

USA Today Bestselling Author
Jarica James



His Safe Haven

Grove City Omegas

Safe Haven
GROVE CITY OMEGAS

JARICA JAMES

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This is a Reverse Harem ABO/Omegaverse Romance and is not suited for those under the age of 18. There is MM in this Book.

Edits by Michelle Motyczka

Contents

[Note and Triggers](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Note](#)

[Also by Jarica James](#)

Note and Triggers

Safe Haven is an omega verse romance meaning it deals in an alternate world to ours that has ABO elements. This is not a book about shifters, but the humans have Alpha, Omega, and Beta Designations. Alphas knot and are the protectors, Betas are the ones who balance the alphas, and the omegas go into heat and their bodies are made to take the alpha's knots and get pregnant.

There is some content that may be triggering, including violence, gun violence, and mentions of sexual assault.

Happy reading!

Chapter One

Briar

“You’re pregnant.”

I never thought those words would cause my entire world to crumble around me.

What *had* I envisioned? If I had to answer, I’d probably say that at the very least, I’d be surrounded by my pack, the room filled with love and joy. Those words would be met by cheers, maybe even a few happy tears or one of those corny but cute celebration dances. My alphas would be handing out those bubblegum cigars like the proud dads they were. It would be a moment that I’d cherish because it would mean that I would be starting a real future with the people I loved.

But no, they hit the air like an explosion.

My ears rang, and my panic rose with each beat of my pounding heart. I was waiting for the walls and building to crumble around us. This couldn’t be happening to me, not now, not with *him*.

“No, no, no,” I muttered over and over. Tears burned my eyes, and even the alpha doctor seemed upset on my behalf. He didn’t ask about the circumstance, but I’d say my reaction was enough of a tell. That, or he could smell my sheer panic and fear despite his mask. My baby’s father would rather die than claim me or this baby, and I couldn’t raise it alone. Hell, I was just an intern. My salary was shit, and now I was in a

situation where it would be next to impossible to get anything better. Finding work as a pregnant omega would be impossible.

Once an omega was pregnant, society expected us to be supported by a pack. That wasn't my case, and no pack would accept me now either. No alpha would be eager to raise another alpha's baby. It wasn't necessarily them being cruel or judgmental; it was instinct. The primal part of an alpha would always recognize that there was something about the child that wasn't *right*, that wasn't theirs. What kind of man would be willing to ignore that screaming voice to give me a chance?

My only other option was the Omega Center. But I'd heard horror stories about omegas and unsuccessful pack placements. No fucking thank you. I had enough on my plate.

No... I'd be on my own, with just the baby as a reminder of what had happened to me. As crazy as all of this was, it wasn't the baby's fault, and I couldn't find it in me to hate it. The idea of getting rid of it did nothing to make me feel any better. In fact, it made me feel worse. Something about this little life growing inside me had already settled in my soul, even if my mind was still processing and panicking.

The doctor awkwardly patted my shoulder, unsure how to handle a hysterical omega babbling to herself like a psychopath. But honestly, who could fucking blame me? I was sure I was going to have to go back to work with raccoon eyes and an aura of defeat. There was no way I could squash my emotions down enough that those around me wouldn't scent them. Even now, the claustrophobic exam room was filled with the sour scent of my distress. The scent was bitter and nauseating, only adding to how badly I already felt.

"We have resources for you. I'll send in our omega advocate," he promised quickly. "You'll get through this, Briar." The kind words had the dam breaking, and tears began to free fall as I wallowed in self-pity for a moment. His footsteps hurried out of the room, and in any other situation I might have laughed at the hasty retreat.

This shouldn't be happening.

I wasn't in heat when he... No. Don't go there.

Their tests have to be wrong.

But even as I had those thoughts, I knew this was real. Their tests were far more reliable than the over-the-counter ones in stores.

A soft knock on the door had me glancing up as a perky omega woman with a bright smile firmly in place burst through the door. She had on a flowing colorful sundress and a cardigan that complemented her curled blonde hair and pink-painted smile. She was the epitome of sunshine, and I wanted to run far away before she even opened her mouth. I couldn't do cheery right now. On a regular day, her mood was something I matched, but right now, it just grated on my nerves.

"Hello, Briar. I'm Stephanie! I hear we got some unexpected news," she said, her voice dropping to a calming cadence as she sat down on the metal stool. Her entire presence was too bright and colorful for the cold white walls and metal equipment in the room.

"But I wasn't in heat," I argued weakly. I knew it wasn't doing much of anything to help my current situation, but it was the only real argument I had. And it was one hundred percent true. That night had been weeks away from my next heat. This should have been impossible. "He needs to check again."

Her lips pursed together at my pleading tone, and her eyes hardened a bit, like she was tired of doing this over and over. I knew then that she was about to flip a switch. The signs were easy to recognize. My mom was the same way, having a perfect mask for strangers until she couldn't hide behind it anymore.

"Your levels are past the area of doubt. You're definitely pregnant," she said, holding out the lab results. I didn't even read it, not that I could've. The words all blurred together as my eyes misted with unshed tears. She pulled them back, placing the papers on her lap. I didn't even care what else she had at this point. What I needed was time to process.

I'd be forced to tell my family, and I knew that they wouldn't take it well. This situation was everything my mother had warned me not to do. Good little omegas found a pack and settled in, let them claim her, *then* had babies. I definitely had no pack and no intentions of telling the father. Plus, it wasn't like I'd had a say in the matter. He had taken what he'd wanted, regardless of my feelings. Alphas could be assholes, so I never understood why they were regarded so highly, especially *him*.

"It's rare for this to happen, but sometimes it does. The probability is only .009 percent, but... What can I say, dear? Your reproductive system is apparently an overachiever!" What in the world made her think *that* was the right strategy? Her silver-linings peptalk needed a real kick in the ass. And I needed to get the hell out of here.

"Can I just have the info and go?" I asked, gesturing at the papers. "I can't do this right now."

"Of course. There are some cards with information for you in there," she agreed, eyes wide at my aggressive tone. It wasn't directed at her; it was just me doing everything I could not to keep from breaking down further. She handed me the papers, then I all but ran through the office and into the afternoon sun. My stomach churned, a mix of nerves and hunger since I'd skipped lunch for this shitshow.

Glancing at my watch, I noticed I had only fifteen minutes to get back to the office. That meant I had just enough time to stop somewhere quick... but my mind ignored the hunger pangs and instead went for a pregnancy test instead. It was stupid, especially with the doctor's confirmation, but I didn't care.

Tucking away the packet of information, I practically ran to the convenience store on the corner, thanking whatever god was listening that I'd worn flats today. I thought I was just dealing with a rough heat, not creating a fucking life.

There was a long line at the checkout, and I held back a growl of frustration, heading for the tiny pharmacy section and nabbing a pregnancy test. Sure, it was irrational, but that was

where I was at today. As I passed a display of candy bars, I nabbed some dark chocolate to tide me over. When dealing with news of the life-altering variety, a girl had carte blanche to treat herself, right?

I barely heard the cashier as I finally checked out and sprinted back to the office building. Thankfully, City Hall was just down the road from the clinic, which was why I'd chosen it. Working as an intern for the mayor's office wasn't a job I took lightly, even now that he'd ruined my life. I wasn't naive enough to think he couldn't ruin it further if I made a big deal about this. I'd be gone in two months, way before this pregnancy became an issue, and with an internship like this under my belt, well, I'd be a step ahead of most. For now, that was all that I could focus on. Fake it until I made it, get the recommendations, then get the fuck out and deal with this baby situation.

With ten minutes to spare, I made it to the ladies' room and claimed the biggest stall. The instructions were clear enough. Pee on the stick, wait three minutes, get the results.

The fact that I successfully managed to straddle the toilet in the tiny stall and pee on the stick was a feat in itself. But I was in no mood to celebrate. Each passing second felt torturous. My heart was slamming in my chest, and with how tumultuous my stomach was feeling, I was glad I hadn't eaten lunch.

It took less than a minute before two dark pink lines stared back at me. I almost panicked all over again when the lines blurred, thinking that maybe, just maybe the doctor had been wrong, but then I realized I was crying. That realization in itself transformed those tears into gasping sobs. Oh god, I was a fucking mess. I gave myself that moment, counted to five, and calmed myself enough to draw minimal attention—or so I hoped.

When I had the tears dried and my big girl panties on, I tucked the test away in my bag. The last thing I needed was to generate office gossip by throwing it in the trash can.

What I didn't expect was to push the door open and come face to face with the mayor's personal assistant. Vivian's lips were turned up in a fake smile that felt like she'd dropped a bucket of ice water over my head. My mind immediately declared that she knew... but that was crazy.

"It seems we have an issue," she said in a syrupy sweet voice that didn't fit her nasally tone and sharp eyes.

"What issue? Sorry if you heard the crying. I just had a rough day," I said casually. "I'm fine now." My smile was as fake as hers, but it was necessary in this world. Politics was all about fake smiles and navigating the petty corruption that eventually seeped into all involved. I wasn't in this world for politics, but I had to suffer through them to get what I wanted. The recommendations I would get from such a prestigious office would be unmatched.

"Oh, of course," she said, stepping back. As I walked up to the sink, I saw her glancing in the stall, her eyes trailing to the floor as if looking for some type of evidence. Not wanting to be anywhere near her, I washed my hands and left on swift feet. I knew better than to turn my back on a snake, but I had to retreat before she made this worse.

It felt like all eyes were on me as I hurried across the building to my desk. I sat down and took several slow breaths, wishing that this day could just start over again, that I'd wake up from this nightmare. Of course, guilt hit me right after that. This situation might be a nightmare now, but I knew I'd think the opposite the moment this baby was in my arms.

Firmly closing my purse before shoving it into my desk, I pushed the worries and stress aside so I could focus on my ever-growing to-do list. Each item I ticked off of the list put my mind further from the life growing inside of me, and that was the best thing for my stress management. I needed something to focus on to just get me through my day. It made me feel in control again, like I could survive these next two months.

After gathering my papers from the printer, I walked back to my desk, freezing when I saw Vivian pulling open my desk

drawers, searching for something.

“Can I help you?” I asked, rushing forward. My shoes squeaked on the polished floors, garnering attention from the other interns in the area. She stood, and from the smirk on her lips, she’d found what she was looking for. My stomach dropped at the sight of my purse strap hanging out of the hastily shut drawer.

“Nope, but you better hope someone can help you,” she muttered with more venom than one person should have. It was a wonder she didn’t choke on her own poison.

I stood there, speechless, as she walked away, a small tinkling laugh filling the air in her wake. Everyone nervously glanced at me before ducking their heads. They weren’t going to go down with me, but I couldn’t blame them. *I* didn’t deserve to go down for this, so why should they?

I hadn’t asked for any of this. In fact, I had told the mayor no, but that hadn’t deterred him. Now I’d lost control of my fate in more ways than one. Whatever she had planned, I knew it would be far worse than finding out I was pregnant.

How did my life get so off track? I kept my head down, worked hard, and even played these assholes’ games. It felt like ever since I was cornered in the conference room, my life had become one awful thing after another. I just wanted off this ride I was on.

My hand drifted to my still flat stomach like I could save my baby from whatever hell was coming my way. Part of me was worried she’d tell the mayor since that was the absolute last thing I wanted. In truth, my goal was to save up more money and get the fuck out of this city before he ever had a clue. I’d do everything I could to make sure he never saw me again when I left this internship. He didn’t deserve this baby just like he didn’t deserve my body or his position.

But how can I keep this baby safe if I can’t even protect myself? I was no longer just a small fish in a big pond. I’d been dropped into the ocean, and the sharks were already starting to circle.

Chapter Two

Briar

I spend the rest of the day looking over my shoulder, waiting for the other shoe to drop. I needed a glass of wine in the worst way, but of course that was off the table. Maybe chocolate could suffice... or something salty like chips... or both? My stomach growled loudly, reminding me I'd missed my lunch. That would be an issue for me on a normal day, let alone one where eating my feelings was basically a survival requirement.

When I left work, all eyes were on me again. This time, I knew I wasn't making it up or imagining it. Every time I glanced up, someone would look away just as quickly. It wasn't until I got outside that I could really breathe normally again even though that sense of dread never left me.

Instead of chocolate, I needed to order a pizza and force my brother to watch some ridiculous movie we could make fun of together. He was my best friend and only real ally in that house. Right now, I needed a bit of normalcy.

Even with the prospect of a movie night, the walk home felt like I was heading to the gallows. Something was settling in my stomach that was terrifyingly similar to fear, and although part of me claimed that it had to be irrational, I couldn't push it aside.

Would they somehow know I was pregnant? My entire life it felt like Mom was two steps ahead of me. Keeping secrets

from her was usually an exercise in futility, one that didn't end well in any way. There was something about her blend of smug triumph—she loved knowing that she'd ferreted out something I'd tried to hide—and disappointment that had the power to practically incapacitate me. If she did find out... How would they react?

My mother was always telling me how to be a proper omega—to be submissive, do as I was told, listen to my alpha, obey him, everything the omega centers of the world loved to tell us from fucking birth. I didn't buy into that outdated bullshit, or at least I didn't want to. I didn't give a fuck what my hormones and pheromones thought about the world; I had a very different view, and I intended to stick by that. Even now, no matter how hard society was probably about to make that.

My phone dinged, and I looked down, my stomach clenching at the SOS my brother had sent.

Liam: Some lady from the mayor's office is here. What the hell happened at work today? She's been chatting with Mom and Dad for like twenty minutes.

Me: What?!

Throwing my phone in my purse, I took off at a run, my heart sinking. Vivian had snuck out of work early today, so she was an hour ahead of me already. What had she told them? And why?! Then my mind flickered back to the purse strap hanging from my desk, and I realized her true purpose.

I was sweating profusely and out of breath by the time I reached our front door. Not wanting to look like a mess, I took a few deep breaths and swiped the back of my hand over my sweaty forehead before stepping inside.

The voices that were speaking in the next room became hushed before my father's voice called out to me. There was a hollow quality to it that had me panicking, but I put a smile on my face and pushed open the door to our dining room.

Vivian turned, her grin morphing from sympathetic to evil as she locked eyes with me. *What a fucking bitch.*

“Here she is,” she said in a singsong voice like this was some sort of fun reunion, not her overstepping *so* many boundaries by being in my fucking home.

“What are you doing here?” Despite my smile, I knew there was malice in my voice. I just didn’t fucking care. We both knew the truth of why she was here, just as well as we knew my job was no longer a reality. The future I’d been working so hard for was gone.

She gasped dramatically, the sound full of perfectly orchestrated fury, and my mother jumped in to chastise me. “Briar, this isn’t how we treat guests!” I didn’t entertain that admonishment, never turning my eyes away from the snake still staring at me. How she managed to look like Edna Mode in supervillain mode was impressive, though the comical image did nothing to calm my nerves.

My father wasn’t the type to beat around the bush, so when he cleared his voice, I turned to him. What I saw there, the detachment in his eyes, had my chest aching. *What the hell is going on here?*

“We’ve heard some very troubling news from Vivian here. She’s concerned about an omega working in your... *condition*,” he practically growled. Every single word dripped with his true feelings of embarrassment. “Do you have an alpha waiting to take care of you somewhere?”

The disappointment and judgment in his eyes had me breathing quicker, but it was all indignation. Like this was in any way my fault! Leave it to a fucking alpha to blame a packless omega for getting pregnant. It wasn’t like this shit happened by immaculate conception.

“No,” I said simply. At this point, I didn’t even care if the bitch heard what I had to say. “I don’t. In fact, he’s a deadbeat who should be in jail for what he did, but I want to focus on my life and not be dragged down by him. I only have two more months of my internship to handle, then I’ll figure out where to go from here.”

“You don’t have that anymore,” Vivian supplied like she was being helpful. “What kind of message would that send to

the public? Your services are terminated as of now. We'll be sure to submit to HR that your work was lacking. We can make up something so it's believable. They never question us, anyway, and in your state, we aren't required to give you reason for termination."

"I wouldn't even be showing at two months!" I challenged angrily. I couldn't say I was surprised, but I wouldn't just sit here and let this go without at least trying to put up with some kind of fight. "This wasn't my fault. You can't punish me for the father's transgressions." She wasn't outright saying it, but I could tell she knew exactly who had done this. Neither of us were stupid, and she was doing everything she could to protect that bastard.

"It's my job to protect the mayor's office from possible scandals, so we will be handling this as appropriately as possible. The fact you would throw yourself at an alpha, tempt them in this way, is deplorable." She threw me a victorious smile for everyone to see, and an overwhelming urge to smack it off of her face hit me. I was livid, protective of my baby, and ready to tear her apart for her part in it. What kind of fool was she? I might barely be pregnant and certainly still wrapping my head around this, but she should know better than to provoke an omega with child.

"I didn't!" I screeched, my fingers clutching my purse like a lifeline. "He did this to me even though I said no!" Tears threatened to fall, but I refused to give her the satisfaction of seeing them.

Not a single expression in the room shifted. Judgment weighed heavy on my parents' faces, and Vivian looked fucking gleeful. Because of fucking course it was the omega's fault. Alphas never had to answer for their shitty lack of control. Hell, at this point, they just took what they wanted because they could. I was walking proof of that bullshit.

"I have a solution," Vivian offered them sweetly, back to her act already. She was a fucking actor, playing them like an instrument, and they were eating up every word.

“You’ve done this before, haven’t you?” I accused. “Let him take advantage of omegas then fucking gotten rid of us like *we’re* the problem?”

“Of course,” she said simply. “We can’t let some promiscuous, hormone-driven omegas harm the office! Your kind are unpredictable and far too emotional to work in this world despite the laws that require us to *humor* your desires.” She let out a sigh like she had the weight of the world on her shoulders, which was ridiculous.

If either of us were a burden to society, it was her. She was a fucking beta; they were far more looked down on than omegas. At least we could have alphas’ babies. We all lived in the alphas’ world, and since a beta couldn’t provide a baby or a heat, then what good were they? I disagreed with that idea on principle, but she was my exception.

“What is your solution?” Mom asked with a slight waver in her tone. She refused to look my way now, both of them already resigning themselves to my fate, whatever it might be. Just like every other ‘scandal’ in our lives, I could tell they were ready to sweep me under the rug and use pretty lies to explain away my absence for their prestigious friends.

They were acting like this was my mess to handle instead of being angry on my behalf. Their daughter said she was forced against her will, and they weren’t even angry? I should have known this would be the outcome. They’d rarely surprised me in my life; if not for Liam, I’d have lost my mind long ago. Our family wasn’t a true pack. It was a mockery of one, where there were just expectations based on our biological lottery but no real bond based on love or affection. Our family was about duty, and frankly, I was happy to base my morals on a different foundation.

“We are prepared to pay for your silence to keep this out of the media,” Vivian started, but I interrupted.

“No. We won’t let you buy our silence,” I growled.

She laughed openly now, dropping the facade for a moment. “This offer isn’t for *you*. No one would believe an omega. In fact, if you spoke out, we’d spin it all around to ruin

your life. Our strategies have shifted elections and ended careers. You're but a speck of dust in comparison."

"That's not okay," my father interjected, his brow furrowing. Hope bloomed in my chest for a moment when his pale blue eyes glanced at mine. There was frustration there, and I wasn't entirely sure it was directed at me for once. But just when I was starting to give in to the wildest kernel of hope that he might partially be on my side, he stamped it down as quickly as it came.

"We're prepared to sign over our support to your company, an exclusive contract, and pay out a sign-on bonus in this amount." She handed over a check, ensuring I couldn't see it as she did. My father let out a low whistle at the amount, eyes bouncing between me and the money being dangled in front of him.

"You can't seriously be considering this?" I asked, my voice shaking with anger and utter disbelief. "I'm your fucking daughter."

"You brought this trouble here, not me," my father shot back.

"The fact that you think I *did* this is answer enough," I said in disgust. "A real father would be angry his daughter was raped." His face paled at the blunt wording, but that was all I got. He'd read between the lines prior to this, but he just didn't care.

Vivian took that opportunity to pluck the check from my father's fingers, which was a risky move for a beta, but someone had given this one a power trip, and it was making her feel invincible. From the way she'd walked with more confidence than she should, her two-faced tone, and her boldness, you could tell she was savoring every bit of power her position gave her.

"There are terms," she warned. My parents looked at her greedily, ready to do whatever it took to gain this advantage. The shittiest part of this all, though there were in fact *many* shitty parts, was that we didn't need the mayor's money. My father was successful. Sure, the company could do better

because growth was always something to aim for, but at this expense? “She has to leave town and never return. You must cut off all contact—no calls, texts, or visits. She’s exiled from the city and has twenty-four hours to leave it. And if you refuse and decide to stand by her... Well, your names will suffer as well. It’s her or your reputation and business.”

The world stopped around me, their silence so loud it was deafening as I watched my entire future crumble. Their eyes looked at me with resignation, and that, more than anything, told me their answer. With a final glare that shared every bit of my pain, I turned and walked out before they could utter the words that just might break me.

“This is insane!” Liam thundered as he stormed in. “You can’t be fucking serious! You’re going to let this bitch come in here and disrespect your flesh and blood like that? You know Briar. She wouldn’t do this, and even if she had played a willing part in this situation, she’s your daughter! Who are you to decide her worth? You didn’t even listen to what she had to say!”

“Watch your tone, or you’ll follow her” was the only warning I heard before I closed the door to my room behind me. My alpha brother could fight his own battles. Right now, I had none left in me.

My eyes scanned the room I’d lived in my entire life. Moving out before you had a pack was dangerous for an omega, so I’d lived under my parents’ thumbs for longer than I’d wanted to, and Liam had stayed because of me. He had always been my protector, but even he couldn’t save me now. Liam didn’t have resources outside of the city, and for that matter, neither did I.

My bed creaked under me as I sat down on it, fighting back tears even though a cold, numb feeling was creeping in to turn off my emotions. I was at the point that my mind couldn’t take another second of this emotional onslaught.

As soon as I was enveloped in a comfortable cloak of numbness, I finally began to move, grabbing two suitcases and laying them on my bed. Flipping them open, I started to fill

them with the things I found important—a book I'd read so many times the cover was worn, pictures of me and my brother, my jewelry, anything with some sort of significance that wasn't ruined by the moment I'd just had with my parents. Next, I threw in the necessities like clothes, my meager stash of money, and makeup.

Now that I was prepared just in case they decided to be cruel and kick me out early, I tried to figure out what I'd do. Other than the money I had in my account, which wasn't much, I had no resources. The thought of giving myself to a pity pack assigned by the state had my skin crawling. I'd rather raise this baby alone. If I could manage that.

I'd been to college and spent far too many years working with the wealthy, political, and influential people of the world. If it came down to it, I could land myself a job and talk my way through any doubts they'd have. Between my marketing and graphic design degrees, they could hide me away in the PR department and out of the general population. If I were established somewhere, I could save up for daycare and an apartment, hide my single motherhood for as long as I could. *Whatever it takes.*

Opening the browser, I typed in 'homeless omegas,' coming across a shelter in Grove City. The pictures didn't show the outside or any faces, just an address and a few standard pictures. It was my best and only option, and the fact that the site explicitly said it wasn't involved with omega centers was enough for me. If I went to an omega center, they'd be ready to sell off my baby to the highest bidder or force me into a life I didn't want. *Hell fucking no.*

My heart broke as I scrolled through the survivors' stories. Victims of abuse, discarded by packs, omegas left with no other options, they went on and on. Apparently, I'd fit right in, and damn if that didn't break me a little more.

My hand fell into my lap, my phone tumbling to the floor as I stared at nothing. Now that I had a plan, I didn't know how to proceed. Did I leave tonight? In the morning? Take a bus?

A soft knock on my door sounded, but I didn't look up. My brother sighed as he walked in, giving away who was interrupting my trance. I knew he'd come; I just hadn't known how long the screaming would go on beforehand.

"Briar," he breathed, voice full of pain. He wasn't the same type of alpha as my father was. Liam actually cared about people, not the power he possessed through his designation. He was genuine and kind and strong. He was my rock. And now I was being forced to leave him behind.

"I'll be okay," I said, though my voice sounded off. He huffed out a laugh and sat next to me, pulling me into a hug. Tears came out as I shook in his arms, my brother the only thing holding me together while I broke down. When the sobs subsided, he gave me one last hug and pulled away.

"Hey, it's going to be okay. We'll figure it out. Fuck them," he said firmly.

"I've got a place I can go," I said. "There's a shelter in Grove City. It's a place to stay until I find work."

"Briar, you can't have the baby in a shelter," he said. "I'm coming with you."

"You can't," I reminded him. "You've got a life here, Liam. If you leave, you won't finish the program, and it could impact your future jobs." He was taking classes at the university, and if he left now, he'd have no way to finish his studies or pay for it. His dreams were being wholly funded by our parents, and there was no confusion about my dad being willing to sacrifice our futures. That much was obvious.

"Then I have an alternative." He sighed, pulling out his phone and pressing a button. A deep voice answered after a ring. "Hey, sorry to interrupt your night. Do you happen to be in Mason Hills?"

"Who is it?" I hissed, but he stood up and stepped away, a clear sign for me to wait him out.

"Look, my sister just got kicked out. I need you to take her in," he hissed into the phone. "Some asshole knocked her up,

and now they're making sure she has nothing to survive on. She has to be out of the city by tomorrow."

"I don't need to be handed off! I have a plan," I argued, swallowing down the bile that was quickly rising. He was trying to help, but the last thing I needed was a pity pack taking me on out of obligation. That was no life, and it would be downright painful when they found an omega of their own. Because I had no delusions that I'd ever be considered as such.

Either his voice fell quiet, or my pulse was thundering in my ears too loudly for me to hear his conversation. I didn't realize I was hyperventilating until he was back in front of me, hands on the sides of my face, forcing me to look into the hazel eyes I knew so well.

"My friend is going to take you with him to Grove City. He's in town for the night, and you can trust Ellis. He's not like Dad or the guy that did this."

My hands instinctively went to my stomach, and I nodded. If nothing else, this gave me a ride. I could always give him the address for the shelter when we got close to Grove City. Surely I could convince him to drop me off there.

"I'm going to grab you some money. Stay here," Liam ordered before running out of my room. I took the opportunity to pull off my work clothes and put on a pair of yoga pants and an oversized sweater, tugging my dark brown hair into a messy bun. The pack swooping in wasn't my pack, so I wasn't here to impress. In fact, there was already no chance of that. My green eyes were dull and hollow, bags already forming underneath them from all the day's tears. My shoulders were slumped, and I couldn't find it in me to care. The most I did was swipe a bit of gloss over my lips and wipe off the mascara trails that lined my cheeks. I wasn't entirely confident that the streaks wouldn't be back at the slightest comment. My walls were down, and the numb was wearing off.

No sooner had I finished changing than Liam was sweeping back into the room, handing me a backpack and informing me that my ride was here. He grabbed my suitcases while I clung to the backpack like a life preserver.

My parents were nowhere in sight, though their arguing voices echoed from behind the firmly closed door of my father's office. It was best for me to leave this way. They didn't deserve to push their guilt onto me. I fucking hoped they choked on it, forced to live with the reminder they'd sold me out like a fucking possession.

When I stepped into the night air and spotted the dark SUV waiting for me, I knew that there was no going back.

This was my future now, and I had to do what I could to survive.

Chapter Three

Ellis

“This is a terrible fucking idea,” Miles said again, like I hadn’t heard him the first several times. He wasn’t usually the worrying type, but I could see how bringing an unmated omega into our fold could be dangerous. But he was claimed, and I had no intention of claiming her as well, just protecting her, so he needed to let it go and trust me. Thanks to this visit with my mother, I was already on edge, and this wasn’t helping. But it wasn’t the omega’s fault, and if Liam was asking, this was a big deal.

“I’m not going to let Liam’s fucking sister live on the streets. It doesn’t mean she’s pack, alright?” I reiterated through gritted teeth, casting a glare at my omega. He angrily put his shoulder-length blond hair in a bun, his number one tell that he was angry. Omegas were known for being territorial, but this was next level, even for him. “What are you so against? She’s not going to get in the way of us.” His raised brow tried to say that wasn’t even on his radar, but I knew him better than that.

“She’s pregnant... with another alpha’s baby, Ellis!” he argued. His anger was filling the car, suffocating and bitter, so I rolled down my window and kicked on the vents. Poor girl would think she was walking into fucking battle, not her getaway vehicle. “How does that not bother you?”

“Because she’s not *my* fucking omega,” I ground out. “You are, and Beckham is. End of discussion. Now, fucking deal with it and breathe through this meltdown, or I’m leaving you

here.” He narrowed those fiery green eyes at me in silence that I knew wasn’t going to last forever. “Liam didn’t go into detail. He said it’s her story to tell. But he did say that this wasn’t planned, and it wasn’t her fault. She just needs a safe place until she can get back on her feet. We can give that to her.”

I wasn’t usually this harsh, and Miles was generally full of snark and sass, but after over five years together, we knew these kinds of moments would pass too. Fighting was inevitable among packs as close as ours, and we tried not to dwell on disagreements. So, instead of pushing further, I switched tactics to appeal to his sensitive side. He had one, even if he tried to hide it. “She’s dealing with some heavy shit. Let’s not make it worse. It’s temporary, Miles. Think about how you’d feel in her situation.”

He let out a long-suffering sigh and faced forward, his hands clenched into tight fists as he took measured breaths. Whoever said omegas weren’t the real time bombs clearly hadn’t spent time with omega males—or at least not ones like Miles. Our other omega, Beckham, was his opposite. Sweet, soft-spoken, controlled. Not many packs had two omegas, but Miles and Beckham were close and complemented each other. We had all come together for work then naturally fallen into this pack of ours. The first heat Beckham hit triggered Miles’, then after we helped them both through, we didn’t want to go back to being just friends. I loved both of them, as did Graham, their other alpha. Tallon and Wells didn’t share the omegas, though they weren’t shy about helping them through heats when they came about. Our other two pack members fit better together, their strong and stoic personalities a natural balm for one another’s intensity. Personally, I thought they could use a bit more balance, but some thoughts were better left unspoken.

A few minutes later, Liam walked out of the large house, followed by a woman I assumed was his sister. She didn’t look pregnant, with her baggy clothes hiding the baby bump if she even had one. How had they found out so early? An omega’s scent didn’t change until the second trimester.

“She looks timid,” Miles noted, sounding a bit too pleased about that aspect.

“Her entire world just crashed around her. Of course she does. *Behave*,” I ordered him, using my alpha tone. He glanced over at me and nodded, serious now. Miles wasn’t an idiot and wouldn’t push too far. He knew when he was dancing along the line of my patience and wasn’t one to cross it, but I could tell that something about this was getting to him. “That, or I’m handing you over to Graham to deal with.”

Was he truly worried about us choosing her over them? Claiming bites weren’t something you could take back. I made a mental note to talk to him after she was settled in. I didn’t want him to sit and worry over nothing, and this display was screaming that he was letting something get to him.

He swallowed hard and turned back around, grumbling about alphas and their threats.

Leaving the car running, I stepped out just as Liam and his sister approached. He hadn’t given me a name yet. As he pulled her in for a hug, I studied her. She was around 5’5, petite, and now that I was close enough, I could tell there was a fire somewhere inside her. She looked determined, and I had a feeling this wasn’t going to go off like Liam was planning. I knew a scheming omega when I saw one thanks to how often Miles wore that look.

She’d dressed down, not to impress, which was already out of character, or at least what my assumption would be. Omegas generally loved to dress up and catch an alpha’s attention, but she was currently the opposite in an oversized sweatshirt and yoga pants, no makeup, and her hair in a messy bun. But fuck... If she still didn’t look adorable. *Not your omega*, I reminded myself. Not to mention her current situation probably hadn’t endeared her to alphas.

“Ellis.” Liam breathed out my name like I was his savior. There was anger bubbling under the surface, which was completely expected. I knew he was in a bad spot, caught between loyalty and his own future. More than once, he’d mentioned needing to finish school before he could strike out

on his own. I had known long before this how awful and selfish his parents were.

“Liam,” I said, shaking his hand. Then I turned to her. “I’m Ellis... and you are?”

“Briar,” she said. Her voice was soft and sweet, a bit timid. She was a wild card like Miles; I was sure of it. She just wasn’t doing well at the moment.

“I’ll take the bags, Briar,” I offered, gathering up the suitcases she had. From the way she was clinging to the backpack, I knew not to even ask. When a breeze blew past us, I was slammed with the scent of guava and coconut. It was downright mouthwatering, so intense my steps faltered for a moment. It took everything in me to step away from her, busying myself with opening the trunk so I could put her bags inside before rejoining them.

“Be safe, Briar. I love you,” Liam said, sounding like he was in pain. I clapped him on the back before walking to my door.

“Back seats are open and all for you. My omega and I are up front. We’ll give you a minute,” I offered, climbing back inside and closing the door. Clicking the button, I rolled up the window as well.

“Well?” Miles hissed once they couldn’t hear. “What’s she like?”

“Sad, defeated, but she’ll hold her own with us, I think,” I told him honestly. She looked rough, but she also seemed determined, and that instinct would serve her well. I didn’t mention that her scent was heavenly or that I couldn’t stop myself from already wanting to protect her from whatever hell she was living in. Liam had given me the basic rundown—a surprise pregnancy, losing her job, an evil boss, and then her family sending her off to *protect* themselves. Like her pregnancy was some awful scandal instead of their own behavior. Assholes.

When the door opened, Miles’ hand clasped my wrist and frantic eyes turned my way. I didn’t react, knowing that Miles’

issues were about to get worse. He was the most territorial omega I knew, and now he was aware of just how good she smelled. The fight had drained from him as a new kind of tension took over. Yeah... This was going to be interesting.

“Ready?” I asked as I put the car back in drive. Our eyes met in the rearview mirror, and she shook her head, lips pursed in a thin line. It was a look that I recognized. She was holding herself back, from feeling, from crying, from screaming... Which one, I wasn’t sure, but she was doing her best to keep herself on lockdown right now.

We drove off without looking back, the tension in the car tangible enough that I knew this hour drive was about to be pure fucking torture. Even Miles didn’t speak as we merged onto the highway, heading toward Grove City.

“Listen,” she finally said when the city border came into view, its towering buildings and bright lights a harsh contrast to the unoccupied fields around it. “I know you don’t want a pregnant omega, and I would never ask that of an established pack. I’ve got a plan. Can you just take me here? I’ll be out of your hair in no time.” She leaned up and stretched her hand my way, a piece of paper in it. I opened it and frowned at the address. Parker Lane wasn’t on the side of town we lived on, and that meant it wasn’t in the good side of the city. Hell, that was where most of the dirty deals went down, from sleazy bar gambling rings to omega dens. She wasn’t about to sell herself... right? Because over my dead fucking body would I drop her off at any place in that section of town.

“What’s there?” Miles asked bluntly, and I appreciated his lack of filter in that moment.

“A shelter that’s not associated with the damn omega clinics,” she said evenly.

Miles snorted. “I hear that one. They once tried to send me to an omega etiquette training class.” I shook my head at that thought. He would have been kicked out in under five minutes. It only registered after our laughter died down that Miles had lost all of his attitude. *I guess he decided she wasn’t a threat after all.*

“Your brother entrusted you to me, and you want me to just drop you off at this place?”

“Yes, I do. I’m *not* your responsibility,” she said bluntly. There was almost a growl to her voice, the sound small but fierce. Omega growls couldn’t hold a candle to an alpha’s, but it was conveying her feelings clearly enough. “I’m no one’s burden. I’ll figure it out.”

“I agreed to take you in, and you’re far from a burden. Our place is much nicer, that I can promise,” I argued as I gripped the steering wheel to the point that my knuckles turned white. Arguing with omegas wasn’t an easy or smart task, but I wouldn’t let her self-sabotage and put herself in a dangerous situation because of pride.

“And I don’t give a fuck about luxury, Ellis,” she challenged. She muttered something else that was unintelligible, and I heard Miles laugh softly next to me.

“Feisty,” he noted with amusement. “I’m here for that energy.”

“You *are* that energy,” I deadpanned. Okay, so at the moment, I wasn’t quite sure how to handle this. It wasn’t like I was going to traumatize the girl further by borderline abducting her. Maybe I could get her to change her mind. If nothing else, driving past might scare her into agreeing. “Put it into the gps.”

Miles raised his eyebrows as he tapped it into the dashboard screen, which was a good thing since I wasn’t exactly fond of this option either. But I knew the stubbornness of omegas, and this one wasn’t going to give in without a fight. Let her see the seedy buildings and drug dealers on the corners.

“Should I text the others?” he asked quietly. My nod was subtle, but he caught it, picking up his phone and shifting so she couldn’t see. Mine was already in my lap, and I opened the group chat so I could follow along as I navigated through the city.

Miles: Ellis and I picked up a stray omega, the sister of a friend of his. If I know Ellis, she'll be staying with us.

Beckham: Is she okay?

Miles: no

That answer had me biting back a laugh, knowing he was riling them up on purpose. He wasn't wrong, but they'd be picturing worst-case scenarios.

Beckham: Oh god. I'll prepare the guest room.

Graham: Is this wise?

Miles: No. But that won't stop your nephew. It wouldn't stop you either.

Tallon: No. We don't need this kind of drama. Take her to the omega clinic or something. That's why we have them.

Wells: He has a point.

Miles: That's likely not an option. Brace yourselves.

With that, he tossed his phone into the middle console to ignore it, and I did the same. We were now only two minutes out, and she was anxiously tapping her nails on the door. Half of me wondered if she was going to try to run from us, but her suitcases were in the back. My heart rate picked up as we drew closer, everything in my instincts fighting against this awful fucking plan.

As we rolled down the road, the buildings became more broken down, the roads full of holes, and the vibe was getting shadier by the second. Nope. Definitely wasn't going to let her get out of the car.

The GPS guided us down a dead-end street. The shelter stood at the end, covered in graffiti, and half of the windows on the lower levels were broken. Someone had boarded them up as if that would keep thieves and junkies out, but I knew that was a fool's dream. A group of alphas stood on the corner a few buildings down, a pile of empty beer cans at their feet and greedy eyes on my SUV, trying to see who was inside.

“No,” Miles said, glancing back at her. “Are you fucking crazy?”

She glared back. “No, I’m just out of options.” The words were underlaid with the first crack of nerves. She knew this wasn’t the place for her. I just needed to give one more little push.

“We told you we have a place for you. You’ll have your own room with a fucking lock on the door and intact windows,” I pointed out. She swallowed hard and studied the building, eyes slowly raking over it from roof to sidewalk. Then her gaze flickered to the alphas, and she swallowed hard.

“This is why they didn’t show the outside.” She sighed heavily. “But I can’t be a burden on you, and no one is going to hire a pregnant omega. I can lie short-term, but I only have about a month before the whole damn world knows I’m pregnant.”

“We’ll figure it out,” Miles said. “We don’t throw pregnant omegas to the fucking wolves around here.”

“Fine, but I won’t stay forever, just enough to figure out what to do,” she said firmly, like that would change our minds.

This wasn’t a time to argue, but I let my next words slip out anyway. “You’ll stay as long as you need,” I growled, throwing the SUV back in drive and peeling away. Her startled gasp was the only sound as I got the fuck out of this part of town. If I hit a rogue puddle and splashed the creepy assholes, well, that was one-hundred-percent intentional.

It took about thirty minutes to get across town. City nightlife was in full swing, so we had to navigate through a horde of drunken people on the busy streets—one of the downfalls of living just outside of what Grove City called downtown.

The towers were high-end apartments, with outside parking for staff and an underground parking garage for tenants. She didn’t say anything as I navigated to the parking level. She was out of her element now and it was obvious. But

then again, it wasn't every day that you agreed to go live with an established pack.

When I parked, we climbed out, with Miles and I grabbing her bags while she gathered herself. She climbed out a few moments later, her face a mask of tension and concern. I hated that look and despised even more that it was because of me, even if indirectly.

"You live here?" She eyed the cars and then the glass-wall-encased elevator lobby. The floors were a shining black and gold marble, and the security desk was manned by a gentleman in a crisp uniform. Everything, from the plants to the art on the walls, screamed money.

"We do," Miles said easily. "We share the penthouse with some other guys, but we're a family. Everyone there has respect for omegas. You don't have to worry." Her eyes went wide at the mention of the penthouse, but she nodded, still clutching her backpack like a lifeline, and following us into the lobby. We greeted our security man, Stephen, but didn't say anything about our new guest. I'd let Graham handle that aspect since the situation was a bit trickier than simply saying she was with us. Luckily, part of this place was tight security and full guest and tenant profiles, so our reputation with them would buy us some time to be discreet.

"This is our private elevator," I said, gesturing to the far left elevator, its doors gold instead of silver. She remained quiet as the doors closed and the gentle cadence of the elevator music played. Anxiety and fear filled the space, and I wanted to pull her in for a hug, to comfort her, but I knew any gestures like that would only make it worse. We were strangers, and she was alone in the world as far as she knew. This was definitely going to be a hard transition for her. I just hoped she gave us a chance to show her the whole world wasn't against her.

Chapter Four

Briar

How is this my life? That question replayed in my mind as we rode the elevator up to the twenty-second floor.

“It’s going to be fine,” Miles said with a shrug. His scent was intoxicating, a manly mix of wood and leather. It was interesting for an omega. Generally, we all had sweeter scents, no matter the omega’s gender, but it somehow fit the man next to me. “The only one who will be an ass is Tallon, and he’ll likely just give you the silent treatment. I’m not sure he knows more than a few words and phrases, anyway.”

“Sounds delightful,” I mumbled as I hugged my backpack to my chest. It surprised me that he’d protested me going to that shelter. Omegas were territorial, and even male omegas could be downright vicious when it came to keeping unclaimed omegas away from their pack. Yet here he was, giving me insight into their dynamic.

But how could I argue now that I was seeing the boarded up windows and lack of security? If it was just me, fine. But this was me *and* my baby at stake. I couldn’t take that risk. Especially not with those drunken alphas hanging on the corner, hoping for an omega with a death wish to wander outside.

They didn’t give me any more reassurance as the elevator dinged past floor after floor. When it finally opened, my jaw dropped. I’d expected another fancy lobby, not direct access to their place. Yet here we were, standing in a foyer that likely

cost more than the home I'd grown up in. I was way out of my depth here, and it felt like they could all see it even though I knew that was my insecurity rearing its head after the awful day I'd had.

Four men were standing in what I assumed were supposed to be casual positions around the room, like they just happened to be there, totally not waiting for our arrival. Ellis' snort confirmed their complete lack of nonchalance.

"Smooth, guys. This is Briar. She's staying here for a bit." His words held a finality that led to no argument from the others, and I took the moment of silence to begin studying them.

One man leaned against the wall of windows, his leather jacket bulging around his muscled arms. Tattoos covered his hands and neck, the images a mix of knives, skulls, anything to make him look impossibly more intimidating. He glared at me with icy blue eyes. His hair was buzzed close to his head, and he would easily be considered handsome... if he weren't so fucking scary, anyway. There was true anger behind the stare, and I swallowed hard before glancing at the next guy.

This one was a shirtless mountain of a man, leaning against the kitchen counter in open view. The space was open concept, with kitchen and living room all in one area so they could all see the elevator doors we'd just stepped through.

"That's Wells," Miles explained. "The pissed off one is Tallon if you hadn't guessed that one already."

Wells looked pissed as he sipped his drink. It was amber-colored, so I assumed it was whiskey or something else to help deal with the insanity of a strange pregnant omega joining them. He wasn't as volatile as Tallon, though from the frown on his handsome face, he wasn't pleased either. As my eyes took him in, I noticed how tightly his jeans hugged him, wishing he'd turn so I could see his ass better.

No, that's not why you're here.

Forcing myself to look away, I watched a sweet-looking man push away from the back of the sectional to approach us,

a smile on his face.

“I’m Beckham,” the other omega greeted. “I got your room ready.” My instinct told me to be careful, to not let them assume that I wanted to encroach on their pack, but this man only radiated genuine kindness.

“Thanks,” I said, trying my best to return the smile. Everything about him screamed ‘safe,’ and I was glad I had another friendly face here. He seemed the type to wear his heart and feelings on his sleeve, and I needed that to help me face the rest of his pack.

His expressive hazel eyes were speckled with gold, and right now they were telling me he was just as curious about me as I was about him. His dark brown hair was perfectly styled, and although his outfit was casual, it was dressier than the others—a sweater and slacks. Even his scent was inviting, a soft sandalwood that wrapped around me, soothing my tightly wound nerves.

“Lead the way, Beck,” Ellis told him, gesturing toward a hallway. The omega obeyed, walking right past the last pack member who had now taken a seat. The older man had a thick beard that was well taken care of, brushed and trimmed to perfection. His hair was combed back, not hiding the hint of gray mixed in with the light brown. He wasn’t significantly older, more like early forties if I had to guess. His dark brown eyes watched me closely, his face giving nothing away. From the tucked in white button-up shirt and dress pants, he looked like a businessman, but it was just a guess. Truthfully, I knew nothing about the men I was staying with, something I refused to think about right now. If it weren’t for Liam’s trust in them, I’d never consider this. His word was enough to put the worst of my worries off.

“Breathe,” Beckham said softly as he fell into step next to me instead of leading. “They can look intimidating, but you’ll do just fine. They’re safe.” He said it like he truly meant it, and that did help ease some of my uneasiness.

“Thanks,” I said, a small but genuine smile on my lips this time.

“Of course,” he said simply, stopping at the end of the hall. “I got the guest room prepared for you. It has everything you should need for now, except clothes, and there’s an attached bathroom. I also put some snacks out in case you get hungry but aren’t comfortable enough to head to the kitchen.”

“Thank you,” I said again, fighting back tears at his thoughtfulness. The fact that this stranger cared more about me than my own family was hitting me hard. Taking a few deep breaths to calm myself, I nodded. He gave a sympathetic smile before turning to the closed door and pushing it open.

I stepped in after him but didn’t take the time to inspect my new surroundings since Ellis followed us in, setting my suitcases inside the door. He gave me a tight smile before walking away without another word. Beckham chuckled and shook his head, seemingly completely unsurprised.

“I think he’s trying to give you space,” he explained. “Can I see your phone?”

Digging it out of my pocket, I handed it over. He pulled open contacts and added all of their names and numbers in.

“Just in case, there’s all of us, though I wouldn’t call Tallon or Wells for any pep talks just yet,” he joked.

“No worries.” I laughed in surprise at the teasing. “Definitely didn’t get warm and fuzzy vibes there.”

He grinned and headed toward the door. “No, but like I said, we’re all safe. Call me if you need anything.” He gently closed the door behind him, leaving me in a harsh silence I wasn’t quite prepared for.

Now that I was alone, I glanced around the room. It was just as nice as the rest of what I’d seen so far, though I’d barely given the living room much of a glance, with so many other things to see... like all the men standing around.

The king-sized bed was topped with fluffy gray and blue pillows and a blanket that was calling my name. It had a swirling metal headboard that probably cost more than everything I owned, not that I had much in the way of possessions anymore.

The carpet in the room was plush, like I was walking on a cloud. Even the artwork was nice, pretty and neutral, giving the room cozy but expensive vibes.

Yup, definitely in over my head.

There was a small counter with cabinets underneath and a mini fridge settled alongside it. On top was the basket of snacks Beckham had mentioned, way more than even a pregnant lady could eat.

With a sigh, I sat on the small window seat, glancing out at the city. Rain had started to fall, casting gray clouds over the shining lights, but it was still a gorgeous view. If someone had told me I'd end this awful fucking nightmare in a penthouse with a pack of very hot men, I'd have thought they'd lost it. Yet here I was, stuck in the middle of this pack with no clear plans for my future.

What I'd told them was true. I had one month before all hope would be lost for my job prospects. I wanted to earn my keep and contribute my fair share, but it was going to be damn near impossible. Online jobs would be my best bet, but my skills were in the corporate world and politics, not exactly the prerequisites for online marketing jobs. Not to mention, I even have a completed internship on my resume. Hell, even bringing up my unfinished work with the mayor could be a major risk. Vivian had said if I left, it would be over, but who knew how fucking far she would go?

Sighing in defeat, I decided to let that be tomorrow's problem. I'd had enough of dealing with the heavier things for tonight. I finally unzipped the backpack Liam gave me, dumping it on the bed. I gasped as I looked at its contents. Three wads of cash were bundled in rubber bands, thick enough I knew it wasn't a small amount. There was also a knife that folded in on itself and pepper spray, two things I definitely would have needed if I'd stayed at the omega shelter. The rest were some random things like his lucky keychain, a coin with a hole in the middle that we'd gotten at some tourist trip on our last family vacation. It was from years ago, but it made me smile that he'd kept it and had sent it with me. I packed it back up, both grateful for the cash and totally

unsure what to do with it. Finally, I noticed a weight in the front pocket, finding a leather journal there when I unzipped it. Flipping it open, I nearly ugly sobbed at the words on the page.

Dear niece or nephew,

Today was hard, but I've never seen your mom act so strong. You're going to be such a good thing for her and your uncle Liam will be right there with you guys when the time comes. Just know that no matter what you hear about your mom's past, you were the bright spot among it all.

We already love you,

Uncle Liam

“Damn it, Liam,” I grumbled through my tears, closing it and setting it on the nightstand. Of course he'd do something so sweet, giving me a way to connect with the baby and not blame it. He wasn't usually the sappy type, so I knew this was his way of giving me the space to truly accept it and myself.

Not wanting to live out of suitcases, I opened the closet door to find an empty walk-in. Shelves lined one wall, with the other featuring a bar for hanging clothes. It took about five minutes to put my meager belongings away, but once it was done and my suitcases were tucked away in the back, I felt better. Even though I didn't know the guys or truly trust them yet, I knew Ellis meant what he said when he told me I'd be staying as long as I needed. They'd already proven they wouldn't throw me out on the streets, and maybe it was just desperation for kindness after what had happened today, but I was oddly happy about that. It was nice to know I wasn't alone, that I wouldn't be facing this with my eye on nothing but survival.

Almost unconsciously, my hand rested on my stomach as if I could protect the little bean from whatever crazy would be coming our way in the upcoming weeks.

Before I could brush my teeth and climb into bed, a soft knock sounded on the door. Taking a deep breath, I walked over to open it, a bit shocked to see Miles on the other side.

“Just wanted to check in on you,” he said with a shrug, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck like he was the one out of his element.

“I’m... surviving?” I said with an awkward laugh. “I can’t say good.”

“Fair,” he agreed. “Want me to give you the rundown of this place?” There was a conspiratorial grin in his eyes, and I couldn’t help but let him in, too curious to send him off. I might also be craving the presence of someone who wouldn’t reject me like my family had.

Now that we were alone, the scent I’d noticed earlier wrapped around me, and the earthy notes of vetiver were soothing. Scents weren’t something I noticed often since I’d always lived and worked around so many people. They all kind of blended together, so one’s individual scent mark had never really been this distinct. But his... I found myself wanting to lean in and take deep, greedy lungfuls.

“So I know you saw the guys. Ellis seems in charge, but Graham, his uncle, is the one who runs this show. He owns the company we all work for, which pays for all this.” He gestured around the room before glancing back at me. “Honestly, I’ll put in a word for him to see if you can fit in there. We’d hire you pregnant.”

I laughed bitterly at that. “You’d be about the only one.”

“We’re different,” he said like that made sense, but he was already off on another tangent, so I didn’t interrupt. “Ellis is our protective one, though Wells is too in his own way. Ellis is just much more personable and charming, which is likely thanks to his rich parents making sure he always presented his best. Tallon is Tallon. He and Beckham are brothers, believe it or not.” My jaw dropped at that, and he chuckled. “They’re fucking night and day, but you’ll notice it now that I pointed it out. The main thing is to fire right back at Tallon, or he’ll never stop.”

“That I can handle,” I said. I’d had my fair share of assholes in the mayor’s office, so I could handle one jerk with

a superiority complex. And after my last twenty-four hours, it might be cathartic.

“Good. That pretty much covers everything. Just don’t touch Graham’s top-shelf whiskey without permission, don’t use Well’s coffee maker, and you’ll be fine.”

“Why are you being so nice?” I asked, glancing at my hands instead of the omega next to me. “You didn’t seem happy when you picked me up. And I get it, trust me—an unmated, pregnant omega in your space. I know this isn’t my pack, and I won’t mess up your relationships.”

He sighed. “Damn, jumping right in to call me out, huh? Honestly, I don’t know. I hated the idea of picking up a stranger and figured the whole other alpha’s baby thing would be an issue, but from what I’ve seen in our short time so far, you’re focused on the baby. That, I can respect.” He gave me a look that said not to fuck with his trust.

“I don’t need that kind of complication right now. I need to survive and make sure my baby will be safe,” I admitted. He nodded like he understood where I was coming from, and as another omega, he probably did. They might not have babies like their female counterpart, but omega men had just as many alphas trying to take advantage or underestimate them.

“Well, we’re different here. Get some sleep,” he said gently, giving my thigh a squeeze before getting up to walk out. My traitorous mind was already wishing I could beg him to stay, but I had no choice but to watch him leave.

Time to pull up the big girl panties. You’re a mom now, Briar. No one is going to hold your hand through this.

But damn if I didn’t wish that someone would.

Even if just for tonight.

Chapter Five

Briar

Waking up in the new room was strange, and it took a few seconds to remember everything from the day before. The sting of it was sharper now, burrowing into my chest with a pain I couldn't put into words. They'd betrayed me. For money. Of all the things I thought would happen when I woke up yesterday, that would never have crossed my mind. From the pregnancy news, to Vivian snooping in my desk, to the encounter at home, none of it should have happened. They weren't great parents, we were always forcibly molded to fit their outlook and reputation, but I had assumed there was at least a semblance of compassion somewhere in those shriveled hearts. *Silly me.*

Grabbing my phone from the bedside table, I checked my notifications, hoping against all odds it was some kind of elaborate fucking joke, but nope! In fact, in my inbox was confirmation from the doctor and more contacts for help if I needed them.

Liam: Tell me you're okay?

Liam: I finally got an answer from Ellis. Chin up. You've got this.

Me: I'll be fine.

Liam: Don't sugarcoat it for me. I know how fucked up this is. When I get out from under this, it's you and me, sis... and my adorable niece or nephew.

His text back was immediate, and I snorted at his response, but it quickly turned into a sob. My vision blurred with tears, and I let my phone fall onto the bed as I curled into a ball, letting myself have this moment.

Even though Liam's reassurances were well intended, I refused to give them a second thought. He deserved to find his own pack without his little sister and her baggage trailing along behind. It might be too late for me, but he still had a chance at a normal life, and despite everything I was currently dealing with, I wanted that for him.

Not wanting to wallow or sit around like I was a scared little mouse, I pulled myself together and went into the ensuite. It was as nice as the rest of the house, full of shining tiles and gleaming fixtures. Cleaning this place couldn't be easy, but maybe if I took over, it would give me something to do aside from applying to jobs and fielding rejection letters. If I was going to stay for even a short time, I couldn't become a burden. My mind was blindly grasping at ways to make this work. I needed to assuage some of the guilt I was feeling thanks to this entire situation and my knights in shining armor. They were being kind despite me being thrown into their lives, disrupting their usual routines.

My hand hesitated over the knob, but the prospect of coffee and food urged me forward. I might have to drink decaf, but maybe I could trick my mind all the same.

Of course, despite everything being gleaming and new, the door hinge was squeaky. I sighed, already defeated. So much for subtlety.

"Stop tiptoeing around. You won't make it a week here with that timidness," a voice called out—the older man who'd been hanging around the kitchen when I'd arrived. Graham, I thought they'd called him.

"Sorry, I didn't want to be more of a bother than I already am," I said, going for honesty over pretty, honeyed words. He smiled at that, raising his eyebrows a bit as he pushed a muffin toward me.

Graham shrugged. “You’re not a bother. We help out our friends and family, and Liam is a good man.” I hadn’t considered that as Ellis’ uncle, he’d know my brother, but it made sense.

“He’s about the only one in my family worth a damn,” I said bitterly, blinking rapidly to fight off any rising emotion. They didn’t deserve an ounce of it. Not from me.

“That may be,” he agreed easily. He was so close now that his scent filled the space between us, a mix of spiced rum and cloves. It was downright delicious, and just as smooth as he was. “But now you’re in a different world, so how are you going to handle it?” He followed his question by holding up two pitchers, one filled with cold water and another of orange juice.

“Orange, please,” I answered before looking down. “I can help with whatever you need here. I’m not a freeloader. I can clean and run errands, I’d offer to cook, but that wouldn’t end well for any of us.”

“We don’t need a maid. We have one. We’d never ask you to do that,” he said with a bit of anger in his tone that had me tensing.

“Sorry,” I muttered, unsure what I was actually apologizing for.

“Who told you that in order to have value you had to lower your standards? I know damn well you didn’t clean for those people you called family,” he challenged. Instead of being put out by his directness, I was actually kind of enjoying it. It gave me something to anchor myself to, forcing my mind to think about his question rather than running off wherever it wanted to go.

“My parents,” I answered. “I may not have been a maid, but even omegas earned their keep. My mother had a lot of strong opinions about what an omega should be doing, and those definitely included the running and maintenance of the family home.”

“Well, I think we’ve established your parents are shit, so let me get one thing straight here. You were *invited*. That means you’re a guest here. You’re not a burden, and you won’t be ‘earning your keep.’ If you want to help out, fine, but it’s not because you have to or face the risk of being tossed out on your ass.”

“How are you going to hit her with that wisdom bullshit first thing in the morning? Though you aren’t wrong about Tallon,” Ellis interjected as he walked in. Graham glared at him, though it was definitely playful, and I bit back a laugh. I didn’t know what to say, and I wasn’t about to step in between the brewing storm.

“Look, I’m not being an ass. I’m just being honest,” Graham said, offering me a wink before walking out. Ellis poured himself a cup of coffee then joined me at the counter.

“I guess you’re allowed to touch the coffee maker?” I joked, hoping to get his attention off of me and the conversation he’d overheard.

He chuckled into his mug, eyes glinting with humor. “This one, yes. Wells has *that* contraption.” He gestured to the huge machine near the fridge. “I’m fairly sure you need a degree to work that one.”

That had a grin spreading over my face. “You’re not wrong.”

“He means well, by the way, but he was wrong about one thing. You’re not just a guest. That room is yours for as long as you need,” he said. It was a genuine statement, but it still didn’t feel right to me.

“I’m not going to take advantage of your kindness,” I said simply. “I’ll be applying for jobs, figuring stuff out. A baby can’t mean the end of the line for me.”

“Well, maybe you should have kept your legs closed, omega,” Tallon’s bitter voice chimed in. The words stunned me enough that I froze, glaring up at him as I tried to figure out how to respond. Anger quickly won out, and my energy surged, running hot and ready.

“Oh, so we’re doing this already?” I asked, my tone full of venom. “You see me once and know my whole fucking life story?!”

“No, we fucking aren’t,” Ellis growled. “What the fuck is wrong with you? Get out until you learn some fucking respect.” Ellis’ voice held every bit of alpha command he possessed, so much so that I started to move as well. Before I could get anywhere, his hand locked onto my wrist to keep me in place. “Not you.”

Tallon let out a low growl as he stalked toward the elevator, and the doors closed behind him with a loud thud that made me jump.

In the silence that followed, I closed my eyes, the shame and humiliation I felt after the assault flooding back into me. I could scent it in the air, and from the low rumble coming from Ellis, he could too.

“What the hell just happened?” Beckham asked as he came rushing into the room. I couldn’t open my eyes or speak yet, so Ellis answered for me.

“Tallon told her she wouldn’t be here if she’d kept her legs closed,” he summarized, and I respected his choice not to sugarcoat the situation or lie even though it hurt to hear the words repeated again. Beckham’s answering gasp finally had me opening my eyes, startling backward when I found his face right in front of mine. Sandalwood surrounded me as he invaded my personal space, but the ferocity on his face didn’t scare me. I was taken aback that the omega who’d been so sweet last night had that spirit just waiting to come out, but it was also flattering. He felt that way on my behalf, and he didn’t even know me.

“Do not listen to that. I don’t know the circumstances of what happened, but I *do* know you owe no one an explanation,” he said fiercely before taking my hand. “Now, come on. If anyone needs us, we’ll be in my room for movie day. If Tallon comes back, punch him in the dick for me.” He pulled me up and grabbed the remains of my breakfast before leading me down the hall.

Beckham's room smelled like pure heaven. The sweet underlying omega scent, one that always reminded me of maple, mixed with sandalwood surrounded me as he dragged me to his small couch, sitting me down then throwing a fuzzy blanket and pillows my way.

This was the first time I'd been in another omega's space like this. My parents had kept us fairly busy, so it wasn't like I'd spent time among friends growing up, and adult omegas were different. It was huge that he was letting me in here. There were signs of his nesting, from the extra blankets curled up on the window seat to the random clothes piled together, and I envied that he had the space and comfort to have a nest.

One day.

I watched him work at arranging everything just right for me. His muscles shifted as he shoved the coffee table out of the way, and I found myself almost drooling. He wasn't as built as Wells, but he was strong and lean. I'd never given much thought to what my 'usual' type was, but I mainly found myself drawn to bigger packs like this. Something about the mix of muscled alphas, lean betas, and sweet omegas called to me. I wanted a big family.

They're not yours, Briar.

But now that I was faced with Beckham by himself, I couldn't help but watch as he moved around. Between the view of his ass as he bent over to the look of adorable concentration on his face, I knew it would be harder to keep my distance than I thought.

Stop. He's just being nice. No thirsting over your new roommates, Briar!

Needing a distraction, I glanced around his room. It was clean to a fault, with barely any signs of someone living here, yet it was oddly homey. The walls were a soft blue and his furniture varying shades of black and gray. There were art pieces scattered around, little touches that all seemed to coordinate or somehow work together, and I wondered if the proper omega was a secret artist.

“What’s your style?” he asked as he settled in next to me, setting my food down and snatching up the remote. His TV was huge, mounted to the wall over a TV stand that held a mix of gaming systems. I hadn’t pegged Beckham as a gamer, but I loved it. This omega was full of surprises, and I was already completely comfortable around him. He was a breath of fresh air.

“I’m good with anything,” I tried, but he leveled me with a stern look until I answered more honestly. “Okay, I’m a fan of crime shows or ghost shows. Anything supernatural or horror is right up my alley.”

“Oh! Have you seen the new show that just came out?” he asked excitedly, pulling it up to show me. The overview wasn’t familiar, but when I read the synopsis, I was instantly hooked.

“I haven’t. Life’s been a bit crazy lately,” I admitted. “But it sounds amazing.”

“You know it’s going to be creepy when it’s urban legends and folklore,” he said excitedly.

“You don’t have to change today’s plans for me,” I said as he hit play. The idea of him shirking his responsibilities or clearing his schedule made me feel guilty.

“Briar,” he said softly, “you can exist here. None of us would do anything we don’t want to, so don’t worry about my plans or comfort.”

“Okay, okay,” I finally agreed. They were making that aspect very clear today, that I was allowed to exist here, that I wasn’t a problem... all except Tallon. But my worry about how to deal with the moody beta seemed far away as we hid away in this little nest of comfort.

BECKHAM

I simultaneously cursed Ellis and Tallon the entire time we watched the first two episodes—Ellis for bringing her here and her being so damn sweet. And Tallon for being such a fucking dick. He was always a bit rough around the edges, but the way he'd attacked her was personal, and I hoped he was kicking himself in the ass for it now. Even if his ex was an awful person, that didn't mean that every new woman who came into his life would be.

There was just something about the tropical-scented omega next to me that I couldn't stay away from. It wasn't about my constant need to help people, either. It was her magnetism. Her bright green eyes drew me to her, their expressive depths letting me see her true feelings and intentions. I liked when what you saw was what you got; I'd been deceived by enough people to appreciate that quality.

She wasn't my usual type. Hell, she was an omega *and* a woman. I was bisexual, but my preference had always leaned much more strongly toward men. But Briar intrigued me, and I wanted to get to know her better, see if there was more than just the initial attraction I was feeling.

“What's wrong?” she asked. It wasn't until she started shifting uncomfortably in her seat that I realized I'd been staring.

I winced, cheeks flaring with heat. “Sorry. You smell really good... like guava and coconut.”

“Really?” she asked. Curiosity sparkled in her emerald eyes, and she laughed, the small sound even more appealing than her scent. “I was thinking the same thing about your room. I don't usually notice scents much. I worked in an office building surrounded by too many people to make sense of them, really. Got more used to just blocking it out so I could focus. Yours is nice though, sweet and earthy. And your room is so cozy. I feel safe here.”

I felt my cheeks heat, so I went for the easy subject to focus on—her job. “What’d you do at the office?” I wanted to know everything about her. Tallon would scowl if he saw me, telling me I was being too eager and pushy, but she didn’t appear put off by my enthusiasm.

“I was just an intern at the mayor’s office. My degree is in marketing, and I double minored in community outreach and graphic design. It’s an odd combo, I know,” she said, and I started to get the faintest hint of a change in her scent. Embarrassed? Why would she be embarrassed about that?

“No, I could see how it’d all come in handy, especially in an office like that,” I countered. She looked surprised but pleased, which in turn pleased me. Jesus, I was really getting attached super quickly.

When I found Graham and Ellis, it was just as quickly, and that was driving me crazy. They were the only two who’d gotten under my skin like that. Making the adjustment of sharing them with another omega hadn’t been easy, but Miles and I had come a long way from those first encounters that were timid and shaky at best. We’d found out fairly easily that we were very different types of omegas, and we were making ourselves miserable for no reason.

“It was supposed to be my ticket to prove myself, to earn a living without relying on anyone else,” she said vehemently before softening with a sigh. Her hands fell to her stomach as that fire seeped out of her. “To show my mom an omega’s purpose isn’t just to pop out kids and obey. I guess I failed at least part of that.” She patted her stomach.

“That’s not a fail,” I said, and I truly believed it. Of course, I was a little bit biased, but I thought that omegas, regardless of gender, could do whatever they set their minds to. It was a shame that she’d had the opposite example in her life, but if I could encourage her at all now, change even the slightest nuance in how she saw her situation, I would.

“I’m starting to see that,” she sighed.

“Have you talked to Graham about a job?” I asked, not wanting her to dwell on her worries.

“No,” she admitted. “If I’m not staying, then I figured it wouldn’t be worth his time.”

“Where do you plan to go?” I asked. Surely not that omega shelter. Ellis and Miles had got us all up to speed after she went to bed, and I wanted this sweet omega nowhere that would leave her jaded and even more broken.

She shrugged. “I don’t know. First step, a job that won’t fire me. Second step, housing. Third step, figure out how to be a fucking parent.”

“There are books for that,” I said with a small laugh. “And I bet every one of them won’t help a damn bit. I’ve heard parenting tends to throw all your preconceived notions out of the window.”

“You’ve had kids?” she asked. The surprise in her tone had me chuckling.

“Nope,” I said, “but I have four nieces, and let me tell you, that house is *pure* chaos.”

She laughed and gave me a side-eyed glance that was much more adorable than it had any right to be. “Don’t you wish that kind of crazy on me, Beckham.”

“Beck,” I corrected. “And don’t worry, that’s probably all my sister’s doing. She’s the definition of hot mess, but she’s a great mom.”

“I hear sleep deprivation can do that to a girl,” she countered with a smirk. “Trust me, you guys want me out of your hair before this baby comes. Late-night crying fits won’t help anyone. I can see Wells and Tallon now, forming an alliance at the very first hint of a cry.”

“You’d be surprised,” I said, knowing not a single one of us would care when it came down to it. Especially once they got over themselves. Tallon needed to deal with his past. She wasn’t his ex, and at this rate she never would be anything to him. Wells was just looking out for us, so he didn’t really hold any anger toward her.

Ellis was keeping his distance, which wasn’t too surprising. He wouldn’t want to overstep her faith in him. His

job was to keep her safe, not to hit on her, and he'd take that charge from his friend very seriously. Miles was doing better than I anticipated, giving her a chance to adjust and being friendly. Graham... Well, he was Graham. He was fulfilling his usual protective/provider role and feeling her out. He wouldn't show anything to the rest of us until he was ready.

However, that wasn't what we needed to be thinking about. For now, I wanted to be friends and enjoy a lazy afternoon with my new roommate. "Let's order some lunch."

Briar nodded enthusiastically, her stomach growling as I opened up my app to get started on that. I definitely didn't breathe in her scent... and I *definitely* didn't notice my heart rate spiking at her close proximity.

She was just a roommate, after all...

Chapter Six

Briar

My eyes burned as I stared at the screen, scrolling through endless marketing jobs. The issue was that most of them wanted in-person interviews and consultations, meaning they'd take one look at me and rescind their offers.

"This is useless," I groaned, banging my head against the table. It wasn't hard, but Beck still made a noise and rushed around to put his hand between me and the tabletop.

"Jesus, woman," he grunted, and a hint of worry hit me, mixing with his sandalwood.

Miles and Beckham had been spending the last few hours scouring website after website with me. One of us would call out a job that might work, then something would fucking ruin it. From in-person events, to insane requirements, to omegas requiring their alpha's approval to even apply. Beckham had sweetly pointed out that I could have gotten the approval from any of their alphas, or Ellis at least, but I'd refused on principle alone. Clearly, Miles agreed because I'd earned a fist bump.

I'd only been here a few days, and we'd already settled into a routine. Or at least the omegas and I had. Wells and Tallon hadn't shown their faces much, but the others assured me that was just Wells' style, and Tallon... well, yeah. That was still going about as well as it had started. Ellis had kept his distance as well, but he at least showed his face at meals.

He was friendly, almost formally so. Graham was acting like me being here was no big deal, and he tried to make sure I was comfortable. It was nice having a protector on my side, someone outside of Liam.

“What is it that you guys do?” I asked after another round of us silently scrolling through sites. They were amazing for helping me in the first place, but I worried that they were wasting time here when they had their own jobs.

“The company is a management firm. Graham and Ellis find our clients. They assess what they need, then they fix it, so we usually help them improve their marketing, management, and security systems. The problem could be small things like overpriced office equipment or big things like needing to rethink their entire HR teams,” Beckham summarized. “My focus is on market research. Miles helps with accounting and merchandise.”

“That’s cool. I didn’t even know that was a thing,” I admitted. “So you’re working behind the scenes to make these companies thrive?”

“Exactly. The nice thing is that we do it for companies of all sizes, so it’s not like we’re just giving corporate America a boost to further monopolize markets. Graham has morals, so he’s turned shady companies down on principle alone,” Miles said proudly. I loved that he held his alpha with such respect.

Speak of the devil. As if summoned, Graham came through the main room in some kind of daze.

“What’s going on here?” He asked as he walked by, rubbing at his temples like he was fighting off a migraine. Concern dipped down the corner of my lips as I watched him squint and blink against the light.

Without thinking, I went over to him, gently settling my hands on the sides of his face.

“Do you mind if I help?” He raised one eyebrow in confusion, and I smirked. “My brother got migraines at least once a week from studying. Med school is a bitch.”

He snorted at my words but nodded. My fingers reached for his temples, exerting just the right amount of pressure before I began to massage in slow circles. Just like Liam always had, his body slowly relaxed, tension draining from him limb by limb until he swayed on his feet, needing to grip the counter for support. I continued on for two minutes, breathing in his spiced rum scent before returning to my seat like nothing had happened. He silently sagged against the counter for a moment while Beckham and Miles gave me curious glances that spoke more than any words could have.

“Damn,” Graham finally said with a relieved sigh. “I don’t know what kind of witchcraft you possess, omega, but that was impressive.” He rolled out his shoulders and gave me a smirk that made my breath catch in my throat. I’d thought he was handsome before, but seeing him like this, relaxed and a bit disheveled, that gray scruff covering his chin and his eyes studying me with a bit of awe, was a whole new level.

Not your pack.

The familiar mantra played in my head, so I forced myself to look away and focus back on my own screen.

“What are you guys working on?” he asked again, his voice gentle this time.

Miles glanced up at his alpha. “Seeing if we can find her an online position.”

Graham frowned. “You’re a stubborn one, aren’t you?”

“It’s like you haven’t met sassy omegas before.” Miles grinned mischievously, his blue eyes sparkling.

“Don’t make me spank your ass, Miles. I know how to torture you,” he warned. There was heat behind it, and fuck... If my pussy didn’t throb in anticipation, wishing I could be a fly on the wall. They all stiffened, and I realized that I wasn’t keeping my thoughts to myself. Shit.

“Well, it seems someone doesn’t mind that idea,” Graham noted, his voice a bit huskier now.

Temporary hookups will just end in pain, I reminded myself. A blush crept over my neck and cheeks, and I took

measured breaths until I could get the two of them out of my head and settle my scent.

The sound of a slamming door cut off the awkward moment stretching out between us, and I'd never been more thankful for the scowling mountain of a man walking into the room. This time, he had a shirt on, stretched to its limits by his huge muscles.

“What the hell are you up to?” Wells accused, eyes on Miles. He hadn't lost his smirk yet, a dead giveaway he was ready to cause trouble.

“Nothing!” Miles defended. “I'm merely helping our new roommate here find an online marketing position.”

“It's proving harder than we expected,” Beckham admitted. “You forget the fucked up rules these big companies have when you've been off the job market for a while.” He was frowning seriously enough that I reached out, giving his hand a reassuring squeeze. Wells made a noise, and I jumped, tucking my hands in my lap.

“Sorry,” I mumbled. Everything in me wanted to go hide in my room again, but I refused to let myself. This timid side wasn't me, and I didn't know why I was acting like this. Could pregnancy hormones give you a personality change, or was this residual issues from being exiled by my family?

“Hey, don't apologize,” Beckham said. I gave him a small smile before a round of intense whispers came from the kitchen where Graham was hissing at Wells. After a few seconds, Wells grunted and walked away, mumbling about trouble under his breath.

“Okay, now that he's made it nice and awkward,” Graham deadpanned. “Let's get down to the real issue. If you can't find any opportunities that work for you, start your own.”

“I can't just start my own,” I argued, already feeling more alive. For some reason, the way Graham spoke so matter-of-factly, like the world was just that easy, brought out the fight in me. I wasn't disrespectful about it, just a bit cynical. Who fucking wouldn't be? I'd dedicated nearly a year of my life

and way more hours than I should have to the mayor's office and look where it had gotten me.

“Of course you can,” he said evenly. That was all he said as he poured a glass of wine for himself and came to the table. When his eyes finally settled on me, he sat back and studied me in tense silence for a few beats. I swore I didn't know that someone could build sexual tension just by staring silently, but here we were. In the span of a few seconds, he'd reduced me to just another omega ready to preen under an alpha's attention. It took everything in me to keep my neutral mask in place. “You did your own pitches for your former job, right? Start with a portfolio, figure out your freelance name, then set up the website. If you handle the images, Miles is great at organizing websites. I'll gather what you need for the legal side of it if you choose to go this route.”

My mind spun with all the information he was throwing out there. It sounded so intimidating, but choosing my own jobs, working whatever hours I needed... That part sounded like heaven, especially as I eased into the next few weeks. From what I'd heard, morning sickness and fatigue would be hitting me hard soon.

“Breathe, Briar. One thing at a time,” Beckham said, scooting his chair around to my side. “Show me what you've got for a portfolio.”

It was nice to have a single task to focus on. I'd kept all of my work for my resume, so it was only a few clicks into a folder before my images popped up, compilations of marketing gimmicks, the mayoral campaign, and a few logos and designs I had done as samples, not for actual companies.

“This is good,” Beckham said, perking up even more as he clicked through them. Once the ball was rolling, Miles and Beckham were all in, asking questions and using what I had to create a professional page. It was impressive how well we worked together, especially since we were still practically strangers.

“We'll take the next few days to research rates for projects, but your base is done,” Miles said proudly. When his gaze

flickered to mine, he frowned. “And you need to go take a nap. You look exhausted.”

“It hit me all of the sudden,” I agreed, yawning around the words.

“That’s probably because you’re pregnant,” Beckham pointed out as he shooed me from the room. Without argument, I zombie walked to my room, barely reaching my bed before I fell asleep.

Wells

GRAHAM’S WORDS kept replaying in my head until I was ready to slam my fist into the wall. Knowing it wouldn’t stop, I stalked out of my room, just managing to stop myself from slamming the door since it was well after eleven. Most of the apartment was asleep or winding down by now.

I took the elevator down to the floor beneath ours, each ticking second making my tension rise and my fists clench tighter.

‘She’s been through enough. Don’t make it worse.’

How the fuck would Graham know what she’d been through before coming to us? Yeah, it sucked that her family kicked her out, but was it really the end of the fucking world? No. If there was more to the story though...

But that underlying sadness she’d been carrying around for a few days must have been affecting us all. Everyone was somber, walking around like they were waiting for the other shoe to drop. I hated the change.

The moment the elevator slid open, I stalked down the hall to the gym. I didn’t stop long enough to look around, my eyes homing in on the red punching bags. Stopping at the first, I cocked my fist back and swung. My hand made contact with a loud thud, my breath huffing out in a grunt. Over and over, I rained hits on the bag until my body was covered in a sheen of

sweat, my mind and body calmed to a blissful state of numbness.

When my body started aching, muscles shaking and exhausted, I finally stepped away. I walked two laps to calm my racing heart before settling on a bench next to the clean towels, dabbing at my sweaty skin.

I'd been down here every night for a few days. I was pissed that they'd kicked Tallon out until Graham explained the situation, and now I was angry at Tallon for having his head too far up his own ass to handle this. The man was quick to accuse and slow to trust, and it continuously got him in trouble.

Letting out a groan of frustration, I pulled my phone from my pocket and opened up our text thread.

Wells: Where the fuck are you?

Tallon: I just got a hotel room for a few days. No big deal. I'll be back eventually.

Wells: No. You'll come back tomorrow.

Tallon: Like fuck I will. I'm not apologizing for not trusting a fucking stranger who managed to get herself into this situation.

Wells: You don't know her story. Is this really about her?

Tallon: Fuck off. I don't need a therapist.

Wells: You really do, asshole.

Tallon: This isn't about Maggie.

Wells: Good, because she's gone, and you're better off. You'll have to get that through that thick fucking skull of yours if you want to move on and live your life.

Tallon: How shady is she?

Wells: Nice subject change. But she's alright. Sad but tries to hide it. They helped her set up some kind of website for freelance work. She didn't take the easy out and agree to work for Graham.

Tallon: All to drag you guys in. They're manipulative like that.

Wells: And I've got the grumpy reputation...

Tallon: Well, I'm known for being a dick. You get used to it.

The man was impossible, refusing to see how closed off he was being. If I didn't know him, I'd think that was just who he was, but underneath this asshole mask, Tallon was incredibly smart and funny as hell.

Tallon: I'm coming up there. Don't fucking leave.

My eyebrows furrowed as I stared down at the text, confused. The closest hotel was twenty minutes away, so how the hell was he going to get here?

Less than three minutes passed before the door swung open. Just from his look, I knew what he wanted, and my dick immediately hardened at the prospect. Both of us had held on to far too much tension in the last few days and needed a release. Thankfully, that was something we could always find in each other. Tallon was the beta that had a perpetual chip on his shoulder. I liked his fire, and I saw the more vulnerable sides of him that he refused to show anyone else. I liked to think he provided the same safe space for me. We'd been together since this odd pack of ours formed, and I hated to see him cast out like this. I was willing to help him fix it, but getting him to agree would be the real challenge.

"You know you're going to have to ask Beckham for forgiveness," I told him the moment he was close. "Maybe Miles too if you ever want to smooth shit over in our pack."

"I fucking know, okay?" he seethed, chest heaving angrily as he stripped out of his clothes. He handed over a bottle of lube and stared me down in challenge. His cock was already hard, and I didn't need any more invitation. My body was already responding with a thrum of need I couldn't ignore. The intoxicating scent of my beta hit me, and I reached out, roughly grabbing his neck and yanking him forward. I might be gentle with our omegas, but Tallon never wanted gentle. He

needed to be pushed around to truly get his tension out, and I ate up every fucking moment of our volatile passion.

Crushing my lips to his, I took what I wanted, sweeping my tongue into his mouth to taste every inch of him. There was a sharpness on his tongue from alcohol, but I didn't point it out now, not with him releasing those soft whimpers as I roughly gripped his cock, stroking him as I dominated our kiss.

Pulling away, I dropped my clothes in the pile, not giving a fuck if anyone decided to walk in. This was our place, and it was after eleven.

“You going to submit for me, beta?” I barked out the question, my voice harsh and my eyes full of heat. His hackles rose, goosebumps flowing over his skin at my order. “On your knees.” My tattooed beta obeyed, lust filling the air in a fog that had my head spinning and my cock leaking precum. His mouth fell open, and I smirked down at him. Ice blue eyes blinked up at me, begging me to calm his racing thoughts.

Taking a step forward, I ran the tip of my cock over his lips. His pink tongue darted out, licking it up before I slid into his warm mouth. I let out an involuntary groan as he swallowed me down, his throat constricting around me. As I pulled back, he slid his tongue around my dick, teasing me in the way he knew drove me crazy, but this wasn't about my pleasure. This was taking my beta rough and fast like he needed.

I rested my hand on the top of his head before I ruthlessly fucked his mouth. He tried to keep up, gasping for air around my thick cock, eyes streaming as he fought against his gag reflex. For a brief second, I pictured Briar next to him, kneeling at my feet as he did, my beta guiding her through this as they took turns letting me fuck their sweet mouths. I shouldn't be thinking of her like that, but after one look from her green eyes, one breath of her coconut and guava scent, and she was stuck in my head. Sure, I kept up my protests, knowing this likely wouldn't end well, but that didn't stop me from craving the omega I knew I couldn't have.

Before my knot could swell, I stepped back. Tallon tried to regain his composure, taking in lungfuls of air while wiping the saliva from his chin and tears from his face. I grabbed the lube off of the ground and walked over to the closest weight bench.

“Bend over.” The authority in my voice echoed in the gym. He took a shaky breath before moving himself into position for me. His complete submission usually took a bit of work, but he was desperate for it tonight. My hands hungrily ran over his ass, squeezing and teasing him before I poured lube straight into his crack. He groaned as I teased a finger over his hole, easing inside before stretching him properly for me. He might like it rough, but I wouldn’t actually harm the guy, so prep was a must.

When he was panting and gripping the bench for dear life, I slid my four fingers out, wiped them on the towel I’d left nearby, and guided my cock to take their place. His tattooed body shuddered as I slowly pushed inside of him, inch by slow inch, until he’d taken everything I had to offer.

“Fuck,” he groaned. His back was heaving with strained breaths, and in mere moments, he was wiggling against me, silently begging me to move.

“Say it,” I ordered, amusement in the words. He knew damn well I wasn’t taking orders from him, silent or otherwise.

“Please fuck me, Wells,” he begged, voice strained, and that was all I needed. My first thrust had him crying out, and I never let him catch his breath from there, fucking him as ruthlessly as he needed. His fingers clawed at the leather of the workout bench, and sweat beaded along his skin, all signs he was losing his grip on reality and giving in to the blissful peace this brought him.

My hands grabbed his narrow hips as I pounded into his perfectly rounded ass. He felt so fucking good around my cock that my knot was already swelling, pushing my beta to his fucking limits. It was never as easy for them to take our knots

as it was for omegas, but Tallon liked that sweet mix of pleasure and pain.

“So tight,” I groaned as I swelled further. Tallon tried to relax as my thrusts faltered, my knot filling every inch of his ass. It wasn’t as easy for him to take an alpha, but we’d had a fair amount of time to figure out the right strategies for prep. Now that he was used to it, it was still more difficult than it would be for an omega, but he liked to feel every sting or burn. but he felt amazing. I knew that he was enjoying it by the keening cries he was letting out. Claiming bites only truly worked for alphas and their omegas, but I sank my teeth into his flesh, loving the sounds that followed. The marks would heal, but until they did, I would have a reminder of the pieces of his soul that were mine. And, in any case, it was always fun to leave new ones behind.

“Yes,” he breathed out like a prayer as he rolled to the side. A soft smile curled his lips as I fucked my knot into him. Seeing him like this was so fucking sexy. There was just something so damn satisfying about bringing such a force of nature to their knees.

“You’ll come home tonight,” I told him. “And tomorrow you’ll apologize and actually fucking listen. You got it?”

“Yes, alpha.”

Chapter Seven

Briar

“I’ll make a chef of you yet,” Graham said triumphantly as he dropped the sliced chicken into the pan along with the veggies I’d sliced up. He was being far too nice considering my knife cuts looked like a toddler’s art project, but at least it’d taste good.

I watched on in fascination as he added spice after spice without measuring. Knowing me, it’d end up bitter and bland or absolutely inedible, but the smell already coming from his concoction was delicious.

“I think I’ll leave real cooking to you,” I said as I dropped the dishes in the sink and started to wash them. We both froze when the elevator doors clicked open, revealing Tallon and Wells. Even though Graham visibly tensed, he didn’t say anything. The opportunity was open for the beta to start off whatever this confrontation would be.

Tallon looked rough. His pale blue eyes had dark circles underneath them, and he generally seemed beaten down and exhausted.

“Are you okay?” I asked without thinking, my concern getting the better of me. I blamed the hormones, but what else could I do?

The man clearly wasn’t handling this well—me being here, his temporary separation from his pack. Part of me felt guilty for being the reason he’d gotten kicked out, but in truth, it was his own words that had done that, not me. It’d be interesting to

see if he had foot-in-mouth disease or was just a genuine asshole. Since the others had kept him around before I showed up, I hoped that he was simply bad with words.

Both of them froze and looked at me like I'd lost my mind.

"Did you just ask if he's okay?" Graham clarified. He was likely questioning my sanity at this point.

"No offense," I threw at Tallon. "But he looks rough."

"I'm fine." He sighed, taking a bar stool on the far side of the island so he could see both of us. "I wanted to apologize to you. You didn't deserve what I said to you."

"I didn't," I agreed. "You know nothing about me or how this happened to me."

"Well, I think I know how sex and pregnancy works," he defended like I was questioning his intelligence. I'd never met someone so hellbent on expecting the worst in people. The thing was, responses like that often came from true trauma, and that was the only reason I didn't let anger overtake me.

"Obviously," I sighed. "Are you always this intense?"

He winced. "Shit. Sorry again. Yeah, I am."

"It's a real problem," Wells agreed. He sat down next to Tallon, his hand resting on the beta's thigh as he settled in. "Go on." It was the blind leading the blind, with two men who obviously weren't good with words trying to figure out how to fix this.

"I apologized," he insisted, but this time Graham turned around and pointed at him with his wooden spatula.

"That was a shit apology, and you even snapped at her right after! At least tell her why you're being a dick so we can fucking move on. Don't make me spank your ass too, Tallon," he growled. I'd never given older men much thought, but damn, he radiated power and sexual energy. In any other world but this one, I'd be here for it. Now, I didn't have that option.

Tallon didn't speak right away. His eyes were focused on the granite countertop, but I could still make out the tight lines

of fury on his face. Wells squeezed his leg in silent encouragement, but that was as far as he pushed the other man.

“Look, you don’t owe me your life story. I know me being here is temporary. Just don’t assume you know me because of whatever it is that happened to you. Life’s not that simple,” I said firmly. Setting boundaries was one thing I’d had to learn to do while growing up because my mother always lacked them. It had helped with her, sort of, anyway, and it would probably help now. This situation was rocky, but even though I refused to make Tallon tell me something he didn’t want to, I also wouldn’t let him treat me like shit.

Tallon exhaled at my words, and I turned back to the dishes to distract myself. The tension in the kitchen was killing me, but the bitter stench of regret kept me from running away from it.

“My parents were both alphas. As a beta... I was their biggest failure,” Tallon started. His voice was low and almost muffled, so I focused in on him, not wanting to miss a single word. “Everything I did was never good enough. I was too slow at sports, not dominant enough, useless through and through.” I turned at that, my mouth already open to form some kind of protest, but he didn’t give me a moment to cut in or reassure him. “Dating as a beta is pretty limited, but I found a girl I thought was perfect. She was an omega, so I knew going in that it was risky. I couldn’t knot her through heats, and there would always be things that she’d lack thanks to our dynamic. It was about two months in that she changed, going from sweet to vindictive. She resented me for what I wasn’t, so I left.”

“Good, she didn’t deserve you,” I said, angry on his behalf. He smiled, but it was hollow.

“She wasn’t wrong. I’m not an alpha that can knot and protect, nor am I an omega who has a purpose and brings packs together.” He sighed and shrugged, the resignation in the movement making my blood boil.

“That’s utter bullshit.” Wells let out a bark of a laugh, and Graham joined in.

“What is?” he demanded, a hint of anger creeping back into his expression.

“Alphas get shit for being too angry and unpredictable. Omegas? We’re weak and only good for breeding. That or property. We all have some fucking stereotypes to battle, but useless? Hardly. Society is stupid! We’re all worth way more than we’re given credit for. How about the fact that betas make up over three-fourths of our fucking population? They literally run the world yet get no credit for that. You matter, Tallon. Don’t let anyone else tell you otherwise.” There was a growl to my voice, the words full of a passion that had my voice rising, drawing the rest of the pack into the kitchen. My chest heaved as I finished speaking, and the silence that followed was intense.

Wells cleared his throat. “Nicely put.”

“That felt like it came from somewhere personal,” Miles said, raising his eyebrows. A blush crept up my cheeks at my outburst.

“I’ve just always thought it’s so fucked up how we keep each other down. I’m facing it now with being pregnant and packless, and I’ve dealt with the seeds of that bias my entire life. I’m not just here for an alpha’s pleasure, and he’s not just a placeholder,” I argued.

Miles held his hands up and nodded. “No arguments from me, Briar,” he agreed. “Life’s fucked up like that.”

“It is,” Beckham agreed, coming over and giving me a hug. It instantly had my frustration dissipating. “And, for the record, none of us think that about you, Tallon.”

“Do we think you’re a dick?” Miles asked with a glint of teasing in his eyes. “Yes, abso-fucking-lutely. But do we love you still? Yes.”

Graham pinched the bridge of his nose like this conversation was giving him a headache. “Miles, that’s two.”

Despite Miles’ curse, a cloud of lust hit us that had more than one of them adjusting in their seats.

“Thanks,” Tallon mumbled sheepishly, like he hadn’t expected the conversation to take this turn. And he probably hadn’t. If he was anything like me in my weakest moments, those self-doubts whispered in his head, trying to fool him into thinking they were the truth. When I was younger, those whispers had sounded like my mother, but on the dark days when I’d started to believe her words, they’d started to sound like me. It was hard to fight yourself. “I’m sorry again.”

“It’s okay. I’m a bit more sensitive to it. My parents assumed the same before they took a payout and exiled me to keep their silence.”

“What the fuck?” Wells’ anger was followed by Graham’s warning growl. The weight of all of their gazes was resting on me, but I wasn’t tempted to falter. There was no threat here against me. Something about releasing this was cathartic, and them knowing I wasn’t just a pushover omega who slept around was important to me.

“Yeah,” I laughed darkly. “The head assistant at the office said she’d pay for silence, but when I said no, she offered insane money to my dad, along with a paid contract, in exchange for my exile. No contact to them or from them. They barely hesitated.”

“Why do I feel like this gets worse?” Ellis asked quietly. I glanced up and met his pained gaze with a sad smile.

“The man who did this,” I said, pointing at my stomach, “was an alpha with power he doesn’t deserve. I was working late, the only one around... or I should have been. Apparently, he stopped back at the office for something and spotted me. He...” My voice faltered, and I closed my eyes. The pain still felt fresh despite how many months had passed.

“It’s okay. We get it,” Beckham said in a hushed tone, but that kindness steeled my resolve. I could do this. I could speak my truth without needing them to take pity on me. I could put a voice to what I’d survived.

“No, it’s fine,” I said with renewed anger. “He cornered me in the copy room, bent me over the table, and threatened me, my family, my future, anything he could use to coerce me.

When I still said no, he left bruises and took what he wanted, my feelings and body be damned. It took a month to recover from the pain, then another month before I found out about the baby. His assistant went through my desk and found the test. That's what started all this. That evening is when Liam called you," I finished, gesturing to Ellis before nearly collapsing.

Just like that, the memories were back—the feel of his hands running over me, the bruising grip on my shoulder as he roughly pushed me onto the table and held me there. The ghost of his disgusting scent, a blend of booze, lust, and anger that had my stomach rolling, ready to heave up what was left of my breakfast.

"Hey," Ellis said softly as he pulled me into his arms. I flinched at first, but he was unyielding. "I'll let go if you want, but I'm not him. You're safe."

"So, can we kill him?" Wells asked. The seriousness in the question had a slightly hysterical laugh bubbling out of me, and I pulled away from Ellis' hug to face him.

"Nope," I said with a shake of my head. "Power and influence, remember? They'd look extra hard for him."

"Who is he? Is it the mayor? Someone else in his inner circle?" Miles asked sweetly, batting his long eyelashes like that would get it out of me. "I just want to have a little chat."

"Convincing," I wryly said, keeping my poker face in place. How could a few threats be so endearing? They cared enough to want to kill him, and that felt amazing.

My phone buzzed on the counter, and my eyebrows dipped down in confusion. My number wasn't on the site, and no one used it. Stepping forward, I saw my brother's name and snatched it up.

"Sorry, it's my brother. The only good part of my past," I said as I clicked the green button to answer. "Hey, Liam."

"Don't 'hey, Liam' me," he grumbled. "You don't call, don't text. I give you to my friend for safe-keeping, and you ghost me?" His dramatic voice and feigned hurt had me chuckling as I walked to my room and settled into the window

seat to talk to him. The view of the city was quickly becoming my favorite part of this penthouse. It was even nicer in the living room with an entire wall of windows, but this one I didn't have to share with the others.

"I'm sorry. It's been a bit crazy," I admitted. "They wouldn't drop me off at the shelter, so I had to adju—"

"Shelter?" Liam's voice hardened, and I winced, realizing I'd slipped up.

"Look, I just didn't want to be anyone's burden," I argued. "It was one not associated with the omega clinics."

"Why would you try that? You'd be alone with strangers!" he said. The defeat in his voice was enough to show me he understood.

"I did go alone with strangers," I pointed out. "Though they aren't exactly strangers anymore."

"I'm glad they didn't let you," he said. "You're so damn stubborn, Briar."

"At least I'm not an awful human," I said bitterly. "How goes living with the devil and his wife?"

He laughed at that. "Fits them, doesn't it?"

"It does," I agreed.

"It hasn't been too bad. I've remained silent in their presence and kept to myself. They know my feelings. I made them *very* clear. I will, in no way, stick around. They didn't just exile one child; they exiled two that day. My departure is just a bit delayed."

"I'm glad you stayed. An education is the least they owe you," I said. "They can afford it even better now with their hush money."

"It's sick," he bit out. "They're acting like nothing happened. Mom's systematically wiping out your presence here. She even had someone come pick up your stuff and clear your room. Pictures are down. It's like you fucking died."

“Well, they’re dead to me, so I guess it fits.” We didn’t address the lancing pain going through me. They truly had sold their souls. Some part of me had been hoping they’d regretted it, that I’d get to listen to their pleas and tell them exactly how badly they’d fucked up.

But that day wasn’t coming.

“Briar?” Liam’s voice was desperate, clueing me in that I’d checked out on him.

“Sorry,” I rasped. “I’m just so fucking angry and hurt. Fuck them.”

“They don’t deserve to be called family,” he said with the same conviction. “But you’ve got me and that sweet baby.”

“And for now, I’ve got the guys,” I said with a soft smile.

“Is that going well?” he asked, grasping at the chance to change the subject.

“It is now,” I promised as someone called out my name. “Dinner’s ready, so I have to go. But I’ll call more, okay?”

“You better,” he said. “Briar?”

“Yeah?” I asked, chest already aching with the broken sound to his voice.

“Miss you.”

“I miss you too, Liam. But I’m okay now,” I said firmly, enough conviction in my tone that we both bought it.

And maybe, just maybe, I would be.

Chapter Eight

Briar

The moment I stepped out of the shower, the scent of something sweet wafted into my room. For a moment, my stomach growled, then it churned, and I had to run to the restroom. When I was done dry heaving, I kicked on my fan, praying the scent would go away.

With my stomach queasy and a feeling of bone-deep exhaustion hanging around, I fell back into bed, not caring that I was wearing only a robe or that my hair was wet.

A knock on my door had me peeking out from my blankets, but I couldn't find the energy to get up, so I made sure I was covered before calling out for whoever it was to come in.

The moment the door opened, the overwhelming scent of sugary pastries hit me, and my stomach revolted again. This time I had no choice but to get up, barely keeping my robe closed so I didn't flash Tallon as I ran to the bathroom. His eyes were wide, but I could offer no explanation. The reality that I'd vomit on him instead was all too real, and we'd just barely managed to connect with one another.

When I came back out, I was surprised to see him waiting there. I winced instinctively, hating that he'd witnessed and possibly heard that. I'd been lucky enough to avoid morning sickness so far, but the scent of baked goods was apparently now out. Which was entirely unfair as far as pregnancy symptoms went.

“Sorry. I don’t know what’s cooking out there, but the baby hates it,” I groaned, laying back down and clutching a pillow to my stomach as I pitifully stared up at him.

It was like watching someone come back to life. He was a stoic statue for a moment then in a panicked frenzy the next. If I wasn’t momentarily under the weather, I might have laughed about it.

“I’ll go kick some fans on and tell Beckham to stop baking!” he said with a ridiculous amount of enthusiasm. Assuming he was gone after that, I drifted off to sleep again. Thankfully, the scent had stayed away, so I didn’t make any more hectic runs to the bathroom.

“Briar?” Tallon’s voice called out, just loudly enough to hear but soft enough to not wake me if I were asleep.

“I’m up,” I called out. “Come in.”

He walked in carrying a pharmacy bag, and his cheeks were a bit red when he stopped next to me. “I wasn’t sure what would help, but I grabbed a Gatorade, a Sprite, some lollipops the pharmacist recommended, and some crackers.”

My eyes burned with tears before I squeaked out my next words. “You got this for me?”

He shrugged and chuckled. “Yeah, you looked pitiful, and I didn’t want you suffering all day.”

“Thanks,” I said. I grabbed the outstretched bag, choosing the Gatorade and crackers. I nibbled the corner of the cracker and was happy that there was no immediate nausea this time. “I think the crisis is averted. This is perfect. Thanks, Tallon.”

“You’re welcome.” He started to turn away then stopped like he wanted to say more. “Do you need anything else?” I was hit with dusky amber and eucalyptus when he shifted forward again, a warm and soothing scent that was an interesting contrast to his generally harsh personality. Until today, Tallon and Wells were both a mystery, keeping enough distance that I couldn’t quite place their scents.

Stop breathing him in like a freaking psycho, Briar.

Blushing, I forced my mind to other things.

“A distraction?” I hedged.

A genuine smile bloomed on his face, the sight nearly breathtaking. “Now, *that* I can help you with. Are you a movie buff? Gamer? Cards?” he asked, speeding through the options like an auctioneer.

“Are you a gamer?” I asked. “Because I’d definitely watch you play while I veg out.”

He blanched. “What?”

I raised an eyebrow. “Why is that so shocking?”

“Because unless a person is a gamer, most don’t just like watching,” he said. The weary tone to his voice had me imagining it was his ex that he had in mind.

“I’m not great at fighting unless there’s an easy mode, but I enjoy the storyline,” I admitted.

His grin was blinding, which felt like a reward in itself. It was giving me whiplash, though a good kind, to see this different side of him. If we were going to be in close quarters, it was for the best that he let me start seeing the real him behind the armor.

“Then come on. I’ve got one in mind,” he said, offering me a hand. I started to stand before realizing I was still in the midst of a slight wardrobe situation.

“Uh, one sec,” I stumbled out. He chuckled as I gestured at my lack of clothes.

“Right... I’ll just wait outside,” he said and rushed out. For a brief moment, I thought I caught a scent of lust, but it was gone before I could be sure.

Not wanting to dwell on that thought and the men I couldn’t have, I threw on some comfy clothes. But the moment I glanced in the mirror, I winced. My hair was crazy, sticking out at odd angles from showering then sleeping, so I spent a few minutes fixing it down to a smooth braid over one shoulder before calling it good.

Tallon was waiting right outside of my door when I opened it. He held out a hand for me, and I didn't hesitate to take it, something that didn't go unnoticed by him. His grin spread before he ducked his head and turned to lead me to the opposite end of the penthouse. I held my breath as we walked past the kitchen, my urgency making him walk faster.

The moment he opened his door and pulled me inside, I was surrounded by that warm amber and eucalyptus. Maybe it was yet another weird pregnancy symptom to thirst over scents like this, but either way, it was refreshing and calming.

"It's a bit messy," he mumbled, letting go of me as he hurried around the room, picking up the dirty clothes on the ground and tossing a bit of trash in the garbage can.

"It's lived in," I corrected, ignoring whatever perceived mess he had going on and heading for his gaming setup. There was a fluffy, well-loved couch with an entertainment center right across from it. The TV was huge, so no matter where I sat, I'd have a good view.

"Are you sure I can't grab you a snack or some real food? Don't you need to feed the baby?" he asked. He was totally out of his element, his expression all confused frown and furrowed brows.

"I've got this for now," I said as I held up the drink and crackers he'd bought me. "Maybe I'll want something else in a bit, but I'm okay for now."

"Okay," he conceded, grabbing a throw blanket from the back of the couch and handing it over. I felt a bit lazy since this wasn't the first time that I'd found myself on one of their couches over the last two weeks, lounging through the day, but I also couldn't find it in me to complain.

A thought that kept bugging me in the back of my mind was how badly I needed to find a doctor and make sure things were okay, but I knew that would make this even more real. As silly as that sounded, even in my head, it was easy to forget sometimes. Honestly, a guilty little part of me kind of liked it when I forgot.

Each symptom and thought of the baby was a glaring reminder that I had to be strong enough for the two of us, and that was a scary thought when my life felt so chaotic and uncertain.

“Hey, you okay?” Tallon’s voice brought me out of my head, and I gave him a reassuring smile.

“Yeah, sorry, just thinking.” I shook it off. “What game did you have in mind?”

“Well, I have a few,” he started. “I need to know what you’d rather play. Fantasy? Horror? Or just something with a good storyline?”

I thought it over for a second. “Something with a story, so you can start from the beginning. That way I don’t miss anything.”

He nodded and turned his attention back to the main screen. While he watched it, I couldn’t help but watch him. The man who was on edge and ready to start a fight at all times was calm and collected. In mere hours of conversation, he seemed to transform, like he was finally giving himself permission to relax.

“Okay, this one here might be cool if you like fantasy. You’re essentially thrown into a new world and have to gather an army to fight the villain, some evil wizard who stole a special amulet from you. It sounds super cheesy, but I’ve heard good things,” he said.

“It sounds fun,” I said, leaning up to click the button so he couldn’t second guess it. He shook his head but couldn’t hide his grin as the story started. It took a whole five seconds before I was fully drawn into it. He shifted to the floor, and I stretched out behind him. Without thinking, my hands started to run over the buzzed hair at the back of his head. When I noticed what I was doing, I snatched my hand away, mumbling an apology. It wasn’t my smoothest moment, but I was apparently cursed with being awkward here.

“It’s okay,” he promised. “Wells does that a lot. It’s calming.” He shrugged like it was no big deal, but I was

automatically curious. There was an openness to him when he said his packmate's name, an easy happiness that I hadn't noticed before.

"So, how did you and Wells meet?" I asked. "You seem like an unlikely duo."

"I had a lot of anger when we met. He was a personal trainer, and he took me on when he saw me acting a fool." He laughed humorlessly. "My hands were banged and bruised, so he pulled me aside to help me wrap them properly, then he took me on. It took a long time for me to trust him, but he proved himself to be different. He could handle my bad days, which said a lot."

My hand went back to his scalp, knowing that he needed the comfort. His scent was marred now with a bit of melancholy, and I hated it.

"It's crazy you and Beck are brothers," I said softly. "Do you get along?"

He nodded. "Yeah, it wasn't Beckham's fault our parents were idiots. He hated it just as much, and we both got out the moment we could. He actually met Graham and Ellis first, then we all kind of melded together in this makeshift pack. Miles was the last to join, but he knew Graham and Ellis for a long time and needed a family."

"Are you all... together?" I asked. It wasn't my place, but I was too curious to take the question back.

"We're a pack," he said like that answered everything. "I'm closer to Wells than the others, though we all have our own forms of relationships. It's complicated."

"That's fair," I said gently. "Sorry, I didn't mean to pry. I've just been trying to figure you guys out." The pack got along so easily, and they all seemed to read each other well, so I'd been curious how their relationship dynamics broke down.

He snorted. "Good luck with that."

"You don't have to share," I reassured him. "It's just me being nosy." He threw me a grin at that.

“It’s understandable. You’re stuck in this apartment with us every day. Graham and Ellis share the omegas, while Wells and I are together. We’re all a pack, so we look out for each other and help out during heats, but I’m not romantically involved with the omegas.”

“Do you want to be?” His eyebrows raised at the question, and I bit back yet another apology. He would answer if he wanted, and if I wanted him to relax with me, I needed to stop acting like I was walking on eggshells around him.

“I’m not what they need,” he said simply, which was neither a denial or confirmation. “I wouldn’t be against an omega someday, but it’s never really been a top priority.” He didn’t seem upset, more matter-of-fact, and that was understandable. I was one of those people who hadn’t given my future pack much thought until now.

We fell silent again as the story picked back up. Tallon fought his way through a dark forest full of magical assassins while I watched. It was entertaining, but I couldn’t stop my mind from wandering. This pack was a puzzle to me, a mix of hot and cold, stubborn and sweet, and I wanted to know how they fit together.

“Okay, I’m apparently not as strong as you because I’m fucking starving. You ready to eat yet, or should I go sneak food in the kitchen?” he teased. He stood and stretched, leaning back with his hands over his head, giving me a view of his gorgeous abs. My thoughts fell away, but my stomach rumbled at the prospect of food.

“Apparently, I’m ready,” I admitted, letting him pull me up. “If I had to guess, Graham is probably already in there figuring something out.” I glanced at the clock, confirming my suspicions. The man was like a clock, sticking to the same routine every day. It was oddly comforting. I couldn’t say that I’d really much appreciated the home routine I’d had growing up, but now, with the unpredictability of what was happening in my body and my life, I was super appreciative of any predictable anchor.

“Thank fuck, because my cooking might be worse than yours,” he teased.

“Hey, I’ve taught her a bit,” Graham cut in as we approached. He raised an accusing eyebrow at Tallon. “More than I can say for *you*.”

“Well, the baby’s finally hungry, so teach away,” Tallon said, gesturing to the stove where Graham already had something boiling.

“You’re lucky. I was feeling soup, so we’ve got a huge pot of broccoli cheddar already going. We just need to pop in some rolls,” he said. “I may be able to cook, but baking isn’t my thing. We’ve got some in the freezer.”

Tallon opened the freezer door and searched while I stood on my tiptoes to peek into the giant pot. It smelled heavenly, and my stomach rumbled again.

“This is perfect!” I grinned up at Graham. He smiled down at me, an unreadable yet sweet look in his eyes.

“Tallon mentioned you felt a bit queasy, so the soup may have had more purpose than just sounding good to me,” he admitted. The admission had my chest warming. That they’d hear something like that and change their day around made me feel special. It was strange, but nice. “Feeling better now?”

“Yeah, Tallon’s got me hooked on a game now,” I explained. “I feel guilty for just being lazy though.” I gasped as a thought occurred to me. “Shit, was I keeping you from work?”

“Me?” Tallon questioned, his eyes softening at the frazzled look I was giving him. Me being here was not supposed to distract them and disrupt their lives. Guilt bubbled in my stomach, but he waved off my freakout. “No. I’m a grown ass man, and we work by project, not by the hour. I still have time to get done anything I need.”

“You’re not a burden,” Graham reminded me, a soft whisper of a touch tracing across my back. He was always so careful, never crossing any lines, and how my heart ached for him to just lean in and give me a hug for real. Apparently, I

was touch starved, so these teasing brushes of their hands and gentle squeezes to my shoulder were making me a needy omega. I had never been one to just jump into a man's arms. In fact, I had avoided them like the plague thanks to my desire to put my career first. But something with this pack was different.

Part of me feared that it was a savior thing, that I'd fixated on them just because they'd given me shelter and kept me safe. Was that enough to trigger this awkward neediness that was taking me over? Were my feelings real? But as I sat at the counter, eating soup, while sandwiched between the misunderstood beta and the protective alpha, I couldn't help but feel right at home, like my place had been waiting beside them all along.

Chapter Nine

Miles

Briar had been staying with us the better part of two months now. She still wasn't really showing and had been lucky enough to not have too many bad symptoms. Really, everything was almost perfect, and that, in itself, was the problem.

The issue was that the longer she was here, the more her presence felt unmistakably *right*. She fit into our group so easily. Without words and only a brush of her hand, she could calm Tallon's anger. Beckham was her best friend, their laughter filling the once quiet space. Ellis and Graham were more reserved and harder to read, but I could see their stolen glances and amusement when she was in the room. Even our statue, Wells, had been talking more. He didn't just hide in his room, working, or spend time down in the gym, getting impossibly stronger. Now, he joined us for meals. Hell, even the company was doing better. She was the morale boost we hadn't known we needed around here.

For me? She was refreshing. Briar was unlike any other omega I'd met. She'd been through some shit yet came out with compassion. She was an alluring mix of strong, confident, sexy, and still vulnerable enough to be approachable.

Needing to see Ellis and figure this out, I stalked out of my room. Beck tried to say something, but I held up a finger for him to wait as I hurried toward Ellis' office. I rapped my knuckles on the wooden door twice before softly pushing it

open. He rarely took phone calls, but I wanted to be safe, and that was a good thing too since he had his office phone pressed to his ear. From the pinched expression on his face, it wasn't going well.

“Yes, Mother,” he groaned. “I'll be there.”

My eyebrows raised, but he didn't react. He kept humming in answer to whatever his bat of a mother was barking at him on the phone. We'd met her once, and that was too much for me. She was short and waspish, every word out of her mouth critical and biting. The way she spoke to Ellis had me ready to punch her out, and I wasn't normally the violent sort. Okay, maybe in my head, but not to the point I had to force myself to not react.

Graham hated her. They were siblings, but nothing alike, and it drove Ellis' mother nuts that her son would rather spend time with her brother. But who could blame him? Where Graham was cool and controlled, putting effort into everything he did, she was entitled and conniving. Her success came at the expense of others, something Graham was far too classy to dream of.

When Ellis finally hung up, snapping the phone in its place with a loud, angry click, I finally moved forward.

“What did Maleficent have to say today?” I asked as I moved his planner out of his way and sat in front of him. I spread my legs, encouraging him to scoot closer so that his head rested against my stomach. I ran my hand through his dirty blond hair as he regained his composure, reining in his anger.

“She's running some sort of charity ball right before Christmas,” he said. His voice was muffled since he hadn't bothered to move, but I heard him clearly.

“And this involves you how?” I asked, knowing this was about to turn into something I was going to hate.

“Her family is supposed to be there to support her or something.” I sighed. “She wants me to get Graham to go as

well, which means the whole pack is going because I'm not fucking doing this alone. One pack."

"One pack," I muttered. It was our one unshakable rule. If one of us needed the others, they could invoke the 'one pack' rule, meaning we had to follow and support them. It didn't happen often, and none of us would consider not doing it. "I'm going to hate it."

"We all are, but there's free fancy food, free booze, and I'll do my best to keep her away from us," he admitted.

"And Briar?" Ellis pulled back, his eyebrows drawing together as he studied me. "Will she be coming?"

"Will she even be here by then?" he asked. His voice wasn't unkind, but I winced anyway.

"I fucking hope so," I admitted, staring him down to show I meant every damn word. "You can't tell me you don't see it."

"See what?" I narrowed my eyes at his feigned ignorance.

"You're not stupid, Ellis, and don't insult me by acting like I am," I growled. "She's got Tallon and Beck wrapped around her finger without even trying. I've wanted to kiss her since I've met her, and that scent of hers makes me hard just by being close to her. She fits here with us."

"She's not meant for us," he said stubbornly, but it was a weaker argument than before, holding no real conviction. Good, because I'd hate to have to smack sense into my alpha.

"She is," I argued. "She's funny, she's smart, and she's so fucking strong."

"I don't disagree with that," he said, which was good, but the remorse in his eyes had me tensing up. "But she's not ours. She's been saying this is temporary the entire time. Hell, her design business is taking off. She has no need of us, and she'll probably strike out on her own as soon as she has the funds to."

"An omega's purpose is not to need their alphas. It's to be part of a pack and whatever else they desire," I argued. "I'm

not here because you support me! I make my own money, and I contribute the same as everyone else.”

“You do,” he placated. “Seems you have that in common. She tried to give me money for rent yesterday.”

That had me grinning. “Of course she did. Did you take it?”

“I tried not to! But she seemed genuinely hurt, and then she asked what we all contributed. I wasn’t going to lie to her.”

We all put in one-fourth of our payouts, no matter what they were, into a pack fund. It was a way to keep the pack provided for while allowing everyone to also be self-sufficient.

“She’s paying into the pack fund while she’s not even pack?” I questioned pointedly. The man was fucking delusional if he didn’t see what was happening.

“I didn’t put it in there,” he admitted. “I started a savings account for the baby’s future.”

That had me swooning a bit. “Shut up, you sappy motherfucker,” I laughed. “That’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“It wasn’t a big deal. It just felt wrong to take her money,” he grumbled.

“Not pack, my ass.” I shook my head. “But why does she get to keep her money while I don’t?”

“Because the times I tried that, you threatened to super glue your ass cheeks so I couldn’t fuck you,” he deadpanned. We both knew I wouldn’t do it, but he couldn’t resist bowing to that threat.

“I want her.”

He leaned back in his chair and let out a defeated breath. I could practically see his walls breaking down now that I’d told him where I stood. He’d have to be blind not to see how she was changing us all.

“Me too,” he admitted. “I’ve tried to keep my distance, but she smells so fucking good.” The fact that he was admitting it to me now was fucking huge and a step in the right direction. I needed to confront the rest of the pack, get them on my side, because we weren’t letting her walk out of our lives. But I wasn’t going to push him too far either, I’d said my piece and now I needed him to mull it over like I knew he would.

“I read that she needs more folic acid, so we should be cooking with more spinach! And listening to classical will make the baby smart, so we should just start playing classical over the speakers for ambiance,” I said. As far as subject changes went, it was successful. Though he was now looking at me with a glint in his eyes that I’d never seen before.

“Have you been researching?” It was a playful accusation, but I crossed my arms and glared anyway.

“Yes. And?”

“Nothing, that’s just oddly sweet for you,” he teased. “Beck’s our sweet one. You’re the snarky brat, remember?”

“Only for you and Graham.” I winked. “And that’s because you fuck me like the Doms of my dreams. Contrary to popular belief, I *do* have a heart.”

“I knew you did somewhere,” he said, gripping the front of my shirt and pulling me in for a kiss. His lips slanted over mine, claiming me with a searing kiss that had my cock stirring in seconds. His pine scent swirled around me, mixing with lust in the manliest intoxicant I’d ever encountered. I could get high on this stuff.

Before we could go any further, his phone rang again. With a huff, I scooted off his desk so he could get back to work. Teasing him was all well and good, but I wasn’t going to drive myself nuts when satisfaction was so far out of reach. With a swat to my ass as I passed, he answered the phone in much higher spirits than before.

The apartment was quiet when I walked out, everyone working in their own spaces. Graham had put an office set-up in Briar’s room last week, and she’d spent every afternoon

working at her desk. The rest of us did the same, or most I should say. I'd already finished my workload by ten, so I was enjoying a rare afternoon off that didn't include avoidance.

Instead of mindlessly scrolling social media, I went to the 'becoming a dad for newbies' site I'd been working my way through. I'd made it past the early weeks, and the information was starting to be a bit more interesting. As it talked about the baby recognizing our voices and brain development, I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like having an infant around. No matter how I spun it in my head, I knew that if she left after I met the little one, I'd be devastated. The baby wasn't even here yet, but I was already this invested.

The information turned from voices to what kind of music was good for babies, and there was enough written on classical music that it had me opening my music app. I wanted to start on a playlist of classical music for the penthouse. Of course, in hindsight, work hours wasn't the best time to do it. The system immediately played the last thing I'd listened to... which happened to be porn. And of course it wasn't a cheesy intro. Nope, the surround sound went right into heat action, blending a chorus of manly moans with a high-pitched female's keening cries. Fuck my life. My mouth dropped open in horror as the video echoed through the penthouse at top volume. More than one door burst open, with everyone, including Briar, looking around wildly.

"Yup. It's my porn! I'm sorry," I growled before anyone pushed. "It was unintentional." Ignoring all of their glares I switched it over to classical and turned it down to an ambient level.

Briar was the first to crack, her laughter bubbling out of her before it turned into a wheezy cackle that was obviously contagious. The others joined in one by one until everyone was losing their shit, bent over and laughing at my expense. I wanted to hate it and be angry, but seeing the effect she had on everyone proved my fucking point. I turned to Ellis and gave him a meaningful stare that he shook his head at, but his smile never left his face, especially when he turned to the omega who was now leaning on Beckham for support.

“That was certainly the mid-day pickup I needed,” she mused as she straightened and wiped her away tears.

“Come on. I’ll start lunch,” Graham said with a chuckle, gesturing for the rest of us to follow. Within minutes, he had a sandwich-making spread set up, paired with two bowls of chips, and all of us dug in.

“I got a new client today,” Briar said softly. The room fell into silence, and we all stared at her, waiting for her to continue. From the twisting of her fingers and the excitement in her scent, it was huge.

“With?” Tallon prompted, always the impatient one.

“Cafe Mocha!” she admitted with a scarlet blush on her cheeks. “They saw my portfolio and messaged me, offering a contract for a full logo and brand set. Apparently, a new shop moved in with similar branding, so they want a new look to wow the city.”

“That’s amazing,” Wells praised. The pride in his voice had her biting back a pleased smile. I knew that feeling well; these alphas knew the right tone of voice to bring us to our knees. It was adorable to see Wells doing it for her without a second thought.

“That really is incredible. I told you your work would speak for itself,” I said. Seeing her so excited had the rest of us buzzing with it, ready to celebrate.

“This calls for an ice cream toast since we can’t share champagne just yet,” Graham joked. Beck and I helped clear the table while our resident mother hen put together an ice cream buffet in minutes. I hadn’t even known we kept this kind of stuff in the house, but he had sprinkles, chocolate chips, and several syrups. When we all gaped at him, he growled. “We have a pregnant omega in the house. You thought I wouldn’t cover all necessities?”

“Ice cream is a necessity?” Tallon snorted, but his laughter cut off when Briar spoke up.

“Yes, it is,” she said, plucking a cherry out of the bowl and popping it into her mouth, yanking the stem away as she

danced happily in her chair, humming at the taste. It was fucking sinful, but she somehow remained oblivious, happily finishing her bite then dressing up the bowl Graham handed over. I swore he looked like a proud papa as he watched her fill up her bowl with way more sugar than a single person needed. And those damn moans of happiness as she ate it were worth every fucking second of torture.

Not our pack... What a fucking lie.

Chapter Ten

Briar

I was a statue. I'd been staring at the shiny metal doors of the penthouse elevator for five minutes now, but I couldn't make my feet move. This was my first time facing the world since I'd been exiled, and I couldn't quite remember how to function.

"Are you waiting for it to do tricks?" Wells mused as he stepped up next to me. I jumped at his gravelly voice, so lost in my panic that I hadn't noticed him approaching. Now that I was back in the present, I took a deep breath of his scent, a mix of patchouli and vanilla musk. It was warm and strong and rough around the edges, just like the man himself.

"No, I'm being a coward," I answered honestly. He snorted at my admission.

"Where are you supposed to be going, then?" he asked.

"My first appointment. I found an OB in the city, but I don't know my way around well, and this... It makes it impossible to ignore." My voice wavered at the end, barely over a whisper, but he heard. He reached out and squeezed the back of my neck in a comforting gesture that had my anxiety calming down.

"Let me come," he said simply. I blinked over at him, confused why he'd even offer. It wasn't his baby, and I wasn't his charge.

He sighed. "You're going to have to work on letting people in, sweetheart. We're not the enemy, and even if you don't

think this arrangement is forever, we're still here for you now."

His words hit me hard. I'd always relied on myself. Hell, Liam was my favorite person, and I barely relied on him for anything other than companionship in our family's cold house.

"Please?" I asked. I'd barely been able to force the word out, and he gave me a sad smile.

"Don't worry. Shit like this takes time. I'd love to. Just let me grab my keys," he said, returning a few minutes later with a black leather jacket and his keys.

With him by my side, I finally hit the elevator button. It dinged almost immediately, and he stepped in, raising an eyebrow when I hesitated one last time.

"If you weren't pregnant, I'd say we better stop for a drink," he teased.

"You know, I was warned you barely spoke. I'm not seeing it," I shot back playfully. He grinned and shrugged.

"I just don't have much to say. Plus, you're far more interesting, and you need reassurance more than they do. Some of our pack does enough talking for all of us," he explained.

"Miles," I said confidently, causing both of us to laugh. It felt nice, and just like that I was able to function again. I wouldn't dwell on the fact that I'd needed someone else to get there. The important part was that I ended up here in the end.

"So where are we going? And are we insanely early or running behind?" he questioned, which was a more relevant question than he could've known. Liam was always behind, so I knew if we had to go somewhere, I had to rush him. I was the opposite—always early for any appointment.

"It's at three-thirty," I admitted. He shook his head, but there was no judgment there. I liked that Wells seemed unshakable and unfazed.

"With that much time, we need to stop for a snack or something first. Did they warn you not to eat or anything?" he asked.

“Uh,” I said unhelpfully, pulling out my phone to double check their email. “Nope, no restrictions.”

“Alright, then I’ve got the perfect place,” he said as the elevator descended to the parking garage.

“Which one’s yours?” I asked, warily eyeing the motorcycle. He reached up with his keys and hit a button, making a sleek red SUV chirp back at us. “I should have known it would be a tank.”

“I’m a big guy,” he defended. Of course, he was also a gentleman, rounding the car and opening the passenger door for me before helping me climb inside. Maybe some women would balk at the old school display of chivalry, but I had never felt safe and cared for, and it was easy to tell it was just second nature for them. They were the true meaning of alpha. These gestures weren’t a show of power or strength, but an innate ability to protect.

He turned on a classic rock station and hummed along as he navigated out of the lot and into the midday traffic. When I’d been brought to their home, it was nighttime. This was a vast contrast, with the bright sun beating down on Grove City, cars flying by, and the sounds of the city drifting into the car despite his music.

Grove City was much nicer than home, or rather this part of town was. The sidewalks were clean, the buildings well maintained, and there were no sketchy alphas waiting for an opportunity to jump the next cute omega who happened by.

My nervous side had me glancing at the clock, wondering if we would make it to the doctor’s appointment on time, but I was going to trust Wells to know best. He was the one with experience in traffic around here.

“Alright, here we are,” he said as he turned onto another street and parallel parked like it was no big deal.

“I’m having you drive me everywhere. That was impressive,” I said. It might have seemed like I was joking, but in reality, he would be the first person I asked.

“You get used to city driving when you grow up with it,” he said as he shut off the engine. “Stay there. I’ll come around.” He climbed out and jogged around, opening the door and helping me out just as he’d gently helped me in. “My lady?”

“Thanks, kind sir,” I said as I got out. “Oh my god.”

“What?” he asked, startled at my gasp. But I was already power walking up the sidewalk and pushing open the door to the pizza-by-the-slice shop. They had New-York-style slices, bigger than my face, and the smell of freshly made dough permeated the air.

I grinned up at him when he stopped beside me, looking exasperated by my sudden departure. “You’re my hero!”

“I’m glad, but maybe don’t just rush off on me when you’re under my protection,” he growled.

I winced, though it was due to regret, not intimidation. “Sorry, I didn’t think about it. The pizza called me.” He gave me a pointed look but dutifully stepped up to the counter.

“What’ll it be, Briar?” he asked. I stared at the pizza behind the display for a few moments.

“Pepperoni, please,” I told the teen behind the counter.

“Make that two, and two drinks,” Wells finished for me, fishing out his wallet and sliding a card to the cashier.

“I could have paid as a thank you for bringing me,” I argued weakly, and even that small kernel of indignation was soothed by the wink he gave me.

“I don’t let ladies pay,” he countered. “My dad wouldn’t put up with that for a second. They were that overly attentive, wholesome sort.”

“That’s adorable,” I said. I was genuinely glad that one of us had awesome parents. Maybe if I stayed long enough, I could see him interact with them. The idea of this big, quiet alpha being doted on by adorably present parents was funny to picture.

We quietly ate for a few minutes, but my mind was going a million miles an hour.

“What if I’m pregnant with a boy? Does that still count me as a lady?” I blurted out. His laugh was deep and rich. The gravelly rasp of it rolled over me, sending a surge of heat straight to my core. My omega slick responded, and I took a step away, praying to whatever gods were listening that he didn’t notice me getting turned on by his laughter. Something was seriously wrong with me.

When he had a tray in hand, he led us over to a small table. I sat down, checking my phone again.

“I promise I won’t let you be late. The doctor is within walking distance,” he said gently, and I winced at being caught.

“Sorry, old habits.”

“You don’t have to apologize. What do you want to drink?” he offered, picking up the empty cup and gesturing to the fountain.

“Sprite works,” I said. “I’m supposed to avoid caffeine now.”

“Damn, there are so many rules to pregnancy. I need to read up on it,” he grumbled to himself as he walked away. I stood there, stricken. Why would he want to know more?

“What’s wrong?” he asked as he settled into the seat across from me and slid my drink over. His thick eyebrows drew down, almost making him appear angry, but I recognized that look as concern.

“I just don’t understand,” I admitted. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but why? Why do you guys care? Why do you want to get to know me? Wouldn’t it make more sense for the pack if you kept me at a distance?”

His eyebrows rose, and he leaned closer, tenting his hands in front of him as he stared at me.

“Do you keep your distance?” His question was pointed, and I couldn’t deny it. Because no, I didn’t keep my distance. I

wanted to get to know them, and I loved the time I'd spent with them so far.

“No. And that’s knowing that if I get attached, it’ll hurt when I have to go,” I explained, fighting off an unexpected surge of tears. It wasn’t something I’d set out to reveal, but it tumbled out now. It was too easy to be with Wells, and I found myself forgetting my mask. I knew he’d see right through any lies I spoke, so I couldn’t even try.

“And no one is telling you that you have to leave,” he told me. “You’re pack.”

“That’s a nice sentiment, but I’m not. Packs don’t consist of mates and an outsider, Wells.” Our pizza sat in front of us, cold and untouched, as we talked, and I knew I’d have to force myself to eat it now.

He sighed. “You’re not an outsider.” His mouth opened and closed like he might say more, but in the end, he just pushed my plate closer. “Let’s eat and get this done. I know this feels complicated right now, but I promise you, Briar, you’re not just expendable to us.”

“Okay,” I sighed. It was obvious from my tone that I didn’t believe it for a second, but I held those words close anyway.

We ate in silence after that, all of our lighthearted joking forgotten in the face of the cold reality that was our situation.

“Let’s go,” he finally said. I cleared our trash and tossed it away before heading for the door. He held it open for me, and I hated the shadowed expression on his face. We made it about two steps before he snagged my hand. I spun around as he yanked me close, backing me into the wall. I swallowed hard, but it wasn’t from fear. Instead, I felt something a lot more inconvenient—lust—as his body pressed into mine. “Fuck what anyone else thinks, Briar. As far as I’m concerned, you’re ours.”

He paused just an inch away, searching my eyes for permission. My gaze flickered to his full lips, and I couldn’t find it in me to regret the whimper that slipped out. The moment his lips touched mine, I was lost. They felt like they

were made for me, teasing me breathless as a possessive hand curled around my hip. He was gentle but possessive, keeping us from taking it too far here on a busy street. A loud car horn had us pulling away, our chests heaving as we stared at each other. The way he was always taking the extra step to ensure I felt safe and valued was wearing me down quicker than anything else. Wells was turning out to be this complicated mix of sweet, possessive, gentle yet rough, and blunt. My heart couldn't handle the distance, and she wanted to believe every beautiful word this alpha uttered. It was that damn voice in my head that kept reminding me that this was temporary, that they'd change their minds once a screaming baby was in the mix.

“Well, *that* was unexpected,” I said, followed by a surprised, awkward giggle. He chuckled and shook his head, wrapping an arm around my shoulders.

“Come on, you don't want to be late.” My brain wanted to try to make sense of what had happened, but I refused to bring it up. For now, I'd focus on this appointment. He was keeping me close instead of putting any difference between us, so that was an interesting sign at least.

The check-in process took forever. I had to write down everything I knew about family history, which was complicated in itself. I couldn't give them anything from paternal history, nor would I. He'd remain a mystery to this baby and anyone who asked.

“Briar Mackenzie?” the nurse called out. “I'll take you back alone first, then, if you want, I can come get Daddy for the ultrasound.” I nearly choked when she called Wells Daddy because it was all too fitting, just not in the way she'd intended.

“Do you want me back there?” he asked with a reassuring smile. The thought of facing that alone was terrifying, and I knew there was no way I'd hidden that panic from him. After a beat of silent eye contact, my chance to turn down his offer, he turned to the nurse and said, “Please come get me. I'll be there.”

“Perfect.” The nurse smiled at him. “Right this way, Briar.”

The next twenty minutes were a torturous rush of awkward invasive question. At this point, they knew everything they could ever want to know about me. Talking about my sexual history was excruciating, but she stayed professional the entire time, which made it a bit less painful in the end. She didn’t seem shocked at the lack of a pack. The guys and I were moving in a good direction, but not far enough into anything for me to include them on the ‘father’s’ side of the paperwork.

However, there was one concern that I couldn’t deny. The mayor had a genetic disorder, some rare type of thing that he used in his campaign to get sympathy votes. The hole in his heart might not affect him daily, but I wrote down his name and the disorder in case it would affect the baby. I also left a note about them not contacting him under any circumstances; they may be required to know for medical purposes or complications, but that was as far as this needed to go.

“Heat happens,” she said with a shrug. “Alright, I’ll get you to the room then grab your alpha.”

“Friend,” I corrected as I diligently followed her down the hallway. She smoothly navigated our way around pregnant omegas and staff until she finally stopped outside of an ultrasound room and pushed the door open.

“Go ahead and settle on the bed. I’ll be right back, and your tech will be in shortly,” she promised.

As the door clicked shut behind me, I exhaled, the breath shaky. The bed was covered in a white sheet, and I climbed on and laid back on the pillow. Glancing around the room, I took in the clinical white walls and informational posters as I waited.

The door opened a few minutes later, and Wells came around to my side. He smiled down at me, suddenly looking out of place.

“You can wait out there if this makes you uncomfortable,” I offered in a whisper as the nurse backed out of the room.

He shook his head firmly. “Nah, it’s not that,” he reassured me. “I just really hate doctors.”

“Big bad Wells is afraid of the doctor?” I teased with a grin. His playful glare had me laughing openly, gripping at the distraction and holding on tight.

“Not afraid. *Hate*. Big difference, sweetheart. I’m not afraid of anything.” He puffed out his chest as he crossed his arms, striking a macho pose that was offset by a half-grin.

The door opened again, and a petite scrub-clad omega walked in. His grin was kind and welcoming as he greeted us and took the stool in front of the machine.

“Welcome, I’m Gray,” he said. He hit a button, and the screen popped up. “Permission to get you ready?” he asked as he turned, gloved hands in the air. He directed a wary glance at the alpha, and I wondered how often this poor guy had to kick out shitty, angry alphas.

“Of course,” I said. He smiled and gently tucked my shirt up before wrapping a paper cover around the top of my pants and pulling them down to give him room to work.

“Just to keep the goop off your clothes,” he explained before grabbing it. “And don’t worry, I warm this so it’s not awful and cold.” He squirted the warmed gel over my stomach before grabbing the scanning tool he needed. He moved it around to spread the gel before applying pressure. The machine made a whooshing sound until he settled it on a spot where a dark blob was taking shape. The whooshing was replaced by a quick thumping, and he grinned. “There’s the heartbeat.”

My eyes burned with tears at the sound, and every bit of hesitation, anger, or worry that I had melted away. I knew this moment would be monumental, but I had underestimated how life changing it would be. That heartbeat was growing inside of *me*. I was creating this baby that I would hold in my arms someday.

I barely heard anything else the tech said until he printed off a row of images. He ripped half off and handed the other

half to Wells.

“Images for you. I’m estimating that you’re about fifteen weeks, so I’ll see you again in five. Your nurse will give you appointment information outside of that,” he said with a smile. “Congratulations.” He made quick work of cleaning off the gel before slipping out of the room.

“You okay? You’re awfully quiet,” he said as I stood and straightened my clothes. For some reason, I couldn’t bring myself to look at him, worried he’d change his mind. It had certainly had an effect on me. “Talk to me.” His order had me braving a glance at him.

“You aren’t running yet?”

He sighed and pulled me into a hug, holding me close. “No, and I hope you start believing that some day.”

“Me too,” I admitted.

We didn’t say much as he drove us home, and I fucking hated how I’d let my own insecurities ruin our afternoon. He might not have complained, though I certainly felt like I’d been a downer. I’d never considered myself a negative person, but it seemed that was all my brain went to lately. *I suppose it’s easier to shove them away and expect the worst rather than risk getting hurt again.* Yeah, I definitely needed to work on letting people in, or I’d live a miserable life.

“Hey, I’m here when you’re done processing. I’m not going to push you, and this doesn’t scare me. This silence doesn’t mean I’m ready to run or wanting distance from you. This time is for *you*,” he promised just before the elevator doors opened. There was a clatter and rustle, then we hurried out to Miles, Beckham, and Graham. They were all reading books, or they were before they tried to hide them. Unfortunately, their stealth skills were not up to par. One had fallen to the floor, and I immediately recognized the cover.

“You’re all reading pregnancy books?” My voice was no more than a whisper, but even that sound was loud in the awkward silence that descended when our eyes trained to the floor.

“Of course we are. We need to know what’s happening, so we can help,” Miles said like it was obvious.

“Did you know the baby is the size of an orange this week?” Beckham asked, snatching an orange out of the fruit bowl on the table and holding it up for me to see. The wonder in his eyes struck me right through the fucking heart, and I melted right then and there.

I’d given them an estimated date when the omegas asked about it, but I hadn’t expected them to be here, learning about babies. I was blown away by their involvement.

“Believe me yet?” Wells asked as he took a seat. He pulled out his phone and hit a few buttons before the swooshing methodical sound of the baby’s heartbeat played. “Sorry if you didn’t want the recording, but I had a feeling you might.”

“I didn’t even think about it,” I said, startled that I’d almost lost that first sound forever. “Thank you.”

“See? Alphas can be useful sometimes,” Miles teased. “So, is there a cute little baby bump yet?”

“Yeah,” I admitted, lifting my shirt to show the subtle swell. Just seeing their excitement was amping up my own, and before I knew it, we were showing off the ultrasound photos while I updated them on what the doctor had said. I hadn’t expected that I could find such joy in this unexpected situation.

This bubble of safety and acceptance was exactly what I needed to finally accept this baby and forgive myself.

Chapter Eleven

Briar

My focus was fully on adjusting the shading on the logo I was making. The coffee shop job had brought in more and more clients, so I had to work a bigger chunk of hours each day to get them covered, but I loved it. Plus, it was a nice reprieve between the morning sickness, weird cravings for jalapeños and chocolate, and getting used to this whole motherhood idea. Now that I'd seen the baby on the ultrasound, it was real. The doubts loved to start creeping in, reminding me that my life wasn't stable enough for motherhood, but I was getting better at shutting that voice out. *I can do this.*

The two weeks since my doctor's appointment had been strange, to say the least. Wells was spending more time checking in on me and being around. Tallon and I had nightly game time as we worked through the complicated storyline, which was quickly becoming my favorite way to wind down for the night. Graham was still hellbent on teaching me to cook, so I helped out with dinner every night, forcing Miles and Beck to join in whenever they were brave enough to wander by. The only one who really hadn't changed was Ellis. He was kind and protective, but a certain measure of distance remained between us. When the guys got too close, I could see the worried glances he threw around, but I tried not to let it get to me. I just hadn't expected Ellis to be the cold one since he'd been the one to bring me into their home in the first place. But whatever... I wasn't going to force anyone to accept me, and even if I wanted to, I didn't know how.

“Hey, you need a snack?” Beckham’s voice cut through my focus, and I glanced up, blinking to clear my vision. I almost said no, but then I changed my mind—or my stomach did. It protested the long break since my last meal. Reminder to self: pay attention to meal times and snacks. Not to mention, it kept the nausea at bay when I ate regularly.

“Actually, yes. I hadn’t realized I’d been going for a few hours,” I admitted. Pushing back my chair, I stood and stretched out my stiff muscles. I had a desk in my room, but sometimes I liked the open space better. Since I could easily work on my laptop, I split my time between my quiet space and this one—the view out here couldn’t be beat.

He gave me a teasing grin. “I noticed when Tallon tried to talk to you, and you didn’t respond.”

“Shit,” I cursed. “I’ll have to apologize to him later. I’m awful about tuning everyone out when I’m really concentrating. It’s a gift and a curse. The office was so loud I had to do it to get any real work done.”

“Oh, I bet.”

A shrill buzzing sound startled me. “What the hell is that?”

“Intercom,” he said as he walked over to the elevator. There was a speaker next to it, but I’d never considered what it was for. Tallon stepped out right as Beckham answered. “Hello?”

“This is Franklin in security. I’ve got a nurse down here saying she’s supposed to check in with Briar.”

“What?” I questioned. “No one makes home visits. This can’t be normal.”

Tallon stepped forward and gave my shoulder a squeeze. “It’s okay. We’re here.”

“Do you want me to let her up?” Beckham gently questioned. I didn’t *really* want to interact with this stranger, but my curiosity as to why she was here overrode my hesitation. At my nod, he pressed the intercom button again. “Send her up.”

When the elevator doors opened, a woman was standing there. She wasn't wearing scrubs like I'd expected, just a cute pantsuit. Her long red hair hung to her shoulders, and she had a friendly but clinical smile on her face.

"Briar, I assume?" she asked as she stepped out, offering me a hand. Her skin was like ice, which I desperately hoped wasn't some kind of omen as to the woman herself.

"Yes. Can I ask what this is about? I didn't realize Dr. Bower did home visits."

"She doesn't," she explained. "I'm from the Omega Services office here in Grove City. When an omega is packless, their information is automatically sent to us by the doctor's office. Standard procedure after an omega turns eighteen, so I'm sure you understand. It's a measure to protect omegas in... *strange* situations." She directed a pointed look at the guys, who narrowed their eyes in return. "It's just a standard welfare check and information meeting. In fact, I've brought along some information about packs who are seeking an omega. Despite your... condition, they are open to meeting with you. Can we speak somewhere private?"

My blood boiled. I'd done everything to keep them away from me, and now she was standing in front of me, trying to force me into a box I didn't fucking want to be in.

"I'm not interested," I said firmly. "Sorry you've wasted your time here."

"Actually, it's not an option to simply decline. If you don't see me, I'll be forced to say that I cannot vouch that you're in a safe environment."

"How are we not a safe environment?" Beckham questioned, his tone remarkably even. Tallon was only quiet because Beckham had a bruising grip on his hand, something she seemed to notice. I was thankful the omega had enough sense to not kick her ass out like I really wanted.

"Fine. I don't see how speaking to me privately will change my answer, but I'll play your game for now," I countered. "Can you two give us a moment?"

“Of course,” Beckham said before turning to me. “If you need us, don’t hesitate to yell.”

“Have a seat,” I offered, shutting my laptop as I took my own.

“We’re not the enemy,” she said gently. I glanced up upon hearing the sincerity in her voice, and the concern in her eyes told me she believed what she was saying. Maybe she wouldn’t just throw me under the bus after all?

I relaxed when I realized she meant it. Now that the pack was out of the picture her demeanor changed. I just hoped it was real this time. Either way, I had little choice but to cooperate.

“Alright. What do I need to hear?” I asked, keeping us on track.

She flipped open a portfolio, plucked out a folder, and set it aside. “First, resources. If you’re unhappy with your doctor or need any accommodations, call us at the office. We have advocates who will help you take care of that. She slid the paper over, and I took it, quickly glancing over it. The premise of their office was nice; I couldn’t fault them for wanting to make sure that omegas were looked after. I just hated that our world made omegas feel like they had to be part of a pack even if that pack wasn’t a good fit. They needed to realize that protecting an omega didn’t mean the omega should lose all autonomy.

“Thanks,” I said as I set it aside and met her gaze again. She didn’t miss a beat, diving into a long speech about how important my baby and I were and how we weren’t alone. It was well practiced.

“Finally, this is for you. We’ve taken your information, upbringing, all of that, into account and selected packs that fit your needs. This packet contains their profiles and pictures. We break them down as thoroughly as possible, so it makes the decision easier.”

“And if I don’t want to join a pack?”

She looked up at me, confused and a bit taken aback. “How would you raise a baby without a pack, Briar?” There was a condescending note to her voice that had my hackles rising. This woman was giving me whiplash with her switch from sweet to judgmental.

“With my own money,” I pointed out. “I’m not poor and isolated here.”

“You’re also with a pack that *isn’t* yours,” she said, that note of condescension fully coming out now. She might as well be talking to a child. “They may be giving you a place to stay right now, but eventually, there will be things that they can’t provide you. You know omegas have needs, and there will come a time when yours rear their head. This pack will not be able to give you what you’ll require when that time comes around. You will choose a pack or be placed with one by law.” And there it was, the ultimatum I’d been waiting for.

“And if I find a pack on my own?” The words came out quicker than I would have liked, telegraphing too much about how this line of conversation was bothering me.

“Then I’ll need proof they are *actually* your pack. Once I have that, your case would be closed in that regard,” she said.

“Proof?” I asked, eyebrows raised. What the fuck did she expect, a sex tape to show I was actually with this pack?

“We’d need to know it was permanent—either a formal ceremony or something like your name on the lease for their home. Co-ownership is an easy tell that this isn’t a fleeting whim or something to distract us from the truth. You’d be surprised how many try to hide their packless status like we’re the enemy.” She laughed flippantly, but I completely understood why they’d do it. *This is insanity*. She closed her portfolio, and her gaze softened when she looked back at me. “Look, you have two weeks until I’m required to check back in. Glance over the profiles and give them a chance, Briar. You don’t have to face this time alone, and if you go into this with an open mind, you could find the people missing from your life.”

I sighed and took the folder, setting it on top of the other papers she'd given me. "Alright, I will." It was a lie, but I made the promise anyway. She hadn't said I had no choice outright, but I read between the lines. I chose a pack, or I'd be assigned one for my protection. My stomach churned as I escorted her to the elevator. Not wanting to look at the information, I rushed to my room and threw it on my desk.

My shoulders ached with tension, and my stomach was not happy. I didn't want to stress out my poor baby, so I opted to take a soothing bath. In the steamy, bath-bomb-scented bathroom, I could at least pretend this wasn't happening to me. The last thing I wanted was a pity pack or to be shoved into a life I didn't want.

Fuck. What am I going to do?!

Tallon

"SHE'S OUT THERE TALKING to some bitch from Omega Services. The lady said she's brought pack options for Briar to choose from," I bit out the moment Beckham and I slipped into Ellis' office.

"Well, she deserves options," he said stubbornly. Growling, I grabbed a book from his shelf and launched it at the wall. It hit with a clatter that had him raising an eyebrow. Fuck, Ellis could be so pragmatic sometimes—*too* pragmatic. This wasn't the time to let some kind of logic get in the way. He needed to let his heart do the thinking, not his head, because his heart had to know that this wasn't right. She didn't *deserve options*. She deserved *us*.

"No, this isn't okay. We're her pack!" Beckham argued. "I'm not going to sit here and fucking pretend she doesn't matter to us."

Ellis stood up and gave him what he probably thought was a soothing smile. "It's not up to us, Beck. She's planning for this to be temporary. She's mentioned that more than a few times."

“But Wells kissed her,” I countered. He’d admitted it last night, and it was all I could fucking think about. I had been so jealous it was all I could do to keep from bursting into her room so I could do the same. Since our first night gaming together, it had become our routine, something I treasured and was tortured by in equal measure since I just wanted to be closer to her.

“What?” Ellis growled. “What the fuck?”

“You can’t tell me you don’t see this!” Beckham yelled back. I was suddenly glad that these rooms were soundproof, knowing that lady would drag Briar out of here if she heard us. Poor Beckham was now pacing, hands flailing wildly as he ripped into Ellis. “I love you, but this is insane! Barring this new information about Wells, we’ve kept our distance like you asked. We’ve all gotten to know her as a friend. Now is the time to move past that.”

“She’s pregnant with another alpha’s baby.” Beckham groaned at the weak argument, and I refused to look at Ellis. That was a cheap shot that he knew didn’t matter to us.

“I don’t give a flying fuck if she’s pregnant. I’m excited about that baby now. We’re all fucking adults here. Why is your head up your ass over this?”

“She’s my friend’s sister,” he defended. We both stopped and gaped at him.

“And Liam would approve of her picking strangers?” I challenged. Ellis winced. It was almost imperceptible, but we didn’t miss it. He turned away from us and stared out his floor-to-ceiling window like the bustling city below would give him the answers he needed.

“Just talk to us,” Beckham pleaded. Ellis sighed and turned around. For a moment, he let a hint of vulnerability slip free.

“It’s not her,” he promised as he took his seat again. “She’s great, and I’d have to be an idiot to not see how much she’s already changed us. Wells is out here every day, openly chatting. Tallon, you’re less angry—today being the exception. Beckham and Miles took to her right away. I can’t deny all of

those things, but she's vulnerable and alone. What happens when she gets her feet beneath her and the world is less overwhelming? When she has a completely clear head and looks back at her choices? I don't want us all diving into something that makes her feel like we've taken advantage of her. At that point, we'll all be too far gone."

His words were like a bucket of ice on our heads.

"You're wrong. She's not as vulnerable as you think," Beckham said evenly, shaking off the idea. "Briar is a strong omega who wouldn't take anyone else's shit. She's not just a roommate, but our friend, and now she's pack. You're wrong, Ellis, and if you keep hiding, you'll fuck it up for all of us." Beckham turned and walked out, leaving the alpha in stunned silence.

"I've spent every night with her until she goes to bed, Ellis. She's not a broken doll. She's a person. Sure, she has some cracks in her foundation right now, but she's standing strong despite them. You can't make these decisions for all of us, just so you don't get hurt in the end. Can packs fail? Sure. But it's rare when they choose their mates like we have. It's different with her, Ellis. I want her more than I've ever wanted anyone other than Wells. He feels it, I feel it, and our omegas feel it. Hell, even your uncle is taken with her. Look around, Ellis. Open your eyes. Otherwise, she'll start looking for fucking packs that will."

I left the 'and we'll never forgive you' unsaid as I walked out and went to my room. If he didn't feel it, it'd be different. We wouldn't force him to be with a mate he didn't want for himself, but we could see the stolen glances and chemistry. She fit with us perfectly.

Flopping on my couch, I breathed in the mix of my and Briar's scents. It calmed my jagged edges, telling my body what I already knew—she was mine. I just had to get the rest of the pack on board... or rather, one stubborn alpha. Because I had a feeling Graham wasn't hiding from her either.

I'd be damned if she left us, thinking we wanted nothing to do with her. It couldn't be further from the truth.

She belongs with our pack.

Miles

BETWEEN THE MEETING Briar had with the social worker and Ellis' stubbornness, I couldn't sleep. It had been a few straight hours of tossing and turning before I eventually gave up, padding out into the kitchen for a drink. I nearly screamed when I turned the corner to find Briar sitting on the counter, nursing a cup of something cloudy. From the adorable wrinkle of her nose and the glare directed at the cup, it wasn't going well.

"What are you doing?" I whispered. She glanced up at me and shuddered.

"Well, I couldn't sleep because the baby decided heartburn should make its debut tonight," she admitted. "I read online about baking soda water, but it's making me want to vomit, not lessening the heartburn. Pregnancy is weird."

"That sounds vile," I agreed. "I couldn't sleep because today was a bit of a shitshow."

She snorted out a laugh, nearly spilling her water. "Understatement of the century. That stupid meeting stressed me out. The audacity that office has is infuriating."

"No apologies necessary," I promised, stepping up to take the cup out of her hands, nestling in between her legs. "Come here." She leaned in, and I wrapped my arms around her. "Is this okay?"

"Yes," she said with a small laugh. "I'm not fragile, Miles."

"Not what I meant," I said as I stepped back to look into her eyes. Without words, I let her see my hunger for her. She'd already seen that we cared about her and the baby, but I wanted to take this further.

Shock, then curiosity, then determination flashed through her expression in quick succession before she brushed her lips over mine in a gentle kiss and wrapped her arms around my shoulders. It was the boldest we'd been together, and it was needed. We'd been dancing on the line, holding back, but now that we knew how we felt about each other, I refused to not act on it.

My hands trailed around her back and over her hips until they teased along her thighs. The scent of her sweet omega pheromones mixing with her own coconut and guava was mouthwatering, and I pushed aside the long tee that was covering her lap. She didn't stop me, so I moved higher, brushing gentle touches along her bare skin until I reached her sleep shorts. I curled my fingers in their hem, pulling them down. Her breath caught as she wiggled a bit to make it easier, and I let them fall to the floor.

"No panties?" I husked as I dropped to my knees. She spread her legs, and I helped her move to the edge, putting her pussy on display for me. I breathed in deep, committing that musk to memory before I licked a stripe over her pussy. She was sweet with her slick, and I eagerly began to lick and suck every inch of her.

Briar tried to be quiet, muffling her cries by biting her lip, and damn if that sight alone didn't make me hard as fucking steel. I soaked in every moan and whimper I pulled from that sweet mouth of hers as I tongue fucked her. It had been a long time since I'd been with a female; most of my relationship history consisted of being dominated by Ellis and Graham, sometimes together, though Wells wasn't afraid to help me through a heat or fuck me when the mood struck. We didn't hold back with each other, and I didn't think Briar should be any different.

I'd never deluded myself into believing that I couldn't satisfy a mate because I was an omega. I couldn't knot like an alpha, but I could easily make my partner feel good, and her muffled cries of pleasure only solidified that. Yet another reason I knew this could work for us.

She started to grind into my face as I sucked hard on her clit, following with soothing swirls of my tongue. I kept up my barrage of rough and gentle touches to bring her right to the edge, continuing until she was crying out loudly enough that I knew the others would hear. A sense of satisfaction hit me with that realization. Good, I hoped Ellis got an earful and realized what a stubborn ass he was being.

She was writhing against me and whimpering, but I kept my pace up so she was forced to ride out the sensations. As she came down from that high, I meticulously cleaned up every ounce of slick I could get with gentle strokes of my tongue.

She was breathing heavy and a bit dazed after I pulled away, swiping a hand over my wet face and grinning up at her.

“Who knew your tongue was the cure for heartburn?” she asked, her voice husky with lust.

“Well, at least we know now,” I joked as she started to yawn. “Come on, let’s get you to bed.”

“Only if you come snuggle me,” she challenged. She didn’t push me to let her return the favor, and I was glad. Sex didn’t have to be a give and take. I had wanted to give her relief, and she seemed to know that. It was just so easy being with her, and I hoped it stayed this way because I knew I’d sleep happy tonight with her in my arms.

Chapter Twelve

Briar

The file stared at me from my desk whenever I walked in and out of my room. Every single time I passed, my fingers itched to open it. She had made it very clear that being single wasn't an option for me, and I wasn't about to tie these men to me and a baby—especially one that wasn't theirs—forever.

They might want you in their pack. Several of them had made that clear; the logical part of me argued, but it was useless. The negative side of my brain would chime in with but not all of them did. Ellis had kept his distance, and in the three days since the meeting with Omega Services, he'd been even colder. I was ready to rip my hair out over trying to figure these guys out. And outside of Wells and Miles' very obvious declarations, the rest hadn't said anything about wanting to take our relationship to the next level. *Am I being too hopeful?*

When I finished my work for the day, I sent off the files and tucked away my laptop. I had no excuses left, and I knew it. I opened the file, seeing she'd compiled data on over ten different packs, most old enough to be my dad. My stomach spun with nerves at the prospect. The idea of leaving these men and this pack had my chest physically aching, the pain so intense I felt like I couldn't breathe.

My pulse pounded in my ears, thundering loudly enough that I thought I might have a heart attack. I'd promised myself when I got here that I wouldn't let these men get under my

skin. Yet here I was, *devastated* by the thought of leaving. I'd been here for a little over two months, and I was ready to dig my heels in to stay. I just knew that if Omega Services wanted me to leave, I'd need to be dragged out, kicking and screaming.

They knew my darkest memories, they'd gotten baby and pregnancy books to learn all they could about us, and they'd proven more than once that I could genuinely trust them. And for me, that was fucking huge.

Shoving the folder aside, I grabbed my wallet and keys and stalked out of the room. I needed fresh air and distance from that wretched file.

My focus was on escaping, so when I stepped out of my room and came face to face with the entire pack, I stumbled.

"What's going on?" I asked quietly. Fear struck through me so fiercely. That negative voice was starting to win out, practically shouting in my mind.

My eyes flicked to each member of the pack until they landed on Ellis. He winced at my eye contact, and that was it for me. Nope. I couldn't do this right now. Shaking my head at the lack of answers, I went to the elevator and hit the button.

"I need to take a walk and get out of the house," I told them. Beckham and Miles were by my side in seconds, each taking one of my hands. They didn't speak, and I was thankful. My emotions were already so up and down that if they did, the dam would surely break.

The alphas let us go, not that I would have let them stop me at this point. The scent of worry and fear filled the elevator, and I knew it wasn't all mine.

"Are you leaving?" Beckham asked as soon as we were outside. I let the sun's rays hit my face, head tilted back, absorbing it like life energy for a brief moment.

"I'll have to," I finally answered. Forcing myself to open my eyes and face them took everything in me, and I instantly regretted it. "She gave me an ultimatum."

"That is?"

“Pack up or they pack me up,” I said with a shaky breath. My control over my emotions was faltering, like a car teetering on the edge of a ravine. I was all too unsure whether it would roll over or hold strong.

“I thought you wanted us?” Miles asked. There was a mix of hurt and anger in his voice that I recognized. It was the same twisted tone that I’d heard come from my own lips when I’d asked similar questions of my parents as a child.

Beckham cursed. “It’s Ellis. Isn’t it?”

Shrugging, I finally met his hazel eyes. They were glassy with unshed tears, which only made me feel worse. I hated that this was hurting them too. I’d failed to keep my distance, and that had opened the door for all of us to be hurt, not just me. But Ellis’ distance hurt too. I knew it was silly that I’d thought we had a connection forming when I first arrived, that he was interested in me. In another life, maybe we would have been together. But the moment it felt like we got along, he started putting space between us. I understood why, but that didn’t make it any easier to swallow.

“Fuck Ellis,” Miles spit out. “He’s being stubborn. Stupid.”

“He thinks you’ll regret it. You’re in a vulnerable state, and he’s afraid that one day you’ll think we’re taking advantage of you and want to leave,” Beckham admitted. “Tallon and I confronted him after that bitch came to the house.”

“She really was terrible.” My chuckle held little humor. “I don’t know what to say to that. It hurts to consider that he thinks me being pregnant somehow renders me overwhelmed and too irrational to make decisions. I’m not a child. I’m also not going to beg someone to want me, guys. Breaking up your group was never my intention, so going is the only option.”

“This is ridiculous,” Miles growled, pulling out his phone. Beck and I watched him, confused. When Ellis’ *hello* filtered through, my breath caught. What the fuck was he going to do? “I hope you’re happy. She’s leaving us. That social worker gave her an ultimatum to find a permanent pack, and she’s

refusing ours because she's too fucking kind-hearted to break up years of friendship. I love you, Ellis, but I won't let you ruin this for all of us. Get your head out of your ass. Now."

When he hung up, panic struck me.

"What the fuck, Miles?" I gasped. "Pushing someone to pick me is such a bad idea! I'd rather die than be placed with a pity pack."

"If I thought he was on the fence about wanting you, Briar, I wouldn't have said it," he promised fiercely. "We've all seen it, and as someone who spends a good chunk of his nights with Ellis, I know he's admitted as much. I can read him better than most, and he's letting honor get in the way of what he really feels. At this point, he's being a stubborn asshole and needs a reality check."

"Briar?" The sound of Liam's voice had me turning. Seeing him was like sunshine after rain. The world slowed down around us, and all I saw was my safe haven, my person. Taking off at a run, I raced down the sidewalk to the man who would always come before any pack drama.

"Liam!" I screeched as I launched myself at him like a true psychopath. Breathing in my brother's scent had the rest of my walls falling until I was sobbing, and not the cute, soft ones, but huge body-shaking sobs.

"Briar, what the fuck happened?!" he growled, holding me tight. "If one of you did something to my sister, you're fucking dead."

"Get me out of here, please. Just for a bit. I'll explain, but I'm not hurt," I promised. He looked startled at my pleading, but he led me to the passenger door of his car with an arm around my shoulders. I'd just climbed in when I glanced back at the guys. Miles and Beck looked understanding, but now they'd been joined by the rest of the pack. Ellis looked panicked, and the rest seemed downright pissed.

Someone called out my name, but I shook my head when Liam met my eyes, pleading with him to get me the space I needed.

“I’m going to kill them,” he promised. Thankfully, instead of walking down there, he rounded the car and got in. His chest heaved angrily until I rested a hand on his arm. He took a deep breath and glanced at me. “Alright, alright, I’m going. Do you need to eat?”

I sighed. The idea of food wasn’t appealing at the moment, considering I was a fucking mess, but it wasn’t just me anymore. If I could avoid adding nausea to the emotional mess I was currently dealing with, then I’d do it. “I haven’t eaten,” I admitted.

“Alright, I was going to take you out to dinner regardless. I had a meeting across the city at the hospital and wanted to surprise you, but it looks like I came right in time. Tell me they didn’t hurt you,” he begged.

“No. I promise it’s not as bad as you’re thinking. It’s just been a hard few days,” I explained. That was all he was getting for now, and I needed a subject change. Fast. “How’s school? Home life?”

“Nice subject change.” He snorted, giving me an exaggerated eye roll. “They’re still being assholes and pretending you don’t exist. I’m biding my time. I’m so sorry I haven’t been down in the last few weeks. Between classes and interning, I’m fucking drowning. I did have a breakthrough recently, though,” he said with a grin. “I had an interview two weeks ago, and they accepted me. That hospital specializes in obstetrics, and they only take two students every year. I’m one of them.”

“Oh my god, what?!” I gasped. “Congratulations, Liam. That’s incredible!”

“Thanks.” He blushed, but his grin was huge. He should be proud; he worked so fucking hard.

“Wait... obstetrics?” I asked. “I thought you wanted pediatrics.”

“It turns out the transition between them isn’t too bad. I did it last semester, and we crammed the extra classes in. It’s tireless, but I’m still on track,” he admitted. “After you got

pregnant and I saw how you were treated, I wanted to work somewhere I could make a difference. Help spot alphas abusing their omegas and give them at least one ally.”

“That’s great,” I said with a snuffle. My brother’s heart was so big, and even now he was trying his best to make the world better. He couldn’t save me or change this situation, but he might be able to save another omega someday.

He pulled up outside of a small Italian restaurant. It was early enough we didn’t have to fight the dinner crowd. We quickly made our way inside and nabbed a table.

Liam ordered us both drinks, which made me smile. I was grateful he was taking care of me. It was a nice change, spending time with him and not having to try to be anything but myself. He knew everything about me, and it had always been so easy with us. We had been each other’s only allies for so long that it was impossible not to be best friends.

“Quit stalling. Spill,” he ordered, using a bit of his alpha authority—a rarity. Protective big brother was here, and I found everything tumbling out, from falling for the pack, to Ellis’ hesitations, to the visit from Omega Services.

“I don’t know what to do,” I admitted in a quiet voice. “I’m in over my head here, but I really tried not to be. Keeping my distance was supposed to be super easy, and I failed.”

“You didn’t fail,” he promised. “I’ve known Ellis for a really long time. If it’s because of our relationship, I’ll talk to him, but I’m guessing this has more to do with the ‘trapping you’ part. He’s always been a gentleman, and it sounds like he’s trying to not overstep his role as your protector. That, and his mom became pregnant with him during the early stages of her pack’s relationship and felt forced to stay. She reminded them of that often as well, so that’s likely right in the front of his mind. Ellis can be complicated. I’ve never met his mom, but from everything he’s told me, she torments her pack. As a beta, she always felt dismissed until she had Ellis with his beta father. Somehow, they produced an alpha, but even though that gave her a little more status, it didn’t make her any happier. So he might be feeling that if he offers you a spot now, you’ll

accept it just for the baby and regret it one day. But at that point you'd all be trapped together in misery," he explained.

"But I'm not trapped," I argued in frustration. "I'm in the shitty situation of having to pick and prove my pack status, but I'd have chosen them regardless."

"We both know that, but he's always been a bit hesitant with commitment because of it. I don't know how deep that bullshit with his family goes, but if this is happening, then I'd guess pretty deep."

"I want to hug and karate chop him at the same time," I grumbled. "Why are alphas always making shit complicated?"

"Because *men* are dumb sometimes. It's not just alphas," he promised. "And trauma has a lasting effect. You know that better than anyone."

"Yeah, but I'm not stubborn as fuck," I snarked. He raised an eyebrow and leaned back, giving me a look that told me he didn't buy that. "Fine, but not *that* stubborn."

"I'll give you that. And not to be the meddling older brother, but you guys need to fucking get over yourselves and talk. So I'm inviting your pack to dinner since we just ordered drinks and appetizers," he said, grabbing his phone and starting to type away.

"Alright," I sighed. "But I don't need you to fight this battle for me, okay?"

"No punching?" he whined playfully.

"Or maiming, or kicking, any of that," I added on with a laugh. He softened and reached over, resting his hand on mine.

"I love you, Briar. I just want you to be happy and safe. That's all," he said gently, and damn if those tears didn't make a comeback.

"I love you too," I said back, wiping at my face and grumbling about pregnancy hormones. But we both knew those tears of love and acceptance had nothing to do with being pregnant. It just meant so much more to hear those

words since my parents had proved their complete lack of love.

“Here’s your garlic bread and bruschetta,” the waitress said, interrupting the moment. She pretended not to notice the tears as she gave us smiles and slid over the plates. “Can I get you anything else?”

“Yes, actually. Can we have another table pulled over? We unexpectedly have six more joining us,” he said.

“Of course,” she said, giving him a shy smile. He jumped up to help her adjust the seating, and I secretly hoped he got her number. He could use a sweet omega like her in his life.

Just as he took his seat, the others walked in. Graham took the seat next to me, pressing his thigh against mine as he leaned in to whisper in my ear.

“You’re mine, Briar. That baby is mine. You’re not going to any other pack. You hear me?” It wasn’t a threat, but a declaration. My stomach fluttered with nerves while I swallowed hard.

“Okay,” I whispered, trying not to show my sag of relief. He pulled back and tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear.

“I mean that, and so do the others, Briar,” he said gently. His brown eyes were full of so many unspoken things. “I’m taking you home after this. We need to talk privately. Clearly, I haven’t done a good enough job at conveying my feelings. And for that, I apologize.”

“Okay,” I said quietly. “I feel like I’m creating so much drama.”

“You’re not. If anything, we were. By being so damn hesitant to cross a line, we created drama that none of us expected. No more,” he said before taking my hand and turning to his menu.

Beckham was on my other side, a hand resting on my thigh. Their hands met under the table, and they rested there together, staking a claim. A surge of lust went through me and

I could scent it in the air. Graham chuckled, but that was his only acknowledgment of it.

Tuning back into the table, I winced at the tension between Ellis and everyone else. I almost felt bad, but he'd done this to himself, drawing a firm line in the sand that everyone but him had crossed.

"Can we get together and talk tomorrow?" Ellis asked me. Everyone fell silent, eyes darting back and forth between us.

"Sure," I agreed, keeping my tone light and even. He was saved from any further awkwardness when the waitress came back to get our dinner orders.

Now that the tension was over, dinner continued on with lighter conversations and the guys getting to know my brother a bit better. He'd been friends with Ellis for a long time, but they'd never sat down like this, with him and the entire group. Seeing my brother with my potential pack was soothing. Not all packs cared about an omega's past, and I was grateful they recognized how important he was to me, or it would have been a deal breaker.

The prospect of tomorrow's conversation played in the back of my mind, and I resolved to keep a small sliver of myself tethered, not giving in to any hope in case I was going to get rejected tomorrow. From the way Graham and Beck held on, and the looks I was getting from Miles, Tallon, and Wells, I had nothing to worry about, but it was hard to tell my anxious heart that.

Chapter Thirteen

Graham

Dinner next to Briar was pure torture. All I wanted was to take her back to my room and show her how much she meant to me. The continuous brush of Beckham's fingers against mine wasn't helping the situation either. He was my omega, but lately it had been harder to find time for us to spend together. With Briar now here, and hopefully staying with us in the future, I had a feeling that was about to change. Especially after Miles confessed to their middle-of-the-night rendezvous the other night. She seemed to be coming to terms with joining us, but we still had a long way to go to make her comfortable.

"I've got the check," I announced when the waitress came back to clear the table.

"Of course, sir. I'll be right back with that," she promised as she expertly stacked plates and carried them off.

"You don't have to do that," Liam countered, but I waved it off.

"It's my pleasure," I reassured him. "I'll give Briar a ride home if you don't mind?"

Liam stared me down for a second, then glanced at my omega. His gaze softened before he nodded once.

"You take care of her, Graham," he warned. Although the words were said in a mild tone, his eyes conveyed every ounce of pain he'd rain down upon me if I were to hurt the person he cared about most. There was trust in this exchange, even if it

was warily given, and that was something I wouldn't dream of breaking.

"Of course. I'd protect her with my life, and that includes her heart," I promised, and he relaxed. He knew I was trustworthy, but this was a different situation than we'd ever faced. After I handled the bill, I turned to Briar. "You ready?" She squirmed in her seat, which enticed me far too much, considering her brother was sitting at the table with us. She was just so responsive, and I hadn't even touched her yet. What would it be like once I did?

"Yes."

"Do you know how badly I want you right now?" My voice was low enough that only she could hear, and the way her breath hitched had me shifting in my seat. "Do you want the same? If so, then I plan to take you back to our place and show you how much you're mine."

"God, yes," she breathed out before blinking out of the fog she was in. "Let me say goodbye to Liam."

She gave him a hug as we all stood around them, watching the love between the siblings. With the kind of parents they had, it was so important to me, to us, that she had a relationship with her brother. She deserved for there to be some positive spark in her family, and while I wished her parents could have given that to her, at least she had Liam.

He whispered something in her ear, and her arms tightened around him before she released him with a sigh. I took her hand and led her out to my waiting car, only stopping long enough to turn to Beckham.

"You coming?" His eyes widened before he grinned enthusiastically. Oh, they'd be a fun pair. The thought of them both submitting to me, letting me order them to please the other, had me aching. But I'd keep a handle on my control because this night was going to last.

The ride back was a blur, and the moment I parked, I practically dragged my omegas upstairs and straight to my room. Briar looked shy and unsure when we stopped inside,

and I didn't want to scare her, so I stepped closer and gently pushed her chin up until she was looking me in the eyes.

"I've never wanted a woman as much as I want you, Briar. You now mean just as much to me as Beckham and Miles do," I started. Beckham's intake of air had me pulling him closer, my hand possessively wrapped around his forearm as I reassured our counterpart. "We may have had a pack bond before you, but you only add to that dynamic. We all want you, and we all intend to show you how much. Will you let us love you tonight, Briar?"

She swallowed hard, her mouth opening like she wanted to say something, but didn't. Finally, she gave the barest movement of her head. I didn't know I could be so deeply affected by something so small, but that consent meant everything to me. There was a submissiveness in the way she cast her eyes down and moved so subtly, like she was waiting for me to take the lead, and I was ecstatic my earlier assumptions had been right. Reading people was my forte, and I could already tell that I'd be taking complete control tonight. I couldn't wait to make this pair of omegas fucking soar.

"Do you have any hard limits, Briar?" I asked her bluntly. She stared at me for a second before shaking her head. "Will you speak up if you're uncomfortable or don't like where this is going?"

"Yes," she promised, and that was all I needed.

Clothes off. Now," I ordered, stepping back. They both hesitated, but one quirk of my eyebrow had them dropping their clothes, piece by piece, until they were gloriously naked in front of me. I was so fucking hard as the mix of sandalwood, coconut, and lust created a fog around us. I was a patient alpha who fully intended to enjoy the next few hours. "Good girl," I told Briar as she bared herself for me, allowing my eyes to rake over her body. She shivered at my praise, and I tucked that knowledge away for later. Beckham was slower, so we both turned to watch him. His fingers fumbled with the buttons now that the weight of our attention was solely on him. "Briar, help him."

She obediently stepped forward and easily unbuttoned his jeans, slowly pushing them over his hips before peeling his boxers down his body. He was gorgeous, all bronze skin and sleek muscles. His perfect physique had the softness of an omega mixed with a strength he worked hard to maintain.

“What now, alpha?” Briar asked. Her pink tongue darted out, wetting her lips, as she stared up at me. She was fucking perfect.

“Take mine off now. Together.” I held my arms out and spread my legs enough to give them easier access. They stepped forward and worked together, button by button, to pull off each layer until I was naked. The omegas stared at me with hungry eyes, Briar letting out a whimper at the sight of my hard cock. She had me painfully ready, my dick already leaking precum. I stroked a slow hand over it before pointing one finger to the ground. They fell to their knees as one, and then it was my turn to hold back a groan. It was a beautiful fucking sight, one I’d commit to memory and enjoy for years to come.

Briar and Beckham stroked and licked my cock like they were fucking made for it. Briar licked a stripe along my length while Beckham teased his tongue over the tip. Her fingers were wrapped around the base of my cock, and she angled me toward Beck, who moved forward to take me in his mouth. He expertly swallowed me down before I pulled away and offered myself to Briar. She immediately opened her lips for me, and I pushed inside, groaning at the warmth of her mouth wrapping around me. There was no hesitancy now; she hollowed her cheeks and let me fuck her mouth. When my knot started to swell, I pulled away and gave myself a squeeze, calming the tide. It was far too early for this to end. I wanted to knot them both before this was over.

“On the bed, Briar. Let us taste you,” I gritted out, holding on to my composure for dear life. Beckham helped her to her feet and led her to the bed where she laid herself out, her knees falling to the side, giving me a perfect view of her pussy. She was gorgeous. Her slick filled the air with its sweetness, and

when her scent mixed with Beckham's, it nearly sent me into a rut. "You two will be the death of me."

"I was going to say the same," she said with a small smile, her eyes pleading for someone to touch her, give her relief.

"You will tell us if anything feels uncomfortable. Got it?" I asked.

"Yes, alpha," she whispered, and it was nearly my undoing. Falling from those cupid's bow lips of hers, it sounded so fucking good. I practically dove for her pussy, licking a stripe over her cunt before diving in with vigor. Every flick of my tongue or pump of my fingers earned a new wave of slick for me to clean up. She was so loud and responsive, it was pushing me higher.

"Suck Beckham off," I ordered. Beck hurried up to kneel by her face, lifting her head to place a pillow underneath before sliding into her waiting mouth. I lost myself in them for a moment, watching from between her thighs as she focused on our omega lover. Beckham's raspy groans were delicious. Both of them were slowly losing control as his fingers tweaked her nipples, which had her grinding her hips shamelessly. Not wanting her to miss out, I refocused on my own task.

She moaned around him when I sucked her clit into my mouth, curling my fingers and pumping them in and out of her. Beckham groaned, using a hand to brace himself on the headboard.

I didn't relent until a wave of slick flooded her pussy as she came, screaming our names. I lapped up every fucking drop of her cum and continued to finger fuck her right through it.

"Pull out and cum on her chest," I ordered Beckham. "Your alpha wants to watch you lose yourselves together."

She whimpered when Beckham pulled away, wrapping his fist around his wet cock. His head fell back as he milked his cock for us. Picking up my face, I watched his cues and brought her right to the edge with him. She shattered when he

did, their cries of ecstasy echoing in my bedroom as he painted her breasts in his cum. The sight of it had my cock giving an angry throb, and I had to squeeze again to calm myself as I crawled up her body, keeping my weight off of her baby bump while I licked up every ounce of his cum. My omegas watched me with hooded eyes as I cleaned up Briar then sucked a hard nipple into my mouth.

“So good for me,” I praised them. “So responsive and ready for your alpha, aren’t you?”

“Yes, alpha,” they said together. Beckham’s cock was already hard again, which was why male omegas were so fun to play with. They were as insatiable as their female counterparts.

“Good thing we’re just beginning.” I grinned. “Switch spots with me, Beckham.” He glanced at me, unsure, so I explained further. “Make sure to clean up every ounce of slick she gives us. Don’t you think she should come again for us?”

“I do.” The moment he thrust his tongue into her core, she bucked her hips, intensely riding his face as he tongue fucked her. They were so fucking sexy together, so turned on they were damn near animalistic. A lesser alpha would have fucked them both by now, but I was waiting for them to beg for my knot before that happened.

I watched, mesmerized by the two of them. Beckham’s muscles strained as he moved, his skin glistening with sweat. The claiming bite I’d given him was on his left shoulder, the whiteness of the healed mark standing out against his tanned skin. Ellis’ mark was on the right, a perfect pair.

A sense of possessive pride ran through me. I couldn’t wait to give Briar the same mark. Even if Beckham and I had let the monotony of life pull us apart, he was mine, and I’d work even harder now to ensure that he felt cherished by me. In fact, I’d spend my life ensuring all three of my omegas had everything they needed. Domination was so much sweeter when your submissive partners had love and trust in spades.

“Do you believe us now, Briar?” I asked as I leaned down, our noses brushing as I stared her down.

“Yes.” She said the word like a prayer before I met her lips with mine. My kiss started sweet, then I swept my tongue into her mouth, tasting and owning every fucking inch of her. She groaned, and I knew she tasted Beckham’s cum on my tongue. Fuck, that had another pulse of pleasure going straight to my painful erection.

When I pulled away, I moved off the bed and stopped behind Beckham. “Keep going, Beckham.” He didn’t stop, but he did shift so his ass was in the air for me. He likely thought I’d tease or stretch him, which was partially my plan, but first I wanted to give him just as much pleasure as he was giving her. Parting his cheeks, I flicked my tongue over his entrance. He faltered, and I stopped for a moment. “If you make her come before I make you cum, you can fuck her.”

“Yes, alpha,” he breathed, going back to her with twice as much enthusiasm this time. Now that he was focused, I was going to do everything in my power to make him lose it. Pushing my tongue past his ring of muscle, I thrust my tongue in and set a rapid pace before switching to soothing licks, alternating back and forth while he groaned into Briar’s pussy and ground his ass into my face, begging for more.

Then Briar lost it. Her screams were louder this time, and her hand gripped at his hair like a lifeline.

He pulled back and gave me a triumphant smirk over his shoulder. I stopped my teasing and backed away. Instead of giving him the go ahead, I used my fingers to stretch him until I was satisfied.

“Fuck her, Beckham. Make her scream,” I ordered, waiting for him to get into position before climbing onto the bed behind him. The moment he slid in, he paused, letting me do the same. My hands locked on his hips as I pulled back, moving slowly to get him ready, then slammed my hips into his ass. Her resounding whimper had a smirk curling my lips before I fucked my omegas together, using Beckham as my tool to take Briar as well.

Their whimpers filled the room again as I fucked them. She was pregnant, not breakable, and I knew she’d tell us if it

was too much.

“I’m going to come,” Beckham gritted out. I knew his thrusts were only keeping steady because of me guiding him.

“Not yet,” I growled, nipping at his back. “Hold on tight, omega.” Shifting us, I started up again with a rhythm that would shatter them both. Sure enough, they came together only moments later, the scent of slick and chorus of moans filling the space until I had no choice but to follow. My knot swelled, and Beckham groaned long and low as I pushed him to his limits. I continued to shove my knot deeper with each shallow thrust, forcing Briar to come along for the ride.

“You two were so perfect,” I said. My voice was rough and deeper than normal, and Beckham shivered at the sound. I let out a rumble in my chest that had my omegas shivering. Fuck, they were beautifully reactive to every sound and touch. I could lose myself in them for days if I let myself.

With two more thrusts, I came, filling Beckham with my seed. My knot swelled impossibly larger for a moment, locking us in place.

“Breathe, sweet omega,” I reminded him, rubbing a soothing hand over his back as I slowly rocked my hips. Briar pulled him into a kiss in a display of confidence and ownership that made me feel so happy. I was ready to purr again, loving the sight of her showing this ease with one of my pack members, particularly my lover. Her hands ran over the back of his neck, and a swell of possessive love hit me. Their gentle side was just as addictive as their insatiable sides.

When my knot finally released the omega below me, I pulled away, keeping hands on him so he couldn’t move. I loved the sight of my cum dripping from his ass.

“I’m going to slip into the shower and clean myself up before I fuck Briar. Take care of each other,” I warned before walking away. I didn’t look back for fear of wanting to join them. The shower was quick but refreshing, and I was easily ready for round two when I walked back in. Beckham had passed out, but she’d cleaned him up. His dirty shirt was resting on the floor as she ran soothing fingers over his back.

“He was exhausted, so I’m not surprised,” she teased.

“Do you want to sleep?” I asked her.

“No, alpha, I want your knot. Please,” she begged, spreading her legs wide for me again.

“Get up for a moment,” I told her, helping her off the bed with a steady hand when her legs shook. I laid down in her place, my cock already hard and in position. “Ride me, Briar. I want to watch you.”

Her hands dropped to her softly swelling stomach, and she faltered for the first time.

“No, omega,” I ordered. “Don’t hide your body from me. You’re fucking gorgeous. Look what you do to your alpha.” She watched as I gave my rock hard dick a stroke. Briar bit her lip, a blush on her cheeks. “I’ll want to fuck you just as much in four months as I do now. Don’t hide your softness from me. I want all of it, all of *you*.”

“Yes, alpha,” she finally relented, crawling onto the bed and straddling my hips. She hovered over me for a moment, and I teased the tip of my cock over her pussy before she sank down on me. We both groaned as her body swallowed every inch of me, stretching her. Beckham was long, but not as girthy, and I knew she felt this one. “Fuck yes.”

“I knew you needed your alpha’s cock tonight,” I told her with a grin. “Now fuck yourself on me. I want you to come all over my dick. Mark me, omega.”

She breathed shakily at my words and started to move, circling her hips until she found the right spot. Once she did, her response was immediate. She started to grind herself over me, her slick aiding her movements. It was impossible to look away when her mouth fell open in pure bliss. My hands ran along her hips and traveled up her torso until I was rolling her nipples between my fingers, using her moans to tell me how much pressure she needed.

It was moments before her scent strengthened, enveloping me in a cloud that had my knot already starting to swell. She cried out as it pushed against her, intensifying the moment.

“Please,” she begged, and I moved my hands to her hips, helping her seek out her release. She finally came with a gasp, her nails biting into my chest as she rode out the waves of pleasure overtaking her. I waited until she was starting to come down before fucking her through the aftershocks. My knot continued to swell, and the clench of her pussy was making it so fucking good I could barely think or breathe.

“You did so good for your alpha,” I praised. She smiled and sighed as he continued to shake with the last waves of her release. Our sex wasn’t frantic now, the pace calming down. My knot pushed her further as she lazily grinded on top of me. Her next orgasm was slow to build and not quite as intense, but it was enough for me to join her. We locked together as I filled her with my cum.

When our breathing slowed again, I rolled us to our sides and whispered sweet words to her. She fell asleep still knotted, in the midst of being fucked. I let her sleep, only continuing to move at a slow pace so she didn’t become uncomfortable, until the knot receded and I could pull out. I cleaned her up before tucking the blanket over them and climbing in behind her. Beckham sighed and rolled over, his hand resting atop mine on her hip. A smile graced my lips as I fell asleep with my two exhausted omegas by my side.

Chapter Fourteen

Briar

Through the morning and early afternoon, I waited for Ellis to come talk to me, but he was nowhere in sight. Miles rolled his eyes and stopped me from walking by the kitchen for the millionth time.

“Hey, I told you. He’ll be coming.” Something in his gaze told me he knew more, but I’d already learned enough about Miles to know that pushing him would get me nowhere.

“I know,” I growled, wincing at the bite in my tone. “Sorry.” He didn’t let go, pulling me closer and making me drop into his lap on the couch. I snuggled in, nuzzling into his neck and breathing in the scent of vetiver that was all Miles.

“Then breathe, Briar,” he said gently. “And tell me how good last night was.”

I gasped and sat up, staring at him with shock. “What?!” He captured my lips with a grin on his own.

“Don’t deny it. I know that look from Graham. He’s spanked my ass enough to know it by heart, but you’re not a brat like me, so I’m guessing it was mind blowing?” His eyes sparkled with mischief, and I had to admit I was squirming against him thanks to the mental image of him bent over Graham’s knee.

“Now all I can think about is him spanking you,” I groaned. “How am I supposed to focus on my worries if I’m horny?”

He snorted. “That’s the point, isn’t it?” He brushed his lips against mine again, and I shifted so that I was straddling him instead of sitting sideways. His dick was already hard as we pressed our hips together. Miles was more dominant than Beckham, guiding our sweet kiss until it was full of fire.

“We’re going to have to implement a ‘no making out or fucking in the common rooms’ rule,” Beckham muttered. “I’m still sore from last night. I can’t do it.”

I giggled into our kiss, and we pulled apart. I rested my arms lazily around Miles’ neck as I glanced at Beckham.

“Sleep well?” He had gone right back to bed after breakfast. We really had worn him out last night.

“Yeah,” he said as he stretched. “I’m usually not so easily exhausted, but I’ve been sleeping awful for a few nights.” We both froze.

“Because of me?” I questioned. “And the drama with Ellis?”

“That lady coming here shook me up a bit,” he admitted quietly. I moved off of Miles, and we both went over to Beckham, giving him a group hug. Although he didn’t stiffen or fight the affection, he chuckled like he was trying to play off how much it had gotten to him. “It’s selfish of me, but I got attached quickly, and I was terrified of losing you.”

“I’m still here,” I promised, and right then and there I knew I’d fight to keep my word.

“We wouldn’t let her get away that easily,” Miles said. The edge in his tone gave away that he wasn’t kidding, and he’d demonstrated that yesterday when he called Ellis on his shit.

“I’d like her to stay.” Ellis’ voice had us all jumping, and I spun around to face the alpha who’d given me nothing but the cold shoulder. He appeared to be exhausted. Dark circles lined his eyes, and he was disheveled in a way that wasn’t normal for him.

My head tilted as I took in the specks of gray on his skin. “Did you paint?” Now that I’d noticed it, the chemical scent of paint mixed with his pine, and I wrinkled my nose.

“Can we have that moment now?” he asked, dodging the question. He held out a hand for me, but I hesitated, glancing from his outstretched palm to his eyes, before finally resting my hand in his. I hated how much I liked his larger hand wrapping around mine, and that hurt came right back to the surface. He’d been my first lifeline here, and I’d thought, even if it wasn’t romantic, that he liked me more than he’d been showing.

He didn’t speak as he led me down the hall. We’d passed Tallon and Wells’ rooms when he pushed another door open, revealing a large space. I expected a bedroom, but it was a living room. There was a large television and couch, a small kitchenette, and three doors off of the main area. Between the fluffy couch, throw pillows, and the large fireplace, it was so cozy.

“Is this your room?” I asked. “Or one of those?” I pointed at the doors, and he shook his head. Every second with him, I was growing more confused and frustrated.

He let go of my hand and walked away, pushing open the first door. When he glanced back expectantly, I followed with a huff. He frowned at my reaction, but all that was forgotten as I checked out the room in front of me.

“Did you do this?” Now, it made sense. The room was freshly painted, the soft gray walls pristine. On one wall there was a mural of mountains and the silhouette of a sleuth of bears, one of them tiny. My heart clenched at the sight of the crib and baby furniture in the room. There was even a stack of diaper boxes in the corner. “Ellis?”

When I turned back, I faced a broken man. He wasn’t crying, but he wasn’t far from it.

“Briar, I am so fucking sorry,” he started. “I just didn’t want you to be trapped with us. This pregnancy left you in a spot that I’m sure wasn’t easy to navigate. We were supposed to be a temporary thing, but the moment you were here, you fit. It wasn’t just attraction. You brightened up this entire loft. I want you, Briar, just as much as the others do. I just didn’t want to push you into anything.”

“I’m not your mom, Ellis,” I said as gently as possible. He still flinched, which made me feel terrible. He started to say something, but I held up a hand to stop him. “Nor does this pregnancy affect my mind or my decisions. You know damn well I had every intention to leave after I got on my feet. I was ready to face everyone as a single mom regardless of what the world thought.” He smiled softly at that.

“I have no doubt you’d be the omega to shake things up. You’re so strong,” he agreed. “Have I fucked up too much to come back from this?”

“No, Ellis,” I said, then I stepped forward, wrapping my arms around his middle and resting my head on his chest. “You just have to talk to me. This hurt me. I thought you hated me, that you didn’t want this. I like you, but I never would have pushed. You get to make your own decisions too.”

“That was never it,” he admitted. “The moment I saw you, breathed in your scent, I knew you were mine. My head just didn’t process that the way it should have.”

“You did?” I asked quietly, stepping back to glance up at him.

“It’s true. For the first time in my life, I regretted being friends with Liam because I knew he wouldn’t approve. Guess I was wrong. He almost beat my ass last night,” he joked. His laughter was a bit too self-deprecating, like he actually believed he deserved that kind of punishment, and it blew my mind that such a strong alpha could be so insecure. Liam was right; trauma was trauma. There was no comparison system or a way to determine the value of what someone had gone through or the power it had to affect their lives.

“Don’t,” I told him firmly. “We talked it out like adults. I don’t have time to deal with a back and forth, nor do I want to. This is me saying I want you, this pack, all of it. I want to stay.”

He gestured at the room. “This is me begging you to stay, Briar. To forgive me and let me in.”

“Alright.” I smiled, a wave of relief hitting me hard. Tears of happiness burned my eyes. I shut down the part of my mind that questioned how we could have such strong feelings after such a short time.

What was growing between us was a tentative, shaky kind of love, the first blooms that would either fall away or grow depending on how we all handled them. This was our turning point, the precipice we were teetering on, and Ellis had just taken the final step in the right direction.

“This isn’t all,” he said gently, tugging me by my hand to the second door. When he pushed it open, my jaw dropped all over again. This room was amazing, and I could see touches of myself in it. A bookshelf rested on one wall, and I spotted a few titles that I’d discussed with Graham. The bed was huge, nearly the size of two king mattresses, and I loved the idea of my pack cuddling with my baby on that bed someday. “I even got a bassinet for our baby to sleep in.” He pointed out the small white bed, but I was stuck on a single word.

“Our?” I questioned in a hushed tone. “*Our* baby?”

His gaze softened. “Yes. That baby is mine just as much as you are, Briar. I’m sorry for what you went through, but I’m proud of you for coming so far, and I can’t wait to be a dad.”

“Holy shit,” I eloquently said before letting out a strangled sob. My knees collapsed, but he caught me.

“What the hell, Briar?” he called out as he picked me up and carried me back out to the couch. “Guys?!” His panic had a laugh bubbling out of me, mixing with my body-shattering sobs. All of my tension and worry came to a head at once, and I couldn’t do anything to stop it. It felt like all I did anymore was cry, but it was cathartic this time.

“What’s wrong?” Graham burst in with the omegas on his heels. Tallon and Wells were right behind them, everyone wild eyed.

“Briar?” Wells called loudly enough for me to hear over my chaotic crying.

“Is she laughing or crying?!” Miles asked, throwing his hands up. “What the fuck is happening?”

“I don’t know,” I wailed, unable to make sense of it myself. At this point, it felt like I had zero control of my warring emotions.

“What’d you do?” Tallon barked out and Ellis tensed.

“Nothing! I showed her the room, told her I wanted her and the baby, then she lost it.”

“Dude, she’s been through hell with stress. I’m not surprised,” Beckham said, sitting on the arm of the chair to gently run a soothing hand down my back. “Take a deep breath, Briar.” I tried to do as he asked, but it was shaky and pathetic, making me laugh all over again. The more I laughed, the more it drove back the tears, and eventually the guys joined in. We sounded fucking crazy and hysterical, but when I quieted down to hiccups, they stood around in a stunned circle.

“Pregnancy is weird,” Wells said, but his smile was amused as he shook his head at me.

“Did you guys all help with this?” I asked, pointing to the room behind me.

“We’d talked about it before, but Ellis did the hard work last night, painting and putting together furniture,” Graham answered. “I added some books while Tallon got your game set-up out here. Beck stocked your kitchen and made sure you had comfy blankets everywhere. Miles likes to shop, so you have some clothes in there to choose from, and Wells worked on the closet.”

“There’s a closet?” I asked. We’d checked out both rooms, and there weren’t any extra doors.

“Door number three,” Miles announced in a gameshow voice. I scrambled off of Ellis’ lap and followed Miles over. He pushed open the door, but it wasn’t a closet.

“Uh, this isn’t a closet. Holy hell, that’s magical!” I gasped, glancing around. They’d lined the floors and shower walls with a gorgeous gray river rock. The fixtures were shining silver, and a chandelier hung over a clawfoot tub.

There was also a shower stall in one corner and a his and hers counter and sinks on one wall.

Miles snorted, walking across the room to the other door. “Through there, smartass. We thought this would be easier with a lot of laundry.”

Closet still wasn't the right word for this huge room. They'd built shelves and drawers, and there was already a plethora of clothing. In the corner was a washer and dryer as well. A huge rug sat in the center, taking the room from plain to homey. A large circular ottoman sat in the middle, and a baby changing table was nestled under an open window that overlooked the city below.

“We thought two changing tables made sense. You'll need a place to change her,” Miles said with a grin, his fingers trailing over a row of baby onesies in neutral colors.

“Her?” I teased, my hand running over my stomach as I smiled at him.

“Oh yea, she's a girl. Wells is claiming differently, though, so we're a pack divided,” he explained.

“I'm almost afraid of how you'll all react at the next ultrasound,” I said. There was a hint of vulnerability in my words, and he caught it, rolling his eyes.

“We'll contain ourselves. We just want to meet our baby. Plus, we can't let Wells have all the fun,” he said, hooking his arm through mine and leading us back out. “You're stuck with us, Briar.”

“There's nowhere else I'd rather be.”

Chapter Fifteen

Briar

My heels clicked on the floors of the Omega Services Office. Everything here was overly nice, from the shined marble floors to the polished dark wood furniture. They'd spared no expense.

"Can I help you?" the security guard called out when I approached the desk. The two men looked bored and simultaneously frustrated that I was ruining their quiet.

"I'm here to see Miss..." I glanced down at the business card attached to the file. "Olivia Price."

"Do you have an appointment?" the second security guard asked in a haughty voice.

"She told me to stop by today," I countered. "My name is Briar Mackenzie."

"One moment," the first said, picking up a phone, entering a number, then waiting.

"Olivia, it's Mason down in security. I've got a Briar Mackenzie here for you?" He paused, and I almost laughed when he started to nod along like she could see him. "I'll send her right in."

The second man hit a button. "Elevator, second floor, room 203."

"Thanks," I said curtly, heading for the silver elevators. After I hit the button, I took a calming breath. Part of me couldn't believe it when Graham had added my name to the

lease, finalizing that gesture so easily. There was a clause that any of us could request the others buy out our shared portion at any time, but until then, the penthouse was a shared property, and that was all Olivia had required to close my case.

When the elevator opened, I stepped inside. Hurried footsteps had me glancing up. A frazzled omega was running my way, and she slipped inside right before the doors could close her out.

“Man, this place gives me the chills,” she said as she shuddered dramatically. “They’re like fucking robots or something.”

I laughed at that. “You’re not wrong. It’s all a bit *too* perfect.”

“Right?!” she said, throwing her hands up and nearly tossing a folder identical to mine. She noticed at the same time I did. “Oh god, did they hit you with the ultimatum as well?”

Sighing, I nodded. “The ‘Here are ten packs. Pick one or we pick for you,’ one?”

“That’s the one,” she growled. “Like we can’t function without an alpha by our side. My boyfriend is a beta, and I have no intention of leaving him because some asshole alpha knocked me up. Ridiculous!”

My chest tightened at her words. “Maybe they need to take a look at alphas needing to be managed instead.”

“That’s what I said,” she mumbled, a hand brushing her pregnant belly. She looked younger than me, barely eighteen. Her long red hair was straight and shiny, skin flawless, and she had a bright smile despite our conversation. I hated that someone was trying to dull this adorable, cheerful person. “My name’s Katelyn, by the way. Nice to meet another badass omega who hasn’t been brainwashed by the splendor of this place.”

“Briar. And I’m also telling her to fuck off,” I admitted with a grin. “My pack stepped up when they heard.”

“Nothing kickstarts commitment like the prospect of losing a good one,” she said with a wink. The elevator opened, and

we stepped out. I followed the numbers to 203 and pushed the door open, with my new ally following behind me.

“Welcome, ladies,” the caseworker who’d visited me said. “I take it you’ve chosen? Briar, I am shocked to see you so soon. I thought you’d give me the most resistance.” Her fake chuckle had me fighting back a growl. I’d misread her trust in the system as her being a good person, but now I knew for sure that she was just another pawn for the alphas who made our laws.

“Actually, I have a pack and won’t be needing your help or your prospects. Though I do have to say I’d rather be alone than set up with packs that could be my grandfather.” Her smile thinned, but I kept my face even as I handed over the folder, a copy of our signed lease on top. “There’s the signed lease that you requested, and my alpha Graham had it notarized so there’s no confusion on its authenticity. He also filed a copy with his lawyer.”

“How nice of him.” She sneered, glancing it over then sitting down with a huff. I wasn’t sure what her deal was or why she wanted to stick us with these packs so badly, but I was happy to ruin her day. “However, we did get a message from the baby’s father and will be required to inform him of this little... development.”

“You have no right to get involved in my life, and I’m fairly sure there are laws that protect me against men like him. Alphas assaulting omegas then trying to take custody doesn’t exactly look great in court or the public eye,” I countered in a low, venomous voice. I didn’t even care that Katelyn was hearing me. “I’d think twice before breaking the law, because you will be the one to face the fallout, not anyone else.”

Her face tightened further. “It’s standard procedure. And *you* are here for what purpose?” She turned to Katelyn, effectively dismissing me.

“I’ve declined your packs as well. I have a partner who has claimed me, and I intend to continue to live with him, as I told you previously. Here is paperwork from my alpha doctor *and* our lawyer since you didn’t take no so well the last time.”

Now, Olivia was downright furious. Two omegas defying her in one day was clearly enough to trigger the woman.

“How nice. However, that’s not satisfactory. There are laws in place to protect omegas from making poor decisions like this,” she bit out, but Katelyn was already prepared to fight her. *Oh, now she cares about laws.*

“My lawyer cited those laws in the papers I handed you and told me to remind you that if an omega is in an established relationship, has a stable home life, and steady income, she’s exempt. I’ve also been advised to make this my last contact with your office. If you have further questions or need me, you’ll go through her.” She dropped a business card on Olivia’s desk like a mic drop, and I almost cheered.

“Have a good day, Miss Price. Thanks for your concern, but it seems we both aren’t in need of your services,” I said professionally, giving her a small smile before heading out. Katelyn was right on my heels, but neither of us spoke until we were in the elevators, then our laughter burst out as if we couldn’t contain it anymore.

“That was fucking gold,” Katelyn said around her laughter. “She might be blowing a blood vessel right now.”

“Is it just me, or is it strange how persistent this office is?” I said as we caught our breath.

“That’s why we lawyered up. There’s an omega shelter across town that offers free legal counsel. They’re directly trying to combat this office’s barbaric rules,” she said quietly. “If you ever need help, check it out.”

“Thanks,” I said, though I kept to myself that I wouldn’t have felt safe there for a second. They needed a new location, fast, if they wanted to encourage more omegas to connect with them.

We parted ways the moment we went outside, Katelyn heading for street parking while I headed for the lot. Ellis had insisted on taking me, and we were going to check out a pregnancy and baby boutique across town now that I was done. Things were still a bit rocky between us, but now that

he'd given himself permission, he was really trying. That progress meant more than any words he could have said.

"Briar." My footsteps faltered, and an icy tingle of fear went through me. Immediately, I was back in that copy room, his rough hand tugging up my skirt as the other gripped my hair so tightly my eyes watered.

"Ellis," I breathed out, frantically looking for my alpha. I spotted him stepping out of the car and moving my way. When I tried to run to meet him halfway, a hand clamped on my shoulder.

"Get your hands off of her!" Ellis roared, his face contorted with rage as he ran forward. I was spun around and held tight to someone's chest, a cold blade pressed against my neck in warning. I swallowed hard, terrified of what might happen if I struggled. Ellis was fist fighting with more than four others, and he was swiftly losing. Panic rose with each hit that made contact. If it wasn't for fear of them killing him, I'd have screamed my head off.

"I've come here to retrieve you, Briar. You see, the moment my office was contacted for further medical history, I knew I needed to step in. So I've been waiting here for you, and I'm not a patient man," the mayor said with a dark chuckle. The man that haunted my nightmares tugged at the lapels on his suit as he started to pace. His thick brown hair was styled to perfection, his suit unwrinkled. His cold blue eyes were studying me with a hint of amusement. "You'll be coming back with me. It seems I need a bit of image clean-up, so Vivian suggested I come find you. Let's go, omega."

"No," I said with a startled laugh. "Have you lost your fucking mind?"

"Watch your tone," he barked out, a bit of that well-practiced composure falling away. "You will need some training. A bit of submission practice at my hand would do nicely. I could use some stress relief, and you did take my knot so perfectly before."

"You *raped* me," I said plainly, refusing to let him make it into anything else. "I told you no. There was no consent."

You're a sex offender. I have a pack, and I'll never go anywhere with you. If you take me, I'll defy you every step of the way, drag your name through the mud even if it kills me." Every word was spoken with a confidence that appeared unwavering despite the fact that I was panicking and lying through my fucking teeth. "Let him go. You don't want my pack after you."

The mayor finally stopped then, his eyes bouncing from me to where Ellis' bloody form lay on the pavement. Every time he tried to crawl toward me, to fight his way over, he was kicked down. When he fell this last time, he didn't move. My hands curled into fists at the sight, and I sent prayers that he was still alive to whoever would listen as I fought to keep my tears at bay.

"Your little... *pack* doesn't scare me Briar," he countered. The indifference with which he looked down at Ellis' battered body spoke volumes of his character... or lack thereof.

"They should. They know where I am, and I have a friend coming here today so you'll have a witness soon enough. Just wait until the world sees you're a murderer, sex offender, and a terrible person. Wonder how that campaign would go then?" It was stupid to keep egging him on, but I was grasping onto the hope that someone would walk if I just kept him talking. I knew I wouldn't be able to outrun his men or the guns I saw tucked into their belts.

"And you think that anyone would believe you?" he asked with a condescending smirk. "You're just a pathetic omega who was tempting enough to sample once. Now, you're an inconvenience. If you refuse to play along, then you must be removed from the situation." He turned to his men, snarling out his order. "Enough of this. Kill her." He started to walk away, but then he stopped and turned around. With a wicked glint in his eyes, he added one last line that shattered the world around me. "Aim for her stomach."

"No!" I screamed, my voice cracking with the amount of force I put behind it. Most of his men followed him, but two stayed behind, guns trained on me since Ellis hadn't moved

once. That was likely his only saving grace, and I hoped that he would make it out of here alive even if I didn't.

The world slowed around me as the crack of a gun sounded off, my ears ringing thanks to the close proximity. The impact of the shot had my body flinging backward, and I smacked down to the pavement before I could make sense of what was happening. Pain flared to life, bringing everything into too-sharp focus. The light of the sun was nearly blinding, the pain so intense I couldn't breathe, and it took far too long to realize a ragged scream of agony was ripping through my throat.

Something warm and sticky pooled under my hip, and when I brushed my hands over it, using all of my strength to lift them, my fingers were coated in dark red blood.

"Briar!" Ellis' voice had my head turning to the side. He dragged his battered body closer. "I'm so sorry." He slumped the moment his fingers brushed mine, unconscious again.

The sound of a siren echoed in the air, and I hoped it was here for us. That was as much as my mind could handle before darkness pulled me under.

Beckham

MY EYES ROLLED BACK in my head as Wells worked his magic hands over my shoulders. With Briar at the Omega Office, I was a ball of tension, and it was creeping toward migraine status. Ellis had gone with her, but the place always gave me the creeps. I couldn't help worrying that they'd fight her on this, and we'd have to start some long, drawn-out legal battle. After pacing and practically growling for I didn't know how long, Wells had finally taken pity on me.

"Just breathe, omega," Wells ordered. "I used to think your constant bubbiness could get annoying, but now I kind of miss it." His voice was light and playful, so I merely smirked and appreciated his presence.

His hands moved from massaging my shoulders to my scalp, and all thoughts fled.

Until Graham's office door slammed open. I almost complained until I opened my eyes and saw his pale, stricken face.

"What is it?" Wells barked out, snapping him out of his trance.

"Ellis and Briar were attacked. She's been shot." The room erupted into chaos, with Wells yelling out to the others and all of us rushing to grab our phones and wallets before running for the elevator. Time felt excruciatingly slow as we all piled inside, and the moment we reached the ground floor, we were running for Wells' SUV. He flew to the hospital Graham named, driving faster than I thought possible. As signs and lights flew by us, two pleas ran on a loop in my mind.

Let them be alive. I can't lose them now.

Chapter Sixteen

Miles

The smell of the hospital had dread rushing through each and every fucking cell in my body. There was nothing about this place that didn't make me want to run out of here. If not for Graham's firm hand on my bicep, I'd be gone.

"Breathe, omega," he rumbled in my ear. I shivered at the gravelly command and tried to cling to the odd sense of safety it gave me. The scent of his spiced rum and alpha pheromones was strong enough that it dulled the sterile scent of the hospital. Graham and Ellis were both so strong that imagining Ellis in the hospital was almost incomprehensible. If Graham weren't by my side with constant touches and reassurance, I'd have broken down. He was such a natural alpha that his ability to take over and direct me through this moment was exactly what I needed.

"I need to find my omega!" Wells demanded, barely keeping from crashing a fist on the counter as Tallon tried his best to cling to his side.

"You have to be calm, sir, or we'll have security escort you out," the beta nurse said curtly.

Beckham stepped up. "Blair Mackenzie and our alpha Ellis Crane, please." He had used his sweetest voice despite his obvious annoyance, and she ate it up. After a few routine questions and showing our IDs, we were in the clear.

"Ellis is in ICU room six, and Blair is still in surgery. The waiting room is outside of ICU and up the west hallway. They

may have updates for you,” she explained. “Now, I need you all to sign in.”

Beckham handled it for all of us while she pretended not to notice, and in less than a minute, we were racing for the elevators.

“ICU is on three,” I said quietly as Beckham’s finger hesitated over the buttons. He clicked it and gave me a worried smile. They all knew how I’d lost my parents, and I wasn’t keen on reliving some of the memories I’d shoved away but never truly dealt with. What ten-year-old could deal with that kind of thing?

“I’ll head to surgery,” Wells said as the elevator rose. I didn’t know what to say. I was so torn on who I should check in on first, but once again, my pack was there to help make the decision for me. *I need to send them a fucking bouquet of roses or give a really good blow job when all this shit is over.*

“We’ll head for Ellis,” Beckham said, gesturing to Graham and me. I nodded, knowing damn well I wouldn’t get through this without them.

As soon as the elevator opened, we were off. Wells jogged down the hall, dodging nurses and staff, before disappearing around the corner. Tallon stayed on his heels, calling out apologies as they went.

Graham led us at a more sedate pace, his worry mixing more deeply with ours the closer we got. There were so many fucking complications in this whole situation that I wasn’t sure where to start.

“Do you think it was him?” Beckham asked quietly. “The baby’s father.”

“Yes,” Graham said. “This wasn’t a random attack. They’ll have more answers, I’m sure.”

He meant it to be reassuring, but it only made me more terrified. They were attacked in a very public parking lot in broad daylight. Whoever the father was, he clearly feared no backlash from this.

“Hello, we’re here for the alpha of our pack, Ellis Crane,” Beckham said as we neared the receptionist.

“Oh good, he just woke up and is inconsolable. He’s in room three. Go on back,” the nurse told us, his haggard face lighting up with relief. That definitely wasn’t a good sign. It probably meant that Ellis was going crazy in there. If he’d watched Briar get shot, he’d be beside himself. Plus, they couldn’t exactly wheel him over to the surgery wing for reassurance. “Let me know if you need anything.”

That was all the prodding we needed to rush down the hall toward the room the nurse had pointed to. The curtains and door were wide open, probably because the staff were too busy trying to deal with our alpha.

“We will be forced to sedate you if you cannot calm down, Mr. Crane!” The nurse was doing everything she could to soothe him, but Ellis was nearly throwing her out of the window.

“My omega and our baby are here somewhere. Someone better fucking tell me something!” he roared before wincing and falling back, breathing heavy, as blood started to seep out the bandages wrapped around his side.

“Ellis!” Graham’s voice was so loud even the nurses froze. Ellis sagged in relief, and Beckham rushed over, throwing himself over the alpha without a care for any bruises or wounds. The man looked like he’d been absolutely brutalized, and my steps faltered in the doorway. My instincts had me ready to cry and run over to him; seeing our alpha like this wasn’t something I’d ever be ready for. But he’d let out such a groan when Beck collided with his body, I knew he needed a calmer approach from the rest of us.

“We’ll leave you to him then,” the nurses announced as they filed out in a rush, shifting me out of their way.

“We don’t have answers yet. Tallon will be here with them soon,” Graham reassured as he checked Ellis’ chart, not giving a fuck that guests weren’t supposed to do that. “She’s in surgery, and Wells and Tallon went down for answers.”

“It was awful. I failed her,” Ellis said, his eyes clouding over as all the fight left him. Graham put his chart down and sighed, coming over to give his shoulder a gentle squeeze. “I’ll end his career, that bastard.”

“Who was it?” I asked gently, finally moving closer now that Graham had seen his results without freaking out. “She’d always been so careful to keep his name from her stories, all we knew was that he was a big deal at her company.”

“The mayor of Mason Hills, my mother’s fucking boss,” Ellis bit out before going into the full story. Hearing his voice so full of pain and anger had me dropping to my knees at his side. I rested my head on his thigh, breathing in his scent, and his hand went to my hair. Our connection was natural enough that it was second nature, and that was more reassurance than anything else.

Graham let out a low growl that continued almost through the entire story. “I’ll make a few calls. He’ll pay for this even if I have to do it myself.”

“Thank you,” Ellis told him. Graham nodded once before stalking out of the room, phone to his ear.

“Wait... Isn’t your mother the mayor’s assistant?” I asked. Once my brain connected the dots, anger started to replace my fear. It made me strong enough that I finally looked up at him, battered face and all.

He closed his eyes in defeat. “Yes. She’s the one who exiled Briar and left her with nothing. Briar’s going to fucking hate me, and we *just* began to start over.” The look on his face said that hurt him more than the physical pain he was suffering from now. I’d hated his mother before, and now I fucking *loathed* her.

“So I guess the charity ball is off?” Beckham tried to joke. Ellis snorted then winced. Beckham moved off of his bed and tried to tuck pillows around him. We couldn’t see the extent of the damage, but his arms and chest were covered in bruising. His face was swollen and red.

This man who'd always seemed so strong to me was lying in bed, looking half-dead, and I wanted to scream in frustration. Both Ellis and Briar were hurt, and we were powerless to fix it. This never should have happened, and I hoped Graham put whatever power and influence he had into bringing the mayor down.

When I tried to get off the floor and step away from him for a moment, he dragged me toward him like he needed our connection as much as I did. Glancing to his other side, I saw he was holding Beckham the same way. We moved closer so he didn't have to strain, but the damage was already done. So much for taking it easy.

"Fuck, this hurts." Ellis growled when he tried to shift again, obviously restless. It wasn't in an alpha's nature to lay back and heal, especially not when his omega's state was uncertain. "He didn't even fight his own battles. He ordered his help to take care of us."

Before we could say anything, the door opened again, and Tallon came in. He looked over at Ellis and surprised us all when he rushed forward and wrapped him in a hug, being gentle enough that Ellis didn't cry out. I barely managed to step out of his way before he mowed me down. We were all struggling.

"Is she alive? Is our baby?" I asked. Everything I was feeling had finally become too much, and I would have sagged to the floor if Graham hadn't stepped up, wrapping his strong arms around me and holding me in place.

"She is," Tallon confirmed, "and so far the baby is doing well. They're being monitored still. The surgery was to make sure the bullet had grazed her and left no remnants. She was bleeding fairly heavily, so they wanted to make sure the baby was handling all the stress okay. Apparently, the man who shot her had hit her in the safest place possible. It started to send her into labor, but they got that stopped with some meds. All in all, it was a deep gash on the hip, more than anything."

"Thank god," I breathed out, breaking into a sob that caused Graham to hug me tighter. Beckham clung to Ellis,

who had tears coursing over his bloodied face. I'd never once seen an alpha cry, and that sight now threatened to break me even further.

"Is she awake?" Beckham finally asked. Tallon shook his head before dropping into the free chair.

"No, they had to be really careful with everything, so they're gently weaning her off to keep them safe," he explained. "Wells is waiting there in case of news."

Graham cleared his throat to get our attention. "I spoke to my lawyer. He's working on a warrant for all outdoor cameras now. If they're already erased, it'll only add to our case for suspicious activity."

"Her caseworker told him we were coming. It's a big possibility," Ellis admitted. "She's barely gone out since she moved in with us, so there's no way he would have found her just by chance."

"What did I miss?" Tallon asked, his head bouncing between the two alphas as they spoke. Graham gave him a quick recap, and for once, Tallon was speechless.

"If the tapes are changed, then we'll sue Omega Services as well," Graham said like he wasn't threatening to take on one of the biggest organizations in the world. "Though we'll need more evidence to make our case open and shut."

"The shooter, if we can get to him?" Beckham wondered out loud. "If his aim was intentional, he might speak out."

"Wishful thinking at best," I said bitterly. "Sorry, Beck, but most people let money buy their silence."

"We may need the mayor to confess on audio or video," Graham admitted. "That won't be easy."

"I disagree," I countered. "It'll be easy if we don't wave a recording device in his face. Men with an ego like his will do anything to brag. I guarantee this isn't our last encounter."

"The ball!" Beckham gasped. "We bring her with us and stay in a group at all times. Let him come to us. He won't be able to resist when he sees she's alive."

Graham and Ellis looked at each other like they could telepathically compare notes before the former answered. “If she’s on board, that just might work. I’m having our lawyer check into laws regarding custody in regards to our situation. I wanted answers before we continued with this,” he admitted.

“I don’t like the idea of using her as bait,” Ellis said. “He’s already proven he’s bold and reckless. That’s a dangerous combination. But if it can keep him from a chance of getting custody, Briar wouldn’t hesitate. I don’t think we all have much say in it.”

Reality sunk in. This man, the one who’d nearly taken her from us, wouldn’t get any rights to the baby... *Could he?* There was no judge that would support that, or at least I hoped there wouldn’t be. I wanted to be optimistic, but knowing how our world worked didn’t leave me with much hope.

“She’d do anything to protect the baby, including defying our wishes,” Tallon added. “When we say stick together, it has to be in bigger groups, not only one or two of us as her back-up. I just really don’t like this.”

“I watched Briar confront him,” Ellis bit out. “You think *I* fucking like this?”

“What other choice do we have?” Beckham asked quietly. “This is the only way he’d give us that confession. The man is egotistical, so you know he won’t resist running his mouth. He’ll brag or mouth off, whatever he thinks will establish him as being in control of the situation.”

“I don’t like this,” Tallon repeated.

“What other option do we have?” I added in. “We go in, get the confession, and get the fuck out. Stay together. Maybe even hire some security for the event?”

“They’d need tickets to get in,” Ellis pointed out. “We could have them in the parking lot to ensure he can’t take her and leave.”

“That’s not a bad plan,” Graham mused. “I’ll happily pay off the security they do have.”

Beckham let out a small chuckle at that. “Of course you will.” Graham gave him a playful glare that fell away just as quickly as it came. The mood was somber now, each of us in our own personal hell, as we considered what would happen to our pack. That man did not need to be in any child’s life, and I truly hoped that Graham’s influence went further than any of us could imagine. He had friends in high places.

“I’m going to sit with Wells,” I announced. “I need a second.”

“You sure?” Graham asked, his fingers brushing along my arm as I stood. I gave him a smile, not wanting to speak, as I walked from the room.

True fear had struck through my core. The possibility of losing custody of the baby had never occurred to any of us, and I had a strong feeling it hadn’t to Briar either. She could accuse him of sexual assault, but they’d likely accept him at his word without proof. No, Graham was right. We needed to build a case, fast. Thankfully, we were mere months from the charity ball, and if all else failed, we’d find a way to get him to admit to his crimes. All of them.

“Miles?” The familiar voice had my steps faltering, and I looked up into the face of the doctor I’d known a bit too intimately in my lifetime.

“Dr. Garner,” I said. It was an attempt at a friendly tone, but it sounded more like a strangled bullfrog. He was kind enough to not call me on it.

“I hope you’re not here for something too serious?” he asked, concerned. His wrinkled hand reached out and settled on my arm. That was all it took for me to be back in that hospital room, staring at my mother’s failing body. My father had tried to kill her before himself, but he’d failed. The cut hadn’t been deep enough, but she wasn’t free of consequences. She’d fought for months, all of them under Dr. Garner’s care. I could still see her now—the sedatives just enough to keep her calm, her cheeks sunken in, and her head shaved where they’d had to do emergency surgery to calm the swelling of her brain. “Miles?”

His voice brought me out of the memory, and his eyes were full of concern. I swiped my hand over my cheek when I felt something there, a bit surprised to find tears had leaked free.

“My omega mate and my alpha mate,” I whispered. The look on his face was one of horror.

“I saw them come in. They’re in good hands, son. This won’t end the same,” he said gently. “I hear your alpha pulled out of it and was giving those nurses hell. He’s a feisty one.”

I laughed at that. “He is, and she’s out of surgery and being brought out of the sedation. They’re monitoring her and the baby.” His face lit up at the mention of a baby.

“I knew you’d grow up to have a hell of a pack, kid,” he said confidently. “Now, you get yourself together and get in there to give that omega some love. She’ll need it.”

“I will, Dr. Garner. Thank you... for then and now.” His smile softened, and he gently patted my shoulder.

“That’s why I do what I do. I don’t win them all, but I sure as hell try,” he said before walking off. It was an odd moment, one I hadn’t expected, but it settled something in me. That inner child who was continuously holding in his pain was now realizing that the past was done. I didn’t have to put on a show of being the happy, sassy omega; I could *be* that omega.

“Hey, Miles. Wait up!” Tallon called out as he jogged up, falling into step beside me. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” I said, sounding a bit surprised. “I am. Let’s go see if she’s awake.”

“That’s the plan. I don’t hear Wells hulking out on the office staff or the sound of security beating him down, so it might just be a win.”

We both chuckled as we continued to the waiting room, relieved to see Wells wasn’t even here. He had to be with Briar already, or so I hoped.

“Is she awake?” Tallon asked as he approached the nurses’ station. The woman glanced up and smiled.

“She is, and the doc is in there. Hurry back!” she told us, hitting the button to unlock the door. We rushed on without even remembering to thank her, Tallon leading the way.

Suddenly, he stopped. “She didn’t tell us where to go,” he said out loud, letting out a frustrated growl.

“Get in here, you idiot,” Wells’ voice responded from a few doors down. I heard footsteps before he poked his head out and gave us an exasperated but happy look.

“Well, that’s a good sign,” Tallon said over his shoulder. I moved past him and into the room, intent on seeing our omega. Briar was a bit pale... but she looked like herself, and that was everything I fucking needed to see. She was in a hospital gown that was pushed up above her rounded stomach, a blanket covering just below, and there was some sort of monitor strapped to her. The gentle whooshing sound was strong and steady.

The doctor was checking her chart and jotting in a few notes, but he glanced up at us when we entered.

“Pack?” he questioned.

“Yes,” Briar said with a smile, holding her hand out to us. Tallon and I moved to her side, his hand resting on her leg while mine squeezed her hand.

“The baby?”

“A fighter,” she said before she burst into sobs. We all huddled around her, wrapping her in a gentle hug so we wouldn’t disturb her wound.

“Just like their mama,” I whispered, kissing the side of her head. I couldn’t find the strength to make myself move away. I needed another minute to breathe in her coconut and guava scent like it was the only thing keeping me going. At this moment, it was.

“I’m okay,” she said between breaths. “I just... It was awful.”

“She’s a lucky one. The surgery was quick and without issue. We got all of the bullet out, and recovery won’t be too

terrible. She'll just be very sore as it heals, and she'll need her bandages changed twice a day. Keep an eye out for extra redness or swelling and come back straight away if she gets a fever. Either way, we want to monitor them both for another night, two if anything seems off," the doctor explained in a practiced, calming voice. "It was a shock for the baby and her body, so we need to take this slowly and carefully. Even when she's home, she'll need to take it easy and stay off her feet. At least until her follow-up appointment."

"Thank you, Doctor," Wells said, shaking his hand before he left. We all turned back to Briar, who was looking exhausted, with dark circles under her eyes.

"Ellis?"

"He was fighting the nurses when we found him, so he's alright," we reassured her. She laughed, the sound filling the room. Seeing her talking and laughing was a balm to my soul. It didn't cure my insane anxiety, but it definitely helped. That, and knowing that my mates and our baby were going to be okay.

"I was so scared. Ellis was hurt, and that asshole was trying to force me to live with him, so he could use me and the baby for a PR move."

"He what?!" Wells growled.

"Graham already got in contact with a lawyer. They're working on finding security footage," I said, holding back the rest.

"Don't hide stuff," Tallon accused me.

"It's not my information to tell," I argued weakly, but one glare from Wells had the rest spilling out.

"He's also checking to make sure we can keep him from gaining custody," I finished, meeting Briar's eyes. Hers flared with panic, the monitor beeping rapidly until Wells reached over and took her hand.

"That man doesn't get to touch my baby or me again," she said vehemently. "I'll kill him myself, first. He told them to shoot me and *specifically* said to aim for my stomach."

“God, I wish we had audio of that,” I said. “Otherwise, it’s his word against yours.”

“Beckham said if we take her to the charity ball and flaunt our relationship in front of him, he might slip. We’d have to record the whole night just to be safe, but at least we’d get solid evidence,” I said softly.

“I’ll do it,” she said without skipping a beat. “If Graham thinks we can take him down, I want in. I’ll do whatever I can to help. If you heard the same things I did from his mouth...”

“Like what?” Wells asked.

“Apparently, the doctor’s office had called him for more information,” she admitted.

“Did you tell the doctor he was the father?” I asked. She had been so tight-lipped it surprised me.

“I did. He has a genetic heart condition, so the doctor needed to be aware. Though I adamantly told them to not contact him for any reason. Isn’t that a violation of patient rights?”

“Graham will sue him too, and you’re not going back to that fucking doctor ever again.”

“Oh, I know,” she agreed. “I’m over being treated like this, so I’m fully behind suing him. Then taking down the mayor. I want it to hurt.”

“Damn, that’s hot,” Wells said with a wink.

“See? Strong,” I added with a grin. She blushed and hugged her stomach as best she could.

“I’m going to check on Ellis now,” Wells said before he stood up, but he didn’t walk out until he brushed a kiss to her forehead. “Don’t leave her side.” It didn’t need to be said since we wouldn’t be letting her out of our sight for a long fucking time, but I knew he couldn’t help himself. We were just glad that both of our mates and the baby were all safe.

But that did beg the question... What would be the mayor’s next move when he found out they were alive?

Chapter Seventeen

Briar

The parking lot around us was barren, empty of cars and people. A cool breeze chilled me to the bone as I stood off against the mayor. The vile monster stared me down with a haughty confidence he didn't deserve, but I matched it with my own brand of fury. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew this was a dream, but I couldn't wake myself up.

"That baby is mine. It'll give me the boost I need. The polls will sing my praises. Mayor Aaron Townsen, a true family man," he said in a newscaster voice, arcing his hand through the air like he was showcasing a headline.

"You're delusional. You'll never touch this baby," I countered. My hands instinctively covered my baby bump, and I stepped away from him.

"I exiled you," he pointed out. "My words have power. All I have to do is tell them I want you to be mine. We'll have a public claiming ceremony, do a press tour, the works." His eyes were faraway like he was picturing just that.

"No," I said. The mayor's eyes changed then, turning black like a demon's, before he lunged at me.

The dream shifted and I was no longer facing off with that monster, but watching as Ellis fell to the ground, his body lifeless and bloody.

"Ellis!" My scream was no longer in the dream, and I woke with a start. My body was covered with sweat as I bolted

upright, shoving stray hair out of my face and breathing heavily.

“You’re not alone, Briar. It’s okay. That was just another awful dream,” Ellis promised. He pulled me back down to my pillow and ran a soft touch down the side of my face to smooth out my hair. I stared up at him, relieved to see him mostly healed now. “They’ll stop soon, I hope. Until then, we’ll always be here to remind you that you’re safe, the baby is safe, and I’m safe.” He’d been so patient with me; they all had. We’d been home for a few weeks, and they’d had a nightly rotation going so someone was always with me, though Ellis ended up in my bed more often than not. We’d both been through a lot and found solace in each other. It was a huge difference from the reluctant alpha he’d been before.

“I’m sorry.” The shaky words were little more than a hoarse whisper.

“None of that,” he chastised gently. “There’s nothing to apologize for.”

“It’s been weeks of this,” I argued. “You can’t be this patient, Ellis!” I ground out. “It’s not fair when you faced just as much! I shouldn’t be putting this on your plate as well.”

“I did,” he agreed. “It was awful. Which is why I get it, Briar.”

“Stop being so understanding,” I grumbled. He laughed and pulled me closer, locking my knee between his as he held me tight.

“You want me to be mad at you?” he questioned. It was silly, we both knew it, but I was so frustrated with myself that I needed an outlet.

“I don’t,” I countered. “I just. Gah!” The entire situation made me want to scream. They’d all been so amazing, but that asshole mayor was still haunting my dreams. I couldn’t shake it, and I hated that I’d given him that power. Ellis tipped my chin up and brushed his lips over mine.

“You’re not alone, Briar. Remember that.”

At least I finally believed the words coming from his mouth. *I'm not alone. I have a pack standing behind me to support me, so why can't I shake this?*

Ellis

“IT’S NOT JUST YOU. Did you know that the reason I come out more during the day is to see that you’re safe? When I’m not with you at night, I pop in while you’re sleeping to make sure you’re okay. Sometimes I just need to see that you’re okay, even feel it,” I explained, knowing exactly what she was grappling with.

“Ellis...” she breathed, moving closer to capture my lips. It wasn’t sweet and gentle; it was desperate. Her hands gripped at my clothes, trying to rip them off of me like she couldn’t take the layers between us any longer. I helped her, freeing myself of my shirt before pulling hers off as well. I groaned when I saw that the shirt was all she had on tonight. The scent of her slick started to fill the air, its sweet musk mixing with the rich sweetness of her scent. It was pure fucking heaven, and I never wanted it to fade.

We’d been too scared to take our relationship further in the face of her recovery, but we both needed this connection right now. She was stronger and had been cleared by her new doctor.

“Fuck, you smell divine. I need to taste you,” I begged. She bit her lip, and I nearly came at the sight of how fucking perfect and innocent she looked. Her eyes watched with raw hunger as I shed my boxers. My cock was already hard and ready, but it would have to fucking wait. She reached for me, stroking lazily, as she gasped.

“This might hurt,” she joked, though there was a bit of uncertainty behind it.

“I’ll be gentle,” I told her, moving closer to press a kiss to her lips. She laughed as she kissed me back, breathless when I pulled away.

“Don’t be,” she pleaded. “I need to feel this one.” Thank fuck because gentle wasn’t in my blood tonight. I’d held back from her for so long that I could kick my own ass. And now, in this moment, I wanted to make it so neither of us could forget. This was our first time together, and it would be nothing like the sweet sex it should have been. No, this would be demanding and possessive, allowing us to reassure the other that we were here.

“Oh, you will,” I promised as I shimmied down the bed and spread her legs so I could settle between them. Grabbing a pillow, I tucked it under her hips before hooking one leg over my shoulder. I breathed in deep. The scent of her natural arousal was too intoxicating to pass up the chance. My mouth watered, and I couldn’t deny myself this treat any longer, licking a stripe over her needy pussy. She cried out as I thrust into her core, lapping at every ounce of her slick. Her hands tangled in my hair as I ate her out, moving away from her core to teasingly swirl my tongue around her clit. Her whimpers were beautiful. I kept up my rhythm, slowly working her up, as I slid two fingers into her in a way that had her grinding into my face. As she reached the edge, I pulled out, gripping her hips to steady her as I feasted on her cunt until she was shamelessly riding my face. If I suffocated this way, I’d die a happy man.

She found her spot, using me and my tongue to get herself off. It was fucking perfect, and when she came, her pussy flooding with her arousal, I lapped up every drop before backing away. There was just something incredible about being able to make your omegas shatter. I’d had similar experiences with Beckham and Miles and now her, and it was everything.

My omega was mesmerizing. Her chest was heaving as she stared up at me, breasts bouncing from the intensity of it. Swiping a hand over my damp face, I crawled up just enough to capture her hard nipple in my mouth, sucking hard then soothing it with a flick of my tongue. She gasped, aftershocks of pleasure causing her to shake as I kneaded and teased her perfectly rounded breasts. She was sensitive, and the noises she made rivaled those she’d cried out mere minutes ago. That

thought had my hand trailing back to her clit, touching her with deft fingers until she came for me again.

Her eyes locked on me as I pulled my hand free, making a show of licking up every drop that had coated my fingers.

“Holy fuck,” she breathed out as she watched me. “Fuck me now, please. I can’t do this torture anymore.”

“Torture?” I mused as I lightly ran my fingers down her abdomen. She shivered at the attention. She was so responsive to my touches and words. I loved it.

“Yes,” she pleaded. “I need your cock, alpha.” Fuck. She knew just how to beg. Coming from my sweet omega, those words were far too seductive. “Give me your knot.”

“Gladly.” I settled back between her legs. Gripping the base of my cock, I slid the tip through her wet pussy, coating myself in her slick before slowly pushing into her center. She was impatiently trying to move, but I steadied her with a hand on her hip, refusing to let her speed this up. She might say she wanted to feel this tomorrow, but the reality was that soreness wouldn’t be fun. I wasn’t a small alpha by any means, and once my knot swelled, she’d be begging me for mercy.

I moved in, inch by inch, while her pussy tightened around me. I wanted to feel every single second of this. Even if we were both desperate to feel each other’s touch, to know we were okay, this was a big moment. As an alpha, I wanted nothing more than to bite her, mark her as mine, but we weren’t ready for that. That was something we needed to discuss. But even if we weren’t taking it that far, I wanted to savor the feel of her, the scent of her, the sound of her coming undone for me.

When I was finally buried deep inside her, I stilled, giving her body a moment to adjust. I knew she wanted to feel this one, but when she looked back on this, she needed to remember the sensation of pleasure. I watched her breathe heavily, waiting for the pain of the stretch to ebb away. While she adjusted, I brushed my fingers over her clit again, helping her relax. The moment she wiggled against me, all bets were off. I fucked her hard and fast, hitting her as deep as I could in

just the right spot so that she sang my praises. But even though I wanted to hold onto that control, I longed to see her taking it for herself. Her fight and fire were some of my favorite parts of her, and I wanted to watch her fuck herself on my knot.

Without warning, I shifted us, wrapping my arms around her and rolling so that she was now on top. She blinked for a few moments before bracing her hands on my chest.

“Ride me, Briar. You want my cock? Take it,” I challenged. A glint of excitement shone in her eyes, and she started to rock, tentatively at first.

“My alpha,” she moaned as she circled her hips, searching for the spot that would bring her to another orgasm. The moment she found it, she flipped from tentative to frenzied, fucking her hips over me as her nails dug into my chest. I rumbled happily, satisfied that she could find such pleasure on my cock. I’d be committing this one to memory even though I could fuck her any time I wanted now. It was foolish that I’d held myself back for so long.

“Keep going,” I ordered when she slowed, snapping my hips upward so she couldn’t hide from the sensitivity. When she shattered, her screams echoed in the room as her pussy clenched around me, and my knot started to swell in response. Before she could fully come down from that high, I maintained the same rhythm, bringing her right back up. Finally, my knot finished swelling, trapping me inside her while I continued to thrust as deeply as I could go. She whimpered, eyes wide, but I didn’t stop. Soon, her eyes were rolling back in her head, and she was rocking again, each movement of her hips sending a shiver through us both.

“You’re beautiful,” I told her, and it was no attempt at flattery. The way the moonlight spilled through the curtains made her look like a goddess. Her face was taken over by ecstasy as she came undone for me again and again, the softness of the moon’s glow giving me perfect glimpses. Fuck, I was hers. There was no turning back now.

One last swirl of her hips was all it took for me to lose my shaky hold on my control. My orgasm coiled from my

stomach, shooting through my entire body. Pressure built moments before I spilled my seed inside of her, filling her with my cum. There was something so satisfying about marking her this way, about keeping it locked inside of her. She might have been pregnant with another alpha's child, but right now, I was making her mine in a way that that bastard would never get to have again, and I would continue to do so every time she let me.

When my knot receded, I carried her to the bathroom and showered her, worshiping every inch of her in a different way—taking care of her, pampering her, was just as healing as that sex had been.

We snuggled under the covers, and although I was ready to pass out, I could tell something was still on her mind.

“What’s going on in here?” I tapped a finger on her forehead. She gave me a small smile and shook her head.

“How do you guys do that? I thought I was pretty good at keeping my thoughts to myself,” she said as she brushed my shaggy hair out of my eyes. I was in need of a haircut, but it wasn’t exactly high on my priority list these days.

“We know you.” I shrugged. “Being in a pack is more than just attraction, sex, and instincts. It’s about knowing each other in ways that no one else could, learning our quirks and tells and using them to make sure everyone is safe and happy. That’s what a worthy alpha does.”

“Damn, that’s deep,” she blurted out, making both of us dissolve into laughter. She had a way of saying the first thing that came to her when she was feeling too much.

“It’s the truth,” I promised, kissing her gently. “You don’t have to hide from what we make you feel.”

She sighed. “Old habits are hard to break, but I’m learning.”

“If you didn’t, Graham would torture you with long talks about feelings,” I teased.

She laughed. “I have a feeling our child will be so well behaved just to avoid those.”

“You aren’t wrong,” I agreed. “One time, I stayed with him for a week over the summer. My family had some work event, so I got shuffled here. He was a rich bachelor, and I may or may not have gotten into his expensive booze. He found me, shitfaced, and he calmly took care of me and got me in bed. I was positive he was just cool.”

“No way. There’s no fucking way he let you get off without anything,” she accused.

“Oh no. He struck the next morning when I was good and hungover. Served me scrambled eggs, toast, and the tongue lashing of a lifetime. But you know what the best part of it was?”

“His cooking?” she guessed. “Ugh, remind me to beg him for some toasted ravioli tomorrow.”

“Toasted what now?” I asked, raising an eyebrow. “Is this one of those weird pregnancy things?”

“Uh, no,” she said with a laugh. “Have you never been to the Midwest?”

“I’m a strictly sunshine-and-big-city kind of guy,” I countered. “So that’s a no.”

“You’re missing out,” she sang out. “But we got sidetracked. What’s the best thing about being lectured during an epic hangover?”

“When it was done, I just apologized, and we didn’t talk about it again,” I admitted. “My mom wasn’t the same.”

“Not a good relationship with her?” The question filled me with dread. This was the moment I was dreading. Since I’d realized who my mom was to her, I’d been terrified to have this conversation.

“No, and she’s not a good person. Since the moment I realized who your attacker was, I’ve been trying to find a way to say this...”

“Hey, it’s okay,” she soothed. “Just tell me. It won’t make me run.”

“It might.” I laughed humorlessly. “Vivian Crane is my mother. She’s an awful woman, and one you know well.”

She scrunched her eyebrows for a moment, then realization flicked across her face.

“No. *She* produced *you*?! What the fuck, Ellis?” she gasped, eyes comically wide. “How?”

“Well, we don’t need to explain that tonight,” I said with a shudder. Really, I was relieved she was taking it this well. “If I’d have known sooner, I would have told you.”

“I know,” she said. “And her shitty outlook and actions don’t reflect on you, but I get why you were so worried about diving in if that was your example of normal growing up.”

“Well, I’m officially done with her. I was going to confront her, but the petty side of me kind of wants to just say that I met an omega before I show up to the charity ball with you on my arm,” I admitted. “Then we can get that confession, and I can rid myself of her toxicity.”

“I do love that plan,” she agreed, “but I’m exiled. There’s no way Vivian will let me in if she sees me.”

“They don’t check individuals, just pack names, and our pack is on the list,” I explained. “Plus, she’s all about that public experience. She’d never make a scene that others could witness.”

Her grin widened until she almost looked a bit scary. “It’s two months away, right? That means I’ll be showing up in a ball gown, with full baby bump, on your arm. Damn, that’s fucking gold.”

“Yes, yes, it is,” I agreed.

“Can’t wait,” she said around a yawn. Knowing she needed rest, I pulled the blanket over us and tugged her in close.

“Goodnight, Briar,” I whispered. She tried to respond, but a small snore escaped instead. I bit back a smile and kissed the top of her head. Until we met Briar, I had been content with my life and my omegas. Miles and Beckham still meant the

world to me, yet here I was, falling hard, all over again. The way she fit in with all of us so perfectly was amazing. We might not have been looking, but somehow all of our lives were now complete. Fate was a crazy thing.

Chapter Eighteen

Briar

“**W**hat the hell is this thing?” Wells asked as he inspected the toasted ravioli in his hand. I rolled my eyes at their dramatics. Graham ended up being the only one who’d had them, so when I asked if we could find some, he took it upon himself to make them for me instead.

“Just eat it,” I told him as I bit off half of mine and chewed, moaning at how fucking good it tasted.

“Well, how could I resist? What baby wants, baby gets,” Graham said, resting a hand on my bump. A fluttering movement went through my stomach, and he gasped, looking up at me. It happened again, the baby kicking even harder this time. The feeling of the baby’s movements was so strange but amazing, and we stared down in wonder as my stomach moved with it. I’d felt smaller movements for a bit, but this was a full-on kick.

“The baby’s kicking!” I grinned at the others, laughing when they all tripped over each other to reach me.

“Feed him more ravioli!” Miles demanded playfully, his hand resting right next to Graham’s. I dutifully popped the last of my piece in my mouth and chewed, a rumble of satisfaction going through me. The baby moved again in response, and seeing the look in their eyes as they watched the movement was everything.

Beckham teared up as he watched and let out an adorable ‘aww.’ He’d been buying small things for the baby here and there, but this made it all the more real for him. Tallon’s mouth hung open in a mix of awe and horror. Watching the ripple go through my skin could be a bit unnerving, I guess. Miles found it amusing, laughing in fascination as he stared at my stomach. This was the moment I’d wished for when I found out I was pregnant. I thought I’d miss out on sharing all of these special moments with them, yet here I was, surrounded by an amazing pack. As if he could read my thoughts, Ellis smiled lovingly at me. Even Wells was showing emotion, pure happiness radiating from him.

This is what my pregnancy should have been like from the beginning.

For a moment, I let myself wonder what it would have been like if I’d met them first, if one of them was the baby’s biological father. I could see it now—me coming out with the announcement, being met with shouts of joy and kisses. It would have been a true celebration, not the awful scenario that I’d actually been through.

“Hey, what’s the sadness for?” Beckham asked. His smile faltered, and I quickly tucked away my regrets.

“I’m sorry. I just was so happy. I love the way you react to things like this. It’s how it should be,” I said. I’d tried to gloss over my sadness, but the perceptive omega knew.

“It should have been like this when you found out,” he guessed. “I’m sorry you didn’t get that, but I’m not sorry that it led you here. We can’t change that part, but we get to be here for the rest, and I, for one, wouldn’t change a damn thing.”

“Fuck, you know just what to say, don’t you?” Sniffling, I grabbed his shirt and tugged him in for a quick kiss and hug. He held me tight for a moment before pulling away and placing a hand on my cheek as he made me meet his eyes.

“You’re ours, and so is this baby. You get that, right?” The room was silent as that question hung in the air, but I didn’t need time to consider it.

“Yes, I do.”

“Good,” he said, tapping me on the nose. “That’s the right answer. Plus, we have this amazing appointment in two hours that I think you’ll be excited to go to.”

I perked up at that. “What?”

“Just wait and see,” he teased as everyone went back to their original activities, avoiding my questioning gaze. *Brats*. I knew they’d hold out, so I didn’t bother to try.

It turned out they’d planned a 3D ultrasound for us, so we could see the baby or even do an early gender scan. We didn’t exactly have anyone other than Liam to reveal the baby’s gender to, but I was excited to find out with them.

“You know,” Graham said as he turned off the car, “I was reading a baby book, and they suggested you dress your child in gender-neutral clothes for baby pictures. A lot of clothes are frilly for girls or super sports-related for boys, and who knows what our baby will grow up to be or to love? This way, you’ll give them baby pictures to look back on that they won’t hate.”

“That’s such a great idea,” Beckham said with a grin. “I love it. Challenge accepted.”

“I’ve already got a lot of neutral stuff too,” I added in. “I couldn’t resist buying a few things, and sometimes that stuff is way cuter than the wretched over-the-top gendered products. Our baby, whoever they are, needs to have some style.”

“Well, let’s go meet them, shall we?” Ellis called out, tapping the dashboard clock. “We’ve got five minutes to get inside and check in.” That was all the motivation we needed to move.

What I thought would be a little ultrasound place was actually a full privately owned birthing center. The fact that it wasn’t centered on omegas made me ridiculously happy. Betas might not get pregnant by alphas, but that didn’t mean they never had babies, and finding clinics that included them was rare.

When we walked into the lobby, I was even more impressed. The floors were a gorgeous white and gray marble

inlaid with flecks of glitter. A large crystal chandelier hung over the circular desk at the center of the lobby. They had fresh plants in every window and precisely placed around the desk. It was immaculately clean, and the soft music that played in the background set a soothing ambiance.

“This place is so fancy,” I hissed at Beckham.

He grinned. “Get used to it, babe. Graham spares no expense for us, and that includes making sure we have the best medical care.”

“Hello, we have an appointment. Pack Crane,” Graham told the receptionist when we approached.

“Oh yes, Mr. Crane. Our owner has personally volunteered to show you around before your appointment. I’ll call her now,” she chirped back in a cheery voice. Shockingly, it wasn’t a fake one. She seemed like a genuinely bubbly person, so they’d chosen well for her to be the first face anxious moms saw when they walked in.

“No need to call,” a female voice answered, followed by the clicking of stilettos. The owner was gorgeous. Her confidence and presence were a dead giveaway of her designation even before she got close enough for me to scent the familiar spicy alpha musk. “I’ve been anxiously awaiting your arrival. It’s a pleasure to see you again, Graham.”

“And you, Anita.” He grinned, air kissing her on each cheek. A low growl filled the air, and I gasped when I realized it was coming from *me*. The sight of someone close to my alpha had me ready to fight.

“I see you found a feisty omega,” she said before turning to me. “Apologies...?”

“Briar.” My voice was curt, but she was unaffected.

“Apologies, Briar,” she clarified. “We’re simply old friends. I promise I’m a happily mated lesbian Alpha.”

That had my possessiveness ebbing away a bit, and I cleared my throat, cheeks heating in embarrassment.

“Sorry. I don’t know what came over me,” I admitted.

“Omegas tend to get very territorial as they approach their third trimester, even sometimes midway through the second,” she said gently. I realized I liked her; she seemed connected to her business and genuine, so I let my anger fade. “Now, we have full facilities here with medical staff. Our birthing suites are amazing and adaptive to your needs. We have ultrasound rooms that are big enough to accommodate larger packs, something our hospital counterparts severely lack. We also have a plethora of classes from pregnancy yoga, to push classes, to parenting 101.”

“Wow,” was all I said. I gaped around as we walked through the halls. The rooms we passed were so pretty, almost more like a spa than a medical facility. “Can we see a birthing room? And get a list of classes I can review later?”

“We have a whole bag of information we’ll send home, with all of that included, and of course we can. Let’s head on over to one now.” There was pride in her voice, and it was well deserved. She’d obviously put her soul into this place.

“Anita and I met in college. She had an omega patient nearly die in the hospital during birth because the doctors were too overwhelmed. She started this place so that never happened again, and it’s grown to be this impressive empire,” Graham explained as he pulled me into his side, wrapping an arm around my waist as we walked. The closeness calmed any lingering tension, a subtle way to remind myself that he was mine.

“It’s hardly an empire,” she said. “Regarding the rest of what Graham said, we have excess medical staff on call to avoid that scenario.”

“That’s amazing and reassuring,” I admitted. “We’ve all heard the horror stories.”

“Thankfully, you won’t hear any about this place. We have the highest client satisfaction rate in the business, and we take great care to prepare and reserve rooms ahead of time to make sure you have all you need,” she said as she stopped outside of a door. Pushing it open, she let us file in first. It was downright huge, hardly just a room. There was a large tub for water births

in the corner and a hospital bed on one end with the necessary equipment sterilized and waiting. To the side, she had an exercise ball and a few other things.

“Through that door are the extra beds, and the far door is a full bathroom,” she explained.

I moved out from under Graham’s arm to take it all in. From the fresh stack of blankets and pillows waiting, to the garden tub, it was gorgeous here. The window was open, letting the sunshine spill in to illuminate the soft gray walls. There was a bassinet and a full stock of baby items like diapers, wipes, and little onesies. They even had oil warmers for scented oils; she really had thought of everything.

“I want to give birth here,” I declared, earning a laugh from the others.

“That was kind of the plan, love,” Graham said with a grin. “It’s why we wanted you to have a tour first.”

“Thank you, alpha,” I said sweetly. He was practically beaming. Beckham had been right about Graham’s desire to care for us all and how much happiness it brought him.

“Always,” he said simply, bringing me in for a kiss. His lips brushed over mine before he deepened it. It took every ounce of my control not to jump him right, so I latched onto the only real distraction I had.

“Can I meet my baby now?” I asked. He rested his forehead on mine before chuckling.

“*Our* baby,” he corrected.

“Of course,” Anita said. “Right this way.”

She led us to a huge room, where a row of seats waited. There were huge TVs on the walls behind and in front of the ultrasound bed, so the family and mother could see. The bed looked cozy thanks to the plush blanket on top. I’d take that over the rough linens they had in the hospital. It was also much wider than the last one, practically big enough for the expectant mother and a pack member to cuddle. The ultrasound machine and a stool rested next to it.

“Go ahead and get her settled on, belly exposed, and I’ll send in my omega, Reece. She’s our tech,” she announced as she walked out, giving us a moment to adjust.

“Up you go,” Wells told me. “I’m ready to see my daughter.”

“No, it’s a boy,” Ellis argued. “I can feel it in my bones.”

“Well, your bones are wrong,” Tallon countered, always on Wells’ side. Miles shook his head, but even he had a vote.

“Boy,” he said firmly. “Those kicks were strong.”

“Girl,” I voted, all of them grinning as I joined in. “Beckham? Graham?”

“Girl,” Beckham said confidently.

“Twins,” Graham teased. “Both.”

“Shut your dirty mouth, alpha,” I growled. “There’s one baby and one baby only.”

“We’ll see,” he sang out. His face was set in a bright smile, and a teasing glint was in his eyes. I didn’t think I’d ever seen him quite so alive and happy. It made him look younger and more carefree, like the world could see the sweet and fun side that only his pack was privy to.

We stopped arguing when a small blonde omega walked in. Her hair was cut in a cute pixie, and her makeup was done to perfection. She gave us a bright smile.

“Welcome in. We ready to see this little one?” she asked as she adjusted my clothes and tucked cloths around them to protect them. “Do we want to know the gender?”

“We do,” I said as she squirted the warmed gel on me and spread it around with the transducer. She was short enough that she didn’t have to sit to be at the right height. She woke the machine up and dove right in. It took a moment to pick something up, and I nearly panicked, but then she found the pocket, and the heartbeat was immediate. I sagged in relief at the sound, and when I glanced over at my pack, they all had phones out, recording, eyes full of awe.

“There we are,” she said, and I turned my attention to the large screen. It looked so much more like a baby now, arms and legs waving around as it wiggled. It was weird to see it move on screen and feel it at the same time. “Nice and awake, too! Maybe we’ll have a cooperative baby. They love to make me work for it most days.”

She took a few screenshots before moving to the bottom side. The guys started whispering back and forth about what they thought they saw, but she didn’t say anything right away.

“And we have...” she finally said, drawing it out.

“You’re killing me, Reece!” Graham groaned.

“Congrats, it’s a boy!” she announced, earning excited cheers from the pack. Tears formed in my eyes, and I could already imagine holding my sweet little boy. Even though I had guessed it would be a girl, I wasn’t sad to find out he was a boy. It was just nice to know so I could pick out a proper name.

She switched it over to the 3D then, showing us the strangest images, but they were so cool. I could just make out his little features, and I couldn’t stop staring once she’d handed it over.

“What’s his name going to be?” Graham asked as they led me to the car. We hadn’t discussed names, but I’d thought about this a long time ago.

“Oliver Liam Crane.” Once I said it, I knew it was the right fit. Oliver might not have been given to me in the best way, but I would never regret that he was mine. He was going to have a mom that loved him fiercely and a pack that loved him just as much. We’d never let anything stand in the way of that.

Not even Aaron Townsen.

Chapter Nineteen

Ellis

The closer it got to mid-December, the more I dreaded what we had to do. Graham's lawyers had a strong case building. They'd reached out to anyone who might speak out against Mayor Townsen, which was far fewer people than we'd hoped. The biggest thing they were fighting for was the security feed. That had been the biggest hurdle so far. But if we wanted that foolproof nail in the coffin, we needed a confession. Briar was already thirty-two weeks along, and I didn't want to take any chances. As it was, by the time the ball happened, she'd be thirty-six weeks.

My phone vibrated on my desk, and I picked it up, sighing at the sight of my mother's name.

Mother: Your tickets are being delivered by courier this afternoon.

Ellis: Ensure that you include seven. We have a female omega now

Mother: We? You're still insisting on being in your uncle's shadow?

A moment later my phone rang, and I bit back a groan. I knew that I didn't really have a choice unless I wanted to be harassed all day. I answered, knowing it was the best course of action. For now, I needed to pretend I was the dutiful son—or as dutiful as I ever was, anyway.

“Hello, Mother.”

“Don’t ‘Hello, Mother’ me,” she bit out. Her tone had always been grating, but now even more so. “You got an omega and didn’t think to call us?”

“No, because I knew you’d meet her at the charity ball,” I countered. “And yes, I’m still in a pack with Graham. It never made sense to me why you hate him so much.”

“He’s always been so pompous,” she huffed. “Thinks he’s better than everyone.”

“For someone in politics, you’d think you would be able to handle that.” She let out a laugh.

“Oh, I know how to handle them, but he’s always been catered to, and you know I hate that. It’s why I pushed you so hard,” she said. It was rich that she thought she had anything to do with my behavior and accomplishments now.

“He’s a good man, and our omega seems to love him.” I sighed. “Can you send an extra ticket?”

“Yes, yes, adding it now,” she said flippantly as her fingers clicked along her keyboard. “And sent.”

“Thank you.”

“So, tell me about her.” The question took me by surprise. She was never interested in the details. The one thing I couldn’t do was tell her Briar’s name because it would raise suspicion. Instead, I did the only logical thing by texting Graham for help.

“She’s great. Super sweet and caring. She’s already got all of us opening up, and it’s only been a few months,” I started. I didn’t get far before the door slammed open.

“Ellis, I need you on this call. *Now*. The client is losing his mind,” Graham’s voice boomed in the room. I heard Mother give an exasperated huff.

“Coming!” I called back. “Sorry, Mom, duty calls. Talk to you soon.” I hung up before she had a chance to argue. “Thanks for the rescue.”

“She’s insufferable,” he said with a chuckle. “I’m sure she had only pleasant things to say about me.” She’d spent her

entire life hating her brother. He was an alpha, meaning he was important to society. She was a lowly beta. Even though he never saw her that way, she did, which had forever tainted the relationship between them. Approaching the world with so much hate had to be exhausting, but that was my mother.

“Did you tell her about Briar?”

I nodded. “I kept her name out of it, but yes. She was sending tickets over, and I needed an extra for her.”

“Did you get the usual lecture?” he asked. He perched on the arm of the chair across from my desk. “How could you be in Graham’s pack? He’s deplorable, always catered to.” His impression of her was spot on, minus the bitterness that was practically my mother’s signature.

“Yup, practically word for word. She tried to ask for details on Briar, which was strange. She also pretended to be hurt that she didn’t know about her,” I admitted.

“That *is* weird. If it doesn’t benefit her, she doesn’t generally care,” he agreed. “On an unrelated and happier note, should we do a baby shower for Briar and Oliver?”

I perked up at that. “If you put Beckham on it, it’ll be over.”

“I figured it might be a good way to meet the family. I can rent out a restaurant and have them serve lunch. She’d never forgive us if we did a gaudy, over-the-top baby shower. It’s already going to be a stressful time.”

“That’s a good point. She’s been craving Mexican lately. We could just rent the cantina side of Alejandro’s place out,” I said, brushing my fingers over my stubble as I thought about it. “I hadn’t even considered telling our families.”

“We don’t all come from the best, but I know she’d feel like a dirty fucking secret if we didn’t do this. Close friends. Family. She deserves to be shown off,” he said, and I couldn’t agree more.

“I’ll send out a text and start a list,” I said as I pulled up my contacts. “Do you have a date in mind?”

“Next Friday. We have dress shopping Saturday since we need to purchase it as close to the ball as possible. After her last appointment, she mentioned that she’d be growing a lot faster now,” he said with a small smile on his lips. We’d all thought she looked gorgeous with her baby bump, but Graham was definitely the most taken by it. Every chance he got, he was brushing his hand over it or bending down to talk to Oliver. I never thought I’d see the day Graham acted like that, but it looked good on him.

“She looks amazing,” I said in answer to his silent appreciation of our omega. Even if she still held on to a bit of fear that we would change our minds, we all knew Oliver was meant to be ours. He was a part of our omega, and that was more than enough for us. We’d have to face the reality that he might ask about his biological father someday, but when the time arrived, we’d have an answer ready. No matter what, we were his fathers and always would be. Biology didn’t mean shit if you were incapable of being a decent parent.

“She does,” he agreed, oblivious to what was running through my mind. “Alright, now that the rescue mission is complete, I have to run. I have a meeting, so make sure to remind Beckham not to get too crazy.”

“On it,” I said as I started typing out the long text.

As I hit send, the elevator call button started going off, and I rushed out to grab our tickets. The next few weeks would be full of crazy, but I was ready for the ball. It was the one obstacle that was standing in the way of our future together.

“Mother dearest dropped off tickets,” Miles said when the elevator slid open again. He handed over the envelope.

“You doing okay?” I asked. The hospital trip was rough for him, so we’d spent just as many nights together as I had with Briar. He didn’t want her to know about it just yet, wanting to share his past when he was ready, but we’d all checked in on him.

“I am,” he said, exasperated. “I told you guys that after talking to the doctor. I never would have expected it, but that really helped. It’s fine. Well, it’s not fine, but I’m okay.”

“Good. I need your help,” I said to distract him. He’d get the text, but I filled him in on the details anyway.

“I’ll ask Christopher,” Miles said. His cousin was the only family he had left. He was an hour away, but he’d come in a heartbeat.

“I was thinking the same thing. I’m not inviting my family for obvious reasons, but I figured we’d get Liam to come. Wells is the only one of us with a real family, so he can bring his, and I’m sure Tallon and Beck will invite their parents.”

“Oh god,” he chuckled. “Imagine Briar’s reaction if Tallon’s shitty parents say stuff about him.”

“She’d shut that down *so* fast. They just always laugh it off when we try,” I said with a hint of a growl in my voice. Graham was always the one who handled it since I’d likely reach across the table and punch them both. Usually, a pack had a leading alpha, but ours was split. Graham was the responsible alpha, while I was the one who focused on the pack as a whole, and Wells was our protector. It worked for us, especially since Graham had kept us out of jail on many occasions.

“Does she know about it?” Miles asked.

I ran a hand over my stubble, curious how she’d take it. “No. That’s my next goal.”

“Come on, you big scaredy alpha. Let’s go,” he said. “I was just about to see if she needed a food break. I know it’s been a bit since you got attacked, and I want to take her out of the penthouse. She needs fresh air, and you do too.

“Aren’t alphas supposed to be the ones taking care of omegas?” I challenged, but he shrugged it off.

“We take care of each other here. Deal with it,” he grumbled, walking away and expecting me to follow.

He knocked on the door, and we could hear shuffling around before she pushed it open. Her eyes were red and puffy, and tears coursed down her cheeks.

“Briar?! What’s wrong?” I demanded. Miles shot me an annoyed glare before putting his arms around her and gently stroking her hair. *Shit. Should have thought of that.*

“I was just watching this TV show, and...” The rest of her words were undecipherable under the sobs. “Damn hormones.”

“Okay, yup,” Miles said. “Come on. You can tell us about it over some dessert. I found a bakery two blocks away.”

She stiffened, and that clued me in on something I hadn’t consciously acknowledged. What Miles said was true; she hadn’t really been out since we were attacked, aside from the doctor visit. I realized that she really was hiding away in here, and with that realization about Briar came one about myself. It was easy to say I’d go to something in a week, but when it came down to it, I didn’t want to. I was hiding away as much as she was.

“We’ll be somewhere random. He won’t find us there, and Graham has men watching him, so he won’t be able to surprise you like that again. We’d have a valid reason to call the police if he showed up,” I reassured her. “It’s been really hard for me to go out too, but we can’t hide in here.”

She took a deep breath. “You’re right.” With fresh determination, she stripped out of her clothes, only realizing what she’d done when we both groaned. “Whoops?”

“Damn it, woman,” Miles grunted. “Now I’m hard as fuck. Want to forget about the food?”

“Not a chance! You had me at bakery.” With a smirk, she went into her closet and pulled on fresh clothes. By the time she came out, she was all smiles. *Pregnancy hormones and mood swings are insane.*

The moment the elevator door closed, she was onto us. Her head swiveled from Miles to me and back again.

“Out with it,” she ordered, hands on her hips. Her face was pinched into a grimace. “I don’t do secrets.”

“That’s fair,” Miles said, giving me a pointed look.

“Graham wants to throw a baby shower,” I blurted, not loving the horror on her face. “Breathe, omega. It’s Graham-style, aka all of us sitting around a table for dinner. You’ll also get to meet what families and friends we do have despite our workaholic lives.”

“Beckham will never let it be just a simple dinner,” she argued.

“I’ll keep him in line,” Miles said. “This time, at least.”

“This time?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah, the next time you have a baby, you might not be so lucky,” he said evenly. Her mouth opened and closed a few times, then she snapped it shut and faced forward with wide eyes. She looked more shocked than upset, meaning she still hadn’t truly accepted that we weren’t going to leave her.

She didn’t talk much until we entered Karl’s Bakery and Coffee Shop. As soon as we walked into the room, she took a deep breath and let out a pitiful whine.

“I miss coffee. When I pop this baby out, someone better get me a caramel latte,” she huffed.

“Done and done,” I agreed. “For now, they have hot chocolate if you want a hot drink. Be careful with the hibiscus tea. I read in one of the books that it’s not safe. It can cause early labor and complications.”

She grinned at me with a sappy smile, the same one we got any time we spouted off a pregnancy fact from the books we were reading. It had started with just a few of us reading, then it escalated into book swapping and reading everything we could. We owed it to her to have as smooth a labor as possible. That included us being prepared enough not to panic when it was time. Though I wouldn’t be watching the baby crown. I’d leave that for stronger alphas than I was.

She couldn’t decide, so we ended up with a platter of pastries and three hot chocolates. Drinking a coffee in front of her felt unnecessarily mean even though she’d assured us it would be fine.

“So, give me the gossip. Who do I need to avoid during this baby shower? I know these people can’t all be sweet,” she said before taking a bite of danish. Her subsequent moan was borderline inappropriate.

“First, don’t do that, or we’ll be in trouble for public indecency,” Miles joked, dramatically fanning himself. “To answer your question, I think you’ll only have to watch Tallon’s parents when they’re with him. They can take that man from a confident, take-no-shit badass to a child closing in on himself with a single comment. It infuriates me.”

“Kick their asses. Noted,” she said. “Make sure he sits next to me at dinner, please.”

I grinned at that. “Done. I’ll spread the word. Now, what’s a girl gotta do to find a massage in this city?”

“Graham has one on speed dial,” Miles said. “She’s magical. Every time one of us approaches heat, he calls her in. I swear she must have sold her soul to the devil.”

“Of course he does,” she laughed. “Does he have someone on speed dial for everything?”

“Yes,” I said. “My mom always talked about how privileged he was thanks to being an alpha, but they both grew up with money and, in turn, connections. He cultivated his by being personable.”

“Glad we’re on his side,” she joked. “Anyway, I’m in desperate need of a nap. Who wants to come snuggle me?”

“Me,” Miles said without hesitation, getting up to grab a box for our leftovers. We laughed at his enthusiasm, but I was right there with him. After all the stress we’d carried lately, I would kill for a long nap with my omegas.

“Let’s go home.”

Briar

MY HAIR WAS TIED up in a messy bun, and I had on an old outfit that I wouldn't mind getting messy. Cleaning gloves were pulled up to my elbows, and I had a bucket of natural cleaning products in hand. I was ready to face the suite. Sure, the guys had overhauled the whole thing, but was it *truly* clean? I couldn't shake the compulsion to make sure every bit of it was devoid of even a speck of dust.

I kicked on my favorite playlist then got to work. I knew I looked like a crazy lady, crawling around on the ground to clean baseboards and every surface in reach, but I needed everything to be perfect.

"Briar?" It was Ellis calling out my name, but I was too focused to answer back, stretching so I could reach the portion of the blinds that was still untouched. "Uh, what are you doing?"

"Cleaning. It needs to be dusted, wiped down, and aired out. I think we should get some air purifiers," I ranted on. His eyes went wide as he dropped the box he was carrying and came over to take the dust rag out of my hand.

"Okay," he said. The man was confused, but I couldn't explain my need to get this perfect. "You know we have people who come in, right?"

"They're not me," I countered with a huff. Instead of answering, he dutifully cleaned the blinds while I watched with an eagle eye. *Smart man.*

"Guys?!" Wells was the next to call out. He came in with three boxes that he dropped next to Ellis'. "Packages for you, Briar. Uh, what are you guys doing?"

"Cleaning the already clean room," Ellis said, but he shut up when I turned a glare on him. He held his hands up and went back to dusting.

"It's not clean enough! It has to be completely clean. Babies crawl on floors and breathe in dust if it's not properly cleaned," I argued. "Here, you're tall." I handed over the broom. "Dust the ceiling and corners."

“Don’t argue, bro,” Ellis said. He was keeping up his good humor, but I knew they both thought I was crazy. Whatever. They could think what they wanted as long as they cleaned for me.

“Dude, what’s with all the packages?” Beckham asked as he dropped four smaller ones on top of the growing stack. I didn’t offer an explanation. Those could wait until I was satisfied. “Oh, is she nesting?”

“But she’s not in heat?” Wells asked. The poor alphas were beyond confused.

“Nesting happens even outside of heat, which you should know.” Beckham rolled his eyes. “In this case, it’s a pregnancy thing. When it’s nearing time for the baby, omegas get an urge to make sure everything is clean. I’ll get all hands on deck.”

While he was gone, Ellis and Wells worked on their tasks as I started in on the mantle and tops of the tables in the common room.

“The cavalry is here,” Beckham called out when he walked back in with Miles, Graham, and Tallon behind him. “We’ve called in a personal day, so we’re at your disposal.”

“Aw, guys.” I teared up from how sweet they were being. Then the tears were gone, and I was barking out orders to the pack. Pretty soon, we were a flurry of dusting, mopping, moving furniture, vacuuming, and singing along to the ridiculous playlist I had. I didn’t think I’d ever been so fucking happy in my life. This right here was what having a pack was about, real partners who supported your crazy and stuck by your side.

The elevator intercom sounded off, and Ellis practically sprinted for the door to answer it. He was gone so long that I was starting to get worried.

“If he ducked out of cleaning duty, he’s getting the spanking this time,” Miles huffed. “I’m going to go drag his ass back here.”

When they both came back, I burst into laughter. Between them, they had two more large boxes, and Franklin, the

security man, was carrying another full stack.

“You guys redecorating the whole penthouse today?” he mused. He’d had to field several deliveries already, and I made a mental note to give him a tip later. If he’d even accept it. Maybe cookies? Oh, those sounded amazing.

“Uh, Briar?” Beckham asked with a laugh. “Why are you practically drooling?”

“The baby wants cookies,” I answered with a shrug. “Thank you for the help, Franklin. Hopefully this is the last of them.”

“No problem, ma’am,” he said with a tip of his hat before he took his leave. The guys were gaping at me, all except Graham who came over to rub my belly. It was funny that this man, the biggest workaholic who had dedicated his life to his company, was the biggest softie in regards to the baby. If he put the same dedication into fatherhood that he did his company, this baby would want for nothing.

“Ask and you shall receive. What kind?”

“Chocolate chip... No, peanut butter! Oh, but chocolate,” I whined. He laughed and shook his head.

“Peanut butter chocolate chip, it is,” he answered before hurrying out. I glanced around the room and realized it was practically sparkling. Every surface, including the floors and walls, was shining.

“This is great, guys. Thank you for the help,” I called out. “Can you help me take care of the cleaning supplies?”

“We’ll get them,” Beckham promised, and they all moved so quickly I couldn’t grab anything. “Put your feet up, woman.”

“I can’t,” I muttered. “One more thing to do.” I ignored more protests as I walked into my room to grab the small tool box I’d gotten in last week. It was blessedly quiet when I walked back out with my box cutter in hand, ready to tackle the mountain of packages they’d carried in for me throughout the evening. The guys had done such an amazing job on the suite, but it felt like the rest of the house—homey but not *my*

home. I needed my touches in this suite and my room. They'd made sure my room had the coziest corner, and I was ready to set up my nest. The idea of snuggling up in a comfy space that smelled like my mates was too enticing to ignore. I'd also bought some baby detergent that smelled amazing, and I wanted to wash everything in it.

Box after box was emptied until I was surrounded by an insane amount of stuff. I'd gotten Oliver a whole set of animal blankets. The website had had the cutest gray and white fluffy bear set, so he had blankets, plushies, and even a few things to hang on the walls of his nursery.

Once I was satisfied with that, I moved on to the living room. With just a few candles, lamps, throw blankets, and rugs, I had pops of color in a room that had previously been decorated in muted tones. It was satisfying, and the more things I added, the more I felt settled here. Like this was truly *my* space.

After finishing in the common room, I went to my room. I draped the new blankets and burp cloths over the bassinet, then got to work on my nook in the corner. I added a few blankets and pillows and large plushies before grabbing the small stash of nesting items I'd collected. Graham's button-up shirt went on the giant stuffed bear, the throw pillow from Tallon's couch was tucked between all of mine, Beckham's t-shirt was draped over the back of the couch, Wells' boxers were tucked in the corner, Ellis' pillow was now on the couch along with the throw blanket I'd "borrowed" from Miles' room.

The scent was stronger now, but not strong enough. Needing more, I grabbed my phone and sent an SOS text to the guys. It was almost comical to see them run in like their asses were on fire.

"Whoops, maybe not quite an emergency, but I need you all to rub yourselves all over this corner," I ordered. Their faces went through a range of emotions—shock, relief, confusion, then amusement. At least no one complained. I wished I had a video of them throwing themselves into the nest I'd made, rubbing their bodies along the pillows, blankets,

and fluff surrounding them. When Miles threw himself across the bear, I couldn't keep my laughter contained any longer.

“You guys are the best pack a girl could ask for.”

Chapter Twenty

Briar

The baby shower was tonight, and I had so much nervous energy I couldn't figure out what to do with myself. I'd already sent half the guys running to their respective rooms, and at this point, only Beckham remained. To be fair, we hadn't seen Tallon and Wells all morning. They might have been strong enough to withstand Hurricane Briar.

As I paced back to the kitchen with no real purpose in mind, I heard Beckham chuckle.

"I promise you that whatever you've conjured up in your mind, it's not accurate," he called out. "My parents may be assholes about betas, but they won't make this torturous."

"And I get to see Liam," I agreed, latching onto that. I forced myself to stop pacing even though it was hard. "Speaking of your brother, where are Tallon and Wells?" They were forever disappearing for hours at a time, and other than fucking, I had no clue what they could be up to. I had no issue with them taking time together, whether that was spent naked or not, but I'd definitely gotten curious.

"In the gym if I had to guess. It's on the floor below us," he said like that wasn't brand new information for me.

"Gym?" I questioned, and he winced.

"Shit, sorry. There's a whole gym and sauna on the floor below this. It's not general access, just ours. You can take the elevator down if you hit the button for twenty-two."

“That sounds like a good distraction,” I joked. “Shirtless tattooed men, with sweat glistening on those muscles? Sign me the fuck up.”

“They are quite impressive,” he agreed, adjusting himself. “While you do that, I think I’ll find me an alpha. I need some... self-care.”

“Ellis is pretending to work. Interrupt him,” I said with a grin. “Have fun!” We both chuckled as the doors closed. I had half a mind to follow him, but Wells and Tallon had both been a bit on edge the last few days. For being an alpha, Wells was a bit too in-tuned with all of our emotions. An empath of sorts for his mates. With Tallon’s parents coming tonight, I knew he probably needed a distraction to help keep him out of trouble.

The sound of methodical hits filled the hall when I stepped out of the elevator. It smelled like sweat, pheromones, and leather, a combination that I was oddly turned on by.

I pushed open the door and started to watch Tallon kick and punch a large punching bag while Wells held it steady, his eyebrows furrowed and worried.

Neither turned my way, so I settled on the weight bench nearby and let them finish their session. It was incredible how much power was behind each one of his hits. He clearly wasn’t handling the impending dinner well, and now I wished we hadn’t invited them at all. He’d explained a bit about them when we first talked, but the guys gave me their perspectives as well. Each story had me hating them almost as much as I hated Vivian.

The fact that his parents couldn’t see his worth was infuriating. He was a successful businessman in Graham’s company, a member of a well-rounded pack, and he’d made sure he was just as strong as our alpha counterparts. I was glad he was starting to see it. Between our game nights and generally spending time together as a pack, he’d calmed a lot of his pent-up anger. Though now that I was witnessing this, I was wondering if a large part of that was thanks to his workouts with Wells.

When he stopped slamming his fists into the bag, he was breathing heavily. But then he moved faster than I would have thought possible right now. He shoved the punching bag aside, practically tackling Wells in a kiss. My pussy throbbed at the sight, wanting to join in, but I was also teetering on the edge of wanting to see where this went.

“As much as I’d love to watch this unfold, I don’t want to be a creeper,” I called out, startling both men. “Unless you want a third? Otherwise, I can just leave.” A hint of vulnerability hit me, but I tried to keep it under wraps. It was hard coming into a fully functioning and committed pack. They all had their own relationships, and I didn’t want to assume I was part of any of it, nor did I want to stop them from having a moment if they needed it.

“Don’t you dare leave,” Tallon growled, stalking away over to me. He pulled me to my feet gentler than I expected before putting his hands on either side of my face and claiming my mouth. His kiss was aggressive and fierce, dominating me until I melted under his attention. He tasted and teased every inch of my mouth, our tongues dueling for control that he wasn’t about to give up.

The sound of shuffling mats had us breaking apart, and I looked over as I gasped for air. Wells was dragging over a stack of workout mats and laying out a layer of fresh towels and sheets.

“Don’t worry. We sanitize these after every workout,” he called out.

“Come on, little omega. Let us work out some of this extra energy,” Tallon practically begged.

“I thought you’d never ask,” I said, suddenly shy.

He chuckled, low and raspy. “God, you’re perfect. You don’t know what you do to us.” He gently guided my hand lower until I gripped his hard cock through his basketball shorts. It was always a boost to my confidence when I watched one of them fall apart or unravel their control for me.

“I have a few ideas about how we can handle this,” I teased, stepping back to throw my clothes aside piece by piece. They watched every article of clothing drop to the floor with hungry eyes. Ever since we’d all gotten more serious, I hadn’t faltered in my confidence even as my belly grew. They had made it clear I was just as sexy to them, and I loved them for that.

“So do I,” Wells rumbled as he stepped up and pulled me closer. His kiss was just as possessive, though a bit gentler than Tallon’s. His hand trailed over my hip before he gripped a handful of my ass. “You ever been fucked here, Briar?” I swallowed hard when I realized what he was asking.

“No,” I answered, but based on the fresh wave of pleasure coursing through me at the thought, I definitely wasn’t against it. “But I’m willing. Just be gentle with me.”

“Always,” Tallon promised as he opened a bottle behind me.

I turned, surprised. “You keep lube waiting in the gym?” I asked with a laugh.

“We fuck down here. Often,” Tallon snarked.

“And if he wants to fuck me, he has to use plenty of lube. I’m not looking to walk like a cowboy for a week every time he needs to get out his rage,” he joked, surprising me even more.

“God, don’t give me all these mental images,” I whined. My hand trailed down to my pussy and pressed into my clit, needing relief. They didn’t argue or stop me. Instead, they let my head fall back as I circled my clit and pleased myself, the thought of them fucking playing in my head.

“Fuck. I don’t know if I should stop her and help or watch,” Tallon said. I glanced over to see him licking his lips and shedding his clothes, stroking his cock in time with the teasing of my hand. Pleasure thrummed through my body, and with a few more swirls of my fingers, I was coming. I cried out, the sound turning into a whine when my pussy clenched around nothing.

“Well, that was sexy as fuck,” Wells declared before he stalked over and picked me up. He carried me over and deposited me on the makeshift bed. It was cozier than I expected, and I got comfortable, letting my knees fall open to show them my glistening pussy. Wells grabbed my wrist and brought my wet digits to his mouth, sucking every ounce of cum from them with a satisfied groan. “I need more.” A breath later, he was between my thighs, tongue fucking me like it was his job. I nearly cried as he ate me out, my fingers dancing over my nipples while Tallon stroked his cock, watching us with hooded eyes. He smirked when he noticed me watching him in return, coming over and picking up his pace, rapidly fucking his fist while I lost my mind. Between the sight of him and the sensations Wells was awakening in my body, I was at the edge of my orgasm. Before I could come, he slowed, letting the pleasure ebb away before expertly rebuilding it all over again. He was edging me with a precision and skill I had never experienced before, and I was writhing and moaning under him, unashamed to let them hear me come undone.

This was all because of them after all. It was all *for* them. There were still bonds to make and a future to be had between us all, but this was something I could give them now, a representation of my feelings for them and the closeness I wanted between us, always.

“Fuck,” Tallon cursed as he painted my breasts with his cum, those hungry eyes of his focused on Wells between my thighs. Hearing Tallon, Wells finally let me come, and my back arched as I rode his face through the most intense orgasm I’d had in a long fucking time. My vision blurred, and my entire body shook with the aftershocks.

Wells moved to his knees, eyes on the sticky mess on my chest. I expected him to clean me, sure, but I hadn’t expected he’d do so with his tongue. He kept his eyes on me as he slowly trailed his tongue over every drop of cum on my breasts. Fuck, if it wasn’t the sexiest thing I’d ever witnessed.

“I’m going to take your spot, omega,” Wells said once he’d finished, helping me sit up so that he could lock his mouth to mine. I could taste the mix of my and Tallon’s cum on his

tongue, which was something I never knew I'd needed before this moment. Who the fuck was I right now?

Once he was satisfied, he helped me stand up, leading me a few steps away to make room for our lover. Wells laid down in my spot, his cock jutting into the air, leaking precum. "Climb on, omega." There was a challenge in his tone, and no part of me was about to miss out on that one.

I carefully climbed onto his lap with Tallon's help since this big baby bump didn't make it easy to move around, then the moment I straddled his hips, I lifted up and sank down onto his dick. He had a monster of a cock, so I moved slowly, taking him inch by inch. Thank fuck I'd already come twice, so I was nice and wet for him. We were both breathing heavily by the time I'd taken him fully.

"Now for the fun part," Tallon teased. The snick of the lube bottle had my eyes widening but Wells interrupted. He pulled me closer and ran hands along my back. The baby bump kept him from kissing me, but it didn't matter. I felt so close to him anyway. I was lost in his gaze as he whispered the sweetest words to me. Behind me, Tallon gently pushed a lube-covered finger inside of me. I closed my eyes, focusing on Wells' voice, and breathed through the odd sensation as Tallon stretched me for him.

"I'm super glad you're a beta," I told him as he added a third finger, making me gasp. It was a mix of a sharp, stinging stretch and a new kind of pleasure once Wells' fingers slid over my clit. My body was unsure what it should focus on—the pleasure, or the pain that was already ebbing away.

"Oh, don't be fooled. I'm a beta, but my cock is still big enough to make this uncomfortable," he said. "Ask Wells."

"He's not wrong," Wells confirmed, "but she's going to take our cocks beautifully. Aren't you, omega? Let us fill you and fuck you until you forget your name?"

"Yes," I breathed out like a prayer. Tallon slowly slid his cock into my ass, and holy fuck, I'd never felt so full. Between him and Wells, I thought I might lose my mind, and as soon as my body adjusted, I was done waiting. "Fuck me."

They moved at once, rocking together in a perfect synchrony only two mates could achieve. Incoherent words fell from my lips as I braced my hands on Wells' chest, taking their cocks just as they wanted. They weren't gentle now, only giving me a quick warning to stop them if I felt uncomfortable. But the truth was that I was lost in the fucking moment, each rock of their hips sending a fresh wave of lust curling through me until I was hurtling right toward another orgasm. Wells didn't deny me this time, letting me fall right over the edge, my body pulsing around his cock. I was a whimpering mess as they prolonged my orgasm, making one turn into two when someone's fingers found my clit. My eyes were closed, my body theirs as they used me for their pleasure.

Tallon was the first to come, his fingers digging into my hips as he filled my ass with his seed, calling out my name as he lost control. He rested his head on my back, then reached around to play with my breasts as he came down from his high.

Wells came right after, his knot swelling against the thin barrier between him and Tallon. If I'd thought I was full before, now I felt like they'd rip me apart from the inside out. At the first whimper from me, Tallon slowly pulled out, giving Wells' knot more room. Our alpha gently rocked into me, making sure I stayed as comfortable as possible while it locked us together, but he didn't need to worry. The moment he took hold of my hips and ground me on his knot, I was crying out again, the sound blending with his rumbling purr.

In mere moments, I was coming again, this climax a blend of too much and not enough all at once. My body milked my alpha's cock until he filled me with his seed, mine and Tallon's names coming from his husky voice as he gave himself over to the euphoria of his own orgasm.

Tallon remained behind me, stroking his hands over my skin as we rode out the knot. When it finally receded, he had to help me to my feet, holding me up when my knees began to shake. I was sore, but perfectly so. It would be a nice reminder while I sat through the dinner in a few hours, something to keep me grounded.

“Let’s get upstairs and clean up,” Wells said, standing up to gather the pile of linens and toss them away. “I’ll finish in here later.”

“My shower is the biggest,” Tallon offered. “Plus, I don’t think I want to be alone today.”

“You don’t have to be, and you’re sitting by me at dinner,” I informed him, brushing a gentle kiss over his lips. “Remember that you are the perfect beta for me. I’ll never not love that aspect of you, even if you’re still working on accepting it yourself.” He smiled down at me, a mix of relief and disbelief in his eyes. I just hoped that this was enough to ground him as well because he wasn’t alone, and I wouldn’t let anyone talk to him like he was anything but perfect.

We were a pack, and I took that seriously. They’d given me so much more than shelter; they’d given me a new outlook on life, one that included what real love and respect was, and I’d never let them feel anything less than the acceptance and love they gave me every day.

Chapter Twenty-One

Briar

My heart pounded as we walked into Alejandro's Cantina. Graham had rented out the entire place, so the center of the room was now occupied by one long, candle-lit table. They'd moved all the others aside to make it front and center. A dessert table sat next to the bar, and atop it sat a cute blue cake along with a full spread of all of Alejandro's desserts.

"I made sure your favorites were up there," Alejandro said when he walked up, catching me drooling over the dessert. "I hear we have big news. Congratulations!"

"We do," I said with a smile.

"You look radiant. I'm happy for you all," he said respectfully. He gave a bow before turning to Graham. "Did we decide between individual plates or a sampler for everyone?"

"Sampler, let's make it as easy as possible," Graham said, then he followed Alejandro to the bar to handle it.

"How are you feeling?" Wells' voice was teasing, and I gave him a mock glare.

"I don't know how you expect me to sit through a whole dinner now," I joked. "I'm a bit sore."

"Good." He grinned, guiding me to a chair right in the middle. The press of his hand against my lower back only served to remind me of what other parts of him had been

pressed against me before we came here. Although I had told the truth about being a little sore, my body was ready for a second round of whatever my alpha wanted to give me. Luckily, the logical part of me intervened, pointing out that now was not the time and this was definitely not the place. My touch-starved body would need to rein it in... at least until the guests left.

I settled into the seat, glad the ache was fairly minimal. “Tallon!” I jumped at the sharp command for our beta, who was talking to Miles across the room. He started to complain until he saw me sitting. Miles followed him over and sandwiched Tallon between us. Beck took my other side while the alphas settled across the table, forcing our guests to take the seats on either side of our unified pack. *This*. This was what a pack was supposed to do—protect each other, love one another, and use their resources, be it mind, body, or money, to make sure that each member felt safe and loved.

“Stay in your seat, Briar,” Ellis suggested. “Getting up and down would be exhausting, and they can greet you from there.”

“You going to order your families around, too?” I teased. He simply winked at me as the door opened. At the sight of Liam, I rushed out of my chair, ignoring his protests.

“You look amazing!” Liam grinned before crouching down to hover his face inches from my belly. “Hey, little man, I’m your uncle Liam. I can’t wait to meet you.”

“Stop,” I choked out. God, I was an emotional mess. Two sentences, and I was already fighting off tears. “I can’t take the cuteness.”

He laughed and straightened up, giving me another hug. “There’s someone I want you to meet.” I gasped and almost shoved him aside to see who was behind him. A shy omega stood there with a stack of presents in her hands that he promptly took. She smiled up at him in thanks, and I was fighting back those damn tears again. There was so much adoration and happiness in her expression, I could hug her. Because my brother deserved every fucking bit of it.

“Hello. I’m Briar.” She turned a nervous smile on me, and I knew exactly how she felt. “Look, I’m meeting my pack’s family and friends tonight, so let’s shake off this awkwardness. I’ll feel enough for both of us later.”

She laughed; it was a sweet, melodic sound that fit her petite frame and bright smile. “Ouch.” She winced. “And it’s nice to meet you. I’m Cora.”

“So, how’d you two meet?” I asked, gesturing for her to sit at the table. Beckham had shifted to the other side to leave room for her and Liam by me. I gave him a silent thanks before focusing in on her.

“He’s doing his residency at the hospital I work at. I’m a nurse in the labor and delivery department,” she explained.

“That’s amazing,” I gushed, listening as she went into the adorable story of how he’d flirted with her until he worked up the guts to ask her out. He looked so damn happy as he listened to her talk. I barely held back from asking if they were going to try to make a bigger pack or stay as a duo. I’d just ask him later when she wasn’t around.

My attention was pulled away by a boisterous laugh, and I saw Miles hugging a man who looked a lot like him. He was a bit taller, an alpha, and his blond hair was shorter.

Miles led him over to the table and stopped behind his chair, looking over at me. “This is Briar, our newest pack member.” I gave an awkward wave. “This is my cousin, Christopher.”

“Cousin, best friend, dashing handsome comrade, whichever you prefer,” he joked, with a mischievous smile. Apparently, that ran in the family. Thankfully, he didn’t dive into a bunch of questions. He and Miles settled into chairs and conversation, catching up with one another.

Next to come in was Wells’ parents. His mom, Elise, was a sweet omega with bright red hair. She was gorgeous and genuinely kind. Instead of a handshake, she gave me a hug before moving down the line of my guys, giving them each love, before fawning over Wells about how handsome he’d

gotten since she last saw him. I held back a laugh at the bright red lipstick she left on his cheek. He blushed and waved her off before introducing his beta, alpha, and omega fathers. They were just as nice. The alpha, Sam, was quiet and stoic like Wells had been when I first met him. The omega, Lance, was a sweet guy who made sure Elise made it to her seat before taking his. Arlo was the beta; he was a charmer, joking with the guys and giving me a wave before clapping a hand on Wells' back.

I was acutely aware that Tallon and Beckham's parents still hadn't arrived, and eventually, Graham had Alejandro get everyone drinks and chips and dip.

Then Elise looked at me and asked how we met. Thank fuck for Liam speaking up for me, ever my protector.

"Ellis is one of my best friends, so when I introduced them, it was an easy friendship that obviously turned into more," he explained.

"That's so great. It's always nice to have family be accepting of your mates," she said with a smile. "My mom might be a bit... overbearing."

"A bit?" Arlo asked with a laugh. "Let's just say *we* won't stop by unannounced and fuss about how you keep house and cook."

"Well, you wouldn't get far on the cooking front. I'm awful!" I joked back. He nudged Wells at that.

"I like her. She can take a joke," he said.

"Oh, don't let her fool you. She's been learning well," Graham called out from the other end of the table. He was on Ellis' other side, chatting with Sam and Liam.

The door opened then, and a couple walked in. I could immediately tell they were Tallon's parents. His mother had hazel eyes like Beckham, while their dad had pale blue like Tallon. They held themselves with an air of superiority, like they had somehow already judged the rest of us and found us wanting. The worst part for me was that my mind immediately compared them to my parents. It was the way they wore their

superiority like a cloak and demanded attention the moment they entered the room. I could tell that appearances were everything to them, and knowing how they treated Tallon, well, that assumption checked out.

I made sure to stand up to greet them, refusing to let them cause a scene due to some imagined slight on my part. Tallon and Beckham stood with me while Graham kept the rest of the table talking. Even though it seemed like he was focusing on our guests, the alpha had his eyes trained on us, a silent way of showing his support and care. If things went to shit, he was ready to step in and be the protector.

“Hello, thank you for coming,” I said, offering a bright smile. So long as they played nice, or some small semblance of that, I would try to kill them with kindness. “I’m Briar.”

“Nice to meet you too. I’m Claire,” she said, holding out her hand and waiting for me to take it. I gave her a shake despite not wanting to touch her. *Play the game, Briar.* Before she could say more, her husband stepped up and put a hand on her shoulder.

“I’m Drake,” he said. There was no smile. All I received was a brief glance before he dismissed me entirely. “Son.” He nodded once at Tallon, that reception even cooler than what I’d been given, then switched to Beckham, his smile widening. “Beckham! How are you doing? Still showing the world that omegas can work in business?”

“Always,” he said, though his voice was strained. “Briar is actually doing the same in her field. She’s a successful graphic designer with her own company.”

“Betas try,” Drake said flippantly, “but they always fall just a little bit too short.”

“Now, that’s statistically untrue. Betas make up sixty-seven percent of our population, meaning they dominate most fields. While alphas do rival them in positions of power, betas make an average income that is in line with what alphas contribute to their packs. Our top surgeons in the country? Betas. Top entrepreneurs? Betas. Take your son, for example.

Tallon just landed the biggest client that Crane Enterprises has seen in years.”

They blinked at me when I finished my speech, and it was Tallon who spoke up next.

“You heard about that?” he asked quietly, almost embarrassed.

“Of course, and you should have been yelling it from the rooftops! Graham bragged about you instead,” I reassured him. Because I was proud of him, and maybe a little bit to hammer home how valuable he was to me, I gave him a peck on the lips. I wouldn’t shy away from giving him the recognition—verbally or physically—that he deserved just because his judgmental parents had their eyes on us. “Now, I’m starving. Let’s go find a seat.”

“Alphas easily out-power betas, and the latter have none of the biological benefits that omegas do,” Drake argued, refusing the redirection.

“In strength? Probably, if they keep up with the gym,” I said pointedly, glancing at his smaller, unmuscled frame. “Other than that, I see no difference. Being the face of a company doesn’t mean much. A CEO is nothing without an entire board behind them.” After that, I walked away, not wanting their company nor caring if I was on their good side. Tallon and Beckham followed me, retaking their seats, and the moment we sat, Tallon’s hand was on my leg. Every one of my guys and half the table was smiling openly, ignoring the incoming couple.

“That was amazing,” Tallon whispered to me. I grinned over at him, my cheeks heating. I was a little surprised I’d gone all in on that conversation, but I didn’t regret it.

“I couldn’t help it. They were begging for someone to shut that shit down, and I meant every damn word,” I told him vehemently.

“It’s kind of nice having someone so fiercely in my corner. It was kinda hot,” he teased with a wink. Despite him trying to play it off, his hand rested on my thigh and his eyes were a bit

glassy for a second. I hated that they couldn't see him the way I did. Sure, our first impression was rocky, but he'd proven every day since that he was a caring packmate, and he always looked out for the rest of us.

When his parents eventually found their seats, he held his head high. The conversation around the table was light and full of laughter, though his parents remained silent in their spot. Good. Let them see how people should treat each other. Because right now, they were the outsiders, and it was well deserved.

With perfect timing, Alejandro brought out dinner, easing some of the tension because no one could stay mad when they had tacos. Without hesitation, I dove into my plate, Oliver kicking happily as I ate. Once I'd scarfed down a taco or two, I brought Tallon's hand to my stomach. He seemed remarkably fine considering we'd had to deal with his parents' bullshit within moments of me meeting them, but I knew this would be a pick-me-up to calm any lingering nerves.

"He's a fan of tacos, isn't he?" he said, all hints of shadows gone from his eyes.

"That he is," I agreed. "Just wait until I give him some cake. It looks amazing, Beckham."

My omega smiled at me. "They made me promise not to go too crazy, so that was my touch. But just you wait until Ollie has birthdays!"

"They're all yours." It was so sweet that he was already looking forward to celebrating our son. *Our*. I had a feeling that word would never cease to make me smile. When I found out I was pregnant, I'd thought of nothing but a future on my own, no pack or support aside from Liam. Now, I had a pack. Now, I had *our*. These men had shown me the power a single word could hold, and it was more than I ever could have hoped for.

When we'd all eaten our weight in tacos, well, everyone but Drake and Claire, who looked so out of place it was painful, presents were excitedly shoved into my hands. I had never been a fan of opening them in front of others, but seeing

the guys' joy, I couldn't be uncomfortable. They wanted and deserved this moment.

"This is amazing," I gasped. Liam and Cora had put together a practical gift that would be a help to any busy pack. She'd found a huge baby organizer for the nursery. The guys would have to put it together, but they'd also provided everything I'd need to fully stock it—lotions, rags, diapers, blankets, creams, the works. "Thank you."

"We had to hook up our little nephew." I wasn't the only one who melted that time. My brother had a very satisfied and teary-eyed omega sitting next to him, which I totally understood. Men being sappy about babies was my kryptonite as well, so I couldn't blame her.

By the time we'd unwrapped it all and had dessert, I was full, happy, and ready to put my feet up.

"My sister looks uncomfortable. Someone get her home and rub her feet so they don't swell," Liam ordered with a pointed glance downward.

"Yeah, yeah, Doctor." The words were filled with the affection that I only felt for my brother. Sometimes I didn't appreciate his bossiness or alpha tendencies, but this time, I would gratefully accept the out. Although that didn't mean I wouldn't throw a little friendly sarcasm his way.

"We'll take our leave then," Claire said, handing Beckham an envelope before walking out. She spared no backward glances for the rest of us, including their other son. The moment the door closed behind them, I turned to the guys.

"They're not invited to any more parties," I huffed.

"I was just thinking that. What a heinous outlook on life," Cora agreed with disgust. "This makes me want to find us a cute beta to add to our pack."

"Do it! Betas are the best." I grinned down at Tallon, loving that he actually grinned back. Surly Tallon was more or less a thing of the past, minus the occasional passing grump phase on a bad day. Slowly, I was chipping away at the baggage that others had piled on his shoulders.

“There’s that cute beta that works down at the coffee shop,” she mused. and Liam barked out a laugh.

“I knew you couldn’t love coffee *that* much,” he accused playfully.

“Uh, can you blame me?” she teased, and he shook his head and pulled her in for a hug. I was just happy she was comfortable around us now. Between her, Wells’ parents, and Chris, I was ready to have more family dinners.

“Let’s get our omega home,” Graham reminded us. The other guys jumped into action, carrying our things out, while Alejandro’s staff cleaned up the dishes and wrapping paper.

“Thank you so much, Alejandro. Tonight was perfect,” I told him. The older man grinned happily.

“Always a pleasure,” he assured as he disappeared in the back. While Graham stayed behind to handle the bill and tips, I followed the guys out to the car. The moment I was in my seat, I was drifting off, happy but exhausted. All I knew was that I was the luckiest omega in the world.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Briar

“Guys, I look ridiculous,” I said as I tried on what felt like the sixteenth dress.

“This one is terrible on her,” Beckham said, waving his hand like he could curse the dress off of me.

“Agreed, no more green,” Miles said.

“Onto the next!” Maria, the lead stylist, declared, ushering me back behind the curtain. I’d forgotten my modesty after the first five dresses, and I was far too pregnant to independently get in and out of them without hurting myself.

“I’m going to look awful,” I said, more to myself than anything, as I studied the gaudy sequined ball gown I’d been maneuvered into.

“Not if I can help it,” Maria promised. “Stop! This isn’t it.” The girls stopped trying to adjust it and stepped back. Maria gazed at me, head tilted to the side, and her eyes roamed over my frame. “Favorite colors?”

“Black and bright blue,” I said without thinking on it too hard. “I’m more of a sexy-yet-not-too-revealing type. I don’t want to be self-conscious at this event. There are going to be some people there who will try to tear me down.” Not that I really cared, not deep down. Despite being worried about having to field commentary from others, I was finally comfortable in my skin. Other than the occasional hormone burst and the weight of the baby bump, I was at a good point of pregnancy. No morning sickness, constant kicking to let me

know Oliver was thriving, and even the exhaustion had subsided again. Now that I was here, I wanted to accentuate the bump that I'd become attached to. It felt like I'd been pregnant forever, but I knew I'd miss it a bit when Oliver was finally here.

"Fuck them. You're gorgeous, and those men are head over heels for you. That, and how you feel about yourself, is all that matters," she said sternly. "For a mix of sexy yet modest, I think I have a dress in mind." She rushed off while her assistants helped me out of the gown. I stood there in my boyshorts and strapless bra, crossing my fingers that this would be the last dress. When she came back, she ordered me to turn away from the mirror, and I did, trusting her enough to listen. They got me in this one much easier, and the satin underlay was soft against my skin.

"I think you need to see this one in the other mirrors," she urged. Her face was full of excitement, which boosted my own as I followed her out to the platform where the guys were waiting. Beckham's jaw dropped, and Graham was beaming. Ellis slowly looked me over and discreetly adjusted himself while Wells let out a whistle. Tallon smiled up at me, nodding his head like this was the one.

"Well?" Miles demanded. "What do you think?"

"I haven't seen it yet," I admitted with a shake of my head. "I'm almost afraid to look."

"Take a look," Graham ordered. When I turned and faced the three-panel mirror, I smiled. The dress hugged my bump perfectly, showcasing it. The material was soft and delicate, the nude satin covered in a pretty black lace. It had long lace sleeves and dipped low to show off my breasts, which I thought looked fantastic in this. Pregnancy had given me an extra cup size, and I hoped I didn't lose them.

"Wow, Maria," I breathed out. Like a little girl, I let my excitement lead. I spun around to take in the cinched back and the flow of the skirt. It pooled around my ankles at what somehow seemed the perfect length. It didn't look like I'd

need alterations, and the material had enough give in case Oliver had another growth spurt.

“This is the one,” she agreed. “I had a feeling.”

“Holy cow, you look amazing, Briar!” I spun around at the familiar voice, a huge smile on my face.

“Katelyn!” I called out, hopping off the dais and heading over. “Did you make it free of Olivia’s clutches?”

Her eyes darkened, and she shook her head. “No, she’s still trying to fight us, but it’s nothing I can’t handle. Plus, it seems you made it out worse. Are you okay after that shooting?”

“What? How did you hear about that?” We’d followed every news outlet, and not a single one had breathed a word of the shooting. They’d somehow swept it under the rug.

“I realized I forgot to ask for your number just in case we needed a witness or something if they came after us again, so we drove around just in time to witness it. Our dash cam got the whole thing. We gave it to the police. Did it help?”

“You did?” I gasped. Now, my men were around us.

Graham stepped up, close to my side, giving Katelyn plenty of space. “Tell me you have another copy?” he asked gently. I could hear the anxiety in his voice, which was something I’d yet to witness. Graham never seemed shaken by much of anything.

“They took my memory card from me,” she admitted with a frown. “They didn’t give it to you?”

“No, they said they had no evidence of our shooters,” I admitted bitterly, unsurprised but entirely unhappy that they’d withheld pertinent evidence.

“I knew that place was shady!” she bit out.

A man who I assumed was her husband stepped up behind her. “It backs up to your email. I paid extra for that feature,” he reminded her, and she gasped, nearly throwing her phone as she snatched it out of her purse. She recovered quickly and opened it up.

“Holy fuck, you’re right! There’s a whole drive.”

“Here, babe, I’ll do it,” he promised, and Graham followed him over to the side.

She glanced at me, shaking her head. “I can’t believe this. They refused to give us your names or anything, so I had no way to find you to call and check in. I was so worried. That was insane.”

“I was lucky,” I admitted, giving her a brief rundown of our injuries and recovery. “But me and the baby are fine, and so is our alpha.”

“That’s great,” she said sincerely. “I’ll be looking like you before too long.”

“You found an alpha?” I asked excitedly.

She shook her head. “Not yet, but we’re looking into alpha surrogacy practices where they help couples like us.”

“That’s so exciting,” I gushed, giving her a hug. “I’m so happy for you. Let me know if you want Graham’s lawyer to take a look at your case. He’s been great.”

“We might take you up on that. Ours is great, but kind of new and not super forceful. I’m over being harassed,” she admitted. “Here.” She pulled out a piece of paper and jotted down her info before handing it over. Borrowing the pen, I did the same.

“Thanks. I’ll send over the lawyer’s details once I get them from Graham,” I said. “And now I better get out of this dress.”

“You look stunning,” she said, her mood easily picking back up. “We’re here to find a dress for this charity event in a few weeks.”

“That’s what this is for,” I admitted. “Over in Mason Hills.”

“My dad helps run the youth charity they’re donating to,” she explained. “Kid Konnection. It provides tutoring services and vocational skill opportunities for kids who struggle with conventional classes.”

“That’s amazing. We’ll keep an eye out for his auctions,” I promised before saying my goodbyes. While I changed into my normal clothes, with Maria’s help, of course, because pregnant women didn’t rate high on flexibility, I thought over what we’d learned. Would this give the lawyers what they needed? It would be so easy to sit back now and let the video speak for itself, but a sinking feeling in my stomach argued that the confession would make it air-tight, and I couldn’t lose my backbone now.

“Maria, wait,” I said before she could leave. “That girl out there? I know Graham is covering my dress, but I want to pay for hers myself.”

She smiled. “We can do that. I’ll send you an invoice.”

“Thank you. And I mean alterations, the works,” I said firmly.

“Of course,” she said. “It’s nice to see some sweet omegas in here. We get a lot of... *privileged* clientele who forget manners on their best days and are downright nasty on their worst. This is nice to see. Thanks for making this old lady’s day.”

“Thanks for helping me. The dress is phenomenal,” I said in answer before she walked out.

The guys didn’t talk much when I rejoined them, but the moment we were closed in the car, Wells was done waiting.

“Well?”

Graham let out a long breath. “It’s really solid evidence. You can clearly see that it was us. However, it has no audio from that distance. We still need that confession, but this... This will give us a huge advantage. He’ll have no way to deny that it was his order. He pointed, then they shot. Plus, I can see their faces. I’ll have the lawyers dig into their bank accounts to see if he paid them off.”

“That’s great news then,” Beckham said. “We already planned on getting that confession, so we can move forward.”

“I’ll get it,” I said evenly. “The man’s ego won’t let him stay away. He’ll come over, probably with some twisted story

about how it's thanks to his benevolence that I'm alive. That, or to take another shot at convincing me to come with him."

"This is going to be a snowball effect. The moment it's in the news, it's practically guaranteed that others will come out," Miles said. "Men don't suddenly become mean and vindictive. He had that inside him all along, and I don't doubt it's reared its ugly head with more than one woman."

"Oh, Vivian assured me she's taken care of all the omegas he's done this to," I said with a bitter laugh. "That means there were likely dozens. She's just as guilty as he is... She's an accomplice."

"She is, and we'll be including that in our report," Ellis said.

I couldn't help gaping at him. "What?"

"Why wouldn't we?" he asked. "She's guilty, and I won't let her hurt others. Because if it isn't him, it'll be someone else. Maybe a little jail time will help teach her something about right and wrong. I guarantee she was the one who called Omega Services to see when you were coming in."

"Damn," I breathed out, impressed he'd throw his mom under the bus like this. But he was right; she needed to face the consequences of her actions. Even if she dodged charges for her role in the attack, she had bribed families and covered up multiple sexual assaults, so something would likely stick. "I have a feeling she's going to make tonight hell."

I guess I must have looked overly worried because Graham stepped up and ran a soothing hand over my arm.

"You won't be alone for even a second," he promised me. "Anita's pack will be there, so if you have to go to the restroom, they'll go with you. We have all bases covered."

"Good," I sighed, relieved at that. "Because I pee a lot these days. Not to mention, she confronted me in a bathroom when this all started. I wouldn't put it past her to try that same tactic, especially once she realizes we're there together. I don't think she'll be able to resist the idea of cornering me while I'm

alone, and she'll know we can't sneak you guys into the restroom."

"She's an asshole who needs the reckoning that's coming her way," Miles said, making us all laugh. "And *I* need ice cream."

I groaned at the mention of my current craving. "We agree."

"You're going to sound crazy when he's born and you keep saying 'we,'" Tallon said, but the grin on his face told me he didn't mind in the slightest.

"We'll just have to knock her up again," Beckham said. It was a joke—at least I thought so—but no one laughed. *Oh fuck no. They are not seriously considering that.*

"Don't you fucking dare! I'm not saying never, but I want a solid two years of sushi, lunch meat, wine, and having my body to myself."

"Deal," Wells said, and I knew damn well the man was making a mental note, down to the fucking date.

"Plus, it'll be nice to have him walking and in the toddler stage first," Ellis said. "I can't imagine two babies who don't sleep. We've got enough people in our pack, so sleep won't be an issue, but that might not be pretty."

"The books said Briar will likely sleep lightly and hear him no matter what, so you're not wrong," Beckham chimed in. "And a sleep-deprived omega can be a scary omega, for sure."

"I love that you guys know more about the baby and pregnancy than I do now," I said. "I love you guys." For a brief moment, it was silent, and I started to panic. But then I felt Graham's hand rest on my thigh, and I met his eyes, finding my love returned there.

"I love you too, Briar. You were meant to be with this pack," he said.

"The beginning was shaky because I'm an asshole, but I love you too. I know I wouldn't have admitted this months

ago, but the way you meshed with our lives was just seamless. It's easy with you, Briar, especially now that I'm not standing in my own way. I don't think I've ever had easy before, not with the way I was raised, and I was afraid of what that meant, but now I understand. You're made for us," Tallon added on.

"You know I love you. I have from day one," Beckham said. "I told Ellis that night you weren't going anywhere."

"Really?" I grinned. "Why? I was a hot mess when I got here."

"You were not! You were so strong," he argued.

"He did," Ellis agreed. "I was just too fucking stubborn to see it, but now I love you just as much as I love these fools. You make this pack better."

Miles snorted. "Fools? Please, you know I'm fabulous." Ellis leaned over and gave him a kiss, grinning as he pulled back. "Fine, fine. Smooth talker." He turned back and met my gaze. "I love you, Briar."

"I love you too," I said, tears pricking at my eyes.

"I don't have anything funny to say to make those tears stop, but you're our world, Briar. I love you, and I can't wait for this baby to change all of our lives. This next chapter will be amazing."

"That it will," I agreed, unable to not smile like a fool after all that. I'd said it because I felt it. I hadn't expected a full array of declarations afterward, but those words meant the world to me. *They* meant the world to me.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Briar

The event center was gorgeous. Windows lined every wall, and chandeliers hung throughout the room, giving it a brightness that made everything sparkle. It was a sea of formal wear, and I was glad it was crowded, meaning we wouldn't stand out quite so much.

"Tickets?" a man in a suit asked when we approached, so Graham handed over the stack.

"Pack Crane?" the man clarified, stylus poised over his tablet to add us to the roster.

"Yes," Graham confirmed.

"Welcome. You'll find the charity auction tables on the east wall. Dinner begins at seven sharp. Tables are marked with pack names. Yours is up front; it seems you've been placed at the mayor's table." He was already waving us off, oblivious to my impending panic attack. Ellis wrapped my arm around his and gave me a gentle squeeze, guiding me into the room.

"It's going to be fine, Briar. You don't have to sit with him," he said. "The moment we get what we need, we're out of here."

"Okay," I whispered back. It was unfair that even the sound of his title sent me into an emotional tailspin. The man didn't deserve the power he still had over me.

“Let’s check out the auctions. I believe you mentioned one you’d like us to invest in this year?” Graham said, holding out his arm. I gratefully accepted it, and Ellis let me go.

“Yes,” I said, giving him the details. The auction tables were filled with items, each displayed with a fancy sign up sheet so that attendees could place their silent bids. Alongside everything else was a sign-up sheet for donation; people could volunteer to support a charitable cause out of the goodness of their hearts—or at least that was the surface rationale. Really, in this sort of crowd, both the donations and auction items were another sign of status. You might not be verbalizing the money you had, but others would see it nonetheless. I barely held back my gasp at the astronomical number Graham pledged. Knowing my pack was wealthy was one thing, but seeing it like this was another.

“Briar!” I eagerly whirled around when I heard Katelyn’s voice. She was walking over with an older man in tow. “This is my dad.”

“Nice to meet you, sir. Thanks for all you do for the kids here,” I said, meaning every word. This kind of program would change lives.

“Why thank you.” He grinned, eyes wrinkling around corners into familiar lines. This was a man who smiled often. He was clearly where Katelyn got her warm energy. “I’m just ecstatic they accepted us for this function. It’ll mean the world to us and the kids.”

“You deserve to be here,” Graham said, shaking his hand. “I’m happy to donate to such a company.”

“Thank you for the donation,” he said. “And you are?”

“Briar’s mate, my name is Graham Crane,” he said. “If you’ll excuse us, we have to track someone down before dinner, but I hope we see more of you tonight.”

“You as well,” he said before something else caught his attention. He started to drag Katelyn through the room, her laughter trailing after them.

“I just saw Vivian coming closer. Let’s avoid her for now,” he hissed as he dragged me back toward the bar. The line was long, but it gave us something to do while everyone milled around.

“This place is so fucking full of ego, it smells of it,” Miles noted when he stepped up beside us. A cloud of lust hit us, and both of our noses wrinkled in disgust. Having the ability to smell emotions should make people be a bit more circumspect in crowds, yet here we were. I wasn’t even sure who was lusting after what. Had someone seen an attractive person in the crowd, or was it a lust for money and power? When you were rubbing elbows with the city’s privileged elite, it was anyone’s guess as to the source. Either way, I wanted out as soon as possible.

“We need to be out before dinner,” I said with a shudder. “No part of me wants to sit through that monstrosity.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” he said. “These functions are always insufferable. I’ll be glad to be done with them now.”

“Briar?” The blood drained from my face at the sound of my mother’s voice.

“No,” Liam’s voice cut in as he hurried over. “You don’t get to exile your daughter, which is possibly one of the biggest offenses in parenting that I’ve ever heard of, then try to talk to her now. Walk away, woman.”

“How dare you speak to your mother that way!” my dad seethed, stepping in.

“How dare you exile your daughter for money,” Liam shot back.

“You know, I never thought I’d get this opportunity,” Tallon said, stepping around me to face off with my dad. I hadn’t realized they’d caught up to us, though I couldn’t say I was unhappy about having more backup.

“For what? Who are you?” Mom bit out, her voice shaking now that she was flustered.

“Tell me. How did you learn that your daughter was assaulted, then promptly take money from her attacker? Then,

to top it all off, you kick her out, rendering her homeless! Was the money worth it? How do you sleep at night?"

"I sleep just fine," he growled. "She's capable of saying no, and we didn't deserve to be punished for her lack of willpower." His indignation was laughable, or at least it would have been if I wasn't so fucking furious.

"Don't you dare blame me for his actions." My blood was boiling, and I had to take several breaths to calm down.

My dad's gaze flickered to mine, his mouth set in a thin line, but he didn't dare speak to me. What could he say at this point?

"Kindly fuck off before I take you out back and teach you how a *real* alpha protects his family," Wells warned. There was a command in his tone that made my parents' faces pale. *Good. I hope they think about this moment every day for the rest of their miserable lives.*

When they were out of sight, I finally took a deep breath. Liam hugged me before rushing off to make sure they didn't come near us again.

"Can we wrap this up soon?" I quietly begged. Completely unintentional, a whine slipped out, setting the alphas' backs even straighter. They closed in around me, giving me comfort, until my emotions evened out.

"We'll try," Graham promised. "We need to linger near the mayor first, draw him in."

"Easy enough. He just saw us," Ellis said. He pointed across the room at the mayor. He was practically foaming at the mouth, fury in his gaze. All my sadness washed away at the sight, replaced by determination, and I gave a sweet smile. Sure enough, the moment he saw it, he practically shoved his way through the crowd, Vivian popped up out of nowhere to intercept him, but her efforts were met with some kind of angry response.

Ellis gripped my arm, and her eyes narrowed in with a flicker of anger, then confusion, then shock as she realized who stood around me. A confidence I didn't know I could

channel went through me. They weren't going to win this. It could have been my men at my back or the microphones that Graham and Beckham had sewn into our clothes that helped, but it didn't matter.

"Let's go to the balcony," Ellis suggested, moving us out of line and toward the open door. It was the only thing keeping the overfilled room from being stifling. The outside air was chilly enough that Ellis gave his coat to me to stay warm. It took less than five minutes for the mayor and Vivian to make their way through the crowd. When he approached, he tried to get close to me, but my pack stepped in front, with Wells and Ellis blocking me off while Graham had my back.

"I'd like you to step away from my mate," Ellis said evenly.

"She isn't your mate," he hissed. His volume was low enough right now that I knew it wouldn't carry, but that wouldn't last long.

"I told you that you were exiled. How dare you show your face here of all places!" Vivian cut in.

"I was invited. Had a ticket and everything." Although it was hard to maintain my calm, there was nothing to be gained by being the first to lose my shit.

"Look, you little bitch, you don't get to disrespect me like this. I thought I made myself clear the last time I saw you," the mayor ground out. The man was barely keeping it together. His jaw was clenched tightly enough that the veins were popping out in his neck.

"Last time? You'll have to refresh my memory." He lunged for me again, but they were an unshakable block.

"Don't play cute. You know what happened." He laughed humorlessly. "And if you're here, then clearly, you've rethought my offer."

"To come live with you and put on a show for the public?" I asked, matching his fake laugh. "I think not. You don't get to use us and toss us as you see fit."

“I’ll fight you for that baby, make you out to be some vapid omega who threw herself at me,” he said with a confidence he shouldn’t have. “The courts would grant me custody. I’m the fucking mayor of this city, and I have friends in all sorts of high places, including in the government.”

“Nice try, but when an omega is claimed, the law stands by the alpha who claimed her, not the one who got her pregnant,” Graham said.

“Too bad no pack would claim her. You may call her your mate, but she’s unclaimed,” he fired back.

“Oh really?” Ellis asked, turning to me. There was a question in his eyes, asking me if he could do this, and I couldn’t think of a better fucking time.”

“Claim me,” I whispered, and that was all he needed to close the distance between us and bite into the juncture of my neck. It was one of two locations on an omega’s body that produced pheromones, and from now on, his would permanently mix with mine. This was a forever kind of move that he’d just made in front of our pack and the assholes who were trying to use anything they could against me. This was Ellis’ checkmate, and it was fucking brilliant.

His teeth pierced my skin, and I cried out, but it was more from the pressure than pain. The intense sensation was gone just as fast as it had happened. My fingers brushed over the bite mark when he pulled away, and it was tender, but already healed.

This was also Ellis formally declaring that he was the alpha of our pack, a role that Graham had graciously let him take. I’d never given much thought to claimings, but my soul was soaring with the promise of forever he’d just given me.

“How dare you touch my omega!” the mayor screamed, all pretenses of calm now gone.

“I’m *not* your omega, and I never was,” I yelled back. “You don’t get to touch me ever again.”

“I wouldn’t touch you anyway,” he bit out.

“It seems you’re not so good at keeping your hands to yourself or hearing the word no,” Wells added. “That’s a real problem, Aaron.”

“You have no proof,” he said flippantly. “Vivian ensured that it was never an issue. It’s funny how when you dangle a check in front of people, all their morals fall away.”

“Oh, by exiling the omegas you raped from the city? How is that not an issue?” I asked. “Some example you set for the city, Mayor Townsen. And funny. Your almighty word sure didn’t keep me out.”

“That bullet I ordered them to put in your stomach should have accomplished that,” he said. The asshole tried to shove past Wells, who cocked his fist back and slammed it into the mayor’s face. The man folded like a deck of cards, hitting the floor, unconscious. Vivian screamed and started to make a scene, but Ellis turned to her, his voice icy cold.

“Stop with the theatrics. You’ve been an accomplice in all this. I hope you enjoy jail, Mother,” Ellis said, stepping over his prone body. Graham and Wells led me out, with Tallon, Beckham, and Miles following behind us.

“Oh, and I always wanted to tell you,” Miles said, pausing long enough to look Vivian in the eye. “You’re a terrible fucking human, and I hope you have to live your life miserable and alone for all the hell you put Ellis and Graham through.”

With that, we walked out, though Tallon practically dragged Miles away.

We didn’t talk much as we jumped in the car and left that place like our asses were on fire. We had the evidence we needed, and I wasn’t about to let them get arrested for assaulting that asshole.

We were about ten minutes from Grove City when I saw a gas station. My bladder had protested for the last twenty minutes, but there had been nothing in sight.

“Graham, stop here! I have to pee,” I begged. The last thing I wanted was to pee in a gas station, but I was desperate.

Thankfully, Graham immediately obliged, smoothly getting us to the parking lot. As Tallon helped me from the car, a cramp hit me. I groaned through it and waited, ignoring their questions until it passed.

“Sorry, fake contraction. We’ve hit that point, apparently.” I sighed. They all looked freaked out, so I waved them off. “The doctors warned me about this. If it hits randomly, it’s fine. It’s when you’re a minute apart that we worry about labor. I’ve still got four weeks to go.”

“Take it easy either way,” Tallon said as he helped me walk in. I was waddling when I walked now, especially since the baby had shifted lower. Here I thought I’d avoided the penguin stage of pregnancy.

Ten minutes later, refreshed and clutching a bag of snacks, I let them escort me back to the car. They all stuck by my side, too worried after the night’s events to let me out of sight for long. I considered it a blessing that I’d gotten to pee by myself.

As the cool air hit me, I felt something shift in my stomach before a trickle of water ran down my legs. For a brief moment, I thought I’d peed myself, but then it turned into a fucking river.

“Uh, guys?” I gasped out.

“What’s wrong?”

“I think my water just broke,” I said. They all glanced down with a mix of panic and excitement, then almost all of my mates rushed for the car without me. Both Miles and Beck grabbed an arm, and between the two of them, they basically carried me to the car.

“Who do you think will be the one to realize?” Beckham asked.

“Graham,” Miles and I said together, cracking up when the man in question smacked his head and ran back.

“God, I’m sorry, Briar,” he said, looking genuinely embarrassed. “So much for alphas being the calm protectors.”

“Oh, honey, no one thinks alphas are calm.” Miles snorted. “Let’s get her to the car. Someone needs to call Anita. I’ve got her number in the glove box.”

“What would we do without omegas?” Graham grinned as they helped me get in the car. Miles dug in the glove box and grabbed out the card before buckling me in. “Let’s go.”

“It’s too early,” I said, the reality that I was only thirty-six weeks hitting me.

“They said they wouldn’t stop the labor if you went into it naturally,” Ellis reminded me.

“You guys are like a fucking encyclopediaaaaaah!” My words were cut short by a screech of pain as a contraction hit, my entire belly tensing with it.

“Hang in there, Briar. We’re on our way,” Graham vowed as he drove back to Grove City. I was just thankful that it had happened close to home, not in that wretched city. Either way, Oliver was coming whether I was ready or not.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Briar

The doctors had managed to keep me out of full-blown labor for two days until I hit the thirty-seven-week mark. They agreed that stress had likely gotten us here in the first place, but thankfully we were close enough to the due date that it wasn't as risky as it could have been.

Anita had checked in on us often, but between the amazing room and all my mates, I was well cared for. I was just fighting through the pain of my sporadic contractions.

When they finally deemed it time to start pushing, I was more than ready. Labor was the most pain I'd ever endured, and I'd crushed more than one set of fingers thanks to each and every contraction. The moment Oliver was out, the pain became almost nonexistent as I focused on our tiny baby.

The sound of his cries was the best thing I'd ever fucking heard. Moments later, he was on my chest, and I was staring down at his precious face. The moment he was in my arms, I realized that nothing mattered besides our family. The trauma of his conception might haunt me for a long time, but it wouldn't affect my love for him. After a few heartbeats, he was already my world. I had never known I could love like this.

"He's perfect," Wells whispered. I glanced up at the alpha who was swiping away a tear.

"I never thought I'd see you cry, big guy," I teased, but I was smiling up at him in adoration.

“How could I not? You’re both so perfect,” he said. Oliver was now snuggled against my bare chest, my body heat warming him. The pack gathered close, tucking blankets around us and putting a hat on his tiny head.

“You did so good,” Beckham praised, butting Wells out of the way. He rested his hand on Ollie’s head, tears rushing down his cheeks. “I can’t believe you made me a dad, Briar. Have I told you lately that I love you?”

“Every day,” I confirmed. “I love you too. No cold feet yet?”

“You still worried about that?” Graham asked. He was on my other side, softly stroking my hair. “I couldn’t imagine turning away from this. In this room is everything I need. Nothing else matters.”

“Remind me of that when I’m sleep deprived,” I begged. “Where did Ellis go?” I asked, glancing around. “And Miles?”

“They had to grab something, or that’s what they said,” Tallon explained. He sounded as confused as I was, and ten minutes later, my missing mates returned. They carried in a coffee cup from the bakery we had our date at.

“You remembered,” I laughed. The small gesture mixed with my still crazy hormones, forcing me to bite back a full-on sob.

“You know, it’s funny...” Miles pointed out. “We haven’t known you while not pregnant. It will be interesting to see the difference.”

“For the record, I don’t normally cry like this,” I said as Graham wiped away the stray tears.

“I hear we have a baby,” Liam’s voice sang out. I covered myself a bit before calling him over. “Is it okay for me to come in? And Cora?”

I appreciated his attempt at respect, but I wanted him here.

“You know I want you to meet Ollie. Look, Liam, he has your hair!” I ran my fingers through the tiny curls poking out of his hat.

“He’s perfect, Briar,” Liam said, totally choked up, as he placed a kiss on top of my head. “I’m so fucking proud of you.”

“Language,” Beckham chastised, making us all laugh. A tiny cry rang out, and everyone groaned.

“Yeah, this’ll be a fun change for us all.” Tallon winced.

Oliver calmed as I patted his butt and softly sang to him. I couldn’t stop staring at him, awestruck that he was mine and finally here.

“Graham, what did you do?” Beckham accused with a gasp. He was holding his phone, one hand over his mouth as he scrolled. I couldn’t tell if he was angry or holding back a laugh until he spoke again. “Headline after headline. ‘After confrontation at the charity ball, Mayor Aaron Townsen is in the hot seat,’” he read off.

“I gave my lawyer all the information that night. He worked through the footage, compiled everything, and finally filed formal charges. They’re already trying to settle, but someone leaked the information, along with footage of that punch,” Graham said proudly.

“That punch felt great,” Wells admitted, smirking at the memory.

“He deserved worse,” Liam said with a bite in his tone. Cora stayed by his side, quiet but confused, as we had our moment. I had a feeling he hadn’t divulged everything, but at this rate, she’d find out soon.

“Good, I’m just glad he won’t have a leg to stand on. He deserves this and more,” I said. “Vivian too?”

“Yes,” Graham confirmed. “I’m not sure of the charges yet, but she won’t get through this unscathed. I was a bit too busy to check in.”

“Who wants to hold him?” I asked as I shifted Ollie. He let out a cute burp before softly sighing, and even that was adorable. It seemed the guys agreed because every one of them was staring at him like he was perfect. With all these adoring men around, this kid was going to be trouble.

“Me,” Wells said. I swaddled him in his blanket before handing off the baby burrito to his dad. A tear rolled down Wells’ cheek, but I didn’t call him on it. I knew the feeling. He rocked our baby in his arms and spoke in a soft whisper that made me fall in love all over again. As each of the guys took their turns, I became positive that life couldn’t get any better.

“You did good with this group,” Liam whispered as he leaned in and hugged me.

“Thanks to you for saving me,” I said, squeezing him back. “They make me incredibly happy.”

“I know the feeling,” he said with a grin. “We want to move to Grove City so we’re closer. I need more baby time.”

“You’re welcome any time. I bet Graham could check on availability for a room in the building if you want.”

“It’s a bit rich for my blood,” he countered. “Med student, remember?”

“I own the building,” Graham admitted. I glanced over at him in surprise. “I didn’t realize until right now that you didn’t know that. Sorry.” He winced and braced himself, but it was just one of those things. Graham didn’t put much stock in wealth. He had it, and he invested well, but flaunting it never occurred to him, so it had never come up.

“We could lease-to-own if you’re interested. I offer reasonable prices. I’d be willing to simply give it to you, but I have a feeling you’d never allow that.”

Liam shrugged. “You’d be right, but I’d love to talk. I’ve been stuck at home until now, but I graduate in a month, and I’ve got four years of residency ahead.”

“I’ll figure something out and call you this week,” Graham promised. “Family always has a place with us.”

“Can I have a turn?” Cora asked. Her voice was unsure, but she didn’t need to be. Everyone had had a turn, and if she and my brother were serious, that made her family too.

“Of course! He should meet Auntie Cora,” I said, carefully handing him over. She was a natural, and I swore she shed

every bit of shyness in that moment. Her face brightened up, and she became a whole different person.

When I started yawning, the alphas kicked everyone out, and Tallon took Oliver so I could try to sleep while he did. The moment he was safely nestled in my beta's arms, I was out.

A WEEK LATER, I was still trying to get this new mom thing down. The suite they'd put together for us was perfect, and some semblance of a routine already established—with the adults, at least. Oliver had a long way to go before we would be getting solid sleep.

Despite being tired, I was finally starting to feel like myself again. I'd done a bit of work here and there on my laptop, and although my body was obviously not back to normal yet, I was okay with that. Part of me missed his little kicks and movements, but having him in my arms helped me forget all of that. I had my sweet baby, a pack that claimed me as theirs, and men that loved me enough to stick around, even through the toughest scenarios. They were Oliver's dads in every sense of the word, and I would never not be thankful that I'd found my way to them.

Epilogue

Briar

Two years later

Former Mayor Aaron Townsen in disgrace as he loses legal battle. Seeing that the world now knew what a monster he was was the single best thing I'd ever read in my life. He wouldn't hurt me or Oliver ever again.

In the end, over twenty women had come forward with their accounts. Thankfully, not all of them had gone as far as my attack had, though that didn't truly make me feel any better. In court, Vivian had tried to play the vapid beta who didn't know any better, but when her own son spoke out against her, she had no legs to stand on. They were both facing jail time, and both Oliver and I had a restraining order against the mayor, along with full termination of his rights. Essentially, we were now free of him, and that felt so great. Even better was telling my parents to fuck right off when they'd tried to come groveling back to me.

Now, we had a perfect life. My business was doing great, and we were able to fully focus on each other and our now toddler.

Oliver was staying with Liam and Cora for the week. They'd spent as much time with him as they could, especially since they weren't any closer to having any of their own yet. Liam was finishing up his residency soon, and he just happened to have the week off, so he'd offered to take uncle duty. The eyebrow wiggle he gave when they drove off was

unnecessary, but the guys were already dragging me inside, so I supposed we'd earned it.

"You're close," Miles said as we stepped back into the elevator. In the enclosed space, our intermingled scents were intoxicating.

"So are you," I groaned as my pussy throbbed.

"Did you take birth control?" Graham asked, and I wasn't surprised by that question.

"I stopped it last month," I admitted. "Figured it was time after our last conversation."

"Really?" Ellis and Wells asked together. "So, we *are* trying for a baby this time?"

"By trying, he means having one. Because there's no way you'll make it out of this heat without getting pregnant. Not with how much sperm will be going around," Miles snarked. I burst out laughing, sharing a conspiratorial look with him before I dropped my clothes, piece by piece. The elevator continued descending as I kicked my boyshorts away. The moment the doors slid open, I took off at a sprint through the penthouse. I didn't even make it through the foyer before I was snatched up and thrown over Wells' shoulder. He smacked my bare ass, his chest rumbling approvingly as I moaned. As lust took over, my scent surrounded us in an oppressive cloud. My heat was fully kicking in now. My pussy throbbed with need, and my body flushed with heat. Wells picked up the pace and led us to the suite, practically throwing me onto the bed. All six of my men stood before me, shedding their clothes with a desperation that only a heat could bring.

"Rock, paper, scissors?" Ellis asked, turning to Wells. The larger man frowned and glanced at Tallon like he'd help. While they were preoccupied, Graham took the opportunity to crawl toward me. He licked his way up my body, starting at my ankle but skipping my pussy like the asshole he was, but I forgave him the moment he sucked one hard nipple into his mouth. My back arched up from the bed as Miles dove between my legs, attacking me with his tongue as Graham explored every inch of my body.

“Damn it, Ellis!” Wells growled, but his chuckle softened the sound. He joined us, his hand stroking my hair while he pressed his lips to mine. The kiss was sweet at first, a reminder that amid all the lust, there was love, too, but it was short lived. They were animals, hands and tongues teasing at my skin, pulling orgasm after orgasm from me, my mind so fogged I couldn’t tell who was touching me. I simply lived in the moment, enjoying every second.

“You ready for me, omega?” Wells demanded as he lined himself up, the head of his cock sliding through my slick pussy.

“Yes, alpha,” I said, spreading my legs wider for him, and he slammed his hips forward. The moment I gasped, Tallon was there, touching his cock to my lips. I opened for him, flicking my tongue over the head before he thrust forward. Tallon was sweet when he wanted to be, but this was definitely not one of those times. He fucked my mouth unabashedly, and I happily swallowed him down. Wells was just as possessive, using my body as he pleased. He fucked me mercilessly, fingers sliding over my clit, dragging orgasms out of me like it was his job. My body responded to them with no reservations. They knew me and my sounds; they knew how I liked to be touched and didn’t have to work hard to make me come.

Tallon came first, spilling down my throat, and I swallowed him down, cleaning up every drop he gave me. When he moved out of the way, I got the full view of Ellis buried inside of Miles, and Graham inside of Beckham, the omegas being fucked as thoroughly as I was. This time, it was my fingers that slid over my clit, winding myself up, as I watched the show. Wells pulled out and flipped me over, sliding right back into place. His fingers kneaded into my ass as he fucked me from behind. With my cheek pressed into the mattress, I couldn’t look away, not that I wanted to. They were fucking gorgeous. Miles and Beckham’s faces were slack with bliss as their alphas knotted them through their heat. We’d been through a few together now, but this one felt different. We were more connected. I could practically feel all six of them, their emotions mixing with mine as we lost ourselves in each other.

As Wells' knot started to swell, I relaxed, giving him room. He pushed as deeply as he could, shoving his knot into me with shallow thrusts. The pressure was intense at first, but Tallon played with my clit and rubbed my back, talking me through it.

“You can take him, Briar. You're so fucking perfect. I'm going to fuck you next, using your cum as my lube.” He hummed. “Or maybe I should take your ass while someone else fucks you? We have so many possibilities.” Each suggestion had me envisioning the possibilities, and my body was ready for more despite being knotted at that very moment.

The night dragged on, becoming a blur of sex, showers, and restless sleep. Over and over, I'd wake up to someone else ready for me. Yet no matter how much they knotted and fucked me, I wasn't satisfied.

Three days later, it was just over. I woke up with a clear head and aching body. I wrinkled my nose at the smell of sex and sweat in the air and went for a shower... alone.

By the time I was out, everyone had showered, and Ellis and Beckham were airing out the room. We all knew what it meant because a heat only cut early for one of two reasons: I was either stressed, or pregnant, and stress was clearly not our issue.

Almost three years ago today, two words had changed my life, and now I was ready to do it all over again. Every single one of my guys was grinning like the Cheshire Cat. They were already such great dads, and I couldn't wait to see them all grow even more. Oliver made our life hectic, sure, but it was so full of love, and I couldn't wait to see what the next year would bring.

Note

Thank you for reading! Safe Haven has been one of my favorite books to write and I hope you enjoyed it!

For updates and info on my work, make sure you join my reader group and stalk... I mean follow, me on social media!

[The Reaper Realm:](#)

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[TikTok:](#)

Also by Jarica James

Paranormal Reads

Obsidian Cove Supernatural Academy series: (6 book series)

Call of the Siren: <http://geni.us/cots>

Path of the Bear: <http://geni.us/potb>

Trial of the Vampire: <http://geni.us/totv>

Mark of the Psychic: <https://geni.us/motp>

Power of the Mage: <https://geni.us/POTM>

Vigil of the Gargoyle: <http://geni.us/votg>

The Spirit Vlog series: (Ghost hunters, each book is a new case) (completed)

Haunts and Hotels: <http://geni.us/handh>

Parks and Poltergeists: <http://geni.us/pandp>

Haunt Sweet Home: <https://geni.us/hauntsweethome>

Mines and Manifestations: <https://geni.us/mandm>

The Spirit Vlog: Haunted Histories

Standalone 1: Coming soon

The Forgotten: (Co-write with Suki Williams) (Dystopian PNR Demigods) (Completed)

Nexus: <https://geni.us/fpnexus>

Broken: <https://geni.us/fpbroken>

Memory: <https://geni.us/fpmemory>

Reset: <https://geni.us/fpreset>

Not Your Basic Witch series cowrite with A.J. Macey: (completed)

Witch, Please: <http://geni.us/NYBW1>

Resting Witch Face: <http://geni.us/NYBW2>

Witches be Crazy: <http://geni.us/NYBW3>

Born to be Witchy: <http://geni.us/NYBWnovella>

Academy of the Elite series cowrite with Rowan Thalia: (3 Book Series)

Juniper's Sight: <http://geni.us/juniper>

Juniper's Peril: <http://geni.us/juniper2>

Juniper's Trial: (in progress)

Pinch of Sass cowrite with Chloe Gunter:

<http://geni.us/pinch> (Standalone)

Scifi Reads

Chosen by the Stars: <https://geni.us/SOSChosen>

Check out Saved by the Stars and Healed by the Stars here:

<https://geni.us/sosshareduniverse>

Dark Reads

Cruel Crimes: (Dark Mafia RH Romance Duet)

Damaged goods: <https://geni.us/Damaged>

Wicked Games: <https://geni.us/ccwicked>

Twisted: (Bully BDSM Standalone)

<https://geni.us/twistedmmf>

Young Adult/New Adult Reverse Harem Reads

Broken Silence: <http://geni.us/brokens> (YA)

Battered Voices: <https://geni.us/battereddy> (NA)

Contemporary Romcoms

Besties & Booze series of standalones-shared universe:

Faked by A.J. Macey: <http://geni.us/faked>

Arranged by Jarica James: <http://geni.us/arranged>

Performed by Suki Williams: <http://geni.us/performed>

Played by Elyssa Dawn: <http://geni.us/played>

MF

Once Upon A Pineapple: <https://geni.us/ouap> (Standalone MF as Jarica Riley)