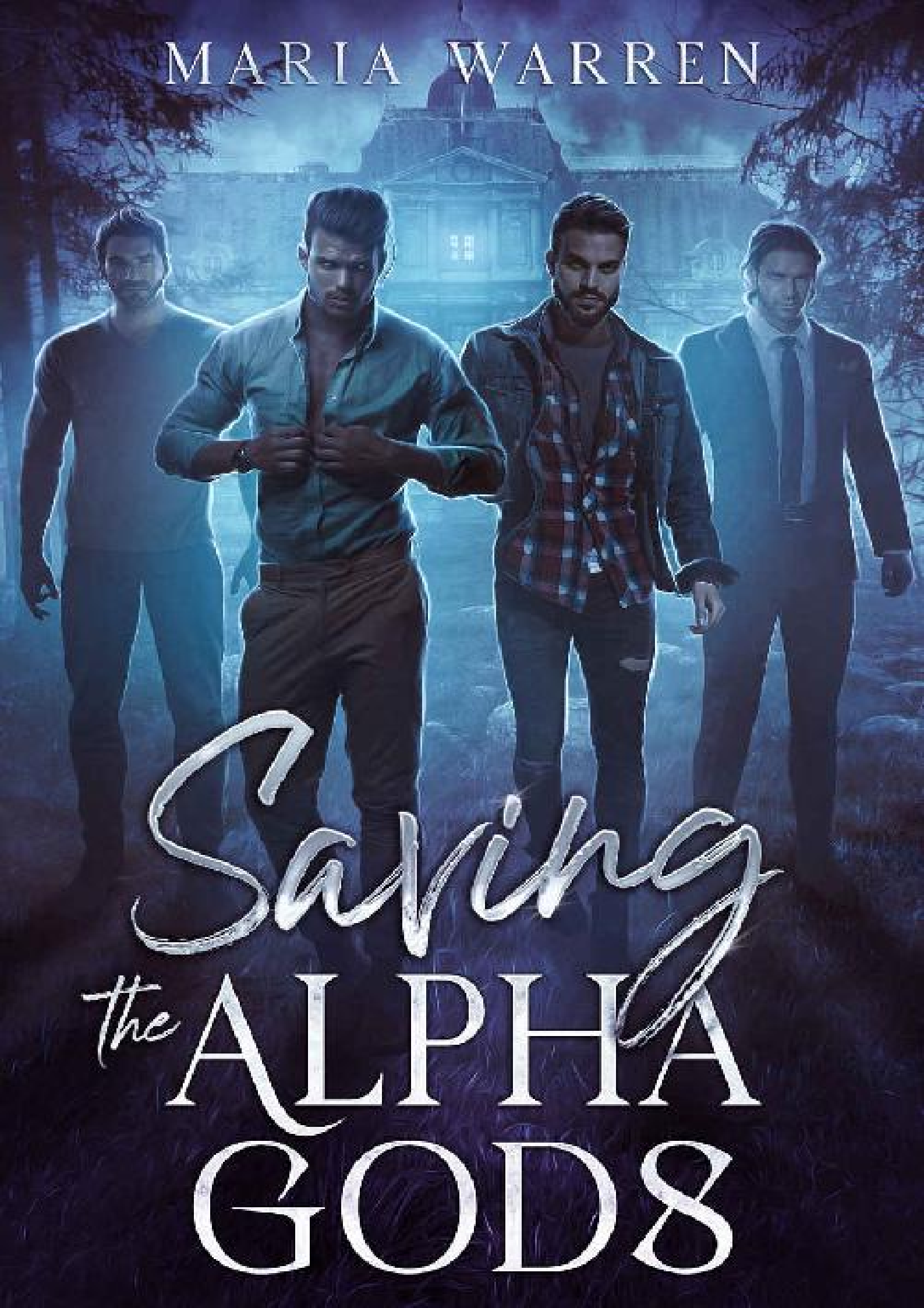


MARIA WARREN



*Saving*  
*the* ALPHA  
GODS

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## Dedication

THIS BOOK WAS A labor of love and wouldn't have been possible without those that helped support and encourage me throughout.

To my editor Michelle, without you, we never would have got this far. Thank you for your time and dedication.

A special thank you to Tori, she's an expert in finding weaknesses and not holding back when she does. She's made this story so much stronger, and longer, than it was before. She's an incredible beta-reader and this book would have been a lot worse without her.

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Thank you to all of my friends and fans for loving our Alpha Gods, and I hope you enjoy getting to see how their story plays out.

And because I don't want to be sat on, to my beloved sister. She's supported me since the start, and it's still crazy cool that

I can talk to her for hours about the worlds I've created. Thank you so much. I love you.

And thank you, hubby, for letting me use your name for my asshole, it fits him well.

Saving the Alpha Gods

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Chapter 1

## Shifting Loyalties

### LEE

Barb relaxed in a way I'd never felt before as the bond settled over me, tying me and the Alpha Gods together with acceptance and warmth, like another piece of the puzzle sliding into place. Through Julian, I sensed the rest of his pack: Elijah, and the new Gods.

Not wanting to give Reuben a heart attack, I decided to forego trying to reach out to them. Barb was probably smirking to herself, dang wolf would never let me live this down, but nothing mattered other than keeping my mate safe.

The Dean's gaze fixed on me, his eyes like two pebbles of coal, lips pressed into a thin line. Maybe he hadn't believed I would go this far. It's not like I had the perfect relationship with Julian yet, I would have preferred to wait until I was confident this new behavior of his was going to stick.

This monster in front of me would never win again. Running my fingers through Julian's soft hair, I locked eyes with the

Dean and mouthed, “Mine.”

Julian’s lips grazed the mark he’d left. I couldn’t see his face, but I felt his smirk through our bond. Yet, beneath that, I sensed an unexpected gentleness—the kind he reserved for his robotic pets.

“Dean,” he commented casually, with a hint of a growl beneath his words. “Do you mind telling me what you’re doing here with my mate?” The threat in his tone sent a flutter through my stomach.

I’d never have imagined he could make me have that reaction.

The Dean settled back into his chair, his eyes focused on us. “I see,” he mused with the faintest of frowns. “Very well, Ms. Suga. I will admit, that you are brash enough to go to extremes to achieve what you desire. You’re a fool if you think this one action is going to save you.” His gaze shifted to my bracelet. “We still have that other matter, remember?”

Julian tightened his arm around my shoulders, leaning his cheek against mine as he assessed the Dean. “I’m not sure what you’re trying to do here, but if you lay a finger on her or her family, you’ll know the full strength of mine.”

The Dean chuckled. “That would be more of a threat if it was Elijah, the golden child, sitting across from me. I’m well aware of your status, and lest you forget, Mr. Newton, the Alpha God position can be stripped from those I find unworthy. Attempt to push too hard, and you’ll end up like those former members.”

A cold wave of rage flowed through Julian but he didn't let it show. Instead, he intertwined his fingers with mine and gave my hand a gentle, reassuring squeeze. He tugged me off the seat and toward the door. Pausing at the entrance, he glanced back. "Don't think you can keep using that threat. I promise, I'll take you down, even if I have to be pulled down with you. This school is no longer your plaything, Marcus," he spat the last words as if he was cursing, and slammed the door behind him, cutting off anything else the Dean might have added.

I hadn't gotten everything I'd wanted, but with what I'd snuck onto the tape it would be enough to save my Alpha Gods, without setting off any repercussions that may hurt my brother.

The Dean's elderly secretary glanced up as the door was slammed shut and she turned her icy gaze on us with her nose wrinkling. "The filth has spread, I see." She shook her head with a click of her tongue. "A Newton, with a filthy little halfbreed, how revolting."

Julian bristled at her response but didn't engage.

Huh, who knew he had any impulse control?

He only waited until we were outside the door of the office before he pulled me against his chest and buried his nose in my hair. "Lee," he whispered, voice shaky. "I thought everything was falling apart, I was worried about you." He nuzzled against me, continuing to hold me close as if I would vanish if he let go.

The urge to tell him everything bubbled up, but how could I risk it? The deal I'd made to save King was too important. "I told you I could handle it," I whispered instead, with far more bravado than I felt.

Around us, students froze in place and stared. One student was so captivated by our embrace that he walked straight into a wall.

I yelped and tried to pull away from Julian's enveloping warmth, but he wouldn't allow it. He drew me in closer and eyed the rest of the crowd. I couldn't see his grin, but felt his confidence pulsing through the bond.

"That's right," he drawled. "She's mine, and if you dare try anything, I'll rip your life into pieces."

Many of the students squeaked like mice and scurried away, desperate to be away from the simmering glower of my new mate.

Mate... How had I ended up being marked by him, out of all the Alpha Gods?

Barb was still snickering, pleased with herself over being right.

Julian shook his head as he watched the rest of the students who had been too scared to move. "Lee," he mused, gently brushing the mark on my neck. A trail of liquid fire followed his touch. "You should mark me. Everyone should know we belong to each other, and if they dare mess with you again, I'll end their miserable little lives."

Heat flooded through me, burning my cheeks. His intensity took me by surprise. I had only just marked Albedo, could I turn around and mark another so soon?

I winced at his memory, but thankfully Julian didn't see it. How would he feel about Julian claiming me before anyone else did? I had no choice, I had to throw a wrench into the Dean's plans, but my reasoning wouldn't stop the pain this action had caused.

I understood that.

"What?" Julian questioned, frowning faintly and tilting his head to inspect me. "You have a problem?"

I put a finger against his lips before he could go on. "Julian, a lot has already happened, give me a minute or two to absorb it all."

The one thing that stood out to me, as bright as a morning star, was the fierce burning love that surged from Julian. I had understood he was attracted to me before, but I had never expected to find such a pure emotion inside him.

He hadn't been playing me in some grand scheme, somehow, he'd fallen for me, just as I had him.

How? Why? None of it made sense. He hadn't acted like someone madly in love. It made me wish I had the time to sit him down and talk. Only recently had I found room in my heart for this ass, and yet here he was, devoted to me.

"What the hell?" snarled a shaky voice from down the hall.

We both glanced up and Cindy stood, staring daggers at us. She shook as the rage ate away at her. Her nostrils flared and her sharp claws pierced a bottle she held. She looked halfway between shocked and disgusted.

“What’s wrong, Cindy?” Carl strolled into view and froze beside her, his eyes focused on us. “What the fuck?” he growled. “Julian! I thought we understood each other. Get your paws off my bitch!”

Cindy trembled, like a fawn before pointing at me. “Julian! What is this? How could you cheat on me with her? We were so happy earlier!”

Carl’s sharp canines grew, and his eyes turned solid gold as his wolf pushed to the surface. “What the hell did you do?” he snarled, pointing at my mark. “You’re my mate. Not his.”

I put a hand over the mark, hiding it.

Julian kissed the top of my head before smoothly standing between me and our aggressors. “I didn’t realize both of you were too stupid to come to a conclusion based on the evidence in front of you. You should go back to Silverton Elementary, Cindy,” he suggested. “They’re great at teaching logic and deductive skills.”

“Julian,” Cindy hissed. “Tell me this is some plot of yours. Tell me I don’t understand and you’re going to still crush her.”

Her eyes flicked to me, and they narrowed to slits. I was surprised she hadn’t attacked yet.

“I’ll never let you have him!” As he didn’t respond, her hand flexed and the plastic crackled as it gave in to her strength and claws. “I don’t get it,” she turned on Julian, and the fury in her flickered like a candle, barely hanging on. “Earlier you were with me... Why are you throwing it all away when we were so happy?”

If she hadn’t tried to make my life a living hell since the moment I’d stepped onto campus, I might have felt sorry for her. As it was, I only leaned closer to Julian, to piss her off more. Someone else needed to be hurt for once.

“You were happy,” Julian corrected. “I’ve never wanted to be with you from the start. The only reason I agreed to the marriage in the first place was you could help keep me in power.”

Emotions flashed across her expressive face before a shard of the bottle slid into her hand. The thunderstorm of building rage faded away, and she watched passively as her blood dripped to the ground.

“Cindy?” Carl called.

She didn’t answer him. Instead, her head jerked up, and she lobbed the bottle at Julian’s head.

He stood there, waiting for the impact. Maybe on some level, he understood he deserved a bit of her wrath, but another hand snatched the object out of the air before it hit. “Cindy, your aim has improved, I remember the last time you tried to throw a water bottle and what happened afterward,” Elijah mused, smiling politely before he crushed the container the rest of the



way and tossed it into a nearby can. He dusted his hands off and glared at the two. "I thought I told you to stay away from Lee, Carl," he softly pointed out as he grabbed an unopened bottle of juice from Carl's hand.

A little zip of lightning danced through me at his words. Was this part of the act too, or was Elijah seriously upset over my treatment?

Carl's eyes flicked his way. "My bitch, because she doesn't even deserve to be called my woman anymore, needs to be forced into her place. She let someone else claim her instead of her mate. As worthless as she is, I still want to make her pay."

I didn't respond, but the wave of unbridled anger from Julian was almost enough to knock me over. He glowed with an untamable rage. Barb was too stunned to even be pissed herself.

"You don't talk to my mate like that," he snarled. "I don't care if you're a fake God, or even if I lose my status. I'll rip your skin off, and drop you into a vat of salt. You'll know what real pain feels like. Then I'll put you through a wood shredder, turn you into nothing more than scraps. Your remains won't even be worth cleaning off my shoe. But I won't let them go to waste - I'll throw them into a litter box. At least then, you'll serve some purpose."

Carl's only response was to step away as he rapidly paled. His mouth opened and closed as he gaped at Julian like a fish out of water.

The true Alpha God had won that little exchange.

“Mate?” Elijah echoed. He turned away from Cindy and Carl, his eyes scanned me before widening upon seeing the vivid mark Julian had left behind. “That’s... Julian’s,” he whispered. His normally calm exterior had been shattered. “Julian?” he stressed.

Julian smirked at his twin. “What? She wanted it, so I claimed her. Besides, weren’t you too wound up over Alexandra to care?”

“I...see,” Elijah all but whispered.

A part of me felt genuinely bad for him. I wanted nothing more than to throw myself at his chest and beg for him to mark me too. However, after everything I’d been through, I couldn’t find it in me to throw myself at him and be rejected again. I might have promised to win him back, but that fight would be saved for another day.

The corner of Elijah’s lips twitched, but the smile that came from it didn’t reach his eyes. “I’m so glad for you both. Take care of each other.”

“That’s the big fight?” Cindy’s scowl deepened and she tapped her toe on the ground. “You tore into poor Carl about not touching her, and yet you’re backing off because deluded Julian got there first? How could you even be upset over someone as pathetic as that? She’d have been better off dead than being a scholarship student. Who knows, it’s not too late for her to meet that fate.” She smirked.

Elijah calmly unscrewed the cap off the bottle of his juice and tossed it into a trashcan. Taking a firm grip on the bottom of the beverage, he squeezed and a fountain of orange liquid jetted through the sky to splash onto the furious woman. “I thought you looked thirsty, sorry,” he observed with a smirk that looked identical to Julian’s.

Cindy’s hair hung in wet strands around her face and she shook like a little lapdog. “You fucking assholes! I’m so done with you, all of you! Go rot in hell for all I care. Carl, come on!” she snapped.

Carl looked from us to Cindy, then back before racing off to catch up to her.

Elijah waited until they were out of range before he crushed the rest of the bottle, then nodded to my claiming brand. “Care to explain that, Lee?” he whispered in a voice of unrelenting steel.

Wait... was Elijah jealous? Was my plan already coming together? Masking my twitching lips with a smirk, I met his eyes. “Sorry, wait, no I’m not. This had to be done, and even if it didn’t you have no right to object.” I took a step away from Julian and closer to Elijah. His eyes widened but he held his ground. “But, if you don’t like it, all you have to do is show everyone that I belong to you too.”



## Chapter 2

## A Change of Heart

### **ELIJAH**

Julian tensed beside her, his eyes flashing gold. Before I could answer Lee, she grabbed Alexandra's arm. When had she appeared? Normally, I'd have been aware of her long before she showed up.

She flashed me her normal sweet smile, but my heart didn't pound harder. In fact, there was no response at all.

"Sorry, Elijah. But Alexandra and I need to have a little girl talk." Both women pulled away and headed down the hall towards the restroom, leaving me alone with Julian.

"Elijah," he whispered. His voice had an edge to it, unlike what I was used to. "If you're thinking about toying with Lee, know I will put a stop to it. Brother or not, my bond matters more."

His bond? This man that had laughed at the idea? I scowled. "You're one to talk. You're doing this to hurt her later. I know you."

“I’m not letting you claim her, or her claim you, or anything like that as long as I know you can’t be trusted,” Julian sneered. “You might look pristine on the outside, but lately your insides are a fucking disaster, like a potato blew up inside there.”

“Well, it’s not your decision, Jules.”

He scoffed. “She’s my mate, there’s nothing I won’t do to protect her, even if it’s from herself.” Oni glared out at me and for a moment I lost the staring battle.

The unfamiliar rage bubbled in my gut again. “You don’t deserve her.”

He laughed. “In that we agree. But it’s too late, she’s stuck with me.”

Spikes of jealousy stabbed deep, stealing my breath. How did I know these burgeoning feelings for Lee weren’t jealousy of what my brother had? What if I was using Lee as a band-aid for the ragged wound Alexandra had left in her wake?

What I wouldn’t give to be confident. For a moment the jealousy inside burned out of control, a roaring fire in the pit of my body threatening to push me over the edge.

One thing I admired about Julian, and would never let him know, was the unwavering confidence he had in himself, even if it was only outwardly. Right now he was viewing me as unworthy of Lee, not even a rival but less than.

It didn’t roll off my back, it was more like Julian was slamming down my buttons with his entire palm. “You need to

back off,” I growled at him. His eyes widened at my tone, but he didn’t move. “If I want Lee, you won’t be stopping me from being with her. The only one that can do that is her.”

What was I doing?

*“Fighting for your mate,”* Baron observed with a grin. *“About time, Elijah. I was worried you’d never come around.”*

That wasn’t it, *“Even if she is my mate... I can’t...”*

*“Don’t make me take back my praise.”* Baron huffed. *“Because she is your mate, you can do everything.”*

Not just mine, she belonged to Albedo and now, even Julian. It was too much to comprehend. How could one person be perfect for all of us?

She was a miracle worker or a witch. She’d somehow turned Julian back into the boy I’d grown up with, before our father ruined everything. Sterling was someone who could now do more than talk about his video games and his Kitty, and even Albedo had opened up a new side of himself.

When we went silent, my thoughts revolved around the marks that claimed her as the mate to two of my pack. They were seared into my mind, the two cocky wolves were branded into her skin, and would forever mock me.

“Elijah, I’m serious.” Julian took a stance in front of me, cutting me off from glancing down the way Lee had gone. “She’s going through enough right now. If this is some sick game of yours, I’m putting a stop to it. Or can you tell me

without a doubt right now that you're not in love with Alexandra?"

Sick game? Groaning, I reached up and rubbed my forehead. When had my world gone topsy-turvy? "You're the one that plays those games, Julian. Out of my way, or I'm going to put you on your back. You have no right to interfere."

Julian's eyes turned golden at my challenge, his muscles bunched as he prepared for a fight. "I have something to fight for. You're not going to hurt her. If you want to be her mate, I'll only allow it if you give up on Alexandra."

Why did this piss me off so much? The more he told me, the more I wanted to push past him and claim Lee in front of him. The thought horrified me. I prepared myself, fully aware I hadn't got over Alexandra yet. "I don't love Alexandra anymore."

I froze as the words hung pungent in the air. My eyes widened and my heart thumped louder.

It was true. I didn't love her, not in the way of a mate.

"See?" Baron huffed. "*Lee is ours, Oni will not stop me.*"

"Julian, why did you do it? If this isn't part of a game to you, why did you mark her, and why now? You were supposed to be handling the Dean. How did it happen?"

Julian didn't relax, but his eyes returned to my same blue before he glanced away. "It wasn't a choice...The Dean was trying to play some twisted game with her, and I won't let her be hurt." He leaned back, his head resting against the wall as



he eyed me. “I’ve never been one for mates, but I know she’s mine. No matter what happens, I’m going to protect her.” He waited a moment for me to respond but I was stuck, staring off into the distance trying to make sense of my thoughts. “And you?”

“And me?” I frowned.

He ran a hand through his pure black hair. He’d gotten rid of the streaks he had been so proud of, in an instant. It had always been so important he used it, and his contacts, as a way to separate himself from me, but now they didn’t seem to matter.

“Damn it, Elijah. You’re really going to make me come out and say it? You’re such an ass.”

He had called me an ass, had he looked in a mirror lately? I adjusted the cuffs of my shirt. “Please, enlighten me on this line of thought.”

He answered with a groan, “I really hate you sometimes,” he griped. He pointed in the direction the girls had wandered off. “You know Lee loves you. I wish I could deny it, but all that matters to me is her happiness. Are you planning on making her suffer or are you going to claim her? You admitted you’re over Alexandra. Nothing should hold you back.”

Claim Lee?

Baron’s tail wagged, pleased with the idea.

As it seeped through me, I shuddered. Not because I didn’t want to, strangely enough, the idea of doing so made me feel

complete. But did Lee still want me after everything I'd done?



### Chapter 3

## Ladder to the Heavens

### LEE

We made it to the bathroom without further incident. Still, I didn't trust others who roamed these halls. "Keep a watch out," I asked Alexandra as I glanced through the stalls. Though it was still a fancy bathroom, it wasn't anywhere as elegant as the one I'd taken a shower in, but it was still beyond what a normal restroom was, with its marble counters and glistening silver fixtures. "I need to take care of something." I resisted the urge to reach into my pocket, it was better if Alexandra knew nothing.

Her answering smile warmed my insides. "I'll guard the main area, but I'm not going to go much farther. I don't trust those women to not pop up and cause more trouble."

"You're their number one target, and you made Cindy mad earlier, which will only serve for her to refocus her wrath on you, especially since Julian has marked you." Her lips twitched at the last word as she fought a smile. "Lee?"

“I know... I never thought I’d want Julian to claim me either,” I admitted. But somehow, that asshole of a wolf had wormed his way into my heart. Barb had noticed earlier than I did, but now I bore his mark, I never wanted to let it go. “But now he’s mine.”

“Why aren’t you with Elijah yet?” Alexandra countered.

I stared, almost falling into the stall I had pushed open. Out of all the questions she could ask, I hadn’t expected that one. “It’s...” There was no way I could tell her I had declared to Elijah I was going to win him over by force if I had to. It would be far too mortifying. “Complicated,” I squeaked.

“I see,” Alexandra answered softly. “Lee, I’m not sure what’s happened between all of you, but I remain convinced Elijah is one of your mates. No matter what happens with the others, I know you two will find your way together by the end.”

My hand lifted of its own accord, tracing over Julian’s mark. It made me shiver. His love surged through me, leaving me weak in the knees. I never would have imagined he would feel this way about me; it was a fierce love, threatening to consume me, and I still couldn’t figure out where it had come from.

I shook my head, breaking free of my train of thoughts, and smiled at Alexandra. “You don’t have to worry. I’m making all the Alpha Gods mine.”

She blinked at me and, for the first time, I had stunned her into silence. “Lee, are you sure?” she whispered. “True, I thought it might work, but that was before I thought Julian

would go with it. He changes the dynamics, I'm not certain he'd be willing to share you with the rest."

My body was set on fire, and my cheeks burned. "About that.." I swallowed. "They've kind of already agreed to it..." Granted that was before Julian had marked me, but I was confident of his answer. "Julian isn't the same person he was when I joined this school. I know it hasn't been long, but I promise, he's changed. He loves me."

Nope, even saying it out loud didn't make the statement any closer to reality.

Her mouth hung open, and she stared at me, a wide grin slowly spreading across her face. "Lee!" she squeaked, and launched herself at my chest. She hugged me tightly and laughed.

"That's the best news I have ever heard! All of them will take the best care of you, and I know you're perfect for them." She pulled away until she stared into my eyes. "Just remember, Elijah is the best. He's been an ass lately, but I know him. Besides, he has convinced himself he was madly in love with me since we were kids. But, what you two have, that's special." She giggled. "What all of you have..."

"What's so special, Alexandra?" Zelda snapped from the entrance as she glared coolly at us.

Damn it. Couldn't I have a minute of enjoying something good in my life? But no, like clockwork, the two thorns in my side strut into the bathroom.

“Stop it, Cindy. You had to have realized Lee has already won Julian over. You need to get over it.”

Cindy’s eyes narrowed, but she didn’t answer Alexandra. She kept her focus solely on me. “My poor Julian is interested because he’s never been around someone this deathly poor before. It’s like trying a commoner food. He might be fascinated for a minute, but there’s no way he’ll keep you as his. Mark my words, filth, he will reject you, they all will. I’m not sure how you contacted the Alchemist with a station like yours, but there’s no way you will last. You can’t keep our Alpha Gods pathetic like this.”

“Your Alpha Gods?” Alexandra interrupted.

The two froze in place, slowly pivoting toward her. “Seriously?” Zelda whined. “You’re on her side? She’s not one of us!”

“She’s who they chose and neither of you are going to get in her way, or are you seriously going to keep mates away from each other? Because that’s what she is, their mate,” she spoke evenly, but her eyes flashed gold. “I suggest you both apologize to her, now.”

Zelda cracked first. She slapped a hand over her mouth, bursting out into giggles. “Alex! I had no idea you could be so funny! Why would I apologize to someone like her? You want me to cheer her on while she sleeps with all of our future husbands? It’s not happening! You’re our friend, Alex, we’ve been friends since we could walk.”

Cindy nodded, looking like a bobblehead, as she agreed to every word coming out of her friend's mouth. "You know what? I don't even care about Julian anymore. You keep him, I hope he gets stuck in you and tears you apart," she snapped at me, her eyes glued to the mark Julian had left.

Huh? Stuck in me? The way she smirked sparked my curiosity. "Cindy, what are you talking about?"

Her smirk grew, and she giggled in response. "This is who is replacing me? She doesn't even know!"

My eye twitched at being ignored. "Damn it, cut it out you bitch. The Alpha Gods have made their choice, and it's me." Well, most of them had, I hadn't gotten Elijah yet, but I would. "You've lost, now get your head out of your ass and explain what that snide comment was."

Zelda snorted so hard she choked. She recovered and glared at me as if I'd been the cause. "You lying, little bitch! Of course, you know what we're talking about, there's no way Julian marked you without fucking you. You're not special. You had to have seen the Jacob's Ladder piercing, it's the most impressive part of him." She snorted again but didn't choke herself this time. "The only impressive part about him."

"Zelda!" Cindy snapped. She trembled as her wolf pushed forward. She lunged forward toward one sink and grabbed a bottle of peach-scented soap. I expected her to throw it, but she smashed it into the back of Zelda's head. "You fucking traitor!"



Zelda stumbled forward after the first blow and held the back of her head, which was now covered in soap. “What the hell, Cind? You crazy bitch! What crawled up your ass?”

“Zel, the only reason I’m friends with someone like you is because of our families. But you have to be the stupidest ass bitch I’ve ever met. You’re going to sit there and act all offended? You shouldn’t know a damn thing about his piercings! Julian was my man! Not that I want him anymore, but you never had a right!”

I cocked my head to the side, my brows furrowing. “I don’t get it. What’s a Jacob’s Ladder?”

Alexandra stood to the side, monitoring the feuding women, but not stepping in. She kept herself between me and them and it made warmth spread through me. She was trying to protect me?

Zelda grabbed what was left of the soap from Cindy’s slack grip. She upended the broken container and squeezed it all over her, supposed, best friend.

Cindy shrieked like a banshee and tackled Zelda around her stomach.

Great. It looked like they weren’t going to tell me whatever this piercing was or what they meant about it being stuck in me. Sighing, I pulled out my phone and slipped into a stall, letting the women fight it out while I took care of business.

I replayed the conversation I had with Inu, the chaos outside the stall covering the voices. When I got to the part of the

conversation, no one else needed to hear, I pushed the stop button and deleted it.

“Found it,” Alexandra chirped from outside my door.

I put the phone back in my pocket and peeked out, Alexandria had her phone in hand and grinned at me. “Found what?”

She held the screen towards me. I didn’t understand why I was staring at a banana until I noticed the set of tiny barbell-like piercings down the length of the underside of it.

Oh.

My.

Goddess.



Chapter 4

## Calm Before the Storm

### **ALBEDO**

I locked my eyes on the second hand of the clock and with all my might, I willed it to move faster. Why was Lee taking so long? Every minute away from her was painful, was this because we were so newly mated?

I jerked to attention, almost falling off my seat as a rush of newness entered the bond. Eyes widening, I reached for my shoulder. Though I hadn't been marked, I had felt the instant Lee had let another claim her.

And not just anyone, but Julian. I was connected to his mind again, in a much more rudimentary way than before. I couldn't contact him, but I sensed him.

How did it happen? When did they even have time?

It shouldn't have surprised me. He'd made his intentions well known, still, I hadn't expected to feel the claim.

"Bedo? What's going on, man?" Sterling leaned closer, inspecting me.

I shivered, lost in my thoughts.

“Hey,” Sterling snapped his fingers in front of my eyes. “Don’t make me slap you. I don’t think Kitty would like it if I did, though you deserve it.”

My eyes flickered his way, and a growl tore out of me as Lewis trembled with his desire to fight. “If you try to touch me, I’m biting your fucking arm off!”

Sterling rolled his eyes at me, not in the least cowed by my threat. “Yeah yeah, you’re a big bad wolf. I don’t care if you do fight me, if it means I can know what’s happening out there. You’re the only one with a bond to her.”

I snorted so loud, that he froze and frowned at me. “Oh, don’t mind me, go on,” I added.

He gave me a strange look. “I want to know what’s going on with Kitty. You’re the only one I can depend on, so spill.”

Lewis paced back and forth, his growls were kept inside this time. “*He wants to know what’s going on so bad? Let him know what happened, Albedo! Let’s see how he reacts to finding out about Julian marking our mate before he did.*”

It’s not like it did not tempt me. But it was bad enough what I’d already done to the man when it concerned his Kitty. I couldn’t betray him any more than that. “*Actually, you’re the one that betrayed him, Lewis. I’m the lucky one who gets to handle the guilt.*”

Lewis huffed. “*If you’re trying to make me feel that, you’re wasting your time. She’s mine, and I won’t back down for*

*anyone else, not even him. When it comes down to it, remember this: she's our mate."*

A wave of icy water splashed into my face, and all guilt dissolved with it. "Sterling!" I gasped.

He crossed his arms over his chest, staring me down. I liked him better when he was always on his damn phone. "I won't repeat myself. What's going on with my Kitty?"

I couldn't hold back the scathing cackle. "Your Kitty? Oh, poor Sterling, don't you understand you have to share now? Julian marked her."

"What?" Sterling's fingers went slack and the cup in his hand clattered onto the counter, bouncing off and falling to the ground. He held onto the long, smooth surface and used it for support. "How do you know? Why would she let that happen?"

Lewis wanted to maul his face, but I held my crazed wolf back.

Didn't Sterling get that if I understood why, I wouldn't be in this torturous position? It's not like I expected her to never be marked again, but knowing it was Julian, pissed me off. Did something happen to the plan that required him to mark her? Did I need to rush to her side and suffer the consequences?

Sterling closed his eyes. "Are... are you sure? Could you be mistaken? Maybe Elijah?"

I sighed.

“I can feel him,” I snarled. With every useless word from Sterling, I longed to rip his throat out. “She’s my mate, I know when anything happens to her.”

Sterling’s eyes slowly opened and he hung his head. “Do... do you think that, at least she’s safe?” He peeked at me through his unruly hair.

“I hope so,” I whispered. “There’s no way for me to know unless she gets hurt. We know Julian and Elijah are with her. We’ll have to believe in them to protect her.”

Sterling straightened and pushed his bangs out of his eyes. “Right now, I don’t trust anyone but us. We are the ones that should have gone.” He glanced at the door. “We still could. All we have to do is sneak onto the property.”

I shook my head. “Sorry, not possible, man. Maybe you were saved from the details because you weren’t the punching bag of an abusive dean, but once you’re expelled, a spell keeps you from entering the grounds of the school.”

“A spell?” Sterling’s brows knit together. “That doesn’t sound right, a verbal spell would be hard to keep together. Every time they add someone new to the list, the spell would need to be redone, so no one from the start of the spell is allowed in.”

I blinked at him. Even Lewis stopped being pissed as he tried to figure him out. “What are you even talking about, Sterling?”

Sterling rolled his eyes. “Come on, man, think about it. You’ve played video games before. They don’t use verbal spells for stuff like that.”

Where was he going with this? “Yeah, and? Get to the point already.”

Sterling shook his head. “A magical object would work better, it could keep track of those already listed in it. If it was a spell, once the caster died the spell would break. How useful would that be? But an object can be passed down and the spell remains.”

I thought about his words, turning them over as I tried to reason out why it would matter. My head jerked up, and I studied him closer. “Wait, if it is an object, is there a way for us to get hold of it and break the spell? But how do you know it isn’t just a spell? Just because something makes more sense, doesn’t mean people won’t be idiots and do it the wrong way.”

“Albedo? How many people do you think have been expelled already? And how long ago?”

I shrugged. “None of that ever came up in my lessons. I don’t know.”

“Whatever, I’m telling you, Bedo, it’s a magical object. All we have to do is find the object, and destroy it, or steal it. Whatever it takes to break the spell that is keeping us from protecting her.”

“How would we even get in to do that? We’re already banned, remember?” I rolled my eyes. Even if his plan might



have been feasible, it wasn't something we could carry out.

“It doesn't have to be us, man. All we need is Julian, Lee, or Elijah to go in and find it. Once the spell is broken, we can be at her side and protect her like we should always be. I won't let anyone hurt my Kitty.”

It's not like I didn't want to protect her, but his plan was far-fetched. What if it wasn't an object? Or worse, what if it belonged to that Inu guy? We'd be putting the others at risk if we sent them after him. I didn't care if I threw Elijah and Julian into the flames, but no way in hell would I ever put Lee in danger.

A soft knock on the door interrupted our conversation, and the robot animals around the apartment roused themselves to crowd around. “They came back for lunch?” Sterling suggested with a small smile.

I doubted we could get that lucky. No, whoever was on the other side was likely an enemy. But if they thought they could stop us, because we were stuck here, they didn't know the meaning of Alpha God. We'd given up too much to gain our spots, to lose to whatever was waiting on the other side of the door.

I reached for the door handle and it swung open. Mia strolled through the doorway and she eyed the two of us before smiling. “Hello, boys. I know the others are on that little treasure hunt, but I've come to ask for a little assistance.”

“What is it?” I questioned. I wanted to trust her, but until everything was solved I couldn't find it in myself to blindly

believe she had our best interests in mind.

“Excuse me?” she questioned, a brow lifted as she stared me down.

“Ma’am,” I added.

She giggled. “Much better. I have had no news yet from little Lee, but there’s been a minor complication to our plans and I need to think of a way to put a stop to it.”

“What would that be?” I asked dryly.

She sighed and adjusted her hair, her eyes darting away. “Well, you see, my husband is visiting the school today and if he runs into Julian with Lee, I’m worried about what could happen. He might try to use his power to get her, and her family kicked out of Silverton, and if he does, I’m powerless to stop him.”



Chapter 5

## Playing the Part

### **JULIAN**

Elijah and I lapsed into silence, our eyes trained on the direction Lee and Alexandra had left. My brother wanted to claim my mate and while it put me on edge, in a sense I was almost relieved.

*“When did you get so soft?”* Oni snarled.

My wolf wasn't as willing to share as I was. And it wasn't like I planned to let anyone get to enjoy the thrill of her touch, but Lee had wanted Elijah from the moment she'd met him. I would never stand in the way of her happiness; it meant more to me than mine.

“What's taking so long?” Elijah questioned. “Do you think they ran into trouble?”

I repressed the urge to smirk. Unlike me, he had no indication of how Lee felt, maybe the ghost of it through the Alpha God bond, but that was it. How silly of him, my mate wasn't someone to be taken down so easily and Alexandra had

a surprising edge to her when forced to reveal it. Even if Zelda and Cindy pulled out their little tricks, I had total faith.

“Julian!” Elijah hissed the words and looped his arm in mine, tugging me into the shadows.

“What the hell?” I jerked away from him, scowling at being touched. “What are you doing?”

“Quiet!” he snapped, holding an arm against my chest so I wouldn’t head back in the direction we’d come from.

I resisted the urge to slug him. Lee wouldn’t be happy if I did and there was a note of urgency in his voice. “What’s going on?” I whispered. My eyes flicked over the area, searching for his source of distress.

“No, the other way,” Elijah hissed into my ear. “Dad’s here.”

The floor gave out beneath me and it took every bit of willpower I had to stay standing. It was like I had been punched in the gut. Dad was here at the school? He’d never visited before, not even to drop off his lavish checks. Anything that involved parental intervention fell on our mother’s shoulders. “What the fuck is he here for?”

Elijah shrugged. “Your guess is as good as mine, but we can’t let him near Lee. If he found out what and who she was to us...” He swallowed. His skin had grown pale and his eyes glowed gold. “We’ll protect her from him.”

Lee... My blood turned to ice as my fists clenched. No. How had I been so stupid? My claim on her was visible. I’d wanted to make sure it protected her from the other students in this

shithole school, but all I'd managed to do was paint a bullseye on her back. If my father saw his failure-of-a-son had marked a scholarship student, I wasn't sure who would receive his wrath. No matter what, I had to make sure none of it fell back on Lee.

No, there was no way in hell I'd even let him near her to begin with. If it came down to it, I would sacrifice myself in a heartbeat to save her.

Then again, since when had my father stooped to such low-class dealings? He didn't need to go after her openly, he might not even confront her if he did see my mark, he'd do everything in his power to dismantle her life from around her.

I had lost count of when, after a seemingly great business meeting, he'd turned around and his expression had gone cold. Not even a day would go by before he would use his resources to ferret out his enemies' weaknesses and he'd crushed them, one after the other.

Nothing was out of bounds for my father.

Elijah dropped his arm and slowly leaned out, as he checked the area. "I think he's gone for now, but we have to get to Lee before he does."

"Yeah, you do," I agreed.

Elijah paused, his eyes narrowed on me as he searched my face. "What are you planning, Julian? Why aren't you going with me?"

I lifted my chin. “I’m going to go be your responsible big brother. I’ll distract him. Until then, I need you to protect her. Please, Elijah.” Even Oni was surprised at my request but he conceded it was more important to stop the threat than to let that man get close.

Elijah gave me a weak strained smile. “I should be the one offering to deal with him, we both know how he feels about you. You’re only setting yourself up for more pain. You protect her.”

“No,” I interrupted before he could push on. I was beyond tempted at the thought to grab Lee and go into hiding, but that wouldn’t have solved the issue. “You’ve done your time dealing with the old man. Besides, I promise he’s not going to know what to expect when I show up in front of him.”

Carefully, I took out the stud in my nostril and ran a hand through my hair, flattening it down to look as much like Elijah’s as possible. It was time to pick up a role I hadn’t touched in ages.

Elijah’s eyes searched mine. “You’re sure about this?” His worry vibrated through the bond.

I gave him a reassuring smile I didn’t feel. “I am the big brother, remember? Take care of her and keep him away.” I put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it. “I trust you man.”

Elijah straightened up and nodded. He adjusted the sleeves of his blazer and the cool, calm, and collected brother I was used to had returned. “I’ve got this, Julian. We’ll keep her safe.”

There was no way Elijah would ever let me down when it came to this. “I know.” I turned away from him and adjusted my clothes, much in the same fashion he just had.

There he was. Down the hall, headed towards the Dean’s office; a place I couldn’t afford to let him near. Elijah slipped into the shadows behind me and I prayed he found Lee before it was too late.

I quickened my pace, hurrying but not rushing; a hustled walk is what he would call it. He paused, he’d probably heard my footsteps. He was too good to turn around, my father would never lower himself to show anyone else respect. “Whoever you are, you should know I am more powerful than I appear. If you wish to follow me, I will bring my full might down on you.”

“Father,” I answered his rant.

His back stiffened. “Julian?”

“We should talk,” I added.

That was enough to get him to turn, but even as he did so and came to face me, he froze. His face remained as impassive as ever but his eyebrows jumped the slightest bit. That little movement was more than enough to tell me everything I needed to know.

For the first time in his life, I’d surprised him enough to throw him off his game. He scanned me from head to toe. “Julian, I did not expect to run into you here. I must say you have surprised me, especially while looking like that. You’ve



gotten my attention, please tell me what you're trying to accomplish. I never thought I would see the day you put away those silly little rebellious symbols of yours and grow up to be the Alpha you should be. What has brought this on?"

I could have told him any number of lies, but my pride wouldn't allow it. "I've found my mate, the one the Goddess has granted me. It's time I stepped up, and I couldn't let Elijah inherit all of the work of the company alone. I understand I'll never be the legitimate heir to that position for you, but that's not why I'm doing this. I will help Elijah lighten his load so he's not crushed. He's brilliant, and it's only right I free his time so he can use that brain of his for the common good."

The instant the words left my lips, I wished I had swallowed them. My father had remained passive during my speech, until those last two words.

His lip curled as he shuddered. "Common good?" he sneered. "No one in our family needs to bother with that, it's a waste of our Goddess-given talents. There is no such thing as a common good, the world consists of those that have been blessed by the Goddess, and those shunned by her. Those that are part of our class are obviously blessed while those in poverty are cursed. Even if there was such a thing, there is no way you, nor Elijah, would be allowed to waste your time with it. You are both Alpha Gods, and as such you have certain obligations I expect you to keep."

I was grateful, for once in my life, for one of his speeches that went on for far too long. Was this enough time to get Lee

away from the area and to a place of safety? How was I going to get away from him after engaging like this? If I pushed to leave too early, I could have risked Lee's future, and I was never willing to do that.

“Ah, that reminds me.” He adjusted the cuffs on his sleeves and I was reminded of how strongly Elijah took after him. “Marcus has brought to my attention an interesting proposal. Technically, he's doing it himself and I think it's a good idea. He's accelerated the wedding for Albedo and Zelda. I will be following suit for both you and Elijah. You will of course be marrying Cindy, this mate of yours needs to be rejected.”

I didn't rise to his bait. He would dye his hair bubble gum pink before I'd ever let Lee go. I had a short time to use the man for everything I could before I broke the news, right before the wedding, that I was dumping Cindy. He would be pissed, and whatever goodwill we'd created with this little conversation would go up in smoke. “What time will it be next month?”

My father did something else I had rarely seen in my life.

He laughed, a mocking sneering, and grating noise. “Next month?” he questioned with another laugh and a shake of his head. “No, Julian, you two will be marrying this weekend.”

The weekend? That meant I'd only have a handful of days to try to get to the bottom of the Alpha God's secret and expose it. But even if I couldn't find anything, there was no way I'd ever marry Cindy. The only woman I wanted at my side was Lee.

“And Julian?” my father added as he regained composure and turned away from me. “You know what will happen if you fail this little task. I only need one heir, and I’m not as soft as my wife is.”



Chapter 6

## Claws Come Out

### LEE

My brain continued to try to function, ending up as little more than gunked-up mush. The image of the banana with the tidy little row of piercings was seared into my mind.

Why would Julian have something like that? Didn't it hurt? I winced and remembered the caption beneath mentioned some men had multiple little barbells down the length.

He wasn't planning on keeping it in when we eventually mated, was he?

And those bitches wanted that stuck in me? At first, I winced but then a red haze settled over me. I'd been too lenient with them before.

They continued to argue with each other; Cindy had graduated from the lowly soap or maybe it had fallen apart from the constant bludgeoning. She now wielded a shampoo bottle, but instead of using it to pummel her opponent, she

unscrewed the cap, pointed the end at a sobbing Zelda, and squeezed until her arms shook.

A thick mint-green rope shot out of the top and hit Zelda square in her forehead. It dripped down her face in thick globby dollops.

Zelda had hit her limit and her sobs dried up.

With a primal roar, she launched herself at Cindy. Instead of trying to tackle her, she sidestepped and jumped on Cindy's back, clutching handfuls of hair, she pulled until Cindy burst into painful shrieks. "Bitch!" she snarled in her ear.

Cindy's face was a mix of tears and green shampoo as it dripped all over her. "You fucking slut!" she howled back, her eyes solid gold. She grabbed onto Zelda's legs and stopped the other woman from escaping; she backed up, slamming her body into the wall, and squished her attacker.

Alexandra stood at my side and watched the two with a tiny smile on her lips. "You know, those two have really needed to have it out like this for a long time. Zelda usually has her nose stuck up Cindy's ass, doing her best to try to be her."

We might as well have not existed as far as the two were concerned. They might have followed me into this bathroom to stir up problems, but that had all been forgotten. "I'll never let you have him," Cindy snarled through her cries as she slammed her back into the wall again until Zelda let go of her hair.

Cindy stepped away from the wall and Zelda limply fell over and out of Cindy's grasp. She hit the ground with a thud.

As if on cue, Cindy's phone buzzed from deep inside her purse. She ran her fingers over her cheeks trying to dislodge the worst of the mess before she fished through her bag and retrieved it. She stared at the name before her eyes widened, she glanced back at us and put a finger to her lips. "Quiet!" she hissed.

From the floor, Zelda staggered to her hands and knees and screeched like a banshee. Cindy tossed the empty shampoo bottle at her head, but Zelda ducked beneath it. It rebounded off the wall hard enough that it spat out one last green blob onto Zelda's back.

"I told you to shut the fuck up," Cindy snarled before she tilted her head toward the phone. "It's Julian's dad!" She glared at us before she smiled brightly and answered the phone. "Hello, Sir?" she chimed sweetly.

How had she done that? If I hadn't been looking at her, I would have never imagined her to be in the state she was in. She held herself with perfect poise and despite all the mess that still dripped down her face, I could practically see her in some board meeting. Had the catfight been an illusion?

Cindy pushed a button on the phone and the voice of the twins' father boomed through the speaker. "Ah, Miss Bishop." His voice was warm, and if I didn't know better, I'd have thought he was a caring father. "I'm sorry to have to contact you like this, I would have rather talked this over with your

parents first. Unfortunately, there is not enough time for those formalities. My schedule is far too packed, and not only that but Julian is apparently set back on course, there will be a lot of training for that worthless boy. He must be broken down and then molded into the perfect Alpha.”

Cindy remained quiet over his spiel but as he went on her expression changed from sickly sweet to the same simmering fury that had dueled with Zelda. “What can I do for you, Mr. Newton?” By some miracle, she kept the edge out of her voice, even as her eye twitched.

Unbeknownst to Cindy, Zelda had recovered from her thrashing and stealthily snuck up on Cindy. Her eyes were locked only on the phone. What was she planning?

I was stuck in an observer’s role.

“Right, this concerns your wedding to Julian. There were some issues that complicated the former date.”

A smile crept across my lips. How shocked would he be when he discovered Julian had shunned his choice to be with me? Would his calm voice be shattered?

“Oh? And what would that be?” Cindy questioned. The sweetness of her voice was fading fast and impatience dripped from her words.

If he noticed the change of tone in her voice, he didn’t react to it. “The date for it has had to be adjusted. I’m aware I promised it would be after he becomes an official Alpha God, however, I’m moving it to next weekend.”



Wait, what? The smile wilted on my lips. It's not that I expected Julian to abandon me, but the gall of this man! Did he think he could take my mate away?

Cindy nodded. "I see, that's great news," she agreed in a rather monotone voice.

This time it dug through the self-absorbed man's senses. "Miss. Bishop? Are you okay? You sound upset. Has Julian done anything to endanger his relationship with you? I assure you, our family lines are meant to be together. Whatever it is, we can fix it."

Zelda chose her moment. Her hand darted out over Cindy's shoulder and she slapped a giant green glob of the shampoo all over Cindy's face. She grabbed the phone and jabbed a button on it.

The phone lit up and a video camera started, revealing to the man the catfight that had only paused for his phone call. I was taken aback by how much he looked like an older Elijah, only with silver streaks working their way through his hair.

"What is this?" he hissed. "This is not how I expect a Bishop or a Swan to act. If this is the kind of behavior you believe is acceptable, then we will be finding other family lines to tie ourselves to and both of you will be replaced."

Cindy yelled. "Wait! This isn't what it looks like. We just got too involved with playing around!"

Zelda jerked the phone toward her, opening her mouth to yell at the man when the mixture of soap and shampoo took

effect and the phone slipped from her hand, jumping into the air and landing with a squishy thump at my feet.

The man's eyes widened as he got a good look at me. "What is that on your neck?" he hissed, pointing a finger at me. He shook and his teeth ground together. If he'd been in the room with me, I had no doubt he'd have attacked me.

I slapped a hand over the claiming mark as I tried to loosen the weight on my tongue. His rage was a smothering blanket that robbed me of all words.

"Who are you?" he coolly demanded, his eyes flickered golden as his wolf pressed closer.

Cindy pushed Zelda to the ground again and untangled herself from the other woman. She marched over to me, glaring the entire time. "This is the mutt that tricked Julian into claiming her. He actually believes someone like her is fated to him. She's the latest scholarship student, we all know those don't last long so don't worry, I'll be there to pick up Julian's pieces when she shatters him."

He rubbed his forehead, his brows were knitted together. "I see your point, they do tend to vanish. However, I can't have that thing, walking around with Julian's mark. Ms. Bishop, Julian is your future husband, why haven't you handled this little matter?"

"No, she's not," I interrupted. I uncovered the mark and glared down at him. "Julian is mine and no one is going to take him away from me, I'll be claiming him soon."

Cindy's eyes widened before she glared at me. She bit her lip as she shook like a little dog. "Your filthy lips will get nowhere near him."

How quickly she'd changed her tune from earlier. "Didn't you mention something about wishing I'd get stuck?" I tapped my chin and stared up into the sky. "I could have sworn those were your words. It would be hard to not touch him if that was the case."

"Ms. Bishop, what is she talking about?"

"Nothing," Cindy snapped before clapping a hand over her mouth and glaring at me. "I mean-"

"No, that's enough from you. Clearly, you need to remember your place, Ms. Bishop." His eyes flicked back to me and they turned to pure molten gold. His beast was dangerously close to taking over and ripping me to shreds. "You will regret trying me, charity case. Your ilk will not get in the way of my plans, and remember, whatever happens next is your fault. When your world crumbles around you, remember this moment. If you wish to save yourself, you'll reject Julian and stay far away from Elijah. This is your one and only chance."

"Never," I snarled at him. Barb was desperate for a battle and my vision turned gold-tinted as she threatened to come to the surface. Silly wolf. Was she trying to fight him through the phone?

"Very well, your decision is made and so is mine." He hung up and Cindy stared at the screen.

Instead of her usual mocking smile, she looked concerned. “You really shouldn’t have done that.” She picked up her dirty phone and rubbed it against her hip, one of the few spots that wasn’t covered in gunk. She slipped the phone in her pocket and stared at me.

“What?” I scowled, as I crossed my arms and prepared to battle her again. “I won’t give him up.”

A ghost of a smile flitted over her lips. “I hate you, Lee. You’ve taken everything from me, all the dreams I’ve had since I was a little girl. But, no one deserves the future Mr. Newton is going to bring you. Maybe you think I’m trying to trick you with this, but you should reject Julian right away. That man’s cruelty makes Zelda’s look like a game of Old Maid.”



Chapter 7

## Frenemies

SOMEHOW, I WOULD HAVE been more relieved if Cindy had glared at me. The half-broken smile sent a shiver down my spine and a feeling like I'd signed my death warrant.

Cindy shook her head with a little sigh. "I know, you will not listen to me until it's too late, I hope whatever he does is quick and painless, instead of the slow torture he's fond of. Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't care if anything happened to you but it's not fair to those connected to you."

My family, that bastard; he was going to target them.

Cindy strolled over to Zelda and kicked her in the side. "Get up Zel, it's time for this game of ours to end."

Zelda glared up at Cindy. Her hair was stringy and the mixture of soap and shampoo made her look like a kid that had fallen face-first into a paint bucket. "Little game?" she snarled.

Cindy rolled her eyes. "You know how Mr. Newton is. Which do you think is more important, staying around her," she jabbed a finger toward me, "Or getting out of here before

he shows up?” She frowned, biting her lip. Her eyes darted my way again and she studied me.

“Oh, hell no, Cinds. You can not be thinking about that! No fucking way! We hate her guts! She has both of our men tied around her little finger, she deserves the hell coming her way, you know that!”

Cindy sighed. Her strong posture faded away and she sagged. “You know as well as I do all the women around the twins have vanished, Zel. I hate her, but can I look the other way when she, and everyone she knows, is about to be slaughtered?”

Zelda rolled her eyes. “You have no proof of what’s going to happen. You don’t need to be soft for that thing, she’s not one of us. She deserves no pity, don’t let your conscience ruin this. If we can’t get revenge, Mr. Newton can.”

I resisted the urge to joke Cindy didn’t even know what a conscience was, but this new argument made my stomach queasy. Why the hell was Cindy hesitant? Shouldn’t she be crowing in triumph? She’d wished a horrible fate on me and there’d been no end of her trying to get me out of her way, so she could get to Julian.

This behavior made no sense. It was as if the other woman was terrified.

Cindy shook her head, coming to some sort of decision and wandering closer to me. “Hey Lee, do you have any family or friends in this area?” She bit her thumbnail, her eyes darting to the door, then back to me.

Did she think I was going to fall for this fake help scheme? I'd never tell these bitches about King!

Alexandra interrupted my thoughts as she stepped closer, putting a hand out to me. "Lee, she's not trying to trick you, not this time. Cindy is being serious."

Had my sweet friend betrayed me? Hadn't she enjoyed these two monsters tearing each other apart? I stared hard at her. "Do you think I should trust someone who did that to her supposed best friend?" I snarled as I pointed Zelda's way.

Cindy shook her head and rolled her eyes. "You know what? Fuck it. Fuck you, Lee. You deserve what's coming to you. Zelda was right, I don't need to waste a single brain cell worrying about you, or your family. When people start to go missing from your life, don't come whining to me."

I uncrossed my arms and took a step closer. "Wait, what do you mean, people go missing? Does he have something to do with the former Alpha Gods or the scholarship students?"

My heart raced. Did he have power capable of that and did that mean he was willing to sacrifice his sons? What would he do to poor King, if he found out about him?

Cindy scoffed. "What? Now you're willing to listen to me?" She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Who said I'd still be willing to help? You're the man-stealing whore here. Couldn't even be satisfied with the best of them, my Julian, no, you took Zel's Bedo as well. The more I think about it, the more I'm sure you don't deserve a drop of pity from me."



My eyes twitched at her constant barrage of insults, but I refused to let anything else show. It's not like I had gone out of my way to steal either of those men. The one I'd had my heart set on from the beginning was Elijah but pointing that out to those two would be utterly pointless. Instead, I did my best to swallow my pride. "Please, I have a family and I don't want anything to happen to them. I don't care what happens to me, but you're right, it wouldn't be fair to them."

Zelda groaned. "Cindy," she warned.

Cindy glanced back at her and shook her head. Slowly, she slipped her hand back into her pocket and pulled out her smudged phone; she inputted a series of pushes before flipping it around and showing me some words on the screen. "You're not welcome but whoever you're worried about, send them here. I promise they'll be safe, no one but Zel knows about it."

"Thanks," I whispered, memorizing the simple lines.

"You shouldn't thank me, Lee. He'll torture you until you beg for death."

Zelda sighed before tossing her soaked hair behind her shoulder. "He will," she agreed with a shrug.

Their words made me shiver. "How can he get away with something like that? If people are vanishing under others' noses, someone has to have noticed, right? Just because he's rich and powerful doesn't mean he can do whatever he wants!"

"Did you forget he's got two Alpha Gods for sons?" Zelda answered with a scoff. "He's practically one himself,

considering the power they wield. There's nothing that man can't get away with. The power extends farther than you know, not that I'd expect you to be aware of that much, gutter trash."

Alexandra took my hands in hers and squeezed them. "Lee, we need to get you out of here and into as safe of a place as soon as possible, at least for the rest of this day, until we figure out something that will work better. The girls are right, Mr. Newton is a brutal dictator, he gets pleasure out of hurting others."

I had a place I could escape to; one only Alexandra knew of and Mr. Newton was completely unaware of, at least for now. However, despite their sweet words of concern, I wasn't about to trust either of these vipers. There was no way I'd risk my life with them.

"You're positive that place is safe?" I gestured to Cindy's phone. Sending my family was risky, but I felt like I could trust that Cindy would at least not do anything to hurt them. Her target was solely me.

Alexandra studied the address herself, before nodding. "Yes, it's a cabin her family owns. Cindy is a lot of things, but when it comes to family, she's loyal. I know you probably won't trust her right away, so I'll go with them to personally keep them safe. Will that help to make you feel any better?"

She would have no idea how much her words meant to me. They lifted a weight from my soul. Alexandra was no slouch, I knew she wouldn't let anything happen to my brother or parents.

Should I try to send Rue there too? Before all of this mess, he had been my friend, there was no doubt about that. But what were we now? I had no idea. I missed him and I didn't want anything bad to happen to him, but he had a connection with the Alpha Gods now. Trusting him could be putting my family at risk.

No. Hopefully, he was right about the Alpha Gods practically being immune to everything. It was the only thing that could keep him safe.

Maybe I should have listened more to that mysterious Luci's offer to help earlier. "*Barb? What do you think about all this?*" I questioned.

My wolf considered the situation. "*If she's lying and we listen to her, Alexandra will be there to help us. But if she's telling the truth and we don't listen to her...*" she trailed off, her meaning was crystal clear.

"Yes," I replied to Alexandra's earlier question. "You're the only one I trust with them. Please, protect them."

She smiled at me and nodded. "You know I will, Lee. Like they are my family."

Cindy stared at my neck, focused on my mark. Her eyes were dark, but her expression was somber. "Actually... He's not going to kill you at first because Julian has claimed you, and he wouldn't want to risk hurting him yet. But, if you don't reject him, he'll find a way to use you and torture you in front of Julian until he breaks his spirit. That's the future you're looking at, a living hell. When he finally gets what he wants,

you'll be blessed with death. You should run while you still have a chance."

Why were things turning out like this? Why couldn't I have a single normal day? No, my bad days kept multiplying like a warren of horny rabbits. "I'll never reject him," I hissed.

Instead of glaring at me, she gave me that broken smile again. "Then Julian's torture is on you." She sighed and turned to Zelda. "Come on, Zel, let's go get you cleaned up. We need to prepare the cabin for our guests."

Alexandra darted forward and hugged me tight around the middle. "Get back to the others," she ordered.

I nodded at her words, but it was all a lie. Sure, I would return to my mates soon, but there was something I had to handle first, and if this man was as dangerous as Cindy believed, I had to be quick.

My family was in critical danger and their safety meant more than anything else to me. After I got them tucked away in Cindy's little cabin, I would retreat to the apartment and try to concoct a plan. There was no way I was going to give up to that bastard.

I hated hiding, I wanted to fight on a level playing ground. I needed some sort of leverage, something that was important to him.

What could I possibly use?

A stray thought crossed my mind and I winced. Damn it... No! How could I do that? Sure, it was likely the most effective

option I had, but could I bring myself to do it?

Could I use Elijah as bait against his father?



Chapter 8

## Table Talk

### **STERLING**

The day continued to stretch endlessly. All I wanted was for my kitty to come home so I could hug and squeeze her, and confirm it wasn't some cruel dream.

“Sterling,” Mia interrupted me. “It’s going to be okay. I know you’re worried about her, I am too, but you have to believe the others won’t let any harm come to her.”

Albedo got to his feet. “Let me fix lunch,” he offered. He eased his way out of the conversation and escaped to the solitude in the kitchen.

That traitor.

Mia sat down beside me, patting my hand. “I know my husband can be... difficult. But if anyone can stop him, the boys can.”

Didn't she understand how much danger my kitty was in?

“Sterling,” she tried again.

I glanced up from my game, the only thing keeping me from screaming at her. My nerves were stretched to their limit, I couldn't handle one more ounce of pressure. "Please," I whispered simply.

She sighed. "Albedo, can you say something to help him calm down?"

Albedo leaned over from the kitchen doorway, his eyes were dark. "I understand what you're trying to do, I get it. But she's our mate and we're worried about her. We can't even go to her side and you're here telling us that your dick of a husband is at the school. If he finds out about her, he'll target her and everyone knows about the rumors surrounding him."

She winced away from us. "I know," she whispered softly. "But, I think he'll understand when he realizes love is involved. He doesn't get what Lee means to the Alpha Gods yet."

Her usual sweet clumsiness was fading away, and we were the culprits.

"Once he sees the claims we all leave on her, he'll understand," I corrected. "Tonight, I'm marking her as mine."

Mia sighed. "You should give him the benefit of the doubt."

A jeering laugh escaped me. "You mean how Marcus was with Albedo?" I sneered. I hated myself for it, but the words slipped out.

"Sterling," Albedo growled from the kitchen. He was right, it wasn't my place to be upset about, but I couldn't help



drawing the comparison. The twins' father abused his sons in his own way. "Drop it," Albedo added, his golden glare gave me pause.

"I understand, but-" Mia tried to defend herself. Normally, we would have let her, but both of us had been pushed too far with our worry.

"Did you notice after I entered Silverton I didn't hang out with Julian or Elijah anymore?" Albedo questioned casually. "Or remember the time you picked me up to hang out with them on a rainy day and I wouldn't let you go in to say hi? You knew I'd run away from home that day but you didn't understand why."

"Bedo," she whispered, as she reached for him. "I'm sorry, I remember. You were so small in the backseat. The twins were almost double your size and every time the car turned you let out this small little cry. I..." She looked away, tears brimmed in her eyes.

"You didn't want to see what was happening, or you were too blinded by how great my father could be to everyone else. But don't sit there and act like your husband isn't one of the largest threats to the woman I love."

Mia winced at every word. She wilted onto her stool, and one of the robot cats rubbed against her ankles. "I understand," she whispered. Her voice had dropped to whisper-soft almost breaking.

"Sorry," I whispered to Albedo. "It wasn't my place to bring that up."

Albedo wryly chuckled in response. “Oh? I thought you were still upset with me over a certain kitten.”

Just like that, the goodwill that had formed was snuffed out like a candle. Why did he have to be such an ass? “I’m still pissed at you for lying to me and hiding something so important, but that, and this, are two different things. How’s lunch coming along?”

Albedo backed away. “Calm down, calm down,” he answered. “Here, I’ve got something, let me get the pieces cut.” He waltzed out of the kitchen bearing three oversized plates balanced on his arm and set them down, one in front of each of us and one for himself.

I wasn’t sure what he’d cooked exactly, but golden melted cheese covered the top. Ham, sausage, and what looked like liquid cheese oozed out of the middle, and a golden crust awaited my inspection. “Wow, Albedo, what’s this?”

“Eat it,” he answered with an infuriating smirk.

Mia took her fork and cut off a tiny corner, she popped it in her mouth and her eyes widened. She stared at Albedo with a new light in her eyes. “This is incredible.” She scooted closer to him. “Bedo, will you please teach me how to make things like this? I want to make things my sons will love and not just tolerate to make me happy, even if it has a tendency to poison them.”

I smiled, taking a bite myself. Deep inside, I was relieved Mia had regained some of her sparkle. No matter how angry

I'd been with her husband, that had been no reason to take it out on her.

The crumbled sausage and chunks of juicy ham that simmered in the cheese sauce, was heaven. The eggs were fluffy, but not too hard, and practically melted on my tongue. "I always knew you belonged in a kitchen," I complimented Albedo.

"I've never thought about it, but it doesn't matter," he replied with a sigh. "Dad would never allow it."

Mia didn't talk until she'd finished her plate. She dotted her lips with a napkin and studied us, far more intently than before. "You are not the boys I remember growing up with, my Eli, and Julie. You've both come into your own and are excellent young men. Albedo, I will help you follow whatever culinary desires your heart contains. I'll handle Marcus if he dares object. You have a talent, and I won't let it be frittered away."

She turned back toward me, but before she could say anything, her phone buzzed.

"Who's it from?" I questioned, as I leaned closer. Was there finally word from my poor Kitty?

"Lee," she answered with a quick glance and a bright smile my way. She answered the phone and pushed the speaker button. "Yes, Lee? I've got you on speakerphone here with your boys."

Instead of Lee's voice, we heard the mysterious Inu from that night. And as we all listened, none of us interrupted until the conversation was over.

“Was that enough?” I whispered.

Mia looked up and slipped the phone back into her purse. She got to her feet and closed her purse with a sharp click. “I’ll be in touch. Keep that girl safe. I will get to the bottom of this and none of you will be Alpha Gods; I won’t allow my boys to be sacrificed and once I’m done with the other parents, neither will they.”



Chapter 9

## Checkmate

### ELIJAH

I waited outside the restroom. Thankfully, it was around a corner, so if my father had walked by, he wouldn't run across me and wonder what I was doing there, or worse, look into the matter.

How long were those two going to take? Had something happened? Worry gnawed at my gut. Alexandra had been trained since birth, she was more than capable of handling herself. Physical training was not an option for our families.

The same could be said for Zelda and Cindy, but those two always ducked out of training. After Lee's last little run-in with them, I was confident she could handle herself, but knowing wasn't helping the unease that pricked my scalp.

I hated this.

*"We should go in,"* Baron suggested. *"It's been too long."*

*"We can't do that,"* I hissed at my wolf. *"What if there are other people in there? Just because we're Alpha Gods doesn't*

*mean that it's impossible for us to get into trouble, at least not anymore.*“ Things have changed with that Inu character around. If I got expelled, I'd be cut away from Lee and that would be unbearable.

Finally, after what had seemed like an eternity, Lee stumbled out of the door. But Alexandra wasn't the one at her side, instead, combat, it was Cindy. I snarled and prepared to jump into combat but Baron stopped me.

*“Wait, look at Lee. She looks fine, identical to when she left us.”* He wagged his tail and his relief washed over me.

Cindy, however, looked bedraggled, like someone had tossed her into a vat of slime. Her shirt sleeves were stretched and red marks littered her shoulders and neck.

What *had* happened while they were in there?

*“Our mate took care of business,”* Baron snickered.

Before I could ask what was going on, Zelda, and Alexandra exited. They walked side-by-side but ignored each other. Again, Alexandra looked the same as before, but Zelda looked like a drowned rat. Her hair was plastered to her head, wet, stringy, and with bits of green gloop through it.

It's not that I disagreed with him, but it was still hard to reason out what exactly had happened. Instead of acknowledging me, both sets of women walked past as if they were in some sort of trance. “Let's follow them,” I suggested. I wasn't sure how long Julian would distract Father and if it came down to it, I would need to do the same. Something is

off here.” There was more than one thing off, a lot were. It appeared Zelda and Cindy had been through a battle and obviously the women on my side had won.

But if that was the case, why were they walking with their enemies? It simply didn’t make sense.

*“We should keep our distance and use the element of surprise against them if we have to. We will keep her safe from those snakes.”*

I wished Julian was around. Since he had claimed her, he should have at least been able to tell me what her emotions were. Though if he had been here, I’m sure he’d be a smirking pile of shit. There was no way he wouldn’t show off for having claimed her.

Neither Cindy nor Zelda acted like they usually did. They were subdued and it wasn’t the mess they’d become either, they chatted to Lee in low voices and instead of getting upset at them, she’d nod in response to their words.

Had Lee tamed the harpies?

*“I can’t figure it out,”* Baron complained. *“Where are they going, anyway?”*

If only I had already marked her, so I would understand what she was feeling. The crackles of jealousy stirred in my heart, an emotion that was hard for me to accept. How could I be jealous of Julian? He’d always been the one jealous of me; things reversed like this were not fun and for the first time, I



truly thought about the hell I had helped heap on him by following father so closely.

“*Elijah!*“ Baron snapped. My head jerked up and I saw my father’s outline from outside the Dean’s office. He appeared to be distracted by the secretary, but why hadn’t he noticed us walking down this path?

Thankfully, wherever the group was going, they were getting there in a hurry. We sped by the Dean’s office, the nurse’s station and a dozen sparsely tended classrooms. The women didn’t look back at me or anyone else that mingled in the hallways.

Before I knew it, we’d arrived at the main entrance.

They continued their speed walk out of the building and down the sidewalks, we traveled between the old stone statues and I couldn’t resist glancing at them as we passed. They looked almost alive.

We got to the edge of the university’s property and Cindy went to take a step to the other side when I froze and whirled around.

No!

Where was Julian? But my brother was nowhere to be seen. My father stormed down the path, moving with a speed I didn’t think would have been possible at his age. His eyes narrowed on me, but he didn’t stop. He shoved me to the side. “Don’t you take another step, Ms. Bishop,” he snarled.

His golden eyes forced me to a stop, I tilted my head to the side and exposed my neck. Against him, I was powerless. As much as I wanted to protect Lee, his Alpha aura had become too strong for me to fight. There was a stranger between him and the Dean who I didn't recognize, though he looked strangely familiar somehow.

Lee turned into a deer caught in headlights, her mouth opened and she took deep breaths as tears formed in her eyes.

“Elijah!” Baron snarled. I knew what he wanted, what I wanted as well, but how could I fight it? “You either take control or I’m going to, and when I do I’ll make her as ours in front of him. She needs you!”

Lee took a step toward them, and my father smirked. The smile of a man who was about to be victorious. “That’s right, Ms. Suga, is it? Come here, right now.”

“Lee!” called the young stranger, he waved at her with a big grin. “Isn’t this guy great? I told him I needed to find you, and between him and the Dean we did it!”

“*Eli, there’s something wrong with all this. His smell,*” Baron warned with a whimper. “*He’s.... Her family.*”

My heart gave out as Lee’s head dropped and she gave the younger man a sad, sweet smile. “King.”



Chapter 10

## Sacrificial Lamb

### LEE

My stomach twisted into a thousand throbbing knots. I'd been so close to finding safety for my family, how had this happened? Why hadn't Julian been able to keep him away? Hadn't he promised to protect me?

My little brother stood in the middle of the men that wished to ruin my life. He had no idea what kind of danger he was in and he continued to stare at me with that goofy smile of his.

Why was I such a failure? Why couldn't I keep him safe?

"Lee?" Cindy hissed. It wasn't like we were friends, I highly doubted that would ever happen but there was some kernel of decency to this woman, buried so deep inside no one would ever find it.

"Thank you," I whispered to Cindy and Zelda. I turned back toward the group and trudged forward. There was no choice, no matter how hot the flames would become, I would walk through them to save my brother.

“Lee!” Julian’s panicked voice reached me, but instead of going toward him, I continued my solitary trek. At least he’d shown up, even if it was pointless.

Elijah reached for my arm as I passed and for a moment his warmth danced through my body and I stared deep into his eyes. Was I seeing things or had he finally understood what we were?

If only it hadn’t been this late.

It’s not like I had a choice in this. Everyone had told me how dangerous their father was and now my little brother was within striking distance of that monster. There was only one answer to all of this.

I needed to give them what they wanted.

The Dean eyed me with a self-satisfied smile on his lips. “I see you’ve finally come to your senses Ms. Suga. That’s excellent.”

“We’ll be talking soon,” Julian’s father whispered to me as I passed. The growl in his voice sent a shiver down my spine.

“Lee!” I turned at the desperate cry, to watch Julian push his father out of the way as he grabbed me by the arm and hauled me against his body. “You can’t do this,” he whispered in my ear.

Tears sprung to life and burned the corners of my eyes. I couldn’t let them fall and alert King that there was anything wrong.

Relief at being in his arms as they engulfed me and left me weak in the knees. It would be so easy to lean into his strength and let him handle everything.

No, I would be risking King, and that was a trade I refused to make. The decision that was left to me would crush him, and those eyes that now shone with love would darken when I did this. I had no doubt. “Julian Newton,” I announced loud and clear. Everyone needed to hear my intention.

“Damn it, doggie, you’re being a bad girl,” Julian growled in my ear. He put a hand over my mouth and his lips brushed the side of my throat. My pulse went crazy beneath his touch.

This wasn’t fair. The mate bond was working against me.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. He leaned his cheek against mine. “I understand what you’re trying to do, but I won’t let you. I just found you and nothing will tear you away from me. You’re mine, Lee Suga.”

The bond hummed with his love. It was so strong, I didn’t know how I’d ever survive when I claimed him if it was this strong already.

How had I wormed my way so deep into his heart? He’d started out as my merciless bully and now I didn’t even want to break contact with him. I liked the way our skin sang when we touched, with a melody only we knew.

“Julian Newton!” snapped his father. “You step away from that mutt right this instant, if you refuse, you will be disinherited. I’ve been put through enough of your antics to

suffer ten lifetimes. Your nonsense will not be tolerated for even a second longer, leave that creature, she'll never be one of us."

It's not that I didn't appreciate Julian was trying to save the damsel in distress instead of being the one putting me in distress, but now was not the time for this shit. King's life was the priority, he was the one I'd sacrificed everything for. Whatever Julian's father wanted, I would make it happen.

"Jules, hold her still!" Elijah ordered.

My eyes darted his way. No, he couldn't care now. Not after all of this. The tears were dangerously close to rolling down my cheeks, if he came near me, I would break.

The man I'd had a connection to the instant I saw him, strode toward me and took a twin position to Julian's, so I was crammed between the two of them. I stared up, my heart beating so hard I was sure it would break my chest.

He brushed the hair from my shoulder and everywhere he touched, a trail of sparks followed. Leaning down, Elijah kissed the crook of my neck. I squeezed my eyes shut, desperately trying to escape this dream.

This couldn't be happening.

"Elijah," his father's growl made me flinch. "What do you think you're doing in front of me?"

I chanced a peek at the man, and his dark golden eyes were locked on his sons. He could shift and attack us at any moment. What if King was caught in the middle of all this?

My brother stood next to the Dean, his eyes were wide but a goofy grin tugged at his lips.

Oh, that kid...

Elijah only held me closer until I could feel the thump of his heart vibrating through my body. Barb was ecstatic to be between her mates, she was beside herself with joy and completely forgot about the danger we all were in.

Elijah's words were spoken against my neck, right after he gently kissed it with the barest of touches. "Taking what's mine," he answered as sharp fangs slid into my throat. It was directly opposite where Julian had claimed me.

Elijah's bond flowed into me like a tidal wave, threatening to pull me under. It was warm, no, a burning hot that threatened to consume me. It burned bright and erased all the fear and hesitation that had existed inside me.

The situation had appeared hopeless at first and I was going to be forced to give up my heart, but the bond told me there was another way. Together, we could survive this.

I relaxed and accepted it.

"That is our answer," Julian coolly answered his father. There was no fear in his eyes, instead of the worried man I had first seen, he had been replaced with an Alpha that would never back down.

He kissed the top of my head before he slid around the front of me, putting distance between me and his father. "Now, back



the fuck off old man, before I show you why I'm an Alpha God and you're just the father of one."

I stared at the back of Julian's head as Elijah pulled his lips from me. Julian had willingly let Elijah claim me.

Heck, Elijah had just claimed me!

I'd planned to win him over, was determined to fight, but... how had he been swayed my way? I thought he'd been utterly in love with Alexandra.

But there was no mistaking the warmth that flowed from his touch or the way he looked at me.

It was love. I finally had his love.

Elijah Newton had accepted me as his mate.

It took every fiber of my being to stay standing and not fall to the ground in a puddle of shocked ooze. King wasn't safe yet.

"You dare to speak to me like that? I should have thrown you away the moment I knew you'd never be good enough to carry on the Newton legacy. You're still nothing but a runt, how dare you bare your fangs at me. Elijah, if you want to cement your place in this family you'll take care of your mongrel brother."

Elijah gently brushed his lips across the mark he'd left behind, and I shivered under his soft touch. He stared steadily at his father. "Give up; Lee belongs to us and no matter what you try, we're never giving her up."

Julian nodded at his side. “Her, and her family, are off limits to you.”

I bit my lip, my eyes darted between them. Was this okay? What if their father retaliated against my brother? His happy grin faded as he watched the going ons between everyone, but the Dean’s hand on his shoulder prevented him from escaping.

Slowly, their father walked away from us and back to the Dean. He looked into my eyes and gave me a smile that contained nothing but cruelty and hatred. “You are the scholarship student, if I recall. Well, I regret to inform you, that little deal of yours, has officially ended.” He tilted his head towards King. “Which of course means you know what will happen to everyone who you let down.”

It was like a stab to my gut. My knees threatened to crumple as they trembled, and I would have fallen if it hadn’t been for Elijah and Julian cradling me between them. “Please,” I whispered, as I stared at the man who threatened to take away everything I’d fought for. “The scholarship is the only thing keeping him safe.”

He scoffed. “If you’re that sorry, get on your hands and knees, mutt. I want you to kiss my shoes and prove you’re willing to abandon all your pride.”

“That’s enough,” Elijah growled.

“If you dare to hurt her I’ll bend your fingers backward, tear them off, and stuff them down your throat!” Julian snarled.

I ignored the two and struggled out of their embrace. I dropped to the ground and pressed my forehead against it. “Please,” I repeated.

“Damn it,” Julian huffed. But a moment later, he joined my side, kneeling beside me. There wasn’t any humility in his expression, he looked like a caged animal plotting its revenge for the moment it was next free.

“Father,” Elijah spoke as he too knelt on the ground beside me. He put a comforting hand on my back. “No matter what cruel tricks you play, we will not give her up. She’s our mate, given to us by the Moon Goddess Morgan herself.”

Their father scoffed at their pleas. “I think this is the first time I’ve ever seen Julian kneel. About time you at least faked manners.” He turned his focus back on me, his eyes bored through me. “If you want to save your brother, you know what I’m demanding. Do what I say and your scholarship, and the protection it offers, will remain. Fight me on this and I will not only make sure your family suffers, but I will put you through hell.” He grinned. “The Dean has been more than forthcoming with details about your whole ratty family.”

“No!” King tried to struggle free from the Dean’s grasp. “You can’t do this to her! Lee, don’t listen!”

“Sorry,” the Dean apologized as he tightened his grip. A bright red light came from the ruby on his finger and King’s outraged expression went slack.

He looked like a living doll.

No, I didn't deserve a happily ever after. Hadn't I always told myself my family was everything? I gently brushed the marks of my mates one final time.

May the Moon Goddess forgive me for refusing her generosity.

My brother was not about to suffer and die because of me.

"I'll reject them."



Chapter 11

# The Fall of the Tyrant

## **ELIJAH**

Had I heard right?

Did Lee think she was going to reject us that easily?

No way.

Lee brought his fingers to her lips and kissed them. “Julian, I’m sorry. I have to protect him, I’ll always love you but if I don’t do this...” She shook her head and let out a shuddering sigh. “Julian...”

“Lee,” Julian pleaded. He grabbed her hand and squeezed it tight; a surge of warmth floated over me through the bond. “... Newton, Elijah Newton, I Lee Suga-”

Her phone cut off her rejection.

Lee let out a tiny breath and a shaky smile crossed her lips.

She could hide it on the outside, but the relief that swirled through her was potent. She didn’t want to reject us.

I moved closer, prepared to grab the phone if I needed to. If this call was not what we needed to stop this, I couldn't let her go through with her plan. None of us would survive if she tore out our hearts and souls.

“Do you think a phone call is going to save you?” the Dean sneered.

Lee ignored him and fished her phone out of her pocket glancing at it. Her eyes widened, and she pressed the accept button, putting the call on speaker.

My mother's voice was unmistakable. “Lee sweetie, please give the phone to my husband.”

Said husband winced at the snap of the last word. With a grin, I grabbed her phone from her loose fingers. “Don't worry, I've got this,” I promised her. She gave me a weak smile in return as I scrambled to my feet and marched over to my father, slamming the phone against his chest. “Mom's calling you,” I taunted.

The Dean's self-satisfied smirk was fading by the minute. His ring glowed but he had done nothing else to King, besides taking away his agency, which was bad enough but at least wasn't deadly, for now.

“Keith,” my mother seethed in a voice I rarely heard from her. She reserved this tone for when one of us royally screwed up. “I need you to come home this instant, dear. We need to sit down and have a little chat about Julie and Eli.”

“Mia, this isn’t the time for that,” Keith argued. “Our sons are in trouble! They both marked the same mongrel-”

“Keith, it wasn’t a suggestion, it was an order. And I know all about Lee, I approve of her for both of them.”

“You...do?” Keith stared at the phone before staring at me. His brows wrinkled, and his shoulders sagged as his head slumped forward. “Yes, honey.”

“Good,” mom chirped. “She might not have the type of background you imagined for them, but I can guarantee you from what I’ve seen of her so far, there is no better wolf for our boys. Besides, she’s risked a lot to share something you need to hear.”

The Dean’s eyes widened at the call, and he stared at Lee. His head jerked back and forth as he tried to smile placatingly at Dad. “Keith, whatever she’s trying to share with you is all a big lie. Don’t bother listening to her.”

He stalked toward my father, reaching for his shoulder, and leaving King behind.

Julian wasted no time. He darted forward and grabbed the still unfocused King, pulling him back to our little huddle. Lee threw herself at him, hugging him tight and sobbing her thanks to Julian.

The Dean growled, “I will expel you all.”

My father pulled away from the Dean’s grasp and scowled at him. “I’m listening to my wife right now, Marcus. Whatever you have to say can wait until she’s finished.” He eyed Lee



again, but the utter hatred that had blazed in him before had dulled to a mix of confusion and simmering anger. His eyes searched for an answer. “I’m listening, Mia.”

“As you know, all we’ve wanted their entire lives was the boys to be Alpha Gods, they’ve had everything that should have made them perfect for the role. However, they’ve misled us about what it means to be one, and as hard as it is to believe, Lee has given me proof. If we don’t stop this, we could lose the boys.”

“What?” the Dean snarled as my mother unraveled his layers of deception. His eyes were gold as his wolf pushed close to the surface, ready to take over and confront us.

It would not be a battle he’d ever win. I still owed him for every single time he’d touched Albedo.

“Explain,” Dad pressed.

“We’ve been told Alpha Gods have the ultimate power, but this university has a secret kept hidden from us. The trinkets that were tossed our way when our sons were chosen into this elite sect felt good at the time but not a single one of the Gods has stepped outside of this school after graduation.”

My father went still as his eyes narrowed on the Dean. “Are you saying they have lied to us to this entire time?” His snarl wasn’t for my mother but for the Dean. “My sons are meant to lead my legacy, to carry our name into the future, and carve their names into the history of all wolves. Their story will not end within this university, Marcus.”

“As for Julian, I know how you feel about him, dear, but I promise you he’s a changed man with that sweet woman in his life. I’ve never seen him so fulfilled and happy before.”

My father’s knuckles turned white as his fists clenched at his side. His golden gaze locked on his supposed friend as he stalked forward. “Marcus, how much of this did you know?” he growled.

“Keith! Why are you believing all this? It’s nothing but lies,” the Dean spat the words, but the conviction he’d had before was all but lost. “The Alpha Gods are the brightest and best in the university. You’ve seen the stone statues we leave in memory of their excellence, and the reason you’ve never seen any of them after they graduate is because they all hold pivotal positions of power.”

Dad tilted his head, stalking toward the Dean. “Marcus, have you ever talked to any of the previous Alpha Gods yourself?” He studied the other man while he adjusted the cuffs on his tailored suit.

“Keith, you have to understand...” Step by step, the Dean backed away with his hands held up. “I have an appearance I must keep away from the public. You know that the Alpha Gods will save this world, maybe I don’t know all the exact details but my son is one too.”

A growl tore from my throat and I stomped forward. All the dignity and calm my father had drilled into me had evaporated in a moment. “The son you abused every chance you got. We felt what you did to him, you sick bastard.”

His head jerked toward me.

“You little shit, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” he snapped. “Albedo is mine, whatever I do to him is my decision and I will not let you stand in my way.”

His mask was completely off.

Calmly, my father continued to step forward. “You dare to insult my son in front of me, Marcus? I think it’s time I take you off the board of this school, perhaps it’s time for you to get a taste of what you’ve done to your own.”

“Keith, come on. Understand, and that what I do here is more important than anything else. It’s information that has to be kept away from the public. The Alpha Gods are the only ones that can save the world but I don’t have the exact details.” He backed away, edging closer to one of the stone statues. His eyes darted from side to side. “Please, be reasonable.”

My father continued his calm stalk. He folded his sleeves completely back so his arms were bare. “Reasonable, Marcus? I remember the day you picked my sons as Alpha God candidates and told me all that would be expected of them, and how great this could be for my family. We were already rich, this wasn’t something we needed. You made it sound like the Goddess herself chose them for this task.”

“They were, they will be the ones that fight against-”

“That’s enough,” my father snarled softly. His calm was far more terrifying than his rage. He cornered the Dean against the

wolf with the eyepatch and swung a right hook.

The Dean might have been an imposing figure at one point and knew how to abuse Albedo, but he was no match for my dad.

Fresh blood sprayed over the stone statue and the Dean slapped a hand over his bleeding nose. His eyes watered. “Stop!” he pleaded as he dropped to his knees.

He turned his watering eyes to Lee and her brother. A grin split his bloodied lip.

“If you don’t stop, I’m going to kill that boy,” he promised.

“You would stoop that low? This is over for you, Marcus, just like our friendship.”

“Hit him again, dad!” Julian encouraged, from his position beside the two. “That fucker has been using Albedo as a punching bag, stuffing him in a cage and carving into him like a fucking turkey. Don’t you dare go easy on that monster!”

“Is that so?” Dad smiled our way before driving his fist into the other man’s gut and watched him crumple to the ground with a cry. He wasted no time once his enemy was on the ground and he kicked him in the back until Marcus howled. “I might be a shit father but I’m still a sight better than you, Marcus.”

Lee shivered, leaning against Julian while she continued to hold King tight.

Slowly, my father walked back to us, brushing the blood off his arms and readjusting his suit. “Come on, you four,” he

called. “You’re coming back to my house. We need to sit and have a long chat.”



Chapter 12

## Bridging the Rift

### **JULIAN**

As much as I hated my father, I appreciated watching the beat-down he gave to the Dean. It was a bit too simple for my tastes, I would have preferred doing something that would burn the knowledge that touching my pack was forbidden to him, but the brutality had its own charm.

I was more worried about Dad's proposed little sit down, especially with my mate. Just because my mom was on my side, didn't mean things were about to get easier. "Lee isn't having a sit down with you, old man."

He rubbed his forehead. "You give me no end to my headaches. Your lack of control is one reason you were never fit for the company."

The joke was on him. The company had never interested me. "What do you want with my mate? Because she's not rejecting us and we're not about to reject her."

“We will discuss this in more detail when we get home. This...mate of yours has supposedly given undeniable evidence about what is going on in this school. Before anything else is decided, I would like to sit down and look at this evidence.” He gave the Dean a side-eye. The man was curled into a whimpering ball on the ground. “Away from tainted sources.”

“K-Keith,” the Dean gasped. He grabbed onto my father’s leg. “Please, look at this with sense. You have everything right now, but you know some of that prestige is because of them being Alpha Gods. If you take this away from them, your family name will be ruined. Do you want to risk that?”

Father responded by kicking the Dean’s face, forcing him to let go. “Get your filthy hands off of me, Marcus. I might have problems with my kids, but I’m not about to sell them to benefit myself. Pathetic excuse of a wolf,” he snarled at him. The Dean backed away, wrapping his arms around his head and crying.

I felt no pity for the man, if anything, I wanted my father to go farther. The Dean deserved to suffer, he deserved the pain and humiliation he had heaped on Albedo. I wished I could tear his fingernails out and plunge his exposed fingers in fresh coarse salt.

Lee leaned against Elijah but kept her arms wrapped around her brother. She didn’t speak to anyone, just cradled him close. He still wasn’t responding properly. “Dad?”



He glanced at me from the corner of his eye. Despite his rosy words earlier, there was still a wall between us, one I had no desire to bridge to get closer to the man. “What is it, Julian?”

“His ring. Take it.”

My father glanced down at the sniveling man. The Dean curled into a tighter ball, cradling his wrist against his stomach. “Please,” he sobbed. “You can’t take it. I’ll be punished!”

Bending down, my father grabbed the other man’s finger and bent it backward as he pulled the ring off. The Dean howled at the pain and rolled back and forth on the ground. A broken man.

Not broken enough. He could only handle this amount of pain? Did he not know how much greater Albedo was for putting up with his endless shit all these years? Then again, I wasn’t completely surprised, most bullies couldn’t take the punishments they handed out.

“Here.” Dad tossed the ring at my chest and the red glow faded away.

King’s eyes cleared and he hugged Lee tight. The surge of happiness from her was almost enough to bowl me over, I glanced over and I couldn’t stop my grin. We’d at least saved her brother.

“King,” she whispered, hugging him until the kid squeaked. “Listen, it’s not safe here for you. I want you to go with these nice women, okay?”

She was calling those harpies nice? He'd have been better off with us, even if we had to deal with Dad still. I'd keep him safe. He was my family now too.

King hugged her tight again. "You'll be okay, sis?" He glanced over at me and gave me a defiant glare as if he was telling me in no uncertain terms to take care of her.

That was a given.

"I'll be fine," she promised him. She looked up at Zelda and Cindy, who had stayed watching from the background. As much as I despised the two right now, I didn't blame them for staying safe. "Thank you both for watching him, go with him to get the rest of my family?" she whispered.

Cindy nodded and with her lip trembling, Lee watched her brother led away by the two.

"Is that it? Are you done with this sappy shit?" My dad snapped at me. "We have to get back."

I scoffed. "Is that it? Why should we trust you, old man? You talk a big game about how much your sons matter to you, but let's be honest, it's only Eli, the golden boy, that you care about. You tried to kill her brother, do you think we're going to forgive that?"

"Julian!" Elijah's snap caught me off guard. My brother was buzzing with annoyance and glaring at me over Lee's shoulder.

What the hell? Hadn't we found some sort of brotherly solidarity or some shit? I scowled back at him. Why was he

the one holding Lee? “What?” I snarled back.

“That’s enough, let’s have this chat with dad. He’s wanting to at least talk to us and hear everything.”

Why did we have to care whether or not he heard us? He didn’t have the power we did, and while watching him beat the Dean was badass, it wasn’t enough to make me forget everything he’d done to us, or to Lee.

Then again, Elijah had always been the ass-kisser in our family. Maybe with his claim on Lee, he felt he could slip back into the shitty role. Either that or his lips had gotten so cold he needed to pucker up for Dad again. “I don’t trust him,” I grunted.

“Trust or not, staying here isn’t smart. You’re being childish, Julian. Shouldn’t you be more concerned about your mate?”

How dare he lecture me on how to treat my mate when he’d been such an ass to mom. Snarling, I stood in front of him, blocking him from getting close to Elijah and Lee.

“Move, Julian,” he spoke calmly, with the same crisp tone and aloofness Elijah usually displayed.

“We should go,” Elijah agreed. He kept an arm around Lee.

“One minute.” I stared at my father and lifted my chin. “There’s one way you can prove that I can trust you, that you’re not lying to separate all of us and be on his side.”

“Julian,” Elijah groaned. “You can’t be serious. What would he do? We’ve already chosen her.”

“Sorry, but I’m not about to trust him because he beat the Dean’s ass. He’s already been pretty clear about how he feels about those who aren’t pure of blood, like Lee. And I’m not letting anyone take her away from us, not even him. How about it, dad?” I called.

He let out a long, drawn-out sigh. “Very well. Please, tell me what it is you’re trying to discover, Julian.”

I wasted no time and pointed to Lee. “She’s my mate, let her mark me so everyone can see it. If you can manage that, I’ll know you’re being honest about wanting to help us without there being an ulterior motive in it for you.”

“Hey, wait,” Elijah growled at me. A deep growl I hadn’t expected to hear from him.

“You want me to let you complete your bond with that woman?” Dad pinched his nose. “If that will make you listen to common sense. Go ahead. I will get nowhere by telling you what a bad idea it is. Though, shouldn’t you ask the lady if that’s her wish before you make plans like that? You’re asking someone to take *you* for a mate.”

I winced at the disgust layering his words; my insides twisted and a lump formed in my throat. The bastard was a professional at targeting my weaknesses.

That’s right, I wasn’t the one people chose. Besides, why would she want to mark me? She got the happy ending she wanted, Elijah had marked her. I was an extra in her story.

A small smirk creased Dad’s lips. He knew he’d won.

No, even if it wasn't me, this was important. "If she doesn't claim me, let her claim Elijah. There's no way she would say no to him and he's your precious child. If you were going to betray us, you'd do it for him."

"Julian?" Dad's eyes went wide. "Are you seriously doing this right now when we're so short on time? Elijah, please cure your brother of this nonsense; we need to leave, and we have to do so now."

My brother didn't answer immediately like he usually did. Instead, he smirked, one I'd seen far too many times in the mirror. "Actually, I like Julian's idea." He smiled down at Lee who stared up at him as she continued to hug her brother. "Well? What do you say to that, Lee?"

Jealousy gnawed my guts, but I'd endure it. This was for her sake, I'd been an asshole to her in the past, and I deserved the pain and so much more. "Sorry Dad, you lose," I said with a mocking smile. "Elijah's fallen for her too."

Dad sighed like his soul was leaving his body. When had his shoulders sagged so much before? His back even had a curve to it. That was new. "Very well, if that's what it takes. Go ahead, Lee."



Chapter 13

## Meant to Be

### LEE

There was no way I'd heard the conversation I'd thought I'd heard. No, I had slipped into some enchanted sleep that felt as real as reality. That could be the only explanation.

Elijah's dad had given me permission to mark Elijah.

And what shocked me most of all was Elijah agreed to it.

No, wait, the most shocking thing was Julian was the one who had come up with this.

There was no way I was awake. Too many dream-like things had happened. I stared at the three, trying to reason out a response.

"Her silence is all we need for an answer." He shrugged. "It looks like she said no to you boys. Too bad."

With a shake of my head, I forced myself out of my thoughts. "No," I answered. "I won't mark Elijah."

His beautiful eyes widened at my careless words. That hadn't been what I meant! "Lee?" The tremor in his voice was almost enough to break me.

Meanwhile, their father seemed to think this new development was hilarious. He was snickering to himself, doubled over in his laughter.

"I mean," I corrected, "I'm not marking *just* Elijah."

Julian tensed. "What?" He turned in his seat and stared hard at me as if I had turned into a ghost. The combination of hope and happiness, layered with the fear of it not being real, was an unreal combination, and thanks to our bond I felt an echo of it.

There was no doubt Julian had been an ass when I first met him, beyond that, but somehow, somehow, this man had wormed his way into my heart, and seeing the fear of rejection in him had done something to me.

"Lee?" Julian's voice was a whisper. No one else existed beyond us.

I smiled back at him. Reaching out, I cupped his cheek in my hand and he leaned against it. "You heard me, almost all of you have marked me, it's time I repay the favor. I belong to you all, I admit that, and you all belong to me."

Their father's laughter had died out. He looked like he'd swallowed a fly with the way his eyes bugged out. He stared at us, but it wasn't the glare he'd once held before. There was something else in his gaze. "Go ahead," he encouraged, softly.



Julian gave me his usual grin, but it was shakier than usual. Elijah joined soon after, and the man of my dreams was practically shaking. Was it okay to do this? Wouldn't they regret it at some point? I was just me, and they were destined for greatness.

Elijah's smile steeled, and he stared hard at me. It made my heart beat faster. "Stop," he whispered to me. "I can feel your worry. I don't know exactly what you're thinking, but I do know Julian and I love you. This isn't a mistake, this was fated. We don't care what your background was, we care about what's inside you."

He paused, glancing away from me. There was a wave through the bond as he took a deep breath. Why was he nervous? What was he going to do?

He turned back to me, eyes locked on mine. "I failed to take care of you when we first met. I was so stuck on my own ideas I never stopped to consider anything else, I hurt you and that's something I can never forgive myself for. Lee, if you can't forgive me, I understand. However, I promise no matter what, I'm always going to be here for you now; even if you reject me, I'll spend every day of my life making sure you get the happily ever after you've always deserved."

My heart ached. I wanted to sit down in the middle of the room and cry. But no, there was something more important to do, something I had to prove to both of them. Returning their smiles, I took a few steps back. "Shirts off," I ordered softly,

placing a hand on each of their chests, feeling the beat of their hearts beneath my palms.

I didn't need to tell them twice. They slipped the clothing off and revealed chiseled torsos that took my breath away.

"Lee," Elijah's voice came out in a groan as I ran the tips of my fingers down his chest. I turned and did the same to Julian, not wanting either of my mates to feel left out of this moment. It didn't matter to me that their father stood to the side and watched, this wasn't about him, it was about the three of us.

I stepped closer to Julian, and his eyes widened. "You're first," I admitted. I kissed the spot above his heart softly before glancing back up at him. He couldn't tear his eyes away. "Ready?" I questioned with a stronger tone in my voice than I felt.

"Lee," my name was a choked whisper from his lips. Gone was the familiar bravado and cockiness I had come to expect from him.

Barb pushed to the surface as my fangs grew and I cuddled closer before I bit into his chest. He winced at the bite, but instead of trying to push away, he threaded his hand through my hair and gently stroked my scalp, cradling me close.

Elijah watched from the sidelines and gave me that classically cool smile of his. But I already knew from experience there were more emotions swirling behind that smile than I'd ever considered. Reaching out I grabbed his hand and gave him a squeeze as my mark formed on Julian's

chest. I was too close to see it, and right now I had to make sure both my mates were taken care of to stop and peek.

Pressing a soft kiss to Julian's chest, I turned away from him and approached Elijah. He stood, watching me. I brushed my lips against the spot I would leave my mark on, then pulled him down for a sweet kiss.

Finally, after all this time, I was getting to kiss Elijah.

My lips moved against his in the barest of touches. There was an odd buzz at the back of my mind, something wasn't right, but whatever it was it would need to wait.

"Lee?" Elijah's eyes searched my face. "Are you okay? Did something happen?"

I gave him a small smile, touching his chest again. I hoped my selfish choice to claim them there didn't hurt too much. But there was no favorite in my heart, though once upon a time that wouldn't have been the case. This was the easiest way to show them both they had my heart, or rather I had theirs. I glanced over at Julian's chest. A black version of Barb glared down at the cuddling Oni against her, but there was still a hint of a smile in her eyes.

"Not yet," I replied, giving Elijah my full attention.

I kissed his chest, and my fangs slowly slid into his chest. The bond swept around me like a warm embrace. Barb's pack was nearly complete and I'd never felt my wolf so at peace before.

I reached up and kissed Elijah, giving him a faint smile.

Panic flared through my new bonds, but it wasn't the bond I'd formed with Elijah and Julian, nor was it the one I had with Albedo.

No, the fear, pain, and pleas for help came from those other bonds that had grown stronger the minute I'd claimed these men. The angry buzzing in my head was overwhelming me as what it all meant hit me like a truck.

It looked like even the new Alpha Gods needed my help.



Chapter 14

## Rocky Homecoming

### **ELIJAH**

My new mate sat in the corner of the car, rage thrummed through her. She hadn't stopped glaring at me since the moment we'd tackled her and stopped her from running off after those other two.

“Why did you stop me?” she growled.

My father was in the front with his chauffeur, at least he couldn't hear our conversation. He hadn't batted an eye when Lee had tried to run off back into the school. Instead, he'd helped us get her into the car and now we were heading back to the house.

Julian leaned forward, he was on the seat across from her. “Lee, there's no way we'd ever let you run back into that school to rescue them. You know it has to be a trap, they're doing this to get you under their thumb again.”

“No, you don't understand.” She scowled, leaning back. “Rue is one of them, and you can't think for a minute that I'm

willing to sacrifice my best friend.” She looked away and observed the scenery as it zoomed by. “I know things between us aren’t the same as it was in the past, and we’re not best friends anymore, but I will always protect him.”

It’s not that I could blame her. I probably would do the same if Alexandra was ever in any serious danger, but I wasn’t the one being targeted by a mysterious group inside a school of secrets.

“Let us protect him, Lee. You know what it would do to us if anything happened to you.” He put a hand to his chest. “Especially now.”

She huffed, but her heart wasn’t in it. Her shoulders sagged as reality pressed against them, she had no choice but to accept his words.

My father’s acceptance of this entire situation unnerved me. I couldn’t help but wonder if he was going to do something that would twist this situation around.

But he’s never looked at Julian like that before, or me for that matter.

My father was a tough man, one who used skill and charisma to get by; he only resorted to force at the end of matters. Never had he shown such vulnerability, it was something that had been driven out of us as kids.

All that had existed for the two of us was the never-ending circle of him pitting us against each other. It had eventually driven Julian off the deep end, and he’d snapped into his

rebellious self. Instead of trying to be there for him and support my brother, I stood by and watched him march his way to oblivion.

And he would have too if Lee had not appeared in front of him and forced him to stop and acknowledge her existence, to let him know others existed in the world and he didn't have to be so hateful of everyone.

"It doesn't matter if it's a trap. I have to be there for him. I hurt him when I rejected him."

Julian scoffed. "What, would you rather have had him as a mate?"

I winced at the same time Lee did. Julian still needed to learn how to tame that tongue of his. While the red streaks, red eyes, and even some of his piercings had vanished, he was still the rough and wild young man his lack of oversight had led him to be.

"Elijah, back me up," Julian snapped, glaring over at me.

Lee looked ready to smack some sense into my brother and I didn't want a fight to erupt in the car, especially where father could see. Old habits were hard to break. "Do you want us to go and save them, Lee? We won't let you run into danger, but we'll do it for you."

She whipped around, her eyes had turned into Julian's infamous death lasers. "Speaking of that, why didn't you guys say a single word about any of this? You had to have felt it, had to have known they were in danger!"



Her whole body shook as she hissed at me like a spitting kitten. I had to be careful with my words, the last thing I wanted to do was upset her again. In the past, I wouldn't have minded, but it mattered now. Yet another thing this woman had changed with the bond that tied me to her.

I cared she was upset, that she was hurting. All I wanted to do was take her into my arms and make her happy again, no matter what it took.

However, such a thing wasn't easy in this situation. "This was more important than whatever is going on with them, I won't abandon them because that's what you want. And after our discussion, I'll save your Rue."

Baron chuckled. "*Oh? No rescue of Carl?*"

My lips curled at the thought of that particular specimen. We could drop him from the top of the Silverton bell tower and I wouldn't care. "*You already know the answer to that,*" I replied to my wolf with a roll of my eyes. No one in our pack would ever help that man.

Lee nibbled on her thumbnail and her eyes darted to the scenery outside. "It'll be too late by then." She held a hand to the top of her head. "He's in trouble, Elijah. He needs help." She dared to put a hand over her heart, and Baron growled at the action. I was relieved she couldn't hear his jealousy. "He might not be my mate, but this bond ties me to him as well as you."

Julian snorted. "I don't care if you are tied to the entire damn school, Lee, you're not running off into some obvious trap."

Besides, that ass is the one that wanted this life so badly, he gets to deal with all facets of it. You're the only one I care about."

The car pulled to a smooth stop in front of our father's mansion. I turned to the two who were about to get into a bigger argument. "That's enough arguing. Lee, we'll handle the situation after we make sure it's safe. Right now, our focus needs to be on what we're going to do about our problem. Unless you've suddenly decided to trust Inu?"

Lee whimpered before her shoulders slumped and she gave me a small nod. "I understand," she ground out between gritted teeth. "But if anything happens to him.... I swear."

I gave her my brightest smile, hoping it would distract her. "I've got it, Lee. We Alpha Gods can take a lot more punishment than you know. I'll keep an eye on what's going on with them, if anything gets worse, I'll handle it."

Julian slipped out of the car and turned, offering her his hand. She stared at it, and then at him before accepting it and letting him help her out of the car.

Mother was waiting for us the instant we drove up. "I'm glad you're all okay." She flashed us a warm smile and grabbed Julian's hand. "Julie, I think I need to have a little chat with your father in private for a few minutes. You can all sit at the table, it won't take long."

Lee huddled close to me, and I was treated to her sweet scent. It made me want to bury my nose in the nape of her neck and inhale. "Is everything okay?" she whispered. Her

eyes darted between us. I didn't blame her for the distrust she had for my parents; Mom could be a little much to take and Dad was acting peculiar.

My parents walked off, with my mother sticking close to my father's side and gently talking to him. With the way he tensed and looked back at us, I understood she'd told him everything she knew.

They didn't even make it to another room before Dad leaned against a wall, supporting himself as all the color drained from his face. He looked up and stared at Julian and me as if he'd never seen us before. He shook his head and a shudder shook his giant frame.

His words were soft, but I still caught them as he whispered into Mom's ear. "I'm sorry."

She gently patted his cheek and a warmth filled me. For all their flaws, it was undeniable to me that my parents were truly in love with each other, and now I was going to have a chance at a relationship like that.

It took only a few minutes more before they walked back to us. My father knelt in front of Lee. "You found out the truth about the Alpha Gods, you saved my family, thank you."

Julian watched, his body was tense like a wound coil ready to spring into action. It's not like I believed Dad either, how could he do something we've never seen him do before? Not when we'd seen the horrors he could bring to others.

Mom turned to us and smiled calmly. “We need to plan out our response. If I know Marcus, he won’t wait long before he tries something else.”

Dad chuckled, rubbing his knuckles. They still held the red dots of the Dean’s blood. “Marcus won’t be doing anything to anyone else for a bit.”

Mom gave us a small smile. “I knew everyone would be worried, so I made sure that all would be gathered here for safety. Your father and I need to discuss matters regarding Marcus and Albedo. Please, give us a few minutes.”

They slipped away into a side room and left us in the main living room. About Albedo? If anyone could help one of my best friends get out of the shitty situation he was in, it was my parents. But had almost losing us warmed up Dad’s ancient heart enough for him to care?

Julian gently took Lee’s arm and guided her deeper into the house, heading towards the kitchen.

“It’s about time you guys got back,” snapped a voice the instant we set foot on the tile. “You guys have some explaining to do on what you did to my Kitty.”

Sterling’s gaze was pure gold. Even though we were all aware of what would happen if he dared to attack us, he was more than willing to do it for her sake. He was everything I should have been from the beginning for her.

“Damn it, man,” Julian scolded. “Calm down. She’s our kitty now too, and we have to stop her before she runs off to save

those fake Alpha Gods.”

From the kitchen came the sound of a pan hitting the ground with a crash. Seconds later, Albedo appeared with his nostrils flared and his eyes molten gold.

No, not Albedo, but his wolf, Lewis.

“I’ve got a question,” he snarled. His eyes focused on Julian and me as he sniffed the air. “Why the hell would she be connected to the fake Alpha Gods, to that point?” A deep growl rumbled from his chest.

We didn’t need to answer him. He already knew the answer, and he was pissed.



Chapter 15

## Achievement Unlocked

### LEE

Waves of fury and jealousy surged over me, they threatened to pull me down into their whirlpools and all of it came from one wolf. His anger wasn't at me, it was solely locked on my two latest mates.

“Albedo,” I called, trying to summon the man back from the wolf. His golden glazed eyes darted to me, a wild gleam inside. “Lewis,” I corrected slowly as I edged forward. Barb readied herself, prepared to shift if we had to. “I’m sorry, I didn’t have time to talk this over with you. It all happened so fast.”

He shook his head, blinking hard, and for a split second, I glimpsed Albedo’s sea-glass eyes. “I’m not angry, Lee. I just need answers.” Considering I still felt like they could pull me into an undertow of hatred, I had to doubt his words.

“I-”

He held up a hand, cutting me off before I could say more. “From them.” He nodded to Julian and Elijah. “What happened?”

Julian grinned, his familiar smug smirk lifting his lips.

Oh Goddess, why couldn't he ever show some sense?

“She claimed us.” He nodded to Elijah as he positioned his mark so all could see. If I was closer, I'd have smacked him for his smugness. There had to be a better way to break the news than that.

Lewis rolled his eyes. “I smelled that the instant you came into this house, my question is why? You are aware your little selfish ploy has connected her with those same fake Gods we were trying to protect her from, right? Or did neither of you manage to remember that?”

Julian's smirk wilted. “I... I didn't,” he admitted. “All I could think about was a way to prove to Dad what Lee meant, and how important everything was. Letting her mark us was his way of proving we could trust him.”

Lewis's growl only grew louder. “That doesn't matter, and I will not forgive you for putting her in danger. If anything happens to her because of those fakes, I'll rip both of your throats out.”

Elijah cautiously moved towards the furious wolf, talking too softly for me to catch his words. I tried to go after him, but Sterling's hand wrapped around my wrist and he tugged me back to his chest. “Kitty,” he whispered.



I turned and hugged him tight. At least he'd calmed down enough to hold a conversation. "You okay?" I questioned, looking him over for any issues.

He chuckled at me, ruffling my hair. "You're the one that was in danger. No matter what happens to me, you'll always be my top concern." He tilted his head towards the hallway. "Would you mind stepping away with me for a minute? I want to talk in private."

Whatever was happening to Carl and Rue hadn't slowed down in the slightest; if I didn't hurry, I'd miss my chance at rescuing them. Still, with the way Sterling was staring at me, like a puppy prepared to be kicked, there was no way I could tell him no. The others could wait a few minutes more, I still had to figure out a plan before I tried to run to their rescue anyway.

Getting caught was not in the plans.

"This one." Sterling turned the knob to an elaborate black-paneled door and held it open for me.

From what I could tell from the long black couch that spanned one wall, this was a living room of some sort. I took a seat and sunk into the soft leather. This place was way too big, my entire old house could fit inside this one room.

"Listen," I whispered. My throat was thick with the words as I tried to choke them out. I should have told him or warned him or something.

“Kitty, you don’t need to apologize.” He clicked the lock on the door before sauntering my way.

My heart sped up. “Sterling?” I whispered with a shiver. If anything happened in here, there was nowhere to run. I was trapped as effectively as a rat was with a cat.

I resisted the urge to slap myself. What was I thinking? This was Sterling! Out of everyone, I knew and understood him the best. Rusty had been my constant for years, there was no reason to be worried.

Sterling took a seat next to me. The heat of his thigh against my leg made me unable to focus on anything else.

Had he ever sat so close before? I swallowed, searching for something to say. He wanted to talk about what I’d done, and why wouldn’t he?

“Kitty,” he whispered into my ear. “I’ve been patient, but I’m at my limit.”

What? I turned, trying to see what in the world he was going on about.

Grabbing the bottom of his shirt, he shrugged it off, revealing his muscular chest.

I stared.

I don’t know why I was so shocked. Anyone who attended Silverton should have a somewhat decent physique, if not Godly.

Sterling was godly. Considering the man wore large shirts beneath his blazer, I hadn't noticed his body type before. Every muscle was defined, and I would be hard-pressed to find any fat on him.

My eyes were glued to a drop of sweat as it trickled down his chest.

“Ste-Sterling?” I whispered.

The corners of his lips twitched. “Finally, Kitty.” He reached out, his hand cradling my cheek as he stared into my eyes. “I’ve waited forever for you, and I would have kept on waiting until my dying breath because you’ve always been the only one for me.”

I leaned toward him, and he needed no other signals. His lips grazed over my forehead, my cheeks, my nose. “Rusty,” I complained, glaring at him.

He answered me with a chuckle. “My Kitty,” he whispered before gently pressing his lips against mine.

I looped my arms around his neck, lips moving against his. The tip of my tongue darted out and teased the crease of his lips, testing the waters. His kisses were soft like he worshiped me.

He winced and pulled away. “Sorry,” he grunted. His eyes flickered gold. “You even smell like them.” He groaned. He shook his head viciously and buried it in the nape of my neck, smelling hard. “It doesn’t matter, you can smell like all of

them, I don't care. As long as you're here with me, I don't need anything else."

I giggled as he tickled me with his nose. Was it okay to be this happy when everything else was falling apart around me? The thoughts of everything else vanished like popping bubbles as Sterling mercilessly tickled me until there was nothing left in my mind but him.

"Didn't you say you were fine with sharing?" I teased, pushing against him to stop the endless tickles.

Sterling growled softly and pushed me back into the plush black cushions as he peppered my throat with kisses. "Kitty, I knew you would take others, that doesn't bother me, but I can't hold back much longer." He nipped at my throat. "Please, let me," he whispered.

Oh. I knew what he wanted in an instant, and my cheeks burned with the knowledge. Instead of letting him off easily, I let him suffer a little. "Do what?" I asked innocently. There was nothing more I wanted than to hear the words from his lips. I had to know he wanted to be with me as much as I wanted to be with him.

"Minx," he growled again, sucking at the skin on the base of my throat until I moaned beneath him. His teeth grazed me. "Let me mark you, Kitty. I want to claim you so badly I can't think of anything else. It's all I've wanted since I found you."

"Rusty," his name came out in a low moan as he nibbled on my shoulder. It was the name that had gotten me through

countless hells, the one I could always rely on. My personal knight in shining armor. “Claim me, I’m yours.”

His gentle kisses returned, and he smiled against my skin. “My sweet Kitty. Scholarship, I love you.” His voice was a purr.

I closed my eyes, basking in his words. Burying a hand in his hair, I pulled him closer so I could whisper into his ear. “I love you too.”

He gave me one last soft kiss before he bit down at the base of my neck. It would be a mark everyone would see, and I didn’t give a damn. Finally, I would be his, and all that was left was for me to claim him back.

I settled into the warmth of the bond as it spread over me.

But underneath, something was screaming for my attention. It wasn’t Sterling and had nothing to do with our bond. No, deep inside there was the echo of screams and panic before the voices fell completely silent.

As much as I wanted to make this right with Sterling, I couldn’t yet. My smile faded, and I gently pushed him away.

“Kitty?”

“Something’s happened to Rue, and I have to find out before it’s too late.”

My words brought him pain, I felt the echo of it through our bond, but there was nothing I could do. I’d always defended Rue, and he needed me again.



Chapter 16

# The

## **STERLING**

Despite her worry clawing at me, and the knowledge that this peace was about to be shattered; for this one moment my life was perfect.

I'd claimed Kitty.

Yes, I had been the last, but at long last she bore my mark in a spot everyone would see. My wolf peeked out from the base of her throat; the beast was crouched down with his thick fluffy mane hiding one of his eyes, and he touched noses with a wolf in cat ears standing on a game controller.

If only we'd had the time for me to claim her, but she was scrambling to her feet. "Sterling," she whispered, already preparing her excuse. "I have to go."

That guy. She'd talked about her best friend multiple times before, though she'd never called him by name. If she had, I would have figured things out faster. "Lee, I understand, but

you have to realize we can't let you run into danger." I stared into her eyes as she trembled.

This was the worst possible timing that could exist, but I couldn't risk her walking away.

Taking a deep breath, I took a step forward. "Mark me, Kitty."

She whimpered. "Rusty, I have to go... I can't waste time."

I winced at the idea that she thought it was a waste. "I have to know what's going on with you, I need our bond to be complete. I'll go after him and rescue him, I promise."

She leaned forward until her forehead touched mine. "I want that more than anything else, Rust. I'm not doing this for any other reason than I don't want to lose my best friend. It's the only thing that would pull me away from you."

"No matter what, I'll save Reuben. You know you can trust me."

"I know," she replied with a sad little smile. "You're too important for me to rush this. I promise, when he's safe, I'll claim you too."

Warmth surged through me, and I couldn't stop the smile spreading across my lips. I would take on the world for her; I would tear Silverton down brick by brick and set it on fire if it could make her smile at me like she was doing now.

Lee placed her hand on my chest before she grabbed my shirt and pulled it back over my head. "I'm going to put it over your heart, like the others."



“No,” I answered, putting a hand over hers. When she looked at me, I tilted my neck. “I want it to be visible so everyone can see that I belong to you.”

She softened and gave me a half-smile. “Rusty,” she scolded, even as she kissed me on the cheek and looped her arms around my neck. “I’m so lucky you found me,” she whispered, kissing my neck.

She nuzzled the spot and I waited. Her wolf came to the surface and her fangs grew sharper against my skin. She bit into me and the magic of the bond flowed through me, tying me to her and through her, to the rest of the Alpha Gods once more. I couldn’t hear them the same way as I had before, and thankfully, I didn’t sense the fakes.

While the bond’s power settled over us, I felt Barb bouncing through my mind and meeting Lewis, nose to nose. The wolves embraced and pushed against each other as if trying to meld into one like they’d been waiting for each other all their lives. There was no doubt in my mind, especially now, I had bonded with my mate.

Lee kissed the mark she’d left and nipped at me. “Spoiled,” she scolded. “Now, we go.”

I would follow her into the depths of hell with a grin.

The door to the room slammed open, bouncing against the wall. I gently pushed Lee behind me, despite her protests, as Julian stomped through like a rampaging bull. I tensed, prepared to defend my mate with everything I had.

“Julian? What’s wrong?” I questioned.

His eyes sparkled with flecks of gold as Oni and him struggled for control. “Inu,” he snarled. “The bastard called me.” His eyes fell on my mark and a pained smile crossed his lips. He blinked and the expression was gone, replaced with a true smile of acceptance.

“What? Why?” Lee darted around me and got in Julian’s face. “I don’t trust that bastard.” She shuddered and clasped her wrist tight with a knuckle-white grip. A flash of fear seared through our bond.

Julian’s glare skewered her, and she took a step back. “About the other two fakes,” he grumbled. “Inu claims they were doing a test for him and things went sideways. Unfortunately, Carl made it through without a scratch.”

He froze as Lee went still. She slowly dropped her hands to her sides and stared at him. “And Rue?” she whispered.

Julian’s eyes darted to the side. “He’s... in critical care at the hospital. He’ll be okay, but it was close.”

“I see,” Lee whispered, and she swallowed. “We have to go.”

“What? I can’t let you walk into what could be a trap,” Julian argued.

“I’ll go,” I offered. “I’ll make sure it’s real, Lee.”

But my mate’s bond was glowing hot. Instead of being shattered at this news, her rage was spiraling. “No,” she snarled at me. Lewis shrunk at her tone. “I’m done with asking

permission. Rue is my best friend and I'm going to him. Nothing will stop me."

Julian groaned. "Damn it. Sterling! Talk some sense into her. You agree this is all some big trap, right? Inu can't be trusted, and who knows what tests they put the guys through."

Lee's anger stuttered. "Tests?" she repeated. The fury had drained from her words. It was a cold, emotionless query.

"Lee?" I whispered.

She glanced my way and looked down. "Sorry," she whispered. "What... what did Inu want us to do?"

Julian scowled, his brows turning into one solid line. "What the hell? Lee, why are you asking that? I thought you were going to run to the hospital."

I wanted to ask why he even told her what was going on if he knew that was going to be the result. He could have left us alone for a bit longer. I could never have enough time alone with my Kitty.

"Well?" Lee wasn't giving up.

Julian winced. "Well..."

As amusing as it was to see him tongue-tied, I wanted to get some answers, too. "Spit it out, she's not going to let you go until you do."

Julian groaned. "It doesn't matter, it's part of a trap. He wants to separate us. There's no way we're going to go do a

bunch of tests and try to prove we deserve to be Alpha Gods while you're alone with Reuben.”

“No,” Lee interrupted. “What were you told about Rue exactly, Julian? He’s in critical care, but can he receive visitors yet?”

Julian sighed. “They’re taking him to the hospital for surgery, Inu said it looked like he’d make it, but…” He paused and scowled. “I thought you should know, Doggie.”

Why the hell did that idiot have to show a decent side of himself now? I wanted to slap him for being honest. I already knew my Kitty, she would throw herself into a pit of vipers if it meant saving her friend. Traps meant nothing to her.

“We should meet with Inu,” Lee decided.

My jaw dropped. “What?” I sputtered.

“I can’t help Rue if he’s in surgery, but I can get to the bottom of what that asshole did to him,” she snapped. Her eyes had turned gold again, obscuring the dark pink depths I loved so much.

“You walking in with us on an obvious trap isn’t a great idea either,” Julian complained. “Fine, you want to do something so pig-headed, we’re asking the others. It’ll be a vote, we’re a pack now.”

“We can,” Lee agreed. “But I’m not changing my mind, even if every single one of you votes against it. I’ll find a way out and back to your sides again, it’s where I belong. Besides, isn’t unity better than division?”

Julian's frustration rumbled through the bond in endless waves, but my mate refused to back down. I wanted to appreciate the fire in her, but in this case, I partly agreed with Julian.

"Why are we waltzing into this trap, anyway?" I interrupted.

"Exactly!" Julian pointed out.

If his dumbass had kept his mouth shut about this, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. I get why he thought he had to share it with her, he'd grown a conscience and had to tell her about Rue. But still, Julian shouldn't have been this much of a dumbass about what would happen.

"Julian, what the hell did you do now?" Elijah growled as he stalked into the room, flanked by Albedo. His eyes flicked around the scene, taking in all the vital information.

"I'm going to confront Inu," Lee spat. "He put Rue in the hospital and I won't let him get away with it. You can all come with me or stay here, but there's no way I'm going to stay here safe and sound when that bastard nearly killed my best friend."

"For the record, I'm against us leaving at all," I added with a hand raised. "This is a trap."

Elijah rubbed his brow. "It might be, but this is a chance for Sterling and Albedo to prove they deserve the Alpha God's position. They paused the expulsion until the results of this little test."

"I'm going," Lee replied. She clenched her wrist tightly. "I have to, and if you try to leave me here, I'm going to come

right after you.” She didn’t give us a chance to answer as she marched out of the room, leaving us behind.

We had no choice. If we didn’t catch up to her, she’d run the whole way by herself. “Lee, wait up!” I called and ran for her. The others argued behind me, but I had no doubt what the result would be.

We were a pack, Lee was ours and no one would ever hurt her again.



Chapter 17

## Deal with the Devil

### LEE

I was a filthy traitor. What proof did I have I wasn't betraying the men I claimed to love? I wanted them to be Alpha Gods, true ones that would never be taken advantage of or broken down again, but what if Inu's cost was too great?

He'd obviously done enough to curse countless others that came before. The grounds of Silverton were littered with failures from the past. What was I going to do if my mates were going to be the latest additions?

"Lee?" Elijah reached over and gently held my hand. Since we'd got in the car to travel back to Silverton, I'd been quiet. Julian had insisted on driving and kept glancing at me in the rearview mirror.

Could I have been more stupid about this decision? Instead of only risking Albedo with my fate, I'd added the others.

"Lee?" Elijah tried again, squeezing my hand.



I forced a smile. “Sorry, I was thinking about Rue,” I blurted. It wasn’t exactly a lie. I was worried about him. But since I’d heard the word tests, my thoughts were only focused on one thing.

“I’m sorry, Lee. We’ll check on him as soon as we can, I promise.”

With a sigh, I leaned against his chest and relished in his warmth and the sparks from our mate bond. I couldn’t stop my greed. Worrying would solve none of my problems. When we got to face Inu, I’d get my answers.

It was time for those damned Alpha God trials, and I couldn’t say a word or I’d risk killing us all. The situation was so frustrating I could howl, but I kept it all inside.

Goddess, save us all.

“Hey,” Albedo took my other hand and rubbed his thumb against my palm before bringing my knuckles to his lips and kissing them. “It’s going to be okay, kitten, I promise.”

How could I not smile at my sweet Bedo? “Are we doing the right thing? Should we have waited to talk to their parents?”

“No,” Elijah disagreed. “I’m sure they meant well, but we’ve been given a chance to stop this once and for all. He might think we’re going to fight for a spot, but we’ll show him our pack’s power.”

“Don’t worry, scholarship. You don’t need to tear yourself apart, we can feel it gnawing away at you like a disease. We’ve got this together.”

“I can’t stop,” I admitted. “This all feels like a trap. Rue got hurt and then you’re summoned after being expelled? What if he has something horrible planned for you?”

“There’s no doubt it is,” Elijah agreed. “That’s why I think everyone being together is the best. With all of us here we can keep you protected, no matter what.”

“I left them a note before I marched out of there,” Julian admitted from the front. I had almost forgotten about him.

Elijah craned his neck, staring at his brother. “Wait, you left a note? You? For mom and dad, right?”

Julian rolled his eyes. “It told them we were leaving and we’d be back as soon as we could, and that I was sorry about this. I asked them to send backup when they got everything figured out. Anything I can do to make sure Lee stays safe, I’ll do it.” His eyes met mine through the rearview mirror before he turned his focus back to the road.

His words were an arrow to my heart, and I did everything in my power to not let the guilt leech through me and into our bonds.

Julian brought the car to a stop and I gathered my shattered thoughts. This was the time to focus and get answers, and for all of us to confront our future.

Albedo opened his door first, and using his light grip on me, he helped me out of my seat. The instant I set foot on solid ground, he brought me flush against his body. “It’s going to be

okay, kitten,” he whispered, with a soft press of his lips to the side of my head. “We’re in this together.”

“How cute,” Inu observed from down the pathway. He stood beside one of the wolf statues with a condescending little smirk. “I’m surprised to see you all together. I thought for sure you’d want to stop at the hospital and visit poor Reuben.” His eyes flashed from behind his mask as he spoke. There was a warning in their depths.

A grim reminder of who was in charge.

“Kind of hard to visit someone who’s in surgery,” Julian growled, getting out of the car. “We prefer she’s at our side, we’re a pack. What is this bullshit excuse you’re weaving about who is worthy to be an Alpha God again? It’s obvious the originals will always be the best. What’s your real reasoning to bring us here?”

Inu gave him a small smile, the only hint of emotion the mask would betray. “Funny you, of all people, would ask. Well, Alpha Gods, I too think the Dean was a bit too hasty in expelling two of you. Think of this as your chance to prove your worth once and for all. It’s graduation time, Alpha Gods.”

As he spoke, I surveyed our surroundings. Everything was still; there were no students milling around the grounds. It was like a ghost town. The moment we’d entered the school grounds, the pain I’d been experiencing from the new Alpha Gods was gone.

“Where’s that Carl ass?” Sterling snarled. His eyes swept the area. “I have some unfinished business with him.”

A burst of rage surged through Julian, like a creature awakening from sleep. The bond was hot and heavy with it and seconds later the other's annoyance sizzled. "Yes," Julian agreed. "Where is Carl?"

"Oh, do not worry about him. He's not to this level yet to take these tests. It is strictly for you all. Alpha Gods, if you succeed here you will be more than Gods in just name. However, if you do fail, I feel compelled to let you know there will be a penalty."

"Penalty?" Elijah echoed, longer, and his eyes narrowed. "What are you hiding, Inu? Why do you think we'd be willing to play whatever sick games you want to throw at us?"

A smirk spread across Inu's lips. "Oh, I wanted to hide that for a little longer but I suppose I can share it now." His eyes found mine, the electric blue felt paralyzing. "Lee," he purred. "I think it's in your best interest to convince these men of yours to prepare for graduation."

"Lee?" Albedo questioned. His brows knitted, and his eyes darted between Inu and me. "What is he talking about? What's going on here?"

My bracelet burned against my skin and I bit my lip to keep from screaming, instead clenching my fists and swallowing my pain. There was no way I could let them know, and at least the magic of this thing kept them from suffering from this same curse.

Wait. How could that be right? He had told me it was connected to me through my mates. If that were true, shouldn't

they feel the pain too? But instead of being in agony, they continued to stare down Inu, with no knowledge of the endurance test I was suffering.

Had he lied about this thing? I was grateful. I didn't want them to suffer, but it made me wonder if he'd lied about this power. How much more had he lied about?

“Oh, Lee,” Inu chided, clicking his tongue. His eyes glowed and the power around the bracelet stuttered. The bands that let me keep all the pain to myself snapped one by one. “Let them get a taste of what you get to endure, and have it serve as a reminder of how you will suffer if they disobey.”

The bracelet burned, becoming white hot, and I clenched my eyes shut as I tried to swallow my howls.

“Lee!” Elijah's passionate yell made my insides twist. It hurt far worse than the burn that worked its way through my body.

The bracelet came apart, no match for the raging fire. The second it left my skin whatever magic was keeping my mates safe faded away. One by one the agony zipped through the bonds and they jerked as if they were being electrocuted.

Looks like Inu had told the truth about his stupid piece of jewelry.

Why was he being so desperate? He had let his calm facade crumble and revealed the monster that only I knew.

Sterling wasted no time, he growled, his eyes turned golden and he sprung at Inu's throat.

No! Until this curse was broken I couldn't risk anything happening to that monster! What if we were stuck in a cycle of suffering? I ran from the others and wrapped my arms around Sterling from behind, pulling him against me. "Please, stop," I whimpered.

"Kitty?" he questioned, cocking his head.

I'd never felt more like a traitor. "We have to find out how to break this curse," I whispered.

Inu chuckled. "That was a taste of what I can do to you. Lee is the very center of our tests, boys. Come here, Lee, now that your bracelet is gone there's something new I can give you to stop that pain. I promise, if you don't, you'll all die here cursing each other before your deaths."

I clenched my eyes shut. I hated him so much. "We'll never curse each other," I promised.

His chuckle grew into a laugh as my powerful mates dropped to the ground on their knees. Only I was still standing.

Wait. Why wasn't I in as much pain as them and why had it improved for me? "What did you do?" I hissed.

Another slow smile spread across his lips. "You're not in pain anymore, but they will be until they die. Don't make me kill my most promising Alpha Gods, Lee. Come to my side and accept my present so we can start the trials. If they succeed, the curse will be completely broken."

What choice did I have? My mates needed me and though the path ahead was paved with broken glass, I would never

stop until they were safe.



Chapter 18



## Decider of Fates

### **STERLING**

Everything burned, it hurt to exist. Every breath was like breathing in fire and ash. It writhed like snakes through my veins and whatever tears I'd possessed had been sizzled away.

Lee stumbled by me, and no matter what I tried, I couldn't reach out to her. My hands were fists that trembled, keeping me in a kneeling position using the last bit of strength I had.

Had Kitty suffered this without telling us? A dagger thrust into my heart. How had I failed her so completely? I claimed to love her and yet she'd been in such a position without me knowing. All I wanted now was to wrap my arms around her and keep her safe, to protect her from that scum who stood beside her.

Julian crawled forward. The blue of his eyes flashed to the gold of Oni. I couldn't even summon Rust. Everything hurt too much. "Why?" Julian howled. "Let her go!" Every word drained his strength and I winced as he toppled over.

“Well, Lee?” Inu questioned. He glanced over at her as she stared listlessly into the dark. “Do you agree?”

Lee clenched her eyes shut before she jerked her head in a nod. “Save them,” she pleaded.

The bastard laughed. “Excellent. Before we let our brave men up, I need to give you this.” He lifted a black collar with four jewels as decoration. Lee held up her hair, and he wrapped it around her slim throat.

One by one the jewels lit up. Blue, sea-glass green, teal, and crimson, as they did the pain was cut off, as if someone had flipped a switch.

The instant it was over, I stumbled to my feet, summoning Rust to me. We would rip Inu’s throat out for ever making my Kitty suffer.

“Not so fast,” Inu chided with a finger wave. “The pain you’ve all been experiencing is in those lovely little jewels around her neck. If you try to attack me, I’ll unleash all four, so she’ll endure everything you all did, at once.”

Rust was wild. He wanted to rip Inu’s arms off for daring to touch our mate. I had to keep him in control, not easy, but for Lee, I’d do anything. “What do you want, Inu?”

He smiled again. “I want perfect Alpha Gods, that’s all. Graduate and you’ll be perfect. Take the tests.”

“I’m going with them,” Lee interrupted.

Inu raised a brow. “The plan was for you to stay at my side and you would watch all of them on their little journey.

However, if you truly insist... I suppose that is acceptable. I'll even throw in some extra rules to make it more interesting."

"Extra rules?" Lee whispered.

"Why yes. If they fail or get hurt during the tests, you will take all the pain and suffering they would endure. If it's enough to kill them... Well, I'm sure you understand what would happen."

Lee's head dropped to her chest with a little whimper.

Elijah's eyes narrowed and through our bond, his anger lapped at me like the ocean eating away at a beach. Outwardly, though, he was calm. "Let's get this out of the way. Once we've passed your tests, you'll let Lee go?"

Inu swished his hand to the side and bowed. "You have my word that once it is all finished, she will be free."

Lee opened her eyes and they found mine. She gave me a small sad smile, guilt ebbed from her. Didn't she understand we were the ones that failed her? If we'd been paying more attention to this slimy asshole, we would have noticed something was wrong.

Like that damn bracelet.

"How many?" I whispered.

Inu sighed. "If you're going to ask a question, you need to be more specific. You are to be an Alpha God, and this is how you converse?" he tsked. "Let's try again."

*“Tear this man’s head off, Sterling!”* Rust was prepared to take him down himself, but I wasn’t so easily convinced it would be that easy.

I couldn’t risk my Kitty. “Please, Inu, how many tests do we have to get through to become a true Alpha God?”

He gave me a patronizing smile. “See? That wasn’t so hard, was it? There is one geared to each of you, so four in total.”

“Thank you.” I hated myself for saying one polite thing to him, let alone two.

“Now that we have that little matter out of the way, it’s time for us to get started.” Inu reached up, adjusting his mask. “Sterling, considering your special talents, I’ve got a fitting position for you. Your little pack won’t get to do this together. For our first task, everyone is going to rely on you.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. “Why?”

Instead of answering, Inu crooked his finger. “Come,” he ordered. He turned and walked away while the others gathered around Lee. Did he trust I would follow him like a beat dog?

“Rusty,” Lee whispered before launching herself into my arms. “I’m so sorry, this is all my fault.”

I kissed her worries away. “I’ve got this scholarship,” I promised with a ruffle to her hair. “No matter what he’s planning, he’s not pulling it off with me around. I’ll use whatever I can to help you through this test .”

She didn’t look convinced, but time was short. Inu paused and glanced over his shoulder at us. His eyes flashed a

warning and I would not let my precious Kitty suffer because I'd failed to heed it.

“Don't worry, I'm coming,” I reassured him. I turned and hurried after Inu's long steps, he was quickly leaving the group behind. We were heading back inside the university, but not down any of the normal pathways.

What were we going to the music room? It was the only room this far on the outskirts, but no. We continued walking the long path until we got to a dead end where many students would try to hide. It was a strange sort of alcove, nothing was in it but a pure onyx wolf statue. His paw rested on a giant rock and his head dipped forward like he had given up.

“This is the guardian at the start of our journey, Sterling. Allow me to introduce you,” Inu spoke with an irritating smirk.

“Yeah? Who is it?” I couldn't sense anything, but Rust was on edge.

Inu reached out to the rock and curved his hand around it, pushing a button I hadn't made out before. “This is one of the first Alpha Gods of this school. His name is Alex Silverton.” He put a hand against the statue, studying it. “I thought that one of such pure blood, one of such size, would surely be the one I sought.”

While I thought about his words, the wall behind us rumbled and shook before swinging outward. A sleek elevator awaited us in the dark. Inu wasted no time in striding forward, but I was still focused.

I hadn't paid the best attention in classes, but that name held too much weight. He'd been the first son of the founder of the pack, and the first Alpha God. "His statue, right?"

Inu chuckled. "I suppose that's how it would look to you. No, Sterling, I'll let you in on a little secret. This is his true form. He failed his tests and so he became the very vessel to bring others to theirs. His power is boundless, I doubt he'll be consumed anytime soon."

Puzzle games were a staple in Clevania as a strong feature in the mini-games. It took little for me to piece together the bits of information he'd just given me, but I didn't want to accept it. "All the wolves on Silverton property..." I whispered.

"Yes?" Inu questioned. He leaned on the statue, still smiling. "What is it?"

"If you've never succeeded in creating an Alpha God after all this time, why are you so confident we're going to be the ones? Weren't you sure he was the answer before?"

Inu cocked his head, and his smile withered away. "Watch it," he growled. "You're correct, I have been beyond certain before that I had the answer, but they've all disappointed me. This set of Alpha Gods has shown a spark none of your predecessors have ever had. I believe without a doubt at least one of you will be a true Alpha God, the warrior I need. Will it be you, Sterling? Think about it, if you're the last one standing there won't be a need to share, would there?"

For a moment, I let myself imagine it.

Kitty would be just mine. There would be no need for her body to be marred with anyone's mark but my own, and the only bond she would have would be with me.

“Well, no need to worry, I'm sure you'll do your best to make sure everyone gets out alive for your little test. After all, no one has a chance of surviving without you.”

His words rang in my ears. With each step towards the elevator, my thoughts filled with moments with Kitty and the visages of what could be. Once inside the elevator, I closed my eyes and leaned back against the metal back.

“This won't take long,” Inu promised. He tapped a button, and the area in front of us rumbled. I didn't have to open my eyes to guess the wall had closed, entombing us in its depths.

Instead of traveling upward, as I had assumed, the elevator descended and I was torn from my thoughts to watch us delve into pitch black. Only a few lights flickered around us from outside the glass front of the elevator I hadn't noticed earlier.

The light was barely enough for me to make out the shadow of Inu. Only the electric blue glow of his eyes told me where his face was. I hated the man.

Once I passed his tests and saved Kitty, I would make sure he suffered. When I was an Alpha God, a lot of things would change.

My thoughts were disrupted as the elevator reached the ground floor. At least there was more light here. The doors slid open and it bathed the two of us in a pale blue glow. “Come

along, Sterling,” Inu instructed. He strolled down the long hallway, ignoring the few people in lab coats darting around the room. They barely registered my presence.

Why did the university have a giant lab beneath it? Maybe Inu was telling the truth about searching for an Alpha God, but this didn't seem the right setting for it.

Inu waited for me beside a black metal door. “Here you go. You'll be in here until the test is over, and don't worry, I promise your precious Lee won't be in any real danger. The others, though?” He chuckled. “Good luck, Sterling. Show me what a true Alpha God is made of.”

I opened the door into a small room. An entire wall was covered in four oversized monitors, and as they flickered on they greeted me with images of Lee and my pack.

Lee's room was simple, resembling a cold prison cell. Her gray stone walls were bare, only a single lever, adorned with a star, brightened up her surroundings. She stared at the surrounding walls with her arms hugging herself tightly.

On the other end of the spectrum, Albedo's chamber was a complex rainbow of colors within a confined space. The walls, floors, and even ceiling were adorned with bars of varying hues, creating a visual tangle that was both mesmerizing and bewildering. I didn't know where to start.

Elijah's room was a geometric disaster. While there was some semblance of order in the patterns in Albedo's room, in Elijah's, there was a mosaic of tiles, each with various markings, and none of them looked like they connected with



each other. There were numbers, letters, symbols, arrows, and the list could go on endlessly. Strangely enough, the disaster only decorated the floor. The walls were bare and it was clear the real challenge was whatever message lay beneath his feet.

I wasn't surprised to see Elijah on his hands and knees, inspecting each tile and looking for some sort of pattern.

Turning my attention to the final monitor, I flinched. Julian was stuck, pounding on the walls and screaming, but from the lack of reaction from the others, it didn't seem like they could hear him. His room was similar to Lee's but while hers was at least clean, his was filled with signs of decay. A rusted metal wheel waited in the center of the room and the ground was cracked around it.

As I watched, sprinklers emerged from various spots in each room. Lee had a single one in the corner of her room that spat out a few drops at a time. Albedo's sprinkler was beneath the twists of brightly colored pipes and a steady stream of water flowed. Elijah's was another trickling sprinkler, but instead of just one, he had a series of five scattered around his room.

Julian of course, had the worst of it. His sprinklers were on full blast, and there was already a puddle of water gathering at his feet.

Inu's laugh filled my ears from the speakers in the room. "This is it, Sterling, time to prove yourself. In front of you is a microphone, you can only speak to those in the rooms one at a time, and they can't hear each other. Their fates are in your hands."

I wasted no time, I rushed to the microphone to solve the puzzles, but as I jammed the button down to talk, a pin pierced my thumb. I winced as the blood welled, but forced myself to focus.

I'd get Lee out no matter what, but would I be enough to keep the entire pack alive? I jammed my finger onto the sharp pin that had pricked me before until my thoughts cleared. All that mattered was saving her, I could think of everything else after.



Chapter 19

## Whispers of Treachery

LEE'S SOLUTION WAS OBVIOUS. "Lee!" I called to my mate. I'd found a piece of the microphone I could push that wouldn't stab me anymore.

"Sterling?" Her head jerked and she searched around for me in her room. "What's going on? Where are the others?" She held a hand over her heart.

"It's going to be okay, Kitty," I promised. "I need you to listen to me. Your room is easy but there has to be a secret for what the others have to do hiding in it. I can't see anything but a lever in there, is there anything else? Think about Clevania and the puzzles we've had to solve before. Search everywhere."

She nodded and dropped to her hands and knees, inspecting every cranny of her room. It didn't take her long to finish her sweep and look up and shake her head. Her corner of the room didn't even have a puddle yet.

If there was an answer hiding in her room, moving forward could make us lose it completely. But I knew Kitty, she wasn't stupid; if there had been anything she would have found it. I had perfect trust in her. "Kitty, grab the lever with the star on it, and pull."

My eyes flicked to the other monitors. Julian was throwing himself against the walls. The water sloshed up to his ankles. He snarled like a wild animal. Oni hadn't been released yet, but it wouldn't be long.

Elijah's seeped over his tiles but the man stayed crouched on the ground, tracing every tile with his fingers, still trying to puzzle them out.

Albedo was tapping his pipes, one after the other, searching for some musical clue.

Lee grabbed the lever and squeezed the heavy bar. She jerked it down with all of her weight and her room rumbled as the sprinkler withdrew back into its depths. The wall opened up before her and a bright red exit sign glowed in the distance.

My heart sped up.

"Rusty?" she whispered. "What now? Are the others already out?"

"Look around the lever and the area that opened," I suggested instead.

She obeyed, kneeling on the rough ground. She grabbed the lever and pulled it back and forth, scowling as she did so. "Hey, Rusty?"

“Yes?”

“I don’t know if it means anything but the star on this lever turned into a bunch of different colors. There’s a 1 and a 2 next to it, on a couple of them, but the rest of the wheel is blank. Do you think it could mean anything?”

Colors? It had to connect to Albedo’s room. The water there lapped at his shins. “Bedo.”

He glanced up. “Where’s kitten?” he questioned. He didn’t even care about me contacting him, his thoughts were only on my Kitty. He even used a similar nickname.

It made my skin crawl.

I let the vision overtake me. One where Lee was the only one to escape this little challenge, where she and I survived but had each other. We would be so...

Almost instantly, the thought dissolved. She wasn’t happy in those dreams of mine; she was broken and so was I. The Alpha Gods were a pack, we’d been together far too long to betray each other.

I was an ass for even the thought of it.

No, I wouldn’t give in to Inu’s sweet suggestions. I would do everything in my power to get the others out of this situation and we would gain the powers we needed to protect her forever.

“Sterling?”

“Sorry, give me a second. Lee is okay, her room was easy and she’s already at the exit. I’m going to have her give me the sequence of colors. I’ll get back to you and you have to strike whatever bars I tell you, got it?”

Albedo let out a breath, and his shoulders relaxed. “Got it, and thanks for getting her free first. I was so worried I couldn’t think about anything else, man.”

“Lee, give me the order of colors,” I instructed. I listened intently to the sequence, and the minute she finished relaying it, I turned my focus back to Albedo and relayed it.

The instant he tapped the final bar, his sprinkler too withdrew, and his walls shook as one descended straight down. The water drained out of his system and the viewpoint for him zoomed out. All he had to do was follow the path down the halls and he’d be with Lee.

“Wait before you go, Bedo.”

“What is it?”

“Look around to make sure you’re not missing anything. The clue to your prison was with her, so there’s no doubt you’ve got someone else’s as well. Don’t go anywhere until you find it. Elijah is okay, but Julian’s already up to his chest in water.”

He had been up to his chest, but somehow, more sprinklers had appeared. Julian was treading water and sucking in what air he could at the top of his cell. It wouldn’t be long before his area was completely flooded.

“Albedo!”

The thought of losing one of my best friends made my stomach churn. There had to be something.

Albedo stared at the pipes, bashing this one and that. “I don’t see anything!”

“Lee!” My mate jerked to attention. “Please, run down the hall and help Albedo. Jules is going to drown!”

She turned white and I thought she was going to faint. Instead, my Kitty jerked her head in a nod and sprinted down to the area I’d instructed. She got to Albedo’s little room and they both scoured the pipes.

Julian dived beneath the waters. He struggled to push the rusted wheel, but no matter how hard or how desperately he struggled with it, the metal refused to give an inch. He crouched low on the ground and pushed himself back up to get another precious breath of air.

“Got it!” Lee and Albedo screamed the words together. They held a small paper between them. “It was crammed between the pipes! There’s a circle here and it says below!”

Circle? I scowled. Could the puzzle they’d found be something Elijah needed? He had circles, ovals, and even dots. But there was no way his room could be solved so simply.

“Jules! Is there anything circular around there?”

He jerked his head before diving under again. The waters lapped at the ceiling.

This was it, the last chance to save him. I had to do something; our shared life flashed through my memories. A



circle and below... Wait. "Julian! Underneath the wheel! Look there!" I screamed as hard as I could. I wasn't sure if he could even hear me beneath the waters.

*Please, Morgan... save my friend.*

Julian let go of the wheel and jerked his head down, searching below it. He pulled his fist back and struck the ground hard, repeatedly, and nothing happened.

The bitter taste of failure, and what I'd caused to happen with even a second of hesitation, soured my soul. There was no way I deserved Kitty... not if I'd caused one of her mates to die.

With a shudder coursing through my body, I forced myself to look on. I would watch his last moments and remember.

Julian thrust his hand through the ground and twisted. His room shook and the sprinklers finally retreated. Julian went limp as the water receded around him, but worse than that, Lee fell to her knees screaming, her hands clenched on the blinking collar around her throat that glowed a violent red.

"Lee!" I howled her name. "Albedo! You've got to get in there!"

My eyes flicked to Elijah's corner. The water was up to his neck, but the man kept diving and inspecting new tiles. If there was anyone who could solve a riddle without the answer, it would be Elijah.

Julian still didn't move.

“Julian!” Lee struggled to her feet, the light on her collar still blinked but she forced herself forward with Albedo and burst into the still-wet room. Lee threw herself onto his chest, beating the man until he coughed up a stream of water. With a cry, Lee hugged him and Albedo close before looking around. “Sterling! Where’s Elijah? Where’s my mate?”

The walls rumbled around them and fell down. A rush of water escaped Elijah’s room and he calmly walked down the hall to the others. He crouched beside Julian and slapped his cheek. “Are you going to sit there and make her cry?”

Julian groaned and grabbed Lee tight, smashing her to his chest, though he didn’t bother sitting up. “Good doggie,” he whispered into her hair. I barely caught it.

Thank the Goddess. My friends had survived Inu’s first fit of cruelty, but what else did he have in store for us? He’d said four tests and this was only the first. “When you guys can, get to the exit. I don’t trust him.”

“One minute.” Elijah knelt beside the shattered remains of the tile Julian had pummeled. He picked up a few and rearranged them until they were whole again. “Ahh... “

“What?” Not knowing how the man had freed himself was bothering me. Now that I knew everyone was safe, relief and curiosity were setting in.

“He had the answer to my room. I only found out when I noticed there was only a set of tiles that had arrow markings as well as others. I had to figure out the sequence of arrows for it to work.”

“We’re all good, right?” Lee questioned. With Albedo and Elijah’s help, they got Julian to his feet between them and Lee stayed plastered to his side. “Should we try to rest before we go on?”

I had a feeling that wasn’t in the cards. “No, Kitty, head to the exit. This whole thing could be timed for all we know.”

The monitors went black and the surrounding speakers hissed as their connection was severed.

“You had the perfect opportunity, Sterling. I’m disappointed with your results. Follow me, it’s time you met up with your precious pack again. The next trial is waiting.”

There was no point in trying to find out more, I was desperate to be with them again. There was one thing I’d learned from my countless times gaming in Clevania, everyone had a weakness and it was only a matter of time before I found his.



Chapter 20

## Through the Grinder

### **JULIAN**

My senses were fuzzy. I could still taste that fucking water in the back of my throat. It was hell. When I got hold of Inu, I was going to tie him into a pretzel for fucking with my room. There was no way anyone else's had been that complicated.

“Are you sure you're okay?” Lee looked up into my face.

One great thing about nearly dying, my mate's endless concern and love rushing over me in waves was practically addicting. “Yeah,” I grunted. “Let's go kick the second trial's ass.”

As a group, we limped our way to the exit. Albedo opened the door and I tensed, prepared to battle whatever might be on the other side.

Instead, Sterling barreled his way through. He strode over to Lee and grabbed her, hugging her tight. Once he was satisfied with her, he grabbed me and hugged me too. “You fucking idiot! How didn't you notice Elijah's clue?” he growled.

Something smelled foul, and my nose crinkled. I hissed and jerked away from Sterling. “What the fuck, man? Did you go roll around with a skunk?”

“Huh?” Sterling sniffed himself and scowled. “What the hell are you talking about?”

But it was getting stronger.

A roar rattled the ground around us. It came from behind.

“Is that.... A troll?” Lee whispered. She pointed behind me.

Groaning, I twisted around. A green monstrous creature thundered toward us, grasping jagged stalactites in each gnarled fist. Yep, no other name for it than troll. It had bashed its way through our drowning chambers and was marching straight toward us.

It was not only massive but smelled like multiple species had died out in its rotting black teeth. Its muscles bulged with thick ropy pink veins and scars decorated almost every inch of the face.

The monster roared, slamming its heavy makeshift clubs into the ground. Grabbing Lee with one hand and Elijah in the other, I dove as far out of the way as we could. The ground shook beneath us.

“Having fun?” Inu taunted as he walked out behind the creature. He patted its leg but the beast didn’t even take note of him. “Janet here likes to play, and now she has your scent. You’ll all enter the next trial room, and you’ll have, let’s say... fifteen minutes for you to make your way through. Fail, and

you know what will happen to poor Lee again. Last time was only a taste of the agony. Imagine how she'll feel if Janet gets hold of you. You might kill her."

If I got the opportunity, I was going to pull Inu's tongue out of his Goddess damned mouth and stick a spike through it. The asshole did nothing but piss me off and Oni was ready to rip his face off, grind it into a bed of coarse salt and tear the guy's balls off. That one was a bit harder to get behind; he had a few too many graphic thoughts about how to split them apart and I didn't want to think about it.

"We're not afraid of you," Lee hissed at Inu. "I know they can do this. Whatever traps you have, they will not fail."

"There's the door. Enter that room and go down the hall, once you've entered the trial room, the countdown will begin and Janet here will get a chance to play." He leaned closer to the troll that knelt down and grunted. "Oh? Yes, I think so too." He glanced at us and grinned. "Well, Janet has decided who her favorite playmate is going to be." Inu pointed to Elijah. "You'll be the first one she rips the arms off and eats. I hope you're good at running."

If that bitch touched my brother, I would turn her inside out and hang her with her own fucking intestines. Trolls had those, didn't they?

"Julian, come on." Albedo grabbed my arm and pulled me along. The others had already stumbled ahead of me, heading for the door the prick had pointed out.

*“Why are we obeying like whipped puppies? There’s five of us, we could shift and tear him apart before he even blinks!”* Oni’s vicious growl was enough to give me a headache.

“*Calm down,*” I snarled back. My wolf froze, listening to me for once. Good, he had to, because I wasn’t risking my mate. “We get her free from any of his traps, spells, and special accessories first. Then you can do whatever you want with him.”

The others opened the room and I rushed in behind them. It wasn’t anything like I was expecting. Instead of a wide open space or a somewhat normal room, it was a tight-ass tunnel. We’d be rubbing our bodies against, what looked like, dark slime. “Is this the only way?” I complained.

“No other choice.” Elijah was the first to duck through the muck. He grunted as he slipped his body through the tight crevice. At least he’d gathered the worst of the slime, I didn’t want that muck anywhere near Lee.

“Bedo, you next,” I ordered, nodding at the tunnel entrance. Meanwhile, I kept count of the time slipping away from us. Even if this was a cramped tunnel, it didn’t look like it could withstand that troll.”

“What? Why me?” Albedo scowled. “Sterling should go next, then Lee, then us.”

Lee reached out, brushing her finger against the slime. “It’s oily...”



“Kitty, you’re not trying to eat that, are you?” Sterling put a hand on her head. “Let me go next. Julian is right, you’re safest in the middle.”

Lee scowled. “You do know I can fight too, right? I’m not exactly a damsel in distress, even if this collar says otherwise. I worked my ass off to get into Silverton and it didn’t involve anyone going easy on me.”

Sterling answered her with a sigh. “You’re right... but you can’t blame me for being protective. I’ve waited for you for so damn long.” He kissed the top of her head. “See you on the other side. If Janet comes for you, give her hell but you better believe I’ll run right back to you.”

Lee leaned against him for the space of a heartbeat before gently pushing him. “We don’t have time for this, Rusty. Treat this like Clevania and we’re on a job quest.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure that I had to run from a troll that wanted to eat me when I picked up the assassin class,” he agreed with a chuckle before turning and slipping through the tight confines.

Lee didn’t even wait for him to get all the way through before she followed him. Albedo winced. “Guess it’s my turn, huh?”

“Did you want to guard the rear and deal with Janet? I’m not letting that bitch near Elijah.”

With a little more complaining, Albedo slipped through the tunnel. Janet’s growl and stench was growing closer. It hadn’t

even been three minutes. It wouldn't be long before Inu released his beast. Fifteen minutes? More like seven at this rate.

Once Albedo had struggled his way through, it was my turn. Since everyone had gone before me, the oily slime was drastically reduced. I squeezed through and was forced to scuttle sideways like a crab after only a few yards. My hips scraped against the hard stone, and I flinched.

The light from the other end mocked me, only a few feet away and that's when I got stuck. I wedged my back foot between the tight quarters. Damn it.

"Julian?" Lee called for me and my light was obscured as she stuck her head into the tunnel. "Do you need me to come get you?"

"No, I've got this." Elijah gently moved her to the side and my brother forced his way over to me, leaned down, and jerked my foot free without any effort. Why hadn't his ass gotten stuck? Why was I the only one to be humiliated? "Come," he ordered.

I opened my mouth to object the whole reason I had wanted him to go first was to get him farther away from the creature that wanted to devour him when a rush of hot, foul breath filled the area.

"Not yet, Janet," Inu chided from outside the other end of the tunnel. He deliberately let his voice echo. "I know you smell your yummys, but patience."

“Elijah, get your fucking ass out of here before I kick it,” I snarled, shoving my twin toward the exit. “Move it!”

By the time I made it to the exit, my eyes were teary at the ungodly stench Janet was sending my way. Still, finally, I was out of that tight, cramped tunnel.

The area wasn't what I was expecting. Instead of more of the tight disgusting tunnels, there were a variety of wide paths in front of us, with not a speck of slime. A grinding noise filled the area every few seconds, like stone rubbing against stone.

Elijah adjusted his clothes and scanned our surroundings. “Let's try the left pathway first. Stay together. We can't risk being separated. We don't know how this place works yet.”

“What are you talking about? If we split up, we can cover more ground; I'll take the middle passage.” I strode off towards the middle. Why was he acting like such a tight-ass?

Elijah grabbed the back of my shirt and yanked me back. “Listen to me, Julian, there's no way this place is just a simple maze. There's something strange in here.” He lifted a hand as the grinding continued. “That for instance, stick together.”

He didn't give me a chance to argue, and Albedo guided me away from the path I wanted to take.

How much time had passed? Five minutes? Ten? I wasn't sure. All I could think of was I had to keep Elijah safe from that damn troll, and no matter what it was, it would be worth it to keep him alive.

Besides, he's the one Lee had fallen in love with at first sight. If he was to die, it would break her and I'd never let that happen.

Janet roared again and I gritted my teeth. "Lead the way, Elijah, I trust you." But if things went south, I'd be the first in line to stop that bitch.



Chapter 21

## Facing the Beast

### **ELIJAH**

Behind us, stone ground against stone as the last of us entered the strange area. We whipped around as one, but too late. The tunnel's entrance disappeared, sealed off by a shifting wall.

We were trapped inside with the ravenous troll on the other side.

“Fuck,” Julian spat, voicing my own thoughts, albeit in a bit more colorful manner than I would have used.

Considering the size of Janet, it wouldn't be long before she burst her way through and to us.

She roared and the ground shook from how close she was. The promise of death and agony lay in her cry. If I didn't solve this issue soon, we'd all be devoured.

I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath and focusing.

Losing my senses would only lead to fatal mistakes.

I placed my hand against the nearest wall where rough, cold stone met my palm. Eyes closed, I trailed my fingertips along the blocks as we walked. Each one fit seamlessly into the next. Inu, or whoever built this maze, had taken great care in its construction. But why?

Why wasn't he focusing on one trial with multiple elements, instead of having multiple trials with various ones? There had to be a method to the madness somewhere.

My middle finger dipped into a small indentation. I paused, eyes opening, and pressed harder, tracing its edges. A circular depression. I continued down the hall and I spotted them at regular intervals, like our own little series of breadcrumbs.

Hope flickered inside me. There might be a way to solve this problem before the crazed troll ate us.

“This way, I think I know the solution.”

As if mocking my words, stone scraped against stone; a grating sound that made my teeth grind.

The walls shifted again and I reached out, searching for the one marker I'd found.

I was greeted with a smooth, endless wall.

My insides froze. No! I had to find the indents! It was the only way forward. I reached for another wall, brushing my hand down the length until the little divots greeted me. A huge weight lifted off my chest.

The sounds of Janet and her rampage trailed off behind us as we rushed forward with my touch guiding us.

The walls shifted again, this time the one in front of us slid out of view and we stumbled into an open room. The walls were the same high stone, but it was empty besides a singular white stool in the middle.

Leading out of the room were a dozen different doors of various sizes and colors.

Escape from this place wouldn't be so easy.

That stool had to be an answer, but it could just as easily be a trap. I crept forward, eyes locked on it.

Strange symbols adorned the stool's wooden surface. A riddle wrapped around the seat's rim. I traced the words with a finger:

**“In life's flow, I am a key,  
Neither water, nor wine, nor tea.  
Red as a rose, hidden away I stay,  
To unlock the path, a drop must lay.”**

It took little more than a moment before the meaning clicked into place. This maze demanded blood.

I turned the stool upside down, studying it for more of an answer. The bottom of it wasn't flat wood like I had assumed. Instead, there was a thin, almost hidden, wooden compartment on the bottom.

I found a latch, but as I slid it open, it pricked my thumb and a drop of blood landed on the magnifying glass that lay inside.



Lifting it, I peered through the lens at the doors surrounding the room.

Two glowed under the glass' power. One pulsed red and the other blue.

One was likely the way out and the other probably took us straight into Janet's jaws.

*"What do you think, Baron?"*

*"Red,"* he replied calmly.

Of course, why hadn't I caught that sooner?

*"This way."*

Lee hesitated. "Are you sure it isn't a trick?"

No, for all I knew it could be, but I wouldn't let her see that.  
*"Trust me, Lee."*

Patches of red stained her cheeks and she smiled as she moved closer.

Taking a breath, I grabbed the handle and pushed it in.

*"Fuck,"* Julian complained.

*"No..."* Albedo shook his head.

Sterling and Lee glanced at each other and moved closer together, talking softly.

Had I chosen wrong? Instead of escape, there was another maze, this time the walls waltzed around us to the tune of the music that filled the air.

“Don’t worry, Eli,” Sterling put a hand on my shoulder. “I know this looks complicated, but all we have to do is find the timing. Once we’ve got that down, this is even easier than the last maze.”

“Stay close until then,” I ordered. “You two keep an eye out for that timing of yours, but if we stop here, Janet is going to burst out of that last room.”

“Kitty!” Sterling dipped closer to her ear. “This reminds me of the guild dungeon founding event. Remember how the special bosses shuffled around the entire time?”

“You’re right! I bet if we memorize this song, we can move at that pace and get through here.”

With their words as my guide, I paid attention. Janet’s snarl was closer than I’d like, but I forced myself to focus.

Left, right, left, back, spin to the left, then go forward. Now I knew what I was looking for, the beat was unmistakable. “Come on,” I ordered the others, my path was certain.

The music got louder and the pacing quicker. The walls whistled as they slid around on their mechanisms.

Grabbing Lee’s wrist, I raced down the hallway. With every second, the pathway was getting smaller. If we didn’t hurry, we’d be trapped beneath the closed wall and a hungry troll.

“Faster, Jules!” My brother kept spinning around to stare behind us, but if he kept it up, he’d be in a tighter spot than he had been at the start of this hellhole.

“I won’t let her hurt anyone,” he snarled back. “She’s going to break through soon.”

“Yeah, but she’s not here now!” I looked at Lee, who had slowed down. She wouldn’t run without him.

“Julian, if you don’t move it, your big head is going to be as flat as your ass if we get stuck in these walls!”

His head jerked back toward us. “What did you call my ass?” he growled. “Wait until you see it, doggie, it won’t disappoint.”

The stench of the troll filled the area and the floor shook with every step she took, cutting Julian and his stupidity off.

Did we have seconds or minutes?

“The door, Albedo!” Sterling ordered. He grabbed Lee’s shoulder and propelled her forward. She slipped, but Julian finally got his act in gear and grabbed her before she hit the floor.

We burst through the door and I turned to shut it, though I knew it wouldn’t save us any time.

Janet’s roar shook the door, and her club thudded against the floor.

Seconds was the answer.

“Get back, Elijah, I’ve got this!” Julian grabbed me by the back of my shirt and tossed me backward.

“Julian!”

My brother glanced over his shoulder at me before he let Oni have control and he shifted into his wolf form.

Janet barreled through the entire wall, flinging the door I'd wasted precious seconds on to the side. Her eyes caught sight of me, and she grinned.

"We've got her, Jules," Sterling announced as his wolf took over.

"Yeah, get Kitten out of here," Albedo ordered. "This bitch is about to learn why we were chosen as the Alpha Gods."

"Julian!" I grabbed Lee around the middle, there was no time. Despite us getting through the damn maze, the trial wasn't over. "Elijah, let me go!" She hit at my shoulders, flinching as she hit me too hard and it rebounded on her.

A yelp filled my ears and a spray of red blood rained down as two wolves howled. My bond throbbed with my twin's pain, but it was nothing compared to Lee.

Instead of continuing her assault, she was howling as her body thrashed back and forth and the red gem on her collar went nuts.

She couldn't talk anymore, nothing but endless screams escaped her.

Janet's eyes flicked to my mate and her lips pulled back revealing her rotten teeth in a broad grin.

"Elijah!" Baron snapped.

His words were not needed. My body was moving before I even took notice; I let my shift ripple through me and joined the others facing her.

We would protect our mate, nothing would stop us.

Julian staggered to his feet and stood beside us. The instant he was on his feet, he snarled and threw his head back in a howl, this time not in one of mourning but of promise.

This troll was dead.

Janet's attention focused on us and she lifted the one club she had left. The last had been smashed to smithereens when she'd assaulted Julian.

At least she wasn't going after Lee, that's all that mattered.

I ducked beneath a swing, the wind of it ruffled my fur from above and Julian leaped into the air, landing on the club the instant it was on the ground and ran up the stalactite.

Her head jerked to the side and her massive maw was exposed as she opened her mouth, prepared to eat my brother.

Julian gathered his feet beneath him and jumped into the air again, jumping over her head and landing on her back. Seconds later, he tore into her neck.

With Sterling and Albedo at my side, we struck at her legs, making her stumble backward.

She dropped her weapon and swung wildly. Sterling was caught in the side and it knocked the air from his lungs. He hit the wall hard with a sharp yelp and crumpled to the ground.

“Bitch!” Julian snarled before biting harder, his body trembled as he held on tight.

Lee’s cries got louder and she curled into a fetal position. Her fingers clawed at the stone floor, struggling to bring herself closer to us.

Even now, our mate only thought of us.

I was done with this. Jumping up, I went for her throat. My jaws clamped down with all my might and her nauseating thick blood filled my mouth. The taste of rotting eggs, moldy food, and cat feces would haunt me forever.

Janet screeched, dropping onto her ass as she tried to grab at me to wrench me away.

Albedo went for one arm and Sterling went for the other, keeping her from crushing me.

She struggled against us for a few moments more, but she was no match. Julian let go of his hold and slipped around the front, helping me take this beast down.

Finally, the back of her head smashed into the floor behind her and she went still.

A chuckle filled the air and Inu walked out of the exit we were so close to. “You took out Janet? I must admit, I’m impressed. This isn’t over, but... you truly could be the Gods I’m searching for.”

I snarled, prepared to add the taste of his blood to the rot that was in my mouth, but then Lee moaned. Our mate needed us.

Pushing my head against hers, I let my body tremble as the aftermath of the battle washed over me. This wasn't over? This could have been the death of us.

What else did that bastard have in store?

Not that it mattered. No matter what he threw at us next, we'd get through it and we'd keep Lee safe.



Chapter 22



## Shackled by Pain

### LEE

The pain sizzled through my body, like a set of thorny vines tied around me that electricity flowed through. Even the inside of my nose burned.

Yet the sight of Janet's defeated and crumpled form made me grin. It was worth the pain, my mates were truly the best.

But Inu's focus wasn't on his fallen soldier. Instead, his piercing blue eyes were fixed upon me. "How is his agony?" he questioned with a slow smile, nodding to Julian.

I growled at Inu in response. The pain was too intense for me to argue with him. The part of my brain that formed words had been completely shut off.

"Does it burn through your veins or is the electric shock what's pushing your pain so far? Oh, I know, maybe it's the cracked bones; Janet almost broke him in half, you know."

Snarling, I forced myself to my knees. It was better that I suffered this than them. But my voice wouldn't cooperate, no

matter what I tried.

Inu knelt beside me; the others struggled to stop him but with a wave of his hand, they found themselves pressed against the cold stone, unable to rise. He put his index thumb under my chin and slowly lifted it. “Would you like a break from this deal of ours?” His words were a soft purr and his electric blue eyes drilled into my soul. “Just nod, I know you can’t exactly speak yet.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Julian snarled. Even pressed against the ground, he pulled himself forward using his forearms for leverage. “Keep your shitty hands off her!”

“Kitty!” Sterling’s pained cry tore deep. Barb whimpered, desperate to comfort him.

“I’m going to rip that finger off and stuff it up your ass,” Albedo promised. “That’s our mate.”

Inu rolled his eyes. “Oh? And you’re willing to let her endure all this pain instead of listening to my little proposal?”

Julian’s body shuddered. His body was mangled, if Inu’s little deal was taken, he would be met with all this pain.

Reluctantly, the others quieted down. “What good boys, deciding to listen for once. Here’s my offer, Julian, Albedo, I still need the two of you to take on two more trials, alone. Agree, and I’ll give your precious Lee some relief from this endless anguish.”

I jerked my head away from his touch. With all the power I had left, I shook my head. We’d battled a troll and had almost

been drowned. There was no way Julian could endure anything half as bad in his battered state.

“Why them?” Sterling questioned with a frown.

“You and Elijah have already accomplished your tests, although the results shall be revealed only when all trials are finished. “

No! I couldn't let them risk themselves. The pain swirled through me like a living being that sought to crush me, body and soul. My tongue was ash, my jaws lead and every second only brought torment. Still, I gathered everything I had, every last ounce of strength. “No,” I whispered.

All eyes turned to me.

I wished I could summon more words, but all I could do was shake my head at them. My eyes sparkled with tears.

“Do it,” Elijah whispered. There was something in his eyes I'd never experienced before.

Defeat.

Inu snapped his fingers and the power pushing my mates down faded away and the collar terrorizing me went blissfully silent.

“This is a mistake,” I wheezed.

But it was too late. I watched as Julian fell to his knees, his arms wrapped around his middle, and he screamed before gritting his teeth and breathing heavily.

“Excellent,” Inu mused. “There are two trials left. Julian is your so-called leader, so he can be the one who goes and does the physical trial, and you, Albedo, will take on the more emotional challenge. We both know if Julian attempted that, he’s sure to fail.”

“No!” There was no way I could let Julian die like this. “Please, let him take the other challenge, Albedo can do the physical one.”

Albedo put a hand on my shoulder and hugged me close. “She’s right, it’s the best choice. I’ve got this, Jules.”

Julian glared at him. “Since when do you decide for this group?” He winced as he tried to stand taller, fresh blood staining his chest. “I’m the leader here, I can handle it!”

Albedo’s eyes narrowed and he dug his fingers into Julian’s side. Julian yelped, crumpling back against the wall.

“Yeah? And how’s that working out for you right now, fearless leader?” Albedo asked dryly. His face softened. “Look at yourself, Jules. You’re in no shape for another fight. Let me handle the physical one.”

Julian gritted his teeth as he clutched his ribs, but he didn’t argue further. After a long moment, he gave a single stiff nod. His eyes darted from mine and he dropped his chin to his chest.

Inu chuckled behind his mask. “Now that we have that little matter handled, it’s time for you two to run off to your destiny. Prove to me you deserve to be a true Alpha Gods.” He waved

to two of the doors on opposite ends of the wall. “Julian, you’re taking the one on the right, and Albedo, you get to handle the left. Do be careful, because it would be a shame if you make Lee’s pain any worse when I turn it back on.

My heart clenched as Julian and Albedo moved toward the doors.

In a few minutes, they would be taken away from me. Julian hobbled to his door, leaning against the wall and taking deep, pained breaths. My heart hurt. He needed me.

They both disappeared inside their respective challenges. The doors slammed shut behind them with an ominous thud.

“Please,” I whispered, crawling to Inu’s side. He smirked down at me. “I want to help them. They can’t do this alone.”

Inu’s reply was accompanied by a chuckle. “And you want to help them on their trials to prove themselves? What gives you that right and why should I allow you to?”

My mind raced. What could I offer him? “I’ll call out to Luci for you when the trials are over,” I whispered. “Would it be enough? He’s the one you’ve been after, right?”

I had no idea how I was going to contact the creature, but Inu didn’t know that.

“Hmmm.” Inu pondered over my offer before giving me a simple nod. “Tempting. If you fail, I’ll break your little mate bonds myself.”

Sterling growled. Rusty was prepared to take over and go to battle.

“Deal, just let me help,” I insisted.

Inu held up three fingers. “Very well, but there are three conditions.”

“Don’t listen to him,” Elijah protested. He took a step toward me and Inu glanced his way, giving him a cold glare.

“What are your terms?” I questioned.

“One, you must give them ten minutes before you run off to help. Two, you’ll only get to help one of your precious little mates, the other will be forced to take their trial on by themselves. Three, if either of them fails, I’ll be turning the collar back on and turning it up so the pain will be ten times higher than before.”

Ten minutes was a lot of time to be wasted. One of them could easily die during that, and only getting to help one made my stomach ache.

“Well, Ms. Suga?” Inu questioned.

My chin hit my chest. “Fine, I agree.” As for who I would help? As much as I wished I could help both, I had to make the smart move. I would trust Julian to pass his test. “Albedo.”

Inu nodded. “Very well, I’ll set the timer for you, and once this is all finished, we’ll see who the true Alpha God is.”

I took a spot next to Sterling and Elijah and leaned into them, trying to absorb their strength. We couldn’t talk with Inu so close, but like a hamster stuck on a wheel, only one thought kept spinning through my mind.

Why did he mention a true Alpha God in the singular route?  
What was the bastard hiding?



Chapter 23



# Deadly Allure

## **JULIAN**

I plunged into the room, the door slammed shut behind me. The instant it was closed, I let the pain do its thing as I leaned against the wall, desperate to not crumple to my knees.

Fucking troll had almost killed me.

Darkness enveloped the area, and an eerie mist coiled around my ankles.

“Julian...” Lee’s voice whispered, swirling through the shadows.

I limped forward, wincing with each step. Mirrors loomed out of the gloom, reflecting fractured images of myself - bruised, bloodied, and broken.

Had Lee seen me like this? I winced. My mate hadn’t needed to be exposed to me ever showing weakness. I wanted to show her my best parts, not this weakling.

If only Janet was still alive, I'd rip her apart again. Damn troll.

As I drew nearer to the mirrors, the reflections changed from me to my mate.

Lee scowled back at me with an expression I'd seen on my face before. Hers was hard, fed up, done with me.

"We're through," she spat. "After everything you've done, I want nothing more to do with you." Each word felt like a dagger, and I recoiled as if struck, stepping backward. "Julian, I hate you," she snarled.

I put a hand over my chest. All the pain from before was rebounding through me and now dealing with this was too much. It wasn't her, right? But it looked so much like her, down to the damned ears and collar I had forced her to wear.

"Please," I whispered. "I-I can change, you know I can."

From inside the mirror, she shook her head. Disgust twisted her pretty features. "I'm done giving you chances. All this time I've been waiting for you to prove to me you're truly sorry and that I mean a damn thing to you. Did you think because you marked me, I'd forgive you? You did your best to make me suffer the second I stepped through Silverton's doors. You're a bully, an asshole, a monster, and I refuse to even be near something like that." She turned her back to me. "Go away and leave me alone."

In the middle of the hall, I sank to my knees. My palms rested against the cold stone and I stared into the swirling

mists. My heart tightened and the pain rebounded through me, it was so much worse than my broken body.

I crawled away, unable to even look at the mirror anymore. Oni was screaming at me it wasn't real, but I couldn't get over her expression.

It was true; I didn't deserve Lee. I'd been nothing but a bastard to her for so long, and yes, I'd softened up a little but I'd practically been a monster. I deserved her hate, what I didn't deserve was her.

"Oh, Elijah," Lee murmured from nearby.

It killed me to look up, but I couldn't stop myself. Another mirror Lee stared not at me, but at my perfect brother who held her close in his arms. She stared up at him adoringly, as if nothing else in the world mattered but him.

It crushed me as much as the rejection from the last Lee.

She must have noticed me because the serene expression on her face cracked, and she glared down. "You," she sneered. "Why would you ever think I'd love you? You were nothing but a crutch until Elijah admitted how he felt about me. You are not needed here, you never were. The only one that can make me happy is him."

Hanging my head, I sought solace in the ground. There was nothing I could argue. Elijah chuckled, and a spark of rage ignited inside. My head jerked up and I glared at the smirking couple. Without another thought, I smashed my fist into the glass, fracturing the hateful image.

Blood dripped from my torn knuckles, this, but I barely felt the pain.

A sharp-pitched scream shattered my eardrums, but it was hard to focus on that pain when my heart had been snatched from my chest and thrown to the ground before being stepped on.

Why had I insisted on being with her? She would be happier without me; all she needed was the others, and when I got through this I'd let her know I wasn't holding her back anymore.

I staggered away from the shattered mirror. My breathing came in ragged pants and my eyes stung like sand had been ground into them.

“Julian?”

Her soft, sweet voice had a hum to it. I looked up and there was my mate. The mirror she peered at me from was deeper inside the array of mirrors scattered throughout the space and it glowed a silver color.

“Come, mate,” she called, with a curl of her index finger. “I need you.”

My heart thumped harder and I struggled forward. The shards of glass from the mirror I broke crunched beneath my feet. The brightness of the new mirror increased with each step and I continued until I stood bathed in its warm glow.

The Lee from inside reached through the mirror, her hand outstretched. “Julian, be with me,” she whispered.

I hesitated, mesmerized by her hypnotic eyes. How easy it would be to grasp her hand and leave this wretched trial behind...

Then I saw it - the predatory gleam in her gaze, the too-sharp teeth behind her smile. This was no loving mate, but a cunning temptress.

With a snarl, I yanked back my hand. The false Lee melted away, revealing a siren in all her terrible beauty. Her eyes were molten gold and her long hair shimmered with an electric blue light. I stumbled back, my heart pounding as she stepped from the mirror.

She smiled, her teeth razor-sharp and glinting in the light. She stalked towards me, claws unsheathed.

“Run!” Oni ordered.

Dumb wolf. If I could have managed that I would have taken off after the first mirror Lee broke my heart.

I darted between the mirrors, stumbling in my haste and doing my best to hold my tattered body together. I'd need to visit the spa after all this shit was done, Lee and I needed a couple's massage.

The siren had foregone Lee's sweet voice, I wasn't sure if I was grateful or regretting that. Her voice was far more powerful as her own. “Julian~” she called as she sauntered closer. The tips of her claws screeched against various mirrors as she stalked me.

Every move I made reminded me of how badly battered my body was. I wouldn't be surprised if I had broken ribs but no matter what, I had to make it through and keep Lee safe.

It's all that mattered.

"He's over here!" One of the nearby Lee shrieked, pointing at me and laughing. A cruel smile twisted her pretty lips.

The siren appeared at lightning speed; she cornered me against the wall and grinned as she pressed me into the stone corner.

No choice, it was time to rely on Oni again. No matter how much it hurt, I shifted and growled as the pain returned twofold.

"Stay still," the siren scolded. She stepped forward, a wide grin stretching her lips. I could smell the lust for blood coming from her.

There was only one shot at escape. I snarled and crouched down, my nose pointed to her left. Her eyes flickered toward me and I dove forward, but I was too slow. She turned her body quickly to throw her claws at me like a cat springing on its prey. I threw my body against the stone wall as hard as I could, in an attempt to bounce off of it and end up on the other side, even more bruised and battered than I had been before, but a pathway to safety glowed ahead. Coughing up blood, I surged forward as she struggled to dig her claws out of the same stone wall she'd used to corner me.

My paws were clumsy beneath me, my claws scrabbling on the floor for purchase. All it took was one mistake for her to catch up.

She lunged for me, and I dove out of the way, slamming into a mirrored Lee. She let out an unearthly wail as her image fragmented into a thousand pieces.

I barely registered the new cuts on my paws. My skin tingled and I spun around. The siren was close enough to reach out to me. She prowled towards me, certain of her prey.

She charged, but with a burst of speed, I feigned left, then darted right back towards the glowing mirror this bitch had slithered from.

She shrieked in rage, turning to go after me.

Using the last of my energy, I shifted again, hobbling forward, my goal clear. All around me, in the other mirrors, tons of Lees popped up, they pleaded with me to stop and turn back.

I steeled myself against the false tears. I wouldn't fall prey.

The lights grew brighter as I approached the mirror. Shrieks and pleas surrounded me like a tornado of sounds, but I ignored them. My hands gashed open on the rough stone, but I didn't care.

With a wild scream, I tossed the rock at the mirror. The screams increased in tempo and behind me, the siren fell to her knees as a high-pitched wail escaped her and she begged for me to stop.

I had no mercy. With another howl, I smashed the stone into the last bits of the mirror and the surrounding lights went dark.

No mirrors.

No siren.

Just me and my battered body.

The darkness swirled around me, threatening to consume me. I was broken and exhausted but I had to keep moving. I had to find a way out of this hell.

At first, there seemed to be no end in sight, but then a beam of light caught my eye. There was a doorway right in front of me and it shone with an eerie blue glow. Hand trembling, I touched the door handle and pushed it open slowly.

What lay beyond made my heart stop beating in my chest for a moment.

A creature that could only be described as a chimera walked in front of me and then crouched to prepare for battle, it was stalking an all-too-familiar form; Albedo. The monster had the body of a lion, the front paws of a dragon, and the tail of a serpent, but most strange of all was its three heads, all turned away from me but focused on whatever lay before it. It was a predator's stance.

Even if it killed me, I was not letting that thing go after Albedo. He was my pack and I'd protect him at all costs.





Chapter 24

## Chime of Destiny

### **ALBEDO**

I moved cautiously through the space past the door. After two tests had nearly killed us, I wasn't foolish enough to rush headlong into death.

But I wasn't prepared for what awaited me, instead of another puzzle or game, this area was a wide open cavern that yawned open before me, and in it, a gaping maw of glittering temptation.

Mountains of gold, priceless jewels, and ancient artifacts I recognized from my lessons...this was enough wealth to set a man up for a dozen lifetimes. Not only that, there were answers here researchers had searched their entire lives for. What secrets did this cave hold? I stepped closer, intrigued as I saw a jade statue of the Moon Goddess herself, but as I got closer, I noted it wasn't Morgan but the Goddess before her.

Lewis growled in warning as I took another step closer and the hair on the back of my neck prickled. Of course, we were

not alone, I'd been so caught up in history, that I'd forgotten about the present.

I froze, nostrils flaring as I scented the air. There, a musky odor lingered under the metallic tang of gold.

There was a faint shuffle of claws on stone from the shadows, just out of sight of the ring of torches.

This was a trap.

I backed swiftly away, my eyes scanning the torch-lit chamber for signs of my stalker. There, on the smooth cavern wall, a mural was etched into the rock. A dragon, a lion, and a snake coiled around a gemstone, above it, musical notes rose from a bell.

A flash of red eyes in the darkness sent a shiver down my spine. The thing was getting closer. With a deep growl, it stepped out of the shadows and into the light.

My breath caught at the sight of it - the body of a lion, the heavy forepaws of a dragon, and the tail of a snake. Three heads swayed above its shoulders, the dragon's head in the center wore an intricate silver crown, and a bell hanging from it tinkled with each step.

Right beneath where the bell hung, a ragged hole was thrust through the beautiful metal. What was supposed to fit there? And how would I ever get to the crown in the first place? I needed more information to solve this.

The door behind me burst open. "Albedo!" Lee cried my name and Lewis wagged his tail at the sight of her.

But why was she here? Had they allowed her to run in? She skidded to a stop beside me, taking in the chimera.

Her eyes glittered intensely, but not with fear. She set her lips in a hard line. “Stay away from my mate,” she snarled at the creature.

My heart beat harder at her words. I would do anything for her.

“Aww,” the chimera’s snake head gushed. “That’s just so romantic! Did you come barreling in here to protect your mate? Such sweetness! Such loyalty!”

The lion’s head roared as it turned toward the gushing snake. “Silence!” he growled. The air around us reverberated with his deep voice. “You two will have your romance, but it will be as your bones rot here forever.” He grinned. “But at least they’ll be together.”

The dragon nodded. “I have a taste for wolf’s flesh, it has been far too long since anyone has made it all the way to us and I tire of the little wolves shoved down here year after year. Never the ones with power or strength, but weak filth whose blood is mixed and revolting.”

Lee tensed beside me. I didn’t need to read her mind to understand the horror rebounding through it.

We’d finally arrived at one answer we’d been seeking, the fate of the other scholarship students. Those used to push the previous Alpha Gods.

My stomach clenched as I imagined tearing Inu apart for his part in all of this, and slowly torturing my father. He had been around long enough to be responsible for the deaths of many.

If only I had found my voice before all this. I could have tried to stop him.

Lee grabbed my arm and squeezed it but she kept her eyes on the giant beast that loomed over us. “You were a victim, Albedo, as much as everyone else. I can feel your guilt.”

The warmth of her touch surged through me and calmed the savage beast that peeked out.

“Enough of your chatter, prey, it’s time to eat!” The chimera lunged at us with dual roars and a hiss. The dragon’s jaws snapped at the place we’d just stood, the lion aimed for the left while the snake aimed for the right. They were determined that one of the heads would get a taste of us.

Lee and I had chosen different paths. I leaped into the air to get their attention while she dove behind a pile of treasure scattered across the cave floor.

The dragon pulled back from its attack and threw its head up, its eyes glinted as it spotted my descent. It opened its maw and I stared into its mouth as a glowing orange ball of fire built inside.

I was about to die without even doing anything for Lee. “Run!” I screamed at her as I plummeted.

“No!” the snake hissed. She bashed her head against the dragon’s, to get the prime spot. It wasn’t much, but the

distraction was enough for me to make a move.

Instead of landing in the dragon's mouth, I landed on top of its snout. I pulled myself up and reached for the bell, slapping at it with my palm.

A sweet melody rang out and the chimera froze in place. Its eyes widened and I smirked.

Until the dragon's head jerked away from me and spit out a jet of flame, melting the treasures Lee was hiding behind.

My heart clenched, but there were no endless screams or the mate bond reacting. I dared to hope she was okay.

"You thought the bell would stop us?" the dragon laughed at me. Its voice was soft but layered with power. "Foolish wolf."

Lee peeked out from behind a golden chest, where she'd once been, it left behind a golden pool. In the center, a bright red gem glittered, untouched by the fire.

Lee's eyes widened the second she saw it and she lunged forward, reaching it, she held it to her chest even as she rolled through the dangerous gold. The lion's head reached out, its snapping jaws closing in.

In slow motion, I could only watch as the sharp fangs caught her leg, piercing it and she screamed in agony, the bond giving me an echo of her pain.

Rage boiled up inside. How dare this creature touch my woman. With a savage cry, I shifted into my wolf form and launched myself at the lion's head. My jaws clamped around

its ear and I wrenched it away from Lee, blood flowing down its head as I did.

It thrashed in my grip but I refused to let go. Lee scrambled back and away, pressing a hand to her wounded leg.

At least she was safe, that's all that mattered. I let go and prepared to escape when a shadow covered me. Razor-sharp claws raked down my side, digging into my skin.

I howled in pain, but readied myself to keep fighting. Whatever time Lee needed, I would make sure she got it.

“Fool, you've bought her but a few moments of safety before we devour her, just as we're about to tear you apart,” the dragon taunted me.

There was no escape, they were too close. Their hot rank breath rolled across me.

The snake opened its mouth and prepared to plunge its fangs into me but instead of snapping down, the creature screamed and writhed, throwing the others off of their attack.

A dark creature had hold of the snake's tail, and it was not letting go. The midnight wolf dug its teeth in, ignoring its injuries as blood trailed down its body.

Julian had arrived.

I didn't question it, I tore free from the creature's grip and stumbled back to Lee's side. The deep gashes left in my flank made me gasp, but I was no stranger to hiding agonizing wounds. I wouldn't let the others worry; I bit my cries back

and firmly focused on not letting the pain flow through my mate bond.

Lee shifted and picked the gem up in her jaws. Her eyes focused on the crown the dragon still wore.

“Wait,” I hissed. “That won’t work.”

“I’ve got this,” she replied instead and took off like a rocket as she raced toward the back of the creature. The heads were fully invested in shaking Julian off its tail; they hadn’t even noticed Lee, as she scrambled up a scaly forepaw and pulled herself onto the back of the monster.

“No!” The snake jerked away and went after Lee instead. She struck at Lee, repeatedly, its fangs gleamed with venom but my mate climbed on.

The snake reared back to bite her when the lion roared and shook its head. Julian had clawed out one of its eyes. My pack leader showed no fear as he continued dodging in and out and harrying the beast.

The bell on top of the dragon tinkled as Lee pushed the gem into the hole with her snout. She bashed her head against the bell and this time, instead of a sweet melody, an awful siren of a sound erupted and the three heads reached back and howled in a toe-curling chorus.

Cracks spider-webbed through the creature and it let out an unearthly shriek as its body turned to cold unfeeling stone.

The injuries she’d sustained from the encounter vanished one by one as the bell continued its hideous chime, and as I



watched, so did Julian's.

We had done it, we'd survived Inu's final little test.

The ground rumbled beneath our paws. I looked around in alarm as the walls and ceiling shook violently.

"What's happening?" Lee yelled.

Julian's hackles rose. "I don't know, but stay close!"

We pressed our bodies against each other, taking strength in the warmth that flowed through us, preparing ourselves for another deadly encounter.

Then, with a great lurch, the floor shot straight upwards. We scrambled to stay upright, the chamber blurring around us as we ascended at an impossible speed.

But, as quickly as it had started, the rumbling stopped and the floor locked into place with a resounding thud. Still reeling, the three of us got shakily to our feet and took in our new surroundings.

We were in another large arena-like space, high stone walls encircled us. At the far end stood two familiar figures - Elijah and Sterling.

"They're okay," Lee whispered, and her relief pounded through me.

"For now," Inu agreed. Instead of being upset, we'd defeated his trials, the man walked toward us and slowly took off his mask. His blue eyes glowed with an insane light. "We are so

close to the end now and I am happy to inform you that all of you are capable of being Alpha Gods.”

Lee breathed a sigh of relief, but it only made Inu laugh.

“Capable, but that’s not how my tests work. No, there can only be one able to hold the true power of the Gods, and the winner will be the one that survives.”

I laughed. “Seriously? We got through your bullshit. Take your loss like a man. You have nothing else you can hold over us.”

Inu clicked his tongue and snapped his fingers. Like a doll with her strings cut, Lee landed on the ground and sobbed as all the lights on her collar lit up. She clawed desperately at it, her eyes bulging as the pain ricocheted through her.

Inu’s smile only grew. “You should hurry, she’ll only be able to survive a few minutes at the level I’ve got her at. I’m looking forward to seeing which of you will emerge as the true Alpha God.”



Chapter 25

## Petition to the Gods

### LEE

Blinding white-hot agony tore through me as the collar around my neck exerted its full powers on me. Every nerve was washed in a baptism from its holy fire.

I barely registered anything else happening around me. Their words were muffled as if I was underwater and fighting to hear.

Inu strolled into the middle of them. “Fight to the death or she’ll be the one that dies in front of you. I want my Alpha God.”

Elijah and Julian’s expressions were twin mirrors of pain as they glanced my way before facing each other. Albedo and Sterling weren’t in much better shape as they circled.

These idiots were going to kill themselves off to save me.

I couldn’t be any more horrified or frustrated. Thanks to Inu, I couldn’t do anything to stop it except dance like his puppet as the pain kept circulating through my system.

The only relief I had was none of it went back to my mates, I was the only one to suffer. The collar kept them from enduring my agony, at least for now.

“Did you think it would be so easy as to become a true Alpha God, by simply taking a few easy trials? This is someone I have been searching your entire lives for, the one that is worthy. You all have the blood within you for this, so whoever wins will be the one destined to shape our future.”

“Please,” Albedo begged as he continued to circle Sterling. “Stop her pain. We will still fight.” The others nodded in unison, united in their bone-headed desire to save me.

Why couldn't I be stronger? My mates were ready to murder each other, and I was nothing but a helpless damsel.

“I suppose,” Inu mused and snapped his fingers. The lights on my collar faded and the pain receded to a dull, throbbing ache, though it could intensify again in an instant at his sick whims.

“Fight with everything you have,” he purred, “else your precious Lee pays the price.”

I would have been better off trusting that Lucifer guy than dealing with this. The men growled, submitting to the cruel rules, and then as one, they charged. Sterling and Albedo went to the walls where Inu had summoned a variety of weapons while Julian and Elijah squared off with their brute strength.

I prayed with every fiber of my being, but it wasn't to the Moon Goddess. No, I prayed to that strange man I'd run into

just once before. Someone even Inu was terrified of. “*Luci, please!*” I screamed with every mental effort I had. “*Help me...*”

Julian and Elijah circled each other, fists clenched, and their faces were masks of rage. My words would never reach them in this state. All around them, the air seemed to buckle with the intensity of their emotion, sparks of electricity dancing off their skin as they moved.

Julian lunged forward, throwing a powerful punch at Elijah’s jaw.

Ducking beneath it, Elijah retaliated with an uppercut, sending Julian stumbling back and shaking his head to recover from his daze. He recovered quickly and charged again, driving his shoulder into Elijah who pinwheeled backward but stayed on his feet.

Elijah retaliated with a flurry of punches, connecting with Julian’s face and body, sending him flying across the room.

Julian got up slowly, blood streaming from his nose and mouth, before raising his fists threateningly once more. The two men faced off again in silence before launching into another brutal exchange of blows.

With every new injury, my heart twisted anew.

My head tipped back and I stared up into the sky. There was nothing amazing inside me. I wasn’t an Alpha God, chosen for my breeding or the power that could be sleeping inside me.

But I was the mate of all of them.

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath and focused on all of my bonds. I wasn't strong, but I wasn't losing even a single one of them. Bonds ran two ways and as sure as I could feel the rage and fear through them, maybe I could find a way to put it to work for me.

"Lucifer, help me," I whispered. Inu's head snapped my way, but I ignored him and clasped my hands together, focusing only on draining the power from all of my mates and taking it into myself.

"No!" Inu snarled. His hand jerked and the collar flared to life with a sick rainbow of colors dancing over my skin.

I didn't care, I'd made my choice, and even if it killed me, at least it kept them from killing each other.

One by one, the men fell to their knees and then their palms, helpless to get back up. I didn't know how this was working, it was a desperate gamble and by all rights, it should have failed. Bonds didn't work like this.

A black crescent moon spread over the back of my hand, its touch like a lit fire crawling across my skin, but I held steady, determined to see this through to the end.

"You bitch," Inu snarled. He lifted his hand and the collar switched to the highest setting. "You can't stop me from saving this world."

Pain ripped through me, agony so vivid and terrible I could barely stay conscious.

I refused to let go of the bonds and give them their power back.

And then the suffering stopped.

Everything stopped.

The world turned pitch black around me, except for one thing. The crescent moon mark branded on the top of my left hand had changed. Instead of pitch black, it was replaced with a glowing golden crescent moon.

“Well, well, I wasn’t prepared to be summoned like that, little wolf.” The man known as Luci, strode out of the shadows. His wings swept around me and the collar grew impossibly hot. I gasped, but remained still.

The trinket broke, melting away from my neck without hurting me, and fell to the ground in a useless lump of metal. “Thank you,” I whispered, my hand went to my neck and I rubbed it. Was this real? Or some sort of fever dream on the brink of my death?

“Unfortunately, since you weren’t so willing to listen to me before, this is the best I can do for you against that piece of trash.”

My heart sank. The Alpha Gods were too far gone to stop and listen to reason at this point. Inu had sparked something inside them and fanned it out of control. “I’ll do anything,” I whispered. “I have to save them, it doesn’t matter what happens to me. If you need my life, take it. Just protect my mates.”



“Luci,” chided a woman’s voice as she too stepped out of the shadows. She had wild black hair hanging to her hips and her attire was a mix of green and black hunting outfit.

I recognized her instantly and fell to my knees. “Goddess Morgan!”

She paused and smiled at me. “Yes, Lee. My sweet daughter, my friend Luci, has helped break some rules down so I could step in and help you.”

My heart resumed its frantic beating. “Help?” Was the Goddess of my kind offering to help someone like me?

She nodded. “That’s right. Your acts of bravery and self-sacrifice have reached me, Lee. You can not draw on Lucifer’s powers anymore since you’ve rejected his offer, but you can draw on mine.” She paused, studying me.

“Sweet little wolf. There’s a reason I was so drawn to you. Like my mate, you too have a soul that draws in others to love and protect you. If I wasn’t searching for my queen, your mates might have found themselves in trouble,” he purred, moving closer to me until I could feel the heat of his body.

I shivered under his intense gaze.

“Luci, look at what you’re doing to that poor girl. Behave,” Morgan scolded. She waved her arms until he stepped away from me. She smiled at me, her eyes were like the night sky itself and they twinkled with a thousand stars shimmering in their green depths. “Lee, you might have been taking Inu’s trials, but in doing so, I too have watched you, and I’ve

already made my decision about your character. You can become a Goddess at my side and put an end to this whole Alpha God charade.”

“A Goddess?” the words came out in a squeak. “You have to be mistaken! I’m nobody!”

“I’m not interested in where your family came from or the riches you possess. The only qualification I desire is to prove your soul to me. If you want to stop Inu and the rest of his little Zodiac Council, then you must throw aside your bonds and accept your new role.”

“No,” I answered the instant she finished talking. “I’m never giving up my mates. They mean more to me than this world.” I looked away from the two of them. “I’d let the world burn down if it meant keeping them safe.”

Luci chuckled, and the sound sent shivers through my soul. “I knew I liked you, little wolf,” he mused into my ear.

“I see,” Morgan sighed. “Then that means there is nothing I can do to put a stop to this sick game of theirs. Many others will come after you and they will suffer, doomed to die one after the other for this dream Inu chases after. If he ever got what he wanted, he’d never even know what to do with it.”

“There has to be another way. I won’t sacrifice my mates, but there has to be something!”

The Moon Goddess didn’t seem disturbed in the least I was yelling at her. “There is one viable option, but it’ll only be enough power to help you, and will do nothing for the rest of

the Zodiac Council. They, and their ilk, will remain loose and able to torture their own students.”

My stomach clenched. I’d been so focused on the problems of Silverton, I’d never imagined they could branch elsewhere. “What will happen to them?”

Morgan shook her head. “I cannot tell you. My realm only applies to my wolves. Take my hands, Lee. I promise I will not take away the bonds to your mates, however, in order to unlock this power for you, something does have to be sacrificed. Power never comes without a price.”

“Anything,” I answered without a thought.

“You might regret those words,” Morgan mused. She gave me a small smile. “I’ll be taking all the power of the Alpha Gods away, the only one that will possess it will be you, Lee. You will be a true Alpha Goddess and the one capable of taking that monster out.”

“Why didn’t anyone stop him before?” I stared at Luci, who lounged on the wall beside me. He seemed perfectly content to listen to our conversation. “Isn’t this entire Zodiac thing against you? Why aren’t you fighting back?”

Luci glanced away from me. “My powers have not completely returned. I could take on one or two, easily, however, if they all ganged up on me, even I would have problems getting out of it in one piece and there’s no doubt many of my warriors would be lost in the process. No, I refuse to put anyone, whose life I care about at risk.”

“But,” I objected.

“I know,” he answered with a faint smile that didn’t reach his lips. “But I choose my battles and the ones I’m willing to put myself on the line for. Perhaps I’ll be able to make a pact with one of the other school saviors. For now, though, this is all I can offer you, Lee, and your decision must be made now. Luci can’t keep time paused forever. He has already used a lot of his power to help you drain your mate bonds.”

“Can’t I ask my mates before we take all their powers?” I glanced over my shoulder at the frozen Alpha Gods. Each of their features was twisted with an unquenchable rage. “This isn’t a decision I can make without them.”

“There’s no time, Lee. Accept, and put a stop to this.”

Closing my eyes, I let my chin hit my chest. They could hate me all they wanted then, but I would keep them alive no matter what. I would rather have them be around to hate me, than for any of them to die.

“Take it,” I whispered, closing my eyes and clenching my fists.

“Very smart choice, my little wolf,” Luci praised. “I’ll make sure you’re well rewarded for this.”

Nothing mattered to me except finally putting an end to Inu, and his schemes; and for the other schools?

One day I’d save those too.



Chapter 26

## Judgment Day

### LEE

The words left my lips, and Morgan took my hands in hers, giving them a tight squeeze. “So be it.”

The world around me came back into shockingly sharp focus. My four mates were still locked to the ground, held captive, not only by their lack of power since I had taken it away, but also by a blinding white light coming from my crescent moon.

It lit the area up around me and warmed my body. Morgan was nowhere to be seen, she and Lucifer had both vanished the instant the world had gone back into motion.

“What did you do?” Inu seethed. He turned toward me, his eyes were two glowing blue orbs that sparked with his fury. It dripped from him. “Lee,” he growled my name as he strode toward me.

My mates were forcefully shifted into their wolf forms, and the power still refused to let them go. They panted beneath the

burden and fought against the bonds that held them tight.

It's not that I blamed them for being upset. I had betrayed them and taken their power without talking to them, but it was worth not losing them, as selfish as my decision had been.

“You're going to pay for ruining everything, bitch,” Inu sprung at me, his hands were sharpened claws. “I should have known better than to let you live after you claimed Lucifer tainted you. I'll rip you apart with my claws and this place will be holy again.”

Keep him talking, it was the only option I had left. I couldn't take this man on, one on one, and expect to succeed. No matter what the Goddess had said, it would be stupid to even try. “Lucifer did not taint me.”

He scoffed. “If he so much as touched you, then you were infected with his filth. I suppose I should be grateful you've brought me four possible Alpha Gods, it's a shame they all showed up at once, however, my methods will not change. Once you're dead, I'll use the powers of the other Alpha Gods to take over their minds and force them to fight until all but one is dead. This university only exists for this one task and I promise you, tainted wolf, I'll create an Alpha God. And after I've trained them, Lucifer's reign will be over before it even begins.”

I clenched my fist until it stung, then froze. It was faint but there was something different about my bonds, they weren't just with the men on the ground anymore. Like a stone being

tossed in a lake, with the ripples growing and lapping at the shore, I felt them wake one by one.

Like a gentle sprinkle of rain at first, but as each mind linked with mine, the impact got more intense, until it felt like I had released a raging river. They focused on only one emotion, revenge.

Hundreds of minds connected to me from all over the university. Most were groggy as if they were waking up.

Inu froze mid-strike and stared as his claws shrunk back to normal nails. “What?” he sputtered. He turned and stared at my mates as if they were the cause. “What’s going on? What did you do?” He shuddered before glaring fiercely at me.

“Barb,” I called, connecting to my wolf once more.

She answered in an instant, dipping her head to me. “Lee.”

“Those voices... try to talk to them. I think they’re all the past Alpha Gods.”

Inu threw himself at me and we both went down hard. My teeth rattled in my head as his heavier frame pinned me down. His hands went to my neck and they wrapped around it as he pressed down with all the strength left in his body.

I brought my knee up, thrusting it into his stomach. He gasped but didn’t let go, instead, he tightened his hold.

Bastard.

“Bastard!” a hundred voices called out, echoing through my mind.



The world dimmed around me as he squeezed so tight that the veins on his arms stood out. “Die, you pest,” he growled into my face.

I’d gone through far too much to get into this school, for everything to end like this. With a wild cry and summoning up all the training I’d endured, I smashed my fist into his side, just below the ribs. Claws slipped from my nails and sliced into him.

It wasn’t much, but he let go for half a second and that’s all I needed to bring my knee up again, directly between his legs, with all my might. He howled and rolled off me, I scrambled to my feet and took a breath into my aching lungs.

“Traitor,” snarled a rumbly voice from the exit. A monstrous black wolf forced his way into the room, eyes trained on Inu. “We’ve stood by and watched as you used our powers to carry out your little experiments, not to mention the multiple wolves you’ve tortured.”

“Silverton,” Inu gasped. “How? You’re nothing but a battery! How are you even alive?”

The wolf chuckled. “You think I’m the only one?” He looked at each of his sides and waves of stone wolves entered at his side.

“They’re waiting for our judgment...” Barb let me know. “Why?”

Another wolf limped into the room, he only had one eye and he was snarling like a feral creature. “Goddess, give us the

command,” he begged. He licked his chops.

Goddess? But I’d turned that down. Whatever, if they were offering to be the executors, then so be it. “Kill him,” I thought to all the minds as strongly as I could.

More of them entered the room in sets of two and three. Coats of various colors, but all with white eyes focused on my enemy. Some were big, others small and all ready to fight.

“No,” Inu whispered, backing up. “This is a mistake. I’m only trying to save the world. You can’t do this.”

“Like it was a mistake when you tried to kill me?” I sneered. “You deserve this, Inu. You’re the one that took their lives from them, it’s only fair they get to repay the favor.”

The wolves stared at me, transfixed by my every word. Even the first Alpha God did nothing but wait for my command.

Using the hand with my glowing palm, I pointed at Inu, and as if their heads were all tied to a string, every wolf looked his way. “Get him,” I ordered.

The wolves howled in a haunting chorus, they raced forward, and like a tidal wave of fur, fangs, and claws, they tore into their captor.



Chapter 27

# Goddess

## **ELIJAH**

My senses and strength only returned when Inu's mask fell to the ground with a soft, woody thud.

One by one, the others came out of their stupors. Julian held his head in his hand, searching through the hundreds of wolves. What had happened? My memories were fuzzy at best and it looked like it was the same for the others.

“Kitty?” Sterling got to his feet, practically falling over.

Why did we feel so weak?

All that remained of Inu was his hated wooden mask. The man himself had been reduced to a bloody mess.

“Who the fuck are all of you?” Julian growled at the strangers. Lee was apart from us, stuck in the middle of a crowd of monsters. Would they turn on her?

A giant of a wolf that made even us look up loomed to us. “Did manners die while I was locked up in here? You're my

juniors I imagine, so you better behave and not use such crude language around our Goddess. You can call me Alex Silverton. The original Alpha God.”

Goddess? I couldn't absorb anything past that word. Had Lee been the one to ascend out of all of us?

“Elijah!” Lee pushed her way through the wolves, running to each of us and giving us tight hugs. The collar Inu had forced her to wear before was long gone. How had she endured so much pain and not had any traces left behind? I'd felt an echo of it course through our mating bond. How was I only feeling joy now?

No, there was a hint of guilt that trailed through her, but what in the world could she feel guilty about?

None of it mattered. I took her in my arms and hugged her tight, kissing the top of her head. Her scent calmed me, and Baron relaxed.

Somehow, we'd all survived.

“Lee? What's wrong?”

“Goddess,” Alex interrupted again, glaring at us from his spot surrounded by the growing number of wolves. “You saved us from an eternity filled with endless pain and suffering. Morgan herself came from the heavens to bless you, and all of us here will lie our lives down to keep you safe. And if you get tired of those mates of yours, there are plenty of Alpha Gods who would be more than willing to show you what true power is.”

Julian growled, and Lee smacked him on the back of his head. “Stop it! Don’t pick a fight with them, you’re outnumbered and in case you forgot, I picked you guys as my mates. Not them.”

I chuckled. “She’s got you there, Jules.”

“Don’t tell me you were happy about others trying to horn in on our mate,” he snapped back at me. “Shut up, Elijah.”

It was strange. The bond between us wasn’t the same as it was before, there was something stronger about it.

“Lee, please tell us what happened,” Albedo requested. “I can’t remember much since the whole fight started.”

“I’m sorry,” she blurted, glancing away from us. “I had to do something without asking any of you, and I’m so sorry.”

“What did you do, Kitty? No matter what, we’re always on your side,” Sterling added.

A strange mark marred her pretty flesh. A golden crescent moon stood out on the back of her hand. I brushed my hand across it and she shivered before seeking warmth in my chest.

“I made a deal with the Moon Goddess,” she whimpered.

Wait, I hadn’t heard her correctly. “Did you say the Moon Goddess?”

She nodded. “I was desperate to stop Inu, and she promised to grant me the power, but I had to sacrifice the power you all had as Alpha Gods.”

I tilted my head. “But I don’t feel any different. If anything, I feel stronger.”

Her brows furrowed. “But she said...”

“Excuse me for interrupting,” the giant Silverton wolf butted in. “Considering you carry the mark of a Moon Goddess, I think it’s time you accept you’ve become one.”

Lee stared at her hand. “Wait, how do you know that?”

The wolf smirked. “Well, I was the smartest student this school has ever seen.”

The one-eyed wolf snorted beside him. “A lot of good your smarts did, oh brave Alpha.”

Alex gave him a dark look. “We were all in the same situation, think about it, an Alpha God isn’t the one that survived all this.”

“Now what?” one of the smaller wolves questioned. He sniffed the air around him and circled several times, searching the area. “Do you know what happened to the scholarship students? I’ve been waiting to find Iris again.”

Lee winced and glanced away. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

Albedo put a hand on her shoulder and faced the wolf. “Inu sacrificed all the previous scholarship students. None of them survived the trials.”

Alex growled and turned to glare at Inu’s mask. “I wish he was still alive so we could kill him again for everything he did.”

“What about the Dean?” questioned Max. He looked at us. “That bastard is still around, right?”

Albedo nodded. “He is,” he agreed softly.

Lee put her hand over Albedo’s and got to her feet. “I can’t let you go after the Dean,” she told the gathering of wolves.

Alex nodded. “I don’t understand why you would want to protect anyone involved with this, however, you are our Goddess and you freed us. No matter what you wish, the Alpha Gods will bend the laws of the world itself to make it happen for you.”

“She’s got a mate,” Julian objected with a scowl. “You fuckers stay away from her.”

“Julian,” I corrected him. “They’re not your enemies. They’ve been suffering all the time.” I turned to Alex and nodded to him. “My name is Elijah Newton, one of the current Alpha Gods. Am I correct in assuming you all could see everything going on around you?”

Alex grunted. “Yeah, that’s right. They all had to come right by me, I thought for sure you’d all be added to his little collection.” He trotted to Lee’s side and sat, staring up at her. “Thank you, Goddess.”

“Her name is Lee,” Albedo corrected. “And Lee, you don’t have to try to protect me. I don’t want to protect my father, he deserves the same fate as Inu.”

In my opinion, he deserved a fate worse than that, but I’d settle for that mild form of revenge. “As much as I’d love for



us all to stand here and figure everything out, I think our group is tired and we need to rest. It's been a long day for all of us."

"Very well." Alex moved to the middle of the room and sat down again, staring at the legion of waiting wolves. "This university is now under my control. The Dean will answer for his crimes, with the Goddess deciding his ultimate punishment. All of those here will return to what families you might have left and reveal the truth. Silverton will survive the scandal, and when it's over, we're going to build the best university in the world." He glanced over at Albedo. "As for you, come and see me tomorrow after you've gotten some rest. I want to talk to you about your future within this university."

"Thank you," Lee whispered to him. The great wolf bowed to her and then, like a giant wave, all the other wolves followed suit. Lee's cheeks turned cherry red and she looked my way for help.

"Yes, thank you," I repeated her words. "We couldn't have stopped Inu without all of you."

Lee wrapped her arm around mine and rested her head against my shoulder. Her exhaustion ebbed through our bond. "Let's go back to Julian's apartment," I suggested.

Julian glanced over at my words and shook his head. "No, we're going back to our apartment." He glared at Alex and the rest that stayed prone on the ground. "We'll deal with you all tomorrow," he snarled.

Lee sighed and glared over at him, though she didn't move from my side. "Do you always have to be such an asshole? It's

hard to convince people you have a good side to you when you're a prick all the time.”

He grunted, but at least didn't say another word.

With an arm around her shoulders, I lead Lee and the rest of our little pack out of Inu's demented trials. I had no doubt Alex, and his men, would find the Dean and keep him from running away but that was a problem for another day.

Right now, we were going to spend some quality time with our mate and nothing was going to stop us.



Chapter 28

## Kitty Love

### **STERLING**

We made it to the apartment and I collapsed on the first stool I could get my aching body on. Every muscle in my body screamed for rest. The others slumped around Julian's tiny kitchen table, looking just as haggard. We'd survived the battle, but only just.

Lee's stomach rumbled, and Elijah lifted his head from the smooth table. "Don't worry, I've got this," he assured us as he staggered to Julian's fridge. He opened it and inspected its contents for a long minute with a shake of his head. "You're lucky I know how to cook, Jules."

Despite his complaints, the sizzle of meat soon had my nose twitching, and drool dripped from the corner of my lip. Whatever he'd discovered, I couldn't wait to eat it.

Julian looked over. "What the hell did you find? I thought all I had were some steaks, but that doesn't smell like anything I've ever made."

Elijah glanced over his shoulder with a lifted brow. “Yeah? That’s because you’re more like dad, and you don’t care to learn the finer arts of cooking. Mom might not be the best at it, but at least she tries.”

Julian glanced away, his shoulders sagging. “You know, that’s something I wanted to talk about.”

“Mom’s cooking?” Elijah pulled some coffee out of the cabinets and ground it.

“No, tomorrow, I’m having a talk with Dad.” Julian sighed before he lifted his head and gazed at Lee. “I want him to know what’s important to me, and lay it all on the line. If he wants to disown me after I’ve had my say, so be it. I don’t give a damn, all I need is in this room.”

Lee leaned against me, her eyelids fluttering. “Want to go to bed?” I offered her.

Though she had to be beyond exhausted, she shook her head. “Not until I eat, after today I could eat a whole cow.”

Julian’s monkey chittered and clambered onto his lap, leaning against his stomach until Julian stroked it.

“Almost done,” Elijah let us know as he flipped the steak, and a fresh burst of roasted coffee beans and wagyu aroma filled the kitchen. My stomach growled at the reminder it’d been such a long day.

Lee’s head continued to nod, but her nose twitched like a rabbit. Oh, how I wanted to hoard her to myself, if even for a few hours. She was ours, it was hard to believe.

Elijah threw some sauces into the pan and the fire danced as another burst of delectable smells erupted from his cauldron of magic. He grabbed a ladle and expertly splashed sauce over our meal before he slid piping hot plates in front of us.

“Elijah,” Lee moaned as she took a tiny piece and let the meat melt on her tongue. “This is the best dish ever. Would you mind making some extra? I want to visit my family now that everything is over.”

“Anything for you,” Elijah agreed with a rare, sweet smile. “However, when Jules goes to have his talk with Mom and Dad, I won’t be able to make it. I need to apologize to Alexandra. Without meaning to, I’ve been a dick to her, chasing her all these years. I won’t feel right about starting our life together until I make it right.”

Lee nodded. “I think that’s for the best. Who knows how long it will take before we uncover information about the rest of that Zodiac Council, or whatever they were? But we won’t let any other schools suffer this same fate.”

I put a hand over hers and gave her a gentle squeeze. “That’s right. Together, we’ll track them all down and put them all out of business.”

Silence descended over our little group as we indulged in the perfectly cooked steaks. Two flavors that shouldn’t work together, but somehow Elijah had married the buttery taste of Wagyu with the expensive coffee that Julian prided himself on.

When the last bite of steak was finished, we pushed ourselves away from the table. Elijah and Julian both hugged

Lee between them, giving her a kiss on each cheek. “I’m going to take care of this tonight, I’ll see you tomorrow,” Julian promised.

“What he said,” Elijah agreed with a kiss on her brow. “I’ve decided to go with him as backup. It’s about time we showed our family we will not be used against each other any longer. We’re a united front.”

Julian scoffed. “Yeah, we’ll see about that, little bro.”

Elijah sighed. “We’re twins, remember?”

“I still came out first, so I’m older. Besides, are you sure you’re ready to disappoint Dad as much as I do? I know I make it look easy, but I promise it’ll make someone like you squirm a bit.”

Elijah slung an arm around Julian’s shoulders and hugged him. “We’re in this together. Tonight I’ll be your backup to handle your thing, and tomorrow, I’ll talk to Alexandra and finish mine. It’s time for us both to move on from what’s been holding us back.”

Julian tilted his head, glancing at Albedo, who was almost asleep on his plate. “Hey, you should keep that meeting with Alex tomorrow. I don’t trust that asshole one bit but I do trust you. Make sure this school isn’t going to turn back into what it was before.” He glanced back at Lee. “And, we need to have a serious talk about the standards expected of students who wish to enroll in the school. It’s about time those that deserve to be in Silverton can make it no matter what their background is.”

Lee finished her food and took the dishes to the sink, automatically grabbing the soap and a sponge and getting to work. Following her lead, I grabbed the plates from the others and joined her.

She glanced my way. “You don’t have to do that. I’ve got this.”

I gave her a half-grin. “If we do it together, it’ll be done in half the time. No boring quests for you to solo.”

“We’ll see you guys tomorrow,” Julian and Elijah called as they slipped out of the apartment.

Albedo smiled, staring past us. “I’ll get out of here too, it’s about time you guys had some alone time.” He winked at me. “You better take care of her, if I’m not sensing you’re doing the job, then I’ll have to tag in.”

Rust growled at the challenge, but I reined him in, instead, I smirked and lifted my chin. “Oh yeah? You’ll know soon enough.”

I should have kept my mouth shut. The truth was I had zero idea how I was going to take care of her the way she deserved to be, but I’d be damned if I didn’t try.

Albedo took his time giving Lee a gentle kiss on the cheek. “I’ll be back tomorrow, Kitten. I’ve got a date with a dorm room that needs to be fixed.” He gave her a wink, and with a final wave to me, he too left the apartment.

Every instinct I had told me to race for the door and lock it, but I was also worried about how Lee might respond. Would



she get upset at any assumptions on my part?

Lee slipped her hand into mine and intertwined our damp fingers. “Let me get the door,” she offered.

She clicked the lock closed and turned toward me. She took a deep breath before she stepped to me and grazed her palms across my chest, her nails made me shiver beneath her touch.

I was lost in her eyes, in her every movement.

And then, like a string that had been holding me back was cut, I moved forward. My fingers didn't fumble at her buttons, and I slipped her shirt off of her, kissing every spot of skin I exposed. She made appreciative little murmurs with each one. Her eyes fluttered as if I was putting her under a spell.

My fingers went to her bra and by some grace of the Goddess, I succeeded in finding the hooks and freeing her perfect breasts. I gently kissed beside her nipple, not quite committing to giving her any satisfaction yet and I was rewarded with a soft throaty moan from the woman I'd loved since the moment I'd met her.

It hadn't mattered she was digital at the time, all that did now was we'd found each other and we were mates, like I'd always believed. Rust growled, impatient with my slowness.

He would just have to be frustrated, I was enjoying every second.

“Sterling,” she whispered, her head tilting back as I lavished her collarbone with soft kisses.

The little catch in her voice was too damn addicting. “Yeah?” I whispered, kissing down to above her breasts.

The only answer she could give me was a moan, and the tip of my tongue flicked out, swirling around her nipple. She shuddered at my touch, her knees threatening to give out.

I pulled her into my arms, my hands going beneath her knees, holding her close. “Let’s take this somewhere else,” I offered.

She might not know my plans, but I’d been confident since the moment we’d first kissed last night. It was about time I treated her like the Goddess she’d always been to me.

I carried her, not into the bedroom where I’m sure she expected me to go, but into the bathroom. I set her on the porcelain sink and she leaned against the mirror, making soft little puffs as she tried to control herself.

With a smirk, I slipped her skirt off and hooked my fingers into her panties before I slid them off her body and let them fall to the ground.

Her heartbeat sped up, and her arousal sparked through our bond. My cock twitched at seeing her exposed to me for the first time, though far from the last.

I knelt before her and her eyes widened as I gently parted her thighs. My warm breath made endless moans slip from her sweet lips. “Sterling,” she moaned, in a yelp the moment my warm tongue lapped at her sweetness.

The sound of her pleasure was driving me mad, every cry drove me forward, my tongue swirling faster around her clit. I pushed her legs as wide as they could go so I could have access to every inch of her.

Her fingernails raked down my back and I groaned at the roughness; she was losing herself and it was all because of me. Warmth burst through the bond and her fingers twisted into my hair. “Sterling!” her cries were so fervent I could have believed she was praying to me.

In response, my tongue moved faster, sliding and twisting the sensitive bit of skin until she was panting. Her thighs trembled and her whole body tensed as every second I drove her closer to the edge.

Her orgasm hit her in rolling waves, her juices flooded over my eager tongue.

I didn't stop prolonging her pleasure until she went limp against the mirror, dazed in the afterglow.

Slowly, I pulled away from her trembling pussy and placed a tender kiss against it. She whimpered and moaned at the touch, staring at me through half-lidded eyes. She gave me a faint smile as I slipped my own clothes off.

Taking my time, I set up a steaming hot shower.

Lee put her hand on my shoulder and gently turned me around. She slipped off the sink and got to her knees, staring up with a wicked gleam in her eyes. “My turn,” she purred.

My body trembled at her call, and I grinned. “I’ve always been yours, Kitty.”

Lee grazed the pads of her fingers against my shaft, careful to not hurt me, but such a light touch was only driving me crazy. She kissed the underside, and my cock twitched. It was impossible to hide how excited she made me.

Lee smiled and brushed her hair behind her ears before she took me into her mouth. Her tongue swirled around my head in ways that made my knees go weak. I braced myself against the wall so I wouldn’t fall over on her but her every touch was enough to break through my limits.

Despite her being my Goddess, I was to the point where all I wanted to do was throw her in the shower, push her against the wall, and fuck my mate until I was the only one she would think about for the remainder of the night.

I was lost in the wet heat of her mouth, and the sight of her on her knees before me, her head bobbing up and down as she took me all the way in, my tip brushing against the back of her throat.

She was a master at exploiting my weaknesses, loved and she applied them mercilessly. Pressure here, a graze of teeth there—she played my body like a finely tuned instrument and I shuddered beneath her mastery.

I tangled my hands in her hair, struggling not to thrust too deeply but unable to stop the motion of my hips as we settled into a rhythm.

The little vixen purred around my length, the vibrations shooting straight to my core.

She deserved to be cherished and loved, for me to spend every waking moment focused on taking care of her. Yet, in seconds, she had driven me to my brink. “Kitty, I—I can’t—“ The words died in my throat as my release crashed over me in waves, and I held her tight, watching her drink every last drop. I didn’t let go until I was spent and trembling.

Hopefully, she wasn’t about to be upset. I hadn’t meant to rough handle her at the end.

Lee rose like the Goddess she was and wrapped her arms around my neck. Her bare body pressed against mine and my cock jolted to life again, my hardness pushing against her soft wetness.

Her fingers lightly wrapped around me, and she stroked me with a sweet smile on her lips. “Ready for round two, Rusty?” she teased with a soft kiss against my jaw.

I was ready for round one hundred as long as it was with her.

My control snapped, and I jerked the shower curtain to the side, hurrying her into the space, and I pinned her against the wall. “Kitty, I won’t be able to hold back. I’ve wanted you for so damned long.”

Her eyes sparkled like the most beautiful sky I’d ever seen. “Did I tell you to hold back?”

With a groan, I leaned forward and sealed her lips with a searching kiss as my body pressed against hers. Her legs

wrapped around my hips and I kissed her harder, lining up my throbbing cock with one hand to her slick entrance.

We'd need to look into making sure we had lube everywhere for the future.

She moaned into my mouth as I slid inside her wetness. Her inner walls tightened around me like we were always meant to fit snugly.

I held her up, thrusting into her as I continued to deepen the kiss, enjoying being able to taste her in two different ways at the same time. With every thrust of my hips, she mewled into my mouth and wriggled closer so I could sink even deeper into her heaven.

We moved in sync, me thrusting upwards and her pushing down, a back-and-forth dance as old as time. The water streamed over us, steam rising in clouds, but I was blind to everything except the woman in my arms.

Lee's hands fell to my shoulders and her nails sunk into me as she panted. Her body trembled against mine for one long delicious moment before she shattered around me with a long cry and her pussy tightened, squeezing me to the point of no return and I spent myself into her quivering body.

We held each other beneath the steam and shower sprays, taking shaky breaths as we smiled shyly.

No matter what our future held, we were going to handle it together. I grabbed a robe off a hook and wrapped it around her before carrying her back to the bedroom.

Thankfully, all the robot pets had vacated the area, it would have been awkward if they had stayed, though it wouldn't have stopped me.

I was alone with my mate and we had all the time in the world to explore each other. Whatever might come tomorrow, I'd handle it then, this moment was for my beautiful Goddess and all the ways I'd make her sing.



Chapter 29



## Settling Old Debts

### **ALBEDO**

Getting a solid sleep had been next to impossible. It wasn't so much the fact I had holed up in my old classroom and slept on the floor, but more along the lines that I got to experience how well Sterling had cared for my little kitten.

And more than once. I hadn't thought the bond would respond the way it had with such intense feedback.

Stretching out, I rolled out from under my covers and picked the area back up. The meeting with Alex Silverton wasn't too far off and I wanted to get there early. Lee felt satisfied, I wanted her to, but on the other hand, I wanted to be the one to make her purr.

Running a hand through my hair, I yawned and grabbed a suit out of my private bathroom closet. I hated having to dress up for this, but it was smartest to be in my best. Maybe I could convince the man to change some things around this damned school.

Using the bathroom, I took a quick shower, letting the hot water pound against my skin and wash away the pent-up desires simmering in my blood. Once finished, I put the suit on and adjusted it until I was satisfied, I at least looked professional.

I put away my things and locked the door behind me. Where was Alex supposed to be, anyway? He hadn't exactly given me clear instructions.

"Hey, you're Albedo, right?" A young man leaned against the wall beside my door, an eye patch obscured a blazing blue eye. "This way, Alex is in the conference room."

I wasn't being given a choice about attending this little meeting, so I followed. During the familiar walk, I kept my senses alert. These were the same Silverton halls I'd walked thousands of times before, and yet an energy hummed in the air.

The halls were full of new students and all had one thing in common, a haunted look in their eyes. How much had they felt of what Inu had done to them?

"You," sneered an all too familiar voice. I glanced up and spotted Carl waiting outside the conference room door. His lip rolled back and he scoffed. "This meeting is for real Alpha Gods."

My companion cleared his throat. "There's none of that here anymore, Albedo was personally called in by Alex. If you want to argue with anyone, I suggest you bring it up with him."

Carl looked like he'd swallowed a fly. He dropped his head and his eyes focused on the ground. "Sorry," he mumbled.

"Go in," my eye-patched friend suggested. "We've been waiting for you."

I shivered at the chill in his words. There was such malice sparking in the depth of his eyes. With a nod, I moved into the conference room and froze a foot in.

My father, the former Dean of the school, was at the head of the table, the same as ever. However, he was no longer the man in charge, he was strapped down to his precious chair and a knotted white rag had been thrust into his mouth. As soon as he saw me his eyes widened and he wriggled as he tried to escape.

"Silence," Alex snapped at him. My father went still but turned his wide, panicked eyes to me.

The nerve. How many times had I given him that look? That silent plea when I had begged him to save me? No, there was no mercy left in my heart, and Lewis rumbled in agreement. Whatever his fate was, it had nothing to do with us.

"Albedo," Alex nodded to me. "Considering the Dean is your father, we've agreed that given your part in our liberation, the choice of what happens to this... individual rests solely with you."

My father wilted in his seat. We both were intensely aware there was no pity left in my body. There was nothing but endless hatred.

“I don’t care what happens to him. As far as I’m concerned, he’s nothing but a stranger.”

Alex tilted his head, observing me closely. His deep green eyes resembled an untamed forest, a potential danger if I wasn’t cautious. “This isn’t something you can pass off to someone else, he is guilty of countless crimes. Due to his willingness to work with Inu, many have suffered these so-called Alpha God tests.”

I turned my focus back to the man who had been my demon for all of my life. Even though he had brought me into this world, there was nothing left in me. “Punish him for his crimes, don’t hold back, I’d suggest killing him but that would be too good for him. He deserves to suffer.”

Alex grinned at my response and nodded. “Very well, we will arrange a listing of all the charges against him and then create a suitable punishment that will last until his dying breath. You know, I was worried because of your connection with him that you might try to use your bond with the Goddess to make us go easy on him.”

“That bastard deserves death,” I growled.

“That’ll come, just not right away. In any case, I think you’d be an asset to this school. While I’m the one now in control, I need someone to be in charge and be my new Dean. You have teaching experience, and I trust you far more than any other teacher in this place.”

Wait. Was he offering me the Dean position?

My father's face turned red and he mumbled around his gag, desperately trying to interrupt.

How good would it feel if I accepted his beloved position right out from under his nose? How many years of his torment would it take away?

"I appreciate the vote of confidence, but I don't think it's a wise move. I got to mark my mate fairly recently, and I plan to spend every waking minute with her until she gets bored with me. Besides, you do know this isn't the only school under the control of those assholes."

Alex chuckled. "Your acknowledgment only makes me want you to accept this position more. You're right, we don't have all the details yet, and because Inu is gone, what we have is scraps at best. However, it's already been established that we will create teams to go to other schools and inspect them. If any of the others have these kinds of sick games going on, we'll handle it."

"Don't let that bastard Carl keep his Alpha God position."

"Oh?" Alex moved closer. "Do tell why."

"He was a puppet of my father's, desperate to follow any order. He tried to take advantage of my mate by using some sort of fake smell."

Alex's eyes turned to ice and he turned his head toward the door. "I'll kill that bastard myself. No one touches my Goddess."

Lewis caught that little possessive word and he didn't like it. "Listen, I understand you're the original, but if you think you're going to get anywhere with my mate, I'm here to put you in your place. She already has four mates, she doesn't need anyone like you."

Instead of getting upset, Alex laughed. "You think I'm after her for a mate? Never. She is our Goddess, someone to be worshiped and protected. You better watch your back, if you ever do anything to upset her we'll be the ones to punish you."

That was fair. If I ever did anything to hurt her, I'd strap myself to a cross of silver for a month.

Wait. I smirked. "I've got an idea for punishment, after all. Whatever else you have planned, make sure you strap him to silver daily, and every time his wolf tries to heal him, punish him. I want him to endure a taste of what he did to me."

Alex flashed me a smile. "That can certainly be arranged. Though I am disappointed, you don't want to be my Dean, Albedo. Is there anything I can offer you that could make you change your mind?"

What a silly question. I already had everything I wanted. "Sorry, all I want is my mate, but even though it won't make me change my mind, I have a suggestion for you."

He raised a brow.

"Change how Silverton runs. I don't know how close you were to the other scholarship students, but Lee was ours. She deserves to be in this school far more than half the students in

this place. She didn't get in by having the right blood, she got in by working her ass off and I know without a doubt this place will be better off if more like her are let in."

Alex absorbed my words, his face didn't reflect his thoughts. He nodded. "I'll take your words under advisement, but I can't guarantee anything. I might have the oldest claim to this school, and the council that runs it, but I'm not the sole decider."

"That's all I ask." I shook his hand a final time and made my way back to the door. I wasn't sure what was about to become of Silverton, though I doubted it could get any worse. All I wanted, all I knew, was I needed to get back to Lee before my heart burst. I'd done my duty and now it was time for my reward.



Chapter 30



## Indulging Desires

### LEE

Everything had a delicious ache by the time I woke up. Sterling had slept beside me with one hand wrapped around my stomach as he nuzzled against the back of my neck, even in his sleep he wanted the constant touch.

Wriggling out from beneath his light grip, I turned and stared down at his sleeping form and resisted the urge to brush his unruly hair from his face. My cheeks still burned from the night we'd had, but I didn't regret a minute of it.

Never had I felt more treasured or been treated like a literal deity.

Sterling's eyes fluttered open as if he could sense the heat of my gaze and gave me a crooked smile. "Kitty, it's too early. Come back to bed." He patted the spot next to him.

"Sorry." I shook my head at his suggestion. There was no way I could just curl back up, one of my mates was nearing.

Sterling cocked his head. “Ah, Albedo is almost here.” He chuckled and tossed the covers back. “I guess that is my signal to leave the house for a bit.”

“Wait, you don’t have to go.” I reached for him as he slipped off the bed.

The robot animals had all curled up in the room’s corner in one big pile, with the monkey treating the others like his personal pillows. The cat looked up at me and mewed a soft greeting before the monkey flopped over, and a paw hung over her eyes.

They didn’t want to start their day yet, either.

“They’re like their owner,” Sterling chuckled as he got dressed, bending and tossing me my undergarments. “I’ve got a feeling you’re going to be purring all day, Kitty.”

I picked up a pillow and tossed it at his smirking face. He chuckled and fluffed it before putting it back down on the bed.

Reluctantly, I got dressed, not wanting to be the only nude one. The instant I shrugged on one of Julian’s shirts and flipped my hair free from its confines, the doorknob to the apartment rattled.

“Sorry, I should have knocked,” Albedo’s voice carried from the kitchen as he entered the apartment.

“No need,” Sterling answered. “We’re a pack, closer than family, and I know what you’re here for.” He clapped a hand on Albedo’s shoulder. “Take care of her, Bedo. I’ll be back after you two have gotten some personal time. One of my

professors for my gaming class sent me a text to come meet them right away, so I'll be gone anyway." He turned and flashed me a smile from beneath his messy hair. "Have fun, Kitty."

Before I could respond, he ducked beneath Albedo's arm and left the room, leaving me alone with Albedo.

Shifting, I stepped to the side and gave him a shy smile. "How did things go with Alex?" The man might worship the ground I walked on now, but that didn't mean he could be trusted to not be a danger to my mates.

Albedo leaned against the bedroom door frame, his eyes pinned to me as he gave me a faint smile. "I guess you could say it went well, he wanted to make me Dean..."

I froze. "Dean of Silverton?"

He nodded. "I turned him down. I want to spend time with you and I'm not qualified to run the place, anyway. This school has had enough of those kinds of merits. Someone that deserves to run this place should take the reins, it shouldn't be based on who someone is related to."

"But what-" I blurted, before slapping a hand over my mouth. This wasn't my decision or my place.

"What?" Albedo's brow rose.

I stared at the ground and nibbled my lip. My first thought had been purely selfish. "I'm sorry, it's nothing, just selfish reasoning."

He moved closer and put his hands on my shoulders. “No matter what you have to say, it’s always important to me, Kitten.”

Albedo nodded but continued to stare at me. I could feel the heat from his burning gaze. With a gulp, I looked up to meet his eyes. “If you were the Dean... I thought of all the ways you could change Silverton, so people like King have a fighting chance.”

“That’s your version of selfishness?” He shook his head with a chuckle. “I’ll never be worthy of you. I won’t become the Dean, but I’ll use my voice to help guide them in the right direction, and if Alex does screw it all up, we can take him down. But if I’m being honest, I think Silverton never will fall into the pitfalls it has before.”

Gently, I stroked his cheek and he went still. “Listen, Bedo, you’re more than worthy. If you don’t want to become the Dean, then don’t. I trust your judgment and no matter what, nothing will change how I feel about you.”

He gave me a warm smile and the tip of his tongue darted out and circled my palm. “Kitten?” he whispered against my skin. His eyes had turned to those of a predator, and I shivered.

Barb perked up. She’d been taking it easy after the marathon with Sterling. “*Lee, Lewis is telling me something... interesting.*” She chuckled. “*It looks like your mate isn’t so... shy anymore.*”

Oh? Could that be true? It was hard to deny when desire sparkled in his eyes. “Bedo?” I whispered.

He smiled, pressed a soft kiss on the center of my palm, and let go. “This is scary for me, but I don’t want Sterling to be the only one to experience bliss with you. After what I felt from the bond last night, I want a taste of it for myself.”

My heart sped up. “Does that mean...” I glanced at the bed.

He nodded. “I want all of you, Lee, and I want to be all yours.” He held up a finger. “But first, I’m going to make sure Sterling locked the door behind him.”

He turned and left me, and my racing heart, alone in the room. I marched over to the pile of sleeping robots. Part of me felt bad for kicking them out, but the other half wanted my first time with Albedo to be magical with no distractions.

The monkey stared up at me with wide, sad eyes and dared to pout at me.

Damn it...

“I’ve got this.” Albedo tossed a small bag in the corner and knelt down to talk to the pets. “Thank you guys for keeping her safe for your master, but now I’m here, she’ll be fine. Do me a favor and keep the other areas of the house safe, we have to rely on you all for protection, can you do that for me?” He stared solemnly down at the little monkey.

The animal jerked its head in a nod and, with a commanding shriek at his companions, he raced out of the room. The others filed out with the cat tailing after them, her tail held high. Albedo waited until they’d all left before he locked the door

and glanced over at me with that same predatory grin. “Well, how should we start?”

“What’s in there?” The bag had all manner of weird bulges coming from it, and I couldn’t hold back my curiosity.

“Believe it or not, that’s not for me. I picked it up as a favor for... a friend.” He chuckled. “I don’t need any of it, all I need is you.”

I needed no further prompting and I slipped off Julian’s oversized shirt. It was practically a dress on my frame, and I hadn’t been wearing anything but panties beneath it.

“You’re as beautiful as the first time I saw you...” Albedo moved closer and brushed his thumb across my right nipple, watching as it gently bounced from his ministrations. He picked me up, guiding my thighs to grip around his waist and he squeezed my ass cheeks as he moved us to the bed.

Instead of dropping me, we fell together in a mess of limbs and skin. I clawed at his shirt and he groaned so loud it made my insides throb.

“Do that... again,” he panted. There was a frenzied light in his eyes.

Smirking, I obeyed. I sank my nails into the thick fabric, letting the tips of my claws shred the fabric. His body shuddered and his head fell back as another delicious moan escaped him.

I could get used to this. “You sure it doesn’t hurt?” My claws trailed over his sensitive skin.

“It does, a little,” he agreed, “but please, don’t stop. The pain is so small compared to how fucking good it is.” His eyelids fluttered and he growled. “Wait, I’m supposed to be taking care of you, woman.”

In reply, I ripped his shirt in two, tossing fragments of it over each shoulder. Beads of blood decorated him from where my claws had sunk too deep. He breathed deep, his body shuddering as he stared at me.

I’d unleashed a feral animal.

“You asked for this.” He tossed me onto my back and kissed me hard; I swallowed my laughter as his tongue twined with mine and his hands roamed my body. He twisted one of my nipples, almost to the point of pain, and let go before doing the same thing to the other. I writhed against him, lost in a mix of pain and pleasure as I wrenched my mouth from his.

“I’m not done with you,” I objected, pushing at his shoulders. “Please, let me spoil you.”

Albedo moved back, sitting on his heels. “Kitten,” he growled in warning. His pants were tented, his cock struggling against the fabric.

Poor man was about to lose more of his clothing.

“Bedo,” I growled back, reaching out and stroking him through the fabric. My nails raked his shaft and his eyes rolled back as he melted backward against the bed, thrusting against my touch.

“Not fair,” he groaned.

I brought my nails to his tip, scraping hard and shredding the pants. “Want me to stop?” I whispered.

His eyes hardened. “Don’t you dare.”

Grinning, I unzipped his pants and reached inside, running my nails directly against his skin. This time I made sure to not use my claws. Even if he liked pain, that was too much.

He thrust shallowly against my touch, forcing me to be rougher. “Lee,” he begged with a rough cry.

My fingers circled around his shaft, and I stroked him, increasing my grip and relishing in his husky whimpers.

I unwrapped my fingers and pulled away before I grabbed what remained of his pants and yanked them off. It took less than a minute to toss them with the other remnants of clothing. “You’re going to need new clothes...”

Albedo chuckled. “I’ll borrow some of Julian’s stuff. I’m sure I’ll look at least half as cute as you.”

I rolled my eyes. “You’re something else.” To cut him off, I knelt between his legs and leaned down, lapping just below his shaft.

Albedo couldn’t speak anymore. His answer was a series of guttural growls.

With one hand, I teased his shaft with a light touch, my fingers barely grazed him, with just enough pressure to move his skin up and down. Meanwhile, I breathed against his balls as I twirled my tongue against his roughened skin.



“Fuck,” he whimpered. “Lee!” he gasped.

I sucked one of his balls into my mouth and increased the pressure, sucking harder until he squirmed.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he whimpered. He thrashed on the bed, his fingers tightening on the sheets. His pants grew stronger and I let go of his cock to grab his hand and hold it. I sucked harder and his hand tightened around mine.

Precum glistened on his tip and he bit his lip to keep from moaning more for me.

I couldn't have that.

Letting his ball go, I moved upward and licked my way up his shaft. When I reached the top, I pursed my lips and slowly took him in, but once I was over the sensitive tip, I let my teeth graze against him.

His body jerked, and a raspy growl slipped from his lips. I lifted my head to stop hurting him, but his free hand grabbed my head and he gently pressed down before letting go.

More? I didn't want to hurt him and I wasn't sure how hard I could press with this kind of play before I slipped up and went too far. With a deep breath, I squeezed my jaws tighter so my teeth sunk into him, leaving the barest indent.

“Fuck!” Albedo howled, and a fresh burst of salty liquid filled my mouth. I swallowed it, swirled my tongue against Albedo, and cleaned up the mess. “Lee, stop,” he whispered.

I rolled my lips back over my teeth and pulled away. Had I gone too far? “I'm sorry-” My words were halted as he put a

finger against my lips.

“No, I want to finish inside you. I’m ready to share that with you if you still want me.”

As if he’d ever have to ask. With a grin, I kissed his tip and climbed onto his body. I settled over his hips and brushed his cock against my wetness. Maybe it was the bond, or maybe I enjoyed the kinky play but he slipped inside with the barest pressure.

Albedo’s hands dropped to my hips and he squeezed them tightly. “Lee, you haven’t been taken care of yet at all and I’m already close to my limit. If you continue, I won’t be able to stop myself, I don’t want to fail you.”

I smirked. “You fail me? This is your payback for the last time with me. Besides,” I moved my hips slowly, taking him all the way in until his body shuddered. “I’ll get mine from this too, I promise.”

His eyes closed to half-lids. “Fuck,” he whimpered in response. “I’m so close already. I can’t hold back.”

Keeping eye contact with him, I rocked back and forth, moaning as he slipped in and out, and rubbed against that most perfect spot. My hands slipped to his chest so I could balance myself and I lifted my hips before plunging back down on him again.

Soon, I lost myself in the motion, Albedo’s fingers dug into me as he tried to stop himself from tipping over the edge. The tidal wave of his orgasm was itching to be let go, but I

couldn't stop myself. I continued to rise and fall, each time increasing my speed and my roughness until the only sound in the small apartment was our skin slapping against each other, followed by his long drawn-out moans.

“Lee!” he groaned, thrusting hard into me, his cock swelling a final time before unleashing inside.

I plunged harder and faster, chasing my pleasure before he went too soft. A part of me was horrified at my selfishness, but I ignored the bitch and plunged a final time, finally letting the waves of relief wash over me.

Grinning down at my mate, I collapsed against his chest and nuzzled against him. I made no means to disconnect us, instead, I relished in the connection. “Albedo, I love you,” I whispered into his ear before biting his earlobe.

For answer, he groaned, and his cock twitched.

I laughed and kissed him hard. I wasn't sure if either of us would be up for another round, but I wanted to pour everything I had into letting him know how much he meant to me.



Chapter 31

## Kitchen Nightmares

### **JULIAN**

It was surreal. The instant I stepped back into the house, Dad had treated me differently. He even took it upon himself to prepare the guest room for me.

As I stared up at the ceiling in said room, after a less-than-restful sleep, I was still trying to believe this had happened.

What would Dad have to say about everything that happened? Would I be tossed out of the Newton family completely for tarnishing our precious name? I didn't need them, or what they could provide me.

If it came down to it, I could stand on my own.

A firm knock on my door made me roll out of bed and call for them to enter. The door opened and closed as I got dressed with my back to it.

"They're acting weird, Jules." Elijah frowned at the door as if it could give him some sort of answer. "Mom is fixing all of your favorites."

I winced before smiling. Oh well, crispy sausage wasn't about to kill me. Besides, it was nice to have her support. "And dad?"

Elijah fell quiet and blinked. "Well..." His eyes darted to the side. "He's helping."

Huh? In all the years of my life, I'd never seen my father in the kitchen, beyond waiting for his food to be delivered to him like some king.

My father did not cook.

"You're shitting me," I whispered.

"I'm still processing it," Elijah whispered.

I finished getting dressed and adjusted my tie. I'd at least look the part of the perfect son today, even if I ended up being rejected. I didn't need his, or anyone but my mate's. approval from now on.

Elijah led the way and we took seats at the dining room table. Mom bustled into the room with her hands full as she deposited several bowls and plates across the table.

They looked flawless. There was a plate of eggs, I assumed those were for precious Elijah, but they didn't have a single eggshell in sight. Had mom really made those?

She dropped off a plate of flawless bacon in front of me, with succulent sausages that didn't have a spec of char to them. No solid disc of black, no burnt odor.

What the hell was going on?

“Julie, you don’t have to look so surprised,” she scolded me. “Here, have some juice. I squeezed it myself.” She plopped down a glass full of orange juice and grinned at me. “I want you to know I’m very proud of you, both of you.”

My father walked into the room, his arms laden with even more plates than what mom had brought in. There were so many foods that I stared dumbly. None of what he held contained eggs at least.

“Here, Julian.” He set down most of the plates in front of me. “I made these for you.” He paused and stared steadily at me. “I want to tell you I’m sorry, son. I know I haven’t been the best father and that my arrogance put you both in real danger.”

What the fuck kind of warped reality had I entered? This couldn’t be my family. Maybe Inu had done something before we’d taken care of his ass.

“Julie,” mom hissed. “Your father is talking to you!”

If my family had been taken over, I doubted they’d still be using Mom’s embarrassing nickname. “Thank you for breakfast,” I grunted. No way could I accept his apology after everything that had happened. There had been too many years to forget about.

Mom sighed and helped my father finish unloading all the dishes. “I want you to know your dad has been up since dawn cooking for you two. He wanted to show you how proud he was.”

“Of what?” I scoffed. “All we did was be the perfect little Alpha Gods he wanted, right?”

“Julian...” Elijah grabbed my arm and shook his head. “Let them talk.”

I sighed. It wasn't like I expected him to change his spots so easily, but some damn support would have been nice. I trusted Mom without a doubt, but how could he expect me to accept this weak offering from Dad?

My father took a seat across from me and slowly tilted his head to the side, submitting to us. “I know I can't make up for what happened, and there's no reason for you to believe I'm truly sorry about it. However, everything I have is yours. I offer everything I've built up, and that our ancestors have, to you two boys and your mate.”

This had to be a damn dream. I grabbed a handful of my skin, and with a twist, pinched my arm until the area throbbed.

Not a weird ass dream then.

“Why are you doing this, Dad? What's your angle?”

He continued to speak from his position of submission, and the longer he did it, the more my dream theory cracked. Would I want this, even in a fantasy world?

“There's more to life than status and power. You had none of that on your side, and yet, you still survived some depraved attempt on your lives. I only wish that fucker Inu, was alive so I could rip his insides out.”



The fierceness in Dad's voice took me by surprise. There was such a strong note of hatred, stronger than I'd ever heard leak through before. Had I ever seen him so openly hostile? "Well, he's gone."

"And Marcus's fate has been handed off to the first Silverton," Dad agreed. "If I had gotten my hands on him, I'd have ripped his teeth out one by one, then driven them into his dick."

"Dear!" Mom gasped. "I know you can be colorful, but I don't want to think about that."

He gave her a wry grin. "Yes, only think about mine, honey."

What the fuck?

Elijah coughed. "Can we please focus on the conversation at hand? That's hardly proper talk to have and it makes mom uncomfortable."

"Thanks, Eli," I grunted. I really didn't want to think about those two screwing around. "What's the deal with that fucker, anyway? He kept trying to get close to my mate."

Dad winced and slowly straightened his head. "What do you mean, close to your mate?" he growled. "That's my daughter-in-law."

Hearing Dad accept Lee was every bit as reality-breaking as the rest of this morning had been. "He kept calling her Goddess and wanted to get near her. I don't trust him."

"Alex Silverton is from the family that originally founded Silverton University. They are the most powerful and richest

pack. Unfortunately, Alex's parents had passed away shortly after setting up Silverton, so now all that money and power has dropped into his lap. None of that means that he gets to take my daughter-in-law."

Despite myself, I winced. No matter how willing I'd been earlier to accept rejection from my family, the idea of them being completely gone left a bad taste in my mouth.

Damn it... How had I gotten this soft?

The answer was of course, my Lee. She'd had a busy day from what I could tell from our bonds. And it would be even busier after Elijah and I finally had time with her.

Who would have thought I'd willingly share my mate? It wasn't with just anyone; Somehow, it was with the men who were as close as brothers, and of course, my real brother. Somehow, that made it easier to accept it all.

Goddess, I had gone soft for that little wolf.

Oni smirked. "*You won't be soft long for her.*"

"*Damn it, shut the fuck up,*" I snarled.

"Julie, you should eat. Your dad worked hard on breakfast, and I haven't seen him in the kitchen since we were dating."

"Dear," he scolded with a mock pout.

Goddess. Were my parents flirting? I grabbed the breakfast casserole in front of me and dumped a square chunk on my plate. A quick whiff assured me there were no hidden eggs, though I still found it hard to believe.

I grabbed my fork and cut off a corner, shoving it into my mouth. The strong cheddar flavor filled my mouth, followed by a smoky flavor from the sausage, but not a burnt type. No, it was more like the meat had been hung in a smokehouse and the deliciousness clung to every atom.

Goddess.

This was where Elijah had gotten his talent from.

Who knew?

“Well?” dad questioned with a smirk.

Bastard. “It’s delicious.”

His self-satisfied smile grew. “Yeah, I haven’t lost it too much. I remember when you tried to help me in the kitchen when you were little, Julian. You always made such a big mess. You grabbed the sugar once and ran off with it to your room, you were determined to create snow for your trucks to zoom through, then when I finally got that cleaned up, you grabbed the pepper and did the same thing. We were sneezing for weeks until we got that disaster cleaned up.”

My cheeks burned. Was this a preview of the shit he had planned to put me through in the future? Goddess, what if he told Lee this crap? “Come on, Dad, I don’t need to hear this.”

“Sorry. It’s hard to accept you’re not that little boy anymore. You’ve grown up and made amazing decisions, even if I wasn’t part of those. Hell, even if I stood in your way. I’m serious about you two having everything I have.” He glanced at mom and coughed. “You tell him the next part.”

I tensed, what was he going to drop on me now? Damn it, I knew I shouldn't have let my guard down around this man. "What do you have to tell me, Mom?"

She cleared her throat. "Julie, I'm taking the apartment back from you."

What? I stared. "You can't, we're all living there right now!"

"Calm down," Dad ordered.

My fist clenched around the sausage sandwich I had picked up. Was this the plan to rip our home away from us? There was no way in fucking hell I was about to ask Alex to let us go back to the Alpha Gods dorms. Not after everything that had happened.

"And," Mom continued. "We are giving you this house."

Wait, what? Could they stop shocking me? They were going to give me a heart attack at this rate. "What do you mean you're giving us this house? You've always lived here."

Dad took a pat of butter and slathered it all over his bread. "Well, I thought it was time your mother and I downsized. You all are going to be cramped if it's as small as your mother says. Here, you all can be together and yet still have room to yourselves. I promise, no matter how much your mate loves you, you'll need some alone time."

I snorted. There was no way I'd ever need that with Lee around. "Yet you and mom are going back to the apartment, you'll never have alone time."

He grinned and sipped his orange juice. “I’ve had more than enough time to myself, all I want to do with my remaining years is let your mom know how much she’s my Goddess.”

Elijah coughed into his fist before grabbing some bacon and cramming his mouth full.

I didn’t blame him. My parents were never lovey-dovey like this, ever.

“You use this place for business, Dad. We can’t take it from you.”

Dad leaned back. “I’m done with that, son. I’m serious, all I want to do now is enjoy the time I have left with your mother and my family. I know neither of you boys are interested in the business but if you ever change your mind, it’s all yours. For now, I have someone that will be running it for you.”

Elijah finished his breakfast and set a napkin on the table. “Mother, would you please accompany me to the store? I want to get something for Lee.”

What the fuck? Was this bastard about to leave me on my own? Goddess damned asshole.

Dad nodded at Mom’s questioning look. “I think that would be a good idea. It’s about time I had a talk with Julian.” He gave me a smile.

I didn’t like the sound of that, and the smile reminded me of all the smarmy deals this man had made in his life with that same fake plastic grin.

“Julie, behave yourself and be sure to bring Lee over soon. I want to spend more time with her.”

Funny, so did I. And spending any time with my father instead of Lee was not in my plans.

I had the sense to wait until the two of them left before I pushed myself away from the table. “On that note, I should get going too, Dad.”

“Wait.”

Strange. It wasn't the same tone he used as a command but came out like a plea. It was enough to give me pause and study him closer.

He didn't look anything like the self-assured man I'd known all my life. Instead, he looked fractured, almost broken as he stared at me. “Julian, listen, I have been the worst father to you.”

I chuckled. “Yeah? I think Marcus has got you beat on that one, old man.” I pushed the chair back in and turned. “Catch you later.”

“Julian, please.”

The desperation in his voice made me freeze in place. My father was full of surprises today. I turned and the man was on the ground. “What are you doing?”

Slowly he looked up at me, and a stranger stared back. His face was creased and he was near tears. Someone had taken my father's body over, it was the only explanation.

“Just, talk with me a little longer. You can leave after you hear what I have to say.”

I scoffed. “And if I don’t, let me guess, I’m cut off, right?”

He shook his head. “No, Julian. You don’t understand, it took almost losing you to understand how much you mean to me. True, you don’t do things the way I do, and you’re not Elijah, but you’re someone more important. You are Julian Newton, and you’ve proven to me you’re a better Alpha than I’d ever dreamed you could be.”

I paused and sighed. “Why are you saying all this shit now? I’m out of the house, and I was planning on leaving the Newton family completely. I’ve got a pack, and the only family I need is Lee.”

“I know. That woman has proven to be something else. To be honest, when I first heard about you getting involved with someone who had zero pureblood, I was worried for you.”

“Worried, right.” I rolled my eyes.

“Damn it, Julian. I’m trying to be honest with you.” He slammed the ground with his fist. “She’s proven me wrong. You’ve proven me wrong. We might approach things differently, but it’s not wrong. You’ve grown every bit into the man I’d hoped you would on the day you were born. No, you’ve surpassed all of my expectations.”

A lump formed in my throat, and my shoulders sagged. I’d dreamed of Dad completely changing like this once, long ago,

but now I was getting it, it was hard to accept. “Get up off the ground, Dad.”

“I’ve got more to say.”

Damn it. What else was he going to say? “Go on.” I turned away, leaning against the table with my arms crossed. I couldn’t bear to keep staring at him like this.

“I’ve never been prouder of you or your brother, but more importantly, I’m so damned happy you’re okay. When I thought about what could have happened to you... I’ve never been more terrified.”

“I’m fine, we’re fine. You should have known some idiot in a dog mask wasn’t going to beat me.”

He got to his feet and lunged at me. Before I could defend myself, he wrapped his arms around me and hugged me tight enough to make my bones pop. “I love you, Julian. Please, forgive me for the hell I’ve put you through. I promise I’m going to be the kind of dad you can be proud of. Fuck the business, I’ll have someone else run it if you don’t want it. All I want to do is spend time with you boys and your mother, and my future daughter-in-law.”

I clapped him on the back a few times. Another first, a hug from the old man. “Seriously, Dad, we’re okay. And...” I sighed. Lee would probably want me to at least meet him halfway. “We’ll try to come and see you more often, family dinners or something.”



“Thank you,” Dad whispered before squeezing me tight and then finally letting me go. “Sorry, you probably had plans for today, and I’ve kept you here. It was important to me you heard me out on all of this. I’m not the same man I was a few days ago and I didn’t feel like I could take changing seriously until I had this talk.”

I ran a hand through my hair. I needed to get off this roller coaster of emotions. Besides, I couldn’t stay away from Lee for too much longer, though first I wanted to make sure everything was perfect for the two of us. I needed to get some supplies to make sure everything was what she deserved.

“If you’re serious about the house, we’ll move in soon and I’ll get the apartment ready for you. You’ve got to give me some time to get my pets out of there; I’ve got a lot of robots since I couldn’t have a real pet.”

“Keep some of them there, that’s their home. I promise I’ll take care of them, and think of it as a way for me to make amends.”

I laughed. “You’re not going to think the same way when you wake up and the monkey has made a nest in your hair.”

He laughed. “We’ll see.”

I caught myself laughing along with him. How long had it been since we’d parted ways on good terms, and was this going to be how our relationship would be from now on? “Dad... Thanks for breakfast. I appreciate the effort you put into it. I have to get back to Lee, but I’ll talk soon, okay?”

He nodded and held up a hand in farewell. And before my eyes, my father picked up the dishes. I offered my help but he waved me away.

Maybe he had changed and, just maybe, I could bring myself to forgive him.



Chapter 32

## Elijah Gets Collared

### **ELIJAH**

“So why am I really accompanying you, Eli?” Mom asked gently.

“I do need your help shopping.” I took a deep breath, she was going to smack me with something when I told her the truth. “I did something awful to Lee, and though she’s forgiven me, I don’t think I’ve apologized enough.”

Mom’s lips pressed together and she tightened her hold on her purse.

Here it comes; Mom reared back and smacked me with the full contents of her brick, and I stayed still and took it in the face.

“I thought you were going to duck!” She checked me over, torn between her anger and genuine concern. “Tell me exactly what happened, Eli.”

Her soft words only made me wince. “I was a brute.” She reared back to hit me again. “I don’t mean I forced her or

anything. But back when I thought I was in love with Alexandra, I was cruel to her. I even threatened her, and... hurt her.”

Mom hit me with her purse in three quick bursts. Her nostrils flared as she glared at me. “That’s not how I taught you to behave, Eli!”

“I know... And Lee especially didn’t deserve it. But that’s why I want to apologize. What can I buy that tells her how sorry I am?”

Mom groaned. “Sometimes I believe you’re the smartest in our family, and at other times, I worry you might be the stupidest. It’s not about what you can buy her, son. It’s about what you can give her that has meaning. All the money in the world isn’t going to get her to forgive you.”

Technically, she’d already forgiven me. It wasn’t like I had to do anything at all but I wanted things to feel right between us, it was important to me. What could I give her? What said ‘I’m sorry I acted like an animal?’

Wait. That was the answer. “Thanks mom, I think I know exactly what to get her.”

She smiled. “I’m glad to hear that. So where are we going?”

Suddenly I regretted asking for her to accompany me. While getting a gift wasn’t an issue, how was I going to explain to my mother what I wanted to get Lee? “I can take care of it myself.”

She chuckled. “Somehow, I doubt that. No, I’ll go with you, Eli. I’ll make sure your gift is at least thoughtful, it’s the least I can do.”

No, the least she could do was go back home. “Are you sure?” I asked. “I promise I’ve got this, and I wouldn’t want to keep you away from Dad for too long.”

“Eli... Are you trying to hide something from me?”

Only my dignity. “No, mom.”

“Good. Let’s go.”

With a sigh, I led the way to the specialty store. We walked the whole way in silence; Mom was going to think I was a deviant.

“Uh, here we are,” I announced outside the place.

Mom turned and stared at the things on display. She reached out and twisted a pair of silver cuffs around as she studied them. Glancing down at where a cage big enough for a person stood, she raised her brow. “Are you getting her a pet?”

A pet would be less embarrassing. “Something like that,” I admitted. “Why don’t you look around? I promise I’ve got this.”

“Don’t worry, Eli, I’m here.” She grabbed my arm with hers, and the Goddess above must have snickered at my fate.

I had led my mother into the BDSM store and to a wall where a dozen different collars were on proud display. It took me mere seconds to find it. It twinkled and drew my eye

instantly. Reaching out, I took the sterling silver collar down; it was inset with diamonds in a rough imitation of Dalmatian spots, the clasp had a discrete paw print, and thankfully, the inside was a soft suede.

“Are you... giving Lee a collar, son?” Mom whispered.

“Not quite.”

“I was going to say, with her pretty pink eyes, I think this other one with rubies would suit her better.”

I had not just heard my mother give me advice on something so embarrassing. “It’s for me, mom.”

“Oh.” She took it into her hands and studied it. “I thought you were giving Lee a gift. Wasn’t that what all this is about?” Her eyes widened, and she grinned before leaning closer. “Or are you the gift, son?”

My ears burned, my cheeks were set on fire, and I was pretty sure my chin was cherry red.

“Something like that,” I mumbled.

She laughed and glanced around. “Well, if you really want to be her pet, get yourself a cage too, so she has a place to throw you when you’ve been a bad boy.”

I was not having this conversation with my mother.

I was not having this conversation at all.

This was some sort of delusion I’d conjured up after seeing my father cook.

Mom was not trying to give me toy advice.

Then again... The cage would be a strong addition to my apology. What better way to handle a beast that misbehaves than putting it in a cage?

“You’re right, Mom, let me go get it.”

She laughed. “Be sure to get two, sweetie. I need one for your father. He might be behaving better now, but you can never be too careful.”

My entire face exploded in a burst of heat and I hurried away to go make my purchases and mom’s tinkling laughter followed me.

After I finished and directed the salesman where to go with the cages, I returned. Mom was waiting outside the shop, thankfully. I wasn’t sure how I’d be able to handle it if I had come back to her checking out the dildos or something.

“Ready to go, Eli?” she questioned with her normal gentle smile. No sign of the demon that had tormented me was left.

“Ready,” I agreed. The collar was in the small black bag in my grasp, hopefully, Lee would understand its meaning. If it didn’t work, I wasn’t sure what else I could do.

“Does that mean you’re going back to see your beloved now?” Mom asked as we walked leisurely back. This time, she didn’t hesitate in chattering about the most random topics. I’d learned of several flowers and how they could be crossbred before we’d walked ten minutes.

My heart beat faster at the thought. I should go talk to Alexandra and take care of my apology, but the selfish part of



me wanted to run back to Lee and beg for forgiveness. Never again did I want her to look at me with fear in those beautiful eyes of hers.

Alexandra could wait. It wasn't like she was going anywhere, and I had to be with my mate. "I am," I agreed with a grin.

Mom stopped, and I took several more steps before I noticed. "Mom?"

"That's the first time I've seen you smile like that, Eli. You're finally smiling with your heart. I swear, every day I love Lee more for what she's done for you boys. I can get home by myself, I want to surprise your father with a gift I bought."

I had no desire to have any inkling of what that was. Some secrets were better kept to themselves.

"We'll talk again soon mom, uh have fun."

She laughed. "No worries, Eli. Your father won't know what hit him."

I didn't waste time listening to her anymore as I power-walked away from her laughter.

At some point, I broke into a run. I didn't care how far away the apartment was or about taking a vehicle. All I could think about was being in front of Lee.

Sometime later, I arrived at the elevator, and huffing and puffing, but I was there.

The doors opened and Albedo walked out. He paused and smiled. “Hey, she felt you coming, so I’m going to take a walk and find Sterling. I’ll see you around when Julian comes home.”

My heart beat far faster than it had during my all-out-all-out run.

Lee.

The ride up was like time had turned to molasses around me. Every second stretched by and the ding from the elevator ascending slowed down with each floor.

Finally, after what had felt like an eternity, the doors opened and I rushed towards the apartment. I unlocked the door and slipped through, locking it behind me.

“Elijah,” Lee greeted from the kitchen. She was putting the finishing touches on a sandwich. “I’m sorry. I grabbed something to eat for lunch after my shower.”

Without words, I strode to her side and pulled her into my arms, hugging her tightly until I could feel the beat of her heart against mine. “Lee, I love you.” Our bond surged and my skin danced from everywhere we made contact. “I’ve got something for you, but I don’t want you to get the wrong idea.”

“What is it?” She set her sandwich aside with a sad look before focusing back on me.

It was okay, after we were finished I’d make her a meal fit for a queen. No, a Goddess. Alex and the other Alpha Gods

were right about what she was, what she'd always been to us. I pulled out the small bag and held it up before opening it and pulling out the sparkling collar. "This."

She winced, and her hand went to her throat. "I don't know..."

I held a hand out. "No, Lee." I clasped it around my throat and tightened it before handing her the key. I knelt on the ground before her. "You've forgiven me, but the truth is I was terrible to you. All you've done is love me since the moment you set eyes on me. Somehow you felt our mate bond when I could not and all I did was torment you."

"That's not true, Elijah."

"I'll never turn into that animal again, never hurt you, never scare you. And if I do, you can treat me like a beast. Uh, it's not here yet, but I have a cage to go with this idea..."

"A... cage?"

This perfect idea was crumbling around me. "It's not important, it was a symbol... unless you wanted to use it. The point is, if I ever make you feel like that again, you can lock me away and throw away the key." This had gone better in my head.

Lee reached out and stroked my collar. "Are those... spots?" I nodded. "Like that one night." I smiled.

She gently stroked my cheek and we both enjoyed the sparks from our bond. How had I ever been so foolish as to think anyone else possessed my heart like Lee did? "I can never

apologize enough for what I did to you. Listen, I want to make love to you, of course I do but there's something I'd like for you to do first."

She blinked like an owl. "It doesn't involve that cage, does it?" she giggled.

"No, love."

She melted and knelt to my height, falling into my arms. We toppled over and I held her tight, burying my head in her neck and inhaling the cinnamon and apple scent that was my mate. Gently, I nipped at her skin until little moans escaped her.

"Elijah, the pets," she gasped.

I didn't give a damn about the pets, if they ended up being some sort of weird recording devices, then let it be so. I thought I was going to die if I didn't get to feel her skin against mine. I sucked on the mark I'd left on her and her moans filled the apartment as she wriggled against me.

My cock twitched against her as she gave me a dreamy smile and shifted her weight until she was brushing against it. "What did you want me to do, Elijah?" she asked in between her moans.

Her cries were enough to make me rock hard. Taking her hand in mine, I guided it down to my stomach and into my pants before she gripped me tight. I sucked harder on her neck in time with her squeezes and we were soon both filling the kitchen with our moans.

“Albedo grabbed some stuff for me earlier, it’s more punishment for me and I want you to deliver it. I can’t forgive myself until you do.”

She squeezed me tighter and I gasped beneath the assault, shuddering in her grip. “You don’t have to do this, Elijah. I’ve already forgiven you for all of that.”

My tongue danced over her skin, and she whimpered. “I want to forgive myself. You are my precious mate and if anyone is going to punish me, it should be you. There’s lubrication in the bag and your tool for punishment.”

She hesitated before nodding and wriggling away from me. I gathered my things and followed her to the bedroom. The pets were avoiding the room, but that was fine with me.

Lee stared into the depths of the bag and pulled out the leather belt with the strap-on secured. “What... is this?”

“My punishment.” I wasn’t sure what to expect from it but I wanted something that would likely bring me pain while it brought her pleasure, and this was the best way to accomplish that. It would hurt, but I could survive it.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” She fingered the leathered straps and stared into my eyes. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Help me forgive myself, Lee. It’s the only way I can think of.”

Mom’s method probably would have involved tossing me in that cage in some sort of demented type of time-out.

Lee pulled the lube out and flipped the top open. “If this is what you want... I’ll do it.” There was a harshness to her eyes, and I smiled.

It was what I deserved.



Chapter 33

## Pegging for Forgiveness

### **LEE**

The whole device looked unwieldy to me, but I stepped into it and used the lube to make the strap-on shine with the anal jelly.

I'd never imagined I'd ever be in this kind of situation. A part of me was horrified that this was how Elijah wanted to apologize.

And yet another... was intrigued.

The dildo attached to the straps was thick but surprisingly soft. It slipped inside of me with hardly any effort on my part and I whimpered at the full sensation. Maybe this was too much for me at this point.

"Turn it on," Elijah suggested.

"On?" I noticed a small set of dials on the right side of the strap and I pressed a button.



Intense vibrations shook through my body. I gasped, holding onto the wall while the beast inside me vibrated for all it was worth.

“Lee, you turned it up halfway to start!” Elijah twisted the dial down and I sagged.

Wait. Did he say that was only halfway? I licked my lips. What would it feel like if I turned the dial all the way up?

Elijah grabbed more of the lube himself and used it on himself. It mesmerized me as I watched his strong fingers swirl the jelly around.

Was I doing this?

“It’s okay, Lee,” Elijah assured me. “I want this.”

Biting my lip, I grabbed the other end of the dildo merrily buzzing away inside of me and I applied more lube until the end was dripping. “Hold still,” I whispered, guiding Elijah to the side of the bed and stretching him across it.

The end of the dildo that filled me was thick, but the one meant for my partner was shaped a bit differently. It had a series of balls on it, each bigger than the last until it joined my massively thick toy.

Elijah spread his legs and I lined myself up to his body. “Are you sure?” I whispered.

“Positive,” he replied with a grin over his shoulder. “I trust you, Lee. You’re my mate.”

Slowly, I pushed forward, and the first small ball slipped into his body. He shuddered at the addition. I grabbed the dial and twisted the second one, which activated the other side of the dildo. Elijah's body tensed as the low vibrations worked their way through him.

“Lee,” he moaned, writhing against the bed.

I stroked a finger down his back and pushed harder. It was hypnotizing, watching as he swallowed each slightly bigger ball.

How much could he take? My hips worked back and forth and he swallowed yet another of the balls. I twisted both dials until the vibrations were back to half. A ragged moan escaped me and I put a hand against Elijah's back to hold myself steady.

The dildo had another piece I hadn't noticed at the time that neatly covered my clit and delivered the perfect vibrations to every sensitive spot on my pussy. My hips worked faster and Elijah swallowed three of the balls at once. He was only one away from reaching the truly thick part of the dildo.

“Lee!” he moaned into the mattress. His body shook, trembling for all it was worth.

I slipped my hand around him and grabbed his cock, squeezing it and stroking it to the rhythm of the vibrations that wracked my body. I moaned into his ear, unable to stop myself. Honestly, it would be next to impossible to stop with how good this felt, and he was rock hard in my hand.

How could something so strange feel so damn good? “Elijah,” I whimpered as I thrust faster, making sure I didn’t push anymore into his poor aching body.

“You’re holding back, aren’t you?” he questioned in between moans. “This is punishment, give it all to me, Lee, and then I want you to come all over the dildo. Use me.”

“It’s big, Elijah, you’re going to hurt.”

“Do it,” he ordered with a moan. “And turn the dials to max. I want you to lose control.” I could barely make out his words as he kept breaking out into deep groans and his body writhed against mine.

“If that’s what you want, love,” I whispered before twisting the dials to the max and slamming the rest of the way into him. I kept a hold of his cock, squeezing it and stroking it in time with my hips as I lost sense of everything but my own building orgasm.

I was so fucking close, just seconds of letting go. The vibrations were delicious, spreading through my entire body but focused on my clit. Something that should have hurt at that intensity was only driving me more insane.

I thrust faster, the slap of my skin against his filled the room, and I couldn’t get enough of it. Elijah kept his mouth against the covers, to moan or scream I couldn’t tell anymore. My touch got rougher as I chased that delicious moment.

Almost there.

I gasped as the vibrations sent me over the edge and I pounded with all of my might into Elijah as I was hit with a wave of orgasms one after the other that made me take one out of Albedo's book and bite into the shoulder of the man beneath me.

"Lee," Elijah whimpered. "Turn it all off, I want to be inside you."

I wasted no time in obeying, first pulling the dildo out of Elijah, and watching him shiver as each bead escaped him; then I pulled it the rest of the way free from my body.

The second it was free, Elijah gathered me against his chest and flipped us around so that I was on my back on the bed as he hovered over me. He guided my legs onto his shoulders and slipped effortlessly into my slippery pussy.

Despite the intense vibrations from the dildo, they still didn't compare to the natural tingles that came from my mate. Lightning struck my clit first, and my body clenched as sweet heat surged through me.

Elijah positioned himself higher and pressed me into the bed as I was bent almost double. My fingers dug into his shoulders and I couldn't tear my eyes off his glittering collar.

Should I have been so surprised he could be so aggressive after the glimpse of the beast he'd shown me then?

His body slammed into mine, far harder than when I'd been fucking him. The delicious sparks exploded from every touch

and I lost myself in a sea of moans as another orgasm struck me.

“Fuck,” he groaned. “So tight, Lee, you’re so wet for me. I’ve been dreaming about this since last night.”

I focused only on the orgasm as it drove me higher and higher, threatening to break me into tiny pieces, but it felt so good, I never wanted it to stop. This delicious tightening of my body as he got me dangerously close to yet another dose of bliss.

“Elijah!” I screamed as it hit me like a bolt of electricity and danced through my body. Elijah’s fingers dug into my hips as he chased his own high, pounding into me with a force I hadn’t thought possible until he went still.

“Lee,” he whispered, slipping my feet from his shoulders and lying next to me, keeping us connected. “I’m sorry... I made this grand speech of not acting like a beast, and then...”

I snorted. “Elijah, in case you couldn’t tell, I liked it,” I confessed. “Besides, after what I put you through, a little soreness is a small price to pay.”

“Shit.” Elijah winced. “You’re sore? Jules is going to murder me...”

I pulled him toward me and stroked his hair. “I’ll be fine, love. I promise. Just stay with me for a few minutes like this.”

Elijah relaxed into my embrace and let out a shuddery sigh. “I love you,” he whispered, his eyes fluttering.

“I love you too,” I whispered, kissing his brow.

My stomach grumbled, realizing all too quickly that there was no way I was going to go grab my sandwich when Elijah was using me as a pillow.

Nope, it looked like I was going to be stuck there until Julian made his grand arrival, or at least until Elijah woke up from his nap.

I moved the bangs from his eyes, and he smiled in his sleep. “Lee,” he whispered. “Forgive me...”

“Dummy,” I scolded. “I forgave you a long time ago... You’re my mate and I know that’s not the kind of man you truly are. Sleep honey, and stop beating yourself up. I forgive you.”

He relaxed at my words, and his soft snores filled the room.

With a tired smile, I cuddled against him and fell asleep to the beat of his heart.



Chapter 34

# Broken Dreams

## **STERLING**

The halls of Silverton were eerily quiet. There were no students milling about. All I saw were groups of the past Alpha Gods talking in hushed whispers.

What were they up to? If I hadn't been on my way to talk to my professor about some emergency, I'd try to eavesdrop. I wasn't in charge of this school anymore, but I still cared about its fate. I had no idea why. My entire time here I'd barely acknowledged anything around me, but this place had brought me my Kitty.

For now, though, I had to let others handle it. Still, if they dared to pull any of the crap that the Dean or Inu had, there would be no forgiveness from any of us.

I got to my classroom and rapped on the door. A few moments later, my professor cracked the door open and brightened upon recognizing me. "Sterling! I was hoping you'd find time to visit me today."



She pushed the door open wider and gestured me in. As I walked through, she locked it behind me.

“What are you doing?” I scowled.

“Sorry, I don’t trust all those new people around the school. I’m not sure what’s going on and I haven’t seen the Dean since I got here today. All I’ve noticed is that all over the campus, someone has stolen all of our noble statues.” She sighed. “But none of that is why I called you here.”

“Oh? What is? You said it was an emergency.”

She chuckled and brushed her golden hair behind her ears. “Well, it is in a way. Do you remember how I told you there would be a position opening up on the Clevania development team?”

My eyes widened. “I remember... What happened to it?” My heart picked up its pace. The only other dream I’d had in my life, besides my precious Kitty, was being able to create and develop my precious games. It’s why Kitty and I had gelled instantly. We shared that dream.

Professor Thomas laughed. “Oh, come on now. You have no reason to look so nervous. There’s only one other student in this class and, as I’m sure Kelly has already told you, she passed on it. There’s nothing in your way, Sterling. You should take it.”

My mind raced. What had I done to impress them? “Which assignment did it?”

She blinked. “Assignment?” she repeated. “What are you talking about?”

“There had to be a reason I was picked. So which assignment of mine impressed them?”

Professor Thomas walked behind her desk and shuffled several papers. Among them was the one I’d given her days ago concerning Lee.

I scowled. “Why haven’t you looked at that yet?”

She glanced at the paper I was pointing at and frowned. “You mean that friend of yours?” she sighed and shook her head. “Listen, shortly after you gave me that file, you were no longer an Alpha God, or even allowed on the property. What reason would I have to look into a scholarship student for this class? It’s only for the elite few.”

My insides felt like glass cracking at her every word. “Professor... How many of my assignments have you looked at since I started classes with you?”

She laughed. “Oh, don’t be silly, Sterling. There was never any need for you to do any real work. You were given everything you needed the day you were born. It’s your birthright, just like this position is.”

I turned away from her and strode to the desk. I grabbed Lee’s mock assignment based on one of mine and rifled through the papers until I found mine. Turning around, I thrust them in her face. “Tell me now. Which one of these is the right one? Our answers are different.”

Her laughter died. “Wait, you’re being serious about this, aren’t you?” She shook her head and took the papers from me, staring at them with an intense focus. Her brows knit as she looked at Lee’s and with a sigh, she set it to the side. “Sterling, your little friend-”

“My mate,” I corrected her.

She took a step backward, bumping her hip into a desk. “Oh,” she whispered before straightening. “ I see. Congratulations. In any case, her work might have had more correct answers, but in the end, it would never matter. The ones that always win at life are the ones with the correct cards dealt at the starting line.”

The cracks raced through me, and my insides shattered. “Thank you,” I whispered. I turned and headed for the door.

“Wait, Sterling, where are you going?” Professor Thomas called, reaching for my shoulder. “I need to give them a date for when you’re prepared to start.”

What had I been doing all this time? I’d thought I’d been chasing after my dreams just as hard as Kitty had, but nothing here was real. How many of my grades were based on merit rather than circumstance? Was it all one big front because of our families?

I thought about accepting it, letting fate have its way, and being on my dream team. I’d even get to design another creature like a cabbit. I had plenty of ideas for cute mascot creatures, maybe something that mixed a cat with a dragon this time.

But as shining as that vision was, I couldn't get over the truth. I didn't deserve it, my Kitty did, and I was more than willing to let the best person for the position take it.

No matter how much it hurt to turn my back on my dream.

"I want you to talk to them again and tell them all about Lee Suga. You're going to tell them what a wonderful student she is and you're going to get her that position, Professor Thomas."

She frowned. "Are you sure about this? You told me when you first requested this special class, working for them was your dream. Are you going to hand it over just like that?"

"No, I'm only giving it to the person who deserves it. If you tested us both, who would pass?"

"You," she answered without hesitation.

"What about if you actually graded our work?" I scoffed. Why couldn't she understand winning this way would bring me no joy? It would be like grabbing what I thought was a chocolate cake and taking a big bite of charcoal and ash.

"You're being silly about this. What does it matter? Why can't you use what was given to you?"

"Just answer the question," I growled. Rust joined in; he didn't seem happy with the way things were working out either.

"If there were no other circumstances involved, and you were being judged exclusively on what you've brought before me, then yes. Your friend would win the spot."

“Then she deserves it,” I answered. “Make it happen, Professor Thomas or I’ll have to have a little chat with all the other Alpha Gods in this school. I’m sure you’ve noticed them in the hallways.”

“Al-Alpha Gods?” she stuttered, staring at her wall as if she could see outside of it. I wonder why that made her look horrified.

I grinned. “Goodbye, Professor. I’ve got more important things to do with my day. Please take care of it.”

I unlocked the door and closed it with a firm pull.

The instant I was out of her sight, I let my shoulders sag. I’d failed to uphold our promise. Not only had I not been able to get her into the classes I’d promised, but I couldn’t even follow her into the future we were both working for.

She was going to grow without me, leaving me behind once again.

I was halfway down the hall before I paused.

No, this wasn’t how our story was going to end. Yes, I’d make sure she got the position and that she’d kick ass at it, but I would never stop reaching for our dream. She could get there first, but I’d always make it to her side.

She was my Kitty, and she was stuck with me for life.

So I wasn’t given a real education here in Silverton? Fine. There were other schools I could look into and take classes online.

No matter what, I'd fulfill our dream.



Chapter 35

## How to Train Your Mate

### **JULIAN**

How was it already so late in the day? In a few hours it would be dinnertime, and no doubt all the guys would be back by then.

All the plans and conversations I'd wanted to have with Lee would not happen at this rate.

I needed her, as much as I needed water or food to survive, I couldn't exist without the warmth of her skin.

Which made little fucking sense considering I hadn't even got to experience any of it yet. Fuck. What if I couldn't compare to the others? I winced. She'd already been with the golden boy Elijah, and from the waves that came through the bond after that...

It was enough to leave anyone more than a little hesitant about themselves.

Even me.



*“Are you going to sit and waste all the time we have left worrying about what might happen?” Oni scoffed. “I thought you were the big bad Alpha God. We can finally spend time with our mate and I don’t give a damn if the others are there at the same time, it won’t stop us. She’s ours, Julian, and nothing will change that.”*

“How can you be so fucking calm? Aren’t you jealous of Baron, or any of the others?”

Oni huffed. *“Jealous? Why? When Barb is with me, it’s all she needs to think about. No one else will exist when I’m with her.”*

Easy for him to say. He wasn’t planning to apologize.

*“Is it an apology when you’re going to get off to it?”* Oni rolled his eyes. *“I can feel your excitement about this idea. Who would have thought the big bad wolf had a degradation kink?”*

*“Shut up,”* I mumbled.

I made it to the apartment door and reached to open it when it swung open.

Elijah gave me a half smile. “Hey, Jules,” he greeted. “I lost track of the day. I took a nap with Lee and I haven’t even had a chance to talk to Alexandra yet.”

“Oh, she’s in the nurse’s office at the school. I saw her there when I was grabbing some stuff from our old dorm.”

“Huh, I wonder why she’s there?”

I shrugged. “Looked like she was giving a check-up to all those other wannabe Alpha Gods.”

Instead of the usual annoyance that crossed his face when I talked about guys around Alexandra, he merely shrugged. “Thanks, I’ll catch her there.”

I watched him vanish into the elevator and turned my focus back to the door.

How should I start this? Where should I start this?

I reached into my bag and pulled out the kitty ears from the whole truth or dare game. They were a little worse for the wear since I’d been drunk off my ass the last time I wore them, but they were still serviceable.

Slinging the bag back over my shoulder, I strode through the door and locked it behind me.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” Lee all but whispered. She had been facing away from me at first, working on dinner it appeared. Considering the vast array of dishes, I was confident Elijah had set everything up beforehand to make things easier for her.

Probably for us.

She turned and stared at me before slapping a hand over her mouth, but not before a giggle escaped.

“What are you wearing?”

I slung the bag onto the table, and it landed with a metallic clatter. “My penance,” I replied with a shrug. “Lee, maybe it

doesn't bother you, and you've decided to forgive me for being an asshole when we first met. But, it bothers me."

Her lips twitched again and she broke into giggles. "You two are such brothers," she chuckled.

I was going to ignore that.

"I'm serious. So, since I made you my little bitch, I'm here to be your pussy. Treat me however you want, feed me from my pet bowls like I did to you. I've got a collar and leash too if you want it, but I figured this might be enough."

Her laughter died out and she flicked one of my ears. "You're serious, huh?"

"Yeah, but this is the only time I'm letting you do this, so get it all out of your system because I promise, once I have control again, I'm going to fuck that pretty little mouth of yours before I lose myself in your sweet pussy, mate."

My words only made her giggle again. "Really submissive there."

Scowling, I crossed my arms and looked away. "Yeah, well, I'm not used to it."

Humming, she walked closer to me, standing against my body. "Well, first, if you're going to be my pet, I don't think you should be wearing all these clothes. Let me take those off for you."

Before I could object, her nimble fingers went to my buttons and she slipped my shirt off and then she worked on my pants,

pulling both them and my underwear down with a fierceness I hadn't expected from her.

It turned me the fuck on. My cock throbbed under her inspection, twitching as she reached out and ran her fingers over the barbells. I shuddered beneath the light touch.

"Good boy," she praised, smoothing the pad of her thumb across my tip. "Oh," she mused, studying me closer. "I guess you don't have a flat ass, huh?" she gave it a squeeze and I resisted the urge to moan as the sparks from our bond and her soft touch collided into one giant cock-tease.

Fuck. Maybe Oni was right and I was a damned pervert. Hearing her say that felt so fucking good.

Lee pulled away and I pouted, missing her warmth the second she left. She grabbed the food bowl and proceeded to fill it up, though she didn't mix all the food together like I'd done to her.

"Here you go," she said, setting it down. She watched me as I knelt on the ground.

Had I really made her feel like this? Damn, I'd been a monster to her. Despite knowing she wasn't judging me, and wasn't even angry at me, it was hard to shove my face into the food bowl.

I hated myself for ever doing this shit to her.

"You can stop now." Lee stroked my head, letting her nails rake against my scalp. I leaned against the soft touch.

"It's not enough. I was a fucking monster, Lee."

“You were,” she agreed. “But that was before. Do you want to be on your hands and knees all night?”

I glanced up at her and smirked. Now that she mentioned it, there was one great thing about being in this position. “One pussy deserves another, right, master?” I purred. I toppled her over before she could object, letting her hit the soft couch right behind the counter. My old shirt was ripped off her pretty little body in seconds and tossed in the corner far away from where she could reach.

“Julian,” she clenched her thighs around my head, trying to stop me. “What are you doing?”

“Being a good boy,” I replied with a chuckle.

She laughed. “Aren’t I supposed to be the one in charge?” She pushed at me. “Come on, I haven’t finished getting to enjoy you as my kitty.”

Fucking ears. I regretted putting them on now. Maybe her wearing them and bent over with her pussy all wet and exposed would be hot, but I was already over this punishment of mine.

I should have just brought her fucking chocolate.

Groaning, I backed away.

“Sit on the floor, and lean back against the couch cushions,” she ordered.

I crawled on the ground to the area she indicated and did as told. My cock twitched, swaying from the arousal coursing through me.

Was being stared at by her really so hot?

She knelt down, leaning against my leg before she took her hand and gently ran it up and down the steel bars. “They’re kind of rough,” she mused.

“A little, but I promise they’re going to feel so fucking good inside you.”

She hummed and ran her fingers up and down them like she was trying out for a keyboarding gig. I groaned, my hips thrusting upward at each pass.

“Stay still, kitty,” she scolded, nipping at my thigh.

Goddess damned. Had being with the others unlocked such a vixen in one night? If she kept this kind of torture up, I wasn’t going to last long enough to even get a chance to be inside her.

No, there was no fucking way I was going to finish early when the others hadn’t had problems. I had to be the best.

With a hiss, I stayed perfectly still.

Lee chose that moment to lean over and take me into her mouth. She gagged around my size, but instead of pulling away, she kept going until she had traveled to the bottom of my shaft and she licked her way up, sucking on my tip.

It took every fiber of willpower I had not to grab her by the back of her head and force her back down.

“Julian?” she whispered, running her fingers up and down the bars again. “Will it hurt?”

I nuzzled into her neck. “A little at first, but once you get going, all you’ll be able to focus on is how damn good it feels.”

She pulled out a cylinder filled with thick, pale pink fluid. “Let’s get you prepared and we’ll find out.” She uncapped the lid like a pro, turned it over, and drizzled it all over my tip. I winced at the cold.

She didn’t let it chill me for long. She rubbed her thumb across my tip again before she smoothed the lubricant all up and down the length of my cock until I thought I was going to burst.

“Are you going to be my good kitty?” Lee questioned, slowly straddling me. She put her hands on my shoulders, guiding my lubed tip toward her. “Or am I going to punish a bad boy? Because Elijah gave me a present for that.”

Why was this so fucking hard? Waiting for even thirty seconds felt like an eternity. She lowered herself slowly onto me until her pussy lips brushed the tip of my cock.

Fuck the original plan. This felt so much better.

“One more thing, Jules,” she whispered into my ear. “Meow for me.”

She plunged down onto me, taking all of my length and the piercings all at once. “Meow!” I moaned like a man possessed.

“Oh my goddess!” She stared down at me, going perfectly still.

Fuck! Had I ripped her? It took all my willpower, great but I resisted the urge to smash into her to chase my orgasm.

“Are you okay? How does it feel? Do I need to pull out?”

She shook her head. “I’m fine, it was more than I thought. It’s rough, but it doesn’t hurt.” She lifted herself off me and then moved up and down in a sinfully slow display. “It feels really good like this. I keep feeling every bar of the ladder press against me.”

“Ride me as much as you want,” I whispered. I clenched my jaw as I struggled to not turn into a beast. No matter what, I had to restrain myself.

Lee pulled herself all the way to the top of my shaft with my tip barely enclosed inside her wet little pussy before dropping all the way down again.

My hands darted to her hips, and I guided her up and down, working our way ever faster. I’d never imagined a mate could feel like this. If only I’d found her sooner, this could have been our hundredth fucking session instead of our first.

“Careful,” she panted. “If you’re a bad kitty, I’ll have to punish you.”

I tore the ears off my head with one hand before placing it back on her hip. “Sorry, you missed your chance, I can’t hold back anymore.” I pulled out of her and smirked at the hazy lust swirling through the bond. She was pissed at me and it never felt better.



“Why?” she protested. If we hadn’t been on the floor, she’d have stomped her foot over the injustice of it all.

“We’re going to the bedroom, and you’re going to crawl to the center with that hot little ass in the air,” I growled into her ear. “And then I’m going to fuck you so hard, you won’t be able to walk for a week.”

“I think I’m already at that point,” she giggled.

I gathered her in my arms and strode to the bed, kicking the door closed behind me before plopping her onto the bed. “Get in position,” I ordered.

Lee didn’t even hesitate. Where had this obedience been back when I had been messing with her? Whatever. I crawled onto the bed behind her and stroked her ass cheek before using them as leverage and pulling her against my cock until I nestled it between her ass cheeks.

My hands circled around her body, and I squeezed her breasts before rolling her nipples between my fingers. She let out a pretty little moan and I repeated the motion, squeezing and pulling the nipples taut until she writhed against me.

I pulled my cock free of its nest of warmth and slipped it back into her waiting wetness. I slid all the way inside with no extra effort and paused for a moment to enjoy her tightening around me. If she had meant to do it or not I wasn’t sure, but all that mattered was how fucking good it felt.

“Julian,” she mewed.

“They feel amazing from this position, don’t they?” I purred into her ear and moved my hands back to her hips. Using our natural rhythm, I thrust into her and she tightened around me with every stroke.

Fuck, she was so tight. I was going to lose it and explode inside of her before I had time to take care of her.

“Yes,” she yelped in response.

I pushed her against the bed and guided one of her legs higher up so it looked like she was trying to take high steps with one leg bent and the other straight. It let me sink ever deeper into her sweetness. “Fuck, Lee,” I moaned.

She quivered around me, and it only made me thrust harder and faster, seeking more of her body as it responded to me. Her moans filled the air, a sweet reminder I was the one making her go fucking crazy.

I needed to hold it together until she came first, after that, I could get some relief and not before.

Her fingers tightened in the sheets. “Julian!” she screamed into the mattress.

Her body tightened impossibly around me, and I held her knee to my chest as I thrust into that tight warmth for a few moments more. My mate was here, and as her orgasm hit her and slammed through our bond, I was a mere puppet, unable to resist the tidal wave.

I came hard, my cock spewing into her like a water hose.

She panted and glanced at me over her shoulder. “You’re terrible at apologies,” she giggled in between pants.

“You’re right, I should probably stop doing stupid stuff I have to apologize for then, huh?”

She halfway flipped over so she was staring up at me and put her hand against my cheek. “Thank you, Julian. If it wasn’t for you and the others, I would have ended up like those other scholarship students... You saved me.”

The bridge of my nose burned and I glanced away. “You were right there with us, you even used that power, whatever it was, to control the Alpha Gods and get rid of Inu.”

She pulled me down into a tight hug and kissed the mark she’d left on my chest. I groaned at the surge of sparks dancing through me. My cock twitched even in its deflated state and I battled it down.

The others would likely be back soon, especially after Elijah handled whatever he needed to with Alexandra, and then this new future of ours would officially start.

“Oh yeah,” I gently kissed her cheek. “I forgot to tell you, Mom and Dad gave us the house to live in. We don’t have to be in this cramped apartment any longer, in fact, they want to take it over.”

“Really?” She glanced around the room. “I feel like we’ve lived here for so long already... It’s going to be weird to be gone.”

I smirked. “Yeah, but there you won’t have to worry about how loud you are when you’re with one of us.”

Streaks of red crossed her cheeks and she turned her head. “I think we need to get dressed before the others get back. It’s time for dinner.”

“We could stay naked,” I suggested, nuzzling her throat. “It’s not like anyone is going to see anything they haven’t already seen, right?”

“You’re impossible,” she smacked at me, but I ducked beneath the blow.

“You’ll have to be quicker than that,” I growled at her. “Besides, who knows how long they’ll be,” I bumped against her again. “We could go another round.”

She pushed against me and wriggled free. “You might be ready for that, but my legs are about to fall off and I’m exhausted. I’m not about to have another day like today or you guys are going to end up breaking my hips. We’re making a schedule as soon as we move to the new house.”

I chuckled. “Then that means....” I ran my fingers up and down her spine, letting my fingertips glide across her ribs. “We can fuck as much as we want until we go.”

Lee grabbed the pillow from beside her and smacked me in the face with it. In the second it took for me to defend myself, she rolled away from me and grabbed more of my clothes, slipping them on while glaring at me defiantly.

Fuck, if only I had realized the first time I saw that look that I'd fall so hopelessly in love with her. I'd wasted so much of our time being her enemy when all I needed to be was her lover.

"I love you," I whispered.

She peeked at me from over her shoulder and smiled. "I love you too, Julian. I don't know how it happened, but now I wouldn't trade any of you, ever. Now get dressed, you're going to help me with dinner too."

Hopefully, she wouldn't be too disappointed when my cooking rivaled my mother's. In any case, she'd soon learn.



Chapter 36

## True Alpha Gods

### **ELIJAH**

Alexandra was harder to get to than I'd assumed. She'd glanced my way when I arrived but had gestured for me to take a seat while she gave each of the Alpha Gods a physical.

The line stretched down the end of the hall and beyond. I took a seat on a bench and the woman beside me scooted over to give me room. She was fussing over someone on her other side. "Sit still, we have to get you properly looked at."

Wait.

I knew that voice. "Cindy?"

She turned to glance at me, and her eyes widened. "Elijah? What are you doing here? Did you get hurt too from all this?" She waved a hand at all the men. "Who are all these people, anyway? We were trying to get King seen for a second opinion, but the wait time was massive."

King? Wasn't that Lee's brother? I tensed. "Is he okay? Should we take him to the hospital? And these are all the

previous Alpha Gods. I'm not sure if you knew, but this place was apparently a testing ground for us all, and all the statues around here were those that got rejected."

"Oh," she stared at the line again. "That's... crazy." She frowned. "Wait, since you guys apparently cleared it, does that make you the true Alpha Gods or something?"

I shrugged. "Who knows? The extra strength and power I had before doesn't seem to be with me anymore, I only feel it when I'm with my mate and the other guys. Can you call something with those limitations an Alpha God?"

She rolled her eyes. "It's simple, Elijah. If you're the ones who took the test and passed, and they're the ones who took it and failed, it tells me you're the real ones. They're a bunch of knockoffs."

It was probably better if I got her off the subject before she stirred up trouble. "You said you brought King here for a second opinion? Did something happen to him?"

"No," she answered softly. "In fact, he's doing better than ever, and that's the problem. He told me he had some deadly disease Silverton was fighting, but my doctor said it was only a reaction and easily treatable. He gave him a shot and he's been doing better since but none of it makes sense. You can't cure something like that so easily, can you?"

What was going on? "Are you sure he's cured?" I leaned out, inspecting the young man. He didn't look as weak or pale as he had before, though he was far too delicate.



“He shouldn’t be, right?” She frowned and turned back to him, leaning close and inspecting him as he turned all manner of red. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad to see there’s some change, I just don’t understand how.”

Neither did I.

“King?”

Baron growled as Reuben sat on my other side. The bench was feeling far too cramped. “What are you doing here?” I growled. A bit of Julian’s rage had rubbed off on me when it concerned this one.

Reuben pulled back with a wince. “Sorry.” There were bruises all over his face and arms. “I’m here for a check-up after being released from the hospital. Tell me, is Lee okay?”

“She’s fine,” I growled.

Cindy turned back toward us and scowled. Then she froze, her eyes widening. “No way,” she hissed.

What was she so vehement about? I glanced around but couldn’t make it out. “Cindy?”

“I don’t get it... Elijah, you’re mates with Lee now, right? I mean, of course, you are, but how did you know? Was it right away or...?”

“The Alpha Gods had a curse placed on us, we couldn’t sense our mates no matter how close they were. Why? You’re not going to try to start anything else with her, are you?”

She held up her hands. “No way. Julian has made it crystal clear what will happen if I do any of that, and I’m not about to take that risk.” She frowned and leaned out to look past me. “But... Elijah? Why do I suddenly feel like Reuben is my mate?”

Why was I in the middle of this? Couldn’t Alexandra hurry up? The line was moving at a snail’s pace, and it left me in this awkward conversation. Never had I regretted my decisions more than I did at this moment.

Cindy continued to stare at me with her piercing gaze. There was no escaping her. “My guess is when we defeated Inu, that curse was vanquished and all the Alpha Gods, past and present, can find their mates now.”

Cindy stared at the ground. “He’s my mate?” She shook her head. “How is that possible?” She put a hand to her chest. “But...”

“Are you okay?” King tore himself away from his video game to check on his temporary guardian. “You don’t look so good.”

She gave him a tight smile. “I’m fine, just surprised. That’s all. Here, why don’t you sit next to Elijah. I need to have a talk with that other person.”

King nodded and I scooted closer to him as Cindy traded spots with me. Her conversation with Reuben was low, but based on their reaction to each other, I could guess what the topic of conversation was.

“Hey, aren’t you the guy that my sister left with? You and Julian,” King observed, twisting toward me. “Did you hear? Cindy’s doctor checked me out and somehow the tardoxia was gone. He gave me a vitamin shot and the next thing I knew, I felt better.” He grinned. “Isn’t that amazing?”

I smiled back, but my mind raced. Tardoxia, that was something Julian had been researching of late. There wasn’t a lot to go on, but it wasn’t a natural illness. The only ones that had caught it in the past were those involved in some sort of lab spillover out in the country.

Maybe the waters had been tainted? But if that had been the case, Lee would have most likely caught the disease as well. No, it was more likely something far more sinister was happening, and I’d get to the bottom of it. “That’s great, I know your sister is going to be thrilled to hear that too. You should come with me for supper tonight.”

Why had I done that? Instead of us getting to spend more time with our mate, I’d gone and invited her little brother into the cramped situation. We’d all need to find somewhere else to sleep again.

“Really? Sure! I wanted to show my sis my new cabbit. He’s a white version of her favorite. His name is Eros, and he’s even got some powers!” He twisted his phone around. “Did you want to see?”

Thankfully, I was saved from having to lie to him as he was called into the nurse’s office and I was left alone with my thoughts.

Just when would Alexandra be finished? Was I going to spend the entire evening here? Though it was probably best I did that anyway, since King hadn't given me an answer. Even Cindy looked far too lost to notice me.

It felt like hours had dragged by when Alexandra finally had a break to come and sit at my side. "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"I think we need to talk."

She frowned. "I'm not sure I've got the time. There are still a lot of patients to look over, and then I have to help do the testing on their blood. We don't know what might have happened or what effects might have been left over after what happened to them."

"I get it. I'm not here to bother you. In fact, I'm here to apologize."

"You don't need to."

"No, Alexandra. I treated you pretty crappy because I was convinced we were supposed to be together. I didn't listen to you or what you wanted. Even if we had been mates, the way I treated you was uncalled for."

She grabbed a clipboard and scribbled on it. "What I'm most upset about is how you treated Lee. I'd always thought you were the safe one, and from what I've heard, you were a total monster."

"I was," I agreed without hesitation. "That's why I made sure I apologized properly to her." A bit too much apologizing.

I was still finding it sore to sit, but perhaps this was all part of the punishment as well.

“I swear, Elijah. If you do anything to hurt Lee, or if any of you Alpha Gods do, I’ll come back so fast and slap the hell out of all of you.”

“Wait, what do you mean come back? Where are you going?”

She paused and looked back up at me. “Ah, that’s right. I haven’t told you or the others yet.” She took a deep breath. “Some of the Alpha Gods I’ve seen today had friends in another one of the umbrella schools, and said school just so happens to be taking on nursing students.”

My eyes widened. “You’re finally going to go after your dream?”

A wide smile split her lips, and she hugged her clipboard tight. “That’s right. You’re looking at the newest transfer student to Obsidian Woods. However, it’s not just for fun.” She leaned closer to me. At another time such an action would have sent me into fits of giddiness. Now, however, it meant nothing. “I’m going to do some investigating on my own.”

I frowned. “That sounds dangerous, Alexandra. We barely survived the trials and the fight with Inu. We had to give up some of our power to make it through.”

She shrugged. “Danger or not, I’ve already decided. I need to say goodbye to Lee, and of course, you all need to come visit me after I get settled in over there. I’ve heard rumors

about disappearances in that place and I'm not going to rest until I know the truth."

"I understand your drive, but what are you going to do if you end up running into their version of Inu, or if they have a corrupted Dean as well?"

"You worry too much. As a nursing student, I can investigate them and find out if they have those kinds of people around, and if they do, I promise I'll reach out for help." She tossed her long braid over her shoulder. "I'm not exactly harmless, however, even I know I can be easily outmatched since I've never been in a real fight."

The thought of Alexandra leaving should have filled me with dread or left me so shattered I couldn't think.

It did neither of those things.

"That's all I ask. Promise no matter what, if you find something dangerous you're going to reach out to us. We're your friends and we'll always come running."

"You don't have to be so dramatic about it, Elijah. It's a transfer."

"I still want you to promise. You're my best friend and even if I've been a shitty one in comparison, I want to make up for it by being someone you can rely on again. If you get in trouble or even see anything weird, you call us."

"Yes, yes," she answered with a small smile. "I promise."

"Good."

A long line of previous Alpha Gods stood outside the nursing office. They stretched all the way down the hall and I winced. Even if she loved this work, wasn't this too much?

“Feeling sorry for me?” she chuckled. “Don't. This makes me feel more alive than anything else I've done in my entire life. I'm not saving the world, but I am making it a better place, one person at a time.”

In that case. “You've got a patient in there right now. His name is King, he's Lee's little brother. Cindy brought him in because apparently, her doctor cured him of some deadly disease that he swears is easily managed. It's called tardoxia, please look into what it is and how it spreads because none of what I've learned makes sense. If it's something that can come back, I want to know.”

She nodded. “You know I'll take good care of him, and I'll look into it. I'm not sure how long it could take to get you answers, but you'll have them, Elijah.”

“Thank you, Alexandra,” I said. “And take care.”

She held up a hand in farewell and I turned and walked back to my bench to wait for King to finish up. The last thing I wanted to do was show up to dinner without him and miss the chance to see Lee's eyes shine when she learned of the good news.

The too good news, but if anyone could get to the bottom of it, I had no doubts Alexandra could. She'd been the one who had suspected something had been going on in Silverton after all, and she'd been right.

There was no sting or any other sudden pains when thinking about her. Claiming and being with my mate had changed my whole life, and we were only getting started.

That Obsidian Woods school wasn't the only other one beneath the umbrella system, either. Ten other schools needed to be checked out, and no matter what we found, we were going to put a stop to anyone else who was trying to use their students as guinea pigs, no matter what.

My phone buzzed and I glanced at it. It was a text message from Julian, letting me know it was safe to go home.

Good, I was getting worried that with me being gone so long, the food would end up a total disaster, though I'd done most of the work before I left.

With Julian in the picture, though, that little worry could still become reality.

King finished with his appointment and joined me, too lost in his game to chat. We walked down the hall and out of the Silverton main hall before heading for the apartment.

Who knew what Alex, and the others planned to do to this place?

There was one thing I knew for certain.

We didn't want to dominate the school any longer; we promised to restore it to what it should have been from the beginning. Not a place of fear where the strong abused the weak, but one where everyone had an equal chance to pursue their dreams and become their best selves.



And it wasn't just about our school; we aimed to extend this change to all schools, one by one.

This became our final promise as the true Alpha Gods—a promise we were determined to fulfill.

### **The End of the Alpha Gods of Silverton Saga**

### **Next Saga: Witch Gods of Obsidian Woods**

If you enjoyed the story please leave a review so others can find it. Thanks so much for your support, and I hope you're prepared to enjoy the entire Academy Gods lineup.



## About Maria Warren

Maria Warren is an ambitious author working on a universe that spans 100 books (nope, not a typo! 36 of those are just Academy Gods!), all connecting with each other in one large story involving Gods, Goddesses, Demons, Angels, and every paranormal creature you can shake a stick at.

She's deeply in love with urban fantasy and paranormal romance and loves losing herself while writing it. Inspired by a healthy love of games, anime, and otome, her works focus on reverse harems so the heroine never has to choose, with lots of plot and then hot. You can visit her online at <https://mariawarrenwrites.com/>

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