



WHEN THE
WILD
WHALES
WAIL

KRIS VANC

When
the
Wild Whales
Wail



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OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

The Charlington Chronicles

Roots

Tempest

Dominium

Tellings of the Time

Hidden by Hours

Mourning the Minutes

Seconds to Silence

Deserted Lilies

Changing Chords

Breaking Bridges

Elided Endings

Standalone

When the Wild Whales Wail

Disclaimer

‘When the Wild Whales Wail’ is a standalone gay romance novel. While I have written Reverse Harems before, this is my first gay romance novel. Dominic’s story was never supposed to be a story, but when he first spoke in ‘Deserted Lilies’, it was a done deal.

Now, if you just like reading MM and RH isn’t your thing, go ahead and read this book now. You don’t need to have read ‘Deserted Lilies’ first, so go ahead.

If you’re one of those people who don’t mind spoilers (raises hand), then go ahead and read this book now.

But if you *do* like RH and if you *don’t* like spoilers, I suggest you read ‘Deserted Lilies’ first. The first book is called ‘Changing Chords’ and has some wild tales to tell.

For those of you who have read ‘Deserted Lilies’; yes, I changed Dom’s eye color from brown to blue. As Corey Taylor sang: ‘Make my black eyes blue’ on CMFT, I did just that. No, really, I just fucked up and call it artistic freedom. You’ll just have to deal, sorry.

Also: I know shit all about the technical shit about boats, nautical law and hunting regulations in this book – just go with it as if it makes sense. Thanks.

Dedication

Sometimes the loudest cries are those you can't hear. Sometimes the softest cries carry the furthest. The depth of despair is not measured in decibel.

Prologue



Six weeks earlier

Every little sound reminds me that this could be it. That there could be a monster lurking in the darkness. I used to feel at ease in the shadows, happier when nobody could see me than when they could. Now I'm not so sure anymore. I'm hiding from people who could be literally anybody.

Yeah, I'm aware that most Victorious members have their ink and their cuts, but both of them are easily hideable by putting on a shirt. And who's to say that other MC's won't help Victorious stop me? I know enough about everything to make me dangerous, which makes me a target.

In exchange for my testimony against my older brother, Nathan, I asked for clemency for everything I did during my time in Victorious. That was almost a year ago. They agreed, with the promise that I would go into WITSEC. Because as I said, I know too much.

Which means the darkness I'm hiding in scares me to death as well.

I'm testifying tomorrow, which means I will face Nathan for the first time in almost a year. It also means that tonight would be an excellent opportunity to try and kill me. If there wasn't so much hanging in the balance of my testimony, I wouldn't

even be all too mad if someone did kill me. After all, I did all the things I'm accusing Nathan of myself as well.

Growing up as the son of the Prez of an MC leads to certain expectations. I was doing runs before I was even legally allowed to drive a bike. We were never taught that what we were doing was wrong, we just never knew there was any other way of living.

Lance is sitting outside in his car, having a conversation about things I'm not supposed to hear. His brakes have been making screeching noises that they shouldn't make, and I've been trying to convince him to let me check them out. He keeps saying that everything's supposed to be done by proper mechanics who are allowed to work on government vehicles. He's a little bitch for all the rules in the world, and it's becoming painstakingly clear that this is becoming my world as well.

I've been hidden away for the better part of a year, ensuring Evan, my brother's ex, can keep living her life. She found happiness after the trainwreck that was her relationship with Nathan. She might not have seen it herself, but that relationship was toxic from the very start. She was never meant for the biker life. He tried to kill her multiple times and he was getting out of control, so I gave myself up so she could keep living her life.

She should have the choice that I never got.

I grab my packet of smokes, put on my jacket and head outside to get my hit. There's a light breeze outside, blowing my loose hair out of my face. It's usually tied when I've got something to work on, but ever since I've been covered up like a dirty secret, there hasn't been much need for me to tie it into a knot.

I hope that there'll be something to keep me busy wherever the hell it is I'm going after the trial. From what I've been told there's a short period where I'm going to some in-between safehouse, until I'm moved to my final location, where I'll get a new identity and life. Perhaps it'll come with a nice side of will to keep living as well.

Did I agree with everything Victorious did? No. But I was never taught that it was wrong what we did, either. It's literally been everything I knew my whole life. It's my whole identity. So perhaps getting a new one, even if it's custom made and fabricated, will turn out to be a blessing in disguise and a fresh start.

I sigh.

In another life I would've loved Evan, or a girl like Evan, in the way my father would have wanted me to. But in this life I love her like a sister and I turn out to be willing to sacrifice my whole life for her.

But is it really living if you've never been allowed to be yourself anyway?

Maybe, just maybe, if I stop being the old Dominic, I can stop pretending to be the tough straight biker. Maybe this time I can just be Dominic, the biker who loves men instead of women.

And just maybe, I can have my own happy ending.



“Last things just arrived. Haven’t seen my KitchenAid yet. You sure you sent it?”

Of course he hasn’t seen his KitchenAid. I fucking kept it. Braden took all the kitchen appliances when he left for California, when he left me. He ran for the hills when he got the opportunity to go somewhere warmer. He didn’t even hesitate when I told him I wouldn’t come with him. I can’t. I’m needed here for my job.

Since he had no trouble packing his things and leaving me, I took something he loved. Not that I’m ever going to use the thing. The only function on that appliance I know is the meat grinder.

I put my phone back in my pocket, having no intention to text him back whatsoever. I crank up the heat in my car while I wait for the ferry to arrive. It’s the whole reason I’m out here. It’s the whole reason I can’t leave.

Jack sneezes, shakes his head, and then lays it down on my thigh. The huge husky likes to pretend he’s a lapdog when he gets the chance.

“Bless you,” I tell him. He looks up at me with one icy blue eye and one amber colored eye. He takes a second to look at me, then he closes them and starts to snooze. He’s made to withstand the cold temperatures of Alaskan winters, but I’ve spoiled him. In some ways he’s more like a cat – finding the warmest spot in the vicinity to curl up in.

The plane should have landed, but I know it takes a fuckton of time to get your luggage. Not that he should have much. He should have a fresh start. I've just learned that most of my witnesses have at least a few things they want to bring. Aunt Julia's pocket watch they got as a heirloom, a photo album with pictures that I shouldn't allow but will let slip through the cracks. Stuff like that.

So I'm a little surprised when I see a Marshal leaving Tom Madsen Airport, a huge man walking next to him, carrying nothing but a duffel bag hanging over his shoulder. I recognize the Marshal from anywhere, it's Lance Grayson, one of the few Marshals who actually enjoys making the trip to Unalaska, Alaska. We're so far off the map that Bumfuck, Nowhere is easier to find.

I get Jack off my leg, who huffs in irritation that I dare disturb his sleep and then gets right back to it when I leave the car. I pull up the collar of my jacket to protect my face from the cold air around me. I'm used to the cold, having lived here for all my life, but it takes adjustments to be able to make it here in these conditions.

The man Lance is bringing with him does *not* look like he prepared for Alaska. He's wearing ripped bleached jeans, biker boots, an open hanging leather jacket and what looks like a shirt beneath it. If this is the way he's going to dress, he's going to make it very easy for the people who are targeting him because he's going to die from exposure before anybody can track him down.

I sigh.

He's going to stand out like a lighthouse in the small population of Unalaska. People are used to me bringing in strays even if they're unaware of my job, but this is going to be a tough one. He's tall, stacked, and looks like some bronzed version of a viking with dirty blond hair in a knot on the top of his head, the rough look finished off by a neatly groomed beard.

The idea of pushing him to his knees and wrapping my fingers in those locks while I steer his face surfaces before I

push it down as deep as I can. I blame Braden texting me right before he got here, making me very aware of the fact that I haven't gotten laid at all the last two months.

Anyway, he's a job, so I'm going to be a professional.

"Lance," I say by way of greeting. The bulky man is wearing sunglasses, even though it's a dark day even by Alaskan standards.

"Warren," he says. "I'm here to hand over Dominic, new last name LaRue. You've read his file, now it's up to you to keep him safe."

I lift the corner of my mouth. Lance can usually be persuaded to spend a few days out here, going on hikes and hunting some, but he seems to be in a rush to leave again.

I hold out my hand to shake Dominic's. His grip is firm, his hands calloused. It's freezing though. "Warren Philips. I'll be your handler for as long as that's needed. I say we get out of here as quickly as possible, because you're going to catch a cold if you're staying out here like this."

Something electric zaps through me when he grunts and says "Let's go" with a gruff voice. He claps a hand on Lance's back and they quickly grab each other's arms before they let go. From what I know, they've been together for a while, Lance keeping him safe throughout the waiting for the trial, so they must've bonded.

"That's all your stuff?" I ask him, pointing to his bag with my chin.

"Yeah, didn't want to bring anything."

"Not true," Lance says, who's already halfway back towards the entrance of the tiny airport. "He wanted to bring his bike, but he wasn't allowed."

Dominic growls again. We both look at how the other Marshal disappears out of sight now that he has made sure his witness is in good hands.

"You wouldn't be able to ride it most of the year anyway," I say to try to make him feel better.

“Still better to be able to ride it half of the year than not be able to ride it at all.”

I turn to him, taking him in for real. Now that I get a better look at him I can see the age that was in his file. The beard makes him look older, but up close, frustrated that he can't have his bike, he looks like the twenty-five year old he is. He's a few inches taller than I am and has a gorgeous tan that you don't get around here. “Everything is going to change. We'll just have to both work on it to go as smoothly as possible. Let's get in the truck, I'll take you to your apartment.”

He follows me to my car, going to the passenger side and opening the door after I do the same on my side. He pauses when he finds a sleeping husky sprawled out over the whole bench of the truck.

“That's Jack,” I say before I scratch my trusty friend behind his ears to wake him up. He's not happy about it. Dominic climbs in after lifting Jack's tail to create enough space for him to sit down.

“You have a wolf as a pet?”

“That's a husky, and he's more like a cat born in the wrong body. He's a great help hunting though.” I take off, driving at an easy pace to the town center of Unalaska.

“No PETA supporters here?”

“Plenty. But we eat what we can forage here, because bringing in meat from the mainland is expensive. All the fish and crustaceans coming in at Dutch Harbor will be the biggest part of your diet.”

Jack stirs awake at that moment, talking in his doggy speech like huskies love to do. He turns around, swishing his tail in my face, and excitedly starts sniffing Dominic. Then he tells exactly what he thinks about that. Jack, that is, Dominic is quiet like a mouse.

“This is Dominic,” I say to Jack. “Friend.”

Jack says some more I don't understand.

Dominic finally unfreezes and lets Jack sniff his hand before he starts petting him and scratching him behind his ear. We drive over deserted roads through the wildlife of Alaska. Near the shore everything is barren, but more towards the inland of the island we're on, nature reigns. Large trees, bodies of water and wildlife are the true masters here.

"It's quiet," he says.

"It's like that most of the time. There's a little more noise in the town center and in Dutch Harbor. You'll see. But with a population of a little over four thousand and a whole lot of land, it's going to be quite a lot."

"You seem to know the place well."

"Grew up here." I know nothing besides this island. It's been home since the day I was born and I wouldn't be able to leave even if I tried.

Dominic stares outside while he absentmindedly keeps stroking Jack, who does not object to the attention he's getting.

When I drive to the town, people start looking up the moment I drive past. When they see I have someone with me, they rise like meerkats on the lookout. They're all a bunch of nosy fucks.

"That's the diner," I say, pointing towards Deanna's Diner. It's been here longer than I've been alive and it's the social hotspot of the town. There's a bar, but it's only open on Fridays. People tend to drink at home. It's a fucking miracle anyone in this town ever meets someone and falls in love, because there isn't much of a choice. Most of the new people we see here are deckhands on the local fisher ships that fall in love with the place and stay. There are a lot of single men here, and just a few women who've got broad pickings.

I've had my fair share of the men fleeing into a man's embrace instead of that of a woman. Life here is an acquired taste, or a necessary taste in my witnesses' cases. Works out well if you ask me. For me anyway.

"Your apartment is two blocks that way," I say pointing towards the far side of town. "It's above the bookstore. It's

more like a library because we don't get new books here all that often because shipping is expensive as shit, so most people just return a book once they've read it."

He nods. He doesn't come across as a reader. To be honest I'm not getting a very good read on him anyway, which is odd, because most of the time I deal with hardened criminals who've struck a deal and start over. They just seem smug because they got away – I know how to deal with that kind. But Dominic? He looks subdued as he stares outside.

I get out of the car, tell Jack to stay put, and take off towards Dominic's new future. Let's see how he handles the reality of what he's facing.



It's a shabby little street that looks as depressing as I feel. The whole trip to Unalaska I've felt out of place, which is exactly what I am. Walking out of that airport and seeing a man fully clothed in winter clothes made it painstakingly clear that I don't belong here. It's only fucking October and I'm already freezing my balls off.

The man, Warren, my new handler, looks like he belongs here. His coat is thick and has a collar he can flip up to protect him from the cold winds. What's up with those anyway? I've never been big on the sea, but besides wet, I never realized it was windy as well.

The moment I laid eyes on the slender man with almost white blond hair, I felt a pull towards him. As far as men go, he's pretty, effortlessly, and it's the last thing I want to notice about him. This is the guy who's going to help me settle in and make sure I stay alive. This is the man who's going to help me rebuild my life, build any life, really. I do not need a crush to make things complicated.

So I ignored the way his pale blue eyes observed me, the strong line of his jaw exuding a strictness I naturally respond to.

I follow him when he gets out into a little alley. We walk past the bookstore he mentioned. I try to glance inside, but the windows are filled with stacks of books and I can't see anything besides endless spines and a warm light shining through the cracks between the stacks.

Warren walks up a flight of stairs right next to the bookstore, leading to a single dark blue door. I try not to stare at this guy's ass while he walks in front of me, grabbing a set of keys out of his back pocket. I just focus on my shoes instead, because that's the reasonable thing to do. They seem to be the only part of my attire that's suited for this island in the middle of nowhere. Biker boots work with the rough terrain.

Warren steps inside, holding the door open for me and stepping to the side. He reveals a one-bedroom apartment that has been furnished. From what I can see, it's nothing all too special, but it's still an upgrade from my room at the compound. While that was mine, it was never really me. Being forced into the role of a tough biker and acting the part meant that my room looked like it as well.

This?

This might be new, and not me, but this is something I can work with. I step inside, thanking Warren when he hands me the keys, and go in to have a further look. There are red brick walls all around, wooden floors, and a horrendous burgundy kitchen. The bedroom is behind an already opened door. There's a double bed, white bedding on it still in the package, ready to be made.

There are two closed doors, and my guess is one will lead to the bathroom.

"It's not much," Warren says. "But we can't have you starting out on an apprenticeship and house you somewhere luxurious. It just wouldn't add up."

Something twirls in my stomach that I can't really identify. It's not the apartment though. That's fine. In the end I shrug. "I don't care. It's got everything I need."

“Your rent will be paid, you will get paid monthly other than what you’ll make with your apprenticeship.”

The twirling returns. “What apprenticeship?”

“I’ve found you a learning spot at the docks as a ship mechanic,” Warren says, his pale blue eyes staring intently at me. I avert my gaze, staring at his Adam’s apple instead. “Eddie’s been working on ships since he moved here, which was a long time ago. Now he enjoys telling people what to do while swearing like a sailor. I thought you’d appreciate the work.”

He’s right. I love working with my hands. And the fact that I don’t have to pack a gun, deliver drugs or do other morally questionable things I never fully stood behind is only a plus.

“Thanks,” I say.

“Okay, so we’re renting this place from Georgia. She’s a shark and she owns most of the rented places in town. She doesn’t allow for pets, but she’s a fair landlord. Let me know if you run into any trouble with her.”

He walks inside and goes to the horrible kitchen, where he grabs a beige envelope. He opens it, takes a few items out, and lays them out over the counter one at a time.

“New identification, welcome Dominic LaRue. Driver’s license. Debit card. Bank account details. New mobile phone.” When he says the last words, he slides the phone towards me, but keeps his finger on it, making sure we make eye contact. His stare gives me goosebumps. His eyes are so light, somehow reminding me of a snowfox in combination with his almost white hair. But every time he looks at me it’s just so intense.

“You only get this from me for emergencies and making new contacts. No reaching out to people from your old life. If you do, you will be in breach of your deal and you can be kicked out of WITSEC. At the very least you’ll have to be replaced.”

He takes a moment to let silence do its thing. “Agree?”

I nod. “It’s not like there’s anyone I want to reach out to anyway.”

“You might think so now, but there’ll come a moment you’ll get tempted. That’s the moment you call me. I’m already in the contacts under Wickedly handsome Warren.” He winks and then gives me a smile that almost makes me choke up. It’s almost enough to make me laugh. I clear my throat, simply nodding, not answering him.

“Now, lock up, let’s go.”

I’m confused because didn’t we just get here? The look must be showing on my face. “You need groceries and at least a warmer coat. I’ll show you around and make sure you won’t get eaten alive by the nosy busybodies in town.”

Great. Meeting people who don’t want to meet me is exactly what I want after a long day of traveling and an even longer year of getting here.



He seems to take all the changes well as far as I can judge. He grabbed his phone and all his new cards before we headed out. But he hasn't said a word since then. Instead of going back to my car, we walk towards the clothing store. It's in the town center and mostly sells outerwear. There's a shop a few blocks down that sells more fashionable items, even if I'm not sure when they were in fashion exactly. We usually dress for the extremities and for practicality. It's so ingrained in people's mentality that we don't question it, it's just the way it is.

Right now, Dominic at least needs a good coat that can keep him warm and dry. Even if the ships are out of the water he'll still get wet a lot. Compared to motorbikes, knowing that there isn't any water leakage is a big part of the job. Eddie doesn't do bows, but sometimes the mechanics mix with the exterior. Don't ask me how it works, because I know fuck all about ships except that they're an excellent way to get nauseous.

"Can I help you?" Taylor asks. She's one of the few young and single women around and works in this store because her dad owns it. She's attending college online, and she's having the best time with all the greenhorns passing through here to go to Dutch Harbor. Her dad isn't all too pleased with her promiscuity, but he'd rather have her here while he can keep an eye on her than out in the big world.

"No, we're here to get Dominic some Unalaska-proof clothing. He's a desert boy."

Dominic scowls, and I wonder if it's because of the chastising because of his clothes or because I'm calling him boy.

I start going through the racks, getting a jacket that I think will fit him. It's not leather, so I'm curious to see if he'll even try it on. My mind wanders to places where he's wearing other kinds of leather outfits and starts going through my own closet to see what outfit I'd put on myself – but then I remember where I am and what I'm doing and I snap out of it.

I find Dominic staring at me, and because I've got no good excuse whatsoever, I scrape my throat and hold out the jacket. He scowls at it before he tries it on. It's navy-colored, and it makes his bright blue eyes and his dirty blond hair pop even more against his sun-tanned skin.

Sun. Tanned.

God. The only sun tan we're getting around here is that weathered look you get from the sun reflecting off the water when you're out on open sea when the weather is nice. Which I never am. I don't have sealegs.

"Looks good on you," I tell him while I go through a stack of thermals.

"It's heavy."

"That just means it'll keep you warm."

He goes through a few jeans as well. I'm probably not going to convince him he should wear something else. Especially not if he's going to be working in the docks and not at sea.

He looks at the clothes, thinking about it.

"Think of them as something functional. In a hot desert garage, a pair of jeans will suffice. Now that you're in these cold extremities near the sea, jeans aren't enough. Dress up all you want when you're at home. But when you work, you stay warm and you stay dry so you stay alive."

He grins, and it lights up his face. "You should narrate one of those survival shows."

"How come?" I ask in wonder.

“You’ve got a good voice, and you know your shit. And you absolutely made these ugly clothes sound badass. So I’ll take them, and I’ll wear them with pride on the next episode of Ultimate Survival.”

Now it’s my turn to laugh, clapping him on the shoulder. “Let’s go, Bear Grylls. We’re gonna hit the grocery store after.”

It’s an hour later when we’re sitting at a table at Deanna’s. The diner isn’t anything fancy, but they serve decent home-cooked food.

We got the new wardrobe Dominic is going to need to get accustomed to these parts. Then we went to the grocery store and got him the groceries he needs to get through the first couple of days. He tried to get one bag of coffee, so I made him get three more.

First rule of surviving Unalaska is that you load up on the essentials as soon as they’re in stock, and you don’t tell anyone you’ve taken a lot of coffee. There’s regularly scheduled produce coming in, but schedules are there to get fucked up. Annie, the lady working the register, is the unofficial secret keeper of the town. She sees everything, she knows everything. We’re just lucky that her lips are sealed tighter than Fort Knox.

“What can I get you guys?” Deanna asks. The white apron she’s wearing is smeared with remnants of food. Deanna is the third generation to run the diner. Her grandmother started it and as soon as her mother took over, she changed the name of it to her own, Norah’s. So of course, the moment Deanna took over, she changed the name to her name. Some traditions are too good to give up, no matter how new they are.

“Uh, the steak, I guess?” Dominic says, flipping the laminated menu over in his tatted hands. His eyes keep going over the lines, the reflection of the bright lights hanging over the table reflecting in them.

“Don’t. It’s Sunday. Supplies come in every Tuesday. All the good red meat is gone by now. Either take the crab or

something that doesn't go to waste after a few days without being deep frozen," I tell him.

Deanna raises an eyebrow at me, giving me an arrogant look as if she can't believe her ears. I like the woman, but her chef isn't good enough to get away with less than fresh product and I'm not going to scare Dominic away on his first evening.

There seems to flash some panic over his face before he regroups himself and says he'll have the tomato soup. For someone as tall and stacked as he is, it seems like an odd choice and definitely not enough to make him feel full, but who the hell am I to say anything about that.

I tell Deanna I'm having the crab and she leaves us while scribbling our orders down.

Dominic stares outside, his dirty blond eyebrows furrowed, his jaw squared.

"What's wrong?"

He huffs, biting on the inside of his cheek and nervously playing with a silver chain around his neck before he answers. "I'm a biker on an island, without a bike, where the only red meat I get to eat will be available on Tuesday and Wednesday."

"Ah, so you're starting to finally understand what moving to Unalaska means," I jibe. They all go through this phase, but Dominic is the first one I actually feel for. It's just something about him.

When he stays quiet and ignores me, I press him on it a little, my voice barely above a whisper. "Why did you exactly agree to go into WITSEC and turn on your brother?"

His blue eyes finally leave the window and find mine. His eyes are cloudy, troubled by the past of his decisions.

"It was either me, or a dear friend of mine. And Nathan had hurt her enough already. She found happiness somewhere else, and I wasn't about to take that away from her when I had the power to prevent it."

I nod. I'm quite aware that he isn't innocent in any way – nobody that runs in an MC is – but he does come across as the selfless type. Still, I know blood is strong, especially in biker gangs. Something must've happened for him to pick sides with his friend instead of his brother.

“What'd he do to you?”

At that moment Deanna comes over and brings us our orders. Dominic sighs when he looks at the three tiny pieces of bread before he picks up his spoon and starts stirring his soup.

I dig into my own plate. There's Red King crab. The chef has already prepared it in a way so that I don't have to crack it myself and won't make a mess. Deanna wouldn't mind, but there are customers who don't like it. I'm fine either way.

I catch Dominic staring at my plate every few seconds, until he finally groans. I lift my chin, asking him what's up.

“I didn't know it was going to come like that. I would've ordered the crab if I'd have known.”

I stare down at my plate, trying to figure out what's his thought process. “You don't like eating it out of the shell?”

“I don't know *how* to eat it out of the shell,” he growls.

“Why not?”

“I'm from fucking Nevada! We eat meat and lots and lots of chicken, but there aren't any oceans around, so we don't eat any seafood.”

Now I'm dumbstruck. “Like never?”

He shakes his head.

“So you've never eaten crab?”

Another headshake. I grab the little plate and shove his pieces of bread off before I slide half of my meal on it.

“The soup was fine,” he says quietly.

“No, you don't come to the fresh crab capital of the whole States and not know what crab tastes like. That's a sure way to make sure all the townspeople will be outside of your house

tonight with torches and pitchforks. Or well, nowadays it'd probably be flashlights. And instead of a pitchfork they'd bring their fishing rod."

He laughs, but it isn't even that far from the truth.

Then he eats the crab, and it's like the heavens open up and angels come down to sing. Or well, at least he seems to like it.

I like the way he enjoys the food a little bit too much.

I like the way he looks when he's pleased.

Fuck.

"That's amazing," he says, scarfing down the food.

"Good, 'cause you'll be eating a lot of it."

He doesn't hear me anymore, finishing his plate like he was starved. I know he's not, because you can't maintain the kind of muscles he has with bad food.

I force myself to think of something else, because if I let my brain do what it wants to do right now, we're going to end up in a bad place.

"You never told me why you turned on your brother," I say softly, getting the conversation and the thoughts in my head back to safer things. It's weird that I consider talking about his past the safer option.

He looks at me with those blue eyes. Chewing. Seemingly thinking. The lines on his head deepen, making him look older than he is. We've both got those lines. His from the hot Nevada sun, mine from the brisk sea air. I've got a good skin care routine, so they're not as bad as they could be.

He takes a deep breath. "The MC is not as LGBTQi+ minded as they could be. Meaning that I'd better not bring a guy home and never talk about my love conquests unless they were club pussy. Which basically meant that I was never allowed to be myself, to the point that I don't have a fucking clue who I am. Figuring that out in WITSEC and saving my friend in the process seemed like the logical thing to do."

That was not the answer I expected.

“Where on the alphabet are you?” I say, keeping a close eye on him. I’ve got some hopes for what I want the answer to be, but I don’t want to seem too eager. So I keep my face in check. Something I mastered in my previous endeavors.

“G as can be,” he says, not returning my look.

“Well, welcome to the out and proud group,” I say matter-of-factly.

He squints his eyes, and somehow I just know he wants to ask. He wants to know if I am too. But I’m not going to tell him unless he asks. Let him think about it for a while.

He doesn’t ask. He just finishes his crab before he eats the soup as well.

So I finish my dinner in silence and try not to think about Dominic LaRue and all the things I want to do to him.



I'm glad Warren showed me around, because I wouldn't have found the right building in the shipyard without him pointing it out to me. It's a dark-green shed that looks like it hasn't been painted in forever, but then again, being this close to the sea and being exposed to salt water year-round probably won't do the paint any good. It reminds me of the shabby parts of the compound, the garage where we'd rather work on the bikes than on the building, and it's comforting to find something that's so familiar in a place that's anything but.

Warm light shines through the tiny windows, and even if it's really early, I know I'm not the first to arrive. I was excited to have to set an alarm last night. I haven't had the need to do that in over a year, and even before then I didn't have to do so on a regular basis. The day just started when the day started. This? This feels like a responsibility, and I've found out that I crave something like that.

"Hello?" I say when I enter, but I shouldn't have shouted out. An old man wearing a dark blue beanie, sitting on a desk chair and holding a cane, rolls into view. His face is wrinkled, and the scowl on his face suits him in a way that it seems to be permanent.

"You Dominic?"

“Yes. Are you Eddie, Sir? Warren told me to look for an Eddie.”

“And what makes you think I might be that Eddie?” he asks with his head cocked. I see just a tuft of white gray hair coming out of his beanie beside his ears. His question makes me uncomfortable, because Warren said that Eddie was old and I just assumed because he’s old that this must be him. But telling him seems kind of rude.

A warm cracked laugh comes from Eddie’s mouth. “I’m just fucking with you, boy. I know damn well Warren said I’m ancient, so the fact that you thought I’m him makes perfect sense. Come in, close the door, keep the cold out. We’ve got enough of that over here.”

I take a step inside and take in the surroundings. It’s a large shipyard, but it’s completely dry. Several ships are hanging on catrols. On the other side of the shipyard is a pull up door, connected to the docks and the sea. My best guess is that that’s how the ships are brought in.

“Come here, come here, let me have a look at you, boy.” Eddie beckons me to come over, and I stand in front of him, my eyes down on the floor. I’m expecting him to tell me to look at him, but instead he grabs my hands. He spins them and looks at my fingers and my nails, and I’m half inclined to pull them out of his hands. Because what the hell? Does he have some kind of weird thing for hands, just like some people have for feet? Because Eddie is not my type, especially not if he’s got some kind of weird hand fetish.

“Good hands,” he mumbles. “Good calluses. Not enough grease on it at the moment if you ask me.”

I squint my eyes. “I didn’t really get the chance to work on anything the last couple of months like I would’ve liked to.”

“You know anything about ships?”

“Just that they’re supposed to float, sir.”

“Don’t call me sir. Sir was my father. Just call me Eddie.”

I manage to give him a smile and a nod.

“What did you work on?” he asks.

“Motorcycles.”

Eddie grunts. “Guess it’s the new computer kind of bikes? I don’t like that technology shit. I want to be able to take it apart and put it back together again without having to give in a password.”

That manages to make me laugh out loud. “I can build you a bike from scratch with no passwords needed. Taking them apart and putting them back together again is the way I learned from my old man a million years ago.”

Eddie eyes me suspiciously. He seems to be weighing his options, but he doesn’t seem like a man who trusts easily. Until in the end he seems to reach a decision. “Fine. Follow me. I’ll get you through the basics and then I have an engine block for you I want you to pick apart. If you’re really feeling adventurous, I’ll give you a shot at putting it back together again.”

I nod, already dreading the welcome and instruction video I’m probably going to have to watch going over safety and shit like that. I hate regulated videos like that. One of the upsides in working at an MC run garage is that we never did shit like that. We didn’t have a Union, we were our own Union.

Eddie rolls his chair towards another part of the shipyard instead of getting up and walking, and I watch how he carefully makes his way through tables full of equipment and engine parts. He reaches something that looks like a kitchen, grabs an ugly-as-sin mug and fills it to the brim with coffee before he hands it to me.

“I don’t care how you drink your coffee, just pretend that’s your iced latte macchuchino latte shit-chai if you have to. It’s the only coffee we serve. It tastes like rocket fuel and it’ll make sure you stay alive. You empty the pot, you make a new one.”

I take the mug, nodding again.

“So, that was orientation. I’ve got an engine to the side there,” he says while pointing with his cane. “Pull it apart and

put it back together again.”

It takes a few seconds before it registers with me what he just said. Then I start chuckling and take my coffee towards the table he just pointed at. There’s a filthy and huge engine on the table. While warming my hands on the coffee I got, I walk around it a few times. It doesn’t look too complicated, but I’m pretty sure I’m going to eat those words soon. My face contorts when I take a sip of the coffee. Strong is putting it mildly. But from what I’ve gathered these last few days is that the whole of Unalaska runs on coffee.

Looking around, I find some tools that look like they’re going to come in handy. I grab a rag, put it in the back pocket of my pants so I have it when I need to wipe my hands, and just get into it.

“Who’s this?” a man in his early thirties with dark hair says. He looks Mexican, which throws me off a little because I did not expect Mexican heritage in these parts of the States.

“Warren’s new stray,” another guy says. He looks younger, a lot younger. He’s skinny, doesn’t have any hair, is pale and has blue bags underneath his eyes.

“How does he keep coming up with guys who need a place in the most undesirable place in all of the States?” the first one asks.

A third guy joins them. Where the second guy was skinny, this one is a little more on the plus size. All I see is a lot of hair. He’s got a full head of brown curls and a full unkept beard that matches his head. Basically he looks like a huge poodle. “Isn’t he running a temp agency?”

“Feels like it,” the first one says.

“I thought he was the town broker,” skinny guy says.

“No,” Poodle answers. “That last guy he brought started his own broker agency. Can you imagine? Trading stocks from Unalaska?”

“So what does he do for a living?” second guy pipes in again.

“I seriously have no idea,” the Mexican one states before he turns to me while holding out a greasy hand. My own hands are dirty right now from the work I did on the engine, so I make sure I wipe them before I shake it. He has a good firm handshake. “I’m Emmanuelle, but everyone calls me Mano. Why is Warren helping you and do you know what he does for a living?”

The corner of my mouth lifts in a half smile. “I’m Dominic, Dom’s fine as well. Warren is doing a mutual friend a favor and helped me out when I needed to get out. I have no idea what he does for a living.” Or well, I do, but I’m pretty sure I can’t say that. I have no idea what story he’s going with, and I make a mental note to check with him so our stories will be in sync.

“He did you a favor by letting you work here?” second guy says, who also holds out his hand. When I grab it there isn’t much strength in it. “Tiny Nick,” he says.

I squint. “Tiny Nick?”

“I was a small baby. It stuck. Now I don’t know any better. When someone calls me Nick without the Tiny I look over my shoulder to see if they mean someone else.”

All three of them stare at me expectantly, and I realize Tiny Nick asked me a question.

“I needed to get away from a toxic situation, and that led me here,” I say by way of explanation. It’s the closest to the truth we’re getting, and it’ll make people uncomfortable enough not to ask additional questions and let me be.

All three of them nod, not asking anymore questions. Then the poodle guy walks up to me and almost crumbles my hand. “Bash,” he says.

“Bash?”

“I don’t know dude,” he says. “My parents probably had some of the salty air go to their heads or something like that.”

I can’t fight the chuckle that leaves my mouth.

“What kinda ships you worked on before?” Mano asks.

“None. I’m from Nevada. I worked with bikes.” Warren and I discussed keeping my background story as simple as possible, that way I won’t fuck up when I make mistakes in the story.

“Then how the hell have you disassembled half that motor already?” Tiny Nick inquires, rubbing his neck.

“Taking it apart isn’t that hard,” I say while staring at all the various parts stalled out on the table in front of me. “And really, when you think about it, it’s not that difficult to put it back together,” I say, eyeing all the bits and pieces with intensity.

“Oh, get a seat, boys,” Mano says. “This oughta be good.”



I wipe the sweat from my brow with my towel. Hitting it hard in the gym at Meryll's was supposed to be a way to get rid of some of the excess energy that's flowing through me. We don't have a big fancy gym here. It's a garage, and it has a lot of stuff that could be used as workout material – life is harsh enough in most cases for people to not work out.

Fishermen usually have a hard time eating enough calories with the hours they're making, and the people who work in town do everything on their own as well.

"All done?" Meryll says while I start downing my water.

I still feel twitchy, but I guess I can't keep pushing my body any further without being useless tomorrow. "Guess so."

Meryll owns the garage. His day job is to sell fishing gear, which happens to be in the building right beside this. Sometimes we work out just by moving stuff from the garage to the store because it's in the way of the gym equipment. He doesn't charge us for the use of his stuff, we pretend we don't know he uses us as cheap labor when he doesn't want to do it himself.

"What has you riled up like this?" he asks me, his always observant green eyes gliding over me. When you've known each other since kindergarten, because that consisted of six kids, you tend to notice things about each other.

I shrug, not wanting nor really able to talk about it.

“Something to do with your new boytoy?” he adds with a smirk.

Other than my real job, Meryll knows everything about me. He’s a nosy little bastard, so he found out about my former profession as a pro-Dom. And he knew I was gay before I ever dared to peep outside of the closet.

Meryll never minded. He’s lucky – could’ve been on the cover of a Vogue magazine if he wanted to. But he missed Kaya, his high school sweetheart, so he came back here after his brief little stint in Hollywood and they’ve been married ever since, raising three even more stunning kids. They’re as close to me as family.

Yet even he doesn’t know about my work as handler for the Marshals.

As far as he’s concerned, I’m just quirky Warren who takes in strays and makes them feel at home in Unalaska. Which might be part of my official job description, but let’s not talk about that.

“Not a new boytoy,” I say, pulling extra clothes out of my bag and putting them on over my dirty gym clothes. There’s no shower here, so I have to go home first to get cleaned up.

“He looks like a good replacement for Braden,” Meryll casually drops as he walks away.

“He’s no new Braden. I helped him find a job, showed him around. That’s it.”

“You can’t bullshit a bullshitter,” Meryll yells from the front of the store, making me roll my eyes.

“Nothing’s going on,” I yell back.

“Doesn’t mean you don’t want to.”

“For fuck’s sake, he just got here!”

“That never stopped you before.”

I grab my duffel and start heading out the garage exit, not answering Meryll anymore. It has indeed not stopped me before, but those were people who I knew that came here for a

certain reason, and that reason wasn't to be put into WITSEC. That reason was to get their ass beaten raw, and pay a pretty dime for it as well.

Images of naked and bound men surrendering themselves to me flash before my eyes until they make place for images of Dom being tied to one of my devices, naked and sweating and averting his gaze.

I blink, shaking the thought off me. I need to be able to look this man in the eye and not think about all the things I want to do to him. My brain seems to have a different opinion on the matter, though. Breathing in deeply, I relax all my muscles and start the walk back to my car.

By the time I'm driving down the road, my mind has gone back to safer topics. It's weird that I wasn't thinking about my old lifestyle while I was with Braden, but a week with Dom has me craving the power exchange like it was just yesterday.

My house is a little way away from the town center of Unalaska. It's a wooden cabin in the woods, and I love it with everything I am. The secludedness is what lured me there, and I've never looked back. It's been upgraded and has all the luxuries I can think of.

When the winters get extremely cold, the power dies down, though. But a wooden heater and a backup generator do wonders.

You get used to the cold anyway. It might take some years, but it all just becomes part of your life.

One of my other protectees used to work for some mafia boss in Chicago. He sold him out and saved himself and is now the local investor. He loves to go ice fishing. When winter is setting in he goes to the lake daily to see if the ice is thick enough to go on. He's like an impatient child waiting for Santa to come on Christmas morning.

But it's not for everyone.

After parking my car, I enter my house, only to be loudly greeted by Jack, talking in his particular doggy language. He's swishing his tail in a way that lets me know he has to go out.

And when Dom's eyes flash in my mind's eye again, I realize that sentiment is as much true about me as it is about my dog.

Skipping the shower, I get out of my gym clothes and get dressed in my outdoor gear. The funny thing about Unalaska is that wildlife has deemed it too rough to settle, but stubborn men decided to live there anyway.

Jack is a trained hunting dog and I can hunt, but other than a few birds, rabbits and deer there isn't much to shoot here. Most days we hunt with fakes. Today we'll just see what we run into.

Once I'm dressed and ready to go, Jack is doing a little dance on the mat near the front entrance, letting me know he *really* needs to go. I lift my chin towards him, and he jumps up, opening the door himself and rushing outside, finding his favorite nearby tree and relieving himself.

Then he comes skipping back, sniffing the pocket where I keep the treats and presses his nose against it.

A smile covers my face, and I hand him two of the treats, which he gently picks out of my hand using his lips. He has some strange habits for a dog, but so far he's the truest love of my life.

We take off to the woods at the back of my house. It stretches endlessly, only having a few houses sparsely spread out through the lands behind it. We head to where there's a clearing where we'll be able to see the occasional bird. Perhaps today will be a lucky day.

Jack was a gift I didn't know I needed. My sister Jen's dog had a litter of puppies. The dogs were always her thing, never mine. But when the pups were born she told me in no uncertain terms that, pointing to the busiest pup of the litter, that one would be mine and we were both going to need each other.

I didn't understand what she meant.

But by then, I was knee-deep into the pro-Dom lifestyle, and while I had all the attention I could have craved, I was

more lonely than I realized.

Jack ended that.

I took his training like training a new sub, my natural dominance making the natural ranking order clear. Jack is trained in ways that most dogs are not, but he took to it like a fish to water.

You wouldn't say it right now, when he's chasing a fly and biting in the air, but he's a really smart dog.

I set a higher pace than I usually would, but my insides keep being at unrest. Hiking through rough terrain, almost picking it up to a jog, until all I can feel is the cold air against my cheeks and through my hair.

Alaska isn't very inviting. Unalaska even less than that. I've always thought it fit me – I never felt the need for many people in my life. That's why the lifestyle was perfect for me. They gave me the intimacy I needed, but they left after and it was always a professional exchange.

Braden changed that.

I thought.

But thinking back on it I realize I care more about my dog than I ever gave about that man. The ironic thing is that I was in the business of embracing yourself, every weird and tiny aspect of it, of being unapologetically yourself. Yet Braden tried to change everything I was – he did change a lot of who I am. He made me give up that one part of myself that made me feel like me.

Kind of sad when you think about it.

Jack comes running back. He has a small mole in his mouth, an unlucky bastard that wasn't fast enough to crawl back into his hole when Jack spotted him. The dog looks exceedingly happy about it.

Me? Not so much. We're not going to eat mole, and now my hand is dirty and bloodied by the rodent's intestines. Nevertheless I praise Jack and give him two additional treats. He trades me the mole for the treats and then goes on his

merry way to chase God knows what. Sometimes there are things only Jack can see to follow.

We walk around for two hours, and by the time I get back home my muscles have soured.

Jack shakes his fur when we get inside, trying to get the cold out of it and finds his favorite spot where the light of the late afternoon still warms the floor in front of my book cabinet. He walks in circles for a few seconds, then turns around and circles twice more before he drops to the floor like a lazy cat and basks in the sun with his tongue lolling out of his mouth.

With a smile on my face I turn towards my bathroom, turning on the water of the shower before peeling my clothes off me. When I glance at myself in the mirror I see that I need to shave, but I can't find the energy to be bothered. The almost white shade of my hair isn't exclusive to my head, it's everywhere. So when I grow out my beard, it looks white and ages me ten years, because people think it's graying instead of just being my natural complexion.

Tomorrow, I tell myself. Tomorrow will be soon enough.

I look myself in the eye through the mirror. I've never seen the freakiness of the paleness of my eyes that everybody else sees. But for a second it reminds me of the blueness of Dominic's eyes, making my cock harden.

The second I step under the water it's at full attention and the visions of having my new protectee tied up on a bed somewhere have come back in full force.

I sigh.

There's no fighting this. Not even a workout and a hike can fix this. So I do what I normally make other men do: I surrender.

Wrapping my hand around my cock, I give it a firm squeeze before I start stroking myself, all the while imagining unboxing all my old equipment and using them on Dom one by one.

Much faster than I care to admit I feel my cock start to pulse and my balls draw up. I've taught myself when to come and not to come, but there's no holding this back. I sully the black tiles of my bathroom with thick spurts of white cum and ride out the thrills of exhilaration for far longer than I care to admit.

It would be worth it if this solved everything, but I'm not even done cleaning before I'm horny again.

Fuck this shit.



“Bullshit,” I say to Mano, who has just told me that they once brought in a sea turtle in Dutch Harbor. “It wouldn’t survive the cold temperature.”

“I know, *amigo*, but they did bring one in. And it survived the cold waters and it came out all cranky and snappy.” Mano is showing me how to put certain parts of a rotor back together because bikes don’t have those. While most of the mechanics follow the same logic, some stuff just has to be explained to me. But I’m a fast student and they usually only have to tell me once.

Mano, Tiny Nick and Bash have quickly taken me in and treat me as one of their own. Eddie is cranky towards everyone and treats us all as if we’re his kids. He’s a neat freak, a perfectionist and always around. Though I like the old bastard. He’s rough around the edges, but has a soft side that nobody in the MC was ever allowed to show. Or didn’t possess. I don’t know, and I try not to think about it all too often.

“What you guys talking ‘bout?” Bash asks as he comes over, cleaning his hands with a rag. It’s useless to get the grease off, but truthfully, everything is. It’s the fate of a mechanic, no matter what kind of object you work on.

“Killer, that snappy turtle that old John brought in two summers ago,” Mano says while he pushes a tiny part into my hands and motions me to put it back in the rotor.

“That was one mean son’o’a’bitch,” Bash says, pulling a face.

“Really? A sea turtle?”

“Why the hell would I lie to you about that? I’ve only been telling you the truth,” Mano says, looking as if I’ve insulted him terribly.

He has not. He has told me bullshit on several occasions and he’s been called out on it as well. These three guys like to prank each other, and now that they’ve decided to adopt me I’m in on their pranks as well. I’ve had salted coffee, a rotten fish taped beneath my work bench and almost peed on a toilet covered with clingfoil in the short time that I’ve been here.

Eddie shouted at all three of them for salting the coffee because wasting good coffee is sacrilege according to the old man. None of them wanted to fess up who had done it, so they all got the same treatment. They were ordered to clean the outside of the hangar, which is a sucky job because the salty air makes it a mess, and they all cursed loudly.

I think they took me in as one of their own when I stayed and helped them. I didn’t have anything better to do anyway and I thought it was a good bonding experience.

Truth be told I have never had to make new friends. The club always provided the men I should get familiar with, so having to get to know people from scratch and not having a cut and a patch to rely on is daunting.

“You lie about everything,” Tiny Nick says.

“I alter the truth to my advantage,” Mano says.

“That’s lying, bro,” Bash says with a smile running so wide it covers his whole face.

“He’s right,” I say, putting the last pieces of the rotor back together without Mano showing me what to do. Once I’m done

I wipe my hands on my own rag, but end up with equally dirty hands.

I like it.

I've missed it.

Even if it's not a bike.

Last night I dreamt I was driving through the warm Nevada sun, feeling the wind on my face and my arms and I woke up with a craving for the feeling. It was almost unbearable.

"You comin' with us to Deanna's?" Bash asks.

We've been going there regularly. Truth be told, it's the only thing to do around here and it beats sitting at home watching crappy TV or jerking off to more porn.

I shake my head. "I'm going over to Warren's," I explain.

"What you gonna do there, *amigo*?" Mano asks.

"Just have dinner, have a chat. Thank him for getting me this awesome job and these awesome friends."

All three of them light up like Christmas trees, shifting the subject of the conversation to a safer territory. I can hardly explain to them that I'm going to Warren because he's my handler and we have to have regular check-ins. It's one of the conditions of me being in WITSEC. The American Government wants to know where I am at all times, because it's not as if I'm washed in innocence and not some cold blooded murderer.

My stomach churns. If anyone here ever finds out I can kiss my newfound life goodbye and start all over again. Yes, Unalaska is cold and uninviting, but it's growing on me. And it's certainly better than joining my brother in prison.

"Find out what he does for a living?" Tiny Nick says while grabbing his jacket and getting ready to head out.

The other guys follow his lead and I find myself nodding. I know what he does for a living, but I don't know what the lie is he tells around here. Come to think of it, I don't know very much about him at all.

Eddie is still in the back. He's always the first one here and the last one gone. It's like he never sleeps at all. When I asked the guys about it, they said it was his story to tell and I should ask him myself, but I haven't gathered the courage yet.

I put away all the tools I've used and leave the rotor on the bench to be tomorrow's problem. Eddie will go over it and check if everything is right, before he or one of the guys teaches me how to reapply it to the ship.

The door to the hangar opens, letting cold air in, and closes immediately. When I look up I see Warren standing there, looking all kinds of fantastic. Despite standing out with his white hair and his near white blue eyes, he seems to fit in the environment, like he was made for it. And for some reason I can't put my finger on that turns me the fuck on.

I'm attracted to the man in the opening of the door with every fiber of my being, and I don't know how to fight it now that I no longer have a death sentence hanging over my head just for being gay.

My eyes fall on his cheeks and the way he's clean shaven. He's older than I am, by a lot, but somehow he feels younger than the rough men I'm used to. Somehow age hasn't gotten a hold of him.

Going on looks alone I feel I look older than him. It must have something to do with the beard.

"Ready to go?" he says, breaking the silence and the growing tension.

I wonder if he felt that tension as well, or if it was all just me. "Ready," I say, taking the rag out of the back pocket of my pants and laying it neatly on my bench.

Eddie won't accept anything but neat anyway.

"I'm going!" I yell towards the back to let Eddie know he's on his own. "Last one to leave."

"Go away and be young," the grumpy old man says, but I know he doesn't mean it in a bad way.

I grab my coat and make sure to zip it all the way up before I even set one foot outside of those dock doors. That's one thing I learned pretty fucking quickly. Warren actually made sure I didn't die of hypothermia in the first week I was here by taking me to get clothes.

"Bye Eddie," Warren yells.

"Say hi to your old man for me, kiddo!" Eddie yells back.

We open the doors and the motherfucking cold hits me in the face like a freaking baseball. It's so cold they don't even know these temperatures exist in Nevada. There should be some law against this. And this isn't even the coldest it's going to get. Nuts. I'm fucking nuts that I'm out here willingly.

Warren has a knowing smile on his face when he closes the door behind me and I quickly start walking towards his truck.

Thankfully it's unlocked when I try to open the door and I sit myself down in the passenger's seat, quickly closing the door behind me.

There's no Jack here this time to get all up close and personal in my business, so there's actually room to spread my legs.

Warren gets in on the other side of the car, letting new cold air get in. He's full on smiling at the foul look I give him.

"Gotten used to our lovely temperatures yet?" he asks while he starts the ignition. The sound of the motor rumbling to life does something to my insides. It's a good sound, reminding me of other days and another life.

The car fills with some classical song that makes me scrunch my face. Warren seems to be relaxed as he steers his car to the main road though, his head slowly bobbing to the instruments in the song.

He actually likes this shit, I realize.

Not giving a fuck about personal boundaries or politeness, I change the stations until I find something I like.

Warren observes me with an interest as I flip through radio stations, every one worse than the one before. Finally I settle

on a station when I find one that's playing "Petrichor" by 4A – a broad smile spreading over my face.

We already liked 4A within Victorious, but now I like them even more.

"That's the band with the girl you saved, right?" Warren asks before he steers us to some small road that is hardly worth the name. The fact that I can see old tire tracks lets me know this is actually a road and not Warren taking me to the outback and killing me in the name of Victorious.

"Yeah, Evan's with 4A. I like their music."

It's silent except for the music for a moment. "It was a noble thing for you to do."

"I'm not noble," I grunt, thinking about all the innocent lives I took instead of standing up to my brother sooner.

All Warren does is cock his head.

"What's this song called?" he asks when it's almost finished.

"Petrichor," I say.

"I've never smelled it," Warren offers.

"Never?" I ask in surprise. It's so normal in Nevada to smell it after every rain that ends a drought that it's hard to imagine someone having never smelled it. Then again – the smell of the ocean was quite new to me before Lance brought me to Unalaska.

"The temperatures here don't get high enough during summer to get the ground dry enough to get that ozoney smell."

"Have you never traveled?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

"Didn't you want to see more than just the place you were born?"

"Says the man who had never had crab because he hardly ever left Nevada?" he counters.

We stare at each other and I get lost in the paleness of his eyes.

He looks away first, having to keep an eye on the road and not crash us into some ancient pine trees.

“Besides, why would I leave home when I’ve got all I could ever need right here?” he says.

We pull up to a wooden log cabin. It’s huge. And it completely fits with the surroundings. It’s gorgeous. The home any hardened outdoorsy man would love. *If only there were a bike in the driveway.*

Warren kills the engine and gets out of the car, looking at me expectantly and waiting for me to follow him.

I get out in the cold air and make sure I rush towards his home, ignoring the chuckling I hear coming from Warren. He can laugh all he wants, as long as he opens the door and I’ll be able to retrieve my balls out of the cavity of my belly.



I closely look at the man that is impatiently waiting to get in my house. He's rubbing his own arms in order to keep himself warm, and for a fraction of a second I'm jealous of his hands.

He eyes me expectantly and I force myself to retrieve my keys, walk over and open my door for him. He's inside before I can really let him in, and this time I can't hold back a laugh.

Jack gets alerted by the sudden intrusion of Dom into his territory and my laughter. Lord knows there isn't much of that going on around here. The husky approaches with care, sniffs the air and cocks his head while he says something that sounds like confusion in his doggy language.

"Dominic, friend," I repeat, just like the first time I did when he met him in the car. It's all the encouragement Jack needs to jump forward, tail wagging and sniffing Dominic all over. Including all of the inappropriate places. Which for the first time ever makes me jealous of the ability of my dog to do that and get away with it without being called a creep.

"Hi Jack," Dom says, and he actually looks younger when he scratches my companion behind his ears.

I'm forced to look away while he makes friends with my dog and I take off my jacket, hanging it by the door and taking off my shoes. The last witness I took in didn't like dogs at all, which made things a little harder when we met. We mostly met at Deanna's and I left Jack in the car or at home.

Dominic walks over, taking off his warm coat as well and mimics me by taking off his shoes and putting them neatly

next to mine. The two pairs of shoes look like they belong there and I swallow thickly. Braden's shoes were always all over the place and they never made me feel anything but annoyed.

Meanwhile Dominic is studying my house. There are a lot of emotions showing on his face and I can't place them all. He's a tougher egg to crack than I would have liked. I guess living with bikers will teach you how to keep your emotions to yourself. Seeing what my previous occupation was, I thought I was better at reading the little signs though, but perhaps I just don't know his tells yet.

I let him look around, get familiar with the surroundings and head towards the open kitchen, where I start grabbing ingredients, a chopping block and a knife.

Dominic follows me to the kitchen and gives it the same inquiring look as he did to the rest of the place.

"Little empty, don't you think?" he says after having studied my barren kitchen.

A half smile forms on my face. "My ex partner was a chef. He took all his stuff when he left for better and warmer places. You should have seen the place when he still lived here. There was barely any room left."

Something flashes over his face that I can't place much to my frustration. His eyes leave my face and go straight to the KitchenAid. "Yet you have a KitchenAid?"

My grin grows wider. "Pure pettiness," I tell him.

"Why?"

"He loved that thing, and I have no clue how to use it, so I kept it and told him it must have gotten lost with the shipping."

That entices a smile from the biker slash ship maker and he seems to relax a little. "What are you cooking?"

"Meat, veg and some potatoes," I tell him. I've got a big freezer and whenever I get the chance I buy meat to fill it up. I

figured that Dominic would appreciate that after our encounter at Deanna's and the crab leg debacle.

He sits down at one of the barstools at my kitchen island and starts watching what I do.

"I never learned how to cook," he offers.

I let silence return, because not interrupting someone and letting them do the talking themselves usually leads to them opening up. Whenever I push, men like these clam up.

"All the old ladies did the cooking or we ate out. There were a lot of things that were considered not okay for a man to do at the club."

I nod while I grab a few potatoes and start peeling them. "Well, if we look at old social hierarchy men would hunt, women would collect, and both of them would be accountable for the food. I don't see any reason why cooking should be a woman's chore. And I would starve if I didn't cook myself."

Some of the unease returns to his face. "Have you lived here alone for long?"

I nod. Telling something about myself usually helps them to open up as well. "I moved out of my parents house when I was twenty. They still live in Unalaska. My sister as well. You'll probably meet all of them at some point. They're good people." I'm japping and I know it. "Got this house about ten years back. It was nothing but a wooden cabin back then. Renovated the whole thing. Now it's actually livable."

Dom looks around again, for some reason letting his eyes go over all my doors. "Many rooms," he concludes.

I point at all of them with the tip of my knife. "Bedroom, bathroom, bedroom, storage."

"And that one?" he says, pointing to the one on the other side of the house that I deliberately skipped.

"Basement," I lie. Or half lie – because it is a basement, but it's my dungeon and it's been out of use for quite a while. But let's not open that door – both literally and figuratively. It's

been closed for a reason and I don't want to scare the kid away.

He gives me a look that I don't completely understand, but it vanishes before I can study it. Something new appears on his face, and he becomes younger, almost as if he is shy.

"I need your help with something," he says.

My eyes go down to the potatoes. I could peel them with my eyes closed, but I feel like he's more comfortable telling this without me looking at him. "What can I do? That's what I'm here for."

He sighs. "I need a tattoo artist. Or hell, just even a tattoo gun."

I look up, raising one of my eyebrows but not saying a word. Because what the hell? Getting new ink should not be on his mind right now.

Another deep sigh. "There's a Victorious tattoo on my back. It's pretty large. And the guys all change in front of each other, and right now I get away with acting as if I'm shy, but that won't hold for much longer because I really like these guys and friends should be comfortable changing their outfits in front of each other, right?"

"Hmhm," I answer. I don't think he's getting away with being shy anyway. He's got the body of a demi-god as far as I can see, so what would he have to be ashamed of?

"So I need to cover it up. Preferably with something that's nice to look at. If that's not an option then I'll just have a big black splotch on my back."

I inhale deeply, seasoning the meat and grabbing a steel pan, putting it on a high fire and putting butter in the pan. "There are two tattoo artists that I know. One is really good, but he would see your tattoo and know where you're coming from and why you're here. The other guy is a little less creative, but he's actually my first protectee so I know he'll keep his mouth shut."

"Second guy," he immediately says, not even giving it a second thought.

“I’ll set something up,” I say. “So the guys at the ship yard. You like ‘em?”

“They’re good people,” he says, his face lighting up.

“Do you like *like* them?”

“No, they’re all straighter than a level.”

I snort. “They’re all something.”

“That they are,” he says.

We remain in silence while I finish the meal. The moment I put down two full plates of food he digs in. We talk about how he’s adjusting and have a regular handler and protectee conversation. All the while I keep taking him in.

He makes my heart flutter.

I try to ignore it, because we have a professional relationship and I’m way too old for him. The hardest thing is that he makes me want to open that one door that I vowed would stay closed. He reaches a part of my brain that makes me want to do things to him.

“Tell me something about yourself,” he suddenly says.

The question takes me by surprise. “Why?”

“Because I don’t know anything about anyone here, and I’m used to knowing everything about everyone. It makes me feel lonely.” His eyes sadden, and he stares at the remnants of his food again, poking it around with his fork without actually eating it.

I can’t say I can relate. I’ve known just about everyone here for as long as I can remember and being the social butterfly that I am, I actually know a lot about everybody. Jen used to call me a busybody. Always hanging out with everyone, figuring out everyone’s secrets. Looking back on it, it’s probably the wisest choice to have me be the one to be the WITSEC handler here. I would’ve found out somehow anyway.

When Dom keeps staring at me, I realize I’ve been staring and been quiet for quite some time. Trying to remember the

question, I come up with some random piece of knowledge about myself.

“I like to eat my M&M’s in order of color.” I don’t know why I do it, but somehow it just feels right. Eating them any other way feels very wrong.

He looks up with a smile on his face, his eyes amused and sparkling. “Which color do you eat last?” he asks.

“The yellow ones.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know,” I answer truthfully. “It’s just how it’s always been.”

“Thanks for sharing,” Dom says, finishing the last few bites of his plate. Without me uttering a word he gets up, grabs my empty plate and starts running the water to clean everything.

Pushing my chair back, I stand up, grab a towel and start helping him.

It feels oddly domestic and familiar.



Warren didn't waste any time in setting up an appointment with his first protectee to get rid of my Victorious tattoo. He picked me up first thing on this early Saturday morning, getting me in his car alongside Jack, who licked my face as if I was some kind of doggy treat, and driving to the other side of Unalaska town. The drive over is fairly quiet, mostly because I didn't have any coffee yet and Jack's constant talking. That dog is fucking hilarious and he's growing on me.

We're pulling up to a decent sized three story building with some small shops at the bottom level. Warren parks the car and we get out, followed by Jack, who immediately proceeds to pee on the one barren tree in the street. Warren then opens the car again and lets Jack back in. Guess he isn't allowed to come along.

"Second floor," my handler says, and for a moment our eyes lock, sending a tingling sensation to my stomach. One I quickly try to stop, but I don't seem to have any influence on it. Once we break eye contact, I follow his pointed finger to a staircase in between two buildings.

I start walking towards the building and climb the stairs, waiting on Warren, because there are three doors here and I don't know where I'm going.

When he catches up, he knocks on the door to my left and we wait in comfortable silence for the door to open up.

A fully tatted man opens the door. His face lights up as he mumbles a hi and opens the door further to let us in. There are tats on his neck and on his face. You'd think he stands out here in Unalaska, but a lot of the people working on the ships are hardened men, and they don't give a shit if there are visible tattoos or not. Besides, didn't tattoos originate from sea men?

The man holds his fully tatted hand out towards me. "Hank," he says when I shake it and give him my name.

Then he turns around and leads us towards a living room where he already has a fully set up tattoo station and chair. It might not be a tattoo parlor, but hell, we did our own tattoos at Victorious.

"Dom, this is Hank, my first protectee. Hank, this is Dominic, my latest job. And he still has some ink from his old life he needs to get rid off. Everything that gets said between these walls stays within these walls. You both now know very dangerous information about each other. Please don't get each other killed."

"That would lead to too much paperwork, wouldn't it?" Hank says while he puts on some black gloves.

"Exactly," Warren says while he sits himself down on the couch, taking off his coat and making himself comfortable. He's probably right, because this is going to take a while.

I inhale deeply and then I take off my coat and start peeling off my shirt. Having had nothing to do the last six months gave me all the time to work out. So right now I'm as ripped and buff as I've ever been. I'll never be bodybuilder broad, simply because I do not have the physique for it, but I know I've got nothing to be ashamed of right now.

I catch Warren checking me out, and when I turn back a smile forms on my face. It's nice to be able to so openly act on my sexuality. The smile doesn't leave when I straddle the chair and show off my back.

"That's a Victorious tattoo," Hank says.

“Yes,” Warren answers for me, and thank fuck, because I wouldn’t have known what to say.

“You’re the witness who went against Victorious and took them down,” Hank says.

“I thought there weren’t any chapters here?” I say, ignoring his way too accurate statement.

“We’ve got TV and internet over here. Besides, it was once my business to know about Victorious.”

“Why?” I ask.

Hank glances at Warren, and I see the handler nod his head curtly.

“I once tattooed all the members of the Da Glacini family,” he says.

Which makes a lot of sense. The Da Glacini’s were a mobster family who were involved with the casinos in Las Vegas. And since that was smack in the middle of Victorious territory he has probably heard of them. The Da Glacini’s vanished suddenly, after someone testified against them, and I guess I know who that person was now.

Hank sees the radars spinning in my mind and sees me putting the pieces of the puzzle together. “People tend to talk a lot when they’re lying on a table getting tattooed. I’ve overheard more phone calls than I should.”

“Careful,” Warren says, his voice stern, sending a shiver down my spine.

Hank chuckles. “Yes, Sir.” Then he turns to my back. “What do you want to do with it?”

I shrug. “Haven’t thought about it. It just needs to go.”

“They’re pretty straight lines,” Hank says, referring to the giant V on my back. “Those are hard to incorporate in a tattoo.”

“What if you do like one of those abstract diamond line work thingies?” Warren offers.

“You’ve got such a way with words,” Hank teases.

“Oh shush,” Warren chastises him.

“It would work though,” Hank says.

“Can you make it into like a wolf?” I ask, thinking about the books I’m currently reading. It’s a gay novel, about a wolf and his mate, who’s a human. I’ve borrowed it from the bookshop downstairs and it’s absolutely glorious. And it’s a gay romance novel, which is something I’ve always wanted to read but never really got the chance to.

“A wolf should work,” Hank says. Then he stays silent, his fingers going over the old tattoo. “I think it’s best if I draw it straight on your back, so we get the best coverage for the old tattoo. Are you okay with that?”

I just nod, because I don’t care. I would have been fine with just a big black patch on my back, but an abstract wolf sounds a million times better. Whatever it ends up being, it’s going to represent freedom – a step away from my old life.

Hank grabs a pen and begins to draw on my back. Meanwhile, Warren studies me with such intent eyes that I look away. It’s what I’ve been taught to do, it’s what I’m comfortable with.

“Why a wolf?” he asks me, his voice deep.

And I don’t want to tell him about the book. I’m afraid he’ll have the same reaction as every one of my old crew members would have had. It’s ridiculous, I know it, but I don’t get any words about that book out of my mouth. So I come up with some bullshit excuse.

“I like the fact that wolves run in packs,” I say. “It makes me feel less lonely. I just got to find my pack.”

“Wrong place for a pack, buddy,” Hank intervenes. “Unalaska is one of the toughest places to find friends.”

I squint my eyes, because in my opinion it’s been the easiest place I’ve ever made friends. There’s Warren, who might be my handler but I’m pretty sure he’s my friend too. There’s Eddie, who feels like a grumpy father figure. There’s Mano, and Tiny Nick and Bash. Hell, there’s even Deanna, who feeds

me and tells me nice things. It doesn't seem that hard to make friends here.

So I ignore it.

And make the mistake to look back at Warren again. His eyes seem to be burning, which is a feat in and of itself, because his eyes are so pale it must be a very cold fire. Yet the heat is on.

Warren doesn't say a thing, he just sits and stares and breathes, and I feel small yet oh so powerful beneath that stare.

"What?" I end up asking when I can no longer take it.

"It's just..." Warren starts. "Never mind. It's nothing."

"I'm done," Hank says. "You wanna look at it?"

And I really couldn't fucking care less. "Nah man," I say. "It's just my back. I won't ever see it. Just start, I just need to get rid of that fucking marking."

Hank doesn't seem to care whether I want to look at his work or not. Maybe that's what you get when you work with the mafia. You don't ask questions, you just do as you're told. He turns on the tattoo gun and before I know it I feel him make the first line.

It hurts, but I embrace the pain.

And before I know it I somehow drift off. I've always enjoyed the pain of getting a tattoo. Sometimes I wonder if there is something wrong with me, because I welcome the pain. Not just this pain, but all of it. Sure, having my nose broken because I was in a fight hurts like freaking hell, but somehow having just a little bit of pain feels good. Is it because I think I deserve to hurt?

I don't fucking know.

My thoughts float away and I sit in complete ease while Hank works on my back and for the next I don't know how long I'm gone, away in a state of equal bliss and agony.

“All done,” Hank says, shutting down his tattoo gun and putting all the aftercare stuff on my back. “Wanna see?”

“Sure,” I answer.

Getting off the chair costs more effort than I expect. Maybe I’ve been sitting down longer than I thought. The muscles in my legs are sore and I try and stretch them when he leads me to a large standing mirror.

I stand in front of it and look over my shoulder. There’s a very large wolf on my back, made out of abstract figures, covering up my old tattoo wholly. Something inside of me heals when I see it, and I can’t explain what it does to me. My throat feels thick and I quickly blink away tears.

Bikers don’t cry, my head echoes with voices from the past.

“Thanks Hank, that’s truly marvelous.”

Hank beams. I don’t care if it’s shitty work or not. I’m just lighter now that that thing is gone. I’ve still got blood on my hands, but at least now nobody has to know about it. The guilt of getting away while I’m just as guilty as everyone else in Victorious is something that keeps me up at night. It’s why I’ve been reading a lot and drinking a lot of coffee.

Warren is getting dressed to go outside, and I follow his lead. Before I do I catch his eyes going over my abs once again – the same heat there again. And something primal inside of me wants to jump this man’s bones. But I won’t.

When I’m dressed we say goodbye to Hank and get into the car where we’re greeted by Jack’s excited doggy talk. It’s almost as if he’s telling me he’s missed us.

Warren is unusually silent.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“Did you pick the wolf because of Jack?”

The question takes me by surprise. “No. I didn’t. Truly.”

The awkward silence returns and I can feel it boiling in my stomach.

“Why?” I ask when I can no longer take it.

Warren sighs. “Before I started doing what I do now, I had another business. They called me the Dire Wolf. I just feel connected to everything that has to do with them.”

I squint, because what kind of job do you have where you need a nickname? Was he a Ninja Turtle or something like that?

Inhaling deeply I try to let it go. Thinking about my book I try to give the whole thing a positive spin. “I guess we’re pack then.”

“Pack?” he asks, his eyes leaving the road and giving me an intense stare.

“Yes, like we belong together.”

A low growl fills the car and it’s not Jack who’s making the sound. Warren clearly tops Jack in the hierarchy, which in its turn makes Warren the alpha I think.

A chuckle leaves my mouth, because it’s ridiculous to think in terms like these.

“Stop it,” Warren says.

“Stop what?” I ask.

“Doing every little fucking thing in the world to make me want you. I’m your handler – we need to keep things professional.”

My heart skips a beat, because that’s the last thing I expect him to say. “And me saying we’re pack makes you... want me?” I ask with a raised eyebrow. Because what the hell?

“Yes,” he simply states.

“Would that be the worst thing in the world?” I ask.

“Yes,” he repeats.

“Okay,” I say, turning my head and looking out of the window, not showing my hurt. It feels like he’s rejecting me for something I have no influence over, and I hate it. Because I’ve seen the heated looks, and they’ve made me feel all the things he’s now telling me I’m not allowed to feel.

“I...” he says before he falls quiet again.

I let him stew in his own mess.

“I think I’ve got to tell you something.”



What the hell am I thinking? Why would I tell him anything? Why am I telling him that he's making me want him? Have I forgotten everything I've ever learned? Jesus, even with Braden I didn't come on so strongly. I know restraint - I fucking *am* restraint. And now I'm making mistake after fucking mistake and I can't take it back.

Not like he didn't know I was attracted to him, I could see it in about every little tell in him. He's hard to read, but he was very clear in his attraction.

Now that I have told him I have to tell him something, I actually have to spill.

He just looks at me with those big blue eyes, expecting something from me. And that's all my fault because I had to bring stuff up.

"What do you have to tell me?" he asks after his patience has run out.

I scrape my throat. "I told you about my ex partner moving out..." For some reason I'm putting this off because I don't really want to tell him - afraid of his response, of his rejection.

"Yeah, so what?"

"Well, he was the first man I ever lived with. He made me step out of a certain lifestyle."

Dominic scrunches his brows. "Like, were you a drug lord or something like that?"

The honesty in the question makes me laugh so hard that I start coughing towards the end. “No, I never sold drugs. I don’t think the Marshals would have liked that very much.”

“What lifestyle then?” His eyes are so sincere that it makes me gather the courage to speak up.

“I used to be a professional Dom before Braden. That door to the basement? It actually leads to a dungeon.”

Silence returns to the cabin of the car, only to be interrupted anytime Jack has to say something.

“And why is this a problem exactly?” Dom asks when we’re nearing his house.

“Because I’m not a gentle man. I’m not a lover. I’ve tried so with Braden – it’s not who I am. I’m a mean sadistic bastard that thrives on power. You don’t want me, Dom. I’m not good for you.”

He looks at me dumbfounded. Then, after what feels like an eternity, he speaks up: “Is that a lifestyle you’re going back to?”

Now it’s my turn to stay silent. I’m not planning on anything. I don’t know what the future looks like. I know I’m not dating, but I’m not going to stay celibate for the rest of my life. Am I really considering going back to it?

“Undecided,” I answer.

Dom puts his foot on my dashboard, and the casualty he does it with makes me feel like he simply belongs.

My insides churn. I know I’m not staying celibate. Hell, my drive is probably higher than it’s been all my fucking life, and that’s including those wonderful first teenage years where you discover your body. But part of me knows that I’m not going to mindlessly fuck around and going back to being pro Dom isn’t in the cards either. Because no matter the short time I’ve known him, no matter the fact that he’s my protectee and I’m his handler, I’m drawn to this man like nothing else.

It’s magnetism in its purest form.

“So,” Dom finally says to break the silence and put me out of my misery. “Why are you telling me this?”

Good fucking question.

“Because you keep looking at me like...”

“Like?”

“Like you’re waiting for something to happen between us.”

He scoffs and shakes his head. “Just because we’re both gay and you’re practically the only guy I know here doesn’t mean I’m going to fall for you.”

He’s lying. He’s already fallen for me. And fuck if I haven’t already fallen for him. He might not know it, but I can read through the lines.

Then why am I telling him about the Dom thing? Am I subconsciously trying to scare him away? Am I trying to convince myself that this is a bad plan? Is this self sabotaging?

I drop the fucking subject, because clearly Dom doesn’t know and I don’t know either. “Home then?” I ask him, making sure I keep my eyes on the road. Looking at him would be disastrous.

“Still need to eat,” he says. “Can you take me to Deanna’s?”

I nod, telling myself that I’ll just drop him off and I won’t join him for dinner. It’s the only logical thing to do. At least if I want to keep my head on straight. Which I don’t know if it’ll be possible.

We drive in silence for the rest of the way, Dominic shifting in his seat every now and then. He acts as if the fresh tattoo on his back is irritating him. It might be the case, I wouldn’t know. I’m an empty canvas.

When I pull up to Deanna’s I have every intention of dropping him off and then going back home, but my eye falls on Felix having dinner at Deanna’s. And Felix? Well, he’s Unalaska’s biggest gay slut. I don’t have any objections to that – he even used my services a few times back in the day. But I know for a fact that the moment Dominic walks in Felix is going to hit on him like a hitman out on a mission.

I can't even blame him. It's making me feel a jealousy that is way out of proportion to how it should be.

So before I know what I'm doing I'm parking the car in one of the empty slots and getting out of the car with Dominic. He throws me a suspicious look, and I feel guilty as shit. So I start to stutter excuses.

"I don't have anything to eat at home," I lie.

He raises his eyebrow. He has seen my fridge and knows perfectly well that I won't run out of stock anytime soon. He just rolls his eyes and starts walking to the entrance. I stare at the big strides he takes and can't help but admire the significantly manly way he walks. It's pretty obvious that he grew up in an environment surrounded by men. It's something that makes me feel all giddy on the inside.

When he halts to open the door, I lay my hand on the small of his back before I know what I'm doing. And I immediately know I've fucked up.

He glances over his shoulder, looking as if he's seeing water burning.

PDA between two men was deadly within Victorious, and after the performance I just gave about not wanting him I should've known better.

What the hell is wrong with me? I'm usually in fucking control. Where has my restraint gone?

Dom goes to an empty table and sits down.

I make sure I sit down opposite to him and look everywhere but at the man sitting opposite to me.

Felix notices me and gives me a wink and a two finger salute with a knowing smile.

I'm so fucking fucked.

Deanna makes her way to our table, grabbing her signature notebook and pen, giving us a warming smile. I swear to God that that woman's smile can warm all of Unalaska. All the rejects and misfits who find their way here trying to make a quick fortune that have no loving home to go back to can find

one inside this diner. Everyone is welcome, and nobody will ever feel left out in this place. It's kind of magical that way.

"What can I get you guys?" she asks, tucking a strand of her loose hair behind her ear.

"Crab and a coke, please," Dom answers immediately. Seems like he has developed a taste for the crustacean food.

"Same, but with a beer please." Lord knows I need it right now.

"Coming right up," she says, scribbling down an order that I know she'll remember by heart anyway. It's a force of habit to write everything down. I follow her while she walks to the computer system next to the kitchen where she indeed puts in the order without looking at her notepad once.

It's then that I feel his eyes on me, studying me. When I look up I get met with curiosity.

"What?" I ask.

"How does it work?" he asks, never breaking eye contact. He's feeling brave right now and I wonder what it is that's enticing this kind of behavior.

"What?" I repeat myself.

"The pro Domming," he says, his voice softer, making sure it doesn't carry and doesn't reach any ears it shouldn't. It warms me that he even cares to think about it.

I sigh and then lean forward. I've got nobody to blame except myself. "It's a business deal. Or maybe that's the best thing to compare it to. I sell a service, we negotiate the rules of that service, and then I perform that service. It varied per client what they wanted. Or needed."

"So you, like, beat the crap out of men who pay you for it?"

I cock my head and rub my hands over my eyes. "It's not like that." I fall silent for a moment, thinking about all the things I've done. "Well, sometimes it's like that. But that's not all there's to it. Some guys need a firm hand, rules to follow, something to hold onto. Even outside of scenes."

“Scenes are the moments you’re together, right?”

I nod. “It’s an agreed upon period where a certain dynamic is in play. I’m the Dom then, and what I say goes.”

“But sometimes it’s outside of those moments?” He looks confused, but he is taking all of this very well. And I like that he is curious and comfortable enough to ask questions.

“Sometimes they follow certain rules outside of play. I’m not their Dom in that moment. They do so themselves. But they have something to hold onto.”

He falls silent, sitting back in the booth we’re sitting in and looks around. His eyes go around the diner, but he seems lost in thought instead of taking everything in.

Deanna comes to the table, bringing us our food and our drinks, and we both tuck in without finishing the conversation.

He devours his food like he’s starving, and I guess that getting a big back piece is something that takes a lot of energy and makes you hungry.

Deep down I want to offer him some form of aftercare, but I push that thought deep, *deep*, down. Instead I focus on my food and drink my drink. Mentally I’m beating myself up for making everything so difficult.

He surprises me again when he’s finished his dinner.

“It doesn’t sound all that bad, you know? It actually sounds like you’re doing them a real nice service. Providing them what they need.”

He’s romanticizing it.

“I whip some of them until they’re bruised and bloody,” I say, the kindness disappearing from my voice.

Still, he doesn’t look all that shaken.

“Pain can be healing sometimes,” he deadpans, holding my gaze and not backing down.

Fuck. I really want to break him in. Train him and keep him all to myself. It’s a feeling I’ve had once a lifetime ago. I’m

still working through the pain of that.

“Yes,” I whisper. “Yes it can.”



The next morning I have trouble getting out of bed. My night was terrible. I tried to sleep on my back, but the fresh tat hurt too much. So I tossed and turned until the night ended and a new morning came.

Now, I'm fixing myself a cup of coffee, because I'm going to need it. There'll be coffee at the shipyard, but I need some caffeine to even get there.

While I was awake last night Warren's confession kept going through my head. I don't really understand most of it and I have to admit I did some research on my phone on the matter. It seems there's a whole world out there I know nothing about, and it's as broad as you can imagine.

I'm going to have to force myself to think about different things though, because I'm going to make mistakes if I don't pay attention. Those ships might work the same as a motorcycle in theory, but there are still some significant differences and everyone is trying their hardest to teach me how everything works. I don't want to fuck up and have some men out there on the sea with a broken ship.

Right now all my work is being checked, and I prefer it that way.

But I do need to get going, stop thinking about Warren and learn how to do all that ship stuff. Though my stomach aches when I think about bikes. I might not miss the club and its practices, but I do miss the bikes.

I place my empty cup in the sink, knowing I'll rinse it later that evening, grab my coat and head out the door.

The cold Alaskan air hits me like a hammer – I don't think I'll ever get used to it. Looking at my feet and hiding in my jacket I quickly walk towards the shipyard, having every intention to get inside as quickly as possible, but something grabs my attention.

With the sun just rising over the horizon, the sea has a rare and unnatural golden glow. And when I look in the distance I can see whales. The sound of the ocean rushing in gives me a sense of serenity and it only heightens my marvel over the huge mammals.

I've never seen them before and they're fucking majestic.

They're humpback whales, and there's a whole bunch of them. Having never been to the sea before I came here is one thing, but this is a sight I'll never forget. It makes going into WITSEC all the more worth it. There were plenty of afternoons spent locked away in that safehouse where I just watched endless documentaries.

I startle when a hand slaps my shoulder and I look up. It's Eddie, standing outside, holding onto his cane. He looks at the sea as well, staring at the humpbacks. "The sea is a mistress, and she's a fucking unforgivable bitch, but those animals are a sight to behold."

I sniff, my nose running from the cold and the wind. "I was just thinking something along those lines. I've never really been to the ocean. And I've never seen humpbacks."

Eddie's look darkens and his demeanor hardens. "You stay on land, you hear me? Those humpbacks are just as marvelous here as they are at sea. You don't have sea legs. You're supposed to stay on land."

My stomach twists. There's something to his words that I can't place, but I can feel the gravity of them in my body. Eddie seems to be processing something himself and I get the feeling there's a story behind all of this – I just don't feel like I'm in a position to ask. I just arrived here and the old ship maker has graced me with a learning position in his business. It's only fair that I don't get all up in his business.

“Come along,” he says, the anger and sadness disappearing from his face and his thinking wrinkle returning back to normal. “I found you some junk you might like.”

I raise my brow, questioning him, but he just turns and stalks to the ship hangar. I quickly catch up and open the door for him so he can enter easily while still using his cane. As soon as he enters he sits down on his chair and disposes of his cane.

I close the door, take off my coat, hang it by the other coats and try to shake the cold off me. I have no idea what Eddie means by finding me some junk I might like. I don't like junk in general.

“Over there,” Eddie says, pointing to my work station.

I follow his finger, and next to my bench is the old and rusty frame of a motorbike. And my heart skips a beat.

“The motorblock is there somewhere, but they found it all detached. I thought you might like it. For personal time of course, I need you to work when you're here.”

My throat thickens. “Thank you, Eddie,” I manage to say.

He waves my thanks away. “It's nothing, boy.”

It isn't nothing. It's something. It's a huge something. It's filling a gap in my heart that has started to grow bigger and bigger over the last months. It's a bike, just a piece of motherfucking mechanics, but it holds such significance to me.

Walking towards it, I let my eyes glide over the thing. It's old, and it's rusty, but it's a thing of beauty all the same. Once I reach it I stroke the frame, getting a feel for it. It's an old

school frame, making me wonder where Eddie got it from. Probably he literally got it from the junkyard.

But it's salvageable.

Everything deserves a second chance.

And like pieces of a puzzle falling into place, I can see what I'm going to do to it. It's going to take months of work, but with winter right around the corner there won't be any riding to do anyway.

Fuck Lance and fuck Warren for telling me I can't have a bike in Alaska. At least Eddie gets it.

While I'm wondering what I did to deserve this from the old man, the three stooges come walking towards me. Tiny Nick whistles between his teeth, and Mano shakes his head with a goofy grin on it.

"What have you got here, buddy?" Bash asks, his hands already dirty with some sort of grease. I don't think it ever fully gets off.

"Eddie said he got me junk," I answer, looking a little sentimental to the bike.

"Better than getting you his junk," Tiny Nick jokes, but his laughter dies when he gets an elbow to the ribs.

"We don't know which way Dom swings, and we never joke about different sexualities," Mano says with a stern look on his face.

Tiny Nick nods, taking the criticism like a trooper. I breathe freely again, not even knowing I tensed up when Nick made a harmless joke. I'm used to people making jokes about gays. Their intentions might not always be harmful, but they hurt more than they realize.

"Tell us about your junk," Bash says, inwardly chuckling.

I can't help but laugh at his playfulness.

"Better than talking about Eddie's junk," Mano says.

"What was that?" Eddie calls from the back, and all of us start laughing out loud.

“This here is the frame of a Harley Chopper. It reminds me of my youth,” I tell them and I wonder if I’m rocking the googly eyes.

“Rust remind you of your youth?” Mano asks.

“Yeah,” I answer truthfully, because it fucking does. I once overheard Evan in her first days at the compound telling Nathan that everything smelled of oil, concrete and leather, but to me it’s rust and whiskey. The rust leaves a happy memory, the whiskey not so much, reminding me of my father in one of his foul moods.

“You gonna save that?” Mano asks, eyeing my new baby with questioning eyes. Somehow I feel like I’m going to have to convince him to have some faith.

“Yeah,” I repeat myself.

“He’s like that TV-show,” Tiny Nick says. “You know the one, with the father and the son who argue all the time and the other son who doesn’t really do anything?”

He’s not fucking wrong.

“Get your asses back to work!” Eddie booms from somewhere around the coffee machine.

So I give one last glance at the chopper and then get back to it.

“Tuna or chicken?” Warren’s voice startles me from right beside me.

I’m working on a motor block from a ship and I’ve forgotten the world around me exists. So when I hear his voice I startle.

His piercing white eyes look at me, holding up two bags of what I presume are sandwiches.

“Chicken,” I answer, half by force of habit, half by preference. You never know which kind of tuna you’re going to get here.

“There you go,” he says.

“What are you doing here?” I ask suspiciously, trying not to look at the way the jeans stretch over his ass while he takes off his jacket.

“I’m checking up on you,” he says.

“Do you check up on all your protectee?”

“No, but I do on the ones I just dropped a bomb on about my former occupation.” He looks grave, like his admittance changes something with me. It didn’t. He’s still just Warren. My handler. My handler who I’d like to throw down on the ground and do the nasty and dirty with.

“I’m fine,” I say, cleaning my hands on my rag before I take the lunch he has brought us. After I’ve placed the bag on the counter I was just working on, I turn around to the tiny kitchen and grab both of us a cup of coffee.

Eddie is sitting there, guarding the kitchen, but he hums in approval when he looks at Warren.

I just roll my eyes at the old man, who promptly directs me back towards my bench by pointing towards it with the end of his cane.

By the time I’ve come back with the coffee, Warren has unbagged the food and has found a chair for himself. He looks both out of place and at home in the ship hangar. His white hair is too clean for the greasy environment, but at the same time he looks like he belongs. I wonder if it’s Unalaska that suits him, or if he’s some kind of chameleon who just adjusts to his surroundings.

“Don’t you have anything better to do?” I ask him when I bring him his coffee while he is happily chomping away on his sandwich.

“No,” he says, giving me a stern look with those creepy white blue eyes of his.

“Where’s Jack?”

“Wow,” Warren says. “You resort to talking about the dog so soon? You really don’t have anything better to say to me?”

“What can I say? I like the damn dog.”

Warren nods and takes another bite.

“So?” I insist.

“He’s sleeping in the cabin. We went on a hike this morning, then we went home, he passed out, I made some sandwiches and I drove over. Jack couldn’t be bothered.”

I snort, because I can vividly imagine what that must look like.

“He was snoring when I left.”

Now I laugh out loud. When I look back up after picking up my sandwich I can see a twinkle in Warren’s eyes and I swear I can feel something zinging between us. There’s this static energy that both of us can’t deny.

Before I can give it too much thought Mano walks up, slaps Warren on his shoulder with a dirty hand, leaving a stain on Warren’s clothes, before he asks where his sandwich is.

“You can fend for yourself,” Warren replies. “Dom is no match for Unalaska, we need to help him a little.”

I roll my eyes, because I’m not some damn kid who can’t defend himself. I was in the nation’s biggest MC for crying out loud.

Warren gives me a stern look when he catches me rolling my eyes, so I shake my head and do it again.

I swear I can see something burning behind his eyes.

He can claim all he wants about the need for us to stay professional, but he wants me just as much as I want him. We can beat around the bush all we like, but there’s no denying it.

“Now that you’re here,” Mano says, sitting his ass down on my bench and crossing his arms. “What do you do for a living?”

“I’m an international spy,” Warren deadpans.

I look at the two men while they interact and bicker about the possibilities of Warren being an actual spy and I feel something I haven’t felt in a long time. I feel at home.

The moment Warren looks my way and gives me a wink, I know I'm a goner.

Guess Unalaska is here to stay.



“Sit,” my mother says. She’s tiny and I can easily lay my chin on her head, but that has never meant she lacks in personality. She has the biggest heart of all of Unalaska. Don’t mistake heart for being a doormat though. If she tells you to sit, you better fucking sit.

So I do.

My father is already at the head of the table. He’s reading the newspaper on his tablet. I can tell because his glasses balance on the tip of his nose and he holds the tablet about two inches from his face. Ever since technology made it possible to read news online we no longer bother getting physical newspapers. We always got them a few days late anyway.

Jennifer, my spirited sister, sits at his left, joined by her husband Josh, already sitting down, cradling a glass of wine. Both of them look exhausted so my guess is that it’s been a rough week.

Somewhere in the distance I can hear my niece Liv and nephew Oliver run amok. They’re the probable cause for aforementioned exhaustion.

My mother is on the hunt for them, because I can hear her rush them to the dining room to eat dinner.

It’s our weekly family dinner, and while I don’t *always* attend, I try to be here as often as possible. It’s the way it’s always been and the way I like it.

“I’m a speedboat!” Oliver yells while he runs into the dining room, Jack following him and bumping into him when Oliver abruptly comes to a halt. My nephew falls down from the unexpected bump, laughing like a little maniac when he falls on the ground. I don’t know what it is with the little guy, but he hardly ever cries, he just happens to think everything is hilarious. Which in this case might be for the best anyway.

Liv enters the dining room, being ushered forward by my mother.

“What’s for dinner?” the seven year old asks.

“Roast, vegetables and potatoes,” my mother says.

“Gross,” Liv says, making it hard for me to suppress a snicker.

“Excuse me?” Jennifer says, both her eyebrows raised in surprise.

“I,” Liv says with a dainty attitude while she turns to her mother, “have decided to become a vegetarian.”

She might be seven, but she acts like she’s a teenager. The annoying thing is that she has the brains to back it up. Where Oliver is happy go lucky and doesn’t see the danger in anything, Liv is wise beyond her years and way too smart.

“Like hell you are,” my sister says.

“Language,” my mother says, taking her seat at the opposite end of the table.

“I don’t want to eat animals anymore, I want to save the environment, like Greta Thunberg.”

“Greta doesn’t live in Unalaska where the only good source of protein is meat,” Josh patiently tells his daughter. Where my sister is a fiery one, Josh is the calm one. He always makes time to explain everything to Liv like she’s his peer instead of a kid. “And since you’re still a kid and have several feet to grow, you need that.”

“Meat is yummy,” Oliver contributes to the conversation. He’s sitting on his knees on his chair, impatiently hopping

from one side to another. He doesn't have the option to sit still – it just wasn't installed in him.

“How do you know about Greta?” my father asks while he puts his tablet aside and plucks his glasses from his nose.

“There's such a thing as the internet,” Liv says before she turns to Oliver. “Greta goes everywhere with a sailship.” Conniving little thing. She knows Oliver will get excited by the mention of a ship and the conversation will soon be steered away from her.

I sit back and watch in amusement while the scene unfolds.

“How many sails?” Oliver asks, his eyes big.

“No, no, no,” Jennifer says. “You're not allowed to become a vegetarian.”

Liv rolls her eyes.

Josh lays his hand on top of Jennifer's hand and he squeezes it in reassurance.

“What do you think, Uncle Warren?” Liv asks me in her sweetest voice.

Crap. Busted.

“I think that it makes sense for us to eat meat and fish here as a source of protein. We don't import more meat than we can consume, so our environmental footprint isn't that big. We do need to stay healthy. And as your father said, you're still growing, so you need it to stay healthy.”

Liv huffs at me and I have to fight not to laugh out loud.

“Everyone is just eating, and that's that,” my mother says. And that's that. Mother's word is law and none of us dare to go against it. She starts plating everyone's food. Growing up in Unalaska has taught me one thing: you'd better eat your damn plate and not let any food go to waste. It's not like we have endless resources and everyone needs the sustenance.

The fishermen that come through Dutch Harbor know this better than anyone. Whenever they're out on sea they eat several thousand calories a day, just to keep up with their

body's demands. It's the long working hours and the freezing temperatures that ask for it. And the people on the land have taken to this way of living.

The indigenous tribes in Unalaska live this way as well. It just feels right, while living here.

"So," my father says, letting his pale blue eyes rest on me. "Eddie tells me you've got a new one?"

My dad and Eddie have been friends for as long as I can remember. But where my father slowed down, Eddie just keeps going. I don't think he'll ever do anything else besides fix ships and the people working for him until the day he dies.

"New one?" Jennifer asks, her interest piqued.

"Thanks" I say, looking at my mother while grabbing the plate. "And yes, I've got a new friend that came over."

My family knows that I work for the government and I bring people to Unalaska. They don't know anything besides that, for everyone's safety. My parents are private people, Josh is a man who can keep his mouth shut. My sister? She's a completely different story. She thrives on gossip, and ever since she settled down, my love life.

"Is he any cute?" she asks.

"Eddie says you were making googly eyes at him," my father says, and I want to retract my statement about my father being private. Apparently he gossips like those two old men from the muppets with Eddie.

"I was not making googly eyes at him, I was eating sandwiches with him."

"That's practically a declaration of love," Jennifer says.

"Eating sandwiches is being in love?" Liv asks aghast. "I ate sandwiches with Mathew Porter and I do *not* love Mathew Porter."

"What's wrong with Mathew Porter?" my mother asks.

"He has cooties and he picks his nose when he thinks nobody is watching."

“You pick your nose when you think nobody is watching,” Josh says calmly before biting the potato off his fork.

“I do not!” Liv shrieks.

“Are you going to marry Mathew?” Oliver asks.

“Ew no!”

“Wait, let’s get back to the new guy Warren is seeing,” Jennifer says. “And Liv, you’re not allowed to date until you’re thirty, so eat all the sandwiches you want with Mathew, nothing is going on.”

Which is kind of rich, coming from Jen, because she dated almost the entire single population of Unalaska before she settled with Josh and she started at an early age. But with there being an abundance more men here than women, we get kind of protective about our girls.

“I’m not seeing anyone,” I say, staring at my plate. My heart rate picks up and my hands get clammy.

For fuck’s sake. The mere mention of Dom shouldn’t have this effect on me. But it does, and it annoys me.

“But is he cute?”

“Yes,” I answer curtly.

“Do I need to set him up with anyone?”

I ignore the spots that appear in front of my eyes. My eye twitches before I answer. The idea of Dom with anyone else is making me feel violent and has me wanting to slap the shit out of someone. “No,” I say, grinding my teeth. “He doesn’t like women. And me telling that is a gross invasion of his privacy, so you better back off.”

Jennifer holds up her hands in surrender and Josh not so subtly pushes her wine glass in the direction of her hand.

We can all feel the change in my mood – it’s big enough to affect the whole room. I really need to get a grip on things.

“I’ve heard some things from the other guys,” my father continues as if we didn’t just have a heated conversation.

“What’d you hear?” I ask, genuinely curious as to what’s going on.

“People with bad intentions going round.”

“What kind of bad intentions?”

“Rumor is that stuff is being brought in through Dutch Harbor.”

“Drugs?” I ask. We’re not really on the drug route, but it wouldn’t be the first time that cocky criminals thought they could master the wild seas and harsh nature as an easy and new way to get drugs into the country. Most of them only try once.

“No, poaching is the rumor,” Dad says, looking me in the face, worried lines on his forehead.

“What’s poaching?” Oliver asks.

“Illegally hunting species that shouldn’t be hunted,” my father states matter of factly, stopping all the additional questions my nephew would ask if we’d have beaten around the bush.

“Like unicorns?” he asks with wide eyes.

“Unicorns aren’t real,” Liv says.

“Are so,” Oliver argues, poking his fork in her general direction. “They’re called Narlawns or something.”

“Narwhals,” Josh corrects him, keeping his eye on his food, not even blinking an eye that we’re now suddenly talking about unicorn narwhals with a five year old.

“Whales,” my dad says, making me look up really slowly.

Whales have been a thing here in Alaska. While there was a hard pass on hunting them for ages, the last couple of decades some hunting has been allowed. Orcas in particular have become a pest, but we shouldn’t overfish them like they were before.

Some Asian countries still believe that some parts of the animal possess some magical or healing abilities for infertility.

Then there's real cod drops and general whale meat that still gets sold and eaten.

"But we've got a million of them here," Liv says, a small wrinkle forming between her eyes reminding me so much of Jen it makes me smile.

"We do here," my mother explains. "But there aren't that many in the rest of the world. And seeing how big they grow, they need a while to become mature."

"But it's just really big fish, right?" Oliver asks.

And then Josh fucks up.

"Some people believe that their penises are medicine."

The look on Oliver's face is hilarious while he stares at his plate, then at his mother, then at Grandma and lastly at me.

"Have you ever fed me whale peepee?" he asks in horror.

We start laughing simultaneously.

"No sweetheart," Jen says.

"Swear on..." He tries to find something important to swear on. "Swear on Jack's life that you never fed me whale peepee."

Jen crosses her heart and then nods, my mother follows his example and I just give him a stern look.

"I make you help me gut the animals I hunt. Have I ever made you gut a whale?"

"No," he says with a tiny voice and a little green face.

"So no, I never made you eat whale penis. And I'd like it if you kept my dog out of this."

Oliver nods and reluctantly starts eating again.

"So," Jen says chipperly. "Tell me more about Dominic."

I swear there are heart shaped figures in her eyes when she says his name.



Rain is pouring out of the sky. It's a freezing rain and I was very glad to get to the hangar to get some warmth back – but then I found Eddie standing in front of an opened pull up door that only gets lifted when new ships are coming in.

Right now? It's all the way fucking opened. And it's keeping none of the warmth in.

I greet the guys – who are all still wearing their coats and are cupping mugs of coffee in their hands. They don't seem to be bothered by the weird behavior of Eddie and they all give me head nods as if nothing's off.

Foregoing taking my coat off, I grab a cup of coffee as well. I take a second to look at the old mentor, standing in the opening, looking out at the dark sky. Usually by this time the sun would start to rise, but it's dark as the dead of night right now and it doesn't seem like it's going to be changing any time soon.

Eddie doesn't sit in his usual desk chair, he stands up tall, his back straight as a rod, lightly leaning on his cane. He despises the thing, so to see him use it inside the hangar where he has his desk chair to use if he needs to is kind of setting me off.

Perhaps I'm staring at him, because he turns around, and beckons me towards him with a chin lift.

Feeling busted, I make my way over to him and stand next to him. The rain hits me in the face, and fuck if that doesn't feel like I'm stuck in an ice blizzard. The sound of crashing waves is almost deafening this close to the sea.

When I get a good look at Eddie I see that he's drenched. A big fat drop of water hangs from his nose, his coat is soaked all the way through and his shoes are getting wet by a puddle of water that keeps rising.

"She's a treacherous bitch," he says, his voice low and almost unrecognizable.

"Who?" I ask in confusion.

"The sea, boy."

For just a millisecond I'm taken back to the MC, where my elders made me feel like an inexperienced young man. But this isn't there, I'm not some inexperienced boy and Eddie doesn't mean any ill will with calling me boy. He's embraced me being here like all of the people I've met in Unalaska so far have.

"Isn't this just the storm, causing all the trouble?" I ask because I don't understand what's going on.

"Yeah, it's the storm. But a storm turns the calmest sea into a murderous piece of shit." His voice breaks when the words leave his mouth and the grip on his cane gets so tight his knuckles turn white.

I'm unsure how to proceed. In my past I would've walked away, because people didn't want me to get all up in their personal business. But that's not the vibe Eddie has given me so far. And I want to know why he's acting so out of character.

In the weeks I've been here I've never seen him pay any attention to the sea. He lets the guys get the ships inside and he closes the sliding doors as soon as he can. The only time I've heard him talk about the ocean was the time we saw the humpbacks right before he gave me my bike.

My mind races and I take a long drink from my coffee, the steam unfreezing parts of my face I can no longer feel now that the cold rain is falling on it.

“I don’t mean to pry,” I say as I put on my big boy boots. “But what’s up with you and the sea?”

Eddie huffs, turning his back towards me and I’m sure he’s going to walk away because I’ve overstepped my boundaries. But just when I start feeling bad for even asking the question, he turns back.

His eyes are watery and he doesn’t make eye contact, looking out over the sea again.

“He was twenty,” the old man says.

I let silence linger between us – the air feels static and fragile, and I’m afraid that by speaking I will break it.

“Damian was my son. And he came here from Portland to go crab fishing and make some money. He had thought it all through. A few good seasons and he could take it easy the rest of his life.”

Now I definitely keep my mouth shut.

Outside on the sea lightning crashes in the ocean in the distance. Both of us look towards the point of impact, but soon all I can see is the rain falling down.

“It was his second trip. He wasn’t a green horn anymore, he had learned a lot the year before. He was praised by his captain about how quickly he picked the trade up. He was always smart like that. Show him something once and he’ll know it by heart. And if by some rare occurrence he didn’t, he’d practice until he got it right. He was tenacious like that.”

“Bet he got that from his dad,” I say, earning myself a crooked smirk from the old man.

“I think I learned more from him than he ever did from me,” Eddie reminisces, lost in thought.

I drain my coffee and wait for him to continue talking. Or not. If this is what he wants to share I’ll take it.

“There was a huge storm, and he was emptying the pots, when one of the loose pots hit him and made him fall overboard. They spent days looking for him, but after that first hour everyone knew they were looking for a body, not for Damian.”

I swallow thickly.

Eddie turns towards me, staring me straight in the face, tears streaking down his cheeks. “The sea is a murderous bitch. It gives life and it takes. But I’ll never forgive her for taking my boy.”

I scrunch my eyebrows. “Then why stay here?”

Eddie scoffs. “Stay? It was the reason I came here. Had a really decent life back in Portland. Had a desk job, can you imagine? Made some pretty money. But after Damian was taken, I just had to come here. I opened up this shop, taught myself everything there was to learn about ships, with the help of some decent people helping me out I must admit, and I kept going until fixing ships became second nature.”

“Like Damian,” I half whisper.

“Like Damian,” Eddie says.

We stand in silence, looking out over the sea again. This time looking at it I can see the harsh picture Eddie paints of her.

“Why?” I ask in the end. If something would have taken something from me that I love more than life itself, I wouldn’t want anything to do with it. I now understand why he never brings the ships in. I get why the doors get closed again after everything is brought inside.

“Because if there are any guys out there who want to make a quick buck, who want to go out to sea, but who haven’t heard her call – I want to offer them an alternative. Some of us are stuck in Unalaska, for varying reasons. And I want them to have the option to not become the Bering Sea’s next victim.”

My heart aches when I hear his words. My father made me into the enforcer of the nation’s biggest MC, not giving a damn crap whether I live or die. And here’s Eddie, who even

after his son's death cared so deeply about him he packed up his things, left his home and made sure other people's kids won't meet the same fate as Damian did.

Fuck.

That's what love is.

I pray to fuck that I may ever experience feeling so deeply.

"Some men hear her call. I swear to God, I've seen grown men go crazy if they couldn't get out to sea often enough."

I haven't felt that pull. I've been marveling at the ocean, because I haven't seen it that often, but there is no need to go out there and go sail it. I'd rather keep my feet on the ground. But the way I'm jonesing to get on a bike is something that I think is comparable to people feeling the need to go out to sea. The way the wind blows through my hair whenever I drive might be the same as feeling the ocean breeze through your hair.

"Did they ever find him?" I ask. I know I've killed people in the name of Victorious and I know their bodies were never returned to their families. The club made sure that there were no bodies left. There was a clean-up crew and everything. Sometimes when I'm lying awake at night those families haunt my mind. I'm a lousy enforcer – having a conscience about everything I did.

"No," Eddie says, staring at the waves that slam into the shore. "He's taken by the sea, and she never gave him back."

I swallow thickly – the image that flashes through my mind of a rotting corpse on the bottom of the ocean makes me a little sick.

"They say the grief lessens," Eddie continues. He doesn't look my way, his eyes are glued to the sea. "It's a lie. Grief is like a ball that's stuck in a box. And there's a red button that activates the grief. Time makes the ball smaller, but it's still there. And sometimes it hits the button. You don't know when it hits you, and when it does it feels like it happened yesterday."

We stand in silence. What do you say to that?

Eddie notices my discomfort. “It’s okay, boy. It just flares up whenever there’s a storm. The storm resides in my head as well. It’ll die down in a bit, but I just have my moment when the weather acts up like this.”

“Does everyone know?”

“Yes. Most of Unalaska knows. It’s no secret. You can talk about it. I only thought it was fair you would know as well.”

I nod, letting his words sink in. It’s almost like Eddie takes in the strays that don’t have it to make it on the sea. That could be a reason to feel bad about myself, but I genuinely don’t. I have no desire to go to sea, I’m just happy to be here, alive and kicking, not locked up, and finally free from my brother and the club.

I owe a lot of people everything. The FBI and the Marshals, for allowing me to go into WITSEC and not persecuting me. Warren, for helping me find my footing here. Eddie, for welcoming me like I’m his son. I now understand where that comes from, and I wonder whether he tries to fill the void that Damian has left inside of him by taking in young men and giving them a job. Whatever it is, I’m grateful for it.

I grab Eddie’s shoulder, squeeze it in silence, and then leave him.

After getting myself a second cup of coffee, I walk to my bench. Before I can figure out what I’m doing Mano walks up to me. He looks serious – something I rarely see. He’s always happy or irritated and bitching about everything. Serious is not one of his default modes.

“He told you?” the man who’s quickly becoming my friend asks me.

“Yeah.”

“He doesn’t talk about it all that often,” Mano offers. “But he likes it when we say his name. It makes him feel like Damian is still remembered.”

That’s something I can understand. Having done the things I’ve done, I thought about what would happen when I would be gone. Would people think of me? I’d like that – knowing

that I left an impression. My biggest fear was ending up like one of my victims – nobody knowing where I was. Just disappeared. Like Damian. I want people to remember me. I would like an Eddie whose heart still bleeds even after all these years. Someone who loses the plot when it storms and thinks of me.

It's a deeply coveted need.

I want to make an impression.

"I'll make sure I name him every now and then," I tell Mano, who's watching me like a hawk with his brown eyes.

"Thanks," Mano says.

I think this work arrangement works two ways. Eddie fills a void by taking in young men and giving them purpose. But those same young men get to fill some other kind of void by having Eddie in their life. Mano, Little Nick and Bash all put Eddie on a pedestal. And I dare to bet that they all have a reason why they're so faithful and thankful to him.

After sighing deeply I force myself to let my train of thought go.

I set down my mug and grab the tools I need to fix the motorblock that's on my workbench. The storm in my head dies down a little when I let my hands do the work that they know like it's what they were made for.

And I don't think about what those hands did when they held a sniper rifle – they can make things better as well as ruin someone's life. It's a choice I get to make. And I choose to fix things.



“That’s it,” I say, hands on my hips while I watch Dominic push food around on his plate without eating it. It’s waffles with bacon, and he loves waffles with bacon.

“What’s what?”

“Whatever is wrong with you, it’s going to stop now.”

He glares at me, pokes yet another piece of his waffle around and gives me a scold.

I grab my own fork, pierce the bite he was playing around with and shove it in his mouth.

“Whawazthatgoofor?” he murmurs while he tries to kill me with his eyes.

“What the hell is wrong with you? I don’t want to be a chauvinistic pig, but I’m about to ask if you’re about to have your period or something like that.”

He takes a while to chew his bite before he very audibly swallows it. The glare never leaves. “I miss the feeling of sand,” he finally says.

I raise a brow, not making a peep.

“Everything here is rock or water or salt. There’s wood everywhere, and iron and rust. There’s so much fucking rust. And algae, and weeds, and fuck all of that. I miss the feeling of sand between my fingers. I miss the feeling of taking off my sunglasses and feeling the sand in my beard. All that gets stuck in my beard here is ice, snow and snot and I can tell you,” he says while pointing his fork towards me, “I do not

like that. I am not the Night King. I do not like winter coming. I just want some fucking sand.”

I hold back a laugh, because the more he talks, the louder he starts talking. He gets more passionate and at the end of his little speech everyone in Deanna’s is listening to him. When he mentions the snot, people start laughing out loud. Because it’s a real issue. Whenever winter gets cold enough, snot freezes and you get snot popsicles. It’s an acquired taste.

“Well, then eat your fucking waffles – they’re delicious and you, me, Deanna and the whole of Unalaska knows you love them – and then we’ll go get you some fucking sand.”

“There’s sand here?” he asks with a dumbfounded look on his face.

“You’re on an island, idiot, of course theres going to be fucking sand. You just got to know where to go to avoid all of the rocks.”

“And the crabs,” Dom mumbles when he starts shoving his food in his mouth.

“I thought you liked crabs?”

“When they’re buttery and dead and already cracked open, yes. When they’re alive and trying to pinch me they can go to motherfucking crab hell.”

“I think motherfucking crab hell is the variant where they end up all delicious and buttery and cracked open on your plate, honey,” Deanna says as she walks by. She has a huge tray balancing on her hip and she’s collecting all the empty plates and glasses.

“Hm,” Dom acknowledges.

I watch the interaction with amusement and then stare at the man in front of me while he eats his breakfast like it is an eating competition. The man must really like sand.

In the time he’s been here, his light blond beard has turned darker. I guess it’s the lack of sun. The sun is actually more bright here in Unalaska when it breaks through the clouds, but since he’s been inside all the time he rarely sees it. I vow there

and then to make sure that this man gets to see the beauty of the state we live in. And I guess we're starting with sand.

Jack is going to love it.

Dom is going to hate it afterwards, because I am absolutely going to make him wash the dog. And Jack? He does not like being washed. I figure we all have a good day this way.

I pay the bill while Dom eats his last bites and then start putting on my jacket and scarf and everything warm I can find.

Dom looks a little apprehensive because I guess he thinks sand means warmth, but I know standing in front of the open sea and nothing to shelter by is going to make snot popsicles laughable.

We get out of Deanna's, walk to my car and get greeted by Jack, who apparently has a whole lot to tell.

"Where are we going?" Dom asks while he starts flipping through the radio stations until he finds one that's playing a 4A song. I'll never admit it out loud, but I'm starting to like the sound of the fuckers.

"We're going to Iliuliuk Beach."

"Bless you."

I snort. "Do you know where the habit of blessing someone after sneezing comes from?"

The silence says enough.

"The ancient Celts used to believe that when you sneezed, your soul left your body for a moment and a demon could take over. So by blessing the body, it was protected against the demons."

He stares outside of his window, working through what I just said. His brows are furrowed and he looks disconcerted.

"Some demons stem from within," he says.

"Everybody was born innocent," I counter.

"We big biker men make it worth it."

“Not all bikers are evil,” I say.

He stares in the distance, his eyes following the incoming waves. “Well, then I guess my Daddy was really good at conjuring demons, because I’ve had mine for as long as I can remember.”

Jack shuts us up by climbing in Dom’s lap and starting to lick his face while talking in his own doggy way. I have no idea what he’s trying to say, but I wholeheartedly agree with him. There is no demon in Dom – he just needs to come to terms with what he did and learn to love himself again.

We drive in silence until we reach Iliuliuk Beach and I park the car. It’s isolated, nobody here. I can’t blame them. It’s fucking cold as balls outside.

Dom? He doesn’t fucking care. He carries Jack. Yes, you read that right, he *carries* Jack out of the car and moves to the sand. Once he comes to a halt, he seems to be able to breathe deeper.

I don’t know what it is, I almost get frostbite when I inhale, but seeing the joy on his face makes it seem as if he does not even feel the cold.

He puts Jack down, who doesn’t seem bothered by the cold in any way whatsoever, but he does think the sand is weird. He’s picking up one paw at a time, sniffing it but finding nothing out of the ordinary. Then he does the only logical thing he can do in his tiny doggy brain and starts chasing seagulls.

I took my eyes off of Dom for just a second and before I know it he’s near the shore. Not dangerously close, but close enough. I watch the way his jeans stretch over his ass while he sits down and buries his bare hand in the sand. I can only see his back, but it’s the most relaxed I’ve seen the man since picking him up from the airport.

Dom throws his head on his back, letting the wind and some of the water splatter get over him as I move towards him.

“Enjoying yourself?” I ask him when I finally reach him.

“This,” he says, emotion thick in his voice. “This is bliss. I’ve got the fucking sand between my fingers, I can see the ocean, I can hear the waves break against the shore. Even Jack making a fool out of himself trying to grab those damn birds is making everything more perfect.”

“And this from a man who’s never seen the sea,” I mock him.

“Sit your ass down and enjoy the view,” he demands.

“Nah, I kind of like my balls intact.”

But Dom grabs my hand and pulls me down, and weak as I am, I can’t resist. I want to do everything for this man. The ground, the sand, is motherfucking freezing. Standing up would have been the wiser choice. But with Dom I don’t feel like there are any wise choices.

I’m supposed to be his handler, yet here I am taking him to a sand beach because he misses the sand. I told him about my path. I go to bed thinking about him, I wake up thinking about him. This can’t be fucking healthy. This feels a lot like fucking falling for someone and I thought I had decided after Braden that wasn’t going to happen anymore.

The only mind I’m into is a Dominant submissive mind. Which is something I don’t think Dom is looking for. He’s finally getting the chance to be with someone he wants to be with. A real relationship. Not a half one where I can’t offer him what he deserves.

So I take the cowardly way out.

“How are you dealing with the whole Nathan thing?”

He sighs, one of those long sighs that takes a few breaths before it truly gets inhaled. “I’m... dealing.”

“How?”

“By closing my eyes each night, thinking about Evan and the 4A guys and how happy they are, grabbing an extra blanket because it’s always too motherfucking cold and then imagining sticking a big fat dragon dildo in Nathan’s eye.”

I start laughing out loud. “Why that?”

“Because it’s so gay he would hate it and have you seen those things? They’re motherfucking awesome in their own kind of freakish way.”

Dom is weaving his fingers through the sand, digging his fingers deeper and deeper until I can’t see his hands anymore.

That quickly changes when he swears loudly, pulls his hands back and reaches for the back of the band of his pants where he obviously used to keep his piece. I was wondering when I was going to see some of the real biker that I took in, and I guess this is it.

“What’s wrong?” I ask, keeping my tone flat.

“Something stung me,” he says, showing me his hand where a little drop of blood glides down his finger.

“It’s probably just a sharp piece of sea shell,” I say, having known this beach for a long time. We used to come here when I was a kid as well. I’ve had injuries like that.

“Or it was some kind of poisonous deadly animal,” Dom grumbles.

I start laughing when I push myself off the ground. “We’re not in the jungle my friend. The biggest enemy around here is the environment and after that it’s the sea. Not the sea creatures, no, the sea itself.” I walk towards my car, open the passenger side door and grab something from the glove compartment.

Dom gives me weary eyes, not trusting what I’m doing. I guess the environment he comes from stacks different stuff in the glove compartment than what I’m bringing now.

Grabbing his hand, I bring it in front of my eyes, study it, and pick a tiny piece of sea shell out of it.

“See, sea shell.”

“Deadly, fucking, poisonous sea shell,” he says.

A deep belly laugh erupts from my mouth while I open a bandage and stick a nice Dora the Explorer bandage on his tiny cut. Fingers have a tendency of leaving a lot of blood even if the cut is tiny.

“There, all good to go,” I say while holding on to his hand a little longer than is strictly necessary.

Our eyes meet and I swear this is the moment I start to believe in magic. Jack barks, making us both look up and see him almost make a back flip in the sand, happy as a dog can be.

But the moment is gone.

“Is this a Dora the Explorer bandage?” Dom asks, squinting his eyes.

“Yes.”

“Why the hell do you have Dora the Explorer bandages?”

“Because I have nieces and nephews. Frozen bandages won’t do, because Oliver will whine. Ninja Turtles will make sure Liv goes into overdrive. Now Dora? She’s an annoying little Miss Know-it-all, but at last they’ve got pictures that both of them like.”

“I don’t like it,” Dom mopes.

“Well, suck it up. I gave you a nice wolf tattoo, so you just make sure you rock little Diego as best as you can with your shell cut.”

“What if I get shell shock?” he jokes.

“We no longer use that term and I think it’s a little insulting for people with PTSD. So you have a cut and it will heal nicely and then you’ll be all good to go.”

A weary smile appears on his face.

“And there’s sand here.”

“Yes there is,” I assure him.

“You’ll take me when I get grumpy because I can’t go again?”

I nod.

We both walk to my car and get in. Jack waits until he’s standing over the both of us before he shakes his fur and gets

sand everywhere. Dom and I start swearing at the same time. Guess I'm going to have to vacuum my car this afternoon.

"So," Dom asks after we've taken off and are driving back to Unalaska. "Was that considered bloodplay?" There's a smirk so wide on his face the Joker has nothing on him.

"You'd like that?" I ask with an equally big smile.

"Nah, had enough blood in my previous life," he says.

"Not my thing either," I admit.

Dom just nods.

"I'm more of a needle play kinda guy," I say to tease him, but his face turns so white I take it back immediately. "I'm just joking, Dom. I might have been a Dom, but I've never been all that hard-core."

It seems to soothe him a little, but there's still doubt in his eyes. Sighing, I realize there's going to have to be a time I properly explain all of this to him. But not now. Now we need to get home, clean this car, the dog and then take a shower ourselves.

The idea of the latter makes me a little too excited I have to admit.



Soft music comes from Tiny Nick's corner of the shop. It's different from the regular radio that's usually blasting when I come in. The fact that Tiny Nick is even here is weird. He tends to be the one who comes in last, even though he lives the closest. He's not a morning person. It's usually Eddie or me who open up shop. I just like being here early, Eddie just doesn't know how to sleep anymore, and he gets away from his wife as soon as he can even though they love each other to death. Mano is usually right behind me and Bash comes whenever Bash comes. He makes sure he gets in his hours, but he does so when he feels like it.

The closer I come, I see that it's Nick himself playing the guitar. I recognize the opening notes to 4A's "Thomas" and an unwilling smile covers my face. That song did things for them, big things. And as ever I'm proud to have at least played a little part in that.

Once Tiny Nick notices me he stops playing.

"Please go on," I encourage him.

His cheeks redden, but he starts playing again. When he reaches the first line of the next refrain I start singing the words. I'm no Madden, but my voice ain't that bad either.

He keeps on playing while I wrangle out the words until Mano enters the shop, hanging his coat on the hanger right next to the door.

“I always liked “Kites in Thunder” better,” Mano says.

“Nobody asked you,” Tiny Nick snaps while he keeps on playing.

Mano silences, cocks his head and observes what’s going on. “Is it that day again?”

“Hm,” Nick acknowledges.

“He ain’t worth it, amigo.”

“Oh, now you’re gonna pretend you know Spanish. You’re just as Alaskan as all our asses. Don’t suddenly act like you literally came from Mexico.”

“Tsk,” he says while he waves his hand in front of his face. “Everyone uses amigo. It’s not even really Spanish.”

“Of course it is,” Bash says while he enters the shop, uncovering the million layers he has on. “Friend is English, amigo is Spanish, don’t overcomplicate things.”

In the meantime Tiny Nick has stopped playing and I have stopped singing.

“It’s that day again,” Mano informs Bash.

“So, let him be,” Bash says.

“Best advice I heard all day,” Eddie says while he comes walking in with a box of Deanna’s.

“Why are you so late?” Tiny Nick asks. It’s almost as if the boy came in early just to spend some time with Eddie.

“Because I needed to go get a dozen strawberry filled donuts and the line at Deanna’s was bizarre.”

Tiny Nick’s eyes tear up and he puts his guitar away. Then he rushes towards Eddie, grabs the box of donuts, puts it on the nearest workbench and then hugs the man so tightly I’m starting to become worried for him.

“Can someone please inform me what the hell is going on? Because you’ve all lost me, especially after the amigo conversation.”

Nick stares at the noses of the steel clad shoes. “My brother disowned me when I told him I wasn’t going out to sea with him to take over the family business. He hasn’t talked to me since.”

“Because he is a giant asshole,” Bash says, opening the box filled with sweet treats and helping himself to one

“And little Nick has a hard time this day each year,” Mano says, squeezing Tiny Nick’s shoulder before he makes his way to the pastry box and helps himself to a donut as well.

“Well, Big Paul is a loser and he shouldn’t punish anyone for not wanting to go out to sea. You’re welcome here any time and you can bring that guitar more often. It’s better for my hearing than all that noise on the radio.”

Eddie appears to be in a mood, but it’s his mask to show he cares. I’m starting to get to know his moods.

“That’s because you’re old,” Mano says.

“What did you say, boy?”

We’re all boys to him, age doesn’t factor in.

Mano steps on one of the stools and then stands on his workbench. “That you’re old, Eddie!” he yells. “And I... Ai-ai-ai-ai-ai,” he yells in a fake Mexican accent, “have a date with Sugarrrrr this Friday.” He starts rolling his hips as if he is holding a girl and making moves on her.

For some reason his ass looks way better than it should in those pants and I force myself to look away by grabbing a donut.

“So you’re all coming, right?”

“Coming to what?” Bash asks

“Dancing night!”

“Why do we have to come?” Tiny Nick asks.

“So Sugar can see what a catch I am, fall hopelessly in love with me and we’ll live happily ever after.”

“It’s sad you need us for that,” I say while I start grabbing the stuff I need to get working on where I left off yesterday. I was working on repairing the steering part of a rotor, and it’s an irksome job. Once I have all my pieces on my workbench Mano jumps from his bench onto mine, making one of the tiny pieces fly through the air and land somewhere in the sawdust on the floor.

“For fuck’s sake!” I yell. That one tiny little piece is there to make sure everything sticks together without the ship sinking – so it’s kind of crucial if you ask me.

“Did what I thought I just saw happen, happen?” Eddie asks.

“Yes,” I reply, grumbling.

“Goddammit! Help him find it!”

All four of us drop to the ground, trying to find the screw that keeps the whole rotor together. We usually have some left in stock, but I know for a fact this was the last one and getting a new one from the mainland will take at least a week. That’s a week that everybody is missing money, and nobody wants that.

We all search on our knees for what feels like forever while Eddie is screaming and yelling at us, pointing at us with his cane. At one point Bash starts imitating him and before we know it we’re all laughing our asses off. Even Eddie can’t help himself but laugh.

Finally Mano finds the missing screw and the day is saved. Eddie rolls on his chair and grabs us all some coffee, then takes the donuts away from Mano because that’s his punishment for making the screw disappear. If you’ve ever seen a toddler pout you know the exact look Mano has.

It’s a little after eleven when we take another break, drink some more coffee and all get convinced to come out with Mano on Friday. He says it’s because he wants to show off his success with Sugar, but I get the feeling he’s a little nervous.

Eddie chickens out, saying it's his date night with his Jeanine, which is true if I believe all the stories the guys tell. Every Friday Jeanine spends the day in the kitchen, Eddie gets her some kind of wild flowers on the way back – which are just weeds if you ask me, but Jeanine loves the purple thistles.

Tiny Nick and Bash say they'll be there, claiming they could use a drink after a week of work, and I? I stare in my coffee and twirl the contents around.

“What's wrong?” Mano asks. He hasn't stopped shining since he mentioned his date with Sugar.

I inhale deeply and gather all my bravery. “How's the population towards gay men here?” I say so softly it's barely a whisper.

“Felix,” they all say at the same time, making me smile.

“He's single handedly turning each and every one of them gay,” Tiny Nick says. “To be honest there's a lot of gay action going on because there aren't enough women and most men don't mind a little bi-sexual action. The marriage rate is still very old fashioned though. But we don't have any hate crimes.”

His brows furrow.

“Well, not that I know of anyway. I know Lyssa beat the crap out of Caroline last year, but I don't think that was a lover's quarrel.”

“No, Caroline grabbed Nico's butt, thinking it was Theo's and then Lyssa went berserk,” Bash says. He looks very pleased with himself. “It was glorious.”

“But to get back to your question,” Mano continues, draining his mug. “You can safely come out, wear a mesh top, show some fancy nip piercings and still be good.”

I nod.

It's confusing. How can places differ so much? At the club it wasn't an option to be gay. This place? It's no less harsh than the club. It's the environment, it's the people, it's the

weather. Everything is harsh here – yet they still accept people for who they are.

I'm not talking about the difference between men and women because the rape rate is among the highest in the whole US, but apparently as a man you're allowed to be who you want to be.

I don't think I'll ever understand the difference.

“Have you heard from Joe?” Eddie suddenly asks, looking in Mano's direction. We don't have any official ranks here, but Mano is seen as senior. Both because of his age, but because of his knowledge as well.

“Joe?” I ask

“Warren's Dad,” Bash answers.

“There are whale poachers roaming Dutch Harbor, using Unalaska to get rid of the goods.”

“Oh fucking hell, not that shit again. Just leave the tiny little cuties alone,” Mano says, his face soured and his shoulders slouched.

“Whale poachers?” I ask. I always thought that was a thing of the past. I have to admit I didn't really follow whale news in the middle of the desert while running an MC, but still.

Eddie sighs. “There's like a month each year where a few whales can get caught, we don't want overpopulation. It's all regulated and stuff. But we've been dealing with some criminals who overfish them, cut them up in pieces and sell them on the black market.”

“Fucking Moby Dicks,” Tiny Nick says.

“Isn't it Ishmael who tries to catch the whale and isn't Moby the whale?” I ask.

“I know,” Nick says, getting up and walking back to his bench. “But Ishmael doesn't have the word dick in it, so I like it better this way. What do you think? That we're a bunch of uneducated fishermen? I bet we got better education than you did over at that compound of yours.”

And I can't really argue with him on that, because Miss Tatcher was a horrible teacher and I was an even worse student.

“So now what?”

“Now we hope the regular instances catch the sons of bitches quickly and the whales are left alone again,” Eddie says, rolling towards one of the windows looking out over sea. It's a bright day and we can see as far as the eye can stretch. And lo and behold, there are some whales swimming in the distance.

I don't know what it is, but wherever I seem to go, trouble seems to follow me.

With that depressing thought I go back to work and finish the last part of the rotor I was working on. At least that's something I can fix.



Friday evening is always a busy night in Unalaska. Not all fisher ships come in for the weekend, but most try to plan it in such a way their crew can have some fun while they're docked. It helps to keep them sane when they're out at sea.

The thing with Unalaska is that when I say it's tiny, it's tiny. Someone who has ever lived in a big city can't imagine the difference with living here.

We've got one diner. We've got one bar. And on Friday night, everyone goes to Deanna to make sure they have a good basis to soak up all the alcohol they're going to consume and then they're going to get fucking wasted.

It's no longer my scene.

It used to be.

I was a perfect player. Getting whom I wanted and how I wanted it. It can be an upside of being a Dom. I do know how to play someone to get what I want, but I tried to abuse it as least as possible. It's just that sometimes a certain tone of voice comes naturally and things just happen.

Things did seem to happen a lot.

Eddie mentioned that Mano had a break when I went to lunch with Dom that afternoon and that all the guys were going to go out and party. Which they fucking should. Dom is in his mid twenties – he should be having all the fun he wants. But the longer I thought about it, the more my insides started to churn.

I'm in so much goddamn trouble with this boy.

So here I am, in my pale stone washed jeans which I know make my eyes pop and give me a certain magical look with my nearly white hair. Yes, I'm vain. I know how to look good. I'm not ashamed of it.

I skipped Deanna's, not sure if I wanted to go through with my plan, but even before I rinsed my plate I found myself starting my truck and driving to the bar. Where I am now, standing in the doorway, letting the cold air in and annoying the fuck out of everyone that's inside.

My eyes roam the room until I find him.

And like every fucking cliché there is my heart skips a beat, while my molars start grinding.

Oh, I think the hell not.

Felix is dancing his way to Dom and I can't fucking deal with it. Bash, Tiny Nick and Mano all look up in surprise when I move inside so quickly I create a draft when I walk past them. The girl Mano is dancing with, Sugar, gives me a knowing smile. Women just know.

My legs are taking me towards him before I know what the hell it is I'm doing.

Felix sees me coming while I approach Dom's back, and I swear I can see the motherfucker's eyes light up.

"Hello gorgeous," Felix says, combing a hand through his fucking perfect hair. It makes me want to grab a pair of scissors and go Edward Scissorhands on him. His voice is full of asinine, but he backs off after one look.

Good.

Dom keeps on dancing, not aware of the battle that is being fought over him. For a second I wonder if I should turn around and let Felix have his way with him. This is not my battle to fight. But as soon as Dom turns around and sees me standing right behind him I know that I both can't and won't leave.

His eyes twinkle.

And that's all it takes.

With one hand I grab the back of his head, pulling his face towards me, just slowly enough to see the surprise in his eyes turn into a smirk. My other hand grabs his ass and makes sure he's completely pressed against me.

The moment our lips touch I know this is it.

I've always believed it was bullshit, but there is no denying this chemistry. I don't have to make him open his mouth for me, he does so by himself and starts devouring me. The warmth of his tongue touching mine is noticeable in my groin and simultaneously the hairs on the back of my arms stand up as if I'm cold.

He grabs the back of my head, his other hand on my lower back.

Gone is the shy guy who didn't want anybody to know he's gay. He's very visibly going very in and I'm here for it.

Pieces of a puzzle I didn't know I was making fall into place and something resembling violins play in the back of my mind.

Felix walks past, slams my shoulder, gives me a fucking vile smirk and mouths 'you're welcome' when he walks past.

I know the man had nothing to do with what is happening here between us, but he was the catalyst that sent the longest love-at-first-sight ever in motion.

Dom pushes his hips against mine and in rhythm with the music we start grinding against each other. Now that we've given into this desire there's no holding back – it's like we're gravitating towards each other like two stars that are about to collide. It's explosive and inevitable, and screw all the rules.

Dom is mine, and I don't care in what kind of capacity that is. I can be his Dom, I can be his lover, I can be anything he wants, as long as he lets me be his and he can be mine.

His mouth discovers mine, and I make sure I get to know his. It's like two long forgotten acquaintances getting to know each other again.

I don't care that he's ten years younger.

I don't care that I'm his handler.

I don't care that he used to kill people for a living.

All I care about is him.

And then my reason returns, or perhaps it's just my ability to hear something different than my own blood coursing through my head again, but the whole bar is catcalling us. Sugar is whistling on both her fingers and Mano is giving me a very dark look. I guess he's the possessive type.

Two small shot glasses get pressed in our hands when Lilian, one of the bartenders passes us, mouthing something that looks like 'finally'.

Both of us throw back the shot that turns out to be tequila and both of us shiver at the same time. There's a smile so wide you can count my molars on my face and I see the same one mimicked on Dom's face.

"Took you long enough," the brat says.

"Me? You took way more forever-er."

Dom starts laughing, creating a little dimple in his right cheek. "Booze and kissing makes you stupid, you even lost your ability to speak."

"It's the booze," I try to defend myself, but I know that this boy messes with my mind. There's so much going on in my mind. What do I want to do with my kink side? Is Dom even into that? How does this work with me being his handler? Oh my god, what is Jen going to say? She's going to be so smug that she saw this coming. If it gets too bad I'm going to have to move – my sister is a menace when she's right and she'll let you know it.

"Baby," Sugar shrieks from a few feet away, "I love this song, dance with me!" It's some kind of EDM song which I don't know on account of being old and it not being my kind of music.

Mano doesn't care. He grabs Sugar's hips, pulls her against him, wiggles a leg between her knees and starts making dance

love to her right there on the dance floor. You can say what you want to, but the man has got rhythm. And Sugar? She's completely falling for him.

Sugar is one of those enigmas. She came here as a greenhorn two years ago. She heard the sea calling and she listened. She didn't care that most ships think that women are bad luck. She went through all the initiation processes, rocked her first season, worked just as hard or even harder than all the men on the ship and she never left.

And she looks nothing like you would expect of a fisherwoman. She could make money as an actress in Los Angeles if she wanted to. White blonde hair, full lips, almond shaped eyes with eyelashes that go on for days, a figure that many a woman would go to the plastic surgeon for. She's one of the nicest and most helpful women I've ever met and I don't think there's a soul in the whole of Unalaska who doesn't like her.

Which makes me wonder why she likes Mano.

But the heart wants what the heart wants, I guess, looking at Dom from the corner of my eye. He is still stuck to me like glue, not letting me go, and I'm not complaining.

We dance more, we kiss more, we just are more – and when I feel what that more does to him, the hardness between his legs that's definitely there between mine too I *know* I need more.

We need to get out of this bar, and we need to get somewhere private.

We could go to Dominic's tiny apartment, but I know how noisy that building is. The smart thing to do is go to my place, where there are no neighbors and the only thing that could cause distress is Jack.

"Let's go," I say near his ear on a whim. I no longer care what everyone thinks, I just need to get together with Dom and it needs to happen right now.

"Okay," he says, as if it's the most normal thing in the world. At last he lets go of my hip, grabs my hand and tangles

his fingers through mine.

I don't know why it surprises me, but it does. It's a form of PDA I've never been comfortable with, especially not in my role as a Dom, but this? This feels right. This feels like they were molded to shape together.

We walk towards the exit, find wherever I left my coat in my frenzy to get inside when I saw Felix dancing with Dom, and wait for the latter to grab his own coat and say goodbye to his friends.

The freezing air hits us in our face when we open the door, leaving the steaming bar behind us. Our sides are stuck together like glue while I steer Dom to where I parked my car.

When I'm getting in behind the wheel I notice Dom staring in the distance where the water meets the shore. There are no docks there, but there is a large ship and with it lit up by the faint moonlight I can see people unloading stuff.

Something tells me there's something off.

Thinking about my father and the rumors about the poachers, something starts to dawn. Dom stands up, one foot on the frame of the car, lifting himself so he can get a better view. His side of the car is directed at the ship and my heart starts palpitating like it's in tachycardia when I see one of the men on the ship look in our direction. Because my doors are opened, the interior lights of the car are on, giving the unknown man a perfect view of Dom.

Fuck.

If these are indeed men that are up to no good he now has a perfect view of Dom's face. The downside of living in a miniscule town is that it's not too hard to find someone. Our only saving grace being that we're far enough away that he probably doesn't see much more than some blond hair and a beard. A species of men we luckily have enough of.

"Get in the car," I order Dom, who luckily listens to me.

We both shut the doors and the interior lights go out. I start the car, get it in reverse and Fast and Furious Tokyo Drift my way out of there.



“Okay,” I say when Warren’s driven off. “Those were those poachers Eddie was talking about, right. He said he heard it from Joe. Joe is your father, you know?” I know that I’m rambling, but I can’t help myself.

“I know Joe is my father, yes Dominic.”

“Yeah, yes, that was a stupid thing to say.”

Silence returns to the car and we drive the way back to Warren’s cabin without saying anything. I can feel the panic I’m exuding and I can’t exactly put my finger on what it is that’s exactly wrong, but I feel like my heart is going to explode. Which doesn’t make any sense at all. I’ve been in shoot-outs, I’ve been stuck between two fighting gangs, yet some whale poacher is making me want to run for the hills. Is this what it feels like when you finally feel safe and it’s about to be threatened and taken away?

The moment we step inside, Jack jumps against me, licks my ear and starts telling me about all the adventures he has had since the last time that I saw him.

“What if they recognized me? What if it reaches Victorious? I need to get out of here!” I say in a panic while I weave my fingers through Jack’s fur and start scratching him behind his ears. It’s not because I want to please the dog, it’s because I

feel nervous and I don't know what to do. My eyes keep flitting towards the door and somewhere in the back of my mind I can hear the sound of motor engines rumbling even if I know it's not real.

My mouth is dry and I'm feeling antsy.

Warren is looking at me with calm yet stern eyes, grabbing Jack by his collar and yanking him back, sending him to a spot near the fire in the corner of the room.

"Yeah, that isn't happening. We're shutting this behavior down right now," Warren says. Despite the fact that the man is a few inches shorter than me and way less stacked, he still exudes a natural dominance in his attitude that I respond to. I'm pretty sure I can take him in a fistfight, but the way he is looking at me right now doesn't leave any room for interpretation.

"It's not? Don't I have a fucking say in the matter?"

"If you're going to use that brain of yours to make stupid decisions, then no, you don't get a fucking say."

My nostrils flare and my fists are balled. But instead of backing away he takes a step forward, getting right into my private space. Immediately I'm taken back to my childhood where my father towered over me, forcing me to do his bidding. I'm taken back to Nathan looking down on me while I'm laying on a bed with my first boyfriend, threatening me to get over this pathetic phase or else...

But Warren doesn't need the physical height over me to look down on me. He doesn't need the violence to make me want to fall in line. And my boneless past reminds me of a version of myself I don't ever want to be again. My whole brain screams to surrender and give into him, to just listen to him and to let him take the reins. Which I won't let happen this time. This is my do-over.

"You don't get to make decisions for me," I say, acting braver than I feel.

"We'll see about that, boy."

"Boy? You're not that old."

“I’m eleven years older than you. And I’ll damn well call you boy whenever I feel like it. *Especially* when you’re acting like a brat.”

Anger swells inside of me. I’m not a brat, I’m just finally making my own decisions. I tower over Warren and I’m sure he’ll back off. But he doesn’t seem intimidated by the threat of physical violence. He might not be bulky, but I swear that beneath that slender exterior is a shitload of lean muscle. I might have checked him out when I thought he wasn’t noticing one too many times.

“Sit down,” he says calmly even if his eyes seem to be on fire.

Who the hell is this man to tell me to sit down like he owns me? Who the hell is this man to think he has anything to say about me at all? I go to work, I come to all the mandatory check-ins. I keep my mouth shut about my past. I don’t contact anyone from my past life. I’m following the fucking rules. So if I want to have a little mental breakdown, I damn well will have one.

Then why, *why*, is it that I listen to his orders and sit down anyway?

I find myself sitting down on his couch, scowling, while he gains the higher ground by standing upright and looking down on me. He has his arms crossed in front of his chest, looking all snug and tucked away in his black turtleneck that contrasts his white complexion and hair so well.

“I took you home just to give in to this chemistry between us, but I guess we’re going to have to talk first. This freaking out? We’re not going to do that. Those men were really far away and they’re not going to recognize you. You’re safe here, you’re safe here with me. They kept your face out of the media at the trial for a reason.”

And I believe him.

Not once in my life has anyone ever told me that I’m safe and made me actually believe that I’m safe.

He kneels down in front of me, his legs wide open, and takes my head in both his hands. “You’re okay, you’re going to be okay, and nobody is going to harm us here today.”

I feel myself nodding.

He leans forward, gives me a kiss on my forehead and leaves me feeling so confused that I don’t even know how to specify what it is I’m feeling. Have I *ever* been kissed on my forehead? I don’t think so.

My confusion must be clear, because he looks at me, cocks his head and sighs.

“Listen, I brought you here because I want to do really filthy, nasty things to you.” His tone is so serious he makes me laugh out loud. “But I can see you’re lost. Which is understandable. We’ve taken you from your comfort zone, we’ve given you a new identity, and given you a whole new life. Now add the stress with these poachers and whatever it is that’s budding between us, and I’d be lost too.”

I keep my mouth shut.

Am I?

Am I lost?

I don’t know. And perhaps that’s the biggest sign that I’m lost at all.

“I didn’t want to have this conversation tonight, I just wanted to fuck your brains out,” Warren says with a dirty smile. “But maybe it’s better to have this conversation now rather than later.”

“Are you breaking up with me already?” I ask when my heart starts fluttering like a butterfly.

Eerily white blue eyes stare into mine.

“Quite the opposite actually.”



“What do you mean?” Dom asks. The corners of his mouth point so far down it makes him look unhappier than I’ve ever seen him.

I sigh. This was not how this was supposed to go.

Dom was never supposed to happen anyway.

I vow right there and then that if things with Dom work out the way I hope they will, I’ll even send Braden his KitchenAid back. It’s not like I’m using it anyway.

I’ve never seen myself as a coward, but right then I get up, walk away from Dom and throw two new logs on the wooden fire that’s burning. Eye-contact is important to me – it makes me read a person. It’s why I dislike texting. I’m a hands-on kind of guy, no pun intended, but right now I take the easy way out and turn my back to him.

“I’ve told you about my past. What do you know about BDSM?”

I have no idea how he responds because I’m using the fire poker to get the logs to the place I want them to go.

“Not a lot. There’s one type of relationship within an MC. You’re either married or you’re single. And both have their own set of rules. What happens behind closed doors, stays behind closed doors.”

I sigh. “Well okay.”

Getting up I walk to one of the book cabinets in the corner of my room and grab a binder with articles. For something

that's so widely known as BDSM, there's surprisingly little real research on it. And the research there is, is usually very personal and biased. Which is understandable, but it makes it a little hard to assemble a BDSM for Dummies guide. So what I've done over the years is gathered all the research I thought was relevant and made my own binder with articles I thought were accurate.

I grab it out of the cabinet, give myself a three count to think it through and then turn around. What I find are two big eyes, studying me. He's still bouncing his knee like he wants to bolt, but the rest of his body language lets me know he won't. For a second I wonder if that's something that's been beaten into him: doing all the things he doesn't want to do, and listening anyway. How young was he when they started grooming him for the position they wanted him in anyway?

"There's a lot when it comes to BDSM. What you saw in Fifty Shades of Grey is just the tip of the iceberg," I tell him while I hand him the binder.

"Never saw the movies," he says as he accepts it and opens the first page. "Only read the books."

"Why not the movies?"

"Not a big Jamie fan," he simply states and my heart skips a beat. We even seem to have the same taste in men. He skims the contents of the first page before he starts flipping through all the pages, skimming some words but clearly not reading it all.

"There's so much to it."

I shrug. "These are the things I think are important."

Jack barks, jumps on the couch and parks his ass on Dom's lap.

"And why are you showing me this?"

Now it's my turn to be quiet for a bit, thinking my words through carefully. "Because I think we are both very attracted to each other and I don't know how to be in a normal relationship. As you can see, there are a lot of methods and variations to BDSM, and I think that however we end up, it's

going to be some form of a dynamic. I want you to have the information on what it is you exactly want from us before we dive into this.”

Now Dom silently stares at me. Jack? He doesn't do silence or feel the mood, he tells us whatever it is he wants to tell us. I mean, I've been gone for like two hours, so he must have tons of adventures to tell.

“Is this like going through that list and making rules and shit like that? Are you going to call me Miss Steele? Do I need to start biting my lip?”

I start laughing, which is contagious.

“Oh my God, please tell me your dungeon is red and you call it the Red Room of Pain!”

Both of us start chuckling like teenagers then.

“I'd rather go out to sea than do any of that,” I say.

“You hate the sea?”

“Extreme sea sickness. I've tried a million times, but the sea and I just don't get along. If I ever want to lose a few pounds it'd be a great method though. I'm not trying to advertise anorexia, but I lose ten pounds in three days. All muscle, of course.” I'm babbling and I know it, but for once I don't know how Dom is going to respond to my offer to a dynamic.

Dom cocks his head and then goes back to going through the papers. “This is too much to read all at once,” he concludes.

“I know,” I say reluctantly before I sigh. “There's a guest room over there. Read up, and we'll talk tomorrow.”

The disappointment on his face is thick.

“I know,” I say, without him even saying the words. “But that little anxiety attack you just had? There's stuff in there we can help make better with a dynamic. I just... I don't want you to go in blind, I don't want you to just be a fun evening. I want...”

The silence I let linger between us seems to last a lifetime.

“I want decades.”

Dom squints his eyes and I can't read him. This is the face of the hard biker that has been taught not to show his emotions. This is the man who could separate it all while still keeping his human side.

“I'll read it, and we'll talk in the morning,” he says. Then he looks around and suddenly seems like an insecure five year old.

“What?”

“Do you, eh, have thick socks for me?”

I start laughing. “Haven't gotten used to the Alaskan cold feet yet?”

“Jesus H. Christ, it's unbearable. I never slept with socks on – I mean, I come from a desert, and while it's cold there at night, I've never had to sleep with socks but this is inhumane.”

Chuckling I get up, grab a pair of hand knitted socks my mother made me and throw them in his direction. “They're real sheep's wool socks. They keep you warm, but they don't make your feet sweat.”

He looks at me like I stole the moon for him and handed it as a gift.

“There's a new toothbrush beneath the sink in the ensuite and feel free to eat or drink anything you like should you wake up tonight.”

He nods, looks at me, looks at the binder and then disappears in the guest room. Me? I feel like a fool. We could be halfway through a great orgasm right now, but no, stupid Warren had to get his Dom side out and do the honorable thing. Thinking of it, I wonder if any of it is honorable. Sleeping with Dom is against everything the Marshals are taught. Not sleeping with Dom is going against everything my heart is screaming and begging for.

Thinking about the kiss in the bar I start getting excited again, and before I know it I'm tenting my pants, which is

inconvenient because I need to walk Jack for his last round before I'm able to go to bed myself.

Fuck, I'm in so much trouble.

Yes, when I'm putting my coat on, Dom gets out of the guest room. He's down to his boxers, his t-shirt and his woolen socks and even like this he looks delectable.

"I'm, eh, grabbing a glass of water," he explains.

"Go right ahead," I say, turning my back towards him so he doesn't see my hard-on. "I'm taking Jack for a last walk and tucking in as well."

Suddenly everything is awkward between us and I think we're at the periphery of everything changing. I just don't know what direction this change is going to take us in.

Dom grabs his water and I grab Jack, rushing outside so I can be alone with my thoughts. Jack says something in husky and I take it as a sign that it's time to go. The cold wind is a hit in my face, but it sobers me up instantly.

Okay.

Walk first, worry later.

The next morning I'm up early. I've already walked Jack and made coffee and breakfast when Dom leaves the guest room. He's wearing the clothes he was wearing yesterday again, and part of me is disappointed I don't get a second glance at that muscled body of his.

"Morning," he says, red shame on his cheeks for some reason.

"Morning," I say when I start plating him some scrambled eggs and pour him a mug of coffee.

"Have you been awake for long?"

Good, small talk. Exactly what we need. No, we need to get the elephant out of the room and discuss everything he read in that binder.

"Just a few hours."

“Me too,” he admits. “I wanted to finish reading all that information. I’m not that fast of a reader.” That makes him turn red. “We were all home schooled on the compound, and the teachers weren’t the best. My dad didn’t care anyway. He just wanted me to be able to shoot a gun. I don’t have to read fast to do that.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m impressed you got through it all. There was a lot of information there.”

He takes a sip of his coffee, burns his tongue and pulls a face.

“Questions?” I ask him.

“What’s your kind of thing?”

“Going for the big questions immediately?”

He starts eating and gives me a nod. There are dark circles beneath his eyes, so I guess he wasn’t kidding that he isn’t that fast of a reader.

“I’m a combination of things I think. There’s a bit of Caregiver in there, some sadism, but it’s mainly Primal that does it for me.”

He swallows his bite, examines my face and scrunches his eyebrows. “That was the part where you give into your animal urges?”

I nod. “Among others.”

“Give me an example of how that would look,” he demands. I know a demand when I hear one, and this one doesn’t leave any room for interpretation.

“I’d give you a three minute head start to get outside, then I’d pursue you, catch you, fight you for dominance and eventually fuck you into oblivion.”

“Outside?”

I smirk. “Outside.”

“Cold,” he mumbles, rubbing his hands as if he’s mentally already outside and I’m pressing his hands on the snow

covered forest floor. A shiver goes over his body and a smile appears on mine.

“Other questions?”

“Is this like a contract thing, like Fifty Shades?”

I sniff my coffee, take a sip and then make sure we lock eyes. “It can be, but it’s not necessarily my style. When I was doing it professionally? Yes. We both needed ground rules and we needed something to stick to it. With something like this, something I hope will be more casual, I hope there will be less need for rules. But there has always got to be a basis. When you play with sex like this, there has got to be a safety net. At the very least hard and soft limits need to be discussed. They can change over time, nothing is set in stone, but no, I don’t expect you to sign a legally binding contract saying you’re going to clean my kitchen every Monday right after you’ve sucked my dick.”

Dom laughs. “You’re a lot less proper when you’re talking as a human being and not as a Marshal.”

“Don’t tell anyone,” I say with a wink. “Before I know it all my other protectees start thinking they can get away with stuff.”

Dom finishes his plate of food, taps against the side of his now empty plate with his fork and looks inquisitive.

“Does this automatically make me a sub?”

I shake my head. “No, there are a lot of different kinds of bottoms as well. I even know of a few relationships that consist of switches. Or polycules that have all kinds of different ways they work.”

I see that my words register, but they don’t stick. It’s okay – I can’t expect someone to take a crash course on BDSM in one night.

“I know you’re a brat,” I add.

“A brat?” he asks.

“Someone who tries to toe the lines and see how far they can go. Sometimes going too far, just to get a reaction. You

weren't safe as a kid to see how far you could go, so you do so now."

A smirk spreads over his face. He likes that. Good, because I like brats. To an extent. There has to be a point where they just get with the fucking program or they meet a version of me they wish they never had.

"I don't know if I'm a sub," he says.

"I don't know if I'm purely a Dom anymore," I admit – even if the thought of teaching Dom some manners when I was taking a shower that morning very much proved that I still had some of my old ways in me.

"How about we just slowly find out what we are and if this is even a world I like?"

I know for a fact Dom will be right at home in the kink scene. I've seen it happen time and time again. He'll fit right in and he'll flourish. He'll finally get to be the version of himself he wants to be.

But one step at a time.

I bend over the kitchen counter, grab his empty plate and mug and press a kiss to his lips.

"Get dressed. We'll talk some more while we're going hunting."



“Hunting?” I ask while he ties his boots.

“There’s a few months a year we’re allowed to hunt deer. Never during mating season or when the little ones are being born, but this way we can at least be a little self-sufficient.”

“We’re going to shoot bambi?”

Warren looks worried and I start smiling. I have no trouble hunting some animals in the right season for the right reasons. In secluded areas like Alaska hunting is almost necessary to survive. It might be sad for the animals, but in the end it’s better for the environment than importing all the meat. I’ve shot enough animals, but that was part of my education as an enforcer.

I’ve shot enough people as well – but I try not to think about it. It’s in the past, I worked on assignment and I made a deal with the DA for immunity. The deal never said anything about the guilt though.

Hunting for food is something I understand though and have no trouble with. Hunting rare animals for their fur or their tusks is something I *do* have a problem with. Some would call me hypocritical, and perhaps I am, but it’s just how it works in my brain.

I sigh. My head is full of sex and kink and terms I hadn't heard of before last night. Then there's the brilliant kiss Warren gave me, and now we're going hunting? It's like I'm being bounced around in all directions and I don't know what's going on.

Warren walks to a panel right next to the kitchen, opens a wooden door and uncovers a safe. He presses in the combination to open it and the door opens, showing a small collection of hunting rifles. There's a handgun there too, but I get the feeling that Warren is mainly into hunting and not into shooting per se.

It's normal here to have at least one gun to protect yourself and your property. Against people who mean you harm or against animals who are bigger, faster and more dangerous than you. I haven't gotten one. Marshal rules. And I'm absolutely not bothered by it.

Warren hands me an unloaded rifle and then a box of bullets to load it. I put the bullets in my pocket but don't load it. I can't explain why, but it feels better this way. Safer for everyone. Bullets and I have done enough damage in this lifetime.

When we're ready to go, Jack bounces outside, runs to his favorite tree, pees so long that I'm quite impressed and then struts into the woods. I'm not sure what kind of bond Jack and Warren have, but they have an understanding that supersedes species.

We start hiking in a direction that the dog and his owner seem to know, but they leave me in the dark about where we're going. I wouldn't know anyway. I don't know these woods, I can't navigate using the stars – we always relied on GPS or satellite phones when we got too far in the desert.

And there have been some trips into the depths of the desert to get rid of some unruly men.

For some reason my mind keeps pondering about my past today. It shouldn't. I should be elated that Warren and I finally kissed, that we're probably going to do more than just kissing

and that for the first time in my life I have nothing to worry about in the love department.

The funny thing about brains is that it takes the chance to focus on different things when it can. So now that I'm feeling secure I finally get to think about all the things I did for Victorious. All the lives I took in the name of the greater good.

Sure, there were men that deserved what they had coming, but I have never believed that I should be judge, juror and executioner in those cases.

My father?

He thought he was God.

Nathan after him?

Inherited the God complex.

Does that make him Jesus?

And I just shut my mouth, listened and did what was expected of me.

Warren startles me from my thoughts when he starts quietly talking to me. "Just a mile or two deeper in the woods is a large herd. Mating season has just past, and we'll make sure that if we shoot anything we'll take a buck. But right now, they're free game."

"Why hunt at all?"

He shrugs. "If you live in a place where everyone is tough and earns big money by crabbing and fishing and going out to sea, you feel a little left out when you puke your guts out every time you come near a boat."

He stares in the distance, obviously thinking his next words through. "Like I said this morning, I'm a Caregiver. I just can't do it by catching you fish. But I can hunt animals and make sure you get some meat to eat. The meat that comes in through the regular channels only stays fresh for so long. But animals I catch myself I can skin, process, and salt if need be, making sure I can feed the people I want to feed."

I nod, because I think I understand.

“And who are these people you like to feed?” I ask.

“You’re inquisitive this morning,” he answers.

“I’m working my way up to the harder questions,” I say, giving him a wink. Part of it is to tease him, but the other part is the plain old truth.

“My family lives here. Father, mother, sister, her husband and their two kids. There’s some acquaintances, but not too many friends. I once read that extraverts gain energy from seeing people, and introverts lose that same energy. In that case I’m a very obvious introvert.”

I nod, understanding perfectly well what he’s saying. “Then why take me hunting?”

We walk in silence for a while, all we hear is the rushing of the ocean in the distance and different kinds of birds making different kinds of noises. “Because somehow you balance out the energy. Yes, it still costs energy to see you, but you also give me energy.”

“So it’s purely selfish,” I joke.

“Absolutely,” he jokes back. Then he stops dead in his tracks, Jack standing still, his front paw raised and his nose pointing in the distance. When I squint my eyes I can see a fully grown buck eating grass at the other side of a clearing, trying to hide behind a couple of trees. The colors of his pelt almost hide him from sight, but Jack’s heightened senses noticed him anyway.

“We need to get closer,” Warren says. “The wind is in the right direction at least.”

“We don’t have to get closer,” I whisper, grabbing the rifle from my shoulder. I open it, and load the gun with two bullets. The buck must pick up on something I’m doing, because his head shoots up and he looks in our direction.

“You can’t make that shot,” Warren says, the disbelief in his voice thick.

I roll my eyes. “Where do you shoot them? Between the eyes? Or do you need to keep the head intact for those weird taxidermy heads people hang above their fireplace mantles?”

Warren chuckles. “Why don’t you tell me how you really feel about that?”

“It’s just weird. You treat the dead with respect, not hang them in your living room.”

“Yes, you make them disappear in a vat of hydrochloric acid so there’s nothing left of them, not even enough to bury. But yes, in this case we’re hunting it because of the meat, you can shoot it in the head. But I’m telling you, it’s too far away.”

“And I’m telling you that I can make that shot without any trouble. So let me,” I grunt. Without waiting for any further response I automatically check the distance, the wind speed, the sunlight, aim and press the trigger.

The buck goes down immediately.

Jack barks in delight and starts sprinting to the now dead animal. I have no idea what the dog is going to do with it, but since Warren doesn’t say anything I reckon this is normal behavior.

And then I realize Warren isn’t talking at all.

I take out the remaining bullet out of the rifle and hand it to the man standing beside me. Somehow it makes me feel better to know he has the bullet and I have nothing left.

“That was quite the shot,” he says when we start walking to the other side of the pasture to go and get the buck.

I hide my head in my neck, because just for a moment I forgot that most normal people can’t make kill shots from distances like these. Most people even blink an eye when they kill an animal.

Not me. That was the most normal thing in the world for me.

We spend the trek towards the buck in silence, Warren grabbing supplies out of his bag and spreading them on the ground. There are already flies buzzing around the beady eyes

of the dead deer. The shot is perfectly between the buck's eyes, and I know that Warren is impressed.

Hell, I'm impressed.

It was a good shot, especially through the foliage and the unknown territory.

Warren spreads a plastic tarp with straps. It's like a gurney for dead animals to get them home with you. Because there's two of us, it isn't going to be too hard, but sometimes when you're alone and you need to move a carcass, things can get heavy.

I used one of these things once when I had to get rid of a body on my own. There was nobody there to help me and it was one of those situations that the less witnesses the better it would be.

Warren starts loading the buck onto the tarp, everything being made ten times as difficult because Jack keeps jumping on and off, sticking his snout where he shouldn't be. It's almost as if he has the zoomies.

Ask me twenty years later and I still wouldn't have the answer, but it's right there in the nothingness of Unalaska, Alaska, after I killed a deer from a distance I shouldn't have been able to kill, that I start talking.

Years of repressed silence come out.

"I was eight when my father pushed a revolver in my hand. He held the gun against the temple of a man in a garage that was tied up. I knew it was a man because logically that was the only thing he could be. But he was unrecognizable. His face beaten to a pulp, several fingers missing, a whole ear gone. I couldn't tell you the color of his eyes if my life depended on it, so thick were they."

Warren doesn't look at me the whole time, he just works with me and lets me do the talking.

"He pushed the barrel against the guy's head, made sure my finger was around the trigger and then he pushed my finger down."

I swallow, remembering the sick feeling like it was just yesterday.

“There, now it’s done, now you’re a killer,” my father had said. I can still hear the iciness in his voice. “This is what you were born to do. That piece of shit there played a part in the death of your mamma, so don’t you ever dare feel guilty about what you just did. He doesn’t deserve it.”

Now, almost twenty years later, I can see it for what it is. He tried to make it my murder instead of his actions. He gaslit me into thinking that I did this on my own. But nothing that happened that day was on me.

It did shape me into who I became today.

It changed everything about my life.

Jack’s wet nose startles me out of my train of thought when he pushes it against my nose. A wide grin forms on my face when I scratch the dog behind his ears without thinking about it.

My stomach flips when I see that there’s blood on my fingers and I’ve stained Jack’s beautiful fur.

Warren notices my onsetting panic.

“He needed to be bathed anyway,” he says, like it’s the most normal conversation in the world we just had.

What a day.

First I read about different kinds of BDSM all night, then we go hunting, I tell someone a part of my life I have never told anyone and from the looks of it now we’re going to skin a deer and wash a dog.

Whoever said that Alaska would be boring was severely wrong.



We carry the buck back to my cabin, where we leave it in the shed. Part of me is worried what skinning and butchering an animal will do to Dom, but another part of me knows he'll be alright.

The story he just willingly told me about how his father made him kill a man at eight years old taught me a lot of things. Some things I already knew, like that Dominic isn't a regular enforcer. He isn't a killer who enjoys killing people. He just did as he was told, because he was taught as a very young kid that he didn't have a choice.

It also taught me that he feels remorse for killing. He even treated the buck with as much respect as he could.

And my hate for Victorious and all they did to this wonderful man has increased tenfold.

Before anger takes over me I tell him how we're going to drain the buck's blood so when that's done we can skin and butcher him. Then we can prepare the meat and let it cure until it's ready to eat. You could prepare it immediately, especially if you're trying to survive in the wild, but we're just stocking my food, we don't need it right now.

"Red or white?" I ask the burly man when we leave the shed and enter the main cabin. He isn't wearing his dock clothes and has resorted back to his hole ridden jeans, and a shirt. But at least he's wearing his winter's coat so he won't freeze to death.

Jack is all over him again, whipping his tail so hard that he almost flicked my drink off the table.

“Uh, beer if you have it, water otherwise.” He seems out of place in my home, yet he also kind of fits. It’s the change in his demeanor since last I saw him that makes the difference. We’ve covered a lot last night and today, but we’re not there yet, not by a long run.

The thing with BDSM is that you can be physically attracted to someone, but that doesn’t mean you’re compatible for a dynamic. Hell, I don’t even know if it’s wise to get into a dynamic. I know that having a regular relationship with Braden didn’t work. I just need the kink. Is it my brain that’s weird? Or am I just wired differently?

I hand the gorgeous man with his sea blue eyes and dirty blond hair and beard a beer. I hold on to it for two seconds too long, but all that does is create a gorgeous smile on the man’s face.

“We need to bathe Jack,” he says.

“Definitely,” I say, looking at the blood of the deer on his fur. But I also know that the little fucker hates being bathed. I’m just a little mean to not make use of the resources I have. “Why don’t you go stand in the bathtub and lure him to you?” I say with the sweetest voice known to men.

Dom, innocent as he is, shrugs and walks to the bathroom. He steps in the tub and starts calling Jack, who in his enthusiasm forgets he hates everything in the bathroom and climbs in with Dom.

I silently follow them until they’re both good and under the spray before I turn on the water.

“Fuck!” Dom calls, because the water is cold before it warms up. And you think you know cold water, but you haven’t known cold water until you’ve had water that goes beneath a house in Alaska in the fall over you.

Luckily my water heater works fast and the water warms. Jack is trying to escape, but Dom is telling him in a soft and

soothing voice that if they're going to have to suffer, they're going to suffer together.

Jack answers with growls and doggy ramblings, but Dom keeps him in the tub. He manages to simultaneously undress himself until he is in his boxers and by some divine intervention I manage to keep my drool inside – because damn, that body, those abs and those thick and muscled thighs – god-fucking-damn.

“Is there special dog shampoo, or do I just use your natural coconut shampoo without any added silicone?”

I wish he was joking, but that's indeed the shampoo I use. I buy it in bulk, because Unalaska doesn't have it and I have to import it, costing me half a kidney every time I do so, but it's the only shampoo that doesn't make my hair look frizzled and staticky.

Turning around I grab the bottle with shampoo that's for Jack – that's the thing that costs my other rib. He has sensitive skin, so he needs special shampoo too, which has to be imported as well. And at the rate Jack gets dirty and factoring in how big the dog is, we need a lot of shampoo.

I hand the bottle to Dom and I swear there are sparks between us when our fingers touch. Dom looks at me, and I look at his abs but I can feel his stare and I've never felt more caught in my life.

Dom chuckles and starts washing Jack.

Pink water goes through the drain. Jack growls and shows his teeth. I can see the white of his eyes. He really doesn't like to shower. But somehow Dom knows what to do.

“Such a brave little hunter you are,” he says as calmly as he can. “Let's make you a pretty hunter again. Get this blood off your mighty fur. Show you in all your glory.”

And somehow Jack responds to his calmness and his words. He's still showing his teeth, but he's no longer trying to get away.

Quickly after that Dom uses the showerhead to rinse out all the shampoo and Jack is clean again. Dom helps my furry

friend to get out of the tub where I'm waiting for him with a towel to dry him off.

Meanwhile Dom has taken off his boxers and is cleaning himself in the shower. My eyes get drawn to his dick. Sue me. It's only natural. What isn't natural is the enormous Jacob's ladder he has. There's like at least ten barbells there. That's a lot, and that must have hurt like freaking hell.

He catches me staring, because well, I'm pretty obvious about it.

"Ask me," Dom says while he grabs my expensive coconut shampoo and starts washing his half long blond hair now that it's not tied in a knot. The water that comes from him is less pink than Jack was.

"That must have fucking hurt. How many do you have?"

"The alternative hurt worse. And there's twelve."

"What was the alternative?"

"Sleeping with women."

I don't understand his answer, but I'm done with drying Jack off so I toss the towel in the hamper and open the bathroom door so Jack can flee and be mad at me somewhere else.

"Why?"

"It takes six months for one of these to heal. No sex during those months. I got them one at the time. Six years of not sleeping with women is worth having a needle getting stuck through your dick ever so often," he says, his head tilted back to rinse out the shampoo, his Adam's apple prominent and the primal side of me goes berserk when I see him offer his neck to me like that.

I swallow thickly to get myself under control, grab a towel for Dom and focus on the conversation again. "So it was an act of rebellion?"

He thinks about it for a moment. "It was a way of surviving," he finally says, and I see a bit of the fragile side of this tough biker that I'm sure he doesn't show too often.

“I’m glad you did,” I say.

“Same.”

“Did they know that was the reason you did it?” I ask out of curiosity.

“Oh, I’m pretty sure. But it was never talked about because that would mean they would have to talk that there was a fag in the gang. And not just someone. First the son of the Prez, then the brother of the Prez. No, I was a dirty secret nobody talked about and I just let someone stick needles through my dick so I couldn’t be forced to sleep with a woman.”

He falls quiet for a moment.

“One time Nathan said I didn’t have to wait the full six months, five would be fine too, and he wanted to push me into one of the back rooms with the club pussy. But I pulled out my phone and showed him pictures of infected penises and he never tried again after that. Funny thing is that I think he was actually right. If everything heals alright the six months might be on the safe side, and right then the latest piercing felt like all the others, but... You’re gay, you understand. I don’t dislike women, I’m just not attracted to them and I don’t want to sleep with them.”

I nod.

He gets out of the shower, water dripping off him until he grabs the towel and starts drying himself off.

I want to lick every fucking drop off of him. For hydration purposes of course. To save myself from jumping him I walk into my room and grab some of my clothes for him.

He thanks me when he grabs them and starts putting them on.

“Your ass is too skinny,” he says with a smirk on his face.

“Or you’re just a little thick in the butt department.”

“My bubble butt is gorgeous, thank you very much.”

I laugh, because he is right. And he looks damn handsome in my little too tight joggers and black shirt that makes his

eyes pop even more. And I just can't fucking take it anymore.

"We need to talk," I say, my voice stern and back in Dom mode. I can't help it. It happens. It just fucking happens whenever my head goes into Dom mode. And it's something that comes naturally to me. It's always been there.

"So talk," Dom says, his voice quiet. Sometimes I forget that he's used to loud bikers, but deep down he's just a boy that never received love or was accepted for who he was – he responds badly to harsh authority.

"There's something going on between us," I state.

"There is," he simply says as if it's the most normal thing in the world.

"I can't do relationships without some form of dynamic. But there are a million different versions of dynamics."

"I know," he interrupts me, "you made me read all three million of them."

I almost want to punish him for it, but it's not my place. Yet. I allow myself to think that one word. Yet – and my hands get clammy and my heart rate raises.

"What if we just give into this for one night. No rules, no dynamic, just... giving into this lust. And if we like it and you want it, we find a version of a dynamic that works for us."

Silence fills the bathroom. It's eerie and makes me uncomfortable.

For the first time in my life I'm afraid he's going to deny me. Usually it's the sub eager to get the dynamic started. I've never been in this position. Guess that's something that goes for both of us.

"That's manipulation," Dom says with a half smirk that almost makes his eyes disappear.

"Why?"

"Because you know damn well that I can't say no after having a taste."

“That doesn’t make it manipulation, I’m giving you the option now. You can say no. Nothing will change. I will still be your handler and your friend.”

Dom steps forward until our noses almost touch.

“You’re dirty and there’s deer blood all over you. Get cleaned up and I’ll think about it.”

Goddamn.

My dick got hard from the authority in his voice. This is one brat I’m gonna love. I won’t even tame him. He’s fucking perfect the way he is.



His sheets are made of black silk and they feel divine. I keep stroking my hands over it while I sit on the edge of his bed, my cock hard as a rock ever since he proposed an evening of just being together.

But if I'm being honest with myself it's more than that. Ever since I read up on all the forms of dynamics and things that come with BDSM there is a certain craving forming inside my chest wanting to be his. Don't get me wrong, there were things in that blinder that I'll never, ever do – but I also learned not to kink shame, so I'll just keep it as a hard limit and never ever think about it again.

My heart rate is higher than normal and I'm chewing my bottom lip. I can hear the shower running, letting me know Warren isn't ready right now.

Realization hits me that I didn't prep for a night of sex at all. I didn't cleanse – at all. Then again, I didn't most of the time. But that was with guys at gas stations wearing flannel shirts whose names I didn't even know.

Warren is different though.

He has silk sheets.

I'm not too sure he shares the opinion that sex just is a little dirty every now and then. Perhaps his shower is so long because he actually is prepping.

Damn, I haven't even shaved my balls for three days.

This seems to start like a worse idea by the second.

The sound of the running water stops and my heart skips a beat. Warren is drying off now and he's going to come in here soon. I still have the possibility to chicken out, but I don't want to. Not for reasons like these anyway. Perhaps it's best to just be honest with him. Fuuuuuck, that's a conversation I don't want to have. It'll take all the sexy out of the sexy.

Two minutes of panicky thoughts pass until the door to his bedchamber opens and he walks in. He's wearing joggers himself and a pinkish sweater. It suits well with white blond hair and his pale blue eyes. His wet hair makes it look like it glistens like a diamond.

"You've got silk sheets," I say.

"Yes."

"I haven't prepped." My voice hitches a little when I say so.

"I don't care."

"I haven't shaved my balls in three days."

He just grins. "Stop panicking. Do you want this or not?"

"More than anything," I answer truthfully.

"Then stop worrying. Overthinking never led to good ideas."

I swallow thickly when Warren walks forward, stands in front of me and puts his hands on my shoulders. Out of automatism I look up.

"What do you want to do?" Warren asks. This time his voice hitches. I bet he usually doesn't ask the other person what they want to do.

Looking up I see a fire burning behind his eyes and it awakens a need inside of me I didn't know was there. It also

makes me braver than I thought it would.

“I want to suck your dick,” I say.

“I’m never going to say no to that offer,” he says, taking a step back and creating some space between us.

I slowly drop myself to my knees while I slide off the bed, taking off my shirt by reaching around and grabbing it between my shoulder blades. I unceremoniously drop it on the floor.

“I see we’ve got to teach you some manners,” Warren says.

I don’t care what he says, he could recite me the whole goddamn gospel, but I’m sitting here in front of him on my knees, and all I need him to do is pull his pants down so I can get my hands and my mouth on him.

We’ve done this dance long enough, it’s time to give into these urges we both experience. The way his voice sounds when I throw my shirt on the ground doesn’t leave much room for interpretation though. He’s all about rules and etiquette.

And I? I’m not. I’m just faking my way until I get what I want, imposter syndrome being a real thing with me.

“Can I?” I ask, my eyes going to where I can see his pants straining.

“You can,” he says, and my heart skips a beat. “It’s better to ask if you may though.”

I force myself to hold back an eye roll. It’s just semantics, but it’s important anyway. “May I?” I ask. It almost hurts to get the words over my lips. I’m at the point where I’d beg, but he doesn’t have to know that. When I look up from his pants and make eye contact I can see that he knows anyway.

“You may,” he says flatly, even if I can hear the desire in his voice. He might think he can hide himself from me, but a lifetime of being hypervigilant has taught me a thing or two. I can tell within seconds if someone feels right or not, and it has saved me more often than I care to admit.

My nimble fingers grab the hem of his pants and take them off. His boxer briefs strain and what I’ve felt through his pants

doesn't disappoint.

I glance up once more, seeing his pale blue eyes studying me. His mouth is strained, but I don't think it's because he doesn't want this. The way his boxers are filled prove that.

When I pull them down I literally come eye to eye with his, apparently uncut, cock. It's not my first time at the rodeo, but I do always like it when I come across one.

Looking up once more, I still find the glare of Warren looking down on me. He lays his hand on the top of my head, tangling his fingers through my hair.

It's all I need to go forward with what I want to do.

Wetting my lips, I then glide my tongue around his crown, making him hiss. The sound makes me smirk. The insides of my stomach roil at the idea that he's enjoying this just as much as I am.

I grab the base of his dick and guide his tip towards my mouth.

But before I take it all the way down my mouth, I taste the precum that's gathered between his foreskin. It tastes exactly like Warren, and I don't why I know that. It's just familiar. I could even go a little sappy and say it tastes like coming home, but deep down I'm still a biker and I won't harbor those thoughts.

Flattening my tongue, I lick his shaft from base to tip and I revel in the jolt of pleasure that seems to give to him.

I *love* the fact that we're in the middle of his bedroom. That we're not in some back room trying to hide the fact that I love sucking his dick. I like the way he tastes, he fills my mouth, he reaches the back of my throat and makes me gag, my eyes watering because of it.

Some of the men I've met don't like it, the hopelessness of not being able to go there, but I do. I like not having anything to say about it. The feel of his strong hand on the back of my head, pushing me down further, behind my gag reflex. The way my throat relaxes and opens up for him.

It stings a little when he passes a narrow point in my throat, but he doesn't give a fuck. He just fucks my throat like I'm his own personal flesh light and I'm here for it.

With my hand I grab the back of his thighs, holding on tight and not letting go. He can use me the way he wants to, like an old crusty sock or an old raggedy doll he inherited from his grandma, as long as he keeps using me for his pleasure.

Somewhere in the literature he gave me to read there was a passage about me being his to use to his pleasure, and goddamn if I didn't take that to heart.

I try to go back, but he holds his hand in my wet hair and slowly starts to count to ten. When he finally reaches ten, he takes his dick out of my mouth, drool everywhere.

“You did so good, Dom. I'm so fucking proud of you. It took me a lot not to just spill my seed all in your throat.”

I warm from the inside because the words he's saying are filling me with pride. At the same time he absolutely acted like a Dom. I don't think he can help it – but the thing that is throwing me off is that I didn't dislike it. I actually quite enjoyed it. The first three seconds he held me down I panicked. And then I relaxed and let him take care of me.

Even in a vulnerable position I trusted him to do what's best for me.

“Don't you want to come?” I ask, my voice a little hoarse from how deep he was in my throat and how much that hurt.

“Yes I do, but I want to see my cum on your tongue and that won't work when my dick is halfway down your stomach.”

I try to laugh, but some sort of crackly sound comes out. Yeah, I need something to drink to soothe my throat.

Without being able to even say it out loud Warren leaves the room and returns with a glass of water and a slice of lemon in it. He hands it to me and I gracefully chug the whole thing.

“Thank you,” I say.

“So you do have manners,” he jokes, reminding me of the clothes I left all over the room.

“Yes, now please let me suck your cock until you come and let me show you your seed on my tongue.”

He holds his dick, tapping the tip of it against my lips until I open my mouth and take him in. I suck hard on the tip, making him hiss, before I soothe him by softly rolling my flat tongue around his crown. I gently suck his frenum and then let the tip of my tongue slide through his slit.

He closes his eyes, moans, and puts a hand on my shoulder to keep himself steady.

When I take his whole dick in my mouth he grunts and I slowly let him slide in further and further. He seems to tense and relax at the same time. I lick and I suck and then I start bobbing.

Slowly in the beginning, teasing him a bit, just because I can. I make sure spit is everywhere and everything is gliding when I use a hand to grab his base and start pulling his dick in corkscrew motions. Every time I reach the tip of his cock I suck a bit harder.

He tries to hide that what I’m doing is making him crazy, but his legs are shaking and he can barely hold his moans in.

I’m not sure why he wants to pretend he’s not there yet – I know I’m good at giving head and I love doing it.

So I make sure he can’t hide.

I keep a steady rhythm, I squeeze a bit harder and I suck a little more.

And then he goes wild. Salty cum fills my mouth with big spurts and Warren grunts and squeezes my shoulder like he is a wild beast unable to contain himself. On the height of his orgasm he pushes his dick further into my throat, making me gag – and then he tries to pull his dick out. Which isn’t happening.

I make sure I get every drop of his cum and suck him completely clean.

Warren is still huffing and grunting, looking wild and satisfied at the same moment. His eerie white blue eyes are

wide and he looks at me as if he's never seen a human before.

“That... That was something. Jesus fucking Christ. You really like doing that, don't you?”

“Love it,” I say, going with my tongue over my teeth and cleaning my mouth of any residue of his cum. I realize I didn't show him his load, but I have an inkling this won't be the last time I suck him off.



The moment my head gets blood again and I'm able to form coherent thoughts, I maneuver myself to the bed and sit myself down on the edge of it. My breath is out of control and my legs are wobbly.

That was, no shit, the best blowjob I've ever had and I've got quite a few to compare to. I briefly consider the fact that there might be some teensy tiny feelings involved, but I quickly push those thoughts away. Braden showed me that those don't work. Dom is just really good at sucking. Or blowing. Or whatever the hell he did.

I catch him looking at me rather smugly.

"Oh quit it, it had just been a while," I lie.

"Sure."

I put my forearms on the bed and lean back, my dick still out of my pants and my brain still foggy.

"Sure you're alright there?" Dom asks.

"You're so fucking lucky you're having a hall pass tonight."

"Why? What would happen if I didn't have a hall pass? What would happen if you unleashed the Dom."

I inhale deeply, use a hand to tuck my dick back in and take a moment to think. "I'd punish you for not being respectful. A Dom is treated with respect by his sub during play. One of my rules is calling me Sir, or Master after most sentences. I happen to like bratting, but only to an extent. So the jokes and the teasing, they'd only get you that far."

“What if I went too far?”

Damn this boy and his questions. Tonight was to not be about dynamics and rules. It was about indulging.

“Depends,” I finally answer.

“On?”

“On what your likes and dislikes are. I can say I’d roll you over, pull your pants down and spank you until you’ve got bruises tomorrow – but if you’re into that, if there’s a masochistic side to you, you’d like that, enjoy that. It wouldn’t be punishment anymore.”

Now Dom falls silent, because I bet he’s going over all the things he really wouldn’t like as punishment that could happen. Without him telling me a word, he tells me that he likes it rough and there’s indeed a masochistic side to him.

Which the sadist in me likes. A little too much. My dick twitches while it should still be in a coma after the blowjob of a lifetime.

“What are other forms of punishment?”

“The possibilities are endless.”

“Name some.”

“I once had a sub who hated the forest. So I’d send him to a little stream about a mile away. I’d ask him to go grab me a pebble from that stream and bring it to me. He hated it, with every fibre of his being. But he did it. The funny thing was that once he reached the stream, the sound of the sloshing water calmed him down and helped him become more balanced. Next time he acted out, I told him to bring the pebble back.”

“How’d you know he didn’t just grab one from the forest nearby?”

“Trust. It’s all about trust in a dynamic, Dom.”

Silence returns. It’s comfortable and cozy and precisely right. Until the atmosphere changes and it becomes heavy. Our arms glide over the silk until they touch each other and before

I know it I'm half on top of Dom, kissing the living shit out of him.

He's just as greedy as I am, wanting it just as much as me, panting after a few meager seconds.

Hands are everywhere and soon I lose track of whose hand is where and what they're doing, but slowly we're removing all pieces of clothes until we're both just in our underwear. His dick is just as hard as mine – the pebbles my previous sub had to get from the stream were less sturdy – and the moment we start grinding we both start groaning.

Part of me marvels at how quickly I got hard again. I'm not that young anymore, but Dom brings out the teenager in me.

“Please tell me you're a bottom,” I plea. That Jacob's Ladder is designed to provide pleasure going into stuff, but I'm the least bottomiest bottom in the history of bottoms – I just can't relax and if we're both tops we're both going to have a problem. Nothing we can't work around, a nice little frothing is never dissatisfying, but I really, *really*, want to get inside of him.

“Absolute bottom, no desire to top at all, now get naked,” he demands while he pulls my boxer briefs down. I let him and make sure his goes down as well.

When his penis bobs against his belly I admire the piercings again. Yeah, I can't wait to hear those clink against my teeth.

Dom, having just had my cock in the back of his throat, doesn't waste any time to see how the thing looks. He doesn't care, he just wants to get this show on the road.

I wrap my hand around his shaft and give a few careful pulls. I don't know how sensitive those piercings are, but the way Dom pushes himself in my hand lets me know that it's not going to be a problem at all.

Not wasting too much time on it I move my hand over his sack down to his hole and softly circle the skin surrounding it before putting pressure on it.

Dom moans and pushes himself against my finger, so there's no secret to whether he likes it or not. I'm good. Thank

God.

I roll off of him and get a slur of profanities yelled at me, asking me where the hell I think I'm going and I chuckle. "Lube, babe, no prep, remember?"

I see the understanding dawning in his eyes and his body relaxes again. Now that would be fucked up – get someone all worked up and then leave them. I've done it before. All tied up. Blindfolded them and then watched them struggle with themselves and their thoughts while I left them in complete silence. And Dom would deserve it now if we were in a dynamic as well. I don't mind some profanity, but the way he just acted lacked respect and *that* part is unacceptable.

I grab the lube, take off the cap and move back to Dom. He's so eager he's already put his foot on the mattress, his knees opened, giving me access to exactly where I want to be.

Drizzling the cold lube all over his hole I see him shiver. It's not just the cold – it's the anticipation and the eagerness. I know, because I recognize it from myself.

I put the lube on the bedside table on the other side of the bed and then get back to what it is I actually want to be doing.

Devour Dom.

Gently putting pressure on him with one finger, I slide in without all too much resistance. Pumping and being rewarded by soft moans, I amp up the intensity and put in a second finger. I'm still not meeting too much resistance, not even inside at the second muscle ring. Still I make sure Dom is fully relaxed before I add a third finger. This time it's a little more snug so I go as slowly as I can.

I pump, rotate and wiggle until I feel him opening up to me bit by bit. Not that I timed it, but I bet it takes less than two minutes before Dom is pushing back on me.

"Power bottom?" I ask.

"Only when I'm really, really desperate to get fucked," he says in a moany voice that makes me want to do things to this boy that would reserve me a private chair next to the devil in hell.

“Sure you’re ready?”

“For the love of Harley Davidson, just fuck me already.”

I laugh out loud and bend back to the bedside table again, grabbing a condom, opening the foil with my teeth and rolling on the condom like a pro. *Because deep down you’re still a pro* my head thinks.

I crawl over Dom and look him deep in his eyes. He looks desperate and I bask in it.

“Ready?”

I know I just asked, but the world I’ve been living in has taught me that consent is so incredibly important that it’s routine to make sure the consent is really there.

“More than ready.”

Using my hand to guide my cock to his opening I can’t help but notice that I’m harder than I usually am. Even though I just blew my load I know this isn’t going to last long. Good thing I can go more than a few times. I just hope Dom knows what he’s in for.

When the tip of my cock touches his ass I can feel it convulsing in anticipation. I push forward a little and all the prep work makes sure I’m good to go.

The initial entrance is a little tight, but he relaxes immediately.

Holding still for a few seconds so he can adjust to me being inside him, we kiss and make out. They’re tender kisses, no hardness, just two men sharing intimacy.

Slowly I start moving and the kissing stops because Dom’s mouth falls open in incredible bliss.

So I keep moving and I keep picking up the pace, going deeper and deeper.

Dom has his arms around my neck, holding onto me like his life depends on it.

I know I hit his prostate when his nails dig in my back and a long stretched out moan leaves him. “Right there,” he

whispers.

“I know, baby,” I say, poking the same spot again, a little harder this time.

The sounds that are coming from him are sounds coming straight out of a porn movie and I love how vocal he is. It takes a while before I realize I’m huffing and grunting as well.

“Don’t stop,” he begs me, and the way he asks me would probably make me do anything. I love it when they beg, and I didn’t even have to work for this beg. “Please.”

“Of course not,” I say, wanting to give him everything I have in that moment. I feel my balls draw up every few seconds, a tingling sensation at the bottom of my spine. We’re going to finish this both together.

“Oh fucking Indian holy hell,” Dom swears before I feel him coming, his cum all over my stomach, even reaching as high as above my nipples. The man has some serious shooting power.

It doesn’t leave me much room to ponder, because I follow him into another mind blowing orgasm again. I hold my breath while I climax, because my brain is too occupied with being in endless bliss to remember to breathe as well.

When oxygen finally reaches me again and I find something that resembles my wits, I know I’m in trouble. A lot of trouble. Because I’m never going to be able to let this go and just be his handler after this. Sure, I could be professional. But every time I’d see him I’d remember the way his face contorted when he came.

Dom is mumbling incoherent words when I slowly take my dick out of his ass and roll off him.

He turns on his side, lays his leg over mine and snuggles up to me.

Trouble.

So fucking much trouble.



Warren gets us something to drink and snack on while he orders me to stay in bed and move as little as possible. Which I'm completely and utterly fine with, because while that might not have been the longest sex I've ever had, it's certainly the best I ever had. *Everything felt right.*

Warren comes back with water and grapes and bounces on the bed after he has put everything on the bedside table.

He leans in, kisses my forehead and asks me if everything is alright.

All I can do is stare at him and nod. Holy Chrysler this is the best day of my life. If I never find a man like this, or have an experience like this, I'll still be a happy man. But the truth of all truth is that he's addictive and I want to have him all to myself.

"I'm glad that was okay. Didn't I hurt you?"

"Complete opposite of hurt," I say, leaning over him, grabbing a glass of water and draining it. I take the grapes back and put it between us on the bed, Hallmark cliché feeding him one before I eat one myself.

"It'd be my task to take care of you if I were your Caregiver, you know?" Warren says.

“You got everything, I’m capable of feeding you grapes.”

He frowns, cute little wrinkles appearing between his eyes. “It’s not a matter of being capable, it’s more a case of... hierarchy. I’d get immensely satisfied when I could take care of you.”

“Which would include feeding me grapes?”

“Depending on my mood? Yes. I can get a little overprotective.”

I ponder about that for a while. “But we’d make our own rules in how the dynamic would work?” I’m too curious about all of this, too addicted to him to let this go just because it’s something I’m unfamiliar with.

“Yes, we’ll start with some really easy basics, and then we’ll see what we’re comfortable with from there.”

“What would the basics be?”

He turns on his back, looking at the ceiling, one hand folded behind his head. “Usually I’d have a list, but I think we should start with the drastic basics. You’re mine, nobody else’s. When we’re together, when we’re playing, you call me by an honorific. You can pick one you like. Sir, Master, Owner, I’m fine with all.”

“Master,” I answer immediately. “Sir was my father and... just.... No.”

He puts a finger on my lips, making me shut up. “I wasn’t done talking and I didn’t ask for an answer immediately.”

“Yes Master,” I say with a grin even though he has a finger on my lips.

“Oh you’re so lucky I’m not slapping you tonight,” Warren sighs while he pinches the bridge of his nose. Then he sighs, finds his calm again and continues. “Outside of this house we’re a couple. A regular couple. But I demand you to be respectful to me. Everything you do outside the house will be saved for later. Don’t think I will forget. I have an exceptional memory.”

I nod.

Does the nod mean I agree?

I think it does, but I also think it needs verbalizing.

“That all sounds reasonable for now.” Then my mind goes in another direction. “How about the dungeon?”

“You really don’t know how to take it easy, do you?” Warren says with a smirk, turning on his side so our stomachs are touching.

“I don’t know if I will like everything in there.”

“You don’t have to. We’re not going there for a while and we’ll figure it out together.”

The silky feeling of his half hard dick touching my leg does things to me that it shouldn’t. But when I try to make an advance Warren holds me back.

“Easy, Baby. We’ve got all night.”

Instead we start talking. About things I never expected to talk about with someone who I should probably now consider my Dom. We talk politics, and gay rights, we talk about the law on abortion and somehow we even end up on real alligator skin handbags. Warren is easy to talk to. Our minds seem to connect, like the universe put us on the same level. I don’t know if it’s chemicals making me fall in love a little, or if it’s plain magic. But the more we talk and laugh, the more I know this is where I am meant to be.

Eventually he softly starts playing with my nipple and I shiver, getting goosebumps over my whole body. He kisses me, softly at first. Then he wraps his hand around my neck and tilts my head to the side. He bites my bottom lip and I just let it all happen. I completely surrender to the experience he’s giving me. He’s giving me a taste of what it’s like to be with a Dom – and I have to admit that I like it.

Eventually he orders me to turn around, which I do.

“All fours,” he demands.

I gladly comply.

His rough hand presses between my shoulderblades, making me fall face first into his bed while my ass is still up in the air. A new cold drizzle of lube gets spread on my ass, but I'm pretty sure that I'm still slick enough from last time and the load of lube he left in there.

Warren is careful though, using his fingers to stretch me again before he grabs another condom and fucks me into bliss. This time he keeps on going. He wraps his hand around my dick and starts stroking me.

"Those piercings make it weird," he grunts.

"It makes it glorious," I say.

He keeps on going though, fucking me with long hard strokes, probing my prostate every single damn time. Warren gets the hang of jerking me off with the piercings and damn, he's got some damn magic hands.

"You gotta stop, or I'm gonna come," I moan when I feel the tingles of a starting climax at the base of my spine.

"That's exactly what I want, baby, try to keep it in until I tell you so."

"That's impossible," I counter.

"No it's not. Just a little longer. It'll be so good when I tell you you can come and you finally do."

It's the tenderness in his voice that makes me want to listen to him. But I don't know if I can keep it in much longer. There's thick drops of precum leaking from my dick and soon I'm going to explode.

Just when I think I can't keep it in any longer, he leans over my back, puts his face right next to my ear and whispers "Come for me."

Something I don't have to be told twice.

Thick ropes of come ejaculate from my dick and I make a mess out of his gorgeous black satin sheets, but who the fuck cares? Orgasms top clean bedding.

“That’s a good Pup,” Warren whispers, and I can’t explain what it does to me when he calls me a Pup. I hope it’s something that’ll become regular.

Warren keeps fucking me until he finishes himself – there’s no way to miss it, because he growls and huffs as he rides out his orgasm and I have to admit that him being so purely himself, giving into his animalistic side, turns me on.

Again, we both fall on the bed, unable to move.

I don’t even worry about the mess beneath me, those are worries for another time.

“Are you sure?” I ask, as we’re standing in front of his parent’s house.

We spent all night doing all kinds of sexual things. Frotting, oral, more sex, just old fashioned rubbing against each other. It was like we wanted to experience everything at once. He made sure I was being fed and hydrated and then he said we had to shower because we had to go to Sunday dinner with his family.

I panicked.

Meeting family is a big deal and we’re just exploring this. But he made me shower, made me put on the clothes he had washed during our sexmarathon and then drove me and Jack, who was asleep and drooling on my lap, to his parents.

Which is where we are now. Standing in front of his door.

“I am absolutely sure. Now we’re going to go inside. Prepare for noise,” he says while opening the door. Apparently it’s not locked during this time of the day. Or maybe it’s because it’s Sunday dinner and it’s tradition.

I enter a home that is so homely that I’m sure it would be pictured in the dictionary if that showed pictures. Everything screams come in, be welcome, please stay, we love you – and it touches a part of me that makes me want to cry. The contrast with the compound is so big that I don’t know how to act in an environment like this.

Before I can voice my panic a little boy walks in. He gives Warren a fistbump and then he stares at me. It's a very intense stare.

"You are the ship mechanic," he states with a childish voice I somehow didn't expect of him. The way he looks at me makes me feel like he has an old soul, so I expected the voice of a seventy year old.

I clear my throat. "I am."

"Great. I'm Oliver, and I have at least fifty-six questions about the inner workings of boats, so you're stuck with me." He walks up to me, holds up his hands indicating he wants to be picked up and to my surprise I do so. Oliver starts talking at the speed of a fighter jet and I do my best to keep up with him.

In the meantime I follow Warren into the living room where the whole family seems to have gathered. I immediately recognize his parents. There's a little girl who is hugging Jack like her life depends on it. And there's a woman that's the female version of Warren, the only difference being her hair color being darker. Next to her is a man who doesn't resemble anyone, so he must be Warren's sister's husband.

Warren points at them all: "Dad, also known as Joe, he likes reading the newspaper and gossiping with everyone in town. Mom, also known as Ahnah, which means wise in one of the native Alaskan tribes, she loves cooking and taking care of everyone. Then we have Josh, my brother in law, he's the most level headed of us all and sometimes I wonder if he's just deaf because he can ignore all the noise. Don't ask me what he does, it's something with numbers and I don't understand it. Then there's Jen, my sister, pain in my ass."

She snorts. "Best sister in the whole damn world you mean."

"That too. She works in a nursing home with the elderly. And then we get to the highlight of the evening, the two bright shining stars of the night. Liv and Oliver. Liv is a little too wise for her age, is convincing us to become vegan, Greta Thunberg is her idol, and she's going to be a vet when she

grows up, who will also treat wildlife pro bono because the wild life doesn't have any money to pay."

Liv nods fervently and I laugh.

"And stuck to you for the rest of the evening is Oliver. He loves boats."

Oliver nods really wildly.

"And has more energy than a whole solar park."

Jen and Josh nod.

"And remember I have a lot of questions!" Oliver says.

"Well, I used to work mostly on motorcycles, and I'm just learning about ships, so I hope I can answer them all for you," I confess.

There's a hint of panic in Oliver's eyes, but soon he settles again. Some answers are better than no answers.

"Let's eat," Warren's mother says. Everyone grabs their glass and follows the matriarch of the family to an adjoining room, where there's a big dining table with a gorgeous table setting, filled with different dishes.

"Mashed potatoes!" Oliver says, wiggling out of my arms and running to a chair that's closest to the mashed potatoes.

Without having to be told I take a seat next to him, because I feel like our conversation isn't magically over now that there's mashed potatoes in sight. Joe asks me what I want to drink and gives it to me while Ahnah arranges Warren's drink. The table is filled with a feast and it's one of those homely images you see in a movie that I never really got to experience. Or maybe I did, before my mother died, but I can't remember.

Joe lays a hand on my shoulder while he sets down my drink and gives me a warm smile.

From the opposite side of the table Jen is staring at me with her chin in her hand and her elbow leaning on the table. "I want to know everything," she demands.

And just like that I'm part of the family.



A rhythm develops. We don't talk about it, we don't make any arrangements, but a rhythm develops.

Every day when Dominic's work hours are over, Jack and I take a hike through the woods and go to the shop to pick him up. We go inside to warm up a little, and because Jack has developed an enormous crush on Eddie. Whenever he sees the old man he turns into a pup, wagging his tail so hard it looks like it hurts. And when Eddie scratches him beneath his chin or behind his ears, you can see the white in Jack's eyes.

Meanwhile the other guys banter about everything and nothing. The latest subject is the blooming relationship between Mano and Sugar. She's got him completely under her spell and he's more than glad to be there. The guys, Dom included, are all giving him shit for it. I'm sure that when I'm not around they do the same to Dom about him and me being together. We're in no way hiding what's going on between us.

When we manage to get the half drooling dog away from the old man we either go to Deanna's to eat, or we go to my cabin where I cook. Dominic has taken up the habit to help me cook, because he never learned and he wants to.

And we talk.

We talk about everything. We talk about black holes and how they are created, we talk about the best way to shoot a moving target, we talk about how gay men are portrayed in movies and the lack of actual gay actors getting the gay roles.

If you give Dom the chance he'd talk all day.

It's like he has been made to shut up for all those years he was in Victorious – either because of lack of someone to confide in, or simply being told to be quiet and keep his mouth shut. My money is on it being both.

But we agree on most things and the things we don't agree on we discuss. In a civil manner. He listens to my opinion, I listen to his.

But I have to admit that my urge to dominate him, let my urges out, are getting stronger and stronger. I said one night of normal intimacy, and we've been at this for weeks. So tonight I'm going to bring it up and we're going to talk it through, and for the first time in my fucking life it's making me very nervous. Normally this is a business deal, but with Dom it's different. It's uncharted territory and I'm in mortal terror I'll crash into some rocks.

So when we're sitting on my couch, him with one of his legs hanging over mine, our shoulders touching, letting the meal we have just had settle, I gather my courage and I bring it up.

“I think it's time to have the conversation.”

Dom sighs. “*The* conversation. Took you a while. I thought you'd bring it up right that Sunday when you got the choice. You gave me some bonus weeks, didn't you?”

I give him a half smile. “I gave you as long as I could, until my urges started to take over. I tried this vanilla thing with my ex, Braden. This would be the point I would start to find things I'm dissatisfied with and start to make cracks in the relationship.”

“Relationship?”

Fuck. That was not the word I intended on using. But there's no taking it back now.

“It's not just a dynamic I believe,” I explain. “Hence the weeks we just had. So yes, relationship and dynamic.”

“Okay, let's talk it through. Or are we doing a list like Fifty Shades?”

“Fifty Shades of Who? We’re not doing that shit.”

He chuckles, leans back and looks at me with those blue eyes and his thick black lashes. “Where do we start?”

“I want to slowly implement some rules,” I say. This part I thought through. Thoroughly.

“Which ones?”

“When we’re at home, here, not out in public, you call me by an honorific you choose. You said you’re not using Sir and want Master. Which is fine by me. When we’re here, you call me Master. I expect you to say it after as many sentences as you can. If you forget too often, I will say something or I’ll punish you if you don’t listen at all. When we’re here, I’m calling you Pup.”

“That sounds okay.”

“That sounds okay, Master,” I correct him.

He scrunches his brows, tasting the words. I see his shoulders slump in a deep surrender. “That sounds okay, Master,” he repeats, halfway through the sentence looking up at me and studying me.

My face lights up and I give him a wide smile. “That’s a good Pup.”

“What are the punishments, Master?”

“I don’t know yet,” I tell him.

He looks at me in disbelief. “If you don’t know it, how am I supposed to know it?”

I let him get away without calling me the honorific this time, he needs some time to get used to it. “I want you to make a list of things you think would be punishments for you.”

“You’re going to make me do it myself?”

“That’s the second time you didn’t call me Master. There will be slight punishment for that in the future.”

He scowls, and it’s adorable.

“I don’t want to make that list.... Master.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’ll be harsher on myself than you will be, Master.”

“And that’s the exact reason that I’m making you write your own list, Pup. Those are enough rules for now. When we’ll play in the dungeon we’ll discuss hard and soft limits. For now we’ll keep it at regular sex. But I do think you need a stop system or a safe word.”

He looks at me, and I know he understands the concept, but he needs me to elaborate what that means to us specifically.

“We can go with red, orange and green when I ask you how you are. Green being fine and ready to go on, orange is reaching a limit but still okay, and red is stop and I’ll stop everything right that second. You can also just pick a safe word. A word you can easily remember, that means something to you. Say it, and I’ll stop. You need to be able to remember it even when you’re panicking, but it can’t be something in the likes of ‘stop’. One day we’ll play in a way you ask me to stop when you don’t really want me to stop, so it has to be something different.”

Dominic stares at the coffee table, where my feet are resting on.

“I think I want a safe word,” he finally says with a softer voice than I’m used to from him. “And I want it to be ‘Champ’”.

Now it’s my turn to be quiet. Finally I just ask. “Why champ?”

Dominic inhales sharply, his eyes getting a glassy look and the muscles in his body straining. There isn’t a single body part that’s relaxed.

“After that first time he made me kill that man who was related to the death of my mother, he took me to the compound and he declared I was his champ. After every kill, he’d do the same. And Nathan took over the habit. Every time I heard it, it made me sick.”

I swallow thickly, because all I can imagine is eight year old Dominic, blood splattered over him, being in shock from being forced to kill a man and going to a full compound filled with grown men and women who cheered him on while his father declared him a champ.

That little boy? I want to pick him up, cradle him and never let him go again. God, they fucked him up, and they fucked him up good.

“Champ it is,” I say, trying not to let my voice break. “Now, put on some sturdy boots and your thick coat. Once they’re on, you get three minutes and then I’m coming after you,” I say, the thought of it alone making my dick throb.

Dominic’s eyes light up. “Yes, Master.”

He gets up faster than I thought he was possible, ties his boots, puts on his coat and gets out of the door. He’s in such a rush he doesn’t even close it.

I set a timer on my phone for three minutes and slowly start putting on my own shoes and jacket. My insides are twirling. I love the chase. You never know what’s going to happen. I wait in anticipation, skipping from one foot to the other while I look at the timer on my phone. If you ask me, it’s not going fast enough.

When it finally reaches the three minute mark and starts beeping I’m out the door. I’m running at full speed while trying to make the beeping stop.

I’m in luck because it has snowed in the previous days, so I can follow his footsteps. He’s been smart though and has headed to the nearest trees where there’s no snow on the ground and I can’t follow him as easily. When I reach the nearest trees I stop running, put my hands on my hips and look around.

Where would he have gone?

My instincts say that he’s just run as far ahead as he can. He wants me to think he’s zigzagging or finding a good place to hide, but in reality he’s just creating as much distance between us as he possibly can. And the fastest way is a straight line.

I've come to learn to trust my instincts, so I start running forward.

I run hard. So hard my lungs begin to burn and my sides begin to ache. But I don't care.

A smile covers my face when I pass an opening in the foliage where snow has fallen and covered the ground and I see footsteps. My instincts were right.

I think about how I'm going to throw Dom on the ground, struggle with him, peel his pants down and make savage love to him when I catch him, letting the animal in me go wild.

With the speed I'm running I'm catching up to him fast, and I am gaining ground.

At last I see him going through the trees. He's running fast, but I'm running faster. The physically messed up thing about this is that some part of him wants to be caught, making it easier for me to gain ground on him.

It takes me a while, I almost fall down over a log on the ground because my gaze is focussed on my target, but after what feels like forever I grab his jacket.

He tries to pull himself free from it, but it's hopeless. I have him, tackle him, make sure I break his fall and throw my body over his.

He grunts, but has nowhere to go.

I've gotten so hard in the meantime my dick hurts.

I hold him in a wrestling hold I've learned to be effective over the years, and still he manages to almost evade me. I guess being the enforcer of the biggest MC in the country teaches you a trick or two as well.

Don't ask me how, but I manage to unbutton his pants and pull them down.

He swears and shivers when his naked lower body touches the ground.

A half smile forms on my face and if I could I would howl right there and then, but I think it's a bit much for a first chase.

I don't want to scare him off too much with everything that is changing right now.

I manage to get my own pants down as well.

I forego putting on a condom – we both got tested a week ago, got declared clean, so we've been having bareback sex ever since. It's heaven.

We've had sex just an hour before, so there's no need for long preparation and I slide in his ass without any resistance, using my previous cum as lubrication for this round.

I don't start off slowly like I usually do – I'm too hyped up, I'm too into my urges, and I can't control myself any longer.

Beneath me, Dominic is fighting me. He's not really trying to get away, it's more like we're roughhousing. And there are no words coming out of his mouth, just grunts, and they're from pleasure, not from actually getting away.

His body is telling me things too: If he didn't want this, his ass wouldn't be this relaxed and he wouldn't be pushing himself back on me when I pump into him.

I open his legs wider, using my knees, and pin his head down on the cold floor, but I can see the enjoyment on his face.

God, if he loves the chase as well, if he loves it as much as I do, I might never be able to let him go. I might just want to keep him forever.

Picking up the pace I fuck him as fast as I can, no longer focussing on his feelings — although I keep an eye out for his safety – and give him my inner animal. I go wild. With fast paced, hard strokes I fuck him into oblivion.

Having orgasmed just an hour before means I have some stamina to keep going and after about fifteen minutes Dom stops fighting. I'm hitting his prostate with every pound I give him and he's mewling like a newborn pup, begging for milk.

I let his hands go and get one of mine beneath him, finding his rock hard and pounding dick.

In the position we're in I can't really give him a handjob, but squeezing and rotating his dickhead is enough to make him come in under a minute. Warm cum fills my hand and a satisfied smirk covers my face.

I keep up the tempo I have in which I'm fucking him, making sure I keep the same rhythm to find my own release. This way, with everything being right – the chase, the catch, the surrender, being outside, the smell of sweat mixed with the pine trees that surround us and Dom just being Dom – it doesn't take long to get there.

For the second time that day I fill him up, spurting cum in him while I growl and huff and feel like I'm in heaven.

Sated, I let myself fall fully on his back.

This was fucking perfection.



I dump the dumbbell without any grace and let myself drop to the floor and lie flat on my belly. Meryll has just given us the workout from hell, and while Dom looks like he's been to the spa, all sweaty and happy and glowy, I hate him.

And Meryll is Meryll. He cleaned some of his gym equipment while he gave us exercise after exercise and enjoyed our pain and suffering.

Well. I'll take revenge by sweating all over his floor.

Dom and Meryll hit it off immediately. It's Meryll's gift – he can make anyone feel wanted and human. The way he connects with people is astounding. Dom opened up to him after exactly thirty seconds and one push up. I was still busy tying the laces of my shoe.

“Shower?” Dom asks.

“Nope,” Meryll says.

I gather enough strength to raise my head and raise a brow in question.

“We're going hunting. I want something fresh tonight and we're out of fresh meat. So no need to get clean now, you'll be dirty in an hour anyway again.”

And thus, even though every muscle in my body is protesting, I am ready to go hunting half an hour later. Unalaska allows people to hunt wearing camouflage. The problem with that is there are more people in the forest hunting, and if you see something move, you might just risk a

shot and later find out you've shot another hunter. It's the reason why we're wearing neon colored vests over our coats. Even Jack has one.

It's orange and he hates it.

But he also knows it means he gets to run through the woods and hunt things. He never actually catches anything, because that beast is too goofy for his own good, but he's great at spotting the prey and where it ended up.

"How's the wife and the kids?" I ask Meryll, making a wrong move and hurting my glute. I rub it and find Dom staring at the gesture with a look that is way too sadistic for him.

"Fine. They're fine. All fine," Meryll says, adjusting the strap of his rifle over his shoulder.

"Say fine one more time and maybe I'll believe you," I chuckle.

"When is it time for them to come and sleep with Uncle Warren again anyway?"

"That bad?"

"Nobody tells you that as they get older, they get mouthier. Like, *way* mouthier. I've become one of those 'because I said so' Dads. I hate those."

"Then why do you say it?" Dom asks.

"Well, because I said so and they should just fucking listen, but I can't swear, so I say this instead." Meryll pinches the bridge of his nose before he runs a hand over his beard, and swears inwardly.

"I'll check my schedule," I tell him, which we both know I will never do.

Meryll and his wife Kaya met in high school, got married straight after and she started popping out babies. She's one of those women who were put on Earth to look after kids. She also happens to be the local preschool teacher and if you ask me the woman is a saint. Or insane. Either one or the other.

“She wants to have one more,” he says.

“What?” I genuinely ask in surprise. Their kids are a little older and I don’t see why you’d want to have another baby when you almost molded them into functioning little parts of society.

“I know. But she says she wants to feel the kicks one more time. And to smell that new-born smell one more time. She wants to nurse one last time. She wants all the firsts one more time.”

“But?”

“Me? I’m done, dude. I did my part.”

We walk in silence for a bit, trying to see if we can find some wildlife now that we’re far away enough from town.

“She said she’d surrogate for you if you ever wanted a baby,” Meryll whispers, making sure Dom doesn’t hear, who is walking a bit ahead of us and having a very deep conversation with Jack. “*That* I can live with.”

That’s commitment to friendship if you ask me, but wow.

“We just got together,” I hiss through my teeth. “We’re not having babies. We’re barely able to function or talk about... certain... things.”

Meryll and I actually connected when Kaya wanted to get her kink on and they sought someone out to educate them. Not having a million sex clubs in remote Alaska made them end up with me when I was still in the early stages of my career, and let’s just say we all learned a lot from each other.

Meryll holds up his hands. “Not now. But when you like... break him in. Have him house trained. Something like that.”

“House trained? He’s not a dog!”

Meryll raises an eyebrow. “I know your preferences, I bet there’ll be a time you get him to pet play.”

An unwilling smile covers my face, thinking about the chase we just had the week before and how it completely blew my mind. I’m not sure Dom will ever be into pet play, but who

knows? I've been surprised before. Especially with these types who've been held back and finally get the opportunity to explore sides of themselves they never even knew they had.

But babies?

That's about a marathon too far.

"Well, give all my love to Kaya, hold her tight and give her a forehead kiss from me and tell her how much I appreciate the offer. But it might be a while before something like that even becomes a possibility. So she should keep those rambling ovaries tucked up high in her abdomen."

I'm looking at the way Meryll smiles at me, his eyes glassy, lost in the past, where forehead kisses between Kaya and me used to be a thing.

From the periphery of my eyes I suddenly see Dom going down, Jack automatically crouching because I taught him. It almost looks like Dom tripped and I want to start running in his position until I see his outstretched hand, signaling Meryll and me to stay back.

We stand as still as we can while we try to figure out what's going on.

Then Dom one handed shoots his rifle while he holds Jack in his pelt to keep him back and out of the crossfire. He raises his head, lowers the gun and puts the safety back on. After he's done that he lowers his hand.

Meryll and I rush in his direction while Dom gets up as if nothing happened.

"What the fuck was that?" I bellow. "The fact that I let you come hunting doesn't mean you can just randomly shoot things! I *am* still a Marshal you know. You're not supposed to have weapons."

"That's not true," Meryll says, who knows the rules about being a Marshal as well as I do. The plan was that we would do it together and travel all over, but then Kaya got pregnant and he opened a fishing gear store slash gym. Let's just say that Meryll has a wide set of interests.

“If there’s a chance of imminent threat, the protectees are allowed to carry a gun for self defense.”

“There was nothing to defend himself from here!” I yell.

Dom, giving me the stink eye, scratches Jack between his eyes and mumbles a low ‘fetch’ before the dog takes off. I stare at my pet and marvel at the structure of his muscles beneath his pelt. Running through the woods like this, jumping left and right over fallen logs or simply because he feels like jumping, he reminds me of a wolf and when a whiff of the smell of pine trees reaches me mixed with some icy snow smell in the air, I’m reminded of how wonderful nature is and how absolute freaking gorgeous Alaska is – even when you almost freeze your balls off in the height of winter.

Jack disappears and Dom ignores both Meryll and me, not looking at us while he waits. Everything about his demeanor is fuming and I so want to give him the ass whooping he deserves.

Meryll and I are trained hunters – there was nothing there to shoot at. A thought I decide to voice. “There was nothing to shoot at.”

“I didn’t see anything,” Meryll acknowledges with a softer voice – he’s a people pleaser and he still wants to be liked by Dom.

After what feels like an eternity and then some, Jack comes running back, a giant hare in his beak.

“How does rabbit for dinner sound?” Dom asks, the sarcasm so thick you could cut it with a knife.

“What the…” Meryll starts, grabbing the dead animal from Jack who looks very pleased with himself because this means he’s going to get treats, and the overgrown dog that acts like a house cat loves treats.

“Right between the eyes,” I marvel.

Dom turns to us, pointing a finger at Meryll, tapping him right between the eye. “You might know stuff about gyms, and fishing, and who the hell knows what more. You may know this territory.”

Then he turns to me and I feel my ears redden beneath my beanie with shame.

“You might be a mighty Marshal, and do cool government stuff, and have secrets, and know how to hunt and move through a forest.”

He then switches looking from Meryll to me, hesitant at first, but then making a decision.

“But neither of you have been taught as a kid to not just hunt animals, but people in the dark since the age of eight. How to see things that people with a regular eye can’t see. You haven’t had to excel at shooting, including long distance shooting, because your life depended on it. Me? If I didn’t do well, they’d get rid of me. You don’t know the fear of failing to the point where death is certain. I know what it means to make the kill shot, because the alternative is a little less preferable.”

It’s the most he’s ever talked about what it was like being raised in an MC and ending up as an enforcer. He even makes me feel a little ashamed. The fact that he’s lecturing both of us, feeling comfortable enough to speak up against Meryll, is saying something.

The quiet, mistrusting man I picked up from the airport is gone and in its place stands someone who’s becoming a proud Alaskan. A fierce and loyal warrior I can be proud of and even though I just completely lost my cool towards him, my heart fills with pride.

Dom bends down, still oozing anger in both of our directions, but he calms down once he’s at eye level with Jack. He scratches the dog between both his ears, and the dog tells Dom about his most recent adventure in Husky.

I’m not sure if he did it consciously, but in talking softly to Jack he calms himself down as well. He grabs the hare by the ears and holds it out to Meryll. “That enough to feed your family?”

“I wish, man, three growing kids. They eat like it’s their last meal for the next month every night.”

“Then let’s see what else we can find,” Dom says before he turns to me. “And please refrain from shouting at me when I do exactly what you asked me to do. It’s a gigantic turn-off.”

Something flashes behind his eyes, and I know for certain that it’s more than that. After years of dealing with hardened criminals who weren’t born the way they are now, but started off as innocent as you and me, I know when more is going on. My guess is that he’s followed every order he has ever gotten, and still didn’t get the praise he deserved for it.

“Eight?” Meryll finally asks in disbelief.

“Eight,” Dom answers and none of us, even Jack, say another word until we find another hare to shoot.



His whole kitchen is white the week after; we were trying to bake a pie for family dinner later that evening, but for some reason I couldn't resist the urge to throw some flour in his direction and thought I would be able to get away with it.

I'm bigger than Warren, but I'm younger as well, so I thought I would be able to outrun him at least for a moment. But the little bugger just stepped on the kitchen island, jumped over it and floored me. He punched me in the kidney – not too hard, but hard enough to incapacitate me for a second – and straddled me, holding my wrists down on the floor demanding me to surrender. He pushed his white flour-covered nose against mine, and here we are.

I feel both of us getting hard.

My eyes go to the door where he said his dungeon was and my curiosity keeps spiking. We've been having good fun in the bedroom. And the bathroom. And the kitchen. And the living room. But it's all been what Warren calls vanilla – while I'm starting to get exceedingly curious about the kink world. Most of my evenings have been spent Googling everything I can find about BDSM, but I think it's one of those things you need to experience and can't fully learn from a book. Or article, because real books about it seem hard to find. There

were some sites you had to sign up for, but I didn't have the balls to do that.

Does that mean I don't have the balls to dip my toes in these waters anyway?

"Curious?" Warren asks, his voice dark.

"Beyond," I answer truthfully.

"Then we should probably first have a talk about limits."

I sigh, because he's right, but it's a conversation that I'm dreading because I've always been taught to shut up and listen, and not make any decisions for myself, even if I didn't want to do something.

"Why the sigh?" Warren asks.

"Sometimes you feel more like my shrink than my whatever this is between us," I mumble.

"That's because some of this whole kink thing is mind-games as well. I have to truly understand you to get the best results."

"I don't like it when people look around in my head."

His icy blue eyes smile friendly at me, a half smirk trying to console me but failing miserably.

"You've been doing it since I arrived, haven't you?"

"You have *no* idea what a hard time I had figuring out why you, a big and hungry man, ordered tomato soup. I was afraid you were vegan or something like that and that's a hassle in Unalaska. We don't have enough chickpeas."

I giggle. I wish there was a more manly word to describe it, but I plainly giggle.

"So, limits?" Warren asks, rolling off of me. We're now both lying on our backs, looking up at the ceiling, our sides touching, pinkies intertwined.

"No blood. No needles."

Warren scrunches his face. "Agreed."

“I forgot the terms.... But not the... poop and the pee. I don’t care how feral you get.”

I look to the side to see if he’s looking at me, but that’s not the case. He keeps on staring upwards, no emotions on his face.

“No choking. My fight instincts will kick in and I don’t know how that will end up. And I think I have to experience a bit of the rest before I can settle on hard and soft limits.”

“So that’s easy on the bondage too. Or pain when you’ve got nowhere to go,” Warren concludes.

“You can’t hurt me,” I say.

“Yes I can.”

“I’ve been trained to not feel any pain.”

He turns his face towards me and raises a brow. “Your own family made you go through torture training?”

I roll my eyes, as if he couldn’t have expected that.

“How old?” Warren asks between gritted teeth. Our pinkies are no longer intertwined, his whole hand is clenched in a fist now.

“Eleven to fourteen,” I tell him.

“Why the hard limit on choking?”

I consider lying to him, but I can’t make myself. I’ve been nothing but honest with this man and I’m not inclined to start changing that now. “Because fingernails grow back, but once you’ve died because of lack of oxygen that’s it.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, Dom,” Warren says, pulling me against him, my head lying on his chest, his arms wrapped around me. The ironic thing is that it’s almost so tight I want to ask him to let go a little.

“And, eh,” I stumble, “I don’t like to be objectified. I’ve been objectified enough in my life.”

Pain crosses Warren’s face and he rubs a hand over his eyes. “They really fucked you up, didn’t they?”

“Well, no, that’s your job,” I joke, trying to handle the situation with humor.

The way he smiles but it doesn’t reach his eyes tells enough. He pushes himself off the ground, grabs my hand and takes me along with him towards the door on the other side of the living room, to the one space I haven’t entered yet.

He fumbles in his pocket until he finds his set of keys and unlocks the door, showing me a light colored staircase. From the light coming in from the door I can see that the interior downstairs is light too. Somehow that was the last thing I expected. We all have this vision of black and red and purple dungeon. Sultry, seductive, maybe even a little dirty.

This?

This looks like a fucking Norwegian chalet. Even the sheets are white and look crisp. Everything is in order and tidied and it’s obvious that Warren has been keeping this room up. I wonder if he did that while he was still with his ex, or if he started doing it when us going into a dynamic became an option.

“Step inside, hold on to the banister,” Warren says, and I try to figure out why he suddenly doubts my ability to walk off of a stairwell. But once I step on the third step and Warren is inside too, he flips a light switch and closes the door.

By closing the door the whole room gets covered in a pitch black darkness and by flipping the light switch he ignites one of those lights that make the walls and ceiling look like a star lit night. This particular pattern reminds me of the Northern lights and suddenly I understand the Norwegian vibes I got from the room.

The sultriness has increased tenfold and I feel a little nervous. Warren presses against my back with his torso, making me walk down the stairs.

Having a good look around in the darkness, I see things I’ve only read about. Other things I do know, but not from the sex industry. I might’ve even used a few of them and I can confirm that there was no pleasure side of the deal in those cases. But

now that everything is still neatly in order it just looks like a room with some funky furniture.

Warren keeps walking, pushing against my back until my knees touch the front of the bed and he uses both hands to make me fumble forward. My instinct is to turn back directly and get into fighting position, but Warren is already lying on top of me, giving kisses to the side of my neck.

“What are we going to do?” I ask.

He bites the side of my neck.

“What are we going to do, Master?” I correct myself. It’s been hard to get adjusted to the whole formal thing, but I have to admit I get fucking butterflies whenever he calls me Pup.

A while ago he did so while tracing the tattooed wolf on my back with his finger and he made me feel like I’m somewhere I belong. Not just because I was born here, but because someone wants me here for me. Just thinking about it gives me goosebumps.

“How about something easy?”

“Is that a trick question? For all I know your definition of something easy is really fucked up.”

Warren chuckles, gets up with a push up and then gets off the bed.

I turn around, keeping a close eye on him and pushing myself up on my elbows.

He walks towards a cabinet with drawers, takes some things out and shows them to me. It’s a blindfold and a set of supple leather cuffs.

“I’d like to blindfold you and cuff both hands to the point above your head on the bed. And then I have my way with you, but I promise you it won’t be anything hardcore or scary. That okay, Pup?”

He’s not playing fair, because he’s looking pretty damn hot in a white cable turtleneck, tight fitting dark denim jeans and a set of leather bracelets. The warming smile completes the look.

“Yes, Master.”

I scooch up the bed but keep a close eye on Warren. My heart is thundering. Willingly surrendering is new to me, but the desire to please Warren wins.

Warren straddles me and starts applying the cuffs. He pushes a finger in between the cuff and my wrist to see if it's not too tight, then looks me dead in the eye and asks me if that's okay.

I nod.

He takes my wrists, that are now cuffed together and raises them above my head, applying them to the hook above the bed. He watches my reactions like a hawk and kisses me on the soft spot beneath my ear.

“You're doing so well, Pup.”

I glow.

“Is the blindfold still alright?”

Inhaling deeply I quickly nod. Before I have any time to change my mind he applies the blindfold, attaching it with a buckle behind my head. Again, he checks if it's not too tight and asks me to verbally acknowledge it. My heart is fluttering like a butterfly, but I *am* okay.

Now that I can't see and can't go anywhere, all I can do is wait.

Soft classical music I've never heard fills the room. The bed moves when Warren's weight goes off it and he leaves me there. He wouldn't just leave me there, right? I'm pretty sure I'd be able to get out without too much of a hassle, but the idea of him leaving me doesn't sit right with me.

Luckily the bed dips again soon, and Warren's calloused hands start lifting my shirt, leaving it across my chest, and unbuttons my pants, peeling them off by pulling them at the hem.

Anticipation is making me nervous, but when Warren's nimble fingers start tickling my ribs and my armpits, I start laughing uncontrollably. Somewhere in the last weeks he

discovered I'm ticklish, and he stored that knowledge for later it appears. He doesn't stop until I'm laughing so hard I almost choke on my spit, making me laugh even harder.

He stops though.

Only to move down on the bed, pull off my socks, and start tickling me with what I can only think is a feather. And it's hell, but it's the kind of hell that makes tears run down my eyes from laughter.

When I think I can take no more, I beg him to stop, and to my surprise he listens. Maybe it's because I remembered to call him Master when I asked.

Then something prickly glides over the inside of my arm, rolling like it's a pizza slicer, only it stings just a little and when it's gone over a certain spot it leaves a tingling feeling.

I have no idea what it is, but it's a new sensation and it's both thrilling and new. Once the device has gone over my body it leaves little tingly prickles behind and my whole body lights up.

He goes over my collarbones, to my sternum, making me arch my back, over my navel, until he carefully rolls it over my dick that is standing at full attention in the meantime.

The pin disappears and Warren shifts on the bed, fumbling with who knows what and then positioning one leg between mine, the other on the outside.

The skin of his silky cock touches mine and my whole body responds when he wraps his hand around both our dicks and starts stroking.

A long moan leaves my mouth while Warren jerks us both off.

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do. I can feel an orgasm starting to build fairly quickly, but we haven't discussed rules about being allowed to come or to not come and I'm a little confused, because I've read so much about it the last few weeks.

"War," I say desperately.

He picks up on the tone in my voice immediately. “Just come, babe. We haven’t discussed anything else.”

And that’s all the incentive I need to shoot thick ropes of cum all over his hand and our stomachs. I’m not even done coming when I feel Warren’s warm seed join mine and we just make a plain mess of those pretty white sheets.

God.

If this is what being Warren’s sub is like, I don’t think I’ll want to leave this room any time soon.



It's been a few weeks of non-stop playing in the dungeon. Dom is experiencing what they call sub-frenzy, and I'm not strong enough to hold him back. I want to make him feel everything, give him all those new experiences, let him see that it's perfectly fine to be gay, be kinky and enjoy the living shit out of it.

He's greedy.

In every sense of the way.

And I love it.

He wants to learn, he wants to go all the time, he wants to experience it all, he never backs out and he isn't shy to evaluate afterwards what worked and what didn't.

Is this what it is to be in a normal relationship involving kink? I couldn't tell, having never experienced it myself.

We've slowly built up to what we're doing today, but I have to say it's a big step. We started with more bondage, and he responded to that beautifully. He didn't panic from not being able to go anywhere, instead he gave me his trust that I would take care of him. We went on to impact play, and he hadn't lied when he said I couldn't hurt him. Nothing I did to his body made him show any sign of discomfort. What I wasn't prepared for was seeing the scars all over his back from up close and knowing how they got there. The sadist part of me rejoiced, because here I had someone who really could handle the deviant thoughts I had in my head and wouldn't blink an eye. At the same time here was a man I didn't want to hurt.

Here was a man I wanted to hold and to treasure, build something stable with and grow old with.

The moment I woke up with that thought I took a really long walk with Jack to clear my head, but by the time I got back I was calmed down enough to have accepted it. My desires were clear, and I would see how the future would unfold. Nobody could tell me anyway.

We had developed our own aftercare ritual, it just sort of happened. Every sub or bottom, hell, even every top or Dom needs their own form of aftercare. I had a client once who needed to be left alone for a whole hour before he drank a glass of water and left without saying another word.

Dom and me? We're made of the same cloth.

After we've caught our breaths, we talk, have a large glass of water, eat something sugary and then crawl into bed upstairs. The kid practically moved in with me and I couldn't fucking care less. I can't remember the last time we've been at his apartment. After snuggling up to each other we talk some more, because the subjects just never seem to run out. Eventually we fall asleep and have a restful night of sleep.

The next morning we take off all the sheets, take turns in taking a shower and work together on making breakfast. While we do that we make each other listen to our favorite music. I've heard noise I wish I could erase from my memory, but the wide smile on Dom's face made it all worth it. And in return I once caught Dom snoozing when I played him a soft classical piece. It should annoy me that he fell asleep, but the Caregiver in me just felt extremely satisfied that he felt safe enough to risk my wrath and simply doze off.

But this? This might be a bit of a stretch.

I was feeling... creative.

Dom is completely naked except for a collar and cuffs I got for him. He read up on the meaning of them and them showing that he's owned by me. We picked out a set together and he's wearing them as soon as we start a scene.

I made him sit in the middle of the bed in the dungeon.

Right now, he's sitting up on his knees, the tops of his feet flat on the bed. He doesn't know that's going to change in a bit. I'm currently using the soft hemp shibari rope to tie his hands to his elbows behind his back. It's a few simple knots, but they do the trick and they always look more impressive than they are.

Dom is relaxed. As far as he knows, this might be as far as we're going. But I'm not anywhere near ready.

Leaving him on the bed, I get up, walk to the cabinet near the stairs, where the more serious toys are kept and I can just feel his curious stare. He's okay with handing over his trust, he simply wants to know what's going on.

Opening the second drawer I grab an anal hook and turn back to my beautiful sub, who's looking mighty confused and a little hesitant. We haven't played with this before, even if he has been open minded about all the new things I've tried with him.

He turns his eyes back, staring at the place between his knees on the bed, subconsciously already opening his knees a little. The sight of it makes me smile, because he's so intuitive when it comes to pleasing me it's bizarre.

The bed dips when I sit back down on it. Slicking the hook and my sub's hole with some lube, I get everything ready.

Dom opens his knees some more, giving me access to his ass. But he's so eager I decide to tease him a little before proceeding with the scene. I press a finger to his hole, steadily applying more pressure and teasing him before I enter his ring of muscles and start fingering him.

He still seems mighty content, and just knowing that I'm going to fuck with that is making me feel more content.

Adding a finger, playing some more, softly stroking his prostate just once and I'm ready to go on. I grab the anal hook and replace my fingers with the device and gently put it into place.

With another piece of rope I tie the hook to his arms and the tie I used to knot those together. This way, when he moves his

arms, he'll move the hook, pulling it deeper inside him. And trust me, he'll feel that.

I'm just not done yet.

Getting another piece of rope, I see Dom looking over his shoulder with a hint of hesitancy. There's no panic, there's a slight fear of the unknown.

I fold the tie, knotting a Lark's Head around the rope that is on his arms and taking the other end of the tie up. I stand on the bed, pull the rope through a pulley that hangs above the bed and take the rope back down. Measuring if it's not too tight, but not too loose as well and make sure it's tight with Two Half Hitches. This rope is going nowhere.

Dom's shoulders slack again, thinking this is it, and if that would've been the case he could handle this with ease.

But we're taking it up a notch.

I grab another rope, and now I do see a hint of anxiety in Dom's eyes. Right now he already has nowhere to go and can't do a thing. So if I decide to do something he's not particularly happy about there's little he can do. He'll always be able to safe word, even if I probably would feel it coming before he would actually have to do so. But there's never the guarantee that I'm a hundred percent right.

I grab his foot and take it off the bed, pulling it towards his hands. It doesn't reach them all the way, but that doesn't matter. With two Prusik Head incline knots I tie his ankle to his arms, his stance getting wobbly. I see him doubting himself if he can keep himself upright for long. Little does he know...

I grab the last rope I'm using today, take his other foot and bring it up to his arms as well. My own arm is wrapped around his torso so he doesn't fall forward, but once he's steady and leaning the tops of his knees, no other body part of him touches the mattress anymore.

And he has to hold very still, or the hook will move, which might be pleasant, but it won't stay pleasant.

"Fuck," he whispers.

“Hold still,” I say, unable to keep the smile out of my tone.

And I can see him contracting every muscle in his body to indeed hold still because the alternative isn't something he's preferring over not moving. I'm not going to make it that easy for him though.

I grab a soft leather nine-tail that isn't too harsh. We've discovered that Dom likes a little pain with his pleasure and that I can push it further than I ever had. Which means that my regular punishments don't impact him too much.

But in this position? Every move could be wrong, and the tips of his knees he's balancing on aren't giving him much ground to stand on. Literally.

“Do you know why I'm going to punish you?” I ask him, voice even and steady.

“N-no, Master,” he says, wobbling on his knees. His face looks strained because he does not want to topple over.

“What did you do when I asked you to clean your coffee cup this morning?”

Realization dawns on his face and I swear I can hear him say fuck under his breath. “I put it on the counter instead of in the dish washer, Master.”

“And?”

“And then I quickly took off my collar to go to work to not be late.”

“So you were indeed wearing your collar when I told you?”

“I was, Master.”

“I'm thinking fifty,” I say when I grab the whip. It's actually quite a soft one and used right it won't leave a mark at all. It's the fear of moving and keeping still while sitting out his punishment I'm after.

“Yes Master,” he says, the only acceptable answer in this situation.

I roll the whip through my hands, sweeping it through the air, getting closer and closer to his skin, until the ends of the

tails start caressing his skin. I'm going softly, warming him up, changing from side to side, making sure I hit as much skin as possible but not the same spot again and again.

"Start counting, Pup," I say, but there's warmth in my voice, letting him know this is more funnishment than punishment.

I start hitting his back, his shoulders, his legs, ass – and every time I do so he counts out loud which number it is. I increase the intensity a little every time I do and by the time we reach fifty, both of us are warm and sweaty.

He's severely out of breath and my arm feels a little heavy from the hitting. It's a heavy whip, but I'm used to it.

It's time to put him out of his suffering though, because I can see his body tilting from front to back every now and then and that anal hook must be getting pretty snug up there.

Going around Dom on the bed, I take his hanging head in my hands and wipe the sweat off his brows before I press my lips against his. Still, I can't keep myself from biting his bottom lip. Not that he minds, he loves that shit.

With my index finger I lift his face, making him look at me.

"I'm so proud of you, Pup," I say, wrapping one arm around him to give him some support to keep him upright. With my other hand I grab his cock and slowly start stroking him. There's a fair amount of precum there, so he must've at least enjoyed the scene a little.

I know I did.

Stroking up and down, I give him a sensual handjob, all the while staring in his eyes. It took me a while to figure out how best to jerk him off with the Jacob's Ladder, but I figured it out. Turns out it's just a regular handjob and he enjoys it when the barbells move a little.

"Please kiss me," he begs, his breath picking up, and after all I've just put him through all I can do is listen.

Our lips touch and make tender love before he stops kissing me back. Concentrating on the incoming climax. I keep

kissing him though; the sides of his mouth, his cheeks and always back to his lips.

He soils my hand with ropes of thick white cum while I do my best to keep him as still as possible. I don't want to ruin his moment of glory by making him hang himself by the ass while he acted so good all scene long.

During his orgasm he closes his eyes, but by the time he is done and looks at me I can see the exhausted bliss that has taken over his body and mind.

Who said torturing your sub couldn't be fun for both of you?



“Look, I don’t want to be that one smurf that kept asking how much further, but seriously, how much further is it?” I’m getting the distinct feeling that a little further into the woods means something completely different to my group of companions than it does to me.

I’m carrying all kinds of tools I’ve never used, a cooler box filled with food and a foldable chair.

Warren convinced me to go ice fishing with him, Meryll, Joe, Josh and Eddie. Meryll and his fishing shop gave me the confidence that they know what they are doing. And perhaps they do, but walking through the forest with Eddie and his stick is taking forever.

Once they heard the river froze two weeks ago they’ve been making plans to go. It’s some kind of tradition. I just think it’s a good reason for all the men to get out of the house and to gossip.

Oliver asked if he could come, but Josh said no, because the topics of conversation weren’t meant for five year olds. Oliver quickly retreated in his tent fort they just built and said the password had changed and nobody was ever going to guess it.

“It’s right around the corner bend,” Meryll says.

“Well, if that ain’t a Disney reference,” Warren says, and Josh is the only one who gets it and laughs.

But I shut my trap and keep hiking on. The pace is slow for Eddie, because he’d be damned to miss the first ice fishing expedition of the season. He used to be a huge fisher in Portland, and he still likes to come out for the peace and quiet. But ice fishing isn’t something he can do alone.

I’ve been told it’s a whole thing and it has everything to do with the pile of supplies I’m carrying.

“Here,” Meryll says, slowly walking through a clearing in the trees to the river side. It’s obviously a place that gets used a lot, because there are footprints everywhere and there aren’t any plants growing on the ground. We walk through and step on the ice like it’s the most normal thing to do.

It creaks.

I look up in horror, because I’m sure the ice will break and we’re all going to go under and die. Fuck, why can’t anything be normal in Alaska like in Nevada where temperature rises so high we have to ration water at times?

The men I’m with start laughing when they see I’m startled, but I fail to see the humor in this.

“Creaking ice doesn’t break,” Eddie says, walking steadily over the ice towards the middle of the river, looking left and right. I don’t know if he’s right about that creaking theory, but he’s standing on the ice without any fear. And if he can stand on frozen water while he won’t go out to sea because of what happened to Damian, it must really be safe to be out here.

When I’m able to pull my head away from my feet and look around, I see various setups left and right. People are building whole shacks, other people using little tents. Some are just busy... Well... Drilling the ice with gigantic drills. It kind of makes sense if you want to get to the fish I guess, but I just want to stay alive and drilling holes in the ice that’s keeping you from falling in the water and drowning seems like a bad idea if you ask me.

“Sniff it,” Meryll tells Joe.

Warren rolls his eyes but is unable to keep a smile off his face.

“Meryll believes my Dad can smell the best place to set up shop. Where we’re drilling a hole today will be the spot where Meryll will build a shack for the rest of the season. And he firmly believes Dad knows where the fish congregate.”

Meryll and Warren’s dad shuffle around the ice, looking at some spots longer than the other. I have no idea how this process works and frankly I don’t give a single fuck. Warren wraps his arms around me and I’m not mad about it. Out on the river the wind is a lot harder than between the trees that leave some coverage.

Some days are cold, but if you stay out of the wind it’s actually a manageable cold. Other days, when the wind creeps between the smallest creeks and it’s even windy when you’re inside it’s hell. By now I’m convinced hell is not some roasty fiery place, it’s cold and there’s no possible way to warm up.

“So explain this to me again,” I ask Warren.

“We drill holes in the ice, creating an opening. Then Meryll will build a shack on the ice so he can return whenever he wants to, and they fish. Today we’ll just use a portable tent to keep out of the wind while Meryll builds the shack. You can pick what you want to do, but I’m here to sit in a foldable chair, gossip with everyone and drink whiskey all under the premise of keeping myself warm, holding a fishing rod and maybe accidentally catch a fish.”

“Is anyone actually here for the fishing?”

“Yeah, Meryll of course. And Dad and Eddie are pretty serious about it too. Josh just likes a day away from the kids every now and then.”

I nod and look up just in time to see Joe and Meryll agree on a spot and call me over. There are other people working on their openings of shacks, but they’re all a long distance away. Guess Joe can smell the fish someplace else.

“Drill,” Meryll says, holding out his hand like an auto mechanic would do when he’s lying beneath a car and asks for

a tool.

I hand him something that in my mind resembles a drill and he indeed takes it.

Meryll kneels, taps the ice a few times, and then picks a spot to put the drill and starts making a hole by hand.

There's a transcendent kind of fascination that goes along with it while I stare.

The drill dips down when he's gone through the ice and Meryll gives himself a nod before he repeats the process about three feet further down the ice.

In the meantime Joe has put up some kind of windcatcher and all the other men have put down their foldout chairs and are drinking something they brought in thermos cans.

I just fold my chair out and sit down with them while we watch Meryll work. I don't know the guy that well, but he seems to be happy.

After drilling four holes in all the corners, he gets something resembling a chisel and a hammer and starts making lines between the holes. It doesn't look like he is putting much effort in it, but then I see the guns on the arms of that man and I realize he's putting tremendous power into it.

Once the square is chiseled out he brings out a hammer that puts Mjölnir to shame. And he rams it like it's his nemesis and he is trying to beat the last level.

I can't help but be impressed.

"Fine job we did," Joe says contently when Meryll finishes and Eddie agrees. I turn around to laugh, but they're dead serious. Not one finger was lifted by those old men and they're here stealing Meryll's thunder. I scoff, not knowing why it even surprises me.

Warren and Josh seem to just be here for the sake of being here.

I guess I got to decide which team I am.

Am I going to make myself useful, am I going to take someone else's accomplishments, or am I going to sit around, do nothing and talk?

My itching fingers give me the answer.

"What can I do to help you, Meryll?" I ask.

He looks up in surprise and gives me a toothpaste white smile. "I've got the parts for the permanent shack just over there," he says, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder to the side of the river bank. "Hardcore ice fishers leave their shacks right here. The foliage protects it and it's less of a hassle to get it back from the village. These bastards," he says while raising his voice. "Never help me in the slightest."

"Bad leg," Eddie says.

"My sniffing is done," Joe says.

"I'm claiming the lazy bastard card," Warren says, raising his thermos and taking a long sip.

"Fuck, that was what I was going to do," Josh says.

"Doesn't matter what all of you say, you're all lazy bastards and Dom is my favorite." He starts walking to the side of the river, going straight towards a tree he seems to recognize and pulls away the overgrown leaves that lay beneath it. To my surprise he uncovers a whole bunch of premade planks. He grabs three, throws it over his shoulder and starts bringing it back towards what is now his fishing hole.

I don't know what to do, so I just pick up a few planks and follow his lead. Once we're back on the ice we start walking right next to each other.

"Have you heard about the poachers?" he asks me.

"Hm," I answer, because it's something that doesn't sit right with me. I came here to escape criminals, not to simply run into new ones. But, as it turns out, they're fucking everywhere.

"It's such a shame. They're amazing creatures."

I laugh. "You run a fishing shop, selling equipment to catch all kinds of fish. Surely you're okay with animals dying."

“I am. I know it’s even necessary for a good ecosystem, but it’s just those whales. They were near extinction, and we got it back to where some of them could be hunted but not all. And still there are people making a profit from it. They take so long before they become the mature animals that they are. And I know – my mother always used to tell me that a pod of whales appeared the moment I was born. I kind of feel connected with them. I swear I’m sane,” he adds while he gives me a side eye.

I laugh. “They’re glorious. But so are most animals. I mean, snakes can go to hell for all I care, but the ecosystem is a beautiful thing.”

We deposit the planks, get greeted by the four men sitting there doing nothing and make the way back to the river side to get some more planks.

“So you and Warren, eh?”

“What about it?” I ask.

“I’ve never seen him like this. Not even with Braden, his ex. You know, the one who he gave the you-know-what up for.”

I bite the side of my lip. I haven’t talked with anyone about Warren’s past except for Warren himself, but it’s obvious that Warren and Meryll share everything.

“It’s never been like this for me,” I admit.

“So pretty serious.” Not a question, just a statement.

I nod, grabbing some more planks and laying them on my shoulder so I can carry them back to the fishing hole.

“I’ve got a question though,” I say, trying to sound serious and mysterious.

“Shoot,” Meryll whispers. I smile inwardly. All these villagers are gossipers and they live for just a little juice.

“What does Warren tell he does for a living?” I whisper back.

A laugh booms out of Meryll’s chest. “You haven’t asked him yet? Obviously you know what his real job is, and I don’t

mean the thing he did in the basement. He tells people, including his parents, that he writes books under a penname.”

Which makes all the sense in the world. The huge book cabinet, the desk with his laptop, the stacks of books everywhere, obviously his own, not those from the book store. I store the knowledge to tell the guys at the shop on Monday, because I finally have something of value to tell.

By the time we reach the fishing hole again, Joe and Eddie have taken out their rods and are actually fishing. Warren and Josh are silently discussing who knows what.

“Here,” Meryll says, holding out a little flask.

I lay the planks on the ground and take it from him. I take a large gulp, expecting water after the hard work we’ve done but getting a mouthful of moonshine instead. I cough, but swallow nonetheless. Guess being with Warren has its perks after all.

“They do nothing, we get buzzed, it’s Alaskan law,” Meryll says. “Don’t you dare share, this is ours. Or well, for as long as you keep helping.”

“Is this why you’re always so happy?”

“Part of it,” he says with a wink. “Getting away from home and those three demons is a big part of having a good day as well.”

“And Kaya doesn’t mind?”

“Kaya was born to have kids, raise them and teach them. I don’t know how I ended up with a saint, but I did.”

From somewhere across the lake I see someone waving, and after squinting my eyes I see it’s Mano. He’s already halfway done building a permanent shack.

“Mano, Tiny Nick and Bash build a shack every year. I don’t think they’ve ever caught a fish, but that’s not the goal here. It’s just something we do, it’s a way to spend the time, it’s a way to mentally survive the short days and the long winters. People can judge all they want, but if it helps, it helps.”

“And you actually fish?”

“Of course, it’s what I do. I drink and I fish.” That huge smile gets repeated.

I laugh.

When we get back to the fishing hole we find Eddie battling with a tightly spanned rod. He’s reeling in whatever is on his hook. He works hard on getting it in and in the end wins the battle. A fish appears and Joe helps take it out of water by sticking his fingers behind his gills.

“A rainbow trout,” Joe says in admiration.

I know shit, for all I know that’s a herring. The only fish I know about is cod, and that’s when someone at the club decided we needed some more healthy oils or shit like that. I don’t think the frying made it that much healthier.

“Good omen,” Meryll says, handing me the flask after taking a gulp.

I take one too.

“And now?” I ask.

“Now we actually build this shitshack and someone helps Eddie text Jeanine that they’re eating trout tonight.”

Sometimes life is just plain simple.



Christmas songs are playing on the audio installation that we've had since I was a teenager. My father spent a lot of money on it back then and he still says it's worth every penny. By now it's old and creaking, but because it was expensive then he still believes it's top of the line.

Really, the cracking is adding something nostalgic to it.

"Hello?" I yell when we enter the house. The door is open, especially on Christmas. My parents are open door people by heart, but the crime rate in Alaska is so high they lock their doors when they have to.

"Uncle Warren!" Liv yells when she comes running out of the living room. I tightly hold onto Dom's hand, who is hesitant and wants to stay outside. It's a double win for me. I can't catch Liv, who will certainly try and jump in my arms if I didn't have a hand full of Dom and a hand full of presents, and I get to lure Dom inside.

He argued it had been too soon. That we weren't dating long enough.

I countered I would take him with me to Christmas whether he was my boyfriend or not. Protectees don't get to spend Christmas alone. We want them to feel welcome in their new homes, not exiled.

"Good, you're here too Dom," Liv says when she walks around the corner and sees us right before Jack jumps inside, shakes his fur to get all the snow off and rushes to Liv who he licks and claims as his own personal slave.

“Why is it good we’re here?” I ask suspiciously. If something is going on I’d rather hear it from my eight year old niece than one of the most likely grownups. Christmas at the Philips is known for ending up with someone fighting with someone, one or both of them getting drunk and a lot of off-key Christmas carols.

“Because I need you on the side of my cause,” Liv says while she plays with Jack.

“Your cause?”

“Reindeers are slaves to Santa,” she says, her face deadly serious. “It’s animal abuse. And while I like Santa not using fossil fuels, he shouldn’t abuse animals to bring joy to the world.”

Josh steps into the hallway, rubbing a hand in front of his eyes and sighing deeply. “We’re reading Harry Potter and since Hermoine is trying to free the house elves this has been a daily debate.”

Jen follows him closely, wearing a Christmas onesie and holding a cup of eggnog, somehow managing to jump on his back without spilling a drop. My sister doesn’t give a damn, either about how she looks or the fact that it’s eleven am in the morning while she’s drinking alcohol.

“Free the reindeer!” she bellows.

“Stop encouraging her!” Josh says through his teeth.

“Uncle Warren is going to have a little conversation with her about Santa while Uncle Dom is going to distract Oliver with some ship facts, right?” Jen says, wagging her eyes.

I shake my head, smile on my face, but I give into her anyway.

“Are they here?” my mother yells from the living room.

“Yes, and they’re joining the Reindeer Reinforcement Act!” Liv yells, adding our names to a flipboard she suddenly got from somewhere. She doesn’t care about consent, she just cares about, well, everything she can think of.

I grab Dom, take him inside and we hang out scarves and coats. Oliver comes searching for us, jumping into Dom's arms because he's his new hero. After Dom gave a little tour through Eddie's shiphouse he couldn't do anything wrong anymore. Family is out of the picture, Dom is in. I'm sure that if a fire broke out, he'd save Dom first and then come back for the rest of us. If Liv hadn't gotten us out already because she had an emergency contingency plan at the ready somewhere anyway. I wouldn't put it past her.

And then we'd all get a lecture about how dangerous smoke is for the environment and what damage forest fires do every year.

Oliver eyes the stack of presents and his eyes get big as saucers.

"Santa left some for everyone at our place as well. I guess this place wasn't big enough," I tell the kid. We use the same lie every year, and to be fair, the whole family goes a little crazy when it comes to Christmas. So there not being enough space in my parents' house isn't too far fetched.

When we enter the living room my mother is busy giving all of us our own cup of eggnog. We're that family. Sue us.

Dom stops in the doorway, his eyes bigger than those of Oliver's when he saw the presents. His whole body screams emergency and I reach for his hand. Our fingers intertwine.

"What's wrong?"

He swallows thickly and I follow the way his Adam's apple bobs. His eyes are hard at first, but when I stroke with my thumb over the back of his hand they get watery.

"It's just... This is Christmas," he whispers.

I squint my eyes.

"Christmas at the compound was hanging some lights, that made it look more like a cheap strip club than anything else, and everyone getting drunk and having themselves a merry little Christmas on club pussy."

My mother comes near handing us both the drinks, so I wait with an answer.

“Well, sounds to me you’ve never really celebrated Christmas then,” I say. Turning to my Dad while holding his hand tightly I ask him if we can borrow some ugly Christmas sweaters. My Dad just nods and waves towards his bedroom, indicating I can go grab some myself. They’ve collected dozens over the years.

“I’m going to get us some sweaters, babe. You go sit on the couch, nip that eggnog, ‘cause I know Jen added more to it than was in the recipe and Liv, sweetie, you can help me. I want to make sure I don’t insult any reindeer in the process.”

Both of them listen to me – an upside to having a natural dominance.

Dom sits down and gets buried beneath Jack on one side and Oliver on the other, all the while staring as if he’s just seen an alien. I take Liv to my Dad’s room, go grab two random sweaters, sit her down on the bed and tell her the truth about Santa Claus.

The shriek that leaves her body probably echoes through all of Unalaska and I doubt any of the lonely ice fishers today will catch anything because she definitely scared away all the fish in the vicinity.

She doesn’t talk to any of the adults for the rest of the day.

We’ve had a lovely day, spending the afternoon opening presents, talking, and playing games. We ate a glorious meal my mother made with mine and Jen’s help and now it’s time to go home.

Dom opened up as the day proceeded. He seemed to get into the Christmas spirit and actually enjoyed himself. Now we’re giving everyone hugs to get home. Both of us have a limit on how long we’re able to deal with other people. Funnily enough that doesn’t go for the other person.

“I’ve got a present for you at the house,” I tell him while I hook my arm through his and whistle to get Jack back who’s wandered off to go chase a leaf.

“I didn’t get you anything,” Dom says. His face looks pained. “I didn’t know I was supposed to.”

“We can share my gift. It works both ways.”

He raises his brows to me in confusion, trying to figure out what the hell I’m talking about. I give him a mysterious grin and he answers me with a scowl. It doesn’t matter how this man looks at me – he always looks stunning to me. It’s like I found my own personal Viking who’s willing to serve and please me.

We get to the house and make sure Jack is dried off with a towel before he walks dirty snowy mud through the whole cabin. Dom makes Jack a nice meal even though he stole enough off our plates while we were celebrating Christmas and I pour both of us a drink even if we had enough during the day.

At one point Josh had to carry Jen to bed because she dozed off. She’s allowed. She moms hard, she hardly ever goes out or drinks, and Christmas is her day. I think it might be part of the tradition. We all laughed very hard when Liv said that the traitor had finally left the room and Oliver asked what she meant.

We let Liv figure out on her own how to get out of that one.

Dom sits down next to me on the couch, his legs draped over mine and I start squeezing his calves. I know that walking through the snow does something to his muscles. He’s used to the heat, not the retracting of the veins because of the cold. He sighs of relief, me rubbing his legs being one of his favorite things in the world.

“So, surprise?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I say, prolonging the moment just a little longer.

“Ah come on,” he half begs.

Looking at him with one eye closed, the corner of my mouth creeps up. “I thought I’d let you be Dom for the evening.”

“I’m always Dom,” he says. He’s had three cups of eggnog and as expected Jen had spiked it to nearly deathly levels.

I chuckle.

“No, I mean you get to call the shots, I’ll wear your collar and I’ll please you.”

He looks confused. “Did you ever wear a collar?”

I hum. “That’s the way I learned. Found a Dom and wore the collar myself. That way I know what I do to my subs. Nowadays it’s considered a little old fashioned. If you have a Dom who will vouch for you that should be enough. But BDSM stems from the old leather daddies, gay men, and I went the traditional route. I won’t sub anymore, not just for everyone. But it’s Christmas, and you’re not just anyone.”

Silence fills the room and Dom throws back his drink, looking very puzzling.

“What’s wrong?”

“I would seriously have no clue where to start or what to do.”

“Nothing in particular you want to get back to or take revenge on?”

He scrunches, putting his empty glass back on the table. “Not particularly. Sometimes I didn’t like doing something, but in the end it was all worth it because it was pleasing you.”

I can feel how much this confuses him, and it’s not something I necessarily have to do. So I make a joke out of it.

“Don’t you even want to make me go out in the snow naked?”

“And make you shrivel your balls?” he jokes back, picking up on my mood. “No thanks.”

We sit in silence for a while and I stare at how Jack walks round and round until he finds a good spot to lie down, closes his eyes and starts snoring like a maniac.

It’s Dom who starts talking in the end.

“Okay, *sub*,” he says with a hint of humor in his voice. “I’d like you to run us a bath, while it’s filling make us a cheese plate or some other kind of snack because I know you hide the good stuff for special occasions, have a bath with me, make love to me and then sleep in. And you get to be the one to walk Jack in the morning.”

I chuckle. “You’re going easy on me.”

“Well, it’s my first time. You went easy on me my first time, so it’s only fair. I might tie you up while you’re sleeping and then tickle you until you can’t stop laughing anymore.”

I smirk. He won’t do that, because once he sleeps he sleeps, but the idea is fun.

“I think I’ll save this gift as a coupon, use it when I’m feeling inspired.”

I raise an eyebrow, giving him a look that usually makes him question if he’s doing something wrong. But then I give him a wink, get up, take the steps two at a time and go to the bath to fill it with scorching water.

We’re having ourselves a merry little Christmas.



It's not what I expected. Part of me understood why Warren got green just by the mention of going on a ship, but I couldn't resist the offer of one of the captains whose ships we fixed to join him on a trip.

Captain Phil brought his ship in for a temporary fix, just to go back out the next day to go grab his pots. It's a one day trip because the cargo has to be brought back to port this evening to get the best price for the goods and he asked if I wanted to go.

Eddie said I should do it, see if I felt the call. He also told me to be brave and to not fall overboard. He said that last bit at least twenty times. The last time he said it I grabbed his shoulder, looked him in the eye and told him I loved him too.

But now that I'm standing on a ship, covered from head to toe in fishermen gear and the ship bobbing up and down, sea water splashing in my face, I'm failing to see the appeal.

I'm not allowed to do anything. I have a radio in my hand while the fishermen count how many *Opilio* crab come out of each pot. The deck boss gives me a number and it's up to me to give the number to captain Phil.

My beard has frozen over and there are literal frozen snot bits coming out of my mustache. I did *not* hear the call of the

sea. I have no intention whatsoever to get on a ship again unless it was a cruise ship going through the Bahamas serving free cocktails.

I also didn't get vehemently sick like Warren did, so that was something at least.

And in case nobody told you; live crabs were fucking assholes with pincers and when they squeezed it fucking hurt. No, my bond with the Bering Sea would stay with fixing the mechanics of the ships and watching the whales swim around when the fog wasn't too thick in the early morning light.

One of the deckhands, Morrey, kept looking at me in a funny way, and I had half a suspicion he wasn't too big on new people or he had heard I live with a man and he didn't approve of the lifestyle. Wouldn't be the first fucking time.

I could feel his beady eyes on me, and suddenly he reminded me of something.

The deck boss gave me a number that I had to focus on to tell the captain. The captain then proceeded to sign the numbers back to me so I could confirm whether he got the right number or not. Regulations about the amount of crab that could be caught were strict and Phil wasn't taking any chances in pissing the harbor masters off.

Morrey looked at me again, and this time he got on my nerves. You can tell me what you want to, you can take the kid out of the MC, but you can't take the MC out of the kid.

Since it would take a couple of minutes before they would bring in the next pot I walked up to him, legs wobbling, because that fucking ship wouldn't hold still like I'd want it to.

"What's your problem with me?" I ask him softly so I don't alert the other deck hands.

"I know it's you, Dominic," he whispers.

"What?" I'm not completely understanding, because everyone knows my name in Dutch harbor by now.

"I know Nathan's your brother."

My heart stops beating for a second and my instincts kick in. Purely to make sure I survive myself I want to kill this Morrey, but there are way too many witnesses around and I couldn't get this ship back to port on my own.

"Come downstairs," Morrey says nervously. "I just want to talk."

And against all my better judgment I follow him and go along. Morrey says he's taking his break and he's going to feed me so someone else has to take over the numbers before I follow him downstairs to the galley.

To my surprise the man actually starts pouring us coffee and loads two plates full of food. It's only then that I feel how starved I am. The warmth of being inside makes my whole body tingle

"It's Paulie, Nevada chapter," he whispers as he sits down.

Now my mind is calculating how to kill him without leaving any evidence and getting off this ship alive.

He must see the panic in my eyes, because he holds his hands up in surrender.

"I got mixed up with Victorious when I shouldn't. But I was young, and I was stupid, and I needed the money. I can tell you a whole honorable story how it was for my sick sister, which would be true, but that's not what it's about. Victorious is blood in, blood out. And I couldn't get away, even though I wanted to. So I just wanted to talk to you and say you don't have anything to worry about from me."

I look at him in disbelief.

"I swear," he says.

"You won't tell Nathan?" I ask.

"Not if you don't tell him about me. I want him to find me about as much as I want to wake up with an ulcer."

I calculate things in my head. He's seen me, but I've seen him as well. He's changed his appearance so people won't recognize him. Hell, I don't even recognize him, and I've

literally seen him with his nose up a whore's asshole to snort coke out of her hole while I was sitting right next to them.

I sigh, still not answering him.

I've never wanted to be an enforcer. I've never wanted to kill people. And here I am, getting a do-over handed on a golden platter. I should not fuck that up. Maybe he should earn the same do-over.

I look him straight in the eye.

"Are you involved in the whale poaching?"

"W-what? No man. I'm here to catch crab. It pays way better than your brother ever did and by the time a shift is over I don't have time to hunt enormous animals, cut them in pieces and then smuggle them to God knows where."

I nod, take a giant leap of faith and decide to believe him.

"Okay," I grunt. And he looks relieved. "Your secret is safe with me as long as mine is with you."

When he nods and continues eating his food we reach an agreement. The rest of our plates get cleaned in silence, because really there isn't much to talk about. The less we know about each other the better.

I'm surprised how easily I ate that entire stack of food and the tingling in my body lightens a little when I warm up again. There are drops on the table that come from the ice that had clung to my clothes. I'm melting. Literally.

Incoming footsteps interrupt my track of thought when captain Phil comes down from the wheelhouse and starts plating himself food.

"Go take the numbers upstairs, Morrey," he tells the crabber.

Morrey grabs his dirty plate and empty coffee mug and places them in the dishwasher before he vanishes up the wheel house.

Captain Phil refills my plate and my mug, and I wonder how he thinks I'm ever going to be able to eat another plate,

but as soon as it's placed in front of my face I can hear my stomach rumbling again.

Phil sees the confusion on my face and smiles. "The cold, the long hours and the hard physical work ensures that a regular crabber eats around seven thousand calories a day. And that's just to keep up. Your body is asking for it."

"I think I'm going to burst, but I'm hungry anyway," I say, my mouth stuffed with sausage. "Who cooks anyway?"

"We have a cook, he's sleeping now. He makes sure there's food available all day long."

"That must cost a fortune," I say, chomping away a sausage that has never tasted better in my life.

"Crabbing makes a fortune, we need to keep healthy," he says, looking over my shoulder at a point behind me. His eyes get glassy and he sniffs his nose before he downs his coffee in one go.

I take a look over my shoulder and see the picture of a young boy. He's beautiful. Dark hair, green eyes, arms folded over each other, all dressed in fishermen's gear. He reminds me of someone. The picture is dated though. Everything in the background seems old, the interior that of several decades ago. But the thing that stands out the most is the smile on his face. It reaches his eyes and makes him look lighter. He looks like a kid without a care in the world, but something tells me that having your picture in the galley of a ship isn't because of a happy story.

"Who's that?" I finally ask.

Phil chews his scrambled eggs before he answers. "Has Eddie told you about Damian?"

My heart clenches when I nod. It's one thing to see a father's grief when it's storming and your kid is still missing at sea decades after it happened. It's a whole other thing to see his picture in the galley of a ship.

Words seem to be unable to leave my mouth, so I just nod.

Phil clears his throat, stops eating and looks at the picture when he starts talking. “It wasn’t really stormy when we left that morning, but as the day proceeded, the winds picked up and the waves became higher and higher. The most painful thing is that Damian did everything right. He was shouting out orders that a lead deck should be shouting, but he just instinctively knew. It was one of the others that couldn’t catch a pot in time that then hit Damian and made him go overboard.”

I listen intently while Phil sniffs in a way only really tough men can do. Everyone knows it’s emotion, but they make it sound like it’s just a cold.

“I saw the whole thing happening, heard the boy call ‘help’ while the others started shouting man overboard. Saw the top of his head coming up over one of the waves once, so I knew in what direction to look.”

He scoffs.

“I still look in that direction when I’m lost in thought, waiting for him to pop up.” He shakes his head and takes another bite of food before he continues talking with a full mouth.

“Eddie and I became good friends, even if he could have resented me for taking his son on the ship he died. He played a huge part in me forgiving myself. It was nobody’s fault what happened that day.”

“Except for that bitch of an ocean if you ask Eddie,” I add.

Phil smiles. “Yeah, he’ll never forgive her. Yet, he hears her call. If it wasn’t for what happened to Damian he would have made a perfect fisherman. And if he really hated the ocean, he wouldn’t have encouraged you to come out here.”

“He kept telling me to be careful.”

“It’s his way of showing he cares.”

“I know.”

“It’s also his way of telling me that he doesn’t blame me,” Phil says with a thick throat. “Sometimes I have bouts where I

believe it was all my fault. But he wouldn't let you come here if he didn't trust me."

I slap a hand on Phil's shoulder. We all look like tough men who can deal with emotions, but deep down we're just people and we go through the motions just like everyone else.

After we've finished our food we both go back to our positions and we finish the day. Damian is fresh on my mind and I decide right there and then that the sea doesn't call me. The dessert didn't get me, neither will the ocean.

I'm a man of the road.

Give me two wheels, some air through my hair and the smell of grease and gasoline.

If you had asked me last year that's where the comparison had stopped, but right now, there's also the smell of Warren's shower wash mixed in with the smell of wet dog. It's weird, but at least it's better than the smell of dead fish.



“I was really looking forward to that venison loin,” I tell Dominic when I help Jack out of the car.

“It’ll hold until tomorrow in the fridge, Deanna really said we had to come over because she had an announcement.”

And nobody denies Deanna anything, we all know that. It’s the first rule of the Unalaska bylaws. I just didn’t particularly feel like going out tonight. I was looking forward to a night of staying in, eating a good meal, having a nice fuck and then falling into a marvelous sleep.

I had been to two of my other protectees that day and had an online meeting with some officials from the Marshals to keep them up to date on how everything was going. Except for telling them I was sleeping with and falling head over heels in love with my protectee it was a good meeting.

Truthfully, the position in Alaska was a pretty easy one. Not many witnesses had to be sent so far away they had to go all the way to Alaska and there wasn’t a lot of trouble because the people out of their past hardly ever put in any effort to come looking for them here.

Lance was talking about how he had to move three witnesses that week because they had been found out. Two were stupid enough to contact someone from their past which made them easy to find for the people they were hiding from, and one was just really unlucky and literally bumped into the man who was trying to kill them. All of them had made it out

safely and were relocated, but it made Lance sigh and wish he had another position.

And still nobody wanted to trade places with me.

Their loss.

“Come on, or we’ll be late,” Dom says. He’s wearing something I’ve never seen him in before and I didn’t even know was part of his wardrobe. He has so little clothes I was convinced I had seen it all by now, but apparently I was wrong. Or maybe he got something new, but that wouldn’t be in character for Dom.

I raise a brow, because Deanna isn’t one for being on time and she doesn’t care what time people arrive. For a second I worry if she’s sick, or just done with the diner, giving it to her daughter Grace, who will then call the establishment Grace’s just like tradition prescribes.

Dom isn’t joking. He grabs my hand and starts pulling me towards the door while I quickly lock the car and make sure that Jack is following me.

The moment we step into Deanna’s there’s a loud eruption of sound and I startle so hard I almost want to reach for my gun. But it’s happy shouting and everyone is yelling congratulations and happy birthday.

For some reason I feel my ears heat – I don’t like being the center of attention and this is obviously putting me right in that spot.

“It isn’t my birthday for another two weeks,” I hiss, giving Dom the stink-eye.

He’s looking mighty pleased with himself and I got to hand it to him, he did this expertly. I never even suspected anything and I’m kind of hard to surprise. I see through all the signs.

Except for this one, obviously.

My heart rate lowers a little again and I decide to put on a brave face, greeting everyone who’s nearing me to come and say hi. It feels like he invited half the town. At least all the

important people are there. My other witnesses aren't here, but that's only right as Dom should have no idea who they are.

Jen, Josh, Liv and Oliver reach me, all giving me hugs while Oliver doesn't let me go anymore.

"I get to stay up past my bedtime today," he gloats.

"I heard that," Kaya, Meryll's wife and the town's preschool teacher says. "I expect you to be all attentive, chipper and on your best behavior."

"There's crab," Oliver counters. "I'm going to be in a food coma tomorrow."

Jen punches Josh in the arm. "He totally got that from you!"

Josh smiles widely. "Yes he has."

"No food comas," I interrupt. "We're all going to behave and be the best versions of ourselves. It's a school night."

"Yes Dad," Jen says.

"What is it, dear?" my father answers automatically and I start laughing. I let my sister and my father try to figure things out themselves when I make the rounds with Oliver stuck to my side.

Deanna and her staff are walking around with all kinds of finger food and a lot of crab. A lot of buttery, greasy hands are exchanged. At the back of the restaurant is a table full of presents, and I don't know how to respond to it.

Dom saves me. He stuffs my mouth with crab and then wipes away the excess butter in the corner of my mouth with his thumb. The look he gives me is worth a million bucks.

Dom keeps feeding me and together with Oliver I work through the stack of presents. It's mostly gift cards and books. And for some reason I get a lot of plants, which is ironic because I'm really good at forgetting I have them and letting them die. Perhaps they know that and that's why they're giving me new plants.

When I've gone through the stack Dom takes Oliver from me, whispers something in his ear and the kid takes off.

I raise an eyebrow, curious what he just said that made Oliver leave. I didn't think I was going to get out beneath him all evening.

Dom just gives me a mysterious look, puts an arm around my waist and brings his mouth to my ear.

"Two minutes," he whispers before he makes his way through the crowd and disappears out the door.

I'm not prepared for this situation, so I quickly grab my phone and set the timer to two minutes. My heart beats so loud I can hear it and the excitement that rushes through my body is enormous.

When my phone beeps to indicate the time is gone, I brutally make my way outside, not caring who I run into or apologize. The animal inside me has taken over and I'm ready to get Dom.

He'll never outrun me.

I've been chasing him for about five minutes, and I finally caught a glimpse of him. He thought he was smart to stop running at a certain point and just hide from me, changing positions when I'm looking in the other direction.

But just like real animals in a hunt my senses get heightened when I'm in a chase. I don't exactly know how it works, but it must be something hormonal. My hearing is sharper and I can smell better. And the stupid little Pup has put on a very distinctive cologne today.

He's somewhere near, because I can smell it.

Silently stalking through some underbushes I jump around a large tree trunk and just as I expected I find him. Both of us are out of breath despite the slowing down in the end.

He tries to make a run for it again, but I grab him before he can get away. With a little more force than strictly necessary I push him up against the tree trunk, where he tries to fight me off.

I growl, grabbing him by the throat and tilting his head to the side while biting in his earlobe.

He's still trying to put up a fight, but I can feel his resistance flee with every passing second. Finally he tilts his head willingly, offering me his neck, that I immediately kiss, bite and lick.

His hands are all over me, going beneath my clothes and giving me the chills, because, fuck his hands are cold.

That's what you get for playing out in the snow.

I get back at him by pushing my hand beneath his jacket on his back, causing him to cuss and press his body up against mine, as if he's able to get away. I don't tell him I'm about to undress him, force him on the ground and make him experience something far more colder. Namely the snowy forest floor I intend to get him on and fuck him into oblivion. If this is my present, I'm going to do whatever the hell I want.

At the same time he lowers his hands and searches for the buttons of my jeans.

The hairs of my arms stand up, which is weird, because I'm not really cold, but something is going on. Somewhere in the distance, really softly, I hear a 'help' being said. It's not even being yelled, it's too soft for that and it lacks the force of a real yell.

I step back, holding Dom away from me, looking around through the trees if I can see anything.

"What's wrong?" Dom asks, concern in his voice, his hands still on my pants.

"I heard something," I say.

"Nothing wrong with a little voyeurism," Dom jokes.

"Something's up, I just know," I say, fully knowing I sound like Spiderman, but I don't care. My instincts have saved me more than once. I'm not going to ignore them now.

"Who's there?" I shout. "Yell out again!"

"Help!" I hear with a little more force this time. The sound comes a little from the west from us, more in the direction of Deanna's than where we are now. So I start stalking through the trees to where I thought I heard the sound.

Dom follows me, staying close. My hand is itching to grab my piece and hand it to Dom, because I know he'll be better with it than I when push comes to shove. But someone asking for help isn't necessarily a reason to grab a gun and while people in Unalaska carry guns, it's usually a hunting rifle and not a government issued one. I don't want to blow my cover, I like things the way they are and I would love it if they stayed that way.

"Hello?" I shout when I can't find anyone.

"Here!" a voice comes from somewhere close.

"There," Dom says, pointing at some bushes beneath three large pine trees. I can see something bright blue, moving very slowly and carefully.

We both start running to the bush and start pulling leaves and sticks aside. And what we find breaks my heart.

Felix is lying on the ground. The only reason I recognize him is because he has a golden necklace on that he's worn every day since high school. He's severely beaten up and half naked. I can't see his eyes, his face is red with caked blood. His usually immaculate hair is more dirt than anything else. And his trousers are around his ankles, showing that his thighs and his ass are bloody too. He doesn't have to spell out what happened to him.

"Go call the Doc," I tell Dom. The local doctor can figure out if he can stay here or if he needs to be med-evaced out to the hospital on main land.

"I don't have any bars," Dom says, frustration obvious in his voice.

I feel myself up, looking for the satellite phone, find it in one of the pockets in the inside of my jacket and hand it to him. Then I turn my attention back to Felix.

"Sweetheart, everything's going to be okay. We just need to wait a little. What do you need me to do first?"

Tears are falling over Felix's face, leaving stripes on his dirty cheeks. "Can you help me pull my pants up again? Doc

can check me out later, but I don't want to be exposed anymore."

Without giving him an answer I start helping him to get his pants up as gently as possible. There are scratches and bruises all over his legs, but those will heal. I'm more worried about the state of his obviously abused and raped body.

When we have his pants back on, Dom says that the Doc is coming, but we need to try and get Felix back to Deanna's. Doc won't be able to find us in the woods.

Felix tries to sit up, but grimaces when there is any form of pressure on his ass. Instead, Dom and I help him get up. Felix winces when he stands.

"My ankle hurts," he says with a flat voice. This is not whiney Felix, this is tough Felix who just survived a serious attack. He's being tough. And if he says his ankle hurts after seeing the state of his ass, I'm inclined to believe that his ankle hurts.

"Two options," Dom says quietly. "I can carry you like a damsel in distress and throw you over my shoulder. You and your diets have ensured you weigh nothing. But I don't know how that will affect... your other injuries."

Dom sighs.

"Other option is you throw an arm over both of our shoulders and we help you skip towards the edge of the forest."

Somehow a tiny smile appears on Felix' face. "As much as I want to be thrown over your shoulder, I think the second option is the best."

I nod and we get in position to get going.

"Thank you for finding me," Felix whispers. "I thought I was going to die there."

"You're not getting rid of us that easily," I say while we start hopping towards Deanna's.

I just wonder what the fuck has happened here.



We arrive at the outskirts of the forest line when Doc comes crossing in. He's far in his fifties but moves and drives like he's in his twenties. When people get sick in Unalaska, they tend to get really sick. And let's not even mention the freak accidents.

Felix didn't make a peep the whole way out of the forest, which is alarming in itself. Felix is a chatterbox and he obviously is in a lot of pain, but no sound has left his lips. Perhaps his lips are stuck together from the dried up blood.

Who knows how long he was out there? Who knows what kind of damage is done to his insides? If they hit his face so hard that it's unrecognizable I can't imagine they didn't hurt him in other places.

"Here," Doc says as he sees us, opening the door to his back seats. "I'll do a preliminary here, but you look like you need X-rays, son."

We start skipping Felix to the car, but when he looks at the bench he turns to Doc and says: "I can't sit down, Doc. I just can't."

The town doctor, Mark, nods in understanding. "Can you lie on your side? I'll find a way to make it work."

“I can try,” Felix says, sounding more vulnerable than I’ve ever heard him. We help him as best we can to get him in some kind of position. Doc shifts the front car seats forward and wiggles himself in between, way more agile than you’d expect from a man of his age.

He takes things out of his bag to examine Felix, but after three seconds of looking at his face he tells Warren to call in med-evac because he needs a hospital. All Felix does is sigh.

“Dominic, please go stand at the window at the side of his head. Felix, I’m going to have a look in your pants. Meanwhile, why don’t you tell us what happened?”

Warren walks away to make the call, and I move to the other side of the car. Felix tries to talk, but his lips are stuck together.

“Water in the bag up front,” Doc says while he ever so gently removes Felix’s pants inch by inch. I don’t feel any desire to look when I see the look of pure disgust and empathy on Doc’s face.

I drip some water on Felix’s lips, making sure he can take tiny sips. It takes me back to a day in Death Valley where I found a little Kitten who was in desperate need of water to survive as well. Knowing how that story ended up, I hope Felix’ story will be just as happy.

“I was on my way to Warren’s surprise party,” Felix says.

The rest of us are silent as can be, you could hear a pin drop.

“I was running a little late because I wanted to change my Chanel shirt for the Gucci one. It was just more of a Gucci night.”

Doc snorts. “Only you, Felix.”

“Well, I guess Gucci is ruined now,” he sighs dramatically, and despite the severity of the situation I smile. Felix is quiet for the first time in his life, but talk about fashion and he’s back. “Anyway, after I looked as fabulous as I could I took the shortcut through the harbor. There were some men on an unmarked ship and one of them was kind of cute. But when I

gave him my mesmerizing smile, his look hardened. And I guess he isn't into guys or something like that. So he got his buddy and they dragged me into an alley and well..."

He doesn't give us the details and for that I'm grateful. He'll talk about it when he's ready with the people he chooses to talk about it.

"Then they said I might have seen too much, which I thought was really ironic because by then my eyes were so thick I couldn't see anything despite thinking they were open. They dragged me to wherever it is you guys found me and they left me there."

We all fall silent for a moment.

"Med-evac is coming, ETA two hours, and we're lucky it's a clear night," Warren says. "If you were rushing to be on time for the party, you were out there in those bushes for around two hours. Do you need to check for frostbite, Doc?"

Mark smiles. "On it. And I need all of you to keep your fingers crossed there's no internal damage because two hours to get here and two hours back is long enough to do some serious damage."

"I'm too young and pretty to die," Felix tries to joke.

"Well, I'd show you yourself in a mirror right now to prove you wrong, but you can't even open your eyes." He then lays a soft hand on his cheek. "It'll be alright, son. If something major was broken we'd have noticed by now. But besides beat up, you show all healthy signs."

Felix basks in his comfort and gently nods while tears roll out of his eyes.

"Those weren't homophobes," I whisper to Warren.

"No," he says. "Those were those fucking poachers."

"My thoughts exactly."

"We need to come up with a game plan," Warren says.

"What a coincidence we've got half the town gathered at a party not fifty feet from here," I say sarcastically.

Doc waves. “Go. I’ll stay here with him until med-evac arrives.”

Inhaling deeply I nod. This has got to stop.

We step inside again, and Warren immediately seeks out Hanson. He’s been the mayor of Dutch Harbor forever.

“We need to change this celebration into a meeting,” Warren says.

Hanson raises an eyebrow, but doesn’t question Warren. “Kids or no kids?” he simply asks.

“No kids.”

“Kaya!” Hanson yells with a booming voice. She turns around and walks towards him, looking confused as all hell. “Can you take the kids to Meryll’s gym or to the preschool and entertain them for a while? We’re going to have an emergency meeting that isn’t meant for little ears.”

“Is it going to be long?” Kaya asks, and Hanson looks at me.

“Probably,” I answer, thinking about how bad Felix was and everything that is going on.

“I’ll take them to my house. The little ones can sleep when it’s time and there’s enough to do for the big ones. Lord knows Meryll has enough game devices to keep the bigger ones occupied.”

Don’t ask me how she does it, but she herds all the children within two minutes and they’re all listening and behaving. I really want to learn how she does that. When she’s left with all the kids, Hanson turns to all the people there.

“This is an emergency meeting. I know we’re not all here, so if you miss someone, spread the word. I’m going to let Warren talk now.”

For some reason Warren gets really nervous then. I think he meant it when he said he doesn’t like being the center of attention, let alone speak in a room full of people. And there are *a lot* of people here. Grabbing one of the chairs, he hoists himself onto it, and now that all he can see are the tops of

everyone's heads, he calms a little. One of my teachers taught me that trick: heads are way less scary than eyes.

"Okay, so we all know about the whale poachers here in Dutch Harbor and Unalaska," he starts by saying and a litany of yeses and acknowledgements goes through the room. "We know they're being handled, but they're still here." He takes a deep breath. "We just found Felix, he's outside with Doc, waiting for med-evac."

Everyone in the room responds differently, but they all respond, abhorrent.

"He went through the harbor to get here quicker, saw two men moving crates. He flirted with one of them and both of them..." He takes a moment to search for the right words, because not everyone needs to know. Felix is a very open person, but it's not up to Warren to share the extent of what happened. "They roughed him up good."

"You can say that if med-evac is coming in," Meryll yells.

"Can I go to him?" Pierson, one of Felix's playthings, asks.

"Go, but just you and if he or Doc needs you to go away you fucking listen to them."

He rushes out the door, foregoing grabbing his jacket, which he's going to regret in a bit.

"The point is," he continues. "This isn't simply breaking rules and regulations on whale poaching anymore. They're becoming hostile and they're taking it out on our people. If the authorities don't do what they're supposed to do, maybe we should come up with our own plans."

Everyone starts talking at the same time and I can't concentrate on what they say. So Warren gets off the chair and Hanson takes Warren's place. He commands everyone to shut their traps and calms the room down again.

"So, before anyone answers, I want to see hands. We can do this like proper gentlemen, not the savages you're acting like now. Any ideas?"

A lot of hands go up.

“Bibi,” Hanson says, referring to one of the eldest women in Unalaska. She says her bones are too frozen to leave the place, so she’s stuck here until her bones will freeze inside the Alaskan soil she’ll get buried in according to Warren.

“I suggest going out in couples as much as possible. Especially the women. If I interpreted Warren’s words correctly, we’re victims of that enough. We don’t need added trauma.”

“Very good idea,” Hanson says. “Try to go out in couples, especially after dark or near the harbor. Jim, what’cha gotta say?”

“Keep records of every unmarked boat we see. We know the ships here. Get one person to record where we saw them and when. Maybe there’s a pattern.”

“Excellent idea. Use frequency 16 if you spot them and give me coordinates or a location in town and I’ll keep records. Those can be useful for the authorities as well.”

Someone raises a hand, and Hanson turns to him, tilting his chin to indicate he can have the floor.

“A few nights ago strangers yelled some homophobic slurs to Leo and me. So maybe keep the PDA to a minimum.”

This raises a lot of noise again. Alaska is complicated. Because of the lack of women, a lot of men engage in gay activities. At the same time there are a lot of hardened and uncivilized men here who don’t believe gays have any rights. The rape rates among women are high and it leaves for a very dangerous situation. We’re a tight knit community, but we deal with a lot of strangers and people passing through. And even then, sometimes the people we know do things we never expected of them.

“I don’t want to discourage PDA, and I doubt the two are connected,” Hanson says, “but perhaps it’s wise.”

“Nobody at Deanna’s will ever get denied showing their love,” Deanna says while she walks past me and pats my shoulder, pushing a large beer in my hands. “So you all love who you wanna love, just stay safe.”

“Hear hear,” Jen yells.

“Anybody else?” Hanson asks.

The room stays silent except for some murmuring, but no hands go up. I guess there isn't much we can do except look out for each other. I think about poor Felix and desperately hope there is no real harm done to him.

All the people there keep talking for a long time after, making plans on what to do and how to get our town and region back. We're real Alaskans. Nobody will threaten us like this.

But until these poachers are stopped, Unalaska is in a state of alarm.



The fire fed furnace is crackling. We're sitting on the floor in front of it on a nice rug made of a hunted deer from a few seasons before. We try to use the animal from tail to end and let as little as possible go to waste. Unalaska, and Dutch Harbor in particular, is a place of contradiction. On one hand everyone tries to respect nature as much as we can, on the other hand we've got industry and capitalism. It's two completely different mindsets, yet they work together here. Within a mile of each other you can stand in a harbor sniffing the ship fuel only to go a little further inland and smell the ancient pines.

Jack is lying in front of our feet, belly up, paws retracted, snoring and farting his life away with his tongue lolling out of his mouth. We had some good giggles about it when Dom pointed out how utterly ridiculous Jack was being.

Our shoulders are leaning against each other. Both of us have a hand flat on the floor, my pinkie finger crossed over his. We realized early on that hand holding wasn't exactly our thing, but this feels just right.

It's funny how we can disagree about the biggest things in life, brought on by the different lives we've led thus far, but can agree on the little things. We both hate olives and somehow are both allergic to strawberries, we both have the same favorite brand of lube and like the same route through the supermarket. But he believes people will mean him harm until they prove him otherwise and I inherently believe in the good in people until they do something to make me see them

differently. He can't wait for summer so he can drive his bike, I'm a sucker for the snow.

Yet we work.

And the pinkie thing works. Why change a winning team?

Dom throws his leg over my leg and pulls it in. He's not collared right now, he's allowed to do whatever he wants to do within the boundaries of the rules we set. Which is him being respectful to me, even if we both know he's a gigantic brat if there ever was one.

Which somehow reminds me of Felix, who is in hospital without any internal injuries. The damage they did by raping him forced him to have surgery though, which he is now recovering from. For someone in his situation he's been lucky on how severe the injuries have been. Hell, he should have been dead if you account for the location he was left at.

Felix gave police a description of the men who harmed him, but truthfully, that's a description of half of all the men in Dutch Harbor. So it won't help us find the poachers any faster.

"Hey," Dom says. "Where's your mind at?"

I sigh. "That if we hadn't been out there right then, in that spot, Felix would be dead by now."

"So my birthday gift for you turned into the gift of saving Felix's life."

I get a Grinchlike grin. "No, it just means I haven't had a birthday present from you yet."

Dom's face lights up, immediately understanding what I'm getting at. He puts on his coat, yells 'two minutes' and disappears. But he doesn't get that I don't always play fair, and today I'm not in any kind of mood to play fair.

So I grab my coat and immediately storm after him.

Before he has even reached the forest line, I've jumped him and with a loud 'oomph' made him land on his belly, me and my full weight on top of him.

“That wasn’t two minutes,” he growls.

“Wolves don’t live by rules on when to pounce, they get their prey when they’re ready, Pup.”

I can feel him shiver and I’m pretty sure it isn’t because of the cold.

“I thought you liked the hunt,” he says.

“Yes, but I also like this part,” I answer.

With my forearm over his shoulders I press his form to the ground. My other hand snakes around his legs and unbuttons his pants until I can wiggle it down. When I get his boxers down too, he starts cussing, because he’s now out in the snow with his junk.

Despite the way his balls are drawn up and are trying to flee in his body, I can feel blood being pumped to his cock. He’s not fully hard, the shock of the cold too big, but I know he’s aroused. He isn’t even fighting me that hard anyway.

It’s not that kind of encounter anyway, it’s simply finishing what we couldn’t the other night.

I unbutton my own pants, fully ready to go for the wild round of naked wrestling I’ve been craving for days. I grab one of the tiny packages of lube, open it by biting the corner of the satchel and drizzle it on Dom’s ass, spreading it with my fingers. We’ve been having enough sex to not have to take ages to get prepared, but I don’t want the coldness to bring him any extra discomfort.

Well, not *too* much anyway.

After gliding in a finger and opening him up, I quickly add a second without meeting any resistance.

His moans sound extra delicious now that there are no walls to keep them locked up in. They all go out into the universe and become one with nature, like they should be. It makes me bite his neck, wanting to mark him as mine and mine alone.

When I add a third finger I find some slight resistance, so I take my time pumping in and out him, circling and stretching until I feel him pushing back on me.

Little brat is trying to be a power bottom today.

Hell.

He can have what he wishes for.

I grab my dick and press the tip of it to his ass, waiting for him to push back on it. At first he holds still, but he quickly catches on, pushing his ass back and impaling himself on me. He's smart enough not to go too fast. No matter how much prep we've had, that could turn out too rough.

But once he's bottomed out I press him firmer into the snow and start fucking him. I don't give him the kindness of starting off softly, no, I immediately start fucking him with quick, long thrusts, poking his prostate somewhere in the process with every movement.

He's now whimpering like a true Pup, and I have never felt more in my element. I growl and I huff and I keep upping the pace until the muscles in the back of my legs start to hurt.

"Master," Dom whispers.

"No," I growl. "Wait."

He whines and I can feel how the muscles of his ass contract, keeping a hands-off orgasm in, which is fucking hard to do, and that I know from experience.

The only reason I'm denying him is because I'm almost there myself and I want to come together with him. I want to feel him milk me while I fill him with my seed.

When there's a tingling feeling at the bottom of my spine I start picking up the pace even more. I'm right there on the edge, while Dom is on the edge of agony stifling his orgasm off.

"Now you can come, Pup," I growl next to his ear before I let myself go as well. I feel myself get milked just like I anticipated and empty myself all inside of him, huffing and ending up howling – which is new for me and feels a little weird, but good at the same time. It's when you discover a new kink, I think.

Dominic is panting beneath me, unmoving and surrendering to the situation.

In the meantime Jack has woken up and is barking and responding to my howl. And the situation is so out of the ordinary that I start laughing out loud. Before I know it Dom is joining me and we are both just laying there, half naked, our dicks deflating, having the giggles about everything. It's perfect.

Twenty minutes later I walk into the bathroom where Dom is already sitting in a steaming bathtub. I made us some tea, because I know we need the hydration and the warmth, but when Dom sees me coming in he looks like I'm carrying poison. Guess they didn't drink tea at the MC compound, let alone green tea with chamomile.

I set the cups on the edge of the tub, undress and wiggle myself in the bathtub. There's barely room enough for both of us. This bath wasn't designed to hold two fully grown men, but I don't fucking care. By the time I sit down water has sloshed over the edge.

We're both sitting at opposite edges of the tub, facing each other, our legs intertwined.

"What's with the tea?" he asks.

"It's good for you."

"Coffee is good for you, it re-energizes you. Tea is for old ladies."

I roll my eyes. "For someone who has changed everything in his whole life, you're a little old fashioned about tea. No, I take that back. It's not even being old-fashioned. It's prejudiced."

He rolls his eyes and ignores me. "It's for the old ladies."

"Really? Tea is the thing you want to stand your ground on. That's where you want to be stubborn?"

He stares me dead in the eye. "Yes."

"You're getting punished for that," I tell him.

Now he scowls. Good.

I grab the mugs of tea and hand him one. “Drink it,” I demand. The scowl stays on his face but he starts sipping the tea. I begin drinking my own as well. The temperature is perfect and the taste is heavenly. After such a rough session, comfort, aftercare, is needed, and warmth of chamomile tea will offer exactly that.

Dom drinks his tea reluctantly, taking big sips so he’s going through it fast. I don’t believe in changing people, but I do vow that I’ll get Dom to be a tea drinker somewhere in the future.

He finishes, puts the mug away with a bang, gives me an angry look and says ‘done’. The calming effect that the chamomile should have isn’t yet working I see.

I take another sip of my tea and ignore his childish behavior. Part of me is feeling extremely content. The fact that he’s letting his child out with me is amazing. He would never do so if he didn’t feel safe enough. He’s still a brat and he’s still getting punished, but I swell with pride as well.

I don’t know what he sees on my face, but he gets even angrier and blows some of the bubbles in my face.

It’s on then.

We have a water fight, get bubbles and water all over the bathroom until we’re both laughing and out of breath. We eventually both give in and end the fight, getting out of the tub. Thankfully the towels are up high on the other side of the room, so we can dry ourselves.

“Well that settles it,” I say. “You get to clean the whole bathroom as punishment and after that you’ll write lines. I want you to write ‘real men drink tea too, not just old ladies’ a hundred times. It must be done tonight before we get to bed.” My voice is low and there’s no room for debate. Just by using the right tone I tame the brat in Dom and get him to submit again.

He eyes me, bends over to dry his feet, looking up. “Yes Master.”

Later that night Dom has gone to bed and I find a note with the sentence I said he should write, added 'x 100' after the sentence. I laugh so hard that I let him get away with it.

Sometimes brats have got to brat.



“That’s it, it’s baby time!” Mano yells while he walks into the yard and uses his stool to stand on his workbench.

“We don’t need to hear about it every time you’re going to see Sugar and are going to do her, asshole,” Bash says. “Some of us don’t have regular sex, some of us have to rely on showers and helping ourselves.”

“What do they call that nowadays?” Eddie asks. “TMI?”

I chuckle. Hearing the man say TMI is like hearing people in a retirement home sing Snoop Dogg.

“What do you have to complain about, mister I live with my boyfriend and have a huge grin on my face every morning?” Bash says.

“Wow, frustrated much?” Tiny Nick says.

“You have no idea,” Bash whines while he shakes his head.

“No, *amigos*, it’s baby time!” Mano says, swaying his hips round and round while holding his hands above his head.

“Yes!” Bash yells aggravated. “We heard you the first time.”

“No dumbass, Sugar is pregnant, we’re having a baby!”

It all seems to click with us at the same time, although we have different reactions to it.

“Congratulations, son,” Eddie is the first to say, his eyes glistening. Out of all of us he knows the joy of having a kid. Out of all of us he’s also the only one who knows how much it hurts to lose one.

“You’re happy about this, right?” says Tiny Nick.

“Over the moon,” Mano says, raising his face upwards and howling.

“It’s pretty fast,” Bash says carefully. It was what I was thinking too, but I know not to voice thoughts like that. In the MC women got pregnant all the time. Sometimes it was intended, sometimes it was a case of a bottle of Jack and a lack of precautions.

“Yeah, but Sugar always wanted to be a mamma and if we’re going to have a whole bunch of them, we better step on the gas.”

I slam him on the shoulder. “Well, if you’re happy, we’re happy. Congratulations, Mano.”

His face lights up. “A little baby. We’re going to teach it all. How to fix ships, and if the sea calls just like it called to Sugar, we’re going to teach it to be the best fisher in the whole Bering Sea. Mark my words, we’re going to take over Dutch Harbor, one way or the other.”

Eddie’s face has tightened a little, and orders us all to get to work, except for Mano, who is ordered to go grab us a batch of cookies to celebrate the good news, and not to get the cheap stuff, but the good ones.

I’ve never seen Mano be more happy to follow an order.

Later that evening we’re closing up shop. It’s cold and it’s dark outside, but for once there isn’t a cloud in the sky. I take a moment to look up, see how the moon lights everything and marvel at the endless stars. They look the same as in the middle of the desert, but something about the cold and the smell of pines surrounding me gives me a different experience this time.

When I climb in the truck I think about how completely different Alaska is from Nevada, and how quickly I got

addicted to the nature. I never saw myself as someone who lived in the forest, appreciating the mountains, missing the sun. The lack of daylight is doing things to me, but Warren is showing me how to fight the lack of Vitamin D and the seasonal depression it can cause.

I crank up the volume of the radio when I drive off because 4A is on and even all the way from the other side of the continent I still feel connected to them. Serenity takes over and I realize that this is the most relaxed I've ever felt.

Until Murphy's Law kicks in.

With a bang my car swerves to the side and when I get it back under control a thumping starts, indicating I've got a flat tire. A long and fatigued sigh leaves my mouth. It's been a long day, it's cold as balls and I don't want to change my tire.

Still, I hop out of the car, leaving the car light on. Some foul reeking reaches me, but as with all things Alaska, I've come to learn to accept it. There's probably a corpse or something nearby. That's what you get for living so close to so much wildlife. Mufasa would be proud of this circle of life moment.

After putting on a bright orange safety vest and grabbing some lighting to see what I'm doing, I see that my right front tire is flat and completely blown, making a mental note to come back in the morning to see what I hit because this wasn't just some sharp pebble, this was something more.

Taking all my tools out of the back, I get the jack and lift up the front side of the car, making sure I can change the tire. It's not that big of a deal, I literally changed hundreds of tires. It's just that I was looking forward to a home cooked meal, two arms wrapped around my middle and lips pressed against the side of my neck.

On automatism I work through changing the wheel, lifting the broken one into the back and replacing it with the new one.

Just when I'm screwing back the last wheel bolt a bright light shines in my direction. My car is parked on the road right next to the shore. There's nothing between me and the ocean

besides a bunch of rocky beach. The bright light blinds me and I blink my eyes rapidly in the hopes of seeing something again.

There is shouting and yelling in the distance, but I can't make out any words. As soon as my sight starts to come back I see an unmarked black ship. People are busy loading or unloading huge crates. Multiple people are staring at me, my face in full view because of the light I created for myself to change the tire. They're all covered in darkness, only the little light of the moon making me notice them.

It's when I see someone running onto the deck holding a rifle that I hurry, secure the wheel bolt and run back to the driver's side of the car again.

Bullets hit the side of my truck, but by some divine intervention miss anything that prohibits me from driving off or hurting me. I have no idea what kind of weapon they're using, but it's at least semi-automatic because the bullets come down like hail.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

I go flat-out and make sure I get out of there as fast as I can. My eyes switch from the road to my rear-view mirror every few seconds, but it doesn't look like I'm being followed. They were far away and I didn't see any cars on the beach when I looked. Just the boat and the crates.

I'm not sure how fast I drive, but if I get pulled over now I'm spending the night in jail. Which might not even be such a bad idea. Instead I don't run into a single soul while I speed towards Warren's house.

The wheels screech when I come to a full stop halt right next to Warren's house. I glance over my shoulder, but I still don't see anyone pursuing me. They must have had a full view of my face and I don't think they were all too happy that I caught them.

I realize that all my tools are still at the beach. If they're not smart enough to go pick them up that means that I can spot where they were when daylight returns tomorrow.

I run up to Warren's cabin, taking the steps to his front door two at a time and storm in. Jack thinks I'm playing a game and jumps off the ground with all four paws, trying to get his front paws on my shoulder to throw me to the ground.

Warren sees the look of worry on my face though and tells Jack to back down and leave me be. The dog whines, but listens.

"What's wrong?"

"They saw me!" I yell. I should be worried that I'm more worried that I just got seen than that I got shot at, but that's my reality. Bullets are part of life, being discovered while I should be hidden is not. My missions were always overt.

"Who?"

"The poachers!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Or maybe they were pirates, getting crates of.... Baby turtles. There's a market for baby turtles right?" I start pacing up and down the room, seeing the set table with a freshly made meal I was just craving. But my appetite is completely gone now.

"We don't have baby turtles in Unalaska, babe. You probably saw the poachers."

"Are you sure about the turtles? Or maybe it was rum. Like that movie with Johnny Depp."

I *know* I'm not talking sense, but I just don't know what to do.

"Pirates of the Caribbean?"

"Yeah."

"No, that doesn't seem very likely at all. What does seem likely is that you ran into the poachers while they were moving their goods."

"And shot at me!"

“They shot at you?” There’s finally starting to come some of the panic I expected from the get-go.

“Just the truck. I’ll fix it,” I say like it’s the most normal thing in the world to get shot at.

“And they saw your face?”

“They had this big industrial light shining into my eyes, so I’d say yes.”

Silence returns to the room and my heart is beating a million miles a minute. Warren walks to the fridge, grabs me a beer, pours himself a whiskey and then sits at his end of the table.

I raise an eyebrow, because in what universe is this a solution to what’s going on?

“My mother always said it’s easier to solve problems when your stomach is full, my father always added ‘with alcohol’ when she wasn’t listening. I adapted both.”

I sit down slowly, looking at a plate with roast potatoes, carrots and some kind of meat that’s probably game from the fridge. In theory I know what to do with it, but right now everything goes over my head.

“Sip,” Warren orders me in his Dom voice, so I listen because I don’t know what else to do.

“Now eat, start with the meat because it’ll go dry despite the sauce and slowly walk me through what happened. Start at when you left at Eddie’s.”

Somehow his calm demeanor and his orders make sense and I follow them without a hitch. I start at the beginning, about how I was looking forward to this meal and how I got a flat tire that I changed. All the while I slowly eat the game, that turns out to be rabbit and is so soft it almost falls from the bone. By the time my plate is empty I’m done talking and there are thick creases between Warren’s eyes.

“So now what?” I ask.

“Well, there isn’t much we can do right now, is there?” He stands up and picks up the plates, bringing them to the sink

and starting to clean even though he was the one who cooked as well.

“There must be something we can do,” I say, panic in my voice.

“Yeah, we’re going to sit in front of the fire, have another drink, and then go to bed and figure this out tomorrow. This stuff with the poachers has to stop, but I have to sleep on it. So you’re going to be my giant spoon and you’re going to intertwine your legs with mine and try to steal my warmth. And then we’ll look further tomorrow.”

I don’t have any other ideas, so I just follow his lead. Good little sub that I’m being. I sigh at the thought, because deep down this has nothing to do with it. The whole situation is complicated, and I think it’s complicated for both of us. Warren has never been in a dynamic in which he is truly in love with his sub, and I’ve just never been in a dynamic while also having fallen for the same man.

You’d think that life would be easier after leaving an MC, after a life of killing people I don’t want to kill that still haunt me at night – but somehow going on is the hard part.

Some time later we’re lying in the crispy white weighted sheets. I wrap myself around Warren, intertwine our legs and indeed try to warm my feet at his calves. Warren swears and I giggle.

We simply make out for a while before in the end Warren puts out the nightlight and after a while we simply fall asleep, leaving the day behind.



It's early morning and the floor is freezing when I come downstairs feeling like I've been hit by a truck because of all the commotion yesterday and a night of unsteady sleep. I still haven't gotten used to putting on some socks when I get out of bed, but every time I come down I dread the decision. Warren is already up, which is weird, because usually he's the one who keeps snoozing and I warm my feet up against his legs before I climb out of bed to make us a cup of coffee.

"I can't keep doing this, babe," he says, his hands leaning on the kitchen counter, his head between slumped shoulders. For some reason he refuses to look at me with those freaky pale blue eyes of his. His breathing is so hard I'm afraid he's about to pass out. His nostrils flare and it's all I can focus on instead of processing the words he's saying.

"Of course you can, why the hell wouldn't you?" I finally manage to stumble out, even if I know the answer already.

Warren is too predictable on this point. It's safety above everything.

"Because you're not safe!" he roars. The defeat he was just showing has disappeared. "I can't keep you safe! They're going to come for you!"

“Then let them fucking come for me, War. It’s all I’ve ever known, people having it out for me. What’s a few more?” I’ve never hated the kitchen counter more. It’s creating a distance between us that I don’t like.

“Because it’s not all I’ve ever known! I don’t want to live in fear! I want us both to be happy, and I can’t be happy without knowing you’re safe!”

I don’t understand why he doesn’t get it. My eyes are burning, because fuck those poachers, we can handle it, as long as we do so together.

Warren’s sadness disappears and changes into something more stern, as if he’s made up his mind. It’s a look I’ve seen way too often, but it was always in a scene and never in a life altering discussion.

“Well fuck that! You’re breaking up because you can’t have any certainty in life! There’s never any certainty! It’s just one big game of chance.”

“Don’t talk to me like that,” Warren demands, that glassy look in his eyes he gets when he shifts into his Dominant role.

“Don’t fucking dominate me right now! I’m not just your sub. I’m a fucking person, and we’re making goddamn life decisions! You say you want both of us to be happy, but you’re doing an extremely good job at breaking my heart right now.”

I try to walk around the kitchen counter to get to him, but he keeps walking around it so I can’t reach it. Out of frustration I slam the counter with a closed fist, because hurting myself is better than feeling the heartbreak I feel right now. I’ve never experienced anything like this before. It’s like there’s an elephant sitting on my chest.

“Don’t,” he growls.

“Don’t fucking give me orders right now. You want to break this off? Then you’re not my Dom right now, you’re just Warren, my handler.”

“Exactly!” he screams. “As your handler I tell you that you need to go, because this is going to end badly.”

“It already is ending badly,” I roar, my heart shattering in a million pieces. With a softer voice I continue. “I can’t go back to living a lie. For the first time in my whole fucking life, I’m *alive*. It’s because of you, and that stupid dock with those dumb nitwits. It’s because of Deanna’s. It’s knowing Evan and all her guys are safe and Nathan is locked behind bars and never coming out. It’s the sound of the ocean in the morning that soothes me. It’s *you*. It’s you making me feel accepted, just like I am – no ifs and buts. No things I need to change. Complete and utter acceptance. Action and consequence? Yes, absolutely. But I love that. I love surrendering myself to you and trusting you know better.”

Fuck. Did I just casually say I love him in the middle of an argument about breaking up?

Are we breaking up over fucking whales?

I hate whales.

I understand perfectly well that I’m acting petty, but I don’t care. I just don’t want to lose him. I just need things to stay like they are because without him I’m lost. I might as well take one of those ships I’m working on and head out to sea, because I’d be as fucking lost as I am right now.

“It can’t keep going on like this, Dominic. Those guys are dangerous. There are safer places for you out there.”

I swallow, because I don’t want safe, I want him. Ever since he showed me how it could be like, *what* it could be like, instead of being exiled by my own goddamn family because I like the wrong gender...

“Then let’s go together.”

He grinds his teeth so hard I can hear him all the way over here. “I can’t.”

“You can’t, or you won’t? There’s a goddamn difference and we both know you won’t leave Bumfuck, Nowhere in Alaska because that’s all you’ve ever known.”

“No!” he shouts, grabbing his white blond hair at the root of his head. “I’m under contract to stay here, you’re not my only client.”

“Of course,” I spit, venom in my voice while I look at a man I thought I knew mere minutes ago but who I don’t recognize in the least right now. “Actual criminals, who’ve done despicable things who you protect.”

“That’s how WITSEC works,” he whispers. “And if I don’t take care of them, even more dangerous men are going to walk. Is that what you want?”

“Well, maybe you can point them in the direction of the motherfucking whale poachers and all our problems will be solved.”

“Just like you used to do?” Warren whispers.

And the fact that he even brings up that I used to do the dirty work for Victorious is so vicious I want to strangle him, only furthering his already low opinions of me. Guess all you have to do is scare someone to make their true feelings come out. He’s never once said he had a problem with my past. Yes, I’ve been the quiet enforcer to Victorious, but only because Nathan was born first and Dad primed me for the role. I’ve never for a second enjoyed the job.

You read about these guys, enjoying the feeling of blood and gut spilling over their hands, of feeling the life leave someone’s body – but not me. I just did what I was told to avoid suspicion about my sexuality and because I actually value my life.

I never expected him to stoop so low.

Warren lets himself fall to his haunches, disappearing behind the kitchen island. When I step around it, I find him with his head in his hands, staring at the floor. He takes three deep breaths, in which I can see him break and put himself back together again. Then he gets up, looks me straight in the eye, and says: “This has got to be over. You’ve got to leave.”

“You don’t have anything to say over me right now,” I snipe, grabbing my jacket, sticking my naked feet in my biker boots, not even taking the time to tie them and head back outside to my car. Jack whines when I pass him but don’t scratch his ears, and it’s like the sound of it scratches my soul.

You and me both, buddy.

Before I know it I'm in my car, putting it in reverse, and drive off through the now crackling snow. We're far enough from the ocean for the snow to stick to the ground. The voices in my head are so loud, telling me all kinds of things I've believed my whole life, but started to see are false ever since Warren took me under his wing.

I crank up the music. It's some sappy 4A song, and while I love the shit out of the band it's not what I need right now. I keep flipping until I find "Puppe" by Rammstein. My German is bad, but the tone of his voice tells me this is exactly what I need.

The car flies over the road, not taking me home, where I would be able to calm down a little, or smash something, or do fucking anything, I end up at the dock. There's an old ship with a motor that is salvageable if you ask me, but all the guys keep making fun of me. They've just never seen me doing what I do best.

There's nobody there to let me in, but that doesn't hold me back. Like a little lock can keep the enforcer of an MC out. I flick the light switch on and get started on the ship. Before I know it the motor is disassembled and tears are streaming down my face, wetting my beard. I never cry. Crying in Victorious was for girls and the last thing I wanted was to be seen as a girl.

Fuck.

He may dismiss me as his sub, but he's not getting me out of Dutch Harbor. I've got a good thing going here. I like working on these ships. In a sense they're the same as the motorcycles I worked on for my whole life, and if I have to lose my whole identity, this is something I'd like to keep. I like the guys I work with. They might be young and naïve, but they're good company. And they don't judge. I sigh, looking at the rusty old motor block. My hands know what to do, even if my head is confused.

This stinging feeling?

Is it heartbreak?

I wouldn't know. I've never experienced it before. But it sure feels shitty, and nothing I do seems to ease it.

When my mustache is wet and gross with snot, I wipe it with the back of my hand.

“Get a fucking handkerchief,” Eddie suddenly says from the opening of the door. “We're mechanics, not fucking savages.”

“What are you doing here so early?”

“I'm always here this early, you young'uns are the ones that sleep way too long. Besides. You don't think I'm coming over to see what's going on when the light in *my* fucking dock is on?”

Eddie sits down in his desk chair, putting aside the walking cane he uses to walk when he's not rolling.

“Wanna talk about it?” he asks in his croaky voice.

“Nope.”

“Then go brew us a pot. And you dropped a screw. I'm not sure if it's from the motor or if you've lost one of your own, but go pick it up. We run a clean business here.”



My fingers go through Jack's fur. Ever since Dominic stormed out Jack has been all over me. He's been whining the whole time. Huskies are vocal dogs, but Jack tops all of them. The moments he's quiet he's either hunting, or he's mad at me. You'd say that dogs are incapable of feeling things like that, but I swear to God that Jack does.

He presses his wet nose against my equally wet cheek.

It's not that I don't want to keep Dom. Goddammit, I want to keep him more than anything, I want to lock him up in a little box and keep him all to myself. Ensure he's safe and nothing can ever harm him.

But those damn whale poachers saw him, and he does kind of stand out as a biker in a city full of fishermen. It's what I like about him though. He's unapologetically himself. And they definitely saw him.

Whale poaching has been a problem for as long as I can remember. And there isn't much we can do about it unless we catch them in the act. Hell. Even I can't do a thing about it, and I'm a damn Marshal. We top all of the other authorities when need be. Endangered species just isn't an issue of national security.

Or maybe I could sell it as one in this case.

Before I know it I build a wall around my heart, moat, drawbridge and all. The last time I gave up most of my identity for someone I got hurt so badly I'm still not recovered.

Until Dominic, my head thinks.

The front door opening startles me, and for the tiniest of moments I hope it's Dom. Hoping against all odds that he didn't listen and came back. Making the right choice has never sucked so fucking much.

“What the hell are you sulking about?” my darling sister says, her hands on her hips, her legs wide. I can barely see her eyes in the wintery hat she's wearing. I've made jokes about her looking like the abominable snowman before, but she didn't take that in kindness.

“Dominic has to leave Dutch Harbor,” I explain.

The hard lines around her eyes soften a little, but the lines going down from her mouth intensify. “Up,” she orders.

“What?”

“Get. Up. Jack needs to pee, you need fresh air and I need to hear this story.”

I scrunch my face, but going against my nature I listen to her. Jen is about the only person in this whole world who gets to boss me around. I think it has something to do with the natural order of things and her being the oldest kid. She's been pack leader since the day I was born.

“Why do you need to hear this story? You weren't interested when Braden left?” I ask while putting on some shoes and grabbing a hand full of doggy cookies for Jack, who's already bouncing at the front door while singing a litany of happy dog sounds.

“Because with Braden you were putting his stuff in boxes before you even made the decision to break up for real.”

“I was not,” I sulk.

“You so were. Now, coat, zip it and start talking.” She walks towards the door and lets Jack out, who runs as if he's chased by a wild dragon, getting the zoomies when he reaches the snow and literally howls. *Perhaps I should've let him out sooner instead of crying on my kitchen floor.*

“You know you’re the only one who gets to boss me around like this, do you?” I mumble at my sister’s back, who gives me her sweetest smile looking over her shoulder.

“Oh I know, Mister Dom.”

My heart stops for a beat. “What did you just say?”

“Oh come on, you don’t think we all know? The whole town knows. It’s not like there’s much going on here, we need some kind of rumor to keep the mill going.”

My heart aches for a second. “Do Mom and Dad know?” I ask softly.

“Yeah, I wish I recorded the year they had a discussion on what to get you for Christmas and their plan was to order in some custom made sex furniture.”

I stop dead in my tracks.

“Yeah,” Jen keeps going. “Best. Night. Ever.”

I’m horrified. My heart could stop at literally any second now.

“So why the moping and why does Dominic need to go?”

I sigh. “Because some dangerous men saw him, and they’re going to want him gone, and I can’t protect him here. It’s too small. Everyone knows everyone. It’s not that hard to find him.”

She stares at me with her big blue eyes while she grabs the stick Jack brings her without looking at him. Without breaking eye contact, she throws the stick.

“And why is that making you sulk on your kitchen floor? I would recommend the rug in front of the fireplace. Much warmer. We live in fucking Alaska if you hadn’t forgotten.”

I bite my bottom lip, because I don’t want to talk about it.

Jen rolls her eyes. “Are you really going to make me say it for you?”

I cross my arms and give her that look. The one that makes boys shiver and say ‘Yes, Sir’.

“You’re in love with Dominic, and you were never in love with Braden. So now you gave up the lifestyle for Braden, and then in waltzes Dominic and you actually feel something for him, and it’s scaring the living daylight out of you.”

Jack runs back, pushing the stick Jen threw in my hands and I throw it again, watching how the dog’s tail swishes with delight when he sets in pursuit. It’s moments like these he’s more wolf and predator than anything else.

“How am I doing so far?” my obnoxious sister asks.

I ignore her.

She walks over and slams her tiny gloved fist on my chest, right where my heart is, a few times. “It means there’s something in there, you stubborn asshole. It means you care, and it’s a good thing.”

I swallow thickly.

“It hurts,” I confide to the wind.

“Good.”

“Good?”

“Absolutely. Love hurts. Life hurts. It just means you’re alive. Now. Where is Dominic?”

I push my chin in my jacket, hiding from the cold. I don’t think the hurting, not being able to breathe and someone squeezing my heart until it hopefully stops beating, is good. I think the hurting should stop right this second and everything should go back to normal. Feelings complicate everything. I like things orderly. I like to hold the reins. I like to figure out how everything is supposed to work. But no, here I go, getting feelings for the one person I shouldn’t be getting them for. Fuck me.

“I told him to leave Dutch Harbor.”

“You told your protectee who, according to you, is being hunted by dangerous men, to go away, and you let him go alone?”

“He did kind of just go,” I try to defend myself.

“Oy vey,” she says, throwing her hands up in the air.

“We’re not Jewish.”

“I know, nitwit. But if there was ever a time to use the phrase, it’s now.”

Jack comes back after taking the longest leak against one of the near pine trees and comes to talk to us in his own little doggy talk.

“He isn’t gone, he’s probably at the dock, working on some ship,” Jen says.

“Because you know him so well?”

“Opposed to you rigging him up and doing stuff to him I don’t want to know about, I actually talk to the guy,” she defends herself.

I open my mouth to defend myself, but she just starts cackling.

“I’m taking Jack for the day,” she says. “You go sulk. Or, I don’t know, find Dominic and make a better plan.”

Without any further ado she calls Jack, and the traitor listens to her.

I watch their backs for a long time as they take off.

The wind surrounding me is freezing. It’s a mix between the sound of the ocean and the wind coming in from the country. I’ve always thought it sounded like a song if you listen closely enough. Sometimes, when Jack is particularly talkative it’s like he talks to it.

I’ve always liked Alaska. The wildness, the wilderness, the rawness. Perhaps that’s what I like in Dominic as well. Suddenly it’s like a hand grabs my heart and squeezes, because fuck if I don’t want to lose that guy.

Look at me, ex-Dom for hire, made Marshal, made Dom again – falling in love with Dom. There must be some poetic justice in that, but there isn’t. All it is right now is agony.

So I do the only thing I can think of.

I start walking. The first five minutes I keep beating myself up mentally. Every unkind thought in the world passes by. But soon it becomes less, and I listen to the song of the ocean and the wind. Just like music always seems to do, my mind goes numb. It goes quiet.

Which is why after who knows how long I find myself standing at the dock. From the inside I can hear Dom laughing with the guys. Eddie is barking orders at them, and they all start laughing harder.

It's at that moment I realize how lonely I feel and have been feeling. Yeah, I've got people in my life. But the funny thing is that there's still the possibility to feel alone when you're in a crowded room.

And Dom? He took that away. He filled my life with brattiness and motor oil and jokes that were too lame not to laugh about.

I swallow, turn around.

And then I start walking home, hating every bit of myself as much as I possibly can.



When for the third time in two minutes I drop a screw and bump my head against the workbench as well, I yell a loud 'Motherfucker'. Nothing is working, because all I keep thinking about is that stupid stubborn asshole that doesn't understand that I'm no longer running. Unalaska is as much my home now as it is his home, and some stupid whale hunters aren't going to scare me away.

Did I almost flee the first time they saw me?

Yes. But that was when I was still very much done with Alaska and it's fucking weather anyway. I was the goddamn enforcer of Victorious, some poachers aren't going to scare me. The downside to it all is that if I use violence without it being in self defense, I break the rules of my witness protection accord. And they'd move me then anyway.

Fuck, I hate how stuck I am in what I can and can't do. I'm used to a life without rules, being the outlaw. Being a law abiding citizen? It sucks.

And then there's Warren, who tried to out-Dom me in this situation. He wants me to go away. My heart aches when I think of him. Do I mean so little to him that he'd be okay if I went away? Am I really just a sub for him? A little toy to play with? I thought we had reached a stage where we cared for

each other. But if it's so easy to toss me away then I must've been deranged.

Somewhere in all the literature I read there was a bit about sub feels. It wasn't a great article, clearly written by someone who just enjoys the lifestyle and wanted to inform people. But I wonder if that's all this is.

Am I in love with this asshole of a man, or am I just experiencing sub feels?

And if I think about how he tried to dominate me to make me do his bidding I boil on the inside. Breathing heavily through my nose I force myself to think about something different. Work has always been a good way to distract myself.

But by the time I drop that fucking screw for the fourth time I swear so loudly I'm pretty sure I can hear the seagulls that usually reside on the roof of the shop fly away.

"Language, boy," Eddie says with a stern voice. "It's been an hour and I let you sulk. You can either start talking to me, or you can go home for the day. I'm not putting up with this behavior."

"That fucking screw keeps falling."

"No, you keep dropping it, there's a difference."

I sigh, although it reminds me more of an angry dragon huffing fire through its nostrils.

"There are whale poachers active, and they're using Dutch Harbor and our shores to unload and transport the product to elsewhere. We've known for a while and a few months ago one saw me. Warren got some really long name involved."

"National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA," says Eddie, nodding while he holds his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Yeah, well, those, whatever they're called. But yesterday one of the poachers saw me from up close while I was fixing my tire. They shot at me and I got out of there as fast as I could, but I was using the big lights to see what I was doing with the tires and they got a good look at my face."

“Fuck,” Eddie says.

“Language,” I say, having the first half smirk of the day surrounding my lips. “But I told Warren, and he freaked out like crazy and he was halfway packing my bags, sending me away to another safe house.”

Eddie’s look darkens.

The door to the shop opens and Mano comes walking in with Bash and Tiny Nick right on their heels. They’re all wide awake and chipper and talking loudly while laughing.

“Go get breakfast at Deanna’s for all of us,” Eddie demands with an authoritative voice that isn’t to be messed with.

“Why?” Tiny Nick asks, combing a hand through his longish hair to get it out of his eyes. He needs a haircut, but we need to keep reminding him to get one or else he simply won’t.

“Because Santa Claus farted on the other side of the world. It doesn’t matter. Just do as you’re told. Bring enough for all five of us and make sure there’s an extra portion of bacon in there because we all know that Bash will eat the whole lot on his own otherwise.”

Bash slams his belly with both his hands. “Oh yes, Bash certainly will!”

They all turn around and leave the shop again.

“I’m not going anywhere, Eddie. This is my home now,” I continue. “I’m not going away. But Warren throwing me out like I’m no more than yesterday’s newspaper hurts like a bitch.”

Eddie pinches the bridge of his nose and thinks for a while. “Listen, I never got to the point with Damian where I could give him lovelife advice, so this is not my area of expertise. But what I do know a lot about is ships, so entertain an old man and let me have this terrible analogy.”

I nod.

“Sometimes, when you’re at sea, you get stuck in a rocky part that you didn’t anticipate. There’s a huge one on the port

side, and a tiny one on the starboard. What do you do?"

"You go star."

"Exactly. It'll leave a scratch, perhaps a tiny hole, but it won't sink you. Then you obviously bring your ship here, because we're the best shop in the whole area. We fix it, probably using some harsh lacquer to finish it off. And we let the lacquer dry until it's good and sea worthy again."

"Solid advice for a ship, old man, but that doesn't resolve the fact that the man that I love wants me gone."

"What I'm saying is: let the lacquer dry. Go home, sleep it off, let Warren calm down. Those poachers are here whether they know your face or not. They're part of a much bigger problem. But you and Warren are a scratch instead of a shipwreck. Now pick up that damn screw and get out of my sight."

By the time he was done talking a glimmer of hope had lighted in my chest and a half smirk was plastered on my face. I picked up the screw because I knew it would lead to trouble with Eddie if I didn't and walked to where I kept my coat.

The guys all came in, carrying boxes of Deanna's filled with breakfast goods.

"Where 'ya going?" Tiny Nick asked as he put down the boxes on the first bench in the shop.

"Apparently to let my lacquer dry," I say.

They all look at me as if I've been sniffing at the glue pots, but Eddie laughs out loud. "Make him something to take home, boys," he says, and starts rolling his desk chair towards the bench with the food.

All of them work together so that I end up with a breakfast box of my own, having a little of everything, although Bash steals a piece of my bacon with a huge grin. I let him have it, but punch him in the ribs when he isn't looking. He bends forward with an 'oomph' but I swear I hear him say that it was worth it.

I grab my box and start my short walk home through the snow. I notice a set of footprints in the distance. They stop a short distance from the shop and then return again. My gut tells me they're Warren's. That he followed me because... well, I don't know why.

The anger in me has died down, and now that I've had some time to process I realize I might have overreacted a little. Warren did only want what's best for me. Why would he do that if he doesn't care about me? On top of that it is literally his job to keep me safe. And being targeted by organized crime isn't a prime example of keeping me safe.

Fuck.

What are we going to do?

One thing I do know is that I'm staying. The problem with the poachers will still be there with me gone. The real problem is getting the hunters and making them stop. Those gorgeous whales need to thrive – not be caught and hacked into pieces to be sold in dodgy places.

And Warren and I need to find a way to make amends as well. It warms me that he apparently followed me and checked up on me. But he didn't come in and it's clear we need a little space, even if all I want is to be in his arms, have him nudge me with his nose before he gives me a forehead kiss.

But our lacquer still has to dry, so it's best that the footprints went back again.

Overthinking everything that happened in the last few hours I walk home. When I pass the bookstore beneath my house, Jeremy, the gangly guy that looks after the bookshop whenever the owner isn't there, comes outside when he sees me.

"I've got a new stack," he says proudly, scratching at a gnarly pimple he has on his chin that perfectly fits his age.

"Cool," I answer and follow him inside the bookshop. I maneuver through the stacks of books that are literally everywhere. If Unalaska was ever to organize a maze, I'd

suggest trying to find a way through the shop. But it has its charm and it's stolen my heart.

At the desk there's a chaos of books, pricetags, information signs, pamphlets and little knick knacks. There's a jar full of marbles, so that anyone who has lost his marbles can come grab some.

Jeremy disappears beneath the desk and comes up with a stack of five books. I recognize the titles. They're really corny gay romance novels and I'll love reading them. Most of the books I loaned are at Warren's though, so I can't return them right this second. I explain the situation to Jeremy, but when I offer him a salted caramel bacon glazed donut, he no longer cares about the books.

Food is always the way to go.

After grabbing the books and saying goodbye I make my way upstairs to my home. It actually takes me a while to find the right key, and that squeezes my heart a little.

I finally get inside, drop my keys in the little bowl next to the door, get out of my ridiculously warm coat and hang it next to my leather jacket on the coat rack. They're the only two pieces of clothing there, and that makes me realize how little I've made this house my own.

First I was reluctant to stay – I was fighting my new life, even though I had done what I did with love for Evan. Then I just half moved in with Warren. It happened, I just never left. So this house – I never made it a home.

I let myself fall on the couch, dropping my books and holding on to my breakfast box. I open it, grab the plastic fork that came with it and start eating scrambled eggs with bacon. I pick up the first book I can reach, one about a private army man who has to work with a new co-worker and is completely crazy. I'm sure I'll love it.

But my thoughts aren't with it.

All I can think is that home is not a place, home is the person or the people who you can be your authentic self with and who you love.

And right now, Warren is home.



I'm walking Jack so he can do his business. It's snowing today, and it's one of those icy snows that hurts when the flakes hit your face. Having a husky is all fun and games, but they're extremely active dogs and have to be walked a lot. So here I am, turning into a popsicle to make sure my dog can take a shit and lose some of his endless energy.

The last few days have been horrendous. All I could think about was Dom. He didn't leave Unalaska. He just went on with his life as if nothing happened. As if we didn't break up, as if we didn't end a dynamic. Losing one of those is harsh, losing both is brutal. And I'm devastated.

I've made some calls to people I know in other agencies to see if they can help in catching the poachers. If we fix the problem from the root, there's no problem at all anymore. Some offered to see what they can do, but most of it is on local authorities. The problem is that there are a lot of organizations responsible for the wellbeing of the whales in Alaska, but they're all small. If the criminals have organized and created something huge, the local authorities probably won't be able to handle it.

I've been trying to solve the problem for the last couple of days, because it's better than thinking about the alternative, namely my heartbreak from Dom, but I haven't come up with a better solution than I already have.

With my hands deep in my pocket and my nose hidden behind my scarf, I look down, following the footsteps of my dog instead of noticing my surroundings. When I finally do

look up, I see that Jack has brought us to town and he's now directly walking to Eddie's shop. And outside of Eddie's shop, on a Saturday, in the freezing Alaskan snow, is Dom, tinkering away on his motorcycle.

Before I can grab Jack so we can get away unnoticed, the dog takes a sprint and jumps Dom, who tries to reach for his piece at the back of his pants which isn't there anymore. Some things probably never change. When he sees it's just Jack, he visibly relaxes.

Dom maneuvers himself from beneath the bike and gets up to properly hug and scratch Jack, who's wagging his tail so wildly I'm afraid he'll push the bike over.

"Who's the goodest boy in all of Unalaska?" Dom asks with a high pitched voice.

And Jack answers something in doggy language that probably is a long dialogue why he is the best boy.

I can't help but feel my face crack in two. Damn, it's good to see him.

Sighing at my own thoughts, my phone starts to ring. Turning away from Jack and Dom and letting the two get their fill of each other I see that it's Meryll.

He doesn't even greet me, he just says "Let's go hunting" as soon as he hears the line is connected.

"I'm in town with Jack," I say. "I'd have to go back to grab my gear."

"Nah, come over, loan some of mine, that's faster."

"What's your hurry?" I ask laughingly. Suddenly I feel Dom's eyes on me, almost as if he's drawn to the laughter. I pretend I don't notice and turn my back further to him. If I look in those pretty eyes now, I'm a goner.

"I've got the zoomies," Meryll answers. "I've been with the kids all morning and they had way too much energy, so now I'm all hyped up and I need to get away from the house. Get some fresh air you know."

A smile forms again. He loves those kids dearly, but they all have his energy and sometimes he doesn't know what to do with it and goes crazy.

"Sure, be there in five," I say.

Then it's time to face the music. "Come, boy," I say to Jack, but even that feels wrong with Dom in the vicinity. Deep down he's still my Pup. "We gotta go, was good to see you. The bike is looking good," I say.

"She's getting there," Dom says, eyeing the piece of metal with a kindness I've seen fishermen have for their boats all their life. "Have fun hunting."

I hum and Jack comes prancing over, wagging his tail like there's no tomorrow and babbling to me in his own little speech.

All the way over to Meryll's I pined over Dom. My resolve is starting to crack and I want my man back, but I know it's a stupid idea. He really needs to leave. And the stupid thing is I could force him. I could request his relocation. Make WITSEC see that it's not safe here as well. But except for the poachers this is the safest place for him and deep down I don't want him to leave.

"You are very, very far away with your thoughts," Meryll says when I almost bump into him.

"Hm?" I say, looking up at my best friend who's already all dressed up in hunting gear. "Oh, Jack led me into bumping into Dom."

Meryll shakes his head. "You're just acting dumb."

"No, I'm thinking about his safety."

Meryll scratches Jack behind his ears while he points his chin to a neatly folded stack of hunting clothes, a hunting rifle standing next to it. I can hear him whispering to my dog how stupid his master is being while I silently put everything on and get ready to go back out into the cold.

"Do you think we're even going to find anything out there in this weather? All the animals are sheltering."

Meryll shrugs. “There’s always some dumb goose who didn’t get the memo.”

I snort, because it’s true. I button up the last buttons of the neon yellow overcoat, grab the rifle, do a standard safety check and then grab the box of bullets that lies next to it on the bench, putting them in my coat pocket. We’ll load the guns once we’re in hunting territory. Over the years we’ve heard too many stories about people shooting themselves in their foot or their own ass. We decided to learn from their mistakes instead of waiting for the mistakes to happen to ourselves.

The icy snow hits my face when we step out again and I silently cuss. I could be home in front of a nice burning furnace, but I’m outside with my dog who tries to bite the falling snow and looks over the moon with his new found activity and my friend who has the zoomies because his kids hyped him up.

Once we reach the area near one of the lakes where we know the biggest birds will be. Some of the birds have migrated for the winter, other birds are prohibited from hunting. So we’re not just looking for them in weather in which we can hardly see, we must also seem to find the right bird — if we can even find them.

This hunting idea seems stupider by the minute, but I was willing to take every excuse to get away from Dominic.

We walk in silence for at least twenty minutes, trying to find a stupid huntable bird, but all I find is iciness.

Then my phone rings. The fact that it rings means that it’s WITSEC headquarters. They’re the only ones who go through when I’ve set my phone to silent.

“Warren Philips,” I answer, while right next to me Meryll releases a shot and whoops, scaring the shit out of me. “What the hell Meryll?” I yell.

“Your noisy phone scared a hidden waterfowl. I got him. Jack, go fetch!” my friend says, looking smug and happy while my dog takes off through the undergrowth to go find the bird.

“What the hell is going on?” my co-worker Kasper says through the phone.

“Sorry Kas, we were in the middle of hunting and you finally scared a bird so it could get shot.”

“You and your mountain man habits,” Kaspers sighs. Kasper is from Washington D.C. and has probably never been hunting a day in his life. It’s okay. I wouldn’t last a day in the city with all its crowdedness.

“What can I help you with?”

“Emergency meeting tonight. I’ve sent you the details through email, but I had to know for sure you’d get the message. I never know how good your signal is.”

“Our signal is just fine.”

“When you’re near the town.”

“Yes, when I’m near the town.”

“And you’re hunting now.”

“Yes, so?”

“So you’re not near the town, which means you probably haven’t gotten the email,” he says smugly.

“You’re insufferable. I’ll see you at the meeting,” I tell him before I hang up.

At that same time Jack comes walking back, waterfowl in his beak, held by his neck. He proudly offers it to me and I take it from him before I crouch down and stroke his snow covered head. His tongue lolls out of his mouth and he almost seems to be smiling.

He’s the only silly goose here today.

It’s ten minutes after starting time when finally the last Marshal arrives in the Zoom meeting we’re having. We’ve been gossiping until then, we’re only human after all, and it’s not that often that we get to see each other. I attend all the regular meetings, but then we’re supposed to be quiet and shut up. Other meetings, emergency meetings, are for those Marshals who are involved or might possibly be involved.

And ever since Unalaska isn't involved in anything, except whale poaching apparently, I'm never here. Which makes me wonder why I'm here.

Lance is the last to arrive. "Sorry I'm late, ladies. Last one didn't want to be left alone. I needed to console her a bit. When the cat she insisted on bringing finally appeared from beneath the couch where the little fucker ran to, she was okay."

Everyone mumbles their understanding.

"So, what's going on?" one of the Minneapolis Marshals asks.

"We might have a breach regarding the Hueva Cartel witnesses."

"Fuck," another Marshal says. And I completely feel what he's feeling. One of my witnesses got here because he testified against the cartel, nearly getting shot while being transported to the court. The cartel was deep into the heroin trade and ruled the city. But the key pieces were convicted and without them the cartel fell. The witnesses were put under protection, the key witness here with me. He's the town broker now and we don't see him all too often. He never took to the cold like Dom did. Anyway, some other cartel or mob group or organized crime group probably took over, but that seems to always be the case no matter how hard we try.

"Which means that this one has got to be moved. Lance, you'll be on a plane soon, and the rest of your guys might be okay, but we have to figure out the extent of the damage and see who is safe and who is not."

Crap.

"What did the fucker do?" someone asks. Because, in our opinion, the witness usually messes up themselves – they don't just get found by their enemies.

The Marshal in question whose witness messed up sighs and pinches his nose. "He took a little unsanctioned road trip because he wanted a sandwich from his old neighborhood again. He said he'd been craving it for three months and he

couldn't take it anymore. Some fucker saw him, recognized him from the trials, followed him and told the new higher powers.”

We're doing a full round of fucks now.

A fucking sandwich.

Lance's mobile beeps, clearly getting instructions to go pick up the idiot and take him someplace else where he hopefully can be kept safe. He logs off immediately. I'm glad I'm not on active field duty – it seems exhausting.

We all spend time talking some more, but internally I hope I don't have to move Bill. For one, it's a hassle, and furthermore I like the guy. He's good at what he does and he has helped me make some investments that made me good money.

But if it's what is needed to keep safe, I'll do it. If someone finds out Unalaska is a place to hide witnesses they might find Dom. And the last thing I want is for them to find him.

It's then I realize I don't want him to relocate, not even one little bit at all.

I've been such a dumb fucker.



“This is bullshit,” a voice I know all too well says when I’m screwing a bolt back on my half finished bike. I get up so quickly I almost bump my head against the handle bar, because that’s Warren’s voice.

My bike is still in Eddie’s shiphouse, so he isn’t here on a whim, and if he were here on handler business he would have made an appointment.

“What is bullshit?”

“This. Us not being together. I’ve been miserable. You’ve been moping like a little bitch.”

I don’t know who snitched on me that my behavior hasn’t really been model behavior ever since Warren broke things off between us, but my money is on Tiny Nick. He’s been known to blab whenever he feels like it and he’s always been friendly with Warren. Then again, it could have been anyone who visited Deanna’s at the same time as I was there, because I showed my sunny side there as well.

“I have not been a little bitch,” I mope while I clean my greasy hands on the towel that hangs from my pants.

Warren just raises an eyebrow, making me roll my eyes. We both know that’s a lie.

“I’m not leaving!” I half yell.

“I know!” he full on yells back.

Jack comes rushing out of the bushes, looking what’s going on. Once he sees me his tail begins wagging, but he keeps close to Warren, looking up whether it’s okay to be happy to see me.

“Go,” Warren says to the beast, who takes off like the start signal to the New York marathon has been given and he’s in the lead to win the whole thing.

He jumps up against me with his two front paws, using such force that I have to take a few steps back. He pushes his wet nose in my neck, gives me a lick and starts telling me all his adventures in dog talk.

“Yes, I know,” I answer the dog. “I saw your footprints in the snow. I was just waiting until that stubborn owner of yours had the balls to get in.”

Using the word balls in Jack’s presence is always a bad idea, because he thinks it’s time to play.

“Sorry buddy, your boss and I gotta talk some,” I let him down while scratching him behind his ears.

“I know you’re not leaving,” Warren repeats. “You’re way too stubborn to.”

“When I got here, you did everything in your power to make this my home. So that’s what I did! I made this my home. And it won’t change anything about the poaching situation if I leave. That will just go on.”

“They could have recognized you. Told someone that you’re here. Before we know it, the remaining members of Victorious will come here to take revenge.”

“Yeah, or maybe one of the remaining members decides to flee Nevada and become a Greenhorn next year and recognize me then. WITSEC isn’t foolproof Warren! You know this.”

He combs his fingers through his hair that looks as white as the snowy ground behind him and sighs.

“I just can’t stand the thought of losing you,” he whimpers.

“Making me go away will do the exact same thing.”

“But it will keep you safe.”

“You can’t guarantee that,” I snap. “What are you even doing here? Because we’ve had this discussion, my answer is final and I’m not leaving. Now if you have nothing to add, please leave, I’ve got some work left to do.”

I turn back to my bike, trying desperately to remember what I was doing, but I can’t for the life of me remember. Not now that he’s here.

“That’s what I’m saying, you idiot. Let’s stop this nonsense. You’re staying, but I’m asking you to stay with me. To pick me. To choose me. To love me.”

I turn on my heels as fast as I can, and there I see my beautiful Warren, tears glistening in his eyes. And how could I not? How could I not take him back? It’s like I can take a breath of fresh air again and all the pieces of the puzzle fall back into place again. Unalaska became my home, but Warren is where I belong. God, if only my dead father could hear me now, he’d turn around in his grave.

“I never stopped loving you, you fool. You wanted me away.” I quickly wipe away a tear that is pooling in my eye while we stare at each other – strangers, but oh so familiar.

“That’s the first time we said we loved each other,” he says while he stalks forward, grabs my face and kisses me so hard that I can’t answer him. A harsh kiss turns into a harsh making out and before we know it we’re both out of breath.

Jack has snuck back inside, running circles around us and the bike, barking every now and then. He must feel like the balance in the universe is restored again too. I laugh, and for the first time in days it feels genuine.

“I was so stupid,” Warren says.

“I was stupider,” I answer.

“We were both the stupidest.”

Jack barks as if he tries to tell us he agrees with us morons when I hear a sound at the door. Eddie shuffles back in with his cane and lets himself fall down in his desk chair.

“Well fucking finally,” the old man grumbles.

“What, you’ve been waiting for this?” I ask him, my arms wrapped around Warren.

“When you’re as old as I am, and married as long as I’ve been, you pick out the ones that are going to stick. Some folk gravitate to each other. It’s like the sea calling certain people. Some lovers just... are.”

Warren scoffs. “You’re a fortune teller now?”

“No, just an old man who despite everything still believes in love.”

Warren pulls me against him and gives me a nose boop before he kisses the side of my head. The grin that spreads over my face is contagious because even Eddie is smiling.

“Call all those numbnuts, it’s Friday, they’re probably at the bar. Go dance, go be young. I’ll take care of Jack while I close up shop here and I expect you all at Deanna’s at eleven tomorrow.”

I raise a brow in question.

“We’re discussing the poachers thing, because we’re not letting them take all our whales. There’s rules and regulations for a reason.”

Suddenly I feel laughter in my belly and I start laughing out loud. Like, really loud, and both men in Eddie’s shiphouse look at me as if I’m crazy.

“Did I try to sell the whale poachers as people taking cradles of baby turtles?”

The corners of Warren’s mouth turn upwards. “You did. And then you tried to convince me it was pirates and Johnny Depp deporting rum.”

Eddie laughs the hardest of us all, laughing so hard he almost chokes. “Sea turtles? Pirates? Damn you, Dom, you

never told me you were a comedian.”

We're all smiling. Warren thanks Eddie for his offer and then starts pulling me towards the exit. When he grabs Jack he looks him in the eye, alpha through and through, and tells him to listen to Eddie until he gets back. Jack whines, but shows his neck in a sign of surrender and trots towards Eddie.

Warren, meanwhile, can't seem to wait until I've put my coat on to pull me outside. He never really wanted to go to the bar on Fridays, but joined me to please me because I wanted to see my friends. Right now? He can't seem to wait to go to the place.

With an arm over my shoulders, he pulls me into his side and starts walking me towards the right street. I think we're both beaming.

Two unknown men are standing beneath one of the streetlights and keep a close eye on us. I don't recognize them, but that doesn't mean that much – I don't know every inhabitant of Unalaska.

Warren seems to though, greenhorns excepted. And he's giving them a wary look. Both of the men seem to be staring at me though, and something tells me that it's not because they like my boots so much. For a second I'm afraid these are the poachers and they recognize me and they're going to harm me – making this the shortest romantic reunion in the history of get-back-together's.

“Faggots!” one of them yells while the other one nods his head.

Homophobia is something we all deal with, and frankly, after a life in an MC where being gay was out of the question, a few words aren't going to hurt me. Sticks and stones and all that. As long as they don't want to actually break my bones I'm fine. Besides, I'm twice their size and Warren is packing.

We both just ignore them, too happy with our reunion to let it be ruined by anyone. By the time we've reached the bar we've forgotten the incident and step inside the warmth of the establishment.

Mano is the first one to notice us, because he is, as he seems to be all the damn time these days, standing on top of the bar, swaying his hips, drink in his hand raised.

“Heeeeeeeey, they’re back!” he yells, and numerous sets of eyes turn towards us.

“That’s about damn time,” Bash says, who throws his drink back and slams the empty glass on the bar.

“That’d be time,” Sugar says, making her way through the crowd and hugging us both.

“You were all waiting for us to get back together?” I ask in surprise.

“Yeah,” Sugar says while she starts pulling us towards the bar and shoos people away to make room for us. “Every epic love story needs some bumps in the road. Poachers are all our problem, not just yours. You don’t know it yet, but you’re Unalaskan now. We ain’t letting you go.”

“Amen,” Tiny Nick says.



“And what do you have to say to that?” I ask Dominic who is on his knees in front of me, back straight, palms held upwards resting on his legs.

He doesn’t answer me, he keeps his eyes to the floor.

“Exactly, you don’t say any fucking thing because you have said enough. A little bit of bratting is okay, Pup, but there is such a thing as going too far. And now you’ve lost your right to speak. I don’t want to hear a fucking peep.”

We’re downstairs in the dungeon, where I literally dragged him to, because he still thought he was being funny and I was done with him being disobedient. I had to keep in a smirk when I saw the look of surprise when I grabbed him by his henley and started dragging him towards the dungeon. By the time we were downstairs I was in full Dom mode. No more smirks, no more disobedience.

“I want you to go grab your collar and bring it to me,” I say, legs wide, arms folded over each other. “Once I’ve put it on, I want you to get naked.”

I can see the apple of his throat bob and the resignation in his eyes. Good. He gets up, doesn’t say a word, doesn’t make eye-contact and walks towards the cabinet where his collar lies on top. He grabs it, slowly turns around and heads back towards me. Once he reaches me, he holds the black leather collar out towards me on outstretched hands.

“Thank you, Pup. So you do know what good behavior looks like?”

He doesn't answer me, because he isn't allowed, and despite my sweet tone he still knows he's in big trouble.

I apply the collar and use my finger to lift his chin, a sign he can look me in the eye. If he'd really been a dog, he'd have his tail between his legs right now. I'm scaring the shit out of him.

"Now, what to do with you?" I say, appearing to be thinking by tapping my finger on my lips. "Let's have some fun."

I have a chair that's normally used for women to bear children. But I found that if you make some changes to it, it makes for a pretty fun piece of bondage furniture. I walk towards it, grab the top, and pull it behind me, the legs of the chair never leaving the ground, making an eerie noise that adds to the suspense that's so thick you can taste it.

I place it in the middle of the room and observe the way it makes Dom nervous. He doesn't like it when I try something completely new that's so far out of the ordinary he can't even begin to think of what's going to happen.

"Straddle it, Pup."

"Yes, Master."

He sits down, straddling the chair, while I move to a cabinet to grab some chains and carabines.

The goosebumps on Dom's skin give away how nervous he is, because I've set the room temperature to hot. For now. He'll be getting hot himself in a few moments. I'll turn the heat down then.

I applied some rings to the bearing chair in various places, so I can make Dom sit just like I want to.

His hands get attached to a hook that's in the middle of the back of the chair. This way he can sit upright. Then I attach his feet to the legs of the chair. They're at an angle, so his legs are spread pretty wide, which is exactly what I need.

Bearing chairs are made so children can come through it, being caught by midwives or spouses or whomever. Which means I've got perfect access to Dom's balls and ass.

His breathing is fast, and my inner sadist is doing a little happy dance. This is where I thrive, and this is where I get off. Now, getting off – that’s what we’re going to be doing. But he doesn’t know that yet and he’s going to dig his own grave. He’s going to beg for it and then he’s going to regret it and beg for it to stop.

I lock a tight ball ring around his balls. It’s not uncomfortable, but it’s tight enough for him not to be able to draw his balls up. And that’s the exact reason for this first part of this plan.

After his balls are secured tightly in the ring, I get a prostate vibrator. It’s one with hard vibrations, one of the hardest I have. I actually quite like it myself. Gets the job done fairly quickly. Especially if you don’t have a choice.

I grab some lube, rub it in and massage his hole before I lube up the toy and start to gently apply it. I wiggle it in, listen to Dom’s breathing and know exactly when I’ve found the right spot. The toy is flexible and curved, so it clings to his body without falling out and it stays in exactly the right space.

It takes less than a minute for Dom to grunt.

“What is it, Pup? Are you having a hard time?”

“No, Master,” he says.

“What is it then?”

“It feels too good. I already feel like I could come.”

I shut up and I smirk. Dom keeps moaning and grunting, the sounds getting harder, his body tightening and showing all the signs of an incoming climax. But it won’t come. You see, for a man to have an orgasm, the balls need to be able to draw up. And they can’t.

His grunts become strained, and little droplets of sweat appear on his forehead and his back. He looks up at me, pleading. I don’t even think this is considered edging, this is continuously almost coming but being held back. It’s a slight form of torture to be honest.

“What is it, Pup?”

His face contorts, like he wants to say something mean to me. But he knows when to brat and when not to and this is definitely not the moment to be toying with it.

“My body wants to come so badly, but it can’t.”

“I know,” I simply state, turning down the temperature of the room for a bit before I stand in front of his face, legs wide and arms crossed.

“Please let me come,” he whispers, his eyes on my feet.

I stay silent.

“Please Master, please let me come!”

“Are you sure you want to come?”

“Please! I’ll always properly put my cup in the dishwasher! Please! Goddammit, I’m begging you, Master.”

“Careful what you wish for,” I whisper while I lean forward and hold my head next to his ear. I release the ball ring and it takes him exactly the seconds before his balls draw up and he starts spurting ropes of cum. It’s glassy and watery, because it’s an orgasm that’s purely induced by the prostate.

He is heavily panting, eyes closed and definitely already exhausted. If only he knew.

I stand back, spread my legs again and cross my arms while I keep looking at him. I put on my serious Dom face. There’s a half smirk on my face, but my eyes exude dominance. There’s no denying who’s the Alpha right now.

It doesn’t take that long before I see what I’m waiting for. The toy is still stimulating his prostate, and it won’t stop. You see, men are capable of multiple orgasms – you just need to know what to do.

“Fuck,” Dom whispers, his body moving along with flows that go through his body. He tries to fight it, then looks up at me. “May I come, Master?”

“Yes, Pup. You may come as many times as you’re physically possible.”

And just like that he climaxes again.

So the cycle starts anew. And after a while he comes again. And again. And again. And all is fun and games until he starts to struggle. Still I let him come again. Every now and then I stroke his hair, or I kiss his temple, or I whisper to him what a good job he's doing. But he keeps on coming and I know it's got to start to hurt. It probably already does, but Dom never shows when it hurts on time. He always thinks he can take more.

No.

Scrap that.

He thinks he deserves more. And it's a thought I'll get out of him eventually.

We've been at it for almost two hours before he looks up, exhausted, just having come again, and he ever so silently speaks to me.

"Please Master, please make it stop. Please, I can't take it anymore. It hurts so bad."

I lay a hand on his cheek, give him a quick peck and then walk around him to remove the toy. The second it's gone, he starts chanting a soft 'thank you, thank you, thank you'. I forgive him for not throwing in the Master, because I know he's not doing it consciously. This is just genuine gratitude that oozes out of his mouth.

I remove the chains and the carabines, letting Dom loose completely.

He hangs over the chair completely drained of energy.

Walking towards the bed I grab a blanket and throw it over Dom's back. Then I gently help him stand up.

His legs are still shaking and he seems on the verge of crying.

I make sure the weighted blanket is wrapped tightly around him, turning him into a little burrito. I wrap my arms around him and guide him towards the bed with tiny steps.

I can feel how strong he tries to stay, to not show me any weakness. That's who he is, that's who he's had to be the last

twenty-six years. He could never show any vulnerability. But he's safe with me.

Always.

I sit down on the bed and pull him against me. My fingers go through his hair, massaging his scalp while he lays his cheek on my pec. With my other hand I hold him as tightly as I possibly can.

I whisper sweet nothings in his ear, telling him how brave he is, how strong he is, what a good sub he is. And when I tell him that I'm bursting to the seam with pride for him he breaks down.

He starts crying with long wails, my shirt getting wet within seconds.

I'm making shushing noises to calm him, not to make him stop. This man has got enough emotions packed into him to make Dutch Harbor flood if he'd cried them all out.

So I hold him, and I talk to him, I stroke him and I let him be. But most of all, I just love him with everything I have.

It's the exact moment I don't know if this is a breakthrough for him, or a breakthrough for me.

Maybe we both needed a little breakthrough.

When his crying lessens a little, I reach over towards the bed stand and give him a cup filled with water. It has a straw and it comes in handy when you don't want to make a mess, but you do want to hydrate.

He drains it instantly.

I reach over again and I grab a chocolate bar, which I open for him and feed to him seeing how he can't use his hands because of the blanket burrito.

"It's okay," I repeat.

"That was hard," he whispers.

"Yes, I was being very harsh on you, Pup. And you did brilliantly. I just need you to know that I love you very much. Do you feel like talking about this now, or later?"

He thinks about it for a second. “Now I think.”

“Was that too much for you?” I ask.

“No,” he answers instantly. “I have my safe word. If you wouldn’t have stopped after the begging I would have used my safe word.”

“Very good of you. I pushed you to the edge and you took it. And still you remembered that you were safe and that you could stop everything when you wanted to.”

“I’m always safe with you,” he states.

“Yes, Pup. Yes you are.”



“No,” I say for the third time when Warren tries to steal my bacon.

“Come on, just one piece. You’re leaving them on your plate anyway.” Warren had ordered himself the pancakes at Deanna’s, which are good, but not as good as the eggs with a side of bacon.

“I’m not leaving them, I’m saving them for last, because I like to end with the food I like best. Get rid of the stuff you don’t like first and then treat yourself with good food after.”

He grumbles. Legitimately grumbles at me. “You should eat the bacon first while it’s still hot.”

“Bacon is good however you eat it. Warm, cold, hell, even if it’s still attached to the pig I bet it’s good. Order your own plate of bacon next time.”

I get a scowl, but Tiny Nick, who sits in the booth behind us, tells me to stand my ground and defend my bacon. It’s worth going to war for. We all laugh and I make sure I stare Warren right in the eye when I slowly pick up a piece of bacon and start eating it.

I know I’m going to get in trouble for this, a lot of trouble. But I can’t help but like the trouble. Right now my asscheeks

hurt from the impact play with various whips we did yesterday and there's some nice bruising on there. It's going to see every color of the rainbow before it'll fade away.

"Everything alright here darlings?" Deanna comes and asks.

"No," I answer immediately. "This man is trying to steal my bacon. I'd like to report a crime."

Deanna laughs, Warren sighs and cocks his head in such a way that I know I'm going to get punished for this.

"Can I have a plate of bacon, please?" Warren asks Deanna. Which takes out all the fun of this breakfast. We don't go out for breakfast often, usually we just have a little something to eat. But we decided to spend some quality time together today. Jack is outside in the car sleeping his heart out. Sometimes I think he's part cat if I see how much he loves napping. Then again, he needs to go on several multiple hours a day walks to be a happy dog, so maybe he deserves some naps.

"What's that?" Hanson, the mayor of Dutch Harbor, says.

"What?" Deanna asks, following Hanson's look outside. We all do. There's a huge plume of smoke coming from the main street where all the stores are. There are no smokers or chimneys there – simply put, there shouldn't be any smoke there at all.

"Fire!" someone yells outside. I have no idea who it is but damn, they got some lungs.

We all stand up as one, making our way to the door. Deanna is on her cellphone, calling the fire department, but from her reaction I can see they already know.

We follow the loud man whose name I don't know, and now that he's got a decent crowd he runs back to the fire. It's not like in the olden days where we can get water out of a well, fill it with buckets and help put out the fire.

Instead we uselessly run outside, just to find out it's the back of the bookstore that's on fire. The bookstore, that's directly beneath my apartment. My heart starts hammering in my chest. It's so hard I can literally feel it palpitate throughout my whole body.

It's not like there's much in that apartment. I never made it my home. But it's got the last remnants of my old life I had and I can't help but wonder if the fire was strategically placed because the poachers found out where I live and they're trying to scare me away.

They've obviously never met a biker.

That's the moment the fire department arrives. They don't fit in the tiny alley with the firetruck. Firemen start ushering people away, so we get driven back. Once they have enough space, they roll out the water hose and start hosing down the fire. Two completely dressed firemen go inside through the backdoor when they get the chance. The fire is all the way at the right of the store, while the door is all the way at the left.

All I can think about are the endless stacks of books that are going to go up in flames if the fire isn't put out quickly enough. It's quite brilliant actually, to set a bookstore on fire. There's enough flammable material to make sure the fire is a success.

Warren wraps his hands around my waist while we watch together how the firemen work together from inside the building and the outside to get the fire under control. It takes a few minutes, but to my surprise the fire begins to shrink and die down.

We all stare in awe at how the fire eventually dies down. There's a huge hole in the wall and we can see the inside of the bookstore. Some books definitely didn't survive the fire, but I can see stacks of books that did survive. I just don't know what the water damage might have done.

I don't even care what state my apartment is in. The flames never reached it and I'm sure the few mementos I have will be fine, but I'm getting the hell out of there.

My gut tells me that it's me they're after.

The firemen start coming out after what feels like an eternity. They spend time watering the place that burned even though the fire is gone. I guess they have to make sure the fire

is completely gone. The men are looking around, scouring the ground, getting samples and what not.

A man in full firefighter's outfit approaches us and I don't know if it's me or Warren he's after. He keeps exchanging looks between the two of us. Maybe he's team no PDA. Which reminds me we should all be team no PDA at the moment, but being held by the man I love seems more important right now.

"Chief," Warren says when the man reaches us. The tag on his jacket tells me he's called Bob Mains and I've never seen the man before in my life. I can't see much of him now, because he's still wearing his helmet, but his eyes are distinguishable. The whole ordeal gets made a lot easier when he takes his helmet off and combs a hand through his salt and pepper hair.

"Warren," he greets back, giving me a nod. "Thoughts on what happened?"

"You're asking me?" Warren replies in confusion.

"It's your boyfriend's apartment the fire was started beneath," he grumbles.

"Was it started though?" I blurt, inviting myself into a conversation I held no part in before.

Bob grunts, which seems to be his preferred method of communication. I know the kind of language, we spoke it fluently in the MC. Bob seems to take me in and form an opinion about me or something. He sucks in air through his teeth, seems to come to the conclusion that he can talk freely to me and then it's like Bob doesn't know how to shut up.

"Well, we can't be for certain, yah know? We have to wait until official test results are in. But it reeked of gasoline. And Lord knows that most of Unalaska that is inhabited reeks of gasoline, but this *reeked* of gasoline." Then he leans in towards Warren, "But that's just between us for now, okay?"

"What's your theory? I know you have one Bob," Warren says, still not letting me go.

"My theory is that this was meant for him," Bob says, nudging his chin at me. "That's why I'm coming to talk with

you. You have a habit of taking in these strays, and you told us all about those poachers, so maybe you can help spread word around so we can warn others if necessary?"

My stomach squeezes.

"Do you think these were the poachers?" I ask.

Bob tilts his head, "Why'd you say that?"

"They saw me a few days ago. What if they found out who I was?"

"I thought it had something to do with who you really are," Bob whispers.

I'm stunned.

Warren lays his head on my shoulder and whispers in my ear: "Bob has a running theory that I bring people here for other reasons than the pure goodness of my heart." Then he winks at Bob and I know he knows.

For a second I think about my trip on the crab ship, and running into Morrey on Captain Phil's trip, but I just know he'd never rat me out. More gut feeling.

"Let's assume that this is the work of the poachers. Then they're actively pursuing us now," Warren says.

"Which is exactly what we expected, isn't it?" I say. I mean, we didn't break up for multiple days over nothing. I didn't fight to get to stay here.

"I'll inform the local authorities," Bob says. He combs his hair again, even though it's still as big a mess as it was when he took off his helmet. "Let's hope this situation gets solved quickly. We don't need trouble like this in Unalaska."

I think about the morning I spent with Eddie and had looked over the water with the rising sun and the pod of humpbacks that were swimming. Other than hoping that the inhabitants of Unalaska and Dutch Harbor get some peace, I hope those giant magnificent creatures don't get killed anymore.

"I'm never going back there," I say, looking up to the window that is my apartment. "Quit the lease."

“Bob, leave us,” Warren says in that tone that I only know from when we’re in scene. It’s impossible to ignore.

Bob smirks, gives us a nod and then turns around to talk to the sheriff instead of us.

“You want to move in with me, Pup?”

“Think about it,” I say on a whim. “If I’m not on the lease, I’m even harder to trace.”

“I don’t lease the cabin, I own it, but that’s besides the point. Don’t you think you should ask correctly, though?”

It takes me a second to realize what he means, but then I surrender myself to being his, to being owned, to belonging to him and only him. “Can I move in with you, Master?” I ask as loudly as I dare with all the people in the vicinity.

A smile appears on his face. With his index finger he lifts my chin and I look at him through my eyelashes. “Yes, you may, Pup.”

And God, the butterflies. Nobody ever told me fire could conjure butterflies. But here we are.

So I kiss him. I kiss him so deeply I can feel it in my toes. Is this what people feel like when they’re in love?

We slowly back away from the alley, seeing that most of the town has gathered and is trying to get a peek at what happened. For a while the world just consisted of Warren and me and now I’m returning back to reality.

“What was stored there?” Mister Stone whisper-speaks.

“I think it’s the biography section,” a woman who frequents Deanna’s says, but I don’t know the answer. Which is probably for the best, because if she’s a biography person we’re not going to get along.

“The smut was stored in the front, right?” Sugar asks.

“Yeah,” I say before I think it through.

“Thank god,” I hear multiple women say throughout the crowd, and I smile. I’m not the only one who likes to read dirty little stories. I’m sure that if this were the nineties and the

video store was set on fire all the men would be relieved if the
porn section made it out unharmed.

I sigh.

Another new beginning.

But this time I'm excited.



“He really said he was on his period so he couldn’t come?” Meryll asks me, laughing loudly.

“Right before he walked up the stairs, dropped trou and jumped into bed, pulling the duvet over his head,” I answer fondly. Dom had pulled a really long day before, him and the guys from the shop doing an emergency fixing on a ship that took longer than they wanted. He was knackered when he got home and he’s still tired now.

“That boy doesn’t necessarily need any more muscle though,” Meryll says.

“No, but he needs to stay fit,” I say, raising my eyebrows suggestively.

Another booming laugh.

Meryll and I make a round through all the gym equipment and when it’s needed Meryll yells at me like he’s some kind of drill sergeant. And I actually listen to him. Meryll might be the exception to the way I can rule someone as a Dom. He just doesn’t give a fuck how I talk to him, he’ll do whatever he thinks is wise. And because he’s my friend he gets to tell me what to do.

“Did you ever hear anything from Braden?” he asks me when I’m swinging two gigantic ropes and making them roll like a snake.

“Months ago I got a text about his KitchenAid. He was missing it.”

“That’s weird.”

“No, it isn’t,” I say with a smile on my face while I lean with my forearms on my knees, catching my breath in the rest period in between.

“What’d you do?”

“I kept the damn thing.”

“Warren Philips, what did you do?” Meryll asks with the biggest smile ever. He looks at me like a groom who turns around on his wedding day when he finally sees his bride for the first time.

“I kept it. He was more in love with that thing than with me and I was feeling petty at the time.”

The warehouse fills with more laughter. Meryll comes over to hit me on the shoulder. “That’s awesome. Start your next set by the way.”

I sigh, feeling my muscles ache already. I hate those fucking ropes. But I listen and I start another round, all because Meryll said so.

“So, Braden was all just a huge mistake?” my best friend asks.

I take a moment to consider how I feel about that. “Not a huge mistake. He taught me that vanilla relationships just don’t cut it for me. I need the kink. Some things in my brain are wired differently and that’s okay. But it simply gives an error when I try to make it act normally. So I have Braden to thank for that.”

“Go harder, you’re talking too easy,” Drill Sergeant Meryll demands.

I stop talking and finish my set strong. Then I let myself drop on the mat, starfishing it and trying to catch my breath.

“Maybe I should send him the KitchenAid back,” I say.

“Nah, keep the damn thing. I never liked him. His dishes were way too delicate. We Alaskan men need big plates and full bellies. And he was way too twinkie for you.”

I snort. “Braden wasn’t a twink by a long shot.”

“Compared to Dom? Definitely.”

“Since when are you an expert about guys? As far as I know you’re a tits kind of man.”

“Ass and tits, actually. But that’s besides the point. Dom is a real guy. One you need. Even if you have your dynamic going. You have both. The relationship and the dynamic. I think that’s what you’ve been missing all your life. You had Jack, and you’re his alpha, but you need to be someone else’s alpha too.”

I look at him with wide eyes. “When did you become so smart?”

For some reason he turns crimson then.

“What?” I demand.

He doesn’t answer because I exude my dominance, but he answers because he’s my friend and we tell each other things. That’s just the way the world works. “I’ve been taking some online classes.”

“What online classes?”

“Well, Psychology.” He stays silent for a moment before he adds, “At the University of Alaska.”

I manage to get upright from my exhausted starfish position and look him in the eye. “Just like that? You just secretly decide to go to college just like that? Get a degree? And in psychology? How’d you get there?”

“It was Kaya’s idea. She said how good I was with the kids and staying calm and explaining things and listening. And I just had a kind of ‘Fuck it’ moment and did it. Since Covid they offer everything online as well, so there really wasn’t anything holding me back.”

“Look at you,” I say proudly. “I’m almost inclined to throw a ‘good boy’ your way.”

“Don’t use that shit on me,” Meryll says, but he’s smiling and I can see that he’s proud of himself as well. As he should be.

“I’d never tie you up with your knees near your head so I could spank your ass raw,” I say. He *hates* it when I say shit like that about him. He doesn’t have a kinky bone in his body and that’s fine. We all have our own lives.

He rolls his eyes. “Don’t make me make you work out even harder,” he threatens. Then he extends a hand to help me up from the floor. We’re grabbing each other’s forearms and when I get up we’re pretty close and eye to eye. “So we’re both doing really great,” he summarizes.

“We are.”

“And you love Dom.”

I nod, thinking about that stubborn yet gorgeous man hiding beneath the blankets to get out of doing a workout.

“I’m sending that KitchenAid back,” I claim, meaning every bit of it.

It’s time to let go and accept my new life.

Later that day we’re at Jen’s house. Normally we’d go to my mother’s for Sunday dinner, but Jen wanted to host this evening. She does so a couple of times a year, usually when there’s been a Gordon Ramsay marathon on some cooking channel she likes to watch.

My mother lets her. I think it’s a rite of passage of a kind.

Dominic opens the door without knocking. He’s become so ingrained in our family he feels secure enough to do that and I love that for him. I can’t express how happy it makes me that he gets to experience what it’s like to have a family after the disastrous first run he had with his psychotic father and brother.

“We’re here!” I yell.

“The beef wellington is almost burning!” Jen yells in panic as a way of greeting.

I smile at the familiarity – dinners that do not take place at my parents’ place turn into a disaster, but they’re the fondest memories I have.

Oliver comes storming down the stairs. He's wearing a Captain Jack Sparrow outfit he got for Halloween. He's a peculiar boy, but I love him so dearly. Me? I no longer exist in his world. It's all Dominic. He jumps down from halfway down the flight of stairs and to his luck Dominic catches him.

"I've got a jar of dirt!" Oliver says.

Josh comes into the hallway to properly invite us in. "He's really got a jar of dirt. We had to go dig in the hard frozen ground to get him a jar of dirt. Guess who got to do the digging? Spoiler alert: It wasn't our good friend Captain Jack Sparrow."

We all laugh.

"Hey," Dom says while booping Oliver's nose. "Is this the day I caught Jack Sparrow?"

"Damn," Oliver says.

"Language," Josh calmly says.

"But you and Mom say it all the time! That's not fair!"

"That sounds like a you problem, young man, not like a me problem," Josh says before taking our coats and hanging them on the coat rack. For how terrible a host Jen is, Josh is marvelous. It's like he's had butler training or something.

Oliver deliberately turns his back towards his father and starts babbling to Dom, who he wants to know everything about ships from. Dom gives in and tells him all he wants to know. I bet they're going to be buddies for life.

We get ushered to the dining room, which I know hardly ever gets used because they usually eat in front of the TV. Both Josh and Jen say it's not worth the fighting to make the kids eat in the dining room where they eat nothing while they eat without giving a peep when the TV is on.

We greet my parents, who are already sitting at their designated spots. The table is set with the nice tableware and there are already various plates filled with side dishes. And most of it looks really good. They look like Gordon Ramsey dishes indeed and it makes me inwardly smile.

When I sit down, Liv comes towards me and crawls on my lap. She's at the age she still desperately wants to hug like a little kid, but is beginning to feel a little self aware. Some of her classmates don't show affection anymore, so she has a hard time doing so.

I give her a hug and kiss her cheek before she cuddles into me.

"How are you doing, buttercup?" I ask.

She sighs dramatically, like she carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. "I failed the world, Uncle Warren."

I raise a brow. "I don't think you failed the world. Why do you say that?"

"Becoming vegan isn't doable here. They just don't sell the things I need," she pouts. "Dad took me shopping just when all the cargo had arrived and the supermarket was fully stocked, and I couldn't find the things I needed."

"Unalaska just doesn't sell hummus, honey," Josh says while he carries in plates of food that he set before my parents. He then walks back to help Jen get more plates.

"You tried, Liv. That's what matters. And you made us commit to meatless Mondays, so you didn't fail the world," Jen says, looking at one of the beef wellingtons that is a little burnt before she places it in front of her own seating.

"You could never fail the world," I tell Liv. "You're way too smart, kindhearted and inventive for that. I'd bet my cabin on it."

We chatter for a bit until all the plates are on the table and both Oliver and Liv get told to get off our laps and onto their own seats.

Jen tells us all to tuck in and we do so gladly. Dishes are being passed around so everyone can fill their plates with the things they want to eat. In terms of my sister's cooking skills, tonight seems very hopeful.

"So, what's new?" my father casually asks, looking at Dom and me very deliberately.

“Well,” I start, scraping my throat. I want to say something to let them know I know they know I am a Dom, but I have to do so in a way that Liv and Oliver don’t catch on. “As you’ve noticed Dom and I are back together. And eh, well, I’m Dom too.”

Oliver starts to giggle. “No, you’re Uncle Warren, silly.”

My mother throws her hands in the air and gives me a huge smile “Oy vey, finally he tells us.”

“Told you it was the only sensible thing to say,” Jen says, referring to the talk we had after Dom and I just broke up.

I roll my eyes. At all of them.

Liv tilts her head. “I don’t understand it,” she says.

“And you won’t until you’re eighteen,” Josh says. “Then Uncle Warren can explain it himself to you.”

Everyone keeps bickering, but Dom grabs my hand beneath the table and gives it a squeeze. It’s nice to know that you’re supported by family no matter what. And he’s finding that in my family. He doesn’t have to say the words for me to know how happy he is to experience this side of having a family.

This dinner is exactly what we all needed.



“I still don’t get it,” I say while I try to fix a valve for a ship that has been severely damaged after a run in with an unknown rock formation. “You have no images inside your head and you have no inner voice?”

“No,” Tiny Nick simply answers while he makes sure all the parts I need are assembled and ready to be installed.

“But I’ve seen you in the bookstore,” I say as if that explains everything. It’s an ancient argument I’ve been having with whoever I run into who doesn’t see images in their head or have an inner voice. I’m an extremely vivid person. I’ll see everything you say to me and have conversations with the voice in my head. It’s just part of me.

“So?”

“How are you able to read if you don’t hear what you read or if you don’t see what’s happening?”

Nick squints. “I just process what I read.”

“But how do you remember what you’ve read if you haven’t heard or seen it?”

He rolls his eyes. “Because I’ve just fucking read it and I remember stuff.”

“And you don’t hear the thing you remember with a voice in your head and you don’t see an image of it?”

“No.”

This is so frustrating. It’s something I’ve never been able to comprehend. And nobody can explain it to me because I simply can’t experience what they experience and vice versa.

“So if I say pink elephant...” Tiny Nick says, looking at me like I’m the odd one out.

“Then I see a pink elephant in my mind’s eye,” I answer, seeing a pink elephant. For some reason it’s wearing a tutu and walking over a cord in a circus while holding a pink umbrella.

“I have the voice,” Mano says, interfering in our conversation. “But not the mental images.”

I look at him in what he probably thinks is disgust, because that’s a version I’ve never even considered or heard from.

“No way.”

“Way,” Mano says while he and Bash reattach a part to the motor of a ship.

Eddie comes rolling in on his desk chair. “You all sound like a bunch of girls with all that chattering. You should be working.”

“That’s sexist,” Bash says.

Eddie grunts, acknowledging what Bash said without saying it out loud. “Still, all of you talk too much?”

“Do you have an inner voice and see images in your head?” Mano asks.

“What do you mean?” Eddie asks.

“Well, for example, if you read something, you see the characters do what you’re reading in your inner eye. Or you talk to yourself in your head, hearing the voice out loud. That kind of thing.”

“Doesn’t everyone have that?” he says with a quizzical look on his face.

“See!” I shout. “It’s totally normal to think that’s the only way there is.”

“Yeah, I have an inner voice and I see things in my mind’s eye. I don’t know what it has to do with fixing ships, but I do know it was a curse right after Damian disappeared. The image of him floating near the bottom of the ocean drove me crazy. I just couldn’t get the image out of my head.”

That shuts us all up.

Eddie sighs. “Now I’ve depressed myself. How about you all go to the bar and get drunk, first round is on me, and I go home to my lovely wife and drink old scotch with her while staring in the fire.”

I don’t care what anyone thinks, but I clean my hands on the towel I have tucked in my back pocket, go over to Eddie and give him the biggest bear hug I can.

He sniffs before I let him go.

“Now go, all of you. Be young. I’m proud of you all for not being peer pressured to go onto the ocean and make a quick buck. You’re all fine guys, you’re polite, you’re fun, and you work hard. And you make a new pot whenever the old one is empty. So go, and live life – because it’s a gift. Let an old man be sentimental, you go be young and foolish.”

I swallow hard. I’m so lucky to have found an apprenticeship with this man. I’m so incredibly thankful for having a good role model in my life for change.

It’s an hour before we normally close shop, but we listen to our boss, because it’s the right thing to do, and who doesn’t like an early weekend? So we tidy our work benches, we put the materials away, and we get freshened up before we get ready to go.

I see Bash hugging Eddie before we leave and we step into the cold winter air outside. It’s only like a three minute walk to the bar, but I swear I’m damn near a popsicle before we reach the bar. I’m so glad for the warmth inside. All the times I cussed at the Nevada heat I take back. I’d give anything right

now to drive over a warm sandy road and feel the sun burn on my cheeks.

Fuck. I'm going to lose my tan.

We get inside and get a round of shots on the house. There's all kinds of colors in the tiny shot glass and I have no idea what's in it, but it burns in my throat and is so sweet that I know this shot alone is going to get me drunk. It's smart business though, because drunk people spend more money than sober ones.

Tiny Nick walks through the crowd, his size making people step out of the way, and gets us an empty standing table to stand at.

I get everyone's orders and make my way to the bar. We're very different people, drinking very different drinks. I just go for my plain and simple beer, especially after that shot we just had. Mano is having tequila, Bash is having a goddamn pornstar and Tiny Nick is having scotch on the rocks.

When I make my way through the crowd I get greeted by several people. I'm glad to say I know them all. I'm really putting down some roots here, and it's never felt better.

I get greeted with yells and cheers when I make it back to the table with the drinks. We all lift our glasses before we yell 'To Eddie' and start drinking. I'm in no rush though.

"So what's everyone been up to?" I ask just to get the conversation started. I don't want to continue the conversation about my fascination about mind's eyes and having an inner voice.

"Sugar moved in completely," Mano says. She had been living in a tiny apartment because she spends most of the time at sea and doesn't want to waste money on a big apartment. Mano on the other hand is home every evening, so he has a nice apartment with enough space. They're going to need it to make a baby room anyway. I know Mano tried to keep Sugar on land with her pregnancy, but she wouldn't hear any of it. She said that the moment her belly was bigger than her boobs, she'd stay at home or she'd join the team as a chef. The ship

she currently works on doesn't have an inhouse chef, so that could be a blessing in disguise.

I adore Sugar. She's a badass and a sweetheart at the same time. She's exactly what Mano needs and I'm happy that they've found each other.

"I got a third date on Friday," Tiny Nick says, twirling the ice in his drink before he takes a sip.

"Whoo, third one boy!" Mano yells in enthusiasm. "Who's the lucky girl?"

"Old Morgan's daughter," Tiny Nick answers, his cheeks turning red. He's shy. He opens up when he's with us, but he's shy anyway.

"She's pretty," Bash says.

"I don't think I know her," I say, scrunching my face and trying to think who he means exactly.

"She works the desk at the pharmacy," Tiny Nick helps.

And now I do know who he means. "Ah, you're lucky, she's gorgeous indeed."

"I know," Tiny Nick says with a knowing smile on his face. I hope at least he gets lucky tonight.

"How about you, Bash?" Mano asks.

Bash stays quiet for a long time, then he drinks his pornstar and looks all of us in the eye before he tries to speak. His mouth opens up a few times, but no sounds come out. Then, after what is maybe thirty seconds, he starts talking.

"I'm coming to terms that I like boys instead of girls," he says, his voice hardly above a whisper.

"There's something in the air here that makes guys like dick," Mano says, looking around as if he can see it floating through the air.

I laugh, because, well, he looks ridiculous. "That's not the way to respond to someone coming out," I say. Then I turn to Bash. "Welcome to the club, it's fun, we got dick over here."

Now Tiny Nick begins to laugh. “Yeah, that’s what every kid wants to hear when they come out to their parents.” Then he puts his arm around Bash. “We love you no matter who you like, even if it’s boys. Now drink your pornstar, get wasted and be proud of yourself for being brave enough to tell us.”

A smile appears on Bash’s face. His eyes seem a little blurry. “Thanks guys!”

My phone rings and I see that it’s Warren, so I answer immediately. “Where are you?” he says.

“Well hello to you too,” I say sarcastically. “Why do you want to know?”

“Because I came to pick you up at Eddie’s to go to the bar, but everything is dark and locked up.”

“Eddie let us go early, we’re already at the bar.”

Silence at the other end of the line. “Would it be too much to ask to let me know these things?”

Feeling cheeky, I answer “Yes” and feel my smile go from ear to ear.

“I’ll be there in five,” Warren says.

“I’ll make sure someone gets you a drink,” I answer before we both hang up. The smile doesn’t disappear from my face. I have a boyfriend, everyone can know and accept it. I can flaunt it. Fuck, despite those poachers I’ve never been more happy in my life.

Mano, having heard the conversation because he’s a gigantic snoop, goes to the bar and orders Warren a drink.

Meanwhile I look at Bash. “If you’ve got questions, don’t be shy.”

It’s the wrong thing to say, because it makes Bash extremely shy. His face turns red and he doesn’t make eye contact with me anymore.

I watch Warren coming in, halting in the opening of the door and looking around until he spots us. His face goes from business to joy in point two seconds. He makes his way to us,

heads straight towards me, grabs my head with both his hands and kisses the shit out of me.

“Hi there,” I say when I finally get released.

“Hi there yourself,” he answers.

“You’re in a good mood.”

“I missed you. And now I have you, so of course I’m in a good mood.” He says while turning me around, dipping me and kissing me again. This time he puts some heat into it.

“You two are sickening,” Tiny Nick says, but I can hear the smile in his voice.

“No, what’s sickening is what I’m going to do to him now that I’m going to drag him to the toilets.”

Mano puts his fingers in his ears and pretends he doesn’t want to hear us. I think Warren is joking, but when I feel a firm hand on my arm, pulling me along towards the toilets. I’m laughing all the way there, because he’s a man on a mission.

He opens the doors as if they personally insulted them and pushes me in the stall furthest from the door, locking it.

“Not a word,” he demands before his nimble fingers find the button of my pants and he undoes them.

He pulls my pants down and my dick starts to harden. It was already half-mast from the kisses in the bar and the way he seems desperate to see me, but now I’m rapidly growing even harder.

Warren gets on his knees, licks my cock from base to tip and takes the tip in his mouth. I’m rock hard by now, and even though this wasn’t on my to-do list for today, I can barely wait for it.

He never disappoints.

Even with all the barbells he manages to take my cock all the way to the back of his throat. It’s a tremendous treat, because most of the time when we’re in play I’m forced to

suck his dick. It's the moments we're not Dom and sub that he sucks mine. Which has made me appreciate it even more.

He gags, but keeps going, taking my dick all the way in his throat. I can feel myself pass something, but he doesn't seem to mind. The feeling is divine. It doesn't last forever though, he needs to breathe.

Warren starts bobbing his head, holding the tip of my cock in his mouth at all times, sucking it and rolling his tongue around it. But no matter how hard he tries, the barbells touch his teeth, making clinking noises.

He takes my dick all the way to the back again and I lose it, shooting my load directly in his throat. That was probably the fastest he ever made me come and I don't know to be proud or ashamed.

Warren looks satisfied, I *feel* satisfied, and let my Master pull up my boxers and my pants again, all with a huge smile on his face. He gets up from his knees, gives me a quick peck and then grabs my hand to lead me out of the stall.

There's a guy washing his hands by the sink who sees us coming out of the booth together, but he just smiles and salutes to Warren in the mirror. Guess this is more normal here than I thought it was.

We make it back to the table, where the guys start rooting for us and we simply grab our drinks as if nothing happened.

Life?

Life is good.

Life is better than I ever had imagined.



“Goddammit Bill,” I say while I hug the bear of a man. “Why’d you guys have to go and be so stupid?”

Bill is one of my witnesses. He sold out the Hueva Cartel and in exchange he got to go into WITSEC. He was lucky, because he did all the bookkeeping for them and he could’ve been sent away for a really long time. Instead he testified and he came to Unalaska.

And now he’s going.

Because the idiots had found each other. They refuse to tell how they located each other – but now that their enemies know the location of the other witness, Bill’s location has been compromised as well. Meaning he has to leave.

I’ve picked him up and now we’re at the airport, waiting for Lance to come take him to his new location. Bill has begged for a warmer location, but he doesn’t exactly get a say. They just try to find the best fit based on where his enemies are located.

“I can still give you advice about investments,” Bill says hopefully.

I slap his shoulder. “Bill, buddy, I don’t want to hear anything from you. Don’t put my other witnesses in danger. We’ve got enough excitement going on here without enemies who will come to get revenge.”

Bill snorts. “Most of them will freeze to death anyway.” He really didn’t get adjusted to the weather, hating the cold with a

vengeance.

“Let’s not try it.”

Lance comes walking out of the terminal, immediately hiding his nose in his coat.

Bill and I grab each other’s forearms and pull into a hug.

“Behave,” I say, and he fucking winks.

Lance reaches us, shaking his head.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“I hate Unalaska.”

“Same,” Bill says.

“More for me,” I answer. I’ll never get enough of the nature here, the people, the community. This is my forever home and that’s something that will never change.

Bill steps away from me when Lance asks if he’s ready, and he nods and goes along with the field Marshal. He waves me goodbye for the last time and that’s the last I’ll ever see of Bill. I wonder if he gets to keep his name or if he has to change that part of his identity as well.

I let him go when I see him stepping inside the airport. That was that and with that my job is done. I’ve always been able to let go when I have to. Except for Dom. Even when I wanted him to go away to be safe, I didn’t want to let him go. Love is such a fucking weird thing.

I inhale deeply, letting the cold air expand my lungs as far as possible while I walk back to my car. It was a rush job to get all those involved to a new location as quickly as possible. We can do our jobs as best we can as handlers, but we see a yearning to their old lives and they reach out in some kind of way. For some it gets too much, and they make mistakes. I even understand it in some cases. But reaching out to your old cartel buddies is something I can’t really find any empathy for. These men, boys, have just been idiots.

Once I’m in my car I decide to drive through Dutch Harbor and see if I can pick Dom up to grab some lunch. I try not to

disturb him while he's at work, he's got his own thing going over there and I don't want to intervene. But every time I'm there, I'm treated as one of their own.

It's a short drive from the airport to the harbor, but even before I'm there I see something happening in the bay. I stop my car on the road which is quite a distance from the shoreline. I grab a pair of binoculars that I have in my car for hunting purposes and watch.

And what I see almost makes my heart stop. It's the poachers. They're unloading crates from the ship to a speedboat and bringing it to a truck that's parked on the beach. There are a lot of fucking crates.

I do a quick headcount and end up on way too many men to take up on my own. I grab my phone and call local authorities to tell them and give them their location, but as I'm doing so, I find one of the poachers with binoculars staring right back at me. My hands get clammy and I can feel my heartbeat everywhere.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Three of the poachers run to a car that stands next to the truck, and I don't think they're doing that because they want to ride through the nice landscape of Alaska.

I quickly put away the binoculars, start the car up again and floor the gas to get away. The roads, especially this one, are salted so people can get to the airport safely, but the more inland I'll get the icier the roads will get. I'm used to these circumstances, I've lived them my whole life. My hope lies in the fact that the poachers can't ride icy roads and I'll be able to lose them.

Looking in my rearview mirror, I can see they're following in pursuit.

Instead of staying on the main road I take one of the side roads. It's a bumpy little forest road that leads to the other side of Dutch Harbor and is hardly ever used, because why drive over unhardened road when you've got a perfectly fine paved road to take you to the same place?

The poachers follow me, and to my horror they seem to gain terrain.

Then I hear the first shot.

My heart seems to stop for a second and my breathing quickens. My knuckles are white from holding the steering wheel too hard. I just have to trust in the fact that my car is equipped for weather conditions like these and I start driving faster, branches of trees hitting the side of my car every now and then.

A second shot is fired and shatters my back window. My front window stays intact so the bullet got stuck somewhere.

When I reach the end of the road I take a right and drive away as fast as the car can go. The back wheels drift when I hit a patch of black ice, but I manage to keep going.

A third shot goes wide. Or well, I think it does, because I don't feel any impact.

When I look back to see how much ground they gained I see that the poachers have run into the same patch of black ice, only they haven't been able to control their car because it's now spun backwards and has come to a halt.

I don't wait – I just make sure to drive as fast and as far as I can, until after what feels like an eternity I reach my cabin.

Only when I'm inside and I've locked the door again and I've sat down for a good minute, I grab my phone, call the police and tell them what happened and where the car with poachers ended up. I have no idea if they're still there, but on the off chance they are someone better go look.

Jack comes to me and presses his wet nose against my hands, making room for himself to lay his head on my leg, offering me silent comfort for something he doesn't understand. All he knows is that I'm distressed. So I tap on the couch next to me, where he isn't supposed to come, which he knows.

He gives me a confused doggy answer, but I comfort him that it's okay.

And then the sixty pound husky turns into a lapdog as he crawls onto me. I have to find a place to put my face just to be able to breathe.

Jack talks continuously, like he usually does and that normality is indeed comforting.

My fingers go through his fur as I keep stroking him, holding on to my dog to feel myself come to my senses.

Fucking hell, what if they saw my license plate and they're coming for me? They somehow found out where Dom lived, so who's to say they won't find out where I live? My mind is going over various situations, all leading to the conclusion that I'm a stupid asshole for stopping and looking what's going on. This is one mess I made myself.

I don't know how long I sit there, with a noisy dog and a messy head, but at one point the front door opens, and I was sure I locked it. My heart rate peaks, because what if they did find me.

I push Jack off my lap with a 'down boy' and look towards the front door, where Dom is standing.

Now I'm getting paranoid too – I think there are intruders coming to my house instead of my boyfriend who has a key and can unlock the door.

"What are you doing here?" I ask him. My hands are still shaking a little and I put them beneath my legs so Dom won't see it.

"Vic," he says, mentioning one of the local police men. "Came to the shop to tell what had happened and thought that in all the commotion you might have forgotten to tell me what happened. Which is exactly right. Did you lose my number, Master?" he says while he moves to the kitchen.

He puts on the kettle and starts rummaging through cupboards.

"I'm sorry," I say, feeling truly stupid for forgetting to inform him. For some reason I'm used to doing everything myself, holding the reins, that I forget to let other people help me.

“You’re unharmed?” he asks coolly. For me this might be something I’ve never encountered, but this was his reality before he came here. A few bullets don’t make him use the dog as a living weighted blanket. And here I am, a mess.

“Just a little shaken, no physical harm,” I say, resuming my petting of Jack, who has wiggled himself between my legs. It’s also excellent therapy to make my shaking hands do something.

“Was it cumin or chamomile?” Dom asks, searching the cupboards in the kitchen.

The fuck is he talking about? “What?”

“That calming tea shit. It was something with a c. But there’s all kinds of shit here and I don’t remember.”

I snort, take one look at Dom’s face who is serious as all hell and start laughing out loud. The deep belly laughs last so long that they start to ache and the kettle starts whistling by the time I’m done.

“Chamomile,” I manage to say eventually, wiping the tears out of the corners of my eyes. I watch as Dom fumbles to make me a cup of tea. He might have been helping with making dinner and he can make tea when it comes in a bag, but the sight of him using a tea egg is spectacular.

He brings it over, puts it on the little side table and then pulls me against him. He takes the leg that is closest to him and pulls it over his leg. Then he reaches behind us, grabs one of the blankets that’s always on the couch and wraps it around me and part of Jack, because the dog isn’t going *anywhere*.

“I’m not cold,” I say.

“I’m usually not cold after we’ve played, but you wrap me up like a goddamn burrito anyway. It’s soothing. So shut up and let me take care of you for once.”

So I sit there, and I let my sub, my boyfriend, the hardened biker, soothe me until I get a phone call that the poachers got away from the beach before the authorities could arrive and the car on the road was abandoned.

I have a feeling that this is all going to lead to endless more problems, and while I'm as comfortable as I can be, this can never lead to anything good.



'Lover of almost all the 4A members pregnant?' the headline of the tabloid reads. I snort, because Evan would never. Not now anyway. And the band is way too busy with making music and touring. They're really on the way up ever since they broke with their management.

"What are you laughing about?" Warren asks me as he pushes the shopping cart forward.

I show him the front page of the tabloid and he takes it from me.

"Could she be?" he asks.

"No, not yet."

"Why?"

"Too many wild hairs, too many adventures to have, too scared for the lifelong responsibility. Can you imagine raising a kid with four unhinged rockstars?"

Warren tilts his head, considering what I just said and then nods. We're doing our weekly groceries, just like everyone seems to be doing. The cargo came in yesterday and they shelved everything last night, so all the inhabitants of Unalaska try to be here as early as possible to get the things they want before the shop runs out. It's bullshit mostly,

because at the end of the day, all of the product is still there. Just a little less of it. Still, we are all drawn like moths to a flame when the store is fully stocked.

“Oh, there’s a whole chicken,” I say excitedly. We don’t eat much chicken here. Some of the inhabitants own their own stock, but it’s a hassle to keep them happy and healthy during the winter. They are susceptible to cold and need to be isolated and kept warm and happy. So not many people bother. The ones that do mostly eat their own chicken.

Which is a damn shame, because I like to eat chicken and the supermarket rarely stocks it. My fellow Unalaskans prefer the gamey meats or the fresh sea product.

Warren gives me a kiss on the side of my head. “You can take the boy out of the MC, but you can’t take the MC out of the boy.”

“Just so you know, if you’d have had a grill and one of the old ladies was placed here, she’d go out in the sub zero weather just to grill the damn chicken and tell you to go to hell with your tiny little rabbit.”

Warren starts laughing, grabs three whole chickens and resumes his way through the store. He just as casually throws lube in the cart as he does with the bananas. Another treat. They’re usually worthless by the time they arrive here. But sometimes when they’re extremely green when they get shipped off, they’re exactly right when we get them. So they disappear in the cart as well.

We quickly finish our route through the store, pay and bag everything and head home to the cabin to put everything away.

Jack was deep asleep when we arrived, and when the door opens he scares so badly he almost makes some kind of flip in the air.

We laugh about it, Jack showing us his teeth before he lies back down again and closes his eyes again.

I think it’s out of pure spite.

We put all the groceries away, and when I put away the last of the granola on the high shelf in the kitchen, I feel Warren

pressed against my back. I come down from my tiptoes, getting closer to his reach, feeling his lips on my neck.

“What are you up to?” I ask him, leaning into his embrace. He wraps his hand around my neck, sliding it up and making me tilt my head backwards.

“That depends on how you look at it,” he whispers, biting my earlobe.

“What are the options?”

“Well, it’s either that I’m up to no good at all, or I’m up to something that’ll feel really, really good.”

“Proceed,” I say, a smirk appearing on my face.

“As if you have a choice,” he answers.

“I like to pretend at least every once in a while I have something to say.”

“Oh my sweet summer child.”

I groan. “Don’t talk about summer. I miss the sun.”

Warren chuckles. “Well, let me find another way to get you warm.”

His free hand goes over my sweater, down to my pants – the exact same route my blood seems to be traveling. He unbuttons my pants and puts his hand beneath the waistband of my boxers. A shiver goes down my spine.

“Excited already?” he asks – which I indeed am going by the state of my half-hard dick.

“No, your hands are cold,” I tease him.

He grabs my cock, wraps his fingers around it and gives it a few slow pulls. “This here says differently.”

“You still have cold hands, you’re just really good at using those ice clumps.”

“Brat,” he says while releasing my neck to give me a face slap. It’s one of the things I had a hard time coming to terms with. The whole submissive thing I could make sense of; with my background and upbringing it isn’t so surprising to crave

someone else taking over the control and responsibilities. But why did I like getting slapped? Why did I like impact play? Why did pain make the sex even better?

I never figured it out. I just went with it.

“Do you smell that?” he suddenly says, halting everything that he’s doing.

“What?” I ask. I just want him to put his hand back in my pants and then do it like they do on the Discovery channel.

“Smoke. And I haven’t put on the wood furnace.”

I inhale deeply, and indeed smell smoke. My brows furrow. Warren takes a step back and I rebutton my pants.

Warren is already in the living room, trying to figure out where the smell is coming from, ending up in the corner of the living room that’s completely empty and doesn’t have anything flammable. Well, except for the cabin itself of course. It’s made out of wood, so that’ll always be flammable.

And then it hits me.

Outside.

Without taking the time to put on a coat I run towards the door. I look at the corner where we smelled the smoke and see two men trying to set the cabin on fire. They have some kind of fire enhancing stuff, but the cabin is treated with anti flammable products and since it’s the middle of the winter and there’s been non-stop snow, the wood is wet, making it harder for them to actually set a fire. Right now the fire is still tiny.

“Grab the fire extinguisher!” I yell to Warren. Right now I don’t really care about the two men who are trying to do this, I’m trying to save the only home I’ve ever known and want to know. When one of them pulls a gun I hide behind the banister next to the door and once again yell. “And maybe a gun!”

Two shots are fired, but they both miss, one of them getting stuck in the banister, one going God knows where.

Warren comes near, hands me a handgun and peeks around the corner. He looks determined, but I also know this is not his kind of scene. And twice in such a short time might be a little

too much for my tame Marshal. There's a small fire that is ever so slowly starting to spread, and I know we must get to it before it really sets the cabin on fire.

I inhale deeply, get myself in a state of mind where I no longer give a crap about the world, feel my heart rate come down and slowly lift myself so I can take aim and shoot. It's over in the blink of an eye. One of the guys is down on the ground, grabbing his knee, which is exactly where I wanted to shoot him.

The other one sees what happens, isn't looking forward to a shattered knee-cap, turns around and runs away.

"Throw your gun away," I yell to the one on the ground.

Bastard is smart enough to know when he sees defeat, so he throws the gun far away.

"Come on," I say to Warren, getting up and hurrying to where a small fire is smoldering. "You go put that fire out," I tell him. Perhaps I have some traits to be a Dominant in me after all. I'm just really good in high adrenaline kinds of situations, because I've been trained to stay calm. And in that calm I see everything clearly.

Warren starts spraying the fire with the extinguisher while I hold my foot lightly on the asshole's knee, having him under my control with one simple move. I grab my cell phone from my back pocket and call 911. I ask for police, EMTs and the fire department just to be sure. Who knows what's going on inside all that wood. I'd rather the professionals look at it.

Once the fire is out, Warren walks up to me, holds out the fire extinguisher and says, "Hand me the gun."

"Why?" I ask.

"It's my property. To me he was trespassing and I had every right to defend myself. Trust me, it's less complicated and things are complicated enough."

I see the wisdom in his words and we switch. Then I focus my attention on the fire starting pyromaniac beneath me. "You with those whale hunters?"

He looks away, keeping his mouth shut. So I let my foot come down a little more, increasing the pressure a bit. That alone hurts – but then I take the pressure off and I know that that exact moment hurts even more.

“I’m not asking again.”

“There’s enough of them, and it’s good money,” the guy says.

I put my foot back down again, just because I can. I look at Warren, trying to get a feel how he thinks about this old version of Dom.

He doesn’t seem bothered.

“Where are you docking and loading?” Warren asks. “When’s the next shipment due?”

“I’m not talking,” the guy says.

So I press down hard this time, and he screams.

“I don’t know, okay! I don’t know! I just wanted to make some quick money so I could help my grandmother out. They don’t tell me shit. All I do is carry crates.”

Looking down and actually staring at his face I believe him. He’s nothing more than a kid. A criminal, fire-starting kid, but a kid nonetheless. And I even believe him in regards to his grandmother.

“Who’s your grandmother?” Warren asks.

“Lavinia Ploth,” he says whimpering.

Warren sighs, turning to me. “She lives about an hour’s drive away from the town. She comes in every once in a while. I didn’t know she was sick. She always does things by herself.”

I nod. I’m inclined to believe him too and take my foot off his knee. “How’d you get in contact with the poachers?”

“They sought me out. Asked me if I wanted to make some money without having to go out to sea.”

Our conversation gets interrupted when the police and the fire department arrive. Everything becomes a blur then. EMTs look at the kid, police are asking a million questions, the fire department is checking everything.

And suddenly I've just had enough.

I'm tired, I'm cold, and I'm exhausted from everything that is going on. So I very brutally interrupt all conversations that are going on.

"Do you still need both of us?" I ask.

The head of police shakes his head because the response is so sudden, but then says that we're no longer needed. I grab Warren, push him on the couch and crawl on top of him, pulling a blanket over both of our heads.

"What are we doing?" he whispers.

"Fortress of solitude," I answer.

Warren chuckles, wraps his arms around me and holds me tight.

Me? I just wonder what's going to come next.



The answer to that question doesn't have a long wait. It's only three days later.

"Help!" Fynn yells while he runs into the bar where we're all gathered because it's Friday night and we've got nothing better to do.

The music is turned down immediately, because you don't yell help unless it's serious, even if it's in a bar. All eyes are turned to Fynn.

"Raymond just saw two big, gnarly guys take Mano onto an unknown ship and sail away. They took him away! I think it's the poachers!"

"Fuck!" I yell. Likewise profanities go through the bar and the bartender grabs the radio that's behind the bar, putting out a distress signal through channel sixteen letting all ships in the vicinity know to switch to a different frequency so they can all hear what is being said.

"Calling for aid, calling for aid, all ships in the vicinity of Dutch Harbor and Unalaska. An unmarked ship has just taken Mano from Eddie's shiphouse. Someone keep an eye on the beacons and the sonars, get your ships out to sea, put your lights on and see if we can find them!"

“The beacons are lit, Gondor calls for aid,” Meryll whispers, throwing his beer back at once while Kaya punches him in the arm.

My eyes get drawn to Sugar, who looks whiter than a ghost.

“Why did I have to get knocked up by such an idiot. Getting kidnapped.” She says it with her eyes staring in the distance, but I notice the hand on her belly on a bump that isn’t even there yet. Warren grabs her and pulls her close to his side.

“Okay, who’s still ashore and who can take some of us with them?” Sugar yells, finally fierce. Maybe it’s that tiny bit of Mexican blood rushing through her womb making her a badass, maybe it’s simply her being the woman who knows no fear. I mean, she did dare to get into a relationship with Mano.

Yells are going up with people who have ships ashore who can take people along and without an ounce of hesitancy I volunteer to come along.

Warren grabs my hand, breathes very deeply and says he’s coming on the same ship I’m going on.

I give him a confused look because I know he gets seasick and we need people on land too, but he just shakes his head and mouths the word ‘together’. And even in this time of distress, I feel nothing but the deepest love for the man. Not my Master, not my Dom, just my man, my life partner. And now we’re going to go out on the open sea to make sure someone else is getting her life partner back.

Sugar is giving out orders like she was born to do so, setting up a rescue mission among sailors who’ve been trained to act in situations like these. She’s staying ashore, helping with the logistics of the ships searching an area as wide as they can.

Life is weird.

Kaya, meanwhile, is calling the seventeen year old babysitter that they might be a little bit later, but seeing as she’s a fisherman’s daughter she understands and promises to take good care of the kids.

And then we’re all off. It’s chaos, but it’s made chaos. We follow Captain Ben, who we’ve been appointed to to go along

with. He's walking fast and I have to make big strides to keep up with him. Warren is right beside me and since he's smaller it's almost as if he's jogging to be able to keep up.

We reach a mid-sized green ship called 'Her Sweet Surrender' and part of my brain laughs at how fitting that name is. We walk the board and step on the ship, and the moment Warren stands on it his face turns green.

"Give me something to secure me to the side of the ship and a flashlight," he manages to say. "That way I can puke my heart out while I look out for the ship that took Mano."

One of the other shipmen comes with a rope and a clip to make sure Warren is secured.

It's a rough sea and it's dark and I have a bad feeling about this. Which sucks, because my feelings are usually right. I'm intuitive like that. We get handed big lanterns so we can shine on the water. The fact that the ship we're looking for is black is really annoying.

But we can't lose Mano, especially not now. Sugar and his baby need him. Mano is the light air in the shop we need when things get too heavy. He always has a way to make the day better, and we need that. Other than that I just love the guy. He has the worst jokes, he farts as if he has eaten chili the night before and he's always willing to lend a hand. His instructions are calm and clear and he's just one of the best people I've ever met.

He's my friend.

And they took him.

Anger takes over me while we sail the ocean and shine the lights in every direction. But all I see are other ships that are searching for Mano. Every now and then I hear Warren throw up, but the warming feeling that he's out here searching for Mano wins from how sorry I feel for him. He made his own choice, he's a big boy. Hell, he loves bossing me around, so he can make all his decisions for himself.

"Fuck," I swear when a particular high wave comes overboard and hits me full in the face. The salty water, the

wind, the waves – I hate them all right now.

I shine my lantern to the other side of the ocean and see a black ship, but it's not unmarked, it's one of our own, people holding lanterns to look for the poachers themselves.

It's been a long time since I've been as angry as I am right now. The last time I felt the need to do something was when I refused to shoot the people that came to save that little kid because Nathan wanted to kill Evan. I still wholeheartedly believe that I did the right thing. I'm less sure how honest it is that I'm in WITSEC. I did things that should land me in jail for several lifetimes.

Maybe Karma really exists and me single handedly disbanding Victorious earned me this second chance at a life.

I shake the feelings off. We're here on a mission. We need to find that ship and get Mano back. So I use my lightbeam to search the harsh and fucking empty ocean.

"We're going to pass right along rocky territory," Captain Ben says. "I should be able to navigate through it with satellite images but hold on tight just in case."

Warren is holding on tight anyway. It's like he believes that if he holds onto the railing hard enough he won't have to vomit, but he keeps on going. Somehow he manages to keep his flashlight on the ocean and look as best he can.

"Shipbreak!" one of Ben's own crewmembers yells. He flashes his light to the front port side of the ship. I rush over, shining my own lantern in the direction he's pointing too.

And indeed there's a tiny ship, more of a boat, out there, stuck on the rocks. They're taking on water and the crew is waving and yelling at us for help.

"We're going to help them," Ben says to us. Then he uses the emergency frequency of the radio to send out a message. "'The 'Ambrosia' has run into the rocks and has been shipwrecked. We're going to use our rescue vessel to get the shipmen."

Adrenaline rushes through my veins. I was already running high on it because Mano got taken, but we're not going to let

these men drown here. Eddie's story about Damian runs fresh through my mind and before I know it I'm on the rescue vessel clipped in safely so I don't fall overboard and drown myself.

The other shipper, who introduces himself as Daniel, steers the rescue vessel through the large and stormeous waves. It's a bumpy ride, and the darkness makes everything seem scary and empty. But the closer we get, the harder the calls for distress come.

When we are close enough we can see that there are four men, all wearing life gear and swimming vessels. I have no idea how they do it, but Daniel secures the rescue vessel to the Ambrosia and helps the men get on board. My task is to make sure they get on safely, get seated and don't fall into the ocean.

We're fucking saving people, we're going to get Mano back and we're absolutely not going to let those motherfucking poachers win.

Once everyone is on board, Daniel maneuvers us away from the Ambrosia, and somehow we all make it back safely aboard. We all stare at the tiny ship that gets crushed by the grueling waves, until Warren, green in the face at this point in time, reminds us we're on a mission.

The ship sails on, and we keep looking.

All we find are other ships that are looking out for Mano – there's no black unmarked ship to be found.

“Fuck, he was the very first to truly welcome me after Eddie gave me the grand tour of the shipyard.”

One of the guys we just saved falls in on the conversation. “He introduced me to my wife. His niece. She's a feisty one, but I'm thankful for it every day.”

Warren throws up again, then shines his light on the ocean and somehow manages to talk while he looks like he's going to throw up again. “I introduced Mano to Eddie. I was actually good friends with his father. We used to hunt together, and he wanted Mano to go crabbing, because that was where the money was back then. But I sensed in everything in Mano that he was not sea material – he's a landrat. So I introduced him to

Eddie, who saw what I saw and took him on as an apprentice. His father was pissed in the beginning, but when he saw Mano's gift with the technicalities and how happy he was, he relented."

Ben grunts. "It's so difficult for some parents to not expect their kids to follow their paths but pick their own."

"I'm sure that when Mano and Sugar have their baby they will let the kid do whatever he wants to do. I mean, Sugar is a real fisher. It's in her blood, there's no denying it. But Mano will make sure the kid is happy," I say, more confident than I actually feel.

"We just gotta find him first," one of the men of the Ambrosia says.

So we search in silence. And we look. We run into other ships. We find all kinds of things but we do not find an unmarked ship that has taken our buddy, our friend, our Mano.

And after another hour I'm starting to worry that we have to let him go for good.



My insides are sloshing harder than the waves that are crashing against the side of the ship. Did Mano really have to get taken while it's one of the stormiest days of the year, I think when another wave of vomit makes its way from my stomach to semi over the side of the ship, and semi on the railing. The fucking ship won't even hold still for me to vomit properly.

When I realize what a whiney bitch I'm being I tell myself to man up, even if I feel another wave of nausea taking me over.

They could've taken Dom. They wanted to take Dom. But the bastards finally realized that we all knew what they were doing, so it didn't matter who they took. Mano was just in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

What those motherfucking criminals didn't realize is that if you mess with one of us, you mess with all of us. And sailors are a kind of folk you don't want to mess with. They showed up. All of them.

Plus one seasick Marshal – but let's just say I'm here to show support.

My eyes are blurry, and this time it's not from the panic of being on open water. This time it's from knowing that Mano is gone. The poachers took him, and we're never going to see him back. The big hearted Mexican that was always more than ready to help out.

And now here we are – we all want to help him, but someone took him.

I give Dominic a pleading look – one he doesn't get from me all that often, usually he's on the other end of it. We just can't offer each other anything, there's nothing left to offer.

We're lost. At sea.

Not literally, because we apparently got radar and shit – but we're lost anyway. From all the guys at the shiphouse, Mano was our heart. He held us together when we needed it. He laid a hand on your shoulder when you didn't even know you needed it. And it wasn't just for the guys. It was for me as well. It was.

Mano was Mano.

He was always there, and he was there for everyone. Eddie made the right call that Mano wasn't right for the sea. It would've destroyed him. He was good hearted and brought everyone breakfast burritos when there were some left. And now? Now he was never going to meet his baby girl.

He was never going to dress up like a princess, drinking tea with her like that was the most normal thing in the world. He wasn't going to teach her his broken Mexican and he wasn't going to teach her how to check her own oil-levels.

All because some fucking assholes wanted to hunt animals that have been roaming the seas for millions of years to produce them into some medicine that nobody ever proved that worked. There were perfect alternatives to cod liver oil, but still we thought that eating whale penis would grant us magic powers. If it did, we'd have proven magic long ago.

Out on the sea more and more of the large searching lights die down.

I've never seen a more literal sign of hope dying down.

Dom? He isn't taking it. He's the hot head he's always been. He's standing on the bow of the ship, Titanic style, screaming at everyone to put their fucking lights back on and start searching right this fucking second again.

I don't have to see his face to know his face is red – he's taking this hard. Yes, Tiny Nick and Bash have been friends with Mano for longer, but it's Dom who adopted Mano as his brother. After losing everything and everyone, he gained Mano. He was going to be the uncle to that little girl whether she liked it or not. Hell, he's still going to be.

But I'm unsure how much more loss he can take.

Right when I'm about to walk towards him, a new search light lights up. It's coming from a direction where we didn't know people were looking. There isn't even a blip on the radar of anyone being there.

And then I hear the loudest crash I've ever heard.

With the explosives being used in Unalaska I'm used to some loud bangs, but here, in the darkness and the silence of the night, it's sound is tenfold.

When all the search lights come back on again, we see two crashed ships. One is blue, old and rusty, and if I didn't see it floating with my own two eyes I would have believed it should have sunken a long time again.

It's then that I see who is manning the wheel.

It's Eddie.

And he's always been known to take in a lost cause, so why not an old ship in the search of a man we all just came to accept is no longer with us.

He's laughing maniacally, his white hair wet and stuck to his face. I'm not sure whether it's the light, or something else, but I can swear I see pure evil on his face.

Fact of the matter is that now that Eddie has rammed his shabby little ship in the side of the whale poachers ship, everyone knows where they are. And like an army of ants that have just found something to eat after having been starved for weeks, everyone makes sure they follow pursuit.

It might be a big whaling ship – but have you ever tried to outrun a group of fishermen who have known each other their whole life when you've taken one of their own?

I think not.

Unsure whether the tears on my cheeks are from sea sickness or relief that we found Mano, I wipe my cheeks clean. The question remains in what kind of state we found him in. Is he still alive? Are they going to use him to bargain to get away?

But a lot of ships from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) are already there, and they're closing in on the whaling ship.

So help me God, if they do anything to Mano now I will whip them to an inch of their lives until Dom can finish them off himself. I'm not too big of a fan of his past, but just this one time I'll be fully on board.

Some of the dumber whalers jump overboard, hoping they'll be saved, probably coming up with some lame excuse that they were being forced, but I'll make sure they won't get away with it. I've never been more glad that I have friends in high places.

"Don't shoot!" one of the scumbags yells, holding Mano in front of him just like the coward he is. "We'll give him back, and we'll stop whaling, and we can all go without anybody getting hurt, right?"

Right, my ass.

They've already hurt too many people. They made us believe that Mano was a goner, not to mention all those humpbacks they caught, killed and sold. And for fucking what?

Out of all the ocean whales are perhaps the kindest creatures there are. They eat tiny plankton, they're not aggressive, they do nothing. Yes, perhaps, they accidentally hit a ship every now and then, but the most they do is create a gorgeous prism when they blow water out of their blowholes and the sun shines on it in the right way.

"You're all under arrest!" A guy from the IWC says.

“Not me, right?” Mano yells, the panic clear in his voice. “I mean, Sugar is pregnant, and it’s gonna be a little girl and I’ll let her paint my nails but I’d rather not have her do that from prison.”

Laughter rises.

“You’re good, Mano,” Dom yells, the relief audible in his voice. I don’t exactly know what went through my lover’s mind, but I do believe some piece of him healed there and then.

“Fuck,” Eddie yells.

“What’s wrong old man?” Bash asks.

“I can’t seem to get up.”

“Do you have your cane?”

“Of course,” he swears like the sailor he finally became.

Dom, the dumb, dumb, dumb man he is, grabs one of the emergency boats, lowers it into the water and starts making his way to Eddie. Both Tiny Nick and Bash follow him, so the only logical thing for me to do is go along with them. These three nitwits would get lost in their own houses if it wasn’t for me.

They, in turn, start laughing, when I vomit over the edge of the boat the moment it reaches the water.

Bash steers us to Eddie’s piece of scrap metal that is supposed to be a ship. I vomit bile when I climb Eddie’s ship, because by now my stomach is empty.

By the time we’ve reached Eddie he looks gray and in pain.

“What’s up?”

“Everything hurts,” he answers, short of breath. Bash is rushing to some kind of old communication’s system, calling the coast guard and asking for medical assistance.

Dom is kneeling next to Eddie. “What the hell you doing, old man?”

“I’m not letting that fucking bitch take one of my boys again.”

“Your boys?” Dom asks, casually feeling Eddie’s heart rate and giving me a worried look.

“Yeah, my boys. Mano, Tiny Nick, Bash, you. Sometimes you get to pick your family. That’s what I had with my Damian. And there’s not a day I don’t think about him. But what we guys have at the shop? Chosen family? That’s everything. We don’t share any blood, but you’re my blood just as well.”

Somewhere over the sound of the ocean crashing against the side of all the ships I can hear a chopper coming.

“They’re not gonna get here in time,” Eddie says, a crooked smile on his face. It’s one of the signs there’s a blood clot in his brain. My guess is it’s from when he got pushed against the side of the ship when he hit the whalers. And let’s be real – Eddie is old.

“Of course they’re going to be here in time,” Dom says, his voice thick with emotion. He’s not ready to let his newly found family go just yet. And as much as I wanted to be the one who embraced him first, it has always been Eddie. The man doesn’t discriminate. He sees someone who needs love or a firm hand, and he’ll give it to him.

“Listen carefully, Dominic,” Eddie says, laying one of his wrinkly hands on Dom’s cheek. “The shop is yours now. You gotta order the coffee, because without it there’ll be mutiny. You gotta make sure that Mano raises that girl right, although I’m certain Sugar won’t give him any other option. Tiny Nick is good with numbers. Let him help you with that. And make sure Bash cleans his bench each and every evening.”

It gets quiet for a moment and all we hear is Eddie’s raspy voice.

“Now, do what you do best. You fix those ships. You’re the glue. I leave the shop to you. It’s been notarized and everything. And just... Just make sure that you take everyone in who doesn’t want to go to the sea.”

Dom is flat out crying right now. We all are.

Fuck.

Eddie's face gets wrinkly, his eyes soften. "I'm going to see my Damian again. And that fucking bitch didn't get my Mano. Tell my wife I love her. She'll know what to do."

Before anyone can answer, a pod of whales rises next to the ship. A few of them spew water out of their blowholes, almost as if they're saying thank you and goodbye. They can't know – Eddie was never on the ocean, hating the fucking bitch with a passion.

Yet here they are.

It's the moment Eddie closes his eyes and with a gurgling sound breathes out his last breath. There's not a single dry face on that whole ship and it feels like someone is squeezing its hand around my heart.

We found Mano.

But we lost Eddie.

There's some circle of life Disney bullshit, but right now all that's left is sorrow, misery and the cold splattering water wetting the already drenched deck.

Just once I wish we could win them all.



“Just a few more minutes,” she says. She’s been saying that for the last half hour, but she’s literally one of the handful of people on this world who can get away with it.

“We gotta go at some point, Kitten,” I tell her.

“Hush,” she says, her arms wrapped tightly around my neck where they have been since she walked out of the airport. I don’t know what kind of magic the Marshals made happen, but Evan and all of 4A is here. They should all be freezing their asses off, because they’re not dressed for this weather, but they’re literally weathering in.

Wolf and Jack formed an instant connection the moment they looked in their mismatching eyes and have been playing fetch since. The other guys have been keeping their distance, letting Evan do her thing, and while I could use some rescuing right now, I’m not sure that’s what’s going to happen.

“Okay, we need to get somewhere safe now,” Kyle says, his eyes looking around everywhere.

“He’s extra protective now,” Evan whispers. “Angel is having her first baby.”

I can feel the corners of my mouth reach my ears. That is goddamn good news. Ever since they’ve come out as a couple

things have gone really fast. They moved in, they got hitched, and now there's a baby on the way.

From what I've heard everyone is doing good. Keshia and Miles had another baby, Evan and her guys are waiting because they want to make some more music. And for some reason Evan is terrified of babies, which is hilarious.

All of us strictly followed the rules of WITSEC. No contact. All I knew was what was in the tabloids. I think it's one of the reasons Kyle approved of them being here. And there might have been a desperate phone call from Warren.

I didn't take Eddie's death as well as I wanted. So some familiarity was welcomed. Of course I had the guys. I had Mano, Bash and Tiny Nick. They were grieving just as hard as me, all in their own way. They couldn't offer me the support I needed while they needed it themselves. There were the familiar townspeople, like Deanna, who kept feeding me like I had been stuck in the desert for two weeks, but sometimes you need someone who knows more about you.

Warren knows.

Warren knows everything.

But the hard thing is that Warren is my Dom and that sometimes the lines get blurred and you just need someone who isn't able to tell you what to do and what not to do.

Grief is such a personal thing that someone can not tell you how to do it.

And sometimes you just need an endless hug from someone that has accepted you for who you are since the moment you met.

"All in the cars," Kyle demands.

I grin when Jack jumps on Wolf's lap and starts telling him whole stories in doggy talk. I see Warren look a little jealous every now and then, but he's just going to have to deal with it.

Once we're all in the car we start driving to Warren's cabin. It's going to be a tight fit with all the people that are coming, but we'll make it work. Evan says that they can sleep with a

lot of people on a really tiny bed. Right now I'm just over the moon to be surrounded by people who know me, by people who accept me and by people who know who the fuck I am.

It's not half a day later we're standing at a double grave. It's not just Eddie. It's his wife Jeanine too. When he said to tell her she knew what to do, she took a suicide powder and followed him into death's warming arms. After all these years, after all this misery, they didn't want to spend a day alone.

The thing that bothers me the most is that Eddie knew what he was doing when he got on that ship. He could have had a perfect five more years with Jeanine.

But he didn't.

They joined Damian.

While there is a perfectly maintained grave for all three of them, they are all buried at sea. They wanted to spend their time in the afterlife with their son.

I won't say I understand. I will say I respect it.

So today we're burying two empty caskets next to a third empty casket. And who the hell cares? They made their choice. Who am I to judge?

I got messed up the moment my father pushed a gun in my hands and told me to kill a man. Their lives were forever changed when the sea took their son. We all have our own demons to deal with.

However, it's a nice service. There are nothing but kind words being spoken. All the guys from the shop said a little something, even if nobody could really understand Bash because he was crying too hard.

After the service was finished I heard the guys speculate how I knew 4A. Tiny Nick suggested that I must've been the sixth member of the band at some point, until Mano tapped him on the back of the head and said that the world would have known if there was a sixth member of 4A, and Tiny Nick, who had finally stopped crying, said that I wouldn't be so good with bikes if I was a musician. Warren, who clearly

overheard, said I had a terrible voice anyway and to my horror Evan confirmed that.

Most of us left to go to Warren's place after, including all the 4A members. Warren seems to like them, but he doesn't like so much that they're invading his personal space. Bryson and him seem to hit it off though. The power of not saying anything to each other will do that.

Everyone's having drinks, reminiscing about Eddie and Jeanine when the enormity of what I'm about to do with the shop hits me. My hands get clammy, my heart rate goes up and my eyes widen.

Warren, sitting on the other side of the room, his chin tucked away in his navy turtle neck, notices. Of course. He squints his eyes and I don't even have to tell him what's going on in my mind to know what it is. He softly shakes his head, one of the corners of his mouth slightly lifting.

It's so annoying when someone knows better what's going on in your mind than you do yourself. I'm six steps behind, and he's already figured it out.

"Wolf?" he asks.

"Yes," the rocker's voice comes from somewhere beneath a pile of fur when Jack is sitting down on his face.

"Take care of the dog for a while," Warren says, giving me that look letting me exactly know what he has in mind. "And whatever you do, don't let him get outside for the next hour."

"Outside?" Wolf says in outrage. "We finally got in, why the hell would I want to go outside?"

Now that I look at him I see that he's taken off what I believe to be a faux-fur coat and is wearing nothing but a pair of bordeaux fake leather pants and a necklace with a feather.

"Jack and I are staying right here, where there's a nice warm fire and doggy treaties." He boops the husky on the nose and they both stare in each other's mismatched eyes. "Now, the fire I'm willing to share, but the treaties are for him *if he behaves like a good boy.*"

Jack mumbles in his own little language, letting the rocker know *of course* he's going to be a good boy, because he's the goodest boy of all boys on this planet.

I smirk, catching on to Warren's idea, and when I step past him to go grab my jacket he whispers two minutes.

I quickly put on my boots, throw on my jacket and while I run outside I start closing the jacket. It has snowed the previous evening, so hiding my footprints will turn out to be impossible. Swiftly it will have to be.

I start running towards a group of pine trees that's closest to our house. It's predictable, but the snowfall is also less deep here, so there's a better chance to hide my footsteps. I zigzag through some trees, but I know the two minute head start will be futile anyway.

I'm already severely out of breath when I jump over a fallen log and start hearing Warren's steps behind me. He's going faster than I am and I know that he's going to catch me eventually. But right now? It's the thrill. It's getting away. It's little red riding hood running away from the Wolf. It's Captain Hook trying to stay ahead of the Croc. It's Belle trying to outrun the wolves and finding refuge in the castle of the Beast.

We all know how it's going to end.

That's how fairytales go.

But right now is the part where Hans Zimmer has written a masterpiece and all the pieces of the puzzle seem to fit together.

I step on a little piece of black ice, lose my balance and end up on the ground. Warren pounces me before I know it. I land on my back, the air leaving my chest like a puff and laughter at the same time.

Warren's almost white blue eyes stare down at me, all his animal urges showing.

"Got you," he says, his voice deep and growly and giving me more goosebumps than the snow beneath me. He grabs my

wrists, holding them down above my head and pressing them into the frozen ground.

The shiver that runs down my spine has absolutely nothing to do with the change in temperature.

When the timbre of his voice reaches the side of my throat I'm a goner. I'm lost, gone off the grid, literally and I've been lost in a man that has had nothing to lose so far.

When I move my head forward to kiss him he grins.

“Eager?”

“Always.”

“What for?”

“Everything,” I breathe out, pressing my lips against his.

I went to Unalaska because it was the right thing to do. To save that family that is now in my home. My friend who deserves all the happiness in the world. I expected to find ice and destruction. Salt water and loneliness.

Instead I found a new family – one that doesn't force me to kill people simply because they think it's necessary. We may have lost Eddie, but I gained the love of my life, friends that will be in my life for long after I'm truly sick of them. I found purpose, gathered a shop where I can actually help people instead of having to kill them.

That Dominic is gone.

And this Dominic? The new Dominic?

He's about to lose his jacket and his shirt, because Warren is taking his clothes off. And the new Dominic couldn't be more ecstatic.

Epilogue



TWO YEARS LATER

“If you guys kill yourselves I’ll drag you back from the afterlife and murder you,” Meryll says, holding a tiny baby. Our Lexi has been a surprise and a blessing. A little over a year ago Meryll came to us in panic, because Kaya was pregnant, and he really didn’t want any more kids and Kaya wasn’t going to end the pregnancy. She was, however, willing to carry the baby for us if we wanted a kid. Her heart was full as it was, and she was happy just experiencing a pregnancy and a birth again.

We talked about it for a few days and said yes.

I’ve never seen a man with a face that almost looked gray turn to a normal color again. And so we got pulled into a pregnancy; we got to experience everything. Go to the check-ups, the ultrasounds and eventually the birth. Meryll had some trouble about us seeing Kaya’s private parts, but as the wise woman – who was hormonal like crazy and only ate cocoa puffs and string cheese – pointed out ‘they’re not interested in those body parts, especially not during a birth’. And Meryll agreed.

So we were there when she gave birth like a warrior, not making a peep when she put her chin on her chest and pushed

a tiny human being out of her, that Warren got to catch himself. The baby was put on Kaya's chest, something about the right bacteria or something like that, I didn't really pay attention, I just remembered it was important.

And that's how little Lexi came into our lives. It has been a wild ride since.

I push the bike up and throw my leg over it, sitting on the gorgeous leather seat that took months to get here. Worth it though. I nudge towards Warren and he sighs. The bike has been ready for over a year and when the weather allows I've felt the Alaskan wind in my face just casually driving around and enjoying nature and the feel of a bike between my legs.

It's the first time Warren is joining me. All the people of Unalaska think I'm crazy for riding a bike, but I don't care. No matter how much Unalaska feels like home, being outside and riding is the thing that completes me.

Warren gets on the bike looking very hesitant. I grab his hands and wrap them around me. Once he knows that's an option he clings to me like a koala bear to a tree. The corners of my mouth turn up whether I want it or not.

"Put your feet on the bars," I tell him, and he listens.

I start the engine and the sound of it is so good it gives me chills. I rev a little before I take off and slowly drive to the road. I can't ride everywhere like I was used to in Nevada, but there are still plenty of hardened roads.

"I still think this is a bad idea," Warren says.

"Pussy," I say.

I open the gas and take off, making speed, going to the only highway we have. It's a gorgeous road surrounded by ancient pine trees and it gives me chills every time I drive here.

The wind kisses my cheeks and I know this is it. This is living. It isn't getting better than this.

I don't know how it happened but that little boy that grew up in an MC, surrounded by bad examples, crime and

hardness, ended up in one of the harshest States and managed to soften.

Warren taught me to be vulnerable, to feel my feelings, to be a kid again while still being an adult and taking my responsibilities. We still have a dynamic, but I thrive in a situation where I'm not at the top of the hierarchy. There have been some freak outs over how that would work with raising a kid, but Warren promised me it will be alright and I'll figure it out.

I've got my man at my back, my baby at home, nature surrounding me, a bike under my legs and the wind on my cheeks.

What else could I ever possibly ask for?

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was more than a year ago when the idea for Evan and her guys appeared in my mind. What I saw was someone dying in the desert, someone saving her and only then the whole rockstar story kicked in. It's safe to say that Dom was in my head before I had any clue who he was.

The first time he called Evan Kitten, I knew he was there to stay. Without going into much details I can't really explain what it means to me he calls her Kitten.

I'm an okay writer – storytelling comes naturally to me, and I have so, *so*, many stories to tell. But this story? Dom's story? It scared the hell out of me. I'm serious. I have just gathered *some* readers who were willing to read my RH, where was I going to get readers who want to read some MM as well? It almost stopped me. Almost.

But Dom had a story to tell.

And then Warren appeared, with his BDSM issues and grumpiness and love for nature and animals.

And then the motherfucking whales came.

So I found myself in a little bit of a conundrum.

I had to have some storyline besides just two dudes falling in love - that's not my style. I like the plot. And for some unknown reason my head said whales. Mind you: I know nothing about whales. No-thing. I think they're pretty. And that's about it. But my head decided I was going to write a story about whale poaching, because, hell, what the hell else are you gonna do? If you think a toddler mid tantrum is stubborn, you should visit my head when it gets an idea.

So whales it was.

The problem, for me, with writing a standalone, is that I need the time to build the plot. I'm not the kind of writer who can make two people fall in love on page one and make it stick. I'm not a fast-burn writer. It's a whole other art that I do not master.

Personally? I hate the miscommunication trope. I hate the seventy percent break up.

And what do we have here?

A fast burn gay romance, with the miscommunication trope, a seventy percent break up and WHALES. Why? Why whales? I've seen all episodes of Deadliest Catch, at least I can tell you something about crabs. But no. I had to go with the gorgeous giants of the sea and stick with it.

So yes. Not everything in this book might be 100% accurate, although I have to admit that Chat GPT made my life infinitely easier. No, I did not write a single sentence with the program, but finding out what kind of wildlife exactly lives in Unalaska was infinitely useful.

So, drones and whales. They're going on the black list.

This time I know what's coming though. Kyle and Angel's story is next. 'Good Night, Sweet Dreams, I Love You' will be an MF story. It will be a little shorter than you're used to from me. It's a standalone, but the stupid story is stuck in my brain like a whale. And I'm going to scare readers away with this story. I'm sorry.

The plan is to publish it is at the end of January. You can pre-order it here, or wait for it to appear on Kindle Unlimited.

Whew. Whales. Who knew.

Oh, and did you know how hard I fought the title? Even I, a fervent alliteration lover, thought it was too much. But no. Nooooooo. It stuck like a barnacle to a whale's belly and it didn't let it go.

Just believe me that not everything I do is willing.

And no, I don't need an exorcism.

Whatever you do, please, please, PLEASE leave me a comment or a rating. It can be two words. Even if you hated it. But I promise us Indie authors are surviving on reviews. So please leave one. It's two seconds worth of work opposed to the months we pour our hearts and souls in creating these works for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

If you've been with me for a while, you know I love Author's Notes and Acknowledgements. I love dedications too, by the way. Anyway. This one is a little different. For the most part. You don't have to understand it, or even read it – I just needed to write it.

I was 16 when I met him. He was 41. It didn't matter – we hit it off. I was shy, he was anything but. And he helped me crawl out of my shell. We became friends, even when we didn't speak to each other for a few months at a time.

Ed was a friend for life. The thing I remember about him the most is the way his face used to light up when he opened the door to let us in. We'd give three kisses as is custom in The Netherlands, we made ourselves at home, and the rest always went effortlessly.

I'm sure there were times things went less effortlessly, but those are not the things you remember when a loved one passes.

I was 26 when he died. He was 51. Heart attack.

I won't lie and say Ed was the easiest man there ever was. We all have our flaws. But his love and forgiveness were endless. We connected, having some of the same issues. We helped each other. And when he passed I didn't get to visit him for a whole week. I had a fourteen month old toddler and I wanted to protect her from all the grief. So when the Friday of his cremation arrived and I rang his doorbell, I fully expected him to open the door with that wide smile of his and help me through this nightmare.

He did not.

His wife opened the door and all I could see was the grief that I had suppressed successfully for a whole week. It all hit me like a tidal wave.

After writing ten books in two years, I wanted to acknowledge Ed. He's called Eddie in this book, and while

they're nothing alike, they're exactly the same.

So wherever you are, whatever you're doing. This one is for you. Did you make me think of the whales? It's exactly the kind of shenanigan you would come up with. Whatever it is, I hope it made you smile that huge smile, and I hope it made you happy.

Then there's little Kris. I'm a firm believer in therapy. Good therapy at least. There's a reason a large part of my last series took place at a therapist. Anyway – I got some diagnosis, which I don't really care all that much about. I just need the tools to make sure that my life is manageable with those diagnoses.

I got some stamps in my mental passport that said I had personality disorders. They sound so hardcore, don't you think? In my case it simply means I'm the biggest people pleaser you'll ever meet and I'm diagnosed with insecurity. Add a bunch of generalized fear, and we've got a nice dose of Kris.

Anyway.

What I learned is that I have children's versions of Krisses inside me. There's a happy Kris, there's a sad Kris and there's even an angry Kris. And over all the years of me being me, I suppressed all those kids. I hid them behind harsh grown-up voices and coping mechanisms. As long as I didn't have to feel them.

Well, you know what happens when you stop feeling things, right?

They come back to bite you in the butt. But like, well, really hard.

So what I've been doing these past months is feel. I've cried a million tears (I counted them, it was exactly a million), I've been angry at the most stupid stuff ever and I've felt joy over really tiny things too.

Whatever you do, don't let anyone ever tell you that working and healing and therapy isn't hard work. It's exhausting. It just happens to be that writing, and telling

stories, and finding all the pretty words is exactly what my happy Kris needs.

So here's to her. Here's to all the kid versions of Kris – they're all equally allowed to be here.

And goddamn if I'm not proud of the work I've done.

Then there's Bart, my husband, who just sat there and waited for me to crumble and tell him what was wrong. Don't let all the other males know, but he even just listened and didn't try to fix everything. And he stood with me no matter what decision I made. That being said: We're never discussing boats, ships and all the proper terminology again. If I want to light up a light house by saying 'Hey Google: Turn up the lights of the light house' I fucking will. And drones. Don't forget the drones. We're not talking about drones.

I want to acknowledge my kids. I hope I'm fighting a battle for you so you don't have to. You find your own damn reasons to go to therapy, you hear me? Just know, that even when I did things very, *very*, wrong as a mother, I will see you, I will hear you, I will listen to you and I will never, *ever*, try to diminish that feeling for you.

To Eva. Do you think they used carbon paper when they drew out this phase of our lives? I don't know. Feels that way. Even when we simultaneously act like huge dumb-dumbs.

To L.: Have your damn horcrux. Know you're also the 'lumos' to my darkest of hours. And you're still in the wrong house. There's a rumor that lockpicks have a tendency of taking things that don't belong to them. I like to call it inspiration. It's all about the language, right?

To Nien. Lady, just move over here already, we'll work on your accent. Love you.

To my Sparkling Vampire Chicks. I can't search for shit, so I don't know how I found you. Must have been an accident, but it was the best damn accident ever.

To the ladies who stuck with me from day one: Kelly, Bernadette, Ines, Amanda and Tam. You ladies are my Kites in Thunder. I don't know what I did to deserve you.

A real special shout-out to Melanie: You really helped me out with this book. Wow. I'm really thankful for your thoroughness and time. You're amazing!

And then there's you, my readers. That still feels a little like a psychosis to write out loud. Thanks for sticking with me. For reading my words. For loving my characters and making my lifelong dream of being an author a reality.

PREVIEW CHAPTER ONE D ESERTED LILIES

CHAPTER ONE



“Don’t, Nathan,” I beg him, tears streaking down my cheeks, the scorching desert sun burning on my face. His dark eyes look down on me, sitting on my knees on the hard and hot ground in the middle of Death Valley. The name has never been more accurate, because according to the man looking down on me, he’s going to leave me here and drive off on his bike.

“Are you willing to reconsider?” he asks me, voice gruff.

“I can never get behind you being in the drug trade,” I answer. I should lie. I should lie my fucking face off. Do my morals mean more to me than my life? Am I willing to die for this? He’s going to sell the drugs when I’m dead anyway, so maybe it’s best to let him do it while I’m still alive.

He sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose with the hand he uses to hold his gun. “You leave me no fucking choice, Evangaline.”

Rage conquers my fear. I try to get up, but the hands that have been tied behind my back make it difficult. So I stay where I am, on my knees, hopeless. “No choice but to leave me in the desert to die? You don’t have to expand by dealing drugs!”

“It’s how it is. It’s club business.”

That’s what I’ve been hearing for the last two years. Everything is club business. But he chooses to tell me anyway. And now that I want to walk away, because I don’t want to be involved in what he’s about to do, he believes I know too much. I’m a liability.

The only liability on this deserted piece of fucking land is him.

He rubs a hand over his face, pinches the bridge of his nose and shakes his head. His slumped shoulders imply defeat.

“Goodbye Evan,” he says while he turns around and walks to his Ducati Desert Sled.

“Don’t fucking leave me here to die! I loved you!”

And I did. I did with everything I was, but that’s over now.

“That was your first mistake,” he answers, his bike between his legs and his hands fumbling to put his helmet on. “I’ve never put you first. That position has always been for the club. You just never understood.”

He revs his engine, looks over his shoulder one last time and drives off, leaving me alone with nothing but endless desert and my time running out.

I’ve managed to get up on my feet and I’ve been walking ever since. Which feels like a week ago. But the sun isn’t even starting to set. How long can I survive out here without any water or protection?

That motherfucker took me out here first thing in the morning, driving for what felt like hours before we got here, probably making sure I wouldn’t be able to walk home or be saved.

Don’t get me wrong, I know I’m a goner. There’s no way I’m making it out of here alive. But I’m too stubborn to give up yet. I’ve got a lot of living left to do, but I mostly don’t want to let

the overgrown biker mouse win. And at this point, dying would mean he wins.

So there's really no other option than to simply not die.

Mind over matter.

Whoever said that the desert is empty has got it all wrong. The desert is full of harsh truths, ugly thoughts and empty regrets.

I should never have fallen in love with the bad boy everyone warned me away from. But no, I had to go and burn my hands on the dirty blond, raw biker. I saw the cut, I saw the tats, I knew what they meant. But I also saw the lust in his eyes and the way his ass filled out his pants. And the smell of motor oil and grease sure seemed like an aphrodisiac at the time.

Before I knew it I was his girl and I was so deep into the club life that it seemed to be the only option left. So I went along with it. And now I'm the only one left to deal with the repercussions.

My lips are chapped and I try to keep myself from licking them constantly. My tongue isn't in any better shape than my lips, so it's useless. Being a nurse, I know that a human body can go three days without water. But having no shelter and non-stop burning sun can speed that process up to three hours. Which would be around the time that I've been walking around.

I don't really feel like I'm dying. I mean, I don't feel exceptionally awesome or anything. But dying? No. That should feel way worse.

The backs of my arms are burned, and my shoulders hurt as well. The tanktop and jeans I'm wearing aren't really doing anything to keep the sun off of me. Usually I like my black hair, but right now it's containing all the heat and making my skull feel like an oven.

At least my biker boots protect my feet from the heat, enabling me to keep taking step after step. But the hope they say that's at the horizon is nowhere to be found.

What is to be found is the outline of something tall in the distance. I'm aware it might be a product of my imagination –

dehydration will do that to you – but it's not like I've got a better destination.

I spent way longer than I thought it would to reach it.

The something tall turns out to be a Joshua tree. It's in full bloom, which is something I've never seen before. If I wasn't in such a crappy situation I'd appreciate the beauty of it.

The real treasure is the shadow at the base of Joshua tree. There isn't much of it, but it's more than nothing and I force myself to close the distance to it and let myself fall on the ground.

So I guess this is it.

This is where I'm going to die.

Beneath the slim shade of a blossoming Joshua tree, in the middle of Death Valley because the man I thought I loved loved his job more.

I'd be sad if I had any energy left for it.

But I have none.

“Kitten,” a gruff voice says.

I feel hands on my face, and something wet on my lips. Did I die? Is this the afterlife? The last thing I remember is my eyes falling shut, because they were too dry to keep open – the sun shining too brightly to keep going. I swore I'd just closed them for a second.

“Drink,” the voice says.

The sound of it rings a bell somewhere in the back of my head. Did he call me kitten just now? Don't I know someone who calls me that? I open my cracked lips, feeling wetness on my tongue. It's water. I try to swallow it, but my throat is too dry.

“Come on, Evan, drink.”

I force the water down, half of it ending up in the wrong windpipe, starting a coughing fit. But it gets my blood pumping again and gives me the strength to open my eyes. A large man hovers a water bottle over my face, his brown eyes worried. For

a moment I recognize Nathan, until I remember he's the one who put me here.

Kitten.

This is Dominic. Nathan's little brother.

I try to speak his name, but no sound comes out. He pours another sip in my mouth and this time I manage to make it all go down the right way. With my feelings returning, so does the pain. Everything hurts.

Perhaps I was better off being left for dead.

"Here, sit up, Kitten." He pulls up my upper body, laying it against his chest when he moves on the desert floor and sits beside me. "Drink some more. Just a little. Then we're going to go. Don't drink too much right now. It'll only make you sick."

I think life is making me sick right now. At the very least, life is playing a very sick joke on me.

"You came," I finally manage to stumble out.

He inhales sharply, turning his head away from me. "I was almost too late."

"Or right on time," I try to joke, but he's not having it.

"We need to get you out of this desert and away from here," he stumbles, tucking a piece of my hair behind my ear. "Nathan thinks you're dead. It's best for your health if it stays that way."

I swallow.

Surviving this means I have to start all over. Somewhere far away from here. Where I know nobody, and nobody knows me.

It's not like I'm leaving a lot behind. In the two years I've been with Nathan he managed to become my life. I no longer saw my own friends or family. It was all about him. Or as it now turned out, all about the club. The only friend that I have left is the man that crossed a desert for me. Dominic.

Guess I'm losing him now too.

"I'm glad you came," I whisper, filling my mouth with water yet again.

"Me too, Kitten. Me too."

I sigh. Even that movement hurts. Above me, I see the blossoming Joshua tree. It's a lot more impressive now that I don't think it'll be the last thing I ever see. It's a sight I'm going to remember for the rest of my life. Which will hopefully be long and healthy.

Staring at the horizon, I still don't see hope. But I do see possibilities, and that's kind of all I need.

“Make me disappear, Dominic.”