



Plus

TWO

JILLIAN WEST

Plus Two

The Exchange: The Hotel

Jillian West

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Contents

[Author's Note](#)

[World Info](#)

[A Quick Recap](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

Melody

[Chapter 2](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 3](#)

Melody

[Chapter 4](#)

Miller

[Chapter 5](#)

Melody

[Chapter 6](#)

Nik

[Chapter 7](#)

Melody

[Chapter 8](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 9](#)

Melody

[Chapter 10](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 11](#)

Nik

[Chapter 12](#)

Miller

[Chapter 13](#)

Carver

[Chapter 14](#)

Melody

[Chapter 15](#)

Nik

[Chapter 16](#)

Melody

[Chapter 17](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 18](#)

Melody

[Chapter 19](#)

Miller

[Chapter 20](#)

Melody

[Chapter 21](#)

Carver

[Chapter 22](#)

Melody

[Chapter 23](#)

Nik

[Chapter 24](#)

Melody

[Chapter 25](#)

Carver

[Chapter 26](#)

Melody

[Chapter 27](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 28](#)

Melody

[Chapter 29](#)

Miller

[Chapter 30](#)

Melody

[Chapter 31](#)

Nik

[Chapter 32](#)

Melody

[Chapter 33](#)

Carver

[Chapter 34](#)

Melody

[Chapter 35](#)

Miller

[Chapter 36](#)

Melody

[Chapter 37](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 38](#)

Carver

[Chapter 39](#)

Miller

[Chapter 40](#)

Nik

[Chapter 41](#)

Oliver

[Chapter 42](#)

Melody

[Chapter 43](#)

Carver

[Chapter 44](#)

Melody

[Epilogue](#)

[Bonus Scenes](#)

[Bonus Scene](#)

[Bonus Scene](#)

[Bonus Scene](#)

[Bonus Scene](#)

[Bonus Scene](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Also by Jillian West](#)

Author's Note

Important information to know before diving in.

Melody's story is light and fluffy. The entire Exchange series is a set of books I created with the goal of keeping things low angst/stress. Any issues that arise will be addressed quickly and in as comical a manner as possible without doing a disservice to the story.

If you suffer from reading anxiety then this book should be relatively safe. (Trust me, I get it! I do too. Reach out if you have any questions.)

>>>>Spoilers Below This Point<<<<<

First let's do what you won't find.

I know some readers prefer an already formed pack and there is a group of friends/a partially formed pack, but Mel will be adding to it. There is no cheating (brief mentions of an ex cheating before the story. None by the main characters.) There's no abuse from any of the men. These guys treat her very well from the beginning.

Now let's do what you will find.

This book contains pregnancy and we do live the birth on page. There is breeding kink & a smidgen of lactation kink.

If I've missed any things that should be listed please reach out to me on social media or email. I'm happy to correct it. If you find any issues you think are errors please also reach out to me directly.

You can reach me at JillianWestAuthor@gmail.com or via social media. I'm always available.

World Info

This book is set in an alternate universe.

You will recognize many things as familiar, but there may be a few you don't. If you recognize the terms alpha, beta, omega then you're probably good.

If not, welcome to the omegaverse!

Here's a small bit to get you started if you're unfamiliar with how things work.

Omegaverse is basically an alternate universe where similar to wolves or animal biology there is a hierarchy.

Alphas are at the top. They're generally bigger, more aggressive, or dominant and they have a few extra features like a knot (think wolves but no shifting.)

Betas are the regular humans.

Omegas are the opposite side of the spectrum from alphas. They tend to be less aggressive, smaller, and they mate with alphas (and sometimes betas too, but omegas need the alpha to help them through their heat).

Alphas and omegas have scents which attract compatible mates. Omegas calm an alphas more aggressive nature.

In my contemporary omegaverse books the world is very close to ours with just a few biological drives that are different & some extra features like male alphas have knots & purr to comfort omegas, omegas and alphas have pheromones that attract compatible mates, and omegas have a heat cycle where

they're super fertile. During this time it sends compatible alphas into rut. (Lots of practicing making babies.)

A few hundred years ago the birth rates for alphas and omegas were nearly equal. Nowadays, there are nearly eight alphas born to each omega. As a result alpha packs have become the norm. Omegas are the center of the pack and as mentioned earlier calm an alphas more aggressive nature. Betas (the normal humans) do join packs sometimes, but their biological drives don't demand it like alphas and omegas.

These alphas growl and snarl, but you'll find no degradation or abuse from these men.

There are no shifters in this book.

I hope this helps clarify. You can always reach out to me via social media or email & I'm happy to explain further.

A Quick Recap

If it's been a while since you read *A Pack For Christmas*, or if you're just starting with the series here, this is all you need to know to be caught up. (Honestly, you could likely go in without these details, but here they are in case you want them.)

Melody and Ben dated for ten years.

He brought her on a family trip to The Exchange in North Carolina.

She thought he was going to propose.

He did not.

Ben flirted with another woman in front of her and was just an all around jerk.

They've broken up & Mel is getting her harem!

All other info and details will be covered in the book.

Chapter One

Melody

I curl deeper into my bed and wrap the fuzzy blankets tighter around me. My tiny apartment doesn't have a nest, but my bedroom is small enough that most of the time I can make do.

It's strange, but I always make my own bird-style nest on top of my mattress when it's a tough day.

Today qualifies.

I'm not sure why I thought Ben might call or show up.

It's only Valentine's Day.

Then again, I haven't seen my ex since Christmas, so I have no idea why my system convinced me he'd show up to offer some grand romantic gesture.

I don't even want that, not really. Coming out of a ten-year-long relationship is complicated.

I bury my face in the pillow and breathe through the tightness in my chest. It's really hard, but I'll hate myself if I give into the loneliness.

I can't count the number of times I've almost broken down and called him. Part of me is desperate to tell him exactly what I think of him, which isn't much. The rest of me is still in love with the asshole. Being an omega is ridiculous. He's never treated me right, and yet my system craves his acceptance and approval.

Growing up I was told that being an omega is a gift. Everyone went on about how rare we are and how packs spend

their entire life searching for their omega, and when they find them, they love and cherish them above all else.

What a load of crap.

I've never once felt loved or cherished.

But I did see the way the alphas at The Exchange in North Carolina looked after their omegas.

It would be a blessing to find a relationship like that.

Being hung up on my ex is getting me exactly nowhere.

I know he'll never be able to treat me like the alphas at The Exchange did their omegas.

I'm pretty sure it's because I didn't demand it from the beginning, and now it's too late to go back.

This is why I have to start fresh. I wish The Exchange had found an immediate opening for me. It would be way easier being there than it is being here alone.

They didn't have a spot for me, so they sent me back to Texas to wait for a location to have a space open up. Initially I hoped to find a match before heading to one of the franchise locations, but the closer I get to my heat, the less likely that becomes.

At this point, I told them I'll take any opening at any location, even if I won't have an initial match. Scent cards aren't an exact science, and who knows what might happen in person.

I'm not willing to risk going through a heat here at home.

Omegas who try to ride out a heat without alphas are in for a world of pain and suffering that's difficult to comprehend. I've handled days of that on my own before, and even the thought of doing it again makes me curl up tighter into the fetal position.

I'm so damn lonely, but there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

I just have to hold on for the spot in New England.

Connor Hastings is the owner of the North Carolina location. He told me that he'd keep searching for somewhere with an immediate spot, but at most, I'll be heading to dreary New England in just under two weeks.

I can hold on that long.

I should have stayed in bed and pretended to be asleep. Not that I could have slept through the ridiculously loud banging or the obnoxious sound of Ben's exhaust as he pulled up.

I'm questioning a lot of my life choices at the moment.

"Come on, Mel," my ex-boyfriend says, shoving his hands in his pockets. "Aren't you going to let me in?"

Ben gives me the same chagrined smile that he does every time he screws up. I'm very familiar with this particular look. He's used it regularly over the last ten years.

The cowboy boots he always wears rock against the porch, and it's like my eyes are drawn to them. Maybe it's because they're so familiar.

We've had this same showdown many times. I guess I'm the one who changed. I'm not backing down.

I can't.

No matter how much my heart hurts, I can't continue to do this. Otherwise, I'm afraid I'll completely lose myself in the process.

"There's no reason for you to be here." I jab a finger toward his truck parked in the driveway. "I told you before we left North Carolina, but I'll say it again. *We are done*. Please leave and don't come back."

My chest aches, and I say a little prayer that I can keep it together until he leaves. He had the audacity to show up on Valentine's Day with no gift and no apology.

I'm not sure why I'm surprised. I think maybe I'm more annoyed at myself for letting it hurt my feelings. I know better. What I can't seem to figure out is how to shut off ten years' worth of emotions.

"Melody," he says, rolling up his shirt sleeve. "Come on, honey. I made a mistake."

I scoff because making a mistake is forgetting to take out the trash. A mistake is missing the electric bill and paying it when the truck shows up to cut off your power.

What Ben did was straight up disrespectful, and unfortunately, it wasn't outside his normal character.

I believe human beings are allowed to screw up and it isn't something that should be held against them, but he's never going to be the man I need him to be.

I've spent so long trying to be a better girlfriend and the perfect omega that I lost myself along the way. I'm never going to be enough for him to treat me the way I deserve to be treated.

My lower lip quivers as my eyes burn.

If I let him, he'll continue to use me up until there really is nothing left. I take a deep breath and steel myself against the barrage of emotions.

There have been good times over the years, and at this very moment my system is trying to convince me the bad times don't exist.

I think it's the fear of the unknown and maybe a little heartbreak that I wasted so much time on a relationship that wasn't all that great. If things don't work out, all the pain and suffering meant nothing.

I read something that said people hang on for too long because your brain registers investment versus loss.

Basically, the more you put into something, the higher the value your brain puts on the return. You've put in so much effort that your system isn't willing to take that loss.

When a relationship is new, you're more likely to walk away. It's easier because you haven't invested so much into it. But once years go by, even if the other person's behavior has declined significantly, you're still more likely to try to fix it than you are to move on since starting fresh is accepting you've forfeited your investment.

I don't know if I'm even remembering it correctly, but I do know when I read that article, something clicked.

If Ben had started out doing half the crap he's done the last year or two, I would have walked away, but it was a gradual progression.

It slowly got worse, and that conditioned me to think it was because I wasn't doing enough.

"Bye, Ben," I whisper, spinning around.

I don't look back. He always gets me with his puppy dog eyes and those damn straight white teeth of his.

I yank open the screen door. I'm almost inside when he grabs my wrist.

His spicy scent floods my nostrils, and I fight the feeling of familiarity.

My eyes ache as they squeeze shut. A ragged breath escapes as I do my damndest to hold back the sob.

It's hard to accept that all those years were for nothing.

It's even harder to acknowledge that I've always loved him more than he loved me. We both know it, but he's used that to his advantage for the last time.

"I already apologized," he says, framing my back. "Exactly how long are you going to hold it against me?"

My entire body goes rigid.

That's the thing.

He *didn't* apologize.

He never does.

He'll talk in circles and belittle my feelings until I just give up because he's an alpha and I'm an omega. His designation is always going to be more strong-willed than mine.

I hate confrontation and arguing, which he knows. He'll steamroll right over me if I let him.

"I'm done. I don't know how else to explain it." I pull my hand free. "You spent ten years promising me a future you never intended to deliver. I can't listen to you lie to me anymore."

I take a few steps inside and grab the actual door. I won't be able to shut it all the way until Ben gets out of the way, but I still prepare to slam it in his face if I have to.

I can't let myself fall into his trap again.

"I need you to really think about what you're doing here." Ben stretches out a tanned hand, running his fingers over my cheek. "I've been in love with you since I was a teenager."

"Is that right?" I stagger back. "That's why you flirted with another omega right in front of me? Don't even get me started on what you said to your brother. Get the hell out." I pull the door as far as I can without slamming it into him. "Back up, Ben. I'm not messing around."

My voice sounds hysterical even to my own ears. I need him to get the hell out of the way.

Somehow I always manage to forget how toxic we are when I'm lonely and missing him.

"Mel, everyone knows we're going to end up together. You *know* how it goes. No alpha will look twice at you because they understand *you're mine*." He sighs like I'm being purposely difficult.

"That's true enough," I agree.

He's right. He's spent many years ensuring no other man will give me the time of day.

Unfortunately for me, the women in our small town do not give me the same courtesy.

An embarrassing sob escapes at the thought.

I've let him get away with so much garbage over the years that I can't stand to think about it. It makes me resent *myself* for letting him treat me this way.

"That's why I signed up for The Exchange. I wanted to be gone by the time you made it back to town, but I had to wait for a location to accept me. Not to mention you've been back for weeks and you didn't even call, never bothered to show up."

That just made it seem like I spent the last few weeks wishing he would, which I didn't. It makes it easier to hate him when I don't have to look at his face.

It's harder when he's close because my system craves his pheromones, but I won't let myself give in again.

"I thought you'd reach out to apologize for the way you talked to me," he says. "Mel, you're over exaggerating everything. You know I love you."

"Please move, or I will have to slam the door on you, and I don't want to have to do that. If you've heard nothing else I've said over the years, hear me when I say this. *I am done*. I need you to leave."

Ben's jaw falls and he takes a step back. I carefully make sure the door doesn't touch him as I close and lock it.

I bolt for my bed, but it isn't far enough away to muffle his banging. He yells something like if I go to The Exchange then we're done.

I roll my eyes.

I don't think he really hears anything I say.

I crawl into my makeshift nest and pull a pillow over my face. I cry until he finally leaves and then a while after just for good measure.

I was going strong until he came over. It makes me hate him even more. It's clear I'm not completely over him.

It's crazy how another person can feel like a festering wound.

Chapter Two

Oliver

My eyes dance around the penthouse apartment. It's weird considering it's the entire top floor of this side of the building.

It's nice.

I mean, it's cold in that high-class way. It's filled with stainless steel appliances and sleek lines.

I prefer our house in Virginia. It's huge, bigger than this place if I had to guess just by looks and feeling alone. But whatever. We only have to be here for a month.

I don't *love* change, but this was an opportunity we couldn't pass up.

Nikolas Vincent tosses himself down on the couch across from me as I continue to take everything in. It's hard to imagine growing up in a place like this. My packmate gives me a look that says he's studying me just like I'm studying our new home.

I can't believe Nik lived here as a kid.

It does make sense why he was so adamant about wanting a big yard and tons of space.

I'm the youngest of our pack, but I'm also at the highest risk of going feral, which is why I'm not complaining that we had to come to New England at the tail end of winter.

Virginia gets cold, but it's not like this.

Nik's moms owned this location of The Omega Exchange before they decided to retire. Nik was still playing football back then, so his brother took over. However, Nathan's pack found their omega, and they wanted to honeymoon around the world prior to their baby being born. Since Nik still owns half of the hotel and The Exchange, we were nominated to take over while Nathan's pack enjoys a proper vacation.

Our pack has been in The Exchange's database for a while and never had an outright match.

Sometimes I wonder if it's because the scent cards degrade when they have to be shipped all over the country.

Or maybe no one wants us. That's a terrifying possibility considering my future sanity hinges on us finding an omega during this month-long takeover.

Nik swipes his long black hair away from his light blue-green eyes and sighs heavily. He's grown in some stubble for his ridiculous incognito mission, but I don't have a lot of hope that will successfully hide his identity.

In all honesty, I don't see a point to it anyway.

Most people recognize him from his time playing pro football. Finding an omega who doesn't jump up and down for the chance of building a pack with him is going to be tough.

The black tattoos that line his arms, chest, and neck don't really scream businessman either.

Who knows, maybe I'm overthinking this, but I don't think so, considering it's *my* cognitive functioning that's declining every year.

It seems to me there are more important things to focus on.

Then again, no one recognizes me, even when I give them my name, it takes a very specific person to pick up on my star power. If you can even really be considered famous for tech, which I am. But I couldn't care less at this point.

Let someone recognize me, or let them have no clue.

I don't give a shit.

As long as they like me for me, then what does it matter?

That's my thinking, but I also don't have fan-girl stalkers or women sending me their underwear in the mail.

It's kind of surreal.

I live with the guy.

He's not all that special.

Sure, he threw a football for a few years, but he also eats cheese dip and salsa on nacho flavored corn chips directly out of the bag and then puts the jar back in the refrigerator like nothing happened.

He's not really a catch.

Nik's light eyes stand out in stark contrast to his dark olive complexion as they narrow, like he knows I'm thinking about his bad habits.

"What's the game plan for tonight?" Maxim Miller asks, tossing himself down on one of the club chairs. Our other packmate frowns, wiggling his ass a little like if he only tries hard enough, he can instantly form the same butt groove he's got on the couch back home.

Miller looks like a fucking giant in comparison to the minimalist furniture. His dark brown curls bounce as he continues trying to get comfortable. He finally gives up, scratching at his short brown beard.

This place sucks.

"What is the plan?" My eyes cut to our illustrious apex alpha, but Nik flips me off with both hands.

I snort.

"Listen, I know neither of you are particularly happy to be here, but it is what it is. Nathan deserves a break. He's been running this place for ten years." Nik sighs, stretching out across the hideous couch.

It really is ugly. None of the furniture is soft or especially plush. No wonder Nathan and his pack bought a house

elsewhere on the island. I can't imagine an omega ever finding this place comfy.

"It's fine," I say, giving him a tight smile. I know I'm the problematic one.

Miller and Carver can adapt to anything. I think it's due to their military backgrounds. Me? Not so much.

"Where is Carver?" I ask, looking around like he's about to pop out from behind the super uncomfortable chaise lounge.

"Last I saw he was flirting with the married receptionist," Nik says, shaking his head. "Nathan is going to hate me by the time he gets back."

"He should have left his administrative assistant in charge." I push my glasses up. "What? Don't pretend like any of us have a clue how to run this place."

"It's a well-oiled machine," Nik says, shrugging. "That's what Nathan said. We should have zero problems as long as Carver keeps his dick in his pants."

Miller gives me a look that screams how unlikely that is.

Dylan Carver isn't a bad guy. He's not technically part of our pack. It's not unheard of for betas to join packs these days, but we don't have an omega so there's technically no pack for him to join.

Carver is like our questionable security guy who joined the team and *never left*.

I guess he's a friend, *maybe*. He's more of a pain in the ass than anything, but whatever.

"Okay," Nik says, staring at his phone. "Basically I need you and Carver working security shifts because we're short-staffed."

"Carver I can understand, but can Miller work security with omegas? What if he finds our match?" I ask, glancing between my packmates. Miller is on his phone now too.

"You'd be hard pressed to find a security team at one of the franchises that isn't filled with alphas. It's nearly

impossible to stack the entire team with betas.” Nik chuckles. “If Miller *of all people* finds our omega running security, then we’ll all say a prayer and thank the universe for blessing us this day. Agreed?”

I laugh. That is extremely unlikely. “Agreed.”

Chapter Three

Melody

The next week is busy as I prepare to head to The Omega Exchange.

I wait and wait to see if I'll be pre-matched, but I'm not. It doesn't matter. I'm going to New England to ride out my heat and see if anything works out when I'm face-to-face with the available packs.

I don't know how long it'll be until I come back to my apartment, so I spend a couple days cleaning everything.

I completely empty the fridge the day before my flight.

There's not much since I purposely avoided going grocery shopping, but even the little bit of takeout and condiments manages to turn my stomach.

I know it's stress.

I've never handled pressure well.

The only plus side is that Ben is completely MIA. I haven't seen or heard from him since Valentine's Day. I should be grateful for that fact, but somehow, even that manages to hurt my feelings.

The next morning, I grab my already packed suitcases and load them into the back of my car. It's early, and my stomach rolls with tension.

My mom is driving me to the airport, but I already know she isn't happy with me. She spent the last few days lecturing the hell out of me, but I'm twenty-six years old.

I have to start living for myself, or I'm going to end up not even really living at all.

The drive to the airport is tense.

As soon as we pull up to the drop off area, I blow out a breath of pure relief. My mom helps me unload my bags, but I can tell she's itching to say something. She's been distant and cold the entire trip.

"I love you." I lean in for a hug, hiking my backpack up my shoulder.

My mom sighs, shaking her head. "I think you should come back home with me . . ."

I try not to let it bother me. I really do, but I hate the way she seems content to see me trapped in the same small town she's been in her entire life. She knows there are no prospects for my future and no one to build a family with.

"Mel, I'm serious, men make mistakes, and sometimes you have to overlook bad behavior, but Ben loves you—"

"I can't do this right now," I tell her, glancing over my shoulder toward the doors that lead into the airport. "I love you. I'll see you soon."

"You've never listened to my advice." She presses her lips together, shaking her head.

My jaw falls.

Is she joking?

She's the entire reason why I ended up with Ben. I dated Ben's brother Luke in high school, but after the number of times that she lectured me about how it wouldn't be fair to Luke for us to stay together, I finally caved. She went on and on about how I would need alphas and how Luke would never be one.

I broke up with Luke and Ben immediately started chasing me hard. Only as soon as he caught me, he realized he didn't want me.

My whole damn life in Texas has been toxic.

I lean over, giving her a kiss on the cheek, and bolt before she can talk me out of it. I hate that I don't have even one person in my corner, but I'm going to start being that for myself.

The flight is fine, but I don't feel great.

I'm not sure if it's stress or maybe a sign that my heat is coming faster than I expected.

My stomach aches, but I toss an arm around my middle and pull my shoulders back. I don't care if I feel like crap. I'm not letting anything stop me from doing this.

I thought long and hard about it on the plane and came to the conclusion that it's not me that's unlovable.

It's Ben.

He can't love me because he doesn't have the ability to care about anyone but himself.

Or maybe he can, and I just wasn't the right person for him.

Whatever it is, that's fine.

I'm willing to accept that I don't know it all and move on.

I've been waiting for this spot for two months. I'm not missing out because my body shuts down under stress.

The Exchange offers omegas the chance to match with alphas outside their geographical region.

They also provide a safe haven for omegas trying to escape a bad situation, but that's not why I had to be accepted.

I needed them to take me since none of the alphas in my small town consider me an option.

If I can't find a pack willing to ride out my upcoming heat with me, then The Exchange has alphas on standby.

The shuttle bus has a few other omegas, and the scent of so many of us in one place is giving me a headache and making me a little car sick.

My sense of smell is hypersensitive when my heat gets close.

I shut my eyes and rest my head against the seat. Despite feeling kind of crummy, this is exciting.

Finally finding alphas and a pack is something I should have done years ago. If nothing else, I'll ride out my heat for the first time with someone who isn't Ben.

It's sad, but at this point, even that feels like a step in the right direction.



There's practically no traffic, and the weather isn't bad, but the drive is long.

The entire area is incredible. New England in late winter is nothing like Texas. Besides the nightmare Christmas trip to North Carolina, I've never really traveled.

This place is beautiful, but totally different from what I'm used to.

We take a long bridge that's so close to the water it feels like a road directly on top of the ocean. The view is breathtaking, but it's scary as the waves crash against the tops of the barriers.

We pull up to the massive hotel, and it feels like all the breath leaves my lungs.

The exterior is white with gray accents. There's a huge circular driveway that has a few parking spots directly in front of the entrance.

The building is almost a U shape and the pull up area is close to the bottom. Each side of the hotel has rooms that face out over the cliffs and have a view of the ocean.

The entire island is covered in trees. Some are lush and still green, and some are barren since they've lost their leaves, but I can only imagine how beautiful all this is in the spring or especially in autumn.

It doesn't take long for everyone to get off the small shuttle bus, and we stand in a group huddled together as we wait to head inside.

Texas can get cool in the winter, especially at night. This seems like it's an entirely different kind of cold. There's no wind at the moment, but I'm freezing. I thought I packed accordingly, but maybe I made the wrong choices.

Several large men come out flanking an older woman as she heads down the stairs. She's pretty and not dressed for the weather at all. She waves a hand, calling us closer, and we make our way up the steps and into the hotel.

The lobby is sleek and modern with white and gray marble flooring . . . I think that's what it is. It's some type of hard stone that fits the decor to perfection. The walls are white with simple silver beams to accentuate the unbelievably high ceiling.

There's a reception desk, but our coordinator doesn't guide us to it.

She stops near it and clasps her hands in front of her.

"I'm Kara, the main coordinator for The Exchange. The hotel is a separate business. There are two sides to the building," she says, smiling brightly. "The right side is the larger tower and it hosts all the guests who are on the island for golf, fishing, or other amenities. The left side houses all of the employees who live here full time and also The Exchange."

She gestures to the left of the check-in desk. The entire area is open in a bright, airy way. There are several small seating areas further toward the glass walls on our right and left, but the wall directly behind her is solid as it houses the desk.

“Each side of the building has two elevators,” she says, gesturing to the wall with buttons. “The exterior elevator is open glass. The interior is standard. If you have no preference, you can hit the button in the middle. Otherwise, select the button on the side closest to the elevator you’d prefer.”

I immediately sidestep to the one without glass walls. They arrive and we funnel inside. The ride up is smooth, and although the elevator is spacious, my stomach sloshes for the entire ride.

My eyes close, and I take a few deep breaths to keep from vomiting on their fancy flooring.

“Are you okay?” a growly voice asks.

My eyes pop open. I give a nod despite my dizziness. There’s a giant alpha leaning over in front of me and everyone else is gone.

Kara stands outside the doors, gathering up the rest of the group of omegas from both elevators.

“Do you get claustrophobic?” the man asks, taking a step back. He stretches out a hand nearly touching my shoulder and then clenches it into a fist. “If so, we should probably get you out of here.”

He’s tall, even for an alpha. Then again, I’m five-seven, so I guess it’s relative. His brown hair is longer on top and very short on the sides. It’s curly and thick, and the color matches his full beard. It’s not long, but it’s fluffy. His pale blue eyes are extremely expressive as he frowns at me.

“No. Sorry, I think I’m stressed.”

“It’s understandable,” he says, extending an arm for me to head out first. “But you’ve got nothing to be afraid of.”

“Thank you.” I push off the back wall and head out of the elevator.

“The way the building is set up, this floor is actually at ground level with the outdoor pool and the cliff face,” Kara says. “This is where we do check-in for The Exchange. We have a full-time nurse practitioner on staff and a few of you

will need to see her at some point in the next day or two. All mingling activities are held on this floor.”

She begins sifting through her paperwork and another older woman joins her.

“Last names A through M with me,” the new woman says.

“N through Z with me,” Kara says.

I step over to Kara’s line and lean against the wall. My stress is definitely getting the better of me. My knees feel shaky and the urge to bolt is strong.

It’s one of the most frustrating things about being an omega. Our urges demand we please those around us. If that doesn’t work, instinct tells us to run at the first sign of trouble.

My eyes dart around checking my surroundings, but my panic has no legitimate purpose.

This location of The Exchange is beautiful. The entryway is lined with glass walls with frosted pieces in triangular shapes. The edges are trimmed in silver and it’s majestic. I don’t know any other word to accurately describe it. There’s a runner of cream carpeting that leads toward what looks like a spacious waiting room. The floor on both sides of the carpet is the same style as the lobby.

“You can go ahead,” a soft voice says from beside me.

“Thanks.” I step up since it’s my turn. “Melody Webber.”

Kara hands me a packet of papers. “If you head in, they’ll introduce you to Frank. He’ll be your security. He’s got your room key. All your belongings will be brought up within the hour.”

“Thank you.” I smile and head for the next line.

It takes a couple minutes to make it inside the next room, but when I do, it’s exactly what I thought. It’s an expansive waiting room with chairs lining the wall. There are people milling about and some up talking to the omega they’re paired with.

You can tell who works here because they all wear the black polo with the hotel logo embroidered on it and under it is the word security.

A younger woman about my age comes back from bringing another omega to his security person. She glances at her clipboard and asks my name.

“Last minute change,” the alpha from the elevator says.

I spin around at the sound of his voice, and he’s sliding around the few omegas behind me. He comes up to my side. He types away on his phone without looking up.

“They’re swapping it out in the system. I’m taking Melody Webber. Frank will be with Rayvn Zellar,” the guy says.

“Got it,” the woman with the clipboard says, scratching something out. “You’re all set. So you’ll be with Miller now.” She directs the last part to me.

My eyes fly up to Miller’s. His cheeks are red, even the beard can’t hide it, but he shrugs a giant shoulder and heads off. He leads us over to an older guy with short gray hair.

“We’re swapping,” Miller says. He reaches into his back pocket, pulling out a folded envelope and hands it over.

“No problem.” Frank smiles and laugh lines appear around his eyes. He hands Miller a similar package that has my name on it. He pats him on the shoulder and heads off.

The giant alpha turns to me.

“Come on, let’s get you settled in. You’re still kind of pale, and I can’t decide if that’s your natural coloring or . . .” He leads us down a hallway and to a staircase. “I thought this might be easier since you seemed uncomfortable on the elevator earlier.”

“Yeah, thank you,” I agree, following his giant form up the stairs.

“Maxim Miller,” he says, over his shoulder as I follow him.

“Melody Webber,” I reply.

We make it to the landing and turn to head up to the next floor.

“Are you feeling all right, Melody?” His eyes rake over my face. “I know you’re obviously anxious or nervous. I’m picking that much up from your scent, but do you need to see the doctor? I can get you in right away.”

The look of concern on his face makes my chest feel tight. I can’t remember the last time someone truly seemed to care if I’m okay. He peers down at me and I get myself together.

I probably look like a goofball, staring silently and blinking. “I’m good. I think all the traveling got the better of me.”

His pale blue eyes study me a second longer, and he finally nods. “Let’s get you settled in. Maybe some lunch and a nap will help.”

We hit the next floor, and the hallway straight down is lined with rooms. I move to head down it, but Miller gently grabs my arm. His skin is warm and scratchy against my inner wrist as I turn to face him.

“S-Sorry,” he stutters. “It’s actually this way. It’s all the same direction, but you can’t get to your room from that corridor.”

“Oh,” I whisper as he guides us around the staircase.

When we come to another set of doors, he pulls an ID badge off his belt and swipes it. This building is way bigger than I realized. The hallway is just as long as the other seemed. It has doors on both sides as we make our way down.

“This is the omega-only wing,” he says, clearing his throat. “Alphas aren’t allowed over here unless they’re part of the security staff.” He browses the doors and stops. “Do you have a pack? A scent match or anything?”

My eyes fall to the floor as I give a quick shake of my head.

“No.” I scuff my shoe against the carpet. “I did the preliminary testing at a location in North Carolina, but when

nothing pinged, they sent me home. Then you guys had an opening . . ." I shrug. "I really needed to get out of my small town, and I've got a heat coming up. I came knowing I wouldn't have an initial match."

"Gotcha," he says, pulling out my envelope and opening it. He grabs a key card and swipes it in front of the door. "Small towns are the worst, aren't they? Everyone knows everybody's business."

"Yeah," I agree with a forced laugh. "Middle-of-nowhere Texas. That's exactly how it is."

He opens the door and heads inside. "Do you want me to give you the tour or . . ."

"A tour would be great."

It's kind of sad, but I'm not ready to be alone just yet.

Chapter Four

Miller

Holy fucking shit, Melody is really pretty.

My brain seems to be stuck on a loop of how obsessed my nose is with her scent and how much I want to help get rid of that sad look in her eyes.

She's a beautiful woman, that's for sure. And I'm supposed to be giving her a tour of her suite . . .

We've been here for a couple weeks, and I finally feel like I have the lay of the land, at least for The Exchange side of the building.

I flip on the light and hold out an arm for her to go first. She walks past me down the hallway, and I'm smacked with her scent *again*.

She smells sweet, kind of like vanilla, but with hints of coconut. She's not short for a woman, but the top of her head barely reaches my shoulder.

The soft material of her flowy white dress brushes against my arm as I follow her. It has little silver hearts and bows embroidered into the design.

"Okay," I say as we make it into the small living room area. "You've got a mini-fridge, a microwave, and a sink. It's not much, but there's a restaurant, and we do food delivery for all meals if you'd rather stay in."

Did I really just call room service food delivery?

Jesus Christ.

“It’s nice,” she says, taking everything in.

“The suites are much larger once you have a pack.” I head over to the right wall. It took me a while to realize it, but all the rooms are one of two styles simply inverted based on which side of the hall they’re on. “This one is the bathroom.”

I open the door and click on the light.

Melody’s long blondish-brown waves fall around her shoulders as she comes over and peeks inside.

We both step back, and I close that door before stepping to open the next one.

“This is the nest. It’s small,” I warn, because this version makes me a little claustrophobic.

It’s concerning. She seemed uncomfortable in the elevator. That could be due to the fact they move, though.

I’m not sure if I’ve ever heard of an omega experiencing claustrophobia.

I mean, I’m sure it could happen with trauma or something.

The thought makes my teeth clench. It’s an extreme reaction, but I don’t like the idea of Melody going through anything like that.

She steps past me into the six-by-eight room and smiles.

“It’s not that small.” She chuckles. “Well, not compared to me, but you are kind of a giant.”

I nod, holding the door open since the space will feel smaller if it closes. She has to slide by me to get back into the living room area.

“Then the bedroom is the door opposite these two.” I point instead of heading over because I’m an alpha and she’s an unknown omega. It doesn’t seem appropriate to be all up in her bedroom area. “Let me show you this before I go.”

I aim for the phone on the counter in the small kitchen.

“Zero gets you to the receptionist. If I’m off shift and you want to leave your room, that would be the perfect time to call for night security.” I fish one of my cards out of my pocket. “This has my phone number. I imagine you want to get settled in, so whenever you’re ready to leave the room just give me a call.”

I hope she doesn’t focus too much on the fact I’ve got a Virginia area code and we’re definitely not in Virginia.

Nik and his stupid obsession with finding an omega who doesn’t recognize him.

“What time is your shift over?” She takes the card and her fingers barely brush mine. “That sounded weird. I don’t want to accidentally bother you when you’re off the clock.”

I chuckle, but my mind races. Technically speaking, I’ve been working eight to eight since this place is majorly short-staffed, but I also don’t want her needing anyone except me. “After ten p.m. you can call the desk.”

“Oh, I probably won’t be going out that late anyway,” she says, giving me a relieved smile.

Perfect, that’s exactly what I was hoping she’d say.

“Well, your stuff will be delivered within an hour or so. You can call down and get a late lunch delivery or take a nap. I’ll be back for dinner. Does that sound good?” I ask, backing toward the door to leave the suite.

“Yeah,” she says, giving me a tired smile. “Thanks, Miller.”

“Anytime.” I promptly bolt from the room. Her scent is entirely too damn potent.

“What the hell is up with you?” Dylan Carver asks as I grab him by the shoulders, guiding him into the security office. He’s part of my security team and I need his assistance. The employees of the resort might not concede to my demands, but

Carver is part of Nik and Oliver's full-time security team just like I am, meaning he's stuck with my crazy ass.

"There's a new omega." I shove him into his chair. "I need her file."

"What the hell, man?" He laughs, shaking his head. "You've got a password for the system just like I do."

"You know I'm not good with computers," I grumble, jabbing a finger at his chest. "Get to it. Melody Webber."

He knows my big ass hands make typing practically impossible. I can hunt and peck with the best of them, but he's being purposely difficult.

"Wait, I know that name," Carver says, spinning to face the computer. "Is she the one that came from North Carolina?"

"No, she's from Texas." Once the words are out, I vaguely remember her mentioning something about that. Unfortunately, my brain got stuck on how beautiful she is, and I guess I didn't fully absorb everything she was saying, which makes me feel like an asshole.

"Right, but she did her intake at another location." He types away on the keyboard. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure this is the same chick. I remember Nik talking about it. Connor Hastings reached out personally to see if we could find a spot for her."

"Why?"

"It was a favor for his omega . . ." He frowns. "I think she may have had some past relationship with one of his pack and they needed her out of there. I don't fucking know."

I growl, and I'm not even sure why.

The thought of Melody with anyone else doesn't sit well with me. It's another ridiculous thought, and if my brain were functioning properly, I'd be able to recognize that.

"Ohhh," Carver says, elongating the word to the point it's obnoxious. "Gotcha, all right then. Let's see what we can find." He goes back to typing. When her picture pops up on the screen, he whistles low under his breath. "Damn, she's smoking hot."

I lean over his shoulder to get as close as possible. She is incredibly pretty, but I also love the sound of her voice and her smell does funny things to my chest. Her long blondish-brown hair hangs in waves around her shoulders in the picture. She's on the slender side for an omega, but she's not thin. She's got an hourglass frame similar to most omegas, she just seems more athletic, or I have no idea.

She's freaking beautiful, that's about all my brain can seem to process.

"She's twenty-six?" Carver asks. Apparently he's been reading her information rather than staring at her like a total creeper.

I'm not sure why, but my eyes are continually drawn back to hers. The outer rim of her iris is dark blue, but the closer it gets to her pupil, the lighter the color gets until it's a very bright light gray. I'm sure there are fancy color names to explain each shade, but all I know is they're striking.

"That's on the older side to just be entering the system," Carver continues. "I guess it makes sense if she's already been in a relationship. No bonds? That's even more bizarre at her age. I mean look at her."

I am, but I'm also starting to feel a little too much like I'm objectifying her.

"She doesn't have a matched pack she's here to meet," I say mindlessly, finally taking a step back.

"No, but according to her last lab results, she's going to have a heat within a week maximum." He continues scrolling through her information. "You know it's not an exact science."

"Christ," I grumble, swiping a hand over my face. I've never had such a visceral reaction to another human being. "I've got to go. Thanks, Carver."

"No problem," he says, laughing and shaking his head. "Things are about to get interesting around here."

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Nik asks as I toss open his brother’s office door and stomp inside.

I glance at the open doorway and back to my packmate.

“Sorry,” I mumble, carefully closing it before making my way to the desk.

“Right,” Nik chuckles, “what exactly has you all riled up?”

“Do you know someone by the name of Melody Webber?” I ask, putting myself down in the chair opposite his. “She’s an Exchange guest.”

“I vaguely remember the name. Why?”

“She smells like . . .” My head shakes involuntarily. I’m not even sure how to finish that sentence without using the words *she’s mine*.

Apparently Nik doesn’t need to hear the words to know what I’m getting at. His perfectly manicured eyebrows rise as a predatory grin takes over his face.

“Really?” he asks, leaning forward. “What exactly does she smell like?”

“Perfection,” I mutter before I can hold the words back. “She’s got a light vanilla smell with tinges of coconut and . . . Do you want me to be honest, Nik? I don’t know how to describe it other than saying she’s absolutely a match.”

“*Fuck*,” Nik says, laughing darkly. He scoots his chair close and starts typing on Nathan’s computer. “Damn, I do remember her. An owner of one of the other locations was calling around trying to find her a place in one of the programs. If I’d known she looked like that, we would have taken her the same fucking day.”

“Don’t be a dick,” I growl as my hands land on the edge of his desk.

“Oh, *hell*.” He snickers. “You’re so fucking done for. Already? They say it’s wild when it happens. What’s the plan? Damn, she wasn’t pre-matched? That’s insane. I’m telling you, this is why they don’t offer pictures with the scent cards.

There's no way that delightful little treat would have made it until now without being snatched up."

That's probably true. I'm not sure I like thinking that she could have been scooped up before I got the chance to meet her.

"I want you and Oliver to check out her scent cards," I say, pushing myself out of my chair. I don't add that I'll pursue her alone if I have to because I'm sure he can tell that just from looking at me.

"It's almost like we wished it into reality," he says, shaking his head.

"What?"

"I'll ask Oliver to meet me in medical after my appointment," Nik says, looking considerably more serious.

"Good," I grunt, pushing myself out of my chair and aiming for the door.

Chapter Five

Melody

The fact I'm searching statistics on the most likely sexual positions to conceive in isn't something I let myself think too hard on.

I do a pretty stellar job of ignoring the thoughts and feelings that come when I think about ending this little excursion with more than I came with.

I want a family.

I've always dreamed of having kids. I'm fairly financially stable, and I know I've got more than enough love to give.

At what point do I stop waiting and take my future into my own hands?

I met an omega in North Carolina who specifically went to The Exchange intending to leave pregnant.

I don't know that I'm quite that brave, but once I have a pack, I'd definitely like to negotiate keeping my no birth control clause.

I have a generic contract like all omegas who come to The Exchange, but there's no guarantee any pack will accept it as it stands.

I know I'm not even thirty yet, but most omegas my age already have at least one or two children.

My phone falls to the nest beside me as I snuggle into the pillows even deeper.

A weird, whiney sob escapes as I wrap myself deeper in the fuzzy blanket. I hate being alone. It feels like I've been lonely for my whole damn life.

Ben and I never lived together. I shake my head. Thinking about it makes me feel even worse. I believed that he felt guilty about hurting his brother.

I let myself be strung along for so many years that it's like I don't know how to make sure my next relationship doesn't fall into the same trap.

And I'm still thinking about Ben. It's tough because he's been so intertwined with me for my entire adult life.

"Melody?" Miller's gravelly tone causes me to let out an embarrassing little squeak.

I burrow under the closest pillow.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I call out trying to keep my voice level. "Go away." Ugh, that sounded rude even to my ears, but he can't see me like this. "Please, go away."

"It's almost six. You haven't left the room or called for anything to be delivered . . ." His booted feet stomp closer.

My stomach does a bizarre little flip-flop.

It's really sweet that he came to check on me.

Except it's literally his job, you idiot. He's probably got some requirement that says he has to check in if it's been so many hours.

I swipe at my eyes, praying there are no tears.

"I'm okay." I toss the pillow aside, struggling to sit up.

"Is that right?" he asks, crossing his huge arms over his chest. "You seemed unwell in the elevator and that was hours ago."

My hair falls in my face and I swipe at it, sniffing.

"You smell . . ." He sighs. "Stressed? Sad? I can't tell exactly, but I don't think sitting in here alone is helping."

“I am kind of hungry,” I admit, pulling the blanket off.

“I’ll bet, considering you haven’t eaten all day. Come on, we’ll grab dinner.” Miller extends a hand.

“Are you, like, my omega-sitter? Do you coddle me until I find my pack?” I ask as his calloused fingers wrap around mine.

The giant alpha pulls a bit too strongly, causing me to careen into his broad chest with an oomph. His smell hits me square in the vagina. A shiver runs through my system, and I end up burying my face in his side in an attempt to catch more of his scent.

It’s nice, but not strong enough. I tip up on my toes until I’ve got my face pretty well wallowing in his armpit.

“You’re still too tall,” I grumble as my hands meet his shoulders.

He complies, bending lower, and I shove my nose in his throat. He smells so good, kind of like cranberries and lemon, but there are hints of something else.

It’s a masculine, fresh smell, and *I love it*.

“Is that what you need?” he asks, palming the back of my head. “You need to smell me? Are you unsettled, sweet girl?”

Sweet girl?

It’s so very close to *good girl*, which is a personal weakness.

A mortifying little gasp escapes my lips as I hug him. Apparently my impulses are firmly on board to embarrass the hell out of me because my arms wrap under his and then I’m pulling him even closer.

“Holy hell, you’re a really big guy,” I mumble against his collarbone. “And you smell delicious.”

I try to take a step back as my mind finally catches up with what I’m doing, but I get tangled in the blanket.

Miller grunts, making a grab for my hips, but he still has his shoes on.

I hit my ass on the nest mattress, and he lands on top of me a second later. He's heavy, but I'm more shocked at the intense look on his face as he stares down at me.

"Are you okay?" he asks, hovering over me on his forearms. He smells so damn good—even his breath. It fans over my face as he studies me, smelling like some type of spearmint gum. His blue eyes meet mine as I squirm under his strong form. If omegas could purr, I think I would be right now, that or I'd be doing something even more embarrassing like popping my ass up to present without even being asked. "Melody?"

"Um, yeah. I think I'm okay." I wiggle under him as my face burns. "I'm so sorry."

"No need to apologize," he murmurs, nuzzling his cheek to mine.

The contact is something I've seen in movies and read about in books. It's a way for alphas and omegas to comfort each other. It marks the skin with the other's scent and, as a result, their pheromones.

My breath catches.

Was that instinctual or did he really mean to mark my cheek?

"Let's get something to eat. Does that sound good?" He runs a hand over the top of my head. "I don't like that you've been here for hours and you haven't had anything." He pushes himself up and again offers me a hand.

I bite my cheek to keep from blurting out something ridiculous, like asking him to have food delivered, so he can wallow around my nest with me.

My pulse picks up to a gallop.

I love the idea of the nest smelling like Miller.

It's an unexpected reaction. I've never nested with anyone except Ben, but my impulses at least are fully on board with the possibility of other alphas.

Ben never wanted to snuggle up with me and cuddle in my nest. It took me too long to recognize the reality of our situation.

“Mel?” Miller asks, watching me carefully.

“Yeah, let’s do it.” I take his still extended hand and he pulls me up with ease.

It’s kind of crazy how petite I feel in comparison to his massive frame. He slides his hand around my ass and plants it on my hip, leading us out of the nest without another word, but his pheromones are thick.

The sound of both of our ragged breathing fills the air.

My face burns as he guides me toward the door, but the only thing that keeps me from melting into a puddle of embarrassment is the fact it’s clear his system is as affected by me as mine is by him.

I glance up at him out of the corner of my eye and try to decide what the hell I got myself into when I came to The Exchange.

“There are two restaurants inside the resort and several others on the island. The hotel restaurant is running on reduced hours right now because it’s the off season,” Miller says as we make our way down the stairs. “This side has a buffet. You can eat free from either, but we ask that you don’t go over to the other side of the resort without an escort.”

“Is that a normal thing? Have y’all had problems in the past? I’ve never had an escort or guard anywhere I’ve been in my entire life.”

Then again, I did grow up very low middle class.

“Are there not a lot of alphas where you’re from?” Miller frowns so deeply his forehead wrinkles.

“They’re all over.” I laugh. “I mean it’s cattle farm central where I live.”

“I’m glad you never had any issues, but it’s surprising.” He opens a glass door with the name of the resort in script font. “I guess maybe it’s overly cautious. No, I can’t say that. It’s just cautious enough.”

“Did you grow up around here?” I ask as Miller nods for me to head through the open door. I do, and as he follows me in, he immediately plants his hand on my hip.

If he is from this area then everything makes more sense.

This entire area of New England just screams wealth and privilege.

The food smells delicious, and it gives me a little pep in my step to get to the line as quickly as possible. I haven’t eaten since breakfast. Once I got into the room I was stuck in my feelings and didn’t want to leave.

I’m not sure I would have noticed the hunger pangs if Miller hadn’t forced the issue.

“I didn’t.” He pulls me closer to his side and I don’t fight the contact. “I’m actually from a small town in South Carolina.”

That explains the growly tone. It’s not exactly a southern accent. I think his voice is just naturally deep and gravelly.

“So you know all about how it goes when everyone knows everyone else’s business.” I scan the food options to distract myself from how easy it is to lean into his strong form.

I’ve always craved touch and physical affection, but over the years, I’ve learned how to get by with the bare minimum.

My eyes slide to the side, taking in Miller’s wide shoulders. With some guys it’s impossible to tell their designation until you catch a whiff of their scent, but it’s clear just from his size and the dominance that rolls off him in waves.

Miller is an alpha through and through.

“I know my dads never let my mom or sister go out without someone around to keep them safe,” Miller grumbles, glaring at a group of guys at one of the tables.

I guess he's still stuck on me not going anywhere alone. I'm not going to fight the rules of The Exchange, but I do find his concern to be charming.

"Alphas outnumber omegas like seven or eight to one." He shakes his head. "It's not worth the risk."

"My dad's left when I was thirteen," I say, pulling out of his grip to grab a tray. "They didn't want anything to do with me or my mom. I've always looked after myself."

"Shit," he says, catching up to my side. "That's disgusting. Leaving a partner is one thing, but a child is a completely different story."

"My mom is impossible to deal with under the best of circumstances," I reply before I can stop myself. There's no reason I should stick up for them after all these years later, but I still do. "Two trays or will one do?"

"Exactly how hungry are you?" Miller asks, cracking a playful grin. "I mean I can fill one on my own, but I feel like that's bad form on—"

I laugh, tilting my head so I can study his pink cheeks. "Were you going to say on the first date?"

"I just meant . . ." He doesn't bother finishing as his head shakes.

It's kind of adorable. It seems like maybe he's a little nervous around me. I'm not sure, but it's endearing as hell.

He sets the tray on the line and pulls me back to his side with no trouble, like I don't weigh a hundred and seventy-five pounds without shoes on.

It reminds me a bit of the way the alphas at The Exchange in North Carolina acted with their omegas.

"I do love to eat," I assure him, bumping my hip against his. He looks a little miserable, and it doesn't sit well with my impulses. "But I think we can share one and come back for seconds if necessary."

"Yeah, that's true. Sorry, I need you here." Miller gently moves me until I'm between him and the food bar. His warmth

cocoons my back and my nipples tighten painfully.

It's so unexpected that I gasp.

"Sorry," he says again. "My impulses are demanding I keep you close and safe. I'm thinking your heat is coming up quick."

I don't know what to do with myself right now. His concern is kind of addictive.

I'm here to be matched because I want a future filled with a pack that looks at me like Everly's pack looked at her in North Carolina.

Hell, I'd even settle for an alpha looking at me the way Viktor looked at Anastasia. Sure, half the time it seemed like he couldn't decide whether he wanted to spank her or strangle her, but their chemistry was off the charts.

I'll take that over cold indifference any day of the week.

It's ridiculous to get my hopes up. If I start counting on his protection and affection and it turns out to be all part of his job?

Ohmigod, not only would that be mortifying. I think it might be more than my heart can handle right now.

It's times like these that I loathe my upbringing.

I can't tell if I'm majorly misreading the situation.

Maybe this is how respectable alphas act when they have an omega under their care. Crap, in all likelihood, I'm just a job to him, and I'm over here daydreaming about cuddling up to him in my nest.

Being an omega can be so damn frustrating at times.

"Do you have any allergies or foods you don't like?" Miller asks. His warmth frames my back as his face appears over my right shoulder.

I swallow thickly, shaking my head. "No allergies, and I'm not picky. I don't care for a lot of shellfish or seafood, but I'll eat it if I need to."

“I don’t eat a ton of seafood either, especially if it comes in a shell. You’ll want to avoid the other restaurant. It’s very New England.” He chuckles. “I feel like the smell permeates everything. I guess I’m easy to please. I’ll take a steak and a loaded baked potato any day of the week over lobster.”

“Me too,” I agree, smiling at him. My chest rises and falls quickly as I get another strong hit of his scent.

I could have looked really silly just now. I know seafood is popular up here, especially crab and lobster.

Miller’s hand falls to my waist as he guides us closer to the food. My hand shakes against the tray as I try to figure out if all alphas are this touchy feely or if maybe he’s as attracted to my scent as I am to his.

Chapter Six

Nik

“**S**he’s obviously a match,” Oliver says, yanking the scent card back and taking another huge whiff. His mess of curly white-blond hair falls in his eyes as he glares at me from behind his black glasses.

It’s a legitimate struggle not to punch my packmate in the face and tear the scrap of cloth and cardboard out of his hands. He’s breathing so deeply that I’m pretty sure he’s going to have soaked up all the smell and then I’m going to have to murder him.

“You’re wasting it,” I snap, trying to yank it back.

“Fuck you,” he grumbles, petulantly spinning in a circle.

Oliver might be skinny as fuck, but he’s got three or four inches in height on me and extremely long arms.

Unnaturally fucking long now that I think about it.

He stretches the scent card toward the ceiling and shoves me away with the other. I snarl, slamming my chest into his back.

Oliver growls, slapping at me again, and I’m surprised when he pops his ass back, knocking me off kilter.

I’ve stared down a line of defense that could have broken my spine if they hit me wrong and never blinked.

I can take Oliver if I have to.

“Oh yeah, you guys are totally fucking fucked,” Claude says, chuckling darkly. “I’m a little disappointed we don’t

have a camera in this room. I could make bank using it for blackmail purposes.”

The lab specialist shakes his head like he’s truly enjoying watching Oli and me go at it.

“You’re fired,” I snap, jabbing a finger at his chest. “Give me the bag before you collect your belongings.” He doesn’t listen, so I lunge for it.

“Holy shit,” Claude says, spinning around and heading for the door *with* the bag. “Go sniff her yourself, you fucking lunatic.”

“Find a new job,” I growl at his retreating back.

I frown because Nathan will be extremely fucking pissed if I start firing his employees left and right. My brother and I might own equal shares of the resort, but I can admit I’ve left him to handle the business for so long that I didn’t even complain when he started demanding an extra fifteen percent of the profits.

“God, it feels like your brother has been gone for ages. How much longer until he gets back? I want a raise.” Claude sighs. “I deal with shit like this every day. Why do you think I’m the one who administers the scent cards?”

Well, that’s a very good point. Farrah Chamberlain, the resident nurse practitioner, is tiny. She’s not someone I’d want going toe-to-toe with a half feral alpha. Especially not now that I realize how insane a highly compatible scent can drive an alpha.

Farrah has been here since I was a teenager. Claude has been here for years too. It would be irresponsible to let him go.

“Fine, you’re not fired,” I assure Claude, approaching with my palms raised.

Oliver is still huffing away at Melody’s scent card. His back is facing me, but I can see the goofy smile on his face. This is a good thing, all three of us need to be in agreement if we’re going to court an omega, and it’s very clear that we are.

“You can keep your job, but I am going to need those remaining cards.” I give Claude a tight smile and barely hold myself back from lunging at him.

“Arm wrestle your packmate for that one,” he says, snorting a laugh. “But let me just grab my phone first. Nathan is never going to believe this. I’m going to need proof.”

“I changed my mind,” I grumble. “You’re absolutely going to need to find new employment.”

“Moody fucker,” Claude says, laughing. “So what do you intend to do? You better move fast. She hasn’t got a match yet, but even the few sniffs I got told me she’s extra sweet. Ten bucks says she’s got three different packs following her around the first time she makes it to one of the mixers.”

“No way,” Oliver groans, finally turning away from the wall. “We should lock her in the penthouse and never let her escape. Actually we should snatch her and head back to Virginia . . . Now. I can handle booking us a flight.”

I do a double take. Oliver is normally very passive, but we’ve all noticed he’s been acting increasingly feral the last year or so.

It’s strange considering he’s the youngest of us by nearly ten years.

I jab a finger at Claude. “Don’t say a word. He was obviously joking.”

“I’m not sure I was,” Oliver says, shoving his glasses up.

“For the love of God, shut up,” I growl.

My packmate doesn’t have that brain-to-mouth filter other human beings have. Most of the time, I love that about him because he’s one of the realest people you’ll ever meet.

Now is not one of those times.

“Yeah, that’s not mildly concerning or anything,” Claude says, glancing at something on his clipboard. “So when my temporary boss is the one spewing one of the red flags . . .” He spins the file around. “Who exactly am I supposed to report it to?”

The list of statements and concerning behaviors taunts me as he taps a long finger against it.

“Oh, fuck off.” I swipe a hand over my face.

“That’s not an answer.” Claude chuckles. “You’re lucky I know you’re not normally feral. Don’t do anything you’re going to regret.”

“Come on,” I say, grabbing Oliver’s shoulder and leading him out. “We need to find Miller and put in a formal request for courting.”

“I think he’s on the verge of stabbing someone with that fork and butter knife,” Oliver mutters as we walk into the buffet. “Just for looking at her.”

“I know,” I chuckle giddily.

I’m fucking thirty-five years old. Nothing makes me giddy anymore. Except for the sight of Miller sharing one side of the table with the darling little omega.

The fact our normally jovial packmate is shooting murderous glares at anyone who glances in their general direction practically makes my dick hard. Fine, it’s been hard since I got a good sniff of her scent card. I can’t even bring myself to feel guilty about it because it’s biology.

“Hey,” Miller says, giving us a tense smile as we slide into the opposite side of the booth. He makes introductions and turns to offer Melody a bite of thinly sliced pot roast.

Oliver stares with his mouth hanging open. That’s a very good sign indeed. Not to mention Miller is the least likely to take initiative with a woman. I’d be less surprised to find Oli had charmed someone in a few hours than I am to see Melody so comfortable with Miller.

“You’re packmates?” Melody asks, pulling her hand up to cover her mouth as she finishes chewing her bite. She glances between the three of us.

“We are,” I agree, extending a hand over the table.
“Nikolas.”

I wait, fully prepared for her to light up at the sound of my name. She doesn't. There's not even a hint of the nervous anticipation others get when they recognize me.

Melody places a soft hand in mine, and a slow grin crosses my face. I fight the urge to do something cliché such as bringing her wrist to my mouth to kiss.

I'm obviously reforming into a respectable adult.

She pulls her hand away and offers a hesitant smile. “It's very nice to meet you,” she says, glancing between Oliver and me.

I don't believe in love at first sight, but I'm developing an unhealthy addiction to the way the omega squirms in her seat when all three of us study her.

“Here,” Miller murmurs, lifting a bite of carrot in brown gravy and offering it to her.

I frown at the concoction. I much prefer sweeter options like glazed baby carrots, but I suppose it does fit with the dish he's currently serving her.

“How are you liking everything?” Oliver asks, leaning across the table.

I nearly snicker. If he stretches much further, he's going to be in her lap.

“She hasn't gotten the chance to see much outside of the nest in her room,” Miller says, holding out his fork.

“I'll eat this bite, but I'm getting full,” Melody says, wrapping her puffy lips around the silverware.

“Did you get dessert?” Oliver asks, eyeing the table like he's looking for evidence they had that first.

“No,” Miller says, chuckling.

“I'd love to see what they've got up there. There's always room for a few bites of dessert,” she says, bumping her shoulder against Miller's. “This guy wouldn't even let me

browse until I *ate the meal*.” She says the last few words mimicking his voice.

It makes me ache to devour her whole. She’s fucking adorable. There’s something about her energy that’s intoxicating.

“You’ll go with her?” Miller asks Oliver.

Oli nods, scooting into my side like he’ll fling me out of the booth if necessary.

I stand as Miller does the same.

Oliver climbs out and Melody’s jaw falls as she tilts her head higher and higher before giving a small smile. He might be skinny as hell, but he’s tall like a Viking or something.

They head toward the buffet, and I notice Miller’s eyes are glued to them. “She’s a match for all of us, isn’t she?”

“Fuck yes,” I agree. “And she didn’t recognize me.”

My packmates don’t understand my newfound obsession with anonymity. Being recognized has become increasingly tedious over the years.

I’ve forgotten what it’s like to have to win a woman over with my charm and not the star power of my name or my former ability to throw a football. But more than that, I worry what happens if I lead my pack into a bad match.

I’ve dated here or there and even come across omegas from time to time, but they only had interest in me. That type of favoritism would be the death of a pack.

I’m only interested in an omega who wants all of us equally.

I trust Miller with my life and safety on a regular basis.

I view Oliver like the younger brother I never had.

They deserve to be loved and cared for and not considered extra cocks to be pulled out during a heat.

“How are we going to approach the conversation?” Miller crosses his arms over his chest. I’m not sure what he means. It

could be courting in general or addressing who I am. “She was crying when I found her earlier.”

“Why?” I ask, turning to face him. “Did someone do something to upset her?”

“Not that I know of,” Miller replies. “She didn’t feel well when she first got here. Maybe she’s just overwhelmed.”

“I don’t like not knowing the full scope of the issue.” I yank at my shirt sleeves.

Miller sighs. “Here they come. We can talk more about it later.”

“It’s interesting that you went for the pina colada pie,” Oliver says, holding a plate full of dessert. He’s got his other hand on her lower back and she doesn’t seem uncomfortable as they approach.

“Why is that?” Melody moves to slide into her side of the booth.

“Because you smell a bit like it,” Oliver says, taking a seat on the other side. He pushes the plate between them and Melody immediately goes for her spoon.

Miller and I join them.

“Mmm, this is so good,” she groans, flicking her tongue over her spoon.

I clear my throat awkwardly. Now I’m getting hard again. Christ, it’s like being a teenager all over again.

“I’ve still got your scent card in my back pocket. Do you think you could refresh it with your scent for me?” Oliver asks nonchalantly as he scoops up a bite of vanilla ice cream from the side of the plate.

I sigh, shaking my head at the ceiling.

I should have seen that coming.

Oliver doesn’t understand that some things are better approached with tact or not at all. The first time we met, back when he was creating tech for my fitness app, it was one of the

things I found refreshing about him. It's less convenient now that I'm concerned he might frighten off our omega.

"We were hoping to discuss putting in a bid to court you," Miller says, turning to face Melody.

"Or at the very least ride out your heat," I add because she's looking a bit overwhelmed.

"I'm . . . Wait, are you serious?" she asks, twisting to face Miller.

"I'm very serious about needing to refill your scent card," Oliver says. He truly cannot read a room to save his damn life.

"That's very sweet," she says, giving him a soft smile. "I'm really fond of your scent too."

"That's great," Oliver says, laughing. "Does that mean you'd be open to us?"

"Don't look at me," Melody says, dropping her spoon and stretching back in her seat. "I have no clue how this stuff goes."

Miller takes the opportunity to pull her into his side. It's quite a smooth transition from where his arm was resting on the back of the booth.

I quirk an eyebrow, giving him a grin. I'm actually proud of him right now. The big bastard has zero game. I almost think he was saving it all up for the one day he'd need to use it, and apparently, that time has come.

"Are you interested in permanent matching or simply looking for a pack to ride out your heat?" I ask.

"I wasn't pre-matched," Melody replies, looking at her lap. "I came with pretty low expectations."

"That just means you have the luxury of options," I tell her, trying to figure out how to wipe that frown off her pretty face.

"I pulled up The Exchange rules on matching for owners," Oliver adds helpfully as he scrolls through his phone. "You have the right to an advocate and we shouldn't be having this

conversation here. It needs to be in the office with her file and our file.”

“Oh,” Melody says, shooting a confused look up at Miller. He’s running his fingers through her hair and she looks content despite her confusion. “Wait, you’re the owners of the hotel?”

“Nik is,” Oliver mutters, still studying his phone.

I frown.

I don’t think he was nearly as helpful as he intended to be. Although, I do vaguely remember signing rules when my brother and I took over for our moms. Having three female alphas and a female omega in one pack is rare, but my moms make it look seamless. That’s neither here nor there.

The point is when we inherited the hotel and this location of The Exchange, there was some controversy due to both of us being unbonded. It didn’t affect me nearly as much as Nathan since he’s here doing the day-to-day stuff.

We were still in our twenties at the time. That, combined with neither of us having a pack, made the franchise coordinator uncomfortable, but we were eventually approved for ownership.

There’s every possibility that was only because separating the hotel from The Exchange would have been a logistical nightmare.

“How about we do a little research while Melody gets a good night’s sleep?” Miller suggests. “Does that work?”

“Yeah,” Oliver agrees without looking up. “I think that will give us time to buy courting gifts and plan for our declaration meeting in the morning.”

“Christ,” I whisper, trying to catch Melody’s eyes. “Please understand that we don’t mean for you to feel obligated or pressured.”

“Come on, Mel,” Miller says, sliding out of the booth and pulling her with him. “Let’s get you settled into your room and we can set something up to discuss this stuff tomorrow.”

“Real quick,” Oliver says, pushing himself up and grabbing the scent card from his pocket. “Would you mind?”

“For the love of God,” I grumble, shaking my head.

Melody shakes out of Miller’s loose grip and turns back to Oliver. She wraps her hair around her other shoulder and leans over the table while giving him an indulgent smile.

A dubious sound escapes my chest. “You really shouldn’t reward his questionable behavior.”

“Is it questionable?” Melody asks, chuckling softly. “All I know is it feels like a compliment.”

“It should. You smell beautiful,” Oliver says, running the scrap of fabric over her throat. “I mean you know you’re really pretty, but you smell nice, too.”

“On that note,” Miller says, carefully helping Melody out of the booth. “We’re leaving before this conversation can go south.” He puts her on the side with the wall, and I chuckle under my breath.

“Do you think you can think through everything that wants to come out of your mouth the next few days and try to say only half of it?” I ask, bumping my shoulder against Oliver’s. He’s still huffing the scent card like an addict desperate for one more hit of her pheromones. “On second thought, let’s go with, like, twenty percent of whatever crosses through that magical mind of yours.”

Oliver gives me the side eye like he’s afraid I’m going to try to rip Melody’s scent away, and all I can do is laugh.

I’m pretty sure everything just changed.

My moms bought the resort almost forty years ago back when it was a dilapidated old hotel. It got a major facelift and a shit-ton of upgrades and a new life as a resort. There is golf on the island, hiking, fishing during the warmer months, and a whole host of other activities.

The locals still refer to it as the hotel on the cliffs, but it's no longer the monstrosity I remember from my childhood years.

I'm sitting at Nathan's desk listening to Kara, The Exchange coordinator, explain a million things about why there are stricter rules in place when it's an owner's pack bonding.

Oliver lies sideways on the couch, doing something on his tablet. I briefly consider telling him to find a local lawyer to draft the paperwork, so I can gift my remaining percentage of the resort to Nathan and his pack.

The more Kara drones on the less I care about my inheritance and the more I realize the absolute bullshit my brother has had to put up with for all these years. It's very clear that I don't know half the rules and regulations an owner is supposed to abide by.

I don't consider myself an overly shady person, but I do think some of their guidelines are ridiculous. Why would we need to offer Melody the chance to meet other packs? We're a compatible match. It's highly unlikely she'll find another perfect pack, especially when it's winter in New England.

This is one of the larger Exchange franchises, but we aren't even at forty percent capacity. That's partially due to the awful fucking weather and also due to the fact my brother took four supervisory members of his security staff with him on his honeymoon. That's likely because they're part of his pack, but he sure did leave me with a clusterfuck in the making.

"Oli, do me a favor—find McAnders contact information. I think I'd like to give my remaining percentage of the resort to Nathan as a gift for finding his omega," I say, raising an eyebrow at Kara.

"You didn't listen to a damn word I said," she says, swiping a hand through the air. "You're not barred from courting an omega, but you must abide by her contract. Kiernan Daniels is coming into town. They need us to take six omegas from the New York location. They had a pipe burst and we're accommodating them—"

Kiernan is the regional director for The Exchange.

“Wait, is that a good idea with the Nor’easter on the way?” I ask, frowning. I guess I wasn’t listening.

“Christ,” Kara says, shaking her head. “Kiernan is bringing their security. All we have to do is feed and house them. Back to what I was saying. He’d like you to complete a personalized contract with the omega if it comes to that. It’ll give all of you the added protection.”

“Understood,” I say, eyeing Oliver. “What are you doing?”

“Researching courting gifts and buying them from the three of us. I’m not sure they’ll arrive before the storm,” he says without looking up.

“Your brother could not have picked a worse time to take a month-long vacation,” Kara grumbles, spinning around and heading out.

“Shit, sorry,” Miller says, slamming the door open as Kara goes to leave.

She jumps back, cursing under her breath. The two sidestep each other several times before Kara gets frustrated and simply elbows Miller out of the way. The door closes loudly behind her, and Miller makes his way across the room before tossing himself down in the chair opposite me.

“All right, let’s make a game plan.” Miller smiles so deeply his dimples pop. I don’t know what the hell changed when he met Melody, but I fucking like it.

Chapter Seven

Melody

My room is lonely. It makes me feel like a giant loser to be here in this super fancy hotel and be hiding in my suite.

If I were back home, I'd be jogging around my neighborhood trying to burn off some energy before bed. I never once felt like it was dangerous to go out after dark alone.

It's strange to hear how different life could have been if I were born into a normal pack.

The fact my fathers managed to leave my mom even after bonding blows people's minds when they hear it. For me, it wasn't that shocking. Then again, I was young, and I didn't understand how determined they had to be to make that choice.

It's pretty much unheard of, but after spending a quarter of a century dealing with her mood swings, I can firmly say that I get it. It's not that I don't love my mom because I do, but I'm also at a point where I can't live my life trying to make her happy anymore.

I know it's impossible, partially due to her mental health issues, and I also think she enjoys being unhappy, or maybe she finds comfort in the turmoil. I'm not really sure, but I'm not prepared to live like her for a lifetime.

A slow smile crosses my face when I remember the look Oliver had while he was sniffing my scent card.

Maybe it's weird, I don't know.

All I do know is that it's an incredible feeling to be desired even if he went about it in a kind of bizarre way.

I roll over in the nest desperately trying to catch any hints of Miller's scent, but I think I wallowed them away.

My heat is coming up, and I'll be horny all the time until it hits. The only thing I've found to combat that is to run until I'm about to collapse.

I have curves like most female omegas, but I've stayed decently fit over the years because I had to learn to find ways to exhaust myself. Running is my go-to for stress relief. It keeps me active, but I used to have a bad habit of obsessing about all my problems while I ran.

I leave the nest and aim for my room. I'm sure they have a gym in the hotel. Damn, I wish I were one of those people who get into the workout zone and that's all they can seem to focus on.

I've learned over the years to focus my mind on plotting scenes for my characters.

There were a lot of years where it's embarrassing to admit, but I spent hours of my life jogging around our small town waiting to see what I'd find. The sad thing is I regularly found something and yet, I still let him sweet talk his way back in.

I really am pathetic. There's no other possibility to explain the way I let myself be treated.

Nope, I can't continue to do this.

I undress and pull on my workout gear before gathering my hair up in a tie. Once I'm back in the suite, I eye the door and the phone.

I know I'm supposed to call for someone to escort me, but that seems so bizarre.

It's kind of nice in a way.

I mean, it's a weird feeling to recognize that strangers have more concern for my well-being than my ex-boyfriend did.

I frown, glancing at the clock and seeing that it's too late to bother Miller. Not that I really want him to see me stressed and gross after a workout.

I take several steps toward the door, but the urge to follow the rules is too strong.

Picking up the phone, I call the reception desk to ask for an escort.

There's a light knocking on the door.

I've already got my phone and my key card in hand, so I aim for it.

Checking the peephole, my stomach drops.

It's not Miller.

I'm ridiculous.

He deserves time off and it is nearly midnight.

I pull my shoulders back and unlock the door.

"Dylan Carver," a massive guy says as I open the door. He holds out an ID badge with his name and picture, which is nice since I probably wouldn't have thought to ask for proof. He's not as tall as Oliver, but if I had to guess I'd say he's probably close to Miller's height.

"Melody." I check the hallway like someone I recognize might jump out of hiding.

Being an omega is frustrating sometimes. I was lonely in the room, but it feels even stranger to be around someone I'm unfamiliar with.

"Yeah, I know," he says, giving me a once over. "What I don't know is why you're dressed like that when it's winter in New England."

"Wait, doesn't the hotel have a gym?" My hands fidget for no good reason and my phone almost goes flying.

He wraps a large hand around mine and steadies it between us.

“The resort does have a gym,” he says, frowning so hard wrinkles appear on his forehead.

Maybe I used the wrong word to describe the place? I don’t know, it looks like a hotel to me, and they rent rooms, but I’m not sure why he’s frowning so hardcore over an incorrect word choice.

“Perfect.” I finally let go of the door and it closes behind me. “Would you mind leading the way?”

He releases my hand, but my face burns.

I don’t know why I’m so awkward with new people, but it’s been like this my entire life.

I think I missed out on proper socialization or something as a kid. My mom has always been hard to deal with. She never wanted to be around other people, and until I went to school, I’d hardly ever even played with another child.

“Of course,” he says, extending a tattooed forearm. “I never would’ve imagined an omega asking for the gym.”

His large black watch slides around his wrist as he scratches at his ridiculously handsome jaw. His dark brown hair is shaved on the sides and longer on top. He has a short beard in the same color and it crunches as he swipes at his face.

“Well, now you can,” I say, and suddenly I’m the one frowning. That sounded like something my mother would say. A shiver runs down my spine. “Thank you. I know it’s late and this is probably the last thing you want to do.”

I give him a polite smile. Thinking of ending up like my mom is enough to put the fear of God into me.

“Nah, really I’ve got nothing better going on. I was flirting with the night receptionist, but that was mostly to keep myself awake. We’re short-staffed, so I’m pulling a double shift,” he says, pausing as we get to the end of the hallway. “Elevator or the stairs?”

“Stairs are fine.”

“Fuck,” he groans. “I knew you were going to say that.”

I give him a confused smile. He’s not in bad shape at all. He’s wearing dark jeans and the same black polo I’ve seen all the security guys in, except he’s wearing the long sleeve version with the sleeves pushed up. His broad shoulders fill it out quite nicely indeed.

My eyes dart away as I realize I was totally creeping on him.

“Let’s do it,” he grumbles, turning left to head down the flight of stairs.

“I can go back to my room if you’re short-staffed. I doubt I need security, but I did promise Miller I’d call if I left the room.”

“Nah, stop. I’m needlessly bitching. It’s kind of my thing,” he says, laughing. His country accent gets thicker. “The guys would have my damn head if they learned I let you wander around without an escort.”

I don’t know what guys he’s talking about, but my guess would be the owners.

“Do I call you Dylan or Carver?” I ask as we hit the bottom floor landing. I don’t think this is the lobby attached to the parking area, but I do think it’s the main floor of the hotel. It’s weird because of how the building is built into the cliffside.

“Whatever tickles your fancy,” he says, smirking dangerously. He shrugs. “Honestly, everyone calls me Carver. It may take a few tries to get a response if you call me by my first name.”

“Gotcha,” I reply as he leads us down a hallway I’m unfamiliar with. “Dang.” My mouth actually falls open when I catch sight of the wall of glass that frames the room we walk into.

“You haven’t been down here?” he asks.

“No,” I reply mindlessly, but my eyes are still glued to the sight. There’s a huge pool twenty or thirty feet away. Lounge chairs and tables with umbrellas line the sides of the wall that surrounds it, but they seem to be put away like how they’re stored for out of season weather.

“Do you mind if I change into my workout clothes before you get started?” Carver asks, scanning his badge and opening a door that seems rather unassuming.

I shrug. “Nope.”

It helps me feel better, like I’m not just burdening him.

We step into a small locker room and I’m kind of surprised, but it makes sense. The hotel staff would want somewhere to change and shower.

“Is there somewhere I should go?” I ask, eyeing the area.

“You can wait on the other side of that wall of lockers,” he says, chuckling.

Carver isn’t a bad workout buddy. The treadmill I’m on faces the wall of windows, and I swear the cold seems to seep inside. I’m pacing myself up when he steps to the side of the machine to offer me a zip-up hoodie.

It’s lightweight, and even though I’m exercising, I’m still chilly. I take it. It’s an entire process trying to get it on while not face planting, but I am eventually successful.

I jog, running through plot points in my head. The characters I’m writing for are two fan favorites. It makes it especially tough since a significant portion of readers wanted the hero to end up with the heroine in my last book. I have to be careful to make sure she doesn’t feel like a consolation prize.

My thighs ache as my chest heaves, but I don’t stop. I’ve heard there are some people who get a sense of euphoria when they work out hard enough. That’s not me, but I wish it were. I

push myself until the ache turns into numbness. It's the best I can get. I'm sweaty and miserable, but I keep going.

My phone vibrates again in the cup holder of the machine. I'm eventually going to need to block Ben, but it feels so final. I've never taken that step, not even once over the years.

I shake my head, pulling my eyes from the screen to keep myself from doing something ridiculous like answering.

Carver's low chuckle fills the air. I cut my gaze to the side and ignore the way my stomach flip-flops when he grins. He's a delicious man. The problem is his energy says he knows it. His arms are covered in black tattoos, but they're all big bubbly shapes. I'm sure there's a term for the style, but I don't know it. They've got bright pops of dark teal, purple, lime, and even a dark pink. He yanks the bottom of his sweaty T-shirt up, swiping his face, and my jaw falls.

I stumble like a total loser and have to grab the machine. He's cut with well-defined lines of muscle and so many abs. I think that might be an eight pack.

That's not natural.

I suddenly feel quite frumpy in comparison.

The call ends, but it only takes five seconds before the screen lights and Ben's picture pops up again.

"Late night booty call?" he asks, nodding to my vibrating phone. He hits the buttons on the machine and continues pacing himself down.

My ponytail swishes from side to side as I do the same with my machine. "An ex who hasn't quite gotten the picture that I'm serious this time." I grimace, glancing away from his big brown eyes. They're a little too assessing and I feel a whole lot lacking.

I know I'm pretty enough. I've heard it my entire life, but my self-confidence is shot. I've spent a lot of time questioning my worth because of Ben and his games.

"I've never called *anyone* seventeen times in a damn row. What the hell is that guy's problem?" Carver asks, tossing me

a towel.

“He’s likely drunk and didn’t find anyone new to take home at the bar tonight,” I blurt out and bite my lip to keep from saying anything more.

“Right,” he says, brushing a sweaty curl away from my eyes.

My hair is naturally wavy, but it always turns into a mess of curls when I work out and it never manages to all stay in a tie. He towers over me as I continue wiping off to distract myself from how close he is. He’s big for a beta, but I guess it makes sense—having a security team filled with alphas could be problematic, especially if an omega goes into heat.

“So you’re sayin’ that this isn’t outside of his normal behavior?” Carver’s country twang sounds even more pronounced as he finishes his question.

Betas can’t bark like alphas can, so I know his question wasn’t a bark, but the dominance in it still rolls through my system.

My head shakes involuntarily. “I’ll text him tomorrow and ask him again to stop. If I answer now, it’ll be nothing but an argument.”

“Ask? Christ,” he mutters. He spins around, snatching my phone from the holder before I can stop him.

“What in the world are you doing?”

The ridiculously tall, infuriating man slides his finger across my phone, answering the call.

“Chill, baby, I got this,” he murmurs in a sensual tone that sends a shiver down my spine. It’s definitely not the normal cadence of his voice. “What can I help you with?”

I sputter out a choked cough as I can hear Ben snap something into the phone.

“Yeah, she’s right here. She’s all sweaty and worn slap out,” Carver says, biting his lip as he gives me a playful look that says *how’s that for a double entendre?* “I don’t think she’s

going to be doing much talking for a while. She's still trying to catch her breath."

Ben snarls something that I can't make out.

Carver pulls the phone away from his ear a bit. "Listen, bro. I *totally* get why you've got your panties in a bunch. Mel is *certifiably* fucking fine, but she's also done with your shit." He chuckles. "That's what happens when you play games. Females might put up with your garbage for a while, but they always figure out their worth eventually."

My heart races as I stretch on my tiptoes to try to grab the phone. A huge part of me is reveling in hearing someone besides me tell Ben that I have value, but an even bigger part is panicking because I know he's going to freak out.

I get close to grabbing Carver's wrist, but he slaps my ass with his free hand.

"Stop," he says, chuckling darkly. "Or I'll give you more than a playful slap." His eyebrows rise and my stomach flip-flops in response. He's sweaty and his scent is strong. It makes it difficult to focus.

Ben continues to scream into the phone, but my eyes are locked with Carver's. He's been hiding a set of deep dimples under that short scruffy beard. They become even more apparent as he smirks and wiggles his eyebrows.

"Aww, baby, you're so short. If you wanted to climb me, all you had to do was ask," he taunts Ben. "You know I'm more than happy to help with whatever you need."

I should find it highly inappropriate considering we don't know each other, and I didn't ask him to act like this. But no one has ever challenged Ben for me, which is likely why I was never a priority to him.

There's more angry growling on the phone, but as I stare up at Carver's twinkling brown eyes, I'm whacked with another strong hit of his scent. His hand lands on my hip to steady me as I wobble. My nose twitches as I breathe him in. He's got the same base scent most betas have, but Carver

smells woodsy and almost electric, like the way the air smells right before a strong storm.

I'm leaning against his chest since I was desperately trying to get the phone from his grip, and now all I can feel is the warmth of his body pressing against mine. My thighs clench as I get another strong hit of his manly smell. I roll my lips together to muffle the moan that tries to escape.

"Right," Carver says placatingly, running his hand up and down my side. "I hear you, man. All I'm saying is, she wouldn't be here all sweaty and up in my personal space if she was still interested in you."

He raises an eyebrow like he's daring me to contradict him.

I do not.

Mostly, it's stressful contemplating the fallout when Ben freaks out over this.

It's like a light bulb goes off.

I don't have to deal with his shit anymore.

A wide smile crosses my face.

"Well, you've said that three or four times now. My recommendation is find somewhere to sleep it off and don't call Melody again." Carver chooses that exact moment to slap my ass.

I gasp and he chuckles darkly as he hangs up. His huge hand is still on my butt and hip. My chest is pressing against his side. I shouldn't be all up in his personal space. I move to take a step back.

"I much preferred that playful little smile you had a minute ago."

"I don't think that helped anything," I whisper, shaking my head. "But thank you for trying. I know it's petty, but it does feel good thinking he'll be the one to hurt for once."

"Shit," Carver mutters. "You're not over him."

My jaw falls.

“I don’t know why that would be any of your business.” I take a step back and stumble over the end of the treadmill.

He instantly grabs me, pulling me into him. “Don’t hurt my friends. Miller really likes you and Oliver is as sincere as they come.”

My heart races both from the near miss of almost falling and the seriousness of his tone. I swallow thickly, glancing away from his searching look.

I like them too, but it’s not really comparable, is it? Nearly ten years of history trumps knowing someone for a day, even if I am wildly attracted to their scents.

“Aww, fuck. You’re *really* not over your ex,” Carver says, giving my hip a squeeze before taking a step back. “Come on. I’ll get you back to your room.”

I don’t argue. I let him guide me out of the gym because I understand exactly how ridiculous I seem.

Carver aims for the stairs and we head up toward my suite.

No matter how much I wish I could flip a switch and just turn off those emotions, I don’t know how to shut them off.

I wish I did.

It would be a lot less embarrassing.

A whiny sound slips from my lips and Carver stops dead in his tracks.

“Do you have a cramp? Do you need some water? Is your cat dying? Oh shit, did you smuggle your pussy into the resort? I don’t think we allow pets.” He gives me a once over.

I scoff.

“You’re insane,” I grumble, checking the wall to see if we’re on my floor.

“So your kitty is fine and you don’t have a cramp. What’s up? Tell me why you’re going all pouty omega on me.”

I blink for a few seconds before turning to head off down the hallway.

“It’s actually this way,” he says, gently grabbing my arm and pulling me in the complete opposite direction.

“You didn’t even get to change back into your clothes,” I say, watching his shoulders flex under his workout T-shirt.

He shrugs. “I’ve been working for like sixteen hours. I’m calling it after this.” He swipes his key card to get into the locked omega wing, and I head down the hallway.

“Here’s your sweater,” I reply as we come to a stop at my door. I pull my key card out of the weird pocket on my leggings and move to yank off Carver’s zip-up hoodie.

“It’s cool,” he says, gently giving my wrist a squeeze. “You can keep it for now.”

“Thanks.” I move to unlock the door.

“Don’t forget this.” Carver hands me my phone over my shoulder as I bump open the door with my foot. “You think he’ll bother you again tonight?”

“I’ll be fine.” I step inside giving him a little wave. “Thank you for keeping me company.”

“No problem, Mel.” He leans against the doorframe, and I’m once again smacked with his delicious scent. “Do me a favor?” He moves even closer, brushing the same hair away from my face. “Turn your phone on silent and don’t answer if that fuck face calls again. Some of the shit he was spewing . . .” He shakes his head, sighing loudly. “You don’t need to hear that. Let him sober up, and even then, ignore his ass.”

My jaw slides side to side as my eyes squeeze shut.

“Right, I’m guessing he’s always a total fucking twat?”

My eyes pop open.

His jaw clenches, and he raises his eyebrows like he’s waiting for a response.

I hate that someone else witnessed the way Ben talks to me when he’s drunk. Embarrassment floods my system as my face burns.

I step backward into my suite and give him the sincerest smile I can fake. “Have a good night, thanks again.”

His huge hand lands against the door, making me startle. He studies me for a few seconds. I almost think he’s going to continue to push the issue, but he finally gives a nod and backs away.

“Have a good night, Melody.”

The door closes. Even though I know it has an automatic lock, I still flip the bolt catch thingy.

My head falls against the door as I stare at the ceiling. I need more out of life than waiting around for an alpha who is never going to appreciate me or see my worth.

It’s the entire reason I’m here—to find a future outside of our gossip-ridden small town.

I want to build a future with trust at the foundation of my relationship.

I don’t trust Ben.

I know this.

I haven’t in a long time.

I don’t know if it’s even fair for me to be here. I’m still in love with someone else, so how the hell am I supposed to build anything new?

Can I really afford to go back home and spend the next year healing from a relationship that was broken longer than it was healthy? No, I don’t think I can.

I’m here now, and it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity. It’s time to put myself first for a change. I won’t be dishonest with any of the packs that might consider courting me, but I also can’t see letting my past hold me back any longer.

Chapter Eight

Oliver

Being genius-level intelligent is a gift, but it's also a curse. Add in the fact that I have off the chart eidetic memory skills, and it's easy to get trapped in replaying events.

In the moment, I rarely realize when people are making fun of me or someone considers my behavior off-putting.

It's later once my anxiety and adrenaline settle down that my brain decides it would be an excellent time to replay every nuance of the conversation. That's when I tend to recognize that I did something embarrassing.

I spend hours obsessing over every second of my time with Melody. The only thing that gives me a glimmer of hope is that in all the times I replay the conversation, she seems more amused than mortified or appalled.

I might be crossing a line right now, but I don't care. I *need* answers. I use one of the all-access key cards to open the door and carefully slip through the suite.

It's dark with all of the curtains pulled.

As quietly as possible I open the door to the bedroom and tiptoe inside.

This is a covert mission . . . Until I spot Carver all sprawled out like he doesn't have a care in the world. The urge to smother him with a pillow is strong.

"Why the fuck were you all over Melody last night?" I snap, leaning over his bed.

Fine, maybe my covertness was unnecessary, especially since I just ruined my advantage.

I easily recall details once I've learned them, and I read *a lot*. It's not unusual to come across random facts that can be used to cause pain and suffering.

He really should be more aware of his surroundings.

He was in the military just like Miller. It's why they both go by their last names, or maybe it's because they're part of our security team. I don't know, but I'm annoyed by everything to do with him at the moment. Especially since I know how easily women seem to fall for his tacky charm.

"Are you ever going to answer me?" I snap.

My glasses slide down as I lean over. I shove them up, but I end up jabbing myself in the nose. My ADHD is always worse when I don't sleep. I'm a jittery mess, but this is serious.

"Oliver?" Carver groans, rolling over to face me. "What the hell, man? I worked a double yesterday. What time is it?"

"Five after eight," I reply, reminding myself that I don't want to end up incarcerated.

Murdering a friend without prior planning would lead to me getting caught. Meaning I have to be smart and fight the alpha fog that's trying to slip in.

"How did you get in?" he mumbles. He's the only one of us not staying in Nik's moms' penthouse. He could have, but he's not part of our pack.

I guess he wanted his own space.

"I used a key card. Catch up," I snarl. "What happened between you and Melody last night? Who was on the phone?"

I frown, swiping curls away from my face. They're so annoying. I bump my glasses and haphazardly rearrange them because I need to look serious and imposing right now.

I wasn't supposed to mention that I spent the last few hours watching every second of their interactions from the

time they left her suite until he returned her over an hour later.

I'm pretty sure that would make me sound creepy, which I'm not.

"I'm sleepy," he groans, grabbing my arm. "Cuddle with me and think soothing, sleepy thoughts."

"I'm going to murder you." I slap away his hand, but he's stronger than he looks. He yanks me into the bed with little effort.

"She called for a security escort. I wasn't about to let any of the night shift guys take the call, so I brought her to the gym . . ." He goes on to explain about her drunk ex calling repeatedly. He pulls up the blanket. "I'm cold, snuggle close."

I frown.

We're coworkers and I guess friends, but not the type of buddies that cuddle in bed on a Sunday morning. However, it is kind of chilly in his room, so I kick off my shoes and pull my legs up onto the bed.

"Stay on your side," I grumble, crossing my arms over my chest. "Are you interested in her too?"

"She's really fucking pretty," Carver mumbles, tossing an arm over my stomach. "Just enough curves that you can tell she's an omega, but it almost seems like she doesn't realize she's the one in demand. By the way, her ex is a fucking dick."

I continue to frown at his heavy arm, which is *still* touching my person.

He goes on to explain everything that her ex said. It sounds like he's borderline verbally abusive from Carver's rendition of the events.

It would be nice if humans were programmable like video game characters. I wouldn't turn down the ability to psychically murder him from across the country.

"I get the feeling the way he was talking last night wasn't unusual," he finally finishes. "I think he convinced her she was lucky anyone wanted her at all."

My mind races. I nod my agreement. She didn't seem aware that the masses will descend upon her at the first mixer or group activity she attends. That succeeds in sending a pang of pure panic through my system.

"You've never had a girlfriend, and she's coming out of a problematic relationship with an asshole who didn't know how to keep his dick in his pants," I say, gripping the caveman's arm and lifting it off my middle. It falls to the mattress with a heavy thump. "If you do a single thing to fuck up my pack's chances of courting her . . . then I'll find a very obscure way to murder you. It'll be so completely random that no medical examiner would ever think to check for it."

I shove off the blanket and prepare to push myself out of Carver's bed.

"You've never had a girlfriend either," he muses, petulantly tossing up his middle finger.

"Yes, but I also don't have a reputation of sticking my cock in anything that moves," I retort, rearranging my glasses.

"That was unnecessary," Carver says, grabbing a pillow and chucking it at my head. I barely duck in time. "Get the hell out if you're going to be an asshole."

"Remember what I said because I meant every word," I assure him before spinning to leave his suite. "Keep your distance if you aren't serious about putting in the effort required."

By the time I make it to the restaurant I've already pulled up everything I can find on Melody Webber. I've got her family history at least as far as legal documents and medical records go.

I've also got the basics on Benjamin Hall. He's a total dick. He's been arrested multiple times for drunk and disorderly conduct and fighting. He's a stereotypical alpha on the edge of going feral.

It's concerning because my doctors have made it clear that I'm edging my way there faster than they'd like. They make it seem so easy to find an omega and soak up their soothing pheromones.

It's fucking not. Not by a long shot, even being at The Exchange hasn't helped.

Over the last two weeks, I've sniffed scent cards all day and never felt so much as a twinge of attraction . . .

Not until Melody.

They aren't fucking joking about the pull between compatible alphas and omegas. It's an undeniable connection. Her scent immediately sends a jolt to my cock every single time I catch a whiff of it, but more than that . . .

I actually want to touch her.

I very rarely crave sex. That's not to say I don't have sexual desires because I do, but I know I'm more than capable of jerking off and getting the job done. Human contact, for the most part, seems like a lot of work just to have an orgasm. Or it did until Melody fluttered her lashes at me while saying it's a compliment that I have an unnatural and unmatched addiction to her scent.

I scan the restaurant and quickly determine Miller and Melody aren't here.

It's weird.

His plan was to bring her to breakfast so we could all discuss the contract.

Yanking out my phone, my jaw falls as I get a look at the screen.

Miller, Nik, and I have a group chat, and it exploded while my phone was in my pocket.

I briefly scan through the messages as my brain races through what all this means. Melody was feverish and perfuming when Miller found her. He brought her up to the nest in the penthouse and called the nurse practitioner to do an emergency consult.

Shit, how did I miss so much happening in such a short amount of time?

They say things move fast with omegas, but I never realized it could be quite this quick.

I spin around and leave the restaurant. I need to be there *now*.

The building might be a hotel, but Nik's moms converted the entire floor on this side of the building into a massive penthouse apartment.

It's nice, I guess. I mean it's pretty and has a lot of stainless steel and cream walls, but it's also not very warm or welcoming.

It comes off more like a high-end apartment than a comfortable, warm, and cozy home.

I shove my glasses and shake out my hands.

I hope Melody likes it.

If she doesn't then I'll take her and head home to Virginia. If she doesn't like our house then she can pick her own, wherever she wants.

Well, if she likes us and wants to keep up a more permanent relationship.

"What's happening?" I ask, pushing myself forward so I don't stand frozen obsessing about what ifs.

"She wasn't in good shape when I found her," Miller says, swiping a hand over his face. He's pacing the floor bare in the sunken living room. "She's in heat or going into it . . . Fuck, we didn't even get to go over the personalized contract."

"She signed the generic one," I remind him.

The standard agreement has all an omega's dos and don'ts before they even arrive. It's to protect everyone in case an omega goes into heat immediately. It's extremely important

because of consent. Once an omega is in heat, they're more likely to give into the fog.

I know the nurse practitioner will be verifying that Melody is comfortable with us and going over the basics that she agreed to before arriving.

This is a good thing, I remind myself. She created that guideline well before her heat hit, meaning she was clear enough to fully think through each option. I signed it last night, but I do wish we could've done a specialized contract.

My mind won't stop racing through all the facts.

My stress is sky high.

Miller looks worse than I feel. He's clenching and unclenching his hands and weirdly shaking out his arms.

It seems like he's preparing to go into battle.

Exactly how bad of shape was she in?

"I'm sure Farrah is going over all the important stuff to get clarification. Was she okay?" I frown.

I was trying to find a way to put him at ease and that last question slipped out.

"She spent most of the night in agony, and *she didn't call*." His head falls back as it shakes. "Why didn't she call? She said she didn't want to bother us while we were sleeping."

"Shit," I whisper.

I don't like the sound of that at all.

She's not a bother.

Heats are an integral part of alpha and omega biology. It sends compatible alphas into rut, which helps lessen our aggressive nature. It's strange to think about, but it does help us stay calmer overall if we participate in helping an omega through their heat.

It doesn't hurt to be around them regularly either as their pheromones soothe our system. I'm aware I'm at a higher risk than normal for my age group to end up feral.

It's a terrifying thought considering I already view my brain as my greatest strength and simultaneously weakness.

"Where's Nik?" I ask, glancing around. Thinking too much is a dangerous rabbit hole to go down.

"He's in a meeting with Kiernan," he says, staring at the hallway that leads to the nest. "I want to be in there knowing what's happening."

"I get it," I agree. "Why would she be worried about being a bother? It's basically our entire purpose in life."

"I don't think her shitty ex helped matters any."

I'm starting to see a real pattern. First Carver mentioned it and now Miller. It's hard to believe anyone could take her for granted.

The door opens down the hallway and commotion heads our way.

Claude smirks when he catches sight of us.

Farrah Chamberlain is right behind him.

I've seen her twice since we've been here. I had to get special clearance to be around any omegas because of my diagnosis.

"Is she okay?" I ask at the same time Miller says, "How is she?"

"Melody is in the final stages of pre-heat," Farrah says, pulling her bag off her shoulder and handing it to Claude. "She passed the coherency test by the skin of her teeth, but I honestly think she's mentally more aware than most omegas we see at this stage. She's just in a tremendous amount of pain, which is hindering her ability to focus enough to rate clearer on the scale."

"What does that mean?" Miller asks.

"She's asking for you," Claude says, grinning widely. "All three of you actually."

Miller and I head toward the corridor.

“She needs regular temperature checks. Alphas are better equipped to handle an omega’s heat spikes and as such you might not notice. I suggested having a monitor . . .” Farrah glances between us, sighing loudly.

We continue inching toward the hallway.

“I’m having Carver check in since he’s the one you’re most comfortable with. Don’t do anything stupid.” She gives us a look like she doesn’t have high hopes of that happening.

Miller goes rigid next to me. “Did she ask for a monitor?”

“No, she declined, but it’s within our purview to assign someone,” Claude says, chuckling. “It really is wild how every single alpha loses the ability to think rationally around an omega in heat.”

“Take care of her,” Farrah instructs needlessly. “I get the feeling she thinks heats are mostly spent suffering. If the three of you aren’t enough—”

“We won’t leave her in pain due to the fact we don’t share well,” I assure her.

“Miller, can I speak to you for a moment?” she asks.

I ignore them because she didn’t ask for me and aim for *my* omega.

Chapter Nine

Melody

The nest in the guy's apartment is nicer than anything I've ever seen, which seems to be the running theme for this place.

The room is big and it has two parts. When you first walk in, there's a circular cushion sunken into the floor. It's unreal. There's even a huge television on one of the walls. There's a circular carpet around the giant mattress.

My feet dig into it as I desperately try to keep myself upright. It's soft and plush.

This place even has fancy carpeting.

I stagger toward the wall on the right. It has a full bathroom with a separate tub and shower and of course a toilet. I yank off my pajama dress as I go, tossing it carelessly behind me.

I need to get in the shower.

My eyes fly to the tub. A cool bath would help, but I don't have any time to waste. I stumble through the cutout in the glass, flicking on the overhead shower spray.

It takes forever, but I jam my finger around the controls for the touch panel until I figure it out.

The button lowering the temperature is as low as it will go, but I jab it again a few times for good measure. My arm wraps protectively around my middle as I battle my panties down with my free hand. Kicking them toward the back of the shower, I try to remind myself that this isn't my house.

The radiating pain sends a jolt through my entire body, but I don't want to look like a slob. I glance back at my wet underwear. They're really far away. It feels like way too much work.

I'm not wearing a bra, which is a good thing. It's one less item I'll have to pick up later. Back home, I always just left things a disaster and cleaned them up once I was feeling better.

My shoulder rests against the wall as the cool water pelts down on my skin.

Dammit, I should have grabbed a hair tie. It's going to be wet and annoying forever.

"Holy shit," Oliver says from behind me. "Are you okay?"

My cheeks feel like they're on fire, but as I spin around completely naked and trying to convince myself it's unladylike to pounce on him with no warning, my body seems to move of its own volition.

"Oh, okay," Oliver says, staggering back a few steps as he catches me. "You are hot."

"I am," I agree. "Wow, you smell delicious." We're near the door area, and he's not getting soaked in water because the shower is huge, but I did just plant my wet body all over his dry frame. "I'm so sorry. I got you all wet."

"It's all good. Did you need a shower?" he asks, frowning.

I'm pretty sure any other alpha would have taken full advantage of my word choice.

"My glasses aren't fogging up. Wait, are you taking a cold shower?" His hand flexes on my very naked bottom.

I bury my face in his neck. "I needed to cool off."

"I don't think a shower will help, not long term anyway." He nuzzles his cheek to the top of my head. "Are you good to get out? You should be nesting. If you're feverish then you need to be knotted. I read a few books last night. They were all about how to care for an omega in heat."

“You read multiple books in one night?” I pull back to stare at his face.

He grimaces, glancing away.

“You’re really smart, aren’t you? I read pretty fast, but I can barely finish a three-hundred-page book in an evening. That’s really cool. You’ll definitely have smart kids. Do you want kids?” He’s still not looking at me, so I continue to ramble, “I know I do. At least two or three seems like a good number. I’m an only child, and I was lonely all the time growing up. As an adult too, now that I think about it.”

Oliver spins us around with no notice. My back hits the wall and the cool tile feels great against my burning hot skin.

“I’m also an only child. And yeah, I’m down for a couple of kids.” His curly blond hair falls around his forehead as he gets close and pushes his mouth to mine. My feet dig into his denim-covered ass as I shove myself closer, gasping into his mouth. I love the idea of that. I want a family and I need it to be soon.

My impulses haven’t let up on that fact, and it’s only getting worse the older I get.

I moan into his mouth as my nipples brush the fabric of his T-shirt.

“Oliver, I need you,” I beg, my head nodding wildly.

He growls in response as his hands flex on my ass. It’s a dangerous sound that my body instantly responds to.

I leak slick to the point I know he’s going to be dripping in me. My face feels even hotter.

I’m not a super seductress, but I do know we’re compatible, and that should help.

My pussy aches feeling tender and empty. I *need* to know what it’ll be like being stretched around his knot.

My heart pounds rapidly as I imagine the faces he’ll make and the sounds that’ll escape as he fucks me. My desperation grows as my entire system pulses with a wave of heat that makes me arch into him.

He wraps his arm around my lower back and pulls me off the wall.

“Shit,” he mumbles, walking us into the spray of water long enough to turn it off. “I’m going to take care of you. I’d also really like to talk more about getting you pregnant.”

“Wait, did you sign the contract? My birth control shot probably isn’t still working,” I whisper, glancing away.

“I know,” he growls. He heads out of the shower and doesn’t stop in the bathroom. “And I did sign it.”

My skin is slick from rinsing off, but Oliver guides us around the cushioned mattress in the nest entryway and up into the den style nest. He’s got the slenderest build of the guys, but he carries me with no problem. He makes it up the stairs and tosses me down on the mattress.

My boobs bounce so violently they hit my chin.

God, that’s embarrassing. My thighs and lower stomach keep jiggling for a few seconds, but Oliver doesn’t seem to mind.

The look on his face is pure carnal desire. He yanks his shirt off and manages to climb out of his jeans as I scoot back on the mattress until my head hits the pillows.

I want his skin on my skin and him inside me, but I find myself wrapping up in the soft throw blanket that’s on top of the comforter.

It’s ridiculous.

Omega instincts don’t always make a whole lot of sense.

I need him in me, right now.

Why the hell does my system think it would be a good time to burrow?

“You can’t cover up all that soft skin,” Oliver growls, crawling up the mattress. I’m not sure when he pulled the sliding curtain, or got completely nude, but I’m immediately drawn to his long, thick cock bobbing as he moves. He prowls over me, and it’s strange to see him without his glasses. “You

started talking about kids and my brain instantly went to fucking you full of my cum.” He brushes his lips over mine. “It made me forget to ask. Can I kiss you, Melody?”

“Please do,” I beg, scratching at his shoulders.

He complies, kissing me as he grinds over me. My core aches feeling empty as my nipples pulse painfully. My lower stomach cramps worse than it ever has even when I was in full-blown heat.

“Oliver,” I murmur between frantic kisses. “I really need you.”

“My knot?”

“Yes,” I agree, giving him a shove. He rolls until his back hits the mattress. I rip the blanket off, tossing it aside. He’s so slender that a pang of insecurity slips through my system.

Omegas tend to have exaggerated curves. I know I’m on the slender side for my designation, but Oliver is skinny. I think I might weigh more than he does.

That’s not a very sexy thought.

Then again, he did carry me from the shower and hold me up with no problem.

Is it possible for someone to carry more than their body weight?

“Whatcha doing?” he asks, tilting his head and studying me.

What the hell *am* I doing?

I’m achy and desperate, but I’m more coherent than I should be at this stage. Usually all thoughts outside of being rutted disappear pretty quickly once a wave starts.

“Come on,” he says, gently gripping my arm and pulling me toward him.

My boobs land on his chest. I blush. I don’t even know why.

He helps me maneuver until I'm straddling him. I push up on my knees, trying to keep my weight off him, but his hands land on my hips. He pulls me down, grinding my slippery core over his impressive length.

"Yeah, like this. God, you're so slick." His huge hands cup my ass and he teases his fingers lower. "You know you're in control, right?"

"I don't really like being the one to make decisions," I whisper, leaning down and burying my face in his throat. I'm not sure why I'm self-conscious, but it seems to have gotten worse over the years, not better.

"You're the one who pushed me down. I'm not going to lie, it was surprising, but I really dug it." Oliver chuckles. "I'm all for you taking the lead. I haven't taken part in a heat before."

"You've never been with an omega?" I push up so I can look at him again.

My eyebrows raise as I watch him to see if I can pick up any dishonesty.

Wow, way to be rude and put him on the spot.

Ben destroyed my trust to the point it's hard to believe anyone with a dick. But it's also not fair to treat Oliver with mistrust due to someone else's actions.

"I've only tried sex a few times," he says, his eyes darting away. "I'm not sure why I said that. I gave myself a stern peptalk last night about the importance of not being embarrassing." He shrugs. "But it is the truth."

My nipples ache painfully as I study him. He looks a little miserable. His hard cock is buried between my thighs and I'm dripping slick.

"I've only been with one person," I confess, running my nails over his pecs. "I'm nervous too, but I like you."

Oliver surprises me by rolling us. His hand cups my head and I feel quite safe and protected as my back hits the nest

mattress. The fog gets so heavy it's hard to concentrate on anything except the way his hard body presses against mine.

My legs wrap around his ass as he grinds his cock against my pussy and kisses the hell out of me. His fingers are soft as they tease over my cheek.

I think I'm obsessed with how cherished it makes me feel. His vetiver scent is heavy in the air, and every time I gasp a breath between kisses, it only makes me foggier.

If I had a choice, I'd want to be completely clear for our first time together, but it's impossible to fight my impulses right now.

His hand wraps in my hair and tilts my head to the side. I blink up at him, unsure what to expect next, but my heart races as my anticipation grows.

He pecks a final kiss on my lips. I try to follow his mouth, but he's got other plans. He moves to lick down my neck, and since I'm not expecting it, I lunge for him again.

Chapter Ten

Oliver

“Ouch,” Melody grumbles as her chin connects with my eye. “I’m so sorry! Are you okay?”

“Shit, are you okay? I can’t see a lot without my glasses,” I say at the exact same time.

I’m pretty sure she just gave me a black eye.

My shoulders puff up with pride.

I just got my first sex-related injury.

“That was on me,” I admit. “Did I hurt you?”

“No, I’m good.”

“Let’s try this again,” I suggest.

“Please.” She nods wildly.

“You’re so beautiful,” I murmur. My tongue flicks down her neck as one of my thumbs brushes over her tight pink nipple.

“Thank you,” she says. “But I’m honestly fighting the urge to wrap my hand in your curls and shove you toward . . .”

I chuckle, shaking my head. I’d be fine if she did.

“You’re so much taller than I am that I think that might be impossible,” she mutters.

“We can make it work.” I rake my teeth over the curve of her breast and pinch her other nipple. She bows toward me. It makes me grin against her skin as she wiggles against my pelvis.

The fog slides in, growing thicker, and everything feels hazy as she claws at my back and shoulders.

A string of mostly incoherent begging spills from her lips as I flick my tongue over her nipple and gently bite her tit.

“Holy shit,” she moans. “You should do that to my clit.”

“I need you to tell me if I do anything you don’t like,” I say, pushing up to look at her.

“I will. I promise,” she whimpers. “I don’t like that you’re not inside me. You should do that now. It will make me very happy, and I’ll love it.”

“You’re really fucking cute.” I give her other nipple a quick suck before licking and kissing my way down.

She moans as my stubble tickles across her hip bone. I scoot back until I’m kneeling and give her a playful smile.

I have no idea when her fingers ended up buried in her pussy. I wrap my hand around her wrist and bring them to my mouth, grinning the entire time.

“Fuck,” I groan, noticing the line of slick that links her hand to her pussy.

God, it’s almost too much.

A low growl escapes as I lap at her small fingers. She tastes like sweet vanilla cream with tinges of coconut. “Fuck, Mel. It’s like I can’t get enough.”

I guide her hand back down, flicking her digits through her drenched lower lips and bringing them to my mouth again.

“I need you,” she sobs as her free arm falls to cup her soft lower stomach.

My eyes widen.

I need backup right now. Where the hell are Nik and Miller? They’re both way more experienced than I am. At least Nik is. Miller has ten years of life experience on me too.

“I’m twenty-four,” I tell her, tilting my head to study her face.

“I’m twenty-six,” she replies, but she’s in pain. It’s clear enough from her tone. “I don’t mind if you don’t.”

“It’s two years,” I say, shaking my head. “You’re hardly robbing the cradle. Nik and Miller on the other hand . . .”

“Oliver,” she whines.

I’m still frozen, holding her wrist.

My mind races through possibilities.

Do I slam my dick inside her?

What if that’s not what she’s asking for and I manage to hurt her?

They say alphas on the edge of going feral can disregard logical sense.

Why would they leave me alone with a fertile omega in heat? I could bite her or slip into rut.

“Try licking directly from the source,” Nik says, crawling into the nest like I summoned him with my thoughts.

“Yes, that’s what you should do,” Melody agrees, nodding wildly. “It hurts, Oliver. I need you, or both of you? That’s okay too. Actually I prefer that idea. I need you both *now!*”

“You’re still forming coherent sentences,” Nik says, pulling off his belt. “That’s good. Are you sure you’re okay with more than one of us being in the nest at a time?”

“Yes.” She stretches out her free hand for him.

I dive down, wrapping my arms under her ass, and bury my face in her puffy pink pussy. She’s bare of any hair, but I wouldn’t mind if she wasn’t.

“You’re okay,” Nik coos to Mel. He pulls off his shirt, tossing it behind him. He goes on to remove his pants and stretches out next to us. “Let me soothe you.” He brings his chest close enough to Melody’s face that she can hear his purr and likely feel it vibrate against her cheek.

I flick my tongue over her clit and revel in the taste of her pussy, but I’m not the expert. I’d really love some advice on

how not to embarrass myself.

My eyes fly to Nik's.

He nods in response.

"I feel like I'm on the verge of having a very unladylike fit if someone doesn't make me come," she grumbles.

Nik smirks dangerously. "Shh, let your alphas use your tight little body until you collapse from all the pleasure."

"God yes, do that," Mel whines, burying her hand in my hair.

She shoves my face in her sex. The snarl that escapes my chest only makes her wetter, which happens to be awful for my paper-thin self-control.

"Let's see if we can give you some direction," Nik says, chuckling darkly. "Lean up for me just a bit, gorgeous."

He helps lean Mel up until her heavy tits pull into teardrops. His tattooed hand wraps around her left breast and he smirks at me.

"Watch and do the same to her clit," he instructs. He purposely gives me a good view as he slides his tongue around her nipple keeping his face out of the way. His arm keeps her upright as she flails.

I shake away the fog. It's hard to focus, but I'm supposed to be doing the same except to her cunt.

My cock aches painfully as I grind against the nest mattress. I pull her plump pussy apart even further, but this close I can see her tight little hole clenching around nothing.

I do my best to follow Nik's instructions, but alpha fog is a bitch to fight, and with Melody's scent all over my face, it's impossible to stay clear.

Chapter Eleven

Nik

Melody writhes around, trying to collapse into the nest mattress as I suck her tit. It's the most enticing sight I've ever seen in my fucking *life*. Her perfume floods the air, making everything smell sweeter.

"Fuck me," she begs, wiggling around. "I need you inside me!"

My impulses are going haywire. It's difficult to remember that this experience is for all of us.

I want to shove Oliver out of the way and slam every inch of my rock-hard cock into her dripping pussy. The smell of her slick has my brain function running at baser level only.

Mount. Rut. Breed. Claim. It's the caveman loop, and it wants to ensure we make use of the fertile omega desperate for our knots.

"Where's Miller?" Melody peeks around to try to find him. Oliver leans up on his forearms, frowning. "Did he change his mind?" She pulls a hand up, slapping it over her mouth. "He did, didn't he?"

She looks like she might burst into tears.

I wish he could see how sad she is.

Miller is a stand-up guy, and he's the most overlooked member of our pack. I've got fans from my football career. Oliver is a tech genius and people recognize him. *Well, sometimes.*

Miller is a solid as fuck human being, but he always fades into the background to keep us safe.

It fills me with pure fucking joy knowing she wants him as much as she wants me or Oliver.

It's one of my major concerns and a huge part of why I've been so desperate to find someone who doesn't recognize me. I'd never forgive myself if they got stuck with an omega who pretended to want them just to get to me.

It sounds cocky.

I know that, but it's still a real possibility. Except it's clear that's not why Melody wants us.

"He didn't change his mind," I assure her, running my fingers over her cheek. "He's waiting for Carver. Farrah is worried the three of us won't be able to manage your heat. Carver is going to be your security."

"But Miller will be here soon?" she asks, blinking big blueish-gray eyes.

"I promise he'll be in the nest before you know it. Can I kiss you, gorgeous?" I ask and my dick jumps at the thought.

"Yeah, if you make Oliver do something other than stare," she grumbles.

It's ridiculously hard not to keep her all to myself. I want to ram my cock so deep inside her she'll never be able to forget the way it feels when I rut her full of my seed. I want her cunt permanently molded to the shape of my shaft.

I need her so desperate for me that she wouldn't think to look twice at another man. Ensuring she's carrying my baby would be a perfect way to deter other alphas from pursuing her.

God, my brain is fried with the scent of her perfume.

"Lick her pussy!" I bark, and Oliver complies almost immediately. Which is good because I am trying to share despite how my brain is screaming to do otherwise.

Melody moans into my mouth as I kiss her. Her hand wraps in Oliver's light blond curls. He's uncoordinated as hell, but Melody bows even further toward him. It's a surreal sight, and combined with her coconut and vanilla scent, it makes my knot pulse.

We need to breed her full of our baby and sink our teeth in, that way she'll never escape.

I lean my chest over hers, pushing until her back hits the mattress. She whines in response. I tease my tongue down her neck. She thrashes under me as my tip bumps her hip.

I grip her hand and bring it to rest on my throbbing cock, helping her work me over. "Feel that? I'm so fucking hard for you. God, I've never wanted someone this much in my life."

She moans long and loud. I use my abs to keep myself upright and pinch her nipple between the fingers of my other hand. She's gotten the hang of jerking me despite the awkward angle, and it's overwhelming my brain.

My tip is leaking. It's clear I'm foggy. All I can focus on is how those drops are wasted if my omega isn't soaking them up.

"How do you feel about letting us fuck you full of our baby?" I growl against her throat as her grip tightens on my cock. "You want us to breed you, gorgeous? You're not on birth control, are you?"

"Yes I do, and no I'm not," she gasps. "I was supposed to discuss it if a pack was willing to sign my contract. Otherwise I was told to handle it once I got here."

"Holy fuck, I managed to forget about that again," Oliver groans.

"You want us to breed you? Huh, Mel? You know you'll never get rid of us, right?" I taunt, wrapping my tongue around her nipple.

"Yes," she sobs, thrashing around.

I slide my hand over the top of her head and move up to kiss her. Our tongues clash as she continues to work my cock.

I'm really fucking glad she put that contract together before coming here. Otherwise I might feel like an opportunistic dick for wanting the same thing. An unexpected stab of jealousy hits me square in the chest. I don't like that it could have been another pack in our place.

"Please?" she begs.

I growl into her mouth. "I want to watch your belly get big with our baby and see you feed our child from your swollen tits."

"Yes," she whispers, nodding wildly.

I grin against her cheek.

"I need a knot," she sobs. "I'm too hot."

"No more fucking around," Miller growls from somewhere behind me.

A whimper escapes Melody's lips. "He's supposed to be here. I need him *now*."

"You've got all three of us, gorgeous girl," I assure her, pulling back until I'm kneeling.

"I'm here, baby," Miller says, crawling to her other side. He wraps his wrist around her neck, sliding his hand into the hair at the base of her skull, and tilts her face to his. "We've got you. All you have to do is let us take care of you. You can do that, can't you?"

She nods, but it's limited by the tight grip he has in her hair. He cuddles his cheek to hers and pecks a quick kiss on her lips.

"That's right," Miller growls. "You're such a good girl. You're *our* good girl."

Melody whines in response. I blink in surprise. I'm proud of him, he should be more assertive instead of always blending into the background. It's clear Mel likes it when he embraces his dominance.

"She's entirely too hot to keep fucking around. Oliver, why don't you let Nik take over and you can come up here. Our

delectable little omega can introduce you to the joys of getting your cock sucked.” Miller rakes his teeth over her throat and bites the skin where her neck meets her shoulder. “Do you want to taste him?”

“Yes!” She trembles, clutching at the back of his head with her free hand.

I’m blown away when Oliver looks at me and shrugs. Removing Mel’s hand from my cock, I swap places with him.

My breath fans over her very slick cunt as my mouth waters. It takes every ounce of self-control that I’ve got to keep myself from shoving my dick inside her.

My tongue runs over my teeth as my impulses scream to bite into her inner thigh. She wouldn’t be able to get away if she was properly claimed. We can court after the fact once she’s bred with our baby.

Fuck, being an alpha is difficult sometimes. Our instincts function on a baser level that doesn’t seem to understand polite society or even basic fucking consent.

I shake away those ridiculous thoughts.

I settle for flicking my tongue over her exposed clit. Her feet bounce against the nest mattress as she begs.

“I’ve got you,” I assure her, stretching out. Once I’m on my stomach, staring at her pussy, I shove two fingers deep inside her. My arm wraps under her left thigh, and I pin her hips down. She’s warm and so fucking tight that my eyes slide shut.

She doesn’t need my fingers, not really. What she needs is my knot.

“How is this supposed to work?” Oliver asks, drawing my attention.

“We’ll be with you in just one second. Jerk off for a bit and play with her tits,” Miller says in a commanding tone. He smirks down at Mel.

“I really like that look on you,” she moans. Her inner walls clench around my fingers, and it’s easy to believe her words

are true.

I'm desperate to see the faces she makes when I'm pounding into her *deep*. Her cunt starts to rhythmically contract, and it's like my brain fails to process anything except that we can lock her down permanently if everything goes well during this heat.

I'd like to see her try to escape.

Melody doesn't realize it yet, but she's found her pack. We're going to keep her so well-fucked that she never glances at another man again. Then we're going to pamper the hell out of her and sink our teeth in so she can never escape.

Chapter Twelve

Miller

My cock pushes painfully against my zipper as I study Melody's sweaty form. She's so beautiful when she begs that it's difficult to focus on staying clear. My impulses are demanding one thing, but my brain and morals are reminding me that I'm here to take care of her.

My wants are secondary to what she needs.

During a heat it's not unusual for an omega to beg with no idea of what they're asking for. They often make demands that their body isn't ready to accommodate.

"Knot me, please!" Melody's eyes meet mine. I don't think she knows who she's asking, and at this point, it wouldn't matter to her which one of us complied.

It's a very slippery slope. I don't feel like we know each other well enough to be taking this step, but I won't risk another pack being in our place.

I continue to gently rub her cheek, carefully caressing her skin. "Knotting will come soon, we just need to make sure you're ready for us."

"I am! I promise," she says, her head bobbing up and down. "I'm so ready to be stretched around you, please?"

She's cute, it's distracting. It makes it very difficult not to immediately give into her demands.

She's in an unfamiliar nest that she didn't have time to prepare properly. I'm sure her system is craving comfort and reassurance, which means I have to give it.

“How could anyone say no when you beg so sweetly?” I grin. “I can’t wait to see my cock wet with your slick as that pretty little pussy stretches around my knot. Will you be a good girl and let me fuck you deep?”

“God yes,” she sobs.

Oliver jerks his cock, staring at Nik as he eats her out. Apparently he forgot half the job I assigned him.

I chuckle.

He looks a little overwhelmed.

I flick my thumb over her nipple, cupping her heavy tit.

“Wait, you’ve been hiding dimples under that beard? I need to toss you down and climb on your face,” Melody says to me. “I think that smile just short-circuited my brain. Grin like that again, or fuck me. Either one.”

I laugh, shaking my head.

I’ve heard omegas can get bossy during a heat, but I don’t mind complying with this type of demand.

“You can sit on my face any time you’d like,” I growl, brushing my lips over hers.

“She tastes like fucking heaven,” Nik growls, working her pussy with his fingers.

“I need more than your mouth,” she mumbles against my lips.

“You’ll have it soon. Be a good girl and let him tongue fuck you into oblivion.” I slide my hand from her tit, up her chest, and give her neck a solid squeeze.

Mel whines something I can’t understand, but it’s clear her body appreciated my words. Her tits get tight as they bounce while Nik works her over.

Oliver scoots up close to her left side as he jerks off.

I give her a final kiss and pull back to give them a little space.

“I liked the neck thing,” Mel grumbles, but then she spots Oliver. Her face immediately lights up as she stretches a hand toward him.

“You’re beautiful,” he says, running his thumb over the dripping slit on the head of his dick.

Melody opens her mouth, sticking out her tongue. He swipes his pre-cum over it.

I don’t know what Nik is doing down there, but it makes her entire body tremble.

“I’m there,” she gasps.

“Come all over my hand for me, gorgeous,” Nik snarls before lapping at her clit again.

“That’s it, baby. Coat him in your slick,” I growl, moving to choke her again. I keep it at a light pressure, just enough that her impulses will enjoy the feeling of being trapped. My thumb teases over her lower jaw to let her know I’m here and to keep it sweet.

If sweet choking is even a thing.

Mel explodes. It looks like jolts of electricity shudder through her entire body. She moans and begs through her release.

The sight ramps up my desire and the haze slips in.

She’s so fucking beautiful with her pink, puffy lips parted as her eyes clench closed. The few freckles that line the bridge of her nose and cheeks stand out with how rosy her skin is.

“Nik,” she whines.

All three of us growl in response.

Carver’s low chuckle fills the air. Before we came in, he warned me he planned to stay close to the door.

We’re all in uncharted territory here.

I obviously like him as a person.

Otherwise, I wouldn’t consider him a close friend, but it’s difficult to remember that as the fog slips in.

I've never experienced this overpowering urge to murder everyone in the room so I can have my omega all to myself. Yeah, that's definitely alpha fog taking over.

I shake my head to try to stay clear.

She's our omega.

That means I have to share. She's already been fucked around by one alpha who left her in pain too many times because he was too selfish to share.

My fury reached dangerous proportions listening to Farrah explain a little of what Mel said to her. I didn't need the lecture the nurse practitioner gave me about sharing.

I'm not perfect, but I am better than that type of caveman behavior. Oh, I want to rut her through the mattress while locked as deep inside her as I can get, but I know it's nearly impossible for one alpha to satisfy the needs of an omega in heat.

We have the haze of rut to help us along, but it would take toys and zero sleep for up to five days, and even that's not a guarantee it would be enough for a single alpha to fulfill a heat.

It's why omegas are meant for packs.

"I need to be knotted," Melody says, staring straight at me. There's a pleading look on her face that I know I can't deny.

I'm unsure how I ended up the boss of this first round, but I've never had a problem taking the lead. In most cases, I defer to Nik since it's important to him to be the apex alpha in our pack, but that's more out of courtesy.

"Are you going to fuck our omega, or am I?" I ask, but I don't wait for his response. I pull her up until she's sitting. "Sit up against the pillows." I nod to tell Oliver I'm talking to him.

I'm still dressed, but from how thick Mel's perfume is, I wish I were the one about to lock my knot inside her.

Oliver scrambles to comply as Nik pushes up on his knees.

"What's the plan?" Nik asks, tilting his head predatorily.

“I’m not exactly a group sex expert, but I think simple positions work better in this case,” I reply.

“Oh, holy fuck,” Oliver hisses. His long fingers wrap from Mel’s hip down to the curve of her ass.

Melody apparently has other plans. While Nik and I were discussing options, she sank right down on Oliver’s cock.

Melody rests her head against his chest and rises on her knees again as she trembles.

“That might be a problem,” Nik murmurs, tilting his head to get a better view of the action. “Damn man, if I had realized you were packing that thing then I would have made sure I went first.”

“Any direction or assistance would be appreciated.” Oliver’s voice breaks on the last few words.

“Omegas are created to take alpha cock,” Carver says. “Are all alphas so damn dramatic? Or did I just get the benefit of being stuck with you overreacting fuckers?”

“Shut up or get out,” I snarl, tossing a thumb toward the exit. Looking at Oliver I continue, “Tease her clit.”

“Switching positions might also help,” Nik adds, moving up to kneel by her side.

“Well, shit,” Carver says, rolling his lips together as he leans far enough forward to see what we mean. “Why aren’t you doing porn? A dick like that is going to waste without the world being able to see it.”

“What?” Oliver scoffs. “Someone hand me my glasses.”

“Oliver,” Melody whines, baring her neck.

Nik grabs Oliver’s glasses and shoves them at him before kneeling over his legs behind Mel. “You need that knot. Don’t you, gorgeous?”

“Yes,” Melody begs.

“Let’s see what we can do to help.” Nik doesn’t ask, just lifts her using his forearms as leverage. “Turn for me, that’s a

good, sweet girl.” Oliver’s tip stays inside her the entire time he spins her to face him.

“Your junk is all over my thighs,” Oliver grumbles.

Nik ignores him, lifting Mel and pulling her down on Oliver’s length.

Oliver growls, stretching back and staring at her ass. His hands land on her hips below Nik’s hold on her waist and the next time she rises, he helps her take more.

“You’re so deep,” Mel whimpers. Her hand falls to spread her lower lips as she teases her clit.

Nik leans in for a kiss that has their tongues meeting in the air.

Oliver looks half feral as he bites his lip. It doesn’t seem like he’s going to last long. Yanking my shirt off with a hand at the back of my head, I chuck it at Carver.

“Dick,” he grumbles, stretching out across the very bottom of the mattress. He uses my shirt as a pillow.

Melody’s perfume floods the air and she collapses against Nik’s chest. I’m shocked when I see her bite into the top of his shoulder as she sobs through her orgasm.

Oliver hisses, “I really don’t think you’re supposed to get this tight. I’m . . . ahh, *fuck*.”

Nik groans as Melody flicks her tongue over the indents she left with her teeth.

“You’re dangerous. It makes me want to bite you back,” Nik growls.

“Oh, *hell* no,” Carver says, pointing in our direction. “I’m not fucking up my first real assignment. I’ve got your back, Mel. Do I need to come up there?”

“Try it and I’ll murder you,” Nik says, yanking Melody’s head to the side with a handful of hair. “I’m foggy, but nowhere close to the line for forgetting common sense.”

“Bite me, please,” Melody sobs.

“I will,” Oliver groans, his head falling to rest against her shoulders.

“You motherfuckers are making it real damn difficult to relax,” Carver grumbles. “I’m texting a couple guys on the teams to see if this is normal. By the way, you’ve known each other for less than two days.”

“Bite, alpha!” Melody demands, slapping at Nik’s chest.

“Nobody cares? Great, glad I wasted my breath,” Carver mutters.

“Not this heat, but we all want to sink our teeth in,” I assure her, coming up to kneel at her side.

“Really?” Mel whispers, turning her head to mine. Her lower lip wobbles, and it’s very difficult not to bite into it.

“Absolutely. Now relax and let us worship you.” I pull her mouth to mine as Oliver growls and his scent floods the air.

My nose wrinkles. I’d much rather smell more of Melody’s perfume.

Her tongue teases mine and all thought bleeds away. The kiss grows desperate as she claws at my shoulder and the fog smacks me with full force.

Chapter Thirteen

Carver

The fucking continues for so long that I'm vaguely impressed. I mean, if watching Mel get plowed from fifty different directions by someone who isn't me counts as impressive.

Which it doesn't.

Bitter? I'm not bitter. Maybe a little jaded and a whole lot on edge from lack of sleep, but I'm definitely not envious.

What I am is seriously questioning how the fuck I ended up here.

My eyes dance around the room as the power flickers a few times and eventually goes out completely. Isn't that just the icing on the shit-cake of my day?

It's only a few minutes later that Miller and Nik get a phone call that they're needed.

From where I'm lying it looks like Miller's knot is still swollen inside her. He's awake, spooning her from behind and running his hand over her lower stomach like he's willing his baby bullets to be the one to fertilize her egg.

I chuckle, shaking my head.

Alphas and omegas are un-fucking-real.

Melody is sucking Nik's cock while she sleeps, and that would be enough for me to tell whoever the hell it is something along the lines of *best of luck. Figure that shit out yourself.*

Which is probably why I'm not the boss. He carefully pulls his still-hard cock from her mouth. I'm a little shocked that he doesn't seem pissed to be called away from the nest.

I wonder if that means her heat is coming to an end

The backup generators do come on like they're supposed to, but I overhear Nik talking. Apparently there's a problem with one of the elevators.

Miller and Nik briefly talk it out, but they've got no choice except to sober up and handle it.

Miller eventually pulls free of her pussy. I fight the undeniable urge to slide up behind her and make sure she's content.

They spend the better part of ten minutes trying to wake Oliver before deciding it's a useless endeavor.

We've known there was a Nor'easter on the way. I'm pretty sure my bosses forgot that fact somewhere around the second or third day of rut. The hotel is pretty well insulated, but the few times I went for food and drinks, it was clearly coming down out there.

I'm stretched out across the end of the mattress, but my eyes fly up as Nik hovers over me.

"If she wakes up . . ." He sighs heavily. "We're trusting you to take care of her."

I frown.

I'm barely capable of taking care of myself most days.

"I'm sure they'll figure out how to get that guy out of the elevator without you. Actually, why don't I go handle that?" I move to push myself up.

"She trusts you," Miller says, pulling on his jeans. He heads down the steps that lead out of the nest.

"Trust is an *extreme* stretch of the word." I stand up and follow him as I eye the door out of the nest.

Now I'm considering running.

“Wake up your lazy ass packmate,” I suggest helpfully.

“He’s beat.” Miller swipes a hand over his face. “She’s comfortable with you, and she invited you in.”

“That doesn’t count,” I say indignantly. “I’m not fucking your omega so you two can run off and do management shit. This place isn’t even our problem.” I look at Nik. “I mean, I guess it’s yours, but I don’t want to die.”

“And you called us dramatic?” Nik scoffs. “I have to go. Let me put it this way. Take care of her or I’ll murder you in your sleep.”

My gaze moves to Miller. “We’re now two for three for members of your pack threatening my life. Would you like to sweep the board?”

I’m seriously questioning my life choices.

Orgies are awesome, I’m all for them. *If I get to participate*. Watching got old two days ago, but I’m not about being an opportunistic bastard.

I guess I’m kind of old-fashioned because I wouldn’t feel right fucking her without at least putting in the effort to make her like me first.

Pheromone fog is a great excuse for alphas and omegas to fuck like rabbits, but that shit doesn’t apply to me.

Okay so, her perfume *nearly* got me a couple times, but I’m a fucking adult, and I mind-over-mattered that shit.

“This may take a while,” Miller says, sighing as he grabs a T-shirt from the floor and tosses it aside when it’s not his. “You know how hard he sleeps when he crashes.”

“That is not *my* problem,” I hiss.

I swear to God, I’m not the unreasonable one in this situation. No matter how they’re making it seem, I know I’m not. These fuckers got a taste of a ripe omega and they’ve lost all brain functioning as a result.

“Max?” Melody mumbles, sitting up and rubbing at her eyes. She calls him by his first name, and the big fucker trips

over his own feet crawling back into the nest. He finds his shirt along the way and pulls it on.

Oliver is still dead to the world, sleeping on his stomach with his face on his forearm and his bare ass in the air.

“Why are you dressed?” Melody whimpers.

“The storm hit and there’s a problem with one of the elevators. Nik and I have to take care of it. Oliver’s a notoriously hard sleeper, but Carver’s here and he’s going to take care of you,” Miller says, nuzzling his cheek to hers.

“Don’t make me sound like a consolation prize,” I grumble, jabbing a finger at him.

“I don’t want you to go. My nest won’t smell right without you,” she whispers, shaking her head. “I’m sorry. I know you have responsibilities outside of me.”

“I don’t want to go either,” Miller says. He pulls her mouth to his and they share a kiss so tender it makes *me* feel like an asshole for intruding on it.

I’ve never thought anything was missing from my life, but I’m also getting closer to thirty-five than I am thirty. Settling down wasn’t a thought in my mind during my twenties, but I have noticed lately that when I think about marriage or kids, the idea doesn’t immediately send me into a panic attack like it would have ten years ago.

My parents were on the older side when they had me.

My dad could barely toss the ball around in the yard with me when I was a pre-teen.

Once I hit my teenage years, they supported me from their recliners.

They’re not bad parents. I was their late in life surprise. I don’t like the thought of ending up like that though. If I’m ever going to have a family then I want to be young enough to do *all* the things.

“Would you mind refreshing my pillow before you go?” Melody asks, yanking it from behind her and shoving it at Miller.

“Not a bit,” he says, taking the pillow and shoving it under his T-shirt.

Life is fucking weird when alphas and omegas are involved.

This shit is not normal for betas, but it’s just another day of the week to them.

I barely hold back the derisive chuckle as he swipes the pillow around his chest under the material of his T-shirt. He looks like he’s nine months pregnant.

“If you’re not comfortable with Carver, we can assign someone else,” Miller says as his eyes meet hers. He hugs the pillow, and I briefly consider pulling out my phone to record the insanity.

Until I realize Melody is naked.

Goddamn, I never thought I’d be so desensitized to such a nice pair of tits.

Somewhere along the way their crazy rubbed off on me, and apparently, we’re all just going with the insanity of the moment.

“I’ve only ever had sex with one person. I mean before the three of you.” Her free hand flies to her face and she looks like she’s praying she could melt directly into the floor. “I told Oliver, but I don’t think the two of you were around yet.”

“Hey, that’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Miller says, dropping his hold on the pillow. It stays tucked under his T-shirt. “It’s a little surprising since omegas are meant to have multiple partners, but it’s not something to be embarrassed about.”

“My ex made sure no one else would look my way in our small town,” she whispers as he tenderly tilts her face up to his.

“There’s no reason you need to justify yourself to any of us,” I say before I can hold it back.

I’m really going to need to get my hands on that motherfucker sometime in the near future, especially

considering how he talked about her on the phone the other night.

The fucking balls on that guy.

Miller brushes his lips over hers. Mel's eyes squeeze shut, and I'm *still* just standing here.

Yup, just a voyeuristic dick, watching their intimate moment like I have every reason to be here. I rock back and forth on my heels, trying to keep my eyes off her tits.

God, this is incredibly awkward, and I've gotten myself into some *shit* in my lifetime.

I have no idea how the full-time monitors handle it.

I wonder if they're desensitized to all the fucking too.

Miller cradles her face in his big ass hand and Mel whimpers, following his mouth as he pulls back. It really is a very tender kiss. I don't think I've ever kissed anyone like that in my life.

Goddamn, I've seen a little too much of them banging in every position imaginable for it to be the goodbye kiss that pushes me over the edge.

I think I need therapy.

My mom is right.

I need Jesus.

"All alphas have to fight biology, but when it comes to the health and well-being of your omega, you deal with it." Miller runs his thumb over her chin. "If you need relief that's what Carver is for."

My palms fly up, and I take a step back.

"Hey, asshole. Thanks for making me sound like a human dildo," I snap.

I'm now on the verge of taking a step forward so I can knock his ass out.

I've had a lot of sex in my life, but I also don't want to be essentially a sex toy. I'm not okay with Melody thinking of me

that way.

“I want it on record that I’m only here because those dicks are my friends. I’m not in rotation for monitoring heats. I’m straight up security. That’s all. Just so you know.” Damn, that sounded shitty even to my own ears. But I like Melody as a person. Not that we’ve had all that much time to get to know each other.

I’m not sure why it even matters to me that she knows that.

I’ve known a decent amount of people a lot less time before fucking them, but Melody is very . . . I don’t even know the word for it. Innocent? Sweet?

I fucking like her, and I’d rather that asshole not make me out to seem like a human dildo.

“Carver is a close friend. Not a single one of us will be upset if anything happens between you two,” Miller says, giving her a slow kiss. “I’m sorry. I’ve got to go. I can feel my phone buzzing away in my pocket.”

“Go on, I promise I’ll take real good care of her for you,” I say smugly.

They’re all on my last damn nerve. Well, aside from Melody.

I can’t believe Oliver has slept through our entire conversation. I’m tempted to head over there and kick him in his bare ass.

A weird bubbly feeling happens in my gut.

I think it might be jealousy.

I immediately shut it down.

Sure, it would be nice to be fucked so thoroughly that I could sleep through the power going out, the generators kicking in, and the long-ass conversation we just had. But that’s clearly because I’m pent-up from watching them fuck like rabbits for days with little sleep.

“You better or else I will hurt you,” Miller growls. He leans in, giving her a final kiss and chuckles as he pulls the

pillow out from his shirt. He hands it off to Mel and heads out, clapping me on the shoulder on the way past.

“Three for three,” I mutter.

It sure feels like I just got metaphorically and physically tagged in.

Melody has quite efficiently pouted the entire time the guys have been gone.

She swallows thickly as I approach with the thermometer in hand.

I’m not sure what that look on her pretty face is since I don’t know her well enough to be sure, but I think it might be terror.

She clutches the pillow covered in Miller’s scent to her chest like that will save her.

I chuckle. “You’re cute. I’m not going to maul you. That’s the benefit of not being an alpha. You might be flooding the nest with your perfume, and yeah, I like the way you smell, but it doesn’t turn me into a mindless fuck monster.”

“Fuck monster?” she snorts, shaking her head. “Is that what they call rut around here?”

“Nah, I just needed to lighten the mood.” I smirk. “Come on, let’s get you into some clothes.”

She’s still naked, and it’s difficult to concentrate with her tits hanging out. I’m supposed to take care of her. I figure I should get on that while the alphas are out of commission.

“I’ve got goodies and I know how much omegas love a treat.”

Melody perks up at the word.

I chuckle.

Omegas always get excited over surprises. Her head wiggles a little like a hyper puppy. She's fucking adorable.

"Take your precious alpha covered pillow and go change into something comfortable while I get everything all set up," I say, nodding back toward the open area of the nest. "You should find your bags by the door."

Melody blinks wide blue-gray eyes and finally pushes herself up, wandering off with the damn pillow.

I shove the thermometer in my pocket and consider how I can make it sanitary enough in here that I can feed her.

The nest smells like a straight up fuck-fest, and I'm kind of hungry too.

The cushioned recessed area is clean. They never made it out of the den.

I grab the clipboard where I've been monitoring Melody's stats and head out to the open area. Dropping it on the cushion, I aim for the kitchen.

As a precaution, food services delivered every suite their own storm rations. Unlike the rest of the smaller suites, the penthouse has a full-sized refrigerator.

I know for a fact it has cut up fruit and pre-made sandwiches.

I pick up one of the room service trays and load it with drinks, fruit, a couple of sandwiches, and a brownie for Mel since I promised her a treat.

There's no way to know how long the main power will be out, but generators don't run the major appliances in the rooms. At least in my experience, they only run the lights and necessities, and from the look of it, that's the case here too.

I make it quick getting in and out of the refrigerator, that way there's less of a chance of spoiling the food.

Who the fuck would take the elevator during a blizzard? They should've gotten their steps in for the day and taken the damn stairs. I mean, unless it's someone with mobility issues—that's really the only viable reason.

Once I'm back in the nest, I set the tray on the floor. It's getting kind of chilly without the heat running. Most of the rooms will be fine since they're pretty well insulated, but with the walls of windows in this place, it's not retaining heat for shit.

We need extra blankets. I head out, checking the linen closet. Thankfully it's stocked, or I would've gone room by room and plucked them off the beds.

I make it back, grabbing the clipboard and pen and mark off that she's about to eat and drink as well as her bathroom visit.

Omega-sitting seems pretty similar to babysitting. You've got to make sure they eat and drink regularly and are using the bathroom. Maybe I'm further ahead than I thought. I bet I could catch right on to parenting, which is a fucking weird thought to have.

Apparently omega perfume doesn't only rot alpha's brains.

My jaw drops as I catch sight of Melody.

She's in a romper?

An adult onesie?

Fuck if I know, but she's goddamn delectable.

All I can see is legs for days, thick hips, and her hair is up in a messy bun, which happens to be a personal weakness of mine.

Aww, hell.

The outline of her nipples are fully visible as her tits bounce. My head falls back, and I curse the universe.

Melody is physically my dream girl.

I saw her in her compression workout clothes and spent several days with her naked and getting railed by friends.

It makes no sense, but now that she's in that damn snap-up onesie, her curves are more pronounced.

I can't force my eyes away from the jiggle of her tits and lower stomach as she moves.

That shit is my weakness.

There's something about the tantalizing peek of skin, but the majority of the package being covered that really does it for me.

"Are you okay?" she asks, swaying forward in a way that makes my mouth water. She's got the pillow Miller cuddled tucked under her arm and she looks so unsure that I immediately get my shit together.

I clear my throat. "You seem more coherent now that you're out of Miller and Nik's general vicinity. Are you feeling clearer?"

"Somewhat, but I'm also sleepy. I think I'm just going to try to get some rest." She shrugs and slides by me, trying to head into the den nest.

"Nah, sorry, sweetheart. We've got to do all that annoying shit that makes you want to claw my eyes out." I gently grip her wrist, spinning her to face me.

She stumbles into my chest with the Miller-scented pillow between us. She blinks owlishly, frowning up at me.

"Are you going to be a good girl for me?" I ask, giving her my signature smirk.

Her eyes fall shut as she shudders out a ragged breath.

"On second thought, it might be more fun if you're a naughty girl."

Small hands clutch at my chest. "Um, I'll try to be good, but I might need to get back in the real nest."

"If it comes to that then we'll move back in there, but I need to take your temperature and get some food in your system."

"Okay," she agrees in a shaky tone.

I release her and she tosses the pillow up by the top of the cushioned mattress before falling to her knees to crawl up. Her

ass cheeks hang out the bottom of that tiny little contraption she's wearing.

A strangled sound escapes my chest.

I'm pretty sure my karma has caught up. Who the hell knows what I've done, but it must have been awful.

She's an absolutely beautiful girl that I happen to be incredibly attracted to . . . but I'm only here to make sure she's hydrated and fed.

Sometimes being a beta really fucking sucks.

Chapter Fourteen

Melody

Carver is easy company. He unfolds a couple of fresh blankets and covers us both up before taking my temperature and documenting it.

It's 105.7, which is actually on the low end for a heat. It doesn't seem possible that it could be over already, but when I consider it, I realize I'm not sure exactly how many days I was hazy.

I try not to grumble as Carver feeds me a turkey and Swiss sandwich by hand. It's not something I'm used to. Not at all, but it is nice.

I suppose I'm a very cliché omega because I can't seem to stop myself from soaking up every bit of attention and care they've given me.

I continually remind myself it's part of his job and not because he wants to care for me.

Betas are meant for betas and alphas are meant for omegas. I've heard it my entire life. It's why my mom pushed and demanded until I broke up with Ben's brother Luke all those years ago.

Which is incidentally how I ended up with Ben.

Ben being an alpha made him a more logical choice. Add in the fact he never intended to leave town after graduation, and my mom considered him a perfect match.

Yeah, Carver is hot, but he's a beta.

I know I'm being ridiculous. He's not asking to date me. He's helping take care of me because I'm a job. But the tender way he walks me through each bite with soft praises and killer smiles makes this feel like very dangerous territory. Maybe I'm not as settled as I thought. Every time he tells me I'm a good girl as I take a bite, it makes me want to sit on his face.

Or possibly his cock.

Or sit on his face while sucking his cock.

I'm willing to be flexible if need be.

I get attached to people really easily.

I have to be careful here.

Miller said that they would be okay with something happening between us, but I don't think it's worth the risk.

No matter what my vagina thinks.

Ben is a manwhore, meaning I should have learned my lesson with them in general. I know better than to get my hopes up with someone who doesn't understand the word commitment. Especially since I really like Carver's friends, and if by some miracle I end up in a pack with them, I'd have to see him regularly.

It's not a good idea.

"I need you to wake up," Carver murmurs, brushing his lips over my forehead. "Sorry, sweetheart. I'll keep annoying you until you do."

I startle awake, completely unsure what's happening or where I am.

Carver and I are lying chest to chest on the open cushion nest. He's palming the back of my head, and I know I'm hotter than I was when I fell asleep.

"You're sweaty and you were writhing around. I need to take your temperature," Carver says, waving the thermometer

in my face.

“I’m not hot enough for it to be dangerous,” I snap, slapping at his hand.

“Oh, yeah? Are you hiding a thermometer somewhere that I don’t know about?” He bites his lip, wiggling his eyebrows. He slides his hand down my back and over my ass until it rests on my thigh. “I’m not sure if the fabric is making it feel like you’re hotter than you are.” He tenderly rubs my skin and it makes me shiver. “Nah, sweetheart. Your fever is up. The guys are still dealing with the elevator emergency. You didn’t even sleep for forty-five minutes.”

“No, but I’m not a teenager. I’ve braved full-blown heats before when my ex couldn’t get time off at the ranch,” I say, trying to roll up into a ball.

“What?” He blocks my knees as his jaw falls open. “Heat leave is guaranteed. It’s a law.”

“Yeah, for omegas and their *bonded* alphas, which obviously we were not. Also he works for his family, so it’s not like they paid attention to all that stuff.” I try to hold back the whimper, but it escapes anyway.

Some of those memories are a little traumatic. There were times when I was younger that I honestly thought the pain would kill me, but omegas are resilient.

I can do this. I just have to focus on the fact it won’t last forever and accept the agony. Sometimes during a heat there’s no other option outside of hurting.

I don’t get why people think it’s so glamorous to be an omega. It’s really not.

“That’s fucking bullshit,” he says. “Sorry, it’s not like I’m telling you anything you don’t know. Family or not, I’d tell them to fuck right off if I were an alpha and my omega needed me.” He seems so sincere it makes my heart ache. “He left you in pain, even knowing it’s a real possibility it could put you in the hospital?”

I sigh. I really don’t want to talk about that. “You can take my temperature if it’ll make you feel better.”

He rolls me onto my back and ends up leaning over the top half of my body. I know I've had some intimate moments with the guys the last few days, but I was pretty hazy for most of that.

His touch is gentle as he cups my cheek, brushing his thumb over my lip.

"Tongue up," he says and he's already got a new cover on the thermometer. He must have handled that before he woke me. He might be a bit of a player, but he's not bad at taking care of someone. Or maybe I've just made assumptions based on what he said about flirting with the receptionist the night he brought me to the gym.

"I'm going to guess," I say around the thermometer. "106.5."

He frowns. "That was really specific."

It beeps. He grabs the clipboard and removes the thermometer.

"106.9, you weren't far off." He writes down the temperature, tosses the board aside with the thermometer on top of it, then lies down next to me.

"I told you. I'm a pro at this." I grimace, rolling toward him. I pull my knees up to my chest since I know it usually helps.

"Tell me how I can help," he says, his eyebrows drawing together. "Do you normally watch TV? Not that we can do that now, but my phone is charged. Nesting is kind of boring without the dirty sex and pheromones. I mean I've never been around an omega in heat, but now that you're just lying here . . ."

"Back home if I were this coherent, I'd probably be working."

"What do you do? All omegas in heat are supposed to stay home. Come to think of it, I don't think I've met an omega with a job before."

“I’m a writer,” I mumble in a small voice. I hate the snide comments that come my way whenever I admit that.

His eyes widen. “No shit?”

“Nope, not joking,” I say, but it sounds more like a groan.

“I read a lot when I was bored out of my mind overseas. What do you write? Mystery? Suspense?”

I’m hot, but I don’t think I’m blushing from the thickening wave of heat. “Romance.”

“Dirty stuff?” he asks, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Sometimes, but it’s secondary to the emotions.”

“Holy shit. That’s wild. Will you tell me about one of your books?” He stretches an arm over, gently rubbing my back in the same area I’ve apparently been rubbing on my front.

“Girl meets boy. They fall in love.”

“You don’t write pack romance?” He sounds surprised.

“Nah, it wasn’t worth the arguments . . .” I’m sure he doesn’t need to hear me say the words to know it was Ben and the rest of our small town that gave me trouble.

“What a fucking tool. Omega biology isn’t built for monogamy.” He gives me a look like he wants me to know he’s serious.

“Small towns are weird.” I shrug.

“Come on, tell me about your favorite characters,” he suggests, giving me a killer smile. “Tell me your favorite *dirty* scene.”

I squint, carefully watching for any sign he’s picking on me.

“I love a good romantic comedy.” He bites his lip, wiggling his eyebrows. “Don’t leave me hanging, Mel.”

“All right,” I concede. “I’m having trouble figuring out what to do about the characters in my next book. I’ll talk as long as you keep massaging.”

“Does it help?”

“It does.”

“Then you best get to talking.”

I wake up with my onesie stuck to my skin. It's been cooler since the power went out. Carver mentioned the generators don't run the heat, but I'm grateful because I'm sweating up a storm. I can't imagine how miserable I'd be with the heat on.

I let out a weird groan that sounds something like, “Ungh.”

I blink awake, plastered to Carver's chest with my pussy resting right over his very hard cock. I barely catch myself as I give an involuntary grind over it.

It feels so good that I think I do it again. Okay, I definitely do, but he's so hard it's practically impossible not to.

“You're slick.” Carver's hand flexes on my ass and his fingers dance down to the seam of my sex. “Does this have crotch snaps? Fuck me, it does . . .”

I snort, burying my face in his chest. “It's comfortable.”

“I'm not hatin'. I've got a thing for skimpy little outfits. I go for them over straight up nudity anytime I pick porn.” His fingers drag over the material, barely brushing my aching core.

I'm very close to demanding he fuck me. My eyes throb like they do when I get especially feverish.

“I can tell just by touching you that you're hotter than you were,” he says, brushing his other hand over my cheek. “I texted Oliver. I could hear it beeping from here, but he's still out. You only slept for another thirty or forty minutes. Do you always cat nap during heats?”

“Yeah, but when I wake up, it always feels like I slept for twelve hours or something crazy.” I shake my head, trying to will away the haze of lust and want, but it doesn't help. “I have to go.”

I don't know where I plan to go. I'll probably have to be super annoying until Oliver finally joins the land of the living again.

My hands fall to Carver's shoulders, and I try to push myself up. I manage to kneel over him, but the movement causes a wave of cramps.

I groan, clutching at my middle.

"Fuck." Carver grabs his phone from next to us. He types something out and tosses it aside.

"I hurt," I moan, falling back to lie on top of him. If I was thinking more clearly, I'd climb in the den nest and right onto Oliver's cock. But lying on Carver I get a strong hit of his scent. It's woodsy and has notes that remind me of the air right before a thunderstorm. My nose plasters itself to Carver's throat. "Dylan, you smell like pure sex."

"Busting out my first name? Shit is getting serious," he murmurs, nuzzling his cheek to the top of my head. "What do you need, sweetheart?"

"I'm okay," I groan, but then I'm licking his neck and grinding my pussy over his sweatpants-covered cock. "I'd probably be better if I could come, though. I think that would be good."

"Is that right?" he says in a humor-lined tone.

"Yes," I assure him. "Now would be great."

"Are you sure you know what you're asking for?" he asks, his hand tightening over my ass cheek.

"Definitely."

His cock jumps under me. I whine in response. My chest feels tight, but it doesn't hurt nearly as badly as the cramping in my lower stomach.

"My eyes burn. That only happens when my temperature gets close to 110."

"Fuck." He rolls us with no warning. He stares down at me with his brow drawn tight. "That's high. I know it's dangerous

if it stays there for long.”

“Right,” I agree, because that sounds totally logical. “So I need to come.”

“Who am I?”

“What?” I scoff.

“What’s my name?”

“Dylan Carver. You work security and you’re only here as a favor to your friends. Not because you want me. So either wake up Oliver or get out.” My eyes squeeze shut. My mental discomfort is nowhere near as bad as the pain that comes with the next pulse of heat.

I curl into Carver as he leans over me, holding himself up on his forearm.

His free hand slides up my throat.

“Are you under the mistaken impression that I don’t want you, Melody?” He squeezes with just the right amount of pressure.

My nipples poke through the thin material of my onesie, but while I slept, the upper three snaps came undone. The tops and sides of my tits pop out. On the plus side, it makes my boobs look great.

“I asked you a question,” Carver says, running his thumb over my pulse.

“You’re here because it’s your job. Don’t pretend otherwise,” I say defiantly. “You’ve made that clear.”

“I could have declined and told them to fuck off but I didn’t like the idea that you might end up fucking someone other than me. I get it, I’m not an alpha—”

“I don’t care. I just want you.” I pull my legs out, wrapping them around his ass. My feet dig in as he slides his hand up my neck and into my hair.

“Is that right? Are you sure I’m not just a faceless cock at this point?”

“No one has ever stood up to Ben for me. At first, I was anxious because I knew he’d make life hell to get back at me, but then I realized I don’t have to put up with his shit anymore.” I bite my lip. “I know we don’t know each other, but you’re a decent workout buddy.”

He tilts my head to the side and scrapes his teeth down the column of my neck.

“Are you sure you can handle me, Mel?” he teases.

I writhe against his tightly controlled strength. “I’d love to find out.”

“I spent three and a half days watching you get railed in every position imaginable. Do you know how many times I daydreamed I was in their place?”

My head shakes, but it’s limited by how tightly he’s holding my hair.

“I’m never going to be able to smell vanilla again without getting a hard on. It might be dangerous to take me into an ice cream shop.” He licks and sucks from my neck to my collar bone and down my sternum as far as he can go. “Even your skin tastes sweet. This is why omegas are so dangerous.”

“I need you.”

“I do love hearing you beg. It’s going to replay in all my dirty fantasies for quite some time.” He bites the side of my tit. “It’s even better now because you’re begging *for me*.”

My feet bounce against his ass as I arch off the mattress. He uses his teeth to pull the fabric aside until my right breast is completely exposed.

I ache painfully, but Carver teases his stubble over my sternum before wrapping his tongue around my nipple.

I leak slick.

It’s embarrassing how soaked I am.

I grind against his cock that manages to perfectly bump my clit, but it disappears as I gyrate.

I let out a huff of annoyance, but Carver chuckles darkly.

“So impatient, aren’t you? Are you desperate for me?”

“You know I am,” I gasp as I find that blissful friction for a second, only for it to disappear again.

“I do, and I fucking *love* it.” He leans up on his knees and yanks his T-shirt off before chucking it aside.

“Now isn’t the best time to tease me.” My hand immediately runs over his warm skin. He’s nowhere near as hot as I am.

It’s clear how much time he puts in at the gym. His pecs and traps are well-defined, but not overly bulky. His dark hair falls over his forehead as he smirks. He clearly noticed my ogling. My fingers brush over the few fine hairs on his chest before sliding down the indents of his abs. He’s got a dark happy trail and I run my pointer finger through it.

His sweatpants bulge as his cock presses against the material. I cup him in my hand and he laughs.

“Nah, let’s take care of you,” he says, gripping the crotch of my outfit. The snaps pop open and he folds up the top flap until it’s tucked around my lower stomach. “You’re dripping for me, little omega.”

My hands fly to cover my face as I try to close my thighs.

Carver makes that impossible.

I don’t see it, but I feel him pull my other tit free. He’s got a view of all the important parts, but I remember he said he likes a little coverage. I don’t mind since the fabric is hiding all the areas I’m most self-conscious about.

His skin is starting to feel cool compared to mine. He wraps his fingers around my wrist, pulling my arm down.

“Don’t hide.” He’s got a bit of a southern accent and it sounds thicker than normal. “Show me how you get yourself off.”

“What?” My mouth falls open.

“I’m not an alpha. I’m not going to jump when you whine. Show me how you finger your pussy,” he demands, bringing

my hand to rest over my pelvis.

There's a look of challenge all over his stupidly handsome face.

Really, no man should be that hot. It melts a woman's better judgment, or it does mine.

"Give me a good show. Make it real dirty, and I might help out if I'm feelin' generous." A dangerous smile crosses his face. He drops my hand and leans over, teasing me with a light kiss that makes me whimper.

Instead of going for my clit, I grab his cock. It's thick and heavy. He definitely has a reason to be so smug.

"You're a naughty little thing." His forehead rests against mine as he shoves his tongue in my mouth. The bare skin of his chest brushes mine, and I want him so badly that I can't hold back the moan. He keeps himself up on one palm and grinds against my clit. My hand caresses his shaft over the fabric, and I think he might give in. "It is tempting to give you your way, but I'm getting a nice little thrill from pissing you off." He pushes back until he's kneeling and removes my hand, shoving it to rest over my pussy. "Get to it."

"You're a sadist," I grumble, poking out my bottom lip.

"Nah, just a man who wants to watch you tease that dripping cunt." He winks, and it makes my silly heart race. "Show me how you play with your pretty little pussy."

I shrug. Cupping my left breast, I tease my fingers across my over-sensitive flesh. My other hand slides down my pelvis. I spread my lower lips and Carver stares transfixed.

"Yeah, you feel that? You're drenched, aren't you?" His voice is low and gravelly, but it lacks the growl like an alpha would have. It still causes a visceral reaction in my system. I bare my neck to him, whining. "Your cheeks are pink. Don't be embarrassed. Do you have any idea how hot it makes me seeing you leak for me? Here, let me help." He wraps his hand around mine and guides my fingers to work my clit. "You're not the only one. You've got my cock dripping pre-cum."

I groan, trying to roll him over so I can climb on his dick, but he just chuckles.

“You’re not in charge.” He kisses my cheek. “Do you normally shove a finger inside? Or just tease the button?”

He cups my tit, pinching and tugging the nipple. It makes me sob. He readjusts himself until he’s on his elbow and carefully slaps a hand over my mouth. “Do you want me to spank your pretty ass? Hmm? Is that why you’re being so defiant, or is it that I’m not an alpha? Is that why you think you don’t need to listen?”

I bite his palm, huffing in response. I’m shocked when he rolls over onto his back. He sits up, pulling me over his lap without any further warning. My top half lands against the cushion as he teases his calloused hand over my ass.

“You want me to stop, then you say *red*. Do you understand?”

“Yes, but what are you doing?” I squirm, twisting to look at him.

“I’m going to show you what happens when you refuse to be good for me.” He raises an eyebrow. There’s something about the look on his face that makes me ache for him. “Can I spank your pretty ass red? Huh, Mel?”

A shiver runs through my entire body.

I’m not against the idea of it. It’s just something I’ve never experienced before. I give him a shaky nod. “Okay.”

“Scream if you need to. Hell, maybe you’ll even get lucky and wake Oliver. Then he can take over. We all know the claws come out when an omega doesn’t get their way.”

I push up on one hand so I can turn fully and flip him off.

He chuckles a low throaty sound that makes my nipples ache. “Keep bratting, sweetheart. It’s not my ass about to pay the price.”

The fabric of my onesie slid down at some point. He lifts it, tucking it around my lower back before teasing my ass cheeks and even brushing his finger over my sex.

“Let’s be real. I think we’re both going to enjoy this,” Carver murmurs, palming the back of my head before moving that forearm to my lower back. “Have you ever been spanked?”

“N-No.” My hands fist in the comforter. My anticipation and anxiety are ratcheting higher with every second that he delays.

“I’ve read that an omega’s biology is set to convert sexual pain to pleasure, but don’t hesitate to stop this if it’s not for you.” He brushes his fingers down my dripping core, and I briefly wonder how we even ended up here. “I’d like to see how accurate the information is. You know, for research purposes.”

I snort, shaking my head. Carver is playful in a way I’m not used to, but I do like the way he makes me feel.

“Last time, what do you say if you want to stop?”

“Red, but I don’t, so get on with it.”

“Such a brat,” he says, chuckling.

I very nearly prove him right when he pulls his fingers from my pussy and his hand lands against my ass with more force than I’m expecting.

I whimper as the pain sizzles for a few seconds before transforming into blissful pleasure.

Being an omega really is a gift sometimes.

Chapter Fifteen

Nik

The power finally comes back on late in the afternoon, but the shit show is just beginning.

I've still got Kiernan Daniels on-site.

The Exchange regional director is all over the unsanctioned bonding that occurred while an omega and his pack were stuck in the elevator.

It's not like I can control free will or impulses. Alphas and omegas do stupid shit sometimes, like bonding after only knowing each other two days. Kiernan continues to rant and stomp his way across Nathan's office.

My brother is going to come back to a shit show.

Miller is with the omega getting a full statement. I'm not even pissed. Three alphas managed to have a successful orgy in the *clear* elevator while claiming their omega.

Normally, the implications that anyone could have come across them would be a real concern, but let's be real.

We're in the middle of a damn blizzard.

Should they have taken the stairs?

Absolutely.

Am I upset?

Not really, or I wasn't until I somehow got blamed for this fiasco when all I want is to get back to Melody.

The alphas are happy.

The omega is fucking ecstatic.

Who cares if they didn't have it in writing?

If it had happened outside the building, it wouldn't be an issue.

"There's a group of investors with extremely questionable morals, and they're dead set on owning a franchise in The Exchange." Kiernan sighs, shaking his head. "Now we have to report this to the Omega Protection Authority. It's the last thing we need, especially with Nathan on vacation halfway across the world."

"I'm in the same position you are." I push myself out of my chair to indicate this meeting is officially adjourned. "Controlling other people's actions isn't one of my gifts. Let the OPA investigate. If they don't like it then I'll sell my half to Nathan. What I'm not going to do is stand here any longer when my omega is in heat. She's had a shitty past filled with an alpha who didn't meet her needs. I've already been gone for too long."

"You took Melody Webber," Kiernan says, scratching his jaw. "Or you *took* Melody Webber?"

"We gave her a slot." I narrow my eyes. I know he's going to love this next part. "She's meant to be *my* omega. I've been gone for hours and Miller has too."

"Well, damn." The chubby man grins mischievously. "You know, I've met her before. She's a very sweet girl. I'll do what I can to mitigate with the OPA. It's not like I can leave with the storm still rolling."

"Thank you," I mutter, swiping a hand over my face and heading for the door.

I'm surprised to hear the begging moans all the way from the hallway. I know Oliver can sleep through a cataclysmic event. I stumble a step as I push through the door.

Carver is entertaining our omega, and the sight sends an immediate pulse to my cock. She's wearing more than she was the last time I saw her, but her bare ass is flaming red. She writhes, begging into the blanket as Carver lands several smacks to her upper thighs.

"I'll be good. I promise," Mel whimpers. "I'll show you. I can behave."

"Is that right?" Carver says, sliding two fingers down the seam of her sex.

"Yes," she groans.

Carver catches my eyes and winks.

The fucker.

I can't decide if I want to murder him or join in. I don't view him as the enemy. I know he's a friend and he's only doing what was asked of him.

I'm honestly a bit taken aback that he's still wearing his sweatpants. It doesn't necessarily mean he hasn't already fucked her, but it takes me only a fraction of a second longer to determine that I don't care if he did.

She builds her pack. I can either choose to be a part of it or not.

"You've already come once or twice just from me bouncing my palm against your tight ass." Carver wraps his arm around her stomach and his other hand in her hair. He pulls her up to face him and she kneels over him. "Do you need more, dirty girl?"

"Yes." She lunges for his mouth. His fist in her hair tightens, but he gives her enough slack that their tongues clash in a filthy kiss.

"You're dripping all over me," Carver muses. "I'd rather feel your slippery little pussy grinding over my bare cock."

"Okay," Melody sobs, leaning her forehead against his shoulder.

Carver slides his hands up her sides, pulling the leotard looking thing off and tossing it aside. She pushes up on her knees and helps him yank his sweats down. He kicks them off, and I stop standing like a total voyeur to their private moment.

I don't feel too bad considering he watched the three of us with Melody for days.

Melody is dripping all over his pelvis as his cock bumps her ass. Their mouths meet again.

I remove my shirt and pants, prowling closer.

“Are you going to do as I ask? Show me how you play with your pretty pussy?” Carver murmurs, nuzzling his cheek to hers.

“What? I thought you were going to . . .” she grumbles. “I want you inside me.”

“I don't concede to your demands. Do I, little omega?” He rolls them until her back hits the mattress. She stares up into his eyes, but she slides a hand between them to rub her clit.

Carver chuckles, pulling back until he's kneeling. He grips her hand and pulls her fingers to his mouth. My naughty little omega grabs his cock with her free hand and jerks the head against her clit.

Betas can't growl, but Carver lets out something close to it. “Yeah, I'm gonna need a taste.” He scoots down, burying his face in her pussy.

Melody gasps.

My mouth waters, I know she tastes like nothing I've ever experienced, but it's the way she trembles and clutches desperately at his shoulders like she can't get enough that makes me wish I was in his place.

A low growl escapes. Damn. I didn't even mean to, but I'm ready to join in.

“Hey,” she says, giving me a bright smile. “I missed you.”

My pulse races in time with the throb in my cock.

Women don't look at me with that kind of soft affection. It's dangerous for both of us how fucking sweet she is.

She stretches out a hand, grinning, and it makes my palms sweat. There's a weird warm feeling in my chest that means I don't care how sneaky or underhanded we have to play.

My pack is winning, and Melody is the prize.

"I missed you too," I assure her. I crawl onto the cushion of the open nest.

"Thank fuck," Carver groans. "I swear my cock is about to explode."

"You could have gotten inside me at any point over the last several hours," Melody complains.

"I'm not getting inside you now," Carver says, licking his lips. "I'm hopefully going to finally jerk off all over your huge tits while Nik knots the fuck out of you."

"Oh," Melody says, glancing away.

"Switch places with me," he says.

It takes a bit of work, but I end up between Mel's spread thighs. She's got her arms crossed over her chest and she's pouting quite adorably.

"You're too hot," Carver says, leaning over the top half of her body. "Do I want to fuck you? Hell yes, but Nik's here now, and you need to be knotted."

"It's fine, you can go back to watching," she says, but her voice is lined in hurt.

Carver chuckles. "Such a grumbly little omega. Hey, Mel, will you go out on a date with me once your heat is over?"

"What?"

"I asked you out on a date. Apparently I'm growing old-fashioned in my old age, and I don't want to stick my cock inside you until I have the chance to get to know you," Carver says.

Melody nods and they kiss.

I frown. I wanted that chance too, but plans and intentions go out the window when an omega goes into heat.

“Fuck her nice and deep for me,” Carver says, stretching out on his side next to her.

“You ready for me, gorgeous?”

“Please?” Melody begs.

I crawl over her, wrapping my hand around her head. I stare at her beautiful face as I shove my tongue in her mouth. I don't usually keep my eyes open during a kiss, but she's so fucking pretty that I need to see every expression she makes. Her hands twine around my neck as she runs her fingers through my hair.

My cock notches at her opening and I thrust with no further warning. Her eyes pop open as she gasps. Her pupils are huge round saucers.

Goddamn, her slick heat feels like heaven.

I'm already in deep shit because my chest feels warm and tight as our eyes meet.

“He teased me too much,” she whispers. “Knot me, please, Nik?”

“Anything for you.” I pull back and slam my knot inside her then bring her thighs over mine, so Carver has access to her too. He spent the last several hours meeting her needs. I'm not generally self-aware enough to recognize my faults, but it would be uncharacteristically awful of me to keep her from him now.

I barely pull my eyes from Melody's beautiful face, but I manage it.

Barely, but it counts.

I nod from Carver to Melody.

“Fuck.” He shakes his head, leaning close and sucking her nipple as he jerks his cock. “I guess I'm joining the fuck-fest.”

“Rut,” Melody begs, catching my attention.

“I’ve got you.” I wink. Her pheromones flood the air, and that’s the last coherent thought I have for a while.

I wake up slowly.

It’s one of those sleeps where I slept so damn good I have no idea who I am or even what year it is. There’s a very soft nude female form wrapped around mine. I glance around for Miller and Carver. They were both in the open nest with us when I fell asleep. I vaguely remember Miller crawling in and joining us, but they’re both gone now.

Melody grunts, snuggling closer to my chest, and a full-face grin takes over. Her hair is wild and sticks up everywhere. I wiggle my chin against the top of her head, trying to get her hair to stop tickling my mouth.

My hand flexes on her ass, and I pull her over on top of me. She’s much cooler this morning, and her scent isn’t nearly as thick.

“Hey,” she mumbles sleepily.

“How are you feeling?” I run my hand over the back of her head.

“Like I need a shower and a big breakfast,” she says, shaking her head. Her cheeks are pink and she looks embarrassed by her admission.

I squeeze her ass while my other hand brings her face close to mine. “Would you be open to company during your shower?”

“I mean, don’t you have to get back to work now that my heat is over?”

“You still need aftercare,” I murmur, brushing my lips over her forehead. “The cramps haven’t started yet?”

“No.” She shakes her head, causing the ends of her hair to tickle over my bare chest. “Not yet.”

My heart races. I genuinely hope she understands she's not getting rid of me. With or without a baby, she's stuck with us. It's surprising that we managed to make it out of her heat without at least one of us sinking our teeth in. But I am thankful since that would be another unsanctioned bonding.

"I should probably go back to my room. I really don't know what I'm supposed to do now."

My gut drops. She's skittish like she expected us to kick her out this morning.

"You should not leave," I assure her. I need to check in with Oliver and see when our courting gifts will get here. We've done this entire thing ass backwards, but it's now time to woo her. "We want you here with us. There may be times we'll trade out shifts if someone has work to attend to, but it's our responsibility to care for you following your heat. Is that a yes to showering together?"

"Okay." She bites her plush lower lip looking so bashful that I have the desire to eat her alive.

I settle for sitting up in a crunch that makes my abs burn and kiss her softly. It's a light brushing of our lips. I need to get us into the shower immediately or I'll ruin the tenderness of the moment by flipping her over and fucking her through the mattress.

"Come on, let me pamper you for a bit."

For being one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen, Melody is very shy. The tentative way she blinks up at me from under her lashes as I dry her is endearing.

Memories file through my mind. I rambled away about biting and breeding her over the course of the last few days. It takes a lot to embarrass me, but my face heats as I recall some of the shit that spewed out of my mouth.

I spin her around until her fingers hit the counter as she sucks in a sharp breath. I carefully towel off her back.

“Are you open to letting me help you get dressed?” I ask, brushing my lips down the column of her neck and over her shoulder. Our eyes catch in the mirror. Her heavy teardrop-shaped tits bounce lightly as her chest heaves.

I quirk an eyebrow giving her a playful grin. “I’m not only capable of removing your clothes. I’d actually get a lot of joy out of it if you let me care for you as every respectable alpha *should* care for their omega.”

“Yeah, you can. I mean, as long as I’m not holding you up.”

“Did you miss the part where I *want* to be here with you?” I ask, kissing her shoulder.

She shivers in response. “No, but I really don’t know the etiquette of these kinds of things.”

“Long term courting?” I ask, scraping my beard over her flesh. I drop the towel on the edge of the counter and wrap my arm around her middle. My dark tattoos look gritty in comparison to her flawless skin. “Do you have a job or responsibilities back in Texas?”

“I have a job, but I can do it from anywhere,” she whispers, running her hand over mine as she stares at me in the mirror.

“What type of work do you do?”

“I write stuff,” she says, finally breaking eye contact.

I must be a sick bastard because I love the way she squirms in discomfort.

“What do you write?”

“Romance and romantic erotica,” she murmurs with her eyes still firmly squeezed shut.

“Is that right?” I groan, sliding my hand down her stomach. “Do you write naughty girls, or good girls?” I barely keep myself from slipping my hand down to tease her clit.

She whimpers. “Both.”

“But you’re a good girl, aren’t you, gorgeous?” I lean close so I can nuzzle my cheek to hers.

The towel doesn’t hide my half-hard cock as it bounces around her ass. My hand flexes on her stomach, pulling her back into my bare chest. Her body is clearly very comfortable with mine, but I’ve got to put in the work now to get her to trust me.

“Yep,” she whispers as her eyes slide shut. She’s absolutely the perfect woman for me. She’s such a naughty little thing when she’s begging and lost to the fog, but damn, I think I prefer her now with her lips parted and those pink-tinged cheeks.

“You sure are,” I assure her. It’s very hard to ignore my baser urges to rut and claim, but I’ve managed to keep from biting her thus far. Which means I need to focus on caring for her. “Let’s get dressed. You haven’t eaten properly in days and I am starving. Let me feed you.”

“Okay,” she agrees, shuddering out a shaky breath.

Chapter Sixteen

Melody

Breakfast ends up being more like brunch.

Nik brings me out to the living room, or I guess one of them. The storm is less severe, but as I stare outside, it's clear it's still gloomy and gray.

Luckily we haven't lost power again. I study the cliff face and the way the waves crash violently against it. It's awe inspiring. I don't have any other words to describe it. It's foggy, or maybe there's another word to explain the dark clouds and low visibility, but if there is, I don't know it.

Nik comes into the room with a tray of breakfast goodies. He places it down on the coffee table and gives me a dangerous grin.

I smile back at him over my shoulder as he prowls closer. He's so handsome and well put together that I feel frumpy in comparison. I'm not sure if it's the collared shirt folded down over his sweater, or the dark jeans combined with his boots, but it all makes him look very high class.

My dress cost twenty-five dollars on sale at a store that also sells home goods. Now that I'm more coherent and really taking in their home, it's hard not to feel inadequate.

I know I've got that look that screams small town. I was surprised when he didn't ask me to leave immediately upon waking up, but I'm not holding my breath. I know there was a big problem while the power was out. He's being polite and feeding me, but I won't be shocked when he has to make his exit to get back to work.

“Come on, breakfast is waiting.” Nik gives my hips a squeeze.

I follow him to the couch and move to sit next to him, but he carefully lifts me into his lap before stretching to grab the plate of food.

“Are you okay with me feeding you by hand?”

“Yeah,” I agree. I’m not sure why I’m suddenly so self-conscious of everything I do or say, but I *really* am.

He pulls the topper off the plate and sets it aside. “The other will have breakfast meats and eggs. Are there any foods you don’t care for?”

“No, not at all. Not for breakfast. I’m not picky.” I give a tight smile, hoping it doesn’t come off as rude.

My stomach hasn’t felt great since I woke up this morning. It’s nothing serious.

I’m more concerned that I probably shouldn’t be eating, but I know that would come off as rude, and one thing that was drilled into my head growing up is manners.

When I woke up, I thought it was that I went too long without eating, but now it’s starting to feel like a different type of stomachache.

“You can be vocal about your likes and dislikes. I don’t want to think I’m learning something about you only to realize down the line that you were just being polite,” he says, carefully resting the plate on his stomach before slicing the French toast.

“I’ve never been spoiled the way I have since coming here.”

“I don’t think we’ve done anything to particularly spoil you. At least not yet.” He offers me a bite.

I take it and the sugary sweet taste hits my tongue. This is the type of treat omegas usually lose their minds for. Normally, I would be too, but it’s not hitting the spot today at all.

My mouth fills with saliva, and no matter how many times I swallow, it doesn't help.

He offers me a drink, and I grab the bottle of water, taking a long swig.

It doesn't help either.

In fact, that was a bad idea.

The tattoos on his hands flex as he offers me another bite.

Don't cringe, be polite and just take it. My head shakes involuntarily as a wave of nausea hits me hard.

"Are you feeling okay?" he asks with wide eyes.

"I don't think I'm going to eat anymore if that's okay. My stomach doesn't feel so good. I'm sorry, excuse me . . ." I am mortified, but that doesn't stop me from climbing out of his lap and bolting from the room.

I groan, leaning over the sink in the nest.

I think I vomited up everything I've ever eaten.

Then some stomach acid just for good measure.

Cool water bounces around my mouth as I rinse and spit. I stagger over to sit next to the toilet on the floor.

"She's obviously unwell," Nik says from outside the bathroom door.

"Yeah, no shit," Miller's deep growly voice replies. "Is Farrah on-site?"

"No, she's home with her family riding out the storm." Nik sighs heavily.

"We should text her at the very least," Miller says.

"She could be carrying our baby," Nik growls. "But according to the internet, there's no way this is morning sickness. Not yet. She doesn't have cramps though, meaning

she very well could be pregnant. Should we take her to the hospital just to be safe?"

Ice slides through my veins as I realize he's right. I could be pregnant, and I don't even know if they really signed my contract or if they just said they did.

I took their word for it, but what if they didn't? Or what if they only agreed because they thought the chances of me getting pregnant were really low and now they're furious? My chest rises and falls in quick movements as I try to keep from panicking. My stomach rolls even more violently.

"Please go away," I call out, trying to settle my shaking hands. "I probably picked up a bug on the flight here. I'll be fine."

"Then why aren't we sick?" Miller asks in a soothing tone.

"It must have a long incubation period," I offer.

I close the toilet lid and lay my arm across the cool surface before resting my head against my forearm. I groan. My stomach feels worse. I'm afraid I might be sick again.

My throat still burns from the acid or bile I choked on last time.

"I need inside that bathroom," Nik snarls.

"Fuck no, you'll only add your stress to the mix. Go check in with Kiernan and speak to Farrah," Miller says firmly. "I'll take care of Melody. Try to see what the weather says. That way we know where we stand if she doesn't start feeling better."

Nik grumbles something I can't understand, but Miller growls back in an equally low and dangerous tone.

I'm surprised when I hear footsteps heading away.

There's light knocking, but my head is spinning. I tell him to go away again, but the door opens and Miller lets himself inside.

"Aww, you look rough," he says, squatting down at my side.

“I’m fine.” I turn further away from his probing look.

“Clearly,” he says, chuckling. “So how about I sit down and we’ll be fine together?”

I shrug. It’s kind of nice to have someone concerned enough to want to check on me. Unless . . . “Are you only here because this is part of your job?”

“God no,” Miller says, sitting down. He scoots back toward the wall and pats his lap. “I bet I’m softer than that tile you’re sitting on.”

“Probably, but I don’t want to risk getting you sick if I’m contagious,” I tell him truthfully.

“I’d much rather deal with a few days of feeling under the weather than leave you in here alone right now.” He looks so sincere that I don’t think it through. I crawl over into his lap. My face wiggles around his chest as I bury my nose in his shoulder.

“You smell very manly and I like it,” I whisper, huffing deep hits of his scent, similar to the way Oliver did in the restaurant that first night.

“Well, you smell very sweet and feminine and my nose quite likes you.” He laughs, palming the back of my head.

I wrap my arms around his back and hug him. There’s something about the way he feels holding me that makes my impulses hum in delight.

I think he feels like a nest, but in human form.

“What are you thinking?” he asks in a gentle tone.

I shrug rather than speaking. It’s very difficult to put what I’m thinking into words. Thinking I might be pregnant is as exciting as it is terrifying.

“Did Farrah show you our test results that morning when you first went into heat?” Miller runs his huge hand over my back in a circular pattern.

I nod. “Well, she offered to, but she assured me you had lab work done within the last few weeks. I was in a lot of pain

—”

“Carver also got checked out since it was recommended for all monitors.” He shrugs. “Shit happens. I guess it’s not unusual for them to be tapped in. If you’d like to see our results now that you’re clear, I can have Oliver print them out for you.”

“No, that’s okay. I had my tests done in North Carolina, but they are a couple months old. I haven’t been with anyone since then, but I don’t mind having them redone. I think I was supposed to . . .” I grimace.

I can feel where this conversation is headed, and my stomach churns. I stretch up a bit to bury my face in his throat. He should probably be disgusted with me this close. He got an earful of me losing my breakfast *and possibly what I ate for lunch three years ago*.

“That’s not necessary. Not for me. It seems like we were probably supposed to discuss birth control before your heat,” he says.

“Are you upset with me?” I nuzzle deeper so I don’t have to see his face.

“Hell no.” He laughs good naturedly. “I’m trying not to get my hopes up in case you wouldn’t be excited.”

“What?” I push up on my knees to stare at his face.

“I’m getting older. All I really want at this stage of my life is a family,” Miller says, shrugging. “Maybe I’m boring, but I’ll leave the fancy careers to Oliver and Nik.” He grimaces. “I just mean I’ve accomplished most of my goals in life outside of finding a woman to love and raising a couple of kids.”

I wrap my arms around his neck, running my fingers over his skin to comfort him. That was endearing as hell. I wish I knew him well enough to have the right words to express that.

“That’s very sweet,” I murmur against his cheek. “I would kiss you right now, but I was—”

He cuts me off, “Would you be upset? Have you changed your mind since making that contract?”

“I want those same things, but I do think I got caught up in the fantasy of it all . . .” I go on to explain a little about how I ended up at The Exchange. I tell him how Ben asked me on a Christmas trip and ended up making me look like a complete idiot. Luckily, the owner’s omega helped ensure they’d find me a spot at one of the locations because otherwise, I don’t know what I would have done.

“Let’s back up for a second,” Miller says, gently squeezing my hips. “Your ex insinuated that he brought you as a gift to repair his relationship with his brother?”

That’s exactly what he did.

I snort, laughing against his neck. “I think he called me a peace offering.”

“What a fucking idiot,” he says in a much colder tone.

“Yeah,” I agree. “It was probably the most mortifying moment of my life thus far.”

“I hope you understand that you’re worth so much more than that. Not because you’re an omega, but because you’re a human being with freewill.” He kisses the side of my head and my heart flutters in response.

I lick my lips.

Miller isn’t drop-dead gorgeous the way Ben or Nik are. He doesn’t have that effortless swagger like Carver, or that vibe that Oliver has that screams *I’m a literal freaking genius*. But Miller is rugged and manly in a way that makes my knees clench as I hover over him. He’s just a really good man, and he puts me at ease in a way that’s difficult to explain. He wraps his arms around me, pulling me back to rest against his pec.

“Let me tell you about my family.” He teases his hand over my back.

I snuggle in close and listen to him tell me all about his mom, sister, and four dads. It’s very clear he had a good foundation. He was brought up in a loving and respectful pack, and they raised a damn good man.

Chapter Seventeen

Oliver

Following Melody's heat, I wake up feeling clearer and more coherent than I have in two or three years.

I spend a few hours fixing code that's been annoying the hell out of me. It's like a fog has slowly started to dissipate. Things I could do before, that have been harder since I got my diagnosis, are now surprisingly easy again.

It's close to ten-thirty when the red, glowing numbers on the clock catch my attention. I only planned to spend an hour or two finishing up some work before the others got up.

Pushing the chair back from my desk, I aim to find Mel.

The nest is empty.

I check both living rooms and am on the verge of texting someone, but I aim for Miller's bedroom first.

Melody is knocked out on his chest. A giddy warmth fills mine.

She didn't bolt following her heat.

Well, at least not yet.

If she does that's fine, I'm flexible on living locations. Texas is hotter than the world's armpit, but I'll survive if she's fond of it.

I grimace.

I'm not one of those people who handle heat or sweat well, but I can always stay indoors and make sure we've got the best air conditioning money can buy.

Miller is awake and typing something out on his phone.

“She’s not feeling well,” he whispers, running his free hand over her back. “But she said my scent settled her stomach . . .” He quietly goes through the events of the morning. “I’ve got to check in with the shit show downstairs. Will you stay with her?”

“Of course,” I agree, “are you going to move her to my room or?”

“I don’t want to risk waking her, but once she wakes up you can ask her what she wants to do.” He nods for me to come over. It’s a slow process as he carefully removes himself from under her, rolling her to face the middle.

I climb into the spot he vacated. He gives a wave and heads out without another word.

Melody rolls over and blinks, rubbing at her eyes when she notices I’m not Miller.

“Morning,” she mumbles, rubbing her face against my chest.

“Miller has some work he’s got to get done, but I’m here. Get some more sleep if you need to.” I kiss her forehead.

“Am I keeping you from working?”

“No, I caught up on everything I needed to for the day. How about you?” I snuggle closer to her. My system doesn’t like any space between us, and I’m strangely okay with that.

“I’ve got a deadline in two weeks and . . .” Her eyes widen almost comically. “Holy crap, I lost five or six days of that. Oh no.”

I frown.

I understand that feeling of pressure to meet performance deadlines, but she’s still recovering from her heat and possibly an illness or something more.

“Is there any way I can help?” I have to at least offer.

“You’re good with computers?” she asks, rubbing her hand over my heart.

“Yeah, it’s kind of my thing.” I shrug because I don’t want to sound cocky, but I’m sure I can do whatever she needs done.

“Do you think if I dictated a couple of scenes that you could type it out for me?” she asks. Her eyes clench closed, and I frown even harder. “I’m a little afraid to stare at my computer screen when even keeping my eyes open is tough.”

“I can definitely do that.” My chest puffs up.

Could I set her up with some high-tech talk-to-text software?

Oh, absolutely.

Am I going to?

No fucking way.

I’m going to figure out her pen name and read all her books so I can see if I can get any clues or hints to what she finds romantic and use it to my advantage.

I’d also really like to read the sexy scenes she’s dreamed up. Hell, I’ll gladly offer to recreate any she’s having trouble getting the logistics right on. It’s clear her career is important to her.

I intend to be the most supportive boyfriend on the planet. And not just because being around her is giving me hope that I won’t end up feral and need to be put down.

I really fucking like her. I love that she never makes me feel like I’m weird even when I say things other people know not to say.

I’m going to study her through her writing and then be the perfect hero from every one of her books.

Okay, that might require split personalities . . . But there are three of us.

“It won’t be weird?” she asks, frowning at my chest. “Do you promise you won’t pick on me even if it’s kind of cheesy?”

I chuckle. “I promise. What I can’t guarantee is that I won’t get a hard on if you start saying sexy things. I mean, shit that wasn’t very romantic. Are we dating? Can we date? I want to woo you.”

Her hand slides over my chest and across my stomach. My cock jumps in response, but now is not the time.

“You really want to court me?” she asks.

“Yes, courting. That’s the word I was supposed to use. Wait, is that different from dating? We go on dates and I buy you stuff and we see how things go? That’s what I would like to do. Do you want that too?”

“Yeah,” she says, chuckling. “I think I do.”

Melody and I spend several hours learning how to work together. I quickly pick up on the fact that she has one voice when she’s testing something out and another when she wants me to type it.

My favorite is when she brainstorms for the male character, she rambles aloud in her impression of his voice, and it’s fucking adorable.

Carver pops his head in Miller’s door sometime in the early afternoon. He’s got a tray of food and a smirk that makes me want to snarl at him to get out.

Shit, I probably should have fed her lunch by now.

Having a girlfriend is harder than a goldfish. I ignore the fact that my mom ended up repossessing the fish when I forgot to feed it for several days.

He lived, I’m not a monster.

I occasionally forget to feed myself too.

I set my laptop aside and pull out my phone. I quickly schedule daily reminders for mealtimes so I never accidentally forget to feed Melody again.

This is why packs are a good thing since I'll likely manage to miss the alarms at some point.

"Are you okay?" Melody asks, patting my thigh.

"I should have considered that you didn't keep down much breakfast. I never thought to offer to order us lunch." I cross my arms over my chest and glance at Carver, who is busy stretching across the end of the bed. "Thank you."

"No problem," he says, nodding to the tray. "There's a grilled cheese, a turkey sandwich, and a few other things. Do you think you can keep something down?"

Melody looks like she's contemplating exactly that as she sits up against Miller's pillows. "Yeah, I hope so."

Melody takes the grilled cheese, but she only nibbles at it. The three of us eat in Miller's bed, which I find funny because he'd kill Carver and me for doing the same thing if Melody wasn't involved.

We're just finishing up when Carver grins dangerously. "Are you still going to let me take you out some time?"

She's still got half her sandwich left. I think it's in poor taste to push the issue while she's unwell, but also, I did ask to court her earlier, so I keep my mouth shut.

"Is there anywhere to go on a date during this time of year?" Melody asks, giving Carver a smile that makes me jealous.

"I guess you'll just have to put a little faith in me." He winks.

Melody chuckles. "Yeah, I think I'd like that Mr. Carver."

He looks at me and smirks. "Don't be jealous. You can plan a date on your own night."

"You're not taking her anywhere until the weather clears up," I growl.

Melody jumps at the sound, and I instantly feel like an asshole.

“Damn, you’re on edge.” Carver laughs. “That’s why I said *some time*. All right, if we’re done, I’m going to take this tray back.”

He gathers up the remaining stuff, and right as he’s about to head out the door, he turns back. “Call me if you plan to workout.” He grins. “I’d really like to see you in those tight-ass workout pants again.”

Melody laughs and snuggles into my side.

“You do seem like you’re doing better than you were this morning,” I muse, rolling slightly to face her.

“Yeah,” she agrees around a yawn. “But I’m beat. It’s weird, I’m never this exhausted after a heat.”

My mind races with the possibility of what that could mean. It could be nothing, or it might be something totally life changing. I know from the research I did that we won’t be able to find out this soon. It’s one of those things where only time will tell.

My mom ranted and raved for years that I stopped taking naps before I turned three. I was an active kid because my brain never shut off. As an adult, I think I can count the number of times I’ve napped during the day on one hand. That’s not including when I’m up for days and then crash.

But as Mel runs her fingers over my chest I will myself to be normal.

I can do normal things like nap in the day with a beautiful woman . . .

Right?

Yeah, I can if I want to.

I breathe in deep lungfuls of Melody’s scent. It’s not as strong as right before her heat hit, but it’s still the most amazing scent I’ve ever smelled. I pull her closer with a hand on her back and wish I wasn’t so damn bony.

It feels like it takes years before I manage to start purring, but when I do, she lets out an adorable sigh as she wiggles closer.

See, I can be totally normal even if I have to lie here and pretend to sleep rather than actually accomplish it. I still can't imagine a more peaceful moment in time.

Chapter Eighteen

Melody

The next several days go pretty smoothly. I'm not violently sick again, but the cramps also don't start. I try not to obsess about it too much. Having kids is something I want more than pretty much anything in the world.

Nik and Miller are busy handling the situation from the storm. Apparently it was a big deal that a pack bonded without having it in their paperwork. The omega in question didn't have a guard though, so it seems to me that The Exchange did all they could.

If I declined a guard or moderator and then ended up bonded, I feel like that would be on me. Then again, I'm not the one in charge.

Nik and Miller both come up to the penthouse after work, and on the second night, Nik informs me they have a surprise.

"Can I wear this?" I ask, looking down at the oversized T-shirt and leggings.

"Of course," Nik murmurs, pulling me off the couch in the far living room. The storm is over, and for a few hours yesterday and today, I've been able to sit on the couch opposite the glass wall and watch the waves crash into the shoreline as I write.

This penthouse is beautiful, but it's not really homey. I always imagined being able to take my kids outside to run and play to burn off some energy.

Christ, Mel. How ungrateful can you be? It's like I find something good and still have to pick it apart.

Nik blinks down at me with his head tilted.

"Sorry," I whisper, taking his outstretched hand. "Let's go."

"If you're not up for gifts then we can settle into the nest. I promised we'd be around to take care of you." He pulls me into him. "I'm feeling like I've failed you in that." His head shakes. "I'm never this busy, and it couldn't have come at a worse time."

"It's okay," I tell him truthfully. "I have a job too. I understand that there are times when things come up."

"All right, gorgeous," Nik murmurs, brushing his lips over my cheek. "Let us court you properly."

I clutch at his forearms, giving him a nod because my mouth feels too dry to speak. His calloused fingers link with mine and he leads us out to the main living room.

My jaw falls open as I get a look at all the boxes.

"Those cannot all be for me," I whisper before I can hold back the words.

"They are," Oliver says helpfully. "This set I bought before your heat, but because of the storm they weren't delivered on time." He nods to a smaller set on the end table at his side. "These are the ones I picked out after."

"You don't have to open them all today," Miller assures me.

Nik guides me to the couch and nods for me to have a seat.

"Can I sit in your lap?" I ask Miller. He lights up, uncrossing his legs, and I sit on his thighs. The way he immediately wraps a thick forearm around my middle makes me feel melty inside. His hand brushes over my stomach, and I almost don't know what to do with myself. After our conversation, it's clear he and I have the same goals in life.

“I love holding you. You never have to ask. Next time you just plant your ass right on me,” Miller murmurs, nuzzling his beard to my cheek.

I smile like crazy, giving him a shaky nod. Goodness, he knows just how to make me feel wanted.

“Okay, these are from all of us,” Oliver says, grabbing two boxes off the top of the pile. He hands me the first, and it’s kind of heavy.

This one isn’t wrapped, and I pull off the lid to discover a super soft knit blanket. It’s the chunky weave style that I’m obsessed with, but I would never actually pay as much for a blanket as I know this cost.

I squeal, pulling it out and bringing it to my face to test the feeling.

“Oliver, I love it,” I assure him, staring into his dark blue eyes.

“Good.” The boyish smile that crosses his face makes my heart race. He’s so sweet. I’ve never known anyone as off-the-charts smart as he is. Over the last few days while the guys were gone, we’ve spent a lot of time together. Hearing him talk about tech and computer programs, it would be impossible to miss how intelligent he is. It was a little intimidating when I first realized it, but he’s so authentic it’s hard to feel uncomfortable around him. “How about the next one?”

I nod as Nik takes the blanket and wraps it around my middle. I do an embarrassing little wallow back into Miller’s chest.

“You know how you always try to give the furniture an ass groove?” Nik chuckles, swiping a hand over his face. “I think our omega is trying to make a permanent claim on your lap.”

“I’m good with that,” Miller says, squeezing my middle.

“Can we get back to the gifts?” Oliver asks.

“Sorry,” I mouth the word, stretching out a hand and wiggling my fingers. “Give me all the goodies.”

Oliver grins, shaking his head, and passes me the next box. I grab it and settle back into Miller's chest.

The lid comes off easily, and I snort a laugh when I get a look at what's inside.

"You got me an avocado stuffie?" I hiss, pulling it out and snuggling the foot-and-a-half-long fluffy avocado.

"It's microwavable," Oliver says, shoving his glasses up. "Well, the heating pad in his abdomen is. I originally got it in case you had cramps, but—"

I untangle myself from Miller and chuck myself at Oliver. He lets out an oomph, wrapping his arms around my back.

"He's adorable and I love him," I say, kissing his chin.

"These are from all of us, but I'm really glad." He gives me a lopsided grin that makes my thighs clench as I kneel over him.

"There's also a cooling gel bead mask," Miller says, pulling it out of the box.

"Apparently Oliver was on an avocado kick," Nik says, laughing.

"It's a perfect courting gift," I assure him, running my hand over his chest.

"There's more." He kisses my cheek and my silly heart races.

"This one is from me," Oliver says, handing me one of the boxes from the after-storm pile.

It's not a clothing box like the others.

This one is heavier.

I shake it until the lid comes off and my jaw falls.

"Wait, what is this?" My eyes fly up to his. "You got me a new laptop?"

"Eh." He shrugs. "It's new in the sense it's never been used, and I ordered it just for you, but I gave it some upgrades. You'll be amazed after that clunky thing you've been using."

However, that's not the gift." He grabs another smaller box that is wrapped in plain pink paper. He nods to it.

I rip into it and frown even though I don't mean to.

"I'm so confused," I whisper, looking up at him. "But I love the laptop, and I know it'll be a million times easier to use my publishing software now."

"I still can't believe you were logging into a website to convert your files," he says, running a finger over my cheek. "The microphone goes with the dictation software that's already installed on the computer. This way if you're not feeling great you can still get work done."

My lip quivers as I grab the stuff and set it on the side table.

"Wait, what happened?" Nik asks, coming up to squat at our other side.

My head shakes, and I bury my face in Oliver's throat. "Thank you," I choke out, swiping at the ridiculous tears that I wish I could will away. "No one. Not one person has ever supported my career."

"If it's important to you, then it's important to us," Miller says.

"Although, if you'd like to cut back and only write for pleasure, you can do that too," Oliver says. "I know how stressed you are about meeting your deadline." His chest vibrates as he starts to purr, and I cry harder.

Ohmigod, I am so embarrassing.

"I'm so sorry. It's a great gift and I love it. I don't know why I'm crying," I admit.

"My moms said to expect major mood swings during the heat and over the next few days," Nik says, grimacing. "Shit, I don't think that came out right."

I laugh, shaking my head. "It's okay. I know what you mean."

“Can Miller and I give you one gift from each of us?” Nik asks, running a finger over my cheek. “The rest can wait.”

“Of course,” I agree.

“This is from me,” Nik says, giving me a smile I can’t quite interpret.

It’s small and light. I’m pretty sure it’s a jewelry box. Once I pull the lid off, it’s clear there’s a black rectangle with a popular jewelry company logo on the top.

I shake the inner box out and pop the hinged lid.

My eyes fly to Nik’s as I gasp. There’s a round cut diamond pendant necklace and a bracelet that matches. I mean, I think it’s a diamond. That’s what it looks like.

The bracelet has two metal sides that are elegant and simple, but the top has a very large round clear stone.

“I noticed you don’t wear much jewelry, so if you hate it, we can save it for special occasions. But I know you have a birthday coming up at the end of April, and I figured it was fitting to match your birthstone,” he says, seeming to grow more uncomfortable the longer he speaks.

“I love it, but for the record, you don’t need to spend this type of money on me again,” I whisper, shaking my head. “Sorry, it’s beautiful and I love it.”

“Good,” he murmurs, wrapping his hand around my head and pulling my mouth to his. We share a kiss directly in front of Oliver’s face. He tightens his hold on my hips as Nik devours me in a tantalizingly slow kiss that builds until I’m grinding over Oliver.

“Let’s not forget Miller,” Nik says in an amused tone as he pulls back.

I follow his lips, which makes him chuckle.

I give Oliver a quick kiss on the cheek before aiming for Miller.

Nik helps me stand, and before I turn to head for my last gift, I make sure to kiss his cheek too. Naughty kisses are one

thing, but I want him to know how much I appreciate him.

“I really do love it. No one has ever given me jewelry before.” I give him a quick hug and move to Miller.

“Mine is nowhere as fancy as that,” he says, rolling his eyes at Nik over my shoulder.

I climb into his lap, facing him, and bury my face in his fuzzy throat. His beard tickles my skin, but I really love the sensation.

“Spending more doesn’t make it mean more,” I whisper against his ear.

“Good,” he says, taking the black box Oliver holds out. He sets it between us and I lift off the lid.

“Ohmigosh,” I whisper, running my fingers over the cover.

The dark brown leather scrapbook is smooth against my skin. Embossed on the cover are the words *Packed Full of Memories*.

“My dads gave my mom one very similar to this forty years ago,” he says, palming the back of my head. Oliver appears setting down another set of boxes, but these aren’t wrapped. One is a digital camera and the other is a small photo printer. “There’s another box of goodies. It’s paper and border, glue and tape, stickers to decorate it. That kind of thing.”

“I-I . . .” My head shakes and I have no idea why I burst into tears again. I seal my mouth to Miller’s as Oliver pulls the items free.

“I’m glad you like it,” Miller says, nuzzling his cheek to mine.

“I love it.” My heart races. I honestly don’t know how I lucked out finding these guys, but I’m really freaking happy that I did.

“You assholes,” Carver grumbles. My eyes fly to the door and he’s standing there, glaring at the guys. He’s got on dark jeans, combat boots, and the same long-sleeve security polo he always wears, but he looks extremely hot despite the fact there’s nothing different about what he’s wearing. I think it’s

his energy, or maybe it's the glare he's shooting at my alphas, but Carver is gorgeous.

"You didn't wait for me?" He sounds more hurt than I'd expect.

"Shit," Nik says, sighing heavily.

"It's fine," Carver says in an icy tone. He heads my way with several bags on his arm. "Can I give you my gifts in the nest?"

"It really wasn't purposeful," Oliver says, grimacing.

"Yeah, well, check your texts next time." Carver offers me a hand.

I give Miller's shoulder a quick squeeze and let Carver pull me up. He guides me toward the nest, and once we're inside, he closes the door.

"The cushion or the den?" he asks, nodding between the two. He kicks off his unlaced boots, giving me an expectant look.

"The den is good." I aim for the stairs, and since the curtain is open, I climb inside.

"Goddamn," Carver mutters. "Your ass is so damn juicy. It makes me want to bite it."

I laugh, settling myself down against the pillows. "Is that crossing the line? I haven't been out on a date with you yet."

"That will come," he assures me, tossing one bag to the side and bringing the other between us.

"I didn't know you wanted to be included in the gifting portion," I say, rolling toward him. "And for what it's worth, I don't think they purposely excluded you."

"Maybe not," he mutters, giving me a tight smile. "But I'm making my intentions clear now in case you were too hazy to remember."

He grabs the bag, setting it on my stomach.

I reach inside and pull out a journal. It's spiral bound with a pink and silver cover. I immediately flip it open to study the pages. There are character information sheets, plot points, possible plot twists, world information pages, and the list goes on.

"This is amazing." My fingers run over the pages. It's even in a girly font that I love. "Wow, Carver. I love it."

"Good, there's one more thing in that bag, but it's small." He nods.

I reach in and find a black pen box. Inside is a heavy pen that's pink and glittery.

"Thank you." I shove it all back into the bag and put it aside before tackling him.

"You're welcome." He laughs, squeezing my ass. "Will you sleep in here with me tonight?"

My eyes widen, but a smile crosses my face.

"Yeah," I agree. "I'd like that."

"Don't go gettin' any ideas like trying to seduce me." He bites his lip, looking like sex personified. "This is just a cuddly snuggle."

"I think I can manage," I say, but my face heats. I remember begging and demanding him to fuck me. It feels like we fast forwarded and now we're rewinding the clock.

Carver and I fall asleep in the nest. I'm not sure what time it is that I wake up nauseous and miserable, but I wiggle out of his hold and bolt for the bathroom.

I slide across the tile floor, barely making it to the toilet in time to vomit up stomach acid and pure bile. It's a terrible experience. My mouth burns with the rancid taste while my throat feels like it's on fire.

I rinse at the sink, frowning at my reflection in the mirror. Rough doesn't cover how I look. My face is pale and my hairline is sweaty.

"So this is probably crossing a line," Carver says, coming up behind me. He runs his hand down the back of my head, looking at me in the mirror. "But I'm a little afraid you're all thinking like alphas and omegas."

"What?" I turn to face him.

A shopping bag from a popular pharmacy dangles from his outstretched finger.

"It's not exactly a traditional courting gift, but I thought you might want to know . . ." Carver grimaces as I take the bag. He brings his hands back to my hips as I peer inside. My jaw falls and my heart pounds like it's trying to take flight out of my chest.

"It's too early for a pregnancy test," I say, shaking my head and closing the bag.

"It might be, but—"

"They don't show positive for weeks," I reply, gently pushing out of his hold to toss the bag on the counter.

My head is a mess. I haven't really let myself consider it. I'm not dumb, despite what people have always thought. I can't count the number of times I've been told *you're pretty enough you don't have to worry about being smart*.

That particular damage doesn't matter right now.

My birth control shot would have only worn off a week or two before I got here, and I've only been with Nik, Oliver, and Miller since before Christmas.

"I didn't mean to upset you," he says, pulling me into his chest. "You're coming out of another relationship. Is there no possibility?"

"No," I say firmly. "My birth control shot was effective until right before I got here. I haven't been with anyone in months."

It's a terrifying thought to consider what that would mean. I can't be tied to Ben for life. I'm finally starting to embrace a future without him in it.

"Okay," Carver says, leaning down to brush his lips over mine.

"I just puked," I grumble, giving him a shove.

"You're still cute," he says, smirking.

"You're still a pain in the ass."

"Aww, Mel. You better get ready. I'm going to date the fuck out of you."

I scoff. I'm pretty sure I slipped into an alternate dimension or something. That, or he's just being nice because he feels sorry for me. He's the only one who really had a conversation with Ben to know what he's like.

I've always done everything in my power to ensure no one knew exactly how crappy things got at times.

No, there's absolutely no way I could've been pregnant before I got here. They gave me a test at the other Exchange location before they sent me home.

I can't be stuck with Ben's crap for life.

Chapter Nineteen

Miller

Melody spends the morning praying to the porcelain gods. It's a shitty feeling being unable to fix the problem or even help her feel better.

Nik demands Farrah come into the clinic to see her, otherwise, we'll be driving to the mainland. The bridge isn't dangerous in good conditions, but it's still windy as fuck. Not that it would stop us, but it's much easier for Farrah to make the five-minute drive across the island than it will be for us to drive forty-five minutes into the next closest town.

Or maybe we're selfish dicks because our omega is miserable. It could go either way.

My anxiety is through the goddamn roof, but I'm doing everything I can to not let it bleed into Mel. She did some tests when we first got to the medical office, but she joined us in the exam room a few minutes ago.

Melody is in the chair next to mine, but she's got her head in the crook of my shoulder and her arm wrapped around my middle. I know she's anxious. Her stress pheromones are thick in the air. Not to mention the fact her hands are shaking as they clutch me.

Farrah opens the office door and carefully sidesteps Carver. The tiny room is crammed full of bodies.

"She's sick again," Nik growls, pacing the crowded floor.

"It's very possible you picked up a virus during your travels or even once you arrived," Farrah says, giving Melody

a soft smile. “I think it would be best if we clear the room, that way I have some additional space.”

“No,” Oliver says, shaking his head. “This involves all of us.”

“It involves my patient,” Farrah corrects, tossing a thumb toward the door. “If she chooses, I’ll bring you back in when I’m done *with* Melody’s permission.”

Carver stands by the door. He winks at Mel and opens it, heading out.

“Go on,” I tell Nik and Oliver.

They glare.

“Why do you get to stay?” Oliver asks petulantly. He looks like he’s mentally trying to wish me dead where I sit. Oh yeah, if looks could kill, I think I’d be in real trouble right now.

“My scent helps keep her stomach settled.” I nod for them to get the hell out. They’ll know something as soon as I do. Or immediately after, but in this case, that’ll have to do.

Nik sighs, but they do leave the room.

“You’re sure you’re comfortable with Miller staying?” Farrah asks, raising her eyebrows.

I don’t know what the fuck that look means, but I don’t like it.

Melody still has her face buried in my armpit, but she rolls her head to look up at me. I give her a nod. I’m afraid I’ll show my ass if they ask me to leave right now. It’s hypocritical as hell considering I just sent the others away, but my impulses can’t handle having Melody out of my sight right now. Not when she’s so sick and weak.

“He can stay,” Melody says, swallowing thickly.

I blow out a breath. Thank God.

“You might have picked up a virus,” Farrah says calmly. “But that’s not the only thing going on. You’re pregnant.”

A warmth fills my chest like I've never felt before. My free hand slides down to cup Mel's lower stomach. It takes about three seconds of the tight look on Farrah's face to realize I'm not going to like whatever comes next.

"In order for the urine test to pick up the pregnancy, you'd need to be a *minimum* of three to four weeks along. There's another test we use to determine gestation in omegas. Without a regular menstruation cycle, it can be problematic to determine conception without an ultrasound, this is especially compounded because omegas rarely conceive outside of a heat." Farrah grimaces. "But when you do, there are three months of unaccounted time versus only one month for a beta. This is in general, of course. There are always exceptions to the rule."

My mind races.

If she's at least a month along . . . *Fuck.*

Melody clutches me so tightly that I pull her from the seat next to mine directly into my lap. Luckily, Farrah wheels her chair to the side, ensuring she can see Melody's face.

"Ohmigod," Mel whispers, her eyes wide. "You can go. I won't blame y—"

"This changes nothing," I say the words and even though I don't know if they're true . . .

I'm going to make sure they're reality. Over the last few days, she's opened up more about her mom and that piece of shit ex of hers.

There's no way I can leave her to that.

We may not have bonded yet, but this is my omega. I'm going to treat her like we bonded during her heat and she's stuck with me for life.

She hasn't fully accepted that she's ours yet.

This might be a roadblock to her believing that I'm all in, but I am.

I know Oliver is too.

Nik is the only one I'm unsure about, but if he doesn't like it . . . Well then, he can make his own choices.

There's a fucking baby in the mix now. He or she is going to need love and support and protection just like Mel. Not to mention, this is basically everything I've yearned for. I'm not going to show my ass because it's a slightly imperfect version of everything I've prayed for.

One of my dads always says be careful what you wish for because God doesn't always grant prayers on your terms.

That very well could have been my packmate's baby instead of mine.

Would I have walked away if that was the case?

Fuck no.

"Christ, I hope we didn't hurt the baby during rut." My entire body goes stiff at the thought.

Farrah chuckles. "You didn't. It's not unusual for omegas who conceive outside of a heat to experience a mild version. Your system is different from a female beta patient. You met a compatible pack and that ramped up the same hormones that come during a heat. Now you're not experiencing cramps, and essentially this is your body's way of indicating that you're pregnant, much like when a beta skips menstruation."

"Is there any way to figure out how far along I am?" Melody asks. The quaver in her voice only makes me hold her tighter.

"Would you feel more comfortable if you and I talked alone?" Farrah asks, her eyes flicking up to mine.

"I don't know," Melody says.

"I think I can handle whatever needs to be discussed," I tell her, tilting her chin up. "We've all got history."

I'm still a little worried Nik is going to fly off the handle, but I will knock his ass out if need be.

He has a temper.

I think all pro-athletes are a little spoiled and used to getting their own way, but he's going to have to learn to shut his fucking mouth.

"Okay," Mel agrees. "I really don't want you to go."

My chest puffs up as my shoulders pull back. Her words stroke some part of me that really needed that confidence boost.

"The test isn't able to give us specifics. Well, it is and it isn't. If you're carrying one fetus then you're likely around ten or eleven weeks. I did some rough calculations. Pregnancy isn't calculated by fertilization date, but instead the first date of last menstruation. It's the first date of the last heat for a female omega. I think I'm getting more specific than the need calls for. I'd put your conception date just before Christmas, but you have to understand this could change once you have an ultrasound."

"No, you're right. It had to be the Christmas trip. I haven't been with anyone since. I mean except here. But wait, they gave me a pregnancy test in North Carolina . . ." Melody whispers, shaking her head. "I don't understand."

"I checked the date on that. It was administered on the twenty-eighth of December, and it was negative," Farrah says, looking at me like she wants me to hear that.

"This is a nightmare," Melody says, her voice breaking.

"This is a surprise, but not an unwelcome one," I murmur, kissing the side of her head. "Not to me. You don't have to do this alone."

"Miller," she sobs, burying her face in my armpit.

"I'm going to get you in with a colleague on the mainland," Farrah says, closing the paper file she's been holding before standing up. "They'll be able to give you more information and go over options."

"I'm having the baby," Melody says firmly. The fact she's buried between my arm and my chest significantly muffles her words, but a slow smile crosses my face. "Ohmigod, I have to tell Ben."

My heart sinks. I bite my cheek to keep from blurting out something that I can't take back. Personally, I don't think that fucker needs to know anything. He was a shit boyfriend. He'll probably be a shit parent, and he's *never* touching my omega again.

I carefully remind myself that this is dangerous territory. I don't get a say in that. All I can do is be the rock Mel desperately needs and pray that asshole magically drops dead. Unfortunately, my luck has never been that great.

Chapter Twenty

Melody

I came to The Exchange to move on from Ben. Somehow I managed to find a pack of men that I really like and who made me believe that it's possible to move on from the ten years I spent in limbo waiting for Ben to get his shit together.

I ruined everything, and I don't even understand how.

"My birth control shot was supposed to be effective then," I sob against Miller's shoulder. "Omegas don't get pregnant outside of a heat, that never happens."

"Six out of every hundred women become pregnant while taking the shot as directed," Farrah says softly as she heads for the door. "That includes omegas."

"Tell them to give us a minute," Miller says firmly. "Don't ask. Tell them."

"I will," she says, heading out.

"I can't do this," I whisper. "They're going to hate me. I didn't know. I swear to God I didn't."

And I really didn't. What Carver said this morning was almost too much to handle. We came to the clinic within hours, and I was still mulling over the implications of what he said.

Farrah suggested the test and it seemed irresponsible to ignore the possibility, but I really didn't expect it to be positive.

"Ohmigod, what a nightmare," I sob.

“Shh, you’ll make yourself sick,” Miller says, rocking me against his chest like I’m a toddler having a tantrum. “I’ll make sure they hear everything I heard.”

He lets me cry against his chest as he continues to murmur comforting assurances that I’m not alone. It’s when he starts to purr that I finally manage to breathe normally again.

“I don’t know what to do,” I choke out. “I live in a garage apartment at my mom’s house. I’m twenty-six years old. I think my impulses took over and convinced me that I could have a baby on my own. I have to write, like, five hours every single day just to make enough to pay for my cell phone and car. I couldn’t even get my own apartment because of how expensive my mom is. She isn’t great at taking care of herself, so I’ve always helped out with her bills, but after that there’s hardly any left for mine. I have some in savings, but I’ll have to go right back to—”

“Okay,” Miller says, nuzzling his beard to my cheek. “You’re going to focus on one thing at a time. The only thing you need to do right now is trust me. Can you do that?”

My eyes ache as I push back enough to look up at him. He squints as he studies me. My hands rest on his purring chest. I give him a shaky nod. I *want* to trust him, and I think part of me does.

An even bigger part of me has been abandoned and disappointed by every man I’ve ever loved.

“My dads walked out on me and my mom,” I say, squeezing my eyes shut. “I know she’s hard to deal with, but they didn’t even try to take me with them.”

His huge hand cups my cheek. “I learned in the military that there are some men who buckle under pressure. There’s another type who thrive under it. I’m somewhere in the middle. Like I said, I guess I’m pretty easy to please because all I’ve wanted for a long damn time is a family of my own. I know we’ve got a long way to go before you can trust me completely, but that’s the thing. Look at me, sweet girl.” My eyes pop open and he smiles softly. “I’ve never been afraid of hard work.”

“You’re an asshole,” Nik snarls. It’s muffled by the door, but it’s clear he’s furious.

“Yeah? You’ll get over it,” Carver says, chuckling.

“Are they fighting?” I ask, glancing over my shoulder.

“I think Carver is keeping them from busting in,” Miller says.

“You can come in,” I call out, wiping my nose. I can’t cause fights between them. I don’t know how I’m going to handle the discomfort of this conversation, but I’ll survive it like I survive everything else.

The door bursts open, and I steel myself for the world’s most uncomfortable conversation.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asks, barreling inside. He hits his knees on the floor next to me.

I burst into tears again because he looks so worried.

“Let me in,” Nik snarls.

“Fuck you, *boss*.” Carver’s voice is colder than I’ve ever heard it. “You and I are taking a walk around the building.”

There’s more shouting, but when the door closes, I can’t make out exactly what’s said.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asks, leaning in close.

“Medically she’s fine,” Miller says, giving Oliver’s shoulder a squeeze.

“Thank God,” Oliver says, nodding. “Why are you crying?”

“I’m pregnant,” I whisper. My head shakes involuntarily. I open my mouth to continue, but all that comes out is a whine.

“It’s okay,” Oliver says, nuzzling his face to mine. “Whatever you’re upset about, we’ll figure it out together.”

“I was pregnant before I got here,” I choke out.

Miller goes on to explain everything Farrah said. He makes it clear there’s no way I could have known. But that really isn’t true, is it? If I’d taken another test before leaving

Texas, maybe I could have caught it then. I definitely could've based on how far along I am.

My arms wrap protectively around my middle.

“Okay,” Oliver says, pushing his glasses up. “You and the baby are okay, though?”

“As far as we know,” Miller says. “Farrah is setting up a visit with an obstetrician on the mainland.”

“Okay,” Oliver says *again* as he stands. My eyes fly up to his, and he gives me a tight smile that I don't understand. He leans over, kissing my temple and runs his hand over the back of my head.

And then . . .

He walks out without another word.

Chapter Twenty-One

Carver

“I don’t know who the *fuck* you think you are, but put your hands on me again, and I will lay your ass out,” Nik growls.

I quirk an eyebrow. Yeah, he played pro-ball and he’s not in bad shape, but I spent a whole lot of years in the military taking on meaner motherfuckers than him.

My entire job is assessing threats and neutralizing them before he and Oliver even know they exist.

“Go on.” I chuckle derisively. “Take another swing. Get it out of your system.”

“Why the fuck do you think you have any right to keep *me* from Melody?” he growls, swiping at his jaw.

Mine doesn’t feel great either.

He got a solid hit in while I was busy corralling his ass out of the clinic.

I’m not proud of the fact I swung back, but sometimes it takes a little aggression to break through an alpha’s skull. At least the one currently glaring at me.

“Why don’t you think with your brain for five seconds *instead* of your bullshit alpha pride?” I suggest giving him a shitty smirk because he’s starting to get on my last goddamn nerve.

“Speak clearly.” He pushes hair back from his face, spinning in a circle.

“What reason could Farrah have for asking us to leave?” I’m starting to feel like he’s purposely being dense.

“For Melody’s privacy,” he hisses, his light blue eyes narrowing.

“Correct,” I agree. “She took a pregnancy test. Just from the little I know those things don’t work for like a month after the chick gets pregnant.” My eyebrows rise. “She’s also having symptoms of morning sickness and no cramps. Hell, maybe it’s a bug and I’m off-base, but I don’t think I am.”

“What?” Nik spins to face me. He freezes with his mouth hanging open. The asshole blinks for a few more seconds and his hand flies to cover his face as reality sinks in. He staggers back several steps until his shoulder rests against the wall.

“That’s why you couldn’t go in there right now.” I gesture toward him with both hands.

“Are you saying she knew this before coming here?” he asks, shaking his head. “No, I don’t believe that.”

“Good, you fucking asshole. Get it all out of your system. Did you hear the story of how her ex brought her along on some family fucking vacation at Christmas only to break her fucking heart? She thought he was going to propose.” I take a few steps toward him before I catch myself. “Let me hear you ask another bullshit question like that in front of Mel. I swear to fucking God, Nik. They will not be able to identify your remains when I’m done with you.”

“You’re really on your high horse today aren’t you, *Dylan*?” He spits my name like it’s a curse.

I sigh, shaking my head. “Not even close, but I’ve known you long enough to know you need to spew out all your bullshit before you can calm down enough to think clearly.”

“I thought she was pregnant with our baby,” Nik says, staring at the ceiling with his hands fisted at his sides.

“Would it matter if the baby was Oliver’s? What about if it was Miller’s? Or mine?” I tilt my head, watching him carefully.

“You didn’t fuck her,” he sputters.

God, it’s really hard not to slam my fist into his face. Apparently it’s impossible for him to imagine Melody pregnant with *my* baby, and that shit gets under my skin. I roll my shoulders back and blow out a breath to center myself.

“No, I didn’t,” I agree. “I’m still going to take her out on that date once she’s feeling better.” I cross my arms over my chest. “I knew it was a possibility she’d end that heat pregnant and there was no chance the baby would be mine. That doesn’t change the fact I’m interested *in her*. Not as an artificial womb for my kid. If you can’t say the same then you need to bow out.”

“Fuck you,” he growls, advancing on me.

I don’t step back. I plant my hands on my hips and give him a serious *fuck you* look right back. “You need to put some real thought into things and know where you stand before you talk to her. Don’t break her heart. She’s already had enough of that.”

“Motherfucker,” Nik hisses, swiping a hand over his face and staring at his feet.

My eyes widen when I catch sight of Oliver bolting down the hallway.

“Where the hell are you going?” I ask, stepping in front of his path.

“I need to pack. We’re seeing a doctor on the mainland. Melody’s pregnant.” He doesn’t stop, just spins around me and keeps moving.

I turn to watch him make the turn toward the elevators. Maybe I majorly misread the situation? Oliver didn’t say a word about the baby not being theirs.

“He’s probably grateful there’s no chance he passed on the gene for prematurely going feral,” Nik says like he can read my mind.

“Does she know who you are? Or does she still think you’re Nik the resort owner?” I cross my arms over my chest.

“I do own the fucking resort. Well, half of it, but no, I never had the chance to tell her prior to her heat.” He groans, covering his face with both hands. “Goddamn, I really am the asshole in this situation.”

“Yeah, you are,” I assure him, patting him on the shoulder. “On the plus side, I don’t think you outright lied about anything, but you definitely omitted the truth.”

“I kept thinking I’d tell her when it came up, but it never did.”

“Would that have flown for you if she had known about being pregnant? Can you imagine being like ‘yeah, it’s no big deal. I didn’t ask.’” I give him a look that indicates he should fuck off with that bullshit.

“I’m going to check in with Nathan and let him know Kara either needs to take over or perhaps Kiernan can appoint someone until he gets back,” Nik says. “We need to get Melody to Virginia and get her in with a permanent doctor.”

“Is that right?”

“God, unless she breaks up with us to get back with that asshole,” he says under his breath. “That would be devastating.”

“Prove to her that you can be what she needs,” I suggest, patting his chest. “He’s a righteous asshole. I only talked to him for three minutes, but I can assure you, I’m not letting her go back to that dickhead. Not without a fight.”

It’s entirely possible that Melody decides it’s easier to raise a baby with the biological father and tries to dip out.

I’m fairly sure at this point Miller and Oli would follow her. They’d pretend to get along with her dickhead ex and wait for him to fuck up, which probably wouldn’t take all that long. I have serious doubts that I could keep the peace with that fucker *at all*, but for Mel I would try.

“I need to speak to my brother,” Nik reiterates again.

“I’m going to check on Mel and Miller. How’s that for alliteration?” I chuckle, bumping my shoulder against his.

He sighs, but I blow out a heavy breath when he grins. He's difficult to get a read on during the best of times, but Miller is as solid as they come. Oliver had that puppy dog look in his eyes that guarantees he won't be hurting Mel any time soon. The clueless fucker might say questionable things from time to time, but he's not malicious.

"How about you make the call and we go find them together?" I offer.

"Yeah, all right," he concedes.

I shake my head. I can't control Nik. All I can do is be a decent guy and support Melody the best that I can.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Melody

Miller totes me out of the exam room and we grab the information from Farrah before heading out. I don't know what I would do without his steady comfort right about now. My mind races as he carries me down the hall and up the stairs.

"You cannot be serious," I say when I notice he's aiming for the stairwell. "You can't carry me up twenty flights of stairs."

"I can and I will," he says in a serious tone.

"I think I can survive the elevator." I stretch up, kissing the edge of his mouth.

Miller's hand flexes on my ass and then my back hits the wall next to the bottom of the stairs. It's so strange because we've literally already had sex, but it still feels very much like a first kiss.

My legs tighten around his solid form as Miller teases his lips over mine. He's a mountain of an alpha, but he's tender in a way no one has ever been with me. His palm slides up my neck, and he brushes his thumb over my chin as he teases my lower lip with his teeth.

His beard scratches my skin as I claw at his shoulders. The kiss turns from tender to downright dirty in the blink of an eye. Miller uses the wall as leverage to keep me up as his left hand brushes hair back from my face.

"Tell me you aren't going to run from me?" he murmurs in between deep kisses that make me grind against him. "We'll

figure out the rest as we go, but don't run, please?"

My eyes squeeze shut as my chest rises and falls. I honestly don't know what to say.

I'm embarrassed.

My heart hurts.

I needed a clean break from Ben and our small town. His family isn't rich, but they do well running cattle. My mom and I have always struggled, even before my dad's left. I've built a solid career for myself. I'm not rolling in money, but I can finally grocery shop without checking my bank balance before walking into the store. If Ben wants to fight me for custody? God, he has the ability to make my life a living hell.

"I'm scared," I admit. "And I feel incredibly stupid."

"We've all been there, but don't shut me out. You've had a shitty support system, and I can understand why that makes it hard to trust, but I won't let you down," he says, staring straight into my eyes.

He's so earnest it's easy to believe he's being sincere. The weird warmth that fills my chest helps to wipe away any lingering doubts. I thought Ben and I were compatible, but I never felt his emotions to this degree.

"I do trust you."

"Come on. Let's get you upstairs." Miller pulls me off the wall.

"Okay, but the elevator really is good. I don't want you to throw your back out toting me up twenty-something flights of stairs."

Miller chuckles. "You're adorable."

His words aren't dirty at all, but for some reason, they seem to radiate in my pussy like he told me to be a good girl and get on my knees.

Reality sinks in as Miller guides us into their penthouse. The jostling that came with all those flights of stairs didn't help my nausea, but I refuse to show it. He's such a good guy, and it sucks because everything just got so much more complicated.

My chest gets tight when I see the pile of bags sitting in front of the island.

"Put me down," I whisper. My legs shake, and Miller holds onto my arms while I get my balance.

Those aren't my bags, which means Nik or Oliver is actually leaving their own home to get away from me.

Oliver comes down the hallway with a laptop bag and a couple of bed pillows. He tosses them down on the chair and heads our direction while I'm still trying to formulate the words to apologize for getting us all into the situation.

"What happened?" Oliver asks, swiping his light blond curls back from his forehead as he gets closer.

"I'm so sorry." I chuck myself at him with no further warning. He's so tall that I only reach his chest. "Please don't leave because you're upset at me. This is your house, I'll go."

Oliver pats my back, frowning down at me. "This isn't our house. I'm packing because I'm going wherever you're going."

"What?"

"This is Nik's moms' penthouse." Oliver's forehead wrinkles and he sighs heavily. "He still hasn't told you."

"Told me what?" I ask, glancing between them. "And who? Nik?"

"That's a conversation I think would be best if you have it directly with Nik," Miller says, coming up from behind. He slides his hands around my hips and settles them on my lower stomach. "Nik does own half the resort, but we don't live here normally."

A few things suddenly make a lot more sense. The fact Oliver had to open three cabinets the other morning to find the glasses and how Miller had to search through the nest storage

for what seemed like forever to find more of the ice pack pillowcase inserts.

“Where do you normally live?” My mind races.

“Virginia. You’re going to love it,” Oliver says, nuzzling his cheek to mine. “It’s three stories and we’ve got plenty of space and a big back yard. Although we need to get a child safe fence up around the pool *immediately*. It’s inside the fence to the yard. You don’t have to worry about any neighborhood kids stumbling into it while we’ve been away, but there’s no protection if you’re already inside the fence. Does that make sense? It’ll be clearer when you see it.”

“Is that why you packed? You’re heading home?”

Miller growls. It vibrates against my back as his hand tenderly rubs over my lower stomach.

“If you want to go now then we can,” Oliver assures me. “Mostly I needed to be packed so I’d be ready to leave in case you were.”

“I think you’ll like the house in Virginia,” Miller says, pulling my hair to the side and kissing over my neck.

“You live there too?” I ask.

“I do,” he agrees, nipping at my throat. “I even own an entire ten percent of it.”

“He owns thirty-three percent,” Oliver says. “I told you before. I bought the other twenty-three percent from Nik and gifted it to you when you got stabbed to save me.”

“W-What?” I jolt, gripping Oliver’s forearms for dear life.

“It was a pen. I got *nicked* with a ballpoint pen when one of his techie fans got a little overzealous. It’s not like I took a machete to the kidney.” Miller laughs.

“You have fans?” I ask. “Wow, that wasn’t what I meant. I know you’re good with computers.”

“I’ve made a few software products that made life easier, even among my people,” Oliver says, shaking his head. His

shaggy hair bounces, falling over his forehead as his cheeks get pink.

“Your people?” I ask with a bark of laughter I’m not expecting.

“Yeah, the nerds of the world.” He bobs his head awkwardly. “Before the haze got worse, I used to be able to fix the problems no one else could find. The last year or two . . .” He shakes his head. “You’re beautiful, you smell pretty, and the fog is starting to clear just from being around you. I sniffed every card in the database, but since we took you last minute, your samples weren’t in that set. Once I scented you, I knew you were meant for me. Please don’t go back to your ex. I know it’s complicated because of this.” His hand comes to rest directly over my uterus.

Miller is still more gently massaging my ovaries, but he’s a man. I’ll give him a little grace on locating the area.

“He didn’t treat you right,” Oliver says, getting so close his glasses bump my nose. “You don’t have to ever tell him. That baby can be our baby just like it would have been if—”

Miller’s hand leaves my side to smack into Oliver’s gut. I can feel his head shake, telling Oliver that’s not going to fly.

“That’s very sweet.” I wrap my arms around his waist. “But I’d really rather not think about that at the moment.”

“How about you and I have a conversation?” Nik asks.

I startle at the sound of his voice and locate him standing in the open door that leads to the vestibule with the elevator and stairs.

“Come on you two,” Carver says, appearing behind him. “We can grab some food from downstairs.”

“No, I’d rather stay with Melody,” Oliver says.

“I promise to be on my best behavior,” Nik assures him.

“Would you like to threaten *his* life for a change?” Carver laughs. “It might make you feel better.”

“I think Nik knows what’s at stake if he steps out of line.” Miller nuzzles his cheek to mine from behind one final time. “We won’t be gone long.”

Oliver kisses me, giving my lips a little flick of his tongue before pulling back and following Miller. I watch them leave with a newfound level of anxiety.

Nik is disturbingly hot on a level that’s difficult for my brain to process. I thought some of it was the haze that comes with pre-heat, but apparently that wasn’t the case. He’s wearing a black long-sleeve T-shirt with the logo of some company I don’t recognize across the chest. He has the sleeves shoved up around his tattooed forearms, and as he prowls closer, I take a step back, followed quickly by another.

“No!” Nik barks.

A jolt goes through my entire system as I freeze. He moves faster than I thought possible and grips my hips, yanking me into his chest.

“Shit, gorgeous. You almost backed down the stairs.” He turns me so I can see how close I was to stepping off the top step.

I don’t think it would have been a huge deal, it’s only three carpeted steps down into the sunken living room, but it wouldn’t have felt great.

Nik always smells musky and manly like an expensive cologne, but it’s just his scent. My head tilts as I look up at him. He’s definitely a few years older than I am, I can tell by the small wrinkles at the edge of his eyes as he squints down at me.

“I’m sorry,” I say, swallowing thickly.

“No, I’m sorry,” he quickly replies.

“I have something to tell you,” we both say in unison.

I snort, shaking my head.

Nik grins. “Can I hold you while we talk?”

“Yeah,” I agree.

I could really use a cuddle right now even if I'm a little anxious for what he has to say.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Nik

I'm not sure how I got myself into this mess. Obviously I knew I'd need to come clean about who I am. I thought I'd do that before Melody's heat hit, but then it was all pheromones and dirty sex.

I settle myself on the long end of the sectional sofa, pulling Mel to rest in my lap. I kick my shoes off quite carelessly before using my toes to help remove her ballet flats.

Her face is red and blotchy, but she's still stunningly beautiful. I don't think I've seen her wearing makeup in all the time she's been here, but I have no doubt she'll be just as attractive when she's dressed to impress as she is in comfortable clothes and soft dresses.

I sit against the cushion, but Mel essentially ends up lying over me.

"I was pregnant when I got here," she says in a shaky tone. "Farrah said meeting a compatible pack could have mimicked the hormones that spike during a heat. Or I'm not sure I understood all of it. She also said sometimes omegas who get pregnant outside of a heat still have one final heat before their system catches up. I'm not sure, but you can ask her, and she can explain it better than I did."

"And that puts you how far along?" I ask, trying to keep my tone gentle.

I have no idea why, but I am fighting some lingering disappointment. Maybe I am a selfish dick because I liked the thought that she could be carrying my baby. It feels like I lost

something I never really had. It's complicated. She could choose to work things out with her ex.

"I think she said around ten or eleven weeks. She said it's not an exact science with the test she used to calculate, but I also know the only time I was with someone was right before Christmas," she says, staring at the arm of the couch.

"That's more like nine weeks then," I say mindlessly.

I'm no mathematician, but we're at the end of February.

"There's some weirdness on how pregnancy is calculated."

"How do you feel about this turn of events?" I try to channel my inner Max Miller. He probably knew exactly what to say to set her mind at ease. I don't doubt he mind-over-mattered his body and managed to purr despite the uncertainty of the circumstances. I'm no Miller, but I do attempt to offer her comfort.

"I feel like I completely understand if you've changed your mind about courting," she says in a wobbly voice that I instantly hate.

"Do you intend to go back to your ex? That's a lot of years' worth of history. I won't lie. It's daunting." I shrug. I'm pretty sure this conversation requires honesty on both of our parts.

"N-No." She shakes her head against my chest. "I can't go back to that. I wasn't happy. I don't only have myself to think about anymore."

"Is there a possibility he'll try to win you back?" My teeth grind together as I hold back from mentioning the violent things I'll have to do if he tries.

"I really don't know." She picks at something on my shirt. "I think I've always been a backup plan to him. Or I don't know, but I can't imagine him being excited about this. I think he's actually going to be really mad." Her chest rattles.

My forearm wraps under her ass, and I pull her further up my torso. Her warm breath fans over my neck as she whimpers.

“Last I checked, it requires two to create a life. He can be unhappy all he likes, it still won’t change the fact he holds fifty percent of the responsibility.” I palm her head as she shudders out a breath. “I don’t think you should worry too much about that now. Stress isn’t good for you or the baby. I have something I also need to tell you, and I’m afraid it might cause additional strain, but it’s not something I can keep to myself anymore.”

“If you have a wife or a girlfriend,” Mel hisses, trying to push herself up.

“Stop,” I growl, swatting her ass. “Jesus Christ, I guess I can understand why you’d be concerned, but no. I’m single and have been for many years.” I chuckle, pulling her back to lie over me. “Or I was until a beautiful little omega came out of nowhere and knocked me on my ass.”

“Tell me what you need to. Waiting is only making it worse,” she snaps.

“I do like it when you’re feisty. For the record, I’d love to see more of that in the future.” I sigh. It’s time to put it all out there. “I own half the resort. The other half belongs to my brother Nathan. He’s the one who runs it. I’m only here because he found his omega and demanded a vacation for their commitment ceremony and honeymoon.”

“Oh.” She sounds extremely relieved. “Where do you normally work? Or I mean, what do you do regularly?”

“I’m retired.” I clear my throat. “I spent a lot of years playing professional football, first for New York and eventually Carolina.”

“You played football for a living?” She runs her fingers over my collarbone.

“I did.”

“Okay.” She shrugs. “I don’t watch sports, so that’s probably not something we can bond over.”

My head falls back as I laugh.

I stare at the ceiling, wondering if the universe is playing some cosmic joke on me. I've spent the last three years doing everything in my power to meet a woman who doesn't want me because of my fame, and I genuinely don't think she has any idea I purposely kept my past from her.

"I am a little confused why no one mentioned that this isn't where you live. I didn't want to come off like a spoiled omega, but it's not my style at all. I couldn't imagine trying to raise a family in a hotel."

"Does that mean you still consider us as courting?" I tilt her chin up to face me.

"Are you sure you want to date a pregnant chick?" she asks as her face falls.

"You have no idea how much I want you, gorgeous." I shove my mouth to hers.

Melody grinds over my cock as I do my best to pour every ounce of apology I can into the sensual licking kiss.

"I asked Oliver and Miller to keep my secret. If I managed to find someone who didn't recognize me . . ." I peck a kiss on the edge of her mouth. "Don't blame them for keeping my identity from you."

Melody's forehead wrinkles. "I feel like you're being a bit over dramatic. If we don't count the days we were all hazy then that gives us, what? Maybe four or five days that you could have mentioned it? I don't expect to know everything about you just yet."

It's a tight fit since the couch isn't overly wide, but I manage to roll us, trapping her under me.

"This means you'll come to Virginia with us?" I ask, studying her face.

"I honestly don't know what to do," she whispers. "I'm fairly sure the three of you don't understand exactly how much my life is about to change."

The image of Melody's soft stomach swollen as she gets as big as a damn house makes me chuckle. It also makes my cock

jump against her thigh as I hover over her.

Perhaps Carver is right. We can make the future what we wish it to be. I certainly wouldn't have had any doubts if the baby was Miller's or Oliver's. I'm more terrified by the thought she could leave us behind to head back to Texas.

"I know I've been ready to settle down and start a family for years," I murmur. "It just took you a little extra time to make your way to us."

"Nik," she whispers. Her eyes fall closed, and I think it's clear she wants those things too. She just doesn't know how to believe they're possible.

"It's fast. I know that, but that's how things go with alphas and omegas."

"I spent ten years—"

I cut her off, "That's because your ex is a dick. I'm sure some of that is that two of you were young. I'm not twenty or even twenty-five anymore. I've got almost ten years in age on you. Give us a chance. What could it hurt? If you decide you're not happy, we won't make a big deal about it. But don't pass up an opportunity at something good because of the bad you've already experienced."

"Okay," she agrees, smiling up at me. "If you're willing to put up with morning sickness and mood swings then . . ." She laughs. "Let's give it a go."

Chapter Twenty-Four

Melody

Nik carries me to the nest following our conversation and spends the next hour or two cuddling with me. He has some office stuff to take care of, and I'm sleepy anyway. He gives me a tender goodbye kiss that feels very much like it should lead to naughty activities *not* him leaving the room, but I try not to pout.

Once he's gone, his scent seems to disappear all too quickly. I can't fall asleep even though I'm beat. The nest doesn't smell right without their scents.

I finally give up on trying.

I leave the nest and sneak into Nik's room. I feel a little silly knowing this isn't their house. I guess I overlooked some of the signs since I was hazy and everything moved so fast. I grab one of Nik's hoodies. I've never seen him in it, but it smells strongly of his sweat. I think he wears it to workout. I don't even have to dig through his crap to find it since it's laying over a chair near the door to leave his room.

I flip off the light and aim for Miller's room next. I'm not sure why this feels like a covert mission, but it sure does. I know they came back in a while ago, and Miller's room is closer to the main living room. I slide inside and squeak when I spot him coming out of his bathroom.

My hands fly to cover my mouth as I take in all of Miller's skin on display.

He's wrapped only in a towel that's low around his hips. His short curly brown hair sticks up wildly like he dried it in a

hurry.

“I’m so sorry,” I whisper, but my eyes are greedy for him. He’s such a big guy. His chest is lined in strong muscles, but he doesn’t have a row of abs like Nik or Carver.

“Don’t apologize. Did you need something?” he asks, grinning wickedly.

I scuff my sock against the carpet. This covert mission was highly unsuccessful. “Could I maybe borrow the shirt you were wearing earlier?”

He nods to a laundry basket by the door to the bathroom. “Go on, sweet girl.”

I still have Nik’s hoodie laying on my arm, but I make my way over and very unceremoniously dig out Miller’s T-shirt from the hamper. I mean to toss it with Nik’s sweatshirt, but I get a deep hit of his scent and end up burying my face in it instead.

I drop the hoodie and pull my dress off before yanking on Miller’s shirt.

“Thank you,” I mutter, grabbing the sweatshirt and tossing my dress into the clothes bin.

“No problem.” Miller chuckles.

I move to dart past him. My face feels like it’s on fire. I know it’s bizarre. Normal people do not dig through dirty clothes, but omega impulses are strange at the best of times.

Huge hands cup my hips as I move to escape. “You can borrow my scent any time you’d like.” He kisses my neck, running his hands over my stomach, and my boobs throb almost painfully.

“Well, that’s new,” I grumble, tossing an arm around them to help mitigate the ache.

“It’s very hard to remember that I’d like to court you properly before shoving my cock back inside you,” Miller muses, grinding his half-hard shaft against my bottom. “If I were you, I wouldn’t run on the way out. My instincts might

snap. I'd hunt you down and who knows what would happen after that."

"Oh," I say in a breathy tone I'm kind of embarrassed by.

"Go on, baby," he growls. "I'll find you once I settle the urge to fuck you through the mattress."

A shiver runs down my spine as I slowly leave the room. I close the door and lean against it for support. My chest heaves while my thighs clench.

Holy freaking dominant alpha. And I loved every second of it.

"It's weird as hell to see you wrapped up with my pillow," Carver says, crawling into the nest. "But it does make me feel like a fucking king."

"Get out if you're going to make fun of me," I snap with a frown.

I don't think I've ever been so moody before, but I'm going to guess it's the unbelievable amount of stress and fear of the unknown.

It doesn't feel possible that I'm pregnant, but every time I'm hit with another unexpected wave of nausea or a weird ache in my boobs, it does become a bit easier to acknowledge. I am excited. It's just a little terrifying knowing that I'm going to have to come clean with Ben at some point.

"Aww, I'd never make fun of you for that, sweetheart. I think it's one of the cutest things I've ever seen. Although I could do without the locker room smell." He laughs, shaking his head. "If you're feeling up for it, I was hoping you'd let me take you out on a date tonight?" He tosses himself down next to me.

I roll to face him, but I get tangled in Nik's giant hoodie, and it becomes a whole thing.

“Let me help,” he says, smirking as he lifts me using his forearm strength alone.

I twist and face him.

He’s really hot, like melt my brain matter gorgeous, especially when he’s cocky. I’m sure that bemused grin of his has disintegrated quite a few pairs of women’s panties over the years.

He quirks an eyebrow. “If you’re about to break my heart, just get it over with already.”

“If you’re still interested after what I have to tell you.” I swallow thickly, but it feels like there are rocks in my esophagus. “Then yeah, I’d love to.”

“I already know,” he says, raking his eyes over my face. He bites his thick lower lip, running a finger over my cheek. “I think I knew before the appointment, or I had a feeling.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t ready to hear what you were trying to say, but it was thoughtful. I get that you were trying to save me from that public humiliation.” My head shakes, and I look away from his dark eyes.

“Stop,” he says. “We’re not doing that. So does that mean you’ll go out with me?”

“I don’t have anything seriously fancy,” I warn.

“Do I look like I’m going to swing something super high class?” He chuckles. “They probably wouldn’t let me in the door if they have any kind of dress code.”

“Okay then, yeah, I’d love to,” I agree.

“Good. Do you mind if Oliver comes with us?”

“No, that sounds fun.”

“All right,” he says, rolling over on top of me. “Why don’t you get dressed and maybe shower. I didn’t want to mention it, but you smell kind of like Nik’s armpits after he does too much cardio.”

“Ohmigosh,” I snort.

“You know you’re sexy when you can pull off armpit funk and you still make my dick hard,” he says, grinning against my cheek. He runs his hand over the top of my head and pushes his mouth to mine as he grinds over me.

I smile into the kiss and pray my stomach doesn’t embarrass me on my first real date with Oli and Carver.

I shower and change. I think I look decent enough for a casual dinner. I even run some mascara over my lashes and put on lip gloss. Honestly it’s about as good as it’s going to get.

I’m concerned I’ll be cold since the dress I picked has short sleeves and it falls above my knees, but I do have a small leather jacket that I toss over it.

“Damn,” Miller growls when I make my way down the hallway. He prowls toward me, and the next thing I know, he’s got me wrapped around his chest and my back against the wall as he kisses me senseless. I pull back gasping for breath, and Miller grins wickedly. “I call the next date. Don’t worry, Nik and I will bring anything else you may have left behind.”

“What?” I ask as he places me on my feet. I know they asked me to pack up all my stuff since I’ll be seeing the OBGYN on the mainland tomorrow, but I guess I didn’t realize we wouldn’t be coming back to the hotel following the appointment.

“Nik’s brother and his pack are on their way back,” Miller says, running his hands down my arms. “God, you really are beautiful.”

It’s vain to admit, but I like not having to wonder if they’re attracted to me. I think I’m finally gaining a little self-confidence back.

“Thank you,” I murmur, stretching up to kiss him again.

“All right,” he growls. “I’m going to miss you tonight, but I know they’ll take good care of you. I won’t miss your appointment, not for anything. You still want us there?”

My mind races. It could end up being awkward again, but I don't have anything to hide. I can't imagine what it would feel like trying to face that appointment alone. If they can ignore the slight discomfort, then so will I because I need someone in my corner right now.

"It would mean a lot if you were there," I say, fighting the wave of emotion that hits me square in the chest.

"Good, I think you'll find it's going to be very difficult to keep me away from you from *here on out*. I'm only managing tonight because I trust Carver with my life, and I genuinely think he's serious about you," Miller says, kissing my cheek before linking our hands together.

I lean in close to his side and let him guide me off toward my date.

We hit the lower lobby, the one that leads directly out to the parking lot, and Miller aims us toward the doors.

My heart stalls in my chest when I spot Nik walking hand in hand with an obviously pregnant woman.

I mean like she is very clearly quite knocked up.

I stumble and miss a step. I'm in flats, but if I was in heels, I would be hitting the floor right about now.

Miller's hand tightens on my hip and he manages to keep me upright as my gaze flies from Nik and the woman back to Miller. He doesn't seem alarmed, and that does help me from straight up panicking, but emotionally, I'm not doing so hot right now.

I point blank asked Nik if he was with anyone, and he said he was single.

That better be his damn sister I've never heard of.

Actually, I changed my mind.

His hand is definitely a little too low on her ass for that to be his sister.

“Miller,” Nik says, lighting up when he spots us. His voice sounds weird, and I frown like crazy.

The woman at his side has short black hair to her shoulders and large almond shaped eyes. She’s beautiful and probably close to six or seven months pregnant.

I stagger back a step because something is not adding up. I pull a hand up, rubbing at my eyes like maybe I’m seeing things. That’s definitely not Nik. I can’t put my finger on it, but I know it’s not him.

“I hear congratulations are in order,” Nik’s look-alike says, coming closer.

“Nathan,” Miller says, squeezing my hip. He looks at the pregnant woman. “Selena, you look lovely.” He looks at me. “This is Melody.”

I’m still frozen, blinking like a complete goofball because Nik has a twin brother. He mentioned a brother, but he absolutely forgot to mention they’re *twins*. Miller releases me to shake hands with Nathan, and I’m still dumbfounded.

“It’s weird, isn’t it?” Selena says, stepping up to my side. “I knew it was coming, and it still made me . . .” Her face transforms into a goofy cringe. “Didn’t Nik warn you?”

“Of course he didn’t,” Nathan says, holding out a hand. “He never tells anyone unless he has to.”

Now that I’m not in shock, I can see that he doesn’t have tattoos peeking out the top of his neckline or out the bottom of his sleeves like Nik does.

I shake his hand and he pulls me in for a hug. “Welcome to the family. I never thought I’d see the day my brother settled down.”

Miller growls a low, dangerous sound.

“Shit, sorry,” Nathan says, tossing his palms up and backing away.

“Fuck.” Nik’s voice comes from behind me.

I spin around, and he’s approaching with Kiernan Daniels.

Kiernan is a chubby older man with a thick white beard and salt and pepper hair. He has a Scottish accent, which I only know from meeting him during my unfortunate Christmas trip to the North Carolina Exchange location.

“By the way, I have a twin,” Nik says, giving me a chagrined smile.

“No more fucking surprises,” Miller growls. “Do you smell how stressed she is right now?” He wraps a hand around my stomach under the bottom edge of my jacket. “It’s not good for the baby.”

My jaw falls open. Okay, apparently that news is all out there in the open.

“I’m sorry,” Nik says, prowling closer. He steps up to my front and tilts my chin up to look at him. “Carver is wondering why the hell you haven’t made it outside yet.” He brushes his lips over mine, and I kind of melt into his chest.

All while Miller’s hand still rubs my stomach. It’s a little bizarre how obsessed he is with touching my belly. Especially since I’m sure that’s just my normal lower stomach chub and not actually the baby at this point, but it’s also really freaking sweet.

“Have fun on your date. We’ll meet you at the doctor’s office in the morning,” Nik says, squeezing my ass and pulling me closer for an actual kiss.

“That shit blows my mind.” Nathan chuckles. Selena slaps his chest. “What? It does?”

My cheeks feel warm as we pull apart.

“I wish I could be with you, but I’ve got to hand the reins back to Nathan,” Nik says, frowning.

“I’m not even pissed anymore,” Nathan says. “Sure, you left me with a clusterfuck to clean up with the OPA, but I’m happy for you, bro. Ever since Kara called and I realized we’d have to cut our trip short—”

“Kara called you?” Nik asks, cutting him off.

“Yeah, did you really think we could have made it here in less than twelve hours if we weren’t already on our way?”

Nik sighs.

“Anyway, I’ve spent the last few days planning ways to strangle you in your sleep, but I’m over it.” Nathan chuckles. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Melody.”

I give him a small smile.

“I’ll walk you out,” Miller says, pulling me away from Nik.

“I’m glad to see ye’er doing well,” Kiernan says on our way by.

I wave my thanks as Miller guides us toward the door. Despite the uncertainty, life definitely is looking up.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Carver

I'm a gentleman, or I should say I'm desperately trying to be one. My cock doesn't seem to understand the definition of the word. Ever since I caught sight of Mel as she climbed into the SUV, it became clear I probably wasn't going to make it to the second date without shoving my cock inside her sweet pussy.

Oliver seemed equally at a loss for words. She's got on a cream-colored dress that's tight on her tits and stomach, but it gets fluffier around her hips. Fuck if I know what that style is called, but I do know she's drop-dead gorgeous.

Nik's nickname for her is apt.

Miller mentioned her preference to avoid seafood. I could've kissed him because I nearly fucked up our first date. Finding a restaurant around here that didn't feature seafood was impossible, but I managed to find a nice little steakhouse that at least has options.

It's directly next to a decent hotel that we've already reserved a room in.

I drop Oliver off at the front desk to check us into the room, that way if Mel isn't feeling well after dinner, we can head right up. Are we being presumptuous assholes renting a room with one king-sized bed? Probably not, considering she hasn't spent a night alone since her heat started, but my hands do weirdly start to sweat against the steering wheel when I think about her being pissed.

Oliver comes back before I can blurt out something ridiculous like offering to get her a separate room.

Jesus Christ.

I need a beer. Or seven.

We park and head into the restaurant. One side is a steakhouse and the other is a bar with a dance floor. I'm not entirely sure Melody will be up for dancing, but I do want to give her a full date experience, so I'm grateful it's there if we aren't quite ready to end the night.

We make it inside and they seat us in a two-sided booth. I would have preferred one of the round ones, but it is what it is. Mel and I share one side while Oliver takes the other.

Dinner goes well.

I mean, other than Oliver informing Melody that she needs to pick a different salad dressing when the server doesn't know if their Caesar dressing is pasteurized, that is.

Melody is a good sport about it. She stretches a hand across the table after we place our order and thanks him for teaching her that tidbit of information.

Oliver lights up, and it's clear he'll be researching every possible food she might come into contact with from here on out.

Melody puts away a fair amount of her steak and potato, but she declines dessert when it's offered. I brush my fingers over the soft skin of her inner thigh, relishing how she feels pressing against my side.

The waitress drops the check and Oliver and I immediately fight over it.

"You paid for the room," he growls.

The skinny fucker has long arms and unbelievably quick reflexes, I covertly flip him off while Mel frowns at her phone.

My interest immediately transfers to her screen as it lights up again. Her ex's picture dances across it, and I fight the urge

to do something stupid. I've already spoken to that asshole once. I don't think it would go any better a second time.

My hand dances up Mel's thigh in an attempt to distract her.

"He's still bothering you? Or did you reach out to him?" I ask close to her ear as I tease my fingers higher.

"I thought I should wait until after seeing the doctor tomorrow before . . ." She sighs. "I won't lie. I don't want to have that conversation. I know he's not going to be happy."

I twist toward her, sliding my free hand around her throat and up to turn her to face me fully. She gasps as I brush the fingers of my other hand over her panties. It gives me the perfect opportunity to shove my tongue into her mouth.

She tastes sweet like the soda she's been drinking. That's just Melody. She's always fucking delicious. My blood pumps through my system with staggering force. I've never felt as out of control as I feel when Melody claws at my shoulders. I've been a goddamn saint at being patient.

"You smell electric to me," Melody whimpers as we pull back. "I've never had an attraction to a betas scent before. Not like I'm drawn to you. I didn't mean that how it sounded." She stares into my eyes, running her fingers over the back of my neck. "I just meant I really like you."

I give her lower lips a little squeeze between my fingers and she spreads her legs wider.

"I like you, too, sweetheart," I assure her, grinning against her cheek. "Ready to get out of here?"

"Yeah."

"I paid while you two were *preoccupied*," Oliver adds, laughing.

Melody's phone lights up with the dicks picture again. I don't hesitate to swipe my finger to decline the call.

Mel gives me a relieved smile. "Thank you."

Melody seems very sheepish once we're all in the hotel room together. Maybe I am a presumptuous dick. She's only been with her asshole ex before her latest heat. Who knows where her head is at?

Oliver drops his suitcase in the armchair and immediately starts digging in it. "I'm going to hop in the shower if neither of you need the bathroom."

"I'm good," Melody says, kicking off her shoes as she pulls off the black leather jacket.

Oliver looks at me. I shake my head to clarify I don't need it either. He nods and aims for the shower while my focus is on the fidgety little omega. I'm not sure why she's so damn cute as she darts her gaze around like she's trying to find anything else to focus on.

I pull off my shirt and kick my unlaced boots in the corner before prowling toward my prey. She's been lightly perfuming since our kiss in the restaurant, which Oliver quietly muttered to me as we dug the bags out of the cargo area of the SUV.

It's not like I could miss the fact. My nose might not be as sensitive as an alpha's, and she might not be flooding the air the way she did during her heat, but it's clear.

She wants me just as badly as I want her. That's a goddamn good feeling. I've never been one of those betas who wanted to be an alpha. I don't think a fancy cock defines the man, nor my ability to provide for my family.

Mel turns to drop her earrings on the television stand. My hands land on her hips as I grind against her ass.

"Would you like help removing the necklace?" I ask against the shell of her ear.

She gives a clipped nod as she wiggles against my chest. Her dress feels silky against my forearms as her sweet vanilla and coconut scent fills the air. I make my way up to undo the necklace Nik bought her and bring her hair to the side. I nip at

her neck before making quick work of the clasp. I set it next to her earrings before working down her zipper.

My hands land back on her luscious hips.

I've dreamed about all the ways I'd fuck her if I got the chance, but I'm trying to hold onto the shreds of my sanity that I have left.

Mel whimpers, baring her neck as she curves forward. My teeth scratch over her throat as my arm wraps around her middle to keep her upright.

I turn her and sidestep a few feet. This way she has a perfect view of everything I do to her in the mirror.

Her eyes sparkle as they meet mine. My cock aches, but it's that weird, warm feeling that radiates in my chest as she grins at me that makes me nervous. Her puffy lips part gently as I undo my belt and toss it aside while I tease my other hand over her stomach and lower toward her pelvis. Apparently I'm on my game with multitasking tonight.

She's so damn short in comparison to my frame that I can perfectly see down the front of her dress. She really does have a nice pair of tits.

"I've got to admit, I've never had a thing for wanting to fuck a pregnant chick." I chuckle, shaking my head. "Not until you. I've developed a slight fascination to the fact you're growing a fucking life inside your body."

I slip my fingers into the waistband of her panties and pinch her pussy lips.

"Carver," she whimpers.

I smirk against her shoulder, brushing my beard over her skin. She trembles in response. I use my teeth to grip the strap of her dress and pull until it falls down her arm.

Her pupils are blown wide as her gaze meets mine. There's something about that aching look of desperate desire all over her face that fucking kills me.

I kiss my way across her skin and pull down the other side of her dress as I slide a finger between her lower lips. She's

slick to the point it's hard not to shove her hands down on the dresser, yank her hips back, and slam inside her.

“Fucking Christ, you're soaked.” I drag my teeth over her neck and she curls away, trembling. “Goddamn, Mel. Do you feel how hard you make me? It turns me the fuck on being coated in your cunt.” I pull my hand off her hip to yank the front of her bra down. Her heavy tits spill over the cups and I pinch her nipple, rolling and tugging lightly at the same time as I slide my middle finger lower to tease her hole.

“Damn, my tits are tender,” she groans.

“Sorry, sweetheart. I wish Oliver was here. I'd have him kiss it better for you.” I switch to light flicks between my middle and pointer finger.

Her hands fly back and she claws at my ass. I've still got my jeans on, but I release her tit so I can unbutton and unzip them.

“You should get inside me.” She nods, her head rolling against my chest.

“Should we take these off?” I muse, snapping the band on her panties.

“Unless you plan to pull them to the side, then yes.”

“Such a brat.” I chuckle against the side of her head and pull my hand free of her pussy to rip them down.

Mel steps out of them and surprises me by spinning around and dropping to her knees. She yanks on my jeans and my cock bobs out. Sometimes it's convenient to go commando. Her breath fans over my pelvis as she scratches her nails over my lower stomach and wraps a small hand around my shaft.

I groan, fisting a hand in her hair and guiding her mouth to my tip. She grins and my damn knees go weak. The way her naughty tongue curls around my crown isn't doing shit to help keep me upright.

I tighten my grip at the base of her skull. She's tentative at first, rolling her tongue around the mushroom head, but not

going much further. My forearm flexes as I hold myself back from slamming her deeper.

“Are you impatient, Mr. Carver?” she moans around my cock.

“Fuck yes, dirty girl. You know I am.”

“Whatcha gonna do about it?” she teases, immediately going back to flicking her tongue just over the slit.

“Fuck, Mel. You’re playing with fire.” I kick the rest of the way out of my jeans. Which incidentally makes me feel like kind of a dick. I’m supposed to be romantic tonight.

“You talk a big game, but I’m not scared of you.” She smiles, kissing the tip of my cock.

I pull her up, using her hair as leverage and Mel glares once she’s back on her feet.

“Naughty little omega, I’ve already told you. I’m in charge,” I say, guiding her over to the bed. I use my free hand to unhook her bra, it slides down her arms and she tosses it aside. I leverage my hold in her hair to bring her mouth to mine. I bend lower, lessening the strain on her neck.

She grabs my cock, running her finger over the crown before giving me several solid jerks against her lower stomach.

I release her hair, gripping her hips and toss her onto the edge of the bed. She lets out an adorable little squeak as I kneel in front of her. Her legs hang off, and I bring them to rest on my shoulders.

Her nipples are tight as her chest heaves, and it makes me chuckle. I swirl my tongue around her clit, teasing my thumb barely inside her opening. I noticed during her heat how her body immediately tries to clamp down on any intrusion.

Mel begs and thrashes, but I don’t let up until she soaks my face as she screams out her release. Hopefully this place has decent insulation, or the neighboring rooms are going to be pissed.

I'm covered in her slick as I climb up her body. Her legs wrap up around my ass as I grind into her.

"Can I fuck you how I want?" I ask against the shell of her ear. "Use your slippery little pussy to get myself off?"

The thought sends an undeniable thrill straight to my nuts. I've never fucked without a condom before and the idea of nothing between us only ratchets up my need to get inside her.

She nods. "I'd like to come too, please."

"We'll see." I chuckle at the look of horror that crosses her face. The naughty little vixen digs her nails into my ass. Fuck me, I've always liked a little pain with my pleasure, but more than anything, I like it when she's feisty. I'm on edge just from the taste of her still on my tongue. "Be careful, dirty girl. I'd hate for you to start something you can't finish."

I wrap my arm under her, pulling her chest to mine, then I crawl us up the bed until her head hits the pillow.

See, totally a gentleman.

"I'm gonna fuck your slick little cunt raw now, sweetheart." I shove my tongue into her mouth as I hover over her on one palm. I grip my cock and swirl it from her clit down to her tight little hole and back again. "Do you like the way you taste on my tongue?"

She nods.

"Please, Dylan, fuck me deep," Mel begs, staring straight into my eyes.

I thrust into her without warning. She arches toward me, gasping so loud I slap my hand over her mouth.

"Holy shit, Mel," I choke out. I pull back until I'm kneeling and move my hand into her hair. I curl her up until she has a view of me disappearing inside her. "That's unreal. I've never been inside someone bare before. Goddamn, you're so wet but tight. Look at your perfect little hole stretching around my thick cock."

She whines in response, and it only pushes me closer to the edge.

Her heavy tits jiggle with each snap of my hips. Her hand slides down, and I think she's going to play with her clit—which isn't a bad idea because my balls are already getting tight. But she wraps her forearm around that soft pooch of her lower stomach that I fucking adore.

I use my core muscles to keep myself up and bring the palm that was on the bed to knock away her arm. “*Every* inch of you sexy as fuck. I love watching you bounce.” Mel frowns. “You don't like that? Too bad.” I pull out and ram back inside her. I bend close, brushing my chest against hers as I kiss her. “You're fucking beautiful. Your curves make my cock rock hard. Don't hide from me.”

I kiss the fuck out of her.

I release her hair and slide that hand around her neck, gripping gently. “You ever try that shit again, and I'll grab my belt and tie your hands together. Then I'll fuck every hole I want and come all over every inch of your skin to claim you as mine. I'll have you *dripping* in my cum.” I smirk. “Complain about it, and I'll spank your ass raw and then get back to it.”

“Sorry,” she whispers.

“I'm trusting you to keep it down until Oliver can put your pretty mouth to good use.”

“I will.”

“Sorry, sweetheart. This may get a little rough. Enjoy the ride while I make you mine.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

Melody

Dylan Carver knows how to absolutely wreck a woman in the best way possible. I'm grateful when he seals his mouth to mine. He's hitting my g-spot in deep rhythmic strokes that make my entire body tingle.

"Rub your clit for me, sweetness," Carver says against my cheek. He swells even larger inside me. My body tries to lock him in place, but he keeps working himself in and out.

It's so intense that I can't seem to focus on anything.

"How about I help," Oliver offers, climbing onto the bed at our side. His cock bounces against my side as he reaches a long arm between me and Carver and pinches my clit.

I bow off the mattress and Oliver helps pin my top half down.

"Here let me suck your fabulous tits," he growls.

"Are you feeling a little adventurous?" Carver chuckles.

"Yeah," I moan as Oliver flicks his tongue over my right nipple.

"Let's try something," Carver suggests, pulling out of me.

I barely hold myself back from sobbing.

"Stand next to the bed," he directs Oliver.

Oli pops up and stands next to the side of the bed with his dick heavy and pointing toward me. I lick my lips. I suddenly have the urge to taste him.

“I’ve got you, sweetheart,” Carver says.

He pulls me up and lays me back down with my head at the edge of the bed. It doesn’t hang off, but it’s close. Carver moves with me and pulls my thighs over his before guiding his tip back to my entrance.

“What do I do?” Oliver asks, pulling his glasses off.

“Shove your cock in her mouth and do a push up over her. I’m pretty sure you’ll be able to lick her clit like this.”

“Okay,” Oliver says, standing over me. His forearms hit the mattress near my middle as his cock bounces against my face.

Carver flexes just right inside me, and I ignore the awkwardness of the position, pulling Oliver’s cock to my open mouth. Carver continues to practice grinding into me as Oli wraps his tongue around my clit. I know they’ve got to be all up in each other’s personal space, but the combination of both of them pleasing me is all I can process.

At first, it’s hard to do anything except let Oliver fuck my mouth, but eventually I smarten up, wrapping my hand around his knot.

“Fuck, Mel,” Carver groans. “I’m about to bust.”

Oliver’s cock swells in my mouth as my pussy clamps down on Carver’s erupting length.

“Shit, I can’t come yet.” Oliver pulls out, allowing me to lose myself in the wild jolts of ecstasy that zip through my system. He teases my clit with his fingers, but he moves to kneel next to me on the bed.

“Keep wringing my cock *just* like that,” Carver snarls. The look on his face takes my breath away as he fills me with jet after jet of hot cum. “You’re lucky you’re already pregnant. Otherwise I’d definitely be breeding your slick little cunt right now.”

Oli moves to the side completely and Carver falls over me, kissing me deeply as his cock jumps through the final few kicks.

My chest heaves as I stare up at him, and I see the same look of intense pleasure that I'm sure is all over my face.

"Holy fuck," Carver murmurs, pecking a final kiss on my lips.

"Yeah," I agree.

"Here, let's get you settled in where you're not about to take a header off the side of the bed," Carver says, moving off me.

I laugh because, at some point, he definitely did fuck the top half of my body right off the side of the mattress.

Oliver moves until he's sitting on the end of the bed. Even though I'm kind of exhausted, I still climb down, tackling him to the mattress.

I need to see those same looks on his face.

"I can jerk off if you're tired," Oliver says, grinning up at me as I position his dick at my entrance.

"I want you, Oli," I assure him, sinking down on his massive length. "That's always really intense."

"I'll bet it is," Carver says, lying down next to us.

Oliver snorts, but his face quickly changes to pure carnal desire as I rise and fall, taking more of him on each grind of my hips.

"Are you okay?" Oliver asks a while later. I'm snuggled up tight between him and the snoring Carver.

"Yeah, just a little anxious for tomorrow." I nuzzle back into his purring chest. His hard cock is still inside me even though we aren't locked together. He basically never pulled out after our final round.

It wasn't something I expected, but it is really comforting in a way I don't know how to explain.

“No matter what happens, I don’t think I can let you go,” Oliver says, pulling me until I’m more on my back than my side. He slips out of me, but I ignore it because he looks very serious.

“I know you’ve heard us mention it, but I’m finally feeling like myself again. It was scary getting lost in that rage of alpha fog. I never expected to get an early diagnosis. I’m not a violent person.” He shrugs. “You’re giving me, me back. I will be the best man I can be. I promise you. I’m not going to abandon you.”

“Oli,” I whisper as my eyes clench. I can feel his emotions as if they were my own. His sincerity is impossible to miss. “I don’t want to lose you either.”

“Then you won’t. I’ll treat that baby just like it’s mine because if you are then it is too.”

Our mouths meet as he teases his fingers over my cheek.

“You know you’ve got support now, right? That no matter what you don’t have to do it alone.”

“I believe you.” I can literally feel his emotions toward me. It’s a mind-blowing feeling. I might burst into tears at any second.

All omegas are sensitive to the emotions of others, but I’ve never been able to pick out each feeling so easily before.

My hand trails over the few fine hairs on his chest and eventually down his slender stomach.

Oliver grips my hand. “I’ve never been as aroused all the time as I have since meeting you. Go any lower and I’ll definitely need to fuck you again before we sleep.”

I chuckle. “I don’t hate that idea, but I also loved the feeling of just snuggling with you inside me.”

“You need rest,” he says, brushing his nose against mine. “If I slide back inside you now, I don’t think I can keep it sweet. But I was wondering how you feel about giving me permission to fuck you sometime . . .” He licks his lips. “Like maybe if I woke you up with my cock already inside you?”

I study his face and try to hold back the smile. He looks so damn hopeful that I nod my agreement. Oliver is kinkier than I expected. I freaking love it. “I’m a really light sleeper usually, though. So don’t be disappointed if you wake me up while you’re trying.”

“I do love a challenge,” he says, rolling me back to face Carver. “Get some rest. From what I read, we’ll likely be able to hear the baby’s heartbeat tomorrow.”

He wraps his arm around me, pulling me back into his chest. I don’t fight it. I give into the moment of pure contentment and try not to let my brain think about all the what ifs.



Slightly calloused fingers scratch over my nipple as I blink awake. I’m not sure where I am or what’s happening. My hips slide back as Oliver growls into my hair. I’m lying on my side and he’s behind me. His hard cock is already inside me, and it pulses as I wiggle my hips back.

Oliver’s lightly citrus and vetiver scent is heavy in the air. I can smell my own arousal and my pheromones thump in response to Oli’s fresh scent.

“You are slick, aren’t you, Mel? Is that all for me?” Oliver asks, nuzzling his chin to the top of my head. He’s extremely tall. I can only imagine how much maneuvering this position took for him to be able to get inside me.

“Yes.” My head rolls around his chest as I remember Carver is in the bed with us. Last night was incredible. They rocked my world in the best way possible. I never imagined how intense sex could be with multiple partners.

“Tilt a little.” Oliver directs my hips back and cups my lower stomach. “Fuck, I can’t get over how hot that is.” He pulls out and works his length back inside me. “You’re not even taking all my cock, and I’m bumping the bottom.”

I moan. He feels *unreal*, like I'm stretched to capacity around him.

"Shh, I want to keep you all to myself," he whispers.

I nod my agreement, sliding my hand down my stomach over his hand to tease my clit. My skin feels hypersensitive, and I'm freaking obsessed with the way his fingers dig into my hip and lower belly as he slowly thrusts in and out.

"I bought six books by different authors last night after you fell asleep. I started one this morning. I don't think it's your voice." He scrapes his teeth over my shoulder. "But I'm not going to lie, the sex is hot as *fuck*."

My breath comes in rapid pants as he wraps his body tighter around mine. Spooning sex with Oliver is lazy and sensual, but super freaking intense.

"I'm going to read every author in your genre until I recognize the character names," he says, nipping at my ear. He slides his forearm under my head and wraps his hand over my mouth. "That or I recognize your style. Then I'm going to read every book you've written."

Okay, so Oliver's dirty talk is not what I was expecting, but it still turns me the hell on.

I shiver as my fingers brush his cock. My clit pulses, and even though I'm barely awake, it's clear he got my body on board before I was conscious. My inner walls clench at the thought. I tilt my head and wrap my arm back, teasing my fingers through his soft curls as his knot bumps my lower lips.

"The first time I knot you outside of a heat it's going to be face-to-face," he whispers. "It's like you're trying to drag it inside you." He releases his hold on my mouth and bumps me up until his arm rests under my ribcage. He palms my tit with that hand and yanks my hips back into his pelvis with the other. "I can't wait to see your belly get big with the baby. Is that weird?" He pinches my nipple and I sob. "I want you to ride me with the pregnant belly."

"Oliver," I moan.

“It’s so hard not to sink my teeth into you,” he growls, snapping his hips into mine with more force.

The bed shakes and the next thing I know Carver’s sleepy face is grinning at me. “Damn, I like sharing a bed,” he says, scooting his nude body down until he’s at eye level with my tits. “Do you think one day you can take us both at the same time?” He buries his face in my tits before pulling them together and sucking on my nipples one by one.

“Harder,” I demand, shoving my ass back into Oliver’s pelvis. Their scents are flooding my system, and even though I know it’s not possible to have another heat already, I still feel hazy. “Bite me, please?”

“Aww, fuck,” Oliver hisses. “I will anytime.”

“Are you foggy?” Carver asks, sounding perplexed.

“Not to the point where I don’t know what I’m asking for.” And I’m really not. It’s something about the way Oliver clutches me to him while trying to bruise my cervix that makes me very sure I’d be content with this alpha for life. “Oh crap, you’re so deep.”

“Then by all means, that’s between the two of you. I think I’m going to see if I can lick her clit like this,” Carver says, sliding down even further. I pull my leg back a bit to make room for him. “Try to keep your balls from slapping me in the face.”

“I’m so close,” Oliver groans, completely ignoring Carver.

“I’m close too,” I agree.

Carver licks from my hip down to my clit and gently shoves my hand away. “I’ve got you, sweetheart.”

He isn’t shy about burying his face in my pussy.

I tilt the top half of my body and pull Oliver’s mouth to mine. It’s not the easiest to manage, but we make it work. His forearm is still under me and his palm splays out over my chest as he grunts into my mouth. His other hand tightens over my hip, and he lets out the most adorable sound that’s somewhere between a whimper and a growl.

My arousal spikes higher and higher with each shallow buck of his hips. It seems like he's tired of pulling out all the way, and I don't mind at all. It makes it easier to grind over his throbbing length.

Carver knows just how to tease my clit while working my pussy lips in some magical pattern that only makes everything more intense. My nipples ache as my tits bounce.

"You're so tight it gets almost painful right before you come," Oliver groans, yanking me back into his chest.

I don't know what the beta with the enchanted tongue does next, but as his teeth graze my hood, electricity zips through my entire body. My hand flies to Carver's hair as I thrash. My other tightens on Oliver's head as he growls into my ear.

His knot teases against my opening as he slams as deep as he can go. My arm falls to the side as he moves to scrape his teeth over my throat.

"Can I bite you, Mel?" he growls, sounding more animalistic than I've ever heard come from him.

I nod. "Yes, please."

My eyes fly open as Carver's head pops up.

"No, don't stop," I whine.

Oliver snarls, licking the tender skin just below my ear on the side of my neck. He has to twist to get close enough, and I follow him with my hips.

Carver finally tongues my clit again, but my orgasm is starting to subside. That is until Oliver strikes. His teeth dig into my skin just below my hairline on the back of my neck. Pleasure like I've never felt explodes through my body.

"They're going to fucking kill me," Carver mutters. He slides a single finger inside me next to Oliver's cock as he thrusts, and everything feels like too much to process.

"Holy shit." Oliver licks over his bite.

"You good, sweetheart?" Carver asks.

I nod because I can't seem to form words.

“Good, let’s see if we can really make you fly,” Carver drawls. He slides a second finger inside me and aims like he has radar for my g-spot.

Even that’s difficult to concentrate on as I get slammed with a pulse of Oliver’s emotions. I’m not sure what the underlying feeling is. Appreciation? Contentment? I have no idea, but a ragged sob escapes.

“Shh, you’re okay,” Oliver says, laying his palm over my heart. “We’ve got you. I’m always going to take care of you from here on out.”

Carver keeps his fingers inside me, which is a really weird feeling when Oliver’s still-hard cock is also inside me.

“Are you good?” Carver brushes his nose against mine.

“I am,” I agree, but really embarrassing tears leak from my eyes.

Carver’s cock bumps around my stomach, and I wrap my hand around him to distract from the overwhelming emotions I’m hit with. I lunge for his mouth and he grins into the kiss, wiggling his fingers and brushing them against the spot that makes me see stars.

“Oh, *fuck*. She really likes that,” Oliver growls. He’s mostly been gently thrusting as deep as he can go, but he pulls out and slides back in.

“One day, pretty girl, we’re both going to fuck your sweet cunt,” Carver says.

They tease and tantalize my body until I’m so satiated, I can’t even muster enough energy to be stressed about my doctor’s appointment.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Oliver

“How do you feel about your carbon footprint?” I ask as we wait for the others to arrive. The doctor’s office is pretty dead, but they fit us in as their first appointment of the day as a favor to Farrah.

“What?” Mel asks. Her wide blueish-gray eyes blink, but it’s the warm, happy feeling that fills my chest that does my head in.

We’re fucking bonded.

No one can take her from me now. And the icing on the cake? She’s *happy* to be stuck with me for life.

I can feel it in the bond. It blows my goddamn mind, but I do know I’m going to keep her so fucking well cared for that she never regrets her decision.

“Oliver?” Mel asks, giving me a goofy smile.

“I scheduled a flight for us to Virginia on a private plane. That way we don’t have to fly commercial, and it’ll be easier if you’re sick. It’s never really mattered to me one way or another, but I’m thinking it might make our lives easier. Leaving Virginia . . .” I frown trying to find a nice way to put this. “People tend to recognize Nik, and they will ask for his autograph and end up holding us up.”

“Wow, I never considered that type of thing when he mentioned that he’s famous.” She bumps her shoulder against mine. “What about you? Do I need to keep my guard up around anyone with a ballpoint pen?”

I laugh, shaking my head.

“They all make fun of me for that.” I pull her closer to my side with an arm around her shoulder. “But I promise to always try to protect you.”

“My ex once pushed me in front of an angry goose,” she says, giggling. “Gilbert, who is actually a girl by the way, was quite angry that we had the audacity to walk into his grandma’s front yard.”

“Wait, what?” I ask, snorting a laugh. Then reality catches up and that pisses me off. An alpha shoved his omega into danger to protect himself? God, what a loser.

“Yeah, apparently Gil has good tastes because she loathes Ben. She’d fly around me to try to get to him.” She smiles up at me and my heart skips a beat.

I can’t help myself. I wrap my hand around her head and pull her mouth to mine for a soft kiss.

“So you’re okay with flying private to get to Virginia?”

“Yeah, that was very thoughtful, but won’t it cost a lot?” she squints.

“It’ll be worth it for this flight, especially since we have so much extra crap to bring back.” Including all her courting gifts, some she hasn’t opened yet.

There’s some commotion at the door, and Miller stomps inside the waiting room. He makes a beeline for Mel, but it’s the look on Nik’s face that says I’m in for it.

Lovely.

Carver follows them in, grinning dangerously.

I can only imagine how gleeful he was to rat me out. That asshole. He should remember, payback is hell.

The door to the back of the office opens, and a younger nurse smiles. “Melody? Are you ready to come on back?”

My heart gallops in my chest, but I shove myself out of my chair without asking if I’m welcome. This is my bonded omega. No one can legally keep me from her unless Melody

asks them to. Which she doesn't. She wraps her small hand in mine and gives me a terrified smile.

"Let's do it." I nuzzle my cheek to the top of her head, pouring comfort into the bond. Her fingers shake against mine, but I do everything I can to settle her nerves.

The nurse asks Melody a bunch of questions and does a few preliminary things.

Everything is fine until she asks Mel to step on the scale. I'm not expecting the overwhelming wave of panic that floods the bond.

I shoulder check Nik and Carver, and we all turn around.

Miller apparently gets a free pass on everything because I notice he doesn't follow our lead and Melody doesn't get onto him about it.

"Real quick, could you just," Melody says, grabbing my hand once she's done. She yanks me over to the scale and nods to it. "Could you weigh him?"

The nurse chuckles but goes with it.

"Oh no, keep your shoes on. It's fine," Mel says, laughing kind of frantically.

I don't catch my weight because I'm trying to figure out why I'm the only one getting this impromptu weigh-in.

"What was that about?" I ask Carver as the nurse guides us to a room.

"Not a clue," he replies, laughing. "Women are mysterious creatures."

I frown. I'm pretty sure he does know, and he's leaving me out of the joke.

We make it into a spacious exam room. It's way larger than the one at The Exchange. The nurse goes over a bunch of stuff with Melody.

Mel has to leave the room to do a couple tests. I'm unsurprised when Miller follows her out.

I grab my phone to confirm the flight for later this afternoon.

"You fucking bonded?" Nik growls as soon as we're alone. He crosses his arms over his chest, glaring down at me.

"Yup." I lock in all of our details and close out that window.

I need to shop for engagement rings, but one of the pregnancy books mentioned her fingers will likely swell.

"You're telling me she consented to bonding?" Nik asks, sounding indignant.

"Oh yeah. I'd even go so far as to call it *enthusiastic consent*." Carver chuckles.

I ignore them both and continue to scan for appropriate size and styles of jewelry.

"At least it's guaranteed she's ours," Nik finally mutters.

I bring up another window and check to see if there are pictures with carat size and small fingers for reference.

I want it to be a respectable size without going overboard.

I don't think Mel is the flashy type.

I read once that you're supposed to spend two months' salary on an engagement ring, but it's ridiculously large when I check the chart. Seven carats seems wider than her actual finger.

It's better to go with a higher quality of stone and keep it somewhere under three carats. If it's smaller, I think it'll be easier for her to accept it. Then there's the fact that she'll need something low so she doesn't scratch the baby. The pictures of settings are extremely helpful.

I personally think the low-basket option is the best, but I'm willing to see what the guys have to say.

I need to find a covert way to determine her ring size.

Mel, Miller, and the nurse come back into the room. Dr. Blake is a younger guy in his mid-thirties. *He* isn't wearing a ring and Nik is tense every time he gets close to Melody.

He nods to the nurse and asks her to help Mel get set up.

I don't know what that means, but he stretches a hand out, waving to the door, and all four of us follow him into the hallway.

Shit. I got hyperfocused and forgot to pay attention.

"Did I miss something?" I ask, glancing between the guys.

"We're going to do an ultrasound and see if we can get a firm conception and delivery date pinned down," Dr. Blake says, typing away on his phone. "Since I know you're not sticking around the area I'm not going to give her the full routine. Especially since they'll just redo it all once you pick a primary doctor in Virginia. But I have to ask. Do you know which one of you is the father?"

The four of us awkwardly glance back and forth. Apparently Farrah didn't share that piece of information.

"No," Miller says, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Got it," Dr. Blake says, nodding. "Do any of you have any health problems or genetic disorders that could have been passed to the baby?"

We chorus a quick no.

Dr. Blake glances between us and nods. "All right, well you've got some time before you see the doctor you'll stick with for the duration of the pregnancy, so give it some thought. I'm going to try to keep the cost down since I know she doesn't have insurance."

"What?" Nik's jaw falls. "No, you do whatever needs to be done. We're privately paying."

Dr. Blake chuckles. "I wouldn't phrase it exactly like that when searching for a permanent OB, but I'll do everything necessary today to ensure she's good until you make it back to Virginia."

“Thank you,” Miller says.

“All right, give us five minutes to do a couple of quick things and Lexie will call for you,” Dr. Blake says, stepping over and knocking on the door. “It’s right on the cusp, but I think we’ll do the abdominal ultrasound first. If it isn’t clear then we’ll go from there.” He mutters the last bit like it’s more to himself and disappears into the room, closing the door behind him.

“Why isn’t he letting us in there?” Carver asks.

“The first visit usually includes a pelvic and breast exam,” I say mindlessly. “I’m sure he’s trying to give Melody some modesty.”

“Are you going to pull the dick’s medical records?” Nik asks like he’s been following his own train of thought.

I nod because that’s exactly what I’m planning to do. If the doctor will need to know her ex’s family medical history, then I can pull the information easily enough.

“Not from my phone. I’d prefer to do that on my laptop from behind my firewalls.”

“Sounds good,” Nik agrees.

A surprising wave of panic swells in my stomach. My eyes widen as I shove my glasses up. It’s not my anxiousness that I’m feeling.

“She’s nervous about something.” I shake my hands out because it’s bleeding into me so strongly that it’s difficult to focus.

“You can come in,” the nurse says, poking her head out the door.

“You should hold her hand and maybe see if you can get close enough that she can get a few hits of your scent,” I tell Miller as we all file back inside.

Melody is stretched out on the exam table, and the doctor is swiping an ultrasound probe over her stomach. I instantly regret suggesting Miller comfort her.

I want to do it.

I settle for stumbling forward until I can get a good view of the screen.

“Ready dads?” Dr. Blake asks. “You’re about to hear the heartbeat. Don’t be alarmed. At this stage, the baby’s heart rate can be anywhere from 140 to 170 beats per minute and that’s just average. We put you at eleven weeks five days for gestation, and it usually does start to slow a bit as we approach twelve weeks, but let’s see what we’ve got.”

“Are you okay?” Miller asks, cocooning himself around her head. The fingers of their left hands are interlocked while his right forearm wraps around her head. It’s such a tender moment that I yank out my phone and begin to snap pictures.

“Can we record it?” Carver asks, swallowing thickly.

“The heartbeat? Yeah, go for it,” Dr. Blake replies, chuckling.

The rapid whooshing sound that fills the air makes my knees weak.

“Fuck,” Nik says, staggering back a step.

Melody’s eyes get huge as she peers around Miller. I knock my shoulder into Nik and nod to Mel.

“Damn, gorgeous,” Nik says, elbowing Miller back. “I guess you really are growing a human being in there.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” she whispers.

Nik kisses her forehead. I pull my phone up, taking a picture even though my hands are shaking.

I need more baby books *now*. We only have twenty-eight weeks or so, and that’s if the baby comes on time.

“Are you okay?” Carver asks, giving my shoulder a squeeze.

I nod. “Melody and I bonded, which I read was safe during pregnancy, but is there anything I should know?”

Dr. Blake chuckles. “You’re in for about twenty percent pain crossover during delivery. The more bonds you have the more the pain will transfer. It’s a great way to share that misery.”

Melody’s eyes fly to mine and she looks worried.

I head over to her and slide between Nik and Miller. “I’ll gladly help shoulder that pain if it’ll lessen the burden for you.”

“Famous last words,” Dr. Blake says.

The asshole.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Melody

Dr. Blake makes it clear it's too early to determine gender. He gives me samples of prenatal vitamins to try, and he suggests I try each for a week to see if any cause symptoms like nausea.

If they don't, I can get a permanent prescription once I find a doctor in Virginia. He also gives me a prescription for anti-nausea meds, but that's only when Nik pushes the issue.

My estimated due date is September 18th. Which is crazy. I'm going to turn twenty-seven while pregnant. Not that I usually drink or go out partying.

The more I think about it, nothing will really change on that front.

The trip to the airport is hazy at best. My brain is elsewhere, but no matter how I try to focus, it's all one big jumble of stress and things that need to be done.

Miller is a huge comfort. Carver drives. Oliver stays glued to his phone. Nik talks a little about the OPA investigation into the unsanctioned bonding and how shitty he feels to be leaving Nathan with that mess. He may end up needing to fly back to give a statement, but he's clear about flying to Virginia with us.

Check-in at the airport goes smoothly. The plane isn't huge like a commercial airliner, but it's ridiculously large and spacious for the five of us.

"How are you doing with everything?" Miller asks as we wait for the flight to take off. He turns toward me, planting a

giant warm hand on my belly.

“Excited, nervous, I don’t know. Maybe terrified is a better word choice,” I say, giving him a tense smile. “I know I’m going to have to talk to Ben, and I feel like I probably shouldn’t do it over the phone.”

Miller nods. “We need to plan a trip to Texas to retrieve your things, but there’s no rush. I do think it would be best to rest for a few weeks and give yourself a chance to settle in.”

“I have a deadline I need to meet before I can take some time off.” I lace my fingers with Miller’s.

“Would you like to give me a hint on your pen name?” Oliver asks, wiggling his eyebrows. He’s in one of the seats facing us. “I’m trying so hard not to cheat, but it’s tempting.”

“Ohmigosh.” I chuckle. “No way, I’ll never be able to look you in the eyes again.”

“Aww, hell,” Carver says from the row next to ours. “You just gave me a semi.” He gestures to his crotch. “If it’s that dirty then I’m going to need to read it too. For research purposes.”

“Are you feeling all right?” Nik asks, coming to sit across from Carver. “I checked and they have ginger ale and water.”

“I’m good for now.” I give him a sincere smile, snuggling back into Miller’s side. I say a silent prayer that it stays that way.

“Do we have any more of the air sickness bags?” Oliver asks, patting around in the backseat of the SUV. “I think she’s getting nauseous again.”

“I’m okay,” I whisper from the front passenger seat.

“Clearly,” Carver chuckles.

I lift a hand, flipping him off, and he full-on belly laughs. He’s driving the SUV, which apparently was left at the airport

in long term parking.

“I’m telling you, I think she’s going to puke when she sees our house,” Oliver whisper-hisses at Nik. “We need to be prepared.”

Miller is all the way in the back. I did originally start the drive next to him, but once the car sickness kicked in, they put me in the front seat.

“It’s a beautiful neighborhood,” I choke out.

It’s a gated community filled with mansions like I’ve never seen before. It really starts to sink in the farther we drive past multimillion dollar homes . . .

Nik is a famous professional athlete and Oliver is a tech genius.

I’m bonded and pregnant. I still have to tell Ben, and I’m totally out of my depth with these men. I know that I’m a small-town girl all the way.

“Please don’t cry,” Oliver says, popping up at my side. “If you hate it. I’ll buy us a new house.”

“Ohmigod, stop.” I snort, shaking my head. I twist my left hand back and caress his cheek. “I feel like there’s no way I belong in this neighborhood, but I’m sure it’s a beautiful home. They all are.”

I pull my hand back to my lap, but I can’t stop fidgeting.

“You’re going to find we fully appreciate everything you have to offer,” Nik says, catching my eyes in the rearview mirror as I face forward. “No more undermining your worth or we might have to explore punishment options.” His reflection winks and I look away.

“We’re here,” Carver says, stretching a hand over and wrapping his fingers in mine. It helps keep me from bouncing them around awkwardly. “If you think you might hurl, give a man a little warning this time. I need to steel my stomach to those noises. You almost got me last time.”

I snort *again*, glancing out the window.

There's a metal fence with a black sliding gate that opens as we approach. The homes are all close enough together that you can see the next one, but they have spacious yards and don't seem like they're right on top of each other.

The house is big, even by the neighborhood standards. It's a modern design with columns and two wide porches on the second floor. They frame the entryway with charcoal gray railing. The house itself is white, but all the accents match the dark gray color.

Oliver mentioned that it's three stories. All the houses on this street are framed in the back by the water. I'm not sure what type of waterway that is, but it's beautiful. There are large trees lining both sides of the fence, which seems to give the yard additional privacy.

Carver follows the driveway up. There's a circular area, I guess for guests to park, but he opens the garage and heads inside.

"I think she's going to need Miller," Oliver whispers, nodding at me.

I laugh. He really is very sweet and kind of clueless sometimes, but in the most endearing way possible.

"It's been a long day," Nik says, climbing out of the door behind Carver. "Let's get you settled."

"This is the pack bedroom," Nik says, guiding us inside. "We've never used it. I did ask LeAnn—"

"That's our housekeeper," Oliver interrupts, sliding around us. "She's in her sixties." He nods, giving me a look like it's important that I know that. He sends steady comfort through the bond.

"Thank you for telling me." I grab his hand.

"I know omegas tend to be territorial. We would never compromise your safe space." Oliver pulls my wrist to his

mouth.

I laugh because he's probably right. I haven't had the chance to think it through, but I don't love the idea of another woman in my bedroom.

"Back to the room," Nik says, gently shoving Oliver out of the way.

My jaw falls as I really get a look at it. The entire house is kind of overwhelming, but this bedroom is incredible. There's a small seating area, like a mini living room to the left. There's a flat screen hanging on one wall with two club chairs and a full size couch facing it. It's built into a little cubby with three walls, but I love that because it feels cozy.

Nik doesn't stop, he pulls me past it, and that's when I really fall in love with this room.

There's a bed larger than anything I've seen. It must be one and a half or two king-sized beds. It has a matte black headboard, a white comforter that's thick and puffy, and too many pillows to count.

There's a smaller flat screen on the wall at the footboard of the bed and under it is a freaking *fireplace*. But the double French doors past all of that draw my attention.

"You'll love this," Nik says, guiding us forward with a hand on my ass. He opens one of the doors, and I'm glad he's practically holding me up at this point. There's a deck with a view of the pool and, past it, the backyard. This side of the house backs up to the water, and even though it's chilly out, I know I could curl up in one of the plush chairs and be content to write out here every single day of my life.

"Wow," I whisper, taking everything in.

"Wait until spring, it's magnificent when the willows and the cherry trees are really in their prime." Nik grins, nodding to the trees.

"I can only imagine."

"You won't have to," Oliver says, popping up on my other side. "You'll see it in a couple of months." He sounds so sure

that it puts me at ease. I know we bonded, but it's all so new. I don't even fully understand how to block my thoughts or emotions and how to send them through, but I can't wait to figure it all out.

Oliver heads off to see about something for dinner and to check in on Miller and Carver. I heard the guys mentioning something about hiring movers for Carver, but I only got the basics. Honestly, I'm surprised my brain is working at all.

It's been a whirlwind since I met them. Nik briefly shows me the main bathroom and it's bigger than my entire garage apartment back at my mom's.

I honestly don't think I'd be comfortable with them coming home with me. I feel like maybe they see me one way, and if they see where I'm from . . .

I blow out a shaky breath. Material possessions aren't everything. It's hard. I know I don't fit in here, but I will do my best to not embarrass them in front of their friends and family.

A pang of pure terror floods my system at the thought. I've done a pretty good job of hiding my identity, but the reality is anyone could link me to my pen name. I really don't know how that could impact Nik or Oliver's careers.

Ben was very clear that he didn't want any of his family to know what I write. My mom was supportive, right up until she got around to reading my first book.

"Can I show you the rest?" Nik asks, using his grip on my hips to pull me flush with his front. "The nest is extremely basic at the moment, but that's because we want you to set it up to your liking."

His short dark stubble is a little longer than it was at the hotel. Combined with the searching look and his tight hold on my hips, it makes it very hard not to climb him.

I've had the least opportunity to really get to know Nik, but I am comfortable with him.

It's just hard. I think he's the one who's most likely to change their mind once I start getting as big as a house. I guess everything felt a lot more insulated at the hotel. I'm sure he has female fans, and Oliver insinuated that women tend to throw themselves at Nik.

"Come on. I want to get this out of the way so you can pick a spot and settle in. You need rest," Nik says, wrapping his arm around my lower back and turning us so we can head further down the hallway.

The nest is of a similar style to the one at the hotel. Except where there was a circular cushion, this nest has a massive recessed square area that faces a full floor-to-ceiling window that also looks out over the yard and has a view of the water. There's eight or ten feet of open carpet flooring from where we are by the door. If you look straight ahead, you see the sunken nest and the wall of windows.

"It has a panel that can be lowered when we're nesting," Nik says, sliding his hand up the bottom of my dress. He palms my ass cheek with his scratchy fingers.

"It's amazing."

To the right is a wall that has an open area you can walk through. There are steps that lead to a giant mattress-style nest. It's fully enclosed on three sides. Both aisles alongside the nest have carpeting and small end tables near the top where the pillows are.

It doesn't have any natural lighting, but I like that. My impulses immediately love it.

"There's a curtain that can be closed to block off the entire back wall," Nik says, flicking several switches on the wall. "There are different light settings and even music or nature sounds. There's white and pink noise, but honestly?" He laughs, shaking his head. "I couldn't tell you which is which."

"I love it," I assure him. Turning to face him, I stretch up on my tiptoes and kiss the edge of his mouth.

“Good,” he growls, lifting me into the air. My legs twine around his ass and then my back is hitting the wall. “Shit, I know I need to be gentle with you . . . it’s hard. I’ve been fighting my impulses all day.”

He tilts my head to the side, licking his way down my neck.

“Why?” I ask.

“I know Oliver is my packmate. The two of you bonding is a *good* thing, but I’m territorial under the best of conditions. My teeth ache with the urge to claim you.” He scrapes his teeth over my throat, and I whine in response. “You want that too, don’t you, gorgeous?”

My feet dig into his ass. Part of me does, but a bigger part of me doesn’t want it to be solely for competition or one-upping Oliver’s claim. I’m a little afraid Nik is used to being the most important member of their pack. He wants to be the star.

“One day,” I say, nodding my agreement. “I want to get to know you.”

“Is this because of Nathan? I never—”

I push my mouth to his, clutching his shoulders. He freezes for several seconds before he makes it his mission to destroy my sanity with a kiss that feels like pure foreplay.

“It’s not,” I say between kisses. “I know we have so much to learn about *each other* and that goes both ways.”

“You let Oliver bite you,” he says, raking his teeth over my lower lip.

“And we’ll get there too, but I do think I need a little time to settle into one bond before I add more.” I stare up into his bright blue-green eyes. They’re captivating. They stand out in stark comparison to his dark olive skin and dark hair.

“But you do want me?” Nik asks, grinning dangerously.

“I do,” I agree as his hands tighten on my ass.

“Then I can be patient. As long as you know I’m going to keep courting the shit out of you,” he murmurs, kissing me again.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Miller

Melody spends the next few weeks in what she calls her “writing bubble.” It’s very cute, but I think we’re all grateful when she sends her manuscript off for editing.

I know she’s frustrated because she was behind schedule, but I’m a big fan of the saying *life happens*. She’s had a lot going on. I think she hyperfocused on her job in order to mask some of her fear of the unknown.

She picks a local doctor, but it’s more for an introductory visit to make sure she likes the practice and they’re a good fit. She has her next real appointment coming up in a few days.

Mel still doesn’t seem one hundred percent comfortable in the house. I get it because it was an adjustment for me too.

We help Carver pack up his apartment, and he moves into one of the downstairs bedrooms.

Melody misses most of it since she spends the majority of her days compulsively setting up the nest.

We finally make it to the day of her doctor’s appointment with the local obstetrician, and this time Nik and I accompany her.

Dr. Jamison is an older beta in his late fifties if I had to guess. He’s friendly and not at all concerned by the fact Melody has lost *six* pounds since her first appointment.

“I would like to see you maintaining weight or possibly gaining a pound or two by the time I see you next,” Dr. Jamison says when I bring up the issue for the second time.

“But it’s not unusual for there to be weight loss in the first trimester.” He glances at his tablet. “Oh, you’re going to be sixteen weeks tomorrow. You’ve successfully made it into the second trimester . . .”

Melody’s eyes get wide when the doctor mentions setting up an ultrasound. Nik leans forward in his chair, but I push myself out of mine and stand by the side of the table. She instantly takes the hand I offer and leans against my stomach.

“So we’ll get that scheduled sometime before your next appointment,” Dr. Jamison says.

“She’s been run down lately,” Nik mentions. “Sleeping and nesting . . .” He frowns like he just realized that might sound insulting. “A lot.”

“That’s par for the course,” the doctor says, giving Melody a soft smile. “Omegas are often extra cuddly for the duration of the pregnancy. I’m sure you’ve already noticed that your alpha’s pheromones tend to help with anxiety and even nausea to a certain extent.”

“I have,” Melody says, glancing between me and Nik. Her cheeks are rosy as she shrugs. “Am I safe to take a trip? I have to head back to Texas.”

“You should be fine,” Dr. Jamison says. “If possible, travel sparingly to help prevent swelling, especially once you get further along. But honestly, the second trimester is the ideal time for travel because you should notice your energy levels pick back up.”

I run my finger over her inner wrist. She has belongings and things she needs to retrieve from her apartment, but it’s safe to say she won’t be taking the trip alone. There’s no way any of us are going to let her be around her ex without at least one of us being there.

I haven’t talked to him. He has left Mel alone the last couple weeks, but from what Carver said combined with his arrest records . . .

It’s just not going to happen.

Pure fucking terror takes over when I imagine her deciding to try to work things out with him for the sake of the baby.

I don't know how I could coexist peacefully in a pack with that asshole. I'd try to keep Mel happy, but I don't think it would take long before I snapped and told him exactly where to shove it.

I'm shocked when I glance up and realize the doctor is saying his goodbyes to Nik.

"Are you okay?" Mel asks, bumping her shoulder into my chest.

"I am," I agree. "I think I'm just anxious for more of that snuggling with you in the nest."

Her eyes twinkle as her face lights up. "Yeah?"

"Definitely," I assure her, planting a quick kiss on her puffy lips.

"You're awful at this," Oliver hisses later the same day. He glares at the stack of boxes taking up half the living room.

"Her birthday is coming up and we need everything necessary for an entire extra human being," Nik growls, swiping a hand through his hair. "Don't act like I'm out of line for buying things she needs."

"Do you think she's going to decide to come back with us because we set up a nursery before we leave?" Oliver asks, frowning at the giant pile of shit Nik bought over the last week.

Nik glares. "I *think* she's almost sixteen weeks pregnant and that's four months—"

"Pregnancy is weird. The fourth month actually started at fourteen weeks," Oliver says, cutting Nik off.

"Then we're even more behind than I thought," Nik snarls. His anxiety is plain to see, but he's only got himself to blame.

Melody is surprisingly low maintenance for an omega. Nik is the one who makes things difficult, or maybe I'm lucky because Mel and I tend to seamlessly understand each other.

"You need to get laid," Carver says, bouncing down the stairs. He grins at Nik. "Are you afraid you're going to break her? Why exactly haven't you tried your luck—"

Carver ducks as Nik tosses a box at his head. He catches the thing one handed and grins. "A video baby monitor? Good choice."

"You really are riled," I say to Nik. "Are you still planning to take her as your guest tomorrow night?"

There's a charity event that Nik had planned before Mel made it to us. I know he mentioned it to her and she seemed nervous but excited.

"Yeah, of course," Nik says with a nod.

"Melody's love languages are physical affection and quality time." Oliver looks through the boxes. "Maybe hang out and assemble the crib with her?" He frowns, ducking a little like he's afraid Nik might toss something at his head next. "What? You're wondering why you're having trouble connecting with her." He jabs his middle finger at Nik. "Don't look at me like that. I'm *trying* to help."

"She's asking for you," Carver says, wiggling his eyebrows at me.

Melody and I haven't had sex since her heat, but I *have* greatly enjoyed watching Oliver and Carver share her.

I grin, shaking my head and aim to check on my omega. We've had a bit of a routine of snuggling every night before bed. It's quickly becoming my favorite time of the day.

It's not late, but immediately after dinner she and Carver disappeared together. Nik waited until she was out of sight to bring in all the shit from the garage.

There's every possibility that Oliver is on to something. Melody isn't uncomfortable with Nik, but I have noticed they're pretty terrible about meeting in the middle. Melody

doesn't do well with flashy gifts, and that's how Nik seems to show he cares.

I did briefly try to broach the subject to see if maybe her ex had a habit of giving gifts whenever he screwed up, but I didn't get very far without her shutting down.

I finally make it into the nest.

Mel sleeps in here, at least so far, which might be another reason Nik is on edge. Then again, the house is huge and would be an adjustment for anyone.

Omegas often feel safest in confined spaces. She's spent weeks making the nest her own. I don't think she would have done that if she was going to abandon us, but that's just me.

Mel nests a little like a bird, which I find utterly fucking adorable. She's got four or five thick blankets swirled in a circle around the top of the mattress. Our clothes are layered between them to keep her surrounded by our scents. It fills me with an unmatched level of pride.

Mel is curled up in a ball, looking at something on her phone. She pops up, giving me a soft smile as I crawl toward her. She's got on one of Carver's T-shirts and her hair falls around her shoulders in messy waves. She's so goddamn pretty it's hard to breathe when I catch sight of her sometimes.

Mostly, I'm just really fucking grateful that she's finally feeling better. Well, for the most part. She still gets sick here or there, but it's no longer hours of every day spent nauseous or vomiting.

I lie down and try to get comfortable, but I'm a lot taller than she is and my knees end up hanging over the nest wall she built.

"It smells like you two enjoyed your cuddle," I murmur, giving her a quick kiss.

"Yeah," she agrees, snuggling her head on my shoulder. She rolls toward me, tossing a leg over my thigh.

Don't get me wrong, I'm down to broach intimacy any time she is, but every night when she asks for me to snuggle

with her, it strikes a different chord. My hand rests on her lower stomach. I can't help myself. She's got a small rounding of what I think is a baby belly.

Melody swears it's just her normal chub, but it's definitely the baby. The books said at sixteen weeks it's the size of an avocado. It's also easy enough to tell because her lower stomach is harder than the rest.

"I think I need to call my ex and warn him that I'll be in town this weekend," Mel says, tearing me out of my thoughts. She runs her finger over my heart. "I was kind of hoping you would keep me company while I do that?"

"Of course." I pull her over on top of my chest.

"Okay," Mel says, grabbing her phone. Her hands shake as she kneels over me. I pull up her shirt and palm the baby. Yeah, it's hard to ignore her bare pussy on my sweatpants, but I'm an adult.

I can admit, I'm obsessed with the idea she's baking a human being.

It doesn't hurt having something else to keep myself focused on. It's necessary. I'm an alpha. My urges to destroy anything that poses a threat to *my* omega have the ability to overtake rational thought if I'm not careful.

I already hate her ex on her behalf. It wouldn't take much to push me over the edge into feral territory.

It's a constant battle to stay supportive *without* trying to control everything.

I don't crave it as a power thing.

I just need to keep her happy and safe. Sometimes my instincts suck at recognizing boundaries, but I am trying. I blow out a breath and refocus my thoughts so Mel won't pick up on my emotions.

The baby book I bought is specifically for dads, and it mentioned that she might start feeling the baby move at any time. Although we likely won't be able to feel it for a while.

Melody holds her phone to her ear, but she gives me a goofy look. I grin as she grinds over my hard cock. I don't care if it's bizarre because I'm totally fucking enamored with her. I can't wait to see her get a full-on baby belly.

I chuckle, shaking my head, but Mel sticks a finger to my lips.

“Hey, Ben. It's Mel. I'm going to be in town this weekend. I fly in on Sunday, and I'll be there for at least a couple of days. I was hoping we could talk face-to-face. I guess let me know when you're free?” She hangs up and tosses her cell phone aside. Her small hands fly to her face. “I can't decide if I'm a giant asshole for keeping this to myself the last few weeks.” She pulls her hands down. “Would you want an ex to tell you that over the phone? I mean, that's a conversation to have in person, right?”

I'm the wrong person to ask. I'd want to be there from the first fucking second. But I've got the undeniable feeling that fuck face doesn't have the same sort of morals I was raised with. After hearing the things he said to Carver when he was drunk, it doesn't give me a whole lot of faith that he won't say something equally as stupid.

In which case, I'm concerned I'll murder him with my bare hands.

“I think . . .” I sigh. What I want to say and what I think I should say are two very different things.

“Be honest with me, please,” Melody says, bouncing on my pelvis. Her hands rest on my chest as she stares at me with a pleading look on her face that I can't force myself to deny.

“I don't think I'm going to give good advice here no matter how you look at it because I'm biased.” My hands slide up her thighs. “I wish he wasn't an issue, but that doesn't mean I think that baby is a mistake. I guess I'm selfish. I want to keep the two of you to myself. Well, to our pack, but I'm learning to accept Carver, and if need be, I'll do my best to interact with your ex too. *But* he won't take you from us, and he will not continue to treat you the way he's used to treating you or he will get a very stark wake up call.”

“I think that’s my main worry,” Mel says, lying down on my chest. She nuzzles her face to my neck. “He might be really pissed that I’m pregnant, or he could be really angry that I kept it from him. I know I don’t handle conflict well, so that pushed me to assume it’s going to be the first option. I don’t know. I think I was so desperate for a family that I ignored a lot of things, but now that I’m out of that situation . . . I just don’t see him being excited.”

“He might surprise you.” I palm the back of her head. “But if he doesn’t, you’ll still have an entire pack at your back for whatever comes next.”

Chapter Thirty

Melody

Max Miller is dangerous to my heart. I don't think he has a manipulative bone in his body, and he always manages to say the perfect thing to put me at ease.

His beard is scratchy against my cheek as my hips give a grind over his thick cock. I'm not sure why he hasn't made a move the last few weeks. Everything was moving at super speed, but since we made it to Virginia, it settled down.

Miller cuddles with me every single day, but he hasn't once tried to stick his dick inside me. That was fine while I was obsessing about my deadline, but the last few nights I thought I made it pretty clear that I'm interested.

Carver and I talked about it earlier. I guess maybe I was pouting a little because I don't know how to encourage Miller to do the damn thing.

Carver, the giant goofball, said Miller is the gentleman of the group. He suggested I might need to slide right down Miller's cock to get it through his thick skull.

I give his neck a lick while gyrating my hips. It's hard. His beard is extensive, but I manage to find a small piece of skin below his ear. Miller lets out a low rumble that makes my thighs clench. I give his ear lobe a little nibble and his huge hands land on my hips.

"I've really missed your cock," I whisper and my cheeks heat.

I'm trying here.

I might not be apt at dirty talk, but I am going to find a way to get him inside me.

Miller's calloused hand slides up the back of my shirt, and I grin against his cheek.

Flipping finally.

I love that he's obsessed with the baby. I really do, but I kind of miss the way he ravaged me during the hazy moments I remember from my heat.

The proprietary way he holds me to him makes my tits ache. I bring my mouth to his and try to hold myself up enough that I can get his sweatpants down.

Miller rolls us with no warning and my back hits the nest mattress. The look on his face makes my heart race. There's a heat in his gaze that drives my impulses crazy. I bare my neck, but yank on his pants again. His heavy cock bounces out as he cages me in.

"Don't let me hurt you," he growls, licking across my neck. "My instincts are riding me hard, but if I get too rough, tell me stop. Okay, baby? Tell me you hear me."

"I trust you," I assure him, wrapping my hand around his stiff length. Oliver may have the longest cock in the group, but I think Miller's is the thickest. It's hard to be sure since I haven't seen Nik's recently either. Which is something I'm going to rectify after that fancy dinner he's taking me to tomorrow.

I tease him, trying to wiggle my way higher. The height difference between us really does make this harder than it needs to be. I'm still wearing Carver's shirt. I pull it up with my free hand and tuck it above my tits as Miller grins against my cheek.

"Get inside me. Please, Max?" I don't usually call him by his first name, but I do think the intimate moment calls for it. Or maybe I'm playing dirty to get what I want.

"You never have to beg me," Miller growls. "Did Carver leave you wanting? You smell like him." He chuckles, holding

himself up on his forearm and sliding his fingers down to tease my pussy.

No, he didn't. He actually left me quite satisfied, but I guess the books were right about the second trimester being go time. He teases two fingers inside me, and I bow off the mattress and into his chest.

"You can leave that on," he says, nodding to Carver's shirt that's bunched around my breasts. "But I want to feel your tits bounce against my chest." He pulls his fingers free and leans back, ripping his shirt off and tossing it aside before doing the same with his sweats.

He crawls down until his face is resting right above my pussy and makes a show of flicking his tongue over my clit. It sends little zips of pleasure coursing through my body, but what I really need is his cock.

"Max," I sob as my hand lands in his hair. There's some incoherent begging and demanding that he fuck me, but he slides his fingers back inside me while teasing my clit, and it's like nothing I've ever felt before. He chuckles against my lower lips as he kisses my sex, and I try to determine the likelihood of me successfully wrestling him to the mattress so I can climb right on his cock.

"Let me make you come on my hand, and then I assure you, I'm going to ram every inch of my dick inside you," he growls.

I nod. "Okay, do that. I like that plan."

He twists his fingers as he works them in and out, and my hands fly to my face as I sob. He stretches a long arm up and pinches my nipple. I thrash, locking down on his fingers as my entire body pulses with pleasure.

Miller snarls against my lower lips and continues to tease my clit as I shatter and tighten.

"It's too much," I hiss, yanking his hair. "Ohmigod, that's so intense."

He growls, sounding feral as hell, and my screwed-up system thinks it's some invitation.

“Present for your alpha!” Miller barks, pulling his fingers free and leaning back on his knees. His head tilts and he looks animalistic, but somehow that only makes me want him more. “Present!”

I stop staring dumbfounded as my system jolts with the command. I really like Miller going all apex alpha. I scramble to comply. My top half hits the mattress as my knees spread to give him room to mount me.

“Fuck yes,” he growls, sliding between my legs. His hands work their way from my hips up my spine, and he grips a handful of my hair. He lifts me, and I follow until my back hits his chest. I stare at him over my shoulder with wide eyes as he grins. He’s looking extremely hazy, but I’m not afraid. I think I’m more shocked than anything because I’m definitely not in heat. “Get loud if you need to, but only stop me if I get too rough.”

With that, he shoves his tongue in my mouth. He tastes like me, and I moan into the kiss as his hand in my hair tightens. He cups my lower stomach with his free hand and chuckles as we pull apart. He guides me back down to the mattress and both hands land on my hips. He pulls me apart and thrusts.

He doesn’t pound deep, but he’s so thick, the intrusion takes my breath away. I grip the sheet for dear life as he pulls back and enters me again. It’s just as intense the second time.

“That’s it,” Miller taunts. “Make sure they all know who’s claiming you. Scream for me, baby.”

My face brushes the soft sheet as I shake my head no, rolling my lips together.

“No? Do you think your beta is the only one who can smack your ass red? Hmm, you defiant little brat?” Miller growls.

I leak around his swollen length, reveling in the intense euphoria that comes with sucking down his pheromones when he’s exceptionally potent. Miller pulls all the way free of me and dips just the head of his cock back inside me. It triggers

whatever impulses that teases an alphas knot. It makes my entire cunt clench around him, but then he's gone again.

I glare at him over my shoulder as his eyes twinkle back at me.

“What’s the matter? Huh, sweet girl? You want more?”

“You know I do,” I snap.

“Then be vocal. Let them all hear how I’m wrecking your tight little cunt.” He pulls free of me and slams back in *deep*.

This time I don’t even try to hold back the sounds I make. As he stretches a hand around to tease my clit, it becomes clear I couldn’t keep quiet if I wanted to.

“Fuck,” Miller growls. “You’ve got no idea how badly my teeth ache to bite you.”

I glance at him over my shoulder and nod wildly. “I want that too.”

“Are you sure?”

“I want a bond with you,” I assure him.

He releases my hip to pull me up until I’m kneeling. He feels so deep like this that I grind over him, chasing my orgasm that’s right there. His huge hand splays across my lower stomach, holding me to his chest as I bounce.

“This is going to take some maneuvering.” Miller pulls my hair to the side and has to stretch down significantly to tease his lips over my neck.

I slide my fingers down, brushing them over my clit. They tease his knot and he groans.

“Fuck, if you’ve changed your mind tell me now.”

“Bite,” I hiss as I come all over his throbbing length.

Miller snarls against my skin as I do my best to grind through my release, but mostly I feel like I’m just trembling against his tightly controlled strength.

“All mine.” He strikes the side of my neck as his cock swells. It’s so intense that I pull my hand away from my clit

and grip his knot as it pulses.

If his arm wasn't banded around my middle, there's no way I'd still be upright. My tits ache as my pussy clenches in waves, milking his cock, and I know it's not just my pleasure I'm experiencing.

"Holy fucking shit, Mel. You feel that, don't you?" He licks over his bite.

I nod because I can't seem to form words. The feelings of peace and contentment that fill my chest aren't only mine, but it makes them so much more intense.

"Max," I whisper, clutching at his arm. My head rolls back against his chest.

"I know, me too." He nuzzles his cheek to the top of my head.

My heart pounds rapidly. He's always so sturdy and safe and he's now all mine. Tears sting the edges of my eyes as I try to breathe through the deep emotions I'm hit with.

"I'm really happy for you guys," Oliver says, startling me. He crawls up, appearing in front of me. "Congratulations."

"Thank you," Miller says, his voice filled with emotion.

"I think we're going to have to consider extending the offer for one of us to bite Carver." Oliver hugs me.

Miller doesn't seem to mind.

"I mentioned the two of you bonded and he seemed . . ." Oliver's face scrunches. "Sad? Maybe a little left out."

"Crap," I whisper.

"No, none of that," Miller murmurs, kissing my cheek. "He wouldn't begrudge us this. It's something we'll sit down and talk about together. It would require an alpha link."

"You'd be willing to do that?" I ask.

"For you? Yeah, I'd be willing to do just about anything," Miller says.

Oliver shoves up his glasses, nodding his agreement.

Their sincerity rings through the bond, and since I'm overly emotional, I burst into embarrassing happy tears.

Chapter Thirty-One

Nik

“Nik, it’s stunning,” Melody says, sliding her hands down her stomach as she twists in the mirror.

“You sure are,” I agree, prowling closer until I can plant my hands on her hips. The dress is a soft, silky material that clings to every well-placed curve. Her hair is French braided at the top, but it falls into cascading waves that I can’t help but ache to run my fingers through. Preferably when she’s on her knees with my cock in her throat, or doggy style while I slam into her from behind.

“I honestly had doubts it would zip.” She turns to grin at me over her shoulder. “But you were right, it’s gorgeous.”

“You’re gorgeous,” I clarify, kissing her throat. I’ve held off for too long, and I’m growing increasingly feral to claim her as mine. My left hand tightens on her hip as I dig out the silver and white jewelry box from my pants pocket. “This is for you.”

“Nik.” Her eyes meet mine in the mirror as she takes the box. “I hope you know that I like you for *you*. You’ve already spoiled me plenty with courting gifts.”

We’ve both carefully ignored the stack of shipping boxes in the living room. Fucking Oliver, he might be right, and as such, I haven’t pushed for her to examine them. She’s going to need to soon.

I purchased everything she could possibly need for a dream nursery.

My tattoo-covered hand lands on her slightly curved stomach.

Did I purposely pick a dress to show off her small baby bump? Oh fuck yes I did.

Her belly popped in the last few days, and it hasn't helped my composure. My system doesn't give a fuck who fertilized her egg. My need to slide inside her grows with every passing day. It's all my brain can seem to focus on—*our* omega is carrying *our* baby.

“I know,” I assure her, refocusing my attention. I give her a playful smile. “But I do love giving gifts. Oliver says it's how I express my love.”

Melody's eyes widen.

My heart skips several beats.

That wasn't a declaration. It's clearly in my vocabulary because Oliver hasn't shut up about how different people express and accept love in a variety of ways.

Jesus Christ, I have more game than this.

“Also, you needed something to match your dress. Open it.” I nod to the box.

She lifts the lid and runs a painted fingernail over the aquamarine and diamond drop necklace. I've got the matching earrings in my other pocket.

“Will you help me put it on?” She flutters her lashes.

“Of course,” I growl, failing to take the box. Instead I seal my mouth to hers for a slow kiss that makes my cock ache.

Melody's scent is stronger tonight than it's been since her heat. Not even the twinges of lemon and cranberry or vetiver can hide her coconut and vanilla scent.

I've done something wrong. She bonded both of my packmates before me. Her soft fingers rest against my thigh in

the back of the town car.

Carver sits on Melody's other side, and I focus really fucking hard on not allowing it to bother me that she's leaning into his side instead of mine.

The cream and silver dress I picked out fits every delicious curve to perfection. My hand is drawn to the round bump low on her stomach.

I adjust my sleeves *again* in an attempt to focus on something else. The car pulls up to the hotel the event is being held in. There's already a line of reporters and paparazzi.

Melody's hand tightens on my thigh.

"You let me hop out first," Carver instructs, like he's not blocking her in. "Then I'll help you out."

"And I'll be right behind you," I assure her. "You don't have to look at the cameras. I'll answer their questions like we discussed earlier."

"Okay." She gives me a timid smile.

The car pulls to the spot where we'll unload and the door opens. Instead of climbing out, Carver leans over and kisses the hell out of Melody. After an eternity, the fucker finally climbs out, adjusting his suit coat and extending a hand for Mel.

She shimmies out and struggles to her feet in her heels.

Carver pulls her a few feet away so I can exit without bumping into her. The shouts become louder when the press realizes that it's me. I carefully wrap an arm around Melody's lower back and guide her toward the doors. I only have one sound bite that's required, and we stop in front of Jonathan and his photographer.

The questions go smoothly enough until he catches sight of Miller's bond mark on her neck.

"Nik, are you bonded?"

Melody's eyes fly up to mine.

I'm not sure the right course of action here is to claim her since it would undermine Miller and Oliver's claims, but not doing so could lead her to believe I never intend to.

"I will be soon," I say, bending to brush my lips over Mel's. "Well, as long as she'll have me."

"Are you bonded to Oliver Turner?" Jonathan asks.

Melody's eyes get wide, but she nods her agreement before I can stop her.

"What's your name, sweetheart?" he probes.

Melody just gave him his headline for the night, and she likely doesn't realize the insanity heading our way.

"Have a good night," I growl, ignoring his question and leading Mel in without another word.

"Did I mess that up?" she asks as soon as we're out of ear shot.

"You did nothing wrong. Oliver will be ecstatic," I assure her.

"Are you sure? Ohmigosh, what if they look into me? It's not like my information is super hidden. Oliver could find it in two seconds if he tried."

"What do you mean?" I pull her into my chest.

"I write smutty books. I'm going to tarnish both your names," Mel hisses.

"Oh, gorgeous." I grin, running a finger over her cheek. "You're so damn cute. Relax."

"What will your family have to say?" Mel asks, shaking her head as her fingers dig into my shirt.

"My mom will probably ask if you have audiobooks," Carver says, smacking her ass. "That's because she's getting older and it's harder to see small print. When I was overseas, she used to send me large print editions." He laughs, shaking his head.

It's clear how much he loves his parents.

“My moms will buy them all and make a book club.” I chuckle. “Have I mentioned how grateful I am that you came to The Exchange?” I brush my lips over hers. “Because I am really fucking happy to have you.”

“Me too,” she whispers, kissing my cheek. “But this whole theme of having to pee every two seconds has continued.” She rubs at her abdomen. “And I think I better start searching.”

“I’ve got you, sweetheart,” Carver says. “I scoped it out as soon as we came inside.”

Melody’s appetite has finally returned after the few weeks of hell she experienced. She leans in close to my side, eating like a champ. It makes me grin like I ate one too many pot brownies.

When her eyes meet Carver’s across the table, I already know what’s coming.

“Again?” He chuckles. “Come on, we already know the way.”

I stand and pull out Mel’s chair so she can easily slide by me.

Once they’re gone, Levy Evans leans over. “I think your security guy is banging your omega.” He gives me a very serious look.

“He most definitely is.” I snort. “Somehow the darling little omega claimed him for her pack.”

“Gotcha.” Levy nods his blocky head. “She’s pretty. You should probably claim her soon.”

I give him a dubious look. “Because I’ve clearly not thought of that.”

“I’m just saying.” He shrugs a giant shoulder. “She’s got the same sweet smell that Valerie had during both her pregnancies. Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” I say, laughing.

I know he’s coming from a good place, but fuck does it reinforce all of my insecurities.

The remainder of the evening passes easily enough.

Melody and I dance several songs, but things turn questionable when I notice one of the guests flirting with Carver. He leans against the wall with one leg crossed over the other, but his eyes are on us.

My initial reaction is to head over and slam my fist into his face for being so goddamn disrespectful.

However, I quickly notice his posture is closed off, and he even has his arms crossed over his chest. Melody lets out a soft gasp when she spots the tall blonde leaning into Carver’s personal space.

“You should likely make it clear he’s claimed,” I murmur close to her ear.

“I’m not going to make a scene at a charity event.”

“There’s no need for a scene,” I assure her. “Simply head over and see what happens.”

“Will you come?” She looks at me over her shoulder.

“With you, gorgeous? Any time.”

Chapter Thirty-Two

Melody

Clawing out some poor woman's eyes for talking to my beta would be highly uncalled for, right?

I know my impulses are firmly in control as I stomp toward Carver and the beautiful woman, who obviously doesn't smell me all over him. Which should be impossible since I did a very good job of marking his cheek after my last bathroom break.

Nik's hands are heavy on my hips as I aim for the wall.

Carver's ridiculously handsome face gets practically giddy as I approach. I have the irrational urge to bite the hell out of him, even though I know it won't form a bond. Maybe I could talk him into getting my teeth print tattooed on his neck? He's covered in tats. What could one more hurt?

I refuse to be a catty omega; I remind myself of that the entire way across the room. The woman pats Carver's arm again, and my nails dig into my palms. I'm not normally a full-blown psychopath, and I don't want to use pregnancy as an excuse for everything, but if he doesn't very politely remove her hand from his body in the next three seconds, I'm going to have to hurt him.

"Hey, sweetheart," Carver says, stretching out an arm for me as soon as I get close. He pulls me into his side and brings a hand to rest on my stomach.

"Hi, nice to meet you. I'm so sorry. I have to borrow my boyfriend." I look at Carver. "I need the restroom."

“Let’s do it,” he says, chuckling. “I swear that baby must be lying right on your bladder.”

The woman takes a step back, grimaces, and turns without another word.

“You looked like you might claw her eyes out for a minute.” Carver guides the three of us toward the bathroom.

“Nope.” I slide my hand over his chest. “Just you. It’s *your* responsibility to make sure you inform others that you’re in a relationship.” I pinch the hell out of his nipple.

“Damn, woman. Let me live in the fantasy that you’d throw down for me,” Carver grumbles, smacking my ass. “Christ, those tiny hands are vicious when they want to be. By the way, I *did* tell her I have a girlfriend.”

“Oh, sorry. I mean, good job.” I lean into his chest and stretch up to kiss his cheek.

“Where are we headed?” Nik asks, sliding his hand from my hip to my ass.

“Oh, do I have a treat for you,” Carver says, chuckling darkly.

Carver guides us into the private bathroom one of the venue staff pointed out earlier. I think it might be for VIP guests, or honestly, I have no idea, but the worker pointed it out when Carver tried to follow me into the women’s restroom. I kind of got the feeling she thought we were trying to have a quickie and she wanted to offer somewhere more appropriate.

“I told you we’d make good use of it.” Carver nods to the weird couch he sits on every time he waits for me to pee. “Have a seat, Nikky.”

“You know I hate that,” Nik grumbles. He sure does toss his jacket over the back of the couch, though. He grins wickedly as he wraps a hand around my neck, pulling my

mouth to his. “I hope I’m not majorly misreading the situation right now.”

“Nah.” Carver laughs. “I’m pretty sure our naughty little omega is about to sink down on your dick.”

“Is that right?” Nik muses, undoing his belt and opening his suit pants.

“How about we start with his cock in your mouth while I lick you from behind?” Carver runs his hands down my sides. He reaches under the hem of my dress and grabs my panties, yanking them down as I nod my agreement. He helps me out of them and pulls my hair to the side, licking over Miller’s bond mark.

Nik tosses himself down on the couch and unbuttons the bottom of his shirt, exposing his abs and that sexy “V” that I forgot about.

Carver teases his fingers down my lower lips as he rakes his teeth over my neck.

Nik slides a hand down his stomach and palms his cock. I forgot those tattoos of his went all the way down to the base of his shaft.

Carver pulls my mouth to his. He kisses me deeply while his fingers dance over my clit. I wiggle desperate for more, but he laughs.

“Suck off your alpha while I get you ready.” Carver playfully scrapes his teeth over my lower lip. He guides my head down to Nik’s tip.

My eyes fly up to meet his, and Nik looks hungry. His swollen length is only inches from my face, and he quirks an eyebrow, like he’s saying the ball is in my court. His pheromones are heavy in the air, but it’s that drip of pre-cum that does my head in.

I need to taste him.

I wrap my lips around the crown, but I forgot how thick he is.

My thighs clench as I try to find some friction for my clit.

Carver chuckles as I pin his forearm between my legs. “Sorry, sweetheart.” He slaps my ass with his free hand. “I’m going to need a little room to work my magic.” He carefully edges my knees further apart as I work my way down Nik’s thick length.

The next thing I know, Carver is pulling my hips apart and burying his face in my pussy from behind.

It’s such a bizarre feeling.

It’s great. I definitely like it, but it’s something that I’m not used to just yet, despite his affinity for it. I continue teasing my way down Nik’s cock, wrapping my tongue around the underside of his shaft as my nails dig into his thighs.

“Goddamn, gorgeous,” Nik growls, brushing his fingers over my cheek. “It’s been too long since you’ve had that tiny little mouth wrapped around me.”

I grin. I like knowing I’m affecting him the same way he does me. Carver isn’t shy as he buries his tongue in my hole. His forearm wraps around my hip and he teases my clit with his finger. It’s intense trying to concentrate on making Nik feel good while Carver makes it his mission to undo me. He knows just how to tease my body to get me there with what feels like very little effort on his part.

“I’m trying to be a gentleman. Do you have any idea how hard it is to keep from fucking your face?” Nik teases his hand down the front of my dress, flicking his fingers over my nipple as he shoves me deeper onto his shaft with the other. “I love the mewls of pleasure, but I’m also a sick fuck who craves the gagging sounds when you dip a little too deep.”

I gasp as electric shocks jolt through my system.

“That’s it, gorgeous. Come for us,” Nik growls, cupping my tit. My pussy clenches around Carver’s tongue as he flicks his thumb over my clit. “Shh, we’ve got to keep it down.”

I jolt, realizing I’ve been sobbing around him.

My orgasm subsides slowly, but Carver keeps licking like he’s desperate for every drop of my slick. He pulls back and slaps my ass.

“You’ve got no idea how hard it is to keep from ramming my cock up your tight little hole.” Carver pulls me off Nik’s cock. Once I’m upright his hands land on my hips and he sets me right on Nik’s lap.

Nik smirks, stretching back. “Are you going to ride me now?”

“Yes.” I grip him, guiding him to my opening, and sink down with an embarrassingly loud moan.

Carver slaps a hand over my mouth as Nik’s hands land on my hips.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Nik growls, wrapping his arm around my lower back. “I forgot how snug your needy little pussy gets. You’re so slick. Fuck me.”

“It’s nice to see I’m not the only one who rambles when they’re balls deep,” Carver muses, nuzzling his cheek to mine.

“I really fucking wish I could see your tits right now.” Nik pulls my dress up, but only enough to see my stomach. He looks at Carver. “Hold this.”

Carver finally releases my mouth to hold my dress. His huge hands cup my sides and he helps me rise and fall as Nik stares at where he disappears inside me.

Nik wraps his hand around my neck, teasing his finger over my jaw. My hands rest on his shoulders, and I’m not sure, but I think it’s the look of ecstasy on his face that sends me over the edge again, or maybe it’s the way Carver licks over Miller’s bond mark.

Nik rolls his head to the side and stares at my wrist. “I’m going to fill you full of me. Can I bite you while I do?”

“Yes.”

Nik doesn’t hesitate. He pulls my wrist to his mouth and strikes. My head rolls around against Carver’s chest. I’m pretty sure he’s holding me up right now.

“Holy shit, Nik.”

“Fuck yes. Scream my name while I paint your cunt in my cum.” Nik licks over the bite. His dick kicks, swelling to the point it’s nearly painful, but all I can do is shake as pleasure jolts through my system.

It’s hard to process that this is reality. Everything is muted by the sensations in my core and the warmth in my chest as Nik slides into place in the bond. It’s hard to tell what that emotion is that he’s feeling. It might be smugness? Or possibly satisfaction. His orgasm hits us both and Carver chuckles.

“Do I need to cover your mouth too? Goddamn, neither of you have a quiet setting.”

Nik flips Carver off as I collapse against his chest.

“You’re all mine, gorgeous,” Nik says, pushing his mouth to mine.

My heart races as he pours his affection into the bond and the earth-shattering kiss. I tremble so violently I think my nerve endings are over stimulated.

“So, your mom is calling,” Carver says, grimacing as he does something behind me. “Sorry, mom. Sexy times are upon us. Melody’s going to have to call you back later.”

“Ohmigod,” I snap, twisting my head around like one of those possessed people in a movie where they need an exorcist.

“He’s only joking,” Nik says, smiling brighter than I’ve ever seen. “You’re totally fucking stuck with me for life.”

“What?” I snort. I can’t hold back the laugh that bubbles out. My chest gets warm as I study his face. “You should smile more. It really fits you.”

“I think you’ll have a hard time getting me to *stop* smiling from here on out,” Nik says, pecking a kiss on my lips.

“Hey Mel,” Carver says seductively. “How do you feel about staying on Nik’s lap, but popping your ass back so I can fuck you too?”

My eyes fly to Nik’s, but he just shrugs.

“I am feeling especially generous right now.” He smiles, and the sight is breathtaking as his light blue-green eyes sparkle. “Let’s see if he can stay quiet while you’re milking his balls.”

I laugh. “You’re both ridiculous.”

Carver lifts me, leaning me forward and pulling my hips back until my pussy hangs off the couch. “See we don’t want to leave the place a mess so if you drip, it’s all over Nik’s fancy suit pants.”

“Dick,” Nik grumbles.

Carver positions himself at my opening and snaps his hips into mine. “She sure does know how to take one.”

“That was bad,” Nik says, laughing.

“Bad?” I scoff. “That was awful.”

Carver grinds all the way inside me and flexes his hips, brushing some magical spot inside me.

“But that was amazing, and you should definitely do it again.” I nod. “Many times.”

“God, Mel.” Carver flexes his cock inside me. “You’re really my perfect match.”

I can’t help it. I beam like a total goofball. Well, I do until he pulls out and plows back inside me. I fall against Nik’s chest and try to get reasonably quiet while Carver fucks me into oblivion.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Carver

Mel calls her mom back once we make it home from the charity dinner. I don't get to hear the entire conversation, but she's visibly upset when she gets off the call.

"Is everything all right?" I toss myself down onto the bed at her side.

She rolls her lips together and shrugs.

"Have you told her about the baby yet?" I run my fingers over her soft cheek.

"No," she whispers, glancing away. "I know it's going to be . . ." She pauses.

I frown.

I've already told my parents about the baby. They're excited as hell and made me promise we'd visit soon. I've been meaning to bring it up with Mel. It would mean a lot to me, especially since my dad isn't doing great health wise. I mean, there's nothing in particular wrong, but he's pushing seventy-five.

I'd like to introduce them to Mel and hopefully the baby once he or she arrives.

She's still quiet. It seems like she's carefully trying to pick her words.

"I don't think she'd keep it to herself. She's always pushed me toward Ben. I wish I knew why," Mel says, sighing heavily. "It would've been nice to have my mom on my side

just once even. It doesn't matter. It is what it is. I learned that a long time ago with her. She said she fell and that her health hasn't been doing great." She rolls her lips together. "The thing is, you can never tell when my mom is being truthful."

"Shit, sweetheart," I murmur, pulling her over onto my chest.

"We'll be there late tomorrow. I guess we'll see." She runs her fingers over my chest, and for one of the first times in my life, I wish I was an alpha. I'd purr right now to comfort my omega. Since I'm not, I run my fingers over the back of her head and do the only thing I can do, which is be here for her.

The trip to Texas isn't an easy one.

Mel is sick for most of the private flight, and even once we arrive, we push to try to get her to stay in a hotel and get some rest before visiting her mom. She's been doing so much better lately that it's concerning to see how much traveling takes out of her.

Melody talked to her mother briefly again this morning. I'm not exactly sure what the problem is because Mel has been pretty tight lipped about it.

I get the feeling she thinks she might be right about there not being anything wrong with her mom.

Oliver immediately starts looking into home health care nurses that he can hire, so maybe I'm totally off-base.

We're all in agreement that we aren't sticking around Texas, but if Melody's mom needs some extra care, we won't leave her stranded. It's just important that we do what we can to lessen the stress on Mel and the baby.

We need to pack up Mel's apartment, inform that fuck wad of her pregnancy, and get back to Virginia.

Those are my priorities anyway.

Oliver found an ultrasound place in a town an hour away. Melody is willing to go have that done with the asshole, in case he's interested, but I'm not holding my breath.

Okay, fine. I've said multiple prayers that he very politely and without insulting Mel chooses to bow out.

I don't care if it's fucked up.

I'm a human being and I've got feelings too dammit. I'm the one on the shakiest ground now. All of those assholes have a permanent bond with Mel.

All I can give her is a ring, which I did help pick out. We figured that might be best saved for once we get home.

Nik is having one of the rooms converted into a nursery while we're away. It's being painted and recarpeted from what he said.

Miller pulls up to a small yellow house with white trim. It's an older style that shows its age without feeling dilapidated.

"You can park anywhere." Mel points to a small, detached garage. "That's my apartment."

I'm in the far back row behind her and Oliver. Nik and Miller are upfront. We eventually pull to a stop on a gravel driveway. Miller keeps us close to the garage.

"I'd like to hold your hand if that's okay," Oliver says as we're preparing to climb out of the SUV.

"Yeah," Mel says, giving him a tight smile. "Please do."

I'm again hit with a staggering pulse of jealousy. It's frustrating as hell that they have a direct line to her emotions when I don't have that same luxury.

We all climb out of the vehicle, and Mel approaches the side of the house.

There's a slender blonde woman with her hair in a ponytail. She's kneeling on one of those foam pads that people use for gardening.

The weather here sure is different from Virginia. Melody wasn't joking about that.

The woman that I'm sure is her mother is pruning some type of flower. Which means she's definitely not doing that poorly; not as bad as she made it seem anyway.

That's some bullshit if I've ever seen it. Not that I wish the woman illness or injury, but we just flew across the damn country with Melody actually sick as fuck and worried about her mom.

I'm getting real heated the more I think about it.

"Mom?" Melody says, getting a look at the same thing I am. She actually stumbles back into Oliver's chest.

That woman sure as hell didn't take a serious fall a few days ago, and she looks as healthy as any other forty or fifty something person.

"Melody?" Marie Webber turns, pushing to her feet and dusting her hands off on her jeans. "I didn't know you were on your way."

"Everything you said was a lie," Melody says like she's talking herself into believing it. "It's so messed up that I thought it was a possibility, but even then, I couldn't risk being wrong."

"We need you back home. Who are these men?" Marie asks, frowning as she approaches.

"Maxim Miller," he says, holding out a hand. Melody's mom stares but makes no move to shake. He finally pulls his hand down. Moving to Melody's side, he wraps it around her lower back. "That's Oliver, Nik, and Carver."

"Why are you here with my daughter?" she asks in a *fuck you very much* kind of tone.

"I told you that I've got a pack courting me. You said you weren't doing well and you might need to rent out my apartment for extra income," Melody says. She never mentioned that. Not to me anyway. "I'm here to pack up my stuff."

Oliver and Nik seem to be ping-ponging their gazes between the two women.

“You know that isn’t what I wanted,” Marie says, giving her a look I can’t quite figure out. I feel a little like I’m trying to decipher some kind of code, like neither are speaking as plainly as they would be if we weren’t here. “I need you home.”

“Mom, I’m paying rent for you to store my stuff, but I think we both know how spiteful you can be.” Mel leans further into Miller’s chest. “I wasn’t going to risk losing my things when you have an off day.”

“I don’t like your tone,” Marie says, planting her hands on her hips.

It’s a real struggle to hold back from saying something to the effect of I don’t like your entire fucking vibe.

The loud rattling sound of a truck exhaust approaches.

“No way,” Mel whispers, her hands flying to her face, and Miller turns her further into him. “Okay, so this is happening now. God, I bet one of the neighbors called him.”

Nik and Oliver stop standing dumbfounded and approach. It’s going to be the ex. I know it before he climbs out of the lifted truck. Haven’t we moved past the days of gas guzzling vehicles with no purpose? The thing is immaculate, meaning there’s no way that monstrosity is used for any type of work on a ranch.

I guess maybe I’m being a judgmental dick, but I also don’t really give a fuck. I don’t like him, I know he’s not going to like me. If he even remembers me. Granted I wasn’t fucking Mel yet, but I was definitely daydreaming about it.

He’s a big guy; not quite Miller’s size, but he’s a problem in the making if he wants to show his ass. He’s got a backward baseball cap on and worn cowboy boots.

“Hey Ben,” Mel says, giving an awkward wave of her hand.

“What the hell is this?” Cow-bro asks, crossing his arms over his chest. “You said you’d be in town, but you never mentioned having an entourage.”

“Maxim Miller.” Miller tries again, extending a hand.

Ben scoffs. “Right. What the fuck is going on, Melody?”

Miller looks at me, gesturing between the two of them. I give a clipped nod. I’m not leaving Mel’s side. If the asshole doesn’t like it? Well, I’m just providing security for my bosses. They’re bonded, so they automatically come off as more of a threat, or that’s what we figured when we discussed it extensively.

“We’re going to grab the boxes from the back of the SUV and start packing,” Miller says, kissing her temple.

“Everything on the bookshelves is my part of the list,” Oliver says, grinning. “I’m going to figure out your pen name even if it is *slightly* underhanded.”

“This is the key,” Mel says, grabbing it from her pocket and handing it to Nik.

“You know where we’ll be,” Nik says, winking at Mel.

“Can I talk to you?” Mel glances around. “I guess over by your truck?”

“What is this about?” Marie asks, planting her hands on her hips.

“It’s okay, Marie,” Ben says. “Could you give us a minute?”

Melody’s mom grumbles under her breath, but she turns toward the house, heading inside.

“What’s up?” Ben asks, shoving his hands into his front pockets.

Melody freezes. Her chest rises and falls, but she looks like she might hurl or keel over. It’s hard as fuck not to walk over and pull her into my arms. She glances at the SUV and heads over without a word.

I smirk at the asshole.

Ben glares right back.

I shrug and aim for Mel.

By the time I make it to the vehicle, Melody is pulling out the file folder with all the information and her lab results.

She spins around and her hands shake.

The way her shoulders hunch pisses me off. She's got nothing to be ashamed of or feel guilty about. No birth control or pregnancy prevention is one hundred percent effective. If you're going to fuck then you've got to be adult enough to recognize shit happens.

Ben stops three feet away and rocks on his heels. "All right, say what you need to say."

Melody steps forward, shoving the file at Ben. This entire exchange is painful as fuck to watch. It takes a few long seconds of him staring and flipping through pages before the light bulb goes off.

"You're fucking pregnant?" he hisses. His jaw is tight with tension, and I take a step closer to Mel.

"I am." Her shoulders pull back and her chin tilts.

"Congratulations." His eyes bug when he gets a look at the ultrasound. "Yeah, I mean, I'm happy for you. I told you we were done if you went to that place, and you did it anyway. Why exactly did you need to talk to me in person to tell me this?"

"The baby is yours," Mel says slowly. She takes a step back until her ass hits the metal of the door.

Ben makes a strangled sound that I think might be disbelief.

My hands fist and unfurl.

I try real goddamn hard to put myself in his position. How would I feel if an ex came back a few months later to inform me she was pregnant? Yeah, I've got no clue because I've never had a girlfriend until Mel.

They were together for almost a decade. That constitutes a different type of response than a bar hook up.

“Are you sure? How do you know it doesn’t belong to one of them? You’re bonded now, aren’t you?” He nods to her neck.

“I am bonded,” Melody says, giving me a soft smile. “But I was pregnant before I got to The Exchange. I didn’t know that at the time, but you can look at the estimated conception date. Dr. Jamison was kind enough to document all the information on one of those sheets. I did the tests at the North Carolina location when we were there. They gave me a pregnancy test then, and it was negative, but they said it was because it was too soon to pick up the HCG hormone. I got pregnant during the Christmas trip.”

“You were on birth control,” he says dubiously.

Mel’s shoulders slump as her eyes close. She opens her mouth, but I cut her off.

“Yeah, you’re right. It’s absolutely not your kid. It’s mine. We came all the way out here so Mel could lie to your face and try to trap you into giving a shit about a kid that isn’t yours. Do you think that makes any fucking sense?” I take a step toward him. “Don’t worry. You can bow out knowing Mel and the baby will be taken care of. The only reason we’re even here is because she wanted to do the right thing.” I jab a finger at Mel so he understands none of us give a shit if the baby isn’t biologically ours. I’m as attached to the baby as I am to Mel at this point.

I’d rather he wasn’t involved at all. If he is then he has the opportunity to continually hurt and disappoint Mel and eventually the baby.

“You’re fucking him now too?” Ben asks. “Really, Mel?”

His tone sends my hackles right up. I clench my fists, barely holding myself back. He’s a disrespectful shithead.

“Omegas aren’t meant for monogamy, you close-minded prick.” I take a step forward, but Melody grabs my arm.

“You’re not an alpha though, are you, man?” Ben taunts.

“Okay, that was unnecessary,” she says, glaring at her ex. “Listen, the point of this isn’t to fight. I’m making you aware of the situation, that’s all. I won’t keep you from the kid’s life if you want to be a part of it. If you don’t want to be active in the baby’s life then that’s fine too, but my conscience wouldn’t allow me to keep that information from you.” Mel wraps my arm around her lower back. “But what I’m not going to do is let you talk to either of us like crap.”

I grin, bringing my free hand to rest on the baby pooch. It’s not really a belly yet, but I love it.

“I don’t think you should have it.” Ben crosses his arms over his chest. “If we aren’t going to be together then that’s not fair to me.”

“My mom mentioned on the phone that she heard you’ve got a new girlfriend. You don’t want to be with me, and that goes both ways,” Mel says.

Our little omega hasn’t been openly sharing information because she never mentioned that either.

“I do have a girlfriend,” Ben says, giving Mel a cutting smile. “You know I spent two days in jail after that night I called and you had your boyfriend answer.”

“What?” Mel whispers.

“Yeah, she works at my bail bondsman’s office.” He smirks like he’s itching to drive that knife in.

“I told you to go home and sleep it off,” I say, chuckling to hide the fact I’m about to rip his fucking head off. There’s something about his entire vibe that is setting off every protective instinct I’ve got.

“You can stay the fuck out of this,” he snarls. “Why the hell would you want to have my baby?”

“Because it’s a human being, you rancid piece of shit,” Nik growls, coming around the back of the SUV. His entire body vibrates with tension.

“I’m having the baby,” Mel says with a quaver in her voice. “I’m too far along to even consider anything else. I’m

almost seventeen weeks, and you know how I feel about that anyway.”

“Christ,” Ben says, taking a step back. “And you’re just now telling me?”

“I didn’t find out until later than normal because the baby wasn’t conceived during a heat. I thought about telling you over the phone, but I wanted to be here in case you wanted to come to an ultrasound with us. I’m far enough along that one of the 3D ultrasound places should be able to determine gender,” Mel says, rambling it all out super fast.

“You’re an omega. You know how they are. No one is going to want to bond with me when I have a kid with some random chick,” Ben says, like he isn’t ripping her heart out.

Mel sways into my side. “It’s always about you. How did I miss that for so long?” she whispers, taking a step back.

“Random chick?” Nik growls. “I think you need to take a walk around the block and come back when you’ve cooled off.”

“Random chick,” Mel repeats. “Yeah, so fucking random. You know what’s *really* random, Ben? That I let you dick me around for *ten years*. You dangled a bond and having a family just out of arm’s reach. The really ridiculous part is that I let you. I put up with it like that was all I deserved because I loved you. Or maybe all these years I was punishing myself for what I did to Luke. But guess what? Your brother is happy. And I finally am too.”

I squeeze her hip, pulling her closer into me, but my eyes fly to Nik. He’s got this low rattling growl coming from his chest.

“Oh yeah?” Ben snorts a derisive laugh. “You won’t have heats for a year and then you’ll pop out some other guy’s kid. You really think they’re going to stay faithful when you’re out of commission?”

I don’t see the punch coming until Ben hits the ground. He slides back a few feet and my eyes widen.

Nik shakes out his hand. “I told you to take a walk.”

Melody gasps, her hands flying to her mouth.

I chuckle.

“You fucking dick,” Ben snarls, pushing himself off the ground. He makes it to his feet and moves to swing at Nik, but Nik tackles him. Nik is used to being on the other side of that equation, but it is a solid takedown.

I snort. Cow-bro definitely deserves a little pain and suffering.

“Ohmigod, please stop,” Mel begs as the two alphas roll around, punching each other in the kidneys.

“That was assault,” Melody’s mom calls out from the porch. “I’m calling the police.”

And that’s how Nik ends up in cuffs in the back of a podunk police car, while Mel has a panic attack, Miller keeps packing, and Oliver quietly tries to negotiate buying off Mel’s ex.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Melody

“I swear on the sweet baby Jesus that if you don’t stop laughing, I am going to hurt you,” I tell Carver.

“I’ve never seen a police officer stop and ask if they can take a selfie with the person they’re arresting . . .” He pulls me into his chest. “Nik will be out by morning.”

I glance down the dirt road where the police car disappeared a few minutes ago. Poor Nik.

My heart aches, and not because of the crap Ben said. Some part of me was always expecting that reaction.

What I wasn’t counting on was my mom to be quite so spiteful to call the police, nor did I anticipate Ben gleefully spewing his side of the story.

What an asshole.

I’m so pissed that I can’t even look at my mom, and I don’t even want to think about Ben.

“Sweetheart, don’t stress. Nik is a big boy.”

“That’s not making me feel any better.” My eyes close as I fight the nerves rolling through my stomach. “This is a damn nightmare.”

“Do you *really* think Nik has never gotten himself into trouble before? Damn woman, didn’t you do a quick web search of the men you were considering bonding?” Carver snorts. “I guess it doesn’t matter because you’re stuck with them now.”

“No, since I definitely didn’t want people searching me,” I admit.

“It kills me that they’ve convinced you your books are something to be hidden. I’ll bet that dick was watching way naughtier shit every time he pulled up porn, but he couldn’t stand you writing it?” Carver squeezes my hips. “Do you really think any of us give a shit? Sorry to burst your bubble, but your dirty mind makes my cock hard.”

“You’re trying to distract me,” I mumble as he teases his hands up the edge of my skirt.

“Yup, is it working?” He smirks, brushing his thick fingers over the front of my panties while the other slides back to squeeze my ass.

“You do realize my mom, my ex, and like five cops are ten feet away?” I ask, tilting my head to study his face.

“Ask me if I give a fuck,” he murmurs, dipping his mouth to mine. I melt into his chest as he distracts me in the best way possible.

“You’re pure freaking trouble, Dylan.” I gasp as we pull apart.

“Nah, Melody. I’m just really into you, and I don’t give a fuck who knows it.” His fingers keep teasing my pussy as his hand flexes on my ass.

“I’ve got a call into our lawyer and Nik’s manager so he can get ahead of the PR shitstorm,” Oliver says, shaking out his hands as he approaches.

Carver spins me around and sends me to Oli with a pat on my ass.

“I really dislike your ex,” Oliver says.

“Well, that makes two of us.” I sigh, snuggling against his slender chest.

“Three,” Carver says, slapping my ass.

“Melanie Winters?” A sly smile crosses Oliver’s face. “I should have caught that. You kept it really close. I actually

bought one of your books, but I haven't started it."

"Shit," I mumble, wallowing in his armpit. I'd go for his neck if I could reach it, but he's entirely too tall for that. "I wanted to stay similar enough that I'd recognize if someone was talking to me, like if I ever did a book signing."

"Makes perfect sense to me," Carver says, hugging me from behind.

"Poor Nik," I whisper as my brain circles back to that. "God, I can't believe my mom called the police. There were times Ben showed up here wasted when we were fighting where I wished she would. Only she didn't, so it felt like I had to let him in because I wasn't going to ask him to leave when he was shit face wasted."

"That's disgusting," Oliver says, frowning.

"I would appreciate it if you could keep your deviancy from showing on my front lawn," my mom hisses, coming up to stand a few feet away. "I'd like to speak to my daughter *alone*."

She has a sour look on her face that makes it difficult to want to hear whatever she has to say. She got really deep into religion when my dads left. She's been anti-pack since then.

Oliver tilts his head down, raising his eyebrows in question.

"Yeah, I should probably speak to her one-on-one."

"Melody is pregnant as I'm sure you've heard," Oliver says, surprising the hell out of me. He releases me and turns toward my mom. "She's had a lot of stress the last few months. Don't add to that, please. Um, I mean that respectfully, and it's very nice to meet you. Thanks." Oliver nods at my mom.

Carver pats my hips and grabs Oliver's shoulder, guiding him off.

Nik is far enough away that I'm not picking much up from him in the bond outside of annoyance.

Miller is frantic energy, but he's also blocking most of it.

Oliver's care and concern are heavy in the bond. He's pretty terrible with keeping his emotions or feelings to himself. It took some getting used to at first, but now I love it. He's an open book, and it puts me at ease.

"What in the hell were you thinking?" Mom hisses, once the guys are heading inside the garage. "Do you want to make the same mistakes I did? It's like you're dead set on following in my footsteps."

She takes a step toward me, and for once I don't retreat.

I've worried about her a lot over my lifetime. As a kid I used to do everything in my power to make her happy.

I'd clean the house, cook for her, make sure I didn't make any noise while she was sleeping all day, and that was before my dads left. Once they were gone, I tried even harder because sometimes it got scary how sad she was.

No matter how much effort I put in, it was never enough. It didn't make her happy because I don't think it's possible for her to be content in life.

I know she hoped I'd never bond after I saw what it put her through when my dads left, but I want different things out of life.

I don't think you can judge all relationships off one shitty example.

"I'm going back to Virginia with my pack," I say, giving her a tight smile. "I know you're struggling financially, and I have savings. When we thought you fell, Oliver was going to hire a home health care nurse or something to help take care of you. You clearly don't need that, but I'm going to see if I can find some type of agency that has companions or something who can come check on you or take you to the grocery store."

"No, I don't want to spend money that was made in a way I don't agree with. Melody, I'm worried about you. God sees everything. Do you think he's pleased with the trash you put out into the world?" Mom sighs, shaking her head.

She really is self-righteous considering she has taken my money since I was sixteen and got a job. Not all of it was smut

money, but still. She doesn't have a job, and I'm starting to worry how she's going to survive without me.

"Then I'll ask Oliver or Nik to pay for it." And I'll pay them back with my *unclean* money. "I won't be around to do those things for you, and I want to be sure you're taken care of."

I really think I need some distance from our relationship for a while. I don't have any plans to keep her from seeing the baby or even coming to visit, but I need a break from the toxic relationship I've allowed to develop between us.

"So you're going to leave just like your fathers did?" she asks with her mouth hanging open. "The world isn't a kind place. I've kept you safe here with me . . ."

My stomach drops as I realize she really has been navigating and influencing my life with the intention of keeping me here. She didn't want me to leave her behind, so she encouraged me to put up with Ben's garbage. I wondered sometimes, but it's clear that's the case.

The overwhelming pang of sadness that forms in my gut takes my breath away.

I want more for her than this, but I can't force her to do anything, and my encouragement over the years has gotten us nowhere.

"I'll be giving birth sometime in mid to late September, especially since first pregnancies tend to go past their due date. If you'd like to come out and meet the baby, just let me know," I say, giving her a tight smile.

"What about Ben? You're going to move halfway across the country and purposely keep his child from him?" She looks at me with disdain, and it pushes me to an ugly place.

"I'm sure you heard the things he had to say when I told him. You didn't magically pop out only in time to see the altercation. You know what? There's an idea. You're so fond of Ben, maybe you can start counting on him to bring you groceries or make sure you have enough money to pay for your medications." I run my hand over my stomach, reminding

myself to stay as calm as possible. “I wish we could’ve been a team. But if nothing else, I appreciate that you taught me a lot about who I refuse to be as a parent. I don’t have a lot of compassion for you at this moment, and I’m afraid I might say some hurtful things.” I toss a finger toward the garage. “So, I’m going to go, but I love you, Mom.”

I give her a tight smile and aim for my guys. I’m going to start setting boundaries and only subjecting myself to healthy relationships. I have to set a good example for the baby, which means being stronger than I was.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Miller

“What the hell are you doing?” I ask, shoving everything from Melody’s bedside table into a small box.

“Speed reading,” Oliver replies without looking up from the book. He’s sprawled across the couch, which is incidentally all in the same room as her bedroom.

There’s a small kitchenette along one wall and a door that leads to a bathroom, but this place is basically smaller than an efficiency apartment.

It’s no great mystery why the house in Virginia overwhelms her. It’s massive to the point of almost being obnoxiously huge.

Even with five of us living there, it doesn’t offset the fact it’s a fucking mansion.

Mel comes in smelling stressed to the max. She ignores Carver and Oli and walks over to a small closet next to the bathroom. She yanks out a couple of old blankets and brings them over to her bed.

She begins to toss them in a circle and I immediately recognize this pattern. She’s building a nest. I grab the box off the end of the bed, tossing it on the floor.

I toe off my boots and put myself down on the bed. It’s going to be a tight fit to hold the both of us, but she can lie directly on top of me if need be.

I pat my chest and Mel scrambles onto the bed. She grabs one of the blankets, pulling it over her, and buries her face in my shoulder.

The bond is helpful sometimes. It's a great way to get a little insight into her thoughts and feelings, but she's so chaotic at the moment that it's not really helping me know what the problem is. I can guess just based on the circumstances of the day, but I'd also like to know specifics.

"I'm going to go check in with Nik's lawyer," Carver says, pushing himself off the couch.

Oliver grabs his phone, holding it up. "The two most recent calls are the important numbers."

"Thanks." He takes the phone, but catches my eyes, nodding at Mel.

I don't even need the instructions. I'm already all over this.

"You smell stressed," I murmur, focusing on breathing in deep hits of her scent. It doesn't take long before the low rumble of a purr starts in my chest.

"I think it might have been a mistake coming here." She wallows deeper, and all I want to do is wrap her up and keep her safe from anything and everything that causes her distress.

"It was something that had to be done. You can cross it off the list and get back home to start setting up the nursery." I grimace. I don't think Nik has mentioned that little tidbit yet.

"That does sound nice."

"Have you given any thought to what you hope we're having?" I slide a hand between us. Yeah, fine. I'm fucking addicted to the belly, but feeling it helps keep me calm.

I couldn't go outside while the shit was going down because I was honest to God daydreaming about strangling that asshole with my bare hands. It definitely didn't help when Oliver mentioned what he said.

"I'm just praying for a healthy baby." She shrugs. "Either way."

“Little fibber.” I chuckle. I can’t tell if she’s lying to herself or if she forgets the bond bubbles over, but she’s definitely hoping for a girl.

I am too.

Although, Nik and Carver have pointed out that it wouldn’t be bad to have a boy first. I’m in agreement on that, but I also have a plan to knock her up again as soon as possible, so if we don’t get a boy the first time, we’ve got another shot. They should be close enough in age that he can look out for his older sister, especially once they get into high school.

“Oh, you stop.” Melody laughs. “Okay, fine. Maybe I do have a small hope for dresses and tea parties, but I’d be happy either way.”

I grin, pulling her over until she’s fully on my chest. I need to be able to see her face.

“I’ve been meaning to tell you . . .” I clear my throat as my heart tries to pound right out of my damn chest. “I love you.”

Melody’s mouth falls as she blinks. I get nervous when fat tears spring from the sides of her eyes. “Really?”

“Yeah, I’m absolutely gone for you.” I brush my fingers over her cheeks, wiping away the tears.

“Good, because I love you, too,” she whispers, kissing me.

I smile against her lips.

“Dammit, I got caught up in Dante and Liz’s first kiss,” Oliver grumbles, climbing into the full-size bed at our side. There’s not really enough room for three people, and he ends up lying on my arm. “I want to get in on the declarations of love too. By the way, I haven’t felt this way before about anyone, but I feel confident saying this. I love you, Melody.”

Mel whimpers, climbing over onto him. I slide out from under the two of them as they kiss. I’d really like to slide inside her, but not here. That can wait for the hotel. I look at the boxes and sigh.

“I’m going to take these out and go for fresh boxes,” I say more to myself than to them.

“I love you, too, Oliver,” Mel says between frantic kisses.

I chuckle and grab a box before heading to check on Carver.

The cops are gone. I carry the box to the cargo area of the SUV and shove it inside. I’m pretty sure we’re just going to need to hire movers and have all her stuff shipped back. She can pick a box or two of important stuff and we can carry that on the flight with us, but I don’t think we can manage flying all her stuff back. Not even on a private plane.

I grab the last empty boxes and the last roll of packing tape and turn to head back into the garage.

I stumble several steps.

I was not expecting *in the fucking least* to come across Carver pinning Ben to a tree with his forearm pressed to his windpipe and strangely his cellphone slammed into the dick’s ear.

“Shit,” I hiss, stomping toward them.

“You hear that?” Carver asks, slamming Ben back again. “That’s a fucking heartbeat. Your kid’s heartbeat, you stupid son of a bitch. Let me hear you say any bullshit again like you don’t think she should have the baby. I will motherfucking—”

“Carver!” I bark. The last thing Mel needs is for him to end up in jail too and for a more serious charge. “Back up!”

Carver completely disregards my order.

I’m not shocked.

In the military they went harder on the betas than any of the alphas. They wanted to be sure they learned how to override alpha commands.

“Come on, man,” I growl, dropping the shit at my feet and making a grab for his arm. “This is the last thing Mel needs right now.”

“Benjamin and I are just having a friendly chat,” Carver says, locking his screen and shoving his phone into his back pocket. He still hasn’t removed his forearm from Ben’s windpipe, though.

“Clearly,” I say, shaking my head. “Melody’s nesting with Oliver. Why don’t you head inside and cuddle up with them?”

Carver chuckles. “You know, if I was you then I’d seriously be regretting my life choices at the moment. But I get the feeling you’re not smart enough to recognize just how good you had it.” He slams Ben against the tree a final time. “That’s okay because I do.” He winks, spinning around and heading off without another word.

“Are you okay?” I ask, scratching at my jaw.

“Like you fucking care,” he scoffs.

Well, he’s got me there. I really don’t. Not outside of it causing any more stress for Mel.

“I already told the guy with glasses that I wouldn’t press charges, and I don’t want your fucking money. That just feels slimy.”

I nod because Oliver did mention all of that. It’ll likely come down to whether or not the prosecutor’s office decides to pursue charges. I know Nik’s lawyer will have found someone local to meet him at the station.

“I’m sure it’s been a day,” I say, rolling my jaw from side to side.

I’m greatly lacking any form of empathy toward this guy, but I do try not to be a raging asshole.

“You’ve got no clue,” he says, pulling off his baseball cap and messing with the bill.

“The way I look at it, you’ve got two choices,” I say, exhaling loudly. “You either make the choice to be in the baby’s life or you don’t.”

“I’m not even twenty-eight years old,” he says, kicking the toe of his boot against the grass.

“She’s not either.” I manage to keep from telling him a whole lot of people have kids way younger than he is now. I don’t think that’s going to help anything at the moment.

“We weren’t good together,” he says, staring at the ground. “I think I always blamed Mel for my brother hating me. He used to be my best damn friend, but I lost him because I wanted her.”

My hands clench, and I have to center the fuck out of my energy to keep from swinging. I really do not like him, and it’s hard as hell to stay civil.

“You can try to justify your actions all day, but I guarantee you won’t find peace until you own up to your mistakes and acknowledge your culpability in all of it.” I shove my hands into my pockets. “The issue isn’t whether or not the two of you will be together. The only choice you need to make is if you want to step up and be a father.”

“And I’m supposed to be happy about sharing that title with you assholes?” he scoffs.

I can actually understand where he’s coming from there, but if he hadn’t taken Melody for granted, she never would have met us.

It’s a sobering realization.

“I don’t think having more people to love a kid is ever a bad thing.” I shrug. “Look at it this way; it’s less responsibility for you when you inevitably fuck up.”

Ben takes a step back.

I sigh. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that. Do you want to go with us to an ultrasound to find out the gender?”

“I didn’t know that baby existed before today.”

“That is tough,” I acknowledge. “Take some time and think it through.”

“You’re a man.” He nods at me. “You’d honestly be fine with some guys you don’t know raising your kid while you live states away and only get to visit a few times a year?”

I frown because, while I get where he’s coming from, I don’t think he’s understanding that he set all of this into motion.

“At this point, you’ve acknowledged you and Melody weren’t healthy together.” I fight the urge to spew a bunch of shit about how he’s twisted her to think it’s wrong to be with a pack and even more about how he treated her over the years. I hold my tongue because that wouldn’t get us anywhere. “The only person who will cut you out of the child’s life is you, if you don’t put in the effort to be a decent father. That’s not to say you have to. No matter what, Melody will have support. The two of you should talk once you’ve had some time to think it through.”

I turn and grab the stuff I dropped earlier and aim to check on *my* omega.

Ben stomps over to his truck and climbs inside. The loud growl of exhaust fills the air before he blessedly leaves.

I’m surprisingly proud of myself. I was civil. Okay, I don’t think I managed to talk to him like a friend, but I think I counseled him like an acquaintance that I don’t hate.

Maybe.

I don’t know.

I did try, though.

I make it inside Mel’s tiny apartment, and I’m not sure how I was so focused that I missed their pure bliss in the bond. Hell, maybe that’s how I managed to stay so civil.

Mel is naked and riding Oliver. Carver is kneeling over Oliver’s thighs, and I think he might be fucking Mel’s ass. I drop the shit on the coffee table and prowl closer.

“That’s . . .” Oliver growls, stretching back. “Completely fucking insane.”

“I’m a big fan,” Mel sobs, her head rolling back against Carver’s chest. He’s got his forearm banded just under her tits and the corded lines of muscle bulge like he’s desperately trying to hold himself back.

“Someone has to move,” Mel whimpers.

My eyes bug when I get close.

“Are you both in her pussy?” I barely manage to close my mouth.

“Fuck yes we are,” Carver agrees, gently shoving Mel down to rest on Oliver’s chest. “Try to rub her clit or something. Hell, I don’t know. I’m afraid if I move I’m going to bust.”

“Yeah,” Oliver says, nodding wildly.

He doesn’t move for her clit.

Mel is mostly a sobbing, sweaty mess.

I get close and squat next to the bed.

“Let me help,” I murmur, carefully sliding a hand between them. “No weight on the belly.” I look at Carver.

“Yeah, got it,” he says, sliding back and gently thrusting back inside.

“It feels like a cock long knot,” Mel whines. “Is this even real?”

“You’re a fucking dream,” I tell her, scraping my teeth over her shoulder as my hand finally locates her clit.

Oliver is trapped to the bed with Mel clawing at his chest, but he looks completely content, or maybe like he’s trying to keep from coming.

“I really love you,” Mel says, tilting her head back to look at Carver. “Thank you for always sticking up for me. If biting you would make you mine then I’d do it.”

“Aww, fuck,” Carver groans, falling to frame her back. He has enough presence of mind to keep himself up with one

palm on the mattress at Oliver's side while he grips Mel's hip in the other and thrusts deep. "I love you too, sweetheart."

I tease Melody's pussy until she thrashes out her release.

"Yeah, I'm done for," Oliver groans, sounding intensely satisfied.

"You're such a good little omega," I praise. "Look at you, taking both of them."

"Mel, your pussy is the real MVP." Carver snorts. "Fuck yes, tighten up just like that. Holy fucking shit, *goddamn* . . ." he continues to ramble as his thrusts get erratic and he freezes.

"Grind him through it," I suggest.

Mel nods, working her hips as Carver spits a slew of incoherent curses.

"Such a beautiful girl." I kiss her cheek.

"Did you really mean that?" Carver asks, pulling Mel up with an arm under her breasts.

She wraps a hand back around his neck. "I did. You've got a lot of tattoos. Would you be opposed to getting my teeth print on your neck?"

"You're ridiculously fucking cute," he says, shoving his tongue in her mouth. "And I'm all for wearing your claim. I will absolutely get your teeth tattooed on me."

"That's one option," Oliver says, leaning up using his forearms as leverage. "But it's not the only one."

"What?" Carver chokes, kissing over Melody's shoulder.

"You're part of our pack. If you want a bond with Mel, it would require one of us to link the two of you. It's something we've all agreed to." I give his arm a squeeze. "All you have to do is say the word."

Melody gasps, bursting into tears. "Stupid hormones. I'm actually really happy."

"We know," Oliver says, brushing his fingers over her cheek.

“Yeah, I’d like to be able to know too,” Carver says, laughing and shaking his head. “Not right this second or anything, but I definitely want that link to you.” He runs his hands down her arm.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Melody

“Someone in the police department doesn’t know how to keep confidentiality,” Nik growls, glaring at the reporters.

It’s not paparazzi like it was in Virginia. This is several small news station camera crews.

“I’m so sorry.” I shake my head. “I honestly don’t know what else to say.”

“You’ve got to stop apologizing.” He pulls me into his lap, nuzzling his cheek to mine.

“You may not want to break any laws,” Carver says, starting the SUV. “They’re still pointing those cameras this way.”

Nik holds up a hand, flipping them off while his other wraps around the back of my head. He brings his mouth to mine, and all thoughts bleed away as he kisses the hell out of me.

“I shouldn’t have let my temper get the better of me,” he says, frowning against my cheek. “I probably didn’t leave the best impression when meeting my mother-in-law.”

I snort. “I think you could’ve had exemplary behavior and it wouldn’t have made a difference.”

“You’re not angry with me?”

“God, no. I’m just ready to get back home.”

“Home?” Nik beams, his straight white teeth digging into his lower lip.

“Yeah, back to Virginia . . .” I give him a final kiss on the cheek before moving to buckle into the seat next to his.

“I fucking love hearing you call it that,” Nik says, lacing his fingers with mine. “Did I screw up the plans? I thought we were sticking around for another couple of days.”

“We’re giving Ben some time to come to terms with things, and we hired movers to pack up the rest of Mel’s belongings,” Miller says from the back row.

“And I figured out Mel’s pen name,” Oliver adds, spinning around in his seat with his nose in one of my paperbacks. He wiggles his eyebrows playfully. “This one is pure delicious filth. By the way, we’re totally trying the hot tub spit roast.”

“Wait, I thought all your books were single couples?” Nik asks, chuckling.

“It was my first book,” I say, trying not to blush. “I actually pulled that one down. The only place to read it is in paperback. I knew I should’ve burned that thing.”

Oliver’s eyes widen. He looks horrified as he clutches the book close to his chest. “She didn’t mean it.” He looks at me. “Don’t even joke about that kind of sacrilege.”

“Now I’m *really* interested,” Nik says, pulling our interlaced fingers over and cupping his cock. “It was a long night without you.”

I laugh.

“By the way, you make me really fucking happy, gorgeous,” Nik says, staring straight into my eyes. His sincerity radiates through the bond.

I whimper out a quick, “Me too,” and try not to burst into tears again like a total hormonal pregnant woman.

The flight home is easy enough, and luckily I'm not sick. However, I'm beat. I know the guys have something they want to show me, but it's going to have to wait. I'm dead on my feet.

I don't aim for the nest, which is unusual. Instead, I crawl up into the giant bed I've never slept in, and Nick curls himself around my back. His hand slides from my stomach down to my pussy. Normally, I'd be good to go, but exhaustion is kicking my ass.

"Listen, I already told Oliver that I'm good with getting frisky if I'm not awake—"

"Wait, what?" Nik interrupts, laughing.

"If you want to slip your dick inside me while I'm sleeping. I'm totally fine with that. There are four of you and it's kind of a lot of work now that I think about it," I grumble, pulling his hand from my panties. "Although I think I need to amend that to say, if you fuck me while I'm asleep then you better finish without waking me, otherwise, you might get an earful. I'm tired."

"God, you're cute." Nik chuckles against the back of my head. "And for the record, I think I just unlocked a new kink."

"You're ridiculous, but I love you anyway." I pat his hand that's now carefully caressing my belly and promptly fall asleep.

The next morning Nik wakes me up with his cock already inside me. He's done a fine job of getting my body fully on board, so I don't complain even though I'm pretty sure I could have used an extra three or four days of sleep.

"Do you know that you told me you loved me last night?" Nik growls, thrusting even deeper.

"Yeah," I whimper, clutching his hand that splays over my sternum.

“Did you mean that, gorgeous?”

“I did. Holy shit, Nik.” I thrash as he slides his hand down, pinching my clit.

“Fuck Mel, it’s all I thought about all night, but you knocked out immediately after saying it.” He scrapes his teeth over the shell of my ear. “I’ve never said this to a woman before, not romantically. I love you.”

I nod, slamming my hips back into his.

“Don’t worry, sweet girl. I know how to fuck you like I don’t, but just remember I really fucking do,” he growls, plowing into me from behind as we lie spooning.

“Okay, good, me too. But deeper or harder? Both please.”

Nik chuckles darkly. His breath fanning over my neck makes me shiver. He pounds into me like I’m his dirty little fuck toy, but he cradles me to him like I’m precious, all while sending jolts of his pleasure through the bond.

It’s ridiculously intense.

I come twice before he finally growls out his release, palming my stomach and raking his teeth over my shoulder. I gyrate my hips trying to milk every ounce of enjoyment from his orgasm.

He finally pulls out of me, but I’m not expecting him to grab my shoulder and roll me down until I’m lying on my back. His hand slides between my legs as he hovers over me. He grins into the kiss as his top half pins me to the mattress.

“Say it again, gorgeous,” he pleads, nipping at my lips.

“I love you, Nik,” I whisper, staring up into his light blueish-green eyes.

“I know you do. I can fucking feel it.” He laughs, twisting his thick fingers in and out of me. “Let’s see if I can make you scream while I finger fuck my cum back inside your tight little cunt.”

“Please,” I beg as he hits that magical spot inside me. He drives me to the edge with his hand while he teases my tits

with his tongue, and he doesn't stop until I coat him in a combination of his seed and my slick.

“That’s so fucking hot,” he growls. His cock is hard again, and it brushes my hip as he sits up, but he ignores it. He climbs out of bed and mutters a brief apology for waking me.

He makes it up to me by carrying me to the shower and pampering the hell out of me.

The guys meet us in the kitchen for breakfast. I’ve just finished a plate of sugary French toast with orange juice when I feel the same bizarre bubbling I’ve felt the last few days.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asks, leaning close to my ear. “Are you going to puke? I can’t decide what that feeling is, but if you need to pass gas, I’ll totally claim it was me.”

He tilts his head looking so serious that a ridiculously loud giggle bursts out as my head shakes against his shoulder.

Oliver just shrugs. “I know women are funny about stuff like that.”

“I really do love you,” I tell him, staring up at his deep blue eyes. “Like a fucking lot.”

“I love you, Mel.” He leans down to kiss me, and his glasses bump my cheek like they always do. “But I really want to know what that feeling was for next time so I don’t have to ask.”

“I think maybe that’s the baby moving.” I grab his hand, lifting my shirt and lowering my skirt before placing his fingers on my bare skin.

“Wow,” Oliver whispers as his eyes fall shut. “Okay, let me focus.”

I gently push his hand deeper where the light fluttering bounces against my skin.

“What’s up?” Miller asks, wiping at his mouth with a napkin.

“Shh,” Oliver hisses.

“You won’t be able to hear it,” I say with a laugh.

“The books are right—I can’t tell if that’s gas.” He grimaces. “I mean digestion, or possibly the baby moving around.”

“No fucking way,” Nik growls, tossing his fork down. “You think it’s the baby?”

I shrug. “I’ve been feeling this kind of light spasming or fluttering for a week or two now. It took me a while to really pay attention, though.”

“That’s awesome,” Carver says, sliding his hand over and gripping my free hand.

“Yeah, it really is.” I smile.

“Okay, so I need you to remember that apparently, I show love and affection through gifts,” Nik says, glancing at the door behind him and back to me.

“Whatever it is, I’m sure it’s great.”

“Famous last words,” Oliver says under his breath.

“It’s all stuff you needed,” Carver says, leaning against the wall and looking like pure sex.

“Dick, way to ruin the surprise,” Nik growls, taking a step toward Carver. His frustration is clear in the bond, but mostly he’s nervous.

My head tilts up to study his face as I wrap my hand in his. “I promise to be extremely surprised even though I’ve been able to smell the fresh paint since we walked into the house.”

I give him a goofy smile, trying to lighten the mood and help relax him.

“Well shit.” Nik chuckles. “All right, gorgeous. Pretend to be amazed by my sneakiness.”

I laugh and let him guide me into the bedroom.

It’s the only other bedroom on the top floor that’s on this side of the house. There are four or five other bedrooms, but they’re on the opposite hallway.

My eyes widen as we step inside. The wall directly in front of us is the same cream color it started. There are two wide windows, and between them is a glider with a footrest. The cloth is light gray and the wood is white. On the left are two white dressers, and painted shapes of stars, moons, planets, and clouds line the wall. They’re all very bubbly and could fit any decor, depending on what the ultrasound reveals. The floor has a light gray rug that’s extremely thick and fluffy.

Immediately after walking in, the wall to the right has a tall five-drawer dresser and a wide changing table. It’s white like the dressers, but the changing cushion is light gray. The far wall is taken up with a beautiful sleigh crib, but it’s the wall behind it that draws my attention. It has two cloud lamps that are lit up. They glow a warm yellow glow and match the celestial shapes that are on this wall too.

“Check this out,” Nik says, guiding me over to the closet. He yanks it open, and a sound of disbelief escapes my lips.

The entire top rack is stacked with boxes of diapers. They’re kind of arranged by size . . . I think. There are numbers on the boxes, a few with “N” for newborn, but the majority are size one, two, and three.

The shelves have baby blankets in neutral colors folded over tiny baby hangers, onesies, and so much more. The floor has several clear plastic dressers. They’re small, maybe three feet tall at most.

I step forward, pulling open one of the drawers, and it’s filled with bibs. The one under that is socks. The next dresser has a bunch of items it takes me a few seconds to recognize. There’s a hairbrush, baby nail clippers, several types of thermometers.

“Thank you,” I whisper, chucking myself at Nik.

“Aww, gorgeous. You’re very welcome,” he murmurs, kissing me deeply. “Consider this my preemptive apology for the fact that my moms are coming to visit in a few weeks.”

He gives a smile that might be considered a grimace, and I laugh against his shoulder.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Oliver

When I wake up on the morning of Mel's gender reveal ultrasound, she's missing. Carver and Miller slept in their own rooms last night, and Nik is still snoring, so I go searching.

I make it downstairs and take several steps toward the kitchen. My nose twitches with the smell of burning food. I pick up my pace.

Melody gags into the trash can.

I skirt behind her carefully and head over to the stove to flip off the element.

I slide the pan to the back burner and turn to face Mel. She's using the kitchen counter as an armrest, and she looks miserable.

My chest pounds uncomfortably as I watch her cough and gag. Spinning around, I grab a water from the fridge and bring it over to her. I set it next to her hand and head for the sink. Pulling out a fresh hand towel, I run it under the cool water and bring it over to her.

I lay it over her forearm and she jumps.

"Thank you, Oli," she says as her eyes meet mine. I give her a nod, shoving up my glasses. She looks exhausted. I was really hoping the constant vomiting was a thing of the past. Traveling was one thing, but at home, she's been doing pretty well.

“Are you okay? What happened? Are you hungry?” I ask as my brain files through another twenty questions. I need to know so I can figure out how to fix this.

“Yeah, I mean I was,” she says, snorting a laugh. “I’ve learned I can’t do eggs. Probably ever again. All I’ve wanted for two days is fluffy scrambled cheesy goodness. But when I cracked them, all I could think about was baby chicken embryos . . .”

She gags, turning her head.

“I don’t think—” I start, but she cuts me off.

“Listen, you saw where I grew up. I understand how farm life works. I know it’s not logical, but . . .” She shrugs. “I don’t think I can do it.”

“That’s okay,” I say, eyeing the pan of eggs. “I’m not a big fan of eggs either. Are you craving other proteins like meat or nuts?”

I’ve done so much research lately. It’s unreal the vast amount of information there is about pregnancy.

Cravings can be nothing or they can indicate a deficiency in something.

“I don’t know. We know I can’t do bacon anymore, but I was hungry before this.” She frowns. “Dammit, I was fine with eggs until I tried to cook them.”

I laugh, shaking my head. “Do you want me to make you some pancakes or a bowl of cereal?”

“No, not yet,” she groans. “I’ve got to give my stomach a chance to stop hating me before I put anything in it.”

“How about I grab a bowl in case there’s an emergency and we can snuggle on the couch? Your appointment isn’t for another few hours.”

“Yeah,” she agrees solemnly. “Man, I’m actually really bummed about this turn of events.”

It’s hard to keep a straight face. She’s cute as hell at the most random times.

“I don’t think I can hold it anymore,” Mel whimpers, pacing back and forth across the waiting room. Our appointment was close to twenty minutes ago, and Mel has felt every single extra second of wait time. “They’re going to get me on the table, push on my stomach, and I’m going to be sitting in a puddle.”

I frown because that does sound terrible.

“You’ll live,” Carver says, snorting a laugh. “I’m more impressed that you put away half a bag of jalapeño cheese puffs for breakfast. Not even your toothpaste could overcome that debacle.”

It was the closest we had in the house to satisfy the craving she was having for non-egg scrambled eggs with cheese. Yeah, I’m still baffled by that one.

“Ohmigod, does my breath stink?” She slaps Carver in the stomach. “It’s legally your responsibility to warn me of these things.”

“Legally? Is that right? Are you going to press charges?” he asks, snorting a laugh. “I almost don’t want to tell you . . .”

I raise a hand, swiping it across my throat. Under no circumstances will Melody learn that she has had terrible gas while she sleeps the last few days.

To be fair, some of the concoctions she’s been craving would be hard on even the most hardcore digestive tract.

Miller and I have done our best to mitigate the fact we live with two men who act more like teenagers than actual adults. They think it’s hysterical, but I know it would make Mel uncomfortable, so we’re sticking that one in the vault and taking it to the grave.

Nik really isn’t in a place to judge. I’ve smelled him after corn chips and cheese dip with salsa. He’s got no room to talk.

“Stop picking on her,” Miller says, shoving his way out of the too-small chair and heading over.

“We’re just trying to keep her mind off the bladder emergency,” Nik says, smirking.

“It’s so bad,” Mel says, burying her face in Miller’s chest. “I really am afraid I might pee myself. I’m sorry you’re stuck with me.”

“I’m not,” the big guy says, leaning down to kiss her forehead. “I’m sure they’ve had more than one incident, especially since they want a full bladder for the ultrasound.”

“Pregnancy is more embarrassing than I expected,” Mel mutters as her shoulders slump.

The beginning of the ultrasound is questionable.

I’m regretting not thinking to bring Mel a change of clothes, or possibly adult diapers. She’s made several jokes that she’s as dangerous as a potty training toddler.

It’s cute, but we’re all relieved when the technician says she’s got all the important measurements and offers Mel a bathroom break.

She gleefully accepts. Once she’s finished, the tech goes back to scanning and documenting things I don’t understand.

“Okay, so I have to ask—would you like to know what you’re having?” the ultrasound technician asks after a while.

All of our eyes fly to Melody. She blinks frozen for several long beats.

“We want to know, right?” Nik probes, bouncing on his toes. He’s got his hands in his jeans pockets and he looks like he’s about to burst out of his skin if Melody doesn’t agree.

“We do,” she finally says, reaching out to grab Nik’s hand.

“Fuck yes!” He actually fist pumps the air before intertwining their fingers. He wraps his other hand around her

back, leaning in to kiss her forehead.

“Are you sure, Mom?” the tech asks, chuckling.

“Oh yeah, I think I froze for a minute, but I definitely did want to know before we got here.” Mel grins. Her excitement and maybe a little fear slide through the bond.

“Okay, let’s see if we can tell,” the tech says, giving a bright smile.

“Thank you,” Carver says, holding his phone toward the screen.

“All right, so we’ve got the cord up here which means I feel pretty confident in saying it’s a girl.” The tech points at the screen. “I’ll print out a picture.”

“A girl?” Nik whispers. “Holy shit.”

Melody leans forward to get a good look at the screen and promptly bursts into tears.

Carver aims the phone at her, but his eyes cut to mine. My shoulders slump. He needs a bond. I remember what it felt like to wonder what was going on in her head.

“They’re happy tears,” I whisper, giving him a smile.

“Yeah, I’m going to need to get in on that bonding action soon,” Carver mutters.

“We can do it tonight after we give her the thing,” Miller suggests in barely a whisper. His eyes are glued to the screen, and I’m pretty sure he’s mentally calculating how much savings we’ll need to hire a hitman one day in case someone hurts *our daughter*. I mean, I’m only getting mild impressions. He’s excellent about blocking the bond.

My knees go a little weak.

A baby.

Our baby.

And it’s so fucking real that I panic.

I yank out my phone and start searching for companies to baby proof the house. It suddenly feels imperative that we

handle this *now*.

“Oliver?” Mel calls softly.

My eyes fly from my phone to her. She stretches out her fingers and I cross the room, wrapping her hand in mine.

“Are you okay?” she asks, looking at me with slight creases in her brow.

“Yeah, just making preparations,” I assure her, kissing her forehead. She squeezes my hand and I take a deep breath and blow it back out again. I can’t panic right now. It bleeds through the bond, and Mel needs me to be her rock.

I give her as sincere a smile as I can manage while my brain calculates through the fifty-three things on my to-do list in order of importance.

I shove my phone in my pocket and live in this life-changing moment with my packmates.

I can obsess once we’re in the car.

The press caught wind of us being back in Virginia, but I don’t think any of us were expecting to walk out to four or five paparazzi.

Melody holds the ultrasound pictures to her chest along with the bag of stuff they gave us.

“Nikolas, is it a boy or a girl?”

“Oliver, how do you like being bonded?”

“Have you decided if you’ll join Core-Tech? You’re on their short list.”

“Nik, tell us about the arrest.”

“Hey, sweetheart, is it a boy or a girl?”

“Which one of your pack is the father?”

The questions don’t stop. They do the round robin game to see who’ll crack. They don’t care if they get an actual answer;

just a snarling response will be enough for their clip or sound bite.

“You’re going to want to back the fuck up now,” Miller growls, tossing up a forearm between Mel and one of the camera men.

“I wasn’t touching her!” the guy complains.

“I’m good,” Mel says, smiling tightly.

“How far along are you?”

“Nik, is the baby yours?”

The questions do not stop even as Carver pulls to a stop with the SUV. Nik and Miller guard either side of Mel, but I make a straight shot for the front seat.

“Please don’t touch me,” I snap as one of the photographers bumps into me on the way by. My chest heaves as I climb into the front seat and slam the door.

Nik and Miller ensure Mel is safe as we take off, but I feel like a giant asshole.

“Can you just give me some space,” Mel grumbles as Nik pats her down. My eyes fly back to the front as Carver pulls away. “Are you okay?” She leans forward, battling the seat belt to pat my arm.

“I’m good,” I assure her.

Melody sends pure steady comfort in the bond, and my anxiety does seem to melt away. Somehow I ended up with the perfect omega for me. Here’s hoping she never realizes just how much she settled when she agreed to bond with me.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Carver

Oliver spends most of the afternoon in his room. Around three o'clock Mel gets tired of worrying about him and stomps up to his bedroom. Dinner time comes and neither of them have emerged, so I go searching.

Melody is passed out cold on Oliver's chest, and he's typing on his tablet screen with the keyboard sitting next to him. I grin because I've seen him do that before when she's sleeping.

It's a slow process waking Mel, but she does come down for dinner. Miller grilled steaks and chicken breasts and Mel lights up when she sees the foil-wrapped baked potatoes.

She dives into her steak first and then shoves herself out of her chair with no notice. The four of us glance between each other, but she doesn't aim for the closest bathroom.

She makes it back and sets down a couple of bottles. I'm not the only one frowning when she picks up the chocolate syrup.

"Hey, sweetheart," I say, gently grabbing her wrist as she goes to pour. "I think maybe you've got the wrong bottle."

I nod to the chocolate fudge sauce in her small hand.

"They say pregnancy brain really kicks in during the second trimester," Oliver says, wiping his mouth with his napkin.

Mel looks between the bottle and her potato and then wiggles out of my hold. "Listen, it might not make a lick of

sense, but this is what sounds good, so I'm going for it."

"Far be it from me to stand in the way of a pregnant woman and her craving." I chuckle.

"You can try to shame me all day," Mel mumbles around a bite of potato. "It's not going to work. This is *delicious*."

Miller gives Nik and me the same look he does regularly to indicate we should shut the fuck up and be supportive.

"On that note," Nik says, pushing himself out of his chair. "Help me clear the rest of the dishes?"

Oliver gives my shoe a not-so-subtle kick with his, and I nod my agreement.

It's the middle of April, but it's still kind of cool here in Virginia, especially now that the sun has gone down.

The breeze that rolls over the water probably doesn't help, but I'm not cold at all.

In fact, I'm pretty sure I'm sweating fucking bullets. I saw live combat and wasn't half as stressed as I am right now. My hands are shaking and my armpits reek, which might not be a bad thing because Mel always likes us best when we're extra ripe after a workout.

Nik gives me a killer peptalk and the ring box.

I'm fucking doing this. As long as I don't puke all over the back deck, I'm totally asking the woman I love to marry me. Then I get to bond with one of these fuckers to make it official.

Mel comes out to the deck after dinner. She's got on a pair of stretchy leggings and one of Miller's long-sleeve T-shirts that dwarfs her small frame.

Oliver carries one of the chunky weave blankets, and once Mel gets settled on the couch, he tucks it around her.

“You’re all being exceptionally strange,” Mel mutters, glancing between us.

Miller shrugs a giant shoulder while Nik chuckles. I bet we do look bizarre as hell. I’m not helping matters. I clear my throat and swipe my hands on my pants a couple of times.

I had a speech prepared. I’m not extremely eloquent or anything, but I thought it didn’t suck. My brain blanks completely, and everything I was going to say disappears.

“You’re looking a little like you might pass out. Do you want to sit next to me?” Mel asks, pulling her knees up to free the seat next to her.

I stagger forward, tossing myself down next to her. I turn to face her and she leans forward.

I grab her hand, but I still can’t remember any of the shit that I was supposed to say.

“Dylan?” Mel asks, brushing the fingers of her free hand over my cheek.

“I’ve lived a lot of years. I’ve been around the world; seen and done things, some I’m proud of and others I regret, but the one thing I’m sure I’ll never regret is you. For the rest of my life if I have a choice, I’m going to choose you. Always, every time. Wherever you are in the world, that’s where I plan to be too. Mel, will you marry me?”

“Marry us?” Nik corrects.

“Yes,” she says, scrambling over into my lap. Her hands land on my face as the blanket bunches between us. “I love you.”

“I love you too, but you’re sitting on the ring.” I laugh, shaking my head. “Shit, that was a fail.”

“I don’t care about that anyway.” She plants a naughty kiss on my lips and spins to face the guys. “Pack marriage?”

“That’s the plan,” Miller says, aiming his phone at us. “Have you made a decision on which one of us you’d like to be your link?”

Initially it seemed like an easy choice. Miller and I have the most in common, and from what I've heard, he's the best at blocking his emotions from spilling over into the bond.

But then I considered Nik because I've got serious doubts he ever has much going on inside his head, so I figured it would be easy to tune his ass out.

It took a while, but I eventually circled around to Oliver. We all know how often he gets stuck in his own head, especially in moments like earlier today when he got overstimulated with the paparazzi.

I've read about the bond for betas a lot since we were in Texas.

Oliver and I are complete opposites, but that means we have different strengths and weaknesses. Having him as my link means he'll be the person I'll be able to feel the strongest outside of Mel, well hopefully, there was some contention on that in my reading.

"Oliver," I say, catching his attention. "If you're still willing?"

"Me?" he asks, pointing to his chest. "I mean, yeah." He laughs. "I didn't see that one coming."

"I've spent my entire life knowing I'd never experience what a bond is like, and I was okay with that," I tell Mel. "I don't want it because I think I might fuck up without it. I want that connection with you. Feeling you on that level and being able to share thoughts . . . That's why I want this."

"I want all of that too," she whispers, burying her face in my throat.

"Where do you want it?" Oliver asks, scooting his way next to us on the small couch.

"Do you have any preferences?" I ask Mel. I know she wanted me to get her teeth print tattooed somewhere, and I'm not against the idea.

"Wherever," she says into my skin.

“You choose then,” I tell Oliver, shrugging. “Just not over one of my tattoos.”

“Gotcha.” He frowns. “So on your ass?” His deadpan delivery kills me.

Melody snorts.

“Just kidding,” Oliver says, getting close to my neck. “Maybe you can claim they’re Mel’s teeth.” He yanks the material down over my shoulder and bites into my trap with no heads up.

“Fuck,” Nik says.

“Damn, man. No warning?” I grumble.

“Are you okay?” Mel asks, sitting up to look at me.

I get pulses of Oliver’s confusion first, like he’s unsure if it worked. He pats my back and licks over the wound. An alpha’s saliva has healing properties to close the bite and make sure it doesn’t get infected.

Oliver pulls back and grins, shoving his glasses up. “It worked.”

“It did,” Mel sobs. She wraps an arm around Oliver and pulls us both in on a hug.

I’m still royally fucking unsure what I’m feeling. Or hell, even which way is up at this point.

My chest radiates with a warm full feeling that isn’t my own.

Mel and Oliver kiss, and I wrap an arm around both of them to keep myself upright.

“It’s wild,” Nik says, appearing in front of me.

“It sure is,” Miller agrees. “You’ll get used to it.”

They’re clearly picking up on the fact that I’m about to fall out.

“So now that it’s getting a little warmer,” Nik says, laughing behind his fist. “We’d like to negotiate acting out the hot tub spit roast scene.”

“Ohmigod, stop,” Mel says, laughing. “I have to pee.”

She scrambles out of my lap, leaving her blanket and Oliver leaning against my chest.

Miller chuckles, shaking his head at the night sky. “She’s distractingly cute and a hot fucking mess most of the time.”

“That she is,” I agree as Mel barely makes it inside the door without hiking Miller’s shirt up around her boobs like she’s truly preparing to pee the second the toilet comes into sight.

“I’ve still got the ring in my pocket,” I say to no one in particular.

“Doesn’t matter,” Oliver says, grinning up at me. “She agreed!”

“Thank God,” I mutter.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Miller

Mel's twenty-seventh birthday rolls around, but she's twenty weeks pregnant.

Nik and Carver come up with the intelligent idea to take her dessert hopping instead of bar hopping. By the third restaurant and the seventh dessert, Mel is green around the gills.

The ride to the house is filled with a lot of uncertainty and Oliver holding a shopping bag at the ready.

Needless to say, while she does survive the experience, she's not happy about it.

"You two are banned from planning dates forever," Mel groans as I help her unzip her dress.

"Aww, shit. I'm sorry, gorgeous," Nik says, approaching with his head tilted. He looks a little like he's trying to read the line of defense and he'll duck and weave if she unexpectedly spews on him.

I chuckle at the thought and help her unhook her bra.

"I don't know why you think it's funny," Mel says, shaking out of it and tossing it aside. "I'm going to be sleeping in your armpit and birthday sex is clearly off the table."

"Damn," Carver groans. "How about early morning fuckery before we leave for our flight?" He rubs his hands together. "Four days without you is going to feel like an eternity."

“Maybe,” she says coyly, but the bond buzzes with her interest at his words.

“Do you want my undershirt?” I ask, tossing my button down aside.

“Yes, please,” she agrees.

I yank it off and kiss over her shoulder as she raises her arms.

I pull it down for her and Oliver groans. “Damn, I’m pretty sure your tits have gotten bigger in the last week or two.”

“I agree,” I muse, running my hands over the baby belly.

“The two of you will need to take Mel maternity clothes shopping while we’re gone,” Nik says, climbing onto the edge of the pack bed. “Fuck, I wish we didn’t have to go.”

I’m surprised that I don’t have to be there for the final hearing with the OPA, but they’re accepting my written statement. Nik isn’t getting the same luxury as the owner in charge when the unsanctioned bonding took place.

“Me too,” Mel says around a yawn. “But I’m sleepy. If you’re very sneaky once my stomach settles down . . .”

Oliver immediately elbows Carver in the gut. I sigh, pregnancy has not been kind to Melody’s stomach.

“You two are up to something,” she grumbles, jabbing a short finger at them. “I’m too tired to care. Snicker away, assholes.”

I laugh because she’s definitely settling in and no longer walking on eggshells.

I fucking love it . . . *almost* as much as I love her.

The next few weeks seem to fly by without much happening. Melody sets a self-imposed deadline for herself. Somewhere along the way she decides she needs to have two full books ready before the baby is born. That way she can take off six

months or so without any huge gaps in her publishing schedule.

I don't mind.

Nik does stocks and trading during the day, and he's got his fitness app to record content for.

Oliver works on whatever new tech he's developing.

Carver and I have been mostly useless because we rarely leave the house.

The OPA finishes their investigation, and ultimately, Nik and Nathan pay a pretty heavy fine and take a warning. From what Nik has said, Nathan is interested in selling off the franchise anyway.

Although there is some discussion on why that will need to be a careful process, it's not my business, so I stay out of it.

Mel is just shy of twenty-six weeks when her belly really pops. Over the next couple of weeks it becomes impossible to miss. No matter what she's wearing it's very clear she's pregnant.

I know the belly is going to continue to get bigger, and I can't fucking wait.

It's late on a Friday night, but I can't fall asleep, so I hit the gym to burn off energy. It's the only major downside of our newfound domestic lifestyle.

I'm just about to head up the stairs following my workout when I catch the light in the kitchen.

Mel's cravings have been wild the last few weeks, but it's late so there's every possibility it's one of the guys.

My jaw falls when I find my omega sitting on the rug in front of the cabinets. Her head is leaning back against them and she lets out a moan of pure pleasure as she licks the spoon. She's sitting cross-legged, and she's got a bunch of stuff laid out around her.

"Whatcha doing?" I ask, crossing the room in a few large strides.

Melody squeaks, jolting when I squat down next to her.

“I ate all the apple slices,” she whispers, dropping her spoon on the plate that’s sitting on the floor. Her lips roll together as she shrugs. “And the jar of peanut butter.”

Her hand flies to cover her face as she laughs.

“The one we got today?” I ask, trying to keep the humor out of my tone.

“That would be the one.” She nods solemnly. “Also the rest of Nik’s cheese dip and the salsa is questionable at this point because I think maybe in the haze, I dipped my peanut butter spoon in it.”

“That’s okay,” I assure her, grabbing the discarded remnants of her craving rampage. I shove it all on the counter. I’ll clean it up in the morning. “Let’s get you two off the floor.”

Normally I’d offer her a hand, but she’s been wobbly lately. I wrap my arms under her armpits and lift her.

“Thanks,” she says as her nose twitches. “You were in the gym. I did wonder about that. Originally I came down to find you, but then . . .” She shrugs. “I really needed a snack.”

“It happens.” I chuckle, sliding a hand up under her shirt.

“She’s super busy.” Grabbing my hand, she places it just below her belly button, but under the curve.

The light fluttering of the last few weeks is gone. Tiny kicks or punches bounce against my hand from the inside out.

“Wow,” I whisper, grinning and trying to keep from doing something ridiculous like bursting into tears.

“You feel that? She’s getting stronger,” Mel says, smiling a wide smile.

“She sure is,” I growl, dipping my mouth to hers. “Come on, I think I’d like to keep you all to myself tonight if you don’t mind?”

“Mr. Miller, are you trying to seduce me?”

“Maybe, is it working?”

“Definitely, but I’m going to need to brush my teeth before you get anywhere close to my mouth.” She snorts.

I shake my head because I couldn’t care less.

I wrap an arm under her ass and lift her. I’ve had to start leaning back lately to make this work.

Mel groans, rolling her forehead against my shoulder. “Ugh, heartburn. So much acid reflux is headed my way. I blame Nik and his obsession with salsa.”

My hand flexes on her ass. I wouldn’t mind burying my cock in her soft little body, but I’ve learned things quickly change with a pregnant omega.

Still, I wouldn’t change a thing.

I wake up at some point while it’s still dark. A naughty tongue flicks over my crown as I fist the sheet to hold back from thrusting too deep.

Melody’s hand wraps tighter around my cock as she works her warm mouth further down. She has one of her knees between mine, but the belly keeps her from lying flat over my leg.

I yank the blanket away, tossing it aside. She’s completely nude as she grinds her pussy against my skin and sucks me deep.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” I growl, brushing my fingers over her cheek. There’s something about the way her tits bounce against my thigh as she flicks and sucks that makes me very sure I’m on the verge of embarrassing myself. I groan, wishing my arms were as long as Oliver’s. I bet he could reach her slick little cunt from here. I have to settle for teasing my thumb over the tight bud of her nipple.

Mel whimpers, taking more of me on each bob of her head. It’s a battle fighting the urge to toss her down and bury my

face in her slick sex, but I'd also really like to palm the belly while she rides me.

Mel does the thing that drives me fucking insane. She lets my tip bounce against the back of her throat a few times, and then when I'm least prepared for it, she swallows around the crown.

The clench is too much, which the dirty little vixen knows.

"I can't last when you do that. Come on up here, baby." I pull her arms and she pops off my shaft, grinning playfully.

She climbs up until her wet pussy brushes the bottom of my dick. My hands tease her ass, pulling her apart and ensuring I'm lined up perfectly between her slippery lower lips.

"Max," she whines. I love it when she calls me by my first name. She has to reach around the swell of her stomach to tease her clit and it makes me feel rabid. The sight of her big and pregnant coaxes some primal part of my biology. As soon as she has that baby, I'm going to fuck her full of another, over and over again.

"You are obsessed," she moans. She's obviously picking up my thoughts in the bond. She tilts her hips. It drags my tip from her clit down to her hole.

"Yeah, I am," I growl, thrusting up into her. Her arousal fills the air as she stretches over my length.

She enjoys knowing how on edge I am. And I don't mind a bit.

Every time she rises and falls she takes more. She's so damn slick. It's clear she got herself worked up while she was tasting my cock. I use my handfuls of her ass to help leverage her up and down. It doesn't take much time before she's taking my cock like she was made for it.

"You're so hard." She scratches at my chest as she bounces.

I snake a hand up, grabbing her hair at the base of her skull and give it a little tug. She switches to deep grinding

movements that I almost prefer to the bouncing. I move a hand between us and palm the belly as Mel teases her clit.

I sit up until my chest brushes hers and bring her mouth to mine using my hold in her hair. Mel's tongue slides into my mouth hungrily, and I get a strong hit of her pleasure through the bond. She's close and it makes my cock swell even larger.

"I want your knot," she begs, biting my pec.

"Yeah, baby?"

"Please, Max."

I hold her to my chest, rolling us carefully to keep weight off her stomach. Every inch of my length slides out during the transition except for the tip. The way her hips shimmy as she gets comfortable ends up feeling like she's giving me a hand job with her cunt. I think her body is trying to decide if my crown is a knot.

Omega biology is fucking wild.

Wrapping my fingers around her wrist, I yank her hands up, pinning them above her head. "Keep these here for me."

"Okay, but slam inside me. Please? I need your knot," she says, fluttering her lashes.

"Such a naughty little omega begging for your alpha's knot." It's tough ensuring I don't press on her stomach like this, but I've learned if I plant most of my weight on my forearm and knees then suck in like I'm doing a crunch, I can stay pretty close to her without pushing on the baby.

My free hand slides up her neck, giving her a teasing squeeze before stopping on her jaw. My thumb flicks over her swollen lower lip as I slap my hips into hers. Her feet dig into my thighs as my knot lodges just inside her opening.

I growl.

Mel floods the air with her pheromones, and they're so thick I shake my head.

Now is not the time to let biology take over. Falling into rut right now would be dangerous. I blow out a breath as her cunt

locks down on my knot.

I run my fingers over her stretched tight skin. Her stomach isn't soft anymore, and it's enough of a reminder that I can't allow myself to get lost to the fog.

"Rut," Mel begs, pounding her feet against my ass. "Alpha, please."

"I've got you, sweet girl."

No matter how badly I want to cage her in and rut her through the goddamn bed, I can't. I move back until I'm kneeling, and it allows me to fuck into her with no threat of losing myself and pinning her too fully.

I pull her legs up over my forearms and yank her ass onto my knees. I use my hold on her hips to rut as much as the position allows.

"Mmm," Nik says, making his way onto the bed. "I knew there had to be a reason I woke up with a raging hard on. It just took me a while to find you two."

"Nik," Mel gasps, twisting to face him. He bends over, kissing her.

I try to keep myself clear. It makes no logical fucking sense, but seeing her pregnant makes me want to immediately fuck her full of another baby. Ridiculous breeding impulse.

Mel's pleasure courses through the bond, and it only ratchets mine higher. I tease her clit, and it doesn't take long before she's gasping and tightening around my knot.

"Fuck yes, gorgeous. Come all over his cock," Nik growls.

I ignore him as her pussy clamps almost painfully tight and I explode.

I growl as my shaft swells and my knot tingles. My chest heaves as I take deep breaths.

Mel laughs at something Nik murmurs in her ear. I carefully shoulder him out of the way to kiss her deeply.

Mel smiles through the kiss, clutching at my shoulders. I give the belly some space. The movement tugs on my knot and

we both groan.

“Okay . . .” Mel shrugs. “I totally should have peed before this little adventure. Let’s make sure we don’t accidentally reactivate that timer.”

She grins.

Nik snorts.

I smile, shaking my head. She’s what was missing from my life all this time, and she’s all ours.

Chapter Forty

Nik

Each month brings a new set of challenges for Melody. She's been working a lot in preparation for maternity leave, but she's so exhausted that I think we'll all be grateful once the baby is out, and we can help harbor some of the responsibilities.

We have her thirty-two-week appointment and everything looks great.

My moms come for a visit and throw Mel a small baby shower. It's then I realize we need to encourage her to make some female friends in the area. She likes a few of the ladies in our Lamaze class, but my mom mentioned it's probably not a good idea to count on those friendships lasting since everyone will be in their own baby bubble once they give birth.

Mel spent some time on the treadmill tonight, which is good because the doctor mentioned staying active can help make her delivery easier. She jumped into the shower after, but I've been lounging on the bed waiting for a while, and she's still not out.

I push myself up and aim to check on her. I heard the water cut off a few minutes ago, and now I'm wondering what the problem is. I knock gently but get no answer. I poke my head inside and do a double take.

Mel is kind of lying on the edge of the tub, which is separate from the shower. She's stretched out with her back against the wall and one foot on the ground.

It's the shaving cream smeared over her forehead and the red face that has me striding toward her.

"Hey, gorgeous, whatcha doing?" I ask squatting down at her side.

"Failing at shaving, apparently." She snuffles, glancing away. "I'm starting to get a bush, and I can't believe none of you mentioned that my legs are practically at woolly mammoth proportions."

I snort, grinning and patting her thigh.

"I'm kind of digging the hair. I love you, hairy beast or bare." I cup her extremely round belly and focus on keeping my eyes on hers. She's nude, and it's very difficult not to stare at her heavy tits and the baby belly. They always seem to ratchet up my baser instincts.

She's still frowning though. I can recognize my joke didn't land like it would have a few months ago.

"I did a quarter of a leg and realized," she sobs. "I can't reach the rest."

"Can I help?" I offer, biting my lip. "I'd quite like it if you'd allow me to."

Mel frowns, sniffing. "I feel so unsexy. I'm sorry you're stuck with me."

My hand slides up her neck and into her hair. "None of that. Focus on the bond and you'll notice how hard I'm fighting the urge to fuck you senseless. I find you absolutely beautiful and utterly adorable, but I know you need a different kind of care at the moment. Allow me to provide it."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure I love the fuck out of you."

It's a little past three in the morning the night after my moms leave when I wake up drooling on Miller's arm. That's one

thing they fail to mention about the lifestyle. I've woken up with a hard on against my ass more times than I can count in the last few months.

I slide out of bed and aim to find my omega. Her panic is clear once I'm fully awake enough to pay attention to the feeling. There's light spilling from under the door to the nursery.

I toss it open and stomp inside, prepared to see what the problem is. I know the alarm is set, so I'm fairly confident no intruders made it inside. There are also guards at the gate to the neighborhood twenty-four hours a day.

I stop dead in my tracks, glancing around, trying to figure out what the fuck happened to the nursery. I paid a highly recommended professional organizer to set the baby's room up for maximum efficiency.

My thirty-three-week pregnant omega is sitting on top of the changing table, which incidentally is pulled out from the wall. The step stool is nearby.

Mel is rubbing the stretch mark cream over her belly and she jolts when she spots me.

"So you picked an awesome real wood changing table," she says, giving me something between a grimace and a smile. "I'm impressed that it can hold me up."

I'm baffled by the bottles of glass cleaner, wood polish, and antibacterial wipes that sit next to her.

"Hey, gorgeous. Want to tell me what the hell you're doing up there?" I ask, approaching slowly.

I'm not sure if this is the weirdest dream I've ever had . . . or I've got no fucking clue. My eyes are continually drawn back to the baby belly. It's a huge turn on all the time. Maybe it's weird, but watching her rub the lotion all over her stomach is kind of giving me a hard cock.

I constantly ache to fuck her. It seems to be a real theme the further along she gets.

“I needed to clean,” Mel says, pulling her shirt down. “But I couldn’t reach the ceiling fan on the stool, so I moved the changing table over. Only once I got up here, I couldn’t get back down. I was making a plan of action when my stomach started itching and the stretch mark cream was within reach, so I grabbed it and then you came in.”

Dr. Jamison did warn us about nesting.

“Okay.” I chuckle, shaking my head. “Let’s get you down from there.”

“Thank you,” she mumbles.

I wrap my arms under hers and lift her off the changing table. “Just for the record. Next time you need to clean, wake one of us up. You’re really lucky I’m not spanking your ass raw right now.”

“What?” she gasps indignantly. “Why?”

“You could have fallen.” I give her a serious look. “I’d much rather you wake me. I’m happy to keep you company.”

I run my hand over the back of her head and bend to give her a kiss.

“Ready for bed?”

“Yeah, I got tired twenty minutes ago. I just had to work out how to get down.”

I snort, shaking my head.

Melody is nearly thirty-six weeks when the baby enters the next zip code before Mel even gets close. Not that we’re really traveling much these days.

Mel is in full nesting mode, and that’s fine because we all prefer to keep her close to a bathroom whenever possible.

I’m not sure, maybe I’ve just never paid much attention to pregnant women, but she seems bigger than normal. At our

last appointment, the doctor mentioned it could be because she's carrying high. Whatever that means.

Either way, she's adorable. She's all boobs and belly, but the last few days her face has gotten a little puffy with water weight. I would be worried, but Oliver very quietly assured us that it's completely normal.

We've got to leave for her doctor's appointment in less than fifteen minutes. They're supposed to be checking to see if the baby has made it head down yet.

The stubborn little lady still wasn't aiming the right direction at Mel's last appointment. The doctor didn't seem too concerned, but it's been a worry of mine.

I take the turn into the pack bedroom and stumble a few steps. Mel is lying on the floor with one shoe on and the other several feet away. The bottle of stretch mark cream we rub on her belly every night is sitting open a foot out of Mel's reach.

She snuffles, wiping at her face and glancing away when she spots me. She crosses her short arms over her giant belly and I chuckle.

"Want to tell me what happened, or should I take a guess?" I ask, squatting down at her side.

This is kind of becoming our thing. Anytime I find her in a precarious situation, which is happening more and more often these days, I always ask the same question.

"I dropped the bottle," she says, tipping her chin in the air.

"And you tried to pick it up?" I laugh. "I thought we learned that lesson last time."

"I kind of kicked my shoe away too, so I was going to rearrange them both at once. It didn't go to plan."

"All right, let's get you up." I circle her back with my arms and lift. Once she's standing, I help her into her other shoe.

"I'm surprised my flats even fit with how swollen my feet and ankles are." She snuffles.

The belly brushes my cheek as I stand up.

“I love you, gorgeous.” I nuzzle my cheek to hers.

“I love you, too,” she huffs.

She seems annoyed, which is not exactly unusual these days, but I chalk it up to the fact being pregnant is very clearly kicking her ass.

“Ready to see if the little lady migrated south?”

“Yeah, let’s go,” she agrees.

“How’s your ice cream?” I ask, tossing my arm over the back of the booth.

“Heaven, it’s basically sugar and cream made into heavenly goodness,” Mel moans, swirling her tongue around the small amount that’s left of the double scoop ice cream cone.

Mel’s doctor’s appointment went well. The baby is head down and gaining weight like she should be. My level of excitement is only matched by pure fucking terror. I’m going to be a father in a few short weeks. It’s an unreal feeling, but I can’t wait.

Like I told Carver, if I can keep hold of a football with four two-hundred-and-fifty-pound linemen trying to take me out, I’ve got zero worries about dropping her.

My major concern is Mel has been off since this morning. She’s blocking enough of her feelings in the bond that I can’t tell exactly what the problem is, but I am going to try to find out.

“I’m glad you like it.” I wipe a smudge of ice cream off with a napkin. “Would you like to tell me what’s been bothering you all day?”

My arm wraps tighter around her shoulder as she glances away. I toss the napkin down and tilt her chin to face me.

“Please, tell me what’s got you upset. Let me be here for you.”

Mel sighs, setting her ice cream down in the small cardboard tray. “My mom isn’t planning to come. I asked if she wanted me to schedule her a flight, but I should have known she wouldn’t travel.”

“That’s hard.” I pull her closer. “Oliver’s mom is planning to come for a few days, and she’s over the moon excited. My moms want to come back too, but they’re going to give us some time to settle into a routine. Unless we need them. If we do, then we’ll call. They will drop everything to get new baby snuggles.”

“I know.” Her eyes squeeze shut as I try to figure out how I fucked up so royally when I was trying to help her feel better. “That’s the way it’s supposed to be with grandmas. At least that’s the way I’ll be.” She runs her hand over her belly like she’s making a silent vow.

Where the hell is Miller? He always knows exactly what to say to settle her down. I’m stuck with Carver on this little excursion, but he’s outside keeping the couple paparazzi at bay. Who knows why they’re so obsessed with the fact Mel is pregnant, but they haven’t left us alone.

“I’m also worried about what’s going to happen with Ben. Has he responded to the papers we sent?” Mel asks. Her brow crinkles, and I wish I could fix everything for her.

My hand comes to rest on her belly. It’s a tight fit since she almost touches the table with how far it sticks out.

“Not yet,” I say, brushing my nose against hers. “But that’s just a courtesy. He can be on the birth certificate if he’d like, but thanks to the pack laws, it won’t prevent our pack from being listed.”

It’s a goddamn blessing that our country realized a few years ago that it was a slippery slope to only allow biological fathers to be listed on the birth certificate. Those new laws are the main reason we went ahead and filed the pack paperwork.

We'll have a wedding or pack commitment ceremony once the little one arrives, but we needed to make it official before then because it gives all members of our pack equal parental rights to the baby.

"I know. I just feel like maybe it'll hurt her feelings one day . . ." Mel sighs, glancing away.

The bond truly is a gift at times like these. If I didn't have that insight into where her head is at, I'd likely worry that she's still hung up on the cowboy asshole. However, her feelings toward him are clear. She still cares about him, but she's no longer in love with him. Which is good because he's a total piece of shit.

Mel hasn't heard from him since we were in Texas. It's not exactly shocking, but I do wish he'd either sign the papers to dissolve his rights or make a goddamn decision that he's going to put in the work to be a father. It's not looking good based on his behavior up to this point.

"She'll have more than enough men fighting for the chance to hold her hand while she takes her first steps, or threaten her first boyfriend to keep *his* hands to himself unless he'd like to end up in a shallow grave." I grin.

"I love you," Mel whispers, pushing her mouth to mine.

I kiss her back, pouring every bit of my love into the bond.

Chapter Forty-One

Oliver

Miller notices Mel is in labor before she does. It's probably due to the fact he's always feeling all over her damn stomach. Not that I have room to talk, but he's next to her on the couch, and he very covertly begins timing the tightening of her stomach.

Her due date is still five days away, but they taught us in the classes that it's rare for a baby to be born on the exact day.

Melody is in denial for several more hours. "It's Braxton Hicks. It's like eleven p.m. I just need a glass of water and a good night's sleep."

She does try to get some rest, but she's up and down constantly going to the bathroom.

By four in the morning, it's clear she's in labor. Her contractions are coming every three to four minutes and have been for close to two hours. We've all started feeling them quite strongly over the last hour.

We call the doctor, and he's surprised we aren't at the hospital yet.

There's pure pandemonium as we pack up the hospital bags and get settled in the SUV.

"Ohmigod, I already feel like I have to pee again," Mel says as soon as she moves to grab her seat belt. She had to go immediately before we came out to the garage too.

"I brought a towel," I say, grabbing one out of the bag at my feet.

“I don’t think that was the right answer,” Nik mutters, staring down at where Mel is squeezing the fuck out of his hand.

“Did someone grab my phone?” Mel asks, frowning. “I didn’t think to pick it up.”

“I’ve got it,” Carver assures her as Miller backs us out of the garage.

I’m pretty sure he texted Ben to let him know what’s going on. Not that he cares. He’s had the better part of five months to come to terms with things, and he still hasn’t done the adult thing or at least told us where his head is at.

I shove up my glasses, facing toward the front of the car. I don’t like thinking about what happens if he changes his mind.

Our family is about to expand. The baby is coming, and life is about to completely change. Nervousness wars with excitement, but I know we’ll be fine.

Well, as long as Ben doesn’t come out of nowhere and ruin everything.

We make it to the hospital and check in. They determine Mel is in active labor. She’s already almost four centimeters dilated. They taught us in her birthing class that labor is easier and tends to progress quicker if the mom stays active. Melody never stopped hitting the gym during her entire pregnancy. Although she did significantly cut down the amount of time she spent there, especially the last few weeks.

Hopefully it means labor won’t last forever, and maybe it’ll be easier on her. I have no idea. I’ve read so much contradictory information over the last few months.

Melody is hobbling from the triage room to the room where she’ll deliver when she stops dead in her tracks.

“Uh-oh,” she whispers, holding onto Miller for dear life.

“Your water just broke,” the nurse says, sighing. “It’s fine, keep moving. On the plus side it’s clear and that’s a great sign.”

I frown, it feels like she’s annoyed that someone will have to clean that up.

How much could a hospital cost? I wonder if I could buy this one before Mel gives birth. She definitely doesn’t need to feel bad about leaking on the floor. It’s not something that’s controllable. I read that too. It also means the baby is moving down.

Another contraction hits and this one seems to be worse than the last few. Damn, it takes my breath away.

I think maybe I’ll quietly encourage her to take the epidural once we’re settled into a room.

Mel does eventually decide to go for the epidural without any of us even suggesting it.

“Oh, God,” Carver groans, glancing around like he’s looking for somewhere to puke. The nurse pulls her hand from under the sheet and measures her fingers against a weird set of beads.

“They’re dilation beads,” the nurse says, smiling when she catches sight of us staring. “You’re at almost ten centimeters.”

Melody groans. She’s been sick as hell since she got the epidural, but at least she’s no longer in agony. Unfortunately, she has been pretty consistently vomiting, which the nurse says happens sometimes.

“You’re doing great,” Nik says, kissing her forehead. “She’ll be here before you know it, and this will be nothing but a memory.”

“More like a nightmare,” Carver mutters. His anxiety and worry bleeds through the bond. We’re all doing our best to

block crossover, but it's hard considering we're all anxious. Feeling helpless doesn't help.

"It won't be too much longer," the nurse says, patting Mel's calf. "If you feel the urge to push, let me know. I'm going to quickly update the doctor."

Things move pretty fast after that. It isn't long before another nurse joins the first. They completely change the bottom of the table and offer Mel leg holder thingies. Miller ends up with one foot and Carver takes the other.

"Where the fuck is Dr. Jamison?" Nik growls as Mel pushes through another contraction.

"Another patient from the same practice just delivered. He'll be in as soon as he can," the newer nurse says.

My heart pounds erratically. This seems dangerous. If she's pushing then shouldn't the doctor be here?

"Are there any other on-call physicians?" I ask, glancing between them. "If he's occupied then . . ." I swipe a hand over my face and breathe through the panic.

"Pushing can take hours for a first-time mom," the original nurse says. "If the baby starts crowning or is in any distress, we'll get someone in here immediately. I know it's stressful, but we do this every day." She looks at Mel. "You're doing great, Mom. And it seems like you're going to have an amazing support system."

"Yeah," Mel whimpers.

I make my way up to her head and grab the wet rag from Nik.

"I love you," I say, kissing her cheek.

Since she got the epidural, the contractions feel like a rolling wave of pressure clamping down on my lower stomach and sometimes my balls. Another comes. They're right on top of each other now.

"Breathe with me," I remind Mel.

Mel does a lovely impression of a feral alpha. Seriously, her snarl is impressive. And kind of fucking terrifying.

“Get the doctor. That can’t be normal. Is that supposed to happen?” Carver asks, his face as white as a sheet.

“For the love of God,” Miller growls. “Shut up or get out!”

“He’s not going anywhere,” Melody snaps. “I let him have sex with me. That means he’s going to get his ass up here and hold my damn hand. Not that any of you are ever touching me again. No way, not after this.”

“Shit, I’ve never heard an omega growl louder than an alpha,” Carver whispers. Looking at Mel, he says, “You’re beautiful, sweetheart. So damn pretty and kind of scary, but I still love you.”

“Get up here,” Nik grumbles. “You can switch places with me.”

“But is that normal?” Carver asks, glancing between us.

“Where the hell do you think the baby comes out?” I ask, shaking my head. “I’m sorry you’re stuck with him for life—” I groan, clutching at my stomach. I’m surprised the smack came from my omega.

“Don’t even joke right now,” Melody hisses. “Ohmigod, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to hit you.” She looks at Miller and bursts into tears. “I hit him.”

“It’s okay, it really didn’t hurt . . . that bad,” I assure her, leaning over to kiss her forehead.

Dr. Jamison picks that very moment to finally make his entrance. He glances at Mel already in the stirrups and does a double take. “Okay, things are really moving. Let’s see what’s going on.” He heads over to wash his hands.

“Just a reminder,” the nurse says, glancing between us. “Growling and snarling is fine to a point, we’re used to it. But if you get physically aggressive, you will be removed.”

We all mumble some form of agreement.

“Another one is coming,” I warn because for whatever reason, I seem to pick up the feeling first.

I suck in a sharp breath, leaning over the head of the table by Mel’s head. This one is worse than any of the rest.

“Jesus Christ, woman,” Carver groans. “Remember that you like what I can do with my hands. Sweetheart, you’re about to break my fingers.”

“It hurts,” Mel whimpers.

“You’re doing great,” Miller says. That asshole barely seems to notice the contractions.

“Okay,” Dr. Jamison says, wheeling his chair over. The nurses start prepping a table and bring it over too. “Let’s see if we can get your daughter in your arms.”

“Okay,” Mel sobs. God, it’s hard seeing her so beat. She’s had a night and morning of hell that’s for sure. I run my hand over the top of her head and give her all the comfort and reassurance that I can.

The next thirty or forty minutes are a lot of grunting and misery. Mel is physically wiped out.

“Come on, Mel,” Dr. Jamison says. “On this next one, she’s coming out.”

“I can’t,” Mel says, her head rolling around. “I don’t have any energy left.”

“You’d be surprised,” the nurse says. “It seems to be a superpower of moms. Finding strength when you swear there’s none left. One more good push and you can hold your daughter.”

It’s pure agony for all of us when the next contraction rips through Mel’s system. I swear that fucking epidural wore off somewhere along the way.

“Push, push, push,” Dr. Jamison chants. “Keep going, you’re doing great.”

Mel groans. She hasn’t really screamed or yelled. It feels like she’s kept most of it internal.

I'm breathing through the pain with Mel when the tiny wail breaks my focus.

"You have a daughter," the nurse says.

"Would one of you like to cut the cord?" the doctor asks.

"You should do it," Carver says to Miller. The big guy is red faced and looking a little like he might keel over.

It's a quick process as he handles the cord and they bring the baby up to be placed on Melody's chest.

"You did it," I whisper.

Melody is still frozen, staring at the baby. She really needs a name. She's got medium blondish-brown hair and there's a lot of it. She's still kind of gooey and her skin is bright pink.

I've watched *a lot* of birthing videos. That's the only thing keeping me calm right now. I tried to get the guys to watch them with me, but only Miller made it through the first one. After that, he said he got the idea and passed on checking out anymore.

"She's perfect," Nik says. His voice quavers with emotion.

"I'm so proud of you," Miller adds, pushing his way up to kiss Mel's forehead.

"I love you, sweetheart," Carver adds.

And because it's all my brain can focus on, I simply say, "You're still going to have to deliver the placenta."

Melody snorts, giving me a tired smile. "I love you, Oli."

I say a silent thank you to the universe for sending me a woman that understands that was my way of saying I love you.

"Have you decided on a name?" I ask once we're settled into a private room.

I'm snuggled on the bed at Mel's side, and I can't stop myself from running my fingers over the baby's soft hair as

she . . . I don't think she's actually nursing since she's conked out. I think she's using Mel as a human pacifier at the moment.

The chunky little lady weighed in at eight pounds nine ounces, and she really needs a name.

“Should we open the baby name book that my mom sent and each pick a page randomly?” Carver asks, chuckling. “Then we can do it lottery style from there.”

“One of these days, I swear we're going to see you on one of those television shows featuring the dumbest ways to die.” Nik laughs, gesturing to Mel. “Damn, gorgeous. That look is intimidating.”

“You really need to stop,” Miller says. He's on Melody's other side in one of the chairs, but he's leaning mostly on the bed.

“They love tormenting me,” Mel says, stretching back. “I'm fond of Kendall, Linley, and Mallory.”

“Shall we vote?” Carver asks, winking at Mel.

“She just pushed out an almost nine-pound baby. I think that means she gets full naming rights,” Nik says.

Someone knocks on the door. All of our gazes fly to it. The nurses and several different doctors have been in and out. The pediatrician Mel picked checked in less than an hour ago though.

My jaw falls when Ben Hall pokes his head in the door.

Chapter Forty-Two

Melody

“Hey Mel,” Ben says, shoving up his shirt sleeve as he quietly comes into my hospital room.

My heart races, and I have the undeniable urge to whine. I don’t want him near me or Mallory.

Yes, fine. I picked a name weeks ago, but I needed to be sure it fit once she was born. Still the urge to beg Carver or Miller to kick him out is strong.

“She’s feeding the baby,” Nik growls, stepping in front of his path. “Turn around.”

“Do you want me to burp her?” Oliver offers.

“Yeah.” I groan, gently pulling her small mouth off my super sore boob.

God, I really hope they stop the dramatics. Both breasts feel swollen and extremely tender. My nipples have barely gotten a workout, but they’re miserable too. I’m only like four hours into nursing. I’ve heard it gets easier over time, and I’m hopeful because right now? I kind of feel like crying as my arm bumps my breast when I hand Mallory to Oliver.

“Hey, grunty girl,” Oliver says, beaming at her. “Oh yes, I know. Mom took the good stuff away.”

I yank up my hospital gown and glance at Ben. He’s got his back to us. Miller hops up and grabs a burp cloth from the baby cart, handing it to Oliver.

“Why don’t you and I check the cafeteria and see if we can find anything worth bringing back?” Carver asks Nik.

“What?” he growls.

“Thank you,” I say, nodding at Carver.

“I’m not going to take a swing at him again. Well, not unless he says something—” Nik cuts off when Carver grabs his shoulders and literally guides him to the door.

“She doesn’t need us adding our stress to the mix right now,” Carver says, waving over his shoulder as they head out.

“Can I turn around?” Ben asks.

“Yeah,” I agree.

“If I come closer, is the big guy going to try to murder me?” Ben chuckles.

“Not unless you do or say something very stupid,” Miller says, taking the seat he vacated.

“I had to ask.” Ben shrugs. “Not that I can really blame you.”

“Why are you here?” I ask as he comes closer.

“I deserve that,” Ben says, nodding. He’s got a serious look on his face that I haven’t seen in years. Maybe not since his grandfather died.

I’m on edge to the point I don’t know what to do with myself. Apparently my system thinks now would be a great time to burst into tears. My eyes ache and fat tears appear out of nowhere.

“No,” Ben says, tossing his hands up in front of him. “Please don’t cry. I’ll go if you want me to.”

Mallory picks this exact moment to let out the most monumental burp I’ve heard from her yet.

“Dang,” Oliver says, chuckling. He gives her a goofy look and my heart races.

“You’ve ignored every attempt I’ve made to get in touch with you. Why are you here now?” I choke out.

Miller climbs out of his chair and carefully puts himself on the hospital bed next to me. He wraps an arm around my

shoulder and starts to purr.

“I should’ve reached out before now.” Ben sighs, shaking his head with his gaze on his boots. “My family is mighty fucking pissed at me. Your mom talked to my mom and let’s just say it was ugly.”

I sigh, shaking my head. My mom definitely knows how to stir the pot.

“I went to North Carolina for a couple weeks. Did you know Everly is pregnant?” he asks.

Everly is Ben’s brother’s omega. Luke is a beta, but he still ended up in a pack. It takes me several seconds to realize Everly’s baby and Mallory are cousins.

Ben chuckles. “She’s due in a week. Luke took another swing at me. Yeah, big surprise, I know. They both want you to know they hope you and the baby are doing well. That’s actually how I got here so fast.” He sighs. “God, this is awkward, isn’t it?”

“I’d like to name her Mallory if you’re okay with that,” I say, rolling my jaw from side to side.

“Can I hold her?” he asks, meandering closer.

Miller sighs, squeezing me tighter.

“Yeah, if you wash your hands,” I say even though I really don’t want to.

He heads over to scrub his hands, and my heart feels like it might pound out of my chest. I’ve still got tears dripping, but I’m going to blame it on the hormones.

Oliver carefully stands and nods to the chair. Ben takes a seat and Oliver carefully hands over the baby.

“Shit, she’s small,” Ben says. “Yeah, I think Mallory is a good name. Not that I really get much say.”

I don’t say anything because his entire demeanor is different from the last time I saw him.

“I think we both know you and I weren’t good together,” Ben says, without looking up from Mallory’s face. “I don’t

want to make excuses about that. I didn't treat you right."

"No, you didn't," I agree.

"I don't want to lose out on the chance of ever being in her life, but I've also got a lot of shit to figure out in mine," Ben says, cutting his eyes up to look at me. "I didn't drink at all for the time I was visiting Luke."

"Okay," I say, frowning. "Can you just talk plainly? Please?"

I snuggle deeper into Miller's purring chest.

"Luke and Everly made it very clear that I'm to let you know she'll have a cousin coming soon. They said if you need anything to give them a call. My mom also wants to be able to come and visit her from time to time. I'd like that option too." Ben shakes his head. "I know I'm in no position to make demands. That's me asking if that would be all right."

"So, what you're saying is, you won't sign the papers relinquishing your rights, but you also won't file for joint custody," Miller says, like he's trying to surmise what the hell Ben means.

"Yeah, that," Ben says, rocking Mallory against his chest. "Is that something you'd be open to?"

My eyes fly to Miller's. He nods. This is basically the second best-case scenario. Maybe it's actually the ideal compromise and I'm just selfish. I wanted him to sign his rights away because that would've made my life easier, but it's not only about me anymore.

Mallory has an entire side of the family that will want to get to know her. Ben's mom is a little pushy sometimes, but nothing compared to my mom. Not to mention she's a very good grandma to her other grandkids.

"I think that sounds good," I agree.

"Good," Ben says, smiling tightly. "So you'll let me sign her birth certificate?"

"She's biologically yours," Oliver says, chiming in for the first time. "That's how it's supposed to go. But I do hope you

realize all the hell you've put Mel through these last few months."

"Shit, I am sorry," Ben says, staring straight at me. "But I promise that I'm going to do better from here on out."

"That's all you need to do," I reply, moving to try to get comfortable. My entire lower body throbs. "God, I hurt so bad. I think it's time for my pain medicine."

Ben grimaces. "I'll get out of your hair. I'd like to come back and see her tomorrow though."

"Yeah, of course." I give him a tight smile.

Honestly, only time will tell if he's truly going to be a fixture in Mallory's life, but either way, she'll be fine.

Chapter Forty-Three

Carver

“Well, you’ve certainly got a pair of lungs on you,” I coo, picking Mallory up out of her bassinet. Her little face is red as she shudders through another fuss. My nose wrinkles as I get a whiff of her rancid smell. “Good God, child. Your bowels could chip the paint off an ocean liner.”

“You are ridiculous,” Oliver says, making his way into the nursery.

“Do you want to take this one?” I offer, rocking from side to side.

We’ve been home from the hospital for a few weeks, and Mallory still isn’t sleeping longer than two or three hours at a time.

The pediatrician assured us that it’s completely normal for breastfed babies to eat that often, but it’s been tough on Mel. She’s pumping enough now that we can help with feedings here or there.

Nik hired a lactation consultant after Mel cried for two days straight because she was sure she was failing at feeding the baby. As it turns out, babies often lose a few ounces after birth, and it was no great failure on our omega’s part.

I could have kissed the seventy-year-old woman—platonically and completely respectfully of course—when she recommended pumping. It helped Mel feel more confident that she wasn’t accidentally starving the baby because she’s able to see how much Mallory puts away at any feeding.

I personally think she's just spoiled rotten and she likes sleep eating. It's where she nibbles for thirty seconds and then falls asleep again until Mel pulls her off.

"I don't mind," Oliver says, stretching his arms out for Mallory. "I know you've got a particularly weak stomach."

I laugh, handing off the rotten child.

"Dammit," Nik says, popping in. "I swear you guys steal her every morning."

"Oh, by all means," Oliver says, waving a hand. "You can take care of changing her and getting her dressed. I'll start warming a bottle."

"Really?" Nik asks, prowling closer. "Why do I feel like you're setting me up?"

I snort, heading to grab fresh clothes out of the closet.

"Oh hell," Nik groans. "Now I know why they weren't fist fighting for the chance to have you this morning."

Stepping out of the closet, I see he's got his cheek nuzzled to hers. She looks so damn tiny in comparison to his giant hands. I toss the clothes over the end of the changing table and grin.

"I'm doubting she wants to sit in that stench any longer," I say, laughing.

"Shit," Miller growls, stomping inside the nursery.

I chuckle.

Little does he know how perfect that was.

"I'm going to pick a new time to work out. She always wakes up while I'm on the treadmill," Miller bitches.

"You know what, you're right." Nik winks at me, spinning around and carrying Mallory over to Miller. "You can take this one."

Miller quirks an eyebrow, tossing his towel over his shoulder, but he sure takes the baby. "Oh yeah, I see why they

were suddenly so giving. You assholes are worse than children.”

He takes the few steps to the changing table and carefully puts Mallory down. She grunts and her entire body goes rigid as she kicks. She isn't pleased with this turn of events.

“My boobs hate me,” Mel groans a few weeks later. She rolls her head against my shoulder and blinks up at me.

“At least your pussy is finally feeling better,” I say, giving her a wicked grin.

“Yeah,” she concedes. “It's so much easier when she nurses, but honestly I think maybe I'm just not cut out for breastfeeding.”

“And that's fine too,” I assure her, pulling her mouth to mine.

“Careful, don't knock off my pumps,” she grumbles, rearranging the circular cone pump in the right side of her bra.

Oliver found a breast pump that's wireless. She pops each one on a tit and it does its thing while Mel does something else.

“You know it's been six weeks.” I wiggle my eyebrows.

She snorts. “Don't get any bright ideas. Not one of you is sticking your cock inside me until I'm sure I've got active birth control in place.”

I groan. “When is the appointment again?”

“Friday.” She laughs. “Complain about it, and I'll stop showering with you.”

“Hey, there's no reason to be hasty.” My fingers tighten in her hair, and I kiss her again. “I love you, sweetheart.”

“I love you too, but I'm dying of thirst. Would you mind?” She nods to her cup on the coffee table.

“Not a bit,” I assure her, grabbing it and heading to get her a refill. She drinks the thirty-two ounce cup like it’s nothing these days.

I make it into the kitchen.

Ben and his mom are sitting at the bar, talking to Oliver. Ben’s mom is holding Mallory, and it makes me desperate for Mel to feel better so we can visit my mom and dad. We’re holding off until Mallory is a little older, but it means a lot that Mel immediately agreed without even a hint of annoyance or hesitation.

I refill her cup and move to head out, but Ben steps into my path.

“Yeah?” I ask, trying to keep my tone light.

“I wanted to thank you. That day when you knocked the hell out of me and then made me listen to Mallory’s heartbeat . . .” He sighs, shaking his head. “It hit in a way I couldn’t ignore. It made it real. Melody also told me you were the one who texted to make sure I knew she was in labor.”

I nod.

I’m still not fond of the guy, but I’m pretty sure he reminds me a little of myself at that age. Only I was smart enough not to drag someone else along for the ride. Although at this point, I can also recognize that without him pulling all that shit, we wouldn’t have Melody or Mallory.

“You’ve been doing well,” I say, shaking the ice in Mel’s cup. “Keep showing up and doing your best. That’s all we ask.”

“I will,” he says, holding out a hand.

I need to get Mel her drink, so I shake his hand, heading off without another word.

Chapter Forty-Four

Melody

“Can I talk to you before we head out?” Ben asks, taking a seat on the chair next to the couch. Ben and his mom have been here for almost a week visiting, but they’re leaving in a couple hours. “Yeah,” I agree, grabbing the blanket and covering up Mallory.

I wait for him to make some kind of ridiculous joke like *I’ve seen them before*, but he keeps his eyes on mine.

“I know it would have been easier if you never told me that she was mine,” Ben says, swallowing thickly. “Thank you for being honest. You’ve always been too good—”

“Stop,” I cut him off.

“You know it. I know it. It’s the truth, Mel. I’m really glad you found a pack that treats you right.” Ben sighs, stretching back in his chair.

“Thank you, I am too. I got really lucky.” I watch him carefully. Spending ten years with someone you learn to pick up the clues, and something is definitely bothering him.

“What’s wrong?” I ask, pulling Mallory off my breast.

“Can I burp her?” he asks, leaning forward.

I nod, handing her over.

Ben gets her settled in his hands. “Have you talked to your mom at all?”

“No, she hasn’t answered any of my calls. I know she’s angry with me.” I get my boob put away and shrug. “Oliver

hired a companion, and he said she has been allowing him to help out.”

“That’s something at least,” Ben says, patting Mallory’s back. “My mom is also going to check in on her when we get back. I still can’t believe she didn’t want to come meet Mallory.”

I give him a look because we both know how spiteful my mom can be. I’m not going to purposely exclude her, but I’ve also decided that I can’t let her emotionally and physically drain me anymore.

“She is a little like a happiness vampire,” Ben says, grimacing.

“Anyway,” I say, trying to move this conversation along. It still hurts when I think of my mom, but she used up all my compassion. I officially have none left, and I don’t feel guilty about that.

Oliver’s blond curls bounce as he peeks around the wall. I give him a smile, and he comes in taking the seat at my side. He wraps a long, thin arm around me, and I snuggle into his chest.

“What happened to your girlfriend?” I ask Ben.

Ben frowns, sighing heavily. “We’re on a break. You know, I think I would have done it—signed the papers I mean. I told her I was seriously thinking about it, and Heidi was pissed.”

My chest gets tight. Mallory would’ve been okay with only having our pack, but I know Ben and his family have a right to her too. Oliver runs his fingers over my arm soothing me.

“She basically told me that was an option. The other option was to get my shit together and be a man . . .” He laughs, shaking his head. “That’s what made me head out to North Carolina. I needed to get right with Luke.”

“Did you?” I ask.

He mentioned he visited them before Mallory was born, but I don't know all the details.

"I'm hopeful," he says, shrugging.

"Good. Are you going to fix things with Heidi?" I ask. From just the little I've heard, it sounds like she might be good for him.

"I hope so. She's not an omega. It's complicated." He pulls Mallory up and rocks her in the crook of his arm. "I know I miss out on a lot from Texas, but I can't believe that I was going to give up all of these moments."

"You've come a long way," I tell him truthfully. "I'm really proud of you."

He grins. "Thanks, Mel. We did good. She's beautiful."

"That she is," I agree.

"Goddamn, your tits are huge," Nik growls, climbing into the shower with me. He slides tattooed hands over my stomach and up to cup my tits.

"No, I'll leak," I groan.

"I know," he murmurs, kissing over my shoulder. "And it turns me the fuck on. I can't even watch you feed Mallory lately because I end up like this." He grins, his hard cock against my bottom.

After not having great luck with the shot, I decided to go for oral birth control that's safe while breastfeeding and formulated specifically for omegas.

Nik teases his hand down my stomach, and I fight the urge to cover my stretch marks. We've already had that particular disagreement more than once, and he was clear that the next time we have it, I'd be going over his knee. I'm embracing my heavier frame with grace, or maybe from the fear of his palm on my rear end.

“Do you know how many times I’ve dreamed of sinking inside you again?” Nik growls, scraping his teeth over my neck. One hand cups my tit while the other teases my clit. “I won’t even admit the number of times I’ve thought about jerking off and fingering every drop back inside your sweet little cunt while you slept.”

I gasp as he works a finger inside me.

“Only once you were healed.” He chuckles. “I’m not a complete monster; I’m just an alpha who daydreams about knocking up his omega again.”

“I will hurt you,” I moan because he really does know how to tease my body to get me interested with very little effort on his part.

“If you can take my tongue and my fingers then you can take my cock,” he says, sounding particularly pleased with himself.

I’m pretty sure we could’ve managed before my appointment, but I wasn’t going to risk it.

Pregnancy was harder than I expected, but I already know I’m going to do it again at least a few more times. Mostly I just want to enjoy Mallory being small for a while. Although they do make it really easy, and I love being a mom . . .

I shake my head.

Nik and Miller are especially dangerous because I think they could talk me into another baby with very little effort.

“Oh, gorgeous, it’s happening again *soon*,” he growls, brushing his palm over my clit. “Until then, I’ll settle for practicing if you let me play with your tits.”

“You’re freaking obsessed,” I moan as he twists his finger in and out of my core.

“Yup,” he agrees easily. “I really want to watch you ride me while your tits stream milk.”

I laugh. Miller and Nik have spent the most time watching me breastfeed. They’re both totally into my tits now, possibly more than ever. I’ll chalk it up to biology.

“Let’s see if I can make you come all over my hand,” Nik growls, scraping his teeth over my shoulder. He continues teasing my nipple and working my pussy as he murmurs dirty promises that make my cheeks heat.

My cunt starts fluttering in waves, and Nik slams my hands against the wall. “Keep them here.”

My palms slide around as he works me over. All while his sticky cock bounces around my ass.

“Be sure to scream for me, gorgeous,” he growls, adding another finger. He pushes on that magical spot that sends me soaring, and it tips me over the edge. Feeling his desire and carnal pleasure only heightens every second of the experience. “That’s my good girl. Goddamn, I’m never going to get tired of feeling you coat me in your slick.”

My head lolls around his shoulder as I come down from my orgasm. Nik spins me, pulling me flush with his front and lifts me. I wrap my legs around his ass as he cuts off the shower.

“I was going to take you to bed, but drying off feels like it would take for-fucking-ever.” He carries me into the nest, tossing me down on the open mattress. My tits ache as they bounce, but luckily my pussy seems to be fully on board for whatever comes next.

“You are going to let me inside you, right, Mel?” he growls, kneeling between my spread thighs. His black tattoos move and flex as he works his shaft.

I moan, nodding my agreement. Nik is stupidly hot. The way the bond pulses with his arousal only succeeds in heightening my own. Every ab and oblique flexes as he crawls over me, caging me into the mattress.

They’ve done their best to prep me for this. I’ve felt a little guilty the last week because they’ve made me come multiple times, but I’m not complaining about being spoiled.

Nik shoves his tongue in my mouth as his muscular chest brushes mine. He smirks into the kiss, and I know he’s thinking feral thoughts of knocking me up again. My nails dig

into his shoulders as I use my feet as leverage to move his crown from my clit to my hole.

“You’ll tell me if anything hurts,” Nik says, raising an eyebrow. “That’s not a question. Promise me.”

“I promise,” I sob, trying to wiggle down on his swollen length.

Nik barely inches forward, and the stretch is extreme. It’s not painful like it was the first few times they fingered me. I leak around his tip.

“More! I’m good. So totally good,” I assure him.

“I love you so fucking much,” he growls, palming the top of my head. He pulls out and slides back in, teasing me with a little more on each stroke. “Still good?”

I nod.

I’m great.

“Damn,” Miller growls, tossing himself down at my side. “Looks like Nik beat me to it.”

I grin. “You’re more than welcome to join.”

“Lean back,” he says to Nik.

Nik grumbles but pulls back until he’s kneeling.

Miller immediately goes for my tits.

“Let’s switch this up,” Nik suggests. He pulls me up, rolling us like I weigh nothing. Once I’m hovering over him, he guides his cock back to my pussy and thrusts up with no warning.

My head falls back as I stretch around his swollen length. He cups my hips, slamming me down on his shaft.

Miller brings my mouth to his. My arm brushes warm skin, and it’s clear he got naked while I was preoccupied.

“Gush around me,” Nik growls, powering up into me from below. “Goddamn, gorgeous. I’m not going to last long.”

Miller palms my tit, flicking his thumb over my nipple. I shudder as everything gets hazy.

“Well, damn,” Oliver grumbles, bouncing against the mattress on my other side.

“I know, next time hit up the group chat if it’s something important,” Carver says, tossing down the baby monitor before pulling his shirt off.

“Whiny fuckers,” Nik snorts.

“Do you think I can knot your mouth?” Oliver asks, brushing his fingers over my cheek. “I’ve been reading about it and it sounds really fucking hot.”

“Oral knotting?” Nik scoffs.

“With that ridiculously long cock of yours? I’m going with no unless you want to compromise her ability to breathe,” Carver adds, kicking out of his pants.

“I don’t know, but I’m open to trying,” I tell Oliver, ignoring my beta.

“I love the shit out of you,” Oliver says, shoving up his glasses. The boyish smile that crosses his face takes my breath away.

The bond lights up with their loving affection and their desire to fuck me into oblivion.

“Relax, baby,” Miller murmurs against my lips. “Let us love the fuck out of you.”

I shiver in response.

And that’s exactly what they do.

Epilogue

Miller

Mallory Seventeen Months Old

“Don’t pass out,” Ben says, chuckling. “I think it would take all three of them to keep your big ass from hitting the ground.”

“Don’t curse in front of Mallory,” I growl, but I smile at her to offset the tone.

“She barely knows five words,” Ben snorts. “Okay, ten if we’re being generous.”

Ben’s girlfriend Heidi comes up, stretching out her hands for Mallory.

“I’ll distract her if you want to smack the crap out of him,” she says, tickling Mallory’s sides.

I chuckle.

If Benjamin fucking Hall has a perfect match, it’s Heidi. She takes no bullshit, has a good head on her shoulders, and she’s kind of intimidating when she needs to be.

“It’s taking forever,” Oliver says, wiping sweat from his forehead.

“You know how these things go,” Carver adds, tossing an arm around his shoulder. “Have I said thank you for agreeing to get married in St. Louis? Because I really fucking appreciate it.”

“You have,” I assure him.

The rest of our families were pretty flexible about traveling. Mel suggested doing the ceremony here so Carver's mom and dad could witness it. I don't think he cried the day Mallory was born, but he sure as shit got weepy when our omega suggested making sure his parents could witness our big day.

"They need you," Nik says to Ben, yanking at his collar. "And we need to get lined up."

"Let's do this," I say, clapping Oliver on the back.

"Here you go," Heidi says, handing Mallory back to Ben.

"All right, let's get you guys hitched," Ben chuckles. "Say bye-bye to the dad brigade."

He waves and Mallory frowns. Her big blue eyes blink like she might burst into tears.

"Dada," she says, stretching for me. I haven't yet figured out how to say no to that precious little face, so I take her.

"Traitor," Ben says, laughing.

"I love you," I say, kissing her forehead. "Don't you want to go see Mommy?"

"No, no, no," she says, burying her face in my shirt.

"Come on, we've got to walk your mom down the aisle," Ben says, trying to take her back.

"No," she screeches, turning away from him.

"Change of plans?" Carver offers, chuckling as he covertly flips me off. "We all know who the favorite is."

"That's because he spoils her rotten," Ben says, frowning. "You want me to tell Mel she'll see her at the end of the aisle with you fuc—fine gentleman?"

"Yeah, we've got to get up there," Nik says.

"Holy shit," Oliver whispers.

“Goddamn,” Carver hisses.

“We’re in a fucking church,” Nik says softly. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Oh, because that was so much better?” Carver snorts.

“She’s beautiful,” I choke out.

“Mama, mama, mama,” Mallory choruses as soon as she spots Mel.

“She’s so pretty,” Oliver says, swallowing thickly.

“I knew it would be puffy like a princess dress,” Nik says, shaking his head.

“Yeah,” I agree.

“Wow,” Oliver says, tickling Mallory’s tummy. “So in case you didn’t notice, they’re in the same dress.”

“Really?” I lift Mallory and chuckle because she’s definitely in a much smaller, less intricate version of Mel’s dress.

Ben and Mel make it to the bottom of the steps. I sure as fuck never thought he’d be the one to walk her down the aisle, but it’s strangely fitting. We’re the definition of a blended family these days.

Heidi and Ben even take Mallory overnight once in a while, but they always stay in town. I was surprised they offered to do the same here in St. Louis.

Oliver did pay for their hotel though. They spend a lot on traveling regularly to see her, so it seemed fair.

They’ll be keeping her for a few nights so that we can have a mini honeymoon. Or I guess a babymoon since we didn’t do one last time.

Oliver looked up Mel’s dads. She hasn’t had any further contact with her mother, despite Mel’s best efforts. Oliver wanted to see if maybe her mom had something to do with them leaving and never reaching out to Mel again. He checked for court records, email correspondence, and other shit I didn’t understand. He deemed them not worth bothering with. We

were going to try to surprise Mel by reuniting them, but we took Oliver's word for it.

Sometimes people are a lost cause, and it's okay to keep them from tainting your future.

Ben helps Mel up the stairs and they share a brief hug.

"Mama," Mallory babbles, tossing herself at Mel.

"Hey, cutie," Mel says, taking her from my arms.

It might be weird, I don't know, but seeing her hold Mallory on her hip with that big rounding of a baby belly gives me a hard on. Right in the middle of our wedding in a fucking church.

"We both need Jesus," Carver mutters, turning behind me and readjusting his dick.

"Yup," Nik agrees, smirking dangerously at Mel.

We didn't knock her up on her first heat, but we managed it on the second go round. She's almost eight months, and I love every delicious curve.

"Are we ready?" the minister asks, clearing his throat.

"Abso-fucking-lutely," Carver says, rubbing his hands together.

"I can't believe he'll technically be my husband too," Oliver mutters.

"I love you, too, man." Carver bumps his shoulder against Oliver's.

"God, you're so damn beautiful," Nik says, leaning in to kiss Mel.

"No skipping ahead in the ceremony," Heidi calls from the audience.

Mel bursts into a fit of laughter.

I step around the others to pull her into my chest. "Let's do it."

Bonus Scenes

You didn't think I'd leave you without the hot tub spit roast... Did you? lol

I'll be honest this turned into a duet before changing back into one large book because I'd rather give you all the story at once whenever possible.

That being said, I had a few extra scenes that were cut to keep the storyline from dragging.

If you are content with the story as it stands, you can be done here, or if you'd like to live in the happily ever after a bit longer you can turn the page for a few extra scenes.

Either way, thank you for reading & I hope you enjoyed Melody's story!

Bonus Scene

Miller

Mallory 1 Week Old

Mel just finished showering with Carver. The naughty little omega tried to undertake that all on her own, but she's still very much recovering from giving birth. She did have some *light tearing* according to Dr. Jamison. Whatever the fuck that means, but only a couple of stitches.

I'm still unsure if that's a good or a bad thing.

Not to mention, after a woman gives birth, there's bleeding and other uncomfortable stuff going on. I felt woefully unprepared for all of that, but Oliver came through with more information than any of us ever needed.

It's life.

Melody has to *experience* it, so the least we can do is support her through the good, the bad, and the ugly.

I think Mel wanted to avoid having any of us around for her first real shower attempt at home because she sure waited until we were occupied to try to manage it alone.

It didn't take long for me to notice the pain. Carver quickly followed. Sure enough, Mel was half in and half out of the shower because stepping over the lip on the edge was a little too much.

I kept Mallory while Carver climbed in to help Mel. She put up quite the fuss about being too gross for company, but the bond lit up when he gently demanded that she let him help.

“I never knew how horrifying it could feel to be forced to wear what amounts to an adult diaper.” Mel sighs, resting her hands on the vanity in the bathroom. She’s dressed and looking a little miserable.

“It was worth it though, right, Mom?” I ask, doing my best to mimic a baby voice. I turn to the side, showing her Mallory’s sleepy baby face.

“Of course,” Mel says indignantly. Her face softens when she sees Mallory. “My vagina currently feels otherwise, but yes. She’s totally worth it. It does hurt though.”

“I know.” I slide up behind her. My free hand wraps around her middle, pulling her carefully back into my chest. She turns, running her hand over Mallory’s back.

“She’s so small,” she whispers, blinking up at me.

“She really is,” I agree. I can hold her tiny little body in one giant palm. She’s in what I call restless sleep, where she still wiggles around a little. “And absolutely precious.”

“I never believed what they said about forgetting how awful it is to give birth, but I’m starting to believe it. I look at her, and it’s like yeah, I could probably do it again to get another sweet baby out of the deal,” Mel says, grinning.

My heart pounds against my ribs.

I *really* like the sound of that.

“Want to snuggle in the nest for a bit?” I offer.

Melody lights up. “Yeah, but don’t let me fall asleep if I get too comfortable.”

“You think she’s hungry again already?” I ask, laughing because Mallory does seem to think she’s starving every hour or two. But I know Mel only ever worries about unexpectedly falling asleep when she’s lying down to nurse.

“Probably,” she says around a yawn.

“I’ll make sure she’s safe even if you doze off while breastfeeding,” I assure her, guiding her toward the nest.

It's probably creepy to admit, but I've spent hours lately watching my girls sleep.

We get settled into the nest.

Melody does some cute-as-hell grumbling and whimpering that her pussy may never recover. I lie on my side facing her as she does the same. She whips out her breast, and Mallory seems to sense dinner is within reach.

I chuckle as she roots around until she finds Mel's nipple.

Mallory's tiny face shakes frantically as she attacks.

It's precious.

I'm not quite sure how I lucked out, getting all I dreamed of and more. But I say my prayers every damn night in thanks.

Bonus Scene

Oliver

Mallory Eleven Weeks Old

“Want to tell me what you’re doing?” Mel asks, laughing behind her hand.

“We’re having tummy time.” I shove my glasses up as I study her beautiful smiling face. I roll, leaning my head on my hand to make it easier to see her.

“Yeah, I got that part,” Melody says, coming to sit cross-legged at my side. She stretches a hand over, running it down Mallory’s back.

It’s wild when I think too much about how fast she’s growing up.

“Oh, what are you confused about then?” I ask.

Mallory grunts, kicking and flailing her tiny arms. She turns her head to follow the sound of my voice, or perhaps she recognizes my face. She’s obviously a genius in the making. She’s not even three months old yet, and she’s already mastered most of the three-month milestones.

Okay, fine. She has around a sixty percent success rate with them, but I’m biased.

“What’s this?” Mel asks, running her fingers over the book I was reading Mallory. “The basics of quantum mechanics?”

I nod. “She’s going to need to know how atomic particles exist and interact with one another one day.”

Melody snorts, shaking her head. Long blondish-brown hair falls around her arms as she laughs. “Okay, so that’s absolutely adorable and kind of ridiculous.”

We all take turns with the kid books at night, but I’m ensuring she recognizes my voice.

“It’s good for boring her to sleep when she’s fussy. It knocked me out like nothing else when I was in college.” I laugh, Mallory gnaws on her little fist as she kicks.

“Looks like she’s hungry,” Mel says, nodding to Mallory.

“Here let me help you up.” I push myself up until I’m standing and offer Mel a hand. I pull her into my chest and lean down for a tender kiss. “I love you.” My cheek nuzzles hers.

“Love you too, Oli,” Mel says before bending down to pick up the baby. She heads over to the couch to nurse as I tidy up.

Once I’m done, I aim to grab her cup and fill it. Nursing makes Mel thirsty.

I mean she’s thirsty. All. The. Time.

I take the seat next to her and she immediately stops leaning against the arm of the couch to instead rest against my chest as she sucks at her straw.

The grunty little lady gobbles greedily, and I’m completely entranced by the show.

Maybe it’s strange.

I’m not sure, but I am fascinated by the way Mel’s body produces everything Mallory needs to survive nutrition-wise at this point.

Melody snuggles deeper into my shoulder, and I can’t help but grin.

I’m pretty sure this is what pure contentment feels like.

Bonus Scene

Nik

Mallory Four Months Old

Warm water laps at my skin as I stretch back in the hot tub. It's the middle of January, but with the outdoor heaters and the water temperature turned up it isn't bad.

Steam rises in the air, making for a tantalizing image.

Melody has her hair pulled up into a giant messy bun, looking so relaxed that I almost don't want to ruin the moment by being a horny fucker.

Mel's eyes pop open. She gives me a playful grin that makes my heart race while my dick throbs. She leans forward, sliding through the water toward me.

Carver whistles. I think he's indicating he enjoys the view too, or possibly he's giving our packmates a courtesy heads-up that it's about to go down in the hot tub.

Mel climbs into my lap, and I say a little thank you to the universe that my brother demanded I take over The Exchange while he was away.

Mel grins as her tits try to escape the cups of her bikini. They've finally settled down a little, I think they got used to the breastfeeding routine, but fuck. I'm still obsessed with them, or maybe it's just everything to do with my omega.

"Goddamn, gorgeous. Are you trying to kill me?" I ask as my hands land on her deliciously thick hips.

“Ohmigosh, you’re silly,” Mel says, grinding down on my lap.

“That bikini is doing funny shit to my brain,” Carver adds, smirking predatorily as he leans forward in his seat.

“Yup,” I agree, biting my lip. “Remember that naughty scene Oliver read out loud from your first book the other night?”

“The hot tub spit roast,” Carver says, chuckling darkly. “Oh yes, this has replayed in more than one of my dirty fantasies lately.”

“Mine too,” I agree.

“That was a four-person hot tub. This is way bigger. I’m not sure how we could make that happen logistically,” Mel says, laughing.

“Wow, I think Oliver is rubbing off on you,” Carver says, moving to slide his hands around Mel’s front.

“I’m just saying, I’m pretty sure this is like seven or eight feet across. I am not.” Mel’s head rolls back against Carver’s chest as he pulls the string around her neck, allowing the top of her bikini to fall. “Also, I feel like you missed your window. It’s winter again.”

“How about a modified spit roast?” I offer, doing the same to her bottoms.

“As long as I’m warm enough?” Mel laughs. “I guess I can manage being tag-teamed by the two of you.”

“My fucking dream girl,” Carver says, tossing her top over the edge of the hot tub. “Why don’t you sit on the wall and let Mel blow you?”

I quirk an eyebrow.

Mel smiles, shrugging a shoulder, and steam rises off her smooth skin. I push up until my ass hits the frame of the hot tub. Luckily, we’ve got a wooden walkway around the top and steps leading up to it. It’s much cooler once I’m no longer submerged in the warm water, but I’ll live.

I look at Carver, who smirks. I bet that fucker was hoping I'd get shrinkage in the cool air.

I slide my swimming trunks down and shrug. I definitely won't be bothered by the cold once Mel's sweet little mouth is wrapped around me.

Carver helps her position her knees on the bench and starts working some magic on her pussy. He's got a thing for eating her out from behind, but that's not possible at the moment. I never thought I'd wish for a smaller hot tub, but that scene Mel wrote was dirty as fuck.

"Oh yeah, gorgeous. Just like that," I growl as Mel flicks her naughty little tongue over my cock. She teases the crown with her lips while working the underside of my shaft.

I'm thankful for the raised wooden deck we added. It's definitely convenient at the moment. Otherwise, I might not be able to keep myself upright so easily.

Mel grins around my cock as she works her tiny little mouth farther down my length. The cold isn't even a thought in my mind as I run my fingers over her cheek and move to pinch her nipple.

She squeaks, shaking her head. "No, I'll leak," she grumbles, swatting my hand away before going back to worshipping my cock.

I know she will, and that shit turns me the fuck on. I don't know why, and I don't focus on it because I don't really care. It just does.

"Oh, you dirty motherfuckers," Miller growls, stomping out onto the deck.

"They really are," Oliver agrees, following him out.

"Them, not you, Mel," Miller clarifies. "We love you."

"You know the hot tub spit roast was my dream." Oliver jabs a finger at Carver, who conveniently slides into Mel at that exact moment.

"Wow, that's intense," Mel whimpers around my length. "Don't worry." She winks at Oliver. "You two can have the

next round.”

“Hell yes,” Oliver says, setting down the baby monitor before battling his way out of his T-shirt.

I chuckle because life is really goddamn good.

Bonus Scene

Melody

Mallory A Year Old

“I ’m beginning to think she has no incentive to walk because the four of you spoil her rotten,” I say, snorting a laugh. “All she has to do is let out a *fake* cry and she’s got a minimum of two of you fist fighting for the chance to pick her up.”

“You can’t spoil a child with love,” Miller says, giving me a chagrined smile as he rocks Mallory.

She’s sleepy, but she’s fighting it.

She let out one little hint of a whine. Nik and Miller practically elbowed each other out of the way to get to her. I shake my head, stretching back against the couch.

They really do spoil her.

Then again, I can’t say much since they do the same for me. I still enjoy giving them a hard time about it, though.

“Let me,” Nik says, carefully taking Mallory from Miller.

“I can’t wait until you pop out the next one,” Carver says from the other side of the couch. “It’ll be fifty-fifty odds. Two on and two off on dad duty.”

I snort.

Miller tosses himself down on my other side. The couch bounces as he pulls me into his chest.

Mallory lets out a whiney fuss. She really is fighting her afternoon nap today.

“I can read her some advanced chemistry and she’ll knock right out,” Oliver offers without looking up from his tablet.

“Nah, let me handle this,” Nik says, swaying over to the surround sound before turning it on to something light that’s kind of like elevator music.

“Oh yeah, that’s the guy who swore he’d never spoil his kids,” Carver says, chuckling. He yanks out his phone, snapping pictures of Nik dancing Mallory around the living room.

“You live and you learn,” Nik says in the same soothing voice he always uses when he’s trying to get Mallory to sleep.

“What do you think it’ll be this time?” Miller asks, running his hand over my stomach.

I chuckle. He’s just as obsessed with the belly as he was the first go-round, but I don’t mind. They pamper the hell out of me. Who would complain about extra affection? Not me.

“I think we’ll keep it a surprise until the baby is born. That way there’s no lingering disappointment if it’s a girl,” I say, biting my lip to hold back the laugh.

“I would never even think such a thing,” Miller growls indignantly.

“I know,” I say truthfully. He’s firmly in the girl-dad camp. I can feel it in the bond.

“I wouldn’t mind a boy to play baseball with,” Carver says, catching my eyes and nodding to Nik.

“Don’t joke about that. This is a football house all the way,” Nik says, still swaying.

“Well, I’ll be happy either way,” Oliver says.

“Yeah, you are sleepy, aren’t you?” Nik murmurs, kissing Mallory’s temple. Her eyes are heavy, and they close for a second only to pop back open. “When you’re older, I’m going to teach you where a gentleman should place his hands when dancing with a woman he cares about.” He smiles, kissing her chubby cheek. “Carver and Miller will teach you exactly where to punch in case he doesn’t.”

“Damn right,” Carver interjects.

“Oliver will show you how to hack all his social media if he doesn’t treat you with respect,” Nik says, his eyes meeting mine. “And Mom will keep you sane when you swear our only goal is to ruin your life.”

“I love you,” I whisper. “She’s out.”

“Perfect timing,” Nik says, winking as he gives me a look that’s pure fire.

Bonus Scene

Carver

After The Wedding

We're officially fucking married.

I can't seem to wipe the smile off my face. Not that I'm trying too hard. I finally got to put a ring on it in front of my mom and dad. Hell, even my older siblings showed up with their kids and spouses.

Mel is nearly eight months pregnant. As it turns out, I'm still just as obsessed with fucking her now as I was when she was pregnant with Mallory.

The belly definitely popped a little sooner with this baby. Then again, we're having a boy this time.

Yeah, Melody caved at the ultrasound.

I knew she would.

She was too excited and kept studying the screen like she might *accidentally* catch the gender.

I'm not-so-casually watching for her to come out of the room where she's changing into her reception dress.

I probably could have just busted in there, but Nik's moms were in there helping last I checked.

I've got a bit of a covert mission at the moment.

I fold up my dress sleeves one by one as I bide my time.

Mel comes out and immediately takes the right turn to aim for the reception hall. She's fucking adorable waddling her

way down the hallway.

I prowl closer until she's within reach. I've already scouted locations. Just like when she was pregnant with Mallory; I constantly had to scope out bathrooms. I do the same now. I know where the closest one is, and it even has a convenient couch.

"What are you doing?" Mel asks as I scoop her up into my arms.

"What do you think I'm doing?" I ask, smirking down at her.

"Trying to throw your back out?" She laughs, wrapping her arms around my neck. "Are you already desperate to get your dick wet?"

I snort. "With you, sweetheart? Always."

It's only a few strides, and I'm guiding us into the bathroom.

Oliver sits on the chaise lounge. He grins when he spots us. "I knew there was a reason you disappeared."

"Me too," Miller says, gently shoving his way in behind us.

"Let's just make this a regular gang bang, shall we?" Nik asks, chuckling darkly.

"We have guests to entertain," Mel says, laughing.

"They're all enamored with Mallory for the moment," Miller says, unbuttoning his shirt. "My mom has her, but we better be quick."

"All right then," Mel says, wiggling her legs until I put her down. "Do me."

That's exactly what we do.

Afterword

If you enjoyed, or even if you didn't, please consider leaving a review.

Thank you for taking the time to read.

You can reach me at JillianWestAuthor@gmail.com with any questions, comments, or feedback. **Thank you!!**

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