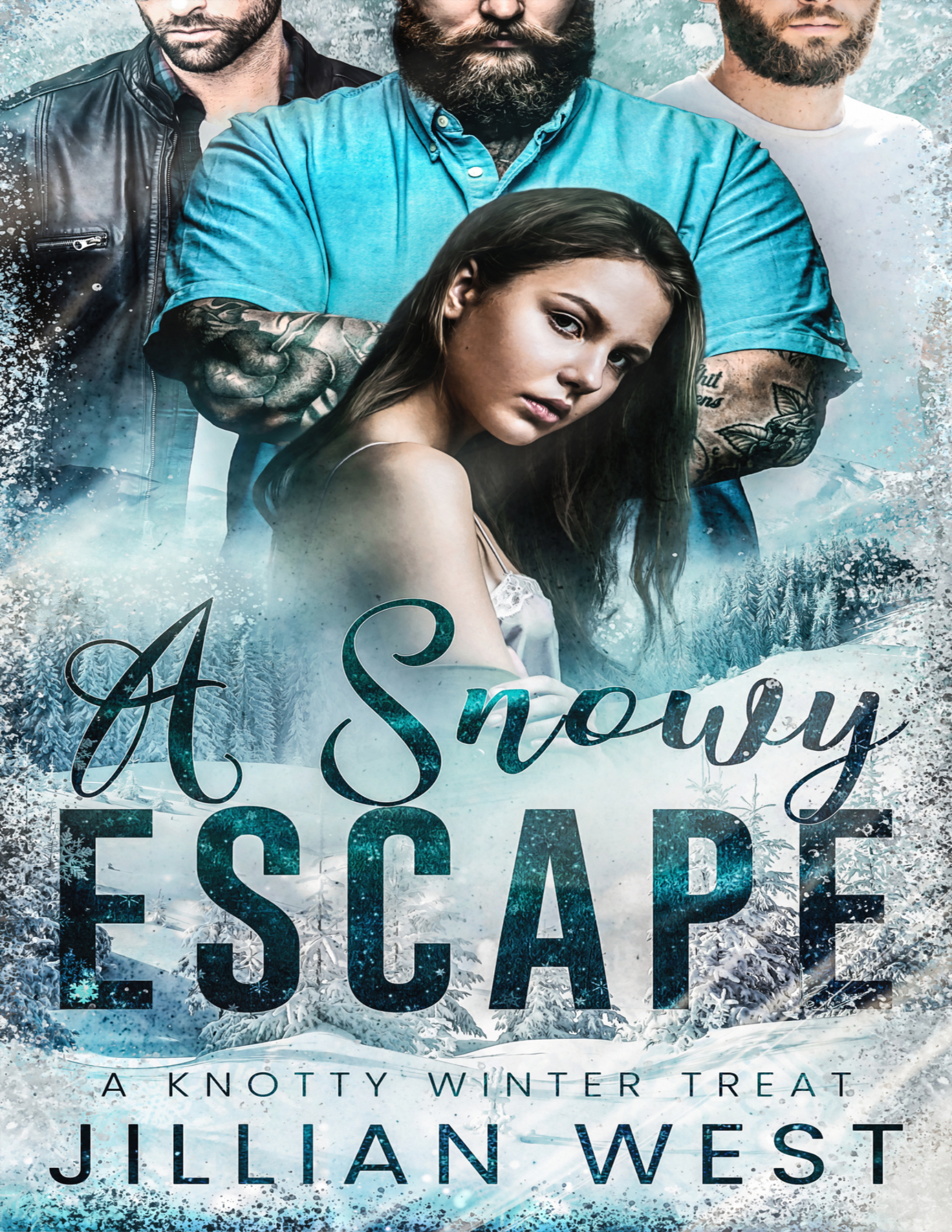




A Snowy **ESCAPE**

A KNOTTY WINTER TREAT

JILLIAN WEST

A Snowy Escape

A Knotty Winter Treat

Jillian West

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World Information

This book is set in an alternate universe.

Here's a small bit to get you started if you're unfamiliar with how things work.

Omegaverse is an alternate universe where, similar to wolves or animal biology, there is a hierarchy.

Alphas are at the top. They're generally bigger, more aggressive, or dominant and they have a few extra features like a knot (think wolves but no shifting). They can "bark" omegas, betas, and even weaker alphas into submission. Alphas are drawn to protect and care for omegas. (Although, bad human beings exist everywhere, and there are exceptions.)

Betas are the regular people. They do have scents, which alphas and omegas can be drawn to, but they're normally weaker smells.

Omegas are the opposite end of the spectrum from alphas. They tend to be less aggressive, smaller, and they mate with alphas (and sometimes betas too, but omegas need alphas to help them through their heat). Omegas calm or soothe an alpha's more aggressive nature.

Alphas and omegas have scents which attract compatible mates.

At least in my contemporary omegaverse books, the world is very close to ours with just a few biological drives that are different and some extra features. (Examples: alphas have knots and purr to comfort omegas. Omegas and alphas have pheromones that attract compatible mates.)

Omegas have a heat cycle that comes every three months (unless medically suppressed). During this time, they're super fertile. They build

safe places called nests and hunker down. They fill their nest with pillows, soft fabrics, and if all goes according to plan, their chosen alphas. An omega may be overly sensitive to light and sound, as well as smells in the days and weeks leading up to a heat. (The closer an omega is to their heat, the more they may struggle with being around other potent omegas.)

Heats also send compatible alphas into rut. (Lots of practicing making babies.)

A few hundred years ago the birth rates for alphas and omegas were nearly equal. Now? There are nearly eight alphas born to each omega. As a result alpha packs have become the norm. Omegas are at the center of the pack, and, as mentioned earlier, calm an alpha's more aggressive nature.

Betas (the normal humans) do join packs and participate in heats sometimes, but their biological drives don't demand it like alphas and omegas.

Alphas need close contact with omega pheromones to prevent them from going feral. It hits different alphas at different ages, but when it comes up, it needs to be addressed quickly. If they're on the edge of going feral, an alpha leans into the hyper-aggressive stereotype that defines their designation. They're more likely to pick fights, have violent outbursts, and ignore rational thought. The good thing is, soaking up omega pheromones can pull a feral alpha back from the edge.

In my world, omegas who go too long ignoring their biological needs end up touch-starved. They get flu-like symptoms, depression, and there are medical complications that can occur. It can pop up if an omega takes suppressants for too long.

Heat suppressants do exactly what the name suggests, they medically suppress an omega's heat. These are most often taken in a pill form daily, similar to our birth control.

Here are a few things that may work differently in my omegaverse universe compared to others you may have read.

Average sizes for omegas: In my world, omegas are not petite. The average height for an omega is 5'7-5'9. They are generally curvy/mid-size. If the omega in the story varies from this, their info will be explicitly stated.

Scent matches: They are not the end-all be-all. While a scent match indicates they might be a good match, it doesn't guarantee compatibility. The average omega will meet five to seven scent matches in their life. (Though, it might be more or less depending on the character.)

Soul matches are the highest form of compatibility in my universe. (You can find more about soul matches on the soul match lore page.)

Feral/Rabid Alphas: My world takes feral alphas one step farther with rabid alphas. They have all the symptoms feral alphas have, but if the mental decay progresses far enough, they can lose touch with reality and even forget who they are. Feral alphas who spend time in close proximity to omega pheromones will gain back cognitive functioning pretty quickly. Rabid alphas must bite/bond a scent matched omega to attain that same level of clarity.

Post-heat cramps: If a heat doesn't end in conception, an omega will experience five to seven days of bleeding similar to how a female beta has monthly menstruation. I know not everyone is a fan of this, but I spend a lot of time pondering all the aspects of any universe that I'm writing, and I really felt like all that built-up uterine lining had to be expelled somehow.

Soothing pheromones: A special type of pheromones that omegas release to soothe themselves or their chosen alphas.

These alphas growl and snarl, but you'll find no abuse from these men. There are no shifters in this book.

The designations alpha and omega are influenced heavily by their instincts or impulses. These words are used interchangeably to describe the differences in their biological makeup since this is an alternate universe.

This is a reverse harem romance, meaning our heroine will not choose between her love interests. She gets to keep them all.

Soul Match Lore

If you've been reading my books for a while, you may have noticed the soul match scent. If either the omega or one of the alphas describe the other's scent as electric, lightning, or the weather before a bad storm, this is indicating they have a soul match bond. (Even if the characters don't know the lore/history behind it, it's a fun Easter egg for you as readers to know what it means.)

A soul match is one step up from a scent match, and those characters will be drawn together even more fully than scent matches. They often feel a magnetic pull to touch each other when they're close. The omega will be able to sense that alpha's emotions more easily than others. It makes it incredibly difficult to fight their instincts, and they're happiest when they're physically close together. They get each other on a level that is difficult to understand.

Some characters will know the lore about this as it was passed down to them through the generations, while others might not.

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Author's Note

A Snowy Escape has no character crossover to any of my past books or series, making it a great place to dive into my universe. The guys are head over heels for Abby from the moment they meet her.

ASE was originally written to be a “snapshot in time” novella. It got a little too long to call it a novella, but it follows the fast-paced nature of one. It’s a character driven plot with low stress and no angst.

It’s meant to be silly, fun, mindless entertainment.

If you have reading anxiety, this one should be safe.

>>>Spoilers After This Point<<<

This is a character driven plot.

There is no cheating, other woman drama, or third act breakup.

Here’s what you will find: A crappy, gaslighting ex. Dog theft. Very brief mentions of parental death. Pregnancy in the epilogues.

Mental health is important! I always want my readers to know what to expect. If you have any questions or need something clarified, you can reach out through email or social media.

I’m happy to answer any questions you may have!! If I’ve missed any things that should be listed, please reach out to me. I’m happy to correct it.

While my books aren’t perfect, they are ALWAYS a human creation. No part of this book was written using AI. You can see how much I value human art by visiting my Instagram or Facebook group. I invest hours of my life at my keyboard and spend a huge chunk of my earnings to support other human artists whether it be through professional editing, covers, graphics, or character art.

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*This one is for anyone who experiences reading anxiety.
Relax, settle in, and enjoy the pure fluffy comfort... It was written just for
you!!*

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Chapter One

Abby

Packing up everything I own is scary. Add in that I'm doing it while it's dark outside, like it's some clandestine mission, and my nerves are shot.

The thought of Tommy coming home while I'm in the process is even more intimidating, but I've made up my mind.

I have a window to get away without it turning into an argument, and I'm taking it.

I wrote out everything I wanted to say and left the note on the kitchen counter, letting him know that I'm breaking up with him.

I've attempted to broach the subject on multiple occasions, but every time I try to have a talk about making some changes, he twists the conversation until I feel like I did something wrong by bringing it up.

I'm not going to stick around long enough for him to brainwash me into thinking his gaslighting is normal.

It's not.

Echo circles my feet, whining as I carry my bedding and pillows downstairs. Making it to the door, I grab the handle, but based on the way she leans against my leg, I'm going to have a tough time getting outside without her coming with me.

German shepherds are great dogs, and she's well-behaved. She's also a herder at heart, and she knows I'm not her pack leader. Anytime we get a delivery, she tries to block me from going out until *she* gets a look at who's on the other side of the door. It often terrifies delivery drivers because she's big and loves to bark.

Okay, I guess she's well-behaved for Tommy. She will sit and follow other basic commands for me. It just tends to be when she's not overstimulated.

She's a great companion.

Unfortunately, there's no way I can take her with me.

Not only do I not have the resources to provide for her, it would also ensure Tommy would come looking for me.

He loves that dog. Or he pretends to when people are watching.

When it's just the two of us, he yells when she gets in his way or begs for a bite of his food.

It's his fault.

In front of guests, he puts on a show, pretending like he spoils her rotten.

How is she supposed to understand that he's only acting that way because other people are watching?

Strangely enough, he treats me in a similar manner.

When other people are around, he puts on a hell of a show, but when it's just the two of us, the real him comes out.

It's embarrassing to realize how completely he fooled me.

That doesn't matter.

Okay, it does, but what really counts is that I'm done playing this game.

Every time he's an asshole, I warn him that I'm not going to stick around forever. He thinks he can act however he wants because he doesn't believe I'll leave.

He's wrong.

I may have moved halfway across the country to be with him, pissing off the only family I have left in the process, but I'm not going to let that force me to stay trapped with him.

I could call my brother and ask to stay with him. I just don't want to go that route if I have any other option. It's not only him I would be inconveniencing. His omega had a baby three months ago. His pack is adjusting to their new normal with an extra human being, and I don't want to throw off their schedule unless I absolutely have to.

Austin already did his time raising me after our mom died. Then he let me live with him for years while I searched for my pack. He deserves to focus on his own life without having to worry about the little sister who straight-up ignored his advice to begin with.

Echo chuffs, bumping her body against my leg like she's trying to remind me that she's here and waiting.

"Sorry, girl," I tell her, gently trying to redirect her away from the door. I've seen Tommy shove her out of the way, but I feel guilty even giving her a gentle push. She's a solid seventy-five pounds, so it doesn't do much. "I can't take you with me. I don't even know where I'll end up. I'll come back in and say goodbye, though."

Her head tilts, and it's clear she's not buying what I'm selling.

I still need to do another sweep to make sure I haven't missed anything important.

"Back up." Pointing a few feet away, I say, "Sit. I'll be right back."

Her chocolate-brown eyes convey her displeasure as she reverses and sits on her haunches.

I take my chances, pulling the door open and struggling to get out with how full my arms are.

Echo has no chill, running out past me.

She looks back, wagging her tail. Her body language says she's just waiting for me to catch up before she runs ahead again.

We've danced this dance many times.

"Okay, you can walk to the car with me, but then you have to go back inside."

* * *

"You're going to get me killed," I mutter, leaning against the steering wheel.

I've already told her this many times over the last four hours of driving. I pray I'm overreacting, but my gut says Tommy is going to shit a brick.

Even knowing that, I couldn't bring myself to leave her behind. His temper is too volatile when he doesn't get his way.

"What are we going to do if he comes looking for us?" I ask, peeking over at her. "Would you bite him for me?"

She's not the best conversationalist, but I do feel safer with her by my side. Not that I think she would really attack Tommy. I do have faith she would protect me from anyone else, though.

We're going to have to find a parking lot or rest area to sleep in tonight.

Knowing she'll bark and growl if someone comes close to the car gives me an extra layer of protection, but she's also a massive beast. Her chunky butt takes up the entire passenger seat of my car.

Once I stop for the night, I'll make space for her in the back seat, since I'm a little worried that it's not safe for her to ride up here. I would have put her in the back from the get-go, but it was already packed with boxes and all my bedding.

"We've got this. We're just two independent ladies on an adventure." Reaching a hand over, I dig my fingers into her neck rolls. "You're going to protect me. Right, Echo? In exchange, I'll feed you and give you all the pets and scratches."

She licks my wrist, and I think that's the only confirmation I'm going to get.

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I pull my hand back to the wheel and focus on the lines on the road. It's way past my bedtime, but I need to get as far away as possible.

When I saw there was a snowstorm coming, I decided it was an extra special message from the universe that it was my time to go.

I shut off the location-sharing app on my phone, deleted it, and even went so far as to print out four different sets of fake directions. That way, if Tommy checks the printer history, he'll have a three out of four chance of going on a wild-goose chase.

Under normal circumstances, I would trust my phone to guide me, but service can be spotty, and I have next to no sense of direction. It seemed safer to have a physical copy, especially with bad weather coming in.

I should be able to stay ahead of the storm, and by the time it hits tomorrow, hopefully I'll be out of its path or at least out of the worst of it.

* * *

My entire body jolts as Echo nuzzles her cold nose to my cheek, whining.

Holy shit.

I was about to fall asleep, or maybe I was already in that weird half-awake, half-asleep state. Either way, it's not safe for me to drive any farther tonight.

"Damn," I whisper, rolling down the window. The cold air smacks me in the face, and I finally feel more awake. Once that hand is back on the wheel, I reach over and pat Echo with the other. "You just saved both our lives."

I'm normally not so irresponsible.

I never drive at night, let alone when I'm mentally and physically exhausted. This one time, I didn't have a choice, but we've been on the road for over five hours.

I need to find somewhere to rest and recharge. I'm sure Echo is thirsty and wants a pee break. I brought her travel food bowls and her normal ones, but the big set is in the trunk.

I'm really hoping that I can avoid springing for a hotel room.

If the storm gets too bad, I might not have a choice. I want to at least give it a try, though. I've watched a lot of social media videos about how solo female travelers stay safe in their cars, vans, or RVs.

I think I can manage it.

I just wasn't expecting to have Echo with me. She adds to the safety factor, but she's going to be expensive to feed. Not to mention, I bet most hotels aren't pet-friendly.

Still, I'm grateful I brought her.

Not only did she save my ass just now, but I also wouldn't have been able to stand the guilt of wondering how Tommy would have treated her. With me being gone, she would have been the only living being around for him to focus on.

My eyes are bleary, and even the frigid air hasn't managed to wake me up enough that I feel like I'm safe to drive.

A sign for an exit a mile ahead thankfully pops up. It's probably going to be pretty miserable sleeping in my car, but with how worn out I am, I don't think it'll be a problem.

* * *

The exit might have only been a mile ahead, but it took an extra twenty-five or thirty minutes to locate the town mentioned on the signs. While I normally would have turned around and headed back to the interstate, there was nowhere to do so. No gas stations, restaurants, or other businesses.

It's actually rather eerie.

It's my fault for not paying closer attention.

I drive along several of what I assume are the main roads and *finally* pass two separate hotels that say *no vacancy*. Not that it would make much sense to get a room now. It'll be daylight in a couple of short hours, and while I have some money saved up, I'm not in a position to rent a room just to have to check out in five or six hours. Maybe less than that.

I don't know.

My brain is fried.

The road has changed from what seemed like a main highway down to a smaller street that runs through town.

The first signs of life are a handful of cars in a parking lot that has a few businesses in a strip farther from the road.

There are also two shops spread out from each other, closer to the road.

I pull in, circling the restaurant, at least that's what I assume it is, based on sight.

I squint as I read the sign.

Maxwell's.

Yeah, that has to be a bar or a restaurant or some combination of the two.

I might be able to get away with parking here.

I'm sure sometimes people aren't in a state to drive, so they leave their cars overnight. As long as I was gone before they opened, I probably wouldn't get in trouble.

It's probably a good idea to see what else is in the plaza, so I continue on.

The other business close to the road is a gym. Or that's my best guess, based on the name of *Impact Fitness*. The side near the street is for customer parking, and the back lot is probably for employees. That part of the parking lot is enclosed with a few trees and a ditch with grass.

Now, that would be the perfect place for Echo to take a quick potty break.

I circle the parking lot, peeking around for security cameras. There are plenty of lights in the main parking lot, which might make it difficult to sleep. The back side of the gym only has two floodlights on the building.

Okay, I'm going to go for it and sleep here, at least for a few hours. If employees start to come in, I'm sure I'll hear them. Then I can move over to the big parking lot.

Or if I get very lucky, maybe I'll sleep for a solid four or five hours. That should be enough for me to get back on the road.

I still have no idea where we're going, but as far away from Tommy as I can get seems like a solid first step of the plan.

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Chapter Two

Bryant

It's cold as shit as I step out the back door of Maxwell's and into the early morning air.

My packmates, Luka and Lawson, inherited Maxwell's when their uncle passed away and their family pack wanted to move down south. The combination bar and restaurant has been in their family for close to fifty years, and it happens to be in the same plaza as my gym.

It's how I met the guys.

They were both freshly out of the military for varying amounts of time. Taking over the restaurant gave them purpose.

I had to stop by Maxwell's to check on a few things in preparation for the incoming storm.

It's later in the year than we normally get whacked with our first *don't leave the house for a few days* type of snowstorm, but our weather is always weird.

I didn't bother zipping up my coat, since I'll just have to take it off when I get into my truck.

Remote start is one of the best inventions in recent memory. Growing up, my mom used to send one of us kids out to start the car every morning. It was miserable, and we would hide, praying we weren't the one she spotted.

I chuckle as I climb into my truck, pulling off my jacket and tossing it into the passenger seat before backing out of my parking spot.

It's a quick trip across the parking lot to get to my gym, but I squint as I spot an unfamiliar car parked behind the building.

That's not one of my employees.

I see their vehicles regularly enough to know it's not one of their cars. Also, I sent the staff texts last night to let them know we would be closed today, which is Friday. They don't need to come in through Sunday. I told them I'd send an update about Monday at some point over the weekend.

I'm going to have to check out what's going on there.

Luckily, it's where I'm headed, anyway.

This is a small town, and the police are strict about the no-overnight-parking law within the downtown area.

Since the gym is private property, they wouldn't mess with the person unless we called to report a trespasser. In most cases, I would have the vehicle towed rather than calling the non-emergency line. Well, unless the person was just hanging out and refusing to leave.

I've never actually run into a situation like that, though.

Most times we've had vehicles left for a day or two because the driver was having car trouble.

Occasionally, we'll have someone who didn't want to leave their car in the bar parking lot. Who knows why they think their vehicle will be safer in the gym lot, but it has happened on a handful of occasions.

Most of the time, they pop up the next day to pick it up, and that's that.

With the storm rolling in later this afternoon, it's more concerning than if it was the middle of summer.

Oh, well.

I'll just have to see what's going on in this particular case.

* * *

I'm incredibly confused as I peek into the car window. There's a woman with long brown hair sleeping on her side in the driver's seat. At least I assume it's a woman, based on the person's small frame and long hair. A sleeping bag covers most of her from view.

There's a German shepherd stretched across the passenger seat that's been reclined to give it more room, but its neck rests on the middle console. Its head pops up, and I take a step back.

Jesus.

Shepherds are one of those protective breeds that I have no interest in setting off, but it's also below freezing.

At best, it can't be comfortable sleeping in a car with no heat.

At worst, it's dangerous.

Shit gets real around here with very little warning.

What is she thinking?

Is she trying to find her way up into the mountains to the ski resort?

We occasionally get travelers who take a wrong turn and end up here.

I doubt her car could make it up to the resorts and back down again with the storm that's on its way. During summer, it wouldn't be a problem, but driving in snow on icy roads is a much different story.

Dammit.

I'm going to have to knock and see if she's okay.

I step forward and gently tap the backs of my fingers against the window, making the dog growl.

The sleeping woman jolts awake, sitting up and rubbing her eyes.

Great.

Now I feel like an asshole.

* * *

I shove my hands into my pockets as I wait for her to get her dog clipped into its harness.

I better not get bitten for trying to be a Good Samaritan.

It's too bad Lawson isn't here. He was a dog handler in a past life—also known as his time in the military. He's mostly retired from that now, but a few times a year, he'll get a call from someone requesting his help to train a dog for military or police services.

Very rarely, he'll get a call to evaluate a puppy to see if it has the right traits to go into a program for service canines. When that happens, he flies out for a week or two.

Law trained Shadow, and even though I call him a mutt regularly, he's actually quite well-behaved for being seventy-something pounds.

I mean, he barks at *everything*, but he can also subdue a full-grown man, so I put up with his chatty ass.

He's a Belgian Malinois rather than a German shepherd, but they're both big dogs who love to work.

Yeah, Lawson would be much better equipped to handle this situation.

I'm the one who's here, so I better figure out how to deal.

The woman opens the door, and the dog hops out, barking and growling while completely focused on me. The woman thankfully keeps a good hold on the leash so the dog doesn't rush me.

"Hey, sorry to wake you," I say, holding my palms out. "I just wanted to make sure you're okay. You mind calling off your dog?"

"Come on, Echo." The woman gives the leash a tug. "Enough, girl. Sit."

Echo looks back at her owner and sits with as much attitude as I've ever seen from a canine.

"Well, at least she's well-behaved." I chuckle.

"Occasionally," the woman says, smiling tightly. "When she feels like it."

"Yeah, my roommate has one. Well, a Belgian Malinois, but they're similar," I say, smiling as I lower my palms. "He's mouthy all the time."

"If I'm not allowed to be parked here..." She swallows thickly, obviously not put at ease by my joke. "I'm so sorry. When I took this exit, I didn't expect the town to be so far from the interstate. I was exhausted, and it wasn't safe for me to keep driving."

"Hey, no worries," I tell her sincerely. "It happens all the time." Ehh, the last part is a stretch, but I'm also not an asshole.

A little white lie won't hurt anything. Hopefully it helps set her mind at ease.

"Sorry, I bet she needs a bathroom break, can I step over to the grass?" she asks, rocking on her heels.

My forehead wrinkles.

"I'm not a cop." I laugh. "You can do whatever you want. You're not in trouble. I just wanted to make sure that you're okay."

"Thanks. I'll make sure I don't linger and wear out my welcome." She guides the dog over to the grass near the drainage ditch.

I follow them, shoving my hands into my pockets.

I should have put on my gloves.

Come to think of it, she's *majorly* underdressed for the weather.

"You don't have to run off. You're not hurting anyone by hanging out in my parking lot, but there is a pretty serious storm front coming in this afternoon. Are you close to your destination?"

The dog sniffs around, and the woman pulls a roll of pet waste bags from her coat pocket. Well, that's considerably more thoughtful than most folks who walk their dogs back here.

“Um.” She laughs, but it comes out sounding almost hysterical. “Echo and I are on an adventure to see where we want to settle down next.” She shrugs, following the beast over to the tree Shadow *always* pees on. “I had to move out of my last place on pretty short notice, so we’re just checking out our options.”

“Are you considering settling in town?” I ask. “Do you have somewhere to stay?” Her face drains of color despite the cold, telling me that I pushed too hard. “Shit, I bet I sound like a creep. I’m not. I could call my mom or either of my sisters, and they would vouch for me. I just want to make sure you have somewhere safe that you’re going to end up. We’re about to get several feet of snow dumped on us. That’s not the kind of storm you can ride out in a car.”

I mean, I’m sure someone has done it before, but it wouldn’t be a pleasant experience.

Her dark blue eyes widen. “I think I made a wrong turn somewhere. I was trying to head south last night.”

“Well, shit,” I say, shivering as a gust of wind slides through. “You’re in Bay Pines.” The look on her face tells me the name is unfamiliar. “Upstate New York.”

“Jeez,” she whispers. “Okay, so I need to get out of here before the storm hits.”

“The storm is coming in from the southwest and heading northeast.” I pull out my phone. “Let’s check the weather radar.”

* * *

The woman comes to a stop a few feet away as I frown at my phone while trying to find a way to gently let her down. She’s not beating the bad weather no matter how fast she drives.

The storm radius is too big. Even if she successfully made it back to the interstate, she’d have to stop in another town and find a different hotel.

I move the device to my left hand and hold out my right. “I’m Bryant, by the way.”

“Abby,” she says, shaking.

Her hand is frozen, and I fight the urge to ask her to come inside the gym while we talk. I’m already pushing my luck by having her this close.

I have sisters.

I remember all the times my mom beat it into their heads to never allow themselves to be taken to a secondary location.

The logic behind it is sound, if not fucked up that it's necessary to teach women that lesson.

I'm not sure if the building twenty feet away counts as a secondary location, but I'm not trying to frighten the poor woman off. If I do that, she might chance it on the unsafe roads.

My nostrils flare, picking up something sweet and fruity. Raspberry with hints of lemon zest.

Damn.

Abby is an omega.

There's no doubt in my mind about that.

She smells delicious, but there's something even more intense that my nose is having trouble picking up on.

What the hell is that?

It's shocking and stormy.

Almost *electric*.

That doesn't make any sense, but it's true.

Is it that she's a scent match?

Nah. I've met two of those before, and I could immediately tell what was happening.

She's a *super scent match*.

Jesus.

What a way to start the morning.

How the hell did she end up out here, sleeping in my parking lot? We don't run into many omegas up here, and when they do pop up, they're almost always bonded and surrounded by their packs.

Omegas are meant to be coveted and protected.

Did she run from a bad situation?

Is she just one of those omegas who doesn't want to conform with society's expectations of her designation?

If so, more power to her, but she should be careful. While things aren't as bad for unbonded omegas as they used to be, life is more dangerous for them than it is for alphas or betas.

"This is Echo," Abby says, gesturing to the German shepherd.

I picked that up when she spoke to the beast earlier, but pointing it out might scare her.

Omegas are skittish.

I'm now even more on edge about not startling her.

"Nice to meet you both," I say, bringing my phone up to show her the radar. "We're here." I point. "Right in this valley between the mountains. The main problem is, the roads that will bring you back to the interstate are here and here." More pointing. "It's going to send you right toward the storm. The overpasses and bridges freeze first. Are you from around here? Am I mansplaining?"

Abby shakes her head, making her long brown hair fall around her face. "I'm from Georgia. I moved up here at the beginning of summer, but I started in Rochester. How the hell did I get all the way up here?"

"You said you were tired." I shrug. "You must have gone north instead of south. It happens."

"Now I feel like a complete idiot," she says, looking up at me. "I printed out directions to a couple different places. I think I followed the wrong set."

I hear what she says, but I'm also captivated by her.

She's quite pretty, with soft cheeks, puffy lips, and big dark blue eyes. She's on the slender side for an omega but has some curves.

"Don't beat yourself up." I clear my throat, shaking my head. "We all mess up from time to time. Do you believe in fate?"

She squints like she has no idea where that came from.

"My grandfather used to be a truck driver," I say, getting right to the point. "When my siblings and I were little, he used to tell us about the only day in his professional career that he overslept. He swore he'd set his alarm the same way he did every night. If he'd been on time that morning, he would have been right in the middle of a forty-car pileup."

"Wow," she whispers, blinking repeatedly.

"Maybe your mix-up was your guardian angel looking out for you."

"I don't think I got one of those when they were being assigned," she says, laughing awkwardly.

"Maybe it was just bad luck, then." I smile. "How about I call around to the hotels and see if they have any vacancies? I'll pay for a room for you for a few days. Just long enough for the inclement weather to pass. I'm not sure it's safe to head into the storm, at least not in a vehicle without four-wheel drive."

Especially when she mentioned she moved up here during the summer. Our winter weather is an entirely different world when compared to the

milder seasons.

I think parts of Georgia get snow, but it's nothing like the storm we're about to be smacked with.

People die up here every year when they underestimate the weather.

"I drove past two hotels last night. They both had signs that said *no vacancy*," she says, shaking her head.

"They might have people checking out today," I say, shrugging. "At least let me give them a call."

She opens her mouth, likely to protest.

I'm shocked when she gives a shaky nod.

"Okay, thanks, Bryant."

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Chapter Three

Abby

Being woken up by a man knocking on my window was not how I expected the morning to go. Luckily he wasn't angry, but I can't believe I got the dreaded *knock* on night one.

I've heard all about it on social media, and even watched a variety of videos from van-lifers about how to avoid parking in places you're likely to get told to move in the middle of the night.

Unfortunately, I was reckless and avoided pretty much all of their recommendations. If nothing else, I got lucky by being woken up by someone who wasn't aggressive.

Bryant is easy on the eyes and friendly in that way some people manage effortlessly. He ran inside the gym to check on a few things before the storm rolls in.

I've been considering leaving, since he's not around to stop me. Technically speaking, I could just get in the car and risk it, but snow and bad weather scare me.

I have no experience driving in snow or ice. Hurting myself or someone else because I was being stubborn would be unforgivable.

Echo devours her breakfast and drinks half the bowl of water while I dance around, trying to pretend that I don't have to pee so badly it's becoming an issue.

Mr. Friendly Gym Owner could have been extra nice and offered to let me use his bathroom.

Echo whines, pulling me back over to the grass.

I frown as I remind myself not to drive off without grabbing her bowls that are near the back tire.

I don't think I'm going to be one of those hardcore people who manages to live out of their vehicle while making it look easy for social media. I have a tiny bladder, and I even kept myself from drinking much before I went to sleep to avoid this very situation.

I might have to leave to find a gas station or knock on the back door to the gym to ask to use the bathroom here. Only, going inside a closed business with a stranger sounds like a great way to get myself killed.

It's also probably not fair to let him pay for a hotel room.

Will he expect something in exchange?

Ugh.

Maybe I should just leave.

* * *

I toss the pet-waste bag into the dumpster, head back to the car, load up Echo's bowls, and get her into the front seat.

Damn.

I need to move her to the back, but she can chill there for now. Heading around to the driver's side, I open the door and pull my hand sanitizer from the cup holder. It's freezing as I slather my hands, and I end up bouncing on my toes.

I need to find a bathroom ASAP.

My head whips up as Bryant comes out the back door. He spins and locks the top lock before crossing the parking lot in long strides.

Shit.

I missed my chance to beg to use the bathroom.

My gaze stays locked on Bryant as he comes closer. That man is massive—definitely an alpha. While I got within a few feet of him, I couldn't smell him. The wind direction is probably to thank for that.

Even without sniffing him, his size gives away his designation. He has to have close to a foot in height on me.

That's not unusual, though.

I am on the shorter side for an omega at five-five. Sometimes I try to claim an extra half inch, but my shoes are usually to thank if I'm closer to five-six.

Most alphas hover and get really close once they realize I'm an omega, but there's every possibility he didn't pick up my scent.

Either way, I thought it was considerate that he kept a few feet of space between us as we talked. He must have known I was skittish because even when he showed me his phone, he did so with his arm extended.

I'm sure he could have grabbed me, tossed me over his shoulder, and taken me into the gym if he wanted to.

I'd like to think Echo would have bitten his face off, but I have no idea how she would react.

All I do know is that I wouldn't stand a chance against an alpha his size.

The straight brownish-black hair on the top of his head falls over his forehead as he comes around the front of my car.

Echo climbs over onto the driver's seat, and I give her a shove back inside the vehicle before closing the door.

That dog will hop out with no warning.

Bryant once again gives me a solid three or four feet of space between us.

I'm not sure what the look on his face means, but his deep blue eyes are expressive enough that I get nervous. He sports a short dark brown beard, but it doesn't cover his displeasure as his jaw clenches.

Okay, this doesn't seem good *at all*.

He swipes a hand through his hair—which immediately falls back onto his forehead—and shoves his hands into the pockets on his jeans, rocking on his heels. “Okay, I have some bad news, but also some good news. The hotels are fully booked. They added my number to the cancellation list, but it's not looking good.”

“Okay,” I say, wondering if I could ask him to unlock the gym so I can run inside to pee before continuing this conversation.

He speaks before I work up the courage to bring it up. “Luckily, I have a backup option. Luka and Lawson are my roommates. They're brothers, and they own Maxwell's, which is right across the parking lot. There's an apartment on the second floor. No one lives there. They spend the night sometimes when they're exhausted and don't want to drive home, but with the storm coming in, it'll be closed for at least a few days.”

“The bar?” I glance over my shoulder toward the building in question.

“It's a combination bar and restaurant,” he says, nodding.

My mind races.

Okay, Bryant has roommates who own the place that I drove around last night when I was trying to pick my sleeping location.

It would be amazing to be able to ride the storm out in an actual building rather than my car, if for no other reason than to have access to a bathroom.

Am I really considering staying in an apartment owned by a stranger?

I think I am.

All of the nomadic content I watched said to trust your gut. I've seen videos with stories of people needing to be towed out in the middle of the night, others having a stranger offer them a place to stay, and even more videos highlighting how amazing some people can be.

What if I'm the idiot who ends up on one of those missing person's TV shows?

What if I'm the dumbass who says no to a genuinely kind offer and ends up freezing to death in a snowdrift because I was too afraid to accept help when I needed it?

Dammit.

I wish I'd never left Georgia.

Since I can't go back in time, I have to make a decision and stick with it.

"You're sure I wouldn't have enough time to beat the storm if I left right now?" I ask, swallowing thickly.

"You might." He shrugs. "Or you might not. If you were my sister, I'd tell you not to risk it."

"You're sure they won't mind?" I ask. "Echo is hairy. She will leave a trail of fur in her wake. I can try to clean up—"

"Lawson has a Belgian Malinois named Shadow. I promise, they won't even know the difference." He chuckles. "Come on, I'm not going to be able to relax if I know you're out here trying to ride out the storm in your *car*. No one is using the space. You might as well take advantage of it."

I nod. "Okay, thanks, Bryant."

God, I really hope this isn't how I end up on one of those true-crime TV specials.

Chapter Four

Abby

The apartment is accessible by a set of wooden stairs near the employee entrance at the back of the building. Echo wants to dawdle and sniff everything, but she gets excited as she scrambles up the stairs.

We make it to the landing as Bryant gets the door open, and Echo drags me inside like the uncouth beast she is.

“Sometimes she pretends to have manners, but I guess today is not one of those days,” I say over my shoulder, laughing awkwardly.

“They get excited.” Bryant shuts the door behind him and flips on the lights. “I bet she can smell Shadow. She must be looking around for a friend to play with. Sorry, pup. He’s not here.”

“She’ll live,” I grunt as she drags me through the small living room toward the kitchen.

“You can let her off the leash. Well, as long as she won’t bite me.” He chuckles. “Actually, even being leashed probably wouldn’t stop her if she wanted to get my ass.”

“Pretend you know how to behave,” I say, giving her a tug.

Echo barely notices.

I finally give up, walking to her and grabbing the handle on her harness. “Sit.”

She looks at me over her shoulder as I repeat the command.

“I’m not letting you off the leash until you sit,” I tell her, shrugging.

She sits back on her haunches, and I unclip the pink and purple leash. As soon as she knows she’s free, she takes off to smell Bryant.

He’s brave, squatting down and patting her back.

“You are solid for a lady doggy.” He chuckles as she bumps her blocky head against his arm until he gives her scratches. “Just as big of an attention fiend as Shadow.”

While he’s preoccupied, I glance around, taking in the space. Most of the space is an open floor plan until you hit the tiny kitchen on the right and the dining room on the left. There’s a wooden table pushed against the far wall.

Two barstools line this side of the counter. A row of top cabinets block some of the view, but I can make out the appliances in what little of the kitchen is visible from here.

To the left is a hallway, and the door straight ahead is open.

A bathroom.

The ache in my bladder has moved to almost painful.

“Let me show you around,” Bryant says from behind me.

“I see the bathroom,” I say, moving toward it. “I’m going to pop in there real quick, if that’s okay. Then I would love a tour.” I take off to the sound of him chuckling.

“Shit. Sorry. I should have thought of that.”

* * *

“In here,” Bryant calls out as I step into the hallway from the bathroom.

The relief is extreme, but I already feel like I have to pee again. It could be anxiety. Or I overtaxed my bladder, and now it doesn’t know what the hell is going on.

I follow the sound of his voice and step into a sparsely decorated bedroom. It has a queen-size bed that stretches across the room horizontally.

The headboard starts on the wall to my right, and the bed takes up the majority of the space.

There’s a window on the wall opposite me that provides a decent amount of light. Dark gray curtains frame the edges, and I bet they help block the lights from the parking lot.

The left side of the room has a dresser with a decent-sized TV perched on it.

“I have no idea when the sheets were last changed, so I wanted to handle that before I left.” Bryant pulls a fitted sheet onto the mattress and

nods to the wall behind me. “I left fresh pillowcases on top of the pillows on the dresser. Sorry, it’s not exactly hotel-level service.”

Echo circles around the end of the bed, following me over as I grab one of the pillows. It appears to be clean and without stains, but even if there were, I couldn’t complain.

I smile over at Bryant. “I’m more than capable of putting on fresh sheets by myself, but I appreciate you being a thoughtful host.”

“I failed with the tour.” He chuckles. “So I had to redeem myself somewhere. The door at the other end of the hall is another bedroom, but the guys use it as a spare office. The folding doors in the hallway are where you’ll find the washer and dryer. If you need to do laundry, I would tackle that soon.”

“Thank you so much.” I shake the pillow, struggling to get it into the pillowcase.

A rich, woodsy scent fills the air, and I fight the urge to bring the pillow to my nose.

There are hints of some type of citrus combined with fresh pine. It’s manly and delicious, and my senses are obsessed.

Holy shit.

Bryant’s roommate is a scent match.

At least one of the brothers he mentioned is.

Packs often end up being filled with compatible scents. When an omega meets one alpha from a pack, they often find themselves drawn to the other members.

Technically, to be a pack, there has to be an omega, at least legally speaking. That doesn’t change the fact that alphas are drawn to those who they’re emotionally compatible with, sometimes before they ever meet their omega.

It’s one of those random parts of life.

Nature seems to anticipate who will work in a family pack, and it somehow brings them together as they wait for their missing piece.

Does that mean I’ll also be drawn to Bryant’s scent?

It’s highly likely.

The man has been a little too respectful in regard to giving me space.

How am I ever supposed to scent him if he stays five feet away from me at all times?

“Sorry, I really am a shitty host. Let me help.” Bryant crosses the room, grabbing the other pillow. He shakes it into the pillowcase, and his head tilts. “Are you okay?”

Another story, whenever you're ready.

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“Yeah, all good.” I force a smile. “Thank you for letting me stay here.”

“No problem,” he says, finishing his task. He strides over and tosses the pillow near the top of the bed. “The comforter is pretty thick, but I did want to mention, there are extra blankets in the hall closet. If the power goes out during the storm, you’ll need them. This place doesn’t have a generator.”

“Is there a good chance of losing power?” I ask, finally getting the pillowcase in place. Stepping over, I toss it onto the bed and turn back to Bryant.

“You know, I’m not exactly sure,” he says, shrugging. “We lose power regularly up at our cabin, but we have a generator, so it’s not a big deal. Here, maybe twenty percent of the time?”

Okay, so that’s an eighty percent chance the power will stay on. I’d normally like those odds, but I’ve had a rash of bad luck lately that makes it hard to stay optimistic.

I might end up needing those extra blankets after all.

“The stove is gas, so you’ll be able to cook, even if the power goes out. At least on the burners.” Bryant shoves his hands into his pockets. “Do you know how to use a gas stove?”

I nod. “Yeah, but you have to light the burner with a match or something, right?”

“Exactly,” he says, nodding toward the door. “Why don’t I give you a quick recap?”

“Okay, thanks.”

He strides out into the kitchen, and Echo follows like she thinks she might get a snack.

Bryant shows me a box of long matches in one of the kitchen drawers and goes over what I'll do if I want to cook while the power is out.

He steps around me, and my nostrils flare, desperately trying to scent the air.

His scent is something I've never smelled before, and I instinctively sway toward him as he opens one of the top cabinets.

"This is where you'll find the plates and cups. Silverware is in the top drawer. Cooking utensils are in the ones below that." He shuts the cabinet and bends over, opening one of the doors on the bottom. "Pots and pans are down here. There's not much variety, but it should be enough to get you through the storm."

I hear his words, but I'm more focused on how he smells.

At first, I get hints of fresh rain, but the more I analyze it, the more confused I become. There's something stormy and electric mixed in with his natural scent.

It's indescribable.

It's more like a feeling than a scent, and a shiver runs down my spine.

He closes the cabinet and spins to face me. "There might be a few things in the pantry." He points to the door just past the refrigerator. "But I doubt there's much. You'll want to run to the store before they close."

"Okay, thanks."

Bryant nods. "Let's exchange numbers before I forget. I want you to be able to reach me if you need anything."

And that's exactly what we do.

* * *

Bryant leaves me the apartment key. I would be lying if I said I wasn't shocked. I'm not sure there's much in the apartment that someone could steal, but still. It's a lot of faith to put in a stranger.

I force Echo to come with me to find a store that's open, mostly because I don't want to risk her chewing on something if she's left alone. She's usually pretty well-behaved, but all dogs can chew when they're bored or anxious.

The grocery store that's close to Maxwell's is closed, so I have to venture farther out. It takes a little work, but I find a mom-and-pop store that also has a gas station on the other side of the building. The small

grocery store smells amazing and looks clean, so I grab food for at least three or four days, some dog bones, a chew toy for Echo, and fill up with gas before heading back to the apartment.

This entire town is weird.

It goes from a highway to this adorable little downtown area in the blink of an eye. The gym and bar are just two or three minutes away from the residential streets of the cozy little town.

It's picturesque, like something out of a Christmas movie.

I kinda love it.

If the sky wasn't gray and gloomy, I would have spent some time exploring, but nearly all the stores and shops were closed.

Echo paces the apartment as I put away the items that require refrigeration. The rest I leave in the bags on the counter, mostly because it feels invasive to dig around in someone else's pantry to find space to put it away.

The fridge is stocked with beer, water, soda, condiments, and nothing else. It's easy to see this place isn't lived in regularly, but it's warm and lacks that stale smell that usually takes over when a place sits unoccupied for too long.

Now that the refrigerated items are put away, I'm not sure what to do with myself. It's awkward being in someone else's space.

Echo comes up, bumping my hand as I stand in the kitchen.

"You want to go out again before the storm hits?" I ask, giving her scratches and patting her hard head. Her tail whips around, smacking against the cabinet. "You're such a mess." I laugh. "Doesn't that hurt? Or do you just ignore it because you're that excited?"

She barks, bouncing from side to side with her front paws.

Damn.

I got her too worked up.

We're going to need to do some serious laps around the parking lot. While she's mostly out of the chew-on-everything phase, I'd still rather not risk it.

It's definitely time to tire her ass out. Maybe I'll take a warm shower when we get back.

That sounds heavenly.

It'll be my reward for having to drag my ass back outside in the cold.

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Chapter Five

Lawson

It's not even five, and I've been driving in the dark for over an hour. The sun always starts setting ridiculously early during the winter, usually about four-fifteen to four-thirty, but thanks to the storm, it's been middle-of-the-night dark since I climbed into my truck.

The game plan was to leave no later than two-thirty or three p.m. to ensure I made it home before the storm blew in.

That clearly didn't pan out, but shit happens.

I needed to give the cabin Luka and I inherited when our family pack moved to Texas a final once-over before winter hits hard. It's up deep in the mountains, and I won't make that trip again until closer to March or April. I was on the way out when I saw the neighbors struggling with their water pump.

It delayed my departure, but up there, you help your neighbors. Not many companies and services are available that far out, so you do what you have to do to help each other out.

The snow is coming down so heavily by the time I make it into town that I have no choice but to ride out the bad weather at the apartment above the bar.

Even driving the extra fifteen minutes to our house would be irresponsible. Considering that's how long it takes when it's not dumping down snow, it would probably take double that with how slow I've been going. Having the opportunity to keep an eye on both businesses isn't a bad thing, anyway.

My phone has been dead since I left the cabin, but once I get inside, I'll charge it and let the guys know what's up.

I make the turn into the parking lot and frown as I spot the light streaming around the blinds.

Huh.

It looks like one of them got stuck in town or made the call to stay at the apartment. There's only one bed, which is going to make it a pain in the ass, but I'll sleep on the floor in the office if it comes down to it.

* * *

Warmth smacks me in the face as I push open the door, working on getting my key out of the lock. It's dark in the living room, meaning it must have been the light in the bedroom or office that I saw when driving up.

Huh.

Maybe they just forgot to shut off the lights.

I kick the door closed, flip both locks, and work on getting myself out of my layers as I stomp the snow off my boots. This place is so small there's no mudroom.

I'm starving.

There's not going to be anything except canned soups and nonperishables in the pantry. I hid a twelve-pack of beer in one of the cabinets last time I was here, but I might just run downstairs to grab a cold one.

The restaurant has burgers, chicken fingers, and fries. It's not exactly professional to go rooting around in the fridges, but desperate times and all that.

The low growling that comes from behind me makes me smile.

Shadow was pissed when he realized I wasn't going to take him with me up to the cabin. He's mouthy under normal circumstances. When he's moody, it's a whole different ball game.

I chuckle, dropping my coat on the hook by the door before bending down to unlace my boots. "Yeah, yeah, keep talking shit, you spoiled pain in the ass."

The growling gets louder, and my head tilts.

He must be holding a grudge.

I'll make it up to him with a burger.

"What did you do to get yourself dropped off here?" I ask, pulling off my boots.

Wait...

My phone is dead.

Neither Bryant nor Luka knows I was coming here rather than home.

That must mean one of them is here.

The growling gets louder, and the little asshole nips at my ass. That wasn't a full-blown bite, and he'd better be thankful that my jeans protected me from the worst of it.

"You little shit. I've had about enough of your attitude," I growl back. "I was only gone for one single night."

Shadow barks, but it comes from farther away, and it sounds off.

I spin around, and my jaw falls.

That's fucking weird.

"You're not my dog," I say, my tone accusatory. "How did you get in here?"

It's a German shepherd, but I can't tell anything else by sight. Luka or Bryant must have found it and brought it up here to get it out of the storm?

I'm confused.

Where the hell are the guys?

"Hey, you're okay. You're in my apartment," I say, keeping my tone level. "You can bark and growl at me in my space. I won't hold that against you. I'm sure you're scared and unsure about what's happening, but if you bite me again, I will bite your ass back. House rules."

I turn to the side, approaching at a ninety-degree angle.

It amps up the growling, so I stop, keeping my arms close to my sides.

Back when I was a kid, the advice was to hold our hands out to let the dog sniff us. In reality, that advice is dumb and a great way to get yourself bitten.

I stop as the beast tucks its tail and its hackles rise.

"Ahh, you're really not feeling having me in your space," I say, keeping my voice soft as I take a step back.

I've avoided making eye contact, but I give a quick check.

Still no one around.

I want to yell for my brother or Bryant to see what the hell is going on.

I can't do that, though.

Not without riling the dog even more.

"Well, even though it doesn't make much sense when I think it through, I thought you were Shadow," I say, staying completely still. "You're clearly

not. I made a mistake there. I would have been a lot quieter when greeting you, if I had known. Hopefully you won't hold a grudge."

A minute or two passes as I avoid moving.

The dog finally stops growling.

"That's a good pup," I murmur, keeping my tone steady. "I'm not going to hurt you, and you're not going to hurt me. We got off on the wrong foot, but that's fixable."

The door in the hallway opens, and the dog barks, moving to a low, guttural growl. It's not like I speak canine, but I am good at deciphering their behavior. That was a warning that someone else is in the apartment, but he or she thinks they have it handled.

I blink repeatedly as a woman, clad only in a towel, comes around the corner.

The shock on her face mirrors my own.

"I'm Lawson," I say, barely holding myself back from lifting my arms to show her my palms. The dog wouldn't like any sudden movements, so I keep very still. "This is my apartment. Well, it's mine and my brother's."

"Abby," she says, her voice coming out mostly a squeak. "Bryant said I could stay here. He told me he cleared it with one of you. I'm so sorry." Her hand wraps around the top of her towel, and she walks over to the dog. "Echo, enough. Sit your butt down and hush. You're supposed to be a lady. Act like it."

I nearly chuckle.

Shepherds don't work that way.

Echo's head whips back, and I almost think she's going to nip at her owner. Her body language makes a lot more sense now. She didn't want me getting anywhere close to the hallway where her human was located.

If she had nipped at the woman, she would have been doing so to tell her to stay behind her.

She's still riled, and she hasn't decided if I'm a threat.

Her natural inclination is to trust her instincts, but for the most part, dogs want to please their owners. She's coded to follow the command the woman issued. She's just not sure that it's a good idea.

The woman's wet brown hair falls around her shoulders as she stands from petting the dog.

Right.

She introduced herself.

What was it?

Abby.

It's a pretty name.

Huh.

I can't help but wonder how she knows Bryant. He must have asked Luka if it was okay for her to stay because I certainly had no idea about this.

"It's no problem," I say, shrugging. "Unfortunately, I never got the message. I was planning to ride the storm out here because I got back to town late, now I'm snowed in with you."

I grimace, waiting for the freak-out that I assume is coming.

"I, uh, my phone is dead. I was up in the mountains getting my family's cabin ready for the storm." I clear my throat. She's still not talking, and apparently I can't shut up until the silence is filled. "I'll stay out of your way. Once you're done changing, I'd like to do the same. I keep backup clothes here, and my extra charger is in the bedroom. I need a shower, but after that, I can head downstairs to the restaurant to hang out there. I'll sleep on the couch." I toss a thumb over my shoulder, pointing at the sofa. "You won't even know I'm here unless I'm asleep."

"No, it's totally fine," she says, laughing awkwardly. "This is your place, and you're kinda ridiculously tall. I'll sleep on the couch. You can take the bed."

That won't work for me, but we can tackle it once she's dressed.

I was raised right. No woman will ever sleep on the couch while I take the bed. My big ass can sleep on the floor in the office, if it comes down to it.

"I'll change, and the bedroom is all yours." She backs toward the hallway, keeping a death grip on her towel.

Once she's gone, Echo watches me warily.

She's no longer in attack mode, but I don't think she would like it if I tried to head toward the hallway.

I don't make eye contact as I slide around her and go into the kitchen. There's a bag of dog treats in the pantry, and I dig inside, grabbing out a few.

Shadow would be pissed if he could see me trying to win over another dog.

He's a judgmental fucker.

Still, I love his spoiled ass.

I slide around the end of the counter, and Echo has moved to sit in front of the hallway door.

“You’re a brave girl,” I tell her, approaching slowly. I stop a few feet away to give her a bubble of safety. “You were just trying to protect your mom. Huh? Only this isn’t your home, and you didn’t know the rules of how things work here. I bet you were confused.” I squat and break off half of one of the bacon sticks Shadow loves so much. They’re pure trash with no nutritional value, but I eat junk, so I figure it would be cruel not to give him a few goodies here or there. Tossing down half the treat, I back toward the couch. “I’m going to go sit down. If you’d like to come say hello, I’d love to have a do-over introduction. I’ll even give you scratches to make up for my mistake. If you’re still too riled to want to be touched, I understand that too.”

I drop the other half of the treat about halfway between Echo and the couch. Taking a seat, I toss another piece by my feet and reach over, grabbing the remote.

I flip through the channels and avoid checking what she’s doing, but I hold my other hand out on the cushion with another treat.

She’s quiet as she comes in and eats the one on the floor.

“You can have this one too, if you want it,” I say, giving my hand a little shake.

She doesn’t immediately take the bait, which is fine.

I put the weather forecast on and keep my eyes on the TV.

Not even a minute passes before her warm, scratchy tongue licks the treat from my palm in one go. She keeps her face on the couch cushion as she crunches away, swallowing down the snack.

I move slowly, digging my fingers into her muzzle as I keep my gaze on the TV. “That was good, huh? You forgive me for startling you?”

She bumps her head against my wrist, and I grin. I can win over almost any animal with enough time.

Too bad my luck with women is nowhere near as good.

Chapter Six

Abby

I text Bryant to let him know his roommate is here. Also maybe a little to verify that the man is who he says he is. Luckily, Bryant confirms that's what Lawson looks like. He also assures me that he won't hurt me.

It's kinda reassuring, but also...

I just met Bryant this morning, so I should probably take anything he says with a grain of salt.

I get dressed in a matching set of Christmas pajamas and frown when I spot myself in the mirror above the dresser.

Dammit.

I didn't bring in my makeup.

I have my brush, but my hair is naturally wavy. I only ever brush or comb my hair *before* a shower. Otherwise, I just anger the hair gods even worse than I do on a normal day.

My system is freaking out, wondering if he's the one who smells like citrus and pine.

God.

It might be better if it's his brother's scent I've been obsessing about all afternoon. Then again, I was crazy attracted to Bryant's scent as well. There's a big chance I'll also be attracted to Lawson's, if I haven't smelled his yet.

Dammit.

Why didn't I bring in my makeup bag?

Maybe I'll covertly grab it when I take Echo for a walk.

Rolling my shoulders back, I accept that I'm just not going to be able to give a good second impression.

My first was even worse, but that's life.

I let myself out of the bedroom and take my towel back into the bathroom, tossing it over the curtain rod. Normally, I would close the shower curtain to prevent mold, but I don't know what else to do with my towel.

My shoulders shake as I exhale heavily, making my way out into the living room.

My eyes bug when Lawson and Echo come into view. Lawson has his sleeves pushed up, and I'm surprised to see a multitude of black and gray tattoos. That's not the shocking part, though.

Echo is up on the couch with her paws on his thighs, nuzzling her face to his chest as he gives her scratches.

"Oh my god," I whisper, stumbling forward. "I'm so sorry. She has questionable manners, but she knows she's not a lapdog."

"It's nothing to worry about." Lawson chuckles good-naturedly. "Any dog is a lapdog if you've got a big enough lap, which I do. She probably smells Shadow. He's my Belgian Malinois. I haven't seen him since last night, but dogs have excellent senses of smell."

"I know you're waiting to change and shower," I say, aiming a finger over my shoulder. "I tossed my towel over the shower curtain rod in the bathroom, since I didn't know what else to do with it, but I can grab it if it'll be in your way."

"Nah, it won't be hurting anything," he says, smiling.

Jesus.

Lawson is handsome.

I think.

It's kinda hard to tell with the long blondish-brown hair that falls around his face and full mountain-man beard. The ends of his hair fall a few inches past his shoulders, and the man is wearing a legit flannel shirt.

I mean, it looks warm and all, but it's not something I would pick out at a store.

Maybe that was all they had in his size?

He's massive.

At least six-four, and he's got a thick build with strong shoulders and a soft stomach.

I've never been drawn to the mountain-man aesthetic, but even I have to admit, Lawson is a vibe. He's got dark, expressive eyes and an easy smile.

He also won over my dog.

Okay, Tommy's dog.

Still, it counts.

I've heard that you should watch how a man treats babies, old people, pets, and his own mother. I can only verify one out of four of those, but the energy in the apartment lightened when he came in.

I think that says it all.

Sometimes I would dread when Tommy would come home because the house would go from comfortable to suffocating.

"All right, pretty lady," Lawson says, giving Echo's chest a push until she settles fully onto the couch cushion next to him. "I gotta go clean up. Once I'm done, I can run down to the restaurant and grab some burgers for dinner? If you're hungry?"

"I bought canned soup and stuff for sandwiches." I glance over my shoulder toward the kitchen. "I can eat that. I don't want to cause you any extra trouble."

"I'll be cooking for me either way. I'm starving." He shrugs and makes his way closer, holding out his hand. "I know we did this before, but it was a little hectic. I'm Lawson Maxwell."

"Abigail, but everyone calls me Abby." I smile and shake his hand. "Sorry about our first introduction. I was in shock."

"No need to apologize. Nothing exciting ever happens up here during winter." He chuckles a low, throaty sound, and a damn shiver runs down my spine. "Anyway, I'm going to hop in the shower."

I nod as he heads toward the hallway.

I've never had to share space with a complete stranger. Hell, I never even had to adapt to a roommate in college... Mostly because I never went to college, but this is like a whole new world for me.

I'm still confused about how I ended up trapped in a snowstorm with a sexy mountain man.

What is happening to my life?

* * *

Lawson comes out a while later clad in dark gray sweats and a white long-sleeve shirt.

There's no doubt about it.

He's a beast of a man.

I'm perched on the couch, trying to act relaxed.

Echo has been lying with her head on my feet since I pissed her off by making her get off the couch. No matter how hard I swiped the material, there's still a layer of fur. I'll have to buy a lint roller and give it a solid once-over before I leave.

She perks up upon spotting Lawson.

I almost chuckle.

I feel similarly.

It's kinda scary to be sharing space with an unknown alpha, but it's also nice not to be alone. If Tommy managed to track me down, I think Lawson would tell him to get lost.

While Tommy is an alpha, he's nowhere close to Lawson's size. Plus, Lawson is very rugged in a way Tommy could never dream of being.

My temporary roommate was winterizing a cabin before he came here. I'm sure he knows what to do if things get sketchy with the storm.

I'm totally ill-prepared when it comes to dealing with a snowstorm, so having him here is a huge relief.

The man in question tosses a thumb toward the door. "I'm going to run down to the restaurant—"

"You really don't need to leave on my account," I say, cutting him off.

"There's nothing to cook up here," he says as he crosses the room and shoves his feet into his boots. "I'm going to grab a few things to make dinner."

"Oh," I say sheepishly.

That's right.

He did mention something about that.

At first he insinuated that he could hang out down there to avoid us having to share space, and I guess I got hyper focused on that.

He grabs his jacket, pulls it on, and opens the door.

A gust of bitter cold air spills inside, and I shiver as he sticks his head out, examining the conditions.

Echo pops up, shaking out her long fur.

"You wanna take a bathroom break, Echo?" Lawson asks, closing the door. He squats down, digging his fingers into the fur around her jaw. "The snow is only going to get thicker." He looks at me. "There's already close to six inches on the steps. We have a snow shovel in the storage room in the

restaurant, but it'll be an eventful trip down the stairs. I don't mind carrying her."

I spin around on the couch, peeking out the blinds. It's dark and impossible to see much of anything, even with the streetlights.

"Are you sure?" I ask. "If you shovel off the steps, I can take her. I mean, I'd have had to figure it out either way if you weren't here. It's not like I can avoid letting her out to use the bathroom."

"It's no problem." He chuckles. "If I pick you up, are you going to roll around like an angry alligator? Shadow does when he's in a bad mood." He pats Echo's head and stands. "Maybe I'll run out and make a path. Then I'll come back for her."

"Thank you so much," I say sincerely.

Jeez.

I really was unprepared for how difficult it is to ride out a serious storm up here.

* * *

Lawson and Echo are gone for so long that I kinda start panicking. There's no way he got very far if he stole my dog.

Not that it makes any sense that he would want to.

A strange scraping noise catches my attention, and I kneel on the couch, peeking out the window.

Lawson has the snow shovel he mentioned, and he's shoveling off the stairs.

Where the hell is Echo?

Hopefully he tied her leash to a pole or something. She will run off if she spots something exciting. She can usually be coaxed back with treats or by repeatedly calling her name, but she's unfamiliar with this area. I don't want her to get turned around and lose her way.

Hopping off the couch, I pull the door open and peek outside.

Lawson is headed back down the stairs, and Echo waits at the bottom with her tail wagging.

That freaking traitor.

If I was the one on the stairs, she would have barreled up past me, knocking me into the railing. Then she'd run back down, probably loop

around the parking lot, and come back up all over again, all before I had the chance to get to the landing.

Before I bought her the harness she has on now, Tommy had her in a collar. That thing was miserable for both of us, but the harness makes walking her much easier. Even then, she's strong as hell, and she has been known to drag me around Tommy's neighborhood. Anything from seeing a cat to a squirrel to another person would get her excited to the point that I was running behind her to keep her from getting away.

Maybe once I get a job, I'll get her behavioral training.

* * *

Lawson and Echo are covered in snow as they come back inside the apartment. He doesn't step off the small tiled area right in front of the door, but he does hit a knee, wiping her legs off with a small hand towel he pulls from his pocket.

"She did great," he says, smiling as he unclips the leash from Echo's harness. "I have to run back down to the restaurant, but it shouldn't take me too long. Do you eat burgers and fries? How about chicken tenders?"

"I eat everything," I say. "Thank you so much."

He nods and disappears back out the door. The cold air that comes in even during his quick trip out makes me shiver, and I frown.

I don't know how I would have survived in my car.

There's every possibility that I wouldn't have.

People freeze to death in this kind of weather.

Damn.

That's a sobering thought.

I'm so damn lucky I decided to sleep in Bryant's parking lot. I'm not sure what would have happened to us if I had taken a different exit.

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Chapter Seven

Lawson

Abby meets me at the door as I carry in the pans of food. “Can I take those from you?”

“You can,” I say, handing them over. “Just be careful. The bottom is hot.”

Echo follows her to the breakfast nook, but circles back to me as I toe out of my boots. It’s hot in the apartment, and I want to get out of my heavy coat.

I still take the time to squat down, giving her scratches.

“Did you look after your mom while I was gone?” I ask, keeping my voice low. “You did, didn’t you? That means I owe you a treat.”

Echo’s tail wags, and her body slides from side to side.

She’s a good dog, but she’s also desperate for instructions and a job. If I had to guess, I’d say she’s mixed with Belgian Malinois, though that’s just a hunch based on her temperament and physical features. It could be that she’s still an adolescent.

It’s hard to tell.

She’s nowhere close to as confident as Shadow is when taking a command.

She has all the right instincts, though.

When I told her to stay at the bottom of the stairs, she ran up twice. After I corrected her for the third time, she stayed put and continued to watch me for further instructions.

It might be that Abby hasn’t had the time to work with her, or maybe the woman is too tenderhearted to correct Echo’s bad behavior. The latter is problematic because female shepherds, even more so than males, are known

to test boundaries when they notice rules aren't being enforced. They get pushy and think they know best.

I give Echo a final pat and stand, pulling myself out of my jacket before hanging it on the hook.

By the time I make it to the table, Abby has pulled off the tops of the pans.

"Wow, this is a ton of food," she says with wide eyes.

I shrug, making my way into the kitchen to wash my hands. "I'm a big guy."

"Yeah," she agrees, nodding.

I have no idea why my shoulders pull back.

Is that a compliment?

It feels like it.

* * *

The two of us dig in, and it's clear we were both hungry.

Abby piles her burger high with lettuce, tomato, cheese, and pickles, but no condiments.

It's weird.

Kinda cute.

Nonetheless, strange.

She groans upon taking her first bite, and my head tilts.

Exactly how hungry was she?

I left my phone up here charging, but I need to check it after we finish eating.

Is she homeless?

Is that why Bryant gave her a place to stay?

Echo circles the table, watching for any sign someone is going to offer her a bite. When no one does, she gets pushier and pushier. Once she starts weaving under the table, forcing her body against my legs, I stand.

"Has she eaten today?" I ask, patting my thigh to get her to come out from under the table.

"She had breakfast, but she's always asking for table scraps," Abby says. "I'm so sorry. I can feed her."

"Nah, that's okay," I say, shaking my head. "She's not starving. She can wait until after we finish our meal."

I stride over to the hall closet and grab out a small throw blanket before bringing it into the living room and tossing it down on the floor.

“Come on, Echo,” I call out, hitting a knee next to the small blanket. She barrels over, and I chuckle. “We’ll teach you some manners if it kills me.” I point to the blanket and give her a scratch behind the ear. “Place.”

Her head tilts.

I try again with no response.

“I take it you don’t know that one. That’s okay.” I would normally start this type of training with her leash on, but I don’t want to make a huge thing of it in front of Abby. I stand, grab the back of Echo’s harness, and redirect her. “This is where you’re meant to be if you hear the word *place*.”

She sits, but doesn’t look happy about it.

“You can sit if you’d like,” I say, shrugging. “You’ll probably be more comfortable if you lie down.”

Her chocolate-brown eyes meet mine, but she fails to stretch out.

I bend over and pat the material, giving her the direct command of, “Lie down.” This time she complies, and I grin. “Good girl. Now stay.”

I keep my hands up, palm out, to signal that I don’t want her to follow.

This is the first step to giving her a safe place to return to when someone can’t be watching her nonstop.

I promised her a treat for keeping an eye on Abby, and I never break my word. She just needs to relax a little before she’s rewarded.

Echo keeps her eyes on mine, and as soon as I move to take my seat, she pops off the blanket.

“I saw that coming a mile away.” I stand, making my way back across the room. “Echo, place.”

Consistency is key.

She’ll get the hang of it.

She just needs gentle but firm guidance on how she’s supposed to act.

* * *

There’s every possibility I’m a pushy bastard.

Echo isn’t my dog.

Abby is a guest.

She might not want me interacting with Echo at all.

“I’m sorry that she’s being such a pain.” Abby peeks over her shoulder to check on her pup.

“She’s really not.” I smile. “She’s actually getting the hang of it really quickly. How old is she?”

Her face goes blank, and she stares at the ceiling, blinking rapidly. “Like two. Maybe two and a half?”

My head tilts.

She doesn’t know how old her dog is?

It’s probably not that unusual for an owner to just have a rough estimate.

“Has she been spayed?”

Abby nods. “Yeah, it was done right before I moved up here.”

Was that a creepy question?

Possibly.

It’s also better to know ahead of time since Shadow hasn’t been neutered.

“Where are you from?” I ask to change the subject.

“Georgia.” She dips her fries in a horrible combination of mostly mustard with a tiny bit of ketchup, and I know my face must be a mask of horror.

“How did you end up here?”

“That’s kind of a long story,” she says, studying my face.

“I’ve got time, but no pressure.”

“Let’s see...” She hums. “Okay, I grew up in Georgia. My mom died when I was seventeen. My older brother and his omega took me in. They let me stay with them as they built their pack, but it was awkward, and I knew I’d overstayed my welcome.”

“Did you grow up in a pack?” I ask before taking a bite of my burger.

“Yeah,” she says, her head bobbing. “I mean, kinda? One of my dads died when I was three. The other passed away when I was fifteen. My mom kinda lost her will to live after that. I’m the youngest. My older brother was already settled down. My older sister was nineteen. I guess our mom felt like she’d raised us. Also, she was just crazy depressed...”

“I’m sorry,” I say sincerely. “That must have been difficult on all of you.”

“It wasn’t easy, that’s for sure.” She grabs her bottle of water, taking a long swig. “Anyway, I knew I had to get out of my brother’s house before

the baby was born. They'd already asked me to move into the garage apartment, and I totally understood why. My brother's omega, Leslie, is great, but it was hard on her to have an unbonded omega around her other alphas, especially while she was pregnant."

Well, damn.

I ended up snowed in with an omega.

What are the chances of that?

They have to be astronomically small.

Jesus Christ.

No wonder she kept a few feet of space between us. She was probably hoping I wouldn't pick up her scent.

I can't believe she didn't lose her shit when she found out she was going to be trapped with an unknown alpha for a few days.

"Anyway, they wanted me to head out and start my own life, but I had no luck with being matched." As Abby fidgets in her chair, I have the urge to stretch over and pat her bouncing knee. "I must have sniffed five hundred scent cards, and none of them clicked. I finally got desperate and tried an app for alphas and omegas who wanted to find a connection outside of going by what nature said was a compatible scent."

"How did that work out for you?"

"Not very well." She laughs mirthlessly.

Echo must sense her owner's distress because she comes over and rests her head on Abby's lap. She wasn't told she could leave her mat, but I would never correct her under the circumstances. Her need to comfort Abby supersedes any command.

"I met a guy that I really liked," Abby says softly. "He came down to Georgia for two weeks, and we clicked. We'd been talking for months. When it came time for him to head back to New York, he asked me to come with him..."

I stay quiet.

Is that where she's headed now?

Or she's already been there and is now trying to get back home to Georgia?

"My brother told me not to go with him," she finally says. "Austin said he got bad vibes. I was stubborn. I felt terrible about the strain I was putting on his pack, and I was determined to make things work with Tommy. Only, once we made it up here, he started acting a lot differently than he had when

we hung out together in Georgia. I, um, packed up my stuff in the middle of the night while he was at work and stole his dog on the way out the door.”

My jaw falls.

That story took a turn I wasn’t expecting.

I would freak out if someone stole Shadow.

I don’t react because something in my gut tells me there’s more to the story.

“I’m not a monster, I swear,” Abby says quickly. “I didn’t plan to take her with me, at least not at first. I barely know how I’ll take care of myself, let alone feeding her and handling vet visits. I just couldn’t force myself to leave her behind. I was afraid he would take his anger out on her when he came home to find me missing. Okay, maybe I am the bad guy...”

Well, that’s the *more to the story* part that I was waiting for.

She darts a look at me but glances away just as quickly.

“It sounds like it’s a good thing the two of you found your way here,” I say to hopefully set her at ease. “No one will bother you. You’re safe. You have my word about that. Does Echo have a microchip? What about a GPS tracker on her collar or harness?”

Abby’s dark blue eyes fly to mine, and she blinks repeatedly.

“He can’t track her microchip,” I say to get that out of the way. “They don’t have a battery, so they can’t send out a location signal. A GPS tracker on her collar or harness is a different story. I didn’t notice one when I was playing with her, but if you have any of her other belongings, you might want to give them a look.”

“All I brought was her harness, leash, dog food bowls, and the rest of the bag of her dog food,” Abby says with wide eyes. “Oh, God. I’m probably going to prison for dog theft.”

“Nah, I’m pretty sure it’s only a misdemeanor.” I chuckle, winking. “Seriously, don’t stress. I’ll help you check over her things for a tracker.”

I’m more worried about him showing up here and trying to get Abby to leave with him. If she left while he was at work, she must have had a damn good reason to take such drastic measures.

I don’t play when it comes to the safety of women or children...or pets, for that matter.

Chapter Eight

Abby

I way overshared at dinner, but I couldn't seem to stop talking. It's Lawson's fault for being so damn relaxing. After dinner, I feed Echo, and Lawson gives her about thirty minutes before taking her out for another bathroom break.

Once they get settled in, he sits on the opposite end of the couch, and we watch the news. The storm should peak tomorrow morning, and by late tomorrow night or early Sunday, Lawson says the roads should be cleared.

His is definitely the scent that I caught a whiff of while putting on the pillowcase. Some type of citrus mixed with strong undertones of pine. It's delicious, reminding me a little of a Christmas tree.

It's a struggle to fight the urge to move closer to him on the couch.

People say I smell like raspberries with soft hints of lemon zest. I've always been a little self-conscious that my scent isn't as sweet as a typical omega's. I've met a fair number of omegas over the years, and they often smell like desserts. Maybe I do too, but more like the pastry with fresh fruit that most people overlook to go after the chocolate cake or vanilla bean custard.

Lawson has been nothing but a perfect gentleman, and now I'm questioning how scent matches work.

I'm positive that he and Bryant are compatible matches for me. Upon smelling them, I've been incredibly drawn to each one.

Is it possible to have a one-sided scent match?

Has he just been such a gentleman that he hasn't gotten close enough to smell me?

Has he smelled me, but he's trying to be respectful under the circumstances?

I should have skipped that shower earlier. If I was still sweaty from walking Echo, I bet he would have had a much harder time ignoring my scent.

Holy shit.

I'm losing it.

* * *

"You really should take the bed," I say a few hours later as Lawson grabs a pillow to take to the couch. "You're going to hang off the sofa. I, however, will have plenty of room."

"Nah, you and Echo take the bed. I'll be fine." He circles around the end of the mattress.

I step into his way, planting my hands on my hips. Much like Bryant was *too* respectful of my personal space, Lawson has done the same.

How am I ever supposed to determine if this scent-match thing goes both ways if he won't get close enough to smell me?

"This is your place," I say, smiling. "That means it's inappropriate for me to kick you out of *your* bed."

"Incorrect." His long blondish-brown hair falls around his face as his head shakes. "That means it should be *my* choice whether or not I give up my bed." He chuckles. "My mom would kick my ass if she found out I made a lady sleep on the couch. Hell, if I can't get comfortable, I'll stretch out on the floor in the office. I'm easy. I don't complain; I find a solution."

Dammit.

That's hot.

Too bad I can already tell that he would turn me down in a heartbeat if I suggested that we should just share the bed.

* * *

I wake up freezing for the second time. The first time I woke up, I directed Echo to lie on my feet. It helped for a bit, but I have no idea how long I was out.

I'm groggy as I trudge to the hall closet, grabbing the extra blankets Bryant told me about when he showed me the apartment. It takes trying to turn on the lamp on the bedside table before I realize the power is out.

"Shit," I whisper, pulling my hand to my face.

My fingers are frozen.

That seems like a bad sign.

I layer the two heavy blankets over the bed, but a terrible thought occurs to me. If I take these, Lawson won't be able to use them. Heading back out into the hallway, I frown at the thermostat.

Oh yeah...

It won't tell me the temperature because the power is out.

It was in the low twenties, based on what the weather forecast said earlier, and it was supposed to drop even more overnight.

Without the heat going, it'll get dangerously cold in here.

Rolling my shoulders back, I make the call to wake him up. He's much more likely to know what to do, and I'm starting to shiver just from being out from under the blanket.

Echo follows me into the living room, and I grimace when I spot the massive alpha. His feet and part of his calves hang off one end of the couch. He has his forearm thrown over his eyes. The blanket only covers from his chest to his ankles.

Jesus.

I should have pushed harder for him to take the bed. Coming to a stop next to him, I lean down and give him a little shake.

"I'm so sorry to wake you, but—"

Lawson pulls his forearm off his face and blinks at me. He wraps his arm around my lower back and asks, "What's wrong, sweetheart?"

I'm not sure he's awake enough to even notice the move, but it pulls me closer to him. It's strangely comforting, like he wants to shield me in case there's danger close by.

"I'm sorry to wake you," I repeat. "The power went out. I woke up shivering."

Even though I know he isn't anything like Tommy, I still brace for the explosion my system thinks might be coming for having the audacity to bother him while he was sleeping.

"Shit," he says, patting my lower back with his huge palm. "Okay, let me think."

“Bryant mentioned there’s no generator,” I tell him. “I thought maybe you could come sleep with me. Body heat and whatnot...”

His hand digs into my back as he sits up, his hair falling around his face. “Do you know how long ago the power went out?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I was asleep. I woke up once and asked Echo to lie on my feet. I think it was likely already out then. I fell back asleep after that, but it didn’t last long. I couldn’t get warm, no matter how deeply I burrowed under the blanket.”

“Damn, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” I smile tightly. “I would have been way worse off if you hadn’t shown up.”

“Bryant really should have taken you to our house to ride out the storm,” Lawson says. “We have a whole-home backup generator. All right, let’s relocate to the bedroom.”

I nod as relief washes over me.

I really just want to snuggle with the delicious-smelling alpha and let him handle the stressful parts of being snowed in. That probably makes me weak, but it’s part of being an omega. I get overwhelmed when I have to make decisions.

I have no idea what I’m even doing with my life right now. Maybe Bryant was right when he said my guardian angel was responsible for the wrong turn that led me here.

Chapter Nine

Abby

“Are you doing okay over there?” Lawson asks as I flop around, trying to get comfortable.

He’s been super respectful of my space, staying on his side of the bed.

Echo lies on the bottom of the mattress, completely unbothered by the cold.

“Yeah, I’m good,” I lie. “It’s so quiet. I guess I’m used to having background noise or something. I don’t know.”

The wind occasionally howls outside. If it was nonstop, I’d probably be able to fall back to sleep with no problem.

“I sleep with a fan, no matter how cold it gets,” Lawson says. “I need the white noise to drown out Shadow’s snoring.”

“Do you miss him?” I ask, rolling over to face him.

“Ehh, it’s only been a day.” He chuckles. “Okay, yeah, I do. I know Luka and Bryant will take good care of him, but he’s still going to pout like hell when I get home.”

“That’s cute. You’re lucky you have family and friends who can watch him.” I scoot down, pulling the blankets even tighter around my throat.

It doesn’t help, and I shiver, making my teeth chatter. The sound is even more noticeable with the room being so quiet.

“Are you still cold?”

“It’s way better than it was before you came in,” I say, hedging my words. “But yeah, I’m freezing.”

“All right,” he says, scooting closer to the middle of the mattress. “Flip over. Let’s see if we can get you warm enough that you stop shaking.”

My body jolts into motion like he barked the command.

I settle on my side, facing away from him, and shimmy backward until I can feel the heat radiating off his front.

Omegas are the ones that run fevers during heats, but Lawson is warm, and I crave it. His citrus and pine scent makes my insides buzz.

This is so bad.

I'm still baffled how I spent so much time sniffing a million scent cards, only to run into a scent match in the middle of nowhere.

The massive alpha curls around me, tucking his knees under my thighs.

"Is this okay?" he asks, planting his hand on my stomach.

"Y-Yeah," I choke out, nodding. "Jesus. You are so warm."

"Glad to be of service." He chuckles. "What are your plans for after the storm? Are you heading back to Georgia to live with your brother and his pack?"

"I'm not sure," I say softly. "I think I mentioned that they just had a baby a few months ago. I don't want to disrupt their lives. I already feel guilty for the time my brother spent financially providing for me after our mom died. I don't know how they'll feel about Echo. Even asking to stay in their garage apartment feels like too much. That's also the first place Tommy will look for me. I have a little saved from what I got when Austin sold our childhood home. I just have to be really careful with that money until I find a job."

"What kind of work are you used to doing?"

"Well, I technically haven't had a job before," I admit. "I know it's normal for packs to keep a close eye on their omega children, at least until they're bonded. My brother kinda took up that mantle for me and my sister. She found her pack pretty early. I clearly didn't. He was really overprotective, but I also get it. Omegas are more likely to be kidnapped and trafficked than any other designation."

"That's grim," Lawson says. "I have to admit, I'd probably be the same way if I had sisters."

"You just have the one brother?"

"Yeah, Luka," he says. "He's two years younger than I am. You have one sister and one brother?"

"Exactly." I laugh awkwardly. "Although I'm much closer with my brother than my sister. She's two years older than I am. We're kinda like oil and water."

“That’s tough. Luka has always been my best friend.”

“I wish it could have been like that with us,” I admit. “It just wasn’t in the cards. When I was a freshman, she was a junior. Any time I told her I liked a guy, she hooked up with him. After the second or third time it happened, I stopped telling her anything, but it was like she could sniff it out. If I had a crush on someone, she knew, and she would purposely destroy any feelings I had for that guy.”

“That is extra shitty,” Lawson says. “I don’t blame you for distancing yourself from that relationship.” A few seconds of silence pass, and his chest sputters and eventually vibrates with the sound of his purr.

“Holy shit,” I whisper. “That’s amazing.”

“At least it’s some kind of background noise.” He laughs. “I wasn’t even trying to purr. I think my system picked up the change in your scent and acted accordingly.” He pats my stomach. “You know, between the restaurant and Bryant with his gym, we’re always hiring. You don’t have to rush off once the storm passes.”

“Really?” I ask, trying not to get my hopes up.

I wish I could see his face. Maybe then I could gauge if the offer is because he feels sorry for me after that killer sob story or if he wants to spend time getting to know me.

Shit.

I wasn’t purposely trying to guilt him into letting me stay, but I do want the opportunity to get to know him and his packmates.

It’s not unheard of for an omega to meet five to seven scent matches in their lifetime. I just haven’t had particularly good luck. It could also be that I’m young, but most omegas I’ve met have been bonded in their early twenties.

“Yeah, really,” he says, pulling me back into his chest. “I don’t like the idea of you heading out with no one to look out for you, especially if your ex could try to track you down.”

“I’m probably supposed to assure you I’ll be fine,” I say, reveling in the warmth radiating off him in waves. “But I’m not going to be stubborn just to feel independent. I would really appreciate it. If I can work for one of you, I can pay rent and utilities.”

“We’ll worry about that later,” he murmurs. “Rest, Abby. I’ll keep you warm. I can’t think of a better way to fall back to sleep than to smell lemon and raspberries.”

* * *

No matter how much I bundle up, I'm still freezing.

A novel for your next quiet moment.

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I wish I had some idea of what the temperature in the apartment is, but I know it's cold as hell.

I never knew it could be physically painful to sit on a cold toilet seat.

I guess I know now.

I'll definitely be limiting my fluid intake for the rest of the day.

Lawson is hardcore.

He does the breakfast dishes, and his hands have to be uncomfortably cold, but he doesn't complain.

He's spoiled me rotten to the point I'm starting to feel guilty and a little useless.

When we first got out of bed this morning, he layered me up in three pairs of his socks and one of his massive flannels. Then he cooked, cleaned up breakfast, and ran down to take Echo out all on his own.

The alpha in question comes into the living room. His head cocks to the side when he spots me sitting on the couch, wrapped up in one of the comforters from the bed. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah." I nod, bouncing in my seat. "Just trying to warm up. I don't know how you're walking around in just sweats and a long-sleeve T-shirt."

"I'm a little chilly, but that's mostly from the dish water." He crosses the space between us, picks me up, takes a seat on the couch, and faces me toward him.

My eyes widen, and I wrap the comforter around his shoulders. It makes a perfect little tent between us, but my face is still cold, so I bury my nose in his pec.

"Wow, you are freezing." He chuckles as I suck down deep hits of his citrus and pine scent. "I would suggest that we watch a movie on one of our

phones, but we should probably conserve their batteries.”

“I have a charger in my car,” I admit. “But I’m not sure it’s safe to run the vehicle if the snow is this high.”

“It can be if you dig out the exhaust pipe,” he says, running his hand up and down my back over the blanket. “But we’d better save that for a last-resort option.”

“Agreed.”

“I guess that means we’ll just have to talk to pass the time.”

I smile against his shirt.

That sounds heavenly to me.

As long as I get to stay close to him, I’ll be happy.

* * *

Lawson is great company.

As the day passes, I learn a little about his time in the military and his relationship with his brother, Luka. He tells me about meeting Bryant and how seamless it was to build their pack.

I share a little about my relationship with Tommy, but I don’t get in too deep with specifics, mostly because it’s embarrassing to admit how poorly he treated me.

Something inside me says Lawson gets it without me having to spell out all the details.

It’s a very lazy day without power, and I enjoy it more than I thought possible.

I might be the most cliché omega in existence, but I love having a potent alpha completely focused on me.

And damn, Lawson is attentive.

He owes me nothing.

He still ensures I’m fed, hydrated, and warm.

By the time evening rolls around, there’s nothing to do but snuggle in bed together.

Echo curls up on the bottom of the mattress, and I fall asleep completely confined in Lawson’s warmth and delicious citrus and pine scent.

* * *

Beeping wakes me up in the middle of the night. The *whooshing* of the heat turning on makes me frown. Carefully disengaging from under Lawson's arm, I gather the extra blankets and toss them on the bottom of the bed by my feet next to Echo.

"The power is back..." Lawson sits up and swipes his hand over his face. "I can head out to the couch."

"No, please don't," I say, settling back onto the mattress. "It might go out again, and even if it doesn't, I can't stand the idea of you having to sleep on the couch when we know we both fit in the bed."

"All right, sweetheart. You've convinced me," he says, settling back onto the bed. "Come on. Snuggle up. I'll keep you warm until the heat catches up."

No one in my entire life has ever given in to me the way he does.

Dammit.

I almost don't want the storm to end.

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Chapter Ten

Luka

The roads finally clear up early Sunday morning. After spending two damn days hearing all about the omega Bryant stashed at our apartment, I'm up and ready to go early.

Lawson, that motherfucker, barely bothered with a handful of texts. He checked in enough that we knew the two of them were alive and without power, but not much else.

According to the outage map on my phone, they got power back late last night.

I have no doubt Law took good care of her. My brother doesn't have a dishonorable bone in his body. With that being said, he has much better luck getting along with animals than he does with humans.

Women often find him gruff and abrasive. Hopefully Abby can overlook his growly nature under the circumstances.

Bryant is pissing me off. He made it clear that he wanted to ride into town with me, but I've been ready and waiting for his sorry ass for fifteen minutes.

I already know that I'm not making it out the door without Shadow. Bryant better hurry his ass up, or he'll be driving himself.

I'm anxious to get over there and see how things panned out. If Law wasn't too grumbly and growly, Bryant and I might be able to do damage control to win her over.

My brother isn't a bad guy. He's actually one of the best people I know. He just doesn't suffer fools, and he never learned how to cushion his delivery when it would come in handy.

* * *

“Shadow can’t come up with us right now,” I tell Bryant, shaking my head as I climb the stairs to the apartment. “He’s too riled. We need to make sure Law is the one who introduces him to Abby and her dog. We can’t risk the two of them fighting.”

“How did I get nominated for babysitting duty?” Bryant grumbles, tugging Shadow toward the grassy area near the drainage ditch.

The ground is covered in so much snow that it won’t really matter where Shadow pisses, but I can’t spend any more brain space on that.

Hopefully the woman’s dog—Echo—won’t attack me once I let myself into the apartment.

I texted Law both before leaving the house and before getting out of my truck after parking, but he hasn’t replied.

* * *

A gust of warm air smacks me in the face as I open the apartment door.

I peek around for the woman’s dog and let myself in.

Law isn’t on the couch.

I’m a little confused because neither is the elusive Abby that I’ve heard so much about.

Pulling off my jacket, I kick out of my boots and drop my coat on one of the hooks by the door.

There’s no one in the office, and that only leaves one room left.

If her car and Law’s truck weren’t in the parking lot, I might be worried that they left. That doesn’t make much sense, though.

Law isn’t reckless.

He wouldn’t risk traveling in such questionable conditions. He’s much more likely to hunker down and ride out whatever comes his way.

I’m still shocked I haven’t found him yet, but that must mean the two of them snuggled for body warmth.

I can’t decide if that’s a good or bad sign. Getting brave, I try the doorknob to the bedroom. It pushes open without any resistance.

My eyes take a second to adjust, and my jaw falls.

Lawson lies on his back near the middle of the mattress. A woman with long brown hair lies on her side with her head resting on his shoulder.

I can't see her features, since she's facing the wrong direction, but Law has his arm wrapped around her and his hand resting on her ass over the blanket.

They look quite cozy.

On Lawson's other side is the massive German shepherd that Bryant warned me about. Her face rests on his hip, and Law also has a hand lying on the mutt's back.

Shadow would shit a brick if he saw this.

I'm tempted to pull out my phone.

Bryant will never believe me when I tell him what I walked in on.

My nose twitches as I try to pick up Abby's scent.

Bry warned me it was like nothing he'd ever scented, but then he rambled about lightning and storms and a bunch of other shit that didn't make sense.

She smells delicious.

Sweet and fruity.

Raspberries with hints of lemon.

Echo's eyes pop open, and a low growl fills the air as the beast stands.

Law's arm falls to the mattress while I debate whether I'll have enough time to close the door if she lunges at me.

"Hush." The woman raises a slender arm, wrapping her hand around the dog's mouth. "I'm still tired. We'll go out soon. More sleep."

Huh.

She's brave.

I'm not sure I would try that with Shadow when he's pissed.

The dog shakes her head, trying to break free of Abby's hold.

I almost chuckle.

Hell, if *I* hadn't seen this play out firsthand, I'd never have believed it. That guarantees Bryant will call me a liar when I relay these events.

Lawson's eyes pop open, and he immediately hones in on me. His brow furrows as he glares. He's clearly not pleased that I interrupted their snuggle session.

Well, damn.

Maybe I was concerned about nothing.

They were doing just fine without me or Bryant around to referee.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Law says, his voice lined with sleep. He runs his hand down the woman’s back. “The roads must be clear.”

“How do you know that?” she grumbles, sounding less than pleased with the prospect of starting the day.

Law brings a hand up, patting the massive German shepherd. “You can relax. That’s an invited guest.”

“Guest?” I chuckle. “This is my place as much as it is yours.”

The woman squeaks, pushing up on her forearm and peeking over her shoulder.

She’s rumpled and sleepy-looking and tiny compared to my brother. God, she’s cute with the wide-eyed shock covering her face.

Seeing that she’s comfortable being up close and personal with Law is an excellent sign.

“Hey.” I smirk, waving. “I’m Luka.”

“That’s my pain-in-the-ass little brother,” Law chimes in.

“Bryant is downstairs keeping Shadow busy, but that dog is high-strung on a good day, and he’s *pissed*,” I warn him, shoving my hands into the pockets of my jeans. “Sorry. We were worried. You could have answered your texts and saved us a trip.”

I shrug unapologetically.

Truthfully?

I wanted to get a look at the woman and gauge whether we could convince her to stick around.

We almost never run into omegas around here.

When Bryant told me he stumbled upon one sleeping in her car in his parking lot, I straight-up told him his nose was malfunctioning.

That kind of thing just doesn’t happen.

Alphas outnumber omegas something like seven or eight to one nowadays.

Families with omega children often hire full-time security or keep a close eye on them personally if they can’t afford to hire out the job.

Once an omega is claimed by a pack, their alphas are responsible for keeping them safe.

After catching a whiff of her scent, I can confirm she’s an omega, and an unbonded one at that.

Now all I can wonder is if she’s in trouble.

“I’ll step out and give you two a minute to get moving around,” I say, smiling as I back toward the door. “Just a reminder, Bryant is out there walking Shadow...”

I’m sure my brother gets my meaning.

Shadow can handle the cold much better than Bryant can. Lawson should also be the one in charge of Shadow when the dogs are introduced.

He’s probably not pleased that he has to peel himself away from the little omega, but he doesn’t get to keep Abby all to himself. The two of us want a chance to get to know her as well, and my main goal is to convince her to stick around a while. If we can pull it off, it’ll benefit all three of us.

* * *

Lawson heads to the parking lot to greet Shadow.

I’m supposed to escort Abby and Echo down once the woman finishes getting dressed.

While I’m waiting, I get a text from Bryant that he’s going to run out to grab breakfast.

I send him my order, and the door to the bedroom pops open.

As Echo bolts out, I shove my phone into my back pocket.

“Well, hello,” I say, keeping my voice light and friendly. “I’d love it if you didn’t bite me.”

Abby follows the dog out.

I have to hold my tongue to keep from adding a disclaimer that my previous statement doesn’t apply to her. If she wants to bite me, I’m down to get freaky. It might make me ache to bite her back, though.

I should probably focus on whether the giant beast is about to fuck me up.

Echo wasn’t pleased to see me pop up into the bedroom earlier, but I’m more focused on her owner.

Abby is dressed in black leggings and a thick black and cream sweater dress. Hopefully those leggings are lined. Otherwise, she’s going to be freezing once she steps outside.

“Do you have a coat to go over that?” I ask, wondering if we have an extra pair of gloves and a beanie somewhere.

“Yeah.”

“Okay, good,” I say, chuckling. “Because otherwise, you’d be damn cold.”

She nods and comes into the room, stopping next to Echo, then bends and scratches the dog’s head. “Give me just a minute, and I’ll get you into your harness.” Once she’s done, she stands and holds out a hand. “I’m Abby. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Luka.” I shake. “Law recommended that I manage her leash when we head out to introduce the dogs. Is that okay?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. She has been known to tug me around like I weigh nothing.” She laughs awkwardly and steps over to grab her coat off the hook. It just so happens it was hidden under Lawson’s, which is why I didn’t spot it when I first came in. “When Bryant offered to let me sleep here, he said he cleared it with you.” She spins to face me as she gets herself into her jacket. “He was right. I never would have survived trying to sleep in my car. Thank you for giving me a place to ride out the storm.”

I’m not sure why I’m taken aback by her honesty, but I am.

“No problem,” I say, clearing my throat. “The weather up here is no joke. We all look after each other.”

“Lawson said something similar.” She grabs the leash and harness from on top of the small cabinet that we use as a catch-all for pocket change and our keys. “He also mentioned that I might be able to stay for a bit while I get on my feet. If that’s pushing your kindness too far—”

“It’s not,” I say, shaking my head.

Well, shit.

I’m impressed.

Never in a million years would I have thought Law would have laid the groundwork to get her to stay.

It seems like Bryant and I weren’t needed at all.

It’s surprising.

Most women don’t give Law the time of day.

It’s shitty.

They don’t know what they’re missing out on. He might be a little rough around the edges, but he’ll make a good husband. Our dads taught us about how to look after an omega, and I know Bryant’s family did the same for him.

We just need someone who’s interested in all three of us equally.

I would never be with anyone who pretended to want Law to get to me. Sadly, it has happened before, but Abby was interested in Law before she even met me.

That's an excellent sign.

Maybe the universe is finally getting around to answering my Christmas prayer.

I've had the same one for the last three years. I'm so tired of being alone.

Abby showing up here has to be a Christmas miracle.

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Chapter Eleven

Abby

It's a little overwhelming watching Lawson introduce Shadow and Echo. Their names even kinda feel similar, and I have no idea why it feels like fate.

Okay, I'm turning into a delusional omega. Over here planning a future when they're just being nice.

I can't help but find it attractive how confident and knowledgeable Lawson is when it comes to dogs. He keeps a close eye on both of them, even handing Shadow off to Luka so he can take over with Echo.

"Her tail is tucked, and she's licking her lips while Shadow is relaxed," Lawson says, guiding her a few feet away. "That means she needs a little extra time and a confidence boost." He squats down and keeps his voice soothing as he says, "I'm going to give her the opportunity to smell me while I'm covered in Shadow's scent."

"I know you just peed," Luka says to Shadow. "Whatever, we might as well walk around so you can piss on everything. We all know it's your second favorite activity."

I chuckle but focus back on Echo.

I'm not an animal expert, but it does seem like she doesn't know what to make of Shadow.

Lawson stays at her level, talking to her softly. She eventually licks his hand and bumps her muzzle against his chest. He laughs, giving her scratches, and my heart races.

I think the only thing more attractive would be if he was holding a baby.

"Okay, I don't want to rush her into anything," Lawson says, standing. "Let's swap, Luka. You bring me Shadow, and you take Echo over and give

her a chance to use the bathroom. I'm going to introduce Abby to Shadow. Maybe seeing that he's friendly with Abby will help set Echo at ease."

"Come on, mutt. You heard your dad," Luka says, sounding amused.

He comes over, and they switch leashes while doing it in a way that the dogs stay a decent distance from one another.

"Make sure you give her some attention. She might get jealous seeing me introduce Abby to Shadow," Lawson says.

"We can do that." Luka bends down, patting her side. "I'll never complain about having a pretty lady on my arm."

He guides her away as I bounce on my knees, rubbing my hands together.

"Sorry, I know you're cold," Lawson says, waving me over. "It's best to introduce them on neutral ground to avoid any territorial disputes."

"It's really cool that you know this stuff at all," I say, smiling as I approach.

Shadow is beautiful.

He's not quite as tall as Echo, but he's pure muscle, while she's longer and lankier. Though he has large splotches of tan on his chest, back, and hindquarters, he's got a lot more black than I've seen on a Belgian Malinois.

Not that I've seen many of them.

Shadow takes off toward me, and I get a little nervous. He looks like he could mess someone up if he wanted to.

I'm sure Echo is also capable of being dangerous, but she mostly just looks goofy. Her ears have never stood up the way they're supposed to, and it naturally makes her seem like less of a threat. Or maybe I just feel that way because I know her. She barks and growls like she's vicious, but she backs down real fast when someone gets close to her.

"Sit," Lawson growls, giving his leash a tug.

Shadow immediately sits.

"Come on, sweetheart. He won't hurt you, I promise," Lawson says, holding out an arm. Though it's a little intimidating, I trust Lawson. "He wants to play with Echo, but we need to get this out of the way first and see how she reacts."

I skirt around the dog and lean against Lawson's side. "His coloring is so pretty."

“He’s already spoiled enough without any extra compliments, but I’m sure he appreciates it.” Lawson pats my hip. “Hold out your hand.”

I do, and he drops a treat onto my palm.

“All right, step in front of him and hold the treat out,” he says. “I’ll tell him to *greet*. That’s his opportunity to take the treat and sniff you. Once that’s done, the two of you will be introduced. He’ll know that you’re a friend and not to bother you.”

It’s kinda crazy that there’s a whole process just to introduce myself to Shadow, but it’s also amazing.

He’s clearly trained to another level, and that shows the level of commitment Lawson puts into everything he does.

Dammit.

I’ve got a hell of a crush on him.

* * *

It takes a bit of time, but Echo does eventually warm to Shadow. They take turns chasing each other around the parking lot, and Lawson says Echo’s body language is a good sign.

She seems more confident to me, too, which is a huge relief.

When the three of us, plus the dogs, make it inside, Lawson keeps Shadow on his leash.

“Echo, place,” he says, snapping and pointing at the blanket he laid out for her.

Much to my surprise, she takes off, dragging Luka with her. Once she makes it to the blanket, she lies down.

I follow her over, mostly because I have no idea what else to do with myself.

When I stole her from Tommy, I don’t think I realized just how complicated life can be with such a big dog. He never took her out in public, so I guess it was easier, since she had a yard and never had to interact with random people. At least not outside of the occasional delivery or the very rare night when he had friends or coworkers over.

“Give her some love and go ahead and unclip her,” Lawson says.

I kneel down at the same time Luka squats on Echo’s other side.

I can’t deny it. Lawson’s brother is handsome. Their features are similar enough that it’s easy to tell they’re related. At the same time, Luka has more

classic features.

I think.

It's really hard to tell with how furry Lawson's face is.

Their eyes are the same rich brown, while their hair and beards are a lighter blondish-brown.

They're both tall with broad shoulders, but Lawson has a much thicker build than his brother.

The differences don't end there.

Where Lawson has long curly hair that he occasionally pulls up into a tie, Luka's hair is short but shaggy. It falls around his face in that messy way some men can pull off where it seems purposeful.

Luka has a short, well-kept beard lining his chiseled jaw. Hell, maybe the brothers share the same jawline.

I have no idea.

It's impossible to tell with Lawson's thick beard.

I shake my head and focus on Echo.

Lawson asked me to do something, and I got distracted checking his brother out.

That's embarrassing.

My fingers dig into Echo's thick fur as I give her scratches, nuzzling my face to hers. "I'm going to unhook your leash, but that doesn't mean you can hop up and run laps around the apartment." She pants heavily, and I chuckle. "Okay, maybe I overestimated your energy level."

"She's a beautiful dog," Luka says, drawing my attention as I unclip her leash from her harness.

His dark eyes sparkle, and it reminds me a lot of the looks Lawson has given me over the last two days.

"Thank you," I say, smiling. "She's also a pain in the ass." I peek over my shoulder to look at Lawson. "Should I leave her harness on in case we need to separate them?"

"You can leave it on for now," he says, nodding.

I give Echo a final pat and move to stand.

Luka beats me to it, and he holds out a hand, helping me up. I take it and step around Echo to put her leash on the cabinet by the door.

As I pass him, I catch a whiff of his scent.

He smells like a campfire. More specifically, his scent reminds me of a fireplace on Christmas morning. The crackling smoke and burning wood

scent that fills the air.

Okay, I wasn't wrong when I guessed all three would be scent matches.
Now...

What the hell do I do with that knowledge?

* * *

Bryant makes it back, and the four of us sit down at the table.

I end up closest to the wall with Lawson at my left.

Luka is directly across the table from me, and Bryant is next to him.

The sound of teeth snapping causes me to lean in my chair to peek between Luka and Bryant.

My eyes widen, and I prepare to push my chair back.

Echo has Shadow on his back while she nips at his muzzle. He whacks her in the face with his paw, grunting.

Is that a grunt?

Maybe it's a soft growl?

"Relax, sweetheart," Lawson says, patting my thigh. "They're just playing. That grumbling is their way of talking."

"Their teeth snapping kinda reminds me of nails on a chalkboard," Bryant says, laughing. "But at least they're happy and getting along. How's your breakfast?"

When he texted me, asking for my order earlier, I was surprised. I was torn between assuring him I didn't need anything and the empty feeling in my stomach. It may not be pouring buckets of snow, but I'm still not confident driving up here, even if the roads have been cleared.

I asked for a breakfast sandwich and hash browns or whatever else was easy. I had no idea he was going to a diner.

"The bacon is perfectly cooked," I say, smiling. "Thank you. The French toast is great too."

Honestly, the French toast is better than *great*.

It's otherworldly.

It's lightly dusted in powdered sugar and drizzled with milk chocolate. It's cliché as hell, but I have the standard sweet tooth that most omegas are born with.

"Was it a shock having my brother come into the apartment when Bryant told you you'd be alone?" Luka asks conversationally.

Something about the lightness in his tone tells me he lives for a bit of chaos.

I laugh, nodding. "It was, but it was also a great surprise. I would have had no idea what I was doing without him."

I smile at the massive alpha, fighting the urge to pat his arm.

Lawson grunts. "You should have taken her to our house, Bryant."

"Hey, mountain man, in case you didn't know, that's considered kidnapping and is generally discouraged in polite society," Bryant says, laughing and shaking his head.

"I would have been in deep trouble if you hadn't stopped to make sure I was okay," I say to Bryant. "I owe you big time."

"Nah," he says. "Everybody looks out for each other up here. It was nothing." He almost looks shy with the smile that tips his lips as his mess of brownish-black hair falls over his forehead.

Lawson leans close to me, wrapping his arm around the back of my chair. "You've barely nibbled at your breakfast, and you didn't eat much yesterday while the power was out. Are you feeling okay?"

"I'm good." I tilt my face until our eyes meet. It's a little overwhelming to be having breakfast with three alphas that I barely know, and I didn't want to overdo it and risk getting a stomachache. "You're a great caregiver. Has anyone ever told you that?"

Lawson's citrus and pine scent gets easier to pick out, and my system screams to lean into him even farther.

"That was a polite way to say it," Luka chimes in. "I've always just called him a bossy dick."

"My instincts find it very reassuring." I chuckle, bumping my shoulder against Lawson's. "I'll eat a little more, but I'm not really a breakfast person."

I make a point of picking up my fork and grabbing a bite of the hash browns.

Am I being too flirtatious?

I was always taught that alphas pursue omegas.

Why aren't they chasing me?

Ugh.

Maybe I'm expecting too much.

They did say that I could stick around.

* * *

Luka and Bryant leave to check on their respective businesses, and I'm once again left with Lawson.

A lump forms in my throat as I realize he's probably about to leave too.

Omegas get attached easily, but this is kinda ridiculous.

The man in question sits on the floor next to the dogs. While I'm only a few feet away on the couch, I have the most random urge to slither down to the floor so I can be next to him.

Omega instincts are so out of pocket.

I had no idea how strong the pull would be with a scent match.

I ache to be close to him, and I want him to be soothed by my presence too. Basically, I want him to be forced to snuggle me like he did when the heat was out.

Although I'm supposed to have a month left before my next heat hits, I'm prepared. I went to an omega clinic while I was staying with Tommy. I've had my IUD since before I moved up here to be with him, but I saw a new doctor who gave me a prescription for suppressants. The shitty part is that they have to be started right after a heat ends. That, or I can start them the first day my heat starts.

The medication should help make it not as severe, but I will likely have some breakthrough symptoms.

Basically, I'll feel like crap for a week.

Hopefully it won't be completely unbearable, though.

Lawson chuckles as both dogs try to climb into his lap.

Shadow makes that weird noise that isn't a growl or a whine. He also smacks Echo in the face with his paw. I'm not an animal expert, but I think he's trying to tell her to stop taking his human's attention.

"All right, enough," Lawson says, chuckling. "You can share my affection for a few more minutes."

I pat my thigh. "Come on, Echo. Stop being a pain."

She doesn't even bother looking at me.

Well, apparently she's just as enamored with Lawson as I am.

"She's fine," he says, patting both their backs.

"I know the storm is mostly over," I say, clearing my throat. "I just wanted to say, you don't have to feel obligated to let me stay. If you're still open to that, I would be really grateful—"

“You’re more than welcome to stay for as long as you’d like,” Lawson says. “No conditions or time limit.”

“Will the restaurant be open tomorrow?” I ask. “I can get to work right away.”

“I’m not sure,” he says. “We might wait and open on Tuesday, but I just want to make one thing clear. You don’t need to pay rent to stay here. If you want to work to make extra money, we’ll make sure we find something for you, but I won’t be taking a dime of rent money. I know my brother feels the same way.”

I open my mouth to protest, but Lawson shakes his head.

“It’s not happening, sweetheart,” he says, sounding amused. “So just let it go.”

I laugh, shaking my head.

There’s the stubbornness alphas are famous for. Every time he calls me *sweetheart*, my insides get melty.

Dammit.

I’m in so much trouble.

* * *

The apartment gets a whole lot colder and more depressing when Lawson leaves.

I’m almost tempted to unblock Tommy’s number to see what threats he’s making. Some ridiculous part of my brain thinks it would be better to know, but the rational side of my consciousness says not to go there.

Instead, I take Echo for a long walk in the afternoon and unload some of my stuff while the sun is still up. It’s lonely and boring, but I’m grateful to have somewhere safe to stay.

Time passes exceptionally slowly, and I try not to let it get to me emotionally. Other than the few months I spent in Austin’s garage apartment, I’ve never lived alone. That hardly felt like it counted because I had to go into the main house to do laundry and for meals.

It’s actually a relief once the sun goes down. I make myself a sandwich, feed Echo, and settle onto the couch to watch TV.

My phone chimes with a text, and I smile as I see it’s from Lawson.

Hey, sweetheart. Just checking in. I hope you had a good day. I’ll be by in the morning. I figured we should see how Echo does with going out for a

walk when there are customers in the parking lot. Sweet dreams.

Wow.

He texts like he's sending an email, and I have no idea why monstrous-sized butterflies flit around my stomach as I respond.

Jesus.

I have a hell of a crush on Lawson Maxwell.

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Chapter Twelve

Luka

It's kinda hard to believe there was ever a time I worried a woman might use my brother to get to me. I mean, it happened in high school more than once, but that's not what's going down with Abby.

The omega has shown up to work every day for the last week, and while she's polite, she never lights up at me the way she does when she spots Law.

They must have bonded on another level during the snowstorm. Even though I might complain, it's actually a good sign that she's attached to my brother. It means she's less likely to leave before we get the chance to win her over.

Despite Abby's positive outlook and strong drive to learn, she hasn't eased into serving like we hoped she would.

Beverly taps her foot against the carpet in my office, crossing her arms over her chest. "If anyone else would have made the mistakes that she's made, we would have let her go by now."

"Everyone has to start somewhere," I say, shrugging.

It's a battle to keep my tone light.

This isn't the first time she's brought up that she doesn't think Abby is a good fit to work here, and my patience has officially run out.

Bev is a great business manager. She handles scheduling and all the orders for the restaurant. She also meshes well with Lucy, who runs the bar. I would prefer not to have to fire her. Training someone new would be a pain in the ass when the business runs smoothly as it stands.

Unfortunately for Bev, I don't think she understands that if she gives an ultimatum, she'll be the one on the way out the door, not the omega.

“She hasn’t successfully rung in a ticket yet. Every single order has at least one error, if not multiple issues,” Bev says, planting her hands on her hips. “She dropped a tray of waters on a table yesterday. Even you have to admit, she’s a liability.”

“It’s not like she’s been here for months. It’s been a week, Bev.” My eyebrows rise. “If she’s still struggling at that level, I would say there’s a solid chance that she needs more training.”

“Why would you hire someone with no experience in the first place?” she snaps back. “My niece has applied twice, and both times you refused to hire her. She’s been a waitress for years!”

Yes, I do know that.

Unfortunately, Bev’s niece loves to come into the bar late at night when Bev isn’t working. She drinks entirely too much and treats the employees like shit.

It’s one of the only complaints Lucy has brought to me in two years of working here. We considered banning the woman, but we didn’t want to offend Bev.

Beverly raised her niece. She’s very protective over her, and we didn’t want to cause any bad blood.

“Look,” I say, raising my palms, “I know you’re busy. How about I take over training her? That way it won’t add any extra stress to your plate, and I’ll be able to see firsthand where she needs extra support.”

Bev sighs, shaking her head. “Every dish the kitchen has to remake or glass she breaks is costing the business, but I’ll leave that in the capable hands of the owners.”

I roll my eyes as she stomps out.

It’s not the first time she’s thrown around an attitude when Lawson and I have chosen to go against her opinion on something. That’s something that will have to be addressed in the new year.

* * *

After spending close to an hour watching Abby as she works, two things become clear.

The first is that she’s trying.

The second is that she’s overwhelmed.

Not everyone is meant to be a server.

It's a demanding job, both mentally and physically.

Still, I want to be encouraging, so I make my way over as she's cleaning off her last table.

"Abby, how ya doing?" I ask, pushing my hair back from my face.

She jolts, shoving her tip into the pocket on her apron.

"I'm hanging in there." She smiles, though it doesn't reach her eyes. "This is my first real job. I mean, I babysat when I was a teenager, but this is an entirely different world. I forgot that poor lady's ranch until she was completely done with her meal." She pulls her hand to cover her face. "Shit. I'm probably not supposed to admit that in front of the boss."

"It happens." I laugh. "You'll get the hang of it."

She offers another of those fake smiles. "Hopefully, because right now I feel like I'm drowning."

My head tilts. "You don't have to work here in exchange for a place to stay."

"No, I want to work," she says, stretching out a hand to pat my arm. "Sorry. I wasn't trying to be negative. I appreciate you letting me stay upstairs. I would be so bored if I wasn't getting out a few hours a day."

I nod.

That's understandable.

"Just as long as you understand you're under no obligation. The apartment is yours for as long as you need it." I smile. "Now, are you finally cut?"

"Yeah, this was my last table," she says, rolling her shoulders back.

"How about we get food to go? I can head up with you to let Echo out, and it'll be done by the time her walk is finished," I offer. "I know she's been struggling with the noise and having people walking around outside while you're gone."

As a matter of fact, Lawson has been bringing Shadow over to hang out in the apartment for a few hours each time Abby is on shift.

The first day she worked, Echo barked for hours. We could hear it down here, and Law finally went up and kept her company.

It's not like it's a hardship for him. Although he did grumble about not getting to spend time with Abby. He's still willing to do it to make it easier on her.

"Are you sure you don't mind?" she asks, blinking up at me from behind her lashes.

“Mind?” I chuckle. “Hell no. It’ll be nice to spend some time together.” I wink, backing away from the table. “Come find me when your side work is done, and we can put in our dinner order.”

Well, shit.

Hopefully that doesn’t sound too much like a date.

Unless she wants it to be one. In that case, I would be totally down to call it what it really is.

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* * *

We take Echo for a long walk around the parking lot and down the sidewalk on the street next to the plaza.

On the way back, we grab the food.

Once we’re inside, I keep the bags on one arm and lean down to unclip Echo before going over to the table to drop the bags.

I get those put down and spin back toward the living room.

Abby is still in her work clothes.

I’ve never seen a polo and black jeans look so good on a person. She’s already out of her jacket, and she shivers, running her hands down her arms.

I’m going to have to order her gloves, a beanie, and a scarf. With how pushy Law is, I figured he would have brought it up to her by now.

Hell, maybe he has.

I’ll still do a little online shopping when I get home tonight. Or if I get out of here early enough, I could swing by the sporting goods store.

“Are you cold?” I ask, crossing the distance between us. “You want me to bump up the heat?”

“Nah, I’ll live,” she says, laughing awkwardly. “I’m not sure I’ll ever get used to winter in New York. It’s brutal.”

I chuckle and grab her arm, pulling her into my chest. “Wrap your arms around my back. I’ll warm you up.”

She doesn't hesitate to bury her face in my shirt as she hugs me. I cover her with the sides of my jacket, and she rewards me by digging her cold little hands into the material of my shirt. It reminds me of all the times that my dad's joked about my mom attacking them with her cold feet.

"Jesus, woman. You are freezing," I say, pulling her even closer as I bear hug her. "We need to get you a way better coat. There's no way you should be this cold." Especially not when I was the one keeping hold of Echo's leash. She could have buried her hands in her coat pockets for warmth.

"Wow, Luka. You give a great hug. You smell really nice too." She rubs her face around my chest, and I have to force myself to breathe normally.

"Thanks, gorgeous," I murmur. "You smell fucking fantastic to me too." I'm almost afraid speaking will ruin the moment, but I think it's important to let her know the attraction goes both ways. "Are you hungry?"

"Yeah." She nods. "I'm starving."

"All right. Do you want to run and change out of your uniform?" I give her back a final pat and release her. "I'll unpack the food and meet you at the table."

"I do want to change, but can we eat on the couch?" she asks, pulling her arms free of my coat. "My legs and back are killing me."

It's on the tip of my tongue to offer to give her a massage, but I stop myself in time.

I'm not trying to get her into bed, meaning I need to really think through everything before I act.

Okay, I do eventually want to fuck her brains out, but for the time being, I want to take things slow and get to know Abby.

"Dinner on the couch while we watch a movie sounds heavenly," I say, smirking.

She nods and bolts toward the bedroom.

She's really cute.

* * *

My eyes continually slide over to Abby as we eat. There's some superhero action movie playing on the TV, but I couldn't name which one.

I'm enamored with watching her.

“Do you have plans to visit your family for Christmas?” I ask, hoping she won’t be annoyed at me for interrupting the movie.

It only takes another second for me to want to punch myself in the face.

Lawson mentioned her fathers and mother all passed away before she was eighteen. From what he said, she has a brother and a sister, so hopefully my question doesn’t drag up any old memories.

She shakes her head, dipping a fry into a combination of mustard and ketchup. “I’m really only close with my brother, but his omega just had a baby. I wouldn’t want to intrude on their pack’s first holiday as parents.”

I nod. “I can understand that. Lawson’s and my family pack moved to Texas while I was still in the military. I went to visit them my first year out, but it’s a long trip. They also don’t do much in the way of decorating or celebrating anymore, which makes sense. They’re at that stage of enjoying their retirement.”

“That’s actually really sweet.” Abby leans forward, putting her food container down on the coffee table. “I probably wouldn’t go visit, either. That’s more because I’m an awful traveler, though. It’s still nice to know they’re around so you can go see them once in a while.”

“It is,” I agree. “Do you want to end up in a pack someday?” The words are out before I can stop myself from speaking, and I hold my breath as I wait for her answer.

“Yeah.” She grabs her bottle of water and twists off the cap. “I think all omegas dream about finding their pack. It’s quite literally coded into our DNA. How about you?”

“Absolutely,” I tell her truthfully. “I loved growing up in a pack. I’ve always known I wanted to end up having Law as one of my packmates. When we met Bryant, it was seamless. We just don’t happen to run into a lot of omegas up here.”

Abby chokes, sputtering as she puts the lid back on her water.

I stretch over, patting her back. “You okay, gorgeous?”

“Went down the wrong pipe.”

I smile.

She’s cute as hell, and I’m in so much trouble. Ever since I caught the first whiff of her scent, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about her.

I always thought the stories of alphas and omegas bonding before names were even exchanged were bullshit.

Only, now I know better.

I haven't had the chance to learn all there is to know about Abby, but my instincts won't shut up about biting her so she can't get away.

We could always get to know each other once we bonded...

Well, shit.

I've definitely slipped into the obsessive side of being an alpha.

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Chapter Thirteen

Abby

Luka is charming. He carries the conversation, which is a good thing. I felt more like I was pursuing Lawson the days we were snowed in together, but with Luka, it feels like he's the one trying to engage with me.

"Well, I bet you're tired," he says as the movie comes to an end. "It's probably time I head home. Do you want me to take Echo out before I leave?"

"Oh, it's okay. I can do it."

He leans over, grabbing my sleeve. "You're already in your jammies. I don't want any of the assholes leaving the bar to give you trouble. I don't mind."

"I appreciate it," I say, smiling. "The restaurant was closed the first few nights I was here. I didn't realize I'd be running out to let Echo pee while people were leaving the building." I shake my head. "I'm not complaining. That sounded so ungrateful, and I didn't mean it to. I appreciate having a place to stay."

"Don't stress, Abby," he says, standing from the couch. "I got what you meant. I know what it's like. I've stayed here regularly. Any time I left before the bar closed, noise filtered up from downstairs."

"Yeah, but the bedroom is above the restaurant, so it's not too bad, usually." I smile as Echo climbs off the sofa from where she was curled on Luka's other side.

I still have no idea how she made room for herself between him and the arm of the couch, but I get it.

I, too, would love to be curled up on a sexy alpha's lap.

“Sometimes a loud car or truck will start after we’ve gone to bed,” I say. “She barks when that happens, but overall, I’ve mostly learned to tune out the noise, which is crazy when we’ve only been here a week.”

“Still, you never answer the door to anyone you aren’t expecting,” Luka says, leaning down to pat Echo’s blocky head. “I don’t care if they scream bloody murder while begging for help. You stay safely locked inside the apartment and call 911. I’m sure Echo could mess someone up if necessary, but it’s not worth the risk.”

“That’s a good point.”

I’ve been lucky so far.

No one has given me any trouble when I was coming or going or bringing Echo out for a walk, but I have made it a point of waiting until no one is around before I come upstairs.

I think, no matter where I was, I’d always be a little anxious.

Omegas do best when we have alphas at our sides. Now I just have to figure out how to get these three specific alphas to stop dawdling and get to courting me.

* * *

I’m just getting into my jacket the next morning when there’s a knock at the door.

My mind flies back to what Luka said last night. While it was good advice, it’s also early enough that no one should be at Maxwell’s.

Echo barks, and I shush her, waving a hand, like that might more effectively shut her up.

Shockingly, it doesn’t help.

I step over, preparing to check the peephole, but freeze.

Oh, God.

There’s no way Tommy found me...

Right?

I hold my breath as I prepare to check who’s on the other side of the door. My hands fist and unfurl, as though that might give me extra strength.

The person knocks again before I get stretched up on my tiptoes.

I squeak, pulling my hand to cover my mouth.

“Abby? You awake? It’s Bryant. Shit, I probably should have texted before coming up.”

My entire body sags against the door, and I exhale heavily, nodding.

It's just Bryant.

Tommy didn't track us down.

I managed to freak myself out over nothing. Flipping the locks, I pull the door open.

A bitter gust of cold wind smacks me in the face as Bryant slips inside.

"Good morning, ladies," he says, winking before he bends down to pat Echo's head.

My eyes widen.

He's loaded down with bags.

"Whoa, do you want me to take any of that?" I ask as I close the door and flip the dead bolt.

"Nah, I've got it," he says, skirting around Echo and walking over to the table. "Are you guys headed out for a walk?"

"Yeah, she hasn't had a bathroom break this morning," I admit, wondering why he's here.

"Ah, well, let's take her out," he says, smiling brightly. "Then I'll show you what I brought."

That sounds good, but it didn't clear up my confusion, not even one tiny bit.

* * *

We make it back inside, and Bryant leads me to the table with his hands on my shoulders.

It's still early.

I hadn't even had the chance to brush my teeth, since Echo woke me up heavy-breathing on my face. She's usually pretty good about letting me sleep, but when it gets to that step, I know it's serious.

"Are you hungry? I brought breakfast." He slides around me as we make it to the table, pulling out a chair. "I got you the same thing as last time. Bacon, hash browns, French toast, and eggs, but I noticed you didn't eat them the other day, so we can give them to Echo if eggs aren't your thing."

"I can't do eggs. I have no idea why they gross me out, but they do." I take a seat, and Bryant moves behind me, pushing in my chair.

“Noted.” He chuckles. “Well, Echo will be happy to have them. I got them scrambled with cheese just because I had a feeling you weren’t a big egg person. Do you want me to have them swapped out with something next time?”

Next time?

My hair is a poof ball from rolling around all night.

I’m rocking my Christmas pajamas.

Not to be redundant, but I *still* haven’t brushed my teeth.

While I’m not sure why anyone as sexy as Bryant would want my breakfast order, I’m hopeful that means he likes me too.

I smile over my shoulder at him. “Honestly, bacon, hash browns, and French toast is plenty.”

“I’m not huge on breakfast either, so I can appreciate keeping it light,” he says, moving around to dig in the bags.

I almost snort.

Three food items is not *keeping it light* for breakfast, but he’s in killer shape. I bet he burns off a lot of calories working out at his gym every day.

He places a food box down in front of me, along with a pack of plastic silverware. “What do you want to drink?”

“Oh, um, just a Coke.” I tuck my hair behind my ear as I pop the lid on the food. “I don’t drink coffee, but I need some caffeine to get moving.”

I’m not sure why I’m self-conscious about not being a fan of coffee. It gives me a stomachache, and I never feel good after drinking it. Actually, I do know why I’m afraid Bryant will look at me funny. Tommy picked on me about it and even called me a child for not liking the taste of the expensive espresso he tried to get me to drink.

“Hey, I love a crisp Coke first thing in the morning.” Bryant sets the can of Coke on the table and pops the lid. “Dig in, pretty girl.”

I blink repeatedly.

Pretty girl?

Is he just one of those flirtatious people? Maybe he was afraid of scaring me off that first morning, so he toned down his natural personality?

I focus on getting the plastic fork and knife out and cut myself a piece of French toast before taking a bite.

“Okay, so it’s somewhat a rite of passage up here to underestimate the weather,” he says, digging into one of the bags. “Luka noticed you were cold. He stopped by the sporting goods store on the way home last night,

and bam!” He pulls something gray out of the bag. “Now you have a matching scarf, beanie, and gloves. Everyone thinks a beanie is overkill, but you lose like ten percent of your body warmth through your head. Well, that’s what my mom always told me. I have no idea if it’s actually true. On the bright side, you’ll look really cute in it.”

“That’s so thoughtful.” I swipe my drink off the table to take a long swig. “I’ll have to thank him when I’m back at work, but please pass along the message for me. I know you’ll see him before I will.”

I have today and tomorrow off, which is nice after working the last six days straight. At the same time, I don’t have any friends here. Sitting in the apartment for two days sounds depressing.

“You can always text him or stop in for dinner downstairs,” Bryant says, winking. “But I’ll be sure to tell him. Okay, what’s next? Oh, yeah. Lawson sent this for you, Echo.” He pulls out a massive bone. “God, it smells gross. Let me get it away from you while you eat.”

Echo pops up at his side, wagging her tail.

“They’re spoiling you rotten,” I say, reaching out to run my hand down her spine.

She runs off, following Bryant into the living room.

“Lawson is particular as fuck when it comes to what Shadow is allowed to have, so at least you know it’s good quality.” He chuckles. “I’m pretty sure it’s an actual cow bone filled with marrow. Oh, Jesus. I could live without that smell first thing in the morning. Sit. Okay, here. Just take it before I gag.”

I laugh, peeking over my shoulder to see what’s happening.

Bryant holds the plastic the bone was wrapped in between two fingers with his nose wrinkling. He takes it to the trash can and moves to wash his hands. “I heard a rumor that you’re off today. Do you have anything planned?”

“Nah, I haven’t exactly had the chance to make friends yet,” I say, wishing I had said anything but that.

Everyone up here has been great.

Well, except Bev.

My manager seems to be sweet as pie to all the servers, excluding me. I don’t know what I did to make her dislike me, but I’m hoping she’ll be more welcoming the better I get at my job.

“We’re getting down to the wire, but I finally buckled down and bought Christmas decorations for the gym.” Bryant dries his hands on his jeans as he comes into the dining room, taking a seat across the table from me. He pulls out a food container like mine and gets to work opening the plastic silverware. “I thought maybe I could sweet-talk you into helping me out today? I’ll pay you—”

“You don’t have to do that,” I say, cutting him off. “I would love to help. Maybe I could even work in exchange for a gym membership?”

I bet it would be way easier to meet friends at the gym than it has been at the restaurant. The majority of the employees working with me at Maxwell’s during the day are fifteen to twenty years older than I am. The night shift and bar staff seem to be closer to my age, but I leave right as they’re coming in.

“You don’t need to work to pay for a membership.” Bryant chuckles. “We’ll get you set up with one today.”

Chapter Fourteen

Bryant

Abby clearly had no idea what kind of gym I run. She spins to face me after spotting the boxing ring, and her head tilts.

I chuckle, my hand twitching with the urge to wrap it around her lower back and pull her into my chest.

“We do boxing and MMA training,” I say, shrugging. “But if we continue around that wall over there, we’ll get to the exercise equipment.”

“Oh,” she says, nodding.

Echo leans against my calf, barking at a couple of guys who come around the corner from the locker rooms on their way out.

“Hush, don’t be rude,” Abby says, bending to pat Echo’s head. “If you’re noisy, I’m going to have to take you back to the apartment.”

“She’s no trouble. She was just saying hello.” I laugh. “Hopefully she won’t mind relaxing in my office while we decorate.”

“Here’s hoping she doesn’t whine or bark the entire time.” Abby stands, rolling her shoulders back.

“Ehh, almost everyone wears headphones while they’re on the equipment, anyway.” I shrug. “My office is a decent distance from the ring, so I doubt it’ll bother them.”

Even if they can hear her, they’ll deal.

I want to spend time with Abby, and the entire reason we brought Echo is so she wouldn’t bark while Abby was gone and annoy the restaurant guests.

* * *

I'm going to get so much shit from the guys currently sparring in the ring, but it'll be worth it. Christmas music plays through the Bluetooth speaker I dug out of my office for just this occasion.

I had no idea that Abby would take decorating the gym so seriously. She checked out the decorations and lights, then carefully circled the gym, coming up with a game plan.

Now I'm her assistant, following her around like a puppy, and damn if it isn't the most fun I've had in a long time.

Her electric scent makes my whole body buzz with a weird energy that I've never experienced. It's unexpected but not unwelcome. I just don't know what the hell it means.

I've met omegas who smelled good before.

This is different.

It's almost a yearning to be in her presence, and when I am, I ache to touch her.

The latter part is inconvenient.

We aren't there yet, but I'm laying on the charm and doing my best to get her comfortable with me.

All three of us are.

Christmas is just around the corner, and not one of us likes the idea of her staying at the apartment alone. Hell, we aren't particularly pleased with her living above the bar at all.

I've kicked myself many times for not bringing her directly to our house the day the storm was about to hit. At the same time, that would have felt predatory.

Lawson may have ended up sharing space with her at the apartment, but it was an accident. I can't help but think that she agreed to stay at the apartment because she believed she would be alone.

"Okay, I'm ready for another," she says, holding out her hand as she waits for me to place an ornament on her palm.

It's cute as hell.

She's perched on the step stool, and even then, she really has to stretch to reach the garland lining the top of the front window.

I didn't have the heart to tell her that I could have reached the garland without even having to stretch.

"Here you go, pretty girl." I hand her one of the silver ornaments.

"Thanks."

She leans over, hanging it on the garland.

“Careful.” My heart rate picks up as I slide up behind her, planting my hands on her hips. “It’s better to be safe than sorry. We need to move the step stool after this. I don’t want to risk you falling off.”

“I am clumsy by nature.” She laughs. “Thanks, Bryant.”

“No problem.” I lift her, stepping back to allow for space to put her on her feet.

She squeaks, grabbing my hands. “Holy shit.” As soon as she’s on the floor, she spins in my hold. “That was like something straight out of a Christmas movie.”

My hands stay resting on her hips, and my head tilts. “Are you a romantic?”

Jesus.

There it is again.

Raspberry and lemon with hints of something shocking and stormy underneath.

The edges of her lips pull up, and every cell in my body screams to kiss her. She has a soft chin and full cheeks that fit her face to perfection. Not to mention those puffy pink lips.

She’s so fucking pretty.

“You know, maybe I am.” She stretches up onto her tiptoes, kissing the edge of my mouth. She lingers a second longer than would indicate she’s just being friendly and keeps eye contact as she lowers to her heels.

My hands tighten on her hips, and I grin. That’s a good sign, and it’s all I need to not feel like a creep about pursuing her.

It’s on now.

“So, you like Christmas movies,” I say conversationally. “How do you feel about the full princess treatment?”

A sly smile crosses her face as her fingers dig into my chest. “I think all omegas are coded to crave being taken care of, but I’m not afraid to work and chip in. I love being helpful.” She steps back, and I force myself to release my hold on her, even though it’s the last thing I want to do. “Okay, now we have to figure out how to put the fake tree together.” She claps, glancing around like she’s trying to determine where we should put it. “This is going to be so much fun.”

With her around?

Yes, it is.

If she hadn't popped up in town, I likely wouldn't have even bothered decorating, but I'm not above orchestrating excuses to spend time together. Especially not when I know she's interested in us too.

* * *

Lawson stops by a while later.

I'm not shocked. He mentioned wanting to install another lock on the apartment door today. He's also been working with Echo to build her confidence, whatever that means.

Okay, maybe I'm a dick.

He said that once a dog is confident, it naturally starts to trust its assessment of dangerous situations. Basically, I think Law is training her to fuck someone up if they went into the apartment without being invited.

And I was worried about being too pushy?

Ha.

I let Lawson into my office, and he hits his knees, nuzzling his face to Echo's.

"Hey, pretty lady," Law says, chuckling. "I missed you."

Echo pops up, and her entire body wiggles from side to side as her tail whacks against the wall. Well, he managed to win over one out of the two ladies.

"All right, come on." Law pops up, wiping his hands off on his jeans. "We gotta put another lock on the apartment, and you get to keep me company while I work."

Sometimes I wonder what it's like to have infinite patience.

I certainly wasn't born with that gift.

I hand over her leash, and Law gets it clipped to her harness.

"What's the plan for this evening?" I ask, backing toward the door.

He shrugs. "I'm hoping Abby will make it back to the apartment so I can spend a few hours with her before I have to head home to check on Shadow."

"Why didn't you bring him?"

"Echo needs more one-on-one training," he says, patting the mutt's head. "She gets too distracted when he's around, and he wants to show off how good he is at everything. I don't want her to get discouraged."

I laugh.

Who the hell would know stuff like that outside of Lawson?

“They are bonding really well, though.” He nods to the door. “Let’s check on Abby. We shouldn’t leave her alone with all the gym bros for too long.”

I snort, shaking my head.

I process the thought for half a second.

He’s right.

It’s not a good idea to leave her out there in a room filled with alphas. She couldn’t be pulled away from decorating the tree, but now I’m wondering if it was a bad call to leave her alone.

Anyone who bothers her had better watch out. I won’t hesitate to beat them to death with my bare hands.

* * *

Lawson growls louder than Echo as we come around the corner into the front of the gym.

Abby stands next to the mostly decorated Christmas tree with her arms crossed while three men hover nearby in a semicircle. If they could see the situation from where we’re standing, I’m sure they would get that the optics are bad, but they probably just think they’re tossing their hats into the ring with the new girl in town.

Abby smiles, nodding.

To someone who wasn’t paying attention, it could look like she’s happy to engage with them. Her closed-off body language says otherwise. She backs up, even running into one of the tree branches.

“I’m going to break their hands.” Lawson takes off toward the group, but I plant a hand on his chest, pushing him back. “Maybe their legs too.”

“Chill, I’ve got this,” I say, keeping my tone low. “We don’t want to risk scaring her off. If you beat them to a bloody pulp, not only will I have a mess to clean up, but she’ll also realize how unhinged you are.”

“Who says I’ll do it here? I’ll drag their asses off into the woods, and you’ll have three less membership renewals.”

“You can’t court Abby if you’re in prison,” I remind him, laughing. “Just remember that.”

Chapter Fifteen

Abby

I'm not necessarily scared, considering we're in a public location. I've got a decent amount of experience blowing off pushy alphas. I'm kinda confused why they want to talk to me at all; none of them are scent matches. In fact, not one of them smells particularly good to my senses.

I guess what they've said is true—it's rare for omegas to pop up around here, especially during winter. I'm surprised at how relieved I feel when Lawson and Bryant come around the corner.

Not that I really thought anything bad would happen to me in the middle of the gym, but the door is right there. If these guys were dangerous, they could drag me out into the parking lot, and I wouldn't have a chance in hell at fighting back.

Damn.

Maybe I should ask Bryant if he does self-defense lessons?

Tommy would have told me I was being dramatic.

Maybe I am?

No.

I think it's reasonable to want to know that I can protect myself if the need arises.

Lawson stomps across the room with Echo. I peek between the men, marveling at how she keeps pace at his side. She never seems to lunge at or drag him the way she does me.

Then again, Lawson is a total vibe.

I wouldn't want to disappoint him either.

She keeps her head tilted, like she's watching his face and waiting for her next command. It's impressive how much he's taught her in such a short

period of time. It leads me to believe that she must have been bored out of her mind when she was lying around Tommy's house all day and night.

Lawson comes up, circling around the men while growling, "Move."

Their heads whip up as they jolt.

I shouldn't be so smug about how easy it was for him to make them jump, but it's satisfying. I don't even care if that's weird.

"Hey," I say, smiling brightly. "Are you two headed out?"

Seeing him take such good care of Echo only manages to make me more attracted to him, maybe because it's easy to imagine how well he would take care of me and any theoretical future children.

Wow.

I am an obsessive freak.

"Yeah, we'll wait for you over at the apartment." Lawson looks almost shy as his head bobs.

My stomach flip-flops with butterflies.

He's so cute, which might sound strange when describing a six-foot-four alpha, but it's true.

Bryant steps over and ushers the men away.

Lawson's lip curls, a little like Echo's does when she doesn't like a command, and he glares until the guys are out of our orbit. "I didn't like how they were crowding you," he says, scratching his thick beard with the hand not holding Echo's leash. "If I paid each one of them a visit with my brother and Bryant, we could see how they like being cornered with a three-to-one ratio."

"They probably wouldn't." I laugh and stretch a hand over, resting it on his forearm. "They were mostly harmless. I'm used to it. Anyway, I appreciate you coming to get her." I nod to Echo. "She wasn't barking or anything, at least not that I could hear. Are we disrupting your day?"

"Not a bit. Luka mostly runs Maxwell's. I just pop in when he wants a break."

"I've noticed you aren't there a lot, but I assumed it was because you were helping out with Echo," I admit. "I know she can get loud when I'm not around to tell her to hush."

"That's normal, though it might get better with a little extra training." His massive shoulder bounces. "It also might not. Some dogs are naturally more vocal, but a little barking never killed anyone."

"Yeah," I agree as my stomach flutters.

It really is easy to imagine how calm he would be with a fussy baby. I've always wanted kids and a big family, but I'm usually not so quick to project random thoughts onto other people.

Yikes.

My upcoming heat might be affecting me more than I realized.

"I'm not sure how much longer I'll be here," I say to get back on track.

"No rush. I'll be there whenever you're done." He moves Echo's leash to his other hand and cradles my cheek in his massive palm. "Have fun with Bryant. Don't let him forget to feed you lunch." He bends down, kissing my temple.

It's such a brief point of contact, then he's gone. My knees get weak, and I find myself bouncing on my toes.

Holy shit.

I'm far too desperate for affection.

If I'm not careful, I'll throw myself at him, embarrassing us both in the process.

* * *

"How's your salad?" Bryant asks as we sit in his office a while later.

"So good," I practically groan. "You were right. Their crispy chicken combined with the honey mustard dressing is freaking delicious."

I might try it with ranch or blue cheese next time, but it's one of those salads that would taste divine, no matter the dressing.

It also came with a honey butter croissant that I was depressed when I finished. I'll be ordering extra the next time I eat at this place.

The salad is bright, with chunky tomatoes, hard-boiled egg, bacon, cucumber, and cheddar cheese. It also had purple onions, but like a child, I shoved them to the side. Luckily they came in a chunk, so it was easy to scoop them up with my fork.

I don't think I realized how badly my body was craving vegetables. I've been eating a lot of junk lately or settling for a can of soup after work.

"I'm happy to know I didn't steer you wrong," he says, chuckling. "How are you enjoying Bay Pines?"

"It's nice. I haven't really had the chance to explore, but I love it so far." I take a long swig of my bottle of water before placing it back on the table. "Everyone has been welcoming."

Except Bev, I add silently.

It sucks, but I might not be cut out to be a server. Her negativity has really taken a toll on my self-worth.

"I mean, the three of you have gone above and beyond," I say, laughing. "But everyone I run into is polite and helpful. The only downside is that I'm still not confident driving in the snow."

"You know, it's something I've done my whole life, and I still let Lawson or Luka drive if there's a choice."

"It's nice that you have someone you trust to ride with so you can relax." I tuck my hair behind my ear. "Can I ask how you met Luka and Lawson?"

"Absolutely." He laughs. "But it's a long story. Let's see." He hums. "I played baseball in high school and got a scholarship to play in college. Only, I jacked up my rotator cuff, and that was that. I knew I wasn't making it to the majors after that. I stayed in school long enough to get my bachelor's degree, but it was expensive without the scholarship to cover the majority of my expenses. I got a job at a local boxing gym to help with spending money and racked up a fair amount in student loans." He shrugs, frowning. "I'd probably still be drowning in debt from that if one of my dads hadn't been injured at work. The company knew the equipment was faulty, and they failed to fix it."

"Is he okay?"

"Now? Yeah," he says, nodding. "At the time, his pelvis, hip, and thigh were decimated. He won a lawsuit against his employer. My family pack paid off their debt, bought a new car, put a little in savings, and the rest they split between me, my sisters, and my brother."

"I'm glad he's okay, but God, that must have been scary."

"It was," he agrees, closing the lid on his salad. "It was a long recovery. When I came to town, everyone assumed I grew up with money. I didn't. I never would have been able to buy this place without that settlement. I poured everything into buying the building and equipment outright." He chuckles. "I was living in this terrible little studio apartment downtown. Eventually, I got close with Luka. Then I met Lawson. The three of us meshed really well, and I moved in with them. I've known them for four years, but we didn't start living together until three years ago."

"Have you guys ever considered being matched?" The words pop out before I can stop myself from speaking, and I kinda wish a hole would open

up and swallow me.

“We’ve discussed it casually, but there aren’t any omega-matching programs close by,” he says. “I think we were all hoping we would meet someone organically.”

“That makes sense,” I say, smiling tightly.

Why is it so hard to tell if they might be interested in me? I feel like I’m putting myself out there. It’s time for them to make a move. That way, maybe I’ll stop driving myself crazy.

* * *

Over the next several hours, I help Bryant with some admin tasks. Once we’re done, he takes my picture and gives me a shiny new membership card.

With Bryant’s help about what his friend would actually eat, I called in a dinner order for me and Lawson.

Bryant drives me over to the restaurant and pulls into a parking spot.

“Thank you,” I say, unclipping my seat belt. “I had so much fun.”

He chuckles, turning to face me. “I enjoyed it too. If you ever want to pick up some extra hours at the gym, come on over. As you saw, I have a backlog of paperwork and admin tasks that I’ll never catch up on at this rate.”

I smile as we say our goodbyes, then I head into Maxwell’s to pick up dinner.

Before leaving, I pop into Luka’s office.

His eyes sparkle when he spots me. “I didn’t think you were working today. At least, not here. Don’t tell me Bryant is stealing you away from me already.”

“No, not at all.” I laugh, setting the bags of food on the edge of his desk. “I just wanted to stop by to thank you for the winter gear.” I shake the scarf that’s wrapped around my neck. “As you can see, I’m already putting it to good use. The gloves are in my purse too.”

“I’m glad,” he says, leaning back in his chair. “Did you grab dinner?” His arms stretch above his head, and his long-sleeve T-shirt pulls up, showing several inches of his lower stomach.

Damn.

Luka’s abdomen is covered in tattoos.

He's nowhere close to as thick as his brother, but he has a strong medium build. He reminds me a little of a swimmer or a soccer player with the wide shoulders and slender waist.

His shirt falls into place, and my eyes fly to his.

The smile that tips his lips says he knows I was checking him out.

Oh, well.

The goal is to let them know I'm interested without having to outright be the aggressor.

I'm the omega in this relationship, dammit.

We don't chase.

Alphas are supposed to do the hunting part.

"I grabbed dinner for Lawson as a thank you for helping out with Echo," I say, smiling. "I didn't want to wait to thank you for the gifts. They're lovely, and I promise I'll get tons of use out of them."

"You're very welcome. Maybe I'll spring for a coat next time and see if it gets me dinner." He winks, and my silly heart races.

Yep.

I'm majorly out of my depth with these men.

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Chapter Sixteen

Lawson

A bby notices the brand-new third lock on her way in the door, and it's the first thing she asks about.

"Ehh, this one is only accessible from inside," I say, shrugging. "Meaning no one can pick the lock. If you lock it, you'll need to be the one to unlock it. Unless the fire department were to bust the door down or something, but you get the idea."

"That is strangely comforting," she says, grinning. "Now, are you hungry? I sprang for dinner as a thank you for all the time you've put in with Echo."

That damn playful smile makes my chest feel weird. I'm not a giddy person, but the strange anticipation fluttering in my stomach says otherwise.

"That sounds almost like a date," I blurt out.

"Huh, ya know what? It does." The lightness to her tone makes me hopeful that I didn't say the wrong thing. "Can we eat on the couch? I'm feeling like the table is a lot of work."

"The couch works for me. Why don't you get that set up, and I'll get Echo her dinner?"

"That's perfect."

* * *

Since we're eating in front of the TV, I put on the news.

On the drive over, I heard there's another storm front coming our way within the next few days.

They're forecasting ice before snow, which is never a good sign, *except* when I want the adorable little omega to be stranded at our house for at least a few nights.

We'll take good care of her, and maybe if we do a solid job, she'll realize how much more relaxing our home is compared to living above Maxwell's.

I've spent more than a few hours daydreaming about closing down the bar, just so I wouldn't develop an ulcer from worrying about her being surrounded by drunk idiots in the middle of the night while taking Echo out.

I would end up in prison for sure, and that would be counterproductive to being able to court her and keep her forever.

She somehow ordered my burger exactly how I like it and substituted macaroni and cheese for the fries, exactly like I always do.

That's more than a woman has done for me in my *life*, excluding my mother.

We eat and chat about nothing, and once we're done, Abby scoots closer to my side.

Echo is already stretched out on the other cushion with her head on my thigh.

I toss my arm over the back of the couch in an attempt to lure the omega even closer.

Abby grabbed the throw blanket earlier and covered her lap before she started eating. She brings it up, tucking it around her chest.

"You cold, sweetheart?"

"A little," she says, wiggling around the cushion.

I pat my pec. "Scoot over. I'll warm you up."

"Thanks." She plasters her face to my chest, leaning into me.

I smile, shaking my head.

She's so damn cute.

I'm not cut like Luka or Bryant.

I'm strong, but I'm also soft.

While I might not make women drool when I take my shirt off, I know I'm comfortable to cuddle with.

That has to count for something, goddammit.

I pull my arm off the couch, planting my hand on her hip and pulling her closer.

She feels so small compared to me, but alphas tend to have close to a foot in height on omegas. I have to believe nature knows what it's doing on that front.

She nuzzles her face around my shirt, and I can't be sure, but I think she's seeking out where my scent is strongest.

I focus on her sweet raspberry and lemon scent until a low, vibrating purr rattles out of my chest.

"Oh, man," Abby says softly. "You're just playing dirty now."

"Do you like it?"

"I love it," she murmurs. "It's like catnip for omegas. Omega-nip."

I snort. "Well, I'll keep that in mind if I ever get on your bad side."

"I doubt that's possible," she says. "Thank you for all the work you've put in with training Echo. Not to mention, the whole *giving me a place to stay* thing. I don't know where I'd be right now if I hadn't run into Bryant that morning in his parking lot."

"I'm grateful he ran across you too." I bend down, kissing the top of her head like a total lovestruck weirdo.

Echo gets mouthy and rolls over onto her back, yawning and doing what I call grunt-talking.

I scratch her belly and go back to watching the TV.

It really is a perfect moment in time.

The only thing that's missing is Shadow.

And I guess Luka and Bryant too.

The weather report rolls back around, and this time Abby is paying attention. Her small hand lands on my stomach as she pushes forward in her seat, like leaning closer might help her hear better.

"Is that something we need to worry about?" she asks, her hair falling around her face as she peeks up at me over her shoulder.

"The ice is the problematic part," I say cautiously. "We can get a shit ton of snow without it causing much trouble. It's a pain in the ass when you have to clean off your car so you can leave for work or go to the store, but the snowplows run around the clock when it gets bad. The problem with ice is that it drags down power lines and trees. It also sticks to the road, and it can't be cleared in the same way snow can."

"That sounds really freaking dangerous," she whispers.

"We got lucky that it was mostly snow rather than ice last time. That's how everything cleared up so fast."

“How long could a storm like he’s talking about last?”

“Anywhere from a couple days to a week.” I shrug. “The ice won’t be coming down for that long, but it takes time to melt. Don’t stress. If that storm hits us, you’ll be coming to our house to ride it out. I would never leave you and Echo here without a generator or, at the very least, a wood-burning stove.” I laugh. “Okay, I lied. Even then, I’d probably try to convince you to come stay with us. It’s just safer that way. Especially since you don’t have any experience with this kind of weather.”

“Okay, good.” She nods, snuggling back against my side. “I’m not too proud to admit that I’d be scared shitless.”

And this is why alphas and omegas work perfectly together.

Now I just need to determine if it’s creepy to pray that the once-in-a-lifetime storm they promised us last week actually hits this time.

* * *

I barely get to see Abby for the next couple days. She spends some time with Bryant at the gym, then she’s back to work at Maxwell’s.

I’ve never wanted to hang out at my family’s restaurant. Hell, I thought it was straight-up torture when our parents forced us to work there to help our uncle out during the summer when we were growing up.

I’d be happy to sit around watching Abby work, but I’m afraid I’d fire Bev.

Luka has mentioned a handful of times that Bev isn’t fond of Abby, and I’ve never been particularly impressed by our restaurant manager. I didn’t say anything, because Luka liked her. Now that the cracks are starting to show, I’m ready to let her go at any time.

Still, it’s almost Christmas.

Firing anyone right before a big holiday is shitty, so she can stay until the new year, as long as she isn’t cruel to Abby.

If she is?

Well, I’ll be as polite to her as she’s been to my omega.

I spend my free time working with Echo and setting up the house for Abby’s arrival.

The storm is still headed our way, and even though it’s not set to hit until tomorrow afternoon, Luka is supposed to bring her and Echo home with him tonight after work.

I'm a nervous mess, but being proactive always helps me feel less out of control.

Having her in our space is going to take some getting used to, especially the *not hovering* part. Mostly, I just need to ensure everything is set up in a way to be as comfortable as possible for her.

Another worry popped up last night when I remembered that omegas have heats every three months. There's a possibility that she takes suppressants. If she doesn't and a heat starts, she would be in for a world of pain and discomfort if she tried to ride it out alone.

That thought is terrifying, but hopefully, we'll woo the hell out of her during the storm, and she'll never want to leave. If we can swing that, we'll be available for whatever she needs from here on out.

I may have gone *a little* overboard with my purchases, at least based on Bryant's laughter when he spots me toting the massive shipping boxes through the living room.

"Damn, man. What the hell did you buy?" he asks. "I ignored it yesterday when the FedEx guy was looking like he wanted to shank me with all the boxes he had to unload. Now you've got a whole new set today. Is all of that for Abby?"

"No," I lie.

Okay, it's more like stretching the truth.

I'm fairly sure at least one of the boxes contains the new bed that I bought for Echo.

The rest is for Abby, but he should keep his mouth closed if he wants to claim any of the multitude of gifts that I bought are from him.

I'm not a selfish packmate.

I understand this is a team effort to win her over, but if he heckles me, he can spend his own money and pray his purchases arrive before the storm.

"You are such a shit liar," Bryant says, chuckling. "Okay, so what did you get? Need any help putting it together?"

"You can help me hang the curtains in the nest," I say, nodding. "There's also probably twenty loads of laundry to be done before we stock the shelves in the nest. If you're coming, come the fuck on."

"Oh, I wouldn't miss out on this for anything," he says, shoving off the sofa.

Chapter Seventeen

Abby

“I promise I’m not a serial killer,” Luka says, chuckling as we drive toward his home. “We just live in the middle of nowhere.”

“I trust you,” I say, reaching over and patting his arm.

Not only am I really starting to trust Luka, Lawson, and Bryant, I’m also excited to spend a few days with them.

At the same time, I can safely say that if Bryant had tried to bring me to their house the first day we met, I legit would have thought he was taking me to the woods to murder me.

“Good,” he says, peeking over at me as he stretches back in his seat. “Law has spent the last two days doing everything he can to prep the house for your arrival. Bryant went over a full itinerary of things we can do to keep you from getting bored. They’d kick my ass if I scared you off.”

“Just them?” I ask, fluttering my lashes. “You wouldn’t be disappointed?”

“Oh, gorgeous. I never said that.” He winks and focuses back on the road.

My stomach flip-flops as he stretches back in his seat.

Something about the way he maneuvers the massive vehicle with so little effort is attractive.

His shaggy blondish-brown hair falls around his face, but it doesn’t detract from his killer jawline. While he’s not smiling at the moment, I know dimples appear faintly in his cheeks when he gets particularly pleased about something.

Dammit.

Santa Claus and the universe had better be listening.

I really only want one thing for Christmas this year...
Them.

* * *

The drive is surprisingly relaxing. It's probably only ten or fifteen minutes outside of town, but it feels like an entirely different world. The houses we pass on the main road are set back with long driveways. They're also what I would consider mini mansions. The farther from town we get, the more sporadic the homes become.

It's only another minute before Luka says, "This is our driveway."

"It's very cozy," I say, marveling at the trees on either side of the easement.

"It's kind of a hike into town, but I can't lie, the views make it worth it." He grins, and my stomach flutters. "Okay, it makes it worth it ninety-five percent of the time. Very occasionally, I'd sell the whole damn thing for pizza delivery, but luckily, Law is above hanger. He would never let me."

I laugh. "Being angry-hungry is a real thing. I turn into a monster when I go too long without eating."

"Oh yeah, I bet you're a real nightmare," he says, his tone playful.

"I guess you'll just have to wait and see." I shrug. "You'll shove a cookie at me and run."

"Is that the trick to settling you down? Toss a treat and back away slowly with my palms raised?"

"It's the safest option."

He booms a laugh. "I'll keep that in mind."

My jaw falls, and I lean forward in my seat as the house comes into view. The driveway circles the huge detached garage and passes the porch that takes up most of the front of the house. If you followed it around, you'd loop back to head out to the road.

The front yard is lit up with floodlights and those small exterior lights that shine on the house to make it look fancy. If I ever knew the name for them, I forgot it.

The house is massive in a modern farmhouse design. It's at least two stories, maybe three. It's hard to tell with the small windows on the very top. Those might belong to a finished attic or something.

The exterior is white or a pale cream, and the accents are black or very dark gray. Even with the lights, it's nearly impossible to tell. The porch boards and railing are that same dark color, and I absolutely love it.

"Holy shit," I whisper as Echo jumps up onto the middle console from the back seat. She was well-behaved during the drive, but now that the vehicle has slowed down, she's a mess. "Oh God, get your butt back there." I give her chest a shove, which does nothing. I was so worried that her nails would ruin the leather seats, but punctures in the middle console would be even worse.

"She's fine," Luka says, hitting a button on the clicker on his visor. The garage door opens slowly, and he pulls inside and parks. "Ready to check out the house? I can come back for your stuff once you and Echo get settled."

"I don't want you to have to come back out in the cold. We can carry it in with us."

"It does look like a completely detached garage, doesn't it?" He points to the back-left corner. "That door leads to a hallway that connects to the laundry room. We added it when we added on the garage."

Damn.

I guess I missed that.

"That sounds great. Thanks, Luka."

* * *

The house is incredible, and I'm only a little overwhelmed at having Bryant and Lawson join Luka for the tour.

It's always strange being in someone else's space, but I'm also relieved not to be risking it at the apartment.

Right after the first storm, I updated my brother on where I ended up. I didn't want to tell him too much, so I settled on the basics, letting him know that I'm in Bay Pines and working at Maxwell's.

I didn't want him to worry, and I thought it was important that someone know where I was.

He mentioned that Tommy called him, which wasn't what I wanted to hear, but I was expecting it. At the point my ex reached out, Austin had no idea where I was, so he couldn't tell him.

I still asked him not to tell Tommy anything if he called again. Austin didn't say *I told you so*, but I could tell he wasn't surprised that things went south between us.

If my brother could see me now, he'd develop an ulcer.

I really have put a lot of faith in Bryant, Lawson, and Luka, but it's not like I had a ton of options.

The first bad choice I made was trusting Tommy enough to move states away after only knowing him in person for two weeks. I was nervous then, but I ignored my instincts.

My gut tells me I'm safe with these guys, and I can only hope that I can trust my intuition not to lead me astray.

The fact the house is practically a mansion adds a whole different kind of stress to the situation.

If I pursue them, will they think I'm a gold digger?

Yeah, I knew they owned two businesses, but I guess I didn't realize they had the kind of money that it would take to live in a place like this. Hell, I couldn't even pay the electricity bill for this house.

Echo bolts past us as we stand in the living room, and Shadow runs by a few seconds later. Their nails clack on the wood flooring, and I can only pray they don't get too rough and cause damage.

More books to choose from.

Look up **Lokepub** on Google and find a novel you like.

The interior of the house is just as fancy as the exterior. When we first came in through the hallway that connects the garage to the house, we stepped into a combination laundry room, mudroom, and storage area.

Luka pointed out the gym that's on the same hallway as we passed through, and then we ended up here.

The living room is on the back side of the house, and it has two large windows that look over a spacious porch at the rear of the home.

"You can't see it with how dark it is, but the backyard is fenced in," Bryant says, nodding to the windows. "Past that and down the hill, you'll

find the lake. During the day, you can see the water right from here.”

“Wow, I bet it’s beautiful.”

“It is,” Lawson agrees, shoving his hands into his pockets. “Are you warm enough? We can bump up the heat or turn on the fireplace.” He nods to the other side of the room, and I naturally follow his line of sight.

The ceiling is crazy high, making the already large room feel even more spacious. The majority of the wall on the right is taken up by a massive sectional with loungers on either end. There are two large club chairs, a coffee table, and a television. The far wall has a brick fireplace that would be picture-perfect when decorated for Christmas.

“I’m good,” I say, smiling. “A little nervous about where Echo ran off to.”

Lawson shrugs. “There’s nothing she can destroy that we can’t replace.”

“When Shadow was younger, he ate every pair of boots I owned for like a year straight,” Bryant chimes in. “Come on, let us show you the rest of the house.”

Luka’s hand comes to rest on my back as we follow Bryant and Lawson. “If you take a right here, that hallway leads to the back stairs.”

I nod, trying not to let how out of place I feel show on my face.

I’m definitely going to get lost a time or two.

Just past the living room is a formal dining room, and beyond that is the kitchen. It has an open, airy design with an island in the middle.

The cabinets extend out on the side we enter from, and a circular booth breakfast nook edges up to the counter. I’m not really sure how else to describe it, but it’s like the kind you would find in a restaurant. It looks like it would be an easy place to enjoy a meal on the go. Carrying dishes over to it would be much easier than taking them over to the formal dining room. Not to mention, it would give everyone a place to hang out while someone was cooking.

The cabinets are white, and the fixtures are black. Even if I tried to describe everything, I wouldn’t do it justice.

I’ve never seen such a lavish kitchen in my life, and it’s spotless. I’d be afraid to cook in it and ruin the aesthetic.

They lead the way down another hallway, and we end up in another living room.

“This is the family room,” Lawson says, pointing at an archway. “Through that is the front door, the main mudroom, and the main stairs.”

“This is where we tend to hang out,” Bryant says. “At least for most of the year. During winter, the fireplace in the main living room gets a lot of use.”

“It’s nice and cozy. I can see why you chill in here,” I say, glancing around.

This room is much smaller than the formal living room.

“Come on,” Lawson says, taking off toward the archway. “Let’s show you where you’ll be staying, so you can settle in and take a shower before dinner.”

A shower sounds nice, but I also might need a few minutes to center myself so I don’t have a panic attack. These guys live in a freaking mansion. I don’t know what I was thinking when I convinced myself they might be into me.

* * *

The dogs follow us upstairs, barreling down the hallway. The guys take turns pointing out their bedrooms, and just before the curve to take the hallway down in the other direction, we come to a stop in front of a door.

“If you follow the hallway that way, you’ll end up at the back stairs,” Luka says, rubbing circles over my lower back as he points with his free hand.

“I’m going to get lost a few times over the next few days,” I say, smiling. “I can feel it coming.”

“It’s really not that bad once you get the hang of it,” Bryant says. “Head left if you’re late and need to skip breakfast when rushing out the door. Go right or, I guess, straight, when leaving the pack bedroom if you want to go anywhere else in the house.”

Pack bedroom?

“On that note,” Luka says. “Law, why don’t you open the door?”

Lawson tosses the door open, leading the way inside.

Bryant follows him in while Luka kinda drags me along.

The room is dark, but someone flips on the light.

I’m not a fan of the big light.

It’s kinda my nemesis.

In this case, it’s easy to ignore as my jaw drops.

Holy shit.

The bedroom is spacious, with a huge four-poster bed that takes up most of the far wall. It has to be larger than a king.

A thick, dark gray upholstered headboard with tufted buttons lines the top of the mattress. It takes four king-size pillows to fill the space without gaps.

Thick, dark cream linens hang from the posters. A foot of fabric in the same color circles the top, and I'm guessing it blocks the curtain track.

Several dressers line the walls, and near the doors that must lead to a balcony, there are two wide club chairs.

"What do you think?" Bryant asks, rocking on his heels. "Will you be comfortable in here?"

Noise comes from behind me, and I spin as Echo and Shadow barrel into the room.

Lawson is brave, stepping in front of Echo. "Not gonna happen. You don't jump onto the bed unless you're invited." He raises an arm, pointing at the door. "Go play. Burn off some of that never-ending energy."

"Let's check out the bathroom and nest," Luka says, giving me a gentle push toward the hallway.

All I can do is blink as he guides me across the room.

This place is amazing, and I fit in zero percent.

Chapter Eighteen

Luka

Abby is stressed. If the look on her face didn't give it away, the change to her scent would.

She steps away from my side, spinning in a circle as she checks out the bathroom. "Wow, that tub is massive."

"It can fit four, so you'll definitely be able to stretch out and float around when you're in there solo." Bryant grins, nodding.

I have the overwhelming urge to punch him in the throat.

Is he not paying attention?

Can he not tell that she's stressed?

Also implying that she can stretch out and float around *when* she's in there alone implies that she'll also be in there not alone.

Right?

I mean, that's how I would take it.

"The shower has about a million settings," Lawson says, holding his arm out. "Let me show you how it works."

Abby doesn't hesitate to walk into his chest.

Well, thank fuck for Lawson.

Maybe we aren't screwed just yet.

* * *

We continue the tour, heading to the nest. It's multifunctional, with a large circular recessed mattress in the middle of the room. It has curtains on runners that can be closed to make the space feel more confined.

Two walls are covered with floor-to-ceiling cabinets. Those are stocked with extra sheets, waterproof pads, blankets, pillowcases, and anything else an omega could need during a heat.

“The space was completely renovated when our parents’ pack moved to Texas,” I tell Abby. “It hasn’t been used since, so you shouldn’t have any trouble with scents.”

“Wow, it’s beautiful.” She takes off toward the steps that lead to the den nest.

Three walls frame the bed with just enough room on the sides to easily walk around the mattress. There are end tables built out by the head of the bed, and closed cabinets line the wall above them. They’re much smaller than the ones in the open area of the nest, since they’re intended for things like breakable ice packs, thermometers, and fever reducers.

Lawson trails after her, coming to a stop at the end of the bed.

Bryant tries to follow them up, but I plant a hand on his chest and shove him back.

“Let’s let him handle it,” I whisper. “She’s stressed, and he sets her at ease.”

“Well, we could too if it came down to it,” he grumbles back just as softly. “Fine. Whatever. Help me cook dinner.”

* * *

Somehow, I luck out by sliding in on the edge closest to Abby at the table.

Bryant is directly next to her, and Lawson is opposite me on the other edge of the booth.

This setup is actually one of my favorite things that we kept from what it looked like when my parents’ pack lived here.

Granted, the booth we had when we were kids was old and cracked, but I loved sitting around the table with our mom and dads.

“Do you like plain Alfredo or would you like chicken, steak, or both?” Bryant asks.

I peek over at Abby, and I’m surprised how dark it is outside. It looks more like it should be midnight, even though it’s only seven or seven-thirty. It always gets dark early in winter, but I’m a little thrown off. Maybe my circadian rhythm is out of whack, or maybe the impending storm is already making itself known.

“Maybe a little of both?” she says. “Wait, is that Caesar salad? I want to destroy that first. Can I have a little chicken to go on it? Then I’ll see if I still have room for more protein when I get to the carbs.”

I laugh, tossing my arm around the back of the booth. “A woman after my own heart. I think I’m going to go with that also.”

“Would you like a glass of wine?” Lawson offers.

Abby blinks.

She’s about to turn twenty-three, which I know from scanning her license for the hiring paperwork.

At that age, I’d never had a glass of wine. It was beer or hard liquor, but I was also enlisted by the time I was eighteen, so that could explain my lack of a refined palate.

Hell, I didn’t even know we had wine in the house.

Did that fucker buy wine just to impress Abby?

“Oh, no, thank you,” she says, shaking her head. “I’m not big on wine. I would drink a beer.” She nods to mine. “That would work, but can I also have a glass for water?”

Damn, Bryant and I suck at setting the table. We brought the water pitcher but forgot to bring her a glass.

“You got it, sweetheart.” Lawson shoves himself out of the booth and makes his way into the kitchen.

Bryant piles Caesar salad onto Abby’s plate and forks a chicken breast, bringing it to his plate and cutting it into thin strips.

My arm is still around the back of the booth, and Abby scoots closer to my side.

“Mmm, your scent is really strong,” she says, plastering her nose to the side of my chest. “Smoky campfire with woodsy undertones.”

I don’t have the heart to tell her the smell of the grill probably enhanced my normal scent. Normally we would pan-fry the chicken and steaks during the winter, but I braved the cold to ensure it would be as flavorful as possible. Also, we have a covered back porch and a tower heater for a reason. I only had to step out of the warmth to start the grill and flip the meat.

“Thank you.” I pull my arm down, wrapping it around her shoulder. “You always smell delicious. Are you hungry?” I run my fingers through the ends of her hair, wondering how long it’s been since I was this close to a woman.

“Starving,” she says, her words coming out muffled by the material of my shirt.

It makes me smile, and even Bryant looks excited. It’s a very good sign if she’s this drawn to my scent. We’ve played it safe over the last week, but Mother Nature was on our side with this storm.

“Your salad is ready,” Bryant says, making me ache to punch him in the throat.

I was enjoying having Abby cuddled to my chest, but she pops up.

A bright smile crosses her face, and it’s hard to be angry with Bry, when I know she’s hungry.

“Damn, I guess I’m on my own to make my salad,” I say, chuckling.

“Yup,” Bryant agrees.

Lawson makes it back to the table, offering Abby her beer and filling her water glass before placing it down in front of her.

Here’s hoping she’s one of those omegas who really loves hovering alphas...

Otherwise, we’re pretty much screwed.

* * *

Christmas music plays through the speakers as we settle into the living room. It’s a fitting background for what comes next, and hopefully it helps solidify the holiday spirit.

Law works on getting the fireplace going while Shadow and Echo do their best to supervise.

Abby curls up at my side, pulling the blanket off the back of the couch to tuck over her legs.

I grin like a fiend.

She’s cuddly, and I’m living for every second of it. She’s in a soft set of navy blue cotton pajamas with little silver and gold stars on them.

I’ve seen her in the same style on several occasions, meaning she must favor them over other pajamas.

I’m not sure if I have enough time before Christmas to order us matching pjs, especially with the storm, but I make a mental note to search for some when I have a free minute.

“I’m going to go make some drinks.” Bryant claps. “Do you drink boozy eggnog?”

“I’ve never tried it,” Abby says. “But I’ll give it a taste.”

“Perfect,” he says. “When you’re done with that, why don’t you drag in the boxes?” The last part, he directs at Lawson.

“Yeah, got it.” Law pulls Echo back with his forearm around her sternum. “That will singe your fur. Have you never seen a fireplace before?”

“I don’t think she has,” Abby says.

“In that case, why don’t you call her over to lie with you on the couch.” Lawson pats Echo’s shoulder. “Once it’s going, she’ll be able to sense the heat, but I don’t want to risk giving her a new haircut.”

I laugh, calling the dog over.

Echo climbs onto the couch, lying right between Abby and the back cushion. There’s technically not enough room, so she mostly ends up lying on Abby.

“She’s committed to making room, huh?” I ask, chuckling.

“Apparently.” Abby grunts, scooting her legs closer to the edge. “What’s the plan? I thought we might watch a movie or something. What boxes was Bryant talking about?”

“That’s a surprise, but we’ll get into it once he’s back.” I run my hand down her arm, soaking up her raspberry and lemon scent. “Don’t worry. We won’t torture you for too long.”

“Good.” Abby beams. “I suck at waiting.”

Hmm.

Now I can’t help but wonder if she’s frustrated that we’ve tried to take things slow. Not that waiting a week or two is truly moving *slowly*. Then again, it kinda is when alphas and omegas are involved.

* * *

“Real Christmas trees are so pretty,” Abby says, almost sounding awed. “I’ve never had one before. My family always used the same fake one.”

I catch Law’s gaze, nodding. He made a good call there, even if getting the eight-foot monstrosity out of the bed of his truck and into the house was a pain in the ass. The interior setup went mostly smoothly. We always had a real tree when we were growing up, but we haven’t bothered decorating since we inherited the house.

Bryant bought one of those fake tabletop already decorated trees last year, and that was the extent of our holiday spirit.

Having Abby here is like a breath of fresh air.

"They really are a whole different experience," Bryant says from next to the fireplace. "I can smell it from over here."

"There are going to be so many pine needles to sweep up." Abby smiles over her shoulder as she glances between us. "Will the dogs try to chew on it?"

"Nah, we'll keep an eye on them," I tell her, winking. "They've got enough chew toys to keep them busy, and we can always toss them one of Bryant's boots."

"Oh, fuck you," he says, laughing.

Lawson grabs Abby by her waist and tugs her into his chest. "Do you have a guess about what's in the boxes?"

"I'm hoping it's decorations." She melts against him, grinning up at him.

If we can convince her to stick around, we'd be remiss not to have pictures of this. I rip my phone from my pocket, snapping a few candid shots as Law smiles down at her.

"You got it, sweetheart."

She squeals, and Shadow barks, making her jump.

"Ahh, shut up, mutt. Don't ruin the vibes." Bryant chuckles.

"All right," I say, shoving my phone into my pocket. "Now we drink eggnog, listen to Christmas music, and decorate the tree."

* * *

Either Bryant made the eggnog a little strong, or I've become a lightweight when it comes to drinking. I suppose the third possibility is that Abby's scent is hitting me hard.

Hell, maybe it's all three.

Holidays were a big deal growing up, and I've always wanted a family of my own to carry on those traditions. With four of us decorating the tree, it goes pretty quickly.

All the decorations are brand-new, but I know we have boxes upon boxes of things that our parents' pack left in the attic when they moved.

Law must have wanted to start fresh with Abby. I'm not the only one who will be devastated if she leaves.

"One of you will need to do the star," Abby says, holding it out. "There's no way I'll be able to get it up there."

I step around behind her, planting my hands on her hips. "Oh no, gorgeous. That's all you." I lift her and step closer to the tree. Even giving her an extra foot or two of height doesn't help, so I lift her higher.

"Luka!" She squeals but stays still, likely out of fear I'll drop her if she wiggles around.

"I've got you," I say, trying not to laugh. "Go ahead and put it up there."

"You scared the hell out of me," she mutters, stretching to place the star on top of the tree. "It looks great. Wow. Everything looks different from up here."

I chuckle, backing up and placing her on her feet. She spins in my hold, planting her hands on my chest.

My head tilts as I stare down at her. I'm not sure what the look on her face means. "Sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you..."

"Thank you." She stretches up on her tiptoes, planting a quick kiss on the edge of my jaw. "That's the first time I've ever put a star on a Christmas tree."

"No shit?" I blurt out.

"It's a good thing I got pictures of it, then," Bryant says. "Hey, as a matter of fact, I got pictures of your first kiss too."

Abby spins, resting her back against my chest. My hand falls to rest on her stomach, and she interlinks her fingers with mine.

"Who says that was our first kiss?" she asks, sounding sassy.

I laugh as Lawson glares at me like he's saying *she'd better be joking*.

Oh yeah.

Abby is definitely going to keep us on our toes.

Chapter Nineteen

Abby

It's already strangely gloomy the next morning, even though the storm isn't set to hit until later today. I'm majorly confused because I fell asleep with Echo lying on the end of the bed, and she definitely migrated to my side during the night. However, when I woke up, she was nowhere to be found.

After our house tour, Lawson showed me Shadow's safe room, which isn't anything like a safe room for humans. It's basically a room off the hallway on the other side of the kitchen that has a doggy door.

It's set up to be a comfortable, safe place for Shadow to chill when no one is home. It has a baby gate that blocks the doorway from the rest of the house, but like Lawson said, he could clear it if there was an emergency. Or if someone was in the house, and he wanted to investigate.

He also has the doggy door, so he can access the fenced-in yard.

The room looks like it was an office once upon a time, but it has a crate, couch, toys, and a water bowl. It's an all-around cushy setup for a pup.

Lawson even got a duplicate bed in the same style as Shadow's for Echo. He just picked a different color to avoid any confusion.

That makes it a logical choice when looking for my dog, but I don't make it in there to check if that's where she is.

Bryant is already in the kitchen, and a dazzling smile crosses his face when he spots me. "Good morning."

"Morning," I say, grinning back. "Do you know where my dog is?"

He nods, pointing out the kitchen window. "Lawson dog-napped her. He's got her and Shadow down by the lake. They won't be able to leave the

yard once the storm starts, so he wanted to get them good and tired out before it rolls in.”

“I can’t believe I didn’t wake up when he popped in to grab her,” I say, circling around the counter and coming to a stop next to him at the kitchen island. “Where’s Luka?”

“He ran into town for a last-minute errand,” he says, wiggling his eyebrows. “And no, I’m not telling you what he’s up to. It’s a surprise.”

“Huh, color me intrigued,” I say, fluttering my lashes. My nostrils flare, and my mouth waters. “Oh, wow. That smells delicious. What did you make?”

“I wanted to test out my mom’s favorite Christmas breakfast recipes.” Bryant shrugs. “Testing them out on Christmas morning seemed reckless. Anyway, these are giant apple-filled cinnamon rolls. Then the pan is a breakfast bake. I know you’re not a fan of eggs, so I left you a corner over here without any. Your slice has hash browns, bacon, sausage, and sausage gravy on a croissant sheet. The rest has all of the above plus cheesy scrambled eggs.”

My teeth dig into my lower lip as my head tilts. “You didn’t have to do that. I would have eaten it.”

“I wanted you to enjoy it.” He rubs his hands together, shrugging. “If you’d like to try some of ours to see if it’s okay to add them to the whole thing next time, that’s fine, but I don’t want to force you to eat something you don’t like.” His dark hair falls over his forehead as his eyes sparkle. “Can I make you a plate?”

“Yes, please,” I say, nodding. “Is there anything I can do to help? I can wash dishes or something.”

“Nope,” he says, spinning and opening a cabinet. “I hand-washed some while I was working. The rest, I stuck in the dishwasher. As soon as we finish breakfast, I’ll run it. After that, we’ll probably be hand-washing until the storm is over, since we can’t run the dishwasher on the generator.”

“That makes sense, but please don’t treat me like a guest. I’m just as capable of helping with dishes as any of you.”

“I don’t know about that.” Bryant chuckles. “I mean, I’m not questioning your dish-washing skills. We want you to enjoy yourself and to give you a chance to relax. Go get settled at the table. I’ll be right over with our plates.”

I slide around the island but hover next to the cabinet. “Luka mentioned you have a game plan for activities. Was that just for last night, or do you have things planned for today too?”

“We’ve got plans through Christmas,” he says, laughing. “Not that we’ll actually be snowed in for that long, but I’m fond of having a backup plan just in case.”

Seriously, how has no woman snatched them up by now?

* * *

“All right, sweetheart,” Lawson says, guiding me into the formal dining room with his massive hands on my shoulders a while later. “Can you guess what we’re doing by smell?”

Before we came into the room, he made me close my eyes and cover them to ensure I wouldn’t peek.

My nostrils flare, and I desperately try to pick up anything outside of Lawson’s citrus and pine scent. Immediately following breakfast, I went back upstairs to shower and change. That shower might have been a mistake.

I keep huffing, but all I get is hints of my coconut shampoo. I’m competitive, so I keep trying, tilting my head to either side and sniffing all over again.

Someone chuckles.

“Come on, take pity on her and move her a couple feet closer,” Luka says.

Lawson gives me a gentle push, and we move forward.

My nose twitches.

Molasses.

Cinnamon.

Nutmeg.

A slow smile crosses my face.

“It’s gingerbread. Can I pull my hand down now?” I ask, bouncing on my toes. “Are we decorating gingerbread houses?”

I rip my hand away from my face and open my eyes without being given the green light.

In my defense, I’m super excited.

I haven’t decorated a gingerbread house since I was probably ten.

“Holy shit!” I squeak, clapping. “This is going to be so much fun!”

Bryant leans over the table, high-fiving Luka. “I told you she was going to love it.”

Luka smirks. “I retract my earlier statement. It was totally worth driving into town.” He winks at me. “Do you want to pick your house? There are two different styles.”

“Yes,” I agree, grabbing Lawson’s hand on my shoulder and dragging him to the table. “I hope you guys know how to assemble them because I sure don’t.”

“Ehh, we’ll figure it out.” Lawson guides me to take a seat in one of the chairs before taking the one next to me. “That’s what instructions are for.”

Luka ends up on my left while Bryant sits directly across from me.

Bryant pulls the lid off one of the boxes, holding it up for me to see. “This is the farmhouse, and it comes with a family of four in gingerbread form.” He chuckles, moving to one of the other boxes. “This one is more of a house you’d expect to find in a neighborhood, but it comes with two cool exterior trees. We have one of each, so we’ll have to work in teams, but we want you to pick first.”

I glance between them.

They’re both cute.

If I had to guess, I would say they’re from a bakery, since they don’t look anything like the mass-produced kits. Each says they include four colors of frosting and candies to decorate, along with a few other things that are too small for me to read from this far away.

“I’ll take the family,” I say, grinning.

“You got it.” Bryant slides over one of the boxes. “All right, who wants to be my partner?”

“I’m right in between, so I could work with either of you,” Luka says. “But based on where Law is sitting, I’m going to guess it’ll be easier for them to work together. I guess that means you’re stuck with me.”

“We’re judging these at the end to see whose house ends up looking the best,” Bryant says, smirking. “You’d better put your game face on, Law.”

Lawson simply grunts.

I laugh and stretch over, patting his thigh. “One of us had better read the instructions. I have no idea why, but I thought these things came already assembled.”

A booming laugh spills from Lawson.

“I’ll handle the instructions,” he says, sounding amused. “You handle the decorating. I don’t have an artistic bone in my body.”

“This is probably a terrible time to tell you that I don’t either,” I whisper, cupping my hand around my mouth. It won’t stop Luka and Bryant from hearing, but it’s all in good fun.

“Oh, we’ve so got this,” Luka says, laughing.

“Keep talking shit,” Lawson grumbles. “I just realized, we’re going to be eating gingerbread for weeks.”

I grin and scoot my chair over until I can rest my head on his shoulder. “Luckily, I have a sweet tooth.”

* * *

“Come on.” Bryant gestures at the table with both hands. “Ours is clearly the winner.”

“It’s a tie.” I roll my lips together, trying to keep myself from laughing. “Two votes against two votes. Remember, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

“You fight dirty,” Luka says, smiling dangerously. “I’ll remember that.”

“We were so close to victory.” I laugh, turning to Lawson.

He has a smudge of white frosting across his forehead and another on the edge of his lip that spills into his beard.

“Aww, you went to battle with the frosting.” I stretch a hand out, brushing it over the frosting at the edge of his lip. “I’d try to get it off for you, but it’s, uh, caked in your beard.” I move to trace the line on his forehead. “And that’s not the only spot.”

Lawson chuckles. “What you’re saying is that I need a shower.”

It’s right on the tip of my tongue to offer to take one with him, but I chicken out. I’d probably be braver if Luka and Bryant weren’t three feet away, watching this entire conversation play out.

“I can run and grab a wet rag.” I clear my throat, smiling awkwardly. “You came in clutch in supporting our *almost* win. I really thought I could convince one of them to flip to our side.”

“Nah,” he says, nodding at the window. “That’s okay. It’s getting real dark out there. I want to make sure the dogs get one more bathroom break before it starts sleeting.”

“Hey, you can give me a sponge bath, and I’ll totally declare you the winner,” Luka says, winking.

Lawson growls, and I chuckle.

They’re too cute.

Is it supposed to be this easy to be around people who are basically strangers?

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Chapter Twenty

Bryant

Having Abby here seems to make the time go by so much faster. We have sandwiches for a late lunch as the weather really starts to intensify.

The dogs are going to be *pissed* the next time they have to go out, but it is what it is.

Law always blocks off the doggy door when it's actively snowing or sleeting. Shadow's goofy ass will circle the yard, trying to catch snowflakes while he bounces around like he's on a pogo stick.

That double coat must come in handy because the cold never seems to affect him. I've seen him lie out in the yard in three feet of snow and straight-up ignore Law when he begged him to come inside.

Echo has even thicker fur than Shadow. I bet they'd be just fine with no heat if the power went out. That won't fly for the humans, but at least so far, the power hasn't flickered.

Since the fireplace is wood-burning, we can run it while it's actively snowing. It gets dicey when there's sleet and ice sticking to everything, but we keep an eye on things. We also have carbon monoxide detectors.

There really is nothing like cuddling up near a fireplace and listening to it crackle while the wind whips around outside.

It's gloomy, but not dark enough for the Christmas tree to be fully appreciated. Still, it's kinda romantic having the only light be from the fireplace and the Christmas lights.

* * *

After I stoke the fire, I chill on the couch, waiting for someone to join me.

It's fine.

I'm sure the three of them aren't upstairs having fun without me.

They fucking better not be.

I did all the dishes, then did the heavy lifting to dig our courting gifts out of the closet.

This is on the goddamn schedule.

I will do it with or without Luka and Lawson. Although I can't really hand over the gifts without Abby.

I'm annoyed as I peek around to see which holiday movies are available.

I could go with something light and family friendly...

There's also a new paranormal rom-com about a woman who falls in love with a pack of reindeer shifters.

Yanking out my phone, I search for reviews. They don't disappoint, ensuring me that it's sexually charged and only recommended for adults.

Noise comes from the hallway that leads to the garage, and I lean around over the arm of the sofa, trying to figure out who that is.

Abby lights up when she spots me. "I took a wrong turn."

"It happens." I chuckle, settling back into the cushion as she comes into the room.

She's in a different outfit than what she was in when I saw her last, and her hair is damp, making it seem much curlier than when it's dry.

She comes over, taking a seat on the cushion closest to me. Reaching behind her, she grabs the throw blanket and tosses it over her legs.

Abby is definitely omega coded. She loves to snuggle under a blanket, but I'm always available if she needs extra warmth.

"You good?" I ask, holding back a laugh.

"Yep." She nods dramatically. "Where are the others?"

"Law is probably with the dogs. Luka, I actually have no idea, but he has been known to enjoy an afternoon nap more often than anyone else I've met, outside of toddlers."

"That's really cute," she says, wiggling like she's trying to make a butt groove on the cushion. "Sorry it took me so long. I realized I had a chunk of frosting in my hair, so I washed it, but then I realized it would frizz if I didn't condition it. Then I got my clothes wet while I was trying to wash my hair, and I was like, screw it. I'm putting my comfy pajamas on."

“I love it.” I wink. “Next time, give me some warning, and we can have a movie afternoon in our pajamas.”

“That sounds like a date.” She grins, peeking at me out of the corner of her eye.

It only lasts a second, but it fully convinces me that Abby wants to be courted...

By us.

It’s nice to have a little reassurance that she won’t freak out when we hand over the multitude of gifts I’ve been collecting since I met her.

Lawson added a bunch to the pile, and I’m sure Luka will too, if he hasn’t already.

“What did you pick?” Abby asks, nodding at the TV.

I snort. “How adventurous are you, pretty girl?”

“I’ll try anything once.”

“Perfect,” I purr, grabbing the remote and pressing play. “We’re about to watch one poor lost traveler get snowed in with a pack of reindeer shifters.”

“Oh my god.” She claps. “Is it *Sleigh My Heart*? Please tell me it is. I saw a preview for that one. The CGI was so bad, I was dying. I love cheesy romance movies, like the more preposterous the better.”

“That’s the one,” I agree as my heart beats funny.

Jesus.

She’s beautiful.

“Ahh,” she squeals. “This is about to be so good.”

* * *

The movie is, in fact, really fucking cheesy.

I don’t mind a bit.

The longer it plays, the closer Abby gets until she pulls her legs up onto the couch, stretching out as she leans against my chest.

I spend way more time watching her than I do what’s playing out on the screen, but I try to follow along well enough that we can discuss the flimsy plot if it comes up later.

Though it takes a while, I get brave and pull my arm off the back of the couch, resting my hand on her thigh.

Goddamn.

I wish I understood what her scent means. Stormy and electric aren't words I've heard anyone use when describing what someone smells like.

The longer I touch her, the warmer I feel. It's hard to explain, but it's almost like I've had three or four beers. That tipsy feeling where you're loving life while also not being drunk.

That can't be normal, right?

I listened when my dad's explained what it was like when they met my mom. None of what they mentioned during those talks sounds like what I experience with Abby.

The omega in question snuggles closer to my chest, sliding her hand under mine on her thigh. I smile as I interlink our fingers, but the grunting and groaning from the TV catches my attention, and I quirk an eyebrow.

Damn.

Those reindeer shifters are taking that chick to pound town.

Abby snorts, pulling a hand up to block her face. She peeks through her fingers, and it's obvious that she's interested, even if she wants to pretend to be sweet and innocent. "Wow, she's very bendy."

"No kidding." My head tilts as I blink at the screen. "I'm not entirely sure legs are supposed to bend that way."

I could totally ask if she's not flexible. Maybe add in a comment about stretching being your best friend before an orgy, but I'm trying to be respectful of whatever is growing between us.

"Mine sure don't." Abby snorts. "I think it helps that she's super tall, or maybe I'm just out of shape."

"You're in perfect shape," I assure her.

Before I can say anything else, Lawson drags a sleepy-looking Luka into the living room.

"Oh shit," Abby whispers, rolling over onto me.

At first, I have no idea what's happening. Her tits smoosh against my chest, and she grabs the remote, pausing the show.

I snort. "I don't necessarily think that helped."

The TV is now paused on a side-view shot of the main character on her back on the bed. One guy's hand is wrapped around her thigh as they give what amounts to a soft-core porn shot of him eating her out.

Another of the guys kneels next to her on the opposite side from the camera. He caresses her cheek tenderly, and the actress fakes being in the throes of passion well.

Luka takes a few steps into the room and turns, bursting out laughing. “Next time, wake me up if we’re watching porn.”

“Don’t be an idiot.” Law follows him in, smacking his brother on the back of the head.

“It’s not porn!” Abby huffs indignantly. “It’s a Christmas movie. I just paused at a bad time.”

“Sure, whatever you say.” Luka spins to face us and saunters over to the couch. “Can I just...” He lifts Abby’s legs and takes a seat, pulling her feet to rest in his lap. “Ahh, perfect. I love snuggling up to watch Christmas porn.”

“It was a Christmas *movie*, and it was basically over.” Abby laughs awkwardly, using the remote to back out to the main menu. “But we can find a new movie. That way, we can all start and finish together.”

Finishing together is important.

If we knew each other better, I’d pick on her about only watching porn with me.

Goddammit.

Maybe I need an etiquette class or something.

“It really is best not to leave anyone out,” Luka says. “All right, what are our options?”

Law glares, flicking his gaze between me and Luka. “The schedule says we’re supposed to be doing something else entirely. Watching a movie isn’t until seven-thirty, but whatever. I can be flexible. It’s not even my schedule.” He continues on, grumbling under his breath as he makes his way to the big-ass chair he always sits in.

Abby laughs, tosses the blanket onto Luka, and climbs off the couch before making her way over to Lawson.

He leans back, quirking an eyebrow.

She doesn’t hesitate to climb onto his lap. Sitting sideways, she leans into his chest and stares up at him. “I appreciate a schedule as much as the next girl, but I also have to ask. Where is my dog?”

He chuckles. “Last I saw, they were in Shadow’s room. I already smelled like wet dog after I took them out, so I brought them in and dried them thoroughly. Then I smelled like dog and was covered in fur, so I went to take a shower.”

“Thank you for taking care of Echo. You’re incredible with dogs.” Abby stretches up, pecking a kiss on his cheek just above where his beard ends.

“She has a little storm anxiety,” he says, and I swear I can see his face turning red from here. “Or maybe it’s from being in a new environment. Either way, they were both tired out and resting. I didn’t put up the gate, so they’ll come looking for us eventually.”

“That shit is baffling,” Luka whispers, leaning close to me as he nods at Lawson and Abby. “He won her over so damn fast.”

I chuckle. “They really must have bonded during the last storm.”

“Okay, it’s time to bust out the gifts,” Luka says.

I nod.

Yeah, probably.

It really is a good thing that she’s so comfortable with Law.

She’s starting to get there with me and Luka, but I don’t want to be left behind completely. It’s hard for alphas to share when bonds aren’t in place. Once the pack experiences an emotional connection through the omega, it’s supposed to help. Until then, we’re all a bunch of possessive assholes trying to remind our instincts that the other guys she likes aren’t enemies.

Abby runs her fingers through Law’s thick beard, and I have the irrational urge to punch him in the throat.

And the kidney.

Simultaneously.

Jesus.

It’s a *good* thing for her to feel so at ease around Law. It’s just, no matter how hard I try to remind the more primal parts of myself of that, they don’t seem to remember for longer than three minutes.

“Get your ass up and help me move the boxes,” I mutter to Luka.

It’s time to flat-out ask if she’s interested in having the three of us court her.

Chapter Twenty-One

Abby

Bryant and Luka drag in a bunch of boxes. Rather than huge ones, like yesterday, these are smaller shipping boxes. At least most of them. There are two or three that look pretty heavy.

I'm still perched on Lawson's lap, but I relocated to sit facing away from him when I heard the noise. I glance over my shoulder at him before focusing back on Luka and Bryant.

"If that whole pile is stocked with more holiday stuff, we may have to pick a new room to decorate." I laugh as I point at the boxes. "I feel like this living room is decorated to perfection. If we add any more, it might be too much."

Lawson's chest bounces behind me as he chuckles softly. "It is more festive than I've seen it since I was a kid, but those aren't decorations."

"Here you go, gorgeous." Luka holds out one of the boxes, giving it a little shake. "These are from all three of us."

I take the box, frowning. "What is it?"

"Dig in and find out." Bryant wiggles his eyebrows.

Lawson grabs the sides of the shipping box, ripping through the tape. "Preopen them or find the box cutter. I don't want her hurting herself on the strings some companies put in their packing tape."

"I have actually cut myself on that stuff more than once," I admit, peeking at him over my shoulder. "Does the same thing not apply to your hands?"

Lawson grunts, and I can't help but smile. He's a little like a growly bear at times, but it never feels like he's directing that surly attitude at me.

"We'll make sure we open them before handing them over," Luka says.

“Go ahead.” Bryant nods at the box I’m holding. “Get all up in there, pretty girl.”

“I’m so confused.” I squint, opening the flaps. Digging inside, I pull out a lavender fuzzy robe. Just under it is a pair of matching slippers. I run my fingers over the material and smile. “It’s very soft, but my birthday isn’t until late January, and Christmas is, what? Eight or nine days away? Why are you giving me gifts?” My voice sounds a little frantic by the end, but I can’t help that.

There’s no gift-giving holiday, and it’s not my birthday...

The only other possibility that comes to mind is that they want to court me. If that’s the case, I need them to spell that out quickly so I don’t get my hopes up for nothing.

“Ahh, see, we were hoping you might be interested in letting us court you,” Luka says, a boyish smile tipping his lips.

“That’s a no-pressure question,” Lawson rumbles from behind me. “You’ll be welcome to stay throughout the storm, and you’re free to stick around in the apartment as long as you’d like, no matter what your answer is.”

“It’s a no-obligation offer,” Bryant chimes in.

“Oh my god, you guys.” I laugh. “If you’d let me speak, I’d tell you that I love that idea.”

“Perfect,” Bryant purrs.

“Yeah?” Luka asks.

Lawson’s hand simply tightens on my side.

“Yeah,” I agree. “But based on that pile, we’d better get going. I have no idea what’s on the schedule for after this.”

Bryant chuckles. “Dinner and a movie. The one we watched technically wasn’t on the agenda, even though I’m not complaining.” He winks, and my heart flutters.

“Okay, moving on.” Luka grabs another box, ripping open the lid and handing it over.

Lawson piles the robe and slippers on the floor on one side of his chair and tosses the empty packaging on the other side.

Opening the box, I pull out something square and smooth. I have to flip it over to see what it is, and my jaw falls.

It’s a photo book with the year and the words *Packed Full of Memories*. Well, technically it has next year listed, but that makes sense because it’s

almost a brand-new year.

"This is so perfect," I whisper, running my finger over the raised words. "Thank you so much."

"There's a digital camera in one of the boxes and a photo printer," Lawson says. "But you can still print pictures at stores, I think. If they haven't done away with that completely."

"The printer will definitely come in handy." I smile over my shoulder at him. "Thank you so much."

"Here we go." Bryant hands over a smaller box and grins. "This one should complement that one."

As I slide my hand inside, I'm met with cool plastic. It's packs of glittery pens, fancy calligraphy-style pens, and stickers that will be perfect for scrapbooking.

"This is great to have. I'm going to have to look up tutorials on scrapbooking," I say, laughing. "I hate to be redundant, but I really do have no artistic abilities. I'll do my best, though."

"Yeah, I don't have skills when it comes to art, either." Luka shrugs. "We can make it a team effort. It might not be pretty, but at least it'll be ours."

"That is true," Bryant says. "We can all chip in. If it looks like shit, you can tell the grandkids that it was all us."

I laugh, but it comes out sounding a little frantic.

"It'll be a lesson on why they should never let their alphas help with their photo books." Lawson chuckles. "All right, what's next?"

"This one looks good." Luka rips into it and grins. "Oh yeah, I think you're going to love this one." He lifts a smaller box out of the bigger shipping package and hands it over.

Cozy Spa Essentials is written on the top of the box. I flip it open to find a small blanket or towel that's tied with a ribbon. It's pale, almost sage, green and super soft. Underneath that is a tiny potted succulent, two small candles, a bath glove scrubber, a mug with tea packets, marshmallows, and a teaspoon. Digging around, I find lotion and face wash.

"Wow, this is amazing," I say, peeking at the brands of tea. "I haven't tried tea like this before, but I can't wait to check it out."

"We may have gone a little overboard, so let's move to the big ones, and we can save the others for later," Bryant suggests.

"That sounds good to me," I agree.

Dammit.

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I love holidays and shopping for other people's birthdays. Getting so many amazing gifts while having nothing to give them makes me uncomfortable, which is crazy.

Alphas court omegas.

That involves giving gifts and taking the omega out on dates. Dating during winter in the frozen north sounds like a lot of work. I'm totally fine with dinners in and cuddling up for movie nights.

Maybe I should tell them that?

Bryant and Luka pull out the massive shipping boxes at the bottom of the pile and rip into them. I fall back against Lawson's chest as they each remove a giant bin from their respective boxes.

Law takes the box I just opened and places it in the pile with the other gifts.

"You might want to come down here to open these. They're pretty heavy," Luka says. "Jesus Christ. We forgot to take pictures. Who has their phone?"

"Wow, I even reminded myself when I brought them out of the closet..." Bryant sighs, shaking his head. "I've got my phone."

"Go on, you'll probably need room." Lawson pats my stomach. "They aren't very aesthetic gifts, anyway. We'll have to get bags or wrapping paper for the next set."

I climb off his lap and end up on the floor in front of the bin Luka unboxed. I make a point of smiling at Bryant so he can grab some pictures before I struggle with the bin to get the lid off.

"Here, let me help." Luka frames my back.

It's so unexpected that I jolt, but thankfully, I avoid tossing my head back. I'm pretty sure I would have smacked him right in the face with my skull.

He unclips the sides, and the lid pops open easily. "There we go. Nothing to it."

"You have stronger hands than I do," I say, grinning over my shoulder. "Thank you."

"Dig in, sweetheart," Lawson says, and I do exactly that.

At the top is a fluffy blanket in light gray. Bringing it to my face, I test the material. It's nice—not the type of fuzzy that's a sensory nightmare.

"Wow, it's great. I love it." I drop it onto the bin lid and go back to peeking around. The next thing I spot is a catalog for *The Divine Omega*.

Bryant snatches it before I can pick it up, saying, "You can browse once you're done."

"That's probably not a bad plan," I admit, picking up something heavy that's wrapped in fabric. I pull the piece of tape, carefully unrolling the material. It's a three-wick candle, and I bring it to my nose, scenting it. "Wow, that actually smells like me."

"It's supposed to help regulate your system in an unfamiliar space," Lawson says from behind me.

"That's incredible." I just realized that I'm completely blocking his view. When Luka takes the candle and fabric, I crawl around to the side of the box to ensure all three of them have an equal view. The next thing I pick up is a clear pouch. Inside are bottles of scent-reducing soap, scent-enhancing soap, and a completely scent-free body wash, shampoo, and conditioner. "This is amazing, you guys. I don't know if I'll ever use the scent-enhancing soap, but I'll definitely get good use out of the other four. Sometimes my scent gets so thick that it almost makes me gag."

"That can be used by your alphas," Bryant says, winking. "It'll help make our pheromones easier to pick out, which should soothe your system."

"Wow, that's crazy," I say, putting everything back into the leak-proof bag. "I had no idea they even made such a thing."

"They make it in a cologne version as well." Luka takes the plastic bag from me.

I go back to digging in the bin. The next thing I encounter is a first-aid kit, but I don't get to examine it.

"That's pretty boring, but necessary," Bryant says, taking it from my hand. "This should have a booklet with helpful heat facts and an in-depth instruction guide for alphas. The kit also includes an omega thermometer, fever reducers, ice packs, and a few other things I can't seem to remember."

“Blackout eye mask with cooling gel and earplugs for when you’re overly sensitive to light and sounds,” Lawson chimes in.

“This is such an amazing gift,” I whisper as my eyes ache. “I appreciate it so much, but I really don’t need such lavish gifts.”

“You deserve it,” Luka says, digging in the bin. A spaghetti-strap pajama dress hangs from his pointer fingers as he raises his arms. “Now this is sexy.”

“It is.” I take it, rubbing it against my cheek.

It feels expensive.

The rest of the box is filled with a white-noise machine, fuzzy socks, two incredibly soft pillowcases, and a set of matching pajamas in the same material. It has everything—versions of the T-shirt in long and short sleeves, as well as shorts and pants.

“Jeez,” I say, grinning. “You guys know how to spoil an omega.”

“We won’t make you dig through this one.” Bryant pats the other bin. “It’s a bedding sampler pack from The Divine Omega. It has a variety of blankets, sheets, and pillowcases for you to test out. That way, we can order whatever you like best and outfit the nest with that style.”

“If we had a store close by, we would have brought you in to test them out in person,” Lawson says. “Since the closest one is an hour away, we thought this would be easier.”

“I can’t thank you enough,” I say, tucking my hair behind my ear. “And there’s more.” I gesture to the other boxes the guys set aside to get to the bins. “I’m going to owe you three so many Christmas gifts.”

“Nah,” Luka says. “Courting gifts are our chance to show you that we can provide for you. They’re meant to be over-the-top and lavish.”

“Having you here is the perfect gift,” Lawson chimes in.

“It really will be.” Bryant grins, and those little creases around his eyes appear. “Now, I’m going to go start dinner so we can woo you with as fancy of a courting date as we’re going to get in the middle of a snowstorm.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

Lawson

Dinner goes well, and I try not to obsess about how little Abby eats. Even reminding myself that she's a lot smaller than me doesn't seem to help.

"I promise, I'm stuffed," she says, leaning her head against my shoulder as she smiles up at me. Her cheeks are pink, but that could be from the beer she had with dinner. "I mean, I could probably find room for dessert..."

I grimace.

We don't keep many sweets in the house, and I'm just realizing we should have stocked up in preparation for having an omega around.

We have those damn gingerbread houses, but those don't really count as a dessert.

"How about a bowl of ice cream?" my brother offers. "I know we have vanilla and chocolate."

"Do you have milk?" Abby asks, pulling her head off my shoulder as she perks up. "I can make a milkshake by hand. I don't need a blender. I promise I won't make any extra dishes."

"We do have milk." Luka chuckles, sliding off the bench and standing. "Keep your butt right there. One chocolate milkshake, coming right up."

"Thank you. That sounds great," Abby says, nodding vigorously.

Goddamn, she's cute.

Bryant comes back around the counter from clearing some of the dishes and glances between us. "What did I miss that has you so excited?" He leans over, grabbing Abby's plate before collecting mine.

"A chocolate milkshake," she says.

“Ice cream during what amounts to a blizzard? You’re definitely an omega.” Bryant laughs, taking off with the dirty dishes.

“Did you like your gifts, sweetheart?” I ask, trying not to let myself get distracted by how excited the dogs sound.

That fucker.

He knows better than to feed Shadow table scraps, but Abby had half of her chicken breast left. It probably is better to split it between them. That way, they won’t try to dig in the trash for it later. Although Shadow knows better, sometimes he thinks he can get away with it when no one is watching.

“I did,” she says. “Now I just have to figure out what you guys want for Christmas. Maybe you can give me ideas for the other two, then I’ll ask them for ideas about what to get you.”

I chuckle and wrap my arm around her from where it was lying on the back of the booth. “I can do that. Give me some time to think about it, and I’ll make you a list.”

Her small hand comes to rest on my pec as she leans up.

I just so happen to be in the process of tilting my head down to look at her, and our lips brush. Abby releases a soft gasp, but instead of pulling back, she presses her lips to mine even more firmly.

My hand moves to cradle her back and side as she sweeps her tongue over my lips. Her raspberry and lemon scent is all I can process as I open for her. She brings her hand up, burying it in my beard, causing a low growl to rattle from my chest.

Luka and Bryant had better read the room and not interrupt our first kiss. All thoughts of them fade away as Abby’s tongue teases mine. She melts into me even farther, and I love how soft she feels pressing against me.

I’ve never experienced attraction the same way my brother or even other friends did in high school. That’s a huge reason why I was so taken aback by my reaction to Abby. It was a surprise, but not unwelcome, to experience the instant attraction that so many others have described.

I’ve always taken a while to warm up to people, and even when sexual attraction bloomed, I didn’t have much interest in acting on it. That absolutely does *not* apply to Abby.

I’m drawn to her in a way I’ve never been with another human being, and that tells me I should pay attention.

My hand slides up her back, and I cradle her skull as I take the lead, kissing her with a fervency I didn't know I was capable of. Her fingers twist in my beard, and she pulls back, heaving in deep lungfuls of air.

"Whoa, Lawson," she whispers. "Your lips are really soft. You're a really good kisser."

"You too, sweetheart."

She pulls her fingers free of my facial hair as she settles back against the seat, and I have the overwhelming urge to pick her up and slide her onto my lap.

Even though I'm a big guy, she's small enough that I think we could both fit without her pushing against the table.

Maybe I should get a smaller table to match the booth? Then she could sit directly on one of our laps during all meals moving forward. I add that to my mental to-do list.

Luka comes around the cabinet, and the smirk on his face says he watched our entire encounter. He's probably judging me for my lack of kissing skills. He really shouldn't be so jovial. I've been able to kick his ass our entire lives, and I'm not afraid to remind him of that fact.

* * *

The sectional is technically large enough to fit all three of us. We picked it because it has two loungers, plus a long middle couch. However, the dogs were already on my spot, so I took one of the club chairs and dragged over the ottoman.

Bryant made the dogs get up to give him the chance to toss down Shadow's fur-catching blanket—which is not the same throw that rests on the back of the couch.

I almost laughed.

Those two had already left evidence of themselves behind, but it made him feel better, so I kept my mouth shut.

Abby chose to lie with me, possibly because the dogs were taking up my side of the couch. She's warming to all three of us, but she and I spent two days together during the last storm. She'll get there with Luka and Bryant. I just think she's naturally more at ease with me for the time being. After this storm, she'll probably treat the three of us equally.

It's actually rather peaceful watching a holiday movie while the tree twinkles in the background. The fire has died to almost nothing, and I didn't bother rebuilding it, since I'm guessing we'll be heading to bed after this.

Abby ends up sitting between me and the side of the chair, but her legs aren't quite long enough to rest on the ottoman, so they hang toward the floor.

"Do you want me to move the footstool closer?" I offer as she rearranges her blanket.

"Nah, I don't want your feet to hang off," she says, rolling onto her side. It puts her nose close to my ribs, as I'm quite a bit thicker than she is. She tosses her knee over my leg and wraps her arm around my stomach. It's a full-blown cuddle hug, and I almost don't know what to do with myself.

I finally settle for resting my palm on her hip, but my damn hands are so big that my fingers are on her ass.

Abby is on the opposite side from the TV, so it becomes obvious that I'm staring at her rather than the movie...

I still can't force my gaze away from her.

She's so damn pretty.

Seeing how content she is practically in my armpit is crazy, but omegas love potent pheromones from compatible alphas.

* * *

Abby passes out during the movie. I quietly call the dogs out for a quick last-chance bathroom break and make my way back into the living room.

It's a careful process to lift Abby and carry her upstairs without waking her.

I get her under the blanket in the pack bedroom, and Echo's collar jingles as she jumps up, circling around the foot of the mattress until she finds a spot she likes.

Shadow tries to follow her, and I give him the look, whispering, "No." He stops, sitting on the floor.

"We aren't sleeping in here," I say softly, so he won't hold a grudge. Leaning over, I brush Abby's hair back from her face. "Rest well, sweetheart. You know where to find me if you need me."

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She grunts, nuzzling deeper into the pillows.

I take that as my sign that it's time to leave. Giving my thigh a soft pat to call Shadow, I exit the room, pulling the door to the frame without letting it click closed.

Echo is pretty good about going long stretches, but if she has to have an accident, I'd rather it be in Shadow's playroom. She won't be able to get down there if she's trapped in the pack bedroom. While I can't leave the doggy door open with the amount of ice and snow that will pile up overnight, I'll shovel out the space in front of it in the morning.

* * *

I'm not expecting to be woken up in the middle of the night by Shadow low growling. The unmistakable sound of scratching comes from the door, followed by Echo's whining.

I shove my hair back from my face and toss off the blanket. Shadow hits the floor at the same time I do, and I cross the room in purposeful strides.

I pull the door open, and Echo barks, bouncing around with her front legs moving from side to side. She follows it up with a whining that makes my head tilt.

"All right, come on." I slide past her, making my way toward the stairs. I keep my spare boots and a backup jacket near the door to the porch for a reason. Shadow follows me to the stairs, but Echo stays behind me, whine-barking.

I spin to face her.

"I'm trying to take you out." I pause and remind my sleepy mind that she's not as used to the way I talk to my dogs. "Want to go out?" I ask. "Need to go pee?"

Echo vocalizes something in that mouthy way that shepherds do and takes off down the hallway toward Abby's room.

Shadow follows her.

Okay, that's my sign to get myself together.

I take off after them and let myself into Abby's room.

The scent hits me first, making my mouth water.

Raspberry and lemon.

It's so thick, it has to qualify as a perfume rather than simple pheromones. If I was more coherent, I'd be alarmed. Omegas perfume in the days and weeks leading up to and throughout heats.

Echo sits next to the bed with her head resting on the mattress. She whines, nuzzling her nose to Abby's cheek. Shadow comes to a stop next to the bed, and his front paws land on the blanket as he sniffs around.

"I don't feel good. Just sleep." Abby groans, rolling to face away from the edge.

"Come on," I whisper, patting my thigh. They both ignore me, and I growl the command.

Shadow pulls his paws down with no hesitation while Echo sniffs the sheets where Abby just was.

"Lie down," I tell Shadow, pointing at the space right in front of the door.

I cross the room as the hair on the back of my neck stands on end. Every cell in my body screams to find the omega. There's no doubt in my mind, she's either in pre-heat or fully there.

This could go so badly.

We haven't had the chance to really get to know one another, and we haven't had any of the important conversations. I don't know if she takes suppressants or if this was something she knew was coming.

Meeting compatible alphas can cause suppressants to fail. It can also hurry along a heat that wasn't supposed to hit for weeks or even months, according to what we learned in my alpha-and-omega-dynamics class.

Shit.

That was more than ten years ago.

It might be closer to twelve or thirteen.

Dammit, I'm getting old.

"Hey, you gotta give me some space," I say to Echo, burying my hand in the fur of her neck. Her head flies back, and she nips at me but doesn't follow through with a full bite. "Okay, that was my fault. I know you're riled. You have to move, so I can help." I take a few steps back and call her

again, this time using, “Heel.” It tells her I want her at my left side. Echo looks at me but doesn’t move. “Jesus, you are stubborn. I promise, I’m going to take care of your mom. You just have to give me some room.” I growl the command again, forcing every ounce of my alpha bark into my words. “*Heel, Echo.*”

She finally comes to stand at my side, looking up at me like she knows she’s supposed to. I make my way over to Shadow and tell Echo to lie down before backing away with my hands raised to let her know I’m serious about her staying put.

I get back to the bed and kneel on the edge, leaning over Abby and pulling the hair back from her face. The backs of my fingers brush her skin, and I hiss.

“Jesus Christ, sweetheart,” I whisper as my eyes widen. “I need you to wake up for me.”

She groans, and her legs twitch under the blanket.

Shit.

That’s another thing.

I should get the covers off her as soon as possible, but I don’t want to shock her system. I’ve had the flu before. I know what it’s like to run a fever but be freezing. It’s almost physically painful to get out from under the covers.

“Come on, Abby,” I murmur, keeping my tone low and soothing. “You’re burning up. I need you to roll over and talk to me.”

“Law?”

“Yeah, it’s me. Echo came and got me. She was worried about you.”

“I don’t feel very good. I think I need more sleep.”

“That’s not going to help,” I tell her. “You’re perfuming and running a fever. We have to get you cooled down.”

“You should go, I don’t feel good,” she says, her voice scratchy.

“I’m not going anywhere.” I bury my fingers in the crook of her neck. “You don’t feel good because you have a fever that would fry most people’s brains. Do you take suppressants, sweetheart?”

“No, but I have them. The pills can’t be started in the middle of a cycle.” Her whole body tenses, and she curls even farther into a ball. “The ideal way to take them is to begin taking them at the end of a heat. If there’s no other option, they can be taken once the heat starts, but the medication won’t stop the symptoms right away. It’s just going to suck for a while.”

“When was your heat supposed to hit?” I ask, trying to figure out if she’s going to get even hotter than this. She burns my skin in a way that’s almost terrifying, and I’m normally excellent under pressure.

“Like a month. Maybe three weeks.”

Jesus.

That is early.

“Okay. I need you to tell me what to do. Do you want me to grab your pills?”

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Chapter Twenty-Three

Abby

I'm on fire.

Burning from the inside out.

Agony rips through me, and I sob. My entire body shakes uncontrollably, an embarrassing whine spilling from my lips. My eyes throb like they always do the first couple of days I have the flu, but even clenching them closed doesn't help.

"I'm here with you. We're going to get through this together," Lawson says, trying to comfort me. His hand teases over the side of my face and brushes my hair back. "Tell me what you need."

"I don't know. I ache," I tell him. "It's never been this bad before. I'm not sure the pills will help."

"I'm going to roll you over." He grabs my shoulder, gently pushing until I'm flat on the mattress. "Let's see if my pheromones help." He marks my cheeks, and even the brushing of his beard against my skin makes me ache.

"I might need to go to the hospital," I admit. "It's never been this bad."

Shit.

Didn't I just say that?

It's hard to know if this is even real life. The room is dark, and everything outside of Lawson's face is fuzzy. Wrapping my hand around the back of his neck, I pull him lower as he studies my face.

I've never seen him look anything less than completely in control.

Once he's close enough, I bury my nose in his throat, sucking down deep hits of his pheromones.

My body twitches as an electric zap runs through my nerve endings.

Citrus and pine.

Oh, that's good.

So perfect.

Amazing.

I rip my other arm from under the blanket and dig my hand into his side as I try to keep him from getting away. Not that he's given any indication that he wants to escape.

My system is paranoid, and I have no idea why. If I was rational, I wouldn't think Lawson would leave me while I was so vulnerable.

"We've still got some combination of ice and snow coming down, so I think the hospital is out for the moment unless we call EMS," he says calmly. "I'm shocked we haven't lost power. Don't stress—if it goes out, the generator will kick on. I'm just saying, I think it would be more dangerous to venture out with the weather like it is than it would be to manage your symptoms here. All you have to do is tell me what will make you feel better."

"I don't know!" I snap. "That's the problem. It's like my brain is frying inside my skull. Even my eyes ache. Everything is hazy, and... Oh, God. The cramps are coming back."

What starts as almost a muscle cramp or spasm in my lower abdomen intensifies until every cell in my body is pulsing with pain.

"Okay, I'm taking you for a cool shower," Lawson says, scooping me up. "Then I'll get you settled in the nest, wake up Luka and Bryant, and find the thermometer."

That sounds like hell, but my brain isn't working well enough to know what I need to ask for.

* * *

"Arms up," Lawson says as he holds me with his hands on my hips.

Without that support, I'm not sure I would be vertical.

I don't bother just raising my arms, instead grabbing the bottom of the long-sleeve pajama top and ripping it off over my head.

I need to cool off, so I have no idea why it took me so long to think of peeling off my clothing.

"I didn't realize you didn't have a bra on," he says, his gaze darting away.

“I have underwear on.” I grunt, pushing my pants to the floor. I try to kick out of them, but everything aches, and I end up falling against his chest. “*Lawson.*” His name comes out as a whine that’s intended to force alphas to do an omega’s bidding. Unfortunately, I still can’t think straight.

I’m annoyed, and I want to be left alone.

Maybe.

If he had left me in bed, I might have been able to sleep for a few more hours without noticing the pain, or I might have been rolling around alone in agony.

Every breath floods my senses with raspberry and lemon.

It’s everywhere, and I hate it. It’s way too potent, making me feel like I might gag.

I’d much rather smell Lawson’s citrus and pine scent, but even having my face buried in his chest, I can’t smell him over myself.

“Okay, keep leaning into me. I’m going to get out of my pants and get us into the shower.” He pushes down his sweats, but he has something on underneath—either boxers or boxer briefs.

My entire body pulsing with heat, I whimper as goose bumps erupt on my skin. They’re certainly not from being cold. I think it might be a physical reaction to the pain.

“Up you go,” Lawson says, wrapping his forearm under my backside and lifting me with ease.

I slide up his front, and his skin feels refreshing against mine. He’s always so warm in comparison to me, but right now, it’s cool to the touch. I loop my arm around his neck and bury my nose in his throat. Half my face ends up in his beard, and I still don’t pull away.

I need to scent him.

To have him completely surrounding me.

My thoughts turn naughtier as he opens the shower door and walks inside.

Okay, maybe I don’t need a hospital.

I just need Lawson’s knot locked inside me.

His cum.

Bryant’s and Luka’s too.

I need all three of them in the nest, cuddling and taking care of me. My system yearns to be saturated in their pheromones. No matter where I roll, I want to smell them.

Need sizzles under my skin, and I use my feet on Lawson's ass to grind over his stomach. I would say his pelvis, but the man is ridiculously tall and has a long torso. It's going to take some work to find sexual positions that work.

I'm just making a plan in my head about begging him to fuck me against the shower wall when he walks us into the spray of water.

My soul leaves my body as I screech, curving away from the frigid water. "It's like ice!"

"I promise, it's not," Lawson says, refusing to give me any reprieve. "It's barely cooler than what I normally shower in. I didn't want to shock your system, so I kept it as mild as possible."

"It burns," I tell him, trying to twist away from the spray. "It feels like being dipped into ice water."

"I'm so fucking sorry, Abby," he says, shaking his head. "You're hotter than what can be safe, even for an omega. We'll slowly lower the temperature as you acclimate. The water should help cool you off. Then we can go from there on how to keep you comfortable."

I cling to him to avoid slipping and readjust until our mouths are close together.

"What I need is you." I seal my lips to his, and a growl rattles out of his chest as he opens for me.

My nipples ache as they brush his skin, and I unabashedly grind my panties against him. His hand tightens on my ass while his other palm flattens on my spine.

He finally pulls me out of the shower spray, my back landing against the cool tile. As a shock runs through my system, I mostly lean my shoulders against the wall. It's almost painfully cold, and that's too much to have touching my spine and lower back.

Lawson's tongue tangling with mine is a solid distraction. He's intense and primal, leading the kiss and devouring me in a way that makes my core throb. Though the water still ricochets against my left side, it no longer feels like torture the way it did cascading against my back.

My fingers dig into the hair at the base of his skull, and I moan as he nips at my lower lip.

"Goddamn, your pheromones are so thick," Lawson growls, pulling back. "I have to know you're clear to consent before I touch you. They beat

it into alphas' heads not to take advantage of omegas when they're lost to the fog—"

"This isn't me lost to the fog," I assure him, grinding against his pelvis. My clit pulses with need, and my perfume thickens—my system's attempt to tease the alpha into fucking me. I have no control over it, but my body knows what it needs. "This is the pain that comes before a full-blown heat. I can form sentences. I know your name is Lawson Maxwell. Your brother is Luka. You own the restaurant and the apartment I'm staying in. Bryant's gym is in the same plaza."

My words must go a long way in proving my mental state because Lawson seals his mouth to mine while bringing his hand between us. He brushes the backs of his fingers down my panties, and I lament not pulling them off when I had the chance.

Lawson manages to tug the material to the side and circle my clit while I sob against his lips.

"Shh, you don't have to beg," he murmurs. "Just tell me if I do anything you don't like."

Well, I don't love how long it's taking to get to the good stuff, but I don't get to complain. He teases a thick finger inside my opening, and I gasp, nodding frantically.

"I like that, for the record," I choke out, clenching around him. "More!"

"Oh, sweetheart. You are soaked." He nuzzles his nose to mine and murmurs, "Let's see if this helps." He adds another finger, and my whole world tilts as the stretch intensifies. "You're burning my skin. That's fucking terrifying."

"I'm okay," I assure him. "Just make me come."

"I don't exactly have a ton of practice here, but I'm going to do my best." He stretches his fingers as his forearm digs into my lower back, making my knees shake. He's massive compared to me, and my system loves how safe and comforting it feels.

If we were in a bed, I'd toss him down and climb right onto his cock. I can work with him not having a lot of experience as long as he's willing to gain a little more with me.

"Do you like this?" he asks, circling my clit. "Or this?" He changes to flicking his thumb over it in fast strokes.

My face falls against his shoulder, and I nod. "Yes!"

He chuckles. "No preference?"

I try to really think about what he said, but I'm so full of his fingers, and everything feels great compared to the misery I was just in.

"Maybe the first?" I choke out, clenching around his thick digits.

"This isn't too rough?" he asks, slamming his fingers deep inside me. He brushes that spot that makes me soar, and I'm pretty sure the sob I release tells him everything he needs to know. "Damn, sweetheart. You're dripping down my fist."

"It's perfect. You're perfect." I bring my other hand to smooth through his beard and capture his lips.

I love how he kisses me like he can't get enough. My free hand falls to his chest, teasing down his soft stomach to the top of his boxer briefs. I want to peel him out of them, but I settle for working my hand under the material.

A ridiculous whimper escapes my lips as I cup his shaft.

Okay.

He might actually rip me in half.

He's thick and so hard.

I've been with a couple alphas over the years, including my high school boyfriend and Tommy. Neither of them were packing what Lawson is. That's intimidating and exciting all in one.

No one has ever died from being railed with a massive dick.

Right?

I'm sure it'll feel fantastic.

He jumps against my palm as I work him as well as I can with the awkward positioning. It's a mess of limbs and cold water, but it also feels like a perfect moment in time.

Law rakes his teeth over my lower lip, and my body sizzles with need. His arousal sits heavy in the air, and it's making me foggy.

Everything feels incredible.

I use my feet on his ass to grind to meet him as he works my aching clit. I tease my thumb over his sticky crown, and it's so easy to imagine his cock in place of his fingers.

My pleasure builds as I clench around him. Dropping my face to rest in the crook of his neck, I lick and suck on his skin, imagining what I would do if his dick was in my mouth.

"Fucking hell, Abby," he growls, the sound reverberating in my soul. "How am I ever going to fit inside you when you're this tight around my

fingers? Huh, sweet girl?”

“We’ll make it fit.” I pick up speed, awkwardly jerking him off.

In turn, he applies firmer pressure to my clit, and it sends me over the edge. My orgasm washes over me, electric zaps shooting through my nerve endings.

I lose all sense of reality as I tighten around his fingers, moaning against his throat.

Lawson’s hand tightens on my lower back, and he growls as his shaft grows even longer and thicker. I try to focus on making it good for him, but I’m also a sobbing, shaking mess.

I would normally be self-conscious about how wet I am. Only, Law slams me against the wall with even more force as his muscles bulge. He bucks into my hold, growling a low, dangerous sound.

I flick my tongue over his throat, circling his crown with my thumb. He tastes delicious, and my instincts scream to bite him, so I do, even though I know it’s dangerous to taunt an alpha.

“Fucking hell, Abby,” he chokes out as sticky cum spurts all over my hand. His citrus and pine scent gets so much stronger as his fingertips dig into my back.

My insides are warm and floaty, and the pain is mostly gone. At the very least, it’s manageable.

Maybe I’m high off his scent?

Honestly, I’m just relieved to no longer be in agony.

Lawson nuzzles his cheek to the side of my head, and I smile as his beard tickles my cheek.

I like him so much.

Now I just need to figure out how to convince him to bite me. Then I can work on Luka and Bryant, and we can start our lives as a pack of four.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Bryant

“**W**ake the fuck up,” Lawson growls, thumping me in the chest. “How the hell can you sleep through Shadow barking at your door for five minutes straight?”

My eyes pop open, and I push up using my forearms. “What’s wrong?”

“Abby is going into heat,” he says, pulling his wet hair up into a messy bun on the back of his head. He secures it with a hair tie and stands, rolling his shoulders back.

“What?” I finally manage to choke out. “Is she okay?”

“She’s fine for the moment, but she was burning up when I found her.” Law shakes his head. “I thought a cool shower would help lower her temperature. She acted like I was torturing her.”

“Where is she right now?” I ask, throwing back the blanket.

“In the nest,” he says, clearing his throat awkwardly. “Things got intense...”

“Okay,” I say, trying to read between the lines. Unfortunately, I was asleep sixty seconds ago, and my brain isn’t working at full capacity. “Did the two of you have sex? That’s what she needs, right?”

“She’s going to need pheromones, regular knotting, and a fair amount of our cum, based on how bad the cramps were.” He crosses his arms over his bare chest, and I finally notice he’s only in sweats. It’s hard to be sure, since it’s dark, but they appear to be damp, like he pulled them on in a rush after their shower. “We didn’t have sex. Not exactly. Sexual contact, yes. I’m not sure how long an orgasm will keep her settled.”

“I’ll go check on her right now,” I say, climbing off the bed. “We’re going to have to figure out a sleeping schedule. We can’t leave her without

someone awake if she needs to be knotted—”

“Luka locked his door. He slept through my knocking for over a minute. I was about thirty seconds from kicking the damn thing in. I came to get you instead, but I’m going to work on getting him up next.” He bends down and picks something up off the floor before shoving it at me. “Take her temperature and write it down. We need to know what it is between waves. She was burning up when I found her. It was a little better when I tucked her into the bed in the nest, but who knows how long that will last.”

“I’ll make sure I note her temperature,” I say, taking the first-aid kit. “What time is it?”

“A little before five a.m.”

“Maybe you should let Luka sleep until he wakes up on his own,” I suggest, and I’m not just trying to get alone time with Abby. “That way he’ll be well-rested and ready to take over in case one of us needs some sleep later. You can always text him and let him know what’s going on.”

“You don’t think we should all be with her at once?” Lawson asks, scratching his thick beard.

“Let’s see how it goes,” I suggest. “If she needs more than one of us at a time, we can make that happen, but she just agreed to let us court her. Three half-feral alphas hopped up on her pheromones might be overwhelming, especially at first.” I shove the first-aid kit under my arm and grab my phone off the nightstand, unplugging it. “I’ll keep my phone close. If I need backup, I’ll text you immediately.”

“I need to let the dogs out and feed them, but I don’t know how long my instincts will let me be away from her,” Law says.

“Heats last for days,” I remind him. “This is a marathon. We’re going to have to pace ourselves to ensure she won’t suffer with there only being three of us.”

“She won’t suffer if I have to go the next five days without sleep, but I get what you’re saying.” He spins and heads toward the door. “Take her temperature. Try to get her to drink something afterward. She might not be very hungry or thirsty, but it’s our job to make sure she gets enough fluid and calories to sustain her through the heat.”

I flip him off, even though he can’t see it.

Of course he wants me to play bad cop.

Whatever.

The itchy ache under my skin isn't going to settle until I get my eyes on Abby and verify how she's doing.

* * *

Abby glares at me as the thermometer does its thing. She could not be cuter, but I think now would be a bad time to tell her that. She seems to be daydreaming about my demise, and I would be worried *if* I wasn't holding back a chuckle. It might have something to do with how relieved I am.

Based on what Lawson said, I was concerned about what state she would be in, but when I came into the nest, she was at the head of the mattress, sitting up against the pillows. At first, I couldn't figure out what she was doing. It quickly became clear she was trying to sniff Lawson's scent from the T-shirt she was clad in. While it gave me a lovely view of her mostly nude body, I did try to be a gentleman by keeping my gaze locked on her face.

When she pulled the material down enough that I could spot her dark blue eyes, it was the first real breath I'd taken since leaving my room. I'm still not sure if she was blushing because she was caught huffing Law's T-shirt or if her cheeks were red from running a fever.

I think it was probably some combination of the two, but we're about to find out for sure.

"It shouldn't be too much longer." I bring my hand to cradle her jaw and run my thumb over her cheek.

Her eyes are red and glassy, making it almost seem like she's been crying. Goddamn, she's beautiful, even when she's miserable.

She's also likely a few years too young for me.

Nah, I'm not going to go there. Mother Nature obviously knows what it's doing, and that's just how things tend to go with alphas and omegas.

My mom is eleven to fourteen years younger than my dads. I'm not going to stress myself out over a six- or seven-year age gap.

The device beeps frantically, and I pull it free of her lips.

"That doesn't sound good," she says, squinting. "What is it?"

"106.9." I flip the thermometer around until she can see it. "It's high but within normal range for an omega." I pull the cover off and toss it into the small garbage can that sits on the bottom shelf of the nightstand. Sliding the device back into the case, I put it down and grab the temperature log that

came in the kit from The Divine Omega. Once that's done, I turn back to her. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine," she says, snuggling back against the pillows. "I'm no longer burning alive, so that's nice, but I'm also unsettled?" Her shoulders bounce. "Maybe that's the wrong word. I'm not anxious, but it's like my body is? Maybe it's my instincts that are restless. That makes no sense. I'm still really new to this whole heat thing."

"What do you mean?" I roll fully onto my side facing her and scoot down the mattress to make it easier to watch her expressions as we talk.

"I lived with my brother and his pack when my first heat tried to start," she says, wincing. "They took me to an omega clinic. The doctors sedated me, and when I woke up, I was already on suppressants. I kept taking the medication until I met my ex." She sighs, shaking her head. "Suppressants aren't meant to be taken for longer than twenty-four months in a row. Once you reach that threshold, the doctors recommend taking a yearlong break. I'd been on them for longer than two years, and even though I was apprehensive about whether my ex could handle a heat solo, I let him talk me into going off them. We both kinda thought the heat would start right away, but it didn't."

"You've never had a heat outside of the one where you were sedated?" I ask to make sure I'm following.

"Right," she says, her teeth digging into her lower lip. "I mean, I had some random waves when I first went off the pills, but a full-blown heat never hit. My ex accused me of permanently screwing up my system, so I went to an omega specialist while I was living with him. She assured me that my heat would come when my body was ready, but I confided in her that I planned to leave when I got the chance. She gave me a new prescription for suppressants, even though I could tell she didn't love the idea. She also warned me that I couldn't start them that day."

"I'm not sure we could get out to a pharmacy to fill the prescription with the weather conditions." I bring my fingers to brush over her cheek.

"I have them," she says. "But I don't want to take the pills. They're supposed to be started at the end of a heat. Under extreme circumstances, it can be started on the first day that symptoms begin, but they won't fully stop the misery. I'd have to suffer through a week or more of what I felt when Lawson found me, and I really don't want to have to go through that."

“Then you won’t.” I lean in, marking her cheek with my pheromones. “The three of us are going to take care of you. Don’t worry about that.”

She brings her hand to my jaw, brushing her fingers through my beard. “I appreciate it.”

“Always, pretty girl.” I cup her hand, giving it a squeeze. “Now, are you thirsty? I’m supposed to hydrate you while you’re coherent.”

A smile breaks out on her face. “Not really, but I’ll gladly drink something if you’ll let me cuddle with you when we’re done.”

“That’s a deal I’m happy to accept.”

* * *

Abby is exhausted, and the two of us lie down with the goal of getting a few more hours of sleep. It seems unlikely that I’ll be able to knock out with how busy my brain is, but the next thing I know, someone grabs my hand.

“Bryant, please,” Abby begs.

I’m on my side behind her, and my eyes pop open. Her skin radiates heat against my palm as my fingers slide over her hip and stomach. She’s so fucking soft compared to me, but also insanely warm. She continues guiding my hand down her pelvis and lifts her top leg, pulling my fingertips to her pussy.

“The pain is back,” she says, her voice shaky. “I need you to make it stop.”

Okay, it’s time for me to take charge.

“I’ve got you, Abby,” I murmur, trying to wake up. I haven’t done a single thing, and she’s already so slick that it’s hard to comprehend.

Circling her clit, I try to decide on the fastest way to bring down her fever. Orgasms might help, but from what I understand, she needs my knot locked inside her and to soak up as much cum as possible.

For my entire life, I’ve heard how fast things move when alphas and omegas are involved. I guess I just thought it would be different for us. Mother Nature doesn’t care if we’ve had the chance to get to know each other.

It’s all about the breeding with alphas and omegas. That thought shouldn’t make my shaft jump as precum dribbles from my tip, but here we are.

I push up using my forearm and rest my head on my palm.

Abby grinds back into me, working my already hard cock against my lower abdomen. “That feels really good, but I’m so empty.”

When I move to lean over her, she pulls away and rolls over, landing on her back.

“Hey,” I say, taking in her red cheeks and sweaty hair. “What do you need, pretty girl?”

“You, on top of me,” she says, nodding. “Inside me. No teasing. Just fuck me.”

My eyes widen.

Direction is good.

It’s great, in fact.

I was also asleep three minutes ago, and everything is moving ridiculously fast.

The tightening in my stomach is due to the fact we didn’t get to talk about any of this beforehand. She knows what she wants now, and she’s forming complete sentences, but what happens if she’s pissed once the fog clears?

“Oh shit,” Abby hisses, pulling her knees up.

An incoherent whine slips from her lips as her pheromones burst in the air.

I finally pull my hand from her pussy and get my shit together. There’s always the possibility that she could feel like we rushed things, but she could also resent me for hesitating.

Every second I battle with myself, she’s left to suffer.

She agreed to let us court her while she was completely clear. The goal of courting is bonding and building a life together.

I lean over her and plant my hand beside her head before sealing my mouth to hers. My other arm moves between us, pushing her legs to the mattress.

It makes it easy to crawl over her, and I settle between her thighs. She’s still in Lawson’s shirt, but it’s ridden up around her hips.

Our tongues tangle together as I work her swollen nub with my thumb and bury two fingers inside her. Her inner walls ripple in a way that I’ve never experienced, but I’ve also never hooked up with an omega before.

It’s fucking wild.

Abby’s warm fingers trail down my stomach and into the waistband of my sweats. Her fist wraps around my length, and it feels amazing, but it’s

also a shocking reminder of how feverish she is.

She jerks me as much as she can within the confines of the material and groans against my lips.

I fully break the kiss, pulling back and nuzzling my nose to hers. “You think you can take my cock? We’ve missed a whole lot of steps. I don’t want to shove it inside you, only to realize we needed that prep.”

“Are all alphas this dramatic?” She squeezes the hell out of my shaft as her body tenses.

“More cramps?”

“Yes, dammit.” She groans. “I think smelling your pheromones is making it worse, not better.”

That’s like a kick to the teeth, but I think I understand what she means.

Holding myself up with the hand next to her head, I pull my fingers from her pussy and yank my sweats down. Once they’re off, I lower on top of her once more.

I wish I had gotten her out of Lawson’s T-shirt, but we’ll just have to work around it.

“I like you so fucking much.” I trace my fingers up her thigh and over to swirl around her clit. “You know that, right?”

She moans, thrashing under me.

I pull her hand off my cock and take over, jerking my crown against her clit.

Abby wraps her legs around me, digging her toes into my ass.

“Pull your shirt up, pretty girl,” I tell her. “I want to watch your tits bounce and feel your skin against mine.”

She pushes up on the mattress using her shoulders and bunches the material on top of her breasts. She’s slender, but all her delicious curves make themselves known when she’s no longer drowning in Law’s shirt.

My gaze slides up her body, and I barely hold myself back from groaning.

She’s fucking stunning.

Everything outside of Abby gets hazy, and my canines pulse, aching to be buried in her tight little body.

This is dangerous.

The hazier my head gets, the more my worries slip away, but I need rational thought to keep me from doing something that I can’t take back.

Claiming bites can only be attempted once with a person. If a bond is rejected, you never get to try again with that individual. Rushing into biting her could have disastrous consequences, but my head won't shut up about bonding and breeding her.

"You good?" Abby asks. "You're looking a little feral..."

My eyes land on hers, my teeth digging into my lower lip almost painfully.

Every inhale floods my system with more of her pheromones, and I have tunnel vision on the wiggly little omega.

She wraps her hand around the back of my neck, pulling me in for a kiss.

I work my crown in a circle around her clit and back down, barely dipping inside her opening before starting the process all over again.

She's so soft, and she kisses me like she's dying for more.

On the next try, I dip inside her a little more. She's still so fucking snug, and even as hazy as I am, I don't want to hurt her.

A light bulb goes off in my mind.

She's not a beta.

This isn't like the other sexual experiences in my life where I've had to hold back.

There's no reason to continue to torture us both while I try to prep her.

With how slick she is, it's easy to thrust deep, and Abby moans against my lips, nodding and digging her fingernails into my neck.

The difference in our temperatures is staggering, but my system is sure we know what she needs. She leaks around my swollen length, and my hand lands on her hip.

Mount.

Rut.

Breed.

Claim.

The caveman loop takes over as my fingers dig into her side.

Well, this might be a problem.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Abby

I've never been so full, which makes it weird that it's not enough. I'm still hot and sweaty, with that itchy ache that makes me want to climb out of my skin. My toes dig into Bryant's ass, and I try to force more of him inside me.

He breaks our kiss, and his head tilts almost like a predator.

A shiver runs down my spine, and the look pulls a whine from my lips.

My head falls to the side to offer him my throat.

"I like that way too much for it to be civilized." Bryant growls, burying his face in my neck. He licks and nips at my throat, which only makes me slicker.

He's so hard, and I'm stretched to capacity, but I need his knot.

He's been very gentle and respectful, which I would normally appreciate. Under the circumstances, it's kinda annoying, but I might be overreacting. Omegas are known for being demanding during heats.

My tits throb, and I reach between us, working my swollen nub. It makes me wonder how much more of him that I have to take if I want his knot.

I do a quick check and bite the inside of my cheek.

That's ridiculous.

Alpha dicks are ridiculous.

They're also amazing.

My fingers wrap around his knot as much as I can in the awkward position, and I apply pressure.

"Jesus, Abby," Bryant growls against my throat. "You feel so good, and I'm afraid I'm going to slip into rut. Everything is foggy, and all I can think

about is...fuck. I have to stop talking.”

“I’m not afraid of you,” I assure him, clenching my inner walls.

“Oh, but you should be. If you could hear the insanity running through my mind...” He slams deeper with every rabid thrust, and I pull my hand from between us. He doesn’t disappoint, his pelvis brushing my clit as he works in and out of me.

His crown slaps against my cervix, and then he’s gone again. It feels impossible that I could take all of him to even get to his knot, but vaginas are forgiving.

If I have any pain, I’ll ignore it.

“More,” I beg as heat blooms under my skin. “Bryant, please!”

He scrapes his teeth down my throat and flicks his tongue over the ache. “I’m trying here, pretty girl. I’m just not sure how you’re ever going to take my knot.”

If we have to defy logic, he will be knotting me. I don’t care if I have to toss him down and impale myself on his cock, it will happen.

He gets into the perfect rhythm, slamming deep and brushing my clit with his pelvis.

My tits ache with the same pulse in my core, and my pleasure builds. His tongue sweeps over my throat, his chest brushing my aching nipples.

I beg him for more, but the words sound garbled.

My eyes clench closed, and he once again bumps my G-spot.

It sends me over the edge, and I tighten around him.

“Shit,” Bryant growls. “Holy fuck, you’re killing me here. How am I supposed to put on a decent performance when you’re wringing my cock so good?”

I don’t know if that’s a compliment, but it sure seems like one.

As pleasure rips through my nerve endings almost violently, he doesn’t let up. His strokes get ragged as his shaft swells to the point it’s almost painful, and he falls onto me, rutting me into the mattress.

There’s so much pleasure.

It’s almost like being disconnected from reality, but I want him to enjoy himself too. Pulling my feet off his ass, I plant them on the bed and do my best to grind over him. His shaft jerks, and hot cum spills inside me.

I’ve never felt as content before, and at the same time, I want his knot.

His muscles bulge, pressing me into the mattress.

“Goddamn, woman. I hope you know you’re never getting away.” He growls, nipping at my throat. The sensation of his teeth on my oversensitive skin makes me whine. “You’re mine now, pretty girl. All fucking mine.”

A wicked growl escapes his chest, and his pheromones flood my system. My head gets even hazier, the fog hitting with full force.

* * *

“Present for me, Abby,” Bryant growls.

As he kneels between my thighs, all I can seem to focus on is his long, lean muscles. He said he played baseball in college, and it’s clear he kept up his physique, which makes sense with him owning a gym.

“Ass up, pretty girl,” he says, slapping my clit.

Pleasure radiates through my body, and I moan.

“Now!” he barks.

My body jolts into motion.

I flip over rather gracelessly.

My top half stays flat to the mattress with my ass pushed up and out. The sheets are going to need to be changed soon. All I can smell is a combination of the two of us, and I’m kinda lying in a puddle, but heats are all about messy, dirty sex.

Bryant bumps my legs apart and settles behind me, slamming into my pussy with no additional warning.

I’m warm and floaty.

No longer in agony.

Basically, I’m loving life.

My face rolls around the mattress as I moan, and it only makes Bryant’s fingers dig into my hip even more.

“The view back here is fucking phenomenal,” he growls. “I forgot there’s no refractory period when alphas and omegas are involved. Jesus Christ. All I can think about is biting and breeding you.”

My core spasms around him, and a slick sound fills the air every time he ruts into me.

Bryant’s hands hit the mattress next to my head as he flattens his chest to my back, slamming into me in punishing strokes.

My eyes clench shut as his knot brushes my lower lips.

He growls, and I move my head to the side, offering him my neck, even though my hair is stuck to it.

Bryant pulls my hair out of the way and gets close to my ear. "Such a pretty throat. It'll look even better with my bite. That way, everyone who looks at you will know you're mine."

I whimper and nod, squeezing my inner muscles. It only seems to make him more frantic, and his knot brushes my opening on every thrust.

"You keep clenching around me like that, and I'm going to fuck you full of my babies," he growls, sounding like he's lost to the fog. "You want that, Abby? Want me to breed you?"

My pheromones are almost thick enough to make me gag, but my system seems determined to tease the alpha into rut.

On his next thrust, Bryant slams his knot inside me.

We both freeze, releasing sounds of agonized pleasure.

His knot swells, fully locking into place.

The twinge of pain turns to bliss as he rocks into me, practicing rutting.

"Tell me you're okay," Bryant chokes out.

"Okay? I'm fantastic."

Wow.

I sound wasted.

I don't even care.

Every movement sends euphoria ricocheting through my system.

Bryant slides a hand between me and the mattress, pulling me up with him until we're both on our knees.

I sob, bending toward the bed, but he keeps me upright. "Are you trying to rearrange my organs?"

"Sorry, pretty girl." He chuckles darkly, sliding his hands up my thighs, over my stomach, and continuing up to cup my tits. "My head is a mess. I want to watch your tits bounce and daydream about you big and round and full of my baby."

I have no idea why that's so hot, but I leak around his shaft and squeeze his knot.

"Hmm, you like that idea too." Bryant bends, burying his face in my throat. His forearm hooks in the indent above my hip as he works my swollen nub. "I'm blitzed. Your pheromones are messing with my head. My teeth are aching. This is so fucking dangerous."

My hand falls, cupping his as he works my clit. “Yeah, but it feels amazing.”

He licks and sucks on my neck but pulls free, growling like a rabid alpha.

Though my vision is foggy, it’s easy enough to spot Luka as he climbs onto the mattress.

“Don’t growl,” I say, smacking Bryant’s hand. “I want both of you.”

Luka is in low-slung sweats, and the outline of his shaft is fully visible under the material. He makes his way across the mattress, coming to a stop in front of me.

“Hey, gorgeous.” He smirks. “You look wrecked.”

“Bryant has been taking good care of me.” I smile back, even though I know I must look like a hot mess. “Kiss me?”

Bryant growls again.

Luka ignores him, saying, “Gladly.” His facial hair scratches my skin as his hand cups my face, and he shoves his tongue into my mouth.

Need pulses in my lower stomach, and I rock on my knees, working over Bryant.

“Damn, Abby,” Bryant groans. “You’re trying to wreck both of us at once.”

I love the sound of that.

These alphas are mine.

I just have to claim them.

Get them to claim me.

Ehh, whatever.

Luka kisses me like he wants to destroy my sanity, and I cup his shaft over the material of his sweats. He’s thick, but I’m already so full of Bryant’s knot that there’s no way to fit him inside me at the moment.

Having them both stretching me to capacity sounds heavenly. That will have to be with no knotting, though.

Luka jumps against my palm.

I snake my hands under the band of his sweats, pushing them down, along with his underwear.

Bryant bucks up into me, and pleasure builds in my abdomen as I wrap my fist around Luka’s cock.

I want to feel him against me, so I use my hold to tug him closer until his crown bumps my pussy on every stroke.

“You’re burning up,” Luka says, breaking the kiss to breathe. “Are you okay?”

I nod, my face falling to rest against his shoulder.

“This is nothing,” Bryant says. “When I first found her, it took my breath away.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here sooner.” Luka’s hand moves to cradle the back of my head. “You’re beautiful. I’m not even inside you, and I’m soaked in your slick.”

Bryant tugs his knot along my inner walls, and my pheromones burst into the air.

Being able to smell both of them has me a whole different level of out of it. Their scents blend together perfectly, and I want my nest saturated in the three of us.

My tongue sweeps over Luka’s clavicle as he uses his free hand to flick my nipple. He tastes salty but smells like smoky campfire.

I beg against his skin as my orgasm builds. Working my hips in a circle, I do my best to blow Bryant’s mind.

My instincts won’t shut up about keeping them.

I don’t think it through as I beg, “Bite me, please.” My teeth dig into Luka’s shoulder. It won’t form a bond, but it might taunt him into biting me back.

“I warned you,” Bryant says, releasing a feral snarl.

I can’t be sure, but it feels like he buries his hand in my hair next to Luka’s.

One of them pulls me off Luka’s shoulder.

Bryant’s teeth dig into my neck right below my ear.

A half second later, Luka’s hand moves to cradle my cheek, and he tilts my face toward Bryant. It pushes Bryant’s teeth deeper into my neck, but it also gives Luka enough room to strike the other side of my throat.

The orgasm that washes through my system is violent.

My entire body quakes as pleasure cascades through my nerve endings in waves. There’s some pain from how deeply they’ve buried their teeth in my skin, but my system converts the discomfort to euphoria.

It’s almost an embarrassing amount of time before I realize I have to accept their bonds. Luckily, it’s intrinsic to understand how to accept each connection.

Bryant’s stormy, electric scent floods my mind first.

Luka's smoky campfire scent comes next.

It's kinda like smelling them, but also not. It's more like I can feel them in my mind while getting hints of their scents.

Bryant growls, and his euphoria rips through the bond, sending me over the edge all over again.

Luka groans against my throat as he retracts his teeth, licking the bite to seal it. His hot, sticky cum splatters all over my pussy and stomach.

I'm guessing the intensity of feeling my and Bryant's orgasms in the bond sent him over the edge.

I'm floaty and foggy, but I still know one thing is missing.

Or rather, one person.

Lawson needs to bite me.

Once he sinks his teeth in, I'll be completely content.

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Chapter Twenty-Six

Luka

Who knows how much time we spend lost to the fog, but the next time Abby wakes up, she's boiling, exactly like Bryant warned me she would be.

Lawson gave me a heads-up that he was going to try to get some rest so we could take care of Abby in shifts.

I'm still shocked that he hasn't popped up, but it might be a smart call.

I will be genuinely shocked if he's actually sleeping, though.

It's far more likely that he's downstairs alternating between pacing the floor bare and tiring out the dogs so they won't destroy the house when he leaves them for his turn in the nest.

The first thing Abby did upon waking up was to shove my shoulder until I was flat on my back, then she climbed right onto my dick while I was still trying to figure out what year it was.

Bryant woke up, rolled off the mattress naked, grabbed the thermometer, and shoved it into Abby's mouth.

Now I've got a very pouty omega sitting on my dick while my packmate stands at the edge of the bed with his arms crossed, waiting for the device to go off. Although, I think she knows he means business because she hasn't tried to pull it from her mouth.

It would be quite comical if she wasn't burning my cock. The severity of the situation outweighs any urge I have to chuckle at the absurdity of the moment.

Abby groans, wrapping her arm around her middle as she curves toward me. Her pussy spasms, and slick drips down my shaft and balls.

Some of that is likely Bryant's cum, but I ignore it in favor of checking on my omega.

"Hey, gorgeous, are you okay?" I ask, pulling my hands off her hips to cradle her face.

Her emotions in the bond aren't as easy to read as I hoped.

She's anxious and unsettled...

Maybe?

She might also be mad at us for sucking at taking care of her. We might need Law more than I'd like to admit.

She whimpers around the thermometer, shaking her head as much as she can with my hold on her cheeks.

The device lights up red, beeping incessantly.

Bryant yanks it free, frowning as he squints at the readout.

"What is it?" I ask.

"108.9."

"I told you I was fine," Abby says, planting her hands on my shoulders and swiveling her hips in a circle.

I've been so distracted that I'm shocked my dick managed to stay hard, but her pheromones are likely to thank for that.

"An almost 109 fever is not *fine*," Bryant says, pulling the cover off the thermometer. "You need to knot her and pump her full of cum."

"That does sound like a good plan." Abby's head falls to the side, and she whines, finally stopping blocking her emotions in the bond.

Pain filters through the connection, and I hiss.

"Jesus, Abby," I choke out. "Why didn't you tell us you were suffering this badly?"

A more pressing question is, why did she work so hard to block us off in the bond?

"It comes and goes," she whispers. "I just need you."

I hate that I wasn't more coherent when she first climbed on my dick, but that can't be fixed now. We'll have to have a do-over for our first time after the heat passes. I'll be sweet and take my time once she's no longer hurting.

Sliding my hand around her side, I cradle her lower back as I roll us toward the middle of the bed.

Abby's back hits the mattress, and her tits bounce as I manage to stay buried inside her throughout the entire transition.

She's stunning, and I'm not sure what I did to get so lucky.

Her eyes widen, a sexy little smirk tipping up her lips.

"Were you thinking about how attracted you are to me?" she asks, fluttering her lashes.

"I most certainly was." I cup her jaw, lowering until my chest presses against hers.

Abby leans up, meeting me in the middle for a tender kiss.

She's so warm in comparison to me that it's an outright shock to my system when cool skin touches my abdomen.

My head whips up, and Bryant lies on his side as he snakes an arm between us.

"She needs that fever brought down fast," he says, circling her clit. "You're being too slow." His eyes fall shut, and his exhaustion filters through the bond. His concern for Abby comes next, and my head tilts.

It's strange to experience what he's feeling, but it's also kinda cool. It'll definitely come in handy to prevent arguments moving forward. Being able to live what someone else is feeling has to help with finding common ground.

"I've got this," I tell him. "Get some rest so you can take over if Law needs backup."

"I really miss him," Abby says as I pull out, thrusting back in.

"Law will be here soon," I assure her, nuzzling my nose to hers. "With there only being three of us, we have to make sure one person is always well-rested and ready to take over."

I'm also sure he wanted to give us the chance to take care of her and build trust. He's been ahead since they were snowed in together the first time, but I'm not sure he was expecting the two of us to bite her the first time she asked.

Bryant pulls his arm free, and I make sure my pelvis brushes her clit as I snap my hips against hers.

Holding myself up using my core muscles, I cup her tit and pinch her nipple between two fingers.

Abby plants her feet on the mattress, rocking to meet me as she moans. She aches to come all over my cock, her need filtering through the bond.

It takes my damn breath away.

We're now connected on a whole different level, and I bit her before ever slipping inside her.

That's insane when I think about it, but I have no regrets. My system didn't want to risk letting her get away, and now we get to spend all our time getting to know one another.

"You're not going to break me," she says, wrapping her hand around my neck and guiding my mouth to hers once more. "Fuck me deep. Please, Luka? I need you." She murmurs the words against my lips, and her pheromones pulse in the air.

My nostrils flare, breathing in her raspberry and lemon scent. Every inhale makes my head foggy as pleasure blooms in my chest.

I shove my tongue into her mouth, doing my best to get back on track. Her desire floods the bond, spilling into me. It's exactly what I need to relax and enjoy the moment.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I won't be able to get it back.

She's slick and warm and tight around my cock.

Her pheromones help take away my concerns about fucking up.

What the hell am I doing stressing about messing up, anyway?

The whole goal is to make her come and lock my knot inside her.

Abby wraps her feet around my ass, her toes digging into my skin.

It's crazy.

I've never been intimidated by sex before, and I've had a fair amount of it in my lifetime. I guess I just wanted our first time to be magical, not the fumbling exchange that I've managed so far.

That's the thing about life—you can prepare all you'd like, but it doesn't mean things will follow that plan.

"Mmm, you're driving me crazy here, gorgeous," I murmur against her lips, planting a hand on the mattress and teasing the other between her head and the bed.

My fingers dig into her hair as I give in to the moment.

Every thrust fills the air with a slick sound. Usually, I'd feel pretty smug about that, but I haven't done shit to contribute to how wet she is. That's all biology.

I'm baffled about how my knot is supposed to fit inside her when my crown bumps the bottom of her pussy on every rabid thrust.

Abby bounces around the mattress, but I hold her in place with my hand in her hair.

Kissing her only intensifies every sensation. Unfortunately, I have to breathe.

I pull back and bump her head to the side with my cheek. She's sweaty and smells sweet, making my mouth water. I lick and suck down her throat before getting close to her ear. "You're such a good omega, taking my cock like a champ. Warm and wet and so fucking snug."

Bryant must not be asleep, because he snorts. I would normally flip him off, but I don't take my focus off Abby.

"I want your knot," she says, her nails digging into the back of my neck.

"I'm not sure how to make that happen without hurting you." It's not an exaggeration, either. "How about you ride me?"

I don't give her the opportunity to object. I work my other hand between her and the bed, rolling us farther away from Bryant.

It's tough to manage without squishing her, but Abby ends up on top of me once more. Her long hair falls around her shoulders as she plants her hands on my chest.

"You're so damn pretty," I tell her, cupping her cheek. "I want you to use me. Take what you need. Get yourself off on my cock."

Abby moans, her head falling back as she rises and falls on my length.

With her on top, it's a much better view.

I'm torn between staring at my shaft dripping with her slick and watching her face as her tits bounce.

Jesus.

We haven't even had a conversation about STIs or birth control. It's a little late for that with Bryant's cum dripping out of her.

Abby is on the slender side for an omega. She still has a soft rounding to her stomach that I'm obsessed with. The thought of watching her body change and grow as she carries our baby makes my dick jump.

She clenches around me, swiveling her hips while I'm as deep as I can get. She bears down, and my knot slips inside her opening.

Damn.

Maybe I wasn't as deep as I could get, after all.

A low growl rattles out, and I use my forearms to push up until I'm sitting.

I wrap my forearm around her lower back and tease the fingers of my other hand into her hair.

I tilt her face up and check on her in the bond.

Everything is fuzzy, leading me to believe that she's either lost to the fog or on her way there.

"You good, gorgeous?" I ask, brushing my nose against hers.

Her eyelashes flutter, a naughty little moan filling the air as she swivels her hips. The motion sends my arousal skyrocketing, and I release her hair to pull my hand between us. Working her swollen nub, I push my mouth to hers.

Every small movement causes intense bliss as my knot drags along her inner walls.

Abby whimpers, and the first few inches of her pussy ripple around my knot. Being able to feel her pleasure intensifying only ramps up my own.

I growl and nip at her lower lip as she grinds over my knot.

Her orgasm washes over her.

I'm cooked as it spills through the bond and into me.

There's no way to hold back as I empty deep inside her, daydreaming about breeding her.

The bond becomes a mess of euphoria, and the fog hits hard.

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Chapter Twenty-Seven

Abby

I was so excited to see Lawson when he popped up next to the bed. Only, the bossy grump immediately popped the thermometer under my tongue. Once he had a reading, he wrote it down and lifted me off Luka's shaft. Not that it was hard anymore, but I was enjoying sleeping on his chest.

The brute dropped a T-shirt over my head and carried me downstairs while letting me know the dogs were safe and resting in Shadow's room.

He placed me down on the kitchen counter, where I now sit.

This definitely qualifies as questionable sanitary practices.

I don't even have panties on.

Hopefully his T-shirt is extra absorbent.

Lawson closes the refrigerator door, spinning to face me as he cracks the lid on a bottle of water. He stomps over and carefully brushes the hair back from my face. "You're cool for the moment. That's good. Now is the time we're supposed to look after your other needs." He lifts the water to my lips. "Drink."

"You're very bossy all of a sudden," I grumble, bringing my hand up to help support the bottle.

"Oh, sweetheart. You should know that by now." Law grabs my wrist in his free hand. "Here, let me. I'm not going to spill it all over you."

I have solid faith in him. Less in myself. I smile as he offers me a long drink of the water.

I love him a little surly.

There's something incredibly hot about knowing how gruff and growly he can be without worrying that he'll take his attitude out on me.

I don't know.

Maybe Tommy screwed me up more than I'd like to admit. He was always so nice to everyone else, but when it was only the two of us, that mask faded fast.

It's the opposite with Lawson.

He doesn't go out of his way to be fake nice with strangers. He's as stoic as ever anytime he interacts with anyone but me. Okay, he's softer and more playful with Luka and Bryant, but I kinda love that he's only gentle with people he cares about.

Though I wasn't thirsty at all, the water is cool and refreshing.

I'm actually dying for more.

He keeps eye contact, watching my face to gauge when I'm done.

It's intense, but sexy in a way that's hard to explain.

He gives me a decent amount before pulling the bottle away from my lips. He sets it on the counter and steps between my thighs.

"Are you upset that I bonded with your brother and Bryant?" I ask, tilting my face up until our eyes meet.

Even with me being perched on the countertop, he still towers over me.

"Not at all," he says in his low, gravelly tone. "Maybe a little jealous, but I stayed away this morning for a reason. I wanted to give the two of them the chance to look after you."

"I know," I tell him, wrapping my arms around his lower back. "It was nice to spend time with them, but I also missed you."

"Me too, sweetheart," he says, ducking his head until his face is close to mine. "Me fucking too." He marks my cheeks with his pheromones and brushes his lips over mine before pulling back. "All right. Before we get sidetracked, turkey or ham? I made sandwiches. You need some calories to keep up with all the ones you're burning."

"I'm not very hungry." My nose dances around his T-shirt until I end up face-deep in his armpit, which just so happens to be where his scent is strongest.

"Being cute isn't going to prevent me from feeding you." He chuckles. "Now, pick one, or I'll pick for you."

"Either is fine," I say with a huff.

It's a bit of an act.

I'm not really that annoyed.

It's actually rather attractive that he sets a plan and follows through. Maybe that's the wrong way to explain it. I think I love knowing that he's

going to enforce boundaries when it comes to keeping me safe and healthy.

That's something I haven't had before, and I find it ridiculously attractive.

* * *

After we eat, Lawson forces me into the tub, but I refuse to get in without him. He's excellent at pampering, and I do feel better with my hair no longer smelling like sweat. The water is cool compared to my skin, but I don't think I'm running as high a fever as I was with Luka and Bryant earlier. If I was, my eyes would be aching.

Lawson sits behind me in the massive tub, digging his thumbs into my shoulders. His massive cock is firm, resting between my ass cheeks. He's been a complete gentleman, but I kinda wish he would test the waters.

Maybe he's waiting for me to make the first move?

Before we got into the water, Lawson stopped and nursed Bryant's and Luka's claiming bites. I knew an alpha's saliva would clean their own bond mark, but I had no idea it would work on any bite, which is silly. I guess it's just not something I ever would have thought about.

Law is always on top of everything, and he wanted to make sure they were cleaned and firmly sealed. I learned during that experience that it sends a pulse of desire through the bond, no matter who licks the bite.

I'm gaining all sorts of new knowledge, and it makes me giddy.

I don't think it's quite sunk in yet that I get to keep them forever. I just need to figure out how to tease him into sinking his teeth in, then our pack will be complete.

"Jeez, Law." Peeking back over my shoulder at him, I grin. "You're so good at that." I purposely wiggle around on his lap, pushing his heavy cock against his stomach.

"Good, you need to relax and let us take care of you between the waves," he says, running his hands down my arms. With him no longer working my shoulders, it allows me to completely plaster my back to his chest. "You deserve to be pampered. Heats are rough on an omega's system."

I roll over, making the water splash around us. Luckily the tub is huge, and I don't think any spills. I love that it's big enough that even when it isn't filled to the top, my tits still float high in the water. Rearranging

myself, I plant my knees near his hips. If he wasn't sitting back against the tub, I'd circle my legs behind him.

My lower lips perfectly line the underside of his shaft as I grind it into his pelvis.

Lawson's eyes darken as his hands land on my ass. "You're way too fucking pretty to be looking at me like that."

From any other man, it would sound like a cheesy line. From Lawson, it makes my chest flutter and my stomach flip-flop wildly.

"You're incredibly handsome." I bring my hand up, running my fingers through his thick beard. "More than that, you make me feel safe in a way I've never experienced." I stretch up, and he dips his head so I can kiss him.

The face full of unruly facial hair is taking some getting used to, but his lips are so soft. I smile as I kiss him, working my pussy over his crown. If he wasn't so damn tall, I could grind over all of his impressive length.

He's so thick.

An extreme amount of girth, but I'm determined. We'll fit together, or I'll die trying. I'd probably also have a smile on my face.

His fingers dig into my skin. He's firm with his touch, but not aggressive. It makes me feel safe and protected, even if the room is a little open for my liking.

His tip bumps my opening, and my nipples brush his strong chest. His soft stomach presses against mine, which leaves me feeling like I don't have to suck in or try to hide my flaws. Apparently I'm just attracted to every single thing about Lawson.

Pulling my hand off his shoulder, I work it between us, grabbing his cock as I rise on my knees.

He breaks the kiss, shaking his head as he stands with no warning. "Sorry, sweetheart. Not gonna happen. I'm not fucking you for the first time in the bathtub."

"How about the bathroom counter?" I blurt out, running my thumb around his crown.

His booming laugh fills the air. "Not there either, but I promise, I'll be quick drying the two of us off."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Lawson

Abbey sits on the counter as I do my best to dry us off, but I know she won't wait for much longer. She wiggles around and cups her stomach with her forearm as I squeeze the excess water out of my hair.

A low moan spills from her lips, and she bends in half.

I drop the towel, taking the few steps over to her. Once I have her upright, I push my mouth to hers.

Goddammit.

The water must have hid her rising temperature. She's hot again, and her pheromones are everywhere.

I tease my free hand up her thigh and circle her clit, testing her opening with a finger. She sobs as I pull back and peck a final kiss on her lips.

"Plant your hands behind you and lean back," I tell her.

She doesn't hesitate, and I grin as I loop my left arm around her lower back to give her extra stability. Once she's settled, I take a knee while keeping my other foot flat on the floor. Hopefully it will give me more flexibility to move around as needed.

I wasn't lying when I said I didn't have much experience, but here's hoping enthusiasm will make up for a lack of hands-on practice.

Abby lifts her legs, resting her knees on my shoulders, and I chuckle as she uses her feet and hands as leverage to lift herself up and shove her pussy closer to my face.

"Eager, sweetheart?" I chuckle and swipe my tongue over her swollen nub.

Raspberry and lemon.

Jesus.

My dick was mostly well-behaved as I dried us off, but he perks up. This isn't about me, though. The first time I slide inside her, I want us both to be comfortable.

Bathroom quickies can come later.

Abby leaks around my finger, so I add another as I work her clit, testing to see what she likes best.

"Holy shit," she says, her heels bouncing against my back. "That feels so good, but your beard tickles. I love it. Don't stop."

I smile and get back to work. She's bare of any hair, but I wouldn't mind if she wasn't. I'm used to having a bunch of hair on my face from my beard.

Jesus.

Her pheromones might be getting to my cognitive functioning.

My hand digs into her hip as she leans into my forearm. It was a good call to give her some extra stability. She wiggles all over the countertop as she forces me where she wants me.

I love that she's not afraid to ask for what she wants.

Her inner walls cling to my fingers, and I stretch them, doing my best to help prep her for my cock. The worst thing that could happen would be for me to hurt her or leave her feeling uncomfortable. With my limited experience, it's a real possibility, even if I take my time.

What I need to do is to stay in the moment.

Pushing away those thoughts, I focus on her clit.

Abby buries her hand in my hair, pulling me even closer. Based on the way her heels bounce against my shoulders and how she begs mindlessly, I'm going to guess she's close.

My chest puffs up with alpha pride, and I suck each of her lower lips into my mouth one by one.

"Oh no," she chokes out. "No teasing." She uses her hand in my hair to guide me back where she wants me.

Barely any time passes before she starts to shake. She gushes around my fingers as the room fills with the scent of her perfume.

I can't believe I managed to make her come, though I'll thank her heat rather than my impressive skills.

I would snort at the thought, but her pheromones hit me hard, and I growl against her sex. It's time to let her come down from her orgasm and

get her to the nest.

* * *

Abby looks confused as I lie her down on the circular nest rather than carrying her up to the den nest that Luka and Bryant are currently sleeping in.

In my entire life, I've never felt anything but love for Luka. From the day I met Bryant, he felt like pack. That's why it's unsettling to realize I purposely kept them away from Abby.

She has a bond with each of them, and my system views that as a threat. Once she lets me sink my teeth in, hopefully that urge will settle, but for the moment, I'm like a rabid alpha.

I gave them some space this morning to let them have the chance to get comfortable with one another, and they went and bit her on day one of her heat.

On one hand, it's a good thing that she's tied to us for life.

On the other, I'm practically green with envy.

I close the curtain behind us and get Abby stretched out on the circular mattress before settling between her thighs.

"Hi." Her hands land on my shoulders, and she grins seductively. "Okay, let me play out this conversation. You're going to worry about hurting me. I'm going to assure you that you won't. Then you're going to go painfully slow until I'm at the point of pulling my hair out. Let's skip all that." She leans up and pecks a kiss on my lips. "Roll over, handsome."

It's a careful process to make sure I won't squish her as I land on my back, bringing her to hover over my hips.

Abby grins. "No one has ever given in to me as easily as you guys do. I could get used to this."

Bryant's and Luka's bites adorning her neck are comforting in the moment rather than antagonizing.

"That's a good thing, considering you're stuck with us for life," I say, running my thumbs over her hips. My hands feel gigantic in comparison to her, and I'm sure she nailed the walk-through of how our conversation would have gone.

"Stuck is absolutely the wrong word." She traps my shaft to my pelvis, grinding against the underside until I'm soaked in her slick. "Mmm, you're

looking a little feral. You good?”

My teeth dig into the side of my cheek as I lie my ass off, answering with a nod to avoid an outright mistruth.

Feeling her wet pussy gliding over my cock is a lot. It’s a good thing she’s going to be the one in control of this exchange because my head is a foggy mess.

Raspberry and lemon.

It’s all I can scent, and everything outside of Abby is hazy.

That can’t be a good sign.

“Kiss me,” she says, pinching her nipples.

A low growl rattles out, and I sit up in a crunch. With the height difference, it’s not the easiest to ensure our mouths meet, but I’ll keep sucking in for the next hour if I have to.

She shoves her tongue into my mouth and reaches between us, notching my crown at her opening. My entire body tenses as I hold myself back from shoving her down my length.

I distract myself by sliding my hand into her hair and taking over the kiss.

Abby moans, falling over my cock.

“God, sweetheart,” I choke out, massaging her skull. “That’s a tight fit.”

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“Okay, that’s a lot,” she says against my lips. “The stretch is intense, but you feel so good. Damn, Law. I can’t decide if you’re about to rip me in half or if I need more.” She swivels her hips in a circle and whimpers. “It’s the second. I need more of you. Help me fuck you.”

My hand digs into her ass as I lift her, dropping her while giving her a little push down my length. “Tell me if it’s too much.”

Her pussy clings to my cock in a way that ensures she’s going to embarrass me, but I’m more concerned with whether she’s okay.

“I’m great,” she says, sounding foggy. Her face falls to rest against my shoulder, and I sit all the way up.

If she needs something to lean against, I think this will make it easier.

It changes the angle completely, which also changes the feel. It’s crazy that such a small adjustment can make such a big difference, but I’m already hanging on by a thread.

She’s doing a much better job of taking my cock, so I pull my hand off her ass, bringing it between us to tease her clit. It seems to be the right call based on how loud she gets.

Slick drips down the extra inches of my shaft that Abby isn’t taking, and my head gets even foggier.

Mount.

Rut.

Breed.

Claim.

Fucking hell.

My instincts are convinced the plan is to bite her sexy little ass, breed her full of my baby, and never let her get away.

For once, I’m on the same page with my impulses.

“See, I’m totally taking your cock,” Abby says, nodding against my shoulder. “So since that’s a nonissue, can you take over?”

“Only if you promise you’ll warn me if I get too rough.”

“Deal.” Her agreement comes out mostly a moan, but it’s all I need.

I roll us, pinning her to the mattress.

My forearm lands against the bed next to her head, and I cradle her skull with my palm.

Abby whimpers, clawing at my back and ass. “I’m good. Don’t you dare stop.”

I haven’t even gotten started, but I’m guessing my dick wedged deeper inside her when we changed positions.

“I’ve got you, sweetheart,” I murmur, dipping my mouth to hers as I plunge in and out of her. My crown bumps the bottom of her pussy on every stroke, and I’m baffled how she’s supposed to take my knot.

Maybe that’s something Bryant and Luka will have to manage for the time being. If she soaks up enough of my cum and has multiple orgasms, it should help.

I think.

I don't know.

My knot aches, and I have to focus on anything outside of how incredible she feels wrapped around me.

I'm leaking enough precum that I should probably stop and ask her about birth control.

It's too late for that now.

In for a penny, in for a pound.

You can't unfry the fish.

Jesus.

My head is foggy.

I massage her scalp, keeping her from bouncing up the mattress with my hold on her head.

She's so damn small compared to me, and logic would say I need to be extra careful. Except Abby gets louder and sounds more satisfied the deeper I pound into her.

I pull my hand off her hip, bringing it to her clit at the same time I pull back to breathe.

I make the mistake of looking between us, and it does my head in. Her pussy is pink and glistening. Seeing where I disappear inside her only makes me more rabid.

The harder I rut into her, the slicker everything gets. She's dripping down my knot and balls, and her scent is everywhere.

"That's it." She nods frantically. Her core clenches around my shaft, the first few inches of her pussy rippling like it's searching for a knot. "I'm about to come so hard. Holy shit."

My mouth falls to hers, drinking down her sounds.

Thank God.

I was so worried I wasn't going to be able to get her there before I did. She gets so tight there's no hope of holding back.

I slam into her in shaky strokes as my cock swells, and I snag her lip with my teeth. As my canines plunge into the soft skin of her inner lower lip, I can only pray it's not too painful.

If I had planned this out, I would have gone for one of the locations that's always visible, like Luka and Bryant did.

My shaft jumps, spilling all my hot cum against her battered cervix.

Abby plants her feet on my ass, grinding me even deeper.

My knot slips inside her.

She sobs.

I growl.

I'm still blissed out on my orgasm and the feeling of my knot locking into place.

There are so many sensations that it takes me a few seconds to realize she accepted my bond.

Relief washes over me, replaced quickly by Abby's bliss.

It's intense.

Having a main-line connection to her emotions is going to take some getting used to, but this is the very best moment of my life.

I retract my canines and swipe my tongue over her lip, cleaning and sealing the bite. My chest is warm and fuzzy in a way I've never experienced, and it makes my damn eyes ache.

Abby is all ours, and we get to spend the next fifty years or so proving just how good of husbands we can be.

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Chapter Twenty-Nine

Abby

“ I ’m telling you right now,” Lawson growls, sounding deathly serious. “If you stick your dick in her ass before she’s clearheaded, I will strangle you to death with my bare hands. That will be a real awkward conversation to have with our parents. Let’s just avoid it.”

Okay, that would be weird.

What’s even weirder?

That I’m riding Bryant’s cock while sucking Law off. Oh yeah, and there’s definitely something in my ass.

I clench my pussy, trying to figure out what that is. It’s hard to be sure, but I don’t think it’s a dick.

I groan, popping off Lawson’s length.

His heavy shaft slaps against his lower stomach, and he quirks an eyebrow at me.

God.

He’s so handsome.

And grouchy.

Who knows why I find that so sexy.

It’s a little ridiculous that he can be cranky when I was just sucking him off.

I grin at him before peeking over my shoulder.

Everything is hazy, but Luka is behind me, kneeling over Bryant’s thighs. His sticky crown rests against my ass cheek, and his fingers are inside me.

“Hey, gorgeous. You back with us?” Luka asks, winking.

I nod, licking my dry lips. “Yeah, holy shit. I’ve never been this full before.”

“You were begging us both to fuck you.” Bryant squeezes my hips. “Do you still want that?”

Do I?

“Yes!” I moan, nodding.

My skin sizzles with heat, and a wave of cramping tightens my lower abdomen.

I whimper, curling toward Bryant.

The movement reminds me that I can ride him.

I swivel my hips and rise and fall on my knees, trying to figure out which movement will take the pain away.

“You, fuck me.” I yank my hand off Bryant’s chest, reaching behind me to gesture at Luka. “I can handle it.”

“Are you sure, sweet girl?” Law asks, cupping my face in his giant hands.

Oh, he’s not even on the mattress. He’s standing next to the bed. No wonder it was easy to get his dick into my mouth.

Wow.

Heats are wild.

I was definitely lost to the fog for a while.

I remember him bringing me to the den nest, but everything after that is hazy to downright missing from my memory.

“I asked you a question, Abby,” Lawson says, running his thumbs over my cheeks.

“I’m trying not to be insulted that you don’t think I can handle it,” I say, grabbing his shaft. “I’ll let you know if it’s too much, but I want all three of you inside me at once.”

I bump his arm out of my way and bring his crown to my lips, flicking the slit on the head of his dick.

I’m rewarded with spurts of his precum, and my pheromones pulse in the air. It’s kinda unreal how in sync my system is with my demands.

“Does this hurt?” Luka asks, scissoring his fingers in my ass.

“No,” I tell him, going right back to sucking Lawson.

“It feels weird as shit,” Bryant says, bringing his hand to my clit. “Go on. She’s lucid. She knows what she’s asking for.”

Luka pulls his fingers from my ass, and a squirting sound fills the air.

That must be lube.

I'm so slick that it's hard to believe it's necessary, but I also would rather be safe than sorry, so it's probably not a bad idea.

Instead of stressing, I rock on my knees, focusing on how full I am of Bryant.

Licking and sucking my way down Law's cock isn't the easiest with my head turned to the side. Luckily, he's up by Bryant's shoulder, making it easier than if he were near his hips.

Next time we do this, I might have whoever is in my mouth stand over the head of the person I'm riding.

And there will be a next time.

So many next times.

I still haven't fully comprehended that I get to keep them forever, but I think that will sink in after my heat ends.

My goal for the moment is to prove that they picked a good match. I want to show them I can meet all their sexual needs at once. It's kind of a lofty goal when I've only ever been with one person at a time before this heat.

I wasn't overloaded with Bryant and Luka, but I have a whole extra alpha to focus on.

Luka notches at my ass, and I grab Lawson's hand, guiding it to my hair.

I'm pretty sure I'm going to need him to take over if I have any hope of managing this.

"No," Law growls. "Not until he's inside you. If you still want me to fuck your mouth once you've proven you're good, I will. But I want you to be able to vocalize if there's a problem."

I nod.

I guess that makes sense.

When Bryant picks up speed on my clit, I fight the urge to clench around him. I don't think getting tighter would be helpful in this situation. I still, breathing through the urge to chase my orgasm.

Luka's cool palm teases down my spine, and he asks, "Ready for me, Abby?"

I keep hold of Law's shaft, popping off long enough to say, "I'm so ready."

Luka pushes inside me.

I freeze.

Bryant curses under his breath.

Lawson runs his thumb over my cheek, digging his fingers into my hair. His anxiety spills through the bond, reminding me they know everything I'm feeling in return.

I'm stretched to capacity, but it's not painful.

At least, not exactly.

It's more shocking and intense.

I think it's worse with only having Luka's crown inside me.

"More," I choke out, squeezing Lawson's shaft as I practice jerking him. I want to taste him, but he was right when he told me to get acclimated first.

Bryant's hold on my hip is almost painful.

The poor guy.

I have no idea how long he's been inside me, since I was lost to the fog. He's probably ready to come.

Luka pulls out and dips back inside, and it's easier this time to accommodate him. "Jesus, Abby. You're taking my goddamn breath away."

"Me too," Bryant says. "It's fucking weird being able to feel you moving through her."

I nod, clenching my eyes closed.

It's strange, but I love it.

Time loses all meaning as Luka works in and out of me, fucking me on Bryant's cock.

Lawson's sticky tip bumps my lips, and I finally remember I'm supposed to be sucking him off. Bringing him to my mouth, I hollow my cheeks and meet his eyes.

I haven't had much chance to practice sending them things in the bond, but I do my best to let him know that I want him to take over. He doesn't disappoint. His fingers weave into my hair, and he takes over, albeit gently, shoving me down his length.

My entire body buzzes with bliss as I soak up their pheromones.

Bryant finally gets back to teasing my pussy, and my pleasure builds *fast*.

I whimper around Lawson's shaft while my core locks down on Bryant and Luka. There's so much cool skin pressing against mine as I lose it, coming all over both of them.

It's hard to be sure exactly what happens next, but I think Luka comes first, followed quickly by Bryant. Lawson is as patient as ever, waiting for me to gain a little clarity before shoving his length between my lips once more.

Hell, I don't even remember him pulling free of my mouth.

My eyes lock on his as he fucks my throat, and it isn't long before I'm rewarded with a mouthful of hot, sticky cum.

Holy shit.

Heats are insane.

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Chapter Thirty

Bryant

Several days pass in a blur of sex, bodily fluids, and a very bossy omega.

Abby is lucky she's cute because she turns into a demanding little demon when she's particularly lost to the fog. I'm not even sure what day it is when I wake up with her sleeping on my chest.

My dick is soft but still mostly wedged inside her. I don't think she's fallen asleep over the last four or five days without having one of us locked in her pussy. It helped with the cramps if she could just wake up and immediately have access to a knot.

My nostrils flare, picking up the scent of blood.

Aww, shit.

I forgot about that.

Now she's going to have to deal with an entirely different kind of misery. The post-heat cramps start when the heat comes to an end. Well, unless conception occurred during the unbelievable amount of fucking.

There's every possibility that she's on some form of birth control, and we never thought to ask.

Either way, it's part of the biological process of a heat.

Menstruation is needed to clean out all that built-up uterine lining, and it's our responsibility to care for her in this phase, just like it was during the fun parts of her heat.

Growing up with omega sisters, my parents' pack educated us all thoroughly on what to expect. It was awkward as hell at the time, but I'm grateful they took their job seriously.

My hand flexes on Abby's ass as I nuzzle my cheek to the top of her head. "Hey, pretty girl. I think we've got to wake up."

Abby groans, stretching.

"I'm going to stand up and bring you with me. I just didn't want to scare the hell out of you by waking you up with no warning," I tell her, kissing her temple.

"Oh, God. I bled all over you," she whispers, pushing up using her hands on my shoulders as leverage.

"Not a big deal," I assure her, sending steady comfort through the bond. "Skin can be washed off, and sheets can be too. The mattress is protected by the waterproof pad."

"Mother Nature really loves to fuck with women." She shakes her head, her hair falling around her shoulders.

"That it does, but we're going to pamper you until you feel better," I say, sliding my hand up her ass and settling it on her lower back. "All right, I'm going to do my best to get us both vertical. Wrap your feet around my ass when you can."

Walking across the mattress is going to be an adventure, especially when I have to skirt around Luka and Lawson. Still, we'll get it done.

Jesus.

Hopefully one of those packages has feminine supplies. Otherwise, one of us will have to make a quick trip to the store. I'm sure the storm passed a couple days ago, but it's not like any of us have been checking the news.

Actually, maybe Law has been when he let the dogs out or fed them. I certainly haven't, though.

We'll just have to see where we stand after I get the two of us cleaned up.

* * *

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Abby's cheeks stay red during our shower, and it's not from the heat of the water. Now that her heat is over, the bond makes it easy to tell what's running through her head.

"I appreciate you taking care of me," she whispers as I rinse the conditioner from her hair. "This is so embarrassing."

"This is nothing," I say, grinning down at her. "Did you hear some of the things that came out of my mouth over the last few days? I get these hazy little flashbacks, and it's hard not to bang my head against the wall."

"Nah, don't be embarrassed. It was hot in the moment."

"Do you have a breeding kink?" I quirk a brow. "It feels like that's something I should know about, if you do."

She laughs. "I don't even know what that means, but I do want kids one day."

"Me too," I admit. "Were we playing with fire during this heat? Or do you have some form of birth control?"

"I do," she says, nodding. "An IUD."

Damn.

That makes all the shit I talked seem extra ridiculous.

"That's probably a good thing," I say, running my fingers through her long hair. "It gives us the chance to really get to know each other before we introduce kids into the mix."

"Yeah."

"Before I forget, I wanted to tell you something..." I trail off, wondering if I even want to broach this subject. It might make me sound crazy.

Abby rests her palms on my chest, tilting her face up toward mine. "Don't leave me in suspense."

"The night before your heat hit, I talked to my grandma after Lawson carried you to bed," I say, shrugging. "I was telling her about you and how you smell electric, and she told me an old wives' tale about that particular smell."

"That's crazy," she says. "You smell the same way to me too. Electric and stormy. Almost like lightning, if lightning was a scent."

"Exactly." I nod. "Apparently it was a well-known thing back when single couple pairings were the norm. Now that packs are more common, the information isn't being passed down as frequently. Basically, that smell is reserved for soul matches. It's one step up from a scent match. Kinda like

soulmates. I'm not saying that our bond is any more important than the connection you have with Luka or Lawson. It's just what my grandma told me."

"Huh," she says, bouncing her fingertips against my pec. "Is there anything else important that we should know?"

"Not really." I shake my head. "Well, she said we'll be most comfortable when we're close together. She also mentioned it could cause some jealousy within the pack, but another way to think about it is that all three of us are your perfect matches. Luka, Lawson, and I were already a pack before we found you. For me to click with them, it's showing our pack is the best match you'll ever find. No other scent matches would have been as fulfilling of a connection."

She smiles and stretches up onto her tiptoes to kiss the edge of my mouth. "I could have told you that. The three of you make me so happy."

"That goes both ways, pretty girl."

"I know." She beams. "Now, can we get out? I'm turning into a prune."

"Yeah, let's do it." I chuckle. "I'm starving."

"I'm sure you guys burned a lot of calories fucking me into oblivion."

I snort.

Goddamn.

She really is perfect for us.

Chapter Thirty-One

Abby

Even though I'm sure Bryant and Luka need to get back to work to check on the gym and the restaurant, they stay home and spend the next few days pampering the hell out of me.

Shadow and Echo have become thick as thieves, which is cute. Echo will lie around, snuggling with me, but she also abandons me to play with Shadow quite regularly.

Honestly, I kinda feel like she's adopted Lawson as her person. Maybe she just views him as her pack leader. I don't know, but I find it sweet how excited she gets whenever he calls her name.

We're only a few days out from Christmas.

I overheard the guys chatting this morning.

Bryant mentioned the gym will be closed Christmas Eve to the day after Christmas and New Year's Eve, as well as New Year's Day.

The restaurant has similar closures, except they'll be open New Year's Eve.

Luka mentioned he was going into the restaurant to handle some admin stuff, and I asked if I could go with him.

The roads are clear, and it's not snowing today, making it the perfect time for me to pick up my car and the rest of my stuff that's still at the apartment.

* * *

Lawson lingers around close to the doorway that leads to the garage as Luka and I prepare to head out.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to come with you?” Law asks, scratching his fluffy beard. “It might be a tight fit, but I can drive your car home, if I put the seat all the way back.”

Hearing him call it our *home* sends a shiver down my spine in a good way.

The dogs whine, circling between the three of us. They’ve been spoiled the last few days with the guys not going to work.

“Nah, I can handle it.” I step over, wrapping my arms around Law. “If it starts snowing, I’ll ride back with Luka, and we can try to bring my car over another day. I barely have two bags to pack. You should stay with the dogs.”

He nods, nuzzling his cheek to the top of my head. “All right, sweetheart. Be safe. Call me when you’re leaving, and I’ll be ready to come out and help you unload the car.”

* * *

Luka takes me by the store for a quick shopping trip. I needed to buy more pads and tampons. I also grab some treats for the dogs while Luka is busy looking at charcoal.

We make it to the apartment, and he helps me pack up my things and get them loaded into my car.

Once that’s done, we stand around near the driver’s side door.

“Do you want me to wait for you?” I ask, rubbing my hands together to warm them up.

“Nah.” He shakes his head. “There was a bit of a falling out between Bev and Lucy during your heat. It shouldn’t take too long, but I need to have a meeting with each one individually. Then I’ll have to bring them together to see if I can get to the bottom of the discourse.”

“That’s tough. I’m sorry my heat caused problems within the business—”

“It didn’t,” he says firmly. “Their issues had nothing to do with us being away.”

He pulls my palms to rest on his chest as he warms my hands with his. It’s such a small gesture, but it feels pretty monumental to me.

My stomach flutters as I stare up at him.

“Bev has been on Lucy’s last nerve for a while,” Luka says. “They used to get along, so I’m not sure what changed. I’ve also noticed a difference in Bev’s attitude, which sucks. I don’t want to let her go so close to the holidays, but we’ll see how it goes.”

“I hope it goes well and isn’t too stressful.”

“You don’t have anything to add about the Bev situation?” he asks, tilting his head.

“Nope,” I lie my ass off.

I’ve met Lucy, the bar manager, a few times. She seems rational and good at her job. Bev is more abrasive, but it’s a work environment. I think that’s probably to be expected from any boss while a new employee gets the hang of things.

“Fair enough,” Luka says. “All right. I guess I’d better get going. You have our address all programmed into your GPS?”

“Yep,” I assure him. “And I’ll call Lawson before I back out of the parking spot.”

Luka chuckles, dipping his face to mine for a quick kiss. He grins as he pulls back. “We got so damn lucky that you’re receptive to our personal brand of crazy.”

They all keep saying that, but honestly...

I’m the one who lucked out.

I guess all four of us did.

“Here’s hoping you never get tired of our hovering.” He pecks a final kiss on my lips as I smile.

Get tired of them worrying about me?

That’ll never happen.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Abby

Lawson wasn't lying when he said he would meet me outside. I don't even have my car in park before the front door opens, and Echo comes barreling down the stairs.

I'm surprised to see Bryant, rather than Lawson, following her out. He yells, trying to call her back to him, but she's in one of those moods where she's not going to listen.

I can't believe he beat me home. He must have left the gym while Luka and I were in the apartment, packing stuff up. I would have thought I'd have noticed his truck missing from the gym parking lot, but I guess I wasn't paying attention when I left.

Since I don't have a clicker, I couldn't park in the garage. That means we'll be unloading my stuff in the cold. Not that the garage would have been much better. Realistically, I'm not sure my car will fit with their trucks.

Now that we're bonded, I may not even keep my car, especially if there's nowhere to store it.

I push those thoughts away and get my car turned off, tossing open my door.

Echo immediately jumps up, her front paws landing on my jeans.

"Hi, I missed you," I say, giving her scratches. "Okay, I swear you've gained weight. Are you growing again? Does that even make sense?"

Of course she doesn't answer, but I'll have to ask Lawson.

I assumed she was full-grown.

Maybe she's just filling out as she gets older.

With how gifted the guys are with cooking, I'm probably gaining weight too.

"All right, Echo. Back up for me," I say, giving her a final pat.

She lunges at my face, licking my cheek.

I laugh and give her a gentle push so I can climb out. "Well, we're still working on the *manners* thing."

"Come on, ya brute," Bryant says, grabbing the handle on her harness and tugging her out of the way. He steps up and offers me his hands, helping me from the car. "Did you get all your stuff?"

"I did." I grin up at him. "My trunk is packed, but honestly, I never unloaded most of it into the apartment. There's also a few bags in the back seat. That's the stuff I use most often."

"Just point me where you want me." Bryant grins, dipping his mouth to mine for a quick kiss.

Echo barks, and we pull apart.

My jaw drops as I spot Tommy's SUV coming up the driveway.

"Oh my god," I whisper-hiss. "He's going to try to take Echo."

"Your ex?" Bryant asks.

"Yeah," I choke out. "I'm going to jail."

"You're not going to—"

"Echo, heel," Lawson growls, cutting Bryant off. "I'm taking her inside. Don't say a word about her being here."

"I think the cat might be out of the bag on that one," Bryant says.

I'm still frozen in shock, blinking as Tommy's vehicle gets closer.

"You heard what I said," Lawson growls, and my head whips in his direction. Echo's back rests against his chest as he carries her up the porch steps.

"Hey, it's okay." Bryant pulls me into his chest. "Why don't you go inside too? We'll handle this."

I hear his words, but what comes out of my mouth is, "How did he even find me? I didn't just turn off the tracking app, I uninstalled it from my phone."

"Who knows?" Bryant says. "But you've been at our house while your car was at the restaurant. Maybe he has a tracker on your vehicle?"

"That has to be illegal, right?" I ask, rolling my face around Bryant's shirt to try to find where his scent is strongest.

“As long as you own the car, it’s highly illegal,” Lawson says, coming around the front of my car. “It can be charged as stalking in New York.”

Tommy’s vehicle comes to a stop, and he tosses open the door.

My entire body quakes.

Lawson comes over, standing on Bryant’s other side. He leans in, whispering something in Bryant’s ear. He speaks so softly that I can’t even hear what he says. That could be due to the blood rushing in my ears.

Bryant’s hand tightens on my ass. “I’ll be up on the porch if you need me.” He bends, kissing the top of my head.

Then he’s gone.

Tommy approaches, and a lump forms in my throat.

There’s every possibility that he has a right to hate me. What he didn’t have the right to do was track me after I left a note explaining that I was breaking up with him.

Except, maybe legally speaking, he has a right to search for Echo?

God, I have no idea.

Lawson wraps his arm around my shoulder, and he doesn’t bother lowering his voice when he says, “He won’t put his hands on you, sweetheart. I can promise you that.”

“I don’t know what kind of lies she’s been telling you, but I never raised a finger to her,” Tommy says, stopping ten feet away. “You stole my fucking dog, and I want her back.”

“You’re on my property, talking to my *bonded* omega,” Lawson growls back. “I’d change your tone *real fucking quick*.”

“Oh yeah, or what?” Tommy asks with a mocking laugh. “You’re lucky I haven’t called the police, at least not *yet*.”

“The sheriff’s department responds out here,” Lawson says, running his hand up and down my arm as he sends steady comfort through the bond. “I can go ahead and call them for you. I’ve got Ed’s personal cell phone number on hand. That’s the sheriff. I trained Ruby for him a year and a half ago. I’ve also worked with both dogs in their canine department.”

Tommy’s head tilts.

He’s used to knowing everyone, since his brother is a cop and his dad was the former fire chief.

His jaw clenches, and he gets that cold, dead look in his eyes.

I once again berate myself for not being smart enough to spot it sooner.

Omegas are supposed to have excellent instincts. It goes back to when the world was a more lawless place, and we needed to be able to sense danger before it popped up.

Unfortunately, evolution failed me there.

“Are you trying to intimidate me by listing your connections?” Tommy asks, shoving his hands into his jacket pockets.

“Not at all,” Lawson says. “I don’t need to. Abby ended your relationship. You came onto my property *uninvited*. Call the police. I’m not sure that conversation will go how you think it will, but I’ve got all the time in the world to test it out.”

“Look, I can be out of your way in three minutes,” Tommy says, his tone lightening. “Just get me my dog, and I’ll go.”

“Your dog isn’t here,” Lawson says calmly. “What you saw was *my* dog. He’s fully trained in personal protection, and he takes his job seriously. I put him inside for *your* safety.”

“That bullshit isn’t going to work on me.” Tommy laughs derisively. “I saw her. I know she’s here.”

“She was inside your house when I left,” I lie my ass off. “Unless she ran off while I was packing the car...”

“You’re such a lying bitch,” Tommy says under his breath.

Well, he’s not wrong about that, but Lawson’s energy also starts to vibrate in the bond, which seems like a bad sign.

“You should say that again if you want me to beat your face in,” Law growls.

I spin in his direction, stepping fully in front of him.

My eyes fly up to his, but his gaze is locked on Tommy. “He’s not worth it.”

“Yeah, big guy. Why don’t you hand over my dog, and we can be done,” Tommy says, his tone taunting.

I plant my hands on Lawson’s chest and practically beg him through the bond not to react.

“As I’ve said, you’re mistaken.” Lawson wraps his forearm around my lower back and, once again, brings me to stand at his side. “If you need to see that firsthand, we can make it happen. Bryant?”

“You sure?” he calls back.

“Yes.”

“All right, he’s coming your way,” Bryant says.

The sound of Shadow's nails hitting the porch is unmistakable.

"Come on, Shadow," Lawson says.

We're standing in front of the car, but Shadow doesn't let that stop him. He hits the hood of my car like a canine missile.

Law chuckles. "Down, you pain in the ass."

Shadow jumps down, whining and vibrating with energy. He sits on Law's right side, but it's clear it's the last thing he wants to do.

My eyes bug when I realize he's wearing Echo's pink and purple harness.

Jesus.

Law had a plan when he carried her inside. He was only gone for a minute or two, so it's hard to understand how he put her inside—probably in one of the rooms to ensure she couldn't run out when Shadow did—then he swapped Shadow into her harness to make it look like Tommy was seeing things.

Not only that, he's been pretty heavily gaslighting Tommy into believing he's crazy.

I'm here for every second of it.

The man deserves a taste of his own medicine.

"That's not my dog, and you know it," Tommy growls, jabbing a finger at Lawson.

"I tried to tell you that." Lawson shrugs. "It's not my fault you refuse to hear anything I'm saying."

"Do I need to go in there and find her myself? Or are you going to bring her out?" Tommy asks.

"You won't be stepping inside my home," Lawson says. "Guard."

Shadow splits the difference between us, pacing the concrete while keeping his gaze locked on Tommy. He whines like he's begging to be released to mess my ex up.

It feels like things are escalating, and my skin itches with the need to calm the situation.

At the same time, I'm disgusted with myself for ever thinking he was hot.

Oh, he's always been conventionally attractive. It's what's on the inside that makes him ugly. I just wish I had realized that sooner, but if I had, Echo would still be stuck with him.

He doesn't deserve her.

She's got so much personality now.

She's thriving under Lawson's training, and even when she still gets excited sometimes and misbehaves, he always keeps his cool.

Tommy couldn't be bothered to do anything more than feed her and let her out in the backyard when he wanted her out of his hair.

"Listen, Tommy," I say, swallowing thickly. "I'm sorry Echo is missing. Have you checked the—"

"Don't apologize to him," Lawson growls. "You didn't do anything wrong. He's pissed that you had the audacity to leave, and now he's trying to force you back with lies about his missing dog."

"He's like those creeps who try to lure women and children to their van with promises of puppies," Bryant calls out from behind us. From the sound of it, he's still up on the porch.

Shadow continues pacing, whining and chuffing like he's just waiting for the signal to let him know he can take Tommy down.

"You can keep Abby. I was done with her, anyway. All I want is my dog." Tommy nods at me. "Am I really going to have to get the cops involved, Abigail?"

"I already told you to call it in," Lawson says. "Be ready to answer a few questions about how you located Abby."

Luka's truck comes up the driveway, and I suck in sharply.

I'm not sure that's going to help anything. He pulls around Tommy's SUV, comes to a stop near the garage, shuts off the truck, and jumps out. He makes his way over in long strides. "Who is this? I didn't know we were expecting company."

"This is an uninvited guest." Lawson chuckles.

"Look," Tommy says. "I'm just going to walk up there and call for my dog. If she's not here, that shouldn't be a problem."

"That's not going to happen," Lawson says. "And just in case you get any bright ideas about trying to come back when we aren't home, you should know what you'll be dealing with. Shadow, *protect Abby*."

Shadow freezes. He's been walking parallel to my ex, but he turns in Tommy's direction, growling and snapping.

He's so loud that I jolt.

Lawson gives me a squeeze, sending reassurance and comfort through our connection.

Shadow backs toward the three of us, and if I was Tommy, I'd be pissing myself. The massive dog doesn't stop until his hindquarters touch my shins, and he continues growling.

"You want me to haul his ass back to his vehicle?" Luka asks. "I have no problem disposing of the trash."

"These are the kind of men you chose to bond yourself to for life?" Tommy asks, looking directly at me. "You know what you did. Are you really going to make me take you to court?"

"Don't say a word, sweetheart," Lawson says. "Take her inside, Luka."

"Come on." Luka wraps his arm around my middle, tugging me away from Law. "We get to watch from the nosebleed seats."

"Please don't touch him," I say as Luka guides me around the front of my car. "It's not worth it. He will press charges."

"Don't worry," Lawson says, sounding amused. "I'm not putting my ability to climb into bed next to you every night at risk for that piece of shit."

"He'll be fine," Luka whispers. "Don't stress."

That's easier said than done.

I peek over my shoulder, and Shadow runs in a semicircle around Tommy, backing him toward his SUV.

Oh, God.

I think I'm going to give myself an ulcer.

* * *

Luka guides me inside the house, and Bryant follows us in.

"This is such a bad idea," I whisper as Bryant closes the door. "Lawson needs witnesses in case Tommy tries to say he did something that he really didn't do."

"I would counter that Law might not *want* witnesses for whatever comes next." Bryant chuckles, crossing his arms over his chest.

My eyes narrow, but I can already tell there's no way I'll be able to get by him to get back out the door.

I take off for the family room and climb onto the couch.

Bryant and Luka hit the cushions on either side of mine. Then it's all three of us peeking out of the blinds.

Lawson looms over Tommy.

I can't see much else, since the door of the SUV blocks most of Tommy from view.

Lawson jabs a finger at him, and even though I can only see his side profile, I can tell he's not happy.

Okay, maybe I'm picking up his distaste in the bond.

Lawson grabs Tommy's door, his huge hand wrapping around the metal. Based on the rocking of the vehicle, it looks like Tommy scrambles inside.

Law slams the door and crosses his arms over his chest.

Shadow runs up to the porch, and Lawson steps to the side of the driveway, watching as Tommy loops around up by the house and drives off toward the road.

"Huh, that was kinda anticlimactic," Bryant says, chuckling as he releases his hold on the blinds.

Lawson makes his way toward the house in long strides, and I finally feel like I can breathe.

"Thank goodness," I whisper.

"Lawson doesn't have to put his hands on someone to let them know the deal," Luka says, popping off the couch. "I'm going to let them in. Shadow is probably tired of waiting."

"You feel better now?" Bryant asks, tossing his arm around my shoulder.

I nod, but my body betrays the lie, and my head shakes. "I don't know. He can be so spiteful. What if he comes back with the police?"

"Don't worry about that," Lawson says, coming into the room with Shadow at his side.

Bryant helps me off the couch and pulls me into his chest.

"Ed is an old friend," Lawson repeats what he said to Tommy. "I'm going to call and let him know what happened. I'm hoping he'll come out and help us go over your car to check for trackers."

"I agree," Luka says. "There has to be one on your car. If he was tracking your phone, he would have shown up here days ago."

"Won't that backfire?" I ask. "What if he tries to arrest me? I really did commit a crime."

"Come here, sweetheart." Lawson chuckles, holding his arms out.

I cross the distance between us and face-plant into his chest.

"I would never let that happen," Law says, wrapping his arms around me.

“Me neither,” Luka chimes in. “If I had to, I’d testify that I picked you up from your ex’s house and stole Echo myself while you begged me to leave her behind.”

“I’ll say I drove the getaway car,” Bryant says, his voice growing closer.

Luka’s and Bryant’s scents hit my nose as Lawson lowers his arms. The two join in the hug, and my system revels in being surrounded by all three of them.

“I need to go let Echo out.” Lawson kisses the top of my head. “Honestly, I don’t think he’ll bother us again. I wouldn’t even worry about calling Ed, but I want to make sure that fucker can’t track you from here on out.”

“I can understand that.” I squeeze him back. “I’m updating my Christmas wish to hoping Tommy never bothers us again.”

Bryant or Luka slaps my ass as they both step back.

“Way to break my heart, pretty girl.” Bryant laughs. “I could have sworn your Christmas wish was for the three of us to dress up in reindeer costumes so we can act out that one scene in *Sleigh My Heart*.”

“Damn, man,” Luka says. “I told you that was *my* Christmas wish. You suck at keeping a secret.”

I snort, my forehead falling against Lawson’s chest as my shoulders shake.

“I’ll let Santa know that I’d like to amend my wish,” I say, laughing.

Lawson chuckles. “If we don’t have a Santa costume around here somewhere, I’m ordering one. You can sit on my lap, tell me all your Christmas wishes, and I’ll decide if you’re on the naughty or nice list.”

And just like that, all thoughts of Tommy are forgotten.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Luka

Abby's ex slinks back to wherever he came from, and he doesn't bother us again. That might be due to the fact there was a tracker on her car.

We had it removed by an officer and a report drawn up, which protected the chain of custody.

It might be a little hypocritical, considering how Echo came to join the family, but after talking to Ed, we wanted that documentation in place in case he ever comes back around.

As far as canine custody goes, legally speaking, it can get murky.

Even though Tommy owned Echo before he and Abby got together, those cases often become a he-said, she-said type of situation.

There's technically no proof that Tommy didn't tell Abby that she could take the dog when she left.

The fact his name was on Echo's vet records was a strike against her, but like Ed said, the police are reluctant to get involved in pet custody cases because they're just too messy.

In the vast majority of situations, they consider it a civil matter. They wouldn't come onto our property to repossess a pet. The supposed owner would have to file and take it to civil court.

The judge would be the one to look at all the documentation. He or she would then make a ruling.

I've met guys like Tommy before. They enjoy tormenting anyone weaker than them. When they find someone on equal footing, they back off fast.

Now that he understands Abby has us at her side, he's far more likely to move on than he is to press the issue.

If that changes, I've got a shovel.

Lawson has an extreme understanding of the most remote parts of the wilderness up in the mountains.

Bryant can be our alibi since we'd never ask Abby to lie for us.

* * *

Christmas morning rolls around, and having Abby with us makes it every bit as magical as I imagined it would be.

We get solid use out of the new digital camera, but we also take a fair number of pictures with our phones.

The dogs are stretched out in front of the fireplace, and I take a picture as Echo wallows around on her back.

I learned from Lawson that dogs only sleep like that when they're comfortable with their environment, since it makes their internal organs more vulnerable to attack.

Both Abby and Echo are flourishing, and that makes me smile as I snap a few more photos. I never would have said I wanted a second dog, but I'd miss her if she wasn't here.

Abby laughs, and I turn back to see what she opened. It's a sexy silk and lace nightie in baby blue.

I raise my phone, taking a few pictures as she smiles over her shoulder at Bryant. He's in one of the club chairs with her on his lap, and he looks like there's no place in the world that he would rather be.

I get it.

I feel the same way anytime she's close to me.

"That'll make your eyes look even more blue," I tell her, wiggling my eyebrows. "At least, until we peel you out of it."

Abby snorts, tossing it onto the massive pile on the floor. "You guys are insane. We can't do this every year. I spent my entire paycheck on gifts for the three of you, and I'm still opening while you guys finished twenty minutes ago."

A novel for your next quiet moment.

Find something to read on [Lokepub](#).

“Yeah, but we already have everything we need,” Lawson says, scratching his fluffy beard. “I’ll start throwing out things that are getting old so you have more options to buy.”

A bark of laughter escapes our omega as she climbs off Bryant’s lap and makes her way over to the chair Law is stretched out on. She gets settled, kneeling over my brother, and stretches up to kiss him.

His hands look ridiculous in comparison to her hips and ass, and I start to contemplate a different way to get into the Christmas spirit.

“You don’t need to throw out things that still have value.” Abby pecks a final kiss on his lips as she pulls back. “That’s wasteful, but I’m telling you right now. When we have kids, you can’t go this overboard with presents.”

My dick jumps, and I slide my palm over my jeans to settle it.

It doesn’t help.

The goal is definitely to knock Abby up at some point in the future, but I also want to enjoy a year or two of pampering her and settling into our bond before we add to the family.

“You know, it might be the perfect time to give her the big gift,” Bryant says, chuckling. “If you accept it, you’ll have full access to our bank accounts to go wild buying us too many gifts.”

“Don’t ruin the surprise, dumbass,” Lawson growls.

I dig the ring box out from between the cushion and the arm of the couch. Once it’s secured in my palm, I pop off the sofa and come to kneel in front of Law’s chair.

He helpfully lifts Abby, spinning her in his hold and facing her toward the room.

“Oh my god,” she whispers, her hand flying to cover her mouth.

Bryant stands, and I wait for him to get the camera situated.

“Every day is brighter with you in it,” I say, smiling. “We didn’t know what was missing until you came into our lives. Will you marry us, gorgeous?”

I pop open the ring box, displaying the large emerald-cut diamond solitaire. Abby doesn’t wear any jewelry, so we kept it super simple with a single stone set in white gold.

“It’s beautiful,” she says, holding out her hand. “So big.”

“My dick is getting a little depressed that you never say that about him,” Bryant says, chuckling. “You, uh, plan to stick the ring on her finger?”

“Did you say yes?” I ask, winking at Abby.

“She said yes,” Lawson lies, grabbing the box and plucking the ring out. He shoves it onto Abby’s finger as she grins over her shoulder at him.

“I think I might have forgotten to actually say the words, but yes, I’ll happily marry the three of you.” She twists her hand from side to side, checking out the rock. “By the way, I love you. I know it’s fast, but I’ve been aching to say it for days.”

“Fuck.” Law growls, kissing her temple. “Me too.”

“Love you, pretty girl,” Bryant says, shoving the camera at me. “Here, you take some. I want to be in a few.”

“Hey,” I say, catching her eye. “Flash me the tits. Love you, Abby.”

She snorts, flipping me off, and I get a killer photo of her ring and the smile on her face.

She’s so beautiful.

I can’t wait to see what chaos we can get into as a pack.

Epilogue

Bryant

Eighteen Months Later

Abby waddles down the hallway and into the ultrasound room. Lawson is at her side, like always.

If we thought he hovered before, our poor omega had no idea what she was getting into when she let us knock her up.

She's only twenty-one weeks, but she's pregnant with twins. While we found out that we'd be having double the babies pretty early on, we haven't found out the genders. At least not yet, though I think she'll crack during this appointment.

I keep pace at Luka's side, getting close to his ear before we step into the ultrasound room. "There's something seriously fucked up with my head. I can't even watch her walk down the hallway without getting a hard-on."

"Right there with you," he says softly. "It's the belly. Ever since it popped, my instincts are smug as fuck that everyone can see how thoroughly she's ours."

Lawson sticks his head out the door and growls, "Get the fuck in here. We're not waiting for you."

I laugh.

That man has managed to get crankier the more pregnant Abby becomes. I'm betting there's zero chance that he takes a more relaxed approach, at least not until the babies are born.

Well, shit.

I bet he actually gets more neurotic when we have kids, not less.

* * *

“Okay,” the ultrasound tech says, clicking a few buttons on the machine. “This is Baby A’s heartbeat.”

The quick whooshing that fills the air makes my knees weak, just like it does every time we hear one of the babies’ heartbeats.

“Just under one-forty beats a minute,” the tech says. “That’s perfect.”

She moves onto Baby B, and I stare at the screen in awe.

“We created not one, but two tiny humans. That’s crazy,” I whisper.

“It is,” Abby agrees.

“It’s amazing,” Luka corrects.

“That it is,” Lawson chimes in.

The ultrasound tech messes with the machine, and a few minutes pass as she takes some measurements.

Once she’s done, she looks over at Abby and smiles. “I’ve got a pretty clear view of both babies. Did you want to know the gender?”

Gender?

Genders?

I guess since they’re identical, we really only need to hear it once to know if we’re having boys or girls.

For the first twelve weeks, Abby swore she didn’t want to know. She was determined that it would be a surprise for all of us. More recently, she’s seemed disappointed while baby shopping.

I’m dying to know.

I don’t have any preference one way or another.

I just want to start mentally preparing for girls or boys. At the same time, I don’t want to influence Abby’s decision one way or the other, so I block off my emotions in the bond.

Although I’m a hypocrite.

I immediately go poking around to see if I can tell which way she’s leaning.

She’s good.

I can’t pick out anything.

It feels like an eternity passes before she says, “We’d like to know, please.”

Luka reaches over, smacking me in the stomach.

I laugh as the two of us somehow end up holding hands as we lean toward the monitor, like we have any idea how to decipher what we're looking at.

"I'll print you out pictures of each, but I'm fairly confident," the tech says, like she's trying to torment us with the wait. "Congratulations, you have two boys."

"Holy shit," I blurt out.

"Boys?" Lawson repeats.

"I knew it," Luka says, laughing. "You owe me twenty bucks, Law."

Abby snorts. "You guys are ridiculous."

I squeeze Luka's hand before releasing it. Shoving myself out of my chair, I cross the room.

Lawson steps out of the way, and I lean over Abby's top half.

"Are you excited?" I ask, cupping her cheeks in my hands.

She nods, cheesing. "Boys first. That way they can look out for any future girls."

"Damn right," Lawson says from behind me.

It's probably inappropriate, considering the location, but I can't help myself.

I shove my mouth to hers for a quick kiss. "I love you so much, pretty girl. Can you believe we're going to be parents?"

"It's kinda surreal, but they're also sitting on my bladder, so I'm coming to terms with it." She gives a wide smile that makes my heart flutter.

Sometimes I think about how different life would have been if I had skipped checking on the gym and restaurant that morning... It never fails to make a pit form in my gut.

I'm not religious, but I'll never get over how lucky we got that day.

Epilogue

Luka

Not being able to have all three of us in the room while the boys were delivered was hard, but I was able to video call with Bryant and Lawson while they waited in Abby's hospital room. With the boys being identical twins, they needed to be delivered by C-section. Since they shared a placenta, but not amniotic sacs, they were able to bake until thirty-six weeks.

I'm still shocked that Abby was carrying around a little less than thirteen pounds of baby. They're so small, but when I think about the fact they were floating in her stomach less than eight hours ago, it's a mindfuck.

The female body really is a wonder.

I thought Lawson was going to be the blubbering baby, but it ended up being me, and I'm okay with that. I'm still having trouble regulating my emotions.

It was tough watching Abby undergo major surgery. Not only that, but she barely got a few hours of rest before they took out her catheter and had her walk around.

After witnessing what I did, I'm pretty sure we should be done with two kids. At the very least, I'll let Bryant or Lawson be in the room if she ever has to have another C-section. It was fucking brutal, and everyone acts like it's completely normal. I guess it is for the doctors and nurses.

I'm perched next to Abby on the hospital bed, and I snuggle a little closer as she feeds Colt. She's made it clear that she's not completely sold on breastfeeding, but she wants to at least try to get them both a little colostrum.

With everything she's been through over the last twenty-four hours, I wouldn't blame her for wanting to solely bottle-feed. I want to be supportive of whatever she wants, though formula feeding would finally allow us to take over for more than diaper changes.

Goddammit.

Why didn't anyone tell me how helpless I would feel while watching the woman I love suffer?

Lawson has Beau tucked in his forearm as he gently rocks him against his chest.

The boys are incredible.

It's an instantaneous feeling of love that I didn't know existed, and I'm still beating myself up for everything Abby had to go through to bring them into the world.

Abby nuzzles her cheek to my shoulder, peeking up at me from under her lashes. "Are you doing okay over there? Your emotions are kind of a mess in the bond."

"Me?" I scoff. "How are you? Can I get you anything?"

"You were more traumatized by my C-section than I was." She laughs, shaking her head. "I'm not going to lie, I was hurting pretty bad when they tried to give me *Tylenol* after cutting me practically in half. Once they coughed up the good stuff, I'm feeling great."

Yeah, that is pretty fucked up.

I threw out my back playing basketball a few years ago, and they gave me stronger meds than what they gave Abby at first.

I bend down, kissing the side of her head. "I'm so relieved that you're feeling better. Can I get you anything?"

"Nah, I'm enjoying snuggling with you," she says, running her fingers over Colt's cheek. "If I need anything, I'll make Bryant get it."

He chuckles. "Direct me where you need me, pretty girl."

I get lost staring at Colt all over again.

He's passed out, so I can't see his deep blue eyes, but the pregnancy books warned us the color could change as they get older. They have the same light brown hair as Abby, but we read that it's common for their hair color to change too.

Basically, it's a toss-up on who hit the DNA jackpot. Some packs are really careful about knowing who fathered which children, but the three of us decided that we would be more comfortable not knowing.

“I mean, I wouldn’t turn down a burger,” Abby says, shrugging. “Bacon, cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickles—all the good stuff. Just no condiments, unless they have barbecue sauce.”

“Like I could forget how you like your burger,” Bryant says, pushing himself out of his chair. “I’ll check the cafeteria and report back.”

“Bring me something too,” Lawson chimes in as Beau starts to fuss.

“Me three,” I say as Bryant waves a hand over his head.

“Want me to take Colt, so you can feed Beau?” I offer.

Abby nods, pulling the baby off her breast. “I feel like I’m going to be feeding one of them *all the time* for a while, but I kinda love it.”

“It’s crazy that your body can produce all the nutrition they need to survive.” I take Colt, bringing him up to my shoulder to burp him. “But a few bottles here or there won’t hurt anything.”

Law steps over to the bed, handing off the now-screeching Beau.

Something tells me that we’re going to be in for a wild ride with these two.

* * *

If I thought the first few weeks home from the hospital were chaotic, I had no idea what was coming with the whole *six-week sleep regression* thing.

I’m so grateful there are four of us. It allows us to split shifts with two on and two off. It’s not too bad during the day, since they still sleep for long stretches, but at night it becomes a party in the nursery.

I can’t understand how some moms go back to work when the baby is six weeks old. Hell, none of us have set foot inside the businesses for more than a quick meeting since the boys were born.

Letting Lucy take over as restaurant manager was one of the best business decisions I’ve made. She was already kicking ass as our bar manager, and she alleviated so much stress when she let me know she thought she was ready to manage the entire business.

Bev was clearly ready to move on, and it had been showing in her attitude for a while.

I let Lucy hire two assistant managers, one for each side of the business, and there was no looking back after that.

Before the boys were born, Abby occasionally helped out at the gym and the restaurant, but it was more of a sporadic thing and just for fun.

Beau finally stops fussing as I rock him against my shoulder, and my gaze moves to Law. He's always done well with a lack of sleep, but even he looks beat.

He carefully lays Colt down on the changing table, and I jolt as the door bumps the wall.

Echo and Shadow peek their heads in, but that's just part of their nightly rounds. Ever since the boys were born, they alternate between sleeping in the hallway outside their door and pacing the house all night long.

Colt starts screaming, and Lawson pops his pacifier into his mouth. The dogs take off, and I chuckle. They've had enough of listening to the fussy baby.

By the time I check back on Law, he has Colt's footie pajamas unzipped, and he's in the process of pulling off the baby's diaper.

"Shit, man. Get another diaper on him ASAP. You know they like to..." My words trail off, and I grimace as the stream of pee hits Lawson's stomach. "Pee all over us."

"Ahh, hell," Law mutters as I barely hold back the laugh.

Yeah, I'd say sleep deprivation is getting to all of us, but honest to God, I wouldn't change a single thing.

Epilogue

Lawson

Another Three Years Later

There is nothing like the giggles and screams that fill the air as the boys run around the yard trying to collect all the plastic eggs before the dogs or other kids can find them.

Holidays never had much meaning before Abby came into our lives. Being able to experience each one through the eyes of the boys is a whole different world.

Sometimes I wonder if becoming a sentimental mess is just part of getting older. I'm honestly not sure if I could have appreciated these moments of chaos if I'd had kids ten years ago.

I've got infinitely more patience than I did when I was in my early twenties, but I'm also not in the kind of shape I was in back then. The positives far outweigh the negatives, at least to me.

"Can I get a second opinion on whether this chicken is done?" Luka asks from his spot, manning the grill.

"I'm coming," Abby's brother says, shoving out of his chair. Austin and his wife, Leslie, have only made the trip up twice before—once right after they found out we asked Abby to marry us, and the other time was about three months after the boys were born.

I wouldn't say we know them well or anything, but they seem like good people. Since Luka and I are the only kids from our parents' pack, the boys don't have any cousins from our side of the family. They have a ton from Bryant's side, though, as well as three from Austin's pack.

Abby waddles across the yard, scooping up Beau and planting a quick kiss on his cheek before he demands to be put down.

I cringe like I always do when I see her lift one of the boys. Normally I just worry about the toll on her back, but now that she's six months pregnant with the new baby, I have a whole host of other concerns.

The boys are solid kids.

Definitely future alphas.

They come up almost to her hip, and they're only three. We joke a lot that they'll be the same height she is by the time they're ten.

When she holds them, they stretch from the top of her shoulder down to her knees. I can't seem to understand how the universe thought it was smart to make alphas so big in comparison to omegas.

Everyone tells me that Mother Nature knows what it's doing, and that is the rational way to look at it. They just don't understand that I'm not logical when it comes to anything to do with Abby.

That woman is my heart and soul walking around in another body. I'm going to worry about her until the day I die.

"Love you, Mommy! I gots to get more eggs!" Beau says, taking off in a flash.

I chuckle, shaking my head.

"Shadow!" Colt yells, sounding exasperated. "That's mine. Give it back! Bad dog."

If I didn't talk to them on a daily basis, I would likely have no idea what he just said. I'm going to miss it when they get the hang of all the words they mispronounce.

Shadow takes off with the purple plastic egg, and Colt chases after him.

Echo follows the two.

Bryant takes a swig of his beer and chuckles as he follows the two toward the fence. "Trust me, kid. You don't want it when it's covered in Shadow's slobber. Let me help you find another one."

Abby's eyes meet mine, and a bright smile takes over her face as she sways closer. Her face has gotten fuller earlier than it did with the boys. Her bump also popped faster this time.

She's absolutely the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, and I still can't believe that I tricked her into loving me.

She face-plants into my chest, and I smile like a fool.

"How ya doing, sweetheart?"

“I’m good,” she says, her words coming out muffled by my shirt.

“Really?” I ask, trying not to chuckle.

“Okay, fine.” She huffs. “I’m starving, tired, and ready for everyone to leave so we can put the boys down for a nap. But I am happy to see Leslie, Austin, and the kids. They’re braver than I am. I wouldn’t have traveled with three kids with just the two of us. I can’t believe they left the rest of their pack back in Georgia.”

“Yeah, but their kids are a little older. I bet it’ll get easier for us with time.”

“I told you guys that I’m a terrible traveler,” she says, rolling her face around my shirt. “I feel guilty that your family pack had to come to us last time, but honestly, I don’t see myself wanting to make the trip to Texas anytime soon. Hell, I don’t think I could bring myself to go to Georgia next year, even if it’s fair.”

“You know my family doesn’t mind. They get to visit their old friends when they come up—”

“Oh, shit.” Abby steps back and grabs my hand, bringing my palm to rest on her stomach. “Sorry to cut you off. I didn’t want you to miss it.”

“Is she wiggling around?”

“She’s doing full-blown flips or something.” Abby grins, pushing my palm in even deeper.

The material of her dress bounces against my hand, and it takes my damn breath away.

We’ve gotten to feel little kicks or punches before, but the baby is clearly getting stronger. It makes me miss when she was pregnant with the twins.

“She’s going to be just as wild as the boys,” I say, shaking my head. “I love you so fucking much, sweetheart.”

“I know. Me too.” She smiles, grabbing my arm with her free hand. She gets wobbly nowadays, so I know she wants support as she stretches up to meet me.

I dip my mouth to hers for a quick kiss as I tune out the noise around us.

I always thought I enjoyed having a slow, quiet life. Looking back on it now, I can’t believe I didn’t realize how empty the house felt without her and the boys.

Luka calls out, “I think the food is done.”

“Thank God, I’m starving,” Bryant yells back.

The dogs bark.
The kids scream.
The baby bounces around Abby's stomach.
And I kiss the hell out of my wife.
I'm pretty sure life doesn't get any better than this.

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Thank You!!

Thank you so much for reading Abby's story.

I have plans to do other books in the "Knotty Treats" line. Possibly other holidays, but always low angst/no stress titles that are short and fun. If you enjoyed this one, keep an eye out for more coming in 2027.

If you have a moment, leaving a review really does help.

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