



Billionaire Wolf Needs a Fake Girlfriend

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Category: Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult, Paranormal

Description: He's jaded arrogance. She's cheerful sunshine. He made a deal to save his empire. She made a deal with the devil.

Denver Roberts has a reputation as a hotheaded playboy billionaire. His lifestyle hasn't been a problem until now. If he can't prove that he's stable enough to lead his company, the board will vote him out. Denver handles this problem like everything else, with a mutually beneficial business arrangement.

Enter Sasha Bennett, the recently hired assistant designer at Denver's company. She's talented, stunning, and annoyingly cheerful, which means she's definitely not his type. Sasha has her own reasons for agreeing to his plan. After showcasing her designs on social media, she's gained an obsessive internet stalker who's been sending her threatening messages. To throw the stalker off her trail, she needs a fake boyfriend who can make her look untouchable. What better choice than Denver, with his wealth, power, and intimidating presence?

It's the perfect plan. Fake date for six months until the board thinks he's changed his wild ways and the stalker has lost interest, then they can part ways and never speak again.

But as they spend time together, sparks fly and chemistry ignites. With pressure from all sides, their fake relationship becomes a lifeline and it becomes impossible to pretend it's all a charade.

When the stakes rise and Denver's wolf scents Sasha as his mate, he will risk it all and tear the world apart to keep her. Forever.

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Chapter 1

DENVER

I stifled a yawn and clapped politely as this year's overrated philosophical writer climbed up the steps to the stage to accept his award. It was the Annual Arts & Literature Achievement Gala and this was an event for the elite to mingle as much as it was a celebration of pretentiousness.

I would bet my new yacht that he was going to quote Nietzsche. As the self-important author began his thank-you speech, I zoned out and took a sip of whiskey. From behind my glass, I observed the room. The ballroom of the Casino de Monte-Carlo was filled with people and wolf shifters who thought too much of themselves. They were dressed in the latest couture fashions and enough jewelry to buy a small country. Expensive perfume, smoke, and the stench of ambition hung in the air like a heavy fog.

"As Nietzsche once said..." I raised my glass and took a big gulp in victory. They were all so predictable. I hated these events. As much as I wanted to roll my eyes, I was being watched on all sides. After all, my company was the host of the event. Any reaction that could be misconstrued would be plastered all over the gossip sites and social media before the end of the night.

Instead, I gritted my teeth and pulled my lips into what I hoped looked like a smile instead of a grimace as I joined the rest of the audience in forced applause. After dragging on for far too long, the awards ceremony finally ended. While everyone else began mingling, I made my escape. If I could get past the kitchen to the servants' exit,

then I would be out of here.

I was two steps out of the building exit when a sultry female voice purred behind me.

"Denver Roberts."

I turned around and sighed. This was what I got for dipping my dick into every up-and-coming starlet with a bouncy set of tits.

It was Savannah Sweetwood, the actress I slept with and then ghosted last summer. She ran to catch up to me, her stiletto heels clacking on the pavement. Savannah was exactly as devastating as she was last summer when I'd slipped away in the night. She was still beautiful, with those blood-red lips, shiny blonde hair, big doe eyes, and a couture gown that hugged her curves like liquid gold. Too bad she had the wit of a wet sock.

"Savannah," I managed, my tone carefully neutral.

She stepped closer, her perfectly manicured nails grazing my arm in a move that was supposed to be seductive. Her eyes had a predatory gleam that rivaled any wolf shifter's. "You never called."

My hand brushed away the spot where she had touched me. I took a deliberate step back. "I was busy."

Savannah smirked. She stepped closer and rubbed my arm again. "Too busy to return even one message?" Her laugh was brittle. "I thought what we had was special."

"It was what it was," I replied, keeping my voice low. The last thing I needed was the European press catching wind of our past.

She leaned in, her lips barely brushing my ear as she whispered, "Care for some company tonight? I can make it worth your while."

The flash of a camera caught us both off guard. I blinked away the spots in my vision to see a paparazzo hiding behind a car, his camera lens trained directly on us. Savannah's hand found my chest, and her smile turned predatory.

Savannah let out a laugh. She threw her head back and tossed her hair over her shoulder as if she were posing for a photoshoot.

"Perfect timing," she murmured. "I wonder what they'll make of the naughty American billionaire and his jilted lover reuniting in Monaco?"

I let out a growl, but before I could respond, the camera flashed again.

"Smile, darling."

With a snarl, I swatted her hand away.

I really hated these fucking events.

The next morning, news of my bump into Savannah was online everywhere. In the time it took me to fly from Monaco back to Huntington Harbor, the photos had spread already across the globe.

From my penthouse office, the unsavory words and photos from last night filled my laptop screen. "Billionaire Playboy Denver Roberts Caught in Steamy Embrace with Sultry Influencer Turned Actress Savannah Sweetwood!"

One after another, I tabbed through the gossip websites. Similar headlines blazed across European tabloids, each more sensational than the last.

The office door opened a sliver. My assistant, Colin, poked his head in. "Sir, the board has called an emergency meeting," he whispered.

I slammed my laptop shut in disgust. "Of course they have."

The boardroom overlooked Huntington Harbor's skyline, showing a bright sunny blue sky, but the view did nothing to melt the arctic atmosphere inside. Staring at me with judgmental glares, the board members around the table tracked my steps like they were ready to pounce. I was a problem that needed to be solved. They were wolves, all of them, and they were older and far too conservative for my liking. My risk-taking was an asset when I was hired as CEO and invited to join the board, but now that I've successfully turned the failing company around, I was deemed an uncontrollable liability.

I held my head high and kept my posture relaxed as I made my way to my seat at the head of the table. Despite being on edge with my wolf snapping at the bit to attack, I could not let them know how much they affected me.

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"Really, Denver, an international scandal?" Victoria Song began, her voice dripping with disdain. The silk Hermès scarf around her neck was knotted as tightly as her expression. "XMGH's Foundation is meant to support the arts, not become tabloid fodder. The European market is crucial for our expansion plans into the Americas and Asia. We've discussed this before. Your lifestyle is becoming a liability."

I leaned back in my chair, my gaze steady. There could be no sign of fear or backing down in front of these old wolves. I had to maintain my composure. "It was a calculated move by a bitter ex. Nothing more. My lifestyle is my personal business, Victoria. It does not concern the board."

"Not when it affects business," snapped Maxwell Callaghan. "Your bitter exes are becoming quite the collection. These scandals are hurting our reputation. And the timing, right before announcing our new product line for the Asian markets? We need stability. You know how important discretion and propriety are to them. If you can't control yourself, how can we trust you to lead the company?"

My jaw tightened. "Profits have gone up quarter over quarter under my leadership."

"And yet," Victoria interrupted, "your personal life remains a constant source of embarrassment. XMGH Brands is a luxury women's fashion company. Your antics are damaging our standing with our target market." Victoria leaned forward and clasped her hands on the table. "The board has reached a decision. Either you demonstrate some genuine stability in your personal life, or we'll be forced to reconsider your position. And this time, we mean it."

The words hit like a punch to the gut. They were trying to force me out after all of my

hard work. I fought back a snarl. "And what, exactly, are you suggesting?"

Victoria smiled, flashing her teeth like fangs. "A mate. Someone respectable who can repair your image and show that you are a dependable leader."

I scoffed. They were wrong if they thought I would be easier to control with a woman by my side. "You want me to get married?"

"We want you to prove you're responsible," she said simply. "Six months, Denver. The board will reconvene to evaluate your continued suitability as CEO of the company."

I found myself wandering the hallways of the office that evening. What the fuck was I going to do? By now, my reputation ensured that the only type of woman who would even think of dating me was either someone wanting to climb the social ladder or someone who would sell my secrets out to the tabloids for exposure.

Most of the staff had already gone home, but there was a bright light coming from the area of the design studios. This area of the office wasn't someplace I bothered to visit. My skills were in the boardroom and negotiations. Like any competent CEO, I left the day-to-day operations of the business to my employees. Tonight, however, something drew me toward the light like a moth to a flame.

The studio was a chaotic mess of fabrics draped on mannequins, samples of shimmering beads and sequins, and sketches pinned onto boards. I spotted her at a cluttered desk, bent over a large sketchpad. She wore a white button-up shirt which was stylishly tucked into the waist of her loose-fit jeans. Her strawberry blonde hair was pinned on top of her head in a messy bun. Several long strands fell out of her bun and framed her face.

The rhythmic scratching sounds of her pencil across the page came to a stop as she

sensed my presence. She looked up and turning toward the door, narrowed her eyes at me.

"Does the C-suite understand the concept of knocking, or do you always barge into people's workspaces unannounced?" she asked, her tone sharp.

I smirked. "Only when I'm desperate."

Moving closer to her, I took in the sketches scattered across her workspace. There was a large leather tote sac tucked under her desk and a half-empty cup of coffee on top of some papers. I sniffed. She used real cream, not that fake creamer made of chemicals, and there was some sweetness from a teaspoon or two of sugar. These clues painted a picture of her, practical and authentic. She was perfect for what I needed. "Sasha Bennett, right?"

Her sharp hazel eyes tracked my movements. "And what has the great Mr. Roberts so desperate to seek me out after office hours?" She leaned her hip against her desk and crossed her arms over her chest. In her hand, she held her pencil like a dagger.

I studied her for a moment, noting how she seemed comfortably at home in this chaotic workshop. My gaze locked with hers. "Just Denver. Mr. Roberts is my father. I need a girlfriend."

Her eyebrows shot up. "Excuse me?"

"A fake one," I clarified. "Just for six months. Long enough to get the board off of my back."

The studio's cluttered walls seemed to close in around us as she considered my words.

She laughed, a sound that was equal parts disbelief and amusement. "This is some

kind of prank. I'm on hidden camera, right? You can't be serious."

"Deadly."

"Is this about what happened in Europe with that influencer?" Her voice was tinged with curiosity. "I thought that was all B.S., but you were really involved with her? Wow."

A part of me wanted to crawl out of my skin at the judgment in her voice. Savannah was a lust-fueled mistake I was going to regret for a long time. I moved to examine the sketches pinned to the wall. "The board wants me to prove I'm stable. They're concerned about my reputation impacting our expansion into the Asian markets." I turned back to her. "I need someone smart. Sophisticated. Someone who can handle both the boardrooms and European galas."

"And you thought of me?" She raised an eyebrow. "The workaholic assistant designer who's never even been to a social event?"

"Exactly," I said, stepping closer. "You're a clean slate. You have a chance to develop a name in the industry. You fit in with the business and I can teach you to fit in with my world. And you're the last person anyone would expect me to date, which makes it believable."

"And what's in it for me?"

"Name your price."

Her expression turned serious and she studied me for a moment. "I want my own line. Full creative control. No interference."

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I nodded. "Done."

She laughed, the sound echoing off the studio's high ceilings. "You're actually serious about this. You're out of your mind." She tilted her chin up and met my gaze. "And What if I say no?"

I leaned in. We were so close that I could hear the rapid beating of her heart and smell her sweet scent. Summer roses with a hint of a fresh sea breeze. My nostrils flared as I took in a deep breath. "Then I'll find someone else. But I'd rather it be you."

"Six months of pretending to be your girlfriend? In the public eye? With your ex-lover probably plotting revenge as we speak?"

I nodded. "Don't worry about her. She can't plot her way out of a paper bag. Think of it as a business arrangement with social benefits."

She paused for a moment as she considered my proposal. To my dismay, she shook her head. "I can't. Pretending to be in a fake relationship feels wrong. I'm sorry, but I'm not the one to help you with your problem. I hope this won't interfere with my work here at the firm."

I was disappointed, but this was only a setback. "Of course not. Take your time to consider my offer. There's no need to rush."

As I left the studio, I couldn't help but feel a spark of curiosity. She was unlike anyone I'd ever met. For a lowly assistant designer, she was sharp, independent, and

unafraid to challenge me.

Sasha Bennett was going to be mine, she just didn't realize it yet.

Chapter 2

SASHA

I woke up to the sound of my alarm blaring, pulling me out of a restless sleep. With a groan, I reached out to silence the alarm. After tossing and turning until almost dawn, I had finally fallen asleep for a short while.

My head was still spinning from what happened at work last night. Denver Roberts had actually cornered me in the design studio and asked me to be his fake girlfriend. The absurdity of it all made me want to laugh, but the memory of his intense gaze made it all too real. Not to mention the way he'd leaned so close to me until I could feel the heat radiating off of his body. A shiver of excitement ran through my body at the memory.

With a groan, I dragged myself out of bed and padded to the kitchen. The fridge was empty of everything except a can of soda, a quarter stick of butter, a jar of raspberry jam, and a bag of lettuce that was starting to grow fur. I had been so busy with work that I completely forgot to get groceries this week. Thankfully, I still had a loaf of Wulfthorn multigrain bread on the counter, so I cut off two slices and popped it into the toaster oven. I poured a scoop of coffee into the coffee maker and started it before heading to the bathroom.

Freshly showered and with a cup of hot coffee in my hands, I started feeling human once again. Retrieving my warm toast, I slathered on a healthy pat of butter and jam.

As I ate breakfast, I examined my surroundings. The apartment was cluttered with

sketches, fabric swatches, and half-finished designs. A mannequin at the end of my dining table wore a half-finished dress covered in black roses held in place with pins and a large purple hat with a piece of black lace veil over the left eye. All of it evidence of my sudden flashes of creativity. I loved my little space, but it was a constant reminder of how far I still had to go.

At XMGH, I was just an assistant designer working under other designers with years of experience and seniority over me. My ideas were often dismissed as "too experimental" by my conservative lead designer, Margot. It was frustrating, but I wasn't about to give up. Some day, I would be in Margot's place and in charge of my own line. I'd worked too hard to get here.

My gaze fell on the sketches scattered across the coffee table. They were rough, and unfinished, but they were mine. And for all her criticism, Margot hadn't been able to take that away from me. Maybe I wasn't where I wanted to be yet, but I wasn't giving up. Not now. Not ever.

I grabbed my phone and scrolled through my social media while sipping my coffee. While I wasn't getting recognition for my designs at work, I had a small but loyal following online. People who were aware of underground trends before they broke out and who were not afraid to take a risk with unconventional fashion. My latest creations that I posted yesterday already had over six thousand likes and a couple hundred comments.

And yet, it only took a little red flashing icon at the corner of my screen to make my heart sink. I had a new message in my direct messages. Like all the messages I had received lately, it was from a user with a question mark as their profile picture. The message was short, but chilling.

"I'm watching you. I like the color purple."

I quickly deleted it, my hands trembling slightly. It wasn't the first creepy message I'd received, but this one felt different. My eyes darted to the window in the living room. Shooting to my feet, I dashed over there and pulled the curtains shut.

My hands shook. It was just a good guess by a troll. There was nobody out there. Despite my attempts to calm myself, the uneasy feeling lingered as I got ready for work.

The apartment felt too small suddenly, the walls closing in on me. I needed air. I grabbed my coat and headed for the door, but as my hand touched the knob, I froze. What if he was out there, watching me? The thought sent a chill down my spine.

Stop it, I scolded myself. I couldn't let an online troll keep me from living my life.

The XMGH office was already buzzing with activity when I arrived, but the energy felt off. Margot was waiting for me at my desk. She had a pinched disapproving look on her face as she sifted through the sketches that I had left on my desk from the day before.

"Sasha, these are interesting," she said as I approached her. The condescension and sarcasm in her tone contrasted sharply with her words. "But I'm not sure this is what we're looking for. Our customers want elegance, not costume party or whatever this is supposed to be."

I bit back a retort and forced myself to smile. "I understand. I'll revise them."

She tossed the sketches onto the desk with a curt nod. "Try starting over from scratch. And it will do you well to remember to stay with the brand's aesthetic. Mr. Roberts will not tolerate anybody on this team wasting company resources."

I clenched my fists as she walked away. Frustration churned in my chest. Margot had

it out for me the first time I stepped into her studio. I could come up with the perfect design that hit every target of the brand's aesthetic and she would still find something wrong with my design. Her constant criticism was wearing me down, but I refused to let her break me.

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As I sat down at my desk and prepared to make a new sketch, I overheard my coworkers gossiping on the other side of the room.

"Did you see the photos of Denver in Monaco? What a disaster."

"I heard the board's furious. We might have a new CEO by the end of the year if he's not careful."

I tried to ignore them, focusing on my sketches, but their words nagged at me. Denver's scandal was all anyone could talk about, and the last thing I wanted was to get involved in his mess. But deep down, I couldn't deny that his proposal had intrigued me. The idea of using him to elevate my career was tempting, but it wasn't without risk. Could I give up my privacy and potentially ruin my reputation by aligning with him?

The day dragged on, and I was just starting to feel like I was getting back into my groove when a courier appeared at my desk, holding a small box. "Package for Sasha Bennett," he said. I signed the delivery confirmation form and he handed the package to me before walking away.

I wasn't expecting anything. Turning the lightweight box in my hands, I frowned. Curious, I opened the box and immediately regretted it. Inside was a single black rose, identical to the ones in my apartment. A folded note was tucked underneath. I opened it to find sharp jagged handwriting in black ink.

"You belong to me."

My heart pounded in my chest. With shaking hands, I shoved the note back into the box and quickly closed it before putting it under my desk. I felt sick to my stomach. There was no way he could have known about all these details unless he was watching me in my apartment. This wasn't just online harassment. I was being stalked.

Paralyzed with fear, I tried to remain calm even though I had no idea what to do. Should I go to security? It didn't take me more than a moment to cancel that idea. It would draw attention to myself and Margot would pounce at any sign of weakness. If word got out about this, the ensuing drama could end my career here at XMGH.

Despite the distraction of the stalker hanging over me like a dark cloud, I powered through the workday.

The words of the note echoed in my mind long after I'd shoved it back into the box. "You belong to me." It felt like a shackle, tightening around my throat every time I tried to breathe. I couldn't stop thinking about the stalker, how he seemed to know every detail of my life. The black rose, the purple hat, how had he seen it? Had he been in my apartment? The idea made my skin crawl.

I stayed late in the office, sketching furiously, trying to distract myself. But no matter how hard I focused, my hand trembled, and the lines on the page came out jagged and uneven. Margot's voice rang in my ears. Her constant criticism, and her dismissive tone looped in my head like an annoying song. "Too experimental," she'd said. "Not what we're looking for." The words had been a knife to my confidence, and now, they twisted deeper.

I thought of the half-finished dress on the mannequin in my apartment, the one covered in black roses. It had felt like a breakthrough when I'd started it, a bold statement that defied XMGH's usual sleek, minimalist aesthetic. But now, it just looked like a mess. Who was I kidding? I wasn't a real designer. I was just an

assistant, scraping by on borrowed ideas and half-baked concepts. Maybe Margot was right. Maybe I didn't belong here.

I leaned against the back of my swivel chair and tilted the seat back until I was staring at the ceiling. My mind wandered back to the early days of my career when I'd been so sure of myself. Fresh out of design school, I'd landed an internship at a boutique firm in Paris. I'd been so eager to prove myself, so confident in my vision. But my designs had been rejected, one after another. "Too out there," my supervisor had said. "Not marketable." I'd been crushed, and I'd spent months questioning whether I had any real talent at all.

That same doubt crept in now, gnawing at the edges of my mind. What if I wasn't cut out for this? What if I was just pretending to be something I wasn't? The thought made me feel sick. I'd worked so hard to get here, but what if it was all for nothing?

And then there was Denver. His proposal was tempting. It was a chance to elevate my career, to prove Margot wrong. But it was also a huge risk. Everything about him was unpredictable, from his reputation to the way he seemed to see straight through me. Could I really trust him? Or was I just setting myself up for another failure?

I sighed, running a hand through my hair.

Empty of the usual bustle and chatter, the studio was deathly quiet. The only sounds were the hum of the overhead lights and the scratch of my pencil on paper. My peace was shattered when I heard quiet steps coming down the hallway.

"Sasha?"

I yanked on the handle of my chair and shot upright. It was Ethan Cross, the freelance photographer who often worked with XMGH, standing in the doorway. He was tall and lean, with messy brown hair, and a boyish face that dimpled when he smiled. As

always, he had his camera hanging from his neck. His presence was always calming, and he had a way of making the models and everyone on set feel at ease during photoshoots.

"Hey, Ethan," I said, forcing a smile. "What are you still doing here?"

He stepped into the room, his camera beeping softly as he fiddled with the buttons and adjusted the settings. "I was reviewing some shots from today's shoot. Thought I'd stop by and see if you were still here. You're always the last one to leave."

I shrugged, trying to seem casual. "Just trying to get ahead on some designs."

He came over to my desk. His gaze lingered on the sketches scattered across my desk. "These are incredible, Sasha. You have such a unique vision. I don't know why Margot doesn't see it."

His words were kind, but they only made me feel more exposed. I shuffled the papers until my drawings were covered. "Thanks, Ethan. That means a lot."

He leaned against the edge of my desk. "You seem off today. Everything okay?"

I hesitated, unsure how much to share. Ethan had always been friendly, but we weren't exactly close. Still, there was something about his quiet demeanor that made me feel like I could trust him. "Just a rough day," I admitted.

He nodded, his expression sympathetic. "If you ever need to talk, I'm here. You're not alone, Sasha."

"Thanks, Ethan. I appreciate it."

He smiled. "Anytime. Well, I'll let you get back to it. Don't stay too late, okay?"

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I nodded, watching as he left the room. My peace was short-lived. Moments later, Denver stepped into the room.

He looked as commanding as ever. Not a single line of his perfectly tailored dark suit was out of position. His short dark hair was neatly styled and even under the harsh overhead lights, his sapphire blue eyes seemed to pierce through me. "Still here?" he asked, his voice low.

I stiffened, my guard immediately going up. "What do you want, Denver?"

He stepped closer and sat on the edge of my desk. My grip tightened around my pencil until it was about to snap. His presence was overwhelming, but I wasn't going to let him know that. "You seem upset. What's going on?"

I shook my head and pinched the bridge of my nose. "It's nothing. Just a rough day."

He tilted his head, studying me with an intensity that made me squirm. "You're a terrible liar, Sasha. What happened? I'm not leaving until you tell me the truth."

I hesitated, torn between my pride and my growing fear. But something in the softness in his voice made it seem like he cared. Finally, I gave in. I pulled the box out from under my desk. "I got a package today. From my stalker. A rose and a note. The rose is identical to the ones in my apartment. At first, I thought I was being trolled online, but it's been getting worse. I don't know what to do."

Denver picked up the rose and then read the note. He placed the items on my desk. His expression darkened, and for a moment, I saw a flash of something primal in his

eyes. It was rage, but it wasn't directed at me. Was he protective of me? "Let me help you," he said, his voice firm. "All the conditions we discussed yesterday still stand. Agree to be my girlfriend. I can keep you safe."

I looked at him, searching for any sign that he might be manipulating me. But all I saw was sincerity. "Why do you care?" I asked quietly.

His eyes locked onto mine. "Because I don't like seeing you scared. This is serious, Sasha. If he knows where you live, you need more resources to protect yourself. Resources that I can give you."

I stared at the black rose and sighed, letting out a breath I didn't realize I had been holding in. "Alright, we'll do it your way, but I have conditions."

He raised an eyebrow. "Name them."

"We are dating only for the public. There will be no hanky-panky or catching feelings," I said, keeping my voice steady. "And you keep your promise to deal with the stalker."

His lips twitched at my words. "We still need to make this look real. That means public appearances, dates, making it look like we're living together, the whole thing."

I frowned. He was right, of course. I leaned back in my chair and crossed my arms. "Fine, but we need to have boundaries."

"Such as?"

I held up my fingers and counted out each of my conditions. "There will be no more touching than is necessary. Kisses will be on the cheek only, no mouth to mouth. And we don't spend more time together than needed to make it look convincing."

He raised an eyebrow. "You're not making this easy, but alright. I agree with your boundaries. We still need to sell it to the board. If they don't believe us, then this whole thing will be for nothing. The easiest way is for you to move in with me until your stalker problem is resolved. I have plenty of space at my place. We will be like roommates."

I wanted to protest, but the argument died on my lips before I could say anything. He had a point.

He nodded and extended his hand. "Do we have a deal?"

"Deal." I shook his hand, the warmth of his touch sending a strange jolt through me. As I looked into his eyes, I felt a mix of relief and apprehension. While Denver was going to protect me from the stalker, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Only one thing was certain, I had just made a deal with the devil and my life was about to get a lot more complicated.

Chapter 3

DENVER

The drive to Sasha's apartment was quiet with the hum of the car's engine the only sound between us. She sat stiffly in the passenger seat, her arms crossed over her chest as she stared out the window. I could feel the tension radiating off her, but I didn't push. She'd agreed to this arrangement, but that didn't mean she was happy about it. I couldn't blame her. I'd just upended her life, and now I was dragging her into mine.

Her apartment building was a modest brick building at the edge of the city. I eyed the rusted iron bars on the first-floor windows and the graffiti that covered the brick walls. It wasn't the worst neighborhood, but it wasn't somewhere you could leave

your car overnight and expect your windows to be intact in the morning. I suppose this was one of those gentrifying neighborhoods popular with struggling artists and up-and-coming professionals.

She finally spoke. "You don't have to come up. I can pack my things myself."

I turned off the engine and unbuckled my seatbelt. "I'm not letting you go up there alone. Not after what happened today."

She shot me a glare, but despite her defiance, I detected the fear lurking below. Awkward silence weighed heavily on us during the elevator ride up. When we reached her floor, she led the way to her apartment down a dingy hallway. Her keys jingled in her hand as she unlocked the door.

The moment she opened the door, I was struck by the chaos. Not a single table, chair, or wall was left uncovered. Even her television had sketches taped to the screen. At the dining table in the middle of the room, there was a mannequin draped in a dress covered in black roses. It stood at the table like it was a guest at a meal. The space was cluttered, but Sasha's creativity oozed from every corner. Even though I hadn't known her for long, I could tell that it was completely her.

"Sorry about the mess," she muttered, stepping inside. She swiped her hand along the wall and flicked a light switch. "I wasn't expecting company."

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I followed her in, my eyes scanning the room. "It's not messy. It's alive. You can see the passion in every detail."

She tossed her large bag and keys on the couch and glanced over her shoulder. "You're just saying that to be polite."

"I don't say things I don't mean," I replied, my voice firm. "Your work is impressive, Sasha. You have a unique vision."

She didn't respond, but I could see the faintest hint of a smile tugging at her lips. Sasha gathered the piles of fabric and papers on the couch and stacked them in a corner. "You can wait here while I pack up my things."

She disappeared into the bedroom, and I heard the sound of drawers opening and closing as well as the heavy thud of something against the wood floorboards. Probably a suitcase, I figured.

I wandered over to the sketches pinned to the wall, studying the intricate designs. Each one was bold, daring, and unlike anything I'd seen in the XMGH line. No wonder Margot didn't like them. It was too innovative. Too different. Like the rest of the board, Margot was conservative, favoring traditional designs that fit into country clubs and afternoon tea parties. Sasha's talents were being wasted under Margot's leadership.

"That's it. I can always come back if I've missed something." Sasha's voice pulled me from my thoughts. She stood in the doorway, a suitcase in one hand and a duffel bag slung over her shoulder.

I moved to take the bags from her, but she stepped back, her grip tightening. "I've got it."

My hands shot up in a gesture of surrender. I had to take it easy and avoid pushing her away. It seemed like Sasha valued her independence and anything that infringed upon that was seen as an attack. "Alright. But let me at least carry the suitcase."

She hesitated before finally handing it over. "Fine. But don't think this means you're in charge."

I smirked. "Wouldn't dream of it."

We made our way back to the car, the silence between us less tense than before. As we drove past the large houses with gated driveways leading to where I lived, I could feel her anxiety growing. This was one of the richest and most exclusive areas of Huntington Harbor. It might as well have been another planet from the area where she lived. She was about to step into a world she'd never been a part of, and it had to be overwhelming.

When we arrived at my building, I drove into the underground garage. The doorman came to take her bags and led us to the private elevator to my penthouse suite. Once we arrived, I guided her inside.

The moment Sasha stepped into the penthouse, I could see the discomfort etched across her face. Her gaze flickered over the polished surfaces, the expensive art, and the sheer scale of the space as if it were a museum rather than a home. She stood stiffly in the foyer, her fingers gripping the strap of her duffel bag like it was the only thing grounding her.

"This is, a lot," she said finally. Her voice was faint, almost swallowed by the vastness of the room.

I shrugged, trying to downplay the opulence. "It's home. You'll get used to it," I replied, trying to keep my tone casual.

She shot me a look, her lips pressed into a thin line. "I'm not sure I want to."

Her words hung in the air, and I realized then how jarring this must be for her. Sasha wasn't just stepping into a new home. Judging by what I saw of her apartment, she was stepping into a world she'd never been a part of a world of wealth and privilege that she clearly resented. I wanted to say something to ease her tension, but I knew better. She wasn't the type to be comforted by empty reassurances.

"Come on, I'll show you around." I gave her a quick tour, emphasizing the security measures in place, the state-of-the-art alarm system, the cameras, and the reinforced doors. She listened quietly, her expression unreadable. I watched as she navigated her new surroundings with a quiet unease. She moved gingerly, as if afraid to touch anything. When we reached the guest room, she set her bags down and turned to me.

"I'll take this room," she said.

I frowned. "The master bedroom is bigger. You should take that."

She shook her head. "This is your space, Denver. I'm just a guest. I'll stay here. Besides, this is only temporary."

I wanted to argue, but I could see that she wasn't going to budge. "Alright. But if you change your mind, the offer stands."

I couldn't help but notice that she had a faint smattering of freckles across her cheeks. I wanted to trace each point with my fingers and then follow it with a kiss. This was insanity. I shook my head clear of the intrusive thoughts. "I'll let you get settled. If you need anything, just let me know."

She nodded again, and I left her to unpack, retreating to the living room. I poured myself a drink. This arrangement was supposed to be a simple business deal with mutual benefits. But already, it was becoming more complicated than I anticipated. Sasha was unlike any other woman I had ever met. Not only did she not fawn over me, she wasn't even all that impressed. She was independent and not at all afraid to challenge me. Frankly, that made her all the more attractive to me.

As I sipped my drink, I couldn't shake the feeling that I had gotten myself in way over my head. The stalker was the most immediate threat, but my growing attraction to Sasha was going to be the real danger. After a lifetime of dealing with wolf pack politics and my conniving family, I had had enough and preferred to live as a lone wolf. My life was simple and quiet. And I liked it that way. But now, she was making me question everything I thought I knew about myself.

Later that night, I stared at the ceiling as I lay in bed. Even through all the walls between us, her presence disturbed my peace, leaving me a restless agitated mess. My wolf's enhanced senses picked up everything. I heard each thump of her heart, each breath she took, and each rustle of her sheets as she turned. I even found her delicate snoring to be cute.

Opening my eyes, I glanced at the time. Midnight. I'd been lying in bed for hours, listening to her soft breaths through the walls. It was maddening. I was Denver Roberts, billionaire alpha wolf shifter, and here I was, wide awake because of a human woman who snored like a kitten. Pathetic.

Her scent drifted through the penthouse, and I was sure that by the end of this arrangement, every corner of my home was going to smell like her. I let out a low growl of satisfaction at the thought of coming home to her delicious scent every night.

Suddenly, I heard her cry out in her sleep. I jolted up and pushed the sheets aside, but

then I stopped myself. As much as I wanted to go to her to make sure she was okay, it was out of the question. She had been clear when she stated her boundaries and I had to respect them. No matter how much my instincts were screaming at me to burst into her room and take her into my arms. I was going to protect her, but it had to be on her terms.

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I lay down and closed my eyes. Taking a deep breath, I tried to quiet my mind, but it was no use. She was all around me. She was the only thing I could think of. Even though this was supposed to be an act, having her in the next room, sleeping so close to me, made it feel real. Sasha Bennett was burrowing her way under my skin bit by bit and a part of me wasn't sure if I wanted to stop her.

Chapter 4

SASHA

I woke up to the sound of birds chirping outside the open window, a sound so foreign to me that it took me a moment to remember where I was. In my old apartment, my morning call came in the form of police sirens or the sound of shattering glass.

Denver's penthouse was in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods surrounding Huntington Harbor. Surrounded by trees in the hills, and sprawling estates, we were far from the noise and pollution of the city. The bed was enormous, the sheets impossibly soft, and for a moment, I allowed myself to sink into the luxury of it all. Then reality came crashing back.

I was living with Denver Roberts. The man who had turned my life upside down in a matter of days. The man who was now, technically, my fake boyfriend. The thought made my stomach churn. I sat up, running a hand through my tangled hair, and glanced around the room. My suitcase was still half-packed with my clothes spilling out onto the floor. I hadn't bothered to unpack last night, too overwhelmed by the sudden changes in my life.

I slipped out of bed and padded to the attached bathroom. With quick steps, I half-skipped and half-tiptoeed my way across the room. The tile floor was freezing against my bare feet, and I made a note to buy some slippers if I was going to be living here for the next six months. Spotless glass and white marble surrounded me in the bathroom which was as big as my apartment bedroom. The sink and counters were made of a single piece of unblemished marble, and the walk-in shower which was big enough for a football team was surrounded by gleaming glass walls. Next to the shower was a sleek oval bathtub that looked like something out of an alien spaceship.

I turned on the faucet and splashed cold water on my face, trying to shake off the remnants of the nightmare that had woken me. The stalker's face had been blurred, but his voice had been clear as he whispered threats that made my blood run cold.

By the time I finished my morning ritual, I heard the faint sound of clinking dishes coming from the kitchen. My stomach growled, reminding me that I hadn't eaten since yesterday. As I got dressed, I hesitated, unsure if I was ready to face Denver. But my stomach made the final decision. The smell of coffee and something sweet wafting through the air was too tempting to resist.

I found him in the kitchen, dressed in a crisp white shirt and dark slacks, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. To my surprise, there wasn't a personal chef at the stove like I had expected a CEO of his wealth to have. He was there, flipping pancakes with a practiced ease that surprised me. The sight was so domestic, so unlike the image of the grumpy billionaire I had in my head, that I couldn't help but stare.

"Morning," he said without looking up. "I hope you like pancakes."

"I do," I replied, my voice still rough from sleep. I leaned against the counter and watched him. "I didn't take you for the cooking type."

He smirked as he flipped a pancake onto a plate. "There's a lot you don't know about

me, Sasha."

I raised an eyebrow. "Is that supposed to be a challenge?"

He glanced at me, his blue eyes glinting with amusement. "Maybe. My household staff has the weekend off. They do have their own families that I'm sure they want to spend some time with instead of hanging out here all the time."

I rolled my eyes and moved to the table, where a cup of coffee was already waiting for me. To my surprise, it was exactly how I liked it, a dash of cream with a teaspoon of sugar. How did he figure out how I liked my coffee in the short time we had known each other? Denver Roberts was a curiosity. I took a sip, savoring the rich, bold flavor. "You're full of surprises, Denver."

He set a plate of pancakes in front of me, along with a small bowl of fresh berries and a drizzle of maple syrup. "Eat. We have a lot to discuss."

I picked up my fork, cutting into the fluffy pancake. "Like what?"

He sat across from me, his own plate in hand. "Like how we're going to sell this relationship to the board. And to the public. We have this weekend to figure everything out before we make our debut at the office."

I chewed slowly, considering his words. "I've been thinking about that. It needs to look real. We don't want people to think we're in love or anything."

He raised an eyebrow. "You're worried people might think we're in love?"

I felt my cheeks heat up. "No. I'm just saying we need to be careful, make it look natural. It's way too out of the blue and unexpected. We don't want to give anyone the wrong idea."

He leaned back in his chair, studying me. "And what's the wrong idea, Sasha?"

I hesitated, unsure how to answer. "You know what I mean. We're not actually together. If we keep this simple, then it will be easier to disentangle out of the situation at the end of six months. We can just say that we dated and things didn't work out in the end. This is just an arrangement."

He nodded, but there was something in his expression that made me uneasy. "Right. Just an arrangement."

We ate in silence for a few minutes, his words hanging in the air. Finally, I set my fork down and looked at him. "So, what's the plan?"

He wiped his mouth with a napkin and leaned forward, his elbows on the table. "First, we need to make it look like we've been together for a while. That means we'll have to come up with a story about how we met, how long we've been dating, all that."

I nodded. "Okay. What else?"

"We'll need to make public appearances. Events, press conferences, fashion shows, that kind of thing. We'll have to act like a couple in front of the cameras. In fact, there's a charity event to raise funds for the local children's hospital next Saturday."

I frowned. "So soon? I'm not exactly comfortable with that."

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"I know," he said, his voice softening. "But it's necessary. If we're going to convince the board, we need to make this look real."

I sighed, running a hand through my hair. "Fine. But we stick to the boundaries we agreed on. No kissing, no touching, none of that."

He rolled his eyes. "We will have to touch each other a little bit to make it convincing, Sasha."

I blew out a breath and glared at him. "Okay, fine, but we keep it family-friendly. Hugging and kisses on the cheeks only."

He nodded. "Agreed."

We spent the next hour hashing out the details of our plan, from the story of how we met to the events we would attend. By the time we were done, I felt a little more in control, but the weight of what we were doing still hung over me. Could I really pull it off? A part of me felt like a fraud.

As I stood to clear the table, Denver reached out and gently grabbed my wrist. "Sasha."

I looked at him, surprised by the intensity in his eyes. "What?"

"I know this isn't easy for you. But I want you to know that I'm going to do everything I can to protect you. From the stalker, from the board, from everything. No matter what happens with this fake relationship, I will keep you safe and give you

an opportunity to lead your own line."

I swallowed hard, my heart pounding in my chest. "Thank you, Denver."

He released my wrist, and I quickly turned away to escape to the dishwasher. I busied myself with the dishes while he cleaned up the kitchen table. But his words lingered in my mind, stirring up emotions I wasn't ready to face. This arrangement was supposed to be simple, but already, it was becoming anything but.

For the rest of the afternoon, we fell into a strange rhythm. Denver worked from home in an office on the other side of the penthouse. I could hear him on the phone and the sounds of his typing on his computer through the closed doors. His presence was a constant reminder that I wasn't alone.

While he was in the office, I explored the penthouse and settled on setting up my workspace in the living room. I spread out my sketches on the sofa and coffee table. Soon, I was lost in the flow of work as I added finishing touches to the sketches.

For lunch, I rummaged around the fridge and found the supplies to make a turkey and ham sandwich. Denver didn't emerge from his office until it was almost sunset.

"Do you like seafood?" He asked. His shirt slightly ruffled and there was a determined set to his jaw that told me he had been deep in work all day. As he made his way to the fridge, he rolled up his sleeves, revealing lean tanned muscles that flexed with each movement. My breath caught in my throat and I clenched my fingers on the edge of the table like they were his arms.

I nodded. Clearing my throat, I found my voice. "Yeah, what do you have in mind?"

"How about grilled halibut in a garlic white wine sauce with roasted vegetables? I figured we could have something lighter and healthier after all the pancakes this

morning."

My stomach grumbled and Denver smirked at the noise. "How about you help prepare a salad while I cook?" he asked.

I mock-saluted him and took the knife and cutting board he handed me.

We worked in silence for a few minutes, the only sounds were the rhythmic chopping of vegetables and the soft hum of the refrigerator. It was oddly domestic, and I couldn't help but feel a strange sense of comfort in the moment. Despite being forced to live together under unfortunate circumstances, there was something nice about this. About him.

As I chopped the vegetables, I couldn't help but hum under my breath.

"What's that song?" Denver asked.

"Just something I made up," I said with a grin. "It's called Denver's Glare Could Freeze Hell Over." He shot me a look, but I swear I saw the corner of his mouth twitch.

"So," Denver said, breaking the silence. "How's the design coming along?"

I glanced up, surprised he'd asked. "It's going. I'm still working out some details, but I think it's coming together."

He nodded, his expression thoughtful. "I'd like to see it sometime. If you're comfortable sharing."

I hesitated, then shrugged. "Sure. Maybe after dinner."

He smiled, and for a moment, I forgot to breathe. There was something about his smile, so rare and genuine, that made him look boyish. Not the grumpy billionaire who left a trail of broken hearts and scandals in his wake. Right now, he was just a man who, despite everything, seemed to care about my work.

We finished preparing dinner and sat down at the table, the salad and grilled fish between us with a bottle of wine. The first few bites were quiet and stilted, but as the meal went on, the conversation began to flow more naturally.

"You're a good cook," I said. "I didn't expect that."

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He raised an eyebrow. "What, you thought I lived on takeout?"

"Not exactly," I replied. "More like personal chefs who served you caviar and lobster on silver trays."

Denver barked out a laugh and took a sip of his wine. "You're a fashion designer. I figured your talents were limited to fabric and thread, not kitchen knives."

I smirked, leaning back in my chair. "Well, believe it or not, I can multitask. Cooking helps me unwind. It's a lot like designing, putting together a mix of ingredients to create something new."

He tilted his head, studying me with those piercing blue eyes. "Interesting. I guess we're more alike than I thought."

I snorted and flaked off a piece of halibut with my fork. "Don't push it, Denver. We're nothing alike."

"You keep telling yourself that," he said, his voice low and teasing. "But I think you're underestimating how much we have in common."

I rolled my eyes, trying to ignore the heat creeping up my neck. "Whatever you say, boss."

The nickname slipped out before I could stop it, and Denver's smile widened, his teeth gleaming in the soft light. "I like it when you call me that."

"Don't get used to it," I muttered, shoving a bite of food into my mouth to avoid saying anything else stupid, though my heated cheeks gave away my embarrassment.

We ate in comfortable silence for a few minutes. All of the awkward tension that was there earlier faded away with each passing moment. It was strange, how easily we fell into this rhythm after less than twenty-four hours of living together.

"So," he said, breaking the silence again. "You said you'd show me your designs after dinner. Still up for it?"

I hesitated, surprised he'd remembered. "Yeah, sure. But fair warning, they're not finished. And they're different from what XMGH usually does."

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "Good. Different is what we need. This new American line has to stand out. It's our chance to shake things up."

I nodded, feeling a spark of excitement despite myself. "Alright. Let's do it."

We cleared the table together, the silence between us easy now, almost companionable. When we were done, I led him to the living room where I'd spread out my sketches earlier.

They were scattered across the coffee table, each one a bold, daring vision that I'd poured my heart into.

Denver stood beside me, his presence both comforting and unnerving as he studied the sketches. His eyes moved methodically over each design, his expression unreadable.

I worried my bottom lip between my teeth as I waited for his reaction. This was the first time I'd shown my work to anyone outside of Margot and my social media

following. The vulnerability of it made my stomach clench.

"These are incredible," he said finally, his voice low and sincere. He picked up one of the sketches, a gown with large angular shoulder pads and intricate lace flowing down to a dramatic train. "It's bold but delicate at the same time."

I nodded. "That's the effect I was going for. A lot of people think it's a design mistake rather than a deliberate choice."

He glanced at me, a small smile playing on his lips. "I'm not just a grumpy billionaire, Sasha. I know art when I see it. And this? This is art."

My cheeks warmed at the compliment, and I looked away, suddenly self-conscious. "Thanks. I've been working on these for a while. They're not exactly what XMGH is known for, though."

"Not yet," he said. "That's why they're perfect. XMGH needs to evolve." He gestured to the table. "And this is the future. It's fresh and daring."

I felt a lump form in my throat, his words hitting me harder than I expected. For so long, I'd felt like an outsider in the fashion world, like my ideas were too unconventional. But hearing Denver of all people validate my work meant more to me than I wanted to admit.

"Thank you," I whispered.

He set the sketch down on the table. Our hands brushed and a flash of heat ran through my body. His presence was overwhelmingly close and I was far too aware of every breath he took. "You don't have to thank me. I'm just stating the obvious. You're talented, Sasha. And I'm not just saying that because you're my fake girlfriend."

I laughed. "Good to know."

He grinned, his blue eyes sparkling with mischief. "But since you are my fake girlfriend, I think it's only fair that I get to see these designs come to life. How about we make this the centerpiece of the new American line?"

My heart skipped a beat. I gaped at him, unsure if I'd heard him correctly. "You're serious about this?"

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"Deadly," he said. "These designs are exactly what XMGH needs to stay relevant. They'll make a statement and launch the American line with a splash. This is your chance to show the world what you're capable of."

I felt a rush of emotions. Excitement, disbelief, and a flicker of fear. This was everything I'd been working toward, everything I'd dreamed of. But it was also terrifying. What if I wasn't ready? What if I failed?

"Denver, I don't know what to say," I stammered, my mind racing.

He reached out, squeezing my hand in a gesture that was surprisingly gentle. "Say you'll do it. You've earned this, Sasha. Don't let fear hold you back."

I looked into his eyes, searching for any hint of doubt or hesitation, but all I saw was confidence in me, in my work. It was the push I needed.

"Okay," I said, my voice steady despite the storm of emotions inside me. "I'll do it."

His smile was triumphant, and for a moment, I forgot to breathe. "Good. We'll announce it at the charity event next week. It'll be the perfect platform to introduce your work to the world."

I nodded, still processing everything. "Thank you, Denver. For believing in me."

He shrugged, his expression softening. "It's not hard to believe in someone as talented as you, Sasha. Just don't let it go to your head."

I laughed, the tension easing as I shook my head. "Don't worry, I'll keep my ego in check."

"Good," he said, his tone teasing. "Remember to keep us little people in mind once you have your own brand and become a household name."

I rolled my eyes. He was being over the top. Like I was ever going to be the next Vivienne Westwood.

He chuckled, the sound low and warm, and for a moment, it felt like we were just two people, joking and teasing like any normal couple.

"Let's rehearse how we're going to announce our relationship at the office," he said.

Reality came crashing back, reminding me that this wasn't real. It was just an arrangement, a means to an end.

Chapter 5

DENVER

On Monday morning, we left the penthouse and drove to the XMGH office in silence. Sasha didn't speak much during the trip, and I couldn't help but notice the way she worried her bottom lip between her teeth and her shaky hands fiddled with the strap of her purse. The acrid stench of anxiety and fear came off of her in waves. I knew it was just the nerves of what was to come, but I didn't like seeing her upset. As we pulled into the parking garage, I glanced at Sasha. "Ready for this?"

She nodded and flipped down the visor mirror to check her appearance. "As ready as I'll ever be."

I placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "You'll be fine. Just stick to the plan. Remember, I'll be right beside you. We're a team. Act natural."

She looked up at me, her hazel eyes searching mine for a moment before she nodded again. "Right. A team."

We walked into the office together, and the moment we stepped through the doors, I could feel the weight of everyone's eyes on us. The whispers started almost immediately, and I could see the curiosity and skepticism in their expressions. Sasha kept her head high, her posture confident, but I could tell she was feeling the pressure.

"Good morning, Mr. Roberts," the receptionist greeted me, her eyes darting between me and Sasha. Her expression was filled with curiosity, though she dared not ask what was on the tip of her tongue.

"Morning," I replied curtly, not giving her a chance to ask any questions. I placed my hand on the small of Sasha's back and led her to the elevator. As the doors closed, I saw the receptionist pick up her cell phone. Good. News of our new status as a couple would spread through every floor of the building by lunchtime. I turned to Sasha. "You're doing great."

She let out a shaky breath. "I feel like everyone's staring at me."

"They are," I said with a smirk. "But that's the point. We want them to notice."

The elevator doors opened, and we stepped out into the bustling office. The whispers grew louder as we made our way down the hall. I could see the calculating looks of some of the staff. As we walked by the glass-walled offices, I spotted Victoria Song in conversation with Margot.

"Denver," Victoria called out. "A word in private?"

I glanced at Sasha, who gave me a small nod. "Go ahead. I'll be fine."

I followed Victoria into the meeting room. Margo brushed past me and headed in the direction of the design studio. Sasha was going to have to deal with her supervisor on her own. I had my hands full at the moment. Closing the door behind me, I turned to her. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Is there news you would like to tell me?"

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"I don't know what you're talking about," I replied, keeping my tone neutral.

"You and that woman," she said, her voice dripping with disbelief. "She's one of ours, isn't she? How long has this relationship been going on?"

"Since a while now," I said, not giving her any more information than necessary. "Sasha is one of the company's best designers. It's not something we've been public about, but we decided it was time."

Victoria narrowed her eyes at me, clearly not buying it. "You expect me to believe that this is genuine? That it's not some ploy to secure your position as CEO?"

I met her gaze head-on, my voice firm. "My relationship with Sasha is none of your business. But if you're questioning my integrity, then I suggest you take a step back. I've done nothing but work tirelessly for this company, and I won't let baseless accusations undermine that."

"You were supposed to demonstrate stability and earn the reputation for being a respected leader of the company. This little fling of yours will accomplish none of that, and only cause chaos and problems in the office."

Victoria was suspicious, and once she sniffed a bit of weakness, she latched on with fangs. I had to shift her focus away from my relationship with Sasha and onto something tangible to the business.

"I'm aware," I said, my voice firm. "But it's my personal life." And you should keep your opinions to yourself, you old bat, I wanted to say. "Sasha is an incredibly

talented designer, and I believe she has the potential to lead our new American line. Her work is fresh, daring, and exactly what we need to stay relevant in this industry."

Victoria's expression tightened, her fingers drumming against the polished mahogany table. "Denver, with all due respect, this is absurd. Sasha Bennett is an assistant designer. Handing her the American line isn't just risky, it's reckless. She has no proven track record leading a team. What if she fails? The fallout could cripple the company."

I met their gazes head-on. "Sasha's talent is undeniable. I have never seen anything like her designs, they are unique and expressive. She has a vision that aligns perfectly with what this company needs to stay relevant."

Victoria scoffed, her lips pressing into a thin line. "Expressiveness is only valuable if it's executed well. And forgive me for saying this, but Sasha Bennett is not Margot. Margot has decades of experience and understands the brand inside and out. Passing her over will cause chaos in the design department."

I tightened my jaw, but I didn't back down. "Margot's designs are safe, but safe isn't going to save us. We need boldness, and Sasha has it. If we don't take this risk, we're going to lose to our competitors."

Victoria crossed her arms, her tone skeptical. "And if her line flops? What's your contingency plan?"

"There isn't one. Because I believe in her. And I'm willing to bet everything on that belief."

Victoria's expression was unreadable, but somehow, my words had an effect on her. "I will take that under consideration and advise the board at our next meeting. For now, I will be keeping a close eye on this relationship of yours. Any public scandal

and the board will have to take decisive action. Do you understand, Denver?"

I nodded, knowing that was the best I could hope for. "Understood."

The meeting ended shortly after and I retreated to the sanctuary of my office. I had just sat down at my desk when my phone vibrated in my pocket. I pulled it out to read the message. It was from Sasha.

Sasha: "How did it go?"

Me: "As expected. Victoria's skeptical about how real our relationship is, but I managed to shift her focus to expanding our brand with the new American line. I could practically see the dollar signs in her eyes."

Sasha: "I just hope this doesn't backfire on us."

Me:: "It won't. I won't allow it."

Over the next few days, the staff at the office continued to gossip about our relationship. By the time Friday afternoon rolled around, we were old news.

Saturday was the charity auction for the children's hospital held at the Hughes Hotel in Paradise Peaks. Vintage pieces from XMGH's archives were up for sale and all proceeds would go to the hospital.

As soon as we stepped out of the car, the cameras were on us, bathing us in a blinding flash of lights. I held onto Sasha and led her down the red carpet. Despite her brave face, I sensed her nervousness. I gave her hand a comforting squeeze as we finally made it inside the hotel and away from the photographers.

The cameras and attention never seemed to relent. Sasha clung to my arm, her smile

bright but her grip tight. I could feel her body coiled tight as a spring and her stiff flinch every time a flash went off. "Is my dress okay?" she whispered to me, her voice barely audible over the chatter. "Do I look out of place here?"

I glanced at her, surprised by the vulnerability in her tone. She looked stunning, radiant even, but her eyes betrayed a flicker of self-doubt. "You look perfect," I assured her, squeezing her hand. "Why would you think otherwise?"

She hesitated, her gaze dropping to the floor for a moment before she forced another smile. "It's just, I'm not used to this. The cameras, the people watching every move I make. What if I say something wrong? Or do something that makes me look like I'm out of place here?"

Her words struck me. This wasn't just about the event; it was deeper. It was about her fear of not belonging, of being judged and found wanting. "You're more than good enough, Sasha," I said firmly. "You're here because you deserve to be. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

She nodded, but I could see the doubt lingering in her eyes.

Despite the boundaries she set for our arrangement, Sasha leaned against me as we made our way across the room. For a moment, I forgot that this wasn't real and placed my hand on the small of her back. To my surprise, she didn't brush me off, but instead, smiled shyly as she glanced at me from under her lashes. Whatever doubts or nerves she had expressed earlier seemed to vanish as the night went on.

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We mingled with the guests, playing our parts perfectly. The chemistry between us was undeniable, and I could see the way people watched us, trying to figure out if it was real. Sasha was a natural, her charm and wit winning over everyone she spoke to.

But then I noticed him, Ethan, the photographer. He was watching Sasha and for some reason, my possessive instincts roared to the surface. Though Sasha hadn't said anything, something about him bothered me. I subtly positioned myself between them, blocking his view of her. Sasha seemed to sense my tension and glanced up at me, her eyes questioning.

"Everything okay?" she asked.

"Fine," I replied, keeping my tone light. "Just wanted to stick close to you."

We continued to mingle, but I kept a close eye on Ethan, making sure he didn't get too close. The auction was about to start when my sister, Sophia, approached us.

"Well, well, well," she said, her tone dripping with sarcasm. "Look who's playing house."

"Not now, Sophia," I growled, shooting her a warning look.

She ignored me, turning her attention to Sasha. "And you must be the lucky girl. Sasha, is it? Tell me, how does it feel to be the flavor of the month?"

Sasha's smile didn't falter, but I could see the fire in her eyes. "It's nice to meet you, Sophia. Denver's told me so much about you."

Sophia's smile faltered for a moment, but she quickly recovered. "I'm sure he has. But let's be honest, Sasha. You're not exactly his usual type. What's your angle?"

I stepped forward, my voice low and dangerous. "That's enough, Sophia. Sasha is my girlfriend, and I won't tolerate any disrespect toward her."

My sister was recently promoted to Marketing Director at Alpha Fang by Victoria Song after Reeve Song's dismissal as CEO. Bolstered with confidence from her new promotion and growing ties to the Song family, Sophia had been insufferable. My little sister needed a reminder that I was the alpha in the Roberts pack hierarchy. "Behave or I will arrange a marriage for you with Eugene Mudgett in Kansas. You can spend the rest of your days mucking in mud as queen of his hog farm."

Sophia snarled and glared at me. "Don't you dare pull rank on me, Denver. Fine, I'll leave you two lovebirds alone for now."

She walked away, and I turned to Sasha. I pressed my lips together in a thin line. A flush of shame heated my cheeks at Sophia's antics. "I'm sorry about that. My sister can be difficult at the best of times."

Sasha shook her head, her smile genuine. "It's fine. I can handle her. I've dealt with my share of catty women in this industry."

The auction was about to start when I spotted another familiar face. It was Cameron Fitzgerald, my college roommate and one of my best friends. He owned Cam's Comfy Cuisine, the country's top home delivery meal kit company. Cam was the epitome of a self-made billionaire, charismatic and confident. Unlike myself and others at my alma mater, he came from a humble background without family money or connections. He spotted us and as soon as he noticed Sasha, a mischievous glint came into his eyes.

"Cam." We greeted each other with a friendly clap on the back. "I didn't know you were in town."

Cam grinned, his gaze flickering to Sasha. "Couldn't miss the auction. I heard there's going to be some interesting pieces up for auction." He extended a hand to Sasha. "And who is this lovely creature? You've been selfish, Denver, keeping her all to yourself."

"Sasha, this is Cameron Fitzgerald, one of my oldest friends and a constant pain in my backside. Sasha is one of our best designers at XMGH."

Sasha smiled politely, shaking his hand. "Sasha Bennett. It's nice to meet you, Cameron."

"Please, call me Cam," he said. "Anybody who can tame this grump deserves all of my respect."

The flirtatious wink he flashed her ignited a rage inside of me. My wolf snarled at the competing male. Until Sasha, I had never been this possessive of a woman.

Cam grinned at me. He was being a pest as usual. I rolled my eyes fondly. "Ignore him, Sasha, Cam's here to be a nuisance."

Cam placed a hand over his heart, feigning offense. "You wound me, Denver. I'm here to support a good cause, and maybe catch up with an old friend." He turned his attention to Sasha. "So, what's your story? How did you manage to get this one to settle down?"

Sasha's cheeks flushed, but she held her ground. "We're still figuring things out."

Cam raised an eyebrow, his grin widening. "Ah, enough said." He leaned in, dropping

his voice to a whisper. "If Denver ever steps out of line, you can always call me."

I growled low in my throat, shooting him a warning look. My friend was really pushing it. "Enough, Cam. Don't make me remind you what happens when you mess with things that don't belong to you."

Sasha elbowed me softly, her eyes sparkling with amusement. "Relax, Denver. He's just being friendly."

"Friendly," I muttered under my breath.

Cam held up his hands in mock surrender. "Alright. I'll behave." He glanced around the room. "You know, Denver, I've been thinking about moving back to Huntington Harbor. We should catch up sometime."

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I nodded. "Let's set something up."

The auctioneer came up to the stage and announced the start of the auction.

We said our goodbyes with a quick hug. "She's too good for you. You'd be a fool to let her go," he whispered in my ear.

I didn't respond, but his words lingered in my mind. He was right. Even if this was supposed to be a means to an end, it was becoming something more. Something which I wasn't ready to admit to myself yet. We took our seats and as soon as the first piece was revealed, Sasha gasped.

"That's an original 1992 Shades of Fire chiffon dress," she breathed out, her voice full of awe. "I've always wanted to see it in person. It's a masterpiece."

Her passion for design and love of vintage fashion shined brightly from her eager eyes. She leaned forward in her seat, her cheeks flushed as she admired the piece on stage. "That's one of my favorite pieces from the archive. I didn't know they were going to auction it off."

"You should bid on it. It would be a great addition to your personal collection."

She hesitated. Her gaze flicked from the auctioneer to me, and then back again. A longing expression came over her face. "I don't know. It's probably going to be way out of my budget."

Before I could respond, Cam's voice cut through the crowd. "I'll start at \$10,000."

Sasha's eyes widened in surprise, and she turned to look at Cam, who winked at her from across the room. I clenched my jaw, my protective instincts and competitive streak flaring up. Cam was playing games.

The bidding quickly escalated, with several other guests joining in. Sasha watched the proceedings with a mix of awe and disappointment, clearly wishing she could participate. When the bidding reached \$50,000, I raised my paddle. "\$60,000."

Sasha gasped, turning to me with wide eyes. "Denver, what are you doing?"

"Winning that gown for you," I said, my voice firm.

Cam raised an eyebrow, his grin widening as he raised his paddle. "\$70,000."

I shot him a glare, my jaw tightening. "\$80,000."

Cam smirked, clearly enjoying himself. "\$90,000."

Sasha tugged on my sleeve, but I ignored her. I gritted my teeth, my grip on the paddle tightening. "\$200,000."

The room fell silent, the auctioneer looking between Cam and me. Cam leaned back in his seat, raising his hands in surrender.

The auctioneer slammed the gavel. "Sold to Mr. Roberts for \$200,000!"

Sasha stared at me, her expression a mix of shock and gratitude. "Denver, that's too much. You didn't have to do that."

I shrugged, trying to play it cool, but I couldn't hide the slight smirk tugging at the corners of my lips. A primitive part of me basked in the success of acquiring the dress

for her. "Don't flatter yourself. I just didn't want Cam to outbid me. Besides, that dress belongs in the collection of someone who knows how to appreciate it."

She looked at me, her hazel eyes shimmering with something I couldn't quite place. Gratitude, maybe? Or something deeper? Before I could figure it out, she leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to my cheek. "Thank you," she whispered, her breath warm against my skin.

The rest of the evening passed without incident. We left after I paid for the dress arranging for it to be delivered to the penthouse. Sasha seemed to be in a good mood. As we drove home, she sang along to the stereo, her voice slightly off-key but full of joy.

I glanced at her. "You're terrible at singing," I said, but she just laughed.

"Good thing I'm not a pop star, then."

I couldn't help the small smile that tugged at my lips.

We arrived home and the first thing Sasha did as she stepped past the front door was kick off her heels. I paused in the doorway and watched her. It was such an everyday maneuver and it showed that she felt comfortable and at home in my penthouse. Warmth burst in my chest. There was no denying it. Everything so far today felt so right. Even though it was supposed to be pretend, it all felt so real.

"Sasha," I said, clearing my throat when I realized how hoarse my voice sounded.

Sasha spotted the bags of takeout on the dining table and sniffed the air. "Is that eggplant parmesan? I would have asked to come home earlier if I had known that was what we were having tonight." She looked at me, her eyes wide and full of happiness. Whatever I wanted to say could wait until later.

"Yeah, I ordered some takeout from Allegro. I hope you like Italian?"

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Sasha beamed. "Are you kidding? It's my favorite."

While Sasha unpacked the takeout containers, I went to the kitchen to grab a bottle of red wine, plates, and silverware. Sasha had already opened the containers of food and laid out the salad, bruschetta, fried calamari, and eggplant parmesan.

We ate family style, helping ourselves to each dish. Sasha took a big bite of the eggplant parmesan and made a low moan of delight. She closed her eyes and sank back against her chair as she chewed. "This is so good, Denver. You made the perfect choice."

A warmth spread through my chest at her praise. "I figured you would want something hearty after today."

Sasha plucked a calamari ring and popped it into her mouth. "You guessed right. Gosh, those fancy schmancy foods they served at the auction might as well have been made for ants. I needed a magnifying glass to see what was on my plate."

I picked up a piece of bruschetta and bit into it while I watched her eat with gusto. "Sometimes simple and authentic is best over complicated artifice."

She took a sip of wine and tipped her glass at me. "I couldn't agree with you more."

We chatted like we had been friends for ages as we ate. When every last crumb had been devoured, Sasha rose and took our dishes to the sink, while I cleaned up the empty containers. After I threw away the trash, I leaned against the counter and watched her as she did the dishes. To my surprise, she chose to wash them by hand

instead of using the dishwasher. As she worked, she hummed the song that played on the stereo on our drive home. Her hips shimmied as she swayed to the music.

A giant knot formed in my stomach, and it wasn't from the heavy meal we just had. I wanted her and I was going to have her.

As soon as she placed the last dish on the drying rack, I crossed the kitchen and came up behind her. She gave a surprised yelp when I yanked her away from the sink and twisted her around. Her wet hands flew up to my chest in surprise, staining the expensive silk with water. Not that I cared.

"Denver," she breathed out.

I pulled her to me until we were pressed together from chest to thigh. "I'm going to kiss you now."

Her breath hitched. "But the plan," she whispered as her tongue darted out to wet her lips.

"Fuck the plan. Things between us have changed. I want you, and I know you want me. This isn't just pretend and I can't deny that I feel something for you. Tell me that I'm wrong."

She gulped and clenched my shirt in her fists. "No, it's real. We've made an awful mess of things, Denver."

"No, it's just the right amount of mess."

I leaned in, my lips brushing against hers in a soft, tentative kiss. The moment our lips touched, it was like a spark ignited between us, lighting us on fire. I deepened the kiss, holding her in place with a hand on the back of her neck as I claimed her mouth.

Backing us until she was pinned against the counter, I thrust my hips against hers, letting her feel the hard evidence of my desire for her. She ground against my bulge and let out a soft moan as she returned my kiss, devouring my mouth with equal fervor. The sweet musky aroma of her arousal overwhelmed my senses. I wanted to be covered in her scent.

When we finally pulled apart, we were both breathless.

Sasha looked up at me, her pupils dark with desire. "Denver, are you sure? We still have to deal with the board and the stalker. I can't go back and play fake girlfriend if you're just going to fuck me and cast me aside."

"I would never do that to you," I said, my voice softening. "My intentions toward you are genuine. If we keep going, then I will never leave. I've never met another woman like you, Sasha."

She didn't respond, but the way she looked at me, the way her breath hitched when I spoke, told me everything I needed to know. She felt it too. But she was scared. And I couldn't blame her. This wasn't part of the plan. This wasn't supposed to happen.

"We don't have to figure this out right now," I said, my voice gentle. My hand came up to brush a strand of hair out of her face. "But I need you to know that you are it for me." Letting her go, I helped her stand steady on her feet. It was unclear whether she was unstable due to my revelations or the wine she had with dinner.

"Take all the time you need, Sasha. I'm not going anywhere. I'll wait for you." I left her in the kitchen and went to my room. Though I pretended to be calm in front of her, once I closed the door, I went to the minibar. Taking a large swig from a bottle of vodka, I collapsed on my bed. My mind raced as I realized what I had just done. Never before had I poured my heart out like that to a woman. This was supposed to be a simple business arrangement, not a life-changing event. But now, nothing was

certain, except that Sasha was for sure my fated mate. If only I knew where she stood.

Chapter 6

SASHA

I woke up the next morning with a heavy feeling in my chest, my mind still swirling from the events of the night before. Denver's words, his kiss, they had shaken me to my core. I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, trying to make sense of the chaos in my head.

I cared about Denver. More than I wanted to admit. But the reality of our situation was a tangled mess. Not only was he my boss, but he was the CEO. And our relationship, if I could even call it that, started as a lie. How could we possibly navigate this without destroying both of our careers? And what if it wasn't real for him? What if this was just another game, another conquest and notch on his bedpost?

I groaned and buried my face in my pillow, willing the thoughts to go away. But they clung to me, stubborn and relentless. I couldn't ignore the way my heart raced when I thought about him, the way my body came alive in response to his touch. It wasn't just physical attraction, though that was undeniable, it was something deeper. Something I wasn't ready to face.

Reluctantly, I got out of bed and got dressed, my mind still racing. When I stepped out into the living room, Denver was already there, sipping coffee and scrolling through his phone. He looked up when he saw me, and for a moment, we just stared at each other.

"Morning," he said.

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"Morning," I replied, my voice barely above a whisper.

He set his phone down and gestured to the coffee maker. "There's coffee if you want some."

I nodded and busied myself with making a cup, grateful for the distraction. But I could feel his eyes on me, watching me. It made my skin tingle and the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

"Sasha," he said finally, breaking the silence. "About last night--"

"We don't have to talk about it," I interrupted, my voice sharper than I intended. "We had a lot of wine with dinner. It was a lapse of judgment. That's all."

He frowned, his brow furrowing. "A lapse?"

I turned to face him, clutching my coffee cup like a lifeline. "Denver, this is complicated enough already. We can't just let our emotions get in the way."

He stood and took a step toward me. His expression softened as he tilted his head. "Sasha, I meant what I said last night. This isn't just a fling for me. It's real. And I think you feel the same way."

I gripped the edge of the counter and looked away, my heart pounding in my chest. "It doesn't matter how we feel. We have a plan, Denver. A plan that doesn't include this."

He covered the top of my hand in his, gently unclenching my hands and weaving our fingers together. "Plans change. People change. We're both adults, Sasha. We don't have to stick to a script we wrote before we knew how much we'd care about each other."

I opened my mouth to argue, but the words caught in my throat. Because deep down, I knew he was right. This wasn't pretend anymore. It hadn't been for a while. But that didn't make it any less terrifying.

Before I could respond, my phone buzzed on the counter. I glanced at it and froze. It was a text from an unknown number. My stomach dropped when I opened it. There was a photo of me and Denver having dinner at the penthouse the night before, along with a chilling message.

"You can't escape me. I'm always watching."

My hands trembled as I stared at the screen, my coffee forgotten. Denver glanced at the screen and immediately, his jaw clenched as his eyes darkened with anger.

"That's it," he growled. "You're not going back to the office. We're staying here until we figure this out."

I shook my head, panic rising in my chest. "Denver, I can't just hide forever. This is my job, my life."

"Your safety comes first," he interrupted, his tone brooking no argument. "I'm not going to let you face this alone, Sasha. I'm here, and I'll do whatever it takes to protect you."

His words should have comforted me, but they only made the knot in my stomach tighten. "Denver, this is my problem. I don't want to drag you into it."

He cupped my face in his hands, his touch firm but gentle. "You're not dragging me into anything. I'm already in this, Sasha."

His eyes met mine, and I recognized the sincerity shining from them. It was overwhelming, the way he looked at me like I was the only thing that mattered. My breath hitched, and I felt myself wavering. But the fear, the doubt, it was still there, gnawing at my heart. "Denver, what if this ruins everything? My career, your reputation?"

He sighed, brushing a strand of hair from my face. "None of it matters if I don't have you."

My eyes filled with tears. Nobody had ever put me first like this. I looked away. "I don't know if I'm ready for this. For us."

"That's okay," he said softly, his thumb brushing against my cheek. "You don't have to have it all figured out. Just let me be here for you. Let me protect you. We'll figure the rest out together."

I wanted to believe him. I wanted to let go of the fear and the doubt and just trust that this could work. But it wasn't that simple. Not with the stalker breathing down my neck, not with the board watching our every move, and not with the messy tangle of emotions between us.

Denver seemed to sense my hesitation. He stepped back, giving me space, but his eyes never left mine. "Take your time. I'm not going anywhere. But for now, let's focus on keeping you safe. We'll work from here, and I'll make sure you're never alone."

I nodded. It wasn't ideal, but Denver was right. We had to lay low as long as the stalker was out there. "Okay."

He gave me a small, reassuring smile before pulling me into a hug. I buried my face in his chest, letting myself melt into his warmth. For the first time in weeks, I felt safe. But I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that this fragile peace wouldn't last.

Over the next few days, we fell into a routine. To my surprise, Denver didn't work in his private office. Instead, he set up his computer in the living room while I claimed the dining table for my sketches. The space became a strange mix of professional and personal, and it felt both comforting and surreal to share this part of my life with Denver.

He was surprisingly attentive, in between his own work, he made sure I had everything I needed, snacks and coffee made just the way I liked it, and he was even quiet when I was deep in thought. It was strange to see this gentle side of him compared to his notorious reputation as a cold businessman who used and discarded employees and women.

After a long day of work, we had dinner together. His chef, Lydia, was on duty today, and she had prepared a feast of grilled scallops and prawns on a bed of pasta.

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Since the dining room had become my office, we ate at the kitchen island. Denver twirled pasta onto his fork and somehow, ended up splattering red tomato sauce on his shirt and cheek.

"Who knew the great Denver Roberts could be so messy?" I teased, brushing a smudge of sauce off his cheek.

He smirked, catching my wrist before I could pull away. "Careful, Sasha. You're starting to sound like you actually like me."

I rolled my eyes, but there was no denying the warmth spreading from his touch through my entire body. "Don't let it go to your head."

The meal was delicious and the moment felt so normal like we were just a normal couple having dinner together after a busy day at work.

Denver's words from last night echoed in my mind. Though he didn't push, it seemed like every touch of our hands, every glance, was loaded with intention. By the time we finished cleaning up, my nerves felt like a live wire.

"I should probably head to bed," I said, my voice barely above a whisper.

Denver nodded, but he didn't move. "Yeah. Me too."

We stood there for a moment, the silence stretching between us. Fuck it, I thought. I couldn't live in fear of the what-ifs any longer. Then, before I could change my mind, I stepped forward and kissed him. It was soft, and tentative, but it was enough to

shatter the fragile stalemate between us.

He responded immediately, his hands cupping my face as he deepened the kiss. My heart raced, and I clung to him as if he were the only thing keeping me grounded. The world outside, the stalker, the board, and the risks, faded away, leaving only the two of us. His lips were demanding yet tender, and I melted into him, my hands sliding up his chest to wrap around his neck.

He broke the kiss, his breathing ragged as he rested his forehead against mine. "Sasha," he murmured, his voice rough with desire. "We have to stop. I can't control myself if we keep going."

I silenced him with another kiss, my fingers tangling in his hair. "I don't want to stop," I whispered against his lips. "I want this. I want you."

He let out a low growl, the sound sending a jolt of lust to my center. In one decisive scoop, he lifted me up. I let out a laugh and wrapped my legs around his waist as he carried me to his bedroom. His eyes never left mine as he set me down on the edge of the bed.

He knelt in front of me, his hands resting on my knees as he looked into my eyes.

"Are you sure?" he asked. His eyes were dark with the intensity of his desire.

I nodded, my heart pounding in my chest. "I'm sure."

He stood, his hands sliding up my thighs as he leaned in to kiss me again. This time, there was no hesitation. His hands roamed my body, exploring every curve as if memorizing me, and I responded in kind, tugging at his shirt until it was off and my hands could feel the warmth of his skin.

We discarded our clothes in a frenzy, and soon, our limbs were tangled together, his body pressing me into the mattress. He overwhelmed all of my senses, surrounding me with his warmth and scent. I was drowning in Denver Roberts in the most delightful way. I never wanted it to end.

Every touch was electric. His palms ran over my curves with possessiveness, cupping my breasts and plucking my nipples to hard points before he slid down to my knees. With a decisive quickness that made me suck in a breath, he parted my thighs, exposing my most secret place to his view.

His nose flared as he ran his fingers through my puffy folds. I was already so wet for him. He spread my moisture up to my clit and rubs me to a frenzy until my hips are bouncing against his thumb. "Denver, please," I begged. He cupped my mound in his hand, grinding the base against my clit. "This belongs to me."

I held his gaze. "Yes."

He squeezed my ass before slapping it, the wetness from my juices on his hand making the blow sting even more. "And this."

"Yes!" I gasped.

Cupping my chin, he ran his thumb along my bottom lip before slipping it into my mouth. I sucked him hard, savoring my own flavor on his flesh and licking him clean with my tongue. "And that pretty little mouth too." He removed his finger with a pop.

"Yes." My eyes locked in on his shaft which was so hard it pointed straight at me. Reaching down, I took his throbbing length into my hand and stroked him, tracing the ridged veins. A glistening drop of liquid pooled at the tip. My mouth watered. "I need to taste you."

"Then take what you need. Kneel."

His order sent a fresh flush of arousal through me. I obeyed, grabbing a pillow and shimmying off of the bed before dropping to my knees on top of it.

Denver wrapped one hand in my hair, cupping the back of my head, and gripped the base of his cock with his other hand. His eyes were almost dark with lust. "Swallow it like a good girl. All of it."

My tongue darted out to wet my lips before I inched closer. Keeping my eyes locked on his, I closed my lips around the swollen head, swirling my tongue around the rim before taking him in. As much as I tried, I could only make it halfway down before I gagged.

I let out a moan of disappointment and doubled my efforts. By the end of the night, I was going to suck all of him down. Soon, I found a rhythm. Closing my eyes, I worked him in and out while I savored the weight of him on my tongue and the sweet salty flavor of him. His hand flexed on my head, urging me on.

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"Oh, Sasha. That's so nice. You're such a good little cock sucker." He rocked his hips against my movements, pushing more and more into my mouth.

Beaming under his praise, I opened wide to accept his thrusts.

"Look at me, Sasha," he commanded.

My eyes snapped open to meet his. His chest heaved with heavy panting breaths and his eyes were a dark amber. Tilting my head back so my neck was extended, he rocked his hips. He held my head in place as he fucked my mouth until he finally slid down my throat. My hands flew up to and gripped his thighs for purchase.

"Good girl. Fuck, that's it, Sasha. So good at sucking cock."

I felt him throb and jerk on my tongue, his length growing impossibly harder and bigger. My eyes watered. Silently, I begged him to give me what I wanted. What I needed.

"Are you ready, Sasha?" he groaned.

I was. More than ready. I opened my mouth and reached up to squeeze his balls. His fingers gripped my hair and held me in place as he gave three more hard thrusts, burying my nose in his wiry hair. His cock twitched before flooding my mouth with his salty seed. I swallowed it down, loving the thick bittersweet savory flavor of it running over my tongue and down my throat. Over and over again, he spurted until I couldn't swallow quickly enough. Dribbles of his cum fell past the corners of my lips, running down my chin and dribbling onto my breasts.

He pulled out of my mouth with a grunt. Running my thumb across my chin and breasts, I licked my finger clean, not wanting a single drop of him to go to waste.

Releasing me, he stepped back, his chest rising and falling rapidly. To my surprise, he was still hard.

"I'm not done with you yet. All of you belongs to me, remember? And I'm going to claim every part that's mine. On the bed, now."

I scrambled up onto the bed on my hands and knees. The bed dipped as Denver kneeled behind me. I felt the brush of his thighs and the wet prod of his cock on my behind. Instinctively, I dropped to my elbows, arching my back and offering my pussy to him.

Rough hands gripped my hips, fingers biting down hard enough to leave bruises. The pain only added to my arousal. A fresh flood of moisture flowed from my core.

He pulled me back until he pressed at my entrance.

"Yes," I hissed. "Do it."

Denver pushed into me with one solid motion. I cried out as he stretched my channel to the limit. Shit, how was he going to fit?

With another thrust, he drove deep, to the point of nudging the mouth of my womb.

I let out a cry and bit down on the sheets. He pounded into me with a brutal pace.

Soon, the stinging pain turned into a throbbing pleasurable pressure. My walls were so tightly stretched around him that I could feel every vein and ridge of his shaft rubbing against me. Denver twisted his hips as he pumped into me, leaving no inch of

my sex untouched.

He reached around and at the first touch of his finger on my clit, I exploded. My orgasm rocked through me, lighting every limb on fire. I shook and spasmed as I rode the waves of ecstasy. Each jolt of pleasure made my channel clamp down on his invading shaft.

Denver groaned holding my hips in place as he rode me until the shockwaves of pleasure turned into weak flutters. I let out a whimper as his teasing fingers traced my stretched folds and circled around my sensitive nub.

"Denver, I can't," I whimpered.

"Shh, you can. Trust me," he murmured. He avoided touching my clit and instead gathered more of my dew before traveling up to my pucker. He pressed down against my back hole, making my core squeeze around him in surprise. He kept teasing me like that, with a throbbing press of his finger against my other entrance timed with each thrust of his cock.

Soon, I churned my hips against him, pushing my bottom against his prodding digit for more.

"Are you ready for me to give you pleasure here too?"

"Please," I hissed. I was so tense with anticipation that I was ready to explode like a coiled spring.

When he finally pushed his finger in past my tight sphincter, I cried out at the exquisite burning stretch of having him in both channels. He fucked me relentlessly in both ends, twisting his hips and fingers. Then he added another finger, until finally, he was fucking me with his thick cock and three fingers.

The pressure was intense, and there was some discomfort, but it felt so good. Pleasure built up into a searing heat and then I felt it. His cock expanded in a bulge that stretched my entrance until neither of us could move. Denver let out a roar, pulling my head to the side. His teeth clamped onto my neck and bit down. I exploded, bursting apart into a million shards of sensation. White light filled my eyes as I came, cresting on a wave of bliss.

"Mine," he growled into my ear. He filled me with his seed, flooding my sex. My muscles rippled as I rode out my orgasm, milking him until we were both spent. Finally, I shuddered and collapsed in a limp pile.

Denver pulled out and I heard him rummaging in the bathroom as well as the sound of running water.

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He came back and eased me onto my back. His touch was gentle as he stroked the warm washcloth along my folds, cleaning me of our spendings. I sighed under his care.

"Sasha," he murmured against my skin, his voice a low, soft growl that filled me with warm happiness. I had done that, turned the formidable jaded CEO into a purring kitten. "You're everything."

After I was no longer sticky, we climbed under the covers. We snuggled, our limbs entwined. I rested my head on his chest, listening to the sound of his heartbeat. His fingers traced lazy patterns on my back.

Tonight, we had each other and that was enough.

Chapter 7

DENVER

I woke up to the weight of Sasha's body curled against mine, her warmth seeping into my skin like a balm, the faint scent of her filling my nose. Her head rested on my chest, her breath steady and soft, her arm draped loosely over my torso. For a moment, I just lay there, soaking in the quiet intimacy of the moment. Last night had been amazing. It was everything I hadn't realized I needed in my life until now. I pressed a kiss to the top of her head, my chest tightening with something I hadn't allowed myself to feel in years. Not since I'd learned to keep the world at arm's length.

Sasha stirred, her eyelashes fluttering against my skin as she woke. She blinked up at me, her hazel eyes still hazy with sleep, and a soft smile tugged at her lips. "Morning," she murmured, her voice soft and rough around the edges.

"Morning," I replied, brushing a strand of hair from her face. My fingers lingered against her cheek, tracing the curve of her jaw. She was breathtaking, not just in the way she looked, but in the way she made me feel. Raw. Exposed. Alive. "Sleep okay?"

She nodded, her cheek nuzzling into my hand. "Better than I have in weeks," she admitted, her voice still heavy with sleep. But then her expression shifted, her brow furrowing slightly as she studied me. "You're thinking too hard again. I can hear it."

I let out a low chuckle, though it didn't quite reach my eyes. "Can't help it. Last night, it changed things."

Her gaze softened, and she propped herself up on one elbow, the sheets slipping down to reveal the curve of her shoulder. "Yeah," she agreed, her voice quiet but steady. "It does."

I hesitated, my thumb brushed over her cheekbone, and I searched her eyes, trying to find the words I'd never been good at saying. "Are you okay? With this? With us?"

She bit her lower lip, her gaze drifting to the window before returning to mine. "I don't know, Denver. I've never felt like this before, and it's a lot. But I believe in us."

Relief washed over me, though it was tempered by an old, familiar ache. I'd never been good at vulnerability, at letting someone in. But with Sasha, it felt different. Necessary. "Me neither," I admitted, my voice rough. "But I need you to know something. Last night wasn't just a moment for me. You're it for me, Sasha. Forever."

Her breath hitched, and for a moment, she just stared at me, her eyes searching mine as if trying to find the truth in my words. Then, without a word, she leaned in, pressing her lips to mine in a kiss that was soft, lingering, and full of promise. When she pulled back, her forehead rested against mine, her breath warm against my skin. "You're it for me too, Denver," she whispered, her voice trembling with emotion.

We stayed like that for a while, wrapped in each other's warmth, until the demands of the day forced us to move. I managed to convince her to shower with me all in the name of conserving water. After we were both as wrinkled as prunes, we got dressed and settled into the soft domesticity of our morning routine.

As we stood in the kitchen, I couldn't help but watch her. Sasha was quiet as she sipped her coffee, her fingers wrapped tightly around her mug as she stared into the distance. I could practically see the gears turning in her head, and I knew what she was thinking before she even spoke.

"Sasha," I said softly, breaking the silence. "Talk to me."

She turned to look at me, her expression conflicted. "We can't keep hiding here, Denver," she said finally, her voice steady but tinged with frustration. "We both have jobs. Lives. I can't just let this stalker dictate everything."

I clenched my jaw, my wolf's instincts roaring to the surface. "Sasha, it's not safe. I'm not risking your safety for anything."

She set her coffee cup down with a little more force than necessary, her eyes flashing. "I get that, Denver. But I can't live like this. We're like prisoners in a gilded cage. I need to go back to work. I need to feel like I'm in control of my own life again. And you need to show up at the office before the board replaces you."

The urge to argue was strong, but I forced myself to take a breath. She was right. I

couldn't keep her locked away, no matter how much I wanted to protect her. "Okay," I said finally, my voice tight. "But we're doing this my way. Increased security. I'm not taking any chances."

She nodded, her expression softening. "Thank you," she murmured, her hand reaching out to brush against mine. The touch was brief, but it sent a jolt of warmth through me, a reminder of everything I was fighting for.

When we arrived at the office, the whispers started the moment we stepped off the elevator. I could feel the weight of everyone's eyes on us, but I kept my focus on Sasha, my hand resting protectively on the small of her back as we made our way to the design studio.

From her desk, Margot glared at the two of us like she wanted to stab us right then and there. We didn't get far before Victoria cornered us, her expression as sharp and calculating as ever.

"Denver," she said, her tone clipped. "The board is waiting for you."

I glanced at Sasha, who gave me a small nod before heading to her desk. I followed Victoria into the boardroom, where every member who was a significant stakeholder was already waiting. I could feel their judgmental gazes boring into me.

Victoria wasted no time. "What's going on with you and Sasha Bennett? First, you expect us to believe she's your girlfriend, and now you've suddenly disappeared for an entire week during the run-up to Fashion Week. Do you have any idea how this looks? There is chaos in the design department because of the whispers about your romance with a subordinate."

I clenched my jaw, my patience wearing thin. "My personal life is none of your business, Victoria."

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She arched a brow, her tone as cold as ice. "It is our business when it affects the company. Your little love affair is causing a distraction, and we cannot afford to have you divide your priorities to protect your lover. The stock price has already dropped heavily and our market cap has fallen below \$500 billion. You are absolutely failing to prove your stability and maturity as CEO of this company."

I took a step forward, my voice low and dangerous. "Sasha is one of the most talented designers this company has ever seen. She deserves to be recognized for her work on the new American line. If you have a problem with that, then perhaps this company deserves to go the way of the dinosaurs."

The room fell silent. Margot cleared her throat. "In light of the drop in our stock price, we, the board of directors, demand that you accelerate the launch of the new American line and name a lead designer. You have to stabilize the stock price and reassure the markets. If you fail, your position as CEO will be in jeopardy."

I nodded reluctantly, realizing I didn't have a choice. "Understood. I'll make the announcement at the upcoming press conference."

"That's all we need to hear," Maxwell said with a sharp nod. "Make it happen, Denver. And keep your personal life in check."

I stormed out of the boardroom, my mind racing. Sasha was still at her desk, and I couldn't go to her without creating more rumors at the office. While I was protected from the venomous wagging tongues, Sasha was not established enough in her career to survive the blow to her reputation. With a growl, I went to my office and slammed the door behind me. What I needed most right now was the comfort of my mate.

I paced the length of the room, stopped, pulled out my phone, and fired off a text to Sasha.

Me: "I have good news and bad news."

Sasha: "Give me the good, I guess?"

Me: "It's one and the same. The board wants me to accelerate the launch of the new American line and name a lead designer at the press conference next week. Your chance to shine has come sooner than we planned."

There was a pause. My fingers twitched as I waited for her reply.

Sasha: "That's a lot of pressure. And so soon."

Me: "Yeah. And with your stalker still out there, I don't like the idea of putting you in the spotlight like this."

Sasha: "Denver, I can handle it. I need to handle it. I'm not going to let someone's sick obsession control my life. And you can't let this board dictate what you can or can't do."

Me: "You're right."

Sasha: "I'm always right."

I chuckled and poured myself a drink. My mate was full of surprises.

Later that evening, as we were walking from the office to my car, Sasha's phone buzzed. She froze when she saw the message, her face pale. I glanced over her shoulder, and my blood ran cold. The text was from an unknown number, but the

words made it clear who the message was from.

"I'm always watching. You can't hide from me."

Sasha's hands trembled as she clutched her phone. I wrapped an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close. "We're going to figure this out," I promised, my voice low and fierce. "I'm not letting anyone hurt you."

We went home and had a quiet dinner. It had been an exhausting day and neither of us was in the mood to talk much. As we lay in bed, Sasha turned to me, her eyes searching mine. "Denver, I'm scared," she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper. "Not just of the stalker. I'm scared of screwing things up. Of costing you your position."

My heart ached at the vulnerability in her voice. "Don't worry about me," I said, my voice firm. "You're going to launch this company to new heights. I know it. I've never been as confident in anything as I am in you, Sasha."

Her eyes watered. I continued. "You are the most talented and authentic person I have ever met. I am honored that you have trusted me to be a part of your life. I love you, Sasha Bennett and you will never be rid of me."

She blinked rapidly to clear her eyes and smiled. Her face lit up with joy, erasing the lines of anxiety. "I love you too, Denver."

We held each other close, the world outside fading away. But even as I held her, I couldn't shake the feeling that the storm was far from over.

Chapter 8

SASHA

The lights of the press conference were blinding, the chatter of the media a dull roar in my ears as I stood beside Denver on the stage.

Cameras and microphones swarmed around us in a whirlwind as reporters lobbed relentless questions at us.

My heart was racing, but I kept my head high, my smile steady. Beside me, I could feel the tension rolling off of Denver in waves. Despite his calm and measured voice, his muscles were coiled tight, and I noticed the tick in his jaw as he clenched his teeth in between answering inquiries about the sudden accelerated launch of the American line at XMGH.

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Denver shot me a glance out of the corner of his eye. I smiled and gave him an encouraging nod. Despite my nerves and flip-flopping stomach, this was our moment and I wasn't going to let him down.

He turned to me, his blue eyes meeting mine for a brief moment before he continued. "And I am proud to introduce the lead designer of this groundbreaking new collection, Sasha Bennett."

The applause was thunderous, but all I could focus on was the way Denver looked at me.

There was pride in his eyes and something deeper that made my heart swell. I stepped forward to the mic, feeling the weight of the moment settle on my shoulders.

"Thank you," I began, my voice steady despite the butterflies in my stomach. "It's an honor to lead this project, and I'm incredibly excited to bring this vision to life. My goal is to bridge the gap between modernity and classic design. In creating our new ready-to-wear line, silhouettes, and footwear, I will push and test boundaries all while staying true to the XMGH DNA. Stay tuned for exciting changes up ahead. This is just the beginning."

"I have a lot of confidence in Ms. Bennett to bring a blend of innovation to XMGH while preserving our heritage. We want the world to know that our company is ready to move with the times, that we are not stuck in the past."

The Q&A session that followed was a blur of questions about the collection, my design process, and my experience.

When the questions finally died off, I handed the microphone back to Denver. "Thank you all for your time. We're excited to bring this new line to the world and to continue pushing the boundaries of design at XMGH."

As the room began to empty, I couldn't shake the feeling that someone was watching me. I scanned the crowd, but nothing seemed out of place until my gaze landed on a figure standing in the shadows near the emergency exit. It was too dark to make out who it was besides the fact that it was a man with a medium build.

Denver turned to me, his hand brushing mine in a reassuring gesture before it instinctively found its home on the small of my back. "You did great," he murmured. Though I wanted to give him a hug and a kiss, we had to keep things professional until we were back home at the penthouse.

A warm feeling spread through my body at the thought of his place being home.

I glanced up at him and gave him a relieved smile. "I hope it was enough."

The crowd was dissipating, and only a few stragglers stayed behind in the auditorium to mingle.

"It was," he assured me. "Let's get out of here."

We headed for the parking garage, the weight of the day pressing down on me. The stalker's presence was a constant shadow, and I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off.

Denver's arm tightened around my waist, pulling me close.

"What's wrong?" My heart skipped a beat and the hairs on my arms stood on end. Something wasn't right. I looked all around the dimly lit parking structure, but I didn't

see anything out of place.

Denver stood still as his eyes scanned the room. He reminded me of a professional soldier at this moment, on guard and ready to kill.

"Stay close to me," he whispered.

As we approached the car, I noticed a figure lurking in the shadows. My instincts screamed a warning. Before I could yell out, Denver pushed me aside, shielding me with his body.

"Denver--"

"Stay behind me," he growled.

He dashed out from behind a concrete column so quickly I didn't have time to react, but Denver did. I caught a glimpse and saw that it was Ethan. His face was twisted with rage, his eyes wide and frantic as it darted between Denver and me.

"Sasha!" His voice was desperate, dried spittle gathered at the corners of his mouth like a rabid animal. "You promised. I was the only one who understood your designs. How could you just replace me?"

"What are you talking about?" My voice trembled as I tried to make sense of his words.

"We talked every night about your designs. I thought we had a special connection, but you were just leading me on this whole time."

I gasped. He was the stalker, I realized. The whole time that I thought I was sharing my work anonymously online with my followers, I had one following me in real life.

"Enough!" Denver barked. "Back off now, Ethan. She wants nothing to do with you."

"You can't leave with him. I won't let you!" His voice grew desperate, the ravings of a lunatic. Ethan gestured wildly. Even with Denver's body forming a barrier between us, I caught the metallic gleam of the knife he waved in the air.

"Stop, before I put you down!" Denver commanded.

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But Ethan wasn't deterred. He lunged forward, his movements erratic and unpredictable. Denver let out a low rumbling snarl and pushed me out of the way.

I scrambled behind a parked car and watched as Ethan collided with Denver. The impact knocked him off of balance, but Denver was much bigger and muscular compared to Ethan's wiry frame. With a supernaturally quick motion, Denver grabbed Ethan by the collar and slammed him against a concrete column with enough force to knock the wind out of him. He took advantage of the moment as Ethan was stunned and wrenched the knife from his hand, tossing it away.

"You are not going anywhere near her." Denver's words were so garbled. It didn't even sound like they were spoken by a human.

Ethan struggled against Denver's grip. His face distorted with rage. "She's mine!" He was beyond reason, twisting and thrashing frantically like a wild animal. To my surprise, he squirmed free from Denver's grip and dashed for the discarded knife.

A loud booming roar echoed around the parking structure, causing the entire building to shake. I sucked in a breath and stared wide-eyed shock as Denver's body began to change. Muscles grew and rippled, tearing through the fabric of his suit. Dark fur sprouted from his skin, covering the tanned smooth surface until it was as thick as an animal pelt. He dropped onto his hands and knees as his fingers twisted and turned into claws. Denver turned his head toward me, and I gasped at the primal beast with blue eyes that stared at me. He was a wolf.

I had known that wolf shifters ran Huntington Harbor, but I never suspected that Denver was one of them.

Ethan's eyes widened with terror, the knife hanging limply from his hand as he stumbled back. "What the fuck are you?" he stammered.

The wolf let out a deafening snarl and lunged at him. Ethan screamed, bringing his arm up and slashing the knife in the air. His efforts to fend off the wolf's attack were useless.

With one swipe of his claws, Ethan fell to the ground in a bloody pile. I watched in frozen awe, my heart pounding as the gruesome scene unfolded. Denver pounced on his prey, pinning Ethan in place and landing several strikes with his claws.

Ethan's whimpers grew weaker until they finally stopped. Oh my god, Denver killed him, I realized.

"Denver!" I cried out. "You have to stop."

The wolf turned to me and snarled. Droplets of blood decorated his face like a mask made of rubies.

Despite his fearsome appearance, I was not afraid. No, underneath the form of the beast was the man whom I loved.

The wolf let out a low growl, turning away from me and back to Ethan.

"Please, he's dead," I pleaded.

Placing a hand on his fur-covered back, I swallowed the sick that threatened to come up my throat at the blood surrounding us. "I know you're still in there."

The wolf looked up at me again, his piercing blue eyes locking with mine. For a moment, I doubted myself. Who was in control right now, Denver or the beast? If I

was wrong, then the wolf was going to kill me.

For a moment, we were both paralyzed. Then, I felt him tremble beneath my palm. Slowly, the wolf began to shift, the giant animal shrinking and elongating back into human form. Like a magic trick, Denver stood in front of me once again.

"Denver," I whispered. I placed a hand on his bare chest.

He flinched and looked away from me. His expression was filled with guilt and to my surprise, shame. "Sasha, you shouldn't be around me."

I cut him off, throwing myself into his arms and hugging him tightly. "I don't care that you're a wolf," I cried into his chest. "You saved us."

He hesitated before wrapping his arms around my shoulders. "I thought I was going to lose you. I didn't want you to see me as a monster." His voice broke with emotion.

I pulled back slightly and cupped his face with my hands. "Denver, you're not a monster. You're still you and I love you in any form."

"I love you too, Sasha. I will always protect you. Always."

Our lips met in a kiss that was fierce and desperate. When we finally pulled apart, I rested my forehead against his, my heart still racing but my mind clearer than ever.

"Let's go home," I whispered.

He nodded, his eyes softening as he looked at me. "Home."

Chapter 9

DENVER

The warm water of the bathtub lapped gently against my skin, but it did little to soothe the storm raging inside me. I leaned back and rested my head against the porcelain edge of the tub, the coolness of the ceramic a stark contrast to the heat surrounding me. Closing my eyes, I tried to steady my breathing, as if I could breathe away the images that haunted me.

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The heady scent of rosemary and eucalyptus from the bath oils drifted into the air, mingling with the thick steam rising and wrapping around us. It was both reassuring and suffocating.

Across the tub, Sasha sat with her legs tangled with mine. In this brief moment of normalcy, she became my anchor in a day that had been anything but peaceful.

Sasha ran her foot against my thigh. Her touch brought me out of the dark thoughts swirling in my head, but it wasn't enough to chase away the guilt gnawing at my chest like a relentless beast, its teeth sinking deeper with each flashback of that fateful encounter. I had killed a man. To make matters worse, Sasha had witnessed the transformation, and had seen me revel in the raw bloodthirsty violence that both scared and thrilled me.

I caught her foot in my hands, kneading the arch softly, searching for solace in her warm flesh. She sighed and sank deeper into the water.

"I can hear you thinking," she said softly, her voice cutting through the silence like a knife. Her heavily lidded eyes opened a sliver and glanced at me. Despite my fears, her eyes were soft and full of understanding. There wasn't any of the fear or disgust I had expected and braced myself for.

She loved me. She really fucking loved me unconditionally, even though I didn't deserve it.

"How can you look at me like that?" I asked. "After what you saw?"

She sat up and shifted across the tub until she was sitting on my thighs. The water rippled around us, some of it sloshing over the edge onto the tile floor. Her fingers traced a pattern on my chest over my heart, their soft touch igniting a flicker of hope in the coldness that had settled there.

"Because I see through you, Denver. Not just the wolf, but the man you are underneath. The man who protected me. That's who you are. That's who I trust."

Her words were a soothing balm, yet they stung, forcing me to confront my inner turmoil. I shook my head, denial mixing with helplessness. "I'm dangerous, Sasha. You saw what I was capable of. What if I lose control the next time? What if I hurt you?"

"You wouldn't," she said firmly, her hand reaching up to cup my cheek. Her palm was a warm balm against my skin. "You're not a monster, Denver. You're my mate. And I trust you with my life."

Her words though soft, hit me like a punch to the gut. I leaned into her touch and kissed her palm.

I closed my eyes, inhaling deeply, trying to steady my racing heart. I had spent far too long constructing walls around my heart, convinced that isolation was a necessary shield against the chaos I'd become. Now, here she was, both a ray of light and an unsettling force, dismantling the very defenses I built to keep her out. My breath hitched, and I fought against the tears that threatened to spill.

Despite my efforts, Sasha had slipped past all the defenses I had put up around my heart. Now she was here, all around me, inside of me. Even when I was falling apart, she was here holding me together.

"I've spent my whole life trying to control the wolf," I admitted, my voice barely

above a whisper. Memories of my father's stern face loomed large, echoing in my mind. I could almost hear his voice admonishing me in that deep, unforgiving tone.

"An alpha wolf is strong, but strength without control is nothing."

"My father always told me that being an alpha meant being responsible. I thought that meant keeping everyone at a distance. But you make me want to be more."

She smiled, her thumb brushing against my cheek. "You already are, Denver. You've always been."

We stayed like that for a while, the silence between us comfortable and full of silent understanding. But eventually, the water grew cold and the weight of the day caught up with us. We climbed out of the tub, wrapping ourselves in plush robes, and retreated to the living room.

Sasha nestled on the couch, her delicate form curling into a comfortable position as she flicked on the television while I went to the office to grab my laptop. I came back out and stood stock still at a giant image of Sasha and myself on the screen. Not only had the news channel gotten wind of Ethan's death, but they also discovered my relationship with Sasha. It was all they could talk about. Over and over, our images flashed on the screen as the news show hosts dissected the details of our personal lives. All of the work we did for the press conference was for nothing. The gossip overshadowed everything.

A photograph of Ethan at the company charity auction popped up. My mind flashed back to the attack. The red rage that filled my vision as he threatened Sasha, the metallic tang of his blood in my nose, the warm sticky blood that coated my claws. I wished that I could go back and uncross that line.

I sat down next to Sasha who curled up against me, resting her head on my shoulder.

She turned the television off, but the peaceful moment was short-lived. My phone rang and I grimaced at the name that popped up on the screen. It was Victoria.

"We need to talk, now," Victoria said, skipping any social niceties. "You are expected at a video conference with the board in five minutes." The call ended as abruptly as it started.

I gave Sasha an apologetic look.

She squeezed my hand. "I'll be right here."

With my mate by my side, I braced myself for the inquisition I was about to face as I opened the laptop and logged into the video conference call. Every member of the board was there, their faces staring sternly back at me from the split windows on my screen.

I clenched my jaw, my nerves on edge as I prepared for confrontation.

Victoria lead the attack. "Denver, you were warned before about the damage your personal scandals have caused the company. "The fact that you're involved in a relationship with a subordinate was already a scandal, but now, with the death of our photographer, the board is questioning your ability to lead."

I took a deep breath, squeezing my hands into fists. The urge to shift and snap my fangs at her was overwhelming. But Sasha's warm hands on top of mine grounded me. I held back the rage that simmered inside of me, forcing myself to remain calm. For her.

"I understand the board's concerns, but I assure you, the attack was not caused by anything of my doing. Ethan attacked first. I only acted in self-defense."

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Victoria pursed her lips. "Be that as it may, the optics are terrible. XMGH's stock has plummeted to a two-year low, and the media is having a field day with this. You need to take decisive action to control the damage."

"I agree," I said. "The only way to get rid of bad press is to drown it out with good press of our making. Sasha's leadership on the American line is going to take us to new heights. We need to flood the internet and traditional media with exciting news about what's coming up. At the same time, I will blitz the media with public appearances by going on a positive press tour to every showbiz and fashion event. Add in some publicized charity work and volunteering opportunities and it should be enough to rehabilitate our image."

Victoria's eyes flashed with annoyance, but she didn't argue. The other board members nodded begrudgingly.

"Very well," she said finally. "But know this, Denver. The board is watching you very closely. One more misstep and your position as CEO will be over."

I didn't respond as the conference call ended. The screen went black, leaving the room in silence. My heart was pounding, and I could feel the anger and frustration bubbling up inside me.

"Do you think your plan will work?" Sasha asked, her voice soft and full of concern.

I nodded, pulling her into my arms and holding her close. "It's a long shot, but if anybody could make it work, it's us."

She looked up at me, her eyes searching mine. "We'll get through this, Denver."

My heart swelled with love for this woman who had stood by me through everything. I pressed a kiss to her forehead.

But even as I held her, I couldn't shake the feeling that this wasn't over. Not by a long shot.

Chapter 10

SASHA

The flashing cameras and the roar of voices calling my name had become a familiar backdrop over the past few weeks. I stood next to Denver on the red carpet, his hand resting reassuringly on the small of my back as we posed for the photographers. The paparazzi were relentless, shouting questions about the launch of my new line, our relationship, and Denver's plans for XMGH Brands.

"Sasha! Over here!" a photographer yelled. I turned, smiling as the camera clicked rapidly. Denver's deep voice rumbled in my ear, low enough for only me to hear. "You're a natural at this."

I glanced up at him, my smile widening. "I'm just following your lead, Mr. Roberts."

He smirked, his piercing blue eyes softening as they met mine. "You're doing better than I ever could. You're stealing the show, as usual."

The Fashion for a Cause event was the last appearance in Denver's multi-month press tour. It had been grueling, but his strategy to bombard the media circuit with positive press for the company was working. The frenzy had shifted from the scandal surrounding Ethan's death to the debut of my line.

Once news broke about my appointment as lead designer, my social media account went viral. Instead of my posts going into what seemed like a black hole, I now had millions of followers who praised my designs for their freshness and mix of traditional and futuristic elements. Every day, I made sure to post videos featuring behind-the-scenes peeks at what went on in our design studio. Denver's cameos in my videos had only added to the hype, with fans swooning over our chemistry and labeling us the "power couple" of the fashion world.

But the spotlight wasn't easy. The pressure was intense, and the scrutiny was relentless. Every move I made was analyzed and every word I said was dissected. I'd never been one to crave attention, and the sudden fame was overwhelming.

Only Denver's strong and stoic presence by my side made it possible for me to keep going. His unwavering support gave me the strength to stay the course and continue with our strategy. He'd become my anchor, grounding me when the world felt like it was spinning out of control.

The event dragged on until well after midnight. Thankfully, it was a Saturday and we had one more day before we had to head back to the office. As soon as we returned to the penthouse, I kicked off my heels, sighing in relief as my feet hit the plush rug in the living room. Denver followed me, loosening his tie with one hand.

"You were incredible tonight," he said. His voice was soft and low.

I turned to him and smiled at the way he looked at me like I hung the moon. "You're just saying that because you're biased."

He stepped closer, his gaze intense. "I'm saying it because it's true. You're amazing, Sasha. And I'm lucky to have you by my side."

Through all the scandals, stalkers, and hostile boardroom meetings, Denver never

failed to make me feel seen, cherished, and unstoppable. His strong arms wrapped around me, pulling me close, and I melted into his embrace, feeling the weight of the world dissolve under his touch. He was my safe harbor, my constant in the chaos, and in his arms, I found not just love, but the confidence to be who I was always meant to be.

My breath caught in my throat as he cupped my cheek, and pressed his lips gently but insistently against mine. I let out a soft moan, his touch sending hot bolts of desire through me. We tumbled toward the bedroom, each fighting to outdo the other in removing as many items of clothing as possible. Denver's love and kisses drove away all thoughts of business and publicity for the rest of the night.

The next morning, we woke up to the news that my collection of ready-to-wear apparel for the American market had sold out within hours of its launch. The success was surreal, and the flood of congratulatory messages on my phone was overwhelming. Denver sat beside me on the bed, scrolling through the headlines on his tablet.

"Looks like you're the talk of the town," he said, a hint of pride in his voice.

I leaned into him, resting my head on his shoulder. "We did it, Denver. We actually did it."

He wrapped his arm around me, pulling me closer. "This is just the beginning, Sasha. With your potential, I can see you starting your own brand. You're going to outgrow XMGH, and I can't wait to be by your side when you do it."

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His words filled me with hope, and for the first time in a long time, I let myself believe it.

But even as we celebrated, the weight of the board's decision loomed over us. Denver's position as CEO was still on shaky ground. We succeeded in pushing back the torrent of negative press, but XMGH was a conservative brand at its core. Our strategy had dragged the company into the modern age of social media and celebrity news. We had no idea how the board was going to react to this new direction.

That afternoon, Denver received a call summoning him to a board meeting. He left the penthouse with a grim expression, and I felt a pang of anxiety settle in my chest.

I spent the next few hours pacing the living room, my mind racing with worst-case scenarios. When Denver finally returned, his face was unreadable.

"Well?" I asked, my voice trembling slightly.

He crossed the room in a few long strides, pulling me into his arms. "They voted to keep me as CEO," he said, his voice steady but tinged with relief.

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding, my heart swelling with pride. "You did it, Denver."

He shook his head, his arms tightening around me. "We did it, Sasha. None of this would've been possible without you."

Later that night, we sat on the balcony, overlooking the forested hills below. Denver's

arm was draped around my shoulders, and I leaned into him, savoring the peaceful moment.

It was quiet, the bustling sounds of the city were far away, and only the quiet song of chirping crickets filled the air. The balcony was lit up with a dozen glass votive candles.

"Sasha," he said with a deep breath. "I know we started this as an agreement, a fake relationship for PR, but what I feel for you has evolved into something much more, something real. I love you. More than anything."

My heart raced at the sincerity in his gaze, his blue eyes sparkling from the flickering candlelight around us. It was the first time that I had seen such vulnerability on his face. It took my breath away.

I turned to him. "I love you too, Denver. So much."

He cupped my face in his hands, his gaze searching mine. "Then let's make this official."

Before I could respond, Denver dropped to one knee, his piercing blue eyes locked onto mine.

As he reached into his pocket, I felt the flood of tears filling my eyes. My heart skipped so fast it felt like it was going to burst from my chest. He pulled out a small velvet box and opened it to reveal a stunning ring nestled within. My breath caught in my throat. A delicate band of crisscrossing white gold decorated with small diamonds that flanked a larger diamond in the center.

"Sasha Bennett," he began. His voice started steady but soon quivered with emotion. "You've turned my world upside down in the best way possible. I thought I was fine

being a lone wolf, but you showed me that life is so much better as a team. You are not only my mate, but my partner, and guiding star. You've put color into my life, filled it with laughter, and shown me what it means to care for someone beyond just myself. Will you marry me?"

His gaze held mine like a lifeline, the seconds between us stretching into eternity.

My vision blurred as I nodded frantically, my voice trembling. "Yes! Yes, of course, I'll marry you, Denver."

He slid the ring onto my finger, and I couldn't help but admire how perfectly it fit. It was as if it had always been meant to be there.

Denver stood, his hands cradled my face, his thumbs brushing away the tears that had slipped down my cheeks. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me with a passion that set my soul on fire. His lips moved against mine with a hunger that mirrored my own, and I clung to him, pouring all my love and gratitude into the kiss. When we finally pulled apart, we were both breathless, our foreheads resting together.

"I never thought I'd find someone like you," Denver murmured, his voice thick with emotion. "You've made me believe in something I thought was impossible, that I could have a real, lasting love. A family. A future."

We'd been through hell and back, but we'd come out stronger on the other side. What had started out as a ruse turned into something real and authentic. And as I looked over at Denver, his eyes full of love and promise, I knew that no matter what the future held, we'd face it as partners.

This was our new beginning.

Epilogue

SASHA

EIGHT MONTHS LATER

The backstage area was a whirlwind of activity. Models darted like gazelles, their heels clicking sharply against the polished concrete floor as they rushed to change into the final pieces of the collection. Their stylists followed them, adjusting their outfits like buzzing hummingbirds. The air was heavy with the mingling scents of hairspray, sweat, and the faint citrus tang of the essential oils I'd diffused earlier to calm everyone's nerves. My pulse thrummed in my ears, a steady rhythm that mirrored the pounding applause echoing from the runway beyond the thick velvet curtains. The final model had just stepped off the stage, her sequined gown shimmering under the lights like liquid gold. The applause was deafening, a roaring tidal wave of approval that washed over me, leaving me breathless.

I exhaled sharply, the air leaving my lungs in a rush. My knees threatened to buckle beneath me, but I steadied myself, pressing a hand to my chest as if to keep my heart from leaping out. Even after several seasons of presenting my work on the runway, I was still a wreck every time. It was over. We'd done it. The XMGH spring collection runway show had been a resounding success. The show was a triumph. My vision and designs had just captivated an audience of the most critical eyes in the fashion industry.

I could still see the glint of the runway lights reflecting off the intricate beadwork of the gowns, the way the fabrics had flowed with each step, as if alive. The collection had been a gamble, a fusion of sharp architectural lines and soft, ethereal textures that had pushed the boundaries of what XMGH was known for. And it had paid off.

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The audience applauded again, and I joined my team to take the runway in a final bow. Once I came backstage, the noise around me began to blur, the excited chatter of the team and the rustle of fabric fading into the background as I allowed myself a moment to breathe. My body ached with exhaustion, but it was a sweet ache, the kind that came from pouring your soul into something and seeing it come to life.

Denver stood off to the side, his arms crossed over his chest as he watched the chaos with his usual grumpy demeanor. But there was a softness in his eyes, a quiet pride that made my heart swell. He stood a few feet away, leaning against a rack of garments with his arms crossed, his presence a quiet storm in the chaos. His tailored suit was perfectly fitted, the deep charcoal fabric catching the dim backstage lights and accentuating the broad lines of his shoulders. His dark ebony hair was slightly disheveled as if he'd been running his hands through it, and his piercing blue eyes burned with an intensity that made my stomach flip. He was watching me, his gaze steady and unflinching, and I felt the weight of it like a physical touch, anchoring me in the moment.

Joining the applause from the other side of the velvet curtain, he clapped his hands, his lips tugging into a smile. He'd been my rock through it all, my partner in every sense of the word.

"Sasha." His eyes gleamed with a mix of pride and something else I couldn't quite place.

He pushed off the rack and took a step toward me, his movements deliberate and predatory, yet there was a softness in his expression that made my heart swell. "You were incredible," he said. "The collection, the show, you've outdone yourself."

Denver's gaze softened, and he reached out to gently brush a strand of hair from my face. "You deserve this, Sasha. Every bit of it." His thumb lingered on my cheek, and for a moment, time seemed to stand still.

I felt the weight of his pride settle over me like a warm blanket.

His touch was warm and soothing, but it also made the secret I'd been holding onto feel impossibly heavier pressing against my chest like a second heartbeat. My hands instinctively settled over my still-flat stomach, and I took a deep breath, the scent of his cologne mingling with the faint tang of my own nervous sweat.

"Denver," I hesitated, searching for the right words. "This collection is going to be my last big project for a while."

His brow furrowed, confusion flickering across his face. "What do you mean? You're not leaving XMGH, are you?"

I shook my head, a nervous laugh escaping me. "No, no, nothing like that." I paused for a moment, searching for the right words. "It's just that I've got something else to focus on now. Something kind of unexpected."

His eyes narrowed slightly, and I could see the gears turning in his head. "Sasha," he said carefully. "What's going on?"

I took another deep breath, my heart racing. "I'm pregnant," I blurted out, the words tumbling from my lips before I could second-guess myself.

For a moment, Denver just stared at me, his expression unreadable. The silence stretched between us, thick and heavy, and my stomach churned with a mix of anxiety and anticipation.

The noise backstage seemed to fade into the background, leaving us in a cocoon of

silence. My stomach churned with a mix of anxiety and anticipation. I hadn't planned to tell him like this, but the moment had felt right, or as right as it could get in the middle of a post-show frenzy.

Then, slowly, a smile spread across his face. His entire being seemed to light up. It was the kind of smile I rarely saw from him, one that made him look almost boyish, despite the sharp edges of his closed-off and grumpy demeanor. His hands came up to cup my face.

"You're serious?" he asked, his voice rough with emotion.

I nodded, my own smile breaking through despite the nerves. "Dead serious. I found out last week, but I wanted to wait until after the show to tell you. I didn't want it to distract you, or myself, from pulling this off."

Denver's thumb traced the curve of my cheek, his eyes searching mine as if trying to make sure this wasn't some elaborate dream. Then, without warning, he let out a joyous cry and pulled me into his arms.

I could feel the steady beat of his heart against my chest, and for a moment, the world outside didn't exist. It was just Denver, me, and the tiny life growing inside me.

He pulled back slightly, his voice trailing off as if he couldn't find the words. Then he shook his head, a low, almost disbelieving laugh escaping him. "This is everything, Sasha. Everything."

My chest tightened, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes as I clung to him. I'd been so nervous about his reaction, worried he might feel overwhelmed or even hesitant. Worried that this would disrupt our plans to launch our own fashion brand and forge our own path away from XMGH. But the way he looked at me now, like I'd just handed him the universe, made all those fears dissolve away into nothingness.

SIX YEARS LATER

Outside of the living room, the sounds of laughter and playful growls trickled in through the window from the grounds of our sprawling estate.

The scent of freshly baked cookies wafted in from the kitchen, mingling with the earthy aroma of the potted plants scattered throughout the room. Outside, the sprawling lawn stretched out like a sea of green, the trees swaying gently in the breeze.

Our two children, Aurora, a spirited little girl with Denver's dark hair and my hazel eyes, and Rowan, a mischievous boy with a laugh that could light up a room, were playing a game they had created with Denver that was a mix of tag and wrestling.

I sat on the overstuffed couch, a soft smile on my face as I sipped tea from my favorite porcelain mug. The warmth of the tea sweetened with honey, spread through me, comforting and familiar, as I watched my little family through the windows.

Denver was gentle with the kids, letting them tackle him and rolling on the grass as they wrestled. His laughter, deep and unrestrained, carried through the open windows and filled the room with a sense of joy that made my heart swell.

Aurora was already showing signs of her shifter heritage. She playfully growled at her father, her eyes glowing faintly before she launched herself into his arms. Rowan was still too young, barely having learned how to walk six months before. He sat on the grass, plucking tufts of it, and giggled as Denver play snarled at him.

Eventually, the three wolves exhausted themselves. Denver carried Rowan in one arm, the boy's head resting sleepily on his shoulder, while Aurora followed behind, her cheeks flushed with exertion. Denver collapsed onto the couch next to me, letting out an exaggerated groan as he laid his head back. "I'm not a young pup anymore. Your children are relentless," he grumbled, though his eyes twinkled with affection.

I laughed, leaning into him and giving him a peck on the forehead. "They get that from you," I said.

The kids piled onto the couch, demanding a story. Denver, ever the grumpy alpha, pretended to protest but eventually gave in. He told them a story about a lone wolf who found his pack in the most unexpected place, a story that was clearly about him and me. The kids listened with wide eyes, their little faces painted with wonder, while I rested my head on Denver's shoulder.

He wrapped his arm around me, pulling me closer and I placed my hand over his heart so I could feel the steady rise and fall of his chest.

As the story unfolded, I closed my eyes, letting the sound of his voice wash over me.