



The Omega's Savior

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Description: She never wanted an alpha. Then one rescues her and sweeps her off her feet.

Olivia has seen the worst of how alphas and omegas use each other. She's seen the insane things her omega mother has done to get an alpha and vowed she wouldn't fall into the same trap. All she wants to do is focus on keeping her younger sister safe and happy. Then, her world falls apart when she's kidnapped by traffickers ready to sell her to the highest bidder. She's rescued by Jax, a rich playboy with scars from his past who never thought love was in the cards for him. From the very first moment he sees her, he's captivated. He's willing to do everything he can to prove to her she can trust him.

Will he be able to bring her walls down?

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CHAPTER 1

OLIVIA

Being kidnapped fucking sucks. Well, I guess technically I wasn't kidnapped, I was sold, but still. I don't want to be here in this goddamn hole in the wall.

"What do you think they're going to do to us?" Willow, the sweet girl, a few years younger than me asks.

I lean my head back against the wall of the concrete, makeshift cell we've been put in.

"They're alphas," I practically snarl. "We're omegas. It's pretty self-explanatory what they want with us."

"Oh," she says, curling herself into a ball, her knees hugged to her chest. She leans her head down so the only thing I can see are her golden curls.

The shake of her shoulders as she trembles in the corner makes something twist inside me. She doesn't deserve me snapping at her.

I stand and move to sit next to her, leaning to bump her shoulder against mine.

"Hey," I say softly, my tone a lot less harsh than earlier. "Sorry for snapping at you, I'm just stressed."

She peeks up at me, wiping away her tears. “It’s okay, I get it, you’ve been here longer.”

I nod, sighing and kicking my legs out in front of me.

“How did they manage to nab you?” I ask her.

“I—I was trying to find suppressants at a party,” she answers.

“Wait, how old are you?”

“Twenty.”

“Fuck,” I say, sitting up and facing her. “You’re in school?”

“Yeah, I’m in college. I’m a visual arts major,” She gives me a sad smile as tears well in her eyes once more. “Not that that means anything here.”

“It totally means something, at least to me,” I scoff. “I was never good at art. I stopped trying when I was a kid.”

“How old are you?” She asks me.

The tension in her shoulders seems to relax as we continue to talk. She’s so young, she looks even younger than she is, she shouldn’t be here in a place like this.

“I’m twenty-six.”

“How did they get you, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Ha!” I laugh, leaning my head against the wall. “My mom sucks. She gave me to

them, I'm pretty sure for money or drugs. It could've been money to buy drugs for all I know."

Willow goes silent at my side.

"Sorry for the downer," I say. "I've just been here for a while and you're the first cellmate I've had."

"I'm sorry," Willow says softly. "Your mom sucks though."

"She does indeed suck," I laugh.

Willow is such a sweet girl. She tells me about her little dog and her favorite mediums of art. I feel a spark of protectiveness grow in my chest. She reminds me of my little sister.

I have to lean my head back and close my eyes to keep myself calm at the thought of my little sister. The thought of Summer having to stay with our mom makes my blood fucking boil. I have to make it out of here because if I don't, she'll be stuck with our horrible mom for however long that witch can keep her claws in her.

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The thick, metal, industrial door creaks open and an angry beta with dark, slicked-back hair comes in. I smell the choking fake alpha pheromones on him from across the room as if he pumps whatever serums that're made to mimic alphas into his veins.

“Get up,” He snarls. “Time to go piss.”

I stand, giving Willow a nod to follow. He walks us through the halls of whatever warehouse they're keeping us at and to the bathroom and stands at the open door, sneering at the two of us.

“Do you have to go?” I whisper to Willow.

She nods, nervously glancing at the beta at the door.

“He's not going to leave,” I sigh.

I do stand in front of the toilet, turning my back to Willow and doing my best to block his view of her. I cross my arms across my chest and stare him down. The beta who seems to so desperately want to be an alpha doesn't say anything, but he does bare his yellow teeth at me, so that's something.

Once she's done, she quickly washes her hands at the sink before shuffling back to me, wincing as her sneakers squeak on the linoleum floor. When I make my move to use the toilet too, she stands where I stood for her, though she faces towards me and just looks up at the ceiling.

For some reason, my mind hooks on that. I know our lives have both been so

incredibly different. She's told me all about what she's been studying and her cute little dog, but still. It doesn't hit me until then how different our lives have been.

I'd never turn my back on anyone that could be a threat. Ever.

I know from experience what that can get you and I don't want to repeat that experience.

"Thanks," I say to Willow when the guard takes us back to our makeshift cell, which I'm pretty sure is an old storage room.

Even though this particular guard has made it a point to watch me every time he's come to take me for my bathroom break, I still appreciate her kindness.

"No, thank you," she says, picking at the cuticle of her thumb. "Do—do they do that all the time?"

"Not all the time, but that guy's a fucking creep. The others let you close the door but there's no lock and they bang on it if you take too long.

"Oh," she says.

I almost desperately want to tell her everything will be okay, say something to take the tension away from her shoulders. But I know I can't. It would probably be crueler to give her hope when there probably is none.

We only get to choke down one shitty meal together before they come for her.

I know something's not right when I hear a lot more footsteps than normal. When the door opens, there are two hulking alphas surrounding a man in an all too fancy, grey, three-piece suit with snow-white hair. I don't think I've seen eyes that dark. I'm not

one for poetics, but it looks like evil lives in his eyes.

He nods down to Willow, who's curled up in the corner behind me.

"Take the blonde one for transport," Suitman says.

I press my hand against Willows and can feel her trembling. She squeezes my hand almost desperately. A desperation I'm familiar with.

I'm not just going to let them take her without a fight. I won't let her feel like no one will fight for her before she's taken away. Even though this stupid ass plan is doomed for failure, I won't let her feel like she's not worth fighting for. Maybe it'll give her the strength to get through whatever bullshit life is going to put her through since life seems to have it out for us omegas right now.

I hiss at the alpha that moves forward to grab at Willow. He stops for a second as if he's surprised that I'm fighting him, but he still moves forward.

I lunge forward and aim a strike at his throat, managing to hit it with my open palm. He stumbles backwards coughing.

The other alpha goon lunges forward, grabbing me from behind as I claw at the air, kicking and screaming. He wraps his arm around my neck and locks my arms behind me pretty easily, but not before I manage to slam an elbow into his ribs.

Suitman steps in front of me, his eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Shut up," He barks, his dominance hitting me like a brick and making me freeze. My throat muscles lock, unable to make any noise with the hold his bark has over me.

I hate my body so much in moments like these. If my body doesn't even belong to me

then what good is having one in the first place?

“Let me go!” Willow cries as she’s dragged up from the floor by the other alpha. Tears stream down her face and the fear on her expression breaks my heart. “Let me go!”

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“You’re a curious little thing. I didn’t know you had this much of an attitude,” Suitman says, tracing a finger down my cheek. “That’s a marketable characteristic, you know. Some alphas will pay a premium for an omega they can break.”

“Fuck you,” I snarl, snapping his teeth at my finger.

An eerie smile crosses his face as he jerks his hand back. “Anyways, your little friend,” he says, stepping backward and waving a hand at Willow. “Has already been sold. So it looks like you’ll be alone again until I can find you a buyer interested in your... temperament.”

He waves his hand and the alpha guard that has a hold on Willow drags her out of the cell. To her credit, she kicks and screams nearly as much as I did.

“Olivia!” She cries. I can still hear her, even when she’s dragged outside and I have to close my eyes for a second to collect myself.

Suitman turns his eyes back to me. “Unfortunately for you, I can’t have you running around and throat-punching my men anymore.” He nods at the man holding me and makes his way out of the cell. “Leave her conscious, but make sure she doesn’t get any more ideas.”

The guard throws me to the ground when his boss leaves. His manic smile makes fear skate down my spine, especially with the instructions his boss gave him before leaving.

The kick in my ribs makes me curl into myself. Getting kicked in the ribs isn’t

exactly an unfamiliar feeling, but it's probably because it's a familiar feeling that I feel myself drifting off.

My mind starts checking out of my body.

I'm grateful for it because things continue for what feels like forever.

But even though I try to focus on the feeling of floating away, there's still one thread keeping me attached to my body. The pain, I can at least try to get over, but the burning, fiery anger?

Not a chance.

That shit is pulsing through my veins. I can feel it pulsing in my temple, though, that could just be the blood dripping down my face and into my hairline from when he pressed my face into the concrete wall.

When he leaves me, sprawled out on the floor, all that I'm left with is my pain and anger. A familiar enough combination that remind me of some of the darkest parts of my life.

CHAPTER 2

JAX

"You ready for this?" Brandon, arguably my best friend, asks me as he claps a hand on my back.

We're in the locker room, getting ready for a rescue operation. Our agency specializes in these sorts of mercenary jobs and we've been working towards taking down this ring of traffickers for months. Too long if you ask me, but today is the day.

“I was born ready,” I answer, strapping on the holsters for my firearms. “What about you?”

Brandon gives me a solemn nod.

“How’s Sadie doing with this?”

Sadie is Brandon’s bonded mate. I can imagine this is probably pretty stressful for her considering this is the first real field operation he’s going on since they got together. She’s also the data analyst who managed to pinpoint where these traffickers were probably keeping the omegas they were kidnapping.

“She’s a bit nervous for me, but she’s also pretty determined to get those omegas out so that’s what she’s been focusing on.”

“I bet you’ve been keeping her plenty distracted too,” I tease as I slide on my tactical gloves.

He rolls his eyes at me. I’m used to it at this point, Brandon’s always been pretty straight-laced. He’s always got a plan, which is great since I usually don’t.

When we’re all ready, we head along with the rest of the team to the trucks we’re using for transport to the locations of the operation. There’re two of them we’re hitting today, both in the warehouse district of the city. When Sadie gave her presentation to the agency about her analysis, she told us that the omegas were in one and the drugs were in the other.

These kinds of drug rings aren’t all that uncommon since the government sucks and isn’t willing to legalize and regulate the industry.

From the data we’ve been able to gather through our recon missions, they’ve been

using omega heat suppressants to lure a lot of their omega victims in. They've also supposedly been making bank with alpha enhancers, which is a newer kind of hormone that's hit the market. The easiest way of describing them is jacked up steroids, even for already jacked alphas. They even work for betas, which seems to make up a significant portion of their customer base, which is interesting.

On the ride over, the captain of the team is giving us a pep talk about the plan and going over our roles again.

"Everyone got that?" He finishes.

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“Yes, sir,” we all say.

I know my role in this like the back of my hand considering I pitched half of it. I was offered leadership of one of the teams, but I’m the type that likes to really get my hands dirty during a field mission. I can get a bit lost in my head during these things and I’m self aware enough to know that’s not what a team needs.

I’ve been offered a lot here, which makes sense since it was my trust fund that founded this thing when I first went into the military twelve years ago, but that’s beside the point. I like my job as it is and there’re a lot of other people who can do the other jobs of this agency better than I can.

We rush out of the van, Brandon and I heading for a door on the East side of this particular warehouse. Brandon, the tank out of the two of us, kicks down the door and I rush in, my guard raised. I’m expecting more action, but the only thing I see in this part of the warehouse are pallets of stuff.

“Awe, come on,” I sigh. “Looks like this is the warehouse with the drugs.”

“Don’t look so disappointed,” Brandon says, his eyes continuously scanning the area around us.

“I was just thinking I’d get to knock some heads together, you know?” I say, pulling out my radio. “I’ll call it in though.”

I call in that I’m pretty sure this is the warehouse where they’re keeping all the drugs.

“Make a sweep through the building, see what you can find,” The captain responds.
“Keep your guard up though, other teams have called in about guards.”

“Noted,” I answer.

The two of us make our way through the back halls, checking the various rooms. After making our way through an empty break room and a couple of empty supply closets, we hear voices from down one of the halls.

“What the fuck are we supposed to do?” I hear a voice hiss. “We can’t fucking run, the boss will have our fucking ass.”

“If you want to stay here and get fucking killed go right ahead, but I’m not dying for that bitch.”

A grin crosses my face. Finally. It’s been a while since I’ve been able to knock some heads around.

I signal to Brandon to cover me and I run down the hall, surprising the two guards. Their eyes go wide with surprise and I land a clean punch on one of the guys, sending him stumbling backward. I sweep the legs out from underneath the other one, sending him sprawling down to the floor.

Brandon comes in and starts handcuffing the one I knocked out and I start doing the same to the one who I managed to sweep to the floor. He’s still conscious though and he’s freaking out.

My nose twitches at his scent. It’s interesting. I don’t think I’ve ever smelled a beta this jacked up on alpha enhancers before, but it’s weird. No wonder it was so easy to take these guys down, they’re not actually alphas.

For most alphas and betas out there, there's a pretty big natural strength difference. Even though this guy has been pumping himself full of whatever enhancers are on the market, these days, he didn't stand a chance against someone with actual training, I guess.

"Damn, that was really easy," I say, turning to Brandon. "I was hoping I'd have more fun with that."

"Uh huh," Brandon says, sighing. He's used to the shit I say when I'm on the field though, so I don't take it too personally.

I look down at the guard I'm currently pinning down to the floor and something clicks in my head.

"Hey," I say, pulling him up to meet my eye. "Are you guys guarding anything here?"

There must be a reason that there're not one, but two guards, here out of all places in the warehouse. Especially when there's a whole bunch of unguarded products out on the main floor.

His eyes go wide and dart to the door behind me before he snaps his jaws shut.

"There is!" I say, excited. "You've gotta get a better poker face, man, I could read you like one of those cardboard books for three-year-olds."

"You want to check it out?" Brandon asks, seeming to pick up on my excitement.

I slap him on the back as he comes over to take care of the guy below me. "This is why you're my partner."

I stand and head to the door. I seem to be a bit too excited to see whatever these guys are hiding cause I don't realize the door is obviously locked.

That's when the hairs on the back of my neck start to stand up. I've always had a good instinct for things and it's yelling at me now.

"Hey, does he have a key to the door?" I ask Brandon.

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He hands me a swipe card he pulls out from the conscious guard, despite his protests. I swipe it against the control panel to the side of the door and the lock clicks open.

I had a bad feeling about what was behind the door, but not even that prepared me for what I saw when I opened it.

“Holy fuck,” I say under my breath.

The first thing that hits me is the sight of the girl on the floor, blood spread out underneath her head, her shirt torn and her chest barely moving.

The second is her intoxicating scent of mangoes, which is still strong underneath the metallic smell of her blood.

It’s a scent that has the world falling away. Who knew mangoes would make everything but the floor in this room absolutely disappear? All that exists in my universe right now is her.

I walk in and kneel down beside her, brushing her red hair away from her face.

The face of my fated mate.

She’s absolutely gorgeous, even under the blood and the bruising that’s starting to show up on her face.

“What’s going on?” Brandon asks.

“There’s an omega,” I answer, picking her up into my arms. She groans as I move her, her breaths speeding up. Even while she’s unconscious, I can smell the sourness of her stress. “She’s hurt pretty bad.”

“Holy shit,” he gasps when he catches sight of the omega in my arms.

My gaze instantly narrows down on the conscious guard. I feel my hackles rise and the muscles in my neck grow tight.

“What the fuck is this,” I growl, my dominance radiating throughout the entire hall. “Why do you have an omega here when this warehouse is only supposed to have your drug supply?”

“I—I can’t tell you,” He stutters, his eyes going wide.

“You fucking better,” I snarl. “Or else this is going to get real fucking ugly.”

“They—they’ll kill me if I tell you!”

“I don’t fucking care. Spill it,” I bark, waves of dominance pouring from me.

He opens his mouth and starts talking instantly. I don’t usually use my bark on anyone, really. It never sat right with me, being able to force people less dominant to do what I told them to, but I don’t have any issues doing this here.

I’d do anything for my mate.

“She wasn’t picked up like the other girls. She was sold to the boss and so he didn’t want to keep her with the other omegas. He used this place for omegas that already have a buyer or for the special ones.”

Once he's done talking, his head drops down to his chest. But that's not my problem right now.

I look down at the face of my mate. Even in her sleep, her eyebrows are furrowed in stress. My chest twists at the sight, especially since me throwing around my bark and being all pissed didn't fucking help with the stress she's probably feeling.

Sold to this trafficking ring though. Fuck. That's horrible. Who would do that to her?

I don't care who did that to her, they're never going to hurt her again, not if I have anything to say about it.

"Hey, man," Brandon asks, putting a hand on my shoulder. "You good?"

"I have to go get her to a hospital," I say under my breath.

"That's not answering the question," he says, his hand on my shoulder preventing me from leaving this godforsaken building like I want to right now.

"She's my mate," I hiss. "Let me go, she needs help."

His hand drops my shoulder as if it burned him. He just curses under his breath. "Go, I'll take care of this."

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I just give him a nod as I head out of the warehouse.

I ignore everyone and all the looks they're giving me as I walk over to the captain, who's standing by the van we came in.

"Call an ambulance," I growl.

His eyes go wide as he sees the omega in my arms.

"What the fuck happened?"

"I found her in a cell like this, now call me a fucking ambulance."

Thankfully, he doesn't ask me any more questions before pulling out his phone and making the call.

"Yeah, we need an ambulance," The captain says over the phone. He puts it on speaker and comes over to me.

"What're her symptoms?" He asks me.

"She's unconscious. It looks like she has a headwound. She's breathing, but not very well," I tell the dispatcher.

"She's an omega, correct?"

"Yes."

“Any signs of sexual trauma?”

My throat closes at the thought. “I don’t know,” I manage to say.

“Okay sir, we have an ambulance coming to your location now.”

I let out a sigh of relief I didn’t know I was holding.

The captain looks at me, his arms crossed over his chest after the dispatcher ends the call.

“I get that she’s a hurt omega, but care to explain why you’re acting like, well, this?” He asks me. “You don’t usually get like this, Jax.”

My jaw grinds. He’s right. I don’t usually act like this. I’m the one that always has a joke ready to go. The one who’s never fucking serious.

And for some reason, that persona I’ve been more than happy to uphold doesn’t feel right. Not anymore.

I look down at the omega in my arms. Maybe she has something to do with that.

All the stuff about me is a defense mechanism from my own fucking life, but my life is pretty sweet now so I don’t have anything to worry about anymore.

How could I fucking joke when she’s this hurt? When she’s so obviously been through so much bullshit in her life already.

“She’s mine,” I say under my breath. “She’s my fated mate.”

CHAPTER 3

OLIVIA

I'm floating. Everything is peaceful.

Well, everything except for that stupid beeping noise. When my brain starts to focus in on the constantbeep-beep-beep, the peace in my brain starts to slip away.

I try almost desperately to hold onto it. But the harder I try, the faster that stupid noise becomes. I don't want to go back to the real world. I don't quite remember why I don't want to go back to the real world right now, but I don't really care.

I just know I don't want to go back.

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That's when I feel a presence next to me. It feels like I'm underwater, but I can still feel the air vibrate with a purr that soothes my soul. I catch the faint scent of a fresh campfire and I sink back into unconsciousness.

When my eyes finally open, it feels like they're weighed down by a herd of elephants. Actually, scratch that, the herd of elephants is pounding around in my head. I can't help but let out a little whimper when the bright lights above me start stabbing into my brain.

I see the lights turn off from behind my eyelids and relax back into the mattress underneath me. I try opening my eyes again and this time, it doesn't make the pounding headache I have any worse.

I blink, finally registering my surroundings. I'm in a hospital room. That stupid beeping from earlier was from one of the machines attached to me.

Then my eyes meet a pair of grey ones. Deep grey eyes with so much depth to them I feel like I'm falling through a cloud. There's a man, standing by the light switch. A tall, muscled alpha from the looks of it.

My eyes go wide with fear and I struggle to sit up. That's when I remember everything: the kidnapping, those horrible alphas, the beating.

That stupid, stupid, stupid beeping keeps on getting faster.

"Whoa," He says, holding his hand out. "I didn't mean to scare you."

“Who—who are you,” I cough, holding a hand up to my throat because it burns when I talk.

“My name’s Jax,” he answers, walking over to a water dispenser in the corner of the room and filling up a cup. “Can I come over and give this to you? You’re probably really thirsty right now.”

He’s right, a glass of water sounds like heaven right now but I don’t trust him. Him telling me his name didn’t even really answer my question, I still have no fucking clue who he is.

He seems to sense my wariness cause he takes a sip of the water himself and holds it out in my direction.

“It’s not drugged or anything, I promise,” He says.

I give him a reluctant nod and he walks over. I take the cup from him, the cool water soothing my throat. I finish the cup and he reaches out to take it from me.

That’s when my nostrils flair as I catch his scent. His warm, campfire scent hits me like a truck. My eyes go wide as something clicks in my head.

He’s my fated mate.

“You—you’re—” I whisper.

“Yeah, I’m your fated mate,” He says with a smile.

I feel a wave of horror flow through me and he notices, reaching out to hold my hand. I jerk it backwards, away from him.

“What’s wrong?” He asks, taking a step back to give me space.

The worst possibilities of what could be going on fly through my brain.

“Did—Did you buy me?” I ask.

His eyes go wide with shock. “What? No! Of course not!” He scrubs a hand through his cropped chestnut brown hair. “Fuck, I’m screwing this up.”

“Then why am I here?” I ask, gesturing to the hospital room. “How did you find me?”

“I’m part of a mercenary company. We’ve been working to take down the people in charge of that drug and trafficking ring for months now. We rescued you from the warehouse you were being kept in and I brought you to the hospital because of your injuries.”

For some reason, there’s something that tells me he’s telling the truth. Like there’s something inside me that just believes him, even though I’ve spent my entire life being super wary of alphas.

Which, honestly, in a way freaks me out even more. I know he’s my fated mate, but why are all my defenses down with him? Why does his scent and his presence calm me down so much?

He pulls up a chair to sit beside my hospital bed. “Can you tell me what in the world happened to you?”

I snort, reaching up to hold my throat when that noise hurts the inside of my throat.

He stands immediately to grab me another glass of water.

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“Thanks,” I say, looking up to him once I finish. As I hand the cup back to him, our fingertips touch and I feel something like a spark travel up my arm. I jerk my arm backward and the plastic cup falls to the floor. “Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize, it’s cool,” He answers, picking it up.

“I must look pretty rough though, for you to ask me what happened like that.”

He winces a bit and I sigh, leaning back into the pillows of my hospital bed.

“I fought back.”

“Fought back against who?”

“I had a cellmate for a little bit and they were going to take her to her buyer. I—” My voice breaks. “I couldn’t just let her get taken without seeing someone was at least trying to fight for her. So I did. And they didn’t like that.”

“Fuck,” He says under his breath. “That’s horrible.”

“No shit,” I say, rolling my eyes.

“What was her name?”

“Why?” I ask, narrowing my eyes at him.

“I can check with the shelter the other omegas are at and see if she’s there,” He says

pulling out his phone.

I blink at him, kind of shocked he'd do that.

“Willow,” I say. “Her name is Willow Carter.”

I look down at my hands, remembering the things Willow told me about her life. That's when the fear hits me.

I don't know why this wasn't the first thing that came to my head, maybe I got hit too hard, but I'm a horrible sister. I need to find her. God knows what's happened to her since I was taken.

“What day is it?” I ask Jax, my eyes wide with fear.

“It's March second.”

My eyes go wide. “How long have I been out for?”

“This is your third day in the hospital,” he answers.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I hiss under my breath.

“What's wrong?”

To my horror, tears start filling my eyes. “They had me for a week and a half. I've been gone for two weeks. Oh my god, she could be starving to death.”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Jax says, stepping a bit closer and wrapping his hand around mine. “Who could be starving?”

“My sister,” I say, the panic starting to flow through my veins. “Can I borrow your phone? I have to see if she’s okay, please.”

“Of course,” he says. “Is she alright?”

“I don’t know, that’s why I need to call her,” I whisper, taking his phone with shaky hands.

I pull up his phone app and type in my sister’s phone number.

“Summer?” I say when the call goes through.

“Oh my god, is that you Livvy?”

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I sob at the sound of my little sister's voice over the phone and she starts talking at a million miles per hour.

"Livvy, I was so worried, Mom said you were leaving forever, but I knew she wasn't telling the truth, but none of your calls went through. Where are you? Are you okay?"

"I'm okay," I say, taking a breath. "I'm okay, sis. Where're you at? Are you with Mom?"

"Yeah, she was there when I was done with school and told me you trashed the apartment and left with some guy. I obviously didn't believe her, but she told me I had to go with her or else she'd call the police."

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay, but her fridge never has any food and she hasn't been taking me to school."

"Oh my god," I growl, the blood in my veins starting to boil, like usual when I think about my mom. "You haven't been able to go to school for two weeks?"

"I've still been going, Allison and her older brother have been picking me up."

"Okay," I sigh in relief. "Okay, that's good. Remind me to get together a thank you basket for their family."

"Livvy?" She says, her voice dipping in volume. "I don't like the guy she's been

hanging around. He's been giving me weird looks."

The fire in my veins instantly freezes as shivers of dread make their way through my entire body. Summer is fourteen. I got those same looks when I was fourteen by the men our mom would bring around the trailer and I know how they end. I'm not letting that happen to my little sister.

"I'll be there as soon as I can. Get your stuff together and hold tight, okay?"

"Okay, I love you Livvy."

"Love you too, sis."

As she hangs up, my hand falls to my side.

"Is your sister okay?" Jax asks softly from the chair beside my bed.

I jump a little at the sound of his voice. I was so overwhelmed with finally being able to talk to my sister that I forgot he was there.

"Yeah, she's okay," I say, in part to convince myself by saying it out loud. "I have to go pick her up. Like, right now."

"Whoa there, I don't think that's a good idea."

I just glare up at him. "I don't think you get what I'm saying," I say, my voice low. "I have to go."

"You've gotta get discharged from the hospital and I don't think they've cleared you to leave. Plus, the police want your statement."

The thought of staying here, stuck in this bed, stuck in this hospital room while Summer is stuck with my mother and whatever douchebag alpha she has around with her makes me so crazy I could start pulling my hair out.

“They can discharge me now,” I grit out through clenched teeth. “I’ll sign whatever I have to sign, I just have to get my sister.”

Jax sees the determination on my face and seems to understand that there’s no way I’m going to stay here.

“Is your sister in danger?” He asks softly.

“She could be! Why the fuck do you think I wanna go get her!”

He just looks at me, staring intently at me with those deep grey eyes. Then he nods his head. “I’ll go get a nurse. The police can interview you later after we go get your sister.”

“Uh, excuse me, there’s no we here!” I call out as he walks out of my hospital room.

I’m fairly certain he’s actively choosing to ignore me, but I’m not going to do anything to cause any trouble that’ll keep me from my sister.

CHAPTER 4

JAX

God, my fated mate is gorgeous. And her eyes. God, her eyes.

Her deep green eyes captivated me from the first moment she opened them. I've only left her bedside once when Brandon dragged me back to my place to get changed and take a shower. I just couldn't leave her, especially when we had no clue who she was.

We couldn't identify her because there were no missing persons reports for anyone of her description.

That combined with the fact that the guard mentions she was sold directly to that trafficking ring screams that she was sold by someone close to her.

Fuck, I didn't even get her name. I need to do that.

"Hey there," I say, smiling at the nurse at the nurses' station. "The patient in room 312 that I've been watching over wants to be discharged early."

The beta smiles back at me. "I'm sorry sir, but the doctor has recommended she stay for extra observation."

"Ah, yeah, but she's pretty insistent. I'd really appreciate it if you could help with the paperwork," I say, toning up my alpha dominance a bit more.

I see her shoulders relax a tiny fraction and know she'll agree. "Oh, it should be fine as long as she signs the waivers."

“Awesome,” I say with a smile glancing at her nametag. “Thank you, Nancy, I appreciate it.”

Alpha dominance is the backbone of how alphas can say a command with their bark and make less dominant omegas do what they want. For more dominant alphas, they can even make other betas and even some alphas do what they say.

But that kind of use of alpha dominance isn't my style. I like to be a bit more charming. I've found if you mix some alpha dominance with a well-timed smile, especially on a beta who's less sensitive to the actual feel of dominance in the air, you can get a lot of people to do what you want without them even knowing what you're doing.

I wait at the door to her room for the Doctor. He raises an eyebrow at me as he sees me in the hallway.

“Hey doc, just the person I wanted to see,” I say, flashing him a smile.

He doesn't return it. He seemed like the kinda guy to be a bummer.

“Excuse me, Mr. Henderson,” The doctor says, his steps clipped. “What is this I hear about you asking to discharge my patient?”

“Well, it's not really me wanting to discharge her, but she certainly wants to be discharged.”

“She's awake?”

“She is,” I say with a nod. “And when she demands to be discharged and you hear she's saying exactly what I'm saying, just know I'm also willing to do anything to make it happen. I can make sure she's safe and looked after and all that jazz.”

“Under what authority?”

“I’m her fated mate.”

“Very well,” He sighs, pursing his lips. He grabs the clipboard attached to the side of her room before opening the door.

“Hello there, miss, I’m Dr. White,” He says to my omega.

“I’d like to be discharged right away, Dr. White,” she says, immediately, not even giving the doc to say anything.

“Well, miss, I really wouldn’t recommend that. You came in with some pretty intense wounds and we’d like to keep you for observation.”

“Well, Doctor,” she says, her voice slow. “I appreciate the recommendation, but I would like to get discharged. I’m ready and willing to sign any and all paperwork.”

“It’ll be a lot of paperwork since you’re still a Jane Doe in our system,” The doctor says, almost like he’s grasping at straws here.

“My name is Olivia Miller. I’m twenty-six years old, five-two and a hundred and twenty pounds,” She says.

Olivia. I like it. Now I finally know her name.

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“I have no history of heart disease or diabetes,” she continues. “But my mother does have high blood pressure, what the fuck else do you want to know about me before you clear me to leave?” she asks, her eyes spitting absolute fire at this man.

I look over at the doctor and give him a shrug as if to tell him told you so.

He sighs. “I’ll allow you to be discharged as long as you have your mate here sign along with you to make sure you’re cared for.”

Her eyes fly towards mine and they narrow as if I’ve betrayed her somehow. I like this fire in her. It makes her seem so much more alive than when the fear consumed her when she first woke up. I don’t know her yet, but this sort of spark seems a lot more like her natural self.

I shrug and flash her a smile.

“Looks like you’re stuck with me, Olivia,” I say, my voice dropping at her name. I like the way it rolls off my tongue.

She just glares at me before scoffing. “Fine,” she agrees.

When the doctor leaves to go get the paperwork and we’re left alone, she narrows her eyes at me.

“I fucking told you there’s no ‘we’ here. Why’re you trying to butt into my life.”

I sprawl into the chair by her bedside. “Last time I checked, honey, I’m trying to help

you. I dunno if you'd be leaving this quickly without me signing with you."

"Fuck this stupid ass world," She mutters under her breath. "Fine, you can sign the papers, but the moment we leave the hospital we go our separate ways."

"I don't think I'm allowed to do that, I am signing papers saying I'll look after and take care of you, you know? Signing those and not doing that would be dishonest," I say, my voice teasing.

"Oh my god!" She says, throwing the hand not attached to the IV up in the air. "Why are you this fucking determined to hang around where you're obviously not wanted?"

I give her a genuine smile. "Because I want to be around you. I wanna get to know you. You're my mate."

She narrows her eyes at me. "I don't like you," she hisses.

"Well, then it looks like I've got a lot of work to do so we can get to know each other."

Nancy, the nurse I spoke to earlier, knocks and opens the door, handing the two of us a clipboard full of paperwork for both of us to sign.

"Once you both are done with the paperwork, I'll come in and start the discharge process." She turns to me. "The doctor also prescribed some medications for her to take to help with her recovery so make sure to let us know in the paperwork which pharmacy to send those to."

"Thanks, Nancy," I say, giving her a grateful smile.

I hear Olivia scoff from next to me at my use of the nurse's name. I turn to her once

the nurse leaves and raise an eyebrow at her.

“What?”

“Why was she making eyes at you?” she grumbles.

“Jealous?” I tease her.

“What? No!” She says immediately.

I’m pretty sure I see a faint blush dust her cheeks but I don’t push her, I want her to come out of the shell of fear she was stuck in earlier, but I don’t want to push her away.

“I used a bit of my dominance on her earlier,” I shrug. “She wasn’t completely down to discharge you so I made it so she was. No biggie.”

She purses her lips as she stares at me, her brows furrowed. “Why would you do that?”

“To help you, duh,” I answer. “You said you wanted to do something and I mean, I got it. I get why you wanna get out of here and to your sister.”

She blinks at me, her eyes wide. “Thanks,” She says softly.

“Of course,” I chuckle. “How about you go through the paperwork and tell me where I have to sign? I’m gonna make some calls real quick.”

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“Sure.”

I take a step out of her hospital room and call up Brandon.

“Hey man,” I say. “I’m calling in a favor.”

“What’s wrong?” Brandon asks.

“Nothing’s wrong, why’d you think something’s wrong,” I laugh.

“Cause you’re asking me for help. You don’t do that unless shit’s hit the fan.”

“Well, everything’s fine, I was just wondering if Sadie could get some clothes together. Olivia, the omega from the warehouse, she’s awake and I’m helping her get discharged. She needs clothes.”

“Wait, she’s awake? How’s she doing?”

“Well, I mean she’s awake, pretty snarky too.”

“That’s not answering the question, man, but sure. We’ll get there as soon as we can.”

“Awesome.”

“Why’s she getting discharged so soon? From the way her report looked, it seemed like she needed more time in the hospital.”

“She has a little sister she’s worried about. She’s gonna go check up on her.”

“That makes sense, I’ll cover some of the paperwork for you and let the higher-ups know any of her interviews should be pushed back for a bit.”

“Thanks, man.”

“Of course, you’ve done the same for me.”

When I return to Olivia’s room, her fiery red hair is hung around her face like a curtain as she’s scribbling away at the paperwork.

“How goes it?”

“Huh?” She asks, her eyes flying up to meet mine as I lean against the wall.

“How’s the paperwork going?”

“I mean, it’s paperwork, it sucks.”

“Amen to that,” I laugh.

“Come over here, I’m almost done.”

I do as she says and walk over to her bedside. This is the closest I’ve been to her since she’s been awake and her sweet mango scent hits me so hard I just have to close my eyes and appreciate it.

“Here,” She says, handing me the clipboard.

I make it a point to make my hand linger against hers as I take the pen from her. I see

the pulse in her neck jump and her scent gets thicker in the air.

Then something seems to shutter inside of her. It's like I watch it happen in her eyes in real-time. She pulls away and leans back against the pillows.

I quickly sign all the things I have to sign.

"I'm gonna go drop this off and get a nurse to help you get discharged," I say to her.

She just nods, not meeting my eyes.

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I go and grab a nurse to help with getting her discharged. It's a different nurse than Nancy, which is probably a good thing cause even though Olivia said she wasn't jealous, it was enough of a thing to her for her to say something.

I'm waiting outside her room as I wait for her to finish getting taken care of when a text buzzes in my pocket.

Sending Sadie into the hospital lobby with some clothes.

Thanks, man.

I head down to the lobby and see Sadie standing by the lobby doors with a paper bag. She gives me a little wave when she sees me.

"Hey, Sadie," I say, giving her a little side hug.

"Hey, I brought some clothes, just a pair of yoga pants and a t-shirt, nothing too fancy."

"Awesome, thanks," I say. "I should probably get back upstairs."

"Oh yeah, go for it, I wouldn't want her to be alone after something like this."

"You're a sweetheart," I say. "See ya!"

I take the elevator and head back up to Olivia's hospital room. I knock before peeking in to see the nurse taking out her IV.

“Hey, I brought you some clothes to change into,” I say.

Her eyes go wide with surprise. “Clothes?”

“Yeah, I called in a favor and my friend’s mate got something together for you,” I say, setting the bag down at the foot of her hospital bed. “I’ll be right outside when you’re done.”

CHAPTER 5

OLIVIA

I slide off the hospital bed slowly, now free from all the equipment from before. I catalog all my aches and pains. My head is still definitely pounding, but it’s probably my ribs that hurt the most. They hurt whenever I breathe or move my upper body too much.

Makes sense considering I was, you know, kicked there multiple times.

I peek into the paper bag Jax brought in earlier and see a pair of black yoga pants and a large, soft graphic t-shirt.

There’s also a pair of socks and underwear with the tags still on them, which I’m really grateful for because the hospital gown I’m wearing right now is pretty breezy.

I slide everything on and manage to find my sneakers tucked into the corner of the room.

When I open the door to my room and try to take a single step out, the nurse that helped get all the hospital equipment off of me seems to appear out of thin air with a wheelchair.

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” I tell her. “I can walk.”

“Sorry, miss, this is hospital policy,” she says, giving me a sympathetic smile.

“I get to push you though!” Jax says, popping up behind the nurse with a much too cheery smile. “I just pulled the car up.”

I roll my eyes as I sit down. The nurse follows us to the front lobby as Jax wheels me around.

“Have a good day,” She says with a wave to the two of us.

As he wheels me up to his car, which is a large, black SUV with tinted windows, he peeks his head over me and gives me a smile that looks decidedly ridiculous from this angle.

“So, where’re we headed?”

“You can just drop me off at my apartment and I can take care of myself,” I say.

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“Oh, you know I can’t do that,” he says with a grin, opening his passenger side door.

He sweeps me up into his arms, making me yelp in surprise as I hold onto his neck for balance as he sets me down on the seat.

He leans over me, his campfire scent the only thing I can smell in the cabin of his car. He slowly pulls the seatbelt across my body, never dropping eye contact with me. I feel myself leaning closer to him before I snap myself out of it.

Why the fuck am I falling for his alpha charm? I know exactly where that landed my mother and I’m never, ever doing anything that’ll make me remotely resemble her.

He seems to register my shift in mood, because his grey eyes dim before he plants another grin on his face.

“That would be against the paperwork we both just signed,” He says.

Then, this motherfucker, out of all things he could possibly do in this moment, boops me on the nose with his finger.

“And we wouldn’t wanna do that, would we?” he asks, his smile turning genuine.

“Did you just fucking boop me on the nose?”

“You betcha,” he says, closing the door in my slackjawed face.

He takes out his phone and pulls up its GPS app when he makes his way to the

driver's seat. "So anyway, where am I heading?"

I take his phone and enter the address of my mom's trailer park.

"Damn," he says, checking out the route we're going. "We're headed across the bridge to that part of town?"

"Yeah," I answer. I don't elaborate anymore because what right does he have to judge where I came from?

"Alrighty, let's get going then."

He gets the car started and he begins driving. The silence in the cab of the car seems to get to Jax because he starts tapping on the wheel of the car.

"Hey," He says, his voice soft, turning to me at a red light. "I'm starting to get the vibe you had a real shitty childhood."

"No shit, Sherlock," I answer, crossing my arms across my chest. I wince a little at that move, it seems like whatever pain meds they gave me at the hospital are starting to wear off.

He looks at me so intently it feels like his gray eyes are looking into my soul.

"Just say what you wanna say," I huff.

"There were a couple of guys outside of the cell you were in. When we saw them, one of them mentioned the reason why you were kept at that warehouse and not at the other warehouse with the other omegas was cause someone sold you directly to them. You didn't get nabbed liked the others."

My jaw clenches at the thought.

“There’s not a question there,” I say, narrowing my eyes at him. “If you want me to say something you’ve gotta fucking ask me.”

“Who was it?”

“My mom.”

“Your momma fucking sold you to traffickers?” He growls, his hands clenching around the steering wheel.

“Yeah. Now do you fucking get why I have to get to my sister?”

“Oh yeah, totally,” He says. I notice that he increases his speed as we drive down the highway. “But why would she do that to her own daughter?”

“Ever since I presented as an omega and the dickish alpha she was dating came into my room at night, she always viewed me as competition,” I shrug. “She wanted to get rid of me for good, I guess.”

“What the fuck,” He says. “Your mom is fucked in the head, holy shit.”

“Yeah, you’re telling me.”

“What happened to him?”

“When mother dearest found out he was more interested in her teenage daughter than him, she ran him out of the house. Never saw him again.”

“And your Mom didn’t do anything to help you?”

“Nah, not her style.”

The smokey campfire scent in the cabin thickens so much with his anger that I have to open the window.

“Tone it down,” I cough, gulping some of the clean air.

“Sorry,” he says, opening his own window to help.

“Why the hell’re you this pissed anyway?” I ask, my eyes closed as I just let the cool air flow over my face. “You upset some other alpha got to what’s yours?” I scoff.

“What the hell, of course not,” He says. He sounds like I just insulted his grandmother. “Look, you’re my fated mate. I don’t know what that means to you, but that means I care about you.”

“You don’t even know me,” I mutter, resting my head on my elbow as I let my fingertips flow through the wind as we drive.

“Well, I mean, the point is to get to know you. Plus, the little I do know about you I like.”

“You must be a masochist.”

“Nah, I mean, I’m a switch but not an outright masochist.”

“What?” I ask, looking at him puzzled.

“Switch, you know? I’m down to be a dom and a sub?”

I just blink at him, confused. “Why are you talking about BDSM?”

He shrugs and I can see the hint of a smile. “Well, the conversation was getting a little depressing and it didn’t seem like you wanted to continue it. And I mean, you brought up the masochism thing.”

“Oh,” I say, leaning my head on my hand as I look out over the bay as we continue driving over the bridge. “I didn’t think any alpha would want to be anything other than dominant.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. I’d say I’m a free spirit, an equal opportunist, shall we say.”

“You’re not what I thought you’d be like,” I say, turning to meet his eyes.

“I’m taking that as a good thing, so thanks!” He chuckles.

“I don’t know yet, don’t get comfortable,” I say, a small smile tugging at my lips.

I do know. And that’s what scares me. Jax almost seems too good to be true. If I let myself get attached and he realizes this fated mate bullshit is a scam then what

happens then?

I'll get my heart ripped out of my chest and there won't be anything of me left. I've given up too much for the people that were supposed to be there to love me to try that again. Been there, done that, and have the T-shirt already.

The only person I have a responsibility to in this world is Summer.

"Hey," I ask, turning to Jax. "Can I borrow your phone again to let Summer know we're coming?"

"Sure," he says, pulling out his phone and handing it to me.

"Thanks."

I enter in Summer's phone number and she picks up on the first ring.

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“Livvy?” She says excitedly.

“Hey sis, I just wanted to let you know I’m coming to pick you up. I’ll be there in like thirty minutes. Make sure you’re all packed okay?”

“Okay,” she says. “Who’s phone’re you calling me from? This isn’t your number.”

Pretty sure the people that took me smashed my phone into a million pieces when they were dragging me out of my apartment.

I glance to Jax before answering my sister. “A friend’s. We’re coming to get you. I’ll see you soon, okay?”

“Okay, I love you Livvy.”

“Love you too.”

I hand Jax back his phone and he comically wiggles his eyebrows at me.

“So I’m a friend now, am I?”

“Shut up,” I say, laughing and rolling my eyes.

“Hey, I’m not complaining, that’s progress! Plus, you said we.”

“What?”

“You said earlier at the hospital there’s no we here,” He smirks at me. “Now there is.”

“What the hell,” I laugh. “You’re a piece of work.”

“Why, thank you.”

“That wasn’t supposed to be a compliment.”

“Too bad,” He shrugs. “I’m taking it as one.”

He turns up the radio and sings along to pop songs as we continue the rest of the drive. I watch the golden light of the sun getting lower on the horizon dance across his face and feel something twist in my chest.

I don’t want to admit this to myself, but there’s something here.

We pull down the street of the trailer park my mom lives in and he parks.

“Whoa, whoa, what’re you doing?” I ask him when he pops open his door as if he’s going to follow me in.

He just blinks at me. “Going with you, duh.”

“Nope. You’re staying right here and waiting.”

He crosses his arms across his chest and raises an eyebrow. “No chance in hell am I letting you go in alone.”

“She’s my mom, I’ve had to deal with her for my entire life, I got this.”

“Olivia, she’s fucking bat shit from what you told me. You’re not going in alone.”

I purse my lips before throwing my hands up and giving up. “Fine. Just—” I trail off, biting my thumbnail.

“What’s up?” He asks me, his voice softer than it has been.

“Just don’t agree to get your dick sucked by my mom, okay?”

“Ha!” He laughs. “Trust me, I havenointerest in her,” he says. His eyes darken as he looks at me. “There’s only one omega I’m interested in.”

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A blush floods my cheeks. I rip off my seatbelt and jump out of the car.

“Alrighty then, let’s get going,” I say.

I’m not prepared to deal with the butterflies fluttering around in my stomach or the way my core clenched at his words.

I walk up the stairs to my mom’s trailer and bang on the door. When it opens and I meet the sunken eyes of my mother, I give her a kind of demented, toothy smile.

“Hey there mom. Long time no see.”

CHAPTER 6

JAX

When I look at Olivia’s momma, it’s hard to believe that it’s actually her. Olivia is drop-dead gorgeous in such an effortless way I just assumed that her mother had to at least have a fraction of that sort of energy.

But no. Her skin is pale and weathered and her eyes are sunken in. They’re devoid of anything remotely close to life.

She also looks like she just finished the world’s longest bender.

But out of everything, the most shocking thing, though, is the black bond-mate scars I see on her neck.

Bond-mate marks only turn black when mate bonds are broken. Given how dark they are, I'm pretty sure it was her fated mate.

I've never, in my entire thirty years of life, seen a sign of a broken bond before. That could be cause a lot of people are choosing not to bond and a lot of others just aren't meeting their fated mates, but still. Doesn't change how shocking it is to see those black, almost tattoo-like marks on her neck.

It makes something click in my head: the face Olivia's never mentioned her dad, the jealousy she described her momma having, the fact she was sold and not taken.

I couldn't wrap my head around how a mom, let alone an omega could do something like that to their kid, which probably says a lot of things about how I was raised, but still.

I guess omegas who lose their bonds can go a little batshit.

Her eyes widen with horror at seeing her daughter, almost like she's seen a ghost.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" She hisses, baring her yellow teeth.

The tiny bit of sympathy at this sad, old omega losing her fated mate disappears in an instant. I mean, I don't know why I expected this bitch to say anything different since she was the one to sell her fucking kid to traffickers, but still.

"Surprised to see me?" Olivia says, baring her teeth back. "I wonder why? Oh, was it because you fucking sold me? What did you use the money for, huh? Drugs? By the smell of things, that's totally what you did. Those heat drugs are a bitch and a half to pay for so you had to sell your fucking daughter?"

That's when the smell from the house hits me. The overly sweet and chemical smell

wafting from the house does smell like an artificial heat.

I mean, it kind of makes sense that she'd try to get her hands on something artificial to start up her heat often if she doesn't have her bond with her mate anymore.

"Shut the fuck up, you whore!" Her mother yells, her voice raising in volume.

"I dunno if I'm the whore here, Mother dearest. You're the one selling your kid so you can try to fill that black hole of a soul of yours with alpha dick," Olivia spits.

"What the hell is going on out here," a deep voice grumbles.

An alpha with a thick, messy beard and a huge beer belly comes up behind Olivia's mom and crosses his arms across his chest.

"None of your business," Olivia snarls at the man, her shoulders getting tense.

I see the stress of facing off against her momma being multiplied by the presence of this alpha. Makes sense considering the bullshit other alphas her Momma's brought around have put her through.

I step up behind her, making sure she can feel my presence at her back. She's not in this alone this time.

Her shoulders relax the tiniest bit.

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“We’re here to take Summer back,” Olivia growls. “Get out of our way.”

She manages to push past her mom, but the Alpha stops her, grabbing her arm and yanking her back.

“Get her off the property George!” Her mother preens.

Not a chance in hell. I don’t know how Olivia survived years in this kinda environment while staying fucking sane.

“Let me fucking go, you asshole!” Olivia yells, trying to shove him away.

I grab the Alpha’s wrist and twist it so he drops Olivia’s arm and swing him around so I’m pressing his face against the wall of the trailer outside.

“Hey George,” I say, cheerily into his ear. “You’re being a little shit so I’m just gonna hold you for a little bit.”

This is probably the first time that I catch the bitch’s attention.

“Who the hell are you?” She hisses at me.

I ignore her, looking down at Olivia. I give her a small smile, noting that she’s rubbing her arm where this little shit, George, grabbed her.

“You good?” I say softly.

“Yeah.”

“Go grab your sister. I’ll handle things here,” I say, slamming George back into the wall of the trailer as he tries to kick out at me.

I lean into his ear. “Settle down and things won’t get ugly,” I murmur. I twist his arm back, the threat open between us. “Unless you’re into that sort of thing. Then I’m more than happy to oblige.”

He snarls and kicks against me again, trying to throw his entire weight back against my grip. This isn’t very fun and I’m getting kind of annoyed at him constantly trying to fight me so I let him go and take a couple steps back.

“You fucker,” He growls. “I’m gonna clean the fucking floor with you.”

The guy’s definitely a bit sturdier than I am, but I’m not worried. His fighting experience seems to be limited to bar brawls and bullying. I can totally take him.

He lunges forward, aiming a punch at my face. I sidestep him pretty easily cause the guy’s slow as fuck and quickly knock him unconscious.

He slumps to the concrete below us and I clap my hands together as if brushing off dust.

Olivia’s eyes are wide as she looks at me. “Wow,” She whispers.

“All in a day’s work,” I say flashing her a smile. “Things are handled. Go get Summer.”

Olivia pushes past her momma with a glare and heads into the trailer.

This is when I see a complete shift in her momma's personality.

"My name's Janice," she purrs, stepping closer to me. "What's your name?"

"Damn, woman, you fucking work fast," I say, nodding down to the unconscious body at our feet. "George here hasn't even been out for like, ten seconds."

"What's something like you doing with my daughter? She's a bitchy little thing."

"And you aren't?" I ask, raising my eyebrow and crossing my arms over my chest. "I just saw your conversation with her."

She waves a hand as if waving all that nastiness away. That's when I catch her scent. Seems like she's trying to suffocate me with it, with how strong it is. It's almost sickeningly sweet. Like corn syrup with a twist of artificial from whatever drugs she's just taken.

"She's always been such a sensitive little thing. You're much better with a real woman," She says, attempting to make fuck-me eyes at me.

Really unsuccessfully, I might add.

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I've been really good about this considering Olivia's far from ready, so I haven't pushed her, but she literally just needs to look at me and I'd be ready to go. No weird eye narrowing and twitching necessary.

"I mean, I think your definition of real and mine are different, so I'll pass on your offer. Plus, I think you're forgetting that I know you sold your own goddamn kid to traffickers. Why the hell would I want anything to do with you?"

"I just want what's best for her. I was trying to connect her with people who'd really help her flourish."

"Bull fucking shit, you're so jealous of her you're practically green. I mean, I get it though, she's worlds better than you'll ever be."

Her eyes narrow at the insult.

"Answer my fucking question, why the hell are you with my daughter?" She hisses.

I can't help but smile, for the first time during this clusterfuck of a conversation. "She's my fated mate."

Janice tilts her head back and lets out the most maniacal laugh I've ever fucking heard. "She'll never really be with you. She's seen what that fated mate bullshit does to someone," she says, waving her hand at herself in what seems to be the first example of self-awareness I've seen this entire conversation. "She'll be bitter and miserable just like me."

It's my turn to let out my own laugh.

"Nah, that's not what any 'fated mate bullshit' did to you, that's just you," I say, crossing my arms across my chest. "She's worlds stronger than you. Probably got more balls in her pinky finger than you do in your entire body. She's nothing like you and never will be."

CHAPTER 7

OLIVIA

I push past my mom and into the trailer. Tension coils inside me the further I walk into the all too familiar trailer, memories from my childhood I'd much rather keep locked away bombarding me.

I head to the small guest bedroom at the end and knock on the door.

"Hey, Sis? It's me," I say.

The door flies open and I see Summer's messy red hair that's so similar to mine. She freezes when she sees me, her eyes going wide.

"What in the world happened to you?" She asks, her voice a low whisper, pulling me into the room and shutting it behind her.

"Oh yeah," I wince, my hand hovering over the nasty cut on my forehead. I imagine the bruises around my face and neck that she must be seeing. "I'm in pretty rough shape, huh."

"Uh, yeah! What happened?"

“Uh,” I say, trailing off. It’s not exactly age appropriate for you to tell your fourteen-year-old sister you were sold to traffickers because your mother wanted drugs.

“Mom said something about you going away, did people hurt you when you were gone?” She ask me.

“Yeah, something like that.”

Her face scrunches up and she pounds her fist into her palm. “Let me at ‘em. I wanna give them a piece of my mind.”

“You’re sweet,” I laugh, ruffling her curls.

“No I’m menacing,” She says, baring her teeth at me before bursting into a field of giggles.

I laugh with her and pull her into a hug, tucking her head under my chin and swaying back and forth with her, taking in that she’s okay.

“You have all your stuff packed?” I ask, taking a step back.

She nods, hefting a duffel bag over her shoulder. “Yeah, I didn’t get very long to pack so I don’t have a lot of stuff.”

“Got it,” I say grabbing her backpack. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’ve been trying to stay out of the trailer as much as I can though, Mom and George are really loud,” she wrinkles her nose as if she just smelled something absolutely disgusting. Understandable, considering what the two of them were probably doing with each other within earshot of her.

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My jaw clenches. “You’re not coming back here,” I promise her. “Let’s get going.”

I open the door and nod my head, gesturing for her to follow me.

She stops, “You sure you don’t want to leave through the window?”

“We’re fine,” I say, giving her a reassuring smile. “My friend’s keeping everyone occupied outside.”

As we make our way down the hall, I hear my mom’s cackle followed by her shrill voice.

“She’ll never really be with you. She’s seen what that fated mate bullshit does to someone. She’ll be bitter and miserable just like me.”

My back stiffens as my steps slow.

I don’t know how I feel about my mom telling Jax about my very real fears about fated mates considering how my mom ended up, but I also know I fucking hate she thinks I’m gonna end up something like her.

I won’t. I refuse. I won’t be anything like her.

I feel Summer’s hand wrap around my free one, giving it a supportive squeeze. God, she’s too good for this world. I have to get her out of here.

I squeeze Summer’s hand back and continue down the hall.

That's when I hear Jax's laugh. There's something kind of healing about your super hot and talented fated mate laughing in your stupid mom's face.

Then I hear what he has to say and I freeze again.

"Nah, she's worlds stronger than you. Probably got more balls in her pinky finger than you do in your entire body. She's nothing like you and never will be."

Wow. Okay, if I thought it was nice to hear him laugh in her fucking face, hearing him stand up for me makes something click back into place in my heart. I don't think I've ever had someone defend me like that, ever.

I want to curl up in myself and cry. Mourn some semblance of the childhood I lost or something like that, but I really don't have time.

"No clue who your friend is, but I like what he has to say," Summer says.

"Yeah, he's pretty great," I laugh. "Let's go."

We take Summer's stuff and head toward the front of the trailer.

I meet Jax's eyes and he flashes me his usual bright smile. I give him my own smile, though I'm pretty sure it's wobbly at the sides because, against my better judgment, I want to run and throw my arms around him. I want his arms around me, but I don't know just yet whether I want him to be kissing me or comforting me while I cry.

Who knew protectiveness could make me react like this?

"Hey," He says softly. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah."

The looks we give each other don't seem to escape my mother because she steps in front of me and starts waving her finger in my face.

"You whore," She spits. "You'll never fucking amount to anything in life, you hear me? No matter what alpha you have on your arm! You. Are. Nothing."

I roll my eyes, pulling Summer toward Jax's direction and shifting my body so she's out of the way.

"That's an awful lot of projection," I say.

I read somewhere every accusation is a confession and it stuck with me. Now I finally get to say it to her fucking face.

I've spent so many years hiding in fear of when she'd get drunk or high and kick the shit out of me for existing.

Then I spent so many years keeping my head down and just trying to survive.

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Now I get to finally stand up for myself.

“What?” She sputters in my face. “You little—”

“Leave us the hell alone, okay? You didn’t want anything to do with us after Dad died, so why don’t you keep it that way.”

I turn and walk towards Summer and Jax. Summer looks up at me with the biggest grin on her face. She looks at me like I’m walking away from an explosion in an action movie or something. Remember what I said for absolutely too pure for this world?

“Time to go,” I say, softly, under my breath.

“I’ll ruin you!” My mom screeches, but we just walk towards Jax’s car.

“Well, that was certainly something,” Jax says, opening the door for Summer to climb into the car. He smiles down at her as he takes her bag and puts it in. “My name’s Jax, nice to meet you.”

“I’m Summer,” she answers. “Are you my sister’s friend?”

“Well, yeah, I’m also her fated mate, which is pretty cool.”

“Whoa! Really?” She says, her eyes going wide as she climbs into the car. “Did you also knock out George?” ”

“Yup, now get buckled in, kiddo. We’ve gotta scram.”

“Oh my god, that’s so cool!” She says.

I glare at him as he shuts the door, leaving the two of us standing outside his car.

“Hey, what’s that look for?” He asks me, a small smile on his face.

“You know very well what that was for. I didn’t want to tell her yet.”

“I mean, what would hiding it from her do?”

“I don’t want her to get attached if you’re just gonna up and leave us. She’s a kid. I’ve worked my fucking ass off to give her some semblance of stability.”

This man. This fucking man. He boops me on the nose again.

“I’m not leaving, Liv,” he says softly.

My breath catches in my throat and I swallow hard, his firewood scent the only thing I can think about.

He opens my door for me. “Let’s get going,” He says.

“Yeah,” I say.

He extends his hand to help me into the car and I take it. His hand is warm in mine and I feel the rough callouses against my softer skin and it makes my brain fucking short-circuit.

He closes the door with a smile and heads over to his seat in the car.

I see Summer on her phone in the backseat.

“What’re you up to?”

“I’m letting Allison and her brother know that I’m leaving Mom’s house.”

“They’ve been helping look after you, right?”

“Yeah, Allison’s brother would drive me to and from school. Their mom also lets me sleep over on the weekends,” She says.

“That’s good. I’m glad you had somewhere to go.”

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She looks up from her phone as Jax starts the car. “Do you know where we’re going to stay?”

“I was thinking you’d stay at my place,” Jax says, looking back at her through the rearview mirror as he starts driving. “I’ve got a couple spare guest bedrooms for you guys to stay in and it really wouldn’t be a hassle.”

“What?” I ask, my head jerking toward his. “No, we’re heading back to my place.”

He turns towards me and his voice drops. “That’s not safe, considering what happened,” he says. “If you stay with me, both of you guys’ll be protected.”

My eyes narrow. He has a point. From the sounds of things, only the lower people in the trafficking ring were caught. There hasn’t been a whisper about Suitman, meaning he’s still out there.

“Fine,” I huff.

“What happened?” Summer asks, leaning forward.

“Use your seatbelt properly,” I tell her, poking her in the forehead.

“Hey!” She says, sitting back in her seat properly. “Fine, now answer my question.”

I purse my lips, glancing over to Jax, who just shrugs as if telling me it’s my place to tell her.

“Mom tried to send me away with some bad people.”

“What!” Summer says, slipping out of the top part of the seatbelt again to lean forward.

“Oh my god, sit properly!” I laugh.

“Fine!” She says, huffing as she throws herself back into her seat. “Now tell me what’s going on!”

“Jax here saved me and that’s how we met, but there may still be some bad guys looking for me, so he’s saying we should stay with him.”

“It’s a really nice place,” He says. “I inherited it from my grandparents when they passed.”

“Ah, so you’re a trust fund baby,” I mutter under my breath.

“Oh totally,” he laughs. “I definitely had a lot of help as a kid, but I mean, I’ve done pretty well for myself too.”

“Uh-huh,” I say.

“What’s your place like?” Summer asks Jax.

“My place is in Seacliff, a pretty nice place. It has a really nice view over the ocean.”

“Seacliff?” I say, my eyes wide.

“Whoa, that’s where all the fancy rich people live!” Summer says. “You’re rich, rich.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty lucky,” He says.

“No fucking kidding,” I add.

“Anyways, I was thinking, I’ll take you guys to my place so we can get settled and then maybe we can go shopping to get the things you guys need. I don’t usually have guests for too long.”

“You’re paying,” Summer says.

“Sure, shopping trip on me,” Jax says, making Summer bounce up and down in the backseat. “How’s that sound?” he asks me.

“That—That sounds good.” I say, settling into the seat of Jax’s car.

I finally relax a little bit. Summer’s with me and we’re heading to safe place together. Everything is finally starting to feel like it’ll be fine.

CHAPTER 8

JAX

Summer is exactly who I thought she'd be. Seems like a pretty sweet kid with a head on her shoulders. A head covered in the same bright red hair as her sister's.

It was honestly surprising to see how dull their mother seemed in comparison. These two just seem to scream that they enjoy living life.

"You don't have to do all this, you know," Olivia says, looking out the window as I drive through the hilly streets of the city to get to my place.

"Well, yeah, I mean, I don't have to do anything," I say. "But I want to. I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't want to."

"Okay," She says, sounding pretty unsure.

I'll have to change that.

I enter the gate code for my particular neighborhood and drive in. Summer's face is practically stuck to the window as I drive past all the other big houses in the neighborhood. I don't miss how Olivia's eyes widen too.

I try to see my neighborhood through their eyes. Especially when I compare these houses to the trailer we just came from, I can definitely see how this can be kinda mindblowing.

It's not a particularly big secret I come from wealth. My grandparents were rich, my parents were rich, and now that I'm the only one left, I'm rich too. The amount of money they had definitely shaped the kind of person I am and I'm definitely lucky and grateful to do the things I enjoy doing, like work at the company I do, but it wasn't like I had a particularly happy childhood either.

It was definitely unicorns and rainbows in comparison to what Olivia and Summer had to grow up in, but there's a reason why I want to do this whole thing with Olivia right.

I want love.

Never really got that as a kid and it seems pretty damn exciting.

My mom didn't care about me at all and my dad was always working and when he finally started paying more attention to me, poof. He was gone. So was my mom, but admittedly, that hurt a lot less.

I pull into my driveway and open the garage before driving in.

"Holy shit, you have a fucking four-car garage," Liv whispers under her breath. "Who the fuck needs a four-car garage in the city."

"I have no clue," I say, parking the car. "That's why half of it is my gym."

Summer practically throws herself out of the car as she stares, slackjawed at the little sparring ring I have set up.

"You guys wanna see the inside?" I ask the two of them, grabbing Summer's duffel bag.

“Duh!” Summer says, running back up to Olivia and I.

We make our way through my house and both their jaws practically hit the floor. They walk slowly through the house as I show them where the necessities like the kitchen are.

Olivia runs her hands over the marble countertops and the glass top of the induction stoves I have. She practically balks at the multiple ovens.

I didn’t design this house, but I’ve definitely made sure to help with the upkeep, so all of the appliances have been updated.

“We can go grocery shopping tomorrow,” I say. “I’m a takeout guy and don’t really have anything good in the fridge right now.”

“Cool,” Olivia says, now distracted by the view from the floor-to-ceiling windows.

“Pretty cool huh,” I say.

“No shit, Sherlock,” She says under her breath.

“This. Is. So. Cool,” Summer says, stepping up next to her sister.

“Do you guys wanna see the guest rooms?” I ask.

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“Sure,” Olivia says, staring up at the high ceilings.

“The bedrooms are upstairs.”

The three of us make our ways up the spiral staircase to the bedrooms upstairs.

“I have two guestrooms set up, I was thinking Summer could get the one down the hall and Liv could get the one over here?”

Liv narrows her eyes at me when she seems to notice the one closer to the master bedroom, but she doesn’t say anything.

“That sounds awesome!” Summer says, “Where’s my room!”

I walk them down to the guest room with the blue-painted walls and the white canopy bed.

“Pretty sure this used to be my mom’s room when she used to live here,” I say. “How do you like it.”

Didn’t like her but she did have great taste in decor.

“This is mine?” Summer asks quietly.

“Yeah, for as long as you guys want to stay here, it’s all yours,” I say. Hopefully, forever, my brain adds.

She kicks off her shoes and jumps straight into the bed. “Oh my god, this is amazing.”

I turn to Olivia. “How about we give Summer a chance to settle in while I show you your room.”

“You gonna be good on your own sis?” She asks Summer as she leans against the bedroom door.

“Yeah, you look dead tired, go get some rest,” Summer says from her bed.

Liv does look dead tired. She doesn’t even fight me when I take her hand in mine and lace our fingers together as I lead her toward her room.

Liv’s a lot more intentional with the way she goes about the room. Instead of starfishing onto the bed like her sister did, she perches herself at the edge, biting her thumbnail.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“What do you expect from me, for all this?” She asks, looking up at me, her green eyes so open and vulnerable. “I—I can’t give you what you want right now. I—I don’t know if I ever can and I don’t want to accept these things without knowing what strings are attached.”

“Oh Liv,” I say, kneeling on the carpet in front of her. “The only thing I want is for you to be okay. I’ll go at whatever pace you want, even if it’s no pace at all. I just want you happy, you know? Plus, it’s really not that big of a deal.”

She scoffs as she waves her arms around the room. “This isn’t a big deal?”

“No,” I say, lacing our fingers together again and squeezing her hand. “It isn’t.”

She looks down into my eyes and gives me a small smile. “You really aren’t what I expected you to be.”

“Why is that?”

“Cause alphas usually fucking suck donkey balls,” She laughs. “I thought I’d eventually end up with some shitty one and not be able to leave, but you—you’re different.” Her voice drops in volume and she squeezes my hand “You’re better than whatever I could’ve ever dreamed of and it scares the living shit out of me.”

“You know, you scare me too,” I say, reaching to pull her other hand to cup my face.

She strokes a finger back and forth across my cheek before moving to play with my hair. “I scare you? Really? Me?”

“Well, yeah. Of course you scare me,” I say, smiling at her sadly. “I don’t think I saw my parents smile at each other, like ever. They got together for some sort of political marriage for power cause of my father’s business connections or some shit. My mom would always bring her affair partners to the house and everyone knew. I left for the military right when I turned 18 and didn’t think anything genuine would ever be in the cards for me.” I look up at her and see such kindness in those green eyes of hers that part of my heart melts. “Until I met you.”

“But, you don’t even know me,” She says. Her eyes don’t hide anything from me right now. I can see all the hurt she’s been through over the years.

“But I want to know you,” I insist. “Before I met you, I didn’t even hope for something for myself. I was fine going about my life the way I was. Now—Now you’ve given me hope.”

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She blinks as if she's trying to blink away tears.

"I don't want to put all this on you. It's not your responsibility," I murmur, taking her hand in mine and kissing the top of it. "But I want you to know I want to try. Even if things don't work out between us, I think we owe it to each other to at least try. I think we could make each other happy, Liv."

She closes her eyes and leans her head back.

"You don't have to give me any sort of answer now," I say softly. "Like I said, whatever pace you want, I'll be happy with and you don't even have to set it now."

"O—okay," She says, looking down at me.

When I smile and she smiles back, it makes my heart soar in my chest.

"You're gorgeous when you smile, you know," I say, reaching up to brush some of her fiery red hair away from her face.

A blush covers her cheeks. "I—I—"

"Come on, just take the compliment," I tease softly. "It's true and I'd be lying if I said anything different."

"Thanks," She says.

"You look absolutely exhausted," I say, squeezing her hand. "How about you take a

nap? I'll go out and grab your meds from the pharmacy and get some takeout for later. We'll save all the shopping for when you feel better."

"What about Summer?"

"I think she'll be fine," I say, cupping the side of her face. "And if she isn't, I'll take care of it. It's your turn to relax, okay?"

"O—okay."

I stand, leaning down slowly, giving her plenty of time to push me away or tell me to stop before I kiss her forehead.

"There's a bathroom right there," I say, nodding to the side of the room. "If you wanna get cleaned up before you lay down."

"I—I think I will," She says with a nod, her eyes a little dazed.

I think the chaos of everything is starting to sink in for her. I'm going to give her some space.

"You go take care of yourself, I'll leave some clothes for you to change into."

"Thanks," She murmurs, standing.

When the door to the bathroom shuts, I stand and head to my own room across the hall. I pull out one of my old t-shirts with a smirk. I'm definitely giving this to her selfishly cause I want to see her in my T-shirt. I grab a pair of my boxers for her to use too.

I go back into her bedroom and set them on the bed.

I take a moment to breathe in her mango scent in my home. I could get used to this.

I wasn't lying to her when I told her I'm afraid too. She's everything I never thought I could have in my life and if she wants to walk away, there's nothing I can do to keep her. I just have to hope she's strong enough not to run away from everything.

I wouldn't blame her, even if she did. I'd be absolutely shocked if the scars from her past didn't run deep.

Whether or not she wants to keep me in her life or not, I'll make sure her and Summer are set up. The money will be doing more good with them than it will with me and with the way I live, I have a stupid amount of money that's kind of just sitting there.

That's the least I can do for them. They both deserve to be happy.

CHAPTER 9

OLIVIA

I freeze when I close the door to the bathroom behind me. Holy shit, I've never been in a bathroom this fucking fancy.

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There are sleek, black tiles on the floors and walls and a huge shower that could probably fit half a dozen people.

I almost turn around right then and there. Being alone in Jax's amazing house makes things sink in. If he's serious about wanting Summer and I to be a part of his life, this is what his life includes. I'd be fucking stupid if I didn't get over myself and accept all that he's offering. I'd finally be able to start saving for Summer's college and things like that. I could maybe stop working at that bar.

But still, there's a part of me that won't shut up about how I shouldn't trust all this, especially with how amazing things are.

I take off my clothes and fold them, putting them on the huge counter of the sink. I wince when I look at myself in the mirror. I avoided looking down at myself too much when I was getting changed earlier at the hospital because I just wanted to get the hell out of there, but I can't avoid it in here.

I turn to the side and see the mottled purple, black, and blue bruising along my ribs. When I look at them, the boot shape of the bruises is really obvious. I tilt my neck up a bit to see the defined finger-shaped bruises there.

I think looking at the damage done to my body makes the reality of everything really set in because a wave of dizziness and exhaustion flow through my body and I have to slump against the sink. I lean my forehead against the cool counter and do my best to breathe the best I can with my sides screaming at me.

I should get going before I pass out on the tile floor.

As I start the shower and let the warm water flow over my body, soothing my sore and aching muscles, I remember the words Jax said earlier to my mom.

“She’s worlds stronger than you. Probably got more balls in her pinky finger than you do in your entire body. She’s nothing like you and never will be.”

It’s not the most romantic thing in the world and from what I know about Jax, that’s a pretty Jax-like statement. But still.

He thinks I’m strong. He thinks I’m nothing like my mom, even though I’ll admit, I haven’t been the sweetest to him.

Even though I know he thinks it already, I want to prove it to him. I want to prove to him that I am strong.

“I think we could make each other happy, Liv.”

He’s right. Fated-mate thing aside, if I didn’t have the truckload of baggage I carry and we met normally, I think I’d be drawn to him in the same way. His magnetizing smiles. His hilarious jokes. The way he can always tell when I’m too stuck inside my head.

He just seems to get me in a way no one’s ever really understood me in my entire life.

I finish my shower and wrap the big, fluffy towel around my body. I stand there for a second, just absorbing how great the softness feels against my skin. I don’t think I’ve ever felt a towel this soft.

I wrap another towel in my hair and crack open the bathroom door and peek back into the room. It’s empty, which isn’t particularly surprising.

What is surprising is the twinge I feel in my chest. I miss Jax.

I do see he's left me a T-shirt and a pair of boxers on the bed for me, though. I pull up the shirt to my face and inhale, smelling Jax's comforting firewood scent. It warms my body as if I'm sitting right next to one.

I put on the clothes and hang the towels back up in the bathroom before going to the bed and peeling back the blankets.

The moment I slide into bed and close my eyes, the world goes black.

* * *

I wake up to the sound of knocking at my door. When I open my eyes, I see Jax's tall frame standing in the doorway.

I look outside through the windows and see that it's dark out.

"How long was I out for?" I ask, sitting up against the pillows and yawning.

"A few hours," He answers. "Can I come in?"

"I mean, it's your house."

"I told you earlier, this is your space," He says, stubbornly not coming into the room.

I roll my eyes and give him a small smile. "Yeah, you can come in."

He has a couple pills in his hand and a glass of water in his hand.

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“Sorry for waking you up,” He says, handing me the glass of water. “I went out and picked up all your meds from the pharmacy. I thought you should take them sooner than later.”

I take a sip of the water before throwing the pills back.

“You’re supposed to take them with food, but I wasn’t sure whether you wanted to eat it in here or out in the kitchen with Summer and I.”

My stomach grumbles at the mention of food and Jax laughs.

“Hey!” I say, playfully shoving at his arm. “Don’t laugh at me!”

“I’m not laughing at you,” He says, while most definitely laughing. “You’re just so cute.”

I roll my eyes as I slide out of the bed.

His laughter stops and I see his eyes running up and down my body. I feel my body go warm under his gaze and I feel my nipples harden as they brush against the fabric of my shirt. He definitely doesn’t miss my body’s reaction.

“I like seeing you in my shirt,” he says, his voice low and intimate.

“I like wearing it,” I say softly, heat coming to my cheeks.

I don’t know what voodoo magic Jax’s scent and pheromones have, but they

definitely have some sort of magic. I'm never shy. Ever.

But he makes me feel all soft on the inside and outside, almost like I don't have to be as hard as I am for the rest of the world when I'm with him because he'll be there to protect me.

I look up at him and give him a small smile.

"Thanks for giving me your shirt to wear."

"Anytime," he says, clearing his throat. "Let's go eat."

"Yeah, I'm starving," I say, walking with him down the stairs and to the kitchen.

"I asked Summer what kind of food you'd probably like and she said you liked Chinese takeout so I got us some."

"That sounds amazing."

When we walk into the kitchen, I already see Summer chowing down on a full plate of food. She waves at me, grabbing her glass of water to chug down the absolutely massive bite she just shoved in her face.

"Hey Livvy, how was your nap?"

"It was great, very needed," I say, taking the fork and plate Jax hands me.

"Go ham, eat as much as you want, I bought way too much, anyway," Jax says.

I load up my plate just as much as Summer did and sit down next to her at the bar of one of the kitchen counters.

When the first bite of food hits my tongue, I let out a little moan. It tastes so fucking good. I literally haven't had food this good in weeks.

I hear Summer's giggle from beside me and glance at her. She's covering her mouth to keep from laughing too hard and she points to Jax, who's in the middle of loading his plate.

He's frozen, his eyes stuck on me and a noodle hanging off of his fork.

I narrow my eyes at him.

"What're you looking at."

"Nothing, nothing," He says, standing up straight and turning back to his food.

Summer can't keep her laughter inside as she lets out a full-on cackle. To my absolute astonishment, I see a blush on Jax's cheeks.

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“What in the world was that look for?” I ask him as he sits next to me.

“Nothing,” He says, quickly stuffing his face, probably so he doesn’t have to answer.

“I think he likes you,” Summer whisper yells from the other side of me.

“I got you the snacks you wanted and you sell me out like this!” Jax says, holding his heart like he’s been shot. “The betrayal!”

I join in with Summer’s laughter at Jax’s ridiculous show. There’s something that feels so comfortable with the way we’re all laughing together. It just feels so right.

Later, when we’re all done eating, Jax stands and grabs my plate before I can snatch it back from him.

“Hey, I can take care of my own plate,” I say, making a move to stand.

“Nah, it’s cool,” he says. “Let me take care of you guys.”

“Thanks Jax!” Summer says, sliding her plate and fork over to him.

I reach over and hold her hand. “How’re you doing?” I ask her.

“This is so cool, oh my god,” She says, smiling up at me. “I told Allison about it and she thinks it’s crazy!”

“You mentioned how Allison and her brother came and helped you get to school on

time, right?”

“Yeah, I did miss a day of school though,” She winces. “The first day after mom picked me up from the apartment, she said she’d bring me tomorrow but you know how she is.”

“That sucks, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, I got all caught up.”

“We’ll get you to school tomorrow, okay kid?” Jax says.

“Okay, that sounds awesome!”

“Thanks,” I say to him.

I really do appreciate it, especially since I don’t have a car right now and both Summer and I used to just take public transport everywhere. I don’t particularly like the idea of Summer going out and taking public transportation when there’re still people out there who may be looking for me.

“Were things okay with that guy mom had hanging around?” I asked, squeezing Summer’s hand.

“He was super creepy. One time I heard him trying to get into the bedroom I was in but I locked the door.”

“What?” Jax asks, leaning against the counter, his expression growing dark.

“Yeah, but it’s okay, nothing happened.”

My head falls to my chest and I let out a slow sigh of relief. From the corner of my eye, I see Jax's knuckles go white as he grips the countertop."

"I should've fucking knocked him out harder," He hisses. "That motherfucker went down too easy."

"He went down easy?" Summer asks Jax. "But he was a big dude!"

"Yeah," He says, a quick smile appearing on his face. He raises his arm and flexes his bicep, kissing it as he peels back the sleeve of his black t-shirt.

My eyes go wide at the sight of the defined muscles in his arm. I knew he was strong and stuff, but I wasn't really focused on his muscles when he carried me up into his car or anything. But now, now I have no other distractions.

"Like what you see?" Jax teases me, turning to the side and flexing his arm in a different way.

"Shut up," I say to both Jax and Summer, who's giggling her head off.

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When I go to stand from the bar, my head spins a bit and I have to lean against the countertop. Jax is immediately by my side. I feel the warmth radiate from his body and my body slumps even more at the smell of his firewood scent.

“Whoa,” He says, holding me up. “Okay, I think that’s enough excitement for tonight. Let’s get you to bed.”

“I—I can make it myself,” I say, holding a hand up to my head, which still feels like it’s being swung in a carousel at superspeed.

“Nah, I got you,” He says, sweeping me into his arms.

I don’t even have the energy to protest.

“Goodnight, Livvy,” I hear Summer say.

“Goodnight,” I tell her, waving a hand over Jax’s shoulder as he walks me up the stairs.

As Jax carries me up the stairs, I take time to really appreciate him. His jaw is cast in soft shadows from the hallway lights.

I take all of him in. How strong he is. How considerate he is. How beautiful he is, both inside and out.

I wrap my arms around him and rest my head against his chest, letting out a little sigh of contentment.

I'm sad when he lays me down in the bed. I don't want him to let me go.

He freezes when I won't let go of the hold I have on his neck, so he's bent over my form on the bed.

"Give me a second," I whisper. "I—I just want you close for a bit longer."

"Okay, whatever you want, love."

The nickname makes my heart flutter.

When I finally get the courage to let him go, he pulls the covers up over me and lays down on top of them, leaning over to brush my hair away from my face. It's like he knows exactly what I need.

"I'll stay by your side as long as you need me to," He murmurs.

He traces the marks against my neck with a light fingertip and I turn my head to face him. His eyes are dark and stormy.

"No one's going to touch you like this again," He whispers. "I promise."

"You know," I say, a smile appearing on my face. "I didn't know how hot protectiveness was until you told my mom off earlier."

"Oh?" He asks, a grin appearing on his face too.

Seems he's not the only one that can use smiles to distract someone.

"Yeah, it was really hot," I say, my voice soft as I grasp his hand and bring it up to my lips to kiss.

“God,” he groans. “Okay, noted.”

“I really appreciate everything you’re doing for me. For Summer and I.”

“Of course, love,” He says, cupping my cheek. “Always.”

“I—I think I want to give things a try,” I say with a yawn. “I’m excited.”

“Me too,” He says, leaning in to kiss me against the forehead again.

As he continues stroking my hair, my eyes flutter shut and sleep greets me.

CHAPTER 10

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JAX

I shut the door behind me softly and lean my head back against it. When Olivia's breathing started to slow, I decided it was probably time for me to leave, even though the only thing I wanted to do was stay next to her.

As I head down the hall, I hear Summer laughing on the phone with who I assume are her friends.

I didn't have any siblings or anything when I was growing up so I was always pretty lonely and I'm glad they had each other.

All things considered, Summer seems like a really well-adjusted kid, so Olivia seems to have done a great job.

I head downstairs and pack away all the leftovers. My phone buzzes in my pocket and I pull it out.

Hey, how're you doing, man?

Good, the girls are all settled in and I'm about to pass out

Glad to hear it, you need your rest.

I just wanted to let you know the Agency really wants you to bring that omega in tomorrow so the police and stuff can get a statement

This early? Damn

Yeah, they want to get a move on it cause she's the only one they haven't interviewed yet and she may have more info since she was in the other warehouse

Makes sense, I'll make sure she's there tomorrow.

Cool man, get some sleep.

I head upstairs and flop into bed. It's been a few nights since I've slept here since I've spent the last few nights sleeping in the uncomfortable ass recliner in Liv's hotel room.

It feels a lot better than that recliner, for sure, but I can't help but feel like her presence is missing. At least when I was sleeping at the hospital, she was right there.

I just want to hold her close and fall asleep with her in my arms.

One day. Hopefully one day soon.

* * *

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," I hiss, jumping backward.

I stare at the god-forsaken burnt mess on the pan in front of me and curse every single god that'll listen.

I never learned how to cook. It's never been that big of a deal. But this morning, I decided I wanted to do something nice for the girls and make them breakfast and now I'm stuck here with a block of charcoal and only half of the eggs I bought last night left.

“Why does it smell like the house is on fire?” Summer yawns from behind me.

I turn and see her eyes go wide when she makes eye contact with the monster I made.

“Wow. Okay, now I know.”

“You can laugh,” I sigh.

“It’s too early in the morning to laugh,” Summer says. “Here, let me help you. Do you have another pan?”

“Yeah, this one is a lost cause,” I say, dumping my fire fuel into the trash and putting the pan in the sink.

I grab another pan and put it on the stove for her to use and she gets started.

“How do you feel about my sister,” She asks as she starts whisking the rest of the eggs.

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“I really like her,” I say, leaning against the counter.

“Well, what are your intentions with her,” She says, turning and narrowing her eyes dramatically at me. “It’s time for your interrogation.”

“I mean, she’s my fated mate. I’d like for us to be all that entails, you know? Obviously, I’m not going to push her for something she’s not ready for, but I want to be there for her.” I pause. “You too.”

“Oh of course,” She says with a wave. “We’re a package deal.”

“Of course,” I laugh. “Did that answer your question though?”

“Yeah,” She says, looking down at the pan. “I just want the best for her, you know? Our mom has been really shitty to her for basically our entire life.”

“Yeah, that must’ve really sucked.”

“Yeah,” she says, stirring the eggs in the pan. “I don’t remember our dad cause he died when I was super young, but from the way Livvy describes it, he died, Mom lost her bond and she kinda went insane. She just couldn’t deal with life unless an alpha was there for her and she kinda just stopped taking care of us.”

“And your sister’s been taking care of you ever since?”

“Yeah, she ended up dropping out of school and getting a waitressing job so she could move us out of that trailer. I was like, four when she managed to do that. She’s

been working her ass off ever since.”

“Wow, sixteen is fucking young to deal with that.”

“Yeah, but she’s made it work,” She says, smiling fondly. “She’s worked so hard to keep me safe and give me a good life, I just want someone to do that for her too.”

“Oh, I’m totally prepared to do that, even if she doesn’t want me to be a part of your guys’ life forever.”

“What? Really?”

“Yeah, you guys at least won’t have to worry as much,” I say.

She grins up at me. “Alright, I like you. You can date my sister.”

“Yes!” I cheer, pumping my fist into the air. “I have the sister seal of approval!”

“Okay, now I get to tell you all her favorite things,” Summer says excitedly.

She’s practically bouncing up and down with excitement, listing the various things to get and do to win her sister over.

I whip out my phone and start typing a lot of it down.

“Dang, you’re taking notes?”

“Duh, this is valuable information, of course, I’m gonna write it down,” I laugh.

“How about I just text it to you? I think I have your number from earlier. I’ll send you all the things that come to mind and you can use them!”

“You’re literally my fairy godmother,” I say. “What can I do to repay you?”

“You don’t need to repay me.”

“Well then just think of it as something to make you more comfortable here. I wanna make your sister and you feel at home here.”

She pauses, looking down at the pan and shuffling back and forth between her feet.

“This is probably a big ask, but can I have my friends over?”

Damn, that’s all she wants? I mean, I’m not particularly surprised, it seems Liv’s put a lot of effort into raising her right, but still. I would’ve bought her a unicorn if she asked me for one. It doesn’t matter that they don’t exist.

Summer’s a big part of Olivia’s life and I know if Summer’s happy then it’ll be a lot easier for Olivia to be happy.

“Sure, I’ve got a movie room you guys can hang out in and everything.”

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“You have a movie room?” She asks, her jaw-dropping.

“Yeah, I’ll text you the gate code and they can come over,” I say. “No big deal.”

She smiles up at me. “Thanks, Jax.”

I hear footsteps down the stairs and turn to smile at Olivia as she walks into the kitchen. Her nose wrinkles in the most adorable way.

“What the hell is that smell?” She asks, waving a hand in front of her face.

“I accidentally burned the eggs,” I say, nodding over to the trashcan.

She raises an eyebrow and walks over to the trash, opening the lid and bursting out into a fit of laughter.

“Oh my god, fuck that hurts,” She laughs, holding her sides. “Those were eggs?”

I shrug as Summer joins in on her laughter.

“I know right?”

“Hey, don’t gang up on me,” I laugh, taking out some plates and plating the much better eggs Summer made for the three of us.

“Oh, we can totally gang up on you,” Olivia laughs. “That shit was fucking crazy. You burn water, don’t you.”

I cross my arms over my chest. “I can boil water,” I huff, smiling at the two of them.

I grab the orange pill bottles from the pharmacy and take out the medications Olivia needs to take and fill up a glass with water.

“You should sit down and eat. How’re you feeling?” I ask her.

“A lot better, that’s probably the best night of sleep I’ve had in absolutely forever.”

I smile down at her as our fingers brush as I hand over the pills she has to take. Her hand lingers in mine as she blinks up at me, her eyes a little sleepy.

The three of us eat breakfast together and talk a bit about how Summer’s school is going and the classes she’s taking before we all head upstairs to get ready. Pretty soon after, we’re climbing into my car and driving over to Summer’s school to drop her off.

“Bye, guys!” Summer says, jumping out of the car.

“Have a good day!” Summer calls. “We’ll see you later!”

“Love you!”

“Love you too!” Olivia says, a broad smile across her face.

“I always thought she’d grow out of saying that kinda stuff one day,” She says, turning to me. “In all the movies and stuff, a lot of parents always talk about how their kids are too cool for them now and won’t do that kinda stuff anymore right around when they start high school. But she still does.”

“Well, duh, obviously it’s cause you’re cool,” I tease. “Seriously though, it’s cause

she really loves you.”

“Well, I really love her.”

“I’m glad you guys have each other.”

“Yeah,” She says wistfully, as I pull out of the parking lot for Summer’s school.

“Anyways, I was thinking we’d see what we could scavenge from your apartment and then I’d take you to go buy the necessities, how does that sound?”

“Really? You’ll take me back to the apartment?” She asks me, her eyes hopeful.

“Yeah, the only thing I do have to ask of you today is I need you to come with me to my work. The police are looking to interview you.”

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I reach out my hand to hold hers when I see her shoulders stiffen. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” She says, sighing. “I’ll be okay, I know I have to get it over with.”

“And maybe something you tell them can help with the case. You can give them details about that other girl that was in that cell with you. Willow?”

“Yeah, Willow,” She says. “I’ll do it.”

“Awesome,” I say, squeezing her hand. “I’m glad.”

“Now I get to show you the shithole apartment I lived in,” she says, laughing.

CHAPTER 11

OLIVIA

Wow. My apartment really is a shithole.

It’s worse than I remember. Probably in part because I’m coming from Jax’s stunning cliffside mansion, but more so because it’s absolutely trashed. It looks like it was ransacked.

“Holy shit,” I say, stepping into the apartment.

The door wasn’t even locked, not that I would expect my mom to lock up she had me kidnapped, but still, the whole living room is trashed and every single dish in the

kitchen is smashed onto the floor.

“Stay close to me,” Jax says, softly, holding a hand out for me to stay behind him.

“Let’s check the house for people first, okay?”

“Sure,” I say, wrapping my arms around myself as I follow him through our small apartment.

The curtains that Summer and I used to divide our one bedroom are all ripped and tossed on the floor. Our dresser drawers are all toppled over too.

I almost feel like crying. Everything I worked for, ever since I got Summer and I out of that god-forsaken trailer: gone. Or at the very least, a fucking mess.

“Fucking hell,” I hear Jax growl as he steps into the bathroom.

In our tiny bathroom, the mirror is a messy spiderweb of cracks from someone breaking it.

And written on that shattered mirror, in what looked to be my most expensive lipstick, are words.

I will ruin you.

I can practically hear my mom shrieking those words at us as we left her trailer yesterday.

“She must’ve come back here after yesterday,” I say softly. “It definitely looks like my mom’s handiwork.”

“Yeah,” he mutters under his breath.

“You know, it’s kinda funny,” I snort.

“What?” Jax asks, looking at me like I’ve gone insane.

“Look,” I say nodding to the sink below the mirror, where the toilet lid is currently resting. “Just imagine, my mom being just as fucking pissed as she was yesterday and taking the goddamn toilet lid and trying to throw it against the mirror to smash it.”

Jax crosses his arms and gets this contemplative look on his face like he’s genuinely trying to imagine the picture I’m painting for him.

“I mean, I don’t know if I’d call that funny,” He says, slowly.

I burst out into laughter, slumping against the wall. I cover my hands with my hands.

“This is one of those times where you’ve gotta laugh or else you’re gonna cry, you know?” I say, my voice thick with emotion.

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“I get that,” He says, pulling me into his arms and surrounding me with his campfire scent. I let it flow through me and soothe all my frayed nerves.

“I mean, another positive is we know who did this,” I say.

“Yeah,” He says pulling back. His brows are furrowed in concern. “You know you can’t come back here, right? It’s not safe.”

I bite my lip, my eyes darting between his. This time, I can’t keep the tears from filling them. “This has been our place for the last ten years,” I whisper. “Moving in here was the single most important thing I ever did for us and now it’s all gone.”

“Oh, love,” He says, brushing my tears from my cheeks. “Just cause you can’t stay here doesn’t mean the huge steps you took to get out of there aren’t important. It just means life is changing.”

“This was our home,” I sob, clenching his shirt in my fists. “What are we supposed to do now?”

He pauses before he tucks my head into his chest like looking into my eyes at this moment in time would be too much for him. “If you’re asking me, I’d like for us to make a home together,” he murmurs.

“How can you even say that,” I whisper back. “Look at this fucking mess. This is my life, Jax. This isn’t a perfect world—”

“And it doesn’t have to be a perfect world. And I don’t care about the mess. I just

care about you. I care about Summer. I care about you guys being okay,” He says, pulling back to meet my eyes. “That’s why this shit bothers me. I don’t care about having to deal with it, I care that you guys have had to put up with this bullshit.”

He grabs my hand and holds it up to his heart. I can feel his strong heartbeat beneath the palm of my hand. “I swear to you, Olivia. I’ll do everything in my power to make sure you can live fucking happy life, free from all this bullshit. I promise.”

Tears well in my eyes and I can’t help but bury my head into his chest, my shoulders shaking with sobs.

“I’ll spend every day proving to you that I want to be in your life,” he whispers.

He holds me close to him, rocking me back and forth while I cry into his arms. When I’ve finally caught my breath, I pull back and look up at him.

“I’m probably a mess right now,” I laugh, in between my ugly hiccups.

“I don’t care,” He says softly, leaning in to kiss my forehead.

“Let’s see if I can find some trash bags in the kitchen, maybe we can save some clothes and stuff,” I say.

“You sure? I can take a bit longer to hold you,” he offers.

“It’s okay, I think I need to actually do something, you know?”

“Yeah, I totally get it. Let’s get this done.”

We spend the next hour or so shoving clothes that weren’t slashed apart into trashbags that Jax throws in the trunk of his car.

I pick up some of Summer's books from the little shelf beside her bed that we thrifted together.

"These are probably Summer's favorite things ever," I say to Jax. "There's a used bookstore down the street and I'd always save some of my tips every month so I give them to her so she could buy a book she liked."

"Why didn't she take them with her?"

"Knowing my bitch of a mother, she probably wasn't given much time to pack and just grabbed some clothes and stuff. Plus, I don't think she wanted to lose them at my mom's place, I think she probably hoped we'd come back here."

"That makes sense, your mom did tell her you were leaving on your own and she'd never think you'd just leave her for good," He says, stroking a hand down my back.

"Yeah," I say, gently placing them in an old plastic grocery bag for us to bring down.

"What next?" Jax asks me, his hands laced behind his head, stretching out his arm muscles for me to stare at.

"Huh?" I say, shaking my head and trying to focus on what he was actually saying.

He smirks. "You liked me flexing earlier," He teases, lifting up the sleeve of his t-shirt again and flexing for me. "You can touch too."

"Shut up," I say with a blush.

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“Fine, fine, I was just trying to help,” he teases. “I was asking you what’s next though.”

“Oh, could I have your help lifting my mattress?” I ask, turning back into the bedroom.

“Sure,” he says.

My mattress is slashed too, so I can see some of the exposed springs. It wasn’t the best mattress in the world, but it definitely didn’t deserve to die like that.

Jax lifts it up and I lean down under the bedframe to get a shoebox.

“What’s in the box?” Jax asks as he drops the mattress back onto the frame.

“Just some of Summer and my important papers and some emergency money,” I answer, peeking into the box. I let out a sigh of relief when everything is still there. “Let me know if there’s any way I can try to pay you back for all the help you’re giving the two of us.”

“Hey, don’t say that,” Jax says, stepping up to me and pressing a finger against my lips. “You don’t owe me anything.”

“Bu—”

“How about you look at it this way,” he says. “We’re a team. When you’re on a team you help each other. I want to help you, okay?”

“Okay,” I answer, smiling up at him.

This man has a heart of gold.

“Is that the last of it?”

“Yeah,” I answer.

“Alright then, let’s go head to the mall and grab you some stuff then.”

“What else do we need?” I ask, walking with him as he tugs me along and out of the apartment. I lock it out of habit.

“I was thinking of buying you a new phone,” He says. “I think the traffickers got your original one.”

“What? No. I have some money saved up, I can cover—”

“Team, remember? I can handle buying you a phone.” He grins down at me as he opens the door to his car. “Plus, if I get you a phone, that means I can finally get your number.”

I roll my eyes as I hop into his car.

“Thank you, then,” I say.

“Of course.”

We head to the mall and just like Jax said he would, he buys me the newest phone. When we’re at the store, we even manage to set it up with all my old info because I backed up my phone to the cloud.

He also brings me to a few other stores to buy me some new makeup and the shampoos and conditioners that Summer and I like using.

“Hey, what about this?” He asks me, handing me a scented body wash.

I take a sniff and laugh at the smell of mangoes that hits my nose.

“For who, you or me?”

“I mean, I wouldn’t be opposed to smelling like mangoes, but there are better ways of getting there,” He says, his voice low.

“Uh huh, tell me about them,” I say, leaning into him.

In the store full of a ton of products that smell like a million things, the only thing I can smell is his woody campfire scent. The only thing I can see is him and his calming gray eyes.

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It's like when he's with me, the entire world falls away.

He leans down and brushes a kiss against my forehead.

I feel a twist of disappointment as he pulls away from me, but I swallow it down. Now isn't the time for those sorts of feelings.

"You ready to check out?"

"Yeah," I say, nodding and trying to get my racing heartbeat under control. "Yeah, I'm ready."

"Thank you," I tell him as we walk out of the store.

"No need to thank me," He says, flashing me his usual charming smile. His smile falls when his phone buzzes in his pocket. He takes it out and winces. "We should get going to my agency, they want to get the interview done soon."

My hands squeeze around the couple bags I'm holding and I take a deep breath. "Okay, let's get started."

"Hey," he says, his voice soft. "It'll be okay."

"You'll be there with me, right?"

"If you want me to be."

“Yes please,” I say, nodding eagerly. “I don’t want you to leave me.”

“I won’t leave you, ever. I promise.”

CHAPTER 12

JAX

As we walk into my agency’s building, to my surprise, Olivia takes my hand in hers and squeezes it. I remember when we first met and she didn’t want anything to do with physical contact with me. A warm feeling sparks in my chest at the thought that she feels safer with me.

I squeeze her hand back, looking down at her.

“How’re you doing?” I ask her as we step into the elevator.

“Fine,” She says, her jaw clenching.

“Oh no,” I say, my voice dropping.

“What?” She asks, turning up to look at me.

“Sound the alarms! She said she’s ‘fine’, the world is gonna end,” I tease.

She just rolls her eyes at me, letting out a small huff.

“Seriously though, how’re you doing?”

“I mean, does that matter? I don’t think that’s gonna change anything.”

“It matters to me,” I say softly, lifting her hand and kissing the back of it.

She pauses, looking at her hand in mine before letting out a deep sigh. “I’m just not used to talking about my shit, you know? I like leaving it in the fucking past.”

“I get that,” I murmur.

“But I have to do it. I’m not gonna withhold information that could be important for helping other omegas.”

“And remember, I’ll be right by your side. I’m not leaving you, okay?”

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She smiles up at me and squeezes my hand. “You better not.”

The elevator doors open and we walk into the lobby of our office.

“Hey Jax,” the receptionist greets us.

“Hey Lily,” I say, giving her a wave. “This is Olivia, my fated mate.”

“Hey, nice to meet you,” Liv says giving Lily a small nod.

“It’s nice to meet you too, I’m glad you’re all up and about,” Lily says. She seems to notice the questioning glance that Olivia sends me. “Oh, just to give you a heads up, the entire office knows about how Jax stormed out of the warehouse with you in his arms demanding for an ambulance for you.”

“What?” Liv asks, looking up at me.

“It wasn’t that dramatic,” I say, rubbing the back of my neck.

“Oh, it totally was,” Lily says, unhelpfully. “I don’t think the agency has ever seen Jax that serious about something.”

“Wow,” Olivia says, smiling up at me. “Well, that’s cool.”

“Yeah,” Lily says. “Anyways, people are waiting for you in conference room 3, I assume Jax can show you the way?”

“Oh I got it,” I say. “See you later!”

Olivia follows along as I lead her further into the office.

“She seems sweet,” She says.

“Yeah, she’s pretty cool. She won’t stop giving me shit though, I don’t know why she had to go tell you that.”

“I don’t think what she said was a bad thing,” She says slowly, a blush creeping up on her cheeks. “Your protectiveness makes you even hotter.”

I smile down at her. “So you think I’m hot, huh?”

“Shut up,” She says, pushing her hand in my face.

“Fine, fine,” I laugh. “We’re here,” I say, stopping outside the conference room door. “You ready?”

“Yeah,” She says, squeezing my hand.

When I open the door to the conference room, I see there are four other alphas: Brandon, the captain of the operation, and two police officers.

Olivia squeezes my hand even tighter when she sees the four other alphas in the room, but I make sure to keep close to her so she knows I’m not going to leave her alone.

“Hey guys, this is Olivia Miller,” I say. I start pointing out all the other people in the room to her. “And Olivia, this is Brandon, my partner. That’s the captain for the rescue operation, and these are the police officers here for the interview.”

Her knuckles are white with how tightly she's holding onto my hand. I don't mind. I just wish I could take away all the stress she's feeling.

"Nice to meet you, Ms. Miller," One of the police officers says. "I'm Officer Parker and this is my partner Officer Ballard."

"Hey," She says, nodding at them.

"Why don't you take a seat," Officer Parker says, nodding to the other chairs at the conference table.

She looks up at me and I just swing one of the chairs next to the one they nodded to for her to sit at and smile up at her as I take a seat. She follows me and sits, still nervously clutching my hand.

I don't think I've ever seen her this nervous before. I mean, I get it, with all she's been through.

"Excuse me, Jax," My captain says. "But this interview is just for Ms. Miller."

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“I think I’m fine right here,” I say.

“Jax,” He sighs, exasperated. I don’t know why this is unexpected, I’m not acting out of character by saying I’m not leaving.

“Olivia, what would you like?” Brandon asks, cutting in.

I love that guy, he always has my back. I need to take a book out of Liv’s book and send him a gift basket or something.

“I would like him to stay,” She says softly, her eyes darting to him.

“Very well,” My captain sighs.

“Okay, we just have a few questions for you, Ms. Miller,” Officer Parker says. “Are you okay answering them?”

“Yeah,” she says with a nod, straightening her back.

“You were kept in a different warehouse than the other omegas, do you know why?”

“Yeah, it was because I was sold directly to them.”

“Sold? Who sold you?” the other officer chimes in.

“My mom,” She sighs, her gaze falling to the table. “She came to my apartment and I opened the door for her and then a couple of alphas knocked me out and I woke up in

that warehouse.”

“Why would your mother sell you?” The other officer asks, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

I already don’t like this guy. I don’t know whether it’s the stench of his dominance or just him in general, but I know I don’t like him.

“She really hates me,” She grits out. “Like, really hates me. I moved out with my little sister when I was sixteen because of how bad things were. She also probably wanted money.”

“What were things like in that other warehouse?” Officer Parker asks. “You were the only one to come out with injuries so severe. Why?”

“I had a cellmate. Her name was Willow Carter. She was a twenty-year-old visual arts major from the local college. She was being taken away by this guy in a suit and his goons, I’m pretty sure he was the one in charge of the whole thing. He said she already had a buyer. I tried to fight back when they tried to take her and they didn’t like that.”

“Why would you fight back against alphas?” Officer Ballard—I should call him Officer Ballsack cause he’s really being a dick. Childish, but I don’t care. I can’t do anything but tap my foot on the ground right now anyway. Punching him in the face for being so aggressive to Liv won’t do anything positive.

“You know that’s a stupid thing to do,” He continues.

She narrows her eyes at him. There’s my fiery Liv.

“I wouldn’t just let them take her without a fight,” She scoffs. “She was being taken

away to be fucking sold. Everyone here knows what that fucking entails. I wasn't just going to let her be shipped off to that hell without seeing someone was willing to fight for her."

Officer Parker seems to be the smart one, cause he picks up on the tension in the room and continues asking some questions.

"Other than the physical assault that happened, did anything else happen with the man in a suit?"

Her shoulders tense up at the memories and she squeezes my hand even tighter. "He said something about some alphas paying good money for an omega they could break, but that's about it."

My blood starts to boil at the sound of that.

"If that's the case," Officer Ballsack cuts in, his eyes glinting with something that makes me want to wipe that look off his face. "Then you should be taken into police protective custody."

"That's not necessary," I cut in. "She can still be protected while not in police custody."

Officer Ballsack just rolls his eyes. "I've read your file, Mr. Henderson. You really don't have to do this here, I'm sure you understand she'd be safer—"

"No," Olivia cuts in turning to look at me. "I want to stay with Jax."

The biggest smile spreads across my face.

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“Officer Ballard has a point,” Officer Parker says. “Police custody may be better, we could relocate Ms. Miller to a completely different area.”

“I’d like to stay here,” Liv says. “I have a life here that I don’t want to give up and a little sister who’s still going to school. I don’t want to uproot her life.”

“I also have state-of-the-art security systems installed,” I cut in. “She’s as safe as she can be.”

“But—“ Officer ballsack cuts in.

“I can give her round-the-clock 24/7 protection. I don’t think your department can offer that.”

“Good point,” Officer Parker says. “Well, then I’d say we should listen to what Ms. Miller wants here.”

Olivia sends me a smile that warms my heart.

They ask her a few more questions that she’s able to answer pretty easily and then we’re done. Not soon enough, by my standards, but I can be super impatient. The only thing I want to do is bring Olivia back to my place, wrap my arms around her, and make the rest of the world fall away for her.

“Alright, I think that’s all our questions for now,” Officer Parker says. “Thank you for your time.”

He takes out a card from his belt and slides it over to Olivia. "If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to call."

She takes the card and nods.

"You guys are free to go," The captain says, standing from the table.

Liv shoots up to her feet and tugs me along after her. When we make our way down a random hallway free of people, she turns around and practically throws herself into my arms.

"Whoa, you okay?"

"They wanted to take me away from you," She whispers, her scent sour with stress.

"Well, they won't," I say, brushing my fingertips through her hair. "I promised, remember?"

She nods.

"Oh there you are," Brandon calls from down the hall.

Liv's body stiffens in my arms.

"It's just Brandon," I whisper. "You up for meeting him? I can send him away if you don't want to."

"I'm okay."

The two of us turn to see Brandon and his fated mate Sadie coming down the hall.

“Hey Brandon, hey Sadie,” I say.

“Hey Olivia,” Brandon says. “This is my fated mate, Sadie.”

“We’re glad to see you up and about, how are you feeling?” Sadie asks Liv.

“Oh, I’m doing alright, thanks for asking,” she says with a smile, her defenses seeming to come down at Sadie’s comforting nature.

“Of course. I’m glad to see those clothes fit, you have everything you need right?”

“Sadie was the one who got those clothes for you,” I explain, nodding down to the outfit she’s wearing right now.

“Oh, thank you!” Liv says. “And yeah, Jax’s made sure that I’m good.”

“I’m glad,” Sadie says with a smile. “We should definitely hang out sometime, get away from the alpha pheromones and stuff.”

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“That would be nice,” Liv says with a smile.

“Here, we can exchange contact info and set something up!”

The two girls do their thing and Brandon pulls me to the side.

“She did well in that interview,” He says softly.

“Yeah, she did,” I say, smiling fondly over at her.

“That one cop gave me bad vibes though.”

My jaw clenches at the thought of that officer and the way he looked at Olivia.

“Yeah, I didn’t like the way he was talking to her. Have we worked with him before?”

“No, he’s a new transfer from a district in central California.”

“Huh, we should keep an eye out.”

“For sure,” He says. “I’ll let you get back to your girl though. Seems like she feels safe with you.”

“Yeah, we’re getting there,” I say with a smile.

“Anyways, we shouldn’t keep you,” Brandon says, pulling Sadie to his side. “We just wanted to say hi and make sure everything’s okay.” He looks down at Liv. “Good job

in that interview, by the way, that one officer was being a dick.”

“He really was!” Liv says. “I’m glad I wasn’t the only one to notice.”

“Bye, guys!” Sadie says with a wave.

“She was sweet,” Liv says, looking up at me. “Can we head back home now though?”

Part of me melts when she calls my place home. With her by my side, it really does feel like home.

CHAPTER 13

OLIVIA

The only thing I can focus on as we drive back home is Jax’s hand in mine. My mind is a frazzled mess.

“You okay?” Jax asks as he pulls into the garage, seeming to notice my mood.

I turn to face him and it feels like he’s looking straight into my soul. He lifts a hand to cup my cheek and I lean into his touch, letting out an involuntary purr.

His chest vibrates with a growl in response, sending a jolt throughout my entire body. My skin feels warm at his touch.

“Can—can you hold me, when we get inside?” I ask, reaching up to hold his hand against my face.

“Sure, love, whatever you want,” he whispers, leaning in to kiss me on the forehead.

As he climbs out of the car and shuts the door behind him, I have a few seconds of silence in the car by myself to make a decision.

When he opens the door to help me out of the car, I reach my hands out to grab his face and pull him to me. His soft lips meet mine and I go straight to heaven. The kiss is almost magical with the way it makes me feel.

I can't help but let out a little whimper against his lips, which causes Jax to lift me up into his arms.

“Whoa!” I squeak, quickly wrapping my legs around him.

“We need to get inside,” he growls against my lips.

“Need?” I laugh as he carries me inside.

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“Yes,” He says, staring into my eyes.

He carries me into his bedroom and sets me down gently on his bed, leaning himself over me.

“God, I’ve been waiting forever to kiss you,” He murmurs, tracing my lips with his thumb.

“Seriously?” I ask, jerking my head back. “Then why didn’t you do it sooner! I’ve literally been waiting for you to kiss me.”

His face melts at my indignation. “I wanted you to be ready,” he says, leaning in to kiss my forehead.

I grab the front of his shirt and tug him down so he’s facing me. “Jax, I love those, but I want you to kiss me for real.”

“As you wish,” He whispers against my lips before diving in like he’s dying of thirst and I’m the first drink of water he’s had in ages.

His kiss consumes me, lighting me on fire from head to toe. When his tongue comes into play, I can’t help but let out a little moan underneath him, pulling him down to feel him on my body.

He traces a hand down my side and it makes shivers run down my spine, even through the clothes I’m wearing. His campfire smoke scent grows thick, almost hypnotizing me.

“God, you feel worlds better than I ever could’ve imagined,” He growls as he pulls away from the kiss.

I pant, trying to catch my breath, my chest brushing against his.

“I want to make you feel good, love,” He says. “Can I?”

I nod, quickly and he leans back down to kiss me, slipping a hand into the yoga pants I’m wearing. I feel his fingers stroke up and down my panties.

“God, you’re so fucking wet,” He groans. “Tell me it’s for me, love, please, I need to hear you say it.”

“I’m wet for you,” I whisper.

He lets out a moan into my ear that makes my slick come in another flood of wetness. I love the way he sounds.

“You fucking own me,” He says, reaching up to circle my clit. “Body, soul, fucking everything. I’m all yours.”

My hips shift, searching after his touch and it’s my turn to moan into his ear.

“You smell so fucking sweet, I bet you taste just as good as you smell,” He growls.

I whine when he pulls his hand back, my eyes flying open. “Please,” I whisper.

He smirks up at me. “You want me to touch you?” He teases.

“Yes, please Jax, please.”

“I like the sound of that.”

“Yes, yes, yes, please, I just want you to touch me,” I beg.

I help lift my hips as he peels my pants off of me, the cool air against my burning pussy making my thighs clench together.

Jax makes his way down the bed, spreading my legs open.

“You look fucking gorgeous,” He whispers, dragging a finger up my bare pussy and circling my clit.

I let out a little moan. I have to grip his comforter in my fists to keep me from flying away with how amazing he’s making me feel.

He teases me a bit more before he slides a finger into my pussy, making me cry out.

“You look even more beautiful than I ever could’ve imagined,” He says, thrusting his fingers in and out of my pussy at a steady pace. “Your hair all spread out over my comforter. I want to worship you in this bed for the rest of our lives.”

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He reaches up with his thumb and starts circling my clit with every thrust and swallows my cry with his own lips as he kisses me.

I fly over the edge, moaning into his mouth as my orgasm runs through my entire body. I clutch him to me, my pussy spasming on his fingers.

It's the most magical feeling I've ever felt in my entire life.

He helps me slowly come down from my orgasm, every single one of his little touches sending aftershocks through my entire body.

He lays down by my side, lifting his glistening hand up and licking his fingers.

"God, you taste fucking delicious," He says. He looks down at me and my wide eyes and a smirk of mischief appears on his face. "Want a taste?"

"I—I—"

He holds a finger up to my lips and I tentatively take a small lick of my slick.

"You taste fucking sweet," He says. "I love the taste of your slick. I want to bury my head between your thighs."

I close my legs and my pussy clenches at his words. I imagine what it would be like if he went down between my legs and devoured me and I feel warmth appear on my cheeks.

“How was that?” He asks softly, brushing some hair away from my face.

“Mindblowing,” I whisper. “I—I’ve never come with someone before.”

“What?” He asks, jerking backward, his eyes wide with surprise.

“Yeah, I had a beta boyfriend when I was a teenager, but we were kids, you know? And doing things solo is so different than with someone,” I look him up and down, soaking in this moment. “Especially someone like you.”

“Well,” he says, a grin spreading across his face. “I’m glad I could make that a good experience for you.”

He opens his arms and I lean onto his chest, resting my head against it. Even though I feel completely safe in his arms, I feel a bit of dread creep into my chest.

He seems to notice because he tilts my face up to meet his gaze.

“What’s up, love?”

“I—I don’t know if I’m ready for, you know, everything,” I say softly, my eyes darting back and forth between his eyes to gauge his reaction. When he just looks at me with those familiar kind eyes, I continue. “I don’t think I’m ready to take your knot. I—I need more time.”

“I’ll wait as long as you want me to,” he says, cupping my cheek.

“You’re not upset that I can’t return the favor?”

“No, not at all, love. I promise it’s more than enough for me just to be able to watch you fall apart in my arms. It was fucking amazing.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, of course I am.”

“O—okay,” I say, resting my head back on his chest.

I lay my head back down on his chest and just sink into his body. I nearly drift off, while I’m in his arms.

Then his phone rings from his pocket.

His brow furrows when he sees who it is.

“Who is it?” I ask him, tracing my fingers across his chest.

“It’s Summer,” he says, answering the phone and putting it on speaker. “Hey, what’s up?” He asks her.

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“Jax!” She says, her voice panicked. “There are people at the school, I think they’re part of CPS or the police or something, but they’re saying I have to come with them!”

“What?” I ask, shooting up in bed.

“Livvy! I don’t know what’s going on,” She says, her voice shaking. “Please come quick. I don’t want them to take me away.”

“We’re coming right now, Summer, just hold tight for me, okay?”

“Okay,” She says. “I have to go now, please, please hurry.”

CHAPTER 14

JAX

I jump up and out of bed. What the fuck are people doing at the school looking for Summer?

Olivia jumps up just as quickly, cursing when she can’t find her panties.

“Screw them,” she hisses, pulling on her yoga pants. “Let’s go.”

“That shouldn’t have been as hot as it was,” I tell her as we run down the stairs together. I catch the heat of her glare and wince. “Not the time? Not the time. Got it.”

We hop into my car and I gun it, speeding through the hilly streets of the city. I see

Olivia biting her thumbnail as we get closer and closer to the school.

“Why do you think people are there?” She asks me.

“I don’t know, but whatever’s going on, I have your back. I promise.”

We pull into the school’s parking lot and Olivia jumps out of the car before I even have a chance to turn the engine off. I manage to catch up to her as she makes a beeline for the office.

When we make our way there, I see Summer’s face light up when she sees us. I also get to see every single muscle in Olivia’s body lock up when she sees who’s in the waiting room of her office.

Sitting there with a police officer and what looks to be a CPS officer, is their mother.

Oh man, do I hate that woman. She’s sitting there, her hands clasped in her lap, her nose tilted towards the air as if she thinks she’s better than everyone else in the fucking room.

“Livvy!” Summer says, jumping up from her chair and running over to throw her hands around her sister’s neck.

Summer is practically seething as she glares at her mother.

“What is the meaning of this?” she asks, her voice low. She doesn’t let go of Summer though, holding on to her like her life depends on it.

“Sorry to bring you in like this,” the principal says, pushing up her glasses up her nose. “But we seem to have a complaint from your mother saying that she has custody over your sister and wanted to take her out of school. I’ve urged everyone to

remain patient and wait until you get here because you're the listed contact for Summer, here."

"I just want my daughter back," Janice says, wiping at her eyes even though there are no goddamn tears there. "And she's being kept from me."

She turns to the alpha police officer and reaches out her hand. "You understand, right officer? I just want my daughter back."

Oh god, the nerve of this woman.

"Olivia, was it?" the CPS officer says, stepping in. "It looks like in our records, Janice is still the one who holds primary custody over Summer and she's requested for us to ensure that her rights to custody are still maintained."

Olivia's scent twists into something acrid with her anger. Everyone in the room but Summer seem to lean back away from her.

"Excuse me, Ma'am. Has Janice," She says to the CPS officer, spitting her mother's name. "Explained to you that I've been the one to take care of Summer ever since we were kicked out when I was sixteen because the alpha she was dating at the time raped me when I first presented as an omega?"

I see Summer's hands tighten in the back of Olivia's shirt at her words.

I take a step closer to both of them, stopping myself short of wrapping my own arms around them and carrying them away to safety.

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The CPS officer's eyes go wide. "No," She says, turning back to Janice. "That was not shared."

"I didn't kick them out!" Janice hisses. She turns to Olivia. "You have no proof!"

"I have no proof you kicked me out, sure, but I do have proof I've been taking care of Summer since then." She nods over to the principal. "I'm sure if the school records are checked you'll see that I've been the one to sign all the paperwork for her ever since she started elementary."

"I didn't even see her until a couple weeks ago," Summer chimes in, still holding on to Olivia.

"She was gone for two weeks! That has to indicate she's not fit to look after Summer," Janice says, growing more and more agitated with the situation. "Plus, she's bringing that violent alpha around my daughter! He assaulted my boyfriend!"

"I was only fucking gone for two weeks because you sold me to that god damn trafficking ring!" Olivia hisses. "Plus, look who's fucking talking, you're the one who brought random, violent, abusive alphas around all the time! Jax only knocked the guy out because he grabbed me!"

The police officer's eyes go wide and he stands up and gets between the two omegas. Understandably so, but I don't like that another alpha is so close to Olivia right now. Her stress is making all the protective instincts I have work in overdrive.

"Everyone, let's calm down," the officer says.

I take a deep breath. I have to be calm. Me losing my shit right now won't do jack shit for anyone involved.

I step forward.

“Hello there, Officer. My name is Jax Henderson. I've been working with the Henderson Security Agency on the case of the drug and Omega trafficking ring. I can vouch for Olivia that she was taken against her will.”

I glance back at Olivia and see her eyes wide. I don't think I ever really mentioned the official name of the agency I work for to her. But yeah, it shares a name because I decided to invest a bit of my trust in it when it first started.

“Well,” The CPS officer says, taking a breath. “It looks like this situation is quite complicated.”

She turns to Olivia and Summer with an apologetic glance. “I'm sorry, but with the allegations made from both sides, it looks like an emergency custody hearing will have to occur. We're going to take Summer away for seventy-two hours to give time for the trial.”

“What?” Summer says, her eyes going wide. “Don't take me away from my sister!”

“Where are you going to be taking her?” Olivia demands, her arms squeezing Summer to her tightly.

“Considering her age,” I cut in. “Is there any way she can be placed with a family friend instead of in a foster or group home?”

“I think that may be best,” the CPS officer says, slowly, nodding. “Is there a particular friend you can spend a few days with, Summer?”

“Yeah,” She says, nodding. “My friend Allison Stone and her family. They’ll take me in.”

“Okay, we’ll make arrangements for you to spend a bit of time there while all this is worked out,” She says, her voice surprisingly calm.

“What?! No! This cannot be allowed,” Janice practically wails. “You’re taking my daughter away from me.”

“Officer Caldwell,” The CPS officer says, her voice sharp. “Please remove Mrs. Miller from the room.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the officer says, pulling Janice out of the room.

“Can we at least drop off some of her stuff?” Olivia asks, her voice quiet, almost as if it’s a bit defeated.

“Yes, of course,” The CPS officer says. “I’m sorry you guys, but your mother has filed formal complaints with the county.”

Olivia closes her eyes and takes a deep breath before looking down at Summer and offering her a small smile.

“I went back to the apartment today,” She says softly. “I picked up your books. I’ll bring them over to Allison’s place later, how about that?”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” She says, tucking Summer’s head into the crook of her neck. “Everything’ll be okay.” She whispers, probably more to reassure herself than Summer.

The final bell rings, making the two of them jump.

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“Okay Summer,” the CPS officer says. “Can you get Allison here so we can talk about me bringing you to their house?”

“Yeah,” She says, pulling away from Olivia.

“You can drop off her stuff later tonight,” the CPS officer says. “And here’s my card, in case you need to get in touch with me. My name is Alicia Carlson.”

“Okay,” Olivia says, her voice flat.

“Here, let’s go,” I say, taking her hand in mine and leading her out of the office. I look over my shoulder and give Summer a wave. “We’ll see you soon, okay?”

Summer nods and gives me a small wave.

The moment the doors of my car close behind Olivia and I, she buries her face in her hands and sobs.

“They’re going to take Summer away,” She cries.

“No, they won’t,” I say, pulling out of the parking lot with a screech. “We’re not going to let them.”

“But what can we do? She’s right, I didn’t file for custody back when we first moved out. I didn’t have any money for a lawyer and I never thought that bitch would try to get custody of Summer at all, she didn’t want anything to do with us!”

“Hey, love, please breath,” I say, squeezing her hand in mine. “You know what we’re gonna do right now?”

“What?” She asks, between small hiccups.

“We’re going to go get a lawyer. Best in the city. We’re going to figure out how to deal with this and we’re going to get Summer back, I promise. She’s safe for now and that’s what matters. We have time to figure this all out.”

“We—We’re going to get a lawyer?”

“Yes.”

“But—But I can’t afford one.”

“Love, you don’t have to worry about that anymore. I’m here for you guys. You aren’t in this alone anymore.”

CHAPTER 15

OLIVIA

My body is wired so tightly right now, I could snap if the wind blew too hard. My entire world is falling apart.

I hate that bitch of an egg donor so much that I could throttle her right now. She’s taken so fucking much from us. Why does she have to try to literally tear us apart like this?

“What did I ever do to have her hate me this fucking much?” I ask, turning to Jax, my eyes almost wild with stress and fear. “I never did anything to that woman. I was a

really good fucking kid.”

“You didn’t do anything,” He says softly, reaching out to squeeze my hand. “Seriously, she’s just a narcissist that’s willing to do anything to be the center of the fucking universe.”

I blink at him. I don’t think I’ve ever heard my mom described as a narcissist before.

“What?” I ask.

“She’s a total narcissist. The fact she has to make a scene when things don’t go her fucking way, the way she needs a fucking flying monkey of an alpha flying around her and feeding her stupid ego.” Jax looks me in the eyes. “She hates you cause she’s jealous of you.”

“Jealous?” I laugh. “What’s there to be jealous of, I’m a fucking mess.”

“Were you happy in that apartment with Summer?” He asks me, squeezing my hand in his.

“Yeah,” I say, thinking fondly. “It was tough when Summer was younger, I had to take her to work with me, but when she grew up, it felt a lot like a constant sleepover with my best friend.”

“There you go, you guys were fucking happy, even though you didn’t have a lot. You made that fucking life for you and her. You guys had each other and deep down, she knows she doesn’t fucking have anyone and it tortures her inside because she’s a fucking bitter woman.”

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“I—I don’t think someone’s ever said something like that.”

“Well, I think it’s fucking true,” He says, his jaw clenching as he turns back to the road. “I’m not going to let her take that happiness away from you guys. She’s not gonna fucking win.”

Something clicks in the back of my head as I stare at the way Jax’s hands clench the steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles are white. The thickness and intensity of his scent in the cabin of his car screams there’s something deeper here.

“How did you know what to say about my mom?” I ask softly.

“Experience,” He laughs bitterly. “My momma was the same fucking way. Her need for being the center of the fucking universe got her and my father killed.”

My eyes go wide.

“What? Oh my god, that’s fucking horrible.”

“Yeah, it was a fucking shit show.” He turns to me, his gray eyes lined with so much pain.

“I’m here for you, Jax, you can tell me.”

“She had to be the center of the universe too,” he says. “My dad wasn’t enough for her, he always worked too much apparently, even though he would’ve chopped off his left fucking arm for her, it wasn’t enough. She had to be the center of attention.”

He reaches his hand out and I take it in both my hands, lifting it up to my lips to kiss.

“She brought all these random fucking alphas to our home when I was a kid. The obsessive kinds of guys. And one day, she must’ve pissed one of them off because he came to my parent’s house and murdered them in their bed.” He squeezes my hand. “I was the one that found the bodies. I came home from school to that fucking mess.”

“Holy shit,” I whisper.

“Yeah,” He laughs. “Senior year of high school, so I shipped myself off to the military the first chance I fucking got.”

He turns to look at me again, a look of pure determination on his face. “That’s why it’s so important to not let your fucking mom tear you and your sister apart. I refuse to let that happen.”

“Oh Jax,” I say, reaching out to him. My heart hurts for him. I never would have guessed the amount of bullshit he also carries in his past.

“There’s a fucking reason I live in that gigantic fucking mansion alone,” He grits out. “When my grandpa died while I was deployed, I literally had no one left. Until you. Now I have hope again. I’m not going to let some fucking narcissistic bitch take your family away from you. I refuse.”

When he pulls into the parking lot of our final destination and parks the car, I grab his face and pull him over the center console and to my lips for a kiss. The kiss makes my heart twist as our lips move against each other. It’s so full of all the feelings swimming around in my head: all the passion, hurt, and hope.

“God,” he whispers against my lips. “I don’t know if I deserve you.”

“Shut up,” I say, grabbing his face and staring deep into his eyes. “You’re fucking amazing. You care so fucking much about me. About Summer. I don’t think I’ve ever had that from someone.”

“You should have,” He says, brushing some of my hair away from my face. “You deserve the world, love.”

“So do you, oh my god, so do you. You don’t deserve all that bullshit life has thrown at you at all.”

“We were dealt some pretty shitty hands in life, huh,” He says, flashing me a smile. “I don’t know if I can complain though, because life also gave me you.”

I feel something bubbling up in my chest. Three little words that hit me so hard I don’t think I can keep them inside.

There’s a part of me that knows this is way, way, way too fast for something this big.

But there’s also another part of me that’s ready to scream it from the rooftops. A part of me that needs to hear it back because if shit hits the fan moving forward, at least I’ll have that.

“Jax?” I say, my voice soft.

“Yes, love?”

“I—I have something want to say,” I whisper. If I weren’t holding his hand right now, mine would be shaking. “But I’m scared to say it.”

A smile crosses his face. “I love you, Liv,” He says, cupping the side of my face.

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“You do?” I say, my eyes going wide.

“I do,” he says.

“But it’s so soon—”

“That just means we have a lot more time for me to love you even more.”

I blink away the tears starting to fill my vision.

“I love you too,” I say, wrapping my arms around his neck.

“Kinda took your thunder there, huh,” He teases, rubbing circles on my back.

“I don’t care,” I say, holding him tighter.

He loves me. And I love him.

Oh my god.

There’s something that settles into place in my chest. It clicks into place. Maybe it’s the pieces of my heart, shattered from the childhood I have, clicking back into place, or the click of new pieces of my heart growing. I don’t know or care right now, really.

“You deserve to be taken care of, love,” He says softly, stroking my cheek.

“You deserve that too,” I say back. “I’m not sure if I’m good at all this relationship stuff, but I really care about you. You’re amazing.”

“We’ll figure this out together,” He says, kissing the back of my hand. “We’ll figure everything out together, how does that sound?”

“Good,” I say. “Really good.”

Something inside me settles as we step out of the car and into the law office. I think I’m finally starting to believe that I’m not alone. At least not right now. I don’t have the mental energy to worry about tomorrow or next week or next month, but I do know that right now, Jax is there, right next to me.

CHAPTER 16

JAX

“Hey there, Kelly,” I say, flashing a smile at the gray-haired receptionist. “How’s the husband?”

“He’s doing well, dear,” She says, pushing her glasses up on her nose. She glances at Olivia, her eyes widening in surprise. “And who is this?”

I smile down at Olivia, squeezing her hand. “This is Olivia, she’s my fated mate.”

“Oh, how exciting!” Kelly says, clapping her hands. “I remember the days when I first met my fated mate, they were quite a whirlwind. It’s so nice to meet you, Olivia.”

“Nice to meet you too,” She says with a small smile.

“So,” Kelly says, “What can I do for you today?”

“I’d like to see John whenever he’s free.”

“Oh? Is it urgent?”

“Very,” I say, sighing. “Please let him know I’ll compensate him accordingly, but I need to see him as soon as possible.”

“I’ll let him know,” Kelly says. She seems to sense Olivia’s frayed nerves and turns to give her a reassuring smile. In all the years I’ve known Kelly, she’s always had something of a sixth sense for when I’ve needed extra reassurance or some kind words. Maybe that’s just an omega superpower.

“John is the best attorney in the city. Anything that needs to get done, he’ll get it done,” she says.

“Oh,” Olivia says, her eyes softening. “Thank you, miss. I really appreciate it.”

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“Of course dear. I’ll go let him know you’re here now,” Kelly says, giving us a smile.
“Take a seat and let me know if you need anything.”

“Thanks, Kelly,” I say before Liv and I go take seats in the empty waiting room.

“She was really sweet,” Olivia says, leaning against my shoulder as we take a seat.

“She’s literally the sweetest lady I’ve ever met.”

“Seems like you guys have known each other for a really long time.”

“Yeah, I’ve known them ever since I was seventeen when John helped me with some inheritance stuff, and before then, he was my dad’s lawyer. Kelly’s been his secretary for a lot longer than that.”

“And John, he can help us?”

“Yeah and if he can’t help us then he can find us someone who can.”

“And you can just see this really important lawyer just like that?”

He smiles down at me. “Hey, there’re benefits to being the sole heir to massive intergenerational wealth.”

“And you started the security agency you work for?”

“Nah, I didn’t exactly start it. My grandpa was a bit vain so he had my trust set up so

if I invest in any new companies or projects, I at least have to try to get something named using the family name. Like a building on a college campus or something. It just happened that the agency was fine having my name really attached to it.”

“Wow,” she whispers. “You’re like, stupid rich.”

“Yeah,” I shrug. “But it gives me the power to do things like help you and Summer.”

“It’s wild,” She murmurs, leaning back in the chair she’s sitting in. “You and I grew up so differently but there’re certain things where we just, you know, click,” she says, snapping her fingers.

“We do just click, don’t we,” I say, smiling down at her.

“I don’t think I ever thanked you,” She says softly, leaning on my arm.

“Thanked me for what?”

“Saving me.”

The sight of her beaten and bruised on the floor of that cell flashes in my mind and my body tenses.

“I can’t see any other universe where I didn’t,” I say, leaning my head against hers.

We sit in the waiting room together for around half an hour before Kelly stands and flashes us a smile.

“He’ll be down in a second,” she says. “Good luck.”

“Thanks, Kelly,” I say, standing with Olivia. I squeeze her hand. “We’re gonna figure

everything out, okay?”

“Okay,” She says softly.

John, a tall man with salt and pepper hair with more salt than pepper these days and fine wrinkles on his face walks down the hall to greet us.

“Hello there, Jax, it’s been a while!” He says, clapping me on the back. “And who is this?” He says, smiling down at Olivia.

“It has been a while,” I laugh. “This is Olivia, she’s my fated mate.”

“Oh, wow! How exciting for you both,” He says. “I hear this is an urgent matter, how about we head up to my office and you can run me through how I can help you.”

He leads the two of us back into his office and sits down behind his desk, which is piled high with various files. I don’t think his office has changed since the first moment I stepped into it when I was seventeen. Still what he likes to call “organized chaos.” That doesn’t stop him from being the best lawyer in the city.

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“What’s the situation?” He asks as the two of us take a seat across from him.

“How familiar are you with custody cases?”

“I’ve done a few cases here and there,” he says.

“Are you comfortable representing Olivia and I?” I ask him.

His eyes go wide as he darts his gaze between the two of us.

“The two of you have a child involved already?”

“My sister,” Olivia says, cutting in, her back going straight. “My mother is trying to get custody of her.”

She explains the whole situation to him, telling him about how she’s been taking care of Summer since she was sixteen and Summer was four and ending with the most recent kidnapping and CPS disaster at Summer’s school earlier today.

“Hmmm, well, in most cases it would be significantly easier for you to get custody of your sister, but considering your mother has already gotten CPS involved and this is going to a legitimate trial, her having legal custody will be a difficult thing to fight,” He says.

Olivia hangs her head. “I just didn’t have the money to go to court and get custody of her,” She whispers, her hands clenched into fists.

“No one’s saying it’s your fault,” I say, wrapping my arm around her.

“It’s not your fault at all, it just makes things more difficult because as of right now, your mother is just enacting her rights to see her child. What we need to do is we need to file for full custody of your sister. The best way to do that is by proving you have a stable life to provide for her.”

“Done,” I say. “If the courts want to see stability I can set up a 529 for her college right now. That should show stability, right?”

John winces. “If you want a slam dunk sort of case against this mother of yours, who, frankly, sounds ridiculous, you’re going to want to do something more. She’s unbonded, correct?”

“Yeah,” Olivia says, “She’s been unbonded since my dad died when I was thirteen.”

“Then the easiest way to get full custody in the court system we have today is for you two to bond. You both are fated mates, so you have the advantage of being able to show the most important form of commitment within our society.”

Olivia freezes. “What?”

I smell the way her mango scent goes sour at the mention of us having to bond. Part of me wants nothing more than to dedicate myself to Olivia like that, but I can only imagine what’s running through her head now with the bullshit she’s gone through.

“Like it or not, our court systems are biased towards those sorts of relationships,” he tells her. “Could we still win if you guys aren’t bonded? Maybe. But what if your mother starts asking what’s keeping Jax around if there is no bond? There are a growing number of fated mates rejecting each other these days.”

I reach over to squeeze her hand, doing my best to communicate to her that I'll never fucking leave her. But I get what John is saying. It doesn't matter that I say I'm not going to leave her to Olivia, I have to fucking prove it to a court.

"Then it becomes a question of which omega is better for taking care of this child," John continues. "And then the court may lean towards the biological mother, at the very least for partial custody. And we want your sister out of your mother's home one hundred percent."

"You don't have to give an answer now," I say to her softly.

"But we don't have time," Olivia says.

"Well, it looks like you have three days. If I could have the contact of that CPS officer I can follow up with details for the hearing," John adds.

"Okay," Olivia says, handing over the business card of the CPS officer from earlier. He takes a picture of it and hands it back to her.

I see Olivia starting to stare out into space and know we should get moving.

"We'll call you," I say, standing from my chair. "You'll update us with details?"

"Yes, of course," John says. He looks down at Olivia, a look of sympathy on his face. "I know this is all rather sudden, but whatever choice you decide, please know I'll do everything in my power to make sure Summer comes home to you both."

"Thank you, John," She says softly as she stands, giving him a weak, wobbly smile.

"Let's get out of here," I murmur, taking her hand. I throw a wave over my shoulder. "See you soon, John!"

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I walk a numb Olivia out to the car. When I open the door for her, she turns around before getting into the car and throws herself into my arms.

CHAPTER 17

OLIVIA

It feels like my life is being torn apart right in front of me and the only way for me to save it is for me to throw myself into a fucking fire.

I was never the girl to want a bondmate. I saw what losing my dad did to my mom. It brought out the absolute worst in her.

Technically, one of the next steps in Jax and my relationship would have been bonding. We would've been together longer, agreed to spend the rest of our lives together, and bonded with each other. It just would've made sense to leave our bond marks on each other's necks, tying us together for life.

But even then, I didn't even think I could even be with an alpha until I met Jax.

At the very least, I thought choosing to bond with him would've been my choice. But now I'm not even sure if that's the case anymore.

It feels like something I'm being pressured to do. Something my horrible egg-doner of a mother is forcing me to do. She's taken so fucking much away from me and now she's taking this?

I'm a ball of swirling thoughts as Jax wraps his arms around me, holding me tight. If it weren't for him holding me right now, I'd be falling apart.

"We don't have to do it, you know," He whispers, resting his chin on my head.

"You heard him though, bonding is the best chance we have of getting full custody of Summer without a hassle," I say, the burn of tears building behind my eyes, even though my eyes are closed.

"That doesn't mean we have to do it, love. If you don't want to right now, then we don't have to do it. We'll make it work."

"I don't know if I can take that risk," I say, pulling back to look up into his eyes. "What if we lose? What if my mom gets partial custody and Summer's stuck with her? I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I knew I could've done something to make sure she was safe."

"Listen to me, love," he says, brushing away my tears. "What do you want?" He asks. "That's the most important thing here. Summer wouldn't want you to make a decision that would kill you inside."

"I don't know," I sob. "I don't know what I want." I bury my head in his shirt again, clutching the front of it in my fists. "There's a part of me that wants you. The part of me that knows deep down you're my fated mate and wants all that means. I want to be yours and for you to be mine and for us to build a life together but—" My voice cracks as my throat tightens. "I'm so scared. I'm so, so, so scared that bonding with you will turn me into my mom somehow."

"Oh Liv," He whispers, stroking my hair down my back. "Listen to me. Nothing you ever fucking do in life could turn you into your momma. You are who you are and she is who she is and just like how she's never fucking changed, there's nothing you

can do to end up like she is. You wanna know why?”

“Why?” I whisper against his chest.

“Because you fucking care about the people around you. Even right now, you care about what happens to Summer. You’re not trying to figure out what ways you can use other people to get what you want.”

“But I am,” I say. “I am. I’m using you.”

“Love,” he murmurs. “You’re not using me. I want you. Forever. For as long as you’ll have me. I promised to protect you. I want to do whatever I can to do that.” He kisses the top of my head. “Whatever you end up choosing, make sure you choose it for yourself. How about you take some time to think about it?”

“Okay,” I whisper.

“How about we drop off some of Summer’s stuff at Allison’s house? We’ll get her address and drop off Summer’s books and some of the clothes you picked up from the apartment, how does that sound?”

“Yeah,” I say, nodding and taking a deep breath. I need to focus on something to do. Something to keep me from drowning in my own thoughts. “Let’s go.”

We hop into the car and I shoot Summer a text from my new phone.

Hey sis, Jax and I are going to come over to drop off some of your stuff

We have some clothes from the apartment and your books, is there anything else you need?

are you taking requests? :)

Sure, what're you thinking?

could you get some gummy worms?

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You fucking hate gummy worms though

come on, you said you were taking requests

Well, yeah, I just wanna make sure you're not causing trouble for Allison's parents

okay, okay, it's cause they're Alex's favorite

I let out a little laugh at the screen.

“What's up?” Jax asks.

“Can we stop by a grocery store real quick?” I ask him. “I think we've gotta pick up some things for Summer.”

“Sure,” He says, pulling out of the parking lot and heading to the nearest supermarket.

“I think Summer has a crush,” I laugh as I turn back to the screen.

“Damn, really? On who?”

I'm assuming Alex is Allison's brother?

“I assume on Allison's brother,” I tell him.

“How old is the kid?”

“Sixteen, he’s a grade above Summer.”

“Aw, that’s cute.”

“Yeah,” I say. “She wants us to pick up gummy worms of all things. She fucking hates gummy worms.”

Jax turns to face me at a red light, his face serious. “If I hated gummy worms, I’d eat them for you.”

I burst out laughing.

... yeah

Just make sure you don’t step on Allison’s toes if you’re interested in her brother. Girl code, remember?

i told her a while ago, she’s actually been shipping us

like, she wants us to get married so we can be sisters

Well, then, good luck

We’ll see you soon

love you, Livvy

Love you too

“We should also pick up a fruit platter from the store, or something,” I say, putting my phone in my pocket.

“You’ve mentioned that a couple times before,” Jax says. “Are they big fruit people or something?”

“Maybe? I’m not sure, I just don’t want to show up empty handed, they’re a really good family.”

“How long’s Summer known Allison?”

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“Since elementary school. They moved to the city when Summer was in second grade, I think? Pretty sure they hated each other when they first met, but they’re best friends now.”

“Oh wow, that’s super cute.”

“Yeah, but I’ve known that family forever. When Summer got a stomach bug from school, Allison’s mom called me and asked how we were doing and if we needed anything.”

“Damn, so they’ve kinda been there for you guys for a while.”

“Yeah, they have.”

“Fruit platter it is,” Jax says.

He gets more than a fruit platter. As we walk through the aisles of the grocery store, pushing a cart he insisted we get, he’s picking up a potted flowery plant, a way too expensive bottle of wine, a fruit platter and a charcuterie board set, the whole works.

“Why’re you getting all this stuff?” I ask as we continue to make our way through the grocery store.

“You said you didn’t want to get there empty-handed.”

“I also didn’t mean to get stuff that would take multiple trips?”

“In what universe would this take multiple trips,” he laughs. “As a man, I pride myself on the ability to get everything into a house with one trip.”

“We have all Summer’s stuff to get too.”

“You underestimate my power,” He says, stopping to flex his arms muscles.

I roll my eyes with a laugh and continue through the store.

“We should also pick up some toiletries for Summer, like a toothbrush and stuff like that.”

“Sure,” Jax says, following me.

We wrap up our quick shopping and load everything into the car. I give Jax the address and we drive down to Allison’s place.

“We are not having you take everything in one trip,” I tell Jax as we get out of the car.

“What? Come on, I can totally do it.”

“I don’t doubt you can, but let’s bring in the gifts first and then we’ll get Summer’s stuff with her later.”

“Yeah,” He sighs, dropping like a disappointed puppy. “Makes sense.”

“We’ll go grocery shopping some other time,” I say, wrapping my arms around his waist. “Plus, I already know how strong you are, you don’t have to show off.”

He laughs as he strokes my hair down.

I grab the wine and he grabs everything else as we walk up the stairs and to the front door. It's a really nice two-story house that must've cost an arm and a leg.

I ring the doorbell and take a step back. Jax smiles down at me as I shift nervously and nods down to the arm full of stuff we have.

"You're fine," he says. "They've known you for years and I'm sure they like you, even if you didn't have any stuff for them."

"Yeah, it's just they've been helping with Summer so much," I whisper.

The door opens and a tall, blonde woman with eyes that sparkle with emotion appears in the doorway.

"Oh my god, Olivia, you're safe!" She says, wrapping her arms around me and pulling me into a hug.

"Oh, hi there, Sharon," I say, rubbing her back in circles.

Definitely didn't expect that.

"Summer told me about all the horrendous things that you've been through these past few weeks," She says as she pulls away, keeping her hands on my shoulders as if to make sure I'm still here with her.

"Oh, yeah, I'm fine now," I answer with a smile.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I wish I were less awkward. Oh my god.

"We brought some gifts," I say, lifting the bottle of wine in my hand and nodding to all the stuff Jax is holding.

"Oh, you didn't have to," She says, offering me a kind smile that makes me relax a bit.

"I really wanted to do something to say thank you for taking care of Summer so much recently."

"We love having her over, it's really no trouble at all," She says down to me. "How about you introduce me to your man?"

"Oh! This is Jax. He's—he's my fated mate," I say smiling over at him.

I think that's the first time I've really introduced him as my fated mate before. It feels nice.

“It’s wonderful to meet you, Jax. I’m Sharon: Allison and Alex’s mom. I’m glad Olivia has someone to look after her all the time now.”

“I’m glad to be here,” he says, smiling down at me.

“Here, how about you both come inside,” She says.

We follow her inside their wonderful house and set down the gifts we brought over on her kitchen counter.

“Summer!” Sharon calls up the stairs. “Your sister is here?”

I hear a rush of footsteps down the stairs and then Summer is flying into my arms.

“You okay?” I whisper into her hair.

She nods, pulling back to look up at me. “What about you? You look like you’ve been crying. “

“Come on,” I sigh. “let’s go get your stuff from the car, we can talk about it there.”

I give a little wave to Sharon and Jax, who’re both talking with each other, and head out to the car with Summer.

“We went to go see a lawyer,” I tell Summer as I open the trunk to Jax’s car and sit on the back bumper. “Jax has a really good one.”

“What did they say?” Summer asks, taking a seat next to me.

“He said we should definitely try to get 100% custody of you. Unless you’d like to see Mom more?”

“Hell no,” Summer says, shaking her head. “I want to stay with you.”

“Okay,” I say, reaching over to grab her hand. “Well, then, the lawyer gave us a recommendation for the best way to make that happen. He said Jax and I should bond. How do you feel about that?”

Her eyes widen and she squeezes my hand back.

“Why’re you asking me how I feel about it, it’s your life. How do you feel about it?”
She asks.

“Well, cause he’s gonna be a part of your life too, you know? I don’t want to have someone permanently in our lives if you don’t want them there.”

“Does he make you happy?”

“Yeah,” I say, smiling fondly at the concrete driveway, thinking of Jax and all the things he’s done for me. “Yeah, he does.”

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“Well, then you have my approval. Now you’ve asked me and you have an answer, now you have to ask yourself whether you’re okay with it.”

“When did you get so smart,” I laugh, pulling her into a hug.

“I had a great teacher,” She says squeezing me tightly. “I love you Livvy.”

“I love you too, sis.”

“Everything’s gonna be okay, right?”

“It will be, I promise.”

CHAPTER 18

JAX

Sharon is a pretty great lady. She really cares about Summer and Olivia. I’m glad she’s been in their lives.

“Hey,” I ask her, turning to her as Summer comes running down the stairs. “Could I ask you a favor? For Olivia and Summer.”

“For them? Of course,” She says, her shoulders straightening.

“There’s probably going to be a custody case in a couple of days for Summer. I think it’d be a good idea to maybe have some character references for Olivia since we’re

gonna file for 100% custody and you've known both of them for a really long time. If you have the time, could you write a letter or something for us to bring?"

"Of course," She says, nodding, looking over at Summer and Olivia fondly as they go grab some of Summer's stuff. "I've known them since they were both just kids themselves. Olivia has worked so tremendously hard to provide for her sister, I don't think I've ever met anyone that strong." She turns to me. "They deserve to be happy."

"I know," I say, nodding. "And I plan to make sure they will be."

"That's good, very good," She says nodding. "But yes, I'll write that letter for you as quickly as I can."

"Let me give you my contact info so I can come pick it up before the hearing."

We exchange contact information and pretty soon after, Summer and Olivia come in carrying some of Summer's stuff.

"How're you doing, kid?" I ask her, ruffling her hair.

"Hey quit it!" She says, slapping my hand away and laughing up at me. "But I'm doing okay."

"We're gonna make everything right," Olivia says, pulling Summer to her side. "Right?"

"Yeah," I answer, wrapping my arms around the two of them. "Of course."

"We're gonna have to leave soon," Olivia whispers in the middle of the group hug.

I feel Summer squeeze us tighter before taking a step back.

“Okay, I’ll see you guys soon, right?” She says.

“Yes. We’ll come pick you up after the hearing. We promise,” I say.

We say our goodbyes and head back to the car. Olivia is silent on the drive back. I let her sit with her thoughts because whatever she chooses to do, I want her to be completely sure about. She’s making some huge decisions for her life right now.

“Can you hold me when we get inside?” She asks as we pull into the garage.

“Of course,” I say.

I take her hand and lead her into the house and pull her down and into my bed. She rests her head on my chest and I run my fingers through her hair.

“Jax?” She asks.

“Yes, love?”

“If we weren’t in this crazy situation, would you still want to bond with me?”

“Of course I would,” I say, holding her tight to me. “You’ve given me hope for something greater in life. You’ve given me hope that I could actually experience love with someone. Regardless of whatever’s going on in our lives, that’s not going to change.”

“I—I just don’t want to force you into something you don’t actually want to do. That would be the last thing I’d ever want to do with you.”

“Love, the last thing you’re doing right now is forcing me to be with you. I don’t think anyone could take me away, no matter how fucking hard they tried.” I dance my fingertips across her back and let out a purr, trying to take the stress away from her. “What about you, do you want to bond with me?”

“I—I do,” she whispers softly.

“You don’t sound very sure about that. I don’t want us to do something you’re going to regret either.” I look to the ceiling, my mind trying to figure out what to say. I wish I were good at making plans and solving problems. I just know I almost desperately want to make her feel better. “If you’re really concerned about Summer, we can bond and then just pretend to be bonded? That way there’s no stress on you—”

“No!” She says, pushing up so she’s staring down at me. “No. I—I don’t want to bond with you if it’s not real.” Her deep green eyes captivate me. They’re like

walking through an enchanting forest. “I’m just a bit scared.”

“I get it, love,” I say softly, tucking some of her hair behind her ear.

“I’m just scared you’re going to leave me and I’m going to turn into my mom and become a monster. I’m scared to give myself over to you like that. I’m—I’m just scared and I hate it.”

“Oh Liv, I’m never going to leave you. Ever. I’ve spent my entire life making stupid ass decisions and I haven’t died yet. Imagine how long I could live if I stopped doing insanely reckless shit?”

“You’d stop doing insanely reckless shit for me?” She asks, smiling down at me.

“Well, I mean, the reason why I did those sorts of things was because life had nothing to offer me. Now I have you. I don’t need any of that shit anymore,” I say softly, pulling her down because I can’t resist her delicious lips anymore.

Her lips are so soft and sweet. As her lips move against mine, I wrap my arms around her and try to communicate to her in more than words that I will always protect her. I will always be there for her.

“I want to bond with you,” She whispers against my lips as we pull apart for air.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, please, I want you.”

I trace my fingertips up her spine, pulling up her shirt as I go.

“Let me worship you,” I purr, my chest vibrating underneath her.

“O—Okay,” She whispers, a blush covering her cheek.

She sits up, straddling me and I peel off her t-shirt, groaning at the sight of her above me. I harden beneath her and her eyes go wide.

“Wow,” she says.

“God, you’re fucking stunning,” I say, running my hands up her sides.

My thumb brushes the underside of her tit and she arches her back into her touch. I reach behind her and unclip her bra, making it fall between us.

“You have gorgeous tits, oh my god,” I say, reaching up to massage them in my hands, my fingers flicking at her pert nipples. Her tits are just the right handful. “I’ve been thinking about what your tits would look like in my hand ever since I saw your nipples peeking through my t-shirt.”

“You gave me that t-shirt on purpose,” she breathes, throwing her head back.

“You bet I fucking did,” I growl. “I want you to wear my t-shirts to sleep for the rest of our fucking lives.”

I pull her down for another kiss as my fingers drift down to her pussy. I can smell her mango scent grow thicker the more we touch. When the smell of her sweet slick hits me, I know I’m a fucking goner. This woman could ask me to cut off my goddamn left arm and I’d do it for her.

“Well, I want your shirt off,” she growls back, tugging my shirt up.

“Your wish is my command,” I laugh, practically ripping off my shirt.

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She stares down at me, her eyes bright and hungry in a way I've never felt so good to be on the receiving end of.

"Wow," She says, her fingertips drifting down my chest. "All I can really say with you is wow, huh."

"You can keep saying it all you want," I murmur, taking one of her hands and kissing her fingertips. "I like knowing you like what you see."

"I do, I really do," She whispers, grinding down on my hard cock.

I throw my head back and groan. God, I want to feel her against me.

She seems to feel the same because she sits up and starts trying to peel off her pants.

"I want these off," She growls.

"Here, let me," I say softly, pushing her onto her back and sliding her pants down her smooth legs. The lengths of beautiful skin she's allowing me to see make a fire ignite inside of me.

I glance up at her, her hair spread out over my covers, her beautiful body on display for me. I brush my hands up her thighs and slowly push them apart, groaning at the sight of her slick soaked panties.

I hook my finger into the waistband of her panties as I look up at her. Her chest heaves with her breaths.

“I want to worship you,” I murmur against her thigh.

“O—okay,” She breathes. “I—I’ve never had someone do this for me before.”

“What?” I say, sitting up a bit, my eyes going wide.

She drops her head back to the mattress and lifts her arm to cover her face.

“Oh love, I’m sorry for reacting like that, I was just surprised. I don’t think any differently about you for it.”

“You sure?” She asks, peeking up at me.

“Very,” I answer, stroking her hip with my thumb reassuringly.

“Well, it’s cause I never had the time for anything too serious and I so I never got to know someone enough to feel safe enough to do something like this.”

“Do you feel safe enough with me?”

“Yes,” She answers, lacing her fingers with mine. “I do.”

“Well then,” I answer with a smile, hooking my fingers in the waistband of her panties and tugging down slightly. “How’d you like for me to show you what it’s like to be eaten out?”

She nods her head.

“Words, love, I want to hear your words,” I murmur, kissing up her thigh. “I want to hear you screaming my name tonight.”

“Yes, please,” She pants. “Please, Jax.”

“Good girl,” I say, pulling her panties down and baring her pussy to me.

Even though I saw her pussy earlier, I don’t think I’ll ever get used to it. I don’t think I’ll ever get used to her. Everything between us just feels so electric.

I start kissing up her thighs again, teasing her with little licks as I get closer and closer to her pussy. She squirms beneath me, shifting her hips and trying to get me to go where she wants me. I still continue to tease her until she threads her fingers through my hair and pulls me.

I want her to take what she needs from me. I want to give everything I can to her. I wasn’t kidding when I said I wanted to fucking worship every part of her body.

When I give her what she so desperately wants and start licking circles around her clit, she throws her head back.

“Jax,” she moans. “Please.”

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I smirk against her pussy as I slide my fingers into her slick heat. I let her practically ride my face, setting a steady rhythm that seems to drive her absolutely crazy with the way she's moaning above me.

Her slick tastes so sweet against my tongue. It's like the world's strongest aphrodisiac for me. All I want to do is spend the rest of my life buried between her thighs.

"Jax! Jax, I'm going to—I'm going to—" She cries out, her thighs clenching around my head.

I feel her pussy flutter around my fingers as a rush of slick hits my tongue.

"Jax!" She cries out, as she comes, her red hair splayed across my bed.

It's the most gorgeous thing I've ever seen in my life. She's the most gorgeous thing I've ever seen in my entire life. And I'm going to show her how much I fucking love her.

CHAPTER 19

OLIVIA

I have no choice but to lay there on Jax's bed, my body a boneless mass for a few seconds. That was the hardest I've ever come in my entire life.

When I finally have some control over my body, I start running my hands through Jax's hair, making him groan against my thigh. God, he sounds so fucking hot.

He moves up, crawling back over me, my pussy fluttering with aftershocks at the sight of my slick covering his face.

I don't know what comes over me, but I tug him down into one of the most passionate kisses I've ever had. Our tongues dance as our breathing gets heavy and I can taste my slick on his lips.

I feel his hardness against me, trapped against his pants and I pull back from the kiss. I trace my fingertips down his chest to squeeze his cock through his pants.

His head falls down to the crook of my neck and he groans.

"God, your touch on me feels like heaven."

"I want to feel you, Jax," I whisper. "I want to feel you inside me."

"Fucking hell, I love the sound of that," he says, sitting up and practically ripping off his pants.

When he kneels in front of me, his full body on display, my eyes go wide.

"Holy shit," I say, my eyes watching him stroke his gorgeous cock.

"Like what you see?" He teases with a smirk.

"You're fucking huge."

He really is, I don't think I ever would've expected he's been packing that much in his pants. My pussy squeezes in anticipation.

He pulls me over him so I'm straddling him again. I lower myself so my soaked

pussy slides along his length and we both close our eyes and moan. His cock feels so warm against me, what would it feel like if it were inside me?

“I want you to ride me, love,” He says. “I want you to take what you need from me.”

My pussy throbs, reminding me of how empty I am and how desperately I want him inside me.

“I—I don’t know how,” I say, looking down at him, my brows drawing down in frustration.

“I’ll help you,” He murmurs, tugging my hips up so he can line up the head of his cock with my core. “And then you just have to do what feels right to you.”

“O—Okay,” I say, meeting his eyes.

His gray eyes are so full of emotion. So full of desire, care, and love. “Whatever you do,” he says. “I’ll fucking love it because it’s with you.”

We share a soft smile before I sink down on his cock. The stretch as he enters my body is absolutely delicious. I don’t think I’ve ever felt anything like when I’m fully seated on his cock.

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“God, your pussy. So tight, so wet, so warm for me,” He growls.

His hands go to my hips and he encourages me to move.

“I want you to take what you need, love. Make yourself feel good with my cock,” He says.

I tentatively start rocking back and forth, trying to figure out what feels good. When I hit a particular spot inside my pussy, my brain practically short-circuits with how good it feels.

“Oh my god,” I say, throwing my head back. “Oh my god!”

“Just like that, love” He encourages.

“Yes, yes, yes,” I chant, grinding my body above his in a way that makes my body practically sing.

When Jax joins in, thrusting up into my movements, my world falls apart a second time, my pussy clenching around his cock in a powerful orgasm. This one feels so different with his huge cock inside me, but still so mind-blowingly good.

I collapse down onto Jax’s chest, my nipples brushing against his chest as I catch my breath.

“I loved feeling your pussy coming around my cock,” He says softly, brushing my hair out of my face.

When I look up at him, I squeeze my pussy muscles around him with a smirk and he groans.

“I want you to fuck me, Jax,” I say against his lips.

His eyes darken as they look down at me.

“I want you to take me and then I want you to make me yours.”

He flips us over so I’m on my back and thrusts into me slow and deep, making me moan.

“Do you know what you’re asking for?” He growls.

“Yes,” I whisper against his lips. “Bond with me, Jax.”

He smiles down at me before he starts giving me these long, hard thrusts into my pussy. He watches me intently, making sure to catalog whenever he does something that makes me go absolutely feral.

Soon he’s worked us up to a pace where he’s pushing me higher and higher and I can do nothing but cling to him, my nails scratching down his back as I moan into the crook of his neck, surrounded by a cloud of his firewood scent.

I feel his knot swell inside me, hitting just the right spot and pushing me over the edge.

He sinks his teeth into my shoulder and I do the same, tasting the quick flash of blood. When I pull back, my eyes go wide.

“Whoa,” I say, sliding my fingers over the collection of pink scars that make up his

bond mark. “I didn’t know they healed that fast.”

“Me neither,” He says, drifting his fingertips over the crook of my neck too.

When I look into his deep gray eyes, I feel it. I press a hand to my chest, my eyes filling with tears. I feel the bond inside of me, the string connecting me to him.

I feel all the love he’s pouring through it. It’s almost overwhelming to feel, how much he adores me.

“I can feel you,” I whisper.

“I can feel you too,” He says, a smile bright on his face. “I’m yours, forever, love.”

“And I’m yours, Jax.”

We lay in each other’s arms, just soaking in the warmth of the newly formed bond while Jax’s knot goes down.

“I love you,” I whisper, as I drift off to sleep, my eyes fluttering.

“I love you too, love.”

* * *

Even though the next few days are stressful, the comfort of my bond with Jax keeps me grounded as we have meetings with John and go through the material for the trial. To my surprise, Jax ends up giving John a signed letter from Sharon, vouching for my character.

“Oh my god,” I say softly as we leave John’s office for the last time before we head over to the courthouse soon. “You got a letter of recommendation for my character?”

“Yeah,” he answers, smiling down at me.

“When did you manage to do that?”

“I asked her while you were getting Summer’s stuff from the car with her. She agreed right away.”

“I love you,” I say, leaning up to kiss him.

We arrive soon at the courthouse we’re supposed to go to and step out of the car together. I take a second to catch my breath.

“How do I look?” I ask Jax, biting my thumbnail.

“You look stunning, as usual,” He says, wrapping his arms around me and pulling me

close.

“So I don’t look any different than usual?” I ask, my pulse picking up with panic.

“Shhh, take a breath with me, love,” he says, pulling my hand away from my mouth and holding it to his heart. “Everything will be okay, I promise. We’re prepared. We’re going to kill this.”

I take a few deep breaths with him and my heart rate slows.

“Everything will be okay,” I say softly to myself.

“It will be,” he says, kissing my forehead. “Also, you look extra gorgeous today. I like the way business casual looks on you.”

In preparation for this hearing, we went out and he bought me a pair of slacks and a nice blouse. My one business casual pantsuit was all sliced up back at my apartment.

I look down at my clothes and smile. I feel good in this. Hopefully, that translates to confidence in the courtroom.

We meet with John outside the chamber. He has a file full of the case file we’ve put together. It’s full of all the things that prove that I’ve taken pretty good care of Summer so far.

“This should be a pretty quick hearing. These don’t usually last long, but yours especially won’t take long,” He says, smiling reassuringly at me.

I see Jax’s shoulders tense and his scent grow more intense. I also feel a slight tug of anger in my chest from the bond.

I turn when I start hearing the click of heels and my own scowl appears on my face. My mom has arrived, her hair all done up in big, poofy curls that're practically bigger than her head and absolutely gaudy makeup.

She leers over at me, her lip curling.

"Ignore her," John says to the both of us.

I sigh and turn back to them, reaching out to hold Jax's hand.

"Yeah, she's not worth our time right now," I whisper.

The courtroom doors open and John nods to us. "It's show time, folks."

CHAPTER 20

JAX

"Good afternoon, everyone," the judge, an older woman says as we all settle in our seats. "I see today we're looking at a custody case over Summer Miller."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:24 am

I squeeze Olivia's hand when I see her reaching up to start biting on her thumb. She must be extra nervous considering we have a bit of an audience behind us in the courtroom. I can also see George's hulking body and his burning glare as he sits directly behind us.

He's not getting any closer than he's allowed or I'll actually break off his arm this time, no threats beforehand, consequences be damned.

The judge has both Janice and Olivia stand and swear to be honest with the court's proceedings and begins the hearing.

Janice doesn't have a lawyer, which automatically makes me feel a lot better about everything.

"Mrs. Miller, since you filed the request for custody orders with CPS, could you explain what you're looking for here."

"I have legal custody over my daughter, Summer and she's being taken away from me," Janice says, wiping a fake tear away from her eye. "I just want my sweet, sweet girl back. I'm her mother. I deserve to be able to see my baby."

My fists clench underneath the desk and I shift my leg so it's brushing against Olivia's. She glances over to me and gives me a quick smile.

"Alright," the judge says to us. "Ms. Miller, I see you and your bonded mate have brought representation for today. Could your attorney please explain what your party is looking for here?"

“Good afternoon, your honor,” John answers, standing. “My client today is looking to file for full custody of Summer Miller under the grounds that Janice Miller, my client, and Summer’s biological mother is unfit.”

He pulls out a stack of papers from his briefcase, which makes Janice’s eyes go wide. I guess she thought we wouldn’t be prepared for this sort of thing. Jokes on her.

“I have here a packet full of information detailing how my client has taken care of the child ever since she was four without the assistance of their mother here. May I distribute these papers?”

“Yes, you may.”

John walks up to the judge’s stand and hands over the packet we prepared. He also drops a copy onto Janice’s desk, who quickly grabs it and starts flipping through it furiously.

“As you can see, there are school records extending to when the child first started elementary school that states my client has been the primary point of contact. You can also find the child’s grades included here showing she’s a great student and has excelled under my client’s care.” John says, expertly commanding the attention of the room.

“You can see testimony from my client about the harmful environment she grew up in, under the care of Mrs. Miller, including experiencing a violent assault at the hand of one of Mrs. Miller’s partners,” He says.

I see Janice’s face blanch. I don’t know why she seems so surprised we’re bringing it up, especially considering Olivia mentioned it in the office at Summer’s school. Maybe it’s because she’s worked herself up to be the victim in her own head hearing anything different shakes the foundation of the warped way she views the world.

“You can also see that there are documented incidents of Mrs. Miller’s malice against my client, including documented police and private agency reports on how Mrs. Miller was very likely involved in the kidnapping of my client and the destruction of her apartment.”

“Wh—What?” Janice scoffs, her face growing red as she stands. “That’s absurd! You have no proof!”

“Sit down, Mrs. Miller,” The judge orders.

“But—”

“You do not disobey me in my courtroom,” the judge booms.

I hear the audience of the courtroom shift behind me, some people eagerly leaning in to witness the drama and others, probably people Janice has brought with her, growing uncomfortable.

“Continue,” The judge says, nodding to John.

“Mrs. Miller’s lack of ability to emotionally regulate herself aside,” John says, causing Olivia to purse her lips to keep her laughter in. “My client arguably offers a more stable home than Mrs. Janice here. She is bonded to her fated mate who is more than prepared to help provide for the child. He has set up a 529 account prepared to pay for her higher education and has made ample accommodations to his home for the child.”

He returns to his seat to finish his conclusion. “Regardless of Mrs. Miller’s status as the child’s biological mother, it is objectively better for the child to be brought up in a home where a bonded pair can provide for her. That is all your honor.”

“Very well,” The judge says. “Mrs. Miller, do you have anything else to say?”

“They have no proof of any of the things they say I’ve done! And I’m her mother, she’s mine!” She says, her face mottled and red.

“Actually,” The judge says, nodding down to the packet John handed out. “They have provided ample evidence to support their statement.”

“They’re fucking lying!” She yells, slamming her hands onto the table.

“I believe I’ve seen and heard all I need to,” the judge says. “I’m awarding Olivia Miller full, one hundred percent custody of the child Summer Miller, effective immediately.”

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Janice lets out a piercing wail as if she's just watched Summer get murdered right in front of her.

"Nooo!" She shrieks. "You're not taking my baby away from me!"

She stands up and runs towards Olivia, her hands arched in claws and a feral look on her face.

I stand and instantly get in front of Olivia, ready to defend her, but the bailiff of the courtroom gets to Janice before I can. He has her pinned and handcuffed impressively quickly as if this is the most amount of action he's seen in a courtroom in a while.

Probably is, considering the scene Janice is making.

"Get that woman out of my courtroom and have her booked for contempt of court,"
The judge says, her mouth twisted in disgust.

Janice is dragged out of the courtroom, kicking and screaming.

I turn to Olivia and wrap my arms around her tightly.

"We did it!" I say, lifting her feet off the floor.

"Put me down!" Olivia laughs.

When I set her down, she reaches up and tugs on the collar of my button-up, taking a peek at the pink bond scars she left on me. She does that often, almost like she's

making sure it's actually real.

"We did it," She whispers softly, looking up at me.

"Now let's go get Summer from school," I say, smiling down at her. "And then we can go home as a family."

"As a family."

EPILOGUE

OLIVIA

THREE YEARS LATER

"Oh my god, oh my god, I got in!" Summer cries, jumping up and down on her bed.

"Oh my god!" I cry, throwing my arms around her.

Jax joins us a second later, probably after making sure Summer's laptop wouldn't be stomped on.

"This is fucking amazing news," Jax says, wrapping his arms around the both of us.

Summer's really thrived throughout high school these past few years. With Jax's help, she's been able to do a lot of things that would've been a lot harder on just my tiny salary from the bar I used to work at.

And now here we are: with Summer being accepted into the best writing program on the entire west coast.

“I knew you could do it,” I say, squeezing her extra tight.

“I was so worried I wouldn’t get in,” She laughs.

“Oh you were totally going to make it,” Jax scoffs.

“Uh huh, totally,” She says. “I was worried I would have to move super far away, though.”

“Yeah, now you can come back on weekends when you don’t wanna deal with college drama,” Jax says.

I just hold her tightly to my chest, not really wanting to let her go in this moment. This is such a big development for her.

And kind of for me too, she’s going to move out in the fall.

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Life's moved so quickly these past few years. So incredibly quickly. At Jax's and Sumemr's encouragement, I managed to get my GED and started taking college classes. I have my associates right now and I work at a nonprofit domestic violence shelter for omegas.

It's really fulfilling work for me and I guess now it'll give me something to focus on while I get used to Summer being all grown up.

"Thank you, Livvy," Summer says, pulling back to look up at me with big, watery eyes. "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you."

"No need to thank me," I say, cupping her face. "I'm so incredibly proud of you. You're going to do amazing things."

Summer pulls away and turns to give Jax a hug too. "Thank you too," She says.

"You're very welcome, kid, you deserve this."

Summer smiles at the both of us. "I'm gonna go call Allison and my friends and stuff now and tell them the good news!"

"And that's our cue, time for the uncool adults to head out," Jax laughs taking my hand.

"You guys are cool!" Summer calls before we shut the door.

I wrap my arm around his waist and breath in his firewood scent as we head down the

hall to our room.

“How’re you doing?” Jax asks me.

“Good,” I say, smiling up at him. “I’m so proud of her, she worked her ass off to get here.”

“How do you feel about her moving out? About her growing up and stuff? You’ve worked basically your entire life to protect and provide for her, so I bet this must be a big change.”

“Like I said, I feel good,” tugging him down onto the bed for us to cuddle next to each other. “She turned out okay, pretty great, actually. So mission accomplished.”

I look up at him, meeting his deep, gray eyes so full of compassion. In the years that we’ve been together, he’s impressed me every single day with how much he cares about me.

“Whatever happens in life, I know everything will be okay. Because I have you. Because we have each other. The two of us can actually live life now that we have each other. I love you so much.”

“And I love you, Liv. You make me so incredibly happy.”

“You saved me, you know, when you found me,” I say, reaching up to stroke his face. “You’re my savior.”