



The Silver Pact

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Category: Romance, Action

Description: I'm the bad twin, the one sent far from prying eyes. People like me don't get happy endings.

My three years at the Omega Refuge are over, it's time for me to stand on my own two feet. Except, how can I when the entire city hates me? I'm the cursed omega who destroyed hearts and tried to steal my sister's pack. I'm the omega Silver Davies, reviled, hated, scorned.

But there's worse out there than hate.

We're the pack rejected by the omegas we courted, twice. Silver is the omega who broke our hearts. We were glimpsing forever when she turned away from us. She's not our scent match, but she's our choice. We watched her burn in the scorching fire of society's tongue. Now she's here, back again, no pack, no family, needing help, our help.

And we can't turn away.

Silver's secrets are as deep a mystery as we've always believed, but maybe with her, we can have a final chance. One last attempt to find happiness. And maybe we can pull her out of the flames too.

After all, third times a charm, right?

This is a novella. A short story set two years after the events in the Packaged Deal

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one

Silver

Three years and three months ago

Isqueeze myself into the tightest possible ball, curled up on the shitty blankets that Onyx gave me. The pounding won't stop. I choke out a sob and look out the window. Can I survive a jump? Do I want to? What if I didn't? Would they stop if I were injured? That last thought is one of two that keeps me on the bed. What if they caught Onyx: is the other.

I shake the thoughts off and check the time. Onyx will be home soon. They'll stop. There's just a short time left, I just need to get through this night. I'm so tired. I think one of my ribs may be broken, and there's a cut in my mouth where thumbs squeeze my cheeks against my teeth.

Where is Onyx?

Why isn't she here?

Resentment flares up, and I tamp it down. She can't know. If she finds out...what happened to me will happen to her.

I close my eyes and count slowly. One, I love music. Two, I love green grass. Three, I can do this. Four, one more day. Five, I can keep Onyx safe. Six, I love my sister.

The banging fades away as I let myself float into memories when we were happy and safe.

Present Day

There's a river of tumultuous, pure panic living inside me, rocking my foundations and threatening everything I've worked for. What am I going to do? How am I going to survive? A mocking voice of laughter echoes in my mind during those quiet hours as I ponder those questions. Sometimes it sounds like my mother. Sometimes it's my father's voice ruining me. Other times it's the voices beyond the door. They all want to see me crash and burn.

This voice jeers at me, laughing and telling me I will get what I deserve. I dread those words. What do I deserve? I know what those voices say, but are they right?

Silver Davies, the omega thief who tried to steal her twins' happiness. I can hear what they say about me. It's not like they whisper. I'm supposed to hear it all. For all these years, I know what they still think. I think it, too. But do I really deserve to have this life?

I think I do. I think I'm cursed.

My pack passed away in a car accident years before Onyx so rightly dumped my selfish ass on the doorstep of the Omega Refuge. It was by chance that their scents awoke something inside me. The lingering scent was still strong on the fabric of the coat I was taking in for donation. When I'd inquired in a choked, hopeful whisper, thinking that perhaps this was the moment I'd find something worth living for, I'd been told the horrible truth. It happened years ago. The woman so burdened with age and sorrow had poured out the entire story of her grandson and his entire pack. A tragedy. All gone in the blink of an eye.

My own personal penance. How could I be so stupid as to dream there might be a way out of this hell that I'm existing in? Perhaps they are better off, rather than with me.

I pick up the basket of washed clothes and carry it through the cold, clinical halls that have been my home for the last three years. The bitter antiseptic scent in the air is barely noticeable to me now. The cold through my slippers is familiar, and the cream-painted walls with the laminated signs are walls that protect me now. This isn't the jail they meant it to be. It's freedom.

I think I cried myself to sleep for six months after I learned about my scent matches. I didn't care about my exile, but I cared about them. At the end of the day, I never knew them, and my dream was over before it began. I'm cursed to live a life of silent suffering. I brought it on myself, though. My jealousy drove me to bitter, cruel words towards my sister. And then desperation pushed me into doing something unforgivable. I finally understood what Onyx had, what I almost ruined for her. That understanding has brought nothing but a wall of unrelenting shame that pounds against my psyche day in and day out.

Three years have passed since that event, since the Omega Meet. Three more of those annual events have occurred. Where three more opportunities that I don't have present themselves to hopeful omegas and optimistic packs. Those horrible days of my worst self replay during the weeks of the Omega Meets in my mind's eye and in my dreams. I haven't seen Onyx since the day she dropped me off here. I can't. There's so much work to do, things I need to atone for.

This refuge is more than just my freedom. It's a place that helps women, gives them safety. Only one man is allowed in these hallowed halls, Doctor Shultz. An alpha who is cold but efficient and gentle with his care. The rest of the world might fear him, but here he is, the sword and shield that protects us.

A woman creeps out of a room, her shoulders curled in. She glances up and down the hallway, and when she spots me, her eyes widen, and her hand trembles. I give her my softest smile and avert my eyes, leaving her in peace.

At the end of the hall, I'm faced with two directions I can choose. Right takes me to the cafeteria, where our on-site chef, Glinda, is cooking up a storm. Back there are the staff rooms, the medical room, and The Director of the Refuge; Jenny Lathem and her personal office.

I turn left and put my palm on the security key. It unlocks, and I push the door open and slip into our enormous hall. There are several adjoined rooms. But the hall is lined with tables. On most of those tables are boxes, nice and sealed up.

"Have you finished with this, Silver?"

I glance up, straight into the beautiful eyes of the tiny omega, Jade from Pack Mortenson. Her alphas, Sven and Adrian Shultz, the doctor himself, are standing behind her. She smiles widely at me. I have tried my absolute best to shake this omega, but she decided a year ago we were going to be friends, and that was it.

Nothing I did or said has changed her mind and, to be honest, I like her a lot. She's braver than most people I know and open-minded. Still, I try to maintain that wall because I don't want her to hate me, and everyone always does, eventually.

"Yes, all the bags are boxed up and are ready to be taken to the charity auction." I run my fingers through my hair and quickly secure it back into a loose bun.

Jade smiles and directs the two men towards the table filled with boxes and bags of goodies for the guests tomorrow. The truck should be here in an hour, thus everyone is moving everything out, getting it ready for a swift transportation. It's not our first rodeo.

I hear whispers and glance back over my shoulder.

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Pack Vore has come into the refuge and, like they are the sun, they draw the eyes of everyone around. People love and respect them. They have impeccable reputations, and everyone who is anyway wants to be around them. I've seen the pack a lot in the past year. With each passing month, they look colder, harder. No one seems to notice, though. They just see what they want to see. And Pack Vore are wealthy, talented, and extremely attractive alphas with no mate.

They never look at me with any kindness, not like they used to, not when they courted me. Seeing them reminds me of how awful I was, so I don't look forward to their appearances. Despite it being near impossible not to stare at them and remember the way they were.

Ian spots me, and his hard gaze holds me captive. I turn my head away in jerky movements, wishing I could slow my heart's reaction to his glare. Their story is as tragic as mine. Their omega found another pack and chose the rich alphas over her scent matches. It's the type of thing I would have done, so I understand why they hate me. It's just the only people I know who could understand what I'm going through are right there. They are really incredible guys, they just hate me like everyone else.

They aren't exactly wrong. There was a moment when I thought we could have been something, had something, but I blew it.

The thought of 'what if' keeps me up at night, laying alone on my cot, remembering the way he said my name. When I picture my pack, I don't see these faceless men. I see Pack Vore. I have since I met them, those first few days of the Omega Meet before Silas Hastings gave me a ticket to ruin my life.

It's sick. It's perverted. It's punitive. I can't stop from seeing them, dreaming about them, fantasizing about them.

No one knows about my pack. No one knows I mourned for strangers for months. I don't even know their names; I didn't ask. Pack Vore met theirs. They caught her scent, had a meeting, and she chose another pack. It's worse in a way than what I've gone through. I just want to ask if they're okay. I just want to tell them I know how it feels and that I'm sorry.

What a joke. They're talking to Jenny now, and she's fluffing her grey hair. Several of the hired workers are giggling and standing close, waiting for Jenny to leave so they can pounce.

I sigh heavily and close up another box. It takes me a moment to get a label on it and slide it out of my way. I grab another empty box and start piling the folded up clothes into it.

If I had known this pack was respectable, had power, had influence, would I have turned them down? Pack Vore is everything I wanted all those years ago. I did not know at the time that they could have been the answer I was seeking. But I'm not bitter. Even when they think I'm the same omega they used to know.

Sometimes I want to scream at the world. Shout that I've changed. I had to change. I'm better. I'm different. Other days, I want to run somewhere new, a fresh start.

But I love my sister. I really do. I never appreciated how much she did for me. Not until she was gone. I have to make up for what I did wrong. That's the only reason I'm still here.

“Silver?”

I jerk my eyes up and find Ian standing there. Right there, beside me. I break into a cold sweat and drop my gaze to the table in front of me. Shit, how did he get so close? I vividly remember standing before him when he looked at me with kindness and interest. That's long gone. Disdain is the expression of the hour. Distaste is the perfume that flavours our interactions.

"Hi, Ian," I say softly. "How can I help you?"

Why does he smell so good? Like sandalwood.

"Still working here?" His blue eyes trail over the deft way I pack the last box. His hair is too long, I like it better short, he's got the kind of blond hair you want to run your fingertips through. And he's tall, much taller than me. The kind of tall that when you hug them, you know you're going to feel safe and protected.

"Yes. The refuge needs me," I whisper. Shame is an oozing wound inside me. I can't look at him, I don't deserve it.

He frowns. "I find that hard to believe. They could get along without you, surely."

I wince. He's not wrong. I'm just a set of hands. I'm not important. "Look, Ian, I just work here. This is what I do now. I've changed. It's been three years. People can change." My voice takes on a desperate sound I dislike intensely. It's not making a speck of difference to him.

He curls his lip and glances over my shoulder. My heart jerks, lifting into my throat and strangling me as I catch their scent. Pack Vore are the only pack from my past that speaks to me anymore. I don't really have anything to do with the packs, and I try to avoid anything to do with my sister.

I want them to like me.

Weston and Quinton close the distance. If Ian's tall, they are giants. Thin, lanky giants with black hair to their chins. They're twins but not exactly identical. Weston's hair has a wave, and his smile is crooked. He's much happier and more extroverted. Quinton is more serious, with harder blue-grey eyes than his brother. But the way they smile, especially at each other, is everything to me. It's like the world doesn't even matter, it always captivates me.

They make me ache for the could-have-been relationship with my twin.

The last member of Pack Vore is Ross. He's shorter than the others, and he's always humming or playing his guitar. His voice is unreal, but when he combines it with the intricate strumming, you can't look away. Ross plays magic, not music.

I've spent so many stolen moments secretly listening to him play, brushing away tears. His music reaches in and touches my soul. He brings out all the yearnings I have but can't voice. He exposes me.

Ross has kind eyes that are green with tiny flecks of gold. His front tooth is chipped, and he's one of the kindest people I've ever met. His perfect, joyful soul shines out of every pore on his body.

The pack moves in my direction. I can feel them all around me, but then I catch sight of something else. Something that can push even Pack Vore from my mind.

The door opens, and I still, spotting my sister and her omega, Dylan. Damn it. I spin on my heel and stalk towards the locked doors that will let me back in the refuge. Ian grabs my arm right as I get to the glass door. I look over my shoulder, panicking when I see Onyx getting closer. She's spotted me, is staring at me, she's saying something, but I can't hear over the rush of panic.

"Let go."

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“No, I want to have this conversation with you-”

I elbow him hard in the stomach and scramble through the doors, using my badge. I quickly step inside the facility and out of sight.

But not out of earshot.

“Silver’s still not talking to you, then?” Ian asks.

“No, I’m afraid not. She sure can hold a grudge.” Onyx sounds sad, but I don’t care. She’d be sadder if I was in her life.

“You helped her. You saved her ungrateful ass and got her a roof over her head. She should thank you.”

“Thanks, Ian, but I don’t think she’s ever going to forgive me.”

“Forget about her. Ross has a song he needs heard. He wants someone to act as an audience. Want to hear it?”

Jealousy burns in my chest, and I squeeze my eyes closed so I don’t have to hear anymore. She has everything, and I have nothing. Onyx will never understand how hard it was for me. Memories flash through my mind, and I start gasping. I clutch at the wall, struggling to breathe.

How terrifying it was to sit and listen to alphas banging on the door, trying to break in. How monstrous it was to exist when they waited until she left for work, calling for

me endlessly through the thin wood. Sometimes succeeding in breaking in and taking what they wanted. She will never know about the times I went with strange men just so I could escape the ones hunting me. How tired I always was. How she thought I was home all day, and I was just being hunted in my home, in my neighbourhood, everywhere. I didn't tell her that hunger made me weak, and weak made me vulnerable. I never explained how much I resented her ability to escape.

I could never look her in the eyes, so I lashed out instead. Causing hurt to hide my pain because I was just so ashamed.

Shame, that memory of shame, is a bucket of ice water that douses the flames and calms my panic. There is no escape from the past. No way to fix what is so wrong.

I ruined myself. No, they ruined me. Until there was nothing good left. All I wanted was to be safe. And, sure, it got a little out of control. Money equaled safety in my eyes. Power meant I'd never have to be that scared, helpless omega again. I could stop all the pain. I could do anything. All I needed to do was use what I had to protect myself.

It didn't work. It failed epically. I lost my chance at a pack. My sister. My home. All of it was gone.

Onyx had freedom. Now she has power, safety, and love.

How can I tell her what life was like? How can I explain and see the pity in her eyes? Or have her ask why I didn't tell her? Like I could? Would she even believe me? I didn't trust her not to leave me. Our mother hated me. Our father did, too. He just hated Onyx more. But our mother...she was supposed to love me, too.

But she treated me like a rival. Like a challenger. Like a threat. Onyx was her loving child, the beta of her heart. I was the omega unwanted, the cause of her suffering.

I was a child.

I slip around the corner, looking inside the hall, and find it empty. I go back inside and pick up two boxes. Then I carry them back to the table and start filling bags. That's all I do now. Work. It's all I'm good for.

"Ian thinks you ran."

I tense and force myself to relax, shrug, and keep working, pressing my lips into a thin line.

"Yet, here you are working again. You didn't run from work or from him. You ran from your sister."

Quinton's words hurt. He's a twin. He knows how it feels to be so close to someone you wonder why you have separate skins.

"Onyx is happy and not part of my life anymore," I say tightly, refusing to cower.

He rounds the table and ducks his head down until he's staring me right in the eyes. I freeze, frozen under his knowledgeable glare. "She's your twin. Cutting her off is either the cruelest thing you've done or the most painful."

"Why can't it be both?"

"You're selfish to inflict such damage on your sister. She's been nothing but kind to you, even when you don't deserve it."

I flinch at that savage cut.

"Perhaps my cruelty is kindness," I mutter so softly he doesn't hear me.

“A twin is a gift.”

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“Or a curse.”

His eyes get colder. “Yes, I can see how she might consider you a curse.”

I flinch again but keep focusing on packing the boxes, even when he snarls and turns on his heel and storms away. I sniff to stop the urge to cry, but still, my eyes blur.

I am the curse, and it’s better for everyone if I’m alone.

two

Weston

Three years and one month ago

Silver

I sneak out of the cabin, my skin crawls. Despite the need to be safe, I have to do this. There has to be a way off this resort where I can just walk until I find a new life. I’ll never get a chance like this again. I watch as Onyx makes her way to the resort, her uniform making her look like a million dollars.

I’m so proud of her. And jealous.

I tie my black hair in a bun and go in the opposite direction. An hour later, I find myself staring at the resort. It’s all fenced in, and security is top-notch. If I’m getting out, it’s through there.

I need to escape through the resort itself. Hysteria tugs at me, trying to pull me down into a useless fit that will see the day pass in a blur of tears. I don't have time.

I press my lips together and slink down towards the place Onyx made me promise to avoid.

I'm following a huge garden shrub when I turn the corner and bump into someone. He's tall and blonde and gorgeous, and when he smiles, I feel my heart flip because this is a man I could easily hand myself over to.

He could destroy me. He's perfect. And I'm shattered.

I run.

Present Day

She's wearing a black dress that doesn't fit her right, not that you would notice. She's as lovely now as she was the day we saw her. Perhaps more so. Silver Davies smiles and hands out another bag, and then another. The guests chat with her easily, but they don't really pay much attention. She's just another volunteer running the Refuge gift bag section.

Hazel and Jade are the big draws here. Those two have become powerhouses in our world, drawing in attention, donations, and cash for the refuge they love so much. Silver just hands out bags. I find it so hard to picture her like this.

Why does that bother me so much? But Silver is doing the work. Every time we see her, she's got her head down and quietly works like it's her only purpose in life. She's not behaving like the selfish woman we thought we knew.

Jenny Lathem, the CEO and director of the Omega Refuge, swans past Silver in a

gown of ruby red. She doesn't look at Silver or acknowledge her, but Silver turns away after she leaves, breathing deeply. Something's wrong.

"Bro? Hey! West! What are you doing?"

I glance at Quint and shrug. "Watching."

He follows my stare, and his face transforms into a scowl. "Why?"

"She seems sad tonight. Look at her. There's desperation pulling at the edges of her."

"Ah, yes, well, that's because her three-year contract is up. The refuge has absorbed the money that Onyx donated for her to stay, and she's now out on her ass. After tonight, she's no longer got a roof over her head."

"She'll go to Onyx, though? Surely."

"I thought that, but Ian says Dylan and Onyx haven't been able to get close to her. She's refusing their help. She'll be fine. Don't worry about her. I'm sure she's got someone lined up who will help her."

That doesn't sit right with me. I sip the whiskey in my glass while I watch her. You'd have to know her to realise she was stressed. She hides it really well. She's sad, and she's scared. My shoulders tense, and there's this strange feeling in my stomach, almost like panic.

Onyx creeps up to stand beside me. I know because Quint murmurs her name when she gets ten feet away. It's an old habit that we both got into so we don't get startled. Silver catches sight of us and stiffens, turning away. I glance between the twins and the stiff posture Silver now has. What is the mystery surrounding her and this dislike of her own sister?

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“I need to ask you a favour,” Onyx says quietly. Her slate eyes look watery, and her hair is elegantly coiled. She looks like a million dollars and not at all like her twin.

“No,” I snap before she can continue. “I’m sick of doing you favours, Onyx. Go away.”

Quint casts me an amused look, knowing I have no intention of honoring that statement. I’ll fold like a deck of cards, especially if it has anything to do with Silver.

“She’s got no one else. You’re the only people she interacts with outside of the Refuge.”

I growl. I don’t want to help Silver because Onyx asked. Instead, I want to help her because I want to help her.

“She had scent matches. Jenny told me in the report I got. She found her pack. I thought you should know that.”

Strangely, that upsets me deeply. So, I’m short and rude when I say, “She did? Where are they? Didn’t they want her?”

“They died.” The bitter words slither through me, making me feel ill. “It was a car accident, years before the first Omega Meet. She found out two and a half years ago, and as far as we know, she hasn’t told a soul. Silver won’t get a pack or a happy ending, not like mine. I hate that for her.”

I rock back on my heels. “We aren’t her pack,” I snarl defensively. “Our scent match

has already found and rejected us.”

“No, you aren’t scent matches, but you could be friends. You, of all people, would understand how she’s feeling. Silver’s not a bad person. I can’t explain it. When we were kids, we were like you two. Our family changed her, our neighbourhood changed her. She’s got a good heart, she always has. She just got lost along the way.”

“You’re awfully kind to someone who is refusing to see you.”

Onyx shrugs one shoulder. She is a pale reflection of her sister. I hate to admit that, but I’ve always felt it. Onyx is pretty, but Silver is beautiful. Even in her sadness, she exudes great beauty.

“She’s got to have her reasons, and who am I to guide her life’s journey? Have you met Jade? She was at the first Omega Meet. She had long hair and wore dresses that covered her from head to toes. Jade was too scared to speak out. She changed,” Onyx says stubbornly.

“Jade is different,” Quint growls.

“How so?”

“Because Jade is Jade. She was hurt, and she fought. Silver didn’t fight. She tried to steal.”

“How do you know she isn’t fighting in the only way she knows how?” Onyx asks quietly.

I return my eyes to the omega, who forces a trembling smile to her lips and hands out another bag.

“She doesn’t deserve you,” Quint says to Onyx.

“Maybe. Or maybe the things I’ve heard, recently...maybe I didn’t do as good a job protecting her as I intended.”

I snap my head around to Onyx, but her eyes are filled with pain. I don’t dare ask, not here.

“She’s got no one and nowhere to go. I’m just asking you to reach out and make sure she’s okay if you cross paths.”

“Onyx-”

“Thanks, West. Quint.”

She fades back, moving into the arms of her alpha. Falcon Treyfield gives us one of his trademark glares. I don’t take it to heart. The dude has a stick up his ass.

I turn back in time to see Silver slip out from behind the table and walk towards the exit.

“Where are you going?” Quint snarls.

“I’m going to make sure she’s okay,” I say to my twin and lift my hand.

“Weston!”

I ignore my brother and push my way through the crowds. By the time I get onto the street, I can’t see her anywhere.

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A strange sense of disappointment crushes me. I stay out there longer than I mean to, but still she doesn't appear.

She doesn't return to the party, either.

She's just gone.

I try to go back in and enjoy the night, but I keep hearing Onyx's words in my head, and this unsettled feeling fills me.

"I'm going to find her," I say to Quint two hours later. I force myself to sit at the circular table. It's just the pack, reclining as the night passes, leading the roster of events to its conclusion and into the real reason most people are here; social drinking. People laugh louder, flirt with each other, and have in general a good time. Ian is annoyed, I can see it on his face, but Ross looks at least concerned. His tie has vanished, and Ian's jacket is gone. Quint looks meticulous still, but his eyes show his growing ire. I can't. The panic and urgency driving me won't let me let this go.

Ian looks up, his eyes cold and hard. Ross nods his head, agreeing with me. He's always had a soft spot for Silver. "We should try. If what Onyx says is true, we're judging her on-

"On her behaviour, the way she treated us," Ian cuts off Ross, glaring at him and then me.

"If she had lied and picked us, we would have hurt Brandy, anyway. Our omega chose another pack, but we could have easily done that to her or Silver. For whatever

reason, it worked out best for all of us,” Ross says with a shrug of his shoulders.

“You call that working out, Ross?” Ian shakes his head. “I call our lives a dumpster fire.”

“So, you’d punish her endlessly for it? Come on, she’s an omega, our friend’s sister, and we’ve been asked to help.”

“She treated us like we weren’t good enough, like we were nothing.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m aware, I was there, you know.”

“You seem to need a reminder!” Ian snaps. His fingers curl into his palms, and his eyes flash with temper. He’s only mad because he fell hard and fast for Silver and his feelings got crushed. Logically, I understand that, but the emotional part of me wants to hit him.

“I don’t need a reminder to see how desperately she tried to get attention. Just as I don’t need a reminder to remember she barely ate. Her eyes had big black rings around them. I don’t need to remember the times we found her crying. Or the nightmares she awoke screaming from,” I hiss at him, stepping into his space. He has to look up at me, and I can tell it’s driving him nuts right now.

Ross nods. “There was the alpha who grabbed her arm and swore because she vomited on herself. Someone touched her, and her reaction was to vomit. That never sat right with me.”

“What are you talking about?” Ian snaps.

“I’m talking about red flags, Ian,” Ross says quietly. “What if she was running from something? What if she was in danger? What if we were blind to it?”

“I don’t believe it,” Ian says after a long moment.

“Yeah, sorry, but I’m not buying it, either. Silver Davies is the most selfish and spoiled omega on the planet.”

I roll my eyes. “Fine. Believe whatever you want, Quint, but I know you, and I know how you feel, and you don’t hate her nearly as much as you want to.”

With that, I leave my pack and stalk back out to the streets, praying that I find this mysterious, disappearing omega that still has a piece of my heart.

three

Ian

Three years and one month ago

Silver

He says his name is Ian, and he’s introduced me to his pack. I’m hiding and masking my pain again. They don’t see me watching the resort, learning all the layout, escape routes, hiding spots. I mean, why would an omega need to know these things?

They say they aren’t meant to be here yet but needed a few days. A favour was called in, and they were given their rooms early. “It was charity,” Ross said with a smile. They are kind and generous. Funny. I keep waiting for the mask to slip, but it doesn’t.

They don’t hit me or demand I service them.

Are they genuinely nice guys?

Present Day

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I turn around and smile at Falcon as he approaches me. He's wearing a suit as he always does, and his cold assessing glare runs over me and leaves me feeling like a muddy toddler yet again. The sun is shining at the Treyfield estate. The garden party is superb, and everyone is having fun. Everything is beautiful, expensive, luxurious. The people are friends. So, why am I so annoyed by it all?

It's been three weeks.

Three weeks since the night she disappeared. I don't even know why I care. I don't know why it's bothering me so intensely. How does a woman who looks like Silver just vanish? What happened to her?

I heave a sigh, not wanting to deal with him. Not today. I was not out driving around searching for an omega. Not at all. I was hungry and couldn't find a bakery open. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

"Have you thought about our deal, Ian?"

"I have. I'd like to see the contract, but I like it. The project sounds incredible." I don't care about the deal. Go away, Treyfield. I'm tired, and I want to pretend I'm just resting. Who's idea was it to come to this stupid party, anyway?

Oh. Mine. Damn.

Falcon grins, but his attention gets side-lined when Grayson waves his hands in the air. He points at Grayson and nods his head. I don't miss the way his eyes soften as he looks at the happy alpha.

“Attention, everyone. I just want to say thank you,” Grayson booms.

Not a speech. Anything but a speech. I groan and have to stifle it when Falcon shoots me a frigid glare.

I tune out of his conversation and discreetly melt back into the gardens. If I can just get five minutes alone to deal with this headache. I turn three corners of shrubs, quickly becoming lost. With a backwards glance to ensure I’m alone, I heave a sigh, letting the tension out of my shoulders. I’m almost relaxed when I spot movement. Someone is already drunk and sneaking into Grayson’s maze. The person looks small. Why can’t I be alone? I’m tired.

“Ian?”

I glance to my left and realise Quint has snuck up on me but refocus my attention on the figure. There is something wrong and off about the whole situation. I find myself drifting towards them. The hair is dark, and the clothes torn and filthy. The smell is awful, but is it a child? A runaway teen?

“Hey, you can’t go in there!” I call out, increasing my pace as the person steps towards the mansion and the open doors.

The person flinches and trips on the next step, hitting the ground hard. They don’t move, they just lay there on the ground, barely breathing. I rush forward, kneel, and carefully turn them over.

For a moment, I think it’s Onyx because there’s no way Silver could look this bad in just three weeks. There are bruises all over her. She’s filthy, and she’s thinner than I’ve ever seen any omega.

“Silver, what have you done?” I whisper the words in horror.

Her eyes open a fraction, and in them, all I see is pain and defeat. She doesn't seem to recognise me.

I scoop her up into my arms.

“Call Adrian!” I bellow, uncaring of what I'm interrupting.

She clutches at me, her eyes wide and huge. “No! I didn't mean to come here! Ian, please, I'm sorry! I'll leave! Please! I'm sorry!”

Why does she beg like this? Where is this fear and hysteria coming from?

“Well, it's a good thing you did come here,” Quint says, though I can hear in his voice that he's struggling to keep the horror out of it.

She coughs weakly, and I get the impression that if I don't do something, I might just watch this omega fade away and out of my life. My heart thuds, slamming against my chest. I see her image a million times in my mind's eye, and the panic at the thought of having her gone leaves me raw and blind.

I loved her back then. I never got to tell her.

I can't lose her!

It's not conscious thought, it's not intentional. There is no plan, there is only instinct.

I bring her wrist to my mouth, and I bite hard. She stiffens and whimpers, but that's the only sound she makes. Her body is so depleted that she can't even cry out. I can barely feel the bond. It's so weak.

Please! Oh, please let this work!

I put my hand to her mouth. My fear is a living, writhing beast inside me. I will not lose her.

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I can't lose her.

"Bite."

She shakes her head. Just a weak movement from side-to-side. I snarl at her.

"Bite!" I order in a bark that allows no obedience. She sinks her teeth into my hand. The bond between us flickers with strength. "Now, you will live. You will have a purpose. My purpose. My pack will be your home. My pack will be your family. You will live, Omega," I order in those same tones, refusing to let her go.

Her eyes blink up at me, so blue, like sapphires. She's lost and confused, but that's okay. She won't be for long. It doesn't matter that she's my omega now. The position was filled in my heart a long time ago.

"What did you just do to my sister?" Onyx snarls, attempting to pull Silver out of my arms, but I lift her, cradling her to my chest, and refuse to let Onyx touch her.

I snarl back at her. "I gave her a reason to stay."

Onyx glances at Silver and does a double take. "What...what happened to her?"

"I have no idea, but when Adrian's seen her, I'm taking her home, and I'm going to find out."

Silver whimpers, but when Quint comes closer, she hesitates, and then struggles free with surprising strength and pushes her way between the twins, clutching onto their

shirts to keep her up. West lifts her easily into his arms and holds her close.

“She should stay with me!” Onyx says calmly, with complete irrational thought.

I scoff at Onyx’s ridiculous demand. “Absolutely not. You have a pack, and an omega to protect, and that.”

I point at a barely visible baby bulge. “Silver can come stay with us. It’s safe, it’s clean, no one will get to her.”

“But she’s-”

Dylan murmurs in Onyx’s ear. She bursts into tears and turns into his arms.

“I know. I just don’t want to see her get hurt,” Onyx cries out.

I assume I’ve won the battle and catch sight of Falcon, Silas, and Grayson’s grateful expressions. It rubs me the wrong way, but I don’t say anything.

Adrian and Jade get here, and he rushes over. “Lay her down on the table.” West carefully lays her down on the outdoor table but stays close, holding her hand, while Adrian checks her over. He shakes his head.

“Oh, god, why didn’t she come to us for help!” Jade whispers. “We’re friends. Why didn’t she tell me she was in trouble? Shit, I knew I should have found her before we left on that holiday! I’m so stupid.”

No one answers her. Silver is a mystery unto herself. No one knows why she does anything. And since she’s passed out again, no one can ask her anything, either.

“Let’s get her to your house. I can set up an IV and get some fluids into her and check

these bruises. It doesn't look too bad, but I need to check some-" Adrian hesitates, and my stomach flips over.

"Okay," I say and swallow hard. I carefully lift her into my arms. She weighs nothing.

Jade and Kandi trot along behind us. Neither of them ask questions, but Kandi opens the back of a huge SUV. I turn and put Silver into West's arms before climbing up into the back seat. He hands her to me, then climbs in.

"Where are we headed?" Ross shouts.

"Our house," I say evenly. I glance at Adrian through the door and meet his eyes. "I have a setup there for emergencies. It's safe, sterile, and has what you might need to treat her."

He nods. "Kandi, meet me at home."

"Fine, but I'm sending Sven over," Kandi growls.

The omega and her beta peel away from the car and disappear.

I direct the alpha the five minutes to my house, and then open the gate with my key fob. She's so small in my arms, and her breathing is strained and painful.

"You look awful," I tell Silver as her eyes blink open and look up at me.

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“So sweet, always trying to turn my eye.” Her rasping comment comes out with a surprisingly unexpected tease.

I chuckle and stroke her face gently, smoothing her hair back. My door opens, and Ross gets out of the way, rushing into the house, Adrian a few steps behind.

“Seriously, Silver, what’d you do?”

“You should see the other guy,” Silver mutters, and then appears to fall to sleep. I tense up, but Adrian doesn’t appear to be concerned at all. Instead, he just follows me through my house until I stop at a door. Ross opens it, and I slip inside.

“That will make things easier, actually. I need permission to undress your omega and inspect her for injuries that could be hidden.”

Everything in me balks, but I don’t know why. She’s not mine. Then I remember the bite. She is now. I shrug. “Do what you need to do.” I cast Ross a flat look when he protests.

It hurts to put her down on the bed.

It takes everything in me to walk away.

“Her injuries are superficial. She appears to be suffering from dehydration and lack of nourishment. The bruises are contained to her face and arms. She has a couple on her legs. But nothing else.”

“That’s because I learned how to fight,” Silver snaps. She glances up at the IV bag and winces.

It’s clear she’s exhausted but trying so hard to be angry and defensive. Her eyes keep falling back to the bite mark on her skin. There’s a whole lot of horror on her face when she looks at my mark.

I’m not sure how I feel about it. Truthfully, it pisses me off, and I want to go and put more of my marks all over her. Give her something to really be horrified about.

And then, what I’m thinking makes me feel ill. I promise myself I won’t be an idiot. Then she glances at the bite, all horrified, and the cycle starts again.

But then, every now and then, a wave of reality hits me. I marked an omega without talking to the pack. I claimed an omega who isn’t ours, who we don’t even like. An omega who hates everyone, who everyone hates.

“Oh, god,” I say out loud and sway.

Adrian frowns and flicks me in my forehead.

“Hey!”

“Get it together. I’m not going to save your pretty face if you faint.”

I snarl at him. He snarls back, completely unintimidated. But I do catch a hint of a smile in his blue eyes. He runs a hand through his black hair and packs up his things.

I ignore him and stagger to the nearest chair and flop down into it. After everything that happened with Brandy, we’d sworn to never take an omega. I look up when Quint and West enter the room. I can’t tell what they’re thinking. Not even a little bit.

But when Ross comes in, there's a giddy happiness on his face that makes my stomach jerk even worse than if he were frowning.

Oh, no, this will not be good.

“What have I done? She's horrible. She's going to destroy us.”

Ross' face falls, and he glares at me.

West shakes his head and turns away. Only Quint silently seems to agree with me.

It's a disaster!

“Can you get out? I need to pee.”

I whip my head around, glaring at the selfish omega and her snarling tones. What the fuck have I done? This is going to be hell on Earth.

four

Silver

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Three years and one month ago

I wasn't going to show up, but I promised, and there is something about them that dares me to step out and take a chance. Onyx is going to be mad. I snuck out again, and they were so happy to see me. I kept waiting, but nothing bad happened. They are really nice. No one broke my ribs or held me down. No one called me a whore and slapped me until my face was numb. Is this real?

Present Day

There is a bond mark on my wrist.

No matter how many times I rub at it, it's not coming off. Ian fucking Vore bonded me. He barked at me and made me bond him. I can feel him inside my chest, his rage, the cold and icy disdain he feels every time he looks at me. It's like he's projecting all those feelings up into this giant wall, so I can't actually feel that he's a person. Ian has simply become one massive ball of 'I hate Silver'.

Yeah! I hear you! "Asshole alpha," I grumble when he shoots a glare in my direction.

I sniffle and swipe at the tears. I hate feeling this vulnerable and weak.

I sit up and swing my legs over the bed. It's been a day or two, I think. After he left, I collapsed and passed out. When I woke up, there was water beside me and Onyx.

For the first time in years, we were within speaking distance. It was strangely absent of all the pain I'd been expecting. I kept waiting for her accusations, her

recriminations, but Onyx didn't do any of that. My sister wrapped her arms around me and helped me to the toilet. She said nothing as she helped me drink the water and take the painkillers, either. We stared at each other, and I've never felt so far away from her as I did in that moment. Onyx is like an angel, and I'm from hell.

"Go to sleep, Silvie," she'd whispered like we were still sisters. Like we still cared and had a connection. Like I was someone she cares about.

Today is a new day with a bright morning in the Vore household, and she's not here. I can hear people moving deeper in the house. The Pack doing daily things. This is their home. Their scents permeate the air, the surfaces, and even me. It makes a girl want to cry.

Ross smells like roasting chestnuts. It's such a warm and snuggly scent, and it makes my mouth water. I remember being at camp before everything went to hell, while a boy showed me how to cook them. I don't remember his face, but I remember that feeling of joy. That's what Ross's scent reminds me of; joy.

Ian's smell fills the air and invades every single space. Sandalwood. It's a scent I want to draw into my lungs and keep ingesting. Strong, sensual, homey. The first time I met him, I was sneaking around the resort while Onyx was in training. I bounced into his chest and started to fall. He caught me and smiled. It was the most swoon-worthy moment. I felt safe and thrilled. Ian was the promise of a new chance.

The twins, though...they have different types of scents. Subtle. Quint's scent is more like the scent you smell just before a huge thunderstorm hits the city, while Weston's is the scent before snow hits the city. They are unstoppable forces, ungoverned by the laws of humanity or designation. Bringing change and excitement.

Both are two of my favourite scents in the world.

I frown. They never used to be. I hated storms. But that was before. Storms are my friend now, I can hide in a storm. I can vanish in a storm.

I climb out of bed and notice the IV has been removed from my arm. A tiny little band aid has been put over the wound. Somehow, I don't think it was Ian.

I find my bag and quickly go through it. I find a pair of jeans that don't smell quite so bad, and a jumper. It's warm today, but everything else is dirty. I'm just going to make do.

I pack everything up, duck into the bathroom, have the world's quickest shower, and get dressed before anyone can come and yell at me.

I peer around the house as I tiptoe out of the room. There's no one in sight, but I'm shocked by the wealth. I didn't pay attention in my room, but now I can see it. I think the floor is granite. It's modern, one of those beautiful showplace homes. Everything is sleek lines, with perfect finishes. There are pieces of the pack everywhere. A bracket on the wall holds a plant with huge leaves. Shoes at the end of the hallway, outside a bedroom.

The hallway I'm in opens into an open plan space. There's a sliding glass set of doors framing a garden paradise, a kitchen with silver and black appliances, and a huge stove. The fridge is covered in photos, and there are stickers on two cupboards. A huge dining table takes up a massive portion of space and manages to look tiny inside the enormous room. There's a laptop left behind, sitting on the table with a coffee beside it. I wonder if someone just stepped out of the room.

I stare at the fridge. My stomach seizes, groaning loudly. Maybe I could just steal some bread? I mean, they hate me anyway. What does being a thief matter on top of being a selfish waste of space omega?

Two steps towards the kitchen, and I'm frozen, unable to do it. I don't want them to think worse of me. With a regretful sigh, I turn on my heel, heading towards the sliding glass doors. I hitch my bag up on my shoulder and slowly crack the door open.

"Silver?"

I freeze with one foot through the door. I could run now, but I don't think I'd get far. My body is shaking already. I need to eat, but I have no money.

Fuck.

Desperation has me slowly turning back to the alpha who called my name.

"Where are you going?" Ross asks gently.

"Home," I say belligerently.

"You have somewhere you're staying?"

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I hesitate and nod my head, refusing to admit to the lie out loud.

Ross steps out towards me, bringing that delicious scent of roasting chestnuts. His eyes soften as he assesses me. I don't know what decision he comes to, but my embarrassment is complete. He can see through all my lies, I'm sure of it.

"You're going to have something to eat, aren't you?" Ross asks with a smile. "I'm cooking this morning, and I'm not bad, if I do say so myself. Take a seat at the counter, and I'll have a plate ready in a jiffy."

"Jiffy?" I tease before I remember where I am and who I'm not.

Ross winks at me. Those green eyes look even kinder when he's walking barefoot in his own house. I want to run my fingers through the brown hair at the base of his neck.

"Why are you doing this?" I ask him to remind us both who we really are.

"Doing what?" Ross asks, frowning at the fridge.

"Helping me."

"Why wouldn't we help you, Silver? We all run in the same circle. You look like you need help. We have it to give, plus, I like you. I always have. I don't want to see you sick or hurt."

My eyes burn, and I look down at my hands. My fingers are red, the skin peeling and

cut near my fingernails. Hell, even my knuckles are split.

“Ian hates me,” I whisper quietly.

“If Ian really hated you, he wouldn’t have bonded you. He also wouldn’t have carried you home and sat with you all night. You hurt his ego, his pride is wounded. He’ll get over it,” Ross says flippantly. He can say that, he looks amazing in a pair of black jeans and a simple t-shirt. Casual yet expensive. He doesn’t know what it’s like.

“Don’t have much of a choice now, do we?” A second voice says.

I stiffen as Quinton pulls up a stool beside me. He puts his chin on his hand and stares at me. I stare back. Quint is wearing a black jumper and shorts. His feet are bare. I try really hard not to let my eyes descend down his body. Nope, not even a little bit curious.

“You’re our omega. Stuck with us.” He elaborates.

“No, that doesn’t have to be true. I can leave-” I stutter out.

“Leave? No!” Ross says sharply. “Stay. Let us help you. Just until you’re stronger.”

“Mmm, and then we can work out how to unbond you.”

My heart freezes and jumps in my chest. It hurts. I can’t deny it. I deserve it, though.

“Don’t be a dick, Quint.” Weston sits on the other side of me, moving so close his thigh is pressed to mine. He’s wearing a singlet. There is so much skin visible, and it’s like being starving and walking into a buffet. As hard as I try not to look, I can’t look away. “Morning, sweetie.”

I peer at him, confused by the kindness. Weston's slightly curly hair is even curlier when it's wet. A ringlet hangs near his chin, drawing my eyes to his lips, which are full and lush.

Damn it, he's as pretty as I remember.

"Morning," I mumble belatedly.

"Feeling better?"

"She will be once she's had something to eat."

I sense him long before he appears. Ian comes towards us in an ocean wave of coldness.

Weston notices how tense I am and leans in close to me, putting a hand on my thigh as if he's trying to reassure me.

"Don't worry about him. He's like this all the time."

I keep my eyes on the counter as Ian sweeps into the kitchen. I can feel his probing stare, but I don't acknowledge him at all. Even when I shiver, I keep my gaze on the bond mark on my wrist. Why did he do it? It makes no sense.

My heart is going to beat out of my chest.

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“I thought you’d be gone.”

I wince.

“Sorry to disappoint,” I snap back. It’s better to be defensive. It’s better to attack back.

“If you were sorry, you’d be gone.”

I reach down, sliding off the stool, and hoist my backpack over my shoulder.

“Ian! Shut the fuck up!” Ross shouts. “Omega, sit. You can eat first, and then run away.”

Weston has hold of my arm, and Quinton is standing between me and the door. I don’t even know why, but there’s no way to escape.

I am starving.

Weston tugs me into his chest and wraps his arms around me. I stand there with wide eyes, staring at his t-shirt. When was the last time I was hugged? I work with battered women. We don’t touch each other. I don’t have friends or family. It’s been...the Omega Meet. That was the last time.

I cautiously lift my arms and loosely put mine on his back. West hugs me tighter, almost lifting me off my feet. I sniffle and close my eyes, allowing the comfort to sink into me. I think I’d give him anything he asked at this moment.

Ross clears his throat, and I try to jump back, but West doesn't let me go. Instead, he grabs a plate with one hand, keeps hold of me with the other, and walks us to the table. He sits down and pulls me onto his lap.

"Eat," he says low in my ear.

When I still hesitate, staring at the mountain of fried foods, he picks up a fork and brings a mouthful to my lips.

"Eat, Omega. Let me feed you."

His words...just melt something inside me. It's one of my fantasies, was one of my fantasies before. Having an alpha who loved me enough to feed me. My lower lip wobbles, and I desperately want to fall into the fantasy.

Don't be a fool, Silver. They don't love you. No one does. You aren't lovable.

I eat in silence, hyper-aware as the alphas come and sit at the table, murmuring in deep voices. Ross reaches out and touches my knee, my hand, my arm. He seeks to reassure me, to make me smile.

I don't even know what to do with it. The Silver that used to be able to flirt and smile charmingly is dead and gone. The touches I hated so much, I'm not desperate for, but I don't know how to react to them.

I'm a husk of who I used to be.

But right now, I'm warm and clean, and my belly is full. It could be the last meal I have for weeks. That's more than I had two days ago.

five

Silver

Three years and two weeks ago

I've spent a week with them, and it's getting harder and harder to leave them when it's time to go. Ian held me from behind yesterday, and it felt like I was really safe. I think I want him. My body responded. That scared me, but he didn't push. He's the nicest person I've ever met. I like him so much.

Present Day

After the meal, I stand up and edge towards the door. If I can just get out of here, I can disappear.

"Wait!" Ross calls out. "Look, can't you just stay for a couple of hours? Adrian's coming back to check on you."

I hesitate. "I feel fine."

"But you were really ill. Look, I'm not going to make you stay, but I'm going to have to go with you if you leave."

I whip around, glaring at the stubborn alpha. "That's ridiculous. I don't need you to babysit me." I also really don't need him to see where I'm going to stay tonight. The thought makes me break out into a shiver.

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“You need help, Silver. Let me help you.”

I hesitate. Part of me wants to accept his help, but the part of me that doesn't trust anyone anymore rejects his offer with a sneer.

“I think that would be unwise.”

“Listen to the omega,” Ian says with his arms folded over his chest.

“You bonded her,” Ross hisses. “You'd just let her leave to starve on the streets?”

Ian clears his throat and looks away. I can't tell if he feels guilt or if he thinks Ross is being an idiot.

“She stays,” Ian announces like he's the fucking king of all omegas.

“You can't make me stay!” I snarl at Ian.

He whirls on me, huge and furious. I stagger backwards, almost tripping over my own feet. I'm caught by Ross and pulled into his safe embrace. “You're right. I can't make you stay, but I can track you down and bring you back.”

I swallow hard, watching the way his blue eyes light up with molten grey streaks. Why is he so pretty?

“Just stay, accept the freebies. You'll be out on your ass soon enough.”

I wince. Maybe not so pretty.

Ross growls and tucks me closer to his side. “Ian!”

Ian simply spins on his heel and stalks down a corridor and disappears. He takes the exhausting tension with him.

“Sorry about him. He’s got issues.”

I snort, unable to stop the amusement. Issues? That’s an understatement.

Ross grins at me. “So, Silver. What do you like to do?”

What did I like to do? I like to lie awake at night and count whatever is nearby, so I don’t think about how screwed my life is or how much I deserve to be here. I like to find places where I can be safe and hidden. I like to steal drugs from doctors to suppress my heats. I like to find places that give out free food. My silence must tell him all he needs to know.

Ross’ smile drops. “All right, let’s try an easier question. Do you want to sit outside in the garden, lounge on the couch, or we can go swimming in the pool?”

I turn my head, staring at him with eyes that are too wide. That’s not what I thought he was going to suggest, and it makes my throat tighten with emotion. “Garden?”

“Garden it is. This way. It’s nothing fancy, not like Grayson’s gardens, but West and Quint find it comforting to muddle about out here.”

Ross grabs his guitar on the way out. I stare at it, envy burning in my chest. Will he sing where I can hear him? Dare I ask?

He leads me through the back doors and around the side of the house. I almost stop walking as the paradise unfolds before my very eyes. The garden isn't at all precise like Grayson's, its gigantic trees with lots of shade, rings of flowers, its sporadic and wild with no rhyme or reason. It's lovely. There's so much shade to sit under and plenty of benches and tables. They spend a lot of time out here, I can tell. I would, if it were mine.

Ross leads me to a bench under a tree, with enough low branches that you could easily climb in it, and urges me to sit down. I sit delicately, but I'm too busy trying to take in everything else to notice he's getting his guitar ready.

At the first strum, I turn my head, captivated by him. He sings a song I've heard before. It's a melody about a man who spots a woman from afar, a woman he loves on sight, but she runs from him. The song ends in tragedy with the woman marrying someone else, and the man marrying his second choice.

I swipe the stray tear from my cheek. It's not the story, it's how he plays, his voice so low and intimate as he sings.

Ross stares at me the whole time. When the song finishes, he keeps playing, transitioning into something gentle.

"You don't like that song."

"You sing it really well," I say instead, not wanting to offend him. Once, I would have teased him into writing me a ballad, but that me is gone.

"But you don't like it."

I shake my head. “No.”

“Why?”

“The song makes her sound bad, but there isn’t a single line about what’s going on in her life, why she chose the man she did. We only see his side of it. I mean, it literally says he was idealistically searching for his perfect woman. Maybe she wasn’t searching for perfection, maybe she was looking for safety.” I snap my mouth shut, furious that I just divulged so much information.

Ross stops playing. “What were you searching for, Silver?”

I stand up and pace away from him. “Nothing. I was...nothing.”

“Silver-”

“Play the song about lost chances. It’s about your scent match, isn’t it?”

Ross’ lips turn down. He obediently plays the song. I turn away, looking out into the garden, feeling a desperate need to run but knowing there’s nowhere I can go. The walls have crumbled, and it’s me and my demise ahead of me. I know my future. I’ll die alone on the street.

This song. I asked him to play it to remind me that the bond on my wrist is nothing. It means nothing.

The song concludes with the woman choosing a life that made her miserable. I choke

on a sob. Did I choose the life that made me miserable? I was trying to choose safety.

“They died, you know,” I throw at him. “My scent matches, long before I ever met them. They all died. I’m cursed.”

Ross puts down his guitar and steps towards me. I step back and start to sing. My voice comes out husky and low. It’s been a long time.

I sing their song about their scent matches, but I change it so that I’m singing about mine. By the time I’m finished and the last note dies in the air, Ross is staring at me like I’m his salvation. He’s missed the point of what I was doing.

“You don’t understand, Ross. There is no happiness for us. We’ll always miss what isn’t here. No one will ever be enough. We’ll be alone until we die.”

Arms grab me from behind and hold me to a warm, hard body.

“That’s not true, Silver. We can be happy without scent matches. We can be happy if we work at it.”

West leans his nose down and inhales my scent. “Fairy floss. I’ve always loved fairy floss.”

I hold still as he opens his mouth and sucks hard on the side of my neck. It’s so hard not to melt. My back arches, and a low moan escapes me. This is crazy! I should stop him. This isn’t right, it’s just making it harder.

“Wait, what are you doing?” I try to protest, but it comes out weak and breathy.

“She didn’t smell the way you do. She didn’t smell enticing or right. Silver, maybe the universe got it wrong,” Ross purrs out, stepping into me, so I’m sandwiched

between the two men.

I stare up at Ross while West kisses his way up to my ear.

“You sing like a siren,” West hisses. “I’m captivated by you, always by you.”

I’m stunned. I’m so shocked it hasn’t even occurred to me to stop them. Ross drags his hands up my hips, up my sides, and up the outside of my arms until he gets to my shoulders and squeezes.

“Sing with me,” Ross says softly, his breath wafting against my lips.

He sings a new song. A song I haven’t heard before. I listen intently, and by the time he’s run through the chorus, I’ve got it. I start to sing.

The two of them move closer, locking me in between them.

The song is about a ghost who keeps disappearing and appearing only when things are dire. It’s about a pack who is in love with the ghost and chases her only to lose her every time.

I stare up at Ross while he finishes the song.

He reaches up and cups my cheeks. “Stop running, my gorgeous ghost.”

I open my mouth, but his lips press lightly to mine, stopping the words from escaping. I’m so stunned I just stand there. But then his tongue swipes a hot, wet path across my bottom lip, and I groan and open for him.

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Our kiss turns molten in seconds. I cling to him, losing track of everything around us, except for West and his slowly wandering hands. I've never been kissed like this before. Never with gentle adoration and sinfully seductive coaxing. The kisses I've had were brutally stolen from me.

Ross steps back and clears his throat.

I glance up and catch Quint and Ian glaring from the window. My cheeks scorch, and the shame of everything I am returns in a massive wave. My lips still tingle, but I feel like my soul is shriveling up, trying to hide from the constant need versus what's right.

I'm the omega who flirted with them. I used them as a stepping stone at the Omega Meet to move to better packs. With open honesty, I confront that truth and admit I was cruel to this pack when they deserved more.

I was desperate.

Shame burns hot in me. My shoulders slump, and I try to pull away from West's hands.

"Stop thinking those thoughts, Silver."

I shake my head, refusing to meet Ross' gaze. "You'd be better off with anyone else but me."

"Why?" West growls.

I tug myself free and turn to face them.

“I want to leave.”

Ross’ face falls, but West’s eyes gleam with frustration.

“Sure, let me drop you off,” West says carefully.

It feels like a trap, but I’ll take any escape from the furious eyes of the alpha I can feel inside me.

six

Quint

Three years and two weeks ago

Silver

West said I was the most beautiful person he’s ever seen. Then he held my hand. That’s all. He held my hand. I think I love him.

Present Day

I follow discreetly. Drop her off? Is West kidding? She climbs out of the car and waves while he drives away. I scoff at her naivety. To think that we would really just let her go, after all these years. I curse as I watch her thread into the crowd of people, hurrying towards some unknown destination.

I slide out of my car and start hurrying through the crowd after her. All the while, she slips further away. Where is she going? She cuts through an alley and turns right at

the end. I have to jog so I don't lose her. The place stinks all to high hell, and my anger spikes and continues to fester inside me.

She knows this area well. That insight makes me want to set the place on fire. Why? It's an awful part of town. Why did she ask to be dropped off here? Does she really have no money? A tiny slither of unease has me turning the next corner faster. My heart pounds when I don't spot her, but just when I think she's gone, I glimpse her out of the corner of my eye, disappearing into a park.

Oh, hell no! She will not sleep with the homeless people in that park. The reputation it has for violence is second to none. How could you be so stupid?

I race to catch up to her. I don't even care about being seen now. The traffic light turns red, but I keep running, ignoring the screeches of tyres and curses thrown in my direction. The only thing that matters is catching that vanishing omega before we lose her forever.

Once I'm in the park, I catch a whiff of her scent and follow it. My shoes pound the hard-packed dirt as I run. Following a trail made by hundreds of homeless humans as they migrate in and out of the parklands, I run until I catch sight of her.

I take just seconds to catch up, and I grab her upper arm, ignoring the fear and surprise, and whip her into me. I'm not gentle. Fuck being gentle. I'm too mad at her carelessness. Her suicidal idiocy. If she wants to throw her life away, she can do it with us!

"What are you doing here, Davies?"

She winces. "I was going to find somewhere warm to sleep, Vore."

I growl at her, showing my teeth and temper. "Why are you here? Why are you here

and not with Onyx? Why are you here and not with us? Why are you here and not with a pack?” With each question, I get louder until I’m shouting at her, furious with both of us. “Are we so bad that you’d rather sleep here in this park than in our guest room?”

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Her eyes skip to the side, red staining her cheeks. “You were there when I fucked everything up. I feel confident you can put story A with story B and come up with the answer. And I’m fairly certain that your pack would rather me be here than there.”

“Onyx forgives you!” I shout at her. “All she wants is her sister.”

“Maybe I don’t forgive myself!” She shouts back at me. “Maybe my life is one disaster after another, and I’ve given up. Maybe I exist to die?”

I haul her close to me until our chests are touching. My rage is incandescent.

“Why did you leave?” I growl out so low it almost needs subtitles.

She tries to pull her arm away. “You hate me. Ian hates me. Ross and West pity me. I’m not staying where I’m not wanted.”

“You are wanted. You’re so badly wanted I could fuck you, knot you, and bond you right now,” I hiss in pure, white, blinding fury.

My words shock both of us. Her eyes go wide, that blue deepening into sapphires. Her pouty bottom lip hangs open, and her tongue dips out to lick it.

I almost groan. Why did I say that? It doesn’t matter why, it’s true.

“You can’t stay here,” I say resolutely.

“I can.”

“If you stay, I stay. I’m not losing you again.”

She huffs. “Why have you suddenly taken such a damn interest in me? We’ve been good for three years. What’s changed?”

I grab her wrist, pull her sleeve up, and show her Ian’s bond. “That’s changed. Maybe I want an omega. Maybe I want my omega to be you. Come home and let’s talk about this.”

She grunts. “This is crazy. It’s insane.”

“I don’t care. I thought I didn’t have a hope, there was nothing left, but this...this bond on your arm, this is my second chance, and I don’t care who you are or what happened in the past, I want a chance for a future.”

She stares up at me with strangely old eyes. Her face is expressionless. I have no idea what she’s thinking or feeling. She’s just blank.

“You want to wipe the slate clean and start again? With me?” She asks, her voice devoid of emotion.

“Yes. I want that.”

“Not because of who I am, but because I’m here with this?”

“Yes.”

She looks away. “You have no idea what I’ve done to survive, Quint. What I am. You don’t care? All you want is a chance with an omega. It doesn’t matter who? Ian really fucked you over, Quinton. You deserve better than someone like me.”

“Maybe, or maybe not. Maybe you’re still the omega that our pack chose,” I snap back.

She flinches, her expression turning vulnerable and unsure. “You can’t say things like that.”

“Why? Because it might be true? We saw you, and we chose you, long before we met our scent match, and forgive me if I’m wrong, but you liked us. For a few days there, you were happy, and something happened...something changed. What was it?”

The fear is not what I expect from her. She shuts her expression down quickly, but the stench is thick in the air.

“What happened at the Omega Meet, Silver?”

She shakes her head, backing away from me, as far as her arm will stretch. I refuse to let her go.

“Did someone hurt you, someone threaten you?”

She hisses when I say threaten. My instincts sharpen.

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“Someone threatened you?”

“Yes, and no. They didn’t remember me, but they were there. I needed to be safe. I needed to be somewhere they couldn’t get me.”

“We could have protected you-”

“With what? You didn’t tell anyone about your wealth. You looked like a poor pack who was picked for charity. Of course, I liked you. You four were the first fun, decent people I’d met in a long time. I didn’t need to pretend around you.”

“Then why?”

“Because I couldn’t go back to being that person,” she throws out. “It was so hard to pretend all the time, to hide from Onyx. I was so tired, and I couldn’t sleep, and I didn’t trust the food. I just wanted to be safe.”

“And you thought Pack Treyfield could give that to you?”

“Yes,” she says in a tiny voice. “I thought if I could get their attention, they could keep me safe.”

“Did you like them? Want them?” My voice is harsh, ripped from me in rage as I contemplate murdering Pack Treyfield.

“No. Treyfield scares me. Grayson is...” she wrinkles her nose. “And Silas is arrogant.”

“Silver,” I whisper through my relief. That hot coal of jealousy I’ve carried all this time finally turns cold. “Come home with me.”

“You don’t know what you’re inviting into your home, Quint,” she whispers mournfully.

I tow her back into my arms and hug her slender figure to my chest. “Trust us to take care of you this time.”

She’s hesitant. She doesn’t trust me. This feeling slithers up inside me and threatens to strangle me. I want to make her feel safe. I want to see her smile like she did in those days when we first met her. Her fear, I want it gone.

She gives me the smallest dip of her chin, and I sweep her up into my arms and carry her back the way we came.

West, the damnable bastard, is waiting for us at the edge of the park. He smirks when he sees me and drops his sunglasses so he can see over the rims.

“Quint, you are not as hard as you pretend to be.”

I ignore him and secure her in the backseat before stepping back and closing the door.

“I’m going to get my car. Go for a drive or something for an hour. I’ve got someone I need to speak with.”

My twin’s eyes twinkle up at me, and he gives me a salute. “No problem.”

I stand on the edge of the street long after they’re gone trying to figure out what that feeling is inside me.

It's only when I get behind the wheel of my car that I realise it's hope.

seven

Ross

Three years and two weeks ago

Silver

Ross plays the guitar. I want so badly to sing with him, but I can't. He serenaded me today. I was so caught up that I almost forgot the time. Onyx would never understand why I can't stay away. I wish I could tell her, but I can't. She would be so mad to know I left the cabin. I have to get out of here.

Present Day

Ian paces the balcony and deliberately refuses to look down. I do. She's currently being bullied into the house by West. She's trying to protest, but when the twins set their mind on something, nothing can stop them.

"She's staying," I say in challenge and relief.

“That’s great. Wonderful.”

I narrow my eyes. “What’s the matter, Ian? It’s been three years. Surely, you aren’t still holding a grudge?”

He turns and casts a scathing look.

The fact that he doesn’t answer me is more telling than I’m sure he’d like. I fold my arms over my chest and lean against the frame of the sliding glass door.

“People can change.”

“No,” Ian says shortly, “they can’t.”

“She has changed.”

Ian snorts. “For now, until she gets what she wants and leaves us all in ruins again.”

I shake my head. “You’re really going to hold a grudge over this?”

“Do you remember how bad we all felt when she just ghosted us? One day, we thought she was the perfect omega for us, the next, she wouldn’t even give us an explanation.”

“Maybe there was a reason.”

“Maybe there wasn’t. Maybe this here is a ploy, a game, and we’re setting ourselves

up for a fall again.”

I bite my lower lip, worrying it. Ian’s concerns are valid. I mean, I hear what he’s saying, but my instincts are telling me that this time is different.

Ian stops and leans on the rail. “What if she hurts our pack again?”

“Then she hurts us. It’s a leap of faith. What if she doesn’t? What if she had a reason for what she did that last time? What if she isn’t here to hurt us and truly is just here because of coincidence? Maybe fate is giving us a third chance. But regardless of all that...you’re the one who bonded her,” I snap, reminding him of his actions.

Ian glances up at the sky and heaves a loud sigh. “I know!” He moans. “I don’t know why I did that. It was just instinct.”

“Well, bonds are forever, so whatever happens, she is now our omega.”

“She’s not Brandy. She’s not our scent match. People will talk. She might never be enough.”

A throat clears, and I whip around. West’s eyes are hard, but Silver looks brutalized. I feel those wounds in my own heart.

“Brandy,” she says softly. “You know her name? I never found out the names of my scent matches. Just that they were gone.”

“Silver-”

“It’s funny. I don’t know what I’d feel about them. I’ll never get the chance. All I had was some donated clothing from the grandmothers who dropped it off for the poor. I wasn’t even allowed to keep it. When I asked her who the scents belonged to, she

sobbed in my arms, while my entire world shattered. I couldn't tell her who I was...because who'd want me, right? After everything I had done, no one would want me." Silver's voice trails off.

"Silver, I'm sorry-"

"It's occurred to me as well that I might spend the rest of my life never feeling the way I did when I held that jacket in my hands." Silver barks out a laugh. "A jacket. That's really sad, isn't it? They were gone, and I'll never know that feeling that you have when you think about her."

West glowers at me before turning to her with an expression of intense sorrow. She continues before he can speak.

"I feel so sorry for you, though, your pack. Having met her and having her turn away from you. But then I wonder if she's like me. If you dodged a bullet. Perhaps your scent match would have made you miserable. Perhaps she would have been cruel. Maybe you escaped a life of torment. I think it would be worse to be you than to have ended up like me."

Silver looks out the window and up at the sky, her eyes growing distant.

"Maybe I escaped a miserable life, too. Maybe they beat those weaker. Or perhaps they were cruel. Life doesn't give us perfect mates. It gives us scent matches, but that doesn't mean it works out. I know I've been in the Omega Refuge for three years, and I've seen what scent matches do to each other. It doesn't always mean a happy ending. So, if this thing, this bond between us, allows us distance and apathy, perhaps it's not the worst thing in the world."

She forces a tiny smile and turns, walking back the way she came.

I let out a shaky breath. I cannot believe she hasn't changed. She is so different. She is so much more than she was. I hate the sorrow in her, but she's not wrong. I've often speculated that Brandy would have made us miserable.

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And even though she was our scent match, her scent had a tone of something that brought out memories of my mother's drinking. I've never told my pack that, though.

I shift uneasily. I hate keeping secrets from them, but this is one I dare not speak out loud.

How can I just say to them, 'oh, we met our scent-matched omega, and what I felt from her was the urge to run to my bedroom and lock my door, to turn up my music, and get my dog-eared copy of the latest comic I'm reading, and pretend like hell I'm somewhere else?' No. I couldn't tell them that.

I exhale and take a step after the omega, only to have West hold out a hand.

"Quint is down there. Give him a chance to calm her down."

I heave a frustrated sigh and glare at Ian.

"Can you be more careful of her feelings? Like, just try not to say stupid, hurtful things while she's here?" I ask softly.

Ian glares at me. "I'll make an effort."

"That's all I'm asking for," I reply and huff.

I wander to my room, needing a few minutes alone. My enormous desk is covered in sheets of music. Songs I've written. So many of them are written about the omega downstairs. No one knows the songs are about her. They assume I wrote them about

Brandy.

But Brandy doesn't inspire me. It's not Brandy who broke my heart. It's not Brandy I watched, working silently, alone in the Omega Refuge year after year.

How can I tell her these things and what she means to me?

I can't, at least not yet. I need to do this slowly so I don't overwhelm her. But her secrets are many. With every new piece I learn about her, my obsession grows. And it is an obsession. She will never know how many excuses I have come up with to go and see her. How many times a day I think about her. How that meeting at the Omega Meet turned my world upside down.

She's my perfect omega.

Now we have a chance.

One chance is all I need.

I'm not losing her again.

eight

Silver

Three years and two weeks ago

Quint and I went walking in the forest today. No shoes on our feet. All we did was talk and laugh. It was the most perfect day.

Present Day

They leave me alone for the rest of the night. Ross and Quint show me a room with blankets and clean clothes and retreat to wherever they're hiding.

The urge to flee settles and then dissipates with the cozy warmth and luxurious soft bed. I curl up and listen to Ross in some distant part of the house, strumming his guitar.

The following day passes the same way. There is food at the bench when I get up, with a note suggesting I might want to explore the house. I take three hours before I agree to the suggestion.

Exploring the house is exploring the pack. There are photos of the four of them everywhere. They're older, though. All of them smiling happily, and gradually, as the photos become current, the smiles fade, become more forced. In their photos, the pack grows solemn.

Someone enjoys decorating. It's in the throw rugs, the pillows, all of it is tasteful and matches. One alpha likes to play games. I found a massive room with consoles and beanbags. That is kind of endearing, and I wonder if the room belongs to West.

There are lists everywhere. With codes to the house. Numbers for emergencies. How to use the dishwasher, the dryer, the washing machine. It's cute. Hell, there's even a shopping list on the fridge. Without question, I know the person who is leaving lists everywhere is Ian. But it's that he's gone to so much trouble, laminating them and making sure his pack is safe. It opens this hole inside of me.

What would it feel like to be on the receiving end of that kind of care?

There's a really subtle fascination with cats. Statues the size of my thumb. There are pictures and photos and even platforms in all the rooms. I don't know how I missed them before.

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I make it my mission to hunt down the cat.

Throughout the house, I peer into rooms, study the bedrooms. Ian is clean and orderly, his bed made precisely. Weston's room is clean but untidy. Quint's room is like a bomb has gone off, and Ross' room looks more like he works in there. In fact, I can't even find a bed.

On the third floor of the mansion, in an open room that is filled with sun and light, I find something that breaks through the hard exterior I've erected. The floor is carpeted in a pale blue, and the walls have navy and gold wallpaper stripes. There's a telescope and a bunch of couches arranged in a circle, but it's the huge patio glass doors and the balcony that pulls me across the room.

I stand there, looking out over the most beautiful gardens. From here, I can see Onyx's house.

What would it be like to live within walking distance of Onyx? To have a relationship with her? Where I didn't have to lie and fight to hide everything? Where I didn't have to say horrible things and behave in an awful manner to make sure she stays far away from me so that she misses the bruises and the scents of alpha on me.

I almost jump out of my skin when something rubs against my leg. I look down and smile. Seek not, the cat shall come to you.

"Hello, who are you?" I say to the cat.

Outside, a dog barks. I glance out the window and see it pulling its owner down the

street and snort a laugh. The cat meows, dragging my attention back to her. She's a tabby looking monstrosity but with the longest hair I've ever seen on a cat.

I kneel on the floor and pat her. She's so soft.

"What's your name then, huh, darling? Oh, you are a sweetheart."

"Her name is Bobbi."

"Bobbi, that is lovely. Hi, Bobbi!"

I glance at Ian and try to calm my startled nerves.

Another cat walks in, yowling at the top of her lungs. I'm so shocked all I can do is stare at her. She's smaller than Bobbi, with a deep orange coat and small brown eyes.

"And this is Fey."

"She looks like a little Fey." The beast in question stands on her back legs, sinks her front claws into Ian's legs, and starts kneading.

He winces but doesn't move.

"Are they your cats, Ian?" I ask impulsively with a small smile.

"Ours, the packs, but," he blushes and avoids looking at me. "Yeah, I like cats. Plus, Ross was collecting statues and putting them everywhere, and he just pushed and pushed. We got Bobbi, and then Fey."

Ian's talking to me like I'm a person. I want to cherish this moment forever. I certainly will not point it out...oh, wait, of course, I will.

“Wow, look at us, talking like people.”

Ian heaves a sigh. “Yeah, well. I’ve decided not to be angry anymore.”

“Angry?”

He scowls, and I have serious doubts about his ability to choose how to direct his anger.

“What happened hurt me, but worse, it hurt my pack. I feel like it’s my job to protect the pack from hurt. Thus I failed, and I’ve been mad at myself all this time and taking it out on you. You didn’t have to like us or be with us. It was irrational of me to blame you for what happened.”

He says it in a rush like he’s rehearsed it several times over.

My fingers twist in my pants as I try not to let him know how much those words hurt. “I’m sorry. Ian, I’ve had a lot of long nights to think about where I went wrong and what I can do to make it up to you. The only thing I could come up with was to stay the hell out of your lives.”

“Yet, here you are.” He doesn’t say it maliciously.

“Here I am.”

Ian’s eyes are dark and filled with something I don’t understand. “I’m glad you’re here.”

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I jerk, shocked at his words. “Really?” I ask before I can think.

“Yes. I...” Ian looks around the room, then walks to the patio doors. “I don’t want anything to happen to you, Silver. Despite our differences, I care about you as a person.”

I blink at his back. “I care about you and your pack, too, Ian. That’s why you can trust me when I say it won’t happen again.”

“What won’t?” Ian asks sharply, turning around.

“Me thinking that I can use people to make my life better. I appreciate all you’re doing for me, but I will find a way to pay you back. I don’t expect this,” I hold out my bitten wrist, “to mean anything. It was an aberration-”

“It was intentional,” Ian says with a queer look in his eyes. “It was so fucking intentional, I can’t even deny it to myself anymore.”

I get the powerful urge to walk backwards and keep going until my back’s against the wall.

“But-”

Ian cocks his head to the side and moves towards me. “I made a choice, again, to help you. To keep you. Silver, I don’t make mistakes, and despite how it ended the first time, I made a conscious choice to follow my instincts, the same as the day I first saw you, when you bumped into me and ran. I followed you and found you hiding in the

gardens. I wasn't going to let you escape me then, and I sure as shit won't allow you to now."

He's standing right beside me, facing the other way. We are shoulder-to-shoulder. There is something so intimate about the two of us alone in a room together, talking about this, separated by an inch of thick air.

I shiver and blink rapidly as I stare at the window. There is so much emotion whirling chaotically around inside me. Surprise, regret, longing.

"It's done, Omega. You will always be a part of this pack," he snorts softly. I glance at him, finding him smiling wryly. "It's your choice how deep in this pack you want to go. We won't demand anything from you, Silver. This is your choice."

On that note, Ian steps past me and slips out of the room, the two cats following him obediently.

Did he mean all that?

My chest is tight, and I've got these strange tingles that I haven't felt in years. A tiny smile plays on my lips before I force myself to return to Earth and remember that they deserve better than an omega like me.

Don't they?

nine

Silver

Three years and two weeks ago.

Three nights before the Omega Meet

Onyx yelled at me tonight. She said she's tired. Onyx said she's sick of my bitchy behaviour. She said that I should try harder. My twin will never know how much she sounded like our mother in that moment or how much that hurt.

I can't tell her anything. She would never believe me.

So, I stay silent. And I play the part of the narcissistic twin. Because, that way, she hates me. That way, she doesn't ask why. And she never really looks at me.

Present Day

I keep expecting someone to come to me and say, 'Look, Silver, enough's enough, you need to leave', but no one ever does. For three weeks, they let me heal. Ian, despite his gruffness, keeps bringing me food. Every time I turn around, he's dropped biscuits, a plate of snacks, candy, or chocolate beside me. There are no words, just the silent actions of an alpha whose eyes are transforming from arctic to confused.

I glance sideways at the slice of mud cake he's just deposited.

West has been my almost constant companion. He eyes the cake now, and then picks up the fork. I watch him, trying not to smile as he cuts off a bit and picks it up.

"Try this," he murmurs.

I hesitate, but he brings the fork to my mouth, smiling in a way that I'm becoming smitten by. I open my mouth and moan as the rich taste floods my mouth.

"Oh, god, this is good."

“Yeah, it is, isn’t it?”

I glance at West and find him staring at me with intense, hungry eyes. My cheeks burn, and I glance down. There’s no mistaking the look on his face. I’ve been seeing it more and more often with them, but I’ve been trying to ignore it.

He gets another bit of cake and holds it up to me. I whimper and open my mouth, taking the morsel that has been rendered tasteless by the look in his eyes.

West inhales sharply and reaches out, brushing my lip. I watch with growing heat as he puts his thumb in his mouth, finally freeing me of his intense stare when he closes his eyes and moans.

It’s worse.

Quint smacks the back of West’s head, startling both of us. I lean back in my seat, and then, as soon as I think I can, I stand up. I get to my feet and stagger away from both of them.

I pause, go back, grab the cake, and then leave them both wrestling on the floor. It’s a common occurrence to find them rolling around tussling, but after the first few times where they end up laughing, I stopped being alarmed.

I find my way to the back porch. It’s a vast space with a large area under cover. The wood is varnished, and there’s a lounge and chairs and a swing. But it’s on the steps that I always find Ross.

“Why didn’t you become a famous musician?” I say and sit beside him. “You could have. You’re brilliant.”

Ross looks up at me and smiles. His smile should be bottled and sold as sunshine. It makes you feel warm and cared for. Like you’re important.

“Ah, but I didn’t want fame, Silver. I just wanted to create songs. Write them.”

“So, you sell your songs?”

Ross shrugs. “Sometimes. Sometimes I play the songs at pubs. Sometimes I keep them for me.”

I sigh and sit down next to him. “Do you want some cake?”

He shakes his head and starts playing a song that requires him to move his fingers at lightning speed. I’ve discovered there is something so arousing about watching him play the guitar. It just gets me hot under the collar. Is it because when he plays music, the connection between us comes to life? Is it because when he plays, he gets this sleepy-lidded look as he looks between his guitar and me?

Perhaps it’s because, though I fight it, it’s getting harder and harder to hide the feelings that are growing inside me.

He slows the melody down, and then abruptly stops and sets his guitar down. He slides closer to me so our thighs are touching.

My stomach spikes with nerves, and my heart races. This feeling, like I’ve jumped off a cliff and am falling endlessly and I’m not unhappy about it, it’s addictive. The strength of the thrill of these intense moments is becoming my own personal drug. All I want to do is smile in their presence. The affection that is growing. More than

affection. Trust, respect, feelings I don't want to name.

"Do you remember when we first met?"

I stiffen and nod.

"I was so nervous."

I jerk my head towards him, my mouth parted. Of all the words I thought I'd hear from him, that's not even on the list. "You were?"

"Of course, I was. You were, no, you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

I stiffen. "Your omega-"

"Do you know that my mother was sick?" he cuts me off and looks out at the garden. "Like, really sick. The kind of sick that lasts forever. The kind that sees her making choices with no thought to how it would hurt others."

I stare at him.

"We didn't know at the time. But she was quite ill. She would be so loving, and everything would be good and wonderful. My mother loved the finer things. She liked expensive gifts. She was fun, affectionate, and happy. And then, like a switch was flicked, she would just change. She would scream and get drunk, she would bring home men, terrifying men. Men with fists that put holes in walls, men who used drugs, men who beat her. My mother would cry and rage, oh, her anger was terrifying, even more so than the strangers because she knew how to hurt us the best. Mum would lash out with cutting words with her fists. She'd throw things. She'd threaten to hurt us or herself. And then in the next minute, she was sorry, begging and promising she would never do it again. I was an adult when she finally went and got

the help she needed. By then, our relationship was in tatters.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“Your dad was bad, too, wasn’t he?” Ross probes.

The abrupt question makes me stiffen and takes the golden light out of the sunshine.

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“Yes, I mean he had all these expectations that I would find a pack to take care of the family. He was selfish and mean.” I shift on the spot, uncomfortable. “I was just a thing to him. Something of value. Onyx had no value in his eyes. But our mother hated me. I was yet another reason why she was trapped to him. I was just another him. She told me once that if she didn’t have me, she would have taken Onyx and left him. All of our suffering was on my shoulders.”

I fall silent, remembering the way my mother would watch me whenever I walked into a room.

“I used to be jealous of Onyx. Because at least our mother loved her.”

“Silver-”

“No, I’m not telling you so you feel sorry for me. I’m telling you so you understand I know what growing up in battlefield is like.”

We’re silent for a long minute.

“I need to tell you something that I haven’t even told my pack.” Ross reaches across, takes my hand in his, and holds it tight.

I twist until I can stare at his face. “Anything you say won’t go anywhere. I promise I’ll keep your secrets.”

Ross smiles slightly. “I know. Brandy made me feel the way my mother used to make me feel when she was in an episode.”

I flinch, then reach out and lay my hand on his. "I'm so sorry." My heart is beating fast, and my thoughts are racing. "But why haven't you told the others? They won't hate you. They'd understand."

"We don't talk about her or you," Ross says. "You have to understand, Silver, we all had potent feelings for you. I understand you didn't-"

I can't just leave him thinking I didn't care. It's so far from the truth it's not funny. I can't let him think that.

"I couldn't. There were things." I take a huge breath, stopping the verbal vomit that is rushing out. "Listen, I had some things going on. I liked you guys. It was the happiest I'd been in a long time. I felt amazing with you."

"But?"

I bite my bottom lip, tears welling in my eyes. "What do you want me to say, Ross? I'm a selfish omega. I-"

"Don't do that. I feel like I know you fairly well. Would you agree?" Ross says firmly, his hand tightening around mine.

I incline my head. Very reluctantly.

"You aren't selfish. Silver, you haven't asked for anything! You didn't complain at the refuge. Silver, you are a good person. I don't know who that person was that you changed into at the Omega Meet, but it wasn't you."

I flinch. Ross doesn't back off, though. In fact, he turns towards me and puts his other hand on my thigh.

“You know what it reminds me of? It reminds me of a mask. Like you were trying too hard to be something you weren’t. Not with us, but with the others. With the flirting and chasing and wanting. That wasn’t you. In your eyes, I saw desperation. I saw the pain that was in my mother’s eyes.”

I stand up, backing away from him.

Ross stands up and follows me. He snags my wrist and pulls me into his arms, wrapping me in safety.

“I’m not going to let anything happen to you, Silver,” Ross whispers in my ear. “You don’t have to wear a mask. You don’t have to pretend anymore.”

My whole body trembles, shivers traveling up and down in a continuous circuit. But he doesn’t let go. He just keeps holding me. Whispering that I’m safe. That nothing will happen.

At some point, even though my head screams that it’s a lie, my heart starts to believe that maybe it’s true. Maybe I am safe.

ten

Quint

Three years and two weeks ago

Two nights until the Omega Meet

Silver

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Ian asked me to be his omega. He told me to think about it, but I'm going to say yes. Of course, I'm going to say yes. They are heaven. My dream. A chance to get out of this hell. My escape.

I love them.

Present Day

She likes music and movies about romance. She loves chocolate and ice cream and hot puddings. Silver avoids talking about her past, and if you bring up Onyx, she will clam up completely. Being fed is one of her favourite things, and it makes her go all soft and gooey. She hates dates and pineapple and is afraid of birds but not spiders.

I walked into a room one day and found her standing at Ross' piano. I stood and watched for half an hour while she taught herself how to play. She's a natural.

Silver doesn't ask for anything. She's grateful for everything. She has a dark sense of humor, laughing hysterically when I managed to accidentally knee West in the balls. The sound had been captivating. Even West thought so, though it took half a day for him to admit.

While West is falling for her, I too, though cautiously, have been falling. Ian is the only one holding out, but even I can see the bond is wearing on him. He's changing, and he doesn't even realise it.

I caught him whistling and humming along with Ross one day. He actually took a day off work and stayed home and just sat on the couch with us. I've never seen him do

that.

They are actually perfect for each other. Both are stubborn and keep their cards close to their chest.

Silver needs to do things. I found that out in the first couple of days, so each day we spend a couple of hours working on the Omega Refuge charity event. Our pack volunteered to take control of the plans. Silver has thrown herself into it with a surprising amount of skill. We work through the day, bouncing ideas off each other and ironing out all the details in half the time I planned.

Ross drags her away to help him with his music and quietly teaches her. I'm not sure if she's aware that he's teaching her, but the sound of the two of them makes my heart soar.

Late afternoon brings West, who bullies her into games or movies. They get along like best friends, sitting beside each other, heads angled close, whispering and laughing.

Ian is there on the threshold, and every time he comes close, her aura intensifies. She is acutely aware of him. They are the same, the two of them, they don't even realise it. Both feel pain and shut themselves away.

The painting of our future is becoming clearer in my mind. I can see it coming together. It just needs a little nudge.

Ian enters the kitchen where I'm blindly staring into space.

"You lost?"

"In space? Yes."

Ian snorts a laugh. He fills up two mugs with the hot chocolate I'd been cooking and leans into me.

"What's wrong?"

We haven't been affectionate with each other for a while. But I find myself leaning into his hard strength, my arms wrapping around him.

"I was just thinking."

"About?"

"Her."

Ian stills. "What about her?"

"Forgive her, Ian. What happened was a long time ago, and she probably had reasons." I lift the cup to my lips and take a mouthful, wincing at the heat. Ian draws back, putting space between us.

"I know. I just...don't know how."

"Well, you could try to get to know her," I suggest.

Ian rolls his eyes. "It's not that easy."

"Sure, it is. You go up to her and say, 'hi, I'm a total dick most of the time, but I'd like to get to know you.'"

Ian glares at me. "Do you enjoy being an ass?"

I grin at him. “Kinda. Yeah.”

He huffs, and his shoulders curl in. “I bit her. I took everyone’s choice away from everyone. How can I even be trusted around her?”

“Just to clarify, you don’t think you’re going to hurt her, do you?”

He looks at me, so aghast, that all my concerns die. “Of course, not. I just do stupid things like bond her without her consent.”

“Oh, that. Yeah. I think you’re the only one who’s upset about it, to be fair. And, hey, lucky you, you can only do it the once. Not like you can bond her multiple times.”

I can feel Ian’s glare into the side of my head, but I don’t turn to look at him or respond.

“Are you going to explain that at all?”

“Well, Ian, have you ever thought that when we all met each other, there was this instant connection? Brandy came to us covered in the stench of other alphas, and her rudeness was off-putting right from the start. But Silver’s scent was pleasant. She was fun. We were friends. Instant friends. Remember? You chased her down and brought her to us.”

“I remember,” Ian says tersely.

“Maybe Silver is our second chance. I mean, you saw her dying, and you didn’t

hesitate. Your instincts took over to save her. Somewhere deep under all the pain you feel from being rejected by both the omegas in our lives, you still want her, you still care.”

Ian winces. He opens his mouth and closes it as if he’s trying to think of something to say but can’t quite push it out.

As if summoned by our conversation, Silver walks into the room, pausing when she sees us. Her hair is loose, and her cheeks turn pink.

“Morning, beautiful.”

The blush deepens, to my delight.

“Hi.”

“Good morning, Silver,” Ian says in a deep voice. I can hear the nerves in his tone, but she wouldn’t be able to notice it.

“Hello, Ian.”

She stares at him, and I sip my chocolate, amused by the tension and the way they can’t take their eyes off each other.

“Ian was just saying that he’d like to take you into his work and show you around if you’d like. He designs computer games. Very cool!”

Ian jerks his head to me, then just as quickly, looks back at her.

“You do?”

“I do!”

They say the words almost on top of each other.

“Really?” Silver asks.

“Yes. I mean, I’d love to show you where I work. If you’re interested. Of course. I mean, you don’t have to, but, like...you could come, and we could have lunch.”

Silver’s eyes are huge. Her lips parted. I lean across the bench.

“Silver.” Her eyes dart to me. “Say yes.”

She jerks. “Yes. Of course, yes. I’d love to.”

“Okay,” he says and blinks.

“Okay,” she repeats after him, her cheeks still stained red.

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I smirk at the two of them. “Okay.”

Silver jerks, abruptly nods, turns around, and starts walking away.

“Wait! Silver, what were you looking for?” I call out with a mocking laugh.

She pauses, turns back, and then marches back towards us, coming behind the island. Her cheeks turn this delicious red colour as she pours a glass of water.

We watch as she drinks it, though I wonder if she’s going to choke on it, but she finishes and sets the glass in the sink, and then calmly walks out of the room. Like nothing just happened and that wasn’t the most awkward moment ever.

“Where are you going, Silver?”

She stops, startled. “I have to get ready.”

“Yes. I do, too,” Ian says, but his voice doesn’t sound certain. I lean against the island and watch as Ian, too, retreats from the room.

A smile plays on my lips.

Today is going to be a good day, I just know it.

eleven

Ian

Three years and two weeks ago

Two days before the Omega Meet starts

Silver

He's here! How can this even be? He hasn't recognised me yet. He hasn't seen me. But I saw him. I'd know him out of a million faces. When he touched me, I vomited on myself. I made an excuse to Pack Vore and ran away.

I can't do this. I can't have a pack that can't protect me. It will be Onyx all over again.

Perhaps I could tell them? No, they would never believe me.

I can't ruin their lives.

I'm going to have to stop.

No contact.

I hate this. I hate my life.

I wish I'd never met them. Why can't I stop crying?

Present Day

I show her around my office, and then take her to lunch, sitting in a quiet café that isn't fancy. Part of me expects to hear her make a comment about the lack of class, but she surprises me. She relaxes as soon as we are hidden from the prying eyes of the public. I remember the bonding and wince. She was so weak; she doesn't look

weak anymore; Silver looks alive.

She looks beautiful. It's hard not to reach across the table and take her hand in mine. It's been growing harder for the last couple of weeks to avoid her. To keep from pulling her into my arms.

I'm supposed to be angry with her. I'm supposed to be using the callous rejection she threw at me like a shield to keep me away, but I'm falling vulnerable again. Weak to her.

Ross keeps telling me I need to learn to trust.

"What would you like to eat?" I say, instead of letting my mind wander.

She hums. "You decide for me?"

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I take her menu and fold it up. A silent server appears from nowhere and stands quietly near the wall of potted plants. He glances at me and winks. Hirasho and I have known each other for a good time now. He knows what I'm going to order, even if I pretend I might choose something different.

"She'll have the cheeseburger and fries and a chocolate shake. Hmm, make that two."

The server laughs softly. "Of course, Alpha Vore."

Silver smiles at me, her cheeks reddening. I look away. From temptation, from fear, from the desire to throw it all in and take a chance on her.

Hirasho leaves, and she looks down at her hands. "You have an incredible job. It must be fun doing something that leaves so many people so happy."

"It is fun. It's the most chilled workplace. I did get really lucky to get a job there."

"How did you get into it?"

I sit back, silent, while a different server puts our drinks down. As soon as he's gone, I take a mouthful. "I used to draw and stuff, muck around when I was a kid."

She peers at me. I feel an urge to squirm.

"My parents thought little of my hobby." Why the hell did I just say that to her?

"You showed them."

Strangely, her words relax me. “What about you? What do you enjoy doing these days?”

“Well, other than making music with Ross, most of what I do, or did, was around the refuge. I’m not sure who I am anymore. I spent all those years hiding in whatever houses Onyx could find for us. When I was younger, it was just a relief to be able to get out of the house. But people would tell my dad or mum what I did. I was always watched.”

I stare at her, trying to imagine that. “I didn’t know.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter. Not anymore. I’m not the same woman that I used to be.” She frowns. “Or maybe I am and I wasn’t then. It gets confusing.”

“Why were you at the Omega Meet? You never did tell us.”

She looks down and toys with the straw in her drink.

“Onyx got a job working for Treyfield Pack. I was her sneaky tag-along. They caught us the day before the Omega Meet began and gave me a full ride. That was when things ended...”

Between us.

“Why?” I ask, needing to know.

“You know, I never stopped to ask that. I was just grateful. It seemed like a miracle when I needed it.” She leans back when her plate gets put in front of her. “Ooh, thanks, this looks good.”

“Thank you,” I say to Hirasho.

I pick up my cheeseburger, and for several minutes, all we do is eat. She picks at her fries and looks up at me.

“I’m sorry for hurting you.”

My food hits my stomach like a lead balloon.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you. In fact, you were the last people in the world I wanted to hurt.” She reaches out, pausing before she touches my fingers. I stare at her outstretched hand and flick my fingers out to brush against hers.

“It’s over and in the past,” I say gruffly. “We can be friends now.” And I really, really want that. I want to trust her and take a chance.

“I’d like that.” She smiles at me.

I pull my hand away and resume eating, feeling slightly unhappy with the conclusion of that conversation. What did they want with her? Why did Pack Treyfield give her that ride that destroyed us?

“Okay, friend.” Ew, that tastes foul in my mouth. I push my plate away and glare at it. “So, what do you want to do? In your life, I mean.”

“I have no idea. I mean, I want to help people.”

“Like the women at the refuge?”

“Yes, some are there because their happy endings were torn apart. Some have never experienced it. All of them are hurting and scared. I loved working at the refuge.” She deflates and stares at the remains of her food.

I didn’t mean to make her sad. I study the curve of her lashes and the dark strands of her hair and how they whisper against her cheek. She’s beautiful.

“All right, are you ready to go?”

She nods and stands up. Without thinking, I hold out my hand, but once it’s there between us, I can’t take it back. She glances at my eyes, checking before she puts her hand in mine.

“Come on. I want to take you to my favourite place.”

We walk through the museum hand-in-hand. She peers at everything with such delight.

“Why here? It’s great! I love it, but I never, ever would have guessed.”

“Well, it’s close to work, and I used to come here as a kid. I was a bit of a nerd. So, sometimes when I need some peace, I eat lunch and come here and just walk around for an hour.”

“It’s beautiful. Thank you for sharing it with me, Ian.”

She honestly seems to love it, which again paints a picture of a woman that is completely at odds with the disaster at the Omega Meet.

We wander with minimal words said between us. I watch her eyes light up when she sees something interesting, how she looks back at me to make sure I’m watching. The long line of her neck when she leans down to read the descriptions. Her black hair, shining with light. Her hand is warm and soft in mine.

“Silver, I-”

She whirls and trips, stumbling into me. I catch her, holding her close and staring down at her. The bond between us hums with warmth, with feelings that could so easily be crushed.

I know what I should do.

I know exactly what I should do.

I lean down and kiss her. Her lips part, and her mouth opens. I press my tongue in, groaning at the fairy floss taste. I’ve dreamed about this moment for three years. And it is so much better than I could have imagined.

She presses closer, curling her arms around my neck.

This is everything. She’s everything my insane heart wants. Still. Just like the day I met her.

I draw back, staring down at her. “Let me show you my favourite display.”

She smiles.

It feels good to put that smile on her face, too good. Ross is right. I need to trust. Maybe take a chance.

twelve

Silver

Three years ago. During the Omega Meet

I flirt and throw myself at the packs while I watch Pack Vore out of the corner of my eyes. My desperation bleeds into the air around us. I snap at the alphas; I lash out at those who are kind. My eyes are set impossibly high because if he's that scary, he can keep me safe, right? He can stop them. He's Treyfield. If anyone can save me, he can.

Present Day

West grabs my hands and drags me into a room that has four couches, seven bookcases, and a huge coffee table. It is one of my favourite places in the whole house.

Quint holds up a huge assortment of board games. I take in the huge packets of chips and popcorn around the table. There's a block of chocolate, a jug of what looks like lemonade, and a six-pack of something stronger.

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“Come play with us,” Quint says cheerfully.

I’m not given the option of refusing. Before I know it, I’m sitting on a couch, perched beside West. He rifles through the games and taps two of them. I’ve played in here with West, but never with the whole pack.

“These are the most fun because Ross and Quint lose.”

I peek a glance at Quint. He smirks and waggles his eyebrows.

I’m not sure how he manages to get his lanky frame to look so relaxed. The twins are never more huge than when they’re sitting beside me. And still, after all these years, I want nothing more than to crawl into their laps and bury my nose in the crook of their necks.

I clear my throat, feeling a burn up my chest and into my cheeks. “I don’t mind, whatever you want.”

They choose one, and I barely manage to pay attention to the instructions before it starts.

It takes about ten minutes before I realise rules are merely guidelines, and whatever the hell they are playing isn’t what we’re actually playing.

I muddle through it with West helping me. He chortles and elbows me, getting closer until we’re pressed thigh-to-thigh, shoulder-to-shoulder.

It's insane because all four of them are crazy competitive but in a happy way. Quint and West don't team up with each other, either. It's every alpha for himself.

Ross keeps handing me morsels of food to eat and topping up my drink, and it's only on my third top up that I realise my cheeks are aching from laughing and my stomach hurts.

I haven't had this much fun in forever.

Quint suddenly lunges at Ross, pinning him to the couch. He licks the side of his face. I'm laughing right up until they start kissing.

Heat rips through me in a way I haven't experienced in a long time. I burn, and I find myself frozen, my hand outstretched.

My heart clenches painfully, and I force myself to look away. I don't dare look at Ian right now. I'm sure he'd see right through me.

Ian grips my wrist and drags me off my couch and onto the one beside him. I perch on the edge, still keeping my eyes averted.

"Look at me," he hisses.

I force my eyes until we're staring at each other. He searches for something, I don't know what, but the answer steals a gusty sigh out of him.

"Do you want to go for a walk?"

"Yes!" I say before he even finishes the sentence.

He stands up and holds out his hand. I glance at Ross and Quint, who are peeling

clothes off each other, and put my hand in his.

West follows us, silent as a shadow. His fingertips brush over my hips every now and then. When we get outside, Ian disappears, and I'm stuck with the fire set inside me and West's fingers teasing me with innocent brushes. The image of Ross and Quint plays in my mind, and not even the cool night air can touch the heat in my skin. I remain perfectly still while West moves around me like a circling shark. All of my attention is focused on him. His scent, his movements, his touch.

I barely notice the crescent moon high in the sky or the twinkling stars.

"Do you have a problem with my brother and Ross?"

I jerk my head in his direction. "Not at all."

West hums. "My brother and I like to share our lovers."

I gulp and edge back from him. Where is Ian? "And you share Ross?"

"And Ian. Though he doesn't share too well, he's too pushy. Control freak."

"Ah-ha. That sounds fun." I glance away from him, searching the shadows. Where is Ian? My control is tenuous.

"We've been really looking forward to sharing you."

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My mouth goes instantly dry as heat lights up my insides. My attention focuses almost entirely on the alpha tracking me across the patio.

“Would you like that?” West murmurs.

I watch his tongue dip out and moisten his lower lip. Oh, help me. I feel strange in my body, awkward, heavy. But so alive. Like I’ve been sleeping all this time.

“Silver?”

“Yes.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, I’d like it.” It’s a bare whisper of sound. Said to the alpha in front of me in the empty darkness of the front of his house. Glass windows are the only witness to my sin.

West moves closer. He’s hunting me. The steady, slow prowling as he inches towards me. The focus, the sound of his voice. Trying to get my guards lowered so I don’t run.

I don’t think I could move if someone screamed for me to run. I’m tired and exhilarated. I just...need.

As soon as I think the word, the heat that I’ve been controlling, the heat I’ve been suppressing blazes into life. A whine, low and needy, fills the air around us, and West

pauses, his head cocked to the side.

“Silver?”

I ignore the question in his voice and stumble towards him. It hurts, it hurts so badly. I don't think I can take this.

“What is it?”

Ian catches me as my legs buckle. He casually lifts me into his arms, staring down at me. But I don't care, I can smell him. Far stronger than I normally do? The drugs I couldn't afford anymore have stopped working.

Where did he come from? Has he been here in the shadows all along?

I can see Ian adding it up, too. His lips press together in anger, and he lets out a growl of such displeasure that my pussy starts weeping. Weeping! It's so humiliating.

“Quint! Ross!” West shouts into the house.

“Prepare to lock down the house for a heat,” Ian says evenly.

I look up with a moment of crystal clarity. “But you hate me.”

Ian shakes his head. He looks so disappointed. “I don't hate you, Silver. I hate what you did. And that is in the past. But none of us are going to leave an omega to suffer a heat alone. We will help you.”

“You can't.” My protest is weak.

“Did you have someone else lined up?” Ian asks softly.

I shake my head, cringing as a cramp ripples through my lower abdomen. His expression softens.

“Let us see you through this heat. Let us make you feel good,” Ian says softly.

“Yeah, we can do that for you. It’s no hardship, Silver.”

I whip my head towards Ross who pulls a robe onto his body and ties it hastily. He could tell me the sky's a picture of red carnations falling, and with that tone, I would believe him.

“You won’t hate me tomorrow?”

Ross leans forward, pressing his lips to my cheek. “I won’t hate you any day, Silver.”

Ian carries me through the house as the other three scatter. The heat is causing my head to ache and my mouth to go bone dry. But at the same time, I have this restless energy.

“I haven’t had a heat in a long time.”

“We’ll take care of you.”

I exhale as he opens a door. It’s free of scents, completely clean. But when he carefully puts me down, I turn to see the most beautiful room I’ve ever seen in my life. At one end is a huge, round, stained glass window. It’s got a compass with four points, beautiful flowers, birds flying, and a scene of a countryside with a stunning sunset.

“That’s beautiful.”

“Yes, West made it.”

I gulp. For his omega. Who isn’t me.

But I could be.

She didn’t want him.

The bed is lower to the ground than I’m used to, with no frame. It appears just to be a mattress on the floor, but no mattress on the floor has ever looked so luxurious. There are blankets and pillows everywhere. There’s a TV. A huge fridge. A music system. Low lights that can turn on from the floor or the ceiling. A fan, air conditioning, a heater.

It is the perfect nest.

“But...what if-”

“Do you see this bite on your wrist, Silver?” Ian asks and runs a thumb over it. I shudder, feeling him inside me in a blast that surprises me.

“Yes.”

“You are the omega we want to share this space with.”

I shiver as he walks to the wall and presses a panel. It opens, revealing a massive bathroom.

“If you want to have a shower or calm down, I need to make a phone call to the office.”

“Office?”

It seems so stupid to ask that now. After everything.

Ian smiles. “I design computer games. Remember, I took you there last week,” he teases and winks at me.

My jaw drops open as he turns and walks out of the nest, leaving me with a myriad of feelings, all of which are too confusing to even try to figure out.

I look at the shower. Perhaps a cold shower will help put this burning out.

I glance back at the bedroom door, a strange mix of excitement, anticipation, and fear coursing through me.

I am the omega they want to share this space with. I take a deep breath and let it out.

thirteen

Weston

Three years ago- Just after Silver kisses Silas

Silver

It's not working, and I'm not sleeping. He knows I'm here. He touches me whenever he gets a chance. Whispers in my ear all the things he's going to do to me. I haven't slept. I can't eat. I'm so scared. How can no one know I'm this scared?

And I did something stupid.

Really stupid. Why is my life like this? Oh, god, I'm so sorry.

Onyx hates me now. I'm sorry. Why do I do stupid things?

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I hate me now, too. She will never forgive me.

I'm so tired.

Present Day

There is something really, really wrong.

I open the door to the nest, and everything inside me goes feral. I have to fight back a snarl and whirl, staring at the others.

"I need you to stay out here. Just give me a few minutes."

"What the fuck?" Quint snarls, but I shake my head, and his face transforms. He backs off warily.

"Trust me," I say to Ross and Ian.

They hesitate, and then nod. I calmly close the door and send a quick prayer to whoever is on the other side that I've made the right decision.

It takes me a moment to find her. She's perched in the middle of the bed, with her arms wrapped around her knees. She is so painfully still. In the dark, it's hard to make anything out, but the scent is crystal clear.

She's terrified.

“Silver?”

She shudders but doesn't answer.

“I'm just going to move a bit closer. I'm not going to touch you.” I keep my voice pitched low and my movements slow and even.

I take a slow, cautious step towards the bed. She eyes me like she doesn't know me. That's not good.

“All right, Silver, sweetie. I know this is hard, but I need you to see if you can remember who I am. Can you tell me what my name is?” I keep my voice low and unthreatening, silently pleading for her to remember me.

She lets out a low growl of pure warning.

“When I was little, Quint and I used to look similar enough that no one could tell us apart. Can you tell me my name?”

She unclenches her jaw, and I notice the death grip she has on her legs. That's got to be hurting.

“West-“ the rasp comes out, and my heart jumps in my chest. I have to hold back a shout of triumph.

I take a step closer. “No one is going to hurt you. No one is going to touch you without your express permission, baby, but we don't want to see you hurting, and you are hurting.”

She shudders. “I-” She cuts herself off short and tightens that terrible hold she has on herself.

“Talk to me, tell me what’s wrong.”

“Lights. Sounds. Smells. This room.” Silver spits out and lets out another growl.

I chance another two steps until I’m halfway up the bed. I could reach out and grab her, but that would be a shocking betrayal of the fragile trust I’m building.

“We don’t have to stay here. We could have a look in the house and see if there’s a better spot.”

“I don’t want!” She hisses and rises up. “Do you want my body, Alpha?”

I don’t like this sudden seductive tone.

“I don’t just want your body, Omega, I want all of you. Your mind, your soul, your heart, and your body. I want you to trust me and know that I’ll take care of you, and you’ll never feel pain from my hands.”

Confusion flickers in her eyes. She sucks in a deep breath. “West?”

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I take a chance and reach out. She doesn't hesitate, taking my hand. I pull her into my arms and turn away from the bed.

"Where are we going?" She almost shrieks.

"Somewhere you can feel safe," I murmur gently and kiss her temple. "No one is going to touch you unless you feel safe."

She shivers in my arms, inhaling and holding her breath while her eyes dart all over the place, searching for a danger that isn't here.

The door opens for us, and Quint steps back, allowing us to pass. "Try the third floor. Ian says that's where her mask cracked."

I take the stairs two at a time. When we get to the top, I cautiously let her go and watch as her fear spikes, and then ebbs.

"Ian?" she whispers.

She is absolutely under the influence of her heat. I don't even know if she will remember this, but not a single one of us is going to touch her, not like this.

Ross sits in a corner, playing her favourite songs, and she drifts towards him, staring as he sings her favourite song.

The balance of fear and arousal tips. By the time Ian and Quint carefully enter the room with blankets and pillows, she's swaying to the music and seems to have

forgotten whatever happened downstairs.

Or at least, I thought she had. When she spots Ian and Quint, her fear spikes again before easing.

Why would the sight of an alpha make her fear spike?

I have no good answers for that question, and all the ones my mind supplies leaves me feeling sick to my stomach.

“Dance with me?” I whisper hoarsely, drawing her attention and trying like hell to get that haunted, agonized look out of her eyes.

She turns and moves in my direction, forgetting Quint and Ian. I make sure that our bodies aren’t touching as I dance her around the room.

“How do you feel?” I whisper the question.

“Hot,” she whispers back, her eyes fluttering shut. I don’t say a word as she peels off the t-shirt she’s wearing, revealing nothing but miles of lovely cream skin and a body that was made out of every fantasy I’ve ever had.

She’s naked. She presses close to me suddenly. I have to fight my instincts. The urge to pull her close and claim her rides at me, pounding into my head. Her hands slide up my chest, leaving trails of fire, making it hard to think.

“Alpha, I need you.”

I swallow hard. “Then you’re going to have to take it from me, baby. You take what you want, stop when you want.”

She pauses, her head cocked. "I'm in charge?"

"You're in charge."

"Take off your clothes and lay down," Silver says, rendering my brain useless.

I take off my clothes, slowly measuring my movements, so nothing appears threatening, and then I lay on the rug. It's thin and doesn't quite get rid of the chill from the floor, but it could be a block of ice for all I care.

Ross keeps playing, but he's playing something slower, softer. Ian's leaning against the door.

She spots him and pauses.

"He's making sure no one gets in, keeping his omega safe," I whisper.

The words relax her, and she looks back at me, taking me in. All of me, from my messy hair, down my chest to my aching cock. She hesitates there, and then follows my body down to my toes, and then returns to my eyes.

I'm nervous, suddenly. What if she doesn't like what she sees? What if I'm not enough?

"Is this to your approval, Omega?" Quint asks in a sexy drawl.

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She lets out a purr that startles me, breaks me. It takes EVERYTHING to stay exactly where I am.

Silver pushes her hair back over her shoulders, and I allow myself to get my first good look at her body. She's perfect. Her breasts are a handful, her skin luminescent. Long, toned limbs and a tiny waist.

She crouches over me. I keep my eyes on hers, trying not to move as she drags her heat along the length of my cock.

Silver leans forward, pressing her hands against my chest. I grit my teeth and close my eyes as she leans closer.

"Alpha," she whispers.

I open my eyes and watch as she lowers her mouth to my skin. The hot, opened mouth kisses trail down my collarbone until she reaches my nipple. I hiss as she sucks gently; her nails scraping lightly over my shoulder. She's exploring, and this is good. It's great. I just don't know if I can control myself much longer.

I turn my head and send a silent plea to the others.

Quint smirks.

"Permission to approach the omega?" Quint says with direct challenge.

Silver sits upright on me, causing me to flex, unable to resist the hot movement her

cunt makes as she slides easily against me. She is so wet. If all we do is this, I will die happy.

Silver glares at him as he circles her.

“Let me make you feel good, darling. Let me touch you, please?” Quint whispers in teasing, challenging taunts that stir her wildness to the surface.

Silver swallows hard, watching him like he’s dangerous. But her eyes are furious, sapphire gems.

“Don’t leave me hanging, darling,” Quint teases. “You remember how we like to share? We really like to make you feel good. Let me show you.”

Silver narrows her eyes and drops her chin a quarter of an inch, then leans back down and continues licking my chest.

I groan, clenching my hands so I don’t reach out and touch her.

Quint kneels behind her and snags her waist, running his hands up her body until he gets to her breasts. He reverses direction, moving slowly, touching everywhere.

“Feels good, doesn’t it?” He whispers.

She lets out a sob, her nipples poking out, begging for my mouth, but I promised I wouldn’t move.

I watch as my brother brushes his thumb lightly over her nipples. She trembles and lets out a coo that makes my cock flex. Slick gushes all over me.

I think of the most terrible things I can think of but stay still while Quint teases our

omega into a sexual haze.

“Do you want to fuck your alpha? Do you want a knot?” Quint whispers in her ear. My eyes snap open. I’ve been rocking my hips, unable to stop, but now I don’t move an inch.

“Yes, I want him.”

“Then take him. Reach down and grip him in your sexy little hand and sink down onto him. Teach West that you can take whatever you want.”

She does that with no hesitation, and when she presses me to her entrance, when she sinks down, I swear, I die a little. She is so tight and so wet. It takes everything in me not to move. My toes curl, and I squeeze my eyes closed.

“You’re melting his brain, Omega. Good girl. All the way down, don’t worry, you’re made for him. He’ll fit.”

I hear raspy breathing and see Ian has moved closer.

“Silver,” I moan, pleading.

Her face freezes, and then she smiles. A smile of confidence and control. She lifts up, following Quint’s instructions.

“Oh, god!” I moan and thrust up.

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Silver gasps. “Do that again!”

I obey her at once. And then again. And again. I can’t stop.

She meets me with each thrust, her breasts jiggling, her face blank with pleasure. Not a single sign of any fear.

I relax, right until Quint pushes her down. He runs his hands over her back.

“Do you trust me, Omega?”

Silver nods with no hesitation. We are so fucking lucky.

“I want to fuck you here,” he must touch her ass because she tenses, and then moans. “Can I do that? Can I be inside you, too?”

She nods.

“I need words, darling.”

“Yes, Quint, fuck my ass. Please,” Silver hisses.

I focus on not coming; I ignore my brother prepping her, but I can’t ignore the way she clenches around me and releases. Her whines and moans make me weak. I fight not to lose control, but she is all I can see. Every part of me is in tune with her.

It seems like it takes an eternity and no time at all, and then Quint is pushing into her.

She gets even wetter, frantically clawing at my chest, driving me almost out of my mind. Quint leans on her, pushing her down to me, and I kiss her without thinking, I just need to taste her.

Fairy floss is now my favourite flavour. Its sweet sugar explodes into my mouth, and I'm gone.

And so is she.

She cries out against my lips, her whole body shuddering in our arms, her cunt squeezing my cock impossibly tight. I growl and thrust back in, but she surprises me, forcing herself down onto my knot.

If her orgasm was intense before, this sudden explosion of pleasure is off the charts. Mine is, too. I claw at the rug. My back arches as I come and come, emptying myself into her.

She clings to me, panting as Quint tries to ride through it and fails.

The heat haze clears from her eyes just a bit. She cups the side of my cheek and stares at me in wonder.

"I didn't think I could ever do that."

I frown, about to ask what that means, but she closes her eyes, and in the next moment, moans, her frantic movements around my knot making me forget she even spoke.

fourteen

Ian

Three years ago at the hotel she's banished to

Silver

The hotel I'm staying at won't let me out of my room. They also won't let anyone in.
I finally get to sleep. I finally eat.

Then I cry. I cry a lot.

Because I lost everything.

But now there's nothing left of me.

Present Day

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I take a step towards them. When Quint flicks me a warning look, he pulls out of her, sits back, and in a move that surprises the fuck out of me, sinks his teeth into the upper curve of her ass. She yelps, but it turns into a panting moan. He lets go, licks it twice, and moves in front of her, where she lunges at him, biting him hard.

I'm frozen, staring at them, locked in their embrace. West moves closer, and she lunges at him, hitting him in almost the exact opposite spot she managed to bite Quint.

West groans, his head tilting back. He leans forward, and when she rises up; he sinks his teeth into the delicate column of her throat.

I move closer, and she turns, her eyes wide, staring up at me. Ross has stopped playing his music now. He's beside me, naked, his cock leaking pre-cum. He reaches down and absently strokes himself. Her eyes watch him do it, almost like she's hunting.

Ross moves just one of his feet, and she sweeps into his space, glancing at me. It's okay, I can wait. I move back, watching as Ross twirls her around the room, stopping only when their kiss gets so heated that it's not possible for them to keep moving. She climbs him like he's a tree, panting and moaning around him.

Slick glistens down the inside of her thighs. My mouth waters, but apparently, Ross is a mind reader because he lowers them to the floor so he's laying on his back and urges her up so she straddles his face.

The hunger in her expression is something I will never, ever forget. Ross wraps his

arms around her thighs and pulls her down to his mouth.

She tilts her head back and gasps.

It doesn't take long before she's riding him, her hips moving in a frantic rhythm. The sounds of his muffled groans are almost crudely erotic. I lean against the wall and watch my pack mate devour our omega.

She comes on him, her hair thrown back, looking incredible, like a goddess. He holds her to him and keeps going. A few minutes later, she comes again. And again. He keeps going, slurping until we're all going insane. The twins watch with burning eyes. They look almost demonic. I suspect I look the same.

At last, he lets her thighs go, and she crawls off him, shuddering, but before she can go far, Ross grabs her from behind, pulling her hips back into his and impaling himself in one slick move.

She keens. The sound is glorious.

He fucks her slowly but thoroughly, whispering secrets in her ear. She trembles in his arms, barely able to hold herself up, and when he forces his knot into her pleasure-filled body, I hold my breath.

The sound of her whine, the smell of spun sugar, Ross' growl. My own heavy breathing. It's an explosion of living that I didn't even know I could feel. This is real, and I want this more than anything. And when they sink their teeth into each other, completing the pack bonds, I feel it in my chest.

And for a moment, I'm terrified because I don't want to lose her.

Ross trembles, his face stark with his ecstasy. He looks gorgeous. I stand against the

wall, giving them space, but all I want to do is go over there.

They stay fused together, whispering to each other. Ross laughs occasionally and kisses her nape and shoulders, and finally, finally, he slips free of her, gets to his feet, and staggers back.

She looks up and finds me. Our eyes collide, and the room fades away. All that exists is my omega and me. I don't care if she rejects me tomorrow. I don't care if she says she'll never be mine. I will always be hers. I don't need anything more than that.

I walk to her as she rises to her feet. Her hands grip my belt when I get close, and she undoes it with her eyes locked on mine. She pulls it from my pants and throws it away. Her fingers make short work of undoing my jeans. We still haven't looked away from each other. We still haven't spoken a single word.

I reach out and cup her cheeks, leaning forward to press my lips to hers. Her taste is so strong, so wild. I'll get drunk on sugar, but who cares?

Silver gasps, and then my jeans are around my ankles. I kick them off and lift her into my arms. Her legs wrap around me. I walk us back to the wall I've been leaning on, the spot where I can see the moon, I can see the night sky and everything in this room.

I push my body up against hers, holding her there as I grab her wrists, gently rubbing my thumbs over her pulse before I pin them to the wall with one hand.

"Omega," I whisper.

"Alpha, I need you."

"I know you do." I close my eyes. The symphony of her moans and whines are

obliterating my ability to think. Instincts demand I knot her now.

I trail my hand between us, reaching down and sliding my fingers inside her. She clenches around my fingers. I pull them out of her and lift them to her mouth.

“Taste.”

She opens her mouth, sucking slowly, her eyes rolling. I lean my head against her shoulder, struggling to find my control.

“Alpha, please.”

I lift my head and shift my weight, grabbing my dick and lining us up. I push into her, pulling my hand out from between us and gripping her hair, pulling her mouth to mine. Her thighs tighten around me, holding me close as I thrust into her.

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No words between us, but in my head, there are three that go on repeat. Three words that scare me. Three words that have changed everything. That will change everything.

I fuck those words into her, letting my body say what my mouth can't.

She cries out, lost in feeling. I made her like that. I did this. I duck down, grabbing a nipple with my mouth and sucking hard.

She arches into me and suddenly shouts out; her nails biting into my shoulders. Her cunt clenches around me so tight I almost lose my mind.

“Silver!” I cry out and pin her to the wall, fucking harder, faster. She moans and thrashes her head from side-to-side as I pummel the fuck out of her tight snatch. Slick runs down our legs. The sound of our coupling fills the air. My snarls and her moans are our music.

I pull her wrist to my mouth and bite deep right as I thrust up into her, forcing my knot in deep. It's like I've never felt pleasure before. My knees want to buckle, but I lock them tight. My balls explode, sending my release spraying into her, over and over. Eyesight gets fuzzy, and my mind goes blank. I've never felt anything like this before. I can't move, but I still want to thrust, and every movement drags more cum out of me, drags more pleasure through my nerve endings.

She whimpers and presses her mouth to my neck, sucking gently. I hold us up, leaning against the wall, shocked at what I've been missing.

“Silver,” I whisper. “I love you.”

She moans and starts to purr.

I glance back at Ross, who wipes a tear from his eye and smiles. Okay, so I did good. That is a relief.

The twins open the door, sneaking back in, bringing more blankets, pillows, and food.

I turn back, focusing on tending to the omega in my arms. The most precious gift I’ve ever been given.

A second chance.

fifteen

Silver

Three years ago at the Omega Refuge

Onyx is in the car. I glance back once, seeing her misery. I’ve never seen her look so defeated. Tears roll down my cheeks, mixing with the rain. She thinks I’m selfish, but I can do this for her. I can let her go. She can have a good life if I’m not there to ruin it.

I walk inside and am led to an office where a woman named Jenny Lathem sits.

“Your sister has paid for you to stay here for three years.”

She explains everything in more detail. The rules, my duties. But I don’t hear anything else.

I sit there, slumped over, crying in huge fits that shake my entire frame. Onyx bought me safety.

She saved me.

All this time, everything I've done to her, and she saved what was left of my rotten self. She probably doesn't even know what she's done. She put me out of their reach. All of them.

No one will get me here.

No man will enter these walls. No threat by alpha will be obeyed. No strike on omega will fall. Those words are written on the walls of this place. This is the oath the workers here take.

I close my eyes and make a promise to myself and my sister.

I will redeem myself. I will work hard, and I will show her that there's more to me than what I gave.

Present Day

There's this warm glow deep inside me, and I'm not comfortable with it. Part of me realises that it's happiness, and I should be fine with it, yet I'm not. It's strange, and I can't help but feel like the other shoe will drop, and I will wake up and lose this again. My heat is like a dream. All I can remember is how good I felt, how safe I felt, and the flashes of pleasure over and over again.

It's the creepy sensation of wrongness that's pervasive, spreading into the glow and stealing my ability to breathe. I put one hand on the dining table to steady myself. I don't want to ruin it, but the more I think, the more scared I get.

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Because I have feelings. Strong feelings. They have been growing since we met all those years ago, but whatever happened during the heat has left me with such powerful feelings that I feel transformed.

I don't want to be hurt again.

I think I remember Ian telling me he loved me, but that can't possibly be true. There's no way.

An arm slings around my waist, hooking me and dragging me back into a wall of naked chest. I inhale and straight away smell the snow-in-the-air scent that is Weston.

"West," I murmur.

He walks us forward towards the glass windows. "There's a whole world that we can explore together. Hand in hand. We can do anything you want. So what do you want to do today?"

I watch his reflection and feel the bond he put on the curve of my neck throb deliciously.

"I want to watch a movie," I say when I get my brain working again.

"A movie? Where?"

I blink. "Here. In your arms. With popcorn and ice cream. I want to sit with oversized blankets that smell like us and laugh at the things they've done wrong. I just want to

be with you.” It comes out a whisper, and he presses closer to me, as if he can feel the feelings that are pouring out of me.

“That’s all?”

I pout. “I haven’t been able to watch movies at the refuge. They don’t give us popcorn or ice cream. I have had no friends or people to do it with, not since-” I cut myself short.

“Not since we did it that night at the Omega Meet?” West whispers in my ear. “Not since me?”

“It’s one of the best memories I have,” I admit softly. Admitting a truth I’ve kept hidden in my heart since it all blew up in my face. They are my best memories.

He spins me around. “What happened?”

I look away. Shame colouring my fairy floss scent. I swallow hard. Would they hate me if I told them? Would they despise me? I would.

I can’t tell him. I couldn’t bear if he looked at me like that.

“You can trust us, you can trust me,” West whispers.

“In all my life, every time someone has said those words to me, my life has become a living hell,” I whisper.

West shuts his jaw with a snap. “Well then, let’s prove fate wrong.”

We spend all day watching movies. When West needs to leave, Ian takes his place, slowly feeding me tiny little pieces of chocolate and stroking my back. He tells me

stories of the pack and keeps me belly laughing the whole time.

“I used to think you were scary.”

“Me?” Ian asks, shocked. “I’m not scary at all.”

“You were to me. Because you were so perfect, and I was afraid I’d hurt you or you would wake up and finally see me and run far away.”

“That’s in the past. We’re together now. This is our happiness.”

He strokes his fingers over my bond mark. I shudder and turn so I’m staring up at him.

“What if I were broken? What if I was ruined?”

“Silver, you could never be broken. Or ruined. If someone hurts you, that’s on them, not you. No one here is going to blame you for what someone else did.”

“What if it was something I did?” I whisper.

“No!” Ian says sharply. “No, just, no. Whatever you had to do to survive, you did to survive. I don’t care what it was. You don’t need my forgiveness, but if it will make you feel better, you have it. Without needing to know what happened, even if you never tell me, I forgive all of it. It doesn’t matter or affect this here, what we have. What you have is my devotion, my trust, my respect. And you have my protection. Nothing will hurt you so long as we are here.”

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“I second that!” Ross says and sits down beside us. “Now stop thinking about sad things, pretty girl. Believe us when we say to you we want you here.”

Ian leaves at some point, and Ross just holds me, humming.

“Why haven’t you sung out loud before this time? Hmm, my pretty girl, why were you hiding your voice? Why does no one but us know about this?” He slides his hand over my throat.

“I didn’t want anyone to look at me. No one heard me when I asked for help. Why would I sing?”

Ross rests his forehead against mine. “What dark shadows lurk in your eyes? I would take them from you if I could.”

“Ross,” I moan when he touches his lips to mine. “Sing away the shadows. Sing me back to the light, to happiness.”

He does. Singing a song that leaves me crying with laughter. That’s how Quint finds us when he walks in with pizza. Ian and West trail behind him.

“Oh, no, not that song!” West shouts and breaks into the second chorus with Ross. His voice isn’t bad, but it’s clear he’s having fun.

Quint hands me a piece of pizza. “Eat, darling.”

I take it and take a bite while they finish up the song.

“All right. We need to have a huge celebration meeting,” Ross shouts out. “This is our official pack party to welcome our girl to our pack.”

I pick up my glass, imitating Ian and West.

“To Silver, the omega we chose, and our one true love.”

“To Silver,” Ian says with a softness in his eyes.

“Silver,” Quint whispers.

“My baby.” West purrs.

My throat thickens, but Quint smacks a kiss to my lips, and then feeds me more pizza.

“So, from now until the sun rises, we’re not talking about bad things. We’re watching movies, eating crap, and having a good time. Those are the rules.” West glares at everyone.

“What are we watching?”

I don’t pay attention, I’m too busy trying not to giggle, feeling my heart grow in my chest, the bonds they’ve placed on me tingle and strengthen.

If this is happiness, sign me up.

sixteen

Silver

Two and a half years ago

Jenny sits down beside me and studies me. “Does your sister know?”

“Know what?”

“Know about the people who hurt you?”

I inhale sharply, focusing on her. Rage dripping off me, a warning in the air.

“I’m not going to tell her, Silver.”

I shake my head. “No, Onyx will never know.”

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“If you ever want to talk about it, we can get you help. I can listen.”

I nod numbly as she stands up, puts a hand on my shoulder, and walks away.

One year ago

I toss back the brandy.

“Jenny.”

She looks at me and smiles. “Yes, Silver.”

“He said that I was beautiful. He said that I was perfect. Then he hit me.”

Jenny listens while I speak and keeps my glass topped up as the darkness absorbs a story I’ve never told before.

Present Day

I answered the door. I didn’t think anything of it. Who thinks before they open the door?

Every single cell in my body wishes I hadn’t.

I don’t know how to do this. All I know is that I’ve stolen what was hers. And she’s here and obviously wants them back. The bonds light up inside me as the guys respond to my distress. I try to shut down my feelings, but it’s impossible.

The woman standing in the doorway is gorgeous. She's got a mane of blond hair that's got a copper tone to it. She has a figure like an hourglass, and she's dressed in expensive designer clothes. Brandy Masters is flawless. I feel like a little girl playing dress up.

The words I said to West last night come back to haunt me.

She walks into the house, pushing past me like she owns it, and I get a sinking suspicion that this is going to go badly. If she manages to succeed here, she will own it all.

I glance over my shoulder, looking for one of the pack to appear, and, like magic, there is Ian. His face goes hard. There's no shock there, just a blank, untouchable mask.

My stomach clenches painfully. He doesn't come to me; he doesn't touch me. Ian pretends I'm not even here.

"Well, I knew this day would come." His voice is ice chips of disdain.

Did he? He knew? A well of hurt opens up inside me. So, this was expected?

"Brandy, what the fuck are you doing here?"

His tone is cold. Horribly cold. I hope he never speaks to me like that.

"Oh, Ian, I made a huge mistake. I've come to make up with you." Her tone is cheerful, happy, and light. She puts her bag down and walks towards him with her arms outstretched.

Ian nods his head. "I see, I see."

“They were so mean to me, and they threatened me. I couldn’t get away, but I escaped, you see.” Her voice is a simpering tone that makes me want to growl.

“When they lost all their money and bankrupted themselves?” Ian asks with a smile.

“Yes! No! It’s not like that,” Brandy shouts, folds her arms over her chest, and glares at him. “I knew you’d be pouty.”

Her shout draws the others. Ross hangs back, glaring from the other side of the room. West and Quint advance like a pair of circling sharks. The anger bubbling inside them is enough to give me satisfaction that she’s not welcome here.

She’s not welcome here. That thought floors me. They want me, not their scent match. Me!

She hasn’t even clued in yet. I almost feel sorry for her.

Brandy throws herself at Ian, clinging to his arm. My rage is instant and wild. I step forward, snarling, and she snaps her head towards me. Her eyes sweep up and down my body, widening when she realises who I am.

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“Oh, you! Silver? It is Silver, isn’t it? I’ve heard of you.” Brandy lets go of Ian and stalks towards me. I hold my ground, refusing to let go of my position near the pack. I swallow nervously. The old me might have fought, but that me who’d been in a refuge doesn’t have that confidence anymore. “You’re the omega that used to cry rape.”

The protective instincts suddenly reverse, and I find myself backing away from the glamorous omega. Please, don’t say it. Please, not here, not now. Not to them. Please, not to them.

I flinch violently. “I never cried-”

“Oh, yes, the one who wanted it so bad, and then after it happened, you tried to report that poor pack, and no one believed you, not even your own father.”

I step back, giving ground as she rips open wounds I’d buried. She advances, following me, chasing me, violating me again and again. My eyes flick to Ian, to the shock on his face, and my shame rips through me, tearing my happiness into shreds and scattering it on the wind. They won’t believe me. No one ever does.

“You don’t deserve a pack. You deserve nothing. You’re the scraps left behind, the rubbish, the unwanted trash. They talk, you see, my old pack. They all know who used to visit when your sister went to work.” Brandy’s lips stretch wide, and all I can see is the crimson colour and white teeth.

My eyes are stretched too wide. Fear is slamming into my chest with each beat of my heart, with memories that make me want to run. I feel like the skin is peeling back.

Exposing all the rot inside me. Everything that was destroyed is on display to the people I love most, and I can't look at them. I can't.

How could they love me after this?

“And the Omega Meet, trying to hide from him. Trying to snag Treyfield Pack for yourself, only to be outsmarted by your very own sister.” Brandy throws her head back and laughs.

“What's she talking about?” Ross asks softly. I can scent their distress in the air.

I did that. I made them ashamed and hurt. I...I ruin everything.

I open my mouth, but no words come out. What can I say? How can I tell them the truth when no one ever believes it's the truth?

I'm cursed. I'm broken and ruined and cursed.

There's no way to withstand the pity, the shame, the confusion, and I can't answer the questions they need me to. They are better off without me.

Agony rips through me, worse than anything anyone else has ever done to me. I tasted happiness. It will have to last me a lifetime. People like me don't live lives like this. People like me don't get amazing packs. We destroy them.

I whirl and sprint through the front door, racing away. The fear, the pain, the happiness that's turned to poison gives me the wings to escape.

seventeen

Quint

Four months ago

Silver

“How can you just kick me out?” I shout at Jenny. “I’ve worked here for three years. You need me.”

“Silver, I’m not kicking you out. The money has gone. I can’t afford for you to stay. If I could, I would.”

I growl and stomp around the office.

“Can you go out and organise putting the clothes in boxes for the auction?”

“What if he finds me?”

Jenny stops, she looks up at me, and her expression softens. “You can’t hide forever, Silver. At some point, you need to realise you’re healed and go out into the world and take back what they stole from you.”

I stare at her, my hope fading but a curious desire to see what’s out there rising up.

“If you get into trouble, come back. This will always be your home, Silver. But you need to face your demons. You need to try.”

Present Day

Onyx sits politely in our lounge room but her stillness is eerie. She is a blank version of her sister, but right now, I see the power of the Treyfield pack simmering in her. There is so much similarity in the way she and Silver echo each other. They should have what Quint and I have, a connection that is more. It’s transcendent. They are

twins, and today for the first time, I see it. I see Silver in Onyx, and it hurts me. And it makes me more afraid than I've ever been. Where is she? She's so good at disappearing. Come on West, find her. You can do it.

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Ian stands silently beside me, while Ross is beside him. We are a wall of hate, and this bitch of an omega hasn't even realised it. Dylan, Onyx's omega, has a hand on her shoulder like he's anchoring her or holding her from breaking. Falcon watches from the door frame, his fury making the room inhospitable. Silas and Grayson stepped out at Falcon's snapped command. But, still, this woman that fate saw fit to give us as ours smiles as she rips away the blindfold and reveals the true wounds that Silver carries. Each word steals the air from my lungs and replaces it with an ache that pushes me towards insanity. It's all I can do to listen, to bear witness.

Brandy lifts the cup of tea I reluctantly brought her and smiles into it. I see that smile, and I hate her. She thinks she's won. Sitting in our home, having chased off our omega, with part of our pack standing here dancing attendance upon her. As soon as she's gone, I want this couch torched. At Ian's order, I've kept Brandy here until Pack Treyfield arrived. I didn't like it, but I could see his reasoning. She's too self-centered to realise we're all simmering in a homicidal rage. A low growl vibrates in my throat as Onyx lifts her own tea cup but sets it down without drinking. I see a tremor in her hands.

"So, you're telling me my sister was raped a few weeks before the fire that killed my parents occurred? She went to the police, but no one believed her. Even my father? And you know this because your pack told you." Onyx glances back at Dylan. "I had no idea about any of this."

Brandy smirks and shifts her weight, sipping from the china cup. I really want to smash her face into it, but Ross is right. We can restore what Silver lost if we play this right. I just hope West finds her in time. Meanwhile, it's taking everything I have not to strangle this omega in front of me.

“Oh, there’s more.”

“There’s more?” Onyx asks. Her chin trembles, but she manages a smile. “Tell me.”

“Well, there was talk about how you could go to her house to be serviced.”

Onyx turns her gaze away, helplessly looking to Silas. Her face is chalk white. “While I was at work? They came to her while I was working? Oh, my god. Who went to the house?”

“Oh, there was a pack. One of them was at the Omega Meet. You’d know them. Really respectable. And Ryan from my pack. He went there a lot. Said he only had her once.”

I close my eyes. The reason she ran from us has suddenly become clear. We went to the Omega Meet pretending we had nothing, no connections, no money. We wanted love. She needed connections. She needed our power. When her nightmare showed up in real life, she ran straight into the arms of Treyfield.

And they, we all, threw her to the wolves.

“I’ve had enough,” Onyx says in a voice that sounds like Falcon. “Quint, Ian. I’d like a word.”

I follow the beta out of the lounge room. My stomach is roiling. The fear, the pain she must have gone through. I want to set this fucking city on fire.

Shouts come from the room we’ve just left, but Simon Shultz is a professional. You don’t become the Treyfield Pack general manager without some skills. Brandy is no longer our problem. She’ll be lucky to be anyone’s problem. Treyfield will take care of her now.

Onyx turns, her omega standing close enough to touch. He keeps a protective hand on her back.

“Where is she?” Onyx’s stark tone slices through the air.

“She ran,” Ross says quietly. “West is trying to find her. We’ll leave in a minute. But we needed you to hear what they’ve been saying. We want Silver to have her life back.”

“And do you believe it?” Onyx snarls almost savagely. Her eyes are shiny with tears of fury.

I hesitate. “A few weeks ago, I might have believed it, but Silver is honest. The real Silver is kind and smart and wounded. Whatever happened in the past, I don’t think it was her fault, and I believe her.”

Onyx sags. “Me, too.”

“She was going to choose us,” Ian says softly. “At the Omega Meet. She was going to choose us.”

“But she got scared and desperate. Why didn’t she just tell me?” Onyx whispers. “Why didn’t she just let me help her?”

“She tried telling people; no one believed her,” I say bitterly.

Onyx picks up her phone and rapidly fires off a message. In twenty seconds, her phone is ringing.

“I need you to find Silver. No, she hasn’t, no! Look, listen, we were wrong. We need to find her and make sure she’s safe. Yes. It’s urgent,” Onyx says.

“Who did you call?” I ask when she hangs up.

She looks up, her eyes filled with pain. “I called everyone.”

I answer the phone call as quickly as I can.

“Hello, is this Quinton of Pack Vore?”

“Yes. Speaking.”

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“Ah, good. I’m Detective Angel Montford.”

My stomach turns to ice. “Is she okay-”

“She’s fine. I’ve got her here. But she’s refusing to speak to anyone and won’t come out of the cell. Seemed the best idea to get the pack here. We saw the bonds.”

I snort a hysterical laugh and turn the car around. “Is she okay? Is she hurt?”

“No, she’s not hurt. A little bit upset, but not hurt.” Angel clears his throat. “Please be aware that everyone is on their way.”

“Everyone?”

“Um, most of the packs. Onyx put a call out. It's kinda how we roll now. If one of us asks, we just start jumping.”

I groan. “Fine. See you in a few minutes.”

The drive flies past in a blur, and then I’m inside the station, asking a very annoying, pimple-faced kid for Detective Montford and getting this little shit try to give me the runaround.

Angel opens a door and looks out. “Thought I heard you.”

I huff and give the kid a narrow-eyed warning look before returning my stare to the alpha. “Angel, you look well fed.”

“You calling me fat?” Angel glares.

I side-eye the detective and shrug. “I was being polite with small talk, and I guess I’m not good at it.”

The detective is not fat at all. He’s fit and dangerous looking. If he wasn’t a cop, I might think he was some kind of boxer or fighter.

“Why wasn’t this picked up when Treyfield did their background checks?” I snap as he leads through a heavy metal door and into the back of the station. Cops look up, watching me pass.

“How do you know they did background checks?”

“They do checks on everyone, it's common knowledge,” I snap, impatient with this entire conversation.

Angel rubs his jaw. “The cop who took the original report lost the file. It never went into the system. The only copy was a paper copy, and that vanished a week after she lodged it. I managed to get it out of a retired friend of mine. He told me about a lot of files that had mysteriously never lodged themselves.”

I let out a growl.

“And the other stuff, the whispers on the street, all that?”

“Yeah, well, I did grill Treyfield. He said the PI they hired was sketchy. They had the basic information; that was enough at the time. Treyfield made a decision to fire that particular man a few months later after another issue came up, but no one thought to check. They had Onyx, everyone was happy, and Silver was gone.”

I close my eyes. “It didn’t matter because she was at the refuge learning a lesson, and out of sight, out of mind, right?”

Angel gives a tight nod. “Yeah. Something like that.”

He leads me through a room, and I come to a corridor full of people. Hazel, Onyx, Missy, Scarlet, and Jade stand together, talking.

I shake my head and edge past them. As soon as I get to the cage she’s sitting in, I grip the bars.

“Do you know what this is?” I ask and stroke the bond mark on my chest.

Her eyes jerk open. “Quint?” She starts to shiver violently, and a low whine escapes.

Onyx tries to come towards us back. I glare at her, and she backs off.

“Do you know what this is?” I ask her again in a hard voice.

“It’s a bond mark,” she says in a voice that sounds exhausted and so heavy with grief.

“It's forever, Silver.”

She peers up at me. “But Brandy-”

“Is a self-serving whore and is already packed and heading back to whatever hole the fuck she crawled out of. But you and I, we're meant to be pack, and pack don't abandon each other.”

She snuffles, and then starts to cry, pulling her knees up and wrapping her arms around herself. I push the door open, stalk inside, and pull her onto my lap.

“Hush now, Silver. We don't need to talk about it if you don't want. We don't need to do anything you don't want to do. I just want to make you happy. We'll keep you safe. You never, ever have to go back to that dark place again.”

Slowly, inch by inch, she unfurls and wraps herself around me. I stroke her back as the pack files in. Ross and West get in on the sides of us and cuddle close, but Ian takes one look and closes his eyes.

“You're safe. Thank you,” he murmurs.

I stand up, feeling the need rolling off our alpha, and Ian hugs us, burying his face in her hair.

“I thought I lost you again.”

I've never heard him so choked up, not even when Brandy rejected us...wait.

I inhale.

“Is that possible?” I muse out-loud.

“What?” Weston asks grumpily.

“Our scent match changed,” Ross whispers. “Silver’s our scent match now.”

“It's been changing for years,” Ian murmurs. He’s not surprised, but he’s much more observant than the rest of us.

“All right. So, I know this is a bit much, but there are some people who’d love to talk to you, who want to set things right. If you’re able. But you don’t have to if you don’t want,” Ian says to Silver. “If you tell me to send them away, I’ll force them to go.”

She lifts her head and nods. “Don’t leave me.”

“Never!” Ross says.

Ian goes to the door and waves.

A red-eyed Onyx is followed by the Raptore omega, Missy. Her gold and green eyes are fierce as she brushes back her ginger hair. Scarlet Waring, Pack Knight’s alpha, comes with her commanding presence, her eyes softening upon seeing Silver.

Pack Montford’s omega, Hazel, with her brown hair in a ponytail, her eyes shadowed in pain from her own experiences, rushes to Silver and squeezes her hand. And finally, I recognise Kandi and Jade from Pack Mortenson. They are good friends of Silver’s; I believe. Angel, Falcon, Sven, and Adrian stand just outside, unobtrusively, against the wall, listening and ready to take notes on who we are about to destroy.

“We need to have a little talk. Omega to omega,” Missy says with a deadly gleam in her eye. “I promise you, Silver, we’re going to make everything right. All you need to do is tell us the names.”

We sit around as best we can; the omegas listening intently as Silver tells her story.

And it’s a story I hope she never has to tell again.

eighteen

Ross

Three months ago

The day of Grayson’s Party

Silver

I’m exhausted, and I don’t have energy. I keep moving one foot after the other until I get to the Mansion of the address I have memorized. It’s so pretty, just like I always dreamed.

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I'm not even jealous. I just hope she doesn't hate me.

Onyx.

I just want to say goodbye.

I'm so tired.

I failed.

I trudge up the drive and cut across the lawns. My feet drag on the lawn, but I don't have the energy to lift them. I just need to make it a little bit further.

This is the end

And I'm okay with that.

Present Day

Ian's leaning back on the couch with Silver curled up in his arms. We've just gotten back from our trip to the Silver Rocks Resort, where we stayed in the penthouse, free of charge, while Onyx and Silver attempted to mend their strained relationship. All of us are exhausted but happy to be home. It's going to be a work in progress to get those sisters comfortable with each other.

But Pack Treyfield was gracious, and Falcon and Silas themselves apologised to Silver for being so blind. She was shocked and told them it wasn't their fault. She had

looked across at me, smiling softly, and said ‘it all worked out the way it was supposed to’. I think my heart burst out of its chest and dragged itself to lie at her feet.

I strum my guitar and play her favourite song. She turns her head towards me and smiles.

“So, there’s been some news,” Soren says, tugging Hazel into the room. Onyx and Dylan follow a moment later.

“Oh, what kind of news?” West asks with a distinct lack of interest.

“The kind of news we like.” Soren beams. “The kind where a certain pack was picked up with weapons, drugs, and an assortment of charges.”

I sit up and forward, listening intently. “A certain CEO bought out their business and ruined them. Everyone, bless our friend in scarlet. Treyfield bought the scraps of that business and sold all the different parts for a dime. No lawyer will touch them. No one will hire them. Nor will anyone help them.”

I exhale and close my eyes. The assholes who hurt my omega are done. Stripped of everything but their lives. And I’m sure they won’t keep those long.

Silver sits up and touches her hair. It’s a nervous habit that she can’t get rid of. “What about Brandy? They were her pack, weren’t they?”

“Oh, she’s a true rat, that one. She scurried away and found another pack to keep her afloat. Don’t you feel sorry for her!” Ian growls. “She’s going to get what’s coming to her, too.”

“They aren’t getting out of prison, Silver. They might not have paid for what they did

to you, but they will suffer for the rest of their lives. We took their things, their home, their omega, their safety, their security, and we put them in a cage.” Dylan sits beside her and takes her hand. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. You’re our family, and we were wrong.”

She sniffles. “You had reason not to trust your family. I’ve met Silas’ mother, remember.”

Dylan chuckles and stands up. He drifts back to Onyx, their hands lacing like they’re magnets.

“Angel’s found enough on them to make it stick, but it wasn’t until Pack Raptore went deep and dug it up that we really got a big break. Sven, of course, insisted on being involved.” Hazel snickers and leans on Soren.

“It was a team effort!” Onyx says.

“I think...” Silver clears her throat. “I think you’ll find information linking them to starting the fire that killed our parents.”

Onyx stares at her. “Oh, Silver.”

I think we’re all thinking about Silver lashing out and blaming Onyx for the fire.

“I just wanted someone to look, to investigate,” Silver whispers. “I am truly sorry, Onyx. What I said was unforgivable!”

Onyx rushes to hug her, and the twins embrace.

I change the tune I’m playing. As always, Silver hears the song and turns towards me, her lips curling up. Onyx pulls back, sniffing.

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“I wrote you a song.”

“You wrote me a song,” She repeats back.

“Sing with me.”

She shakes her head, but I know she will. She stands up and moves towards me like she can't help it. When our voices raise, it's a perfect blending.

The song is about second chances, missed opportunities, and love lost and found again. Our friends fall silent, as I expected they would. I will show the world this exceptional omega. I will show them how talented and beautiful she is. And always, I will show everyone she is mine.

“Wow,” Onyx murmurs. “I didn't know you could sing.”

Silver shrugs. “I don't normally.”

“You're superb,” Hazel says.

Silver blushes, but she sits straighter.

“Okay, you all need to leave,” Weston says loudly.

“West!” Ian hisses.

“No, I shared her enough. They need to go. I need my omega.”

Silver laughs, and it's so beautiful that, again, the room pauses.

"I haven't heard her laugh like that since we were kids," Onyx murmurs. I'm not meant to hear it, but it makes my throat tighten, and it takes me a moment to clear it.

"Come on, let's leave Pack Vore to your sister. I've got plans with Silas and whipped cream tonight," Dylan teases.

I did not need to know that.

Onyx stumbles in her step. "Huh. Can I play?"

Dylan smiles. "Of course."

Hazel drags Soren out with her, laughing and waving over her shoulder.

"It's nice," Silver says with a soft smile.

"What's nice? West? That wasn't nice, he was being greedy," Ian grumbles.

"No, having friends again. Having my sister back."

Ian pauses, and then grips her chin and turns her face to his. "I would give you everything your heart desires, Silver, because I think you deserve it."

"Ian," she protests weakly.

"We all would," I say and start strumming another tune. It's a new song, and I can tell she is listening.

Weston and Quinton move to sit opposite her on the coffee table.

“What’s going on?” She asks nervously.

I start to sing. The song is about a woman with raven dark hair and a beautiful soul. Who stole our hearts and ran. It’s about finding her again and filling the hole she left behind.

West holds out a gift. It’s wrapped in shiny silver paper. She takes it and opens it while I play the same refrain over and over.

“It’s a key.” She looks up at them, confused.

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“It's one key, but it's all of our homes. But if you feel like you need to be safe and have your own house, we will give you a house that's yours. Just yours,” West murmurs.

“And we know you're part of the pack, but we'd like it if you changed your name, became Pack Vore officially,” Quint says.

“We know you don't want to get married, and that's fine. But we want to make you happy. We want to give you whatever you need to feel safe.”

She blinks and looks around in surprise. “I don't understand. You already did that. I just need you.”

I clear my throat. “Jenny Lathem called as well. She heard about what's going on from Hazel. She'd like to offer you a position working at the refuge. No, for the refuge. She said she's looking to retire soon, and she wants someone who wants to take over. She couldn't imagine it being anyone else but you. You'll be directing the refuge and working with Adrian and Jade.”

“But,” Silver looks around, her blue eyes huge. “I had to leave.”

“Because the funding ran out, and the time limit is three years. It's designed to give new people a chance to cycle in. Jenny tried to find you the night of the charity auction with a contract, but you'd disappeared. And things happened.”

She smiles. It's soft and full of wonder. “I can help more people? I can work there?”

“You can work or not work or do whatever you desire, Silver. Anything you want. We’ll give it to you,” West says to her and picks up her hand. He brings it to his lips and kisses her palm.

I put my guitar down and cross the space, yanking her up. “We’ve having a game night. Oh, and you and I are going on a trip. I need you to meet my friends Locke and Ryn Raines.”

“Who are they? Wait...you don’t mean Locke? Like the rockstar? The lead singer of Derision? Locke? You know him?” Silver’s eyes are wide as she stares back at me.

“Ryn is far more talented!” I say with a laugh. “She writes half of his songs.”

Silver is wheezing. It’s so cute.

“Those two people are going to absolutely love you! I also got tickets to see Fate’s Choice play. I know you like their music. I play it for you a lot.”

Silver lets out a little squeal and throws herself into my arms. “Really? All of us? Can we go to a concert? I’ve never been to one.”

There are so many firsts, so many new experiences we will give to this woman. And one promise that we all will keep. She will be safe and happy forever, even if it kills us.

West jumps up and races off. “I’m grabbing the snacks.”

Ian follows behind me as I lead the way into the depths of the house.

“This is what you want?” Ian asks our omega. “You don’t want a fancy dinner? Go to a hotel? A car? Anything, Silver, I’ll give you anything.”

Silver stops between us, her hand resting on Ian's chest.

"I want you. Just you. This pack. Us together."

"Then you've got it, Omega. You can have me and my pack forever."

"And a day?"

"And everything that comes after," I promise. The words are echoed back through our bonds. This is the omega we chose, the one we love, the one we deserve. The omega who deserves us.