?”

I look at her, again. I nearly stare her down, and hot damn, she holds my challenge. I break first, looking away quickly to the side and by the time I look back, she’s smiling. I take a chance and scoop her up into my arms because, yeah fuck that, I have to. I have to hold her, like I need her scent to fill my lungs.

“We ain’t done. We’ll never be done,” I say as she wraps her arms around my shoulders, drawing us even closer.

“You seem determined to make a point this morning, Puck,” she whispers.

“I kind of want to scent you up, Raney. All these voices screaming at my head to do it. And if Hayes and Talon weren’t here, I fucking would.”

I feel the recoil of surprise jolt through her. But like I said, I’m going with it today. I’m not sure where all this fucking full on immediate claiming need is coming from, but I like it. A lot. “I don’t want anyone to interrupt us when I scent you up. That’s why I’m not doing it now. No other reason,” I whisper. And then she reacts with a shiver that essentially makes me hard as fucking steel.

“What about Koz?”

“He’ll have to learn to share, I reckon.”

“He doesn’t like to share.”

I hum because I get completely distracted by the smallest tip of her lips as she teases. She blushes pink, and after she licks her lips, leaving them slightly parted. It looks like she’s

trying to control her breath, not sure if it's for her sake or mine but her scent keeps smashing against me. Reinforcing how right I got the timing.

“We'll see,” I shrug back, not worried at all. Nor am I concerned when she reaches up to plant a soft kiss on the edge of my mouth before she wiggles out of my hold. I let her down after I drag her over my length, of course. And yeah, I see the way her eyes fill with heat, and it's impossible to miss the syrupy sweetness of her desire. Caveman subtlety for the win.

“What about Hayes and Talon?”

“They're only my business if they upset you. I'm not going to vet who brings you happiness, but I will be next to you.”

“And your brother? No one has mentioned Reid yet. Why is that?”

“Because he's dead to me. My whole family are, Raney. I haven't seen or spoken to them. I won't. I chose you then and I choose you now.”

She spins around and walks off with a deliberate sway of her hips. Before she gets to where Rhodes is standing guard, she twists around, talking over her shoulder. “Go to the training camp, Puck. We're taking us slow, despite everything your body and mine are telling us. I don't want to mess our chance up because we want to jump into bed together.”

“After the meeting, maybe, not before. You're not going alone to the meeting,” I yell back at her.

“I won't be alone. I've got Rhodes, he'll save me,” she answers, a cheeky grin on her face.

“Raney! Let's make one thing really fucking clear... you can tease me all you like, but I swear to fucking god, you use another person to do that and I'll lock you in my house and show you what tease means.”

I seriously have no clue where what I said came from. In hindsight, it was like the words bubbled up and gushed out my

caveman mouth. But at the same time, I mean every goddamn word I growl.

I freeze. Half fucking terrified I fucked up completely, but her eyes hood low, while her sweetening scent tells me I got my timing, and tone, spot on.

“Okay,” she purrs back before she walks to open the door.



CHAPTER

Eighteen

RANEY

Pretty much all of me wants to kick Rhodes out of King's house so I can take up Puck on his offer of reacquainting. It would be easy to do, except I would never, for the simple reason of being with Koz. The trust and love we share is something I will never take advantage of, or risk.

Koz is the only person in the world to know how I got back to being me. I cried a fucking river and lived every raw emotion under the sun because of these boys. He held me every time I fell apart. Not all of it was sweet and loving either. He's screamed in my face when I thought I wasn't enough, he threw me out of his house when I used my fists against him instead of my words, and he constantly drives me to expect more. In a sense, it hasn't just been my journey. Without question he's a big reason why I have the self-belief I do.

Stopping next to Rhodes, I make sure he looks at me before I give him firm instructions. "No shooting anyone."

He nods again. Seriously, Rhodes has got his security vibe down fucking pat. I go to shove his shoulder, thinking he might crack a smile, and he sides steps to avoid him touching me, acting like I have the freaking plague in the process. Of course, I stumble, jarring my goddamn knee again, and then he shows a whole lot of emotion on his face. He fucking freaks.

I roll my eyes at the way the big moody alpha panics. "My fault, but for the record, I do joke around and even touch Lew. Koz hasn't killed him yet."

“He’s braver than me then.” He grimaces, his eyes forward at the door. “Did I hurt you?”

“Nah. I need that coffee though, more than I need protection from these people here.”

I open the door and Rhodes doesn’t give the three waiting a glance, which is really gratifying. He takes an obvious step back to the kitchen while I stand front and centre in the doorway, blocking everyone from entering. I keep my focus on Joker because he should and does know better.

“Don’t look at me like that,” he says in his surly, alpha tone.

“Glad you realise how pissed I am, Joker,” I snarl. I seriously need coffee. But instead of giving him the mouthful he deserves, I look straight at Talon. “Why are you here? Yesterday you made it pretty clear you thought my partner and I were scum. You even stood around while the people you work with dragged me away. Oh, and let’s not forget that my father and my partner are both still being held in custody by those lovely people you work for. So, if you’re here to serve a warrant, hand it over and fuck off.”

I hold my hand out, but he doesn’t move a muscle. Okay, that’s a lie. He chews his jaw so hard, one of his teeth is going to have to give pretty soon.

Hayes moves instead. He hands over a piece of paper, “It is early. We barged in and wouldn’t let Joker push us away. But you need to see this, Talon’s been working all night.”

“And what is it?” I wave the envelope around instead of looking at it. On purpose. Because if anyone gets too close, they will get a hit of my scent, and my secret is going to be busted.

Hayes answers quietly. “A photo of Reid arriving last night on a private charter with Senator Anders.”

“Well, that’s going to make today’s meeting interesting isn’t it.”

“Yeah. They weren’t travelling alone either, Raney,” he says, his eyes imploring I stop and listen to him.

“Let me guess,” I drawl slowly. “Sharlene is with them?”

He drops his eyes, but I’ve already moved my attention over to Talon. Talon’s never been able to lie, he does this weird eye twitch, but it’s always the same. “It’s true, Lolli.”

“Raney.” I correct him quick like a slap across the face. And yeah, I see the sting in his eyes. I hum dismissively before I really let loose. “Good to see the police have got their priorities right. I mean, gunning after my father and my partner with the tenacity of a fucking bulldog instead of properly locking up the wife of a Senator who nearly fucking killed me.”

Talon doesn’t even hide his contempt when he bites right back. “It is not me who decides who’s a criminal and who is not, Raney.”

I look at him, making sure I’m hearing this right. And then I glare at Joker, who is really fucking slow to catch on this morning.

“Fuck you.” I jab my finger at Talon. “And you. And fuck you too, Joker,” I hiss before I step back and slam the door in their faces. Spinning around, I walk straight into Puck, literally.

He tucks one of his arms around me protectively, holding me to his chest before he gets ready to catch the door as it flies open. Talon won’t be able to leave my dismissal of them be. And it’s exactly what happens too. Except Puck’s there blocking the door from opening wider than a couple of feet.

“You are not fucking welcome here, Talon. Fuck off. You too, Hayes.” Puck’s voice somehow mimics Koz’s; it’s ice cold and not at all welcoming.

But then I move before any of them do, ducking under Puck’s arm, my hand lingering for a sweet moment before I give him a little shove in the direction of the front door.

“Rhodes, can you please do your thing? Everyone out. I’m eating breakfast alone,” I say. Not waiting for an argument, and definitely not waiting for any reaction either.

Leaving him to sort out the mess behind me, I climb back on the kitchen stool and open up the laptop Rhodes collected. I’m not surprised Sharlene’s decided to make an appearance at the lawyer’s office; there’s no way she’d pass up an opportunity to gloat in my face that her sons are finally free of any bond or arrangement.

The absurdity of it all is not lost on me. I’ve been trying to get the forms signed for years, but apparently this is what Reid has been waiting for—his mother to finish her ridiculously inadequate sentence of home detention before she can sit across from me. But I’m all for it—I’ll gladly look her in the eye when I sign those forms just to show her how fucking far I’ve come. In fact, it’s an easy decision right there and then to not go in with a face full of makeup so she can see the scars she left behind.

Sitting at the kitchen counter, I log in to Koz’s business mainframe and start completing the deals he ran through with me earlier. I get so caught up in finalising the order for the Russians that I miss when Rhodes re-joins me in the kitchen. He lets me work and gets busy making coffee.

Once done, I start going back through and deleting my history, cleaning up traces of my online presence. It’s actually ridiculously easy to do when you know how. Logging off the laptop, I grab my phone and check my emails to make sure that the airline booking comes through so the people trying to get something on Koz are appeased. It’s a convoluted game in motion, but so is life.

“Rhodes, can you arrange extra security for us? I want to be gone from here within the hour. And if you can give Giuseppe a call, or I will, but I’m not staying here. I’ll have to attend the meeting at the lawyer’s within a few hours, but after that I’m disappearing. And clearly, I don’t want anyone but you aware of my movements. While I shower, if you can get a

message over to Puck, I don't want him coming today, if you can give him your phone number. Tell him we're staying here, but I need some time alone. Make some bullshit up, but that's the only person who needs to know. I mean no one else. I don't care if Joker..."

He interrupts me. "You shower and do what you need, and I'll arrange everything else, Ma'am."

"I'll need a new phone too. I'll leave this one here along with pretty much everything I brought, so we'll also need to do a bit of shopping, but I can do that in the car."

"Of course." He nods. And I leave him in the kitchen fixing a mess that is the last thing I need right now.

I take my time showering, washing my hair and using nearly half a bottle of unscented body wash and shampoo before I slather copious amounts of scent blocker over my skin. It's lucky I had them leftover in my bathroom. Sadly, the pack from Unity Collegiate is pretty much a dud. They sent over four days' worth of blockers, a couple of sample tubes of cream, and a t-shirt. It's a good t-shirt, super soft and silky but a fucking t-shirt!

Before we make our clandestine getaway, I put a call through to the Fallen bar. Molly answers and hands it right over to Hawk, one of the more senior members of Dad's inner circle. Without preamble, I tell him I've cancelled today's meeting at the lawyers and then I go on to tell him in no uncertain terms that I don't want to see anyone until I've calmed down. Of course, he starts defending Joker's decision to let my exes grace my door. I hang up before he takes a second breath. Then I climb into the trunk of Rhodes' car, and he drives us slowly away from the latest deception.

Two deceptions don't make a right, but with my heat bubbling away in the background, I'm not prepared to sit around and get caught up playing games. Nor will I be dragged back into the scenario where my uncles believe they should make decisions for me, especially when I'm more than capable of making them myself. I know they love me, I love

them too, but they get blinded by their perceived view of what's best.

It feels like in no time at all that the car slows before it dips as we start descending down a ramp. Rhodes parks the car before popping the trunk open for me to climb out. You kind of get used to doing weird things being in Koz's world, so swapping cars isn't a big deal. And lucky for me Koz is loaded, so I slide my butt straight into another luxury vehicle.

Rhodes sits in the back with me, while a new guy, our driver named Frank and second security/bodyguard, Andrea, sits up front. The privacy screen stays down so Rhodes can run through a quick update while also talking about the next meeting openly. And I'm not at all surprised that Rhodes knows the history of the boys and I. He keeps it factual, and it's actually interesting to hear it, instead of feeling the emotions associated with the past.

Pulling into the carpark of the hotel across the road from the lawyer's office one of Giuseppe's partners, Dominic waits. Since Giuseppe sent a headshot and all the man's details, including his car make and model, he's not hard to spot. Dominic looks like a typical lawyer in his navy pinstriped suit. He's also an alpha, which is good, because I'm about to go face to face with a few other alphas.

Dominic smells faintly of paper and ink, it's a strange combination, I don't find it offensive, nor do I find it appealing. Much like being in his presence doesn't set off any internal alarm bells. The greatest satisfaction comes from knowing if he works for Giuseppe's firm, he'll be strong enough to go toe to toe with the Anders family.

"I'll do the talking once we enter the negotiation."

I smile over at him. "There is no negotiation."

He chuckles under his breath, but when I double check, he's standing straight as an arrow, looking as expensive and pompous as good lawyers do.

Pulling my hair into a high ponytail, I use the window of our car to check my lip gloss. The neck of my faded Fallen white-t-shirt is stretched past the point of acceptable, so it hangs nice and low off my shoulder to show off my tattoos, plus it looks wicked nasty with my favourite black leather pants. Sharlene will hate everything about what I'm wearing. Me, spiteful? You fucking bet I am.



CHAPTER

Nineteen

Opening the door, I literally freeze on the spot. Because despite the notion of every man and his dog being in the room, the only person inside the room is Reid.

Rhodes must feel like we're being set up, because before letting any of us enter, he does a full sweep of the room. Including checking the cupboards behind where Reid is sitting.

"I'm alone," Reid says dismissively. And I can feel the crawl of his attention over every part of me.

Without checking I know his eyes haven't left me yet, and it's not a nice feeling. Mine haven't returned to anywhere near him, after I saw him for the first time. And it's not only because he intimidates me, but also because I'm dealing with some huge fucking life changing shocks.

Growing up, Reid was the embodiment of everything you'd want in a friend, a lover, a past and a future. He made himself the centre of all our universes by making decisions for us and going the extra mile at keeping us together. He planned our days whenever I was visiting, and then scheduled all these catch ups when I was back home with King.

Reid was always stunning. Without a lie, his eyes used to make me think I was looking at stars. He was tall, perfectly shaped like a movie star... honestly, it blew me away how handsome he was. Being with him always made me lesser in a sense. Because I couldn't believe he'd pick me to be who he wanted to pack with over all the other girls.

Today it's not his looks, or the fact that he's by himself that sends me reeling, it's the fact that even though I'm in the same room as him I can't remember his smell. And that hits me like a tonne of bricks.

So much faith is placed on our visceral, primal senses where first impressions are super important; scent and size have to work for you. I know it. I've seen it in action.

Koz is the perfect example of that. No matter how long we've been apart, no matter where and when, I can taste him on my tongue, and he always leaves me thinking I can conquer the world. Puck's the same, he makes my head spin and our time apart has done nothing to change how good he smells or how he makes me feel. When it comes to scent matches, it's impossible to not acknowledge the others too. Hayes, holy shit his cinnamon donut smell makes my jaw hurt, and Talon, even though I want to ring his neck, I can't ignore the way his scent of leather and campfire is clear as day, and oddly soothing, peaceful even. But Reid, right this second there's no way I could recall his scent for the life of me. The only thing I get from him now, even over the distance, is how disgusting he is.

"Take a seat," Reid demands as he waves his hand offensively around when I refuse to enter. Part of that is because I'm so fucking angry at him, but the other part is my body's reactions to being in the same room as him.

"No thanks," I say, walking over to the side of the room where the refreshments are, I'm hoping the coffee cleanses my nose. It actually does help. I guess I did learn a few things at Unity; like how to deal with off-smelling alphas. Now for the next lesson, how an omega talks politely to people—I completely failed at that course by the way, and I'll be making a point of being as fucking atrocious and rude as I can possibly be to him. All these years of bullshit, for what?

He hums a conceited and overly exaggerated prickish noise before he starts talking. "Overkill, much?"

I swing around to look at him, and Reid's arrogance is as offensive as his weird ass scent.

He points to a chair, and tries to make me obey. “Sit.”

Dominic pulls the chair out, and then sits his beefy ass in, taking control of the situation. Slowing the proceedings and letting his alpha rise in challenge. “That is not how you speak to anyone in this meeting, let alone my client. Change your tone, or we’re leaving.”

“And who the fuck are you?” Reid spits back. And surprisingly, instead of being all loud and condescending, he gets cold and bitter. It suits him.

I guess the boy I once fell in love with is long gone. The man staring back at me is someone I don’t want to get to know.

Instead of addressing Reid, I turn around to whisper in Rhodes’ ear, giving him clear instructions of calling Puck and letting him know his parents are not in the meeting. I’m getting a bad feeling about this.

Rhodes excuses himself, and I take a seat next to Dominic.

“Where is the form?” Dominic replies in his no bullshit tone. In the short time since we’ve met, it’s clear he’s got zero patience for games.

“I am not speaking through an interpreter.” Reid leans back and tries to mirror Dominic’s posture and presence. The rise in aggression causes an instant headache between my eyes.

I shake my head. “Fine. Why, Reid? Why all these delays? You could have fixed this years ago and signed the forms like I asked.”

He smiles and the look on his face makes my skin crawl. His expression is condescending, and narcissistic to say the least.

“Haven’t you figured it out? The way you fucked up my family with your scheming, you needed payback. Every time your lawyer called or emailed; I pushed the forms further down the bottom of the things I needed to do. Honestly,

you've been on the bottom of the pile for so long, I'm embarrassed for you. We didn't want you then, so there's not much point wasting time on you now."

His words are clearly meant to incite a reaction, and they do, but the medication I'm taking keeps me from screaming in his face. Omegas use suppressors or blockers, to suppress their reactions to alpha and in some cases betas. It helps keep your emotions and physical responses even keeled so you can protect yourself. They also work best when you're not in the middle of a fucking heat spike, apparently.

Coming here I wanted answers, being in the same room as Reid and his ego for more than a few minutes has me happy to live without hearing his excuses. Besides, I've got better smelling alphas to confront and a rising heat spike to manage. And Reid does not need to be privy to either of those things. Without question, the situation would turn from bad to shitastic in an instant if he realised I was speaking with his brother, Talon, and Hayes or if he knew I was an omega. All I need is *his* signature on the form and since he's conceited enough to show without legal support, I'll use that to my advantage.

"Do you have the form?" I ask in my most timid voice, focusing on his eyebrow as opposed to staring into his eyes.

"I did ask all our pack mates to be here to sign, but they couldn't be assed."

And the fucking idiot is a liar too.

Raising my hand politely to call for Rhodes' attention again, he squats next to me, his back to Reid and the drama. "I want that form, then you can rip him to shreds. But I'm going," I whisper quietly to him, being careful in the volume I use but making sure Dominic can hear too.

Reid watches down his nose as he swings back on his chair, his superiority complex adding more weight to the offensiveness of his presence and scent. "At least have the

grace to speak loudly. Look, we're here now, let's sort this out."

"Pass the form then," Dominic says, smiling at Reid. It's not a sweet and fluffy smile, it's patronising, arrogant, and ugly.

Reid ignores Dominic. Unsurprisingly. He moves fast, flicking something over the table at me.

Dominic jumps up in an instant, his hand catching it before it lands on the table. But I move fast as well and grab at the form he also sent sailing our way.

"A cheque?" Dominic laughs.

"What?" I scoff, absolutely stunned this idiot just gave me the perfect smokescreen. I sit back into my seat and shove the form into my boot while shrieking better than any award-winning actress. "You're buying me off?"

Reid ignores me, drilling his attention at Dominic as he jabs his whole hand in my direction. "I want her word that she stays away from our family. No bullshit civil suits, today or tomorrow. No selling little sob stories to the media. Not one word about our past."

I laugh at the ridiculousness of the meeting and his pathetic demands. Clearly, it's the wrong thing to do in his eyes, because Reid drops all pretence of being nice and barks something in my direction.

Dominic counters.

And then it's on. Their control vanishes and these two fritz my head as the room fills with more aggression and volume. I'd probably do okay if I hadn't been on the edge of a heat spike but add in the relief of finally getting the form, and my spike bounces headfirst towards a full-blown heat.

Physical touch from a 'good' alpha would help settle me, it might even guide me back to a spike instead of a full-blown moment. Clearly, I'm not going to interrupt Dominic arguing with Reid to ask. Although even if I did, Dominic would

probably be more worried about Koz finding out we'd touched, and that makes me laugh.

Employing all the practice and methods of putting a lid on my omega responses I get a moment before I descend into a mindless madness and realise how fucking pointless it is I stay in this meeting. I just need to figure out how to escape, and where to go.

Someone places a bottle of water in front of me. And I nearly drop the bloody thing because my hand shakes so much. I close my eyes not giving a shit what it looks like to Reid. Instead of getting a moment to figure out where I need to go, the room spins. And one rotation spins into another, leaving me feeling like I've drunk way too much, while confirming I'm past the point of stopping my heat.

"Let me know how things end up," I offer flippantly, surging to my feet and knocking into the chair like I'm half drunk. Shit, even my words sound like I've been drinking. And I have the sassy attitude you get from drinking cheap vodka too. Flicking my middle finger up at him, I tell him, "Shove your cheque up your ass, Reid."

I wait for no-one as I find my way to the door. Finding the goddamn doorknob is going to be difficult as those headspins accompany me. Since all my senses are over-stimulated, the rush of movement near me has me alert but I also know I'm pretty well protected so I don't freak out too much.

"Raney, it's Andrea, your new security. Can I help you out to the car?"

It's nice she asks but also a bit redundant because walking without aid is pretty much impossible now. The slippery slide to my heat has hit terminal velocity.

"I need to get out of here," I say, although it doesn't come out like that. Thankfully she gets the gist and slings my floppy arms over her shoulders to hoist me along. "Once we're in the lift, it's an easy ride down to the garage, and we can get you somewhere safe."

“Koz?”

“He’s still locked up.”



CHAPTER

Twenty

Looking back now, I can easily see how Reid completely blindsided us. Gaslighted actually. He was our self-appointed leader and had our trust implicitly. Until in the space of a few hours he fucked us over completely, teaching us in one move that pathological liars come in all shapes and sizes. And it's no fucking wonder I now have a black and white approach to life.

My white picket fence with Raney vanished in the space of a few hours. And then we were left scrambling with the fallout of her getting attacked.

In no time at all my life was thrown into complete chaos where a series of shocking realities were bitch slapped into me. Growing up we were aware of the pyramid of power; I just didn't realise Senator Anders was the self-appointed king with loyal subjects. Including my parents.

No shit, Raney was still in hospital and my father started threatening that if I didn't sever my relationship with Hayes my trust would be locked up. Mom hid her threats behind her sweet way of talking, trying to convince me of all the ways that Raney had poisoned our family. She even blamed Raney for 'making me gay'.

It's little wonder I jumped on board with the simplicity of dichotomous decision making. I fucking had to. And yeah, my therapist still has a field day breaking down the thousand or so reasons why I am the way I am. In my opinion, talking about how PTSD was now a part of my life was a complete waste of time.

Coping was one thing, living was another. I learned to make decisions on the fly, based on surviving instead of how I *felt*. Over time, I got pretty good at being able to see past emotions and feelings and look at people and situations for what they were. My monochromatic view on life saved me and Hayes on more than a few occasions. Don't get me wrong, some days I hate being so decisive. I wish I had the same optimism and emotional capacity as Hayes.

But seeing Raney again has me questioning everything. I always knew seeing her again was a given—it was why we were living here. The ramifications of actually seeing her were not what I thought they'd be. The way she looked at me was one thing. The company she keeps was another. And together they were a barbed knife stabbing in my guts.

She was my measure of good. Her being with Siderno—it doesn't make sense. I fight every day to keep our society safe from people like him. But she was with him! By fucking choice by the looks too. It was hard to miss how protective of her he was when she climbed out of the car, ownership, and worship, in his cold eyes. And then this morning she barely could look at me as she called me out for the punishment Sharlene got. But to add insult to injury, she was in Puck's arms. Puck, who's only just legally allowed to drink and is also part of her father's illegal MC.

The conflict is now infecting all my thoughts. I absolutely fucking detest feeling like this.

“Jeffers, call on line three.”

Snatching the phone to answer, I start pacing. I'm one of those people that needs activity to focus which means I'm storming through the office, looking for a cup of shit station coffee to settle my frayed nerves.

“Hello,” I bark. And the echo I get has me thinking the handset was running out of battery. I start walking towards the charger and get diverted into the empty kitchen when the caller starts speaking.

“We need to get a couple of things straight, Jeffers. I’m not a patient person, and I’m incredibly selfish when it comes to Raney. I also have no issue using people, abusing public positions, spending money on illegal activities to ensure my partner is properly cared for and safe. Do you understand what I’m saying? Actually, Jeffers, I recall how slow you were last time we spoke, and since I am on a timed call, I’ll help you out. You are a method. And I’m using you because I’m stuck here.”

I go to interrupt Siderno, wanting to know exactly what the fuck he thinks I owe him for, and how he got a direct line to my desk, but he keeps talking and I’ve got little choice but to listen.

“Get down to the Wolverines training camp and get Puck,” he demands, each and every word infused with his dominance too. The pompous fuck!

“Who?”

“Colt. Get him. Raney is in trouble, and only he can help.”

“What?”

“Stop talking. King assures me you’d be the person to look after his daughter, but for the sake of further clarification, because you detectives are literally dumb as fuck, I want to remind you of the threat I made on your life earlier.”

I cannot believe the balls on him. I laugh back. “You’re fucking delusional.”

“I beg to differ,” He pauses, like he has all the time in the fucking world. “I am fucking furious though. Are you aware that before Raney was physically dragged out of Deluge, King advised them of her existing injuries and begged for them to be gentle with her? But did they listen? And then those same people you work with refused her medication. It pisses me the fuck off that you wear that same badge as them yet are trying to tell me I’m the delusional one in this conversation. Jeffers, get Puck for her or the first thing I will do when I’m released is hunt you down and gut you like the pigs you work with.”

He hangs up on me.

And it doesn't take much to figure what it means: Raney went to the meeting with Reid's lawyers even though she said she cancelled it. If Siderno was talking, it means Reid hurt her in some way.

I take a slow steadying exhale so I don't have a fucking heart attack on the spot, return to my desk, collect my phones, the keys to my truck, and walk out without a backwards glance.

The afternoon traffic works for me for a change, and it takes me under ten minutes to get to Deluge. I hit the horn and barely a second later, Hayes is climbing in the cab, looking wide eyed and completely freaked out.

"What happened?" He leans over and grabs my hand. Instead of white knuckling the gear shift, I squeeze the fuck out of his hand.

"Apparently she's in trouble."

"How?" He stutters, waving his hand way, "Tal, pull it together for me, you're scenting up a storm."

I ignore his comment. "Siderno got through. I doubt he'd call me if it wasn't bad," I offer without looking at him as I start weaving in and out of the traffic.

"She said she was staying... oh shit. Raney went to the meeting, didn't she?"

"I feel so stupid taking her word she wouldn't go. We should've remembered she's not like that."

"We didn't exactly help the last time she was in trouble, did we? Fuck! So, she just faced off with Reid and Sharlene?" Hayes pulls my hand up as he goes to rub his face but stops and gets stuck looking at my hand.

And I know exactly where his head is. It makes sense, because with her back, I'm questioning everything too. I have done nothing but focus on getting ahead. I pushed myself hard to succeed in my career, I worked on living a different life

after our world was turned upside down. And I fought tooth and fucking nail to be a good partner to Hayes, but now I'm wondering if all that is enough.

"Hey, you and me are solid." I squeeze his hand, pulling it back down to rest on my thigh. It's where it always sits when we drive.

Like always, everything about him settles me, his touch, presence, and scent included.

"She doesn't know about us," he says, purposely looking away from me.

Squeezing his hand, I try to bring him back to me and not avoid the conversation we need to have. "Raney was the one that pushed us together, Hayes."

He huffs a sad laugh, still focusing on his side of the car. "Yeah, but now?"

"Let's hope we get the chance to show her how fucking right she was."

I can feel his emotions as much as I feel my own, and I know already what's going to be worrying him. We've talked about it a million times. He sounds far away when he answers. "What if we tell her and she thinks she's an add on? That we replaced what we had with her with our love?"

"It's not wrong in some ways," I answer truthfully.

"Wrong in others though."

"Hayes, I picked you up to come with me because it was always us."

"And Raney."

"Are you saying you're only with me because of her?" I ask, trying really hard to keep the ache of anger from my voice.

"Not at all. I just would hate for her to not give us a chance because she thinks we're only focused on each other."

I laugh softly, “At this stage, babe, she’s not even speaking with us. But given half the chance, I won’t be keeping our relationship secret. She’ll see everything laid out. All of us fell in love once, you and I stayed in love. We lost her but it doesn’t mean it wasn’t because of her love, does that make sense?”

“I know. I know. I’m just freaking out. What if we don’t get the chance? What if Reid’s hurt her again... I’ve got all this stuff I need to tell her; I have to show her and what if...”

He fades off mid-sentence and I let him get everything together in his head before I squeeze his hand for more.

“I want to believe she’d be happy for us, Talon. I want to know it would make her smile like she used to when she watched us together. That’s not wrong is it? I know my love isn’t a this or that situation, I’ve given you everything, but loving her was just as necessary once upon a time.”

After Raney got hurt, Hayes lost a lot of the light that used to be in his eyes. Sharlene stole the rest of his joy. He pulled away until I clawed him back to me by packing up all our possessions in a few boxes and running in the middle of the night. Leaving Reid wasn’t as hard as it should have been considering he was the supposed head of our pack.

Much like Colt predicted, even before the plane taking Raney home was on the horizon, his parents were out everywhere they could be denouncing her character. And actively looking for support on their claim that Raney had initiated the attack on Sharlene. Self-defence was thrown around a lot, while countless slurs on Raney’s character and her family were added. And the whole time Reid said nothing, which was worse than doing something.

Except when he did finally say something, it was to insist we publicly endorse his parents’ versions of events as a fact. Fuck me, he even wanted us to sign an affidavit against her, of course we didn’t. And then he argued the three of us weren’t really there so how could we trust his younger brother’s version, especially when Colt was always so obsessed with

Raney, and Raney was taking advantage of his age. Since Colt and Raney couldn't defend themselves they did everything to destroy them. Maybe we should have argued with him more, but at the same time the second he stopped supporting her, he'd made his decision.

The day King spoke to us at the hospital was the day Colt vanished. Then the Anders family took it one step further and wiped him from their family. All photos of him were removed from the house. And there was a sense of pride when they advised they'd successfully written him out of 'future proofing' their family. Reid jumped on that bandwagon, gloating how his trust fund had increased two-fold.

I could never figure out where Colt went. Nothing was taken from his room and his parents cut access to his money before the first sunset. But now it looked like he'd apparently ended up here. Pretty brave for a kid not even eighteen.

Coming here meant he was in Fallen territory. Both Hayes and I had to take that into account when we made the move. We laid low, until King and the Fallen found us. And that was a fun reunion. But they never mentioned Colt, so we never knew. It wasn't like we were at school, and we didn't do the whole ice-hockey thing, that was Raney and Colt's gig.

The thought of him facing King alone elevated him in my mind although my respect for him plummeted when I saw him wearing signs he's a Fallen. And then seeing him again, with Raney tucked under his arm in King's fucking house, looking smug as fuck and ready to fight, I'm seriously wondering if I ever did respect him, or what he did.

"How did we not know that Colt was here?"

"Puck, he goes by Puck, Talon. I'd change my name after what those assholes did to him. And her," Hayes says.

I look to him, and he's busy tying his hair up off his face. The simple movement makes my chest pull with pride as I watch him. While Puck evidently rebuilt himself, Hayes did too. He stayed passionate about his art, and fuck me, he has

this power to muddle me with his poetic, romantic, loved up way of life. But that's him. Instead of growing into his alpha and wearing the mantle a lot of more traditional alpha males do—straight up posturing—Hayes moulded his designation and made it fit him. He's gentle. Don't get me wrong, he can stand up for himself, and he is right up there with Raney in terms of strength.

He doesn't talk much about what Sharlene did to him; her lies and manipulations fucked him up for a long time. He still gets nightmares and it's only when he's super drunk does he share more of those days he vanished. I know in time I will get the full story; I mean the bits and pieces he has shared is enough for us to work with.

He has worked actively on himself with psychologists, counsellors all focused on healing the wound from believing he abused a woman. In his self-healing, he found a way to provide for himself too, moving into tattooing gave him an outlet for his creative side which in turn fed his happiness. Hayes has always been an artist and these days I still lose him for days if a school project consumes him. Despite everything, he's a caregiver and a peacemaker through and through. And fuck, I love him for it.

The second he finishes getting himself ready, he returns his hand to mine. I nab it and kiss his hand. The sweetness of his spicy warm scent is one of the most stabilising things in my life.

“Let's go save Raney, babe,” he says, getting all serious on me. “Whatever happens, happens. But this time no one is chasing us away, and I want us to do everything we can to be who she needs.”

“Hayes, she slammed the door on us a few hours ago,” I smart back at him, weaving through the traffic and taking the turn into the stadium.

He laughs softly, “Shit. I forgot about that.”

“You know, I’m not disputing what she said about Sharlene. The sentencing handed down for home detention was appalling.”

“At least she was brave enough to press charges,” he answers quietly.

“And you still can.”

“I don’t want to talk about me. Why did you bring up Sharlene, anyway?”

“Raney had a bloody go at me. Did you miss her insinuating that I don’t think Sharlene’s a criminal? Raney gets that what her dad does makes him a criminal, right? And Siderno is aligned to criminal activities on nearly every continent!”

Hayes doesn’t answer for a while, and I know he’s working through what I said before he turns to me. “Okay, so this is my interpretation based on my own work...”

I dip my head, trying to hide my smirk.

“Oi! I’m the one that figured out we were eternal flames, so shut up and listen.”

“Okay, okay,” I say back.

“What if that is your life lesson, Tal? What if you need to see that being a good person is not based on ‘society’s’ definition. What if you need to see that even ‘bad’ people can, and do, have good intentions.”

“You’re justifying the actions of an international arms dealer, right now? He makes money off violence. For all we know he might be blackmailing her to be with him. It makes no sense that Raney would be with such a dangerous man, Hayes.”

I look over to him, and he shrugs. It’s one of those non-judgemental shrugs too. “I don’t know the answers but maybe you need to see things differently. King’s a good example, the Fallen are not evil men. Shit, he raised the girl we’ve been in love with forever, Tal. Then you look at Sharlene who comes

from silly wealth. She's the wife of a public official, from a long-standing family, with a shitload of money. The woman is a disgusting piece of shit who got off relatively scot free for nearly killing someone. Intentionally too. And then that same woman intentionally removed any reference to their youngest child... that's pure fucking evil."

The rest of our discussion on the meaning of life is put on hold when I pull-up at the stadium.

Hayes swings in his seat, "Hey, babe, will you let me do this? All we need to do is get Puck, isn't it? I mean Siderno didn't say you had to do it literally. He meant figuratively, right? It's just that I think..."

"Yeah, yeah, Hayes. Puck will respond to you better than me. Everyone responds better to you. You're our sexy peacemaker."

"You love me for it," he grins, leaning in for a kiss. He goes to move away, but I grab him, holding him closer to kiss him properly.

And when I finish, I murmur over his lips. "Hayes, you were never a replacement. If there's one thing I want you to know, it's that."



CHAPTER

Twenty-One

The need to feel safe and secure has me asking Andrea to take me back to The Fallen's compound. A tizzy fit is one thing but I'm also cognisant of the fact that being anywhere else at the moment is being petty. Koz and the girls would chew me out for not being somewhere safe when my heat hits.

"What do you need?" Andrea asks for the tenth time as she leads me back inside King's house.

"I'm okay." I grimace past a sharp squeezing pain. The pain is like having someone squeeze your insides with a fist. It's my body's built-in alarm system screaming, 'your heat's coming, nest it up and get some knot action or feel my wrath'. Mother Nature in all her glory.

"I'm going to run a bath, take some medication. I might be in and out here asking stupid questions, or making weird demands, but let's keep it simple, don't let me leave the compound, and don't let me eat sugary food. No matter how much I beg, no sweet food! And please get someone to break Koz out of jail," I offer back in a rush of words as I wave and shut the door in her face.

Once I'm back in the kitchen, it's so empty and quiet I'm grabbing my phone to call the girls before anything. Thankfully, it's only a few rings until they pick up.

"What up?" Heidi yells over the top of blaring music.

I have to shout to be heard over the noise. "Heat is here and she's not going to be stopped!"

The music disappears as soon as I tell her what's going on. "Oh, babes, I'm sorry."

"And the heat pack Unity sent was next level amazing," I quip sarcastically, rolling my eyes at the same time. "Although... the t-shirt is going to help."

Heidi laughs. "Did you pack your rabbit or some other toys at least?"

"Sure did. But of course, my bags are in the first car we had," I answer her, and get distracted trying to remember if I have any hiding in my room. "Oh, I wonder if I have any toys stashed in my room. Bye, Heidi, give the girls my love."

"Good luck, honey. And hey, don't be looking a heat gift in the mouth. If one of those tasty boys shows up, make them work for you."

I swing around, like she's in the room with me, skidding to a stop. Even throwing an arm up, "Really?"

"Yes!"

Slumping forward, I look down at my feet caught up in so many scenarios made both better and worse by the knowledge my heat is fast approaching. And *they* have exactly what I need. "God! Why is this so hard!"

"You're overthinking it," Heidi soothes, and she has such a way with her. Some find her offensively abrasive, but it's not that at all, she's just so sure of herself. "Raney, they can't break you. They already did. And as harsh as that sounds, it's not. It's me saying you hit rock bottom once and the only people that have power over you now are the ones you give the power to. You know the girls and I love you to death. Koz absolutely adores you way too much. Stop doubting how amazing you are and do whatever the fuck you want. We'll be cheering you on."

"Something happened today." I hiss through a pinch of pain, and Heidi waits until it passes.

Living at Unity, you see people in heat frequently so you kind of go with the flow of it without getting all freaked out. My cycle will get to a point where everything blurs, but I'm not there yet. And anyway, talking with Heidi is a good distraction.

“What happened?” she asks. And seriously some days I wonder if she is an alpha, the way she can command a situation.

“I saw Reid.”

She hisses in disgust at his name. I do too, and then she wants to know more details. “I'm sorry you had to see him. What happened?”

“Nothing. Well, that's not right. I'm sure he inadvertently started my heat.”

“No!”

“Yes! For so long, I built him up in my head to be this imposing beast of a man. But he's nothing.” I over exaggerate those words because, goddamn, it's the truth. And it's a huge revelation.

“Okay.” She starts to dig for a better explanation, but I interrupt.

“Ho! Did you hear me? Even though I loved him once, he is nothing to me anymore. Nothing. I mean I don't trust him at all and wouldn't be alone with him, but he's no longer that memory I have to be scared of. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah. The heat thing though?”

“Oh shit, I forgot,” I mumble because that's what happens with my heat—I get easily lost in tangents. “It was the rush of knowing he's nothing or maybe it was that I'm free of that nightmare? Either way, one minute I was kind of freaking out, the next boom, my body relaxed. But it relaxed, relaxed.”

“Really?”

“I walked in, I saw him, and realised he smelt like nothing and at first that freaked me out, but it’s such a relief too. Actually, now I think of it, he smelt faintly like boiled cabbage.” I know I’m rambling, but it feels good to get it out.

“Interesting, huh, he is pretty gross though. So, your reaction was completely different than when you saw *them* for the first time again? Pretty sure you told us Hayes was smelling like a big ole bag of cinnamon donuts made just for you.”

Oh my god, at her description I can instantly taste him on my tongue. My head is full of overlapping images, snippets from my memory of his tattoos, his hair piled up on his head, and that nose ring. Yeah, I’ve never been big into them, but holy shit, I think I am now.

“Raney!”

I give her what she wants. “Hot cinnamon and sugar donuts. Not stale ones, like piping hot ones. I can close my eyes and my mouth waters like I can taste him,” I admit, doing just that. Again.

She fucking purrs at my description and draws a hiss out of me. Of course, Heidi ignores it and keeps going, “And Puck? How did he smell?”

My eyes burst open, and I’m smiling like he’s in the room with me again. “He came on super strong earlier. Like holy shit strong. And I can’t say it didn’t work for me. At all actually. His scent is, no shit, gets me all fucking turned on just thinking about it.” My hand glides down my hip, because I was not wrong, he does get me all hot and bothered.

“And how did Talon smell?” she asks, and yeah, I can clearly hear the smirk in her voice.

I flick up my eyebrows. “I told him to fuck off.” My response shuts her down.

Heidi laughs. There’s nothing like the sound of Heidi laughing, like it’s impossible not to smile when she cracks up; it’s half Valkyrie goddess screech, half hyena howl.

“So, if Koz isn’t around, maybe you need to show them what they’re missing out on. Or, if he was around, he would show them what they’re missing out on.”

I laugh, agreeing immediately. “Yeah, maybe.”

“Pretty sure you’re the one to keep telling me knots don’t mean forever,” She makes a small pause for emphasis. “Your pussy, your heart... you decide who you let in. But you also don’t need to make any decisions about them either, although, let’s be real, you’re going to have one hungry muffin in a few hours...”

“And that’s my cue to go. Hungry fucking muffin? Come on, Ho! You can talk.”

“We’re not talking about me. And stop trying to deflect. Am I right?”

I roll my eyes at her as I walk into my room. The space instantly makes me feel weird, like I’m not meant to be here. My body starts playing that hot and cold game. When I take a step backwards, a warmer tickle races up my spine, and I spin on the spot, chasing it down.

“Going now. Love you.”

“Get some knot action, Raney. As many as you can. We can sort the rest out later, or Koz will make them pretty concrete boots and drop them in the deepest ocean. Do you think someone will ever love me like that?” she asks seriously.

I scoff at her. “Open your eyes, Heidi, that person might already be in front of you.”

She’s silent for all of a second before she gasps. “Wow! You did not! I’ll forgive that slip up and we can blame your heat.”

“Love you.”

I hang up on her. But she wasn’t wrong, neither was I. She does have a maybe person in front of her, and I have an available knot or two in front of me.

Sliding my phone into the back of my leather pants, I get teased by the faintest of scents and follow the smell around my house, back to the kitchen, to the exact spot where Puck was standing a few hours ago.

My ass tingles. And it takes me a few moments to realise it's my phone and not my heat. I answer without looking.

“What?” I snap.

“Micina,” Koz purrs at me, and boom just like that, I start panting. “I’m sending you something, darling. A few compatible somethings actually. I hope to be with you before your heat is over, but you know I’m always with you regardless of where I am. I own you as much as you own me.”

“I wish you were here,” I say, moaning like a hussy as I start rubbing my legs together. It’s his fault completely. He does this thing with his voice that rubs me deliciously up the right way.

“Hmm, me too. I’d have my tongue on your sweet body, drinking down your slick, before I’d shove my hard cock inside your pussy demanding you soak my dick...”

“Are you hard now, Koz?”

“What do you think, Raney?” He growls, moans, purrs, all at once. It sounds perfectly wicked and exactly what I need.

I laugh, it comes out ridiculously breathy, but he responds with a low, deep noise, a rumble and a growl rolled into one. It adds another level of smoulder to the heat starting to take hold.

“Where are you?” he asks, his voice deep and suggestive.

“Standing in the kitchen trying to figure out what to do.” I answer, closing my eyes and enjoying the increasing buzz of my heat. “How are you calling me?” I ask unexpectedly.

“Really? You have to ask? Money, Raney, gets you whatever you need.”

“Well, I need you,” I say as I pout.

“No, you don’t, you little vixen. You want me. And that turns me on more than life itself. Get your phone charger, and the laptop, and get your ass over to Puck’s house...we’re going to be busy.”

“What?”

Of course, the call drops out. And I fucking hustle. All of a sudden, the thought of being in Puck’s house, surrounded by his petrichor scent while Koz talks dirty in my ear brings another larger, more insistent wave of my incoming heat. Instead of spasms and cramps, whispered promises of pleasure takes their place.

I charge out of the house, scaring the crap out of Andrea, but I giggle like a guilty school kid as I dash past her, completely focused on getting set up before Koz calls me back. Is it inappropriate that I’m going to ride my heat out in Puck’s bed? You fucking bet it is. But at the same time, he’s away at camp, so by the time he’s back, in theory I could air his room out, wash his sheets and remove all traces of me... or I could leave his room with my scent everywhere as a reminder of our earlier chat.

“Both ways work.” I chuckle as I reach his door, unsurprised to find the door unlocked. There’s not much privacy at the compound but there’s this rule if the door’s closed it means rack off.

I guess I didn’t really think through what would happen standing in a place saturated in his scent, and by fucking god, I pretty much stand there struck with my mouth hanging open as it all but assaults me. In his house, it’s like Puck is standing in front of me, his scent raining down on me like a torrential downpour. It’s so heady and intoxicating being saturated by his smell but it’s so much more intense because his house is ingrained with his undeniable presence. I can feel him in every room, on every piece of furniture, on each inch of the floor, and it feels like a slow burning caress over my skin.

And then my genetics take over, my clothes drop where they fall as I move towards his bed where his scent is the most

intense. My mouth waters, and my low throb of earlier aches in anticipation. Despite my earlier freak out, I actually enjoy my heats. Handled right, it's a short and intense period of heady pleasure with mind-blowing orgasms. Handled badly, it still isn't as painful or debilitating as physical therapy.

Puck's bed is the opposite of what I thought it would be. The cover, pillows and sheets are like a glassy shimmering sea of indigo and vibrant violet, and the visual is as visceral as his scent and presence; overwhelming. His bed is huge and takes up the entire side of the room. And for fuck's sake, my omega soul luxuriates, and I'm sure I whine out loud at how thick and soft the carpet is under my bare feet. Without a word of a lie, it's what I think walking on a floor of cotton balls would feel like: super soft and luxurious.

A vibration of my phone snaps me back into focus, instead of me getting deliriously lost in a place of colours, scents, and textures. I start talking as I answer, knowing it will be him.

"Koz, seeing the boys again... it's weird. A good weird. Mostly anyway. Reid, not so much. I told him to go fuck himself."

Even without seeing him, I can feel the way he's leaning closer to me, a filthy, almost predatory smile on his face. "Good for you, Raney. Are you asking me for my permission?"

"No. Yes... kind of, but not really. You'd be furious if I asked you for your permission, but they smell right, and I..." I admit, as I fall backwards onto Puck's glorious bed. The softness against my skin making me shiver, while his scent has my body needing a release.

"It's time to start finding your pack. Now this bullshit is done. You choose, as my omega, you choose who we invite in. But, kitten, you do know I will not share you with another person, don't you?"

I cherish how honest Koz is; he is unapologetically selfish, demanding and slightly obsessed. I rub my body all over

Puck's bed while talking with him, imagining them both near me is a real fucking turn on. I barely stifle a soft moan before I answer him. "How does that work, Koz? It seems like a bit of a contradiction."

"Bullshit, micina. You are an omega; we've always said our 'pack' would grow. And that time is now, although you are right about one thing I need to clarify for you, and for anyone who takes their place next to you. When I'm with you, I will not share you," he finishes with a growl.

"I wish you were here."

"Me too. Now, it seems I've been blessed with a few necessary amenities while Giuseppe and Dominic work out the finer details of my release."

"Like?"

"A fucking device with a screen. Spread your legs, Raney, show me my pussy, in all its beautiful wet glory. I'm going to get you ready for your sweet surprise."

"Any hints?"

He laughs, and a moment later, a ping comes through. "Set the laptop up where I can watch."

Flicking our call to hands-free, I go to set up the laptop on Puck's bedside table, making myself completely at home. He's got everything set up so neatly. I stretch over his bed and am greeted with a photo of me.

I drop the laptop, nearly fucking breaking it by the sounds.

"What's happening?" Koz barks.

I gasp in shock, sitting up ramrod straight. "He's got a photo of me here, Koz. I can't do this... isn't it a bit fucking weird I'm naked and slithering in his bed like a damn snake?"

"Raney, it's not fucking weird. It would be weird if Puck knotted you in King's bed... but in his, I'm thinking it will be better for you both."

"What?" I gush out breathlessly.

“For fuck’s sake!” he snaps. “Why can’t I keep anything a secret from you?! Do you really think I’d let you suffer alone? After you told me how you respond to their scent? I’ll always provide what you need, kitten, including another alpha’s knot. What kind of person would I be if I didn’t bring to you everything your heart desires? I’ll leave it up to you to decide if the other two get an invitation.”

“Koz! Are you serious!” I squeal like a banshee, half shocked, half not shocked. It is Koz we’re talking about. He might be possessive but he’s the most considerate, trusting person I’ve ever met.

“Raney, I’ll be with you the whole time. The deal is though, as soon as I’m out of here, they get the fuck away. I will have you to myself, at least until I’ve filled you over and over with my claim. And then I’ll happily watch them crawl to you.”



CHAPTER
Twenty-Two

PUCK

Perhaps fate had a hand in everything today. All practice my mood had been shit. I knew I was pretty much out of control, but there was nothing I could do to slow or stop the rising of my alpha.

The whole time everyone kept their distance, and that was pissing me off, adding to my foul fucking mood. I was itching for a fight. Coach binned me. Again. But I guess I was meant to be where I was because the instant Hayes arrived at the arena, I knew. Don't ask me how, but it was like an alarm going off in my chest.

I dropped my skates where they fucking fell. If I wasn't so consumed by an insatiable need to be with Raney, I'd be asking why the fuck everyone was slapping me on the back. Coach yelled out something about giving me a once off pass, pretty sure I told him to jamb it up his ass. Later he'll get an apology, but considering how I'm feeling right now, he might not.

I love playing, I love my teammates, but the reality is nothing comes close to Raney.

Driving back, they don't talk and neither do I. Or maybe they do. Before Talon even parks near my place, I'm out of the car.

It takes me all of two seconds to pick up the not so faint stirring of her heady scent. Raney's in heat. I can smell it as easy as knowing where she is in my fucking house. And I

respond, my cock hardening to the point of fucking aching while I snarl like an animal.

Opening my front door, I seriously consider pushing the fridge in front of the closed door so Hayes and Talon can't follow me in. But at the same time, now is not the time to be threatening each other. Besides, I could take these two out with my eyes closed and my hands tied behind my back.

I race across to my bedroom, the sight I see stops me dead in my tracks. Hayes slams into the back of me.

"Holy shit," he whispers into my ear, both of us lost watching Raney writhing in my bed.

She's managed to get the windows covered, blocking the light from the huge window, but she's also gathered a couple of small lamps and set them up around the room, making it feel dark and cosy. She's also gone through cupboards, upending drawers, dragging my clothes to cover the mattress along with every blanket and pillow I own. I guess they're pretty clear signs of her designation and yeah, shit, it makes me feel phenomenal knowing she felt safe enough in my space to make a nest. The saturation of her blossoming wisteria scent makes it impossible to argue that she's in heat.

Hayes leans over and talks quietly in my ear, like he's just figured out what's going on. "Raney's an omega."

I should be ready to rip his head from his body in order to keep her secret safe, but I'm not fussed. Which is fucking weird since all day I've been feeling ready to blow up and make someone hurt. I know why: my alpha doesn't see either of them as a threat to her. And I'm going to trust those instincts.

"You don't move unless she tells you," I hiss over my shoulder as I take a step away. Okay, maybe him being here does bother me a little, but I also know if push comes to shove, I'll be able to beat him senseless without raising a sweat.

Ripping my hoodie off, I kick off my trainers and call her softly. "Raney."

Another voice answers, but the look of unbridled desire and relief on her face when she turns around is pretty telling too, except it conflicts with his commanding bark. “Puck, ass where I can see you.”

I guess I’m about to meet Koz, but before I can go nearer to where she’s set up a laptop, she grabs my hand, tugging on it to make me fall over her. The warmth and heat she’s giving off is like lying on an open fire. The softest, most fucking stunning open fire I’ve ever seen, mind you.

Raney’s hands bury in my hair, locking my face super near to hers. She’s strong but then again there’s no reason I would fight against her. Fuck, I’ve wanted this for so long. And up this close, the scent that’s perfuming off her skin does what it’s supposed to do to a compatible alpha—it traps me fucking completely.

“Do you want to be here?” Her words are whisper quiet, a deep husk to her voice that hits all my buttons.

I lean in and drag her bottom lip through my teeth. “Told you already today, we’re only getting started.” Before she can lick the spot, I suck her plush lip into my mouth and use my tongue to soothe the hurt.

Her jade eyes darken in an instant, and her voice croaks before she clears her throat. “Doing a heat together kind of blows going slow out the window.”

If I had a gun against my head, it wouldn’t be able to stop the smile that spreads over my face to mirror the one on her beautiful lips. She pulls me closer, stopping a hair’s breadth from my lips. I have to crack my neck in anticipation at what she’s going to say next, but I beat her.

“Wanna go slow with me, Raney?”

We don’t need words.

I completely let go of all my alpha; perfuming, dropping all my control. But she returns the gesture tenfold. The result is like standing in a hothouse where the air is thick, warm, concentrated sweetness, and so potent it’s almost like standing

under a misting wisteria sky. Except there's nothing romantic about it. Well there is, but there's also this surging thing between us—we need to fuck. And there's no chance we're going slow.

She holds my face like I'm the precious one here. I obliterate the distance between us to slam my lips to hers, a near feral noise bubbles up from deep in my chest that lets her know not to go gentle.

We go from zero to one hundred in the space of one kiss.

I lick my way over her lips, biting down again on her plush lower lip until she gives me access to her mouth. Raney's eyes flash obsidian black, and she wiggles under me, searching for more. "Be patient," I whisper quickly in her ear, before going back to kiss her again.

Kissing Raney is incredible. It always has been. Her lips are soft and she makes these little noises, especially when she relaxes because then she melts.

Behind me, I can hear Koz's impatience. Raney can too. I feel her responding to him and it's a right turn on. "You want to introduce me to your alpha, or is he just going to watch me and you reacquaint?" I ask, trying to put a bit of space between us. But it's fucking hard. It's like we're magnetically connected, and she follows me, closing the distance so we're kissing, slow and deep again. Until he barks, interrupting us while pulling another alpha noise from my chest, an ugly, possessive one.

Of course, Raney laughs before pushing up to sitting. And fuck me, I didn't realise she was fully naked and in my bed, scenting it up like she owns it. But this woman taught me confidence, and the way she teases and purrs at the both of us before answering is like super charging everything about her. It's absolutely mesmerising seeing her this way, so solid in who she is. She owns it, like she fucking owns me.

Her dark brown hair hangs like a curtain on one side over her face, but she flicks it over her shoulder, looking sexy as

fuck, and smug too. “Koz, this is Puck. Puck, this is Koz.”

It’s hard swinging my attention away from her, but I do. Sitting on my haunches, I come face to face with arctic blue eyes drilling through the fucking screen right at me. But it’s weird because it doesn’t feel wrong. It feels strange but not wrong. Nabbing her and spinning her around so she sits on her ass between my thighs, I kneel up so I can see over the top of her head. In a way, it feels like we’ve all done this before, or perhaps it’s just I feel at home with her.

“Raney, tell us both what you want.” He beats me to the words I was going to try to say.

“If you were here, Koz, we’d be in exactly the same position, but I’d be full of your claim already. It doesn’t change the fact of what’s going to happen next.”

“And what is that, micina?” His eyes are on her and only her. And the small tip of his lips is nothing but burning desire for her. It’s like I’m not here, the way they’re so into each other. He leans forward making his presence seem bigger.

Raney sighs happily. “Puck would be about to fill me up too.”

He laughs before sobering up, swinging his intense blue eyes at me. It’s intimidating being in his sights. “And you, pup?”

But he can be as intimidating as he wants because nothing is coming between me and Raney again. Thank fuck I’ve got all of the Fallen and my Wolverine teammates because if push comes to shove, I might have a chance against him.

“I’ve already told Raney, she and I are not done. Not by a long shot. Probably not even in our next life.”

His face doesn’t change. Indifference on a person is a lot worse than seeing their emotions. He scoffs, and it makes me feel like I’m being interrogated. Which I am. “Before or after you discovered she was an omega?”

Except no matter his mood, his emotion, his implied or spoken threat, it just doesn't matter. I rise up a little, towering over Raney. "It's irrelevant. I'm not letting her go again, Koz."

"I'll put a bullet right here." He taps his forehead in case I needed the warning.

I put up a hand interrupting him. "Won't happen. I reckon until we find our way, Raney and I might stumble, but we *will* find our way. We'll learn from each other as we go along but I know without a doubt, I'll never do anything to intentionally upset her. But you need to know without a doubt, I'm not leaving Raney. And I am not letting her go."

Only then does he chill. A barely there pull on his lips which might be a smile changes the look in his eyes before he shrugs. "Fine."

"You going to stick around and watch me reunite with my girl?" I ask him for some reason. Although it's completely irrelevant too because I get why he's watching, and why she wants him to watch.

He grins, and okay, it's intimidating as fuck. It's kind of like what I imagine looking a shark in the eye when your bleeding would feel like. And I'm glad this is how our first meeting is going—remotely. I've never met an alpha like him—he fucking oozes power and rips your attention from you. My intimidation though is not based solely on fear. I'm struck by a sense of respect and another insight that he and I will be fine. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Okay." He chuckles darkly. His sculpted eyebrows flick up in question, either that or he's saying, 'we'll see'. A second later he shrugs unconcerned, so fucking sure of himself.

While I feel okay, it doesn't mean our designation allows us to drop the weird posturing bullshit that alphas do. We size each other up. A million unspoken words including threats, pledges, promises, you name it get swapped as we stare at each other. Until a small noise comes from Raney, as she

wiggles against me, and then my attention is on her, and only her.

“What do you need?” I lean down, turning her face to mine. Without uttering a word, she floods my senses as she looks deep into my eyes and uses her omega side to let me know.

Honestly, it feels like my eyes roll back in my head as her wisteria sweetness coats every part of me. Perhaps it does, because the next time I realise I’m staring at her, I’m nearly nose to nose with her as an insatiable need to drag my mouth over her neck where my faded claim sits drives me wild.

“Tell me how she smells?” Koz groans. It’s as if he can scent her through the screen. He even leans in expectantly.

I have to shake my head as I get so caught up in her. Raney’s hands are rushing to touch my skin, she clings to me. I can hear her begging in my thoughts. Her eyes are at half-mast and a little vacant, telling me she’s here but not really here. As lost as I am. She’s responding to me as much as I am to her. It’s a fucking rush, making my breathing pick up and my already aching cock hurt.

“Spread her wide, Puck, and I’ll tell you how to soothe her need while you show me what you can do.”

I check on the screen, making sure I heard him right. A flick up of his head is confirmation enough.

But I need to hear her sweet consent before I flip her over and fuck her silly. “Is that all right with you, Raney?”

She does this husky laugh that hits me deep in the balls. And then her eyes flutter to close as she takes my hands and runs them down her body.

“Clothes on, off?” I ask and she doesn’t answer, except to keep moving under my hand like she’s drugged. I nab her chin, pulling her attention back to me. “Come on, Raney, use your words. I need to hear you want this.”

“Off. Clothes off. Cock out. I want your hands on my body before you push your fat cock inside my pussy slowly so I can feel the way I stretch around you. And then after I’ve come enough times, I want you to knot me, and make me scream for Koz.”

She goes to shuffle around but I stop her. Despite never wanting anything in my life the way I want her, I have to tell her the truth first. I’m not worried about spilling my secrets to her. “Raney, I might not be the right person to help you through your heat.”

“Why?” Her jade-coloured eyes flare. Uncertainty chasing some of her heat haze away.

It’s not that it’s a huge secret or something that hangs over me making me feel like shit for the very conscious decision I made. It’s my body, so I can choose to do with it what I want. And I never fucking *wanted*. Ever. Not because pussy wasn’t thrown at me. Playing hockey, being a Fallen, is like a magnet for sex, but I’d already found my perfect woman. My guide in life, my North point—it was and always would be Raney.

I look down at her, very nearly getting lost in her eyes. Except in them, I find my truth staring back at me. And I know I’ll always be able to trust her with any and all my secrets. “I haven’t been with anyone. Since you.”

It’s Koz who answers for her. He fucking purrs at me. “Good boy.” And fuck me dead his praise is all of a sudden rivalling hers.

“Really?” She gasps, her eyes filling with emotion. Raney spins on my bed, kneeling up as the sheets fall so they’re only covering her thighs.

“I’ll step you through it,” Koz offers, and I risk a glance to him and he’s leaning forward more.

“Puck, that is such a turn on. I’m going to blow your fucking mind with all the sex we’re about to have.”

“Have you knotted an omega?” Koz asks. It’s completely weird that the three of us are here, having an open, easy

conversation about this. It's like we're talking about what groceries to buy instead of me being a born-again virgin.

I shake my head. "Koz, I haven't *touched* another person."

She's like a coiled spring, jumping up on my lap. Her pert tits brushing against my chest, her nipples hard begging for me to suck on them. I might not have laid a finger on any living person since Raney, but all of a sudden, I'm consumed by a raving hunger along with an innate insight in what I can and do need to do.

But her eyes jump past me and I snarl at the intrusion, keeping her behind me protectively as I go to stand up. "It's Hayes and Talon, Raney. They brought me here, but I told them to wait."

"They do need to wait. Close the door." She flicks her eyes from them dismissively, her jade eyes come back to me and her irritation disappears. Completely. "Didn't I already say clothes off, Puck?" she purrs. "It's time for me to show you all the advantages of the changes since we last saw each other. Show me my cock."

Koz chuckles, making Raney's smile widen. And the look on her face gets a little fucking dirty as she keeps sucking seductively on the edge of her lip. Her eyes are huge like saucers, her teeth gnawing her lip, and her hand shakes slightly as it reaches out to help me undress. As soon as we touch again though, she explodes into action like a rocket taking off.

Her nails rake over my t-shirt like she's a wild cat on the hunt. I help her and go to throw it over my shoulder, but she grabs the edge of my shirt and buries her face in it. Her small whimpers are like injecting Red Bull in my veins, every part of me races.

With a wicked smirk, she holds my stare as she lowers my t-shirt, spreads her legs wide and presses my t-shirt against her wet pussy. It's a beautiful sight, made better when she closes her thighs slowly to squeeze and grind against it.

“Oh, Raney.” I groan, leaning down to kiss my way along her collarbone. It’s the route over her body I have to take so I don’t drop down to her tits. Because once my mouth wraps around her nipple, I’m going to take my sweet ass time sucking on them.

I laugh at the provocative little noises she makes as she continues to rock her hips, “You might need to hold that there to catch all your slick, Raney. I got something just for you.”

“What is it, pup?” Koz asks, intrigued.

I shrug at him too busy keeping my eyes locked on her to watch her reaction. Shuffling a bit so only Raney sees, I hook my thumb in my shorts and my training briefs before doing a slow drop. Using one hand I cover my cock, her eyebrows tip in question, and slowly I show her what I meant.

Her eyes don’t move from my cock, and it does a lot for my ego, my whole-body burns. Every part of me. Without looking away from her face, I stroke myself slowly, trapping the head of my cock between the top of my fist, stretching out my erection to show her my piercings.

And yeah, it’s even more of a complete fucking turn on when she keeps swallowing as she watches me jack myself off. But I need a small release of the tension strumming through me. With my other hand, I reach over, lightning quick to catch her hand to bring it closer so she can feel and count them with me.

“First year, you were gone.” Her fingers trace over the one through my knob. It’s wet, because... yeah.

Before I can speak again, she’s off tracing her finger over the next piercing. And god, it’s like I can feel her fingerprints scarring my skin. “Exactly one year later, this one.”

She tips her head up wanting the details on the third, the balls on the end of the piercing are black instead of silver. “Third year, hurt like a bitch, Raney. I needed the reminder that we were in the same universe.”

Her chin wobbles, and the tears that pool in her eyes nearly undo me. I keep going with my explanation or instead of fucking, we're going to be sobbing.

“Fourth, I struggled the most—in getting this done and being in the world really. I couldn't let you go.” She leans up, not focused on my dick anymore, her lips coming in super close against mine. With one hand over the top of hers, I hold her wrapped around my length.

“Puck...” She exhales.



CHAPTER

Twenty-Three

Puck's confession is a lot to take in. But on the other hand, it's not. He always wore his heart on his sleeve when we were younger. It's his straight up honesty that once again reaffirms how special he is.

Before we both get lost in the moment, my body gets assaulted by a rippling cramp. Dragging my teeth over his jaw, my hands skate up over his body. His words fill my omega heart with sweetness, but now I need him to fill my omega body with his cock.

"Turn around so I can see her enjoying herself, Puck." Koz's deep rumble filters through the speakers and knowing he's watching is a turn on. It's not the first time we've had sex with each other this way, but today Koz is softer, intuitively knowing how much I needed this. Needed Puck, I mean.

Smirking over my shoulder, I wink at Koz before I shift around, giving myself some room. Trailing my mouth over Puck's bare chest all the way down until I can lean in and kiss his cock. I want to go slow, but after one taste, I know going slow is not going to happen. I need to make it so his flavour is the only thing in my mouth. I flick my tongue over his velvety head, twisting it around his piercing before I do the same to the next. I make it to the third one, the bar hitting my teeth before I want more. I deep throat him without warning.

Puck curses, while his hands rub over my shoulders as I suck on him. He taps his fingers over my shoulder, and I look up and wait as he moves around, bringing one of his feet up

onto the bed where he can reach to pull my ass cheeks wide apart, giving Koz a better view.

“Fuck, Raney, that’s so good,” he whispers, watching me intently while he holds me open for the camera.

I can feel his muscles clenching and releasing, and his hips start moving in time with each bob and suck as I explore each and every one of his piercings in my mouth and against my throat. The extra stimulation of his piercings feels incredible and I know it feels good for him. He keeps groaning, praising me quietly.

Testing out what he likes, I alternate between licking his knob like a lollipop and sucking on it before using my teeth again to tug on each one of his piercings. He likes everything.

“Come on, Raney, stop messing around and show him how you suck dick,” Koz snarls, making both Puck and me let out a weird groan.

Holding on to his length I hollow my cheeks and suck his knob properly. Puck responds in an instant.

“Fuck!” he calls out, digging his hands in my hair to hold me still so he can start to control the moment.

“Puck, don’t go easy on her. Wrap her hair in your fist and pull her hair. Hard,” Koz says, his tone leaving no room for misinterpreting his demand.

“Raney?” Puck double checks, and I answer by tugging on his top piercing enough to make him hiss and shuffle his ass into gear.

He fumbles a little getting all my hair in his fist, but when he tugs my head back, he does it hard enough to make a deep rush of arousal race through me. Puck’s pre-come keeps pooling over my tongue like a tasty treat. I don’t want to swallow, I want to savour it. It’s such a turn on having it coat my tongue.

“That’s enough of that,” Koz snaps. “Puck, start on Raney’s tits. She’ll love you for it. I’ll nearly kill you for it,

but you being with her is never going to be risk free. Kneel up, micina, I want to make sure he does it right.”

Koz has always been bossy when we have sex. And I let him because I fucking love it. Him telling me, blow by blow how to move or what to do, lets me focus on enjoying the moment. I know some people absolutely loathe that loss of control, but it seems like Puck might be on the same page as me because he starts jacking himself off harder as he leans and bites down on my nipple with a long, slow groan.

I lose track of time, getting lost in a building sea of pleasure as he reacquaints himself with my body. In no time, Koz is instructing us again. “Puck, spin my kitten around so I can watch you lick her until her slick is coating your face.”

We both scramble. Perhaps I move too far, but Puck growls before he drops down and makes me his prisoner with his body, presence, and scent; and fucking hell, it makes me deliriously happy.

Puck drags his nose up the inside of my thigh, nuzzling my skin and groaning. I want to rush him but I want to savour this too. I’d actually like to flip him over and ride him until both of us lose control, but for the time being, it’s Koz and him guiding me. He lifts one of my feet, dropping it on his shoulder. “Leave it there, Raney.” His voice is like thunder now, rumbling low. He triple checks on me with a dirty smile on his puffy, kissed up lips. “God, I’ve missed having my mouth on your pussy.”

He holds me open as he licks me from top to bottom. Growling more when I thrash.

“Tell me...” Koz demands, clearly wanting a play by play on everything. I swear to gods, Puck, and him, this... is like heaven.

Without looking at the screen, Puck clears his throat a couple of times before finding his voice. “I thought I could go slow. I fucking want to, but she’s lying here looking like a buffet and tasting like my fantasy.”

“She tastes like liquid gold, Puck. Once your mouth is on her, you’ll be addicted.”

He shakes his head. “Too late for that. I was an addict before you were. Trust me.” His thumbs glide against the outside of my pussy, and it’s like holding a live wire against my skin; we both jolt, and then we both release a shuddering moan as he replaces his thumbs with his mouth again. Closing my eyes, I surrender. And he takes me straight past oblivion.

I fall completely under Puck’s spell. It’s not just his mouth on my pussy, his tongue deep inside me—it’s his skin on mine, the sound of his own enjoyment filling the room and his intense petrichor perfume. It’s so overwhelming, but it’s not nearly enough. Lifting my other leg to settle over his shoulder, I lock my ankles behind his head and let my legs open wider.

He zeros in on my clit, flicking his tongue against it as he pumps two of his thick fingers deep in my pussy. And I am so close to coming all over his face. Half sitting up, I dig my fingers through his hair and hold him there.

“More, Puck, more,” I beg.

He gives a growl of frustration, and the noise is all that was missing. I buck against him, fighting for more as I come on a shuddering moan. But Puck drops a devilish fucking smirk at me before clamping his hands down harder, holding me so he can lick me clit to butt, making my orgasm start to roll right into another. And by fucking god, it’s filthy the way he eats me out. It’s not nice, it’s not refined, its teeth and tongue, and I fucking love it. My orgasm whooshes out of me and straight over his face.

“Oh, god yes,” I wail as I all but ride his face.

Koz talks over the top of my orgasm. “Raney’s a needy lover. Are you ready for her, Puck? She’ll take everything you offer and ask for more.” His voice is full of longing and pride.

I’m not sure if I should be proud or embarrassed by being so fucking hungry when it comes to sex. And I don’t think it’s all got to do with Koz being almost as needy and insatiable as

I am. I guess aside from the scars and the emotional damage, having four boyfriends to introduce me to sex turned me into someone who knows what she wants and who unashamedly loves being spoilt by lots of orgasms.

Kissing his way from my pussy up my body, Puck settles over me again before he holds my face and kisses me breathless. And I have to say, I fucking love how his mouth is covered in the taste of my body. He drops to one elbow, not breaking our kiss as he starts rubbing the head of his cock over my entrance. And it feels in-fucking-sane.

He stops kissing as he whispers, “We’re never going to be done, Raney.” He surges deep inside me, forever changing me too.

Nodding my head, agreeing but also encouraging him for more, I kiss him hard while he moves in and out of my body in a glorious speed making sure I feel each one of his piercings. God he stretches me and makes me feel full, so safe too.

“Yes, Puck, yes,” both Koz and I say, at the same time, over the top of each other.

With his cock so deep inside me our bodies as close as can be, his knot swollen and hitting against my pussy agonisingly right, he kneels up and drives us towards another orgasm. He looks a little lost at the same time. His head swings to the screen, and I follow his strange gaze.

“Hands on her waist to hold her tight, and then one almighty slam. You’ll knot her silly,” Koz coaches.

Puck looks down at me a little reluctant and bewildered, and I realise not only is he currently having sex for the second time in his life, but he’s never knotted anyone.

“Knot me, Puck. I want you so bad, I need your knot.”

His eyes flare, and I know he’s half worried about hurting me and considering the size of his knot it’s not without merit, but Koz’s knot is just as big.

I make a grab for him, wrapping my body around his, holding his knot right at my slicked-up entrance. “Knot me so hard I see stars and then fill me with your come. I want everything from you, and I promise you’re going to love it...”

“I don’t want to hurt you...”

“You won’t hurt her, pup, but she needs that knot of yours or she will be in pain.”

He swings another look at Koz, his eyes tipping together in question, and I triple check in case Koz is doing some freaky shit. But holy instead, all I see is the way Koz is fucking his fist to match the way Puck is fucking my body.

“Go slow with me?” I lean up and suck on the exact spot where his faded claim sits on me. And it’s like flipping a switch, he goes off.

“Not letting you go,” he roars as he pushes his forehead to mine, his fingers digging in my hips, and with one all mighty thrust, he slams his knot inside.

Puck throws his head up, his jaw grits tight, making all the muscles in his neck pop out while a low, shuddering noise starts deep in his chest until it bursts out his throat like a feral growl as he starts filling me up with his hot come.



CHAPTER

Twenty-Four

No question at all, when Raney said shut the door, we were meant to be on the other side of it. But it doesn't mean it happened like that. The door closed, but Tal and I stayed in the room with them.

Phrases like, wildly inappropriate, an invasion of privacy, a breach of trust, circle loudly in my head, and yeah, I feel guilty as shit about it. But in my weak as piss defence, her mouth-watering scent is like superglue making it impossible for me to move.

The conflict doesn't stop with us not leaving because now I'm watching Puck absolutely rail her while wave after wave of twisting jealousy floods me at them together. To be fair though, I also have this crazy insight telling me this is exactly where Tal and I are meant to be. And that's not an excuse, that's a fact.

"Omegas don't kill people, do they?" I ask Tal super quietly. My thoughts are already running away praying she doesn't kill me before I get a chance to explain. Although what am I going to say? And that's even if I can say a word before Puck goes off his rocker and gets all territorial. Because as much as Raney smells insanely good, Puck scents like an alpha teetering on the edge of a feral claiming rut.

Like I said, I'm playing a dangerous game, but the risks are worth it.

It's her scent that makes everything hard. Quite literally... there aren't enough words to describe the impact of standing

in the room with her. Right this second it's like someone has brought every bunch they could find of wisteria and dumped them all in Puck's bedroom. The small space is overrun with the sweetness. I can taste each individual floral note of her scent—tuberose, jasmine, freesia, sweet pea. And when I close my eyes, no crap, the smell is so vivid I can see the individual flowers in all their muted vibrancy so minutely that I know I'll be getting a canopy of the purple and indigo flowers inked on my skin.

Though it's not just a smell. I feel her scent too, like it floods my system, making me hyper aware and vigilant while my cock hurts like it's being twisted in a vice.

Her scent is one thing, the atmosphere is another. Puck's small bedroom is almost as indescribable as her scent is. Again, it's a feeling. It really is like standing in the warmth of one of those hothouses at the botanic gardens. It's a wet warmth, and it reeks like the best sex you have ever dared to think about it, but weirdly the space feels safe. Despite that there's an added pressure that's got to do with designations. The space is too small for four alphas, even if one alpha is only here remotely. Koz's presence is unmistakable, adding to the feeling of being in a pressurised room that's about to implode into a million pieces.

I get that it's partly due to her heat, but it's also because it's Raney. And I know Talon is feeling something similar too. His hardness nestled against my ass is impossible to ignore. I'm not sure he even realises, but he's scenting in response to her and what we're watching. His alpha adds another level of intensity to the hot as fuck scene.

“Raney's an omega.” Talon groans in my ear, his fingers squeezing against my hips. And in case I needed any more signs he's getting caught up in the scene happening before us, a low deep noise rumbles out his chest as he talks.

“We didn't know,” I offer, twisting around, needing the same relief Raney and Puck are finding in each other.

I push Tal up against the wall. My lips are on his before he can say a word, and he fights me for all of a nanosecond before his tongue is in my mouth. We move so we can both watch while we feast on each other.

“Reid’s going to go postal when he finds out.” He pulls away. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised his protective nature comes out even when we’re watching live porn with the only woman who’s been living rent free in our head for a very long time.

“You think Puck is going to take anything they do lying down? Look at him, he’s not the little dude we used to know. I thought he was about to drop into a rut, or maybe that’s his control we’re seeing and he is already in a rut. Shit, Tal, they’re both so different.”

Talon’s eyes sweep over to her to check again and I see the moment he realises how close Puck is to dropping into a rut. I grab a hold of him before he can take a step.

“Look properly, Tal, he’s ready to slay the world for her after being back in her world for a few hours. He won’t hurt her; you can see it in everything he’s doing,” I whisper quietly as my hands float down and I touch him up, hoping to distract him.

He thrusts into my hand, his eyes drilling deep into the most private part of me. “What about you?”

“Guess we need to see if we survive this first.”

He holds my face, kissing me with his usual hunger before he twists to watch them again. I lean up to whisper into his ear. “Koz isn’t going to let her go either, Tal, how’s that going to work for you?” I pop the top button of his dark jeans a little aggressively, making the zipper burst open. Burying my hands straight into his boxers, I wrap my hand around his cock, waiting for an answer.

His hips pump as his breathing drops into a low groan. “Fuck knows, Hayes. I just don’t know. But she smells like she’s ours. Does that make sense? She adds a sprinkle of

warmth and spice to your cinnamon scent. I know she's changing something in mine too. I feel different, and I'm so fucking turned on I can't think straight."

"We're not going to work anything out right now, but we'll need to figure it out soon. Because I get everything you're saying." I squeeze my fist over the top of his cock, knowing how much he loves the added pressure. "How about we pause this discussion and you start sucking my dick?"

Talon leans in for a super quick kiss. "Gladly, because then I'm going to slam my cock inside your body and fill your pretty little asshole till you leak."

I swear I nearly come in my pants when he dirty talks. He doesn't give me the chance, somehow spinning us before he rips my pants to my ankles, a devilish smirk on his face before he starts sucking like a champion. My cock glides straight down, hitting the back of his throat as he sucks me hard. It's pure fire, and without warning, my knees fucking buckle. Tal slams his hand against my waist and we noisily crash into the wall.

"Hayes!" Raney's voice from across the room hits me like an arrow.

I squeeze my eyes shut, scared to look at her but also because Tal's hollowing his cheeks and going to fucking town on my dick. And I think I found a new kink, terror sex. It's insane how turned on I am while I'm bobbing frantically in a sea of adrenaline.

I peek out one eye because Talon's so good at giving head, but I'm also sure she's going to throw us out or sick Puck on us. But she laughs instead. "Wow, Hayes, I'm honestly surprised you're still here. I mean, I did tell you to go," she purrs as she curls around Puck's body.

"You did tell him to go," Puck barks over his shoulder, but she soothes him by leaning up and stealing the words off his lips with a kiss that has me holding on to Tal's head as I all but

fuck his face frantically. It must be her omega magic casting a spell over me.

Tal growls and slaps my leg when I nearly suffocate him with my knot. Raney's abrupt laughter has him finally figuring out we've been busted.

"How come you didn't go?" she asks innocently.

The growl that comes through the laptop is not innocent like she's being. "You don't listen to her again and I'll break out of here to hunt you down, you little fuckers."

Raney wiggles, making Puck fall sideways, and instead of stopping fucking each other, she starts riding him super slowly. Puck's hands don't leave her hips as he helps her move, and fuck me, he is huge. He's also got a feral edge to his eyes that make it pretty crystal clear about what way things are going if Raney decides she's not happy. And sadly, I miss out on focusing on her being naked and in front of me, because I'm still trying to figure out if Tal and I are about to die.

"Well?" She smirks, leaning forward like she's trying to look at Talon, or maybe it's my dick. No, that's probably wishful thinking. Puck holds her from leaning down more. One minute she's glaring at us like a spiteful vixen but then looks down to Puck and her expression softens completely. The next minute her face contorts, and she groans in pain.

"Raney?" Puck's question rumbles through the room.

Behind us, Koz's voice echoes. "Raney's heat makes her hurt. And simply put, she needs alpha knots and her pussy stretched or full of come, or she'll be in pain."

"You managed it alone?" Talon asks, except of course it comes out sounding like he's having a go.

The computer answers. "Detective, you will remember my threat won't you?"

"Not sure you're in the position to be threatening me, Siderno. Considering you're there..."

He laughs, but worse is Raney's starts laughing too.

She stops laughing, then waves her hand around, “Okay, two minutes to sort this out. You stay here and you drop all the bullshit because I don’t need it. Like Koz said, I need physical relief, not a walk back through time.”

I go to say something, but she shakes her head, stopping me in my tracks.

“Make no mistake, I’m using you for your body not the other way around,” she shrugs before she looks at Talon. Actually, she stares in challenge at him before she turns back and does the same to me. And I hate the walls I see in her jade eyes. They used to be so full of love and light, and now there’s shadows that I know we’re responsible for.

I always thought Raney was the strongest of us. And watching her, there’s a new intensity to her that must be her omega designation. Her strength has changed into power. And I already know none of us come close to her in that regard.

It’s impossible not to get lost in the way the shadows highlight her body. So many new dips and valleys, acres of space to explore, and I take my time, despite the press of urgency, to drink the moment in. I always loved Raney’s hands, her fingers so long and elegant; she could tease me with them, trail them over my skin for hours. In so many ways, her touch was easier to understand than our teenage feelings. Foolishly, I can’t help the skip of my heartbeat when I realise her promise rings are missing from her thumb.

“Raney... your rings?” My question falls from my open lips, and I slap a hand over my mouth to stop ruining the chance before it even starts.

Her eyes lift, that shimmering depth of power circling in them like sharks in the ocean. They hold me suspended in time, making sure I see the sweetest pride in the tip of her lips. “They were promise rings, Hayes. You broke every one you whispered in my ear. I wasn’t prepared to wear a reminder of how much you were going to miss out on, that seems slightly cruel. So, I flushed them down the toilet, kind of like you did to my dreams.”

Her smile is more about her pride than my feelings. Although, it's not narcissistic, it's beatific. While I'm heartbroken at the reminder at what we did to her, I'm so fucking grateful she blossomed into this powerhouse.

Puck's control and emotions are see-sawing, maybe he's remembering too. But with the softest kiss from her, he melts from austerity into her willing arms. And that in a lot of ways hurts the same way as her throwing my ring out. I watch how she responds so intimately to him and start making promises I hope I can keep this time.

Talon's scoff, interrupts my own sway of emotions, with his usual abrasiveness that I usually love. But now is not the time for him to be an ass. Before I can get him to be a little less abrupt, his own words explode from his mouth. "What's the go with Puck? Why does he get special Raney privileges?"

We're all caught in a washing machine of emotions as this moment gets pummelled by our history; even our tentative hopes and dreams get thrown into the wash, making it pretty confusing.

"Talon, I'm not going to let you get all territorial. I want knots without strings, but if that's not your thing, then perhaps you really should close the door on your way out," she says softly. There's no sting or malice, just a hint of acceptance.

Tal scoffs dismissively again. But if Talon gets himself under control, he'll recognise all she's doing is protecting herself. From us.

"Tal." I call his attention softly as Raney groans, and Puck rubs over her tummy with his enormous hand. Of course, Tal looks to me, and I give him the sign to pump his brakes and chill.

He responds in an instant, and within barely a few seconds I can see his head catching up with the words he just said. His eyes flare, and I grab his hand, squeezing it encouragingly, hoping he understands I'm telling him he can stop being a dick.

Koz pulls him up on it too. “Jeffers, my eyes are on you. You ever not treat her like a gentleman, and I’ll give your lover something to choke on: your dismembered cock.” His eyes are full of as much threat as his words are, but then in the next instant, they flick away dismissively from us as they refocus on her. “Micina, I can’t see you. You want to play, you do it where I can keep watch.”

Puck sweeps her up and drops her into the middle of his bed before he positions her into a spot where Koz can see her better. Her eyes sweep over to mine, and a sense of relief washes over me when they’re not as closed off and hard anymore. They sparkle in the low light, pulling me closer.

“I can’t believe you’re not going to run *now*, Hayes?” she teases, her voice husky like she’s been drinking or sucking dick all night.

Puck growls for her attention. “Eyes on me, Raney.” His demand is infused with an alpha bark, and she melts at it.

Raney kisses him hot and dirty while Puck holds her with his hands on her hips. I follow the motion of her hand and nearly fucking die when I see Puck. He’s pierced. And now I’m super jealous. I’ve wanted to get my knob pierced for so long. And I know I should not be thinking all this bullshit when I just got invited to a heat party with Raney Grady, but no shit, I feel like I’m in the middle of a vortex with Mercury in retrograde again.

Puck turns her around, lifting her like she’s weightless before she wiggles her ass impatiently until he drops her down on his cock. They both close their eyes and stop moving. And the smell of their scent mingling together hits, making me sway.

I didn’t realise I moved until Puck’s eyes burst open, stopping me in my tracks. Koz was vocal with his warning, Puck doesn’t need words.

Of course, Raney is responsive to all of us. “I’m okay.” She twists around, biting up against his jaw as she keeps riding

him.

“In or out?” she asks. “I’m about to go into full heat. I won’t feel safe if you keep being indecisive.” Puck holds her leaning back against him as they move in perfect timing. She moans, not hiding how good she feels.

Talon starts pulling his pants off before he undoes his shoulder holster, triple checking the safety’s on before he puts his clothes out of the way then stalking towards me. He talks quickly as he helps me undress.

“Hayes, don’t let me mess this up. It’s our girl.”

I huff a small laugh, because yeah, Raney has always been our girl until we let her down and then disappeared. Two events. Not one. Both would have been something some people would never recover from.

“What about after though, Tal?” I ask because I’m not sure how our future will look now.

“I think we blitz her out before we start explaining then apologising in every language known to man.” He tugs me closer. “And we need to be honest with her about us.”

“And me. And Reid,” I whisper, and he answers with a sharp nod of his head.

Because we do need to be honest about me. Reid is a given. He’s like a scar forever on our future. Which is a really bad analogy considering the scars Raney wears. But maybe all we need to do to get rid of the mess Reid dumped us in is to look to Raney. Clearly nothing is holding her back; she positively radiates.

“Come on.” Talon looks over his shoulder, his eyes are dark with desire, but he waits, his hand extended to me. And of course, I go to him. Raney doesn’t miss it—the small flick of her eyebrows all but confirms she knows Tal and I are a couple.

Tal moves with authority and pulls me along with him until we’re both in front of her. Being this close to her the heat

rolls off her skin, and everything is ramped up; her, me, us...

“Hayes and...” he starts.

Of course, she interrupts him. “Heat first, talk second.”

But Talon cuts her off, pushing his lips to hers, kissing her the same way he always did: desperately.

“Always so bossy, Lolli...” He grins his boy next door smile, acting like he’s never left her side. I wish we never did.

“You don’t get to call me that.” She pulls away, but he follows her, and I hear him apologising. Then he’s kissing her, repeating the process over and over until they stop talking.

I throw up a quick prayer of thanks to any of the gods that listen. Along with a solemn vow to be a man of my word and explain everything before I get out of this bed. No matter how shit that conversation is going to be.



CHAPTER

Twenty-Five

RANEY

Kissing Talon is like kissing Talon always was: soul destroying. It's always felt like a clash of wills until one of us breaks, and the result is the addictive sweetness I used to constantly crave.

Growing up, there was a point where I was so sure if he didn't kiss me, I'd die from withdrawal. Teenage angst at its finest, but now after Talon's lips are on mine again, I feel like I've fallen off the wagon. And I don't like feeling that at all.

"Lolli..." he murmurs against my lips, holding me firmly but gently. Like I'm going to shatter. Been there, done that. Got the scars to prove it.

My thoughts keep filling with our past. And one small doubt feeds another, making me question all of this. I know it's from being in the same room with them again; seeing and touching them is like being a time traveller. And I get I'm not the same person I was. I'm stronger and more resilient, but what if they haven't changed and are the same people that disappeared and left me hurting.

Hayes sees what's going on, but he's always had an ability to see my moods. I used to tease him about using his new age hocus-pocus as a way of sweet talking me. He crawls over the bed and shuffles in to share the same space Talon does, his dark chocolate-coloured eyes holding mine, pleading sincerity. "Raney, you said you needed us," he says. His warm cinnamon donut scent rushes over my face, bringing a sense of familiarity, adding more ghosts.

“Micina,” Koz barks. His voice is exactly what I need, dragging me out of yesterday. And then I’m back in the game, knowing I’m his, he is mine, and I did survive. I will survive them now too.

Puck’s hold on me tightens. He leans down and bites the crook of space between my shoulder and neck. His teeth press down hard, while he floods the space around us with his insanely strong alpha presence and scent. “I’m with you.”

“Did I talk out loud?” I ask, stunned and half amused by my airy thoughts.

“Nah, Lolli, but we know,” Talon says from next to Hayes, the both of them looking a little haunted and unsure themselves.

“It’s my heat.” I wave everyone away, steering us back to being physical because that’s a hell of a lot easier than the emotional mish mash of who we were. I’m off my game, but it’s my heat and sometimes it makes me bonkers. But bonkers is better than fucked up.

“I’ve been spiking my heat,” I explain for some reason. And Puck answers with a harder bite on my shoulder while he starts moving his hips again.

“Guess we better knot you back into alignment.” Hayes smirks as he leans down, flicking his tongue over my nipple.

Rocking in time with Puck, my temporary freak out gets sidelined as a wave of pleasure shoots through my body as the physical side of my heat intensifies.

“Raney,” Koz calls out. I can hear his concern because despite the bravado, he knows my conflict—being with them is my all-time fantasy, and nightmare. “You’ll be back with me soon. In the meantime, they’ll give you what you need.”

Hayes kneels up, taking one of my hands off Talon and putting it on his chest before he leans up and kisses my forehead. “You’re safe. Puck’s here, he won’t let anything bad happen to you. And we’ll prove to you that we won’t either.”

Puck lets go of his bite on my shoulder, and instantly I miss it. But he twists me around so he can reach my lips better, kissing me senseless while he keeps pumping deeply inside of me. “Shit, Raney, I can’t believe you’re locked on my knot. I can’t stop coming inside you.”

“Yes,” I murmur, leaning against him so I can kiss him while I watch Talon and Hayes. Hunger burns in their eyes, but they wait for me to invite them back to join us.

“Your knot is so good, Puck,” I whisper. “Give me more.”

“Not yet, Lolli, it will hurt you both if he pulls out now. We’ll give you more until you’re ready,” Talon answers before anyone else can get a word in.

My hands reach out and nab them both. “Talon, no offence, I do know how to take a knot. And I know what I like. Puck’s cock and his knot inside me is so fucking good, but I want more, so please, give me more.” With one hand, I push Hayes down to my pussy while the other pulls Talon back to my lips and Puck’s mouth goes back to the faint scar of his claim. This is the more I needed. Another teasing wave of heat rolls through me as I nearly drown in sensory overload as they all put their mouths on me.

Talon’s fingers replace his lips as he pumps them in and out of my mouth. I suck on them, my eyes rolling back in my head because I swear to god I can taste Hayes all over his fingers too. All of them together is like eating cinnamon donuts in front of an open fire while a wild rainstorm falls down on us: pure fucking decadence.

“Just like that,” Talon’s deep voice rumbles encouragingly as he keeps pumping his fingers between my lips. “Can you turn her,” he asks Puck without taking his eyes off me.

Puck pretends he didn’t hear, eventually grunting what is easily interpreted as a *no*. I know he could. His unwillingness to share acts like a bright flame burning out my doubts and adding another yummy burn to my heat. And his possessiveness is exactly what I need to hear.

But Talon does what I need too. He leans in close to my ear before he climbs to his feet. “We’ve got too much unfinished business.” He makes all of us wobble on the mattress as he widens his legs to accommodate Hayes, who also refuses to move away, and finds his balance. Talon doesn’t use his hands to push me back against Puck. It’s his presence. And then he stands over me, looking cocky as shit, holding his dick in one hand, my chin in the other. “I need this in your mouth, Lolli, more than anything. Haven’t stopped dreaming about you...”

He drags his knob over my lips, pushing it further into my mouth with each pass. I hold his stare, but then Puck moves, stealing my attention with a deep moan in my ear as he slows down the way we’re screwing.

I go to say something, but then Hayes pops up for air, reminding me with a soft smile he’s happy to be here too.

“Raney, I’ll never get enough of the way you taste,” Hayes says, coming in close enough to push Talon’s hip out of the way. His eyes are glittering, and it’s like he sucks the air from my lungs, replacing mine with his in one epic, deep, soft, possessive kiss.

The last of my contemplative trepidation fades as my heat goes from simmer to inferno. I lock tight around Puck’s length while I start swivelling my hips more determined than ever to explode under their touches. Nipping at Hayes’s lips, our tongues swirl around each other until Talon gets tired of watching and none too subtly adds his dick to our kiss. And it feels in-fucking-sane giving Talon head while Hayes does too. It’s like we battle it out, until Koz snaps.

“Puck, knot her silly again. Get the one that keeps running away from her to lick her slick straight from the source while she deep throats the rookie,” Koz directs us, and even though he’s there and not here, I can’t help but feel he’s the missing ingredient.

A rumble spills from behind me. And all at once the four of us get caught up in a heat frenzy that feels a lot like a

reunion.

It's impossible to see Hayes or Puck because of the way Talon positions himself as he pumps his cock between my lips. I love giving head, and Talon always loved getting his cock sucked. Unlike when we were younger, there's no rush, and he takes his time as he drags his heavy cock slowly in and out of my mouth. And while he clearly enjoys what I'm doing, his deep moans and heavy breathing are evidence of that, I think he's also trying to remind me in his own way how we used to be. But I don't need that right now, I just need his come gushing down my throat.

Pulling my head back so his cock falls out my mouth, I say, "Stop messing around. If you can't come, Talon swap with Hayes. I bet I can get him..."

And yeah, I sass him out, my heat making me flip to horny and impatient. Puck pushes up at the same time, and I crash into Talon making him fall backwards. My arms shoot out, and I only just manage to stop squashing Hayes. The four of us laugh quickly before we use Puck's sudden burst of movement to reshuffle all around.

Puck keeps his knot pressed up against my ass. His hands on my hips hold me in place while Hayes rolls under me so he's looking up at me with his dick near my face, right next to Talon who's lounging back. I lean in, and while Talon and Hayes hold their cocks out, I go down on them both while Puck keeps fucking me nice and hard.

He swirls his hips and makes me fucking sing as his piercing adds another layer of our shared pleasure. Hayes takes over, directing us in his soft way as he runs his fingers through my hair while encouraging me to take Talon deep in my mouth. It feels like barely a moment later Talon's come hits the back of my throat, making me gag, but Hayes's quiet voice is full of praise and encouragement as he tells me to swallow and keep swallowing.

I try. I really do. But Puck's coming hard at the same time Talon's come fills my mouth. I keep my eyes locked on Hayes

as his brown eyes glitter.

Talon slaps Hayes hand away. “She’s choking, Hayes,” he growls. And a part of me is surprised he reacts so concerned, so quickly too.

I wipe my shut lips on Talon’s chest before I sit up and chase Hayes squirting all Talon’s come into his mouth. Hayes’s eyes flash black as he drinks down what I gave him.

Puck pulls out of me, his loss is instant and I turn away in case I missed something, but he winks. “Need to work on my stamina for you,” he teases.

“Thought you were a big shot hockey player.”

“I will be.” He smirks as his hands spread my ass cheeks wide before he disappears from view. I squeal and wiggle as he all but assaults my pussy, his tongue in so deep I nearly come in an instant. Except at my woeful attempt of escape, Talon nabs me.

“Time to share, Puck,” he growls as he hoists me up out of Puck’s reach and straight down on to Hayes. Like straight down. We both kind of squeak and freeze as I glide down his cock. He stretches me differently than Puck—the both of them have definitely grown up.

Behind me, I can hear Koz calling Puck, telling him to triple check I’m safe and to grab me food and water, but Hayes snaps up and steals my attention away. “You want me to put my come inside your pussy too? You want me to knot you? What about if Talon takes your ass at the same time?”

“What about if I come on your cock, then Talon warms me up doggystyle while I get Puck hard again. Then Talon can take your ass, while Puck takes mine.”

Hayes looks like he loses all ability to talk. And then he lunges, pulling me to his chest. “Raney, you play naughty... but I think that will work.”



CHAPTER
Twenty-Six

One of us has to keep a level head. I think.

It's hard not getting lost in her heat. I want to. I have.

“Check the door, again,” he barks at me.

The distance separating him feels immeasurable as his dominance wraps around me, dragging me to my feet. I like to think I'm not weak, but apparently I might be. Walking away is good though, it gives me the chance to actually think clearer.

Raney and heat are two words that should come with an encyclopaedia of warnings and detailed explanations for any alpha, because her in one is so consuming. She went into this saying she was using my knot to appease the ripples of her heat, but right this second, I'm finding it hard to distinguish her indifference with the inherent knowledge of how rightly she fits around me. And that's not just physical. It's the surety of her confidence in what should be a vulnerable time for her that leaves me so I'm the one tied up in knots.

The way each of her touches sits under my skin, even now, is something I have never experienced. And fuck me, how deeply and unknowingly she's buried inside my head is criminal. All in all, I've been ruined by her, and her mouth-watering acceptance of who she is as a person, and as an omega.

Walking through Puck's shoebox home, the door's barricaded by some cheap shelving unit, the windows hidden behind towels, and the sink littered with empty plates and

drink containers, it's a pretty good analogy for how I'm feeling. My stomach rumbles loudly, reminding me to check the food deliveries again. Another thing he has somehow arranged.

Pushing the shelves away, I crack the door open. A noise, like the sound of a leaf being crushed underfoot, has me levelling my gun with scary accuracy as a shadow stops, and a meek voice floats back letting me know it's the barmaid again. The cool night air on my balls is confirmation that while I feel so far out of sorts, my alpha's needs to protect her haven't been impacted. Or maybe they have because I found my target without having to try.

Kicking the door shut and balancing the basket of food in one hand while I push the barrier in place, I'm waving my horde of food and drinks in the direction of the camera the second I re-enter her nest. Storing them safely inside a cupboard because we have literally destroyed every inch of this room, I grab a bottle of vitamin water and drain it dry while I watch her and Hayes.

Puck is out cold, but she's been relentless with him. Not that he's complained.

Hayes's narrow hips are moving rhythmically, his back contracts with each measured stroke and, goddamn, the way they are together gets my cock stirring again.

"Hayes, we need to get her to eat," I whisper in his ear.

Raney's been adamant she hasn't been hungering for food, but it doesn't mean we haven't stopped trying to make her eat and drink.

"Lolli, let's play a game," I offer when I nudge him out the way, earning a hiss of frustration from her. And a small barely audible thanks from Hayes as he rolls over, falling off the edge of the mattress, but we're all a little beyond caring about us. If it was Raney, it's a complete and different story.

She spreads her legs wide, and fuck me, the challenge in her eyes nearly makes me throw the game away and slide back

into her swollen, glossy pussy.

“Leave them open so I get to stare at your minky, while you eat and drink all these.” I hold up the fresh juice and the bananas. “You eat or all we’ll be doing is massaging your feet.”

I grab one of her feet to make a point, and I get the most pornographic pout I’ve ever seen in return. Her eyes glide down my body like she’s never seen me naked, and no shit, Lolli’s gaze makes my cock stand to attention.

“Ignore it,” I say, holding the juice out, but she makes grabby hands at me. “Lolli, do I need to handcuff you?”

She nods her head without missing a beat, while Koz snaps in the background. “Kitten, time to eat.”

“I want to know the game first,” she says as she sways her legs open and closed.

“You’re dangerous,” I say, pointing the banana at her.

“Stop avoiding answering. What does the winner, meaning me obviously, get when I win?”

Her confidence knows no bounds, and I can’t stop the twitch my cock makes in appreciation. She throws her head back and laughs, “Pass the banana over and tell me the prize, or I’ll use the rest of the bananas as opposed to using you.”

“I thought you might like to watch me knot Hayes’ ass. He whines you know, like my cock is going to split him in half, and I nearly blow every time I hear it.” I speak slowly, trying for indifference, failing miserably.

There’s no need for her to open her mouth, her scent does the talking. Wisteria in the air, so thick it reminds me of warm summer days at Jenn’s place where we used to make love under the pergola. Raney’s eyes flash. One second they’re emerald green, the next they’re ink black. But it’s been like this for hours. She fades in and out of her heat.

I hold her heated gaze as I pass over the banana. And then like I said I would, I massage the arch of her foot, in part to

stop me burying my fingers in her pussy.

The number of times I've seen her come should be impossible. But without question, it feels so damn right too. It feels like I'm back to being me, the me who I was years ago, the boy who dreamed so fucking big.

She bites a chunk of banana off and chews while her eyes keep assessing. "Show me," she demands before she takes another bite.

"Drink the juice too, micina," Koz says. Her hands reach for the bottle without question or argument, and in a lot of ways, it's a reminder that we're not who we were. Although it doesn't piss me off.

While she finishes the banana and drains the bottle, I reach out for Hayes's leg and drag him up from the floor until he's laying horizontal to her.

"Such a good girl, Lolli. Now, while you eat another banana, I'm going to get him ready."

Hayes looks up at me as I crawl to him. Every fucking time he steals the air from my lungs when we lock eyes. He stops me from dipping down low for a kiss by spreading his legs as wide as Lolli does and pulling his bent knees to his chest. His knot is still pink and swollen from Raney, his dick looks fucking decadent, but the way he spreads himself so wide means there's no way I can't look at him without the same hunger I do Raney.

"I eat. So do you," she says, holding the banana poised at her lips.

"Such a hard ask." I wink before I drop down on my stomach. Of course, Lolli does too, holding the banana against her lips, the same way his asshole touches mine.

Hayes drops his legs even wider when I flicker my tongue over his hole, and his moan lets us both know how good it feels.

"Add a finger," she says, as she chews enthusiastically.

How she's flipped my game on its head, I do not know. But I also don't care.

I easily do what she suggests and Hayes mumbles unintelligibly through his clenched teeth. Raney drops her banana and climbs on top of Hayes to kiss him, almost like she's trying to catch the moans as they fall from his lips. And it's crazy intimate but so like Raney.

I'm faced with a goddamn buffet in front of me. Her swollen pussy is as exposed as Hayes's ass. And I use my hands to shuffle her to make them align better.

"You eating, Raney?" I ask her before blowing a long, pointed breath over the both of them. It makes me smile to see them both pitch up, and I do it again, waiting for an answer.

Hayes reaches back blindly for the fruit and the drinks I dropped next to us and pulls them all up in front of her. "Hurry up and eat, then he will too." They talk softly together before I get a thumbs up from Hayes.

I get back to eating him out, until he's a squirming mess before I reach up and do the same to Raney. The low deep rumble that spills from her, pulls a similar noise from me.

"Tal, she's ready for a finger. She's eating like a good omega now," Hayes says softly. And instead of focussing on Raney, I turn my attention back to him and bury my finger in his body. But he's well prepared already, plus the slick dripping from Raney is plentiful enough for all of us.

From my low position, it's a real fucking turn on watching her slick continue to coat her pussy. Her lips are pink and puffy, and yeah, I want to make her ass look the same.

"You going to let me knot your ass, Raney?" I ask, reaching out to lick her again while I keep getting Hayes ready.

"She says yes." Hayes groans when I add another finger.

"I need to hear her say that, baby."

“Yes!” she screams a second later when I use my other hand and finger her ass the same way I’m doing Hayes.

They both try to wiggle away from me, but when I hit her A-spot and his G they lock up tight, as I hold their pleasure in my hand. Together they make a deep moan, though it changes when they kiss. And I really like the sound of them together.

“Raney, come watch,” I interrupt after a few beautiful moments. The scent rolling off them both is indescribable and pushes me with a need to drive my cock deep in Hayes.

Of course, she takes her sweet time, making me slap her ass hard as she keeps kissing Hayes, and her body all but responds in an instant. I reach up and lick the wave of slick dripping out of her pussy before I bite her ass in warning.

She crawls backwards, dragging her pussy over my head and laughing quietly in the process until she is lying over the back of me like a blanket. “I want to watch from here, it will be like I’m fucking him too,” she rumbles in my ear. I have to close my eyes to stop the swell of my reactions to the way she plays me like a fiddle.

Sitting up is easy even with her on my back. Her thighs clutch around my hips, and without being asked, they hook over Hayes’s too when I shuffle him around. Her mouth is on my throat, and I wait as another wave of her heat has her getting lost in the moment before she purrs encouragingly in my ear, letting me know she’s back.

“Fuck, Lolli, you and him together is liquid ecstasy in my veins.”

I line up the head of my weeping cock and wait until she can see properly before I slowly push my cock inside Hayes’s body, but with her added weight, I fall forward and impale him. He cries out, but it’s not in pain. And the vixen on my shoulder reaches around my side and wraps her hand around his cock.

“You in him deep?”

“Deep as he can. So good,” Hayes answers. I can’t, I all of a sudden have to kiss her. I keep my cock shoved inside him, my knot pulsing and ready to lock him as I kiss Raney the same way I fill him.

“Put his cock in my pussy, Tal. Make him knot me before you knot him.”

I bite down on her lip; my orgasm is already so close at her suggestion. Somehow, I have no fucking clue how, but I all but rip her off my body and position her over the top of him. I have to scoop her into the air as Hayes holds his cock up. We fumble in our desperation a few times, but eventually I pull out of Hayes. She sits up, riding him cowgirl. Her heat is back in full force again, making it easier for her body to take him. But she’s also aggressive in what she wants, and from my spot in front of her, I get to see the moment she takes his knot. My precome drips off my cock at the beautiful sight. I push her back because I fucking need him. I want to be in him when he’s inside her.

I’m almost too feral when I slam my cock in, but he hides his scream by biting her shoulder. My dick surges past the tight wall of muscle, and my need to knot him blinds me and has me half fucking desperate with a clawing need until she fills my mouth with her sweet tongue. We join as one, and then the three of us fuck.

It’s not sweet and sensual. It’s reminiscent of a hard and dirty claiming. But by god, it’s better than good. Raney’s tits move in time with the way I drive into Hayes, and both he and I hold her still so he can drive into her while I knot him. I wish I had a camera because nothing has ever looked as good.

A movement from the corner of my eye and I see the moment Puck wakes. There’s nothing slow and tentative though. Her cries of ecstasy and pleasure have his alpha moving forward like he’s on the hunt.

It’s impossible to ignore the way they are with each other. There’s a different intimacy to them, but it’s not a deterrent. If anything, it’s got me wanting the exact same thing they share.

She made sense when we were younger. Now that she's an omega, I get how fucking perfect she was for us then—and now.

“Not letting this go, Raney,” I mumble against her jaw. Her smile is lazy and almost looks like she's drugged, but she's just under the influence of alphas that want to be hers in the middle of her heat.

I take her mouth again. Savagely. But I can't find the right words to say. She kisses me back the same way. Puck keeps coming closer, and she lets go again. Coming in a loud muffled scream, she pours into my mouth.

“Keep your mouth open, Raney,” Puck says once I stop kissing her.

I shouldn't feel relaxed when he directs me towards Hayes's mouth, but I am. I also don't need to double check to know he's shifting himself around, balancing somehow as he starts using her mouth the same way I'm using Hayes's ass.

Lolli fills my ear with the wet sounds of her sucking on Puck's cock, and it feeds a growing orgasm, making me drive our poly love harder and faster again. When Raney starts choking on his cock, the sound of her struggling to breathe and his soft yet insistent praise for her to keep going, has me flooding Hayes with my seed. His eyes burst open, and I see the moment he comes in Raney, then the two of us move as one to drive her through the tease of another epic orgasm.

Twisting around, her mouth is open so wide her lips are close to splitting, the tears running down her flushed cheeks tell me how close she is to coming. Wrapping my hand around her throat, I squeeze hard enough to feel her, but Hayes starts whispering about her pussy squeezing him tighter. Puck is all but fucking her throat, and she locks her eyes with mine and shows me how far we can all push her.

“Now, micina!”

And at the call of her alpha, she goes off like a sky full of flames. There is nothing that compares to watching Raney

come; it's spellbinding. Life changing.



CHAPTER

Twenty-Seven

The water falls in sheets over my head and hits like blunt needles on my sensitive skin. It doesn't really, I'm just being dramatic, but it goes with the territory. More orgasms than any omega could keep track of, plus an endless supply of pulsing knots along with barely any real sleep, on top of spending time with them was always going to have me acting more unstable than stable. And I'm okay with that, it's a side effect of being completely fucked over when I was younger. Heat recovery is also an emotional rollercoaster which I'm not a fan of. I hate feeling imbalanced. If I was at Unity, or at Koz's apartment, I'd be blissing out in a sea of mineral salts and lavender bubbles for a few hours until I floated back to normal. Since I'm at King's, I'm doing the best I can.

I couldn't stay at Puck's. As much as waking up tucked between him and Talon works on so many levels, it doesn't on so many others. Shit, we haven't even had a chance to talk more than a few words. Instead, I did what any normal person having doubts would have—I bolted before anyone woke up. A cowardly and necessary move.

Re-dressing back in the clothes I stole from Puck and Hayes, I focus on finding food, making coffee, then figuring out how to get my man out of jail. And apologising to Rhodes. He bore the brunt of my frustration after providing an update as he followed me back from Puck's. I then proceeded to drop straight into bitch mode.

Grabbing my phone and shooting off an apology to Giuseppe and Dominic, I'm watching the little dots as someone is typing a response instead of watching where I'm going. Bad move on my part because I walk face first into something.

A someone actually. A gorgeous, petrichor smelling, hockey playing boy I used to cherish.

Puck stands in my kitchen with a carry box of chocolate shakes in one hand, and an extra-large bag from my favourite fast-food restaurant in the other.

"How?" I ask, completely mystified, considering I only bolted from his house not that long ago.

Instead of answering, he drops a smile that has the potential of ruining my fresh underwear before he smirks coyly as he comes nearer. Putting the food on the bench, he proceeds to completely ruin my undies and simultaneously make me goo-goo eyed by wrapping his hands around my face. His blue eyes are extra sparkly today too. "We're going slow, remember? So, I reckon that means we do as much as we can together. Get to know each other again. Okay?"

"Okay," I mumble, his rainy, sex drench scent sending all the signals in my head haywire. Again. But this time it's not anxiety laden, it's sweet need.

"Talon and Hayes left as soon as you did. They've apparently got some stuff to sort out, but I also made sure to let them know they weren't invited."

He grins as he leans in for a super quick kiss before he goes back to giving me a run-down of why he's in my house.

"I've got their numbers in my phone for you. And since they're gone, and you're here, I guess that means you and me get to sleep the day away. Then if you're feeling good when we wake up, I'm going to dress you in my jersey, introduce you to Coach, and you're going to watch me play. Before we fuck the night away."

I chew my lip, it sounds too good to be true. But then Puck takes out ‘Newly Rediscovered Lover of the Day Award’ by covering all the bases.

“I took the liberty of calling Koz since he’s been blowing my phone up wanting updates after we smashed the laptop. He wasn’t happy, but I explained how well we’d looked after you, and how good I’d be looking after you for the rest of the day. His words, not mine, ‘ass in bed, eat the food I ordered for you, snuggles from Puck, and by the time you’re back from the game, I’ll be waiting in bed with a swollen knot for you, kitten.’ Apparently, I’m not allowed to be there for the last part. For the record, he also apparently didn’t appreciate it when I told him to fuck off. I’m staying.”

“You didn’t,” I gasp, because for one, Koz doesn’t like being told what to do, but secondly because Puck told him to fuck off. And that does a lot for a girl’s confidence. It shouldn’t. I mean there’s nothing sexy about two men fighting over a girl’s attention... ah, who am I kidding, it’s sexy as fuck.

“Now I’m going to sweep you off your feet, carry you into bed, so we can eat junk food together there.”

His thumb trails over my cheek as he waits for a response, so I ask him the first thing I think of. “Can I dip my onion rings in your shake?”

Smooth. So damn smooth.

He chuckles but it sounds super dirty. Which totally works. “Yeah, babe, I think you can.”

Puck doesn’t wait, he does exactly what he said he would, which is sweep me off my feet, squatting low so I can grab our food before he carries me into my bedroom. It’s nearly an impossible fit for the both of us in my king single considering how much he’s grown, so he drags it off the frame, before using every blanket and pillow in my room to make me a nest. I’m sure I look a mess as I stand there with tears in my eyes. He ignores them, picking me up and depositing me in the

middle before he sits me between his thighs, one arm wrapped around me as we eat.

And then the only time we move is when his arms around me tighten as we share my pillows, or his fingers trail under his t-shirt I'm still wearing. Added with the delicious scents rolling off him, and the warmth he emits, he keeps me in a peaceful and safe lull.

The day passes with no words, but a whole lot of cute cuddles and gentle kisses. And this is one of those times when those sweet, soft touches say more than words ever could.

Puck kisses the top of my head. "I missed you every day, Raney. Every damn day."

My heart fills so very full at his confession. Puck's words are sweet and his rumbling voice ensures I feel the vibration through his chest at the same time I hear his words. Like he's etching them in a part of me. His legs are entwined with mine, and it's like we're slowly becoming us again. Stretching up with a sigh, I look up and see him all sleepy eyed, his face creased from my pillow. He's slept as much as I have.

Reaching up for a kiss, he stops before our lips touch. "You know I never stopped wanting you? I don't think I can. Especially after you popped my knot cherry."

"So, you liked it, huh?"

"What? You didn't notice how I couldn't get enough of you on my knot?" He growls playfully, mock glaring down at me.

"Wow, I must have missed it. Sorry." I pretend to look away, deep in thought, but Puck snatches my attention with his fingers on my chin.

"Yeah, well, do you need a reminder?"

I flick my eyebrows up high but don't answer. Instead, I climb up and straddle over his hips, wiggling down on his hardening length. "Maybe I do need a reminder."

Of course, like you see in the movies, an alarm interrupts us, and he holds me with one hand while grabbing his phone off the floor near us. I watch him closely, and when he looks back at me, I can see the conflict in his eyes.

I lean down and kiss the words off his lips. “We’ve got lots of time. And yes, Puck, I do remember your knot, and the way it fit perfectly like it was made for my pussy. Heat or no heat, I’m always down for you and your huge knot.”

“Yeah, you mentioned that a few times. I’m sorry it’s not even worth me offering you a quickie, because once I start, I think we’ll need another run of days in bed.”

“Deal! But now I want to see you play,” I say, rolling off him. The both of us lift up my mattress and drop it back onto my bed. I have to start cleaning up because otherwise he will not be going to training. “Has your game got better?”

He laughs. And it’s full of cockiness. “Yeah, you could say that.”

He passes over blankets for me to fold, the outline of his morning wood in his boxers nearly making me crash tackle him back onto my bed.

Shaking my head, I purposely look away from his dick and throw his sweatpants at him. “Any offers yet?”

“That’s what I’m working on.” He grins.

I flick up my eyebrows, ignoring his flirty insinuation. But Puck’s cockiness is a weakness of mine. “And how does it work with the Fallen?”

“What difference does it make?” He nearly growls back.

“Well, I’m pretty sure someone will have an issue with it, that’s usually the way it is in sports, isn’t it? Like they think they own your body and your soul, and then there’s that pesky clause about always holding the club in the highest regard.”

He shakes his head dismissively. “Coach knows how it is for me.”

“Coach does, Puck, but do the scouts?”

“Raney.” He waits until I finish putting my bra on before he hooks his finger in the waistband of my pants and pulls me over. “I play hockey because I love the game, but there’s this woman I’ve had my eye on since the instant I saw her... She comes before anything and everything. Hockey, the Fallen, life in general.”

I have to put my hand up to stop him coming closer, to blink away my emotions before they spill out of me. He keeps making it really clear what his intentions are. They match mine, but seeing my dream changing to the potential of becoming a reality is overwhelming.

“For the sake of our current discussion, stick to hockey and give me all the goss,” I say, sitting on the floor to pull on my joggers, needing normal at least until I’m thinking a little clearer and not riding the crest of my new Puck idealisation.

“Fine then. From a hockey perspective, I don’t need any drama. They don’t like me the way I am, I can, and will, walk away from it.”

I like that he lets me go from being half weepy to giving me something to focus on. Standing up, I pop a hip at him, “Yeah, well, I’m not letting you do that.”

“What?” He glares. And I knew he would.

Waiting for him to stop glaring at me, I jab my finger at him. “Because back then, you were good. If you’re telling me you’re better now, then there’s no chance I’m letting you be so blasé about what’s in front of you.”

His eyes widen, as he glares. But I take a leap at him, hoping he’ll catch me. He does.

“Plus, once you get a contract, you’ll be able to keep me in an endless supply of thick shakes and onion rings. Oh, and jerseys so those puck bunnies know who you belong to.” I lean in to kiss him quick.

“I’m not accepting anything, Raney, if it comes with a million stipulations. I’ve lived a life like that—being told who I can talk to, what grades I have to get... It cost me you. And that is not happening again. It’s not worth it.”

“I want the best for you is all.”

“Yeah, well the best thing is currently in my arms, wearing my hoodie and smelling like she’s been riding my cock for days.”

“I stink? I showered!”

“That’s all you got from what I said?” He growls at me, while he purposely and tortuously drops me down to grind over his hard cock. “Raney, you heard me, so don’t pretend you didn’t. You smell like you’re mine, and it makes me really fucking happy.”

And then Puck shows me how much faster and stronger he’s gotten, spinning me around and pinning me to the bed with his pretty dick pressed up against my ass. He moves his hips slowly making sure his dick hits all the right spots, and yeah, I can feel his piercings. “This is me going slow, Raney. Nothing, and I mean nothing, is going to keep us apart now. As soon as the words ‘make me pack’ leave your gorgeous mouth, I’m claiming you like I did the first time by fucking and biting you. This time though, we will not be torn apart.”

Hiding my face in the pillow to stop the moan I make from being insanely loud, I don’t try to control the way my body shivers under him. There’s also nothing I can do to stop scenting up for him. He drops more of his weight on me, his thrusting getting harder before he turns my head and bites the edge of my jaw. “You’ve got me so fucking riled up by simply being you. We’re going slow, and being true with each other, aren’t we?”

His alarm starts up again, but he doesn’t stop doing what he’s doing. And seriously, it will not take long for me to come like this. Every part of me is still oversensitive.

“I’m going to keep doing this until you answer me.” He chuckles as he bites me again; his tongue then licks a path to my ear where he groans.

“Yeah. We’re being honest. I... I...” I push my ass up at the right time, making his piercing hit home. His alarm starts getting louder. “Puck, go have a cold shower and put a cup on or we will not be leaving,” I say as I fight under him to circle my hips, teasing him as much as he teases me. “Rubbing your giant blinged up cock on me will not work. I’ve got a game to watch.”

He laughs. “As much as I think we should test your theory that it won’t work, we do have to go.” And then he moves quick again, climbing off me and pulling me up by my hips before slamming into my ass a few times. “Don’t forget what I said while I’m showing off for you on the ice, Raney. Only for you. Everyone else is just white noise.”

His hands let me go and I slump onto the bed. The both of us start laughing when I roll over and show him how wet the inside of my leggings are. He tugs my shoes off first then my wet leggings before plucking a pair of jeans off the floor and some clean undies from my dresser. His eyes don’t move from me the whole time nor does the smug look on his face.

“You are not sweet and innocent,” I huff as I swap undies.

“Never said I was.”

“Good point!” I grumble as I wiggle into my jeans. “Go shower! You can’t go anywhere with that!”

He stands completely unfazed, his dick stretching out his sweats as he talks. “I’ll have a shower when we get there.” Dropping another filthy smirk at me, he ignores how I throw my hand up, instead picking up all our rubbish and sauntering out my room. Cheeky shit. He’s back just as I’m tying my hair into a messy bun. “I’ve got a few hours until the game, so I’ll get you set up and then...”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, I know that. I’ve just never had anyone special take up my seats. So, you’re going to let me spoil you.” He narrows his eyes expectantly, and once again I’m reminded how much he’s grown up. And he clearly likes getting his own way, bossing me around as smoothly as Koz does.

“We’ll see.” I grin. As if I would say no to him spoiling me.

We get as far as the kitchen before there’s a knock on the door. Rhodes is already down in the hallway standing guard, and after a quick check with me, he swings it open but doesn’t let the person in.

“Raney, Tal’s going to call. We need to go now.” Hayes talks through Rhodes, who steps aside when I reach them both, Puck is at my back. Hayes looks a little freaked out. “We have to go.”

“Why?” I ask suspiciously.

“Precinct Eleven is on the road on their way here. Under ten minutes away at most. They’ve been granted permission to conduct a full raid, including King and Puck’s house. Talon got called in on his day off to do it. They’ve called in pretty much everyone on roster.”

“So?” And it’s not that I want to stick around for a raid because they’re annoying as shit, but I’ve done a few so I know what to expect. But Hayes is looking extra freaked.

“Can I explain in the car?” He offers. “I promise once I can explain it will be fine, but for his sake and mine, if we’re not here, it will be a lot easier to deal with.”

“You actually weren’t here. But now you are,” I offer back softly.

“I had to warn you, Raney. We both did. All this is too coincidental, don’t you think?” Hayes says back, his words gentle but still insistent.

“My security is non-negotiable, Hayes, is that an issue?”

“Not at all. That’s good. It’s not you, well, it’s but... I promise I’ll explain everything. In the car.”

“Okay.” I agree. “I need to finish cleaning up my room though.” The nest will be a dead giveaway of my designation.

And then it’s like all systems go. But raids are almost a daily part of life here at the Fallen compound and increasingly with Koz. I’ve got nothing on me per se that’s incriminating, although I’m not going to give them the chance to snoop either. Running through the house grabbing anything that I’ve bought that looks remotely omega-ish, Rhodes follows behind me and does a sweep in case I missed anything. Standing in the garage, I wait for him to triple check the car is clean before I go to hop in. He takes Koz’s broken laptop from my hand and hides it in the compartment under the seat.

“Raney, I’ll take my truck. You guys follow me, but if you get a tail, lose them and meet me at the east gate. It’s easy to find. Hayes, you come with me.” Puck rushes over and gives me a quick hug and kiss, but Hayes hasn’t moved an inch, and it’s pretty clear he wants to get in with me.

I give him the low-down. “Rhodes is armed. He doesn’t shoot to injure; his instructions are to kill. If you can live with that, you can climb in.”

And yeah, things are different between Hayes and me, compared to how I am with Puck. I’ve got no issue with it and neither should he.

He doesn’t, but Puck still makes a point of looking him up and down, not friendly like either.

“Don’t say it, Puck. As if I would do anything to hurt her,” Hayes says quietly, almost acceptingly of Puck’s show of dominance.

A terse nod and Puck’s flying out the door while we’re climbing in the car. The garage door opens, Frank moves to the driver’s side, Andrea the passenger, while Rhodes sits on the bench seat to look out the back window, opposite Hayes and me.

It's quiet, everyone on alert as we fly out of the compound. Around us all my uncles are stashing gear, planting other stuff for the police to find; it's a complicated game we play.

Once we hit a mile and a half from the Fallen compound, Rhodes flicks over the radio to the police scanner. I raise the privacy screen and then swing around to look at Hayes.

He's chewing his lip.

"Surely working at Deluge, you've been raided?"

"Yeah. I mean, it goes with the territory. Like what happened with you, they try to catch our customers unaware."

"Okay, so tell me what you need to tell me," I say.

He recoils slightly, and it's a good reminder to take a chill pill.

I poke him with my finger before grabbing his hand. "Sorry, me being a wench is a standard after my heat."

"I'm not myself either." He lifts my hand up, his eyes locked on mine as he brings it to his mouth. "I know we said only heat, but..."

"We didn't say much." I wink at him and instead of kissing my hand, he swoops in to steal one off my lips.

"I like giving Talon a kiss every morning. So, good morning, Raney," he says softly, before he moves back to where he was, giving me the time to absorb his words and his kiss.

We did absolutely everything imaginable to each other during my cycle, but his timid kiss makes me blush like a schoolgirl with her first crush. Which incidentally was Hayes.

"You look so good, Raney. I'm stoked you're happy. It's good to see," he says before he gets quieter. "I needed to see you were doing okay."

I roll my eyes at him being a sweetheart. He's so different than the others. He's got a peaceful, chill vibe going on that suits him.

“When did this happen?” I point to his nose ring.

“First day of working with Niche. Can we not do the small talk?” he asks.

And we don’t have to do the small stuff, but at the same time, I want to know all the little details I missed out on.

“Sure. So, you and Talon, huh?”

“Yeah.” He smiles, and the happiness flows off him.

“Does he treat you good, Hayes?”

He scrunches his mouth up, trying to stop the smile getting even bigger. There’s no way to misinterpret the signs he’s giving off; he’s totally in love.

“Like that, huh?” I flick up my eyebrow.

“Yeah. It is. I don’t think we hid it from you, but for the sake of being clear as day, you pushed us together in a lot of ways because...”

“I just saw how perfect you were for each other before you did. You’re made for each other!”

He looks away, his fingers playing with his ripped jeans. “We were made for each other too, Raney. I’m so sorry about what happened.”

“Me too.”

“I can’t forgive myself that I never got the chance to apologise to you. Or even fucking call you.”

I huff an incredulous laugh because I can’t believe it either.

“Why didn’t you ever get in touch with me? Not even a text after Jenn died. I mean, Reid and Puck, I get. Talon a bit too, but you and me, Hayes...”

His knee starts jostling up and down as his fingers tap and fidget at a furious pace.

“I’m not having a go,” I offer. His turmoil makes his hot cinnamon donut smell go cold, nearly stale. And I can feel his

sadness. “Hayes, I don’t want you to be uncomfortable, but I think I deserve an explanation, don’t you?”

His face turns to me, and like I knew, he has tears pooling in his eyes. “I wrote you so often, nearly every day. I had to, Raney, it was like a huge part of me was missing. But I never sent one of them.”

“Why?”

“Because,” he starts but then stops, you can see his thoughts swirling around in his brown eyes. “Can we talk privately?”

I get it, but after being around bodyguards whose job is to guard your body, you get used to talking in front of them.

“What time did Puck say the game starts, Rhodes?” I ask.

He nods at me without looking at me directly. “Let me check.”

No one talks while he does. And once I know we’ve got at least an hour and a half before I need to be there, I flick off a quick text to Puck before I get Rhodes to coordinate with Frank to stop down by the local lake.

I spent a lot of time at the lake when I was recovering. It always made me feel peaceful. If we’re having what looks like a hard discussion, at least we can both get a bit of comfort from the surroundings.

Leaning against the window while we make our way there, I leave Hayes to sort out whatever is brewing in his thoughts. Frank pulls over and parks sideways, reversing back so we can get away quickly if needs be. I don’t expect drama, but it feels like I’ve been cursed with bad luck since Koz and I arrived.

Rhodes climbs out and completes his customary check before coming back around. “I can’t leave you alone with him. It would cost me my job.”

“Yeah, I know,” I offer simply. “Watching from outside the car will be what you’re working with though, so let’s not argue

the detail. Besides, if he attacks, I'll give the signal or scream. Okay?"

I think I'm being funny, but he scowls at me. "It is what it is, Rhodes. We don't have a lot of time, hang close, but I'm shutting the door."

His scowl deepens into a glare, but I hold his stare with my own before I get the customary head nod.



CHAPTER

Twenty-Eight

Her security walks off without a backwards glance, and I wish I could walk off too. Not from her, but given half the chance, I'd be sprinting away from this fucking discussion.

That's half the problem—I can't be seen with her in public, well I can, but the result if I'm seen isn't worth the risk. And that's pretty fucking humiliating. I guess, one thing I'm grateful for is being able to do this in the car, at least I won't have to watch her walk away.

She switches sides and sits on the seat opposite—her face screws up when she twists around. “Raney, you're in pain.”

“Don't you start.” She waves her hand about, an actual small growl accompanying her words.

“What? Huh?” I cringe, wondering what I've done to upset her.

“It's like it's Koz's favourite thing to say. You're in pain. Are you sore? You're limping. Yes, I am. My knee is fucked up and always will be.”

“I didn't mean to upset you. Sorry, you know... I'm not like that.”

“No offence, Hayes, I don't really know you at all anymore.” She turns slightly, watching as Rhodes paces on her side of the car.

“Yeah. That's true,” I mumble. And it is, so much has happened. “I don't know where to start.”

“The beginning is usually a good place, but it’s your story, so you do whatever you want. And, I’m not being bitchy, so don’t read anything into me hurrying you along.”

I stop watching Rhodes’s pacing, his energy is feeding my anxiety. Instead, I turn around to face her. Of course, I should have known she’d be ready and waiting, her eyes are already locked on me.

I take a big breath to start. “Start at the beginning, hey? Impossible, we don’t have enough time. But I do owe you a story, a long, convoluted one. But first up, do you need anything for your knee? I never noticed when we were at Puck’s that your knee caused you pain.”

Her eyebrows tip together like she’s a little taken aback. “So, you never noticed these?” she asks sassily, her eyes narrowing as she points to her face.

And she’s right; I never noticed the scars that grace her face. I was so caught getting lost in her scent and presence, I legitimately did not notice them. I was so focused on being with her, how she looked was secondary. Plus, her heat was pretty fucking intense.

Once again, I act before I think as I follow the deep pink line down her face with my eyes. If I was close enough to her, my finger would be tracing all the way down her cheek, as it comes to her mouth, before they move and touch over her lips. When she doesn’t move or say a word, my eyes fly to hers, and they’re brimming with a mix of emotions.

“You’re right. I never noticed.”

“Hayes, I call BS!” She rolls her eyes before reshuffling on the plush leather to reach under the bench seat, pulling out a blanket to settle over her lap.

I throw my hand up. “Since when do I talk BS to you? Huh?”

Her smile sours for a milli-second before her gorgeous sass comes back stronger, “You always used to! You used to BS so

much you'd get away with murder. You were very good at it too."

"I did not!" I drop my mouth open in shock. Before we both smile like fucking idiots at each other.

The smile on her face changes as the light in her eyes fades. "Then overnight you disappeared."

I know it's time to talk to her. It's why we're here. I just wish I didn't have to tell her what happened, because without a doubt she's going to change the way she looks at me. Fuck, it changed the way I look at me.

Being a complete chicken, I focus on Rhodes as he marches once again past the car window. And I wonder for what feels like the ten millionth time how we got here. But also if we will ever get *there*—the place we all dreamed about as kids.

Raney sits back and waits for me. Her mood shifts, her scent pales in her anxiety. It matches mine.

"Part of the reason I never reached out was because I felt like I wasn't good enough for you. I didn't deserve you after what happened."

She goes to say something, but I flick my hand up to shut her down. Being a bit of a dick, I infuse the smallest soft touch of my alpha influence to ensure she stays quiet, at least until the end. Intentionally, my voice deepens, and while it's an offhanded comment, I ensure there's no room for argument because one thing Raney used to love was an argument.

"I need to purge. Once it's all out and I've said everything, then you can ask away. And that's because I almost don't want to tell you. Any interruption I'll read as a way to avoid telling you everything. So, no interrupting."

"Before you start," she interrupts, a smirk on her face as I turn to look at her. She feigns innocence, but she wears a hint of the look she used to get in her eyes when she was teasing.

“I seriously wish this was one of those instances where we could joke around, Raney.”

She flicks her eyebrows up as her smile falls away and a veil drops over her eyes. It fucking guts me that she’s pulling away. Even though I just told her to.

“Get it done then. Give me all the pain at once.”

I blow out a long exhale before my eyes linger on the peacefulness of the lake in the distance. I hope and pray she doesn’t walk away.

“After you left,” I start softly.

The scoff that falls from her is like a blunt blade only confirming how much this is going to hurt.

“Yeah, I get it, but this is my point of view and I’m not laying blame, but in a sense you did leave. King had you medivaced out the second you were stable enough. I mean, we’d said our goodbyes, but in my mind, we were coming back.”

I have to lock my body down, a strong desire to look over to see her face right now hits but so does a sense of self preservation. And yeah, that’s my therapist in my ears.

“Everything went from bad to worse in the space of a couple of days. Colt disappeared almost overnight, actually maybe he never returned home. Reid... well Reid changed overnight too. Tal and I were caught in a swirling cesspool of bullshit being pushed and pulled in all directions.”

“I lost track of days. Time moved slowly, but it also seemed to disappear insanely fast. We were staying at Reid’s. Camping out there, but now looking back at it, I think we were being rounded up. My parents and Tal’s were completely supportive of the Anders. There was never any doubt in their mind that Sharlene was innocent, and anything we said was dismissed or ridiculed. I seriously thought I was losing my mind at one point. Things we’d say were twisted and when we questioned them, they said we’d never said what we said we did. Complete and utter gaslighting.”

She huffs a little noise in the back of her throat. Half belief and part dismissive.

“There was no doubt in our mind what happened when you were attacked, Raney. They made us doubt ourselves though. Not you. By getting me to not trust myself, it was a pretty smart way of going about it. Especially when they showed me the proof of how much of a dick I was.”

“Proof?”

“Yeah, sadly they’ve got days of it too.”

I close my eyes, steeling myself because no matter what they did and how, the fact is I betrayed Raney and that hurts me most of all. It was unintentionally done, but my guilt cuts deep because it should.

“I was sick. Food made my illness worse. I couldn’t sleep and when I was awake I had blinding headaches. And then I got a rash.”

I can hear the sharp intake of her shock. I mean I fucking lost it when people were starting to say I had ADV too.

“I was rushed to Xavier Memorial for assessment. I don’t know how much you know about the Alpha Deterioration Virus, but some doctors say if you catch it early it can reduce, even stop the growth of the virus. And then Sharlene stepped in.”

“Sharlene?”

I huff a humourless laugh through my nose. “She’s a fucking monster, Raney.”

“Yeah,” she adds.

I desperately want to reach out and hold her hand, but instead, I twist around on the leather seats and pull my feet up and clasp my hands around my legs—stopping me from touching her, and / or escaping.

“I wasn’t myself, but at the same time I have to take responsibility for what happened. I should have run and never

stopped running, but when I realised what she'd done, it was already too late. I think we all under-estimated how much sway the Anders have but that was at the point I still thought Reid had my back. Talon and I couldn't believe he'd flipped and was backing them after the attack, but... anyway, the pull she and Reid's father both have is scary. At the hospital I was segregated away on a separate floor. Because, you know, supposedly there's a high risk of an alpha with ADV dropping into a rut. Not a rut like a brooding alpha. Nah, this is more like a rut where the only thing the alpha wants is blood and violence."

I risk a quick look at her out the side of my eye, and she's shuffled around too and is mirroring my position.

"That's not me. Being full alpha aggressive and ready to rip someone's arms off is not who I am."

"Hayes, I know that."

"I do too. Now. Back then, I thought I was that person. I begged for help because selfishly I didn't want to be locked away from society in one of the alpha facilities. And help came in the form of a new drug they were trialling. Of course, I jumped in and volunteered. I distinctly remember meeting Reid at the hospital, and he was so supportive of me trying it. Of course, when I asked him about it later, he told me he wasn't there. He straight up lied to my face. A lot of the next while is hazy but not that. The drug was administered at nine am one day, and the next week vanished."

"How do you know the timings then?"

"Talon. He said it was the worst week of his life because he couldn't find me."

She stretches over the cabin and holds her hand out. And even though I shouldn't, I reach out for her, I do. But Raney has always had such a beautiful, compassionate heart, it's impossible to stay away from.

"Thanks," I mumble before I shake my hand out of her stranglehold. It's so fucking hard to not pull her into my arms

and let her comfort me.

In an instant her scent changes. Her sweetness sours at my rejection.

“It’s not you, Raney. It’s fucking Sharlene and the extended Anders empire. If she sees me with you, she’ll ruin me before destroying you, then Talon. Being out here is already such a risk, but...”

“What the fuck did she do?”

“It’s not what she did, it’s what I did. She just manipulated the situation to work for her and her family.”

I face the window again, and this time I slide my hands under my ass to make it harder to reach for her.

“The drug they gave me wasn’t what they said it was. I know that now. The medication was one thing, but they also coupled it with a treatment they suggested involving them bringing me what they called an alpha physical aid. I had no clue at the time, I remember that. I was racking my brain to figure out what they meant.”

“What did they do?” she hisses.

Dropping my forehead to my knees, I feel so nauseous in my stomach. “Not them. Me, Raney. I did it.”

She tsks before clarifying. “What did you do then, Hayes?”

I squeeze my eyes shut before I open them again, turning to look at her beautiful jade eyes. “I raped a woman. For days. No one could get in the room, and I nearly killed her. I don’t remember a single second of it until I woke up and I was naked, covered in blood, and wrapped around her nearly broken body.”

“You did not!” She gasps before she all but launches at me. And Jesus she is strong. She ends up on my lap, a fire in her eyes as she fights to pull my hands out to hold on to.

Shaking my head, I try to push out of her arms. I don’t deserve her sympathy, but fucking hell she’s impossible to

break free from.

“I did. I’ve seen parts of the video they have, and I know what I saw. And I have the proof.”

One of her hands lets go of me, and a rush of realisation bottoms out, knowing she’s going to leave me and never look at me again. I steel myself for the moment, already feeling a deep pain in my chest.

Except she doesn’t move, and her expression flashes to something completely unexpected—determination. “Has Talon seen the footage?” She growls at me, as a frustrated and growing anger takes hold in her eyes.

“Do you think I’d let him see me like that?” I ask, and it’s impossible to hide the contempt and disgust from my voice.

“Newsflash, Hayes, I know you would never do that to another living person. She...”

I get it, I do. It’s hard to see evil in a person you know, but I did what I did. My own frustration makes me growl back at her. “Raney! I was fucking there.”

She rolls her eyes and answers with a healthy dose of sarcasm in her tone. “Apparently not, you just said you have no memory of it.”

“It doesn’t matter if I remember or not! I raped another person. I saw her after, Raney, and I completely fucking destroyed her. At first, she couldn’t look at me... She was terrified of me.”

“When did you see her?” she pushes. Her eyes are blazing like stars, her sweet and spicy wisteria scent filling the cabin of the car in her attempt to soothe me.

“All that doesn’t matter.” I push my palms to my eyes.

“Where did you find her?”

“It doesn’t matter!”

“It does, Hayes. Of course, it matters!”

I avert her eyes and stare at something on her shoulder as I confess the last of my sins, “She was pregnant when we met up the second time.”

“Excuse me?” Raney splutters as she moves, so I have no choice but to look at her. Her chin drops in her disbelief.

And then I share with her my biggest secret and the reason for my disappearing act. “I’m a dad, Raney.”

I risk another look, and like I knew would happen, her eyes are full of tears.

“I’m sorry. I’m so selfish, I couldn’t tell you yesterday because it’s my dirty secret and being with you again was something I couldn’t pass up. I needed you. So, like the criminal I am, I stole everything you offered. And now I’m saying goodbye because I can’t risk anything happening to her.”

“What?” she pretty much yells at me.

“She has to come before you, and me. And I have to do everything possible to keep her safe.”

“Anything else?”

Raney shuffles down my legs to put some space between us. It shouldn’t hurt, but it’s like dropping a boulder on my chest. And then she attacks me.



CHAPTER

Twenty-Nine

My shoulders scream in protest at how hard I hug him. I bury myself into his neck and breathe in his cinnamon scent, while also perfuming up for him. This consuming need to soothe him is as necessary as breathing.

“It’s okay,” I whisper over and over against the crook of his neck. The way his arms are wrapped around me, it’s pretty obvious he’s not okay.

No matter the circumstance, no matter if I think he’s been completely set up by the Anders family, it doesn’t stop me comforting him. Goddamn these bonds we have. “How could you not have told me? I would have helped you.”

He shakes his head violently against mine, and I get it. How do you start justifying what you did? And you never should have to explain to anyone but yourself. Survival has to come before everything, I know it. I’ve lived it.

“Hayes...”

As I wrap my hand around his face, he fights against me for a few moments before everything in him lets go. He drops his forehead to mine, his eyes still slammed shut.

“Don’t shut me out...” I whisper.

He takes a shuddering breath, and it sounds so full of hurt, but I keep my hands wrapped around his face as he fights against me. His tears fall, but he refuses to look at me.

“I did this. I ruined everything,” he whispers, his confession barely audible.

I have a million questions, seriously, he has a child! But before I can say a thing, his body gives out, and we both drop to the floor of the car in an ugly, loud mess.

The door gets wrenched open. “Raney,” Rhodes yells out in a panic. And I realise belatedly it would look like Hayes had grabbed me and not the other way around.

“I’m okay. It was me. No guns,” I call out, looking up and raising my hands to the man standing overlooking, hyper vigilant, and hyper freaked out.

And like a good bodyguard, he doesn’t take my word for it as he reaches in the cabin to nab me. His hand poised to rip Hayes off me, but he stalls, seeing Hayes in his stressed out like state, and also the vice like grip I have on him.

“I’m okay. Honest. I tackled him, not the other way round,” I repeat quickly, trying to keep a lid on his growing need to protect.

“It didn’t look like that. It looked like he attacked you.” He nods dismissively as he keeps assessing the situation for himself.

“It was all me. My fault we’re tangled up. Hey, can you find my phone and some water, please,” I ask Rhodes as I try to rouse Hayes, shaking his shoulders when he starts blanking out on me.

“Will you be safe with him?” Rhodes asks me, scepticism in his voice.

“Of course, I am. Never been safer,” I reply as I kneel in front of Hayes. “Come on, get off the floor and come sit on the bench with me again. It will help Rhodes tone down the aggression too.”

I’m a bit surprised when Hayes does what I ask, though it’s easy to see he’s still not back to his normal self yet. Rhodes moves to get water out of the trunk.

“Can we keep this between me and you, Rhodes. I don’t want the others knowing any of the detail.” I start checking my

messages, not finding the phone numbers from Puck I need. I have to dig through Hayes' pockets to find his phone.

"What's your passcode?" I ask once I've got it out.

Thankfully Hayes hears and holds his finger out and I manhandle it to open his phone. It takes me all of two seconds to locate Talon's number.

"I'm going to call Talon and get him to meet you at home. Where do you live?"

He mumbles off some address without looking at me, and I hope Rhodes caught it. The usual nod I get when I look at him confirms he did.

"Close the door, keep watch for me, Rhodes," I say, getting bossy.

Talon's number rings out but goes to message bank. "Hey, it's me. When you get this message can you get your ass back to your place. He told me. We need to catch up to figure this out, but first I think he needs to be with you and..."

I need time to figure out exactly what the hell is going on. That's not me being selfish, turning everything about me, because fucking hell, this became something so much more. I guess I need to figure out if it's my 'more' or if this is a Hayes only more.

"I'm sorry, Raney." His words are so full of regret and guilt, they make me close my eyes to stop my own tears from gathering.

"Don't apologise to me for this, Hayes. I'm sorry for you."

He shakes his head, keeping it against my shoulder. And I follow suit, the both of us curled up in each other.

"How did it happen?"

"I don't know. And then after, it wasn't about what happened, it was about what I had to do."

"I get that." I take a big slow breath and try to not let my scent spike. "Where's her mother?"

He shakes his head again. “Gone.”

“Gone as in?” I push gently.

“Gone as in gone.”

“How do you know you have a child then?”

“Photos. Alimony.”

“You’re allowed to see the baby?”

“Three times a year. Supervised. At a lawyer’s office,” he closes his eyes and blows out a sad exhale, “I’m so sorry, Raney. You and I were meant to do that together, not some other woman.”

I pull his face up, and this time he brings his eyes up too. I rub my thumbs over his eyebrows, wanting the stress lines to disappear, and he leans into the touch.

“You know, we’ve got lots to talk about, Hayes. You being a dad is a big one of those things, but we weren’t together then, so I don’t want you to feel bad about that.”

He disagrees without saying a word.

“I’m not discounting how you feel about it, but I’m telling you, don’t get caught up trying to figure out how I feel about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“You,” I wait for those soulful eyes of his to settle on my face, “always feel deep. Sometimes it’s not your personal grief you feel, but the pain you think you’ve caused. You’re a beautiful, honest person, inside and out. I suspect there is more to this story, and I’m not surprised you’ve put the reason why things happened behind you and focused on the important part of what did happen.”

It’s important that he gets this. Because he is such an in-depth person, this would have destroyed him, but there is no way that Hayes would hurt another person. I don’t trust a thing associated with the Anders family. They are the shadiest fuckers around.

“I’m so proud that you and Talon are together, providing for your child.”

He bites his lip as another tear rolls down his face. “I don’t see her nearly enough, Raney, but I love her with every part of me. But some days, knowing how she came about and what I sacrificed, makes the love fade. And that fills me with more guilt than what I did. I wouldn’t wish her away, but some days I don’t know if I’d be living this life I am if I had a time machine and could go back and change what happened.”

“You’re not a bad person, Hayes,” I reiterate again, softer.

“Yet I walked away from you when you needed me most and then hurt an innocent woman. In my books that makes me a very, very bad person.”

“I’d say a bad person would not be living with a drop of your emotions. Something bad happened and you are making amends every moment you spend with your daughter.”

“God, you sound like Tal,” he says quietly. His voice thick with emotion.

“Why don’t you have custody?”

“I can’t risk Reid or Sharlene finding out.”

“What?”

“Yeah, which is why as much as I don’t want anything to do with them, Raney, I won’t do anything to upset them either. I’m not signing the forms.”

Our conversation is as intimate as our cuddle, and despite his emotions rising and dropping with each secret he shares, his scent stays the same. Which is another sign of how compatible we are.

“I get that. I’ll keep your secret safe, Hayes.”

Obviously, we need to look at our options about the Pack Dissolution Form. For it to be approved without question, everyone in the pack needs to sign as confirmation they want to dissolve the pack. The more I find out the more I’m

swaying towards Koz's old fashioned way of dealing with this, removing Reid forcibly from the pack. First though, as much as I want to stay with him, Hayes needs to go.

I stay snuggled up on his lap. "I'm calling you an Uber." He's withdrawn, but at the same time I know he's listening. I use the app to book. "Four minutes until they're here. Are you going to be okay?"

He pulls his eyes to mine, and I want to say he looks okay, but I'd be lying. I'd like to tell him everything is going to work out fine, but I'm not the kind of person to make promises I can't keep, and he's suffered enough.

"I want you to know, I'm here for you..."

"You can't be. If they know about her... I can't even think about what would happen if they knew. Everything they've done to me and Talon is going to look like kindergarten play if they know about her *and* if they discover you're an omega. It's you for starters."

"Hey? What do you mean?"

"Reid is obsessed with making you suffer," Hayes says defeatedly. "It started with his parents, but they kept feeding him lie after lie, and he never once defended you. He's obsessed but not because you were hurt or disappeared. I seriously think they messed with him."

"When's the last time you saw him?"

He shakes his head, his eyes blowing wide. "Reid we haven't seen in person since we left. Talking to him on the phone, it's easy to figure he's not the same person he was. You have to be careful dealing with him."

I go to say something, but he stops me. "Raney, we try to break away and they wave another bullshit threat in our faces. It's me going to jail, it's restricting our money, it's running us out of our rental... They're pretty good at being assholes. But somehow, they don't know about her. And I need it to stay like that. Before you showed up, we were doing okay."

I look at him, incredulously. “Excuse me?”

“Not like that, you beautiful idiot. I mean we were flying under the radar. We were head down, working our asses off while trying to find a safe way forward.”

“Okay. I thought you were suggesting I was the problem.”

“No chance. The Anders are the only ones that should be taking the blame for any of this.”

“We can agree there. But Hayes, obviously you’ve got reasons for doing things, but I’m the same. You know I’m attending the upcoming gala, right?”

“You can’t.”

“I can. There is nothing stopping me from taking Koz as my alpha.”

“Do it through the lawyers.”

“I am already. I’m covering all my bases, Hayes. I’m getting Koz out of wherever the fuck they’re holding him then, we are going to the gala and announcing our pack, with all the Fallen and every bodyguard we need, but nothing is stopping me.”

“It’s not safe.”

I flick up an eyebrow instead of answering, because it kind of seems pointless confirming what he said considering his life update.

“I get that, but you should just go back to your home. Do it next time or something. I’m sure I read the next gala has been announced in the South.”

“It has been, but no. Especially in light of what you told me just now. Once I’m packed, we get all the laws associated with it, we get the safety of being registered around the country because snatching an omega from their pack is a federal offence. Plus, I’ll be able to list the Anders as people of risk because technically I’m still at Unity.”

He shakes his head in disbelief, but he doesn't argue it further.

“So now, I'm going to put you in an Uber so your boyfriend can look after you while you make sure your daughter stays hidden away. Then I'm going to see Puck play before I focus on getting Koz and King out.”

And then he does argue. His scent gets all bitter, like his sweetened sugar and cinnamon gets burnt by his anger. “After what I just said, you're going to watch Puck?” He pretty much growls louder with each word as he unwittingly tries to alpha me, but he forgets exactly who is sitting on his lap.

“Yes, I can,” I correct him. “Besides, it's not like I can go home because Talon and the lovely people he works with are currently ripping the Fallen compound apart. Anyway, I promised Puck I'd see him play, and I've missed out on him enough. I've got three security with me, and according to Puck, a whole team of Wolverines are going to be watching too.”

Hayes kind of glares harder, rolling his shoulders, and I hold his challenging stare with one of my own.

“Far out, Raney, why do you have to be so stubborn?”

I crack up laughing because my determination is nothing new. And he knows it. “Yeah, I mean because I never was, Hayes.”

We both stop talking and watch a car turning into the park. It's clearly his Uber.

“I need you to know, I never put you at risk. With your heat... I was in complete control.”

“One thing I know, Hayes, is you are not the person they made you think you were. If I didn't feel safe with you, *we* wouldn't have happened. It's an important part of being in heat... Feeling safe and protected that is. Otherwise, simple biology wouldn't work. The proof of how secure and happy I felt around you were all the knots and orgasms we shared.”

“They were good, weren’t they,” he says, a small smile on his face.

“Good? Excuse me... They were amazing. And you know it,” I say, risking nothing, leaning in to kiss him gently on the mouth.

He looks back at me stunned.

“I know I said our heat was a one-time thing, but it was nice seeing you again, Hayes.”

“Yeah, you got that right,” he says confidently, his eyes falling away before they come back to mine. “Can I kiss you, Raney?”

Before I can answer, he buries his hands in my hair and kisses me. And boy does he kiss me good. He pulls away once we hear the gravel crunching under the tires of a car as it parks next to us.

I feel a bit shit not arguing about the kiss, but like I said about missing out on being with Puck, that sentiment also includes him. A sneaky kiss isn’t going to break me. “Hey, Hayes, what hospital were you at?”

“Xavier Memorial.”

I can’t help the roll of my eyes. Xavier Memorial is pretty much a shrine to the Anders and their fucked up rich, snooty friends.

“And what was the woman’s name again?”

His eyes squint together as he glares at me, “Why?”

Shrugging, I lean in to boop his nose, “Because I’ve got a friend who can do some snooping for me.”

“Don’t do that, Raney, it’s not safe to be digging in their world.”

“You get that they set you up, right? Like they completely bent you over and fucked you up the ass with a giant cactus? I get you’ve got a huge reason now, but from a survivor to another survivor, you gotta break free of anything that traps

you. And yeah, sometimes you do it to yourself. Besides, what's the worst that can happen, Hayes?"



CHAPTER

Thirty

RANEY

After watching Hayes leave in his Uber, I ended up texting Talon, but again, no response. I suspect he's still busy being a career asshole. Or he's looking after his family. I hope it's the second.

I seriously think Hayes is way too close to the trauma to see how they fucked him over. I also get he is reluctant to do anything to draw attention to him. But I wasn't being overdramatic when I said I was done missing out on things.

The second I step in the Wolverines stadium my only focus is Puck.

Puck lied to me. He hasn't gotten better, he's in-fucking-sane. He moves like he was born with blades on his feet. His size means he's an absolute unit, and despite practicing his goals the other day, he is clearly defence through and through. Makes my heart giddy seeing how he was made for this.

Unsurprisingly, the friendly game is not that friendly at all but that's the nature of the game. Tied at half time, Puck's nearly the last off the ice, his eyes locked on mine the whole time. He's been showing off and pointing me out to his teammates, and can't say I didn't like it. With a hurried wave, Puck follows his team into the tunnel, and that's my cue to sprint to the loo.

Rhodes takes second point, letting Andrea take lead in my protection since I'm going to the ladies. She plays a good game, making me wait in the hallway while she checks,

leading me inside, waiting at the second door where the loos are. There's just something about her I don't like.

The buzzer over the PA system drowns out Koz's voice as he gives me an update on his release. And yeah, I know I should be more aware, but you should be able to rely on the people paid to protect you.

Instinctively, the second I open the door, I know I've been set up. Before I step foot out of the confined space to where they're both waiting, I crack the tiny panic alarm / tracker hidden in my clothes.

Andrea pulls the door open, and Sharlene's already snarling directions about where she wants me to stand.

"And this would be the first fuck off you'll hear from me." I shrug at her as I step out of the loos into where the basins are. Honestly, I shock myself at my confidence, and then I freak myself out when I put my back to Puck's mother and instead jab my finger in Andrea's direction. "You are dead. Don't even bother packing a fucking bag. You want to survive? You need to start running and not stop. Really, how stupid are you? No amount of money they threw at you is going to be worth the fear and pain you've just brought on yourself."

I guess I shock the shit out of Andrea because her eyes start blinking furiously. Perhaps it's the first time she realises how badly she screwed up, but her bravado disappears and she becomes someone I don't need to worry about. She becomes a victim.

"What do you want, Sharlene?" I say, turning away from them both to wash my hands and using the mirror to keep track.

"The deal was you stay away from my family," she spits, and the way she purses her lips tells me how much lip filler she's had. It shouldn't bring me happiness, but it does. I totally blame my stress.

And then I'm back in the game, aware of every little detail including knowing how soon Rhodes is going to plough through the door. "The deal?" I ask, despite knowing exactly what she's insinuating, the fucking cheque that Reid tried to fling at me is even more of a joke now.

"In light of the recent update my loyal employee has shared interesting and surprising facts about you, our generous offer has changed. I bet you're kicking yourself you didn't take the money, Raney. Now there's no way I'll be leaving this city without you. And honestly, it's almost embarrassing how many avenues of persuasion you have provided to us. How is your father by the way? Still locked up? Still getting raided constantly? Senator Anders works hard to rid our fine country of filth like the Fallen."

Staring at the woman who nearly killed me, I'm quickly filling with fear but at the same time it's like there's a gathering of strength in my bones.

I take a step away from her. "Me? With you? Oh please, you've got no hope. You know the big difference between my father and you? He doesn't hide behind other people, so yeah, Sharlene, you want to talk about avenues? You just invited every one of them into your world. Actually, why are you here, exactly? I mean, last I heard you were locked in home detention." I tap my finger against my chin like I'm deep in thought before I bark out the most bullshit laugh ever heard. "Holy shit, it's just to catch a glimpse of him, isn't it! I mean, that must have stung him running from you the first chance he got."

Winding her up might not be the best move considering how fucked she is in the head, but then again, I refuse to give her any power or control. She nearly throws me off my game by walking past me to the door but Andrea must be sensing things are about to go from bad to worse. Even I can hear Rhodes screaming through her earpiece.

Sharlene's focus drops to my throat, where the faint pack claim rests, "You can't dispute the claim you wear. It's lucky

we finally tracked down Reid's lost pack mate, considering how muddled an omega can get. Almost as fortunate as knowing the right people in the right places. The Pack Dissolution Forms don't seem to be needed anymore. Do they?"

The absurdity spilling out her mouth makes me laugh. I can hear the touch of panic in it, but I roll with the bravado that fills me at the same time.

"Please tell me Reid did not take responsibility for this." I shake my head, pointing at Puck's claim. "And heads up, Sharlene, he lied to his mommy about not passing over the signed form. I've got it, actually my lawyer does, or else it's already been lodged for processing."

"Reid is your alpha!" she screeches, losing her patience.

"Sharlene, you're a bit fucking slow, so I'll help you out in the last three seconds we have. Reid has no claim on me, never had, or will have. Do your best, bitch, then watch me do mine."

The facade she wears drops away as she lets all her crazy shine through before she and Andrea go back into the toilets away from the main entry. I must look a sight when I run out of the bathroom straight down towards Rhodes who is looking dangerous and on high alert.

"What happened?" he barks emotionlessly.

"Sharlene and Andrea happened. Andrea is a traitor and is dead. Find her, catch her, and put her somewhere we can *talk* with her privately."

"What? She's solid."

"Rhodes, she set me up. She is not solid," I snap back.

Passing over my panic alarm so he can turn it off, he scoops an arm protectively behind and walks me out. The whole time he's talking on his mouthpiece, updating all the other people on the security channel about Andrea selling me

out. He guides us straight towards an exit, and I fight out of his hold.

He stops and pulls this face at me. I think it's his version of incredulous disbelief with a dash of 'not fucking happening'.

Schooling my features and swallowing the panic that would make me sound way too dramatic, I borrow his nod to set some ground rules. "I'm not leaving without Puck. Not with Sharlene lurking around the corridor like some nefarious villain ready to body snatch him."

"He'll be fine. He can look after himself," Rhodes barks as he glares hard at me.

"Not happening."

"I'm not leaving you here," he hisses.

"That works, but at the same time, I'm not leaving, so I guess you're staying too." I smile sweetly. Not bitchily nor sassy. Okay, maybe there's a small tongue in cheek in my mannerism. Rolling my eyes, I suggest a workable solution. "Phone Koz," I say firmly despite him getting all alpha-y on me. "If he tells you to pick me up and drop my ass in the car, then by all means you can give that a try. Word up, my foot will be going in your nuts. The other option is you back up and do your thing and keep me safe while I watch Puck play the last half."

"Goddamnit!" He snarls. Rhodes glares for a minute or two while he argues with himself before he grunts and returns his arm protectively as he all but bum rushes us to our seats, earning us a million dirty looks. He refuses to sit until he sees Frank racing through the crowd.

Puck sees the commotion, and I start mouthing off that I'm okay as he skates closer.

"What?" he mouths, throwing his hands up in question. I give him a roll of my eyes as my answer, telling him with a shoo to get his ass back in the game. There is no way Sharlene will make a scene now, way too many witnesses. She did what she wanted to do, which was try to put the wind up me and

maybe if it was pre-heat I'd be a quivering mess, but those boys left me full of endorphins and feeling like I could conquer the world.

Rhodes sits ramrod straight in the seat next to me, his phone never leaving his ear for the entire quarter. But then again, I think he realises how much shit is going to hit the fan if he can't locate Andrea before Koz gets out.

It's the last nine minutes of the game, and I'm already thinking of the ways Puck and I can celebrate. My thoughts are also occupied figuring out what else to add to give to Heidi in the Scorned Girls chat about Hayes and the new information on the baby, when I hear the first gasp.

Looking up, my eyes are locked on number twelve from the other team as he keeps throwing off at Puck. The game is in play down the other end of the ice, but something else is going on. The other guy keeps shoving at Puck, and Puck is doing his hardest to ignore him to get back into the game. Racing off, I think Puck handles it like a pro, but then I'm surging to my feet along with every other person in the stadium when his opponent openly attacks him. Not game play.

I'd put money on this being Sharlene's threat of what she's capable of. It has dodgy bitch written all over it.

The rest of the team are caught up down the other end of the game, until they swing around and realise what's going on. Then it's like an eruption of aggression that sweeps through the stadium as a wave of orange and black rushes to their teammate. He's doing okay, meeting blow for blow except when the guy shakes off his gloves and goes at Puck with his bare fist. Although bare is a lie, even from here you can see the outline of the knuckle dusters that grace his fist.

Puck does well, until he doesn't. And it goes from bad to worse when he cops a fist to the side of his helmet. He drops. The crack of his head is nearly as loud as the echo of my scream.



CHAPTER
Thirty-One

“Lolli...”

I close my eyes and take a full breath in after what feels like such a long time. And definitely since I raced through the tunnels searching for Puck.

Talon wraps his arms around me from behind while he showers me in his scent. “I came as soon as I heard,” he says, resting his chin on my shoulder, giving me the chance to let go of the pressure that’s been building up inside.

“Is he okay?” he asks without moving an inch.

“They won’t let me in yet. They’ve been really good and someone’s keeping me updated but...”

“It will be Puck telling them not to let you in. He won’t want to worry you, that’s all, Lolli.”

“I’ll ring his bloody neck,” I say, leaning into everything that Talon offers. “It was Sharlene.”

“I heard. You’re lucky she didn’t hurt or take you, Lolli.”

“I know. Koz’s training kicked into gear, and I reacted without thinking. So, there is that.”

“There is that. Still not great, Lolli, she knows you’re an omega, and she knows where Puck is now.”

“Well, the good guys let her out, so it’s kind of your fault, Tal.” I huff a strained laugh.

“I’m sure King and Koz will have some choice words for you regarding you staying when you should have been

anywhere but here.”

“Probably true. What about you? You find anything good at the compound?”

“Hmm, I mean I can take you in for questioning if you like. I definitely want to know why Puck got to spend the day hiding in your room and we got shown the door.”

“In light of what I know now, you would have made some excuse to leave instead of telling the truth, so let’s not go there.”

“Seems fair. For now. It kind of makes me feel all important telling you where Sharlene is though.”

“Really? Where is that?”

“She’s hiding in a suite at the Waldorf. Supposedly a rather large team of agents have been called in after the Senator reported they’re being harassed.”

This time I do laugh at their cowardice.

“And there’s an APB out on Andrea, but I also heard through the grapevine there’s an extremely lucrative contract on offer for those that the people I work with like to call, clean-up crews.”

“How do you know?” I ask, my scepticism nice and obvious.

“You didn’t notice the badge I was wearing at all, Lolli?” He leans past so he can pop his eyebrow up at me.

“Yeah, well we had other things to occupy our time than talking about careers.”

“And that conversation is going to get lost again. Come on, I’ll take you to the hospital, see if my badge can open up some doors for you.”

“You would? I know Hayes needs you.”

And then Talon shuffles around so he takes the place of the door I was pointlessly staring at. “Well, the way we see it, you

need us, so you get me. He's fine, I spoke to him the whole time I was driving here. He's going to have an early night. I won't be staying with you too long, just long enough."

"Long enough for what?"

"Well, let's say Koz isn't the only one that can do special things for you," he winks at me.

"What did you do?" I ask, kind of shocked. I mean, Talon is a bit of a goody two-shoes when it comes to life. I can't imagine him doing anything that would stretch past the outline of his two-toned way of life.

"You've got this look in your eyes, Lolli, that's kind of emasculating."

It's hard not to smile at him, and he runs with it.

"You can thank me later, maybe with a sneaky..."

My eyes flare.

"Too soon after your heat to be talking about a repeat?"

"Too soon? Who are you right now?"

"Yeah, I've been asking myself that since I left you this morning. Without a goodbye kiss, thank you very much. You had to know that would have stung."

"I kissed Hayes," blurts out of my mouth.

"Yeah, I know." He grins. "And he loved it."

He starts walking us out of the underground maze of the Wolverines stadium. It seriously feels like we're going in the wrong direction, but he seems to know which way we need to go.

"I know you've got a lot going on, Lolli, but if we could arrange to catch up with you once you know Puck's better and Koz is by your side again. Both Hayes and I would be super keen on your meeting and showing you photos of our little princess."

"What about Reid?"

“No thanks. I’d lose my badge if I was in the same room as him,” Talon hisses, but he keeps the tone light.

“I’m packing with Koz, Tal. You know that, right?” I stop walking and pull him to a stop too.

He nods his head. “I knew that. Hayes also just informed me it’s not my business. I’m a little shocked about your choice of alpha, but I don’t really get a say anymore, do I?”

I shake my head, agreeing he doesn’t get a say.

“Are you really going to stay packed to Reid?”

“Not by choice, Lolli. But I won’t risk Hayes’s daughter until I have everything I need set up.”

“Like what?”

He looks off in the distance. “So you know how Sharlene fucked Hayes over, you also know we have something we need to protect now. But even before that happened, I guess Sharlene got lucky and got Hayes and me exactly where she wanted us.”

“What could she possibly have on you, Talon?”

Shrugging, he tips his head to one side. “I was desperate. Young and stupid. On so many levels.”

“What did you do?”

“I flunked trying to get into the Academy.” He holds my gaze, and I think he’s waiting for me to fill in the gaps.

“Own your shit, Talon. Don’t make me be the person to judge what you did. You did something crappy, you did something crappy. Get over it. What am I going to do?”

“Refuse to see me. That’s what I’m more worried about.”

“Why?”

“Bit hard to be so staunch in your views when you’ve muddied your own morals.”

“So, what? You lied to get into the Academy? Big deal.”

“Bit of blackmail too. Except apparently my conversation was recorded and now I’m the victim of the intended blackmail, instead of being the other way around.”

“Wow, I did not expect that. You are going straight to hell.” I gasp. Hamming it up, obviously. Then I grab the lapels of his white business shirt—he’s certainly gone for hot as fuck police detective today even rolling his sleeves up to forearm porn level. “Are you a bad person?”

“You seem to be changing my views on a few things since you blasted back into my life, Lolli. I had all these indicators set up in my...”

I literally use all my strength and shake the crap out of him. “Tal, stop! Are you a bad person? Simple yes or no.”

“No,” he answers immediately.

“Am I a good person?”

“Without a doubt.”

“Then what is the problem? I just don’t get it.”

He looks away, shaking his head, gathering himself by the looks of it. When he looks back, his midnight blue eyes are clear, sparkling like sapphires in the sun and it magnifies how much he’s matured. His dimple makes a sudden appearance when he smiles shyly, reminding me of the times when we were just kids. Although most of our memories are of those times.

“Everything we did, Lolli, was with the intention of getting you back. Nothing after the baby was unplanned. It couldn’t be. But we had this tunnel vision to get to where we wanted to be. If we could have, we would have teleported to that passage of time where everything, all our hard work was paying off. But we couldn’t, so instead, I bent my own rules and found a way to get into the academy. Like always though, one little fuck up spins itself into a bigger one where you have to lie to keep the truth covered. Like I said, in my mind, if I could be the best damn detective here, then Hayes and I would be able

to provide a safe life for you and all my own demons would be worth it.”

“And were you ever going to tell me of your plan?” I ask unable to hold back the venom in my tone, because for fuck’s sake, it’s all well and good having a life mapped out with someone, but I think letting that someone know is a big part of that.

He grimaces, picking up on the edge of bitterness in my tone and scent. My reactions have nothing to do with my recent heat and everything to do with how much fucking time we wasted.

“I spent so much time believing you didn’t want me, Tal. You’ve got no idea. Shit, I’ve got no clue if we’re even going to be able to get past that. Or even if we should.”

Talon’s mouth pulls together in a depreciative look of defeat, but I look past it and keep explaining.

“I didn’t get or hear one word from you. And don’t think you’re special. I absolutely chewed Hayes out for it too. Surely as a detective you would have looked for a clue to where I was. You could have found me and sent me a handful of words to let me know what you were doing, instead of leaving me wondering what the hell was wrong with me.”

“I probably could’ve found you if I tried.”

“Why didn’t you? Why, Talon? And don’t blame King for this.”

He looks down the now empty corridor.

I growl, frustrated that he’s keeping the reasons from me, and it pulls his troubled blue eyes back to mine. And despite the deep pools of emotion I see in them, I keep my hands to myself as I wait for a better explanation.

“Why, Tal?”

For a man his size, he moves without stirring the air between us. His hand cups my face so intimately that I get a cramp in my chest.

“I lost you once, Lolli. I knew I wasn’t strong enough to find you only to watch you leave. So, I threw everything I had into working on our future. Everything. Along the way I learnt to ignore those fears of losing you by focusing on other things. Hayes hated me doing it, he says I’m a robot some days even now, but working on those foundations until I could deal with the fact I might have fucked everything up with you was the only way I could do this.”

“There’s still a possibility you did screw everything up, Talon.”

“Yeah, I know. But see, in the few days since I saw you again, I’ve got this thing urging me on, screaming in my ear, if I’m honest, that I don’t need to be scared anymore.”

I shake my head, not quite getting what he’s saying.

Talon’s dimple deepens, and I know he’s understanding my confusion in his own way.

“I would survive you leaving me. I’d be scarred deep inside, but I would survive. Lolli, I just don’t want to live like that. But I could if I had to.”

“What do you want?”

His smile changes again, it’s like it comes from such an honest place for once, and I’m caught staring up at the Talon I fell in love with years ago. The one who laughed constantly and had stars in his eyes instead of a plan. He used to have such a deep desire to dream.

“I want another chance with you.”

“How?”

“I guess all of a sudden I have an urge to unlock a new mindset. One where I’m on my knees pulling apart the foundations of a future I’ve been obsessing about before I crawl to you to beg for any clue as to what your future looks like. Then I will start working on that instead of this fucking crazy idealisation of what your perfect life looks like in my head.”

I flinch, it's hard not to. He's got this look of rightness in his eye, but at the end of the day, words are words and even without explaining why I take a step away, I know he gets it. His hand doesn't drop away as the space between us increases.

He takes a step closer. One small barely noticeable step, but it's like holding a megaphone to my head with the noise it makes. Of course, Talon being Talon, makes the simple step mean that much more when he drops to his knees in front of me, "Like I said in Puck's bed, I'm so fucking sorry, Lolli. I'm sorry I let you down. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. And I'm sorry for being a dick."

"World's biggest dick."

He shudders playfully from his place at my feet as he amends his statement. "I'm sorry for being the world's biggest dick. Even though I'm saying sorry, Lolli, I'm stoked you think I've got the biggest dick..."

I shove my hand over his mouth. "Talon, be serious!"

Instead of sobering up, he smirks and shakes his head before talking around my hand, "Can't. Look what being serious cost me. Instead, I'm sure the answer is in the million laughs I owe you."

And in one moment I'm damning and blessing him in the same heartbeat. His words hit home. They are like the sound of ice breaking after a long hard winter. I squash my hand harder over his mouth, except his eyes are glittering and his campfire scent wraps around me like a comforting snuggle on a cold night.

"You have a lot of ground to make up," I tell him straight up. There's no point either feeding his resolution or arguing it. "Right now, I still want to inflict some kind of physical pain on you... but I also need to get to Puck. And Koz. And then no promises, Tal, on what our tomorrow looks like, but I think we do need to spend more time together. You, me, Hayes, Puck. And Koz. He is a part of whatever we are, and he always will

be. It's not a choice of me or you, he's been a part of me since you left."

Talon lifts his hands to hold my hand in place. He doesn't use his words though the kiss he places on my palm is pretty fucking telling.

"This isn't me forgiving you either, Talon. I mean it. I've got years of bullshit to unpack when it comes to you."

"I've got just as many years of apologies, Lolli. If you'll let me."



CHAPTER
Thirty-Two

“Close off the ward. If anyone needs urgent care, they should be in fucking ICU already. It’s not my problem how you do it, Lew, but it will be your problem if you don’t sort it out. Fast.” I wave my hand about, “If I come out later, and find one fucking person lurking in the shadows your bonus will be renegeed. Yes?”

“My bonus?”

“My mistake, I meant to say your services will be terminated.” I smile, like a crocodile. My mood just as ugly.

“Of course. Should I find a hand-blown glass vase for you at the same time?”

I turn slowly to look at him, making sure I heard him right, and the sly dog wears just the smallest tip of his lips.

“I figured that was a given,” I reply slowly, rearranging the bouquet of lilac wisteria I had him driving around the city for.

He breezes past me, his eyes locked on the security guards standing up in front of the doors to the ward. I stop and let him do his thing, rereading the text from Detective Jeffers. Although clearly he wasn’t using his departmental provided phone when he sent me a photo of Raney glaring at the camera under a pile of blankets next to a sleeping Puck.

Obviously, Jeffers has managed to find a way back into her good graces. I’ve little doubt I’ll hear a very detailed explanation from her soon enough. Not that it matters, I’d bring her the world if she’d only ask.

Finishing off a text to Rhodes, letting him know any updates are to go through Lew on Andrea, I accept the offer the security guard makes to walk me to the private room down the far end of the corridor. Smart man also assures me no less than ten times that the ward will be vacated very shortly.

He leaves me with the standard security personnel nod, and I wait until he is back at his station before I open the door to the room. Her luscious sweet and sultry wisteria scent rushes out, and so does his. His petrichor scent brings a rise of my alpha, strangely in both challenge and acceptance. Even with him here, it doesn't take me long to sort through my usual sense of bewilderment that accompanies the realisation I'm in the same world as her.

Locking the door, I slip my shoes off and walk soundlessly to the larger, more open part of his hospital suite. Impressively, and despite his supposed injury, Puck is awake, a good quality revolver aimed in my direction. His arm wrapped around her protectively.

“How long has she been sleeping?” I ask, my voice quieter than her breathing.

He thumbs on the safety before putting his gun under the mattress in easy reach. “Three hours. She's eaten too.”

I flick my eyebrows up at his statement before my eyes drift over every inch of where she's sleeping. A bare toe sticks out of her nest made of blankets, not hospital issue ones, and her little foot is like a kick in the guts at how much time we've spent apart.

I point at her nest, wanting answers, and the cocky fuck smirks before he lifts his hand, and I realise she's hidden away in the Wolverines team colours. No doubt his own scent is interwoven within it, helping her feel comfortable and safe enough to snuggle down.

Jealousy surges through me, but I use her little toes as my anchor, and it helps to get my mood locked down. And that's where any of my attention on him or his presence here

completely dissolves. Without hesitation, I could have him by the throat in a second, and since we're both very aware of that, my alpha settles and starts to enjoy his mate sleeping, spread out like an angel waiting for tasting. My hands fiddle with the side gate on his bed, lowering it before my hands dig under the blankets to explore her warmth.

“Hope your head injury means you're needing extra sleep. Grab some ear plugs too,” I offer as I roll her over. Even in sleep she's responsive, and the small sigh along with the heady rush of her scent is like a soothing balm on the restlessness that's been riding my ass for the past long days.

Using both hands, I find the waistband of her sleep shorts and slide them straight down her long slender legs, undressing her with a practised touch.

“Turn the heat up,” I demand on an impatient growl as I throw the blanket over his face.

And since she's still cuddled up in his arms, there's little he can do. Scrambling would wake her, and even I know he doesn't want that. Except the athletic fuck has been graced with exceptional wrist dexterity. With little effort, he has the blanket off his face, his eyes locked on what I am doing.

Keeping my movements slow and gentle despite my surging hunger, I lift one of Raney's legs open, letting it settle over him. Pausing, because she is that fucking stunning, I take a moment to drink down her relaxed state, and her still swollen pussy. Her scent is stronger, and by god it teases me.

My pause for appreciation lasts for all of a second before I have no choice but to lean down to lick the sleep from her.

A feral need takes hold at the first taste of her on my tongue. It's like a wildfire of desire ignites as I sink to my knees dragging her ass to the edge of the mattress as I wake my kitten with the very wettest of reunions. Raney on my tongue is as necessary as oxygen, and we've been together long enough for me to know how much she likes me enjoying her body while she sleeps.

A soft purr falls from her lips as she starts swaying her hips in a very slow and seductive way under my attention. Spearing her with my tongue, I hear the noises she makes change into a strangled pant that stirs the air so much all I smell is her. While all I taste is her—a winning combination in my books. It's exactly what I need after being away.

Her first orgasm is small and tasty. It glazes my lips and leaves a lingering sweetness on my tongue. Watching, I see the moment her hunger wakes her properly. It's hard to miss the way she reaches over for Puck, even with her eyes closed.

“No,” I snarl to stop her not waiting for an answer, as my tongue returns to circle around her swollen clit. My fingers pump inside her pussy as I lick my claim in front of him.

He waits, as he fucking should. And the building purr that was starting to rumble louder from her rolls into a deep moan.

“They didn't treat you right, micina. Your pussy is strangling my fingers,” I chuckle leaning in to flick my tongue over the stretch of her glossy pussy, teasingly and purposely not touching her clit. “Another one, and then I'm going to fill you with my cock. A hard reminder of who you belong to.”

Her fingers wrap in my hair as she holds me in place, as she shows me exactly how much she enjoys my mouth on her body and my fingers in her pussy. Without warning, her jade green eyes burst open as they sparkle like emeralds caught in sunlight. She lets go for me, her pleasure making her keen like a cat.

Licking my lips, enjoying the sweetening of her slick, I drop my pants. Winking at her in warning, I ram my cock so far and hard into her that her mouth opens in silent ecstasy. I take a savage kiss from her that is not about reacquainting. It's a show of ownership. And she's fucking mine.

Her nails score over my shoulders as she tries to get even closer, making me chuckle egotistically against her lips. “Miss me, darling?” Without waiting to hear her reply, I bury my face into the crook of her neck and wrap my lips around

Puck's fading claim. I suck on the gland where she leaks her scent from. The very place that will soon wear my claim, as I start to fuck her faster, and harder into his hospital bed.

With each thrust I feel more like myself. Raney is the only omega I have ever responded to. From the second she scented for me, she became the only person alive to sate the beast that constantly rages inside my head. Without question, she is my greatest strength, and the only weakness I have. But I can easily admit that to anyone.

Hoisting one of her legs to rest on my shoulder, I slow the way we fuck. She feels like a goddess possessing every part of me. Power literally coats her skin, rolling off her, and the satisfaction of being the one inside her heats every part of me.

Raney pulls my forehead to hers and whispers endlessly words that only make sense to us. Our shared grunts and moans, the strained groans of our body coming as one, is our love language. And Jesus, I fucking love this woman.

“Ready, kitten?”

“Always,” she purrs, and a wide smile breaks over her lips. I clamp my hands around her waist as I slam my knot inside her body.

The sensation is a collision of heaven and hell as I surge inside her. But she matches my intensity with her own. Her pussy clamping and quivering in waves around me, driving me to nearly howl at the fucking moon. Instead, I drop my mouth to hers, stealing her oxygen and her submission with every twist of our tongues.

She fights me, but it's never been against my dominance and my insatiable appetite to own her. She fights to give me everything she can.

“Only you,” I growl over her smiling lips. The both of us taking desperate lungful's of air, but she hasn't finished with me.

With a sultry smirk on her face, she demands more.

Manhandling her is easy; she's completely submissive and eager. I've had many dealings with Raney's needs, and along the way, I've had to learn how to trust her more than I trust myself. With my knot buried deep inside her hungry body, it makes shuffling her around harder, but the pleasure increases tenfold as I shift her leg over so she's lying on her side facing Puck. I slap her ass in warning before I rail into her in a near frantic desperation. Raney twists her body, her eyes latched, on mine and I can see the question in them before she's even figured out a way to ask.

"Kiss her," I bark at him, pulling his acquiesce from him.

He throws off the blankets, and the fact he's buck fucking naked under the sheets has me nearly lashing out until I see the look of pure joy in her pretty eyes.

She drops her hand down to thread our fingers before she reaches up for him as he pulls her mouth down to his. His hand catches hers, and he steers it straight to his pierced cock.

And I snap a ferocious noise at them both. With a soft smile, her hand moves off his cock to rest over the top of his hand.

I've never shared her with another person. And they both know it, but there is no fear or worry in their movements despite my loud protest. We find a way—her not touching his dick but still kissing him—to come together as we take Raney to a newer, more perfect definition of oblivion.



CHAPTER

Thirty-Three

The flood of endorphins quickly collide with the drugs Puck's taken, sending him straight into a deep sleep after my physical reunion with Koz. The cheeky grin on his face is hard to look away from. And it's very much part of the reason I'm tossing and turning.

Having Koz wrapped around me should have had me in a similar state to them both, but every time I close my eyes, all I see is what happened to him. Then it's the crap Hayes is caught in. The threat to Talon. Koz being taken away again. All my thoughts are stacking on top of the other, leaving me in that awful state of being bone tired but completely wired.

Turning for the hundredth time, Koz's fingers on my hip glide down between my thighs, cupping my pussy, his index finger dipping inside. And it usually sends me straight to sleep.

"Micina, why are you so wriggly?" Koz murmurs, his voice thick from sleep. His lips dipping close to my ear, where he leaves them.

I feel shitty for waking him, but he'd be pissed off if I didn't.

"He was lucky, Koz," I whisper back, turning on my back so I can put my legs over the top of his and snuggle against him so his mouth is next to mine. He puts my hand in his and curls us closer.

"Life is dangerous, you know that" Koz answers truthfully, his eyes still closed.

“We might have to resort to your way of resolving the pack thing if Reid and Sharlene don’t stop,” I say, and that makes his eyes shoot open. My alpha is a vicious man. Me teasing him with suggestions of violence gets him hard too. His teeth gleam in the dark room, making him look like the predator he can be.

“I can confidently say I’d have it done with little fuss. I’m sure I have a couple of spare bullets lying around somewhere.” He chuckles as he rolls on his back and drags me over him. “Get on my cock, Raney, you know talking like that is only going to end up with me flooding your pussy.”

I climb up to sitting and his hands immediately cup my breasts as he massages them. I move them slightly so he can twist my nipples at the same time. Stretching up as tall as I can go, I crack my neck, getting caught up in both his searing touch and his rustic approach to life. I eventually remember to speak, “So you kill anyone who is an issue in my life and we fuck to celebrate?”

He smiles, as he sits us up, his mouth trailing a circle of fire from one collar bone to the other before he kisses his way to my ear. “You’re an omega. Fucking is your life force. And my job as your alpha is to give you what you need and want. If you need orgasms at three in the morning, I’m there. You need some stupid woman and her derelict son dead, of course I’m going to be there to finish them off.” He guides me down onto his cock. “You want anything, Raney, you just need to tell me and I’ll do everything to make it happen.”

He rocks his hips, and I wrap my arms around his neck to ride him and his bloodthirsty ideals.

“I want them as my pack, Koz.”

It’s no secret, I’ve told him everything that’s happened, every word they’ve said to me since I arrived back.

My fingers scratch over his scalp as I rock back and forth on his lap, his cock hitting all the right spots while my clit grinds over his knot—he knows exactly how to ruin me. Koz

drops his head back, and I drag my teeth down the column of his neck, stopping where my claim will sit, pulling a deep purr from his chest and a cloud of his scent.

“I don’t want to wait anymore without you being my alpha.” I moan in his ear when he holds me still so he can drive me crazy with long deep thrusts.

“Squeeze my cock, Raney, show me how much you want me,” he growls over the top of his purr. My whole body vibrates as his alpha comes out to play.

All I can smell is Koz’s cherry and chocolate scent mixed with the smell of our sex, it’s overpowering to say the least. He bands his arms tightly around me so I can barely breathe as our bodies move as one.

“You get everything your heart desires. You’ll want for nothing. If you’ll let me do that for you.”

“Do what?” I ask as I grind harder down on him, his cock in so deep he’s touching my cervix.

He groans, and it’s such an erotic sound that continues when I lean down to bite his shoulder. His cherry and chocolate scent coats my lips. He pulls my face to his. It’s not nice or sweet, it’s Koz through and through. He growls against my lips as he holds me still so he can drive our pace. “Don’t be weak in telling me what you need. All you have to do is say it and we’ll make it happen.”

I lose my train of thought when Koz’s hand drops down my ass crack, his fingers rubbing through my slick as we move faster. He waits for the point where I’m panting, trying to slow the orgasm threatening to explode before he fingers my asshole, leaving me slamming my eyes shut and hissing a million words like a silent prayer.

“Come on, kitten, take all my cream like a good girl,” he purrs, as his cock and his fingers drive into me, taking me higher still. “Show your Puck again how much you take.”

I risk a look over my shoulder and sure enough, Puck is awake and watching. His sheets are pulled down low so I can

see the way he's jacking himself off. And god, with Koz inside my body, and Puck watching us with an animalistic look in his eyes, it's so fucking intense. My head falls to rest on Koz's shoulder as he keeps fingering and fucking me.

A moment later, there's a whisper of warning against my skin before Puck's petrichor scent slams into me. Making me lose my rhythm as I ride Koz.

"You were asleep," I say. The first thing coming to my head, filtering out like a weird groan.

"Waiting. I was waiting for you, Raney. Wake up, baby, I've been waiting for you," Puck replies back super quietly.

"He's right, kitten. It's time for you to wake up and start being what you are meant to be."

"What's that?" I ask. Honestly, it's like all of a sudden I've lost the ability to think coherently. And they are most definitely responsible for that. They're both drowning me in their scents, and their presence is pushing against mine, taking everything from me. It should fill me with deep anxiety being in this vulnerable head space, but I haven't felt so sheltered in such a long time.

Koz answers decisively, "A packed omega. My omega."

"Fuck yes," Puck says. His voice sounds closer again, or maybe I'm just getting lost in Koz. He's a monster when he gets in this mood, he's a focused god intent on worship.

"Now," Koz barks, punching his hips up high. He fingers me just as deeply, making me come on a high-pitched wail. Waves of release crash through my body. From the bottom of my feet, building and growing until the rush of my orgasm feels like it explodes out of the top of my head, making my hair tingle.

"You love knowing how much we need you, don't you," He says, his words lost under a series of heavy breathing and fading groans.

I can't talk as he keeps working me through my peak, driving himself in and out of my body with the promise of another orgasm.

"Eyes open." Koz growls as he shoves me sideways while keeping his arms locked around my waist.

Puck's hand races up from my ass cheeks all the way to the back of my shoulders as he steers me to his cock. My mouth is open and ready.

The moment he goes to enter my mouth, Koz growls. Puck erupts in laughter before the noise changes to sounds of him coming as he leans back to blow his load over my face instead. He purposely covers my tongue in his unique rainy flavour. The combination of him and Koz, both in me together, loving me, is too much to handle. Nearly.

"Take it," Koz demands. Barely a second later, I feel him emptying inside me. Koz groans as I clench around him, and then I groan as Puck's fingers dig into my hair as he drags his dick through his come on my face, repeating over and over something too low to hear. I happily imagine him telling me he's never leaving me again.

"Raney?"

I go to answer Koz, but I'm having a complete omega moment, not willing to swallow the taste of Puck's pleasure as my body refuses to let any part of Koz go either. Of course, they respond instinctively, a fresh cresting wave of their alpha pheromones and possessive touches make me actually see stars as I float in a headless orgasm high. I honestly can't figure out if I feel I'm floating or sinking, all I know is I'm safe and loved up. When I open my eyes, I'm not surprised that I'm looking up at the ceiling. I am shocked when Puck dips in close for a kiss. I squeak, making them both do a low, masculine chuckle that makes me shiver.

"Stop," I murmur, as Puck's lips drop near mine.

"You don't want me to kiss you?" He pulls away. But he's got way too much cheeky-shit attitude going on in his blue

eyes glittering for his teasing to be misconstrued.

“Need to breathe,” I reply, wiping my mouth and trying to slow down the race of my heart so I don’t hyperventilate on them. That would make them too fucking cocky. “Besides, you need to get your butt back into bed.”

“No can do, Raney. I feel like a new man right now. You heard the doc, she said I’m here as a precaution. No concussion and no headache. The helmet took the impact, all I’ve got is a black eye. And I’m riding the ‘I blew my load in your mouth’ buzz, wondering about how quick we can pack. Don’t take that away from me...” he whines, with a fucking cocky smirk on his face.

I ignore the way he’s peacocking, because I will combust, and touch over his black eye instead. It’s kind of how our sexfest restarted. His eyes are dark blue, and don’t move from mine as I trail my fingers over the bruise.

“Are you okay with me touching her?” Puck asks, interrupting the moment. I can’t help but giggle when his smug look of satisfaction doesn’t change when he questions Koz.

“We’re going to have to take the touch situation on a fuck-by-fuck basis,” Koz taunts Puck before he looks back at me, “Raney has always been the best judge of my mood. I’ll kill you before you blink if you touch my dick though. But it’s nothing compared to what I’ll do to you if you touch her without her permission.”

Puck’s eyes widen but not in fear. No, his happiness and relief is evident in every blink of his cheeky eyes. He laughs softly, “You know she’s going to want to touch me a lot, right?”

“Puck!” I hiss back. Koz’s correct about me being able to read him like a book, and right now he’s tired but he’s also still got his dick in me, so the touch thing might be tested sooner than Puck realises. “Koz, pull me up.” I lift my arms, and he

tugs me back onto his chest. And we collapse against the pillows.

Puck watches as I settle down. He steps back a little, and his eyes drop. He doesn't miss the fact that Koz has yet to pull out.

“She'll be asleep in a few minutes this way. One day I might teach you all Raney's secrets, unless you piss me the fuck off, and then you get nothing. It's time to take another nap, pup, in the morning we've got a fuck tonne of planning going on.”

“What do you mean?”

“She hasn't told you her girls are arriving shortly?” Koz laughs. It rumbles through his body into mine, making my hips undulate while I whine. He slaps a hand on my ass cheek. “Stop, Raney.”

I moan shamelessly. And then he has to drop both his hands to my ass to stop me rolling them more. “Why the hell do you think I was so insistent on getting out of incarceration? I'm not worried about Raney; she can look after herself in any situation. With her Scorned Girls coming, every person in this town needs to be scared.”

I go to protest, but Koz sweeps my hair over my face, cutting off Puck and shutting down any further discussion. And then the evil man trails his fingers, soft like falling feathers, up and down my back. Fighting against him is futile... as if I ever would.

Being spoilt by good orgasms, having Puck at the same time, and then having Koz's dick in my pussy while I sleep is right up there on my list of why my life is generally fan-fucking-tastic.

Waking up to the low whispered timbre of Lew's voice trying to pacify Koz's shitty mood feels like we're home and back

into the normal swing of things. Cracking my eyes open, the sunlight lets me know I got more than a catnap.

“What’s the problem?” I ask, rubbing my hand over my face.

“King.”

“He’s here?” I clarify, but I don’t move a muscle, considering I’m naked and Lew’s in the room. Lew copping a gander would not be a good start to the day.

Koz drops his hand on my shoulder, pretty much confirming I’m on the ball this morning. But then again, his jealousy is as much a part of him as his beautiful ice blue eyes. His possessiveness has never upset me before, it’s not about to start now.

“Lew, can you let King know I’ll be out in fifteen minutes? I want to have a shower to freshen up,” I offer as an easy solution. “If he’s not happy with that, you can tell him I said stiff shit, and I’ll see him at the clubhouse when I’m ready. His choice if we catch up sooner rather than later.”

I’m not being a bitch. I’m talking to Dad in the way I have been brought up by him and all my uncles. Plus, saying what I said to Lew for him to repeat back will ensure Dad knows it’s coming from me and not Koz. Koz would have just told him to fucking leave.

Lew exits without another word, and Koz leans down near my ear. “Micina, this does untold things to me.” He’s reflective as his finger trails over his name. His voice thick with the emotions that are locking him up. But that’s another of the things I love desperately about this man—he’s completely open about how he feels, and he constantly tells me.

“What does it mean?” Puck interrupts.

“It means none of your fucking business,” Koz hisses while smiling down at me sweet and innocently.

I roll over, using Puck's blanket as a toga inspired dress as I stand up, pushing Koz out of the way. "It means I can be myself with Koz."

"Sono tutto con te, Kozantine," Koz repeats, making all the vowels roll as he pulls me back close so his fingers can trace over the script Niche inked.

"Is it still scabby?" I ask.

He leans down and bites the skin before he purrs in my ear, "It needs cream. I will provide the best cream for you later." He winks at me before flicking his hand at the shower. "First get your fanny washed. We've got a busy day."

"Doing what?" I purposely tease.

"Trying on sexy clothes, picking up the wretched Scorned Girls. Initially, I thought we..."

"They'll eat you alive if you talk like that when they're here."

Puck interrupts Koz, playfully shoving me towards the bathroom. "Do you really think it's wise bringing them here?"

"You don't want to meet my Scorned Girls?" I turn to face him, kind of shocked he doesn't want to meet a part of me he never has.

Koz whistles and pulls a face like he can't believe Puck went there before clapping him on his shoulders.

"Later you can argue, or discuss, I don't care which. Shower now, Raney. Puck, get your discharge sorted out," Koz directs us both.

The bathroom is utilitarian at best, but it's hard to luxuriate anywhere when Koz is constantly walking in and not at all subtly checking his watch every few minutes.

Koz does an exceptionally good job of rushing both me and Puck out of the room and into the deserted hospital ward. He holds my hand, his thumb trailing tenderly over it as we start towards the doors to meet up with King. Puck's following

slightly behind before he sneaks in and drops his hand down inside my pants to rest on my ass.

Koz doesn't miss a thing. The side eye he gives Puck would be enough to send others scurrying in fear, but Puck simply shrugs. "You'll have to get used to me touching her. I get the 'don't enter her body when you're already in it' vibe, but regardless, it's going to happen. You can lose your shit as much as you want, but mark my words, even if it's in ten years' time I'll be fucking her while you are too. Oh, maybe we should think about it being a celebration thing we do... In the meantime, I'll be testing your limits and touching her up as much as humanly possible."

Puck holds Koz's silent challenge, but it's not aggressive, instead it's assertively delivered with his blazing confidence and oozing sweetness. The three of us come to a stop in front of the doors and Dad's eyes narrow at me through the glass partition, but it seems we've got a few issues that need resolving first.

Koz doesn't make a sound. He pops an eyebrow up expectantly at Puck and waits. Except Koz doesn't have a lot of patience, and he cracks first. "Come on, Pup, let's hear it."

"Thought I just said my piece." Puck grins, and it's a touch cheeky and a touch arrogant. And then he purposely waits for Koz's steely gaze to fall down to where Puck's hand is currently buried. Only then does Puck move his hand, at a snail's pace from my ass to my hip before he stares at Koz as his fingers dip inside my underwear. It's pretty obvious where Puck's fingers are. It's clear to see, but I also kind of give it away by moaning softly, making Puck chuckle under his breath.

Puck starts talking at the same lazy pace he touches me. "As much as she is yours, Koz, she's mine too. I've got no issue with you. But if you want me to be a cock about it I can be—she was mine way before she was yours. Like years before." Puck's words seem to slow, while his fingers seem to pick up pace as Koz starts to make noises like he's choking.

Koz's eyes narrow before they flick down to watch Puck's as he keeps fingering me. "Anyway, I love Raney with everything I am, and I actually respect you a lot so I'm happy to work in the confines of your weird needs too. For a little while. We'll make our pack work but mark my word, we're group fucking on my birthday, it kind of seems fair." He pulls his finger out, then pushes my beast further by sucking them clean before waving that hand towards the door. "Shall we? King's going to be pissed enough."

"I swear to fucking god, micina, someone is going to die before the day is out."

"Nonsense," I say, laying my head against his chest. Filling my lungs with his scent, and trying desperately to get my pussy, and heart, to chill the fuck out at Puck's confession. And objectives. And wicked touch.



CHAPTER

Thirty-Four

RANEY

As soon as we step into the corridor, it's pretty clear King's not happy. I hold his ugly glare with my own.

The moment the door closes behind me, his finger is up jabbing around like he's Woody fucking Woodpecker. "You're on lockdown," he roars.

I wait quietly as he struggles not to lose his shit completely. A few tense seconds stretch out until he gives me a weird grimace, letting me know he's good. I reach up for a kiss from Koz, twisting around for a similar kiss from Puck, and then I walk over to dad and straight into his waiting arms, which is all he wants.

"Geez, you haven't put me on lockdown for a few years, King. Are you sure you're okay?" I tease as I sink into his hug. It's weird that despite everything that's been happening, this is the second time since I arrived home that I've been able to get a cuddle from my dad.

"Missed you, kid," he murmurs softly. His hug confirms the past few days would have been as hard for him as they've been for all of us.

Irrespective of how pissy he's being or has been, there's no disputing how much he loves me, it's ingrained in him. He also scents like home. Breathing him in as we hug it out, I'm struck with the realisation, it's my childhood home. My home these days smells more like dark cherry chocolate, falling rain, cinnamon donuts, and a strange combination of leather and campfire.

“I missed you too, Dad,” I squeeze him again, “Not going to let you lock me away though. Besides, I’m pissed at you. Hiding Puck away from me for all these years is grounds for me to have a tizzy, but not you!” His hand clasps around the back of my head as he keeps squeezing the crap out of me.

King chuckles evilly. “Got you a beauty, didn’t I? I can’t believe we hid the kid right under your nose. And before you start bitching, I’d do it again in a heartbeat. I protected you. And I protected him.” He turns us and starts walking off, in typical King fashion, expecting everyone just to follow.

Using the weight of my body, I put the brakes on, and he feels my hesitation immediately and lets me out of our hug but holds onto my arm, stepping away to read me better to see what the issue is. “Hugs are good because I missed you like crazy, but now you can use your words and explain why you are trying to drag your adult daughter off caveman style. I’m pretty sure we’ve already had this argument about your style of parenting... give or take a thousand times. One possessive asshole is enough in my life.”

Puck is suddenly there, leaning down to whisper in my ear. “Two, babe. We’ve talked about the sex thing but Koz will have to learn to cope with him not being the only possessive asshole in our relationship. You know I’ve been obsessed with you since forever.”

I risk a look at Koz, and the glare I get from my man gives me shivers. In all the right places. I think he’s going to say something about King trying to whisk me away, but it’s Puck who opens his mouth first.

“Raney’s not a bone to fight over, King, but if she were, I think it might be Koz and me who’d be going head-to-head. Yeah? You’re her dad and always will be, but you’re not her protector,” Puck says, dropping his hands on my hips and staring through King until Dad begrudgingly lets me go.

King’s never had a long fuse. “You getting all lippy on me now, huh? After all this time, you’re going to start throwing around bullshit comments like I don’t know how to act or who

to be around my daughter? After I treated you like my son? Fair whack of the ball, mate.” Dad also gets overly patronising in his verbal spray. And it’s not a nice sound, nor does it leave me as happy as I was to see him.

I go to say something, but Puck keeps intentionally winding King and my uncles up further. “Hope we’re not related, because shit, some of the stuff Raney and I have been doing wouldn’t be right if that was the case.” His hand curls around my hip more, dipping lower than any of them would ever touch me. And doing it in front of King is a pretty bold statement. Except the bikies miss Koz’s lack of reaction, which should be something they pay attention to, since Koz is my alpha.

“A bit of respect, yeah?” Joker lashes back at Puck as he takes more than a few obvious steps closer to King, adding another level of tension with each pronounced stomp of his steel-capped shit kickers.

“Nah.” Puck smirks back at Joker, and it’s not a nice smirk. “I’ve been listening to you long enough to know you all gave me your blessing to be with Raney, but for some fucking reason, it looks like you need reminding of our chats. If we need to do this in the foyer of a hospital, then yeah I’m ready to get... disrespectful.”

Dad gets that look in his eyes, the one where he’s about to become a different version of himself. But if Puck’s been living at the compound, he’d be well and truly used to King being King. I keep my mouth shut and watch the drama unfold. Honestly, these grown men are more emotionally skewed than the omegas at Unity on spa day.

King’s the first to blow. “Puck, I need a bit more respect coming out of your mouth, considering everything.”

“That’s the thing, King, I’ve got nothing but respect for you. And you know that. But it’s your actions that I’m having trouble with. You’re trying to drag Raney away from the ones who are meant to protect her.”

And much like when Puck stood up to Dad at Jenn's all those years ago, he purposely taunts King, and all my uncles, when he leans down and brushes the hair off my neck and kisses the spot he marked a long time ago. He's relaxed in the way he moves too before straightening up and smiling an apology at me. His blue eyes then jump to Koz, and they do that bloke way of communicating, using head flicks instead of words.

Koz reaches out for my hand, accepting me from Puck. "Micina, let the boys sort this out now," he says, moving us to a safer distance. "You'll get to chew them out later but this is alpha posturing that needs resolving. Now it seems. I'd say it was always going to happen, I've heard Puck gets as feisty as King does when it comes to you."

And while Koz isn't about to go toe to toe with the Fallen, he too adds to the rising tension by making unnecessary gestures. He holds my dad's glare while he dips down the opposite side of my body and kisses my neck right where his name sits.

I'm torn. I should be putting a stop to this. But at the same time, I'm completely buzzing out at the way Puck and Koz are getting all territorial. I'm an omega, this ownership gesture is like drip-feeding sugar water into the fluffy side of my brain.

I swear I try not to get all dreamy eyed when the both of them go full alpha-hole in King's presence. But I fail miserably.

Puck cracks his neck after he turns back to face King, "I sorted this out with Koz a few minutes ago, but by the looks I need to spell it out with you lot too. Raney is mine. Always has been, always will be. Yeah, you're her family, her flesh and blood, but she's my everything. She needs you, King, as her dad, but you go trying to rip her away from me or Koz again and there'll be no warning when I come at you," Puck says, his words coming through clenched teeth. He doesn't do anything to hide how pissed off he is with King. But he drops his eyes from dad at the very end confirming who is being

respectful and disrespectful. “You were the one dissing us, King. Not the other way ’round.”

“I’m too old for this crap,” King says, his scowl deepening before he hands his cut to Joker, while Puck drops his hoodie to the floor.

Then the two idiots stand eyeing each other like they’re actually going to fight it out.

“I’m not waiting around to watch this,” I say to anyone who’s listening. I slap Koz’s hand off mine when he tries to stop my exit.

“Raney,” he growls, and I turn to glare at him.

“What?” I hiss back.

He gives the smallest of shrugs, humour hitting his lips and making them twist slightly. “Wrong way, kitten, unless you’re going to...”

I do a less than graceful pirouette and start laughing as I breeze past him in the right direction. “Come on, Koz, I’m hungry, and we’ve got a million things to do before the girls get here.”

I don’t look behind to see if he’s following, instead I can feel his presence rubbing up against me suggestively with each step he takes. I brace myself to block out the noise of them all fighting, but before that happens I’m hit by a petrichor wave that sweeps me off my feet. Puck leans down for a quick kiss on my nose before he yells over his shoulder. “King, we’ll have to sort this shit out later. Raney is so much more important. But she said stop being a dick and come spend the next few hours with us. Apparently, she’s getting packed today and she’s going to ask me to pack with her too. Then we’re going to celebrate by hunting Sharlene and pulling her fucking toenails out.”

He looks down to double check what he said is right and it is. But I add a few more things we need to do. “Don’t forget I have to figure out the whole Hayes and Talon thing, track

down a baby girl, start looking for a house back home, and you need to sign a contract with the Blackhawks.”

“Whose baby?” Koz demands as he suddenly reappears next to us. He takes me out of Puck’s arms and puts me back on my feet, keeping his hand in mine.

Puck just shrugs when I look at him, and then the cheeky shit slides his hand right back down my pants again, earning him more warning rumbles from everyone trailing after us.

“Hang on! One thing at a time,” Puck says as he pulls us all to a stop. “The Blackhawks play right over the other side of the country. Am I reading this right? That’s where you live, right down there?”

I nod, and before I can say a word, he keeps going.

“Are you asking me to move in with you and sleep in your bed, in the new house you want?”

I shake my head, slightly confused, “I guess I figured that was a given. Since you already said we’re packing.”

He throws his head back, laughing before checking over his shoulder. “Nah, that was you who said you and I were packing, right when Koz was railing you through my fucking hospital bed while I was blowing on your...”

And this time instead of hanging around for my dad to explode, Puck races down the empty corridor, cackling away to himself. Miraculously, the lift opens as soon as he touches the button and as the doors close on him, he yells through the closing gap, “Meet you downstairs, babe, I’ll give King a chance to cool off. In the meantime, I’ll check we’re clear and start looking for houses.”

He doesn’t need to check anything; Dad would have people stationed everywhere. And those people would be hiding in the same shadows Koz’s security are already in.

While we wait, everyone else falls back, giving King, Koz, and me some semblance of privacy. I get ready for King to start up again. It doesn’t take long.

“Raney, you can’t play around with Puck. Cut him loose if you’re seeing whatever is going on with you different from how he is,” King says, giving me another of his best fatherly inspired looks.

In return, I give him my best fuck you glare. “Yeah, I’m not even responding to that.”

“Just did,” King says, looking blankly at the lift.

I jab him in the ribs, and he slings his arm around me again, bending down to kiss the top of my head. “Would you stop giving me such a fucking hard time, kid. First, I had to spend way too many days with Koz and now you got me duking it out with my favourite rescue project. And you and I haven’t even sat down and had a pot roast dinner yet. You know what I mean about Puck though, he was pretty fucking loose in the head for a bit.”

“Again, I’m not responding to that. And as for the dinner thing, you know all you have to do is ask me and I’ll be there. I love your cooking. But we do not need a full-on club cookout. Okay?” I narrow my eyes at him because King often ends up opening his whole house up to everyone on roast night, making it impossible for us to catch up. He’s his own worst enemy in that regard, but it’s who he is: a very generous man to those he cares about.

He ignores me, still wanting to talk about Puck. “Do me a solid, Raney, let him know there’s certain things I do not need to hear about.”

“Sounds like the same discussion I had with a certain someone a few years ago,” Koz fake whispers.

King’s reaction to Puck and me hooking up is tame compared to what happened when Koz decided we needed to be honest with Dad. I shudder, making Koz smile and my dad growl and get all edgy again.

Koz switches the mood in a second as he jabs at the lift button once more. “And now can we address the baby girl comment from earlier, thank you very much.”

I grimace and close my eyes, avoiding the look I'm going to find on both their faces. "I can't tell you everything."

"Bullshit," Koz snaps, his scent getting sharp to match his tone.

I swing around to face him. "It's not my story to tell, Koz. But obviously I'll share with you what I can but tone down your temper tantrum, handsome. You have every other one of my truths and you know it." His jaw grits in frustration at me being put in the position where we have secrets because we made a pact we'd never have any between us.

The lift arrives, and I wait as Koz steps in first to double check it's safe. King follows but no one else does. And once the doors close, Koz hits the stop button, only just beating King to the same.

"Spill," King says, crossing his arms over his chest.

Rubbing my hand down my face, I quickly realise how shit I am at keeping secrets but that's because Koz and I literally have none. I'm going to owe Hayes a thousand apologies, although we also need this resolved.

"Hayes is in trouble," I say, mimicking both their positions on the opposite wall to them. "Sharlene fucked him over."

"Goddamn it, Raney, no more! She and fucking Andrea are dust," Koz spits, his eyes narrowing like poisonous darts.

"Agreed." I talk over the top of him. "I was reluctant to do much before but that was to do with the guys! I didn't know if they were still under her influence. Clearly Puck hasn't spoken with her for years."

"Correct. I've had to stop him going to off her on more than a few occasions. But he wasn't ready. I'm not sure he is still," King adds diplomatically. Making me turn to check on him. He stares at me, expecting more information.

A check on Koz and he's got the same impatient look on his face.

“Talon’s got stuff hanging over his head because of them too. But Hayes, what she did to him means I want her to suffer. I don’t want her getting off without being so fucking terrified she pisses herself.”

Koz opens his arms, and I snuggle into him straight away as I keep updating. “What she did is absolutely disgusting. He believes he’s completely responsible for it, but I know him and he would never, never do what he thinks he did to another person. There’s a lot of his story he needs to tell, but the thing you do need to know, he’s apparently a father.”

And this is in part where my reluctance comes from. While they do need to know, I hate telling King.

Dad drops his head. And I get it, as much as it upsets him, it hurts me too. He’s been pretty close to being in a similar position to Hayes, without the accusation of rape. But the consequences were the same. The emotional fallout was pretty rough on him and me because of what happened but also because it was straight after Jenn died. The difference is that King had the backing of a whole club behind him, whereas Hayes only had Talon.

“I don’t get their dogged determination. It makes me sick how we’ve all been screwed over by that family, but it doesn’t make sense. And her latest stunt of having Puck fucking beaten in front of me...” I swing a look at Koz first, and I let him see the bloodthirst in my eyes before I also lay down the law. “But they’ve clearly got an agenda, and until we figure it out, what it is, I know we need to be extra cautious. The flip side is I need you with me, Koz. I do not need you deciding to go after them and being deported or getting grey hair in some jail cell where we get conjugal visits. Same with you, Dad, not the visit part though.”

He tips his head, telling me to go on, reminding me we’re past the joking around stage. “I know I’m the reason that you never went after Sharlene because you were playing a long game. Her home detention sentence would have made it hard for you to reach her but not impossible. I get you couldn’t risk

her finding out, but thanks to Andrea she knows I'm an omega now."

The small confines of the lift get full of the sounds of angry alphas for some reason. It shouldn't because we're all more than aware of the truths I spoke. I wait until they both settle down. "I *need* to be packed with Koz and Puck. I need to figure out Hayes and Tal before either of you even think about revenge or retribution. And before we get out of this lift, you both need to promise you heard me. We have enough men and women to form an impenetrable wall so I can attend the gala and take my pack properly. I want one night."

And I do. An important part of being an omega is being in a pack.

There were countless days where I swore I never would hope for a pack again, but it was all a lie. I knew it, so did my dad, so did my Scorned Girls, and Koz understood too. It's not just me being here triggering this desire to pack, it really is the reason why I was coming here. Since arriving, my need has changed and evolved but that's okay.

"And it absolutely fucking guts me to say this, but I don't want Reid immediately following the same path as how we handle Sharlene."

Dad barks, "No!" Sounding very much like a dog.

But I hold his challenging stare with my own. "At this stage he is an 'undetermined' risk." And I use my fingers for extra emphasis.

"Why?" Koz questions me, his eyes searching mine.

"Everyone keeps saying he had a personality flip. Complete 360. Reid was a force to be reckoned with when we were younger."

"You always saw him with stars in your eyes, Raney. He was a prick. He was a prick before you got attacked, he was a prick showing up in your hospital room after he'd been with some other woman, while you were in a goddamn coma, thank

you very much! He's been a cunt ever since, and he needs to be punished."

"I get it. But it's not just our decision on that one. Sharlene's a given. She's come at me time and time again, but Reid was so different when I saw him. So different. Anyway, Puck needs to be in on any decision regarding his brother."

"He'll put a knife straight in him," Dad replies immediately.

"Maybe," I answer, my eyes locked on the floor, not these two demanding alphas.

"Why this hesitation, Raney?" King insists. A quick glance at Koz and I see him waiting too.

"What they did to Hayes... what if they did it to Reid too? What if Reid needs help?"

Koz shakes his head, disagreeing. "He could have got out of there, micina, if he wanted. You only need to look at Puck. Who was seventeen fucking years old at the time. But then too, Hayes and Talon, who both apparently had stuff going on, but they too managed to escape. I'm sorry, I'm with King on Reid being a cunt, but I'm fine with waiting until Puck's told of the situation. But from that point we move quickly."

Dad waves that part of our discussion away, like he's satisfied with Koz's resolution. "We need more deets on the Hayes shit, Raney. If he's a risk, you shouldn't be alone with him."

I drop my head to the side, rolling my eyes in response. "I don't believe he's a risk to me. I just did a heat with him and there is not one mark on me that was not invited. He could have done anything, and if he was going to act that would have been the time, when Puck was wiped out, when you were both locked away. He is not a risk."

"Then what are we dealing with?"

I can keep most of the intimate specifics of what happened to Hayes from the conversation, but we do need to take

precautions especially if I've got my girls coming into town for the gala. The gala will be like calling bees to honey, the perfect opportunity for any desperate alpha looking for a quick fix to grab an omega. Although that's me being cynical because there's a lot of good alphas out there who are looking for an omega to be more than just an insurance policy.

"I know you've already heard, every one of my Scorned Girls are coming."

"Ah, shit, Raney, Heidi's coming, isn't she?" He drops his shoulders in defeat.

"She'll have a full team with her, and I already had an argument with her when I asked her not to come. She reminded me in not so friendly terms about the promise we Scorned Girls made to be there for each other when we pack."

Heidi Holmes is the only child of Dr Allan D Verdune and his late wife, Margot. And Dr Verdune's father is the very famous and extremely rich man responsible for the discovery of his namesake ADV, *alocasia diplotaxis verdune*, although everyone knows it by the common name of alpha deteriorating virus.

Every person alive knows the symptoms to look out for—hell, we've got an entire mandatory semester of learning at Unity about the virus. I doubt there's a person alive who would not be able to instantly name off at least the majority of symptoms: blackouts, a distinctive grey skin rash, excessive mood swings, migraines, insomnia, and food intolerance are some of the warning signs. Everyone is aware, because an alpha with ADV is more dangerous than an alpha in a feral episode or rut. And everyone knows because no one in our society wants a repeat of the first outbreak where an alpha tore through his whole pack before escaping into the community for a few short and tragic hours.

After Dr Verdune's father discovered the disease, Heidi's dad locked himself away until he found a cure. And that's where he made his millions and also cemented himself as brilliant a scientist as his father. Although he went one step

further and became the only manufacturer of the test and the treatment, taking him from rich to uber rich. And still to this day his pharmaceutical factory is the only treatment for ADV medication, Omara. Unless of course, you're okay to gamble with the black-market version—Dempara.

Using Dempara is a complete gamble, most alphas get addicted to something in it while in others, the chemical compounds they use screws with their brain, making them as feral as what they're trying to avoid. The government uses the few cases of an alpha having a complete chemical transition into a beta designation as the surest way to sway people to only use the expensive brand, Omara. Because while an alpha doesn't want to get ADV, they sure as hell don't want to be a beta either.

There are numerous avenues for omegas and alphas to find suitable matches and packs. Galas are only one way of finding your pack. Heat clinics and dating apps are also gaining in popularity. No matter how you do it though, once you find your pack you have to formally and publicly announce it, and that's really the only thing I'm desperate for.

Dad taps his toe, waiting for me to continue about Heidi coming.

“Heidi is more stubborn than I am, just as well protected too,” I say, looking at Koz. Because it's true.

“You still haven't explained the earlier link to Hayes,” King says wearily.

“I'm going to ask her to run an ADV on Hayes,” I offer hesitantly before I rush in with the rest of my feelings on the topic. “I think it's a setup. Complete bullshit really, and the test is going to be the quickest and most decisive confirmation we can get.”

“Raney,” Koz hisses, his voice low in warning.

“Let's stick with what I can share. He apparently has a kid. I feel fine with him and a test is going to give me a clear

direction of which way our enquiry needs to go. Which is going to be straight back to Sharlene.”

“And what about Talon?”

“Yeah, well, he’s another chapter in the saga of my life that we should officially call: How Fucked Up is Fucked Up?”

Dad laughs out unexpectedly. “That’s actually pretty funny.”

“I know, right.” I smile at him before hurrying along. “He’s not as much a concern if I’m honest. He tipped Hayes off about the raid, giving me time to share it with everyone at the compound, and got me past security to see Puck. He apparently pulled strings to get Koz out. But Sharlene has also supposedly got her fingers in his life, which is why…”

“We’re on the same page, Raney. But I have to tell you, Koz and I have already come to an agreement that what needs to happen will happen, and you might not be involved.”

“Why?”

“Like you just said, she’s taken enough from us. Given the chance, I’ll happily do what needs doing but not at the risk of it being pinned back on any of us. Phoenix Group owe me a favour, and I’ve already reached out to them.”

Phoenix Group are the people you call on when you need something done without anyone knowing that something is being done.

“Koz?”

“Phoenix Group get my vote.” He flicks his chin expectantly, and I glide right back into his arms. “What about Hayes and Talon? Is there any option with you packing with them? And I’m only asking because you were adamant before, but I can feel the way you’re cooling off on the idea.”

“I’m leaning more towards us not packing today.”

“Why?” King asks, clearly confused.

But so am I. Although it's not so much confused, more I'm resigned to the fact that not all my rediscovered dreams are going to align. Like I said to Talon, he's got a lot of ground to make up and Hayes has different responsibilities now. "It's not the right time for Hayes, Talon, and me. They've got too much going on, including a child to support."

King looks at me, shaking his head, "I have to say, kiddo, I'm shocked."

"So, you thought I'd just, what? Jump straight back into where I was with them after four years?"

"Pretty much. That's exactly what you're doing with Puck."

"He's different."

"Because he doesn't have a kid?"

"Not at all."

"That makes no sense."

"It doesn't have to make any sense to you, King. Tal and Hayes say all the right things, but at the end of the day, they've both flatly refused to sign the dissolution forms, plus they haven't found a way to deal with their ongoing issue with Reid. You both keep reminding me how Puck did, and now you're suggesting I'm being unfair to them?" I roll my eyes at King, but he ignores it and answers me back in typical King style—blunt.

"You're being unfair and unreasonable."

"Fuck off."

"Hold up, don't get your knickers in a twist." He brushes his hair off his face, perhaps giving me the time to chill out. "Sounds to me, Raney, they've had it tough."

"You were just giving me shit about them." I scoff.

"It's my fucking role in your life. Who's going to double check you?" he bitches right back.

“Koz?”

King scoffs his disbelief. “Koz can’t say no to you. But he’s not meant to.”

“He can, and does say no.”

“Stop chucking a tantrum and listen.”

I purposely mimic locking my lips, staring right through him to let him know how I feel about his forthcoming lecture.

“You got your bullshit attitude from Jenn, just so you know,” he says seriously.

And that makes me smile.

“You’ve got to do you, Raney, and I get that, but don’t cut your nose off to spite your face. If you need time, tell them but don’t put a stop to something before it’s even had a chance to restart.”

I agree with a nod before reaching over and pressing the lift button so we start moving again. “Irrespective of all that, I don’t want anyone making a scene tonight.”

There’s a beat of silence, and I check over my shoulder to catch King and Koz staring at each other before they both start laughing. Really hard too. “Fucking hell, Raney, you say some funny shit sometimes. You’re coming out officially as an omega and packing in the space of a few hours. Tonight is going to be top shelf bullshit.”

I ignore them, changing the subject. “I’m surprised no one has rappelled down the lift well to see what the hold-up is.”

“They know we haven’t had the chance to speak privately yet. And lucky we did, huh!” Dad grunts, flicking his eyebrows up judgmentally high.

“Seems like we’ll have to continue this chat later,” I say, watching the counter drop to the basement, snuggling into Koz’s side. “Hey, Dad, if you go at Puck like that again, I will key your bike.”

Dad goes super quiet on me, and when I look at him, he's wearing his typical shit-stirrer expression. "You really going to pack Puck? Bit fucking young, isn't it? Is he even old enough to drink, yet? Not sure how I feel about my kid being a cradle snatcher."

"Couldn't fucking help yourself, could you? I can't believe you. Besides you already know he's nearly twenty-two! What a stupid thing to say," I mutter back at him, snapping my mouth shut and grinding my teeth. Because if those doors open and we're arguing then all my uncles are going to jump on the bandwagon and our squabble will roll into an epic and endless shit show.

I glare at the door, counting down the seconds until I can get out of here. Talking business with King is like he's a different person, talking personal, and he's an asshole.

King starts laughing. A big thundering laughter that echoes in my ears. "Just winding you up, Raney. You should see your face right now." King keeps laughing when the doors open as he charges out.

Right out of the doors stands a large group of anxious MCs and men in suits wondering what the fuck is going on now.

Me too.



CHAPTER
Thirty-Five

King's laughter dries up in an instant and in the next moment, he swings around to watch me closely. His eyes shut down before I can get a clue about what's going on.

"Come on, micina," Koz coos softly, his arm stretched out towards the Scorned Girls. The three of them are standing together looking smug and dressed to kill, with their arms stuffed full of flowers. Wisteria of course.

"What's this?" I ask before I move a muscle. It's kind of hard to miss what's going on, except no one says a word.

Koz dips down and kisses my nose before cupping my face in his big hands, swamping me in his perfume. He sweeps away all my trepidation as he holds my attention.

"From the second you walked into my life, I've been yours. Today we get to watch the sunset as pack, which means I have to do right by you. For the next few hours, I want us to focus on you before I make you mine, in front of all your family and friends," he fakes a big shiver, "even your Scorned Girls."

"Koz..." I whisper. It's not that I don't get what he's saying, I'm seriously in shock.

"Let me finish," he growls. "We will enter into our formal union with all the blessings we're owed, and some traditions from my family back home. And since I know how much these three mean to you, I've asked them to be here with you. I want to give you everything, Raney. Now no complaints." He

smiles, and it really is like one of those moments in a romance novel—all that’s missing is the sun streaming through a parting of the clouds—but then again he’s always had this ability to promise and deliver the world.

“What traditions?”

“Tradition. Single. That’s all I’m prepared to do.”

“And?”

“For the blessing of lots of babies, it means they get to pamper and spoil you while I’m meant to stay away until we are ready to pack.” He barely gives me time to consider what he said. “Are you upset?”

“About the baby thing? Koz, I know how much you’re looking forward to seeing me be a momma to your babies. It’s one of my dreams too. Am I upset about you not spending the day with me? A little, but I get it. Besides, it’s only a few hours, I think I’ll be okay without you.”

His mouth drops open, and he growls while staring at me. I soothe him by jumping into his arms, wrapping my legs around his waist so I can kiss him before he can say or explain another thing. And boy do I kiss him, until the Scorned Girls start catcalling, and he starts scenting up the whole carpark with how much he wants to practice for babies.

Raising my middle finger to silence them only makes everyone else join in. My ears hurt with the wolf-whistles and cheering. My face hurts from smiling, and my heart races at the realisation this is happening.

With a final unhurried kiss, he guides me back to my feet before he spins me to face the girls again. “They’re here to spend the last couple of hours you’re a single omega, gossiping and laughing. Of course, Puck and I will be heavily armed and following behind you at a less than suitable distance. King and Lew, along with a few of your uncles are coming too.”

“Why?” I stammer unnecessarily, but I’m still a little dizzy from his kisses.

“You are coming out to the world as an omega, and I’m letting everyone on this planet know I am your alpha. As part of that, a very alpha part is showing the rest of the world I am worthy of being yours.”

He dips lower again and kisses the shock off my lips while his thumb drops down and trails over the sweet spot on my neck. The exact spot his claim will go. Over Puck’s.

“I want to give you everything, Raney. And I will. All this is for show but that doesn’t mean it’s not happening. Tristan has my credit card because I suspect she’s the sanest out of your girls. The three of them have strict instructions to spoil you and not get arrested. I want you feeling incredible and ready to be my omega, Raney, in less than a few hours.”

“Yeah, well I can’t.” I go to twist around, but he holds me still at the same time my three supposed best friends roll their eyes at me. Except then their eyes go as wide as saucers when Puck steps out of the shadows and starts closing the distance between us.

“Why?” Puck growls as he comes to a stop to stand next to Koz, but I’m stuck hissing like a cat at the way the girls are eyeing Puck like he’s a tasty treat. I flip them the bird, which only makes them dissolve into a fit of laughter.

Ignoring the girls, I focus on *my* men. Mine.

“It’s not safe. Not my bonding, nothing is stopping me from doing that asap. But I don’t need to get all sparkly for it to happen.”

“Yes, you do,” Koz barks, his fingers on my hips gripping me harder.

“I just need you, Koz. I don’t need dresses or facials. Traditions yes, but the girls and I can just sit around at the compound or a bar. We don’t need to go out. In fact, going to the gala is so unnecessary, there must be a way to do this without attending,” I say softly, twisting around to see him. His fingers tighten even more as he lets me see how important completing his traditions are. Instead of stepping to where I

can see him, he threads our fingers through and pulls me to lean back against him.

“The girls have their own people watching them,” Koz growls from behind me.

And then Puck crowds around me too. He’s a little more obvious in why he thinks I should go. “Come on, Raney, you have to go. I’ve been planning on sneaking into the change rooms. I’ll send you back to pack him with a,” he leans down to whisper in my other ear, “swollen, wet pussy and a stomach full of come.”

I go to say something but all of a sudden the girls start barging their way into my private conversation. Heidi grabs me in a headlock before yahooping and dragging me away like I’m a steer at the rodeo. And to add to the chaos, Simona gets in on Heidi’s scene stealing by fake humping me up the ass, making me bunny hop my way to the car. I swear to god, I wish the earth would swallow them up whole.

“Raney’s send off into pack life starts now. See you, boys. Hope you can keep up,” Tristan yodels over the top of my shrieking demands that the girls let me up before she too starts rubbing her knuckles over my head like a thirteen-year-old, along with my flowers, meaning I’m getting covered in wisteria blossom while I’m getting a noogie. “Stop fighting me, Raney.”

I’m not. But it doesn’t stop the three of them accosting me. Clearly, they’re having a great time at my expense if you use their laughter and noise as a measure. Eventually I pinch Heidi’s thigh. Hard. She retaliates by nearly squeezing my neck to breaking point and laughing the whole time as I fight against her.

“Ho, get her ass in the car. Bye guys, we’ll look after her, we promise,” Tristan says almost angelically. Even going as far as grabbing my hand and squeezing it. “Koz... we’re going to be way longer than two hours. It’s private girl time, so no rushing or interrupting.”

And since I can't do a thing but stumble along, as Sim keeps fake fucking my ass and Heidi starts trotting like a damn show pony, I end up getting shoved face first in the back seat of the town car before I can free myself from them.

The door barely slams behind us before Tris is screaming at the driver to gun it. By the time I've rolled over to my side and got some air in my lungs, the three of them are hanging out the windows, making it rain champagne on anyone who gets in our way.

With them distracted, I start looking for exits, even considering the pain factor if I do a duck and roll out one of the doors. Before I make any solid headway, the three of them have a complete paradigm shift and slump back in their seats to glare wordlessly at me. They completely mirror each other—lips pinched and eyebrows drawn up expectantly. Their individual scents even get all tart to match the looks on their faces.

“What?” I sass out, breaking the dramatic pause. Although it comes out like a wheeze because of being strangled.

“Don't *you* what us!” Heidi says slowly pointing her recently manicured nail at me. “We said photos of Pucky boy were expected. And you agreed. Straight a-fucking-way too.” She leans forward, swinging a sweeping look at Simona and Tris. “Did we get any?” she asks.

The both of them gasp melodramatically before digging out their phones, pretending to double check. Honestly, it's like they've choreographed the whole thing. Come to think of it, they probably did.

Rolling my eyes, I ignore their whining about not getting Puck photos. The thought of sharing even a photo makes me want to scratch their eyes out, and I love my girls way too much to hurt them. “You want to explain what the hell that was all about?” I huff, glaring right at Heidi when my fingers get caught trying to untangle the flowers from my hair.

“Oh? You’re still pissy because we did a loud snatch and run? Come off it! If we didn’t do something as offensively as what we had to endure, for you, we’d still be stuck back there listening to all the strong alphas lecturing us endlessly about staying safe and being good. No shit, we thought our over the top and super screechy way would have worked in our favour. And it did...” She waves her hand around. “No moody alphas. No dipshit bodyguards. Just the two in the front, but they don’t really count.”

She’s not wrong, instead of having an alpha or five in the car with us, it’s just Lew and Rhodes. Which makes our escape, and small security detail, as impressive as she’s making it out to be.

“You didn’t want to give me a little warning?” I mumble, rolling my eyes as I dig out a fresh bottle of champagne for us.

Tris jumps over to my bench seat and gives me a side cuddle. Her sweet scent of bubble-gum is a settling reminder of how much these girls mean to me. Even when they embarrass the shit out of me. “Koz flew us in early to surprise you. We figured if any of us said anything, you’d figure it out straight away. It’s so romantic, isn’t it... him getting us here, the flowers, the very loud way he’s making sure you and the rest of the world know what’s going to happen. Enjoy it, Raney.”

I lean into her hug. “Heidi completely fucked my hair though.” I scowl at her.

“She just missed you.” Tris smiles sweetly. God, this girl is so sugary perfect.

“I missed you guys too. Speaking of escaping, where’s Ayden?” I ask, looking at Heidi, my voice dropping down low and filling full of my concern for her. “I didn’t even see him.”

“Just leave it be,” Heidi says softly as her usually ripe apple scent sours at the mention of his name.

Ayden and Heidi have a complicated relationship. Even more complicated than my broken past. And yeah, Heidi and I

immediately bonded over our broken hearts.

“Heidi—”

We get interrupted by her phone, and she answers it without breaking eye contact with me, holding it up so we can all hear Ayden going fucking psycho at her. I snatch the phone out of her hand. “Ayden...” I purposely keep my voice soft despite the bitter anger burning through my blood at him being like this with her again. “Tap out right now. Take yourself out of Heidi’s security detail or I will do it for you. Honestly, how fucking disrespectful are you being today of all days? You know she’s with us, and we will not put up with your bullshit today.”

He hangs up on me before I can finish laying down the law. And I pass her phone back to her before digging mine out. Dialling one handed, I pass the champagne over to Simona so I can hold Heidi’s hand, trying to get her apple scent to not be as sour. But she’s hurting.

“Micina, you’re calling sooner than I thought.” Koz pretty much purrs in my ear and the girls roll their eyes when I scent up the space in my happiness.

“I know, right?” I answer, my earlier mood replaced by my giggly happiness. Sue me, I’m hours away from bonding this man.

Koz chuckles in my ear when I don’t answer, but all of a sudden I’m getting a little distracted by what we are doing in a very short amount of time. He interrupts my thoughts. “What can I do?”

“Koz, Ayden’s here. He’s being a prick already.”

He is quiet for a second, and I can hear a shuffle of his movement in our phone call. “Hmmm, sorry I didn’t notice him arrive, but I spot him now. I’ll speak with him as soon as we park.”

He disconnects the call, kind of surprising because I didn’t get a lecture about being careful, but at the same time I

probably don't need one, because he would have arranged a small army to trail behind us.

Putting my phone back in my bag, I accept the glass of champagne Simona has waiting. She gives me such a heartfelt smile, all our play falling away. "Let's get you packed, Raney."

And then we spend the rest of the drive to our first stop drinking champagne and giggling. Being with these girls is so easy; we've been through thick and thin together. Through our catch up, we all keep a watch on Heidi. She's laughing in all the right places even though it's a little louder and her smile is forced. But we all know if we push too hard, she'll shut down completely.

The car slows as I'm finishing explaining what kind of dress I'm looking for. I swallow my words when we pull up out front of Birdie, one of the country's most exclusive nesting shops. We've actually spent countless hours at Unity looking at all their products online, and they have a lot: wall finishes, endless reams of materials, aisles of room scents and air purifiers, candles in every colour imaginable, pillows and cushions for days, and rugs for every situation. The girls are more enamoured with Birdie's competitor, Twiggy, but I've been one of their most ardent followers. And I have always wanted to spend time here. It looks like another of my dreams has come true.

"Today, you need to trust us, okay," Tristan says, interrupting my window shopping. Her voice is as gentle as the hand she places on my bouncing knee. "Some things today won't happen exactly the way you thought they might but that doesn't mean your special day is going to be any less amazing. Despite our entrance before, Raney, you know we'd never do anything to embarrass or upset you."

"Yeah, I know that," I answer, leaning into her again, while my eyes take in the large building that's full to the brim of any and everything an omega wants for their nest.

No matter how much we fuck around, these three are my soul sisters. If I need to trust them, it's not a hard task to do.

“No dress?” I ask, finally turning away from the amazing window in front of me to Tris.

“Again, Raney, today you have to trust all of us and let us make your dream come true.”



CHAPTER
Thirty-Six

PUCK

Koz hasn't stopped white knuckling the bottle of bourbon King gave him since the second Raney's ass got abducted by her girlfriends. For a confident man, he's got me questioning our plans now too.

"She's going to be disappointed," he hisses for the tenth time. Or maybe it's the fiftieth—he's a little fixated on it.

King scoffs a laugh. "Yeah, I call bullshit. Raney doesn't get off on dresses and diamonds. You know that."

The tension strumming through Koz's body doesn't let up. He's stinking up the inside of King's truck with his anxiety. And nothing Joker or King is saying is getting through to him.

"Hey." I'm a bit surprised by how quick he swings his attention around. He's definitely freaking out. You can see it in his face, but if he chills out, he'll remember how well he knows her and how much she's going to love the day we planned. "She only wants you." I pause for a second to let my words sink in because the man is stressed. "I mean, admittedly, she wants me too. And hell, you should probably at some point know that Hayes and Talon might join our pack. At the end of the day, Koz, all she wants is this."

It's strange, but I can actually see him absorbing what I'm saying. Maybe it's not what I said but our shared obsession of loving Raney that gets through to him. Either way, he chills on the aggression. And after being around him for a few days, it's easy to see how complex a person he is. I'm not suggesting I know much about him at all, but his honour is super easy to

recognise. The change of events and the mix match to what Raney thinks is happening would be like acid in his stomach. It doesn't take much to know that in his logic he'd be thinking he was breaking promises.

Sitting in the back of King's truck, giving advice to the guy who looks to be my alpha might be weird to some, but it makes sense. I feel pretty okay accepting him as our pack alpha. I don't need to think about whether I trust him or not or even if I'm making the right or wrong decision because much like my connection with Raney this feels right instinctively.

The longer I spend with her more of me wakes from what feels like a deep grief filled slumber reawakening. All it is, is another sign I'm so fucking ready for her.

And so is he.

"Koz, she's going to love it."

"I told her she was getting the gala," he snaps, irritated.

"You promised by sunset you'd be packed and everyone would know. Don't get hung up on her missing out on a dinner where new packs are paraded and desperate alphas pine. What we've come up with is all her and beats those pompous get-togethers any day of the week," I reply with a growing conviction.

"Amen to that," King adds from the front.

Koz ignores King and jumps to the next issue causing this second guessing. His icy blue eyes hold me hostage. "Am I doing it wrong, asking them to be there when she said she didn't know?"

"Nah, you know Raney better than that. Besides, Hayes and Talon would have said no if they didn't want to attend. I heard the same conversation you did. They jumped at the chance as soon as they found out you were packing her privately. We got this."

He scrubs his face, my eye catching the tattoo of her name on his hand—he just needs to look at that as his reminder. I go

to suggest it, and he flips on to his next worry. “I don’t want to kill anyone today.”

“Yeah, well, like she said, we’ve got enough security to rival the gold carpet at Alpha Film Awards. All the Fallen, plus your team, and the additional security travelling with her girls means no one’s getting near her. I’ll make sure no one is dying today, Koz. Tomorrow, or maybe next week, we can both agree that’s going to change, but we can easily do no killing today.”

He nods his head at me, taking a swig straight from the bottle of bourbon, pulling a grimace at the burn the cheap alcohol makes. “Jesus.”

“You going soft on me, Koz?” King laughs. Not that funny ha-ha laugh, nah, it’s one of those laughs he does so well when he’s giving you shit. And it’s not that cool he’s giving Koz shit on today of all days.

“Not fucking likely,” Koz retorts. Immediately, you can hear he’s getting his head back in the game.

And then the car descends into an awful, weighted silence when we pull up to the first surprise. I guess Koz’s anxiety is warranted because all of a sudden my stomach gets full of jitters like before I play a game. This is a big part of Raney coming out as an omega. And a real important one for us as her alphas.

We all wait, none of us even taking a breather. Lew gets out of the car quickly and stands at Raney’s door while Rhodes follows immediately and climbs out his side of the car looking hyper vigilant. Ibis and Twinkles are next, from a different car, and they surround the car like security guards do. I think if anyone fumbled out the gate on watching over her, we’d all be out there blowing up.

“You go, Puck.” Koz flicks his chin up without looking at me.

“I was going to go and do the test,” I remind him because he’s got a lot on his mind.

“If I watch her, I’ll be in there when I said I wouldn’t. I promised the girls this time alone with Raney, without any of us hovering. No, you have to go in there, Puck, I just know if I see her, I’ll be spilling the secrets about the rest of our day. It’s better this way. I’ll take Ayden and have a chat with him at the same time.”

It makes sense. Plus, it’s not like it’s a hard task at all. The opportunity to spend any time with Raney after not seeing her for so long, I’d be a right dick not to jump at the chance.

I shuffle over the seat on my way out the car. “You’ve got the address, right. It’s no more than ten minutes each way, we’ll still be here. Have you seen the size of this shop?”

“Exactly. King and Joker stay here too,” Koz snaps out. His alpha making his voice drop dangerously low as his words rush out like a barked command, more than a suggestion.

King blows up in a flash. “Yeah, don’t need you telling me how to protect my daughter.”

“Today she is not your daughter, and we’re entrusting you with our omega. So, if I tell you to fucking do something, King, I expect it without argument,” Koz explodes.

And this time there’s nothing to misinterpret what he says and how he speaks.

King’s alpha takes offence, and the mood of the car descends. Despite me promising Koz no one would be dying today, I’m questioning my choice of words.

“I don’t need your bullshit today, King. The last twenty fucking years I have known you, I’ve bent over backwards, gone above and beyond. Today you will return the fucking favour,” Koz snarls over the noise King makes.

“You’re being a little disrespectful,” Joker growls from the front passenger seat.

And we go from one to sixty in the tension stakes in one goddamn heartbeat. Koz is quick as fuck. Seriously, I’ve never seen someone move like he does. Before King or Joker can

think an apology, because yeah, they fucking owe Koz one, he's got the nozzle of the sweetest Ed Brown 1911s I've seen, kissing Joker's temple.

Koz's eyes are black, shimmering with rage, but he manages to hold it together. "You know, King, we've got a lot of history. Yet old mate here is the one suggesting I'm being disrespectful on today of all days. I'm not sure if you've figured it out yet, but I'm not feeling myself. And for the sake of all of us, let's not see how out of character I'm feeling. Get out of the fucking car and watch over Raney, not as a father but as a man who owes one of his longest and most loyal friends more fucking favours than is allowed in our world. And teach the clown next to you some fucking manners."

The merry-go-round is going to keep going the longer we all stay cooped up in the car. It's inevitable, and it's what happens when there's stressed out alphas confined in a small space. And it doesn't help one bit that King, Koz, and myself have the extra zing in our designation, marking us as head alphas, or pack leaders. I seriously wasn't lying to Raney when I said she was going to have to balance two strong alphas in her life. Even with all the fallout from Raney's accident and my life being flipped upside down, it wasn't hard to figure out that my alpha was a little extra.

Not that it matters—that side of my winning personality is completely besotted by his omega. Later, having two similarly levelled up alphas mindless about the same omega might be a problem, but I doubt it. All we need to focus on together is keeping our omega safe and in a constant state of bliss. I get out of the car, because no shit, I've got way better things to do than defend Joker.

Leaning against the car, I watch closely as Lew, Rhodes, Ibis, and Twinkles become an impenetrable wall around the Scorned Girls as they rush towards the entrance to Birdie. It's sad that these women understand how to be a part of a security detail. They shouldn't need protecting to this degree, but they do. Much like Raney's got issues from her past, I got a quick run-down on each of her Scorned Girls.

Heidi is the only granddaughter of the scientist who found the disease, and the only child of the man who found the cure, making her the sole benefactor for a crap tonne of money. Tristan's face and body graces billboards and magazines around the world, making some think she's theirs to own. And Simona is probably the greatest contradiction out of all of them—she comes across as mild and meek, but she's got a voice on her, or more accurate, her content does. She's big on giving the suppressed a voice, and apparently not everyone in our society likes her doing it. She's got a stalker hell bent on silencing her.

The girls each have their own way of handling things, which is lucky because the only thing I can focus on is Raney. And right now, I'm obsessed with watching her reaction as she walks inside Birdie. Her face is awash of amazement and surprise as she does a slow spin, taking in the entire shop. It's like I can feel her excitement building as she soaks in the walls, shelves, and displays crammed full of nesting supplies. Her girlfriends look equally in awe, holding her hand and pretty much acting as excited as she is. They drag her laughing and smiling towards the front counter, and her head swivels and her glittering green eyes find me in an instant.

I never questioned the way an alpha gets struck when they meet their mate. In a way, I was a little surprised when King explained it to me, but then the others I spoke with said the same, life changes in the blink of an eye. A tease of their matched scent, a glance in their direction and something inside you gets owned. Everything before that moment falls away. For me, it wasn't one moment because it was only ever her which is why I didn't realise it had a name to it. It doesn't mean our connection isn't like two magnets colliding back to each other, time and time again.

Her blossoming wisteria scent is like a visceral punch to the chest when I barge my way into the girl's version of a bridal shower, and my eyes tunnel until it's just her as I get completely fixated with a need to kiss the living shit out of her.

The hiss in warning that falls from her lips whacks me into a vicious mood until she placates the rising of my alpha and makes me fucking hard as hell when she barks an echoing ‘mine’ for the room to hear.

“Only yours,” I get out before my lips slam against hers. I watch her emotions shoot like meteors over the green of her eyes while I taste how true her bark was. I’d like to make her mine in more than words, and I will soon, but a kiss reminds me why we’re here. Before we get too carried away, I pull away from her. “I’m going to sit right there and watch.”

She touches over her lips, looking flushed as she tries to remember what was going on before. Yeah, I fucking like that a lot.

“Watch what?”

“You.” Spinning away to put some distance between us, I go to jump up on the shop counter before I realise how fucking inappropriate that is. “Excuse me, where can I sit?”

The omega that stands behind the counter points to a waiting area. And then she makes me fucking laugh when she suggests I try some of the Soothe Your Alpha scent spray.

Raney stops again, and the look in her eyes as she stares down the shop assistant brings the hairs on the back of my neck to standing. Kind of makes me want to go rub one off.

I guess omegas, like alphas, have their own way of doing things, because before I can open my mouth, the shop assistant smiles gently and submissively at my omega and tells us all she’s happily packed to five alphas.

“Nice,” Raney says through clenched teeth. There’s still a lot of unsaid between them both.

It’s pretty cute watching these two omegas talk and posture. They keep dropping their eyes. “I assure you, my attention is on you, and not your alpha,” the woman asserts in the most subdued tone I’ve heard.

Raney's not a bitch, and never has been, she's just as out of sorts by all this as I am. Maybe it would have been comforting if I had dragged Koz in here, so she could see how we're all pretty much mirroring each other. Instead, I start looking all around Birdie, hoping it's the focus she needs. And it is. A blazing smile breaks over her face as she takes a step closer to the owner. "Sorry about that. I'm a little thrown being here. Surprised. Nice surprise though. Getting vocal about my alphas is new."

"Trust me, there's nothing to apologise for, everything about being an omega is overwhelming but so damn good. You wouldn't believe what some omegas have done walking through those doors," the omega soothes as she glides up next to Raney and takes her hand like they're old friends. "Now how about we start focusing on you since I heard on the grapevine you need to set up your first pack nest. I got in a shipment yesterday of some brand-new blankets I'd love to show you." She's muted when she talks, but she knows how to work the room. The mood changes again into barely contained excitement as she guides them towards the special little carts made for shopping at Birdie. And you get a gist as to why her store is the ultimate omega nesting shop when you spy the white timber framed carts, complete with drinks and snack holders. The four of them swoon, and despite not trying to, I can scent how happy they all get.

Watching Raney's eyes nearly roll back in her head when the owner helps her pull on a special Birdie shopping jacket, complete with Raney's name on the front, is going to be one of those happy memories of my girl that stays with me for a long time. She shamelessly snuggles into it. And then she shows me and everyone watching how much of an omega she is as she softens and glows. Happiness rolls off her, and across the distance the way the colour in her eyes deepens, tells me how perfectly we got today right.

With her being completely distracted by fluffy throws and silky pillows, the Scorned interrogation starts in earnest. The sneaky omegas send Simona my way first.

“Raney asked what your favourite colour was,” she says, her lips drawn tightly like she’s trying not to smile or breathe me in.

I get the breathing thing; I only want Raney’s scent filling my lungs. Completely impractical, but it doesn’t mean I don’t try. Leaning over, I nab the tester of neutraliser spray on the glass display stand next to me, and give it a couple of squirts. “It’s not about what I like, is it?” I shrug, purposely not looking at her directly.

I guess I pass some test, because she sits on the seat next to me, her feet curling under her, making her look like a kitten.

Simona stares at the side of my head. “Puck bunnies?”

“Raney,” I offer without pause, my eyes tracking the woman I’m talking and thinking about.

“A contract with any team and more money than you need?”

I laugh. “Raney.”

“Opportunity to hunt down Reid.”

Nodding my head, I smile when Raney picks up a pillow, dropping it again when she sees the price. “Raney.”

“Really?”

Frowning, I grab my phone quick and shoot Raney a text telling her to put the fucking pillow in someone’s cart. “Yeah, of course. There’s people around who make their living doing that shit. Gotta help them and their packs out, you know what I mean?”

She laughs, and the sound is as delicate as she is. “Can I take your photo?”

I stop being nice, because some things are just not right to ask, even in fun. “You’ll have to ask my omega that.”

“Yours, hey?”

“Simona, I’m more than happy to play one thousand questions with you and I’ll answer every one of them, but I kind of think helping Raney get everything she needs for her nest is more important. Don’t you? She just put a pillow away without putting it in her cart like I asked her to.”

She gets up without another look and scurries over the polished timber floor, right up into Raney’s space. Simona throws half a dozen of the pillows in Tristan’s direction before she launches herself at Raney, giving her a swaying cuddle. I shoot off an update with a suggestion Koz checks his card limit, not watching the girls because every second I spend in here, it’s getting harder not to chase my girl down and bury her face first into one of the nesting displays.

Tristan’s next, and we go through a similar scenario, except where Simona was quiet, Tristan is anything but. After one too many glares from Raney, I finish it as gently as I can. “Hey, Tristan, do me a favour and make sure she goes back and grabs a couple more of those lilac candles. One’s not enough. By the looks of it, she’s starting to act like she’s ready to run.”

“Nice avoidance, mister,” she barks back, her bubble-gum scent getting dull as her emotions bubble up.

“Did it work?” I ask, turning to look at her.

Tristan’s finger is up, jabbing in the space between us. “I’ve wiped her tears away.”

I stare her down, not because I’m pissed off, but I want her to listen so we don’t need to keep doing this forever and a day. “What happened between me and Raney is always going to be a part of our story. But you also know I was pretty young at the time and what happened was not my fault. I should have protected her, yes, but her getting attacked gutted me as much as it hurt her. I do appreciate you being there when I couldn’t. But let’s not keep hashing this up so it becomes something we can’t move past. I’m not going anywhere, no matter how many questions you three throw at me.”

“We have a right to keep asking those questions, Puck,” she nearly fucking spits my name.

“Not today. Lock it up, Tristan, because if Raney knew you were over here talking like that, you know she’d be pissed. So instead, how about you focus on Raney and making sure she knows I’m not going anywhere. Because no shit, I thought that’s what besties did.”

“We look after each other,” she snaps.

“Do you? Because from where I’m sitting, you’re hashing up the past instead of getting her ready for her future. She needs lots of everything in this shop since we’re going to be making up for all the time we missed out on.”

“What about playing?”

“Yeah, I’ll probably be taking a leave of absence. I’ve got better things to do.”

“She said you were crazy good.”

“I am. Hockey I don’t need to practice, with Raney, I do.”

She pops her eyebrows up and her lips pull down like Simona’s did before. “You can swoon her all you like.” But then a smile breaks out and it adds to her pretty face, but she’s not a patch on my girl. “She needs lots of loving, and reassurance.”

“That’s the only position I want. And yours is to go make sure she gets anything and everything she wants. I’m trusting you with my omega as much as you’re trusting me with your bestie. I get it, okay? Now shoo!” I don’t wink even though our chat deserves it. I keep it so far above board I kind of feel like an actor, but I’ll do that and more to make sure Raney is happy.

I miss what happens next when one of the shop assistants interrupts me, thumbing off a text to King to tell me someone called the shop asking for me. Even without saying hello, I know it’s Reid.

“Yeah?”

It's easy to transition into full protection mode, as easy as breathing. Standing up, it's like my brain locks down all my emotions, and I become an unfeeling thing. A thing that is only focused on Raney.

Stopping at the window, I'm relieved to see Koz is back. I wave him over, and he climbs out of the car looking resolute and ready.

"Colt, I think you've got something of mine," Reid's voice makes every muscle in me contract, and I have to crack my neck at the instant tension that nearly locks me up.

"Yeah?" I answer, making eye contact with Lew, letting him know we've got issues.

Koz meets me at the door with King and Joker at his back. The look on his face lets me know he's got a fair idea of who I'm talking to already and the reality is, we've all been waiting for Reid to contact either me or Raney.

Sharlene showing up at the game was too coincidental. And we all knew that. I wait, letting him stew in the pause, because growing up, Reid's tetchy impatience made him rash and stupid. I'm hoping it's only gotten worse in the past few years.

"I want her returned," he hisses at me like the fucking snake he is.

"Returned?" I goad.

"She's mine, Colt."

"Not going to happen."

He snaps again. "I'm serious, Colt, she is mine. Don't make me kill my only brother."

I smile at his choice of words. "I'm not your fucking brother."

"I was hoping you were going to say that."



CHAPTER

Thirty-Seven

RANEY

“I promise, this is the last room we have to do. Your nest is done and I can start arranging delivery times with your alphas,” Emmalina says, almost apologetically.

She has nothing to be sorry for. Birdie is food for your soul. Every item she has in her store has been lovingly selected, and I could quite happily have spent days wandering through the store. Spending time with Emmalina is a bonus and is like bathing in warm sunshine.

Even watching Koz and Puck standing shoulder to shoulder at the entrance to the store isn't a concern right now. I really don't care what the issue is. All those two are is a distraction. Admittedly, a very nice one, but nothing is stealing this moment from me.

“Raney! Stop standing there like you're the judge in an ass competition.”

“And your eyes better not be where mine are, Tris,” I hiss nastily at her.

Tristan laughs as she slaps me on my ass, to make a point I guess, before she struts past me with her trademark catwalk, right into what should be the base or mattress room. I follow after her, my eyes still locked on the buns out the front though. Walking through the door, I have no choice but to pay attention to my surroundings and these tricky bitches. Again, I'm stunned into silence.

“Surprise?” Simona says. Her smile could easily be interpreted as a grimace, but it changes into a full dazzling,

teeth showing smile once she sees my happy reaction.

“What’s this?” I gasp, still shocked. But I’m so full of sweet endorphins, I don’t think anything could steal the contented buzz I’m getting from being here. Seriously, there’s not one thing I haven’t enjoyed about today. Well, them quizzing Puck rubbed me up the wrong way, until I got sidetracked by the shelves of pastel indigo silk sheets. And then by the time I got to the hand knitted socks, even Sim sitting with Puck didn’t bother me. Too much.

“Second surprise moment of the day. We’ve got,”—Heidi interrupts, she’s definitely smiling. No doubt loving that I don’t have a clue on what’s going on—“a couple left to go.”

“A pamper station. In here though?”

Emmalina gives this slow wave of her hand. She’s been doing that at everything she shows me. I think it’s her special omega trait because no shit anything she points out is exactly what I was after. “Your alphas want me to explain, I hope that’s okay with you.” And goodness, the way she talks is like listening to marshmallows talk, if they could talk, I mean. Her voice is sweet and light, and listening to her explanation on the simplest things is near poetic. She’s really got being an omega nailed down. I don’t even hiss at her when she mentions my alphas this time.

My alphas. Repeating her words in my head unleashes a rush of nervous energy which is silly. Almost as silly as being in this room. It really is a pamper station, complete with lit up mirrors, shelves of skincare, makeup, hair products, and countless creams.

“I can do my hair and makeup,” I offer because I can.

“True, you can. You’ve got fifteen minutes to get ready, and then if it’s okay with you, I have to blindfold you. And yes, it’s me that’s asking you because apparently your alphas, and your girlfriends, thought you would take their request better from a complete stranger than you would them.”

My mouth drops open, stunned to silence once again. Slightly offended they're all using Emmalina's squishy sweet disposition to their advantage.

But does it matter? I'm sure if she wanted to, she would have politely refused. I throw my hands up in surrender. "Fine by me. The past few hours have been truly amazing. Being here and creating my nest has been an absolute dream. I actually feel like a different person. Now though, I want to get to the good part. And I really don't care how it happens".

"We were hoping that's what you'd say," Simona says as she comes to stand next to Emmalina.

These two are so similar, it's eerie. The way they move is like they're a single being, and together they shepherd me closer to the first makeup station. And while I was initially going to get ready myself, Emmalina makes her magic happen again. As I get lost in scents, textures, feels and colours of the endless products she shares, the girls get to work on my hair and makeup.

As part of our Omega training, grooming and deportment classes were a daily event. We had to endure so many hair and make-up classes, that I wasn't joking before about getting ready myself in under fifteen minutes. Together they have me made up and ready to go in less time than that. But it's not glamorous, it's not supermodel, it's not even blushing omega... it's natural.

I look beautiful, don't get me wrong, and they look the same, loose curls, hair down, dewy skin, a lick of gloss and a touch of mascara. Sitting back before swivelling in my seat, I say, "I'm not going to the gala, am I?"

Heidi swings around in her chair to face me. "No."

Emmalina excuses herself to get refreshments, and as she leaves she takes a little of my happiness with her. Tris and Simona close in, and I get a tremor of apprehension. If they're here with me, and I'm not going to the gala, the tremors gather speed, growing the longer they look at me with concern.

“Where did you disappear to before?” I ask slowly. And I know Koz and I are rock solid. I know it, like I know my name, but it doesn’t stop the awful memories in my head escaping the tight confines I usually keep them locked away in. It’s a completely irrational overreaction, and I hate being a slave to what happened eons ago, but it doesn’t mean it stops.

“You know we’d all tell you if they were going to do anything shifty, so lock that shit up right now, Raney Grady!” Heidi glares at me.

Her words make sense. They hit home and resonate. But that’s the thing about being hurt before, no matter how loud you know the truth to be, sometimes your past is a nasty bitch that buries in deepest. And why didn’t she mention Koz in that statement?

But that’s my memories talking, not my future. Nothing is stopping me from claiming my pack today.

“Two options...” Heidi says, her eyebrows flick up high in question.

And I know the question because it’s part of our Scorned rules. If we’ve got shit news to share, the recipient gets the option of a soft approach or the no fluff approach that hurts but it’s over in a flash.

I roll my eyes. Never once have I opted for the softly done approach. Whereas Heidi and Simona are huge supporters of the method. Tris flips and flops depending on her mood, but that’s her general approach to life.

“Okay, so while you and Simona inhaled the muffins and cookies Emmalina made for us, I did the ADV that you wanted done on Hayes.”

“You didn’t want to ask me to be there for that?” I huff out.

She nods her head, and her lips pull back all sassy like. “You’re right, I didn’t want to ask you to be there for that. Koz went and got the sample from Hayes, and I did the test.”

The test is simple, you drop a swab into a solution then dab it on a litmus paper, depending on a colour change you're either infected or not. The physical test though is impossible to replicate and the only company that manufactures them is Heidi's dad's. You can order them online, but they come with a steep cost, making it impractical to carry them around in your purse, unlike Heidi who actually does carry a few in her bag at all times.

“Should I be worried?”

Her cheeks puff out as she blows out a measured exhale, making a curl on her forehead bounce. “That's open to interpretation.”

“Why?”

She ignores me as she thinks of a way to put her answer.

“Give it all to me, no fluff. Spit it out,” I insist, biting my lip so I don't start needling her further or else we'll be arguing.

I feel like the world stops turning as I wait.

“Hayes is infertile.”

Wow. I did not expect that. I was expecting her to say he was ADV negative.

“ADV negative too, but we all knew that was going to be the case.”

I thought I was surprised coming to Birdie instead of going dress shopping, but clearly I was not. Not compared to how I feel now. “He can't be infertile,” I stammer, the shock and instant realisation making me feel sick to my stomach.

“Sadly, he can. And he is. The most recent modification to our testing kits provides results on fertility. There's no link to ADV being a genetic disorder but no matter how much marketing we do, people refuse to believe us. And because it was cheaper than trying to keep educating the stubborn fools, we've met the market and added it to our tests. The new test's results show if you're positive or negative but it also provides a definitive result on the person being tested having DNA

clear of the disease. In Hayes's case he is not, nor has he ever been afflicted with ADV, but he is also sterile."

Heidi gives me a moment, which goes against Scorned rules, but this revelation is pretty fucking huge. She waits patiently while my thoughts race as I sort through the implications and the consequences before my emotions catch up. Hayes never had ADV; I bloody knew it! But Hayes being infertile clearly means the kid is not his too. What the fuck did the Anders family do to him, and why? They drugged and supposedly filmed him, blackmailed him for years, why?

But in a way none of that matters, that's easy stuff to fix. Hayes is such a deep well of goodness, finding out a child he has poured love and support into is not his, makes my heart split for him.

I rub my chest. It actually does ache. "He's going to be devastated."

"Or he's going to be released from shackles that were not his own."

I shake my head, disagreeing. Sure, the shackles might go, but in their place are going to be scars until the day he dies. A simple test and everything changes. It's like a pebble rolling down a snow-covered mountain, getting bigger and bigger the further it rolls. And despite a small voice in my head telling me this could have been resolved years ago, I mute it. We all have reasons for making decisions, and I'm a firm believer of doing what you need to do, to survive.

"I need to see him," I say, jumping up from my seat.

"What about packing?" Heidi asks, nodding her head like she's agreeing to what I just said.

"I'm adding him to my pack now."

"You weren't sure before!"

"I was being honourable and breaking my goddamn heart at the same time. That stops now!" I answer, raising my chin and stomping my good leg down for extra emphasis.

Heidi stands there, her mouth open, her hands slapped on her cheeks. She doesn't need to say a word, I can scent her stirring disbelief from here.

“What?”

“You can see why I'm shocked, right? It's not the time to be honourable!”

And then it's my turn to open my mouth, stunned at her not getting it. “It was so. The man was responsible for a tiny human.”

“Raney, this is perfect actually, it clears things up. Not the baby part because that is some serious malicious, evil shit, but Hayes and Talon... you've got your dream pack happening!” She stalks closer to me with each word she takes, looking a lot like a sleek jaguar coming in for the pounce, and I ready myself. She launches at me, her arms holding me so tight. And in them, I feel and scent the depth of her pure happiness and excitement that matches my own.

“I know, right? And then we go clean up the mess before we go home.” I stop my rant mid word again.

“Don't you even consider for a second they won't pack up and move across the country to be with you,” Tris says softly, her sugary cotton candy scent bringing a sweeter smile to my face.

“It's not that, actually.” I shake my head and laugh. “I don't even have an address to send everything we've ordered today.”

Tris lays her head on my shoulder. “I don't know... I can't imagine Koz not having all that sorted out. You guys didn't talk about it?”

I shrug, not at all bothered that I never did sort this out with Koz, because where we live is almost an afterthought. “All I wanted was to pack with him. That's all I was coming home to do.”

She kisses my temple before moving to give me space. “And look how that turned out.”

“Turning out. Hopefully,” I clarify, pushing further out of our huddle. And before any of them can utter another word or give me crap about still being a little wary, I beam at them. “Give me a break, you girls know how it is sometimes. But with you here, you squash each and every one of those doubts, pushing me to believe my happy ever after is right in front of me. I know it. It’s just overwhelming, that’s all. Or it could be you bitches scenting up and feeding my sappy omega side, like you do. I love you guys, and thank you for being mostly amazing.”

“Mostly?” the three of them shout back before we move as one again and meet in the middle for an epic, and overly emotional hug, that is all about love and how far we’ve come together.

“We’ll always be this, won’t we?” I ask inside our huddle.

“We’re lifers, babe. You can’t get rid of us, even when you pack.” Simona kisses my cheek and talks on behalf of all of us.

“Thank god,” I whisper. “I can’t believe this is happening today. Now what are we going to do about the mess?”

“Whatever we do we do together,” Simona says back super quickly, beating the other girls who have their mouths open ready to talk.

I smile at the way they instantly jump in to support, and I shake my head to keep on track and not get caught up emotionally again. “You girls really are too good to me. Coming here was about packing, and yeah, I was hoping for answers or at least closure on why they left me. But now it’s like I’m closing one door but all these other doors are springing open. Obviously, there’s certain doors that are staying open.” I wiggle my eyebrows suggestively, but it fades when I remember them spending a little too much time eyeing up Puck. “I’ll try not to hiss at you looking at Puck, but don’t

push me on that.” I’m jumping all over the place, but that’s how my head works and my girls know that.

The three of them chuckle, evilly, and don’t agree or disagree with my request.

“Anyway, I guess I didn’t expect Reid to be so... piss fucking weak. All these games and subterfuges are so damn pointless.”

“What did you have in mind?” Heidi asks, leaning through our huddle to start fixing my hair. She gives me a wink once I’m back to being perfect.

I walk out of the room, knowing they’ll follow. And I end up standing in the small cafeteria that Birdie uses for her clients, a place to take a breather and rehydrate and enjoy her hospitality. It’s not the food I’m after, it’s what I saw out the window earlier.

“The Waldorf is where Sharlene is hiding,” I say, pointing out to the landmark before swinging my focus to the Convention Centre where the Omega ball is going to be held. “I still want to attend. But I want to go after I’m packed.”

“Why?” Simona asks quietly.

“I think it’s time for the Anders family to get a taste of omega justice. Scorned style.”

And while I thought they chuckled like evil villains before, now they really do. Almost making the hair on the back of my neck stand up with their nefarious enthusiasm. Omegas might be easy creatures to meld, but the four of us are good examples of how hard we are to break. And while omegas generally are the comfort providers in our society, we can be vicious when our alphas are threatened, although Unity and the government try to keep that side of our winning personality under wraps for some reason.

“What did you have in mind?” Heidi asks, the twinkle in her eye pretty telling of her growing excitement.

“Koz, King, and I spoke about using a third party,” I answer. I don’t elaborate because my girls are smart as tacks, but it’s also not safe for anyone to throw the words Phoenix Group around. No one has a clue who they are, like quite literally, they are the ultimate vigilante group hiding in plain sight. “And despite Koz being who he is and King being who he is too, I was hoping this would end without lives being lost. Well, except for Sharlene and Andrea—but women going against women makes me especially vengeful, so I’m not including them in the no violence stipulation. But Reid made this all drag on.”

“Unnecessarily too,” Simona says, shuffling closer.

“Don’t kill them. Make them suffer,” Tristan adds, and I don’t need to see her face to know she’s smiling.

“Exactly,” I agree. “But then I think that’s such bad karma, except now I’m at the point where I’m ready to roundhouse karma in the face if she has any issue with me doing what I’m asking you to help me with.”

“What’s that?”

“Revenge. Pure and simple. Unrelenting, targeted attacks towards Reid. He’s the weak link in all this.”

“How?”

“Everything is pointing to him being a man happy for others to fix his problems. He’s spineless, and with a little pressure, I’m sure he’ll crumble and fill in all the gaps, finally putting an end to this.”

“Agreed,” Tris says. “Sounds like he’s always been a mommy’s boy.”

“Pretty much,” Simona agrees. “If you take her out of the equation, he’ll go to water.”

“Or he’ll throw her under the bus, which would save us time,” I suggest, because the more I hear of the boy I once knew the more I think he’s a self-absorbed cunt. “Best way to test our theory is put a little pressure on him and let him make

himself the fool and hopefully expose his sordid family skeletons in the process.”

“Let me guess, you want this done before you walk into the gala tonight?” Heidi scoffs.

“Well, Ho, I like to think we’re very resourceful but even that’s a bit of a stretch. But imagine watching him flail in front of all the other packs and alphas there tonight. It’s almost a strange turn-on.”

Heidi whacks me on the back. “Ewww. But hell yes to public humiliation for alpha pricks. I’m happy to see if I can add a small compilation of incriminating images to the video presentation that always accompanies the Alpha Gala. If Sim can pull it together in time that is.”

And since we’ve had to watch every Gala at Unity, in preparation for the day we’d be attending ourselves, every omega alive knows the way the night works. Canapes and drinks first, letting everyone mingle before dinner and dancing proceeds the announcement of those packing. It’s slightly gaudy, predictable but a highlight and a sell out event. Which makes it a perfect place for us to start applying pressure on Reid, plus, if what Dad is true, kind of means we drive the drama ourselves.

“Did you have any luck with your... research on Xavier Memorial?” I spin around to face Heidi. Reid is one thing, but more importantly I need resolution on Hayes, and that video I suspect will highlight Hayes’s innocence and Reid’s guilt.

Heidi is a whiz at ‘research’. Hacking is such a nasty word. Plus, it comes with a lengthy prison sentence if you get caught.

“I started, but then Koz lured me away with the invitation of watching one of the most amazing people I know get packed,” she snarls through a tight smile.

“I knew you loved me,” I laugh. “Did you bring your laptop?”

“Does slick ruin French lace?” She rolls her eyes at me.

“Hypothetically speaking, do you think Xavier has everything stored on a mainframe server,” Simona asks. These two constantly feed each other’s love affair for technology.

Heidi nods before she answers. “They would operate off a series of protected servers. Probably onsite and off, a couple of people would have access. Limited to only a few for security reasons.”

I reinsert myself into their discussion before they spin away into an argument on cyber this or that. “How long would it take you to do a search of people employed at the hospital between say a month before I was attacked to a month after Hayes was there.”

“Half an hour,” Tristan answers on Heidi’s behalf.

“And if I gave you a list of people associated with the Anders dynasty to also run?” I ask, a way forward starting to crystallise in my thoughts.

Heidi rolls her eyes. “I could do it at the same time.”

“Why?” Tristan asks.

“The baby thing threw me. Like why would you do that? It makes no sense, which means they did it to protect themselves. I think Reid has ADV, but I also think they used Hayes as a cover for Reid. I’ve said it before, so it’s not really a surprise. But because the Anders are so repugnant they couldn’t really risk people knowing their son was an alpha out of control. Imagine if he was responsible for hurting that woman, it would destroy his father’s political career. But it makes sense.”

“With regard to ADV, the fastest would be confirmation he’s on the Omara register. But yeah, the video of what happened at Xavier would answer the other question.”

Not only do alphas afflicted with ADV have to suffer the disease, they also have to suffer the humiliation of being on a register. Although the government doesn’t call it that, it doesn’t detract from there being one.

Her response stops my thoughts. “How?”

Heidi looks sheepish. But not remorseful. “I never ask questions about what you do for Koz, Raney. I don’t ask how you make me money. I give you cash when you tell me to, and you return a lot more than I originally gave you. Which means, professionally speaking, you have to return that trust and favour to me by not questioning anything about what I do. Give me names and addresses. If you know dates of birth, I need that too. Then find me somewhere safe where I will not be disturbed.”

“You’re not hacking into Xavier, are you?” I push.

Heidi walks over to the window, and not for the first time, the sadness that leaks from her ruins her sweet apple scent. “Let’s not turn this around into something about me.”

“Which is impossible, because if it involves you, it involves us,” Simona says, beating me to the crux of our sisterhood.

“We all have secrets we can’t share.”

“Don’t do it,” I demand.

She shakes her head. “Yeah, fuck that, Raney. You need to know about Hayes now. We don’t have time to play around. He won’t notice anyway. He hasn’t noticed me for the last how many years?”

And without saying it, she also lets us know exactly what she is going to do. Hack into her father’s company.

“He won’t notice, you’re right. But on the off chance he does, what do you think he will do?”

“Nothing I haven’t faced before.”

Even before I’ve reached her physically she’s shut herself away emotionally. That doesn’t stop me from going to her. I ignore the way she flinches as my arm curls around her shoulder, I hold her to my chest. Heidi is so similar to King in a lot of ways, she carries the weight of the world on her

shoulders but has the fortitude of titanium. Nothing will break through her walls, although she sometimes lets us in.

“You know,” I start but she interrupts me.

“Don’t start getting all sentimental. I love you; you love me. I’m doing this and I won’t be talked out of it. Get Simona working on what to do with the information I get you. Hell, maybe you’re right and we should go tonight and finish it once and for all. Tristan could call in a few favours, and everyone who’s anyone would know.”

I put my hand over her mouth to stop her. “Heidi, why don’t you come live with me for a while? You need to take a break from your life. I’ll look after you.”

“No offence, Raney, I saw all your nest selections,” she retorts, but I can see her hurting too.

“You helped me pick half of them!” I scowl at her, letting her hide behind our gentle teasing.

“I felt sorry for you, okay?”

I kiss the top of her head, and she sinks into it. But also knowing how much she hates feeling so vulnerable, I step away before she asks.

I re-join Sim and Tristan, and we cuddle while we wait for the other part of us to pull herself together and come back to us. We’d wait years if we had to.



CHAPTER

Thirty-Eight

RANEY

“I know you said you couldn’t see me today, but I don’t remember if your tradition meant I couldn’t see you,” I whisper against the shell of his ear. My hands cover his eyes, so on a technicality, I’m not breaking his traditions.

He growls at me.

“Keep your eyes closed, Koz, I just need a quick touch up of my soon to be alpha before we pretend this never happened.”

Digging my hands into his suit pants, the silk lined pocket adds to the sensual glide as I scratch my hands up his thighs. I completely touch my man up. Do I care I’m doing it as I stand at the entrance to Birdie with my girls behind me? Not at fucking all.

Dropping my forehead against his back, I stroke his dick and inhale his cherry-chocolate scent, holding it deep in my lungs. This thing with Heidi has me rattled. And what happened with Hayes has my soul sad, but it won’t stop me. I also wasn’t lying about wanting to get to the good part. The thick underwear I’m wearing are already soaked in anticipation. No one ever said being an omega was straightforward; our bodies tend to do things not in line with our emotions.

Puck’s eyes are on me and have been since the second I pushed the doors open. He’s watching me like a hawk. And I love it.

“You should see how much of our money I spent,” I say, and Koz does the sweetest thing ever by squatting down so I can keep feeling him up while also talking intimately into his ear.

“Hope you didn’t waste money on underwear, micina, because the second you are mine is the last time you’ll be wearing any for a very long time. At least until I fill your womb and make your stomach swell.”

I mewl like a kitten against his skin before shaking my head to clear out his promise to refocus on what I was doing. “I need an address to finish off my purchases.” I bite hard under his ear, earning another wicked growl.

He laughs, shaking his head. “Not going to happen. I’ll send Lew in to finalise the details. Get your hands out of my pants now, Raney, before I lose my mind and ruin your virtue.”

“You ruined that a long time ago, Mr. Siderno.”

“And you fucking screamed for more. Are you ready to go yet?”

Puck interrupts. “Raney, you got to feel me up too. It’s only fair.” And then he makes a sharp pirouette before backing up in my direction, stopping with his ass in my face before he grins expectantly.

He’s right it’s only fair, but since my hands are wrapped tight around Koz, I lean over and nip his butt. A little harder than I expected. Instead of any sharp bitch about pain, those sky-blue eyes of his fill with instant heat.

“He likes,” Koz groans as he cups my hand over his suit pants and rolls his hips slightly, “so do I.”

“And I want to get packed, so we can do this in a less conspicuous place. But first you two are going to explain why you’re getting all guard-ish. Instead of using our trained security team. You’re both acting like the last line of defence. I much prefer your face to Lew’s but he’d be deeply offended if you thought he wasn’t competent enough to protect me.”

“Good to know you prefer my face,” Koz growls again, a completely different growl.

And sadly, I unwrap my fingers from around his length, and the both of us stand up. But I stay behind, wrapping my arms around him out of respect for his wishes.

“Reid called,” Puck says, giving me the news I was expecting.

“Well, we knew that was a given, didn’t we?”

“True. He said he wanted me to ‘return’ you to him. Before he went cliché and said something along the lines of ‘don’t make me kill you’.”

“I hope you set him straight,” I reply, shaking my head and pursing my lips in distaste. Honestly, anyone says his name and a roil of revolt fills my stomach.

Puck drops one of those killer, cheeky as fuck, smirks my way, “Seems pointless to answer that, Raney, but of course I did. He’s not getting anywhere near you.”

I’ve got no issue with the tidal wave of giddy relief that floods my system that Puck is exactly where he should be again. Next to me.

“Any chance I can ask for a bit of extra time?”

“No offence, kitten, you’ve run overtime here. I told the girls unlimited budget, but two hours was my limit... you’ve been nearly four.”

“And the issue is?”

“I made a promise you’d be packed before sunset.”

“Yeah, well you promised me a gala too.”

“Ah, so the girls are spoiling my surprises?” He goes to spin around. “Disappointed?”

“No. I think I was being stubborn, having to prove to myself I deserved to be there surrounded by the finer side of society. But I did that years ago.”

“You did.”

“And I don’t need any confirmation from anyone but my pack.”

Koz pushes against me while Puck cups my face. “Sounds good, you saying that, Raney.”

“So, all we need to resolve is the Anders?” I lead them to where I want them.

“Yes.”

“I know how to do it.”

“How?” Koz barks, his alpha making himself known now. I rub his shoulder again. Soothing him as much as settling myself.

“I’m also going to need a safe location, preferably with super-fast WIFI.”

“For Heidi?”

“For Heidi. But I also need a safe location myself.”

“Stop drip feeding me information, micina, you know how much it pisses me the fuck off.” He goes to turn around, but I hold him still by gripping his hips. Earning another bark of frustration.

“It’s okay,” I say softly, only for him. And his alpha. He settles. “I need somewhere private to speak with Hayes before you take me to my next surprise. I’d prefer to see Hayes face to face, but if that’s impossible, I can do it on the phone.”

“Why?”

“Koz,” I brush my hand over his shoulder, keeping it there because he won’t like what I have to say. “I’m not keeping secrets, but I want to speak with him first.”

“About the results of his ADV?”

“In a roundabout way.”

I’m surprised he doesn’t turn around, but that doesn’t miss his rising irritation. “Micina, we said no secrets.”

“There’s going to be times other people in our pack know things before you do, and that’s not because I love them more or less than you, it’s basic respect. But as soon as I’ve spoken with them, and as long as they say I can, I’ll be telling you. How could I not?”

He shakes his head. But he can’t argue. Well, it is Koz, so I’m sure if we wanted, he could argue but for the moment he doesn’t.

“Does it put you at risk?” Puck asks, his eyes full of concern.

“Everything at the moment seems to put me at risk.”

“There is that. Lucky you’re worth it, huh?” He grins again before he gets all serious as he talks low into my ear. “I’m going to give you a key, and you’re going to go up the first flight of stairs—ignore Lew because he has to be there. When I come up, I want to see your fingers in your pussy and your lips around Hayes’s cock.”

I recoil, wondering if I heard what I thought I heard, Koz’s deep laughter lets me know I most certainly did.

“These fucking traditions, micina...or I’d be up there filling your mouth myself.”

When Hayes steps out from the shadows, it’s such a clash of emotions that I’m left struck frozen and silent on the spot. He ignores everyone and everything as he threads his fingers in mine before taking the key from Puck. Passing the girls, they wave and point over to the cafe area and maybe I should argue, but I don’t. I follow him up the stairs and stay quiet as he unlocks a door.

The room deserves more attention than I give it. Clearly set up for a heat, it has all the things that should make my omega heart a mushy mess but nothing would be able to steal my attention from Hayes.

With our fingers still linked, he walks through the room like he’s been here before and goes to a huge window, opening the block out curtains and unveiling a spectacular view down

to the streets below. The moment he does, it's like he also takes away that feeling of the room being too big or too small.

Hayes gives my hand a quick kiss before untangling our fingers. He triple checks the locks and starts rearranging the furniture by pushing a large armchair over, deep enough to hold more than one person. Once it's in the right position, looking out at the spectacular view, he curls around me from behind before sitting down.

His scent is so thick, it fills the room and it's full of all the signs of his anxiety—slightly stale, not as warm as it usually is. Reclining backwards, he holds me to him and lifts my feet up off the floor when he puts his feet on the window ledge.

Hayes and I have always fit together like a jigsaw. He's taller now, a lot wider too, but it doesn't detract from the feeling I get from being in his presence, like everything is in place. It's not a sense of protection he omits, it's more he finishes me off, gives me a place where I feel complete. I go to turn around, but he stops me by dropping his chin on my shoulder and criss-crossing his arms over my chest.

“I think I was meant to wait for a phone call or something, but I can't stop thinking about you, Raney. I can't explain what it feels like properly, I keep trying to find the right words, but they're just words. And it's hard to explain how I feel when it's not right.”

“What's not right?”

Hayes refuses to answer my question by ignoring it, but he doesn't ignore me. He brushes the hair off my neck with a caress so soft it feels like feathers.

He whispers like he's confessing a secret. “I can't let you go, Raney. Despite knowing I have to, I can't do it.”

And then he holds me still as he kisses softly over the scar Puck left behind years ago. It's a pretty telling gesture, matching his words.

“Then don't,” I answer, purposely pressing harder against his lips, before my voice drops lower than his. “You don't

have ADV, Hayes.”

I can feel a rush of air against my skin before he moves up to my ear. “I’ve never had it.”

A weird feeling, a mix of nausea and swirling hope fills me. I’m relieved he understands he’s not a monster, physically. Now I just need to tackle the next awful part of his results. Which is a thousand times worse. “I know something else.”

He stops running his nose up my neck. “And you don’t want to tell me?”

Shaking my head, I disagree, before clarifying. “I do want to tell you, I’m not a fan of secrets, but I don’t want to hurt you.”

Hayes sighs, his scent changing by the smallest fraction as he understands where I’m coming from. I’m not surprised by how quick he responds; he’s always been accepting of how he feels emotions differently. It’s part of what makes him so beautiful and so hard to walk away from.

“And if you don’t tell me, who does it hurt?” he asks slowly before he dips low to kiss my shoulder.

His question is very much a Hayes question.

“Both of us,” I say. It’s such a hard balance to keep. Heidi’s words echo that now is not the time to be so honourable, but he’s built his life on a lie. And with my decision made, I twist around, ignoring the way his arms try to hold me in place. Once I’m facing him, seeing, and feeling him, it’s an easy ask telling the truth. “It will hurt the both of us if I don’t tell you.”

He goes to say something, and I press the palm of my hand over his mouth. “But I will not let you go through this anymore. I can’t, because I feel the same as you, not being able to let this go.”

His eyes do the talking, so I keep going. “If we had more time, I’d do this with a lot more subtlety, don’t forget that, except if it was my last hour on earth I would make the time to

sit you down and tell you the same.” I stop for a minute and shake my head. “That sounded a lot better in my thoughts. What I meant was I’d always tell you.”

Taking my hand away from his mouth, I let it slide under his jaw, and despite not knowing what I’m going to say or what our future looks like, Hayes’s scent leaks from him. Hot cinnamon donuts, sugary enough to make my jaw ache, exactly the same reaction every time. And it’s sweet again after my declaration, but it’s our reminder of our special and timeless connection.

“Sorry, Hayes,” I whisper before looking deep into his brown eyes, so reflective of his swirling and pure emotion. I wish I didn’t have to darken them with sadness, but I have to. For us. “You’re not her dad, Hayes. You can’t have children.”

And I watch his eyes closely and see the moment he starts falling away from me. It’s so sudden, it’s like he’s dropped off a cliff in front of me. I use both my hands to grab his face, my nails accidentally scratching him, but I can’t let him go through this part alone.

“Hayes, look at me,” I growl when he shuts his eyes, cutting me off. “Don’t shut me out.”

He doesn’t answer me, and I start running through the millions of arguments burning on my tongue. They all disappear when his brown eyes burst open, and I come face to face with a very angry version of Hayes.

I go stock still.

It’s instinctual, ingrained into my DNA to not move a muscle. I should drop my eyes submissively and cower under an alpha’s rage, except I don’t. I’m not stupid though, I know not to push an alpha on the edge of going ballistic, no matter how beautiful he is.

His nostrils flare as his breathing gets choppy the more his alpha rises. His surging anger and alpha pheromones fill my lungs and pull from me a need to soothe the fury and hurt I see in his eyes. Rightly or wrongly, I can’t help what I do, the way

my body responds because that too is instinctual. I was built to be his half. His darkness when he's overcome with light, his light when he's lost and can't see.

A low purr spills from my chest, my scent becomes the only thing either of us can smell, and my slick saturates the space between us. My omega is swamping her alpha in as many physical ways as possible. I keep my movements slow. My fingers don't shake when I reach up to let his hair down because I am not scared. And once it hangs, I rub my hands from the top of his head, down his shoulders over and over, showering him in scented, grounded touches.

His presence pushes against me, like a tornado pressing down changing the atmosphere in the room. I wait, giving him the time to find me as he struggles to get a hold of himself. Hayes tips his head, the louder my purr becomes, and his breathing changes from choppy to deep inhalations as he catches my syrupy signals. Without an explanation, or warning, he rips my shirt right down the front, leaving me on his lap, exposed and wanting.

This morning I elected not to wear much at all. Hayes wasn't who I'd undressed for, but I was over the moon at my bold choice now.

Hayes's eyes lock on mine. There's still way too much going on in his eyes for me to talk. It feels like forever, but when he eventually manages to speak, it's barely loud enough to hear. His tone and presence, however, is impossible to defy. "I've wasted how many freaking days thinking I'd ruined us. I'd lived every day thinking we'd already had our last moment together. For what?"

I get it's not a question but an answer nearly falls from my lips, drawing another sharpness to him. And despite Hayes speaking quieter than the breeze, there's nothing gentle about him.

"No talking, omega. You are going to let your alpha apologise for the time we've wasted before I send you back downstairs with my intention to pack you trailing down your

milky-white thighs. I have to.” His deep brown eyes don’t leave mine, and in them I see he’s completely lost the war on holding back this side of him.

“I want you to,” I say. And even though he said no talking, it’s a risk I’m willing to take. Because once his storm is gone and he’s back to being Hayes, I don’t want him to ever question he took my consent from me. “I want you, Hayes.”

He spins me while he snarls angrily, and despite the press of his surging and dangerous emotions, I know I’m not in danger. The whisper soft touches, the considered and remembered placement of his hands on my bad leg are proof of that. While the way he helps, despite his suffering in his rush of anger, only confirms how safe I am with him. I miss out on seeing him undress, but I feel the warmth of him wrap around me from behind. He could be lost in a feral rut, but I’d never be scared by him.

Hayes runs his hand up the back of my thigh, right up the split of my ass crack, following each vertebra until he gets to where my shoulder blades are and then he pushes me face first towards the glass. And then with the whole world watching, he directs his frustrations to my pussy. The first nip of his teeth high up in the junction of my thighs earns me a frustrated growl when I startle, before I get a moan of satisfaction from him as his tongue chases my slick straight from its source. One minute he’s behind me, the next he’s under me, but that’s not enough, he pulls my hips so I’m straddling his face.

I hit my head against the glass at his first suck, but the noise and pain is chased away by the long deep groan we make as he lets go of his frustrations and Hayes absolutely goes to town on my pussy. His tongue flickers aggressively over my folds, and his breathing gets so choppy, I think he’s suffocating, but he does not stop eating me out. Hayes grinds my hips over his face and I have to hold a hand against the glass and pitch upwards so I don’t drown him as a huge wave of my pleasure crashes over his face in no time at all.

Looking down half horrified, I swallow a giggle when I catch him shooting daggers my way. His alpha is not yet happy despite him swallowing an embarrassingly large mouthful of my pleasure. My slick should have helped sate his beast when our words were never going to be enough.

He disappears from view—another crush of his presence is all the warning I get before he’s scooping me up to standing. We share the small confines of the windowsill. Hayes says something almost impossible to hear, but I get the gist of his sweet rumblings when he pushes me hard up against the glass, lifting one of my legs and surging straight inside. It’s like we become one. His arms and legs engulf my own as he starfishes us against the glass, and it’s only when every inch of him is pressed against me does he start to get a grip on his fury. A soft kiss is the only warning I get, before I get railed against the window for the entire world to see, by the sweetest, most caring man I know.

Keeping my mouth shut doesn’t mean I’m quiet, but Hayes, now he has me where he needs me, is way louder than the both of us in his barely spoken words. “Did you figure it out yet, Raney? Did you see what you did? In the space of a few words, you did this?” he hisses desperately, his anger at war with the way he loves. I get lifted off my toes with each thrust. And he doesn’t stop driving his cock into me when he comes. But this isn’t about orgasms, this is a desperate claiming.

Hoisting my leg, my slick, and his come drip down my thighs. He scoops it up and rubs it over my face at the same time he rams his knot home. A haunting sound straight from the middle of his chest releases before he’s frantic in the way he moves, but so fucking gentle and poetic in my ear. “Look at you, my beautiful brave woman. Giving and taking from me in one breath, freeing me with your endless kindness. I’m a storm of chaos, but my rage needs an outlet, like lightning does. You are the endless sky I need.”

He stops talking, the needs of his alpha colliding against his gentle nature again. But this time he needs to feel my

submission. His fingers strum over my clit as he takes me as high as I can go, before I drop off a cliff like he did, screaming my release. Hayes groans in my ear as he comes with me before he drops his head to mine. “Not letting you go, omega.”



CHAPTER

Thirty-Nine

RANEY

“Are you sure?” Hayes insists, as he dries my legs with the softest towel I’ve ever felt.

The tempest consumed us both, leaving a changed alpha in its wake, one that was worried he’d hurt me. The other change was Hayes was now in a place of sadness and bubbling anger. At himself and his situation. Rightfully so.

“You needed the reminder of what life should be about. I did too,” I offer, taking the towel from his hands and drying his body like he did mine. It’s okay to be quiet, we’ve used our bodies as a way to argue, apologise, and reaffirm promises we made in our childhood. Because sometimes finding words is hard.

Dropping the towel, I place a kiss on his hip before standing in front of him. “Koz and Puck do not know the results of your test.”

“Neither does Tal,” he says, passing over his Deluge t-shirt. “Koz is going to kill me, sending you back down there wearing that.”

“Me wearing your t-shirt will not be an issue. Me being upset I didn’t get a chance to see and talk to you would have been. Life for Koz is pretty simple.”

“He’s pretty fucking intimidating, Raney, you know that, right?”

“Be yourself and there’s no issue.”

He looks at me in disbelief and then proceeds to shake his head like he's questioning me and my advice.

“When have I let you down before?” I ask, dipping in quickly for a snuggle and purposely leaving him covered in more of my scent.

Hayes looks good in his jeans and no top. It gives me that moment I've been hoping for, to have a look at his tattoos properly. And before was not the time. I don't think he would have appreciated me asking him to take a break in his feral raging so I could quiz him on the reasons he chose his tattoos.

I trail my finger over the line work of the incomplete tattoo; the wisteria looks like it's blowing over his shoulder and falling around his heart. A heavy pounding on the door interrupts the questions I was going to ask. Puck's voice through the door is easily discernible as is the smile on his face.

“Raney, Koz sent me up—”

Hayes swings the door open in an instant. “We're coming.”

But Puck's eyes are on me first. They go from top to bottom and up again, his eyes holding mine for a brief moment, but in that time, I see his question asking if I'm fine. My lips tip slightly, answer enough it seems because his eyes jump to Hayes, and then he takes in the room, which is in a decent state of disaster. Chairs are left on their sides, a coffee table is in line with the bed, the sofa still pushed against the edge of the window. And yeah, we travelled the circuit of destruction a few times over.

“Shit, Hayes, it must have been some news she told you. Holy crap, is that your boobs imprinted on the glass, Raney? I'm kind of kicking myself I didn't come up sooner.”

I go to wave Puck off, but he sweeps in and nabs my hand, drawing me out of the room while still looking at Hayes for an answer to his question. “Hayes, what was it she told you?”

“Puck!” This time I do interrupt him. “Not your call.”

“It is. Everything about you is my call,” he snaps back. “It’s how a pack works. It’s how we will work.”

“Yeah, well not yet,” I answer quickly.

“So, it was a goodbye fuck?” Puck asks, his eyes on Hayes.

Hayes interrupts. “Not at all. I appreciate where you’re going, and you’re right about not having secrets. The Anders family have been playing Talon and me off for years, just never figured they’d stoop so low as where they did.”

“Go on,” Puck says with an obvious lack of emotion and empathy.

I go to pull my hand out of his, not liking this, but Hayes comes up and brushes the hair off my face as he answers. “Raney let me know the kid I thought was mine is not mine. Now all that remains to be seen is if I’m the rapist they painted me to be or not.”

Puck scoffs an ugly noise. “Yeah, well, let’s be real. You raping someone is like saying Sharlene is a good parent. Whatever I can do to help, you let me know, hey?”

Hayes gives a nod of his head. “Appreciate that, Puck. I feel pretty stupid...”

“Well, don’t. I grew up knowing how manipulative they can be and the games they’re capable of playing. You’ve got some shit to work out, make sure you remember you got other people besides Talon that are there for you. But if you don’t hurry up and get your ass downstairs, that number is going to diminish pretty quick. Koz is going off.”

“You should change, Raney, shit. I’m sorry.” Hayes grimaces before it’s like he catches himself. “Actually, I’m not sorry about spending time with you at all. I’m not. But I will apologise to Koz for being so long.”

And then he takes my other hand out of Puck’s and leads me down the stairs. I pull back at the last second already

knowing he's intending to face Koz and he can, but I can't break Koz's one stipulation in honour of his tradition today.

Koz is talking before I even make my way through the door. "I've got my eyes shut, Raney, get here." He turns in my direction, and his hands find mine, tugging me against his chest. His cherry scent is verging on being bitter except the chocolate side of him is so sweet, it threatens to bring cavities to my teeth.

"Stay," he growls, his eyes still closed as he removes his suit jacket and sweeps it behind me, waiting until my arms slide inside. I swim in it, but I know he's not dressing me in it for fashion or warmth. "I just want to call you mine, micina, and the day seems to be passing slowly. You know, everything else is a yes. It's always a yes. Except it would be nice to pack you when you smell more like me than Hayes. It went okay?" His voice betrays both his impatience and his concerns, but his entire focus is on me. When he talks, it sounds like he's been smoking, making his voice deep and growly, and god it works on so many levels. I have to bite my tongue so I don't whimper like I'm a fresh omega. Of course he picks up on it. And he chuckles as he drops down to give me a chaste kiss on my cheek before he whispers into my ear. "Puck goes with you, or Hayes. Reid's made his intentions very clear in his latest call. It's been a little while since he called Puck, and I'm not worried in the least, but it doesn't mean I'm relaxed. In the car waiting for you are bullet proof vests for you and the Scorned Girls, and a beautiful new tracking bracelet for you. Non-negotiable, so don't even bother opening those lips unless you want me to stretch them with my dick."

Even with his eyes closed, I smile up at him before I start noisily popping my lips open and closed, mimicking a goldfish, earning another noise of frustration from him. "Why are you pushing me so hard today?"

"You have to ask?" I laugh.

He tries to ignore my shenanigans, but he can't hide the way his scent gets all warm and thick. The second I stop

mucking around, he gives a filthy chuckle in my ear, knowing he just muddled my brain with his scent. It also gives him the chance to keep talking without me being a dick. “I want you armed at all times, and tell Heidi that Ayden is with me, so I apologise in advance. And please ask Heidi to borrow someone’s scent blocker, I don’t want to smell another omega, Raney, and she’s making it very difficult. Which I do not like.”

“Yeah, we had a slight hiccup inside, girl stuff, but she’s freshened up and ready to do her thing,” I say quickly. “I’ll get her to spritz again before we leave.”

Koz brushes his lips against my forehead but pulls me closer when Puck approaches. Instead of staying out of my conversation with Koz, Puck does what he did earlier in Birdie, when he swoops in and kisses the bejesus out of me. Of course, the two of them obliterate another pair of pants when Koz seems to think he needs to practice biting his claim on my throat while Puck drags my lip through his teeth. His eyes full of ‘yeah, I’m fucking you very soon too’. Hayes is not left out of the equation. I can feel his eyes on me, and us. I’m hoping he’s working out how to make himself a part of this as fast as humanly possible.

And then I’m the one escaping from them and sprinting over to King to give him a quick cuddle before I head back to where the Scorned Girls are waiting.

“So, how did it go?” They swarm around, each of them wrapping an arm around me, ready to hear all the sordid details.

“Raney!” Koz’s alpha roars over the distance, “get your ass in the car now and let’s get packed!”

My eyes go as wide as saucers, and when Tristan squeaks a ‘holy shit’ in my direction, I’m the first one to break the huddle and haul ass. I seriously have them eating my dust. I can hear King yelling at me about not fucking my knee up, but it’s like I’ve been turbo boosted by my time with Hayes, Puck, and Koz. I feel free as a bird, and light as a feather and sure enough I don’t wobble once in my haste to get to the last part

of the day, getting faster and further away. Even apparently beating Lew or Rhodes back to the car.

Leaping in the car, I slide over the seat, making a mess of all the vests lined up. Koz also laid out a discrete holster. I'm so well practiced in putting the holster on, that I do it in about four seconds max, including sliding the small gun home. The bracelet is next, it's leather and silver and has the weirdest clasp that I have to focus on as I wait for the girls to hurry up.

I never for a moment thought I'd need to pay attention to what was going on around me. For the simple fact we have an army of people watching. It's the eerie silence followed by an explosion of alpha aggression along with the roar of ten men and the screaming of three omegas that lets me know how spectacularly I messed up.

The door I'm leaning against opens so quickly and unexpectedly, I have no time to brace and I spill right out of it. Straight onto the bloody chest of Rhodes. As if his cold blood soaking through Koz's jacket wasn't horrific enough, it's Reid's face that stares down at me.

"Hello, Sweets." He smiles like a crocodile.

"Don't call me, Sweets. I fucking hate that nickname. And always have!" I hiss back before I can stop myself.

"Come on, Sweets," he exaggerates, "I did tell him I was coming to get you. Up you get," he says calmly. It's at complete odds with the wave of chaos swarming towards us. Reid's calm is not like Hayes's peaceful calm, and it has me locking up in fear as I try to figure out what my next move is.

From behind the car, surging forward are a group of people who I can only assume are part of Reid's entourage.

"You won't be needing these," he laughs, throwing out the vests as he reaches for the door handle, locking me inside the car with him. My shock makes me slow, but eventually I manage to get my finger around the door handle, but Reid moves with me, snapping something around my other wrist.

Handcuffs in the bedroom are sexy. Out of the bedroom, the sharp, cold metal cuts against my wrist as he physically drags me onto his lap to use me as a human shield. Of course, Reid went extra and made the handcuffs longer, using another couple of feet of chain.

“Figured, since you were a dog, I may as well leash you like one.” He steals any response and my submission by pressing the tip of a knife to my throat, putting me in a no-win situation.

“I brought a friend along,” he says at the same time he hits the automatic window button, lowering the rear windows right down. From the reflection on the one next to me, I come face to face with the desperation and rage of my soon to be pack, my family, and my girls.

The guys are too far away to even realise that Talon sits in the driver’s seat. For an instant I didn’t notice him there either, until his distinctive campfire, leather scent hits me. Part of me relaxes as soon as I scent him, until the reality he’s with Reid makes my heart nearly stop. I fell for everything he said. Every. Fucking. Thing.

“I told them to take out Colt first. Then the alpha you think can replace me. But also, because I’m really fucking angry at you, King and Joker had to go. Shooting them is only about hurting you as much as I can,” he taunts like a wasp, his voice low and menacing. My stomach rises in a rush when Reid leans in so close his lips nearly touch my ear.

Four gunshots ring off over the noise of the car. I fight against Reid, needing to see but get stopped by his cruel laughter in my ear and an agonising freeze rushing from where the knife was sitting.

I got that wrong too. Evidently, it’s a syringe, and I’ve got something about to render me vulnerable burning through my veins while Koz and everyone else fade away the further we drive.

The faster Talon drives, I should say. And that's a bitter betrayal to swallow.



CHAPTER

Forty

Reid takes delight in watching the way the drugs start burning through my system, a malicious smile spreading over his face the more my breathing changes.

I'm berating myself, using every word known, at how I ended up in this position, but also how I ever thought he was the one. It's funny how that keeps me more motivated to keep my head in the game. And no shit, it's like I start making a list of all the things about him that turn my stomach. It gets long quickly. It's the way the colour of his eyes deepen with his obvious enjoyment at my fate. His eyebrows, so sculptured and fake, keep rising up as he soaks in the moment. I think of all the ways I could rip them off his face to settle the race of my pulse. There was a time I used to think the freckles over his nose were so endearing, and now I'm literally cursing each one to an endless cycle of pain in hell. I use anything and everything on his face to feed my hate. Hate is good, hate will keep me alive until help arrives.

And it will. I have no doubt about that.

The wind whips my hair over my face, the faster the car speeds away, but I'm stuck in a slurpy, spaced out place where I'm staring at Reid. Until he loses the game we were unwittingly playing by looking away as he also closes the windows. And it's hard not to laugh knowing I won. Of course, he takes losing to heart and smooshes my face in a punishing grip until his ringing phone interrupts him.

He chooses to answer the phone. Which in my mind means I win again. He shoves me backwards, hopefully because he

was tired of looking at the challenge in my eyes or it was knowing I'd be making it impossible for him to talk. Foolishly, he doesn't pay me any attention, nor does he see my gun fall to the floor.

“Dickhead,” I slur out. The noise makes me smile and laugh like I'm stoned as hell.

Half listening to him on the phone, I add the sound of his voice as another thing on my ‘I hate Reid Anders’ list. Lying down, I probably look unconscious, and I make that work for me since he doesn't even think to triple check.

The drugs are weird, they make me slow, but I'm aware, and if anything, I feel like I've smoked a bit too much. I guess I was thinking if you drugged someone, you'd completely incapacitate them, unless of course Reid fucked that up too.

That makes me laugh in my head because he probably did, and as I keep my features relaxed and my eyes closed, I try to figure out what to do next. I don't even bother trying to figure out his conversation because his voice grates on me that much. In between the spaces where Reid's not yelling, I pick up on whistling.

The whistling gets more personal in a sense, so either the drugs are mind bending or Talon's being all shifty for some reason. Besides him being a two-faced snitch, that is.

But he most certainly does keep whistling a slow version of Gun's and Roses, Patience. It's hard to keep the act up that I'm out cold because that song, Talon and I go way back. Like one summer and a bottle of wine listening to bad 80s glam rock back. I have to employ all the calming techniques I learned in Maintaining Submission to keep my breathing slow as Talon keeps muddling my brain. The way he whistles the start of that song over and over, like he's purposely toying with me.

“Shut up, Talon, I'm on the phone,” Reid hisses at one point before jumping back into the conversation he's having.

“That song always makes me laugh. I need to laugh more,” Talon says. Again, he’s purposely being a tricky dicky by saying out loud something so left of centre it doesn’t make sense. Except to me, because in our last discussion he said that very same thing. And then he adds to my confusion by intentionally scenting up the car so much that Reid cuts the call and starts banging on about opening windows again and putting up the privacy barrier. Talon’s almost lazy in his response. “Chill out, Reid. The screen stays down like we talked about. Honestly, don’t forget I’m doing you a favour.”

“Bullshit. I know that smell. You want her fucking pussy,” Reid counters.

And I lock down every urge, including vomiting and gouging Reid’s eyes out.

“Yeah, look, Reid. Let’s be real, I don’t take what’s not on offer. I’d never do that to Lolli.”

“Oh please.” Reid scoffs.

And Talon completely ignores him. “Did you use the syringe I gave you? All of it?” He asks, and I can’t help the noise that escapes me. His betrayal hits hardest. Way harder than Reid’s.

Reid slaps my ass, and I fight not to move an inch. “Of course.”

“Cool. Then she’s going to be out for hours, giving us a chance to talk more,” Talon says. I want to think he’s giving me small things to work with, but it might just be him being a dick.

Reid leans forward in his seat. “About what?”

“You’re making a mistake going straight to the Waldorf. You have to know that’s the first place they’ll look. I mean, you’ve made no secrets about staying there and even with the additional security presence your father called in, I think you’re asking for trouble.”

“They won’t be able to get past them,” Reid insists.

“You’re probably right, but I guarantee every person you left back there will try.”

Reid laughs, his oily malicious laugh, before answering. “And if they do, we have them arrested again. Cap’s good, he’s done what he promised. He’d never go against Dad, they’re friends and go way back. Like us, hey. I can’t believe how well you getting in the Academy worked out for us. Good thing you know how to play the game.”

“Yeah, I know, right,” Talon answers, but it sounds vacant. “Lucky I was there in Cap’s office when you guys showed up. How long ago was it?”

“I reckon it was about nine, ten months since we welcomed you into the circle. Cap said you earned your stripes,” Reid says, “Lucky break for you and me both, hey?”

“Something like that,” Talon replies, and I’m surprised Reid doesn’t take a swipe back at Talon’s obvious sarcasm.

It’s seriously like Reid’s on speed, the way he talks shit. “Can’t believe we got them split so easy when they landed, it was a good practice to see what we were up against. We knew the Fallen would be an issue. They won’t be now, stupid fuckers. I knew if we kept pecking at them, he’d eventually break or we’d get something solid to pin on them.”

“Pity you didn’t get to the station quicker, we could have done this sooner,” Talon answers, “You owe me, Reid, seriously, Sharlene was gunning on about how she couldn’t rely on us. I fixed it, but next time don’t be running late. Anyway at least some good came of it, we found Colt, right?”

I swear I hear a similar shattering sound to what I heard the last time Talon was talking to me. This time it’s not my heart thawing, instead he breaks it all over again.

Reid doesn’t answer, and the mood in the car drops. “Why have you got so much to say now?”

Talon’s so relaxed in the way he talks, I believe everything he’s saying. “Protecting my interest, I guess. There’s no point doing all this and getting our wires crossed again.”

“I don’t have anything crossed. Anyway, it’s done. We got her, we go back home and end of story.”

“And you pay me,” Talon laughs.

This time Reid borrows Talon’s earlier sarcasm and his line, “Something like that.”

But Talon counters immediately, his presence changes slightly, letting Reid know he’s not at all impressed. “You reckon? Don’t try to play me, Reid. Or I won’t be helping when they come looking for her.”

“Relax. It’s going to be hard for them to look for her when they’re dead. Unless the guys in your squad can’t shoot straight. I made it clear to each and every one of them who to take out. Besides, I did tell Colt, warned him I was coming. It looks like they didn’t take it too serious.”

“I doubt that. Don’t get cocky yet, Reid, you’re underestimating the people we just left behind.”

“Fuck off,” Reid spits back.

Talon ignores him for a moment and takes a sweeping corner without warning, making me slide over the bench seat.

“Do you really think you can force a bond, and that it will help?”

The bile rises in my stomach, hearing what I think I already knew. But despite it, there’s a part of me pretty relieved too, knowing Talon does know that these two have just signed their death sentences. I can’t think about if people were actually hurt or worse, instead I focus on how four bullets is not enough to stop my alpha, or my dad.

“Yeah,” Reid answers, and I can tell he’s not looking at me. His voice is quieter. “Where are we going?”

“I think I saw a bike a couple of blocks back jump on our tail, I’ll just take the off ramp up here to check, it’s no biggie, the ramp on is only a mile down the road anyway.”

“Stick to the plan, Talon,” Reid barks.

“You should have stuck to the plan and let me get her and bring her to you, like we agreed,” Talon bites back.

“Time’s running out.”

“For her or you?”

“Yeah well, not her. Pack Commissioner Mitchelton agrees too, good call on going to him. How’d you know he’d help?”

“Intuition, I guess since he’s friends with your father.” Talon does this weird hum, his voice a little louder, like he’s talking over his shoulder. “You sleeping better yet? What about your headaches?”

“Not your concern,” Reid snaps back.

“Yeah, you get that it kind of is my concern, right? Being cooped up in the car with you is like a stressful situation, is it not?”

Reid’s phone rings again, and I stop listening to him ranting to slowly piece the dots together. I purposely lock down Talon’s duplicity because it’s too fucking painful, but Reid’s issue is clear as day. The stupid fuck has ADV, and I’d put all the money in Koz’s bank account that he was for some reason being denied access to Omara. I knew I was onto something asking Heidi to do her research, at least in the worst case she’ll have something concrete to pin on the Anders family.

With Reid on the phone again, I use the time to see if my body is indeed out of commission like Talon suggested. I go to move, and he starts this weird tongue clicking before he begins to whistle again. He does it repeatedly getting faster and faster before I realise it’s the same fucking song again. Patience.

“I get it,” I mutter under my breath. Interestingly, despite Reid not hearing, I hear a small chuckle from the front. I’m pretty sure I don’t imagine it.

“Reid, can you check the left side, about three cars back. I think there’s a bike but it’s riding up the van’s ass so it’s hard to see. I’ll switch lanes and give you a second or two.” Talon

interrupts Reid, and I bounce on the seat when Reid's weight shifts.

This time I'm pretty sure I hear Talon hissing under his breath. I can't really question it, and then he makes things really fucking hard when he guns the car over a couple of lanes of traffic, and I slide over the seat even more.

Opening my eyes, Reid is completely facing away from me, and I have to hope Talon's not such a dirty rat that he'd set me up, not that I have much time to wonder, I make a lunge for my gun and snag it just as Talon cuts back over the traffic.

"What the fuck? Do you even have a driver's license?"

"Did you see anyone following us, Reid? Don't worry about my driving, I'm trying to make it easy for you. I'd prefer not to have to explain why we're in a stolen vehicle with an omega handcuffed and chained to the son of one of our state governors."

"Cap will sort it."

"We're not in his precinct right now, Reid. Let's not be doing anything to jinx this. Did you get what?"

"Get what?"

Talon ignores him for a moment and slows the car right down. "Reid, come on buddy, I need to rely on you for this part. Did you see anyone tailing us?"

"No. All good. I'll keep an eye out."

I legit feel the moment Reid looks down at me. Every part of me reacts too. It's like scraping sandpaper over your skin.

"Why can't I catch her scent? She is an omega, right?" Reid asks, just as he jabs a finger into me. And thank Unity for all those acting lessons, even the meditation lessons are being tested. Even with the lessons, how I don't move I have no clue.

"Hey? Reid, we were talking about what we're doing and what's happening next a second ago."

Reid jabs me again, as he answers. “Yeah, well by the looks of it, she’s as fucking broken as she looks. It would have saved us all a lot if she’d just died in hospital.”

I’m a little surprised that I don’t get flooded by a sea of hurt at Reid’s asshole comment. Although maybe it’s like King said, he’s always been a cunt and deep down I’ve always known that, but I’ve been holding on to a notion that he’d man up and become the person I used to dream of endlessly.

Talon takes offence. And that does surprise me. His presence and his blazing emotions fill up the car. “How can you fucking say that? Lolli was our everything!”

“Bullshit. She was a fill in, Talon, and nothing more. I kept telling you I didn’t have a connection with her. You kept telling me to wait. Nothing fucking happened, and all she became was a warm hole to fuck until something better came along.”

It’s like everything –the noise, the air– gets sucked out of the car, before Talon snarls, “I cannot believe you just said that. Honestly, man, that’s... yeah, I don’t think you should talk like that.”

“Why the fuck not? Unless you still want her.” Reid laughs. And it’s not nice. It stops as abruptly as it started. “You know she’s to blame for everything.” Reid’s voice moves, letting me know he’s looking away from me again.

I lock up every muscle in my body, aching to punch him in the back of his head. I would do it to him if I wasn’t chained to him like a dog.

“How is Raney to blame for everything? Actually, see this is why I was asking if you were okay. Your mood’s slipping and so is your control on your emotions. Pull it together,” Talon says.

“I can’t fucking stomach being around her.”

“What?” Talon barks.

“Just leave it be.”

Talon scoffs. “You’ve changed, Reid. Besides the obvious, but I’m starting to think that after this I don’t want anything to do with you. Or your family. Judging by your merry-go-round of emotions and demands, I can’t trust you or your motivations. And if I can’t trust you, our ongoing relationship seems a bit pointless.”

As much as Talon’s saying Reid changed, I want to pipe up and tell him he’s changing. I can’t feel anything from Reid, but Talon’s scent is getting as intense as the pressing of his alpha, and the natural responses he’s pulling from me.

Reid scoffs dismissively before he sobers up and talks with an iciness. “I think you would do well to remember exactly how you got your place, Talon. Playing with the big boys means you don’t get to mouth off when something happens that doesn’t suit you. It’s not how this arrangement goes.”

“Or I just don’t give a fuck anymore, Reid,” Talon goads. And it’s exactly what he’s doing, taunting Reid more and more. “You know the sad thing, it wasn’t you who screwed me over, it was your fucking parents. All you did, and all you keep doing, is sit on your fat ass and reap the rewards. Like you did when we were kids. King even said you would, how ironic is that.”

“King?” Reid laughs cruelly. “Ah, how the mighty just dropped like the sack of shit he is and it’s a fitting end to such a prick of a man.”

Talon takes another sharp turn, and I notice the noise of the highway drops away almost immediately, but Reid doesn’t, he’s still on his soap box.

“I thought he would have come for Sharlene years ago, you know. How could he sit back knowing what he did and doing nothing about it for all this time? He would constantly go on and on about what a man of honour he was, but he’s as piss weak as his daughter is.” Reid finishes with a sour laugh.

“Unlike your honour. Is that what you’re suggesting?” Talon keeps probing.

“Talon, it was something that always amazed me, that you continually worry about things you don’t need to concern yourself with. Someone does you wrong, you fix it. Sharlene knew Raney was trash, and she knew Colt would never get over his infatuation with her.”

“You were equally infatuated. We all were,” Talon fires back.

“And you are apparently hard of hearing. Sure, initially I thought she could be all that, but her designation and her upbringing were always going to be an issue. It’s not like the world doesn’t know alphas need omegas. Raney at that point was a beta so all she would have been is a piece of ass on the side.”

Talon tsks, and I can actually visualise the roll of his eyes and the pinch of his eyebrows at Reid’s attempt at coming up with any kind of reason.

“I call bullshit. A second ago you were going on about King being piss weak, but let’s cut the shit, Reid, you’re the only person in this car that is piss weak.”

Reid’s lies dry up in an instant as he chokes on his bitter anger.

“Excuse me?” he spits.

Talon though pushes on in much the same way he’s driving, fast and furious. “You were never going to be the head of our pack.”

“Bullshit. The idea of us packing definitely didn’t come from your mouth. You were so obsessed with her, all you could think about was what was in front of your eyes. I was the only one who found and filled the forms out.”

“Then what you said makes no sense. You didn’t want her?”

“She would have been of some use. I wanted a pack, needed one if I was going to follow successfully in my father’s footsteps. The rest would fall into place.”

Talon ignores him though. “Hayes’s alpha emerging first was a pretty good indicator he would have been our alpha. Over you.”

“Yeah. No fucking way was I ever going to accept that. A pack alpha does not take cock. Imagine walking into any situation and having to pretend you respected your alpha when he presented for another alpha.”

“How revolting a person are you?” Talon’s voice drops dangerously low.

“Me, revolting? Seriously, Talon, not only does he take it up the ass, but he’s also pretty fucking stupid.”

“Reid!” Talon’s anger manifests in an ugly noise. But Reid just keeps on digging himself a bigger hole.

“He really is as stupid as King is. What kind of alpha sits back and takes everything put in front of him. Easiest thing I have ever had to do. Because not once did he question a thing. Not once. Oh, actually, he did ask me once if I was there, and you know it was so easy to look in his eyes and lie. Of course, I was fucking there. Yet, you’re sitting there suggesting an alpha that can’t smell a lie would have been strong enough to lead our pack? Hayes was way too honourable for his own good, it was the easiest cover up.”

“Cunt,” falls from my lips as easy as breathing. Except of course, it comes out pretty fucking loudly.

I knew he was watching and waiting for a reaction. He digs his thumb nearly under my kneecap. I hiss out in pain despite locking my jaw shut.

“Reid! What the fuck, man? What are you doing to her?”

Not looking at him, I know Reid is grinning. No doubt his eyes are full of malicious energy. I guess I reached my spill over point, I simply cannot physically stand being in his presence a second longer. No matter how dangerous it is to escape.

I go to kick away from him, but his grip on my knee tightens past the point of just trying to inflict pain. He's trying really fucking hard at twisting my kneecap clean off. And I'm not anyone's punching bag, especially his.

I bolt upright, and using my free arm, I ram my elbow as fast and as hard as I can into his face. And Jesus, I get him so good, the impact vibrates up my arm, making me squeak.

The fucking psychopath doesn't make a sound though. I swing around in time to see the first dribble of blood trickling out his nose, which is great. The look in his eyes, not so good.

I scream. Scaring the shit out of Talon. "Reid!" he yells out, making the car swerve. Both Reid and I get thrown around like crash test dummies.

The noise I made is not because I was frightened. Pure adrenaline claws through me, it's my battle cry and I lunge at him. No shit, it's like we go full Matrix; time slows down and I don't miss the slow spread of a cruel smile on his face, nor do I miss the glee in his eyes when he speaks. "Do you remember Sharlene telling you, you're nothing but a dirty cunt, Raney?"

He stops talking. His eyes drop to my neck, and then he goes to scratch my tattoo. "Don't fucking touch his name." I slap his hand away, a little too late.

Time returns to normal, and we clash in a mess of tethered arms and kicking legs. Reid's a dirty fighter but that's the style I'm used to after the training my uncles all insisted upon. I spin around and shove my knee into his dick, coming in too close to avoid the butt of his head. But being close means it's not as bad as it could be, only little stars dance in my eyes. I manage to shake them off and crab crawl as far away as I can, which isn't far enough since he shackled us together. The space though lets him have the room to pull his fist back as far as it can reach, his lip curled up higher, moving over his teeth so he looks like a rabid dog snarling. He's fast, but I move faster. He's strong but not the strongest. We keep dodging, and each time we do, his eyes betray how angry he is.

“Stop fucking moving,” he barks out viciously. His words bounce and echo around the car.

And they should render me frozen like a deer in headlights. His bitter anger and alpha command should have me locked in submission, entirely at his mercy. But the instant they leave his mouth, his deck of cards collapses, because I figure his secret out.

His words are not from a place that pulls my instant obeisance like a loyal subject.

His scent makes me ill because he is not compatible with me. He’s cunning and sly in the faceless games he’s been playing for years, always hiding behind lawyers, and not seeing people because he is not strong enough to face a pack or do anything on his own. Because. He. Is. A. Fucking. Beta.

And he is too slow because he doesn’t have the speed, agility, and power of an alpha because he is not one. Which costs him because while I’m an omega, I’ve also lived with and grown up amongst some of the strongest alphas in our society.

There is nothing I can do to avoid being on the receiving end of a lucky clock in the face, the shock of finally figuring out his secret burns through the pain of his punch. Makes me overly cocky too, but this is my time to shine.

I use the cuffs and chain he bound us together with and turn them against him. Ramming his own wrist, along with mine into his face. I’m a little stunned at how many I get in before he gets the upper hand again and bitch slaps me into tomorrow. Not only is he a fucking beta, but he’s also a slapper. I shake the disorientating ringing bells out of my ears as I crawl away from him as far as I can go. Over the top of our fighting, I hear Talon yelling. The car rocks us from side to side, only adding to the mayhem.

But I find my voice, avoiding another one of his punches, and let Talon know, “He’s not an alpha, Tal!”

Talon slams the brakes on before jamming the wheel one way, making the side of the car smash against something, and in the impact, I end up a jumble of limbs at Reid's feet. It will seriously take one stomp on my head and it really will be night-night for me.

But Reid is dazed from the crash too. Talon is the only one who moves. I watch like I'm suspended in time again from my upside-down position on the floor of the car. Talon moves like an alpha, fluid aggressiveness, wickedly fast. The stars in my eyes return, but not enough to make me miss Talon ripping something that looks like wires from inside his shirt, and it goes sailing behind him. I have no time to properly figure out what he's doing because in the next heartbeat, Talon nearly pulls the door off its hinges as he opens it before he calmly reaches in and grabs Reid by the throat.

And I watch everything upside down with my arm getting yanked along for the ride as he drags Reid out of the car.

Talon's voice drops low, his voice barely audible although his alpha presence is like we're surrounded by towers of speakers.

"You are the most pathetic and disgusting person I have ever fucking met," Talon snarls as his alpha presence becomes another dangerous player.

"Me, pathetic?" Reid blusters while he looks back at me, and kicks a foot out, very nearly missing my face. Talon both sees and feels Reid kicking out, and he swaps his restraint, turning it into a chokehold. It's a good chokehold too. Reid goes from cocky prick to red faced choking bitch pretty quickly.

"Yeah, cunt, you're the pathetic one. You must've had ADV so bad you can't read any situation right! I'm with Lolli, Reid! And you didn't fucking realise—how stupid are you? No shit, you must have been drinking Dempara by the gallon not to figure that out. And then to make matters that much more embarrassing, you pathetic cunt, you screwed your own

DNA up so bad you're a beta. A beta, with no bark, no bite. And no chance."

It still takes Reid a few moments to realise how screwed he is though.

Talon leans down into his ear. "You're not even man enough to get a woman without taking mine." And then Tal moves, like he's about to snap Reid's neck!

"Talon! Do not finish what you're doing there!" I hiss, spinning around so I'm not the wrong way up anymore.

And lucky I did too, because while Reid and Talon are on the outside of the car and my arm is suspended in mid-air because of the chain, Talon can't see Reid being a sneaky fucker and trying to reach inside his jacket. Since I know exactly how many different places Koz arms himself, it's not hard to put together that Reid's armed.

I move like a whip and pull out my gun before he can. And because I am in a bitch of a mood, I shoot Reid. Twice. The first is to disarm him, my small calibre packs a nasty punch and shatters the silence and a part of Reid. Since it was the only place Talon wasn't behind I had no choice but to aim at Reid's arm.

With him squealing like a dog in heat, and as payback for what his mother did, I pop a cap in his knee and watch the blood drain from his face as his flight senses finally kick into action.

Reid shoves back against Talon in his need to escape, and they both stumble and fall backwards. But I get dragged along too, because of the damn chain Reid cuffed on me. I whack my head on the door so hard it brings not just stars but a cosmos of them. That is going to hurt bad.

Over the roar of the traffic and the squeal of Reid as he struggles to breathe through Talon's renewed and even more pressing chokehold, I hear the sweetest rumble ever. Dad's truck and the Fallen are coming. A little late, but still in the

middle of the carnage I burst out laughing, making Talon freak out even more.

“Lolli? What now?”

I hold up my hand, telling him to give me a second so I can get my rush of panic out of my system and into a more appropriate response. I’m not a giggly Gert, although the dark humour of today is not lost on me. Fucking Reid managed to screw up my packing in his own unique way.

“Lolli?”

I take another steady breath before looking at him. We’ve still got some shit to sort out, like him being in the driver’s seat.

“Talon, throw him in the trunk, honestly they’ll kill him out here without a backwards glance. In front of the whole damn world.”

“They should, Lolli! They fucking should.” He barks, his alpha is not in surging dominance and errant aggression, now it’s pointed panic and unbiased attention in his midnight blue eyes that’s holding me hostage.

“And that will happen, Tal, but that’s not something the rest of the world needs to be a part of. Please, do it for me.”

He looks at me for a solid second before he throws up his hands. “Fucking hell, Lolli,” he roars, “everything I do is for you!”

I’m not sure what to say to that, so I don’t reply. Instead, I watch him closely, praying and hoping he didn’t fuck me or anyone I know over, because Talon not being in my world would be brutal. He stands there staring at me, without saying another word, but his chest heaves like he’s run up a mountain and he scents up the space between us.

I want to believe what I see. Without question, he ticks every one of my omega boxes: being so sure of himself, standing there in his ripped shirt, his hair a mess, smelling like a tasty treat. But I’ve been fooled before and looks can be

deceiving. Eventually, I figure I need to break our weird moment or he'll endanger himself. "You better get ready to explain why your fucking ass was in the driver's seat. I don't think they're," I say gently, pointing down the road towards the approaching rumble of King's truck, "in the listening mood."

He doesn't act like a guilty man. He hustles and does everything I suggest including throwing a semi-conscious and banged up Reid into the trunk. And I have to stand against the car, right near where Reid is because of the stupid fucking chain still linking us together. In the middle of it, I see and experience Talon's care in the sweetest of ways. And it feels real, when he alternates between kicking the shit out of Reid and bracing my wrist like it's breakable crystal. He rips his shirt off to press against my bloody forehead, and even though he's using his eyes to ask me to trust him instead of coming up with a million excuses for his actions, he also understands why it's better for everyone when he lies down in classic takedown pose when the truck pulls to a stop.

Talon presses his nose to the road, crosses his hands over the back of his head and spreads his legs wide.

I'd run to Koz, but the cuffs keep me locked in place.



CHAPTER

Forty-One

It's hard to properly know how to express how I feel, but she's standing in front of me which helps me more than oxygen in my lungs. And that was very nearly a real fucking problem when I got shot.

I'll be like one of those fucking reviewers now leaving gushing feedback about how good the new vests the Colombians supply are. Or probably not.

I won't think too hard about the scene we left behind me. Not when I came so close to losing her.

Over the distance, I painstakingly take stock of every inch of her. Her jade eyes are crammed full of what she went through and despite the way she sways in time with each breath I take, she stands proud like the statue of Venus.

Climbing out of King's truck, I know she's starting to put shit together.

"He's fine," I promise. And it's an easy one to keep.

"Where's Puck? And Hayes?" Her eyes fly wide.

"Getting out of the truck now, micina. Puck sat behind me just in case we were being followed is all. Hayes is waiting for you too."

I take a step nearer and she reaches with one arm, but instead of rushing to her I have to hold my hands up in a moment of surrender. It's hard not to sweep her up, but I'm not myself, and I hate her seeing me like this.

Her sweet voice finds me in the delirium of my anxiety. My mind is still locked on what could have happened. “I’m okay, baby. I promise you, I’m okay.”

Raney is the only light I need in my cavernous darkness. I lock onto that insight as I count to a hundred. And then I do it again. The counting helps to calm the ravenous beast inside me as I let her words and her appearance take stock in my mind. It’s the fragrance of her wisteria scent blowing in my direction that shackles me. Opening my eyes, I see her watching me, a hint of panic making her green eyes pop against the white of her wide-eyed shock.

“I hit my head pretty bad, so we’re probably going to have to stop for a couple of stitches or at least some glue before we pack. And maybe we should get my wrist checked, but it doesn’t feel broken. I need to talk to dad too. Oh my god, my Scorned Girls,” she rambles. But I’d much prefer her rambling than what could have happened.

“Micina,” I speak as quiet as the breeze, “I’m going to fix the restraints, you’re going to sit in King’s truck, and wait. And I know you’ve got a lot to tell me, kitten, but you will do as I ask.”

She goes to speak, but the both of us hear the moment Puck opens the door of the truck. His need for her manifests in the opposite of mine; a rush of his scent and a blast of his dominance. I don’t need to turn around to see his desperation. I feel it.

Strangely, I find a sense of calming solace in his reaction. I knew he was hers the second I saw him with her in her heat. I wasn’t looking for confirmation on his motivations or commitment, but it gets delivered to me regardless.

“Puck,” she whimpers. It’s her relief that spills as soon as she sees him, but in a way it’s also her way of warning him.

“It’s good, Raney,” he says over the rush of the chaos around us, already reading the scene better, more maturely

than most others would. “I’m going to hang here a minute. And when Koz is good, I’ll see you. Okay?”

“I’d wait,” she says. Her voice doesn’t waiver or quake, and again I’m rendered more peaceful and stable by how intrinsically well we fit in with each other, even in these initial stages of our pack forming.

I take a step nearer, ignoring the slight whimpering she makes. I focus on doing what I said I would, which is free her. Holding her wrist, the extent of the damage is clear but time will heal the bruises. The ones I bear on my soul, being ultimately responsible for her injuries, will take longer to heal. But it will.

I look down and her gracious smile radiates like a beacon of light guiding me back from the place no alpha in his right mind wants to ever transcend to. Feral is not just a word. It’s a state of mind that no strong alpha ever wants to experience.

“I know you’re not yourself, Koz, but I will say, you should be pretty chuffed considering how everything you’ve ever told or taught me came together, like that.” She tries to click her finger, but it doesn’t work. She rolls her eyes before she stands taller, prouder. “I spilt his blood for what he did to me, but I waited until you were all near me so we could end this once and for all. But, for the record, he did touch your name on my body. He didn’t seem to like it being on my skin, not the way I do.”

I huff a laugh at how perfect she is. She’s my own melodrama. Parts of me remain mesmerised by the sheer audacity of her character, the other parts of me are still lost in a tumultuous clash of what might have been if I was a little later, if Reid was a little braver. A simple touch of her hand on mine and we take a deep shuddering inhale together as I inch further away from falling into a blood-soaked rut.

I shouldn’t press my lips to her forehead while I toy with the dangerous line of control, but she shouldn’t have been snatched away in a blink of an eye from me today either. Without warning, I hold the chain away from her and shoot, to

free her from being tethered to him. And without asking, without all the pomp and ceremony I promised her and even before either of us take another breath of air, my teeth slice through the skin on the sweetest spot of her neck. Claiming and marking her and packing us.

A trickle of sensations follows the second I start binding us. It commences with a calamity of noise and a whirlwind of chaotic thoughts growing stronger second by second, rising to a fever pitch that blocks out the rest of the world. My heart pounds sporadically, increasing in a painful twisting beat that has me wondering if I'm suffering a fucking heart attack, and I stumble against her, making that trickle of sensation become a tsunami of commotion. I'm powerless to stop the onslaught of change and there reaches a point where I wonder if I did it wrong.

“Don't move, Koz,” she says, her lips on my body poised already, and when I'm at my furthest point of madness, she strikes. Returning my claim with a vigour of her own. In it she instantly soothes absolutely everything happening inside me. She sates the rage and frantic disarray to a point of complete and utter, peaceful clarity with a single touch.

Her lips linger for a moment over the aching bite she left behind. By fucking god, her mark on me feels divine. As she comes back into view, I'm greeted by the tease of her scent already changing as a warning to others that this omega is now owned. A galaxy of colour appears in her eyes, reflective of the wave of emotions she contains inside her. Seeing them, I go to apologise for ruining her dreams of packing in front of her friends and family, but she cups my face tenderly instead. “Let's go, alpha, you owe me a sunset.”

Without another word, she leaves me and goes to Puck. I twist around and see him lose any semblance of control as she nears. He rushes her against the door of the car and bites her with a savage desperation. I'm surprised by how quickly Puck claims her, it felt like time stretched out in all directions when I did it. Watching and being a part of it are two very different things.

He hoists her off the ground even before she finishes biting him and carries her to the back seat, but unlike me, he can't not leave until he's kissed her stupid and left her laughing lightly and scenting up the scene. But he does leave her. He shuts the door on her and locks her inside the safety of King's truck. Another part of me relaxes. Hayes is more gentle as he holds her and claims her, but much like her presence fills a new part of my mind, the both of them do too.

Looking into the trunk, I set the barrel against Reid's heart, and wait.

Waiting for Puck feels right.

In his own way, he's already following or mirroring me in a lot of what he does. It's like discovering your shadow is a tangible extension of who you are, which makes sense, considering he is part of my pack now too.

He stands at my back with her scent on his skin, which in theory should have me ready to rip him to pieces, but my alpha and his instinctively know who we are to each other. He holds his gun ready, and without a count down or even a sound, we act as one.

Emptying the entire chamber takes less than ten heart beats. Reid's demise doesn't fill me with satisfaction, but it does put an end to the ugly blight that has been following Raney for so long.

And yes, we should have done it anywhere but in the open for every man and his dog to see. I should be reticent of my actions, though I can easily admit I'm past all points of caring. Without a word, Puck simply turns his back and goes back to watch over our omega with Hayes.

"Are you armed, Talon?" I ask quietly as I shut the trunk.

Talon's voice is confident and unwavering. "Service revolvers, left and right shoulders."

"Any other weapons?"

"Left ankle."

He doesn't move an inch or utter another word as I frisk him. And I find the small unmarked revolver strapped exactly where he said it would be. I collect them and place them on top of the trunk, picking up the sound of sirens way off in the distance.

“What were you doing in the car, Talon?”

I don't need to threaten him with violence to get what I want and need. It flows from him freely, like the trail of blood soaking my skin.

“I'm knockers.”

Where I come from we'd say fettuccini, but nark works just as well. An easy excuse though it does, if true, make sense.

“Sit up, Talon, glue your fucking palms to the ground but look at me while we are speaking.”

He moves easily but also is careful to do exactly what I want.

“Now why don't you explain exactly why you are as you suggest, knockers?”

“You have to ask why I've been deep undercover for the past three and a bit years, Jesus-fucking-Christ.” He snaps, and I appreciate his tone more than I can convey. Because in just a few words he exposed truth in his passion, except life is never as clear cut as it should be.

“I'd like to hear you explain it. Because, Talon, while she is a beautiful reason, it doesn't add up. The timings are off.”

“Not off. I was lucky. The opportunity basically fell in my lap. But I can read people, and the person I met could read me. He also learnt very quickly I had little to no fear when it came to the Anders family because they'd already done their worst.”

“And their worst was?”

“You want me to spell it out?”

“It seems I do,” I muse. Now that Raney’s mine, and safely back in my arms, the need for answers here and now I thought would have been a given.

“They hurt Raney!”

“They did. But why was it your problem to solve?”

“Because I couldn’t stop it from happening!” he screams. His anger is sudden and deep, and he reeks of remorse and conviction. His campfire scent smelling like a raging bushfire. “The way they thought they could get away with what they did to her because of their influence and money was like acid in my veins. And being angry made me focus and choose a side. I made it a mission to track down every person the Anders family got help from so they too could be held accountable.”

“How admirable. Does Hayes know of your duplicity?”

“Of course, he does! He knows everything, like I know everything about him. It’s how it had to work. And without him I would have thrown the towel in way before now.”

“You know everything about Hayes?” A wicked fury blinds me for a moment, because of course the second Raney was taken, Hayes was telling me what she’d told him, and exactly how we reacted.

The quiet alpha will get a stern talking to about fucking my omega for the entire world to see. Later. Right this second, not much else mattered but sorting the endless piles of bullshit out. I was hoping I wasn’t about to break my promise of killing again today.

Talon’s irritation at my question makes the blue of his eyes dull out in his attempt to lock out the challenge in them, but not fast enough.

“For the record, you do not know everything about Hayes. Now I want more information on who you work for.”

“I can’t share that with you.”

I squat down in front of him. I literally don’t give a shit about what he thinks he can, and can’t, share with me.

“I want a name, Talon. You get why, right?”

“Of course I fucking do. But he’s a good cop.”

“You remember the first time we met and I told you I don’t ever keep my woman waiting, well she’s currently doing just that. I’m sure I also shared how much it fucking infuriates me to make her wait. Time is a ticking.” And this time I make my threat obvious. I lay my gun on the ground between us and hand him my phone. “Three minutes to write the name of your good cop, plus the name of every person you have been investigating, since you are having issues answering my questions vocally.”

He cracks before we reach eighteen seconds. Snatching my phone off the ground, his fingers fly over the screen like a teenager’s on a Saturday night. Under the stress of the moment, Talon keeps inserting name after name into my phone. He pauses, his fingers hovering on the screen as I wait for that last name.

“He is a good honest cop,” he repeats as he brings his eyes up to mine. “In a sea of crooked ones, he is good. Please, don’t go after him.” He types the name in my phone and hands it back.

I tip my head to the side, not making promises I can’t keep. Once I have spoken with other sources, and cross checked more times than necessary, I will decide. With the information I need, firmly encased away, some of my anxiety lessens. Checking my watch, sunset is going to fast approach, but she’ll skin me alive if I get in that car without a solid direction of what will happen to the deceptive detective.

Coercion using a person’s weakness is pretty basic, but I’m running out of time. “Are you sure this isn’t about payback for what your lover is enduring.”

I’m not prepared when he flips tactics either. His demeanour changes. It might be knowing what’s done is done. Or it might be that all the games and secrets he’s had to keep to himself are now up to the people he swears allegiance to

stay true to their word. And a good person will always do just that. Instead of eating regret, the cheeky shit shrugs and smiles. “Technically speaking, Raney could be included in that statement, considering her recent heat. But yes, of course what they did to Hayes adds to my motivation. Some.”

“And what about what you just witnessed.”

“I was actually eating dirt because of a certain woman we both know. About what happened though, I do *know* Reid Anders is a beta, and he tried to abduct the omega of Pack Siderno. Justifiable homicide is the only plausible defence and no matter which department stumbles over the crime, no one will press a charge for the simple fact you cannot dispute a thing in the abduction of a packed omega. Especially by a beta. But to answer your question, I didn’t see a thing.”

I shrug. Completely unconcerned with discovering Reid’s excuse for being a disgraceful pissant of a man. Although Talon’s summation will help Giuseppe immensely if we face any investigation. And Talon was also correct that no police officer or person would ever dispute the kidnapping of an omega, and the length an alpha will go to protect them. Throw in a beta’s lack of lawful standing in our society, and an alpha’s recourse is considered *intra vires*, legally just too. I hold my hand up to stall our conversation as a car pulls up behind King’s truck. Talon is quick and reaches for his unregistered firearm, surging to his feet to stand in front of me.

Small movement, loud sentiment.

“Relax, Jeffers. It’s a clean-up crew. They’re going to take over from here and deal with the mess in the trunk. And after your last update, we might ask them to take a DNA sample and a couple of autopsy-ish images, just in case your lot decide to keep trying to pin something on me.”

“I’m happy to clean up. It’s an easy out for you, and you guys could leave.”

“We haven’t finished talking.”

“Get them to pick up my tap too. Please?”

Flicking my hand up, the two men jog from their position. One swoops to pick up the recording device, handing it over before he moves straight into the car. One clears out all our belongings from the back, while the other sits in the driver's seat waiting for the signal to leave.

I dismantle the wire from the outside in, leaving a pile of worthless bits and pieces in my hand, that I hand back to one of the guys once they return with Raney's bag. A few minutes after, he also sets one of our laptops and a handful of incidentals near the back wheel. My clean-up crew work without being asked. Leaving me wondering what to do with Talon.

"Raney saw Hayes."

"I know, he called me. He also told me you did an ADV."

"That was all Raney. And you have not seen him since, although he's been watching you closely. He's in the car with her now. And I suspect they've bitten each other."

"What happened?"

"She's made it pretty clear she doesn't *want* to let either of you go, but she also doesn't want to force you to consider packing with her either. Everything has happened in a strange, and fast, sequence of events since we arrived."

"Trust me, I've heard all of Hayes's explicit explanations as to what is going on with us."

"Such as?"

"He's sure, we're twin flame lovers."

I chuckle to myself because Raney's also gone into graphic detail about the centuries old concept. On more than one occasion. I walk past him. "I'm taking Raney and the rest of my pack home after we've watched the sunset. We're done here. King has things he needs to do, and then he will be coming for a visit. The same runs true for her girlfriends."

"Why are you telling me this?"

“Because Raney is the most persistent woman I know. She was prepared to walk away from what she wants in light of a recent conversation with him, but after today she has a certain sparkle in her eye. The thing though, Talon, is irrespective of what she wants, she knows she deserves honesty; do you understand what I am saying?”

“I’m sure given the chance to think about this conversation more, it will make sense.”

I shrug. “You don’t want her, tell her. You do, again all you have to do is let her know. But if you say things to make her feel better knowing full well you have no intention of delivering on a promise, or her dream, I’ll cut you from her life and you’ll never see us again.”

Talon’s mind is pretty loud, as he works through all the small pieces I’ve shared with him. “Why did they speak?”

“Did you both ever do ADV tests?”

“Yeah.”

“The proper Verdune tests, or the ones from the doctors?”

“Doctors. We couldn’t afford the Verdune ones.”

“The Verdune ones have undergone a recent change, to provide an analysis on reproductive endocrinology.”

Talon’s face becomes a mask. And I’m not an evil man because I have nothing better to do with my time. “Hayes is infertile. The child is a fake.”

He turns and walks away from me, reaching both guns from the trunk and kicking it open, before emptying every bullet he owns into Reid Anders. Once done, he throws his empty service revolvers inside the trunk and slams the lid down.

“Talon, with what I do, I can’t afford for you to do what you do. It’s not personal, it’s life. I’ll go check on Raney for a few minutes. But if you climb in our car you will never have the option of wearing a badge again.”

He holds my gaze, “Siderno, how many bullets you got left?”

“I’ve always got spare, it’s an insult to ask. Why though?”

His shoulders drop. “I had no choice on what I had to grab. Well, I did, it was Nimbex.”

“Pardon?”

“Reid was with me, so I had to make it look real, but Nimbex... I thought it was way too dangerous, the levels need to be exact or a person can drop straight into a coma and never wake up.”

“Keep going,” I snarl.

“Reid emptied a full syringe in her shoulder as soon as we got in the car.”

“And this wasn’t the first thing you thought I should know?”

“No. I mean, if it was Nimbex, I would have already called an ambulance.”

“You switched drugs?”

He nods his head and digs out of his pocket an empty vial. He closes his eyes, and drops his head. “It was the best I could do in a bad situation.”

It literally takes the briefest glance at the label for the word, Igniscaldex, for the day to twist again.

“How long ago did you give my omega a heat stimulant?”



CHAPTER

Forty-Two

Their conversation ends when Koz shoots Talon. No shit, I don't think the bullet has even cleared the chamber when Koz swings around and locks his eyes on mine. Over the distance it's pretty clear he's employing telepathy, warning me not to even think about getting out the truck.

"Holy shit, he's wicked pissed," Puck says. He pulls my attention from Koz, and I watch amused as he keeps talking, trying really hard to talk without actually moving his lips. "Wonder what Talon did?"

Koz's eyes narrow at Puck, and I freeze. Until Koz turns back to say something to Talon, leaving me swallowing my laughter at how busted we are. Clearly, it's not the time to be giggling, but once the first chuckle passes my lips, it's impossible to stop the rest. I'm pretty sure I'm going into shock, or the drugs are making me bonkers. Or this is what it feels like when you first pack.

"I need to write a list." I twist away from the scene in front of me or I'll be peeing myself laughing. One small movement is all it takes for me to get consumed about writing a list of things I need to do, and people I need to talk to.

"Do we have paper?" I ask, leaning in to search through the small seat pockets on the back of the driver and passenger seats.

Hayes bunches a fist of Koz's jacket in his hand and physically pulls me to a stop. With his other hand, he wipes a cool cloth over my face. His eyes become a place for me to

focus on as I try to slow the race of my chaotic thoughts and jerky movements.

“Did I hit my head?” I ask him, confused.

“Yeah. You’ve got a cut there too. Doesn’t look serious, but it’s bleeding.” He dabs at my head before he leans in to kiss against the side of my neck, which is aching like a bitch.

I gasp, at the softest brush of his lips. His simple touch reminds me. “You packed me, Hayes?”

And my thoughts float away before he answers, my eyes getting too heavy to stay open.

“Is she okay, Hayes?” Puck’s voice brings a smile to my face and a lightness to my chest. And when I open my eyes again, I get lost in Hayes’s beautiful brown eyes. “I like your hair longer. And this,” I trail a finger over his nose, my nail tapping over his nose ring, “holy shit, Hayes, you’re completely guilty of being the silent sexy assassin and killing my resolve. So fucking gorgeous too. I mean, put your fingers in my pants and see what you do to me.”

“Hayes, is she okay?” Puck asks again, interrupting me.

Hayes has a cautious smile on his face, but any smile is a good one. He leans in and I close my eyes as he blows his warm sweet cinnamon scent over my face. It’s so calming and settling, and he keeps doing it as he talks to Puck. “Nope, she’s not okay. She’s all over the place.”

“Why did Koz shoot Tal?” I ask him, my thoughts moving back to what I saw before. I sit up, feeling more put together than a second ago. “Puck, did you talk to me?”

He tips his head. “I was on the phone. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know. I thought we had a conversation, but now I’m not one hundred percent sure. I feel like I’m caught driving a roundabout. I’m all floaty inside and getting too hot. Maybe it’s because of the syringe? How bad did I hit my head?” My fingers go to touch over where it hurts, but Hayes has something pressed against the spot.

“What syringe, Raney?” Puck interrupts, and I twist around and find his eyes wide as he searches for my answer. A layer of stress over his petrichor scent makes me fill with worry.

Before I can answer him, there’s a rush of movement around the car and Koz climbs in the back next to me while Talon jumps in the front.

“How badly hurt are you, Talon?” I ask, keeping my eyes locked on Koz. I can read him better.

“I’m not too bad, Lolli. Why?” Talon answers. And he sounds fine.

I rest my head back against the headrest, looking for some relief from my head-spins. It helps, but then I remember Tal’s question. “I saw Koz shoot you.”

“I thought about it, micina, but I didn’t want to ruin your special day,” Koz snarls, sweeping an arm around and pulling me onto his lap. I should have known he wouldn’t let me fight whatever is going on alone. His eyes are full of concern, he scents stressed. He also smells hurt.

“Why are you bleeding?” I say. The relaxed state I was in completely left behind as I once again get caught in a whirlpool of sickly sludge infecting my reasoning, sending me straight into a panic as I pull on his shirt and search his body. “Koz! Are you hurt!”

And then I go from panic to near hysterics when he takes a large shaky inhale, “Are you dying?” I shout, my thoughts keep leaping sporadically, dragging my emotions along for the ride and leaving me feeling and acting like a hot mess.

“It’s okay,” he insists. He leans back slightly and moves my hand to where he is bleeding. “It’s okay, micina, Lew will be able to patch me up.”

He cups a hand around my face, pulling my eyes from where he’s bleeding.

“Why am I so confused, Koz. Things aren’t right in my head. This isn’t shock, is it?”

“You’re okay. You’re still my strong kitten,” Koz answers before he removes my hands from his body and holds them like people do in movies when they have to tell you something awful. His eyes lock on the bruises around the dangling cuff I’m still wearing.

“I don’t feel strong,” I admit. And his eyes fill with sympathy and understanding.

“We’re also dealing with a couple of other issues too,” Koz says stoically, his scent tethering me to a calmer place, the same way his touch does.

I take a shuddering breath. “Okay. Start with the worst.”

“As if I would do that to you.” Koz shakes his head and smiles, and it’s one of those smiles that twists his lips and hits his eyes. And my heart erupts into dance. My ears also fill with Argentine Tango, but I’m starting to get used to the ping-ponging going on internally.

I physically shake my head to stop even crazier thoughts adding to the noise. And in the process, I knock my head against Koz’s.

“Ow!” I growl.

“Calm, omega,” he whispers, guiding me back to him with the smallest infusion of his alpha. And then Koz leans down and makes my state better, and worse, by kissing me hard despite the gentlest way his hands cup my face. “I owe you a sunset, my beautiful, packed omega.”

He steals my ability to speak. The moment, and his intimate words, making my head race, and my heart dance even more. While my temperature keeps spiking higher. But that’s the thing about being in love with Koz, he’s so consuming.

He watches me closely. His eyes darken when I have to blow a large unsteady exhale up, over my face. But shit, it’s

hot, and getting hotter.

And the air is thick with their swirling scents. Each time I fill my lungs, all I can taste is dark chocolate covered cherries, along with fresh rain stirring. Fainter but still discernible is the scent of hot cinnamon donuts, campfire, and leather. I nearly get lost again until a tickle of warmth races up my spine, making me shiver.

He slides his jacket down my arms, “Getting hot, micina?”

“No hotter than I usually am,” I try for sultry, and Puck starts laughing, letting me know I might have got my intention a bit skewed. But he also cranks the aircon.

Koz digs through the truck’s ice chest to grab a bottle of water. Opening and passing it over for me to drink, before grabbing another one to roll over the back of my neck. “Do you remember being injected?”

“Yeah,” I say between gulps. “It stung like a wasp. Actually, I thought I would feel differently, you know?”

“What?” Puck asks. I twist around to find him, and I stop and stare for a moment. He’s so fucking good looking, and my claim on him looks damn fine too. “Raney, what happened?”

“Yeah,” I say, tearing my eyes away from him is necessary if I want to stay focussed, “Reid jabbed me when I got in the car. I figured it would knock me right out. I think that’s what Reid thought too because I’m sure he said night-night. Anyway, I totally have to thank Omega Hillary for her acting lessons, because I kind of figured it would be better to fake it until help arrived.”

Koz nods encouragingly while he also starts mimicking taking long measured breaths. So I do, too.

I take a couple of inhales, and it helps. More clarity seeming to shine through the sludge of my confusion. “Talon was whistling like a budgie,” I tell them, but Talon interrupts.

“I knew you’d get it, Raney; it was the song we used to laugh about. I needed you to know I was on your side and I needed a little bit of time.”

I scoff and roll my eyes and turn to look at him. “Why?”

He looks serious, but there’s a mix of sweet relief and glittering happiness in his eyes too. “I knew there’d be nothing that would stop them from coming for you. Call me insightful, but I also knew given half the chance, you’d probably punch Reid in the balls.”

“Well, there is that.” I nod my head, agreeing before the mention of Reid stirs up memories of what he said in the car. “You do know what he did, right?”

The blue of Talon’s eyes dulls, a blast of anger dampening his happy vibe. “Yeah, Lolli, I know what he did.”

“He nearly fucking ruined all this!” I throw my hand back in grand gesture and whack poor Hayes in the face. I freeze up, nearly bursting into tears before I swing around and look in horror at Koz. “What is wrong with me?”

“Micina, you’re okay. You’re under the effects of a heat stimulant. Unfortunately, some of the side effects include confusion, erraticness, and mood swings. Because it was done in haste the dosage wasn’t measured, so we’re in for a short but very intense twelve hours.”

“What about my Scorned Girls?”

Hayes rubs a hand over my shoulder, and I know it’s his because it’s tender and sweet. Again, that makes no fucking sense. “Raney, you spoke to the girls while we were waiting for Koz and Talon. They’ve all split up with their security teams and are boarding planes or driving to safety.”

I hum, slowly starting to remember that I did speak with them while I was watching Talon and Koz talking. And I definitely remember talking to Dad.

“Twinkles and Joker got hit,” I tell Koz.

“I know, kitten. They will get the very best care available. And I’m sure the both of them will be back on their feet before the week is out.”

“Not Rhodes. Oh my god that poor man. He didn’t deserve to die.” I turn and pin the accusation at Talon.

“No, Lolli. I didn’t hurt him, I swear. It was Reid.”

“Why are you looking at me strangely?” I ask each of them, and it’s like my recall and memory are little grains of sand in an hourglass, slipping away.

Koz blows his scent in my face, pulling my attention to him again. And as he does it, I keep inhaling his chocolate-cherry scent like it’s a cure for my madness, and it helps. “Micina, it’s been a bit of a crazy day and nothing like we planned.” His finger grazes gently over his claim on my body, and a wave of pleasure burns through my need for answers, making me purr.

“There’s a song like that... nothing like we planned,” I say. The second I say it though I’m wondering what the hell possessed me to say it. Slamming my eyes shut gives me that break from what’s happening in front of me, bringing the chemical taste to the forefront of my frazzled senses.

Honestly, I’m currently giving Dory from Finding Nemo a run for her money.

“I don’t like this. What the hell is going on? I’m feeling and acting like I’m going to go into heat. And even though going into heat wouldn’t be the worst thing to happen, I’m pretty sure they would have told me at Unity if being packed would trigger this. What’s going on?”

“Lolli, Reid drugged you.”

A whirlpool of regret and dark emotion seems to suddenly appear in the centre of the vehicle. It becomes so huge and consuming, it’s almost like another person climbed in our car, and it threatens to pull my alphas from me.

“Stop!” I hiss.

The swirling mood doesn't let up, it just changes course. I can feel them fighting to stay here with me, while parts of them are struggling. "It's okay, I'm right here."

I'm not saying I'm a super omega, but even as the words fall from my lips, they find their own way back from losing control. Well, that's what it feels like. Koz is first; his hands wrap around my waist as he holds me to his chest, a deep purr rumbling from his chest filling my ear and soothing me. Puck's scent drenches over me, and my eyes close in sheer relief, and because I get a little turned on. I'm not sure the drugs are to blame for that though.

Hayes shuffles up close enough to lay his head on my back, one hand wraps around me as he becomes an anchor in my chemical activated storm, while Talon's voice as he talks about nothing at all, ties us together.

I sink into Koz and Hayes and surrender, needing this moment. It takes a few minutes until I remember to talk. "What was in the needle?"

Talon answers. "Heat stimulant. I'm so sorry, Lolli."

And I get he's apologising for more than the current state of my mind. When I'm feeling a little more stable, I'm pretty sure I'll wind him up enough for us to argue with each other knowing Tal needs that flash in the pan release of his emotions before he'll be able to even think about forgiving himself.

We've got some heavy shit to sort out. Tal being in that car is one, another is Hayes's devastating and shocking news. But equally important is the fact that three of my alphas killed a man. What they did was completely justified but that does not detract from the fact they ended a man's life. And we will be talking about it because I'm not desperately devoted to psychopathic monsters. Each of them has an emotional depth and complexity at the core of who they are, irrespective of how strong they are, they will be processing. Even drugged off my tits, I know I have to be a part of that process, to see for myself what happened hasn't changed who they are, or

changed who we will be. It makes so much sense to me in my psychedelic state.

“My body is buzzing and my head is a mess. I’m hungry and confused about things but not us. Not our pack,” I say quietly. And my alphas perfume for me; they send a cloud of chocolate sweetened cherries, a shower of fresh rain, and hot cinnamon donuts my way.

“Tal,” I growl impatiently when he holds out on me.

“So impatient, Lolli,” he answers, and without looking I know he’s smiling. A moment later, he scents up like a perfume shop, making sure his distinctive leather and campfire scent clogs my lungs.

The four of them working together pull me back to centre when I’m a little off alignment.

“Better. We’re okay, and we should focus on that,” I stay cuddling against both Hayes and Koz, and luxuriate in their scents, and the strong crush of their alpha presence.

We’re quieter, I’m less freaked out. I’m still off with the fairies and surfing through a couple of floaty troughs and peaks, but we really are okay.

Koz swoops in and kisses my forehead, talking privately to me. “Irrespective of how, what, where, and when, I have to say I’m completely smitten and blown away by how it feels to have you as mine now. Omega Siderno has such a beautiful ring to it.”

“I like it too, alpha,” I offer, and by god, I mean it. I wish we could celebrate it properly, by consummating our packing. Being covered in them and knotted was a given, and still will be.

There’s another lull in the spinning of my thoughts as the drugs give me freedom to act more like myself again. “Do you know what brand it was, Tal?”

Being an omega, you’re aware of the heat stimulants on the market. People use them for a whole range of reasons,

breeding mostly.

“Igniscaldex,” rolls off his tongue like a dirty word.

“Tal, lock that shit up. You did the best in a fucking horrid situation. One that will no longer come and hunt or haunt me again. The world is better off without Reid, so let’s leave it at that.”

And since I’m on a roll of coherent sensibility, I keep going. “If I remember correctly, Igniscaldex is a slow-release stimulant but generally after a few hours, I’ll be one slicked up omega. And it’s highly probable I’ll be walking away from wherever it happens, pregnant.”

A pin could drop. Unsurprisingly, there’s suddenly a whole lot of strong masculine energy pressing down on me, which does a lot for a girl’s confidence and confirms, despite my influenced state and that being a mom is a dream of mine, I’m on the right path even if it’s a skewed one.

“I want Lew to arrange for the doctor to also bring Somniosus. Not because I don’t want your babies, Koz, but I want to remember the exact moment in time you plant your seed. And I also want to remember everything we do during our first night together as a pack.”

Much like I expected after saying what I said, their scents get even more intense and their presence pushes against me suggestively. Do I whine and slick up my panties? Of fucking course I do—I’m off my head, not dead.



CHAPTER

Forty-Three

Tal drops onto the plush leather seat of Koz's private plane opposite me without saying a word. And I keep staring out the window as we bank through the clouds into the darkening sky.

"Hey," he calls softly. Careful not to wake the others since the doors are open to the cabin where she's sleeping. She's out cold, cuddled between Koz and Puck. Koz somehow managing to hold her bruised wrist, even while he's asleep.

Thank god they cut off the handcuff. It was a beacon of our failure and the instant it was gone; we collectively breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hey," Talon says again.

When I don't answer, he reaches for my hand making it near impossible for me to ignore this conversation as opposed to maintaining my vigil of looking at the stars.

Talon looks fresher after his shower and seeing him in casual sweats and a long-sleeved Henley eases the pinch in my chest but adds to the heavy pit in my stomach.

And like always, he comes at me with the tenacity of a bulldozer, obliterating past my barriers. Thank fucking god too because I need him.

Tal takes aim as soon as I look at him. "You and I will always be you and me. I'm not sure why you're so reflective, well I am, but you don't need to be so hard on yourself."

I scrunch my face up, not agreeing with him at all. In fact, I'm still finding it hard to properly articulate both the joy and the rage swamping my insides. He threads our fingers together and the warmth from him radiates, chasing more of the bitter shock from my system.

“Lolli's safe, Hayes, and I'm right here with you.” Talon keeps his voice low, making it almost hypnotic, though he's always had a knack for getting under my skin. “Come back to me.”

His words aren't just words. I don't just hear them. I feel them. I need them more than ever. Because watching Raney suffer through a chemical cesspool has had me weathering the same emotional highs and lows she did. And despite me being able to see her sleeping between Koz and Puck, I'm having a hard time moving past what Reid did. Even with all the protection around her, he breezed past our defences and plucked her out of our arms. The ripple effect between him taking her and us getting her back is just as hard to work through. And that's just in relation to her, I haven't even unpacked Talon being there too.

Obviously, I knew he worked undercover. After Raney, we only had each other to lean on and confide in. We're also extremely close, so there's not much we haven't shared. There couldn't be for us to work after being screwed over when we were younger, but with Tal's job there has to be things I'm not completely aware of, for both my safety and his. I knew the basics in case anything happened to him; Tal was holding two opposing 'jobs' concurrently, with the same person paying his wage—the police department. It didn't take much to figure out it would be better if my knowledge only extended to his position with Precinct Eleven. Not that we mixed much with them, but at the annual events I did attend, they're the stereotypical meat heads who prosper in the boy club mentality.

I never questioned who Talon was working for when he got dressed and left for work, because I trust him. Emphatically. And while I was shocked he was there when we

caught up with Raney, I wasn't blindsided by the discovery. Everything he has done in his career has been with Raney as the end goal.

Him being very nearly hurt or killed doing that is an entirely different issue. And that has me still ready to hurl.

"What are we going to do, Tal?" I whisper, my eyes watching the slow, reassuring way he keeps trailing his thumb over our clasped hands. But he's always been so fucking sure of us. Us, including Raney.

"What we were always going to, live happily ever after as a pack."

"How can we do that now?" I hiss at him.

He squeezes my hands. "Easily. What's got you so... reticent?"

"What? Us both getting played for years isn't an issue to you?" I spit back viciously. As soon as I stop talking, I quickly check, hoping my voice and my frazzled emotions don't wake them.

Talon's dependable calmness washes over me when he answers, "We were both aware of the depravity of the Anders. We've never really discovered why they've been hell bent on ruining her, or screwing with us. We probably aren't even aware of the sheer scale of the games at play, but at the same time, Hayes, it's not an issue that needs my focus right now."

"I don't get how you can say that," I admit. And I'm unable to hide my frustration when I look into his eyes. "I also don't get why you're not upset with me. I took her as pack without you being there or even a part of it. I'm the reason we wasted so much fucking time."

"No. The reason wasn't either of us. You and I have been doing everything we possibly could to get out of a bad situation that we both were shoved into. There's so many sides to this."

I blow out a sigh of defeat. He's not wrong there. It's hard to know where to start. Tal though, seems to have parts of it figured out.

“Look at it from my point of view. Instead of finding Lolli, I became so blinded by the games they were playing, while also being so bear-minded I wanted nothing but the satisfaction of nailing every fucking crooked cop or politician in the city. I lost sight of my reason. Now, since you're a little overwhelmed, I'll remind you again, Mr. Man-of-My-Dreams, you and Lolli are my reason.”

I shake my head, flicking over to the next issue because what he said is so fucking deep. It's easier to deal with other things first. “What about your career, Tal?”

He smiles, and goddamn, it's like the smile he used to have when we were young. “Remember the conversation you and I had when Lolli showed up again? About me needing to see that sometimes the good guys are the fucked-up villains? I mean that's a huge part of why I was undercover, but I think maybe my lesson is now learnt.”

He grins wider before he continues. But his smile is so full of easy acceptance. His confidence and conviction is like a comforting caress over my stress.

“It was the same conversation I told you, you were not a replacement.” He casually winks at me. “You better remember that.”

“Tal, you're taking all this a bit too lightly. Everything is changing, and it deserves more sincerity from you.”

“No, Hayes. I promised Lolli, I was done being so serious. Plus, it's simple, our life is changing and becoming what it always should have been. And if you think you owe me an apology for packing her without us talking first, then I owe you a bigger apology for changing our life in one rather monumental conversation I had with a man who I was gunning to arrest not that long ago.”

“Hey?”

“Koz was happy to give me time to think, but it’s a no-brainer. I couldn’t really be working for the people who are trying to throw him in jail, major conflict of interest there. So... before I climbed in King’s truck with you guys, I quit my career. Somehow, I don’t think I’m going to get my benefits paid out either, now I’ve driven off into the sunset with a criminal. Which means I’ve got nothing to offer you. No financial security, no income... but I’ve got so much fucking love for you and Lolli.”

I look at him. I search his midnight blue eyes for any sign he’s not being honest, not about his job but about how he feels about walking away from something he’d been obsessing about. But like always, all I see in his deep blue eyes is his love shining back at me.

“Tal...” My throat closes over, making it difficult to talk. But even before I can get a word out, he’s there kissing me softly, scenting me up in the same way I did for Raney while we were in the car. And it is soothing. It does level me out. Of course, Tal’s not finished.

With a final kiss, he drops his forehead to mine. “This is what we’ve always wanted. How we got here isn’t how we thought we would, but does it matter?”

I shake my head, because he’s right, it doesn’t matter. A weight starts to shift off my shoulders. Not talking with Tal before I packed with Raney added a regret that soured a fucking amazing moment, but I know if he’d been in my shoes and had packed her without telling me, I’d have no issue with it. None at all. I’d be over the moon ecstatic for them both.

And then Talon gets very serious and sincere. He has the same look in his eye as he did the day he told me we were not just experimenting. My heart fucking beats so damn loud I don’t know if I’ll be able to hear what he’s going to say.

He keeps our hands entangled, and he’s close enough for me to see the flecks of sapphire in his blue eyes. “Out of everything, what hurts me the most is us finding out you can’t have children. I’m so sorry, baby. And I know she’ll rip you a

new one if that makes you feel like you've let her down because you two always used to talk about how many kids you were going to have. I really, really, really want you to know my arms are always open for you if you need to talk about it. I will not let you lose sight of what an amazing father you're going to be. You, Hayes, will be the heart in all of us."

I squeeze my eyes shut, holding on to him and his insight with everything I am. "Damn you, Tal."

"Our happy ever after has had a few bumps along the way, but I think you and I needed to be ready for her. King knew. He told us we weren't ready, but we are now, aren't we?"

And we were.

She slept in my arms the whole way from the airfield to our new home. And then she slept in Talon's when he carried her over the threshold of the house Koz bought her. Puck wouldn't let her out of his arms until Koz was back in the main bedroom, the house locked down and security armed. Then he put her in the middle of the bed, and we swarmed around her like she was our Queen Bee. Until Koz cracked the shits and essentially ordered us to the other two mattresses he had already laid out.



CHAPTER

Forty-Four

I've always been an avid dreamer. I love sleeping so heavily and getting lost for hours in dreamscapes. Since I was a child I've had epic dreams too. I loved them. My dreams changed with my omega designation and wet dreams became the norm. And yeah, I actually love those more. I have no issue with waking up with the remnants of my dreams staining my sheets.

Meeting Koz, my dreams got more intense but that was probably a reflection of how he unlocked me sexually. Or my dreams were a precursor because he's always been the early riser in our relationship. And he fucking loves waking me up with his cock—or tongue.

Coming on his face is my favourite way to wake up. Koz, this morning, is clearly intent on changing my mind. He rolls me onto my stomach, leaving a trail of his bites up my thighs, over my butt cheeks all the way up my back and then like the tease he is, he crowds me, making the tip of his cock slide up the junction of my thighs.

“You're so wet, micina.” His voice is barely audible in my ear. I feel the rumble of them over my skin. We're so close I'm sure he can feel the rush of goosebumps his voice leaves behind. “I'm going to fill your pussy first, then your peachy ass.”

I wiggle impatiently, earning a filthy chuckle and another rush of deep rumblings in my ear. “If you're a good girl, letting me take my time spoiling my omega, they can stay. It's up to you.”

My eyes flutter open, and like he promised, Puck, Talon, and Hayes are asleep near us. The room is huge, but without much light, it's hard to define anything more than their sleeping forms.

"Where are we?" I moan as he keeps pushing himself further in. Okay, maybe being fucked awake is better than being eaten out.

I feel his heart beating fast against my shoulder. My pussy aches at the sudden and intrusive stretch, but it's a burn that sets my heart a blaze and my core on fire.

He wants us closer still, which is so typical of how he loves. He moves my arms forward to stretch me out, guiding my fingers through cushioned handholds on the bed.

"You're on my cock, in your new home," he says as he starts to drag himself out at a torturous pace. He stops moving, the tip of his cock hovering at my entrance like a chaste kiss. "Face in the pillow, kitten."

I drop, already knowing the way he's going to move. He slams himself back inside me in a brutal thrust that has me crying into the pillow. But yeah, that is in joy not pain. The way Koz makes love is something I'll never grow tired of; his strength is a thing of beauty, but he lets us both be exactly who we are, without hiding anything from each other. It's a truer testament of our unbreakable bond.

There's a growing and frenetic energy driving me to meet him thrust for thrust, earning a vicious bite on my shoulder before I stop being so demanding and let him steer. With a quick nip on my neck, he links our fingers together on the headboard and then starts to move. "Come on, kitten. Make my cock hurt."

My face stays buried in the pillow as I start moaning, already struggling to find a way through the pleasure. As always, Koz takes me straight to the precipice of incredible pleasure where he holds me at the highest point. And it's a beautiful place to be but not now.

My body aches for release. And there's no doubt the added thrill of knowing the others are sleeping near me adds to the growing heat starting to race hotter through me.

I want to keep this between me and Koz, but I also want them to watch. I twist my head so I can keep my mouth pressed into the pillow to muffle my increasing moans as I stare, willing them to wake.

The smallest movement means instead of just hearing his grunts and the echo of myself, my ears also fill with the added thud of the headboard and the arousing wetness our bodies make. I'm definitely in sensory overload. There's something about the noise of people enjoying sex that gets me going. Every time. And Koz knows how much I love listening to people enjoying sex, which is why we're usually pretty loud.

You see love in all the little details, and he'd do anything to keep my heart full.

Without question, he always knew I would crack not being able to keep this between me and him. As soon as I start whimpering more, he grunts louder. The devilish man keeps his lips against his mark on my neck as he does it too, reminding me who I belong to. And I respond by locking up tight around him.

"That's it, squeeze me harder. Fuck, I missed you." He sucks my ear lobe in his mouth, his tongue and teeth toying with the overly sensitive erogenous zone, but it's when he drops back and mimics biting me again that the orgasm that was spasming has me twisting for his mouth.

With one deep and ridiculously loud groan, he fills my lungs with his chocolate-cherry scent, making me see stars as I kiss him with the same need as an addict on a bender. But I've never been ashamed of the way I love him and the way I need him. I never will either.

"Harder, Koz," I growl.

He drops his weight down on me, making it near impossible for me to move a muscle before he slows our speed

and turns up the intensity. He pulls himself right out before he slams back in over and over again, ensuring I feel each and every ridge on his beautiful dick.

And then he moves us until I'm straddled over his legs, dropping the gentlest kiss between my shoulder blades. He shoves me forward and rams his knot home in one wicked, powerful thrust.

I wail.

Without checking, I know they're watching. I can feel their eyes on me. Not on Koz. On me. And like I knew it would, they make me feel like I'm being stalked by a pack of lions. It adds an even greater thrill to the blistering way he claims me again as his packed omega.

"Jesus-fucking-Christ, Raney," Puck growls as he prowls closer. His voice is deep and slow, full of sleep but also his alpha waking up. His presence bears down on me as much as Koz's body does. His hair is tousled, face crinkled by sleep, fully erect, and wanting. "Fuck me dead, watching him knot you, I'm ready to risk arm and leg to fill your throat."

I go to answer him, but Koz shoves his thick fingers inside my mouth, making it impossible. His fingers taste like him, and me, and the way he thrusts them in and out has me gagging while my vagina hums in pleasure. I turn my head, letting Puck, Tal, and Hayes see how much I'm enjoying it.

"Do it again," Puck encourages, his voice so fucking deep and powerful. I respond to him as much as I do Koz.

"You still want more, micina?" Koz growls. And my brain's getting fried this morning in all the right ways by my alphas.

I nod. Because I do want more of them and this.

Koz answers in an instant. "I'll blow in your pussy then lock my knot in your ass."

I nod again, making his fingers dip into my throat and making me gag. He pulls them out; a thick string of saliva

keeps us bound together.

“I’ll watch them come inside your body after I have filled your holes.” He moves fast, taking his hand from my mouth to push me face first in the pillow once more as he changes our intensity again. He pumps in a desperation to match the out of control gallop of my heart. Just when I go to twist my head to suck in a lungful of air, he stops me. He presses his hand down harder and holds me face first. I struggle to breathe until an entire galaxy of stars shoot over my eyes, making my pleasure increase and skyrocket.

With his sublime deprivation, everything is heightened. The only thing I can do is feel. And wait.

“Fuck, micina, fucking go,” he whispers as he encourages in such a sweet and gentle way, it’s in complete contrast to the way he uses me.

My whole body is right fucking there, but something is holding me back. I can feel my struggle, how tight everything is coiling up inside me.

Koz pulls out, and a cry breaks past my lungs as they desperately fill with air. My core spasms with an increasing and growing need to be knotted. Another anxious whine tumbles from my lips, one that turns into a snarl.

I know he’s not finished, but my throbbing pussy doesn’t and it feeds the cross-signals coming from somewhere inside me. He scoops a finger load of slick, slathering it on his cock and my asshole before he destroys my patience and makes me swear black and blue at him. I buck and hiss like an angry cat when he inches in slowly. Painfully so. It’s also fucking amazing, not that the euphoria stops me lashing out at him with my attitude and nails.

“Stop your mood. None of us are going anywhere. We’re all alive and so are you. Perhaps if you’re not in the believing mood, we can wait until you’re feeling more trusting of your alpha. Or... you can let me in, omega, and I’ll have my come filling your tight ass in no time,” he coos. Completely sending

more mixed signals to my head by being soft while using his alpha bark.

Koz will always be the most consuming man in my world. The most demanding too. I thrash under him, getting ready to argue.

“Let fucking go!” he roars.

His alpha bark drops down inside the weird cavernous void I’m caught in, dragging me back up. It might be the lingering effects of the drugs, or it might be the shackles of my past. Whether it’s warranted or not, there’s still a part of me scared. Scared of the scars on my face, the wounds on my heart that are sometimes going to appear out of the blue. I’m worried over nothing particular but everything at the same time.

“Let fucking go for your pack, Raney. Your pack will never let you go.”

It’s like everything stops. Absolutely everything.

And then the world goes whoosh. My eyes squeeze shut. And it’s a reminder and a reason all rolled into one. But in it, I find my peace. It might be the way he’s so fucking dependable, or it might be they respond as one, or it might just be me that bitch-slaps sense back into myself because in the next instant, I let go. And he feels it, rewarding me with another inch and a plume of chocolate-cherry ownership.

“Knot, please...” I beg, though it comes out like a soft moan as I give in and sink into the moment.

“Good girl.”

And thank fucking god the instant he feels my submission, he gives me what I want and rams his cock in my ass and showers me in his love. The burn is exquisite, the pain fades away, leaving me whining and scenting my need. With his cock buried in deep, Koz rolls us again so we’re sitting up and I’m facing them.

“Show your pack how good you take knots, Raney.”

I brace for him to be savage, but instead it's nearly the opposite as he holds me tight with his knot inside my ass, his fingers fill my pussy, and his teeth press over his claim on my body. "I love you so much, micina."

When Tal, Hayes, and Puck climb closer onto the bed with us, they ignore the feral growl of warning from Koz.

"Show us, Lolli," Tal demands, coming close enough to show me evidence of how turned on he is after he wipes his thumb over his cock.

Hayes reaches over and twists my nipple, delectably hard. My eyes dart to him, but he's locked watching the way Koz owns me, body, and soul. Hayes's attention feels like worship.

Puck is the boldest, unsurprisingly. He shuffles closest without wavering in his faith he'll survive, blindly chasing what he wants, which is me. His eyes keep watch on Koz, but a small tip of his lips is pretty clear of how he'll respond if the head of our pack has issues. While Koz and I rock against each other, the both of us panting and moaning as we near our peak, Puck drops a skilled finger to my clit.

"Open, Lolli," Tal whispers before stretching over the space that separates us and shoving his wet thumb inside my mouth.

And I go off.

"Fuck yes, micina," Koz encourages again, his knot pulsing in waves as my orgasm smashes over the both of us. There's a point where the pleasure consumes me so much it hurts, but Koz keeps thrusting me through it. And they all continue to touch me.

In the aftermath of Koz claiming me properly as Pack Siderno's omega, with his teeth and come, I think I blank out for a while. Brought back to life when Tal's thumb drags over my bottom lip.

"Tongue out, Lolli," he whispers.

Of course, I comply, and Koz purrs as I orgasm on his cock when Talon's drips come straight from his fist into my mouth.

"Are you're going to show them how incredible you are, micina? And let me see how you toy with them?"

I nearly snap his cock with how hard my body locks up in response.

"No one licks my claim out of her body," Koz insists as he picks me up by my waist. "And watch her knee."

Koz settles behind me as they surround me like a pack of lions.

Puck makes a move to close the distance between us, but Hayes stops him with a touch.

"Raney, remember how I used to talk all the time about being inside you with Talon?" He rises up on his knees, his dick hanging heavy. "I had always kind of thought that's how we would pack you if we got the chance. The both of us flooding your pussy while we scar your throat."

He's clearly spent time thinking about the moment, because he also knows how to make it happen. With the gentlest push, he shifts us until Talon's lying under me, over the corner of the bed.

"Get on my cock and ride me, Lolli." Talon's alpha gets a little impatient when I wiggle down exactly where Hayes wants me to be. His bark isn't needed, but I also love the way he has no issues using it.

"I thought I was the impatient one," I sass out as I sink down on his cock.

"God, you feel incredible. So tight. Are you going to let us stretch your pretty cunt so we can love each other like he's always wanted?" Talon asks. His hand wraps in my hair as he reels me in for one of his standard soul-destroying kisses.

Our lips barely touch, and his tongue is racing over mine, a vicious growl accompanying it. And I realise it wasn't his come he dripped in my mouth, it was Hayes's. His arm wraps

around me, like he's trying to meld our chests into one. I can't move despite the ache in my pussy for more.

A finger traces down my spine, and I sigh into Talon's aggression as Hayes lets me know he's about to join us.

"Hold up," Puck whispers, and the weight of the bed shifts, and I hear him running past before returning a few seconds later. "Don't fucking hurt her, Hayes. I will eat your fucking heart if she's in pain."

"Puck, I'm good. They won't hurt. It's going to feel good."

The clack of a bottle cap in my ear is the warning I get before my ass and pussy are covered in lube. Both Hayes and Puck get their fingers in to make sure there's enough to make this work. I suck on Talon's tongue as they get me prepared.

"Talon, hold still," Hayes says. But there wasn't any need for him to speak because the both of us stop moving as Hayes lines up his cock to the entrance of my pussy.

There's a bolt of pleasure and pain shooting up my spine as Hayes keeps pushing himself in. I grunt and start whining the more he inches in while Talon purrs. Koz's eyes are locked on mine.

"Good girl, micina," Koz says, cupping my cheek as he kneels up to watch. "You look beautifully stretched. Does it feel good being split so wide by your alphas?"

Koz has a vast collection of photos we've taken when I've been stretched before. I'm a fan of double vag penetration. It's only ever consisted of Koz and a dildo. The real thing is indescribable, and so much fucking better than I thought possible.

Talon's hands dig in my hair, holding me tight against his chest. My ear fills with the noise of his pleasure as Hayes keeps pushing inside me, up against him. "Fuck, Lolli, you both at the same time. I'm going to fill you up so fucking soon, it's not funny."

Hayes barks, "No, Talon."

And instead of stopping Talon from coming, it does the opposite. Talon's hips start moving with near desperation. I try not to go with him, but when he's whispering in my ear about how close he is, how good Hayes's cock pushed against his is, how tight it is in my pussy, I lose control.

I thrash between them, unable to move, but aching. It sounds like I'm hurt, but it's all mind-boggling pleasure, making me whimper and groan. Hayes digs his fingers into Talon's hips, holding us closer, pulling them in deeper.

"Stop!" Puck's alpha has more bite, and at his spoken command the three of us plateau. Puck's voice doesn't necessarily have us stopping, but more like we find a place to soak in the pleasure filled moment without rutting wildly.

"Hayes, do not touch my asshole! But I'm fucking in," Puck says, and behind me Koz shocks me by laughing. I mean, I can't help but smile at Puck's blinding confidence, and enthusiasm.

"You tell me, Raney, if you don't want my cock in your asshole, and my knot to lock us while we fill you so goddamn full you'll be sneezing come for days," he growls when he sees me laughing.

I swear my eyes roll back in my head as I start thinking how it's going to feel and begin to blabber yes over and over again.

Koz's voice talks over the top of me. "And now I return the favour of the warning you yourself just said, Puck. Hurt her and not only this will not happen again, but I'll eat your fucking heart before I eat Hayes's."

"What the hell are you talking about, Koz? Raney's going to fucking love my cock in her ass. She'll love it more if you drop the 'can't share' shit and fuck her mouth at the same time. We need to claim her as a pack, and you know it. We can even say it was your idea later, as long as you and I know the truth, yeah?"

Despite currently riding some of the best alpha cock ever, I can't help bursting out laughing at Puck's stunning ego. The vibration of my giggles through my body, has Talon pitching his hips higher as he starts circling them again.

The mattress dips, and I break away from Talon's mouth as I twist around to watch Puck. His eyes are locked on where he's going to enter my body. He's so fucking beautiful, and so damn star struck and proud as he looks at me, a tear rolls out the side of my eye and drips straight down on to Tal.

"Lube, pup?"

"Koz, seriously! Have you fucking seen how wet my dick is? And she's so perfectly ripe and ready, we do not need lube. Now be a good alpha and fill her throat while I ride her ass." His bark washes over me, his alpha command pressing down on me as much as their bodies are.

"Pup, I'm dead fucking serious about the lube. The shit you have through your dick is going to hurt her."

"Bullshit, Koz. The shit I have going through my dick is going to make Raney one very satisfied omega. You weren't there when we did her heat, but I already know how to make each piercing hit her just right. She will not hurt. For fuck's sake, bud, a little bit of credit about now would be appreciated. Now stop the daddy crap and let's properly pack this fucking incredible woman."

Koz's eyes dart to mine, searching for any truth in Puck's insinuation. "I'd tell you if I didn't love you being bossy. I'd also tell Puck if his dick hurt me. Okay?"

He answers with a feral smile. Koz is our alpha. There's no denying that, and the way the others look to him for the final say confirms they know.

"Come on then, micina, let me see if your alphas can satisfy you," Koz taunts them all, a conceited smirk on his beautiful face.

The second Koz finishes speaking, Puck stops Talon moving as he hovers in the space between Hayes and my body.

The warmth of his cock is the first thing I feel before he pushes a wet finger in my ass; it glides straight in. He wasn't lying about me being ripe and ready. He adds another and a second pump. By the third, he's replaced his fingers with his fat cock.

Puck goes as tentatively as he can, slowly guiding the first piercing past the ring of tight muscle, and I moan the whole time, loving the extra stimulation. As he pushes all the way in, a deep noise spills from the centre of my chest, earning rumbles of appreciation from my alphas.

And just for a moment, the four of us are joined. Even without them moving, it's like I'm completely flooded with pleasure. Every part of me tingles, and I burn in need.

"Koz, please. Just this once," I whimper.

There's no need. His dick surges past my pleading and straight down my throat. And it's all they were waiting for.

"We will never let you forget who you belong to, micina," he growls as he loves me. With them.

We find a way to move as one, I'm pretty sure they do all the work as I claim them as much as they claim me. And yeah, it's more incredible than I even thought possible.

I want to say we all come together like they do in the movies, but the truth is. I pretty sure I don't stop coming as they each orgasm in their own sweet time.

Talon's the last. I remember that clearly, because it's right at the time where I nearly beg him to stop. My pussy feels so swollen and abused, my ass on fire from the urgent pump of Puck's body. And the amount of come I have in my body should be criminal if you include Koz's brutal release. But the minute Talon's teeth move past the point of a love bite and into a claiming bite, I orgasm so hard, they all join me again.

Being bitten on the road was one moment seared into my memory forever, the plane trip home not so much, I remember nothing of it. But us claiming and packing properly will be monumental.

It's the sense of utter completeness as our pack bonds bind us together that has my heart peaceful and overflowing.



CHAPTER

Forty-Five

“Ready to see your pack home, micina?” Koz leans over Hayes to press his lips to mine.

“Shower?” I murmur against them. His smile makes my lips twist and my pulse race.

“Don’t you remember we had one before we slept? You even triple checked my wound wasn’t bleeding and the gauze was okay after our tryst. Besides, I can’t think of a better blessing for our new home than our omega walking around with barely anything more than our claim and marks on while she explores,” he replies.

“Another of your traditions?” I tease him.

“I’m all for starting new traditions,” Puck says. His lips have barely left my throat; his hands haven’t stopped taking their fill. “She should only ever wear my jersey.”

“Slightly impractical, pup,” Koz growls as he spins away and walks out.

“And she only gets to wear pants when we leave the house,” Talon suggests. A carefree laugh follows his slightly impractical suggestion.

“She is right here,” I offer sassily.

“I know, let the best morning of my life extend a little further. See, right now, I’m visualising you laughing and talking with the girls in your zone of the house, only wearing my clothes with my come leaking from your pussy.”

I laugh, shoving him out of the bed. Of course, he rolls over and thuds down onto the floor. “Ow, babe, that was my good arm, too.”

He pops back up, the most breathtaking smile on his face. His blue eyes are vibrant and alive. Puck jumps to his feet, towering over me. “Hey, before you get out of bed, I have to tell you something.”

My eyes flare immediately. “What?”

Puck looks at me, his eyes locked on mine. They’re not searching though; they’re filling up with colour, matching the depth of his emotion. He draws out the moment before he grins like a demon and winks. “I fucking love you.”

He leaves me with a tight chest and needing a minute to breathe through a rush of emotions.

“It’s our bond,” I insist to anyone listening, blinking away the pricking of tears.

“No, it’s not. You’re in love, and you’re allowed to be, Raney. But Puck’s right, I need to tell you the same thing.” Hayes throws his leg over mine, rolling his body to squish me down in case I decide to float away in my ooey-gooey happiness. “I have loved you for a very long time, and this thing between you and me is only getting started. I promise while I’m a struggling artist, tattooing the days away, that you will be my muse and inspiration.” He dips down and kisses me slowly, all tongue and all-consuming intention.

Then he climbs off the bed and leaves, and the only one left in the room is Talon. He stands at the foot of our gigantic bed dressed in a pair of sweats, his eyes full of all the starry, sweet things that used to be there when we were kids. He crooks his finger, and like a warlock, he summons me to him.

“You look a dream, Lolli, wearing my bite on your throat,” he says quietly. I don’t need to look too hard to see how reflective he’s feeling; our fresh bond means I’m there with him. Where I belong.

Pulling me up to kneeling, he wraps his arms around my waist and rests his head against my chest. “I wish none of us suffered and went through the bullshit we did, but I know I wasn’t the person I needed to be for you. I know I don’t need to explain how special you are to me, but it doesn’t mean I’m not going to, okay? Because I have to say the words I had to keep locked away from the world. I love you, Lolli. I need you more than I want to admit. Us packing makes me stupid happy.”

He lifts me up and carries me out of the room, stopping at the door they all left from. “Close your eyes and wait until I tell you to open them. I want to see your face when you see everything for the first time.”

And you know, I feel completely fine standing in front of them, with my eyes closed as naked as the day I was born. I must look a mess, and despite my shower, I reek of sex, but I don’t care one bit.

But with my eyes closed, I get a sense of how amplified our connection is now we are pack. I’d be able to point where they are by their presence alone, it’s like four very different phantom touches would guide me back to four very different alphas. I can also scent them in a way that would make a bloodhound jealous, and they smell even more mouth-watering. But best of all, they smell like mine.

Hayes moves closer. “Arms out. He was joking about letting you walk naked. I mean, by all means you go right ahead so I get to admire those gorgeous new dips and curves of yours. Except your delivery from Birdie arrived earlier.”

“Wow, that was fast,” I say, stretching up for a kiss.

Our kiss is over way too soon, but Hayes keeps helping me dress. “Not really, we travelled for some of the first, then you slept like a zombie since.”

“And I don’t stink?” I ask them all.

“You smell fucking divine. Now stop taunting your alphas, put some fucking clothes on, and let us show you around,”

Koz snaps.

Hayes continues to turn me slowly, threading my arms into the softest, silkiest gown I've legitimately ever felt. Even without looking, I know it's the deep chocolate coloured one from Birdie. As soon as I saw it, I put it straight in my cart, completely enamoured by the colour, which reminded me of Hayes's eyes.

Like Emmalina promised, the glide of the mulga silk against my skin brings a soft rush of tingles that race over every inch of me, from top to bottom.

While I'm having an omega moment, it seems my alphas are having one of their own. I get assaulted by a collective noisy inhale and low growls of appreciation before I get teased by them. A soft purr from Hayes, Talon swoops in for a quick kiss before I hear him do the same to Hayes, while Puck groans and Koz growls before he snaps, "I'm changing the dates for our guests to come visit. We're going into lockdown until every fucking thing is unpacked, micina. Look how responsive and fucking delectable you are."

I stay facing away from my new house and smile at him. "I don't have a problem with any of that."

"I fucking do! We're meant to have guests arriving in a week."

"Koz! Don't spoil the surprises!" Puck snaps. His voice like the crack of a whip.

And I know we're in for a more volatile adjustment period than what Omega Beatrice lectured us on. It's a period where we will struggle to keep a lid on our more primal responses and insatiable needs, almost like an extended heat minus the madness. It's a natural adjustment and I honestly can't wait to lose control more often than not while we find that sweet spot that will let us mingle more with people outside of our pack.

I suspect since we have a lot of history, and these alphas are a little more dominant than others, we'll be enjoying more

explosive times than usual. But I really can't find it in myself to worry about that at all. Turns me on, actually.

Koz sweeps past me, muttering under his breath, and scenting like a very aroused and frustrated alpha, heading back into the bedroom. He returns soon after, slightly more under control.

He stops behind me. "Thick panties for you, micina, or seriously I'll be knotting you again and again."

I lean back against him. "I still see no problem with anything you're saying, Alpha."

"Yeah, well I do. I want to cook for you and you need to call King, then the girls. I get they're family now, but Jesus-fucking-Christ they're impatient."

His mood erupts out of him, and I nab his retreating hand. "Show me my house, Alpha, then while you cook for me—"

"And feed you," he hisses.

I turn back for the big reveal, but keep talking away happily. "While you get my dinner, or lunch or breakfast ready, I'll do the rounds on the phone quickly, and then we can go back to bed. We are not rushing through this part. Family and business can wait."

"Agreed, the whole fucking world can wait, showing you your house cannot. Eyes open, micina," he says quietly. His voice is one of my favourite things about him, it always changes, reflective of his mood.

I open my eyes.

My eyes nearly pop out of my head as I do a slow spin, taking in the room. The space is enormous.

"Where are we?"

"Surely you remember this space?" Koz asks. His question is not in disbelief, he's one hundred percent toying with me, and loving doing it.

"You didn't!" I gasp, my mouth falling open.

“Of course, I fucking did. What do you think?” he bites back, getting irritated. But I know it’s not irritation towards me—he’s stressed I won’t like the home he brought us.

“Are you seriously asking me what I think right now, Koz!” I screech.

At my response and accompanying smile, he laughs, and I leave him and the others leaning against the wall while I pretty much float deliriously through the huge, converted warehouse apartment.

Koz and I stayed here for a week. It’s walking distance to all the bars and restaurants, while if you walk in the opposite direction, you’re in the middle of a shopper’s paradise. There’s an easy vibe and energy that suits us to a tee. And I cannot believe he bought it as our home.

Without taking a step, I know how big and amazing this place is. It’s gigantic, over 4000 square feet, spread across two levels. He’s had the place done over by an interior designer. There’s a touch of pale dove grey over the walls, new carpet, curtains, light fittings, marble tops to the kitchen counters; everything we talked about that would make the place sing.

Koz didn’t make it simply sing, he took the place to sell-out concert level.

For me.

I rub my chest as I stare wild-eyed at our home.

“No one is allowed past those doors, micina. I literally do not care who the fuck they are, but that electronic lock is to keep every fucking person out of our space. It is for us alone. I will not have any other male or another omega even look in your nest. Do you understand me?” He’s overly emotional. Half furious in his need for me to understand his rule.

Twisting around slightly confused, I see what he means. From where we just were, two huge doors are currently wide open, but they mark the start of a corridor back to the bedroom we were in. I completely missed seeing the other rooms, lost in the realisation of being packed.

“When it’s us, everything stays open,” Koz keeps explaining the rules. “And Raney, I don’t want you venturing down to the lower levels without an alpha accompanying you. You know how we make our money, sometimes it means I have to make bold statements or lose face.”

“Where is it?” It being a room. Or a cage, or a place where those proclamations of ruthlessness are made in blood and pain.

I look back at him when he doesn’t answer immediately, and he’s looking almost coy. He shrugs and bites his teeth, but I wave him on. “I may have omitted some of the details about what parts of the apartment we own. But I have one very astute business partner who has been in my ear about venturing into property.”

Before I can even demand more of an explanation, the pure elation on his face is pretty telling that Koz bought the whole damn building.

“Koz! Come on, buddy, it needs to make money for it to be an investment. We’ll need the rent; I’ve told you to be more strategic in your spending.”

“I know,” he growls before he shrugs. “I’ve got my eye on an emerging artist who needs a studio renting one floor. I thought I could probably sublet another part as a training area to some young hotshot who’s hell bent on getting into the National Hockey League...”

“I’m only going pro if Raney comes to watch. There’s seriously no point if she’s not there,” Puck argues, making me pull a hideous grin that morphs into a grimace as I struggle to fight through the waves of emotions. Koz shuts him down with a roll of his eyes before he continues on with his dubious explanation of spending a large chunk of our money.

“And, I’m hoping the last office goes to Talon. To get him out of our apartment at least for a few hours a day, so I get time alone with you.”

“Probs won’t happen, but I appreciate it,” Talon says from near me.

“And Raney will appreciate you working on yourself. Plus, you have not seen our omega when she works—she’s an absolute ball breaker. Anyway, since you’re no longer looking at a career with the police department, perhaps you can work with Lew on security, take it off my hands.”

Talon smirks. “Holy shit, you’re officially asking me to work with you?”

“For me.” Koz tips a perfectly poised eyebrow up, without moving his beautiful laser focused ice blue eyes away from mine. He keeps reiterating over and over in words and actions of how he will find a way to share me, and my life, with others. “To answer your question a while back, we have an unmarked entrance only accessible to us, but I’m asking you not to venture down there by yourself. The doors are always open if one of us goes with you. Now that we are pack, micina, I’ve painted an even larger target on your back, I’m afraid.”

“Nonsense. I have you and the rest of my pack to protect me always. Anyone there yet?” I ask.

Koz spins away for a moment, and I look over to the others for an answer, all of them wearing Cheshire-Cat inspired grins letting me know I’m the last to know.

Our pack alpha returns and places in front of me an ostentatious floral arrangement of striking red flowers, wrapped in black paper.

“Are you aware of the sort of flowers these are?” he asks but doesn’t give me any time to answer. “I had no idea, and I like to think I’m a floral connoisseur. Although admittedly only for wisteria.”

“No shit, I’ve tried to grow them for years.” Puck looks stunned at Koz while Hayes shrugs in agreement too.

Koz flicks his head up in understanding before he continues. “They are *delonix regia*, commonly known as

phoenix flowers.”

I crack up laughing, “Are you telling me Phoenix Group are in the business of sending flowers?” I splutter through my snorting. It’s worthy of my reaction, the vigilante group of unknowns who go around righting wrongs for a fee don’t seem the sort to send flowers.

“When you see the invoice they sent, micina, you’ll be asking for more than flowers. But this is their way of letting us know to expect another delivery later.”

“Who?” My laughter falls away.

“I believe we got a two for one deal. They may have been scattering in opposite directions, but both Sharlene and Andrea will be arriving downstairs before morning. I don’t want you going anywhere without us at any time. Please.”

I hold his eye, “Of course.” I smile at him, rubbing my chest at the reality of how he is making my world safer hits home. I swing around and look at Puck first, and then Hayes. “You don’t need to be involved. There is no point to prove about who is the strongest.”

“Raney,” Hayes stops me, his gentle calm voice acting like a weighted blanket around my shoulders. “We all have to make peace our own way. Some of us will take that peace in the form of their blood and pain. For others, seeing them may be enough. It’s not a competition, much like loving you isn’t either. We will reclaim however we need, and I suggest the reward of seeing you smile is all worth anything we choose to face.”

“I don’t want you suffering,” I admit.

“And I don’t want you doubting. Together, we will find a way, and sometimes that will include things you wish it didn’t but we will always come back to you. Nothing and nobody will tear us apart, you need to remember none of us are letting you go.”

He stops talking and raises his head ever so slightly in challenge. Where Koz’s dominance has a bite and vicious

energy to it, Hayes's is just as potent but universes apart. He has my submission—it's easy to give him. As easy as loving him is. I drop my eyes, and he leans over and kisses my forehead.

“I agree with Koz though, I mean about everything, but especially the doors locked on our bedroom suite. Fuck me, I would literally skin a prick, including any of my Fallen brothers, if I thought they saw where you sleep.” Puck drags us back to us.

I nod, agreeing because the thought of showing anyone where I sleep with them and my nest is enough to have me hissing. I bite my lip to stop me doing it, but they see. And yeah, I don't miss the satisfaction that burns in their eyes in return.

Puck's eyes freeze me on the spot, and he takes a couple of his gigantic steps to sweep me up into his arms. “Happy?”

“About to sob like a baby happy. What about you?”

“You in my arms, wearing my claim on your neck, properly this time, yeah, you could say I'm happy. I'm thanking the fucking archangels they let me have their best angel on earth.”

“Sweet talker,” I mutter, laying my head against his chest, hearing the happiness in his heart as he walks us through the room.

While I don't doubt what is going on, I'm being a little needy for reassurance. And I have no issue with that.

“Come on, Koz, lead the way downstairs,” Puck urges, but he waits at the top of the glass and timber stairs. Already I can see changes over the glass balustrade.

Everything before was white, almost clinical. Now Koz has completely overhauled the feel and mood. But that falls by the wayside by the time I'm at the bottom of the stairs. I push out of Puck's arms and walk straight over to the most incredible painting I have ever seen.

Even without asking, I know Hayes did this. It's a kaleidoscope of muted lilac and corn blue. It's slightly chaotic in how abstract it is, but it's absolutely stunning.

"I will not cry. Tomorrow I will. Hayes, what the hell?"

Talon though is the one who wraps me in an epic snuggle from behind, his arms crossed over my stomach, his chin on my shoulder. "He's too modest, it's amazing, isn't it? He painted this as his first art project. Of course, he got a commendation from his professor."

Talon drops a kiss on my cheek before steering me further into the space, and he uses his hands on my hips to walk me towards the bank of floor to ceiling windows where there is a huge modular sofa shaped like a horseshoe. And then he steps away as I spin, taking in everything.

Without walking on the carpet, I already know it's going to squish luxuriously through my toes. The velvet armchairs look marshmallow soft and are finished with matching cable knit throws and fluffy white cushions.

Seeing everything, I'm struck by a sense of comfort. The whole space has been done with my needs in mind.

As amazing as it is, it's enough.

"I think I need food, then to go back to bed. The small taste I got is incredible, but right now, it's enough," I offer, turning away from the rooms I want to explore later.

There's a growing smirk on Koz's face, his eyes dancing in victory. And Puck groans in defeat.

"What?"

"He said you'd do exactly what you did!"

"How much did you lose?"

"Not how much, micina, ask your Puck what he lost." Koz keeps laughing as he makes a grab for my hand to lead me up the stairs. Once we get to the bottom step, his hand drops to my lower back.

“You going to catch me if I fall, Alpha?”

“You fucking know it. Now get your fanny up on the stool at the kitchen island bench, and I’ll make your favourite. Take something for your knee too, to stop it swelling.”

Which is pretty much what happens.

We have the most amazing and stress-free afternoon I’ve had in a long while. My cheeks hurt with how hard I laugh at Puck’s recount of a couple of times he busted Talon, Hayes, and me. Times we had no clue about. And then I nearly pee myself when he finally admits that because he lost the bet, he has to call Koz, Master, for the next month.

And there’s enough updates on Twinkles and Joker to make me feel better but also worry. Joker has to contend with an infection on top of recovering from surgery. The girls have been in constant communication with each of my alphas, which I like, and there’s even a lead on the woman and the baby—not enough to get excited about, but it’s solid enough to give us hope we might eventually get answers.

A wave of grief hits when Koz lets me know that Rhodes is going to be remembered at a private service. To which we were not invited. Not out of disrespect, but out of it really being a private service with only Giuseppe attending. Apparently, Rhodes had no family and was married to his job, but I don’t believe that for a second. Everyone has someone to love them.

“I want to go. The man died because of me, so I will be there even if it’s just me and Giuseppe. And then I want to do something to remember him.”

Koz stares at me, not out of irritation but admiration. “I will get Lew to arrange the details, micina. Rhodes was a mad boxer, so perhaps we could set up something with the gym he attended.”

“I’d like that.”

And despite the mood dropping being together and eating homemade burgers with oven baked chips is still pretty epic.

The second I push my empty plate away and start eating from Koz's plate my mobile starts ringing.

Puck gets up and goes to grab it. I kind of hadn't thought about it for a while, but he knows exactly where it is. Another reminder of the days I lost in a drug induced slumber and all out pack orgy.

"Hey, King, let me get her for you." Puck's voice drifts in from behind me. "Yeah, yeah, she's better than good."

I twist around and watch. There's a small pause as dad talks, and instead of answering, Puck rolls his eyes and passes my phone over.

"Dad, wait up," I manage before the tears that have been threatening since I climbed out of bed are back in earnest.

I make my way back to our bedroom to bury myself under the blankets.

"Hey, Daddy," I manage to get out through a whimper. Which is embarrassing, but it's Dad, so it's not like he hasn't seen me lose it before.

"Raney, you're okay, darling. All the guys are here with me, everyone misses you like crazy, but we're good. Twinkles and Joker will be fine. What's got you crying? Do I need to come and crack some fucking heads already? Because you know I'll roll out in five if I do."

"Just miss you, is all. When are you coming to visit?"

A restless energy that was building dissipates as I snuggle deeper in my bed that smells like my alphas, listening to my dad's voice.

"You know I'd be there tomorrow. But it's not right for us to be intruding yet. This is your time. I'm a phone call away until I come stay with you guys... or maybe I might stay at a hotel. I think Koz and the boys are organising a surprise, but they've probably told you already. You have them wrapped around your finger already, right?"

I answer with a stupid grin, despite him not being able to see it. “Sure do.”

Dad gets all serious. “Are they treating you how they should be?”

“Yeah. It’s overwhelming how right everything feels. I kind of feel whole again. I’m super tired and I am sure I probably need to talk to a therapist about Reid, but I’m happy.”

“Raney, you’re the strongest person I know. You let your head settle without getting lost in what happened by focusing on you being okay and your pack being fine. For a little while, you need to be a bit fucking selfish and just be with them,” King says in his no-nonsense tone that I love and need.

I take a deep breath and get hit again by how insightful my dad is, telling me what I need to hear. “I want to see everyone.”

He laughs. “Well, everyone will wait. And don’t fucking let those Scorned Girls boss you around. Being packed is real fucking important.”

I stop talking and look over my swath of blankets. But I’d felt him coming, then I inhaled his petrichor until all I could taste was him.

“I know it is,” I say belatedly as I wiggle over, making space for Puck to climb in behind me. He curls around me, his strong touches like aloe on a burn, soothing. I don’t need him, but goddamn I love wanting him.

In the background, I hear the dulcet tones of the other Fallen with him. All of them laughing and carrying on. Dad comes back on after a slight pause. “Well, shit, I’ve got to go. The nurse is here and wants to give Twinkles a sponge bath. I do not need to see his nuts getting fondled. Give me a call tomorrow.”

“Will do, Dad.”

“And don’t you ever forget how much I love you, kid. Yeah?”

He hangs up. Puck takes the phone out of my hand and drops it on his side of the bed.

“Go to sleep, Raney. I’ll text Simona and let them know you’ll talk to them later. Or tomorrow. They can wait, us being like this can’t, besides we’re going slow, remember?”

A soft kiss and a brush of an alpha command makes it impossible not to sink back into his arm, and I think I’m asleep before I hear ten beats of his heart.



CHAPTER

Forty-Six

Koz talks quietly to Puck, showing him how the security system and the duress alarm works, and it's a strange sight. Despite the late hour, Koz's dressed in black dress pants and a black business suit with a shoulder holster over the top, his hair slicked back. His trademark chocolate-cherry scent seems even stronger now he's packed, but it might also have to do with the hot shower he just had, the heat amplifying it.

Puck leans casually against the wall in a pair of grey sweats hanging loose off his waist, his hair every possible which way. And he smells like sex, and Raney.

Watching them, they act and talk differently, yet they've got such a similar presence it keeps throwing me. I'll fast get used to it, considering we're pack and we'll be with each other pretty much 24/7, but it still blows my mind.

Growing up, Puck's emerging designation was in everything he did. All this shit might have started because Reid knew then how strong his brother's alpha would be and couldn't cope with the thought. But in a way that makes what Reid said about never clicking with her make more sense.

That's yesterday's issue. I don't think we're in for any problems having two similarly powered alphas. Out in the real world both of them would be poised to lead a pack of their own. I couldn't imagine them being in any other pack besides ours, but because of their very nature, we might see more push and pull between the two. Not necessarily man to man, not from their designations because much like Koz is designed to

lead, so is Puck. And there will come a day where Puck's going to surpass Koz's alpha strength.

The both of them stop talking when the only person in the world with the ability to keep them both in check rolls over in her sleep, whispering something in her dream.

We all hover. I go to make a step to snuggle against her while we wait, but Puck throws his thumb up in Koz's direction then drops his sweats and climbs bare-assed straight back into bed, spooning behind her. She settles as quickly as she stirred, her scent leaking her happiness.

Hayes flicks off the bathroom light, his hair wet and unkempt, wearing his trademark jeans and a long black sleeve t-shirt. He doesn't hesitate; he kneels on the bed and presses a soft kiss against her temple.

None of us say a word as we exit, we stay silent as we lock Raney and Puck away in our suite before we make way to the elevator down to meet with the Phoenix Group.

"They've already explained they will be wearing balaclavas. I've got no issue with them protecting their identity, but just in case." Koz takes a small step away from the front of the lift and presses his hand against a hidden armoury. The door pops open with a silent rush of air, and a soft purple UV light flickers on, illuminating some of the finest weapons available on the black market.

"Let me know what you prefer. In time I'll get you whatever you need but for now this is all I have," he steps back, grabbing *his* guns. The only ones I've ever seen him use.

Hayes isn't a gun virgin. He's a fucking crack shot that hardly misses despite the distance. I've tried to throw him off his game by digging my hands in his pants and jerking him off as he shoots, but it's impossible to get him to miss. He thinks it's got to do with his steady hand and his eye for detail. Either way, we both enjoy me trying to throw him off his game.

Tonight, he's not quiet nor sullen. Clearly, he's not jumping out of his skin to do this. And there was no argument

falling from my lips that this is not for him to do. I'd never hold him back. Much like he told Raney, we all need to be who we are. Plus, he's got some scores to settle with Sharlene.

Koz stands back as the elevator descends. The lights come on automatically when we exit into the basement.

When Raney was still out cold after we arrived, he took us each on an extended tour, and then tested us over and over to make sure we knew the place and its capabilities. He's made this warehouse apartment block into an impenetrable fortress, to give his princess the easy life she wants.

A small flashing light follows us on the ceiling every few feet. Soundlessly signalling we have visitors approaching.

"This is a meet and greet. I've asked them to stop by for fucking payback." He smirks, a shrug rolling from his massive form. It's intimidating as fuck.

We wait in a cavernous room. It's not hard to figure out what this room is about—it's in the meat hook that hangs from the roof, the stainless-steel walls, the massive drain down the middle. How he got this together, I'll never know, but I'm so fucking glad he did. The thought of anyone coming at our pack sends me nearly feral.

A series of footsteps echo across the concrete floor, and Lew waits at the back door as the Phoenix Group enters. It's surreal, almost movie-like in how three masked forms walk closer, two of them pushing wheelchairs in front of them.

The scent of Sharlene and Andrea's fear fills the space, as does a buzz over my skin. It feels fucking good to have them here.

"Koz," one of the trio of men says as he steps forward and holds his hand out. His hand is bare, unlike the other hidden behind black gloves, matching those of his associates. A strange tattoo that looks like three scorpions on his thumb, and yeah, it's my police training burning alive as I take every detail in. Just in case.

Koz shakes his hand before his hand sweeps towards us. “Hayes and Talon, Pack Siderno.”

Hayes moves forward and shakes his hand before I do the same. His grip is surprising. It’s assertive, don’t get me wrong, but it doesn’t set alarms off like he’s an all-out psycho grappling with normality.

“Lew can make you a coffee if you like. I’ll need only four minutes tops. I have everything I need here.” Koz points to near the door.

It takes me a second to realise what I’m looking at. And clearly since we’ve been together sleeping with our omega, Lew got it ready for him.

“I apologise if it makes transportation more cumbersome, but I literally don’t give a fuck,” Koz says as he turns on them. A moment later he carries in two five-gallon plastic buckets. He drops them in front of Sharlene then grabs another pair for Andrea.

Without uttering a word, he unbinds their feet. Andrea whimpers and cries, and she fights against Koz’s grip, but it’s impossible to stop him plunging her feet in the bucket full of concrete. She struggles, without warning and from fuck knows where, he pulls a knife out and stabs her through the thigh. She screams, and he ignores her completely.

He leaves the knife buried to the hilt as he calmly deposits her other foot in the second bucket.

Hayes moves in front of Sharlene. I take a step to him, and my hand drops on his lower back. He does the most Hayes thing I think I’ve ever seen when he twists around and locks his eyes on her as he kisses me. His tongue licks over my lips once he’s done, and then he leans down and spits in her face. “I hope the devil and every demon in hell makes you, and your son, suffer. I can’t tell you how happy I am to see you again, and let you know I’m balls deep in love with Tal and with the girl who was always destined to be ours. And yeah, Sharlene,

that is my revenge—letting you know how fucking happy and in love I am.”

He spins around me after making the only point he wanted to make. I can hear his footsteps as he makes his way back to the lift to wait for us.

Sharlene’s eyes jump past me to Koz as he nods before he rips her leg out of the restraints and dumping her foot into the bucket. She struggles and bucks against the other restraints. Whatever they have shoved in her mouth keeps her garbled protest unintelligible. I can see the venom and fight in her eye, and it’s not anything we need to see more of. Flipping my gun, the crack of the butt of it against her head is like a small boom in the room. She slumps forward, an ugly noise falling from her as unconsciousness takes her.

One of the Phoenix Group takes a step forward, a gun hanging casually from his hand when Koz is kneeled, and I move without thought to stand protectively in front of him.

“Fuck off. Lower your gun, defective,” the guy chuckles, “my bad, I meant detective.”

The one standing behind him pipes up, “Nah, it’s totally defective. But my comrade is right. Use your big boy brain, read the situation, and lower your weapon, Jeffers.”

Of course, they’d know who they’re dealing with, but it still has me craning my neck to crack the rising tension like I do when I’m about to empty my gun.

“Without being a prick, if you speak like that again to anyone in my pack, I’ll come looking for you and deliver my final payment in cash,” Koz threatens. He does it without volume, although he’s dialled up the menace barely hidden behind the condescension.

The guy doing a Michael Jackson impersonation, with one glove, sighs so loud, if he took his dark glasses off, his eyes would be rolling. “Shit! I knew this would happen! Siderno, lock your fucking shit up. We don’t need this; we all agreed no bullshit.”

“Pull the leash on your dog. He shouldn’t have taken a step out of line with his Glock ready to go. Honestly, we’re done here...” Koz stops talking for a minute as he stands and drops one of his feet on top of Andrea’s knee, keeping her foot deeper in the setting concrete. “If everyone can put their weapons down, you can take these two wonderful pieces of shit away with you when you leave. And I can go back to my omega.”

“Hey, congrats by the way, we heard you packed. Are we invited to the coming out party?” the guy who started all of this asks. Maybe I was wrong about them not being psychos.

A small hiss, or it might have been a click of a tongue, whatever it was is something they’ve used to communicate before because the suddenly chatty one undergoes a personality flip and stands ramrod straight and slides back to where he was.

It gives me the chance to see how very similar in stature the three of them are.

Koz is less subtle than they are. “Talon, stand down.”

I move away and even re-holster my gun, but I don’t move far.

Koz flicks his head up to the leader. “As we already agreed. I want them alive, it’s not like they’re going to run on you, but I don’t care what state they are in. One of us will contact you when we’re ready for the next part, but you can take them.”

“Always a pleasure doing business, Siderno. Let’s not do it again,” the leader says, and then like they’ve practised, they all move as one. Except it’s not practised, I’d say it’s more like these three have been together longer than Lolli, Hayes, Puck, and I have been.

I’d put money on these three being related. Big money.



Epilogue

RANEY

Nine Weeks Later

Puck's booming laugh has me leaning forward to see what's got him slapping his legs in a fit of near hysterical laughter.

And there's no way I cannot smile when I see him. The sunlight hits like a halo of light over his head, and it makes his blonde hair look lighter, his skin more golden, but it's the glittering love I see in his eyes when he finds mine over the crowd that chokes me up. He winks and I'm smirking back like a lovesick fool.

"Shut your mouth, Raney! You'll swallow a fly or some shit, then Koz will freak out and the party will get shut down because you have to have a nanna-nap," Heidi growls from behind me, jabbing a nail in my side to make a point.

Tris and Simona have taken similar positions on either side of me, swamping me with their love and excitement. It's good to have my girls here with me today to celebrate Pack Siderno coming out. The girls are such an important part of my past. They helped me be who I am today, and who I will be tomorrow too.

I roll my eyes at Ho's dramatics but let her pull me back against her. The four of us are enjoying the newly installed omega fixture to our rooftop terrace; the sunken nest is full of plush blue and white striped pillows and matching throws. The pillows are the softest and largest cushions I've ever seen. They're insanely comfortable and being in our zone gives us

time away from the prowling alphas. And there are lots of those here today.

“Sshh, let me try again,” Heidi says as her arms reach over the top of me and she uses her very own foetal doppler. She even got it engraved with her name.

Yep, as soon as I told my Scorned Girls I was preggers, Heidi Ho went on a shopping spree that made my time at Birdie pale into insignificance. The packages started arriving before she did, and they haven’t stopped since. Our home is swamped with boxes of baby clothes, gadgets, books, and nappies. Our little Bean is going to be the most spoiled child if my alphas, the Fallen, and the Scorned Girls get their way.

“It’s too soon. Maybe if you had the same one the doctor had...” I offer, closing my eyes and sinking into her attention. Heidi’s language of love is her enthusiasm and her spending. Admittedly, my alphas are just as baby mad, and we already have two or three of everything she sends, but all of us act surprised when we open one of her gifts.

“I didn’t get this one from Mega Babies online,” she huffs back before trying again. “It finally pays to know an obstetrician. The man has skilful fingers, I have to say, but I’m definitely only after him for his gadgets. We won’t mention that to anyone here though, right? Stupid bossy alphas thinking they can tell me who I can be with.”

The three of us agree in an instant, and I try to stop the jiggle of my tummy as I giggle, but it’s impossible. She tsks in my ear and has to lift up the device until I get a grip on my laughing. But these days are full of sweeping highs and lows as I’m constantly finding my way through the pregnancy hormones. And no shit, no-one ever told me how horny I would get. It’s almost embarrassing, but it’s not.

“Stop wiggling! No shit, Raney, as soon as you eat your cake your stomach will be gurgling so loud I won’t get to listen to my little god-bubba until tomorrow. Which is not fair at all. I know Tris heard the heartbeat before,” Heidi whines.

“Sometimes I think you love Bean more than you do me,” I reply. The girls start giggling again.

“Sshh,” Heidi scolds, as she restarts searching for Bean’s wickedly strong heartbeat. I close my eyes and let her do her thing, because listening to it is pretty life changing.

“Oh my god.” She whispers. It’s impossible to miss the awe in her voice. And in her happiness she swamps us in her apple scent, dappled by the smell of her tears of joy. She keeps her hand pressed to my tummy and keeps whispering under her breath as she hears the evidence of my pregnancy herself. It makes me a little weepy, but everything brings a tear to my eyes these days.

The past few weeks have been a surprise to say the least. A complete mix of good and bad surprises too.

The first time we ventured out, our luck meant some of the corrupt boys in blue came at us with their usual gusto. The alternate was the new guys in the Organised Crime Department of Central Bureau of Investigation and Justice were actually good at their job. Either way, I got arrested on suspicion of money laundering; and my alphas lost their shit. Talon got cuffed and thrown to the ground trying to protect me, and Puck was the only one that persuaded Koz not to empty the cartridge of his favourite gun into the lead investigator. While Hayes quietly fumed holding my hand.

Needless to say, Giuseppe has been working overtime. And I’ve been under house arrest since. Not imposed by the police, mind you. No, it was my very own pack that had an epic meltdown and effectively locked the door on the rest of the world. It took some pretty decent threats by King and the girls to even let them in past Lew the first time they came to visit.

Admittedly, we were only leaving our new home because we had a feeling I was pregnant and the doctor who was meant to be coming to see us had to change our appointment time and place because another of his patients was going into labour. Hayes was adamant my scent had changed, and he was

right. My other alphas were just as adamant that the doctor would see us before he went and delivered the other baby.

Our lawyers actually used my pregnancy as justification as to why shit went south that day. Charges against me and Talon were dropped. And the police department was dealing with fresh allegations of vexatious harassment and inappropriate misconduct to a newly packed and pregnant omega. We're looking at new remote servers and better ways to firewall our electronics just in case they really do have something on me, not that it's stopped me sitting in my office and working my ass off daily.

The settling in time usually reserved for newly formed packs was thrown further into chaos by the fact my womb was constantly flooded as we were in our pack adjustment period and as a result, is now swelling. We're having a claiming baby, and despite my hesitation towards not wanting Koz's baby straight away, I hand on heart have to say I'm so fucking excited.

Koz is adamant the child is his. I suspect he's right because even though it's too soon to feel any fluttering, every time his hands wrap around my stomach in awe and admiration, I swear I feel Bean gravitating towards him.

Although, it really will be anyone's guess as to who the father is. We have not stopped having sex since the moment Koz woke me up in our new home. Pretty much every surface, wall, inch of floor, seat, table, whatever, has been used, but it's all a part of us being a pack. The flip side is my omega cleaning drive has been out of control; I never realised how satisfying cleaning our pack home would be, but it goes with the territory of having a wickedly perfect sex drive with four virile alphas. Life is good, though some days I worry for my pussy.

A caress of his presence is the only warning I get before Talon suddenly appears.

"Ladies, I'm sorry to interrupt, I just need to see my omega for a few minutes," he does not look sorry at all. He's got need

darkening his blue eyes and making him constantly lick over his lips.

And boom, like that, I've ruined another pair of thick panties.

"Talon! You cannot drag her away, we're about to cut the cake!" Tristan hisses, slapping his outstretched hand away.

"I *shouldn't* drag her away, but I have to, Tristan," he insists, his hand not moving. He grins at her while Tris sighs and rolls her eyes. "I promise I'll have her back to you, rosy cheeked and satisfied within," he checks his watch, "ten minutes tops. Anyway, you have other things to get organised, so it will be a good distraction. Right?"

I don't care what they are up to. Talon is all I can focus on at the moment. He helps me up to standing, and then he holds my elbow as I limp past our guests enjoying the party. His hand dips to my lower back, while we ride the lift down to our home, his fingers dip inside my underwear as we race through the kitchen. He fumbles with the lock, his hands shaking, but eventually he gets it right, and we get let through to our zone. And seriously, the scent that lingers and saturates our space has me panting even before the doors close behind us. In the next instant, Talon's hands are under my skirt, ripping my thick panties down. He kicks them away before picking me up and racing into my nest.

"God, I hate those things. I need to smell you, Lolli. There were too many years when I missed out on it. And you scent like you're wanting, which is all sorts of hot." There's a deep rumble to his voice, and his eyes are nearly black now.

My nest is already completely full of our scent, but even over it the room fills with the scent of both of us: fragrant wisteria and his unique leather campfire that makes my hands shake. It might be the hormones, or it might just be our bond, but it's taking a little getting used to how much more responsive we are to each other.

Tal sets me down gently on the specially made mattress that fills the floor of my nest. He sends my senses soaring with the gentlest of kisses before he growls against my lips. “My beautiful, ripe woman, I need my knot in you. Present for me, omega. I’m so fucking desperate right now, I’m surprised my dick hasn’t punched a hole through my pants.”

He’s talking a mile a minute, but I’m already bare bum up, my head down buried in the clothes I’ve hoarded. A flicker of his touch on my hips is all the warning I get before he surges inside, and the both of us groan so loud the noise bounces off the walls of my nest echoing around us.

Behind us, I can hear the lock disengaged and hurried feet racing towards us, and I don’t need to turn around or stop enjoying myself to know it’s Hayes.

“How?” he laughs as he climbs out of his clothes and joins us in my nest.

My nest—the space I can barely leave for more than a few hours at a time. Every one of Puck’s jerseys, Talon’s sweatpants, Hayes’s soft t-shirts, and Koz’s business shirts, along with every blanket, throw, cushion, and pillow is in here and wears their scents. I thought I’d be craving chocolate or fried pickles, but all I want is them.

“Oh, Lolli, you feel incredible,” Talon whispers in his worship as he continues to plough into me from behind.

I’m so relieved we’ve moved past their concern they’d hurt Bean. Each of them was too scared for Bean’s welfare to do anything other than make soft love. Honestly, their cocks were barely inside my pussy. After a rather large temper tantrum, and a few conference calls with my doula, we’re now back to heart pounding, loud, frantic fucking.

Hayes appears in front of me, and I open my mouth. The second his cock presses on my tongue, my eyes slam shut and my pussy squeezes around Talon’s cock as my senses get fried by the taste of hot cinnamon donuts.

“Hayes, what are you doing to her? She’s so fucking tight.”

Hayes’s eyes are locked on his cock sliding in and out my mouth. “You like me in your mouth while Tal’s in your sweet cunt?”

I hum my answer, and Hayes growls and pushes himself in deeper. And yeah, the vibrations in my mouth feel crazy good. Tal and he start moving in sync, the three of us finding a rhythm and tempo that hits all the right spots.

I lose track of time. Honestly, it’s only the scent of my nest that makes me remember where I am, but they keep spoiling me so well, together and separately.

Talon speeds up; his hips slap against my ass for a few more energetic thrusts until he holds me still. “Take my knot, Lolli, take it.”

I go to nod, but Hayes grabs my attention, holding his cock against my lips, his pre-come smearing over them, probably ruining my makeup, but not one part of me cares.

“Going to fill your throat soon, omega. They’re going to think Bean is having a growth spurt with how much come I pump down into your pretty throat. Swallow it all,” he growls.

Hayes’s alpha has been another surprise we’ve had to contend with. Some days his dominance rivals Koz and Puck’s, but we’re finding a way to balance and reassure him this baby is very real, and he is very much a father to our Bean. Although, I don’t think it’s the paternal thing that freaks him out, more it’s the threat of our dream of having children being taken again.

Being together helps soothe his distress. But loving Hayes is an easy thing.

I lick over his crown, hollowing my cheeks out and alternating between sucking him so hard he swears before I try to lap the come from the slit of his dick. His fingers dig into my hair, his body locks up tight as he struggles not to lose control and drive straight down my throat. He’s close. The

thick strands of his arousal keeping us linked together each time he drags his dick out of my mouth and coating my tongue are proof enough.

Talon's watching, I know he is. I can feel his cock pulsing inside my pussy each time Hayes thrusts in and out my lips. He waits, and when Hayes is hissing and breathing hard, Talon slams his knot inside my pussy, making me surge forward and deep throat Hayes.

"Oh, yes," Talon whispers as he starts coming, his knot pulsing inside my pussy, he changes to deeper thrusts and his orgasm floods me right around the same time Hayes roars his release, filling my throat so much it leaks out of my mouth.

I love listening to the two of them come. It also turns me on insanely when they kiss while they're both inside my body. I know they haven't forgotten me as they groan into each other's mouths. They keep scenting me up, they both keep coming, sending me into a floaty orgasm high.

"Did you change, micina?" Koz smirks, as he holds his arm out for me. His arm settles around my shoulders while Puck's hand settles on my lower back. Talon and Hayes take the other side of us.

"Smile," Simona urges, and the flash of her camera is blinding. But she doesn't let up and must take close to fifty shots before I lose my patience.

"Enough, Sim! We don't need that many."

Koz growls in my ear. "We need lots of photos. Be a good omega and smile, this one is needed for proof of time and place."

I change my mood in an instant and drop a megawatt smile at Simona's mobile this time, not her fancy camera lens.

She laughs and pastes on her practised smile as the rest of the Scorned Girls, Dad, all my uncles, and anyone who needs an alibi swarms in and we do a live stream. There's lots of posturing, but it's full of what will make this go viral—people aren't used to seeing this many 'wanted' in one place.

Tris's online presence is certainly going to help. She's got her own PR team that will ensure our clip gets seen

“Wish you were here, bitches or not.” Heidi laughs and throws a finger up.

Sim presses stop and everyone lets out a collective groan of relief. And then, no shit, everyone moves away like their asses are on fire, with the noise my alphas make when I sigh. But at the same time, people have things to do.

King and my uncles start joking as they go grab the ridiculously oversized television from the undercover part of our rooftop terrace, while the girls finish posting and tagging the videos that are currently flooding their social media accounts—and ours.

It takes a couple of minutes, but in the madness, I finally turn to Puck, looking for answers, “Why were you laughing so hard before?”

“I got a special delivery left at the door downstairs along with more phoenix flowers. Lew brought it up.”

“What was it?” I ask him.

“Sharlene's fingernails.” Puck barely finishes speaking, and he's laughing again.

I pull a pukey face. I mean, I get the message delivered, but at the same time my pregnancy means I'm always fighting off feeling sick. And any little thing sets me off.

“Oh, you just wait, beautiful.” He smiles so wide I see his pearly whites as he dips down low for a long, slow kiss. “Love you so much, Raney,” he says between each twist of his tongue.

“Okay, pup, turn around and since this was your idea, you can do the lead in for our omega,” Koz directs, his eyes locked on mine. He brushes hair off my face, and his fingers take a deliberately slow run down my scar before he shakes his head and turns me so I’m nestled against his chest. His hands holding Bean and me.

And Puck takes centre stage because I swear that’s where he was born to be.

“I think today is actually a fitting end to what was the start of our story. I guess though, first I need to thank a few people, so shut up and listen.” Puck always takes my breath away when he talks. And these days he’s grown into who he was always going to be. The self-assurance and confidence in the way he loves renders me teary eyed.

“First up, to King, I think I can safely say there was a point where I hated you so fucking much, but without you, I would not be where I am and who I am, so straight up, I love you. Now don’t you start fucking crying on me,” Puck insists with a bright smile as he wipes his own eyes.

I twist around and look at everyone here with us today. All of them ooze happiness. All of them are safe too.

“When I rocked up at the Fallen, I was a mess. King took me in, despite who my parents were and what I did to Raney; he clothed and supported me. He made me deal with my shit before it changed me forever. And I was, and am honoured, he became the father I never had. The pricks at the Fallen became my brothers and they helped me see what the word family means. Twinkles also taught me how to fight, except everyone knows I can beat his ass with my eyes closed now. But that’s beside the point. You know I could go on and on, make you all laugh, but at the end of the day we can laugh as we watch the Anders empire crumble. I’m always up for a laugh or a joke, but I will not ever make fun of how these men shaped me. Thank you to each and every one of you.”

He looks at me and shakes his head. “Don’t you cry, Raney, or I’ll be a mess.”

Everyone releases one of those little sighs, but Puck just rolls on to the next part of his speech. “And to Raney’s Scorned Girls, holy shit, you bitches are more intimidating than Koz. But by god, I fucking admire you. Tal, Hayes, and I can’t thank you enough for putting our girl back together and for constantly reminding her that fairy tales do come true, even when we broke her. I guess it’s in part because of you guys that we’re standing here with Raney as our omega and our fucking pack solid as it is. We owe you and thank you.”

And this time he does look at me, and even over the small space that separates us, I can feel every word he’s thinking in his head and through our pack bond. But thank god he doesn’t utter any of them because I would be inside hyperventilating into a paper bag. I know how deep his love is when it’s just me and him, or us and our pack; he tells me over and over again.

“I love you, Raney. I always have, and will till the day I die,” he says, before leaving it at that and turning back to the television screen and pressing the on button.

By the time he is back at my side, the rush of realising what I’m seeing has me half horrified and also feeling pretty sick. He leans down, “Steady, omega, they can’t take you from me, or our pack, ever again.”

And I watch with wide eyes as swarms of reporters all stand on the front lawn of the Anders family home. A female reporter standing with her microphone takes up the screen.

“Good evening, ladies and gentleman, well, sensational doesn’t seem descriptive enough for what is happening behind me. After weeks of speculation, confirmation came through earlier today that Senator Anders has been arrested and will be formally charged with a long and exhaustive string of charges. These charges are extreme and some date back years... we’re getting word that it appears to include blackmail, extortion along with intimidation, and abuse of power of office. And it seems there’s so much more to this story than we first realised, with charges also being levied at Pack Commission Mitchelton, along with several high-ranking officers within

local and federal law enforcement agencies. All in all, these are sensational claims against Anders, a man who was very vocal about stamping out corruption. If that is not enough for the Senator, there is a warrant out for the arrest of his wife Sharlene Anders.”

The image on the screen changes to one of Senator Anders at a press conference.

The reporter’s voice continues, “Some of you will remember, Senator Anders recently was on television asking for assistance from the public after reporting her missing. Sources close to his office suggest her disappearance may be linked to the recent death of their eldest son, Reid Anders, who police have now confirmed was responsible for the abduction of an omega. There are no charges pending relating to the death of their oldest son. Our sources went on to suggest this sordid tale of greed and corruption stemmed from events years ago.”

The camera moves from the reporter onto the house I spent time in growing up. The only person to ever make me feel welcome there was the man squeezing the shit out of my hand.

“The IRS has also started an investigation into the Anders Empire with claims of tax evasion and violation, along with misappropriation of funds and insurance fraud. Their family home has been a hive of activity today as numerous state agencies worked in a joint task force. Those agents have spent the last ten hours seizing property. The last truck left not that long ago. The home has been locked up, the staff have been let off, with some of them being taken in for questioning for their involvement in the crimes associated with this family...”

The journalist keeps talking, hardly taking a breath as she goes on and on.

Puck dips low. “Get ready, Raney, we’re going to blow their kingdom high. Well, technically Sharlene and Andrea are. Although their involvement wasn’t exactly up for discussion and they apparently didn’t like the little C4 vests

they got to wear, but that's just schematics. Nobody fucks with our girl and gets away with it.”

He barely finishes talking, and an explosion fills the screen. The reporter who was so poised and professional a second ago screams in terror. Her eyes go wide and white for a moment before this look of absolute excitement fills her face as she realises she's now in the middle of an emergency. Media people are weird.

“Ladies and gentleman, that was not at all scripted. And it really does seem that the Anders Family are getting their just desserts this evening.”

Her hand touches over her ear, and she looks off camera, holding her hand up, nodding profusely as she obviously gets an earful of instruction from the producers.

I'm locked up tight in shock while all around me, the patio erupts into cheering and applause.

The reporter starts talking again, but whatever she's saying is drowned out by what is happening on our side of the world.

Koz's deep chuckle has me twisting around to look at him.

“Let me guess, a new supplier?”

He doesn't say a word, but the press of his hard dick into my ass is answer enough.



Epilogue

Thirteen months later

Hayes's anxiety is making his scent cool. And like always, whenever one of my alphas is upset or a little blue, it hits me in the chest.

"Hey," I squeeze his hand to get his attention, "are you okay?"

His brown eyes flare, and I see the moment he starts pulling back his nerves. He slides his fingers from mine before tucking me under his arm and snuggling me close. Despite us walking, he drops a lingering kiss to the top of my head and scents me up, letting me know he's out of his thoughts and back with me again.

"I'm starting to think we should let this go," Hayes says softly. Almost reluctantly, as we cross over the road.

"We or me?" I ask.

"Well, you're mine, and I'm yours, so it's a we. It doesn't matter does it?" Hayes slows down, his hand dropping to my back as I step up onto the pavement. Seriously, he and Koz both are master hoverers whenever we go out, and I love it.

"I just want the door shut on all the past. Nothing to come and haunt us," I admit.

And it's true. It feels like this is the last ghost we need to exorcise for us to move forward without anything possibly haunting us again. The final piece is not stopping our happiness; it's not holding us back from being one loved up

pack. It really is a case of me wanting to make sure Hayes never gets duped again.

He drops another kiss to my head. “We’ve sat and watched the tape a few times over, Raney. The production expert confirms what we know, the video of me hurting that woman was a fake. The entire thing was staged. What I thought I witnessed was me under the influence of an alpha drug. I was rutting against an adult sized doll. At the moment I started to come around, the woman walked in covered in blood and did a mighty fine job of acting the victim.”

I snarl like a she-wolf as a rage of simmering anger explodes out of me. Not unexpectedly either. Whenever I think about the humiliation and hurt they put Hayes through, I seriously want to find a way to reanimate the corpse of Reid and his bitch of a mother and kill them all over again. Repeatedly.

“Relax, omega, look at the life I’m living now,” he says, blowing his breath over my face when I don’t stop growling and seething. Hayes squeezes me tighter. “Don’t wake the monster.”

That gives me pause.

The ‘monster’ is the very recent addition to our family. Much like the last time I was pregnant, Hayes picked up the change in my scent almost immediately. But where Bean, or Sunny as we now call her, is our proverbial ray of sunshine, her sibling is a storm brewing. I’ve been unwell for weeks with morning sickness so bad it extends through to late afternoon, much to my alphas’ angst. Only when the sun is starting to set can I eat more than a few dry crackers. And once I start, I eat like a freaking horse for hours and hours.

If any of my pack are looking for me or Puck late at night, they find us in the pantry searching for snacks. Or we’re in the pantry screwing. The odds of what we’re doing are fifty-fifty, really.

Thankfully, this afternoon, I'm getting a break from our little firebreather's antics. Perhaps they understand in some weird way how important this lead is. The last few times have been huge disappointments. And yeah, I'm chasing hard to track down the woman who kept showing up at the lawyer's offices with a baby in her arms. Even with the knowledge it's all a set up, I haven't been able to let it go on the off chance it turns out to be another twist in our happy ending.

The collapse of the Anders empire was impressive. It also brought to light and gave the authorities a chance to cast a wide net over those involved. Bankers, doctors, lawyers, police officers, government agents, even the parents of my alphas, were all being held accountable. It was very satisfying to see those shady fuckers get their just desserts.

It was equally gratifying that a lot of the charges are sticking to the cockroaches who had aligned themselves with the Anders, or who'd hidden behind their own power, were sticking due to the hard work Talon had done. The evidence he collected over three and a bit years meant a lot of the charges being levelled, were unchallenged and led to impressive sentences. And goddamn I was proud of him.

Hayes and I turn the corner and pull up to a stop out the front of a fast-food joint. My tummy rumbles, despite the gravity of the situation. Hayes chuckles as he rubs his hands lovingly over my little baby bump. "Does your mouth ever not water when you see a burger?"

"It was the onion rings," I admit, pulling an ugly face when my rumbles get even louder.

Hayes turns me around, pushes me up against the window, and swipes his tongue over my lips before he kisses me senseless, swamping me in his tender love before he puts a little distance between us and wiggles his eyebrows suggestively at me. "If I put onion rings on my dick, would you...?"

"Fucking hell yes. Yes, I absolutely would eat every one of those onion rings off your dick. Without a doubt!" I giggle and

go to suggest something about him adding sauce.

He stops me, with a look in his eyes and his finger on my lips. “Raney, I can see that hope in your eyes and hear your thoughts going a million miles an hour. But she’s not here. She’s not ever going to ever be here or anywhere we look.”

“One day they might show up,” I insist quietly.

“No, they won’t. The money I paid for child support is still sitting in a bank account for a fake person, untouched. That’s pretty telling all this was a set-up. I paid the alimony their lawyer demanded we had too and yeah, we were young and naïve not asking for the court documents but I didn’t need proof, I needed forgiveness. I want you to start believing the very real possibility that the woman I saw is either dead, another victim in all this, or she is long gone.” His thumb trails softly over his claim on my throat.

“Find peace in knowing we at last found the baby. Giuseppe did well tracking her to an adoption centre on the other side of the country. The timing she showed up there correlates to shortly after the last visit. I’m okay, her file is closed. I’m seeing that as my forgiveness. She wasn’t my daughter; she was an innocent little girl, but she’s living a new life. There’s nothing else we can do. It’s done, Raney, I don’t want to keep doing this anymore.” He finishes talking and it really does feel like he’s trying to turn the page on the end of the chapter.

I close my eyes and lean my forehead against his chest.

“I hate they stole so much from us, Hayes. And for what?”

Hayes is quiet for a moment, before he answers softly, “Hate. And power. Two pretty big motivators.”

He wraps me tightly into his arms, talking into my ear. “The medical records we found make it an easy assumption that Reid never found a compatible omega or pack that would accept him. It might have been the shock of Tal and me leaving, his brother deserting him too, but for an emerging alpha it can have a devastating effect.”

Hayes has spent a lot of time reviewing the case file we managed to get our hands on. It's not the first time we've talked about the reasoning behind what happened. "Reid would have been a vessel of hate, and the pressure continually put on him by his parents would have been like leaving open the door for darkness. It would have been unrelenting. From the second he rejected you; he lost his pack, he had nothing but expectation rammed down his throat, he was set up for failure. And the samples Koz collected and had analysed confirmed Reid had ADV. Being infected would have made the impact of his parents' manipulation worse. Even if he got proper treatment in time, I'm not sure he would have responded. I think they ruined him first."

With a finger under my chin, he lifts my gaze up to his. Every bloody time he makes my chest squeeze, and my heart fills with the fluttering of a hundred butterflies. "I have to say, being a father now, I understand better about how far they went and were prepared to go. But our family is worlds apart. Our babies will know what it's like to have to work for something, they will be loved but they will be humble and full of gratitude. After all, they've got the most beautiful hearted woman as their mother."

He says nothing as a tear splashes down my cheek.

"We're leaving this here, all of this. I'm not looking for either of them anymore. I only want to love you and Tal, our babies, and our pack."

Our pack, our babies. Thinking of them is part of the reason I keep hammering on about this. The thought of someone hurting any of the people I love sends me skitz.

Hayes drops his forehead to mine again. I think he knows exactly where I went, and he even chuckles when I ask, suddenly worried. "Do you think Sunny is okay?"

"I'd say Heidi hasn't stopped whining about it being her turn to hold her, and Koz would be blatantly ignoring everyone. He's kind of obsessed with our daughter. He's worse

than King was when we were growing up. Shit, Raney, our poor Sunny will have no chance of dating.”

“She is our little chubba-bubba angel.” And Sunny is. She’s the spitting image of Koz, her ice blue eyes a dead giveaway as to who her bio-dad is. But it’s also in the way she and Koz still gravitate to each other. When Koz travels, the second she sees him, it’s like no one else will do. For a solid ten minutes. And then she pines for all her daddies. She’s definitely got that from me.

“Puck’s going to be the one who’s a bundle of nerves today.” He distracts me with the other huge thing happening today.

“Do you think he’ll like?” I ask, doing a slow turn so he can get a full look at the short as fuck skirt and tummy top Tris helped me pull together. I was meant to be bare underneath, but it’s impossible since my boobs won’t stop leaking because of breastfeeding Sunny. Plus, being pregnant again makes them super sore. And whenever I try not to wear panties, it always ends up with one of my alphas filling me up and making me purr. Which is exactly how we ended up with a monster-to-be soon joining our family; the four of them had split up to go their separate ways to get ready for my heat. They came back without Sunny and with nothing else except a hunger only I could satisfy. There were no complaints from me. None whatsoever.

“Are you okay, after me asking you to let it go?” Hayes asks but leaves me no time to answer. “I was thinking we should celebrate the closure of another part of our past by ordering a large serving of onion rings and then asking Lew to drive slowly to the arena, so I get to properly enjoy those onion rings and what you’re wearing. Then we’re going to watch Puck play his first professional game. Me and the rest of our pack probably have to wait while he sneaks you into the locker-room and has his wicked way with you. He’s not the most patient person.” He grins again because it’s true. “Look at all the amazing things we have to look forward to. Please let this go. We have the answers we need, not the resolution, but

it's enough to move on.” His hand brushes the hair off my face, while his beautiful brown eyes implore me to agree with him.

“I have moved on,” I insist. It sounds half-baked even to my ears.

Hayes's eyebrows rise, and his lips tip up in challenge.

I roll my eyes. “Okay, I'm trying to move on, but if you change your mind about wanting to find out more, even in ten years, you'll tell me?”

“Of course, I will. Like I will tell you every day how much I need you. I love you.” He swoops in lovingly and seals the end of that chapter of our life with a chaste, sweet kiss before he steers me inside to order.

Two servings of onion rings.

Coming Soon

Knot Again

Book 2 in the Scornedverse Series

Heidi's story.

<https://books2read.com/Knotagain>

Acknowledgments

If you haven't watched Lewis Capaldi's Netflix documentary, *How I'm Feeling Now*, you should. I sat and watched *How I'm Feeling Now* when I was pretty tired inside, and it hit. It still does keep hitting, and I want to thank Lewis (even though he will never read this) for sharing what he did in such a beautiful and brave way.

I placed a lot of pressure on myself after writing Lennon's story. I tossed and turned at night wondering if I was doing Raney justice. Funnily enough, it was in the middle of the night I figured one of my biggest hurdles with writing is letting go... which is hard when you love your characters so much. It took a few extra weeks of restless sleep until I also discovered I actually didn't have to let go of anything; I could just make extra room for this new cast of characters. Keep making room!

I love Raney's story just as much as I do Lennon's. And Bailey's, Emsley's, Destiny's and Amarli's. I'm acknowledging the influence of my 'girls' as much as I am real people.

Speaking of real-life amazing people, I have to give heartfelt thanks to – Darcy, Kira, Lauren, Laura and Jennifer for their time and feedback. Each of these kind women offer me something unique and special. Thank you.

A huge thank you to Jennifer, Marie, and Mallory, for their ongoing professional support, and assistance. Working with people who love what they do is such a joy.

Last thanks, and acknowledgement, goes to my readers. Please know I keep all your beautiful messages of support and all the words and hugs shared with me at signings, close to my heart! You make writing such a rewarding experience.

Until next time, be safe and enjoy.

xxx LSB

Keep in Touch

Sign up for Lucy's Newsletter

[https://dashboard.mailerlite.com/forms/213277/
71065174065284573/share](https://dashboard.mailerlite.com/forms/213277/71065174065284573/share)

Send her an email at:

lucyscottbryanauthor@gmail.com

Join Lucy Scott Bryan's Readers Group on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/LucyScottBryanReadersGroup>

Check out lucyscottbryan.com for updates.

Books Lucy Scott Bryan

[The Deal](#) – omegaverse, why choose romance

[The Gift](#) – omegaverse, why choose romance

Dragon Kissed – fated mates, why choose romance

[Kissed by a Dragon](#)

[Claimed by a Dragon](#)

The Cedar Mountain Pack – completed series – rejected mate, fated mates, why choose romance, wolf shifters

[The Bone Wolf](#)

[The Omega Wolf](#)

[Her Own Wolf](#)

The Vampire House War (shared world with The Cedar Mountain Pack)

[The Bitten Wolf](#)

[The Blood Wolf](#)

The Amarli Wolfe Series - Completed series - rejected mate, fated mates, why choose romance

[The Rejection of Amarli Wolfe](#)

[The Claiming By Amarli Wolfe](#)

[The Salvation of Amarli Wolfe](#)

[Stolen Destiny](#) (shared world with Amarli - menage)