



A **The
nexpected**

L.K NIGHT

The Unexpected

KINGS OF RUIN BOOK 3

L KNIGHT

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Prologue: Beck

“SERIOUSLY, BECK, ARE YOU EVEN FUCKING LISTENING TO me?”

I glance at Ryker and blink. “What?”

“Those two girls have been checking us out all night. It’s time to make our move, man.”

Ryker cracks his neck and tips the last of his beer down his throat. I hadn’t been listening at all, too busy watching some guys try and hit on Amelia. Ryker follows my line of sight and grins.

“Amelia is looking smoking hot tonight.”

I spin so fast I knock a bottle off the kitchen island where our graduation party is taking place. I have Ryker pinned against the fridge, with my forearm against his throat in seconds, catching him off guard. “Don’t fucking talk about her like that. She isn’t some cheap slut you can fuck around with.”

Ryker holds his hands up, his eyebrows in his hairline. “Calm down, I was only saying.”

I drop my arm, the anger leeching out of me as I step back. Ryker brushes his hand down his crinkled shirt, and I hang my head. He’s one of my best friends and I lost it, but Amelia is different, and I’ve only just started to realize how different she is from all the other girls I know.

“You know I’d never go there, Beck.”

I hand him a fresh beer off the counter, and he takes my peace offering. “I know.”

Ryker wraps an arm around my shoulder and laughs. “No worries. Now, about those two hot chicks?”

As he’s talking, I let my gaze find Amelia, who is watching me intently. A shy smile creases over her face, making my heart squeeze. I wink and she rolls her eyes at me and then blows me a kiss. It’s always been easy between me and her, we fit, and we understand each other. The fact that we are both our families’ disappointments bonds us tighter.

My parents had been here to watch me get my certificate and so had hers. Mine had taken me out for a nice dinner to celebrate my graduation and then promptly gotten back on the private jet to take them back to New York. I know my parents love me, but the stench of disappointment I get from them every time I see them lately is suffocating.

I was never meant to be a doctor. I was meant to step into the family business, like my older brother, Giles, and be the good little boy. Yet I couldn’t force myself to fit the mold they had created for me, and that was a snub as far as they are concerned. Amelia’s parents are slightly easier. They try and hide the fact she doesn’t want to be involved in the family liquor company, but she feels it. I know she does.

“Here we go.”

I look up at the excitement in Ryker’s voice and see two girls walking toward us. They are gorgeous, a blonde and a brunette, both with long, lithe legs shown off in short, butt-skimming dresses.

“Ladies, looking good.”

I let Ryker take the lead, as my heart’s not in it. The blonde moves in closer and puts her hand on my chest, her tits pressed against me as she looks at me with hooded eyes.

“Hey, Beck.”

I can’t remember her name, it’s something sweet like Candy or Honey. “Hey, gorgeous.”

I go with a generic term because, honestly, I don’t really give a fuck. She talks and talks, and I tune out, my attention across the room where Amelia is with her friend, Charlotte.

I'm not keen on the girl, but Amelia likes her. They are slowly gathering a crowd of frat boys' attention and it makes my spine stiffen. I watch as one, Calvin, I think his name is, tries to slip his arm around Amelia and she moves away.

Amelia can handle herself. My girl isn't some shrinking violet, but I've always been her protector and always will be, no matter what. She's special but lately I've been feeling more for her and I can't shake it. I think it might be because of the fact that, for the first time, we're going our separate ways.

"Excuse me."

I leave Honey or Candy with her mouth agape and walk toward Amelia. Without a thought, I nudge frat-boy out of the way and take up position behind Amelia, pulling her back to my front, securing her to me with my arm around her middle. I feel her sink back into me as I bend and put my lips close to her ear. Her hair tickles my nose, her scent settling the anxiety I was feeling. "You good, Melly?"

She turns so her lips are close to mine and grins at me. "Thanks for the rescue."

I tighten my arm around her and watch her slightly dilated eyes lower in a slow blink. The air stills around us, the noise nothing but interference at this point. "You want to get out of here?"

"Please."

My girl is drunk, her voice husky with it and, although the party is in full swing, there is no way I'm letting her stay here with these handsy fuckers. I turn and swing her into my arms bridal style, and she giggles loudly as she holds on to my neck, her body snuggling closer as she lays her face against my throat.

My dick jumps at the press of her lips against my pulse and I fight the groan. I might be her friend and respect the hell out of her, but I'm not dead below the waist, and Amelia is fucking beautiful. Her dark auburn hair is thick and silky and hangs down her back in waves. Her blue eyes are always so

full of life and joy, that it sucks you in until you can't help but be infected by it, and she's smarter than anyone I know.

"I can walk, you know."

"In those heels, you'd break an ankle."

She kicks her legs out in front of her as I walk us up the stairs to my room. I glance at her long legs and close my eyes against the image of them wrapped around me as I bury myself in her warmth.

I toss her on the bed and she bounces with a shriek. "Beck."

I move to my dresser and drag out a tee and throw it at her. "Here, you can change into this."

Amelia snags it from me and lifts it to her nose, making me smirk.

"Weirdo."

"Hey, I can't help it. Your fabric softener smells nicer than mine."

I shake my head as I walk to the door. "We use the same one, dork."

She shrugs and giggles as she kicks off her heels, one landing across the room as she kicks it.

"Amelia, don't make a mess in here," I warn her with a pointed look. She's the messiest person I know. How her mind can fathom out the secrets of the universe with such chaos I don't know. I'm tidy to the point of obsessive and she likes to fuck with me by invading my calm with her own personal brand of bedlam.

"I'm going to go tell Ryker to clear the party out and then I'll be back."

"You don't have to stay." Her lip turns down. "You can go back to Maple and have fun."

So that's her name. Not that it matters, because I want nothing more than to spend the rest of my evening with my best friend. "Find a movie for us to watch. No chick flicks."

I shut the door and lope down the stairs, finding Ryker with Maple and the brunette where I left them. His friend Archer is with them now and we bump fists. “Hey, bro.”

“Beck.”

Archer is a good guy, more Ryker’s friend than mine. The two have been friends since school. Maple gives me her back with a huff as if she’s offended I walked off in the middle of our conversation. I’m not sure if she thinks I care, but if she does, she’ll be disappointed.

“Ryk, do me a favor, man, and get these people out of my fucking house.”

He lifts his head from the brunette girl’s cleavage. “What’s up?”

I shake my head. “Nothing, just tired.”

“Hmm.”

I fold my arms across my chest defensively. “What does that mean?”

“Nothing, just that you drop everything for Amelia.”

“And? I’d do the same for you or Linc or Harrison, too.”

“No, brother, you wouldn’t but whatever.”

“Hey, everyone out. We’re taking this party back to my place.”

Everyone cheers and begins filing out. Ryker has the coolest digs not far from here. His loft is huge and perfect for partying with its open layout. He bought it after his first app sold for over two million dollars.

I don’t wait for him to leave, knowing he’ll lock up when he leaves. Ryker might have a big mouth with too many opinions sometimes, but he’s a solid friend. I rush back upstairs to find Amelia lying in my bed, with my tee on her body, snuggled up to my pillow. She smiles shyly as I head to the bathroom and change into sweatpants. I take a moment to give my dick a pep talk about Amelia being off-limits and head back out. I don’t even think twice about crawling into

bed with her, we've done this so many times. She snuggles up to me, her body pressed against my side as I settle my arm around her.

“So, what did you pick?”

“That new superhero one we watched at the movies a few months back.”

“Fine but you drool on me about the blond guy, and you're getting kicked to the floor.” Amelia pinches me in the side, and I growl. “Pack it in, Tink.” I use the nickname I gave her when we were kids.

“Well, don't make idle threats.”

“You think I wouldn't kick you to the floor?”

“I know you wouldn't. You love me too much.”

She's right, I never would, but something about her words unsettles me, so I flick play on the remote and we watch the movie.

A hot scene with the hero and his love interest comes on and I hear Amelia's breathing hitch, her body squirms against mine and I still, fighting my natural response to the sexy sound. Her leg hooks over my thighs and I suck in a breath at how close she is to my now hard cock. Her skin is smooth and soft, the tee she's wearing barely covering her thighs.

The hero has the heroine pinned to the wall and I can feel Amelia's sharp breaths against my naked chest. “Amelia.”

She looks up at me, and I can see her eyes heavy with booze but also something I've never been on the receiving end of before, desire. I lie there stunned as she swings her body up until she's straddling my hips. My dick is nestled against her, and I'm frozen, not sure what to do or feel. Lust floods my blood, but the warm feeling in my chest is new, and something that solely belongs to Amelia. I lift my hand as if in a trance as I soak up just how fucking beautiful she is. Her lips part as I cup her cheek and she sighs, her eyes closing against my touch.

“You’re so beautiful.” I rub my thumb over her bottom lip, tugging her lips open as she arches into my touch.

“Beck.”

I’ve always known how unique and rare our connection was, but now, as I look at her, it’s like seeing her for the first time. She’s always been my number one. Nobody comes between us—not boyfriends or girls I’ve hooked up with, but I didn’t see it then. Now it’s like my eyes are wide open for the first time.

I’m hopelessly in love with my best friend and it’s terrifying and exhilarating. I want to shout it from the roof tops, to tell the world that this stunning, amazing woman is mine. But first, I want to kiss her.

I cup the back of her neck and pull her down toward me, her hands landing on my bare chest like a brand and my cock jumps against her, making her moan in the back of her throat.

“So fucking hot.”

I nip her lower lip with my teeth, and she presses into me as I guide her head and kiss her for the very first time. It’s like finding the center of a storm, perfect and still until the next second when it’s wild and hungry.

Her tongue duels with mine, taking as much as she gives. Lips crashing, teeth clashing as the tempo of our kiss grows wild. Her hands move all over my skin as I smooth my palm over her naked thigh and cup her ass under the leg of her panties and grind up into her sweet heat. I could come from just this, without her touching my dick. I taste the wine she’s been drinking as I stroke her lips with mine and know I should stop but, as she sits up and tips her head back and moans, I’m held hostage by the sight of her.

Her body moves and I drop my hands to hold her hips and rock her against my aching cock. “Make yourself come all over my cock, Amelia.”

I tilt my hips and she mewls as her hand fists her tit over the tee she wears. A feeling of possession comes over me and I want to mark her as mine. I want her wearing my clothes, my

scent, my come. The thought is dirty and so fucking hot I can hardly stand it. My fingers snake beneath the hem of her shirt and I inch my thumb under the edge of her panties and she's drenched for me. I swipe fingers through her wet heat before hooking two fingers inside her and stroking her G-spot.

“Look at me, Amelia.”

Her eyes are almost black with desire as she leans forward, her weight on her hands against my chest. I hold her gaze as I use the wetness of her arousal to circle my thumb over her clit as she humps my cock. “Come for me, Tink.”

Her thighs clench and shake as she rides me, using me, and I fucking love how she chases her own pleasure with such wild abandon. Her body stills for a split second and then she's crying out, her soft whimpers and slower movements allowing me to watch her and see the fierce pleasure on her gorgeous face. The vision she makes has my own climax hitting me like a hurricane and I come harder than I ever have before. My sweatpants are ruined just like I know my heart is for this girl.

Amelia sags against me and I hold her close, kissing her hair and neck softly. This day started with us graduating so we could start the next chapter of our lives, but I know now she's in every chapter for me and always will be. I smile as I lift her off me and tuck her into bed. I move to the bathroom, grabbing clean sweats before I clean myself up, my brain running away making plans for us.

When I walk out of the room, I stop dead to see her naked and waiting for me. My steps falter as I take in the shy look, her pink cheeks flush from her orgasm. My dick is instantly hard again at the vision of her. I know it's something I'll remember for the rest of my life because it was the second I realized I'd never love anyone the way I love her. It's also the reason I won't make love to her while we're both still tipsy.

I look away and turn to the dresser, grabbing a spare pair of sweats and a hoodie. I toss them on the bed and fight the urge to turn around, but I know my will power is weak with her.

“Put these on and then we should get some rest.”

For a second I hear nothing, no movement at all but then the rustling tells me she's dressed. I turn and she's sitting on the edge of the bed.

"I should go."

"What? No. Stay. Let's finish the movie."

I stomp over her shyness and pull her back into my arms and she stiffens but soon she's relaxing against me and her breathing evens out. I stroke her hair for hours after, my thoughts flitting around how we'll make it work. Will she still follow her parents' advice and go into finance when I know she hates it or will she follow her heart? I make so many plans as I fall asleep and, in the morning, my heart is broken as I find the bed beside me empty and cold, just a single note shattering my silly dreams.

1: Beck

SEVEN YEARS LATER

I GRIT MY JAW AS I WATCH HER DANCING, AND FORCIBLY loosen my grip on the glass of whiskey in my hand. The last thing I need is to fuck up my hands and ruin the career I've worked so hard to achieve. Yet my eyes can't seem to leave her for more than a few seconds before I'm drawn to her again.

Amelia's head tips back in laughter and I see the long column of her pale neck as Ryker spins her around in his arms. I imagine running my tongue along her delicate skin, my teeth nipping at her throat as she takes my cock, the whimpers and moans she'd emit.

I turn away from the temptation and see Norrie watching me as if she can see every secret I have. I hold my breath, wondering if she'll comment but her attention is thankfully taken away by her new husband. Being in love with your best friend isn't something to advertise, especially as she has no clue how I feel. Yet I find myself fighting the urge to tell her more and more.

Being here at Norrie and Harrison's wedding is making me maudlin or perhaps that's the whiskey I've drunk. I watch Harrison take Norrie in his arms and it's clear to anyone with eyes how in love with her he is, but the stupid prick refuses to see it. I hope they can work it out for the gorgeous child they share, as much as for themselves. I'm a romantic at heart. I want to see all my friends find true love with that one special person who makes them better. My gaze slides over to Amelia again and I swallow hard, my jaw going rigid with jealousy as Ryker spins her out and whips her back into his arms, making her laugh again.

“Why are you looking so morose and grumpy?”

I cock my head to the side and look at Audrey. She's a close friend and one of the four people who own Club Ruin with me. She's a ball-busting force of nature with a heart of pure caramel, not that I'd ever say it to her face. Wearing her

heart on her sleeve is not her *modus operandi* and I understand that. A woman as successful as she is in a man's world has to perfect a persona of indestructibility that a man doesn't. As a heart surgeon, I see it a lot. Female doctors work twice as hard to get the same perks as the 'old boy' brigade. It sickens me that it still happens when the truth is, women are ten times more capable than most men.

When we started Club Ruin it was just that, a night club. It was Audrey that made it what it is today. Her ideas, her force of nature, and her passion. Starting the club with my best friends from college is the best thing I ever did, after getting my medical license. It has given me an outlet, an escape from the job I love when it gets too hard. I glance again at the woman I've loved since I was a kid. She is my best friend, my person, the one I always turn to first, even above all my other friends, or she was. Now things feel off like I'm losing her, and I can't figure out why.

"It's just my face, Aud, and I think the words you're looking for are brooding and sexy."

I watch her wrinkle her nose and smirk. "So, it's not about the gorgeous Amelia dancing with Ryker?"

My shoulders tense and I have to breathe through my gut reaction to deny it. That will only make Audrey more suspicious. That's the problem with being so close to these assholes, they know me too well. If I'm not careful, she'll have my every reaction picked apart in pieces at my feet in seconds.

"Why would that bother me?" Amelia is my oldest friend, my best friend since we were seven years old and there is nothing I wouldn't do for her, even if it cuts me up inside to see her with anyone who isn't me.

Audrey crosses her arms over her middle and leans into me, her head resting on my shoulder like she's done a hundred times. There's nothing remotely sexual between us. Even if I have seen her play at the club a few times, I don't see her that way. She's my friend but, as my eyes move once again to the

auburn-haired beauty on the dance floor, I'm reminded that so is she. Yet, I want her with a passion I can barely contain.

"Be brave, Beck. Tell her how you feel."

My heart feels like it stutters in my chest at her words. Nobody can know how I feel, especially Audrey. She'll push and push and I won't risk my friendship with Amelia on something as tenuous as love.

"She knows how I feel. She's my best buddy."

Audrey lifts her head with a shake and a look of pure disappointment and I hate it. Thank God Hudson picks that moment to interrupt.

"Audrey, can I speak to you?"

I smirk as I watch her face transform into an almost snarl. "Fuck off, prick."

Hudson smiles wider. "You are a true delight, Audrey."

She gives him the middle finger and walks away, and he follows as I chuckle. Those two need to fuck or fight or maybe both and get it out of their systems.

"Hey."

Amelia is a sweaty, flushed mess from dancing her heart out with Lottie and Norrie earlier and then with Ryker, and she's never looked more stunning. Every muscle in my body wants to lean toward her, to reach for her. "Hey, Tinkerbell."

She frowns, a tiny line forming on her forehead. "Really, Beck, still calling me that?"

"What? I've always called you that."

"When we were kids, but I'm a grown woman now."

My eyes sweep over her from top to bottom as if they have a mind of their own and admire every single curve. Amelia is around five feet four, and petite in every way, except my girl has tits and an ass that would make a grown man weep for mercy. She's a fucking siren, and I'd happily fall at her feet if I didn't want to risk the thing I value most—her friendship.

I wrap an arm around her like I've done a thousand times and kiss her head, noting the familiar scent she wears is the one I buy her every Christmas. "I know, but to me, you're my Tinkerbell."

She sighs and pulls back to look up at me and I hate seeing the light go from her sky-blue eyes and don't know what I can do to fix this. Since she came back from London, our friendship feels like it is slipping through my fingers and the more I fight for it, the further away she seems.

She forces a big smile, which is as fake as a politician's promises. "You're right."

I can't help it, my body tenses at her words. Something about the way she says them, which is part resignation and part determination, scares the crap out of me. "I am?"

Amelia laughs and it goes straight to my dick, her sensuality curling around me like delicious sin.

She pats my arm. "Yes. I'm Tink and you're Beck and that's how we'll always be."

This feels like a trap and I don't see the way out or even what the danger is. I get the absurd feeling that I know how a fly in a spider web feels now.

"I am going to head back to the city tonight."

Surprise moves through me, her comment seeming to come from left field, and I set my glass down on a table close to me and turn back to her. "Why? You never mentioned it before."

Amelia juts her chin out stubbornly as she places her hands on her hips. "I have a date tomorrow."

I fold my arms and for a split second, I'm sure I see hunger in her eyes as she looks at my chest. I'd lost my jacket earlier that day and my shirt sleeves are folded up my forearms, showcasing the tattoos there. When she blinks, the desire I thought I saw is gone and I want to smack myself upside the head for grasping at something that doesn't exist.

She has a date. Of course she does. Amelia is beautiful, smart, driven, and sweet, which to any man with a heartbeat is a heady combination. It is only a matter of time before some asshole sweeps her off her feet and takes her away from me forever. “Who with?”

“Nobody you know.”

“Name?”

She folds her own arms, her temper flaring and, sick prick that I am, my dick gets harder, and I have to take a step back so she won't feel it. This isn't us, but I can't help being combative about this and she's no better. It feels like she's pushing for a reaction from me, and I don't know which one to give her. How I truly feel, which is sick with jealousy and the desire to tell her she can't go, or be the friend she loves and tell her to be careful and wish her luck. The last one sours my stomach.

“I'm not telling you his name.”

“Fine. I'll ask Ryker to find out.”

Ryker is a technical wizard, and the fact he owns the biggest social media company in the world doesn't hurt.

Amelia closes her lips in a tight line and breathes through her nose as if she's a raging bull. She has a mean temper, which is how she got the name Tinkerbelle. We'd watched Peter Pan together. Because she was petite like the character but played with the boys like Tink did, and had a mean temper when riled, I'd decided in my wisdom to start calling Amelia that and it had stuck.

“Don't you dare.”

I lean forward, putting my face close to hers and her breath hitches in anger. “I dare.”

“You're an asshole sometimes.”

“Agreed. Now tell me.”

“Why?”

I'm stunned silent for a second at her question and the soft almost hopeful way she asks me. "Because I'm your friend, and it's my duty to make sure you don't date assholes."

I don't know what I said but it's like the light goes out behind her eyes, her whole body seems to sag in defeat.

"No. I'm not your duty, Beck, and I can take care of myself."

She turns on her heel and walks away, heading for the cabin where she's staying tonight.

For a second I'm unsure how to proceed, but then my protective instincts get the better of me or at least that's what I tell myself. I see a flash of her hair as she rounds the corner and slow my roll, trying to get myself under control before I confront her again. I don't want to push her away, but the thought of any man spending time with her, touching her, kissing her, makes me unhinged. Every move I make these days seems to be the wrong one, and for the first time in our friendship, I don't know which way to go.

I hear her door slam shut and sigh, running a hand through my hair as I raise my fist to knock. I pause as the sound on the other side of the door hits me in the chest.

Soft sobs, muffled by the distance. Anguished and desperate and I caused them, and it kills me. I might be a hard ass, arrogant, and self-involved but never with Amelia. She's the one person in this world who truly knows my every secret. Who I'd lie down in the road and die for, and because of me her heart is breaking.

Without conscious thought, I turn the doorknob and push open the door. She is lying face down across the bed at an angle, her body shaking as she cries into the pillow. She has no concept that I'm here, her cries drowning out the sound of my entrance. Her skirt is shucked up her legs and I have to drag my eyes away from her sexy as fuck legs to her shoulders, which shake uncontrollably.

I don't think, I just move on instinct, sliding on to the bed behind her as she gasps and looks up.

“Beck? What?”

Her face is streaked with mascara, her eyes are red and swollen. My girl isn't a pretty crier, and it only makes me love her more.

I gather her into my arms, turning her to face me as I hold her against my chest, cupping the back of her head. She goes stiff for a second before she relaxes into me and her sobs, quieter now, continue. Our bodies are pressed together, legs entwined.

“Shhh, just let me hold you.”

We stay like that until her tears have soaked through my shirt and her body has stilled from the crying. Still, I don't let go. I can't let go and that's the crux of the problem for me. I want more from her than she's able to give me, and I have to find a way to make peace with that.

Amelia lifts her head, and her eyes are so much bluer now. Her tears kill me but they are beautiful in a way too and I can't help my body's reaction to them or the feel of her in my arms.

I feel her body still as my hand traces down her spine until it rests on the small of her back just above the curve of her ass. The room seems electrified, the air changing as she licks her bottom lip and I fight the urge to rock my hips against her belly.

“Beck?”

Her voice is tentative, and unsure but holds a husky undertone that is pure sex.

“I'm sorry, I made you cry.”

I hold my breath not wanting to breathe in case the spell around us bursts like the most fragile of bubbles. I don't even know what this is that I'm feeling—hope, terror, lust.

“I know you are, and it's not all you.”

She sighs and goes to move back, and I tighten my grip on her, my arms tensing and again her eyes find mine, an unspoken question in them that I don't have the answer to.

“Do you ever wonder what might have happened that last night in college if you hadn’t been a gentleman and taken me up on my request?”

I don’t know why she’s going down this route, it only leads to heartache for us both, yet I can’t help the way my memory falls back in time to that night.

We’d been out partying hard after our last exam and drunk as fuck. Amelia had been lying across my chest in my room, a position we’d found ourselves in time after time. She’d dumped her boyfriend earlier that week when she found out he was cheating. I hadn’t been in a serious relationship the entire time we were at college, but I’d hooked up plenty.

Yet we always found our way back to each other. She was my true north, and I was hers. We could always count on each other to be there and drop every damn thing for the other. She had been a messy drunk and I hadn’t been much better. It was a night of new beginnings, of moving out into the world and everything was changing.

It was also the night I nearly had sex with my best friend and fucked up the best thing to ever happen to me. That night had been like a smack to the head because I realized that she was more to me, that I was in love with her and probably had been for a long time. I just didn’t think she felt the same.

Her hands move over my chest, wandering down my biceps as if she’s seeing me for the first time. I can’t seem to do anything but hold her gaze, as she leans in and presses her lips to my throat. A groan rumbles in my chest and it takes every single ounce of control I have not to push her to her back and take what she’s offering. Her hand creeps down until she is cupping my hard cock in her hand, and I close my eyes in bliss as she squeezes me gently. I need to take control of this moment, to direct it or we’ll both be dealing with regrets in the morning. One thing I know is that I can’t fuck my best friend, no matter how badly I want to, but I can make her feel good. I can take away that doubt and pain in her eyes.

“Amelia.” I put a little snap in my voice like I do at the club when I’m leading a scene and she responds instantly, her

hand stilling on me. My little Tinkerbelle is a submissive. I always knew that, but this is the first time I've seen it in response to me.

Her breathing hitches and I know I could push this. I could have her screaming my name in minutes, begging for my cock, but then what?

She'd hate me, and what we have now would be lost, sullied, and I don't ever want to have a life without her in it in some way. Even if that means keeping our relationship strictly as friends. "I won't fuck you, Amelia."

My voice is ragged, and I see the way she winces at my words and how she tries to hide it from me. "Hey, look at me. Do not hide from me. That is not us."

I'm a fucking liar because I'm lying to her right now.

"Isn't it?"

"No, Tink, it's not. I hurt you. How can I make this right?"

I see the war on her face play out and we're in uncharted waters right now and neither of us is sure what will happen. I see the instant she makes her choice, and her hand moves to grip my wrist. She tugs my hand down until I'm cupping her pussy under her pretty dress. I close my eyes, sure I'm going to come in my pants just from the heat of her wet pussy against my fingers. I give an experimental sweep of my thumb over her clit, through the silk of her panties and her moan is like music to my ears.

I do it again as I hold her chin with my free hand so I can watch her. "Is this what you want, Tink? You want me to make you feel good?"

"Yes."

Fuck.

The single word is breathy and hazed with desire and I know I'm going straight to hell for crossing this line, but I'll worry about that tomorrow.

Slowly, I work my fingers under the edge of her underwear, tracing her opening with one finger as my thumb

continues the slow assault on her clit. Amelia shifts her leg until it's hooked over my hip, opening herself up to me so I have better access.

I spear her with two fingers, and her head falls back on a whimper as I stroke her G-spot, the feel of her desire sticky on my fingers. I want to taste her, to drag my tongue along her slit and watch her lose her mind for me.

“Beck, please.”

“Hush, I have you.”

I increase the speed as I begin to fuck her with my fingers in a rhythm that makes her squirm, imagining it's my dick as she clenches and pulses around me.

“Not yet, Tink.”

I want her mindless when she comes. I selfishly want this to be the best climax of her life.

Her eyes are practically on fire as she watches my face and this connection is something I have never felt before, but then Amelia has always been different, she has my heart in a way nobody ever has.

The sound of my fingers fucking her in the quiet room is almost obscene it's so raw. She's fucking drenched and I put the slightest pressure on her clit. She stiffens and then she's boneless, her body clamping down on me so hard it's a wonder she doesn't break my fingers and I can't help the way my hips roll against her belly, my cock aching to be inside her.

“Beck, oh fuck.”

I stroke her through her climax, watching her eyes fall closed and feeling like a fucking king. My name on her lips as she reaches her climax is something I'll never forget. Everything about this moment will be tattooed on my brain until the day I die.

Doubt and shame assail me at the realization of what I've done and I panic.

What the fuck was I thinking? I wasn't, that's the truth. I was just feeling.

I withdraw my hand and jump from the bed, moving out of reach as her hazy eyes, cloudy with pleasure, begin to clear. I back away from the bed toward the door, ignoring the urge to go back to her and finish this, but I won't.

I'm a coward.

"I'm sorry, Amelia. I should never have touched you like that. That isn't what we are and I know it. It was a mistake. Can you forgive me?" I run my hand through my hair, pulling at the strands in frustration.

Her body tenses and she sits up, pushing her skirt down her legs and drawing her knees up as she watches me with something akin to fury and heartbreak on her face.

"Are you fucking with me right now?"

I'm not sure what to make of her comment and I know I've hurt her once again. "No, I'm so sorry. I should never have touched you. I regret it but I was caught up in the moment."

A snort filled with disdain falls from her and she glares at me.

"Get out, Beck."

I run a hand along the back of my neck, unsure what I should do. Do I stay and try and fix this or walk away and give her space? "Tink, please don't be mad."

Amelia sighs. "I'm not mad, Beck."

"You sound mad."

I want to fall to my knees at the look on her face, which is so at odds with her words.

"I'm not mad. I'm tired alright, and I have an early start if I want to make that date in the morning."

Rage rushes through me and I want to pin her to the bed and tell her like fuck is she dating anyone but me, but I don't. "I see."

She raises a brow in challenge. "Something to say?"

I bite my lip, to force the words I want to say back down my throat. “Nope, no. Drive carefully and enjoy your date. I’ll call you in the week and we can decide a night for movie night.”

“Sure, sounds good.”

She’s lying. She isn’t good, and neither are we, but we will be. I just need to get us back on track and wash the madness of this night away. I nod and leave her sitting on her bed as I walk back to the party. Maybe we need a little space for a few weeks first, though.

The rest of the weekend is torture, but I put on a good front and join in with the festivities to celebrate Norrie and Harrison’s nuptials. Yet when I’m asked where Amelia is, I can’t bring myself to say she had a date so I tell them she had a job interview.

Things will be fine, I convince myself of that even as I check my phone over and over again and note the absence of text messages.

“Oh, Amelia sent a text to say she’s back and safe.”

Norrie smiles and I grind my teeth. Clearly, I’ve fucked up and I don’t know how to fix it.

2: *Amelia*

TWO MONTHS LATER

“HERE.”

Audrey shoves a glass of champagne into my hand and then stands back to survey me with a whistle.

“You look hot. Like smoking hot.”

I smile at her enthusiasm about my costume. “Why, thank you. You look pretty amazing yourself.”

I take a big sip of the champagne and close my eyes as the bubbles fizz on my tongue. When I open them again, I glance around the ballroom that is decked out like a dream scape. Lottie has hardly been in charge of the Love Books charity for a minute and she’s already pulled this massive event together. A Heroes and Villains ball is inspired and holding it here at Club Ruin is even better.

With all five owners involved in the charity, the cost of the venue is essentially free. Harrison arranged for it to be closed to the general public tonight. This is a ticket-only event and the price is high, but the cause is special and worth every penny.

“You really do look gorgeous, Melly.”

I look down at the green and white ombre gown with a tulle skirt and corset-style bodice and smile.

“Although I still think Jasmine would have been sexy as hell, I have to admit you’re rocking this. If we can’t get you laid tonight then all the men in this room need to hand over their memberships to the top floor.”

The top floor is closed tonight but it’s a members-only sex club and the only reason I know that is because Audrey got me a membership. I’ve never used it. I haven’t had the guts, but I am intrigued. I shake away my thoughts and concentrate on Audrey.

“My hair has too much red in it for me to pull off Jasmine.” I wave the thought away, because I never even

considered not being Tinkerbell, and isn't that telling.

“You look beautiful too, but then when don't you.”

Audrey links her arm through mine as we make our way around the dance floor which is set up for the charity auction later on tonight. Waiters in tight black trousers and either ruffled white shirts or corsets move through the room, offering champagne and canapes.

Audrey looks down at the yellow gown she's wearing and shrugs her delicate shoulders. “I always liked the idea of taming the beast.”

I laugh as Norrie and Lottie rush toward us. Lottie has been a nervous wreck about this for weeks so I snag a glass from a passing waiter and thrust it into her hands. “You look like you need this.”

Lottie takes it and knocks back the entire glass like it's a shot of tequila and I have to roll my lips not to laugh at her.

“Knock it off, Lottie. You're going to be on your ass in a minute if you keep that up.”

Lottie slowly blinks and sighs. “I needed that.”

Lottie is dressed as Cinderella in a pale blue gown, which is cut in such a way that it skims her body, hinting at what is below. I know for a fact that Linc will be dragging her into the nearest storage room the first chance he gets.

Audrey raises her brow, but she's hardly any better. “Norrie is right, slow down.”

“I'm sorry, I can't help it. I'm freaking out. One of my auction lots pulled out and I need to find someone to replace them.”

Her eye falls on me and I see the predatory gleam and begin to back away, shaking my head and waving my hand at her. “No way.”

Lottie pouts and gives me these puppy dog eyes that I bet get her whatever she wants with her husband. Ha, who am I kidding, he'd give her whatever the fuck she wanted without her even having to ask.

“Please, Amelia. I wouldn’t ask if I wasn’t desperate.”

I know she doesn’t mean that as an insult, even if it does prick my confidence a little. I’m not a classic beauty, my hair is too untamed, my body just a touch too curvy, and my skin burns like I’m a fucking vampire if I go out in the sun without sunscreen on. Yet I’m a solid seven when I make an effort, but I doubt anyone would pay for a date with me.

“Can’t you ask Norrie or Audrey?”

“Norrie can’t because Harrison said no, and Audrey is hosting the auction. Please. I’ll owe you big time.”

I sigh and she jumps to hug me before I even get a chance to verbalize my defeat. “Thank you, thank you.”

I hug her back and catch Norrie’s smile over her shoulder. “Whatever, but if I end up as rich old fart’s plaything for the night, then it’s your fault.”

“Don’t worry. If things look a little ropey I’ll make Linc bid on you.”

I’m not sure that isn’t worse, the idea of nobody wanting me except some old perv or Linc bidding for me.

“Please, our Tinkerbell will have the biggest price of the night.” Norrie winks and I appreciate the way she tries to bolster my confidence.

“Hubba hubba, come to Mommy.”

I watch as Audrey’s eyes go wide and glance behind me to see what she’s looking at.

Norrie pulls a face. “Eww, that’s my brother you’re objectifying.”

This man is famous beyond words, he’s the star of every action movie currently on the screens and he’s also the brother to one of my closest friends. Although that’s fairly new information. Norrie wasn’t very forthcoming about who her brother was for her own reasons, but it’s all out in the open now.

Audrey waves a hand at Xander Reynolds, who is six feet four inches of pure sin. Even the strangled sounds Norrie is making in response to our blatant drooling isn't enough to pull my gaze away from him.

“He really is the whole package, isn't he?”

I feel a pang of something in my belly at Audrey's words, but it can't be jealousy. I barely know the man. Plus, Audrey is my friend. Between her, Lottie, and Norrie, I have a girl squad for the first time ever, and with things strained between me and Beck, they've been a godsend.

Xander is dressed as the sexiest Peter Pan I've ever seen and it makes me blush. My body suddenly feels hot and tingly as he makes his way to us with a devastating grin on his handsome face.

“Ladies, you all look absolutely ravishing. Except you, Norrie, because that would be gross.” He leans in to kiss his sister's cheek and the easy camaraderie between them is genuine.

“Brother, you can turn the charm off. These are my friends.”

He looks at me, his gaze running over me from head to toe and I feel goosebumps break out on every part of my skin. “I would if I could, Nora.”

Norrie rolls her eyes, but I hardly notice, I'm trapped in a spell woven by this man. We've met once before when I went to Audrey's to console Norrie after her fight with Harrison, but I was still too messed up over what happened with Beck to notice him. Now, though, it's difficult to look away.

“Oh, shit. Don't look now but Hudson is walking toward us and, oh my God, is he dressed as the beast?”

Norrie's statement finally pulls my eyes away from Xander and she's right. Audrey's nemesis is indeed dressed as the beast to her beauty. It couldn't be more perfect, but one look at the furious look on Audrey's face tells me that this won't go the way of the fairy-tale.

“Excuse me, I have to go call pest control.” Audrey marches off like some kind of Amazonian warrior going into battle. Norrie shrugs and rushes after her.

“I feel like I missed something.”

My head tilts back and I see Xander with a furrow on his sexy brow as he watches Audrey and Hudson.

“Yeah, they have some history. Nobody knows what it is, just that they don’t like each other.”

His gaze comes back to me and I feel the heat of it as it caresses my skin. What is this man doing to me? I feel like I might pass out from lust any second and embarrass myself to the degree I’ll need to leave the country.

“Hmm. That’s the thing with hate, there’s a fine line between that and lust. Maybe they need to fuck it out of their systems.”

I cough and splutter as the champagne I just sipped goes down the wrong way. A strong hand pats my back gently and I try and cover my face before he hands me a napkin from a passing waiter.

“You good?”

I blink and nod as I clear my throat. “Yeah, but maybe warn me before you come out with such honesty in future.”

He cocks his head, a dark, sexy look, heating every part of my skin. “We got a future, Tink?”

Something about him calling me that feels wrong as if I’m somehow betraying Beck.

“Amelia. And that’s not what I meant. It was a throw-away comment.”

He watches me and it feels like he can see into my soul, my every thought suddenly exposed to his gaze. It makes my skin prickle but it doesn’t feel bad, being the sole focus of this man’s attention feels something akin to how I imagine a princess might feel.

“I’m sorry, I meant no harm. It was a comment about your dress.”

Now I feel bad for making him feel bad. “It’s fine, really.” I wave at his costume. “We match.”

His eyes sparkle and I’m sure if looked in the mirror right this second, I’d have cartoon stars in my eyes.

“Would you like to dance, Amelia?”

I blink and lift my gaze to him and see the twinkle in his eye, and the naughty intent. It scares me, but I also find myself drawn to him in a way I haven’t felt before. It’s like, with one look, he sees me. “I’d love to dance with you.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean with me. I just meant on your own.”

I pause, mortification rushing over my skin before I see the way his lips are twitching.

I wave a finger at him. “That was not nice.”

He has the grace to look contrite as he offers his arm like a gentleman of old. I take his arm and he dips his head low so his breath is a whisper over the sensitive skin of my neck.

“I know, but I just had to see that delicate blush stain your perfect skin once more.”

His voice is deep and has a touch of gravel to it. If the devil himself had a voice, it would be that. The promise of sin and pleasure is so clear in his voice and, as I glance up, his face makes it clear too.

“Oh, you are bad.”

“You want to be bad with me, Amelia?”

God, one conversation and I’m ready to fall to my knees and beg this man to touch me. Maybe it’s the champagne or the magic of the setting but this feels like the beginning of something important. “Yes.”

His lips tip up, and before I can guess his next move, he’s dropped a kiss to my throat that sends fire through my entire body. But it’s brief and over before I can thoroughly appreciate it.

Xander pulls me into the throng of people, couples of all kinds, villains and heroes all mixed together. His arms pull me close. I barely reach the top of his chest even in my heels but it's not his height. Beck is tall, and I've danced with him on many occasions. With Xander, it's his wide shoulders, the power in every movement, no matter how slight, that is heady. He could do whatever he liked with me, and I could no more stop him than fly to the moon.

His body is a hard line along the front of my body, his grip on my waist is firm, but his hand in mine is gentle and he moves with a grace that belies his size.

“Where did you go, Amelia?”

I blink, feeling almost drugged, but my head is clear, and I scan his high cheekbones, the square jaw with just a hint of stubble, and can't help but imagine what it would feel like against my skin after the slight abrasion against my neck.

“Hmm?”

“What are you thinking?”

I should lie, should keep my thoughts locked away but after this last year, I promised myself I'd go after what I wanted because life is short, and things can change on a dime. The only thing I've ever shied away from is this thing with Beck.

“Life is short and we should seize every opportunity we get because we don't know when it will be our time.”

He turns me and tips me slightly, making me laugh, before bringing me back up tight to his body.

“You need to have more fun, Amelia.”

“I do.”

“Tell me what you do for work?”

I grimace because the answer at the moment makes me sound like a spoilt brat. “I'm an equity research analyst, but my degree is in physics. Although I don't work at the moment.”

“I see. Brains and beauty. You really are the whole package.”

I snort a laugh. “Not really. I’m currently unemployed.”

“By choice or by circumstance?”

I purse my lips as I consider how much I’ll tell this man, but then figure he doesn’t need my money as he makes enough of his own. “Choice. I was living in London until a few months ago but I quit my job for reasons I won’t go in to but I’m lucky I don’t need to work.”

“So, what’s next for Amelia Stone?”

I giggle. “You make it sound like a poster for an adventure movie.”

“Now that’s a movie I want a part in.”

He twirls me again and I laugh, feeling free as I tip my head back and, as I do, I catch the furious gaze of my best friend watching me from the second-floor balcony. My humor dies in my throat and I drop my head, the smile disappearing from my face. God, why do I feel like I’m cheating on him in some way when he made it very clear that we’ll never have a future as anything more than friends.

Xander follows my gaze, instantly zeroing in on my inner turmoil and I watch his eyes narrow before coming back to mine.

“Something going on between you and Beck I should be aware of?”

I shake my head and bury my face against his chest, and this man I barely know holds me tighter, wrapping his arms around me and making me feel safe and wanted. Tears prick my eyes and I hate that one look from Beck is all it takes to make me want something that I know will never be all over again. I lift my head from his shirt and offer him a tentative smile, but he doesn’t rush me or look at me with anything other than understanding.

“Beck is my best friend. Has been since I was seven years old. He can be a bit over-protective.”

“Does he know you’re in love with him?”

My immediate reaction is to lie and deny it, but something about this man makes me want to always be honest with him. He’s shown me nothing but kindness tonight and he’s the first person I’ve felt even a slither of desire for since my last disaster of a relationship in London, apart from Beck, but I’m trying really hard to forget that.

“No, he has no idea. It wouldn’t matter anyway, because he only sees me as a friend and I’d never risk us that way.”

“I see.”

I’m not sure he does. “I like you, Xander, and that’s why I’m being honest.”

He lifts his hand and runs his fingers through my hair until he’s cupping my neck. His hold tightens and he tips my head back, controlling my movements with his big hands. The gentle pressure is like a live wire directly to my clit. My breath hitches from my chest as he forces me to look at him.

“I like you too, Amelia.”

Then he dips his head and captures my lips in a kiss that makes the world recede around me. It’s light at first, barely a caress, but as I open for him, he deepens it, a growl rumbling up from his chest where my hand is resting. It’s like he has a direct line to every nerve in my body. His tongue strokes out and flicks mine, enticing me, and I moan as I lean closer, allowing him to take as I taste the mint on him combined with something unique that is purely him.

He lifts his head and I see the battle going on beneath the façade he’s showing the world. A hurricane is brewing, and I see the naked hunger in his eyes before they drop to my lips, and he lifts his thumb to rub the lipstick he has smudged.

Before he has a chance to voice whatever is on his mind, the music stops and Audrey’s voice comes over the microphone. Xander keeps his arm around me as he turns us to face the stage, a possessive hand on my hip as if he’s claiming me and I look but he’s not looking at me. In this moment, his

eyes are looking up to the balcony with a challenge in them that makes me shiver.

I follow his gaze and gasp as I see Beck looking at us, but not with the anger of before. Now it is pure heat in his eyes, and it's not just aimed at Xander. It encompasses me too.

3: Xander

I PULL MY GAZE FROM BECK AND CONCENTRATE ON THE STAGE, where the first lot is being auctioned off. I don't know what prompted me to openly challenge him in the way I did, but what I do know is that the kiss with Amelia knocked me sideways in a way I didn't expect. I'd noticed her the first night we met. She stood out like a beacon of light on the darkest night, but I'd been so wrapped up in dealing with my sister, I hadn't acted on it.

Now, though, I can hardly tear my eyes away from her. She's drop-dead gorgeous, but it's more than that. I feel a connection between us, a desire that is hungry for something neither one of us can express.

Amelia moves out of my arms and I look down to see her eyes on the floor. She is dazzling, her cheeks radiant and pink from our kiss, eyes dewy and almost dazed. My arms feel empty without her pressed against me and the thought rocks me. I met her for the second time tonight. I hardly know her, and yet, I feel this unbearable desire to drag her to me until we're touching, so I can gauge her mood and reassure her when I have no business doing either. The fact she is so clearly in love with her best friend and he feels the same is something that should have me running a mile, but it doesn't. Beck has a magnetism that is impossible to resist. His very nature makes me want to drop to my knees and worship him so I can hardly blame Amelia for feeling the same way.

Being a bi-sexual actor in this day and age should be something that doesn't even warrant a mention but I still hide

that part of myself from the world. I pretend it doesn't exist so it doesn't affect my career and I hate it. Club Ruin has been a godsend to me, allowing me to be my authentic self without the threat of someone finding out.

I sense him before I turn around and so does the woman beside me. I turn as he moves closer to her and presses a kiss to her temple as if he has the right, and maybe he does. Jealousy burns through me but it's tempered with lust. Seeing them together makes my dick harden in my pants but I hold my reactions. Years of acting is coming in handy right now.

He's dressed as Captain Hook tonight. Black leather trousers, a white ruffled shirt open to display his impressive chest, and a black leather vest with gold buckles on it. Over that, he's wearing a long, black leather coat, with wide folded sleeves and gold buttons in a military style. It's fucking hot and he knows it, the arrogant bastard. The irony our three costumes together make isn't lost on me either.

"Hey, Tink."

"Hi."

Her voice is different when she speaks to him, softer and full of the love she tries to deny she feels. But what strikes me is the way he called her Tink. It was familiar and filled with so much history I could choke on it. That's why she reacted to me calling her by that name because in her mind it belongs to him. Jealousy, or something that feels similar, swirls in my belly, but for a second I can't place why it feels wrong. When I do, I almost groan out loud. It is jealousy but it feels off because I don't know who I'm jealous of.

Beck has always been a powerhouse of a presence. He dominates a room purely by walking into it. People watch him, either with envy or lust, a lot of the time both, but always respect. He is brilliant at what he does. His is a true gift that doesn't get the recognition it deserves. He is a god among men, but I've never made a move on him, and have actively removed myself from scenes with him because he scares me.

Not in the true sense. I know he'd never physically harm me, but he poses a risk in a deeper way. He knows my secrets

and I want to know his.

“Beck, you remember Xander, Norrie’s brother.”

Amelia angles her body so she’s slightly between us and the thought makes my cock harden even more. I’ve been hard since the moment she stepped into my arms, but now it’s almost painful.

“Reynolds.”

Beck dips his head, his voice curt, the sexy bite of it makes me shudder a little. Beck is dominant in every way. He carries himself with an air of authority that even those not in our little world of kink would recognize. They just might not realize what it is they are seeing.

He turns to Amelia, and it’s as if a switch is flipped. He’s still all power and strength but he seems to tether it and curb himself around her as if he’s afraid to show her who he is. He’s gentle with her, almost tender. Neither of these people seem to see what is obvious to anyone looking at them, and that’s that they might be best friends, but they’re also head over heels for each other. Beck gives her an indulgent smile filled with warmth and I feel like a voyeur watching them. It’s clear to see how close they are, how much history they share. Even with the undercurrent of sexual tension they’re both trying and failing to hide, it’s clear how comfortable they are with each other. The easy touches, the secret looks, all portray a backdrop of shared experiences.

I should walk away, God knows I have my own shit to deal with but just standing here, I have the strongest desire to submit to him and dominate her. It’s intriguing and delicious and my cock weeps pre-cum from the thought.

“Goldsmith.”

He arches a brow as if he can read every dirty thought in my head and I hold his gaze but barely, and the tension between us feels like it will snap at any second.

“I wasn’t aware you knew Amelia.”

He pulls her closer, an arm sliding around her back and she moves into him so naturally I’m not sure she even realizes it.

He's claiming her, warning me without a single word uttered.

"We met when Norrie and Harrison had their falling out."

He lifts his chin and his eyes blaze with heat. He banks it quickly not wanting to show me a single weakness, and yet he's wearing his heart on his sleeve in a way I've never seen from him before, and I've watched many scenes with this man in them.

When he works the floor on the third level of this club everyone takes note. A sex club is hedonistic, a den of pleasure, and the freedom and privacy offered by Club Ruin is second to none. It's why this place has a waitlist and why it's considered the place to go for those in the know.

To any other patron, it's a highly exclusive nightclub for the beautiful and the rich. To those of us in the public eye that need a little something more and crave privacy, it's a safe haven. Politicians, football stars, Hollywood A-listers like me, and billionaires from every part of industry play here, safe in the knowledge that the five owners will not allow even the sniff of a scandal to come out.

Amelia is watching us closely and I wonder if she's picking up on any of the vibes flowing around the three of us.

Beck dismisses me, focusing his attention on Amelia. "You look beautiful."

His voice is smooth and deep like it's been soaked in bourbon and I watch as she smiles, standing a little taller for him.

"Thank you. You look very dashing too. Did Audrey tell you I was going to be coming as Tinkerbell tonight?"

"When do we ever go to a fancy dress party and not coordinate our outfits?"

Her lips twitch and a fleeting look of longing moves through her pretty blue eyes before she dips her head and hides herself away. When he lifts her chin with his forefinger, I want to look away from this private moment but I can't seem to make myself.

“Look at me, Tink.”

God, half of me wants to turn away but the other half wants to see this more than anything. He caresses her cheek with his thumb as he holds her chin up.

“Nothing’s changed.”

I’m not sure if he’s trying to reassure her but I see the split second of pain in her eyes before she pushes it down and gifts him a wide smile. “Okay.”

She pulls out of his grasp and steps away. “I’m just going to go freshen up. Need to look my best now I’m on the chopping block.”

Beck frowns. “What does that mean?”

Her eyebrows rise and she grins, all signs of the pain she let slip are gone, buried under a layer of fake smiles. It’s a wonder he can’t see it. I barely know this woman and I recognize it for what it is, but perhaps it’s as simple as like recognizing like.

“Oh, Lottie had an emergency and I’m a stand-in for the auction. So, get your wallets out, boys. I don’t want to end with no bids and embarrass myself.”

She is gone before he can react, but I see the way his jaw tightens before he looks at me. “She isn’t for you.”

My temper bristles. I get him being protective of her but he doesn’t get to tell me that. “That’s her decision.”

He steps closer and I fight the urge to step back. We’re the same height, but I outweigh him by twenty pounds. Beck is leaner, his muscles defined and corded with strength, not bulk. He drops his eyes to my lips for just a second and it takes everything in me not to lean into him and see if I can taste the power he portrays. I don’t, I am too aware of the people around us, and what a mistake like that would do to my image.

“She is not for you.”

He growls the same sentence, and I can feel the anger vibrating off him.

“Don’t be a dick, Beck. Amelia is her own woman, and she gets to decide who she dates and who she doesn’t. I like her. She’s beautiful and smart and sexy as hell.”

I say the last just for him and he reacts exactly how I expect, his nostrils flare as he gets in my face. “Amelia is worth ten of you.”

I rock back on my heels. “I don’t doubt it. But unless you’re ready to admit that you’re in love with her, then it’s none of your business.”

He moves back as if I’ve shocked him, and I take advantage and lean forward. “Yeah, Beck, I see you. I see the way you look at her, the way you can’t keep your eyes off her. Even now you’re aware of exactly where she is in this room.”

“She’s my friend.”

“Bullshit. But, hey, if you want to act delusional then don’t let me stop you. I’m happy to step in and be the man she needs.”

I hadn’t even made a conscious decision to ask her out but after that kiss, there’s no way that I won’t be calling her.

He shoves me back a step and I let him, a chuckle erupting from my lips even as I want to step in and drink his anger down. Beck is always in control and seeing him this way is exhilarating, heady.

“Stay the fuck away from her.”

“Make me.”

I’m about to face the full force of his anger when a five-foot powerhouse steps between us and plants a hand on our chests. I look down at my sister’s furious face.

“What the hell is going on here?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing.”

We both respond but I ease back as Beck does the same thing. Norrie glares at us as I see her husband prowling toward

us, a warning clear on his face that he will kick our asses if we upset his wife.

“Doesn’t look like nothing the way you two are glaring at each other like two bulls ready to tear each other apart.”

I remain silent. I know better than anyone that whatever I say now will only compound things. Norrie is sweeter than sugar until she’s riled up. Right now, she’s pissed.

Beck steps back clearly wrangling his control back as Harrison makes it to us. His hand goes to Norrie’s back as she leans back into him, but he doesn’t step in letting her handle this. I know this man adores my sister so when he glares at me, I nod. I won’t do anything to upset her if I can help it.

“Xander and I just had a little disagreement about something, but it was nothing and it’s over now.”

He gives me a cool look meant to freeze even the hottest volcano, and I nod. “Yep, that’s right. A little disagreement.” I don’t say it’s over because it’s far from over for me.

Norrie looks between us, clearly not believing a word past our lips but she lets it go.

“Good, now get your ass on stage, Xander. You’re up next.”

I squeeze her arm and offer her an apologetic grin as I walk away. I catch sight of Amelia watching us from across the room and she gives me a tight smile. I can’t resist the wink I give her. She shakes her head in feigned impatience, her smile widens, and is the real deal. My chest goes tight at the sight of it and I have the strangest feeling that tonight has shifted my life on its axis in a way I could never have imagined. She is utterly stunning, and I want her in the basest of ways. I want to feel her body clench around my cock, to watch her back bow in pleasure as she cries my name, to taste her on my tongue, but it’s more than that. I want her secrets too; I want her smiles and her joy.

I climb up on the stage as my name is called and don the façade of my A-list status as I wave at the cheers and hoots from the crowd. Audrey stands beside me and cites some of

the movies I've been in and the awards I have to my name. It's all spice to drive up the winning bid. I'm not arrogant but I know this will be a high price and although I wouldn't normally do something like this and my manager wasn't on board, it's for a good cause.

Plus, when Norrie asks for something, I can't say no. My little sister never asks me for anything so when she does, I haven't got it in me to say no to her. Something her husband is all too aware of. The man is a complete simp for her and I'm here for it. Nobody deserves the kind of adoration he gives her and my nephew more than her.

"Okay, let's start the bidding at five thousand dollars for this fine specimen."

I roll my eyes at Audrey, but I know my part and play up to the crowd, flexing my muscles and laughing along good-naturedly.

"Ten thousand."

Audrey points to a woman near the back. "We have ten thousand dollars from the lady in the magnificent Maleficent costume."

I catch sight of my sister with Harrison, Linc, Lottie, and Ryker. Beck is standing just off to the side of them, but his eyes are on Amelia, who is watching me with a smile. I should feel sorry for the poor guy, but he needs to get out of his own way.

"Twenty thousand!"

My eyes go wide as I hear Lottie call out, and smirk when I see Lincoln's eyes almost bug out as he pulls her closer and says something close to her ear. She blushes and goes up on tip toes to whisper something in his ear that has him smirking and wrapping an arm around her waist, claiming her for all to see. I wonder about that exchange. Not the words necessarily but the obvious connection between them. I've never wanted that but lately, I find myself craving intimacy in a way I never have before.

Audrey pokes me in the arm and I blink. She gives me a death stare and I begin to ham it up for the crowd again. The bidding continues and before we know it we're up to two hundred thousand dollars and Lottie is bouncing on her feet with excitement.

“Okay, do we have any more bids?”

“Three hundred thousand.”

My gaze flies to Amelia who is grinning widely at me. I can't help but smile back. She takes my breath away. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Beck striding toward her with displeasure written all over his handsome face.

“Sold to Amelia Stone for three hundred thousand dollars.”

Audrey bangs her gavel with an excited flare and glances at me before turning back to the crowd with a naughty look on her face. “I trust our Hollywood hero will make it worth the money.”

Her eyebrows waggle and I chuckle at her ability to stir the shit. Audrey and I have actually become good friends since Norrie and Harrison met, even taking my gorgeous nephew out a few times and causing quite a stir in the media.

“I'll endeavor to make it a date she'll never forget.”

Audrey grins and raises her hand to the crowd like she was made for the stage. “You heard it here first, ladies and gentlemen.”

I said it would be memorable for the audience, but I meant what I said. Amelia isn't going to know what hit her.

4: *Beck*

“AMELIA, WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?” I GRASP HER ARM and spin her to look at me and her expression is mutinous.

She crosses her arms and my eyes dip to the curves that have been teasing me since I saw her walk into the room. “What?”

I want to shake her, to kiss her, throw her over my shoulder and carry her out of here so that nobody has any doubt who she belongs to, but I know my response is the one that’s over the top, not hers. I hate that she’s regarding me with wariness and anger in her beautiful blue eyes.

I drop my hand from her arm and run it over the back of my neck. I don’t know what’s happening to me, I feel like I’m losing control. I’m acting like a complete jerk, and I know it, but seeing her with Xander has me spiraling. Like my two worlds are suddenly on a collision course and my nice clean life is about to implode.

“Nothing, just be careful. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Her eyes soften and she steps toward me, and I wrap her in my arms, relishing the sweet feel of her pressed against me. If I close my eyes, I can pretend for just a second she’s mine in a way I’ve dreamed of for so long. I drop my lips to her head and inhale her feminine scent that never fails to affect me.

We pull away but I can’t let her go completely just yet.

“You have to trust me. I know what I’m doing, Beck.”

I want to argue with her, to tell her that she doesn't know who Xander is, but that's hypocritical when I'm hiding my true self from her too. Xander isn't a bad guy from what I know. He's sexy as hell, but he's fighting his own demons and I don't want to see him drag her down into the pits of hell with him. "I do trust you."

She pats my chest. "Good. Now Audrey is flapping at me like a demented duck, so I need to go." She reaches up to kiss my cheek. "Don't let some geriatric perv win this bid or we're gonna have words, mister."

I watch her walk over and step onto the stage and curse myself for being such a coward.

"You ever going to tell her?"

I glance behind me at Ryker, who's dressed as Prince Eric because, of course, he's the hero. "Midas."

He frowns at the nickname we gave him when, at twenty-one, he sold his first company and became the richest man under thirty in history. He doesn't take much seriously except business. He's a joker, but if you fuck with his company he's like a fucking demon. His blond hair is slightly longer than it should be, and his blue eyes always twinkle as if he has a secret and he does, but that's not mine to tell.

"So, are we ignoring the tension between you and Amelia?"

"There is no tension."

"So, we're ignoring it."

I shake my head. "Fuck you."

"Pass, but thanks for offering, buddy. I'm flattered."

I can't help the smile that twitches my lips. It's hard to be mad around this guy, and it's why he's so integral to our little friend group. He lightens up the level of asshole amongst us. Ryker is one hundred percent into women only, but none of my friends give a shit that I'm bi-sexual, which is how it should be in this world. "I can't lose her."

The admission sobers me and I'm not sure what prompts it, except seeing her up there makes my gut clench with longing.

"Love is always a risk, my friend."

"I know, but she's my person. I can't remember a world without her in it and if it doesn't work, we'll never get back to what we had."

Ryker nods slowly taking a sip of the bourbon he favors. "It's a tough one, but I guess you have to make a choice because one thing I do know, is that time waits for no man."

He gestures to the stage, and I see Audrey lifting the microphone.

"Okay, we have a last-minute treat for you all. Our lovely Amelia Stone has a physics master's degree and a head for finance. So, brains and beauty for your buck. Can I have a starting bid of twenty-five thousand dollars?"

Henrik Freddie, playboy and major asshole, bids, and my lip curls. No way am I letting that asshole on a date with my Tink.

"Fifty." I raise my hand and Amelia grins at me, and my chest feels like it's caving every time she looks at me that way.

The feeling is fleeting as Xander raises his hand. "Sixty."

I twist to see him standing with Norrie and Harrison a few feet away. He's looking at the stage and the bastard winks at her and I clench my fist when she giggles. Amelia never fucking giggles, but he made her, and it infuriates me. He turns to me and raises his brow and I don't know whether I want to punch him or force the fucker to his knees so I can make him swallow my cock. The image makes my dick hard, but my dominant nature won't let this slide.

"One hundred thousand."

Audrey is loving this, and Amelia laughs and shakes her head.

"Two hundred." Xander grins at me.

“Three hundred.” I can’t take my eyes off him or the arrogant way he grins.

“Four.” He’s not going to win this, even if I have to spend every penny I have to get her.

“Five.”

Bastard.

The room is silent now and I feel Ryker grip my shoulder, but my eyes are stuck on Xander. This isn’t about Amelia anymore, it’s about so much more.

“Six.” My body is practically vibrating with anger.

“Seven.”

Ryker squeezes my shoulder. “Buddy, what are you doing?”

I shake him off, this is between me and Xander fucking Reynolds. “Eight.”

Linc is striding toward me with a furious look on his arrogant face, as Norrie whispers to Xander furiously but I don’t care. I won’t lose her to him.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

Linc gets in my face, and I push him aside so I can continue eye contact with Xander. Harrison is having a similar conversation with him.

“Fuck off, Lincoln. This is nothing to do with you.”

“Nine hundred thousand.”

I don’t care if I have to drop every penny I own on this. I will not lose to him.

“Wrong, asshole, my wife put hours of work into this, and I won’t have you or the pretty boy ruin it because you’re fighting over Amelia like two dogs over a fucking bone.”

His words make me blink, but he’s turned away from me to the stage.

“One million dollars.” Linc places the bid and motions with his hand across his throat for Audrey to close it out.

“Sold to Lincoln Coldwell for one million dollars.”

I look at the stage and Amelia looks horrified and hurt by our actions. Shame almost takes my legs from me when she looks at me with big luminous eyes full of accusation and disappointment. Jesus, what was I thinking? “Excuse me.”

I move to push past Lincoln, but he places a hand on my chest. “If I were you, I’d give her a few minutes with the girls. If you walk in there now, I’m not sure you’re coming out with your balls because my wife is pissed.”

I nod and move away with no destination in mind, just the need to get away. I move to the upper floor and as I round the corner, I see broad shoulders disappear into one of the closed playrooms. He thinks he can walk around my club like he owns the place after that little stunt?

Hell fucking no.

I reverse course and stalk toward the room I saw him head into, ready to tell him exactly what I think of that little show he made. I take a second to pull the ravaged threads of my control around me before I push open the door.

Xander looks up from where he’s sitting on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. His surprised look moves to resignation. The stormy expression makes his features appear harsh, unforgiving. Like a Viking warrior ready to pillage and kill and it makes lust wash over me like a tidal wave. There’s no doubt how beautiful this man is, but like this, when he’s letting all of his demons show, he’s breathtaking.

“Don’t start, Beck.”

It’s as if his torment calms me and I fall into my role naturally. I know what this man needs, but does he trust me to give it to him, and should I even try? This situation is already complex, doing this could make it ten times worse, but I can’t seem to stop myself. “What’s your safe word, Xander?”

His eyes widen, his lips parting slightly. The room seems to tingle with electricity as we stare at each other, the moment heightened with it.

I think he's going to deny me, deny us, but when he speaks, I feel a calm move through me.

“Raider.”

“On your knees.”

I watch as Xander eases to his knees with the grace of a ballerina, his big brutish body almost shuddering as he lowers his head. I walk around him slowly, watching the way his breathing changes, anticipation building in his body. I trail my fingers over his broad shoulders, and he sighs, every tense muscle relaxing under my fingertips.

“You seem tense, Xander.”

He doesn't respond. He knows the rules, unless I ask a question he does not speak. Pleasure rolls through me and I resist the urge to palm my achingly hard cock. I move in front of him and crouch, my hand gripping the steel of his dick which is straining in his pants, and stroking him through the fabric.

A groan slips free and I smile. “Did you like that? Making me look stupid in front of my friends?”

I continue stroking him and his breathing is choppy. I free his cock and his breath hisses out as I grip him just a touch too hard. Xander likes a little pain with his pleasure, and I stroke again, using my other hand to cup his balls and roll them between my fingers. Xander is a beautiful man, his body built for sin. Even his huge cock is pretty and curved just slightly but enough that I know he would make Amelia scream with pleasure.

I stop my stroking and let that scene play through my head and I don't get the jolt of jealousy this time, I get a rush of lust as pre-cum leaks from my cock. “I asked you a question, little subby.”

A moan rumbles up his massive chest and, given time, I'd have him naked and flushed from denied orgasm. Xander is usually a dominant but him submitting to me is a heady feeling and I can feel him fighting it. His need to take over this scene is almost too much for him.

“Yes.”

I knew it. I release him and stand, and he falls forward, his body on the brink from me edging him. “Head up.”

Xander lifts his head and I see his eyes glazed with lust, his body almost shaking with the need to come. I love seeing him like this, at my mercy, but it’s the trust on his face that centers me. “I am going to reward you for your honesty. Would you like that, Xander?”

“Yes, sir.”

I nod, pleased with him, and I stroke his hair tenderly as he leans into my touch, an almost keening sound slipping from his lips when I grip the back of his hair.

“Take my cock out.”

His hands are firm on me as he does as I demand, his fingers skating over the Jacobs ladder piercing in wonder. His hand grips me and I close my eyes, allowing the pleasure to wash over me. He jacks me once and I tighten my hold until his head is tilting at an awkward angle, but his look of bliss tells me he is loving it.

“Did I say you could jerk me off?”

“No, sir.”

“Exactly. Now open that pretty mouth and suck my cock.”

I loosen my grip on his hair and guide him to my dick. His whiskers brush my skin and I hum in the back of my throat. Xander has a magic fucking mouth.

His lips wrap around the head of my cock and his eyes meet mine as he works my length into his mouth until my pelvis hits his lips. His tongue feathers over the underside of my cock, before he withdraws and repeats it again, his eyes never leaving mine.

My thighs quiver as I hold his hair tighter, and he sucks me like I’m the air he needs to breathe. His hands grip my hips, his fingers digging into my ass as he pulls me to him and I know exactly what he wants. The asshole is topping me from the bottom, and I should deny him, but I want this too much.

I cup his face in my hands and draw back until my cock is resting on his lips and I power back in, fucking his mouth, and he can do nothing but take my cock down his throat. His fingers dig into my ass, and I know I'll see marks from him tomorrow and it only makes it hotter. Before I know it I'm on the precipice of a powerful climax.

“Where do you want it?”

Xander tightens his hands on my ass and resists when I try to pull out.

“You want to drink my cum, slut?”

It's a rhetorical question and, as I bellow out a curse, I watch him drink down every drop. His eyes are closed in bliss, and I stroke his cheek gently. I pull away with a ragged breath and he licks his lips like he wants more. My legs are shaking but I won't show him, that. “You did well. Do you want to come now?”

I crouch again and grip his cock in a firm hand. A choked groan makes his shoulders convulse as I stroke him, jerking his cock like I know he likes. I've watched him in scenes enough to know every single thing this man likes. I can feel his cum dripping from the end, and use it to lubricate my hand as I grip his face with my other one. I slam my lips against his and he moans as I plunder his mouth, his lips firm, his tongue stroking against mine. His stubble rubs against mine and it's a delicious friction that has my cock already twitching like it didn't just come harder than a train hitting a wall.

Kissing him is like going into battle, neither of us wanting to give an inch. Even though I'm dominating him, Xander is a switch so usually he dominates, and I can feel the big bastard fighting me.

I twist my wrist on the next stroke of his cock and his kiss becomes wilder, teeth clashing, and biting and then he spills his climax warm on my hand and he pulls away from my touch breathing hard, as his forehead drops to my shoulder. I give him a few more gentle strokes and he shivers.

I get an unexpected wave of affection for this man and wonder how much I've just complicated things between him and me, and me and Amelia. The thought makes me release him as guilt assails me. I stand and stagger back a step, moving to the closet that has wipes and various other items inside. I grab a wipe and quickly clean myself off, before throwing the pack toward Xander without even looking at him.

“Don't do that.”

My head comes up. Now the scene is over we're back to being equals, two men wanting the same woman, but only one of us can have her and it can't be me.

“Do what?” I know what he means but I don't want to admit it.

“Hide. Don't hide from me.”

Anger makes me step forward. “Don't pretend you know me because you sucked my cock.”

“God forbid.”

I sigh and drop my chin, fighting my emotions which continue to bombard me and feel more muddled than ever. Amelia is the only thing that matters and as much as I hate the idea of her not being with me, I know Xander is a good man.

I lift my chin and he holds my gaze without backing down as I point my finger at him. “Don't fucking hurt her, or I'll end you. Understood?”

Xander waits a beat and I wish I knew what he was thinking in that big, beautiful brain.

“Understood.”

I turn and walk away. I know I left a part of me back in that room with him and the other part is with my best friend.

5: *Amelia*

I LOOK AROUND AT MY OLD BEDROOM WITH A WISTFUL FEELING in my chest. So much of me and my history is in this room. Memories that can pull a smile from me on the darkest of days and some which make me cringe.

Like the time I got my first period and Beck was sitting on my bed when I came out of the bathroom. One look and he'd known something was up, and he hadn't hesitated for a second to wrap me in his arms. Making me laugh with a joke about how he'd live in three-week increments now, with the fourth week one of pure fear for his life. He'd then gone out and got me ice cream, Cheetos, a hot water bottle, and a chick flick. He'd watched *The Notebook* without a single complaint. It had become a ritual, and he'd never let me down, always being there for me.

Now my heart aches for a different reason. I miss him with a physical ache in my chest. Beck Goldsmith is the man I love but that isn't our path. He was my best friend first and I miss that. Since Norrie and Harrison's wedding, things have been stiff and awkward and I know that's mostly my fault. I pushed him away. Last weekend's Heroes and Villains ball has only made that worse.

I have no idea what he and Xander were thinking, behaving the way they did, and I haven't seen or spoken to either of them since. I hightailed it out of there, humiliation hot on my cheeks and a sense of confusion making my heart heavy. I wish my life could be simpler. That I could just meet a man and fall in love and get married and start a family, but that

doesn't seem to be my path. I'd thought for just a second that Xander Reynolds liked me, that he wanted me. But I'd just been a way to score a point over Beck in a game I didn't even realize was being played.

I'd not heard a thing from Xander or Beck. Xander, I understood. It was one dance and one kiss. Hardly something to get hung up over, but I can't deny the disappointment I feel that he hasn't called. But then why would he? It wasn't about me. Bitterness makes me rough as I shove the last of my things into a box.

Beck is another matter altogether. I needed space to figure out my next move, to come to terms with the fact that, despite my dreaming, he and I were not meant to be. I also need to get my temper under control. I'm not one of those women who can just calm down quickly. If anything, my anger grows the longer I leave it until I have a good cry and let it go. That cry was two nights ago after a few glasses of wine and an episode of *The Vampire Diaries*.

Another show I forced Beck to watch in this very room. There were so many memories here. It's partly the reason for this move. Mom and Dad have moved to Florida and though I could stay here in my family home, I know it's time to move on and a new apartment is the fresh start I need. A fresh start and a new chapter in my life, and I've vowed to seize whatever excitement that brings.

There is the date with Xander that I bought and paid for, although I could just let it go, part of me wants to see him and tell him how shitty his behavior was. Luckily for me, the 'date' Lincoln paid for with me is me watching Eric while he and Lottie go away for the weekend. I was happy to do it and grateful for him stepping in like he had. Lottie is a lucky girl, but by all accounts, he was a complete asshole in the beginning before he got his shit together. Now he takes her away every month, just the two of them so he can spoil her rotten and I love that they have that.

Either way, I need to speak with Xander and fix this mess, and I need to call Beck too.

Without thinking too hard, I take out my phone from my back pocket and dial my best friend's number. He may not answer, he isn't on shift, but he might have taken extra shifts or stayed over at the hospital. Beck is an excellent surgeon but more than that, he's compassionate and dedicated to his patients.

"Hey, you."

The sound of his voice is like a balm to my soul and even the tiny sliver of pain that is attached now is worth it to have him in my life. I can't help the way my stupid heart flutters wildly in my chest, but I can ignore it. Will there ever be a time when I don't want this man? God, I hope so. "Hey, Beck."

"How is the packing going?"

"That's actually why I called. It's moving day and I could do with a hand if you're free?"

"Oh, I didn't realize that was today."

He's lying and I can hear the playful tone in his voice that I love, but something sounds off too, and I can't figure out why. There was a time when I knew every thought in this man's head. Just from the sound of his voice, I could gauge his mood. Now he's like a stranger in some ways and I hate it. I miss him, I miss us.

"Yep, all packed and ready for the next adventure. So how about it?"

I can feel the blood pounding in my ears as I wait for his answer and fight the need to pace my room.

"Uh, yeah, can you give me an hour or so? I'm just in the middle of something."

The sudden thought strikes me that I've interrupted a date or a hook-up of some kind and it makes me feel sick but I can't let him hear how upset that makes me. Not if I want our relationship back on steady ground and I do.

"Oh, yeah, sure. Of course. Honestly, if it's not convenient, I have Norrie and Harrison and Linc and Lottie helping out, so

you can go back to whatever it was you were doing. I don't want to interrupt."

"Tink."

I almost shudder at the snap in his voice, but I force the warm feeling away. "Yes?"

"I'm just at the dentist having a check-up, but as soon as I'm done, I'll be there. Do you want me to meet you at your place or at the new one?"

Relief swamps me, and I sag to the bed, but I don't want to examine that too much. "Meet me at the new place. You have the address?"

"Yes, of course. I'll see you soon."

"Thanks, Beck."

"Anytime, Tinkerbell."

I roll my lips to hide my smile as I load my car up with the boxes I can fit in it and head out to my new apartment. It's luxurious and extravagant, and definitely a little over the top, but I've never spent a cent of the trust fund my grandparents left me and this is an investment. A property in this building will only ever grow in value. I still have to find a job, but after everything that happened in London, I needed time to think and re-evaluate my future.

I drive across town to my new apartment building and park as close as I can get. I'm lucky to snag a space and quickly grab as much as I can carry.

I'm so busy juggling the box in my arms and thinking about things better left alone that I don't notice the huge hunk of muscle I'm backing into until I hit a solid wall of flesh. I gasp and teeter on the sidewalk, trying to hold the box of glasses and remain on my feet. Big hands reach out to steady me, holding me until my feet are solidly underneath me again.

I turn, looking up and up, until I meet the brightest blue eyes and the sexy smile that has graced more than one of my dreams this week.

Xander Reynolds in all his magnificent glory.

He's dressed like he just came back from the gym, his huge arms on display and sweat slicking his tan skin. "Xander?"

His smile widens as he reaches to take the box from me and I let him. I'm too stunned by him being here to stop him or to remember I'm mad at him.

"Amelia, nice to see you."

"Um, you too."

His chuckle is deep, and it makes me cross my arms to hide the way it makes my body react. The box looks tiny in his hands. I can't help remembering how they felt holding me, his big palm dwarfing mine, and my brain goes off on a dirty little tangent as I imagine how the rest of him might be built. Feeling it was one thing, seeing it would be another thing altogether. My eyes fall over him, and I think athletic shorts are my new favorite attire. He fills them with his powerful thighs and the hint of what he's packing makes my breath hitch.

He clears his throat and I snatch my hand back when I see him grinning as if he knows every horny thought in my head. A blush creeps up my cheeks and I curse my pale skin which leaves no room for hiding a single second of it.

"You're mad at me."

It's a statement and I see no reason to respond, even though my brain is half full of lust now, not anger, but I can't keep the words from slipping past my lips. "Not at all. I love two grown men fighting over me like I'm the sausage roll at a cheap buffet."

He nods slowly and I tilt my chin up, standing my ground. Might as well get this out now that fate has decided it's time.

"You're right. I owe you an apology. I'm sincerely sorry for the way I behaved. I don't know what got into me, but it's no excuse. I was out of line, and I'd fall at your feet and beg forgiveness, but I don't want to smash whatever is in this box."

Well, damn, he took the wind right out of my sails. I was expecting him to make excuses or say I was overreacting, and he didn't. His apology was heartfelt, and he does seem contrite. "Fine, apology accepted."

He blows out a breath and he looks relieved that I didn't make him suffer. Audrey would have, but Norrie and Lottie are more like me, soft and maybe a little too forgiving but I see no reason to drag out an argument. Life is too short for bitterness.

"So, are you visiting or..."

I smile, grateful that he's changed the subject. "I'm moving in actually. I just bought the suite under the penthouse."

His blue eyes seem to almost twinkle. "I'll be on top of you then."

My body goes hot at the thought, and I can't say I'm not on board with that idea, but I still laugh and tease him. "A little forward, don't you think? We haven't even had our date yet."

His grin dips and then he blushes, which is sexy and endearing. "Oh shit, no. I didn't mean that. I meant I have the apartment above yours."

I'm feeling a little devilish with this man, and even though he's my friend's brother, I can't help but flirt a little, especially now we've cleared the air. It's harmless and fun and right now he's looking at me like he wants to eat me up and I need the boost it gives me.

"Shame." I wink and he blinks long and then I bust out laughing. "I'm just messing with you. Here." I go to take the box back, but he steps away.

"Oh no, I'm not letting a lady carry her own boxes."

He moves toward the elevator I know will take me to my floor and I have no choice but to follow him. I can't help but let my eyes wander over his broad back to the lean carved hips and the tight ass that I just want to take a bite out of. He

glances back and smirks and it's a wonder my clothes don't melt right off my body.

“Are you checking me out, Amelia Stone?”

My denial is so swift it's easy to see the lie. “No.”

If I could die from embarrassment, then I'd be a rotting corpse right now.

He holds the doors open as I step inside and swipe my key to take us up and all of a sudden, this space seems way too small for his size. But it isn't just that, it's his presence. He's imposing as if just his being here commands attention. It reminds me of Beck, and with that thought my good mood teeters.

“Hey, you with me, wildcat?”

I look up to see him studying me intently. I force a smile. “Yes, of course. Sorry, I was just thinking about something.”

“Something or someone? 'Cos let me tell you if he puts that look on your face, he isn't worth it.” We both know who I'm thinking about after our conversation the other night, but I'm grateful he doesn't call me on it. Bringing up Beck now feels like a step back in our unspoken truce.

His words run over my skin like chocolate, decadent and sweet, but he's wrong, Beck is worth it and more. “Maybe.”

He shakes his head. “Nah, a woman as beautiful as you should always be smiling.”

I cock my head at him. He's probably the most well-known actor on the planet right now and I'd expect he has women and probably men fighting for his attention, so why is he even bothering to talk to me? “This charm work on all the girls? Because I have to say, I'm not most girls.”

His smile only widens as a dark chuckle rumble from his chest. “No, you're not.”

The doors open and I step out first and just stand for a second looking around at my new home. It is bare and uninviting, but I don't see that. I see the promise, the potential of what I can make it. I have a good feeling about this place. I

can be happy here; I just feel it. Maybe some of that is projecting or manifesting but I don't care.

“Where do you want this?”

I glance around to see Xander by the kitchen island. “There is fine. I'm going to get it all in and then I can spend the next few days organizing stuff how I want it.”

He places my box on the side and walks slowly toward me and it takes everything in me not to step back. He prowls almost like a wild jungle cat, all elegant lines and purpose, which is so at odds with his size. He reaches me and I look up and up as he stands too close. His scent is masculine, he smells of his citrus shower gel or deodorant and the slightest edge of fresh sweat, which shouldn't be sexy but is. I remember the way he kissed me like I was the air he needed to breathe, as if behind my lips was nirvana.

“So, Amelia Stone, are you going to let me take you out?”

“You want to kill me?”

His chuckle makes my toes curl in my sneakers and my lower belly flutters wildly. His hand comes out slowly and he grasps a lock of my hair and twirls it around his finger. I can hardly breathe, he's soaking up all the oxygen in the room. Sexual energy tingles down my body, all the way to my fingertips but I hold still, not daring to say more.

“I want to do a lot of things to you, wildcat, but killing you is most definitely not one of them. How about a date first though?”

“Well, I did pay a pretty penny for you, so I guess that would be a good idea.”

He shakes his head and smirks, but his eyes are on my lips. “Not one you paid for, a real date.”

He's asking me on a date, and it would be so easy to let flattery overwhelm me, but I tried dating a few months back straight after the incident with Beck and it was a disaster. This man is not only a superstar he's also my friend's brother. I don't want to muddy my friendship with her if I mess up or do

something dumb like falling for him, and then get my stupid heart broken. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea.”

A part of me is screaming that I’m mental because I know this man would drive thoughts of Beck away for a few hours. Any other man and I’d be throwing myself at him with glee.

“How about a coffee, then? We’re neighbors now and I think it’s good to be friendly. You never know when you might need a cup of sugar in an emergency.”

A grin. “A cup of sugar, hey? Like you eat refined sugar with that body.”

I want to call the words back the second they leave my mouth, but they’re out now and I look up with one eye closed and find him watching me with what looks like wonder and delight on his face.

“I like you, Amelia.”

“I like you too, Xander.”

“Good, so where do you need me?”

“Need you?”

He moves back toward the elevator and lifts his arms, kissing an impressive bicep. “I’m great at moving boxes, so put me to work.”

I rush after him as he enters the elevator and presses the button for the ground floor.

“You don’t have to do that. I have help coming. Your sister and Harrison for starters.” I wave my hand around in the air and then drop it. “Surely you have superstar stuff to do, like signing someone’s breasts or butt or something?”

God, I need to shut up. I’m a poised, intelligent woman and despite what the last twenty minutes would indicate, I have a filter.

“Do you want me to sign something for you, Amelia? Because that is awfully specific.”

“As if.”

He flashes those baby blues at me and winks, and my stomach does a somersault as desire ties my tongue again. Jesus, this man is dangerous.

“You’re a wonder. And to answer your question, I have no body parts to sign presently and it’s a good excuse to play with my nephew and fuck with Harrison.”

I pause but I have no real answer except to accept. I just have to hope he and Beck can behave. “In that case, I’d love some help.”

We carry two more loads of boxes up to my place, working side by side in companionable harmony. He jokes and asks me a few questions that are harmless and fun, and I answer and it feels easy. Before I know it I’ve almost forgotten who he is to the rest of the world. I’m no stranger to high-profile personalities growing up as I did. My family wealth is old, going back to my great grandfather who set up the Stone Brothers Liquor Company, and to this day is one of the biggest producers and distributors of vodka. It means I could never work again and still not spend all the money I have. I grew up around wealth too, with Beck’s family being of even bluer blood than me. Yet even that seems different from how star-struck I was around Xander earlier.

“I see you got yourself some help.”

I turn and Norrie rushes up to me with a look of delight on her face. Norrie is utter sunshine and the beautiful little boy in her arms turns my heart to mush. I take him from her and blow raspberries in his neck until he giggles with the total abandon that only the very young can manage.

“So, you roped Xander into helping, huh? Good move. That pretty boy needs to do some real work.”

I roll my lips to stop myself from laughing as Harrison comes up behind Norrie and slides his arm around her waist. These two are adorable and I couldn’t be happier that they finally got their shit together.

“I didn’t realize Xander lived here.”

I eye Norrie who's looking around as if the lobby is suddenly the most exciting place in the world.

"We should probably get a move on. Linc and Lottie are bringing pizza in a bit."

I frown at her and she scurries off. "What is your wife up to?"

Harrison is watching the direction she took off in with a dreamy grin on his face. God these two are too much. "No clue."

As the moving van turns up a few minutes later, I feel a tingle at the back of my neck and turn to see Beck striding toward me. His head is down, but when he looks up and sees me, his face lights up and it's all I can do not to run and throw myself into his arms. I've missed him. Not being around him is like losing a limb. Even being in London wasn't like this because at least we talked every day.

"Hey, Tink."

His arm comes around me and I lean into him and close my eyes. Will this man ever not be home to me? I hope not, but then I also know that one day he'll find someone who he can love like Harrison loves Norrie. His lips find my hair and he squeezes me tight, forcing me to glance up.

"I'm sorry, Tink. I was a huge dick. Can you forgive me?"

I nod, because he *was* a dick, but it's not worth losing what we have, which is years of friendship and love.

"Missed you, baby girl."

That name is new and makes my throat clogs with emotion and I have to work to swallow past it and respond. "I'm sorry, too. Can we forget everything that happened and go back to how we were?"

His eyes look haunted, and I can see how tired he is and yet it doesn't detract from how handsome he is in the slightest.

"Sure, Tink. If that's what you need."

It's not but I can't have what I need so I'm taking the next best thing. "It is."

He presses a kiss to my head and then lets me go and I step back. He's wearing jeans and a black t-shirt that molds to his muscular chest and I can't help but compare him to Xander and don't even know how my head would go there. It's like comparing Thor and Superman, both are utterly delicious in their own way. As if I conjured him, I feel Beck tense and his easy smile transforms into a glare.

"What the fuck is he doing here?"

6: *Beck*

“BECK, DON’T START. XANDER LIVES IN THIS BUILDING, IN THE penthouse. We ran into each other as I was unloading boxes and he’s been helping me.”

I unconsciously pull Amelia closer, relieved when she lets me, and give the man walking toward us a cool stare. Yet the heat in my body can’t help but remember what it felt like to have him on his knees with my cock in his mouth.

“Beck.”

“Xander. I didn’t know you lived here.”

The man places his hands on his hips and my eyes can’t stop the slow perusal over his fit body. He’s a study in perfection and he damn well knows it.

“I don’t advertise it, but it’s not a secret. Norrie knew I’d moved here.”

“Oh, so it’s a new thing?”

He nods, a smirk twitching on his lips.

Asshole.

“Yes. After the debacle with the press I wanted to be less conspicuous so I moved shortly after.”

“I see.”

He turned away from me, angling his body toward Amelia. “Wildcat, do you need me for anything else?”

Wildcat? What? Now they have nicknames for each other? What the hell? Although it does suit her. She can be wild when she loses her temper, which isn't often but boy, when she does, it's not a good thing to be on the receiving end of it.

Amelia steps away from me and I flex my fingers and step back to stop myself from doing something stupid like touching her again. She wants things back to how they were, and although we were always affectionate and touchy-feely, she didn't spend the whole time in my arms, because that would be weird.

"Yes, all good. Thank you so much, Xand. I really appreciate your help this morning."

Amelia steps forward and lifts her arms and the big handsome brute draws her close, enveloping her like she's his, and I have to admit if only to myself that she looks good there.

He strokes her hair gently down her back, his size dwarfing her, and closes his eyes with a smile. Not one meant to taunt me, but a real smile and fuck if it doesn't make my chest ache a little. I know the feeling of Amelia in your arms and it's one of pure bliss and he clearly feels it too.

"You're welcome and if you need a cup of sugar later, you know where to find me."

Amelia lets go and places her heels back on the ground moving away as he drops his arms. "I certainly do."

"Good. Now how about you let me know when you're settled and we can sort out that date I owe you."

She places her hands in her back pockets and rocks on her toes, a blush caressing her cheeks. "I will."

We watch Xander lope off toward the elevator and I have to admit he looks hot in those athletic shorts.

"Come on, Tink, show me this apartment."

Amelia claps her hands in excitement and it's good to see the light back in her eyes. She seemed lost after she came back from London, different, like the weight of the world was on

her shoulders. Even when she was happy, there was something not quite honest about it. I wonder if I've neglected her.

"Yes. You're going to love the view, Beck."

We walk toward the elevator as I listen to her talk, her hands moving wildly. Amelia has always been expressive and I would tease her that if I sat on her hands she'd be mute.

"It's good to see you happy, Tink."

She stops talking and looks at me with a soft look. "I feel like I'm ready for whatever life brings me next. It's time to be brave."

My gut twists at that statement because I know it won't be with me. But I love her enough to want to see her happy, even if it doesn't include me in the way I'd like. "You're brave, Tink. The bravest person I know."

Her eyes look a little wet and she blinks and waves her hand. "Don't make me cry."

I chuckle and pull her into my arms. "Sorry, Tink."

The doors open to absolute chaos in her new home.

Linc and Harrison are on either end of a large couch and Norrie is directing them this way and that. Lottie is underneath trying to straighten a rug and both my friends look like they want to murder someone.

I burst out laughing and Amelia joins me which only serves to draw glares from both men that make me laugh harder.

"Oh, how the mighty have fallen."

"Shut the fuck up and help me, asshole," Linc spits and I move forward but only because I don't want a couch landing on sweet little Lottie. That woman deserves a fucking medal for putting up with his grumpy ass.

We spend the day getting the bones of Amelia's apartment put away and around six-thirty, Norrie and Harrison head home with Isaac, who has most definitely had enough. They are so lucky with him, he's the most placid baby I've ever

seen. It's strange to think of him as Xander's nephew. Though he doesn't have a blood link because Norrie was adopted, he does remind me of him in that he's laid back like his uncle.

"We're gonna head off too if that's okay?"

Lottie moves toward Amelia and I where we're putting glasses in a kitchen cupboard.

Amelia holds her arms out and Lottie hugs her and then does the same for Lincoln and I see him soften toward my girl.

"Thank you so much. I'm so lucky to have you guys adopt me like you have."

Lincoln wraps an arm around Lottie and gives her a soft look before looking back at Amelia. "It's our pleasure and I want to thank you for all the help you've been giving Lottie with the charity."

"I loved doing it and it's not like I didn't have the time."

Lincoln cocks his head and I can see the cogs working in his brain. "Have you thought about what you might do next? I'd love to have someone of your caliber at Kennedy Enterprises."

"Ah, that's very sweet of you to say and Audrey and I have discussed it at length, but honestly, I don't know what I'm going to do yet. I'm considering going back to school and getting my Ph.D. in physics."

Well, that's all news to me and shows just how much of my best friend's life I've missed out on of late. There was a time when I would've known this before anyone else and now I feel like the last person to know. I don't like it one bit.

"Well, the offer is there if you change your mind."

"Thank you."

I walk with Amelia to the elevator as she sees them out and try not to let the hurt fester. I'm as much to blame as she is for the way things are currently, and it only serves to remind me how much I want us back to what we had. "So where next?"

“Bedroom.”

My dick perks up at the thought but I push any desire I feel away.

“Please don’t make me wrestle with the comforter cover.” I groan and she laughs as I intended.

“No, I’ll do that. You can unpack that box.”

I see three boxes on the floor and move toward them, sinking to my knees as Amelia begins to shake the sheets out. Her bedroom is decorated in whites and olive greens with a pale pinky color adding some warmth. It’s a large room, with a balcony that overlooks the city and the color scheme carries out to the large potted plants and ferns she has dotted around.

I unpack the first box quickly and set her books in the small bookshelf she keeps just for those books she loves. Amelia only buys the books she wants to read more than once in paperback and some of these are worn and frayed from frequent reading. I move on to the second box and open it as she gets her head in the comforter cover and wrestles with it.

My eyes widen and I make a strangled sound in my throat. My girl has sex toys and not just one or two, she has a box full of them. A bullet vibrator, a clitoral stimulator, a G-spot toy, as well as several huge dildos. My dick is instantly hard as I peer into the secret world of my friend’s sex life. I pick up the pink rabbit and turn it in my hand. We have these at the club and they are pretty popular.

“Beck.” Amelia makes a cross between a yelp and a squeal and dives toward me, throwing her body across the box as if she can stop me from seeing them.

I raise my hand in the air as she lands face down over my lap. I grunt as she wriggles on my hard cock.

“Jesus, Amelia, keep fucking still.”

She freezes as she realizes what she is doing, her eyes downcast and a blush turning her neck crimson.

“Hey.” I grip her chin and turn her head to me so I can look at her and I almost moan at the desire and confusion in

her eyes, but I know I need to get us back on track. “Sex toys are part of a healthy sex life. Don’t be embarrassed with me, Tink. I *am* a doctor.”

She pushes off me and reaches for the dildo in my hand, and I let it go as she shoves it back into the box and pushes it away from us. She’s sitting back on her knees now and the blush is still as red as ever, the skin on her neck blotchy from it and I know she hates that.

“I know that, but it doesn’t mean I wanted you to see them. God, this is so embarrassing.”

I stand and chuckle as I offer her my hand and she takes it, letting me pull her to her feet.

“I’m sorry.”

She lets her head drop to my chest and I fight the urge to wrap my arms around her, keeping her hand in mine at our sides. My dick is showing no signs of getting the memo that sex isn’t on the table so I angle my lower body away from her.

“Not your fault. I should have been more careful.”

I hate that she sounds so mortified and want to put the passion and zest back in her voice. “I know what will cheer you up.”

She lifts her head. “I’m not in the mood for The Notebook, right now.”

My lips twitch in a smile and I love that even now, with her embarrassment clear on her face, she can make a joke.

“No, not that. How about I take you to Joe’s Diner for dinner? It’s late and we need to eat and this stuff isn’t going anywhere. I can always come back tomorrow and help you do the rest.”

She cocks her head to the side but I can see her excitement already. Joe’s is one of our favorite places to eat and we haven’t been since she got back from London. Another thing I failed on.

“Yes, but you’re buying and you need to help me fix this bedding first.”

“Deal.”

We tackle the demon comforter cover together and finally get it in place and head out.

As we pass the reception desk I wonder if we’ll see Xander and don’t know if it’s something I want to happen or not. I decide not. I want this time alone with Amelia without her thoughts or mine on him.

We walk into Joe’s and it’s exactly like it was the last time we came. In a world where everything is changing, it’s good to have this stability. Even the faded menus are the same, not that either of us needs one.

I wave to Marisol as we walk in and she gives us a huge smile.

“Well, if it ain’t my two favorite people in the world.”

Marisol is older than dirt, but she moves like a spring chicken and never seems to lose her cool or her smile. I’ve seen her handle the most obnoxious customer with a few words and a smile.

“I bet you say that to everyone.”

“Just the handsome ones.” She turns to Amelia and grins as she puts her hands on her ample hips. “Well, you’re a sight for sore eyes.”

“It’s good to see you, Mari.”

“You too, my sweet girl. Now go get yourself seated and I’ll be over in a minute.” She jerks her thumb behind her. “I need to take care of these drunk frat boys first.”

“Give me a shout if you need a hand.”

Marisol scowls at me. “Boy, I’ve been dealing with idiots like this since before you was a twinkle in your daddy’s eye.”

I roll my lips to stop the smile and nod, not wanting to upset her. I only did it once and my mouth was burning for a week after she put minced-up ghost pepper in my burger.

“Fair enough.”

Amelia and I make our way to our favorite table near the window and it's as if sliding into this booth opposite each other like we have done a thousand times resets something between us. I see her visibly relax and I feel my shoulders relax too.

“Is your mouth burning in memory?”

“Hell yeah, that shit was hot.”

She laughs and I love how she holds nothing back. Amelia is a gift, and one I was too blasé about. I always loved her and she was always my person. Even after I realized how I felt about her I was aware but her leaving for London really brought it home to me how much I relied on her.

“So, back to school?”

She looks up as she flicks the cracked Formica on the table with her fingernail. “Are you mad I didn't tell you?”

I shake my head, resting my elbows on the table as I lean in closer. My mother would kick my ass if she saw me with my elbows on the table but then she'd probably hyperventilate if she saw me in this place to begin with. My parents were both born into money and I love them, but we're very different. They see it as their job to preserve the wealth of our family and protect its legacy. I wanted more and thank God I have an older brother who can be my father's protégé because I was never going to be that.

“Not mad. Disappointed with myself for allowing this distance between us.”

“I didn't mean to keep you out of the loop. I just...” She trails off and I know what she's thinking, it's been tough.

I reach across and grasp her hand in mine. “I need to do better and I will, Tink, I promise. I can't have a life where you aren't front and center. You're my person and always will be.”

She squeezes my hand. “Same. It's not all you, Beck. I felt out of place coming home like I didn't fit anymore but I'm settling now.”

“Good.”

Mari comes over and interrupts to take our order and it's like sliding back in time. "The usual for you kids?"

"Yes, please." Amelia nods and so do I.

"So have you applied to any schools yet?"

She shakes her head. "Not yet, but once I'm settled and unpacked I'm going to start applying."

"I think it's amazing. I was always surprised you went into finance instead of research. You lit up when you talked about that stuff."

"I guess I felt like I owed it to my parents to do something that would eventually help the family business."

"They wouldn't want that if you didn't."

Amelia's parents are the sweetest. They adore their daughter and were never shy about showing how proud they were of her and her accomplishments.

"I know. I guess it was me putting pressure on me."

"Easy done."

We chat about my work, and I tell her about a few of my more interesting cases. I fill her in on the gossip I have about our mutual friends and bring her up to date on new couples and broken engagements.

"I can't believe Mason Master got left at the altar."

I shake my head and purse my lips. "I know, right. He was devastated by all accounts and for the last six months, he's been on a complete bender, fucking and drinking. I get the impression from his brother Ethan that the New York Jackals are threatening to transfer him if he doesn't get his shit together."

"Poor guy. Mason is such a sweet gentle giant. Why would anyone do that to someone?"

I shrug because I have no clue, relationships confound me. The only one that has been consistent is Amelia and that's different. She fits, we fit, and it isn't like we pledged marriage to each other.

“Fuck knows, but I hear his ex ended up with a hockey player from Ethan’s team, the Manhattan Cleavers.”

“Wow, what a bitch.”

“Yeah, the joke’s on her because Ethan fired him for fighting with one of the coaches. Although everyone thinks it was because of Mason.”

“Good for Ethan. He should have his brother’s back.”

Our food arrives and my mouth waters at the huge greasy burger in front of me. Immediately Amelia and I begin our usual song and dance. She takes the extra bacon from her burger and gives it to me and I load half my fries onto her plate because she always says she won’t want them and always does.

It makes me smile and she sees it.

“What?”

I shake my head. “Nothing.”

“No, tell me.”

“It’s just nice to have this back. I missed it.”

“Me too.”

Amelia takes a bite from her burger and chews, her eyes closed and a look of pure bliss on her face and my cock twitches in my jeans. Why does she look so damn sexy eating a fucking burger?

“Oh my God, this is so good.” Her moan of pleasure does nothing for the tent in my pants and I cover my groan by taking a bite of my own burger. She’s right, it is good. I slurp down some of the chocolate peanut butter milkshake and sigh.

We allow a comfortable silence to settle over us as we eat and it amazes me how easily we can slip back into this when we get out of our own way.

Amelia is finishing up the last few fries as I lean back and pat my flat belly. “That hit the spot.”

“Yeah for now, but I bet you’ll be hungry before we even get home.”

I love that she always calls whichever apartment or house we’re at home, whether it’s mine or hers. It’s something we’ve both done.

“I could probably squeeze in a slice of cheesecake on the way home.”

Her eyes look bright and she practically bounces in her seat. “From Mama Lucy’s?”

“It’s on the way back.”

“I’ll get the check.”

She raises her hand and I stop her. “No, you don’t. This is my treat, remember?”

“Fine but I’m buying the cheesecake.”

I want to argue but this isn’t a date so I nod. “Fine.”

As we walk down the street she looks at me sideways. “Can I ask you something?”

“My life is an open book to you.”

“Lies but I’ll let that slide for now.”

I tense at her comment but she goes on. “Did you know Xander before the ball and before we met Norrie?”

“Why do you ask?” I’m stalling because I need a minute to compose my answer.

She shrugs her delicate shoulders and her t-shirt slips, revealing the elegant curve of her neck and collarbone. I drag my eyes away and face forward so I can think without the vision of her clouding my brain.

In the end, I decide to give her as much honesty as I can. “Yes, I know him a little.”

“From the club?”

I bite my lip, wondering how to answer that without betraying his confidence.

“It’s fine. Forget I asked that. How about this, is there a reason you don’t like him?”

I stop in the middle of the sidewalk and some idiot almost plows into me because his head is in his phone. I pull Amelia to the side out of the way and we face each other.

I run my hand through my hair and then take both of Amelia’s hands in mine, loving the silky skin against my rougher ones.

“I don’t hate him. We have no issues to speak of. I guess I’m just a little protective of you. Xander leads a different life from us, always traveling and dating different women all the time and I have no problem with that, but I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

“So there’s nothing specific I should be concerned about? He isn’t a closet stamp collector and he doesn’t keep his toes nail clippings in a jar by his bed or anything?”

I chuckle and wrap my arm around her, kissing her head as we begin to walk again. “No, as far as I know, he does none of those things.”

I evade her question easily but the unease in my belly stays long after I’ve seen her safely home and I’m lying in my bed wishing for sleep to claim me. Xander does have a few major issues but they aren’t mine to tell and I’d never betray him or anyone else that way. I will, however, be watching him closely and won’t hesitate to knock his teeth out if I see any sign that he’s going to hurt my girl.

7: Xander

I BLOW OUT A BREATH TO EASE THE TENSION IN MY SHOULDERS and it does nothing. Head up, I push open the heavy glass door with the ‘Rise Talent Agency’ logo on the front. I smile widely at Lois manning the reception desk as I pass, and she gives me a little wink. Lois is one of those people who you can’t be sure of her age but if I had to guess, she’d be well into her seventies. Her silver grey hair is coiffed and her make-up is artful. The colorful kaftan patterned in pink and orange suits her personality.

“Good morning, Alexander.”

She is also the only person who calls me that and I let her because it reminds me of my mother in some ways. “Morning, Lois.” I stop and pick up the latest picture to grace her desk. “Helen had the baby then?”

Her face lights up from some inner glow and the love and pride on her face makes me smile despite the upcoming meeting with Len, my manager, that is about to happen.

“She did. Eighteen hours of labor and that kid had a head the size of a watermelon, but they are both doing well.”

I wince at the imagery. “Glad to hear it. He’s a good-looking kid.”

She looks at me over her glasses. “He is a she.”

“Oops.”

She waves a hand and laughs, and I feel relief wash through me. Lois is an angel unless you upset her, which I

make a point never to do, but I've seen other stars try it and they quickly learn who the real power is in this place. You see, Lois works the reception area, but she's also the money behind this agency.

"I'm just messing. All babies look the same and we love them anyway. That's the point, isn't it?"

I place the picture frame back on her desk and watch as she straightens it with pride. "I guess so."

"Oh I forgot, I made you some of those blueberry scones you like. Pick them up before you leave."

I move around the desk and wrap an arm around her small and delicate shoulders before dropping a kiss on her weathered cheek. "You spoil me. Thank you."

She blushes and I love that about her, but she bats me away with a dry laugh.

"Oh, away with you. Someone has to look after you."

"You're the only one for me, Lois."

She rolls her eyes but grins at me and it's easy to see what a knockout she was in her day and still is for a woman of her age. "Shoo, Len is expecting you and I have work to do."

I knock on the desk twice with my knuckle and walk away. "I know you're ogling my ass, Lois."

A deep husky laugh follows me through the door into the inner sanctum. By contrast, Emma, Len's secretary and the woman auditioning for the position of his fourth wife, is a miserable bitch. Still, I plaster on a smile as I walk past her.

"He in?" I don't stop but whistle past her as she stands up.

"You can't just walk in there, Xander."

"Sure I can."

I'm sure I see smoke coming out of her ears but no one would have a clue what her mood was because her expression doesn't change. Permanently in stasis from all the Botox she's had. If she is under thirty-five I'll eat my hat, but considering

Len is fifty-five, his batting average for wives is still under twenty-five.

The man himself is reclining back in his chair, his phone to his ear as he waves me into the room. I slump down into a chair and wait for him to finish as I glance around at all the memorabilia. Photos of him with some huge stars at some of the most prestigious award ceremonies in the world.

“I know, Marty, but if you can make this happen, I’ll speak to Bill over at Pinnacle. He assures me he can greenlight this deal.”

I watch him as he nods silently after making that last statement, to who I’m guessing is Marty Parry from Lodestar Entertainment, a smile on his face that speaks of triumph.

Len Schneider has been my manager for eight years and is partly responsible for my huge success. I owe him a huge amount, more than I can ever explain, but lately, I feel like we’re wanting different things and I feel less like a person and more like a cog in the machine.

He hangs up his call and claps his hand with a grin on his face as he stands and moves toward the bar he has set up in the corner. “Whiskey, Xander?”

I wave my hand. “Not for me. I have a gym session after this.”

He nods. “Good, good. Gotta keep that body in tip-top shape.” He pauses and loosens his tie. “What about the other thing? Any setbacks?”

I can feel the tension knotting the back of my neck and causing me to tense my jaw. I actively relax my jaw and clasp my fingers together over my abdomen. “You mean my addiction, Len? You can say it, you know.”

He winces as he moves behind his desk and takes a seat, as I follow the movements with my gaze. “Yes, that. Any issues?”

“No. I haven’t touched so much as a joint since I came out of rehab a year ago.”

My particular drug of choice was Oxy after a stunt left me with a fracture in my pelvis. I was lucky I got help pretty quickly thanks to none other than the man I can't stop thinking about.

“Good because we can't have anyone getting wind of it. Your image is everything, Xander, and I don't need to tell you that. Especially when I'm in negotiations with EGA about the next three movies in the franchise.”

“Well, rest easy, I'm doing fine.”

I can't help but feel a sliver of resentment at his words. He isn't the slightest bit concerned about me as a person but just how it would affect him and his ability to bring in the big bucks. I've made Len a very rich man and, yes, he's worked his ass off for me, but he hasn't done it for free.

“Great. Now I want to talk to you about something pretty exciting.”

He starts to drone on and on about a deal with a lingerie brand that wants me to pose in my boxers on their billboards. I start to zone out, my mind on Amelia instead. I wonder if she's settled into her apartment. I know it was only yesterday she moved in, but find myself wanting to go and check in with her.

Who am I kidding, I just want to see her again. She excites me, not just because she has the body of a goddess and I want to do exquisitely naughty things to her, but because she's smart and funny, and I like being around her.

“Xander, are you listening to me?”

I blink long and nod. “Yep, get my pants off, pose, and repeat.”

Len sighs. “What's going on with you?”

“Nothing.”

I can hardly tell him I can't get a woman out of my brain, he'd be horrified. He believes the only women I should see are ones that he approves are good for my career. I can fuck who I like—his words—but dating is different and would upset the

fans. I was okay with that at first but now it feels stifling like I'm suffocating under my own image.

I try and find the words to tell him that. "I'm bored, Len." I lean forward in my seat trying to convey how much I need something I can feel passionate about.

"So you want a little passion project?"

"I guess. A movie where I can keep my clothes on and not wear tights. Something gritty that challenges me."

Len links his fingers together on his desk and looks at me. "Look, Xander, you're an excellent actor, one of the best in the business, but those roles are not for you."

"I disagree."

He sighs. "Fine, I'll have a look and put out some feelers from some scripts that might fit that bill."

"Thank you."

I'm pretty sure he's just playing lip service at this point but it's a start.

"Now, what happened at that ridiculous auction you got roped into? Do I need to extract you from a social media shitstorm?"

That is unfair, I've never caused Len a second of problems and his suggesting I have is irritating. "No, I raised some money and I just need to arrange a suitable date to take the winner on."

I smile at the thought of a date with Amelia. I want to wow her, to show her how special she is, and I might need some help with that. I make a mental note to call my sister when I leave. I could call Beck but fuck if I'm going to give him a chance to warn me off again. I picture him as he was Saturday night, his hand fisted in my hair as I drank him down, and shift in my seat as my pants become tight around the crotch.

"Who is it? Anyone I should be concerned about? You can never tell these days, Xander. All these girls running around shouting 'Me Too' and how they've been harassed when it's just business. I don't want you getting caught out."

I sit up abruptly at his words, affronted on so many levels by that statement. “That statement is so disrespectful I don’t know where to start. Women wouldn’t have to go around, as you put it, shouting ‘me too’ if men weren’t such arrogant misogynistic pricks who sexually assaulted and harassed them. Secondly, I would never touch a woman without her express consent and lastly, this is not my first rodeo, Len. I know not to put myself in a position where I have to defend myself against baseless accusations.”

I’m no fool. I know it happens to both male and female actors where they’re accused of things they haven’t done so they can be extorted.

“Fine, whatever but you know what I meant. Now give me a name.”

I don’t know why but I don’t want Len to have Amelia’s name. I don’t want her to be touched by this in any way, but I know he’ll hound me relentlessly until I give it to him or he gets someone to find out. Len is a fucking rottweiler when he wants to be. It’s what makes him a good manager but can also be a pain in the ass. “Amelia Stone.”

I watch him lean forward and speak into his intercom. “Emma, can you get me everything we know about Amelia Stone.”

“She lives in New York?”

I nod once and try not to give away how much I want him to leave her alone. The bigger my reaction, the more he will get involved.

“Lives here in New York.”

“Age?”

I hear Emma’s bored voice on the line and can see her bitchy face trying to look annoyed.

“Around my age, I guess.”

“Fine. Give me ten minutes.”

Emma is not good at much but if you give her a target for a social media deep dive then she’s worse than the father of a

teenage daughter on prom night. Nothing gets past her.

“So, what else do you have for me?”

Len passes a list on a sheet of paper toward me. He’s old school, still liking paper. A bit like my brother-in-law, Harrison. “What’s this?”

I lift the paper and see a list of women’s names, most are familiar, a few I’ve ‘dated’, and some I haven’t heard of.

“A list of potential dates to the Adler’s charity ball next month.”

My brow furrows and I push the list away. “I haven’t decided if I’m going but if I do, I can get my own date.”

Len grits his jaw and I can tell he doesn’t like me telling him no, but it’s time I started to take more control of things. He’s had free rein for far too long.

“Fine, but I need to know by next week. The Adlers are huge investors in EGA and we can’t afford to upset them right now.”

Ah, so that’s what it’s about.

A knock on the door has me turning to see little miss sourpuss walking in the door. She shoots me a withering glare with her eyes, which only makes me smile wider. I’m pretty sure she hates me because I turned down her advances with a pretty swift rejection when she began working here eight months ago. I know women like her and they’re exactly the kind Len warns me about. It’s a shame he doesn’t take his own advice more often, it would have saved him a fortune in alimony.

“Here’s what you asked for.”

“That was quick.”

He places a hand on her ass as she moves around the desk and I look away, distaste making me shiver. Len is a good manager but he’s a walking HR nightmare.

“Anything for you, boo.”

I wrinkle my nose and rub my chin as I try not to laugh at the pair of them. Len looks at the sheet and I groan internally at the look of glee on his face. He dismisses Emma with a slap to the ass that makes me feel like puking and pins me with his beady eyes. His typical, slightly brown comb-over and dark deep-set eyes do nothing for him and yet he still acts like he's Don Juan.

“Well, well, you are a dark horse. Amelia Stone is the youngest daughter of Harold and Jennifer Stone of the Stone Brothers Liquor Company. She makes you look poor, Xander my friend. This is good, this is real good.”

I shake my head already seeing his brain spinning. “No, this is nothing to do with that. It's a date for a charity auction and that's all.”

He looks up from the information sheet Emma gave him. “But she must like you if she won the bid.”

“Maybe. Or maybe it was her way of helping her friend out.”

“Friend?”

Damn, I didn't mean to say that. “Amelia is friends with Lottie Coldwell and my sister.”

Len looks like he's about to start bouncing in his seat from excitement. “Oh, this is gold. Nobody would suspect a thing if you two began dating and with her family's profile, it would raise your own even more. Especially with the launch of the third movie this fall.”

“I'm not fucking dating Amelia just to raise my profile. She's a nice person and I won't use her.”

“Oh, see, that was so convincing. The public are gonna love this.” He stands and waves his hand through the air. “I can see it now, the movie star and the heiress.” His eyes move to me, and he grins. “And she's beautiful so that will help.”

I stand, having heard enough. “Just stop. I'm taking Amelia on this date and that's it. If you so much as leak this to the press, you're fired.”

I've never taken a hard stance with Len before, but it doesn't even phase him, he just nods. "Of course."

"Get me those scripts to look at."

I walk from his office only remembering to pick up the scones when Lois calls my name. I force the frown away and spin on my heel, pushing my temper down as best I can.

"That bad, huh?"

I roll my eyes and once again kiss her cheek. "Nothing I can't handle, Lois."

"That's my boy, don't let these assholes push you around. You know your own mind, my boy."

I leave through the front and go straight to my truck. I have no use for sports cars and, honestly, I don't even need this truck with the amount of driving I do, but the Ford Raptor was my father's dream truck. When I made my first big paycheck I didn't hesitate to buy it. Is it a sensible vehicle for New York traffic? No. But do I care? Also no.

I pull into traffic feeling unsettled after that meeting with Len. The thing with Amelia bothers me a lot. I don't want her dragged into any unnecessary drama because of who I am and what I do for a living. Acting is my career, it's not who I am. That, more than anything, sings to the heart of my ill feeling. I love my job, but I don't always love what comes with it, like hiding who I am for a start.

Hitting a few buttons on my steering wheel, I call my sister.

"Hey, Xand."

"Hey, sis."

"What's up?"

"Why would something be up? Can't I just call my favorite sister and say hi?"

"You can, but you ain't."

Damn, she sees everything. Thank God she never knew about the oxy, she would've been heartbroken. It's the one

thing I've kept from her, but then she got married without telling me so I guess we're even. "I just had a meeting with Len."

"Argh, that makes sense."

"What does?"

I put my turn signal on and head toward the gym I like to use that's owned by a friend of mine, Mason Masters.

"You always sound fed up after a meeting with him."

"I do?" I wouldn't say I was unaware of my feelings, but I hadn't realized I was being so loud with them.

"Yep, always sound just a little bit, not lost, but down, I guess."

"I guess. I just feel like I need a change."

"Then make one."

I huff out a laugh. "It's not that easy, Nora. I employ a lot of people. I can't just mess with their jobs and take risks because I'm bored."

"I get that, but life is short, Xand. We both know that, and it should be lived for ourselves and those that matter the most to us because one day it will be over."

"Wow, that's morbid." Norrie laughs and then I hear a clatter and her cursing is muffled. "Norrie?"

"Shit, sorry. I walked into the ironing board."

I roll my eyes and smile. I love my sister, but she's a hot mess sometimes. Coupled with Harrison's type A personality, it shouldn't work but he adores her and she adores him.

I want that, a connection that on paper is a nightmare but in real life is the stuff of movies and romance books. "Anyway, I didn't call to talk about me, not exactly anyway. I called because I have this date with Amelia, and I want to make it something special for her."

Norrie goes silent for a beat, and I feel my stomach knot with nerves. "Nora?"

“Yeah, sorry. Um, something special. So you need to know her likes and dislikes, then.”

“Yes, please.”

I park outside Masters of the Universe Gym and turn off the ignition and wait.

“Well, she hates spicy food but adores Italian. She has a sweet tooth but hates sour sweets. Her favorite flowers are hyacinths, but she hates roses. Um, what else?”

“What about hobbies?”

“She loves anything to do with science, especially black holes or stuff like that, and she can make a mean cookie or chocolate brownie. Which sucks for me.”

I try not to let the smile show in my voice. My sister has been trying to perfect the cookie for the longest time but she just doesn't have the magic or the attention span. I've eaten more singed cookies than I care to admit and now the baton is firmly in Harrison's mouth. The thought makes me ridiculously happy and I grin to myself. I like my brother-in-law a lot. After our first few rather fraught weeks we found a mutual understanding and that was our love for Norrie and Isaac.

“Keep trying, Nor, you'll get there. I have faith in you.”

“Yeah but not before my husband divorces me for trying to poison him.”

“Hah as if Harrison would ever let you go. He adores you.”

I hear the smile and wonder in her voice. “Yeah, he really does. Oh, I know. A visiting professor is going to give a lecture at Harvard next week. She really wanted to go but couldn't get a ticket.”

“Really? With her name?”

“Amelia doesn't use her name to get her way, she isn't like that.”

Norrie sounds affronted on Amelia's behalf and it makes me smile. I love that two of my favorite women have that.

“Calm down, sis.”

“Xander Reynolds, when in the history of the world has that comment ever helped anyone calm down?”

“Never.”

“Exactly. Now I have to go. I have a new recipe to try out.”

“Perfect, I’ll leave you to it. Thanks, sis.”

“Love you, Xand.”

“Love you too. Kiss Isaac for me. I’ll try and pop over this weekend.”

“Oh, bring steaks then. Harrison can grill.”

“Sounds good, talk later.”

I hang up and sit for a moment before pulling up the information I need and make a call.

8: Amelia

I RUN MY HANDS DOWN MY RED DRESS AS NERVES SWARM MY belly like an explosion of butterflies escaping their cocoons. “Are you sure this red dress goes with my hair color?”

I glance at Audrey who’s sipping wine on the couch in my bedroom, her long legs crossed as her foot bobs to an unheard song. Even casually dressed in wide-leg pants, this woman oozes class. Though we come from similar backgrounds of wealth and privilege, I still feel like the little nerd girl, who was obsessed with space, next to the popular cheer princess, around Audrey. Except this girl is my friend and underneath her sometimes waspy exterior lies a heart of pure gold.

Her derisive gaze finds mine as I turn to her. “You look stunning, and stop fussing with your hair or the curls will drop.”

I roll my eyes at her admonishment, and she stands and moves toward me, handing me a glass of wine.

“Here, drink this.”

I take a large glug of the cool sweet, liquid, letting the dry flavor burst on my tongue, and sigh.

Audrey takes the glass back and raises her brows, and it reminds me of the look Lottie uses on Eric when he’s about to get a lecture.

“Xander Reynolds is lucky to be taking you out, not the other way around. I don’t care how fine that man is, you’re a fucking rockstar, and don’t forget it.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

A horrified look crosses her face and I have to roll my lips to hide the smile. “Urgh, don’t ever say that again.”

Audrey hands me my black clutch bag and my black wool coat and guides me to the foyer. At the same moment, my door buzzes and the nerves come back in full swing. It’s silly and over the top because I know Xander, I’ve spent time with him, and I didn’t feel weird around him then. I’ve even been kissed by him and maybe that’s the reason. That kiss has played on a loop in my head this last week, and every time I wonder if it was a fluke or if it was as hot as I imagined it to be.

I blow out a breath to calm my galloping heart as Audrey disappears into my kitchen area to give me privacy. She has a key so will leave as soon as we’re out of here and he never needs to know how shaken I was by this date.

I open the door and almost swoon as my gaze travels over Xander. He’s wearing the hell out of a black tux. A crisp white shirt straining over his muscular frame almost makes my mouth water. His hair is combed back and his ice-blue eyes are bright and sexy as they sweep over me. In his hands is the biggest bouquet of blue and white hyacinths I’ve ever seen.

“Wow, you look sensational, wildcat.”

I blush as he steps forward and grips my elbow as he kisses my cheek softly. I get a whiff of his cologne and it’s musky and sweet with a slight citrus undertone and I have the overwhelming urge to bury my nose in his neck and take the biggest inhale.

I step back before I humiliate myself and smile up at him. Even in my highest heels, he towers over me and I like that he makes me feel small and protected. I know that probably sets feminism back forty years but it’s the truth. Xander makes me feel safe like he’ll guard my heart. “Thank you, you look very handsome.”

He thrusts the flowers at me, and I dip my head and let the scent of my favorite flower settle over me. It’s not an obvious choice for most people but I’ve always loved the scent and the

shape of the blooms. “How did you know these are my favorite?”

I tip my head and he blushes, which is adorable and for some reason settles my nerves but doesn't hamper my excitement at all. This man is here because I paid him for a date but he put in the effort and I can't help but hope that's because he likes me too.

“I might have had some help from my sister.”

I move back to the kitchen so I can put these in water and remember Audrey at the last second and pause before shrugging. He just admitted he had help so I can admit to having some pre-date nerves and roping Audrey in to help me get ready.

“Reynolds, looking good.”

Xander pauses but smiles at Audrey. “Aud, you here to give me the friendly do-not-hurt-your-friend, warning?”

She takes a sip of her wine and grabs her coat off the island where she threw it earlier. The woman is more untidy than me. “God, no. I was on hair and make-up. Not that she needs it.”

I give him a shy grin. “I was nervous and wanted to look my best.”

His eyes sweep over me like a caress, causing a full body shiver from the sheer heat in them. “You look beautiful but you always do.”

I swallow as my heart beats double time and the air seems to still around us, like the silence before a storm.

“Oh, for goodness sake, get out of here before I vomit.” Audrey grabs the flowers from my hands and pushes me toward the door.

“Thanks, Aud.”

I kiss her cheek and then take Xander's offered arm as he leads me to the elevator. He slides his hand down my arm and links his fingers through mine as the doors open and we head to a waiting black limo. A uniformed driver opens the door for

us and Xander ushers me in first before sliding in beside me. His thick thigh brushing against me makes my breath hitch as his scent fills the car around us, mixing with my perfume.

I look out of the window as I clutch my bag in my lap. “So, are you going to tell me where we’re going?” When he called to arrange tonight he just told me to dress for dinner. I have to say I was a little disappointed with his lack of imagination but now I’m wondering if maybe I jumped to the wrong conclusion.

He angles his big body toward me and gives me a lopsided smile. “It’s a surprise.”

“What about a clue?”

Xander chuckles. “You do understand how surprises work, right?”

I slap his chest playfully and he snags my hand and holds it tight against his chest before lifting it to kiss the tips of my fingers and then my palm. His teeth nip my palm and my eyes feel heavy as I fight the urge to whimper at the seductive move. My heart skitters in my chest and my belly feels warm and liquid as a pulse between my legs beats hard.

“Are you trying to distract me?” My voice comes out husky and breathy and I can barely concentrate as he kisses the inside of my wrist, before swiping his tongue over my pulse. I’m sure he can feel the way my heart is pounding just from that slight touch of his lips.

“Is it working?”

I nod as I lean into him and he pulls me closer, his hand cupping the back of my neck as his fingers funnel into my curls. Fuck, the way he’s touching me is so hot I can hardly draw oxygen.

“Is this, okay?”

I nod, my brain having left the building without him even touching me where I want him to. Xander dips his head and catches my mouth in a slow drugging kiss, his lips firm but soft as he explores me lazily, his hand controlling my movements until I’m pliant and panting for air. My lungs are

burning as we kiss, but neither one of us seems to want to pull away.

He's the one to finally break the kiss, his pupils blown black with desire as his thumb rubs my bottom lip, before he slides it inside against my tongue and I suck as a moan leaves me. His skin is salty, and I can feel the callouses against my tongue. A deep rumbling groan moves through him as I lave his thumb with my tongue.

“Fuck, you're something else, wildcat.”

I suck once more and he slowly drags his hand away to cup my chin. The kiss this time is more controlled, short and hard but no less potent. His expression is hungry, like a man starved, one who wants to devour me and I want him to, so badly I consider asking him to ditch the date and take me home where we can have some naked fun.

“We're here.”

He sounds as affected as me by our kiss and I blink twice to try and clear my brain and, when I do, I glance forward, relieved to find the privacy barrier is up and separating us from the driver. Although that kiss wasn't exactly X-rated, it was intimate in a whole other way. I feel more exposed by it than I have naked with some of my ex-boyfriends.

“Ready?”

I smile and grip my clutch as he opens the door and steps out. I shiver at the cool air on my skin, on my legs, and wish I could just stay here in this bubble with this sexy man all night.

At least I do until I step out as he takes my hand and helps to steady me. I look around, my mouth hanging open in shock as I take in the beauty of Harvard University's Memorial Hall building. The iconic brick with the high Victorian Gothic architecture never seems to lose its effect on me.

“How? Why? What?” I shake my head as I struggle to find the words and look like a complete idiot as Xander watches me with a warm sexy smile.

“Well, a little birdie told me, that a certain professor is giving a speech here tonight following a dinner.”

“But tickets sold out months ago. Professor Keating is a legend in his field of cosmology.”

Xander leans in close. “Well, being a famous actor does have some benefits.”

I blink again as he gives my hand a light tug and I follow him up the lit walkway to the entrance that has an A-frame announcing Professor Keating as the guest speaker. Excitement bubbles up in my chest at the thought of meeting this man. He’s the reason I fell in love with physics in the first place. He explained the universe elegantly and beautifully, which made me want to know more.

Xander leads me toward Annenberg Hall where the room has been transformed for the occasion. The high ceiling and the beautiful arches catch my attention, and it’s so beautiful in here that it takes my breath away but not as much as the man who made this happen.

Round tables with perfect white cloths are set up and I wonder where the long dining tables have been moved to. A space at the front has been erected as a raised stage with a microphone and an image of the man himself with the backdrop of the universe behind.

“I can’t believe you did this for me!”

Xander passes my coat off to someone behind him and pulls out my chair as I take a seat before he settles beside me and leans in close, his hand on the back of my chair.

He reaches out and tugs on one of the curls at my shoulder gently. “I’m finding that there’s a lot I’d do to make you smile like that.”

I tilt my head and cup his cheek, placing a light kiss on his lips. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

He leans back and snags a glass of champagne from the passing waiter and hands it to me before pouring himself a glass of water from the table.

“Cheers.”

We clink glasses and then others at the table begin to engage us in small talk and before long I'm having a lively discussion about gravitational waves with the man beside me.

A wonderful dinner of balsamic glazed lamb and cauliflower puree is served, followed by a warm gingerbread cake with a caramel sauce. I groan at the first bite of the decadent dessert and Xander chuckles. I turn to see he's having a fascinating conversation with Professor Edward Santini, who is head of the European Space Agency, but his eyes are on me and they sparkle with heat.

"This is so good."

Dr. Howard Scholtz, who has been entertaining me all evening, laughs. "It is rather good, isn't it? My wife makes it better though."

I turn to the man beside me who I now know was one of the lead scientists at CERN until he retired a few years ago. "You're a lucky man."

"I know, my dear. My wife tells me every day how lucky I am." His eyes twinkle as he speaks and it's clear how much affection he has for her, but I don't see her here.

"Doesn't she like this kind of thing?"

"No, this is a bit much for her. She has trouble with her hearing and it's overwhelming for her being around so many people."

"I imagine it is." We talk for a little longer and he asks about my thoughts on the Athena project. It's mind-blowing to be surrounded by such great minds and only enhances my decision to go back to school and get my Ph.D.

"Are you having fun?"

My attention is pulled away from Dr. Scholtz by Xander, who runs his hand along my arm. "Oh, my goodness, this is the best night of my life."

His smile is wide, and I have the overwhelming urge to kiss him for being so sweet, but I know if I kiss him now I won't want to stop.

The look in his eyes tells me he feels it too, a simmering of sexual tension that makes me squeeze my legs together. Xander leans in and kisses my bare shoulder and I shiver. This dress is sexy, modest, and understated but the way he looks at me makes me feel naked.

As our after-dinner coffee is served, Dr. Stan Johnson, the President of Harvard steps up onto the stage. I'm glued to his every word as he talks about the long history of great minds that have studied here winding up to his introduction of Professor Keating. The applause is loud as the small man with the thatch of white hair steps onto the stage. If Einstein has a doppelganger, then surely it's Professor Keating.

I feel a hand on my shoulder and lean back to place mine over the top as the Professor begins to speak about the Lagrange points and how Athena, the advanced telescope for high-energy astrophysics, is essentially an X-ray telescope that has been designed to study the hot and energetic universe. I'm spellbound as he speaks, my blood pumping with the thrill of potential discovery.

I applaud wildly as he finishes his speech and heads off stage to mingle with the great minds in the room. Now, more than ever before, I want to immerse myself in this life, in research and discovery of the world we live in every day.

The band begins to play and Xander stands and offers his hand with a slight bow. "Would you like to dance, Amelia?"

I place my hand in his as he leads me into the middle of other couples dancing as the soft beats of 'Come Away With Me' by Norah Jones plays. He brings me into his arms, his hand light on the base of my back, our hands held between us as we sway as if we've done this a thousand times.

"I didn't understand half of that speech, but what I did sounded fascinating, and watching you was enchanting."

I lean into him, so our bodies are pressed tight, and he strokes his palm over my spine. "This mission will study large-scale gas structures and allow us to map supermassive black holes and explore things like supernova explosions."

He smiles, his eyes warm, and I blush dropping my head. “Sorry, I tend to get carried away.”

He lifts my chin with his knuckle, and I meet his eyes and my heart beats faster at what I see there. “Don’t be sorry. Seeing you so fired up with a passion for something you love is the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen.”

I cock my head as I look up at him. “You’re a very special man, Xander Reynolds, and not what I was expecting.”

His smile fades and a look of resignation and sadness shows for a split second before he can hide it from me, and I know I hurt him somehow.

“I guess if you play the dumb muscled hero long enough people expect you to be that person after a while.”

I shake my head. “No, that’s not what I meant. I never thought you were dumb, not for a second, but I did think you were a ladies’ man. Tonight proves just how much more to you there really is. I mean you held your own with Professor Santini and he’s a tough cookie.”

“His wife is a fan.”

My hand tightens on his shoulder. “Don’t do that. Don’t reduce your worth to what we see on screen. You’re more than that. I see it and so do others.”

“I see why he loves you.”

My step falters and he tightens his hold on me. “What do you mean by that?”

He gives me a tender smile and then dips his head and catches my lips in a lazy kiss that has my blood spiking with white-hot lust for him. I can feel his hardness pressed against my belly and I rock my hips, trying to get closer. Xander drags his head up and steps away slightly and I miss the warmth of his body instantly even though he’s still holding me. I want to protest but he twirls me, making me laugh instead before pulling me back into his arms.

“Come with me.”

He leads me off the dance floor and toward a door near the back.

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

I giggle as I let him lead me. “Not sure I can survive another surprise like this, Xander.”

He winks at me as he pulls me through another door and I’m sure he’s going to pull me into a coat closet and ravish me and I’m here for it. This man could do whatever the hell he wants to me right now. I want him so badly my body is buzzing with it, and an ache settles into a low hum between my legs as I giggle.

“Are we going to have wild monkey sex in the most iconic building at Harvard?”

My words die when I realize it is not a closet, it’s an office. In the middle of it sits Professor Keating and President Johnson, and they both just heard every word.

9: *Xander*

“I HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE EMBARRASSED IN MY LIFE.”

Amelia dips her head against my chest as I walk her toward the elevator for her apartment. Her hand feels small in mine as we step inside and I tug her closer. I can't get enough of this woman in my arms. She feels like she belongs. I smile down at her as I swipe a piece of hair that has caught on her lip gloss out of her face. Her lips have been a constant source of fascination, especially the way she bites her bottom one when she's listening or nervous. It's been the sweetest kind of hell.

“They loved you. I think Professor Keating actually blushed a little.”

A groan slips past her lips and I can't help the full feeling it gives me in my chest. Amelia happy is my new favorite thing and I want to be the one to put that smile on her face again and again.

“I've probably scarred the man for life.”

“Didn't he say he has six children? I'm pretty sure he knows what sex is if that's the case.”

Amelia wrinkles her nose in disgust. “Eugh, gross. Let me keep the image of that from my brain please.”

The elevator dings, spitting us out into her apartment. She turns as I hesitate on the threshold. I want her but I want her to make this move, to show me how much she wants this. I know I could have her naked in my bed, she doesn't hide her desire at all, but I need her to make the choice without me putting pressure on her.

“Are you coming?”

“I don’t want to overstep.”

Amelia reaches for my hand and I take it, letting her pull me toward her. “I’m not ready for the night to end just yet.”

“I see, and what did you have in mind?”

Her hands move slowly up my chest as she steps into me and presses her body against mine. My dick is hard already just from being around her and watching her naturally seductive movements, now it’s hard as stone in my pants.

Her breath hisses as she feels me against her belly. I try and ignore it, the last thing I want is to rush this and screw it up. Whatever is between us feels too important for that.

“Well, we could watch a movie. I have a crush on the lead actor from the latest action flick.”

My lips twitch as I settle my hands on her hips, my thumbs caressing the indents of her tiny waist. “Is that so?”

Her voice is breathy as she rises on tiptoes and I pull in her scent and feel my chest ache. I bend and nuzzle her neck behind her ear so I can get more of her intoxicating fragrance. My teeth nip her earlobe and she presses closer as she angles her head so I can get better access to a spot that makes her whimper.

“I hear he has a crush on someone, too.”

“Yeah?”

I kiss my way down her neck and then across her jaw, light brushes of my lips as I learn every spot that makes her body respond.

“Yeah. He has a thing for a hot scientist with killer legs and a smile that drives him crazy.”

“She sounds hot.”

Her hands play with the hair at the nape of my neck and I fight the full body shiver at her light touch. I swear this woman is a siren because I could come just from her touching

me like this. “She’s so fucking hot, and the things I want to do to her....”

I lift my head, my eyes dropping to her lips as she flicks her tongue out and the air around us buzzes with electricity.

“Show me.”

I fight the silent battle between doing what is right and doing what she asked. I want to take it slow with her. Do things properly but with her looking at me like I’m her favorite candy, it’s impossible to resist her.

“Be sure, Amelia, because one taste of you won’t be enough.”

I murmur the last against her lips, waiting for her answer like I’m standing on the edge of a cliff, trying to decide whether I want to jump or not. She seems to wrestle with something for a second. I can’t help wondering if it’s Beck she’s thinking of, but instead of jealousy, I feel something else, something like lust power through my body.

“I want you.”

I don’t hesitate or give myself the chance to overthink, I just react, picking her up with my hands beneath her curvy ass and she locks her legs around my hips as she kisses my throat, her tongue licking over my Adam’s apple.

“Bedroom?”

She nods and I walk swiftly into the bedroom, which has now been decorated with her things. Soft pinks and greens that suit her fill the room as I toss her gently on the bed.

“Clothes off. I want to see all of you right now.”

“It’s been a while and I know I need to lose a bit of weight.”

I feel sucker punched by her words, anger whipping through me that she would even think that. “Who the fuck told you that you were anything but fucking perfect?”

I’m livid. I want to rip apart the asshole that suggested she might not be the utter goddess she is.

“My ex-boyfriend. It’s okay, I know I’m not as thin as...”

I press a finger to her lips. “Stop fucking talking.” I rest my forehead against hers and breathe through my anger.

“Xander?”

She sounds unsure and timid and I hate that anyone would make her feel less. “Just give me a second, or better yet, give me his name so I can go tear his balls off and feed them to him.”

“It’s fine.”

“It’s not fucking fine. He’s an asshole and he didn’t deserve to breathe the same air as you, let alone touch you. You’re beautiful and I want to see all of you. Will you let me?”

Amelia doesn’t hesitate a second time as she kneels up on the bed and draws her dress over her shoulders. The wide neck makes it easy and I watch captivated as her black lace bra comes into view. Her body is insane, full breasts, a tiny waist, and full hips that make me want to take a bite out of her. She was made for fucking and I’m going to prove it to her. She slides the dress off her hips, revealing a black lace thong that makes me bite my lip.

“Fuck, you’re beautiful.”

I pull the dress off her ankles as I step forward and slip the heels off her feet. They look amazing but I want her naked. “And the rest.”

Amelia watches me as she unhooks her bra and lets it fall to the bed. Her tight, pink nipples make my mouth water but her hands draw my attention as she wiggles her thong down her hips and I palm my cock, squeezing to ease the ache at the sight of her.

Her pussy is bare, and I can see the desire glistening on her thighs.

“Now you.”

I drag my gaze away from her and see her looking at me with hunger.

I step forward and cup her cheeks in both my hands and kiss her, using my tongue and teeth until she's boneless and panting before I pull away. "I give the orders in here, wildcat. Now lie on your back. I want to look at you."

Amelia hesitates and I cup the back of her neck, bringing her mouth close. "What's wrong? We can stop anytime you want if this is too fast."

It might kill me but I'd never push her if she wanted to stop. I'm not that guy and never will be.

I take her hand and slide it down my chest until she's cupping my dick through my pants. "You're so fucking perfect, my cock is leaking for you."

"Oh."

"Yes, oh," I murmur against her lips. "Now, lie back and let me worship you."

Amelia nods and lies down and I palm her thighs, spreading her open so I can look my fill. Her pussy is a delicious pink, making my mouth water for a taste, her arousal glistening on her inner thighs. I run my thumb over my bottom lip as her hands fist the sheets and her hips twitch and I'm not even sure she knows she is doing it.

I step back and she whimpers, but her eyes grow wide as I shuck my jacket and make quick work of shedding my clothes. Her eyes wander all over me like a caress until I'm standing in front of her naked. I fist my cock and stroke, and her eyes go hooded and lazy as she licks her lip and palms her breast on a moan.

I drop to my knees on the floor at the end of the bed and grasp the back of her knees as I drag her closer, lifting her legs so they hang over my shoulders.

I don't hesitate or tease, she's been tempting me all night and I need to taste her. I swipe my tongue up her silky folds and she arches off the bed as I latch on to her clit and suck hard. Her head thrashes as I continue to alternate between sucking and licking, fucking her with my mouth and tongue until she's bucking against my face.

I spear two fingers inside her and she cries out as I stroke her soft spongy inside until she's gasping, her pussy fluttering around my fingers. I suck her clit once more before biting down on the sensitive nub and she screams, her orgasm soaking my chin as I lick and drink down every moment until she's spent, her body languid.

Lifting my head, I see her watching me. Her hand reaches out for me and I kiss her palm. I kiss my way down her thigh until I'm standing and reaching for my pants pocket. I withdraw my wallet and the condom I always keep on me. Contrary to common belief, I don't fuck around as much as people think, but I'm nobody's fool and an unexpected pregnancy isn't something I want to deal with.

I toss the packet on the bed and Amelia sits up and grabs it, tearing it open as I put my knee between her thighs. Her hand fists me and she can barely grip me.

Her eyes are wide as she looks up. "Yeah that's not gonna fit, stud."

I tip my head back and laugh. "Wildcat, it's gonna fit like you were made for me."

"If you say so."

Her head dips, her tongue flicking out to tease the bead of pre-cum on the tip and I clench my fists and grunt at the feel of her tongue on my cock. I pull back out of her reach and she pouts beautifully.

"Not this time, beautiful. I'm too close and I want to come inside your pussy."

Her body seems to shiver but she nods and I move closer so her hands can roll the condom down my length. She gives me two strokes and I grip my hand over hers and pull her away.

"Lie back."

As she does, I palm her ass cheeks and lift her hips off the bed, lining my cock up with her weeping pussy. Stroking my dick through her wetness, I push forward and ease into her tight, wet heat. I close my eyes at the pleasure of her

squeezing me and grip her hips harder. I know I'll leave marks and the thought only arouses me more. I like the idea of Amelia marked as mine, walking around wearing my fingerprints on her skin.

Burying my cock to the hilt, I pause to let her get used to my size. Her breathing is erratic and I take her hands in mine and link our fingers together. "Look at me."

Her eyes are the darkest shade of blue I've ever seen, her sex quivers around me and I ignore the need to fuck into her hard, to rut her like a beast and check in with her. "You good?"

She nods.

"Words, Amelia. I need your words."

"Yes, it feels amazing, but if you don't move I'm going to die."

I roll my lips to hide the smile and do exactly as she asks. I buck my hips, finding a rhythm that makes her moan and whimper, her fingers squeezing mine like I'm a lifeline. Leaning down, I kiss her and she sucks my tongue, making my dick twitch inside her. We kiss lazily as I keep fucking her, my pelvis teasing her clit but not giving her enough to climax.

Sweat coats our skin and I pull my mouth away from her lips so I can kiss and lick my way down her neck. Her back arches, pushing her tits into my face, and I chuckle, a dark sound that makes her pull her hands from my grasp.

"Need to touch you."

"Then touch me."

Her hands move over my skin, her nails snag my nipples and I hiss in pleasure as she does it again. I pull her nipple between my lips and suck. Her tits are flawless and the feel of my mouth full of her is like finding utopia. I torture and tease her nipple and then move across and do the same to the other, only letting go when she grips my ass in her palms and squeezes, her nails raking my skin.

"Please."

I lift up so I can thumb her clit and watch as she takes me inside her sweet body.

“I wish you could see how well you take me, wildcat.”

“Xander.”

Her hands scrabble at my back, leaving divots in my skin as she begins to convulse, her release like a fucking vice on my cock as she cries and moans. Her words are unintelligible except one, my name on her lips and it's a sound I want to hear again and again.

As I fuck her through her first climax, she relaxes and I pull out as she frowns but I flip her to her belly. “On your hands and knees, baby.”

I stroke a hand down her spine and she rolls her body like a contented kitten. I shove into her again and she groans. This angle puts me deeper and I grip her shoulder and her hip as I fuck her harder. She feels like heaven, nothing before her ever felt this good. I thrust like an uncaged animal and she takes it and pushes back into me, taking more for herself.

“Harder, Xander.”

“Fuck.”

I grind my hips harder and faster and my balls draw up as pleasure tingles down my spine. I draw her up so she's flush against me, and nip the space between her neck and her shoulder with my teeth as I stroke her clit with my fingers.

“So deep. I can't.”

“Come for me, wildcat.”

Her long, keening wail as she comes around my cock tips me over the edge and I roar as I spill inside her. I keep stroking into her as my vision blurs, the most powerful climax of my life dragging every ounce of energy from my body. I sag onto the bed, draping Amelia over my body as my dick lies between us. I need to deal with the condom, but I'm not sure my legs will work.

Her hand lands on my chest and I lift it to my lips and kiss the tips reverently.

“That was....”

“Amazing, mind-blowing.”

“I was going to say spectacular but those work too.”

“I prefer your word.”

I sit up and remove the condom, wincing at the fact my dick is getting hard again and Amelia giggles.

“Wow, you’re a man of stamina.”

I tie off the latex and stand and head to the bathroom to deal with it. I hear a ding of a text alert and then another and walk out to find her looking at her phone, a strange look on her face.

“Problem?”

She shakes her head and pops the phone down as I crawl over her on top of the covers and kiss her.

“No.”

“You sure?”

“Yep, it was nothing.”

“Okay.”

“Will you stay for a bit or are you a love ’em and leave ’em kind of guy.”

“Would it freak you out if I said I was usually the love them and leave them kind, but I want to stay with you?”

A smile forces its way over her face as she tries to stop it and I find her utterly adorable and sexy as fuck, which is a lethal combination.

“No.”

“Good.”

I scoot under the covers and pull her so she is lying half over me, her leg thrown over my thighs. A yawn escapes her, and she tries to muffle it.

“Tired?”

“A little.”

“Sleep then, gorgeous. I won’t go anywhere.”

Her body is relaxing before the last word is out of my mouth. Amelia, it seems, is one of those people that can turn over and just sleep without hours of overthinking. I hold her, reveling in the feel of her soft warm body and wonder how I can make her fall for me like I am her, and if I even want that long-term.

A buzz beside me makes me turn to see her phone lit up with a notification. Beck’s name flashes across the screen with a preview of the message.

I’LL BE OVER AROUND MIDDAY TOMORROW. DON’T FORGET IT’S YOUR TURN FOR TACOS.

I get an unsettled ache in my chest at the familiar way they are together. She loves him and one night with me won’t change that, no matter how good it was for both of us. What’s worse is he loves her too, and a love like that doesn’t disappear after years of shared experiences. Can I put myself between that and come out unscathed? Especially when I want him almost as much as I want her.

Beck saved me in ways I can never repay. If it wasn’t for him, I’d probably be dead from an oxy overdose. Him finding me that night was the best and worst thing to ever happen to me. It’s why I’ve stayed away from him since, avoiding his scenes because I want him, but more, I could love him and that’s terrifying because that part of me has to remain a secret or I’ll lose everything. Amelia murmurs beside me and guilt eats at me. I’m lying with this amazing woman in my arms and thinking about him, but I wouldn’t change tonight for the world, because I want her just as much.

10: Beck

“TINK, WHERE ARE YOU?”

“In here.”

I walk through her apartment following the sound of her voice, impressed by how much she’s gotten done in the week since I saw her last. Her apartment looks more lived in than my loft and I’ve lived there for two years. I spot a huge vase full of her favorite blue and white hyacinths on the table in the living area and smile. The scent filling the air and mixing with her own is sweet and sums her up perfectly.

I find Amelia with a drill in her hand trying to hold a level at the same time, the drill bit precariously close to her face.

I rush forward and grab the level from her hand. “What are you doing?”

She gives me one raised eyebrow. “Oh, I don’t know, skiing down a mountain.”

I quirk a lip at her. “Smart ass.”

“I’m putting up a shelf.”

“Why didn’t you ask me?”

I ease the drill from her hand and set about putting the shelf up for her. Marking the level for the screws methodically, first.

“Because I can’t keep relying on you forever.”

A weird lurch makes me slip and the pencil slides across the freshly painted wall. “Shit.”

“It’s fine. It wipes off.”

I try and get myself under control again. “Why can’t you rely on me forever?”

“Really, Beck? One day you’ll find someone who you want to spend your life with and when that happens, I can’t keep being the third wheel.”

I place the drill on the floor and turn to her, placing my hands on my hips to keep from reaching for her. “Tink, you’ll never be a third wheel and I’d never let anyone come between us. You know that.”

She picks at her cuticle until it bleeds, and I swat her hands away. “Stop with the self-mutilation.”

She drops her hands with a huff. “It’s not realistic. One day you will fall in love, and I want that for you. I do.”

“I’m not going to fall in love.”

She crosses her arms over her chest and cocks her hip. “Be serious.”

“I am. I have no interest in falling in love.”

I can’t tell her it’s because I’m madly in love with her and have been for years.

“Are you sure?”

“Maybe you’re the one that’s falling in love. I hear you had your date with Xander. How was it?”

A huge blush stains her cheeks and I grit my jaw at the soft look in her eyes and the heat in her cheeks. Fuck, it’s worse than I thought. “Did you fuck him?”

“Beck!”

“What? Can’t friends ask these things? You never had a problem telling me in the past.”

“This is different.”

“How?”

“Because you don’t like him.”

“I never said that.”

The problem is I like him too much and it’s messy as fuck.

“Oh, so you like him, just not for me.” She throws up her hands in exasperation and spins away from me.

“Amelia, don’t walk away from me.”

I follow her to the kitchen where she’s filling a glass with water. I move behind her at the island, pinning her in with my hands on either side of her body and she stills.

“I like him, Beck. Can’t you just be happy for me?”

The small hurt sound of her voice makes me pause and see this from her point of view. She doesn’t know how I feel about her and it’s not fair for me to behave this way with her. Above all else, I love Amelia and need her in my life, even if that is only as my friend, and I’m hurting her with my behavior. She’s the last person I ever want to cause pain. I touch her shoulder and she spins around, burying her face in my chest and hugging me tight. Her nose is buried in my tee and I cup her head, sifting her silky hair through my fingers.

“I’m sorry, Tink. I really am, and Xander is a good guy. I like him for you.”

That’s the truth too. I do like him for Amelia. He obviously likes her and I’ve seen enough at the club to know what kind of man he is. “How about I put that shelf up and then I make us dinner and we pig out on crap for the afternoon and watch old Hitchcock movies?”

Amelia and I both have a thing for old horror movies.

Her smile is watery, and I thumb away her tears, each one cutting a path straight to my heart.

“Okay, but I want meatball subs, not tacos.”

I kiss her temple. “You got it.”

I release her and bend my knees so I can look into her eyes. “We good?”

“Always.”

“Good, now tell me about your date.”

“Beck.”

I walk back to her bedroom, and she follows. “I’m serious, I want to know.”

“Fine. He got us tickets to the Professor Keating dinner at Harvard.”

I whistle through my teeth. “Wow, impressive. How was it?”

She claps her hands and grins dreamily and as much as I want to hate the guy for having the girl I love, I can’t hate anyone that can put that smile on her face.

“Amazing. Professor Keating talked about the Athena mission and went into detail about the next steps. I sat next to Dr. Scholtz who was the lead scientist at Cern and worked on the Hadron Collider. He was so sweet and then I got to meet Professor Keating in person one on one, and he’s so brilliant. We danced, the food was amazing too, and Xander was so patient and sweet with me and he didn’t get bored. Or at least he hid it well if he did.”

Seeing her so fired up with passion again is like being hit by the first ray of sunshine after a dark and cold winter. Amelia is brilliant and watching her enthuse about what she loves makes me sick that she walked away from it in the first place.

“And he got you hyacinths.”

“And he got me hyacinths.”

She sighs and I grin at her. “So, are you going out again?”

Amelia frowns. “I’m not sure. He said he’d call.”

I grind my teeth together not liking that standard line he left her with. If he fucks her around, I’m going to break that motherfuckers jaw. I don’t care how good he is at sucking cock.

“I’m sure he will. It was only last night, right?”

“Exactly.”

I turn, focusing on the shelf as Amelia helps me hold the bracket. Before long we have two floating shelves on the wall and her old study books stacked in height order, next to the *Feynman Lectures* books I bought her for her birthday a few years ago. I stand back and nod at my handy work. “Not bad.”

“Great job, thank you.”

I look at the bed and notice the bedding is different. Did she change them out already after a few days? Then it hits me why she’d change her sheets and the images in my head make my dick perk up in attention. No, I can’t get a hard-on from imagining her and Xander fucking. What the hell is wrong with me? “So, have you applied for schools yet?”

I change the subject and head out of the bedroom toward the kitchen where I shove my head in the fridge and look for the ingredients I need for meatball subs.

“Not yet. I want to do a little more research first.”

I pause and lean back to look at her. “You are going back though?”

She leans on the island and sighs. “Yes, I think so.”

“You think so? I thought you were set on it.”

“I am. I was, but my parents....”

I cut her off before she can go down that road again. “Have no idea how brilliant you are and need to shut the fuck up.” I place the ground beef on the counter and balance my hands on the island as I lean into her. “Seriously, Tink. You need this. You light up when you talk about black holes and gravitational waves and I’m not going to let you throw your amazing brain away on dumb finance shit.”

Her lips twitch with a smile. “Not gonna let me, hey?”

“No, I’m not. The world needs people like you and little girls all over need to see beautiful women immersed in STEM subjects so they know they can do it too.”

“So it’s a public service?”

“Yes.”

I bury a grin as she rolls her eyes at me.

“You’re insane.”

“I’m brilliant and you know I’m right, so stop fighting this. Pick a school and apply. Fuck, pick several. They’d all be lucky to have you.”

“I did like the team at Harvard.”

“Then that’s what you’re going to do this afternoon while I make dinner. Start your application.”

She bites her lip and I thank God for the island between us hiding my reaction to her.

“Okay.”

“Good girl.”

A blush stains her cheeks and I swallow the groan. Why does her blush at me calling her a good girl make me want to bend her over this island and fuck her until she’s hoarse? Oh yeah, because I’m a prick that’s in love with his best friend and fucking his hand every night to the image of her on her knees with my dick in her mouth. Now I can add her fucking Xander to the jerk-off roster.

As I shape the meat into meatballs I watch her take out her phone and smile at the screen, her face lighting up and my chest heaves as the meat in my hand is crushed.

“He text you?”

Amelia glances up, her bottom lip caught between her teeth and I force the groan back down my throat at how hot that is.

“Yeah. He’s at the gym but is going to call me later.”

“Good, that’s good.”

Amelia cocks her head as she slides her phone into her pocket. “You okay, Beck?”

“Yep, all good. Do you want to pick a movie?”

“Sure.”

I finish molding the beef and begin cooking them off in the pan while I start the sauce, adding plenty of pepper as she likes it. The entire apartment smells divine and my stomach rumbles, but it will be a while before it's done so I join Amelia on the couch. She's awful at making a decision about movies and this process itself could take almost an hour. She can be the queen of procrastination sometimes, while I'm known for making split-second decisions. My job requires it, it's what makes me a good surgeon, that ability to pivot quickly in a situation.

THREE HOURS LATER WE'RE LYING CURLED UP ON THE COUCH, Amelia's head on my chest, her leg thrown over me. It's not unusual for us to end up cuddled up like this and I have to admit I enjoy it far more than I should. She'd probably freak if she knew just how much I loved the feel of her body against mine. I guess that will stop if she gets serious with Xander, although it never did when she was with her other boyfriends, but I have a feeling Xander is different.

A whimper falls from her lips and I pull her hair gently away from her face to see she's sleeping, her eyelids moving like she is dreaming. Her lips part on another soft moan and she squirms her body closer, her hips rocking against the hard muscle of my thigh. I still as the realization hits me. Amelia is having a fucking sex dream and using me to get off.

I should wake her, she'd be mortified, but when her hand trails over my chest, I close my eyes and relish the feel of her fingers on me. I turn, nestling her against me so I can watch her face, her body undulates slowly and I hook my hand over her thigh and settle her closer to me. Another whimper tears through her at the firmer contact and she begins to ride my leg, taking her pleasure from me, and it's the hottest fucking thing I've ever seen.

Her neck is flushed, lips parted and I bend, wanting to kiss her more than my next breath, but I'd never violate her like that. This is bad enough and I'm definitely going straight to hell, but it's worth eternal damnation to watch her fall apart.

Her movements become jerkier, her moans louder as her breathing changes and I wonder if she's woken but her eyes remain closed so I can't tell. I cup her throat softly, my thumb grazing her pulse as it beats frantically beneath her delicate skin. My cock is aching, straining at my pants and I reach down and palm it for some relief, and let out a groan of my own.

I could come from just watching her get off, she's so stunning. There aren't words good enough to explain it. Her lips part and she arches her body, her breasts pressing against my chest, nipples hard nubs. I rock toward her, my cock skimming her belly as her sex rolls against me, the heat and wetness of her pussy soaking through her panties.

It would take nothing for me to run my hand up her thigh and expose her panties beneath the little blue floral dress. Her skin would be smooth and soft beneath my palm as I stroked her to climax, but that's not a line I can cross.

“Beck.”

My name said in that breathy whisper almost makes me lose my mind and slide between her thighs, but instead, it shatters the bubble and I still, lifting my hands off her throat and edging backward. A moan of displeasure whimpers out of her as I extract myself. What the fuck was I thinking almost making her come? She was asleep and I almost took advantage. Fuck, I did take advantage. I move away and she rolls, her hands reaching before she stills, her entire body freezing.

I stand and give her my back as I walk away to give us some distance and clench my shaking hands.

Fuck!

I set to cleaning the carnage that I left the kitchen in, wiping the surfaces and stacking the pans in the dishwasher. In my operating room, I am fastidious about order, but at home, I'm more relaxed or I try to be. It doesn't always work.

“Hey, did I miss the end of the film?”

I look up at Amelia as she ambles into the room, clocking her pink cheeks and the way she won't quite meet my gaze. She's embarrassed. I thank God I didn't let her finish and wake up. Although it does leave us both horny and unsatisfied. Maybe I should go to the club.

As I get the thought, her doorbell rings and she frowns.

"Expecting company?"

"No, although Ryker did say he might stop by and sort out my internet for me and set up my wireless network."

I shove a pod into the dishwasher and turn it on as she heads to the door. I listen unashamedly as she greets her visitor.

"Hey, I didn't expect you."

"Hope I'm not intruding. I just figured it was easier to stop by than call."

Xander's deep voice echoes through the room, and I can't help the wash of pleasure it gives me.

"You don't need a reason to stop by, Xander. Come in. I was just going to make a drink. Do you want something?"

He turns the corner, his step faltering as he sees me. His glance goes to Amelia. "Sorry, I didn't mean to intrude when you have guests."

"It's fine. Beck is a fixture, not a guest."

"Hey."

Her lips twist into a smile and she blows me a kiss, which makes my heart skitter in my chest as I try not to read into it. I've become the King of reading into Amelia's every nuance lately, and every single time I have to snap myself out of it.

"I heard you had a pretty good date. Good job on the flowers, man."

Xander seems slightly taken aback by my words, his cheeks flushing a lovely pink. It looks good on him and his eyes are crystal clear. His skin is tan and healthy, and not the sallow, sickly color from when he was taking oxy. Finding him

slumped in that bathroom still wakes me in a sweat. I honestly thought he was dead, and only my insistence on keeping Naloxone in the office saved him. Well, that and getting him into a top rehab facility.

“Thanks, Amelia makes it easy.”

He smiles as he says it and we both turn to her. She’s smiling between us, clearly pleased with how this is going down. I hate that she doubts my ability to behave and be nice to someone she cares about.

“That she does.”

“Would you like a glass of wine, Xander?”

Amelia moves to the fridge and pulls out her favorite bottle of chardonnay and pours us both a glass. This is how our usual evening would go after a movie.

“I don’t actually drink.”

Xander seems relaxed as he gives her that truth and I almost puff up with pride for him admitting that. It’s a big step for an addict to speak about it to someone he doesn’t know well. Even more so for someone like him, who has the weight of the world watching and waiting for him to fuck up. I know it’s why he uses the club.

The bottle clinks against the glass and wine spills onto the counter.

“Shit, I had no idea.”

She moves to put the wine away and Xander steps closer, his arm brushing over my chest as he stops her, and I hiss a breath, making him look at me and smirk.

Cocky bastard.

“It’s fine. Alcohol isn’t a trigger for me.”

“Oh. Are you sure because we don’t mind, do we, Beck?” She looks at me with confidence that in this instance I’d do the right thing and it pleases me.

“Of course not.”

“Thanks, but really, go ahead. I’m happy with water or soda.”

Amelia nods as she pours him a soda water from the fridge. “So, I thought you were drinking at the auction the other night.”

Xander blushes. “It’s a prop. That was actually water too. I get too many questions if people think I’m not drinking. It’s easier to just pretend.”

I hate that for him, but it’s not my business. I should go and leave these two love birds alone but I can’t seem to get the message to my feet.

We stand in awkward silence for a second, nobody speaking and I force myself to move out of the kitchen area and give them some space, but Amelia moves at the same time.

“I just need to use the ladies a second. That wine is going straight through me.” She blushes as she takes off to her room, leaving Xander and me alone.

I feel him behind me as he steps into the living area, his eyes moving to the couch where our movie nest of quilts and pillows is set up. I follow his gaze and wonder what he makes of it.

“Is this going to be a problem? Me and Amelia being together?”

His words slash at my insides better than the sharpest scalpel, leaving me feeling like I’m bleeding out in front of him. God, why does that simple sentence almost eviscerate me? Because if she is with him it means any chance of me and Amelia is gone. Not that there was one to begin with. I react like a prick and turn on him, stalking closer until only a breath separates us.

One deep breath and he’d be touching me, but I stand with my body rigid and force my cool gaze on him. Little flecks of gray shimmer in his blue eyes, long lashes sweeping down over high cheekbones. He truly is magnificent with full lips that I know the feel of, twitching up.

“What makes you think I won’t tell her how you sucked my cock just days ago and came all over my hand crying my name?”

It’s cruel to remind him and I’d never hurt Amelia or him like that, but pain is making me react this way. It feels like everything in my life is changing. Everyone I love is moving on and finding someone and I’m stuck in this pit of misery loving someone I can never have.

Xander huffs out a breath, the minty scent feathering my face with warmth.

“You’d never hurt her like that.”

“You don’t know me.”

He cocks his head and gasps as I grab his throat in my hand, his pulse battering wildly against my fingers. I drag him closer until his lips are almost on mine, feeling the shudder wrack through his body. My dick is like a battering ram in my denim jeans as his hands skim my hips, not to push me away but to drag me closer.

Two males fighting for dominance, fighting animal lust, and neither willing to give an inch. My thumb strokes over his throat and I have the urge to bite his full bottom lip, to drag it between my teeth until blood blooms.

“Do it,” he growls, rocking his cock against mine.

It’s like he can read my mind as we both lean in, our lips barely touching and heat radiating through us as he closes his eyes and sighs.

A gasp has us jumping apart like scalded cats as we both turn to see Amelia standing in the doorway of the hall leading to her bedroom watching us. Her eyes are bright with shock, and her lips open on a shocked gasp.

“*Fuck.*”

11: Amelia

I STEP FORWARD AS IF I'M WALKING IN A SEXED-UP FEVER dream, my body is humming with desire at what I witnessed. The pure power and aggression between Xander and Beck only added to the desire I could see vibrating between them. It wasn't hate I could sense between them, it was lust and it's a fucking turn-on.

Both men are looking at me horrified, pink heat sits on Xander's cheeks, the need in his eyes making them almost black and the bulge in his sweats is undeniable, but it's Beck I can't look away from. I should be outraged that he'd make a move on the man I fucked just last night but my body is practically vibrating with wanton hunger.

"Tink, I can explain."

Beck is watching me with wariness and guilt, waiting for me to freak out and I should be, but I can't. I don't say a word as I reach the two hottest men on the freaking planet. One who made me feel like I was the most desired woman in the world just hours ago, and the other who has had my heart for as long as I can remember.

I don't suppose waking up to my hips seeking release on his thigh is helping my situation right now, and certainly not the denied release because he backed off before I could finish. Always so noble, my Beckham.

"Amelia."

Xander's voice cuts through my haze and I turn to him and shake my head and he grits his teeth. Reaching up I cup Beck's

cheek and he nuzzles into my hand, the stubble rough against my palm, but the look in his eyes is pure lust and it's for me. I run my thumb along his lip and he closes his eyes like he's in pain. Going up on tiptoes, I touch my lips to his, canting my head and spearing my tongue to taste him as he groans and hauls me into his arms. His arms hold me and I almost purr in my throat as he takes control, angling my head with his hand on my face, and sweeping his tongue inside.

“Tink.”

His voice is gruff and questioning against my lips but I don't answer. I press myself closer, running my fingers through his hair and scraping his scalp. A strangled growl runs up his throat as he fists my hair and tips my head, the sting sharp against my scalp and pleasure blooms from it all the way to my pussy.

I whimper as he bites down on the cord of tendons between my neck and shoulder. Turning slightly, I see Xander watching on with pure animalistic heat burning in his eyes. I reach for his hand and he takes it, letting me drag him closer. Beck lifts his head from the kisses he's placing on my throat and regards me. He knows me better than anyone in this world, and he turns to Xander as I place my palm on his head and push it gently toward Xander.

“Are you sure this is what you want, Tink?” He looks at me, forcing me to stop.

“Yes.” The word is almost a pant. I'm so turned on, I can feel the wetness on my thighs from it.

With one arm still holding me to him, Beck reaches out with the other and hooks Xander around the back of his neck, bringing him into our space, all our bodies touching in some way. It feels intimate and sexy even though our clothes are still intact.

“Xander, do you want this?”

Beck's voice is firmer when he asks Xander but still holds a caring note to it that makes me shiver. He's taken over

whatever this is, leading us and checking in with us both like the protective caretaker he so naturally is.

“Fuck, yes.”

Beck smashes his lips against Xander’s and I swear it feels like my clothes melt clean off me from the incendiary heat between them. There’s none of the gentleness or teasing that they use when kissing me, it’s pure fire as if they’re waging war, on each other’s bodies. I can’t look away and I don’t want to. This is the hottest thing I’ve ever witnessed and without a doubt the most intense moment of my life.

Beck pulls back and turns to me with a look I’ve never seen from him before. It’s as if he wants to strip me down and do obscene, dirty, delicious things to me and I want it. He kisses me slowly, and I can taste Xander on him. I shiver and lean into the kiss, but he pulls away, licking his tongue over my lips before he tilts my head toward Xander, who leans in to kiss me.

His kiss is hungrier as if he can’t get enough of me and I shudder as he nips my bottom lip, licking along the same line as Beck. Beck has his lips on my neck, biting and sucking and I wrap my arms around each of them, holding on for dear life and wishing that this moment would never end. Xander pulls away and then both of them have their mouths on my neck, the heat coming off these two men is like an inferno singing my skin. I feel consumed by them as hands move over my back, one on my ass, the other traveling to cup my tit, a thumb swiping over my peaked nipple, making me cry out. Xander lifts his head from my neck, his eyes clouded with lust. Beck kisses him again and I’m entranced.

Beck moves me so I’m sandwiched between them facing Xander and kisses him over my head as I lean back against him, sighing as pressure builds in my chest. I smooth my hands over Xander’s chest, lifting his tee and exposing the warm, muscled skin beneath.

None of us are speaking, it’s as if words will somehow break the spell. The only sounds are whimpers and groans of

pleasure. I jump as a hand trails up my inner thigh, causing little ripples of pleasure.

“Suck her tits, Xand.”

Beck’s voice is husky and deep, commanding, and Xander grins before he tugs the straps of my dress down exposing my bra. Beck cups my chin, bending my head back so he can kiss me long and deep, his height an advantage as it arches my back, pushing my breasts into Xander’s face. He nuzzles the soft skin, before sucking my left nipple into his hot, wet mouth through the lace of my bra. A cross between a moan and cry eases past my lips into Beck’s waiting mouth as Xander toys with me.

Beck’s hand between my thighs continues to stroke delicate circles just out of reach of where I need him to touch me, but no matter how much I squirm he doesn’t move his fingers.

“Fuck, she’s beautiful isn’t she, Xand?”

The big man just hums against my nipple, making me grasp wildly for purchase and catching his hair in my hands. As I tug he growls, thrusting his hips into my belly. I move my hand but Beck beats me to it, shoving Xander’s sweat down his thighs and taking hold of Xander’s cock at the base. I place my hand over his as we continue to kiss and jack Xander off at the same time. The feeling of us working him together is intoxicating. I tilt my head away as Beck teases my pussy, his fingers funneling through the wetness and stroking into me. I cry out at the feel of it but he withdraws, gathering my juices and using them to circle my clit.

“Stop fucking around so we can make her come. I want to see the pretty way her tits flush with arousal when she comes around my fingers.”

Xander lifts his head, leaning in to kiss Beck, a fierce expression on his face as his hands disappear from my body and I hear Beck hiss. I try and look down but Xander breaks the kiss and bends to lick a line up my cleavage, pulling the cups of my bra down with his teeth. My senses are overwhelmed as my legs shake, my body humming between

them as Xander sucks hard on my nipple, his fingers teasing and plucking at the other until I'm writhing on Beck's hand.

"She's squeezing my fingers in her pussy so hard, Xander. It's like pure heaven. I bet she tastes like it too. Did you eat her out last night? Did you drink her climax straight from her pussy like a good boy?"

Oh God, Beck is the dirty talk master and it has my body quivering with my impending release as Xander nods against my sensitive skin. Beck's strokes on Xander slow until we're almost teasing him, but Xander just sucks my nipple harder as Beck speeds up the way his fingers fuck into my pussy. Arousal coats my thighs and my body tingles and then Beck pulls his hand away from Xander but tightens his fingers over mine on Xander and encourages me to stroke him.

Satisfied I got the message, he dips his head and bites my neck, sucking the tender skin between his teeth causing a frisson of pain that shoots straight to my clit. He then slaps my clit and I cry out, my orgasm hitting me like a freight train. My knees sag and Xander holds me up as he lifts his head and kisses me, swallowing down my screams as if he can taste them. I feel like my body is being ripped apart as pleasure unlike I've never known whips through me and takes my vision and my ability to speak coherently.

"Fuck, I wish I could capture this. You're so fucking beautiful, Tink. Isn't she stunning, Xander?"

"Like a priceless work of art."

I hiss and whimper as Beck pulls his fingers out of me before pulling away. His arm bands around my middle, holding me up as I try and get my Bambi legs to hold me again.

I watch, my body still languid from that climax as he offers his fingers to Xander who parts his lips and sucks my taste off Beck's fingers. Beck's dick twitches against my ass and I rock my hips back as he nips at my neck in warning.

Beck hooks his fingers in the top of my dress and pulls it up sensing I need the armor it gives me as I think about what

he's about to ask me.

“Do you want more, Tink?”

He pinches my chin, turning my face to him and I drown in his blue eyes that are so heavy with passion. This is the line and the question is so much more than whether I want to fuck him, it's about whether we take this next step and risk our friendship.

My eyes flicker to his lips and I can feel the tension thrumming through his body as he waits patiently for me to respond. I glance at Xander, who pulls my face to his and kisses me slowly, lazily cupping my cheeks in his hands as Beck strokes his hands over my hips, causing little aftershocks to run through my jerky body. I turn to Beck and cup his cheek, this man who is my everything and he kisses my palm, tenderly. How will I ever move on from him after this? Then I glance at Xander, who's stealing his own part of my heart so swiftly I can hardly remember what it feels like without him in my life. Can I ask for what I want or do I chance losing it all? But sandwiched between these two men I feel brave, courageous. “I want you both.”

Beck looks to Xander as his hands flex on my hips, his hand smoothing over my belly.

“What do you want, Xander? This only works if we're on the same page.”

Xander looks conflicted as if he's fighting an internal battle and I don't want to influence him but I really want him to say yes.

Finally, he looks at us and nods. “I want that too. I want you both.”

Beck nods once and he licks his bottom lip.

“Beck?”

His eyes move over me as I spin in his arms, putting Xander at my back and giving Beck my full attention. Xander steps into me and I feel his erection at my back. Desire pulses through me, but I tamp it down because Beck deserves my attention for this question.

“Yes?”

“Do you want this? If we do this, everything changes.”

His fingers feather over my collarbone as he holds my neck in his big hands and I feel the power in him that he sheaths around me, the dominance that makes my clit pulse.

“You’ve always been mine, Amelia.” He glances behind me at Xander. “And now you are too. I want this more than I want air.”

I swallow and his palm squeezes slightly, his eyes heat, and then he’s kissing me and it’s like being consumed by a tidal wave. His lips are soft but firm as he takes from me, lapping at my tongue and stealing my breath, my thoughts. Every last part of me is his.

Big hands cup my breasts and I sigh as Xander kisses my neck while playing with my nipples.

“Let’s move this to the couch,” Beck declares and bends to lift me into his strong arms.

I’ve been carried by him hundreds of times but it’s never felt like this. I shuffle my hands through his hair and bring my lips to his neck as he growls and slumps onto the couch with me on his lap. He arranges me so I’m sitting on his lap facing outwards and positions my legs on either side of his thighs so I’m open to Xander’s heated gaze.

“Why are you still wearing clothes, Xander?”

Beck’s words have a sexy snap to them that makes my pussy flood with desire and I squirm.

His hard cock presses against me and he growls against my neck. “Behave.”

I roll my lips to stop the whimper as my body aches for release again. My eyes fall to Xander as he tugs his tee over his head, revealing all that gorgeous tanned muscle. His abs look like stacked bricks of muscle as his biceps flex.

“He’s beautiful, isn’t he? Like a carved sculpture just for our pleasure.”

It should feel strange to hear Beck speak like this about a man I had sex with but it doesn't at all. It feels right, and I'm so damn turned on by it I can't sit still. Beck is right, Xander is extraordinary in his physical beauty but his heart is what I find the sexiest of all, and the way he blushes at Beck's words causes my heart to pound.

When he's standing in front of me naked, I take a moment to truly enjoy him, his hard cock laying flat up against his belly. He's big and slightly curved, and I want to run my tongue along the veins that look almost angry until I can suck the crown and watch his eyes dilate.

Beck draws my dress up over my thighs, exposing my soaking wet panties, his fingers leaving tingles on my skin.

“Make her come on your face, Xander.”

Xander moves between my legs, his eyes on my drenched center before he drops to his knees. He wastes no time putting his face against my pussy and inhaling. I move to close my legs and a wave of shyness rides over me, but Xander's wide shoulders won't allow it. His fingers draw my panties down my legs as his tongue swipes up my slit and is rough against my clit. My back arches in pleasure as a moan erupts out of my mouth.

I feel Beck's lips on my neck as he sucks my pulse. His hands pull down the front of my dress and bra so that it pools around my waist as he thrums my nipples with his fingers. Xander's tongue spears into me, his stubble scraping my skin with a delicious friction. I'm going to die from the pleasure these two men are giving me.

Beck turns my face to his and kisses me, copying Xander's motions as he fucks my mouth with his tongue, his hands torturing my nipples, and pleasure zips over every inch of my skin.

“Oh, fuck, that feels so good.”

Beck looks down my body and I follow his gaze, watching as Xander works me until I'm a shaking, trembling mess. Beck never stops stroking and petting me, and it's overwhelming in

the best way. My thighs shake and I feel my climax building, my pussy pulsing and then Xander bites lightly on my tender nub and I'm soaring.

My orgasm rips through me, taking my vision as I shake and pant.

“Xander. Oh my god, Beck. I... fuuuuck.”

Sweat drips down my neck and Beck swipes at it with his tongue as the man between my legs licks me gently as I come down. Beck kisses me gently, tenderly, and I feel a wave of emotion flow over me.

“Stunning.”

Before I can respond, Beck stands and deposits me on the couch as he hauls Xander up and kisses him, his hand stroking over the hard cock like he owns it, and the way Xander arches into his hand and groans makes me believe he does. I never knew watching two men together could be so hot, but I'm so turned on right now, I can hardly breathe.

Beck pulls away but keeps stroking the hard cock in his hand. Seeing him fully dressed with Xander and I both naked feels vulnerable but so hot.

“You fuck her yet?”

Xander smirks as he looks at me with dark delight in his warm eyes. “Yes.”

“You make her come?”

“Multiple times.”

“Good boy, do it again. Let me see.”

Beck steps back and Xander prowls toward me, his body lithe and fluid as he moves with purpose to the end of the couch. His arms reach for me and I go willingly as he holds me against him and kisses me, drawing out my pleasure until I'm gasping and whimpering from just a kiss. But it's not just a kiss, Xander kisses like it's his life's mission. He turns me gently and places his hand on my back as he pushes me to bend over the couch, shimmying my dress down for me to kick it away.

“Hold on.”

I grip the cushion as he slides inside me to the hilt, working his big cock into me as I whimper as he bottoms out. He holds still as my body adjusts to his size, a wonderful fullness making my body quiver.

“You good, wildcat?”

“Please move.”

I wriggle back against him and he chuckles the sound dark and seductive. “As the lady wishes.”

Then he pulls out and slams back into me, his fingers threading through my hair as he holds my hip and drives into me again and again. His cock teases all my nerve endings as he pounds my G-spot. I feel fingers trace my jaw and look up to see Beck has stripped off his shirt. His gorgeous, muscled body with the slight dusting of hair that trails over his muscled abdomen is right in front of me. I reach for the button on his jeans and he helps me free his cock. I moan when I see the Jacob’s ladder piercing the underside of his hard cock. I never thought of a dick as beautiful but Beck’s is, smooth skin that is hard as stone as I feather my fingers over him and swipe the drip of pre-cum off the tip and use it to stroke him. His head tips back and he grunts, his body flexing as he strokes the back of my head over my spine.

I continue to stroke him from root to tip and he flexes in my hand. I turn to see him and Xander kissing and my pussy spasms from the sight.

“Fuck, she likes that.”

Xander growls as he breaks the kiss to angle his cock higher and I cry out as he rubs my G-spot again. Beck grips his cock and lifts my chin, pulling down on my bottom lip with his thumb.

“You gonna give me that mouth, beautiful?”

I don’t answer, I just roll my lips over the head of his cock and suck him back as far as I can take him.

“Goddammit.”

His sentence comes out as one word as he tries to hold still. I bob my head, tasting the salty, manly taste of him in my mouth and a flood of pleasure rocks through me, and my pussy pulses.

“Fuck, she loves your cock in her mouth. She’s dripping down my cock.”

Xander’s statement is base and dirty and I fucking love it. I hum as I suck Beck off, alternating with long licks up the length of him. He’s holding back, stroking my jaw gently and I don’t want that.

I reach for his hand and guide it to my throat, wrapping his fingers around my neck and then deep throat him so he can feel me everywhere.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” he bellows as his control snaps and he begins to fuck my mouth.

Xander palms my belly and trails his fingers to my clit as my legs begin to shake. I can feel my climax just out of reach taunting me. My entire body is on fire with pleasure, every cell in my body is alive and tingling.

“I’m close,” Beck groans in warning and I take him deeper as he swells and his cum coats my throat. I drink him down, sucking every drop until he staggers backward, his dick popping out of my mouth.

“Wildcat, you close?”

“Yes.” It comes out as more of a sob.

Beck drops to his knees and I feel him between my legs as his tongue finds my clit. Xander yells, a deep animalistic sound, and shoots deep inside me just as my climax hits and takes my legs from me with its power. Every neuron in my body is alive, wave after wave of pleasure dragging me under until I’m nothing but a whimpering mess of feeling.

I sag against the couch, Beck and Xander holding me up between them. Xander pulls out and I sag onto the couch as Beck takes Xander’s cock in his mouth and cleans our combined release off him. I can hardly stand from the three orgasms these men gave me, and still, I can feel my body

respond to the sight. Xander bends and cups my cheek as he kisses me and I know he can taste Beck's release too as he groans in pleasure.

Eventually, we make it to the couch where we're a tangle of limbs and sweat, cuddled up with my bottom half on Xander's lap and my body lying across Beck.

"Well, that wasn't how I expected today to go."

Beck chuckles at me and plays with my hair as I purr and rub my cheek against his chest.

"Me either but I can't say I'm not thrilled about it."

"Same," Xander concurs.

I know we need to have a conversation about this and what it means and how it would work but right now all I want to do is bask in this moment and let any doubts or worries fade away. I should know Beck better than that by now though.

"We need to talk."

12: *Xander*

I GET A PIT IN MY STOMACH WHEN BECK DECLARES WE NEED to talk. What we just shared is, without doubt, the hottest sex of my life and I haven't been a wallflower when it comes to sex. But that was more than sex, it felt fluid like we've been doing it for a long time, a natural dynamic. Threesomes can be tricky more often than not and feel clunky with too many arms and legs, and one person getting left out but that was...I have no words for it apart from right.

“Do I need to dress for this conversation?”

Amelia sounds exhausted as I stroke my hand down her thigh and tease the edge of her swollen pussy lips with my thumb, making her whimper and flex her hips up for more. The woman is insatiable and I love how open she is about what she wants. Seeing her place Beck's hand around her throat as she sucked his cock while I was balls deep inside her was the hottest moment of my life.

Beck chuckles and his eyes flicker to mine full of warm heat. His palm soothes over her belly to cup her breast and he bends to flick his tongue over the tight peak. Amelia pushes closer, wanting more, and he presses down on her abdomen to stop her.

“I think we should probably dress, eat, and talk. Then I'm going to fuck you both.”

I feel his possessive gaze on my skin and shiver at the image in my head. Amelia jumps to her feet like she just got a second wind. “Let's go. Clothes, food, talk, and then fucking.”

I stand and haul her against me to kiss her as she sinks into me and sighs.

“You’re perfect.” I caress her back, enjoying the way she feels in my arms. I can’t seem to get enough of her.

“Thanks.”

Amelia slips out of my arms and heads to the bedroom and I hear her using her bathroom as I stand and pull on my clothes. Beck just slips his jeans on and leaves the top button undone and it’s so hot I can’t drag my eyes away from him. He’s truly something else to look at. Ripped muscle and a tattoo covering his left bicep and shoulder that depicts a beating heart burst open to reveal a tiny fairy with delicate wings. Above his heart is a sunburst that goes over his shoulder and skims the top of his chest. I know instantly the meaning behind it and wonder how Amelia is so blind to what she means to him.

“See something you like?”

Beck saunters closer and I can hardly drag my eyes up over his magnificent body to meet his eyes. “You really love her?”

Beck looks like he’s going to deny my words but then he swallows and visibly relaxes his jaw before nodding. “Yes.”

One word but it holds a wealth of emotion and I know how hard that was for him to admit. What I’m risking is my career and maybe my heart by going into whatever this might be, but they’re risking a lifetime of friendship and love.

“Thank you for being honest.”

Beck cups my cheek, his fingers scratching over my stubble as his piercing gaze holds mine. “Don’t hurt her.”

“I won’t hurt either of you.”

Beck nods and drops his lips to mine in a slow, sensual kiss that zaps my brain of any thought but him. Beck has an intensity to him that’s magnetizing and impossible to fight.

“God, that is so hot.”

I pull away and we turn to see Amelia watching us, her legs crossed as she squirms on the spot. I chuckle and step away as Beck heads to the kitchen. I scoop Amelia up in my arms and sit on a tall chair at the island with her curled in my lap.

“You’re a cuddler, huh?”

I smile at her teasing tone and nod. “Yep, just a big old teddy bear.”

“Sexiest teddy bear I ever saw.” Beck smirks at us but I see no jealousy in his eyes, only indulgence and warmth.

“We can have leftover subs or I can order pizza?”

“Pizza,” Amelia declares and I shrug. I don’t care. Either way, I’ll need to work it off in the gym.

Beck orders the pizza and then comes to join us at the island.

“We should decide what this is and isn’t so nobody gets hurt.”

“Can I go first?” Amelia asks, and Beck reaches for her hand and kisses her palm, making her sigh in delight. “Of course.”

“Firstly, I wasn’t expecting this, Beck. You and I have been friends nearly all my life and I can’t imagine my life without you.”

I see him tense, waiting for the blow as she knocks him back but I don’t think that’s what is coming.

Her hand curls around his cheek and he softens instantly and neither of them can see how she’s the only person he does that for. “I want this, I’ve wanted this for us for so long, since the night of graduation but I can’t lose you. If you have any doubts then I’d rather go back to what we had.” She turns to me. “Xander.” She shakes her head and smiles at me with mischief in her eyes. “Where did you come from? I feel so relaxed with you and I want more of what we just shared. You’re a very special man.”

My chest hollows at the sweet sincerity in her words. “Can I go next?”

Beck nods and it’s strange how we both look to him to lead us, but then that’s the man he is. He leads and guides.

“You both know who I am and what I do but not many people do. It’s not public knowledge that I’m bi-sexual or open to sharing, because although the movie industry likes to think it’s forward-thinking and evolved, it isn’t. When I signed my contract it was a legal requirement that I don’t do anything that would hurt the brand as they see it, and that includes being into men or anything considered unconventional.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

Amelia looks outraged and I can’t help but drop a kiss on her upturned lips. “I know, but I signed it and if I break it my career would be over.” I take a deep breath and blow it out through my nose as I step off the virtual cliff. “What I’m trying to say is, I want this but I can’t be public with you, Beck. I know that might be a deal breaker and I get it, but I can’t do it.”

He purses his lips and I’d kill to see inside that big brain of his.

“So you can be with Amelia openly but not me, and certainly not us together?”

“I can be seen with you but not in an intimate way.”

“I see.”

I hold my breath and I can feel the tension in Amelia too as she waits for him to mull it over.

Amelia reaches for his hand and his eyes flicker up to her, a silent conversation happening between them that should make me jealous but only intrigues me.

“What do you think?”

“I’m okay with it. I want to be with you, Amelia. I want to see if this can work.” He turns to me and his lips twitch in a smile. “You too. I can’t say I love the idea of hiding what we have but if it’s the only way, then I’ll take it.”

Relief pours from me like a popped balloon and I can't stop the grin from crossing my face. "Yeah?"

Beck nods, his grin stretching into an almost full smile. "Yeah."

"Oh boy, this is going to be interesting."

Amelia jumps from my lap as the doorbell rings, announcing our pizza delivery, and Beck moves around to stand between my legs.

"Is this going to hinder your recovery?"

My belly churns at his words and I hate that he ever saw me like he did, but I know his question holds genuine concern, so I try not to react to it negatively. "No, but if I feel myself struggling I'll tell you or Amelia, and I attend regular meetings still."

"Good."

"Pizza."

Amelia breezes into the room and plonks three boxes on the island between us, including one containing hot, gooey, chocolate orange cookies. We eat and it feels relaxed and intimate as we exchange little touches between the three of us. Neither me nor Beck can keep our mouths off Amelia for more than two minutes and it's not long before the heat between us turns molten.

Amelia takes our hands and pulls us toward her bedroom that feels so much smaller with me and Beck in it, despite it being double the size of a normal bedroom. She pulls the light dress she was wearing over her head and my eyes go to her high breasts, the dark pink nipples tight and begging for my tongue.

A hiss falls from Beck as she crawls onto the bed, her ass barely covered by a tiny pair of white lace panties.

"On your back, wildcat, let me see that pussy."

She rolls to her back as I admire her gorgeous curves. My blood still boils that any man would make a woman feel shit

about her body but especially this one, who looks like a fucking goddess.

“You gonna fuck that tight pussy and let me take your ass?”

Beck comes up behind me and I’m slightly taller than him and probably ten pounds of muscle heavier. His body is built for endurance and stamina whereas I’m built for the big screen and the hordes of fans who know me as the superhero they love.

His teeth scrape my neck and I groan as I keep my eyes on Amelia.

“Yes.”

“Don’t keep her waiting.”

I strip and feel him do the same behind me and then I kneel between her parted thighs and pull the lace down her smooth, lithe legs. She palms her tits, twisting and pulling at the nipple for relief and my mouth waters so I take a taste, pulling one between my lips as I line my cock up to her entrance and drive inside.

Her back bows and a keening sound falls from her lips. God, she’s beautiful. Soft and sexy and so responsive. Her pussy is so tight and wet I can hardly stop myself from fucking into her like a wild animal. I give a couple of shallow strokes and groan in pleasure. Beck’s body heats my back as I feel him come up behind me, his cock brushing my ass cheeks and making me lunge into Amelia sharply, a moan tearing from her as she watches us intently. His hands stroke over my pecs and chest, my belly quivering at the rough feel of his big palms on me. When he grasps my throat and tips my head back for a kiss, I feel wet heat flood around my dick as Amelia bucks her hips and mutters.

“So hot.”

Beck pulls away and offers me his two fingers and I suck them into my mouth, twirling my tongue around them and coating them with my saliva. He pulls them away and I see him smirk before he pushes me forward so I’m leaning over

Amelia, my hands pinned on either side of her head. I dip my head and kiss her as I feel Beck's finger breach my ass. I fight the urge not to push back as the sudden full feeling makes my dick drive into Amelia.

“Hurry up, Beck. Her pussy is like a fucking vice.”

He adds a second finger pumping into me and making sure I'm ready as he scissors his fingers, stretching me for his dick. Just the thought of that piercing sliding into me has my balls pulling up in pleasure.

“Suck her nipples, Xander.”

I oblige and Amelia cups the back of my head to her, holding me in place as I fuck her in small strokes.

Beck withdraws and I feel his fingers biting into my hips as he lines his cock up with my ass and pushes inside in one long sure, steady stroke that has me gasping and rolling my hips back until his balls slap against the back of my thighs. My ass is stretched and I can feel the Jacobs ladder scraping the cool metal against every nerve ending and it's fucking heaven.

Beck pulls out and slams back into me, driving me into Amelia's tight heat. A groan slips from all of us as Beck sets a punishing rhythm that drives me mindless. I'm surrounded by more pleasure than I've ever felt. Just as I feel Amelia flutter around me, her fingers biting into my biceps, Beck slows down, denying her climax. A cry tears from her as he does it again and again until sweat is pouring between her breasts and her legs and arms are shaking.

“Please, oh God, please, let me come.”

Beck pushes me flat against Amelia, only my braced arms are stopping my upper body from crushing her. He shunts into me again as he grasps my chin, turns my head, and takes my mouth in a soul-stealing kiss, his teeth biting down on my bottom lip and drawing blood, which he licks away with soft kisses.

“Give that to our girl.”

Fuck, him saying that makes my dick twitch as I turn and kiss Amelia exactly like he kissed me.

Then he lifts up and pounds into me, fucking me with long powerful strokes that shove Amelia up the bed. My balls draw tight, electricity snapping my spine and I groan as her pussy tightens around me and she screams my name followed by Beck's.

I try and stave off my climax as she ripples around me but it's no use and she drags me over with her.

"Fuuuuuuck." My roar feels like it can be heard downtown as my voice goes hoarse. As I sag into her, Beck grips my one shoulder and hip and I thought he was pounding me before but now he really lets go and fucks me like he hates me, and I fucking love it. I love the raw power and brutality of the way he treats me against the soft gentle way he is with Amelia. I take everything he gives me.

I feel him stiffen as he bites my shoulder, causing another wave of pleasure to shoot through me as my still-hard cock slams into Amelia making her cry out and hold on to me. Beck's body hinges over me as he comes with a bellow and I feel his warm release coat my insides.

We all lie breathing hard as he slips out of me and I slide to lie beside Amelia, dragging her into my arms and kissing her softly. Beck disappears into the bathroom and comes back out with a warm cloth. He gently cleans me up, dropping soft kisses on my chest, and then does the same for Amelia.

Never in my life have I felt so cared for than with these two people after one afternoon. Some people think being bisexual makes you less of a man somehow, but I've never felt that, ever. Being with Beck is like riding a storm, raw and devastating and it sweeps you away allowing you to give up control. Being with Amelia is different. She gives me what I give Beck, power and tenderness and a feeling like I can conquer the world. I don't pretend to know what it feels like for either of them but for me, this moment is the turning point. The second comes when I know what I want. Instead of making me happy, it terrifies me because I want them both for keeps and I don't know how I'll achieve that and keep my dream job.

13: Amelia

ADDING A LAST SWIPE OF LIGHT MASCARA TO MY EYES, I TURN from my dressing table mirror and glance at the bed. A blush heats my skin as I think about all the delicious things that happened there last night. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine this could be my life. I'm not a sexual prude, far from it. Lance, my ex-boyfriend, wasn't very adventurous and the one time I suggested we maybe add a few toys he told me it was insulting to him and didn't speak to me for a week.

That should have been the first red flag, but alas I was blinded by his charm and my complete loneliness and trapped by my own stubbornness. London wasn't the escape I thought it would be from my feelings for Beck. If anything, it made things worse in the long term.

Beck left for his shift at the hospital at six, leaving a tender kiss on both of our heads before he did. Xander was asleep and just mumbled but I was awake, and my tummy somersaulted at the wink he gave me from the bedroom doorway as he left. Xander stayed cuddled up to me for another hour, his hands smoothing all over my skin as if he couldn't stop himself from touching me. Then he too had left for a gym session despite my telling him he looked perfect.

That had gotten me another languid ten-minute make-out session, which had also been perfect. I love how Xander can be content to just kiss me until my toes curl and it be its own thing and not a prelude to sex, although I love that too. Beck is different. He kisses me with intensity. With him, it's like

coming home. My heart sighs in my chest when his lips touch mine.

Now, not only do I get to be with him, but also this gorgeous, sexy giant of a man who adorably likes to cuddle after sex. His big body curled around mine making me the little spoon, his arm wrapping over me and resting on Beck's hip as he lies in front of me. It's like being sandwiched between two sexy furnaces.

My life feels like a fever dream, full of all my fantasies wrapped in a bow because it's with them. Watching Beck and Xander together is my new favorite thing to do. The ecstasy that crosses their faces when they touch is so different from how they look at me. It's full of raw power, an almost angry tussle for dominance, which Beck always wins.

I shiver as I think of my best friend like that. He's so gentle with me, so tender and sweet but in bed he's a fucking animal and I love it. My body pulses at the thought of it. Beck hasn't actually had sex with me yet, and I do have a slight worry in the back of my head that perhaps he isn't as all in as he claims, but I don't know how to broach the subject with him. Do I just initiate sex or wait for him or is this more about him wanting Xander than me and I'm just a side dish?

I wish there was someone I could talk to about it, but we haven't discussed how open we plan to be with our friends. I know publicly we can't be together, but I wonder if in private we need to hide what we're doing. I'm meeting Audrey and Lottie for brunch this morning and could really do with some advice.

Not stopping to overthink things, I pull up Beck's and Xander's numbers and add them to a group text that I name Neverland, after our costume choices at the auction, then I type out my message.

AMELIA: SO, I KNOW WE DECIDED OUR SITUATIONSHIP NEEDS TO REMAIN A SECRET BUT HOW ARE WE ABOUT OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY KNOWING?

XANDER: SITUATIONSHIP? (CONFUSED FACE EMOJI)

AMELIA: I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU CALL IT (SHRUG EMOJI)

XANDER: FUCKING PERFECT?

AMELIA: WELL OBVIOUSLY BUT WE AREN'T A COUPLE ARE WE!?

BECK: IT'S A RELATIONSHIP, TINK. WE'RE IN AN EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP AND I'M FINE WITH OUR FRIENDS KNOWING. HEADING INTO SURGERY. SEE YOU BOTH LATER. (BLOWS KISS EMOJI)

AMELIA: GOOD LUCK. DON'T FORGET TO EAT.

XANDER: HAVE A GOOD DAY, HONEYBUNCH (LAUGHING CRYING EMOJI)

BECK: IT'S A GOOD JOB YOU SUCK DICK LIKE A PRO, COS YOU'RE A BIT OF AN ASSHOLE, SWEET CHEEKS. (WINK EMOJI)

AMELIA: OMG. IS IT BAD THAT THIS IS TURNING ME ON?

BECK: FUCK!

BECK: I HAVE TO SEE PATIENTS WITH A HARD-ON. GIVE ME A BREAK.

XANDER: GO BE AWESOME AND SAVE LIVES. WILDCAT, YOU CAN TELL YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY. AS LONG AS YOU TRUST THEM, I TRUST YOU.

AMELIA: YOU BOYS ARE SO GETTING LUCKY LATER.

XANDER:

XANDER: I JUST TRIPPED ON THE TREADMILL AND NOW PEOPLE ARE LOOKING AT ME STRANGELY.

AMELIA: THAT'S LUST YOU SEE LOL

AMELIA: OKAY HEADING TO BRUNCH WITH LOTTIE AND AUDREY. TALK LATER. (BLOWS KISS EMOJI)

I tuck my phone in my purse with the biggest smile on my face and twirl around my bedroom, a giggle I have no hope of containing escaping me as I fall on my back to my bed. I take a moment to let the joy I'm feeling spread through me and then sit up. I run a hand down my pale green fit and flare dress

and fluff my hair. I look good, and I'm pretty sure it's because of the sheer volume of orgasms I had last night.

I head down in the elevator and wave at Hector the doorman on my way out. I walk the two blocks to Le Bistro and see Lottie and Audrey in our regular seats in the back. I walk over to them and kiss Lottie and Audrey's cheeks.

"Ladies."

I sit and shove my bag in beside me as I take a sip of the mimosa Audrey already got me. I close my eyes and enjoy the sweet bubbles on my tongue. When I open them again, Audrey is frowning at me and waving her finger over my face.

"What is this?"

I grin and bite my bottom lip so I don't look like a fool from grinning like an idiot. "What is what?"

"Don't give me that. You're glowing."

She bangs the table and I jump. "You got laid."

I glance behind us and see people looking. "Keep your voice down."

Audrey gives me an eye wiggle. "Was it Xander?"

I take another sip of my drink to stall and collect my thoughts.

"Amelia, spill," Lottie demands.

She's been hanging around with Audrey too much. She's totally come out of her shell and I actually love it. "Well, yes, but also Beck."

Audrey has her glass halfway to her lips and pauses. "You slept with Xander and then Beck this weekend?"

"At the same time."

I say it quickly and Lottie gasps and rolls her lips to hide her shocked reaction.

Audrey thrusts her head forward and arches her perfect brow. "I'm sorry, what?"

"We uh, had a, um, threesome."

“You did not!”

“Yep.” I smile.

Lottie pumps her fist in the air. “Yes, Linc owes me a weekend spa. I totally called this.”

Now it’s my turn to look shocked. “What? How?”

Lottie finishes her drink and rolls her eyes. “Oh please, it was obvious the sexual tension between you three was on fire.”

“Was it good?” Audrey leans into me lowering her voice.

“I had no idea a body could receive so much pleasure and not pass out. I swear it was mind-blowing.”

“And did they fuck too?” Audrey isn’t shy, she owns a sex club after all, so asking this question seems normal for her.

“Yep. Honestly, I’ve never seen anything so hot.”

Lottie licks her lips. “Yeah, I bet.”

“So you and Beck? What does this mean for you two? Are you going to do it again or was it a one-time thing?” Audrey lifts her hand to the waiter who comes over instantly. “Can we get some more drinks and a platter of pancakes and fruit with a side of bacon?”

It’s what we always order, it’s the reason we come here. Their buttermilk pancakes with fresh blueberry syrup are the things dreams are made of. I wait until the waiter is gone before I answer her. “We’re going to give a relationship with all three of us a try. I really like Xander. He’s sweet and kind and funny and he makes me feel like I’m beautiful.”

Lottie grips my hand. “You are beautiful, Amelia. Your ex was an asshole. You did the right thing kicking him to the curb.”

I only told my girls the basics about Lance, which was that he’d cheated on me with my only friend in London and then sent an email around my work that I cheated on him. It was shit and affected me more than I’d ever care to admit, but this might restore my faith in relationships.

“Thank you.”

“I still think you should tell Beck what he did to you or at least let Ryker hack his socials and fuck his life up.”

I laugh but it has less humor than before. “I don’t want Beck getting in trouble because of me. You know how overprotective he gets. I wouldn’t put it past him to get on a flight to the UK and throat-punch Lance.”

“He does have quite the temper when it comes to you, but maybe that’s because he loves you.” Audrey punctuates her remark with an ‘I told you so’ look as she rolls her hand. “But anyway, carry on. You were saying...”

“Yeah, so we’re giving it a go as a throuple, or whatever. The only thing is Xander can’t be seen with Beck openly because of his contract. So this is all hush-hush.”

Lottie’s face falls. “That sucks for you, and Beck especially. I’m assuming you can be open with Xander?”

“Yeah, it does. I can be seen with him but they have this clause that Xander can’t be seen doing anything not mainstream as it might upset the fans and affect the franchise. It could cost him his career.”

“Wow, that sucks. How does Beck feel about it?”

I purse my lips thinking back to last night when we were talking and how Beck reacted. He’d been pretty quiet and closed off in his reaction. “I’m not sure. He didn’t say a lot and we haven’t really had time to talk one on one.”

Our food arrives and we tuck in. I’m famished after last night and a tiny smile creeps over my face at the reason. We eat in silence for a few minutes, just moans of pleasure coming from our lips at the calorific delights.

“So who’s better? Xander or Beck?”

“Audrey!” Lottie exclaims as I choke on a bite of pancake, and have to take a swig of my drink to wash it down.

“You made her choke with your outrageous question.”

Audrey rolls her eyes at Lottie. “What, you were thinking it too.”

“Was not.”

“Lies.”

“Children.” I snap and they go silent before Audrey pokes her tongue out and Lottie laughs at her. I love how close these two are and the friendship that the four of us, including Norrie, have. “I actually wanted advice about that.”

Lottie leans in closer as Audrey rubs her hands together like some maniacal villain.

“Oh give it to me. No, wait. Please don’t say Xander has a small dick. I would be distraught for you.”

I sigh and shake my head. “He has a very impressive dick, but this is about Beck.”

“Okay, what’s up, because I’ve seen him at the club and he’s packing.”

I’m not sure how I feel about Audrey knowing what Beck’s cock looks like, but I mull it over for a minute and decided it doesn’t matter. They run a sex club, for God’s sake. It stands to reason they use it from time to time. Unless?

“Please tell me you and Beck have never....”

Audrey makes a disgusted face. “Eww, no. Wash your mouth out.” She beckons the waiter over. “Can we get a pitcher of Margaritas, please?”

“Yes, Madam, of course.”

The waiter runs off and Audrey shivers with distaste. “See, that comment has me day-drinking when I should be putting the fear of God into a room full of overgrown schoolboys who think they know how to run a company.”

“I hope that doesn’t include Linc.”

Audrey pats Lottie’s hand. “No, my cousin is one of the good ones.”

“Can we focus, please? I need your help.”

Our margaritas arrive and Lottie pours as I fiddle with the hem of my dress. “Okay so we did things, lots of things, yesterday, but Beck only really kissed me and touched me some. We didn’t actually have sex.”

“And?”

I squirm as Audrey makes me say it. “Do you think maybe he just wants Xander, and I’m the side salad he has to have on the side to get it?”

Audrey tips her head back and barks out a laugh, banging her hand on the table. I frown at Lottie who’s trying to hide a smile. “What the hell?”

Audrey wipes the tears from her eyes, not once smearing her mascara. “Oh my god that is priceless.” She sobers and yanks my hand between her palms. “My darling girl, Beck has been head over heels for you for as long as I’ve known him and we all know it. The only two people who didn’t were you and him. When you walk into a room, it’s like nothing else exists for him, he tracks your every movement and reacts to your needs before you can even voice them. How the sexual chemistry between you two hasn’t burnt down the buildings you occupy is beyond me.”

Lottie is nodding as I look between them in shock. Is this true? Have we been dancing around something for an age when all along we both felt the same way?

“I can see you spiraling, so let me stop you. You and Beck have something special, but I think it wasn’t the right time for you before and now it is. He wants you but my guess is he’s still worried about losing you. Beck is strong but I don’t think he would survive not having you in his life.”

“What should I do?”

“Talk to him. Tell him what you told us. A relationship is hard but when three people are involved it becomes harder and communication is key.”

Her words make sense and I have the overwhelming urge to see him and settle this now before my brain can whip me

into any more of a frenzy. “Do you think I should talk to Xander about it?”

Lottie shakes her head. “I don’t. I think even in this you still have individual relationships within the three of you. This isn’t about Xander so you and Beck need to work it out between you.”

“I agree with our little Lottie.”

Lottie rolls her eyes at Audrey. “Only Linc calls me that.”

I stand abruptly from the table. “I have to go.”

“Atta girl.”

“Are you all going to Norrie’s cookout tomorrow afternoon?”

I blink at Lottie. “I guess. We haven’t discussed it yet.”

“Does Norrie know?”

Lottie looks concerned and I bite my bottom lip. “Not yet. I’m going to go see her later.”

“Okay, good.”

Lottie kisses me on the cheek and I hug her and then Audrey. “You’re the best.”

“Oh stop, you’ll make me all weepy.”

I arch a brow at Audrey. “You have tear ducts?”

“Ha-ha, now shoo. Go.”

I rush out of the restaurant and flag down a cab. Luck is on my side and I jump in and give the address of the hospital. My heart is pounding in my chest as I think of everything they said. Beck has always been my true north, it’s always him I turn to and now I have to be brave enough to reach for what I want. Taking out my phone I text Xander.

AMELIA: ARE WE GOING TO THE COOKOUT AT NORRIE’S TOGETHER TOMORROW?

XANDER: I WAS HOPING WE COULD. DO YOU THINK BECK WILL BE ABLE TO GO?

AMELIA: I'M GOING TO SEE HIM NOW, SO I'LL ASK HIM. X

XANDER: THINK OF ME WHEN YOU'RE DOWN ON YOUR KNEES (WINK EMOJI, EGGPLANT EMOJI)

AMELIA: I WILL. CAN I SEE YOU TONIGHT?

XANDER: HOW ABOUT I COOK FOR YOU AND BECK TONIGHT AT MY PLACE?

AMELIA: SOUNDS GOOD, SEE YOU LATER. XXXX

XANDER: (BEATING HEART GIF SENT).

I arrive at the hospital and thrust some cash at the driver before I run up to the second floor where Beck has his office. I have no idea if he's in surgery or clinic or doing ward rounds but I'll wait. This needs to be settled today before it can fester. I'm also impressed with how Xander handled it. I couldn't detect any jealousy at all, and that's a good thing for our future. It might take a while for me to get my head around the fact nobody is cheating here because we all want it but his words helped a lot.

“Hey, Maazina, is he available?”

Maazina has been working as Beck's secretary for five years and he freely admits he'd be lost without her. She is in her sixties and lost her entire family during a bombing in her hometown of Najaf and ended up here with her cousin's family. She says Beck saved her but we both know it's the other way around.

Her smile is wide as she sees me. “Amelia, yes. He just finished clinic and has a couple of hours before his next surgery. Go on in, he'll be glad to see you.”

I grin and my heart slams against my chest with nerves and excitement. I have no plan here other than to get to him. Approaching the door I hesitate for a second and knock once and wait. His voice is muffled as he calls out for me to come in and then I push down the handle and walk inside.

14: Beck

I LOOK UP AS THE DOOR OPENS, EXPECTING MAAZINA WITH A patient she's trying to squeeze in and my words die on my lips. I stand and walk around my desk. "Tink, what are you doing here?"

She looks fucking beautiful in a pale green dress with tiny yellow flowers on it. That length skims her sexy thighs and my dick hardens behind my scrubs at the thought of her naked and spread out like a goddamn banquet last night.

"I um..."

I move closer, taking in her flushed cheeks and the nervous way she shifts on her feet. "Amelia?"

I don't get another word out before she throws her body into mine, her arms coming around my neck and her lips slamming into mine. Her body presses against mine as I wrap her in my arms and lift her off her feet. My brain stutters, overwhelmed with utter fucking giddiness that she's here and in my arms. I angle my head as I kiss her back, my tongue tangling with hers as I grip her chin and pull away for just a second. I need to see her eyes, to know we're on the same wavelength. "Talk to me, baby."

"Do you want me?"

I scan her gorgeous face and see the doubt in her wide blue eyes. *Fuck*, I messed up. "Fuck, baby, I want you so badly it's all I can think about."

"Why didn't you, you know, with me last night, when we were, you know, all together?"

My lips twitch. “Fuck you?”

Her blush makes me lift her and back her into the wall as her legs come around my hips. Her heat against my cock as her pussy cradles me is almost my undoing. She’s so damn perfect. I slide my fingers through her hair and cup her scalp, fisting slightly so I can force her eyes to mine. A shudder of desire runs through her, and I love that she doesn’t even attempt to hide it from me. Jesus, how did I go so long not having this woman in my bed? But I know why, I’m too damn scared of losing her from my life if I fuck it up. Now, though, it seems like we’ve reached a crossroads and I can’t go anyway but forward with her. Having Xander as our buffer felt easy and safe but I can’t go into this and be safe, I have to give them both my all and that starts with me and Amelia being honest.

“Yes, when we were fucking last night, you kissed me and touched me but you didn’t actually have sex with me.”

I move to the couch near my window and sit, hauling her into my lap and it feels so right to have her in my arms like this. Like she belongs. “I’m sorry I made you doubt I wanted you. Do you want the truth?”

Amelia palms my cheek and makes me look at her and my chest aches with how much I love this woman.

“Always, Beck. No matter what happens you’ll always be my person.”

I smile a little at that. “That right there is why I was a coward last night. You’re my person, you’re my best friend, the person I call when my life goes right and when it goes wrong. I’d never want to fuck that up, but the truth is, I can’t go another day without touching you. I want you so badly I can hardly think straight. Not sinking my dick into you last night was pure hell but being with you and Xander was also the best night of my life.”

“I get it. What we have with Xander together and individually is easier but for us, it poses a different risk. We need to be brave, Beck. I want to be brave with you.”

I don't need any more words, so I lift my hand and grip the back of her head as I angle her mouth to mine. This kiss is slower, deeper, more of a promise but as I lick into her mouth it becomes so hot neither one of us can control it. A sigh escapes her chest and I swallow it down as she squirms in my lap until she's straddling my thighs. Her pussy is hot and wet against the thin cotton of my scrubs.

My hands span her ribs, my thumbs brushing the underside of her breasts as she arches into my touch, silently asking for more. I thrum her nipple through the fabric and she rocks her hips against my erection, forcing a hiss of pleasure through my teeth.

"Tell me what you want, Tink."

"Your hands on my skin."

There's nothing in this world I wouldn't give this woman, so I slide my hands over her thighs and gather the hem of her dress, drawing it up and over her head until she's in just her pale pink bra and panties.

My gaze wanders over her perfect body and my mouth waters with the need to taste every inch, but I know I don't have time for that here and now. "When I get you home later, I'm going to kiss every inch of this delectable body while you suck Xander's cock."

Her thighs try and clench around my legs as she moans, clearly liking that idea.

"You want that, baby?"

"Yes."

Fuck, she really is perfect in every way. "Stand up."

I ease her off my lap and she stands before me like a fucking gift. I grasp her hips and shove my nose into her pussy, inhaling her intoxicating scent. Fingers spear through my hair as I flick her clit with my tongue through her panties.

Her taste explodes on my tongue and I groan, my dick achy with the need to be inside her. I sit back and draw her panties down her legs, taking in the sight of her up close. I

help her step out of her panties and put them beside me. She's not getting those back.

Amelia smirks. "I didn't peg you for a panty thief, Beck."

I flick the opening of her bra and she shucks it down her arms as I kiss the silky skin of her belly, watching as it hollows out as I nip the underside of her breasts.

"I'm not usually, but I don't think I'll ever get tired of your scent."

I stand and push her back a step so I can lift my top over my head and then push down the waistband of my scrubs. Her breath hitches and she reaches for me. Before she can, I grasp her ass cheeks and lift her so she's straddling me as I sit again.

"If you touch me right now, it will be over and I'm not wasting this chance to be inside you when I've wanted it for so fucking long."

Her hand smooths over my face and into my hair and I close my eyes at the sheer bliss of having her touch me like this. It feels like a dream, one wrong move and it will be over.

"It's real, Beck. We're real."

I kiss her fiercely, showing her how I feel as she lifts up and takes hold of my cock with her small palm. I grunt as she strokes me once before lining me up with her dripping pussy.

"So fucking wet for me, baby."

Using her own desire, she swipes the head of my cock through her pussy lips, her head falling back. This is so different from how I imagined but it's perfect because it's us. As she sinks slowly down on me, her hot, wet heat engulfing my cock, I make a strangled sound of pleasure. She's so tight, so wet and warm, and it's the most intense pleasure I've ever encountered.

"So full, so stretched."

Jesus fucking Christ, those words from her lips have me flexing my hips as she sinks the last inch and bottoms out.

“Oh God, you’re pulsing against my G-spot. Feels so good.”

I’m barely hanging on by a thread and her words tip me over the edge. I grip her hip, in one hand, her hair in the other. “Ride me, baby. Use my cock to make yourself come all over me.”

“Oh fuck.”

She begins to lift and drop, finding a rhythm as I hold on and let the bliss of her pussy surround me. I suckle her nipple into my mouth, teasing her as I flick my tongue over the tight bud between nips and long strong sucks that make her lose her rhythm and rotate her hips. Her pelvis grinds into mine and makes her whimper.

I lift my head and crash my lips to hers, sucking down her cries and whimpers as I fight off the desire to come. She nips my lip and I growl against her as she licks the sting away with little flicks.

“I’m a fucking goner for you, Tink.”

“Oh God, Beck.”

I can feel her pussy pulsing around my cock, her thighs shaking. I press my thumb to her clit and her body stills for a second and then she’s climaxing around my dick, her body squeezing and rippling as she continues to ride me. I kiss her, muffling her cries and drinking down her pleasure as she rides out her orgasm that’s soaking my dick. Her body goes loose and I pull back, leaning against the couch so I can look at her. My hands grip her hips as I take over, fucking up into her tight body and watching her reactions to every single thrust.

“Oh God, I’m going to come again.”

Her tits are flushed pink, tiny bite marks all over them marking her as mine. Her pussy glistens as I use my thumb to spread her lips and watch as she takes my cock inside her. I roll her clit in sharp circles as I feel the buzz of my climax along my spine. My balls draw up as she leans back, resting her hands on my thighs. Her hair is a wild mess, her body arching back and she lifts her arm to her mouth as her cunt

pulses and squeezes my cock, milking the climax right out of me. I groan and grunt as wave after wave of pleasure erupts and my come hits the walls of her pussy, marking her as mine. It's a feeling of utter euphoria followed by a sense of peace I can't even begin to explain. Her body sags and I drag her against my chest, our hearts pounding against one another. I kiss her hair, her cheeks, and she turns toward me and I capture her lips and try and show her what that meant to me with my body because I honestly don't think I have the words.

“Why did we wait so long to do that?”

I chuckle at her words. “Because we're both blind?”

Her hands feather through my hair, her nails scraping my scalp and I purr and nuzzle against her neck.

“I love you, Beck. I know now is the wrong time, but it feels like I've been holding that in for a very long time.”

Joy rips through my heart at her words and her bravery. I lift my head, my chest feeling like it's caving in before being hit by a tsunami of love for this woman. “I think I've loved you since I met you, Amelia. Even when I didn't know what it was, I knew you were the most important person in my life.”

“We've been silly, huh?”

I stroke her spine as I feel my come leak from her pussy as my cock softens, and yet I don't want to move or lose this connection.

“I think we needed whatever came before to ensure we're ready for what's to come.”

“And Xander?”

I don't have an answer for her. I care about him already. I think I have since the moment I found him almost dead on the floor and my heart stopped for a split second seeing this great man broken.

“I care about him. He gives me something different and it doesn't take away from what I feel for you, if anything, it enhances it.”

“I feel the same way.”

God, she really is perfect. “Does he know you’re here?”

She nods. “I sent him a text and he said to think of him when I was on my knees.”

I chuckle, my head feeling light and the tension I usually carry is gone. “We should send him a picture.”

Amelia wrinkles her nose and giggles. I’ve never seen this side of her, all giggly and giddy and it only makes me love her more.

“Let’s do it.”

She reaches for her bag which fell to the floor beside us and grabs her phone. I kiss her neck as she takes a selfie of us and then checks the screen. I peek over her shoulder, and she sighs. “I love that.”

“It’s great.” Her face looks dreamy and sexy, and I look like exactly what I am, a man besotted with the woman in my arms. She taps out a message and sends it and the photo.

“What did you say?”

“Wish you were here.”

I laugh and kiss her gently, my body overwhelmed with emotions. “You know, this wasn’t how I wanted our first time to be or the first time I said I loved you.”

“You haven’t technically said it.”

“I love you, Amelia. From the bottom of my heart, I love and adore you.”

“Aww I love you too, and it wasn’t what I imagined either but it was kind of perfect for us, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, I do.”

I slap her ass and push her slightly so we can both stand. I lead her toward my private bathroom and we clean up, which involves a lot more kissing and me eating her perfect pussy.

As she straightens her hair and I wash up and dress in clean scrubs, she turns to me. “The cookout at Harrison’s, are

we going together? It's totally fine if not. I don't want to get clingy or anything."

I hook her around the waist and bring her body flush with mine so I can pin her against the counter. "Amelia, if you think for one second I'm going to let you back off now that I have you, then you need to see Dr. Scott in neuro because you have a head injury."

"I just don't know how to navigate."

"We're together, all three of us. So, if we go somewhere we go together as best we can. I know with Xander it's tricky, but in private or with friends, we're doing this."

"Okay."

I kiss her pouty lips and already feel my dick getting hard again so I push her away from me. "Now you should go or Mr. Titley isn't getting a new pacemaker this afternoon."

"Well, I wouldn't want to deprive Mr. Titley of your genius."

I walk her to the door and kiss her again, my addiction to her well and truly out of the box and uncontrolled now. I suddenly know exactly how Linc and Harry felt when they were first in love.

"Oh, Xander is cooking tonight at his place."

"I might be late, so I'll text him and let him know what time. Talking of which, did he respond to the message?"

"Oh, let me see."

She digs her phone out and smiles. "He says he's happy we had fun and next time he's coming with me as he thinks you'd be hot in your scrubs."

I shake my head hiding, or trying to hide, how damn happy these two people make me already. I sit after Amelia has left and consider my life and what has happened over the last week and especially the last few days. Confessing my feelings to Amelia was the biggest risk I've ever taken and adding my attraction for Xander to the mix complicates it exponentially, especially as he can't be open about us. Yet I can't regret it

because this feeling inside me is pure and beautiful. I'm the most reserved of the three of us but I'm all in with this, all the way to an end I hope never comes.

Now to get the first event with our friends and family out of the way. That will be fun.

15: *Xander*

I LIFT AMELIA'S HAND TO MY LIPS AND KISS HER KNUCKLES, unable to wipe the smile from my face. "Relax, babe."

She gives me a strangled-looking smile. "Easy for you to say, I have to face your sister knowing that she knows I had my mouth on your cock."

I laugh, the deep sound attracting the attention of our friends as we step into the backyard at Norrie and Harrison's place. I ignore the curious gazes, my mind focused only on the woman in front of me. I pull her to face me and bend my knees so I'm looking directly into her gorgeous, expressive blue eyes. "I can assure you our conversation did not include those kinds of details. I'd never share that with anyone or do anything to make you feel uncomfortable."

Her face softens and she leans into me, placing her head against my broad chest as I wrap her in a hug. "I'm sorry."

I kiss her head as she lifts up to peer at me with that trusting smile that circles my heart and makes me feel ten feet tall.

"Don't be sorry, it's only natural to be nervous but you don't need to be."

I spy movement from my left and release Amelia, keeping her hand clasped in my mine.

Norrie rushes over as if she was waiting for the sign and drags Amelia from my hands and into her embrace, hugging her like she didn't just see her a few days ago. I get it, I feel the same way when I'm around her, Amelia has this addictive

joy and openness about her that makes you want to be in her orbit. Amelia goes with it, grinning at me over my sister's shoulder as she hugs her back.

“I can't believe we're going to be sisters.”

“Wow, hold on there, Nora. I don't need you scaring her off.”

Amelia chuckles as she moves back into my arms, but her gaze stays on Norrie. Ignoring the comment she asks a question instead. “Are you sure you're okay with this? I know me being with Xander and Beck is unconventional, to say the least.”

Norrie waves it away. “If you're all happy then I'm happy.”

I love my sister for that and so many other reasons and I'm beyond grateful for the fate that put her in my life. Our father finding her the night of the fire that killed her parents was a miracle. But from the first time he brought this little waif home, I've loved her like a sister and my parents adopting her only solidified that bond.

I feel Amelia relax beside me, her body leaning into mine as if a weight has lifted. I dip my head as Norrie hustles off toward Harrison who is manning the grill. “See, I told you she was cool.”

I nip her ear and hear the slight intake of her breath, my body reacting to the sound. Fuck, she's beautiful and I love her sexy, dirty side as much as the sweet side.

“Behave.” The quiver in her voice takes the heat from the word.

“You owe me after the picture you and Beck sent me. I was fucking hard as I did squats with my trainer. Do you know how embarrassing that was?”

Amelia bites her lip and smirks. “Now, that I'd like to see.”

I pinch her ass and she giggles and jumps, swatting me before I grab her and kiss her hard.

Fuck, I can't get enough of this woman.

"I need to go mingle. Can you grab us a drink?"

"Anything for you, babe."

I love that she doesn't treat me like a celebrity but like a regular boyfriend. The soft look on her face is all the reward I need. I watch her move toward Lottie and Audrey, who are playing some kind of giant Jenga game with Eric. The sexy sway of her hips makes my cock twitch with interest. I wasn't joking about being hard in front of my trainer, the picture of Amelia and Beck sweaty and mussed up from sex had been a total turn-on.

I'm glad they'd done it though. They'd needed that time one on one to get fully past any awkwardness so they could be all in with this thing we have. I can't say I dreamed this for myself because I never thought I'd be lucky enough to find two people I'd trust with a secret of this magnitude. I'd been so sure Beck would walk away when I said I had to keep this a secret and I hated myself for having to ask. He'd shocked the shit out of me when he agreed, and I know it won't be easy for him. I'll do everything in my power to make sure he has no regrets.

I pour myself a diet soda and grab a sweet cider for Amelia, having learned she likes them.

"Here, go to Uncle Xander for a second."

I turn as Harrison thrusts my nephew into my arms and hastily put the glasses down and take Isaac, holding him close as my brother-in-law walks toward the fridge.

"Hey, buddy."

Isaac is the cutest kid you ever saw and I'm completely smitten. I never gave kids much thought but since he came along, I've thought about it a few times. I'm not sure how Beck and Amelia feel, although I'm getting well ahead of myself at this point. We've only been together a few days, but it feels right. Like if we were lucky enough to pull this off, it could work between us.

"Beck at work still?"

I glance at Harrison and nod. “Yeah, he had to check on a patient but he should be here soon.”

“He’s a dedicated son of bitch, that’s for sure.”

“Yeah, he’s a good man and an amazing doctor.” He sure as hell saved my life. My belly feels weird admitting it but it’s the truth. Beck is one of the best men I know and sexy as fuck too and I’m lucky that he chose me.

“He is both of those things”

Harrison pauses as he pulls more burgers from the fridge and I can sense he wants to say something and is trying to find the best way to phrase it. We didn’t have the best start to our relationship, to say the least, but now I consider him family and I don’t want him to hold back. “Say what’s on your mind, Harrison.”

He rubs the back of his neck and looks away. “Just don’t hurt him. I know you have your reasons for keeping this secret and I respect them, but him seeing you and Amelia be open in public while he has to hide in the dark can’t be easy.”

“That’s enough, Harrison.”

We both turn at the snap in Beck’s voice to see him standing in the doorway, looking like sin on a stick. Neither Harrison nor I had heard him come into the house from the front. His expression is tight, his eyes cool as his voice whips with fury. He moves closer to me but his gaze is on Harrison, and this protective, alpha thing is hot but unnecessary. I don’t need his protection, especially from my brother-in-law but I can’t say I don’t find it hot as fuck.

“I was just trying to be a good friend.” Harrison defends himself as he walks up to me, burgers in one hand and takes a sleepy Isaac from my arms in the other, and heads outside.

Beck steps in close and I can feel the heat of his body and the tension rippling over him.

“Are you okay?”

He grips the back of my neck, his thumb caressing my cheek and causing a frisson of sensation to tingle up my spine.

“You good?”

I grip his hip and feel the tension in his body. Beck is like a coiled ball of energy and I circle my thumb over his hip as if to soothe him. The edge of his t-shirt lifts until I can feel warm skin and hard muscles. God, what this man does to me, and with the way he’s wearing a backward baseball cap when he’s usually in suits or scrubs, my dick is hard and needy already. Beck is a fucking smoke show and he knows it.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Harry was just being a good friend to you.”

Beck growls and it makes me so hard I barely repress the groan. Jesus, who knew that Alpha Beck was so hot.

“He had no right.”

“He was looking out for you. I’m glad he said it and he’s right. This is hard on you, and I want you to know I see that.”

Beck shakes his head but doesn’t release his hold on me and I love the possessiveness of it. He’s claiming me here, in front of his friends who have a direct line of sight from the yard.

“I’m fine. I chose this. It’s what I want.”

I pull him closer and feel the hard ridge of his erection brush my cock. My eyes fall closed, and I swallow the moan.

“Look at me.”

My eyes open at his sharp demand and I know I’m fucked because this man could ask anything of me, and I would agree. He owns my body completely as if it’s his to command.

“I choose you, both of you.”

I smirk to ease the seriousness of the moment. “You’re so getting your cock sucked later.”

His lips come to my ear, and I feel his warm breath tease my skin. “And what if I want your cock in my mouth?”

My knees want to buckle at the image of Beck on his knees for me. “*Fuck.*”

I break away and slam my mouth on his, taking control and twisting my tongue around his, tasting him and letting the feelings he evokes claim me. Our kisses are always a silent battle, raw with passion and aggression and I fucking love it. I pull away and his eyes twinkle with light, the tension I felt easing up.

“Well, I guess that gets the PDA out of the way.”

I chuckle and release him, turning to hand him Amelia’s drink. “Will you give this to Amelia and I’ll bring ours out in a second?”

Beck smirks and looks down at my dick that’s pressed against the athletic shorts I’m wearing. This is a family affair with kids present, which involves us all relaxing and not having to put on any airs or graces. I thought shorts and a T-shirt would be fine, but I didn’t consider being surrounded by two of the hottest people on the planet and what that would do to me. I need a minute to calm down so I don’t get throat punched by Lincoln for flashing my cock in front of his kid.

“Need some help with that?”

I shake my head and shove him out the door. “Go. Amelia missed you this morning.”

I see his eyes go soft at the sound of her name as he walks away and my chest hollows out. I don’t think I’ve ever seen two people more right for each other. Them allowing me in is a privilege and I won’t forget that.

When my erection has finally subsided, I head out into the backyard where Beck is sitting on the grass with Amelia curled up between his legs. They look perfect like they’ve been together forever, not just days. The connection between them is easy, and the familiarity in the way they interact and speak. It should make me jealous, but I don’t get that feeling because the instant they spot me, Beck waves me over and Amelia gives me a flirty smile that threatens to take my knees from me. Len would blow a gasket if he had any inkling about this, but he doesn’t and that is how it will stay. My mood slips a little at the thought of my manager and the constant texts for an update about me and Amelia that I keep ignoring.

I pass Beck his beer and sit beside them as Ryker regales them with a story about his latest app and how it's going to take the dating world by storm. I don't know him that well but what I do know is that he's easygoing, fun, and could walk onto any movie set and make women and men swoon with just a flirty look and few words. Ryker seems to be the most relaxed of the group of friends, always there with a joke or a laugh, charming everyone with his wit.

I glance toward Beck as I feel his little finger touch mine on the ground between us. He winks and my insides tilt like I just dove off a cliff or rode a rollercoaster. Amelia moves her legs so she's sitting between Beck's thighs but her calves are resting on my lap and I stroke her soft skin. She's claiming me too and it feels good to be wanted for me.

"So come on, Xander, tell us what it's like being such a huge star."

I take a sip of my soda at Ryker's question and shrug. "I love my job, and how I get to help people switch off from real life for a few hours while they enjoy a movie but like all things, it has its drawbacks."

"Privacy I'm guessing."

I nod. "Yeah, that and expectations. People think they know me when in reality they know the character. I get some very creepy emails and I have a whole team who monitor my social media and my fan mail. It's a lot. Crazy fans are far outweighed by the amazing ones though."

Ryker bobs his head in agreement. "That's one of the things we're working on now. How to filter spam messages so we can better protect people. Not just the famous ones but young people too."

"That's good to hear. Don't get me wrong, I know how lucky I am being able to do what I love, but my life isn't necessarily my own."

"That must be hard."

"It is, but it's harder on the people I care about." I glance at Beck and Amelia, feeling the weight of those words. Amelia

shifts so she's sitting across my lap, her arms around my neck as she cuddles into me.

"We're fine. The people who care about you understand."

Beck nods beside her and I feel this overwhelming rush of emotion for them both. Acceptance has always been something I've struggled with and I can't really pinpoint why. My parents loved me and showed affection, but I guess I always knew my sexuality would be an issue for them. Especially my dad, who had very strong opinions on homosexuality. Here though, I feel relaxed as if whatever is said won't be judged.

"You ever think about other roles? Those stunts must be hell on your body."

I laugh as Ryker eases the subject change into easier less heavy territory. "Fuck, yeah, the last shoot almost killed me. I blacked out after a long day halfway up a cliff face. Luckily I was strapped in and the worst I got was a graze where my cheek hit the rock. I'd actually like to do something more serious, maybe an indie film if I can find the right script or idea."

I feel Beck tense beside me and turn to offer him a reassuring smile. "I got checked out and they think I was just dehydrated."

He nods but I can see the cogs working in his medical brain and know this conversation isn't over.

"So, what kind of movie would you want to do?"

"Maybe a thriller or something that involves my shirt staying on would be nice."

Ryker clicks his fingers. "Oh, I have just the thing for you."

"Ryk, don't you dare start sending him shit your friends wrote."

I wave at Beck. "It's fine, I don't mind." And I don't. I know that most great ideas come from luck, and I don't trust Len to do what I asked of him because his cut would be

substantially less on a budget movie. “Send it over and I’ll take a look.”

“Yeah, I will.”

“Food’s ready,” Norrie hollers.

My stomach groans at the smell of the grilled meat and I jump to my feet, lifting Amelia in my arms. She shrieks as I toss her over my shoulder and jog toward the food. I hear her giggle as she slaps my ass.

“Feed me, woman.”

“Xander, I’m going murder you.”

I tip her right side up and she slides down my body with a giggle, her smile is joyous and open, and right in that second, I know I could love this girl. I could fall head over heels, or I could if I wasn’t halfway there already.

It’s on the tip of my tongue to say it but I hold back, it feels too soon, so I kiss her head instead and turn her toward the buffet table Norrie set up. “Murder is a little harsh, wildcat.”

“Maybe.” She grins and I kiss her gently as Audrey makes gagging sounds behind us.

“All this romance and happy couple joy is making me want to vomit.”

I twist to Audrey who’s piling her plate with potato salad. “Green is not your color, Audrey.”

“Oh, please. I’m not jealous, I’m nauseous.”

“That might be my wife’s cookies,” Harrison shouts from where he’s manning the grill.

“Hey, that last batch wasn’t too bad.”

“Yes, darling.”

Harrison grimaces and kisses her head, before shivering in disgust. Those two are the cutest. Amelia loads up a plate for Beck who has somehow ended up holding Isaac and we head back to sit with him. It’s easy and relaxed, everyone getting on

as we all sit together and eat, joking and teasing each other relentlessly, but you can feel the love here. It's in the way Lincoln presses his lips to Lottie's temple before he runs to get her a cardigan. In the way Ryker and Audrey banter about social media filters and how detrimental they are to mental health but he lets her steal his chips off his plate without a thought.

This is what I want my life to be, not red carpets, and people kissing my ass, because of who I am. I want family cookouts and days at the beach playing softball with Isaac when he's old enough.

“Amelia, get over here and explain to my husband why we can't transplant a hundred-year-old tree just because he decided it would make a good treehouse.”

My eyes go wide at Norrie's words, but Amelia chuckles as she stands, kissing my head and running her fingers over the back of Beck's shoulders as she moves away. We both watch her for a second before he speaks.

“I can't believe I get to have her after all these years.”

I drag my eyes away from Amelia at his admission and see Beck with hearts in his eyes as he looks at her, and when those same eyes land on me, they're full of heat. “Or you.”

My throat clogs at his easy admission, and the way he's being so open with how he feels. I always loved the way he could command a room, and how he could draw respect from everyone he spoke to, but he always seemed untouchable to me. Reserved and controlled. Now I see a different side of him. He's a man who, when he decides he's invested, goes all in.

“She is pretty special and so are you.”

Beck blushes and looks away, not comfortable with taking the compliment. He's clever beyond what I can comprehend. He's a top surgeon who has also studied law for shits and giggles and plays piano like a master from what Amelia tells me, and all that while helping to run his sex club. It blows my mind how much there is to this man.

“It’s her birthday next week. We should do something special.”

I blink totally unaware her birthday is coming up but nod. “Yes, good idea. What do you suggest?”

Beck smirks. “Easy. we take her dancing. Amelia loves to dance. If we go to the club, I can control who gets in and people are aware she’s my best friend. The Post even did an article on it a few years back after the media reported us being seen together so often. You can be there as her boyfriend, and I can be there as her friend.”

“Won’t that be hard for you, not being able to touch either of us?”

An ugly feeling coils in my belly at the thought of the lie we’re telling and how determinantal it could be to what we’re building.

“It’s fine you can make it up to me after.”

I smirk and kiss his shoulder, not wanting to pack on too much PDA in front of Eric. I know kids and they can slip up, so even though this is a risk, it’s one I’m glad I took because I’ve had the best day in forever.

16: Amelia

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WILDCAT.”

I claw the sheets as my back arches off the bed and a moan slips past my lips. Xander has his mouth between my legs as Beck suckles at my breast. This is the perfect way to wake up on your birthday.

My hand grips Xander’s hair, the soft strands shifting through my fingers as I wrap my arm around Beck’s naked back and smooth my hand over the hard ridges of muscle. His eyes lift to mine and I get lost in them. The heat, the desire, and the soft affection. How could I have been so stupid not to see what was between us was so much more than friends?

His lips pop off my breast. “Give me that mouth.”

I lift my head and he looms over me, his lips smoothing against mine in an open-mouthed kiss that makes my toes curl. His tongue teases me as he pours every ounce of feeling into it until he consumes me. Xander goes still and I pull away to see him watching us.

“That’s so fucking hot.”

I smile because I can’t not, the happiness I feel inside me can’t be contained.

I beckon him toward me and he crawls up my body, his heavy, hard cock dragging over my belly until he’s above me, my arousal shining on his face. Beck kisses me again and then pulls away, his lips moving to Xander’s. I can honestly say that watching these two men, my men, kiss is the hottest thing

I've ever seen. My body pulses with desire so strong I wonder if I could come from just watching them.

Xander pulls away and some kind of unspoken conversation happens between my two men. Just the thought of getting to call them mine is the biggest high I could ever ask for. Beck kisses my shoulder as he gently pushes me to my side and positions his big body behind me. The heat of him at my back makes me feel safe and protected but his hands on my skin as he smooths his palm over my thigh makes my pussy flutter.

Xander holds my eyes as he sinks to the floor at the bottom of the bed, his top half lying so he can kiss my inner thigh. Beck lifts my leg and hooks it back over his hip and I can feel his cock as he slides it along my soaking slit. His free hand cups my breast, toying with the nipple, pinching and rolling until my head falls back onto his shoulder on a whimper.

I close my eyes as the sensations of his crown hitting my clit drive me to the edge, but I want more, I want him filling me.

“Beck, please. I need you to fuck me.”

A growl rumbles up his chest as he smooths his hand down my ribs, his fingers splaying over my lower belly but not quite touching me where I need him. I rock my hips, looking for something to ease the ache inside me.

My eyes spring open when I feel Xander's tongue swipe up my pussy before flicking my clit and my body trembles with the need to come. Beck's hand tenses on my belly as Xander's tongue leaves me and I look down to see his lips wrapped around Beck's cock. Xander alternates between the two of us, driving us to the edge as Beck's hands and lips tease and kiss every spot on my body that drives me wild.

Sweat drips down my spine and my thighs tremble with pleasure, and I know I'm seconds from falling apart but I need something more, I need to be filled.

I turn my head to Beck who kisses me slowly, his tongue roughing over mine as I pant, my body heaving. “Beck, I need

your cock in me.”

Xander chuckles and I look down to see him grasping hold of Beck and then I feel him guide Beck’s hard length to my entrance. His hands controlling both of us as he positions him and Beck thrusts into me hard and fast and my climax hits me hard, making me scream and scrabble for purchase, my whole body seizing as pleasure rips out from my center and pulses through all my limbs.

As I come down I feel Xander’s tongue gentle on me but he doesn’t retreat or attempt to join us. He focuses on licking Beck’s cock and my pussy as Beck fucks me slowly, building a steady rhythm. My leg is pulled back so I’m exposed and open as Beck begins to drive into me harder, each thrust hitting my G-spot.

Beck growls, a shudder running through him and I look down to where we’re joined and watch his hand as Xander touches Beck between his legs.

“Is he fucking you with his fingers, Beck?”

“Fuuuck yes, and between him and your tight cunt, I’m not gonna last.”

“Me either.”

My cunt clamps down on Beck’s cock as he turns my head to kiss him. I get lost in sensation as his thrusts increase and I can hardly catch a breath as my orgasm rips through me, my body clamping down on Beck.

“Fuck our girl is so tight. She’s squeezing me so tight I can’t...”

Beck bellows and I feel his hot seed coat me as his head hits my shoulder, his breathing ragged. Xander lifts his head with a dark dirty smile that makes me spasm around Beck, who grips me tighter and thrusts inside me lazily.

“That was fucking phenomenal.”

Beck pulls out of me and I whimper from the loss and the heat of him as he grins and slaps my ass, causing another

shiver to run through me. Xander stands and his cock is hard and weeping pre-cum, and I raise my brow at Beck, who grins.

“It’s my birthday.”

Beck smirks. “Lie on the bed, Xander, our girl isn’t finished.”

Xander lies on the bed as we kneel on either side of him.

“I want your mouths on me,” he pleads.

I lick my lips in delight, at the idea of exploring him like a smorgasbord for my pleasure.

Beck cocks his head at me. “What do you reckon, Tink? Think we can make him come before I have to hit the shower for work?”

“Most definitely.”

Beck and I get to work, our mouths colliding over Xander as he puts his hands behind his head, showing off his sensational body for our delight. I tongue his balls, rolling them on my tongue as Beck takes his cock to the back of his throat. The entire thing is so hot, especially when Beck and I kiss with Xander’s cock between us.

I finger my clit and see Beck is hard again.

“Stroke your cock as you suck him.”

Never in my life did I imagine having the confidence or opportunity to say those words but I relish them now, especially when Beck complies. His big hand moves over his thick length in slow, torturous movements. His lips pop off Xander’s cock as he sits back on his knees and continues to languidly stroke his weeping cock. I don’t know where to look first as I take Xander to the back of my throat, my eyes on the two men. His hand lands on my butt and he caresses me slowly, his fingers toying with my puckered hole and making me squirm in pleasure.

“You gonna let us fuck you here, wildcat?”

I push back into his fingers, the sensation not something I’ve had before as he breeches me with one thick digit.

“Oh god, yes.”

Beck moves to the head of the bed and I hum around Xander’s cock as a warm tension builds in my body.

Xander fucks me in the ass with his fingers as his thumb slowly strokes my clit. I moan around his cock, and lift my head to see Xander with his lips wrapped around Beck’s dick. Our eyes meet and they look like warriors who have gone to war and pillaged the countryside and now need to fuck the adrenaline away. There’s no softness, none of the sweetness and I revel in it. I love this dark, dangerous side of my men who fuck with raw passion as much as the sweet side.

“You close, Tink?”

I nod as I suck Xander down and feel his hips lift off the bed.

His fingers increase the pace and I see Beck grip his cheeks and begin to fuck his face. Xander swells inside my mouth and then I feel his release hit the back of my tongue, the salty taste of him driving me over the edge as I whimper and gurgle my way through a climax that takes all my energy, leaving only spent, satisfied flesh.

“Fuck, I’m dead.”

I collapse onto Xander’s legs and he strokes my hair as Beck pulls his wet, softening cock from Xander’s mouth.

“What a way to go, though.”

I hear Beck chuckle as he kisses my shoulder and moves past me into the bathroom. Xander lifts me in his arms and I kiss him lazily, tasting Beck on his tongue as he carries me to the bathroom where Beck is running a bath.

“What’s this?”

Xander places me in the tub and crawls in behind me. “You need to loosen those muscles. Beck and I are taking you dancing tonight.”

I look at Beck who’s stepping out of the shower all clean and fresh and smelling of citrus and pine.

“We are, but the girls are taking you to a spa for the day first.”

“You’re spoiling me.”

Emotion clogs me as Beck crouches down and cups my cheek. “You deserve to be spoiled, baby.”

I love him calling me Tink, but when he calls me baby my insides turn to mush, the same as when Xander calls me wildcat.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

His eyes flick to Xander and I go to speak but he stops me. “It’s okay. I don’t expect to be in the same place as you two... yet.”

“How did we get so lucky, Beck?”

Beck bends over the bath and strokes my bottom lip. “I don’t know, baby, but I’m fucking grateful.”

He kisses me and Xander and leaves while Xander makes me come on his fingers. We drain the bath and then he helps me shower and wash my hair before he leaves to meet with his manager. I relax on my bed as I think about the last few weeks and how much has changed. It’s strange to imagine my life without them now and yet it’s all so new. What I do know is I don’t want to fuck this up. Life is perfect but it also feels too perfect.

17: Amelia

“WOW, THIS PLACE IS PUMPING.” THE BEAT OF THE MUSIC moves through me as Xander leads me into Club Ruin with Beck on my other side. They assure me this is safe for Xander. As I look up and see Lottie, Audrey, and Norrie waving at me from the second floor, I relax even more.

Heading up the stairs past two burly bodyguards, Xander stops to sign a couple of things and I get to see him as the movie star for a few minutes as he poses with fans for pictures. His trademark smile is in place, but I can see it doesn't reach his eyes. The tightness of his jaw is a dead giveaway. We make it upstairs to the VIP section and I see our friends have snagged the best tables. A perk of owning the place I'd guess, but then I look around again and realize we're the only people up here. Beck has closed this whole floor for me. His hands on my hips make me turn and it's amazing how I can differentiate between them without sight.

“You want your usual?” he asks dipping his head to my ear and I fight the shiver his lips bring me.

“Please.”

He smirks as he pulls away to speak to the bartender.

“You look amazing. Happy birthday.”

Lottie twirls me and I laugh as I hug her. “So do you. That dress is stunning on you.”

She's wearing an ice blue mini dress that crisscrosses over her back with tiny straps, and no bra. Lincoln hasn't taken his eyes off her for the entire time we've been speaking. I feel

Xander's fingers skim my spine and smile as he hands me a drink and a kiss.

"Thanks, babe."

His smirk is sexy as hell as his hand rests on my hip. Beck is standing to the left of me and I want to reach for him. I look around and don't see anyone else, and he explained the staff on this level all signed NDAs so we should be good. I reach for him and he lets me tug him until his body is pressed close.

"That's better. I missed you all the way over there."

"You look beautiful, Tink."

I glance down at the black leather mini skirt and gold lace cropped top I'm wearing. It's more daring than I usually wear but I feel good in it, sexy. Judging by the way Beck is assessing me with his heated gaze, it worked. Xander already showed me how much he liked the dress by eating me out in the limo on our way here.

It was our first official night as a couple and I was nervous, so he took care of it for me in spectacular fashion. I can still feel the stubble burns on my inner thighs.

"Thank you, and so do you."

He chuckles and kisses my neck, making me shiver. "I don't think men can be beautiful, babe."

"Well, you are."

Beck is dressed in dark grey pants and a white shirt open at the collar. His sleeves are rolled up exposing his gorgeous tattoos. Xander is wearing dark jeans and a plain black tee with a leather jacket and between the two of them, they're ticking every fantasy crush I ever had or ever will have.

He nips my neck and then pulls away to give me a sexy smile. I feel a hand on me and turn to Audrey who looks smoking hot in a red mini dress, her dark hair in waves down her back. I curled mine too but it never looks like that.

"Tell your hot boyfriends to put you down so we can go dance."

Xander swats me on the ass. “Go, have fun. I’ll be down in a minute. I just want to speak with Beck for a second.”

I smirk and waggle my eyebrows. “Is that what it’s called?”

He shakes his head but he’s smiling as I walk away.

Audrey fans herself as we take the stairs to the main floor so we can dance. Security is high tonight and I know it’s because of Xander being here with me. Norrie, Lottie, Audrey, and I make our way onto the dance floor, pushing between the sweaty heaving bodies until we snag a space. I feel a few eyes on me and try to ignore them. This is part of being with Xander and I have to accept that if I want him, and I do.

I spy him and Beck talking as they watch me from the second-floor balcony. It looks relaxed but nobody but me would know that just hours ago, Xander had Beck’s cock in his mouth. It makes my whole body tingle as I relax and let the music take me. Dancing has always been how I relax. Being a nerd in school was tough, especially when your best friend was the hot guy all the girls wanted to fuck.

Being here with my girl squad makes me realize how amazing my life is since I came home. London was a shit show and looking back on it, I’m amazed at how much it took from me that I didn’t realize. I open my eyes as hands touch my hips and turn to smile. The joy on my face dies. “Lance?”

I jump back from his touch, not wanting him anywhere near me.

“Hey, Amelia. Fancy seeing you here.” His eyes wander all over me and I suddenly wish I’d worn sweats and a hoodie. “You look fucking hot.”

Urgh gross. “What are you doing here?”

I’m stock still as I stare at the man who broke me down into little pieces until my self-esteem was in tatters. His blond hair is slicked back, his blue eyes slightly red-rimmed but he looks the same. Not ugly, not drop-dead gorgeous either, but confident and it was that which drew me to him when he asked me out.

“I got a promotion and I’m working for the New York office now.”

He smiles and I want to rip his face off and stamp on it with my stiletto heel.

“Amelia, you good?”

Audrey eyes him like a cockroach and I have to bite my lip to keep from laughing. I love this woman for looking out for me. “Yeah.”

“Amelia and I were good friends in London.”

Friends, we fucking lived together until he cheated on me with my only friend there while I was sick.

Lance eye fucks Audrey, who gives him a withering glance that would shrivel most men’s testicles, but Lance is like fucking Teflon.

“Do you want to get a drink and catch up? I’d love to take you out again.”

Two big hands land on Lance’s shoulders and he jumps. “No, she fucking doesn’t so get lost.”

I grin up at Xander as he maneuvers Lance out of the way and pulls me against him. People around us are staring and I don’t even care. I smuggle into Xander’s chest as Lance blanches.

“You’re um. You’re him.”

“Yeah, I’m him and that’s my girl you’re hitting on.”

Xander sounds fucking deadly, his voice controlled but the possession threaded through it is clear to me.

“We dated.” Lance looks at me. “Tell him, Amelia. We dated for nearly a year.”

Jesus, this guy is so clueless it’s embarrassing.

“Yes, we dated, and then Lance decided it would be a good idea to fuck my friend, and I use the term loosely like her legs.”

Lance gapes like a fish and I feel Xander hold me closer, his grip tightening and I wonder if I might have said too much. The last thing he needs is to get into a fight defending my honor and I have no doubt he'd do it.

“Amelia, pumpkin, that's not what happened.”

Xander leans into Lance's space. “You're a fucking idiot for letting her go, but your loss is my gain. You're done breathing her air, so fuck off, little boy.”

Xander stands to his full height and motions with his head to the security team who are hovering on the edge of the dance floor.

My ex goes red, his veins bulging slightly as the insult and put down Xander just handed him registers.

“You can't speak to me like that. I'll go to the papers. I'll ruin you.”

I groan internally at the pathetic threat as Xander laughs loud. “Oh, please do it.”

Security steps up followed by Beck, who looks like he's about to blow a blood vessel. He makes his way to my back and I know with my men and my girls at my back I'm formidable and that isn't a feeling I've had before. Beck has always been there but this is different.

“What's going on?”

I motion to Lance. “My ex is going to sell a story about Xander telling him he was an idiot to lose me.”

Beck's eyes go flinty and if didn't know him, I'd be taking a big step back.

“This the fucker that cheated on you?”

“Yeah.” I'd told Beck some of it, only the basics, but that's all he needs.

Beck turns to him and Lance bristles. “You're the famous Beck. She fucking you too?”

Beck moves in front of me, and I grab his arm. The last thing he needs is to get into a fight and fuck his hands up.

“Leave it, he isn’t worth it.”

Beck pins me with a gaze. “He made you cry. Nobody makes you fucking cry, and they sure as shit do not insult you.”

Despite the situation my belly swoops and dives at his words and the way he looks at me.

Rounding on Lance he points a finger in his face. “You’re fucking finished in this town. I suggest you pack up and go the fuck home.”

With a slight dip of his head, the bouncers grab Lance and haul him away as he kicks and whines. I give him a little wave and then turn back to Xander who lifts me in his arms so my feet dangle off the floor and kisses me.

“Drinks are on the house,” Beck shouts and the crowd erupts.

I slide down Xander’s body and he grips my hand as he leads me back upstairs. Harrison, Lincoln, and Ryker had also joined us downstairs but we all head back to the VIP section as people swarm the bar. We settle near the edge of the small dance floor, Xander and Beck shooting me worried looks and I smile to reassure them that I’m okay, and surprisingly I feel it. Lance is a parasite and I won’t give him any more head space.

“Remind me to give the bar staff a bonus,” Harrison gripes as he shakes his head at the chaos we caused. The main floor is controlled chaos, the energy high after the news of a free bar hit the drunk partygoers.

“Oh, stop being a grump and dance with me, Harry.”

Harrison growls but lets Norrie drag him onto the small VIP dance floor where they basically make out like teenagers. Lottie is sitting in Linc’s lap as he whispers in her ear, making her blush as his hand disappears up her skirt. I feel heat hit my cheeks as I turn away, my eyes colliding with Xander’s as he bends to press a kiss to my neck.

“Love it when you blush like that, wildcat.”

“Amelia, you got a second?”

I startle but nod as Audrey drags me away from Xander and Beck toward the back of the room by the stairs to the third floor.

She runs a hand through her hair and shakes it off her shoulders. “Okay, firstly that was hot seeing those two team up to take that asshole down without a single fist being thrown. Secondly, eww. What were you thinking dating that guy? He was punching above his weight when he landed you. I can only think you must have been having some kind of crisis.”

I fiddle with the necklace around my neck that Beck gave me this morning. It matches the bracelet on my wrist that was from Xander.

“I was missing Beck and in a dark place.” It’s easy to admit it now but at the time it was awful. “I can’t believe I’m going to say this but can you believe I stayed with that guy after he told me I could lose a few pounds and that nobody wants to shag a fat girl.” I mimic his British accent badly as I repeat the words he said to me.

Audrey’s mouth flaps open and her eyes shoot sparks. “He did not.”

“He did.”

“What an asshole.”

“Yeah. I’m ashamed I let him knock my self-esteem like he did.”

“It’s easily done, especially when you’re in a vulnerable place and it sounds like you were.”

I nod. “Was there another thing? You started like it was going to be a list of points and I interrupted.”

Audrey grips my shoulders. “Yes. Where does that asshole work?”

I shrug. “Not sure but the way he was talking, I’d say Saint and Jones Bank still.”

Audrey gets a wicked look in her eye, which makes me glad we’re friends.

Audrey locks eyes with me. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I really am.”

Audrey hugs me tight and I realize how lucky I am to have a woman like her in my life.

I link arms with her as we head back toward the dance floor.

Ryker steps up to us and hands her a drink. “Geez, Aud, that look makes my balls shrivel. I swear my nuts just hid behind my kidneys.”

I laugh because how could you not from that visual and the way Ryker winces.

“You’re an idiot, Ryker.”

“I’m charming and you know it. I also have a big dick so that helps.”

Audrey gives him a disgusted look. “Dude, no. Just no.”

Ryker shrugs. “So what’s with the look? Who are we destroying?”

My eyes bug at the devilish look in his eyes now. Honestly, these two are terrifying when they get together.

“Amelia’s ex is going down.”

“Oh, I like it. Beck already made a call to his place of business and let slip he’d be moving his money if they kept him employed.”

“What?” I see everyone turn to me as I shriek.

Beck and Xander walk toward me, concern in their eyes, fresh drinks in their hands.

“Babe, what’s wrong?”

Ryker pulls an oh shit face and heads for the bar.

“Did you get Lance fired?”

Beck looks at Xander and he nods with a smug grin. “Yep.”

I throw my arms around him and kiss him deeply, letting my tongue twine around his and he grips me close, his hand on my ass, the other on my nape. I pull back and he grins at me.

“What was that for?”

“For always sticking up for me and having my back.”

“I’ll always be in your corner, babe.”

I let him hand me off to Xander, who kisses my neck as I pull him down to me.

“Thank you. I don’t know what I did to deserve you but I’m so grateful.” It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell him I love him, but not here and not like this.

“You’re welcome, wildcat. I just wish I could have punched him in the face for what he said to you and the way he treated you. He was the one that made you feel inferior, wasn’t he?”

I nod and bite my lip. “Yes.”

“He’s finished, Amelia. Beck and I will see to it.”

Tears prick my eyes and I refuse to let them fall. Tonight is a good night and I won’t let a run-in with someone so insignificant ruin that for us.

“Let’s dance.”

I grab Beck and we all, including Ryker and Audrey, let our hair down and have a night to remember for all the best reasons.

18: *Beck*

THE LAST FOUR WEEKS WITH XANDER AND AMELIA HAVE BEEN amazing. I always knew my Tink was the love of my life, but I never knew I had room in my heart for another, and yet that's what has happened. Xander has carved out his own space and dug in good.

We've divided our time between Xander's penthouse, my loft, and Amelia's place but I know we all feel the most comfortable in her space. It's where it all began for us and it's homey. When we close that door to the outside world that wants so much of us all, we can be free. But I do miss one thing, and that's the enjoyment I get from the piano at night. Playing has always soothed me after a loss at work or having to tell a family I can't fix their loved one. It's without a doubt the hardest part of my job.

"So, am I just the muscle or do I get to help you choose one?"

I turn to Xander with a smirk as we walk toward Steinway Hall, where the best in the world is sold. "You know about pianos?"

He grins and my heart thuds in my chest.

Fuck, he's a handsome bastard. I've always known that but the last month has shown me his heart and it's that which has me falling for him.

"I know they sound good, and I wouldn't mind trying out the scene from the movie *Pretty Woman* with Amelia."

I shake my head as I open the door for him and he skims past me letting his hand brush my abs, causing me to suck in a breath and growl a warning, which only makes him chuckle.

I step closer so nobody hears me and whisper, “Behave or I’m going to make you wear a vibrating cock ring later and then edge you.”

I feel the shiver that runs through him as he bites his lip in a clear sign that he wants that, but he behaves as I greet the salesman with a handshake.

“Mr. Goldsmith, Mr. Reynolds, what an honor to meet you both.”

I shake his hand and Xander does the same, his public persona in perfect play. “Thank you for seeing us.”

The suited, pale, middle-aged man nods with pleasure. “I can’t wait to show you what we have here.”

He leads us toward a stunning Steinway Grand piano, and I let my fingers move over the keys, the crisp, clear sound relaxing me instantly.

“The sound is beautiful, is it not?” the man asks as I take a seat and begin to play a few notes.

“It is.”

He must sense my need for time because he backs away. “Why don’t I give you a few minutes to look around and then we can discuss your needs in more detail.”

I nod curtly. “Thank you.”

I feel Xander watching me as I begin to play Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven, letting the music flow through me. Every note unwinding inside me.

“When I was a child, the piano was something, I was forced to learn. My mother played and I always loved listening to it. It was a time when we could connect. When she and I would set aside our personality differences and just be. Like most kids, I hated that she made me practice but as time went on, I became immersed in the escape it gave me.”

“Does she still play?”

I shake my head. “No, she has arthritis in her fingers and she struggles.”

“I’m sorry. You and your mom, are you close?”

I stop and look up at him to give him my full attention. We haven’t talked much about growing up or our families, stuck in a bubble of our own making. Amelia knows everything about me, and I her, so it’s easy to forget that Xander doesn’t sometimes. Although I don’t like talking about feelings and the past, I owe him that.

“Growing up in a house full of overachievers was difficult. My father was this great businessman and my mother, she was such a gifted pianist but she set aside her dreams of playing Carnegie Hall and the likes to follow my father.”

“You think she regretted it?”

His gaze is intense and gentle, sensing I need to pause before I answer because I honestly don’t know. We don’t talk about emotions in the Goldsmith family.

“I don’t know. I know she loved us and my father but she’d get this look when she played that lit her up from inside with joy and I only saw that when she sat on that bench. All the tension would just flow out of her.”

“Did she teach you?”

I nod. “Some, but I also had a teacher. I enjoyed my lessons with her the most though because it was our time.”

“You said it was difficult in a house of overachievers but you’re the epitome of an overachiever.”

“I’ve been told that countless times in my life, but it was never about that. For me, it was just a thirst for knowledge. And also a desire to quiet the noise in my head. I’ve never been good at relaxing.”

“And now? Do you still feel that?”

I think about his question, and yes, I do to a degree but not like I did. Having Amelia and Xander has allowed me to be in

the moment more. “Not so much.”

He smirks and I feel my entire body hum with desire for him. He senses I need to lighten the mood and he gives me that with his next sentence. “That’s because you’re dehydrated and exhausted from all the orgasms we give you.”

I stand and fight the desire to go to him, to grip his chin and kiss him, and it frustrates me that we have this invisible barrier between us.

I drop my hand and force a laugh instead. “I think it’s the other way around.”

Xander grins but his shoulders are tense and I know he feels it too, but he also carries guilt. It makes me angry because it’s not his fault. He has to live with this too, but a part of me does hold a smidge of resentment about it and I have no place to direct it.

“Let me show you the piano I want for Amelia’s place.”

He follows me to a smaller piano more suited to her space and I play a rendition of Clocks by Coldplay. Xander starts to bob his head, singing along and he has a good voice, deep and sexy. I smile as we draw a crowd, losing myself in this moment with him. As we finish we realize we’ve drawn quite the crowd and I give an embarrassed smile as Xander bows, ever the showman.

“Thank you, thank you.”

I leave him to sign a few autographs and finalize my purchase, arranging delivery for a time when I know I’ll be home. I pause at that. It does feel like home and makes me want to take that next step with them both. I know it’s too soon, even though we spend every night together unless I have a patient that needs me.

Back in the car, I drive us toward my favorite sushi place.

“Is it weird that you playing piano turned me on?”

I glance at Xander, as he turns toward me and I glance at his lap and see he’s not lying. “No, it was hot hearing you sing. I never knew you could.”

“Yeah, I don’t sing a lot. It’s more of a hobby.”

“You should do a musical. You have a great voice.”

Xander laughs. “Jesus, Len would have a conniption.”

“Len is a dick.”

I don’t know a lot but I know enough to know Len is mostly looking out for himself, not the man beside me. He may have helped get him where he is, but now he’s choking his creativity and I don’t like it.

Xander sighs. “I know, but he’s been good to me.”

I bite my tongue because Xander and I have spoken a little about this and I know he feels torn. He’s loyal to a fault, and I know that’s one of his biggest strengths but it’s hurting him in this instance and I don’t want to cause him more anxiety by bringing it up.

“He’s a dick, but without him, I’d be nothing.”

“Bullshit. You’re an amazing actor, your fans love you. Yes, he guided you, but he wouldn’t have been able to do that if you were no good or if you weren’t the consummate professional you are.” I realize I sound angry and I gentle my tone. Even though I know he can take it, he’s more sensitive than he lets on. It’s one of the things I’m drawn to about him.

“There’s a reason directors ask to work with you, Xander. It’s because of who you are.”

I feel his eyes on me, as I park the car, and turn slightly to meet his gaze.

“You really like me.”

My eyes bug. “Well, duh. I don’t let just anyone suck my cock.” I lighten the mood because suddenly everything feels heavy between us and I don’t want to reveal too much with things like they are. I’m falling for him but I can’t allow myself to really let go when I’m a dirty secret. Xander lets it go and winks, making my dick twitch.

“Not strictly true. You own a sex club.”

“An exclusive one. We don’t let the riff-raff in. Although we let you in so maybe I need to speak to Harrison about standards slipping.”

His deep chuckle bursts out of his chest and I smile in return. “Ouch, that was low, but maybe fair.”

I exit the car and meet him near the front, desperate to take his hand and fighting the urge, so I shove them in my pockets.

“Nah, you’re good. I like the way you look on your knees so you can stay.”

This time he holds the door for me as we head inside and order enough food for the three of us. Amelia is busy writing a paper as part of her application, which is why she didn’t come with us. I’m so damn proud of her for going back to school, and her parents were supportive when she finally told them, which I love.

“You think she listened to our demand?” I ask as we get back in the car and head home.

Xander raises a brow and smirks. “I sure hope she did.”

Last night I told Amelia that when she’s home I don’t want her wearing underwear. I wanted her pussy bare so we could fuck her whenever we pleased. I wouldn’t have made the demand but when I broached it, she was drenched with need at the idea, so I knew she wanted it too. Now we find out if she kept her promise to us and what the punishment might be if she didn’t.

“Yeah, I half hope she didn’t.”

“You have a fucking dirty mind.”

“And you love it.”

Xander winks and I never knew how devastating a wink could be but it makes my insides turn to jello when he does it.

Fuck, I’m so gone for this man.

19: *Xander*

WALKING INTO AMELIA'S APARTMENT FEELS LIKE HOME MORE than mine ever did. I put the food on the side in the kitchen and walk over to the office, Beck is just a few steps in front of me giving me a lovely view of his ass in the pants he's wearing. The man is seriously cut, his ass sculpted with two dimples at the base of his spine that I'm obsessed with. The image of him fucking Amelia, his muscular body moving over her, lives rent-free in my brain.

"Hey, Tink."

I watch as he steps up to her as she spins in her chair, granting him the biggest smile before her eyes move to me and encompass me too.

"There's my handsome men. I missed you."

I don't think I'll ever get tired of her saying things like that. Beck kisses her, his fingers pinching her chin as he moves his mouth to her ear and speaks softly as she relaxes into him. I stand back, watching them and taking pleasure in seeing them together. The way he treats her, with such gentle command, is such a huge fucking turn-on. Her body melts when he touches her, as does mine.

You'd think from that comment that it's Beck holding us all together and in some ways he does, he always takes the lead, and we both look to him, but it's Amelia that holds all the power. There's nothing either of us wouldn't do for her. I just feel such a privilege that I get to be a part of this.

"Get over here and kiss me, Xander Reynolds."

I step up to her and lean down so my lips are touching hers before I speak. “Hey, you.”

She smiles against my lips. “Hey.”

I kiss her deep and feel a hand run along my spine as Beck moves past me. His touch combined with her soft, deep kiss has tingles shooting through me.

“We should eat.”

I cock my head at Beck. “Shouldn’t we check if our girl has complied first?”

He gives me a sexy smirk and crosses his arms as he leans against the door frame, looking like a fucking thirst trap.

“Why don’t you check for us.”

I turn to Amelia and see the heat in her eyes, but also that naughty glint that tells me she’s going to be receiving that punishment after all.

“Stand up, beautiful.”

I grip her upper arm and tug her to stand in front of me. Her back to my front, I lean in, crowding her over her shoulder, my lips close to her ear. “Were you a good girl, Amelia?”

Her body sinks against mine, her breath hitching as I band my arm around her just beneath her gorgeous tits. My other hand floats down her thigh and gathers her long, flowy skirt in my hand. I draw it up slowly over her knees as Beck watches us with desire flaming in his eyes.

“Answer him, Tink.”

Beck’s command is deep and my body responds, my dick pressing against Amelia’s back as she shivers.

“I... um.”

I finish lifting her skirt until it’s bunched around her waist, her lower half exposed to Beck. He pushes off the door frame and prowls toward us as I sink my teeth into the cord of her neck lightly, pulling a sharp inhale from her.

“Tut tut, Tink. You have been naughty.”

Beck stands in front of her, his body so close but not touching her as he reaches out and skims her inner thigh with his fingers. Our girl is wearing a tiny G-string in pale yellow lace. It's sexy as fuck, but nothing is sexier than her bare pussy.

“Looks like she disobeyed us, Beck.”

His fingers toy with the edge of the lace at her leg, not touching her but teasing and her body sinks deeper into me.

“I forgot.”

His fingers continue brushing over the lace, as he bends close to her other ear. “Liar.”

I hear lace tear and her body jolts slightly in my arms as Beck rips her panties away and shoves the underwear into his pocket.

“I'm not.”

“Yes, Tink, you are. You defied us because you want my hand on your ass. You want me to turn your skin pink with my handprint, don't you?”

I lift my hand from under her breasts, where I'm holding her up, and thumb the peaked nipple through the thin cotton of her tank top.

Beck is running his fingers through her drenched pussy lips now. I can smell her arousal, and it's intoxicating. Amelia moans, her head thrown back against my shoulder as Beck teases her.

“You're fucking soaked.” He lifts two fingers and shows us the evidence of her desire before offering his fingers to me. I suck them down, twirling my tongue over the digits and lapping up her addictive taste.

“Fuck, she tastes good.”

Beck pulls his fingers away and the storm raging in his eyes holds me captive. “Hold her.”

I grip Amelia tighter as he sinks to his knees and buries his head in her pussy like a man dying of thirst.

“Oh....God.”

Her hands move to his head and she rocks her hips as he fucks her with his tongue. I can feel every reaction in her body as he tortures her, his growl deep and dangerous as she grips his hair. Fuck this is hot, my dick is aching for release as I watch him bring her to the edge.

“How does it feel, wildcat, having his tongue in your pussy?”

“Gooood. Oh, God.”

Her body bucks and I can see him gripping her hips now as he devours her. Amelia’s body is tense, her legs shaking, her climax just there and then Beck lifts his head and stands, evidence of her need all over his chin.

“Noo. You can’t leave me like this.”

Amelia sounds anguished, pained.

“Oh I can, and I will.”

Beck leans in and grips my chin, kissing me long and deep, his tongue thrusting in and sharing her flavor with me. I groan at the tangy taste. When he pulls away he smirks and turns to Amelia, who’s watching with hunger in her eyes.

“Next time maybe you’ll listen.”

“I hate you.”

Beck takes her hand and pulls her into his arms and I let her go. Amelia pouts when he lifts her chin with his finger.

“No, you don’t. You love me and I love you.”

Her pout lessons. “Fine but I dislike you intensely right now.”

“I can live with that, Tink.”

He lets her go and pushes her toward the door with a smack to her ass. “Let’s go eat before I tell you all about the piano I bought and how Xander has the voice of an angel.”

I see intrigue in her eyes as we walk into the kitchen. The biting grip of lust is still riding me from that performance, and I know they'll be feeling it too, especially Amelia, but delayed gratification is the best kind.

Over dinner, Beck tells her about our impromptu duet and she tells us about her paper. I would love to say I understand it but science, especially physics, isn't my thing. Beck talks with her and it's clear he has a good understanding of the topic, not that I would expect anything less. The man blows my mind with how clever he is and how much he knows.

"Xander, did you hear back from Len about any scripts?"

I pause with my drink halfway to my lips at Amelia's question. I know from just the few conversations we've had about him that Len isn't Beck's or Amelia's favorite person. It's my own fault for showing them my frustration with the man. He's mercurial and greedy and honestly, not a nice man, but he has had my back in this industry and I owe him a lot. Without him, I'd be a bit part actor working a bar to make my rent. So although he's a pain in my ass, I defend him. "He's put the feelers out but there's nothing much around."

Amelia nods. "Did you show him the book Ryker sent you?"

"I did but he thinks it would be a tough sell to a studio."

Beck scratches his cheek. "Really? I thought it would be amazing on the big screen."

"Well, on this you aren't the expert, are you?" I snap as I shove my chair back and stand from the table. I stride from the room, heading for the bathroom just to give myself a minute.

I slam the door and it does nothing to ease my anger. Looking at myself in the mirror, I see a man trying to be part of two worlds and it's splitting me in two. I see the way it hurts Beck to be a secret part of my life and it cuts me up inside. I want nothing more than to walk down the street and tell the world that I'm the lucky son of a bitch that gets to be with both of these amazing people but I can't and it's because

of the contract Len pressured me to sign. I can't blame him, I'm as much to blame, but I feel resentful now.

The door opens slowly and Amelia pokes her head in. "Hey, you okay?"

I lift my arm for her and she walks into my chest, her arms going around me and holding on tight. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

I shake my head, her hair catching on the scruff of my chin. "No, it's not. I shouldn't have snapped at either of you. I know you're only trying to help."

Amelia lifts her head. "We care about you. We just want to see you happy and fulfilled."

"You make me happy. You and Beck are the best things in my life."

Her eyes go soft as she cocks her head. "Same. I feel like since we met, everything I ever wanted is within my grasp."

I lock my arms at the base of her spine. "Does it scare you?"

Her head dips as she nods. "A little."

"Is Beck mad?"

Amelia shakes her head. "No, not at all."

"Did he leave?"

"He went to check on a patient."

"Fuck."

"Xander, he went to check on a patient but he's coming back here tonight."

"I drove him away."

Amelia grips my jaw. "Stop. You did no such thing. Beck is just giving you space. He knows two alpha males in a small place is a recipe for disaster when one is angry so he did the right thing."

"I guess. Maybe I should text him."

Amelia escapes my arms and takes a step back, lifting her tank over her head and shedding her bra. Fuck, her tits are perfect, round and high with tight, erect nipples that I love to roll on my tongue.

“That’s up to you, but I’m taking a shower and it would make me sad if I had to get myself off after Beck teased me.”

I’m ripping my clothes off before she can finish her sentence. I lift her in my arms and her legs come around my waist as she yelps.

“Only person getting you off is me, wildcat.”

“Better get to it, then.”

I kiss a line down her body as the water rains down on us. Her hands grip my shoulders as I arch her back under the spray and suck a nipple into my mouth. She moans as I bend my knees and rock my hard cock against her clit. I’m already on edge from watching Beck eat her out earlier, so it doesn’t take long before we’re both panting.

“Xander, fuck... please.”

I push Amelia against the wall, keeping her legs locked around me as I position my cock at her entrance before sliding inside her wet heat. My head falls to her shoulder on a groan.

“Mother...fucker, you are so tight.”

I still, giving her time to adjust before I pulse lightly into her, small shallow movements of my hips. Her hands stroke down my back, over my shoulders, her nails digging into my skin and the bite of it makes me shudder. I kiss her, our tongues tangling and twisting, her soft lips driving me crazy. Amelia is the hottest woman in the world. Everything about her turns me on, from her smile to her perfect cunt. Holding her ass, I slide my finger to her crack, teasing her ass and she goes wild in my arms, her body writhing as she tries to get closer and make me move more, but she’s pinned by my body, unable to move.

“God, your cock is fucking huge. I can feel it hitting my G-spot.”

I love her dirty mouth and let's be honest, what man doesn't want to hear how big his dick is from the woman he loves.

“That's it, wildcat, ride my cock.”

I pull out of her almost entirely and slam back in, hard. Her pussy squeezes me as her climax builds but I want this together. I fuck her hard and fast, my hips driving into her in brutal strokes. She'll have marks on her ass from where I'm holding her and I can't wait to see them.

“You close?”

“Yyyeeessss.”

I push my finger into her ass and her scream rips the air as my balls seize. I spill into her sweet pussy as she clenches around me until my legs give way and I sink to the bench. Our breaths are labored, our bodies satiated for now, so I pull out of her and set her down and wash her hair before soaping her body and quickly washing myself off.

I take the time to towel her hair and dry it, combing through the silky strands as she applies cream to her legs. It's relaxed and we're both quiet but it's not awkward or strained. It's peaceful and one of my favorite things to do with her. If Beck was here, he'd be making us a hot chocolate or bringing us a glass of wine, taking care of us. He isn't as cuddly as I am, at least not with me, but he shows his softer side in other ways and I appreciate it more. He makes me feel safe, cared for in a world that will build you up one minute and tear you down the next. I haven't had that since I came out to my parents as bi-sexual not long before they died. My father's words and the silence between us before he died still haunts me. Beck is the first person to make me feel strong, and he did that the night he found me OD'ing on the bathroom floor at Ruin. He believed I could kick my addiction and he put me on a path to where I am now. He saw me and I've repaid him by being a dick to him because I feel guilty.

How I was with him earlier fills me with regret, which is swift and sharp in my chest. It doesn't matter what Amelia said, I owe him an apology for the way I snapped.

Amelia dons one of my t-shirts and we slide into bed, my arms around her from behind as we spoon, our heads sharing a pillow despite the size of this bed easily accommodating the three of us regularly.

“You think he’ll come back here tonight?”

Light is filtering in through the drapes from the full moon and casting shadows across her creamy skin as I stroke my thumb along her hip, nothing sexual just a comfort.

“Yes. If Beck says he is, he will. One thing I know about him is that he’s a man of his word. The only thing that would stop him is a sick patient.”

“I hate that we can’t be open. You know if I could, I would, don’t you?”

Amelia turns over in bed, so she is lying with her head on my chest. “I know, and I know it isn’t easy for either of you.”

“Nor you. I saw the article about us in the Post the other day.”

Amelia sighs. “Yeah and the delightful quote from a source close to me saying how I always wanted to land you and pursued you for years.”

I snort because the idea is ridiculous. We didn’t even know each other.

“I wish it were true. I would’ve snatched you up years ago.”

“Hah, no you wouldn’t. I was an awkward geek.”

“I bet you were adorable.”

“Yeah, not so much.”

She smothers a yawn and I kiss her head. “Get some sleep, baby.”

“Hey, we should go to Disney.”

I chuckle at her suggestion that has come out of left field. “What?”

“You like the rides and so do I. It would be fun to torture Beck, who says he hates them.”

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea.”

“No, it’s a great idea. We need some fun and I have some sway. I can get us VIP passes so we miss the lines for the rides.”

“Oh you can, can you? Well, in that case, sign me up.”

I don’t remind her that I can probably get that myself, allowing her to take the lead.

“I’ll ask Beck in the morning. Maybe I’ll wake him with a blowjob. That will help.”

I smile at her playful side, which is always more prominent when she’s tired, and she’s been working her butt off these last few weeks on this paper. Maybe a day at Disney is something we all need.

“Wake me first and we can do it together.”

“Good plan.”

She rambles for a few minutes, her words getting further and further apart until she’s out, her body lax in my arms. I listen to her breathing but my brain won’t switch off. My life is so perfect in some ways and in others, it’s frustratingly complex, and I wish the two would mesh.

I’m dozing when the door opens and Beck slips into the room. My body tenses as I listen to him move almost silently around the room, removing his clothes and folding them on the bottom of the bed before he goes into the bathroom.

The light from the en-suite catches his profile and I marvel at how fucking handsome he is. I might be a movie star but he could be straight off the pages of a cologne campaign. He closes the door and I wait to see what he’ll do. My chest tightens as he walks out a few minutes later and moves to my side of the bed. I turn slightly from where I’m wrapped around Amelia and he scoots in behind me, his thick, carved body molding to mine.

“You’re awake,” he whispers, both of us conscious of Amelia slumbering beside us.

He wraps his arm around my waist and kisses my shoulder and everything settles. My world rights itself.

“Couldn’t sleep?”

I shake my head. “I’m sorry I was a dick earlier.”

Beck’s hands flex on my abs, his pinkie skimming the edge of my briefs and making my dick harden. This man has so much control over my body, more than me it seems.

“Forget it. We were pushing and we had no right. This is your career, Xand, and you worked hard for it. We have no business telling you how to run it. I certainly wouldn’t want someone telling me how to be a surgeon.”

It’s different and he knows it. His job doesn’t prohibit us from being together out in the open and mine does, but I let it go, because what else can I do.

“We good?”

Beck nips my neck before kissing it tenderly and this is one of my favorite variations of him. When he allows his emotions to show.

“Better than good.”

Relief washes through me and he strokes my skin.

“You take care of our girl?”

“Of course.”

“Lucky bastard.”

I chuckle and Amelia stirs and mumbles something unintelligible.

“We should get some sleep.”

“Yeah, we should. Just a warning, Amelia plans to seduce you into going to Disney with us tomorrow morning.”

A deep, low rumble moves through his chest, filled with humor. “Is that so? Well, then, I definitely need some sleep for that.”

“Night, Beck.”

I twist my head to look at him and he kisses me softly, not a passionate, wild kiss but one filled with feeling.

“Night, babe.”

The word washes over me, and it’s the first time he’s used it on me. It shouldn’t pack the punch it does, but the truth is I love him and I don’t want to lose him. I’m not sure I’d survive it and neither would my relationship with Amelia.

20: *Amelia*

“I HATE YOU BOTH.”

I can't help the snort that comes out of my nose at Beck's declaration. It took some convincing but between Xander and I, we got him to Disney. He even organized the transport and accommodation. That's Beck, he might be grumpy sometimes and afraid to let his inner child run free, but he cares, probably more than anyone I know.

I nudge his shoulder as I hook my arm through his. “Stop lying. You know you love me and think I fart rainbows.”

Beck raises his eyebrows a smirk on his ridiculously handsome face. “I have known you a long time and I can confirm you most definitely do not fart rainbows, more like full-on thunderstorms after a plate of hot wings.”

I shiver at the incident he's referring to and the hot wings that made me wish for death after two hours glued to the toilet.

“I thought I was going to die.”

“I know, you told me multiple times.” He nudges my shoulder and I look up into soft eyes that make my belly flip. “I do love you though.”

“So, now that I've learned never to give Amelia hot wings, what ride should we go on first?” Xander squeezes my hand and I let go of Beck and dance backward in front of Xander in excitement. I love Disney, everything about it screams joy to me. From the costumes, the rides, the food, and the wonderful characters. It's a place of pure heavenly wonder.

“I want to do Magic Kingdom first because they have the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train and I also want to go to Epcot because I love the Guardians of The Galaxy ride, then Splash Mountain is a must.”

“Oh my God, kill me now.”

Xander smirks at Beck as we head to Magic Kingdom. We paid for the VIP tickets and were offered the option of a tour guide but I’ve been enough times to know all the good spots and can navigate for us.

“Beckham Goldsmith, you’ll enjoy this day or else.” I see the challenge in his eye and the way his fingers twitch at his sides. If we were alone, he’d have me over his shoulder by now, or be tickling my ribs until I scream for mercy, but we’re in public, so that kind of thing needs to be kept to a minimum.

“Or else what?”

“Or else no caramel waffle cone for you later.”

“Wow, that’s harsh, wildcat. Give the man a break.”

I love how Xander and Beck will sometimes side together. I want their relationship to be as strong as mine is with each of them and I feel two strong personalities like they have could be tricky. I always imagined this kind of thing would involve one alpha and one beta, but both of my guys are true alphas.

Beck is wearing his baseball cap with the Manhattan Cleavers hockey team on it backward and there is something very sexy about a man in a backward hat. He hasn’t shaved, and his jeans hang low on his hips, a simple black tee stretched over his chest. My mouth waters at the sight of him and judging by the other looks he’s getting from women I’m not the only one who thinks so. Xander is in dark jeans and a white tee with the New York Jackals logo on it. The New York Jackals are his favorite football team and he trains with Mason Masters, who Beck and I are both friends with too. He has a baseball cap covering his face and sunglasses to try and make his presence less obvious but you can’t hide the kind of good looks and sexy body Xander has, so we’ve already encountered a few fans. Xander is polite and gracious and

stops to sign things or take pictures, but I can see the façade fall over his eyes, from the true smile Beck and I get from him to the practiced on-the-job smile, which doesn't reach his eyes.

“Magic Kingdom, here we come.”

Xander grabs my hand again and we head toward the rides. The morning slips by quickly with Xander and I whooping and hollering with excitement on every ride. We exit the last ride, which is the Mission: Space ride where Xander pressed the orange button to give the full experience. Beck walks over to a bench and sits with his head between his legs, looking a nasty shade of green.

I sit beside him with Xander on my left side. We've been more careful with touching as the park got busier through the morning. It doesn't stop me from putting my hand on Beck's back and rubbing gently.

“You doing okay, champ?”

He lifts his head and gives me a withering look, which I find charming. He's breathing in through his nose and blowing out through his mouth, trying to get the nausea to subside.

“One day when you get morning sickness, I'm going to remind you of this moment.”

“Hey, that's mean. If I ever suffer from morning sickness, which I might not, because not every woman does, then it will likely be one of your faults for putting a baby in me. I'll deserve comfort and foot rubs.”

“News flash, Tink, this is your fault. You forced me to go into these torture chambers.”

I get a twinge of guilt; he does hate the rides for this very reason. “I'm sorry, but you could have said no.”

He lifts his body, more color in his cheeks now his equilibrium has settled. “When have I ever said no to you, Tink?”

I think back on what he's saying and realize he doesn't. If I want it, Beck finds a way to give it to me, he always has.

“You’re right, I’m sorry.” I want to reach out and kiss him, but I can’t so I stick to rubbing his back in comfort.

“It’s fine. I like seeing you both smile like this.”

His grin encompasses Xander who is quiet as he watches us. He’s relaxed more as the day has gone on and I love seeing him have fun like this. This day together, even though it’s in public, is what we needed. It’s what normal couples do, but we aren’t normal in any way.

“How about I go get us some drinks and food?”

“I’ll come with you.”

Xander stands and I wave him off. “I can manage. Stay with Beck.”

Beck gives me a hard look, which I find stupidly sexy, and says, “Take Xander with you. I won’t have you carrying everything on your own.”

Xander walks toward me and takes my hand and I give Beck one last look before we walk toward one of the food stands selling tacos and churros.

“Will he be okay?”

I smile up at Xander, trying to ignore the people around us who are staring. “Yeah, he always gets like this.”

“Then why did he go on the ride?”

“Because Beck is stubborn and hates the idea of being weak, so he tries to power through and sometimes you just can’t.”

“I feel bad now for helping you convince him.”

I put my hands on my hips. “Oh, please, he loved every second of what we did to him.”

Xander wraps an arm around me and pulls me in close to his hard body. “Yeah, he did.”

I can’t help the giggle that springs from my lips. Today has been wonderful, despite Beck feeling slightly sick. His head descends and Xander kisses me deep as I run my fingers up his

chest and tangle them in his hair. A groan erupts from him when I moan in pleasure. This man kisses like the devil himself is in charge. He never holds back, always showing me how he feels and not caring who sees. It makes me sad that he can't share that with Beck.

He pulls away and looks at me with longing, as if he might say something and is stopping himself.

“What?”

“Did you mean what you said back there, about one day being pregnant with one of our babies or was it a throwaway comment?”

I consider what he's asking me, noting the serious expression, and know I can only be honest with my thoughts and feeling. I can't control others around me but this I can do. “I mean, I want kids one day and this isn't a stepping-stone relationship for me. So yeah, why not? Don't you want children?” I hadn't considered that, especially after watching him with Isaac. If Xander in tights and a cape is hot, then Xander holding a baby in his arms is next level. I'm pretty sure I ovulated on the spot when I saw it, it was that intense.

“I do, I just wasn't sure you felt the same way, especially with, you know.” He shrugs and I know he's talking about the elephant in the room and it pains him.

“That won't be forever, though. This is your last movie in the franchise, right?” He nods slowly and something about his demeanor seems off. “Right?”

Xander scratches his chin, and it's a nervous thing he does when he feels unsure. “Maybe. Len is in talks for a spin-off.”

I step back in surprise, and he keeps his hand on my hip. “Oh. I didn't know.”

“We only talked about it this week.”

“I thought you wanted to do something else. Move away from action movies.”

“I did, I do, but it's not as easy as that.”

I don't respond because we're in a relationship, and this feels like something we should have discussed, at the least because it affects us all. Disappointment hangs over me, and I wonder if perhaps we're not all on the same page. I've been acting like this is working toward forever, when maybe for Xander it isn't. Does Beck know this, does he feel the same way? Am I just a fun experiment for them before they each find the one and settle down? I know Beck loves me but is that just lust on top of the way he already loves me as his best friend?

Suddenly everything seems fragile, and I don't like it.

"Hey, don't look like that. It's not set in stone or anything. It was just an idea."

I shake my head and force a smile I don't feel. This feels exactly like how my life was before, smiling and doing what was expected rather than what I wanted. I thought I'd shaken that girl, but she's still in there, ready to rear her ugly, pathetic head when I least expect it.

"It's fine. I think it's a great idea. You're amazing in them and your fans adore you."

I walk off toward the stand to order our food and feel him behind me. I blink furiously to stop the tears. The last thing I need is pictures of me ugly crying at Disney all over social media.

"Can you order for me while I pop to the ladies' room?"

Xander frowns but nods. As I go to step past him he puts a palm on my belly to stop me and my body lights up from his touch.

"Baby, I'm sorry I upset you."

God, he's such a good man, even now when I'm hurting I can recognize that. "You didn't. Just have the bladder of a gnat, that's all."

He gives me a long look then nods and I escape his knowing eyes. I round the corner and see Beck walking toward me and my heart flutters at how gorgeous he is, my chest aching with love for him. He smiles and everything seems

better, I feel safe again. He moves up to me and his eyes scan me before a scowl falls over his brow.

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Amelia.” I wince at his low growl. I don’t know why I attempted to lie. He knows me too well for me to get away with it. He reaches out and pinches my chin, bringing my eyes to his face. We’re so close and all I want is his lips on mine.

“Xander said his manager was looking to extend his current contract to include a spin-off of his character.”

“So?”

“That would mean we’re stuck in this purgatory for longer and he didn’t discuss it with us. Don’t you think that’s kind of wrong?”

Beck rubs his thumb over my lip as he looks at me and I can feel his need for me underneath his concern. It was always there, I just never saw it until recently and it makes me feel silly.

“It’s a tricky thing to navigate for him, especially with our relationship so established. Perhaps he feels like he’s still on the outside and he doesn’t know if he should discuss his future career with us. And we haven’t exactly been Len’s biggest fans, so maybe we’re the problem.”

Guilt rushes through me at the thought I hadn’t considered. This must be hard for Xander, to come into this even though I was with him first. Beck and I have a deep history that he isn’t part of. I let my head fall to Beck’s chest and he wraps his arms around me as I turn my face into his neck, inhaling his masculine scent. To anyone watching it’s innocent enough, but it feels intimate to me. Probably because of how he makes me feel.

I lift my head. “I feel shit now for overreacting.”

“He’ll forgive you. Xander isn’t a man to hold a grudge but he’s sensitive. We need to make sure he knows that we’re in this with him, not against him.”

I smile up at my best friend, now my lover, and feel such a huge wave of love for him it takes my breath away. “How did I get so lucky to have you in my life?”

He rubs his nose against my cheek, before kissing the corner of my mouth quickly, and then pulling away as if he suddenly remembers he can't touch me like this because I'm meant to be Xander's and only his. “Pretty sure I'm the one who got lucky.”

I turn to the stand where Xander is speaking to a woman with two small children, grinning at him like he's a god. “Maybe we both did.”

“Yeah, you might be right.”

“I'm going to go freshen up. Meet you at the food stand.”

“Yeah. I'll make sure Xand is okay and not getting mobbed by sex-hungry housewives.”

“Not just housewives.”

The side of his face tilts up as I watch him walk away before I head to the ladies' room. Luckily it's quiet as I shut the stall door before sitting on the toilet and taking a minute. How did things get serious so quickly? We were having so much fun and then with a few comments I turned into some deranged, insecure woman. Is our relationship so weak it can't stand one day out of our bubble without me falling apart?

I think about what Beck said about Xander possibly feeling left out in some way and guilt assails me. I forget sometimes that he's only been in my life a short time because to me he fits. I can't imagine him not being in my life, but perhaps I haven't translated that to him like I should.

I know one thing, and that's we won't solve it here so I just need to let it go and enjoy our day. I'll talk to Xander and Beck at a later date, maybe when we get home, and make my feelings clear to them both. Then, whatever happens, happens.

I use the facilities, and then wash my hands, proud of how I've pulled my shit together and put my reaction down to a wobble because of all the eyes on us.

Head down, I stride out of the restrooms and headfirst into a body. I lift my head up to apologize as the man grips my upper arms and my eyes collide with Lance.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t the little princess.”

“Lance, what are you doing here?”

I pull myself out of his hold, disgusted by his touch and the sneer on his face. Honestly, I have no idea what I saw in this man.

“Can’t a man enjoy Disney World?”

“Yeah, sure.” I go to step around him, not interested in the slightest as to why he’s here, even though it does give me a creepy feeling in my belly. His body blocks mine and I step back, a flicker of unease running up my spine now. We’re surrounded by people, but still, I don’t like the way he’s looking at me like my clothes are transparent.

“Move.”

His hand reaches out and his knuckles skim the top of my arm. “What? Not going to give me some sugar, Amelia? Is that just for your movie star boyfriend or are you fucking your best friend too?”

My ears tingle with fear at his words, something about them makes me uneasy. I cross my arms and force myself not to step away and show him any weakness. “You really are a deranged little man, aren’t you, Lance? Still jealous of Beck being my friend.”

His face contorts in anger. “As if. More worried if my dick might fall off from being in such close proximity to such a whore.”

“Wow, I see you really went all out with that insult.”

“Just calling it like I see it. Do you know I was fired because of you?”

I blink and he takes advantage of my surprise and moves in so his body is almost touching mine.

“Not my problem.” I had an inkling it might happen but, honestly, after the way he treated me, anything that happens to him is karma.

“See, that’s the thing. It is your problem because if you don’t give me two million dollars by midnight tomorrow, I’m going to make your life a misery.”

Okay, now I’m mad. All my life I’ve had people treat me like a bank; friends, boyfriends. Even a goddamn teacher asked me for a loan once and I won’t tolerate it anymore. It’s the reason Beck was my only friend for so long, he got it. He had to deal with it too.

“You know what, do your worst. I’m not giving you a God damn thing.”

I shove past, Lance bumping him with my shoulder.

“You’ll regret that, Amelia.”

I didn’t respond, because I haven’t got it in me to deal with his idiocy. I round the corner and see Xander and Beck waiting for me. Beck smiles and Xander opens his arms as I walk right into them and let his embrace soothe me.

“I’m sorry I was a shrew.”

“It’s all good, wildcat.” He kisses my head and then tips my chin up to look at me and I swear I could drown in his gorgeous blue eyes. “Let’s talk tonight and get this all ironed out.”

“Okay.”

We find a bench and devour our tacos like starving people, chatting and laughing, and I forget about the threat Lance made. As I’m wiping chocolate dipping sauce off my fingers, Beck’s phone rings. He steps off the side to answer it and I admire his butt. Then his frame tenses and his eyes come to mine and I see fear in them that rocks me because Beck is always calm and collected.

He hangs up and rushes back to us as Xander stands, seeming to sense the same as me, something is very wrong.

I grip Beck's arm as he makes it to my side, looking shaken. "What is it?"

His eyes seemed slightly dazed and unfocused. "My Mom, she uh, she had a stroke. She's in the ICU."

"Oh, my God." Tears spring to my eyes. Beck rubs the back of his neck as I move into him and hug him tight. He holds me tight as if he needs me more than air right now and I feel Xander step up to my back, protecting us from prying eyes.

"I need to go. I'm sorry I messed up the weekend but I'll call when I land."

I step back a furrow on my brow. "What? No, we're coming with you." I turn to Xander who nods.

"Of course. We aren't leaving you to go through this alone."

He tries to hide it but I see the relief wash over Beck and know there's nowhere else I'd be when he needs me.

"Thank you."

"No need to thank us, Beck. You're ours and we're here for you." Xander grips his shoulder and I can see Beck soaking up his strength.

This.

This is why we work because when one falls there's always someone there to pick them up.

21: Beck

THE PLANE RIDE WAS SHORT AND I CAN HARDLY REMEMBER being in the car from the airport. Xander handled everything because I was in a fog, my mental capacity just shut down on me. On the plane, Amelia sat beside me and held my hand and Xander sat across from us, his worried gaze on me the whole time. This reaction isn't something people are used to from me. I'm the calm one, sometimes the funny one, but always the one in control. Especially when it comes to anything medical.

“Hey, we're here.”

The car has pulled up and Xander exits first and then Amelia. I take a second to try and pull myself together. We'd been having such a fun time at Disney, despite a few tense conversations with Xander and Amelia, and me feeling like my insides were trying to come up through my windpipe.

I let Amelia grip my hand, needing her touch more than oxygen right now. She's my rock, my anchor when I have no clue what awaits me. My mother is gentle, fragile almost, but she never lets it show. She's always holding herself together so tightly that nobody sees how broken she is. I wonder if this is her body's way of obliterating that control.

I walk up to reception with more confidence than I feel, Amelia pressed to my side and Xander at my back. I want to lean on that strength right now, to let myself sink into him and let him take the weight for just a moment in time, but I can't.

“I’m looking for Margarete Goldsmith. I’m her son, Dr. Beckham Goldsmith.”

Yes, I just pulled out the doctor card and with my name being so well known in my field it’s no surprise when her eyes widen.

“Of course, Dr. Goldsmith. Second floor, room 218.”

“Thank you.”

I head for the elevator and we stand silently waiting for the doors to close. Someone tries to get in with us, but Xander steps up and puts his hand up.

“Get the next one.”

I appreciate him trying to give me privacy as we’re whisked to the second floor and spat out into a reception area. I ignore everything around me as I tow Amelia toward room 218. My step falters when I see my father standing with my older brother, Giles. At that moment my father looks up and I don’t see the stoic man who shows very little emotion, I see a man barely hanging on. His graying hair is messed, his eyes red-rimmed, and his posture, normally so rigid, is slumped, defeated.

“Beck.”

Giles rushes toward me, and he’s like an older version of me. I stiffen for a second as he wraps me in a hug before I hug him back awkwardly. My family aren’t huggers. In fact, I can count on one hand how many times my brother has done that, and three of them were when he was drunk at his bachelor party and we never spoke of it again.

“How is she?”

We move toward my father and I feel Amelia let go of my hand and move to embrace my father when I can’t. He looks surprised before he hugs her back, closing his eyes and doing what I’ve been doing since I heard and taking strength from her.

“Good to see you, Mr. Goldsmith. Sorry about the circumstances.”

“They won’t tell us a lot and what they do say is confusing.”

Both men, who I’ve always felt looked down on me for choosing this career, are now looking at me for answers and it snaps me out of the panic-induced fog I’ve been in since Giles called me. “Where is her doctor?”

“In with her doing something.”

My father motions to the room next to where we’re hovering. He looks like he’s going to fall down so I grip his arm and motion for him to sit. “What happened?”

His hand shakes as the normally composed Elgar Goldsmith rubs his hand over his mouth. “She was sitting in the sunroom reading when the book fell from her hand. I asked if she was okay and she didn’t respond. So I went to her and she couldn’t speak and the side of her face had dropped. I remember you telling us some of the signs of a stroke, so I called an ambulance.”

I grip his shoulder and squeeze. “You did good, Dad. Let me speak to her doctor and find out what’s going on.”

I stand and he nods but he looks so lost, so unsure at this moment. I turn to Giles and my gaze clashes with Xander’s who is waiting off to the side with Amelia. He offers me a small smile and nod of encouragement and it’s all I need to give me the strength I know I’ll need. My family is looking to me to guide them and I won’t let them down.

“Giles, where is Sara?” I thought his wife would be here by his side.

“She, uh, she left me.”

“What?”

Giles looks wrecked as he speaks. “Yeah, last month. Her yoga instructor, apparently.”

“Oh, man, I’m sorry. I had no idea.”

He waves it off. “Not important. Just find out if Mom is okay.”

I cup his neck and put my forehead against his. “She’s strong, Giles.”

“I know.” But he doesn’t seem convinced and neither am I. A stroke is no joke and depending on the kind, it can be deadly.

Standing, I move toward the door and mentally brace for what I might see when I walk into the room. As I thought, my mother is in the bed surrounded by monitors, a cannula in her hand, and oxygen being pumped through a nasal cannula in her nose.

A man in his fifties looks up and dawning recognition crosses his face. “Dr. Goldsmith.” He seems to realize what his greeting means as he looks back at my mother.

I step forward and offer my hand. “Dr. Stanley, good to see you.”

He grimaces and I know for a fact doctors don’t like giving bad news to other doctors because there’s no masking the truth or the seriousness of the situation from us.

“How is my mother doing?”

“She’s had an ischemic stroke, so we’ve administered TPA to break up the clot and then we’ll take it from there. I suspect from the brief conversation with your father and some of the things he said, that she’s had a few TIA’s before and ignored them. As you know, that’s not good and probably why we’re here now.”

“Any idea what caused it?”

“Well, as you know it could be age or bad luck. Her weight is fine. There’s no sign of diabetes but her blood pressure was a little raised. Although that’s not surprising given what her body is going through.”

“Yes, I understand.”

“We’re going to do another scan later tonight and see if there’s any change and take it from there.”

“Can my father and brother come and see her?” I know it’s not encouraged but I also know they need it and being a doctor

isn't always about treating the patient only, it's about the whole support system.

“Yes, but not for long and she'll likely sleep.”

I shake his hand. “Thank you.”

“My pleasure, Dr. Goldsmith.”

“Beck, please.”

“My pleasure, Beck.”

I head back out to my brother and father and I'm surprised to see Giles deep in conversation with Xander, and Amelia talking quietly with my father. All eyes move to mine, so I quickly update everyone on what I know.

“She never mentioned anything to me.”

I raise my brows at my dad, not wanting to say it, but he works a lot and, honestly, we're just lucky he was there today. Guilt flashes over his face and for the first time, I wonder if maybe I haven't misjudged my parents a little. I'm not saying that all of a sudden they're different people and they certainly weren't in the running for parents of the year, but maybe the indifference wasn't as profound as I thought. At least between them.

“Can I see her?”

“Yes, but not for long.”

My father rises and I turn to Amelia and Xander as my family moves into the room leaving us alone. Amelia doesn't hesitate to wrap her arms around me and offer the comfort she knows I need.

“She'll be okay.”

I nod, but we both know there could be damage caused by the clot on her brain.

A heavy hand lands on the back of my neck and I glance at Xander who holds my gaze captive. God, I love this man. The realization is like having my chest cave in on itself.

“What do you need?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know. Just you, both of you.”

His blond hair falls over his brow and it takes all of me not to brush it away and sink into his hold. It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell him how I feel, but I know he’ll mistake it for my emotions being overstimulated.

“Then that’s what you’ll get. We won’t leave you to handle this alone, Beck. We’re here for you.”

Amelia squeezes my abs lightly, bringing my attention to her. The look she gives me causes hope to sink into my skin. Warmth, compassion, love, this woman who has been by my side for most of my life.

“Lincoln, Ryker, Audrey, and Harrison are on their way too.”

“They don’t need to.”

“They want to, Beck.”

They say in times of trouble you learn who your friends are, and I’m a lucky bastard because mine are the best a man could ask for.

“Maybe you could grab some coffee or something for everyone then. While I go in and see my mom?”

“Of course.”

Amelia kisses my cheek and Xander squeezes my nape translating everything I need in that one action. I watch them walk down the hallway to the elevator hand in hand and vow I’ll find a way to keep them because I don’t think I’d survive losing either of them.

Pushing back into the room, I really take in my mother for the first time. When I spoke with Dr. Stanley, I was blocking out who she was so I could focus, but now I see how small she looks.

My father is holding her hand and stroking her cheek and I get a jolt from how tenderly he’s touching her, how much love is clear in his blue eyes.

Sitting beside Giles, I sigh and rub my hands over my face.

“How you doing, baby bro?”

God, I can't remember the last time he called me that. I glance at him and see the exhaustion on his face and it's not just from today. The bags under his eyes are so big you could go on holiday for a month with them. “I'm fine. How about you? How come you didn't tell me about you and Sara?”

Giles shrugs and his suit looks looser like the custom fit doesn't quite work now. “Embarrassed.”

“Why?”

“Oh, come on, Beck.” He throws his hands up in defeat as if it should be obvious but it's not. I glance at my father, but he's so focused on my mom, I'm not even sure he's aware we're here.

“You're you. The great Beckham Goldsmith, world-renowned heart surgeon, the man with the magic hands. Mom and Dad worship you and I can't even get my wife to stay faithful to me.”

“I... what? Mom and Dad hated that I became a doctor. You were the golden boy who followed Dad into the family company.”

“Are you kidding? They told anyone who'd listen about how proud they were of you. God, so did I. You're a prodigy, Beck. You carved your own path and you made it. No, you fucking owned it.”

I shake my head as I look at my brother and wonder if I've been wrong all this time. “Wow, I was sure that was you. You went and followed Dad, you married the girl they approved of, and were the perfect son.”

“Yeah, look how that turned out.”

“They never said anything to me.”

“Yeah, well, it's not how they are, is it? Can you remember the night you graduated, and they flew straight home after dinner. They talked non-stop about how you were going to take the medical world by storm, and you did.”

“Giles, can you give Beck and I a moment please?”

Giles nods silently at my father before standing and walking past me, leaving just me and my old man.

“He’s right. We’re proud of you, Beckham. I know we never showed it but you going out and following your dream is impressive.”

“I always thought you were disappointed in me.”

“Never, son. You literally save lives with your hands, Beckham. How could any parent be disappointed with that?”

My father’s eyes travel back to my mom and I see how much this is hurting him. I always thought my parents just rubbed along together but now I see he really loves her. “You never told me.”

“I know and for that I’m sorry. After Mr. Fincham died of a heart attack in front of you, we worried that perhaps you didn’t have the fortitude to be a doctor. You were broken, Beckham.”

I remember that day like it was yesterday. I was in fifth grade when my teacher suddenly dropped dead of a heart attack in front of the whole class. I felt so helpless, so scared, and when my father sat me down and explained Mr. Fincham’s heart was weak and they couldn’t fix him, I was even more scared. I never wanted to feel that way again. In many ways, his death is what prompted me to become a heart surgeon. “I felt so helpless.”

“You were always such a caring boy with a big heart. I knew you’d never be happy in the corporate world.” His eyes move from my mom and clash with mine, and I see pride and love in them. “Without men and women like you, my Margarete wouldn’t stand a chance.”

“She might well face challenges, Dad.” I want to warn him so he doesn’t get his hopes up.

“I know, but she’s here because of men like you. I’m proud of you, son.”

I link my fingers over my belly not knowing what to feel right now. “Thank you, that means a lot.”

“It’s long overdue.”

“Do you mind if I ask why now?”

My father shrugs. “Life is short, and sometimes things need to be said while they can.”

“Well, I appreciate it.”

He gives me a half smile and then silence fills the room, but it’s not uncomfortable. I ponder on his words and know I need to speak to Xander.

22: Beck

THE LAST FEW DAYS HAVE BEEN HELLISH, BUT ALSO HEALING for me and my family. I never expected in a hundred years for those words to come out of my father's mouth. Moreover, I didn't know I needed them as much as I did. Approval is a funny thing, especially parental approval, and I thought I was okay with not having it, but now I have it, I feel lighter.

"You're smiling again."

I turn to look at Ryker as he walks into the office at Ruin. Ryker has been here with me for every phase of my adult life and I trust him with my life. "I'm happy. My mom is being released later today, I have the woman I love in my bed and Xander is..." I don't know how to finish that sentence. Xander has been amazing. He's supported me in ways I never expected. Making sure I eat, that my family has privacy, and allowing me to be a son rather than the person taking care of everyone.

"Xander is...?" Ryker rolls his hand for me to continue, as he slumps in the chair opposite my desk.

"Perfect."

"You love him?"

Ryker hasn't always found it easy to navigate human emotions. Coding and algorithms, he understands in his sleep, but sometimes the obvious emotions are lost on him. Although he seems to understand when a woman wants to fuck him easily enough.

"I do."

He locks his fingers together over his chest and rubs his bottom lip, deep in thought and I wait. He's the thinker, not one to speak of serious things for the sake of it.

"Does he know?"

I shake my head and let out a sigh. This is the problem for me. I don't want to put myself out there if he isn't serious about this relationship. If we're just having fun then that's fine, but I'm not serving him my heart on a silver platter. "No."

"Why not?"

I purse my lips and wonder if this is breaking a confidence but I could really do with a third-party view on it. "So you know we have to keep things quiet because of his contract?"

"I heard that, yes."

"Well, he told Amelia he'd spoken to his agent about extending his contract."

"I see, and where does that leave you?"

I shrug, leaning back in my chair. "In limbo for even longer."

"And he didn't talk about this with you or Amelia first?"

I shake my head. "No, and that's the problem I have. If he wants to be with us, surely he should have."

"I agree, but then maybe he doesn't know how serious you are about him, so he didn't feel like he could, or should. I can't imagine this arrangement is easy if you haven't been through it before. Add in the fact it's so secretive, and I imagine the lines blur a bit."

"That's what I told Amelia. She got pretty upset about it."

"I can see that." Ryker sits forward and leans his elbows on the edge of my desk. "Listen, I'm not going to sit here and tell you what to do because, honestly, I'm the last person to give relationship advice, but I know how long you've loved Amelia. I watched you go through college loving her and

when she went to London you were lost. Just don't let whatever this is with Xander fuck that up for you both."

I frown. "You think he shouldn't be involved?" I have to say I hate that idea.

"Not at all. I'm saying you, all three of you, need to be honest about what you want and don't want. If this is fun for him and that's all, that's fine, but if you two want more, then ultimately it won't work."

"So, lay it on the line?"

"Yes, tell him how you feel."

I blow out a breath, knowing he's right. "And if he doesn't want serious?"

"Then you should walk away before someone gets hurt."

I had a feeling he was going to say that and it makes my chest feel heavy. I need to think and need a distraction. "What about you? What's going on with you? We haven't seen you here much."

Ryker rubs the top of his head and groans. "Beau is in town and wants to have dinner."

Beau is Ryker's older brother and in my opinion, a total prick. He treated Ryker like shit when we were younger, always lording it over him. Now Ryker is the success he is, Beau turns up only when he needs a handout or an injection of cash for his next big money-making idea.

"Oh shit, how much does he want now?"

"Fuck knows, but I told him last time I'm not giving him any more money. He spends it like he's a fucking playboy, flashing it at women and partying his way across the globe. Then when it all goes to shit he crawls back to me, and I'm done."

I cock my head. "I'm sensing a but here?" I can always tell when Ryker is wavering about giving in to Beau.

"He says he's changed, that he's getting married, and he wants me to meet his fiancée."

“Oh, wow. What poor girl said yes to him?”

“No clue, but I feel like I should meet her since Mom and Dad already approve. Mom talks about her non-stop.”

“What’s her name? Did you run a background check?”

“I haven’t asked and, honestly, I don’t care enough to do one. If this poor girl is with him, it’s not him I’m worried about. It would be her but I just don’t care enough to ask.”

“So then don’t go.”

“Yeah, I’ll see how I feel later. Work is slammed so I might use that as an excuse.”

I laugh as I stand and walk toward him, slapping him on the shoulder. “No rest for the wicked.”

“Well, I must be the most fucking wicked of all.”

I head to the exit, wanting to catch Amelia alone so I can speak to her and find out how she’s feeling before I speak to Xander.

I hit the call button from my car and wait for her to pick up.

“Hey, you.”

My heart does this weird jump when I hear her voice. “Hey, Tink. Where are you?”

“Just heading to the library. Why?”

“I’m going to speak to Xander and find out where his head is at after your conversation at Disney. I feel after the last few days, we need to be on the same page.”

“Okay, come see me after.”

“I will. Love you.”

“I love you too.”

I know Xander is at home, so I head there. The ride up is short and it feels weird going to his place rather than Amelia’s. We’ve hardly spent any time anywhere else but at hers since this began. I buzz him when I get to the door and he swings it open and my throat goes dry.

He's standing in nothing but a towel, water dripping down his sculpted body in rivulets that I want to trace with my tongue. His smirk lets me know that I'm being anything but chill about my appreciation.

“Everything okay with your mom?”

He turns to head back inside and I follow him, closing the door behind me. “Yeah, all good.”

He walks into his bedroom and I follow, my mouth watering as he drops the towel and steps into a pair of shorts. I want nothing more than to tell him to leave the shorts off so I can fuck that perfect peach of an ass, but that won't solve the thoughts going around in my head or ease the worry Amelia is carrying. “Can we talk?”

He pauses as he draws a shirt over his abs and finally senses my mood.

“Yeah, of course.”

I watch him take a seat on the bed, resting his elbows on his knees and letting his hands dangle between his spread thighs. He'd look relaxed to anyone else but I know him and I can see he's unsure of himself. I take a second to really look at him and see a man in his prime, with clear eyes, clear skin, and a strong body. He looks tired but that could be from the late nights fucking or waiting around the hospital with me.

“So what did you need to talk about?”

I pace, my own nerves keeping me mobile before I force myself to sit beside him. I could make this flowery or I could just say it. So I plump for the second one.

“I love you.” I take his hand in mine and it's through that I can feel the way his body tenses. “I understand if that's sudden or too quick, but I want you to know where I stand. I love you and Amelia, and I want you both for the long haul. This isn't a joke to me or some fling.”

I watch his big throat bob as he swallows. “It's serious for me too.”

Not quite what I wanted to hear, but I get that some people fall faster than others. “So why did you ask Len to extend your contract? This is fucking purgatory for us, Xander. We can’t be free while it’s hanging over you. I get it’s your career and you can’t mess with that. We knew that going in, but extending it without discussing it with either of us feels like a slap in the face.”

“Len can’t find me anything else.”

“Bullshit, that man is fucking you over.” I’m not sure how you can have so much hatred for a man you’ve never met, but I do for Xander’s manager.

Xander stands abruptly. “He’s just old school, that’s all.”

“So he knows about our arrangement and doesn’t approve?”

“No, he thinks I’m with Amelia.”

“So it’s not him, it’s you?”

He paces, his agitation growing, and I know I need to back off. This has nothing to do with his job and everything to do with how he sees himself. I thought he kept his bi-sexuality a secret because he wanted privacy but it’s not. It’s because he feels ashamed of it, and by extension, me. “I should go.”

I have no idea what to do from here or where to go with us because this isn’t just about me.

“No, wait.”

Xander grabs me and crushes his mouth to mine in a desperate kiss filled with longing and passion and everything I know he feels for me. And that just crushes me more because I know he cares, and this is hurting him too, but he needs to decide. I hold his face between my hands as I drag my lips away from his and his head drops.

“I need to go.” I step away and head for the door, turning back once to see him looking at me, wretched heartbreak on his face. He looks lost and I can’t save him this time, even though I want to, but the truth is, I might be his destruction and I couldn’t live with that. “Find a meeting and go to it.”

He nods once and I let the door close on the man I've come to love. I know that I left a piece of my heart back in that penthouse.

I could go to Amelia's and wait for her there but I need her now so I drive over to the library. I park outside and jog up the steps two at a time. No matter what else happens, this woman is my best friend. I don't even know what I'll say to her because I don't know where I stand. I just know I need to feel her in my arms.

My head twists as I look for her, a frantic feeling in my chest. Then I spot her and everything settles a little, my world, which was teetering and unsure, stabilizes. I move over to her and she spots me, coming to her feet with a grin on her face that dims when she sees the look of anguish on mine that I can't shake. I walk straight into her arms and lift her off her feet, burying my head in her neck. I hold her tight as her fingers stroke through my hair, comforting me without question. We stand like that for I don't know how long and then when I can breathe again, I let her go.

"Talk to me, Beck."

I hear a giggle and turn to see people staring at us so I shake my head. "Not here."

Amelia seems to notice the attention too, so she gathers her stuff and we head for the exit.

"Come to my place."

Amelia makes a face and I remember she has a night planned with the girls at Audrey's tonight. "Shit, you have that thing with Audrey."

"I can cancel."

I shake my head. "No, don't do that. This can wait. I just needed to see you and hold you."

She cocks her head. "Are you sure? You seemed upset. Didn't it go well with Xander?"

I have no intention of dropping this on her and giving her my burden to carry so I smile, knowing she can see through

me. “Yeah, not much to say. I can tell you tomorrow.”

“You not staying at my place tonight?”

“I should probably stay at home. You’ll be late and I need to help get my mom settled.”

“Oh shit, that’s today? Are sure you don’t want me to cancel?”

God, this woman is so kind-hearted, always putting everyone else first. I cup her cheek and peck her lips. “No, go have fun and I’ll call you in the morning.”

I kiss her once more and walk away, my head scrambled from the conversation with Xander and knowing I have to get through this evening at my parents’ house.

This day needs to end, but it doesn’t, and I spend four hours helping my mom settle and explaining things to my dad. Her prognosis is good, she had very little in the way of deficits, and that was fucking lucky. I’m just getting in around ten o’clock when I get a text from Xander.

XANDER: WHAT THE FUCK, BECK. ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE ME A LAUGHINGSTOCK? I TRUSTED YOU.

I blink in confusion and go to respond when my phone rings in my hand, Amelia’s name flashing across my screen. I answer with a sense of dread moving through my gut. Sobs ring through my ears and panic grips me around the throat. “Amelia, baby, what is it?”

“Th...they posted pictures, Beck. It’s all over the media.”

I try to make sense of her words, but the only thing that matters right this moment is making sure she’s okay. “Slow down, Tink. Take some deep breaths for me.”

I’m already grabbing my keys from the bowl by the door. When I step outside, I stop dead as I am mobbed by paparazzi shouting my name and shoving cameras in my face. Moving back, I slam the door and move back to my window, noting the volume of people who have swarmed my house. It’s so reminiscent of what happened with Harrison and Norrie that I

shudder because it almost broke them, and I have a sinking feeling it's the same for us.

“Tink, where are you?”

Another sob and then I hear muffled talking before Audrey comes on the line.

“Beck.”

“Audrey, what the fuck is happening?”

“Someone sent pictures of you and Amelia kissing at Disney to the media, accompanied by pictures of you kissing her at the library today. It's bad, Beck. They're tearing you both apart.”

“I don't give a fuck about me. Is she okay?”

“No, Xander won't answer his phone and it's breaking her heart.”

“He what?”

“Yeah, that's what I said. Norrie spoke with him and he said he had to go to L.A. and now she can't reach him.”

My hurt is buried underneath layers and layers of anger and concern. Anger because how the fuck could he treat her like this, and how could I be so careless to allow Amelia or Xander to be compromised. I'm also concerned because the two people I love are hurting and I don't know how to fix it or if I even can.

“I'll be there as soon as I can. Just look after her until I get there, okay? My house has paps camped outside.”

“Ryker is sending a security team to get rid of them so don't worry. I've got Amelia.”

I hang up and throw my phone on the bed, a roar ripping from my throat. I should have known this would happen. Secrets never end well, but I'm so disappointed in Xander if he's done what I think he has, and that's to allow his career to come before Amelia. Yet, I can't help the worry that worms through me that he's suffering too and I can't be there for him this time.

23: *Xander*

MY PHONE RINGS IN MY HAND AND I CLENCH IT HARDER WHEN I see his name. Beck has called me three times in the last five minutes and every single time I let it go to voicemail. I'm so angry at his careless disregard for my feelings, but also ashamed because he called me out and he was right. I am a coward and I'm still one now.

“Xander, are you listening to me?”

I shake my head and focus on Len, who's been in damage control since the pictures leaked and the rumors began about me using Amelia so I could be with the handsome heart surgeon. There were always rumors about actors' sexuality, and since I'd been snapped with Beck at the piano store, they had increased. Two handsome men being seen together always meant a story as far as the press was concerned. I'd wanted to reach out to her and tell her that wasn't true. I love Amelia. I love them both and yet instead of telling Beck when he told me he loved me, I panicked. I still wasn't too bothered by them though, the media does love a good cheating scandal, but then Len had lost his mind and started ranting about my image and how this would affect my chances of getting work and doubt had set in. Instead of calling her, I'd let him take over as I panicked and hid in L.A.

“What is it?”

“You need to make a statement.”

“And say what?” I still haven't told Len the truth and that should be all the warning I need that I don't trust him.

“That you’re heartbroken that Amelia chose to cheat on you and you believe you were duped by them to gain media attention for his career.”

I stop by the door to the deck that leads out to the pool of my L.A home. I don’t use it a lot, preferring to be closer to Norrie and Isaac. Christ, what must she think? “That’s not the truth and I’m not saying it.”

Len throws up his hands, his face going a mottled purple color. “Who fucking cares. We need to spin this and get the media attention away from what they’re saying about you and that man.”

His words piss me off and I advance on him angrily. “Watch your fucking mouth when you speak about him.”

He holds his hands up as I stand there snorting like an angry bull. I feel trapped, lost, and the two people I want to reach for are the ones who caused this mess.

“Fine, then we say nothing. We let the media storm play out. I’ll speak to the studio and calm the executives down.”

“Whatever you need to do, just fucking do it, Len.”

I wave him away. Hearing the front door slam, I head out back to the pool area but quickly head back inside when I see the news helicopters hovering overhead. Fucking parasites love people’s pain and suffering. I take the stairs two at a time to my gym on the second floor and close the door. I feel caged, like an animal in the zoo, so I quickly change into gym shorts and hit the treadmill. My mind whirls as the TV plays, showing images of Beck and Amelia at Disney. I know exactly when it was taken. I was waiting for food and she was upset with me for asking for a contract extension.

Beck is holding her close but not kissing her. He’s offering comfort and it’s beautiful and a side of him I love. He’s a healer through and through, and I hurt her with my actions, which were thoughtless and selfish.

I run until sweat is pouring down my back and chest, my legs are shaking with exertion, and I collapse to the floor in a sweaty heap. I stagger to my feet and grab a bottle of water

from my fridge. I drink it down thirstily and sit on the floor of my gym, feeling utterly broken. I know how easy it would be to call someone and have them bring me something to numb the pain, to take it all away, but I won't. No matter how tempted I am, I won't do it.

Moving to the bedroom I strip and step in the shower, letting the warm water soothe my aching body. Yet nothing can soothe the pain in my chest and it's worse knowing I'm doing this to myself, but I can't stop.

I wrap a towel around myself and slump on my bed. Not caring about the sheets getting wet, I lie down. My phone vibrates on my bedside cabinet and I grab it and see my sister's name. I sigh and sit up, knowing if I ignore her she'll hop a plane and bang my door down.

"Hey."

Her soft greeting kicks me in the chest and I pinch the bridge of my nose to keep my emotions from exploding out of me in a torrent. "Hey, sis."

"How you doing?"

I was expecting a lecture but I should have known better. Nora has always been my biggest supporter and advocate. "I'm fine. How are Amelia and Beck?"

"You're not fine. Now, tell me the truth."

I don't miss the way she finessed her way around answering that question and that in itself is enough of an answer, and yet I still find my lips twitching at how Nora uses her 'mom' voice on me now. Isaac is a lucky kid to have her in his corner and so, I realize, am I.

"Honestly, I don't know. This is my worst nightmare. I trusted them to keep this hidden, to protect me, and they didn't. Now I'm stuck in the middle. I either have to choose my career or them."

"Do you though? Why can't you have both?"

"Because Len said."

“Oh, fuck what Len said. The man’s a prick. What do you want?”

I pause at her angry outburst. Norrie is a gentle soul with one heck of a temper when it’s really triggered. “He made me what I am.”

“Bullshit. You made you what you are. He’s a leech who sucks the life from you and I’m not going to stand back and let him take this too.”

“I thought you liked him.”

“I’ve met him twice. The first time he patted me on the head like a fucking dog, the second time he hit on me.”

“He what?!” I shoot to standing, fury bubbling in my veins at the thought of that piece of shit hitting on my sister.

“Oh calm down, I handled him. But my point is, he isn’t a good person. He’s out for himself.”

“What are you saying? That it’s Len’s fault that Beck and Amelia threw discretion away and fucked me over?”

“I love you, Xander, so please know I say this with all the love in the world but grow the fuck up! You were out of line to ask them to do it in the first place. The only winner in that situation was you. Beck and Amelia have been in love for years and the second they admit it, they have to hide it from the world. How is that fair?”

“I didn’t force them to do it.”

“No, they did it because they care about you, because they love you and want what you had, and it was okay because there was an end in sight. Then you moved the goalposts without even asking them. It was selfish.”

“Wow, tell me how you really feel.”

“Someone has to. You’re surrounded by people with agendas, Xander, but the people who love you have just one, and that’s for you to be happy. If you dare tell me you were happy hiding your true self from the world, I’ll get on a plane and fly to L.A. so I can clock you one.”

I smile despite myself at her rant and the threats I know aren't baseless. She'd do it and I love her for it. "Do you really think I'm selfish?"

"Don't you?"

I think about what she's saying about Beck and Amelia having to hide but I gave them choices. I never forced this on them, but she's right about the moving of the goalposts. I did that and I need to figure out why. "I guess I was."

"We love you, Xander, and you're a good man, one of the best I know. There's nobody I'd rather have as my big brother, but you need to figure out what you want and make some tough choices."

"Is Amelia, okay?" She's the one being dragged through the mud the hardest and the names they're calling her disgust me. If I had my way, I'd make a statement defending her but Len thinks it would make things worse and make me look weak.

"No, she's heartbroken. You won't speak to her and she can't leave her house without someone insulting her and calling her names. Beck isn't much better, but as a man, he gets more of a pass."

My heart aches and guilt feels like an anvil on my chest easing some of the anger toward them. "Tell her I'm sorry."

"No, I won't do that. If you're sorry, you need to tell her."

"Okay."

I swallow and we say goodnight. After, I lie on my bed before lifting my phone and scroll through some of the social media sites. Nora wasn't wrong, the things they're saying about Amelia are vile. Calling her slut, a whore, saying she probably earned her degree on her back. That last one makes me see red and I go to respond but stop myself. It will only increase the frenzy.

Finally, I get the balls to do what I should have done when the news first hit and call Beck.

"What?"

His angry greeting isn't what I was expecting but I should have. "How is she?"

Beck snorts. "Like you fucking care?"

My back stiffens and the natural urge to defend myself comes out. "I care, you know I do."

"Oh, really? Is that why you haven't spoken to her or done a damn thing to defend what these pigs are saying about her? Do you have any idea what your silence is doing to her? The University threatened to pull her offer."

My belly hollows out and I lean against the wall, sliding down it until my ass hits the floor. "No!"

"Yes."

"If you'd kept your promise, this wouldn't have happened." It's a weak and feeble argument, and I don't even know why I'm making it.

"You're right, I kissed the woman I love in public and broke my promise to be discreet. I made a mistake, but my biggest mistake was agreeing to it in the first place. What I feel for her isn't a dirty secret to be kept in the dark, and neither is what I felt for you. I should have stood firm, but I didn't. I caved for you and I learned my lesson because I won't ever hide who I am again."

He sounds angry and my heart breaks at his use of the past tense, as if what he felt for me just dissipated in a puff of smoke. "You're right. I should never have asked you to hide it. I hope you can forgive me one day and we can be friends." What am I saying? I don't want to be friends with Beck or Amelia. They're my everything, and yet I can't say it. I can't get past the thought of my career being over, of everyone knowing I'm not normal.

"Not a chance. I'll never forgive you for hurting her like this, for throwing us to the wolves. Honestly, you're not the man I thought you were. Now I'm going to go and try and fix this mess and deal with that piece of shit ex who leaked the photos."

Dead air is the only sign he's hung up on me.

THE NEXT FEW DAYS ARE TORTUROUS, AND INSTEAD OF EASING up, the media gets worse, painting me as a victim and Amelia and Beck as cheats. They dig through every part of their past, finding women Beck had slept with. They interview Amelia's ex-boyfriend, Lance, who seems to relish every second as he tells the world she's a sex addict with deviant tendencies. I should have punched that asshole when I had the chance. But for some reason, even now, I trust that Beck will deal with it because he's a fixer.

I hide out in my home, my only contact with the outside world is Len and Nora. Audrey and Harrison won't take my calls and at this point, I don't blame them. I'm doing their friends dirty and they don't like it.

I've thought non-stop about what Norrie said and what Beck said to me and every conversation I've ever had with Amelia springs to the forefront of my brain. What I'm coming to understand is that they were right. I did put them in an impossible situation, and yet they protected me. They locked a part of themselves away to do it, and it was only after hearing that I'd asked to extend my contract that they got careless. I self-sabotaged my relationship by asking Len to tie my hands.

I've fielded call after call from news outlets and talk show hosts wanting my side of the story and I've ignored them all, despite Len pushing me to go and tell the world that I'm a victim and Amelia was using me. I know she loved me, she showed me in every action. Every touch and word was filled with it.

An overwhelming urge to reach out to her fills me and I shoot off a text before I can think better of it.

XANDER: HOW ARE YOU DOING?

God, that's so lame, I almost delete it before she can read it but I see the little bubbles jumping, and my heart rate kicks up.

AMELIA: BEEN BETTER. YOU?

That's so bland, nothing like the woman I know who puts an emoji in every text. I can feel the sad indifference through

the words. I don't even know what to say to her.

XANDER: YEAH, ALL GOOD.

AMELIA: GOOD.

This is so awkward and painful, and yet even this small contact is like an electrical pulse of energy to my lackluster body.

XANDER: BECK SAID THE UNIVERSITY WAS BEING DIFFICULT. DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL THEM?

AMELIA: NO, THANK YOU. BECK HANDLED IT.

Of course he did, it's what he does. It feels silly to be jealous that I'm on the outside when I've done this to myself. I have no doubt if I'd gone to them instead of running we'd be handling this together, but I fell back into unhealthy habits instead of leaning on the people who showed me nothing but love. Not once did Beck or Amelia make me feel like a third wheel. If anything, they made me feel protected and loved, cherished in a way I never have before.

I don't text back because what more can I say. I'm beginning to realize I fucked up and it's like a brick in the center of my chest. Banging at my door makes me freeze, and I wonder how anyone got past my security team. I rush to the door and check the peephole and I'm shocked to see Norrie, Harrison, Isaac, and another man on my doorstep. I pull open the door and step back.

"Norrie, what are you doing here?"

She shoves Isaac at me as Harrison glares and the last man raises his brows in greeting.

"I'm here to help you pull your head from your ass."

I follow her through to the living room as Isaac bats at my face and I turn my head to give him my attention. He grins and babbles at me, waving his arms around and it's the first real smile I've let past my lips since this shit show began. Nora sits on the couch as Harrison stands behind it like some sentinel guard, as the third man takes a seat in my armchair.

"Sit down."

I sit at Nora's demand and Harrison smirks, the dick.

"Now, listen up. This is Hudson, a friend of Harry's. He's a lawyer and he's going to check your contracts over."

I frown, not understanding why.

Harrison pins me with a hard look and I keep his gaze. "I spoke to a few friends of mine in the entertainment industry. Your manager isn't well-liked."

"He's an acquired taste."

"No, he's a dick. Several of the larger studios won't work with him and that's why you have had trouble finding other roles, not because of you. I have it on good authority that they want to work with you but won't because of him."

"Really?"

"No, I said it for a joke. Of course, really," Harrison snarls.

Okay, he's still mad at me but he settles when Norrie gives him one look and his face transforms with love.

"Okay, that doesn't explain why Hudson is here."

"We also heard he was the one who wanted the clause added that has caused this whole fucking mess."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Oh for fuck's sake, stop it." Norrie slaps her hand on the table.

I cover Isaac's ears, who's still babbling for all he's worth. "Language, Nora."

"Oh save it. Now, get your contracts out."

I do as she says and hire Hudson so I'm covered by his confidentiality agreement and client privilege. Six hours later I know just how badly I've fucked up but I have no idea how to fix it.

24: Beck

“RYKER, I NEED A FAVOR.”

“Anything. Just say the word.”

My shoulders slump with relief at having something to do, something I can fix. “That piece of shit Lance that Amelia dated is the one who leaked the photos and he tried to blackmail her when we were at Disney.”

“What an asshole. What’s the plan?”

“He’s staying at some dive motel after I got him fired and Audrey had the fucker blacklisted. I’m going to go over and persuade him it’s in his best interest to leave the country and never come back.”

“Ooh, I like it. I can make it so he’s never allowed back too. Give me an hour to do a deep dive into his online history and then come over.”

“Thanks, Ryk.”

“My absolute pleasure. Nothing I hate more than men who go after women like he did Amelia, and she’s like a sister to me.”

I hang up and pace my loft. My life has gone to shit and it all feels out of control. Amelia is pulling away from me and I know I’m losing her. It shreds me because I love her more than life and I love Xander too, but I’m so angry with him. How could he abandon us like this, abandon her?

I leave for Ryker’s early, not able to stay put when my head is shot. I make it past the photographers that are still

hovering outside my home and head to Ryker's. He welcomes me into his apartment with a grin and I smile when he rubs his hands together.

“Oh, are you going to love this.”

His home is bare except for the stacks of servers in the corner of his living room. He has a couch, a TV, and a rug I know Audrey bought him.

“What you got?”

“Well, this little weasel has enough on his computer to put him away for the foreseeable.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“He has a very niche love of illegal porn, and I mean the nasty kind, involving those no longer breathing.”

I look at Ryker, my lip curling. “Tell me you're joking.”

“No, man. He's a piece of work.”

“Right, let's go take out the trash.”

We head out in Ryker's vehicle so that any paparazzi that did follow me don't follow us to the motel. I quickly find out his room number by paying the clerk a crisp hundred and smile when he hands me a spare key. This is a rent-by-the-hour establishment so I know they won't ask questions.

I use the key and shove my way into Lance's room, gagging at the stench of stale food and body odor. He is lying face down on the bed in a pair of briefs, his pale flesh glaring in the light.

“Get up.”

I kick his leg and he grunts, so I take his leg and Ryker takes the other and we drag him to the floor where he lands with a thud.

“What the fuck?” He jumps up, rubbing his bloodshot eyes and blinking.

“Pack your shit, you're done here.”

“Hey, you're Amelia's fuck toy.”

I throw my arm back and Ryker stops me. “Dude, your hands are worth more than that.” Then he steps forward and jabs Lance in the face. “Mine, not so much.”

Lance howls as he holds his bloody nose. “You broke my nose.”

“I’m gonna snap your fucking dick off and shove it up your asshole if you don’t start listening.”

“I’ll sue.”

Ryker chuckles. “Oh, please do. I can’t wait to show the cops what I found on your computer.”

Lance pales. “You can’t do that. You can’t go through my personal files without my consent.”

Ryker jabs his thumb in Lance’s direction. “Is he real?”

I shrug and fold my arms. “Fuck knows.”

Ryker takes out his phone and begins typing.

“What are you doing?” Lance looks worried now.

“Sending an anonymous tip to a friend of mine in the FBI to check you out, my friend.”

“Is this because of Amelia?”

His whiny voice is annoying as fuck. “Yes, and if you say her name again, I don’t give a fuck if it ends my career, I’m going to put your teeth down that scrawny fucking throat.”

“She made me.”

I close my eyes and shake my head. How can someone be so dumb? “That’s it, you had your chance.”

I nod at Ryker and he grins. “And send.”

Lance pales. “You did it? You sent it?”

“Tick-tock, mother fucker. The nasty shit you like is frowned upon over here.”

“Fine, I’m going but I want a hundred grand or I’ll ruin you. I already did it once with those pictures and my interviews, and I’ll do it again.”

I draw back my arm and punch him square in the face and he goes down to the floor as I bend to speak into his ear. “If you ever fucking threaten me or mine again, they won’t fucking find your body. Nod if you understand.”

He must believe me because he nods.

I walk out into the fresh air and Ryker follows. “That was fun.”

I roll my eyes. “Come on, let’s get a beer.”

“You want me to monitor shit and make sure he goes home or gets arrested? Don’t want this little fucker to disappear.”

“Yeah. Thanks, buddy.”

Ryker slings an arm around my neck. “Anytime, Beck.”

Finally, I feel like I have some semblance of control back. Now I just need to bridge this gap between me and my Tink.

25: *Amelia*

“CHEERS.” I CLINK MY GLASS AGAINST LOTTIE’S AND Audrey’s and force a smile that falls flat. This is the first night I’ve managed to get out of my house without being hounded since this nightmare began two weeks ago. To say I feel wrecked is an understatement. My entire life has been picked apart and analyzed by strangers. I’ve been called a slut, a whore, told that my family’s money bought my degree, or that I fucked my professors. None of which are true. Harvard even told me they wouldn’t let me do my Ph.D. there because they didn’t want the negative publicity.

Beck has been amazing. He’s been there through it all. Holding me while I cry, defending me, and fixing things. Including my Harvard place, which involved a hefty donation. He even dealt with Lance when I told him Lance was likely the one that leaked it. He hadn’t been happy that I hadn’t told him about the confrontation at Disney or the threat. When I explained I didn’t want to make his stress worse about his mom, he’d reluctantly understood my motives.

I can’t be sure that Ryker was behind it, but Lance was arrested when police found illegal porn on his laptop. He was deported and banned from entering the United States again. His social media was also deactivated, again indicating Ryker. I suspect Beck had him do it. He did all of that and yet he can’t fix my partially broken heart, just like I can’t fix his. A piece of us is missing and it hurts more than I ever imagined it could.

“Hey.” Audrey clicks her fingers in front of my face. “Snap out of it.”

I groan and place my head on her island, where all the snacks are set up for girls’ night, including my favorite maple bacon pretzels and peanut butter cups. “I’m sorry.”

Lottie rubs my back and smiles. “It’s okay. We understand.”

“No, we don’t. She needs to stop moping. Xander turned out to be a dick but Beck is here and he loves her. She needs to remember that.”

My head pops up and I glare at Audrey. “Hey!”

Audrey gentles her tone. “Honey, I know you’re hurting, and what Xander did was unforgivable but you need to remember that you still have one man who adores you, and he’s hurting too.”

I pop a pretzel in my mouth and chew as I consider her words. Xander has hurt me, his inability to tell the world the truth and defend me cut a slice out of my heart with every headline and yet I can’t hate him. I knew going into this that he was very private and had still to come to terms with his sexuality. Having tasted a slice of what life in the public eye looks like, I get it even more. But what Audrey says is true. I have Beck still and what I feel for him grows stronger every day.

He has been my rock through this, and I think I forgot somewhere along the line that he is hurting too. He does such an amazing job of fixing people that it’s easy to forget.

“Oh my God, I’ve been such a bad girlfriend. I’ve totally ignored his feelings.” Tears spring to my eyes and Lottie glares at Audrey.

“See what you did?”

“She needed to hear it.” Audrey looks at me. “And you’re not a bad girlfriend. Beck is a Dom. Taking care of you brings him pleasure and is his way of handling things. But you need to make sure he knows that you love him, that he hasn’t

slipped back into that role of best friend. That would kill him, but he'd do it for you."

"He *is* my best friend."

"Is that all he is? Have you guys been intimate since Xander?"

"No, he's everything to me. I've never felt so sexy or cherished as Beck makes me feel. With him, it's natural and I get butterflies in my belly when I see him now. One look and I want to rip his clothes off and do wicked things to him."

"And have you?"

"No." I drop my head as I try and figure out why.

"Why not?"

"Well, he hasn't tried to fuck me for a start."

"He's probably trying to be respectful."

"It's also tied up with Xander. It feels wrong to be with Beck when Xander is all alone."

Lottie munches on a pretzel as she looks at me. "That's his choice. If he decides it's over for good, are you and Beck done?"

I think he already decided that and, honestly, I don't think I could go back to what we had before anyway. Beck and I deserve more. Lottie is waiting patiently for me to answer as Audrey picks at the red Skittles in the bowl before us. She's so weird, she only eats red candy because according to her, it tastes better.

"I'll never be done with Beck. He's the love of my life, always has been. The problem is, so was Xander, and it's held me back from moving on with Beck."

"I can't imagine not having Linc in my life. He was a dick to me at first as you all know, but now he treats me like a queen."

"Yeah, yeah, we get it. My cousin is a hero. What has that got to do with Amelia?"

“I’m just saying that it would be a mistake to walk away from Beck because Xander can’t or won’t commit to you both. Don’t throw away what you have because I’ve lived that life and it’s empty.”

“Okay, good point.”

Audrey nods in approval and I laugh. It feels good to be with my girls again. I’ve missed this, having them as a sounding board. “So, I should go home and ride Beck like a cowgirl?”

“A cowgirl in heat.”

I laugh and clink my glass of wine to Lottie. “Yes.”

That decided, I enjoy the night with my friends, anticipation warming my body from the deep freeze it’s been in for weeks.

“So, Norrie flew to L.A.”

Lottie nods at my statement. “She did, in her words, to kick some sense into her stubborn, mule-headed brother.”

I laugh at the image but have no doubt, she’ll do it.

“Yeah, but did you hear she took Hudson with her?”

Audrey’s lip curls as Lottie mentions Hudson. “Why?”

“Not sure, but I gather it’s something to do with his contracts.”

“She should have taken a decent lawyer, then,” Audrey snipes.

“Hey, Hudson is a great lawyer.”

“Sure he is. He’s just an insect of a human.”

“Why do you hate him so much?” I ask, glad that the attention is off me for a change.

Audrey huffs, throwing her hair over her shoulder, the glossy locks worthy of a TV commercial even at this time of day. “I don’t hate him. I don’t think about him at all.”

“Hmm, seems like you do.”

Audrey stands and flicks her wrist, putting her back to us. “Can we change the subject please?”

I pause glancing at Lottie as I hear the crack in my friend’s voice. Lottie looks as shocked as me and because of it we let it go, but there’s more to this than she’s letting on and I need her to know we are here for her. “We can, but if you ever need to talk, then I’m here for you, Aud.”

“Me too.”

She turns and gives us an overly bright smile. “Thank you. Now, where are we on wedding planning, Lottie?”

The evening moves on and by ten pm I’m tipsy and wanting my man. I could call an Uber to pick me up, but I know Beck is home and doesn’t like me getting in a car with a stranger. I call him and he says he will be here in fifteen minutes. The deep timbre of his voice makes my body heat and suddenly I’m excited to get home. Audrey opens the door when it buzzes and my heart swoons at the sight of him.

“Hey, Aud.”

I don’t think, I just act, running up to him and throwing myself in his arms. He steps back with an oomph but holds me tight, his arms around me keeping me close. I wrap mine around his neck and kiss him deep, a moan slipping from my throat as he kisses me back, his tongue dancing with mine. I pull back and look at his handsome smile and I can see the tension easing out of him. “I missed you.”

He laughs as he lets me slide down his body until my feet touch the floor, but he doesn’t let me go, he keeps me in his arms. “You saw me a few hours ago.”

“I know. It was too long.”

His eyes go soft and I know that look, it’s one I’ve seen so many times, and it’s so full of love for me. “It was.”

“Okay, out of my house. I need to go make friends with my vibrator after witnessing you two and Linc and Lottie making out in my foyer.”

I laugh as we say good night to Audrey, and Beck leads me to the car. He opens my door and helps me in, stealing a kiss as he buckles me in. As soon as we're moving, his hand takes mine and rests our entwined fingers on his thigh. I feel his glance and turn to see him watching me.

“Did you have fun?”

I sigh. “I did.” I chatter on about the wedding and Audrey and Hudson and the mystery between them and before I know it we're back at my place. Beck parks and leads me to the elevator, his arm around my waist as I lay my head on his chest. I feel his kiss on my head and close my eyes, soaking up the feeling of being loved by this man.

He takes my key and opens my door for me and stops. “Do you want me to come in?”

I stop midstride and turn to see the hesitancy in his stance. He's never asked before, using my space much like his, as his own. Have I made him feel so uncertain he doesn't know how much I need him in my life?

I tug his hand as shame hits me and Beck steps up to me. My hands trail over his chest and I press my body against his, feeling his hard cock against my belly as his hands stroke over my hips.

“I don't ever want you to leave.” My heart hammers as I say the words, and for a second he doesn't seem to understand.

“I won't leave you, Tink.”

“I know that. I mean I want to wake up every morning with you. I want us to go to bed together every night.”

His face morphs into a giant smile. “Are you sure?”

I grin and bite my bottom lip to stop my face from splitting in two with joy. “Never been more sure of anything.”

“In that case.” He slams the door behind him and scoops me into his arms, a wicked grin playing over his lips. In three quick strides, he deposits me on the couch and starts to shed his clothes. “Get naked, Amelia. Don't make me wait.”

I begin to hastily pull at my clothes as I watch his magnificent body come into view. His chest is wide and tan, with muscles stacked perfectly. His thighs are strong and thick and his cock is a work of art. If cocks could be art, his would be. I am ogling him as I sit totally naked, every nerve in my body pulsing with the need for his touch.

“Like what you see, Tink?”

“I do.” I beckon him closer and he steps up to where I’m sitting on the edge of the couch. He palms his thick length, stroking slowly as I lick my lips. His free hand comes to my cheek and holds me with such tenderness that my throat constricts with tears. I blink them away, but he sees me, he knows me.

“We don’t have to do this, baby.”

“I want you, I just... I love you so much, Beck.”

His eyes darken and his facial muscles relax. “I love you too, baby.”

We connect like that for a few moments, each of us allowing the other unbidden honesty with no veils between us. Then his thumb presses down on my bottom lip and something inside me cuts loose. I need him. My body aches for his touch, his hands, his mouth, his cock.

“Open up that sweet mouth for me, Tink.”

I do as he says, the low rumble of his command sparking something deep inside me. My pussy clenches, an empty feeling making me feel heavy and achy. He runs the head of his cock over my bottom lip, letting me taste him before he feeds his cock into my waiting mouth. I moan as I slide my tongue along the tip before swirling the underside with the flat of my tongue, drawing a groan of pleasure from him.

Giving head is powerful and even knowing that he stands above me, I know who holds the power. I take him deeper until he hits the soft palate at the back of my throat. I gag and pull back before doing it again and again. Alternating with licks up his length that’s soaked with my saliva and his pre-

cum. Tears fall from my eyes and I let them come, knowing how much he gets off on it.

“You have a perfect mouth.”

His fingers tighten in my hair and I slide my fingers down my belly and stroke my clit.

Beck watches me, his eyes going black with desire. “Such a naughty girl touching what’s mine.”

I smile around him dragging my teeth gently over his cock, causing him to hiss in pleasure.

“Fffuuuuuckkk.”

He guides me off his cock with his hand in my hair and I whimper in displeasure.

Beck smiles and leans down to kiss me, stealing my senses with his wicked lips. “Don’t worry, greedy girl, I’m not done with you yet.”

Then he puts his hand on my chest and pushes me back so I land with my back on the couch, my legs on the floor. He drops to his knees and shoulders his way between my thighs. I sigh, all the tension leaving me as he dips his head and swipes his tongue along my pussy. My back arches when he sucks my clit between his teeth and a climax hits me from nowhere. I scream his name as I ride out my orgasm, my legs wrapped around his head. My body tingles and throbs as I buck my hips with no shame, only the feel of him and what he gives me matters.

He gives me another long lick, lapping up my climax before kissing my inner thigh. I tousle his hair and he winks at me. “I’m gonna fuck that tight cunt now, Tink.”

My pussy aches, clenching around nothing at his dirty words. He stands and lifts me like I weigh nothing and slams me against the wall. He grips my ass, my legs dangling over his forearms as he plows into me, stretching me around his cock. I cry out, my fingers scrabbling for purchase on his shoulders as he begins to fuck me. There’s no finesse or tenderness about this moment. It’s raw and dirty as we both

take from each other and it feels real and wonderful, and I'm on the brink of another climax.

“Don't ever take this tight cunt away from me again, Amelia.”

His hips piston hard, mine slamming into the wall as he cups the back of my head and brings my lips to his.

“Did you hear me?”

His demand is harsh with emotion, and I know I hurt him by retreating when he needed me and I hate it. “Never, Beck. I'll never stop being yours, not ever.”

My answer seems to unlock a part of him and he lets go of the last piece of his control as if he finally trusts me. His teeth sink into the tendon at my neck and shoulder as he pumps into me, his thumb finds my clit as he bends his knees and adjusts his angle and I scream in pleasure.

“Oh, Beck, yes. Right there. Don't stop.”

He lifts his head, and we lock eyes as he shoves me off a cliff and I hurtle full speed toward an explosive climax that almost makes me black out. The edges of my vision blur as pleasure rushes over me like a torrent. His thrusts become harder, the sound of skin slapping against skin almost drowned out by our moans. His body goes rigid and then he bellows out my name as he slams his lips against mine.

Our breathing is harsh as we catch our breath, his strong arms holding me up. He carries me to the shower and we clean up, his hands gentle as he washes my skin and shampoos my hair. I can feel the love in every touch. I do the same, showing him with lazy touches how much I treasure him. Finally, we get ready for bed. I slip one of his t-shirts over me and we climb into bed. Beck pulls me across his chest, positioning me so I'm a human blanket and it feels right, something in my world settles. We lay there for a bit, each of us deep in thought before he speaks.

“Look at me, Tink.”

I lift my eyes to him and see nothing but love for me, but behind it I see sadness and I hate that I had any part of that.

“I love you.”

“I love you and I’m sorry if I made you feel like I wasn’t here for you.” He shakes his head and goes to deny it and I place my finger over his lips. “Don’t lie. I did and I’m sorry. I don’t ever want you to think that you’re not enough for me because you are, Beck. You’re the love of my life and nothing will ever change that.”

“But you miss him.”

I could lie, I could tell him I don’t miss Xander, but that’s not who we are. “I do miss him. Xander made me feel something different. He gave us a different dynamic and it’s not that I don’t love this one, I just...”

“It’s okay, I get it. I miss him too. I’m so angry with him for how he treated you and yet I can’t help but worry about him. I hate the idea of him going through this alone.”

“He has Norrie.”

He kisses me and holds me closer. “I know and it’s ultimately his choice.”

I kiss his chest and rest my head against his heart. “Do you think you could ever forgive him?”

His fingers slide through my hair and I smuggle closer. “I honestly don’t know. I told him I loved him and his first reaction was to walk away and leave us to the wolves. I’m not sure I could do that again or trust him.”

I get that. It takes a lot for Beck to give his heart and trust and Xander mistreated it. Not that he’s shown any signs of wanting that, even the texts between us were brief and awkward. Perhaps a few months of fun was all it was ever meant to be. Maybe Beck and I will look back one day with fondness and not like we each have a Xander-shaped hole in our lives.

But today is not that day.

26: *Xander*

“I CAN’T BELIEVE I TRUSTED THAT MAN FOR SO LONG.”

Harrison gives me a look that is less angry than the ones I’ve been receiving from him the last two days. “It happens. You’re like Norrie, she sees the good in people too, and thank God she does, or I’d be a lot worse off for it.”

A grin stretches over my face at that. “Yeah, you would, but I still feel foolish.”

“Well, you found out and you’re fixing it now.”

Harrison parks outside my manager’s office and I see Hudson waiting on the sidewalk for me. The things I found out about Len, once a private investigator got involved, turns my stomach. Not only has he shafted me but everyone he’s ever worked with. That includes Lois, who was angry but not surprised. I guess when you’ve been in the business as long as she has, nothing shocks you.

“Ready?”

I nod, this is part one of getting my life back, part two is to beg and grovel until Amelia and Beck forgive me for the way I’ve treated them. Not having them in my life these last few weeks has been hell, and shown me a lot of things about the man I am and the man I want to be.

I’ve spent more than a few late nights talking with Norrie and Harrison, admitting my addiction, the shame I hold about being so weak, the shame I have about my sexuality, and it’s purged a lot of the pain I’ve been hanging on to. Tears have

been cried, mine and Nora's, but new bonds have been built too, and I feel stronger in some ways than I did before.

"Xander." Hudson shakes my hand.

"Thanks for coming, man."

Hudson is a fucking good lawyer and, more than that, a good man, and he's helped me untangle the messes that Len has gotten me into. Like the exclusivity deal with a certain studio that involved a backhand payment to him of four million dollars.

"Let's do this. I have places to be."

I walk in with my head high, a confidence that doesn't feel natural to me etched across my body language and face. I'm channeling Beck right now. My gut twists with pain. What I wouldn't do to have him beside me, to have him at my back, but I don't deserve it and that's the truth.

I almost trip over my own feet when I turn the corner and see the very man I was just thinking about standing tall, a three-piece suit fitted to his gorgeous body. Beside him, Amelia is talking to Lois, her long hair falling down her back, a sexy red pantsuit, and nude heels giving her the look of a woman you don't fuck with.

Turning to Harrison, my mouth hangs open and I'm glad Beck and Amelia haven't spotted me yet. "What is this?"

"I called them. Thought you might want the support."

"I don't deserve it."

Harrison shrugs. "Maybe not, but they came anyway."

"I don't know what to say to them."

"Well, figure it out because Beck just spotted you."

I swallow the lump of nerves in my throat and turn to see Beck and Amelia walking toward me hand in hand. The sight of it almost takes my legs from me. I miss them so badly I want nothing more than to fall to my knees and beg them to forgive me but now isn't the time. Beck doesn't even crack a smile, his armor is in place, his Dom demeanor taking up all

the air in the room. Amelia offers me a small smile, and I love her for it. Fuck, I just love her and it takes everything in me not to blurt that out.

“Xander.”

“Thank you for coming.”

“Well, this affected us too, and Amelia thought we should be here when the man partly responsible gets what’s coming to him.”

Okay, so he’s doing this for Amelia. I can live with that.

“Well, I appreciate that but the truth is, I’m solely responsible for how I treated you both.”

“Agreed. Now can we get this done? I have to be in surgery this afternoon.”

I nod. I want to say more but now isn’t the time or the place so I allow Lois to lead us back. We pass Emma, who jumps from her desk to try and stop us.

“What’s going on?”

She puffs out her chest and places her hands out. Lois marches straight up to her, her kaftan billowing, and Emma sneers. “Lois, shouldn’t you be at your little desk?”

Oh, this will be good.

“Little girl, you have two seconds to get out of my way before I use those balloons you have on your chest as a fucking pin cushion.”

Emma huffs, her cheeks going red and I suspect if her face could move she’d be pouting. “You can’t talk to me like that. I have seniority here as Len’s PA.”

“Oh, fuck off. I own this damn company. Now get your Botox-filled ass out of my way.”

Lois moves past Emma and we burst in on Len, who looks up in shock, his smarmy face transforming into a welcoming smile as he stands to greet me.

“Xander, how is my favorite movie star?”

I hear Amelia snort and glance at her with a smirk. A shared look passes between us and it bolsters me for what comes next. “You’re fired, Len.”

Hudson steps forward and thrusts papers at him which he blindly takes. “You’ve been served.”

Len’s jaw hangs open. “Is this a joke?”

“No joke. We know about the backhanders, the assaults you’ve covered up with my money, and the fact that you’ve screwed me in every fucking way possible. I’m suing you for every fucking penny you took from me, and my lawyer is leading a class action lawsuit against you for all the women you’ve abused. You’re finished.”

“You can’t do this.” He looks at Lois. “Lois, tell him.”

She smiles, and on this old broad it’s positively terrifying. “Pack your shit and get out. I’ll be calling every studio and agency I know and making sure you never work in this industry again.”

Len grinds his teeth, his face going red and then he seems to spot Beck and Amelia and it morphs into something else, something ugly.

He lunges. “This is your fault, you fucking whore, spreading your legs for them.”

Beck moves, but I’m faster and I have Len pinned to his desk face first, my rage bubbling under my skin. “Don’t you ever fucking speak to her like that. In fact, don’t fucking speak, think, or mention her name again or I’ll personally fucking end you.” He’s going blue from the grip I have on his neck and in this second I think I could actually kill this man, but I won’t destroy my life for a piece of shit like him. I let go and he coughs and slides to the floor, trying to catch his breath.

“You’d be nothing without me.”

I look down on the man I trusted with my life and realize that he’s so wrong. “For a long time, you made me think that. I thought I was only a success because of you but that isn’t the case. I’m good at what I do, the people I work with respect

me, and I treat people the same way. And even if you were right and I fall on my ass, now, at least, it's with integrity and I can look myself in the mirror and be proud of who I am."

"You mean a fucking fag."

I grind my teeth at the slur and turn to look at the man I love, who's watching me with nothing but support even after everything I have done.

"If by that disgusting term, you mean that I love men, then yes. And for a long time, I was ashamed of that but not anymore. I'm proud of who I am and from now on I'll cherish the people I love and show them how much I value them."

I glance at Hudson who nods, turn on my heel, and walk out. We pass Emma, who's packing her shit, clearly not willing to go down with this ship. Hudson will stay until the police arrive and take the files. Lois can handle it, but Hudson offered and I'm glad. I don't trust Len.

Out on the street, I take my first full breath for what feels like weeks and bend to rest my hands on my knees.

Harrison pats me on the back and bends down to grin at me. "Did that feel good?"

I smile, my chest expanding from the weight it has lost. "Fuck, yeah."

He holds out his hand and I see Beck and Amelia walking away. I slap Harrison on the back and chase after them. "Beck, Amelia, wait up."

They're at the car when they stop and Beck turns to me, his posture rigid and unforgiving.

Now I'm here I don't know what to say. "Thank you both for coming. I wasn't expecting it and I don't deserve it."

"You're welcome."

"I hope you can find fulfillment, Xander." Amelia's voice is slightly husky as she speaks and Beck wraps his arm around her waist and holds her to his side.

"Thank you. Do you think we could talk?"

“Why?” Beck demands.

I can see he’s not going to make this easy, but then I didn’t make it easy for them either, so I deserve this. “I just want to explain.”

Amelia rubs his arm and he glances down at her, his features instantly softening and my belly clenches with longing. They share a silent unspoken conversation and then he lifts his head. “Give us some time.”

I shove my hands in my pockets to keep myself from reaching for either of them. “Okay, but can I text, now and then?”

“I’d like that.”

Amelia is such a beautiful gentle soul, and I want to fall to my knees and hug her, never letting go for giving me that small window of opportunity. “Thank you.”

“We should go.”

I stand back as Beck helps Amelia into the car and I can’t help but admire them together. They’re both stunning but it’s how they interact that draws me like a moth to a flame. Their connection is something you read about. A love that only a few are lucky enough to ever experience. They shared it with me and I trashed it.

He slams the door and turns to me. “Are you doing okay?”

I want to pump the air with joy at his question because it means he cares, but I don’t. I hold still and drink him in as he lets his façade crack just a little. This man told me he loved me, but I never said it back. Instead, I took it and stomped all over it with my actions. “I’ve been attending online meetings.”

“Good.”

Beck dips his head and I see him fighting the urge to say more but he doesn’t, and I watch him get in his car and drive away.

“You good?”

Harrison has become my unlikely ally in this, and it means a lot to have him in my corner. “Yeah, I will be. I just need to figure out how to make this right.”

He pursues his lips. “It will need to be big and public.”

I kick the sidewalk. “You think? Beck is pretty private.”

“Exactly and you dragged his name through the mud publicly, so the apology needs to be the same.”

“Hmm.”

“Come on. Norrie is dying for an update so let’s go back to my place and figure it out.”

“I appreciate this, Harrison. I know we had a rough start and I basically fucked over your friends but I truly appreciate the way you’ve stepped up for me.”

“You’re family, and I love your sister. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do to make her happy, and that includes helping out her brother when he’s being an idiot.” He shrugs. “Plus, despite what happened, I saw how happy Beck was and I know that’s because of Amelia but it’s also you, too. You three work.”

Yes, we did and if it takes forever I’m going to prove to them I’m worthy of the love they so freely showed me.

“Go big you say? I might have an idea.”

27: Beck

POPPING TWO PAIN PILLS, I CHASE THEM DOWN WITH A GLASS of water and turn back to the images on my screen. This surgery tomorrow is going to be tricky and long, but it's not something I haven't done before. That's not what is causing the headache. It's the two tickets to the Molly Sanders show that came by courier last week.

I know who sent them, I just don't know why. Ever since Harrison called and explained what Xander's manager had done, I haven't been able to get my head on straight. I was all for leaving him to swing like he did to us, but Amelia has a soft heart and convinced me to go and support him.

In some ways, I'm glad I did because the man I saw give Len his marching orders is the man I love but I can't forget how he turned on us. The fact that I'd been two seconds from dragging his mouth to mine and kissing the ever-loving fuck out of him makes it worse.

"Hey, got a second?"

I turn, a smile already spreading over my face as Amelia walks into my office, or the makeshift office I've set up in her apartment. God, I love this woman so much. After the first few days when she closed me out, things have been great. We're a unit, our bond unbreakable and now more than ever she stabilizes something in me.

"I always have a minute for you."

She saunters toward me, her hips swaying and I can't take my eyes off her. She moves to stand between my legs and I

grip her ass and put her on the desk in front of me. Her hands move to my hair, my eyes falling closed at her touch, and I moan in pleasure as she massages my scalp. “That feels nice.”

“You seem tense. Is it about tonight?”

I stroke my hands up her bare thighs as I look up at her. “No.”

Her smile is my kryptonite and she knows it. “Liar.”

I sigh and she continues to soothe me with her hands but now my body wants more and I scoot my chair forward and push her dress up, exposing her bare pussy. That rule still applies and I know she loves to feel naughty by going bare for me at home. This is my home now. I moved in officially yesterday, but honestly, where she is has always been home for me.

“Beck?”

I pepper open-mouthed kisses up her inner thighs as she spreads her legs for me, her arousal shining on her pink lips. “Hmm?”

“Behave, I’m trying to talk to you.”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t come in here looking like a fucking snack, baby.”

Her laugh is deep and husky and my dick is so fucking hard for her. All the tension from a few minutes ago has melted away.

“Why are you worried about tonight?”

I lift my head and frown. “I’m not worried. I just want to know why he invited us.”

“He’s trying to make amends, Beck.”

“I know, but tickets to a live taping and a few texts aren’t going to do it.”

“I know, but I want to go anyway.”

“Fine, then we can go. Now, can I eat this pussy or what?”

“You’re asking me? Wow, this is bad.”

Her sass makes my cock ache and my hand twitch to redde her ass. “Looks like someone wants to get her ass spanked.”

“Maybe she does.”

“Get your ass in the bedroom and I want you naked by the time I get there.”

I smile as she jumps up and runs away laughing.

I know she’s trying to distract me and make this easier for me, and I love her for it. I let her because fucking this woman is never a hardship.

We spend the afternoon in bed and then get ready to go. Amelia looks stunning in a floaty yellow wrap dress that does amazing things for her tits and couples it with open-toe boots and a black leather jacket. We’re shown to our seats, which are at the front, and I can feel Amelia’s nerves as people whisper around us. The media storm has died down, but we’re recognized a lot more than we ever wanted and it makes me angry all over again. We never wanted this but we would have dealt with it for Xander. We knew being with him in our situation would attract attention. For him, we would have stomached it but the way it went down is a bitter pill that still sticks in my throat.

I cup her chin and turn her to face me. “You’re so fucking beautiful.”

Her face softens, her lips parting and I kiss her, pouring everything I feel into that kiss before I pull away and she grins.

“If that’s the reaction this dress gets, I’m getting one in every color.”

“It’s not the dress, it’s you.”

The lights flicker and soon we’re being led through some kind of drill by a warm-up act. The host, Molly Sanders, is being touted as the next Oprah. I’ve seen her show a few times and it’s good. She’s a tough interviewer and doesn’t shy away from the hard questions. Before we know it, the music is playing and Molly is on the set.

“Boy, do we have a show for you tonight. My first guest has been all over the media lately and not for his movies. Please welcome Xander Reynolds.”

My gut tightens as we all clap and Amelia leans into me as Xander walks on set. He looks hot in dark pants, a white shirt, and a matching dark vest, his sleeves rolled to his muscular forearms. I hear Amelia’s intake of breath and know she’s feeling the same way as I am. An ache in my chest from missing him, a longing that’s a physical pain.

“Xander, good to see you.”

Xander takes a seat and looks out at the audience with a smile, his eyes searching until they find us and I see his shoulders relax. What is it about tonight that makes it so important for us to be here?

She leads him through a few warm-up questions. He’s relaxed and the audience loves him. He is charming, personable, sexy, and he exudes a new confidence that wasn’t there before.

“So life has been interesting for you these last few weeks. Tell us about that.”

He looks at us and Amelia reaches for my hand.

“Well, earlier this year I met an amazing woman and from the first moment, I was captivated. She was beautiful, sexy, the smartest person I’ve ever met, and we hit it off. Being with her was easy. It was like finding a home.”

“You’re talking about Amelia Stone.”

He nods and I feel Amelia grip me harder as his eyes come to her.

“Yes. I fell head over heels for her. But not just her. A few years ago, I met a man named Beck Goldsmith. He was handsome, charming, and a gifted surgeon.”

“You mean Beckham Goldsmith, the heart surgeon?”

“I do, yes. The night I met him he saved my life.”

“Wow, can you elaborate?”

My heart is hammering in my chest so hard it's a wonder people can't hear it. This is his worst nightmare, and he's exposing it for the world to see.

"I hurt myself on set and got addicted to Oxy. The night we met, I'd overdosed and would have died if he hadn't been there. He got me into rehab and I got clean."

"Congratulations."

Xander smiles and I can feel the silence, the audience is eating this up.

"I've been clean since. It turns out Beck was Amelia's best friend since they were kids, but I could see the way he looked at her."

I can feel eyes on us now and I don't know whether to run and get us out of there or stay and hear where this is going.

"He loved her," Molly says with fake compassion.

"He did and I don't blame him. She's this amazing woman but what I didn't count on was the attraction between us. Beck is larger than life, he has this magnetism, this presence, and we all ended up in a relationship. The three of us."

"So you're bi-sexual?"

"I am and for a long time I hid that part of myself over the fear of how I'd be perceived."

"So why now? Why tell the world your story?"

"Because I wronged the two people I love the most in the world. I fell in love with Amelia and Beck. They loved me back but I was a coward. I asked them to hide what we were and they agreed because they loved me. When it came out, I let them hang. I let them take all the vile, disgusting insults and I didn't defend them or tell the world how amazing they were. How they'd changed my life and gave me unconditional love and acceptance. Not just them, our friends and family too."

"So you weren't the victim the media thought you were?"

“No, they were. All they ever did was love me and I repaid that love with betrayal.”

“We all make mistakes though, right?”

Amelia is silently sobbing next to me and I can barely keep it together as people look at us, but I only have eyes for Xander, who’s putting everything on the line to make things right with us. “We do, but mine hurt the people I love.”

“So, not just a fling? It was serious between you three?”

“They are without doubt the loves of my life.”

Molly Sanders smiles and looks out into the audience, her eyes finding us. “Is there anything you’d like to say to them?”

Xander turns his big body and leans forward as if he’s talking to the camera but really, he’s talking to us.

“I’m so sorry for the way I treated you both. I was a coward. I was weak and I didn’t treat either of you with the love you deserved or offered me.”

I can see sweat dripping down his temple and lean forward, getting a closer look at his pale skin. Something isn’t right. He doesn’t look well.

“I love you both and hope that one day—”

He clutches his left arm and stiffens before collapsing to the floor. I’m on my feet and running toward him as Amelia screams beside me at the sight of his still body.

“Call 911, now. He’s having a heart attack. Stay with me, Xander.”

I tear at his clothes and position him on his back as Amelia falls to her knees and clutches his hand, tears falling down her anguished cheeks.

I begin CPR, silently praying to God not to take him from us.

I will not lose him.

“Don’t let him die, Beck. Please, you have to save him.”

I hear the pleas of the woman I love, and they echo my own as I ignore everyone around me and work on keeping the man I love alive. I don't know how long I perform CPR. It could be minutes or hours. Time blurs, my sole focus is to keep blood pumping through his body. People are moving around us. Paramedics rush in and I'm shoved out of the way as they use a defibrillator on him.

I pull Amelia out of the way as she tries to hold on to him. "Let them work, baby."

I hold her in my arms as she sobs, both of us looking on as they shock him. I wait for the screen to say he has a pulse but there's nothing and my belly rolls.

They perform it three more times with the same outcome and I'm barely hanging on by a thread.

"Shock him again." The paramedic looks at me with sympathy and I want to kill her for daring to give up on him. "Fine, I'll do it."

I push her out of the way and charge it again. "Come on, you stubborn bastard, live. Don't you dare fucking leave us after that speech."

I shock him again and wait a split second and then there's movement. "We have a rhythm."

My shoulders sag as the paramedics move into action getting him onto a gurney and into the rig. I hold tight to Amelia, my eyes not leaving Xander as we follow behind. "We're coming with you."

She shakes her head. "Only room for one of you."

"Beck, go with him. You'd be more help than me."

I want to argue with her. I'm torn between the two but she pushes me. "Go, I'll call a cab."

"No need."

I see Ryker running up to us, concern etched on his face. "I saw the TV and rushed over here. How is he?"

"They're stabilizing him."

“Go with him. I’ll follow with Amelia.”

I turn to the ambulance crew. “Where are you taking him?”

“West Mercy.”

Thank God. That’s the best hospital.

Ryker leads Amelia away as the rig doors slam and I grip Xander’s limp hand. I kiss his knuckles. “Don’t you dare die on me.”

“He’ll be in good hands, sir. West Mercy has the best heart surgeon in the world.”

I should feel pride at her words because she’s talking about me but all I feel is fear. I could lose him and it would be my fault. I knew weeks ago that some of his symptoms sounded suspicious when he mentioned passing out during a stunt, but I didn’t follow up. Now he could die before I get the chance to tell him I love him and forgive him.

It’s chaos when we arrive but it’s chaos I understand. As he’s rushed through to a private room, I take a second to calm my mind. I need to focus and be the surgeon he needs right now, not the terrified man afraid to lose someone he loves.

“Beck.” I reach for Amelia as she runs toward me, Ryker on her heels. “How is he?”

“They’re doing tests now, but I suspect he’ll need surgery.”

“You’ll do it? You’ll be the one to operate?”

“It’s not really recommended to operate on people you know.”

“I don’t care. He needs the best, he deserves the best, and that’s you.”

Her faith in me strengthens my resolve and pushes the unyielding pain from my chest so I can focus. “Okay.”

I kiss her and walk into the room where Xander is hooked up to a variety of machines. I analyze the data in front of me and take over the scene. Every medic in the room knows who I am and they fall in with my wishes as I make a plan.

“Okay, let’s get him into the OR.”

I look down at his silent, still form and make one final plea to God to help me save him and then I block out everything but my knowledge and try to save the man I love.

28: Amelia

“HOW IS HE?”

I stand as Norrie rushes into the family waiting area and throws herself at me. “Beck took him into surgery.”

Ryker made all the calls to our friends, although every single one of them was already heading our way, having seen it play out on TV.

“I can’t believe this is happening.”

She grips my hand as we sit. Harrison has his arms around her shoulders comforting her. Ryker wraps his arm around me as a sob shudders through me. “He’ll be okay. Beck is the best.”

I bury my head in his chest and cry, but it feels wrong. His scent isn’t Beck’s or Xander’s and it makes me cry harder.

“Hey, my aftershave isn’t that bad.”

I sniffle a laugh at his joke and lift my head as he wipes my tears. “Xander is strong, and Beck is the best there is.”

“I know. I just hate this.”

“I know.” He wraps his arm around me, and I let him. I need his strength to be there for whatever comes next. There’s nothing but friendship in his hug and he doesn’t leave my side the entire night as we all wait. Audrey rushes in and hugs me and Norrie before sitting on my other side and holding my hand. Linc and Lottie arrive with Hudson behind them.

“Why is he here?”

“He’s Xander’s lawyer now and is handling his affairs until he finds a new manager.”

“Oh.”

Audrey doesn’t say more as Hudson comes up to me and crouches down. “I know this is a bad time, but the media are swarming the hospital. What do you want to tell them?”

“Me? Why me?”

“Because Xander made you his proxy. You have full control over his affairs when he’s out of action.”

“What?”

“It’s true.” Norrie squeezes my hand. “He trusts you to do the right thing, Amelia.”

Oh God, this is a lot to take in. Why would he do that? “When did he decide that?”

“The day before we went to see Len.”

“But why? We weren’t even together.”

Hudson smiles and it’s swoon-worthy. The man is hot, like debasingly hot, and he’s also nice, which is a deadly combination.

“He knows that whatever happens, you’ll always do the right thing.”

His words slay me and I want nothing more than to tell him how much I love Xander and how much I’ve missed him in my life.

I straighten my spine and lift my chin. “Fine. Tell them that we have no news and they’re carrying out tests but that Xander is stable.”

Hudson nods in approval. “I will.”

“Jerk.”

I chuckle at Audrey. “He’s a hot jerk though.”

“Meh.”

She laughs and for a second my tension eases a fraction. The night is long, or at least it feels long. Ryker and Linc fetch coffee for everyone and liaise with Hudson about security. Ryker also issues a media blackout of any footage from tonight being leaked. The last thing Xander will need when he's recovering is footage like that everywhere.

“What did you think of the show, before it went to shit?”

I glance at Norrie, who's worrying her lip. “I was shocked. We both were but incredibly touched that he'd be so brave as to acknowledge us like that.”

“Do you think either of you can forgive him?”

I shake my head. “I forgave him a while ago. I know it wasn't malice that made him react the way he did and I love him. Tonight he showed me he loved me too and he did it for all the world to see.”

“What about Beck?”

“Beck loves him, and when he loves someone, it doesn't just disappear. You should have seen him, Norrie. The paramedic had given up, but Beck never did. He kept him alive with his own hands and when they tried to stop, Beck stepped in and brought him back to us. That kind of love doesn't die. He just needs to get over his hurt and I think tonight has taught us that life is short.”

“It really is and I know he's sorry.”

“Oh, sweetie, I know he is and once he gets through this, we'll talk and fix this because I need my boys on the same page. I can't live without either of them.”

Just then Beck walks in looking haggard. I go to him and I can see before he speaks that it's going to be okay. I break down in sobs as he holds me close, absorbing my emotions.

“Is he...?” Norrie's voice shakes.

“He's going to be fine. He came through the surgery and everything looks good.”

“Oh, thank God.” Norrie sags into Harrison.

Ryker slaps Beck on the back. “What did I tell you? Best fucking surgeon in the world.”

“Can I see him?”

Beck nods. “Yes, they’re just settling him into the ICU overnight so you and Norrie can see him but he needs rest.”

I kiss him. “Thank you, Beck.”

“It was nothing.”

“It was everything and you know it.”

“I couldn’t let the big bastard die before I gave him hell for admitting he loves me on national television.”

“He did do that, didn’t he?”

“He did.”

I press my lips to his. “And you love him too.”

“Yeah, fine. I love him. I forgive him but I’m going to torture him a little for the shit he pulled.”

“I’m sure he’ll be happy to endure it.”

Beck leads me and Norrie up to the ICU and we go in and Norrie breaks down. Beck explains what the machines are as gently as he can and gives her a rundown on what caused the heart attack and his prognosis going forward. Turns out he didn’t have a heart attack, he had a cardiac arrest caused by an undiagnosed arrhythmia. Beck fitted a pacemaker, which will stop any future events.

I sit beside Xander, my hand in his as Norrie talks to him quietly. After about ten minutes, she leaves him with a kiss on the forehead and a promise to be back tomorrow morning with cookies. We all laugh at that and I hug my friend goodbye and promise to call if there’s any change.

“Hey.”

I feel Beck’s hand on my neck and turn to look at him. “Thank you.”

“No need to thank me. I was just doing my job and I love him too.”

I can see the emotion on his face as he looks at Xander. “Is he really going to be okay?”

“No reason why he shouldn’t be.”

I rest my head on Beck’s shoulder and we sit like that, him intermittently standing and doing checks or speaking with the nursing staff.

“Do you know he made me his proxy?”

Beck raises his brow. “He did?”

“Yeah, Hudson told me and asked for my statement for the press.”

“Well, I can see why he would. You’re stable and sensible.”

“So is Norrie.”

“True, but he was probably trying to show you he trusts you after everything.”

“And do you trust him?” I ask Beck, needing to know we’re on the same page.

“I do. He made a mistake and he apologized for it. Honestly, Tink, when he collapsed I thought my heart would stop. I’ve never felt so helpless. I don’t know what I’d do if he hadn’t made it.”

I cup his cheek. “But he did because of you.”

He shrugs but I see through him. “I love him and I love you. I wasn’t going to give up on that.”

“So we’re agreed? If he wants to, we’re doing this?”

“I guess so.”

“It gets my vote.”

We both look up at the weak voice from the bed and see Xander with his big blue eyes on us.

I stand and bend over him. “Don’t ever scare me like that again. I thought I’d lost you.”

“Never.”

He reaches for Beck's hand, who takes it gently, wary of the IV. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"I love you, Amelia, and I'm so sorry for the way I treated you."

"It's in the past."

"No, I was wrong and I need you both to know that. I love you and I love Beck. I was damn lucky to have what we did and I didn't appreciate it, but now I know what a world without you looks like and I don't want it."

"Well, I guess it's a good job we love you too, you big asshole." Beck chuckles and palms Xander's cheek.

"Does this mean I can come home?"

"If by home, you mean Amelia's apartment, then yes. How else are we going to make sure you don't undo all my hard work by overdoing it?"

I laugh and for the first time since all this began, I draw a full breath. It's going to be okay. I have both the men I love safe in my arms and that's all that matters to me.

IT TAKES A FEW DAYS BUT WE FINALLY GET XANDER SETTLED at home, and I'm sorting his pillows and fussing when I hear voices from the living area. I walk out and see Ryker pacing and Beck shaking his head, a smirk on his lips.

"You have to help me, Beck."

Ryker spins and spots me, hurrying toward me with a charming smile and I back away, hands up. "Oh, no whatever it is, don't involve me."

He takes my hands. "But I need you. Audrey is trying to make me go to this stupid life drawing class with her."

A laugh bubbles up and I have to roll my lips to keep it inside. Ryker looks desperate. "I didn't know Audrey could draw. Ryker, I know you can draw really well, but Audrey not at all."

“She can’t, but she’s decided she wants to learn and as I’m the only single friend now, she’s forcing me to go.”

I fold my arms and cock my head as Beck comes up beside me and kisses my temple, causing me to lean into him. “You know you could say no to her.”

“Yeah, and I could dance naked with a cactus for shits and giggles but both would end up with my balls in a vice.”

I roll my eyes. “Why are you all so scared of Audrey? She’s perfectly reasonable.”

Ryker bugs his eyes at me. “Oh, yeah, of course she is. I love her but she has this way of making you do things you don’t want to and then making you think it was your idea.”

“She never makes me,” Beck pipes up.

Ryker gives him a withering look. “That’s because someone already owns your balls, numb nuts.”

Beck goes rigid and then shrugs. “I have no problem with that. Tink can take them out and play with them whenever she wants.”

I waggle my brows. “Is that so?”

He bends and kisses my neck and Ryker throws up his hands. “Thanks for nothing.”

He storms toward the door and slams it behind him.

“You should go after him.”

Beck gives me a look and I know he’s torn. “It’ll be fine. Go see if you can talk to Audrey and get him out of it.”

“I really don’t see the harm in one class.”

“Me either but he seems stressed. Maybe take him for a beer and find out why.”

“God, I love you.”

“Of course you do. I own your balls.”

His laugh warms my heart as he kisses me and rushes after his friend. I’ve never seen Ryker so riled up and I have a

feeling it has less to do with the drawing and more to do with something else.

Epilogue One: Beck

ONE YEAR LATER

“BECK, THIS IS BEAUTIFUL.”

Amelia gasps as we lead her onto the roof of our favorite restaurant. It's the first place we came as a throuple after Xander recovered from his surgery. Tonight I've had fairy lights and white hyacinths strung on every surface with a table set for three in the middle.

“I wanted it to be perfect.”

Today is our first anniversary as a throuple, and I plan to make it a night neither Amelia nor Xander will forget. He winks at me and I feel my nerves ease. He has no idea of my plans but he knows me. I pull out Amelia's chair and she smiles as she fingers the fragrant blooms on the table.

“It smells wonderful up here.”

“I wanted it to be everything you ever dreamed of.”

Her lips wobble as if she's clueing into my plans and I drop to my knee in front of them both.

“Amelia, I don't know when my love for you changed but I know that every day I love you more. You're my best friend, my confidant, my person. When I wake up I feel lucky every single day because I have you beside me.” I angle my words at Xander next. “Xander, I never expected to feel this way about anyone but my Tink, but you smashed your way into my heart like a wrecking ball and made a home for yourself. You make me a better man, a better partner, and a better human being. I know I can be difficult but I love you both from the bottom of my heart and it would be the greatest honor of my life if you'd marry me. I know we can't legally marry but I want a ceremony, a commitment so that everyone knows you're mine and I'm yours.”

I show them the rings I carefully chose, a large trilogy ring that represents us all for Amelia, and a plain black platinum band with a single small diamond for Xander.

Xander tips his head back and laughs and it's not the response I'm expecting but before I can get offended, he pulls out two similar ring boxes from his pocket.

"Great minds." He looks at Amelia, then at me, and suddenly we're all laughing.

I cup Amelia at the back of her neck. "Is that a yes?"

She nods, tears streaming down her face. "That's a yes to both of you. Nothing would make me happier than being your wife and yours too, Xander."

"I would love to be your husband, Beck."

I pop the ring on Amelia and Xander follows up with a completely different solitaire style that fits perfectly alongside the one I bought her. We fit, we always have and we always will. Xander and I exchange rings and mine is a simple platinum band.

We eat dinner and talk, making plans for our future, one that I never dared dream I could have. "Who would have thought we'd end up here?"

Xander shakes his head. "Not me, that's for sure."

"Me either." Amelia holds both our hands and Xander gives me a look that I can easily interpret.

"So, I know what I want for dessert."

I grin wickedly and stand, hauling Amelia into my arms. "Me too."

"Let's go."

We spend the weekend in bed, feasting on each other and reveling in the gift of love we've been given. I didn't ask for this life, I didn't expect it, but I'll cherish it and the people in it until the day I die.

Epilogue Two: Xander

FIVE YEARS LATER

I SIT AT OUR TABLE AMONGST SOME OF THE BIGGEST STARS OF a generation and marvel at my life. Beside me is my wife of four years, her head tilted back in laughter at something my sister is saying. Her belly is heavy with our second child, and I fall a little more in love with her every day.

She senses my eyes on her and turns, gifting me with a huge smile that makes my heart race, and in a good way, not like I'm about to drop dead. She mouths the words 'I love you' and I do the same and then her eyes move to my right and I follow her gaze. I place my hand on Beck's thigh, my husband in every way that counts and he plays with my fingers as he continues his discussion with Ryker and his wife.

Champagne is flowing and I know this night is one of many that will go into a mental vault where all my best memories are stored. I type out a quick text to Lincoln's Mom who's looking after all the kids tonight, including our daughter, Bea, who's the image of her handsome father. He must sense I'm looking at him and glances at me.

"Are you texting Heather again?" His lips are turned up in a grin of indulgence and I can't resist pulling him for a kiss. Affection between Beck and I has always been easy at home, which is now a brownstone a few houses down from my sister. In public, we're usually more reserved, but tonight I feel like showing the world who I belong to, and it's him and Amelia.

He pulls back his thumb and forefinger gripping my chin. "What was that for?" His eyes are dark with desire and that is one thing we have had to get more creative with. We can no longer fuck where the mood strikes. Having a child makes you shake things up and we have found new ways to quell the desire we have for each other.

"Because I love you."

He growls against my lips and I feel Amelia slip her hand into mine on my lap, her palm stroking my erection

underneath the tablecloth.

“You’re making it difficult not to drag you into the nearest empty room and fuck that beautiful ass.”

My body shudders at his words and her hand on me and he grins and nips at my lip.

“Later, baby. First, let’s see who won.”

I glance to the stage where the MC is reading out the nominees for best actor and Amelia and Beck both grip my hands in encouragement. Losing You was a story about a man who lost his wife and the journey he went on to find love again. There were fewer shirtless scenes, but still a few. Luckily, the pacemaker that saved my life wasn’t visible and the tiny scar was easily covered by makeup. Not that I care, it’s a reminder to me every day how lucky I am to be here with the people I love. How wonderfully talented my husband is, how resilient my wife is, and bossy when it comes to caring for those she loves. I’m so blessed and not a day goes by when I don’t feel it.

“And the winner is..... Xander Reynolds for Losing You.”

Applause rings out around me as I stand on shaking legs. Beck cups my face and kisses me, and then Amelia reaches up to kiss me, her big belly making me bend lower and seal my mouth to hers.

“I’m so proud of you, Xander.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too. Now get up there.”

I walk to the stage in a haze, not really comprehending that I’ve just won the biggest award in film for a movie I truly believed in.

I take the award and stand at the microphone, looking out over the people who helped me get here and I feel blessed beyond measure.

I make sure to thank every person I can think of, but leave the most important to the end.

“Lastly, I would like to thank my husband and wife, for putting up with me. We didn’t have the easiest of starts but their love and never wavering support have enriched every part of my life and allowed me to be the best man I can be and the best actor. I love you, Amelia, and I love you, Beck.”

Amelia is crying as Beck holds her and she blows teary kisses up to the stage at me.

I give the award a shake in the air and then I’m walking back into the arms of my family and friends.

Love really can conquer all

Epilogue Three: Amelia

TEN YEARS LATER

“MOMMY, WHY DO I HAVE TO STAY WITH AUNTY NORRIE AND Uncle Harry?”

I crouch down to my eight-year-old daughter Bea and take in her gorgeous blue eyes so like Beck's. I tweak her nose and she giggles.

“Because, little lady, Mommy has to make sure the rocket gets to the moon.”

“But why can't Scout and I come with you?”

“Well, because Mommy has to concentrate real hard and when you and your brother are around, all Mommy can think about is how much she loves you.” I tickle her tummy and she giggles.

“Ready to go?”

I feel Xander's hand on my back and as he smiles down at me with so much love I catch my breath. “I'm ready.”

“Nervous?”

He slips his arms around me and I sink into his arms. I never get over how one touch from him or Beck and everything is right with my world. “A little.”

“You're going to be fine. You're the best and sexiest lead scientist NASA has ever had.”

This job is a dream come true and it's only because I have the support of my wonderful family that I get to live it. “You have to say that, you love me.”

“I do love you but it doesn't make it any less true.”

“Hey, enough with that. We have to go.”

Beck rushes in and I swear my husband is more nervous than me. Xander and I share a look and a wicked grin crosses his face.

“You're thinking what I'm thinking?”

“I don’t know, are you thinking that it’s been a while since we enjoyed the mile-high club?”

“I was thinking that.”

I grin and he slaps my ass as I crouch down and hug my gorgeous blond-haired son. He’s Xander in every single way, including his size. At only five, he’s the tallest in his class and already had his first proposal from Cait, a girl in his class. I’m just happy it was him and not Bea because I’m not sure her fathers’ are going to do well with her dating. My men are overprotective, to say the least. We never bothered to find out the paternity of either of our kids, one because it doesn’t matter to us, they’re ours and we love them both the same, and two because it’s obvious to anyone with eyes. My husbands’ genes are strong.

Once we’ve dropped the kids off with Norrie and Harrison, we drive to the airfield where we’ll get a flight down to Florida where I’ll oversee the launch of the Enlighten mission. As the flight takes off, Xander grips my hand and Beck drums his fingers on the hand rest. His hair is peppered with grey now and my stomach clenches with how handsome he is. My desire for these two never seems to ease up. After all the ups and downs we’ve been through, not a day has gone by where I haven’t been grateful for them.

“Beck, our girl needs a distraction.”

Beck’s fingers still and he turns to Xander with a dirty smile that make me squeeze my legs together. I see the second his mood changes and I welcome it. I love all facets of Beck but him in Dom mode is decadent and delicious.

“Go to the bedroom. I want you both naked on the bed when I get there. Xander, feel free to warm her up for me.”

Xander grabs my hand and races to the back of the plane where we do exactly what he says. I’m riding Xander’s face when I feel eyes on me and turn to see Beck leaning on the door frame, his arms crossed over his magnificent chest. He looks hungry and I pinch my nipple and moan as Xander flicks my clit over and over.

“Make her come, Xander.”

Beck is bent over the bed behind me, near Xander’s feet and I feel Xander jolt beneath me as Beck swallows his cock down. Seeing my men fuck is the sexiest thing ever. Soon I’m writhing and moaning as I climax all over my husband’s face. I sag against Xander’s body as Beck releases his cock with a pop.

Beck covers my back, his hands lifting me up to my knees. I stay straddled over Xander while his hands play with my nipples as he kisses me. Xander is intent on torturing another orgasm out of me with his talented fingers.

“You gonna let me fuck that sweet ass while Xander takes your pussy?”

A shiver rolls through me at his words. I love taking both my men inside me at once. I crave the feeling of power it gives me.

“Yes.”

Beck kisses me again. “Good girl.”

His hand pushes me down as his hands grip my hips and positions Xander’s cock at my entrance. I ease him into me, slowly, knowing that Beck is watching as he undresses and hiss in pleasure at the feel of him. I begin to ride him as Xander toys with my nipples, teasing and rolling them until I’m on the brink again. I feel a hand on my shoulder then warm lips on my spine as Beck pushes me down to Xander’s chest.

The cool drip of lube along my ass makes me shudder, and then Beck is working his thumb inside me. The pinch of pleasure and fullness as he readies me for his cock makes my body hum.

Xander holds me close and kisses me as I feel Beck’s cock notch against my puckered hole.

“You feel so fucking good, baby. Doesn’t she, Xand?”

“Fucking perfect.”

I moan and whimper as Beck pushes in slowly, my body relaxing as he works his big cock against Xander's, making him groan.

“Hurry up.”

“Patience, husband.”

Xander chuckles. “Yeah, not my best quality.”

Once Beck is fully seated, he grips my hips and groans, his teeth marking my shoulder with tiny bites.

“You ready, baby?”

“Just fuck me.”

And that's what they do, moving in sync, a rhythm of two men who know each other inside and out and know the woman they love too. It's not long before my body is clenching, and spiraling, my climax winding tighter and I cry out as pleasure cascades over me in waves, sensation tingling through every nerve.

“I'm gonna come.”

“Come for me, Xander,” Beck commands.

I feel his release as he bellows into my neck. Beck follows us over and we lie in a tangle of limbs, spent and satisfied.

“I love you.”

I feel Xander turn into me and place his hand over my heart.

“Love you too, wildcat, and I love you, Beck.”

“And I love you both, always and forever.”

Always and forever.

* * *

THIS IS THE HAPPY EVER AFTER FOR BECK, XANDER, AND Amelia. If you want to read what happens to Ryker, you'll find his story in [*The Temptation*](#), releasing September 2023.

Books by L. Knight

KINGS OF RUIN

[The Auction](#)

[The Consequence](#)

[The Unexpected](#)

[The Temptation](#)

About the Author

Lia Knight is a romance author of billionaire romance with lots of angst, and heat. Her heroes are super rich, demanding and know exactly what they want, so when they set their sights on the heroines in these books you know the chemistry will explode your kindle. Having written over forty books under a different pen name she wanted to give those rich, bossy heroes fighting for a story a chance have their say and find their HEA.

When she isn't writing she is binging Yellowstone, The Big Bang Theory, and Bridgerton from her home in Hereford in the UK.

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