



The Cheerleader

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Description: I dance under hot lights and colder rules. Pom-poms, stage smiles, and a thong that barely counts as underwear. It's all part of the show. But behind the glitter and the heels, I'm hiding something that could get me killed.

Abel, my boss, is also my father's old friend, and the Alpha I've been trying to ignore. He has very set rules. No drama. No scent leaks. No slipping.

But I slip.

One moment, I'm the Cheerleader. The next, I'm burning alive in my first heat, and every Alpha in the club smells me. Especially him.

Abel finds me. He saves me and he claims me.

Now the bond is snapping into place like a noose. The heat won't end until he knots me, marks me, and makes me his. But he's twice my age and he's dangerous. He also swore he'd never touch me.

But it's too late for that. Because I'm not hiding anymore. And he's not walking away. He can pretend he's still in control, but I know the truth. He's mine.

And I'm about to ruin both of us.

Total Pages (Source): 22

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

Chapter One

Juliet

The lights hit me like heat, blinding and electric, but I smile anyway. That sugar-sweet, all-American grin they eat up like candy. I spin the pom-poms, kick high, and land into the rhythm of the song pulsing through the club like a second heartbeat.

This place is alive at night. Sweaty, hungry, thick with pheromones masked just enough by rules and tech and pretense. But I feel it. Always. It has become part of me.

During the day I am Juliet, a nineteen-year-old hidden omega, with tattoos from shoulder to hip bone. But right now, I'm The Cheerleader. One of the best burlesque dancers at Dark Side of the Moon.

Someone catcalls near the front of the stage, some beta with more alcohol in his body than sense. I flash him a wink but keep my distance. I never break character and I never get too close. I never let them know what or who I am behind the layers of makeup and cute outfits I wear on stage.

The patch behind my ear itches like hell.

My routine ends in a split, choreographed and precise. The applause hits hard. All I am wearing is a bright orange thong with my pretty orange-and-blue pom-poms covering my naked breasts. Rising, I blow a kiss, then strut off the stage like I own it. Like I'm not terrified that someone might smell past the suppression patch someday

and see the truth beneath all the glitter and attitude.

Backstage is chaos and neon. Corsets hang like skeletons on the wall hooks, and someone's yelling about a broken heel. I keep my head down, make my way toward the dressing rooms, but...

"Juliet."

His voice freezes me mid-step. Abel. My hot, older boss and the owner of Dark Side of the Moon. He's an Alpha. Built like a damn mountain, and all I want to do is climb on top of him and rub myself against his burly chest. Not that I would ever act on it. He's one of my father's acquaintances and he's pushing forty.

But the Goddess knows, I want to lick each and every tattoo he keeps barely hidden beneath his clothes. But he is also a complete asshole. Just as all Alphas are.

I wrap myself in a pure white silk kimono before I turn and meet his gaze. He leans against the hallway wall like he was born to stand there, arms crossed over his massive chest, thick forearms inked with something dark and indecipherable. He watches me like he's sizing me up. Like he always does.

"Nice routine," he says. His tone is dry, unimpressed.

"Thanks, Boss," I say, all bubble and sugar. "I aim to please."

He steps forward, slowly. I hold my ground, but my pulse spikes. Not from fear. From something worse. Something I will never act on.

His eyes narrow. "Are you sweating through that patch again?"

I shrug. "It's a hundred degrees under those lights. It's not my fault that the

technology hasn't caught up with our biology."

He says nothing for a beat. Then he's in front of me, close enough that I can smell his cologne, something dark and old and expensive. My body reacts without permission. My omega instincts curl inward and watch him. I can feel slick gathering between my thighs and pray the patch holds until he leaves and I can replace it.

"You know the rules," he says. "Don't make me regret letting you work here."

"I know the rules," I snap, my mask slipping for just a second. "Better than most."

Something flickers behind his eyes. Something intense. But then it's gone.

He nods once, turns, and walks away without another word.

I exhale. Slowly. My hands shake, but just a little. Because for one second, just one, I thought he could smell me. I push into the bathroom and slam the door behind me. The mirror's cracked. Again. Glitter is smeared across the counter, and someone's fake lashes are stuck to the glass like dead spiders. I peel off my stage underwear, toss it in the bin marked CHEERLEADER like a good little doll, and sit down hard.

The chair squeaks under me, tired of the weight I'm putting on it. Me too, buddy. I rip open the compact cooler on my station and pull out a fresh suppression patch. Peel. Press. Count to ten while it adheres to the skin just below my jawline. It burns, a tiny reminder that I don't get to be what I am.

Being an omega in a club full of Alphas and betas isn't just risky, it's suicidal. But I'm careful. I've been careful since day one. Abel made the rules for a reason. He doesn't bend them. Ever. Which is the only reason I'm still here.

That, and because my dad used to run with him back in the old days. I don't know

what they did together, and I don't ask. All I know is that when I showed up at eighteen with zero options, no pack, and an attitude problem, Abel didn't slam the door in my face. He didn't exactly roll out a welcome mat, either.

A knock rattles the door. "What?" I snap.

"The Vixen needs her pasties back," calls a voice from the hallway.

"Then she can come get them herself," I snap in reply.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I hear laughter fading as whoever it is walks away. I rest my forehead against the cracked mirror.

The club's alive outside this room. Bass thumping through the floorboards, shouts and howls from drunk shifters. It's a show. A circus. And every night, I'm the goddamn ringmaster in a pleated skirt and knee-high socks shaking my pom-poms.

And yet ... part of me likes it. No, I don't like it, I fucking love it.

Not the performing. Not the fakeness. But the power.

I may be an omega, but in here, I run the room, the entire damn world. I make Alphas beg with one wink. I control the heat of their gaze with the curve of a hip. They don't know what I am—they think I'm some beta with attitude—and that makes me feel safe. Safer than I've felt in years. But it is making me complacent and I need to keep my wits about me.

I lean back and stretch. The door creaks open.

“What the hell?” I grab for my kimono but it's too late.

Abel's already in the doorway. He doesn't flinch. Doesn't look away. His eyes drag down my body like they have every right to. The heat in his gaze sends desire spiraling through my system.

I pull the kimono tight around my frame and glare at him. “Do you mind?”

He steps in and closes the door behind him. Just like that. Like he owns the space. Well, technically, he does.

“You didn’t finish your shift notes,” he says, dropping a clipboard onto the counter. “Next time I have to chase you down, I’ll dock your pay.”

My heart slams in my chest, hard enough I think he might hear it.

“What are you even doing back here? The owner doesn’t usually slum it up with the dancers.” I avoid the issue at hand. I fucking hate paperwork. I’m here to dance, not write notes.

He shrugs, walking around the room like he’s casing the place. “Maybe I wanted to make sure The Cheerleader was keeping her panties on tonight.”

Heat shoots up my spine. Not from embarrassment, from rage. He has no right to speak to me that way and I am quickly getting tired of his bullshit.

“You’re disgusting,” I hiss.

He turns to me. “You’re in my club, Juliet. Don’t forget that, little girl.”

“You may be my boss, but you are not my Alpha. What I do in my private time has fuck all to do with you.” The words are out of my mouth before I can reconsider what I am saying.

His nostrils flare. For a split-second, something wild flashes across his face. It’s gone so fast I almost think I imagined it. Almost.

He takes a step closer, and my breath catches. My body wants to submit. I want to bare my throat, drop to my knees, and let him have his way with me. But I clench my

fists and fight back against the urge.

“Watch your mouth,” he says lowly, glaring at me. “I don’t care who your father is.”

“You say that, but he’s the reason you gave me a job.” I smirk.

“I gave you a job because you were desperate, and I’m not a monster,” he counters.

He could’ve fooled me. We stare at each other. The air between us feels like a live wire, buzzing and sharp. Then he turns and walks out, just as fast as he came in. No apology. No explanation. He’s just gone.

I wait until I hear the door click shut before I let out the breath I’ve been holding. My pulse is still racing and my skin feels too tight. The new patch isn’t kicking in fast enough, and I feel wrong, like the room is too small and the walls are pressing in.

Something’s coming. I don’t know what it is yet. But I know it’s got Abel’s name all over it.

As I’m packing up my things, the hallway lights flicker, just once, like a warning. I brush it off, but my skin prickles. Down the hall, I hear the click of boots. Heavy. Measured. Abel walks past my dressing room without a word. But he pauses. Just long enough to make sure I know he’s still there. Just long enough to remind me who owns this place. Just long enough to make my patch sting like it’s trying to peel itself off.

I press my fingers to the skin at my jaw, breathing slow. It’s fine.

I’m fine. Everything is fucking fine. I don’t care what kind of look he just gave me. I don’t care how deep his voice gets when he says my name. I don’t care that something in my blood reacts every time he’s close. Because he doesn’t know what I

am. And if he ever finds out I'm screwed.

I may need to find a new job.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

Chapter Two

Abel

They think I don't notice. That I sit behind the desk upstairs counting drink profits and pretending not to see what happens on my floor. Idiots.

You don't run a place like Dark Side of the Moon for twenty years without knowing every damn detail, who's high, who's hunting, who's slipping through the cracks of the rules I wrote in blood and bone.

And Juliet is slipping.

I watch her on the screen, top right feed, backstage corridor. She's walking fast, shoulders tense, that fucking ivory scrap of silk she calls a robe clutched around her body like armour. That sugary, schoolgirl routine she pulls on stage? That's a mask. But underneath? Something dangerous. Something familiar.

I shouldn't be watching her. She's nineteen. Just a girl. Just a dancer. Just ... my best friend's daughter. I drag a hand over my face. My jaw's clenched so tight it aches.

I should've said no when she showed up here six months ago, looking like trouble in black eyeliner and that too-old-for-her swagger. But she was alone, freshly shifted, and her scent was sealed up tight. Beta, she said. That's what the file says.

I knew better. I just didn't want to admit it.

She doesn't smell like a beta, not exactly. Not like a true one. She smells like static. Like nothing. A blank slate. Only one kind of shifter wears a scent that flat on purpose. Omegas.

And now, watching her on that feed, I know for sure she's masking. Not just with charm or clever lies. But with tech. With omega suppression patches. Which means she's been hiding what she is. Right under my nose. Under my roof. Under my fucking protection. And she isn't the first one to do it either. I must be slipping in my old age.

I slam my fist on the desk. The wood groans. Somewhere downstairs, someone knocks over a chair but I don't care. There are rules in this club. And I made them for a reason. For their safety. For my customers. For me.

No humans allowed. No drinking on shift. No dating the customers. All dancers must wear scent suppressants.

And then, my single unspoken rule. This one is more for me than anyone else: No messing with the talent. All that has ever brought is drama and confusion. It's simply a messy situation.

Juliet is every kind of complication I don't need in my life or my business. And yet, when I walked into that dressing room earlier, and she was half-dressed, lips parted, jaw tight with defiance, my instincts howled.

Something deep in me clawed upward, furious, possessive, starving. My wolf damn near lost his mind, fighting me for control. I wanted to throw her over the damn counter and tear the patch right off her. I long to know her true scent. But that's not normal. That's not control. That's primal. That's insanity.

I stare at the screen, jaw ticking, blood pounding hard in my ears. She's sitting now,

hands shaking as she puts on her knee-high socks. Her fingers keep brushing her throat. The patch must've slipped again.

The feed glitches for a second, a sharp burst of static, and for a moment, I swear I catch it. Just a flicker. Not her stage perfume. Not that almost nonexistent scent she tries to play off as a beta scent. Her real scent. Warm. Soft. Home.

Fuck.

I push back from the desk so fast my chair skids. I need air. I need space. I need to get away from this cursed building before I do something I can't take back. That is what my logic is trying to tell me to do but my feet carry me to the stairs. Down the hallway. Past the velvet curtain and into the dark, pulsing heat of the club.

She's not on the main floor, thank God.

But I can still feel her. That invisible thread, that pull under the skin that makes no fucking sense. I'm forty. She's nineteen. And I'm not some goddamn pup in his first rut. I've been through enough heats, enough heartbreak, to know what it means when the instinct snaps awake.

Juliet isn't just trouble. I lean against the wall, fists clenched, every cell screaming for me to go to her. My wolf growls in the back of my mind as I fight him back for what feels like the millionth time.

She has no idea what she's doing to me. And she sure as hell doesn't know what it means if the patch ever comes all the way off. Because once I smell her unmasked, once my wolf locks in...

There's no going back.

Chapter Three

Juliet

Something's wrong with the patch. I can feel it. The edges are peeling, just barely. Not enough to sound the alarm, not enough to rush backstage in a panic. But enough that my skin itches, hot and raw under the adhesive.

I press a cold bottle of water to my neck, praying no one notices the spike in my scent. No one should. Not if I hold it together. Not if I breathe through it, keep moving, keep performing. Smile, Juliet. Swing those hips. Show some teeth.

The moment I get on stage the difference is clear. Tonight's routine is tighter. Meaner. The Cheerleader's got claws now. And the crowd fucking eats it up.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

There's a table near the stage, low-ranking Alphas with slick smiles and too much testosterone. Corporate pack boys in designer suits, pretending they're dangerous.

One of them has been here before. He always watches me too long. Follows me with his eyes when I leave the stage. Never touches, never speaks. Until tonight. I finish the set, once more naked except for my tiny thong, hair falling into my eyes.

I rise and his hand grabs my ankle. It's subtle, almost smooth. He plays it off like a joke. Grinning, flashing teeth. "Didn't mean to scare you, sweetheart."

I freeze. The spotlight burns.

I can hear security shifting. One of the bouncers steps forward, but I wave him off with a flick of my fingers. I've got this. I always do.

"No touching, handsome." I give him my best fake smile before stepping out of reach. Tips are an important part of this business, and you don't want to piss off the clientele, no matter how fucking creepy they are.

I try to keep it civil. But he follows. He grabs for me again, this time much higher, his fingers grasping my hip.

That's when it happens. The heat under my jaw flares. The patch slips and hits the floor like a dead leaf. My scent explodes into the air. A mix of sweet and sharp and wild. Months of suppression undone in a single heartbeat. The entire room shifts.

Every Alpha in the building snaps to attention. Heads turn. Eyes flare. And me? I

panic. Because the customer is still touching me. His eyes are black now, pupils blown wide with hunger as his wolf dances just beneath the surface. His fingers tighten and his mouth opens. He smells it, me. He knows the truth ... they all do.

“Let go of me,” I snarl, trying to yank free. “Now.”

He doesn't. Of course he doesn't. Because I'm not a beta anymore. Not invisible and absolutely not safe. I'm an omega in full bloom, and every predator in the room just caught the scent.

He lunges but doesn't reach me. A roar splits the air. Not human. Not even remotely. A frisson of lust creeps down my spine and then Abel is there. A blur of muscle and fury and violence. He grabs the guy by the throat and throws him across the VIP railing. The man crashes into a table, shattering glass and bone and whatever passes for ego. The music cuts and the overhead lights snap on.

And Abel is standing over me, chest heaving, eyes locked on mine. His nostrils flare as he smells me. He knows what I really am, what I have hidden from him since I got here.

His jaw goes slack like something ancient just clicked into place. For a second, just a second, I think he's going to say my name. But what he says instead is worse.

“Mine. Mate.” The words are low. Brutal. Final.

I stumble back. “No. No, I'm not,” I deny his claim softly.

He grabs me and throws me over his shoulder, marching through the club and everyone in it to his office. Inside, he deposits me on the cool wood of his desk, his large frame between my split thighs. He stares at me intently before speaking.

“You are,” he growls. “I knew something was off with you. But this...”

“This wasn’t supposed to happen.” My voice breaks. And I hate that it breaks.

His hand shoots out to cup my cheek. Not gentle—possessive. Branding me from the inside out with just a single touch. I can’t hear anything past the blood rushing in my ears.

“You’ve been hiding this from me?” he says, voice dark and dangerous. “From everyone?”

“I didn’t have a choice.”

“Bullshit,” he spits the word like venom even as his touch remains gentle.

“You don’t know me or a single thing I’ve been through. You don’t get to judge me.”

“I do now.”

I slap him. The crack echoes through his office. He doesn’t flinch. Doesn’t even blink. He simply grabs my hands and locks them together behind my back in one of his massive hands.

“Get your hands off me,” I whisper. I say the words, but I don’t mean them. I want him to touch me everywhere. Forever.

His gaze burns with barely restrained lust, his wolf just beneath the surface pushing to break free. “I can’t.”

And suddenly, I know this isn’t just scent. This isn’t just biology. This is the bond. Fated. Destined. Everything I have ever wanted and feared.

And I'm sitting in the middle of his office on his desk, exposed, shaking, caught between fight-or-flight and something worse.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

Surrender.

Chapter Four

Abel

She's shaking. She hides it well, chin up, eyes defiant, voice sharp, but her body trembles like it knows what I am now. What we are.

Mates.

Fated.

Fucked.

The moment her patch hit the floor and her scent broke free, I knew. The world tilted. My wolf surged up like a wave, snarling, hungry, ready to claim the single thing he has never had. I could've torn every male in the building apart without blinking. And I almost did.

Now we're in my locked office, and I've got her naked breasts pressed against my chest where she is sitting on my desk, her thighs cradling my hips. I'm not touching her, not quite. But my left hand is keeping her in place, and my whole body aches to close the last gap between us.

Her throat is flushed. Her eyes wild. She smells like heat and defiance and caramelized sugar. But she still lied to me and I won't stand for that.

“You should’ve told me.”

She scoffs, like it’s a joke. “And say what? ‘Hi, I’m your best friend’s daughter and secretly an unclaimed omega working in a club full of Alphas?’ Does that sound like a smart plan to you?”

“Smarter than this,” I admonish.

Her lip curls. “You’re not pissed because I lied. You’re pissed because you felt it.”

I flinch. She’s not wrong. The mate bond hit me like a freight train the moment her scent reached me. That primal snap of mine buried deep in my chest. I’ve fought every instinct in my body to keep my hands off her since she showed up. Turns out it didn’t matter. Fate always wins.

“I kept it hidden for a reason,” she says, low and bitter. “I didn’t want this.”

“Too late.”

Her eyes narrow. “You think I want to belong to you?” The words hit harder than they should.

“No,” I grit. “But you do.”

She gasps like I struck her, then slaps me again. I have no idea how she slipped from my grip but her slap is harder this time. She’s not weak. She never has been. And fuck me, that scent, even angry, is wrecking me. My cock is harder than it ever has been in my entire life.

I take a step back. I need distance. Space. Oxygen. Sanity. But she slips off my desk and steps forward, pushing into the space I just gained.

“I’m not yours,” she says, fierce and broken and so beautiful it kills me.

“You are. I felt it. Don’t pretend you didn’t.”

She looks away. That’s all I need.

“You did feel it,” I whisper.

“I didn’t.” There are tears swimming in her gaze. “I won’t until the effects of my patch wear off.”

“What?” My voice roughens, raw and cracking. “You can’t be serious.”

Silence stretches between us. Thick. Heavy. Loaded with everything we can’t say and everything we’ve already said.

Then she does the most dangerous thing she could do. She leans in. Not much. Just a fraction of an inch. But it’s enough. Enough to make my self-control snap.

I lunge.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

She gasps as I push her backward until she hits the wall. I don't kiss her, I can't. I need to maintain control until she is ready to accept what is between us. But my hands slam against the wall behind her, caging her in. My nose brushes the crook of her neck and the scent of her makes me lose track of everything but her.

She whimpers. Just once. Then shoves me away.

"Don't," she pants. "Don't you dare."

"I'm trying not to." My voice comes out cracked and jagged. "You have no idea how hard I'm trying."

She bolts. Barefoot. Shaking. Dressed in only a G-string and I don't stop her. I can't. If I touch her again, I won't be able to let go. My cock is lead in my pants, leaking pre-cum into my boxers.

But I need to make sure she is ready when I finally claim her. The second I make her mine, that's it. I won't survive another mate bond. If she isn't one hundred percent ready for me, if she denies me, it will kill me.

Chapter Five

Juliet

I don't remember the walk home. I know I dressed quickly and bolted. The brand-new patch is barely masking my scent, not that it matters now.

I do have some flashes of memory, cold air on my bare legs, the sting of gravel under my feet, the sound of my own heartbeat in my ears like a war drum. I lock the apartment door behind me, press my back to it, and slide down until I'm sitting on the carpeted floor.

Everything smells like him. It's not even real, just a phantom scent. But I can still feel Abel on my skin. In my lungs. On my tongue. I wanted to beg him to touch me the way I have been dreaming about for months but I held back.

"You're mine." His words play on repeat in my head.

My wolf whimpers in the back of my mind, pushing me to go to him. To submit to my mate. I slam my fist against the floor.

"No," I whisper. "No, I'm not his mate."

My heat hasn't started yet. Not fully. But it's coming, slow and cruel, like a storm on the edge of the horizon. My body's buzzing. My skin is too tight. My mouth is dry, and every part of me that knows I'm an omega is already calling for the one thing I swore I'd never need.

Him. Abel. My mate. My Alpha.

The man who's more than twice my age. The man who runs the club like a goddamn wolf pack. The man who used to babysit me when I was too young to shift, before I even identified as an omega.

I press my hands to my face. I want to peel my own skin off. I didn't ask for this. I told myself the patches would work. That if I was careful, if I stayed masked, I could carve out a piece of the world that wasn't shaped by instinct and fate and biology. Or my father. But the second that patch came off, the universe made up its mind. And it

picked him.

I get to my feet and stumble to the bathroom. I strip out of my street clothes, turn on the cold water, and step into the shower, hoping it'll numb the rising pressure in my veins.

Surprise ... it doesn't.

Every droplet feels like a kiss. Every breath makes my thighs clench. My body is preparing. Oiling the gears for a descent into something I've only read about in whispered threads on omega message boards.

Unclaimed heat.

Unclaimed omegas in heat either find relief ... or lose themselves. Some aren't ever the same again. I dig through the medicine drawer and pull out an emergency suppressant shot. It's old, barely legal, and probably expired, but I jab it into my thigh anyway and pray it'll buy me a day. Maybe two. But I know it won't fix this.

The bond is already forming, threading itself through my bones, my breath, my blood. I can feel it—a hook in my chest, sharp and sweet and terrifying. I know I am not feeling it as profoundly as he does, but within a few days the effects of the patch will wear off and I won't be able to deny this anymore. Sooner probably, my heat accelerating everything.

I crawl into bed and bury myself under the covers, trying to disappear. Trying to forget how my life just flipped upside down.

That's when the memory hits.

I was eighteen the first time I shifted. When my designation presented itself. The look

on my dad's face when my scent changed damn near broke my heart. My scent didn't come in soft like most girls. It hit him like a freight train—heavy, unmistakable.

Omega.

He didn't smile. He locked the door to our home, staring at me.

“Don't tell anyone,” he said, voice low and firm. “Not your friends. Not your teachers. Not even your doctor. You hear me?”

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I nodded, too scared to speak.

“You keep it hidden. You suppress it. And you never let an Alpha near you.”

“Why?” I whispered.

His voice cracked.

“Because they’ll take you. Whether you want them to or not.”

I blink back tears. I wish I could call him. I wish I could scream and tell him he was right. That I made a mistake walking into that club. That I should’ve stayed home. Stayed hidden. Stayed safe.

But it’s too late. The bond is forming. The suppressant hits like a cold wave, dulling the edge, slowing the fire, but it doesn’t stop it. Not completely.

I curl tighter under the covers. I try to sleep. I try to think of anything else. But the air in the room starts to thicken, like smoke I can’t see. Every sound stretches too long. My skin buzzes with static.

And then I feel him. Not really. But it feels real.

The mattress shifts behind me. Heat radiates against my back. A large hand brushes my hip, rough and warm, like it’s memorizing the shape of me through the sheet.

“Juliet,” he breathes, voice low and raw.

I squeeze my eyes shut. No. But the hallucination doesn't care.

Abel's scent fills the room—leather, smoke, something darker underneath. My pulse skitters. My thighs press together. The air vibrates with his presence, his growl curling inside my ear like a secret.

“I told you,” he whispers. “You're mine.”

The imagined version of him is softer than the real thing. Gentler, more reverent. His fingers slip under the edge of my sleep shirt, dragging fire across my skin. His mouth finds the back of my neck, and my body arches, desperate, shameful.

“Say it,” he says. “Say you feel it.”

I almost do. I almost give in. But then the illusion shifts. His grip tightens. Too tight. His mouth at my throat is no longer a kiss. It's a claim.

And suddenly, I'm not dreaming anymore, I'm drowning. I throw off the blankets, gasping for air, drenched in sweat. My heart's pounding. My clothes are soaked. My sheets smell like him, and he's not even here.

He's not here. He's not here.

I stumble to the bathroom and vomit into the toilet. The cold tile bites my knees. This is only the beginning. If the suppressant fails before I get another dose, I won't just hallucinate. I'll beg. I'll call for him. And he'll come. Because he won't be able to stay away.

I barely manage to drag myself out of the bathroom before my body betrays me again. My heart thuds in my chest like it's been pumped full of raw electricity. Sweat coats my skin, and my legs feel like jelly.

I try to breathe, try to focus, but my mind is running too fast, spinning into overdrive. I force myself to sit on the edge of the bed and take deep breaths. My fingers press into my temples, trying to push away the suffocating heat, but it's already there, creeping in like a shadow over my senses. It won't stop.

I feel his hand again, his breath at my neck.

It's like I'm drowning, but I can't escape. Not even from myself.

I close my eyes, and another memory assaults me.

The house is quiet except for the low hum of the fridge and the ticking of the clock on the wall. My dad's there, on the couch, flipping through a stack of old papers, but he's not reading. His eyes are fixed on the window. The blinds are drawn now, but I know he's been watching the street for hours.

I'm supposed to be asleep, but the urge to ask him about the shift, about the changes happening to me, is unbearable. Finally, I can't stop myself.

"Dad," I whisper. He doesn't look up. Just grunts in acknowledgment. "Dad, what happens when I shift? When I really shift? When I'm—"

He cuts me off before I can finish. "Don't talk about it. Not yet." The words are sharp. Defensive.

"Why not?"

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

His jaw tightens. There's something cold in his eyes when he finally looks at me. Something I've never seen before, like the world is about to crack open, and he's bracing for it.

"You're not ready," he says, his voice low. "You're never going to be ready for what happens after."

I don't understand. "After what?"

"After you let them get too close," he mutters. "After you let an Alpha think he can claim you."

I swallow hard. "But I thought that's what we're supposed to do. Omegas and Alphas. That's how it works."

He stands up, his hand gripping the back of the couch like he's holding himself together.

"Don't you ever forget it's not about love. It's about possession. Control. The second you let them in, you're theirs. And you don't want to be theirs, sweetheart. Not unless you want to lose everything."

"But—"

"I'm serious, Juliet. You stay the hell away from them. You understand me?"

I nod, but the pit in my stomach grows. Because it sounds like he's talking about

something more than just the fated mate bond. It sounds like he's afraid. And it's not the only time he says it.

My breath catches, the memory of his words churning in my gut. His face flashes in my mind, the tightness around his eyes, the way he'd look at me when he thought I wasn't paying attention. He knew what it was like. Knew what I'd face when I started shifting.

That's why he drilled it into me. "Stay away from Alphas." It was more than just a warning. It was a command. And now, here I am. Because I didn't fucking listen.

The suppressant barely works. It's too late. The bond is already starting to rip through my mind, tearing down the walls I've tried to build. Abel isn't just an Alpha. He's my father's best friend, although we barely know each other. I haven't seen him since I was a little girl.

And now he's the one I can't escape. The one fated to be my mate.

My body aches. My pulse spikes again, and this time it's more than just heat. It's his presence creeping into my thoughts, wrapping around my mind like a shackle. I'm not ready for this.

I reach for my phone, fingers trembling, but I stop. There's no one I can call. No one who can help. Because once the bond takes hold, there's no going back. And the worst part? The part that makes my stomach twist into knots? I want to give in. I want to let him in.

I want him to claim me. But I can't. I won't. Not if it means losing myself.

Chapter Six

Abel

The second I get out of the shower, I can feel it, that nagging, insistent pull. It's like something inside me is calling for her. I shake my head, trying to focus. I've got a dozen things to do. The club needs me. The girls need me. But every goddamn thought is tangled up in one thing.

Her. Juliet.

It's been hours since I saw her, since I almost ... claimed her.

Fuck. I should've walked away the second I smelled her scent. The second that patch hit the floor, and the bond clicked in place. But I didn't. I stayed. I let myself feel it. And now I can't stop it. I can't stop craving her.

I pace the apartment I built above the club so that I was always nearby if anyone needed me. My fists are clenched at my sides. The dark shadows of the club are still with me, the music, the lights, the heat, but that's not what's consuming me now.

It's her.

Her scent lingers in my nose, even when I try to push it away. Even now, as I struggle to ignore the gnawing ache in my chest, I can feel her. The bond is there, wrapping around my ribs, digging into my skin. I don't want it. I don't want her. Or at least I shouldn't.

She's my best friend's daughter. She's off-limits. But the bond doesn't care. And neither does my wolf. He continues to push, trying to get out, to get to her.

A knock on the door pulls me out of my spiraling thoughts. I pause, my jaw tight. I know who it is before I open it. Lance, one of the new bouncers at Dark Side of the

Moon. I don't know what he wants, but I'm not in the mood to deal with him, or anyone else right now.

I swing the door open, and he freezes when he sees my face.

"Are you okay, man?" he asks, his voice hesitant. He's a tall man, tattoos covering his neck and arms, but I can see the fear in his eyes.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

“I’m fine,” I growl, though I’m anything but fine. “What do you want?”

He clears his throat, looking uncomfortable. “Just checking in. You left in a hurry tonight. Is everything good with the club? Do you need anything?”

I nod, though the words feel like gravel in my throat. He has only been there a month, but I can honestly say he is a good guy. He has been trying to fit in and build relationships, even with me.

“I’m good,” I say, but I’m not sure I mean it.

I can’t think about the club. Not when my mind is consumed with her. Not when every part of me is pulling toward her, no matter how many times I tell myself not to.

He hesitates. “Are you sure? You seem a little off.”

“I said I’m good.” I step back, closing the door in his face before he can say another word.

I let out a breath. My chest is tight. My wolf is clawing to the surface, snarling for her, demanding I claim what’s mine. I consider shifting and letting him out for a run, but I know once he is free he will run to her.

The thought makes me sick. She’s not supposed to be mine. But the mate bond doesn’t give a shit what either of us think or want. I pull on my jacket, fingers trembling as I button it up. I need to leave. I need to get away before I lose my mind completely.

But the moment I step outside, it's like I'm drawn to her, like the Goddess herself is trying to guide me to her. My every step feels heavier, like I'm fighting against the tide.

I know exactly where she is, she's not at the club. She's hiding in her little apartment in town. I can feel it.

That's the bond, too, the thread that connects us. It's not just her scent. It's a pull, deeper than instinct. Something primal, something that feels like it's been carved into my bones, into my very soul.

I curse under my breath, turning around to head in the opposite direction, into the forest where I pray I can find peace. I can't do this. I can't. But every part of me screams that I have to. My wolf fights me for control, snarling and snapping at me.

I stop just inside the treeline, my heart pounding, and stare down at my phone. I'm staring at her name. It's a text I never sent. A message I didn't even know I was going to write.

Me: Are you okay?

I press "send," knowing she probably won't even reply. I drop the phone back into my pocket, but it feels like a stone sinking to the bottom of a lake.

I push through the underbrush, head down, but I can't escape the burning urge to turn around and head back toward her apartment. It's almost unbearable. My instincts are howling at me. But I won't give in.

A moment later, my cell phone vibrates in my pocket. I consider ignoring it, knowing I can't go back to the club right now, I'm too volatile to be around anyone at the moment. But my hand still digs in my pocket to retrieve the device. It's the one

message I never expected to receive.

Juliet: Leave me alone.

I force myself to continue walking away from town, deeper into the forest.

I shouldn't have stayed at the club as long as I did tonight. I should have walked away when I first realized that damn patch fell off. The second her scent hit the air, I should've turned and left. I knew what it meant, and I knew what I was to her. But I didn't. I stayed.

I should have turned her away all those months ago. But I didn't and now it's too late to do a damn thing about it.

But I've let myself feel it. Let myself want it. And now it's too late. I can't stop it. She's mine. I've been lying to myself since she showed up. I knew there was something about her, something I couldn't explain but I never thought she would be my fated mate—even if I secretly hoped for it.

She is stunning. Confident in who she is. Her curves are enough to drive any man to his knees and even though I knew it wasn't right, I couldn't stop myself from fantasizing about her when I was alone in the early morning hours.

Now that I know the truth, it is tearing me apart to stay away from her. It's like a fire in my chest, pulling at me from the inside out, and the more I ignore it, the worse it gets.

I slow my stride, fingers digging into my palms as I force myself to think about anything other than her—the club, the other dancers, the fact that I still have responsibilities. But none of that matters anymore. Because in the back of my mind, she's still there.

Juliet. My fated mate. My chance at a happily ever after, no matter how corny that sounds.

I close my eyes, willing the thoughts to stop, but they only grow louder. She's not just some dancer. She's not just an omega. She's my mate.

I curse under my breath. There's no going back. No pretending I didn't feel it. The bond is there, deep in my blood, weaving itself into my veins, like a rope pulling me toward her.

The last thing I want to do is hurt her, drag her into something she's not ready for. And the worst part is she doesn't even feel the bond the way I do. And even when she does, I'm not sure she will accept me.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I try to think about her, try to see her the way I always have, as just Juliet, my best friend's daughter. But my mind keeps straying to the way her scent curled through the air tonight. How soft her skin was when I grabbed her arms in my office, how fragile she felt beneath my touch. Her perfect, perky breasts pressed against my chest, and the colors of her tattoo decorating her skin.

I could ruin her. But I also know I could love and cherish her.

I consider leaving the town, the state, the fucking country. I consider refusing her and ending the bond. The thought of losing her, of walking away from her when I know she's mine, makes something deep inside me snap.

I can't stay away.

I stand in the middle of the forest, staring at my phone. I stare at it for a long moment before pressing the device to my forehead, clenching my jaw as I fight back the impulse to break every rule I've ever made. To throw caution to the wind and pull her into my arms, to feel the heat of her body against mine, to taste her, to claim her.

Every step I take away from her is agony. Every breath I take is one I'm choking on.

Even this deep into the forest the air thickens with the scent of her again, sharper now, more intense. The pull tugs at me harder, twisting through my chest like a knife in the ribs. I can't ignore it. I can't outrun it. I stop. I turn around. And it feels like the Goddess herself is pulling me back to her. I know I shouldn't.

And then my phone vibrates again.

Juliet: Please. Abel. Come.

I swear to God, I almost lose my fucking mind.

I don't know if it's real or just my head playing tricks on me, but I know I can't let her call out to me again. I don't know if I'm strong enough to walk away from this. From her. But the moment I take that first step toward town, toward her, I know I'll never be able to go back.

Chapter Seven

Juliet

I'm on fire.

There's no other way to describe it.

The heat consumes me from the inside out. It burns through my blood, twists my thoughts into something raw and animalistic, and I can feel myself slipping away with every breath. I barely remember the last few hours. All I can do is clutch the edge of the bed, my fingers digging into the sheets as my body shakes.

I need to stop it. I need to control it. But the second I try to focus, the need overwhelms me again. It's unbearable.

I've tried everything. I've tried locking myself in my apartment, tried using the suppressant patches and shots until my skin feels like it's on fire. I even tried to sleep, to escape it. But the second I close my eyes, all I can see is him.

Abel.

His touch. His growl. His scent. He's all I can think about, all I can smell. I can feel it now, the bond. And it's too strong. I can't outrun it. I can't hide from it anymore. My body calls for him, my mind pleading for release, and there's nothing I can do to stop it.

My phone buzzes beside me—an incoming message. I glance at it, fingers trembling, and it's from him.

Abel: Are you good?

For a moment I stare at the words. I want to beg him to come to me. I want to tell him that I feel the bond, that I need him. Instead, I type out exactly the opposite.

Me: Leave me alone.

I can barely focus on the words. They blur. They don't even make sense to me right now. All I can think about is the heat that rips through me again, dragging me down further into the abyss. I need him. I need him more than I need to breathe. More than I need the suppressant. More than I need control.

I writhe in pain. My body screams for my mate, my wolf whimpering in the recesses of my mind. I can feel myself slipping, the bond snapping tighter and tighter around me, and I know I can't keep pretending I can fight it. I'm not strong enough. I never was.

With shaking hands, I type out a second message.

Me: Please. Abel. Come.

I send it before I can think twice, before my rational mind can stop me. The second my phone goes quiet, I feel it. A shift in the air. A tension that wasn't there before.

And then, like the very ground beneath me is pulling me into something darker, something deeper, and I know he's coming.

And then darkness consumes me.

Abel

I didn't expect this. I didn't expect her to reach out. I didn't expect her to break.

The moment her message hits my phone, I freeze. Every muscle in my body locks up, and the pull is so strong I almost drop the phone.

It's a cry for help. She's desperate. I should ignore it. I should stay away. But I know better than that. And I can't stay away.

For the first time since scenting her, I allow my wolf to take control. The shift falls over me effortlessly. The moment my paws hit the ground, I'm moving toward her apartment. Every step feels like I'm dragging myself through thick, molasses-like air, fighting against gravity as I run toward her. I'm not ready for this. She's not ready for this.

But none of that matters. Not when I know she's calling for me. Not when I scent her. It's more potent than usual and my wolf howls at the moon. She has gone into her heat cycle. I need to get to her, now.

Her heat is going to break her, if it hasn't already.

When I get close to town, my wolf allows me to shift back. I steal a pair of sweatpants that are hanging outside and run the rest of the way barefoot. The moment I step into her building, the walls feel like they're closing in on me. Every step is a

step closer to claiming her.

I knock on her door. I wait. My pulse is pounding in my ears. I hear her mewl inside and break the lock, stepping inside.

She is lying on the couch. Her eyes meet mine. They're wide, pupils blown, and her skin flushed a pretty pink. She's barely wearing anything, just a thin tank top and shorts, but I can see how unsteady she is. How she's shaking. How she's barely holding herself together.

I take a step closer to her, my heart hammering in my chest. I look around, moving a bookshelf in front of the door to keep it shut.

"Juliet..." My voice is rough, barely a whisper, but she hears it.

The moment she moves on the couch, I catch a whiff of her scent. It's sharp, desperate, and wild. It hits me like a freight train. My entire body goes rigid, and my cock hardens even more than it already has. The bond pulls harder, urging me to take her, to claim her as mine.

Her breath catches when she sees the look in my eyes. I can't stop it. I can't stop myself. Slowly, I inch closer to her, doing my best not to scare her. I know that an omega's first heat can be terrifying.

"You're burning up," I say, my hand reaching for her before I can think better of it. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't—" Her words break off into a strangled gasp as she lifts herself and her body presses into mine, her scent too much.

I pull her closer, unable to help myself. I can feel her body trembling against me, her

full breasts and hard nipples pressed against my naked chest. I fight the instinct to sink into her, to claim her the way the bond is demanding.

“Abel...” she whispers, and it’s more than a plea. It’s a command.

And the moment she says my name, my will snaps. My control breaks.

I lift her into my arms, my lips crashing into hers before I can stop myself. The second I taste her it’s like the world implodes. I feel her shiver beneath my touch, and every part of me roars to claim her, to mark her as mine. But I’m still holding back. I’m still fighting.

“Tell me, Juliet,” I growl against her lips. “Tell me you want this.”

She looks up at me, her eyes glassy with need, and in that moment, I know. I know she’s already mine. And she always has been.

“I want you,” she breathes, the words shaky and broken.

And that’s it.

I can’t hold back anymore.

Chapter Eight

Juliet

He stares at me, and I can see his wolf rippling just beneath the surface. I know he is holding back but I don’t want him to.

“Are you sure,” he asks roughly, hands rubbing my arms. “You said you didn’t feel

the mate bond. I can't do this and then walk away from you."

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

“I feel it,” I whisper. “My heat...”

“Pushed the last of the suppressant out of your system.” He finishes the sentence for me, and I nod. “What about after?” he asks. “What about your father? I won’t be able to hold back. I can’t help you through your heat and not claim you.”

“Abel...”

He grabs my chin and forces me to focus on him. “I will fuck you through your heat. But know this. I will knot you, mark you, and the Goddess willing, I will breed you.”

I can hear the truth in his words, feel it in my soul. My wolf purrs like a fucking cat. I blink a few times before leaning forward and kissing him. His lips are cool, soothing the inferno raging inside me.

Suddenly, I find myself lifted into his arms. “Room?” His voice rumbles beside my ear.

I point to the door that leads me to my room, and he strides across my apartment. Once inside, he looks around the small space before placing me on my feet. My hands drag down his naked chest, touching all the tattoos I have never been able to see.

He steps away and I frown. Is he leaving? Does he not want me? But then, my gaze travels from his ink to his erection. His fists are clenched at his side, his wolf fighting to get out.

“Abel?”

“I just ... I need a second.” His voice is thick, tension rolling through his body. “There are things we haven’t thought about that will affect us after your heat. I’m your father’s friend and twice your age. I should just break the bond and walk away.”

I don’t think about my actions, I just pull the thin fabric of my tank top over my head. Panic at the idea of him walking away from me is driving my reactions. I drop it to the floor beside me and stare at the man in front of me. A low growl starts in his chest and in two strides, he has me in his arms, my back pinned to the wall.

“Do you ever fucking listen?” he demands. “I should spank the brat right out of you.”

A mewl falls from my lips and I feel more slick slip from my pussy at the mental image he conjures. His nostrils twitch as he breathes in my scent.

“Fuck me. Does that turn you on, Omega?”

“Abel, please,” I beg, rubbing my breasts against his chest. “I need...”

“I know what you need,” he says, rubbing his erection against my pussy. “I could smell your pussy across town.”

His lips fall to my neck, nipping and kissing. My head falls back, allowing him better access. Shivers run through my body, parallel to the fire burning up my veins. I cling to him, wanting, needing him closer.

“Tell me to stop, Juliet,” he mumbles, pushing his hand into my shorts and caressing my sex through my underwear. “Tell me this isn’t right.”

I shake my head. “No. I want this. I want you.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying,” he argues, shoving my underwear aside and spearing me with one of his thick fingers.

I cry out, riding his finger searching for release. “I know what I want,” I counter, my breaths coming in shallow bursts. “I’ve wanted you since I came to the club.”

Suddenly, I find myself flat on my back in the middle of my bed. Abel rips my shorts and underwear down my legs and throws it over his shoulder.

“You shouldn’t have said that, Juliet.” He stares at my bared pussy, and I spread my thighs wider. “A man only has so much control.”

“I want you to lose control,” I whisper.

He doesn’t reply, only pulls me to the edge of the bed and falls to his knees. He buries his face between my legs and attacks my pussy with his lips and tongue. I didn’t even know it was possible to orgasm so quickly, but my body bows off the bed. Black dots dance across my vision as the scream that escapes me fades.

Abel smiles at me before slapping my pussy. Hard. Tingles spread from my sex to all my other extremities and more slick pours out of me.

“You’re fucking perfect,” he praises softly. “This soft, pink pussy is going to be the death of me.”

He licks me leisurely, from asshole to clit, until he has gathered all my slick. Slowly he moves up my body, kissing, licking, and nipping at my skin, leaving little marks in his wake. His hands cup my breasts as he smiles.

“These tits have featured in every single dream I have had in the past six months.”

“Abel, please,” I beg, writhing on the bed.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

“Shh. I’ll make it better,” his cock nudging at my entrance. “I’m going to fuck you so good, Juliet.”

He rocks his hips, pushing himself into me, inch by treacherous inch. I want to beg him for more, but words fail me. All I have left are the feelings he evokes inside me. Heat spears through me and I feel like I am burning up.

“You’re so fucking tight,” he mumbles. “I need to go slow so I don’t hurt you.”

“Please...”

He stares at me before bottoming out inside me. I feel stretched and full. My pussy ripples, gripping his cock. Abel’s wolf dances beneath the surface. The idea of him so close to losing control that his animal is visible does strange, dark things to me.

“It burns...”

Abel moves harshly inside me. His hips piston in and out as he fucks me into the mattress. His strokes are harsh, making my breasts shake.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck. Look at you taking my fat cock, Little Omega.”

“Yes, Abel!”

A second orgasm crashes over me, stealing my breath.

“Fuck!” he roars above me.

I feel his cock kick inside me before he fills me with his seed, his knot stretching me perfectly and locking us into place. My body cools before it starts burning once more. Abel is above me for a moment before he dips down and sinks his teeth into my shoulder. My vision blurs as pain, pleasure, and fire blending together, and sending me into a third orgasm.

The mate bond snaps into place, locking us together.

Chapter Nine

Abel

Three Days Later

The room feels like it's closing in on me.

I can still feel her—the heat of her skin against mine, the scent of her still lingering in the air, marking me, claiming me. Her body pressed against mine. Her pussy strangling my cock.

I can't escape it. I can't escape her.

I'm sitting on the edge of the bed, running my hand through my hair, trying to steady myself. Trying to gather my thoughts. But my body is still buzzing with the aftershocks of our mating, of what we did during her heat. Her scent is everywhere, on my skin, in my blood, in my lungs. It feels like the air itself is heavy with her presence. The pull is still there, tugging at me, deeper than ever before.

And I hate it.

I shouldn't feel this way. I shouldn't feel this connected to her. I shouldn't feel this

much. But I do.

I glance over at her, watching her sleep. Her body is tangled up in the sheets, her breathing slow, deep. She looks so peaceful, so innocent in this moment. But I know what we've done. The bond is complete. She's mine. And I am hers. Joined together irrevocably. It's all I can think about. It's all I can feel.

But my chest tightens, a gnawing guilt taking hold of me. She's my best friend's daughter. She's an omega. I'm an Alpha. I'm the owner of the Dark Side of the Moon. The fallout from this is going to be massive.

What just happened between us is going to destroy everything. I know it. I can't be the man who ruins her life.

I've seen what happens when a mate bond is forged under pressure, under heat, with no room for either person to think it through. I've seen it in the clubs, in the streets, in every broken relationship that came from someone not being ready.

She may have said it was what she wanted but I know better. I should have walked away. I should have refused our mate bond. She's so young, so innocent, and she deserves more than me. More than this.

I stand up, pacing the floor. Every step feels like I'm walking on broken glass. Every part of me is screaming to go to her, to feel her again, but I know I can't. She'll be better off without me.

I've been around long enough to know the bond doesn't care what's good for either of us. It just pulls. And when it pulls this hard, it doesn't give a damn about the consequences.

I can't give in to this. I can't let her see me for what I really am.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I turn to her, feeling the weight of it all crash down on me, the truth I've been trying to avoid. But the bond is so strong now, I can't lie to myself. I can't hide from what I am to her, and what she is to me.

She stirs, my name a soft murmur escaping her lips, and her eyes flicker open. They lock onto mine, that intense, searching gaze, and I feel it again, that damn pull. The irresistible way she draws me to her like a magnet.

She's still mine.

"Abel?" Her voice is weak, still sleepy, but there's an undercurrent of something in it. Something ... needy. She doesn't have to say it. I know what she wants. I know what she needs. I can't help myself. I take a step toward her, drawn like a moth to a flame, even though every ounce of me is screaming to run. To walk away and never look back.

But I don't.

I sit on the edge of the bed again, my eyes never leaving hers. I can't stop looking at her. The bond makes it impossible. That's not true. Even before the bond, I couldn't keep my eyes off her. I've been infatuated since the moment she showed up at Dark Side of the Moon, her presence filling my thoughts and fantasies even though I tried to fight it.

"Are you okay?" I ask, my voice low, rough.

She nods slowly, her lips curving into a tired smile. "Yeah. Just ... a little stiff."

“Don’t lie to me, Juliet. I can feel you.” The words slip out before I can stop them. The bond is stronger now.

Her breath catches, and I see the flicker of realization cross her face. Her eyes go wide for a split-second, and then her shoulders sag. She looks away from me, pulling the sheets tighter around her.

“I don’t know what to do now,” she whispers. “You don’t want this. Me.”

And fuck, if that doesn’t hit me like a goddamn punch to the gut. Because neither do I.

I want to reach out, to pull her into my arms and tell her everything’s going to be okay, tell her I want her and only her, but I can’t. Because I don’t know if it will be okay and I refuse to lie to her. I know this isn’t going to be simple. Not with everything at stake.

I’m not the right man for her. I’m not the man she deserves. And yet, here we are. The bond is unbreakable. We will be linked until one of us dies. Or one of us decides to sever the bond.

“We shouldn’t have done this,” I finally say, the words coming out harsher than I intended.

She looks at me, hurt flashing across her face before she schools her expression. “What do you mean?”

I take a deep breath, trying to keep my emotions in check. I don’t want to hurt her. I don’t want to push her away. But I know I need to.

“This,” I say, my voice thick with emotion. “You and me ... this bond ... it’s not good

for either of us. You're young. You have a life to live. A future."

"And you don't think I know that?" She sounds so small, so vulnerable. It fucking tears at me.

I want to hold her. I want to kiss her and tell her everything's fine, but I can't. I can't let myself fall any further into this. Into her. She pulls the sheets tighter around her once more, her lips trembling. "I don't care about the future. I just care about right now. About you."

And goddamn, her words crush me. I run a hand through my hair, standing up, fighting the urge to go to her.

"I can't give you what you want," I say, my voice thick with regret. "I'm not the guy you think I am. I'm not a good person, Juliet. You deserve better."

But her gaze stays fixed on me, unwavering, despite the unfallen tears clinging to her lashes. "I don't want better. I want you."

And that's it. That's the moment I know I'm in deeper than I've ever been. I don't fight what I am feeling anymore. I go to her, take her in my arms, and kiss her with every ounce of passion and want I am feeling. She rolls me over, straddling my hips and taking my cock inside her. I lose myself inside her once more even though I said I wouldn't.

I am so fucked.

Chapter Ten

Juliet

I wake up alone, the spot beside me empty and cold, the scent of Abel still heavy in the air. My body is sore, but there's something different about it—a deep, primal ache that's lingering, that won't go away. I shift to the side, and the ache deep inside me tightens, the pull between us stronger than ever. I can feel the bond stretching, deeper, harder, more real.

And I hate it.

I don't hate him. I don't even know how to explain it. The ache is inside me, gnawing away at the edges of my thoughts, and I can't escape it. But I also know this is more than just desire. This is the mate bond. This is a life-changing force.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I don't want to feel this way. I don't want to need him like this. But I do, and the worst part is I can't fight it. I'm not even sure I want to fight it. I close my eyes, breathing deeply, but I'm not sure if it's to calm myself or to drown out the reality of it.

I want him. I want everything he could offer, but the way he pushed me away after everything that happened between us ... that hurt. It hurt more than I want to admit. I can still feel his voice in my head, the words about how I deserve better, how he's not good enough for me.

That's the part that's breaking me, I think. Not the mating. Not the way my body is craving his touch again, though that's relentless. No. It's the way he's shutting me out. The way he thinks I can't handle it. Him.

I slip out of bed quietly, my body feeling like it's been through a war, but I know I won't find peace if I stay here. I need to think. I need to figure out what to do.

I know the bond is pushing me, calling me to him. I can't run from it. But I can't ignore the reality either.

There's a knock on my door and I freeze. My heart pounds in my chest. There's no mistaking who it is.

I stare at the brand-new lock on my door. I hesitate, but then the door opens slowly, and he steps inside. His eyes lock onto mine immediately, and I see that conflict there again. The same look he had last night. That same damn war waging in his head.

I take a step toward him, my legs trembling beneath me. “You don’t get to push me away,” I say, my voice rougher than I expect. I won’t let him do it again.

He looks at me, and for a moment, I see him struggling to make a decision. He exhales, his shoulders tense. “I’m not pushing you away, Juliet. I’m trying to protect you.”

“Protect me from what?” I ask, unable to keep the bite from my words. My heart is pounding in my chest, and I can feel the tension in my muscles. I’m tired of this, of him trying to make decisions for me. I’m not a fucking child.

He looks down at the floor for a long moment, his hands curling into fists at his sides. “From me,” he mutters. His voice is low, harsh. “I’m not what you need, Juliet. You deserve someone who can give you more than I can.”

“More?” I don’t even try to hide the frustration in my voice. “Abel, you’re not listening to me. I need you. I need this. I need us. You can’t just shut me out because you’re scared. What are you going to do? We’re bonded, mated.”

He doesn’t answer. Instead, he takes a step back, running a hand through his hair. I can see how badly he’s struggling. How torn he is between what the bond is demanding and what he wants to believe is right.

“You think you know what you’re getting into,” he says, his voice strained, “but I’m not the kind of man who can make you happy, Juliet. You deserve someone who isn’t as broken as I am.”

“Stop it,” I snap. “Just stop. You don’t get to make that decision for me.”

My chest is heaving now, and I can feel the tears stinging at the corners of my eyes, though I refuse to let them fall. I won’t cry in front of him. I won’t show him how

much he's getting to me.

"You think this is easy for me?" I continue, my voice shaking. "You think I want to feel this way about you? Do you think I want to be this desperate for someone who doesn't even think I'm worthy of him?"

I can see the hurt flash in his eyes. His jaw clenches as if he's fighting to hold back his own emotions.

"You're too young for this shit," he mutters, the words nearly breaking me. "And I'm the one who isn't fucking worthy."

I feel my breath catch in my throat. The weight of his words crushes me in a way I wasn't prepared for. The bond is overwhelming. It's suffocating. And I need him, but he's not letting me have him.

"I'm not too young for you," I say, my voice small but steady. "I know what I want. And I want you, Abel. I've always wanted you. And Fate has decided we are meant for each other, that you are worthy of happiness, that we both are."

He looks at me, and I see the flicker of doubt in his eyes. He doesn't speak for a long time, but when he finally does, his voice is barely above a whisper.

"I can't give you what you want. I can't be the man you need."

"But you already have," I reply, stepping closer to him. "You already are, Abel. You're mine. And I'm yours. We're mates." The word comes out like a plea, a desperate declaration, and I feel my chest tighten. "You can't fight it anymore."

For the first time, I see him falter. His shoulders drop slightly, and the hardness in his face softens just a fraction.

“I’m not the kind of man who’s good for you, Juliet,” he repeats, but now his voice is quieter. Softer. “I have a past I’ll never be able to outrun. I don’t know how to be the kind of man you deserve.”

“Then we’ll figure it out,” I say, reaching up to touch his cheek. “Together.”

He exhales, a deep, frustrated breath. His hands move to my waist, pulling me against him roughly. For a moment, neither of us speaks. The air between us crackles with everything unsaid, with everything we’re not saying. And then, finally, he tilts his head down and brushes his lips across mine.

The kiss is soft at first, tentative. But the pull of the bond, the need inside me, flares up, and I press myself against him harder, deepening the kiss. I need him. I need him like I’ve never needed anything before. I feel it in every part of me, in every fibre of my being.

“I don’t know if I can do this,” he mutters against my lips, his voice shaky. “But I can’t stay away from you, Juliet.”

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

“Then don’t,” I say, dropping to my knees in front of him.

I work quickly, popping the button of his jeans and lowering his zipper. His cock falls into my palm and saliva gathers in my mouth as slick gathers between my thighs. I tongue the crown of his cock before slipping his cock into my mouth. His hands spear into my hair, holding me in place as he shallowly fucks my face.

“Goddamn, Omega. Your mouth is amazing. I’m not going to last.”

A few seconds later he erupts in my mouth, and I drink down every last drop.

And in that moment, I know we’re past the point of no return.

Chapter Eleven

Abel

My legs give out and I end up on her living room floor, holding her, breathing her in. The kiss is still burning my lips, and her body is pressed against mine, sending shocks of heat through every nerve in my body.

But it’s not the kiss that has me losing my mind. It’s her. Everything about her. Her scent is all around me. Her warmth, her softness. The pull of the bond is relentless.

I never asked for this, and I never wanted it. But it’s mine now. She’s mine now. And I can’t undo it. I’m not even sure I want to.

Her words are still ringing in my head: “You’re mine, and I’m yours.”

I swallow hard, rolling her over so I can look at her.

“Abel...” Her voice is soft, questioning, and I can feel the weight of her gaze on me. She doesn’t understand. She doesn’t know who I really am.

I drag a hand through my hair. This is too much. It’s all too much.

“I’m not a good man,” I mutter under my breath, more to myself than to her.

“Meaning?” she asks, her voice almost a whisper, but there’s steel in it. She’s not backing down. She never does.

“I did terrible things,” I spit out, my hands trembling with frustration. “I hurt people.”

Her eyes narrow. “I don’t care what you did in the past. I don’t need perfect. I just need you.”

The words hit me like a punch to the gut, and for a moment, I don’t know what to say. I thought I could fight this. I thought I could push her away. I thought if I stayed cold enough, distant enough, I could keep her safe from me.

But it’s not that simple. It never was. She’s already made her way into my soul. She’s already there, a part of my life, a part of me in a way I can’t escape.

“I’m not good enough for you,” I repeat, my voice breaking. “I’m not the man you deserve. I’m just a fuckup, Juliet. A guy with too much baggage. I can’t give you what you need.”

“You don’t get to decide that for me,” she snaps, her voice growing more forceful.

“Maybe you don’t care,” I say, my voice low and harsh, “but I don’t get to have this. Not with you. Not with anyone.”

“Why not?” she asks. “Why can’t we figure this out? Why can’t we make this work?”

I want to shout at her, tell her she doesn’t know what she’s asking. I want to say there’s too much at stake here, my business, my past, her life, her father, everything I’ve built. And the fucking bond is pulling me to her like a magnet. It’s overwhelming. It’s destroying my ability to think.

But instead, I say, “Because I’m an asshole. And I can’t be the man you need.”

There. I’ve said it. I’ve admitted what I am. “I’m a shitty person and I always have been. Just because I stopped running a criminal empire doesn’t mean I’m not that person anymore.”

Juliet pulls me toward her, her eyes filled with something close to frustration, but also a deep, unwavering determination. She doesn’t understand what I’m trying to tell her, what I’m trying to protect her from. She sees me as a man who can be redeemed. But I know I’m too broken, too tainted by my past and the things I’ve done.

“You’re not an asshole,” she says softly, her voice steady despite the way my words must have cut her. “You’re just scared. And that’s okay. So am I. But I’m not asking you to be perfect. I’m asking you to be with me. We both have a past, what I want to work on is our future, together.”

I swallow hard, trying to hold back the emotions rising in my throat. “You don’t know what you’re asking.”

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

“I do,” she insists. “I know what I’m asking. I’m asking you to trust me.”

“Trust you?” The words catch in my throat. “Do you understand what’s at stake here, Juliet? This ... it’s not just some phase. It’s a bond. A mate bond. That means something. It means everything. If we fulfill this mating, if I let you mark me, I can’t walk away from it. But neither can you.”

She pauses, letting the weight of my words sink in. But she doesn’t pull away from me like I expected. Instead, she takes a deep breath, eyes burning with resolve.

“I want this. I want you.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying,” I mutter again, standing and backing away from her. “This isn’t what you think it is. It’s not some fairy tale.” I put my cock back in my pants and walk to the far side of the room.

“Then tell me what it is, Abel,” she demands, her voice growing louder, more desperate. “Tell me exactly what this is. Because all I see is us.”

I close my eyes, running my hand through my hair again. I’m losing control. I can feel the bond pulling me to her, making it impossible to think clearly. But I can’t let it go on. I can’t let myself fall this hard, this fast.

“I can’t let you do this,” I say, my voice breaking, my chest tight with a mixture of desire and fear. “I can’t let you ruin your life by being with someone like me.”

“You don’t get to tell me how to live my life,” she says for what feels like the

hundredth time, her eyes fierce. “And you don’t get to decide for me that I don’t want you. Because I do. I want you.”

I look at her, and for a second, I almost cave. All we are doing here is going in fucking circles. She simply won’t fucking listen.

But I pull back again, the pain in my chest too sharp to ignore. “I’m not the man you need, Juliet. You’re too young. You deserve better.”

She looks up at me, eyes filled with something both tender and defiant. “I don’t want better. I want you.”

I don’t know how to answer that. I don’t know what to say anymore. All I know is that the longer I stand here, the harder it is to walk away. And I’m starting to wonder if I even want to.

Chapter Twelve

Juliet

Two Days Later

I didn’t expect things to get easier. I didn’t expect him to suddenly change his mind and accept this bond like some love story I’ve read about in a book. But this—the quiet silence between us—is unbearable.

Abel’s been avoiding me for two fucking days. Not in a way that’s obvious, but in subtle, painful little gestures. His body language, the way he doesn’t make eye contact when I walk by, the way he retreats into his office at the club or works on the business late into the night. It hurts.

Every day, the bond pulls at me, the ache growing deeper with every passing moment. My body is attuned to him now. Every part of me craves him, but there's no release. There's only this gnawing hunger, an emptiness I can't escape.

I've tried talking to him, tried to explain, tried to make him understand I'm not some fragile little girl who needs protecting. But every time I get close, he shuts down. He clams up. The more I push, the further he pulls away. And I can't decide if it's because he's afraid of hurting me or because he's terrified of what this bond means for him.

Not that he is letting me live my life either. He won't let me dance, instead relegating me to the bar. I'm not allowed to walk anywhere, he insists on driving me. And even though he won't spend the night with me, I know he is sitting outside my apartment in his car. He is driving us both crazy. But I'm not backing down. I can't.

After my shift, I wait until everyone leaves before making my way through the club, trying to push the tension out of my body, trying to ignore the pulse in my veins that seems to scream out for him. But it's hard to escape the hunger. The need. It's always there.

I make my way through the back hall, passing by the dressing rooms and the storage closet. I don't hesitate or stop to think about what I am doing. I know what I'm looking for.

Abel's office door is slightly ajar. The low hum of his voice drifts out, but I can't tell if he's talking to someone or just on the phone. The door creaks when I push it open, and I step inside.

He's sitting at his desk, staring at the papers in front of him, his massive shoulders hunched over as if the weight of the world is on him. His shirt is undone at the top and his sleeves are rolled up, his tattoos glistening in the dim light. I notice that his

jaw is clenched tightly, the tension running through him almost palpable.

For a moment, I just watch him. And my heart breaks.

He's fighting this. He's fighting me. He's fighting us.

I hate that.

Closing and locking the door behind me, I walk closer, and his eyes flick up to meet mine as he hangs up the phone. There's nothing but wariness in his gaze. No warmth. No softness. Just the cold distance he's putting between us.

"Abel," I say quietly, my voice low but determined. "We need to talk."

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

His lips tighten, and he doesn't respond right away. The seconds stretch out, thick with unspoken words between us. He doesn't move. Doesn't even acknowledge me as anything other than another problem he has to deal with.

I hate this. I hate this distance.

I take another step forward, ignoring the ache in my chest that tells me to give him space, to let him breathe.

"I'm not going anywhere," I say, the words sharp and firm, cutting through the air between us.

He doesn't react. Just stares at me, his hands still gripping the edge of the desk like he's holding onto something that's slipping through his fingers.

I step closer, standing directly in front of his desk. I lean over, allowing my flowy pink top to gape open and show him I am not wearing a bra. His scent is a mix of sweat, leather, and something deeper, something that's uniquely him, and it sends a shiver through me. The bond pulls at me, urging me to close the gap, to press myself against him and claim what's mine.

But I don't. Not yet.

"You're not going to make this easy, are you?" I say, my voice barely above a whisper. "You're not going to let me in. You're not going to let me help you."

"I don't need help," he mutters, his voice rough, almost defeated.

“Then what do you need, Abel?” My heart is pounding in my chest. “What do you want from me? Do you want me to walk away? Is that it? Because I’m not leaving. Not now. Not ever. This bond...” I gesture between us, “it’s not something I can ignore. And neither can you.”

“I never asked for this,” he says, his voice low and filled with frustration. “I never wanted this bond. This connection. I can’t...” He clenches his jaw, the muscles in his neck tightening. “I can’t do this to you.”

“But you already have,” I snap, pulling my shirt down and showing him his mark. “You’ve already bonded with me. Whether you like it or not, we’re stuck with each other.”

His eyes flash with something—anger, guilt, frustration—but it’s quickly buried, replaced by that cold, distant mask he wears when he’s trying to shut me out.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he says, almost like a confession, a raw truth that breaks through his usual bravado.

“You already are,” I say, the words sharper than I intend. “You’re hurting me by pushing me away.”

I can feel the air in the room shift. His shoulders stiffen, and for the first time in what feels like forever, I see a crack in his armour. His eyes flicker to mine, and I catch a glimpse of the man he’s trying so hard to hide, the man who’s struggling as much as I am.

“I don’t know how to do any of this, Juliet,” he whispers, his voice barely audible.

Slowly, I round his desk, removing my top and dropping it onto his lap. Once beside him, I lay flat on his desk, my face turned in his direction. I lift the short denim skirt I

am wearing, revealing my naked ass to his gaze.

“You can start by fucking your mate,” I say softly. “I need you.”

I feel the bond hum between us, growing stronger with every passing second. The air is thick with the pull of it, the weight of everything unsaid, everything we’re too afraid to face.

He breathes in slowly, his chest rising with a deep sigh. I watch his struggle, his internal war, and I know that no matter what, he’s not going to give in easily.

Then his chair rolls over his office carpet and he positions himself behind me. His hands caress the globes of my ass, softly massaging them. A single finger slips between my thighs, teasing my pussy before slipping inside. A mewl falls from my lips as my back arches.

“Why do you keep tempting me?” he asks. I mewl, not able to say a single word. “For the first time in my life, I am trying to do the right thing. I’m trying to be a good man.”

“I only want you.” I arch my back and fuck myself onto his finger. “Please, Abel.”

I hear him unbuckle his belt and pull down his zipper. I wait with bated breath for him to do something, anything.

“You’re going to be the fucking death of me.” His hand wraps in my hair and keeps me pinned to the wooden surface. His cock spears into me and I can’t hold back my moan. “Fuck! How is this pussy even better than before?”

“Fuck me,” I beg like a whore.

“Hold on tight, Little Omega.”

And then he unleashes on me. His hips piston into me, his abdomen slapping against my ass. Obscene noises come from both of us as he fucks me like a beast. An orgasm hits me and as soon as I think it has passed, it flows into another one.

My legs tremble but Abel keeps me upright. I feel his knot swell as his cum fills me. His knot locks us in place and a moment later he falls back into his chair, clutching me to his chest. His hands pet me, playing with my nipples and rubbing my clit, drawing the last vestiges of pleasure out of my sated body.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

“You’re beautiful, Juliet. A perfect omega. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

Chapter Thirteen

Abel

I didn’t expect it to feel like this.

I thought if I kept pushing her away, if I kept telling myself this bond wasn’t real, maybe it would stop hurting. Maybe I’d be able to make it go away or at least numb it. But I’m sitting here now with her on my lap, my knot locked inside her, and every part of me is screaming for her. My body, my mind, my soul—it’s all tangled up in the pull of her scent, the softness of her skin, the steady rhythm of her heart. In her.

The thing is, it’s not just about the bond or the sex, even though I have never had better. It’s not just about the way she smells, or the way she feels when she’s near me. It’s the way she looks at me, like she sees something in me I can’t even begin to recognize.

I’m not used to this. I’m not used to someone seeing past the rough exterior, the scars, the tattoos, the mistakes, and looking at me like I’m worthy. But Juliet does. And it’s breaking me.

The moment she walked into my office, standing there with that fire in her eyes, I couldn’t breathe. She’s not backing down. She’s not going to just walk away because I tell her I’m too broken. She is using our bond against me, tempting me like a damn

siren at every opportunity. And I am too fucking weak to stay away.

The guilt hits me in waves, crashing over me until I can hardly think straight. I don't want to hurt her. I've been trying to protect her, trying to keep her away from the mess that is me. But we've been together a lot this past week and she could be carrying my child right now. My hand caresses her stomach, a new sense of longing in my gut. Longing for something I never thought I would want.

The reality is, I'm drowning. And the only person who can save me is cradled against my chest.

I close my eyes for a second, rubbing my forehead, trying to push away the tightness in my chest. I feel the weight of her gaze on me, heavy and unwavering. She's waiting. She's patient, but I know it won't last.

"You don't get it, Juliet," I mutter, my voice raw. "I'm a fucking disaster. I've made mistakes. I'm not the man you think I am and I don't deserve you."

Her voice is soft, but there's steel in it. "You don't get to decide that for me, Abel. You don't get to decide who deserves who. I'm not asking for perfection. I'm asking for you."

And she is asking for me. It hits me harder than I want it to. She doesn't care about the mess I've made of myself, about the things I've done, the mistakes that have shaped me into this ... shell of a man.

"What about your father?"

"He isn't part of this decision," she says firmly. "He can either accept that I am a grown-up and living the life I want, or he can stay out of it."

“Juliet...”

“No,” she says firmly cutting me off. “You have enough bullshit reasons to try and keep me away. My father won’t be another.” She is firm about her feelings.

I’ve kept her at arm’s length because I’m terrified of hurting her. But the thing is, I’m already hurting her by keeping her away. Fuck.

Throwing caution to the wind, I kiss her deeply, feeling the weight of her presence. Her scent is intoxicating, a delicate mix of lavender and something deeper, primal. The bond is a fire in my blood, burning through every inch of me.

I don’t know how much longer I can hold out.

She’s right. I’ve been running from this bond, running from the truth of what I feel for her, because I’m scared. Scared that I’ll ruin everything. That I’m not enough. That she’ll regret this, regret me. But all my reasons are just excuses for me to hide behind.

But it’s too late. She’s already mine. I’m already hers. And I can’t keep fighting it. Not when every part of me is saying she’s the one thing I’ve been missing my entire life.

I can feel her heartbeat against mine, and for the first time in days, I stop fighting it. The bond. Her. I lean down, brushing my lips against her forehead, breathing her in. She’s my fated mate. The one person I was always meant to have.

“I can’t keep pushing you away,” I whisper, my voice strained. “I don’t want to. I don’t know what to do with you, Juliet.”

Her fingers slide to the back of my neck, tugging me down so our lips meet once

more. The kiss is slow at first, tentative, but it quickly turns desperate. I can't get enough of her, her warmth, her sweetness, the way her scent fills me, claiming every part of me.

She moans softly against my lips, and I lose control. I just fucked her like a madman and already I want more, my cock already hardening again. I tug her closer, my hands sliding down her perfect naked body, pulling her tight against me. I feel the heat of her skin, the way her body presses against mine, and my breath catches.

"You're mine," I growl against her lips. "I can't deny it anymore and I don't want to. I can't stay away."

She slides from my lap, my knot having released, but only turns around to straddle me. My cock is at half-mast already when Juliet rubs her dripping pussy against my length. A growl erupts from within my chest as she nips at my throat.

Her hands grip the front of my shirt, tugging me closer as if she's trying to fuse herself with me, and I feel the need, the urge to claim her, to mark her as mine again, rising up in me. The bond is too strong now. Too undeniable. The wolf inside me roars in approval.

Page 20

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I feel the pull of her body, the hunger in her touch, and I know it's only a matter of time before I can't control it anymore. I can't deny it. She's mine. And now it's her turn to claim me.

“Ride me, Omega. Fuck me until my knot is locked inside your pretty little cunt,” I say, staring at her. “And then, I want you to mark me. Show the world I belong to you. Set our bond.”

Chapter Fourteen

Juliet

I can't breathe.

I'm sitting here, naked on his lap, my skirt around my hips, with his growing erection pushing at my sex, my legs still trembling from the way he took me before. Abel's lips are warm on my skin, his breath ragged in the aftermath. The air around us feels thick, charged with the tension that's been building between us for weeks.

I never thought it would happen like this. Not like this. I expected him to fight harder, to push me away for a lot longer, but the moment he fucked me over his desk, I knew it was different. Everything I thought I knew about him, about us, slipped away. The walls he's built, the defenses he's put up, crumbled to dust.

I feel like I'm floating. Just drifting in a sea of him.

I pull back slightly, just enough to look at him. His expression is conflicted, fierce,

desperate, but there's a flicker of something softer there too. He's still struggling with it. With us. I can see it in the way his brow furrows, the way his jaw clenches. He's afraid. I can feel it. But he's not pulling away. Not like he's done before.

I don't want to give him space. I want him closer. I want to feel the full weight of him, all of him. My pulse is erratic, and the bond thrums through me like a steady, insistent beat, pushing me toward him. I've never wanted anything, or anyone, like I want him.

I lean up to kiss him again, this time more slowly, deliberately. The kiss deepens, and I can taste the hunger in him. He wants me. He wants to give in. But there's something holding him back, and I know it's the same fear he's been hiding from me all along. The fear that I'm going to walk away. That I'll get hurt.

But I'm not walking away. Not this time.

"I'm not going anywhere," I whisper between kisses, my hands slipping under his shirt to feel the warmth of his skin. "You've got me, Abel. All of me. You don't get to push me away anymore."

Slowly, I lower myself down on his length. The walls of my sex pulse around him, holding him in place. He groans low in his throat, the sound like a growl, and pulls me even closer. My heart races as his hands slide down my back, tugging me into his chest. I can feel his heart pounding too, matching mine, our bodies in sync as if they've always known each other.

Slowly, I ride him. His hands are on my ass, caressing the globes as I move my hips back and forth. This isn't like any of the other times. This isn't just sex, this is the two of us coming together. Slowly I feel my orgasm building and the moment it crests, he holds me tightly, finding his own release and setting his knot.

“You sure about this, Juliet?” His voice is rough, his lips trailing along my jawline as he speaks, sending shivers down my spine. “Because I don’t know how to give you what you need.”

“You already are,” I reply, my voice steady despite the storm inside me. “You’re giving me everything. You just have to let go. Let us be together.”

His eyes flicker with something deep, something raw, and I know he’s not just talking about the physical act. He’s talking about the bond between us. The connection that neither of us can deny.

“Then claim me,” he says, his voice almost a growl.

And in that moment, I realize I’ve already claimed him. I’ve already marked him with my soul. We are bound. And it’s not just the bond of our bodies—it’s something deeper, something I can’t explain. It’s fate.

My hands roam across his chest, feeling the hard planes of his muscles, the intricate patterns of his tattoos that seem to tell stories I can’t yet understand. I need to know him. I need to feel everything he’s willing to give.

“I’m not afraid of you, Abel,” I whisper, my breath shaky, my fingers trembling as they move to the collar of his shirt to move the fabric away. “I want you. All of you.”

Leaning forward, I allow my jaw to clamp down on his shoulder where I have worked his shirt out of the way. I feel his skin break and the coppery tang of blood coat my tongue. Both of us moan loudly and his cock twitches inside me.

Pulling away, I kiss him deeply before leaning back to look at him. I think I’ve gone too far. But then he pulls my hands up to his mouth, kissing my knuckles as though I’ve just given him a treasure. His eyes meet mine—dark, intense, a storm brewing

within them—and for a brief second, I see the conflict there.

But I don't care anymore. I'm done waiting for him to make up his mind. He can't take back what we've done.

"I don't know how to love you, Juliet," he murmurs, his voice thick with emotion. "I don't know if I can. I'm broken."

I swallow hard, forcing myself to steady my breath. He's still scared. Still unsure. But the bond between us doesn't care about his fear.

"You don't have to know how," I say gently, cupping his face in my hands. "I'm here. You don't have to do anything but be here with me. You're not broken, Abel. You're mine, and that's all I need."

His eyes soften, and something inside him seems to snap.

Before I know it, his hands are on me again, pulling me closer, his mouth crushing against mine in a kiss that is wild, desperate, and full of need. I feel the heat between us ignite again, burning hotter than before.

Page 21

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I tug at his clothes, and this time he doesn't stop me. He pulls his shirt off in one swift motion, and I drink in the sight of him. The strong planes of his chest, the rough scars that tell stories of battles fought, both physical and emotional. He's everything I've ever wanted, even if he doesn't see it.

"I need you," I whisper, my voice shaky with desire.

"You have me," he replies, his voice hoarse with hunger.

Every movement feels like a decision, like we're both choosing each other over the fears that have kept us apart. There's nothing between us now except desire and the bond that pulls us together like two halves of a whole.

I know this is only the beginning. The beginning of claiming everything we've been fighting for. Of letting go of the walls we've both built. Of becoming one.

Chapter Fifteen

Abel

I can't breathe.

I should be feeling something else, something less than this, but all I feel is the weight of her, the weight of what we've just done. Her body is still pressed against mine, her scent enveloping me, her heart beating in sync with mine. It should feel like relief. It should feel like I've gotten what I wanted, like the fire that's been burning inside me for months has finally been quenched.

But it's not that simple. Nothing with her ever is.

I'm lying here in my bed where I carried her a few hours ago, naked, still tangled in the sheets, her body curled against me like she belongs there. And in a way, she does. My hand moves to her hair, tracing the soft curve of her cheek as I watch her sleep. Her breath is steady, calm, but I can feel the tension in her, just beneath the surface. She's not as at ease as she appears. And I know it's my fault, that I am hurting her no matter how hard I try not to.

The moment we crossed that line, I knew there was no going back. The bond between us isn't just a physical pull anymore. It's deeper than that. It's more than the knot that's forming inside me, more than the way I can smell her even when she's not in the room.

She's mine. I'm hers. And that is terrifying.

I thought I could keep her at arm's length, thought I could tell myself I was protecting her from the mess I've made of my life. But in the end, it wasn't about me keeping her safe. It was about me being the one to open up to her, to let her into this mess I've created. And now she's here. She's with me.

I should be pushing her away. I should be telling her to leave before it's too late. But I don't. I don't want to. Besides, it's way past the point of turning back.

I roll onto my back, closing my eyes, trying to sort through the mess in my mind. My thoughts are scattered, torn between the overwhelming sense of want and the deeper fear that I'm ruining everything. I've spent years keeping people at a distance and the past six months keeping her at a distance. And now, with her so close, I feel like I'm losing myself.

I hear her shift beside me, and before I can think about it, she's moving into me

again, her head resting on my chest, her body molding to mine like we've always fit together this way. Her hand presses against my side, and I feel the weight of her touch settle into my bones.

This is it, I think. This is what it's like. What it's supposed to be like. The knot in my stomach tightens again. I can feel it. The mate bond.

I don't have a choice anymore. It's not about what I want, or what I think I deserve. It's about her. And for the first time in a long time, I'm starting to wonder if maybe I do deserve this. Maybe I do deserve her.

Her lips brush my chest, a soft kiss, as though she's just checking that I'm still here. That I'm still hers.

"I never thought it would be like this," she murmurs, her voice quiet, laced with both wonder and fear. "I thought ... I thought you'd always push me away. That you didn't want me."

I clench my jaw, my fingers digging into the sheets. I can't let her see how much her words affect me. I can't let her see how much it kills me to think she might ever doubt my feelings for her.

"I'm sorry you ever thought I didn't want you," I say, my voice low, rough from the emotions I've been holding back. "You're everything, and I have wanted you since I laid eyes on you. How could I not?"

Her hand slides up my chest, and she lifts her head to meet my gaze. Her eyes are so clear, so open. She doesn't hide anything from me. She never has. And that's what I'm afraid of.

I've spent my whole life hiding from people. Hiding from myself. But with her,

there's nowhere to run. I can't hide. Not from her. Not from the bond or the things she makes me feel.

"I'm not going anywhere," she says softly, her fingers tracing the outline of my jaw. "I'm not leaving you. Not now. Not ever."

The words feel like a promise, and they cut deeper than I expect.

"I don't know if I'm good for you, Juliet," I confess, my throat tight. "I've done too much. I've hurt too many people. I'm not the man you think I am. But I want to be."

She doesn't pull away. She doesn't flinch or look at me like I'm some kind of monster.

"I know who you are," she whispers, her voice steady. "I may not know what you've been through. But I don't care. You're mine, and that's all that matters. Nothing will ever change that."

Page 22

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 9:45 am

I feel something shift inside me, like the walls I've built around my heart are crumbling, piece by piece. It's terrifying. It's beautiful. It's everything I've been running from. But I can't keep running. I can't keep lying to myself.

I roll over onto my side, facing her fully, letting the bond between us settle. Her hand slides across the tattoos and scars on my chest, and I take a deep breath, drawing her closer. I can't hold back anymore. I can't not let go.

She's right. She's always been right.

This is us. This is it.

And it's fucking terrifying. But it's real. And for the first time in a long time, I don't want to run anymore.

Chapter Sixteen

Juliet

Four Months Later

I wake up to the warm weight of Abel's arm around me, his chest pressed against my back, his breathing steady and deep. For a moment, I lie still, taking in the warmth of his body and the calm, steady rhythm of his heart. This is where I belong, where I've always belonged. The bond between us pulses, a constant thrum of connection I can't escape, but now I don't want to.

The euphoria of our mating still lingers in my veins. I feel whole. We've crossed the threshold together, and I can feel it in my bones, in the way my body seems to know him even more deeply now. The marks we left on each other, the taste of our kiss, the way our bodies melded together perfectly. It's all part of us, of what we've become.

I turn in his arms, lifting my head just enough to see his face. His hair is messy, his jaw still rough with the stubble he refuses to shave. But his eyes, those eyes, are soft, a rare vulnerability hidden there that I never expected to see from the man who's always been so sure of himself.

"Morning," I whisper, my voice still a little hoarse from the passion we shared last night.

"Morning," Abel replies, his voice thick, like he hasn't quite woken up yet. His hand moves to my growing baby bump, brushing over my skin in a tender caress. The touch makes my heart flutter. "You're still here," he adds with a soft chuckle, as if he can't quite believe it. As if I'm a dream he might wake up from.

I nod, my chest tightening. "I'm not going anywhere. I'm yours now, Abel."

He pulls me closer, wrapping both arms around me, and kisses my forehead softly. I can feel the weight of his emotions through the bond between us. He's still overwhelmed by everything that's happened, by the fact that we've completed our mating. That I chose him, and he chose me. And it's been months.

"I don't deserve you," he murmurs, his lips brushing my skin as he speaks.

"You deserve everything," I say softly, cupping his face and meeting his gaze. "We deserve this, Abel."

He kisses me then, slow and deep, a kiss that speaks of promises, of all the things left unsaid between us. It's gentle but filled with an intensity that makes my body ache

for more. My skin is burning, and I feel like I could stay here forever, safe, wanted, and completely loved.

“I’m not letting you go,” he mutters against my lips. “Ever.”

I didn’t tell my father the truth for a long time. Not until the bond had already formed. Not until Abel had become something more than my boss. More than just a man, but my mate and my future, my everything. Not until after we found out I was pregnant.

When I finally told my father the truth—about the club, about the patch, and about Abel—he didn’t raise his voice. He didn’t storm out or threaten to kill the man I loved. He just sat there, quiet for a long time, like he was counting every breath before he let the next words out.

“Did he force you?”

“No.”

"Did he claim you without permission?"

“No.”

"Did you choose him?"

I nodded, trembling. “I chose him. I choose him every day.”

Then he did the one thing I didn’t expect. He hugged me. And just like that, the distance between us was bridged.

We're not perfect now. But we're trying. He calls every Sunday. Abel never forgets his birthday. And when he visits, he makes sure to knock before stepping inside our space.

It's not what I thought I'd have. But it's mine. Ours. And for the first time in my life, I'm not hiding who I am.

I'm an omega. I'm a dancer. I'm a mate.

And I am not afraid anymore.

The End