



# Your Wild Omega

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** I'm an omega keeping a feral alpha on a leash

The trafficking hub broke me, but I escaped. Now I'm putting the pieces of my life back together one by one with my alphas: Rickon, the sweetheart who accepts everything I am, and Zack, the feral who's as broken as I am but desperate to please.

Callisto, the alpha who rejected me, says he regrets his decision. While I long to embrace him, can I trust a man who crushed my heart? I'm thinking about taking him back, but we both forgot one crucial factor—I'm no longer a lone omega. It's not only me who has a say in this fragile pack, and one of my alphas isn't convinced.

I can't be sure if the lawyer's sincere or just trying to save his career, because the court case for my abusers approaches, and I don't think I can bear to re-live those memories. What if I lose control again?

Some omegas don't get their fairy tale endings; especially those who tow a dangerous alpha around on a leash.

**Total Pages (Source):** 144

# Page 1

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## Chapter one

Red

The feral alpha's fangs punch down into my skin.

"Zaz—aaaack!" I scream as pain explodes through my shoulder. But my cry becomes a moan as the agony melts into a volcano of desire that floods from my chest to my pussy in thick, relentless waves. The static presence of my alpha slides from my brain down into my soul, firmly lodging as an awareness in my chest.

I rescued him out of prison, and now I'll never be alone again.

Neither will he.

The sensation's too intense to bear, and I shudder through a powerful, orgasmic quake. Slick runs down my inner thighs as I pant for breath. Zazu purrs against my shoulder without letting go, and each vibration sends fresh thrills through my core. Fire ignites in my body and for a moment I think I'm going into heat again, but it settles into a softer, tingling sensation.

I feel alive.

My alpha's presence sings within my chest.

Tears slide down my cheeks as understanding dawns. I was never crazy. All along, I've been able to hear the faint echo of a mate bond. I was born with a gift, not a

curse. One that ensured I'd eventually find my pack. And I just located the last one.

The onslaught of Zazu's chaotic emotions pouring through me makes me gasp. The sensation pools in my awareness: raw, powerful, and unfiltered. I spasm with the intensity. If I hadn't spent years with the presence of others in my mind, this might drive me insane for real. His powerful essence batters at me, searching for control but also begging for affection.

I know that feeling.

The bond snaps into place and his shock crashes over me. He still hasn't released his bite, unwilling to be separated. His teeth grip my skin, every shudder pouring fresh oil on the fire of my lust. My core aches.

I need him, all of him, more than I've ever needed anything in my life. This man knows the utter depths of pain and the void of loneliness. Others abused him relentlessly, and it stole his sanity. But through it all, he hasn't lost a single spark of wildness.

He's a chaos creature just like me.

A knock rattles on the truck's back door. "Red, you okay in there?" Lionel, the vehicle's driver, calls.

Zazu growls at the noise. The vibrations of his warning travel through me and clamp around my throbbing pussy.

"Yeah. I-I think so," I gasp out. It's hard to talk with a man's teeth buried in your shoulder. I dig my fingers into Zazu's arms to focus. "Um, I think now's a g-good time to start his tr-training." No way am I leaving my alpha alone now, but that requires staying in the truck all night.

My body quivers with energy and my eyelashes flutter from the hot pulses as I mentally list our supplies. I brought a blanket for Zazu, plus water, snack bars, and a bucket for extra needs. That will do us for now.

My alpha's desperation to keep me close explodes through my chest, coupled with terror that if he lets go, I'll vanish, destroying this startling new development—the tingling sensation in his chest.

I'm not going anywhere. But Zazu can't understand my words, so I'll have to show him with actions.

"Lock us in, will you, Lionel?" I call.

"Are you sure?" My driver's voice deepens with concern. "Could get cold in there."

"Yep, I'm sure." Cold? I'm burning up. It's over a hundred degrees in Zazu's arms.

He growls another warning, sending delicious friction vibrating into my shoulder and chest. Electricity pumps in my veins like live voltage. I grind softly against his knee, my breaths short and shivery.

This is all new to him, but as I suspected, the instinct deep within guides my alpha. He slips his hands under my clothes, looking for more contact. His chilly fingers burn my back, startling a fresh gasp out of me.

"Lock the door," I call desperately. I'm exactly where I want to be, minus Lionel hovering nearby when we take this bonding to the next level.

"Um, okay, but—" Lionel stammers, clearly not liking this plan. "You know you won't be able to get out until I come back in the morning?"

“That’s f-fine,” I stutter as Zazu’s exploration reaches my bra strap. The plaster cast on his arm scrapes my waist with every movement. “We’ll be fine. Good night.” Fine hardly describes it. I’m pulsing all over, ready for my alpha.

The heavy lever on the back door thumps into place, and I breathe a sigh of relief. This gorgeous alpha is all mine for tonight. I’ll worry about the consequences tomorrow.

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Zazu continues his exploration of my body, moving slowly and circling back as if he cannot believe what his senses tell him.

“I’m all yours, precious,” I murmur, diving my nose into his neck, which is the only spot I can reach without ripping my alpha’s teeth through the bite wound. His malted barley scent fills me, rich and natural.

He seems to like my touch on his skin, because he rumbles deep in his chest.

I whimper softly. “You’re happy now, aren’t you?” I stroke his back, feeling powerful muscles below the skin quivering with nervousness. “I’m going to make sure it stays that way, big fellow.”

Moving as little as possible, I slide my hands between us and fumble my buttons open. I’m sure my blood’s all over this fake OCB uniform now, and I want more contact.

A sigh whispers through Zazu as our bodies finally touch skin-to-skin. I understand that relieved breath. Years and years of waiting resulted in this moment. It’s pure, sweet heaven.

My mate’s body knows what we’re doing, even if he doesn’t. The little shorts stretch so tight over his boner I could bounce a penny off them. “That must be uncomfortable,” I murmur as I rip the Velcro open down the sides. His cock springs free, a regular length but thick. Like, super thick. A moan falls from my trembling lips. Shit, that shaft’s already so girthy; how big will his knot get?

As I wrap my hand around Zazu's cock, a sudden vision of Callisto helping me through my heat with his fist burns behind my eyes. I'm about ready to come again just from the mental image. Guess I can handle size after all. My fingers barely touch as I circle the tip and I salivate, imagining how good that's going to feel inside.

"Do you trust me, Zazu?" I ask, nuzzling my chin into his jaw.

Zazu rumbles in response. I stroke his fat erection, and he shivers, purring straight into my shoulder. Seems he knows his name. However, the cartoon imagery doesn't suit him at all. No flighty, talkative bird exists in his big soul. Only a simmering thunderstorm waiting to break open.

I chuckle as I recall my broken scream when he first bit me. "How about Zack?" I murmur into his cheek. "It's much more manly, and still starts with a Z." Plus, he's getting a fresh start from today.

He thrusts his hips up, driving his cock through my fist.

Pleasure floods through our brand-new bond. "Oh," I murmur, stroking him again. "You like that."

He grunts and does it again. I whimper as the hard, veiny flesh pushes through my fingers. I need him inside me yesterday, and my pussy greedily agrees by slicking all over again.

"Zack, you gotta let me go to get my pants off." I stoke his jaw and pressure it a little, clenching down on the fireworks that dance through my skin with his every move.

Slowly, he eases his teeth out, and I gasp. He hovers over my shoulder, waiting to see if the bond sensation disappears. When it doesn't, his tongue darts out to caress the broken skin. I spasm all over, the area so sensitive now I can hardly bear it. My pussy

weeps instead of my eyes, and he sniffs the air.

“Yeah, that’s all for you, tiger,” I gasp out, brushing hair out of his eyes. The coarse brown strands stick upward, pricking at my skin. “Wanna see?”

When I try to ease back, he grips me tight and rests his teeth over the mark, growling a warning. A soppy cry slips through my throat as a fresh flush of heat explodes from the site. No one mentioned this in the omega handbook. Like, yeah, in themovies they giggle and say touching a bond mark feels good, but that nowhere near describes this lightning strike of pleasure.

I stroke his rough cheeks. “I’m not leaving, Zack. Just give me a little space.”

He rumbles in reply, and I chuckle. At least I don’t have to worry about rejection; this one’s never going to let me go. I wriggle in his grip until I can shimmy out of my pants and underwear. Then I roll a little to reach for the blanket. Every time my alpha thinks too much space opens between us, he growls and grabs me tight. There’s no better feeling in the world.

Finally I can spread the blanket out on the floor and get us both positioned so my skin’s not gripping on the rubber floor matting. Not to mention the dirt.

Satisfied, I reach for Zack. “All right, tiger, now you have free rein.”

As if he understands me, my alpha nuzzles in close, sniffing around my face before dragging his solid jaw across my cheek again. “Mine,” he mutters darkly.

Fuck, I love that sultry tone claiming me, and his scent is ridiculously delicious as well. I stroke his solid cheek, marveling over finding this precious man. “Yeah, yours,” I whisper as I grip his bare shoulders and wrap my legs around his waist.



He tenses up as my soaked pussy brushes his cock, and then he thrusts across my belly. He doesn't know how sex works, only that he needs in, immediately. And I concur.

I balance my weight on his back and guide his heated cock between my folds. Streetlight falling through the small window catches in his eyes as they widen in wonder, and then his hips snap forward.

I groan, so full it feels like I'll split. But an omega's body is designed for sex, and I stretch around him, the rivers of slick doing their good work. Zack's chest puffs out as he processes the unfamiliar sensation. Wild elation zaps through the bond, and then he braces his hands on the floor either side of me and thrusts deep. Over and over.

A guttural groan drops from my paralyzed lips as he consumes me, his alpha body knowing exactly how to take over. This wild man's claiming is so powerful, I slide into his straining arms with every stroke, my whole body fucked with a desperation no other being could possess—a desperation born of the need to be joined forever.

The malt scent in the truck deepens until the air I breathe feels damp with it.

“Zack!” I cry out, the inferno in my core consuming me.

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And then I feel them. Giant drops land on my cheeks and slide down my jaw. My alpha cries as he takes me.

“Oh, shit. Baby,” I breathe, stroking his tears away. I pop my finger to my mouth and suck on the salt. My voice breaks as I tell him, “You’re so fucking beautiful.”

Searing energy flares through me, lighting a wildfire in my core. I rise, straining toward my panting alpha and crying out as the peak hits me hard. Zack growls and gathers me in his arms, and then he bites down on the bond mark again.

A scream tears through my throat as a double orgasm explodes, blazing with solar intensity.

My alpha burns with me.

His thick cock pulses and the knot swells against my ass. Potent desire flares in our bond. The scale of his possessive need flooding straight into my heart overwhelms me, stealing my breath. Zack howls in victory as he releases inside me, cum running down my legs to soak the blanket. I drop my head back to catch my breath.

The alpha releases his bite, licks the wound, and then ghosts his mouth across my collarbone. There’s no way he can miss the scars dotting my skin since his sensitive lips catch on every ridge. Does he know what they mean? Not likely.

He lifts his head and hangs over me, barely panting. I track the movement as he runs his fingers down his torso until they catch on a scar over his hip.

My heart tears open all over again as I trace the mark under his fingers. “Yes, Zack, we’re the same. Damaged, but survivors.”

Hot, dark anger floods through the bond. Zack growls, head swinging back and forth as he searches for a threat. I squeeze my eyes shut, shooing tears away from my lashes. “We’re okay, Zack. No more scars for us.” I roll away to grab the water bottle, releasing his softening cock.

Zack snarls and grabs me from behind, flattening me onto my stomach. He lifts me with one hand under my pelvis and tries to wedge his cock back inside me. I laugh breathlessly. At least this is an improvement on teeth. He whimpers and thrusts recklessly into my thighs, cock hardening on command.

“Fuck,” I murmur as his powerful thrusts rock me across the blanket.

He contorts and drops his head to kiss my back. Every touch brims with feral adoration. My omega nature revels in her alpha’s care, and with a needy whimper, I lift my ass and present to him.

His fresh malt scent darkens, as if alcohol soaks through it. Zack lifts me by the hips and drives his cock in deep. I mewl in delight. He barks a gruff, commanding sound in reply that makes me shiver all over. He’s taking what he needs, and he’s not going to stop.

Who cares if we’re like dogs going at it? It’s just us here. We’re as wild as they come. The alcohol scent burns through my nose as Zack dominates my body, growling and shaking as he drags orgasm after orgasm from us both. The lone streetlamp keeps watch while my alpha binds us together over and over in a wild frenzy.

My alpha is in rut.

Somewhere near dawn, he works his giant knot across my trembling thighs and through my swollen pussy lips, lodging it inside with deep, determined thrusts. “Mine,” he pants right into my ear.

An instant orgasm wrings my core, and I scream and shatter in his arms, calling my alpha’s name. The walls of the truck blur and I flop limply across his shoulder.

When I stir, we’re still knotted together as daylight breaks through the truck window, accompanied by red and blue flashing lights, and the wail of sirens—the sound of those damn consequences catching up with us.

I hope my alphas come for me this time.

## Chapter two

### Callisto

Two full days have passed since Red vanished. I slide a mug into the coffee machine cradle and watch the trickle of black gold spill out. Exhaustion saps my bones and I move mechanically, bumping into the benches. We’ve barely slept, and the few hours we grabbed this morning were on the mattress dumped on the living room floor. The omega’s heat scent lingers in the apartment, the fading hints of honeyed nuts driving home the fact she’s gone.

Rickon stirs, his slender body jolting as reality sets in. “Any news?” he murmurs groggily, rising on his elbows.

“Nothing.”

He groans and flops back, his white-blond hair splaying on the pillow. A sting runs through my heart. If I’m this worried, how much worse must it be for her actual

alpha?

“The guys at the OCB will find her,” I say to reassure both of us. “If we don’t hear anything today, they’ll put out a missing person alert.”

Ricky nods and sighs. He rolls off the mattress and collects the trash from the floor we haven’t had time to deal with yet. As he bends, his bed hair flops in his eyes and my fingers itch to brush it back for him. We haven’t shared a bed in ages; takes me back to when we were teens. After all the distance between us in recent years, it feels companionable, like we’re inseparable best friends again.

But I can’t enjoy it with Red missing.

My phone vibrates, spinning on the marble bench, and I frown at the unfamiliar number as I snatch it up. “Callisto Wren speaking,” I answer.

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“Hello, Mr Wren. This is Sheriff Peter McCullis from the Etelis Police Station. We’re holding someone here who claims to be your client.”

My heart double beats in my chest. I snap my fingers at Ricky, and he comes running, skidding to the island bench on his white socks. “Name?” I ask huskily.

“Red Jones.”

My breath catches and I flash Rickon a thumbs-up. Thank God, she’s alive and at a police station. “Yes, she’s my client,” I say. “What charge is she being held on?”

The sheriff hums. “Well, it’s a little hard to explain really, but the official charges are impersonating an OCB agent and—” He hesitates, and I tense, waiting for the blow.

“And what?” I coax when the pause gets too long.

“Um. Stealing an inmate from a federal facility.”

“She stole . . . someone out of a prison?” I repeat numbly.

Rickon’s mouth forms a huge O. “What happened?” he hisses in a whisper.

Shaking my head, I walk a few steps so I can look at the message Red left on the wall. See a man about an alpha. I press my hand to my thumping chest. “An alpha?” I mutter to myself, forgetting the phone call. She left here to break an alpha out of prison?

“Yes,” the sheriff says, sounding worn out.

I shove one hand through my hair, a chill tickling down my arms. What the hell was Red thinking, waltzing into a prison, of all places? They could have torn her to pieces. From what I hear, she can’t even stomach the scent of alphas in closed spaces. I grip the phone tighter. I need to know Red’s okay.

“Put her on the phone,” I demand.

“Well—” McCullis clears his throat. “I’m afraid I can’t do that. She’s still in the company of the stolen alpha, and we couldn’t separate them.”

I turn to face Rickon, blinking at him while I process. My brain doesn’t want to compute the officer’s words. Separate? Surely he doesn’t mean what I think he means. But it wouldn’t be the first crazy thing Red’s done.

“What do you mean, you can’t separate them?” I ask cautiously.

The man clicks his tongue. “He’s still got his teeth in her for a mating bond. And a knot.” His voice cracks, and I can picture him sweating on the other end of the line.

The phone slides from my frozen fingers and clatters to the floor. Rickon leaps forward and scoops it up as ghostly tremors slide up and down my spine. Maybe I’m sweating too.

“Callisto? What is it?” Rickon begs as he passes me the phone.

I shake my head. A mating bond? Rickon’s contract with the Omega Center has a condition that doesn’t permit a bite. For twelve months. Did Red sidestep the legalities? But more importantly, who the fuck is this alpha? It can’t be good news if she found him in prison.

“She’s bonded to an alpha,” I whisper numbly. An alpha who isn’t us.

Rickon staggers back a step, catching himself on the breakfast bar. “She what?”

I slump onto the bar stool and switch the phone to speaker mode, clearing my voice. “Sorry about that, Sheriff. Can you confirm that despite being in your jail, Red has an alpha bonded to her?”

“Yes, sir, that’s what I’m saying. We can’t separate them.”

I rest my forehead on my hand, the skin hot to touch. I’m Red’s lawyer, so right now I need to act like one. “Okay. What’s the bail price?”

“Well, that’s the problem,” McCullis says. Noise scratches in the background and a door closes before the line quiets down. “Hers is a-hundred-thous, but the alpha is a ward of the state, so we don’t even have a precedent. I’ve got agents coming from Alpha Lodgings as we speak to sort this out.”

Well, that can't be good news. I slap my hand down on the bench. “Where did you say you’re calling from?”

“Etelis. A town in Darinian State, near the border.”

I jump to my feet and clap my hand on Ricky’s shoulder, pushing him toward the stairs. “Okay. Do not, for any reason, move Red or that alpha until I get there. She’s considered an at-risk omega by the Laversham Omega Center, so do not move them or separate them, no matter what the agents say. We’ll be there on the next available flight.”

An ache clamps around my chest. Red might not survive losing another alpha, so I have to do everything in my power to protect her decision. Fuck, I hope this was



allherdecision. Otherwise, if he's force-bonded her, I'll be the one sending this damn alpha back to prison.

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Rickon's already halfway up the stairs as I end the call. He pauses and looks back at me, a half smile tugging at his lips. "This is Red we're talking about. Nothing should surprise us."

I scoff and run up the stairs after him and push him onward. "Make sure you pack your alpha contract, as well as a bag for her. I'm guessing she didn't take much with her."

Upstairs, I grip the doorframe to my room, my brain running in a million directions. How the fuck did she manage a jailbreak on her own? "I'll pack a bag for this alpha with his teeth in her," I call down the hall. "If he's someone Red decided she needs, I bet he'll be coming back here. You okay with that?" I drag my suitcase down from the top shelf in my walk-in closet, head cocked to catch his answer.

It takes a while, but finally he calls back, "Yeah. Do we even have a choice at this point? I'm just pissed a stranger got to bond her first."

I grunt in agreement.

A moment later, Ricky appears in my doorway. "Um, Calli? About the bail money . . ."

My throat squeezes and I drop everything on my bed before crossing the room in a couple of strides. "You don't worry about that. I'll take care of it, Ricky."

He nods and drops his gaze. "I'll pay you back later, if you need the cash, or something goes wrong."

His vulnerability scrapes at me like a carpet burn. “No need. Let’s just get Red back in one piece, okay?” Ricky should know that money isn’t a problem in our family, and his anxiety makes me uneasy for reasons I can’t put a finger on.

Ricky draws a shuddering breath. “Okay, thanks.” He squeezes his hands into fists, tension running through his shoulders. “Bloody hell, I’m angry and relieved at the same time. A bond?” He hisses softly, and then nods and turns on his heel.

I shower and get dressed in a decent suit, and then throw clothes into my case. Yeah, I’ve got that same feeling shunting up through my throat to choke me. At least Rickon has the right to be angry, unlike me. But Red needs us now, and that’s all that matters. She can pick any alpha she wants, especially since I—

Yeah, I fucked up.

I snap the case shut and zip it up, remembering to call my driving service for a car before I head into the office to grab my laptop. I have tons of work to catch up on with dozens of cases to prepare for, so I’ll have to do as much as possible on the flight. Including preparing a defense for Red’s OCB impersonation and alpha theft. No matter how much I wrack my brain, I can’t think of a single precedent for an omega physically breaking an alpha out of prison.

Rickon waits for me in the kitchen, stuffing snacks into his backpack. I glance around the house. “Is the bird going to be all right for a couple of days?”

“Oh, shit,” Ricky wails.

I roll his case to the front door while he refills seed and water dishes, listening as the parrot calls him a bastard.

“I can ask Mom or Lector to swing by if we get held up,” I offer as the tiny metal

doors rattle on the birdcage.

Rickon joins me by the front entrance, dusting seeds off his hands. “Fingers crossed we’re back in a day or two.”

“Yeah.” We need our omega back home where she belongs—in our home. I huff out an agitated breath and drag the cases out the door.

The idea festers on the drive to the airport. My apartment has become a home since Red and Rickon moved in. I steal glances at my best friend, taking in his pursed lips and the way his fingers tap against the car arm rest. I screwed up with Red, yes, but she still let me help her through her heat. Maybe if I prove myself, she’ll let me into this fold she’s building.

I mean, she went all the way to Darinian State and broke a man out of prison. If I prove my worth and beg hard enough, will she take me back? Maybe if I make myself useful, she won’t have a choice.

I type out a message to my paralegal to track down any precedent cases of an omega breaking her alpha out of prison. Winning a bail plea has never been so personal.

Which gives me an idea. I dial up my contact at the OCB, Assistant Special Agent in Charge Leroy Hanamack. “Leroy, Callisto Wren here,” I say, relieved he answered. Thankfully, he remembers me. “I need a favor,” I tell him. “You know how we’re missing testimony for the omega cases? The lead witness, Red Jones, turns out to be—”

Shit, I almost admitted she’s my scent match, which is true, but raises more questions than answers. “Well, she’s my friend’s scent match, and she got herself in some trouble. Can you give me some advice on OCB protocols?”

“Sure, what’s the problem?”

I slump down in the seat. “Apparently she got caught breaking an alpha out of prison.”

He coughs down the line. “Seriously? Damn, you’re going to need some help with this one. Where are you now?”

We take an exit ramp, the airport control towers framing the skyline. “About to get on a plane.”

He grunts and papers rustle in the background. “Give me an hour and I’ll come along.”

Leroy sends me his details and I have the tickets booked before we even arrive at the terminal. Something tells me we’ll need all the help we can get this time.

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Four hours later, we fly into a poky little town with two main streets, some decently big truck stops, and a claim to fame as the birthplace of a well-known astronaut. And, of course, the current residence of our runaway omega.

Patrol cars swarm the carpark, the Alpha Lodgings branding on the sides making my heart palpitate as we enter through the station's sliding doors. A chill settles on my skin as we shut out the spring warmth. Inside, the building buzzes with excitement, far too many law enforcement agents crammed into one space. This is a big deal for them.

Leroy scans the area and whistles. "Looks like the entire force came out on parade."

"Or for the circus," Rickon adds darkly.

Behind the counter, a middle-aged beta argues with a burly alpha in an Alpha Lodgings uniform. "He said not to separate them," the officer says, tone wheedling.

"Sheriff McCullis?" I call, catching their attention.

The middle-aged officer with a receding hairline brightens. "Oh, thank God. Attorney Wren?"

"Yes. Just Callisto is fine." I tug Rickon forward. "This is Rickon Jones, the omega's official alpha, and Assistant Special Agent in Charge Leroy Hanamack from the Laversham OCB. We'd like to see Red Jones immediately."

The constable swallows hard and glances at the tall, frowning man beside him.

“Right, well, we seem to be in a bit of conflict about that with Officer McKenna here.”

Leroy steps forward and looks the Alpha Lodgings guy over with subtle posturing. “What seems to be the problem?”

The officer straightens his uniform. “The alpha involved is a special case at the Lodgings. He’s dangerous and not suitable for public interactions. We’ve just had a manhunt across the state for him, so I won’t allow any actions that might aid his escape.”

“I haven’t seen news about a manhunt,” Leroy says, resting one fist on his hip.

McKenna’s gaze flits across all of us and then away. “It wasn’t a nationalized manhunt.”

A strange emotion twists in my belly. He’s hiding something, but whatever’s going on, we’re wasting time. Using my court voice, I tell him, “I don’t give a flying fig who else is in the building, but I need to see my client. Now.”

Leroy nods. “The omega involved is a key witness in an important criminal case. It’s essential that these men see her.” His gaze narrows on the lanky man from Alpha Lodgings. “Agent, do you have an injunction?”

His jaw works a few times. “No, but—”

“Great,” Leroy says, turning away. “Guide us in, Sheriff.”

I’m so glad I asked Leroy to come, because if I was on my own, I think the Lodgings officer would find every reason under the sun to keep us away from Red, but he wilts in the face of an OCB assistant branch director.

With a few nervous glances, the sheriff guides us into the back, where the cells are. “They’re both still in, ah, coitus, so best if her official alpha goes first.”

Rickon slips ahead to take the lead, his hands bunching and unbunching. Poor guy must be beside himself. I know I am.

On the other side of the bars, Red sits on a naked alpha’s lap, her flushed cheek resting on his shoulder. Her hair’s as wild as she is, and all she wears is a blanket draped around her shoulders. Between the bunched wool and her flyaway locks, I spot traces of blood on her shoulder. The fucker still has his teeth buried in her. He has his back to us, revealing a solid build, powerful shoulders, and coarse brown hair. He locks his arms around her body, one of his limbs bound in a grimy plaster cast.

Red tenses as we come into view.

“Hello, Biscuit,” Rickon says, grasping the bars. “You sure had us worried.”

She blinks up at him, and the reflected fluorescent lights glimmer as tears sheen in her eyes. “Hi.”

Glancing around, I’m shocked to discover people in the other holding cells, some with clear views into Red’s space. “You couldn’t give them somewhere private?” I snap, swinging to face the sheriff.

He shrugs, a flush spreading up his pudgy neck. “We don’t have anywhere else, and we found them in the back of a transport truck, so we couldn’t leave them there.”

“Technically, you could have,” I mutter. At least then they’d have some privacy. I scrub one hand over my face, and then move to stand at the bars next to Rickon, blocking the line of sight. “Hey, gorgeous,” I call.



Red smiles wearily. “My alphas came for me.”

Adrenaline shoots through my body. Is she acknowledging my place at her side? “We sure did, Red,” I reply, fighting emotion. “And we’re going to get you out of here.”

She tightens her grip around her new alpha, dropping one side of the blanket. I look away from the lovely brown curves of her body, memories from helping her through the heat riding me hard.

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Rickon leans into the bars. “Want to introduce us to our new family member?”

A soft, heartbreaking gurgle slips through her lips. “You’re really going to accept him?”

Ricky smiles. “Yes, baby. I told you I’m all in, no matter what.”

I’m glad Rickon answers because I’m not sure I could reply with the same conviction, not when I know the guy’s come from Alpha Lodgings and the officer behind us claims he’s dangerous. Not only did the omega take over my house, make a mess of both the nest and the library, but now she’s bringing a criminal alphainto our group. I smile wryly. What the fuck happened to my nice, orderly life?

Red scrubs at her unshed tears. “Guys, meet Zack. He’s been a fighting alpha in an underground kennel all his life, and he’s my scent match.” She shudders and squeezes her eyes closed, hands digging into the alpha’s bare back. Her voice cracks as she says, “But he was going to be euthanized yesterday.”

Rickon’s grip slips, jerking him forward. I steady him with one hand while I whip around to glare at the Alpha Lodgings officer. He turns, refusing to meet my eye.

“He’s completely feral,” Red adds. “But he loves me.” She strokes his skin, and he releases the bite long enough to lick her shoulder, drawing a heated moan from her that has every alpha in the room stiffening.

I want to know what it feels like to lick her bare skin. Does she taste as good as she smells? Involuntarily I lean into the bars and swallow hard. “We can bail you out, but

they're making a fuss about releasing him."

Red hugs her arms around Zack's neck tight enough to strangle him, but he doesn't seem to mind. He rolls his hips lazily, reminding me they're joined in more than one place, and whispers something against her cheek.

Can he talk?

"I'm not letting him go." Her voice breaks and fresh tears spill down her cheeks. "They'll kill him, Callisto. I can't lose him."

I gather myself for a moment before turning back to the agents. "What do we know about Zack?"

The Alpha Lodgings' hardass scoffs. "His name's Zazu, and the psychologists have deemed him beyond rehabilitation. The only reason he hasn't torn this woman to pieces yet is because she's got a pussy."

A crimson film washes over my vision. When I blink to clear it, I've got his collar in my fist and his feet are almost off the floor. "Talk about her pussy again, I dare you," I growl, shivering with the desire to mangle him.

"Easy." Leroy steps in and rests his hand over my bunched fist. "Let's take it down a notch."

I release my grip with a hiss and step back. Last thing I need is assault charges, but the rage just came out of nowhere. "Sorry," I say, halfheartedly. "But the lady in there deserves your respect."

Leroy arches his brows at McKenna, and the agent reluctantly apologizes.

“You’re wrong,” Red says softly into the awkward silence. “About Zack. He’s learning. He just needed his omega.” She winds her fingers into Zack’s hair and tilts his head to whisper in his ear.

The surly alpha growls and licks at her bond mark, sending a look of pure pleasure suffusing across her face. “Mine,” Zack grates out.

That word drops like a sledgehammer in the quiet room. The Alpha Lodgings agent flinches. The escaped prisoner doesn’t look at us, yet his words are clearly directed our way. His alpha presence spreads thickly through the cells.

“I’ll take care of him,” Red announces into the stunned silence. She hiccups as her new alpha licks her bond mark again. “If, if you’re okay with it, Rickon?” she adds, after she gets herself under control.

A pang squeezes my heart. I don’t get a say, because I’m a professional onlooker. I guess not even helping Red with her heat can heal the scar I slashed through her heart.

“Of course, Biscuit,” Rickon responds quickly. “We’ll get it sorted out.” He glances at me for confirmation, and I nod. I’d never refuse Red anything.

My brain races in a million directions. I’ve heard of the rehabilitation program for alphas since it’s part of the judicial system, but even if we can wrangle his release, that’s one hell of a dangerous man sitting in the cell with her.

Everything about him shouts a warning, from his strong alpha scent to the way he’s ignored us. All he cares about is his omega, and we pose zero threat in his books. That speaks volumes about his strength.

As if hearing my thoughts, Zack licks Red again and slides a slow, calculated look in

our direction, taking in the group of alphas and betas clustered outside the bars. I freeze as he deliberately thrusts up into the omega, claiming her in front of the others in the room. It's so primal, my cock stirs. What would happen if I slid in at her back?

I swallow down a groan. I'm the worst damn lawyer in existence, thinking about my client this way.

As if sensing my indiscreet desires, Zack braces Red's body and tips her backward. The blanket drops underneath her body on the bed and her delicate moans fall with it as the alpha flicks his hips to dominate her. If he's got room to thrust inside, his knot's most likely going down. It might be the moment to separate them, but the idea fills me with unease. As much as I don't like it, I can sense she needs him.

Ricky's grip on the bars tightens, making me think he's going weak in the knees too. If I'm feeling so sensitive about Red being with an alpha, this must be torture for him.

I clasp his shoulder, hoping to pass him the strength to endure. "Let's give them some privacy." I push at the others to herd them away. "As much as can be had in a cell, anyway," I mutter darkly.

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The Alpha Lodgings guy throws his arms out to stop us from moving. “No. Now that her real alpha is here, we need to separate them.”

“Are you insane?” I hiss, pressuring his arm. “In what universe do you interrupt a pack bonding, for any reason other than the omega’s safety?”

He glares at me. “Exactly. That man’s a dangerous criminal. He could kill her any moment. He’s killed before.”

A thick sensation bubbles up through my chest, but instead of fear, it’s fiery anger. Why is this man so persistent? I glance back at the lovers. “She looks safe and happy to me.”

Red moans in delight and calls Zack’s name as he leisurely fucks her on the narrow cot. I shoot my brows at Leroy, and he nods.

“Callisto’s correct. The omega’s been with him for nearly a day, right? So she’s in no immediate danger, especially if we all keep our distance. But if we approach, we’d be the ones risking her safety.” He glances over at the naked duo and shakes his head. “Rickon will remain to supervise for now, and we can call the Omega Center if we need a second professional opinion. Let’s take this discussion elsewhere.”

As I turn away, I catch the expression on the Lodgings officer’s face. It’s rage, pure and simple. He’s embarrassed to be outranked by the OCB agent.

I clench my fists. Are their fucking egos more important than a man’s life? Well, it doesn’t matter. Red wants Zack, and my omega’s going to get whatever she wants.

I swear it.

## Chapter three

### Callisto

Once we're back in the station's main office, I spin around to face Leroy, my brain racing with all the possibilities. To get this Zack guy released, someone needs to take responsibility for him. "What's required for alpha rehabilitation?" I ask. Leroy mentioned the guardianship arrangement on our flight over but was light on details.

He purses his lips, eyes narrowing as he thinks it through. "The alpha rehabilitation program is available to aggressive criminal alphas. A suitable alpha needs to become certified as a rehab coach, which is an extension of the physical restraining course all our agents undertake as part of their training."

Leroy pauses, and his brow wrinkles as he scans me up and down. "It's usually available to OCB agents and ex-military—people who already have a foundation in suppression skills." That's his gentle way of saying not lawyers in suits or delicate-looking alphas in corsets. But his warning doesn't faze me.

I splay my hand across my chest. "I did judo when I was younger. How do I sign up?"

"Wait a minute," McKenna sputters, tension coiling in his shoulders. "This alpha is a ward of the state. Only a judge can release him into anyone else's guardianship."

"And how's all that care going for him?" I mutter rebelliously under my breath. Obviously not well if he was on the prison's euthanasia list.

The guard hears me and his eyes flash with malice. At this point, I'm determined to

take Zack home out of pure spite. The guard's attitude reminds me of how the Omega Center tried to hold on to Red, but with none of their genuine concern for their charge.

"Back to the question you asked," Leroy says, overlooking the verbal tussle and returning to the topic. "Sorry, but a rehab coach needs to be someone in the same house."

"Not a problem," I shoot back. "Since they're both currently living with me."

Leroy and the jackass stiffen. "What? Why?" asks the prison guard.

I ignore him and wait for Leroy to finish processing.

The senior agent hums in the back of his throat as he taps his chin. "Oh. Because of the warrant on Rickon's ex-partner?"

"That's right." I nod. "It wasn't a safe environment to bring an omega into, so they're staying with me until they find a new place."

Leroy strokes his goatee and hums in the back of his throat. "I see. I didn't realize you were all so close. But if they're going to be moving out, then Rickon should be the one—"

My pulse leaps. Here's my chance to wind myself so tightly into the pack, Red will have to let me stay. "I think I'm the best-suited person in the picture for handling aggressive alphas." Plus, I can't picture Rickon manhandling a crazed man like Zack. I shudder at the memory of dark bruising ringing my friend's throat.

Leroy shrugs and sighs. "Okay, I can sign you up for the next course, but unfortunately, he won't be able to live with you until there's a certified person in the



household. You'll also need approved restraining facilities in your home, which means renovating."

My heart pounds against my rib cage. He really said yes. I'm sure Judge Harmon would sign off on the guardianship transfer, or if it needs to be a judge based in Darinian, Leroy must have contacts through the OCB.

A thrill of excitement runs through me as I say, "I'll do whatever's necessary. Just tell me what's required." I mean, we already cut the bottom quarter of a door off, so what's a few more modifications?

"Stop. I can't allow this," the Alpha Lodgings bastard cuts in, glaring daggers at me. He raises both hands in refusal and then he postures up, determination heightening his metallic scent. "Zazu belongs to the Darinian Alpha Lodgings. He isn't going anywhere."

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I've had enough. I step in front of him, squaring my shoulders. "Look, pal, I get that an omega's heist embarrasses your entire enterprise witless, but do you really think your ego is worth more than a man's life?"

This riles up the guard, and a faint snarl emanates through his clenched teeth. "Man? He's not fit for rehabilitation. Our psychologists already assessed—"

I sneer. "Why would I give a rat's ass about what your Lodgings psychologists say? Because they haven't been able to get that man to say a single word, have they?" I fling my hand out toward the closed door. "Meanwhile, my client's been with him less than twenty-four hours and he's talking."

My alpha scent swirls heavily through the air as I take a deep breath, working hard to keep my temper in check. Still, I can't resist a few last digs. "So shelve your petty little temper, and start thinking with your forebrain. Let's solve this instead of running backward, shall we? A man's life is at stake." I lift my brows as a thought strikes me. "You were planning to take him out of commission, so just let us have him without all the fuss. Won't change your bottom line."

Words will serve me better than fists today, even though I feel like punching the jumped-up prison guard until he's black and blue. That's been my policy for most of my life. Well, except when it came to Rickon getting bullied and called a megain high school. Then I used everything in my arsenal. I clamp my lips around the smirk threatening to break loose.

Without giving him a chance to reply, I swing back to Leroy and lift my brows.

Leroy rubs a hand across his mouth, and I get the suspicion he's hiding a smile. "Well said. I know a judge in Darinian who I'm sure will look into the matter, but we'll need to transfer the alpha, Zack, was it? He'll move to the Laversham Alpha Lodgings, for now."

The other agent crosses his arms, simmering with barely contained fury but I have bigger issues to worry about. This feral alpha won't even release Red, and she seemed just as agitated about losing him.

I lick my parched mouth, scrambling for a solution. Any way to keep them together. "How about you assign a qualified OCB agent to our household in the meantime?" I suggest to Leroy. "Red Jones is at the center of our cases coming out of the trafficking ring. She needs to have the full support of her alphas if she's testifying."

I feel like a shitty bastard for leaning into something Red clearly doesn't want to do. I've already pressured her enough, but even if she never testifies, this arrangement will help her heal. Get the alpha she wants into her home. I hope.

The guard goes red in the face. "What? That's clearly overstepping! Even if she's involved in a case, she's now a criminal herself, so—"

I shove my hand in front of his face. "Alleged criminal," I correct sternly.

He sputters and waves toward the doorway. "She's in there, cuddling an escaped alpha. That's clearly aiding and abetting!"

"Alleged aiding and abetting," I repeat. "She hasn't been formally charged, let alone convicted in a court of law. And no one's investigated the extenuating factors and accomplices yet." I glare at him, letting my alpha dominance slip. "You do believe in the law, don't you, McKenna?"

The man vibrates like he's about to explode.

Leroy drops his hand on the guard's shoulder. "The lawyer has a good point. Nothing's been proven, and she has bail available."

"This is abuse of power," he yells, hands balling into fists.

Leroy tightens his grip on the man's shoulder. "Come again? You want to be very careful about your choice of words, officer McKenna. This is me following due process to protect at-risk individuals. If you prefer, perhaps I really will abuse my power to get you reassigned to federal interests in the Southern Isles."

The prison guard's eyes widen and I'm sure the same shudder running down my spine crawls through his body. The Isles are a mess with war going on—peacekeeping efforts send in lots of supplies and men, but mostly only body bags come out.

"I overstepped," the guy confirms, hanging his head.

"Mm-hmm." Leroy releases his grip. "The Laversham OCB will take over this case as of now. The Darinian Alpha Lodgings can address requests to me, Leroy Hanamack, at our head office."

The harangued guy grits his teeth but nods reluctantly. "Fine. I'll get started with the paperwork to release three persons of interest into your jurisdiction."

"Three?" I ask.

He sighs. "We also arrested the man who drove the truck."

I press fingers to my lips to hide a grin. Can't wait to hear the story about how Red

roped him into this fiasco. “I’d better see if he needs a lawyer,” I say, sucking on my cheeks to keep from laughing as the officer throws me a look dirty enough to soil a man’s soul. Except he can’t touch mine. Everyone knows lawyers have black souls.

Leroy shakes his head. “Head back in if you need to,” he tells me. “It’ll take some time to get the judge to sign the transfer and arrange an escort to Laversham. We’ll have to go by road—can’t risk an incident with an insane alpha on a plane.”

My hair stands on end at the idea of an alpha going on a rampage in a tin can midair. Most of us are strong to begin with, but one feral trained to fight to the death, well, that would be tantamount to suicide.

“Agreed.” I nod and rest one hand in my pocket. “We’ll leave the arrangements to you, then.”

The OCB supervisor scratches his head. “Ah, I’d better also ring the big boss for authorization on your request for bodyguards. This will cost a pretty penny.”

“I can pay to hire your agents,” I tell him. We have enough obstacles without money being a problem.

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“That will help.” Leroy clicks his tongue several times. “What a day. I need more coffee for this.”

We share an amused look. Then Leroy gets his phone and walks out through the front doors.

As I head back down the corridor, I check the distance by road from here to Laversham and also shoot off an update to Hale. I’ll need to work all night to review case files my two assistantlawyers put together for the trafficking saga. And now I need to add rehabilitation courses and urgent home renovations to my schedule.

A door slams somewhere in the police station behind me, and I flinch.

“You’re making a mistake,” the butt-hurt officer calls after me. “He’s not some pet you can play with. The man’s a killer, through and through. And don’t delude yourself into thinking he’ll share an omega. Someone’s going to get hurt, and my bet’s on the delicate little alpha in there.”

“Thanks for the advice.” I wave at him, letting the fingers around the middle one fall a little, as if by accident. Yeah, I’m not at my most professional today, but he really shouldn’t have referred to Red’s vagina. Or Rickon’s alphaness, for that matter.

Despite my flippant reply, the warning strikes a chord deep within. Red’s a sassy one, but she’s still vulnerable. And while Rickon’s an alpha, he has a slighter body frame than most, and that always makes a difference in a struggle. I protected him through high school, but what about going toe-to-toe with an underworld fighter?

I walk back to the cells and study Rickon as he leans on the bars, talking to Red. Her soft replies come through broken pants as Zack thrusts into her, and a question strikes me. How did Red find him? Out of the dozens of prisons in the country, she flew to Darinian and planned a way to impersonate the OCB and break this one alpha out of prison. And Zack, a man lacking the faculties to say more than a single word, initiated a bond right away.

Is this the power of scent matching? For that matter, the odds of Red bumping into me on the street outside the courthouse have to be one in a million. I press one hand to my chest, my heartbeat thumping under my ribs. I dismissed the reality of asoul bond because science can't prove it, and yet some kind of evidence is sitting before my eyes right now.

Everything in my gut tells me it's a terrible idea to bring a dangerous alpha into my home, let alone leave him with Red and Rickon. But seeing how happy she is means more than all the warning bells going off in my head. Something about their union feels . . . right. I don't know what it is, but a voice deep inside me says to trust this wild omega's judgment.

The naked alpha sucks on her shoulder and Red cries out, writhing into him. His head turns ever so slightly until he can watch me from the corner of his eye. Wary.

Clearly, Zack has accepted Red as his own, but the same won't automatically apply to the other alphas in her life. Myself included. Plus, we still don't know if we can separate him from Red at all. How's she going to be an actress if a feral alpha won't let go of her?

He might be a part of our lives now, but he's clearly going to bring disaster.

Chapter four

Red

It's been two days since I met Zack, and he still shows no sign of releasing me. I slept on his chest, showered in his arms, used the toilet with him clinging to me, and ate while hanging over his shoulder.

Callisto worked pure magic to get us released, transferring Zack's wardship to a joint custody with the OCB, and paying bails for me and Lionel. After that, they backed the Wired Logistics truck right up to the front door and ushered me and my new mate into the back.

Since then, we've been driving for who knows how long and Zack still insists on burying his cock, and if possible, his knot inside me. I've no idea if he's slept, because every time I wake, he's looking at me and panting "Mine," with half-shuttered eyes.

That one word melts my heart a little more each time. As does the knowledge that both Rickon and Callisto came for me when I was in trouble.

I'm so exhausted I couldn't walk even if my life depended on it. Frankly, I can't even feel my legs because my pussy's so swollen. Everything's gone numb, and I desperately want a bed with a real mattress. And carbs. Hell, I could kill for grilled tomato sandwiches or Rickon's cheese and spinach pasta bake right now.

Zack's relatively compliant so long as he gets to carry me, which is good news. While showering in the station's staff bathroom and then loading into the back of Lionel's truck, I used little tugs on his shoulders to get him to walk while the others kept their distance. So long as no other alphas approach, he keeps his growling to a faint, simmering warning.

After endless hours of traveling clutched in Zack's lap, the small windows in the



truck finally show Laversham's familiar skyline. "We're almost home," I whisper into my alpha's neck.

He purrs and licks my bond mark. "Mine," he rasps again, voice cracking. He's as exhausted as I am.

I doze as shadows flicker over us while we navigate the city. The truck jerks to a stop, then bounces as people get out of the cab and I twitch alert as someone knocks on the metal.

Rickon calls out, "We're coming in now, Red."

My heartbeat races. We'll have to navigate the parking lot, the foyer, and two elevators to reach the apartment. "Be good, all right?" I beg, stroking Zack's neck with what little strength I have left. "They won't hurt us; they just want to help us get inside."

The back door swings open cautiously, and I wave weakly as Rickon peeks in. "We're in the parking garage, Biscuit," he says with a smile. "The OCB are here to help move him inside."

"Okay," I whisper, saving my strength.

Two agents in their dark blue uniforms hop up into the back. Zack tightens his grip on me and growls warningly, the hard cast on his arm digging into my hip.

"Let him carry me in," I say, massaging my fingers into his bunching shoulder muscles.

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One agent presses his lips together while the other answers. “We’ll try, ma’am, but if he gets violent, we need to move you out of harm’s way.”

“Then let me try to move him first,” I shoot back, my gut—and bond connection—telling me things won’t go well if I get forcefully pulled from this wild alpha’s arms. Zack’s already on high alert with two alphas closer than anyone’s been in days.

“Come, wild boy,” I croon, pushing up off the floor.

His arms trap me in an awkward half-risen position, but I tap on his back gently and he slowly rises. I keep my arms linked around his neck and take a step back. Instantly he follows, snarling at the other two men as he holds my waist. Fuck, he’s wild. This feral alpha reminds me of the Red who takes over during my heats, all unrestrained animal energy. It’s shockingly beautiful.

I lift my aching hands to his cheeks, turning his face back to me. “Don’t look at them, Zack. Look at me.”

He drops his eyes to my lips, the truck’s shadows darkening his blue irises, the color a much brighter hue than the first day we met. I take another step back, tugging on his neck. His gaze darts up, tracking the threats in the narrow space.

Quickly, I rise on my tiptoes and press my lips to his, silently begging him to behave. Maybe this desire of mine will translate through the bond to him as much as his silent aggression streams into me.

Zack's breath huffs through his nose as he leans into my kiss, and I step away again, my jelly legs trembling with effort. The rumbling alpha follows me step by step as I back up to the truck's entrance. The real challenge is navigating the four-foot drop to the ground. I break the kiss long enough to look down.

The agents sealed the garage, all the entrances locked with mesh grilles. The truck's backed up as close to the elevator as a vehicle can get, and half a dozen more OCB agents line the pathway. Makes me feel like we're in the final hundred yards of a VIP marathon. My body sure feels like I've run one.

Rickon waits quietly, eyes on me, his calm demeanor willing me onward until we reach the edge. I sink down, tugging on Zack. He remains stiff, alternating between glaring at the agents inside and the ones out in the parking lot.

"Please hop out," I whisper to the wary men. "He doesn't want to expose his back to you." How do I know? Because I feel the same way about small rooms. Plus, his boiling unease has a zip line straight to my heart now.

The agents exchange a concerned glance, then slide past us, and jump out. Zack tracks them, quivering with tension.

"It's okay, alpha," I murmur. "Time for us to get down too." I slide my legs over the edge.

"You okay?" Rickon asks quietly as I hesitate.

"Yeah," I murmur. "Just not sure my legs will hold me if I drop."

My beautiful alpha walks forward fearlessly, offering his hand. "I'll catch you," he says.

“We advise against getting so close, Mr Jones,” one agent warns grimly.

My chest thrums with warmth as Rickon ignores them, and Zack leans forward over my shoulder, for once not growling. Maybe the love in my heart translates through the bond too.

Rickon steps right up between my knees. Just in case, I wrap my arm around Zack’s neck in a kind of headlock, and then reach out to ruffle my alpha’s platinum hair. “Look, Zack. He’s mine.”

Zack stiffens. “Mine?”

I pat my chest. “Mine, and mine,” I say, moving my hand to cup Rickon’s face. A sob catches in my throat. This is the closest I’ve been to my first alpha since my heat, and I missed him.

“Hey, Biscuit. You’re gonna be okay,” Rickon croons. His buttery scent washes over me. “I’m here for you.”

Zack growls and sinks down on his haunches to wind an arm around my ribs.

“Nuh-uh. None of that.” I press my hand over his mouth but fumble a little, bumping his teeth. “He’s mine too.”

Confusion and interest spill through the bond in equal measure as Zack studies my slender alpha. I slowly tilt forward, and Rickon rises on his toes to meet me for an ultra-sweet kiss. He’s brave, I’ll give him that, because his head’s only a foot or two away from the crazed alpha clinging to my back.

Zack inhales deeply, sampling Rickon’s scent, and the chaotic emotion in our bond settles somewhat.

I stroke Rickon's jaw, his vanilla scent also putting me at ease. "It's a bit late to ask, but are you sure you want me back?"

Rickon softens. "Always, every time, forever. Where else am I gonna be but with you?"

Damn, he has a way with words. I tip my head toward my shoulder, smiling. "I have a little baggage, but this is the last big surprise, I promise."

He grins. "I dunno, I'm kinda liking these surprises. Feels like Christmas every day with you."

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I chuckle. “Well, let’s see if we can get this particular gift inside.” I thrust my body forward, falling more than jumping.

Rickon catches me, and Zack scrambles to leap out of the truck, his feet thumping on the concrete. His arms come around me as he roars. I spin in his grip, pressing myself into his chest as the surrounding alphas all tense up.

“Shh, precious,” I say, tugging his head down so he looks at me. Rickon covers me with a jacket and then stays close at my back with one hand on my shoulder. When Zack looks at it and his lips peel back, I chide him again. “Nuh-uh. You’re going to have to get used to him.”

To distract Zack, I step sideways, tugging him with me. I want to walk him all the way into our apartment, but my aching legs give way. The wildling alpha catches me and hauls me up onto his chest, where I dangle weakly, all out of fucks to give.

“Come on,” Rickon says, pressing his hand against my back, gently shoving Zack along the path. Step by slow step, we make our way to the elevator.

As we turn, Lionel comes into view, waiting at a safe distance near the truck cab. I lift my hand in a wave, and mouth thank you. I wonder if he realizes he saved a man’s life, even if the truck driver didn’t know what we were doing at the prison.

Lionel dips his head in acknowledgment, a wry smile plucking at his mouth.

A big concrete pillar blocks him from view and Rickon murmurs, “Almost there.”

I glance over at the closed metal box and wonder if we're going to make it through. A feral alpha loaded into an elevator? Sounds like the start of a horror story.

Callisto waits with two men near the doorway. "Hey, Red," he murmurs.

Zack snarls again, and I stroke the back of his neck. "Shh. He's a friend."

Callisto tenses but then waves at the two agents in uniform beside him. "This is Agent Josef and Agent Pierce. They'll be staying with us until I get my rehab license."

I flop my head across Zack's shoulder so I can see them better. Both alphas, and both powerfully built males. Josef's a hand span taller, clean shaven, and serious, while Pierce smiles warmly under his blond mustache despite this dicey situation.

"Thanks for being here," I murmur. "I'd offer you my hand to shake, but it's currently attached to a psycho alpha."

Pierce grins, confirming at least one of them has a sense of humor. "Yeah, that might be a problem," he says. "How about we just focus on getting you both upstairs and out of the cold?"

Now that he mentions it, the basement garage is chilly, probably because I'm only wearing an open jacket and nothing else. Thank God Rickon thought to bring it, because Zack tore my clothing off along the way.

I glance down. Zack's walking on concrete with bare feet, stumbling a little, as he carries me. His eyes are bloodshot from lack of sleep, and a faint tremor runs through his hands. We both need a good rest somewhere safe. I hope he can feel at ease in Callisto's apartment.

A banging noise rings out behind us, and someone yells angrily, “Hey, why’s the garage locked up?” A man beyond the far end of the lot slams his hands impatiently against the closed mesh at the entrance.

Everyone jolts, but Zack most of all. He snarls and whirls around, his grip loosening enough for me to slide down his body. Our contact breaks. Oh, shit.

“Zack!” I shout as his desire to destroy the threat pushes up through my throat, so powerful it makes my head spin. I grab for my bristling alpha, but the zero-patience idiot outside bangs on the gate again, clearly not seeing the blue OCB agents swarming the underground area.

Zack vanishes, moving so fast my tired eyes can’t track him. For a split second, I stand on my own feet, then fall as my knees give way. Rickon gasps and catches me under the arms, balancing me awkwardly until Pierce leaps forward to help.

Across the garage, Zack throws himself at the metal grille, snarling like an angry tiger or an underworld demon. The metal dents. OCB agents swarm toward him, shouting in alarm.

“Shit. He’s gonna kill someone,” Rickon grates out, a quiver running through his arms. I can’t disagree because a dark, murderous urge lodges in my chest.

“Get me in the elevator,” I gasp, pressing my hand to my breast. There’s only one thing now that might get my mate’s attention.

With Rickon and the big OCB agent supporting my arms, I stumble into the mirrored box. Leaning on the handrail, I shoo both men away. “Get out, or he’ll hurt you.”

Rickon’s grip tightens on me, refusing to let go, and I don’t bother arguing with him. I protected him once already; I can do it again. He holds his finger on the button to



keep the doors open.

“Zack!” I scream, the sound shredding my parched throat. “Zack, come!” Fear floods me as I think of what might happen if my alpha harms someone. If those agents reach him, something bad will happen, I know it. I might not be able to save Zack a second time.

My wild alpha spins and a tremor jolts his body. As fast as he went, he runs toward me, dodging OCB agents left and right. My heart hammers in my chest. Zack snarls as he skids to a halt in the doorway and scans the tiny box we stand in, but his hesitation only lasts a moment. He dives inside, reaching for me. Rickon hits the button to close the doors, locking us in with my murderous alpha.

The elevator quivers, and Zack roars and lunges for Rickon.

Dredging up the last of my strength, I throw myself between them, arms wide. “Stop! He’s mine!” I yell, my voice cracking.

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*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

Zack pauses, wheezing from the run. He stiffens, and glances up and down as he registers the sliding sensation of the moving elevator. I use that distraction to cling to his chest, and he instantly tugs me close.

The alpha rumbles with fury, the vibration translating through our bare skin contact. “Mine,” he mutters darkly, heaving for breath.

“Yes, Zack. Mine.” I swivel as much as his tight grip allows and reach for Rickon. “And mine.”

Something like a spark runs through the bond, and Zack draws himself up taller. “Mine?”

A tear slips down my cheek, which goes to show how utterly exhausted I am, because I fucking hate crying. “Yes, Zack. This is Rickon. He’s mine.”

Rickon takes my hand, and I pull him closer, until I can rest his fingers on Zack’s chest beside mine. My bonded mate shivers at the touch. Slowly he cranes his head past me toward Rickon’s neck. I reach up to cover Zack’s mouth, just in case, but he only inhales deeply.

Fear chars Rickon’s vanilla scent, but it’s quickly replaced by a sweet and buttery blossoming of his alpha musk.

Zack’s hand shoots out, grabbing Rickon and squashing him into my side. Zack’s blue eyes fill with confusion as he looks down at the two of us, more than can fill his hands since he’s also carrying me. The murderous intent in the bond dies away.

“Thank you, Zack,” I whisper, stroking his jaw.

The wild alpha skims his hand up Rickon’s arm until his fingers rest on the smaller alpha’s dyed hair. He ruffles strands over his fingers, like he can’t believe what he’s seeing.

“That’s white hair, Zack. Have you ever met anyone with white hair?”

Zack grunts and goes back to gripping Rickon’s arm, locking us tight together.

Something momentous just happened, but we have no time to enjoy it because the elevator dings and the doors slide open. Fresh batches of fear and anger burst through Zack’s malt barley scent as he snarls at the change.

I want to weep and collapse from the nervous strain, but we’re almost home, so I swallow down my emotion. A few more steps.

More OCB agents cordon off the ground floor lobby, and Zack growls in warning.

“We have to go out there,” Rickon murmurs. He slips around the quivering alpha and touches a hand to Zack’s back while also pressing the door button so they stay open.

Zack rocks one step forward.

“Try that again,” I whisper.

Rickon pushes and Zack takes another step, moving us through the doors. One hesitant step after another, Rickon pressures my new alpha across the lobby and into the other elevator. We both heave a sigh of relief as the doors close, locking us in again.

Exhaustion drags on me, and suddenly I jerk awake from a micro-nap. A door clicks shut, and I blink to see the familiar shapes of Callisto's apartment. The lawyer and two OCB agents who'll remain with us stand in the living area, waiting to see what we'll do.

I peer around, meeting Rickon's tired smile over Zack's shoulder. The fact Zack's turned his back to the pale alpha says everything I need to know. "I need sleep," I mumble, unable to lift my head off Zack's shoulder. "And so does he."

Callisto steps forward, met by Zack's instant warning rumble. "We've converted the library for Zack."

Rickon pushes Zack a few more steps inside the apartment, and as he turns, the refurbished library comes into view. The books have all disappeared, and iron bars loom where the butchered door used to be. Like Rose's house, but a bigger room.

"No," I say tiredly, sweat trickling down my back.

Callisto frowns. "But, Red, that's how the rehab program works. He's too dangerous to roam around the house."

"No more cages," I snap. Fuck, haven't we both been trapped for too long? I'm not going back, and neither is my mate.

Zack feeds on my irritation and spins, snarling at the other alphas.

I understand Rose needs cages because she has two ferals to deal with and Rose herself is a more fragile person. But my alpha was in prison a lot longer than her alphas, and he won't be going back into any more confinement. Just like I won't be using the nest upstairs.

Rickon bravely rests a hand on both of us, and his vanilla scent calms me immediately. Zack's warning growl fades to a rumble. I'll have to be more careful about my emotions, since Zack's got a direct line to them.

"Red, you'll be going back on set in nine days," Rickon says. "He'll have to stay here then, won't he?"

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

I look up and meet Zack's bloodshot blue eyes, circled with dark shadows and sagging with fatigue. His lips turn up in a smile as he gazes down at me, changing his entire expression. Damn, he's so handsome. Wild, but handsome. Most of all, he trusts me. Just like Serena said about horses learning to trust and wanting to please.

Well, that settles it. "I'll train him to a leash."

### Chapter five

Zack

The female in my arms goes limp, her eyes sliding shut as her arm droops across mine. I clutch her tighter to my chest as I scan for danger. Fouralphas wait in this unfamiliar territory, watching me. Am I supposed to fight them? Make them leave this space? That would be nice.

I don't know what's required of me, except for the one burning need: protect Mine.

Something thumps furiously inside my body, the pounding familiar but much stronger since the moment I turned around and saw Mine inside that shiny box. I nearly lost her. Nearly made a mistake by facing the noisy challenger instead of staying close.

The males in here don't seem like they plan to fight me, but they could be faking to get my guard down. I shift so I can look at the one with white on his head. He also has red streaks above his eyes, like shed blood. I wouldn't have picked him for a fighter, but looks can be deceiving. My female also called this one Mine. But how can

this stranger be Mine too? The space behind my eyes aches.

The white-headed stranger lifts his hand, and I snatch Mine away so he can't take her, but he touches my shoulder instead. My lips peel back by instinct, but he's not really a threat. Once I sniffed him, I realized Mine smells like him.

I lift my nose once more, trying to make sense of things. This strange, spongy territory smells like Mine, and this White Mine, and the tall alpha at the far end of the room. That means they live here, and the other two are strangers. I square up and snarl at them, but they don't step in to answer the challenge.

"Zack," White Mine calls softly, his grip flexing lightly against my skin. "We need to take her to bed. Up there." He points toward a strange bit of wood and metal that rises from the floor to the roof. White Mine slides past me and steps up on the dark brown boards. "Come on."

Seems like he wants me to follow him. I take a step but then hesitate, swinging back to look at the three men in the room.

White Mine makes a noise, and they move away, confirming they're afraid of him because they obeyed without him even snarling. It gives me confidence, because I'm certain Mine would only choose strong males to be around her. The death alpha back in my original territory didn't snarl either, but he could snap a neck easier than breathing.

I survey the White Mine with interest as he climbs the wood platforms, exposing his back. He's not afraid of me. A sudden desire to creep up on him and find out exactly how dangerous he is shivers through me, but as I step up onto the first platform, Mine's legs catch on part of the wood, reminding me it's not just myself I have to look after. Another time, perhaps.

Painful tremors grip my legs and abdomen, like I've returned from a difficult fight, and my arms ache. I clutch the unconscious female tighter so I don't drop her.

I follow Mine's scent as much as the white alpha, tracking through a darker corridor before turning into a pale-colored cell without bars. Daylight streams through a covered panel in the far wall, revealing the blue sky of the Outside Place. A delighted noise slips through my throat.

White Mine pats a soft, wide lump in the middle of the room. "Bed."

I stand transfixed, confused by this strange space. It's small, thanks to all the different-colored lumps in the room, but it smells like the female in my arms and feels very different from all the cages I've lived in.

Is this a space I can enter?

White Mine waves, using the same motion he gave when he wanted me to follow him up the wooden steps. Then, he drops down onto the lump. I growl, but instead of devouring him, it only bends a little. It reminds me of that soft surface Mine lay on when we first joined our bodies together.

The alpha pats the lump again.

I walk forward slowly. This is where he wants Mine, because it smells most like her. But do I dare release her? If I lie down myself, I'll be too vulnerable.

White Mine shifts, sitting with his back to the wall. More sounds pour from his mouth, and then, to my astonishment, he slides right off the lump to sit on the floor in a submissive position.

Is he really so fearless he doesn't care if he's ended? His gaze slides down to the



female, and the thump-thump in my chest silences for a moment. This strange alpha doesn't care about being vulnerable because all he focuses on is Mine. To the point of risking me ending him.

A rumble crawls through my throat, and I slowly ease down onto the lump, keeping Mine across my lap and setting my back to the wall. It's not a bad position because from here I can see the door and the panel to Outside, and I can even free my hands to strangle anyone who approaches. The padded block behind my back cushions me from the hard wall.

"Bed," White Mine says again, running his hand along the wide lump.

Sounds have complex meaning. Another thing that differs between me and other beings. "Mine," I reply, rolling the sound on my tongue.

He bares his teeth slightly and nods. "Yes. Your omega, and mine."

Oh. So he's also claimed Mine? I'd kill him on the spot, except that Mine hugged him and pressed her body to him. She even smells like him. Something tells me I shouldn't do anything that might upset her. Plus, now I've stopped moving, my body doesn't seem to want to obey me.

I snort softly. Killing can wait.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

White Mine moves slowly, and I track him as he leaves the room and comes back with a piece of cloth. He keeps his hands where I can see them as he approaches and sits down on the lump, close enough to touch my knees. Gently he strokes Mine with his cloth.

“You need to take care of your omega after you have sex. Otherwise, she gets sticky and uncomfortable.”

I track his pale hands as they work up her golden skin to the place where I went inside her. I growl softly, but he ignores me, continuing to work. “Red likes a lot of sex, but always remember she needs us to take care of her.”

The jumble of sounds means something, and I want to know what. Maybe if I know how to make sounds like that, Mine will never leave me.

“Mine,” I confirm.

He nods and passes me the cloth. “Okay. You do it.”

When I sit motionless, he touches the back of my hand, forcing the wet cloth down onto her leg. I snarl a warning, and he slows but doesn’t snatch his hand away.

“You have to learn to take care of Mine. She needs you too.”

His scent fills my nostrils. It smells like something I ate right before I met Mine, a spongy block as pale as he is that had a white coating, like his hair, and a sweet taste that tingled in my mouth. Would he also taste like that? The scent distracts me.

When I look down, he's moving my hand along Mine's body. Cleaning. Like the others did when I came back from a challenge, but more gently. I watch, fascinated, as the cloth leaves a damp streak across her limp body. Taking care of her.

For the first time in a long time, I relax, slumping over my female. The light in the room fades into darkness.

I jolt alert, a desperate whine running through my head as I realize I fell asleep. What if someone attacked Mine while I slept?

My shoulders slam against a padded surface as my eyes snap open. Mine lies beside me, her back nestled along my leg, warm and breathing. Beside her lies the White Mine, illuminated by a golden light beside the big lump. Bed, he called this thing under us.

He murmurs something, and the desperate pounding in my heart eases at his soothing tone. A foreign scent hits me, and I turn to find one of the other alphas leaning on a wall outside the cell. Unmoving but watching us.

My lips peel back in a snarl.

"You're okay," White Mine says, touching my hand. "It's safe."

My growl simmers, but I don't leap up. I'll stay alert to make sure I protect my female. Right now, though, it's hard to think with the irritation running down my arm where it's trapped inside the hard casing. I lift the edge to my teeth and gnaw on it, spitting out the bits that crumble off.

White Mine babbles more noises, then reaches behind him, and grabs a long, thin rod. He holds it out and I sniff, but there's none of the bitter scent from the biting sticks the non-alphas used back in the old territory.

“Like this,” White Mine says, inserting the thin stick inside the rigid case which rubs ferociously against my arm.

The rod’s tip scratches all the way down inside the spots I can never reach, and I wriggle my arm to chase the pleasant sensation until my skin tingles all over. My mouth goes slack and something wet trickles down my jaw, but I don’t care. It feels wonderful after being unbearably itchy for so long.

“Better?”

I peer over at the alpha who knows how to hold and use things in his hands. He’s clever; of course my mate chose well. My gaze drops to rest on her sleeping form. Her gently rising curves, the colorful hair, and her softly parted lips; everything about her fascinates my senses. I want to spend every moment staring at this wonder who appeared in my life.

White Mine puts the rod away and then runs his hands through her hair, which glows the color of blood under the orange light behind him. “Beautiful, isn’t she? I’m not surprised you refused to let her go.” He traces along her side, then looks up at me. “She’s your omega.” That last sound comes out in a different tone, like it’s important.

A thrill runs through my chest. I stare at his mouth, wanting to hear it again, and as if he understands, he repeats, “Omega.”

“Ohm,” I whisper.

His lips curve back in a snarl that reveals all his teeth, and I immediately stiffen and snarl back.

“Shit, okay, no smiling.” He holds his hands out in a gesture I think means he doesn’t want to fight. His scent fills the air again. Normally I’d take that as a challenge, but

with him I can't stop thinking about the palm-sized piece of spongy food I ate.

He freezes as I lean across Mine's body. "Mine?" I murmur, questing for the source of the sweet scent. The closer I get, the stronger the aroma. Before I realize it, my nose touches his skin. My tongue darts out, collecting traces of salty sweat. I dig my nose deeper against his neck, searching for the source. How is he Mine as well as the female? Pain throbs between my ears and down my neck.

Mine stirs beneath me, her soft murmurs making my muscles lock up. Her eyelids flutter, and then her mouth opens to reveal her teeth in a silent snarl. But the fizz in my chest tells me she's happy. So happy it startles the breath from my throat.

Gingerly, I press my fingertip to her teeth. That's not a snarl. It's something else.

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*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

I glance up at White Mine. Was he not warning me? Slowly I reach out, pushing my thumb between his lips to touch his teeth, tensed to pull back the instant he shows signs of attacking. He opens his mouth, baring his jaw to me. I could rip it loose from his face if I dug my fingers inside like this and pulled hard enough. He doesn't move.

Submitting? Or so fearless this doesn't bother him? I can't tell.

A hot, heavy pulse runs from my hand through my body and down to the part of me that swells ever since I found Mine. I shiver.

I rock forward, still running my thumb across his teeth. He could snap them shut and take my finger, but he kneels there, as motionless as the walls.

"Rickon?" Mine breathes out, pulling herself up against the padded block.

His mouth moves and I snatch my hand out in case he intends to bite. "I'm fine. He's just learning." His green eyes lock on me, intense but unthreatening, as he picks up my hand and rests it against his teeth. Inviting me to try again.

A soft sensation flutters in my belly as I press inside, feeling the hard surfaces and, deeper within, the soft, wet chewing muscle. He whimpers faintly and it vibrates through my fingers, the sounds sending heat bursting through my body. Mine makes those noises when we're joined together. The organ between my legs thickens with interest.

I look from Mine to White Mine, puzzled at my body's reactions. "Mine?" I ask.

White Mine pulls back enough to make sounds through his lips, and then touches my arm. “Alpha.” He moves his hand to Mine. “Omega.” I track his hand as he touches his own chest. “Alpha.” Then he puts all three of our hands together. “Pack.”

That’s a sound I know, but it doesn’t seem to suit this situation. I glance around. I had a pack. We fought together against a common enemy, before we got separated. Does White Mine plan to fight with me against challengers? I’m sure there are many who want this beautiful female. I spin toward the doorway where the other alpha lurks silently, but White Mine touches my face, turning me back until our eyes meet.

Not fighting. Something else, then.

Mine strokes the pale alpha’s jaw, a hazy look in her eye I don’t understand, but the fiery feeling in my chest expands, like I won’t be able to contain it for long. “Have I mentioned how much I appreciate you, Rickon?” she murmurs. “You’re amazing with him.”

White mine snarls silently at her, but quickly smooths it away as he glances at me. Not a snarl.

“Mine,” I whisper, contorting to reach my female’s mouth. She’s got that same curve on her lips as I press my mouth to hers and taste her breath. “Ohm.”

She cries out loudly, her hands coming around me to hug me tight, and that hot sensation inside my chest explodes. “Yes, om, omega. Well done!”

If her mouth does this but she’s happy . . . I straighten and look at the pale alpha. “Mine.” I lean forward and press my mouth to his.

Chapter six

Rickon

Red gasps as Zack kisses me, and for a moment I forget to breathe as his lips quest roughly across mine. Each move I make around him must be so careful because he interprets everything as a threat—even a simple smile. And yet here he is, mouth pressed to mine, toying with my lips and supping my breath. Tasting me.

“Shit!” Red hisses under her breath. “No, Zack.”

I reach out and press my thumb to her mouth to silence her, not wanting to startle the alpha. Or break the kiss.

Zack’s rough and intense—not surprising when Red’s likely the first person he’s ever kissed. He pushes into me, deepening the kiss, and when the pressure pushes me off balance, his hand shoots out to grasp the back of my neck.

The thrill of danger trickles down my spine. This feral alpha could snap my spine in a heartbeat; instead he’s learning words and trying to make sense of the world. Trying to make sense of me. Tears mist my vision.

I have a pack. It might be the strangest, wildest pack in existence, but it’s mine.

This close, the new alpha’s maple syrup on pancakes scent fills my nose, accompanied with a lot of sweat after a day in the back of a truck making love to our omega. He’s not Callisto, and yet I find his scent more pleasant than any other male I’ve encountered besides my best friend. Is this the effect of scent-matched mates at work again?

I don’t even mind that he’s unknowingly scent marking me with his fingers against my cheek as he kisses me—or maybe it’s a deliberate sign of dominance. I may need to study some alpha psychology after today.



The stubble on his jaw scratches my nose. Gently, I run my fingers through his hair, finding it coarse and dusty. He doesn't appear very healthy, his skin a sallow yellow, and my thumbprints catch on traces of scabbing around his temples. Despite his two-hour nap, dark marks shadow his eyes, and he's twitchy from living on constant high alert.

From what I learned about feral alphas on the drive home with Leroy, Zack spent most of his life in small cells, coming out only for short exercise sessions and to fight for his life. And he brought that chaos with him to Alpha Lodgings, attacking guards and prisoners alike, and breaking bones.

He needs us to teach him what a pack is. What love is.

I swipe my tongue through his lips, forcing them apart. Zack freezes but doesn't withdraw. I massage my hand across his bare chest in slow movements, rocking a little on my knees to balance on the bed. We both shiver as I lick my tongue inside his mouth, me from fear he might bite it off, and him from surprise.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

He hesitates, processing; then his tongue rolls through my teeth in return. I open my mouth wider to let him quest. Even his tongue is strong, pinning mine to the floor of my mouth. When I pull back for a little oxygen, he follows me, tilting his head for better access and chasing my kiss once more.

I melt, his intensity blistering through our skin contact. I know he's just experimenting, but damn, it feels like he's a man who really wants me. Red wriggles out from between us, and Zack shuffles forward, still holding me in place. A rigid boner pokes into my thigh, and I gasp. He's not long, but so thick I wonder if I'd even get him inside me—if that's what he wants.

"He's so hard right now," Red whispers, the wonder in her voice short-circuiting my brain.

Maybe I'm a greater thrill seeker than I thought, because the idea of this beast of a man dominating me gets my cock leaking with excitement.

Zack freezes as my moan slides into his mouth. He pulls back and looks down, staring at his own cock. Maybe as surprised as I am to feel the erection. The alpha swivels on his knees and presses his hands either side of Red, trapping her against the headboard, questing his face down her stomach.

A slight pang of loss runs through me, but I shove it away. He's not only allowed me close, but kissed and touched me, and even learned a new word. That's amazing progress in a day. Step by step, we'll find out what he likes and dislikes.

She giggles. "Yes, Zack, I'm wanting too, after seeing that."

He drops his head into her shoulder and licks the deep puncture marks of his bond bite. Red gasps instantly and her glazed macadamia scent swirls through the room. Yeah, I'm a little jealous he got to bond her, but Zack lives outside the rules. He wouldn't even understand the concept of an Omega Center or contract.

Red's pleasure sounds affect us both. Zack huffs and tilts his hips toward her, questing his cock to the entrance of her pussy. I glance up, remembering Agent Josef was on guard, but he's moved out of sight, though the door's still open and his shadowpaints the far wall. Just the appearance of privacy, I suppose. But if Zack did something here, I wouldn't have a chance in hell of stopping him alone.

Our omega reaches between them and fits his cock into her pussy, gasping and moaning as he fills her. He's so fat down there, her lips swell out to take him inside. Heat erupts in my belly as I watch him thrust hard. Fuck, no wonder she's so exhausted, because he takes her like a boxer in a ring, pounding his body into hers. But even as he thrusts wildly, he casts glances at me.

Right, he doesn't like his back exposed.

I sink down onto the bed beside Red, sliding my arm across her chest. Zack towers over both of us. "Okay there, Biscuit?" I murmur in her ear.

"So okay," she pants out.

I kiss under her ear and then trail my fingers across her nipples. She moans and arches off the mattress. Zack grabs her hips and drags her legs up over his shoulders, but his eyes track my fingers across her breasts.

"Wanna try?" I ask, guessing he knows nothing about foreplay. I lift my hand, silently requesting his. He reaches out hesitantly, and I maneuver one of his rough fingers over her pebbling areola. "She likes this."

Red's stomach twitches in response, and she swears. "Now you're ganging up on me?" she hisses, nails raking through the duvet.

"Only because you love it," I tease, craning around her shoulder to reach her lips.

She smiles against my mouth, still sleepy. When I try to pull back, Zack's hand descends on my head, holding me in place. I chuckle and kiss Red deeply until we're gasping for air. When I twist to look back, I find him thrusting, one hand pressed to his own breast, a look of wonder on his face.

That's when I remember he can feel what Red does. He feels her happiness and her pleasure. I want that so badly, but knowing these two wildlings share the pack bond is its own special kind of beauty. I want them both to feel so loved they never have to look over their shoulders in fear again.

Was I jealous Red chased after another alpha like we weren't enough? Sure. But I trusted she had reasons. I've barely scratched the surface of what makes my omega tick, and I plan to spend the rest of my life figuring her out. And now she's brought a fascinating, equally unpredictable partner along for the ride. Boredom will cease to exist.

Zack's fingers drift into my hair with a surprisingly gentle touch, like he's not sure what I'll do. I push away from Red, and he lets me up, his blue eyes, slightly hazed with lust and fatigue, boring into me. I brace my arm over his shoulder and lean in, my mouth an inch from his.

He melts into me, pressing his chapped lips to mine. Consuming me. Both of us reach an arm out to Red, locking us into a trio of desire. I can't resist their combined scents and the gyrations of their bodies bumping into mine. I moan into Zack's mouth, my cock straining against my pants. They're so fucking sexy.

I thrust into Red's hip, and with their silky, panted breaths in my ears, it only takes a minute before I'm straining and coming, tingles exploding through my torso. Zack inhales near my neck, thrusts deep, and tenses. Red clings to his good forearm and I realize sleepily she's got a thing for wrists and arm muscles.

We collapse in a heap, and for the first time, Zack truly relaxes. After I catch my breath, I drag myself upright to search for the cloth. I pour some water from a water bottle on it, making sure Red and Zack both drink before cleaning my omega. I offer the cloth to Zack, pointing at his cock, and after a bit of miming, he wipes himself roughly.

His gaze drops to Red. He swipes the cloth between her legs a few times and then looks at me. I think he might be far more intelligent than anyone but Red's given him credit for. He just needs a safe environment to thrive in. I reach out and ruffle his hair, whispering soft words of praise.

We'll give him everything we can.

After we manage a trip to the bathroom and return with no one getting beaten up, I press on his shoulder until he lies down on the bed, and then cover our legs with the duvet. Zack drops his nose into his omega's hair and breathes jaggedly, releasing a sigh that feels millennia old. His lids flutter a few times, and then he goes limp.

I think we're off to a good start.

Chapter seven

Red

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

“So, how exactly do you intend to go about leash training a feral alpha?” Callisto crosses his arms as he leans on the bench, watching me eat scrambled eggs on toast from Zack’s lap.

I reach over my shoulder to offer a square of toast to Zack, feeling how softly his lips brush my fingertips as he takes it. Rickon leans one elbow on the table as he eats, and every time his eyes drift to me, they’re dreamy. The three of us slept for sixteen hours and we’ve all woken up in better moods.

Except for Callisto, it seems.

I swallow and lick my lips clean. “Well, I keep thinking about my horse riding lessons. Firmness and treats, Serena says.”

Callisto snorts. “He’s a carnivore, not a horse. More like taming a lion.”

The OCB agent watches us from the couch where he sips his coffee. From the explanation Rickon gave me when we woke up, they’ll be taking shifts to observe us, in case something goes wrong. At least until Callisto gets his rehabilitation license.

I switch my gaze back to the handsome lawyer. He’s really done a lot of favors for us, but he can be super pushy like this, when he doesn’t like my choices. With my film contract advance, I should have enough money to start house hunting, thanks to Rickon demanding a bigger percentage upfront. And yet, if Callisto’s the one getting a license so Zack can live with us, I can’t exactly leave him. And why do I feel glad about that?

“I never said I was going to feed him carrots,” I say, cutting another toast square. “We don’t even know what he likes yet.” I grin and pass the bite-sized piece over my shoulder. “Well, except for me.”

The lawyer rolls his eyes. “Yes, we all got that picture loud and clear, but—”

“Bastard!” The high-pitched squawk comes with a wild flapping of wings.

I giggle, accidentally sending toast and egg flying, before jumping to my feet and dashing over to the birdcage. Rickon's parrot has hilarious timing. “Ozzie! I didn’t even say hello.” I lean down and stick a finger through the bars, and the moody bird immediately bites it. But it’s more of a nibble, so I can see he doesn’t mean to be nasty. Zack’s arms close around my waist, and he growls softly next to my ear.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to let you out yet, Ozzie,” I inform the parrot, who tilts his head, studying the newcomer over my shoulder.

“Oooh, fuck off.” His little green-and-orange head bounces energetically as he cackles at full volume. “Ozzie, Ozzie.”

I chuckle and slide around in Zack’s grip until I can get one arm over his shoulder. “I’m sure that’s his way of saying hello. This is Rickon’s bird, and his name is Ozzie.”

Zack’s mouth moves like he’s trying out sounds, but he doesn’t make a noise. His confusion leaches through our bond.

“Bird,” I repeat once, before scratching Ozzie’s feathered head. “You stay in there until Zack gets used to you, Ozzie. Can’t guarantee you won’t get eaten.”

Ozzie bounces up and down. “Get out, get out.”

Rickon groans and drops his head onto the table. “You’d think he’d only heard insults his entire life.”

Callisto winces. The reaction reminds me Rickon has plenty of pain in his past, and I haven’t even heard all the details yet. My alpha is so generous with me, I’ll have to make sure he doesn’t get neglected while I deal with Zack’s clinginess.

I take Zack’s hand and lead him back to the table, gently squeezing Rickon’s shoulder as we pass. Wariness feeds through my bond with Zack. He’s tense and keeps eyes on the OCB agent and Callisto at all times, but thankfully he feels less chaotic than a day ago.

After a minute of silence as we dig into our food again, Callisto rinses his coffee mug and drops it in the dishwasher, slamming the door rather loudly. “Red, I know you’re enjoying this, but you have to take it more seriously. I’ve done everything I can to get your alpha out of custody, but if he attacks someone again—”

I shoot him my most furious glare. “You think I enjoy knowing my alpha had his humanity beaten out of him? You think I enjoy feeling his fear that everything in the world is out to kill him?” I fist my hands up as bitter heat lodges in my throat.

Callisto wilts, but I’m not done.

“You think I enjoy the way small dark spaces close in around both me and him, reminding us of how people took and took from us until even breathing became unbearable?” My voice rises as the memories flood in, and I grip the table to steady myself. I’m overreacting because I’ve got a live connection to a constant emotional overload—but everything I said is true.

Zack squirms out from under me with a fierce snarl. He squares up, facing Callisto with alpha domination pouring from him.



I smother a groan. I keep forgetting I'm not the only person with a direct link to emotions. Since I'm one of Zack's favorite things, I'll use myself as a reward for now. I spin around, balancing my ass on the table.

"Zack, stop," I say, resting my hand over his mouth.

Surprised, he hesitates and glances at me, blue eyes widening.

"Good boy." Grabbing his borrowed T-shirt, I tug him down to meet me and kiss him soundly.

Zack braces his hands on either side of me, deepening the kiss, and I lock my arms around his neck.

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As annoying as he is, Callisto's right. If Zack gets into any more trouble, the powers that be will take him away from me. I pull back to catch my breath, and Zack buries his nose in my shoulder to sniff me.

"I hope you trust me, Zack," I whisper, stroking his uneven brown hair. He'll have to if we're going to teach him about life.

Callisto's strained voice floats over my shoulder. "Should I get you a clicker that's used for dog training?"

"If you think it could help," I shoot back, even though I know he's being sarcastic.

A cabinet door slams, and then Callisto's footsteps sound on the stairs. Zack tracks his progress until he's out of sight, vibrating.

Rickon sighs. "He's just worried, Red. I know he's not going about it the right way, but try not to be too angry with him."

"I know." The piece of buttered toast on my plate shreds under my fingers. "I'm grateful. I am. Zack and I only made it back thanks to him," I mutter. "But I could do with less of the attitude."

"Yeah," Rickon says, slumping in his seat. "So do you have a plan?"

I nod, glad to move on. "If I write a list, do you think you could go shopping?"

"Sure." Rickon smiles and clears the table, moving slowly so he doesn't startle my

wild alpha.

A more considerate guy couldn't exist in the universe. I mean, he even let Zack kiss him last night. My body heats as I remember the way they responded to each other. Would they both ever want to take it further? Zack felt so curious, so I know all of this is new to him.

Rickon drops a kiss on my head. "Write your list now, Red. Sooner we get started, the better, because you're due on set in eight days."

Fuck, I'd lost count.

I slide over to the next seat and turn to study Zack. He shoots out a hand to capture my wrist, unwilling to have me out of reach. He lifts a bread crust, studies it, and then pops one end in his mouth to chew slowly. We'll have to teach him everything: how to talk, dress, wash, eat well. He'll need an education and bunches of emotional support for his inner rage, which simmers all the time through the bond. The heat in my body dissipates, replaced by an ominous chill.

Can I really get Zack settled enough to accompany me out of this house in a little over a week? We'll need a miracle.

Rickon unloads the shopping bags on the table, and I open packages and line things up with Zack trailing a step behind me. I trace my fingers over a heavy-duty leather collar, wondering if I'm doing the right thing.

"Having second thoughts?" Rickon asks, hugging me from the side.

I lean into his embrace with a sigh. "Not exactly. I'll do whatever it takes to keep him out of a cage, but I'm sure I'll get complaints from the human ethics commission or whatever." From people with no idea what Zack or I have been through.

I worry my lip through my teeth as I study the plain black leather with a silver buckle, leash ring, and locking mechanism. “Say, Rickon, what’s this going to do for my image as an actress?”

He steps away and runs a hand through his hair. “They’ll say you’re an attention seeker, trying to make it big through your story instead of your skills.”

I scoff and pick the collar up. “I’m not asking anyone to notice my story.” The less said about my past, the better.

Rickon throws me a lopsided smile. “At least that collar’s designed for humans, not dogs. I found a proper adult toys store.” His plush lips turn up more and he leans across the corner of the table to stroke my hand. “Gave me so many naughty ideas.”

I snort. He always makes me laugh, no matter how dire the situation.

I hold the collar around my neck, the leather cool on my skin. That dark, foul room from my heats at the trafficking hub, with the table and restraints looms in front of me, ready to suck me dry. I choke as the horror presses in, and rip the collar away. Sweat trickles down my shoulder blades.

“Red?” Rickon massages my back, and Zack licks my bond mark, startling me out of the living nightmare.

“Sorry, I just—” I suck in a breath and steady myself on the table. “Bad memories.”

Zack curls protectively around my back, shielding me from the invisible threat. His faint growl quivers against my spine.

Rickon’s pale green eyes glisten with empathy as he takes the leather band from my hand. “Do you want to talk about it?”

I study him, taking in his pale face and intelligent eyes. Part of me wants to open up and tell him everything, but I can't. Not yet. I shake my head.

Rickon slides past Zack to hold my upper arms, massaging lightly. "Okay, Biscuit. I'm here for whatever you need."

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My heart fills with gratitude. He doesn't press me to talk, doesn't act like he should get to know everything. His acceptance soothes me.

Rickon gently kisses my forehead, then lifts the collar. "What were you planning to do with this?"

I laugh dryly. "I just wanted to show Zack it wasn't dangerous."

My breath catches as he reaches up and wraps the collar around his own neck, fastening the clasp. "There. How do I look?" he asks brightly, striking an exaggerated pose with one hand behind his head.

I hesitate, waiting for my fears to rise, but they don't. He's simply a normal guy wearing an unusual accessory. The dark leather highlights his pale skin, and with his spiky bed hair, flushed cheeks, and parted lips, he looks like he might have just rolled out of a wild BDSM session.

I choke on the lump in my throat. "Super cute, actually. We might need a family set."

He crooks one brow in doubt, and I chuckle.

Zack reaches out a hesitant finger to touch the leather band around Rickon's neck, and my first alpha freezes to let him investigate.

"He's soaking everything in," Rickon breathes out. "Like a sponge."

"I hope so," I murmur, returning to organizing our supplies while Rickon holds

Zack's attention. Soon I have a line of treats out, ranging from jerky sticks to chocolate and candy, granola bars, and cake. I need something Rickon and I can carry with us all the time.

I push hair away from my face as I survey the items. Most of them are sugary. "Better schedule a dentist trip in the near future," I muse.

"And brushing teeth to the things we need to teach him." Rickon smiles, hiding his teeth as Zack leans in close and sniffs the leather collar.

"Right." A pang shoots through my heart. Zack hasn't had the chance to learn even the most basic life skills that people get taught as kids. I tug the big alpha into my arms and kiss his cheek.

Rickon grabs the shopping bags and my new alpha twitches at the crinkling noise, turning to stare. It's hard to put into words, but the Bitches dragged me into a nest so many times, I couldn't help but break down whenever my heat arrived. I'm guessing at Zack's past, but the constant stress simmering through our bond reinforces my theory that all his experiences have been about fighting. He's always assessing and looking for threats, and I need to reverse all that damage.

"You know, I'm not trying to treat him like an animal," I tell Rickon, worrying some plastic packaging through my fingers.

The tall OCB officer polishing his boots near the front door straightens and raises one hand. "Hey. Not wanting to intrude, but do you mind if I chime in?"

I turn and boost myself up onto the edge of the table. "Sure. Sorry, I was a bit out of it when Callisto introduced you."

He grins. "Not a problem at all. I'm Agent Josef Santino. Been in the OCB for eight

years and seen a few things.” He clasps his hands behind his back, feet slightly apart. Even while he talks to me, he glances often at Zack, reminding us what his job is.

“And you’ve done this rehabilitation training thing Callisto’s signing up for?” I ask.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Guilt flashes through me. I had experts here the entire time and didn’t think to consult them. I wave one hand. “This is all a bit weird ’cause you’ll be based here for the time being, but if you think there’s something that can help Zack, please tell us.”

“Thanks.” He smiles, and although he’s a serious-looking guy, the expression softens his face. “Our OCB training focuses on suppressing out-of-control alphas long enough for their thinking minds to replace instinctual behavior.” The agent crosses the room to lean against the back of the couch. “The rehabilitation coaching then focuses on creating a safe space for the traumatized alpha and putting support structures in place, so the hormones and all those instinctive responses don’t override conscious action again.” His mouth wrinkles wryly to one side. “But most alphas who need it are people who go through a traumatic event and lose their sanity momentarily.”

Agent Josef dips his chin toward Zack, who spins to face him front on, watching warily.

“It’s okay, Zack,” I soothe, squeezing his hand. “He won’t hurt you.”

The agent crosses his arms over his chest and continues. “Zack here, and the other alphas who’ve been through fight rings, spent years being conditioned to react the way the kennel bosses wanted.” He shrugs and spreads his hands slowly, watching Zack’s responses. “While we don’t know their exact methods, it’s safe to say they encouraged violent behavior.”



Judging by the scars streaked across Zack's body, he's right. I rub my forehead, feeling a headache coming on, and the agent gives me a lopsided smile.

"Bit heavy, huh? What I wanted you to know is it isn't treating him like an animal to offer a reward for behaviors you want to encourage. It only feels that way because Zack doesn't have much conscious action of his own under all that instinct, but you're actually being respectful of his limitations during recovery."

Rickon leans over the kitchen bench. "You mean, because this learning style is what he already knows?"

"Basically, yeah." The agent nods. "Although, my guess is he's had a punishment-based system in the kennels. Probably using cattle-prods and chains, since agents found those in the underground areas during the raid." He falls silent, and the pain in his face reflects the ache in my heart.

Agent Josef brightens, shaking off whatever thoughts haunt him. "Anyway, it's not how you're going to treat him forever, but for now, it's a bridge to connect him to other kinds of teaching. In the long term, our aim is to see him learn because he wants to. But in the meantime, positive conditioning so that he feels safe and learns appropriate behavior is part of the rehab training. You're on the right track." He gives us a double thumbs-up. "Does that make sense?"

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I glance at the quivering alpha beside me, whose gaze locks on the agent's raised hands. "Yeah, I think so."

Hope springs up in my chest. We might face an uphill battle, but essentially we just need to replace all the awful things those bastards made him do with life skills that make him feel good and secure. I know how terrible it feels, living on constant high alert.

Rickon beams at me. "You're his omega, Red. You've got the best chance of making Zack feel safe."

I nod and hold my hand out for the collar, and Rickon unbuckles it. I'm not crazy, at least, not about this. With a smile, I touch the leather ends to Zack's neck and murmur, "Welcome to your crash course for humans, alpha."

### Chapter eight

#### Callisto

Aden Parker, the managing director at Laversham's Harkman and Laurance Legal branch, removes his reading glasses and stares at me. The frost in the atmosphere matches the look in his eyes. "Callisto, when I put a lead lawyer on a case, I expect that person to give it his all, not disappear on leave, chasing drama all over the country."

I lock the fingers of one hand around my other wrist behind my back and hold his gaze. "You know I've barely taken any leave in the past, Parker," I say.

He scoffs. “And that’s exactly why you’re on the rise, but that won’t be the case if your professionalism evaporates. Do you think I brought you here to hear excuses?”

“No.”

Parker’s a hardass. Everyone says so. The only reason I rarely get the sharp end of his tongue is because I work like a dog with nothing else to do. Never bothered me before, but today I can’t help wishing I were at home to see what Red’s doing with her feral alpha.

Parker taps a finger against his mouse, glancing at his computer screen. “I’ve had a complaint about your absenteeism. Are you going to lead these OCB cases, or should I put Lyle in charge?”

I stiffen. The sensations I’ve always thought of as my lawyer “edge” rise, increasing my sensitivity to noise, light, and his facial expressions. Increases my edginess, too. Who would’ve believed it was such a fine line between extreme alertness and a panic attack? Not me.

Someone making a complaint rubs me the wrong way. I’m certain it can’t be clients, because I’ve prioritized their calls and emails. The two lawyers I’ve been working with haven’t said anything to me, but they’re the only two people who’d benefit from my reassignment. But this is Red’s case, and no way am I handing it off to someone who just wants to tick the boxes and put it behind them.

Red deserves justice, and hell will freeze over before I let those bastards who hurt her weasel out of maximum sentencing.

“I’m fit for the task,” I grind out. “I won’t let the firm down.” Or Red.

My boss leans back in his chair, arm crossing over his chest. “What’s your win streak

right now, Callisto?”

“Ninety-three, after the Yarril case.”

He purses his lips in a silent whistle. “Then you understand I’m saying this for your own good, right? Pull your socks up and don’t drop the ball now.” He snaps his fingers toward the door in dismissal. “Get on with it, then. Time’s a-wasting.”

Which is why it’s a waste to even call me in, but he’s obviously wanting to bust my balls as a reminder of who’s the boss. I nod and leave his office, closing the door quietly behind me. Someone at Aden Parker’s level can bill a thousand an hour, which means he just lost eighty-three dollars talking to me for five minutes, not to mention my own lost time.

Time is money, after all. I’ve always lived by that creed. Holding in a sigh, I brush my hand against my left shoulder, stroking over the clock tattoo under my shirt that freezes time at the moment of my dad’s passing. I’ve always spent as much of my time working as humanly possible. It felt like a consuming urgency.

But now my internal compass point is shifting. I can’t concentrate on my cases, my mind wanders, and even my words feel more labored.

All because of one redheaded omega living in my home, currently training her pet wild alpha.

I brush hair off my forehead and speedwalk back to my office. Hale leans back in his chair, reading printed case notes with a highlighter set between his teeth.

I rap my knuckles against the high-topped counter running the length of his desk. He waits a moment, his eyes tracking across the page to the end of a sentence before they lift to meet mine. He blinks a few times, and it’s like I can see the cogs in his brain

running down and reversing direction as he switches his attention to me.

“If you had a problem with me, you’d tell me to my face, right?” I ask.

His brows pop. “Indeed.” He reaches for a sticky note stuck on the desk's recess. “Yesterday, you took nine minutes to return my call. That’s four minutes too long.”

I smirk. “Sorry.” Hard to tell who’s working for whom some days.

He nods once. “Do better. Anything else?”

I brace both hands on the countertop. “What’s the best way to punish Quinton and Lyle?”

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One side of Hale's mouth quirks. "Lyle hates sushi and seafood. Quinton has date night dinner with his pack every Tuesday at eight." His eyes sparkle with mischief. "Apparently, they are merciless if he's late."

I grin and slap my hands against the counter with glee. "Damn, you're good. Remind me not to piss you off. What do you want?"

He doesn't miss a beat. "Something elegant from the Wren Grace kitchenware collection. It's my sister's wedding next month."

I shoot him with my fingers as I pass by. "There's a new line of dinner plate sets coming out late spring. I'll get you a twelve-piece set."

He smiles, gaze already dropping back to his case notes. "And that's why I work for you."

"Pfft," I scoff. "Nothing to do with me being an excellent lawyer?"

He shrugs one shoulder, but he's already sunk into his reading and I know better than to waste his time. Like me, Hale's ambitious. Most likely he's stuck to my side because I'm a hard worker too.

I rise on my tiptoes a few times and take deep breaths. The banter smoothed over some of my nerves, but I can still feel them, simmering below the surface. I never want to experience that drowning sensation again, but this vibrating alertness feels like it could spiral at any moment if I'm not careful.

But how exactly do I be careful?

So much at work rides on my ability to dedicate myself, but now my mind and body want to be back at my house, watching Red and Rickon—and that ridiculous man-beast she brought home. I groan softly and drop into my chair. I'm a mess.

My gaze catches on the project-management smart board taking up a huge portion of one wall.

Dad always said if you want to get things done, write a to-do list. I scribble down the most urgent tasks on the notepad beside my mouse, dividing them into personal and work. On the personal list, I add a note to visit Mom. I need to have a heart-to-heart with her, but at the same time, I don't want to. Admitting you're wrong isn't easy.

I tear off the personal half of the list and shove it in my pocket before updating the whiteboard and emailing a meeting invite to the two work partners assigned to the OCB cases with me. Although I intend to roast them for complaining to Parker instead of coming to me, I need them both on my side. Because the truth is, the case against the alpha that raped Red through her heats isn't looking like one I can win.

I set the tray of sushi down in the center of the conference table in front of the two assistant lawyers. "Eat up. This might take a while," I tell them.

Lyle's jaw clenches as he looks at the food, but he smooths away his disgust almost immediately. I swallow down my smugness. It's amazing how Hale learns such minute details about everyone in the firm.

I drag my attention back to the job at hand and slap down Ray Fibbistachi's profile photo, taken after his arrest at the trafficking hub. "Okay, so which crimes are we confident we can nail this bastard on?" I ask, rubbing my temple.

Quinton was in court today, finishing off a case against one of the other omega traffickers not related to Red's case. He won, and the felon's slated to do fifteen years in the slammer, but it meant we couldn't meet until dusk. Usually I can work 'til midnight without breaking a sweat, but today I'm tired and itching to go home.

I shove the desire to know how Red fared training Zack into the back of my mind and glance at the arrest profile of the criminal. Focus, Callisto. This is what I do best.

Lyle scrolls on his a-Pad. "The home search picked up unregistered haze in his home. Twenty vials. So we have him on possession."

"Distribution?" I ask.

Lyle shakes his head. "No, he's been in jail since the arrest. Be nice if they could've let him out and done a sting."

I nod in agreement. Everyone arrested in conjunction with the trafficking hub got denied bail, all determined to be flight risks, but it would be great if we had more to charge him with.

Quinton hums through his mouthful of sushi to indicate he has something to add. He swallows. "Actually, he made bail last Friday."

"Shit," I murmur, checking the dates on my calendar. How did I miss that? Must be because Red's heat distracted me. The guy must have some serious legal muscle behind him to work around the injunctions the OCB set up. Or if not muscle, some under-the-table money.

The idea of that monster walking around freely and possibly bumping into Red makes my blood grow icy. Maybe it's not such a bad idea for her to have a killer alpha on a leash after all.



Quinton leans his elbows on the table and flicks through his notes. “The OCB arrested Ray in the facility during the raid, and we have the statements from other omegas who said the omega designated O-11 was taken away somewhere regularly—”

“Red,” I interject through clenched teeth.

He looks up, confusion wrinkling his brow. “Pardon?”

“Our victim’s name is Red,” I say. “Red Jones.”

“Right.” Quinton narrows his watery gaze on me. “But why all the runaround? You’ve got her statement, don’t you? Isn’t that why you chased her across the country?”

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I shake my head, my heart sinking. “She doesn’t want to give a statement or testify in court.”

Quinton curls his fingers into a fist and slams it down on the table. “Damn these flighty omegas! Do they think we can produce evidence out of our asses for them?” He clicks his tongue in annoyance.

“Watch your mouth,” I snap. “After what she’s been through, I don’t blame her one bit for not wanting to revisit her trauma.” I press one knuckle hard against my mouth to stifle more sharp words and pick up my stylus pen to write the information in my tablet.

Lyle clears his throat. “None of the omegas’ statements mention seeing an alpha in the facility.”

I flatten my lips together in frustration. “So we have him in the facility, but he could weasel his way out of sentencing since there’s no evidence of his actual crimes, right?”

Possession without evidence of distribution will only get him six months behind bars, and he might serve even less if he gets a reduction for good behavior or community service. The idea of this scum of the earth walking away with a slap on the wrist makes me seethe. I have to pin something on him that will stick.

I circle my index finger on the conference table as I think. From cross-referencing the staff names given by the rescued omegas, it doesn’t appear we have all the traffickers in custody yet. I grind my teeth and tap the end of the stylus on the table.

I swivel to Quinton. “You check in with the case agents to see if they have leads on any of the missing traffickers.” I point the pen at the second lawyer. “We need to offer one of the other traffickers a reduced sentence to rat Ray out. Two years should be attractive. Lyle, you take charge of that.” Whether it’s eighteen or twenty years for the nurses who sold the omegas won’t make much difference. They’ll spend most of their lives behind bars, and the world will have changed by the time they get out.

Lyle makes a tick shape in the air. “Okay, will do. Was going to the prison anyway for something else.” He tilts his head. “And what about you, Callisto?”

“I’m going to find the agents who rescued Red and see if I can find anything new in their statements.” I jot a few reminder notes in my tablet before packing up my files. “And then I’m going to visit the facility.”

Quinton leans back and crosses his arms over his chest. “Why would you go there? We’re not forensics.”

I look away, using the pretext of packing my bag. I can’t answer his question. Maybe it has nothing to do with the case at all, but something tells me I must see the place Red came from. I pray it helps me find a solution to this mess.

## Chapter nine

### Rickon

At the far end of the lounge room, Red clicks her fingers. “Come, Zack.” She steps forward, gently tugging the leash clipped to the collar around his neck. The alpha walks obediently beside her through the kitchen and right around the room.

I heave my ass up onto the countertop to watch them. In just two days, the big alpha has settled so much. Although he still monitors our resident OCB agents, he twitches

less, and Red can move a few feet away without him freaking out.

Maybe he just needed his omega, like Red keeps saying.

“Good job!” she praises, feeding him a bit of vanilla cake. She catches my eye over Zack’s shoulder and holds up a tiny square of the dessert. “Still his favorite.”

I flush. When she gave Zack his choice of treats, he went straight to the vanilla cake, and then swung to me and checked my scent. I didn’t think I smelled like vanilla, but Red says I absolutely do, and it appears Zack feels the same way. He’ll eat anything Red or I offer him, but his eyes always light up at the sight of vanilla cake.

Red ruffles Zack’s hair and unclips the leash. “Your turn, Rickon.”

“Zack, come,” I call, beckoning with both hands.

He takes one step eagerly but then realizes Red’s not moving with him. Her cheeks hollow, and her body stills as she waits to see what he’ll do. We’ve played this game, but she walked with him before now.

Zack takes another few steps toward me, looking over his shoulder to check Red hasn’t moved away.

“Come on,” I encourage. “She isn’t going anywhere.”

Zack strides toward me, as if to get it over quickly, and stands beside my dangling legs, waiting for his treat. I keep my amusement inside as I offer him cake and stroke his arm. “Thank you, Zack. Well done.”

He opens his mouth expectantly, and I pop the piece on his tongue. A faint murmur showing his enjoyment hums in his throat as he chews. I play my fingers over his

shoulder muscles as he stands almost between my knees, twisting slightly to keep one eye on Red.

With Josef and Pearce's help, we've developed a schedule of formal reinforcement sessions with Zack on the leash, and informal learning experiences based around meals and showers. We take breaks in between, with Red and me reading as many rehabilitation articles as we can get our eyeballs on.

They all recommend stability, a safe home environment, consistency, and positive reinforcement.

Every day we practice walking Zack on a leash around the apartment and asking him to stay and come for fifteen minutes at a time. Today we started him on kids' educational cartoons. All we can do is try.

My gaze drops to the box on the edge of the dining table. There's a gag and proper restraining handcuffs inside. We haven't discussed it yet, but I'm pretty sure those are Red's backup plan.

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Zack swallows and then braces his hands either side of me to lean in. His sweet grain scent fills my nose.

“Want me to stroke your hair?” I ask, threading both hands through his hair. The strands feel rough, like he’s never produced keratin to make it smooth. Probably his body was too occupied in survival mode for such luxuries.

Zack stares at me, eyes roving over my face, and I wish I could tell what he was thinking. He’s processing, trying to understand everything. Our newest pack mate always seems puzzled about me, and I assume it’s because I’m an unthreatening alpha. His DNA draws him to Red instinctively, but I’m an anomaly in his world, held here because Red wants me. If it wasn’t for her, I’m sure he’d kill me in a flash.

But even knowing the truth doesn’t really scare me. That’s just how powerful love is.

“What’s going on in here?” I whisper, rubbing my fingers more firmly into Zack’s scalp.

He shifts, checking Red is still in place, and then lifts one hand toward my hair. I tilt my head down so he can access my platinum locks. He seems fascinated by the color.

“It looks funny white, doesn’t it?” I’m overdue to the salon, so the dark roots show now. Maybe it looks the same as cake icing to him.

His thick fingers slide down the back of my neck, and he pinches.

Goosebumps race down my arms as I realize I’ve put myself in a submissive pose.

Well, it's not as if I have a lot of choice. Zack could fold me in half as easily as if I were paper. I thought he called me "Mine" that first morning we woke up together, but maybe he was just talking about Red because he hasn't done it again. Still, he doesn't growl at me like he did in the car park.

Instead of trying to free myself, I tilt to the side and kiss his inner arm, my lips brushing over an old scar.

Zack snatches his arm back, eyes widening.

"I hope we're doing the right thing," Red muses, coming up behind Zack and wrapping her arms around his waist.

"If not, we can ask his forgiveness once he's educated." I slide down from the counter and take the leash from her hands. "I know it's only been two days, but I think we need to step up the obstacles." With only six days left until Red's due on set, we need Zack to be comfortable in a crowd fast.

She nods in agreement. "How?"

"I was thinking the lobby." I dig into the box and pull the handcuffs out. "Should we try these, just in case?"

She purses her lips but then nods slowly. I know she doesn't want to restrain him, but the risk of Zack hurting someone and getting taken away is too great to ignore. Red takes the handcuffs and says, "Let's do it inside a hoodie pocket so no one can see."

My heart swells with love. Even in these extreme circumstances, she wants to protect her alpha's dignity.

While she secures Zack's hands, I tell the OCB agents the plan. Both decide to come

along, even though only Agent Pierce is on duty. Josef scouts the lobby while Pierce asks me about the environment on set. It's a relief to see them taking the role seriously and anticipating problems ahead of time. Makes me feel more confident in what we're doing.

"Okay, Zack, we're going out," Red declares, holding up the leash. "You gotta have this on to come with us."

Zack stoops a little so she can reach, allowing Red to snap on the leash clip. His eyes widen expectantly, waiting for instructions.

Pierce clears his throat. "I suggest we get a different attachment for that before we leave the apartment building. The way it is now, he could easily reach up and release the clip."

Red takes another look at the mechanism and sighs. "Yeah, you're right. Add it to the list, Rickon."

I nod and type up a note in my phone.

Nerves trickle through me as Pierce opens the front door and Red leads her feral alpha out into the foyer. She halts in front of the elevator and looks over her shoulder at me, and the pleading in her eyes tells me just how nervous she feels.

"How about we take the stairs this time, for exercise?" I suggest, shutting the door as quietly as I can.

Zack tenses at the faint click, but he's far more relaxed than the day we brought him home.

Red nods and steps out, heading for the fire stairs, more confident now she has



direction. I wonder if she's thinking of a movie. "Just like in *Second Chance* in the Romdine," I offer.

Red snorts. "Much better than what I was thinking of," she mutters.

"Which was?"

"Aliens vs. Alphas."

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I cringe and look down instinctively, imagining tentacled aliens swarming up from the shadowed well. The zigzagging staircase kinda mirrors the movie set. “Shit, that gives me the creeps just thinking about it.” I shiver dramatically to shake off the chills.

“Guys, you’re going to give me nightmares,” Agent Pierce says with a laugh.

Red chuckles. “Lucky we have the fiercest alpha of them all right here. They wouldn’t want to mess with Zack.”

Agent Pierce gasps. “And here I thought you were referring to me,” he says, tone full of mock outrage.

Red and I both laugh. “Would you believe me if I said I was there for the filming?” I ask, following her down the steps.

She smiles, her profile backlit by golden lighting. “I’ll believe anything you tell me, Rickon.”

Hot damn, Cupid just keeps hitting me right in the heart. Can you die from loving someone too much? I blow her a kiss. “It’s true. They had these super weird stand-in rubber aliens that ran on noisy tracks. And half the dialogue had to be dubbed in after.”

Pierce, leading the way down the stairs, pauses to look back at me, brows lifted. “Truly?”

I lift one hand in pledge and grin. “It was Lyra Gray’s first major appearance, and I was her acting manager.”

The agent whistles quietly. “And that was the film that made her big.”

“Yeah.” My voice catches. I’m happy where I am now, but it stings a little, the way she threw me aside like I was nothing. Even if I’m used to people abandoning me, it still hurts.

I said the exercise would be good for us, but sixteen flights of stairs might be overdoing things. Red and I both wheeze by the bottom, and Zack and Agent Pierce puff. Maybe this will be a good way to tire our wildling alpha out somewhat.

We wait at the foot of the stairs until we’ve all caught our breath before stepping out into the foyer. Red tightens her grip on the leash as we enter the open, tiled space. The receptionist watches us curiously, likely already briefed by Agent Josef.

Red leads Zack over to the ground-floor windows facing the street. Cars whizz by under a cloudy blue sky and pedestrians throng the sidewalk, everyone going about their busy lives.

“Look, Zack,” she murmurs, pointing. “One day soon we’ll go out there together.” She reaches up and strokes his neck beside the collar. “That’s why you have to get used to this. I want to take you everywhere with me.”

The alpha vibrates, trying to watch everything at once. The elevator dings behind us, and Zack whirls as the doors slide open.

“Zack, stay,” Red orders firmly, putting a little tension on the leash.

Both agents tense and I hold my breath as a resident walks out, calls a greeting to the

receptionist, and then heads into the basement garage elevator. My shoulders droop as the doors slide shut behind her back.

Zack passed the first test.

“Good job,” Red praises, beaming as she offers him a piece of cake out of a small plastic container in her pocket. She walks him a few more times around the room and repeats the process when a cleaner comes through with his loaded trolley. Zack growls but shushes when Red warns him.

The cleaner swings around to locate the growl. His head swivels as he follows the leash trailing from Zack’s neck to Red’s hand, and his eyebrows arch. “Shouldn’t you keep that kind of thing in the bedroom?” he asks, muttering under his breath about shameless young people.

“Is that any of your business?” Red asks stiffly.

“Right, what would I know about public decency?” He throws his hands up, heaves on his trolley, and trundles down the ground-floor hallway. The receptionist jostles nervously, seeming unsure if he should step in or not.

Well, he’s better off thinking it’s some kind of kink than knowing the truth. But it reminds me that Red might get a reputation for being into kink. I’d better draft some press releases. And brief Mr Yun in advance. Or not. It’s easier to get forgiveness than permission, after all. So long as we can say Zack’s under control.

Today, he appears to be, but that’s only because no one’s done anything that seems like a threat to him. We can’t pinpoint exactly what the kennel bosses conditioned him to react to. I sigh and scrub at my face. We still have a long way to go.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, and I answer it without shifting my gaze away from

Red and Zack. “Hello?”

A familiar cultured female voice responds. “You’re a hard man to get a hold of, Rickon Jones. Some might even think you’re ghosting me.”

My heart sinks. “Hello, Hannah.” She’s right. I have been avoiding her. I swallow hard, wrapping one arm across my body. This woman sold me a summer preview gown on the condition Lyra wore it to the gala—but Lyra wore a different dress.

I gather my spiraling thoughts. “I’m very sorry, Hannah. It’s not that I’ve been avoiding you; I just had an omega situation.”

Red meets my gaze across the room, frowning as she watches me. I turn my shoulder away and cup one hand around my mouth over the receiver. She doesn’t need to know about this problem of mine—she has enough to deal with.

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“Can I come in and see you to explain things?” I ask quietly.

Hannah scoffs in annoyance. “Thursday, eight am. Don’t be late, and you’d better have a good explanation, darling, or I’ll make sure you can never step foot in a couture showroom in this country again.”

It’s not an empty threat. If Hannah Sorentito blacklists me, I’m done for, and so are my clients. “I’ll be there,” I promise grimly, glancing back at my beautiful actress omega.

I’ll be there, but will Hannah accept my explanation? It’s not as if I have a good one.

### Chapter ten

#### Callisto

It’s a four-hour drive out of the city to the shutdown trafficking hub. Agent Brett Walens, the agent who rescued Red, agreed to bring me out after overhearing me asking about the place. It seems everyone in the agency’s saying good things about the lawyers brought in to assist with the prosecution. Probably because we’ve been getting positive results in the trials so far.

Just not in Red’s case.

Brett parks the car outside a gloomy tunnel barricaded off with metal fencing and OCB caution tape. A warm spring sun shines down on us as we get out to look around the woodsy outcropping. Although green grass covers the rocky ground

underfoot, heavy vehicles clearly tore up the area in the past, leaving deep wheel tracks. It feels like Red's been in my life for a long time, but in reality, she's only been free for a few months.

The agent shades his eyes. "Looks a bit different now." He waves at the dark tunnel as he unlocks the temporary gate. "When we came for the raid, this opening was hidden behind a roller door painted to camouflage with the rest of the hillside. I tell you, these fuckers are as sly as they come." Brett switches on a flashlight and points out the blast marks as we step into the shadowed mouth.

The strong white beam cuts through the dark as we follow the tunnel, making me feel edgy, as if we're on a real sting mission. The back of my neck tingles with alertness and I scan over my shoulder regularly until we reach the facility's entrance. Brett uses a special keycard to get through the dented metal door and then labors over a fuse box, muttering to himself as he figures out which switches control the lighting.

Bright white lights tick on one at a time, moving away from us down a long corridor.

"What was your impression that day?" I ask as we follow a polished concrete hallway. The speckled flooring curves up to meet walls painted a pale lemony color, with wooden handrails bolted on at waist height.

"Well, on first impression, it looks the same as a hospital, right?" He lifts his nose and sniffs. "Bit staler now without the AC running, but it smelled like one, all disinfectant and whatnot." He points ahead. "But the deeper you go, the more horrors appear. Rooms with electronic locks requiring a keycard to get through."

"The omegas' rooms?" I ask.

"Yeah." He pauses at an intersection and turns. "Down that way, the guys found fully equipped surgery rooms and science labs. Most of the stuff is with the evidence team

now, but the way the forensics guys talked about it, these bastards experimented with cutting-edge memory manipulation, and even bond altering.” Brett touches his fingers to his shoulder and shudders. I can’t see it through his uniform, but given his comment, he must have a bond scar beneath.

It’s rare for alphas to accept a bond mark from another alpha. While a bond gives access to the other person’s emotions, it can also allow a degree of influencing, especially if the bond-giver has dominant tendencies. It would require a lot of trust to willingly enter that arrangement.

The idea weighs on me as I follow Brett. I can’t picture myself ever submitting to another alpha. I’m more the dominant type, at least verbally, so whenever I thought about a pack, I imagined I’d be the prime alpha.

But then I went and rejected my omega.

If I’d kept her by my side, would she have taken my name? I snort softly. Red Wren doesn’t have the same ring as Red Jones.

Brett clears his throat, drawing my attention back to the inspection. “So, up to this point, it still seems like a medical facility, right? But the true hell hides way in the back.”

We march through some long, twisty corridors, but the agent seems to know exactly where he’s headed. When I ask, he flashes a wry smile.

“That day’s kind of imprinted in my skull. And not in a good way. While all the action happened back in the first wing, my partner and I came down here to check for back exits. That’s when we heard her.”

He stops in front of a door and his chest heaves with a deep breath. He flicks a light



switch on the outside wall and pushes the door open, beckoning me to go ahead.

In front of me is a stark room, three or four yards deep and the same wide. A stainless-steel counter with a sink runs along the end wall, facing a padded bed bolted to the floor. My heart sinks. Thick leather wrist and ankle restraints dangle over the edges, and another for the neck arches near the head of the bed.

Even months after it's been vacated, Red's haze scent clings to the walls and the padded bed. Other, fouler odors leach through the paint and scratches mark the back of the door, along with dull red stains. Blood. My throat closes up, the walls seeming to shrink even with the light on and the door open.

Brett leans on the doorframe, ensuring we won't get accidentally locked in. "This is where we found the omega called O-11."

"How—" My voice cracks and I try again. "How long was she in here?"

Brett shakes his head sadly. "Hard to know exactly, but there was a full bucket of excrement, suggesting weeks, if not more. She said she had months-old haze on her. The smell was unbearable, and the light made her scream." He strokes around his nose and winces, clearly picking up traces of the captivity scents. Then his mouth curves up with a hint of a smile. "First thing she did, after cursing us out for taking so long to find her, was demand a shower."

He offers me a pair of gloves and I tug them over my hands before stepping further inside. My hands twitch as I lift my phone to take pictures—the OCB has official photos for prosecuting, but this is personal now. Every piece of evidence will help me build a picture for the jury.

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But the real story cements in my mind as I run my fingers over the leather belts, finding one wrist restraint roughly sawed through—the picture of Red’s past, when she was trapped in a dark room, praying for her alphas to come.

I lean on the bed, winded. Overlaying this room comes the image of the nest in my apartment, trashed beyond recognition with the string lights cut and pillows snowing across the floor. A small dark room the same as this one. No wonder she can’t even walk past it without twitching.

And the way she screamed and cried through her heat like she was being murdered. Because she nearly was, so many times.

My omega spent months in this dark room before rescue, trapped by these restraints as that devil alpha fucked and edged her while others stuck needles into her.

And I asked her to relive the ordeal, saying it was just words.

Suddenly I can’t breathe. I rest my hand on my chest, gasping as my entire body tightens so hard my bones might break. I drop to one knee, hunching down to get smaller, balancing against the edge of the bed. Tears rush down my cheeks to catch in my beard.

The fact Red’s walking around smiling and talking is a miracle. No, it’s the result of her sheer determination to move forward, and her impeccable acting skills. I can’t blame her for clinging to Zack and refusing to put him back in a cage for any reason. And I thought she was nuts.

I'm the insane, misguided one.

A warm hand rests on my back. "Hey. You all right, Callisto? Is it chest pain?"

Fuck, yes, my heart hurts, but not for the reason he's thinking. "Just . . . give me . . . a minute," I wheeze. What did Ricky tell me to do? Breathe. Look at my fingers. Count.

I roll my fingertips together, examining the knuckles as I count to three over and over, gasping in snatches of air. I glance under my arm at the open doorway. Ricky promised there's enough air in the room for me to breathe, but this space is smaller.

Gradually I lengthen the counts to four. For a long time, I fear I'll be stuck this way for eternity, quivering on my knees and clinging to Red's captivity bed like it owns me. But I promise myself over and over it will pass, and then it does, fading so slowly I don't notice the loosening at first.

My hands ache from clenching and my ribs feel bruised, but finally I can draw a deep breath. I fall onto my ass and stretch out my numb legs.

"Sorry, man," Brett says, passing me a water bottle he got from who knows where.

I eye the seal, but it snaps cleanly as I twist the lid. "Thanks," I mutter. My hand quivers and the liquid spills over my lips to run down my neck and chest.

The agent sighs. "Damn. I should have warned you more." He swivels on his heel and clicks his tongue as he looks around. "They're some twisted shits all right."

I nod, leaning back against the wall near the door. Red would have sat here too, braced against this very surface, waiting for rescue. "My hat's off to you for doing this on the daily," I tell Brett.

His mouth wrinkles. “Thanks. We get some dark days for sure, but no matter what the omegas have been through, my takeaway is that we got them out.” He eyes me up and down, and squats to take the bottle from me when my hand quivers. “It really affected you, huh?”

“She’s my scent match,” I admit softly, pointing the water bottle toward the bed before passing it to him.

“Oh, fuck.” His eyes widen and the color drains from his face. “I thought you were just her lawyer.”

I laugh bitterly and rest my head on my arms, braced over my knees. “Yeah, that’s all I am, because I was too busy with my work to—” Fuck, it hurts.

He drops his hand on my shoulder momentarily, keeping silent. I bet he of all people would understand that we humans are complicated beasts. After a few minutes, I pull myself together and get to my feet. I snap more photos around the room, locking my exhausted emotions down behind a wall of numbness. If I chose my work over her, then I at least need to make sure I deliver on these cases.

Once I’ve finished taking pictures, Brett gathers some samples from the room, gouging out chips of paint and cutting a section of the padded bed as well as the one dangling strap. “I’ll send you my detailed notes from the day, with everything the omega said,” he mutters as he drops them in an evidence bag. “Hope you can lock the fuckers away forever.”

“Me too,” I say darkly. “Let me get another picture of that strap before you bag it.” The opposing counsel will want any evidence not collected on the day thrown out, but this case will go down to a jury, so let them see the straps that held my omega in place.

As we leave the compound, breaking out into daylight once more, Brett clears his throat. He tosses his keys from one hand to the other as he catches my gaze over the car roof. “It’s not my place to comment, but that omega struck me as a real survivor who knows her own mind, the kind who won’t let any shit stand in her way. I suggest you don’t give up either.”

I nod, acknowledging his comment, before folding myself into the passenger seat.

He’s right. Red won’t give up on anything.

I tell Brett I plan to catch some sleep on the way home, and he passes me a cushion from the back seat. I nest it against the seat belt and headrest and close my eyes.

If Red’s willing to commit a crime to rescue one of her alphas from prison, isn’t there a possibility she’ll give me another chance? She let me help her through her heat, after all. She wants me—I just need to step up my game.

Instead of criticizing her choices, I’ll become her biggest supporter. I’ll court her with the same level of determination she’s had to survive.

Then she'll accept me as her alpha.

### Chapter eleven

Red

Rickon's keeping something from me. I mull over this truth as I gently slide my mug of coffee back and forth between my hands on the kitchen countertop, listening to the sounds of my first alpha moving around upstairs. He says he's fine, but whenever he's not occupied, he stares out the windows and picks at his cuticles. I saw this kind of behavior in the movie *Mad Over Her*—although unlike the main character, I don't have to worry about cheating.

No, Rickon's simply too sweet for his own good and feels like anything he has going on would burden me. In one sense, he's right, because Zack is a lot. In four days we've progressed to where I can pee alone, but the feral alpha still refuses to let me leave his line of sight.

The wooden staircase creaks faintly as Rickon descends. "I'm going out to grab those things on our list," he says, dropping a kiss on my hair.

I look up, catching his eye as he straightens and his troubled gaze slides away guiltily.

Even if Zack requires all my attention, that doesn't mean I'll let my first alpha fend for himself. "Let's go together," I say, pushing my half-finished drink away. Zack, part way through a bowl of cereal, stiffens as I flick my thumb in his direction. "It

can be Zack's first outing." Yesterday we stepped out onto the sidewalk with no incidents, which felt like an absolute triumph. We're ready for more.

Rickon shakes his head, a little too quickly. "No, it's too soon." He smooths his hands over his dove gray corset-vest and turns away. "We can't rush him."

"Even if we only have four days left?" I ask softly, letting my brows pop. Not even Rickon needs a boned vest, lace-up boots, and pearlescent eyeshadow for a trip to the grocery store.

His hands dart to his pockets. Then he picks up his phone and keys, fidgeting them back and forth on the bench. "How about we try an in-between activity this afternoon, instead? Like a car trip."

My heart twinges as I recognize he's begging me to let it go. Let him suffer alone.

I pinch my bottom lip between my thumb and index finger, considering my options. "I suppose he needs to get used to the car."

Rickon nods firmly and deposits his phone and keys in his pockets. "All right, it's a date. See you later." He turns away.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" I ask.

Rickon spins around, eyes wide.

I point to the cupboard under the sink. "Shopping bags."

"Right." He chuckles, shoulders sloping with relief. "Can't go shopping without shopping bags."

I narrow my eyes, homing in on his nervous tics. I've seen Rickon lie, and it came pretty smoothly—at least the times hemixed in partial truth. He hides behind a mask as much as I do. I frown and press my fingers together to force myself to calm down. This isn't just a lie; it's nerves. My alpha's scared.

I fucking need a bond with him to know what he's feeling. Damn the Omega Center and their oppressive rules. I don't think they'd force me to go back now, but that's one risk I'm not willing to take. Well, if I can't have a bond, and Rickon won't tell me, then I need to figure this problem out for myself.

"Have a good time," I coo, a devilish sensation rising inside me.

Rickon says goodbye to Zack, carefully explaining that he'll be back in a couple of hours, and then blows me a kiss on his way out. He's so considerate, despite Zack not being able to understand what he's saying. Yet.

I blow out a frustrated breath. I won't let this go, and if he doesn't want to share, it's time to do some digging. Which is a tough ask because I'm exhausted. Zack consumes every waking hour, and even some of the sleeping ones, since I've woken with his cock questing between my legs several times. The constant touch is awesome and strangely comforting, but also means I'm not sleeping nearly enough.

Whenever I'm not actively teaching my new alpha or learning how to cook, I have my headphones on, memorizing my lines from the script Rickon recorded for me. But my gut says I need to make time for Rickon.

"Come on, Zack," I mutter, dragging myself off the barstool and heading to our bedroom. I grab Rickon's laptop and settle against Zack on the bed. He cradles his knees around me and hugs my waist, tugging me closer to his chest.

"Let's see what our naughty Rickon is up to, shall we?" The indistinct murmur of my



first alpha's voice hums in my mind, telling me he's left the building. I don't get that anymore with Zack. Now his presence sits as an awareness in my chest, locked there via our bond.

The browser pops up, full of our behavior research. I minimize it, open another window, and click on Rickon's email, which is conveniently bookmarked in his favorites. Nestled among bills, sales newsletters, and information from Callisto about the charges against his ex-boyfriend, I find a recently opened and starred email from some place called Sorentito's.

Dear Rickon,

Since you aren't answering my calls, I can only surmise that you're experiencing a family emergency, because I'm sure you wouldn't dare ignore me for anything less than a life-threatening crisis. As you recall, we had an agreement regarding the spring preview dress, but I could swear Lyra Gray wore Alexis Panquin instead. Please explain, posthaste.

"Passive-aggressive much?" I mutter, looking at the name down at the bottom, complete with a fancy digital signature that slashes across the screen.

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Zack nuzzles my ear, making me chuckle. I click across to the calendar, and sure enough, an entry for a meeting today blazes there in blue glory. A quick Omoogle brings me back plenty of results for Hannah Sorentito, and it turns out she's kinda a big deal.

An image flashes into my mind of the first day I met Rickon and he took me to his apartment. In that crowded sewing room was a thick dress bag with the same calligraphy "H" logo on it. A mistake, he called it. My excitement at finding my scent match prevented me from asking further questions.

I close the laptop lid and shove it across the bed. Zack peels my shirt collar aside and presses his mouth to my bond mark. Heat flushes through me, heady and tempting, but I press his forehead to move him away.

"Not now, tiger," I murmur huskily. "Rickon needs us."

"Ri."

"Yes, well done," I praise. Every new word he attempts fills me with hot pride. "Rickon. But I'm sure he won't mind if you call him Ri."

Zack tugs me back against him. "Mine," he says proudly, nuzzling against my ear and breathing deep.

"I am," I agree, stroking his hair. I don't correct him. To Zack, my name is Mine, and that's all there is to it.

He purrs happily, and dives his nose through my hair, tickling.

The way he breathes me in, tasting even without his tongue touching my skin, is so sensual and special. Like my scent is his favorite brand of oxygen. Like he wants to possess everything, even the traces of haze that escape my skin.

As much as I want to turn and merge our bodies together, we don't have time. I unwind his arms from around me. "We can do that later, Zack. For now, let's go see what secrets we can find."

In the small storage closet at the end of the hall, I climb over boxes full of Callisto's books to the more jumbled collection of Rickon's things. The big dress bag lies over it all at head height, presiding in the cramped space like a reclining Renaissance model.

"There you are, Dame Big Mistake," I mutter, dragging it down. "Take this," I tell Zack, passing him the bag. He takes it but doesn't know what to do with it, so I have to climb past him and drag the garment case out. "Let's see what all the fuss is about."

The fuss is fucking beautiful.

A scalloped bodice glows with a pearly quality, shimmering whenever it catches the light. The paler skirt froths out like a wave just below the hips. And the side's completely open down past the underwear line.

"Oh, honey, that's not a mistake," I murmur, holding the gown up. An embossed Sorentito's tag catches on my fingers and I turn it over. I choke and re-count the zeroes, but it definitely reads thirty grand. "Shit!" No wonder Rickon's stressed, and it doesn't sound like this designer's offering to refund the dress either.

But I have money now.

Zack trails me as I rush to the bed and dive onto my stomach to find out when Lyra Gray wore a dress by this Alexis whoever. According to the celebrity gossip, the film gala happened not long before I met Rickon. I flash my rude finger at the pretty actress sticking her uppity nose out for the cameras at the red-carpet entrance. “You’re an idiot for letting him go, but thanks.”

I glance over at the gown hanging on the door. This designer lady wanted her clothes seen on someone famous. I’m not famous—yet.

I glance over at my feral alpha, who’s investigating the zip on the discarded dress bag, ticking the mechanism up and down repeatedly. What would the spy Red Hawk do? Hmm, no, maybe I need a different reference. Either way, it needs to be flashy.

I pop my head out into the hallway. “Hey, Agent Josef? Get ready, we’re going out.”

The agent appears out of his room, alarm spreading across his features. “With Zack?”

I grin. “Yep. He’s coming too.” After all, he’s the most important part of my plan.

## Chapter twelve

### Rickon

The thought of meeting a woman who’s not my boss shouldn’t intimidate me this much, but the problem is Hannah Sorentito is not just any woman. She’s an army general in the style industry, and fashion and entertainment weave so tightly together it’s hard to say where one ends and the other begins.

And here, behind this historically sculpted shopfront, lies the merging place.

Although the building is only a few years old, the architraves and detailing carved into the stone exude history, luxury, and timelessness. All elements of the brand Hannah maintains.

Although she's one of many, if this designer really takes offense, she can blacklist me with all her peers. Easy to do since she has a direct line to every influential ear in the Ommywood fashion sphere. Not the end of the world for me, but it'd kill Red's chances of getting designer dresses in the future, which she needs since she'll be in the public eye.

I splay my hands across my chest and move them away from my body as I breathe out, picturing calmness and serenity filling the space within. Well, I simply need to convince Hannah to let Red take over Lyra's part in the contract.

Problem is, Red's completely unknown right now.

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The spring film festival is in just over a month, and by then Red's name will circulate as Director Yun's dark horse pick—pun not intended. I stand on the sidewalk and smirk at my joke, but flinch when someone throws the showroom doors open with force.

The same clerk from my last visit glares at me. "If you've finished your sun yoga, Hannah will see you now."

My gaze drops to my watch, but as I thought, I'm still early. "All right," I mutter, my calm vanishing as her snark throws me off balance. Probably what Hannah intended.

The designer's office forms a larger version of the woman herself: slender, chilly, and decked in a palette of mixed fabric textures. One-way glass down the long side gives her a good view of the showroom while maintaining her privacy.

The fashion queen leans on her desk, crossing her arms. "Rickon Jones. So good of you to come and see me," she drawls, leaking sarcasm. Her hand drops to a sheet of paper on the desk, her sparkling black nails digging into the paper, and I don't need to read it to recognize our contract. She huffs out a pained sigh. "I feel betrayed, darling."

I lock my hands together behind my back. No more stalling. "Lyra Gray specifically asked me to purchase one of your gowns, but when I showed it to her, she wasn't brave enough to wear it."

Hannah's nose wrinkles. "Isn't it your job to manage her?"

One corner of my mouth tilts wryly and shame rushes through me. As if Lyra ever listened to anything I had to say. “I’m sorry I reneged on that part of the contract,” I tell Hannah, meeting her icy gaze. “But since I paid for the dress out of my own pocket, I’d like to offer a counter-agreement.”

Her penciled brows arch. “Bold.” She scans me up and down. “Like the rest of you. I’m listening, but please don’t waste my time.”

Good thing I took the time to dress up, including my heeled boots, which add an extra two inches to my height. The ensemble boosts my confidence. “I’m no longer representing Lyra Gray. But my new client—”

She holds up her hand. “Was my dress the reason for the split?”

I open my mouth to answer, and then carefully reconsider my words. “That gala brought the tensions between us to a head.” To be fair, the dress played a minor role in our professional breakup, but maybe Hannah will take pity on me. Hannah loves sensations, but only of the right kind.

The designer cups her chin with one hand, those sharp obsidian nails stroking her cheek. “So, who are you managing now?”

I swallow hard. “Her name’s Red Jones, and she’s a new actress Valencio Yun brought on board.”

Her upper lip curls slightly. “Aka untried. Unknown. And a forgettable name to boot.” She plays her fingers through the air, indicating something vanishing, before sighing and moving to the curved seat behind the desk. “I don’t need a blip on the radar, Rickon. You know that.” She rubs circles on her forehead with her index finger before sighing. “Bring the dress back, and I’ll refund you two-thirds of the price.”

Fuck. That's a ten grand loss for me. I stiffen. "Please give us another chance. I have an eye for people, just like I did for the dress, and Red is about to blow up big time."

"Dove." She cuts me off, managing to glare down her nose at me even though I'm the one standing. "I'm showing you pity here because everyone knows Lyra's a snake to work with. We'll pretend it never happened. I could charge you the full fee and still ask for the dress back, you know?"

I deflate. She's within her rights, but this is about more than the contract. Red needs this opportunity. I wash my brittle mouth with my tongue and try again. "Please, Hannah—"

She holds her hand up. "You have until Monday to return the dress." The woman opens her mouth again, but the sounds falter as she looks past me. "What in the dickens is that?"

I turn and my heart double beats as a familiar OCB agent opens both sides of the front doors and Red sashays into the showroom, wrapped in what looks like a bed sheet. I gasp as Zack steps up beside her, wearing one of Callisto's suits, with his leash arcing to Red's hand.

Fuck, he looks edible with the crisp white shirt straining across his shoulders and a loosely knotted tie disappearing under the satin charcoal gray vest. My cock pulses, sending yet another shock through me.

Until now, Red's hid his cuffed hands inside a hoodie pocket, but today, not only are they clearly displayed in front, but she's wound black satin ribbon from my sewing chest around his wrists and along the chain. Zack stands stiffly, head held high as he scans for danger. From here, he looks arrogant and proud. Makes me think of a premium escort trussed up as a gift.



I press my fingers to my mouth, heat rising in my cheeks. What the fuck am I thinking about? More important, Red's brought her killer alpha out on his first real outing to find me. Frankly, I'm not even surprised she tracked me down. Probably learned that from a movie too.

Red sheds her sheet, morphing from white caterpillar to goddess as the pearl dress spills out around her. She's wrapped her hair up in a messy French roll, and loose scarlet strands frame her sharp jawline as she looks around for me.

"Good grief! What's going on, Rickon?" Hannah snaps. "Why is she wearing my dress?"

"I didn't ask her to come," I murmur, transfixed. Didn't ask, but so grateful she did.

Why did I assume Red wouldn't help me in the first place? Why'd I forget I don't have to do everything by myself anymore? A lump lodges in my throat. Even with her hands full taking care of Zack, my omega still noticed my troubles.

I spin around and rush out into the showroom, forgetting Hannah. Without the filter of the special glass, Red's even more stunning, framed in the doorway's light.

The moment my omega sees me, she beams. "Good. Looks like we're in the right place."

Zack huffs out a breath and takes a step forward as I approach, but he's relaxing, not posturing. "Hi, big guy," I say, my words thick in my throat as I catch his fingers with mine. "You clean up amazing."

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I reach for Red's hands, the leash loop around her wrist reminding me how much risk she took in coming here. "Damn, you look so beautiful in that dress," I choke out. "I knew you would. Thank you for coming." Tears blur my vision.

Red smiles so sweetly, my heart melts. "Of course. You're my alpha. But next time tell me in advance, 'kay? And do my makeup for me, 'cause I'm all butterfingers with eyeliner."

I choke on a laugh. The lines are a bit wobbly, but she's stunning, nonetheless. The pale dress sets off her darker skin superbly, and she carries herself as if not even noticing how it exposes the entire side of her body.

She drops her voice. "How can I help?"

I offer her my elbow, and she slips her hand in daintily. We walk forward a few paces, the layered skirt swishing on the polished wooden floors. Hannah comes to meet us, alternating between glaring and covertly sizing Red up.

I grin. "Hannah, allow me to introduce Red Jones and her alpha, Zack."

"Zackary Jones," Red corrects me, and a hot thrill runs through my chest. I'm the weakest one of us, and yet the pack's adopting my name. Red turns everything on its head.

I nod to Red in acknowledgment. "Red, meet Hannah Sorentito, the greatest fashion designer of our era." A little flattery never goes astray, and *Stars Weekly* gave her that title at the beginning of the year.

Red smiles and dips a little in greeting. “My apologies for wearing your beautiful dress ahead of schedule, but I wasn’t sure you’d believe Rickon without meeting me. I’m going to be a big name in Ommywood soon, Hannah, and I’m willing to sign an exclusive representation with your label, but only if we come to an agreement today.”

I whip around to stare at Red, trying not to let my jaw drop. She’s attempting to turn the tables on Hannah, of all people?

The sharp lines of Hannah’s face draw in as she sets her jaw, but instead of offense, I read interest in her bright eyes. She lifts an imperious finger toward Zack. “And you expect to win public interest with cheap tricks like an alpha on a leash?”

Zack growls as her finger stabs toward him, and the hair on my arms rise. That’s no feigned threat, and Hannah recognizes it immediately, dropping her hand and stepping back with a gasp.

“Please excuse him,” Red covers smoothly, wrapping an arm around her riled alpha. “You see, this is his first outing. Ever. He’s been abused, so we’re rehabilitating him.”

Hannah’s hands flutter at her side, and she glances around the showroom. The attendants all stare at us, and the two early-morning customers snatch curious glances while pretending to shop.

The designer clears her throat. “Shall we take this conversation somewhere more private?” she asks, indicating the back of the premises.

At the very least, we’ve piqued her curiosity.

I turn and whisper to Agent Pierce, “Not the morning you were expecting, right? Any issues on the way here?”

He waggles his brows. “Our rogue wasn’t keen on the garage, but we’re still in one piece, thank God.”

I grin. Every day with Red is Christmas.

Hannah leads us into a conference room and watches like an eagle as Red tells Zack to sit and then perches on his lap, just about making the big alpha disappear behind her dress.

I sit down across from my gorgeous omega, tearing my gaze away to address Hannah. The short walk helped me overcome my shock enough to gather my thoughts. “You might think this is a cheap publicity stunt, but it isn’t. Zack was rescued from an underground fight ring, and he knows nothing about normal life. He refuses to be parted from his scent-matched omega—”

“And I refuse to leave him at home in a cage,” Red adds sharply.

I nod in agreement. “We’re in the process of training Zack to come out with us, hence the leash. I didn’t invite Red to visit you because I thought it’d be too much to ask of Zack.” I catch Red’s eye and smile. “But I should’ve had more faith in my client.”

Red leans forward to offer me her hand and I take it, squeezing her fingers in mine.

I turn back to the designer. “I hope you’ll have faith in us too, Hannah. Not only is she a brilliant actress, but Red’s also about to become the face of abused alpha rehabilitation. Her story will spread across the country. Maybe even the globe.”

Hannah taps her right hand against the back of her left as she studies Red. After a moment, she swings back to look at me. “And you’re her alpha, too?”

Heat blazes through my cheeks as I nod. Being recognized as this glorious omega’s

alpha in public feels almost as good as Red herself saying it.

Of course, Hannah wants details, and while she's fascinated by Red's story of breaking Zack out of Alpha Lodgings, I can tell she's none too keen on the lawbreaking and prison aspects of the story.

She stares into the distance for a long moment as the conversation dries up, and then she snorts softly. "Some people say even bad press is good news, but I'm not of the same opinion, and neither do I need to be reckless with my brand."

My heart sinks. It's true Sorentito's has more to lose than we do from collaboration. Celebrities line up for a chance to wear her gowns, and any one of them would put her in the spotlight on a red carpet. On the flip side, her name will be associated with us if something goes wrong, like Zack getting out of control.

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Red stands up, spreading her skirts. “It’s true anyone could represent your clothes,” she says, reading my mind. She rests her hands on Zack’s shoulders, reassuring him as she moves out of his direct sight. “But this is about a much bigger story. There must’ve been a point when you were starting out that you took a leap of faith, to get where you are now. Don’t you miss that thrill? And every brand needs an eco-friendly or humanitarian spin.” Her expression turns sly. “I promise I’m going places, Hannah. All three of us are.” She points to Zack and me.

A faint pang of loss runs through me, knowing Callisto should be part of our story, but he opted out. While his silver tongue would have come in handy, it also would be fun having him around to enjoy Red’s shenanigans.

Hannah chuckles as she looks Red up and down. “No wonder you’re a pack; you’re as bold as Rickon.” She runs a hand over her hair and groans faintly. “Fine. I’m a sucker for a pretty face and daring attitude.” She wags a finger in my omega’s face. “I’ll take a bet on you and your alphas, Red Jones. But for pity’s sake, do not wear that dress in a taxi again!” She mutters in disgust as she goes to the door and calls for one of her staff. “Let’s find you something else to wear.”

Red flashes me a triumphant grin, her cheeks rounding with the wideness of her smile. “That sounds wonderful.”

I clench my fists together on the table, silently celebrating. Zack twitches and cranes to look up at Red, no doubt experiencing her joy washing through him. Damn, I’m so jealous of their connection.

I open the door, watching as Red lifts her skirt to get around the table and chairs. The

move reveals scuffed tennis shoes under the gauzy layers, and I stifle a laugh.

She catches my snicker and rolls her eyes. “Not really sure how to walk in heels with all this skirt.”

As she passes me, I pull her close and kiss her cheek, whispering, “One step at a time.”

“Ha-ha,” she replies, mocking my joke, but her sensual mouth turns up with genuine warmth.

As I offer her my lips, Zack snaps to full alert, his vicious growl sending a shiver down my spine. He spins and lunges past us, gaze locked on something through the store’s front doors. Time seems to slow as I lurch desperately forward to grab him but miss. The leash drags off Red’s wrist as the alpha jerks away.

Red hisses with pain. Then her eyes fly wide with alarm. “Stop, Zack!” she yells.

“Grab him!” I cry, trusting our OCB escort more than Zack’s training.

But Zack’s faster than I could imagine, and like a beam of light, he shoots out through the front door, roaring an animalistic challenge.

I turn and give chase.

## Chapter thirteen

Zack

The Beyond is bigger than I can wrap my thoughts around. It’s full of more beings and scents and noises than all the caves I’ve stayed in until now combined. The sheer

size makes my head hurt and leaves me feeling small. Those prickly sensations settle whenever Mine touches me, but if she's out of sight, a warning chill walks all over my skin.

At the den that seems to be ours, the threats are minimal, but out in this Beyond, I have so much to protect her from.

Which is why, the moment I spotted the strange, four-legged beast, I couldn't ignore the danger. As a new being opened the doorway to the blue Beyond, this hairy creature turned and looked through the barrier between us. It may be half my size, but sharp fangs line its open mouth, and the drool spilling from black lips proves the creature's violent hunger.

I must protect Mine.

And White Mine.

I've fought my entire life, but now I have something to protect. If my mate has claimed this territory, then it belongs to us and I'll fight any challenger to keep her safe.

The alphas in matching blue clothes lunge for me. I always suspected they were threats, just biding their time. I snarl at the first man, who's too slow, and kick the second, catching him squarely in his belly. Just missed the spot that makes a man fold in half, but he still staggers back with a pained grunt. A ripping sound comes from my clothes and the restrictive tightness eases.

I fling myself out into the bright light, roaring at the beast who dared set eyes on my ohm. A bitter taste floods through my chest, where new sensations have flickered ever since I claimed her.



The four-legged, hairy being trips over itself trying to face me, and I skid to a halt as I notice the chain running from its thick neck to a female's hand—the same kind of chain I wear.

The connected woman screams at me, but I ignore her because she's not a threat. This beast is. It recognizes the challenge with a growl and moves in front of the female, posturing up.

I lunge forward with a fierce snarl but then jolt as arms close around me from behind. Faster than I can react, a hand wraps around my neck, tilting my head back. Fury pounds fiercely in my chest. I'll kill whoever dared—

The sweet scent of the delicious treats Mine's been feeding me fills my nose.

"Stop, Zack," White Mine says beside my ear, the words loaded with desperation. "Please stop. We're safe. You're safe. Sit." His grip tightens around my neck and chest.

I freeze, quivering with instinct. I'm sure I could break his grip, but he seems taller against my back right now. Is today the day I challenge White Mine? Should I take care of him first before dealing with this other threat?

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He babbles something to the female, and she backs up, dragging the four-legged creature with her. It's getting away.

I growl.

"I'll give you cake," White Mine says, fingers stroking the skin of my neck around the band. It should be a vicious challenge to touch me in such a vulnerable place, and yet his fingers are gentle and nonthreatening. My skin heats and a shiver of pleasure runs through me.

What should I do?

The beast disappears from sight as Mine jumps in front of me, flushed red and gasping. She grabs at the thing hanging from my neck. "Sit, Zack."

My lips peel back with a faint snarl. Do they know how difficult that command is for me right now? I'll sit for her anywhere she likes at the den, but out here I'm vulnerable. Threats of every kind surround us, from the four-legged beast I've lost sight of to the giant noisy boxes that roar along the nearby path. Not forgetting the two alphas in blue closing around us.

How do I keep Ohm safe if I'm on the ground?

The confusion swirls painfully behind my eyes, and I throw my head back against the solid wall with a loud crack. Once, twice.

They both gasp and shove their hands behind my head. I stop myself just in time from

crushing Mine's fingers with a third slam.

"No, don't hurt yourself, Zack." My ohm holds my gaze and repeats her order to sit.

I whine. She asks too much.

"You can do it," White Mine says, stroking my jaw. His creamy scent lodges on my skin. "It's safe. Sit."

Safe. I crane my head to look at him. This moment reminds me of the first time he said those words, after I woke up in the den—when I learned that showing teeth doesn't always mean a challenge.

Did the small beast smile instead of baring its fangs?

Red pulls out a tiny bag, the scent matching the alpha beside me. I lick my lips, imagining the taste on my tongue. But being surrounded front and back by this sweet flavor makes me wonder for the first time why I like it so much.

Do I like the treat because it smells like White Mine, or do I like White Mine because he smells like the treat?

With one fast move, I thrust my fist up, knocking White Mine's hand on my face aside and spin. He lets out an oof of air as I slam him into the wall and reach for his throat. As I thought, I can overpower him, and yet, his pale eyes don't show fear. They blow wide, something else on his mind. Something that excites me.

I lean in and dab my tongue to his neck. He tastes different to cake, but makes me hungry all the same. Saliva pools in my mouth.

An uneasy, prickling emotion rushes through my chest, and I instinctively know it's

my female's fear. She tugs on the strap around my neck again. "Sit, Zack."

White Mine said it's safe, and if it will help my ohm stop feeling afraid, I can do it. I slide down White Mine's body, touching all the ridges in his slender frame. Some other kind of power exists in this world I don't know about, because neither he nor Mine smells of strength, and yet I want to do as they say.

I huff in another whiff of their combined scents. Did my injury change me? Or the clearer air I breathe in the Beyond? Or is it because I started using tools in my hands like the other alphas at the previous place? My instincts are changing. It's both terrifying and wonderful.

Slowly I sink down.

The moment my ass hits the hard ground, Mine offers me a piece of cake, happiness swelling through her to pressure my chest. I stare up at White Mine as the spongy piece melts on my tongue. I can't fathom why I'd sit on the ground at the feet of an alpha who hasn't defeated me, and yet it's not a bad thing.

It makes me fizz with an unfamiliar alertness.

"Well done. Thank you, Zack," he says, smiling without showing teeth.

I grip the back of his knee and tug hard. White Mine yelps and falls, strangely clumsy for such a dangerous alpha. I catch him one-handed, and he laughs and digs his fingers into my hair. Mine laughs too and hunches down to feed me another piece of cake.

The woman from inside darts out to yell at her about a dress.

"Take a photo," White Mine orders. "Zack's first excursion." He points up at some

colored symbols across the top of the wall, and the woman's eyes light up. While she pulls out a hand device and makes little clicking noises, I crane around to look for the four-legged challenger, but it's gone.

Ohm presses her lips to mine, distracting me. New warmth floods my body, and I forget all about the dangers as we cuddle together on the ground.

"Ready to go home, precious?" Mine asks after a few long kisses. Home. That's the word she uses for our den.

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I shunt my nose into her cheek. “Hom.”

Her lips quiver and the sensation flooding through my chest blinds me. So sweet and pure. I think my ohm enjoys hearing my voice. “Mine,” I add, and she nods.

“Up,” she says, tugging once on my strap. “Let’s go.”

I respond quickly, drawing White Mine with me. When he tries to step away, I clamp down on his arm. I obeyed his request to sit, but somehow our challenge isn’t complete. If I must wear this leather-and-chain thing Mine holds, why does he get to walk around alone? Why can’t I chain him to me?

The uneasy sensation makes me want to growl, but I hold it in, knowing Mine is already worried. We walk back inside the shop, but I don’t release my hold on the slender alpha the whole time while Ohm changes her clothes and talks with the woman with hair the same color as the man in my grip.

After we leave, White Mine talks soothingly to me as we climb inside one of the noisy metal creatures and skim across the roads. “You gave us a fright, Zack, but good job listening.” White Mine leans on my shoulder, pushing me toward the chilly glass. He points with his free hand. “Look. What you saw was a dog.”

I stiffen as I glimpse a different four-legged creature being led by another female as we flash past. I twist to look out the back barrier. “Dog,” I mutter. My hand strays to the device linking me to Mine. The men with the biting sticks back at the fighting territory used to use that word. Is it the same?

Red catches my hand. “Yes, this is a leash, but it’s different. You’re Zack, an alpha, not a dog.”

I’m not a dog. If Mine says so, that settles it. I’m Zack, an alpha with an ohm and—and another alpha.

I swivel to face White Mine. His scent lingers in my nose ever since he touched my face and throat. The thin bones in his wrist rub under my thumb. I could snap them easily.

Would he try to kill me if I injured him? Would we struggle and roll together on the floor? What then? My body would cover his, since I’m bigger, and his scent would rise. I press my nose into the side of his neck. If I pinned him, sweat would coat his skin. I’d lick it off, tasting his fear.

Or maybe he doesn’t fear anything?

The thought catches me off guard and I lean into him, processing. No, it can’t be true, because there was fear in him when he stopped me from chasing the dog.

But not fear of me.

The strange fabric Mine loaded me into before our outing squeezes tightly around me, trapping heat and flesh between my thighs. I squirm. I need to get free. Need to challenge White Mine before I die of curiosity.

I stumble, dizzy, as we get out of the machine in the stinking, shadowed cave. I growl, turning to search for threats, holding White Mine behind me. Strange how I expose my back to him without a second thought these days. The two blue alphas are here as well, and I bare my teeth at them.

“It’s safe,” the sweet-smelling alpha says quietly, tugging on my leash.

Mine feeds me a bit of cake as the stomach-clenching box carries us into the building. I lick crumbs off her fingers, staring at White Mine. I need to know.

My body quivers with hot flushes as we ride the second box and step into the space outside our den. I rip the leash from Mine’s hand—I learned I could do that today—and throw White Mine against the wall. He makes the most satisfying sound, one that makes the lump in my chest thump harder.

I crowd the slender alpha, inhaling as his cake scent floods over me. I reach down and take his lower clothes in my hands and tear. His cock juts out, straining the limits of a scrap of lace. I want him under my power.

I reach down, wondering what it will take to make him snap. The blue alphas move closer, bristling with silent warning.

Mine throws herself in front of me, knocking my hand aside. Her eyes blaze with determined fire. “No, Zack. You must always get consent. You have to ask.”

I stare down at her, vibrating. She’s trying to tell me something important, judging by the rush of shared feeling pulsing in my chest. Mine is always teaching me, and this slender alpha is precious to her. Slowly I press a kiss to her forehead, and then I push her back to stand shoulder to shoulder with White Mine.

He looks at me, our eyes level today. His unexplainable power made him grow taller than his usual size.

I lean in and rest my lips next to his ear, just as he did earlier to me. “Ask.”

Chapter fourteen



Rickon

Zack's hot breath tickles my ear, sending a rush of molten sensations from my head to my belly. Words can't describe how fucking sexy he looks, strong arms crowding us in while he's wearing Callisto's suit, which has ripped through the crotch, with his blue eyes shining with lust.

Desire. For me as well as Red.

And now he's asking for my consent. And maybe, just maybe, for something even more precious. Something he doesn't understand yet. My heart double-beats, my tight corset making it harder to breathe.

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I reach out and link my arms around his neck. “Yes, Zack.” Belatedly, I point to our front door. “Inside.”

Zack’s eyes narrow and he swoops down and picks me up, lifting me like I weigh nothing. I might be an alpha with a slighter frame, but I’m still a solid hundred fifty pounds. His malted barley scent, always strong, flares thicker.

“How about you guys head out for lunch?” Red asks, her voice lilting with delight as Zack tows her behind him. She grabs a card from her pocket and flicks it at Pierce. “My treat.”

“Ma’am, we can’t—”

The door slams behind us, shutting off the agent’s protest. Red perfumes, spreading scorched macadamia flavor across my tongue. I’m already aroused, and that scent makes me rock hard in seconds.

And Zack? He snarls in a desperate way that sends fresh heat shocking through me. Like he can’t wait a second longer. I thread my fingers through his coarse hair, tracing the scars on his scalp, signs of the cold, cruel life he’s lived so far. But now Red and I get the privilege of teaching this wild man about love.

“Hello!” Ozzie chirps from his cage around the corner.

“Hi, Ozzie,” Red calls cheerily. “We’re a bit busy now.”

“Hello, hello,” the bird parrots, making us grin.

Zack dives his nose into my collar, every indrawn breath tickling my sensitive skin.

When he lifts his face, a rigid determination shines in his expression. He curls his fingers around his leather collar, collecting the dangling leash with a twist of his thumb. My pulse turns frantic as his lips quiver a few times.

He silently tests his words, and then declares, “Orf. Off.”

Fuck me. That’s a new word for him, although he’s obviously heard us use it. Our feral’s exerting his independence, and it’s exhilarating.

I meet Red’s gaze over his muscled shoulder, and she presses her fingertips to her lips, covering a smile. It might be too soon to tell, but it strikes me that Zack already understands the difference in what’s required of him outside versus in our own home.

How far might he run with that idea?

Red passes me the tiny key from a chain around her neck, and I insert it into the lock on the collar. I think the security is more symbolic, really, in a BDSM way, but after Agent Pearce’s suggestion, we figured it was one more deterrent against Zack getting into trouble in public. After the lock clicks, I pull the collar out from the metal clip and let it slide free.

Zack releases my ass, and I flow down his body to stand, not missing the boner poking out through his ripped trouser seams. I’d better sew the tear up before Callisto sees it. Our feral alpha cages me against the wall, one big, roughened hand sliding down over my hip to grasp my thigh. So possessive.

“Ask,” he mutters, mouth hovering an inch from mine.

“Yes,” I whisper, and his lips close on mine.

Zack knows what he's doing now. His mouth presses to mine, damp and burning hot. A whimper slips free of my throat, and he dives his tongue into my mouth as if to coax more moans from me.

The alpha splays his palm over my chest, questing. I reach between us, pressuring his big body away enough so I can reach my corset laces. When I pull, he tenses, that muscular hand slamming me back against the wall hard enough to make my breath sputter.

"Zack!" Red warns sharply.

"It's okay," I say raggedly. "I actually—" Fuck, heat burns through my cheeks as I realize what I'm admitting.

"You what?" Red asks, suspicion darkening her tone.

"I like it." I throw my hand up to cover my face as heat roars through my cheeks. Is it because I've had so much rough sex in the past that I got used to it? Or is it because I want to surrender to his raging masculinity? Maybe I'm just a simp for the ones I love, and this feral alpha has scorched his name on my heart.

Ignoring my plight, Zack hunkers down and studies the laces on my corset, tugging on the ends until it comes loose. I guide his fingers to the row of tiny hooks used to tighten the clothing over my waist and chest and he frees the lacing until the whole thing's loose enough to scoot over my hips and drop to the floor.

He grins, clearly pleased with himself for defeating the lace-and-boning obstacle. With that sexy smile on his face, he clasps both my hips, fingers extending all the way around my ass cheeks.

"Fuck, Zack," I mutter, balancing on his shoulders. A silent instinct reminds me how

much trust he's showing by taking this lower position before me. His thumbs catch in the lace of my underwear and he pulls, making me gasp as the fabric strains tight around my aching cock.

Red leans over his shoulders to undo Zack's vest buttons, and he takes her weight without even getting off balance. Another faint moan slips through my parted lips as he drags my underwear free.

Zack rises and holds my collarbone with one hand, turning sideways to give Red access to his clothes. "Off," he says again.

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I try to slip his hold, but he straightens his arm, locking me between his palm and the wall with a sudden thrust. This strong alpha could crush my chest like this if he wanted to.

But that knowledge only turns me on more because if Zack was going to hurt me, it would have been the first day we brought him home. My knees go a little weak as heat pulses through me. The noise that vibrates in my throat catches both their attention.

I purr huskily.

Zack growls and attaches his mouth to mine in one sudden move. I gasp into his lips, and he licks, stealing my senses and my breath. Then the world tips as Zack lifts me over his shoulder and, a moment later, it whirls again as he throws me on the couch. It hurts good, the faint sting of adrenaline carrying heady lust in its wake.

The light shutters as Zack covers me with his body, his thick cock questing along my thigh. Fuck, I'm burning up here, ready to explode already. Zack pauses, thumbs deep in my hip crease, a puzzled look on his face as he gazes down at my anatomy.

Red smothers a chuckle. "Here, Zack." She guides his hand between my legs, startling another gasp from me. "This is what men have. You gotta loosen it with your fingers first." Her gaze flits up to me. "Right?"

My omega teaching our alpha how to prep me for sex. Does it get any hotter than this? I thrust my knuckle between my teeth and nod. Red's scarlet hair falls forward over her shoulder, the roll escaping her pins as she guides Zack's fingers over my

balls and down the seam to my hole. Honestly, I'd consider taking him right away, but like everything we do with Zack, this is a life lesson. Plus, it has been a while since my ass last got attention. I block out the thoughts of Hudson that follow.

Zack is nothing like that bastard.

A shiver possesses me as Red traces the rim of my pucker. A moment later, Zack's roughened thumb presses in, spiraling lightly. I moan and arch.

"See? He likes it," Red says, her sly voice fanning my need.

"Come here, minx," I implore, and Red giggles as she obeys. I tug her down for a kiss and she falls, half on me. "He'll figure it out," I murmur against her mouth. "He's smart."

"Mm-hmm." She soaks up my kisses and comes back for more, her breath quickening.

Zack lifts my hips, studying me with a student's fixed attention, and his big knuckles brush over my cock with fascination. His touch slips down through my legs and then back to my ass. The alpha presses more firmly, sending his thumb slipping through my muscle rings. I gasp.

Red hovers over me, grinning. "Feeling good, alpha?" she asks.

I dive my fingers into her hair, locking our whimpers together in a series of breathy, messy kisses. "S-so good," I stammer. When she looks up to check on Zack, I tug Hannah's borrowed over-one-shoulder silken shirt off my omega and work on the buttons of her high-waisted dress pants. Then Zack drags his finger out, making me moan and my body lock up.

He does it again, watching me with a hunter's intense gaze as I garble out a lusty groan. "More, Zack," I beg, spreading my knees. He's got me so hot; my body feels too small to bear the need burning inside.

Red rises to shimmy out of her clothes.

I grasp her hand. "Biscuit, could you grab a condom and some lube? I could go bare, but I don't want him getting a UTI." And I'm definitely going to need the lube, given how thick he is.

She nods and races up the stairs.

Zack watches her go, his head tilting as he tracks her footsteps along the upper floor. Once he hears her returning, he presses his thumb back into me. "More," he repeats under his breath.

I dissolve into a writhing, moaning mess as Zack takes up my challenge. He rocks his engorged dick across my calf, movements growing rougher and more frantic. He's ready for more, too.

Red returns and I catch my breath while she fits the shield over his cock, explaining things as simply as she can. "Okay, you're good to go," she murmurs, kissing his cheek. "You can fuck my alpha." She throws me a sexy wink and my heart double beats.

Zack's eyes widen as he looks down at his cock and back at my ass, realization dawning. It lights him up, and he scrambles to change his footing on the couch, sliding his body up mine. His rubbered cock grazes up my thigh, digging in with short, quivery thrusts showing his eagerness.

Suddenly he freezes, braced with one arm over the back of the couch, one locked



beside my hip. He gazes down at me, his expression changing.

I hold my breath, wondering what's coming. Is there a chance I was wrong about him hurting me? I can't escape now since I'm pinned under his solid body with no leash around his neck.

Zack leans in, pressing his cheek to mine and nuzzling up and down, marking me. "Ask?" he murmurs.

Tears prickle behind my eyes. How does this wildling alpha know more about consent than half the men I've been with?

I worm my hand between our bodies and guide his cock to my pucker. "Yes, Zack."

He groans into my ear as I seat his thick erection into my ass, lifting on my heels to get the best angle. His teeth graze my jaw, and he growls as his hips buck forward, sinking his cock deep inside.

My breath flees. I gape, hands floundering against the couch as his girth shocks up into me. Fuck, he's thick. I use every technique in the book to relax and stretch around him, deep breathing and rotating my ass in small circles to get him inside. Zack rises, bracing on the couch to thrust again.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

I arch, mouth falling open with silent cries. I scrabble my fingers across the fabric-coated joins, looking for anchorage.

“Shit, that’s so hot, babe,” Red croons, wrapping one hand over her bare waist. Her cheeks flush as she stands at Zack’s shoulder in just her underwear, watching where our bodies meet.

It’s too much, my omega watching as our alpha fucks me silly, his punishing thrusts sending intoxicating waves to overload my system.

I reach for Red, and she takes my hand as I crunch upward, groaning and swearing. Have I ever wanted to come this fast in my life? Zack’s nostrils flare as my scent explodes, and he grunts, looking for even more purchase and driving harder.

Red pants, and I spin my hand over to capture her wrist, tugging her closer. I coast her panties down over her smooth thighs. “I want you on my face, Red,” I gasp out.

She shivers, slick dampening the short down over her pussy. Yeah, I need that. I tug her into place, so she’s spread over my chest, facing Zack, and I lever her by her hips until her ass hovers over me just right. My omega’s already dripping from watching her men. I drag my tongue through the wet mound, her honey flavor startling another greedy moan from me. I seal my mouth over her pussy and suck hard.

Red falls forward with a mewl, but Zack catches her. He doesn’t pause in his siege on my ass, steady thrusts turning wild as Red’s scent joins mine and his in the air. I can barely breathe around Red’s pussy, but every gasp of air is thick with the taste of them.

I squirm as heat ricochets through my body, building.

Red drops her hand to my cock, and then it's all over for me. The tingling starts at the base of my cock, and I thrust and lick desperately, digging into Red's hips to keep her from sliding off me as I tremble.

Zack thrusts deeper, threatening to split me, and the hard edges of his knot bump against my ass with every thrust. He's so excited by our union. Tears run down my face as my orgasm locks me up and thrashes me hard, Zack's movements turning frantic. He snarls, and then Red cries out and goes rigid, her pussy swelling around my mouth before a flood of juice sprays over my tongue. I suck it down greedily, then freeze as Zack impales me in a long thrust, his dick twitching.

Sparkling light motes float behind my eyes as I lift my ass off the couch, chasing Zack through his peak. His roar makes us all shudder, prolonging the orgasmic flight right out of our senses. For a long moment, we hover, a trio locked together in ecstasy. I rock Red forward slightly so I can catch a breath before I pass out.

Zack looks down at me over Red's shoulder, where his mouth seals over the bond mark. His blue eyes bore into me, hazed from the sex, and yet with a clarity I haven't seen before. The confusion's gone.

I reach up, my arm shaking from the orgasm's strength. Zack threads his fingers through mine over Red's back, locking us together with our shivering omega in the middle.

Tears dust my lashes as I squeeze his hand. "Love you, Zack." He might not understand such an abstract term at the moment, but there's another he might know. "We're a pack now."

"Pa-kar." He squeezes my fingers back, holding tight like he doesn't plan to let go.

I smile and let my head flop back. “Yeah.”

A shrill chirp comes from the far end of the room, followed by my parrot’s copied breathy voice. “Fuuuuuck!”

“My thoughts exactly,” Red mutters into Zack’s shoulder.

I laugh as I stroke her back.

## Chapter fifteen

Red

Hushed noises downstairs tell me people are moving in the apartment, but Zack and Rickon still sleep deeply on either side of me, their warm breath misting my skin. Honestly, it’s a squeeze with the three of us in Rickon’s queen-sized bed, especially since Zack’s solidly built, but I feel safe rather than claustrophobic.

Anything coming to get me would have to climb over an alpha, and since Zack always takes the side nearest the door, they’d have to go past him. It’s no accident Zack ends up on that side. After we all fall asleep, he climbs over us and resettles himself on that side. He’s always thinking about protecting me.

After the boys’ beautiful claiming, the three of us kissed and stumbled our way up to the bedroom and continued making out. My shoulder stings a little from Zack’s affection, since he often uses his teeth on the mark, but it’s bearable. I cover my eyes with my arm and grin. His fixation is cute, and now it seems like Rickon’s included in his possessive instincts.

The way Zack told me to take off his collar was so dominating it makes me wonder what the future might look like for us as a pack. Sometimes Zack seems simple and

childlike, and then occasionally, like today, he exudes an ancient wisdom.

Damn, I'm getting sentimental for sure now.

Carefully I inch down the bed, joining my two alphas' hands together in the vacated space, then ease off the edge. I slip into one of Rickon's shirts and fresh underwear before tiptoeing out through the door. Something hard but slender snaps under my bare foot and I glance down to find a long-stemmed red rose lying across my threshold.

I lift the blossom to my nose and sniff. Callisto's timber scent lingers, mixing with the rose's oversweet tones. Sickly sweet. Reminds me of my omega friend with her pack of caged alphas. I must call her and tell her about my own alpha fishing trip.

The green stem dangles in my hand, broken but not cleanly. A faint pang tugs at my heart as I pop into the bathroom. Darkness blots the light outside the window, telling me we spent all afternoon making love and napping.

"Three days left," I murmur, popping the rose stem behind my ear and tilting it to stay in place. Three days until my job starts and Zack faces the world.

*Source Creation Date: July 7, 2025, 7:05 am*

Today was a good trial run, but I never imagined Zack would have such a dramatic reaction to a dog. It doesn't bode well. On the film set, we'll be around hundreds more people, and weird moving cameras, not to mention horses.

He listened to my orders outside the designer's shop, grudgingly, but today he's also shown a new level of independence. He's growing into his own person, and he might not blindly follow my commands anymore.

I tuck the worries away as I wash my face. I never would've made it this far if I was gonna let worries suck me down. Red Hawk never gives up.

Halfway down the corridor, I find a second rose, then another on the stairs. Two more dot the floor to the kitchen, where the final one towers out of a vase next to a slim case. A warm glow flickers in my heart but I remind myself not to get excited. The only person who might leave me flowers is Callisto.

Our discarded clothes from the earlier romp sit neatly folded and stacked on a bar stool. Heat flares in my cheeks as I imagine the lawyer picking up after us.

"Looks like you had a good day."

I spin to find Callisto leaning in the doorway of the former library. He smiles but looks worn out, shadows smudging the skin under his eyes. We've barely seen him in the last few days. His gaze drops, taking in my bare legs, and then he drags his eyes up to meet mine. After a moment, he clears his throat and looks away.

"How are things going with Zack?" he asks, coming into the kitchen and taking a

stemmed glass down from the cupboard. “Want a drink?” he adds, reaching for a second cup.

“Um, yeah, thanks.” I slide onto the unoccupied stool. “He’s doing really well.” I rest my hand on top of the clothes. “Sorry for taking your suit without asking. We had a bit of an emergency today.”

His brows lift as he gets a bottle of white wine from the fridge and pours. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah.” I sip from the glass he offers, the dry grape taste tickling my tongue. Pinot Grigio, the bottle next to Callisto’s elbow reads. “It was actually Rickon who was in trouble.”

The alpha’s voice sharpens. “What happened?”

I smother a smile by taking another sip. Does Callisto even know how much he cares for Rickon?

Agent Pierce pads to the head of the stairs to check on us, and then silently returns to the room he shares with Agent Josef. No trouble here.

I outline my day between sips, adding in Zack’s unexpected reaction to the dog, but leaving out his possessive claiming of Rickon. His affections will be apparent soon enough, and it’s Rickon’s story to tell, anyway.

I rest my chin on my hand. “He seemed to think he had to deal with Hannah all on his own.”

Callisto spins the narrow wineglass stem between his fingers. “That’s always been his way.” He sighs and drops his head, dark hair falling forward like a curtain. “I thought

it was because Ricky didn't like people knowing his business, but lately I realized it's because he didn't have anyone who had his back. Or he didn't think he did."

I trace the circular base of the glass. He's right. Callisto's got good intentions, and he acted immediately when he discovered Hudson hurt Rickon, but the fact is, he didn't know his friend was in danger to begin with.

"And Lyra was such a bitch to him," the lawyer adds, staring into the far distance. "The things he used to tell me about her stupid errands . . . Doesn't surprise me she pulled something like that dress business on him."

Which I won't let her get away with anymore, assuming we run into each other in the film biz. Lyra will discover she's not the only one who can make others' lives hell.

And, on the topic of hellish lives, I have one immediate task to take care of. "Callisto, Zack was in a special cell away from the others." The words stick in my throat, but I force them out. "They were preparing to euthanize him. Who would do such a thing when he's so eager to learn?" I roll my bottom lip through my teeth and bite down, using the faint pain to center myself.

Callisto leans both forearms on the bench top and sighs. "Yeah, it's a little hard to believe. I heard from Leroy—ah, he's the assistant director at the OCB here—" He jerks his thumb over his shoulder as if the headquarters were just a block away. "The sting down in Darinian brought in a lot of feral alphas, which clogged up the prison system. Sounds like they're too eager to make space."

I growl under my breath and clench my hands into fists, channeling my rage down toward the ground. "So a man's life is only worth what he eats and a few yards of space?" I can't stand thinking about how close I came to losing Zack forever.

I look up, catching Callisto's concerned gaze. "How can I help these alphas so this



doesn't happen again? I can't bring them all home, but at least they shouldn't die just because their omega hasn't found them yet. That's so inhumane!"

He winces, but it slowly dissolves into a smile as he studies me. "You've got a big heart, Red." He reaches out and strokes my hand, the gentle movement easing the rigid tension inside me. "And you're right. I think someone down in Darinian started a welfare fund for the rescued alphas, but it mustn't have been enough to save Zack. Want me to find out the details?"

I perk up. "Oh, I bet that's my friend Rose. She has two of them in her house."

Callisto blanches. "Two? How in the blazes do they manage that?" He shakes his head and clucks his tongue.

I snicker at his shock. Two alphas like Zack would be a handful for sure. "I've got her number, so I'll ask about the fund," I say. "But if there's a legal way to protect them from, you know, that fate, could you look into it?"

He squeezes my hand, smiling across at me like I'm precious to him. "Of course. And send me the fund details once you know and I'll donate too."

I sip more wine and study the tall alpha through my lashes. He has a good heart, once he's focused. It's just that most of the time, his head is elsewhere.

“Thanks,” I whisper.

“Anything else on your mind?” Callisto asks, releasing me and topping up his wine.

I cover my glass when he offers me more. “What’s going to happen about the charges for my heist? Will I go to prison?”

He spreads his hands on the bench, wide shoulders rippling under his fitted suit. “Well, I don’t want to be insensitive, but I can actually use Zack’s, ah, sentence, in our favor for this one. I’ve drafted an appeal to have the charges dropped based on your scent matching and the alpha’s unfair destination. Leroy’s providing a statement that the alpha spoke intelligent words, and I’ve got a report from the sheriff confirming the same thing, so those Lodgings psychologists will get left out in the cold. Hope this gets them fired.”

Gotta agree with him on that.

Callisto grins, warming to the topic. “Honestly, impersonating an OCB agent is harder to wriggle out of, but I think I can get the sentence reduced to a fine, given the circumstances. For an omega, sometimes the reason does justify the means.”

A lump forms in my throat. On top of everything, I guess I was more worried than I realized about the possibility of leaving Zack. But Callisto’s attitude reassures me. He deals with this sort of thing all day long, and he doesn’t seem concerned, so neither will I.

“That's good news. Thanks for your help.”

He chuckles. "I'd say "anytime" but then I'd worry you'd go and do it again, and none of my arguments will work a second time."

I hold up my hands in surrender and shake my head. "No second time. The first one shaved years off my life."

Callisto snorts. "I hope not."

I drop my hands and brush against the soft petals of the roses on the counter. "Last thing," I say, tracing my index finger around a blossom. "What can I send to the truck driver as an apology gift?"

This time, the alpha laughs loudly. "That poor guy didn't know what in hell was going on." He shakes his head with a chuckle. "Don't send him anything until after the charges get finalized. We can't have it looking like any kind of payment."

"Oh, good idea." Yeah, I hadn't thought of that, but luckily Callisto did. I nod and sip more wine, but a bubble pops right under my nose, making me sneeze.

"But don't worry," Callisto says after I've finished sneezing. "I'll represent Lionel or get his case transferred to someone I trust at our Darinian branch. Once it's over, we can send him a client appreciation gift, something like season VIP basketball passes."

"Oh, that sounds great. If he's not into basketball, he can sell it for cash?"

Callisto nods. "Does that set your mind at ease?"

"Yeah, all immediate worries ticked," I say, smiling. This man's going all out for me, and not just with the legal stuff. I lick a little of the wine off my lips and pick up a rose. "I assume these are for me?"

Callisto flashes me a silly grin. "Looks like you have an admirer. Must be a house

fairy.”

“Uh-huh.” I chuckle, lifting the rose to my nose. “One who happens to smell like you.”

His lips twitch, the corners dipping into his cheeks. Not quite dimples, but impressions. Callisto leans on the bench and slides the long, narrow case by the vase closer to me. “I just—well, we never got to talk about it, so I wanted to say how honored I was to help you through your heat. Don’t feel pressured. I simply wanted to express myself.”

Curious, I flip the box open. Inside, a bracelet nestles on navy satin, the rows of diamonds glittering under the down lights. They twinkle as I turn the box to run my finger over the small square links set in white gold.

“Shit, Callisto,” I murmur. “It’s beautiful.” Very elegant and eye-catching. The sparkles seem to swarm inside me as I recall my heat, Callisto reaching under the cut door to bring me sweet relief.

I glance over at the library, the wooden door now replaced by iron bars. “Thanks for helping, and rearranging your house,” I murmur, pressing the individual settings under my finger as I stroke the bracelet.

“Want to put it on?” he asks, his thickened tone making me think he’s remembering too.

I nod, and he lays the cool metal over my skin and attaches the two ends. His fingers linger momentarily on the back of my hand. If I had any doubts Callisto Wren was trying to woo me, they vanish under that warm touch as he slides the bracelet into position and cradles my wrist between his hands.

“Gorgeous.”

I wet my tongue with a little wine, swallowing the emotion rising in my throat. Why couldn't he have done this the first day we met? Why did he wait until after I saw how wholeheartedly my other two alphas would love me?

I tug my arm free under the guise of inspecting the jewelry. "It's stunning," I say. Too much, perhaps. Clearing my throat softly, I add, "I'm not quite myself when I'm in heat."

His expression falls as I draw the line between us again.