

JAYE PRATT

ZHAVIA

GIFTED, OBEDIENT, DEADLY, STUDENTS,

NEXT GENERATION



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Zhavia

Gifted. Obedient. Deadly. Students.

Next Generation

Genetically altered super team. Sounds interesting, right? Wrong. This life is nothing like I imagined it would be.

My team is supposed to form around me, to love me. While I know they do, it is not in the way I want them to. And why? Because I'm a twin and my brother's link to me makes it impossible. He's the dark to my light and can feel everything that I do. Plus, he has a killer temper, and isn't afraid to come running—whether I need him or not.

Olympia University was meant to be our fresh start; the place where I could finally have the freedom to convince my team that they want me in the same way I've always wanted them. All I had to do was find a way to block my connection with my twin. Much easier said than done when the only way to succeed is shared to me by a mysterious voice in my head and comes with a dangerous side effect. One I don't know if I'm willing to risk.

All I can do is move forward, working towards our goal of earning our first proper field assignment. A feat that is looking even further away after we use unauthorised weapons and manage to burn down the test zone.

When an unexpected bombshell is dropped, none of us know where we stand or what it means for our team going forward. New faces, new teams, and new bonds are introduced, which leads us to make decisions with our hearts and not our heads.

If we all walk out of this alive, nothing will ever be the same.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This is a why choose duet, while Zhavia's team there is no male male, book two is Zadom's book and does contain a lot of male male content. Expect MM, MMF, MMFMMM, MMM, and any other combination that you can think of.

You do not need to have read the parents books, just know reading this duet first it does contain spoilers for the OG series.

This series is also set in **Australia** and the spelling does reflect that.(Except ass, I refuse to acknowledge that we spell it arse, it looks ridiculous and I'm a rebel.) If you do find any spelling errors, please do not report them to amazon. You can reach me on my socials or my email: jayprattauthor@gmail.com.

You can also find a list of content warnings on my website. I personally don't think this book has any, so please contact me if you find something that could be harmful to a reader. This duet would be classed as a very light dark.

Dedication

To all the bad bitches who know what they want.



Chapter One

Zhavia.

“How does that make you feel?”

Fuck! Mandatory therapy makes me want to pull out my fingernails. But to answer his question, how would you feel if you were genetically created and made in a fucking test tube using all your parents’ DNA? It wouldn’t be as huge a deal, I suppose, if I just had two parents. But my life isn’t that simple.

My twin brother and I have ten dads, each of whom has special abilities that we have inherited.

Yes, ten.

Take my father Creed, for example; he can feel my mother’s emotions and her pain. It’s an ability that my brother, Zadam, inherited—he feels everything I do—which has the potential to suck bigtime for me.

Typically, the genetically engineered teams at Olympia consist of five men and one woman, with all members designed to love only her. My incredibly psychotic and now-dead grandfather, Mr Z, switched things up before my fathers killed him. He combined all the DNA of two male teams with my mother’s to create Zadam and I. The problem is, one of our team’s six members is Zadam, but he isn’t in love with me like that—thank god. Now *that* would be some whacked-ass

shit. Instead, he always has to be near me to feel centred, and it's taken us a long time to get to where we are.

As for the others on my team—Kyro, Lynx, Hayes, and Cruze—who I love with every fibre of my being, it's hard to explain. Do they feel the same way? Theoretically, I know they have to; they were made to love me. But then fucking Zadam went and ruined it all by being part of my team.

When they were younger, they made a pact—one that means none of the guys will touch me. I didn't find out until I was fifteen, but by then had already spent so long thinking something was seriously wrong with me. Then Kyro kissed me and Zadam saw red, hitting him. Kyro spilled his guts about what they had agreed to, and they all intended to honour it. We are the first of our kind and we need our team to succeed. Zadam is the first ever handler born and linked genetically to the whole fucking team.

Anyway, back to the question: So, how does that make me feel?

I feel like I got the short end of the stick; everything is always about Zadam and us working around how he feels. He admitted once that the way he feels about me is weird—not romantically, but our continual connection. He has spent the last two years in therapy making sure what he feels isn't "inappropriate." Saying it out loud makes it sound weird, but in reality, we are not much different from normal siblings.

"Zhavia?" My therapist is waiting for an answer.

"I don't know how it makes me feel. I know how it's supposed to make me feel, so does that count?"

"Look, I know you hate coming here, but your parents are worried that you're not ready for Olympia. That your team isn't ready."

"You should talk to Zadam. He's the problem with this team. I love him but to put it out there, he is a cock-blocker. Our team was created for me. To love me and protect me."

"So, you have unresolved jealousy."

“Yes, because I feel like an outsider. Not to mention, every time one of them accidentally touches me, they worry if my brother is watching because Zadom is just always there. Sometimes I wish I had space.”

Olympia is my mother’s company until Zadom and I take over after graduating from Olympia University. She has restored it from the ground up to what it is today. Before I was born, my fathers’ teams were the only ones genetically altered, and everyone else was trained. But right before my grandfather died, he changed all of that by creating a heap of altered babies, and my mum has run with it. Now our teams are hired for good causes, unlike when he used to be in charge. We also have regular people still working within Olympia; some people are naturally gifted, and we don’t discriminate.

The abilities we have are not like you see on television. My parents’ abilities range from a photographic memory, not feeling pain, to one of my dad’s having fantastic night vision. No one can fly or anything super powerful like that. Zadom and I have a combination of all our parents’ gifts, and we are still finding new ones all the time. Some have taken longer to work out.

“That’s all we have time for today. I will see you next week.”

“Yeah, see you next week.”

Pushing up from the recliner, I leave his office as quickly as possible so I can get home and pack. Tomorrow we officially move into the Olympia dorms full time, as opposed to high school, where we only boarded during the week. I love my family and all, but our house is chaos. Eleven parents, plus my nan is always there, and our housekeeper, Petra, also lives with us. Then there are twelve kids, including me. My mother is a breeding machine. Zadom and I are eighteen and our youngest sister, Avi, is just about to turn one. It’s like a goddamned zoo.

Exiting the building, I roll my eyes. Zadom is leaning against his Ferrari Spider, an eighteenth birthday gift from

some of our fathers. Apparently, this model is a classic. They barely even make petrol cars anymore—everything is electric.

He slides his sunglasses to the top of his head and smiles at me. One thing about Zadam is he only smiles for me. I shake my head. Everything about us is opposite: his black hair versus my snow white, his almost black eyes and my aqua, his deep tanned skin to my ivory skin tone.

“How was the appointment with the shrink? Learn anything interesting about yourself?”

“Nope, but I learned how much of a dickhead you are, so that was helpful.”

“I could have saved you an hour and told you that myself. Now hurry up. Mum wants to help us pack. There were even tears—we need to get this done fast so we can breathe again.”

I slip into the passenger seat and quickly connect my Bluetooth before he can argue. He reaches out to change the music and I pout at him until his arm retreats.

“You’re lucky I came. I was in a pissy mood and needed you to calm me down before I ripped out Kenji’s larynx.”

Zadam might be able to feel my emotions, but I calm his; it’s the first ability that they knew I had. He came out of the womb already loud and obnoxious, but once he was placed next to me, he was instantly quiet.

Kenji is the brother closest in age to us, and at sixteen, he thinks he is god’s gift to women—well, girls—and they think the same, so I can’t blame him for having a big head. But he really enjoys pissing off Zadam and deliberately does things he knows will set him off. I’m surprised they haven’t killed each other yet.

“What did he do now?” I ask.

“He was touching all our shit. Trying to steal our room before we’ve even left.”

I place my hand on Zadam’s arm. We’ve shared a room our entire lives until we moved to Olympia High, where I

finally had my own space, even though he still managed to find a way in every night.

“He is just trying to rile you up, and it’s working. He doesn’t even live at home besides on weekends. If anyone gets our room, it would be Rocco, and Kenji will have to bunk with him on weekends.”

When we pull into the driveway, Zadom curses. Uncle Colt and his minivan are blocking the garage.

His knuckles turn white against the black leather steering wheel. He takes a few deep breaths and parks where there is free space. God forbid his baby has to face the elements for a few hours. He’s just like our dad Boston sometimes.

“Come on, let’s get this over with,” I tell him, and he nods, then comes around to my side of the car and opens the door for me, helping me out. He keeps our hands linked, anchoring himself to me.

Once inside, we don’t need to call out to anyone; small kids are running around chasing each other and rambunctious laughter comes from the backyard as the smell of charred meat fills the air.

“Fuck my life,” Zadom whispers to himself.

I drag him towards the backyard, hoping my best friend, Halo, is here. She is Colt’s second eldest child under Kyro, and we grew up together. She may be a year younger than I am, but she understands me. Halo is just a regular girl, as her mother, Sinclair, refused to have any more genetically engineered children after Kyro.

“Look what the cat dragged in,” Colt says to Zadom, followed by a laugh.

It’s no secret that Zadom really doesn’t like Colt. Their personalities clash; Uncle Colt is the life of the party and in your face, and Zadom is not.

“And look what the cat puked up and left on our patio.”

“Zadom,” Mum chastises. “That’s no way to speak to your uncle.”

Zadom lets my hand go. “He isn’t my uncle and just because he is hiding from Aunt Blayne doesn’t mean I have to be nice.”

Aunt Blayne is technically Lynx’s mum, but it’s a long-ass story. Basically, she never wanted kids when our psycho grandpa implanted an embryo in her, so the only way she would keep the baby was if Sinclair raised him as her own. Colt’s entire team—including Blayne—are in a relationship with Sinclair. Relationships with at least one woman and multiple men are the norm around here; honestly, it’s weird for us when someone is monogamous.

“OMG, you’re finally home and can save me from those obnoxious boys,” Halo says, stepping outside.

“You don’t find me obnoxious, sweet cheeks,” Kenji says, following her outside.

“Don’t call me that,” she says swiftly, punching him in the guts.

“That’s my girl,” Colt says with a laugh.

Halo grabs my arm and drags me inside, and I don’t protest. Once we are upstairs in the safety of my room, Halo shuts the door.

“Now, let’s get you packed before your mum comes upstairs. We need to make sure that you have all your supplies.”

She walks into my closet and comes back out with a handful of my underwear and tosses them on my bed.

“Oh, you definitely need these,” she says, holding up a very lacy pair.

“And why would I need those wedgie-inducing underwear?”

“Because,” she drawls, stuffing them into the zippered compartment of my suitcase. “You’re an eighteen-year-old virgin, and honestly, have you seen the muscles that Cruze is sporting? It’s like puberty just hit him late and now he is sexy as fuck.”

Jealousy pools in my stomach. I'm not blind—I see them every damn day, when he pins me on the damn mat during training, and when they force me to run at five in the morning and they're all shirtless.

“I don't know where those muscles came from because Uncle Jimmie doesn't have a single muscle on him, and Hayes, let's not get started on that tattooed god of a man. You could do without my idiot brothers, so I like to pretend that Kyro and Lynx are not part of your weird genetic team. Just thinking about you hooking up with them makes me vomit a little in my mouth. Seriously, Kyro is a slob. He once wore the same underwear two days in a row and declared turning them inside out counted. And Lynx and his cum rags—Mum would always bitch to one of our dads about it being their job to sort that out.”

Unable to help myself, I snort. “No one is hooking up, or have you forgotten about my Zadam issue?”

“No, I haven't forgotten.” She sighs, walking into my closet again and bringing out another handful of clothes which she throws on the bed. “But I have a plan. We find him a girl and get him laid, then he will be so damn busy he won't feel you getting your brains fucked out.”

“That plan would be great if Zadam had a damn soul. If anyone so much as looks at him, he growls at them, and the girls run with their tails between their legs. He barely leaves my side; our weird bond has him glued to me, and now it's literally his job, being our handler. Besides, let's say your plan works. All the guys are so far up Zadam's ass that I'm pretty sure they would be too scared to touch me anyway.”

“That's where Plan B comes into play.” She pulls a small bottle of pills from her pocket. “Slip one of these into his food and *bam*, he will be out cold for a few hours.”

“Are you crazy?” I say, snatching the bottle from her. “Zadam will murder you in your sleep if he finds out. Not to mention Chester.”

My father Chester is one of our lead scientists, and he is also in charge of all medications for our genetically altered

teams. We are resistant to anything our body perceives as poison, so normal medications don't work on us. We couldn't even be normal teenagers and get drunk at parties until Zadom managed to steal some special liquid that our father Kai uses to get drunk. One drop in our drinks, and we can be normal, or at least *they* can. Kyro gave me one of his drinks—once—and when Zadom found out, he went ballistic.

“Not crazy, just realistic. You need to lose your V-card. If not with your team, then find someone else with a death wish. The man-meat pool will open for you this year.”

“Don't you start about me losing my virginity when you lost yours to my little brother.”

Halo is a few months older than Kenji and they are in a team together. We have a few sibling teams that are not genetically engineered. While Halo doesn't have any abilities because her parents don't, Kenji inherited the power of seduction from our mother. She didn't stand a chance.

“Ugh, don't remind me. It happened once, and now I can withstand his voodoo bullshit. It's like the second he deflowered me, the cloud of lust dispersed, and now he is just your annoying little brother.”

“Hot little brother,” comes from the doorway, and Kenji stands there with a smile plastered on his face. “Stop lying to yourself. You know you want all this.”

Kenji lifts his shirt, and I roll my eyes. “Go away, seriously. You get to harass her every day at school.”

“Fuck off,” Zadom snaps, pushing past him and flopping down onto his bed.

“Don't hate on me, sister lover.”

Zadom sits up, his gaze turning murderous. I hate when I see the change—it's so much like our fathers Laughn, Creed, and Chester. When there is a threat to our mother, they turn into monsters and would take out anyone in their way.

“Shit, that's my cue to leave before I become fish food,” Kenji says, taking off down the hall.

“I fucking hate when he says that. One time I was confused about the things I was feeling. Once. We didn’t understand our gifts back then.”

Halo laughs. “You know he only says that to piss you off. No one actually thinks you have feelings for your sister. We all know that you’re bonded to her, so every fibre of your being wants to protect her and keep her safe. It’s literally what you were born to do.”

Zadom relaxes, laying back on the bed; he tolerates Halo because she is my best friend.

“You can’t sleep right now. You need to pack,” I tell him. I don’t want to be stuck here all night while our parents hang out. Once upon a time it was fun, but now there are so many small children that it’s way too noisy to be enjoyable.

“Already packed before I came to pick you up. It’s not like we need that many outfits when we still have to wear a fucking uniform.”

He isn’t wrong, even though the university uniform isn’t as formal as the high school one. It’s simply blue cargo pants, a blue polo with the Olympia logo, and boots. Since a lot of our electives are training, it’s more a military style.

Once I have finished packing, Mum makes her way into our room. “Did you finish already?” she asks.

“We have. We don’t really need much. Just the basics.”

“My babies are all grown up,” she gushes.

“Mum, you will see us all the time, you know, with you and everyone else working at the university. There literally aren’t many classes that one of you doesn’t teach.”

“Zadom, that doesn’t mean my babies moving out of the house isn’t a big deal.”

My dad Boston comes to stand by Mum’s side. “I still don’t think she should move in with those boys,” he huffs.

“Dad, seriously, I’m eighteen now and an adult. Besides, Mum had us when she was eighteen.”

“That’s not the point. You’re my little princess.”

Halo snorts. “You have nothing to worry about. Zadam won’t let anyone take her innocence. The whole first-time pain and your brother feeling that—talk about awkward.”

“So much like your father,” Mum says to her, and it’s true. Uncle Colt just says whatever comes to his mind and so does Halo.

“She would know, I popped her cherry,” Kenji chirps, appearing out of nowhere.

“Kenji,” Boston warns. “Go round up your siblings.”

Zadam jumps up from the bed and grabs my suitcase. “Let’s go, sis. We have an apartment to set up. Cruze is with the delivery driver. We have shit to build.”

It takes another hour to get out of the house. It’s the goodbyes with all our dads that take the longest, and Chester is the damn worst. For a man as scary as he is, he’s a big softy. Then Petra, our housekeeper, makes us promise to come home once a week for dinner, and Zadam agrees just so we can get out of the door quicker.

Finally, freedom and a chance to make some boys realise they have feelings for me. Halo is right, I’m eighteen and probably the only damn virgin walking into Olympia University. Kyro kissed me once; it can’t be that hard to get him to do it again.



Chapter Two

Zhavia

Flat pack furniture, how I love thee.

Zadom had to leave for a handler's meeting, leaving Kyro, Lynx, Cruze, Hayes, and me to assemble everything.

"Are you just going to watch as we do all the hard work?" Kyro says, lifting a box out of the way so he can assemble my bookshelf.

"With all you strong men holding drills and tools, surely you don't need my help."

Kyro laughs, and he is so damn beautiful. I know it's not something you say about a man very often, but it's true. His shoulder-length wavy blond hair is pulled back by a bandana, and his crystal-blue eyes always sparkle with mischief. Also, I very much appreciate that he rarely wears a shirt, his toned abs always left on display.

"I think she is checking you out, bro," Lynx says to his brother, while winking at me. He is the opposite of his brother, with dark-brown hair falling across his chocolate-coloured eyes. He has a ring through his nose, and he is the only one of the guys who can grow a full beard, which he keeps trimmed short and neat.

Hayes is the shortest of all my team at just under six feet tall. His light-brown hair is longer at the top and shaved around the sides, and his green eyes and lopsided smirk will suck you in every time. His whole torso is covered in tattoos that my father Kai has been giving him for the last few years. Hayes's parents are not as strict as ours; when Zadom got his first at sixteen, Mum almost had an aneurysm.

Last is Cruze, and while he was always self-conscious about his body—he was tall and never had muscle—this last year he has come into himself. He has a square jaw and panty-melting smile, and brown hair with natural blonde highlights. But it's his honey-coloured eyes that show his goodness.

“Our little Apple,” Hayes says. “You need to stop looking at us like that, or bad things may happen. We are so close to convincing your parents that we are ready for an assignment. You and Zadom are Olympia royalty, and we need to make sure everything goes off without a hitch.”

And now I see red.

All they care about is our first assignment, one we would get anyway. Not that my parents think I'm ready—which I haven't told the guys yet.

“And fucking me will hinder that how?”

Hayes's mouth drops open and his brows furrow.

Yeah, take that. Actually, you know what? Fuck them. “And just so you all know, Mum doesn't think I'm ready for the field yet. Maybe it's all this innocence that I'm holding onto.”

I cross my arms over my chest. Cruze shakes his head—he knows exactly what I'm doing—Lynx scratches the back of his neck, and Kyro stands, looks at the guys, then back at me.

“Fuck it,” Lynx says, storming towards me. He picks me up, throws me over his shoulder, and storms into his room, throwing me down on his bed.

“Is this what you want, Apple? You want us to go against our handler and cause a rift just so you can get your rocks off?”

Lynx crawls up the bed, his spicy scent always reminding me of the Christmas candles my mum likes to buy. I swallow hard when he pins my hands above my head.

“So what if I do? Is it wrong to feel wanted? You’re supposed to love me. You were created for me.”

“You’re right, we were created for you,” he says, running his nose down my neck as he grinds his erection into me. “We do all love you, but what if we’re not in love with you?”

“But my parents,” I whisper, trying not to cry.

“We’re not your parents, and Zadam . . .”

“Go fuck Zadam then,” I yell. “Everything is always about him.”

I pull my arms from his grip and push against his chest. He knows not to piss me off too much. We have started to test how far Zadam’s reach is with my emotions and pain. Well, not so much the pain because they all refuse to physically hurt me. The clearest connection is when we are in the same house or direct area, and the link is weaker the further away he is, unless I want him to feel it.

I roll out of the bed and see the other three standing by the door. I storm past them and back into the living area. “You know what? Fuck you all. If you won’t fuck me, I will find someone else to do it.”

Hayes is the first to move towards me. He is quick, backing me up against a wall and using his boot to kick my legs open, pressing his knee against my pussy. “Like fuck you will, I’ll kill him,” he growls out, and I scoff at him. “Try me, Apple, and I will make you watch as I tear the poor fucker apart limb from limb.”

Lynx gets in close. “Have you ever asked yourself *why* Zadam feels your emotions when you’re with us? You have tested it, I’ve watched you, and it’s because you’re fucking scared.”

Before I can respond, the front door is thrown open and Zadam stands there, eyes void of emotion.

“Fuck,” Cruze swears under his breath.

“At least it’s not me this time,” Kyro says with a chuckle.

Both Lynx and Hayes step back from me, but not before Lynx whispers, “See?”

“Get the fuck away from her,” Zadam says, moving in towards them.

They move into position to protect themselves, and I step between them, placing my hand on Zadam’s chest.

“Hey, look at me,” I say, but he just zeroes in on them over my shoulder. Using my free hand to force his chin to look down, I bring his focus back to me, and his eyes soften. “Zay, it’s me. I’m okay. This is all my fault, and I’m sorry.”

Waves of anger and sadness roll off him; I can feel it in his aura. Another ability I get from my father Chester.

He nods. “If they make you feel like that again, I’ll hurt them.”

Zadam’s chest rises and falls in rapid succession. I pull him into my arms. “Shh, I’m fine, I promise.”

“I can’t keep doing this, Zhavvy. It hurts so bad. Between this with you and the nightmares, I’m so tired.”

I pull back and look at my brother’s face. “You’re still having nightmares?”

He nods. “I still can’t reach her. She’s right *there*, just out of reach. Then I wake up and I miss her, and that feeling doesn’t go away.”

“Have you spoken to our dads about it? There has to be a reason for them.”

He shakes his head. “If I tell them, it makes it real. What if I’m going crazy and they take me from your team? I have to protect you, and when I think about her, it interferes with that.”

I need to find out who this girl from his dreams is. There is no way he is crazy. It must mean something, and maybe, just maybe, she is the one who will occupy his time, like Halo said.

“Actually, my mum says that in our team, it’s our job to protect Zhavia, and it’s your job to make sure our team runs well and that we follow protocol,” Cruze interjects.

“Fuck your Mum. She was part of the reason we have no fucking idea what’s going on with us,” Zadam snaps.

Cruze recoils and turns back to finish putting my bookshelf together.

Zadam isn’t wrong. Cruze’s mum, Betty, was working with my grandfather to help implant our parents with us, and she knew before anyone else did. Mum says she didn’t have a choice—that you never did when he was involved. But I see the resentment in Lynx’s biological mother’s eyes whenever they are together; she hates Betty for having a hand in taking away her choice. While she loves Lynx, she is more like a cool aunt than a mother. That’s where her girlfriend, my aunt Sinclair, comes in. She has raised both Kyro and Lynx.

“How about you walk me to meet my advisor for this year?” I tell Zadam. We need to defuse this situation.

Zadam nods and we both head out, walking across campus to the administration building. Most of the advisors are also teachers, and my advisor is new this year. I heard Mum and my aunts talking about him. Our fathers are not overly pleased, but my fathers are sceptical about any man around my mother. You would think being together for almost two decades would mean they were secure, but Chester would still happily murder someone just for looking at her.

Once we reach the administration building, we find Mr Blakely’s office. The door is ajar, and he is reaching up to hang a picture on the wall.

Zadam elbows me. “Just no,” he whispers, and I snort.

It’s not my fault that Mr Blakely looks to be our age, with broad shoulders. The way his polo shirt stretches across his biceps has me licking my lips, and his tattoos almost make me swoon.

“Ah, Zhavia, right on time,” he says walking towards us. He reaches out and shakes my hand. “And you must be

Zadom. Your parents have told me so much about the both of you.”

“My mother speaks highly of you,” I tell him, while Zadom just glares.

Zay leans in and places his head against mine. *He touches you—he dies.*

Yep, a new ability I have found is I can hear thoughts, mainly when someone rests their head against mine. I have grilled my dad Chester about it, and he says his ability comes and goes. He doesn’t know why it’s not always there, just that the connection is strongest with Mum.

“Just go. I will see you back home later. Maybe apologise to Cruze—you know he can be sensitive and just wants your approval. It’s not his fault what his mum did. And besides, his father is our mother’s best friend. She doesn’t take well when anyone upsets Uncle Jimmie.”

“Any requests for dinner?” he asks.

“That crispy chicken, please.”

Zadom nods and leaves the room. Mr Blakely gestures for the chair.

“Sorry about him, Mr Blakely. He can be a lot when you don’t know him.”

“Call me Rome. Mr Blakely is my father, and it feels weird you calling me that when we are the same age.”

“Okay.”

“So,” he says, pulling out a folder. “Your grades are perfect.”

“Of course they are. I just have a way of remembering things.”

“Yes, your mother has given me a list of everyone’s abilities so we can work through yours.”

“And what’s your ability, Rome?”

He kicks back in his chair and places his hands behind his head. “What makes you think I have any abilities?”

“Let’s call it intuition.”

In reality, it was a backhanded comment I overheard my mother make to one of my fathers about Mr Blakely being special. I expected him to be a basic; it’s code for what most of our handlers are. They get the basic abilities we all have: super endurance, no fingerprints, bodies that don’t absorb substances perceived as poisons, disease resistance, stronger bones, and faster healing. But they don’t have a link to a team.

“I’m just your basic ex-handler. No special abilities for me.”

Hmm, he is lying to me, but I don’t push him because he must know that I can read people. Everyone at Olympia is trained. My father Davis is a human lie detector, and he runs the class, but I have a natural ability like he does.

I think it over for a minute. I expected one of my dads to be my advisor, so why Rome? Why would my fathers agree to let another person be my advisor? They wouldn’t.

“I take it that my fathers didn’t agree to let you be my advisor, and it was my mum? She wants me to figure out my emotions and Zadom being able to feel them.” I laugh. “She thinks that throwing an attractive man at me will work.”

“I’m flattered you think I’m hot.”

I shake my head. “Cut the bullshit, Rome. You know that you’re hot and you know everyone here is of legal age. The whole teacher-student thing isn’t against the rules.”

Rome laughs. “Okay, fine, you caught us. Mrs Olympia wants me to help you, even if you don’t have feelings for me. It’s a natural response to feel things when someone touches you, but most importantly, she wants someone to help with the pain side. She says your brother, team, and fathers are all—in her words, not mine—too pussy to manhandle you. She wants me to push you and train you to control your emotions, so your brother and you can have a break from him feeling everything.”

“You’re going to hurt me,” I say with a clap. I have experimented with Halo, but she isn’t strong enough to actually hurt me.

“I have never had someone get so excited about that fact. We know Zadom has no pain receptors like your father Laughn, and so far, there have been no abilities you share—if one has it, the other doesn’t.”

“That’s true.”

“Well, now that we have met, I don’t really have a course outline. I think we can just wing it for a while. Your mother thinks it’s best if you don’t tell your team what we are up to.”

I nod—interesting. Is my mum trying to make them jealous? I knew it. The reason she doesn’t think I’m ready is because my team won’t cross my brother.

Cruze was right with what his mum said; I see it between my fathers and my mum, even if their team dynamic is different. My team’s job is to protect me, including Zadom, but his role is also more. He has to make sure we actually work as a team, that the guys do their jobs, and we follow Olympia protocol and report back to our father Brennan.



Chapter Three

Cruze

I flip Zhavia down onto the mat; she didn't even try to put up a fight. We have been sparring together since we were in nappies and she has always been able to overpower me, yet lately I have been able to pin her. She says it's my newfound strength, which just makes me roll my eyes. Puberty and muscles came late for me, and I have never found peace in training like the rest of the team. So, I didn't put in one hundred percent effort until last year, when I realised we would soon go on assignments, and I would have to help keep Zhavia safe. While I might be the brains of the group, the thought of not being able to protect her pushed me to try a little harder.

Zhavia squirms beneath me, bringing my wandering mind back to the present, and my dick quickly gets the memo, so I jump off her with lightning speed. Reaching down, I take her hand and help pull her to her feet. My eyes linger on her breasts a little too long, and I feel a blush creep into my cheeks. I'm an idiot. I have held onto hope that Zadom will pull the stick from his ass and let us be with his sister. It's the sole purpose of our group; we were literally designed to love her.

Honestly, I want nothing more than to have all my firsts with her, which I have been told is lame. But I don't think it is,

as I have no interest in other women. They don't make my pulse race when they walk into a room like she does. Right back as far as I can remember, it's always been her.

“Zhavia, you need to put more effort in,” Rome calls out. He is Zhavia's academic advisor, and it pisses me off the way he watches her. “Here, I'll show you.”

Zhavia bounces up and down, shaking out her arms. Rome moves past me, making me step back. I grind my teeth together when his hands touch her body; he shouldn't be touching what is mine. I use all my restraint to not attack him. We have classes for this, as we need to be trained for anything, especially when it comes to our girls.

It doesn't matter what I think, though. Lynx is in the corner taking out his aggression on a boxing bag, and I catch the moment he notices Rome standing too close. He steps away and onto the mats, then he is a bullet moving forward. All his training is thrown out the window when he tackles Rome to the ground. But Rome is quick, rolling and pinning Lynx beneath him.

“Get the fuck off me,” Lynx spits, and I snort.

He didn't realise Rome was one of us. Idiot. All of our combat trainers are just like us, or at least ninety percent are. We have a couple of ex-military personnel that teach higher grades—those people can already control their emotions. It's the academic teachers who may be regular people. Even though Rome is close to our age, they wouldn't put him around our team if he wasn't at our standard.

“Don't just stand there,” Lynx snaps, looking at me.

“Don't drag me into this. You're the one who attacked a teacher.”

Lynx cuts his glare from me to Zhavia standing next to me, and she shrugs. “Don't look at me, either. I don't mind Rome's body on top of mine.”

Rome jumps up and offers Lynx his hand, but he just slaps him away. “Take that as a lesson that you might come up

against someone you can't beat. You'll want your girl ready to help."

"The issue is," Zadom says, and we all turn to find him pointing a sniper rifle straight at Rome, "I'm fucking insane." A small red dot is lined up perfectly with Rome's chest. "And I know when my team needs me. I feel it."

"Goddamnit," Lynx spits. "I thought I had my shit under control."

"It wasn't you," Zadom says, not taking his eyes off Rome. "It was Cruze, I felt his anger."

Zhavia's eyes cut to mine, and I drop my head. Just because I know how to not lash out doesn't mean I don't feel it. Usually, Zadom is so in tune with Zhavia that he barely feels our emotions. It's in cases like this where we would need him. Well, maybe not like this since Rome is no threat to us.

"Zadom," a large voice booms from the entry of the room. "Put that fucking thing away now!"

Laughn, one of their fathers, strides into the room—he is a scary motherfucker. Zadom turns and the red light hovers over his dad's chest. Laughn keeps walking towards Zadom until he grabs the rifle and pulls it from his hands.

"First lesson, son. Don't point that thing at me unless you plan to pull the trigger. I get it, boys. If someone like that looked at my woman, he wouldn't have legs. That's a warning, pretty boy." He glares at Rome. "If he were to touch my daughter inappropriately, I would hold him down for her team to rip his legs off. Fuck! I have been tempted to rip the legs off you little fuckers for looking at her, but my wife says I'm not allowed to, and she is the boss."

Zhavia rolls her eyes. "Why are you here, Daddy? You can't just barge into my classes and throw around threats. I am more than capable of taking care of myself."

"I was actually looking for your brother. We have a lesson to get on with."

Laughn and Zadom both have no pain receptors, and Laughn is teaching him how to recognise when his body

should be experiencing pain. People think his gift is good, but Laughn says sometimes that isn't the case.

“Fine, let's go,” Zador says, storming out of the room.

“Bye, princess. Give the boys hell.”

“I will. Love you, Daddy.”

Kyro and Hayes pass Laughn on his way out. Kyro salutes him and Laughn just groans and shakes his head.

“Are you lot finished? I need sugar—I feel weak,” Kyro says.

“Zhavia needs to pin someone to the floor before she's done.” Rome is standing beside the mat with his arms crossed as if he didn't just have a gun pointed at him.

“Let it be me. Zhavia wishes she could take me down.” Kyro pulls off his shirt and throws it to the ground, and Zhavia's eyes roam over his chest as she smirks. Lynx scoffs and storms off to the locker rooms.

“Please, I have been kicking your ass since we could walk.”

They stand face to face; Kyro is taller than her, not that Zhavia is short by any means. Kyro bounces on his toes, being his usual idiot self, while Zhavia laughs at him. He bounces, waiting and watching until she takes out his legs and he falls on his ass. She launches herself on top of him, and he bucks his hips up, but his eyes go round when she moans. Then she leans her torso down and whispers something in his ear.

“I tap out,” he says. “She doesn't play fair.”

“Okay, that's enough for today. Go shower. Zhavia, I will see you next lesson.” Rome turns and leaves.

“Hurry and shower, we need food,” Kyro whines, grabbing his shirt from the ground and pulling it back over his head.

As soon as Zhavia enters the locker room, Hayes asks, “What the hell are we going to do about that advisor?”

“Beats me,” Kyro replies. “What can we do? Her mother hired him, and she runs this place.”

“It has to be a test. Mum has told me stories about the tests they used to do back when they were kids.” They both look at me. “What if this is our first test? To see how we handle someone around Zhavia—if it is, we failed miserably. Lynx attacked him and Zadom threatened him with a damn sniper rifle. They won’t ever trust us out in the field. This whole *touch her and die* bullshit is so cliché.”

“Maybe, but she is ours. It’s hard enough that Zadom won’t let us give in to our basic instincts with her. Tell me you don’t want to see her bare before you with her legs spread,” Kyro adds, adjusting his cock at just the thought.

“It’s all I have ever fucking dreamt about. I jack off to the thought multiple times a day. But Zadom is crazy,” Hayes adds.

“Fuck him. I’m sick of holding back. He needs to learn how to deal with it.”

“It’s not that simple, Kyro. Imagine if every time Halo got laid you could feel her every emotion, along with any amount of pain she felt.” As much as it sucks for us, I understand why Zadom asked us to not have an intimate relationship with her until they can figure out a way to lessen the connection. He says it’s also deeper than that; something comes over him, some primal need inside him that screams *mine*. Logically, he understands she is his sister, but his instincts don’t give a fuck. He goes into killing mode, and honestly, we all understand that feeling.

Conrad fucking Jacobson is lucky to even still be alive. The dipshit sibling of one of the altered tried to touch what wasn’t his. Hayes broke his hand and Zadom tied him to a tree above an ant nest, then they left him there. One of the teachers found him the next day when they went for their morning run. We wanted to do a lot more—our restraint was damn amazing if you ask me.

“Dude, that’s fucking gross. I know she lost her V-card to that little fuckface, Kenji—it’s hard enough not strangling the fucker, and I didn’t feel shit. But it goes against our fucking biological makeup to not be there next to her, touching her,

loving her however she wants us to. Every time she looks at me with those huge ocean-coloured eyes, I can see what she wants, and I don't think I can deny her anymore. Killing her brother isn't an option, so we need to find a way to make this work."

"We could drug him," Hayes offers.

"Oh yeah," I say. "That will go down well. Hey Chester, we want to defile your daughter, but your son is a cock-blocker. Do you think you could give us a sedative strong enough to take the fucker down?" I shake my head.

"Maybe not," Kyro says. "But we could try bribing Kenji. That kid can get his hands on anything we need. You know he works with Chester and supplies us with the other stuff we need. Besides, he dislikes his brother, so we might have a chance."

"Can you hear yourselves? Fine, we knock him out *once*, so you can get your fix and then what? We can't drug him daily. I can't speak for you guys, but I just know once I touch her, I won't be able to stop. Anyway, I'm going to get changed."

Grabbing my gym bag, I leave them to their plotting of ways to take Zadom down. Don't get me wrong, I like the idea, but in the long term it doesn't fix the problem. Maybe I'll talk to my dad. After all, he is best friends with Zhavia's mum. If he could talk to Jolie for us, it's possible she knows of a way for us to be with her daughter. Surely, she—more than anyone—understands what it's like to need someone so badly it hurts.



Chapter Four

Zhavia

The locker rooms at Olympia University are unisex, and Lynx has already made his way inside. I grab my gym bag and head in as well, then stop dead in my tracks, blinking a few times. Lynx is naked in the open showers, water cascading over his lean body. My eyes follow the water down and I swallow hard when I stop at his thick cock just hanging there between his legs.

I have seen dicks before; it comes with having a million fathers and brothers, especially since Kenji does not give a shit and walks around naked way too much. Even these guys did as we grew up together, but we were kids the last time I saw him naked.

I stay still and watch him quietly. Lynx hasn't sensed me standing here, and I soak up the sight before me.

“Like what you see?” Cruze whispers in my ear, making me jump out of my skin. Lynx looks up and smirks, in no rush to cover himself as he turns to face me. “You need to learn to control it. Switch your brain off because I’m waiting for you when you do.”

The door swings open. “Fuck, if I knew we were all getting naked, I would have been in here sooner,” Kyro says.

Cruze steps away from me, and Lynx turns back around, giving me the perfect view of his toned ass.

Rushing into the safety of a cubicle, I place my gym bag on the bench chair and take a few deep breaths.

Stop being a chicken shit, Zhavia. These are my guys, and Zadom is with Dad. He will have him locked in that room for two hours, and there is no way Zadom can get past Laughn.

Taking my bag, I step back out into the open room—no one looks my way—and I strip my sports bra and bike pants from my body, dropping them to the floor. Though I can feel eyes on me, I don't turn around, not wanting to lose my resolve straight away.

Turning the water on, I step straight under before it can heat, needing to cool off quickly. My nipples pebble under the assault of the cold water despite the heat pooling between my legs.

“You're playing a dangerous game, Apple,” Lynx groans out.

“Am I?” I ask, turning around to face them and finding all four staring back at me. I close my eyes and take a deep breath before opening them again, then run a hand down my stomach. They all watch with lust in their eyes. Come on, one of you needs to give in.

The face of a girl around my age pops into my head, but I can't quite make her out. *“I'm going to help you.”*

While I try to focus on her, she seems just out of reach. I can feel her—she's in my head, or I'm in hers, I can't quite tell.

“How will you help me?”

I don't know if I say the words out loud or if I just think them, but it's all so real. *“You're the only one who can hear me.”*

I gasp and open my eyes.

Kyro has my naked body wrapped in his arms and has moved us to a nearby bench. “Hey, are you okay? What

happened? You have been out of it for a few minutes.”

A few minutes? It felt like a few seconds.

“I’m fine, I . . . I don’t know what happened, I zoned out, I guess . . . Where is everyone?”

“They stepped outside for a minute. Zadom could be here any second, and we can’t all risk dying.” He grins, regarding me with a banked heat in his gaze.

“My hero, risking your life for me,” I say, sitting up, and use this opportunity to straddle his lap. “Since you’re going to die, should I make it worth it?”

Kyro bites his lip, thinking it over, his hands falling to my waist.

“Do it,” the voice in my head says. *“I’ll help you.”*

Shaking my head, I wonder if I’m going fucking crazy. But I lean in and place my lips against Kyro’s. He stills and then his fingers dig into my skin, and he groans.

“Fuck it,” he whispers against my lips, then his whole demeanour shifts. His hands explore my body and his tongue pushes against my lips, making me open for him. My whole body is on fire, and every nerve ending tingles.

Kyro grinds up, and his pants rub against my most sensitive areas. I gasp, so primed I feel like I could explode. Holy shit, I’m dry humping Kyro and we’re not dead.

“I won’t let him hurt you,” the voice says. *“I’ll always be here when you need me.”*

Tuning her out—maybe she is the inner me, I will have to ask someone—I focus on the way his lips feel against mine and the movement of his hands gliding against my skin. A tension is building rapidly in my stomach that pulls me back into the moment.

Suddenly every nerve ending explodes, catching me by surprise, and a euphoria washes over me. I pull back from his lips as stars dance across my vision.

“Oh god,” I cry out.

The door bursts open, and my heart pounds in anticipation of my brother racing in to kill Kyro, but he doesn't. Instead, the rest of my team files in wide-eyed.

Kyro slides his hands to my jaw and makes me look at him. "You're so beautiful when you come. If I die today, it was worth it."

"Zhavvy," Cruze says. I look over at him, and he holds out my clothes. "I called your dad. He is on his way, so you may want to put these on."

I scramble off Kyro's lap and take the clothes from Cruze, quickly getting dressed.

"Man, you should change your pants," Hayes says to Kyro.

I look down and a blush creeps up my face.

"Hey," Lynx says softly, placing a finger under my chin. "Don't be embarrassed. Under normal circumstances, that is hot as fuck. But as much as Kyro is a pain in my ass, I don't want him dead. And depending on which one of your dads comes down here, the state of his pants will determine if he dies or not."

I nod my head and Lynx steps in, wrapping his arms around me. My forehead rests against his.

"You're so beautiful it hurts."

I pull my head back from his. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to listen."

Lynx chuckles. "I wanted you to hear it."

As the door is pushed open, I move back from Lynx, and my dad Brennan steps in. He looks around and his eyes darken. He knows something has happened; the room is thick with sexual tension.

"What's going on, baby girl?" he asks, looking at me.

"She zoned out, and we couldn't snap her out of it," Cruze says.

"For how long?" he asks.

“Around five minutes,” Cruze replies and Dad nods. Brennan is the most reasonable of all my dads and the calmest.

“Okay, take her home. I will get the doctor to come and make sure everything is okay. Laughn just sent Zadom home. He was feeling weird during his training.”

Huh, interesting. He didn’t come down here and murder any of them.

“Thanks Mr Myers,” Lynx says. “We will go now. It’s been a rough day for all of us with that new advisor. Is it possible to send a female doctor? Zhavvy is due for some lady meds, anyway. Kills two birds.”

“Done,” Dad says, giving me a wink. “Expect a phone call from your mother. She will be worried.”

I groan. I have tried so many times over the years to convince my dads to keep secrets, but they are all weak when it comes to her. She has a way to make them spill their guts in seconds.

Dad laughs and leaves us to get back to our apartment.

Teams live together at Olympia University. Some older teams move off campus, but first years are required to live in the on-campus apartment block. When our building was first constructed, it was designed for Zadom and me to share the penthouse apartment. Every other floor has four small apartments, but ours is one large one taking up the entire top floor. Mainly because Zadom doesn’t play well with others, and me, well, my fathers wanted me to have my own room. Our floor also has our own full-sized kitchen and two bathrooms. One for the boys and an en suite in my room.

All the other teams have to share communal bathrooms and a kitchen on the first floor. But everyone usually eats at the dining hall or requests their pre-made meals to collect and heat in the microwave, anyway. Everything we need can be ordered on our phones or tablets through the Olympia portal that Cruze’s dad—Uncle Jimmie—designed and it’s pretty badass.

We all head out, using the electric golf buggies or scooters that are available to all on-campus students as long as we stick to the roads. The entire campus is surrounded by ten-foot fences. It's weird because as a kid I always wondered if they were trying to keep the kids in or trying to keep other people out. Now that I'm older, I know it's keeping people out—all our schools are designed this way—and protecting us from the outside world. Mum says Olympia's worst threats are long gone, but you can never be too safe.

By the time we get back to our apartment, Zadom is laying on the sofa with his shirt over his head. Bluish hues of sadness pour off him, which means, of course, I'm drawn to him like a moth to a flame. I lay down next to him and he pulls me in close. Resting my head on his chest, I can feel the steady beat of his heart.

“Are you okay?” I whisper.

“I am now. I don't know what happened. Dad was helping me with electricity, nothing too crazy, but for a moment I felt something happening with you. Then everything went almost static in my head, and I felt nauseous. It passed after a few minutes, but I couldn't shake this weird feeling.”

He felt nothing. That voice in my head . . . Is it possible, whatever it is, blocked our connection? It can't be—surely it was just my inner voice.

“Dad is sending the doctor over to check on us.”

“Us?” Zadom says, removing the shirt from his head to look at me.

“Yeah, today I had a moment where I zoned out for a few minutes. The guys were there and couldn't snap me out of it.”

“Damn it, now we will be in the lab all week so they can run a million tests,” he complains.

Every time something new happens, they have to run tests. There is no history on us. Just like our fathers were the first successful genetic teams, we are the first genetic super team. They haven't created any more teams like us because they want data to back up the science behind it first.

The doctor comes, takes some blood, and after a once over, determines we both seem fine. She also gives me a script for my period medication to take to the pharmacy here on campus. My dad Chester used to give it straight to me, but while on campus, any Olympia-grade medication needs a script with the doctor's name. While I'm sure I could get a free pass, I want to set an example and don't want anyone to think I get special treatment just because I'm the boss's daughter.

"Zhavvy, I'm going to head down to the kitchen. I placed an order for some supplies, and I'll grab your script while I'm out," Zadam says.

"Please tell me you're making Dad's crispy chicken."

"Again?" Lynx whines. "I swear you two will turn into chickens soon."

"No one asked you to join us. You can have one of your microwave meals," Zadam retorts, then places a kiss on my forehead before he leaves.

I sit and think about what happened and what it means. Surely, it's a good thing being able to block our connection, but at what cost?

As I head into my room to change from my uniform into some comfy PJs, Cruze follows me and shuts the door.

"Do you think what happened today to you somehow affected Zadam?" he asks.

I shrug, pulling my shirt over my head. Cruze goes a light red in the cheeks; he has spent years closing his eyes while I change, always the gentleman, even though he has seen me in less when I wear a bikini. This time, though, he doesn't close his eyes; instead, he watches while I pull on one of Hayes's oversized shirts.

"It's possible, but did you notice he said nothing about me and Kyro? Whatever this is could change everything."

I take a step towards him, testing the waters to see if my brother magically shows up.

"Zhavia," he whispers. "I . . ."

“Do it,” that same voice encourages. *“I’m always here.”*

I close the distance and crush my lips to his, but he doesn’t reciprocate, hesitant to give me what I want. We have known each other our entire lives, and things were so much simpler before hormones came into play. Whatever this voice is—crazy or not—I will enjoy it while I can. Maybe the hypnotherapy sessions are working. It might be a pure coincidence that Zadom felt weird today.

Cruze pulls back. “Zhavvy, we need to stop. I . . . I’m not ready for this. I’m not prepared.”

Honestly, I can’t be hurt by that—Cruze is a planner, always has been. He fills his journals and notebooks full of his thoughts and to-do lists.

“It sounds so corny, but I want our firsts—my firsts—to be special.” The look on his face is sheepishly adorable.

My mouth falls open. I never expected any of them to sit around and wait for my twin brother to let them touch me; we had never imagined we would find a way around our connection. Sure, we have talked about it over the years. But I’ve heard the rumours about Kyro and Hayes and their playboy ways; gossip spread fast in high school, especially in a family that had just as many siblings attending in formed teams. Not all genetic links have been successful either, so there are always plenty of willing girls. Not to mention the other parties they went to, the ones none of them would let me attend. Cruze, though, always stayed behind with me, and we would watch movies and eat popcorn.

“I just thought you would have taken care of your needs elsewhere.”

“Zhavia, I don’t have needs outside of you. I knew that one day we would find a way. Even if I don’t know what this is, we need to find out, especially if it is linked to Zadom. I don’t know if we should say anything to the others until we know for sure. You should call Creed—you two are close, so maybe he can help you figure out what this is?”

“You’re right. Thank you for waiting for me.” I can’t talk to my dad, not until I know what’s going on.

He leans in, taking my face between his large palms and lightly pressing his lips to mine. “I’ll do whatever it takes for you. Having your dad Case as my advisor this year has been good. He likes to talk about your mum a lot and how he waited for her, that no one else ever came close.”

“Eww, you talk to my dad about sex?”

“Not exactly. I just asked why he didn’t move on after they thought your mum died. But it made me feel like someone gets me.”

“I’ll always get you. Want to watch some TV before dinner?”

The others have vanished by the time we walk back out into the living area. Cruze lays his head in my lap, and we put on one of the latest teen dramas. It’s one of those “brother’s best friend” movies, where they fall in love and can’t figure out how they should tell the brother. Then he finds out and loses it, so the couple break up, but they find their way back to each other. I really love those movies because I can relate to them. While I know my situation is different, I always viewed them as not wanting to touch me due to them being Zadam’s best friends, and me being his sister.

“You can now.”

I push the voice away—I need to talk to one of my fathers before I do anything else.

Zadam storms back into the house and drops a bag on the floor, cursing as he goes into the bathroom. He comes back out a few seconds later, holding toilet paper to his nose.

“Are you okay?” Cruze asks him.

“I got a damn bloody nose. Two, actually. One when I was picking up my food and the other just as I was coming in the door.”

I frown at him. He has never had a bloody nose for no reason before. It has to be me—this voice in my head that

blocks Zadam out is doing things to him. Common sense tells me I should talk to Chester, but then he will talk to Mum, and we will be locked up in the lab until they figure it out. I can't do that to Zadam yet; he hates being taken to the lab.

Looks like I will have to do some of my own research first.



Chapter Five

Zhavia

“I can’t save her,” he whimpers.

Waking, I roll over and touch the lamp on my bedside table. Zadom has found his way into my room again, and the small clock reads 4 a.m. I rub my eyes and place my hand on my brother’s arm, calming him instantly, and after a few minutes, his light snores once again fill the air. I slip from the bed and pad to the kitchen to get a glass of water.

“Thirsty?”

Startled, I jump, almost dropping the glass I’d retrieved from the cupboard. Hayes stands nearby in his long grey cotton pants, which hang low on his hips. He steps forward, placing his hand on my waist.

“Now is your chance.”

The voice is right, now is my chance. I reach my fingers out and run my nails down his abs, and he shudders under my touch.

“Zhavvy,” he warns, but I’m sick of waiting. I wish I had my mum’s power of seduction—instead, that went to Kenji. Here I am with four guys that all want me, but just not enough. “We can’t.”

I drop my hand from him. “I’m sorry,” I whisper.

Pulling me into his chest, Hayes rests his chin on my shoulder. “Don’t be sorry.”

As I step back, putting some distance between us, he opens the fridge and pulls out a bottle of water.

“Go back to sleep. Lynx will wake us up in a few hours for a run.” And with that, he goes back to his room and shuts the door.

Filling my glass with tap water, I drink it all in a few gulps, then place it in the sink. As I head to my room, I pass Cruze’s door. Stopping, I turn the handle and slip inside. His room is pitch black, but my eyes quickly adjust, and I tiptoe over to his bed, slipping under the warm sheets.

“You okay?” he murmurs.

“Mhm, Zadom is hogging my bed.”

His arm comes over my body, and he pulls me back into his chest. I love cuddling with Cruze. Every sleepover, we would all set up together and watch movies. Then I would seek him out, as just being near him would help me sleep. Except now he isn’t the scrawny kid; he is tall and has muscles in places he never had them back then.

“I can hear you thinking.”

I snort softly. “I’m sorry. I can’t help but feel like everything is changing, yet I’m staying stationary. Which doesn’t even make sense.”

“It makes perfect sense,” he says.

I close my eyes and let sleep take over until the sun wakes me a few hours later.

Cruze has his hand resting over my stomach, but his fingers have dipped into the waistband of my pyjama shorts. My core clenches, wishing that he would dip them lower.

The door opening lets the smell of coffee waft in, and Lynx stands in the archway, his brow raised. “Coffee is on, but you may want to dress before your brother messes up Cruze’s pretty face.”

Lynx motions to Cruze, who is stirring behind me. His hand moves from my pants, and I miss the contact immediately.

Slipping from the bed, I catch the way Lynx takes me in; I see it in all their eyes every day. Honestly, I wish one of them would stand up to Zadom and tell him they want me, that they don't care about a stupid pact they made when they were kids.

I squeeze my body between the doorframe and Lynx when he makes no effort to move. Instead, the dickhead purposely makes our bodies touch. Safely back into my room, I find Zadom is no longer in my bed. Once I collect the workout gear I specially ordered from my closet, I smirk. Let's see them keep their hands off me in this. The three-quarter length leggings are tight, making my ass look great, and I've paired them with the matching crop top. I decide against braiding my hair and opt to throw it in a bun on top of my head.

Once I'm ready, I head back to the kitchen in search of coffee.

All eyes are on me—I can feel it the instant I step into the room. One of the perks of being linked with them is I know when they're close by and when they watch me.

“Coffee?” Kyro asks, holding up a cup.

“Please. Where is Zadom?” I ask as I jump up onto the counter and watch as he makes me a cup.

“He headed to your parents' house to see Kai.”

Strange. Kai is not the father you go to see in the mornings. He is the father you see for unfiltered advice and tattoos.

“At this time in the morning? He will be lucky if Dad is even alive.”

Kyro just shrugs as he hands me my cup. “I didn't ask many questions. He just grunted at me on his way out, but I think he must have slept like shit again.”

“He ended up in my bed, so he must have.”

I take a big mouthful of coffee and feel it warm my bones. Hayes stretches in front of me, and my eyes wander over his body. There's a fresh tattoo on his chest, but I can't make out what it is, and it's not like him to not show me. Before I get the chance to ask him about it, Cruze joins him. I'll do some stretches once we get downstairs.

"Where are we running this morning?" Cruze asks.

"I was thinking we do a lap of the grounds and end at the water tower," Hayes says, bringing his foot up behind him and grabbing the tip of his shoe to stretch out his quad.

"What does the winner get?" Kyro asks. Every day we run, and every day Kyro turns it into a competition.

"Winner gets a night with me," I blurt out.

Kyro chokes on his coffee, the milky substance coming out his nose.

"That's not how it works," Lynx snaps. "It needs to be an *if you win* bet."

Kyro laughs. "I don't know—I think I like this. But how about we up the ante and make it loser? Because someone might die if Zadom finds out."

"Deal," Lynx says. He knows he won't lose.

I fake smile at Lynx. "I think I might be able to block him out. I have been hearing this voice in my head and when I do, our connection is severed."

"Since when?" Hayes asks, stretching his arms above his head.

"Since the locker room," I state.

"Have you spoken to your fathers about it?" Cruze asks warily. "They need to know about something like this." He likes to follow rules, but he knows my stance about involving my parents with anything concerning Zadom.

"Not yet. Zadom and I will be tested like lab rats, and I can't do that to him. I want to wait until I know for sure. Are we running, or are we going to sit around and chat?"

I slide off the bench and turn my back on them to place my coffee cup on the counter.

When we get downstairs, Rome is already there, finishing his stretches; unlike my team, he has the decency to wear a singlet to cover his skin. Though it's a shame when he has a body like that.

"Zhavia," he says, looking over at me. "I almost thought you were going to stand me up."

"Unlikely, Rome, as I plan to kick your ass."

"Who invited him?" Lynx snaps as he steps outside.

"I did. Are you afraid he will kick your butt?" I question.

"No. I'm worried he will lose, and I will have to kill him. Don't think that I won't," Lynx snaps as he continues to glare at Rome, probably planning all the ways he could end him.

Shit, I forgot about the loser's prize.

Kyro laughs. "If you plan to run with us, Rome, you have to know we place little side bets. We now have one main one for the loser, but you can't take part in that unless you want to die."

Rome raises a brow. "And what's the loser's prize?"

"Me," I say without adding more detail.

"I don't know. It might give you all the incentive to let me win. What are the other bets you make?" Rome asks.

Lynx growls under his breath and Kyro grins like a lunatic.

"It's an *if I win* bet," Cruze says.

"Like, if I win, they all have to eat a sandwich and watch me cut open a dead body," I say with a smile. I love working in the morgue with my dad Creed.

"And what are the chances that you will win?" he asks me, and I laugh.

"Depends on if I cheat. There are no rules. Just remember that."

I take off running, following the path towards the water tower. Rome is the first to catch up to me. The others usually hang back for a bit, trying to make me feel good about myself.

“You know they are running behind you so they can look at your ass.”

I snort. “That’s Kyro’s usual MO. I get commentary too, unless Zadom is with us.”

“Fair enough. What’s with the loser bet?”

I chuckle. “Rome, I’m an eighteen-year-old virgin. I need to get laid and I’m afraid if I look outside of the team, some poor guy will be murdered, but if it’s one of them, they will be murdered. It’s a lose-lose situation.”

Rome clears his throat.

“You asked.”

This time he laughs. “I now regret it. See you at the water tower.”

He takes off, and it’s now me with a view to appreciate. Maybe I could try to seduce him—he can take care of himself.

“Don’t even think about it,” Lynx growls, coming up beside me. Cruze, Kyro, and Hayes pass us.

“Think about what?” I ask innocently.

“Don’t act stupid. You will get him killed. Behave.”

“And what if one of you loses?” I protest as we continue to run side by side.

“We won’t, Apple. The only loser will be you.”

“So, I guess I will be fucking myself tonight as usual.”

Lynx groans from beside me and stops running, then grabs my hand and pulls me into his body. “If I didn’t feel the overwhelming need to protect you against the world, I would have fucked you stupid by now. But if I die, I can no longer keep you safe. Everything I have ever done has been to keep you safe.”

I nod. “I’m sorry,” I say as we jog again at a slower pace.

Everyone else is so far ahead that I only have to beat Lynx to the finish line—which I know is impossible. Lynx could run there with his eyes closed; he has remote viewing and uses his extrasensory perception to avoid obstacles.

“Don’t apologise to me. It’s me who should apologise to you.”

His words stump me—it’s not often he apologises. “What for?”

I should have known he was up to something.

We jog past a wall of shrubs, and *bam*, he pushes me, sending me flying as he runs off laughing.

“You fuckin’ cheat!”

“No rules, Apple, you know that.”

Motherfucker! He is going to pay for that.

Pulling myself out of the shrubs, I dust off the dirt and twigs. For a minute I consider turning around and going back to the apartment, just so I don’t have to see the assholes gloat. Except I don’t because I now live there with them.

By the time I get to the water tower, they are all waiting for me.

“I guess we all live to see another day,” Kyro jokes, throwing his sweaty arm around my shoulder and pulling me into his side.

“You do,” I agree, “but I hope you all hear me giving myself the loser’s prize.” Leaning into Kyro a little closer, I whisper in his ear, “I will scream a little louder just for you.”

Kyro shivers. “That’s not fair. Now I have to run back with a hard dick.”

I laugh, moving out of his arms.

Rome steps up beside me. “You have a meeting with me after classes today. Zadom has a session with Laughn, so it’s a good chance to start your training.”

Excitement bubbles in my gut. He's training me because no one else will touch me. I have combat class with my Aunt Blayne, but they put Zadom and me in the same class, and she refuses to touch me with him around. While she can hold her own—Blayne is the most badass woman I know—and her skills are next level, she is a normal and everything she knows is taught. Zadom could kill her in seconds, and no one trusts him not to until he gets a handle on his abilities.



Chapter Six

Lynx

Living with Zhavia has been pure torture, especially watching her walk about the apartment in her barely there booty shorts with the bottom of her ass cheeks out. My cock gets hard just thinking about it.

Every morning, all first-year students gather in the assembly hall before classes, and this is currently where I am, contemplating my predicament.

Kyro leans into my side. “We need to do something about Rome.”

“What can we do? Mrs Olympia makes the rules. Our little Apple wouldn’t be stupid enough to let him stick his cock in her. Zادم would flip out and there would be a bloodbath. That’s not something you can easily explain to the investors.”

“But look at them,” he says, as Hayes takes a seat next to me with a groan.

“Did you hear? Team Inferno has gone on their first assignment.”

Hayes drones on about it while I keep my eyes fixed on Rome and the hand he has resting on Zhavia’s arm while they wait at the front of the room. I’m imagining snapping his fingers one by one.

Cruze and Zadom join us, and Zadom stands a little longer than he needs to as he stares down his sister.

“Remind me again why I can’t just kill him and make it look like an accident?”

We all laugh at Zadom because we are thinking the same thing, just for a very different reason.

“Because we think he’s our first test,” Cruze adds. “It makes sense, and you know it.”

“Everybody, take your seats. I have too much to do today for your bullshit.”

Creed, one of Zadom and Zhavia’s fathers, stands at the front of the room, and a hush falls as the remaining students take their seats. Out of all their fathers, Laughn, Chester, and Creed are the three that you really don’t want crossing your path.

“Today we are running five groups through the test zone. When I call out your team’s name, come to the front of the room. Teams Karma, Kings, Trailblazer, Rebel, and Athena. Everyone else, you’re dismissed.”

We push to our feet, moving to the front of the room where Zhavia is still standing with Rome. We are Team Athena; the name was given to us, unlike everyone else who got to pick their own. It really shows with some team names. Like The Pork Swords—how the fuck did that pass?

“There is a bus waiting for you all. We will assess each team, so make sure you put in one hundred percent effort.”

Creed steps down from the microphone and heads towards Zhavia. He places a hand on Rome’s shoulder, which makes me smirk; even he isn’t comfortable with the man so close to his daughter. Creed whispers something in his ear and Rome nods before walking away.

“Zadom,” Creed says. “Use your abilities wisely. You need to focus on them and not your sister. She has the others watching out for her. Fight those instincts and you will be unstoppable.”

“It’s a bit hard when every time they fucking touch her, I feel it.”

“Watch your fucking tone with me. Go get on the damn bus if you ever want a chance to get an assignment.”

Zadom turns and storms ahead while Zhavia links arms with Cruze, and the rest of us follow behind her.

When we make it to the bus, Zadom is the only one on it, and the rest of the teams stand awkwardly outside. Zhavia is the first to step on and she beelines straight for her brother. As much as she won’t admit it, at times she is just as attached to his ass as he is to hers. Taking the seat beside him, she rests her head on his shoulder, and he visibly relaxes.

“Holy shit, I’m so excited. Dad talks about the test zone all the time and the shit they used to do there. Do you think they will let us chase people down?” Kyro beams excitedly.

“No, it’s just a training zone now. There will be a more experienced team chasing us with paintball guns, but we won’t be wearing protective suits, so that shit will sting like a bitch,” Hayes answers, grimacing.

“Pussy,” I quip, and he reaches over and corks my damn leg. I flip him off and he laughs.

Everyone else shuffles onto the bus, and the air changes the second Rome steps on. He looks down towards us and Zhavia smirks at him; something is going on and I plan to find out what the fuck it is. He must sense my annoyance and diverts his attention to the front where he takes a seat behind the bus driver.

The brief trip remains silent after Zadom threatened to gouge everyone’s eyeballs out with a rusty spoon. Zhavia has her forehead pressed against his and they communicate that way, keeping him calm. Hopefully she can convince him to pull his shit together for this. We need to show them we are ready for an assignment.

Once we reach our destination, large wooden gates open and we drive inside. Rome instructs the driver where to park the bus and everyone files out.

“Listen up,” Rome shouts. “One by one, your teams will be run through the test zone with another team hunting you. Refrain from causing any serious bodily harm. You are being watched and graded on how well you can work as a team.”

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” Kyro moans as he points towards the building.

Team Swift Six steps out and walks towards us, head-to-toe in camo. I can’t fucking stand these idiots. They were appointed our group handlers when we were ten and they were with us until we were sent to high school.

I zone in on the guy I stabbed in the leg all those years ago. Served him right—they pushed Zhavia into a pool tied up. One good thing came out of that encounter, though. Cruze figured out he could hold his breath for a decent amount of time.

“Long time no see,” one of the douches says.

“How’s the leg?” I ask him, and he sneers at me.

Zhavia turns towards Rome. “Are you sure we can’t hurt them?”

I snort at her question.

“No, not if you want to pass,” Rome replies.

Zhavia nods and turns back to us. “I guess we might not pass this one, boys.”

Kyro picks Zhavia up by the waist and spins her around. “Thank god.”

Rome ushers us into the building where we are all given our paintball guns, and Team Swift Six are sent into the zone. Lucky for them, our team is up last. We have nothing to do but wait and watch, thanks to the large screens in the main building.

Each team sent in fails miserably, and I question if they were even paying attention. Every member does the same thing: the female hides in a tree due to her size allowing her to conceal herself easily. The biggest of the guys is slow, but his aim is on point, and he shoots every female.

“Has everyone been watching?” Zadam asks.

I clap him on the shoulder. “Of course we have. Though the Swift Six are not stupid—they will be ready for us when we walk in.”

“We know their focus is taking out the female in the group,” Cruze says. “We know our main objective before any assignment is working as a team in the roles we are given. Which means, Zadam, you take lead and we will all protect Zhavvy. Yes, we know you can take care of yourself, but we need to follow protocol to prove to your parents that we can.”

He has always been the voice of reason in our group.

Kyro comes bouncing back towards us. “I found something that could be useful,” he says in a lowered tone.

He presses his head to Zhavia, and she smirks. She does the same to each of us. He’s found zip ties. The rules are that we can’t use weapons or hurt them, not that we can’t disarm them. Kyro is a genius, and I don’t say that often.

Our group’s timer starts the countdown. Kyro squeals and rips off his clothes, leaving him as naked as the day he was born. Zhavia’s eyes go round.

“For fuck’s sake,” Zadam spits. “Anyone look at his junk and I will shank you in your fucking sleep.”

The timer gets down to three—he won’t have enough time to get redressed. But when he realises, he just shrugs. “There was a bug in my pants.”

“I hope you get shot in the dick,” I joke. My brother is a fucking idiot. I take back the claim of genius.

Zadam leads us in, with me by his side. It’s easy for me to find my way through an area or know when someone is nearby.

“Anything?” Zadam asks me, and I shake my head.

“To the right, in the tree,” Hayes whispers. His ability to see sounds as colours comes in handy here. Team Swift Six has no chance against our team.

Zadom breaks off from us while the rest of us stalk quietly through the zone, closer and closer to Violet. Why would her team put her up first when she is their weakest link? I'm not sexist—I know Zhavia could kick our asses—but having them as our handlers as children, we know she is the weakest in their team.

We creep up on her, but the test zone is massive so I doubt they would be close together. Kyro mimics Zadom's voice as we walk, keeping to the denser parts of the bushland.

"I think she is moving out of the tree," Hayes whispers, just as the distinct sound of a paintball gun reaches us. We run towards the sound—Kyro in all his naked glory—and a pop going off again, then Kyro screams as he drops to the ground.

"She shot me in the dick," he wheezes, before pulling himself up. He limps towards Zadom, who has Violet pinned to the ground. He pulls the cable ties from his sock, and throws them towards my brother, who catches them with ease.

"Let me go, you fucking piece of shit," Violet cusses, and Kyro mimics her.

His gift is extremely useful. Most people who can mimic another person's voice can't make it sound exact, but Kyro can. He just needs to hear them talk once.

"Let me go, you fucking handsome devil," Kyro says, using Violet's voice, and I snort when Zadom throws him an icy glare.

"Take off your shirt?" Zhavia asks Hayes. He doesn't question her, immediately removing his shirt. She rips it into pieces, then bundles up a chunk and shoves it into Violet's mouth, wrapping a part around her face to keep it in place. That's when I notice Zadom shot her square between the eyes. The paint drips down between them.

"One down, five to go." Kyro laughs.

We leave her lying face down on the ground—someone will come past soon enough to help her.

As we move further into the course, a clicking sound catches our attention.

“Fucking Alexi,” Cruze whispers, as he comes into view relaxed against a tree, flicking the lighter he carries everywhere.

Alexi is the member of their team who has mastered Krav Maga. It’s one of the deadliest forms of combat and doesn’t hold concern for the opponent’s wellbeing. We will start learning Krav Maga this year as part of our training.

As we walk closer, I see Alexi’s first mistake is that he left his weapon leaning up against the tree. He doesn’t make a move to reach for his gun, so this is personal to them, payback for the shit we caused their team.

Zhavia grabs Zadam’s arm, stepping beside him.

“Hello, Alexi. We meet again,” she purrs, and when she steps closer to him, she has a sway in her hips.

Zadam goes to take a step forward, but it’s me pulling him back this time. “Give her a chance. If he so much as touches her, then kill him.”

Zadam nods.

As Zhavia steps back, the idiot’s flame from his lighter grows ten times its regular size, enough to throw him off-guard, and Zadam takes the opportunity to move.

Some of our abilities are not public knowledge, the same as we don’t know what other teams have—it’s just the way it is. Zhavia can manipulate the elements, fire being one of them.

The rest of us move into formation with Zhavvy between us. Alexi is the first to make a move, and Zadam defends himself. What the fuck, Zadam matches his moves? When the fuck did he have time to improve to that skill level? Zadam has him pinned onto the ground within minutes, while my brother helps tie him up.

“Whoops, teabag!” Kyro laughs as his nuts touch the poor guy’s head.

Smoke surrounds us from where the tree has caught fire, followed by red flashing lights and the sound of a siren. The drill is over.

The rest of Team Swift Six comes barrelling through a gap in the trees towards us.

“Where the fuck is Violet?” Gunner yells.

“Back where we fucking left her,” Zadam snaps. “Serves the bitch right.”

Thick smoke makes me lose sight of Zhavia—fuck. “Zhavvy, where the fuck are you?”

“I’m here, but everyone run! There is so much dry debris we can’t stop it on our own,” she yells.

“I have her,” Zadam yells, and we all move.

Fuck, we are in so much fucking trouble when Aunt Jolie finds out about this. She is going to kick our asses.



Chapter Seven

Zhavia

We are screwed.

Mum paces and mumbles under her breath; it's rare I see her this angry. She normally has a good handle on her emotions. My dad Davis pushes open the door to the conference room she has us held in alongside Team Swift Six. Good one, Mum. Bring in the human lie detector. My shoulders drop when my other dad Boston also appears; here we go with a one-way ticket to lecture town.

“What the hell were you all thinking?” Mum finally says. “Not only did you not follow the rules, but the test zone is now closed until we can get people in to fix it. Fire—seriously, Zhavia?! You should know better than to mess with the elements. It was an abuse of the ability that you have been gifted.”

I scoff. “Gifted? Is that what we are calling it? More like cursed, and why the hell are we the first ones that you look at? What about the adults in charge, huh? Bringing a lighter into a test zone, or more importantly, Swift Six having no intentions of using their paintball guns? This was personal.”

“Especially when that bitch shot me in the dick,” Kyro complains, and all the men in the room wince.

Mum looks at Davis, and he nods. “Don’t act innocent, either. We saw Kyro take the cable ties. You all went in with the same intentions. And you”—she points to Kyro—“why were you naked?”

“There was a bug in my pants. I forgot underwear this morning.”

Mum sighs. “I blame your genetics, I really do. I love your father, but you and your sister are too much like him. You will all be sent to the infirmary tomorrow at 0600 hours.”

Everyone groans. The infirmary means twenty-four hours of gruelling training and being pushed to our limits. And those in there with us will not let up until the last second ticks off the clock.

“And as for you,” Boston speaks up, directing himself towards Team Swift Six. “You are all on suspension until further notice. You took a petty grudge from when you were teenagers and made it into a pissing contest that backfired. Not to mention, you didn’t know your subjects or their abilities before you went against your orders. You are fully trained, and I shouldn’t have to tell you that. Team Athena is not a normal, gifted team. Its members are *the* super team. They have abilities far superior to even mine, and I’m one of the originals. Upon your suspension being lifted, you will also attend the infirmary and your duties will be limited.” They all nod, not one of them argues, and Boston continues. “You’re all dismissed, except my children. They will meet you back at school—you all have classes to attend today.”

Everyone stands and leaves the room. Zadam doesn’t speak; he rarely will at times like this, as he can’t control his temper once he starts. A super team or not, our parents have almost twenty years’ experience on us.

“When did you know?” Boston asks Zadam, and he shrugs. “Stop fucking with me. When did you know?”

Dad brings his hands down hard on the table, leaning in closer to him, and Zadam sighs. “I don’t know, a few months.”

“Will someone explain to me what’s going on?” Mum asks.

“Our son has a new ability, and he didn’t think to tell us.”

All three of our parents stare at Zadom, and my gut boils for him. Anger builds in the pit of my stomach, and he must sense it because he takes my hand in his and squeezes.

“Maybe if you didn’t turn us into lab rats, we would actually tell you these things. Every time we get a new ability, or you think something is going on with us, we are taken to the lab where we have to withstand test after test. It’s barbaric. You claim to be better than our grandfather? At least he didn’t pretend to be a good person,” I say, pushing up from my chair, and it falls back behind me.

“Zhavia, sit your ass down,” Mum yells, but I ignore her and storm out of the room.

Zadom isn’t far behind me, and he easily catches up. “You didn’t have to do that.”

Zadom bumps into my back when I pause and turn to face him. “Don’t for one second think that I’m talking to you right now. Why didn’t you tell me? Just leave me alone.”

Turning on my heel, I leave him where he stands and head towards the morgue. I have class and it’s one I would hate to miss.

I love my time in the morgue, as none of my team is in my class. Not one of them is overly keen on dissecting human remains. For me, it’s the highlight of my day. I have been watching my dad Creed since I could walk, always sneaking in and observing him at work. Today is my first class of the year and I’m already late. When I reach the campus morgue, I push through the doors and quickly grab a lab coat and safety goggles before entering the room. My father pauses mid-sentence and I smile at him. He smiles back.

“How much trouble are you in?” he asks.

“Infirmary,” I reply, and some of the students make ohh sounds.

“Take a seat beside Haven. I have already paired off the class.”

Walking towards the back of the room to the empty seat, I hear someone snicker “teacher’s pet” and I stop dead in my tracks. I turn to see a guy my age staring at me with a smirk on his face. My father has his back to us, so I take a few steps backwards and the mischief in his eyes sparkles and grows as I lean down and grab the back of his neck.

“Oh, you like to take control,” he laughs out.

When I place my head against his, I can hear all his disgusting thoughts about me.

My latest gift is hearing and transferring thoughts or ideas into someone else’s head. So far, I have only tried it on my guys or Zadam.

“Make one more comment about me or my brother, and it will be the least of your worries. I will slice your balls off first and use them to gag you, then I will slowly and precisely slice your cock off at the base and shove it up your ass.”

Letting go of his neck, I pull back and his eyes are now cast downwards. Yeah, loser. That’s what I thought.

“Zhavia,” my father warns. “Take your seat and stop threatening my students.”

Gasping, I place my hand over my heart. “Daddy, I would never.”

He shakes his head at me and points to my seat. Turning my back to him, I make it to my seat and plop down beside Haven, who’s definitely not a boy any longer. He’s more like a grown-ass man with his muscles and tattoos.

“Sorry,” I tell him.

He doesn’t look over at me; instead, he leans back on his chair, his boots on the table. Creed isn’t one of those teachers who gives a shit, as long as you put in the work and listen to what he says.

“For what?” he mumbles.

“My brother. It’s easier to apologise now, rather than the day he tries to kill you.”

That makes the corners of Haven’s lips pull up into a smirk. “I’m not afraid of death. I just transferred out of the asylum, so I’m probably crazier than he is.”

“Great, then I think we will be good friends. No one has spoken to me since we arrived. My brother has a reputation for hurting anyone that comes near me.”

“I know,” he says in a hushed tone, but not quite a whisper. “I’m here because of him. No handler trainers want to work with him, so I brokered a deal. I would, so long as I was allowed out and got to attend classes.”

My brow furrows.

My father clears his throat to get our attention, so I place my hand on Haven’s arm; he flinches at the touch. I can communicate this way, but the connection is always weak.

“Aren’t you a bit young to be a trainer?”

“Possibly, but get out of my head. It’s no place for a woman.”

I snort. *“To listen to your private thoughts, I need a stronger connection.”*

He rips his arm back and focuses on what my dad is saying, and I sit back and pretend that I’m doing the same. Except I already know everything he is talking about—my very first lesson as a child was safety precautions. Next will be the instruments . . . I could have skipped out on this lesson after all.

The door to the class is thrown open and Zadom barges in, his angry glare zeroing in on me. He crosses the room until he is standing in front of my table, then reaches over and grabs the back of my head, pressing his forehead against mine.

“You don’t get to be fucking mad at me when I know you’re keeping secrets of your own.”

I struggle to pull back. “Let me go,” I snap. “I don’t have fucking secrets from you.”

“Zadom,” our father barks, but he just ignores him.

Haven makes a stupid move, standing from his chair, but Zadom doesn't even pay him any attention.

“Remove your hands off of her now,” Haven demands.

“It's okay, don't piss him off, it's not worth it,” I tell him, but instead, he pushes Zadom.

This time he lets me go and takes a step back, his sights now set on Haven. “Try to touch me again, I dare you.”

Haven leans his hands down on the table, angling his body towards Zadom. “Haven't you heard? I'm batshit crazy. I love a good puzzle and that's what you are to me. A jigsaw that I need to put together. Your trigger is your sister, and I can't wait to fuck her so you feel it, inch by inch, as I push deep inside her.”

Zadom launches himself onto the desk, and Haven moves back. The class jumps from their seats and scatters out of the way as punches are thrown.

“Zhavia, stop your brother!” Creed shouts. He knows he can't stop him, so it's always me.

Racing up behind Zadom, I jump onto his back, wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. He takes a few steps backwards.

“All three of you, outside *now*.”

We all shuffle out of the classroom, and Creed follows us. “Zadom and Zhavia, go home. Haven, if you provoke my son again, the consequences are on you. What he did in there was going easy on you. Don't think for one second that was his best.”

Haven nods, and Creed steps back into his classroom and slams the door.

Haven clicks his fingers and smirks. “Oh, and I'm also your new handler trainer. Save your energy for my training. You'll need it. Guess I will see you at 0600 hours in the infirmary,” he says, winking at Zadom and clicking his fingers again.

Wrapping my hand around my brother's wrist, I continue trying to calm him. He leans into me, resting his head against mine.

“Zhavvy, I hate fighting with you, but I can't control my anger. Something happened in that classroom, though. Somehow, he tamed my mood. I felt it, but he was also trying to use my emotions like a yo-yo.”

“Then maybe he is the right person to work with you, Zay. If you don't get a handle on your gifts, they might have to send you away. You can't leave me.”

He doesn't answer me; he knows that those who can't handle their gifts are sent to the asylum. Typically, those who go in don't come back out. They are a threat to society and my parents won't allow that. The poor bastards are probably turned into lab rats and tested on to within an inch of their lives.

We are barely into the first semester and already Zadom is a loose cannon. We have now had ourselves thrown into the infirmary, and I still have not been laid. Fuck my life!



Chapter Eight

Zhavia

Six in the morning is way too early to drag my ass to the infirmary, and even Kyro isn't his normal peppy self. Today we are going to be pushed to our limits, and it's going to hurt not only physically, but mentally. We will be kept separate from our team for most of that time.

To top it off—I'm tired. Zadom had nightmares all night again. I wish he would talk to his shrink; they might be able to help him understand why he has the same dream over and over again. His words from yesterday about me also keeping secrets has guilt buried inside me, ready to fester and spill out at any moment. How could I even start that conversation with him? Hey, Zay. I love you and all, but your cock-blocking days are over. I have a voice in my head that blocks you from feeling me, but I think it fucks with your head as well.

Yeah right.

We walk into the infirmary, and some of my fathers are waiting for us, along with Rome and Haven.

“Welcome to hell,” my dad Kai says. The poor guy still looks like he should be in bed.

“Okay,” Chester says with a clap of his hands. “You all know why you're here. We have split you off with someone who will push your abilities. This is a punishment; there will

be no going easy on you. Zhavia, you are with Rome, Zadom, with Haven and me. Cruze, you're with Case, Kyro with Kai, Hayes is with Trace, and Lynx, you're with Marlow. I will see you all in twenty-four hours."

We each split off with our trainers. Rome comes to stand by my side, and we wait as all the guys are led away. "How do you feel about testing your pain? Zadom is being taken with Haven because he is amazing at hypnosis and getting into people's heads."

Smiling up at him, I nod my head. "I'm pumped. Let's do this."

Rome leads me down the hall and uses a swipe card to unlock one of the doors. As we step inside, the temperature in the room sends chills down my spine, and Rome pulls on a jacket, gloves, and a beanie.

"You need to strip down to your underwear. If you're not comfortable, I can make a call and get you some small shorts and a cropped tee sent up, but we need as much skin as possible."

Already ten steps ahead of him, I smirk as I strip out of my clothes and down to my booty shorts and a sports bra.

I know why he is starting with temperature. Zadom has no pain receptors, so they think I will be like my father Creed and have resistance to temperatures. So far, I know I have a better-than-average tolerance for them, but I still feel the cold.

Rome's eyes travel over my body. The way he drinks me in makes me feel how my team should. It pisses me off they won't freely touch me. I should drug Zadom like Halo said—it would serve the asshole right for not allowing them to touch me.

"Um, Zhavia, look at your feet."

I do as he asks and notice steam rising from beneath me. "What were you thinking about right now?"

I bite my bottom lip. Shit. "Honestly . . . drugging my brother so I can get laid."

Rome snorts. I know I sound juvenile and like a broken fucking record, but there is only so much a girl can take. I need some human touch that is not from my brother.

“Let’s see if you can keep that up while we spar.”

Rome strips out of his jacket but keeps the gloves and beanie on. While I could use a hoodie right about now, the snow jacket would be overkill. We spar for a while and figure out I have to concentrate to ward off the cold. He then switches us into the heat room. Same deal applies. He talked a big game about pain, but so far, he is pussy footing around. Cold and heat is child’s play. Excitement really bubbles in my gut when we step into the electricity room.

He straps me into the chair. “We will start slow, since Zadam has this ability. I don’t think it’s wise to go in hard.”

“Just fucking hurt me, Rome—electricity, knives, blows to my ribs. I need someone to hurt me. I can’t learn to withstand it and control what I am sending to my team in case of a potential situation, unless I have someone who isn’t a pussy just because I might cry.”

Rome nods and puts on his safety gear and steps behind the control panel, flicking the room to life.

The first jolt of electricity is unexpected and a scream peels from my lips. Rome’s eyes widen when I look back over at him.

“Again,” I yell, and he does what I ask.

I channel the heat as it courses through my body, closing my eyes and imagining that it’s nothing but a minor shock. Time starts to blur, and with my eyes closed, I hear the voice in my head. Why is she here right now? I focus on her, walking closer to the voice. It’s dark and I can see a shadow.

“Please don’t shut me out. I just want to help.”

“Who are you?” I ask her. The small shadow in the corner of the pitch-black room just looks like a blob of nothingness.

“I’m . . .”

My face stings as I blink my eyes open. I was so close to her.

“Zhavia, thank god. I thought I killed you.”

I chuckle and Rome unclips me. “Did I pass?”

Rome laughs. “I had the machine as high as it can go. Your pain avoidance for electricity is on par with your brother with his no pain receptors.”

I beam at him. “Let’s try something else.”

He nods and leads me out to work on my recall of facial recognition, which I suck at, if you were wondering.



“Focus,” Rome yells as he strikes at me with his legs, my ribs making an audible crack. He doesn’t let up. He keeps coming at me.

It’s been twenty-three and a half hours. I’m tired and hungry.

“I’m done,” I snap, dropping to the mat.

Rome walks over and stands above me. If I had more strength to even look at him, I could appreciate his body. He leans down and twists his fingers into my hair. “Get up. Do you think your enemies will let you have a break?”

The pain from my hair being ripped from my head has me jumping to my feet and attacking—he doesn’t expect the strike to his neck. While he gasps for air, I revert to my basic self-defence training to keep him away. He recovers from my attacks easily. Surely he must be as tired as me—unless he slept when he shoved me into a tight space, and I had to find my way out. The tunnel system they have here is next level, and it took me three hours to figure out how to escape.

Wiping the sweat from my brow, we square off again. Moving forward, I throw a very sloppy punch and he counters my move easily, wrapping his arm around my neck and

spinning me so my back is now plastered to the front of his body.

“You need to work on your endurance. Yes, it’s naturally better than those not genetically altered, but in here amongst your peers, you need to be better.”

As I push my ass back against his crotch, I can feel his cock harden. It gives me enough time to dislodge his arm and twist my body how he taught me. I bend and flip his body over my shoulder. As part of the super team, my strength is theoretically more than his, but catching him off-guard was helpful, and he hits the mat. I shift to get a good bend on his arm until he taps out.

Letting him go, he rolls onto his back and doesn’t make any move to get up, so I flop down beside him.

“Sorry about rubbing my ass on you. It was a low blow considering you’re my advisor and my team would murder you.”

He laughs. “Don’t apologise. Always do what you can to get out of a situation. Virgins are not my style, anyway.”

I snap my head to the side and glare at him, but he just laughs. “Two can play your game.”

“Just so we are clear, I’m not interested in you. Yes, making the guys jealous is a win-win situation for me, but I don’t want to give you the wrong idea.”

It’s a total lie—I’m drawn to Rome, and deep down inside I have thought about him naked. Fuck, who am I kidding? He has starred in at least one of my fantasies.

Rome jumps to his feet and holds his hand out to me. “The feeling is mutual. We both know why your mum hired me. So, we have one last test left in a few minutes. Your dad Case wants to test the boys’ reaction to you. They are connected to you in the same way as Zadam, so they want to test . . .”

“If I am hurt or aroused, they will feel it. That is fucking weird.”

“Yup, but until your parents know exactly how you and your team work, we need to document everything. Your team hasn’t done that well. They have been able to sense that you have been in trouble or pain and couldn’t get to you. Now we need them to control their emotions when they see us together. If you ever want an assignment, they have to be able to control themselves.”

Well, shit. “It’s your funeral.”

Rome laughs. “Thankfully, they have been fitted with wrist and ankle monitors that will take down an elephant. Zadam will be the problem since he can withstand it. But we will have your dad ready with the tranquilliser gun.”

I laugh. “They must pay you really well.”

“Like you wouldn’t believe,” he says, standing from the mat and offering me a hand. “Okay, the plan is I will take you down, and it’s going to hurt. Then I will pin you to the mat, and with any luck, they will walk in. This is their last test, and yours.”

I nod. “Okay, but I don’t think they will fall for it, honestly. I get they might react and try to hurt you, but they know you’re a test. It’s glaringly obvious. Where is Haven?”

Rome claps, and I study him. “And you passed your final test, knowing how your team would react. Your team now has a good enough handle on me; they would know it’s a ruse.”

The doors to the room are pushed open and Haven strolls in, freshly showered. “We have five minutes, then the rest of your team will be set free. They will come find you, and Zadam is particularly furious.”

“Well, I need to go sleep. Zhavia, I will see you tomorrow for some endurance training, and I’m going to recommend that your entire team comes as well.”

Waving Rome off, I turn to face Haven, who smirks at me. “Ready to get your ass handed to you, little girl?”

“Are you ready to die when my team walks in?”

Haven circles me, but I turn, maintaining eye contact. He strikes at me first, but his movements are slow and not what I would expect; I even manage to get in a few good hits. We go back and forth until an alarm sounds, indicating that our twenty-four hours are up. My first mistake was looking up at the flashing red light, and I don't see Haven's fist coming. He clips me in the jaw, and I stumble back. My body goes down as he tackles me to the floor, pinning my hands above my head. My breathing grows erratic as he wedges his hips between my legs. That smirk sits nicely on his lips when he angles his face towards mine. His long dark hair is pulled back, a few loose tendrils falling around his face.

"If you ever want to change your virgin status, I'm happy to help."

"You know I will help you. All you have to do is channel me."

My body tenses, and the reality of what is happening hits me hard. His body feels wrong pressed against me and I panic. I don't want her to block Zadom out right now. She shouldn't be in my head.

My body suddenly relaxes and my nerve endings tingle. He is in my head—I can feel it. Who the fuck is this guy? *"We need it to be believable."*

"Get out of my head!"

Haven chuckles. *"Not nice, is it? Are you ready?"*

The doors burst open as I fight to get him out of my head. My anger explodes tenfold. Pushing against his chest makes him lift slightly, and I get my legs up enough to throw him from my body. Haven laughs as he is hurled backwards.

Standing, I find my guys all staring at me. Kyro shakes his head and storms away, the others following. Zadom is frozen to the spot, his deadly glare focused on Haven.

"You and me, Reid," he snaps as he runs at full speed towards us. Blood drips from his nose, which he ignores.

Haven jumps to his feet, and they go punch for punch. Whatever Haven throws at him, he blocks and hits from a

different angle.

Zadom roars with laughter. “Don’t try your head shit on me. It was a huge mistake being locked away with me for so long.”

Haven falls to the floor and grips his head. “Make it stop!”

Zadom bends down beside him. “Keep your fucking hands off my sister. Next time I will kill you.”

He kicks Haven in the ribs, and he rolls to the side. I should feel sorry for him, though I don’t. He thought he was a match for my brother, but what I’m most surprised at is my brother’s control. He went easy on Rome because he is my advisor, here to teach me how to control my abilities. But with Haven, they already got off on the wrong foot, and I’m sure whatever my brother was put through in the last twenty-four hours was at Haven’s hands.

Hopefully, we have a fighting chance to get an assignment after this clusterfuck.



Chapter Nine

Kyro

Mum flits around her office where she works as the guidance officer here at Olympia University two days a week. She spends the other three days over at Olympia High. The last person who worked at the high school quit, and I don't blame them. Fuck listening to everyone else's problems.

"I don't understand why you're so upset, baby. Nothing has changed."

Sighing, I know nothing has changed—that's not the problem. It's that I thought by now we would have been able to be all in with Zhavia. But I don't expect Mum to understand; she is not genetically linked to her team. They are the only team of seven, as back in high school, my father, Colt, and his team fell for her, including Lynx's mum, Blayne.

"That's the problem. I have to live with Zhavia, and I can't do the things I want to do."

Mum freezes mid-spray of the stupid plant she refuses to throw away, even though it's clearly dead.

"I'm a man, Mum, and I have needs. Ones my hand isn't cut out for."

The poor woman looks so uncomfortable right now. She places the spray bottle down and takes a seat at her desk.

“You have plenty of time for that,” she says, as if that is the answer I was looking for.

“Hey, cupcake. Do you need any sugar?” my father says, walking through the door without knocking.

“Gross, aren’t you too old for that? Does your dick even work anymore without a special blue pill?”

“Kyro,” Mum chastises while my dad laughs.

“Jealous? Halo has told me all about your little problem.”

Now I laugh. “And has my sister dearest also told you all about how she can’t keep away from Kenji?”

Dad’s face scrunches up. He might be the life of the party, but his daughters are his pride and joy. Halo is the most like him, while Eydee and Kehlani are more like Mum—all sweet and innocent.

“If Kenji wasn’t Jolie’s son, I would have wrung his neck by now. Why are you here anyway? Shouldn’t you be in class?”

Pushing to my feet, I nod. “Yeah, but I’m avoiding Zhavia. Since the infirmary and seeing someone else touch her, I haven’t been myself. I’m feeling guilty as fuck.”

“Why don’t you walk your son to class? Some of us have work to do,” Mum quips.

Dad rushes around her desk and presses a kiss to her lips. Even after being together so long, they are still sickly sweet together. I much prefer when Blayne makes out with her, and Dad gets jealous. Blayne loves to kick his ass. Most families have game nights; instead, we have fight nights. Mum hates it, but with so much testosterone in the house, it’s a good outlet.

Once Dad pulls himself away from Mum, we leave her office and walk side by side out of the administration building. “So, what are you feeling guilty for?”

My dad isn’t usually my go-to for advice on sex—it’s Blayne. She is like the cool aunt who hops you up on crap before sending you home. And she doesn’t sugar-coat shit. The day I got my first boner, I went to her—I didn’t know

dicks got hard—and she laid all the cards on the table. She is my go-to person.

“You know how we all promised Zadam that we would stay away from Zhavia?” I look at him, and he nods. “Well, I haven’t exactly stayed away from other girls. I thought that if I wasn’t horny, then I could control myself around her better. But when I saw that dick, Haven, on top of her, I felt how she was feeling just for a split second.”

“Then you need to just be intimate with her.”

I scoff. He knows as well as I do that Zadam would skin me alive. “Do you have life insurance you want to cash in, or do you just hate me that much?”

Dad laughs and throws his arm around my shoulder, making me stumble into his body.

“I just think it’s time you call Zadam’s bluff. Do you really think he would kill you? That he would risk his sister never talking to him again and being sent to the asylum?”

Hmm, maybe he has a point. I had never considered that before. I only thought about how it would make Zhavia feel if I died. “Thanks Dad.”

“Anytime, son. I’m a wealth of knowledge. I’m also sexy as fuck and good with the ladies.”

“Just no,” I say with a laugh. “You’re old as fuck, and I bet your nuts hang to your knees and have grey hairs growing from them.”

“Wanna see them? I will prove they still hold up well.”

And that’s my cue to leave. Running away from my dad isn’t something I would normally do, but there is no way I want to see his balls. Right now, I have class with Zhavia’s dad Davis, the human lie detector. His class is so much harder than I had expected, as being able to tell if someone is lying doesn’t come naturally to me.

Zhavia stands outside the classroom doors talking to Cruze—she isn’t in this class because she has the same gift as her father. Sneaking up behind her, I wrap my arms around her

waist. I expect her to elbow me in the stomach, but she doesn't. Instead, her body melts into mine.

"I'm sorry," I whisper. "I know I had no right to act the way I have been."

Leaning in, I press a kiss to her neck and a soft mewl slips from her lips. Cruze coughs, and I smile against her neck just as I'm ripped away from her.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Zadom spits.

I prepare myself for him, knowing it's likely that he will attack at any moment. "I'm touching my girl, and you know what? I plan to keep doing it. You want to kill me, go for it. Make your sister hate you if that's what you want. I respect you enough not to take it further than touching until we find a way to control the bond you have, but I can't keep fighting everything that is ingrained in me. Surely you can understand that."

The vein in his neck looks about ready to explode. "Fine," he snaps.

I'm confident that Zhavia's, Cruze's and my mouth all fall open in shock.

"Who are you, and what did you do with Zadom?" I ask. "I think it's aliens. They crawled in through his ear and ate his brains."

Zadom rolls his eyes at me. "Zhavvy, our parents want us in the office."

She nods at her brother, but before she follows him, she walks up to me and her lips crash against mine.

"Don't push your luck," Zadom snaps as she pulls back. She turns her back and skips off after her brother while I smile like the Cheshire cat.

"What the hell was that?" Cruze asks and I shrug.

Lynx and Hayes finally join us. Pity they were not here to witness history in the making.

“What the fuck are you smiling like that for? You have crazy eyes happening,” Lynx snipes, and my smile just gets bigger.

“I think Zadom had a lobotomy at the infirmary. I declared I was over waiting to be with Zhavia, but promised I wouldn’t dick her down yet and he said fine.”

Cruze laughs. “He didn’t say dick her down, but it had the same sentiment. What the heck will we do with this information? Can we all touch her or is this just Kyro?”

Davis opens the classroom door and we all file in. He grabs my arm as I walk past and pulls me in closer to him. “There will be no dicking down of my daughter or I might hunt you down and kill you.”

Clearing my throat, I nod. Davis can be equally as scary as the others—he is just the silent and deadly type. We really didn’t think this through. “She is worth dying for,” I joke as I jump back so he can’t put his fist through my face.

Olympia University doesn’t have rules like your regular uni would. If you don’t like it, no one is forcing you to be here. We all want this: to be the best, to control our abilities, and get assignments. Not many first years get them. We thought for sure being *the* super team would give us top priority, but apparently not. It’s hard to work as a well-oiled machine when one part is a cock-blocker. We are a rusty machine with no fucking lube. Right now, Zadom is raw-dogging us in the ass, and he finally offered us a little spit to make the transition easier. Would I prefer a good silicone-based lubricant? Yes, but we can work on that.

Class drones on and on. We all know how shit I am at reading people. Davis brought in a third year, and she is good. She recalls her last assignment, and it’s our job to decide if she is telling the truth or lying. It’s monotonous training until we know how to read the basics. Once we are good enough, we will get to sit in on an interrogation. I must say that appeals to me.

“Kyro,” Davis snaps. “What are your thoughts? Is she lying or telling the truth? And get your feet off the fucking

desk.”

Sliding my feet off the desk, I sit up straighter. “Well, if you asked me based on her really long and boring story, I would have guessed she was telling the truth, but please tell me assignments are not that lame. Or maybe it’s because she just has a shit group.”

“Focus,” Davis snaps at me again.

“Right, I think she is lying. I have seen her team, and even I would want to fuck them, so her recount of having no reaction to them all being tied up naked or not even attempting just a small glimpse of their cocks seems implausible.”

Davis leans back against the whiteboard. “So you’re telling me you think she is lying because she didn’t look at their dicks?”

I nod. “Girls, please back me up here. If your team, that’s genetically linked to you, was naked, you wouldn’t want a sneaky peek?”

One of the girls sitting in the front row scoffs. “Please, girls can control their urges, and chances are she has seen their cocks a lot since she is a third year. It’s not a plausible reason. You need some solid body language to back up your claim.”

“Fine.” I sigh. “What about the way she was so robotic?” I mimic the girl’s voice and recount some of her story. “She also had a very minor twitch just above her eye. It was barely noticeable because it was timed well with her blinks.”

Davis nods. “Well done. Yes, Vanessa’s tell is a minor, almost invisible nerve twitch. To the untrained eye, it would not be noticeable.”

The only reason I noticed it was because the chick has eyelashes on that are so damn big the lashes moved with the twitch, or I never would have noticed. Also, they made me remember watching a video online about the origins of fake lashes; they were created for prostitutes so they didn’t get jizz in their eyes. Which then made me imagine Zhavia on her knees.

“Aaargh,” I gurgle. Fuck, Lynx just punched me in the dick. “What the fuck?”

“Serves you right for getting a hard dick in class. Pay attention, we are not in high school anymore. Being off with the fairies isn’t going to fly.”

He’s right, I just have a hard time staying focused. It’s not my fault I’m easily distracted—I will have to remember to bring a stash of lollies into class.



Chapter Ten

Zhavia

You know you're in trouble when you're called to my mum's office and both her and my father Brennan are waiting when you arrive. Zadom and I take a seat side by side and he links our fingers. He draws off me to calm him, so something tells me he knows why we are here.

"We reviewed your infirmary tapes and read the reports," Brennan says.

"Since when do we keep secrets?" There is an undercurrent of hurt in Mum's tone. "First Zadom and his new ability, which looks to go deeper than we thought. Honey, we saw you get in Haven's head and use his gifts against him."

Zay shrugs his shoulders. "So what? We knew it was a possibility Zhavia and I would get new abilities. Don't act surprised—we hate being lab rats."

Dad wraps his arm around our mum and pulls her into his side, kissing her head. "We get that." She sighs. "But we can't produce new super teams without knowing what that means."

"Then don't," he counters. "Why fix what's not broken? I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy. Whatever they did to me was bullshit. I can't even let my sister be fucking happy because deep down the jealousy eats away at me. I have tried to block it, reason with it, but nothing fucking works."

“About that,” I say, turning to look at Zadam. “I think I might have found a way . . . I just hadn’t told you yet.”

My father narrows his eyes at me. “Yes, tell us about that. We saw it on the tape.”

“I hear a voice in my head. I thought it was just my subconscious, but when she is there, my connection to Zadam is lost, but . . .”

“But what?” Zadam snaps.

“Your headache and bloody nose—it’s from the loss of our connection.”

The hurt that flashes in his eyes hits me straight in the heart; when he lets go of my hand, he might as well have ripped the organ from my chest.

“Zadam,” I whisper. “I’m sorry.”

He abruptly stands from his chair, kicking it so hard that it hits the wall and shatters. “You’re not sorry, Zhavia. You want this.”

“Calm down,” Dad says. “We need to talk about this. When this girl is in Zhavia’s head, does ‘she,’ whoever she is, pop into your head? This could be a security breach. So far on record, we only have a handful of people who have any form of abilities that alter the mind—you two, Chester, who still isn’t even any good at it, and Haven—and he is on a very tight leash.”

Zadam doesn’t say anything.

“Your dreams Zay.”

He gives me a pointed look.

“Why wouldn’t you tell us your dreams are back? You have been having them since you were a child. Is it the same?”

Zadam looks at Mum as she talks to him. She is controlling the room with her ability to calm people, and I can feel the similarity to my own, though so far, I can only really control Zay and my guys.

“Same, except it’s almost clearer,” he admits. “I can hear her, and I can see an outline, but when I reach her, she is gone.”

Time for another truth. “She almost told me who she was, but Rome thought he killed me, and I woke up.”

Both Zadom and my father look at me. “Sorry, what?” Dad asks.

I suck my lips into my mouth and look at Mum; she needs to come to the rescue on this one.

Mum sighs. “Just so we are clear, I don’t have to explain myself. I have control over everything until you two graduate. Rome was brought in to help Zhavia reach her true potential . . .”

“And?” I urge her on.

She looks at my father with her big aqua-coloured eyes and bats her lashes. “And to help make the boys jealous. Look, I know it’s unorthodox, and I know the thought of your daughter growing up isn’t something you want to think about.”

Dad looks at me, and I shrink back into my chair. I might as well just wear a sign that says virgin above my head.

“How about we regroup later? I know you both hate being taken to the lab, so what if we agree to one test? Zadom just needs some testing while he sleeps, and Zhavia,” he says as he coughs, “we will need one of the others to help with your situation, but you will need to do the same as your brother.”

Zadom comes back closer to me and squats down, touching his forehead to mine.

“Is this really what you want?” he asks.

“I always want to be close to you, Zay, but I also want to be close to my team.”

“Okay, let’s look into this voice in your head and see if we can’t learn how to channel her better. I love you, Zhavvy.”

“I love you too. If it hurts you too much, we will stop.”

He pulls his forehead back from mine. “We’ll do it.”

Once our parents excuse us, Zadom walks me back to our apartment. I'm not up for going to the rest of my classes, but Zay has no choice. He has training with Haven and Laughn, and Laughn is not the father you stand up. He would come all the way down here, probably piss Zay off, and they would fight. Then someone would end up thrown out the window, probably Zadom.

When I head inside our place, Cruze is in the living room. His glasses have slid down his nose as he intently stares at his tablet. Creeping up behind him, I can see that he is reading an article in a girl magazine.

When I wrap my arms around his neck from behind, he flips my body over his shoulder, and I land on the ground in front of him with a thud.

"Shit, I'm sorry," he says with a slight tremble in his voice.

"It's fine, reading about the best cock sizes to please your lady will do that to you."

Cruze goes bright red. "I can explain," he says, offering me a hand.

Using my body weight as I get to my feet, I push him back, so he falls onto the couch. I fall on top of him.

"Don't apologise for wanting to know how to please someone."

The red flush on his cheeks reddens more. "Not someone, Zhavvy. You. I want to know how to please you."

Leaning down, I press my lips to his. I can tell he is nervous; his hands tremble against my waist, and his movements are slow.

"If this is the one time I need you to pop up, now is it."

This time I feel her enter my head—normally she forces her way in. *"I'm here."*

"Can you feel or see what I'm doing?"

"Nope. You're the only person I can reach. I can block everything from your mind."

“Thank you.”

Cruze pulls back a little when I open my eyes. “We should stop before Zadom comes barging in.”

I smile at him. “Or we could take this into your room.”

His eyes widen, and he surprises me by nodding. No one is due back here for a few hours. Cruze stands with me in his arms, his hands securely on my ass, making sure he doesn't drop me. As he walks us to his room, I can see his cogs ticking over, so I place my head on his.

“She couldn't possibly want to experiment with me. I have no experience.”

“I couldn't think of anyone I would want it with more.”

He smiles at me, and kicks his bedroom door shut behind him, letting me slide down his body. He locks his door—not that it would stop Zadom, but it would give us enough time to prepare to fight.

Cruze walks up behind me, and his scent is minimal, like clean laundry after you pull it out of the dryer. It's perfectly him.

“I have dreamt about this for so long, but I never thought the day would come,” he whispers before placing light kisses on my neck, trailing them down. I arch my neck, needing more. “Are you sure you want this? We can take it slow.”

“Cruze, get me naked already.”

He smiles as he untucks my Olympia shirt and pulls it over my head, throwing it to the floor. I do the same to him, pulling the material from his dark navy pants and lifting it slowly. I have seen him with no shirt so many times, but I still hold my breath, pulling the shirt up with one hand and running my nails over his abs.

“That feels so nice—keep doing that.”

I chuckle, running my nails up and down his abs as he takes his shirt off and throws it. He leans in and presses his lips against mine as he undoes my military style pants. When they drop, I kick off my boots and step out. Cruze takes a large

step back, his cheeks stained a light pink now as he drinks me in. The one person who can make me feel so beautiful is him.

He kicks off his boots, undoes his button on his pants and they drop to the floor.

Biting down on my bottom lips, I watch as he drops his boxer briefs to the floor. I swallow hard when his cock is free . . . holy shit. Cruze is standing here naked. Reaching behind my back, I unclip my bra and let it sit loose before shrugging out of it and watching his reaction. His pupils dilate, and he takes a deep breath in. While caught in the moment, I hook my fingers in the waistband of my underwear and shimmy them down my hips.

I know he is waiting for the other shoe to drop, so I take the three steps, closing the distance between us and drop to my knees, looking up at him.

“You don’t have to,” he says.

“I want to,” I reply before I wrap my fingers around his shaft, feeling how silky his skin is beneath my hand, and the way the vein protrudes along the side. Licking my lips, I lean forward and wrap my mouth around the head, sucking lightly and causing his whole body to shudder.

“Fuck, that is magical.”

I wonder if sucking dick is an ability. If it is, I think I would rock it. Keeping my movements slow, I take him as far as I can in the back of my throat before sucking just a little harder and pulling back.

“Zhavvy, we have to stop for a bit, or it will be over before it begins. I want to worship your body, but I’m afraid . . .”

“That it’s too good to be true,” I reply, and he nods. He pulls me to my feet and moves us backwards until I fall down onto the queen-sized bed. He crawls over the top of me, then kisses his way down my body, causing goosebumps to line my skin.

When his tongue reaches my slit, my world explodes. Holy shit, I didn’t know it would feel like that. I buck my hips, causing him to moan against my pussy.

“Cruze, I need you, now!”

He pops his head up from between my legs and scrambles off the bed. Opening his bedside drawer, he pulls out a condom, tears it with his teeth, and slides it down his shaft. I don't know if it's normal for that to be so arousing but he still my ovaries.

When he climbs back on the bed, my heart beats a million miles a minute inside my chest. I have waited for this, wanted it so badly, and now I get to share this moment with one of my best friends.

“I'm glad you waited for me,” I whisper.

He lines himself up, the tip of his cock pressing against me. “I would have waited a lifetime for you.”

Tears well in my eyes. Cruze kisses me and slowly pushes himself inside. He stretches me, and I focus on him rather than the pain. When he is fully sheathed, he pauses, letting me catch my breath. The voice in my head is there, and I can feel her lingering, but not at the forefront of my mind. Is it weird doing this while something or someone is in my head? A little, but it beats Zadam feeling it.

Cruze starts to move again and with each roll of his hips, the pain slowly fades. I focus on the way his skin feels against mine, and the way he looks at me like I'm the most precious thing to him in the world. I run my hands over the muscles in his back, along his ribs, which makes him chuckle, to his hips, then right down to his ass—he really does have a nice ass.

A slow fire builds low in my stomach, and I want to let go, but I don't know how.

“Shit, I don't think I can hold on any longer,” he grits out.

“Then don't.”

Cruze roars my name as he comes, and that is a face I want to see on him every day—pure bliss and no worries.

I didn't expect fireworks or explosions my first time. Mum said it could take some practice to know what I like. Aunt Blayne said boys just don't know how to use their disco sticks

all that well at first and you have to train them, which my uncle Colt then made weird by asking her how she would know about dicks. That started them on a discussion about how the one time she lost her virginity was enough for her to know she liked pussy.

Cruze flops down beside me. “Did you . . .?”

I roll to my side to face him. “No, but I didn’t expect to my first time.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Hey,” I say, taking his hand in mine. “As soon as it’s not sore, we can try again.”

“Shit,” he says, jumping from the bed and pulling the condom off. Then he races into his bathroom and comes back out with a washcloth and helps me clean up.



Chapter Eleven

Zhavia

Hours pass, and I'm sitting curled in Cruze's lap when the front door opens. Hayes and Lynx walk in, and both pause to stare at us. I open my mouth to say something, but snap it shut as Kyro pushes through the door.

"I need sug . . . Oh shit! You two fucked. How are you alive?" Kyro runs and jumps over the couch, landing beside us. "I need details."

A door slamming has me looking behind me; Lynx is gone.

Hayes shakes his head. "This should have been something we spoke about first."

He storms off, leaving Kyro, Cruze, and me on the couch.

"Don't worry about them. They're just jealous. I for sure thought I would have to take one for the team and risk my life. Fuck, where is Zadom? Is he alive?"

Shit, after everything, I didn't even call my brother. Scrambling off Cruze's lap, I make my way to his room and find my school pants, pulling out my phone. I have one missed call from him, which isn't unusual. I hit his name and wait as it rings. Just when I think it's going to go to the message bank, he answers.

"Zhavvy, what's up?"

I sigh in relief. “Just checking in to see if you’re okay. I expected you home by now.”

“Yeah, I was just held up at the nurse’s office. Haven may or may not have been shot in the leg.”

“What?” I gasp. “You shot a trainer?”

Panic sets in. I should have felt something off with him if he was mad enough to put a bullet in someone.

“He is fine. It’s just a flesh wound. He started it and I finished it. There is a party at the Pits tonight—you want to come?”

He stuns me. My brother never invites me to parties, normally just tells me I can’t go. This must be a trick question. “Who are you and what have you done with my brother? First, I get a fine when Kyro touches me, and now, you’re inviting me to a party?”

“Don’t make me regret this, sis, but I’m starting to think I need to let you make your own decisions or we will never work as a team. His hands on you wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be.”

“Okay, I’ll come.”

“Good, I’ll be home soon. Tell the others to get ready.”

He ends the call before I can respond. Bouncing out into the living room, I grin as Kyro and Cruze turn to face me, though the way they both look at me makes me want to say screw the party and stay in.

“Zadom is alive, maybe anyway, and he invited me to tonight’s party.”

Kyro leaps over the back of the couch and picks me up, spinning me in a circle. “I told them! The aliens got to your brother, and this version is so much better.”

I snort. He isn’t wrong. Something is going on with Zadom, and I’m wondering if it has something to do with Haven.

“We better get ready,” I tell Kyro. He is the worst with time management and for him to get ready takes forever.

He places me back down on my feet, presses a kiss on my lips, and runs to his room. Walking back over to Cruze, I lean over the back of the couch and wrap my arms around his neck.

“Stop worrying about Lynx and Hayes. They will be fine. We didn’t have to ask their permission, and I will talk to them. Go shower and get ready.”

He nods, and I place a kiss on his cheek. Cruze hates fighting and can’t handle it if one of the guys is mad at him. It eats at his anxiety.

I decide to start with Hayes, as he is less likely to hold a grudge; Lynx is almost as bad as Zadom. Knocking on Hayes’s door goes unanswered, so I push the door open anyway.

“Hey,” I whisper, and he looks up from his phone. His green eyes lock with mine and he tries to smile. I love the lopsided smirk he does. It gives me butterflies every damn time.

“Hey,” he replies, and I walk across the room and take a seat beside him.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t talk to any of you about this, but I didn’t think I had to.”

“Zhavvy, I know, I shouldn’t have said that. Fuck, I was jealous, and I have never had to feel like that. We always hoped one day it would happen, but as Zadom got more possessive, we figured that we would have to love you from a distance. Now things are changing, and I don’t know where I stand.”

His head hangs down as he fiddles with his fingers, hair falling across his eyes—he is well overdue for a haircut.

“Look at me?” I ask, and he turns his head. His eyes don’t leave mine as I reach up and cup his face. “Hayes Alexander Walker, I have loved you my entire life. There is not one moment that I haven’t loved you. You’re my protector, every step of the way alongside Zadom, with your need to make sure I’m safe. Everyone might rag on Cruze’s mum for the part she

played in creating us, but I believe she hand-picked you just for me. I don't know what I would do without you. I'm so scared that Zadam will storm in and take you all away from me. You gravitate towards each other, and you always choose him. Something needs to change. We should have been a solid unit by now, and I hate to say it, but you guys and Zadam haven't made that easy."

"I know, but we are trying. It's just taken us a while to get here, but I won't go back," Hayes murmurs.

"I don't know if you want to hear it, but Cruze was gentle. It was everything I imagined my first time would be like, and I feel a stronger connection with him now."

"Zhavvy, I'm glad it was him—he waited for you. I wish I did, but I thought . . . I was selfish." He says, grabbing me and pushing me down onto his bed, hovering over the top of me. "But now, all bets are off. You have twenty-four hours to relish in the sweetness of your first time and then you're mine."

His mouth is so close to mine that I could lean in and kiss him, but the door opens and Cruze steps in. "Sorry to interrupt, but I could sense this, and I don't know if it was one of you or both. It's so strange, and I can somewhat understand how Zadam feels."

"Did it bother you?" Hayes asks Cruze.

A blush creeps up his face again, and he shakes his head.

Wiggling my way out from beneath Hayes, I say, "I'm seriously going to be so pissed off if all we had to do was have sex to make our connection stronger. I wonder if it will weaken my brother's connection to us, so I don't have to use the voice inside my damn head? I know what we will be talking about in group therapy this week."

Both guys moan at me; they all hate therapy. Well, maybe everyone besides Kyro, but he just loves to talk to anyone who will listen.

"I'm going to talk to Lynx." I run my nails down Cruze's arm as I walk past.

“Twenty-four hours, Zhavvy,” Hayes growls in warning as I walk through the door. I think I have just opened Pandora’s box, except this box is full of cocks and I’m not sure I can handle them all.

When it comes to Lynx, you need to match his energy; if you show any sign of weakness, he will exploit it. Pushing his door open, I go in ready, but his room is empty. I psyched myself up for nothing—motherfucker. Then the sound of the shower has me deciding that it’s now or never. He doesn’t turn or acknowledge me as I enter the en suite. Lynx has the perfect bubble butt. Honestly, I could stare at it for hours.

“Either get in or fuck off, Apple. I’m not in the mood.”

Fine, two can play at this game. So many times he has said things like this, and I backed off, worried about how my brother would react. Not this time. I peel Cruze’s shirt off and drop it onto the pile of his dirty laundry, along with my underwear. Lucky for me, I needed to shower, anyway. Then I open the shower screen and step in, wrapping my arms around his waist.

“I can’t do this,” he says, removing my arms from around him. The rejection stings. The need to run, curl up, and die eats at me.

“Why? Why can’t you do this?” I ask instead. I’m sick of running away all the time.

He turns and looks down at me, and I take a step back until the wall stops me from going any further. His hands come up on either side of me, his large body so close. I want to run my hands over his shoulders and down his pecs, just to know what it feels like.

“Because you gave away something so precious without even asking us first.”

Pushing against his chest, I succeed in getting him to take a step back. “Fuck you, Lynx. My virginity was mine to do with as I pleased. Cruze waited for me—he didn’t care if he had to wait. While you were all out at parties getting your

cocks sucked, he was with me. He held me while I cried myself to sleep. He loved me the only way he could.”

“Everything I do is for you, from the moment I open my eyes, then you are the last thing on my mind before I go to sleep. You don’t know fuck all about what happened at those parties.”

“I know enough,” I snap. “And you don’t control my life. I have someone who does a good enough job of that already. I just want you to love me and want me.”

His arm reaches out and he wraps his hand around my neck, making my nipples harden instantly. “Never doubt my love for you, but I don’t want you. Get out.”

Fucking asshole! I bring my knee up right into his dick. His hand releases from my throat and he drops to the floor. “Fuck you!”

He groans and cups his junk—serves him right. I step out of the shower, grab his towel that hangs from the rack, and wrap it around my body.

The door flies open and Zadam steps inside with Cruze hot on his heels. “What the fuck did he do to you?” Zadam snaps.

“I can handle myself,” I retort. “Next time, he won’t leave his crown jewels open.”

Zadam peers around me and smiles when he notices Lynx sitting on the floor of the shower.

“Consider yourself lucky right now. I would have drowned you in one inch of water.” I push Zadam out of the ensuite as he continues to lecture me. “You’re walking a fine line, Zhavia. You may be able to block me out, and I might have come around a little to them touching you. But what the fuck will you do if I zone out? That’s how Haven got his ass shot today. He taunted me to the point I turned a weapon on him. He is just lucky Dad was there to pull him out of my way. We are not bulletproof.”

“You might not want to hear it,” I snap, following him out of the room, Cruze behind me. “But being with Cruze, our

connection is stronger. I don't know if that makes ours weaker."

"You what?" he roars. "When?"

Zadom takes a step towards Cruze, and I step in closer to my brother, pressing a hand to his chest.

"You won't do anything. This is how it's going to be now. If we want to be together, we will. You can learn to deal with it or you can leave. We are all adults now, and I don't need my brother protecting me anymore. You clearly didn't feel anything, so this is all that was stopping us. We want to get assignments and be sent into the field? Well, this is how we will do it, and you know that as much as I do.

Zadom starts to clap, but he looks like a fucking maniac while he does it. "It's about time you grew some balls, sister. I just hope theirs have grown too, and that they like sleeping with one fucking eye open. Especially if they think they can touch what's mine."

Anger bubbles over in my gut. "I'm your sister, not your lover. Enough, Zay."

"Fuck! I'm sorry," Zadom shouts, turning his back on me and storming from the apartment.

I watch him leave as guilt festers inside me. It's time that I go to my parents and ask for their help. We need to function as a team one way or another. Hopefully, they have some ideas.

Kyro grabs me around the waist from behind and spins me around. "Did you see that?" He places me back on my feet. "No one died."

"This doesn't mean shit for us. I have spent years waiting for one of you to grow some balls, to stand up against my brother. Just *once* to show me I was more important."

"Don't worry, baby. I'm going to woo the fuck out of you, just you wait."

We all watch as he runs towards the front door and leaves.

"Where the hell is he going?"

“You talk a big game, Zhavvy, but I still stand by the twenty-four hours. Run from me, and I will hunt you down and take what’s mine. And make no mistake, you are *mine*.”

Hayes storms off to his room, leaving Cruze and me alone. Lynx must still be in his room, recovering from his nuts ending up in his throat. Fuck him and his attitude.



Chapter Twelve

Hayes

Keeping my hands off Zhavia has been one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. The long-term red light we've had on pursuing her has absolutely gutted me. She thinks that all these years we have just rolled over and let her brother dictate what we can and can't do with her. Maybe there is a bit of truth in that, but she doesn't know we have fought him every step of the way, and each time he somehow finds a reason that makes sense for us to wait. The older I get, the more I realise maybe he was right. We have known for a while that she is scared—not of us, but of change. Their connection is strongest when she needs him. It always has been. We had to wait until she was ready to stand up to him, to block him out. This voice in her head has to be her way of being able to accomplish this. She has always been so fragile about his feelings; their connection is something unlike anyone else has ever experienced. If you ask her if she is scared, she would probably kill you. Zhavia is deadly, especially when she feels threatened.

Once I've finished getting dressed for the party, I head to the living room. I would have turned it down if Zadom hadn't invited Zhavia. While parties may have been fun in high school, passing the time with some chick on her knees, now I would rather stay in with Zhavia and watch movies.

Cruze and Kyro are on the sofa talking in hushed voices.

“Where are Zhavia and Lynx?” I ask, getting their attention.

Both turn to face me, and Cruze answers. “Lynx stalked out in a huff about twenty minutes ago, and Zhavia went to talk to her dad about something before he leaves for the day. She didn’t want any of us to go with her. I think she is worried about Zadam.”

“Are we going to this party, or should we wait for Zhavvy?” Kyro asks.

“I’ll go to Brennan’s office and walk Zhavia over. You two go make sure Lynx isn’t drinking himself into a coma. You know why he is pissed at you, Cruze?”

Cruze nods, and so he should. Zhavia may have been free to give her virginity to whoever she wanted, but she failed to have all the facts.

“I know. I will go make this right. But can you blame me? She was there, and one of us needed to rip the bandage off. She let her guard down—I felt it. That has never happened before, and it might not happen again. I was selfish, but tell me you wouldn’t have done the same thing.”

“I get it, but she doesn’t. It was a dick move, no matter how you justify it.”

“I would have done it, fuck the rest of you,” Kyro jokes, and Cruze picks up a couch cushion and tries to suffocate him with it.

“I will meet you guys at the Pitt.”

Zadam is throwing the first party of the year. He and Zhavia technically own the entire Olympia franchise now, as it became theirs on their eighteenth birthday. But they have little interest in running it, both preferring to train for assignments and work in the field. So it’s been agreed that their parents will continue running it until at least graduation.

The admin building is a fair hike from our apartment, so I take the electric buggy, cutting across the grassed areas

between buildings. Some students watch but none will say anything. Zhavia's buggy is out the front of the building and I park mine next to hers.

Entering the building, I note that most of the staff have gone home for the day and the cleaners are in doing their job. None stop me, it's not their business. The lift takes me straight to the top floor where Brennan's office is located. When the doors open, I see Zhavia sitting on her father's desk, and he looks stressed as he paces the room. God knows what she wanted to see him for, but as I approach, Brennan nods and Zhavia jumps down from the desk, embraces her father, and presses a kiss to his cheek.

Brennan is the first to see me heading towards them, though I have no doubt she can feel me. She doesn't look my way until Brennan points at me, and she turns, acknowledges me, and pulls her dad into another hug before she leaves his office.

"What are you doing here?" she asks, but I don't answer straight away. I take in her very short, skin-tight red dress, and her fan-fucking-tastic lips painted the same colour as her outfit. Even if she has paired the dress with her combat boots, she is still the hottest woman I have ever seen in my life. "Hayes," she snaps.

"Is that what you're wearing?" I ask, ignoring her question.

She smiles and nods. "Are the combat boots too off-putting?" she asks. "I mean, who wants to wear heels to the Pitt? But I forgot to pack my Converse."

She smiles sweetly at me, but she knows as well as I do the boots are not the problem. Stalking over to her, I throw her over my shoulder. As I look up, Brennan smirks at me and waves. See? At least he gets it.

"Put me down," she yells as I step into the elevator. Once the doors close, I do as she asks. She looks up at me with fire in her eyes, ready to fight me.

Trapping her between my arms with her back to the wall, I lean in. “You’re lucky your father has cameras in here or I would fuck you right here and now.”

She smirks at me and leans into my body, testing my resolve. Death at the hands of her father might be worth it.

“I thought I had twenty-four hours.”

I snort, leaning in and pressing a kiss on her neck. “That was before I saw you in this dress. Mark my words, I will be on my knees eating your pussy by the end of the night. You might be sore, but I will kiss it better, and it’s now twenty-one hours, thirty-three minutes, and a handful of seconds until my cock is inside you.”

She shivers, which fills me with fucking joy as the doors open. We leave the lift hand in hand, and for once in my life I feel complete, like we are finally moving forward.

The party is in full swing by the time we arrive. The best part of being at Olympia and of legal age is that the university has a special alcohol which works on us. It might sound irresponsible to have a bottle shop on campus, but regular alcohol is like water for the altered. We also all know what’s at stake; there are no second chances at Olympia. You want to drink here, you can, within reason. If you turn up to class drunk, you’re out, and if you abuse it, you’re out. If you’re a norm and drink it, well RIP to you because it will fuck you up, but then you’re out. They would then force teams to separate or all leave. And god forbid if something terrible were to happen, like sexual assault. Then, well, death isn’t off the table. They would wipe you from the face of the planet, as if you never existed. If your family had an issue with it, your entire family would just be gone, poof. Wiped out.

Olympia is used for good, but that doesn’t mean the people here are nice if you screw them over. They genetically manipulate humans to be made into weapons, and jobs that come through here originate from a variety of people. The government is one of the primary sources of income for a lot of teams, but you would be surprised at those who work with

us—though most jobs go to the students in third and fourth year.

Zhavia leaves me to talk to a girl who is in one of her classes. I think her name is Poppy, but in all honesty, I don't care enough to remember her name.

“Birthday Sex” by Jeremih plays through the portable speakers, while girls screech like a flock of birds and dance by the fire. Zhavia is one of them.

Lynx comes up beside me and hands me a beer in a red cup while we look on. “You let her show up like that?”

I snort. “I didn't *let* her do anything. I dare you to try to make her leave.”

He doesn't say anything, and we both stand in silence, watching as Kyro dances up behind her and she grinds her ass into his crotch. He pulls her in close as their bodies move together. Scanning the area to see if Zadam is close by, I can't spot him anywhere. Cruze sits off to the side of the party, his noise cancelling headphones on as he watches Zhavia. He hates parties and avoids them at all costs, so he is only here for her benefit.

Over the course of the night, Zhavia dancing with Kyro and his hands on her body was enough to make Lynx stalk off. He needs to stop being a dick and talk to her, tell her why he is pissed instead of drowning himself in beer. He is going to have one killer headache tomorrow. Zadam has been a no show, which is unlike him after inviting his sister.

My attention snags on Lynx, who is stalking around the makeshift dance floor until he grabs some random girl who's been watching him like a bitch in heat. These girls with no teams are brutal—they will purposely try to break up a team. Breaking *our* team in particular would give a girl some serious bragging rights. Not that our team is breakable—we are the fucking super team.

Zhavia notices straight away. I can tell by the way she freezes, her body no longer melting into Kyro's. She turns into

his arms and whispers something in his ear, and the idiot nods and walks off the dance floor towards the kegs.

I look over at Cruze, who is smirking, but he makes no move to intervene, and neither do I. Lynx wants a reaction, and he is about to get one. Zhavia might not walk around staking her claim on us, but she doesn't have to. She isn't insecure like some girls. The girls have all heard the rumours about our team, that we don't have an official relationship with her, and they try to make moves.

Zhavia is quick as she moves between other girls dancing, and the bitch rubbing her ass on Lynx's cock doesn't see her coming until she has a fist in her face. The girl quickly recovers, pushing Lynx back as she gets into a fight stance. Just like we are taught, Zhavia doesn't waste time. She jumps forward and grabs the girl's hair, using it to bring her head down onto her knee. The girl falls to the ground.

"I don't want to fight you," Zhavia seethes at the girl, before turning her attention to Lynx and stepping up to him. They have drawn a crowd and everyone waits to see what will happen next.

"Are you trying to make me jealous?" she asks him calmly and he scoffs.

"Nah, I just wanted to get my cock sucked."

"Is that right?" she snaps, pushing against his chest, and he takes a small step back. "The only one sucking your cock is me. You're *mine*."

She drops to her knees and reaches for the button on his jeans. Cruze gets to his feet, ready to intervene, and Kyro stands frozen, his mouth open, just waiting.

She won't do it; she is calling his bluff. He twists his fingers into her hair and drags her to her feet, pressing his forehead to hers. She pulls back and slaps his face, and tears stream down her face. This has gone far enough. I move forward, but before I can even get close, she runs, leaving us all wondering what the fuck he just said to her.



Chapter Thirteen

Zhavia

Fuck Lynx and his asshole attitude. If he wants to be jealous of Cruze, then that's on him.

The time on my alarm clock reads six in the morning. I've had a shit night's sleep and I swear I've looked at it a hundred times. The red Olympia light in the corner of my room flashes seconds before my morning alarm sounds. Moments later, my door is thrown open and Cruze stands in the doorway.

"You need to get dressed," he says.

The Olympia alarm will go off if your team is called in for an urgent assignment, but given we are only first years, it will be a drill—one that we will be tested on. Jumping from my bed, I grab my uniform off my bedside table. One needs to always be kept out for this reason. I shimmy into my pants and throw the polo on.

Within a minute, I'm fully dressed and in the living area. Kyro, Lynx, Cruze, and Hayes are all waiting.

"Where is Zadom?" I ask, and they shrug.

Panic sets in. He wasn't at the party and now he isn't here. I figured he must have met someone, but now I'm questioning if this isn't a drill.

Pulling the front door open, I race down the emergency stairs, not waiting for the lift, and the guys follow me to our meet point where Rome is waiting.

He clicks down on the top of a stopwatch as we approach. “Not bad,” he says.

“Where is Zadam?” I demand.

He tilts his head at me and smirks. “It seems your brother and his handler have found themselves in a sticky situation. We have been sent a ransom video and you have three hours to find them.”

Rome holds out a small tablet and the video footage is grainy, but Zadam is tied up and Haven is with him. It’s hard to make out, but the voice that talks is robotic.

“You have three hours to find us, or they become fish food. Holding their breath won’t save them when there is no one to set them free.”

I look around. Now is normally the time the handler would throw out a plan. Shit. We are one man down.

“Cruze, you take the tablet and try to trace where the footage is coming from,” I command.

He nods and takes the tablet from Rome. Then we run back to our apartment, bring our laptops out to the dining area, and set them up as I dish out more orders.

“Hayes, you bring up our tracker app and see if it’s still on.”

“Kyro, you hack into the school security feed and see if you can find anything.”

I don’t look at Lynx—I can’t right now after last night.

“Their trackers are off,” Hayes says.

I walk around and look over his shoulder. Their last known location was right here—in Zadam’s room. Why the fuck was Haven here? His tracker says that they were both here for two hours.

“Check our security footage,” I demand.

This has to be our first genuine test. We have three hours to track them down and find them. When I went and asked Dad to talk to Mum about giving us a chance, he agreed, but I didn't think he would work this fast. They must have had this already planned out before that.

Kyro finds the school security network and has no trouble hacking in. Six masked figures sneak up the stairwell, telling me it's a team, and one that is terrible. They pick the lock to our room, but they take way too long. What the fuck is Zadam doing that he can't hear them? Or is he in on it and this is also a test for the other team? But surely my parents are not cruel enough to do that to a new team—pit them against Zadam.

They move through our apartment and stop at Zadam's door, slipping something under it. Fuck, that small little package will explode, releasing a gas that immobilises anyone who breathes it in. Well, that gives them less than five minutes before my brother kills them. This team has to have some serious balls taking us on. Even if it is just a drill, that kind of gas is fucked up and only supposed to be used on assignments when we are in danger.

Not even thirty seconds later, they are pushing through Zadam's door, coming back out with my brother and Haven thrown over their shoulders. Kyro brings up a split screen, and they are seen leaving the building and getting into a black Olympia-issued SUV that was parked behind the building.

"Lynx," I snap. "Hack into the Olympia database and see if they have that car tagged. Cruze and Hayes, pack us a bag of goodies for when we find these fucks. I want to cause some serious pain, so everyone here at Olympia will fear us like they should."

They run off to our secret stash—shit that we have been collecting over the years. We wanted to make sure we were ready for when we got our first assignment, and as it turns out, we have something to prove to my parents.

"Fuck," Lynx booms as he runs his hand through his hair.

They have altered the system, and it keeps changing. I have seen nothing like this before. I think we need Cruze to

come back and take a look—we all know his skills are better than mine.

“They know what they are doing, Zhavvy.” Kyro places his hand on top of mine. “We lose them here when all the cameras go out. They must have hacked into the security.”

I know this is a drill, but does Zadam? I went to my dad about this and swirling in the back of my mind are a million questions for my brother. Like why the fuck was Haven in his room that late at night?

“Let’s go back to the footage,” I demand, and Kyro brings it up for me again. We replay it repeatedly and that’s when it hits me. “I know where they are! We are all idiots. Remember back to the day that the Swift Six had me tied up? They are at the old building.”

Lynx and I jump to our feet just as Cruze and Hayes step into the room. “Swift Six have them at the primary school.”

It must dawn on them as well, but why the fuck would my parents use them? They must have been the only team willing to go against Zadam, but I honestly wouldn’t be surprised if he kills them as pay back this time.

“I have the footage of inside the primary school, and they have them fucking hanging above the pool tied up.”

He turns the laptop to face us, and I can see my brother struggling against the ropes. He needs to calm down or he won’t survive the drop into the water if they are cut down before we get there.

Sure enough, Team Swift Six walk into the pool area. I watch, then gasp as Alexi sets up some wires. Zadam will be fine—he gets a kick out of electrocution, and I can channel the pain away—but everyone else is screwed, including Haven.

“Let’s go,” Lynx says, jingling a set of keys.

We have our own petrol cars, or they do—mine is electric. Lynx has a pimped-out G wagon with bulletproof glass, and I have to admit it’s sexy as fuck. We head down to the basement where our cars are kept, then move out using our private back exit, since no other students keep their cars at the apartment.

Olympia has a student parking garage, and all other cars stay there.

On test assignments such as this, students are typically given stun guns and Tasers, but we don't play by the rules. Cruze has made some liquid-filled bullets for our blaster guns. It's going to burn like a son of a bitch, and those hit will need to be submerged in water for at least twenty-four hours after being shot—it's the only way to ease the pain.

The drive over is silent, which is unlucky for the idiots who took my brother because it means our team is taking this dead seriously. We grew up here, played hide-and-seek all the time, and learned every single blind spot of the security cameras. They might think they are smart, but we will come out on top.

“Shit,” Kyro whisper-yells, showing me the screen. The chains holding Zadom and Haven have dropped lower.

“Let's get in and fuck with them. They know we are coming, but they won't see us.”

Lynx parks the car in a well-hidden blind spot. Cruze takes the laptop and puts in his earpiece. He will stay in the car and guide us. Even though he can hold his breath the longest of us all, he can't survive an electric shock. Instead, he will use his hacking skills to gain entry to the power supply for the building and cut it all. Let's just hope the idiots were not smart enough to rig a generator.

The four of us head around the side of the building to the service entry, where we will need to pick the lock. Hayes moves in and pulls out his kit, getting the old lock opened easily. I'm going to have to talk to my mum about updating to a keypad system.

Lynx takes the lead; the tunnel that leads up into the kitchen is pitch black, but he doesn't need sight to get us there. Hayes goes in second—he sees sound as colour—and the rest of us follow behind. I clasp the back of Kyro's hoodie tightly because if I was to let go, I don't know if I would be able to find him.

We all walk in silence until Lynx stops us at the exit door. He gently pushes on it, but something is pressed up against it. We all use our hands to push against the door and it finally cracks open. The pool is on the opposite side of the school, so we should be good with any noise we just made.

“Cruze, talk to us,” I say.

“Kitchen is empty. There are cameras, but I just looped the footage. You have less than sixty seconds to move out into the hall. They are all in the pool area, so you have time.”

We do as he says and move through the kitchen and out into the hall. The camera here is tricky, with the only blind spot about 100m down.

“Looped, go now, you have ten seconds.”

We all run, and Cruze guides us through the school, looping any cameras we can't avoid. “They are on the move. Alexi has left the pool room, and he is headed right towards you. Try to take down as many of them as you can quietly. It will make it easier for you to get to Zadom. They might drop them straight in if they see you coming. You need the girl.”

I smirk. Oh, I plan to get the girl and fucking electrocute the bitch. She'll just want to pray that she can survive it.

“Let me know when you need me to cut the power. Use the time wisely, because the backup generator will kick in, and I will need to manually override it. That could take me some time.”

“Oh,” Kyro whispers. “Should we have code names? Can I be Captain Bananas?”

“Shut up,” Lynx snaps at him under his breath. “We don't need fucking code names. Everyone in the building knows who the fuck we are.”

Kyro mimics him as we step into the empty bathroom beside the pool room.

“What's the plan now?” Cruze asks.

“I say we storm in there. Zadom will survive the electrocution, and if Haven doesn't, well, he isn't our

problem,” Lynx says.

“No, we can’t. Haven is part of the fucking assignment. We get him killed, we fail. Then they will never let us on an actual assignment. We need to pass, but these fuckers are dirty, so we need to play them at their own game. Let’s try to take down Alexi, then Kyro can mimic him to lure Violet out, and we’ll use her to get them to stand down.”

Everyone agrees it’s a plan.

“Alexi is in the staff toilet. If you want to sneak attack him, now is the time.”

We quietly move out into the hall. The cameras down here face the door to the pool, so we sneak along the far wall. As Alexi steps out of the toilet, Kyro pushes hard against his chest, making him step back. The door closes behind them and Hayes pushes it open and steps inside. It’s surprisingly quiet, then the door opens and both Kyro and Hayes step out.

“He is down for now and the amount of cable ties Kyro used means we have a long time until he can break free of them,” Hayes informs us.

“I like to be careful,” Kyro adds in Alexi’s voice.

I snort. It sounds weird when he uses different voices. Kyro sneaks up to the pool door. “Talk to me, Cruze. Can I push the door open a crack?”

“A tiny bit, but don’t make it obvious.”

Kyro pushes it a little, so it’s cracked a sliver. “Violet, can you come help me with something quickly?”

“Coming,” she calls out.

I get into place, and when the door is pulled open, I lunge for her, pulling her through the door. Kyro has a cable tie handcuff ready to go. She tries to scream, but Lynx covers her mouth, shoving a sock in from our gear bag, and I cringe at the thought of one of the guys’ sweaty gym socks being used as a gag. He slaps some duct tape over it and she looks murderous.

“Aww, didn’t think we would find you so soon. How is your pain tolerance lately? Do you think we should try some

shock therapy? It might help you have better taste than the men you keep around.”

I push her through the door, and the guys fire off pellets as soon as we enter. Violet tries to backpedal as I drag her towards the pool. A scream fills the air—someone has been hit, and oh how painful that is going to be.

“I suggest getting some water on that ASAP. Might wanna turn off the electricity first unless that’s your kink,” Kyro yells.

“Hey, boys,” I taunt. The three of her guys left standing turn to face me. “You might want to wave that white flag now or your girl is going for a swim.”

One of her guys takes a step towards the ladder that leads up to the diving block, and Lynx fires off a shot, hitting him right in the side of his neck.

“Fuck! Turn it off! We need to get into the water.”

Someone else rushes around and packs up the wires. Thank fuck. But now that the threat of electricity has passed, I have no use for her. I launch Violet into the water. Hope she can hold her breath well.

The doors to the pool room swing open and Alexi throws his fucking hunting knife like a damn frisbee. I shout a warning as it flies towards Hayes.

Lynx opens fire on Alexi, and the poor bastard is hit a few times. Hayes drops to the ground, and I race to his side. The knife has left a huge gash on his leg, and he is losing a lot of blood.

“Take your shirt off.”

He smirks at me.

“Fuck off.” I roll my eyes. “I still have time left before you jump me. I need to stop the bleeding.”

“Hey, Zhavvy, look at me,” Kyro shouts, and I glance up to see him hanging off the damn chains that are attached to Zadom and Haven. I shake my head at him until I hear a splash. Fuck.

“Tie that off,” I tell Hayes, and he nods.

Kyro drops into the pool, and all of Violet’s men besides one are also now in the water, trying to reduce the pain. Violet is also above water—shame.

Reaching down, I take Hayes’s gun and aim at her, hitting her in the arm. Fuck that bitch. She can stay put with the rest of them.

The last guy smirks as he steps towards me, holding something in his hand, and my eyes widen. That fucking idiot! If he pops that in here, his whole fucking team will drown.

“If you do that, your team will drown. You think my parents will intervene? They would have done it when they saw what we were doing or when Hayes was hit in the leg. They are not coming.” The smile drops from his face. “Plus, your team will need to stay submerged in water for twenty-four hours or the skin will keep festering and it really won’t be pretty. They will need someone to keep an eye on them so they don’t fall asleep.”

He lifts his leg to take a step, and a bullet hits him in the temple and drops him to the ground. Stupid fucking idiots. My parents will kill us now for sure.

“Never give them options,” Zadom says, dropping the gun beside me.

“Fuck off, I was here to save your ass. Not the other way around.”

Zadom scoffs. “I had it under control. I would have been able to get free once I was in the water.”

Laughter spills out of me. “Haven would have died.”

Zadom shrugs. “Sometimes you lose people for the greater good.”

“Fuck you, Olympia,” Haven snaps, pulling his shirt over his head, and it drops to the ground with a plop.

“Nah, it’s me who will fuck you,” Zadom quips with a wink.

My mouth falls open and Kyro chuckles, coming up behind me. “Close your mouth, Zhavvy, or you’ll catch flies.”

Extending my arm, I push Kyro, and he stumbles, landing back in the pool. Fishing my phone out of my pocket, I dial Rome.

“We are done,” I tell him when he answers. “You may need a crew here to transport Team Swift Six back to the campus pool. They will need a medic on standby for quite some time.”

“Zhavia, what did you do?!” my mum snaps on the other end of the line.

“Mother, they started it, but we finished it. We were given no specifics, nor given direction since we came in with no handler. We were told we had three hours to find and rescue them, and that is what we did. All of Team Swift Six are unfortunately alive and will be enjoying a nice swim for a while.”

“Tell Cruze we will be talking about the development and use of untested ammunition. I will send a collection team out, but get your asses back here so we can debrief.”

She ends the call and I shove my phone back into my pocket. “Mum wants to talk to you, Cruze,” I say with a chuckle.

“Should I bring my dad? She likes him a lot, considering he is her best friend.”

“Probably, but it was so worth it to beat these fuckers.”

Kyro stands on the edge of the pool as Lynx throws the last member in. The shot to the temple knocked him out cold, but his groans indicate he isn’t dead. One of the others can help him float until he regains consciousness.

“You think you would learn—you can’t beat us. Nice try though,” Kyro says, followed by a chuckle.

“Fuck you,” Violet spits. “It was our way back in. We had no fucking choice.”

“Guess I should say it was nice knowing you,” I drawl, unable to resist another jab, “but they won’t fire you. Plenty of roles need filling. I hear the janitor at the high school quit.”

Violet cusses me out as we pick up all our shit and leave, this time using the side door. Lynx’s car is only a five-seater, so the guys all pile in, Lynx and Zadom taking the front seat, and Hayes, Cruze, and Haven sit in the back. I climb in and Hayes pulls me down on his lap. Kyro looks in and Haven shakes his head.

“Looks like it’s me and you, Cruzey baby.”

“Fuck off, get in the boot, you’re wet.”

We all laugh, but Lynx gets out and helps Kyro into the boot. Lucky for him, it’s a decent size. Honestly, we both could have fit, but Hayes just wraps me tighter against his body, a warning growl on his lips to sit still.

A smile graces my lips. We got our first test assignment, and I would call it a win for us.



Chapter Fourteen

Zhavia

Back at the university, we don't get the chance to shower. Hayes is sent straight to medical to get his leg looked at, while the rest of us are marched up into my father's office. Since then, we have filled out paperwork, given a recount of events, and have had my mum chew us new assholes.

The door to the office opens and my father Kai walks in, smiling from ear to ear. "Good news! You are now cleared for field assignments. We knew you could work as a team."

"Kai," my mother snaps. "We were not ready to tell them yet!"

"Oh, my bad. Why doesn't anyone tell me this shit? I was told to bring the files up." He drops the manilla folders onto the table.

"Thanks, Daddy," I whisper, and he leans down and places a kiss on my forehead.

"Welcome, baby. Now listen to your mother and don't get yourselves killed."

Dad leaves the room and Mum hands us all a folder. "Take this paperwork home, read it carefully, and bring it back. You're all adults now, which means once you sign it, the

contract is legally binding. I still don't believe that you and Zadom are ready, but your fathers outvoted me this morning."

"We are ready," Zadom snaps. "Zhavia can block me from her head with her new bestie. And after she boned Cruze, I felt our connection loosen a little. So one down and three to go, then she won't need me at all." And with that, Zadom storms from the room.

"Don't worry about him," Haven says, getting up from the chair in the corner of the room. "I'll go after him."

"You're game," Kyro laughs out. "He might hurt you."

"Don't worry, I like it rough," Haven says with a wink, leaving the room.

Mum's mouth snaps shut. She looks at me and I shrug. "Your guess is as good as mine. I think they are banging, but apparently, we keep secrets now, like normal siblings. So that's a step in the right direction."

Mum just shakes her head at me. I don't think Zadom is gay. If he is, he hasn't mentioned it to me before. Not that I care, but he best believe when I find him he is going to tell me about it.

Mum dismisses everyone but asks me to stay behind for a second, and the guys agree to meet me back at the apartment.

"We need to investigate this voice in your head to make sure it's not a security breach. So far, Zadom only dreams about her, but she comes to you at any time and . . ."

I cut her off, knowing exactly where this conversation is going. "And you want me to be the guinea pig first before him? I get it. Have someone drop everything off today and we can get it happening."

"We don't need to drop anything off. Dad is here now."

She presses the buzzer on her phone and Brennan's receptionist answers. "Can you send Chester in, please?"

"Sure, Jolie."

Fuck, she didn't waste any time. Dad pushes through the door with a small envelope in his hands.

"Hello, daughter, nice job on the test." Mum slaps him on the arm. "Oh, um, make sure you use Olympia approved weapons next time." He leans in and lowers his voice. "Tell Cruze to come see me this week."

"Chester," Mum warns.

"Right, all I need to do is stick these on your temples. They are clear and waterproof. You might get a slight headache, which is normal," he says, placing the small clear discs on my temples.

I sigh. "Can we get someone else to look over the data or whatever you're doing? I don't like the idea of you knowing what I'm doing and when."

Mum laughs when Chester chokes on his own spit and whips his head towards my mum. "Jolie, you said—"

"I lied. Don't worry, Zhavia. We collect all the data in our system, and we will review it later in the week. We can't hear or see what is happening. Come back in a few days and Dad will give you an MRI to make sure her being in your head isn't causing you any damage. Everything your grandfather created had an antidote worked on at the same time. We think maybe whatever this is, could be that for you and Zadam, but your grandfather was not a good man, so we don't know what to expect."

"Can I go shower now?" I ask.

Mum nods and Dad grabs my hand and wraps his arms around me, placing a kiss on the top of my head. "If they hurt you, I'll kill them. Give 'em hell, princess."

I chuckle. Chester is one of the moodiest alphas out of my fathers, but to me he is a big softy.

Leaving the office, I head downstairs to the medical wing, and the nurse smiles at me when I step out of the lift.

"Zhavia, I haven't seen you in years. I take it you're here for Hayes."

I nod. Casey has been working for my parents for most of my life. She leads me into a room where Hayes has a fresh bandage on his leg.

“You’re free to go, but come back in a few days so I can take a look and make sure it’s healing.”

“Will do, Mrs C. Do I get that lollipop now?”

Casey smiles and pulls a lollipop from her pocket and hands it to him. When he beams at her, I roll my eyes.

“Let’s go, we’re not excused from classes today,” I tell him, and he smiles, pulling out a slip of paper from his pocket.

“I am. My poor leg is so sore. Will you play nurse for me?”

I snort and shake my head. “Unlikely. I need to go home and shower and then I have training with Rome, but I’m fitted up with monitors, so I need someone to defile me to see if I’m batshit crazy or if someone is breaching our security by lurking in my brain.”

“I vote crazy. Kyro says they fuck better.”

I pin him with a look. He knows better than to bring up the bitches they have fucked. What he doesn’t know is what happened to the ones who liked to brag about it. Well, let’s just say my parents are thankful they have a doctor on staff. Fucking Tammy Fuller’s face was the last one from high school that met with a toilet bowl. I would have drowned the bitch if Zadom hadn’t felt my anger and come running. Then the security team on campus noticed him running, and apparently an Olympia running anywhere was cause for alarm.

The school’s driver meets us downstairs; we have a campus driver, who takes students from the medical wing to their apartments, as well as on any other errands that need doing.

Once I manage to help Hayes upstairs, we find everyone freshly showered and getting ready to head out to their next class.

Zadom is leaning against the kitchen counter. “We need to talk,” he says, and I nod.

“Meet me in my room in ten minutes. I need a quick shower.”

I don’t wait for his reply, turning my back on him and heading into my room. After the world’s fastest shower, I wrap a towel around my body and find Zadom already lying on my bed. I ignore him as I walk into my closet, shutting the door so I can get dressed in my workout gear, then I grab a clean uniform for after I’m done.

“So,” Zadom says, pushing up on his elbows to watch me pack my uniform and combat boots in a sports bag.

“So,” I reply, picking up my sneakers and sitting down at my desk. “You and Haven, huh? I didn’t think we had secrets.”

“First, there is no me and Haven. We hate fucked, and then I was a little busy being chained up to really tell you about it.”

“I don’t give a fuck about Haven, but since when do you like men?”

Zadom snorts. “Since him, I guess. I don’t know, Zhavvy. I’m confused as fuck right now. You know I’m trying really hard to be cool with you and the guys. We all know it has to happen. I’m not a complete asswipe.” That makes me snort. “Okay, I am, but not when it comes to you. Mum has me working with him, and he pushes my buttons. When I went to attack him, he kissed me, and I don’t know . . . it just happened.”

“Will you do it again?”

He shrugs. “I don’t know, probably not. I don’t have time for distractions now, especially since we could get a field assignment at any time. Besides, someone who came out of the asylum is probably not a good choice of bedmate. What if he gets obsessed with me?”

I shrug. “What’s not to love about you—your sparkling personality or that scowl you permanently wear on your face that makes girls run for the hills?”

“Fuck you,” he says, launching one of my throw pillows my way. “Did you see the fight schedule is out for Friday?”

My eyes light up—the first fights of the year. This is where we will be ranked. It doesn’t matter if you’re a first year or fourth. Every first year must participate, but you can opt out in your third year, unless you’re called in.

“Who are you up against?” I ask him, and he smirks at me.

“Me? Seriously? I’m going to kick your ass. They could have made it a fair fight.”

Zadom pushes up from the bed. “I think someone knows I have been a dick lately and wants you to kick my ass. Bring it. I won’t go easy on you.”

I scoff. “Dick, they probably know that everyone is scared to go up against either of us. My guys would let me win, but you won’t. May the best man or woman win.” I know he won’t hurt me either, and I wanted to throw it in his face and psych him out. He goes to leave my room and twists the door handle. “I’m happy for you, Zay, if Haven is what you want. You know that, right?”

He doesn’t reply, leaving my room just as my phone starts to vibrate and Halo’s name flashes up on the screen. Her scream ricochets through my ear drum when I answer.

“Why have you not called me? Your dickhead younger brother just told me you are now cleared for field assignments in your first year!”

I laugh. “We both know they were going to let us, anyway. It’s their way of keeping us happy, so we don’t decide that we are ready to take over. Not that I want a boring office job.”

“That might be true, but it’s still exciting, and Kenji says that you better kick Zadom’s ass for him.”

I bite down on my tongue—that little weasel. “Halo, you didn’t.”

She snorts. “I’m sorry, but Kenji is right. You need someone who will challenge you, and if you just happen to break his face in the meantime . . .”

“I guess, but it might just scare everyone away from fighting us. I want to take on some fourth years to show them that the years of training they have on me here means shit.”

“Shit, I have to go. I’m hiding in the art closet, and I hear footsteps.”

“Okay, promise you won’t let my brother convince you to hack into the school files anymore? If you get caught, they could kick you out.”

“Okay,” she says. “I’ll see you soon.”

She ends the call, and I put my phone into my sports bag. My training with Rome starts in twenty minutes and my hair is still wet, so I do a quick braid and head out of my room. Everyone has gone, except Hayes, and I watch as he flicks through and brings up the online portal for his next class.

“Have fun,” he says. “I will see you tonight.”

Flipping him the bird as I leave, he just smiles.

I make my way downstairs to my buggy and floor it to the gym where Rome is waiting as I walk in.

“You’re late,” he barks.

Does he really think two minutes late is a big deal in the grand scheme of things?

“By two minutes. I’m sorry that I needed to shower.”

Rome looks pissed. I wonder what his problem is?

“Get your gloves on. We are going to make sure you’re ready to go up against your brother. He knows you, so he will know what to expect.”

“You forget one thing. I have been begging them all for years to fight me for real. I know that I’m strong enough, but he refuses to hurt me. Do you really think he will start now?”

Rome shrugs. “Everyone expects him to win; he is Zadom Olympia. So, he won’t have a choice. His reputation depends on it.”

That stumps me—I didn't think of it like that. Women who are genetically altered are just as strong as the men. We have all the same gifts. Most of the fights are gendered, and it's mainly the older students who don't care. My mum told me the story about her first fight with her friend Summer. She got her ass beat.

“You can't let your brother win. You have a reputation as well.”

Sliding my hands into my gloves, I adjust them a bit, then walk to the boxing bag. “So what if I do? Maybe he needs this more than I do? It's all Kenji anyway—he knows I have been wanting a fight like this and he thinks he is hilarious.”

“If your brother is responsible, then expect the rotation to change as soon as one of your parents finds out.”

Rome gets behind the bag and by the time our session is done, every muscle in my body hurts. He claims I'm not as fit as the guys, but I think it's more than that; I would bet his job here depends on how well he does with me.

“How long are you here for?” I ask Rome as I grab my sports bag.

He turns to me, “As long as your mum wants me here. I'm hoping to get a more permanent role.”

“Why don't you apply to be a handler? It would be way more fun than teaching.”

“That's none of your business,” he snaps.

I shrug and head into the showers to wash off the sweat. I'm so damn wiped out that I think I will skip the last class I have today and instead head back to see Hayes.

By the time I get to the apartment, I find Hayes asleep on the couch. One arm is slung across his face and one foot meets the ground while the other hangs over the back of the lounge. And the best part—he is only wearing his boxer briefs.

“Are you going to just stand there and stare at me or come say hello?”

I laugh and drop my backpack on the ground, kicking off my boots. He removes the arm from over his face and checks to see if I'm still standing there, then motions for me to come closer.

"I think you're wearing too many clothes."

"Take off your clothes, Zhavia. I'm always here to help."

Ignoring the voice in my head, I pull my shirt off and throw it somewhere behind me, then I do the same with my pants. Hayes pushes up on his elbows and watches me as I walk towards him. He sits up as I round the couch, and when I straddle his lap, his hands go straight to my ass, pulling me tight into his body.

"You have no idea how long I have dreamed about this," Hayes whispers against my skin, squeezing the globes of my ass. "Please tell me I can fuck you and then once I'm done, I will worship every inch of your body."

"Yes, please. I need you, Hayes. Right now."

He slides a tattooed hand up my leg and hooks his fingers into my underwear, running them through my wetness.

"You're so fucking wet for me, Zhavvy."

He removes his fingers and brings them to his mouth. "Fuck it," he says, and moves so fast that before I know it, I'm flat on my back, laying almost naked before him as he removes my underwear, his head dropping between my legs.

"I'm going to eat this perfect cunt until I'm drowning it in."

He flattens his tongue and runs it the entire length of my pussy. A low moan rumbles in the back of his throat as my legs clamp around his head, but he pushes me open wider and holds my legs in place.

"Fuck, please keep doing that," I say, thrusting myself into his face as he sucks my clit into his mouth. I can never go back, not now that I know how amazing this feels.

Hayes eats me like a starved man, and my screams of pleasure echo around the empty room. When he inserts his

fingers and sucks on my clit, my entire body explodes and every nerve ending tingles. I'm on cloud nine and never want to come down. Hayes has other plans, though. He picks up my limp body and stands me on my feet, bending me over the armrest of the couch. He presses in behind me, and I can feel the head of his cock as he moves it up and down my pussy, coating himself in my arousal.

He thrusts in hard.

"Yes, fuck me!" I moan.

"Your pussy is so damn tight. I want to live in it forever."

He sets his pace fast from the start, and my screams of "fuck yeah," "don't stop," and "harder" all come out back-to-back. I don't care if the whole fucking building can hear me, not when Hayes fucks this good. The rhythm and speed are perfect, and my orgasm builds slowly; the way he moves is like his cock is dancing with my pussy, in just the right way to be sensual while building lust and want. His hands explore my body and all the sensations hit me at once as he runs a finger over my clit. I scream his name as my body spasms to the point I see stars and my voice is hoarse.

Now *that* was an orgasm.

Hayes barely gives me time to recover before he pulls me onto his lap, and I ride him until he comes. Then I collapse on his chest and eventually pass out.

When I wake up sometime later, his shirt is pulled over me and he's holding me close, still cock-deep in my pussy.



Chapter Fifteen

Lynx

Zadom flops down in the seat beside me. Thank god for lunch; we can stop and eat whenever we like here, but I have a break now before my last class.

“How are you holding up?” I ask him, and he shrugs.

“Zhavia isn’t pissed at me, so I call it a win.”

I was expecting a big blow-up between them. If Zadom is into dudes, good for him. I still can’t picture him on his knees with a cock in his mouth—the guy is way too dominant. Maybe it’s Haven who takes his cock.

“Has she forgiven you yet? Can’t say you didn’t deserve that knee to the cock.”

I shrug. “We haven’t had a chance to talk. I was a dick, but fuck, it’s complicated.”

Zadom shakes his head at me. “Then uncomplicate it. This is exactly why I didn’t want you all banging my sister—it complicates shit. Tell her you’re jealous and that you waited for her.”

“Oh yeah, sure. ‘Hey, Apple, just thought you should know I’m a fucking virgin.’ I should have known she would give it up to Cruze first.”

“Do you hear yourself right now? Cruze didn’t keep it a secret; he owned it, and she knew when the time came, it would be him. Of course she would give him her first time.”

Teams file into the cafeteria. Some walk the long way around us and others stare at us wistfully, hoping Zadam will talk to them. Newsflash, he won’t.

I scoff. “Please, she has to have known on some level. Especially since she messed up all the bitches that Kyro and Hayes fucked. Did she never stop and wonder why my name didn’t cross any of their lips?”

Kyro joins us and I kick the asshole’s shin under the table.

“What the fuck?” he grits out.

“That’s for letting other bitches suck your cock.”

Kyro throws his head back and laughs. “Well, if someone wasn’t a complete cock-blocker, we could have been with Zhavia this entire time.”

“Fuck off,” Zadam snaps, leaning back in his chair. “You all put up such a fight over it, but let’s face it, she wasn’t ready. Could you imagine what it would be like being her, knowing she has four dickheads who want her, and they are hers forever? I can’t imagine being locked down to one person, not at our age.”

“Speak for yourself. I have known since I was a toddler that she was it for me,” I say.

It’s true, and while I don’t have a photographic memory, I remember right back until I was almost five. One day, when Kai was in charge, Zhavia was in a princess dress and boots, and he was chasing her through the school, trying to brush her hair. She ran straight up to me and asked me to hide her, and I got into a fucking fight stance, ready to take on her dad to protect her. Kai just laughed and handed me, a five-year-old boy, the hairbrush and told me to brush her hair. She sat and let me run the brush through her tangled white locks. It was that day I knew I would lay down my life for her, and I would do whatever it took to make sure nothing ever happened to her.

“Seriously, you knew? Or is it just what you were designed to do? They are very different things, trust me—many years of therapy have taught me that. Do we not all remember the whole start of this ‘I feel shit I shouldn’t towards my sister’ debacle?”

Kyro snorts. “We all love her—have you met her? She makes us whole, and every day we are not with her physically hurts. Maybe you don’t understand that because you’re her brother.”

Something comes over him. He isn’t telling us something.

“What was that look?” I ask.

Zadom sighs and leans forward. “I do feel it, but I don’t know what it means. My nightmares are linked to this void I feel. I can’t explain it.”

“Man, your nose is bleeding.”

Kyro is right. Blood trickles down his face, and he wipes it with the back of his hand.

“Fuck!” he spits. “I’m going to kill them!” He stands from his chair. “She’s letting one of you idiots between her legs. I don’t know what’s worse, feeling her emotions and knowing, or getting a fucking bloody nose, feeling nauseous, and still knowing.”

Haven walks towards us and Zadom growls. As he gets closer, Zadom sidesteps him, and he puts his arm out to stop him. “Remove your arm or lose it.”

“Will you beat me with it when you’re done?” Haven quips, which pisses Zadom off more.

“Wish we had popcorn,” Kyro jokes, but he isn’t wrong. No one willingly pisses Zadom off.

“Your nose is bleeding—you should get it checked.” Haven looks at him with concern.

Zadom slaps his arm away. “I know it is, fuckwit. My sister is getting her rocks off while I get this as a souvenir.”

Haven shakes his head. “Leave her alone. You want to fight with someone? Let’s do this. I have too much noise in my fucking head and came here to pick a fight with you, anyway.”

Zay cocks his head at Haven and smirks. Kyro kicks me under the table this time, and I look at him. Yes, I saw it as well. Zadam almost smiled, and not once in his life has he smiled at anyone else besides his sister. Who the fuck is this guy and why is he here?

“Fine, let’s take this outside,” Zadam offers. “I’ll see you guys later.”

I wait until he is far enough away. “We need to find Cruze and find out exactly why Haven is here. All we know is he came from the asylum, but why? They wouldn’t have just let him out.”

Kyro nods, and we get up from our seats and head over to the library where Cruze will be studying.

We find him exactly where we thought he would be, hunched over a table and staring at his laptop. Both Kyro and I sit down opposite him, so he looks up at us and closes the lid.

“What’s wrong?” he asks worriedly. It’s not like us to come into the library. Yes, we study, but at home like normal people.

“Nothing. We need your skills,” I inform him, and he raises a brow at me, waiting for an explanation. “What do we know about Haven? Have we considered that maybe he is a test? Think about it, he comes out of nowhere and targets Zadam, and for some strange reason, Zadam hasn’t tried to kill him.”

Kyro leans forward and put his arms down on the desk in front of us, counting off on his fingers. “Zadam got a bloody nose again, so we think Hayes and Zhavia are getting freaky. Zadam was ready to go postal, and Haven comes in and diverts his attention. I still think it’s aliens.”

“It’s not fucking aliens,” I snap.

“Well, you come up with a better idea,” he retorts.

“Shhh,” the librarian says, and I scowl at her in annoyance, but she just holds her finger up to her lips. So, I flip her off. Today is *not* the day to be testing my patience.

I refocus on Cruze. “Can you try to hack the asylum records and see what he was in for?”

He open his laptop and types away, and we sit quietly while he works. Kyro eventually gets bored and gets up, claiming he needs to take a piss. I continue to watch until Cruze sighs.

“Finally, his files were closed within the system, but someone emailed the files to Brennan, and I hacked into his email and extracted one file.”

He turns the screen, and I read through the first page.

To: Brennan Myers

Subject: Confidential

Mr Myers, attached are the files you requested. We would like to express that we do not agree with the release of this patient. He is unstable and not ready to be taken out of the facility. If you wish to continue with this transfer, then we will no longer take any responsibility for the patient.

Haven Lukas Reid

18 years old (Current)

Subject brought in at twelve years old. His surrogate mother took him from the facility and kept him hidden, thus removing his opportunity to fully learn his ability. He was found in a small remote town of Sunset Haven, where we believe the mother has family ties. He no longer goes by his birth name of Wyatt Stone, and is known as Haven Reid. The subject was believed to be involved in the murder-suicide of six people, including his birth mother. Olympia has covered up the deaths to stop the mass hysteria of norms over the unauthorised use

of his abilities to manipulate and hurt other people. We suspect that his ability to get into people's heads played a major part in the six deaths and we believe he is a danger to society. He shows no empathy for the part he played and has next to no control over his abilities, nor does he show any interest in learning how to control them.

I read over his therapy notes and the images from the deaths. Fuck, how could a small boy who was never trained have that much sway over an adult's thoughts? It's impossible for a trained genetically altered adult to be able to do that. Something more is going on. It's almost as if they wanted us to find this information.

“There is no way he could be responsible for that, right?”

Cruze shrugs. “I'm inclined to say no. Chester still has no control over being able to read minds and he is an original, and Zhavia, while better, is unable to manipulate someone into doing what she wants. He is around the same age as us—could there be a second super team? What if we are Zhavia's team and Zadom has his own? Could his parents be hunting them down? Isn't that kind of what happened with their parents' teams, and they didn't know both teams were genetically linked to Jolie?”

Kyro returns, sitting back down, and rather than explain, we show him the reports and Cruze tells him his theory.

“I mean, it's possible,” Kyro says after he gathers his thoughts. “Should we tell Zhavia and Zadom, as there is really no way to prove it?”

“We should,” Cruze says. “Because what we do know is their grandfather did everything for a reason. Let's go. Lynx, text Zadom to meet us back at the apartment. If we are going to get to the bottom of this, it needs to be done as a team. I doubt it's a coincidence we have Haven here, who has mind control, and whatever is happening with Zhavia is another form of mind talent. What if it's been Haven in her head the entire time?”

“Shit, like a mind stalker. If that’s true, Zadam is going to kill him!” Kyro chirps.

All three of us hightail it out of the library, and I text Zadam a 911 message, so he will actually meet us there.

We reach our apartment in record time, and I open the door. We all file into the main room and my heart stops when I see Zhavia straddling Hayes’s lap on the couch, in one of his shirts. She looks up at us but makes no attempt to move.

“Might wanna put some distance between the two of you. Zadam is on his way back, and he was already pissed about the bloody nose,” Kyro tells them, pushing past me to jump over the back of the couch and pull Zhavia onto his own lap.

How can they all so easily flip the switch and just fall into something with her without thinking about how this affects us as an entire group?

“I should have told him. My parents wanted to track my mind and see if whatever is going on with me is a security breach.”

“I don’t think your parents are being honest with you,” Cruze says.

“What the fuck do you mean?” Zadam booms, walking into the room, and Cruze recoils into himself. I fucking hate when Zadam does that to him.

“What he means is we did some digging on Haven,” I say, taking over.

Zadam freezes, watching me sceptically, and I see the fire in his eyes. I need to tread carefully regarding his newfound friend.

Cruze opens his laptop and places it on the table. Zhavia and Hayes, along with Zadam, come over and read the file.

“You think he is fucking with my head?” Zadam snaps.

“Not exactly, though it’s possible,” I admit. “One theory is that he is controlling you and Zhavia, but that doesn’t explain why your parents would have released him from the asylum. Our other thought is, what if you have a super team as well,

Zadom? Zhavia has us and you, but who do you have? You're linked to us, but not as strong as you are with your sister. I know that while my connection to Zhavia is stronger than to the guys, I connect to them in a way that I don't with you."

"That doesn't explain why the voice in my head can connect with me at any time, but only Zadom in his dreams, even if it's the same person."

"If we are going off the information that Haven was taken as a baby, what's to say this other person didn't experience the same fate and has no training? It just seems weird that it would be two people with mind-based talents. Look at most groups—we don't have a crossover of our main abilities," Cruze points out.

"There are also a range of other abilities it could be. She doesn't seem to control my mind like I felt when Haven was trying to get inside," Zhavia adds.

"Can I throw something out there?" Time to add my final two cents. "What if Zadom isn't part of our team at all and actually has his own? I know that means we are one man down, but it could have been done on purpose to keep us from reaching our full potential as super teams before maturity."

Zhavia steps away from us and storms out of the house. We call after her, but she just yells out that she will be back.



Chapter Sixteen

Zhavia

This shit is getting confusing, but some things are finally piecing themselves together. I'm pissed my parents kept this from us. Shouldn't we have a right to know what's going on? What they are doing is no better than what was done to them. My heart sank when the idea of Zadom having his own team came to light. Is that how he felt about me with my team? The fear of losing him hurts.

I should have taken the buggy to the other side of campus, but I needed the walk to try to calm down. All it has done is fuel my anger tenfold.

The gym looks empty as I push through the doors, making them bang loudly against the wall. Rome steps out of the locker room freshly showered.

"You fucking asshole," I yell at him, closing the distance between us.

He doesn't expect the right hook I throw at his face. The shithead recovers quickly and catches my fist when I try to hit him again. He spins me around and wraps his arms around me to stop me from hitting him.

"What the fuck, Zhavia?"

“Don’t ‘what the fuck’ me, asshole,” I seethe, struggling against him. “Why are you really here? Stop lying to me!”

“I can’t tell you yet. I’m sorry.”

He loosens his hold, and I rip myself from his embrace and turn back to face him. “They should have killed you, but they didn’t. I thought maybe that was because they were growing up. They have tortured people for less. You’re here for me. What ability do you have?”

“What makes you think I have one?” He takes a step closer to me.

“I’m a walking lie detector, and you lied the last time I asked. So, I’m asking you again. What’s your ability?”

“I can change the mood in any situation. It’s why your guys haven’t come after me yet. That, and I have had a little help.”

I gasp when he steps even closer and cups my face.

“You’re not really a teacher here, are you?”

He shakes his head. “You need to talk to your parents. I can’t risk being sent away again. I won’t do it, I can’t.”

“Rome, I can’t do this.” Pulling away from him, my head spins with information. I need answers and the best way to get them is to confront my parents. This is bad, really fucking bad. If Rome is my sixth, Zadam will not cope.

Racing back out of the gym, I bump into a man in a white coat. With a small prick to my neck, my world goes black.



The thumping in my head blurs my vision as I try to blink my eyes open. Looking around, I know exactly where I am: the holding cells at the university labs. The place Zadam hates the most. Jumping to my feet, I look around. Zadam is waking up in the cell next to me and Lynx is on my other side. It looks like we are all here, including Haven and Rome.

The doors to the main room slide open and my mum walks in along with my father Chester.

“Why the fuck are we here?” I snap, banging against the glass.

“Calm down. We have some explaining to do and we expect your tempers to get the better of you.”

“Well, explain,” I demand.

Mum sighs and takes a seat, Dad taking one beside her. “We haven’t been honest with you.”

“No shit,” Zadom snaps.

“When did you know?” I ask her. She knows exactly what I’m talking about.

“Only a few years ago, after Zadom was worried he had feelings for you. His therapist hypnotised him, but something he said was off, so we started digging further. We also finally cracked a folder that we have never had access to, and we still have our best working on the files it contained. Rome’s file was one of the first we managed to get open. First, you have to understand, when we took over from your grandfather, all his files were destroyed or encrypted. So we had no idea how many women were pregnant, or how many there were prior to you. Also, back then, they used surrogates, not the baby pods we have now. The information we were given said that your team was created with Zadom as your handler.”

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” Lynx yells. “Rome is part of our team? How have we not felt it?”

“We have a feeling it’s because you never knew he existed, but did you ever stop to think that things started changing once he was around? Zhavia stopped being scared to touch any of you. Yes, we were well aware she would connect with Zadom every time one of you was affectionate with her. The connection alone now between Zhavia and Cruze . . .”

“I can’t listen to this,” Chester snaps standing from his seat. “I will wait outside. She is my baby girl.”

Mum squeezes his hand, then he steps out.

“As I was saying, the connection between the two of you is now strengthened. We can see it while watching the security footage on campus. Zhavia, you stubbed your toe yesterday, and Cruze was across campus. He felt it.”

“Okay, so you somehow found him, which I hope you explain how, but what about Haven?” I ask.

“After we got Rome’s file open, there was suddenly a whole new file visible. That one belonged to Haven. Now that we have Haven’s file open, another one has popped up. We don’t know how to open that file yet.”

“So that means he isn’t our handler, and he has his own team? Does that mean you have two files opened and four more to go?”

Mum signals for Chester to come back into the room and he does. “Can you pull up the file we are working on?” Honestly, we don’t know if Zadom is your handler. We still believe that to be true, but for some reason, he has people linked to him too. Our theory is that his team members were created to be handlers to your team. When we were your age, we were always told that Chester’s team was created to be Team Hades handlers, but something went wrong and they were linked to me. So, we thought, what if Zadom has a team of five and they are all handlers, created to work as one to protect your team? When Haven first met you, some of the tests came back inconclusive, but we know he is now connected to Zadom, and he helps calm him.”

Kyro laughs. “Fucking someone makes me calm as well.”

“So in other words, you don’t know shit,” Hayes snaps.

“We are pretty much back to square one, yes. Zadom might have his own super team, or they are a team of handlers. Your guess is as good as ours right now. It’s a bloody jigsaw puzzle and one that we don’t know how to put together.”

“Why didn’t you tell us? Didn’t we have a right to know?” Cruze asks politely.

“To protect you. We don’t know why they have been hidden, but apparently Rome and Haven were very convincing

about wanting to join you. After Brennan went to see Haven in the asylum, he created a link between them, and well, here he is. Rome, when we found him, had sketch books full of all of you and yet he had never met you before.”

“How does he have two abilities then? He told me he can calm people,” I say.

“Also something we don’t know. Some lesser abilities are paired with others. It could just be because he is linked to you. I’m going to let you all out, but I’m afraid we will have to run some more tests. We will get you all up here one by one as needed.”

The doors open and we all step out. Bringing us in like this was a bit overkill, but that’s the world we live in.

“Before you all leave,” Chester says. “I’m fitting you all with the monitors just like Zhavia. I want to monitor your brain activity. We don’t know what Mr Z had planned.”

Mr fucking Z, a.k.a. my grandfather. I wish he was alive so that I could kill him. And then I would bring back his twin brother so I could kill him as well for what he did to my nan. Their whole story is fucked up. Nan was married to Mr Z but also in love with his brother. Mr Z found out and had some plan, but his brother double crossed him. Told him that Nan died. He then wiped her memory and kept her locked away, but not before Mr Z got my mum away. Our entire family is fucked up.

“We also think the girl in your head, Zhavia, might be one of Zadam’s team.”

I shake my head. “Then why is she helping me? Wait, don’t answer that because you don’t know.”

“You’re right, we don’t,” Mum says with a sigh. “Right now, we only know how regular teams work. It has taken us so long to get that right. We can only keep trying to open the files.”

“Would you mind if I tried?” Cruze asks.

We all know he is one of the best hackers that Olympia has besides my father Marlow, who is a human computer. I doubt

Cruze would know more than him, but it couldn't hurt.

Chester steps up to Cruze and places the small clear tabs on his temple. "I will set up a meeting with Marlow and you can look over it with him. We all really did just want you to have a normal life, or as normal as possible, and not have to worry about this."

"Dad, that's a cop out. We have never had a normal life; we have been under a microscope since we were born. You need to keep us up to date and let us help. If Zadam has a team, then we need to find them."

"I don't need a fucking team," Zadam snaps, storming out of the room. Haven takes off after him. I go to follow, but Mum stops me.

"Let them go. We won't understand the dynamic unless we ride it out. Haven seems to be good for him."

Once Dad has finished, Mum dismisses everyone but asks to talk to me alone. I wait until they have all gone.

"I'm sorry we didn't tell you, but as you can see, we really have little to go on. Teams have always been six, but you know we have been experimenting with less than that amount. Especially since some teams created around the same time as you had less. My father typically made them handlers, but my point is we don't know if his team will even have six or if they are a linked team yet."

"I'm going to try to connect with the voice in my head more, but I need to tell Zadam first. I think she might tell me who she is if I push. Whatever or whoever she is, she wants to establish that connection."

"Just be careful. We don't even know how she is connected to all of this. Your aunt Sinclair had an idea. She thinks that maybe once your connection to him is lowered, the girl could connect better with Zadam. He is always so focused on you he wouldn't be open to letting anyone else in."

"But what do I do without him? I don't know if I'm ready."

She takes my hands in hers as she stands. “Baby, you will always have him and be connected in some way, but it’s time for you to grow your wings and be your own person. You both deserve to be free of that binding.”

She drops my hands and wraps her arms around me, pulling me tight into her body as tears stream down my face. I don’t know who I am without him, but she is right. Why we are linked may still be a mystery and I will be damned if we don’t find out what the fuck is going on with us.



Chapter Seventeen

Zhavia

Anticipation swirls in my stomach. My parents didn't change the roster for the fights, and Zadom and I are up against each other. I'm so torn—I want to win, but I know Zadom needs this right now.

“Zhavia,” Rome snaps.

I glare down at him as he wraps my hands. We haven't spoken about him being part of my team—I haven't even acknowledged it.

“What!”

He finishes wrapping my hands and holds mine. “I'm sorry. I shouldn't have lied to you, but I couldn't risk being sent away. For as long as I can remember, every day I sketched you from memory, and you aged as I did. You became an obsession and I had to find you. I knew you were real.”

“I don't know what this means—why couldn't I feel you? Now I'm confused and don't know how to feel. Nothing makes any sense.”

My heart beats erratically in my chest, and Rome reaches up and cups my face, but I don't flinch away. I don't want to.

“They won't make it easy for you,” I warn him.

He smirks. “I wouldn’t expect anything less. But I hope you know I won’t back down. I’ll fight for you, like I have every single day of my life. No one will take you away from me.”

“I’m not asking you to leave, Rome.”

He leans in and touches his lips to mine. Electricity swirls around inside me, and I pull away with a gasp, my eyes wide as I press my fingers to my mouth.

“Did you feel that?” he asks. All I can do is nod. What the hell?

The doors to the locker room smash open and Cruze stands there, his chest rising and falling rapidly. “What just happened? I feel odd and I can feel everyone.”

“Me too,” Kyro adds, stepping into the locker room. Lynx and Hayes follow, and Lynx scowls at Rome.

“I think our bond is complete now,” is all I tell them.

“I think it is as well,” Cruze says.

Dread hits me—I need to find Zadam. I have to make sure nothing has changed.

“Zhavia, what’s going on?” Rome asks.

“I have to find my brother. What if this means that our connection is lost? What if he doesn’t need me anymore?”

I see the pity in their eyes, but they don’t understand. No one will ever understand what Zadam and I have been through.

The door flies open again, and my brother steps through, looking around the room. “What did you do to her?”

Rome raises his hands in front of his body, and I step between him and Zadam. “It wasn’t him, it was me. I thought our connection was gone. Did you feel me kiss him?”

Zadam’s eyes narrow at Rome. “No, I felt how sad you were. You kissed him?”

I slowly nod my head. “I did. It just happened, but he is part of my team, and I think we are all linked now. It was weird, and for a second I panicked because I can’t lose you.”

“Listen to me, you will never lose me. Not feeling you getting your rocks off will be great, but I will always be able to know when you need me. Always.”

“Good, I couldn’t live without you.”

Zay smiles at me. “Are you ready to get your ass kicked?”

I scoff. “Please, you really think you can hurt me?”

His face drops like he has only just realised he will actually have to do that.

I slap him on the arm. “Don’t be a pussy. Someone needs to grow some balls and take me down. I can take it.”

“I don’t know if I can do it. What if I really hurt you?”

“Then I will fucking heal—we heal at least twice as fast as norms. And we learned to fight the second we could walk, Zay. Besides, I like that you’re so sure of the fact that you will beat me.”

He nods and we all walk out of the locker room. Alarms ring around the room and the sprinkler system comes on.

Turning, I see Zadom has pulled the fire alarm. “You fucking asshole!”

He shrugs. “Anything you throw at me, I can copy with accuracy. You can’t beat me, and I won’t hurt you.”

I run and don’t stop until I tackle him to the ground. If he won’t get in the ring with me, then I will bring the fight to him. I throw a punch and it cracks him in the nose. Still, he doesn’t fight back.

“Fight me, asshole.”

He smirks at me, so I throw another punch. Someone grabs me from behind around my waist. I instantly know it’s Rome because he’s using his abilities to calm me down. As he lifts me and places me on my feet, I mumble how fucking ridiculous this is and storm off, leaving them all behind.

“Zhavia,” Zadam yells.

Ignoring him, I keep walking until I am outside the building. I stop when I see some of my parents and they look pissed off.

“Zadam Knight Olympia! What the fuck do you think you are doing?” my father Boston yells.

“Saving myself from hurting my sister,” Zadam snaps, stepping forward and my father Laughn smirks at him. “You know I can mimic anything thrown at me, and yet you still wanted me to fight her.”

“My princess can hold her own,” Laughn says.

“Can you?” Zadam says, and Laughn’s brow raises, then he nods. This is insanity. Now they will fight here on the fucking lawn, and I just get forgotten about.

Zadam moves first, and Dad lets him get a few hits in, given Zay knows all his moves and vice versa.

“Fuck this,” I yell at my brother. “I’m having an orgy tonight, so stay with your fuck buddy.”

That instantly stops Zadam, and Dad’s fist connects with his face. It just sucks that the bruising will be almost gone by the time he wakes up tomorrow.

“Like fuck you will,” Zadam throws back.

“Yes, I am, and just try to stop me. You’re not the boss of me.”

“Want to test how good my aim is?”

I scream out of frustration and flip him off.

Haven has appeared out of nowhere. “Go have your orgy. I will keep him busy. He will either fuck me into submission or beat the shit out of me.”

I snort. “I think you might just be good for him. You can remove the stick from his ass.”

Haven nods and walks over to where Zadam is now clearly in lecture town with our father Boston.

“Apple, wait up. Can we talk?” Lynx calls.

I ignore him, still pissy at him for thinking he had the right to dictate who I lost my virginity to.

“Please,” he asks, grabbing my elbow. “I need to explain myself and I want to do it while I have the nerve.”

“Fine, talk,” I tell him.

He looks around to make sure we are alone. “I’m sorry about the way I reacted to you and Cruze, but you have to know I waited for you as well.”

My mouth falls open, and I narrow my eyes. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I was embarrassed about being an eighteen-year-old virgin. I didn’t think Zadom would ever let up, so I figured when the time finally came, it would be something that we spoke about first.”

Guilt washes over me. I was so worried about giving up my V-card I hadn’t thought about it being a possibility for the others as well. But I’m not sorry it was with Cruze—I just didn’t realise I would hurt someone else in the process.

“I can’t be sorry, Lynx. It was with Cruze, so how can I regret it? I don’t. Honestly, if I had spoken to you first, all three of us would still be virgins. I would not have been able to choose between you. All I can say is that when you’re ready, let me know.”

A smile creeps up on his face and he steps closer to me. “Oh, I’m ready. I have been ready for a long time.”

He pulls me into his body and my eyes widen as his hard length presses against me. Stepping back, I reach out and take his hand in mine. “Then let’s go. I have been wanting to try something.”

Lynx chuckles as I drag him towards the apartment. “What about your brother and the others?”

“Fuck Zadom. Haven is going to keep him busy. The others will just have to deal. We can put a sock on the door or something. I have seen it in movies.”

Once we reach the apartments, Lynx gets us inside ours fast, then we both stand awkwardly until he smiles, and all the nervous energy leaves me. This is Lynx—I have known him since the day he was born. Yes, I'm slightly older than all the guys since Zadom and I were born early, but every milestone in our lives we have spent together.

His lips descend on mine, then he lifts me up into his arms, and I wrap my legs around his waist as he walks us towards his room. He kicks his door shut and takes us over to his bed, dropping me onto his mattress. As he removes his shirt, I take in all his tattoos, but I especially love the cherry blossom over his heart with my name under it.

“Apple, are you checking me out?”

“I'm not forbidden anymore, so I think you will need a new nickname for me.”

He gets on his knees on the bed and spreads my legs, then leans over to unbutton my pants, my stomach sucking in from the light caress of his fingertips on my skin. Lifting my ass, Lynx slides my pants down my legs. Half sitting, I pull the shirt from my body and toss it on the floor before Lynx crawls up the bed and hovers over the top of me.

“I think I still like Apple,” he says, dipping his head down to press his lips against mine. I run my hands down his back and his ribs, making him chuckle and pull back.

“Do you trust me?” I ask.

“With my life,” he replies. Tapping his arm, I slide out from under him, turning him lay flat on his back. He watches as I stand and unclip my bra, letting it drop to the ground. A small groan falls from his lips as I remove my underwear, leaving me naked before him.

He wastes no time removing the rest of his clothes.

“You know I'm still here.”

“I don't think I need you anymore.”

“Are you willing to risk it?”

“No.”

I shake her out of my head, although I can still feel her subtle presence.

“Are you okay?” Lynx asks, pushing up on his elbows.

Nodding, I get back onto the bed and straddle his waist, his hands coming up to grasp my hips.

“Hold on to the headboard, Apple.”

Scooting up a little, I lean forward and take hold of the headboard. Lynx wiggles down until his head is between my legs, then he re-grips my hips and draws me down to sit on his face.

With almost zero experience to base anything off, all I know is this feels fucking fantastic. Lynx makes me rock my hips and grind into his face, and the sensation of his beard makes my eyes roll back in my head.

“Oh fuck, don’t stop,” I beg as he circles my clit, but the asshole stops, lifting me up from his face.

“The first time you come, I want it to be on my cock.”

Fair call. He moves himself back up the bed, and I reach down to wrap my hand around his length, stroking him a few times before lining myself up, ready to sink down.

“Zhavia, condom.”

“I’m on birth control. I have been since I was sixteen. And you’re clean. Let me give you one of my firsts.”

“Only if you’re sure.”

“I am,” I say as I slowly sink down until he is fully sheathed.

Lynx closes his eyes and runs his hands up my sides as I slowly rock against him. Leaning forward, I place my hands on his chest and my lips gently against his neck before pulling back. He lifts my hips and thrusts, so we are in a perfect rhythm. I never expected that Lynx would make love; on the outside he looks like a man who fucks. Even Hayes was sweet the other night, despite bending me over the couch and taking me from behind.

“Lean back and put your hands on the bed. I’m not going to last much longer.”

I do as he says and lean back, and he sucks his thumb into his mouth, then reaches out to rub circles on my clit.

My head falls back on a whimper. “Fuck, I’m going to come if you keep doing that.”

Lynx keeps stroking my clit as he thrusts his hips, slowing his pace. Sweat lines my brow and my orgasm builds fast, exploding like fireworks as he angles himself to hit my G-spot. My pussy spasms and clamps around his cock, and he puts both his hands on my hips, pulling me down as he thrusts up and joins me in his release.

“Fuck, Zhavvy,” he moans as I collapse onto his chest. “That was amazing.”

He wraps his arms around me, making no move to pull out of me, and it feels nice being so connected to him.

The door flies open and my heart jumps until I see Kyro standing there, his eyes dark. He steps in and closes the door behind him.

“Tell me to go away,” he says. “Because if you don’t, I’m going to bend you over the bed and fuck you while you suck your come off his cock.” I look back down at Lynx, and he smirks at me. “They can all feel you and I can’t. I need to feel you.”

A nod is all he needs, and before I know it, he has completely removed his clothes.

“Condom,” Lynx growls, and Kyro nods, walking around to the bedside table and grabbing one from the drawer.

Lynx’s cock twitches inside me and he chuckles when my eyes widen. Seems he didn’t need much recovery time at all.

Kyro gets up onto the bed and lifts me off Lynx, positioning me so my ass is in the air.

“Are you ready?”

I nod.

“Words, Zhavia. I need to hear you tell me you’re ready for me, that you want me.”

“I want you, Kyro. I always have. Now fuck me.”

Kyro chuckles and runs his fingers down my spine and over my ass. Then he pushes two fingers inside me and makes a scissoring motion with them.

“I need you to wrap your lips around his cock and show him how amazing it feels to have your mouth on him. Show him all the time he waited was worth it.”

Leaning forward, I do as he asks. I wrap my lips around Lynx and take him as far down my throat as I can, sucking off every last drop of our combined releases. Lynx puts his arms behind his head and watches intently, and it feels so erotic to have his gaze on me while I do this.

Kyro slides up behind me and coats the tip of his cock with Lynx’s and my cum, then takes a moment to tease my entrance. When he pushes inside me, I moan around Lynx’s length. Kyro’s hand twists into my hair, pulling it back so Lynx’s cock pops from my mouth.

“Fuck, you look gorgeous with swollen lips. I’m going to fuck you hard, and you’re going to choke on his dick like a good girl.”

“Okay, so fuck me already,” I sass. It’s torture having him inside me and staying still, so I push back impatiently, but his hand comes down hard on my ass.

My core clenches around him. “Please,” I whimper.

Kyro pushes my head back down. I use my right elbow to keep myself propped up and wrap my left hand around the base of Lynx’s cock, then I lick the bead of pre-cum that has formed on the head.

Kyro gets impatient and pushes my head down. “Take his cock now,” he growls.

As soon as my lips wrap around his brother, Kyro moves. His hips rotate behind me, and he immediately sets a quick

pace, making it hard to match his thrusts. His grip on my left hip is intense as he pulls me back into his crotch.

“Fuck, you’re so perfect taking us both.”

“Bro, if you could see the way her eyes are watering and her spit drips down my cock . . . This is how I want to die.”

Kyro laughs from behind me at Lynx’s words, but I can’t argue the point. The slight pressure Kyro puts on the back of my head stops me from pulling off. The way his muscular thighs smack against mine, and the heady feeling of them both inside me, has another orgasm wrecking my body at the speed of lightning. Kyro rips my head back and I gasp for air and scream a string of words that make no sense. Lynx wraps his hand around the base of his cock, stroking himself as I come down from my high, but when I attempt to lean back down, Kyro grips my hair tightly.

“Keep your mouth closed. Lynx, claim our girl, mark her lips.”

“Fuck! I’m going to come,” Lynx shouts as white liquid shoots towards my lips. “You were right, so perfect.”

Lynx runs his thumb across my lips, smearing his cum over my mouth before pushing it inside, and I suck on it.

Kyro pulling out of me brings me back to the moment. Then he pulls me off Lynx and flips me to face him as he slips off the bed. He motions for me to come closer, and when I do, he lifts me from the bed. “Wrap your legs around my waist. I want your full attention. I need to see your eyes when I come.”

With my legs twined around him, we move away from the bed. Kyro presses my back against the wall and rests his forehead against mine.

“So perfect. I can’t believe I’m inside her right now . . . Puppies, fuck no, Bruce the gardener from the science wing, his plumber’s crack and sweat patch.”

I snort. “Please stop thinking about Bruce.”

Kyro barks out a laugh as he slams inside me.

“Fuck it,” he says. Then he takes one of my nipples in his mouth and sucks as the pace of his thrusts intensifies until he comes, yelling my name loud enough I’m sure the entire building can hear.

Kyro pulls out and carefully helps me to my feet. My legs wobble and feel like jelly.

“Now we need to get dressed. Rome followed us here, and I can’t guarantee that he is alive out there,” he says with a shit-eating grin.

“You asshole!” I laugh, slapping his arm. “You came in here to mark your territory.”

Kyro’s expression is downright mischievous. “You bet your ass I did. He doesn’t get to walk in here, after not being near you for eighteen years, and think he has any claim over you. He needs to earn his place beside you.”

I look over at Lynx, who has dressed. “I’m with him, Apple. If he really is linked to us, we will have to deal with it, but he needs to earn our trust. We have been protecting you our entire lives.”

“I get it,” I say, taking the shirt Kyro hands me, which just happens to be one of Lynx’s from his clean pile of laundry. “I promise to take things slowly with him and make sure that we have that bond and everything as a group. But you have to admit, since he has been here at Olympia, we have come further than we ever have.”

“Pfft,” Kyro scoffs, pulling on a clean pair of Lynx’s sweats. “We don’t even know if that has anything to do with him. But let’s not keep the sexy bastard waiting.”

That makes me laugh. Kyro has always been open about the fact that he finds men attractive; he loves to shit stir the others about it, but none are keen on his advances.

“You think he is hot?” Lynx asks.

“And you don’t?” Kyro replies with a raised brow. “Please let me watch you fuck him when it happens, Apple. I would enjoy seeing him naked.”

“Such a perve. Let’s go make sure our guest is still alive. I take it Zadom hasn’t been home?”

“No,” Kyro says as he opens the bedroom door. “Your parents told him to leave you alone and come home in the morning. They gave him a room in the visitors’ building, but I have a feeling Haven is going to bait him into a fuckfest.”

Shaking my head as we enter the main living area, I stop dead in my tracks when three sets of eyes run over my body. I grab Lynx’s arm as he tries to walk past me—one look and he knows I need privacy. He leans down and presses his head to mine.

“I don’t have any underwear on, and I can feel the air on my ass and pussy.”

“This is going to be fun.”

He pulls back and smirks at me, letting his hand slip under the back of his shirt to squeeze my ass.

“What was that all about?” Hayes asks.

Lynx fucking laughs from beside me.

“Oh, nothing. I tried to ask him to get me some underwear because the shirt is too short, but I guess everyone here has seen it all, anyway.”

All of them whip their heads around to scowl at Rome, who holds his hands up and shakes his head. “Except me. Shit, you want to get me killed? I have *not* seen her with no clothes on.”

“You wanted to talk?” I ask him, crossing the room. He nods and follows me to the couch, then Cruze removes his shirt and puts it over my lap.

“Damn, Cruzey! Looking good.” A sweet blush creeps up on Cruze’s cheeks at Kyro’s words. “I’m going to grab a snack and then pull my dick to the memory of what we just did. Night fuckers.”

Hayes and Lynx both say they are going to do some homework while they have a chance.

Cruze clears his throat. “I’m just going to look over that file your dad sent me—there has to be a way into it. He sent me all the information on how each file has been opened and maybe I can find a similar pattern.”

“Good luck with that.”

He leans over the back of the couch and presses a kiss to my cheek. “If you need us, we will know,” he whispers.

They might all be overprotective and always around, but I’m grateful that they trust me enough to give me some space with Rome to navigate how this is going to work. I don’t know how I feel or what the feelings I have mean. I just thought I felt this way because he’s hot.



Chapter Eighteen

Rome

Joining Olympia has opened my eyes about so many things. My entire life, I thought I was crazy. All I wanted to do was draw a beautiful princess in her dress, but she wasn't a regular princess. She could protect herself, so she wore boots because they were better for stomping on her enemies. She was always surrounded by her knights, who helped protect her.

When an Olympia team found me and brought me in, I thought they were ridiculous until they put one of my sketches of Zhavia side by side with a photo of her. I knew then that she had to be in my life. Chester, one of her fathers, told me he thinks there is something blocking our connection, just like Haven's connection to Zadom wasn't as strong. He wants to try something experimental, but I won't agree unless I talk to Zhavia first.

"Hey," she says once everyone finally leaves the room.

"Hey yourself. Sorry for just barging in here. I would have come back, but it was a big pissing contest and I think they wanted to show me you belong to them."

That makes her laugh. "They told me as much."

"I wanted to make sure that you were okay after your fight with Zadom. I know things are changing between you two."

She reaches out and puts one of her hands over mine. “I will be fine. It’s hard, but we are not kids anymore. Things need to change so we can move forward.”

“That’s understandable. I’m sorry all of this has just been sprung on you. This whole situation is surreal, as if I have woken up in my dreams and I’m now living in this whole different reality. But I do need to talk to you about something.”

“Sure, you can talk to me about anything.”

I take a deep breath. “Since coming here, I have been undergoing tests. Chester has suggested a way to see if we are really linked, but I don’t want to try unless you’re okay with it.”

“We can’t have sex, Rome. The guys need time.”

That makes me laugh. I can understand why that was her first thought. “I’m sure your father feels the same way about the sex, so he has another idea. I feel drawn to you, but we wonder why my connection isn’t strong. Even before you were intimate with the guys, they were all connected to you. He thinks someone has blocked the additional team members. I didn’t have a bad life, just regular working parents and a middle-class lifestyle. We maybe kept a low profile, but I had no abilities that I even knew of until I was in my mid-teens. I didn’t even think it was anything; my mum would tell me I had a free spirit and people were drawn to me. Now I know it’s one of my abilities that I can calm those around me if I want to—it’s why I’m still walking. And just so you know, Zadom is damn hard to keep calm.”

She snorts. “Tell me about it.”

“Anyway, he suggested they try your blood on me. It’s a big gamble, but they know your mother’s blood has special healing qualities to your fathers, and only to them.”

Her brows furrow as she thinks about what I’m saying. “What does he think my blood will do?”

“Honestly, it was a lot of science talk I really didn’t understand, but he thinks it might remove whatever I was given to block our connection or maybe open it up more. He

used a door analogy, said when we were taken away, the door to our team was closed. As we grew older, we were able to reach the door handle, could pull it down and open the door, but there was still a boulder keeping it closed. So, as we aged, we could push for our connection a little, but the block is still there.”

“What happens if he gives you this and you’re not linked to me? Maybe it’s Zadom or a completely different team you were taken from.”

“I could die. Your blood could be toxic to me, but on what level he doesn’t know. Again, it’s only something they have tested more recently. Not a lot of willing subjects out there.”

That makes her smile. “I have no issue with you using my blood . . . but be sure. Death is pretty final. You could always wait, and we could, you know.” She raises an eyebrow.

I intertwine my fingers with hers and it feels so right. My mind is telling me that this is insane. I don’t even know her and something in me wants to be around her as much as possible; when we train, and her body presses up against mine, it feels like we just belong together.

“Zhavia, we can’t. I respect you and don’t want to put you in a situation you’re not comfortable with.”

She bloody giggles at me. “Rome, it would hardly be a chore, but I appreciate your side. Why don’t we start by talking to my parents, and rather than being an advisor, you attend as a student?”

“Already done. I was never here to be anything other than close to you. They wanted to see what happened if I was around you and the guys. Considering they haven’t tried to skin me alive, and they have left me alone with you, I should not die anytime soon.”

Someone scoffs from behind us. “The jury is still out, so I wouldn’t push your luck if I were you.” Lynx walks into the kitchen and turns on the light. Zhavia watches him and jealousy brews in my gut. I want her to look at me like that. “Are you staying all night or . . .?”

“Actually, I was just leaving. I need to meet Chester at the lab, and I also have a meeting with Kai.”

Lynx brings a bottle of water out of the kitchen and hands it to Zhavia.

“Since when does my dad do meetings? You sure that you’re talking about Kai and not Case?”

I smile at her. “He is teaching me how to tattoo.”

Her eyes light up. “Let me get some pants on, I’m coming.”

Lynx growls, but I don’t think Zhavia hears him. She jumps up off the couch and my cock hardens with the sight of her ass peeking out from under the hem of her shirt as she runs off. “You know we aren’t going to make this easy on you, not when you just pop up out of nowhere.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less. I wouldn’t trust anyone with my girl, and I just hope you know I intend on sticking around and making her my girl for real. No matter how long it takes for our connection to grow.”

“I guess we will see you tomorrow morning at six downstairs. You may want to work on your ‘if I win’ bet. Now that the rest of us are sleeping with her, these bets are about to get really interesting.”

“I’ll be there.”

Lynx walks off and only stops when Zhavia exits her room. He presses his forehead against hers and they have a silent conversation. She smiles up at him and he leans down and kisses her.

Standing, I walk towards them, and she turns to look over at me. “Ready?” I ask her, and she nods.

“Don’t wait up,” she tells him. He isn’t happy, and I don’t blame him; after what I heard earlier, I would want her in my bed again too. “Let’s go.”

We head downstairs and to the buggy I drove here in, which is parked out the front of the apartment building doors. She jumps in and I’m stunned for a split second—even in

sweats and a cropped tee, she is beautiful. “Are we going or are you going to keep staring at me like you want to wear my skin as a suit or eat me? Mum says my dad Laughn looks at her like that.”

Shaking my head, I walk around the buggy and get into the driver’s seat. “I wouldn’t go that far, but the eating you sounds like fun.”

Zhavia laughs as I pull away from the curb towards the morgue, which I honestly find a little terrifying. Kai has his damn tattoo studio down there. He said they don’t need all the extra rooms since Creed teaches the classes in one room and the only dead bodies are those donated for teaching purposes or if a student were to pass away.

“Tell me about yourself, Rome. Like how you have so many tattoos, but you claim you didn’t know about us?”

“I know it’s hard to believe, but my father took me to get them. I came home one day from my friend Caden’s house, and he had given me the world’s worst tattoo, but my father said he had a friend who could fix it. He wrapped my arm up and the next day when we went to see this friend, I took my own drawing in. When he put on the stencil, I swear the tattoo my friend did was almost gone. At the time, he told me that can happen with home jobs, and I didn’t question it.”

“So your father knew someone who was one of us?”

I nod. “He did—it’s the only explanation, but Kai said he will test it tonight. Do you want to tattoo me with regular ink and see if it fades overnight?”

Her face lights up like all her Christmases have come at once. “You would let me tattoo you?!”

“Why not? If I am really supposed to be here, it will fade, and if not, at least I will have a reminder of you when they kick my ass out.”

“Kicked out, murdered . . . same, same, right?”

I laugh, but there is some truth to what she is saying; maybe murder is a little far-fetched, but they would wipe my memory in a split second and send me on my way.

Pulling up at the morgue, a shiver runs down my spine. Zhavia jumps straight out and smiles. I wish I could hear her thoughts right now.

“I love this place. You should come and watch me slice and dice a body—it’s so fun.” She turns back to me, and her brow raises. Fear of the dead coming to life is real, or my imagination is running rampant after watching one too many zombie movies. “Come on.”

I slide from the buggy, and she walks over to me and takes my hand.

“Just so you know,” I state, “I will never step foot into that morgue and watch you cut open a dead body.”

She throws her head back and laughs. “You seem to forget that it’s my ‘if I win’ bet, and you also have to eat a sandwich while I’m doing it.”

“I guess I can never lose then.”

Zhavia leads me through the building and the overhead lights flicker. It feels like we are in a real-life horror movie and some dead fucker is going to want to eat our brains.

My anxiety eases as we turn down a corridor and there is a room with a light on, the sound of buzzing a sweet relief to my ears.

When we reach the door, Zhavia drags me into the room. “Hey, Dad,” she says.

He looks up from the man he is tattooing and smiles at her. “Hey, baby. I’ve just finished up here.” We wait until Kai has cleaned the guy up and the man leaves. “So, we are testing to see if regular ink sticks. You realise they have run your bloods, right?”

I nod. “I do, but imagine thinking that you are normal, then getting a tattoo, just to see it vanish. Plus, I was hoping you would let Zhavia do it.”

Kai smirks. “Fuck yeah, let’s get the room cleaned up and she can get started. What were you thinking?”

I shrug. “I will leave it up to her.”

“I want to tattoo your ass.”

Kai laughs and goes about disinfecting everything, and when he is done, he motions for me to get up on the table.

“Since this will fall out, Zhavia will hand draw something on you and we will start.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Zhavia pulls the back of my shorts down and takes a razor to my ass cheek even though there isn't a hair in sight. Once she is satisfied with what she has drawn on my butt, Kai gives her a rundown on how to use the machine.

She places a hand on my ass and the very light buzzing starts; Kai explains how very few tattooists use these machines anymore, and that they are outdated, but he loves the sound. Kai laughs numerous times as Zhavia works, and I lay there patiently as they talk between themselves. Once she is done, she cleans me off and tells me to check it out in the mirror.

Sliding off the bed, I walk over to the mirror attached to the wall and angle my body so I can see.

PROPERTY OF ZHAVIA

Zhavia stands behind me, and her eyes sparkle with enjoyment. “I love it,” I say. “Maybe once it falls out, you can do it again more permanently.”

“Hell yes. Now, my favourite daddy, you know how much you love me.”

“More than life itself, baby girl, but how much will your next words get me in trouble with your mum?”

“Well, I'm eighteen now, and if you don't help me, I can find someone else. I really want a tattoo and it's nothing stupid.”

Kai sighs. “Do you remember how mad she was with Zadam? Can I at least call her first?”

Zhavia smiles and nods at her dad, so he pulls out his phone and hits dial, putting it on speakerphone.

“No, Kai, I do not have time to have an orgy. The baby is getting her molars.”

Kai snorts, and Zhavia almost looks green. “Gross, Mum! That is something I do *not* need to know about.”

Jolie laughs. “I would say I’m sorry, but I’m not. Don’t even pretend you don’t understand. What are you calling for?”

“Our daughter would like her first tattoo.”

Silence hangs in the air for a long moment.

“Zhavia, you are an adult now and I can’t stop you.”

Zhavia claps, then her mum says goodnight and ends the call.

“Looks like I’m giving my daughter her first tattoo. What were you thinking?” Kai asks, and Zhavia pulls out her phone and brings up a picture.

Kai shows me the design. “Do you think you could draw that?”

“Me?” I ask, surprised he would want my art on his daughter.

“No, the idiot standing behind you . . . Yes, you. If you want to be my apprentice, then why not start now?”

Excitement radiates through me as I get to work on a design—it’s a very simple cherry blossom and some black branches. Once I’m done, I get approval from Kai, and he tells Zhavia to show us where she wants it so he can print out the stencil to size.

She explains she wants the tip of the branch to start at the end of her hairline and the cherry blossoms to sit just slightly under the top of her shoulder blades.

Kai lets me do it all, right down to placing the stencil on her back. She shivers beneath my touch as I peel off the paper and ask her to look and see if it’s positioned right.

“It’s perfect,” she says.

“Ok, I need you to lie down,” Kai explains. “Rome, get me the ink.”

Both of us do as Kai asks, and he snaps on a clean pair of gloves. He has been giving me lessons since I arrived, but I normally go to his home studio. I know that I’m decent; my father’s friend Eden started teaching me on fake skin. He even let me tattoo a few clients that were willing to give me a chance. Kai has higher expectations and wants me to give him a tattoo once I complete my training with him. I don’t know where I will tattoo him, though, since he is covered.

The sound of the machine starts, and Zhavia reaches out to squeeze my hand, but I know she won’t be feeling it. I have seen her pain tolerance levels and they are next level. Something isn’t right; she almost cuts off the circulation in my hand. Kai keeps working on the outline, and watching him work is amazing—he makes it look so seamless. I love the design; the cherry blossoms will almost look paper thin and delicate.

“Dad,” Zhavia says through gritted teeth, “I need you to stop, please.”

Sweat lines her brow. “What’s wrong? Does it hurt?”

Zhavia’s face goes bright red. “Um, it does hurt, but, um, you know how Chester can’t tattoo anyone?”

Kai’s brows dip, and I wonder what Chester’s issues are. I didn’t even realise he tattooed. “You’re not saying I’m turned on by this, are you?”

Zhavia laughs. “No, Dad, it’s me. I’m liking the pain a little too much and you can’t keep going.”

Kai jumps up from his seat. “Oh shit. Okay, well, we can’t leave it. I could call . . . actually, fuck that. Rome, what about you?”

“Me? Man, what if I fuck it up? You would have my balls.”

Kai coughs. “Zhavia, would you be willing to let him finish? It’s that, or it stays as it is. Your team would murder another man for touching you, and technically Rome is part of your team now, so . . .”

“Yes, Dad. Please just leave.”

Kai hands me a box of gloves. “Good luck, I’m out of here. Just send me a picture when you’re done, and Zhavia, lock up on your way out. Oh, and no fucking on the table—maybe just clean up before you leave.”

The poor guy doesn’t know what to do. He leaves, muttering under his breath about Chester and Creed and this being their fault.

Once Kai is gone, I close the door and lock it. Over my dead body will anyone hear her come. Well, maybe over someone’s dead body since the morgue is on the other side of the wall. I wash my hands and snap on a pair of gloves.

“Stop worrying so much. I want you to practise on me, and if it’s that bad, we have laser removal,” she says.

It’s not even tattooing her that is the issue. This seems like it will be an intimate moment that we share, and I’m a little cautious knowing her guys will feel this and think the worst. Zoning out, I get to work. She seems to be doing well until we hit certain spots, then her soft moans have my cock listening. Focus, Rome, focus. Once I move into the shading, her moans get slightly louder and more frequent.

“Oh god, Rome—I think I’m going to . . .”

Pausing so I don’t fuck it up, I watch as she squeezes her legs together. Leaning over her, I whisper, “I wish I could be inside you right now. Ride that wave and know that one day, I’m going to be balls deep in your perfect little cunt as you cream around my cock while I give you a tattoo.”

“Fuck yes!”

Her body shudders, and she relaxes against the table and buries her head beneath her arm.

“That was so fucking hot.”

“I’m so embarrassed,” she blurts on a laugh.

“Don’t be embarrassed, but you are the one explaining this to the others. They will be out for my blood.”

She groans, and I get back to work. This time, if she feels anything, she doesn’t show it.

It doesn’t take long before I’m finished. Zhavia gets up and the shirt she had pressed against her breasts falls to the floor. My eyes widen as she stands in front of the mirror, her mouth curved up on one side.

She spins around. “Rome, it’s perfect.”

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I nod like a fucking idiot. I have seen tits before, and none have ever affected me like this. “I’m glad you like it. But could you please put a shirt on? After the noises and now the skin, you’re killing me.”

She chuckles and bends down to pick up her shirt, then holds it across her breasts. While she takes a second look at her tattoo, I clean up all of Kai’s equipment and wipe everything down.

“Shit,” she whispers, looking down at her phone. “We should go. Lynx has threatened to call Zadom if I don’t come home.”

Shaking my head, I motion for her to lead the way, and she flicks off the light and locks the door before I pull it closed after me. She still has her shirt off but secured over her front. Fuck, I should have covered the tattoo.

Pausing, she looks at me. “What’s wrong?”

“Um, your dad will kill me—I should have covered it.”

She shrugs. “I’ll get the guys to do it. We heal exceptionally fast, remember? And we never get that sick, so an infection wouldn’t kill me, anyway.”

Yeah, that is *not* why I want to cover it. She leads the way again through the building and sets the code as we exit.

Once we pull up at her place, she says goodbye downstairs, telling me it’s probably not a wise idea for me to

come up. She needs to explain to them what happened before it will be safe. While I'm not scared of them, I need to respect that they have been there her entire life and they have a right to feel a certain way about me; if I were them, I would act the same. It has taken every ounce of self-restraint when we train to not maim every man that looks at her. Every day I spend with her gets harder.



Chapter Nineteen

Zhavia

Zadom didn't come home last night, and I'm thankful that he gave me space. Lynx was pissed when I got home—they all thought I was out fucking Rome after I told him I wouldn't. It was mortifying explaining what happened, and luckily after that, the focus was on my tattoo.

This morning's run was also sans Zadom, which isn't that strange; he likes to head to the gym over running. Rome and Lynx led the pack, and Rome won, but not by much. His "if I win" bet shocked the shit out of the guys; he wanted a dinner and movie night with all of us. I expected him to want some alone time with me, but he clearly wants to get to know everyone. I'm nervous for him—he is going to see Chester this morning to see if my blood will remove whatever is blocking him from our bond.

As I'm heading upstairs to the cafeteria to get a coffee, Zadom comes from behind me and grabs my arm. "We need to talk."

He presses his head against mine.

"I had a dream last night, and it wasn't black and white. It turned to colour, and I got closer to her than I ever have. I could almost see her. Then Haven woke me up."

“That’s good, right? She has to mean something to you. It can’t be a coincidence.”

“I have a good feeling about this, Zhavy.”

“Haven seems good for you.”

“Haven is a pain in my fucking ass.”

I pull my head back and laugh. When he realises what I’m laughing at, he throws his arm around my shoulders and pulls me into his side, ruffling my hair. “Zadom, stop. You’re messing up my hair.”

Haven jogs up the stairs, and his eyes run over my brother. “You disappeared this morning.”

Zadom shrugs. “I had shit to do.”

“He says that you’re a pain in his ass.”

Haven snorts. “Nah, he is an enormous pain in mine. Zadom Olympia wouldn’t submit to no man.”

“Oh, so my brother is a top, then?” I chuckle as we all walk into the cafeteria.

“Fuck off,” Zadom says, pushing me lightly, and I stumble into Haven.

“How are things going with adding someone new to your team?” Haven asks as we line up for our drinks.

“Better than you would expect. No one is dead yet and Rome is great.”

Zadom scoffs. “Rome is great? Fuck Rome. We were fine before he and Haven showed up.”

“I don’t hear you complaining when your cock is in my mouth.”

Zadom shakes his head, but I see his lip curve upwards; jealousy simmers in my gut and I push it away. I never knew how Zay really felt. Now with Haven around, I feel it, and I fucking hate it, but I’m happy for my brother. He should smile at other people and not scowl—it always makes him look like he will murder the next person who talks to him.

“You two are fucked in the head. I’m going to class.”
Zadom moves out of the line and leaves.

“Do you really think you’re linked to Zadom?”

Haven steps up to the coffee machine and makes our coffees. “Unfortunately, yes. I can feel the cranky asshole’s moods. But it’s not just him—I think I might be connected to you. The first day we met, when Zadom grabbed you, I wanted to hurt him. And just now, when he pushed you into me, I wanted to protect you. I think your parents’ theory of us being a team of handlers for your team is correct, but I also think it’s more than that—I’m here for you and him combined. Can I tell you something and get your advice?”

“Sure,” I say as he hands me a coffee, and I take a sip. It’s perfect, and I realise I hadn’t told him my order. “You were in my fucking head again.”

He laughs and nods. “Sorry, it’s a habit.”

“So, this advice,” I ask.

“Zadom told me he gets nightmares.” That shocks me. Zadom has never told anyone beyond family about them. “Last night I think I dreamt about the same girl. But I wasn’t looking for her—I was following Zadom. He wouldn’t stop. He was in a trance, and I couldn’t get through to him. Do you think I should tell your parents or even Zadom? If it’s a once off, I don’t want to make a fuss for nothing.”

We walk side by side towards the training building. My class is next door with my dad Boston today, and we are learning how to catalogue important elements while on assignment, such as noting landmarks, street signs, and using our natural abilities. Not all of us have hyperthymesia like my father Brennan, or even an eidetic memory like Boston, who can choose to commit to his mind anything he deems memorable.

“I would at least tell Zadom. I don’t think he could handle more secrets right now. If it turns into something and he finds out that you kept it from him, let’s just say you don’t want to be around to see a pissed-off Zadom.”

“Thanks, I will see you later in class. We finally get to see a dead body today.”

Waving him off, I remember that not everyone has grown up seeing dead people. Our house has a morgue in it, so it’s something that I was always drawn towards. I think it’s a field I would like to be in when I no longer want to do fieldwork.

Hayes and Cruze are already seated when I walk through the classroom doors and have left a space between them for me. Other students find their seats, and my dad Boston walks through the doors.

“Everyone, take your seats so we can get through the simulation. These are the headsets you will use, and once you have one, you can put it on and start. Try to remember as much as you can. But first set up your accounts and name your bots, then you will follow them through the simulation, and at the end, you will need to fill out the report.”

Dad hands out the headsets. As soon as I have mine, I slip it over my head and use the control pad to log into my school portal.

Once my details are confirmed, I customise my bot and name him Zepp, then he explains our assignment. The graphics are next level and I feel like I’m really walking behind him. The streets look desolate; old cars with missing tyres—replaced with cinder blocks—line the street, and the streetlights flicker as we walk past them towards an old warehouse. Police tape blocks the door, but Zepp rips it away and steps inside, telling me that the target is on the second floor. I follow behind my sexy man bot, taking in as much information as I can until we have the target apprehended.

The report at the end is fairly self-explanatory, and I fill it out with as much information as I remember. Then Zepp asks me a few questions before I sign out of my student portal and remove the headset.

Hayes finishes as well and smirks at me. I try to keep my lustful thoughts at bay now that we are all more closely connected, but how can one look from him—or any of my guys, for that matter—send my mind straight to the gutter?

The rest of the day goes by at a snail's pace until I get to the one class I look forward to, and even better—it's dead body day. Rome looks green as he sits in front of the body assigned to Haven, me, and him.

He wasn't overly happy that I requested he be in this class, but he needs to get used to seeing dead things in our line of work. Especially when on our first assignment there's a chance we will have to kill someone; it's never the first option, but the men are trained to protect their girl at any cost. It is so damn sexist, and if anyone in my group needs protecting, it's Cruze—not because I think he can't defend himself, but because he is too good to ruin by having him take someone's life.

Me, I have been itching to take down the bad guys since I was ten years old and Team Swift Six messed with us for the first time. Not that they are the bad guys; they showed us what it was really like to work as a team. Before them, we were just little kids who did everything together. They taught us to trust our instincts, to work as one unit, and for the guys to protect me at all costs.

“Do we have to cut it open for real?” Rome gags, then makes sure his nose plug is in place.

“What's wrong, buddy? You afraid of a dead person?” Haven teases.

Rome nods. “Look how gross it looks, and the colour . . . Oh fuck, will it smell when we cut it open?”

I chuckle. “You have your nose plug in, but the smell will linger. That's why Dad makes us wear these stupid jumpsuits and after class we go into the deodoriser room as I call it, strip the suit off, bin it, and shower.”

“Why don't you have a nose plug like the rest of us?”

“I have been in the morgue with my dad my entire life, so maybe I'm just used to it. Besides, it's super fun.”

“Okay, class,” Creed says, stepping into the room. “Today, we will go through the basics of an autopsy. Make sure all your tools are on your trolley, and you will need gloves and safety goggles. I also advise using your nose plugs. All the

bodies here are fresh. Because, as you have learned, between day eight and ten, they turn from the colour you see now to red as the blood decomposes and the gases accumulate . . .”

“You need to show them one two weeks post-mortem when the teeth and nails fall out, or after at least a month when the body starts to liquefy and turn to dark sludge,” I say.

Creed laughs at my enthusiasm. “Zhavia, not everyone has a strong stomach like you do. Rome, are you okay? Do you need to step outside?”

Rome nods and stands from his chair. His legs wobble, and my gut twists—I feel him as waves of nausea wash over me.

Haven jumps up off his stool and catches Rome before he hits the ground. “Did you feel that as well?” he asks, and I nod.

“Take him back to your apartment, Zhavia. Haven, you go with her and call Zadom.”

Dad helps Haven pull Rome to his feet once he comes to and walks him out to his personal buggy. Dad says he will come by and collect it after he finishes for the day.

Rome leans against me with his head on my shoulder as Haven drives. “I suggest you slow down. Creed isn’t the dad you want to piss off. If you crash his buggy with me in it, he will bury you in front of the admin building and erect a statue over your rotting corpse.”

“Please don’t say that word—I still feel sick as fuck. I can’t do it. I cannot be in that class. It’s not the fact that they were dead, but the skin . . .”

He dry retches and I try my hardest not to laugh at him. I haven’t told him why the others don’t take the class; they can’t stand the smell, it lingers. Once we get back to the apartment, we will need to shower.

Haven parks as close to the doors as possible. Before we move Rome, I take off his boots and then my own, while Haven does the same. They’ll need to stay out in the sun for a bit. We help Rome upstairs and I warn them not to sit on anything.

I retrieve plastic bags and give one to Haven. “Go shower in Zadam’s room and put your clothes in that. He should have something you can borrow for now.”

Haven takes the bag and nods, heading towards my brother’s room. I quickly go into Lynx’s room and find a clean set of clothes for Rome and place them in my bathroom. He follows me in, and I make him sit on the toilet while I remove his socks. He watches me intently as I remove my full-body jumpsuit and stuff it into the bag, then I remove the dark-blue Olympia underwear we are given. Every student in my dad’s class gets these. We have to bag them and they go through proper sterilisation. My father and I agree that it’s overkill, but Mum hates the smell, and she won’t hear otherwise.

Rome clears his throat as I slide the underwear down my legs, glancing over at him. He sits there just staring at me. “Are you going to join me, or do you want to smell like the morgue for the rest of the day?”

He looks torn; I know he wants to do the honourable thing, but right now he can’t shower by himself, and I don’t want to leave him alone.

Pushing up from the toilet, he pulls the zipper down until his suit falls to the floor, and he steps out of it. I swallow the invisible lump in my throat as he takes off his boxer briefs. My eyes widen at the size of him; he is on par with the others, but his girth is impressive.

“Zhavia, get in the shower,” he says, pulling me from my lust-infused stupor. He watches me as I push the glass screen open, step in, and start the water, holding my hand under the spray until it’s the perfect temperature.

“Are you sure you want me to come in with you? I can wait until you’re done.”

“Rome, get your sexy ass into the shower.”

He smiles at me and closes the distance between us until he is standing in front of me. Stepping closer, he reaches behind me to grab my body wash from the hanger. Rome squirts some on his hands and rubs them together, and I do the

same. He looks at me for reassurance, and I nod. Reaching out, I place my hands on his chest, rubbing up over his pecs and down his arms, taking my time over his biceps, and then back down to his waist. Rome has broad shoulders, and while his abs are not defined, the V that tapers down to his gorgeous thick cock has me wanting to drop to my knees.

“I really want to kiss you,” he says as he runs his hands down to my hips.

“Then do it.”

He leans down and presses his lips to mine, his arms wrapping around my waist and pulling our soapy bodies flush. A small moan slips from my lips, giving him an opening to push his tongue into my mouth. I need him closer. He steps us back under the water and the soap runs from our bodies as our tongues tangle together.

Pulling back, I press my forehead against his, needing a minute to catch my breath.

“I can’t wait to bury myself inside her once she is ready.”

Putting my hands over his, I slide them down to my ass.

“Lift me.”

His eyes go wide. This is the first time he has heard my thoughts; only those I allow can hear me, and so far it’s only when I use my forehead. It’s a gift I discovered by accident when Zadom woke from a nightmare, and I rested my head against his. I could hear every thought and it broke my heart.

“Are you sure?” he asks out loud and I nod.

“I need to hear you say it. I will cop every beating under the sun for you, but a nod for consent will not cut it.”

“I want you . . . no, Rome, I need you.”

He doesn’t need to be told twice. My back slams against the tiles, and in the next instant, his cockhead is pressing against my entrance. He inches in slowly, lowering his mouth to my shoulder so he can kiss along my skin. Bucking my hips to help seat him fully, I gasp when he begins to thrust in and out of me. He takes his time, drawing out every movement,

sucking and nipping at my heated flesh as he drives me insane with desire. I need to come so badly. It builds slowly with every surge of his hips, until it all boils over like a volcano, and I shudder against his chest.

Rome then pulls out and places me down onto my feet, his hand firmly wrapping around his cock to stroke it. I slap his hand away and lower to my knees, licking my lips. I grab his ass, pulling him closer and opening my mouth as he takes a step towards me. His eyes fall closed when I wrap my lips around his head and suck him into my mouth until he hits the back of my throat, causing me to gag.

“Fuck, Zhavia, I’m going to fuck that mouth.”

I nod so he knows it’s okay, then he tangles his fingers in my hair and thrusts, every time hitting the back of my throat, and spit runs down my chin as my eyes water.

“I’m going to come,” he warns, giving me a chance to pull away. I don’t, wanting to know what he tastes like. He thrusts one last time, and on a loud groan, warm liquid hits the back of my throat. I swallow, knowing that the taste of cum is not something on the top of my “fuck, that’s delicious” list, but it’s passable.

Rome holds out his hand and pulls me to my feet. The electricity that surrounds us feels weird; something has shifted, and the look on his face says he can feel it as well.

I gasp when I realise I didn’t need the girl in my head to shield Zadam and panic sets in.

“What’s wrong?”

“We need to get dressed. The voice I use, she wasn’t there and that could mean Zadam could be here any second. I have just found you and I can’t let him hurt you. I don’t want to lose you.” My voice trembles, tears welling in my eyes, as emotions I have never felt before swirl around inside me.

“You won’t lose me. Let’s get dressed and I will make you something to eat.”

I nod. It’s all I can do. He has no idea what it means to be caught in the eye of a Zadam storm. He gets tunnel vision, and

he won't stop until I can convince him I'm okay.



Chapter Twenty

Zhavia

After Rome and I get dressed, we leave the safety of my room. Just inside the living room, I pause, throwing my arm out to stop Rome from moving forward.

Haven is lying on his back on the couch while my brother straddles his waist, his hands on either side of Haven's head. Shit.

I clear my throat and Zadom looks over at us. "How nice of you to join us," he says, pushing up and moving off Haven.

"Did you . . . Why didn't you . . ."

"Why didn't I come in there and kill him? I figured you used your second personality to block me, and Haven kept me busy."

My expression is serious as I admit, "I didn't have her in my head, Zay. Something has changed."

"Hey," he says, coming to stand in front of me and taking my hands in his. "Haven has made me realise that I have been . . ." He pauses.

"He has been an overgrown baboon and now understands that it's okay for him to trust his sister in the hands of the rest of her team. You know, the men who have helped keep her safe her entire life," Haven interjects.

“Yeah, that, except the verdict is still out on that one.” He narrows his eyes at Rome.

“But . . .” Haven says, looking pointedly at Zadom, who sighs.

“But, if you trust him, and I trust you, then I guess I will give him the benefit of the doubt too. It helps that I couldn’t feel it. You don’t need me to protect your heart anymore.”

“Look at us growing up.” I sniffle, trying to cover it with a laugh. “I guess I need to get the rest of my team home. I need to tell them.”

The door opens and Kyro walks in. “Zhavvy, we need to prepare for Lynx. He is on his way, and he is *pissed*.”

“Fuck,” Rome says. “I can feel him. He wants to kill me right now. Maybe I should go.”

“No,” Zadom says, and we all turn to face him.

“It’s the aliens,” Kyro says.

I try not to laugh, but I can’t help it—giggles bubble over.

“It’s not fucking aliens,” Zadom snaps. “Rome and Haven are part of this clusterfuck. We need to figure out what the fuck our deranged grandfather did to us, and the only way we can do that is to work together. If we find out who the girl is from my dreams, then hopefully she is the last surprise left.”

Cruze is next to arrive. He looks around the room and gives me a small smile. I know they will all be a little hurt right now—they wanted me to wait—but they need to realise they don’t call the shots with this. It’s my body and I get to decide. Zadom has taken away those choices since I was old enough to want to act on them, and I refuse to let anyone else do the same to me again.

We all wait, and the door flies open, smashing against the wall as Lynx storms in. He zeroes in on Rome, but before anyone has time to react, Hayes tackles him from behind. Lynx manages to flip him off, but Hayes just grabs onto his leg as he tries to stand, causing him to fall back down.

“Enough!” I shout.

Haven moves forward, and Lynx puts his hands to his head.

“Get out of my fucking head or I will kill you,” Lynx snaps, now gripping the sides of his face as he curls up into the fetal position.

Zadom growls. Well, that’s new—he wants to protect Haven.

“No one is killing anyone,” I interject with force behind my words. “We need to get the fuck over this because no one will ever tell me what I can and can’t do anymore. If I want fathers, I will move back home—I have ten of them there. You all need to grow up and act like my . . . I don’t even know what you are . . . boyfriends? Teammates? Fuck buddies? All I know is you’re mine, all of you. Except Zadom and Haven, of course. Rome, why didn’t you calm Lynx before he tried to kill you?”

“I don’t want to use my abilities on my team, not unless it’s life or death. If Zadom tried to attack me, it may have been different.”

“Fair call,” Kyro says.

“Why don’t we all go shower?” Cruze says, attempting to defuse the situation. “Once we are out, I think it’s time we talked.”

Lynx doesn’t answer as he stalks off to his room, slamming the door. The others all exit the lounge room, leaving Rome, Zadom, Haven and I to sort out some food. We all agree that ordering in is the best option. Luckily, being Olympias, we can order whatever we want whenever we want it, and I need burgers and chips right now with a side of mint chocolate chip ice cream. Zadom orders the food, and he and Haven argue about beetroot on burgers.

“If it’s not aliens, it has to be a personality transplant,” Kyro whispers from behind me.

“I think it’s him getting laid. Has he ever even been laid before? I have only ever seen him snarl at people.”

Kyro wraps his arms around my waist from behind. “Honestly, I have no idea. He doesn’t talk to me about personal things. You would have to ask Lynx—those two moody bastards are the closest.”

“This is nice, you being able to hug me.”

He presses a kiss against the shell of my ear. “And now I’m never going to stop.”

Rome sits on the couch looking a little lost, so I wink at him, and he smiles back.

Cruze and Hayes are the next to come back into the lounge room freshly showered. The tension in the room is awkward, but Cruze sits next to Rome, offering him a small peace gesture. My heart swells for the sweet man that he is, always trying to do what’s best for us all, even if it makes him uncomfortable.

“Just so you know,” Lynx says, storming back into the room, hostility rolling off him in waves. “This counts as your group date from your ‘if I win’ bet.”

Everyone looks at Rome and waits for his reply. “That works for me. I just don’t want you to see me as the enemy—I don’t plan to go anywhere.”

Lynx just grunts in reply.

“Everyone has had personality transplants. I think Olympia is fucking with us.”

“Shut up, Kyro,” Hayes snaps as the buzzer alerts us to someone downstairs.

Haven goes over to the intercom and buzzes the delivery driver up. Once he has the food, he sets it out on the table and everyone takes their seats. Since Rome is new and needs the moral support, I take a seat on his other side and place my hand on his leg.

“I’m sorry about him,” I whisper.

“Don’t sweat it. I knew they would push back, but I mean it when I say that I’m not going anywhere. Now eat your food,

you need to refuel. I have a feeling Lynx may need to fuck this out of his system.”

I snort and Kyro leans over in front of me. “You’re not wrong. Look at the scowl on his face. If the wind changes, he is fucked.”

Lynx launches the tomato off his burger at Kyro, the slice hitting him on the side of his face, and Kyro laughs. “Oh no, now your burger is tainted. I would offer you mine, but I licked it.”

“No you didn’t,” Lynx retorts as Kyro picks up the top bun and runs his tongue over it. Lynx leans over the table and snatches the bottom bun and replaces it with his.

“Sucks to suck,” Lynx throws at his brother. Kyro flips him off and puts the tomato back on the burger and bites into it.

“So,” Haven says. “Are we going to rip this band-aid off and address the elephant in the room?”

Kyro looks around the room. “What fucking elephant?”

Zadom runs a hand down his face. “For someone so smart, you’re so fucking dumb. The fact Zhavia fucked Rome, or the fact I didn’t feel it even though she didn’t use the voice in her head, or the hundred other things going on right now.”

“Oh.” Kyro laughs. “That. It’s done, and everyone needs to get over it. Rome was created at the same time we were, so it was going to happen eventually. I would have preferred an invite, though. I’m making it known right now that I wanna see the guy naked—just look at him.”

“Next time, buddy.” Rome winks at Kyro and the idiot’s mouth falls open.

“Can I touch your dick?”

Rome snorts. “Maybe. You might have to ask Zhavia first and see how she feels about it.”

I’m definitely not opposed to witnessing that.

Kyro whoops and fist bumps the air. “She is considering it. Watch out, Rome, I will rock your world.”

Everyone at the table laughs, except Lynx. “Can we get back to the fact that Zadam didn’t Kill Rome? I can’t say I’m not a little disappointed.”

“Lynx,” I snap.

“What?” he says. “It’s true. We have spent the better part of a decade trying to touch you in some form without getting our fingers snapped off, but he just walks in and *bam*, Zadam suddenly doesn’t have a problem with you being touched. Nah fam, that’s bullshit.”

Sliding my chair back, I stand and walk around the table, forcing Lynx to let me sit on his lap, and he reluctantly concedes. As I straddle his lap, Zadam growls.

“Let’s not push it, you’re still my sister.”

“Shut up, Zadam. I just witnessed you mauling Haven. Two minutes later, and I probably would have had an eyeful of your cock in his ass.”

Zadam huffs and Haven shrugs.

“Look at me,” I tell Lynx, placing my hands on either side of his face and running my nails across his neatly trimmed beard. He slowly looks down at me. “I understand that you’re mad—things have changed so fast—and I’m sorry you feel this way. Lynx, I love you, and I have loved all of you for my entire life. But I can’t explain what this is that I feel with Rome. It’s there and I don’t think it’s going away.”

“You don’t need to explain yourself, Zhavvy. We can feel him as well. It’s strange, but every feeling is heightened now,” Cruze says, looking up from his laptop. He has been working on this file in every free waking moment he has.

Lynx places his head against mine.

“I’ll be fine, promise. I’m just jealous.”

“You have nothing to be jealous of. He isn’t replacing you.”

“I’m sorry, I just need time.”

He stands from his chair and places me down on it before he stalks away. This whole situation has become so messy.

With Lynx gone, the rest of the night goes by with less tension. I just hope he can understand that I have no control over the way I feel. The same way he also has no control.



“Zhavia,” Zadom says, shaking me awake. “We have a situation.”

His words have me sitting up straight, and Rome stirs beside me. Zadom glances at him, but says nothing.

“What’s wrong?”

“The girl in my dreams, she told me where she was.”

“That’s a good thing, right?”

Rome sits up from beside me and rubs his eyes. “What’s going on?”

“We need to get dressed. We are going to get her.”

“Zay?” I say, sliding out of bed. “I think we should talk to our parents first.”

“We can’t. They won’t approve this. I’m going with or without you, Zhavvy. She is in trouble—she needs me.”

“Zadom, do you hear yourself right now? We don’t even know who she is.”

Cruze runs into my room. “Guys, that file just opened, and this is bad. Everyone needs to get up.”

Cruze races around, waking everyone up, and we meet in the dining area. By that time, Cruze is already back in front of his laptop, typing away.

“Her name is True, and she is the same age as us. The serial number on her file is linked to Zadom’s, just like

Haven's."

Zadom and I have mirrored serial numbers. My team's numbers are all an extension of mine, and so far, it looks like Zadom's are the same.

"The bad news is that Mr Z had a son. True was gifted to him as a bargaining tool, knowing Zadom would need her. I did some more digging, and your father left out that there was another file opened before this one, but I can't tell if it was from before or after Haven's. Marlow mirrored his computer to this one, but he limited access to all the previous files. I have been trying to access them without alerting him to what I was doing."

"Can you stop him from seeing that the file was opened?" Zadom asks.

He shrugs. "Your father is a human computer; anything I lay down, he will be able to breeze through. I could temporarily block the alert, but when he gets to work, it is only a matter of time before he checks the progress. He works on this file almost every day."

"Okay, do that," I tell him. "We need someone to play decoy, and I know just the person."

Zadom whips his head around to me. "If you say Kenji, I'm disowning you. That dickhead is more likely to tell our parents what we are up to."

"Not Kenji, Halo. And Kenji will unfailingly do whatever she asks. But first, I want to know where this girl is and why it's so bad."

Zadom looks at Cruze. "Do you ever remember our parents talking about Mum's family owning this weird fortress? That once upon a time, the entire house held all the secrets of Olympia, but they refused to go in."

"Yeah, it's been abandoned for our entire lives."

"Not exactly," Zadom says. "According to my dream, that is where she is. We need to get her out. She told me he is getting impatient waiting for what he believes he is owed. He has been talking to people about starting a war and

overpowering Olympia. She doesn't know how, but we can't just presume that he doesn't have the resources." He falls silent, waiting for someone to speak.

"I'm in," Haven says.

"You realise this could be a suicide mission?" I point out the obvious to my brother. "But if you're going, so am I."

"Zhavia, we need to think about this," Hayes says. "If this place is a fortress, how will we get in?"

"I will help you."

"How can I trust that you're not working with him?"

"You can't. You need to trust your gut. I know all about your team and Zadam's team. I know everything. He is sick of waiting and plans to kill me."

"Zhavia," Rome says, clicking his fingers in front of my zoned-out face.

"She is back in my head. She says she can help us get in."

"How do we know it's not a trap? From all the stories we have heard from our parents, Mr Z was the master manipulator," Cruze says.

"We don't, but Zadam is going in whether we help or not. If my parents think he is in trouble, they will send in an execution team, and everyone inside that building will die, including her."

"What if I set up a contingency plan?" Cruze suggests. "I will program alerts to go to your parents, explaining everything if we are not back within six hours. From what I can tell, it's going to take us three hours to get there, and that gives us three hours to get her out. I can set our trackers to look like we are all here, and after the six hours they will ping our exact location."

"You realise they are going to murder us when we get back? Possibly even kick us out of the program," Lynx adds.

"If we go to them about this, they will follow protocol and send in a different team. We are too close to this one. But she

could be dead by then.”

Everyone agrees we are going, some more willing than others. Consequences be damned, I will not let my brother go in alone. Some of the guys go pack what supplies we have here. If we were to check out anything, our parents would be notified straight away.

“All set,” announces Cruze. “I have programmed our trackers to loop, so it looks like we are all still here. If any of your parents text you, an automated message will be sent back. It will say that we are having a bonding day since some of the team members are struggling with the transition, and we will call them soon. I suggest we leave now.”

I called Halo while they gathered supplies. She is on board to come up with a plan to keep Marlow away from the school for the time being. I hope she does because if he logs onto his work computer, he will know the file has been opened and that Cruze didn't tell him. It could unravel our entire plan, since they have choppers at their disposal and can speed to our location, potentially blowing our cover.



Chapter Twenty-One

Cruze

Looking at the floor plans of the building only helps us to know where we are, but if there are traps, we are going to have to deal with those as they pop up. The simulator I feed the information into builds me a real-life map, then using thermal imaging cameras, we know what rooms contain people. However, the underground tunnel system is so complex we would have needed weeks to determine if it leads anywhere. It could just be there to trick people into trying to break in that way. There are no physical or digital traces of security cameras within the building, but that doesn't mean there are none. It just means whoever is involved could know how to hide all traces of the footage from being hacked.

“I think hell has frozen over,” Zhavia says as Haven overtakes us in Zadam's Pontiac GTO. “Did you see that?” Rome waves to Zhavia from the back seat.

Zadam never takes that car out—he and some of his dads restored it from the ground up, and he is very protective of it. But it's actually a brilliant choice because it has no tracker. I had to remove all traces of the one on Lynx's car, so it looks like it's still sitting in the basement garage.

Everything is tracked at Olympia University; it's why no students start until they are eighteen and then sign a contract.

Every part of our lives is monitored. Once we graduate, we'll have a little more freedom, but our body trackers have to be active when on an assignment, or so we are told. I have overheard my parents talking about teams who are deep undercover that have had their chips removed for their own safety. While I would love to be one of those teams one day, it's highly unlikely since Zhavia and Zadam are the two most valuable people at Olympia. As a member of the super team, I suppose by default, so am I. Though I doubt anyone wants to harm me to get to my parents, unlike Zhavia and Zadam.

“No one believes me when I say aliens, but it totally makes sense. We have known Zadam since we were born, and he won't even let me lick the fucking car. I just wanted to do it once, but no, and now Haven gets to drive it?! He must be a damn good lay.”

Zhavia snorts from beside me. “Can we not add images of my brother doing the nasty into my head, please?”

“Oh, would you like me to add images of how I plan to fuck you while your new boy toy fucks me? Now won't that be fun,” Kyro says.

“Yes please, much better,” Zhavia says, and Lynx growls.

“For fuck's sake, can you two stop?! We are going on a suicide mission, one that if we don't die, all our parents are going to kill us for committing. So let's hold off on the thoughts of fucking.”

“Sorry, big boy. It's totally fine if you wanna fuck me. What's a little incest between brothers?” Kyro says with a wink.

Zhavia throws her head back and laughs.

“Fuck you,” Lynx grits out.

“It's only a little weird. We're not biologically related.” Kyro laughs.

“Zadam, pull the fuck over. I want to swap Kyro for Rome,” Lynx says through the earpiece.

“Fuck no, you made your bed, now you lie in it. The new guy with the big muscles fucking my sister doesn’t seem so bad now, does he?”

“Fuck you all,” Lynx snaps, turning the stereo up to an almost deafening level. I tune them all out and keep working on gathering as much intel on the property as I can.

A little while later, Zhavia reaches out and flicks the volume of the music down, then looks at each of us with a big grin. “Halo has hacked into the database and given the nannies the day off. When none show up, most of our fathers will need to stay home, as mum has a meeting with Brennan this morning that she can’t miss. She also sent a delivery to Rocco full of sugar—we all know he can’t eat it because of how hyper it makes him—and he will not tell our parents, just so he gets to have a taste. Then he will share with our siblings to keep them quiet about it. All hell will break out once they are hopped up on sugar, so that should keep most of our dads at home. Halo will also keep a close eye on the call for replacement nannies and send male replacements. We know how much Chester hates them and he will want to stick around the house to keep an eye on them.”

“Fuck, I love my sister,” Kyro says to Zhavia.

Thankfully, the rest of the drive is quiet—so far, so good. We drive straight through with no stops; we only have six hours and three of them have now passed. Who knows how long it will take us to get inside the building?

After parking the cars far enough away that they are well hidden, Zadam stands beside me as I set up the laptop on Lynx’s bonnet to show them the floor plans. They will need to memorise it as best they can, and I will guide them through over the comms.

Zadam turns to the team. “Okay, everyone needs to be in their gear, vests, and weapons holstered. We can’t make any stupid mistakes. Cruze will stay here and be our eyes and ears. Did you find any cameras?”

“Not yet, but I’m still working on it. The fence around the property looks to be electric. Zadam will need to cut the fence

open, but that could alert them to your entry and shut down the entire property. I can see at least fifteen people inside using thermal imaging. All appear male, but the number keeps changing when they go down to the basement level. I presume that is where they are keeping the girl. But I can't get any images of the layout, so you will all be going in blind."

Zadom nods. "We stay in pairs at all times. Any sign of trouble, you extract Zhavia—No. Matter. What. Haven and I will focus on retrieving the target."

Zhavia opens her mouth, but Zadom cuts her off. "Don't argue with me on this. Your safety takes precedence over the entire mission, do you understand me?"

"Yes," she huffs.

"Good. Lynx, you and Rome are with Zhavia, Hayes with Kyro, and Haven and I are paired. There looks to be three entry points. Hayes and Kyro will try to draw the men towards them so we can get in. Do you think you can take them?"

"They can. I laced all the bullets, so even if you can't shoot to kill, they will be in so much pain they won't be moving anytime soon. The same goes for the explosives; they are not enough to damage property, but anyone hit will be in a world of pain and feel like acid is eating them."

They all look at me and I smile. "What? I wanted our first actual assignment to be a success, and your father gave his approval. After the demonstration with Team Swift Six, he thought it was a perfect addition to our arsenal and hopes using it will stop a lot of unnecessary deaths."

"Okay, is everyone ready?" Zadom asks, and everyone replies yes at the same time.

They all move towards the building and nerves eat away at my gut as I follow along on their body cam footage. As they reach the fence, Zadom pulls out his wire cutters, kneels, and makes the incision. Electricity courses through him, and Haven goes to touch him, but Zhavia slaps his hand away.

"Don't be a fucking idiot. You will die."

Haven pulls his hand back, and once the fence is cut, no alarms go off. Zhavia helps Zadom pull the wire apart, and everyone slips through, then those two take a minute to pull themselves together after channelling all that electricity. Zadom has been training for years, so he bounces back quickly, but Zhavia is shaky. I want to pull her out, but she rights herself and seems fine, so I check her vitals and they look good.

“Take it slow, Zhavia. Your vitals are good, but they slipped for a second.”

“I’m fine,” she says. “It takes me a hot minute to control them. I’m new at this, remember?”

They split off, and I finally find a backdoor into their camera portal, but it’s interfering with our comms. Moving my fingers as fast as they can go, I find a way in. “I have a visual inside the building and the surrounding areas. Still nothing in the basement.”

“Just guide us in. Make sure you watch Zhavia first,” Zadom demands.

He knows our group has no choice but to save her. If it came down to her life or his, and she wanted us to save him, we still wouldn’t. It will always be her. We would go as far as killing him to get her out, even if it meant she would hate us, but she knows this already.

“Fuck, Zhavia, dogs are headed your way,” I warn her.

“I’ve got this,” Rome says, pushing Zhavia behind him and towards Lynx.

My heart hammers in my chest. I don’t know how Rome plans to stop the dogs, but I hope he has a trick or two up his sleeve.



Chapter Twenty-Two

Rome

The dogs come barrelling towards us. “Lynx, get her behind you now!”

“Already on it,” he says.

I brace myself in case this doesn’t work, then I radiate a sense of calm.

“Your heart rate is still too high, Rome. Things work differently when you have other people to worry about. Try harder,” Cruze chirps in my ear.

“I’m fucking trying,” I snap as the Dobermans get closer, but at just metres away they slow down and their tails wag. Thank fuck!

We continue towards the side door, the pack of dogs losing interest in us. Lynx puts a device onto the door and its keypad lights up until the lock clicks. He pulls the door open, and it’s pitch black, so he takes point, followed by Zhavia, and then me at the rear. I continue to send out my energy in case anyone is in the room that we can’t see.

“Fuck!” Lynx whispers. “There are black spots on the floor. I can’t see what they are, but I need you to get close to me and I will walk you around them.”

We get as close as we can with our packs on our backs and he leads us through the room to a door. Pushing it open, we enter what looks like a living area and everything seems quiet—too quiet, if you ask me.

“Talk to me, Cruze. What can you see?” I ask.

“You should be good to cross through that room. The door to the right should lead to a passageway that goes into the kitchen. Be quiet as you go through. There are men in the adjoining room eating.”

“Update from everyone,” Zadam whispers.

“All good here,” Hayes says. “We are still working on getting into the building. We may need to blow up the door, which should draw all the men towards us, but we will wait on that until someone needs us.”

“Just get in and save your girl,” Zhavia says. “Time is of the essence. If we are in trouble, we will let you know.”

We make it into the kitchen, but there we encounter our first problem. The door we need to go through is no longer a fucking door; it’s sealed off.

“What if we put a gas bomb under that door? Anyone in there won’t be able to move for five minutes,” Zhavia says, looking at us.

“It would give us more like fifteen if they are norms. Just do it and I will keep watch. If they wake up, we can set off the explosives. Don’t forget to leave them around the place as you walk through, just not near exits. If shit hits the fan, you will need to be able to get out fast. I can set them off behind you as you run,” Cruze says.

Lynx retrieves a gas bomb from his pack, preps it, and slides it under the door. A small pop indicates that the gas has gone off.

“They are out. Hold your breath while you move through—we don’t need anyone passing out now. This place is a fucking maze, and I can’t find any way down to the basement since getting visibility in there is shit. There must be a

trapdoor somewhere. We may need to draw the rest out soon towards Kyro and Hayes,” Cruze says through the earpiece.

“We are ready when you are,” Hayes replies.

“Keep on standby. I’m going to get Zadom and Haven into position and then we will be ready for the action. We don’t know if you are being watched. He hasn’t sent men out yet, but he could also be waiting.”

“Oh fuck,” Zhavia says, looking down at her phone. “Halo messaged and Marlow is on his way to Olympia. We have half an hour, tops, until he gets to his office.”

“We need to cause that distraction now—we don’t have time to go any slower. Hayes and Kyro blow up the door. Haven and I will move in closer to the basement, if Cruze knows where that is.”

“That’s a negative, but when the explosives go off, I should be able to see where the guards come from and lead you that way,” Cruze says.

“Good. Zhavia—you, Lynx, and Rome be on standby to take anyone else out as they appear.”

“Zhavia, once you move past the kitchen, it will lead to a dining area. Wait in there until I give you the go ahead. Cuff the downed guards to anything you can.”

Fuck, holding my breath isn’t my strong suit.

Zhavia quirks a brow at me. “What?” she whispers.

“I suck at holding my breath. I will need to pass through quickly.”

“Just give me your spare cuffs and Zhavia and I will do it. Go, have our backs in the next room.”

I nod at Lynx and take the cuffs from my pack, handing them to him. We push through the kitchen door to find the men on the floor, and Lynx and Zhavia get straight to work. I move through quickly and check the adjoining room. It’s empty, and within a minute, they both join me.

My palms sweat. I haven't trained for any of this, not really. I used to do random drills with my father, under the guise of having to defend ourselves if the world went to shit. But this is next level. All I want to do is grab Zhavia and drag her out of here—by her hair if need be—and keep her safe.



Chapter Twenty-Three

Hayes

Kyro rigs the door. “Stand back,” he says and counts us down. We have our weapons out, and we are going to need them. The explosives go off and Kyro kicks the door open wide. “Boom motherfucker, Boom,” Kyro sings, stepping into the dark corridor.

“We are in,” I say.

“We’ve got the location of the basement. Kyro and Hayes brace yourselves—fuck, there are more than we expected, ten are headed your way. Zhavia, I need you to be ready in case any come your way. If they don’t, I will let you go once it’s clear to move out and help the guys. Zadom and Haven, there should be a door to your right. Take that in twenty seconds—the hall will lead to the basement. I can’t see a door, but they came up somehow, so be careful.”

Moving through the house, we stop in a large open area where Kyro and I take cover behind a lounge as the first of the men arrive to investigate. Finding us waiting, they fire off bullets and we do the same. Kyro hits his first target, and the guy drops like a sack of shit, writhing around on the ground and clutching his shoulder. In seconds, his screams start. If these guys are norms, that is going to fucking hurt for a long time.

“There are more coming. You either need to go back the way you came or force them out of that room. It’s like a maze, shit, but there looks to be a ballroom through the doors facing you.”

“Cover me,” Kyro says. Before I can respond, the crazy fucker stands up and starts firing off bullets like we have an endless supply, which we don’t. Two more go down as I take them out. Fuck, I don’t normally shoot to kill, but Kyro left me with no choice.

“Zhavia, four men are coming your way. Be ready.”

Kyro makes it to the opposite side of the room, separating the focus of our opponents. We are outnumbered, and I don’t know how long we can hold them off without Zhavia, Lynx, and Rome’s help.

Another five enter and all rush Kyro. I . . . fuck . . .

Dipping back down behind the couch, I remove a grenade from my bag and pull the pin, launching it towards the swarm of men. Kyro will heal, but my gut tells me these guys are norms, so it will blast them with a liquid that will make them feel like their skin is melting off.

“Heads up,” I yell to Kyro. He ducks, curling into a ball as best he can, and the grenade explodes. Screams fill the air and men try to rip off their clothes, like that would even make any difference. I move, walking carefully towards Kyro in case any of them get the idea to shoot while they’re down.

“Kyro has been hit,” I yell. “I had to set off a grenade.”

“Take him back out the way you came. Around the back of the building is a water fountain. You’ll need to pray there is water still in it.”

“We are heading to your location now to take out any remaining men. We had a few extras pop up here. There was a fucking trap door,” Lynx barks out.

“Fuck! Hayes, hurry! This shit burns like a son of a bitch.”

Helping Kyro up, I wince as he groans in pain. There is nothing I can do to help him except backtrack to the fountain.

“I’m taking Kyro out now and then I will be back to help. Shout out if you need me.”

“We have lasers down here,” Zadom says, and his comm goes static.

“Fuck! Hayes—just stay with Kyro. Cruze—do a count and see how many more men you can locate,” Zhavia instructs.

I listen in to their talk while I take the brunt of Kyro’s weight. The pain from these things is so bad you forget how to do simple tasks like walking.

Back outside, I take him around the building. “Fuck, there are two more men out here.”

Dropping Kyro, I fire off some shots towards them, but they take cover and fire back.

“Kyro, I will cover you. I need you to get up and fucking run.”

“I can’t leave you,” he says, pulling something from his bag. It’s a fucking sling shot and marbles—of course he thought that was a good weapon of choice.

He slings them, multiple at a time, then one man gets hit and goes down. His screams have his friend tending to him, and that gives us enough time to move out of his firing line and get my own shot in.

“Oh fuck,” Lynx says. “We have a problem, Cruze. You better work your magic really fucking fast.”



Chapter Twenty-Four

Lynx

“Rome!” Zhavia screams, belting her fist on the door we just came through. Rome was covering us while I got Zhavia out. But the door closed, locking him in behind us.

“Rome—talk to me,” Cruze demands.

“Everyone in here is dead, but there is something coming in through the vents.”

I knew I should have made him take point; he isn’t nearly as trained as we are.

“Try to find something you can block the vent with while I hack into the house system and shut it down. Every time I find something new, I’m thrown out. Whoever is doing it is online and picking us off one by one. Zhavia and Lynx, you need to leave him and try to find Zadam. We have lost all communication with him and Haven.”

Zhavia seems torn. “We don’t leave men behind.”

“Right now, Rome can’t go anywhere, and I need to concentrate to do this. Go with Lynx and try to locate your brother. The quicker we do that, the easier it will be to get out before someone is hurt. We are in over our heads. You have fifteen minutes to find Zadam, or I’m calling your parents. We

need an extraction team, and right now, no one knows where we are.”

“Let’s go,” I growl, grabbing her arm.

“Zhavia, go, I will be fine,” Rome says through the comm, and she finally stops fighting me.

We have lost Cruze while he helps Rome, but we all have been trained well enough to remember the basic layout of this place from when we were shown it before we entered the building. Both Zhavia and I keep our weapons raised as we creep down the hallway. Each door handle we try is locked, and once we reach the bend, I motion to her that I will check. Peering around the corner, all I see is another empty hall.

“What the fuck is that?” Zhavia whispers and points towards the ceiling. Brown liquid seems to ooze through the ceiling and down the walls.

“No fucking clue, but we need to move faster. Clearly, we are not the only ones with a bag of tricks.”

The lights suddenly dim, making it hard to see—lucky for us, I have remote viewing ability—and Zhavia sticks close as we check yet another corner. “Cruze, where the fuck are we? It’s like we keep walking in circles.”

“Just keep moving. I have found a way in to help Rome but I need time.”

We keep moving, and in each hallway we try the doors; one finally opens and as we step inside, we encounter a room filled with creepy dolls. They are on shelves, on tables, and there is barely any room to move.

“I think we should go back the way we came,” I say, and Zhavia ignores me as she pushes through the mounds of dolls. “Zhavia.”

“What, Lynx?” she snaps, turning to face me.

My eyes widen and she can see my fear as the fucking pile of dolls behind her shifts and a man stands. Aiming, I shoot, and he slumps straight to the ground. “We need to get the fuck out of here now. This is not safe for you anymore. I will take

you to Kyro and Hayes, then I will come in and extract the others.”

“I’m not leaving without my brother,” she says and runs.

I follow behind her, but she pushes a shelf over, and I get momentarily stuck. Although I can climb it, she could be gone by then.

“Zhavia has gone rogue. She refuses to leave without her brother,” I snap.

By the time I climb the rubble of doll parts, she is gone. I follow her down the hallway, reach an open door, and look into a room that has already been shot to shit. We are screwed, well and truly fucked if we lose her. It’s our one and only fucking job. I should have known she wouldn’t leave without her brother; it’s the reason their stupid fucking bond will get them in trouble.

Cautiously, I walk across the ballroom floor when I feel it rumble, and the door I came through slams shut.

I don’t have time to walk; I need to run, and fast.

The floor moves as I sprint towards the exit door. But when I try the handle, it’s locked.



Chapter Twenty-Five

Kyro

“Fuck,” Hayes snaps as I sit in the fucking water fountain. If I don’t stay here, the acid-like substance eats away at my skin and the pain will make me delirious.

“You need to go back in,” I tell Hayes, and he nods.

“Sit with your back against that weird cherub statue and if anyone comes out, shoot to kill. Don’t do anything fucking stupid.”

I salute him as he runs off around the side of the building again, leaving me to sit and wait. This entire mission was a bad fucking idea.

“Cruze, we need an update.”

“Rome is okay. The gas doesn’t seem poisonous, so his body is protecting him from whatever is in the concoction. But it’s enough to keep him unconscious. Right now, I’m trying to help Lynx. He is trapped in a room and the floor is giving out. There is water underneath and we don’t know what will happen next. Shit, there is water coming from a pipe in the ceiling. Fuck! Everyone out of the building now if you can, Hayes—find Zhavia. Everyone else inside can wait for backup. I need to call this in.”

“I can call it in,” I say. “I’m just sitting around doing fuck all.”

“Good, call it in NOW!”

I scramble to the side of the water fountain and yank my backpack onto my lap, pulling out my phone. Bringing up the contacts, I wonder who I should call. It needs to be Brennan—he is the most logical. The call rings twice before he answers.

“Kyro.” Oh fuck, they already know. I can tell by the tone of voice and the fact that it isn’t Brennan on the other end of the phone; it’s Blayne, and she sounds pissed. “Where the fuck are you, you little fucker?! We are doing damage control, so none of you are murdered.”

“If you wait another hour, that will be easily done.”

“Where the hell are you?” Brennan asks in a slightly calmer voice.

“Cruze will turn our location on soon. But we went to that crazy building owned by Mr Z.”

“You what? Are you out of your fucking minds? There is a reason we have left that place alone—it’s a fucking trap,” Boston shouts.

“Kinda figuring that out.”

“We are sending a team to you now. They will arrive by air, but that will take us some time,” Jimmie, Cruze’s dad says. “Where is my son?”

“He is trying to save Rome and Lynx right now. Rome is locked in a gas-filled room, but his vitals are fine. Lynx is in a room where the floor has given way and it’s filling with water. Zhavia is MIA. She ran off to save Zadom, who is in the basement with no communication. We presume Haven is with Zadom.”

“And where are you and Hayes?” my mum asks.

“I got hit by some liquid shit and am sitting outside in a water fountain. Hayes went in to find Zhavia.”

“Ok, sit tight, and tell my son to link me in now so I can help him.”

I end the call and put my earpiece in. “Your father says to let him into your system and he will help you.”

“We are so fucking dead,” Cruze says. “Everyone who can hear me check in.”

“I’m here,” Hayes says. “Wherever I am is pitch black, and I can’t see shit.”

Groaning fills my ear, followed by Haven’s deep voice. “I’m down. Zadom injected me with something. The fucker said it was too dangerous for us both to go down. Zhavia just ran past me. A laser got her, but she kept going. The door closed behind her.”

A new voice comes through our comms. “As everyone comes to, you all exit the building. We have an extraction team on their way. That is a direct order. Get out of that building now, or so help me god, I will murder you all myself.”

Shit, Jolie is pissed, so pissed. I have known Zadom and Zhavia’s mum my entire life and she is normally calm, but right now, I believe every word she just said.

Haven relays that the door to the basement is sealed shut and the lasers have vanished. Cruze helps direct him out of the building. Cruze gets the door unlocked to the room Rome is in, and Hayes is sent to help get him out. Jimmie keeps working on getting Lynx free. They are concerned about where all the water will flood to once the door is opened.

All I know is that we fucked up.

If there is something above fucked up, that’s what we did. Punishment for this is going to suck. I just hope we can get everyone out, then I will endure whatever they throw our way.

An explosion from inside the building has rubble and shrapnel soaring through the air and littering the ground.

“Someone needs to get Zhavia out now!”



Chapter Twenty-Six

Zhavia

Leaving Lynx goes against everything I have been trained to do, but I won't let them remove me. Protecting me above all else is bullshit, and I don't have time to sit around outside and wait for the men to save the day. Kyro is injured, Rome could be dead—but I think I would feel if he was.

Cruze gave vague directions earlier about a hallway leading to the basement; it's where Zadom went, and I won't leave him behind, nor will I let anyone else get hurt saving him. He got us into this mess, and I agreed to it, so it has to be me.

"Zhavia," Haven says as he sits slumped against a wall. "Lasers, don't go down there."

"Is my brother down there?"

He nods.

"Well, guess I'm going then."

Reaching into my backpack, I pull out a smoke packet, crack it, and throw it down the hall. The smoke will help highlight the lasers, allowing me to navigate them easier.

"Sorry, Haven. You need to get out of the building. Don't come after us."

I don't give him a chance to speak, and once I'm past the danger zone, I rip the metal door open and descend into the pitch-black nothingness. The air feels thicker down here, moist almost, as it hits my lungs.

I have no outside help; it's just me down here. I have to be able to find Zadom and get us out of here. Since he hasn't come back up, who knows how big it is down here?

My eyes easily adjust to the darkness, and I blink—what the actual fuck? I can see, but it's so weird.

Moving further down, I come to an open area with three ways out. I need to think like Zadom, except it's Kyro and his public toilet logic that fills my mind. You don't want to use the end one, everyone automatically goes for that, and the middle one is the next best option. The closest to the door is the last resort.

Entering the middle tunnel, I run as fast as I can until my vision blurs and an emptiness fills my core. What the fuck? I can no longer feel my team. They don't feel dead, just no longer connected to me. I have to keep moving—whatever is happening right now is beyond a level that we can compete with. Zadom and I need to leave, and soon.

Suddenly a smell so putrid has bile crawling in the back of my throat, and a very dull light flickers on overhead. I step closer towards the semi-darkness and gasp. There are cells down here, with what look to be emaciated people held inside. Shit, we need my parents, and I have no way to radio this in to Olympia.

“Don't worry,” I whisper to a woman who reaches out to touch me. “Help is on its way. Have you seen a man come down here?”

She nods and points in the direction that I'm walking. I need to find Zadom and get us out of here. Our parents can help with everything else; we can't risk being in here any longer than necessary.

I come to the end of this corridor, and there is a sharp left turn, followed by another short hallway with an open door at

the end. A small amount of light reflects onto the wall, and I move quietly until I reach the end. Peering in through the gap, I can see Zadom with his back to me. There is a girl on an old ratty camping bed, curled into a ball, and there is also a man—around my parent's age—with a gun.

Fuck, if I waltz in there, he could very well just shoot my brother. While we can heal quickly, we are not invincible and a bullet to the head would be enough to take us down. I need to come up with a plan quickly. The man moves, and I don't think I can get a clear shot.

I watch and wait, hoping Zadom has a plan up his sleeve. Come on, Zay, do something so we can get the fuck out of here.



Chapter Twenty-Seven

Haven

The choppers have nowhere to land, so three figures rappel to the ground and run towards us.

“How many are still inside?” one of them asks.

Cruze steps forward and gives the report. “Lynx—my dad is working on getting him out, but things are not looking good. Rome—is regaining consciousness now. Zhavia and Zadom—are in the basement. We have lost communication with them and no one can sense them.”

The men move over to where Cruze has his laptop set up, and another handful of figures descend. From what I can tell, all of their parents are here. Once one chopper leaves, another circles overhead and more people drop from the sky. Fuck! The last group that joins us runs over, and it’s easy to tell these two are women. One runs straight for Kyro, wades through the water fountain and pulls him into her arms. Jolie, who I know, shakes her head as she takes in what’s happening. The other is suited up just like the men.

“Every entry point will have teams going in. We will go in here, Boston—you guys will go in there, and Colt—the back exit. Cruze has laid out a map of what to expect in each room. My team will go straight for the basement to get that door open, Boston—you need to extract Lynx, and Colt—you are

on Rome. This is where you need to be.” Jolie points to multiple points on the map.

“Wait, we can’t get Lynx out of that room without flooding the entire property, so we need to go in from the roof,” Cruze interrupts. “Let me help. Dad has the computers covered and Hayes can help if need be. I can go in, and we all know that I can hold my breath better than anyone here. We should be able to make an entry point here.”

I can’t see what he is pointing to, and I feel helpless. I don’t have a proper team, and though I feel drawn to help Zhavia, it could just be my connection to Zadom. The pit of my stomach cramps, knowing I couldn’t go after him. It stings alongside the betrayal that he risked going down there alone to save this girl, as if I mean nothing to him. I wish I could understand, but if what we know so far is true, shouldn’t I fucking matter to him as well?

Maybe I should have told him I dream of her too. I always have, but she has never been real. Instead, I always told myself that she was my imagination, created to help fill the lonely days locked up in that place. But I didn’t, because coming to Olympia made me feel like I wasn’t a murderer for the first time. That I didn’t get inside that man’s head and make him kill everyone around him, including himself. They deserved to die after the way they treated me, turning a blind eye to the abuse I endured. I wanted them to suffer more, but I was a boy and didn’t know how else to rid myself of them.

Being sent to the asylum was only a short-lived relief. The tests—it’s not humane what they do to people in there, and the doctor behind it thinks he can get away with anything. But I didn’t tell Jolie. After she explained why they got me out, I wanted to wait until I had a team, a place where I belonged. Then when the time is right, I will go back and he will get what’s coming to him. He is a much easier target on the outside.

Each team enters the building, while the rest of us out here are left to wait. Rome is the first to be brought out, and the men who are still alive are detained and sat in the water with Kyro.

Time ticks by, and each second has the guilt eating at me. I can't feel him or get inside his head.

“Sinclair, get over here now. You need to start CPR. Lynx has taken in a lot of water.”

Kyro's mum jumps up from beside him and runs towards Zadam's father Boston, where Lynx is being lowered towards the ground.

“There was an explosion inside the building. Everyone needs to get out now!”



Chapter Twenty-Eight

Zadom

The lights to the room flick on, and for the first time in all the years that I have dreamt about her, she is there—so close I can touch her. She doesn't talk, looking up at me with her big blue eyes, and everything inside me knows this girl is *mine*. Nothing and no one can stop me from getting to her. The men that have died here today should not have come between me and what is mine.

“You shouldn't have come.”

Pivoting, I narrow my eyes at the man aiming a gun at me, then I smirk. He must realise I'm not your regular person coming to steal the girl; she is part of me, and I will walk out of here with her, even if I need to snap his neck to accomplish that.

“Is that so?”

He nods. “She is too good to be with you. He made me swear to protect her with my life.”

“Then unfortunately you need to die.”

An overwhelming sense of dread pools in my stomach, and out of the corner of my eye, I see her tremble in fear. Taking a step closer, I just smirk as he waves his weapon at me.

“You really think that scares me?”

He laughs manically. “It should. Where is your team? They are all injured or trapped. The building is falling around us, and we will all die here today.” This guy is fucking insane. If my team were injured, I would feel it. “Let me guess, you’re thinking that if they were hurt, you would feel it? Well, I hate to tell you, but I have built this fortress so it could block out your gifts. Honestly, I’m surprised that True could reach you at all. She must be more powerful than I thought, and that is why you both need to die.”

A high-pitched scream echoes around us. I turn to see True sitting up, her eyes void of emotion, and as I take a step towards her, the air around us changes.

“Zadom, no,” Zhavia screams, running towards me and tackling me to the ground.

A crack sounds around us and my head hits the concrete floor hard. Blinking through the blurry vision and the ringing in my ears, I see my sister on the ground beside me. Rolling to my side and pushing to my knees, my heart beats frantically in my chest.

She groans and tries to sit up as blood trickles from her mouth. “Tell them I love them. I’m so sorry, Zadom. I couldn’t let you miss out on your love story. I was lucky enough to have mine around me my entire life. Promise to not shut Rome out—he will need you all.”

“Fuck!” I scream as I look up and see the man with the gun now pressed to True’s head.

“Choose, Zadom. Which one are you going to save? Your sister could still live if you leave now, but if you don’t, I will pull the trigger and you will lose them both.”

Zhavia pulls my head down to hers.

“Save her, be happy.”

There is too much blood. I can’t save them both on my own.

I’m torn; everything in me screams “save your sister,” but there is this overwhelming pull to save True too. Guilt hits me

like a tonne of bricks if this is how Zhavia's guys have always felt. Vomit threatens to come up.

Think, Zadam. you need to do something.

Do you need to know what happens next? Zadam will release next month. (January 2024) Pre Order now.

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