



Not a Gift

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Description: Malachi never thought he'd return. Torn between duty and desire, he left his childhood love behind, believing he was too dark and too dangerous for her. But after eight long years of fighting for freedom, an accident forces him to return, bringing him back to the one place he swore he'd never go.

Lyrik has lived her life under the shadow of a secret. Not only the love she feels for the only man she can never have but something far darker as well. She fully believes she has moved on with her life until the past returns to reopen old wounds. The pull between her and Malachai remains undeniable, and as their feelings reignite, she realizes that the truth of who she is could change everything. There are complications that neither of them anticipated, keeping them from finding their happily ever after. Malachai's ruthless father aims to corrupt his son and force him to claim the power of the Black family. Malachai must decide: Will he follow his father's dark legacy, or will he rise up and lead in his own way?

Together, can they leave their troubled past behind and forge a future filled with love and fire? Or will the ghosts of their childhoods be too great a force to overcome?

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Chapter One

Don't Look Back!

Malichai, Fourteen Years Old

My father brought his new omega wife home today. She brought her little girl with her. She looks just like a little princess in her pink dress, her blonde hair in pigtails and the widest smile I have ever seen on a kid. She's a tiny little thing and I instinctively want to protect her from the darkness of the outside world. From the darkness living inside the walls of this house. She keeps looking around, her gaze bouncing from one thing to the next, taking in everything this new house has to offer.

"Here is your bedroom," I say when my father asks me to show her around.

"It's big," she says, turning in circles. "Do you sleep here, too?"

A chuckle falls from my lips. "No. My room is across the hallway."

"What if I have a nightmare?" she asks softly, her big blue eyes staring at me.

"You can always come to me," I reply, never even considering any other response.

Fifteen Years Old

I stare down at my crimson-coated fingers, blood dripping to the floor. Revulsion swims through me and I want to shower more than I want to take my next breath.

“Don’t look so fucking disgusted,” my father says sternly. “This is what you were born to do.”

I want to say something, but my throat is closed up. All I can do is wish that this entire night passes quickly. Tied to a chair in the center of an abandoned warehouse is a man in his late thirties. My father says he is—was—a danger to our family. He was trying to kill my father and take what my father had earned as an Elite. At my hand, I slit his throat like it was the most mundane thing I have ever done. I didn’t even know his name.

This is how my father plans to make sure his little heir falls in line. All this moment has done is solidify my decision to never have anything to do with the godforsaken Black family.

“You did well,” Dante says, placing his hand on my shoulder.

He is my father’s right-hand man in all matters and always at his side. I stare at him in disbelief. How can he praise me for what I did?

“I threw up the first time I killed a man,” he says lowly with a soft smile, trying to reassure me. I don’t want to feel better about what I have done. I deserve to drown in the guilt I am feeling.

Sixteen Years Old

I watch like a hawk as some punk kid touches Lyrik’s shoulder, leaning in too

close. Before I can think through what I am doing, I stomp over to them. I grab his wrist and twist, bringing him to his knees.

“What the fuck, man?” the kid cries out.

“Don’t touch my sister,” I say, my voice low and threatening. For the first time in my life, I consider killing someone without my father’s order.

“Stepsister,” Lyrik corrects, glaring at me.

“Semantics. You’re a Black now, an Elite, and the riffraff need to know their fucking place.”

What I really want to say is she is mine and no one gets to touch her. But those words will never pass over my lips, they can’t. I’m not in love with Lyrik. It’s just a crush.

“I don’t know what your problem is,” Lyrik says, her hands planted on her hips. “But I need you to hear me. I’m a McMillan, not a damn Black. And you are not in charge of me.”

Eighteen Years Old

I am the son of a monster. A man who is ruthless in everything he does, taking no prisoners and accepting no excuses. Not even from his only child. I am expected to fall in line, like a good little heir of an Elite.

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But he made a mistake.

He brought an angel into my life.

Lyrik. My eighteen-year-old stepsister.

For years I have tried to convince myself I don't love her. That what I felt was simply a childhood crush. But I know the truth, deep down in my soul. I can't seem to keep my eyes off Lyrik, no matter how hard I try. I have made lists in my mind, and I know every reason we can't be together. But that doesn't make me love or want her any less.

She is the only girl I have ever wanted, and she is also the only girl I can never have. Lyrik. My eighteen-year-old stepsister. And to make the situation worse, she came into her designation earlier today. I prayed she would identify as a beta, but I have no luck at all. Of course she would be an omega, the one thing we Alphas crave above all else.

My stepsister.

My heaven and my hell.

My dragon has been fighting me to go to her since I shifted six months ago, and now he is insane. Once he scented the omega, he threw his entire might into the fight against me. I don't know how long I can control him.

That's why I am leaving. I am damaged by the life my father has thrust upon me. By

the deeds I have committed and the blood that already stains my hands. I am dirty. Unworthy. And she deserves so much more than I can ever offer.

And now, I am going to do the most cliché thing I can think of. I am joining the Fighting Forces.

I will run away from the life I have been living, the life I have been forced into. Doing this will keep me far away from her and my asshole father, which is a bonus. She can blossom into the woman I already know she is going to be and live a happy, carefree life. Away from me and the stupid fucking feelings I can't seem to control.

Away from the darkness that thrives in me.

Away from the damn Black name.

Slinging my bag into the bed of my dark blue pickup truck, I cast a glance at the house I grew up in, but I don't return. I won't say goodbye to my father because I don't feel like having that argument again. And I can't say goodbye to her. If she asks me to stay one time, only once, I know I will. And then all of this will have been for nothing.

My dragon roars in outrage, fighting me every step of the way. Since I came of age and had my first shift, my dragon has fought me. It is a constant battle to keep him at bay. All he wants to do is go to Lyrik, but I can't—won't—allow that to happen.

She deserves more than me and my ridiculous dragon, more than darkness and death, and this is the only way I know how to give that to her. I will give up anything if it means she can have the life she has always dreamed of. I never even had the guts to tell her how I feel. But I know in my dark heart this is for the best.

I have done my best these past two years to shelter her from my life. From what my

father does for a living, from what he makes me do, but I know she is aware. After all, she isn't stupid.

There isn't a future for us together. My soul is blacker than black while she is pure, perfect light. I won't taint her. I won't drag her down to my level.

It's time for me to grow up and get over this infatuation I have with my stepsister.

Twenty-Six Years Old

I am heading home.

I swore I would never return but I don't have a choice in the matter. An explosion ended my career as a member of the Fighting Force in the blink of an eye. The damage was so extensive, even the magic from the shift and my dragon could not heal it. I am damaged beyond repair.

And now I have to face the people I ran from. It has been eight years since I saw my father or Lyrik. We send birthday and Christmas cards but that is the extent of our communication.

I have no idea what will wait for me when I get there, but I have nowhere else to go.

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Chapter Two

It's My Birthday and I'll Cry if I Want To

Lyrik, Fourteen Years Old

I have a crush on my stepbrother. I only met him today but already I know I could love him for the rest of my life. I feel like a freak but every time I am around him, all I can think of is kissing him. I want him to hold my hand and watch movies with me. I want to call him my boyfriend.

I also know that isn't a good idea. I know I can never tell anyone how I feel. He is my stepbrother and can never be anything except that. So, I push the feelings down, deeper than I ever could have thought possible.

I will avoid him as much as I can except for the family dinners we are both forced to attend.

Sixteen Years Old

I stand in the icy wind staring straight ahead. The wind whips my black dress around my calves, stinging as it slams into my wet face. I can't remember when I started crying but it feels like I will never be able to stop.

Arms wrap around my shoulder, pulling me into a warm body.

“I’m sorry, Lyrik,” Malichai says. “I know this is hard. But she is at peace now.”

“I know,” I hiccup. “She was in so much pain. But I miss her.”

“One day, you will miss her a little less. I promise.”

I trust his words. He should know. His mom died, too.

Eighteen Years Old

Lying in my bed, I think about what I am going to do. Malichai is gone and I am all alone. I am an omega in a house with an Alpha and I don’t know what to do. I do know the way he looks at me makes my skin crawl.

Thomas comes into my room. He is a man I once trusted. He takes what I haven’t offered. A gift meant for someone else. He calls it my birthday present.

I thought I was safe in this house. Now I know better.

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Chapter Three

Men Suck—End of Story.

Lyrik

“Glass of rosé,” I order loudly over the rock music blaring in the background, my fingers thrumming on the scarred wooden bar top.

The cute beta bartender smiles at me as I order, but I know he isn’t really flirting. He has seen all my friends at the table we snagged and is trying to work his way into one of their pants by being friendly with me. It’s the same dance I have been doing since junior high, and I won’t fall for his bullshit. I may not be the prettiest or skinniest girl in our group of friends, but I’m not an idiot.

If he wants to talk to one of them, he has to find a way to do it all by himself. I wouldn’t be very receptive even if he were flirting with me. Men are assholes, and I have put myself on the shelf for the foreseeable future.

“Not that I mind getting drunk on a Tuesday,” Hailey says around the straw in her beer. “But why are we here?” She casts a gaze at the clientele, her disdain for the people and the venue clear for everyone to see.

Her distaste for the local watering hole isn’t lost on any of us. Dixie’s is a supposed biker bar—which has never actually been confirmed—on the wrong side of the tracks. I’ve been here many times over the years, and even though it’s not the most hygienic place, I have never had any problems. The people are always friendly, and

the booze is cheap, which is precisely what I need tonight.

It may also have to do with the fact that my stepfather, Thomas Black, is the head of the Black family. Since I can remember, people have avoided me. The Black family is one of the original five families in the Capitol and the highest-ranking of the Elites. I could commit a murder and get caught red-handed in this town and no one would say a damn word. I would just walk away scot-free.

“I need to be somewhere Simon won’t show up. Dixie’s seemed like the best bet,” I answer, taking a seat.

I look around at the sparse décor. Dixie’s may not be one of upper-crust bars on the other side of town, but it’s better than my damn apartment.

“Why would you ever say that?” Bethany asks sarcastically, drawing my attention back to the conversation.

“Don’t start with this shit again,” I grumble. “Yes, he isn’t very manly and wouldn’t be caught dead in a biker bar. It’s not like you can expect more from a beta. That’s exactly why I chose this place.”

It’s the same logic I used when I started dating Simon. I went for someone exactly the opposite of my regular type. I like a muscular Alpha with rugged good looks, broad shoulders, dark hair, and maybe even a few tattoos sprinkled in. Simon is tall and lanky, with blonde hair and boyish good looks. His beta designation keeps him rational and almost demure.

“And why are we avoiding your boyfriend?” Hailey questions with a raised brow.

“Because he isn’t my boyfriend anymore,” I reply after taking a sip of whatever the hell the bartender is trying to pass off as rosé. “And every time I look at his stupid

face, I want to throat-punch him.”

My four best friends, people I grew up with, stare at me with varying degrees of shock and confusion.

“Explain.” Samantha looks ready to murder someone.

“I found another woman’s blue lace panties under the bed. Our bed. In my apartment. He tried to play them off as being mine, but I’m not dumb.” I lay out my mortification for my friends. “Once he finally confessed, I told him to get the fuck out of my apartment. The end.”

“What a prick,” Bethany proclaims to a round of nods from the others.

“And he blamed me,” I add with a shrug. “Said he had needs and because we weren’t sleeping together, he had to find someone who could satisfy him.”

“Fucking males,” Hailey growls. “I swear there aren’t any good betas left out there.

This is why I called them to join me. For the next two hours, we drink while berating Simon, the dickhead idiot, and all the other men we have collectively dated and dumped. We laugh until we cry, and even though some of them weren’t sure about being here at Dixie’s, we all end up having fun. All my friends are betas and assume I am too. But nothing could be further from the truth. I’m an omega, I’ve just been wearing a suppression patch for years.

“So,” Hailey slurs with a hiccup, already sloppy drunk. “What you need is some dirty, no strings attached sex. I mean real big dick energy.”

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I laugh loudly. “Nope. I am done with men for the foreseeable future. I have the worst taste. Besides, you know I don’t sleep around.”

“This isn’t about taste or even sleeping around,” Samantha interrupts. “This is about getting railed by a big, strong man and then walking away in the morning. It’s even better if you walk with a limp afterward or can’t walk at all. You know, get laid and get out.”

“It’s time to get rid of that virginity you cling to,” Hailey adds.

I’m not a virgin; I just don’t see the point. Why would I allow someone into my body so they can use it against me? I’ve seen how the Elite Alphas treat omegas and I prefer to have a life I choose, not to be locked up in a gilded cage to breed the next generation of asshole dragon shifters.

“Oh my God,” Bethany breathes.

“Don’t be such a prude,” Samantha bites out. “It’s just a one-night stand.”

“Not that. Over there.” She grabs Samantha’s jaw and directs her vision to the desired area.

“Sweet baby Jesus. If I weren’t married, I would ride that pony all night long,” Samantha moans, drawing laughter from all of us.

I can’t help but laugh with them. They are some of the best, most outspoken people I have ever met. Turning around in my seat, I try to see which of these poor males they

are objectifying. It only takes me a moment to spot him. My mouth dries up, and my heart rate spikes. My palms grow sweaty, and I feel like a teenager again, worried about what my clothes and hair look like to other people. To him. I hate that he can take me back to that time without even looking at me.

“Oh, shit,” Pauline whisper-shouts. “We know that pony.”

The entire table devolves into a fit of giggles, but I don’t join. Our gazes connect, and I can’t seem to rip myself away from the dark hazel gaze that traps me. His gaze sears my soul, making my heart beat triple time.

Fucking Malichai Black.

Chapter Four

A Hero’s Return

Malichai

I have been back in the Capitol for all of an hour, and already I want to rip my hair out by the roots. My father is working on my last God-given nerve, and I have to leave before I punch him. Or maybe I’ll let my dragon out so he can rip his head off. It’s a fun thought, but not something I would ever do.

“Where are you going, Malichai?” he questions as I grab my keys off the table in the foyer.

“Out.” I make my way to the front door, fighting to hide my limp, my weakness, from his gaze.

“What do you mean out?” He sounds surprised. “We need to finish our conversation.”

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“I mean, I am leaving this house. Probably to find a bar where I can have a drink without the judgmental stare of my father drilling into the side of my fucking head,” I snap at him.

“You can’t keep running away from this,” he replies following me. “It is time for you to take your place as the head of the Black family. I won’t be around forever.”

“I told you then and I will tell you now, I have no fucking interest in being the head of this godforsaken family.”

My dragon pushes at the corners of my mind, and I fight to keep the shift at bay. He is angry and frustrated with not just my father but my injured form. He wants to rage and burn the world to the fucking ground but we both know it won’t change a damn thing.

I don’t wait for my father to say another word before slamming the door behind me. Since I can remember, all he has ever done is criticize and judge me. My grades were never good enough, I didn’t score the winning touchdown in the football game, and I didn’t want to be the perfect little Elite asshole like all his friends’ sons.

I chose to serve my fucking realm. Something that would make any other parent proud. Except my father. I’m not an entitled prick who bows to his every whim, and that grates on his nerves. I have a conscience and a moral compass, something he doesn’t possess. There isn’t a single fucking thing we have in common.

Nothing I have done in my life has ever satisfied him. And now that I have been medically discharged from the Fighting Forces, he only has another thing to lord over me. He sees it as another in a lengthy line of failures. Another sign of my weakness.

I can't stand being in that godforsaken house for another fucking minute.

Jumping into the driver's seat of my mat black pickup truck, I headed toward the only bar in town I ever frequented—Dixie's.

It's a biker bar, run by Arch Fiends MC, an outlaw biker club, and somewhere, someone like me was always welcomed. It may have been almost ten years since I stepped foot in this godforsaken city, but I still know how to find the damn bar.

Stopping on the packed dirt, I stare at the building that has remained the same since I can remember. The red brick building has been tagged with graffiti repeatedly over the years, and the windows have been painted over to keep prying eyes out, but it is just as I remember it.

Chromed-out motorcycles and a few cars line the side of the building, and I know the crowd that has always frequented Dixie's is still the same, more or less. The faces may have changed, but I would bet anything the vibe is still the same.

"No weapons," the meathead at the door says when I step closer, once more trying not to show my limp to the outside world. But the man doesn't even bother to look at me. He is wearing a leather cut proclaiming him to be a prospect.

"No problem."

His gaze snaps up, and I can't help but chuckle. I know I'm a big bastard. I always have been. But judging from the size of this guy, few people he has met are bigger than him. Until now. I idly wonder how our dragons would match up, but I'm not inclined to find out. Since the accident, my dragon has become unstable and even harder to control.

"I'm not looking for any problems," I say when the bouncer looks unsure whether he

should let me in.

“What a boring way to live,” a female voice says from behind me.

Turning, I take in the petite frame of a pixie-like woman with fire-engine-red hair and tattoos covering almost every inch of her exposed arms. She pats me on the shoulder with a smile.

“You can let him in, Leo. This is Malichai,” she explains. “He’s been gone for a while, but he is one of us. Living in the underbelly and making it look easy.”

“I’m a law-abiding citizen.” I counter quickly.

“And I’m the tooth fairy. We can’t choose what we’re born into.”

“I’m not sure we have met before,” I say with a frown, not happy to be judged by some strange woman.

“We actually have,” she says as she walks away. “Name’s Amy McIntire. We used to go to school together.”

“Damn, woman,” I say with a quick smile. “Seems things have changed while I was away.”

“Not everyone is heir to a criminal empire,” she says with a wink. “Some of us have to make our own way. And stop flirting with me, I’m not interested.”

And then she is gone, and I am left staring after her. Well, shit. The little nerdy girl that sat in front of every class, as far as I can remember, became kind of a knockout. Who would have guessed?

The bouncer begrudgingly allows me entrance with a mumbled, “Don’t start any shit. We don’t want any problems with the damn Blacks.”

I want to tell him to fuck off, that I have nothing to do with my family’s business, but I don’t. No matter how many times I say it, no one will believe me. In this part of the Capitol, I will always be the son of a monster, the heir to the Black legacy.

Walking in, memories assault me. The interior is loud, old-school rock music blaring overhead. People milling about, bodies packed close together in the smallish space. People are drinking and dancing, grinding their bodies on the dance floor. The smell of smoke and sex hangs in the air. It’s busy for a Tuesday night.

The crowd splits for a moment as I look for a way to make it to the bar and the shot of bourbon I have been craving, but instead I lock eyes with a woman. She is fucking stunning. Curvy as fuck with a hint of cleavage on display, her blonde hair up in the same customary ponytail it always has been. I don’t have to be close enough to know her eyes are stormy blue-grey.

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My cock is already hardening in my jeans at the sight of her. I should be embarrassed, disgusted, angry, anything but happy to see the object of my years' long obsession. I close my eyes as my dragon roars deep in my mind, rattling my brain. He fights me, trying to get out and I almost lose the battle. What a situation that would be, my ornery dragon on a rampage in this enclosed space.

I may not have laid eyes on her in ten years, but I know every damn thing there is to know about the woman across the bar.

Lyrik.

My angel.

My own personal hell.

My mate, my dragon adds, communicating with me for the first time in his or my existence.

Chapter Five

Blast From the Past

Lyrik

I break the connection between us and turn back to my friends. I try my best to paste a smile on my face, but I don't think I actually accomplished what I was aiming for because it feels more like a grimace. Thank God they're all a little drunk. I don't think

they can see the confusion and fear on my face. The last thing I needed tonight was to run into my stepbrother. My hot soldier stepbrother. My stepbrother, the heir to the Black legacy.

“Ladies.” The deep timbre of his voice washes over me as he greets us all. A shiver works its way down my spine. “Lyrik.”

I don’t look back at him. “Malichai.” My friends are all staring at him with stars in their eyes.

Yes, that is the Malichai effect. It’s even worse now because I’m not used to it anymore. My body becomes heated, and my skin feels too tight. My pussy slicks with the need for this Alpha and I’m more thankful than ever for my suppression patch.

He mesmerizes anyone with ovaries. Hell, even some men fall under his fucking spell. I am not too proud to say that even I am not immune to it.

His calloused right hand lands on my shoulder, squeezing it. The bared flesh exposed by my white tank top pebbles beneath his touch, along with my nipples, and I curse my traitorous body for reacting to him. Just like it always has.

Even as a teenager, I had an immense crush on him. He was all I could ever think about, all I ever wanted. Seems not much has changed.

“When did you get back?” Hailey asks with a coy smile.

My gaze snaps to her. She is basically falling all over herself, fawning over him. I want to roar, to rage. But I can’t. He isn’t mine, and he never was. He never will be. I cried when he left, my young heart shattered. But I never told anyone the truth, mourning the loss in private.

She has every right to flirt with him. Hell, she could even date or marry him and I wouldn't have the right to say a single fucking thing. Malichai is out of the question. Always has been, always will be.

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“Not long,” he answers coarsely, squeezing my shoulder once more. “I need to get a drink. I’ll see you later.”

What the fuck does that mean? My mind runs a mile a minute as he strides toward the bar. There is something off about his gait, something I can’t quite explain.

All of my friends’ gazes are stuck on him, just like mine. I wish I could say I was strong enough that I didn’t check out his firm ass or the way his jeans hug his thick, muscular thighs. But you can bet your last credit I did. Every woman in the bar did.

“Fuck,” Pauline breathes. “How is it possible that he got hotter?”

“Right?” Bethany chirps in. “Isn’t he almost thirty now? Like, when does the decline in his looks start?”

I can’t help but laugh at her disgruntled tone.

“You!” Hailey points at me accusingly. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I didn’t know,” I reply with a shrug, lifting my hands in surrender. “I barely see Thomas anymore, and we rarely talk. I haven’t spoken to Malichai except for Christmas and birthday cards in almost ten years. We aren’t really family. You know what I mean?”

“Really? I always thought you all were close?” Samantha leans forward.

“It was different when we were all living together. But then Mom died, Malichai

joined the Fighting Forces, and I grew up and moved out. Thomas didn't really want me to start with, but he loved my mom to no end. When she died, he was stuck with me."

"That's heavy," Bethany mumbles. "Why didn't you ever tell us?"

"There was nothing to tell. Thomas was never abusive," I lie. "Actually, he was always good to me. He was just indifferent."

"I wish you had told us." Hailey drunkenly hugs me. "But we are your family. And we love you so much."

Tears burn my eyes at her words. There is a boatload of stuff I never told my friends. Or anyone else for that matter. And I probably never will.

"I know, sweetie. I've always known."

Chapter Six

The Appointment

Malichai

I stare at the steel and glass double-story building that houses all the medical professionals in the Capitol. This is the last place I want to be, but if I want to live a normal life and regain the full use of my leg, I don't have a choice. My dragon huffs, unhappy at the fact that we need to be here, but we both know it's necessary.

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I have to keep this appointment with the physiotherapist and start the long, hard road to recovery. Stepping inside, I appreciate the cool interior while I fill out the customary paperwork. Taking a seat, I listen to the monotonous music in the waiting area, wishing I was anywhere but here.

The receptionist smiles brightly. She is one of Lyrik's friends, Pauline, I think. "You can go through, Malichai. The doctor will be with you shortly."

She gestures toward a door on the right. I enter the office and allow the door to close behind me. The room has floor-to-ceiling windows with a view of the river and the mountains behind it. There is a massive bookshelf on the left and a desk in the middle of the room. Sitting in one of the tan leather chairs, I survey the room, trying to get a feel for who this doctor may be.

In here, there isn't a single personal touch. No photos or knickknacks to give an indication of personality or anything else. I haven't met him before, but he comes highly recommended.

The door opens, but no one approaches or speaks. The scent hits me first—roses and rain. After a moment of tense silence, I turn to find Lyrik standing just inside the room. My dragon makes a contented sound at the sight, happy to spend any amount of time alone with her.

We stare at each other for long moments before she finally rounds the desk and sits, placing a folder on the surface in front of her.

"Doctor Phillips has had a family emergency and won't be available for the next

couple of weeks. You are welcome to reschedule,” she says, staring at a spot above my left shoulder.

What the hell did I ever do to deserve this kind of treatment from her? I know I ignored her for the majority of the time we lived together, but it was better than the alternative. I never thought she would hate me for it, though. We are still family, after all.

“Lyrik,” I say. “Look at me.” It feels like forever before her gaze finally locks on mine. “Is there a reason you’re avoiding me?” I ask.

“Avoid is such an ugly word,” she says with a blush. “I’m trying to keep this professional.”

“And last night at the bar? When you wouldn’t even look at me?” I counter.

“What do you want from me, Malichai?” The old telltale flush of anger I have never forgotten blooms on her cheeks. “It’s not like we have ever been close or even friendly. I’m treating you the same way I would any other male I haven’t seen for almost ten years.”

Fuck. Why does it feel like I got kicked in the nuts? Was that supposed to hurt? “Fine,” I grunt. “Then treat me.”

A deep frown mars her beautiful face, and I want to rub it away with the tip of my finger. “What?”

“You wouldn’t be here if you weren’t qualified. So, tell me what I need to do to get my leg back to normal, and let’s get this show on the road.”

I’m behaving like an asshole. But she hurt me with her words, no matter how

inadvertently, and now I am doing the same. I've always acted like an asshole toward her, so I can just continue the same way I always have.

I've also gotten hard—again—in the time I have been sitting here, verbally sparring with her. Something I'm not proud of, but it is what it is. She has always had this effect on me. My dragon huffs at our silly sparring session and I want to tell him to shut up but he already knows how I feel.

She stares at me with shock before she recovers.

“You had a distal femur fracture as a result of the explosion. It is one of the most severe cases I have ever seen.” Lyrik never even opens the folder, proving she already worked through my case and memorized the details. “Even though you shifted in a reasonable amount of time after the incident, neither the magic of the shift nor your dragon was able to fully heal you. You had to turn to more traditional medicine to help. The surgery to implant the screws was six months ago, and it seems you've made a steady recovery. The only thing that remains is getting your leg back into shape.”

“What does that mean? Should I start running again?” I ask. “Should I shift more?”

“Shifting won't help. You've already done all you can and now it's just hard work from here on out. You need to do some leg exercises and work on your range of motion before you can go running again,” she counters. “I will get you a set of exercises you can do at home and the number of a therapist that can help you.”

“You can't do it?”

“I don't think that's a good idea,” she replies, her frown still firmly in place.

“I don't understand why you're trying to get away from me. Am I not your

family?Did I do something?”

She stares at me for the longest time.

“No, Malichai.You are not my family.You used to be my stepbrother, but now you are just a patient.I am busy and don’t have time for new clients.”

She has a tell.Beautiful little liar.She chews her bottom lip whenever she is being less than truthful.

“You’re still my stepsister,” I say, my jaw clenching.It’s the only thing that still binds us together even if I hate calling her that.“And if you wanted, you could help me after hours,” I counter, trying to bait her into spending time with me.

Anger flashes across her brow before she can mask it.She glares at me, breathing heavily, considering her options before answering.

“Friday, seven o’clock.Where do you want to do this?”

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“I’m staying at the house with my father.”

She goes pale, swallowing, before she can regain her composure. What the hell is that about? My dragon floods my system with irritation, but I can’t decipher his mood right now. I need to focus on Lyrik.

“Fine. I’ll meet you there.”

Nodding, I discreetly shift my erection before standing. “Thanks, Doc.”

Chapter Seven

Memories

Lyrik

I hate that I let Malichai goad me into this. I have been berating myself and trying to think of a plausible excuse for the past two days. I haven’t figured anything out, so I am parked in front of the house I grew up in.

I am also frustrated by the fact that it took me an extra hour to do my hair and makeup, and I changed my outfit three times. It has been this way since I can remember. I want him to think I’m pretty. How can I still be stuck on this damn crush? And how do I make it fucking stop?

Technically, I only lived here for four years after our parents got married, and most of that was spent avoiding Malichai before he left.

Today, my nerves are frayed. I don't want to spend time around Malichai, much less touching him. I've changed my patch twice, afraid it will fail, and he will find out I am an omega. I don't know if I could stand to have him finally want me only because I'm worthy of being bred by an Alpha.

I also don't want to go into this godforsaken house where all the memories are waiting to bombard me. Every last good memory I have of this place has been replaced by something dark. But Malichai has always brought out the worst in me. Even when I was younger, he would goad me into things I didn't want to do by baiting me.

The front door opens, and Malichai stands on the top step, dressed in grey sweatpants and a fitted black t-shirt, staring at me, his gaze challenging me to put my car in "reverse" and drive off like a coward. Instead, I open the door, grab my bag, and step out.

Each step I take toward him has my heart stuttering, emotions threatening to overwhelm me.

Silently, Malichai leads us into a downstairs living room which he has cleared of furniture. I stare at the pale walls, wishing I was anywhere but here. I always hated living in this house. It is too big and empty. It doesn't matter that the most expensive items are everywhere. This house is devoid of love and happiness. No, this beautiful shell hides the rotten core wonderfully, exactly the way Thomas Black intended.

Taking a deep breath, I center myself. All I have to do is teach him the exercises and then I can get the fuck out of here. That is when the memories assault me. Birthdays, Christmases, dinners, and more, all spent with my mother. And then, all the darkness, pain, loneliness, and empty moments after she died.

This house used to be filled with love and laughter. But not for long. Then the fear and

the tears took over.

“Lyrik,” he starts, but I cut him off.

“I thought I could do this, Malichai. But I was wrong,” I say softly, allowing my emotions to get the better of me.

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Already, I can feel the tears gathering in my eyes. This is the last place I spent any time with my mother, and her memory lives in every corner. It's too hard being back here, I lie to myself, forcing the other memories down. If I let them surface, I will almost certainly have a panic attack and then I won't be able to get away from this place.

"Shit!" Malichai curses. I don't expect to feel his arms wrapped around me. "I didn't even think about how being here would affect you. I'm so sorry."

He thinks my emotions are because of my mom and I'm grateful he doesn't know the rest. My heart would break if he ever looked at me in pity. I would rather live with the indifference he has always shown me.

My skin is aflame as I breathe in the scent of the forest that clings to him. I've always loved his smell but it's different now. Being this close to him, smelling his unique scent, drives me insane. I inhale deeply before pushing away from him. I need to leave before he can scent my arousal, my panties already ruined by the slick pouring from my weeping pussy.

"I'm sorry," I say wiping away a stray tear. "That was very unprofessional."

"Listen, I know we haven't seen each other in ages, and even then, we weren't all that close. But you don't have to treat me like a client. I'm still just me."

I stare at him. I take in his strong jaw and chiseled cheekbones, his dark cropped hair that has started growing out, and deep hazel gaze. He is a perfect specimen. But I can't focus on that right now.

“Perhaps we can try again after I get back from my sabbatical?” I ask with a small smile. “We would only have had one session anyway.”

“Sabbatical?” he asks with a raised brow.

“Every year, I take a week off to unwind. I go up the mountain to my cabin and just ...unplug.”

“That sound peaceful,” Malichai says with a soft smile. “We can find somewhere else to do the sessions as well.”

“That sounds good.” Turning, I walk back to the front door, Malichai following on my heels.

“Is that you, Lyrik?” Thomas calls out as he descends the stairs.

Panic slams into me and I quicken my pace, walking out the door and straight to my car before sliding into the driver’s seat. The need to get as far away from Thomas and this place is riding me hard.

“I hope you enjoy your trip,” Malichai says and I smile in return even though I feel like puking right now.

Thomas stands in the doorway watching us like a hawk and all I want to do is leave. My skin crawls beneath his gaze and I swallow down the bile rising in my throat. But Malichai is right. I have no reason to treat him with anything but friendly disinterest, so I remain calm and continue to chat like the world isn’t closing in on me.

“Are you going alone?” Malichai asks, prying.

I roll my eyes at his question. “Yes. I’ve been doing it for years, Malichai. I’m a big girl now. I can take care of myself.”

“There could be a snowstorm up in the mountains. Have you checked the weather?” He is ever the protector, even though I just made it clear I don’t need it.

“I have. And I’ve been through storms before,” I reply, starting my car. “Don’t worry so much. You’re going to get wrinkles.”

I give him my best fake smile as he glares before I reverse down the driveway and make my way home. With every mile I put between myself and the house on top of the hill, my heartbeat steadies. I stop at the store for some staples and a big-ass bottle of wine. I’ll need to be drunk to sleep tonight.

I need to drown my demons.

Chapter Eight

Here is my Truth

Malichai

“Can I talk to you?” Dante, my father’s second-in-command, asks when he finds me in the kitchen.

“I’m not sure what we could possibly have to talk about,” I reply, taking a sip of the coffee I just prepared.

“We need to talk about your father. And the future of the Black family.”

“That has nothing to do with me. You know I’m not interested in anything to do with the family.”

Dante shakes his head. “You don’t really get a choice. You were born to lead this family. Why do you think I spent all that time training you, showing you the ropes?”

“Because my father told you to?” I say with a roll of my eyes.

“No.” He takes a breath, running his hand through his hair in agitation. “Your mother did.”

“Excuse me?” My voice is filled with anger and disbelief.

“Annabelle was the Black, not Thomas,” he explains. “Your father took her last name and the family mantle. He has taken this family from bad to worse. And it’s time for you to fix it.”

I’m shocked, shaken to my core by the words a man I have known my entire life just shared with me. How much of my own life isn’t what I thought?

“Tell me the truth,” I demand. “Everything.”

“That will take days, weeks. I will, but now...” he says shaking his head. “What I can tell you is that the enemies are at the gates. Your father has pissed off some unbelievably powerful people. People that intend to harm anyone that has ever been part of his life or family to get their revenge.”

My first thought is Lyrik. Panic envelops me. Not for my own safety or my father’s, but for hers. If my father has fucked this up as badly as Dante says, I can guarantee whoever wants to take him out will know about her.

My dragon roars in anger, making my eyes squint. He roams my mind, stomping around angrily. All he wants to do is shift and go to her.

Mate.

I wish he would stop with that fucking nonsense. For years, not a single communication passed between us and now that’s all he will say. He has clearly lost the plot. Fated mates are a thing of fairy tales and rumors. Not real.

“What do you expect of me?” I ask the man before me, choosing to ignore my beast.

“Get rid of him,” Dante says with finality.

“Kill my father?” I ask, shocked.

I know it happens that some sons take over as the head of their families by killing the previous head. But I’m not that man. I may be a killer, but I’m not a damn sociopath.

“Well, that’s one way. But I would suggest trying to talk to him first.”

My nerves are shot to shit. I haven’t been able to get a hold of Lyrik since she left. I should have said something, stopped her from leaving. It’s insane for her to go up the mountain alone. And now I have the added stress of the family bullshit, my father pressuring me to take my place at his side, and someone that may or may not want to hurt Lyrik as an extension of our family.

“Severe weather conditions are expected for this weekend,” the balding weatherman on the television rambles. “Be prepared for a lot of snow.”

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I switch off the living room television with a sneer before tossing the remote on the couch. My gaze drifts to the large picture window, snow already covering every available surface, the mountain white in the distance. My fists clench at my side with the need to do something.

Anything. My dragon tries to force his way out for the tenth time in the past hour, and this time I almost lose the battle. I know he wants to protect her and so do I, but I can't just burst into her life.

Slipping my phone from the back of my jeans pocket, I scroll to Lyrik's number—the one she didn't give me—and stare. I hit the "call" button for what is probably the hundredth time and listen to the ringing down the line. She hasn't answered in two days, and I doubt she will now, but I still try.

"You have reached the voicemail box for Lyrik..."

Her recorded message drones. I end the call after listening to the rest. Restless energy thrums through my veins.

"What are you doing?" my father questions from the doorway.

I didn't even hear him come back home. I am so lost in my worry for Lyrik that I have all but blocked out the rest of the world. Her reactions when she was here before bother me and the fact that she all but fled, running from a place that was once her home, has been driving me crazy.

"Does Lyrik still visit you?" I ask instead of answering his question.

He looks shocked that I would ask such a thing.

“Why would she?”

“Because she is family,” I reply automatically.

“No, Malichai. She was my wife’s child, and my wife has been dead for many years,” he says stiffly. “I fulfilled my promise. I raised her, but she isn’t my child.”

“You’re a fucking asshole.” I glare at the man who calls himself my father. “If there was ever any doubt in my mind, you just erased it.”

“What are you going on about?”

He looks at me like I have lost my fucking mind.

“I left this house to get away from you. I did the right thing so I wouldn’t disappoint you again,” I say, my voice clear as I lay out my truth. “I gave up the only thing I ever wanted so it wouldn’t affect you.”

“Malichai...” he starts, but I cut him off with a glare.

“For years, I have been forced to listen to you and all your ridiculous opinions. Now it’s time for you to listen to me.” I wait to see if he will cut me off again. When he remains silent, I continue. “I’ve been in love with Lyrik for as long as I can remember, and you...” I shake my head to clear the rage. “I gave her up so she could have the life she deserved, so I wouldn’t disappoint you yet again. When her mom died, I left her here, knowing you would be here for her, that she would have some form of family. And now you tell me she has been alone all this time.”

“You love her?” he asks with a disbelieving chuckle, not addressing the fact that he all

but abandoned her.

“Not that you would know anything about love,” I sneer.

“Well, you can have her now. She can be a gift to you on the day you take your position as the head of the Black family,” he replies with derision. “She’s a decent lay.”

“Excuse me?”

The words are barely above a whisper. He can’t be serious. A haze of red clouds my vision and I know that one of us will die before the day is through. My dragon has fallen silent in his rage, and I know the moment he tries to break free, I won’t hold him back this time.

“What? You think I’ve lived in this house for years with that teenage pussy strutting around here, barely dressed, and I never took what was offered?”

I snap. I circle my hands around his neck and slam him against the entryway wall, sending plaster falling to the floor. I didn’t even realize I was in front of him.

“You touched her?” I ask between gritted teeth, my dragon already halfway into the shift, my anger allowing him to step forward as rage overtakes any logical thought.

He laughs, even as his face changes color. “I did more than touch. I fucked the cherry right out of her,” he boasts. He doesn’t struggle or try to stop me. His arrogance and the fact that he doesn’t believe I will harm him, keeping him calm in the face of my rage. He doesn’t know me as well as he thinks he does. “And if you were a real man—”

The words die on his lips. My fist in the center of his face silences him as blood spurts

everywhere. I can't make myself stop and soon enough I am kneeling over his prone body. I'm not sure if he is alive or dead but I can honestly say I don't care. He was a fucking monster, and I left her alone with him. How did I not know? What else did he do to her? Dark thoughts swirl in my mind as I stare down at his prone body.

My dragon recedes, allowing me control. His lust for vengeance has been temporarily sated and he is back to worrying about Lyrik. A situation I will be remedying as soon as I can.

"Dante!" I call out loudly, knowing the man is still somewhere in the house.

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A moment later he descends the stairs, his gaze glued to my father's form. He raises a brow in question but doesn't speak. He was my father's second-in-command. I guess he is mine now.

"Is he dead?" Dante asks with a raised brow.

"I don't care either way. You wanted him gone," I say without a speck of remorse. "I'm the head of this family now."

"Good. I will tell the men. Some may want to protest but for the most part they will be happy with this new direction," Dante replies.

"If he lives, make sure he isn't here when I get back. Any men that wish to leave should also do so before I return."

He has always been loyal to the Black family, and I know he will serve me well in the future. I didn't want this life, but this is how I will be able to protect the woman I love from being hurt any more. I move toward the stairs while speaking.

"Where are you going?" Dante asks.

"I need to find Lyrik. If I am going to lead this family into the future, I'm going to do it with her by my side."

"About damn time," he replies, his phone against his face, already doing what I have decreed.

“Meaning?”

“That girl belongs here. With you.”

Heading toward the room I have been using, I toss the few things I unpacked into my bag before slinging it over my shoulder. The woman I love is on this godforsaken snow-covered mountain, and I need to find her before it's too late. I'm in charge of my own destiny now.

Chapter Nine

Malichai to the Rescue

Lyrik

The wind howls outside the small cabin. I have been coming here since I found out about the property. It was a month after my eighteenth birthday when the lawyers contacted me and let me know my mother had left me this little surprise. The first year, it wasn't livable, but I put in a lot of work, and one of the beta handymen in town was willing to help me out for next-to-no payment until we finally got my little slice of heaven livable.

I have been up here in storms but never anything like this. It feels like the entire house is straining to remain upright as the wind and snow batter it from all sides. And for the first time in years, I regret not telling anyone I am up here. If anything happens, no one will know how to look for me and that thought has fear clawing up my throat.

Sitting in front of the fireplace, I add another log to the fire, fighting off the panic attack I feel bubbling up inside me. I stare at the flames that have always called to me and feel myself calm down. Fire has always made me feel safe even though it terrifies me.

Loud knocking sounds on the only door of the cabin, drawing me from my thoughts.

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“What the fuck?” I mumble, thinking my mind has finally snapped and I am now officially imagining things.

I don’t move from my spot on the floor, but I do stare at the door. Did Thomas find out about this place? Does he think I told Malichai what happened all those years ago? The man is an Elite Alpha of the highest rank, the head of the fucking Black family, and will most certainly have me killed if he ever thinks I told anyone his dark, dirty secret. His dragon is also known to be just as ruthless and violence-prone as he is.

More banging, more insistent. “Lyrik!”

That can’t be right. What would Malichai be doing here?

“Lyrik!” There is a hint of panic in his voice.

Lifting from my seat on the floor in front of the fire, I step up to the door, unlatch the deadbolt, and slowly open it. I do it cautiously. If the wind slams it open, I could hurt myself or, worse, not be able to close it again.

Thankfully, I am not going crazy. Malichai steps inside before slamming the door closed and relatching it. I’m at a loss for words. His being here right now just doesn’t make sense.

“Thank fuck,” he breathes harshly before wrapping his arms around me.

I allow him to hold me for a moment, breathing in his scent mingled with the cold,

fresh smell of the storm outside before speaking. “Why are you here, Malichai?”

He stares down at me, not releasing his hold. Something in his gaze has changed, but I can't put my finger on it. He smiles, and my thoughts are momentarily scattered.

“I was worried about you.”

“I'm perfectly safe.”

“Lyrik,” he sighs. “It's the worst snowstorm in ten years. I couldn't just leave you up here alone.”

There it is. Malichai, the savior, the fighter, comes to his little stepsister's rescue. Like I can't take care of myself. It seems things really don't change. He will always see me as the little sister he never wanted. Just like his father.

“How did you even find me? No one knows of this place.” I face him with my hands planted on my hips.

“My dragon tracked your scent.”

My scent? Thank God I forgot to remove my suppression patch. This cabin is tiny, and my true scent would send his dragon into a spiral of lust.

“I told you I could take care of myself,” I retort, turning away from him. “You can leave now.”

“Like you did with my father?” he asks softly.

His words dump ice in my veins. “You don't know what you're talking about,” I hiss defensively, although I can already feel the tears gathering.

“He told me,” Malichai replies in the same soft tone. He is watching me like I am a scared animal and isn’t sure how I will react.

I need to put some space between us. I shouldn’t be angry at him. He isn’t at fault for how I feel. But my heart hurts, even all these years later, knowing I will never have the one man I have always loved. I’m damaged, broken. And now he knows it. I can’t stand to see the pity in his gaze.

No Alpha—no dragon—wants a damaged woman. I can’t expect him to claim me, much less love me now that he knows what I’ve been through. Not that I ever expected him to.

“I don’t want to talk about this,” I say, walking into the kitchen area. The lights flicker, drawing my attention. “Fuck.”

“Where’s the generator?” he asks, changing the subject and taking charge of the situation.

“In the outbuilding.”

He stares at me. “We’ll have to wait for the storm to calm down,” he says just as the lights give a last flicker and remain off.

It may only be noon, but the clouds have darkened the world around us. The only illumination in the cabin comes from the fireplace and a few candles. In any other situation it could be considered romantic.

“Looks like I am going to be here for a while.”

“I want you to leave,” I demand, trying to keep my cool. “I don’t want you to be here.”

“And I want to know what the fuck my father did to you.”

Chapter Ten

Caught in a Storm

Malichai

She acts like I'm not even here. It's been three of the longest, most tense hours of my life. Being in war is less stressful than trying to figure out this woman. I want nothing more than to go to her and wrap her in my arms, but I'm not exactly sure she would reciprocate. My dragon has fallen silent, irritated by the fact that she is ignoring us but content to be around her for the foreseeable future.

The cold is also making my leg act up. It hurts like a motherfucker, and I should be sitting. But I grit my teeth and push through the pain, never looking away from her for a second.

She is pissed off that my father told me what he did, even if I don't know the full story. She is pissed that I confronted her about it. I want to apologize for leaving her alone with a monster all those years ago. I want to beg her forgiveness, but I have no idea where to start. I want to take this time we have alone together and tell her the truth, tell her I want to be with her, and I don't care what anyone says or thinks.

I know how I feel. I know what my beast craves. What scares me, and I don't scare easily, is the fact that she may not feel the same. She may see me as an extension of the monster that hurt her, and the thought is slowly tearing me apart.

I watch her from my spot at the kitchen table. She is curled up on the couch, a thick fluffy blanket covering her knees as she works on her laptop. She frowns, and I know the time has come. Her battery is running low. She won't be able to ignore me forever.

Laying the device on the coffee table beside her, she rises and stomps into the kitchen, not once looking in my direction. The yoga pants she is wearing draw my gaze to her perfect ass and thick thighs, driving me crazy with need.

My dragon perks up, pushing me to go to her, to mount and claim her, but he needs to back the fuck off. This situation calls for some finesse, not his brand of bullheadedness.

"Are you hungry?" she asks, opening one cupboard after another.

It takes me a moment to reply. "Sure. But I would really like to talk to you."

"It doesn't matter anymore," she says, not looking at me. "What happened, happened. I've moved on and I don't want to relive it. Why can't you just leave it alone?"

"Because he hurt you!" My anger at the situation makes me snap at her. My dragon huffs in irritation that she won't allow us to help her heal.

"That was a long time ago," she says, turning to face me with tears streaming down her face. "I don't ... I can't relive it."

Moving to her, I cup her face in my hands. Using the pad of my thumb, I swipe away her tears.

"He'll never hurt you or anyone else again," I say with finality.

“You can’t say that.You don’t know that.”She shakes her head, stepping away from me once more.

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“I can. He will never touch you again.” My voice is emotionless. “I am head of the Black family now and my father is gone forever.”

“What?” she exclaims, terror coating her features. “Is he dead? Is there a problem with the family? Are other families coming here? Do I need to be worried?”

“No,” I say, leaning my hip against the counter. “I don’t know if he is dead, but he is no longer in charge. After he told me what he did, I snapped. I’m the head of the Black family now and his men will follow me.”

“Why would you do that? You hate the family business.”

“Because he hurt you.”

It’s as simple as that. I’m trained as a killer, courtesy of the realm. Not to mention the training I was put through in my formative years by my father himself. He hurt someone I love, and I took what he loved most. There were no second thoughts on my behalf. Silence descends on us, each working through everything we just said.

“How long do you think the storm will last?” she asks, changing the subject while removing a pot and some canned soup.

“No way to tell. Could be a couple of hours, could be days,” I reply cautiously. “Enough time for us to talk.” I know she doesn’t want to but I need to know the truth so I can help her heal.

Her gaze clashes with mine, a hint of fear in the depths before she turns her back on

me to continue with the food.

“As soon as it calms a bit, I’ll go out to my truck and get the extra supplies I brought and take a look at the generator.” I try to assuage some of her fears. “It will be okay.”

She spins to glare at me. “How the hell will any of this be okay?” she sneers. “I’m trapped in a cabin, in a snowstorm, with the last person on earth I want to spend time with! You keep pushing for things I can’t give you. You shouldn’t have come here.”

She slams a bowl of lukewarm soup in front of me before walking away, leaving her own food. I hear the door to the bedroom slam shut.

How the hell did that go so badly?

I waited over an hour for her to come out of the room, but she didn’t. I won’t force her to be around me even if my dragon demands we go to her. Her words from earlier make it clear how she feels about me.

My beast sulks, wanting her near us again. He doesn’t understand that she doesn’t want us. It hurts to know she doesn’t feel the same way I do, but it doesn’t do anything to diminish my feelings. I will always love Lyrik. And that means I will always do what is best for her. Even if that means letting her go. Even when it hurts worse than any other pain I’ve felt in my entire life.

Grabbing my bag from beside the door, I head to the bathroom for a shower. I need to clear my head, and I hope there is still some warm water left with the power outage. The heat will help my throbbing leg.

I listen for sounds of movement from the bedroom but hear nothing. I light a candle I

found in the kitchen to illuminate the small bathroom. Inside I find nothing but a shower, basin, and toilet but Lyrik has tried to make it pretty. Dark red bath mats are on the floor and some plants sit on a shelf.

Opening the water, I allow it to run for a moment while I strip down before hopping under the lukewarm water. I wash my hair and body before reverting to my regular habits.

Taking my hard cock in hand, I stroke from root to tip with thoughts of the woman in the room across the hall. The soft grey jersey she is wearing today left an expanse of creamy shoulder exposed to my gaze and her black tights hugged the full shape of her ass and thick thighs perfectly. I've been at half-mast since I walked through the door hours ago.

Stroking myself, I up the tempo until I can feel the tingle in my balls. My orgasm rushes down on me, thoughts of Lyrik slamming into my mind.

"Lyrik," I moan as my cum splatters against the white tile wall.

My breathing is harsh in the small bathroom, my heart beating violently against my rib cage as I try to regain some semblance of composure before shutting off the water.

My attention is so consumed with thoughts of the woman I love but will never have, that I almost miss the click of the bathroom door shutting. I know I closed that door firmly. Did my little stepsister just watch me masturbate in the shower?

Chapter Eleven

After the Show

Lyrik

I've been lying here in the dark for over an hour feeling sorry for myself. It isn't really Malichai's fault. He has been gone for so long. He knows the truth now and he wants to find out what happened. I can't keep hiding from the past. I should probably just have a simple conversation with him so we can move on.

But I honestly don't want to relive the damn memory. I wipe away another errant tear before swinging my feet off the bed. I've cried enough. Thomas is gone now, thanks to Malichai, and he will never be able to hurt me again. I don't have to live in fear anymore. Padding across the wooden floor I open the door and walk across the hallway. I need to splash some water on my face before I face Malichai once more.

Opening the bathroom door, I realize my mistake. Fuck.

Even in the low candlelight, Malichai is gorgeous beneath the spray of water. Through the glass I can see tan skin and rippling muscles. His taut ass is on show for me to ogle. His head is bowed, one hand placed on the shower wall as the water sluices down his perfect body, washing over the dark ink that swirls on his skin.

Is he...? No, it can't be. But I watch his ass muscles flex, the cords in his neck straining as one word falls softly from his lips. "Lyrik."

I'm frozen to the spot. Malichai was just masturbating to thoughts of me. And it was hot as fuck.

Slowly, I back out and close the door, praying he doesn't realize what I just saw. The door clicks into place and my breath stalls in my lungs, waiting to see if he heard it. When nothing happens, I tiptoe my way down the hall and into the kitchen.

My mind is torn, my hormones rampaging. Minutes ago, I was crying, feeling sorry for myself. And now, I want to run back to the room and find my little purple bullet vibrator. I must be going crazy. It isn't normal for anyone's emotions to go from one to the next in mere moments.

Entering the kitchen, I grab the soup that is now stone cold and restart the gas oven to heat it again. I listen to the man I just watched masturbate in the shower move around the other end of the cabin. By the time Malichai makes it to the kitchen, I am leaning against the counter, eating lukewarm tomato soup.

I almost swallow my tongue when I see him. Why in God's name does he have to look like every woman's wet dream? Grey sweatpants that do extraordinarily little to disguise his cock—something I fight very hard not to stare at—a white wifebeater that hugs every muscle in his torso, too many tattoos on display, drawing my gaze, his hair wet and disheveled having grown out a bit in the time he has been home.

Slick pours from my pussy and I'm glad I'm wearing black tights, or he would be able to see the wet spot forming there. I'm sure he can smell me by the smirk that crosses his features.

His steps don't falter as he approaches me. His left hand cups the bowl, taking it from me and placing it on the countertop behind me as he cages me against the firm surface. His body is millimeters away from mine and I'm finding it hard to breathe. I can feel the heat of him through the layers of our clothing, my traitorous nipples

hardening.

“Did you enjoy the show?”his voice rasps in my ear as he leans down.

Shit.I really hoped he didn’t know I was watching.I shake my head.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”My voice is a husky whisper as the lie falls from my lips and a blush warms my face.I’ve never been good at lying.

His right hand grabs my hip, and I swallow the wanton moan that wants to escape me.I have never wanted aa man to fuck me as badly as I do in the moment.Usually, I am in control of my libido but Malichai has always been the exception to the rule.

“So, if I put my hand down the front of these tights that have been driving me crazy for hours, I won’t find your pussy wet for me?”

Oh.My.God.Why the hell is he talking to me this way?And why is it so fucking hot?I shake my head again, afraid to use my voice.

A devilish smirk crosses his handsome features.“I think you’re lying, Princess.”

“Malichai...”

“I think I should find out,” he continues like I didn’t just say anything.

I don’t do anything to stop him.We are alone in a snowstorm, on the side of a mountain.Away from everyone who knows us.This may be my only chance to have him.Yes, I know this is a ridiculously stupid idea, but he is all I have ever wanted.I will deal with the heartbreak and the fallout once the storm clears.

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“Tell me to stop,” he says staring into my eyes. “I’m not him.”

I shake my head. I don’t want to think about Thomas now. I want to let the man I’ve craved for years do whatever he wants. Consequences be damned. I’m not traumatized anymore. Years of therapy helped me fix that. Now, I want to forget my past, forget we were ever related by marriage, and just give into what I’ve wanted for years.

His calloused hand slips into the band of my tights before cupping my overheated sex.

“No panties. Jesus Christ, woman,” he growls against my throat where his head now rests on my shoulder. “You’re fucking dripping.”

His thick finger slips through the slickness that has gathered there before spearing me. My head tips back on a moan at the feel of him pressed against me, a single finger fucking in and out of me.

“So fucking sexy.” His lips run along the column of my neck, kissing and nipping. “Your pussy is on fire, Princess.”

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” I say, trying to be the voice of reason in this situation even though I don’t want to. My brain is screaming that this is wrong no matter how good it feels but I don’t try to push him away.

Malichai straightens from me and removes his fingers from between my thighs before sucking them into his mouth, his gaze locked on mine. It is the sexiest, dirtiest thing I have ever seen in my life. Beneath his skin I see the green scales of his dragon

shimmer and I can't hold back the shudder that wracks my body.

Is it wrong to be turned on by his beast dancing just below the surface? I don't know and to be honest I'm not really sure I care.

"Tell me why I shouldn't take what I have always wanted?" Malichai asks, his voice low and demanding.

His words wrap around me. Could he really feel the way I do? Is that even possible?

"You're my stepbrother," I say weakly. "I'm damaged goods."

"I haven't been your stepbrother for many years, as you yourself pointed out the other day. I'm honestly beyond the point of caring either way." He stares at me, looking for something before he continues. "I joined the Fighting Forces to give you a chance at a normal life. Away from me. I should have stayed, claimed you, and kept you safe. But the truth is, you're the only one I've ever wanted. You're the only woman I have ever loved. I don't care what happened while I was gone, I'm here now."

"Malichai..." My head spins at the word.

He cuts me off, covering my mouth with his hand. "Either tell me you don't want me or you let me do what we both want."

Chapter Twelve

Confessions

Malichai

Laying out my truth for her isn't easy but I have to take the chance. If I never tell her

how I feel, I will always wonder what could have been. It's not like I am going to fuck up a friendship between us because it doesn't exist. I watch her process my words before she smiles softly behind my palm. I remove my hand so she can speak, praying she'll say the words I want to hear.

Source Creation Date: June 23, 2025, 5:10 am

“I want you,” she whispers. “I’ve always wanted you.”

“You need to be sure.”

“I am.” She stares at me intently before lifting the soft grey material of her jersey over her stomach and removing a small black sticker like a dot from her skin. I watch in fascination as she flicks it away. A moment later, her full scent hits me.

“Lyrik,” I growl out, my dragon at the forefront. I finally understand what he was going on about. This woman, this omega, is more than just the one who holds my heart. She is my fated mate.

Instantly, I lift her in my arms and her legs automatically wrap around my hips, cradling my erection against her covered sex. Turning us, I slam her into the nearest wall before fusing my lips to hers. I kiss her with all the bottled-up passion I have in me. With every single ounce of pent-up frustration. Her hands thread through my too-long hair, scratching my scalp.

In the past eight years I haven’t been a saint, but I was never able to get her out of my mind. Each woman I have ever tried being with was only a cheap imitation of her. My dragon purrs in my mind, content to have her hands on us as we devour her.

I press my cock against her mound and swallow the moan she releases, the sound driving me nuts. Pulling away from the wall, I walk us down the hall to the only bedroom.

“Your leg,” she murmurs.

“I’m fine. And even if I wasn’t, it wouldn’t stop me.”

Beside the bed, I slowly lower her down the front of my body.

“I have been thinking about this for years,” I say lowly as I cup her cheek. “I’ll be fucking you over the kitchen counter at one point or another but for this first time, I want you laid out on the bed so I can devour you.”

A visible shiver works its way through her body. My hands grab the bottom of her jersey, lifting it over her head to expose her skin to my gaze. The purple demi-cups of her bra barely contain her heaving breasts. I lightly run my index finger along the edge of the lacy cup, watching her nipple distend beautifully beneath the material.

“So sexy,” I whisper, pushing her tights down her thighs.

I kneel to help her out of the constrictive garment, my face level with her bare pussy. For a moment I lose my concentration, staring at the puffy pink lips, moisture clinging to the flesh. My tongue darts out of its own volition, sweeping up the desire spilling from her.

“Fuck!” she moans above me, swaying slightly.

Reluctantly, I stand, remove my wifebeater, and drop it to the floor. Her small hands work over the muscles in my chest, touching old scars and tattoos. I see the questions in her stormy gaze but now isn’t the time to talk about my past.

Now is for us.

Unclipping her bra, I watch her large breasts fall free, swaying slightly as the material falls to the floor. My cock kicks behind the confines of my sweatpants, pre-cum decorating the crown and wetting the fabric.

I push her back, allowing her to fall on the bed.

“I am going to consume you,” I smirk.

Lowering my sweatpants over my hips, my cock springs forth. Wrapping my hand around the length, I stare down at her. Lyrik spreads her thighs wide, giving me an even better view.

“Actions speak louder than words.”

Chapter Thirteen

The Only Man I've Ever Wanted

Lyrik

He looks at me the same way a predator watches its prey. Like he wants to eat me whole. My breasts are heavy, my skin feverish, my pussy dripping. This is pure torture, watching him stroke his rock-hard cock.

"I need you, Malichai," I say.

"You have me. You've always had me," he murmurs.

"Prove it," I challenge.

"I will." He smirks. "I'm going to make you mine, claim you so no other male ever comes near you again."

His words both scare and excite me as he drops to his knees, using his shoulders to make space for himself as he pulls my ass to the edge of the bed. There is no preamble as he dives in. His tongue works me from my asshole to my clit, laving every inch of my sex. His lips fuse to me as he sucks and nibbles, pushing my arousal higher and higher but never going where I desperately need him.

Moans fall from my lips as my body writhes beneath his ministrations. Three fingers spear into me, my body bowing off the bed.

“Please.”

“Yes, baby, let me hear you beg.”

“Malichai,” I growl.

He chuckles darkly, his tongue tracing my clit lightly before he blows on it. My hand finds the back of his head, pressing him against my sex, fed up with his teasing. Malichai moans against my sex before sucking harshly on the extended nub while I rub my pussy against his face.

My thighs tremble as my orgasm crashes over me, a scream tearing from my lungs. It's long moments before I can focus again.

Malichai is leaning over my body, his weight braced on his forearms as he stares down at me. The crown of his cock is pressing at my entrance. He watches me with a hooded gaze, desire painting his features. Cupping his face, I lean up and kiss him, tasting myself on his lips.

“If you want me to stop, you need to tell me now,” Malichai says, his voice strained. “I won't force you to do anything you don't want, but I also won't give you up after this, Lyrik.”

“Malichai...”

“I'm serious. I've waited what feels like a lifetime and I won't let you go.” He's as serious as I have ever seen him. “I'll fuck you deep and hard. And I will be doing it without protection. I will breed you and mark you as mine, inside and out.”

My pussy flutters, trying to pull him into my channel and force him to keep his word.

“I’m not on birth control,” I say, trying to be logical.

“That’s kind of the point, Princess,” he says with a smirk. “I’ll pump you full of cum, breed you, and bind you to me forever.”

Fuck.Fuck.Fuck. Why does that sound perfect? Why is that all I want? Why does the thought of being filled with his cum make me want to fall to my knees and beg him to do it over and over?

“Please, Malichai,” I beg, not caring how it sounds.

He bottoms out in me with one fluid stroke, his cock stretching me and filling me. And then he starts to move. At first, his strokes are long and measured, his muscles straining with the effort of holding back.

“So tight. So wet,” he mumbles. “Better than I ever dreamed.”

“More,” I beg, scoring his back with my nails. “Harder.”

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“Fuck,” he groans. “I want this to last.”

“I don’t care if it lasts. You can fuck me again whenever you want.”

He speeds up, his cock spearing deeper into me than before. His thrusts become harsher and less measured, his hand wrapping in my hair and pulling my head back.

“You can bet your ass I will be fucking you whenever I want. I’m going to flood this cunt with my cum every day until you overflow. My seed will drip out of your pretty pussy with every step you take, Princess.”

His dirty words only ramp up my arousal. My walls flutter with my impending orgasm. His other hand moves between us, finding my hard clit and rubbing furiously.

“I want to feel you come on my cock,” he groans, biting down on one of my nipples. “I need to feel your pussy milking me dry.”

I go off like a firecracker in the night sky. My orgasm consumes me, stealing my breath and my vision, leaving me a gasping mess.

“Lyrik.” His groan is the only thing I hear as his cock kicks inside my channel, and I feel his cum paint me from the inside. And then his teeth sink into my shoulder and a second orgasm consumes me.

Chapter Fourteen

Snowed In

Malichai

The storm continues to rage outside as Lyrik lies sprawled across my chest in the darkness, sleeping peacefully. I can't believe I finally got the girl I've always dreamed of, and it's better than I ever imagined. For the first time since I can remember, my dragon is also peaceful. There is no roaming around in my mind, roaring, snorting, or trying to force his way through. He is content.

But Lyrik and I didn't discuss what this meant. Things were said in the heat of the moment, but I know that doesn't mean she'll let me keep her. I did mark her, claim her, and she is mine, but I can't imagine forcing her to do something she doesn't want.

I don't know where we will go from here, and quite frankly, I don't care, as long as I have her by my side. We could stay in the Capitol or move somewhere else, as long as we are together. Fuck the family. I don't care what it costs to have the woman I have always wanted.

"What are you thinking about?" Her soft voice filters into my thoughts. "I can hear your brain working over the howling wind." She presses a kiss to the skin above my heart.

"The future." I smile.

"And what does that look like?" She sounds nervous.

"Right now? Fucking you on every available surface in this cabin while hoping the storm lasts another week," I say, trying to lighten the mood. A chuckle escapes me at her gasp of mock outrage.

"I could probably live with that," she sasses, and I swat her delectable ass beneath the

blanket.

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Sitting upright against the headboard, I pull her into my side.

“I’m not sure about the rest,” I say. “What I want may be...” My words taper off. I don’t want to overwhelm her.

“What?” she asks, looking up at me through her lashes.

“I want it all,” I confess. “I want to build a life with you, and I’m terrified if I push too fast, I’ll lose you.”

I don’t look at her as I say all of this. This woman is my life, my future. And if she denies me, I don’t know how I will ever recover. My dragon will certainly become uncontrollable if our mate denies us. Lyrik moves away from me, and my heart sinks. Maybe I have jumped to the wrong conclusion. I could want more than she is willing to give. Maybe this time in the cabin is all I will ever have with her.

What if this is a one-time thing? A fling in the storm before she returns to her life. I won’t be able to see her and remember what happened here without losing my mind.

She shocks me by swinging her leg over my lap, straddling me, her warm pussy flush with my already hardening cock. She takes my face in her hands, forcing me to look at her.

“I love you, Malichai,” she says. Honesty shines brightly in her blue-grey gaze, a beautiful smile gracing her features. “I don’t care if you want to live on the moon. I want to be wherever you are.”

“And the family? I’m in charge now, I can’t leave it behind this time.” I’m testing the waters, but if this isn’t what she wants I will give it up in a heartbeat.

“Then I suppose I’ll stand by your side,” she replies quickly “I never thought of being an omega for an Elite Alpha, but I’m sure it can’t be that bad. You did mark me for the world to see.” Her hand touches my bite mark as a small smile crosses her features.

“Thank fuck.” I breathe the words around the knot in my throat as my lips crash down on hers.

“Harder!” she screams as my hips piston against her ass.

Lyrik’s body is thrown over the back of the couch. I wrap my hand in her hair for leverage and do precisely as she demands, using all my power to thrust into her hot, wet cunt. The sounds around us are obscene, dirty, and perfect.

It’s been four days of being snowed in, and I can honestly say they have been the best four days of my life. My dragon is content, and my woman is happy, finally in my arms.

“Come for me, Princess,” I command, smacking her ass on another punishing stroke.

She goes off like a fucking rocket. Her walls gripping my length and keeping me locked inside her, milking me as my own orgasm sweeps through. For long moments, neither of us speaks, our panting harsh in the silent cabin.

“Are you sure you want to head back to the Capitol now that the storm has passed?” I ask, stroking my hand down her spine before stepping away from her. “We could stay

here a little longer.”

“This is where I came when everyone else had somewhere to go,” she replies, redressing. “I didn’t want to be a burden on anyone or for people to pity me.”

“Princess...”

“But now, I have somewhere to go, someone to go to.” Her smile is brilliant.

“And you always will.”

She smiles beautifully as we redress, grabbing our bags and heading out to my truck. I will drive us home and then send someone to retrieve her car. I don’t want to spend a moment away from her.

Driving down the mountain, I know we still need to have a conversation, one that neither of us is looking forward to.

“Princess,” I say, drawing her attention to me. We need to talk about some stuff. “I know you don’t want to, but there are things I need to know.”

I see the happiness drain from her eyes. She stares straight ahead. “Fine.”

“I need to know if you want to live at the Black estate.”

“What?”

“Whatever happened is in the past, but we are building a future. I don’t want you to live in a house that will hurt you. I’ll burn it to the fucking ground and build a new one if that’s what you need.”

“Pull over.”

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I stare at her for a moment before doing what she wants. There isn't much space on the single lane, but I try to get out of the way in case someone else needs to pass. The moment my truck stops moving, Lyrik is on my lap, kissing me like she hasn't done it every day since we got snowed in.

When she pulls away, she smiles. "Thank you."

"My pleasure," I say confused. "But would you mind explaining what just happened?"

"I thought you wanted to know about Thomas," she says softly.

"I don't care about that, Princess. It's in our past. If you ever want to tell me, I'll be here but it won't change a single fucking thing about how I feel for you."

"I know that now. And I love that big old house. Of course, there are a million things I would love to change, but I spent the last years of my mom's life there with her. I met you there."

I watch her closely. "So, not too many bad memories."

"Sadness. Loneliness. Yes, there's lots of that, but that's because I spent so much time alone," she explains. "There is only one truly bad memory there. And I moved out the next day."

"If you're sure."

"I am."

“Well, then, if you get off my lap, I’ll drive us home and you can start planning the remodel.”

She laughs freely before kissing me once more. It lasts for long moments before she shifts off my lap and I drive us down the mountain. To our home.

Chapter Fifteen

Will You Look at That

Lyrik

It’s been two days since we came off the mountain and we are still living in our little bubble of happiness. Malichai has taken charge of the family and everyone around him has fallen in line. He has made many big changes quite quickly.

Thomas was involved with lots of unsavory characters and was doing so many illegal things I almost puked when Malichai told me. But things are changing, and Malichai fully intends on restoring the Black name to its former glory.

“I’m running late for work,” I say, stepping out of the en-suite bathroom.

Malichai smirks. “I didn’t hear you complaining this much when my cock was deep inside you. Maybe I should bend you over again.”

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I laugh at his threat. “You know I won’t complain about that, but I do have patients to see.”

“Fine.” He sighs dramatically. “Leave me here in this big house all alone. I’ll be here waiting when you get back.”

He follows me as I make my way downstairs, walking me out to my car. We still need to sort through all the cars in the garage to make space for mine, but we have been taking care of more important things.

My heart drops when I step out of the house to find Thomas glaring at me from the round driveway. He is exactly as I remember him, dressed in an expensive three-piece suit, his salt-and-pepper hair slicked back. He is an older version of Malichai.

Malichai moves in front of me, glaring at his father. “I thought you understood not to come back here.”

“This is my home,” his father challenges. “Everything here was built by me from the ground up!”

Malichai laughs, a dark dangerous sound. “You aren’t even a Black. You took my mother’s last name.” Thomas balks, his face going red at his son’s words. “Clearly, the beating I gave you didn’t knock any sense into your thick fucking skull.”

“You are my greatest disappointment,” Thomas says with a glare as he approaches us. “You’re throwing away your future for some subpar omega pussy.”

“Leave!” Malichai roars. “Or I will kill you and end this for good.”

“We will see who dies today.”

In the blink of an eye, they are shifted into their dragon forms and on each other. Roars shake the ground as they fight one another. Malichai's forest green dragon is fierce and fast, quickly slashing out at Thomas's older black dragon. Flames erupt as Thomas tries to burn his son.

My heart rate is through the roof, and I feel like I am in the center of the inferno, not watching from the outside. My heart stops beating as I watch Thomas lashing out at his son's bad leg, using his injury to his advantage. Rage fills me, boiling over.

In an instant, the wind is roaring past my ears before I pin the black dragon to the ground. My mind is a whirl of confusion, but I know two things for sure. Malichai is my mate, and Thomas needs to die before he can hurt either of us ever again. I open my mouth and allow the heat inside me to make its way out. Electricity crackles in the air before slamming into the black dragon.

The scent of burning flesh fills my nostrils as I watch him writhe in pain. For long moments all I do is stare as his eyes roll back in his head. Beneath my weight I feel him stop breathing as his heart ceases to beat. I fall back on my ass, staring at the destruction I have wrought but never should have been able to accomplish.

Malichai stands before me in his human form, nude. His hands are raised in the air as he eyes me warily.

“Princess, calm down,” he says softly. His voice is calm but there is something underneath I can't place. “I need you to shift back.” Fear. That's the emotion he is trying to hide from me. Why would he ever be fearful of me? Nothing is making sense right now.

Shift?I tilt my head to the side assessing my mate.Mate?I breathe deeply, taking a moment to assess the situation.I look down at my body to see powder blue scales.Fuck me, I'm a dragon.I look back to Malichai, fear and confusion coursing through me.What the hell is going on?

"It's okay, Princess," he says with a smile."You're the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.The most exquisite blue dragon."I shake my head."I know, it's confusing but we can work through this together."

He steps forward and his injured leg collapses.It's all I need to shift back to my human form.I run to him where he curses on the gravel path, glaring at his leg.The moment my hand touches him he pulls me against his chest, holding me tightly.

Malichai

"Fuck, Princess.I have never been more scared, proud, and aroused at the same moment."

"You and me both," she says with a chuckle."What now?"

"We call the Council.They need to know about my father and your dragon," I say, touching her everywhere to make sure she is okay."I've only heard about two other females being able to shift after finding their fated mates, but it seems it may be becoming a more regular occurrence."

"Fated mates?Isn't that just a story mothers tell their daughters at bedtime?A fairy tale?"she asks with a frown.

"That's what the entire realm thought but it seems to be changing rapidly..."

“My ...my dragon knew you were our mate,” she says softly.

“Mine has known for years,” I say with a sigh. “I just never believed him. I’ve wasted all these years.”

She cups my face in her hands and kisses me. “Then let’s not waste any more. We can contact the Council in a bit but first I want to check your leg.”

She slips from my lap, standing gracefully before helping me up. We slowly make our way back into the house where she forces me to sit on the couch. She stretches out my leg, touching my hip and thigh to assess for any new damage my father might have caused during our fight. But my leg feels fine, and I know if I shift another time or two the new twinges will be gone. It’s nothing to do with my old injury or the bone but the muscle, and that will heal soon enough. But I don’t say anything.

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My cock, however, has no problem speaking up, hardening at the simple, nonsexual touch of her hand on my leg. It doesn't help that she is naked.

Lyrik chuckles lowly, shaking her head. "How can you be aroused right now? I just killed your father."

"It was hot, seeing your dragon take charge," I reply. My hand goes to my cock, stroking slowly. Her gaze is glued to my movements. "You're my mate, my heart, my love. Seeing you naked will always arouse me."

"Malichai..." She licks her lips. "You're hurt."

"No, I'm not. A shift or two will fix the muscle, my leg is the same as it has been for months," I reply. "But my cock aches for you."

She lifts from the carpet where she was kneeling to straddle my lap, taking me into her slick heat. My head falls back at the sensation of her pussy gripping me.

"Ride me, Princess," I demand putting my hands on her hips. "Fuck your mate and then mark me for the world to see. I belong to you just as you belong to me."

She rocks back and forth, breathing harshly as she takes her pleasure from me. This is not like our usual fucking, this is more. She is taking her time. My hands roam her body, touching everywhere before palming her breasts. I flick her nipples with my thumbs and her pussy ripples along my length.

"I can't wait for you to get pregnant," I mumble lowly, my imagination running

rampant. “Your tits are going to be even more sensitive, and I can’t wait to suck on them.”

“Malichai,” she cries out, fucking me harder.

She loves when I say dirty things to her. “Yes, Princess,” I hiss, pleasure barreling through me.

Her teeth sink into my shoulder as her orgasm grips her, setting our mate bond as pain and pleasure ricochet through me. My cock kicks inside her, sending my seed into her womb. She cries out as we both experience more pleasure than ever before.

“That was...” she says breathing harshly.

“Intense.”

She smiles, bliss scrolled across her features. “I love you, Malichai.”

Epilogue

Happily, Ever After

Lyrik, Three Months Later

I dance with Dante while Malichai stares at me. He looks like someone stole his favorite toy and I can’t help but laugh. His dragon shimmers beneath the surface but I know neither of them would ever hurt this man.

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“What is so funny, Mrs.Black?”Dante asks with a grin.

“Your boss is acting like a brat,” I say casting a glance in my husband’s direction.

“He is,” Dante says with a chuckle.“But he has been waiting for years to claim you.And even as a child he didn’t like to share.”

“You knew?”I ask, shocked.

Dante winks.“I’ve been a member of this household for as long as I can remember.I’ve seen many things in my time.”

“You never said anything.”

“It was his choice to make.But I knew if he ever came back, he would claim you.”Dante says this last part with absolute confidence.

“What if I was already married?”

“Why do you think you’ve only had a handful of boyfriends in your life?”He smirks, not looking the least bit remorseful.

“You didn’t,” I gasp.

He says nothing as the last notes of the song play before placing a kiss on my cheek.Spining me around, he dips me low.

“The head of the Black family will always be my priority.”

Bringing me back up, he releases me into Malichai’s arms. A new song starts, and Malichai pulls me close against his body, swaying us along with the slow melody.

“So, tell me, Princess, what have you been discussing with Dante?”

I giggle. “Dear mate...” I place a kiss on his chin. “Your man was simply explaining how he knew our love was inevitable.”

“I like the sound of that,” he says with a smirk. “Like nothing could ever keep us apart.”

“Well, if ten years, thousands of miles, and the worst snowstorm in years couldn’t keep us apart, I don’t see what can. We were fated, after all.”

He kisses me softly, holding me close as we dance. “How much longer do we have to stay here?” he asks, and I know what he has in mind.

I look around at our guests. My friends and colleagues are here mingling with some of the most Elite families in the realm. There are a few members of the Arch Fiends MC here as well.

It took a week for Malichai to figure out what exactly his father had fucked up. It took a month more to start rebuilding relationships. The most important one being with the local MC. After all, they were the ones that wanted to wipe out anyone and everyone associated with the Black family. Now, we are on better footing. I am even friends with the leader’s omega, Amy. We spend time together whenever the men have business and even sometimes when they don’t.

“We haven’t cut the cake yet,” I reply.

“I’d rather eat you.”

“Fine.” I sigh, acting like it’s a major inconvenience even if we both know nothing could be further from the truth.

A moment later, he sweeps me off my feet, carrying me out of the ballroom. Everyone in attendance hoots and hollers. He carries me down the long hallway of the local hotel we rented for our formal bonding ceremony, until we are in the elevator. I place kisses down his neck, working to get his baby blue tie loose.

“I need you to behave for two minutes and explain how the fuck I get you out of this dress once we’re in the room.”

I can’t hold back my laughter. I knew when I bought it that he was going to struggle. It is fitted with a corset that laces up in the back. The skirt has a little body to it but not too much. Instead of explaining how to divest me of the layers, I nibble at the flesh below his ear, knowing it will drive him crazy.

“Woman,” he growls, striding from the elevator to our suite.

I don’t know how, but he inserts the key, kicks the door open, and strides inside without missing a beat. I find my back pressed against the closed door as Malichai presses his lips against mine, kissing me until my toes curl in my heels.

“I want you out of this fucking thing,” he demands. “I swear to God I am going to let my dragon rip it off with his claws.”

A shiver works its way through me at the thought. “Do it.”

He stares at me. “Are you sure?”

“Just cut the ribbons on my back and the dress will fall off,” I explain.

Malichai puts me down on my feet before turning me to face the door. I listen to him move around behind me, his dragon at the forefront breathing heavily against my neck. I press my hands against the door hoping to give him better access.

“Stay still.” His voice is a distorted rumble, his dragon showing his presence.

I hear the ribbon give way under the sharp talons of his dragon before the dress pulls away from my frame, slides down my body, and pools on the ground around my feet.

“Fuck,” Malichai hisses behind me. His hands caress my ass, kneading at the globes. “If I knew you weren’t wearing any underwear you never would have made it to the reception.”

I moan low as his fingers work through my folds, spreading my arousal everywhere.

“Keep your hands against the door,” he murmurs in my ear. I listen as he lowers the zipper on his pants. “I’m going to fuck you against the door in nothing but those sexy-ass heels.”

“Yes,” I moan as he notches the head of his cock to my entrance.

Slowly, torturously, he slides his erection into me. His pace is measured, and I know he is trying to make this last, but I don’t want slow and soft. Not right now.

“Is this what sex is going to be like now that we’re formally bonded?”I ask, pushing his buttons.

“Excuse me?”His voice is low and gravelly.

“I thought you wanted to fuck your mate.”

“Fucking brat.”

He lands a blow to my right ass cheek before upping his tempo.He pounds into me, holding my hips tightly.It only takes a few minutes until we are both tumbling headlong into our orgasms and landing in a tangled heap together on the floor.

“I love you, Mrs.Black,” Malichai murmurs against the crown of my head.

“And I love you, Mr.Black.”

The End