



Jace

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Category: Romance, New Adult, Paranormal

Description: Sloane:

Desparion, also known as the alpha zone. The place where they put men with an inner monster.

A place no sensible citizen goes unless they're seeking a dark, unrestrained kind of thrill.

Only I love my little sister. It's her birthday, and despite being the sensible, dependable, boring one, I end up in Desparion surrounded by the kind of men only mentioned in hushed whispers with a sneer of distaste.

That's when I met him.

Nearly seven feet tall, all muscle and a devilish smile that promises a night of pleasure. I can do this. I can escape the drudgery for a night, enjoy the wild side, then slink back to my small sensible life.

But his touch does more than light a fire inside me, it reveals a part of me I didn't know existed.

Jace:

Every monster has a match. A female who is weak and yet strong.

One who responds to pheromones and is driven by instincts every bit as beastly as the monster inside me.

Those women should be protected, not touched. After what I saw my sister go through, I kept my animal side on a tight leash.

Then I saw her, the cute little citizen taking a walk on the wild side.

But fate has other plans, and she's not the ordinary I expected.

Mine, the beast inside me says.

I want to protect her.

I want to ruin her for everyone but me.

And I can't have it both ways.

But if I want to save her, I might not have a choice.

Jace is book one in the Her Monster series, an extra spicy dystopian romance.

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Chapter One

Sloane

So this was a very, very bad idea.

“C’mon, Sloane,” Emma, my younger sister, insisted, grabbing my arm and tugging me forward. She was only a tiny thing, wearing stilt-like heels and a little sequinned dress, but she was strong as a bloody ox.

Why was I here again? Yeah, that was right—Emma’s birthday. She’d been in my ear for weeks and had finally worn me down. Once I’d shown signs of weakening, it had been full steam ahead. I’d lost track of how many people she had texted over the intervening days. It was only now, as I stood on the threshold of the alpha controlled territory, that the enormity hit me slap bang between the eyes.

I had a comfort zone... I couldn’t even see the bloody thing from here.

“Cut it out, Em! You might be able to walk on these shoes, but I’m about to fall on my face,” I shot back, trying to pull free and keep my balance at the same time.

“Hurry up!” Jewel, my sister’s best friend, insisted, waving us over frantically as it felt like half the beta community of our fair city converged on a far from salubrious gate. With chain link fencing, razor wire on the top, and both parts beginning to rust, it wasn’t the kind of place that screamed enter and be welcome! Yet as I looked across the crowds, having wrenched my arm back from Em, I saw that plenty of people were willing to risk it.

This was Desparion, aka the Desparion, where the biggest, baddest, least controllable members of the community lived. You'd think with all those qualities they'd be running the world, but their notorious inability to act rationally disqualified that. Anyway, there were way more of us betas than there were of them. We also had guns and an army to back us up, whereas they only had muscle and extreme strength. We funnelled the weakest of us, the omegas, into Desparion, and that kept them happy. In the end, that was what alphas wanted the most—their mates.

Entering alpha territory was dangerous, we'd had the message pounded into our heads at school, at home, and by the media every damn day, yet for some people, that proved to contain a perverse kind of attraction.

People like me.

"You're eager tonight," a man, an alpha, said on the other side of the fence. He grinned as he went to unlock the gate, seemingly conscious that every beta eye was trained on him, and why not? He was so damn different as to seem like a whole other species. Massively tall, getting close to seven feet, shoulders that were so broad, the artificial lights of Desparion beyond were momentarily blocked. And muscles, so many muscles as he worked the key in the lock until it popped open, pulling the chain free. I wasn't alone in following the flex of those muscular forearms as he wrapped the metal links around his fist.

"Mummy, I would like one of those very much, because I have been a very good boy."

My head jerked up to see the speaker was standing beside me, a man wearing a pair of bespoke jeans, personally beaten up to look like they'd been worn by several generations, and a white linen shirt open at the neck. He turned and grinned at me, flashing those bright white teeth, tossing his loose dark curls, until I punched him in the arm.

“Where the hell have you been? It doesn’t take that long to park a car,” I said. He’d dropped us off because Em was wearing high heels, and while she could dance all night in them, walking the small distance from the car parks to the gate was beyond a birthday girl. “Jesus, Jude, I’ve been trying to keep a lid on those two...” My voice trailed away as we both turned back to the gate and saw that amongst the people stumbling through were Em and Jewel. “Oh crap...”

Jude’s hand slapped down on my arm when I sucked a breath in, right about to call their names across the crowd.

“So the Mummy thing was supposed to be funny and kinda kinky,” he said in a low tone, “not the way you’re going to act tonight. Your sister is a big girl.”

“Are you serious?”

“And perfectly capable of looking after herself,” Jude insisted.

“Really? Like that time she managed to get an invite to a poker game with those bikers? Or when she was hanging out with those guys who turned out to be human traffickers?”

His face fell, a small frown forming.

“Shit, I forgot about that. But, Sloane, you can’t be your sister’s keeper for the rest of her life. Just because...”

His words faltered as I stared at him, both of us seeing it—the moment my parents had been lowered into the ground, victims of a horrific car crash. There were no open caskets, no final goodbyes, just the police at our door, informing us of ‘our loss,’ endless lawyers and discussions about who got what, and me fighting my family to take control of my parent’s very lucrative estate. Our eyes shifted to where the two

girls had wandered, drawn in closer by the tawdry glitz and exotic air of danger that The Strip, a long street of alpha run clubs and pubs within their zone, used to entice and intoxicate the more civilised beta population.

All around the world, betas were solid, dependable, rational people, focussed on building our economies and our civilisations. Keeping order, wealth, success, those were the cornerstones of beta society, and they were the enemies of it.

Alphas and omegas.

Jude made an appreciative little purr as we walked through the gate into the area cordoned off from the rest of the city, where the alphas were left to live whatever brand of lawless bullshit they claimed their instincts dictated. The man at the entrance, the alpha, his brown eyes met Jude's, my friend's close regard pulling an amused snort from him as we passed, but then he saw me draw my clutch closer, my steps getting faster, and all humour was washed away. Instead, deep brown eyes stared into mine, making it very clear he saw exactly what I'd done and why, as well as how he felt about that.

I felt a flush, at the attention, at his expression, at the fact I was acting like all the other bigoted arseholes in this city. As I was about to yank my eyes away and walk past with my nose in the air, like any other over bred beta, something odd happened. A heat pooled in his eyes, his nostrils flaring, that smile returning but in quite a different form. This one was slow, sly, full of dark promises and even darker pleasures.

"Girl, Daddy's got his eyes on you," Jude said, leaning in close. "I came here to get my knot on, but damn if the hottest specimen in this cage ain't looking at you."

"Shut up," I snarled, wresting my eyes away. "And how the hell are you getting a knot...?"

I didn't finish the sentence because shit, I'd just realised exactly what I was asking, Jude grinning in response. He thought me a ridiculous prude, but that was mostly because he was an unmitigated slut. His words, not mine.

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“Where there’s a will, there’s a way. And lube—lots of lube. This boy I was seeing for a while had this alpha fetish, started ‘training’ me to take the knot of this freaking huge dildo.” His expression grew lazy and well satisfied. “First, I signed up because hey, you want to spend hours teasing my hole, I’m down. But then...”

His eyes roamed across what we could see of The Strip, bright lights and gaudy paint all designed to draw us here or there to drink, to spend all our hard-earned dollars, to step beyond the tight constraints of our little beta lives and walk on the wild side.

“But then it got weird and the role play was too involved and he was totally into the idea of me being an omega, which I’m not.” A little humph in his tone. “But I figured while we’re down here, I could see about broadening my horizons somewhat. Which it looks like those silly girls have a head start on.”

I stiffened, saw three massive men towering over my sister and her friend, moving slowly and surely closer, hemming them in. And Em? She was twirling her hair, giggling, reaching out to put her hand?—

“Shit!” I yelped, striding forward, finding my way to her side in a matter of seconds. “Em, I’m dying for a vodka tonic. I found Jude, so let’s go?”

She took a few heartbeats to recognise me, her focus entirely captured by the alphas standing around her, and I understood why. A quick glance up, and I felt like I’d been scalded by hot water. We might be betas, but even we were susceptible to that alpha allure. All that power, all that intensity, it radiated off them, pinning you to the spot, making you all too aware of them and their interest. It made you want more, I knew that, dragging my eyes down, even while feeling a burning need to preen, posture, try

and capture their attention.

Just like Jude was doing right now.

He ambled up, placing a hand on the nearest guy, one with a ragged shock of dark blond hair.

“Well, hello there, handsome.”

The massive man’s lips twisted into a smile almost identical to the door alpha’s. He took in Jude’s trim form—“You could bounce a twenty-cent piece off this arse, love,” he’d told me—with a kind of feral hunger that grew and grew.

“And who are you, pretty?” the alpha asked in a low rumble.

“Going is what we are,” I insisted as I linked arms with Jude and Em, leaving Jewel to stumble after us, her eyes trained over her shoulder.

Jace

“Nice collection of victims—I mean, opportunities,” Ryder said as he joined me at the gate.

I cut him a glare, hardly noticing the sea of bodies rolling past, every one of them with their bug-eyes trained on Ryder and me.

Shock.

Speculation

And open lust.

Yeah, mostly the lust. They wanted to try out an alpha cock, see if it really was as big as those illegal videos they'd been watching.

It was.

Fifty percent would run screaming at the first glimpse. The other half couldn't handle it either, but their enthusiasm to try was fun, not that I partook of the opportunities often. To me, they were wealthy patrons about to get frivolous in my club.

"Don't talk about them like that, asshole," I muttered.

"Willing participants?" he asked with an overly innocent expression on his face.

"Better," I agreed.

The dick laughed. He knew about my hang-ups.

They're not the same as omegas, I told myself. These are betas, and they rule the fucking world.

Maybe not Desparion, but everything beyond the metal fence was the dominion of their kind. I'd lived outside once, and it wasn't as pretty as the commercials would have you believe.

"You're growling," Ryder said way too casually.

"I'm good," I said, letting the memories fade into nothing, which was where they deserved to stay.

I didn't need to go back there, to being a small, unrevealed kid, powerless as they... When I became an alpha, I'd learnt how to fight and had dedicated myself to making

a place for me and my sister. Ella was safe now, and I made sure she stayed that way. If she wanted to be with a man, beta or alpha, it was on her terms.

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“You’re still growling,” Ryder said as a couple of alphas approached to take over watching the gate.

I huffed out a breath. “I know. I’ll deal with it.”

“You need to get laid,” he said, smirking now.

I chuckled, feeling the last of my tension fade. The asshole was probably right. I didn’t usually partake of the party crowd, but there was one little morsel that was making me wish I could make an exception. Tiny little thing, trying to pry her eyes off me and failing as she walked by. She’d caressed every inch of me with her gaze, and I hadn’t missed that tell-tale swallow. I’d known what she was thinking, what she’d wanted, and for once, I’d felt the need to give it to her, staring long past the point of being polite. The bloke with her, he didn’t seem to be hers, looking at me with a much more blatant hunger.

Omega, the beast inside me rumbled.

I shook my head. No omega would willingly enter alpha turf. They were carted off and sold by the Dawn Agency, not waltzed in through the gate to get their drink on.

Several of my men ambled up to take over at the gate. We nodded to our replacements and started walking back toward the club.

“So, Miss Prim...” Ryder trailed off, eyeing the same woman I had, then he launched into a full-on snicker when I punched the bastard in the arm.

“Off limits,” I said, not bothering with pretences.

“Yeah,” he replied, still wearing a shit-eating grin. “That one’s a screamer of the unenthusiastic variety.”

He was probably right on that as well.

Our club, the beast said in a low purr of satisfaction as the uptight little beta and her party walked inside our bar, Inked. Smart choice on her part. I didn’t tolerate bullshit or alphas making unwelcome advances on my turf.

Fuck no.

That didn’t mean I was green. I’d been with enough betas to know how to coax the right woman into the throes of pleasure. All it needed was time and patience.

And lube—a fuck ton of lube.

She was interested. Alphas were instinctual creatures, and we knew the signs of an opportunity, as Ryder referred to them, and how they were susceptible to alpha pull. I wasn’t going there, though, not tonight and not with her. She was in my club now, vulnerable. I wanted to frog-march her right back out of the gate so that she’d be safe.

Ryder’s assessment was like the proclamation of my doom.

“She’s still off limits,” I said because she was, and I was determined the purse clutching beta would be returning home without a scratch on her. If I wasn’t tapping that, then no one else was either.

Sloane

I steered us into a nearby bar, but that was a mistake, though finally agreeing to Em's demands to visit Desparion was probably the first one. We walked up the steps into a darkened space broken by spots of artificial light, the place not yet packed.

"Damn your cockblocking, Sloane," Jude grumbled as he sat down at a stool by the bar, the girls doing the same. A bartender—beta, by the look of it—slid our way and took my order with a nod, along with my credit card. "Three alphas on the prowl. Three! Can you imagine?—?"

"Oh, we could imagine," Jewel said, then sighed. "They're so big and hot. Do you think they're proportionate?"

"Of course they are," Em insisted. "That video we saw of those two alphas and..." She grinned nervously, remembering where she was and whom she was with. "You can't cater to needy omegas with a pencil dick."

"Omegas," Jewel said, sighing. "It must be freaking amazing to be completely overwhelmed and swept up by feelings and instincts so big, you're helpless to do anything but submit."

"Shut up," Jude exclaimed with a groan, rearranging his junk in his jeans. "I think I cried for two days straight when I revealed as a beta. I would've made a brilliant omega—being treasured, maintaining a beautiful nest, plus the harem of burly alphas gagging to take me over and over..."

"Shut up," I said, but not harshly, as I pushed his bottle of beer over, handing the girls their drinks. From our left, a great squeal went up, and the next instalment of Emma's entourage entered the club.

The drinks came right back to me.

“Hold these,” Em ordered before throwing her arms around the necks of the newcomers, and more enthusiastic dancing and squealing ensued. A hairband with sequinned cat ears emerged from one girl’s bag and was placed on Emma’s head to another cheer.

They all started to gravitate towards the dance floor, and with them came the alphas. They formed a ring around it, watching the beta men and women throw themselves around to the music with practised abandon. I could almost hear David Attenborough narrating a documentary about the mating habits of betas and alphas in the background.

“Em...”

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But she was gone, throwing her arms up in the air, wiggling her hips in time with the thumping bass, the other girls doing much the same beside her.

“I take it you’re going to stake out this particular part of the bar, as per usual?” Jude asked, nursing his beer.

“I don’t dance, you know that. I’ve got?—”

“Two left feet, I know—I’ve seen you in action often enough. For someone who seems to have it all together, I’ve not met anyone that damn clumsy.”

I shrugged, sipping the vodka. It hadn’t always been this way. Before puberty, I’d been perfectly capable of participating in the gymnastic program, taking dance classes, and performing all the little rituals a growing beta was required to with grace and poise, but then my body began to change. My feet became obstacles rather than natural parts of my limbs, my constant stumbling, knocking into things, tipping things over driving my extremely well put together mother mad. I took a big mouthful of my drink at that memory.

“Go,” I said, waving to the dance floor, my eyes on the way the men began to cluster around my sister and her friends. “I know I’m boring?—”

“Not boring, love.” Jude swept in, pressing a kiss to my cheek. “Just...overburdened with responsibilities.” He grabbed my hand, clasping it to his chest in an exaggerated fashion. “Parting is such sweet sorrow, but...” His eyes slid sideways, and mine followed them, making him smile and me stiffen on my stool. “Looks like Daddy’s here to stake his claim.”

The doorway filled with a familiar figure—the guy from the gate. Dark hair that needed a cut was raked back with a big, broad hand, the tattoos over his arms and shoulders showing up in the flashes of bright light as he passed under the bulbs, the white tank top he wore stretched tight over his chest, serving only to emphasise the acres of rippling muscle there. Those dark eyes cut through the place, making me shrink back against the bar, even though I knew it wasn't me he was searching for. He probably worked here, or he conducted business in one of the notorious backrooms and was here to carry out whatever shady deals passed for legitimate enterprise in the zone.

“Ohh, you're gonna get it,” Jude said when the alpha's eyes locked with mine, a small smile forming—a carnivorous one. Something that was only emphasised when the alpha came strolling over with the slow, confident prowl of a predator. “Well, toodles!”

He knew exactly what he was doing, my so-called best friend. Jude's fingers trailed through mine, making it clear I could escape with him, out onto the dance floor.

Or I could stay.

I twisted on my stool, unable to find a comfortable position, my thighs trembling with the need to follow Jude or to lock me down tight on the seat.

He's not coming over here, I told myself furiously, forcing my eyes to study the dance floor like it was me that was the scientist, studying the mating rituals of young betas. You are entirely too ordinary and too boring to be the focus of any alpha.

I watched the alphas on the edges of the dance floor move in, arrowing in on their choices, separating the man or woman from the herd, taking them down with surgical precision. And the betas? They responded to all that alpha allure, turning like flowers towards the sun, their steps faltering, their smiles fading, their bodies going soft,

compliant, then wrapping themselves around their alpha, like a vine would a boulder. That wasn't my fate. There was no way.

I spent so much time not seeing him that I didn't even notice them when they approached.

"Hello, sweetheart."

My eyes jerked sideways, but I didn't get what I was expecting. Not tall, dark, and handsome. Well, not just one. Three men, complete strangers, stood around me, none of them the guy that Jude had thought was coming over. And the alpha in the middle? He looked at me in a way that reminded me why I bloody hated these places—like I was a delicacy on a plate, ready to be devoured at their leisure, no matter what I might have to say about it.

"You're looking lonely sitting here by yourself."

God, this was what he was going with? The biggest guy looked over my head and spoke to the barman. "Get the lady whatever she wants."

I glanced meaningfully at the nearly full glass in my hand, but the centre guy smoothly took it off me to the sounds of my outraged splutters as they carried on, seeming to believe I needed a fresh one. Okay, so the corny chat-up line had been amusing in an eyerolling kind of way. Still, I did not like anything about the way they were boxing me in and ordering me a new bloody drink, plus their scent was doing funny things to me. My belly fluttered, and not in a pleasant manner I'd heard being around alphas caused.

"Looking for some alpha cock, beta? We've got what you want," the right hand guy said, moving in closer and closer as his friends did the same, no matter how I shrank back.

I couldn't even see the bartender anymore. They had somehow cut even that off. I considered myself level-headed, I'd had to be for the sake of Emma, but everything about this screamed threat. Their scent was cloying, filling my nose and lungs, and I couldn't stop from breathing it in.

Panic slammed into me out of nowhere. This was all very practiced and organised—take a separated female, close in, and get her high on your scent. They didn't even need to drop something in a drink, as I'd first suspected, because I was already sinking under their spell. I fumbled for my bag, but my clumsy fingers couldn't get the catch and I dropped it to the floor. Fuck!

“And you're assuming that's you?” a deep voice said—so deep, it made my ear buzz uncomfortably, my hand straying to rub at it. I should be thinking about the taser in my bag, not my damn ear.

I hadn't wanted to look, to see who'd butted in on this humiliating event, because I knew. Somehow, I knew. I could feel the heat of the fourth man's body, smell his much fresher scent cutting right through the choking smell of these three arseholes. It took a deep breath and another inspection of the group's insistent gaze before I turned to acknowledge my rescuer. There he was, bigger, taller, stronger than I'd gauged at the gate, and close, way too close for comfort.

The three arseholes had frightened me. The newcomer I'd first met at the gate had twice their potency all on his own.

“You know the rules, dickheads.” God, that low rumble of a voice... It felt like it vibrated all the way through me. “In my bar, consent first. I didn't see the lady accept your kind offer of a drink, did I?”

I hadn't been able to work out how the group stayed standing there, the power, the repressed aggression radiating off the alpha making my head spin, and it wasn't even

directed at me. But it was for me, which made me all the more flustered. Then those deep brown eyes dropped to meet mine, and I was completely and utterly lost.

“Did you want these boys pestering you?”

What the freaking hell?

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I'd heard all about an alpha's bark, their voices reported to have the ability to force compliance in a way that sounded damn near mythical on the evening news, yet now? I had to admit my hubris as my gaze fell to those full lips, hearing the question there but unable to parse the meaning while I was caught under his spell.

I was so fucked.

“What the fuck, Jace? This little beta wants to try on some strange, and we want to be the ones to help her with it. I thought you'd know all about that.”

Wrong thing to say. A little whimper escaped my lips as I saw that body, Jace's, turn to stone, a wall forming beside me of tensed muscle.

“You're right—I do.” That was the only warning they got from Jace. He looked over their heads to a couple shadowy figures hanging by the door and gestured them over. “Escort these gentlemen out, not to return.”

“The fuck? Jace?—”

“You heard the man,” Jace's offsidiers said, grabbing the three who'd been bugging me and hauling them out the door to the musical sound of their complaints.

Then they were gone, leaving me alone with him. My bag was still on the floor. I stared down at it, wanting to scoot off the stool and collect it, yet terrified because it would bring me closer to him.

A low sigh caught my attention, forcing me to recognise what I really didn't want

to—that there was a huge, very masculine presence by my side and only getting closer. I tried to keep my eyes to myself, which was all very out of character. Say thank you, I thought furiously. Get him a drink. Something, anything, then you can send him on his way. He moved in until the shadow of him fell over me, the heat of his skin radiating. Then he bent over right beside me, almost touching me, to retrieve my fallen bag and held it out for me to take. I didn't take it, just stared at it in confusion as I felt the equivalent of a storm batter me.

“You all right, love?”

Fuck, I'd read and heard people talking about ordinary men having this animalistic kind of growl of a voice and always dismissed it as overheated bullshit, but now? My eyes jerked sideways, a congratulatory smile spreading across his face, which should have gotten my back right up. I wasn't one to accept pats on the head from men, not even men like him.

And he was all fucking man.

This close, I could smell him, a deep, woody, musky scent that filled my lungs, replacing a need for oxygen, my body instantly adjusting to breathing him in instead. It was nothing like the other alphas. I'd caught an enticing hint of this man as I'd passed when he opened the gate, but this was a thousand times more intense.

He frowned slightly, watching my chest heave as I sucked his scent in. I wanted to shrink away from the arseholes, but this alpha, I wanted more of it. I wanted to roll in it and him, wanted to get right up close and taste it from the source.

I shuddered.

And that was when it happened—like the slow prickle of a lazy orgasm, every nerve ending perked up and sighed in one long wave. My muscles went lax and my bones

to rubber as I was hit face first with alpha pheromones. That made sense. People bought and sold alpha and omega pheromone extracts on the black market for precisely this reason. It gave us a glimpse of how the other half lived.

But I wasn't about to take a walk on the omega side, only to return to being a safe little beta.

"Fuck..." he rumbled, his voice sounding like grating granite right now. "What is that?"

He closed the gap between us and put a hand on the bar, caging me in, making me feel bloody tiny suddenly, despite being reasonably tall in my heels. He didn't touch, didn't impose anything, just moved so close, my personal bubble was obliterated, leaving only me. Me that trembled, holding myself still, so still, as his nose traced the air around me, breathing me in with slow, shuddering breaths.

I'd thought that this was just the way it went. An alpha hit on you, and his allure smashed into you like a fucking Mack truck, leaving you a quivering little beta morsel as your head swum and your body rioted. I thought that this was what Jude, what Em and Jewel were chasing, because it all became clear, as I fought to keep breathing, just why they were so keen to come here.

I'd never been so fucking turned on in my life. My skin felt too hot, too tight, while my cunt sent out distress signals, clenching down on a horrible nothingness, a whine rising in my throat in response, but it froze when he did. His body stiffened, then shifted infinitesimally closer, so the world was reduced to only him and me. Both hands were on the bar now, on either side of me, my body bowed backwards to avoid touching.

Because I think on some level, I knew.

Despite my body bowing away, there was no threat in him caging me. It was comforting, it felt right.

I was the one who fucked this up, who committed the final sin that damned me completely by reaching out blindly to take my bag, which was still in his hand. As I did, my fingers brushed against his.

“Jesus...” he hissed, just for me.

At that moment, we were hit by lightning, something I’d waited my whole life for and never thought would come.

Most betas woke up in puberty knowing what they were, feeling their betas-ness down to their toes. It was who they were, who they identified as, and it determined everything about them. My ‘reveal’ was weak, shaky, more a question mark than a statement. I’d never told anyone except for my doctor when I was an adult, and when he ran tests, he’d found nothing to suggest I was anything other than yet another beta. Now I, and the alpha before me, felt it, and he sucked my rapidly developing scent in like a dying man.

“Omega...” he purred. My designation, my death sentence.

“No...no!” I whimpered, seemingly unable to make a strident protest anymore. When I raised my fists, pushing against his chest, my bones felt like they were made of rubber, soft and ineffectual.

“Fuck...” He said the word like it personally pained him, while those massive hands formed manacles around my wrists, the thumbs rubbing small circles. “It’s all right, love. Everything will be okay. I’ve got to get you the hell out of this bar, away from every bastard who’s gonna go rampant once they get a sniff of you. You’ll be okay. I’ll make damn sure of it.”

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I felt a horrified flush at the way those words sank into my skin, into my very being. It felt like they filled me with the most glorious warmth, one where pain, loneliness, ennui, boredom...everything that had plagued me since my parents died, sapping all the pleasure from life, was wiped away so thoroughly and shockingly, I wasn't even sure how to reconcile that.

I was pulled in close, cradled against his chest, this stranger, held firm by a heavy hand to the back of my neck, and for the first time since I got that bloody phone call and my whole world was destroyed, I felt safe. Safe with a complete stranger, safe with some...alpha. My brain fought the idea, but something else, something much bigger and more primal, rose up and settled me, and for a second, there was only a kind of stillness, a peace that I sank into and kept on sinking.

“Bring the lady's friends to the VIP section upstairs and whichever guests they want with them,” he ordered, speaking over my head to someone else. “Lay the full spread on—booze, food, drugs... Whatever takes their fancy, it's available and on the house. But no fucking alphas other than those loyal to us. Lock the area down and alert Ryder, stat.”

“Got it, boss.”

He spoke over me with a kind of brutal efficiency, sizing up the situation and surging into action, while I was left reeling. My nipples felt like hard points, the coarse lace and gabardine fabrics abrading against sensitive skin that longed for much gentler handling. My thighs scissored, trying to achieve the kind of friction I craved deep down but only managing to make the itch bite harder.

“It’s all right, omega. I’ve got you.”

I hung onto that voice like a lifeline, helping me keep my head above the riotous swirl of sensation that destroyed my composure.

My world went sideways as I was swept up into a pair of muscular arms and carried away from the bar, across the floor and over to a lift, a man hurrying forward to punch the button for the alpha.

“What are you doing?” I asked with a squirm, something in the back of my mind insisting this was a very bad idea.

“Me? I’m Jace and I’m trying to keep you safe.”

Chapter Two

Jace

She had perfect pouty lips that sent my mind straight to the gutter. Her, spread naked on my bed—my beast flashed a 3D image of exactly how that’d go into my mind. He was rattling in the cage I kept him in, demanding to get out. His prey was in sight, and if her reaction to my pheromones was anything to go by, she’d soon be begging me to take her in any way I wanted.

Yeah, I needed to think of something fucking else, find someone else to take care of her. My beast roared his disdain at that idea

“What’s your name, omega?” I asked.

She was half out of it already, but I figured learning the name of the woman who was sprawled all over me was a necessary first step.

“Sloane,” she said, big eyes gazing up at me in wonder, pupils blown to fuck.

My sweet, startled, prim omega had stumbled right into the beast’s den. He pummelled my mind with debauched images of her slammed up against the elevator wall, of her spread out on my bed as I feasted on her slick, of her coming apart for me and only me.

No, I growled back. We don’t do that and aren’t like that. Because with those images came memories of Ella, of her heat, of men going into her room and the subsequent screams.

Despite remembering everything that had been done to my sister, my iron resolve was slipping. My cock was already hard and ready for whatever Sloane needed. My beast wanted nothing more than to serve her and tend her through her awakening.

But on this we agreed—I needed to get her somewhere safe, far away from a fuck ton of prying eyes. Somewhere without any other alphas sniffing around what was mine.

Mine? She wasn’t fucking mine.

Her vulnerability hit me like a blow between the eyes.

A little needy whimper escaped her lips, and she pressed in tighter. Fuck! I’d never felt like this before, never been this affected by an omega going through her change. Then I remembered Ella.

That was the cold douse of water my libido needed.

I didn’t buy into the alpha bullshit that we couldn’t help ourselves, that we were only giving them what they needed. Omegas were lost to their hormones once the change hit. A strong alpha protected. A weak alpha took.

“Em? Jude? Jewel?” Sloane mumbled.

“They’re coming, baby,” I said. “I’ll take good care of them for you.”

Yess... he hissed inside my mind, pacing in his cage, testing its limits. Taking care of an omega? He liked that very much indeed, because that was the only contact he got with omegas—making sure that every one we could find in the zone was safe.

The elevator opened, and I stepped out into the VIP section. Wait staff were already on standby to cater to my guests’ every need.

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A small private dance floor was on the left, while on the right, high stools lined the small bar ringed in low-lit neon blue and pink. Low couches and tables hugged the wall to the side of the entrance in intimate alcoves lit by a subtle version of the neon pink and blue, while opposite was a balcony offering views over the club and an open staircase that led to the main dance floor if they were so inclined. Bright lights rotated through the colour spectrum beyond the balcony, heavy bass vibrating through the soles of my feet. This was a safe environment, one I could control much easier than the wider club. It provided a breathing space into which I could figure out what the fuck to do.

I'd made it to the couch and taken a seat, with Sloane on my lap because my beast wouldn't have it any other way, when squeals came from behind—her friends arriving. The room could handle a hundred, so the twenty or so who piled out of the elevator wasn't going to cause an issue. The young beta guy who wished he was an omega had already picked up one of my guys, while the girls also had escorts. Security followed them in, subtly positioning themselves to watch over the goings on. Champagne appeared, and they barely paid any attention to the fact their friend was already sitting on an alpha's lap. They flopped onto the low seats opposite us, chinking glasses, getting cosy.

Two minutes later, another elevator load arrived.

"It's my sister's birthday," Sloane said with a grimace.

"Not a problem. The staff here will take good care of her. Make sure she has the best time. Security will make sure everyone is safe."

She settled at hearing this news. Now was the time to put her aside, get her a room maybe, have her sister call her a fucking cab, but fuck, getting her out of the zone wasn't even a guarantee of success with the Dawn Agency's bullshit. One look at her sister, and I could see how that would go down. The woman I assumed was her sister, because she was wearing sequinned cat ears and everyone was hugging her and squealing, was already up and on the dance floor, hips swaying, hands up in the air, when a third elevator arrived and yet more revellers entered. How many fucking friends did she have?

I leaned back to talk to one of my guys hovering behind me. "Find out what's taking Ryder so long and get Dane up here too" I said. I knew the alphas here, but still...it was a matter of instincts versus civility. If things went pear-shaped, if an alpha's instincts got the better of them...the betas on duty were nowhere near enough.

An alpha who'd come up with the party dared to look our way, and a low growl rumbled in my chest. You know what they say about the road to hell and what it was paved with... I never intended this shit to happen. I'd helped plenty of omegas who'd been thrust in the zone. If I were smart, I would've gotten someone I trusted up here, or let the girls guide Sloane through what was happening, because who could help her adjust better than them?

Us. Mine. Mark, breed, claim.

His voice was hypnotic, seductive, battering down my own fucking boundaries and he was a part of me. My teeth locked down, my fangs aching, my cock throbbing with long waves of such an intense pleasure, it had my head spinning, and then she did it. Our fates were sealed. My little omega whimpered, pressing in closer, lips finding the skin at my throat. Mine, my beast purred. That shit went straight to my dick, making it so hard, it damn near burst out of my zipper. I eyeballed the alpha, waiting for him to turn away first, to remember who ruled in this place, letting my sweet prize soothe me and take my aggression down a notch. Sometimes, betas tried

to emulate omega behaviour, watching some shit on the internet, thinking they could fake it.

You couldn't fake instincts. Sloane's small hands petting my skin, nose tracing the column of my throat, that was natural to an omega.

I jerked my head to a beta waitress. "Get me a bottle of water and a comforter."

My sister used to love her comforter and would snuggle under it so that she felt safe. A tic thumped in my jaw as I remembered how little safety she'd experienced, and me, too fucking young, too weak to help her then. My arms tightened around the omega nestled on my lap. She felt right there, like she belonged.

Does belong. Mine.

She's not yours, asshole. You're a stand-in until you can figure out what the fuck to do.

Only I didn't have a fucking clue what to do. I needed someone else to tend to her, someone who was experienced with a new omega. Someone I trusted not to hurt her.

Ryder was experienced, and I loved that fucker like a brother. So why did the thought of passing her over to him make me break out in a cold sweat, my jaw lock up tight, and my fist clench in anticipation of beating him to a bloody pulp should he dare to put his hands upon her?

My beast agreed, showing me exactly what he'd do if Ryder came anywhere near her. He accepted our arrangement most of the time, but this, this omega, out of all the ones we'd found, this was the one to threaten that.

I was so fucked.

A water bottle materialised a moment later, and I snapped off the lid and passed it to my overwhelmed charge.

“Drink some, baby.”

She pushed the bottle back toward me, more interested in burying her nose in the crook of my throat. I tipped her head back, her little gasp went straight to my throbbing cock, and held her eyes as I presented her with the bottle again. “If I tell you to do something, baby, you’re going to do it like a good girl, or you’re going to find yourself over my lap with this cute little schoolmarm dress tugged up and your bare bottom getting acquainted with the palm of my hand.”

Yesss...

This was the point where it all went to hell, where I should’ve found Ryder and shoved her at him with all the force in my body. I had to have known I was standing on a cliff edge, looking down at my destruction, ready to fucking jump off, no matter what my brain screamed. I could see the defiance building, the flash in her eyes. Her body moved like a snake’s, writhing against me, coiling, ready to refuse, to test my resolve.

And me? I just smiled.

“Don’t test me, baby,” I said. “Alphas rarely bluff.”

Peeking at me through her lashes, she accepted the bottle from me and took the tiniest sip.

My lips twitched, despite the pain I was in with my raging hard-on. Oh, sweetheart, you have no idea what I want to do to you. If I gave into the beast inside me, you’d find yourself on your knees in that prim little dress, begging for a taste of my cum.

Fuck, I wanted her to. Fight me, he growled. Fight me, and I'll show you who'll win. Defiance was natural to an omega. Only the worthiest male would breed her.

Fuck!

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Breeding... How the fuck had my mind digressed to that? That was not on the program. She needed gentling and careful handling. She needed assistance adjusting to her life now, because everything had changed. Her body was in turmoil, sensations, scents, needs, all mixed up into a potent cocktail no drug or alcohol could emulate.

The betas tried to fake that too. There was illegal shit you could take that made their pussy cream and their head a little woozy, like that was all there was to it.

It didn't interest me.

The little omega sending coy glances my way did.

A beta server approached with a thick, plush comforter in her hands. I took it from her.

Sloane's nose twitched as it was handed over, her small hand sliding up my chest and a glare shot at the waitress to let the other woman know I was off limits. Instincts she didn't even understand were kicking in. Damn, it was cute.

"What's this?" Confusion entered her pretty face as I tucked the comforter around her. Her hand went to it tentatively, giving a little squeeze and test before her sigh said it was to her satisfaction. Fingers stroking the soft pile of the blanket, she was caught up in the sensory banquet of the fabric like any omega would be.

I'd always thought my beast driven into rut, that sexual urge so fucking intense, it felt like your balls were boiling, would make me fall. That one day, he'd just fucking

snap, collect up the closest omega, and drive himself into her over and over until all that repressed need was exhausted. I hadn't been prepared for this.

I swear my chest swelled with joy at seeing that I had pleased her. I knew it was just pheromones, instincts, and chemical bullshit that both of us were pumping out, but fuck if that mattered because she did. I watched her spine loosen, her body softening as she tucked herself in tighter against me, and I knew I was in deep fucking shit.

However the hell this came to be, right now, I knew without a doubt that Sloane was mine.

I heard his laugh inside my head, low and dirty, but it didn't matter. Seeing her curled up against me, so sweet, completely surrendering, that was what it took.

It was her needs that punched into my gut. She needed tending to, and there was no fucking way I could hand her over to anyone else. I'd go on a fucking rampage. I had to accept what was happening to me and that I wouldn't willingly let her go. I could do this. I could be there for her. I could help her through her change and give her what she craved.

If she chose me. I needed her to choose me, because if she didn't, someone would need to knock me the fuck out before I could let her go. In my mind, I was already forming a plan if she said no.

"Eyes on me, baby," I said, cupping her chin, and drew her to face me.

As our eyes met, she twitched, hand going to the comforter over her tummy.

"You feeling needy, omega?" I asked. "You want me to take care of you?"

"I don't understand," she said.

“I think you do. I’m here. I’ll take care of you.”

Her small hand tightening into a fist on my T-shirt shredded the last of my control. I growled low but quickly shifted it to a purr, feeling like a fucking king when she softened in response. My hand slid around her throat, resting against the delicate column and feeling the pulse leap under my fingertips. Her pupils seemed to explode so wide, the last of the pretty blue disappeared. Another twitch, another whimper, and her eyes lowered to my lips.

“Please, Jace,” she said.

“Fuck,” I muttered before lowering my lips to hers.

She whimpered into my mouth before her tongue came out to play, tentatively at first, then becoming emboldened as it tangled with mine.

That fast, I was drowning. My purr dropped to a growl again, but I didn’t care that it would be driving her pussy to weep slick, nor did I worry about the potent effect it would have on her rampant, newly awakened emotions. Slanting my mouth over hers, I deepened the kiss, hand slipping under the comforter to cup the gentle swell of her tit. Even through the material, her nipple was hard as stone. I swallowed up her mumbled nonsense as I stroked it with my thumb, feeling it grow fat and engorged, begging for my lips. Pinching it between finger and thumb through the material, I squeezed hard.

It was like a shot of electricity went through her. Wrenching my mouth away, I cupped the back of her head, pressing her nose against my chest as I tugged roughly on her sensitive nipple. “Breathe deep, omega,” I rumbled against her temple. “That’s it, baby. I’m going to make you feel so fucking good. Going to work my fat cock in just how you need it and fill you all up. Then once you’re taking that like my good girl, I’m going to work my knot in as well.”

Fuck, I'd never given anyone my knot before, but now... My heart smashed in my chest, the beast inside clawing at me. He was coming out, and the only thing I could control was how soon. Mark, breed, claim.

Nails scored my throat, and she shifted, trying to climb me. Her other hand was at my belt buckle, tugging on it with an impatient sob. I gave her a little shake and a growl, and her attention was once more on my face.

I thought about letting her lead this. She was so deep down the hole already, I could spread her out on the low table and rut her and she wouldn't give a fuck. I was right there with her, but there were other alphas here, and her scent was enough to send even the most stoic alpha bastard right over the edge.

"Tell me to take care of you," I said. "Tell me to rut you, and I will give you everything you need."

"Please," she said without the slightest hesitation. "I need you, Jace."

My reservations imploded. My omega, she needed me.

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Was I taking advantage of her? No, but I was toeing it close to the line.

Was that going to stop me? Fuck no. She'd picked me and asked me to take care of her.

She'd been mine the moment she walked in the gate, I realised, wearing that prim little dress more suited to a job interview than a nightclub and a haughty expression like the entire zone was beneath her contempt. The thought of taming her, breaking down the ice queen inside her, and letting the greedy little girl out had drawn me to her, but now? Her designation shouldn't matter, yet it changed everything.

Omegas needed alphas, but us? Looking at her, I realised I fucking needed her just as much. Whether it was for tonight only or... I didn't let myself think too far down that road. I couldn't, wouldn't.

Gathering her up in my arms, comforter and all, I strode for the elevator. The beta standing beside it punched the button for my floor.

"Make sure her companions don't get into any trouble and the alphas with them treat them right. Any trouble, get Ryder on it."

He nodded. The elevator opened, and we rode up to my penthouse.

Chapter Three

Sloane

This was wrong, so fucking wrong.

So why did it feel so right?

At least I thought that was what it was. I shook my head, trying to clear it, some weird little whine escaping my lips, and that wasn't all.

I need you?

What the hell was that and where had that come from? I wondered about that, but my body had a ready answer. A wetness I'd never experienced soaked my dress, coating my thighs—something I'd only heard about in sex ed at school, in disgusted tones, with other beta women.

Slick.

My body was readying itself to take an alpha's knot in the way only my kind could, just in case I needed further proof that I was an omega. I hissed as I staggered out of the elevator, Jace in no hurry to follow. There was no need now, not when he had me right where he wanted me. I dimly saw the open plan living space with a big screen TV, a couple of couches, and the darkened doorway of a bedroom. He smiled when I turned back to face him, a slow, feline thing.

That was what he seemed like, one of those big cats that paced back and forth in their cages in the zoo, but this one had been let out. No, he had never experienced bars that stopped him from what he was doing, made evident when those massive arms reached up, grabbing the top of the elevator door frame, and surely he knew what that did. Every muscle was on display, outlined by the mood lighting in the suite, making flesh the terrible power he carried. He snorted when he watched me freeze like prey before a predator, dropping his arms and prowling closer.

“What... Why am I here?” I asked, which was bloody stupid in hindsight.

“You know,” he replied, strolling on up. I could run, try to get away, get around him, but I didn’t.

Because he was right—I did know. I’d asked for this, begged for this. My feet were rooted to the floor and sliding outwards, slick was running down my thighs, my nipples felt like they were boring their way through my dress with every breath, and my cunt? Not a nice word, not a decorous word, but the only one for this moment. It flexed and clenched, sending little thrills of pleasure through my body, alerting me of what was to come.

Me.

My brain fought this idea and the absolute certainty in his eyes as he moved closer, his sheer bloody size becoming more and more apparent the nearer he got. He threw a shadow over me as he came to a stop, so tall, so broad, so powerful that even the lights couldn’t get to me, just him. His hand raised and he smiled as I watched its every move, but I didn’t run screaming, did I? When I was a teenager, us girls had talked about what we’d do if approached by an alpha, their brutal ways often discussed in the media, shackled men being led into the courthouse often shown on the news. We’d all assured each other we’d run, scream, call the police, fight him off with our beta ingenuity, but there was a little stun gun in my bag waiting there for me to use and I didn’t reach for it.

I reached for him.

“Mm...” A little purr of pleasure came from him as my hand splayed across one pec, my palm looking even smaller now, but this was quickly covered with his, lest I think about pulling it away. But I couldn’t, could I? That rigid flesh, flexing slightly under my hand, then it all started to move. He squeezed my hand for a second, then pulled

away, jerking the tight singlet that hid nothing over his head and tossing it to the ground. A low groan escaped my lips as acres of brown skin were revealed. Both hands reached for him now, for a body I'd only ever seen on thirst traps on social media. A body of sheer perfection.

Hard muscles, ropey sinews, veins that throbbed under the skin. I got closer and closer as I mapped each one, my breath coming in faster, which dragged his scent deeper into my lungs, making my head spin lazily. For some reason, the waitress on the floor below and the hungry way she'd looked at my alpha sprung to mind, my fingers turning to claws now, raking across his flesh.

"Mine..." I ground out.

"Damn fucking straight, baby," he rumbled, the time for inspection now over as his hands, then arms, wrapped around me.

I was tugged up close, so I could feel every bloody inch of this hard body and how damn ready it was for me, causing another whimper to fall from my lips. Everything was going so fast, so hot, my mind struggled to get my head around it, but he had the answer to that. A big hand went to the back of my head, pushing my face into the crook of his neck, where there was only him—his scent, his taste, my tongue flicking out to lick his skin, his low purr.

"Now I want to see you, the little omega who's going to tell me what she needs."

Tell him? Could I really tell this powerful alpha what I needed? Could I tell him that I was imagining myself sinking to my knees, looking up at him, and begging sweetly for him to feed me his cock?

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A part of my mind, the lone remnant of my former beta nature, rebelled at that, stiffening, but he wasn't having that. His fingers tightened and kept me exactly where I was, forced to breathe his scent in, practically choking on it, which was only a foreshadowing of what was to come. I struggled more earnestly now, but was I pushing him away or pulling him closer? He paid me no mind, drawing down the zipper of my dress in a quick movement before he jerked away, letting the material, and my last shield from him, fall away

Eyes as hot as the sun took in everything I had, now on display, my dress pooling at my feet. I sucked oxygen in greedily, but that just made his smile turn positively feral, his eyes lingering where my breasts now heaved.

“Take them off,” he said, but with no alpha bark, so it was as much a suggestion as a command. I could refuse and keep my hands by my sides, where they had now formed balls. “Take them off and show me that beautiful fucking body that makes mine ache. I’m so fucking hard, Sloane. Take them off, if this is what you want. If you want me.”

He stepped back, away from me, and I swayed a little like I’d forgotten how to stand without his support. There I was, caught on the horns of a dilemma. My arms shook with the effort of holding myself still, my mind racing, but why? What did I want? My mind and body warred over that. What had I said? That I wanted him to... I swallowed hard, then a weird little whine escaped my throat.

“Omega...”

His voice was deep, warm, and felt like dropping into a hot bath, and that was what I

liked to tell myself to excuse what came next. My fingers shook as I reached behind, flicking open my bra clasp.

“Fuck, yes...” he purred, pacing exactly like a wild animal, wanting to come closer but refusing to do so, not until my fingers went to my underwear. I shimmied the sodden fabric down and felt the lace drag on my skin, coated with my slick, when he decided he’d had enough. His fist tightened around the scrap of cloth, wrenching it free before dragging it up to his nose.

I watched his eyelids flutter slightly as he took a deep breath, and for a second, he stood there, wavering, a boyish smile on his face, before his eyes flicked open, the dark colour there gone almost completely black.

“I need to taste that pretty pussy that smells so sweet, need to fucking gorge myself on you. I want you running down my chin and my throat, saturating me with your pleasure. And when you’re screaming for me, that’s when you’ll get what you need, what you’ve always needed deep down.”

“No...” I hissed, some of the old Sloane, not wholly colonised by whatever his touch had done to me, coming through.

Head cocked to the side, he studied me. “You asked for me, Sloane. Said you needed me.” I stumbled back. He watched me kick off my heels, standing there buck fucking naked, turning away from him.

“You want to run,” he said, like he could see right through me. “It’s instinctual for an omega to want to test her chosen alpha. I’ll still rut you. That’s a given, and you fucking know it. You run, and I’ll make you wait. The dumb bastards have conditioned you to think like a beta, but I’ll make you realise that civility is only a façade. You’re an omega, and you need an alpha deep inside you. You need me.”

He felt too calm, too in control, while I felt like I was on the verge of madness.

“No!” I cried, stumbling back, doing exactly as he said I would but unable to quiet the thrashing of my heart inside my chest. Adrenalin pumped through me, screaming at me, telling me I was in danger and I needed to get the hell out, every limb quivering.

Or were they?

My mind and my body were fighting what was happening to it and what was about to, then a knife-like twist of vicious pleasure inside me confused the issue, cutting deep and letting me know that would only get deeper if I went down this path.

But I couldn't bloody stop, could I?

I turned around—my first mistake, putting my back to a predator—as I scanned the room, the elevator, him standing resolutely before that, arms crossed, a knowing smile on his face. I took three steps towards the kitchen, thinking I could grab a knife and hold him off. Yeah, that lasted as long as the next wet gush went sliding down my thighs. The bedroom. I could run into there, slam the door shut, lock it, and call for help. There were services, people who could get me out of here if I just?—

“This is still your choice, Sloane. You can tell me to stop at any time, and even though it'll fucking kill me, I will. But I'm telling you now, if you run, that's a big green fucking light. Get it out of your system now, because it's my turn later.”

Choice? I could tell him no... I eyed him warily. I'd asked for this, begging him, causing him to bring me here, my body aching so badly.

“Run, little omega, and I will rut you how you need. Say no, and I'm gonna walk away.”

His words lit a bomb underneath me, muscles I didn't know I had firing as I ran through the living area, curling around the couch, and into the warm, woody scented haven of the bedroom. I was gasping for air, despite only having run a short distance, and slammed the door behind me, swallowed now by all the comforting gloom of the room. Hands shaking, I felt for the lock, engaging it, and then slid down the door, hoping to jam it closed with my body weight.

A small sob escaped me then, my whole body shaking, but not from fear like I imagined a sane beta would. Whatever part of me resisted this, what I was, what he was, it was dying a slow, horrible death because when I felt his presence outside the door, scenting him, hearing the creak of the wood as his weight pressed against it, the knife inside me cut deeper. I ached, that was what the adrenalin had been masking, my hand sliding through my slick, my palm cupping my pubic mound at the sudden sharp stab of agony.

"I'm not gonna kick this door down," he said, seeming to know the moment when my body went into revolt against me. "I'm not gonna smash the lock, or any fucking lock in this place that you might think to use against me. I could, without a fucking thought. You think you can fight this, hide from this? Hide from me?" I heard the pain in his voice, even if I couldn't see it. "You can't. I'm your alpha, baby, and you want and need me. Do you feel it now—a pleasure so sharp, it feels like your insides are turning out?"

I nodded, panting rapidly now as another wave came, pleasure and pain mixing so intensely, it was hard to make out which was winning, my whole face screwing up to try and bear it.

"You could decide before to let some fucking unworthy bastard between your thighs. Let him pierce you with a few unspectacular thrusts, completely ignoring your clit. Let him blow his pathetic little bolt inside you, leaving you unhappy and unsatisfied. That's the privilege of a beta—you decide when, where, and with whom to have sex.

But that's not you anymore, baby. You've only got one choice, omega, and that's when. How much pain are you going to put yourself through, pretending what I'm saying isn't true?"

As if summoned by his words, the knife twisted sharply inside me now—not pleasure, just pain.

"How much time are you going to waste sitting there on the floor, smearing your slick all over it, while your cunt throbs for what only I can give you?"

I didn't want to let out a whine, but it forced its way out from between my teeth as I moved now, onto my hands and knees, the position soothing the ache, if only for a second. I heard the wood of the door creak as he pressed harder against it, the slight groan of the hinges.

"Open the door, omega. You don't hurt yourself, aching for me, and you don't fucking lock me out, away from what's mine. Open the door."

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His voice was a heavy hand on the back of my neck, clearing all the chaos inside my head and redirecting it.

“Open the door. Choose to accept what you are while you still can. Choose to alleviate a pain that will only grow the longer you hold out. Choose me, omega.”

It was that, that slight break in all those fatalistic words, where the alpha façade cracked for a second and then there was only this—an answering need, pain, desire, a twin of my own. One that would sweep in and take us over, make us one. That was what I knew would happen, as my trembling hand slid up the door, what had me running earlier. Betas made love and broke love with seeming incomprehensible ease, but us? We were dragged together by instincts we didn’t understand and welded tight, for better or worse.

And all I could do was hope for better.

My body was racked by waves of pain as my shaking hands turned the knob, Jace coaxing me, talking me through it, praising me for being such a good omega. Then there I was, on my knees before him, seeing those powerful thighs, those big broad hands as they made short work of his jeans, unbuttoning, unzipping, undressing until there was only him.

I surged up, feeling a certainty I’d never felt before, my hands on his thighs only for seconds before I wrapped them around him.

“Fuck yes...” he hissed as I tried to close my fingers around his thick girth and failed, pumping that rigid cock before moving closer.

That scent of his that eased my pain, drowned me in him, was the most intense here, and he chuckled, low and rough with his need, when I pressed my nose into the curls of his pubic hair, breathing him before my other instincts kicked in. A firm hand to the back of my neck, a real one now, it helped guide my mouth where it needed to go. Initially, I struggled, just licking up and down his length, unsure what the hell I was going to do with a frigging monster cock, but then my tongue flicked over the broad crown.

He groaned, more a growl.

The taste of him, his pre-cum, exploded in my mouth, right as another deep groan escaped him. I made a frantic little sound before fastening my lips around him, sucking hard, seeking more.

“Oh, fuck yeah, baby, that’s it. Take what you need.” His voice turned dark, intense, but I didn’t care anymore. My hands, my mouth, my head, his hand, we worked together now, all focussed on a common goal.

One of my hands moved on instinct, cupping those massive balls, coaxing them to give me what I needed, but discovering that big swelling that no beta sported—the near legendary knot. My fingers spanned it, tightening to the almost painful sound of his groan.

“Omega, you’re destroying my fucking control,” he rumbled. “Harder...that’s it, baby. So fucking good. Soon, your tight little cunt will be snapping around it, squeezing the cum out of me. Fuck, that’s it. I’m coming.”

His hands cupped my face, not letting me pull away as the deluge came. Rope after rope of a cum so sweet, I almost mistook it for something else, shot into my mouth. I swallowed frantically, wanting and needing every drop, a weird kind of euphoria suffusing me as he filled my throat to my continued suckling, until finally, he pulled

away with a pop.

He looked down at me like I'd hung the fucking moon or something, not blown him from my knees. Reaching down, he swiped a stray drop of cum off my chin before forcing it between my lips, groaning, eyes hooded when I sucked him clean.

“That’s my good girl. I think it’s time for your reward. You said you needed me.” His fingers squeezed over his hard dick, what we’d done having barely taken the edge off, so he was more than ready for more. “I’m a man of my word, baby. You’ll always find that to be true.”

And with that, he scooped me up, throwing me onto the bed and following me down. His body was hot, heavy, but I wrapped my arms and legs around it, needing and wanting that contact. His lips found my neck, breathing me in, nipping at the skin there, which only made me squirm harder.

“Need your taste, your slick, your cunt...” he mumbled between kisses, forcing my mouth open to take all of him. “Need you, omega.”

I didn’t have the words to reply, being too far gone at that point, but right then, every part of me agreed.

Chapter Four

Jace

The omega lay there, panting and writhing on the bed now as her awakening frenzy slammed into her hard, and I was there for it. Those tight little beads of nipples, her cunt glistening with slick... She was caught in the midst of a change that would transform her life, and I’d be the one to finalise those changes. As I moved closer, wanting and needing her so fucking much, my teeth began to grind with the effort of

holding myself back, because I was an alpha with fucking hang ups and I'd never been with an omega before.

I couldn't. I shouldn't. I should get someone else, someone more experienced, to tend to her for her first time.

But it was too late now. I was close enough to taste.

Mine! he roared.

Shut the fuck up, I snapped back, feeling my fangs ache with the need to bite her, claim her. I can't do this with you riding me.

A growl rumbled in my chest at the thought of any other male touching Sloane. They'd need to tranquillise my arse to get me to leave this fucking room. She needed tending to, even if it wasn't yet for heat, but I could get through this. I could give her what her body craved, and after, I would not turn into a raging maniac. If I didn't bite her, if she didn't go into heat, we could get up and go our separate ways afterwards.

My hands shook as they skimmed down the side of her body. When had my hands ever shaken like this? I couldn't fucking remember. Her scent was crawling under my skin, driving my mind deeper into the dark, edgy underworld, where animal instinct ruled.

My lips followed the path of my hand, closing over the stiff peak of her nipple and sucking hard. Her back arched into it, little mewling sounds pouring from her lips as her fingers clenched my hair. Her responsiveness lit an echo of her fire in me. I flicked my tongue back and forth over the nipple, a low purr of satisfaction rumbling in my chest.

Primal needs tore through me, each seeking precedence.

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Mark.

Claim.

Breed.

I sucked a deep breath in, sensing the fucking line calling me to cross it. Marking her seemed like a good place to start, but my marks would fade, although my beast recoiled at the thought of that.

My lips popped off her nipple, nose nudging the side of her tit before I sucked on the plump flesh. Her hands tightened, hips rocking against my belly, smearing it with slick. I dropped a little more weight onto her, pinning her in a way instinct told me she would like.

“Mm...” She panted, hands lowering, nails scoring my shoulders. “Please, Jace.”

Yeah, she was all in on the marking.

I ignored her pleas. Little omega had dared to run from me, so now she was going to wait for my cock until I was good and ready, and I was far from being done claiming these perfect, pretty tits. As my mouth moved on, another red welt formed.

My beast rose, even as the man in me sank deeper still. By the time I lifted my head, her tits were swollen and littered with evidence of my possession, but it was time for me to feast. She whined when I shifted, her nails raking over my flesh. Gathering her wrists in one hand, I pinned them to the bed over her head and lowered my mouth

toward hers.

She growled at me, eyes spitting fire when I held my lips just out of reach.

“Open your legs wider,” I said.

Her thighs popped open, glistening cunt mine for the taking.

I lowered my head, snatching a kiss before lifting again.

“I’m going to enjoy your pussy now, baby, and you’re going to be my good girl and keep your hands right here.”

Another lingering kiss, and I couldn’t help but let her have my tongue. She sucked greedily, pouting when I drew away.

“You move them, and the clock starts again.”

“No!”

“Yes,” I said, cupping her cheek, keeping her eyes on me. “You move, and I start all over again. I’ll keep you waiting for the knot your pussy is craving.”

I was standing on the precipice, and I wanted her right there with me. Gazing up at me, she nodded once, eyes glazed, lips glistening and a little puffy from my kiss. Mouth curving up in a smirk, I released her hands, watching as she fisted them against the pillow.

“Good girl,” I said as I shifted, attention lowering to where she was weeping for me. My mouth had been fucking watering long before I spread her even wider and lowered my head. She twitched with the first swipe of my tongue.

Wrapping my hands around her thighs, I held her still and gorged myself on her slick, lapping, licking, and nibbling before closing my lips around her clit and sucking.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” Her whole body locked up, and she flooded me with slick. It was like a bomb detonating inside my head. My cock was so fucking hard, it was trying to rut through the bed. Her small hands were in my hair, but I didn’t fucking care. I just kept on eating her out, driving more of her slick to gush from her pussy, more of those sweet mewling sounds to pour from her lips, like I might die if they fucking stopped.

Her hoarse cries finally broke through the frenzy. Head lifting, I stared up at the omega sprawled out on my bed, chest rising and falling on a pant, face flushed and pupils blown.

“Please, please, please, Jace. I can’t... I’m so empty. Please take it away.”

Omega needs us now.

Rising, I swiped a hand down my face, lungs full of her scent, trying to find solid ground when it felt like the room was moving around me. My cock was so hard, I could drive fucking nails with it. I took it in hand to line it up with her puffy pussy, bringing a groan to her lips.

Knot her, he demanded. We must.

I could not fucking wait a second. I was going to lose my mind if I didn’t get inside her. Barely had I snagged my dick in her entrance than I surged deep.

Her back arched off the bed, fingers clawing at my arse, legs wrapping around me like she was terrified I was going to leave her. As if I could. I’d fucking die if someone tried to take this perfect clenching heaven away from me.

“Good girl,” I rumbled, head lowering to the crook of her throat, trying to ground myself. I felt like I was falling, drowning, and crashing all at once. “Open up for me, baby. Let me in.”

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“Don’t stop!” A great sob erupted from her chest. Her pussy was like a fucking vice around me, sucking me in and pushing me out.

Bracing an arm around her arse, I pulled out and thrust back in, feeling her give and myself sink deeper. “You feel too fucking good,” I said. “I’m not going to fucking last.”

One more deep thrust, and I bottomed out, cock to the root, my knot already swelling with blood as she clamped down on me with her inner muscles. A shudder rippled through me, sweat breaking out over my body. Heaven and hell collided as I braced my knees and began to fuck her. The wet slaps of our meeting flesh were music to my ears and damn near took me over the edge.

My knot was growing, the sensation of it sliding in and out of her hot cunt sublime. No beta pussy had ever felt like this. Nothing in my life could prepare me for the experience of being inside Sloane.

“Come with me, baby. Come all over my cock.”

And she did, locking down on me in clenching waves, forcing me to grit my teeth and work the knot in one last time. Her hips slammed up as hard as mine slammed down. It was like we were both trying to fuse with one another. My cum left me in an explosion, balls tight and cock jerking as I filled her hot cunt with my seed.

Breed.

My cock jerked again, and another great gush of cum left me in a heady rush.

“Good girl,” I crooned in her ear. “Keep squeezing your alpha, encourage him to fill you all up.”

Tell me to breed you.

Her nails were in my arse, and I fucking loved it. Her small teeth in my pec, biting, and I fucking loved that as well.

Mark me as yours.

Gusty breaths followed. My cock continued to jolt, while her pussy continued to clench.

Sanity was slow to return.

Our combined cum was sliding down my balls and saturating the bed. Her teeth, her nails, her legs wrapped around my waist brought all my crazy buried instincts to the fore.

I wanted her again.

I wanted her tomorrow.

I didn’t want another male to ever look at her again.

Chapter Five

Sloane

I don’t care what anyone tells you, there was nothing more awkward than waking up next to a one-night stand—a stranger who appeared in your bed overnight, dragged

there by alcohol, drugs, or in my case, by some weird fucking chemical reaction that had me turning into something else altogether. I peeled myself away from the sheets, sensing two things. The way the fabric clung to me, sticking to my skin, reminded me that last night's events were real and not a fever dream. That and the sun, streaming in through the bedroom windows and illuminating him.

My fingers twitched as I stared down at his sleeping form, feeling the desire and need to stroke them through his thick brown hair, over the brutal planes of his face. Familiar on a cellular level and yet so completely alien, he was a stranger and he was also my alpha.

Jace.

I hissed at that, barely a whisper, but he moved, roused, woke, like a beast in its cave and I'd been the one to poke him. When those brown eyes met mine, deep chocolate coloured, the skin around them crinkling as he yawned before one of those huge arms went around me and pulled me back down, that reality hit me hard. My mind might be raketaking around in my skull, fluttering like a moth against a window, but my body, it knew. It was there in the way I slotted against his big body, sheltered by that massive ridge of muscle and bone, made small and fragile in return. Our size differences, his scent, the way he held me with complete and utter possessiveness said it all—things had changed. I wasn't an independent and self-sufficient beta anymore. I was an omega.

"My omega..." he sighed, as if in counterpoint to my thought, and didn't those words sting as they branded me? But not unpleasantly. I was used to this, tossing aside what I'd thought I wanted or needed, having to do the same when Mum and Dad died. Right now, right here, held so close I could hear the heavy thud of his heart and the whistle of his breath, I found myself accepting this change in roles, settling against his chest. I was rewarded then with a hand spanning my shoulder blades and stroking, bringing my awareness and my body back to the here and now. Again and again, he

stroked me, making low, satisfied little grunts with each pass, running his hand up and down until the awkwardness bled away and there was only this.

I was sure he would consider my movements naughty, further evidence of my rebellious omega nature, but I pulled away, needing that tiny little physical space as I grappled with a need for a little emotional distance. What the fuck was I thinking? Em, Jewel, Jude? What the hell had happened? Had Jude got them home? Were they locked away somewhere in... What was this bloody place? Ensconced in some alpha's bedroom, waking up ready to face the walk of shame or...

"They're safe," he replied to my unconscious deluge, not even cracking an eyelid while I hung there, staring. "I made sure the boys put them in cabs and got them home in one piece. Knew that'd worry you."

I didn't reply, struck speechless by someone else stepping up and seeing to the responsibility that was Em. I couldn't even tell you how I felt about it, the idea so foreign, I couldn't grasp it. So the response, a hot, hot flush of lust, was delayed. Yeah, I was getting used to that, feeling my pussy begin to seep again distressingly. But more? Where the hell did that come from? A wave of gratitude, appreciation, want, need, rose and rose, and at its crest, there was something else—something that kept me pinned to the bed, even when he moved, rolling me onto my back and covering my body with his.

"You look after her," he said, then kissed me before I could reply, the faintest press of his mouth, before he pulled back. "Everything you do is for her." Another kiss, like a punctuation mark, but it was starting to blur the meaning of his words as my body began to respond. "I know what that's like."

Then he stopped, me staring at him, him staring at me.

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“I’ve got a sister that I look after too. She’s an omega, but, Sloane?” This kiss was slower, deeper, much more thorough, claiming my mouth until I was forced to pull back and suck breaths in. “What’s yours is mine, baby. Your worries.” A kiss on my collarbone. “Your concerns.” One on my neck, making me arch my spine. “Your responsibilities.” His teeth, fastening on the skin there, just holding a fold until I began to squirm, feeling an alien need for more. For those sharp fangs to clamp down, breaking the skin as he broached me, spearing inside as he marked me much more thoroughly than he had last night. A small whine escaped me in response, but he chuckled, pulling back and staring down at me. “I told you, I’ve got you, Sloane.” His eyes roamed across my skin. “All of you.”

What was left of me, Sloane, beta, sister, daughter, thrashed around inside me, fighting to get free, but I was an omega in the presence of a very big, very hard alpha, so that got pushed rudely to one side. Instead, something so completely alien happened. My body went limp, my heart rate beginning to slow as a feeling of sweet, sweet surrender overwhelmed me. For now, there was only here, now, him.

A him that saw my moment of weakness and intended to exploit it as best as he could, for my benefit.

He’d called it rutting, but right now, it didn’t feel like that, the word not fitting the way he seemed to read my body as he went up on his knees, stroking his hands up and down me in an almost soothing caress. There were none of the cruel pinching fingers of last night that had made me insane with pleasure. Instead, he seemed content to drive me mad in a much more gentle way.

“My beautiful girl...”

His hands spanned my collarbone, my shoulders and my arms, creating frantic little twitches of pleasure before moving on. When they swept up again to stroke across my hips, my stomach, my ribcage, he snorted when I arched my back. He seemed to want to pet me, but I couldn't be still and let him. I felt a pulse start deep inside me, a slow, ponderous throb, and each pass of his hand stoked it higher so that when he cupped my breasts, I was panting.

"These..." My breasts were dwarfed by his hands and aching for more, his fingers tracing the outer ring of my nipple but no more. "I could spend my fucking day exploring every inch of these and call it good." My areola puckered in desperation, the points beginning to ache like whatever it was inside me. "Pinching these little nipples." The sound that came from me was fucking debauched, a groan of surrender and need. "Pulling them just enough to make it sting."

What. The actual. Fuck. What should've hurt only made my nerve endings sing. This had begun all gentle and sweet, and here was I, wriggling like a fish because I couldn't tell where the pleasure ended and the pain started.

"Soothing them with kisses until I scent that your slick is beginning to run."

And then there it came, one set of fingers holding my breast ready while his mouth descended on the other, his tongue tracing, flicking, then his lips closing over where I ached the most and sucking.

That was the problem with people you'd had fucking hot sex with—their every action reminded you of past successes. I knew the prickle of his stubble, the firm stroke of his tongue all over my body, and the rest of it screamed for more of the same. Finally, I did as he asked, being a good little omega, slick coming out of my cunt in a gush. His head jerked up, and for a split second, I felt a childlike rush of shame. This was so embarrassing, like a child getting caught wetting the bed, but his expression killed that feeling dead. He stared at me for a moment with an attitude of reverence, as if

that small involuntary act was a gift of great magnitude to him.

“You’re still getting used to this body,” he said, way too insightfully, “but I can show you exactly what it’s capable of.” A finger slid down my midline, down, down, tracing a small circle around my belly button before going lower, to exactly where I needed him. I began to shift, twist, but his hand clamped, keeping me where I was. “More pleasure than you know what to do with. More than you can get your head around. More than you’ve ever known. Do you want that, Sloane?”

What could I do but nod furiously? Alpha, beta, or omega, it didn’t make a difference, not when faced by this. Sweat prickled over my skin, and it felt like a fire followed in its wake before chasing his fingers between my legs.

“Up on all fours, love,” he said, more growl than instruction now. I wasn’t about to say no, hearing the desire there. “I need you open and ready for me. All of you.”

I didn’t think too much about that, scrambling to do as he said, the promise of pleasure singing in my blood, nor did I notice the sound of a bottle cap being popped and a wet squirt, but I soon found out as I knelt there, head buried down in the pillows, sucking in mouthfuls of his scent. It was that which had my head spinning, only able to focus on the slap of one of his hands down on my hip, and the other? Slick fingers swiped over my arsehole, leaving a confusing tumble of sensations in their wake.

“Don’t fret, omega,” he said as I began to move restively, struggling to stay still, to process what he was doing. “You’re still getting to know what you are, and I’m going to help you.”

That was all the warning I got as he raised the hand not tracing the outline of my butt, then brought it slapping down across my pussy, dragging a scream from me, but not from pain precisely. An intense, intense warmth spread from the impact site, out and

into my body, my cunt convulsing frantically.

“You haven’t had enough, omega,” he said as he massaged his fingers through my folds, spearing inside me for a second, enough to drag a low, drawn-out moan from me. And my clit? Sometimes, it had felt like the bloody thing was MIA when I was having sex with betas, but now it throbbed, pulsing with that same fire that had been building within me since we’d started this. When he stroked it, an honest-to-goodness growl escaped me as my whole body shuddered with pleasure.

“Come now,” he said in a cajoling tone as a thumb was thrust in. “Just a little one. Something to take the edge off before we build up to the main event.”

I’d always snorted at CEOs ordering their secretaries to come on command in the romances I’d read to try and get to sleep, but I’d never factored in the alpha component. My body was his, humming wildly to a tune he created and that deadly sense of knowledge, that he knew exactly how I’d respond before I did, which resulted in this. His short, thick thumb pushed inside my cunt, teasing me with its lack, reminding me just how good it felt to be filled by him. I did just as he said, feeling a rush of pleasure somewhat ruined by being knotless, which was reflected in my inarticulate cry.

“Not enough for you, omega?” I heard the smugness in his voice. “Don’t worry—with me, you’ll get everything you need, always.”

There was a threat in his words, but mainly, it was an honest, heartfelt promise, that ragged tone something I held onto as he pulled his hand back.

Jace

Her responses were everything I’d heard of. We were new to each other. She was new to being an omega, while I was new to being with an omega. So yeah, we both

had a lot of learning to do. What we did last night had been rutting, but this...this was sensual play. I'd done this before, many times, but never on this level, never with this connection.

Never with Sloane.

"Please," she said, like she didn't know exactly what she wanted, only that it was more than what she'd gotten.

"You need more, love?" My slick fingers traced along her pussy, catching her sensitive clit. She gasped and pushed back, groaning when I took my hand completely away from the little nub. Her arse was fucking perfect, and I took my time squeezing and petting it, liking how it filled my big hands, but that little puckered rosebud was definitely calling to me. Time to explore how sensual a creature she was. As my fingertips traced a circle around that arsehole, a shudder rippled through her.

"Are you sensitive here, love?" Her answer was a fresh trickle of slick and her clenching. At my open-handed spank against her buttock, she let out a small gasp and buried her face deeper into the bed. "Don't try to keep it in, baby. This is natural for an omega. I couldn't give a fuck if you saturate my whole fucking bed. I need you too. Makes my dick twitch and balls clench every time you gush slick."

She'd blushed a pretty shade of pink when her pussy had leaked earlier too. I'd grown up expecting to be a beta, so I'd heard all the bullshit they were fed about us, knew first hand the damage it did to my sister. They made alphas and omegas sound like deviants, causing us to feel dirty and depraved, but I couldn't think of anything more natural for an omega than to show her lover how well she enjoyed what he did.

One hand bracing her hip, my fingers returned to her arsehole. She tensed, but not as much as before, a battle taking place as her body's responses warred with her determination of what a 'good' beta should be and do. Seemed to me the training had

missed the mark, given how many betas came into the alpha controlled zone looking for the darker play that came naturally to us.

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I kept the pressure light, giving her a chance to get used to the sensations. Her pussy wept continuously, so much that I could see slick trickling down her thighs. Then I mixed it up, one fingertip gently scraping over that little sensitive rosebud, and another little huff was breathed into the bed. My dick wanted in her weeping cunt so badly, but this was about her, about showing her what her body was capable of. I paused long enough for another good squirt of lube, smiling when it had the predictable effect of making her tense up.

“I’m not putting my dick in here today, baby,” I said. “So get that worry out of your mind.” I grinned. “But you can bet I’m thinking about it,” I added just as I pushed the tip of my finger past that tight, resistant ring.

She groaned into the bedding, and my grin grew broader.

I slid my other hand around to cup the mound of her pussy, letting the pads of my fingers rest over her clit. Her arse clenched around the end. She was going to come again, sooner than I wanted, if I was judging this right.

“Good girl,” I said. “You’re taking this so well.” I slipped my fingertip out her little arsehole and pushed it straight back in again, pulling more whimpering, more trickling slick from her. My fingertip moved in and out, waking up all the little nerves here, then I timed sinking to the first knuckle to coincide with a gentle strum of her clit.

“Don’t come,” I growled, sensing that she was already close. This next one needed to build up.

“Jace,” she gasped out, clenching down on my finger like a vice.

“Relax, baby,” I said. “You can do this. I promise, I’m not going to do more than you can handle. Just stay with me, okay?”

“Okay,” she replied on a little breathy gasp.

“Good girl,” I said encouragingly. My fingers turned slippery as I gently circled her swollen clit, my other finger pumping in and out of her arse slowly, just enough to arouse more sensations. My cock leaked a trail of pre-cum all the way to the bed, but I didn’t care about that either. My pleasure could wait. I was high on her reactions, her every twitch and sigh making me fucking delirious. “Does that feel good?”

“Yes, so good,” she said on a groan. “How does it feel so good?”

No one had done this with her before, and that turned me on so hard. I liked being the first one to touch her here, her first alpha. I’d be the first one to show her many things, if I had my way.

Yess... he purred.

She relaxed under the gentle attention, letting me push deeper and open her up as my finger slipped in and out. I imagined my finger was my dick, hearing the guttural noises she would make as she threw her hips back, seeking more, harder, deeper, unable to help herself, because an omega was an alpha’s perfect counterpart. These had been mere words before, concepts I’d accepted on an intellectual level, but now I was coming to fully understand them.

“Good girl,” I said. “You’re taking this so well. Let yourself relax for me, baby. That’s it.”

I mixed it up by pulling all the way out and circling the entrance to her arse before pushing my finger back in, over and over again, feeling her flutter around my finger, feeling her tense, then relax, accepting me inside. Little sobs began to fall from her lips. She didn't like it when I pulled out, but she was close, very close. I was right there with her, and my dick hadn't got a look in yet.

“Does that feel good, baby?”

“Yes, so, so good. Please. Please, let me come. I don't...I don't think I can hold it.”

“You can. Relax for me.”

I left off her clit and, taking my cock in hand, lined up with the entrance to her pussy...then sank the tip in. Fuck, that felt so fucking perfect—hot, tight, and a filthy kind of wet from her slick. I fucking loved everything about this. She was closer still, and it wouldn't take much to push her over the edge. Sinking my finger to the second knuckle in her arse, I began to shallowly thrust my cock in and out.

“That's it, baby. Let yourself relax again. You're doing so well.”

Everything was fluttering with little clenches and twitches as her hips jerked, trying to push back onto me, to get more of my finger and cock. I began to alternate pushing my finger in her arse with my cock thrusting in her pussy, swapping them over and over. One hand was on her hip to keep her still because she couldn't be, too desperate for all of it at once. I kept my thrusts measured, driving her higher still. My spine tingled at the base, and my balls were tight to the point of imminent climax. It was taking a heroic effort on my part not to fucking come, but I wanted her there—the slow rising.

I wanted to blow her mind.

I wanted to show her what it was to be an omega.

I wanted to be that alpha who could guide her, who could show her the pleasures of her body and all it was capable of.

Mine... he growled.

This was only the beginning. There were many more experiences for her to have.

There was a prickle up my spine right then I should've taken note of, one at odds with all this drowsy pleasure. It was like insistent cold claws, creeping up my spine, but I couldn't pay it any mind, not when I was so deep in her. So the cold, hard fear settled down in the back of my skull, waiting for its time.

“Relax for me, baby.”

I stilled for a few beats, letting her come down, taking her from the edge before resuming once again. She was so slick now that my cock made lewd noises as it thrust in and out. I began to pick up the pace a little, and her cries turned wild.

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“I can’t... Jace, please. God please. Just let me come, let it come.”

I stilled again. “Relax, baby.” A sob stuttered in her chest, and I smoothed my hand against her hip. “Good girl. Relax, and I can start again. Deep breaths. That’s it.” She sucked air in, getting her spiralling emotions under tenuous control.

I began again, slowly but building steadily, until my cock was slapping in and out, my finger now holding deep in her arse. Sweat bathed my body, and we were both on the edge. A sharp cry tore from her lips, followed by low groans as her pussy made a vice around my cock and her arse crushed my finger, tightening, fluttering, then tightening and fluttering again, and then rippling into the intense contractions that demanded I come.

“Jace, please!”

“Come, baby,” I cried out. “Come on my fucking cock.”

She did.

Hers to command, my knot bloomed and I held deep, letting her sweep me up and over that carnal cliff together. The noises she made were inhuman, and they dragged me into the sensual underworld. I’d done this to her, driven her to this state, this rapture, where her whole body contorted, twisting, pushing back, seeking more. My balls tightened to the point of pain, my mind whiting out as a great spurt of cum ejected from the tip of my cock. There I held, growling low, head tipped back, feeling the chords of my neck strain as I submitted to the bliss.

Breed...

But I wasn't done yet. Fingers reaching around her front, I began to stroke her clit again.

Her answer was another gush of cum and slick leaking around my cock, then trickling down my balls to saturate me and the bed.

"That's it, baby," I rumbled softly. "Come all over me again."

And she did, pussy convulsing, wild groans pouring from her lips. I would never get enough of this, ever.

This right here, this hedonistic glory, was extraordinary and beyond my understanding of pleasure, but it wasn't only that. An awareness shifted inside of me...a hyperawareness. I could hear our every ragged breath like it was amplified, skin and nerves sensitive and flaring over and over again.

My finger stilled over her clit, and I just held her, enjoying the sensation of her pussy clenching over my cock, squeezing me in a demand for more. I answered her call, balls emptying into her.

Suddenly, I needed to see her face, but we were locked tight. Leaning over, I took her chin, turning her face so that I could see the rapture contorting it. Jesus, when had I ever seen anything so beautiful?

"Look at me, baby," I said

Her pretty eyes opened to meet mine, pupils blown to fuck.

This right here was everything an alpha and omega were meant to be.

Chapter Six

Sloane

After we'd showered and got dressed, I floated downstairs at Jace's side in a haze that was just...lovely. A small, uptight part of my brain screamed hysterically at that, this feeling of surrender so bloody alien, but as long as his arm, my alpha's arm, was wrapped around me, I could shove those worries to one side and just be. People looked up as we emerged out of the elevator, not in the bar, but in a large communal living area. They were eating breakfast, a stout woman swinging out from between two doors with platters groaning with food, my stomach rumbling in response.

"Hungry, baby?" Jace rumbled, looking down at me with a warm smile. "C'mon. Ma makes the best breakfast with all the trimmings in the entire city." And so I was shepherded over to a long table, wooden benches set up either side and the eyes of everyone sitting there on us. "Guys, this is Sloane. Sloane, this is...my family."

Not literally, I assumed, as most of the people seated seemed to be in their twenties or thirties and they didn't appear to have anything in common physically. Well, except for them. Two guys sat together, and there was no way to miss them, their bodies huge and hulking compared to everyone else. They also possessed an odd kind of stillness, especially him, with his grey blue eyes that seemed to stare straight into me, eradicating all my warm fuzzies, and mid brown hair that had gotten too long, scraped back from his face by a big square hand.

"Tone it down, Ryder," Jace snarled.

"So she revealed as an omega." Murmurs went up around the table. "And she's unmarked."

"She's not to be marked."

Jace's voice, that famed alpha bark, was like a slap across the face of everyone here, silence reigning supreme. My mind was playing catch-up with the marking comment. This had all escalated swiftly, the hazy bubble holding me in its protective embrace wobbling a little.

"She has to be marked," the darker haired guy sitting next to Ryder snapped back. Somehow, he was even bigger, with more than a five o'clock shadow across his square jaw. "A free roaming omega in the zone?" He shook his head, then glanced at the others. "We're gonna have to lock the place down and assess what weapons we've got. No one goes in or out for fear of someone outside of this place getting a sniff of her, and if she goes into heat?"

I swallowed. I hadn't even gotten to the delicious-looking food, and now my throat was dust dry. Part of me knew that Tall, Dark, and Super Grumpy was telling the truth. Everything I'd been told about omegas outside the zone was that our scents were potent, enough to drive an alpha insane. He'd be maddened by lust, able to commit superhuman feats to remove any obstacles between him and the object of his affections. A small whine escaped my lips, making me instantly flush, and Jace's arms tightened around me, a faint rusty purr coming from his chest in answer.

He was purring for me.

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I'd found the idea positively ridiculous when I was told about it in sex ed, but right now? I was nestling into his chest, trying to find a soft place in all that hard muscle, because that sound? It felt like it washed over all of me, like a big strong hand stroking my back and settling me.

"That's it..." he crooned between purrs. "Good girl." I was lowered to a bench, dimly aware that people were moving out of our way to give us a spot, but Jace, he didn't let me go for a second, even when other people around the table seemed intent on intruding on our moment.

"Look, Jace, I don't want to be a prick, but we have to put our heads together. Better that she's marked like the others. If you don't, Snake and his crew, they'd give their left nuts for someone like her, especially a classy piece of arse?"

"Shut the fuck up, Dane."

"And what's going on here?"

I forced my head up and off Jace's chest, even as I felt the need to stay exactly where I was. The stout woman was standing by the table holding the platters up, looking up and down the table.

"You okay, love?"

Beta me would have bristled at that, at the sweet comment, at the warm tone, at all the sympathy and protective bullshit poured into those three little words, but omega me? I stared at her, and then god-freaking-dammit, felt my eyes begin to sting.

“Oh, sweetheart...”

The platters were put down with a clatter, people waved away, and the strange woman came and sat down beside me, wrapping her arm around my shoulders and squishing me in her soft embrace. Part of me wanted to hate this, fight this, shove off this woman with her patronising bullshit and sit at the table, elegant as a queen, but that wasn't the Sloane who was in the driver's seat. I sank into her hug, taking a big breath before letting it out for a long, long time.

“That's it, lovey, you just let it all out. And, you boys!” That was hissed viciously. “What the hell do you think you're doing, talking such nonsense around an omega who's just revealed? She's probably feeling raw, crazy, like her life's been tipped upside down and put back together all ad hoc.” A big hand stroked my back, then squeezed my shoulders. “Have something to eat, little omega?—”

“Sloane,” Jace interrupted. “Her name is Sloane.”

“Then it's time to have something to eat, little Sloane. I'm guessing that boy of mine has been running you ragged?—”

“Ma...”

“Focussed on your body, but not what it needs.”

“Ma...”

“Turning your head until you don't know what is what. I taught you better than this, Jason Mark?—”

“Ma!”

I found myself jumping at the sound of his bark, my heart clattering in my chest. I wanted to roll my bloody eyes at that, but something, someone, had hijacked my body and its reactions. What was I now, some quivering little mouse?

“I kept Sloane safe, cared for her, looked after her needs, and made sure she stayed hydrated, even when she was fighting me about it. Does that meet with your approval?”

“Oh, well yes, that’s good then.” I was released from the soft, sweet-scented embrace and somehow felt lesser for it, but a big ceramic plate was placed before me. “Now, Sloane, do you have any foods you can’t eat or anything? You’ll need lots of protein to build your strength.”

“Hey!” one of the guys said as the platter of bacon was dragged our way.

“And carbs. You’ll need to load up for what he has in store for you.”

“God, Ma, stop!” the other guys around the table groaned.

“What? You think I don’t know why these strange girls appear around my table every morning? Not exactly for Sunday prayers, is it? But, Sloane...” I felt the woman’s gaze, her smile, and I turned towards it, like a flower turns to the sun. She was a picture of motherly sweetness, her name a perfect descriptor. “You’re an omega.”

Somehow, all I’d achieved in my short life seemed to come a dim second to that. Ma looked so damn proud of me, and for some reason, my heart swelled as a result. I wanted that, for someone to pat me on the head and tell me I was a good girl, even as I knew how asinine that was, but my usual spiky shell was gone and couldn’t protect me against her, against anything. Instead, I smiled up at the woman and pulled the plate over, nibbling on the delights piled there.

“Who’s an omega?”

My eyes flicked up, taking in the newcomers, a small group of young women, but they couldn’t really compete with bacon and eggs. I felt their eyes on me as my stomach clenched hard, letting me know how much I needed food right now, especially with all the extra demands I’d put on my body. So as the girls sat down at the table, looking at me, Jace, and the others, I didn’t really give it much attention.

“Sloane is,” Jace replied, getting to his feet but depositing a kiss on my head. “One we need to protect. Fellas, you’re with me.” A collective groan went up at that. “Blame Dane for this. He made some good points, ones we need to be ready for. Snake and his crew? They’d do a lot to get their hands on an unmarked omega.” He bent down to look at me before he went to go. “I’ll be in the next room, taking a meeting with the guys, but I’ll be back shortly. Have your breakfast. Ma’ll look after you.”

She might, but the other women around the table might not. I felt their collective gaze on me as Ma kept chattering on, piling more and more food on my plate.

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“An omega...” one woman said in a hushed tone. “Jace hasn’t taken one since...”

“Since ever,” another said much more sharply as her green eyes, complete with beautifully executed winged eyeliner, looked me over. “He’s never voiced an interest in taking one.”

“And he’s not now.”

The last woman sat at the head of the table, fastidiously picking through the mounds of food to create a smaller approved selection on her plate. She wore her bright blonde hair up in a ponytail, had the kind of fresh-faced, dewy complexion one would typically expect from an omega, and coupled with the light blue baby doll dress, she looked exactly what I thought she was—alpha bait. Em used to follow the Insta accounts of high-end influencers who liked to descend on the zone, going trawling for alphas like a matador would bulls. She glanced up at me coolly, her crystal blue eyes narrowing as she inspected me closely now.

Only she wasn’t an omega wannabe, she was an omega, like the other women...like me.

“I’m Baby Doll. Jace is a good guy who’s gone out on a limb for every single one of us omegas.” She picked up a piece of super crunchy bacon and took a bite, the pause going on and on. “That’s what he does—he rides to the rescue, saving omegas left and right to try and assuage the guilt he feels about her.”

“You don’t know that,” Ma blustered. “Every alpha needs an omega. You know that. Everyone knows that.”

“But not Jace,” Baby Doll replied, smiling before taking the time to lick her fingers. “And before you come at me, I’ll say one word.” Her smile was perfectly and utterly radiant. “Ella.”

Who the hell was Ella? Why did the mention of her make me feel a little queasy? I glanced up and down the table, trying to read people’s expressions and not liking what I saw. Empathy, discomfort, awkwardness, even dislike. I’d experienced brush-offs and mean girl bullshit every damn day in the beta world, so why did it hit me so hard right now? Being an omega wasn’t like being thin-skinned, it was like being no skinned. Every response and reaction hit me physically, until all my muscles were tensed, ready to bolt.

You’re not safe here, my heart beat. Small, weak, prey. My eyes darted around the table, around the room, finding mocking expressions and escape routes, then a large clatter in the adjoining kitchen sealed my fate.

“What the hell have those silly boys done now?” Ma said, patting my hand and getting to her feet. “Have something to eat, and I’ll be back in a tick. And, you ladies...” She held out a finger, surveying each of the women that had arrived. “Leave the poor girl alone. Jace did help you out, and it’s time to repay that favour by being kind to his lady.”

Some girls blanched, obviously feeling ashamed of their earlier response, while others were mulish, arms crossed, backs jammed up against the seats.

“Sorry,” one said when Ma disappeared. “It’s just...Jace has always avoided omegas. He keeps us safe, and the alphas in this place give us a mark.” She held out her wrist, where I saw a small white scar. “It’s not a mating mark. They don’t do it at the height of passion or anything. It just indicates we belong...here, until we find our alpha.” The lot of them shuffled at that, eyes flicking sideways, like a restive herd. “It stops the other alphas from thinking they can just grab us and claim us, but...”

“Jace is a good guy,” Baby Doll said. “One of the best, but we’ve all been where you are right now. You come floating downstairs like you’re walking on air, feeling like no one or nothing can change that.” Then her face fell, and her expression was mirrored by the other women. “And then you’re treated to the sight of someone else doing the exact same thing the next morning, and the next and the next.”

Blondie’s eyes softened somewhat as she took in my clothes, my hair, and my jewellery.

“He won’t knot you, claim you, fill you with everything you need, and then sink his fangs deep into your skin, leaving his mark for everyone to see. He doesn’t, and they don’t.” I stared at her doll-like perfection and finally started to see the cracks. “They keep you at arm’s length, right when you need them the most. They ‘take care’ of you, finger you until you’re gasping, and then...”

She shoved her wrist out, just like the other omega had.

“Nice, neat, surgical bites. Ones that say fuck off to other alphas, even the ones you might find happiness with. Claimed but not claimed, and left in a godawful limbo.” She shook her head, her eyes shining now suspiciously. “You look like you come from money or something. Subtle pieces but expensive, will last you a lifetime.” She shook her head, as if dismissing that. “Hustle on back to whatever world you came from, that’s all I can say, because down in the zone?” Her eyes went wide and unseeing, because it wasn’t me she watched anymore. “It can be dog eat dog, omega, and you’re the perfect damn bone, but the guy you want sees you as a convenient snack and not the main meal.”

Of course this wasn’t real, that was what their words told me. Everything I’d felt, the fucking surge of heat, passion, but most of all, satisfaction was a lie. Last night, this morning, I’d finally, finally had enough. No more packing away my misery, my pain, my fear, my needs. He was there, he would see to them, all of them, and finally, I

could...

This wasn't real—none of it.

I was up and out of my seat, the other women making sounds in response, but I didn't wait around to hear them out. I was striding across the room, up to the door, opening it and finding myself back in the bar that was empty now, but for a beta barman. Brown curly hair, medium blue eyes, the kind of face that could easily get lost in the crowd, he glanced up, then stared when he saw who it was

"I need to get out of here," I said, slamming my hands down on the bar. "Out of the zone."

"Out of... The gate is closed?—"

"Now," I said, then grabbed the bag I hadn't even remembered dragging downstairs and rifled through it, looking for my card, only to see my phone was nestled in there and ringing. "Hello?"

"Hey, babes!" Em replied with a deafening enthusiasm. "So by the neatly made-up bed in your room, I'm guessing someone was a dirty stop out last night! Jude, Jewel, and I are doing a sneaky Macca's run to soak up all the bloody alcohol we drank and then we're coming to get you!"

"Change of plan," I replied tersely, staring at the freaked-out barman. "Meet me at the zone gate, ASAP."

"Okay... Is everything all right? Sloane, did he...?"

"I'm fine, just ready to go home. Sex is great and all, but does it really compare to a single origin bean caramel latte from Alphonsino's?"

It felt like I was putting old Sloane on like a mask, plastering beta competency and decisiveness over...what? What exactly was an omega? A quick kaleidoscope of moaning, whining, biting, slick splattering, knotting sex, hit me like a gut punch, but I just took a long breath in and charged on.

“OMG, Sloane! At least let me keep my illusions. This alpha I met last night, Ryder... Damn!”

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“Tell me all about it when you get here, Em,” I replied, much more softly.

“Of course. Five minutes, Okay?”

I ended the call, the phone, the bag, the bar, all of it feeling weird, alien, and ill-fitting, but that would pass, I was sure of it. Hormones had rugby-tackled me for a night, made me say and do things I never would have and never would again. I just needed to get home.

“A fifty if you get me out of the zone gate in one piece within five minutes,” I offered, holding up the crisp note. The barman snatched it out of my hand, but not before he looked up and down the bar.

“Through here,” he said. “We’ll have to go down the alleyway. If any of the alphas catch scent of you... Here, spray yourself with this.”

He handed me a bottle of what looked like Febreze and smelled kinda the same—synthetic and flowery. I doused myself liberally before handing it back to the barman.

“Nah, you keep it, love. That’s the good stuff, and it’s hard to come by outside the zone.”

I shoved it into my bag. He nodded, then took me out the back, through the storeroom, and out into a stinking alley beyond. He clasped my hand, the size and strength stirring something inside me, but I pushed that brutally down. Not here, not yet.

No, not ever again.

Then he hauled me up the alleyway, fishing out a set of keys and holding them at the ready as he approached the fence.

It all felt ridiculously cloak-and-dagger. There was no one around, no one to even watch us pass, let alone wish us harm, but the barman acted like he was some kind of secret agent man, slinking low, eyes everywhere. I was prepared to go along with it, until finally, we reached the gate.

“Oi!”

A harsh voice had me jumping in my heels. A mass of huge men off a way had spotted us and were approaching at speed, the barman swearing under his breath as he worked the lock open, yanking the chain out from where it was wrapped around the gate.

“Go!” the barman said, shoving me through the gap, following hot on my heels, wrapping the chain around the gate twice as the men surged up, slamming into the fence.

Alphas.

This, this was the kind of men I’d seen doing the perp walk to the dock on TV, a poster boy for keeping the zone separate. Meaty fingers pushed through the links of the fence, others grabbing the gate and wrenching it, but the barman clicked the lock shut before stepping back, hands in the air.

“Omega...”

He pushed his way through the mass of men, a picture of deadly elegance, even for

his size, the overdone musculature of an alpha somehow looking right for him. He was powerful, lethal even, as he stared at me with pale blue eyes, cold as ice, sweeping a fall of white blond hair out of his face.

“Open the gate, omega,” he said, his voice a perfect purr, rubbing itself allll over me, making my bones and my will soften. “Walk forward and take the keys from the quivering little beta prick and open the gate.”

“Yeah, lure her in, Snake,” a meaty-looking alpha said beside him, fairly slaverling at the idea, and for a second, I was treated to a glare of pure unadulterated menace in Snake’s eyes.

“Back the fuck up, Snake,” the beta snarled, which jerked my eyes sideways. The average barman façade seemed to have been slipped off as he produced a gun, holding it upright while he viewed the men at the fence. “I can have Alpha Control down here in seconds.”

“She belongs here,” Snake shot back, then looked at me, dragging his breath theatrically through his nose. “She belongs to us.”

The alphas all started carrying on at that, posturing and shouting abuse as the barman whipped out his phone, making a call.

“You better get out of here and lie low if you don’t want to be under one of these pricks before the sun sets,” he told me as he waited for the call to go through, frowning when I just stood there. “Go!”

The cheery toot of my car horn jerked me out of whatever spell I was under, tensing my muscles, sending me scurrying away, just as the beta said to.

“C’mon, girlfriend!” Jude shouted from the passenger seat window. “Time to do the

walk of shame. Work it! You know you want to. Girl, I taught you how to walk way better than that, I know I did.”

I didn’t strut my way back to the car. I walked the swift robotic steps a mouse did under the heavy gaze of an apex predator, not able to fully breathe until I was back in the car, the wheels screeching as we took off.

“So, how was it?” Em asked, clinging to the side of her seat with wide-eyed glee.

“I...”

I had nothing, no words, not a titbit to give her, and as I saw her face fall, I knew she’d chalk it up to me being a stuffy old stick again. God, if only that were true.

Jace

I'd hung on to my temper for Sloane's sake, but as soon as the door clicked shut on the three of us, I unleashed hell.

"What the fuck was that about? You guys know better than to act like dicks with a new omega."

Ryder moved toward a seat at the long table, behind which the wide window offered views across the zone. It wasn't pretty like the fancy beta cities. Here, the buildings were mainly weathered and worn. There were pockets that looked fine, like the main strip. Had to be to get the betas in, but the rest? They were half derelict. Contractors weren't exactly lining up to enter the zone. Inked was one of the few places that were on the upmarket side.

Ryder lifted both hands in a snarky version of surrender before he slumped down into a seat and leaned back in the chair, eyeballing Dane and me like he was getting ready for a fucking show.

"I was only looking," Ryder said casually. "Too soft and sweet for me. You know I like a bit of fire."

"She's new to her dynamic, asshole," I said.

"Well, I want it on the record that not marking her is a bullshit thing to do. Mark the fucking woman," Dane said. "Or let one of us do it."

“No!”

“The fuck is wrong with you?” Dane snarled. Unlike Ryder, he made no pretence of being relaxed and stood, feet planted wide as he stared me down. “You’re going to start a fucking riot, and we don’t need this shit coming down on us. You know what Snake is like—one whiff of an unmarked omega, and he’s going to be all over us like a fucking rash. She’ll be a virtual prisoner. Fucking mark her already. We both know it’s what you want.”

Ryder chuckled softly. Yeah, he wasn’t getting involved.

“I can’t fucking mark her, asshole.”

“You and your fucking bullshit. Have you ever asked Ella if this is what she wants for you? Living like a fucking monk?” Dane asked. Stalking across to the table, he dragged out a chair and slammed his arse down.

As I raked a hand through my hair, my eyes went to the door, and I wondered what the fuck was going on out there. Ma was with her and she would take care of Sloane, but knowing that didn’t stop me from tensing, my beast demanding that I open the damn door and go check that she was all right. All of this was superfluous to him, the stuff that got in the way of what was important.

Mark, breed, claim.

“It’s five fucking minutes,” Ryder said, reading my mind all too easily. “Ma is with her, so chill, for fuck’s sake. We need to know what the plan is if you’re not going to mark her...which I agree with Dane on, by the way.”

Great, the two of them never agreed on shit, so it was usually me acting as the middleman. Now, I found myself on the wrong end of both their censure. It didn’t

help that I knew they were right.

The trouble was I liked the idea of marking her more than I was comfortable with. Mark, claim, breed—it was a slippery fucking slope, and I knew exactly where that led. I saw Ella, tied to that bed by a chain around her ankle, a looming figure about to?—

“Plan?” Ryder encouraged.

Jesus, I needed to get my head on straight.

“Just because I won’t mark her doesn’t mean I can’t protect her. Not every omega needs to be marked.”

Ryder shrugged, and his lips tugged into a smirk. We’d marked every other omega we’d come across to keep them under our protection. I was going against my own prime directive, and he knew why.

“You can feed yourself whatever bullshit you like, but we all know what’s true. She has to have a mark, something to indicate that she belongs to our crew, which you always make us do. Something, anything, because if we don’t, someone else will.”

I sucked a deep breath in, still standing beside the door, still barely rational, and there was the issue. The marks the omegas in our place wore weren’t mating ones, more temporary indications of where they belonged. You tried to force them? You’d have the combined might of every alpha, beta, and shit, even the other omegas that belonged to our crew, on your back. Lucky for them, that meant a lot in the zone. So marking Sloane as one of us made perfect sense.

So why didn’t I?

MINE! he roared, answering that question.

The reality hit me hard, like a fucking gut punch I hadn't seen coming. I didn't trust myself not to turn into a caveman. With her in my arms, my teeth at her neck, my knot buried inside her? There'd be no dispassionate temporary mark left. I'd own her, plain and simple.

She'd be my mate. The first and only omega I'd ever take.

I shifted on my feet, looking at the door. Standing here wasn't helping anything, especially when I felt like I was being ripped in two, just by being in a different room from her.

"We need a plan," Ryder said again. "This is our place. Sure, we can stick some more guys on the boundary, no one in or out. We've not gotten eyes on Snake for a while. He's been lying low after that last incident at the centre."

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“Yep, got his arse kicked,” Dane said with a smirk. “But you know what he’s like—that’ll just make him come out gunning for revenge. Bastard has gotten himself a little fucking harem of omegas that he farms out to hungry alphas. You going to even risk that shit?”

I growled in my chest, finally taking a seat at the table.

“It’s hard to keep information locked down,” Dane continued. “Shit always gets out. We all know if she goes back to the Beta Zone, they have ways of getting to them there too.”

“So let’s run by this one more time,” Ryder said casually before I could get a word in. “You’re not claiming her. Are you going to offer her up to anyone else?”

I snarled, my beast throwing himself against the bars inside me and bleeding through. Ryder smiled, slow and cocky, not cowed at all, and that made him mad. But the fact she wasn’t here, curled up on my lap, my nose buried in her throat, followed by my teeth...

“You’re marking her,” Ryder said, shaking his head, the smile fading somewhat. “When you get your head out of your arse, you’ll do it.”

How the fuck did I find myself trapped? Why the fuck did it feel so right, knowing I needed to do this? I was reasoning with the monster in me. It’d never been like this with an omega. There was a part of my alpha side rising that I’d never seen, never even known was there. When I brought her in, when she softened for my purr, turning to me, instinctively seeking my comfort and protection, the only thing that had been

missing was me beating my fucking chest and then tearing that bloody dress off, making her mine.

This was a mess. Jesus, save me from myself and my own demons.

My eyes went to the door again.

“So we keep her safe until dickhead here works through his ‘issues,’” Dane said.

“You’re right. Of course, you’re right—I have to mark her.” I looked down at my hands, flexing my fingers, feeling the need to form fists and fight what ailed me, but there was no fighting this. “She just needs time,” I said. “She needs time to work out how this goes. I’m not the right man for her, but I’ll do it to keep her safe.”

“Hate to break it to you,” Ryder said, “but even omegas have a certain free will. What if she wants one of us to do it?” He finished up with a casual shrug.

And didn’t that really wind me up? My teeth ground hard. If Sloane was going to be attached to anyone, that someone would be me.

“And the way she was gazing up at you,” Ryder continued, “I’d say she’s imprinted on you pretty heavily. You might not get away with just a chomp on her wrist.”

Right then, I could picture it, feel it, how it would really go. Slamming her up against the side of the shower stall and fucking her like a savage. Watching her put her clothes on, my blood thudding when I just wanted to peel her out of every single piece as it went on. She was classy. She came from money, prim little schoolmarm, but elegant, same with her jewellery.

So yeah, she was out of my league, a rough alpha from the fucking slums. Nothing about my upbringing made me suitable for Sloane, but I still wanted her. I would be

lying to myself if I said otherwise. Still, I could do this. I could be rational, give her time to get used to who she was and what she was and all the emotions coursing through her.

Then I would mark her.

“So what’s the plan while we’re all waiting on you to find your balls?” Dane persisted, a belligerent set to his jaw. Only Dane could get away with that. “She can’t leave the place.”

“I get that,” I said.

“And we need to be careful about who comes in and out,” Dane continued. “If we don’t, then somebody’s gonna tell. It’s gonna be a case of damage mitigation while you find your nuts. Anything out of the ordinary, and the workers here will start to talk. It’s not like we hire people who are in Snake’s back pocket. Most normal people hate the bastard. They want a job here because it’s a decent establishment, and we pay the fucking wages without harassing them at the same time. But you know, people talk. They tell a friend who tells his friend that security is suddenly beefed at our bar. Then that person tells another person who they trust, and they tell another person. Before you know it, Snake knows all about it. How long do you think it’s gonna take before he realises something’s going on?”

“I need some fucking time,” I rumbled.

“Well, then we’re going to have to go with plan B,” Ryder said.

“And what’s plan B?” I asked, surprised that he had anything sensible to add.

“Plan B is full-scale anarchy. Let the chaos begin.” Ryder chuckled, the arsehole.

I rolled my fucking eyes.

A great screech came from the room next door, and everything within me went rigid. I was up out of my seat and running for the door, eyes skimming the occupants. Ma had just dropped a tray of drinks over the floor. The omegas were all cowering on the other side of the table, clinging to one another, eyes wide, like they were all fucking terrified. Omegas... I passed over them one, two, three...What?

“Where the fuck is she?” I rumbled.

Baby Doll pointed a trembling finger towards the door.

“She left,” Baby said. “She didn’t want to be part of...whatever the hell this is. I wish I’d left with her.”

I just stared at her for a minute, looking into those pretty blue eyes, but rather than seeing someone I’d thought was part of our weird family, I saw a stranger. That same feeling of alienation, I got it from all the omegas sitting there, but as I grit my teeth, I knew I didn’t have time to deal with that now. Sloane was gone, but where?

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“How long ago?” I asked. Behind me, Ryder was running towards the door, punching the button for the elevator. Which I should have already fucking done.

“Five minutes maybe,” one girl said.

“She won’t have gotten outside yet,” Ma said. “Everyone, calm down.”

I looked toward Dane on his mobile talking to someone, muttering, “Fuck, fuck, fuck!”

“What,” I demanded. “What the fuck happened?”

The elevator arrived with a ding.

“Outside the zone,” he said. “Out the back and through the fucking gate. There’s a fucking riot down there.”

The elevator journey was an exercise in patience that I hadn’t known I possessed. We exited at the bottom into a wall of four men loading up with weapons.

“Stand down, guys,” Dane said before pulling his cell away from his ear. “She’s left the zone. Got into a car. Someone picked her up at the gates before Snake’s crew could get through.”

He flipped his cell sideways and hit play on a recording. It was grainy as fuck, but it showed the gate slamming shut, a beta with her, pulling a chain around the closed gate just as a fuck ton of alphas collided with it, nearly buckling the whole structure.

A car pulled up, arms waving frantically to Sloane, then she climbed straight in. Her sister, maybe?

And the guy with her, her liberator? Art, our barman, if I recognised that mop of curly dark hair, locked the chain and then pulled a fucking gun out. He had a key for deliveries, so that part made sense.

“We had an agent for Alpha Control in our midst,” Dane snarled.

Meanwhile, inside the zone, the crowd had turned ugly, alphas driven by their animal instincts by a whiff of omega, the beta calling for backup, it appeared.

“Shit!” Ryder muttered. “That still going down?” Dane fast forwarded to the camera feed. “Nope, looks like they’ve mostly dispersed. What a fucking mess!”

My heart was pounding out of my chest. The need to fuck something or someone up battled with the calm I needed to assess the situation. “You think Snake will try to track her down?” I asked.

“Yes,” Dane said. “Fresh meat and all that. The license plates are grainy on this image, but it might’ve been clearer for anyone on the ground. If Snake had any sense during that frenzy, which he may not, he’d have clocked her plate. You need to call her and warn her.”

“Call?”

“He doesn’t have her number,” Ryder said.

“I don’t have her number,” I agreed through gritted teeth. It hadn’t been a priority when I was... “Check her ID she came in with.”

“But I’ve got something almost as good,” Ryder continued. “Her sister’s number.”

Chapter Seven

Sloane

“So, girlfriend, dish,” Jude said as he took a seat at our breakfast bar. “I want allll the details. Was he amazing? Like amazing, amazing? Like this amazing?” His hands went up, measuring a metaphorical Jace’s attributes in the air, but his eyebrows shot up when I didn’t reply. “More amazing than this? Girl, you can’t leave me hanging here like this!”

I couldn’t do this. I stood by the sink, fingers turning white against the cool metal, in a kitchen I’d rinsed more dishes in than I could decently remember, yet this was all so different. The stink of the sponge hit me. Yeah, that needed tossing, but the thought of touching its harsh plastic surface made me literally gag. The traces of detergent blasted me with a breezy artificial citrus scent, clogging my nose until I reached over and opened the small kitchen window. Even that was no help, the smog in the air, the many industrial stinks of city living hitting me like a ton of bricks. My sensitive stomach clenched hard, my hand going to my mouth before I felt the bile rise.

“I need to?—”

I sprinted from the room, flying into the toilet and dropping to my knees, then shoving the seat up before emptying the meagre contents of my gut into it.

“Shit, Sloane...”

I waved them off. Their scents, their presence, their feelings, were all too oppressive right now, and wasn’t that a worry? This was my baby sister and my best friend. Jude and I had met early on in high school and been buds forever. There had never been a

time I didn't want him around, but the little sounds of distress and concern they made, the restive shift of their bodies, it was all like nails on a chalkboard.

"She's hungover," Em decided. "Sloane, I'll get you some ibuprofen and water."

"Great, thanks," I croaked out, not sure I'd be able to keep them down, but I needed something. I didn't have a headache, more a whole body ache. I'd run from the zone, the memory of those alphas making my heart begin to race again, muscles tensing, which didn't help at all. I'd hardly put in an hour of cardio, so why was everything hurting? When the two of them left, I reached up and flushed the toilet, then leaned against the wall, just for a second, then felt a hot, hot flush wash over me.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:29 am

I was on fire, and somehow, that transmuted the pain. My skin, my muscles, my body burned, sweat breaking out, making my hands slip on the floor, leaving me to bake in some kind of haze, when Em appeared.

“Here, you look terrible.” I opened my eyes a crack, the effort making me flinch, as it felt like the light stabbed into them like sharp knives. “How much did you drink last night?”

Not enough and too much, that was the correct answer, but I couldn’t voice that right now. I popped the pills, then drank the water down in greedy gulps, anything to put out the fire inside.

“You’re dehydrated,” Em said with a nod, then produced a two-litre bottle of cold water. “Come on, let’s get you into bed.”

Bed, yes, that. Instincts seemed to move my limbs when I couldn’t. My sister helped me up, but I walked to my room on wobbling legs, the heat in me flaring once I got to my bed. Em moved briskly, pulling my curtains, the room descending into darkness. Instantly, I felt a little better, the drapes reducing the room down, making it smaller, more cocoon-like.

“Sleep, Sloane,” Em said, shooting me a gentle smile. “And thanks for last night. It was...wild.”

Something fragile, pleased, almost giddy crossed her face, only to be shoved away, and if I were in my right mind, I’d have questioned that, hard, but I wasn’t. I just watched her move away dully, falling onto the bed when Em left, the door closing

with a snick, the sound of a phone ringing coming from deep within our place.

But not for long. I felt the wrongness as soon as the soft surface cradled my body. That was right, but the sheets? Prickly, bumpy, with little pill-like indentions I could feel all over me. I tore them off, then pawed at the satin cover of the bare mattress. Close, but not right. I threw open my closet, shoving hangers and clothes to one side in my search. Dresses, pants, shirts, anything that had the right feel was tossed on the bed, and when I turned around, I saw it.

A nest.

Not right yet. I frowned, feeling the curl inside me tighten, grow more restless. It was closer to what I needed, a low ache in my pelvis flaring hotter as my skin did. It had to be finished. It should be perfect. So I crawled onto the bed, pawing at the fabrics, shifting them around on the mattress, until finally, they felt right.

What are you doing? a shrill voice asked in my mind. You're not a bloody animal!

No, a deeper one answered. You're an omega.

That was all it took to set the fire that had been banked hard inside me ablaze. His voice, even just an imagined version inside my head, had me writhing on the bed, curling my body tighter within the confines of my nest when that afforded me some relief.

"Jace..." I panted, almost able to feel his hands on my body, between my legs, teasing me, pushing in and opening my arse. Slick oozed from me, coating my skin, my thighs, readying me, and my fingers played in it, trying to ease the ache inside me, but every stroke of my clit only wound me up tighter, and not in a good way. I ended up on all fours, head down, butt in the air, the angle easing some of the pressure off in my pelvis, but also it opened me up. I felt every slight breeze over my

overheated folds like some kind of wisp-like caress.

Frenzy...

When a female omega meets a viable alpha mate and things start to proceed in a satisfactory way, she could tip over into frenzy. Increased sexual responsiveness and need, higher basal temperature, reduced inhibitions, it was all leading to one thing—a heat. I'd lose my fucking mind, become some animal thing, craving alpha cock, any cock, and willing to do anything to get it. When he knotted me, shoving that brutal base of his deep inside me, only then would I be able to settle, working myself over and over on his shaft, as far as that massive protuberance would allow, gushing slick and crying out for him.

For him to bite me.

Mark me like a bloody dog, 'claiming' me as his.

Like that was even possible. It was the subject of many overheated romance novels, but the reality? I saw those hardened faces of the girls back at Jace's bar, the way they looked at me with a shitty mix of concern and pity. Omegas were currency in the zone, to be passed around as a form of coin, worthy only for what we could give an alpha.

Suppressants... the remains of my poor beta brain squeaked out. Dawn Agency.

An institution where omegas went in and were cared for but rarely seen. The thought of it had my fingers clawing at my nest materials, but what were my options? My new nature had plenty of answers for that.

I could almost feel him enter the room, stalking over, just staring at the position I'd put myself in, following the pearly trail of every drop of slick sliding down my

thighs. His fingers, they'd collect some of it, rub it across his fingertips before those full lips would part and he'd lick them clean, greedy as a child. Then he'd go back for more.

I remembered him dragging my panties to his nose and inhaling like they were a drug. He still had my underwear somewhere in his apartment, since I hadn't found them this morning and I'd been too embarrassed to ask.

I gushed helplessly as I pictured him bending over, sniffing the air, drawing my scent in, his tongue moving restlessly over his bottom lip because he knew what was coming—my taste, taken greedily from the source. My fingers stroked my clit anew as I saw his fingers digging into my arse, keeping me split wide as his tongue lashed everything from butt to clit, no part of me able to escape his oral inspection. He would eat me alive, sucking my slick straight out of my cunt, only for me to gush more. A high-pitched whine escaped my lips as he pulled back, face glistening, smiling down at me like some kind of savage god, while he palmed that ridiculously huge cock that I fucking craved.

Like all single women, I had a few dildos and vibes in my bedside table, but I knew none of them would be worth using anymore because they didn't have what I ached for. I'd never been a size queen before, but now? I needed that stretch, that feel of him pushing me to my limits, just pushing himself in at first, only to withdraw, growing harder, deeper, faster with every stroke. I'd ride him, shoving myself back, chasing more, listening to his deep growls as I fought to take him, finally relenting when I wouldn't be gentled. Then he'd stop thrusting, holding me still with iron hands as our bodies fought and his won. I'd part for him, taking that fucking knot.

My whines were loud and getting louder, a muffled sound at the door breaking my spell.

"Sloane, are you okay?"

Jace

It had been a shitty, fucked-up day all around. Despite Ryder's declaration that he had Sloane's sister's number, it wasn't doing us a whole lot of fucking good. Whoever Emma was, she wasn't into answering calls, and even though we had Sloane's credit card details, which you'd think would be enough, it wasn't like we made a habit of hacking for a person's address and phone number. So I was right back to square one—trying to track Sloane down the hard way.

On top of that, something was kicking off over on the other side of Desparion. Our sources said Snake was mobilising his forces. What I didn't know was why.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:29 am

It was late, and outside the window of my apartment, lights glistened through the darkness, the zone looking a whole lot prettier than it did during the day. Usually I stared out at it like a warlord of old surveying his domain, but any satisfaction I might have gotten from the life I'd carved out in the zone was stolen by her.

Sloane.

She was hurting. I could feel it, like a niggling pain under my breastbone where I couldn't scratch. It was just alpha bullshit, I knew that, but...it made it hard to sit still, to stand, to move, to fucking breathe. And what was worse was if I was aching, it had to be twice as hard for her. My hand dropped down into my lap, the heel of it rubbing against my cock. It had been semi-hard all day, which wasn't helping me to think clearly.

For the first time since I'd discovered my alpha strength, I felt helpless. The memories of standing out the front of Ella's door, listening to what the alphas were doing to her and not being able to do anything about that. I'd sworn I would never experience that level of powerlessness again, only here I was, right back in my own personal hell. It wasn't my sister this time, not even someone I knew that well, so why did I fucking ache?

The same level of pain, but still, it was all different.

I needed Sloane to be safe, and even though it probably made me an asshole, the only way she would be safe was with me.

She would be confused, and the last thing I wanted was for her to go to the Dawn

Agency. Those bastards were as corrupt as they came. Half the omegas were sold off to whichever alpha had the most money in the zone, while the rest of them were experimented on, the betas looking for ways to stop alphas, control us, prevent us from being born. The thought of Sloane in their hands had me breaking out in a cold sweat.

I slugged back a gulp of the whiskey I was nursing in my hand, finishing it off and slamming the glass down on the windowsill. It burned my throat and hit my empty stomach like fire.

Then I took up pacing, staring outside, waiting for somebody to fucking call me with some answers, an address, a number, something. Nobody did, so I kept pacing. I wasn't going to sleep tonight, and no way I'd get any rest. I needed...

Need her, he snarled. Mark, breed, claim. Never should've let her go.

I shoved that to one side. It wasn't about me and my fucking instincts, it was her. I needed Sloane to be safe.

I checked my phone for the fiftieth time, my fingers tightening around it until the plastic started to creak dangerously. Like that was enough to force it to give me what I needed. No new messages, no new calls, nothing. No one I knew could tell me anything about where the omega was or what state she was in. My thighs tensed as I strode from one end of the room to the other, my heart rate speeding up faster and faster. I was an alpha. I sorted shit out, so why the fuck was I cooling my heels here?

I thought about calling Ryder or Dane, but last time I called Ryder, he'd told me to fuck off, get some rest, and not to hound him again so he could do his fucking job.

He was right. I just didn't want him to be right.

There was little we needed from betas but their money and patronage. For the most part, we kept things legit here. It was different from the Beta Zone, but there were rules because without them, it would have been anarchy. The identity theft bullshit, that was all Snake. Which made me think about something I sure as fuck didn't want to consider.

Betas didn't care how things played out on our side of the fence. They were happy for the sides to mingle on their terms, let the curious betas come and play, see what it was like here, before returning home to the safety of the sterile world. They weren't stupid, so they understood that blocking us off would only make people seek entry to the zone in less visible ways. I guessed some beta in charge had determined that limited contact was the best way to go for all.

But the systems that ran the world, they were a different ball game. Betas had locked down tight the banking systems and databases on the other side. It wasn't easy to gain access to their world in any capacity, particularly not the data.

We weren't uncivilised here, despite how the media depicted us. For the most part, we played the game, but now I was ready to bend any and every rule to get what I needed—namely, my little omega back where I could protect her.

Why the fuck had I hesitated to mark her?

But I knew. Everyone knew.

Biting omegas, tearing their delicate skin with fangs that ached to mark them, scarring them forever, declaring to the world who they belonged to... I heard my heart thud, deep and loud in my chest. I'd seen marks plenty, littering my sister's lily white flesh. Marks she didn't ask for. That was what alphas did. Half out of their fucking minds with potent hormones, they took and they took and they took, and fuck what anyone else had to say about that.

Fuck, this was a mess. I felt dirty, grubby, and out of sorts, like there were ants under my skin. I could take five minutes to shower and put some fresh clothes on.

I stalked toward the bathroom, but the moment I stepped inside, I was bombarded by fantasies of her in the shower, plump arse just visible through the steamy stall door.

After I had fucked her all night, I'd figured she needed a rest, figured I needed to feed her, my alpha instincts clamouring for me to pamper and coddle my charge as much as the rutting. Besides, I'd planned on bringing her right back here and indulging in some of the sexual relief.

What I wasn't expecting was for her to hightail it and run. She had taken her bag too, so I couldn't even rifle through it for information. With a frustrated growl, I began stripping out of my clothes, T-shirt, pants, shoes, kicking them off, tossing them towards the hamper.

Then I stopped dead. There, hanging over the side of the basket, was yesterday's pants, the ones that I'd been wearing when I found my Sloane, and poking out the pocket was her panties. I walked over like a man on dead feet, reaching the hamper, and carefully pulled them out.

The scent hit me immediately, not as strong as yesterday, nor anywhere near as potent as it had been from the source when I'd had my head buried between the thighs, lapping up her sweet slick. Jesus, my mouth watered for the taste of her again. An alpha was ever addicted to eating omega pussy.

My hand shook as I lifted her panties to my nose and drew in a deep, ragged breath. My cock instantly hardened, pumping full of blood, engorging with the need to serve my omega—an omega who wasn't here where she belonged.

I closed my fist around my dick as I drew another deep, shaky breath in. Fuck that

felt so good. My fingers worked up and down the shaft, pre-cum already making it sticky as I readied myself for her. Only she wasn't fucking here.

That thought should have cooled my heated blood, but it didn't. It just made my frenzy even worse. My fist made wet sticky noises as I pumped up and down roughly, imagining Sloane on her hands and knees, ready for me to take her from behind the way omegas instinctively needed when they were in heat. So I'd heard, anyway. I'd never rutted an omega through her heat. I'd never tasted an omega pussy, nor felt the hot clenching sheath before either, and now, there was only one that I wanted ever again.

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The scrap of lace under my nose, I breathed deeply, filling my lungs, even as my fingers gripped and jacked my cock wetly. I tipped straight over the edge, coming in great jets all over the tiled floor and the bathroom cabinet, too far gone to give a fuck.

I growled, then my growl turned into a roar. The raised ridge where my knot would swell ached like a bastard. It needed her cunt squeezing me to completion. Mark, breed, claim, my beast said ominously, a threat as much as a promise.

This was the last time we did this, spilling our seed alone in the bathroom. It was for her now, all of it, all that we were.

I breathed deeply, letting my hand lower from my nose. I felt empty, but not in a good way, and my cock hadn't softened much. I shuddered. I'd made a nice mess, but a part of me hated it, that it was on the floor and the cabinet, wasted, when it belonged to Sloane and should've been inside her. I didn't care about where—her pussy, her arse, or deep down her throat maybe. She would be greedy for it. I wanted it in every way. I wanted her spread out so I could eat her up. I wanted her to beg.

She'd begged so sweetly yesterday.

Was it only yesterday she'd crashed into my life?

I hadn't bitten her, she wasn't yet marked, but there are already connections being made between us.

Maybe it was all in my head? Maybe I wanted this to mean something. Maybe I should have fucked an omega once in my damn life so I wouldn't be fucking

unhinged.

Instinctively, I knew she would be hurting like I was hurting, and the thought of her being alone and... Or some other bastard tending to her. No.

I sucked in air, my hands planted against the side of the basin, leaning over it, gripping until my fingers ached and my knuckles turned white. My damn cock was still bobbing hopefully, and it stirred a rough chuckle that died as swiftly as it arrived.

She wasn't here. I didn't know where the fuck she was.

I took my shower fast and efficiently, cell phone sitting on the side ready, in case there was a call. No one called or messaged. I threw on some sweatpants and a clean T-shirt, then returned to my bedroom. Here, I resumed my pacing.

If I had to rip the city apart to find her, that was what I was gonna do.

Chapter Eight

Sloane

I woke up groggy and thirsty, although I'd drank the whole two-litre bottle of water that Emma had left for me. It was dark outside, the kind of dark that told me it was the middle of the night. I felt like I'd been hit by a train repeatedly, like I'd been torn inside out and then somebody had given me a beating for good measure. Plus, I was hot, sticky, and a little bit crusted in places, and I had a bad feeling that it was my slick. Jesus, I was a mess.

I could hear the mumble of voices beyond the door as I pushed the covers back, relieved, despite the pain, that I didn't feel any of the burning need. It was there, simmering under the surface, but at least it wasn't incapacitating me.

Hands trembling, I gathered my dressing gown from the chair and slipped it over my shoulders before pulling the belt tight. My eyes went unerringly to the bed—nest, I amended—a great jumble of clothing piled deeply, then on to the decimated closet, where I'd tossed my rejected clothes to the floor.

The ground felt like it was shifting underneath me as I came to terms with what I had done, how I'd behaved, making me question who I was, because a stranger had invaded my body and taken it for a wild ride. Only it wasn't a stranger and these urges were now part of me, had always been part of me, lying latent and unrealised, until I'd met Jace.

The sound of a cell ringing on the other side of the closed bedroom door drew my attention, and I padded over, ears straining, but I didn't want to open it. What if it was him?

"Aren't you going to answer that?" I heard Jude say. "I don't know why you're playing hard to get. We both know you want him."

"It's not that," Emma replied. "I just?—"

"What?" Jude demanded. "Girlfriend, he's been wearing out that ringtone all day long. Why don't you put it on mute?"

Suddenly, the ringing stopped. I thought at first that she'd answered it, but then it went quiet.

"I'm going to head off," Jude said. "Are you sure you're gonna be okay?"

"Yeah," Emma said. "I'll go and check on her in a minute."

"Good," Jude replied. "Maybe take some more water."

“I will,” Emma said. “I’ll speak to you tomorrow.”

A loud bang told me the front door had closed behind Jude. Knowing I needed to face this, I pushed my bedroom door open. Em’s eyes met mine from where she sat cross-legged on the couch, studiously ignoring the cell phone, which was buzzing incessantly on the coffee table.

She reached down and hit the button to turn it off.

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Suddenly, I knew exactly who it was, who was calling. Hadn't Emma mentioned being with an alpha last night...? Ryder... Was it the same Ryder that Jace introduced me to this morning? The same Ryder who was best friends with the alpha I'd bailed on?

"Who's calling?" I asked, my voice little more than a croak.

"Nobody," she said evasively.

My teeth clamped down tight, and I felt an answering ache in response. Shuffling over, I dropped down on the couch opposite Em. "Who is it?" I asked again.

"It's just a guy I met last night. You know, the one I was with."

Only it was more than just the guy she was with, because I'd bailed on his friend, and something told me an alpha didn't take well to omega rejection. He'd wanted to take care of me, but my foggy mind couldn't work out what that meant when all I could hear was the blonde girl's words taunting me. I had my pride. I didn't want to be just another omega in his stable.

I should have known better. Men like Jace, they weren't for me. For Em, for Jewel, for any of the glittering, beautiful girls who brought men to their sides like bees to honey. Yeah, that made a whole lot more sense. Me? Jace would never have come near someone like me, not without those bloody hormones.

My hands shook as I brushed my hair back. Fool that I was, I had jumped in headfirst.

“I’ll get you some water,” she said, untangling her legs and rising, then she disappeared into the kitchen. As I heard the clatter of the cupboard opening followed by the tap as she filled up a glass, I took a moment to compose myself.

Handing me the drink, she took the couch opposite. “You seem different.”

“I’m an omega,” I replied.

Her face went deathly white. “What? How can you be an omega? Are you sure?”

Later in life reveals were rare, but despite the tests run and the reassurance from the doctor, I’d always known something was wrong. Now I knew why.

“I’m very sure,” I said. “I’ve just built a nest.” The nest building was the least of what had happened and the only part I felt comfortable discussing.

A giggle escaped her lips, and she pressed a hand to them like that might stifle it.

I laughed too, not a happy sound at all but...it was ridiculous. Then my smile faded because what followed was like experiencing a personalised hell.

“I need to get some suppressants,” I said.

“Okay,” she said, nodding. “Okay, how do we do...that?” She picked up her phone again, which immediately started buzzing. She frowned and declined the call, before tapping away on the screen. “Do you have other omega urges?”

“Yeah, and I wish I bloody didn’t.”

Emma laughed again, fingers flying over her phone screen. Given she’d been with an alpha last night, at least she wasn’t an omega. It would have tipped her over the edge,

like me, had that been the case. “Em, you used protection, didn’t you?” Why was I asking her if she used protection? Had I? No, I hadn’t. I hadn’t used a bloody thing. Jesus. I was going to have to get myself checked!

Her face flushed bright red, her fingers paused, and she shook her head. “We didn’t,” she said. “We talked. We fooled around for a while, and he kept his pants on the whole time. I’ve never been so frustrated in all my life. Well, not that frustrated. But yeah, I wanted it. He wouldn’t let me have it.”

What the hell kind of guy didn’t take what was on offer?

“I think he’s a Dom.”

“A what?”

“A Dom, like you read about in the books? BDSM. I think that’s him in a nutshell.”

“He’s not a Dom.” I swiped a hand over my face. I wasn’t mentally present enough to cope with this conversation right now.

“Well, he’s got some very Dom-like tendencies,” she said, using her hand to fan herself. “I’ve never been so desperate to get into a man’s pants in my life, and he was having none of it. That’s iron control if ever I saw it.”

Yeah, I’d also experienced a lot of that last night...and this morning.

“So did you...” She nods her head at me. “Did you...with the other one?”

“Yeah,” I said. “That’s what triggered me.” I searched for the point where I could have pulled away, could have made the right call. There were several points where I wasn’t yet wholly lost to my instincts. The most memorable was when I was standing

there in Jace's room.

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“Take them off,” he’d said, no alpha bark, merely a suggestion I could refuse. “Take them off and show me the fucking beautiful body that makes mine ache. I’m so fucking hard, Sloane. Take them off, if this is what you want. If you want me.”

Then I’d stripped like a good little omega, especially for him.

I had picked him.

“I’m glad you’re not an omega,” I said. “Because everything is hell.”

“I thought it would be hot, you know, to be that into a man.”

Not all of it was bad, none of it was terrible. If I were honest, it was the most amazing experience of my life. Then he’d taken me for breakfast, introduced me to his little omega harem, and left me alone with them so they could fill me in. There had been cattiness, but there had also been a ring of truth. I was just another helpless woman that he’d picked up and cared for, driven by a weird kind of alpha protective urge.

I didn’t want to be looked after. I wanted to be claimed, wanted what he’d promised as he’d fucked me in the early hours of the morning, the sweet words about how he would share the burden with me, be a partner. Only he didn’t want to be my partner. He wanted to add me to his little harem.

I still wanted him. Jesus, I needed to take some suppressants, or I was never going to think straight.

My stomach flip-flopped, and heat washed over my body in a new and yet familiar

way.

Fuck! No, don't let it be starting again. I groaned and pressed my hand to my belly. I could feel slick seeping. I can't do this. I can't be here. I can't. I'm gonna make a mess on the couch! "Emma, I need those suppressants," I said, the words half lost in another groan as savage contractions spasmed through my gut. It felt like a tiny little fist was abusing my womb. I was sinking already, lost...burning hot.

"Sloane?" Em's worried voice came at me from a great distance as I rose, staggering to my feet. Nest, I needed my nest. I needed someone to come and take this away.

Someone came all right, but not with the suppressants I needed. I was buried in my nest, but even that tight ring of fabric and the darkened room wasn't enough. What was happening to me made period cramps feel like foreplay. I was being ripped in two, my whole body convulsing with the pain that racked me, and I couldn't even scream. Every muscle, every ligament strained to bear whatever the fuck this was, and just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, they came. The door cracked open, and with what remaining strength I had, I cringed back, the light stabbing me in the eyes.

"Sloane? Oh shit?—!"

"Just leave it to us, ma'am. You said she was with an alpha last night?"

"Ah...yeah, but what does that?—"

"No way he'd leave a tasty little morsel like this alone. He's rutted her, sent her into a frenzy. She's one step away from her heat."

"Yes, that. She said she needed suppressants, like right now."

“We’ll need to get her down to the Dawn Agency. At her age, fucking around with an alpha so soon after discovering her true nature... It complicates things.”

“What? But I thought?—”

“Please, let us do our job. You’ll be able to come and see your sister once we’ve got her settled and sedated. Damn omegas, when they get fixated on something, they can be a bloody nightmare to deal with.”

As if on cue, my lips moved of their own accord.

“Jace...” It was a whisper, a plea, a bargaining with forces I didn’t understand, because somehow, I knew he was the answer to this. We’d called the wrong people, because they weren’t able to give me what I needed, only he was.

But instead of my alpha, his dark woody scent, his strong hands, his taste in my mouth, I got several pairs of harsh, biting fingers that dug into my skin, then gripped tighter still when I started to thrash.

“Jesus fucking Christ, the little bitch has gone deep! Shoot her up with something to calm her the fuck down!”

“No!”

I screamed, Em screamed, it felt like the world screamed, and I imagined somewhere out there in Desparion, he heard us, but they paid us little mind. My skin was pinched before a needle stuck in, sending a cloud of icy cold haziness through my limbs. Like a good little omega, I went limp, everything starting to fade.

“What the hell did you do? I asked for suppressants!” I dimly heard Em shout, but that soon faded.

“You don’t get to make the choices now. She’s an omega. She belongs in the Dawn Agency until a suitable alpha can be found for her.”

“You’re banishing her to an alpha zone? Who the hell do you think you are? She’s independently wealthy. She’s not going to live in some slum, popping out alpha babies!”

“Not any more she’s not. The assets of omegas are seized by the state until such time as a family member is approved to transfer them to. You’ll need to put in an application with the Office of Omega Affairs.”

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“I don’t want her ‘assets,’ I want my sister! Where the hell are you taking her? Sloane? Sloane!”

And with that, I was carried out in a series of rocking movements that made my gut twist, then even that faded away. All there was, was nothing.

Chapter Nine

Jace

Time had stopped, there was only one endless moment of fucking waiting, my hands clenched tight into fists. No one came in or out of my office and there was only this suffocating fucking silence, so maybe that was why I heard her.

I jerked upright, as sure as if someone had shot a thousand volts of electricity through me, because I could hear her as if she were standing in the same room with me. “Jace...” But I knew she wasn’t. Her voice, my name, it was choked out, as if between gritted teeth, the voice of pain. My omega was hurting—no, in agony.

My omega...

I could feel her consciousness snuffing out like a blown candle and knew who would be doing that. There was only one organisation in the whole city who’d see an omega and think sedating her into oblivion was the right way to go. I shoved that thought aside as I got to my feet, striding to the door before throwing it open.

“Get a car ready!” I snarled, at who, I didn’t know. People jumped to their feet

though, ready to do my bidding. “We’re going to the Dawn Agency.”

“I hate to throw a spanner in the works,” Ryder said, stalking over to fall in step beside me, “but we’re not the only skin in this game.”

“What’s happened?” I demanded as we hustled down the corridors before pushing out the double emergency doors and taking the stairs down to the underground garage. It was only a couple of floors, and the stairs were quicker than the elevator.

“Snake just went mobile,” Ryder said. “I’ve long had a suspicion that he has contacts in the Dawn Agency. That place is corrupt as fuck, makes Desparion look like a kindergarten picnic. You can feel her?”

“Yep. They’ve got her, Ryder.” I stopped, and it felt like the world stopped with me when I did. I stared at the man I considered my brother, my heart smashing inside my chest. “They’ve drugged her, have to have taken her to the Dawn Agency.”

“Figured as much. The guys have been on high alert since she left. They’re ready to roll.”

We slammed out the next double emergency doors into the wet parking garage, where two blacked out SUVs waited, along with the rest of the team.

“We both know those centres are run by dodgy arseholes who want nothing more than to eliminate alphas and omega from society, take whatever hard-earned cash they have, and funnel it off somewhere,” Ryder said, a familiar rage simmering in his voice.

The SUV doors were flung open, and we piled inside. As the door slammed on us, we rolled out.

“What’s the deal?” Dane demanded from the front, throwing a glance over his shoulder at me.

“She’s been taken,” I said.

“Centre?” he asked.

He didn’t question how I knew. I’d been going nuts ever since Sloane had left. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to work out that we had already begun to bond. I nodded.

“Fuck,” Dane muttered.

Betas, they dealt with the emergence of alphas and omegas in their midst through the Dawn Agency or the Agency for Alpha Control. If you were smart, you avoided them, and I’d hoped Sloane was. The Dawn Agency was corrupt as fuck, but at least they offered a pretence of being civilised. Alpha Control was more about rounding ’em up and throwing ’em into the zone. Dane and I had battled it out on the streets until we were finally caught and tossed into the zone without a care. Ryder had come from money, a pretty future mapped out for him before he late-bloomed as an alpha. So yeah, your life was fucked-up if you didn’t reveal as a beta, and for some, the transition was harder than others

“When was the last time you tried her sister?” I asked Ryder.

“An hour ago,” he said, already fishing in his pocket and dragging out his phone. “Maybe the little brat will be up for talking now.”

He thumbed his phone and hit a button before switching it to speaker mode.

It picked up on the first ring, and a hysterical “Ryder!” came down the line.

“I’m here, Emma,” he said, his voice the calm, smooth one that insisted everything was going to be just fine. I’d seen him use that voice on lowlifes to get information from them right before he coldly put a bullet between their eyes.

Hard to believe Ryder was a born to rule prick who’d once attended a prestigious school.

“They took her!” Emma wailed into the phone. I might have laughed at the notion of Ryder needing to up his game if I hadn’t been so fucking wired myself.

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“Who, baby?” Ryder asked. “The centre? Tell me what happened. But first, are you somewhere safe?”

“I—yes. Jude is coming to pick me up. I’m outside. The apartment is in Sloane’s name, so they have taken possession of it. There’s security tape over the door! She was going into heat or something. She was in pain, so we called the Dawn Agency.” Her words tumbled out faster and faster. “I thought they would be like, a doctor or something, maybe give her tablets to ease the symptoms, but they gave her an injection and she just went limp. That was when they carried her out into an ambulance, wouldn’t let me go with her. Told me I would be contacted at some point.”

She fell into sobbing.

“I didn’t know what to do. She’s always been the strong one. I needed to help her, and now I’ve made everything worse. I’m so frightened for her.”

“It’s going to be fine,” Ryder said. “How far away is Jude?”

“He said five minutes.”

“Okay, you stay on the line until he gets to you. We’re going to get your sister out.”

“You can do that?” Her tears had settled down, and there was a note of hope in her voice.

“Baby, you’d be surprised what we can do.”

“He’s here!”

“Good girl, now go with him. We’re about to lose signal, but keep your phone with you and charged. When I call you, I expect you to answer. We’re going to be having a long chat about your disobedience next time we meet. Don’t make that any worse.”

“Okay.” There was a loud sniff followed by a click as the car door shut. I heard the other guy yelling what the fuck was happening and her shushing him. “But, Ryder, you better get my sister.” She hung up just as we hit the tunnels.

The full beams came on, and the car dipped down into the darkness. It was always wet in the tunnels, and our passage sent a spray up as we bounced and rolled over the rutted ground. “Little fucking brat,” Ryder rumbled at the phone. “Gonna be begging me to give your arse the spanking it needs.”

I snorted out a laugh because I wanted to strangle Sloane’s sister myself for not answering the fucking phone, but seeing Ryder lose his shit was gold. At least Sloane’s location had been confirmed, although my spidey sense said I could lead us there anyway.

“We got a clear path?” I asked Dane, who was in the driver’s seat.

“Clear-ish,” he said. “Reports of a higher than average number of roadblocks today, so it might be slow going and I can’t guarantee we won’t come up against resistance, but we’ll get it done.”

The concrete tunnels that welcomed us were affectionately known as the catacombs—a network of passages that ran like rabbit warrens between Desparion and Beta Zone. Various beta agencies had tried shutting them down with limited success. Most of the remaining exits came up in the rough parts of beta turf, and the inhabitants there were happy to keep them open, given the trade and passage was

lucrative.

“Switching to short wave radio,” Dane said, flipping a switch on the dash so we could keep in contact with our SUV following behind.

We were going in to get my girl, dressed like we were Alpha Control agents to explain our presence. They always used the biggest, baddest betas they could find, and sometimes we wondered if there were some alphas on the downlow there. Didn’t matter. We’d get in, get out, and the betas? They’d let us in the front door. Without a word, we readied weapons, slipped headsets on, and buckled into Kevlar vests that were kept in readiness under seats. After the wait, I welcomed the action that felt like a fever coursing through my blood. My baby was hurting. Someone had fucking drugged her.

My beast growled, pacing within me. The cage I kept him in was battered and starting to fail. His snarl was as much for me as for the people that would dare to touch our omega.

My mate, he insisted, declaring once and for all what we both knew—Sloane was ours and we were hers, and no amount of running would change that.

Fuck with what was mine, and you would get fucked up twice as hard. And if Snake had poked his nose in this, I was going to end that prick as well.

Sloane

My return to consciousness was a long and painful one.

“Well, well, look what we have here.”

The voice was a heavy, deep purr that seemed to crawl all over my skin. It had none

of Jace's rough rasp, and I hated it. This was an unctuous voice that dripped over me, marking me as his, and his hands, they followed soon after. I shivered when I felt the warm pressure of them around my ankles, pulling my legs apart, prying them when I fought his grip, then came a long exhale.

“Well that's some grade A omega pussy right there. Look at how fucking swollen she is. That clit, it's like a little grape, waiting to be plucked, and her slick...” I shivered on the table I was lying on, twisting and turning but not getting very far. My limbs felt like lead, my head spinning so violently, I felt like I was going to be sick, but his voice, it stopped me, kept me pinned to the bed, kept my bile where it belonged, kept my thighs spread, showcasing my stupid omega cunt to him. I blinked and blinked, forcing my eyes wide, flinching when I did, because there they were.

I'd seen men like this, that looked you over like you were a side of beef, weighing you up and dissecting you, searching for the weak spots. As a beta, I would never be anything but a thing for them, but as an omega? Less rights, less brains, just an instinct driven little bitch that was destined to spend her life on her knees.

I'd run out on Jace, and never had I regretted that more than I did now, as the alpha with the ice blue eyes stared down between my legs, his tongue flicking out to coat his lips, while he imagined exactly what he was going to do with me.

“What do you want for her?” he asked, feigning a degree of disinterest, but I wasn't fooled. His alpha pheromones choked me—menthol, basil, and cigarette smoke. I swallowed furiously, trying to clear my throat, but I couldn't.

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“Snake, this is a preview,” an orderly said, trying for decisive but only sounding whiny. “We can’t sell her off to you yet. This one, she’s connected to one of the hoity toity beta families. She can’t just disappear. People will ask questions and?—”

“How. Much?”

Then my body did something that just drove home the shittiness of the situation. I didn’t want this man’s hands on me, didn’t want those freakishly pale eyes staring down at me, piercing me, but the very cunt he’d described so thoroughly? A gush of slick oozed out at the sound of his growl.

It’s an instinctive reaction, I told myself furiously. You know this. Omegas can be raped, just like anyone else. This is sexual assault. He’s touching you without your permission!

That last bit somehow brought my body back under my control. I jerked my knees shut, scrambling off and away from the examining table I’d been lying on, even as my legs threatened to give out. I shoved down the hospital gown I was dressed in, my lips pulled back in a snarl.

“Ohh, baby... That was exactly the wrong thing to do,” Snake said, a slow shit-eating grin spreading across his face. “You wanna run, little girl? Fucking run. I love it when you put up a fight.”

“Snake, we can’t do this, not yet. You’ll need to pay more?—”

“Name your fucking price. This little bitch ran from me twice now, and my beast? He

can't let that shit slide." His arm twisted, revealing a long, highly detailed snake tattoo all the way down one arm. "I need her taste in my mouth and my fangs in her flesh."

I didn't know why I moved, since there was nowhere to go. Back to the wall, I kept him in my line of sight while I tried to ascertain a way out, but the room appeared to be locked down tight. The orderlies got twitchy, moving towards the door, a hand shifting across the wall to a red button that seemed to be an alarm.

Yes, that, a primitive part of my mind shrieked. Alarms brought people, attention, even fire sprinklers, and I was willing to bet no one here wanted an audience for the shit they were trying to pull. So I did something I really didn't want to do.

"Leave me alone," I cried piteously, only partly making this shit up. Real tears pricked my eyes, because fuck this asshole and fuck the weasel dicks who let him near me. "I don't want you. I want Jace."

Ouch. I was trying to goad the alpha, get him angry and stupid, so why did it feel like someone had detonated a bomb behind my sternum? My words had an instant effect, Snake's gorgeous face becoming monstrous as his lips pulled back in a snarl. Great, now what?

Omegas were supposed to have greater speed and agility, my human biology teacher at high school told me, and I was about to put that to the test.

"You'll want what I tell you," Snake snarled and then lunged as a pitiful little squeak escaped me.

But I was ducking out from under his arms and scrambling over to the doors before slamming my hand down on the alarm, when the orderlies went to stop me from leaving.

The place erupted. Sirens wailed, red lights flashed, and best of all, the doors swung open on automatic, obviously in preparation for an evacuation.

“You stupid bitch!” Snake snapped, grabbing for me, but the bed was now in his way and he had to scramble over it.

“We need to get her out of here and into containment, now,” one orderly said to the other, also trying to catch me and getting in Snake’s way. “An omega running loose during an evacuation? Our heads will be on the block! Get her!”

But I didn’t give a damn about that. With adrenaline pumping through me, giving me speed and strength I wouldn’t have thought possible, I was out of that room and down the hall. The problem was, where to go?

I sprinted along the corridor, weaving through the beta orderlies as I went, somehow empowered when we went running in the same direction, but then they caught sight of my gown, marking me indelibly as what I was.

“Stop her!” came familiar voices down the hallway.

“Hey, where do you think you’re going?” someone called.

Where? I had no idea, but something told me that the swinging doors in front of us might have the answer, so I put on speed, getting closer and closer until...

A strong hand slapped down around my wrist, stopping me mid stride and yanking me to a stop, pulling me out of the flow of rushing bodies. My eyes jerked up, seeing him for the first time.

Chapter Ten

Sloane

I looked up at the beta man. Brown curly hair, medium blue eyes, the kind of face that could easily get lost in the crowd. Those eyes appeared sensitive as they shot from me to the corridor I had just come from, but these, they were familiar.

“You really shouldn’t have run,” he said, grimacing as the alarm blared around us. “And hitting the alarm? I’m guessing it was you who set it off, because no other chump here would be that stupid. That sends the whole place into lockdown and gets the cops around here, poking their nose into things that they really don’t need to.”

I blinked up at him, trying to work out if he was the friend I needed or the adversary I did not. The barman? What the fuck was the barman from Jace’s bar doing here...wearing an orderly uniform? I shook my head, trying to shake the feeling of foreboding off. Maybe he’d gotten another job? What were the chances? It was possible, right?

Yeah, my adrenaline flooded system wasn’t buying that.

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“Okay,” he said, swiping his hand down his face. “You’re really baked, I can see it. So I’m gonna keep this simple. You need to come with me, right now, before they pump you full of some more chemicals and the real monsters turn up.”

He released my wrist slowly and turned his hand over, palm up. He wasn’t forcing this. He was waiting for me to decide. Betas were supposed to be calm and clear-headed, but omegas were supposed to have a greater sense of good and bad. My instincts, such as they were in this heightened yet weakened state, were telling me I could trust him.

I had trusted him once and he’d gotten me to safety, but him being here was all kinds of crazy wrong.

A great cry from the corridor behind told me I needed to decide and quickly.

I put my hand on his and prayed my instincts were not leading me astray. Further astray, I amended, given I’d asked Em to call the Dawn Agency when I should have called Jace.

“Right call,” he said. “Now, we need to run.”

He hauled me with him down a side corridor, my bare feet slapping against the cold linoleum floor in a rapid patter. So fast did I move that it felt like I flew.

At the next corner, he turned left, up to the nearest open door, and hustled me inside. It was dark until he flipped the light switch, then I saw it was some kind of storage room, with shelves brimming with containers, bottles, boxes, and jars stacked from

floor to ceiling with neat labels stating what each of them was.

Here, he dragged out his cell phone and began typing furiously on the screen, muttering to himself about getting fired, again.

“Jace,” I mumbled, arm shooting out to brace against the wall, because I was suddenly sure I was about to throw up, pass out, or throw up and then pass out. It was almost like I could...sense him. “I need Jace.”

The beta barman-turned-orderly stopped what he was doing and stared at me, grabbing my shoulder to steady me.

“Jace?”

I nodded. “I need Jace. Do you...?” He worked for Jace. Did he know how to contact him? He must.

He huffed out a breath and threw a look up to the ceiling. “Last I saw, you were doing the walk of shame and hightailing it out of his life. Not all alphas are bad, but not all of them are good either.”

“Please,” I said. “Jace isn’t one of the bad ones.”

“No, he’s not,” the beta agreed. “But he’s definitely not a good one either. You sure about this? You better be, because if I make this call and you change your mind, it would take a fucking army to get you away from him. And you’re gonna have to trust me when I say the asshole isn’t going to be giving me my job back any time soon. More likely, he will dump my body in a dark alley if we ever meet again.”

I wanted to dispute the last part, but I thought every word leaving his lips was based on an understanding of Jace that was far deeper even than mine. Yet I did trust Jace

with my life, and I trusted him not to dump this man's body in an alley for helping me to leave.

The alarm was still blaring, and the clock was ticking.

I tried to process the facts, but they were getting harder to grasp. Was the guy giving me another option? Was there another option?

“Make your call, omega. I won't offer again.”

Jace

My phone was vibrating. I'd put it on silent so it was just an incessant jiggling in my back pocket. I dragged it out glanced at the screen... What the fuck? I frowned.

“What the hell are you doing?” Ryder hissed, scowling at me. “We have got bigger problems to deal with.”

We were standing a block away from the Dawn Agency, poised to move in, when a chaos of screaming sirens erupted.

“This isn't us,” Dane said, interrupting our glaring. We needed a way to cut the alarm cable, create crazy, bring the police down on the place, and get the fucking rats running. Except the ‘police’ would be us. We were all kitted out in Kevlar vests complete with blacked out visors and all the police gear that went with it to look the part. Get in, get her, get out—that was the plan.

“Another two carloads of the coppers just turned up,” Dane added, pausing to peer around the side of the alley where we'd parked and unloaded. To our left a few buildings away, in the heart of the vibrant Business District, was the austere Dawn Agency. “Fuck, the slack bastards decided to do their job for once. Looks like we'll

have company. We'll need to try and do some evasive shit to take custody of the omega and get her the fuck out of there."

"No shit?" Ryder said, voice dripping with sarcasm. "Observational skills must've been high on the curriculum at your drop out, dead-beat school."

"Fuck off," Dane said. "Just because I didn't go to a prissy, pretty boy school doesn't mean I can't beat your arse to a pulp when this bullshit is over."

"Shut the fuck up, both of you."

Something told me I need to pick up this call. I hit accept and lifted it to my ear. "You've got a lot of fucking nerve," I snarled into the phone. "An Alpha Control agent in our midst all this time."

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“I’ve also got your omega,” Art said. “And trust me when I say you’re gonna have an agent in your bar no matter what, so you’re better off having me there.”

“How about no agents in my fucking bar,” I snapped. “That’s my preference.”

“Not gonna happen.” The prick laughed, but it had a bitter sound. “I got into this side of things thinking I could make a difference.” A harsh sound at that. “The only difference Alpha Control wants is in our name—control of you, of all of you. Using you for high kill missions, doping you up on performance drugs, finding a way to fit you into the beta machine, but that’s not a conversation for now. You want the omega. I can cut the alarm, send the police on their way with a call, and get her out to you, no mess, no fuss. The orderlies here are kicking themselves for bringing her anyway, so if she slips out the door...”

My mind was whirling at a thousand miles an hour, trying to work out what the prick’s angle was, why he wanted to give me my omega back. What he said about Alpha Control, that was no great shock, but him...? “Name your fucking price.”

“I’m going to need my old job back again.”

“Done,” I said without the slightest hesitation.

“Is that Jace?” another voice said, more distant, one that nearly took me to my fucking knees.

“Jace!” Dane tried to cut me off as I walked straight out into the street. “Fuck,” he muttered when I just brushed past him. With more cursing, I heard Ryder, Dane, and

the rest of my men falling into step.

“I’m coming to get you,” I said. I didn’t know if she could hear me. She was here, near, so fucking close, and I’d take down every fucking person here if I needed to get to her. “Tell me where I need to go.”

“Where are you?” That was Art again.

“I’m about to walk in the front,” I said.

The alarm was still blazing, and if anyone was evacuating, it wasn’t out the main entrance. There were cops outside, the real ones, with badges and guns. Two cop cars were parked diagonally with the uniformed plebs standing around, making like they were doing important cop things.

We had the badges and guns too, but they wouldn’t stand up to a close inspection. Our police logo vests were legitimate—it paid to have the right friends.

There was only one rule to infiltration like this, and that was to walk in like you had every right to be there. Show hesitation or weakness, move with anything but purpose, and you might as well throw up a red flag. It helped that the Beta Zone also had several teams of turncoat bastard alphas who they called on for particularly messy jobs...which this wasn’t, but I was still going to walk right the fuck in like I owned the damn place.

One beta cop made the mistake of moving like he was going to step in my path. I just walked right into him, shoulder checking him and sending the asshole reeling. I’d seen the real Alpha Control in action, and my behaviour was on point. Right on cue, the cops turned around and got back in their cars, obviously thinking we had shit covered.

“Step aside, milksop,” Dane said.

Ryder’s chuckle was gold and added to the image of badass motherfucker cops with a mile wide chip on their shoulders.

Sloane

If I were still a beta, I’d have had questions, so many questions. What the hell were the men in the Dawn Agency going to do with me? Why was this barman here and helping me? But I wasn’t a beta anymore, I was an omega—one who’d found her alpha.

The alarm ceased abruptly, and the absence of sound was replaced by a ringing in my head. My shoulders slumped, releasing a subconscious layer of tension.

“Come on,” said the barman turned orderly guy, who I’d learned was called Art. “That’s our cue.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

He didn’t answer, just took my hand and half dragged me along the weirdly empty corridor. He stopped at a T-junction, poking his head around the corner, then tugged me after him. Rapid steps took us to the stairwell, where he opened the door, took another quick look, and pulled me in after him. “We need to be fast.”

From above came the sounds of heavy booted feet, and it galvanised me into action. As we burst out the emergency door at the reception level, I come to an abrupt stop. The handle left my nerveless fingers and shut with a clatter.

There were people here, cops, orderlies, and others in regular clothes. I barely paid them any mind as I watched three men approach, but I only had eyes for one. Even

with that blacked out visor, I knew instantly who it was. Had he always been so freaking massive, a picture of masculine strength? Huge biceps flexing under his thin shirt, thick thighs stuffed into his jeans, he prowled closer like a goddamn panther, and when he got close, he growled like one.

“Omega...”

Just a warning, that was all I got as he towered over me, exuding those dizzying alpha pheromones. I felt the occupants of the reception turn toward him, drawn like I was.

“Sloane.”

The helmet came off, passed to someone with him. My eyes flicked up, meeting his, my already rubbery knees giving out when his gaze sliced into me. He hadn’t even touched me, said little other than my name, but I was being completely and utterly owned. His fingers twitched, like he wanted to reach out and grab me as I wavered, a small whine escaping my lips at the thought. His arm wrapped around my waist, dragging me in close.

“Sloane, I?—”

“Please.”

That’s all I could force out, the drugs, the pain inside me, his scent, everything, it all rose and rose, my eyes aching with unshed tears as my body started to spasm again, then he swept in and made it all better. I was lifted into his arms, not even having to bear the weight of my own body anymore, let alone anything else, and then, while I was hugged close, a sound reverberated through me.

He was purring.

Long, slow, rumbling exhalations that vibrated through every cell, commanding them to give up and give in, to let it all go—the pain, the confusion, the fear, the centre, all of it. This was what alphas did, I realised. We had assumed it was a kind of brutalisation, poor omegas forced to submit against their will, when really, they provided a place for us to surrender. That was what I wanted and needed right now. I didn’t want the pain, I didn’t want to carry this anymore. I just wanted him.

“I’ve got you, Sloane. I’ve got you,” he said, so I shifted slightly, burying my nose in the crook of his neck and sucking his scent down, feeling every pain starting to fade.

Of course when my defences were down, that’s when they arrived, didn’t they?

“Heads up, Jace,” one of the men said. “We’ve got company.”

I went to look up, but a strong hand held me where I was, cradling me softly, yet I could feel the tension in his arm.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?”

His voice contained all the power, all the punch of an alpha, but where Jace’s was roughened silk, his was dripping poison.

Snake.

I forced my head up, despite Jace’s hiss, and saw the big, blond alpha standing there, looking at the two of us with a lethal expression.

“I paid good fucking money for that girl,” he said. “Don’t be thinking that you’re going to waltz off into the sunset with her.”

“Ah, Snake...” one of the men that brought me here stammered. “We haven’t agreed to anything. The money was for a preview, to give you an opportunity to imprint her, make her ask for you.”

“Too fucking late there,” Jace replied in a smug tone. The other occupants of the reception shifted uneasily. The men who had accompanied Jace were moving seamlessly into position like wolves separating the pack. People were ushered out, doors were locked, alphas taking positions to ensure no one interfered. “I dunno if she’ll choose me in the end, but she’s choosing me now. Try again next time, fuckstick. Seriously, I told you what would happen if I caught you trying this bullshit with the omegas again. Ryder.”

“Here.”

I shrunk back in Jace’s arms at the appearance of the other man, something that seemed to trouble him.

“I need you to look after Sloane for me.” He glanced down at me when I tensed, then

stared into my eyes. “Ryder will take care of you while I sort this out, then you’ll be safe.”

I didn’t need safe, I needed him, but he put me down, the two other alphas surrounding me in a wall of muscle. Their combined scents were reassuring but not comforting, not like his, which I thought they sensed.

“You stupid fucking prick,” Jace snarled. “Can’t get an omega legitimately, so you pull this shit? I always wondered how you kept getting your claws into them, and now I fucking know.” His gaze swivelled to fixate on the beta orderlies. “And you little weaselly bastards... I’ll be coming for you next.” He yanked his Kevlar vest off, followed by his shirt, revealing every well muscled inch of him, and tossed it to the ground, Ryder moving to scoop the fabric up. He thrust it into my arms, my muscles relaxing somewhat in response to the scent there.

“You want to throw down over some pussy? Can’t say I haven’t been waiting for this,” Snake said. “But her? It’s nice pussy, I’ll give you that. She was so fucking wet when I parted her thighs, I?”

His taunt was cut off as Jace swung his fist, the massive hand going hurtling through the air, but while Snake was caught off guard, he jerked back in time so that Jace only grazed his jaw. The smile faded at that, those pale blue eyes narrowing, his fangs flashing as he bared his teeth.

“Fine,” he snarled. “You wanna do this? Let’s do this.”

“It’ll be okay,” a deep voice said, and when I looked up, Dane had moved closer. His hand came to rest on my shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze, but his eyes? They were entirely on the fight, all of ours were, because there they were, two warriors, ready to battle for what they believed.

“You’re a gutless fucking asshole.” Jace swung with one fist, forcing Snake back, but the other hand was ready and smashed into the side of Snake’s face while his guard was down, achieving first blood. It trickled out of one nostril, turning his face into a savage mask. Snake let out a guttural snarl, launching himself at Jace, but he was fast, so damn fast on his feet. He seemed to know exactly where the other man would strike and was up and away before they landed. “Can’t present yourself to an omega and have her choose you freely. Gotta try and skew shit because none of them fucking want you.”

Jace dashed in, throwing a few solid punches into Snake’s ribs, driving the other man’s breath from him, but not before Snake struck back. Exactly like his namesake, his strikes were lightning quick, snapping Jace’s head back, but they broke apart quickly.

“Without coercion, without drugs, without fucking buying another human being illegally, what do you have, Snake? What do you have?”

“More omega pussy than you’ll ever get. You can’t even get it up to wreck their cunts.” Jace stopped still, Snake’s smile spreading. Blood smeared across his sharp white teeth. “Yeah, I’ve heard all about the girls you keep, make sure they’re safe,” he said in a mocking tone. “Ensure no one pushes them or forces them.”

Snake came to a standstill, pinching his nose, then flicking the blood that accumulated in his palm across the polished concrete floor.

“That’s what you fucks don’t seem to understand. They crave their choices being taken away, their options reduced down to what they secretly want, what they need. Being held down while I force every fucking pleasure from their cunts, having them screaming for more. That’s what you and I are.” His grin widened. “That’s what Ella wanted.”

“The fuck?”

Jace breathed that out, and it felt like the world stood still.

“You did that to my sister?”

“Damn straight.” Snake’s eyes glittered. “When your sister was under me, screaming for more, screaming for me to knot her...” The shit-eating grin faded slightly, some other more thoughtful expression rising before he roughly shoved it away. “She fucking loved it, just like all omegas do. It’s all part of what they are.”

“Ssh...” Ryder said, bringing my focus back to my own body, hearing the low whines escaping my lips. “That’s not how it works. Snake’s fucked in the head.”

“Snake’s dead,” was all Jace would say, his voice perfectly flat.

And then the gloves were off. Jace strolled up to Snake, the other man lifting his fists, but it didn’t seem to matter. Whatever was inside Jace, he knew how his opponent would strike out, what tactics he’d use. Jace was there, anticipating, predicting, countering, and then, as Snake’s breath started to come in hard, all that explosive energy getting him nowhere but tired, when Jace had him right where he wanted, he attacked.

“That’s it,” Ryder said. “Smash the bastard.”

So Jace did, obliterating the pretty features of the blond alpha one punch at a time, until finally, his face was a bloody mask and he fell to the ground, right as the police

sirens began to wail.

“Fucking coppers have brought reinforcements,” Dane said.

Ryder shot back, “Jace, we gotta go. Now!”

“Keep your fucking head down and your eyes off my omega if you want to keep them,” Jace growled over Snake’s prone body. “I’m serious. If I detect you even breathing her scent, you’re a dead man.”

I threw off Dane’s hand and stepped forward to the hissed sounds of frustrations of the alphas, but I needed to do this. I walked up to the man on the ground, found that a savage side of myself I’d never tapped into liked this, liked seeing the man who thought himself fit to lay hands on me brought down so low.

“Well, well, look what we have here,” I said, an echo of Snake’s words to me. “Look how swollen and wet you are.”

“Sloane...” Jace rumbled, then I did something I think surprised even him. I drew my foot back and kicked Snake in the guts as hard as I could, the oof of forced out breath making me smile. And Jace? He smiled back, his brows creasing in confusion, but we didn’t get a chance to interrogate that further.

“Unless you guys want to see the inside of a cell, we need to move, now!” Dane shouted.

“Let’s go.”

That was all the warning I got as I was scooped up and then rushed out, back through the stairwell and into the alley under Art’s direction. Two big black SUVs pulled up with a screech, and I was shoved in the back seat, the engine turning over, the wheels

squealing before I could even do up my seatbelt.

“Fuck, watch it!” Jace shouted, his arm locking around me, keeping me safe, like he always would, I realised. Somehow, I knew that. I just stared at him as he ballsed out the guys in the front seats, as we scuttled back to Desparion.

Chapter Eleven

Sloane

“No!” My nails clawed at his skin, trying to gain a strong enough grip, but I was never going to be strong enough to stop him from what he needed to do.

“Sloane...” Tears formed, then beaded in my eyes, burning their way out. “Sloane!”

At his bark, I went perfectly still.

The wailing sirens followed us while the SUV bounced and rocked as we entered a huge concrete tunnel. The daylight disappeared, and the vehicle headlights came on, the sounds of sirens fading.

It was dark inside the SUV, and safe, but Jace’s arms were the safest place in the world.

I breathed his woody scent in, letting it fill my lungs, glorying in the sensation of his strong arms around me.

A week ago, I’d been a rational beta. No, I reasoned, I’d never been a beta. I’d always been an omega waiting on a trigger, and oh, how I’d found it. I’d seen both sides, the horror of men like Snake, the corrupt Dawn Agency, and in the most unexpected of places, I’d found this beautiful saviour. I sensed complexity lurking beneath his rough

façade. His mention of his sister had been vague, but there was both pain and love there.

The old part of me wanted to cling to logic, to shy away from the instincts threatening to overwhelm me, yet my instincts were the only thing an omega could and should trust. After Snake had his hands on me, I understood that even as my body might respond, my mind retained enough cognisance to differentiate between choice and biology.

Snake was a sick twist of biology.

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Jace was a conscious choice working with my omega nature, and the outcome was so very different in every way.

I'd run from his home blindly. When I came down, there would be time to question the scythe that had been taken to my well founded beliefs. The Dawn Agency, alphas, our own government, and the corruption that appeared to run deep... I couldn't go back to the old me, that person did not exist, nor could I begin to understand all Jace's reasons for helping omegas the way he did, but I wanted to. I wanted to lift the cover up and learn so much more about this man.

"Bite me," I begged. "Mark me, I want you to."

A growl was his answer, and it had the same compulsion as his bark. I hung limp in his hold, his to do with whatever he pleased, only he wasn't doing anything and I needed him to.

"Look at you, beautiful," he said, eyes luminous in the darkness. The dashboard lights were just enough for me to see features, but even that little bit broke me. The glisten of blood on his lower lip, the swelling and darkening skin to his jaw and right cheekbone, his hair dishevelled from the fight.

One big hand reached to cup my cheek, the thumb brushing over my skin in a way that was almost reverent. I blinked through the tears that wanted to fall and yet were somehow trapped. "Bite me," I whispered, confused, feeling like my gut was being ripped out when he wouldn't do this for me.

He didn't want an omega, he was just saving me from Snake. That knowledge broke

me a little more.

“Don’t fucking ask me to do that, baby,” he said. “Not now. We’re not safe yet, and the only way I’m biting you is when I’m buried in your pussy and you’re fisting around my knot.”

I groaned, and a great gush of slick poured out in answer. He grabbed a handful of my hair, face stark and terrifyingly beautiful in the gloom of the vehicle, while I gloried in his handling of me, heart thudding. There had been a moment when Snake was holding my legs apart, inspecting me, that I had seen my worst future. Fear, so visceral that it left me cold and dead inside, had gripped me then. Now it was hope blooming as I hung in my alpha’s arms.

Jace wasn’t telling me no, only telling me to wait. But I didn’t want to wait.

He had come for me. He’d beaten a man for putting his hands on me. It had been brutal, and yet I rejoiced in everything about it. This savage man, this beautiful god, was going to be mine.

If he wasn’t going to bite me, I was going to bite him.

I was going to claim him, and I wasn’t prepared to wait.

My head turned to the side, lips finding his wrist, kissing, nipping, then I rubbed my cheek against his firm flesh.

He groaned, weakening, grip loosening a fraction before tightening again. Then his lips were on mine, hot, hungry, sucking at my lower lip, our teeth clashing and tongues tangling as we tried to consume each other.

“For fuck’s sake!” came from the front.

I didn't bloody care. My hands were on his buckle, and my focus on what was separating me from my prize was absolute. I needed him inside me, and I needed him now.

He tore his mouth from mine, trailing hot kisses across my cheek and down my throat. I tugged at his belt, gasping in joy as my fingers closed around his rigid cock, then growled as I tried to open my legs farther, straining to get firm flesh where I needed it, deep inside me. His teeth nipped at my throat, taunting me, his hands under my arse helping to lift, putting my pussy right over him.

His tip snagged my entrance, and I sobbed in joy as he impaled me in a single savage thrust. Nails raking his bare chest, I put my lips to his throat and bit.

"Fuck!" he growled, reaching to cup the back of my head, even as he clamped an arm around my waist, pinned me still, and slammed up into me from below. I bit harder, tasting blood, feeling it pool in my mouth and trickle out. He continued the brutal fucking, slamming up into me so hard that my pussy began fluttering with the onset of a climax.

"Take my knot," he snarled into my ear. "Take all of my knot, baby."

I didn't have a choice. The power, as he hammered into me, was the perfect remedy for my fears. I craved everything about the connection, and I wanted it all.

His knot was swelling, I could feel it growing with every deep thrust, his hand bruising on my waist, and I fucking loved everything about that too.

"Good girl, mark your alpha, and he's going to fill your needy little pussy all up with his cum." That hot whispered growl, the dark car, the flashing illumination flickering over us, the roar of the engine smothering our gasps and groans, and the rough passage of the road beneath us, it all cast an otherworldly spell over the moment.

My lips popped off his throat as my climax tore through me, pussy convulsing in heavenly waves around his knot. He slammed deep and stilled, mouth seeking and finding mine, swallowing up my mewling cries of joy as a hot flood poured deep inside me, and my pussy locked down tight, squeezing, gripping, encouraging yet more of his seed. Here, right here, as we swallowed each other's cries of ecstasy, the taste of blood and the rich scent of pheromones saturating the air, I found a new home.

I found where I belonged.

Messy, dirty, rough, I felt like I'd gone through an apocalypse and found a shattered and yet perfect peace on the other side. As his lips left mine, I blinked up at him, hearing the wild beat of my heart thudding through my ears, and there, deep inside, the pulse of his cock. He growled, grinding me down onto him, drawing me closer into him. My nose pressed to the crook of his neck, where my starved lungs could be filled with his comforting scent.

He purred, and it sapped the last of my energy, leaving me boneless and blissed out. Shifting again, he drew me even closer, like he was trying to meld me to him, strong arms providing a cage inside which I was safe, warm skin taking the chill from me.

My pussy clenched in a little spasm, and I felt the cum leak out around his knot.

"Feels like you're wasting a lot, omega," he said, lips beside my ear. "You know what happens to naughty omegas who waste their alpha's seed?"

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I shuddered, and my pussy squeezed again as if to taunt him into telling me. I gave my head a little shake. He looked at me then, and something else seemed to stare out at me. His eyes were darker, almost black, but a fire lit within them, flickering restlessly. I was prey in the path of a predator and he had me in his sights, but I wanted to be there. I wanted to be seen, to be held, to be claimed. As if reading my mind, he continued.

“They get rutted, claimed, and filled all up again. Expect to spend a lot of time locked on my knot. I’m going to feed you my cum. I’m going to bite and mark you all over your hot little body. Then I’m going to smear my cum over you until every breath you take is saturated with me and only me.”

“Please,” I said. “I want you to.”

Here, shattered, broken down, turned inside out, and stuffed full of cock and knot, I had no sense of worry or fear.

But the peace was gone a heartbeat later as a brutal contraction tore through my womb. My pussy squeezed so violently that it pushed out his knot, his cock slipping free, a great gush of cum and slick pouring out.

“Fuck!” someone growled, only it wasn’t Jace.

Jace growled back, savage, full of rattling menace at the other males in the car, males he’d tolerated before but wasn’t now.

Another savage contraction, and then pinpricks bathed the surface of my skin.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” the other voice growled. “Punch it, for fuck’s sake. She’s going into heat.”

Chapter Twelve

Sloane

I was on fire, burning from within, but it wasn’t a painful thing. Instead, everything extraneous was burned away and there was only him.

“Jace...” I whispered.

“Got you, babe.”

And he did, scooping me up and pulling me out of the car, marching me straight over to the elevator and punching the button.

“We’ll...stay back here,” Dane said, not moving away from the car. “Hold down the fort and...”

“No one comes up to my floor, no one but Ma, not unless there’s a nuclear attack or something.”

“Got it, boss,” Ryder ground out, looking very, very pale. “I’ve got a little beta I need to update anyway.”

That should’ve meant something to me, somehow I knew, but it wasn’t making sense right now. There was only him, who held me tight as we swept into the elevator, his dense woody scent filling the carriage as we got inside. Then ding, ding, ding, up the floors we climbed, until we reached a familiar floor. I didn’t inspect his space this time, just grabbing the hospital gown I’d been given and ripping it off, the buttons

skittering across the tiles.

“Omega...” He purred the word, a dark prince happy with the actions of his subject, approving. “I’m going to mark you.”

“Yes.”

“Claim you.”

“Yes, yes, I need that, Jace.”

“And breed your tight little cunt. You’ll swell with everything I give you.” He paused before me, his bare chest gleaming. “You’ll be mine and only mine.”

He stopped for a minute, something I should have taken more notice of, but right then, I was a candle and I needed him to blow me out. I was on fire with need for him, a small whine escaping me as his hands went to his belt, making short work of it until it came free. Material, a barrier I couldn’t tolerate, was pushed aside until brown skin was revealed, making something clench down hard inside me. So by the time he shoved all the way out and his beautiful cock sprang free, I was rigid. I couldn’t move closer, couldn’t touch him, my fingers caught in some kind of cramp.

But I didn’t need to. He swept in, wrapped those massive hands around my arms, and everything inside me turned to liquid fire that followed the broad sweep of his hands up and down my body. Finally, he picked me up and laid me reverently down on the bed, and there he stood, staring at me, a slow grin forming as my body writhed, aching again, my thighs sliding open.

“Fuck, you’re beautiful...” he said, his voice ragged. There he was, so freaking tall, broad, and when his hand wrapped around his cock, giving it a few methodical strokes, thick. The tiny part of me that remained of the old Sloane looked upon this

bounty and was a little worried, but my instincts shushed that. I was made for taking him, I knew that deep in my bones. My cunt gushed slick, signalling that readiness.

“The way this works...” He was trying to calmly inform me of the process, but he was hanging by a string too. I heard the shake in his voice, saw it in his hands, the effort it took to keep him back. “I need to claim all of you and you need to claim all of me. I won’t get soft or stop unless you tell me to.”

My thighs rubbed together at that, needing something, anything, and his mind was completely derailed by that. His eyes shone coal black as he stared at me, making me prolong and slow down the gesture. It was a seductive come-hither, or at least that was what it felt like, but he was the alpha so he shook his head.

“I’ll need to come in your mouth.” I nodded at that, feeling saliva pool in readiness. I could almost taste that salty sweetness. “I’ll need to knot your pussy again. Fill you with my cum.” My hand slid down, ready to cup my pubic mound, but he growled his displeasure at that. “And I’ll need to take your arse.”

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I went quite still, staring down at that massive throbbing length with trepidation now where there had only been heat, but confusingly, that hadn't entirely gone. Part of me could feel that burn, that stretch beyond anything I'd ever experienced before, making me feel full, fuller. I let out a little whimper, all my ambivalence there and more, but he just smiled.

“Oh baby, I'm gonna enjoy teasing you open so fucking much.”

He got on the bed, covering me with his body, and I needed that so much. My hand went up, burying itself in his hair, and his eyes closed for a second as I stroked my hands through it. They stayed like that as I traced the harsh planes of his face, a little broken and bruised from the fight, but underlying were features I knew now that I'd long to look upon for the rest of my days. This was what it was like, the way it worked for us—no doubts, no worries, no growing apart. What we were about to do would lock us together forever. I'd hated the idea of a heat when I'd heard about it in sex ed, but experiencing it... I smiled as I undulated under him, already wanting to feel the pulse of his body against mine. His eyes snapped open, those dark depths staring down at me, into me, then he smiled.

“You're getting needy.”

“Yes, Jace, so much. I need?—”

He silenced me with a kiss.

“I know.” This was said softly, quietly, and I could see it, the tenuous link between us about to be locked down. “I know exactly what you need, and I'm gonna give it to

you, always.”

And with that, he kissed me, the faintest press of his lips, ones I felt like I could drop down into and drown, but we were too restless with the instincts that rode us to settle for that. Our mouths moved, taking a little bit more and a little bit more again, until our kiss was open-mouthed and messy, full of lashing tongues and biting teeth. Then he took my bottom lip between his, sucking it until it was swollen and then letting it go.

“I need you now,” he said, all mischief gone, only naked heat.

“Yes...” I hissed. “Yes!”

But I didn’t need to demand or cajole. For the first time in my life, I had everything I needed. His mouth on my neck, tracing every inch of the sensitive skin there, nipping, sucking, but not doing what I knew he needed to. I started to shift under him, restless, but a big hand pushed me back onto the bed.

“You want my fangs.”

“Yes, yes, need, Jace.”

“Soon, Sloane.” His voice was warm, gentle but firm, really, really firm. There was no arguing with him, and hence, I settled back against the mattress. “But I need to do this right, give you what you need, not what you think you want.” His eyes met mine, a reassuring brown now. “I’ll always give you what you need. Always.”

He watched me as best as he could as his kisses trailed downwards, mapping the slope of my breast, those cruel fingers finding one aching nipple as his lips found the other. He pinched one hard, sending a lightning bolt of pleasure-pain down inside me, my cunt clenching wildly as it felt like he tugged my clit along with it. But the other?

It was all soft teasing brushes, his stubble the only harsh part, just passing those full satiny lips over the hard bead in the lightest of caresses, until I was screaming with frustration.

“What do you need, Sloane?” he asked and I responded with a guttural cry, but that wasn’t enough. “Use your words.”

Sounds garbled in my throat, messy and ill-formed as my brain tried to process the warring feelings. I searched for words, because that was what he’d demanded, just persisting in barely touching one breast with frustratingly light touches before tugging the other one roughly, creating fireworks of sensation. Then I found it, my focus crystallised on the one word.

“More!”

“That’s my girl,” he said before his head swooped down, his other hand circling my breast, squeezing it so the nipple popped up high and tight and ready for him. Then he took it, sucking it into his mouth, his teeth grazing the sensitive flesh before suckling it over and over. My whole body stiffened as his fingers did the same on the other side, teasing me with rolling sensations that washed throughout me entirely.

“You’re sensitive there,” he said in approval, a boyish grin on his face. “When this is over, I want a day of just lying in here, teasing them, marking these fucking gorgeous tits, seeing if I can make you come by just playing with them.”

“Yes,” I forced out, the fire burning hotter inside me now. “Yes, more!”

He just chuckled as his head dropped lower, kisses scattered across my abdomen, my hip bones. They were sweet and made me shiver, my cunt clenching hard, so hard the closer we got. It knew what we needed, and while all this sweetness was nice, it wasn’t it. My tummy didn’t burn for him, my pussy did.

“More...” I reached for his head, tangling my fingers in his hair, trying to push him lower, but a chuckle came in response. He looked up at me, over the top of my mound, and grinned.

“Am I teasing you, omega? Do you need it hard and deep, not soft and sweet?”

“Yes!” I kept panting that, over and over.

“You might regret asking for that,” he said, then grabbed my hips and flipped me over. “Fuck, you’re so damn beautiful. All this creamy skin.”

His hand slid up and down my spine, and I tried to follow it, but those hands, they locked down upon me, holding me still, then pushing my thighs open wider.

“I fucking love you like this. I love staring into your eyes as I tease your tight little nipples, but this?” His fingers swept through my folds, collecting slick, and I cried out when I finally got a tiny taste of what I needed. “This is us stripped back, honest, and open to each other. Your cunt, she tells me exactly what she needs.” And to my shock, he traced the length of my seam before sliding two fingers either side of my clit, forcing the hood to shift back and forth.

“God, yes, Jace. Yes!”

The fire that burned inside me flared so much harder now, and sweat covered my skin, making every inch of me slick.

“She needs me, doesn’t she?”

There was a challenge in his tone, but I had no way to meet it. My answer was a mumbled yes into the pillow as he worked his fingers back and forth, until my hips shifted, trying to catch those fingers where I ached the most, which made the hand on my hip lock down hard.

“You’re being naughty, Sloane,” he rumbled.

God, I felt that all the way through me.

“I’m gonna give you everything you need and a little bit more, but you need to be patient.”

Then I wondered if I’d done something very, very wrong. His hands pulled away before he did, until all there was only me, arse in the air, cunt clenching on nothing, distressingly empty and alone.

“Jace...”

“I know what’s best for you, Sloane. I know.” His voice broke slightly on that, a hint of rawness, of lack of control, and my heart sang in response. I felt him settle back on the bed and heard the sound of a bottle cap being popped. “I know how to make this good for you, not hurt, how to make you mine, all mine. Not all alphas bother, driven mad by heat, by your scent, by your slick.”

Fingers slid into me, right where I needed them, my body instantly responding,

pushing back, taking those thick digits as far as they could go, but he pulled them free, then I heard the sound of sucking. I looked over my shoulder and saw him licking them clean with the heavy hooded eyes of a predator looming over his kill.

“A bastard alpha takes,” he insisted. “Uses an omega, exploits all her instincts and rapes her, right as her body and her heart is opening.”

For a second, he blinked, as if his words meant more to him than me, but they didn’t. I stared into his eyes, saw Snake overlaid on top of him momentarily, and shivered. It could have been his bar I’d stumbled into, his touch that had awakened me, and I thanked whatever god had sent me here that it wasn’t.

“Jace...” I barely whispered his name, but his focus snapped instantly back to me.

He held out a thin tapered length of silicon, a broad flange at the base, and I knew what it was. Never used one myself, hence the anxious whine, but he just rubbed a hand over my hips, stroking me, soothing me, before pulling away to apply lube to the tip, then some on his fingers.

“I’m going to lick your cunt now, Sloane. No.” He smiled, and it lit up his whole face. “I’m gonna devour it, but while I’m driving you fucking nuts, getting you ready to come all over me, I’m gonna start opening you up, slip this in, probably need a larger size before we’re through, and work it in and out of your tight little arse while you come.”

He cocked an eyebrow at me, smiling like the cat who’d got the cream.

“You want that, omega?”

“Yes.”

I said the word because the fire was roaring so hot now, it threatened to consume me, and if I didn't, I felt like I'd burn up entirely. My cunt twitched frantically in response to the pictures he drew inside my head, and my arse clenched too. A hitherto never felt before ache in a part of my body I'd never experienced before became a twin for the one in my pussy, wanting and needing him. I nodded as he showed me the lubed fingers right before he brushed them over the tight muscular ring, a contact he maintained as he twisted, lying down on the bed as he got underneath me, pulling my hips down on top of him when he was settled.

"That's it," he purred. "Ride my face, Sloane. I want your slick coating me."

And with a kind of willingness I'd never have managed as a beta, I did, pressing my aching seam to his face, only to feel his tongue flick out.

This became a dance of sorts. I shifted above him, pressing down when his tongue slid inside me, while he sucked lewdly at my slick, pulsing that mobile length in and out of me until I was begging for something more. As two, then three, then four fingers were pushed in, giving me the closest thing to the burn of a knot, I pulled back slightly to let him lick my clit in long, slow strokes. Then, as he got faster, as his lips closed around my clit, sucking it in rippling great pulls of his mouth, I moved with him, right up until his other fingers pushed inside my arse.

I was probably smothering him, my whole body locking down, jamming hard against his face as I felt those thick fingers pierce me where I was not yet used to it. My eyes snapped open, going wide and staring as my body fought to understand what was happening.

Good or bad, pain or pleasure, wanted or hated, I wasn't entirely sure, feeling the frantic slurp of Jace's mouth in counterpoint with the finger pushing deeper and deeper, until my body decided for me.

Good, so fucking good. Sharp spiky pleasure tore through me, making my legs tremble and my body shake as a feeling of utter rightness came with it. I let out a long cry of pleasure, tearing through the quiet of the room and allowing something else in. The finger was removed, right as my body began to twitch, and something softer yet less yielding was pushed in instead, filling me. In, in, in it came, filling me deeper than I'd ever felt, and somehow, that was right. I understood what he needed because I needed it too—to be utterly consumed by him in every way.

“Jace, I’m gonna come,” I gasped out, right as the plug found its home, and his spare hands now gripped my hips as he redoubled his efforts. His tongue was everywhere, flicking, lashing, sucking, curling, driving me fucking insane, until a shower of the most perfect pleasure broke over me, raining down over every nerve ending.

I called his name over and over, with each body shaking pulse that both blew my fucking mind and had me going back for more, because this was not one and done. Whatever we did just seemed to fan the fires higher, and when I finally prised myself off him, there was a curious humming song filling my body, directing my limbs. I shoved my head down, my lips crashing down on his, tasting myself on them, even as I sought the tongue that had given me so much pleasure. It was him, tensing and shifting under me now as I kissed my way down, teasing those little, surprisingly sensitive nipples before I got where I needed. He got up on his elbows, wanting to watch every second as I licked his cock from root to tip.

“Fuck, Sloane, I’m ready. Just suck me and I’ll come down your throat.” I grinned, then continued to slowly, carefully reacquaint my tongue with every inch of him. “Omega...”

That came out as a low growl, and it felt like a hand on the back of my neck, pushing my head down, but I resisted. I held his cock away from his body, tracing the crown now with the tip of my tongue.

“Suck my dick, omega...” he rumbled, but there was no real heat in it, not like there was in me. I stared at him as I lapped the pre-cum leaking from the tip away. “You want my taste.” There, there was some of that famous alpha bark, the order biting down twice as hard because what he said was true, so I relented by wrapping my lips around the head of his cock and sucking.

“Jesus fucking Christ!” he shouted. “Your mouth is like fucking velvet. Sloane, so good, baby. So fucking hot.” His hips bucked upwards, trying to make me take more, but I did as he had, riding those waves and not allowing them to dictate my pace, while my hands slid down farther until I reached that swollen knot.

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I knew exactly how that'd feel, my pelvis flexing to let him in, then fullness, so much fullness. I'd be caught on the spike of his lust, of his love.

I paused for a second, wondering where the hell that word came from as my fingers tightened, squeezing his knot in a way that felt brutal, but he just groaned in appreciation. The L word tumbled around in my mind as I took him deeper into my mouth, and combined with the salty sweet taste of him, I had a realisation. This was more than instincts, than our designations, than being thrown together by some hormonal glitch. Jace let out a long, frustrated groan as I pulled my lips off him and looked down his body.

He was muscular perfection, exactly the kind of alpha betas came trawling for on a Saturday night, but that wasn't it. He could soften, all that muscle disappear, and I still wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I continued to stroke him absently as I stared, until Jace's eyes opened.

“Baby?”

It was that, all the sweetness in amongst the growl that had me stilling, my hand sliding down, then squeezing hard around his knot. His mouth fell open, his breath coming in frantic little pants, and despite the fact I could feel his cock throbbing, he didn't push me. I remembered Snake's little speech, the words sending shivers up my spine, but not for long. I couldn't stay in the past, only be here in the present, with him.

“I...”

The part of my brain that formed words and put together sentences was offline, so it was a struggle, something he marked with a softening expression. He reached for me, ready to haul me up and in his arms, but that was for later, I knew that. Once we were done, once I'd experienced the ache of his bite in my neck, and that, that forced me back to the task at hand. I stopped teasing him, swallowing him down as far as I could as I swivelled my palm around the base of his cock, twitching my fingers in a way I was sure replicated my cunt when he was buried in it. A spurt of slick oozed out at that, telling me how much I needed that, but this first. My throat ached, not with the burden of sucking him off, but with a thirst only he could satisfy, my head moving faster, deeper, my lips suctioning tighter.

“Jesus, Sloane, I can’t take much more. Suck my cum, baby, suck it down, let me mark you as mine in every way I can. That’s it, love. Oh fuck, I’m close!” A hand went to my skull, caressing it gently, rewarding me for my efforts, until finally, every muscle in his body went tense.

“I’m coming...”

That was all the warning I got as he shot rope after rope of cum into my mouth, my throat working frantically to swallow every bit, but I wasn’t successful. I pulled away, felt some had leaked out, and then swiped the side of my mouth, collecting it and sucking it from my fingers.

“Fuck...”

I wanted him to look at me like this always, those eyes soft and now brown and filled with something so sweet, so intense, it made it hard to hold his stare. He looked at me like I were the most beautiful thing in the world, like I was all he’d ever need, and my heart thrashed wildly inside my chest at the thought of it. As I blinked, my gaze falling away, he dragged me close, tucking me up against his body before nudging my chin up so he could bury his nose in my neck.

“That was fucking amazing. I’ve never... I thought my balls were gonna explode with it. You feel so fucking good, Sloane, it just about tears my fucking head off.” Then a kiss was placed on the curve of my neck, forcing me to move restlessly underneath him. “But we’re not done.”

There he was. The dark prince was back, and he was planning all of the decadent things.

“Need to rut you, baby. Need to tug on that little butt plug as I drive my cock deep, force your little rosebud to open and close over it. I need it, Sloane.” He pulled back, staring down at me for a few frantic heartbeats. “I need you.”

“Need you too,” I squeaked out. “So much. Jace, I need?—”

“Shh...” he said, stroking a hand down my back. “I know. I fucking know.”

Chapter Thirteen

Jace

She needed me.

That was the beginning and the end of it.

I was trying to keep it together, be rational, and make this good for her in every way, but I was an alpha, and I had a beastly side that was clamouring for his time.

Rut.

The word rattled around in my brain. He was taunting me with it, reminding me, as if I could forget, that this was who I was. What had happened to my sister had left scars

on us both, not the kind you could see with your eye, but the deeper ones we carried around inside. It was time for me to move on, and my beast was ready to push the matter this time.

I rolled fully above her, her legs falling open instantly, wet cunt on display, hips already lifting, encouraging me to ease the ache. An ache I understood, since the same fever was calling to me.

My mouth found the crook of her throat, and I nipped, relishing her little hiss. Fingers skittered over her belly all the way to her slick pussy, then farther down until they brushed against the base of the plug. She hissed again, then it turned into a groan as I sucked hard against her throat, careful to keep my fangs from breaking the skin because I wasn't ready to bite her yet.

As my lips trailed, sucking more marks against her flawless skin, I toyed with the small plug, rocking it inside her just enough to wake everything up. My cock was stone hard at the thought of replacing it with me, making her mine in every way. I was sinking, I could feel it—the way my body was rising with a kind of feral hunger, even as my intellect was slipping. I'd never been with an omega before Sloane, never rutted one through their heat, but the guys had talked about it plenty.

Instinct. I needed to trust my beast for once. I needed to give him the lead in this and believe he would know what to do. He paced under the surface, goading me to let go, goading me to pull this little plug out of her virgin arse and give her something that he knew she would enjoy more. She whined and whimpered, hips lifting, getting impatient the longer I made her wait.

“I'm going to knot you while the plug is still in,” I said, the words a growl against her ear. “It's going to feel so fucking tight and hot, and you're going to take all of it like a good little omega.”

“Yes, please, Jace. Yes.”

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I shifted, taking her hips in hand, hauling her down the bed and snagging her pussy with the tip of my cock, then I pushed.

“Fuuuuuck,” she groaned. The plug made her a dark kind of tight as I worked my length in deep.

“Fuck, yes,” I agreed. My beast threw his head back and roared. She was so fucking slippery, cunt fluttering around me as I began to rut her with deep thrusts, watching her tits jiggle with the force and her pretty face contort, while her nails were on my forearms, raking down my skin.

“Good girl,” I encouraged. “Mark your alpha.”

She did, and here I fell. The sounds, the sensation of my flesh piercing hers, her breathy gasps and groans, the flush creeping over her face, neck, and upper swell of her tits, it all called to me. My thumb found her fat little clit fully exposed and eager for attention. That quickly, she was coming over my cock, coating me with more of her slick, showing her alpha how well she enjoyed what he did, but I was ever sinking.

I powered through the muscles fisting over me, letting them coax my knot, while her cries turned guttural as I pushed one arm under her arse, braced my knees wide, and thrust deep over and over. Her nails moved to my shoulders, and my strokes slowed as I growled out my pleasure, working the thickening knot in and out of her slippery cunt. She turned wild in my arms, no longer welcoming, bucking, thrashing, sinking her teeth in and marking me, squeezing her cunt like a vice around me.

I was deep into the rut, and I knew what she wanted—an alpha, a man who would protect her, a beast who would force her to submit. She wasn't trying to stop me. No, my beautiful, wild omega was testing me, her mate.

I had viewed such tales with a little distaste before, but now, now I understood.

“No!”

Her hiss accompanied me pulling all the way out.

I pinned the squirming little thing to the bed, took my cock in hand, and to her cries of outrage, came all over her pussy, belly and tits, thick ropy coils coating her pretty flesh.

“Mine!” I growled, lips curled back.

She arched, sobbing in frustration when I easily held her still.

“Tiny, weak little omega,” I taunted. “Where are you going to go?”

Scooping my cum up in my fingers, I offered it to her lips. “Open up, baby.”

She shook her head, eyes spitting fire. Smirking, I smeared it over her lips, and in an instant, her tongue was out, lapping it up, eagerly taking more from my fingers like a dutiful little mate accepting her dues, all the fury forgotten as she got my seed inside her. She needed this, needed to feel me in every way, and she would.

It didn't take long before the impatience rose in her again.

Flipping her over onto her belly, I dragged her hips back, lined up my cock, and sank deep.

“Yes, yes, yes,” she chanted, pushing back, arching, wriggling.

I grinned. This right here was fucking heaven. Hands bracing her hips, I took her with measured strokes, my knot swollen and sensitive in a way that spoke of imminent climax, eyes roaming over the curve of her arse and back, her hair falling over her like a silken curtain, and the plug in her arse. I played with the rubber flange as I rutted her, reading her little gasps and twitches. “It’s going to feel so fucking good when I work my cock inside here, omega.”

Her answer was a sharp climax that had me gritting my teeth. My knot bloomed and locked, and with my head thrown back, I roared my release. Her pussy milked me, coaxing more of my seed, and I kept on coming. Leaning down, I drew her hair aside and sank my fangs into her throat.

Mine!

Her blood was scalding on my tongue, a chemical cocktail that went straight to my cock, ripping another savage climax as I dumped cum deep in her belly.

Awareness shifted, the air thickening, the scent of her lust, her slick, her sweet omega pheromones like a blow between the eyes. Deep in the centre of my chest, an awareness bloomed.

Pleasure.

Her pleasure, my pleasure, twisting up.

“Jace.”

Her whine reached through the euphoria, my fingers finding her throat, holding her still and to me. Her little whimper said it comforted her as she battled the same

emotional storm I did. Her pussy fluttered, and she rolled straight into another savage climax that ripped another heavy spurt of cum from me. My teeth sank deeper still, the beastly side of me demanding I mark what was mine well, so that no other male would be confused.

Mark.

Yes, we needed to mark her pretty skin. My lips popped off, shifting, finding fresh flesh and biting again. As soon as my knot softened enough, I turned her over, pushed her face into my throat, and putting my full alpha bark behind it, ordered her to, “Bite.”

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She did, small teeth savaging me. I cupped the back of her head, glorying in the sharp sting. “Good girl, mark your mate.” And she did, over and over, nails and teeth finding my chest, arms, throat, hips, belly as she showed me that she claimed me too.

I rutted her with the lazy regard of a predator who has fully claimed his prey, taunting her with what she needed, my cum, but never giving her quite enough, instinctively knowing that would drive her heat higher still. I played with the plug, between working it in and out, moving to a thicker one, relishing every guttural cry that left her lips as I tormented us both with what was to come. I ate out her pussy, lapped at her clit, pushed my cock between her teeth and fed her my cum, smeared it over her body, her throat.

Finally, when we were both so deep into the haze of collective rut and heat, I tossed the final plug aside, slicked up my engorged cock, and taking the wriggling little omega in hand, worked my thick length in.

Her cries were ones of tormented pleasure, begging and demanding I give her her due.

There, with my little omega on her hands and knees, my cock shuttling in and out of her arse with the same ease I’d earlier taken her hot cunt, I found a rapture that transcended all former experiences of my life. This here was the pinnacle of human understanding. This filthy, earthy, bliss, this dark skittering pleasure from her tight sphincter trying to strangle my cock, and the raw garbled cries of joy that felt like they were being ripped from deep inside her belly.

“Come for me, omega. Come now. Encourage me to give you my seed everywhere,

like a good little omega needs.” I swiped my fingertips back and forth over her swollen slippery clit before plunging three thick fingers into her well ravished cunt.

She came, ripping another shuddering climax from me as I emptied into her arse, and all the while, Sloane groaned and convulsed around my cock and fingers. The ecstasy was like endless waves, her pleasure, my pleasure, all rising together.

My chest felt full, too full to contain all the potent emotions crashing through me, but overriding even the pleasure was a feeling of finding what I never knew was missing from my life, a feeling of belonging.

“Jace!”

“I’m here. I’ve got you.”

My cock slipped free, and I gathered her into my arms, my beast gentle now, sated in the hazy buzz.

She clung to me in a way I’d never experienced before. I felt like a fucking god to have this woman, this omega, pouring her love into me, battering me, commanding me to give love in return.

“I love you,” I said, lips against her hair, and my mate cried, small hands fierce as they gripped me.

I felt like I’d been hit by a semi. Love? The word didn’t feel adequate for the tsunami that was destroying my previous notions of the term. This wasn’t love, this was something else—an all encompassing melding of souls.

It was only later, much later, when the fuzzy haze dissipated, that reality crashed in hard.

Beyond my apartment window, daylight was rising, casting my room in shades of grey. It might as well have been a harsh spotlight and not the soft glow of approaching dawn.

The nest, what there was of it, was scattered to the floor, the covers screwed up and soaked with slick and cum, but my omega, the most precious thing in my world, was what stopped my heart before it kicked back into a sick, languid thud.

When you love someone, you care more about the other person's feelings than your own. I'd heard that but hadn't expected it to be true, so when I looked at Sloane, my mate, my heart, my fucking everything, all I could feel was pain. I knew what this was, I'd seen it before. The bites, the smears of cum, the stringy hair, the marked skin. Fuck, had I seen this on Ella...but this time, I was the perpetrator.

Forcing my weak legs to move, I eased from her arms, went to the bathroom, and turned the water on, waiting a few minutes to check the temperature before returning to the bedroom.

"Come on, baby," I said, gathering her in my arms.

"What's happening?" she mumbled, small hands clutching out of fear I would put her down. Through the bond, I felt her alarm that I might set her aside.

"It's okay, baby, just going to get you cleaned up."

I felt sickness roil in my gut. Sloane would be screaming and pushing me away in a moment when she realised what I'd done, what my beast had done to her.

Inside, the fucker was preening. He liked the marks and her languid state. To him, she was a well rutted and claimed omega wearing the evidence of his prowess. The man in me recoiled at everything he rejoiced over.

“Do you need to go?” I asked.

More mumbled protests and clinging followed when I tried to disentangle her. So with her still in my arms, I carried her to the toilet. She went, hissing and cursing me out the whole time because apparently, “it fucking stings.”

That, that was the first strike. I’d fucking hurt her, just like all alphas did.

Once done, I lifted her up again, carried her to the bath, and with her still clinging, stepped into the tub. She sighed, burying her nose in the crook of my throat as the warm water went to work.

My hands stroked over her body. I couldn’t fucking help myself. This last moment, where she was still glowing with warmth and love, I wanted to gather it all up, ready for when she came down and ordered me away. My beast growled at the thought of being pushed aside. He had his own opinion on how to handle an omega who resisted, and it involved putting her on her hands and knees and rutting her into submission. My fucking cock jerked, and my omega wiggled on my lap, arse rolling over my stiffening cock with a groan of delight. Her teeth nipped at my throat, startling a low growl of pleasure from me, and she bit again, harder.

“Baby, look at me,” I said, lifting her chin, forcing her to meet my eyes. This was fucking torture, and I needed to skip to the part where she told me to fuck off because I fucking deserved it.

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Then she did, and her eyes... I swear, I was drowning in her eyes and all the emotion there. "I can feel you," she whispered, small hand pressing to her chest and then to mine. "Inside. I can feel you inside."

I swallowed thickly. "I'm sorry, Sloane. I'm so fucking sorry."

Her face fell, smile crumbling and brows puckering in confusion. Through the bond, I felt the first notes of discord. Her gaze lowered to my throat, eyes widening now, following a trail as she passed over the marks she'd put upon me.

"Jesus! I—" Her eyes dropped, as I knew they would, to her chest, her creamy tits littered with marks and...bites.

Then she did something I wasn't expecting. She lifted her hand, fingers brushing over the nearest welt tentatively before she pressed firmly against the skin...and groaned.

She fucking groaned like she was in the throes of ecstasy.

Her fingers moved up, skimming over her collarbone all the way to her throat, pausing just below the mutilated flesh.

I swallowed, and our eyes locked, only hers weren't filled with revulsion. They were filled with heat.

"I need to see," she whispered.

I shook my head.

“Jace, I need to fucking see.”

“No,” I growled, letting out my alpha bark and stilling her instantly. I’d told myself I was ready for her revulsion, that I would handle it, but I wouldn’t fucking handle it. Seeing my marks on her, my claiming mark in particular, drove both the man and beast in me fucking nuts, only we were perfectly aligned in this because I loved seeing my mark on her and I wanted it to leave a scar.

“Will it scar?” she asked like she could read my mind.

I nodded once, slowly.

Her lips tugged up, like the cat that got the cream. “Good,” she said. “I want it to.”

I was supposed to be cleaning her up, but I was out of the tub with the slippery bundle of woman in my arms and striding off to the bed. Here, I dumped her, sopping wet, upon the ruined nest and buried my nose between her thighs, filling my lungs with her scent. Later, we would talk. Later, I would unpick the nuances of her reaction and work out what the fuck it meant, but now, I needed to soothe her poor, sore pussy with my mouth and tongue.

I needed her to come apart for me.

He wanted to remind her why I was her alpha.

He wanted to remind her of why she should stay.

“Nummmnnnn.” Her mumbled cries of pleasure as I lapped at her soreness, her fingers tearing into my hair, told me this wasn’t unredeemable.

I needed to get her off, and I needed it hot and fast.

She did, wet pussy riding my face, gifting me her sweet slick in a great rush, and I was fucking greedy for it. If I lived to be a hundred, I would never tire of this, and my beast agreed. I got my tongue deep into her hot cunt as she rode out the last of her climax before I turned my attention to her clit and took her tumbling again. I was a fucking addict, and I was getting my fix.

The third time, she screamed herself hoarse, and finally, her fingers ripping into my hair registered enough for me to come up for air. I swiped a hand down my face, taking in the beautiful woman sprawled out on my bed, soapy in places, hair wet where it had dipped in the water. Her body was still littered with the evidence of my possession, but her eyes were glazed with lust...and love.

“Jesus, Jace. Are you trying to kill me?” she murmured with a contented sigh. Her reprimand lost its edge when she performed a lazy, catlike stretch. “I want to be held. I need to scent you close. Then after, when I can think straight, you’re going to tell me what that bullshit in the bathroom was all about.”

Like a good alpha, a slave to his omega mistress, I did exactly as she asked, climbing over her, gathering her in close, and letting her breathe in my scent as I purred for her.

The bond, I realised, didn’t just go one way.

I had some explaining to do.

Chapter Fourteen

Jace

We fell asleep wrapped up in each other, but I woke up feeling alone. Bright sunlight streamed through the window, showcasing the marks upon the sleeping omega’s

body. She still hadn't seen what I'd done to her, not properly.

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She was always ours, my beast taunted, all fucking smug.

I didn't feel smug, I felt like a fucking animal. I paced the bedroom, eyes on the sleeping omega, feeling her peacefulness like a balm trying to hold my demons at bay, but nothing could keep them back.

There I was, a kid again, watching my sister sob and scream, nails clawing into her own skin to remove the marks alphas had left there. Our fuckup of a mother, fag hanging out her mouth as she tied my sister down to stop her hurting herself. And me, fucking helping her because I couldn't stand to see my sister tearing her own flesh, even though those marks made me want to hurl too.

That's not us, my beast said. She wanted what we did, she begged for it.

My sister had begged for it too, asked for it while the alphas were with her. It was only afterwards that the trauma reared its ugly head.

Rinse, cycle, repeat.

Sloane hadn't been thinking straight when I'd taken her from the Dawn Agency, and I'd fucking known it too. I was no better than Snake, no better than a fucking dog.

Sloane fretted in her sleep, and instantly, all my focus shifted to the omega. I was upsetting her just by being in the same fucking room. I stalked to the closet, pulled on some sweat pants and a T-shirt, shoved my feet into sneakers, and headed for the door, ignoring the pain radiating from my chest.

I had no destination in mind, but what I found was Ma in the kitchen, putting together the finishing touches on a tray of what looked like lasagne she was about to shove in the oven. My stomach rumbled loud enough for her to hear.

“Jason!” Her smile was beaming as she pushed the great tray into the oven, but it dropped immediately after.

“What’s up? What’s happened? Is Sloane all right?”

I shook my head, somehow making it to the big kitchen table and slumping down.

“I’ve marked her,” I said, arm around my stomach. “I’ve mated her.”

“And?” Ma demanded, hands on her hips. “From what I heard, she wanted you to. Has something happened? Why aren’t you with her?”

“Yeah, something happened. I fucking marked her while she was in heat.” I stood and started pacing. Suddenly, the room felt too small to contain me. “Just like those alphas marked my sister.”

There, I’d said it, putting it out into the universe—my shame.

“Jason! You get a grip this minute! You’re not too big for me to box your damn ears. You have an omega now, a mate. You don’t get to skip out. If she told you to leave, then you damn well fight for her. You tell her you can work this out together.”

“She didn’t tell me to leave. I just—” I had no idea how to put this into words, but it was like a riot going on inside my head. “Ella.”

“Your sister? What does she have to do with you and Sloane?” Her eyes narrowed. “Oh, I see where this self-pity is going, and I’m not buying into it.”

Damn, for a tiny beta, Ma sure didn't pull her punches. "It's not self-pity," I gritted out.

"I was there, remember," she said. "I was the one who nursed your sister after your mother left. Jason, you're nothing like those men, not even close, and don't you dare suggest that you are."

I gave her a baleful look.

After my mother got hauled away by the cops for stealing one too many times, it was Ma, Dane's Ma, who took Ella and me in. I rubbed absently at the centre of my chest, my eyes lifting unerringly to where I knew Sloane would be. She was stirring, perhaps by my own feelings reaching her through the bond.

"When was the last time you spoke to Ella?" Ma persisted, because the tiny beta never let a matter drop.

"A while," I said noncommittally.

"When was the last time you spoke to her about what happened?"

Never was the answer, and Ma saw that in my face, in the tic thumping in my jaw.

"You should go to your mate, but if you can't do that until you put this to rest, you should talk to your sister now. She had an early breakfast, and she's in her room. Then after, you need to see your mate and set straight with her whatever this nonsense is before you do real damage."

"So, you're saying that you wanted to be with them?" I rubbed absently at the centre of my chest, trying to focus on my sister's words.

Her apartment was on the top floor, the penthouse, because when we were growing up, she was obsessed with stars. You couldn't see them from the shitty place we'd called home back then. You couldn't even see the sky between the layers of high-rise buildings. I remembered her saying that the stars were forever free.

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When she was younger, she'd made a nest in the hall closet. Mum and I came home to find she'd thrown everything out and taken her blankets in there, said something about wanting it to be dark so she could see the stars. Our mum went fucking nuts about the mess, which was funny in hindsight, given the rest of the place was a shithole and you could barely tell more shit had been added.

Soon after, she'd revealed as an omega, and that was where it had gone from bad to worse.

"Don't try and tell me that Mum was looking out for you, because I saw that shit happen too many times," I ground out.

"Much of what happened is hazy for me," my sister said. "I was suffering and in pain, but don't believe even for one moment that I didn't need them. They filled an empty space, and I can't explain it any better than that. I was hurting. The betas who came around took that away."

"Betas?" I frowned. I'd been sure they were alphas, but thinking back, I only knew that they'd seemed monstrous to me.

"Some even offered to take me away and give me stuff, like a nice place to live. I think Mum, even with her addled mind, realized that was a bad idea. You were still a kid, Jace, you hadn't even revealed. You couldn't be expected to understand adult situations. Why would you? Then afterwards, you never asked me about it. I assumed it all went over your head. If I'd thought for one minute you were carrying this around for all these years, I would've talked to you about it. I feel terrible now."

“You have no reason to feel bad about anything, and none of this sounds fucking right. Mum was still high half the time, and you were barely an adult yourself.”

Ella pulled a face, managing to look cute. “I get all that. Mum, she was trying to make the best of a difficult situation. There were rumours about Desparion. We both know now that they’re true. If she’d taken me there, it would have gone so much worse. She made a lot of mistakes. You haven’t spoken to her for a long while, but well, she’s different now.”

Her lips tugged up at my derisive grunt.

“She did the best she could at the time, Jace, and well, I survived. Don’t get me wrong—I prefer your approach. It’s on my terms now, all of it. I haven’t found my one yet...” She looked out the window, as if he could be found there. “The one I want to be with. I’ve never marked a man. One day, I think I will. I’m happy for you, that you have, so damn happy.”

Her smile was genuine. I didn’t talk to her often, almost like I’d been afraid to lift the cover on the pain, and it was difficult to take all of this in. I felt like the ground was moving underneath me.

Was she trying to put a positive spin on it to make me feel better? I stared into warm brown eyes that were a mirror of my own. That was the beginning and end of our similarity. The rest of us were as different as night and day. Yet there was nothing fake in what she was saying, nothing screamed at me that she was lying for whatever reasons she might have.

Then I remembered what that asshole said before I gave him a beating.

“Snake?” I grit out. “Don’t pretend like you wanted that man.”

She surprised me by blushing. My sister was a free omega who, by her own admission, used men to scratch an itch when her heat came. I didn't think she had a blush in her.

"Snake is complicated," she said evasively.

"Like fuck he's complicated. I put a beatdown on him for putting his hands on Sloane. Put him on the fucking floor, and I'd put him there again."

She grimaced. "If you put him down, he let you, Jace. Have I been with him? Yes. Has he marked me? Also yes. I encourage men to mark me. I like it, both the act of putting it there and the feeling after, but I never mark them. I never talk to you about this stuff. You're my baby brother. Some things are not open to discussion, and you need to accept that."

I rubbed the centre of my chest where the buzzing had picked up.

"You're hurting," she said.

Sloane

Before the death of my parents, I'd lived quite the privileged life. Some of it I was aware of. We had money for the things we needed, and our family never argued about it, but the rest? I'd grown up in a household of love, where I was seen, cared for, my parents a constant presence in the background, making sure I was OK. When I'd gotten the news about their deaths, that was when I saw it, what I'd taken for granted—that continual warm regard, the feeling that no matter what happened, someone had my back. Em tried now, but...that wasn't her burden to shoulder, so I'd gone without, until now. As I hovered on the edge of sleep and wakefulness, I felt like I lay within a golden cocoon of warmth. All that loss, that pain, it was muted, right up until I opened my eyes.

How many women go through this? Wake up after a night of what felt like the most intense sex you'd ever experienced, feeling like what happened transcended bumping uglies to get what you want, feeling like you'd made a connection, literally. My fingers found the incredibly sensitive spot on my neck, playing with the scarring flesh there with a gasp and a smile that soon faded as I rolled over. The space beside me was empty, and the place where Jace had slept was as cold as the knife sliding into my heart.

I'd run from this place, from him, from being an omega, and just when I'd finally accepted that, he'd run. I forced myself out of bed, finding a pile of clothes I assumed had been left for me, given their size, and got dressed before striding through the apartment. Not in the bathroom, not in the kitchen, the place had that still feeling of an empty house, because that was what this was. I shook my head, once, twice, then strode over to the elevator, punching the button hard. The wait for the carriage to come, then to take me down to the ground floor, felt like it went forever, but then it opened on a familiar sight. I scanned the long tables, saw everyone was there—the omegas, the alphas, and everyone else between, grabbing a bite to eat before they started their day, but not him. I searched the group, but knew I wouldn't find him.

“Sloane,” Ma said, getting to her feet with a smile, “come and have some breakfast! You must be starving.”

“Where is he?” I asked, pinning her with my gaze.

The smile faltered, and that told me a lot, as did everyone else's reactions. The betas' eyes flicked between us, trying to work out the source of tension, while the alphas just sat there, still as stones, watching everything unfold. And the omegas? There was some of that pity, that scorn from before, but most of all, their eyes remained fixed on the bite mark on my neck. My fingers went up, trailing over it and feeling a flush of heat and shame as I did so.

How could it be like this? How could we have had this moment of complete oneness, where I'd felt like our souls had touched, yet when I woke up, he was gone like I was just a one-night stand? In the centre of my chest was an odd pulling sensation like a slightly off-key note. I was ready to hear the answer to my question, my hopeful heart concocting legitimate scenarios to tear him away from me—security, some catastrophe at the bar, anything. Anything but this.

“Where is he?” I asked again, of all of them this time.

Initially, there were only sidelong looks, making it clear everyone knew but were reluctant to confess, which only made the pain cut deeper. I wasn't going to like the answer, I knew it.

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“I need to know where Jace is, where my mate has gone.” In my chest, the little discordant pull was rising to a roar. I was trying for reasonable, no doubt sounding unhinged, but those words, that seemed to break the spell over the table. There were gasps in response to my announcement, but the two alphas, they remained perfectly still until the one with the black hair, Dane, replied.

“He’s with Ella.”

Ella, the name I’d heard last time, the mysterious woman that kept Jace from committing to me, the name that had driven Jace to a frenzy when he’d beaten on Snake... How could I have erased that from my mind? But where was she last night? Where was she when he...?

“And where the hell is she?” I snapped. I didn’t care what my designation was, I was done with this completely. This and the dead silence that seemed to swallow everything I said, absorbing it until it was like I’d never said a word. “Fine,” I hissed. “I’ll find her myself.”

And so I turned on my heel, ready to flounce out of the room, through the bar, and into the zone beyond, but a voice stopped me in my tracks. Rich and deep like his, but not the same, this one had a rusty rasp to it.

“You go outside, you run the risk of coming across Snake and his fuckers,” Dane said. “He’s got an axe to grind after what happened.”

“Don’t care,” I snapped back.

“She’s not out there,” he continued, and I followed his eyes to the elevator doors.

She was in the building, she lived here, this Ella. She’d probably been sleeping on a floor above us as we... My breath came in noisy gulps, like I’d run halfway around the quarter and back again.

“Fuck it, I’ll take you to her.”

“Dane, we shouldn’t...”

The other alpha, Ryder, looked Dane over as he got to his feet and walked over to me.

“We shouldn’t what?” I asked.

“We shouldn’t interfere,” he replied in a flat voice. “Jace just needs a bit of time.”

“Yeah, that was before he claimed her,” Dane said, then turned back to me. “C’mon, I’ll take you to him.”

And so we got back into the elevator, Dane producing a key and putting it into the required slot before he could select a floor I’d never been to before.

“He keeps her locked down pretty tight,” he said by way of explanation, though it told me little. “Has to make sure she’s safe.”

And me? Where was his concern for my welfare, my safety? I hated being that bitch, but damn me if I wasn’t. Inside, the sense of discord was now flat and empty, and I almost thought that was worse. A small growl formed in my chest, Dane’s eyes shooting my way before he snorted, but before he could say more, the elevator door opened on what appeared to be the top floor, if the view from the windows was anything to go by, but that wasn’t what captured my focus. Through an expansive

living area, on the other side of the building, was a balcony and two people sat there, sharing breakfast. The snarl inside me grew, too high-pitched to be threatening, but still, I couldn't help it.

“Easy, omega,” Dane said. “This isn't?—”

I didn't wait around to hear his heavily edited version of the events. I strode across the living area, skirting the lounge suite, my eyes caught by a massive bean bag piled up high with a cluster of fabrics carefully woven together—a nest. My head felt light, airy, like it was about to float off my shoulders as I staggered closer.

“Why on earth would you presume that?” the girl said, but right now, I found it difficult to register anything she said. There she was, sitting in the morning sun, seeming to absorb all available light, reflecting it back twice as radiant. Her long blonde hair, her pixie-like features, all the way down to her tiny little toes, she was the poster girl for omegas, the kind they used in movies to tug at your heartstrings.

“But, Ella, when you—” Jace rumbled.

“No ‘but, Ella.’” That cold knife, it drew back and then stabbed deeper as her hand reached out, instantly taken by his much bigger one, enfolding her fingers, then giving it a squeeze. “Jace, my past, my history, my experiences are exactly that—mine. You can't use them as an excuse to avoid doing what you need to. The girl, Sloane, you know what you need to do.”

I put my hand on the screen door, sliding it open conspicuously enough to shift both their attention to me. I stared them down, the omega and the alpha.

“What do you need to do?” I asked, my voice pure ice. “Just what exactly do you need to do?”

This, this was the moment everything had been building towards. Jace was as hot as a thousand suns and then gone again, over and over. He'd jerked me back and forth, like my instincts had, and I was done with both. I was an omega, I accepted that now, knew right down to my toes that this was who I was, the previous Sloane a skin shed off like a snake does as it grows, but with that came a knowledge. An omega needed an alpha. Could I survive without one? Absolutely. I could march downstairs, quiz the other omegas, find out how they eked out a living here, and follow their lead, eschewing contact with alphas except when my heat reared its ugly head, but as I considered that life, my fingers went to the mark on my neck. A flare of heat and need came with that, but not for any alpha. For him.

I shortened my words this time.

“What do you need, Jace?”

“You.”

The pretty girl who had the same eyes as Jace—his sister, I realised—smiled at that, seemed to feel a hope I didn't, but I planted my feet, waiting for the rest. There was relief in knowing it was his sister, that he'd been protecting her, but then came a twist of pain from wondering what would have happened if he'd only remained in the bed, held me, and talked to me about this. The omega in me wanted to rush towards him, get swept up in his arms, and be held tight to ease the ache inside me, but I knew now I would never allow anyone into my bed who thought it fine to sneak out on me, right after something as momentous as our mutual claiming. My fingers traced the scarred edges of my mark. I had a mate, the other half of my heart, or did I?

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Jace rose, taking steps toward me, yet not close enough to crowd, while his sister slipped through the door beside me, giving us privacy, although I barely spared her a glance.

“I...I’ve never had an omega before you. Never wanted to.” He snorted, then shook his head. “Nah, that’s bullshit, I wanted ’em plenty, but I could hold back everything I felt. Mark, claim, breed.” His lips twisted as he said the words, even as they made me shiver. “That was just alpha bullshit.” But his eyes flicked up, spearing into me. “Until you. I thought you were safe.” He took another step towards me. “I thought you were just this hot little beta in her mother’s dress.” Another step, my breath starting to come in faster as he approached. “I thought you were some uptight chick looking for some alpha dick.”

“Maybe I was,” I rasped out. “And...?”

“And then I touched you, and I didn’t fucking care about anything that came before.” As if to reinforce his point, he placed a careful hand on my arm, his grip tightening when I didn’t pull away. “I’ve touched omegas before, picked them up when they were hurting, grabbed their hands to pull them out of the way of dickheads who’d hurt them, but none of them felt like you.”

The other hand, the back of his knuckles grazed down the side of my arm, just barely.

“All the usual alpha shit happened—my cock nearly punching through my zipper to get to you, my fangs aching to sink deep into your skin. But, Sloane...”

He tipped my chin upwards so I was forced to meet his eyes, and I was surprised to

feel that didn't make my eyes ache now. I could stare at Jace all day without a problem, and wasn't that scary?

"That's enough to send an alpha into rut, not enough to make him mate you." His finger traced the line of my jaw. "It was you, beautiful girl, with that big fucking heart that was looking out for your sister, no matter what was happening to you, those sad eyes that seemed to hold a world of pain I couldn't help but want to wipe away, and that steel spine" —his hand slid down my back— "that had you kicking that prick Snake in the side. This should've been simple. I knew you were mine from that first moment, but I fought it." His brows creased at that. "I fought it for you. Everything I knew about the mating process was brutal, harsh, and painful for the omega in question. I couldn't feel what I feel for you and want that for you, but at the same time, everything I did to hold that back fell to shit. An alpha protects, that's what we do, and I thought I had to protect you from me."

I shook my head, feeling his words washing over me, just focussing on my breathing for a second, before facing him again.

"I don't deserve that."

"No, love, I know that now."

"I deserve a mate that's all in."

"You'll have it. I've got no fucking boundaries left. I'm done with that shit."

I stared at him now, hoping to use every ounce of my will to push my message home.

"I won't accept anyone, any mating mark, any bond..." I hadn't realised that was a possibility until the words spilled out, but as I saw his eyes widen along with mine, somehow, I knew that to be true. What we had was...fragile, could break if not

tended. “With anyone who’s not one hundred percent in with me. You feel the need to mark, claim, breed me, because that’s what alphas do. They don’t only protect, they provide us with exactly what we need, what I need, Jace. Can you do that for me?”

“Fuck, baby, I feel like every fibre of my bloody being is geared up to do just that. To give in.” Pain scored his voice. “To surrender.”

“To surrender,” I agreed, and at that, I was swept up into his arms and marched through his sister’s living space, over to the elevator, Dane standing by it with a smirk on his face.

“Good choice, brother.” He nodded to Jace, then jerked himself away at my mate’s territorial growl. “I think I’ll catch the next one down,” he said as the elevator arrived, which was just fine because when it did, when we stepped inside, there was an enclosed space and him and me.

“Baby...”

That was all the warning I got before I was pressed against the smooth walls, the number of our floor punched in, his lips trailing down my neck as we went down.

“You’re gonna regret this,” he hissed, one last comment before devouring my mouth. “Surrender to the beast inside me? He’s hungry, baby, starving for you.”

Chapter Fifteen

Jace

I had some making up to do, I got that. I’d fucked up. I should’ve stayed with Sloane, should’ve been there when she woke up, but instead, I’d run off to fight the demons

that didn't really exist, upon reflection. And now? Now I felt strangely free, like a weight had been lifted that I'd never even realized had been holding me down.

There was a sweet omega in my arms, clinging to and kissing me, showing me with her body and telling me with her words that she wanted to be mine, and I was so all in. Distantly, I heard the elevator ding as we arrived at my floor, then we somehow got out the door with her still in my arms, straight through to the bedroom, where I dropped her with a little whoosh on the bed. Her hair flew, and she huffed a little breath as she brushed it out the way

It was then that I noticed somebody had been in and cleaned the place. Doubtless, Ma had been involved in this. The bed was devoid of all bedding, but beside it was a great big pile of blankets, pillows, soft cushions, and throws—nesting materials. I wasn't the only one staring at it. Sloane's eyes slanted to the side and then popped open a little bit.

"Jesus!" she said.

"Do you want to...?" I swallowed, weirdly nervous about her potentially making a nest. "Do you want to use them?"

"I don't know," she said. "I've never made a real nest before."

"It's okay, baby. You don't have to do a damn thing you don't want to." I came down beside her and pressed a kiss to her forehead. The rushing emotions that had been gripping me changed in that instant. Was this what being an alpha was about? Wanting to comfort your omega above anything else?

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My dick throbbed. There was no doubt about that. The thought of her making a nest, of fucking her in it? Yeah, that interested me a lot, but only if that was what she wanted to do.

“Do you want to try?” I prodded. “See how it feels?”

“Yeah,” she said. “I think that I do.”

She wriggled away from me, getting to her feet and kicking off her shoes.

“Fuck,” I muttered roughly as her top came up and off, over her head. No bra, just creamy skin littered with the marks I’d put there.

She sent me a haughty look, one that dared me to try and touch. I swiped a hand over my face. “You’re gonna do it like that?” I asked. “You really are testing me.”

She grinned, and it turned into a smirk as her hands went to the buttons on her pants, undoing them slowly, taunting me.

I groaned as she turned her back to me and shimmied out, giving me a perfect view of her little heart-shaped arse, throwing a look over her shoulder that was pure temptation. I took in all of her beauty, the marks upon her skin, the flush to her cheeks. She was ready for this, and I was ready for this too.

“No,” she said. “I’m going to do it like this.”

She made a little shooing motion to me. “Get naked,” she said. “I want to try this on

for size.”

I nearly fell out of the bed, I moved so fast, fingers flying to my waist and shucking my pants off, cock already leaking. I was damn near embarrassing myself by how much I was into her making her first real nest.

She was tentative at first. I watched her out of the corner of my eyes, yanking my shirt over my head before tossing it to the floor, captivated by my omega. It was like she'd forgotten I was there, her focus was so absolute. The pillows went in first, making an edge of sorts, followed by the softest throws, and yet more pillows, layering, making it deeper.

There I stood, mesmerised, thinking about how I was going to fist her hair as I rutted her...about how I was going to ruin the nest, ruin her in it.

Jesus! How much stuff was she going to put in? The nest seemed to be getting bigger and bigger as she worked. “Baby?” I said cautiously, almost terrified of rousing her from her task, but I was fucking impatient. She was kneeling in the centre of it, palms brushing over the softness with a cute, little smile on her face. “Baby?” She threw a look over her shoulder, eyes glazed. “Can I come in?”

She smiled, and there she was, with me again, my Sloane. “Only if you promise to be very gentle with it,” she said.

“You won’t believe how gentle I’m going to be with it.”

My smirk was the size of a planet. Yeah, I was gonna decimate the whole nest and drive her wild doing it. She issued a cute growl as my knee connected with the nearest cushion.

“What?” I said, torn by indecision. “Sloane, I need to get in somehow.” She’d made a

fucking fort around herself. I waded in and gathered her up to her squeal of outrage. “I’m here now.”

I rolled, taking her under, fingers tangling in her hair, lips on her throat, seeking and finding the claiming mark. The moment I sucked on it, she turned wild, nails clawing at my arse, wet pussy rubbing against my thigh. I felt everything from her like an echo inside me—her rioting emotions, the rushing pleasure that felt too big for her body to contain.

“This is going to be hard and fast,” I said, lips trailing down her collarbone, finding her lush tit and feasting. Her back arched, fingers in my hair pulling me closer, and that need to connect demanded its dues. My hand shook as it skimmed over her shoulder, down her back, over her arse, my thigh pressing up against her drenched pussy that she was rubbing against me.

“I’ll make it up to you after, baby,” I mumbled against her tit, working my way back up, pushing my other knee between hers, spreading her open for me. “I need to get you good and bred.”

“Yes, please, Jace.”

She didn’t need to ask me twice. My cock found the entrance to her without help, and that was it—I was gone. My hips snapped, dick driving straight into the hot, wet, clenching heaven of her cunt. Rising, I took her hips in hand and hammered into her like my life depended on us being one.

The nest collapsed around us, but I couldn’t give a fuck. I just needed to get my seed in her womb. I needed to claim her, and my beast wasn’t going to be happy until she was completely tied to me.

“I’m going to come,” I said. Watching her face contort in pleasure was driving me

straight for the end.

Then she came, pussy fisting my cock, pounding at the burgeoning knot, gripping me up and demanding I give her what she needed.

He growled his approval as she gushed cum, my knot blooming to the point of no return as my teeth gritted, then I pushed past her tight, slippery entrance and locked into place. My lips were at her throat again, teeth sinking into the flesh, tasting blood.

Her cry was guttural, her pussy choking out the first heady shot of cum. I growled against her throat, hips jerking as more and more cum was dumped deep where it needed to go.

Breed.

She wasn't leaving this nest until she was bred—that was a given.

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Her fingers were on my arse, pulling me closer, legs and arms clinging with the same fierce need I felt. Inside my chest, the awareness blossomed into life.

Love.

Rich, deep, complex, the vortex swirled around us. Her pleasure hit me like a fucking avalanche, and my balls reached for more and found nothing, yet I still felt the dizzying sensations, the shuddering bliss.

“Jace!”

“I’ve got you, baby.”

Jesus, what the fuck had been wrong with me to leave her like that? It terrified me how I might have lost her. It pained me that I’d hurt her and caused her to doubt.

“It’s okay,” she said. “It’s okay now. I can feel you—all of you.”

And she could. There was nothing I could hide from her, not any more. I was exposed. It should have frightened me, but it was comforting.

It was right.

My cock jerked. Damn, I wanted her again. I needed her again. I rocked my hips, testing the knot, stirring a growl from my mate when I tried to pull out.

Her arms and legs wrapped around me, tightened.

I grinned.

She shook her head in warning, trying to be stern and failing.

“What?” I said, all fake innocence.

“Don’t you dare.”

“Dare what, baby?” My cock jerked again. He was on board with round two.

A sudden thudding on the bedroom door brought a genuine growl to my lips.

“Jace! Sloane’s sister is here! She’s starting some fucking bullshit, demanding to see her sister.”

I glanced down at Sloane.

“Is she okay?” she asked.

“Handle her!” I hollered back. “She is now, baby. Ryder will take good care of her. Now, I’m going to take good care of your pussy.”

Chapter Sixteen

Ryder

‘Handle her,’ he said. How the fuck was I supposed to handle a bratty beta who was now officially under Jace’s protection? He hadn’t said that part, but it was kind of an unwritten rule. Just like neither Dane nor me put our hands on Ella, touching Em felt much the same.

But as I exited the elevator...and was assaulted by a sharp bony finger in the centre of my chest, all that went out the window.

“Where’s Sloane?” Emma demanded. “You said you were fetching her.”

“I said I was going to check on her,” I replied, feeling that calm settle over me, the kind that usually foreshadowed someone getting fucked up...or a brat getting the spanking of their life. “And she was pretty busy.”

I didn’t point out that Jace had sounded like he would rearrange my face if I didn’t fuck off.

“It was implied,” she practically growled, giving another sharp poke.

“For fuck’s sake, Em, stop poking me in the damn chest!”

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“Don’t ‘Em’ me, tough guy. I’m not afraid of you.”

On the other side of the room, the full crew was in attendance—omegas poised with food halfway to their lips, the guys looking on with amusement. Dane chuckled, the fucker.

Why exactly had I let Emma in the gates again?

Yeah, that was right—she’d been shaking the mesh like a madwoman, looking straight up at the surveillance camera, demanding to speak to the manager.

The fucking manager?! Like this was some kind of holiday resort.

She was batshit crazy. It was either bring her in, or have another damn riot on our hands when the rest of the deadbeats in this zone roused themselves to come and check what the fuck was going on.

“Are you even listening to me?” I asked. “You get your sister is newly mated, right? And from the sounds of things, they were busy alleviating their newly mated needs.”

The frown faded, her eyes went round, and she opened and closed her mouth a couple of times before spluttering, “Newly mated needs!” Her scowl was back in an instant, little chin tipping in defiance that might as well have been a red flag to the alpha side of me. “I demand to see my sister, this instant, before your ‘brother’” —she put air quotes on the word with an exaggerated roll of her eyes— “gets notions of breeding her.”

I rubbed my jaw as though pondering this. I was confident Jace was already balls deep and well into the process of breeding her formerly sensible sister, so I offered Emma a fake smile. “How about no.”

Then she poked me one time too fucking many.

“Oh!”

Her screech accompanied me tossing her over my shoulder. Small fists beat against my back, while she cursed me out like a pro.

And just like that, all the tension left me, because handling brats was a personal forte of mine. All alphas had a beast and all had a weakness. My beast’s weakness was taming querulous women, and this one needed a firm but loving lesson in boundaries and respect applied to her arse via my hand.

“Quiet down, princess.” I landed the first swat against her backside, chuckling when it roused an outraged squeal. I nodded my head to Dane, who was watching with a shit-eating grin. “If Jace and Sloane surface, tell them I’m going to be” —I gestured toward the wriggling spitfire hanging over my shoulder— “handling this little problem.”

I didn’t wait for a reply, just punched the button on the elevator, and with Emma still wailing about her rights, exited the room.

Epilogue

Sloane

If I thought waking up mated was a deliriously gorgeous feeling, waking up bred was something else. My body sang with pleasure, but not so much an intense, grasping,

sexual one. I woke up, heard the heavy sounds of Jace's breath, stared at the ceiling, and felt it. I'd never wanted to have kids before, feeling like I had my hands full with Em and the estate but... My hand dropped down to my flat stomach, the palm stroking over the smooth surface, and I felt it. Just a pinprick of...life, I guessed. No consciousness yet, no existence beyond a few multiplying cells, I knew that academically, but in reality, it was as if someone had gone all out to give me the perfect gift, one I hadn't even known I wanted until I had it. My eyes pricked with tears, sensitive bloody omega, but I didn't care. I let them come, because with them came a rush of the most perfect, all encompassing love.

I'd lost so much when my parents died. We'd expected them to be there, to see us grow up into adulthood, find our way in life, and be the amazing supportive presence they'd always been, and that had been torn away. I'd stepped up, tried to be them for Em, keep her safe and happy and get her through the grieving process, but now I had something for me. We could build our own family here. Jace and I, we could be just like my parents, surrounding our child with love and...

The thoughts were pushed aside as the feelings just kept rising, and then a montage of images hit me almost physically. A little boy with a shock of dark brown hair and a mulish expression, just like his dad. A delicate little girl who'd stumble over her feet but pick herself up again with a grin. I could see them, right as they?—

“Baby?” Jace mumbled the word, fighting against sleep, obviously being wakened by what was going on in me. He blinked rapidly, trying to make his eyes see me. “Are you OK? Did something...?”

The words stopped when it seeped in, that bone-deep knowledge that I felt, that we felt. He frowned slightly, looking down at my hand on my stomach, and then his face transformed. Big growly fucking alphas, they make you think that they're made of rusted steel and barbed wire, but at their centre, they were gooey marshmallows. Jace stared at my hand over my belly like it was the Holy Grail or something, his hand

shaking as he reached out, covering mine with his.

“Jesus, Sloane...?”

I nodded slowly, smiling the smuggest of smiles.

“We’re...” He tried to say it a few times, his brain fighting his mouth, so I had to do it for him.

“We’re going to be a family.”

Then he surged forward, covering my body with his, pinning me to the bed in a way I knew now I would always crave, his mouth finding my mating mark just as I found his.

“I don’t know what the fuck I did to deserve you, love, but I promise you, I’ll show you every damn day that I do. You’re mine, Sloane, mine.”

“Mine,” I agreed, relaxing back onto the bed and closing my eyes, just sinking into the emotions and the sensations of being an omega with her alpha. “Mine.”

Art

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:29 am

The beta barman was back at work, no one else, other than the alphas, wise to his other job. As far as they knew, he'd been on leave for a week or so. He'd walked back in, heard the news about Sloane and Jace and their pregnancy, and was able to act surprised along with everyone else, because he was. He'd lain awake at night, wondering if returning Sloane to Jace was the right thing to do, but evidently, he needn't have bothered. She'd looked positively radiant when they made the announcement, and him? Art had frowned slightly, the transformation of the big man into this hovering thing so dramatic, he half wondered if Alpha Control was playing around with Desparion water supply again. Right now, he nodded to his fellow betas as he walked in the door, then went to grab the keys that led down into the cellar, ready to swap over any beer kegs that needed it. Perhaps that was why his phone rang when it did.

He never knew if his handlers mapped his position on the GPS or had cameras installed in the bar, but they always seemed to know to call when he was alone.

"Any updates?" the crisp voice asked when he answered the call.

"Hard to say," Art replied, going for vague, always trying to redirect their focus. "I've only been back on the job for a day or two."

"The beta girl, the one that was latent. She's mated to the alpha now?"

"Ah, yeah."

"Good, good, we're facing some opposition, but it looks like we might be able to confiscate her estate. That would be an amazing boost to Alpha Control coffers. So,

has she been bred?"

Fuck, direct questions, bolstered by some sort of intel he hadn't provided, those were the ones he hated the most.

"It appears so," he replied reluctantly, feeling yet another stab in his gut as a result.

"Well done!" the voice down the other end said, as if he'd had anything to do with it.

"We'll be in touch."

And with that, the phone line went dead. Art's heart thundered in his chest, his breathing coming harder and faster as he looked up at the ceiling, hearing the muffled sounds of voices. How much did Alpha Control hear or see? Would they know if he went to the alphas' office, asking to see them urgently? His heart kept beating on, a death knell, it felt like, for either his honour or his career. He swallowed hard, his mouth bone-dry, his grasp on the keys loosening, but it was her that was the deciding factor. He saw Sloane, the way her eyes had struggled to focus due to the drugs she'd been pumped with, her desperate, desperate need to get back to her alpha.

In his training, this had been used as further evidence of omegas and alphas' inferiority. They were dismissed as primitive creatures, ruled by instinct, not rational thought, but it was that same rational thought process that had him deconstructing Alpha Control ideology every time he dealt with this kind of case. His hand gripped the keys tighter as he spun on his heel, climbing up the stairs, passing the task and the keys onto a passing beta as he went. He made his way through the back area of the bar, walking past people, so many people, before he reached the office door. His hand hovered. If this was found out, if they knew what he was doing... He frowned and then forced his knuckles to rap on the door.

"Come in," a deep voice said from within.

He turned the doorknob, opening it to see the three main alphas here, along with

several others he didn't know, their collective gaze boring into him.

"Hello...Art," Jace said, the alpha's emphasis making his name sound like a lie.

"I've got some news," he said shortly in reply. "News that affects all of you." He stepped in, closed the door, and then approached the group of alphas.