



# Claimed by the Ultima Wolf (The Omega Selection #3)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** A bad decision. A moment that changes everything.

When my enemy finally gets his hands on me, I know I won't survive. But when an unexpected stranger comes to my rescue, I think I'm finally safe.

Five men call me their mate. Five men would do anything to protect me.

Except, can you ever truly be safe when monsters are lurking in your shadows?

**Total Pages (Source):** 30

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

Kurt's scent is all around me, and his scent is suffocating me, like a vice around my neck that just keeps getting tighter and tighter.

Or maybe that's just my terror. He's leading me through the woods, a knife pointed at the small of my back.

As though he needs a weapon to have the upper hand.

Without my men, Kurt can kill me as easily as he killed Serra and my brother.

I'm a weak omega on my own. Completely at his mercy.

The forest is supposed to be my happy place.

Surrounded by the trees and wildlife, I'm supposed to feel at home, but now, the smell of mulch, bark, and running water—the very things that soothe me—are drowned out by Kurt's stench. It's everywhere, and it makes me feel like I'm going to be sick. Memories flash through my mind, and I can't stop myself from thinking back to when all this started, when I was running through the woods, thinking I could outrun the alpha of my pack who came to collect me for The Selection.

If only I had been smarter then. If I'd just left my cabin sooner.

Had I outsmarted that alpha and gotten away from him, I wouldn't have been dragged to the castle for The Selection, and Kurt wouldn't have been brought back into my

life.

I might have been hauled back the next year, but maybe by then Kurt would've left with an omega, and I would've been safe.

"Nice day, isn't it?" Kurt asks happily behind me.

My thoughts instantly deny his words as sweat beads down my back. Nice day? No, this is the furthest thing from a nice day.

When I don't answer, he pokes me sharply with the knife.

I cry out, feeling the blood already starting to ooze beneath my now torn dress.

"Isn't it?" he asks again, this time a threat in his words.

Blinking away tears, I say, "Yes."

I think of my men, back at the castle, heart twisting when I picture them realizing I'm gone.

Ezra will think it's his fault. Cayson will try to joke and drink through the grief, which will alienate the others and only make him struggle more.

They might not think they're my mates, but I know they'll feel guilty when they learn about my fate.

I haven't known the ferals as long, but they're absolutely certain I'm their mate and will react accordingly.

I can picture them doing something reckless, like going after the ultimas, for failing

to protect me.

A sob rips from my lips at the thought of them learning about my fate. At the pain they might feel if we're mates. Who am I kidding? We are. Of course we are. I may have never been a mate before, but I know the stories—losing a mate can kill you, if your connection is strong enough.

At least, hopefully, ours isn't that strong yet. But it could've been, with time. I know that.

The worry for my men, for Addilyn, for how my death might affect everyone else, is eclipsed by the potent, ardent fear clogging my airway now. I know, without a doubt, that I'm going to die out here. Whether I have seconds or minutes, I know my end is near.

Kurt is going to kill me. All I can hope is that he'll do it quickly. That he won't... that he won't do anything too terrible.

My heart is beating faster and harder than it ever has in my life, to the point where my eyes are blurring from the impact of the blood rushing through my head.

My mouth tastes like battery acid, and my hands are shaking.

This moment is like every nightmare I've ever had about Kurt, come to life.

And like my dreams, I'm helpless against him.

He's at my back, prodding me every once in a while to keep me moving forward, whistling a little tune that I recognize from the day he killed my brother, Miles, years ago.

I hadn't remembered it until now, but now it weaves through my mind, blending today with that day long ago.

It's a tune that's somehow merry and filled with good cheer, yet it makes me feel like I'm eating glass.

I can't stop picturing my brother, his neck turned at that awful angle.

Then, years later, Serra, in the woods, her only crime being someone weaker than Kurt, being someone easy to take advantage of.

These two deserved better than Kurt. If the world were just, Kurt would've lost his life for his crimes.

Instead, his father's status as a powerful alpha had secured his freedom and he was out here, completely free, and able to kill again.

And no one will punish him for this either. He'll walk away scott-free.

More than anything, I wish I was stronger.

I wish I could do something to stop this, that I had questioned the note I received, that I had asked Addilyn about her note—anything but just blindly trusting and believing that I would be okay, that this note was like all the other notes The Selection had given me.

Somehow, not living in constant anxiety and trying to calm my constant state of fear had turned me into someone dumb enough to make this mistake, and I hate myself for it.

I the myself for not heeding the warning from my men not to go anywhere without

them, for every mistake I made that led to this.

Kurt kicks at my feet, making me trip over a root, then grabs my arms, grinning and whispering in my ear as he pulls me upright again. “Oops, watch your step, Faye. I wouldn’t want you to fall down and get hurt. Not before we can play our little game together.”

The tears are running down my face in a non-stop stream, and I gasp for air, desperate to get away from him.

But it’s like my body knows we can’t, and so I just keep walking along, going where he points me.

Ice runs through my veins, and a strange acceptance of my coming death creeps through my mind.

“Okay, stop.” He walks around to stand in front of me, his eyes roaming up and down my body, cold and calculating. “This is all your fault, you know that, right? Serra’s death. Miles’ death. You have no one to blame but yourself.”

“Yes,” I whisper, afraid of what will happen if I don’t answer.

His eyes narrow, and his voice is low and lethal. “All I wanted was a chance, Faye, but you pushed me away at every turn.” He turns on his heel, starting to pace in front of me. “You humiliated me in front of the council, in front of everyone.”

I swallow thickly, watching as he works himself up, the vein in his neck growing more prominent as he spits his words. And it’s weird. I’m just trying to decide if him being angry is a good thing or not. Will it make him kill me faster? Or will it make him drag it out?

“I killed your brother, okay? We both know that. But telling on me wasn’t going to bring him back, so I kept asking myself, why would that bitch do it?”

I just stare.

He advances on me, his breath hot on my face. “Why did you do it, Faye?”

I swallow around the lump in my throat. “You. Killed. My. Brother.”

He stares. “And?”

He doesn’t get it. “I loved him.”

And you killed him to show off to your friends. For the stupidest damn reason in the world.

“So?” His hand waves, like he’s waving away the idea. “I’m a man, Faye. A great man. Our... disagreement shouldn’t have led to you not wanting me. I mean, look at me. I’m big, strong, good-looking, and from a powerful pack. Everyone should want me.”

I don’t know what he wants me to say to that, but my tears finally stop as my brain tries to work out an answer that makes sense.

When I don’t speak, his eyes flash with rage. “You’re just like that bitch, Serra. She fucks me one night, but then won’t let me fuck her again.

She said I was too rough. That it didn’t feel good.

” His tone becomes more dismissive, a quiet mumbling.

“Like it's supposed to be good for the woman. But I'm the one who decides when to stop fucking someone. Not her. All you women are the same. Only good for one damn thing.”

My heart races faster.

His dark eyes meet mine, and pure hatred fills their depths. “You wanted to cut me out of The Selection? Keep me from participating with your little group of guys? Well, now me and you are going to play our own little game.”

A whimper slips from my lips, and he delights in it, a wide smile spreading across his face.

I suck in a breath, desperate for oxygen, but it's like my cells have forgotten how to use it, how to acquire it in the first place.

Anxiety courses through me, and I wonder if I'm simply going to pass out from fear and never wake up again.

Or if maybe that's the best way this could end.

“I'm even going to be kind enough to give you a few minutes' head start,” he says, grinning, his teeth startlingly white in the rising sun. “See? I can be fair, reasonable. You would have seen that if you had even given me a chance, Faye, darling.”

I swallow hard. I know it's not true. I know that had I given him a chance, he would have proved exactly who I already know him to be.

But there's a small piece of me, far in the back of my head, that keeps questioning what I did to deserve this treatment.



The death of my brother, the constant abuse from Kurt since then—surely, I must have done something wrong to warrant all this punishment.

Because the only alternative is that the universe is just random and cruel, and that's even more terrifying.

He steps closer to me, his eyes sparking, his finger grazing over the pulse point on my neck.

“You smell so good, Faye,” he growls, and a new fear courses through my veins. Suddenly, I fervently hope that I die before he gets his hands on me. I would rather be dead than let him touch me. “And I want to chase you.”

“Are you going to kill me?” I ask, feeling defiance rise in my chest. I lift my chin up to meet his eyes, knowing it might be a mistake. I'm just an omega, out here in the woods, with nobody to defend me, but I'll regret it forever if I die lying down. “When you catch me, are you going to kill me?”

“That's a great question,” Kurt says, his breath rancid as it fans over my cheeks. “You always were a smart one.”

He stands there for a moment, his eyes roaming over me, his fingers just centimeters from my skin. Then he laughs to himself and turns away.

“Eventually,” he says, tilting his head when he looks at me over his shoulder. “But we don't want to rush things, do we?”

“I—”

“One, two...”

I stiffen, eyes wide, watching as Kurt laughs through the next few numbers.

“Eight, nine, ten...”

When I realize he’s serious, that he’s counting down, giving me a chance to run, I turn, bolting through the trees as fast as I can, my mind racing just as fast, trying to figure out what the hell I’m going to do to get myself out of this mess.

Except, no solution comes to my mind. None. All I can do is run.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

My body urges me to shift into my wolf form, my instincts kicking in, telling me that I'll have a much higher chance of survival if I do.

But I know better than that. I know that no matter what I do, Kurt is going to catch me, and he's going to kill me.

Whether in our human form or our wolf form, he's bigger, stronger, and faster than me.

Hell, my own alpha was able to catch me, and I'd had a huge head start. I have no chance against Kurt. None at all.

"Think, Faye. Think," I tell myself, my mind spinning.

There has to be a way out of this. There has to be an ending for me that isn't violent and bloody. I... just can't think of one.

I trip on a root, fall, and hit my knee, hard, on a rock. "Fuck."

That's just what I needed.

I ignore the blood and the aching and get to my feet, hobbling along, trying to keep the tears from running down my face all over again.

Crying isn't going to help anything, but that doesn't stop a sob from ripping up my

throat.

Hitting my knee and leaving blood already means I'm making an easy trail straight to me.

I need to be smarter. I needed to be better and smarter.

If that's even possible.

A branch smacks me in the face and I have to bite my tongue to keep from crying out in shock.

The path I'm cutting through the woods is probably clear as day to someone like Kurt, who surely grew up hunting with his father.

If I were back home, I'd know enough of the area to choose ones where I'd be less likely to be detected, but this place is a mystery to me.

I'm trying to pay attention to branches, to grass, to everything, but it's impossible.

The woods are thick here. There's no way to not leave a trail.

"Maybe if I keep going the woods will thin," I whisper to myself.

If I have enough time.

My brain scrambles, trying to determine if the "few minutes" Kurt planned to give me are up yet. If they are, I should be looking for a place to hide, not continuing to run out in the open. But if I have more time, I need to keep trying to put as much distance between Kurt and myself as possible.

Is he already coming for me?

My ears strain, trying to hear if he's following close behind me, but I can't hear anything over the sound of my rapid breathing, the heaving as I try, desperately, to get oxygen in my lungs. The quickness of it makes my head light, and I move through the woods like I'm in a nightmare.

Every snapped twig around me convinces me that this is it—I'm dead.

He's found me. I picture, over and over, what it will feel like when Kurt gets his hands on me.

He won't make my death a quick one. I shudder, pushing the thought away.

Thinking about how he plans to torture me isn't going to make it hurt any less.

I trip and stumble my way through the woods, my ears perking when I hear something familiar. Running water. There's running water near here.

The trees around me suddenly cease as I dash through them, and I skid out into a relatively bare area, heart thudding as I look down into the foamy, thrashing water of a narrow river. It's not just water—there are rapids, coursing through jutting rocks. It screams of danger.

I stare down at it, then glance over my shoulder, into the woods.

There's nothing good behind me. Only Kurt.

I could try to run along the river, but I'd be exposed, out in the open, easy prey.

But what else can I do? My eyes trace the line of the rapids into the drop-off, then to

where the water feeds into the lake far off in the distance, a spot of blue against a green landscape.

It's the lake by the castle. The same water where I boated with Ezra, then later, with Maverick.

This river could lead me straight to them.

If I can survive the water, I'll wash up in the lake, and someone will find and help me.

There are enough people around the lake that it'd only be a matter of time.

But these rapids... they're dangerous. I'd have to not only survive them, but survive them until I reach the lake. If I ended up spit out along the riverbank somewhere, I'd be easy pickings for Kurt.

Except, he would have a damn hard time following my scent if I jumped into the water.

Something rustles in the woods behind me, and I glance over my shoulder, heart stuttering. That could be Kurt. Or it could be something else. But if I keep standing here, he's bound to find me. It's now or never. I have to make a choice.

Even if I die in the water, that's a fate better than Kurt getting his hands on me, then Kurt beating me or assaulting me.

My legs trembling, my body revolting at the very thought of the thing, I take a deep breath and try to ease myself into the water. Except the second I start inching out into the raging river, the water snatches me, pulling me in with a force I never imagined.

The water engulfs me, wrapping around me like a million liquid fingers, dragging me under, pushing over me, whipping me around.

When I surface a moment later, desperately trying to take a breath, my sopping wet hair slaps over my face and acts as a screen, depriving me of breath as the water pulls me under again.

I feel my body starting to go limp, but I'm able to grab onto a root.

I push my hair out of my face and heave, trying not to vomit.

Then the water rips me away, into the rapids again.

My side hits a rock so hard that pain rips through my body, and for a moment, I can't breathe.

I feel like I've been broken in half, like I'm dying.

But I'm swept along, conscious of the water and the desperate need to breathe, even as I'm dragging along sharp rocks and smashed against others.

When I surface again, clutching a branch still attached to a tree overhead, I'm crying, sobbing, just wanting to be still for a moment.

But already the slick branch is hard to grasp onto.

The water pulls at me, pulls at my long coat and dress, demanding I keep moving.

Demanding that I be just another victim of nature.

As a little girl, I had wandered down to the pond near my cabin and fallen in when I

was still too little to know how to swim.

My brother found me in the water and dragged me out.

On shore, he'd cried, repeating that I'd almost drowned over and over again.

After that, I always told people that I'd almost drowned as a little girl, but now, I know the truth.

I was nowhere near drowning back then.

But now? My lungs feel water-logged, my throat constricting with the need to vomit as the river snatches me once more and drags me under.

I'm tossed and turned beneath the river's surface, being smashed into anything and everything along the way, not knowing what will kill me first—the lack of oxygen, or the rocks.

My body screams for release—either for a breath of air or to die—but I get neither, surfacing just enough for my traitorous body to grasp at branches, holding me above the water long enough to keep me on the edge of life and death before I'm sucked in again.

Minutes, hours even, pass by, the water smashing me into rocks, letting me surface just often enough to stay alive, then pulling me back down.

For a while, I'm aware of nothing outside of myself and the river, but then I slowly realize the water has calmed.

I'm drifting like a leaf rather than being tumbled like a tiny creature by ocean waves.



Finally, finally , I'm pushed onto the shore, my pulse thrumming through my eyelids, my head aching terribly. For a minute, I can't quite believe that I'm still alive, but the way my body screams in pain makes it hard to ignore.

I made it. I survived. With any luck, my tumble through the water will have hidden my scent well enough that I can get away from Kurt in one piece.

Except that I'm not in the lake. I'm not just outside the castle. I'm still on the river.

Panic awakens inside of me, threatening to swallow my whole chest, but I squash it down. Panic won't help me now. No one can help me now. And I'm too close to give up. I just have to keep going.

Moving slightly, I cry out, then glance down at my body. Blood covers my entire side, and just the single movement had made the injury come alive with pain. There are more injuries. More patches of blood. More spots where my body feels wrong. But my side is the worst.

And yet, I have to keep going. I have to keep going.

Through the tears in my eyes and the blood streaming down my face, I see a hazy vision of the castle, and, gasping for air, I crawl toward it, my body screaming in protest, a blinding pulse of pain moving from my spine and out to all my limbs, curling in my hands and feet, making every movement nearly impossible.

But the castle is there. My men are there. I can't stop.

I think of my men, waiting there for me, and about their responses to what I'd just done.

I can see all of them and their reactions—Ezra, worried about the long-lasting

injuries, Cayson, impressed and wanting to try it himself, Maverick thinking about the logistics of surviving, Xander, growling with rage, only focused on tearing Kurt limb from limb for putting me in that position in the first place.

Come to think of it—that's how all of them will react .

Pain makes it hard to breathe. Hard to see. There's not a part of me that doesn't hurt. At least the rough ground tearing into my hands and knees barely penetrates through the fog of suffering, making it easier to just keep going. To never stop.

It feels like I've been dragging my body along the shore for hours, but in reality, I know it's been less time. How much, I have no idea. But the castle doesn't seem to be any closer. Still, I cling to the idea of that castle. To the idea of the people waiting there for me.

People. Waiting. For. Me. I taste blood when I smile, but it's worth it. For the first time in a long time, I'm not alone. At least I won't be when I get out of these woods and far from Kurt.

“Going somewhere?”

As though just thinking about him could conjure him, Kurt steps out of the bushes to my side, breathing hard, his eyes murderous. And, before I can answer, scream, or even close my eyes, he's on me.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

X ander

I tear through Faye's room. Her scent is everywhere. Every item is a reminder of my sweet mate, but there's nothing to indicate where she might have gone. No note. No diary entry. Nothing.

The door to her room comes flying open, and Maverick stands in the doorway.

The large feral's face is flushed nearly as red as his long hair, his shirt is buttoned incorrectly, and he's not wearing shoes.

Each of us had set off to comb through the castle for any sign of her, but no one had yet returned to tell me they'd found her.

I hated that I had been the one commanded to remain in her room in case she returns, or in case I could find some clue to her disappearance.

I'd much rather be out searching for her.

"Anything?" I ask him.

Maverick's green eyes flash with pain. "Nothing. Kurt's room was empty. There's no sign of him in the castle and no clues as to where he might have taken her."

"He might not have taken her at all," I say, but the words fall flat.

Our mate had been given specific instructions not to leave her room without us.

I had wanted to start a rotation for us staying in her room with her, but I hadn't made the suggestion, worried that the idea might push Faye further away from us.

Even knowing that The Selection doesn't allow us to spend the night at this point wouldn't be enough to stop me.

The others had seemed so certain that if she didn't leave her room without one of us by her side, the guard in the hallway was enough.

They were wrong.

"Did you question the guard further?" Maverick asks, pacing the room as I go back to tearing it apart.

"He said she'd left early in the morning, in a dress and a coat, after being given a note of some kind. He had no idea where she was going, but she had been alone at the time."

"Fuck," Maverick shouts, and pounds his fist against Faye's dresser. "Where could she be?"

Cayson is suddenly in the room. His blond hair is disheveled.

He's still wearing his pajamas—a cotton t-shirt and sweatpants.

He'd been asleep when I'd come to visit Faye early in the morning, to be with her while she got ready for breakfast. When I'd found her gone, I'd run to get the others, knowing the four of us searching was better than just me.

"Anything?" Cayson asks, desperation in his voice.

I shake my head.

Maverick looks at him, and his expression says everything I can't.

Cayson tangles his hands through his hair and lets out a string of curses. "Nothing at the greenhouse, the lake, or any of the property around the castle. Have you heard from Ezra?"

Materializing as if from thin air, Ezra arrives.

He's dressed in his usual attire—dark slacks and a dark blue shirt.

Even his hair has been styled. But that's because he'd been awake and ready for his day when I'd come to him.

His appearance did nothing, however, to take away from the wild look in his eyes.

I'd never seen Ezra like this, didn't even know he was capable of falling apart like this.

Not that I've known him long, that's just my impression of him so far.

An impression I think is right.

"I've been through every room in the castle." He seems to choke on the words. "She's nowhere. How the hell can she just be gone?"

Cayson grasps his shoulder. "We'll find her. We have to find her."

Ezra shoves him, but there's no fight in the movement, just heartbreak. "Where, Cayson? Tell me where?"

Cayson doesn't seem to know what to say. "We follow her scent."

"I can smell her... everywhere, can't you?" Ezra asks.

Cayson's expression falters.

"We need to go to the utimas," Maverick says. "We need their help to find her."

Ezra shakes his head. "We'll get caught up with their shit, and we'll lose her. Can't you guys feel it already? We're losing her! She's somewhere, with Kurt, and if we don't find her, he'll—"

Cayson pulls him into a hug and Ezra clings to him. My heart bleeds, and Maverick grips my shoulder, giving me a lost look. Our mate. Our Faye. She means everything to us. Without her, we're lost.

We need to find her. We need her to be safe.

I truly don't know what will happen to any of us if we don't.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

My body begins trembling, shaking so hard that my teeth chatter together, the sound audible in the silent woods around me. This can't be happening. I survived the rapids. I can see the castle. I'm nearly safe.

And yet, the castle taunts me. It's still too far away for anyone inside to see me or hear me.

He leans over me, and his sweat drips onto my hand.

I look up into his dark eyes and see that his pupils have spread, so that now the brown is washed out with black.

There's something inhuman about his eyes, something that speaks of an evil force capable of the kind of things I've only ever seen in my nightmares.

"You think you're so clever, don't you?" he asks, before driving a foot into my rib cage.

I cry out, sinking back, curling around my torso. It takes a minute to get the air back in my body, but when I do, I start to back away from him. I'm crawling on my hands and knees, knowing I can't escape him but needing to try.

"I am going to kill you, Faye," he tells me, his tone matter-of-fact. Almost emotionless. "Your men are going to find your body out here, and they're not going to be able to do a thing about what I've done to you."

My thoughts start working. “And what if they can, Kurt? What if this time it’s finally enough for the council to do something? They won’t just throw you out and make you a feral. After killing three people, they’re going to end your life.”

His eyes narrow. “That won’t happen.”

I keep going, desperate for anything that might stop him. “How can you be sure?” It’s hard to keep talking through the pain, but I grip my bloody side and push through. Desperate. “You left your scent all over Serra. You’re going to leave your scent all over me. They’re going to know you did it.”

“They won’t care! I’m Pack Fucking Obsidian! I’m untouchable!” he shouts, the veins in his neck bulging.

“Are you?” I challenge, crawling backwards. “They are still investigating Serra’s murder... I mean, maybe if you’d attacked me years later they wouldn’t put it all together, but you think they won’t connect the dots when two omegas you’re connected to die within a short time of each other?”

He shakes his head, his eyes wild. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You have no idea how powerful my father is. Hector, the ultima, is his best fucking friend.”

That figures. That’s why Hector has been rooting for me to let Kurt be my mate.

I keep crawling backwards, wanting as much distance between this dangerous man and myself as possible. “What do you think it’d be like to have your head chopped off in front of everyone? To bring that kind of disgrace to your father and your pack?”

He leaps out at me, capturing me around the throat. For a second, I can’t breathe, but



then his grip loosens, and he drags me closer, so close our lips almost touch. “You can’t scare me, Faye. You can’t trick me. Today, you’re going to die.”

Then he shoves me back onto the ground.

“Is it worth the risk?” I pant, trying to shift so I’m not on my back and completely at his mercy.

He gives a smile that’s cruel. “To finally kill you slowly and painfully? Yes, it’s worth the risk.”

I’m breathing hard. Prepared for the worst.

“Unfortunately for you, you humiliated me. You insulted me so badly that there was no coming back from it. You could never be my omega. Never be mother to my children. All because of your damn ego, and those assholes. Assholes you stink like.”

I plant my hands firmly on the ground and prepare to run, even knowing that I might not be able to. My legs are shaking like leaves. But before I can try to make a run for it, he lunges at me, shifting in mid-air, growling as he lands on me with all four paws.

His teeth bury into my shoulder and a scream tears from my lips.

I’m crying and begging, hands fisting in his fur and pushing against him, trying to get him off, but he seems to not even feel my attempts to stop him.

Pain burns through my veins, and blackness dances in my vision.

I feel hot blood running over my shoulder and down the front of my chest.

But then Kurt releases me, jumping back. I stare at him, heart thumping wildly in my

chest, wondering what he's doing. And then I remember: he wants to make this slow. He's going to tear me apart piece by piece.

The puncture points from where his teeth embedded in me throb, gushing blood, and I keep my face pointed up, afraid that if I look at the wound, I might faint.

Kurt pulls his lips back, showing me all his teeth, scarlet and eerie.

The sand is sticking to every part of me that's coated in blood, grating on my skin.

"Please," I whimper when he snarls and advances on me again.

Because I'm in my human form and he's not, he can't speak to me, but he can hear me and understand what I'm saying, so I try.

I try one last desperate thing to save my life, no matter how pathetic it makes me feel. "Please, I'll take it all back."

He circles me, and I flinch every time his muscles tense. But he doesn't jump out at me. He just keeps circling me until one of his paws reaches out, and he slashes my arm with his claws. I whimper and scoot back, trying to ignore this new injury. It's just one of many after all.

"Please. We can figure this out. Things don't have to end like this."

He growls again and leaps forward, slamming me back onto the ground.

I hold painfully still as he steps back and runs his maw over my stomach, his drool dripping down onto my bare skin.

I realize the top of my dress was torn at some point when I was in the rapids, and now

my entire stomach is exposed.

Kurt buries his nose in what's left of my shirt, smelling, and the sensation is so horrific I want to crawl outside of my body.

"I'll take everything back," I sob, still digging for purchase in the sand, inching my way up the beach and away from him as he watches me, as if that's going to accomplish anything.

Every bone in my body aches, but still, I try to crawl away from him.

"I'll tell the council I was lying about everything—about my brother, about that girl.

You'll never hear another peep from me about it. Please."

Kurt growls and follows me up the beach slowly, his head tipped down, his pupils almost overtaking his eyes, but still menacing and cold. He's watching me. He knows what I'm doing, but he doesn't care, because he knows I can't escape.

"I'll do whatever you want," I say, the last word coming out on a broken breath, severed into two syllables. "Whatever you want, Kurt, please?—"

With one last, lethal growl, Kurt lurches forward, and I cower down into the sand, putting my hands up over my face and screaming as loudly as I can. I feel his teeth graze against my hands, but suddenly, it's like he's been deleted from thin air.

When I look up, there's a flurry of movement, and a large, white wolf is tumbling through the sand with Kurt, who now looks tiny in comparison. I'm still gasping for breath, but my hands flutter up around my throat, as though it's possible I died and didn't notice.

But I'm alive.

How?

Whimpers, growls, and the sounds of a fight seem to rise up all around me.

My gaze darts to the two wolves, my head spinning.

Kurt is... being ripped to shreds just feet away, yipping and whining, trying to get away from the white wolf, who isn't relenting.

Even when Kurt starts to stagger and fall, the white wolf snaps at him and takes out chunks of his flesh, doing everything short of ripping his throat out.

I've never seen wolves act like this before. Kurt had set out to slowly torture me, but it's like this wolf wants to quickly and violently shred the bastard to pieces. And he can do it. Because he's huge. He's three or four times the size of any wolf I've ever seen before.

I realize I'm backing up, the sand pushing against my heels, my hands grappling for purchase.

When I hit the grass, I cry at the soft feeling of it under my hands and haul myself up onto the soil, just wanting to be on solid ground.

But it's not enough. I have to keep going.

I have to get away from the two fighting wolves, because when they're done, I have no idea what the white wolf will do to me.

The white wolf suddenly takes Kurt by the neck and begins to shake him around.

Blood oozes from his throat as Kurt flails about. Then the white wolf throws him, before leaping on him once more.

Kurt stops fighting. Stops moving. But pieces of Kurt continue to be thrown around as the white wolf rips him to pieces.

I try to keep crawling away, but my shoulder pulls, and I cry out.

This is when the massive white wolf turns, blood dripping from his maw as he looks at me, his eyes studying me intently.

My body folds in on itself, recognizing the ultima even before my mind does.

It's something I would have known already in any other state, given the size of the wolf.

The movement has me crying out in pain, but I'm unable to resist the urge to cower in front of the powerful wolf in front of me.

He moves toward me, and I watch, even with my head lowered, my heart racing.

Unsure of what this unknown ultima's intentions are.

Unsure if he might just not want to deal with two unimportant wolves fighting at all.

I've heard stories of ultimas who simply killed wolves out of annoyance.

Maybe this wolf is like that. Kurt may not be the one to kill me today, but I may still die.

Perhaps even in a worse way, if that's possible.

“Please,” I murmur.

Slowly, I get my limbs to work again, and, still cowering, I try to crawl away, my shoulder and stomach protesting with every movement. My entire body screams with pain as I try not to look at the ultima. As I try to just get away from him.

“Little one,” someone says, and when I glance back, the white wolf is gone, and in his place is a tall, naked, strange man with white hair loose around his face.

What’s left of my breath whooshes out of my lungs.

Even in this state, hanging onto life by a thread, my body and mind must acknowledge that he’s one of the most gorgeous men I’ve ever seen in my life, his skin glowing with a stronger kind of life force than even the ultimas I’d met.

He’s covered in blood, most of it likely Kurt’s, but even as gory and disgusting as he is, his beauty shines through.

And yet, I don’t know what he wants with me.

“Please, I don’t want to cause any trouble,” I whimper, closing my eyes.

The world fades away for the briefest moment, and then there’s a feeling deep in my stomach tugging toward him, wanting me to turn and look at him, to continue to take him in.

But I fight the feeling. I just want to get out of here.

“I’m only trying to get to the castle,” I say, hoping maybe he’ll take pity on me and either let me go or help me get there.

He kneels down in front of me, studying me, and instantly I'm swimming in hazel eyes that are flecked with green and brown, a ring of gold around the outside.

They seem to stare into my soul and somewhere beyond.

His skin is beautifully tanned, and his beard is neatly trimmed.

There's something about him that just screams that he's put together, in a way I've never experienced before.

In a way I wouldn't have expected from a man who had just torn Kurt to pieces.

"You're safe now," he whispers, reaching out and running a finger along my jaw.

Power sparks from his touch, and I stiffen, unsure what to do. The sensation mesmerizes me. It makes me feel strange, keeps me looking at him even when my instincts say to look away.

What is this I'm feeling? And why does it make me nervous?

"Who—?" I begin.

"I'm Eli," he tells me gently.

Eli. For some reason, I'd thought he was older than me when I first spotted him, probably because of the strength of his power. But as my gaze slides over his smooth skin and his sharp cheekbones, I realize that he can't be much older than me. An ultima. With this much power. Barely older than me.

"Oh my little mate," he murmurs, his gaze moving over me. "My tiny mate," he continues, as though the first statement warrants a correction.

“Mate?” I repeat, confused.

Moving, I wince as my body screams with pain. I don’t know what this man is talking about. I don’t know why he’s here or what he wants from me.

“Please, don’t hurt me,” I say, then a sob explodes from my lips.

He frowns. “Never, my tiny mate,” he says. Then, to my surprise, he reaches down, scoops me up, and hefts me into his arms.

I cry out as pain rips through my body.

He trembles, leaning down and kissing my forehead several times. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I should’ve been here quicker. I should’ve known.”

Tears roll down my face, and I sniff, but I don’t move. His arms are warm. Deceptively safe.

“No one will ever hurt you again,” he says, and there’s a note of anger to his voice. Of determination.

His scent rolls over me, that of sandalwood and musk. It’s a scent that’s powerful and subtle all at once. A scent that begs me to breathe it in and relax. It moves through me, lifting me up, and I suddenly feel as though I’ve had several glasses of champagne.

It could be the relief of not having to hold myself up any longer or the intoxicating way he smells, but I suddenly don’t feel the pain from my shoulder, or my back, or my stomach. Even the headache pulsing between my temples abates, leaving nothing but a pleasant, warm buzzing throughout my body.



He carries me away from the beach, but before we go, I catch a glimpse of Kurt's mangled, bloodied body, lying on the sand like a wet towel, his blood and chunks of his fur and flesh littering the area, almost like he walked over a grenade.

"Oh, Gods," I murmur, just before my head lolls back, and everything goes black.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

E li

Fear and anger course through me as I carry my mate through the woods. My expansive manor and the castle had been an equal distance from our location, so I chose to head to my home—knowing I have the best healers in the country and my mate will need them.

Looking down at her, it's hard to ignore the anger that flares in my chest. That fucking piece of shit had been hurting her.

He'd been playing with her, so I'd shown him what happens to anyone stupid enough to touch what belongs to me.

If the man survives, he will have reminders of what I'd done to him for the rest of his life. I only wished that I killed him.

But my mate needed me. And there would be time to kill him later, if he even survives his injuries.

“And I'll always be here,” I tell her softly.

I shift her ever so slightly, amazed by how little she weighs. I've seen small omegas in my travels, but I've never seen one as tiny as her. And she is my mate. The thought sends a warm feeling through my veins.

She just needs to be healed.

My heart hammers in my chest. Her injuries are...

bad, but surely they wouldn't kill an omega, even an omega as small as her.

Could they? My mind starts to work. Ultimas heal the fastest of all the wolves, then alphas, then betas, then omegas.

I would recover from such injuries within a day or two.

But her? I've never spent much time looking into the limits and capabilities of an omega's healing ability. Now, I wish I had.

No, she'll be fine. She has to be.

When I walk into my home, the servants are practically shaking, their heads bowed so far down it looks like their necks might snap clean off. I know the anger rolling off of me is enough to make them all inch to the floor, their bellies on the marble, if only to get low enough to appease me.

I don't want that. I've never exploited my powers as an ultima. But right now, I can't stop it. Anger, cool and unmovable, like liquid steel, flows through my veins. I have half a mind to turn around and find that alpha where I left him and finish him.

If he's even still alive.

"Find the other ultimas. Send them to me," I command, and the servants race to obey.

Pushing through the main ballroom, I watch as several of the servants stop what they're doing, gasping and falling to their knees when they catch sight of me. It must be quite the show—me, strutting in, naked and covered in blood, holding my tiny omega in my arms.

My tiny mate.

What kind of alpha would attack an omega under any circumstance, let alone one in which the omega in question was this small, this weak?

I call her weak, but that's not entirely true. It's clear that she's strong enough to withstand many abuses. Her hair is damp, her body is covered in bruises, and she smells of the river. I'd hazard a guess that she spent some time in the rapids before I found her. Something even I wouldn't do.

And that's not taking into account that she'd fought with an alpha so much larger than herself. He'd put his teeth in her, his claws in her, playing with her like a thoughtless animal rather than a shifter.

Why? I have no idea. But when my mate is well enough, I'll be sure to ask her.

Moments like these make me wish I'd accepted a damn spot on the council.

I preferred traveling and helping packs in need and didn't want to restrict myself, but if I were on the council, I'd no doubt know her attacker.

If I'd been on the council, I would've met this omega on her first day at The Selection, and she never would've ended up in a vulnerable position.

But I'd also have to deal with those pricks — Brock, Hector, and Lance — all the time... and I'm not exactly a patient man.

Two servants gasp, pressing themselves against the wall as I stalk down the hallway. When I finally reach the tall double doors, I kick one of them in, watching as four healers all stop what they're doing, their heads snapping up at me, then immediately lowering down.

“Master,” the one closest to me says, his body already trembling. I imagine it’s taking every ounce of his willpower to remain standing. “What can we do?—?”

“Help her,” I say, cutting him off and sitting on the largest bed in the back, the one that’s typically reserved for me when I come in with an injury.

It’s been a long time since that happened, but I’m especially grateful that we have a bed capable of accommodating my size.

Because there’s not a chance in hell that I’m going to be letting go of my tiny mate any time soon.

Now that I’ve found her, I will never let her out of my sight again.

She will be cared for and worshipped, the way my mate deserves.

“What happened to her?” one of the healers asks as she gathers her equipment.

“An alpha tried to kill her,” I explain, each word dripping with rage. “And I didn’t reach her fast enough to stop it.”

I think about the moment I’d first scented her, about following her along the road from the town to my home.

I’d just gotten back from helping a neighboring pack, so the last thing I expected was to pick up the irresistible scent of an omega on the road.

Instantly, I knew her scent belonged to my mate.

Instantly, I knew my life would be changed forever after that moment.

And then I heard her scream.

I have never known pain like that. Have never known anger like the fury barely contained within my body, knowing some male was hurting my mate.

Even now, my bones are aching with the urge to shift, to go back to that wolf and tear him limb from limb, leaving his carcass for the buzzards, reducing him to nothing more than food for the maggots.

It's what he deserves. It's what he truly is.

When I smelled her blood and knew that someone—a shifter, an alpha —was attacking her, it was like I lost complete control.

And for a man who thrives on control, the experience was shocking.

I'd tasted his blood. Heard his cries of pain.

But all I wanted was to hurt him more. Slowly.

To draw out his suffering. Until the moment she cried softly, and my focus had switched to her.

Then I'd seen how terrified she was of me. How the shifter, the one attacking her, had ruined her trust in men, in what we do when we shift into our other forms. I'd forced myself to withdraw, to leave him with his injuries and his life, for her sake.

After going through so much, the last thing she needed was to witness one more atrocity.

Now, the healers are frantic, pressing salves and balms to her body, asking me to shift

her this way and that so they can get a closer look at her.

One is undressing her from her tattered dress, revealing more and more injuries with each article of clothing that's removed.

Another is carefully placing slivers of seaweed into the puncture wounds on her shoulder.

I get the impression they're most worried about the wounds caused by the alpha at her shoulder, and the one I suspect is from the river on her side.

They're checking for internal bleeding from the injury on her side and trying to stop the bleeding from her shoulder.

It's scary to watch them, to see the concern on their faces, but these healers are the best...

Their practices are ancient and effective. They can save her. I know they can.

I'm just thankful she's unconscious for this part.

Hopefully, by the time she wakes up again, most of the pain will be gone.

She'll be stitched up and the bleeding will be stopped.

And then she'll just have to focus on healing, which she'll do well, because I won't allow her to focus on anything else.

The door bursts open, and I watch as three ultimas walk in, looking rather out of breath.

Brock, Hector, and Lance, the ultimas that make up the council, knew to come when I called.

Because as much power as everyone believes they have as the council, I have more.

My time spent helping the many packs in our country has made me so many allies that should I choose to ever stand against the council, I'll win.

Their eyes roam through the room, landing on me and my tiny mate. They straighten their clothes and rush toward me, even though their movements are somehow measured. I get it. They don't want to seem like they hurried over, like I can command them.

"Eli," Hector says, and I tighten my hold on my mate slightly when I see his gaze focus in on my mate with a mixture of confusion and horror. "What are you doing with that omega?"

I watch with annoyance as the healers struggle to continue doing their work in the presence of four ultimas.

Yes, I know they're powerful, but my mate's life is more important.

I meet the healers' eyes, one at a time, to encourage them to keep working, despite the most rude interruption of the council, walking into my home like they own it.

An insult I will deal with later.

I struggle to fight the wolf down inside me, which demands I defend my territory.

They should be waiting out in the foyer, like any other guest. It shouldn't be until I'm ready to speak to them that they're allowed to enter my home, but no bother.



Things must be discussed, so I may as well discuss them now.

As long as the healers continue to do their work...

“First, I would like to introduce you to my mate.”

My words are met with silence. Each man looks at the woman in my arms and probably believes I am disappointed to have discovered that my mate is so weak after all this time.

I read the thoughts on their faces. And yet, they're wrong.

I do not need a strong mate. I am strong enough for the both of us. I need her .

“ Faye is your mate? Are you sure there's not some kind of mistake?” Brock finally asks, and at the sound of her name, my body feels our mating bond click into place. Faye . My tiny mate.

My voice is deadly low, daring any of them to try and challenge that statement.

“Yes, she is my mate. There is no doubt about it. And she is gravely injured,” I say coolly, even though just mentioning her injuries hurts.

“My healers are doing their best to patch her up, which is an endeavor that you're currently interrupting with your presence.

I don't think I need to say it—but, should something happen to her, you should fear what I'll do. ”

“Eli—” Brock starts to say, but I cut him off, tilting my head.

“I was not finished.”

“Apologies,” Brock says, gritting his teeth.

“The reason I called you here is because there’s something you must handle, and handle right away. The reason for Faye’s injuries is my mate was attacked by an alpha.”

I note that the three of them don’t look particularly surprised by this fact, and I raise an eyebrow at them. Why the fuck aren’t they surprised? If they suspected such a tiny omega would be hurt by an alpha, then they should never have allowed it to happen.

“Yes, well...” Hector begins, but says nothing more.

Rage flashes through me. “You know the alpha who attacked her.”

Lance finally speaks up. “We suspect we do.”

I grind my teeth together. “Hopefully he’s not important to you, because that alpha is currently dying in the woods—though, he may have already bled to death. It doesn’t matter to me either way. Frankly, I think we should let him die.”

Hector’s eyes widen with panic. So he does know the bastard. How the fuck did they allow this to happen? I take deep breaths. I can handle them later. My mate is my focus right now.

Brock and Hector turn immediately, going back the way they came, but Lance stays in the doorway, surveying the scene, watching the healers as they work hard over my mate, trying to heal her wounds as well as they can.

And unlike the others, he seems less concerned about the dying alpha and more

curious about me and my mate.

Knowing him to be a man who roots for the underdog, I believe he's pleased about the turn of events that led to Faye being my mate and this alpha being dog food.

"Eli," Lance says after a long moment, his eyes meeting mine, holding them. "Welcome back. It is always such a pleasure."

I give him a smile that's all teeth. It won't be. Not for anyone involved in my mate being hurt.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

I'm engulfed in an incredible scent, like a perfect blend of herbs, completely distinct, but none of them possible to pull out individually.

And then I'm able to pick out specific notes: sandalwood and a delicious musky scent.

My body recognizes it as something safe, something soothing, and relaxes immediately.

I like that scent. But what is it? Where do I know it from?

The questions nag at me as I slowly wake up. And once I become more alert, I become aware of just how badly my body hurts. It feels like every inch of me was run over by a truck... multiple times.

Why do I hurt so badly?

As I breathe in the soothing scent more, I realize it belongs to someone.

A man. A shifter. His arms are around me.

His chest is under my cheek. He holds me gently, like I'm something small and fragile, which makes absolutely no sense.

Why would this strange man be holding me closely while I'm injured?

My eyes flutter slowly open, and I try not to move, afraid of how my injuries will feel if I do.

We're in what appears to be a mix between a throne room and a drawing room.

It's a large room, perfectly decorated with a fire crackling nearby and a nice sitting area, which is where we're at.

The man is sitting in a large chair with me cradled in his arms.

Again, I have no idea why.

I lift my aching head to find him looking down at me, his white hair loose around his shoulders, his face serious as he gazes at me.

Blood splatters in his hair and on his face.

Every muscle in his body tightens, and he looks me over, as if checking that I'm all in one piece.

The urgency that comes over him confuses me.

All of this confuses me. He's an ultima, he shouldn't care about one broken omega.

Is there something I'm missing? My swimming head makes it hard to think.

As soon as I shift and my muscles contract, I feel a flash of pain.

It takes my breath away for a moment, but it's manageable.

Looking down at myself, I see that I'm in a tank top and shorts.

The rest of my body is bare, exposing bandages and bruises that cover most of my body.

Something in my brain notes that as much as I'm hurting, I should hurt more than I do, but then I try to remember why I should be hurting at all.

And then, everything comes back to me. The carriage ride to nowhere. Kurt waiting for me. My body being battered by the river. Kurt's attack when I'd thought I might be safe. And the... the white wolf. The ultima. The man who saved me. The one I'm breathing in even now.

Kurt. Almost. Killed. Me.

A tremor seems to run through my body, but then I'm shaking uncontrollably. Tears fill my eyes, and it becomes hard to breathe. Every injury I received rolls through my mind, and I flinch, trying to protect my past self from the pain.

"It's okay, tiny mate," the man holding me says, and I look up at him, meeting his eyes, tears running down my cheeks.

I gasp, remembering how Kurt had his teeth in my shoulder, and bring my hand to that spot, finding that it doesn't hurt as much as I thought it would.

It still hurts though, and the bandages are a reminder of the gnarly mess that's hidden underneath.

An alpha might easily heal from such a wound, but for me it'll take time, and a terrible scar will be left in its place. A reminder of what Kurt did to me.

My body is shaking too hard, and I clutch onto this man, this ultima, letting him hold me tight. I'm afraid that if he lets me go, I'll collapse. I'll fall into pieces with no one

left to put me back together.

“You’re safe now,” he tells me gently, holding me just a little closer.

“Am I?” I whisper, teeth chattering.

I thought I was safe before, but I wasn’t. Kurt always finds a way to hurt me again, and no one can stop him. Not my men, and certainly not me.

“You’re in my manor. Protected by me.”

I shake my head, more tears falling. “He’ll find me.”

Anger flashes in his hazel eyes, and his jaw ticks. “You don’t have to worry about that alpha anymore. He can’t hurt you now.”

“Yes, he can,” I say, gasping, feeling suddenly like Kurt could be searching for me, even now.

This ultima means the best, I know that, but I’m tired of people telling me not to worry about Kurt, to keep my head up, to ignore him, like he’s some sort of schoolyard bully and not an actual murderer.

He killed my brother. He killed Serra.

And he almost killed me.

Kurt is absolutely someone I should be afraid of, and the second this ultima is done with me, I’ll be vulnerable again. I mean, I know my men will fight to protect me, especially after what just happened, but the council will find a way to stop them. To allow Kurt access to me once more.

“Darling, he’s never going to hurt you again. I can promise you that,” the ultima insists, nuzzling his nose into my neck.

I stiffen, surprised by what he’s doing. Necks are vulnerable areas, usually only meant for mates. He shouldn’t be touching me like this, and he absolutely shouldn’t be making me promises he can’t possibly keep.

“He can,” I say, holding myself absolutely still. “He can because he has, and he just does it over and over again. Because the council refuses to do anything to stop it. Because his dad is a powerful alpha. Because Kurt is powerful.”

“Tiny mate,” he says, putting his hand—which is so large it practically engulfs my face—on my cheeks and guiding me so I meet his eyes. He chuckles darkly, his eyes darting between mine. “Someone like Kurt doesn’t even understand the meaning of the word power.”

Another wave of his scent washes over me as he says this, and despite the logical part of my brain protesting, I relax into his arms, taking a long, deep breath.

Why does this ultima smell so good? I’ve never met an ultima who smelled good before.

And why do I feel so relaxed around him?

The last thing I’d normally feel around one is relaxed.

“You’re an ultima,” I say, stating the obvious as I stare at him, my chest constricting.

Part of me feels like I should shrink back, away from him, but another part of me feels completely comfortable in his arms. It’s strange. Completely unexpected. My desire to bow down before him just... isn’t there.



“Yes, I’m an ultima,” he says, his eyes sparkling with amusement. “Very observant of you. My name is Eli.”

Eli. I haven’t heard of him, but I bet Addilyn has. There are so few ultimas that everyone knows every ultima, except those of us raised alone in the woods.

I stare at him, hesitate, then decide to go for it. “Why did you help me when Kurt attacked me?” I ask, remembering how he’d come in, just before Kurt had the chance to finish me off, and fought the alpha. “I’m not even in your pack.”

“Firstly,” he says, his eyes darkening, “ any alpha or ultima should have stepped in to help you in that moment. What he was doing was despicable, outside the realm of anything I could imagine an alpha doing. Secondly, I would have travelled to the ends of the earth to find and help you. Because you are my mate.”

Huh? My brain just sort of sputters. Mate? He had been calling me that, but it hadn’t really registered. I’d thought there was another meaning behind it. I don’t know, but my head hurts, and this all feels like too much.

I can’t be his mate. It just isn’t possible. I’m a pathetically weak omega, and he’s an ultima.

If this is a joke, it’s a bad one.

“What?” I finally ask on a breathy laugh, pulling my face back from his. I realize that, while we were talking, our faces drifted closer and closer, the movement imperceptible to me. “No, I’m sorry, you must be mistaken.”

There’s something in the way he looks at me, something dark and possessive and not at all the way an ultima should be looking at a terribly weak omega, when there are so many much stronger ones. Better ones.

“You are my mate,” he says, chuckling and shaking his head, like my denial of such a crazy thing is ridiculous. “But it’s okay if you need more time to grapple with that information.”

“I don’t—” I stop when the door opens and a woman approaches us, clearing her throat softly.

“Sorry to interrupt,” she says, her eyes darting between mine and the ultima’s. “I wanted to update you on your medical information, miss.”

I stare at her, flabbergasted at the unnecessary deferment, the respect rolling off her in waves.

She’s a beta, and I’m an omega. Normally, a beta like her wouldn’t be the least bit nervous to approach me and give me information.

I glance up at Eli, wondering if just being near him is enough to grant me additional respect from others.

“Yes, thank you,” I manage, feeling awkward.

She takes a deep breath, squaring her shoulders as her gaze darts between us.

“You have some contusions, and when you first came in, there was some internal bleeding, stemming from an injury to your side, but we were able to sort that out. Your shoulder has been stitched up from a significant bite, as have the claw wounds on your stomach and arm. We used healing herbs on nearly every inch of your body to speed up your body's natural healing abilities, along with herbs to dull the pain. Now, you’ll just have to wait for your wounds to properly close and heal, and for the discoloration of your bruises to abate. There should not be too much pain in those areas, but if you start to experience it, just let us know and we can remedy that for

you.”

Eli’s grip has tightened around me more with each word the healer spoke, and he presses a feather-light kiss on the top of my head, anger rolling off of him in waves.

The healer looks nervous, bowing low, and I realize it’s from the ultima’s presence, an inclination that I’m, strangely enough, not feeling.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Both their gaze lock onto me, and the tension in the room increases. I try to think of what I could possibly say in this situation, but nothing comes to mind, so I just open my mouth. “I will let you know if I need anything else from you, thank you.”

“Oh, and as for the puncture wounds in your shoulder,” she says, stepping to the side and hovering her hand over the shoulder where Kurt bit me.

I close my eyes, trying to keep the images from popping back into my head.

“They were deep. We cleaned them and packed them with a special kind of seaweed for a while, before stitching you up. The seaweed has healing properties, and will help to preserve the muscle there as you recover. I anticipate that this is the wound we will have to monitor most.”

Trying not to move too much, I nod.

“Thank you, Aliza,” Eli says.

She bows and hurries back out the way she came.

Eli leans back further, settling in. Everything about him seems calm, almost pleased. Even though he’s covered in blood and seems to be, well, naked, although I can’t quite see all of him. I have no idea why he seems so happy. Holding me like this can’t possibly be comfortable.

“ Uh ,” I begin, choosing my words with care, not wanting to upset the ultima. “I appreciate you and your people caring for me.”

He smiles down at me, his eyes filled with adoration. “You’re my mate. Of course I’m going to care for you. It’s my job.”

There’s that word again. Mate.

Then, all at once, I think of Ezra, Cayson, Maverick, and Xander, my heart racing at the prospect of them looking for me, not knowing where I am. They’d be frantic. Terrified. Does anyone from The Selection even realize I’m gone?

“How long have I been here?”

He regards me strangely. “Five or six hours.”

Five or six hours, plus the time I was with Kurt... I’ve been away from my men for a while. They’ll have noticed something was wrong. Unless they’re already here...

“Have you seen my mates?” I ask, voice weak. “They might be looking for me.”

“You have other mates?” Eli says, his eyes softening with amusement. “Of course you have other mates. You’re beautiful.” I shake my head in embarrassment. “And how many of those are there?”

“I—” I drop my head, a blush blooming over my cheeks. “Four. From The Selection.”

He gives me a glib smile, his entire face at ease he gazes down at me. “Four, is that right? I’m not surprised—your scent is particularly intriguing. I scented you all the way out on the road.”

“Oh,” I whisper, blushing, staring down at my hands.

He continues. “Had I known you were already connected to other men, I would’ve sent word to them already. No bother though, I’ll send a message and let them know you’re here.”

“Thank you,” I manage.

He kisses the top of my head again. “Anything for you.”

How I came to The Selection hoping to leave without a mate and instead now having a pack of them, I don’t know.

I mean, technically Cayson and Ezra are just pretending to be with me, but there’s at least three others who seem to really feel this connection.

And I’d be lying if I said I didn’t feel a connection to all four men back at The Selection.

What I do know is that there’s no way I could have an ultima as my mate—he’s much too strong to be mated to someone like me.

Surely, he’ll realize he’s mistaken eventually. Won’t he?

“But with four mates,” Eli muses, “surely at least one of them should have been there to protect you. Why were they not?”

I don’t like the idea that he might be blaming my guys for what happened to me. The only person to blame is me and my stupid self for being so trusting. So naive. Even when I knew there was a dangerous man coming for me.

But how do I explain that to this man?

“It wasn’t their fault. I was tricked,” I say, the embarrassment flushing through me, hot and shameful.

“I received a letter that I assumed was from my men about meeting them for a surprise. It was instructing me to get in a carriage and go somewhere. When I got there, it was Kurt who was there instead. None of my mates even knew I was gone.”

I’m starting to notice something with this man.

He has the aura of a king. Even when he’s sitting up, it feels like he’s reclining, bored, or calm, I’m not sure which.

But topics concerning me make his energy shift in a way that’s almost visual.

He goes from calm to ready to strike without even moving.

It’s just something you feel about him, like knowing when a predator is simply walking past or when a predator is ready to strike.

That change comes over him now, even though he still holds me gently.

Even though there’s only the slightest tension in his shoulders.

“They should never have left you to sleep alone,” Eli says, the faintest growl in his voice.

“But that’s not for you to worry about. I will ensure they’re in line once they arrive.”

“You don’t need to do that.”

“Nonsense. I’m your mate. My job is to make sure that you’re always safe and

loved.”

I stare, not sure what to say. “Sir, truly, it would be an honor to be your mate. But you can’t possibly be.”

He smiles again. “Faye?”

“Yes.”

“You’ve been through a lot. Don’t worry about any of this. Just relax and focus on healing.”

He calls in a servant and gives them the names of my men and to send word that I’m here.

The servant rushes back out without another word.

With that, he shifts his arms, tucking me further into his hold, humming contently.

I want to argue, to say something, but the truth is, I’m exhausted, and his arms feel so incredibly good.

After a moment, I let my eyes close, resting and enjoying being in his warm embrace.



## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

I awaken, feeling groggy and out of sorts. To my surprise, Eli is still holding me, his warm arms wrapped around me. It takes me a minute to realize what had drawn me from my sleep before I breathe in the scent of food. My stomach grumbles, and Eli lifts a brow.

“Hungry?”

Embarrassed, I simply nod.

He leans forwards and assembles a plate of food from the spread on the table.

Then I sit in his lap and slowly eat, trying to ignore the fact that he’s still naked, although he’s managed to clean off the vast majority of the blood that was on him earlier.

There’s a croissant with ham and cheese inside.

A ball that tastes like some magical mix of potatoes, cheese, and something gooey and perfect.

There are little pastries with cream and raspberries.

I eat all of it until the clawing in my belly eases.

“More?” he asks.

I shake my head. “No, I’m feeling much better.”

He sets the plate back down. “How are your injuries?”

I shift a little and wince. “They hurt, but they’re much better than I thought they would be.”

“That’s because my healers are the absolute best in the country. I watched everything they did to you, and I believe you’ll be just fine, with enough time.”

“Thanks again,” I say, then glance down at where his arms encircle me. At his bare chest. “If you want to, you can put me down. I’m okay.”

His arms tense around me. “I’d rather not.”

I look at him in confusion.

He sighs. “Listen, Faye, I understand there’s a certain...

reputation when you’re an ultima. But the truth is that I’ve spent most of my life surrounded by people who bow down to me and had no one who stands at my side.

I help out packs in all the various territories and keep myself busy assisting shifter-kind.

But all I’ve ever wanted is a mate. A woman to stand at my side.

To have children with. And now that I have you, I have no intention of letting you go.  
”

I don’t know what to say to all of that. He needs me? He wants me?

“I—”

The door to the sitting room bursts open, and I smell my men before I see and hear them, but only just. They’re being plenty loud, like a pack of wild animals, destroying the stillness of the castle with ease.

When their eyes land on me, they widen, and they make a beeline for where I sit on Eli’s lap.

“Faye?” Ezra says my name, almost in disbelief, as they race to where Eli is holding me.

When I wiggle a bit, Eli reluctantly releases me and helps me to my feet.

He stands, his arm around my back to keep me steady.

I’m glad he does it, because my legs tremble, sore and exhausted after all I’ve been through.

It’s nice to actually be on my feet though, but I’m not sure I can be on them for long.

“Hi,” I greet all of them awkwardly.

“Gods,” Cayson murmurs, his eyes landing on my body.

Ezra’s gaze rakes over my body, as though identifying every injury. “Are you okay?”

I glance down at myself and remember that I’m wearing a pair of pink, silk pajamas. The spaghetti straps and short shorts do little to hide the bruises, cuts, and bandages that cover my body. Some of the worst ones are on my stomach. I flinch, realizing just how bad I look.

“Kurt?” Ezra growls, reaching out for me, but then letting his hands drop before they come into contact with me.

Maverick comes to my side, silently placing a hand on my bicep, his fingers trailing gently. “You’re hurt.”

My gaze moves between them, drinking them in.

Ezra’s normally neat dark hair is a mess, looking like a storm had swept through and destroyed any gel that might have been holding it back at one time or another.

His shirt and pants are wrinkled, and his shirt untucked.

Cayson’s blond hair, usually styled to stand up on the top of his head, falls into his dark eyes, and his clothes are a mess of grass stains and other things I’m not even going to begin to identify.

Maverick’s long auburn hair looks like it went through a tornado, and his bright green eyes are bloodshot and full of worry.

Xander stands silently. His long black hair is tangled by anyone’s standards, and his blue eyes drink me in like he can’t quite believe I’m real.

I missed them. And like I thought, they weren’t doing well without me.

“She is okay,” Eli says, and all the guys look up at him, suspicion in their eyes. Their gazes sweeping over his large, naked form, a form I’ve been careful not to notice too much. I watch as Ezra, specifically, appraises him. “No thanks to the four of you.”

“What did you just say?” Ezra asks, and there’s a chill to his voice that makes me shiver.

“He insulted us,” Xander mutters softly.

“Who are you?” Maverick says, at the same time Cayson says, “ What happened, Faye?”

I swallow and glance back at Eli before refocusing on my four mates, their worried expressions making my chest twist. I need to tell them what happened, I know I do, but the story will be hard to tell, because it’s all still so fresh.

But you have to do this.

“Early this morning,” I say, breathing through the panic that rises in me when I start to tell the story.

“There was a knock on my door. When I answered it, it was one of the servants. I’d seen him around the castle, and that’s part of why I thought it was a legitimate note.

He handed me a paper, then left. When I read the paper, it instructed me to board a carriage outside the castle, suggesting you had a surprise for me.

I thought this was the surprise we’d talked about last night, so I didn’t question it. ”

They all stare at me, mouths slightly open.

As I tell the story, it becomes clearer to me, the lengths that Kurt had to go to manage this deception.

This wasn’t the same as seeing me in the hallway and assaulting me—this was premeditated.

It was completely planned, from beginning to end, and that makes it all the more

terrifying.

“I followed the instructions,” I continue, swallowing, hard when I remember how happy I was, thinking I was going to find my four men waiting for me. “The carriage took me far away from the castle.”

Ezra’s jaw is ticking, Cayson has crossed his arms over his chest, Xander has started to pace, and Maverick is running his hands over his loose hair thoughtfully, eyes boring into me.

“But obviously, you all were not there when I got out. It was a ploy, a trick from Kurt to get me far away from anyone who could help me. He walked me into the middle of the forest, then told me to run.”

“Like that other game,” Cayson muses, his eyes hard, “when the omegas were supposed to run and we alphas were supposed to go after you.”

“Yes,” I say, swallowing and glancing at Ezra, who looks frozen with rage. “Back then, I was terrified that Kurt was going to catch me, and I’d have to go to dinner with him. This time I had to run or die.”

“Fucking bastard,” Maverick mutters, working his jaw.

“I thought—” I start, a sob catching in my throat when I think about the decision to jump in the water. “I saw the river, the rapids, that led back to the castle. I thought that it was my only chance to get help. My choices were to let Kurt catch me right away, or jump in.”

“Faye,” Ezra whispers, his eyes going wide. He must know the area I’m talking about, know what kind of leap it was into the water.

“That was very brave,” Xander says, his voice gruff.

“It was painful,” I admit, tears coming to my eyes. “I thought I was going to drown. Then, when I washed up on the beach, Kurt was right there anyway. He?—”

My voice catches again, and the guys all wait, watching me carefully as I breathe and try to work through the bundle of feelings—the relief at being okay now, the terror at the memory of his teeth on me, the anxiety of knowing he’s still alive and out there somewhere.

“He bit me, and hurt me,” I say finally, my voice small. “I thought he was going to kill me. And then...”

“I found her,” Eli says, sparing me from telling the rest of the story. “I heard her screaming when I was following her scent. I beat that puny little alpha to within an inch of his life, and even now, sitting here, I wish that I had ripped his heart out and left it beating on the sand.”

“Gods,” Maverick breathes, staring at Eli with wide eyes.

“This is Eli,” I say, clearing my throat and gesturing to him.

As I’m introducing him to my mates, to the four alphas in front of me, something solid and leaden in my chest tells me that this is the start of something, a new beginning for us all.

And I’m not sure how to feel about that.

There’s already so much to handle. I’m not sure more complications is what we need.

“Well,” Ezra begins, eyeing Eli. “We’re incredibly grateful that you saved Faye.

Thank you.”

“If we couldn’t be there, I’m glad someone was,” Cayson tells him, reaching out and shaking his hand.

“And, it seems, your healers did a good job with her,” Maverick says with a smile. “As terrible as all of this was, we’re glad she got the help she needed.”

“We should take her home now,” Xander says, his words full of an unspoken emotion.

They go to reach for me, and Eli steps into their path. “I don’t think you completely understand. Faye is my mate,” Eli says, and I watch as the guys all react in their own ways.

Ezra looks like he had suspected as much already. Maverick and Cayson look equally shocked and confused, and Xander looks like he’s still hung up on the last part, about how Kurt was beating me. Overall, there doesn’t seem to be any happy reactions.

Me? My mind is still reeling over all of this. I feel like Eli is just calling me his mate, hoping if he says it enough times I’ll believe it.

“An ultima,” Ezra says, his eyes flicking between mine and Eli’s.

I blush, swallowing, still unable to believe it myself.

“Yes.” Eli chuckles, as though our constant disbelief is very funny to him.

“An ultima. This will shift the dynamic of this group, as I’m sure you all understand.

Naturally, I am more powerful and influential than the four of you, which will lead



me to make more of the decisions.

Our natural instincts will guide us in that direction. ”

I watch as the men stare back at him silently.

“However,” Eli says, clearing his throat, “I would very much like for us all to be a family, to work together to keep our omega safe, cared for, and happy. I believe that it is what our omega wants, as well.”

“Faye?” Cayson asks, his eyes meeting mine.

I gaze at all of them, heart racing in my chest. I never thought it would end up like this. If anyone had told me that this would be the result of The Selection, I would have thought they were mad.

But here I am, apparently with five mates, one of whom is an ultima. I’m not a math person, but even I understand how incredibly rare this situation is. If someone has a mate as an ultima, they normally don’t have any other mates. One mate is enough in that situation.

Maybe this is because Cayson and Ezra aren’t really your mates. I try to push the thought away. Everything inside of me says that what we have is real. Just as real as what I feel with Maverick and Xander. I just need to know if Cayson and Ezra feel the same way.

Either way, if all I wanted was to be safe, there’s nowhere safer for me to be than with the protection of these men: An ultima, who bows to nobody, and four other strong, capable, loving, goofy men.

“I don’t know if Eli is my mate,” I confess. “But I know that I only want to be in a

relationship where all my mates are equal, at least within the confines of the relationship.”

“Agreed,” Ezra responds easily, glancing at Eli.

Eli turns me to him and then uses his hand to lift my chin way up to look at him. “What makes you doubt I’m your mate?”

I’m trembling. “You’re an ultima. I’m a weak omega. This... this isn’t how things work.”

He doesn’t let me look away. His gaze holds me in place. “But when you look at me, can you honestly say you don’t feel the connection?”

I don’t know what to do. What to say. Do I feel a connection to Eli? Of course I do. But I barely know him. Power radiates off of him in waves. It just doesn’t seem possible.

Choosing my words with care, I say, “I-I feel something, but it’s overwhelming.”

He smiles, then leans down and kisses me lightly on the lips. “Unions with ultimas can be hard in the beginning, as you adjust to my influence.”

Ezra tries again. “So this is what you want... the five of us?”

I wonder if he actually means that. The five of us. Or if he’s still keeping up the ruse.

A crazy image comes to my mind of me, pregnant, surrounded by these five men. All of us together. A family. The first real family that I’ve ever had.

“Yes,” I hear myself say, the smallest smile gracing my lips. “I do. I want that.”

Cayson sighs loudly, but there's a smile teasing his lips. "So, now we have an ultima in our little group?"

"That will complicate things," Maverick says.

"But I can't imagine Faye being in a safer position," Ezra says thoughtfully.

"Definitely not," Xander grunts.

"Even though egos might get in the way a bit," Cayson cautions.

"Yes, but there could be a benefit to having your influence," Ezra says, his voice still slightly tense as he addresses Eli. "Can you finally take care of this situation with Kurt? The council would not listen to us, but perhaps they'll take your claims more seriously due to your position."

I feel Eli's power wash over the room, and it's impossible to ignore the anger he feels at the mention of Kurt's name. His face remains still. His hand on my back are steady, but his anger can't be ignored.

"Not to worry," Eli says, his voice still as calm waters. "I assure you it will be handled swiftly."

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

X ander

Eli's scent is everywhere in his bedroom in his manor, but at least he's finally put our Faye down.

When Ezra pointed out that him being naked and covered in blood might be traumatic for Faye when she wakes up again, Eli had reluctantly slipped her into his large bed and left to bathe and clean himself up.

But not before reminding us to watch her, in a tone I didn't like.

As if we, her mates, would not watch over her.

Even though we're the ones who know her and have a relationship with her.

"What are your thoughts on the ultima?" Cayson asks quietly, sweeping his fingers through his messy blond hair.

The healers had made it clear that Faye had been given sleeping tonic and would likely sleep through wild horses stomping near her, but we all still spoke in low voices. Although we rarely spoke. Guilt was still hovering heavily in the room.

"He's bossy," I say.

Maverick snickers as he uses his fingers to try to untangle the many knots in his long, auburn hair. "Ultimas are always bossy."

“This is going to change things,” Ezra remarks, leaning back in his chair.

Of that, I’m certain. Ultimas are rare and powerful. They’re like stars, burning balls of light. No one gets close to them. Except, maybe, their families, but everyone else endures them when they’re close. It’s hard to imagine comfortably having one in our group.

“We don’t really have a choice though,” Ezra says, staring down at his hands.

“He made it clear he thinks all of this is our fault,” Cayson says. “As if we could’ve stayed in Faye’s room and just watched her every move. Everyone knows the omegas and alphas are expected to sleep separately.”

Although, to be fair, they’ll look the other way on the occasional sleepover, which we’d certainly taken advantage of without consequence.

“We could’ve broken the rules,” I say, but even the thought makes my stomach turn.

It’s not that I’m a rule follower. It’s more so that the expectations of The Selection are ingrained in most shifters from a young age.

Our fathers make it clear to us that having sex with an omega is allowed.

Moving into her room after staking our claim on her is not.

The Selection is the dating part of us getting to know each other.

To move into her room is to show her disrespect.

I don’t honestly know why on the deepest level, but I know that the guard felt like the smartest thing we could’ve done to protect Faye.

It should've been enough.

Except that bastard Kurt was smarter. I hate that he was smarter. Our job is to protect our mate, and we failed.

“It was our fault,” I say.

“But the guard—” Maverick begins.

“Wasn’t enough to protect her.”

There’s silence for a minute before Ezra says, “It won’t happen again. We’ll never let her get hurt again. Hell, we’ll never leave her alone again.”

All of us nod, but I can feel it in my bones. We won’t. We’ll be smarter in the future. She deserves smart mates. She deserves everything.

Fuck. She deserves better than me. I have to tell her. Before this goes on too far. I’d told Maverick the truth about me, and he’d accepted it. He’d understood it. The others will too. She will too.

But the thoughts don’t bring me comfort.

“Do you think he killed Kurt?” Cayson asks, his dark eyes even darker for a painful moment.

“I hope so,” I say.

Ezra sighs, crossing his arms in front of his broad chest. “That will bring Dexter to our doorstep.”

“Is he that bad?” Maverick asks.

I watch Ezra, wondering the same thing, and his wince says everything I need to know.

“The man would start a war over the smallest slight. He sure as hell will start a war over this. His pack has a lot of strong alphas. Perhaps all the alphas in Cayson’s and my packs will be enough to take him and his men down, but there will be a lot of lives lost. Even with Eli at our side.

Although, granted, the addition of an ultima certainly changes the tides of war.

” He rubs his hands over his face, like he’s imagining the lives that will be lost. “But there’s nothing that we can do about it. ”

Suddenly, the door opens. Eli steps in looking like a giant in a room of large men. His gaze instantly goes to Faye, and he crosses the room to peer down at her tiny form. We all watch in silence for a moment as he watches her breathe, and a smile crosses his face.

Everything inside of me tenses. I still don’t like the man looking at my mate like that. Like she’s his.

In a white button-up shirt and white pants that contrast greatly with his tanned skin, he comes toward us and pulls out a chair to sit in the middle of us. Like that’s his place. Like he’s already in charge of us, and we must simply follow his lead.

“What are we talking about?” he asks, his tone arrogant.

My mouth twists.

“About Dexter and what he’ll do,” Ezra tells him slowly, carefully, and I can sense his mistrust too.

Eli flicks his wrist, and his tone is cocky.

“Dexter may be seen as a powerful alpha to lesser men, but he is nothing to me. Should he choose to start a war over the destruction of his son, I will call to me every pack that has thrived under my authority, and I will tear every alpha of his pack into so many tiny bits and pieces that I can use them to fertilize my gardens.”

I have to hand it to him. He has a way with words.

Ezra looks at him, unconvinced. “Are you so certain of the loyalty of all these packs to you?”

Eli leans back in his chair, smirking. “ Absofuckinglutely .”

“I guess there is some benefit to being bonded with an ultima,” Ezra says softly.

The big ultima looks at the other man, and something softens in his face. “I guess I never asked how the four of you felt about me becoming Faye’s mate. I apologize. The ultima in me is a big cock who acts first and asks questions later.”

Cayson and Maverick exchange a look, and I can tell they’re trying not to smile.

“We’re not sure how we feel yet,” Ezra tells him honestly.

“Fair enough,” Eli answers, then after a long pause, “but you should know, you’ll get used to my influence over you, my power.

It will calm. And you could ask for no one stronger to protect Faye.



With me, all of you will be able to offer her anything she wants.

If she wants to see the world, she can see the world.

If she wants a dozen children, they will live in luxury.

Cars, jewelry, clothes, there's no limit.

For her. Or any of you. If your packs need help, I will help them.

I will make them strong, powerful, and unstoppable. All you need to do is ask."

Cayson laughs, his blond hair falling into his eye as he does so. "Can you get an old asshole to step down and let his son rule a little?"

Eli answers without hesitation. "I can. Like I said, there's no limit to what I can do." And then, his cocky demeanor vanishes. "Except heal one tiny omega."

To my surprise, Ezra puts a hand on his shoulder and squeezes. "You got to her as quickly as you could."

"I should've been faster," he whispers, then looks at all of us. "But she seems to be improving. Right?"

And I realize he genuinely needs reassurance.

"She already has more color in her face," Cayson says.

"And she's stopped bleeding," Maverick adds.

Eli takes a breath that shakes his whole chest. "She'll be alright. She has to be."

And it's strange. Those little words... they pull us all together. They make us all realize that we're all on the same side. We love Faye. She's our everything. We're in this together.

It's strange how nice that is. This is my new family.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

I wince as I try to sit up in bed, and Eli is there in an instant, helping me with a firm hand on my back.

Maverick shifts my pillows behind my back so they can support me, and I lean back, releasing a breath.

I'd expected it to be hard to sit up, but that was worse than I thought.

I can't believe how foreign my body still feels.

"How are you doing?" Ezra asks.

All my men are around me, staring at me, the same way they've been doing for the past two days. It's like they think if they take their eyes off of me for a second, I just might break all over again.

"I'm okay." And before I can stop myself, I say, "Just a little hungry."

All five of them are suddenly at alert. Cayson asks, "Are you in the mood for something specific? Or do you just want them to bring a selection of items?"

I blush. "I'm not in the mood for anything specific."

Eli goes to his bedroom door and shouts for a servant. Someone is instantly there, and he informs them that we'll be having lunch in his room. The servant scurries off like

the hounds of hell are nipping at her ankles.

“They’ll take care of it,” Eli says, coming back in and sitting on the bed at my side.

I shake my head. “You know I can be hungry for a little while. I won’t wither up and die.”

Eli lifts a pale brow. “No, you can’t be hungry for a little while.”

Xander speaks up from the edge of the bed, where he’s been watching everything quietly. “It’s our job to take care of you.”

I smile, even though they’re being overprotective.

I’m definitely injured, but the healers have made it clear I’ll be okay.

I should even be able to shift in a week or two, without risking my body healing wrongly.

Shifters don’t shift to heal large injuries like mine, so I’ll know I’m well fixed up when they finally let me do it.

But a week or two feels really long with my men suffocating me.

It’d be nice if they could calm down just a little.

“Do you want one of the magazines Addilyn sent you?” Maverick asks.

“That’d be nice,” I say, because anything would be better than them all just staring at me.

He comes and brings a magazine over, handing it to me, before sitting near the foot of the bed. All eyes are still on me when I flip away from the pretty woman on the cover and start turning the pages of the magazine. Instantly, I find a quiz.

“What kind of ice cream are you in bed?” I say out loud.

Everyone comes and sits around the bed, smiling.

“You want to play?” Maverick asks.

I lift a brow. “Why not?” Then I flip to the first question. “What do you have in you? Chocolate? Candy? Nuts? Or fruits?”

“Definitely nuts,” Cayson says, pointing to his crotch.

All the others eagerly agree.

My face feels hot. “Okay, mentally checking off nuts.”

“If you like to be drizzled on, what do you prefer? Chocolate? Whipped Cream? Or Strawberries?”

There’s silence as they stare at me, and I have no idea why things are suddenly so awkward.

Ezra clears his throat. “I think men typically... do the drizzling, don’t they?”

Cayson starts moving his hands around, like he’s visually trying to picture the way it works. “I guess the closest would be whipped cream?”

“No, man,” Maverick says, shaking his head. “I don’t want your whipped cream on

me.”

I blush, suddenly realizing what they’re saying. “Okay, let’s skip that one.”

“How big do you prefer your ice cream scoops? Big? Medium? Or small?”

Cayson leans closer and pretends to cup my breasts. “Big,” he murmurs, while I smack at his hands in horror.

“Definitely big,” Xander says, gaze locked on my breasts.

“Oh my gosh,” I groan, then go to the next question. “Do you like to put your ice cream in a large space, like a cup, a medium space, like a cake cone, or a small space, like a sugar cone?”

They’re all staring at me again. This time at my crotch.

“Small spaces are best,” Maverick whispers.

“Yeah?” Eli asks, looking intrigued.

“Very small,” Cayson says, laughing.

I put the magazine over my face. “Okay, let’s go to a different page.”

“Whatever you want, Jelly Bean,” Ezra says, laughter in his voice.

I flip through the magazine until I come to another fun page. “What emoji are you in the sack?”

“Eggplant!” Cayson shouts.

“Eggplant and sweat drops,” Maverick says, smirking at Cayson.

“Same thing,” Cayson challenges.

“You just wish you would’ve thought about it,” Maverick says, then sticks his tongue out.

I glance at Xander. He looks down at his shoes. “I have no idea.”

“Maybe lips?” I suggest gently.

He looks back up at me and smiles. “Lips would be good.”

“Probably the tongue emoji,” Eli says, looking thoughtful.

“Why?” I ask.

“You’ll see.” He winks at me.

Embarrassed, I look at Ezra. His expression is thoughtful. “A simple winky face for me. I think.”

I laugh, then wince as my stomach hurts in protest.

All of them tense. Eli asks, “Are you hurting? Do I need to get the healer?”

Shaking my head, I attempt a smile. “I’m okay.”

They look like they’re going to get the healer anyway, but then the servants arrive with food.

Ever since I've been here, they've been piling plates high for each of us, making it easier for us all to eat scattered around the room.

Each of us is handed a plate, including me, and I stare down at all the yummy treats, grateful for the food.

Beef wellington, lobster risotto, short rib ragu, garlic bread, and shrimp in a white sauce.

I know before I eat it that it'll be good.

But we all eat together in silence. Shifters enjoying our favorite pastime... eating. I don't manage to eat a ton before I'm full, but I've enjoyed every bite.

"Are you done already?" Eli asks, looking with concern at my mostly full plate.

"You need to get strong," Xander says, seeming unhappy.

"I'm okay. Just full," I tell them with a laugh. "Remember, I'm a lot smaller than you. I don't need as much food as you do."

None of them seem happy with my answer, but they let it go.

Everyone finishes. The servants come back for our plates, and I yawn.

"Are you tired?" Eli asks.

I don't want them to overreact, but I nod.

They're instantly on their feet, helping me to get settled laying in the bed, fixing my pillows and blankets, then tucking me in.



“I don’t need to sleep,” I tell them, followed by another yawn.

Eli combs his fingers through my hair. “Still, maybe just close your eyes and try to sleep.”

I close my eyes. “But I’m not sleepy.”

“We know,” Ezra whispers, then kisses the top of my head. “Just relax.” Then he returns to his spot.

And as silly as all of it is, I find myself drifting back to sleep. My body needs more time to rest and heal.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

Two days later, I'm wincing as I pull an elegant, pale pink gown over my shoulders.

My lady's maid helps me secure it in the back like I'm some kind of princess rather than the nobody I am.

My maid is cautious of my injuries, leaving it looser than normal so it doesn't pull too tightly on my wounds.

They still ache, but they have healed well over the past four days, under the care of Eli's healers.

It also probably didn't hurt that I've barely left Eli's bed.

Between Eli, Ezra, Cayson, Maverick, and Xander...

it's been hard to even go to the bathroom without one of them carrying me.

It's been sweet, and also a tiny bit annoying.

As someone used to being by herself, all this time and attention from five men is a lot to get used to.

"Are you sure Eli will be okay with you leaving his bed?" my maid asks, her voice trembling slightly. "I'm worried that?—"

“If any of them have something to say about it,” I say, meeting her eyes in the mirror, “then they can talk to me. Don’t worry about them taking it out on you.”

“Okay,” she says, dipping her head and letting out a breath.

I can’t imagine Eli punishing her for my decisions, but I know this will help to put her at ease.

The thing is, I kind of wish they hadn’t left her hovering over me, because I would’ve dressed myself, and she wouldn’t be involved in this at all.

Leaving my bed is definitely going to upset them, considering how concerned they’ve been about me, but I’m going to lose my mind if I don’t get out of this place, see something different, and get some fresh air.

Not that I’ll go far. I learned my lesson.

“Addilyn will be happy to see you,” the maid says, while brushing my hair.

I stiffen. “Is Addilyn here?”

Her back goes rigid. “I– uh, well, yes, miss. They weren’t sure if you were ready to have visitors, but she waited, just in case. I assumed they said something...”

They didn’t, but I don’t tell her that. “Where is she?”

“In the drawing room.”

I smile. “Then I’ll be heading there as soon as I’m ready.”

Once I’m properly dressed and my hair is done up nicely, I slide on some silk slippers

and pad down to the drawing room, grinning when I see Addilyn sitting there.

Her eyes widen when they fall on me. She looks beautiful, as always.

Her light brown hair swept up in a braid that encircles her head, and she's wearing a green dress that brings out the green in her hazel eyes.

"Faye!" she says when I wrap her in a hug.

Some of my cuts and bruises ache and groan in protest at the touch, but I ignore them, the feeling of her arms around me worth the pain. My closest friend, my only friend. It's so good to see her. I'm just happy that after so long apart we've already reformed such a strong bond.

"Addilyn," I say, feeling tears come to my eyes. "I've missed you so much."

"I've missed you, too," she says, already wiping away tears from her face. "Everyone is buzzing with gossip about what happened to you. There's talk that you—well, that you?"

"It's probably true," I say, taking a sharp breath, not wanting to talk about what happened just yet. "Do you want to eat lunch? And I can tell you about it?"

"Lunch sounds amazing!" she says, and I notice her gaze running over the luxurious room like she's trying to picture just how good the food would be in a place like this.

My gaze meets with the butler, who is standing silently beside the door. "Would it be too much of a bother to have lunch in the dining room?"

The beta shifter gives me a little bow. Me. An omega. It's something I'm still not used to. "Of course, miss, it will be brought right away." Then he turns on his heel

and strides away.

I smile at Addilyn. “Then we can properly talk about everything that happened.”

“You don’t have to, if you don’t want to,” she rushes out to say, which is really sweet of her and makes the thought of telling her a little easier.

“I don’t mind; I just want some food in me first,” I say, taking her hand and leading her from the drawing room into the dining room I’d spotted earlier.

Eli’s home is gorgeous and historical, and he’s made it clear that he has several more properties, each impressive in their own way, all handed down from a long line of powerful ultimas.

I can’t imagine owning more homes than this one.

The primary house is a mansion, with sprawling gardens and more rooms than I know what to do with.

Just today, I’d started exploring in my pajamas, before getting caught by a couple of servants and deciding to get dressed and see the place properly.

At least for the small window my men are distracted.

Now that I’ve escaped my bedrest, I want to spend as much time as I can seeing what other secrets such a beautiful home hides.

The dining room is massive, brightly lit, and is all white and golden wood. There’s a huge white table in the center of the room with two dozen white chairs, and a chandelier hanging above it. Fresh flowers line the table and sconces with flickering candles are on all the walls.

“Wow,” Addilyn murmurs.

“Right?”

“I can’t believe a place like this exists, and so close to The Selection.”

I squeeze her hand. “I guess Eli owns most of the property around here. I thought the council owned it, but they just own the lands just around the castle.”

She whistles. “I can’t believe Eli, Eli the ultima, let you stay here.”

I laugh, knowing she’s going to be shocked when I tell her about my newest mate.  
“You have no idea.”

We go to the table together and sit down across from each other.

“Tell me what’s been going on with you,” I say.

“With me ? You sure?” she asks in disbelief.

I laugh. “I’d love to know.”

She bites her lip, and a smile spreads her lips. “You know the alphas? The brothers I was telling you about?”

“Yes?”

“They’re my mates,” she says, the words exploding from her lips.

My jaw drops. “You’re kidding me?”

“No.” And then she starts babbling excitedly.

“Orion and Kai are amazing! They’re from Pack Iris.

They have three sisters and four fathers.

Apparently, their family is super fun, and their pack is amazing.

They can’t wait to bring me home to introduce me to their family, and I’m so excited about all of it.

I get to move to a beach town with two incredible men who hang on my every word.

I guess their moms had told them to go slow and not claim an omega right away, even though they’d felt drawn to me from the very beginning, but they couldn’t wait any more.

” She seems to run out of words, then squeals.

I smile. “I’m so happy for you.”

And I am. Addilyn deserves all the best in life.

Servants come in and set out plates and silverware. More servants come in, and I start to wonder just how many servants Eli has. And that’s just at this house. It’s insane.

“So,” I say, as one of the servants starts pouring us drinks as other servants come out with more food.

Addilyn watches in stunned silence as we’re waited on hand and foot. I already see some of my favorites: lobster salad, truffle pasta, duck breast with orange glaze, crab

cakes, and avocado and burrata toast.

“You’ll love the orange duck,” I tell her as I spear a succulent piece with my fork.

“Orange duck.” She laughs. “I thought your favorite food was rabbit.”

I blush. “Yes, well, I might be adjusting to some different things since leaving home.”

“And you won’t miss these things when you go back?” Her eyes are shimmering, like she already knows the answer.

“Well, I guess there’s a lot for us to talk about.”

“Shoot,” she says, slowly picking up her fork, her eyes rising to meet mine.

I tell her the entire story, starting from the moment I received the fake letter. Her eyes get wider and wider, and by the time I get to Eli attacking Kurt and saving me, she’s gone several shades paler. She sets the fork down and reaches out to take my hand.

“Gods, Faye,” she says, tears in her eyes. “You were so brave.”

“That’s what everyone keeps saying,” I say and laugh, feeling awkward, “but all I did was run away.”

“Bravely,” Addilyn says, smiling gently.

“Back at the castle, people are talking. They say Kurt attacked you, but there are also rumors that you have an ultima mate. Both things seem equally important to everyone, since ultimas so rarely find their mates. So, I guess now that I know that Kurt attacking you was true, is it also true that you ended up with an ultima as your mate? Is it the one who owns this house?”



“Yes,” I say, nodding, hearing Eli’s voice in the back of my head saying It’s our house now, tiny mate. “My mate.”

She whistles low. “You’re one lucky omega.”

I laugh. “I guess.”

But the thing is, I’m not as lucky as she thinks. I still don’t know if Cayson and Ezra see me as their mate. I might be walking away from The Selection with three mates and a hole in my heart.

She flinches. “Right, sorry, I meant you were lucky to have an ultima as your mate, but not when it came to all the stuff that led to the ultima finding you as his mate.”

I eat, but it’s hard to taste the food when thinking about the man who nearly killed me.

“Well, Kurt is at the castle,” Addilyn says, pushing a piece of truffle pasta around on her plate.

“The healers are doing their best with him, but the ultima must have done a number. The council has been talking about what punishment is fit for Kurt, but they have to make sure he lives, first. They’re talking about how he lost an insane amount of blood, and how his legs may not function correctly from the muscle damage. ”

“It was gruesome,” I say, nodding, “but probably no better than what he planned to do to me.”

“I just?—”

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Addilyn stops when the hallway fills with noise, voices bouncing off of once another, and the men walk in, Eli at the helm.

There's a panicky energy to them, like they're a wild pack on the hunt for something they must find.

When their gazes land on me, the energy shifts, even though they still rush towards me.

Addilyn bows her head, nearly touching it to the table, when Eli walks over and takes my face in his hands, his eyes running over me frantically. I stare back at him in shock. I knew the guys wouldn't like me leaving my bed. I didn't know they'd panic and go crazy.

"Faye," Cayson says, hovering around me with the others. "Are you okay?"

"Me?" I blink, still trying to process their reaction. "I'm fine."

"Never do that again," Eli says, his gaze intense for a long moment before he releases my chin and straightens. "We all expected you to be in my room."

"I'm s-sorry," I say, glancing at Addilyn, who still has her head bowed. "I just..."

"What is it?" Eli asks, his voice softening. He takes a step back, furrowing his brow. "You can always be honest with me, Faye."

"Well, I'm feeling stir-crazy," I say, laughing awkwardly, my feet shifting under the

table. “Your healers did a really good job. I’m feeling much better. Definitely well enough to be moving around and seeing my friends. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life in bed.”

“Noted,” Eli says slowly, his eyes traveling over me. “I certainly don’t want you to feel like a prisoner in your own home. If you’re feeling better, then you have free reign of the house. But don’t push yourself too hard; you could reinjure yourself.”

“Thank you,” I tell him softly, then glance at the other men, who all seem more relaxed now that they know where I am and that I’m safe.

“I know we’ve been a bit stifling,” Cayson says, and I think about how he insisted on carrying me to the bathroom, rather than letting me walk myself.

“A bit?” I ask with a small smile.

“Perhaps,” Maverick agrees, and I think of how he fed me berries one-by-one so I would have to lift a finger.

“And perhaps more than a bit?” I suggest, blushing.

Ezra leans down and gives me a kiss. “Forgive us for being a little overprotective. While our plight has been nothing compared to yours, I think we’re all a bit scarred by what happened to you. We’ve made it our goal to never let you get hurt again.”

I smile. “Fair enough.”

There’s a moment of silence where my men seem to notice Addilyn for the first time. I look over at her with her head bowed and feel a wave of sympathy. I hate how it feels to be around ultimas... even though Eli’s presence no longer makes me feel that way.

“You may raise your head,” Eli says, directing his voice to Addilyn, who’s blushing fiercely when she looks up. Her hands are trembling, and I reach out, taking one of hers across the table. “We’re delighted to have you as our guest.”

Then Eli turns and kisses my forehead before taking a seat to my left. The rest of the guys follow suit, pulling out chairs and sitting down around the table. More plates and silverware are brought out by the staff, and then they’re digging in. Their warm, comforting energy is all around me.

“Maybe now that you’re feeling better,” Maverick says, a devilish grin on his face as he looks at me, “we can have you stuck in bed in a different way.”

“Gods,” Addilyn coughs, and I stifle an embarrassed laugh as she takes a drink and tries to hide her own embarrassment.

The moment she recovers, Cayson speaks up. “You can be bed- ridden, ” he laughs, “if you know what I mean.”

“ Tucked in,” Xander says, and we all look at him curiously. “Because I want to tuck?—”

“T-that’s enough,” I sputter, unable to control my smile as I look down at my food. “You are mortifying our guest.”

“More like making me deadly jealous,” Addilyn says, rolling her eyes. “I’m going to have to bring my men to strut around next time.”

I smile at her as the men argue about who’s innuendo was the best in between bites of food.

“Maybe next time bring your mates for dinner. I think it would be fun,” I murmur,

locking eyes with Addilyn while her face glows with amusement at my situation.

“Bed head ,” Ezra says, which makes Cayson burst out laughing.

“It’s—” Eli starts, before whipping his head to the door, his eyes sharp.

A servant appears at the door. “There is—”

“Ultima Lance to see me,” Eli says coldly, but gives a nod of acceptance.

His servant disappears, and the rest of us stop and go still, watching as Lance appears in the doorway. For some reason, the instinct to bow my head to him is gone, and I glance between the two ultimas, wondering what will happen.

“Eli,” Lance says, his voice grave, stealing any lingering happiness from the room. “We must talk.”

Eli just stares at him, and it feels like the temperature in the room drops a few degrees. It makes me wonder about their relationship. Do ultimas not like each other? Or is this something strictly between them?

Then Lance clears his throat, looking up to the ceiling quickly before speaking again. “My apologies,” he says, “for interrupting your meal. We would like to request your presence for a conversation about the next steps. For resolving this situation.”

Ah, so Lance wasn’t showing Eli the proper respect? The idea astonishes me. Is Eli somehow more powerful than the council? Or are they the same, but Eli is making certain that Lance knows that? I honestly don’t know.

There’s another long moment in which Eli just stares at him, then, slowly, he nods, pushes his chair out, and stands. “Well, come on,” he says, when he gets to the door,

looking back at all of us. “We can do this as a family.”

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

E zra

We're all seated at a table in the castle, in the council's room, tension singing between us.

On our side of the table sit the four of us alphas, along with Eli and Faye.

None of us are flinching under the ultimas' stares.

These men had failed our mate, leading to her being hurt, and they sure as fuck better be ready to right their wrongs.

If they know what's good for them.

The instinct to bow to the ultimas is much weaker than usual—with Eli at our side, the power dynamic has shifted.

Something about being connected with him has changed something fundamentally about the sense of hierarchy that we usually feel with ultimas, and it's not something I was expecting.

As much as it's weird having someone with more power than me sharing Faye, I have to admit it isn't necessarily a bad thing.

I can handle anything, if it makes Faye safer. Because the truth is, no matter how I see my future now, it has Faye in it. Faye is my world. She's my mate. I just need to tell her that.

If that means Eli is a part of my future too, then I can accept that.

Plus, the ultimas are tense. They're not the cocky assholes I'm used to.

Probably because Eli isn't happy for a variety of reasons.

For one, Eli had made it clear that he wasn't happy about having to take Faye out of the house while she was still healing, something we were all in agreement with, but we'd done it anyway because we knew it was important for her voice to be heard.

We had all fussed over Faye on the carriage ride over, concerned about both her mental health and her physical health, even though she reassured us she could handle it.

Truly, she was amazing. I couldn't believe anyone could have this much inner-strength, but especially such a small woman. But I've come to realize that Faye is like one of those small trees. When the storms come, they whip back and forth, never breaking, while the tall trees fall around them.

I just hope she can handle this too.

Eli has also warned us that had the council simply taken care of the issue of Kurt, they wouldn't be calling us over to talk, so we should be prepared for bullshit.

And we were. After all we'd seen from the council, any faith I ever had in them was gone.

These men did whatever would cause the least amount of waves, not what was best for our people.

But they sure as hell better prove me wrong in the way they handle Kurt.



“Eli,” Lance finally says, his fingers steeped in front of him. “Thank you for agreeing to grace us with your presence.”

“You are very welcome.” Eli barely gives a nod in acknowledgement, again giving us the impression that although they’re all ultimas, Eli is somehow above them. If that’s even possible.

“As you know,” Brock says, his dark gaze sweeping over all of us, “there is a situation we must discuss.”

“I agree,” Eli says, and I watch him take Faye’s hand under the table.

Faye and Eli are sitting directly across from the ultimas, while Cayson and I are to their left, and Xander and Maverick are to their right. It’s nice that there’s more of us than them. Nice to see them rattled too.

The ultimas exchange a look. Lance seems uncertain, Brock seems focused, and Hector seems pissed off.

Their moods perfectly capture the three men.

Lance, from the beginning, has seemed to be more on our side, Brock appears to be more on the side of the letter of the law, and Hector is weirdly devoted to Kurt and his father.

“We have been communicating with Kurt, now that he has regained the ability to talk,” Lance says, and I glance at Eli, eyes wide. I’d heard rumors of how badly his attack hurt Kurt, but had assumed that, like all things at The Selection, they were broadly exaggerated.

It’s good to know it wasn’t. That bastard deserves to have his heart ripped out and

served on a platter for our Faye, and if I could reach him right now, that's exactly what I'd do.

"I can't say I'm thrilled to hear of his recovery," Eli says coolly. "I'm not quite sure he deserves to live."

Brock clears his throat, and Hector glares.

"We have also spoken with Kurt's father, Dexter," Hector says, "and he believes there's no proof of anything untoward other than his son being somewhat too rough with the omega.

Which is not that uncommon—we all know how alphas can lose their senses, especially when their mates are in heat.

Dexter agrees that Kurt should be disciplined for being too rough with the omega, but believes Eli's attack, and the resulting injuries, some of which could take months to heal, is punishment enough. "

"That's bullshit!" Cayson says, starting to stand, his voice loud and echoing throughout the room.

I reach up and put a hand on his shoulder, urging him to sit back down.

He may feel emboldened to shout because Eli is here, sitting with us, but so far, from what I can tell, Eli doesn't seem like the shouting kind.

I have a feeling this will be handled by the ultima, without the need for us to shout.

"What's the point of even having a council if you don't protect the shifters under your care?" Maverick asks, his usual calm mask fallen away. "Ferals have no council,

but we would never be talking about letting a man like Kurt roam free, to hurt whomever he pleases.”

“Fucking morons,” Xander mutters, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Guys,” I say, just before Eli sends a wave of chilly rage down our side of the table, effectively shutting all of us up.

I clear my throat and lace my fingers together, equal parts worried and excited to hear what the ultima will say. I know that if he doesn’t handle this the way we want, I’ll step in. He might be an ultima, but I’m Faye’s mate.

“Men,” Brock says, waving his hands downward. “We need to stay calm in discussing this.”

“This is us calm,” I say quietly, and my words fall between us.

I look at Faye. Her bright hazel eyes. The way she holds herself stiffly, every inch of her exposed skin covered in bruises and cuts. This is us calm, I repeat to myself.

“If it helps,” Lance says, “we’ve already rescinded Kurt’s claim on Faye as his omega. We’ve agreed that the match... simply isn’t the right one.”

Cayson slow claps, and the ultimas look uncomfortable.

“Kurt,” Eli says, his voice dripping with contempt, “was attempting to kill this omega, and would have succeeded, had I not intervened. I witnessed this with my own two eyes. Would you dare to doubt my word?”

“Nobody is doubting your word,” Hector says. “Dexter’s position is just that there is no proof ?—”

“After talking to my mate, and to these alphas here, it’s clear that this Kurt has done more than enough to warrant banishment from his pack and even to warrant execution, given the fact that he has taken the lives of at least two shifters, though there are probably many more we aren’t aware of. And yet, this council refuses to act.”

“If you wanted to have a say in the actions of the council,” Hector says, his voice just as cold, “perhaps you should have accepted our invitations to join us. Certainly, that would have given you the voice you wanted in the matter.”

I blink, then glance over at Eli. To be given the chance to join the council, and to decide not to? Truly the privilege of an ultima.

He’s staring back at the ultimas before us, something ticking in his jaw.

Of course he was offered a place on the council.

There are fewer than a dozen ultimas, and Eli is clearly young and powerful and located so near to the castle.

It makes perfect sense. I wonder why he denied them.

Although I’m kind of happy with it, because it makes things less complicated in an already complicated situation.

When the four of us had first burst into Eli’s home, looking for Faye, following her scent, I’d been worried about what it would be like to share her with an ultima.

The three on the council are domineering idiots, so my immediate concern was that he would hoard her, limit our access to her, even use his influence to control and exploit her.

But that's clearly not the case. Over the past few days as Eli and Faye have been exploring their mating bonds, the rest of us have begun to feel closer to her, like we're all different elements in a biosphere.

We strengthen one another, and Eli is part of that, pouring out his influence and power into us all.

"I should not have to be part of the council for you to do your jobs," Eli growls.

"Since the start of The Selection, accusations toward Kurt have not been taken seriously because they were made by an omega. Faye's terror over him 'claiming' her as his mate was ignored, as if her terror of a mate didn't matter.

Well, this omega is my mate . Which means you will all be taking anything she says quite seriously from now on, is that understood? "

Back when we first found Serra in the woods, I'd wished more than anything that I'd had the power to make the council listen to me, but now, as a family, we do .

The prospect of sharing Faye with an ultima may be daunting, but it's also worth it to have the kind of power and influence Eli's participation in this group provides.

"Nobody is dismissing her claims—" Brock begins.

"I understand that you're afraid of Dexter," Eli says, "but I'm not. Trust that if this matter isn't taken care of through the council, I will be handling it myself."

"There will be an official hearing. A hearing where Dexter and Kurt will be present," Brock says quickly, as though he doesn't want to give the other ultimas time to respond to that statement. "But if you want to be taken seriously, the omega must be prepared to testify."

Instantly, Faye's entire body tenses, and I want to leap across the table and fight Brock for making her uncomfortable.

After everything that's happened to her, she probably wants nothing more than to never see Kurt again, and here's the council, forcing her back into a room with him, forcing her to talk about what happened to her.

But the ultima may be right. This might be necessary to get him the proper punishment.

Kurt deserves more than a slap on the wrist or a beating from Eli for what he did. More than anything, Faye will likely never feel safe until she knows he's dead or locked up, and the other omegas and betas in his pack and elsewhere could all be at risk of him doing whatever he wants.

I think of Faye's brother and Serra, and how Kurt took their lives as though it was nothing. Likely because he knew he would never face punishment for it. Kurt needs to be stopped, and Faye might be the only person who can stop him.

"Faye?" Eli asks, his voice soft. "What do you think?"

Her voice comes out barely louder than a whisper. "I'll do it. Anything to finally get justice."

Under the table, I reach out and take Faye's other hand, the one Eli isn't holding. Testifying against Kurt will be scary, but every single one of us will be there to back her up.

Faye

It's strange to be back at The Selection, to be back in my old room.

I'd slept here last night, after the meeting with the council, because Eli had made it clear that he'd be happy to attend The Selection events, just like everyone else.

At least after I reassured him that I was feeling up to it.

And when he did so, the council made it clear that we'd be following the rules, including having me sleep alone until The Selection events were completed.

Which was agreed upon. As long as there was still a guard stationed at my door. One chosen by Eli from his own staff.

And maybe I imagined how Eli responded to being included in The Selection, but Eli had seemed excited about it.

We'd had dinner in my room, while all the guys told him about the events at The Selection that he'd missed so far.

He'd smiled at me throughout the whole conversation, kissing me on the forehead and telling me that he couldn't wait for us to play the games together.

But I had missed them more than I thought I would when they'd left me alone in my room again, after they'd had more locks put on my door and made me swear not to undo them until they came back.

My heart skips a beat every time I hear a noise, and I imagine that Kurt is finally able to come after me again. My mind won't stop replaying the memory of that servant coming to my door, issuing me the fake note. A mistake that nearly led to my death.

But now I won't foolishly open my door. I'm safe.

According to the council, that servant had no idea what the contents of the letter were—Kurt was listed as one of my potential mates, and so he thought he was just ferrying a love note from an alpha to his omega. I believe him. But it doesn't undo the harm of what happened to me.

The carriage driver was also under the impression that Kurt was arranging a playful outing for the two of us. Though neither of them was in the wrong, I can't stand the idea of how easy it was for Kurt to trick me. To trick everyone.

If either the servant or the carriage driver had paid attention a little better, if the carriage driver had stayed to make sure I was okay, maybe none of it would have happened.

Or, maybe, there would also be a dead carriage driver.

Still, I can't blame them. I only have myself to blame for not being more careful. I knew a deranged man wanted to hurt me.

I take a deep breath and look at my reflection in the mirror.

I'm wearing a simple dress with pretty diamond earrings that Eli gave me from his estate's personal jewelry collection.

He's already been showering me with gifts, which has made the others do the same, and now my room is full of too many flowers, chocolates I won't be able to eat, and



enough stuffed animals to take up the entire space of my bed.

When someone knocks on the door just before the bell tolls, I jump, hard, biting my tongue and letting out a little moan of pain. My heart is hammering when I go to the door and prepare to open it, hoping to see Eli's guard faithfully stationed across the hall from my room.

"Who is it?"

Logically, I know it can't be Kurt. According to the whispers, he's still having a hard time walking.

But that doesn't stop my active imagination from working up all the ways he might hurt me if he corners me in my room.

And it doesn't change the fact that his father could be ruthless enough to come all this way to cause me problems.

"It's Addilyn."

Opening the door, I breathe a sigh of relief when I see my friend. Her dark hair is in a braid down her back, and she's wearing a pretty purple dress with big sleeves.

"Faye," Addilyn says, grinning at me when she sees me. "It is so weird to see you back here again."

"Well," I laugh, "the council insisted that I finish The Selection. Even though I'll actually keel over if I have to take one more mate." I open the door wider so she can see the interior, all the gifts and trinkets.

"Wow," Addilyn says, her eyes wide as they sweep over my room, "that's amazing."

“Amazing?” I laugh. “I can barely walk through my room!”

“Well, that’s not from the gifts, is it?” she asks, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively.

I smack her arm, but a picture begins to form in my head of me with all five men.

The thought makes me blush. I’ve already slept with four of them.

I have no idea what sleeping with a man as big and powerful as Eli will be like...

Pair that with possibly sleeping with the other four at the same time, and I have no clue what will go where.

“Are you participating in the games, then?” she asks. “I wanted to check before I went down on my own.”

“I am. Weirdly, Eli seems kind of excited about it.” I grab my bag before stepping out into the hallway with her.

The guard nods at me, and I nod back.

“I’m planning on participating in the games. Eli said you’d walk me to them?” I say softly.

The big guard nods, and then becomes our shadow as we head down the stairs.

“An ultima,” Addilyn says, kicking out her leg so her skirt flutters around her. “Seriously, what is that like?”

What is that like? Weird, for sure. I never even imagined myself with alphas, no less an ultima, the rarest kind of wolf there is.

“It was intimidating at first,” I admit, thinking about that moment on the sand when he approached me and every cell in my body had insisted that I get away from him. “But as I spend more time around him, it’s like my body relaxes and sees him like any other wolf.”

“That’s good,” Addilyn murmurs, getting a mischievous look on her face. “But I was asking more specifically about?”

The guard coughs behind us, and I clamp a hand over her mouth, flushing fiercely.

“Please don’t embarrass me,” I whisper. “People are staring at me enough already.”

Addilyn says something, but it's muffled through my hand. I lift it and quirk an eyebrow at her, wondering if I gave her time to reconsider her gross question.

“ You’re the one with your head in the gutter,” she says, rolling her eyes and tugging my arm toward the ballroom, where it looks like most of the alphas and omegas are funneling. “I was just going to ask about his dick.”

“Gods, Addilyn.” I laugh when several other omegas turn, their eyes widening when they see who I am. “Shut up .”

What did she think I was worried about her saying? She’s crazy!

“Seriously though,” she says, grabbing my sleeve and stopping me in the hallway just outside the ballroom.

She tugs me around and looks at my face earnestly.

“Are you okay? I mean, I feel like the answer is automatically no, with everything that’s happened to you, but it just feels like you’ve been thrown right back in here.

It's unfair."

My heart aches a little at her worry. Yes, I've been through a lot, but I don't want to focus on it. I feel like when my brother passed, that's all I focused on. I just... stopped living. I can't do that again. I need to keep moving on and having a life.

"It's okay," I say quietly. "With my mates, and with Eli here, specifically, it feels different. Safer."

"So, they are your mates?" she asks, lifting a brow.

I nod, unable to deny it any longer. "They're my mates, although Cayson, Ezra, and I haven't had a conversation that we need to have."

She looks thoughtful for a long minute before asking, "Do you think you'll miss how your life was before? The cabin, mateless, what you were so desperate to get back to?"

I put my hand to my chin, trying to remember the girl I was when I arrived here on the bus, but it's like she's a stranger to me now. Something inside me has shifted, opening up to others. Like the walls I put up after my brother's death have finally crumbled.

"No," I admit. "I'm not exactly sure what life is going to look like when The Selection is done, but I definitely won't be lonely. And Eli will be there to protect me with his influence when the others can't. I'll be safe."

Safe. What would it even feel like to live a life where I feel that way all the time?

At this, I feel a prick of tears in my eyes, and I turn away. Addilyn shields me from the other omegas and the guard, pulling a handkerchief from her pocket and offering

it to me. I carefully dab at my eyes so I don't smudge the makeup I worked so hard on this morning.

"Thank you," I whisper a moment later when the tears subside. "I don't want the guys to know I've been crying. They'll get all up in arms about it."

Addilyn laughs and takes her handkerchief back as we head for the ballroom.

"Well, better to have them up in arms then up in?—"

I jab her with my elbow as we enter the ballroom, and she laughs hysterically while I smile. Throughout the room are pedestals and racks of fabric, sewing machines, and design books.

What the heck are the ultimas planning now?

"Good morning, to those of you who are just joining us for today's game," one of the council people says.

"Today's game is fashion-focused! The men will be designing a dress for their omega to wear at dinner, assembled with the assistance of the designers and seamstresses from the wardrobe division. "

Oh, gods.

I feel the color drain from my face and look across the room. My men are already holding up swatches of fabric, clearly debating the merits of each with one another. But the thing is, I have a lot of faith in my men in a lot of ways... Making an outfit for me? No way.

This is going to be brutal.

“You have to save me,” I whisper.

There’s mischief in Addilyn’s eyes. “Have fun!” she says, followed by a little cackle, before turning on her heel and moving toward two dark-haired men who have to be the brothers she’s so excited about.

Unable to help myself, I follow her. “Hello,” I greet the alphas.

Both men turn to look at me. They’re big, one with blue eyes, and one with brown. They’re definitely not “pretty” the way my men are, but I know Addilyn loves men that look a little rough, and these two definitely fit the bill.

“Hello,” one of them says, glancing at Addilyn with uncertainty.

“This is my best friend, Faye,” she introduces with a sweep of her hand. “She’s the one that has to ride five cocks. And one of them is an ultima’s, which you shouldn’t even get me started about...”

They both grin at her antics, and already I like them. If they get Addilyn’s sense of humor, they have to be winners. They have to be the kind of guys who will rise to Addilyn’s happy level, always making sure their home will be a good place to live.

“It’s nice to meet you,” the one with blue eyes says. “I’m Orion.”

The brown-eyed one smiles. “And I’m Kai.”

“And you’re Addilyn’s mates.” I grin.

Orion grins back. “We are. And now that we found her, we’re not letting her go.”

“Not that I’d let them,” Addilyn says, followed by a twirl.

They watch her with adoration in their eyes, and I feel like my heart is full of love. Addilyn found her mates. My childhood friend. She won't be leaving alone, or be left with the betas. She found two wonderful alphas.

"Well," I say, "I better get back to my men, but it was nice to meet you."

They bob their heads, and Orion responds. "It was nice to meet you too. The Faye of legend."

I laugh. "I'm hardly that."

Kai smiles. "Well, we have to assume half of Addilyn's stories are exaggerated. An omega left alone in the woods. A girl who fought off an alpha. A girl mated to an ultima. It all sounds like a children's fable."

Addilyn and I exchange a look, and I say, "Yeah, Addilyn and her wild tales."

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

I walk toward my men, with the guard behind me slowly drifting back at the sight of Eli.

The guys stand in a circle talking, noticing that everyone who catches sight of me stops what they're doing and stares.

Even the people around my men are behaving strangely, eyes downcast, shoulders slumped, and I realize it's because of Eli's presence.

Whether he likes it or not, the other wolves can't help but respond to his nearness.

When I get closer, Cayson looks up and smiles, but then concern washes over his face, and I remember that I'd been crying. That my face is probably flushed. That my eyes are probably red.

Oh, shit.

"Faye!"

All the men turn to look for me, and their expressions instantly change. Concern, worry, and rage flit over their features within seconds. I internally prepare myself for the most protective men in the world, reminding myself that their emotions come from a place of love.

I stop in front of them and attempt a smile. "Hi."



“What’s wrong?” Ezra asks, taking my hands in his, his eyes sharp and assessing.

“I will kill the person who hurt you,” Xander says, scanning through the room, as though my assailant might still be here.

Eli’s cool rush of power flows through the group, and some of the omegas nearby flinch at the feeling. Maverick simply raised a brow, as if waiting. Waiting for me to name his target.

It’s all... so sweet.

“I’m okay. I’m okay, I just got a little emotional when I was talking to Addilyn,” I say, laughing wetly, the tears rising up again at this show of affection and protectiveness.

Maverick steps forward, wrapping me in a hug. Then, one at a time, Xander, Cayson, and Ezra hug me too. Their touch instantly soothes something deep inside of me, making me feel loved and safe all at once.

“It’s good to have you with us,” Eli says, when it’s his turn to wrap me in his arms, his deep voice making a shiver roll down my spine. “You raise the emotional intelligence of the group.”

“Hey!” Cayson says, mock hurt. “Are you saying I’m emotionally stupid?”

“I didn’t realize it needed to be said,” Ezra deadpans.

Cayson punches his shoulder. “At least I can hold my liquor.”

Xander turns red. “I don’t drink much.” Then glances at Maverick. “Unlike some people.”

Maverick smirks. “Ezra invited us over for drinks. Sorry for drinking.”

“I didn’t mean get smashed drinking one hundred year old whiskey!” Ezra says, looking scandalized.

Maverick laughs, a big belly laugh.

“And then there’s the guy who drinks liquor like water,” Cayson says, looking at Eli.

Eli grins. “They say do what you love.”

I shake my head at all of them. “It sounds like you guys have been having some fun.”

Cayson shrugs, looking mildly embarrassed. “We’ve been bonding a bit over the past few days, while you’ve been healing. We were kind of going crazy just hovering over you all the time.”

I smile. “I’m glad you guys got a little time to focus on something other than me.”

“We were still focused on you,” Maverick says, winking at me.

I blush. Of course they were.

“We should start,” Xander says, gesturing to the people around and how their omegas are all dressed in various pieces of cloth vaguely resembling dresses.

The designer seems to materialize from thin air, a short, frank-looking beta with a hooked nose. “We should get started before you run out of time.”

Maverick and Eli help me up onto the little pedestal while Xander closes the curtains for our area.

I don't fail to notice that the other ladies had their curtains open, which I know damn well is because my men are so overprotective, but I let it go.

Their eyes track me as I take off my dress, revealing the simple bra and shorts I'm wearing underneath.

"A dress," I say after a moment, tone laced with amusement. "Remember?"

"Right." Cayson coughs, then grabs a shining piece of material and holds it up to my bust. "I'm thinking a two-piece."

"I like that," Maverick says, grinning and grabbing some of the same cloth. A moment later, they've pinned it up on me—a halter top and a short little skirt that barely covers my ass.

"Wow," I say, turning around, "not leaving a lot to the imagination, guys? You want me to give the entire Selection a show?"

I see the realization hit them, and it's comical. Like they'd imagined me wearing this dress for them and only them.

"Definitely not," Ezra growls. "Move over."

"She needs more clothes," Xander agrees.

And, I swear, the designer rolls his eyes behind them.

Ezra, Eli, and Xander start pulling out a plain black fabric, draping it over my body liberally.

I press my lips together, watching as they tug on it so it covers even my ankles.

When I lift a leg, pushing it through the opening of two panels, Eli shakes his head, pressing two fingers to my ankle and tucking my leg back inside.

“We should add a hood,” Xander says, grabbing another piece of fabric and covering my head with it. I burst out laughing when I catch myself in the reflection.

“I look like I monk,” I say, bringing my hands together and bowing to each of them. “I’m not really sure this will qualify as a dress.”

“Does it have to be a dress?” Ezra asks, eyes narrowing. “Perhaps we should ask about the rules again. Besides, you’re always cold. This will keep you warm.”

“I’d also like to eat my food.” I laugh, showing how weighty all the extra fabric is in my arms.

“We’ll feed you,” Xander offers, eyes bright.

“What about this?” Cayson says, starting to cut away the excess black fabric. Maverick joins in, trimming up the hem so it falls just above my knees, and following the designer’s advice to pinch the fabric so it pleats and gives me more wiggle room.

Cayson cuts away the sleeves, but leaves the neck high so my cleavage is completely covered.

“Acceptable,” Ezra says.

“Needs more,” Xander says, grabbing a sheer, sparkling fabric and wrapping it around the skirt of the dress.

“Oh, I like that,” Ezra says, helping them to pin it on. “Faye looks good in anything sparkly.”

“I think most people look good in sparkles,” I counter, but when I turn to the mirror, admiring the dress, I’m actually surprised at how good it looks on me.

I realize that, while I’m normally pretty tan, I’m paler from my time at The Selection, which makes the black even more appealing on me. Are these guys secretly good fashion designers? I think they might be.

“I like it,” Maverick says, nodding.

“Hello?” someone calls outside our curtained area.

“Come in,” Eli says.

A short man in a perfectly tailored green suit enters our area, and I instantly recognize him as one of the lead designers. He stops short, bows his head to Eli, then glances over at me, his eyes widening. I hope he’s pleasantly surprised.

“You’ve done an excellent job,” the designer says. “Are you sure none of you have any fashion training?”

“We’re sure,” Ezra deadpans.

“We just know what looks good on Faye,” Cayson says, his eyes shining in the lights as he gazes up at me.

In the moment, I feel the most pure, unadulterated shock of joy in the center of my chest. How can I possibly have five men who know me well enough to know what I’d look good in?

“Alright,” the man says, “go on and step down. We can get this off of you and put it together for dinner tonight. If you head to the other side of the ballroom, the men can

help you select your jewelry, shoes, makeup, and hair to complete the ensemble.

I let the designers help me take off the outfit, as they make notes about what goes where. My men start to filter out, already arguing about which shoes will go best with the dress, but Eli hangs back.

“Faye,” he says, as the designer continues taking notes beside me. “Would it be possible for me to steal you for lunch today?”

My heart flutters at the idea of him having me for lunch, and I try to keep a blush from rushing over my face. He’s my mate, after all. These thoughts, I’m realizing, are normal. I should feel this way about a man I’ll be tied to for the rest of my life.

“Of course,” I say, nodding, my heart pounding as I look down at my feet.

Eli nods once, then turns and leaves, following the rest of my mates, while I smile. Life isn’t easy, but it’s pretty damn good.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

This time, when there's a knock at the door, I don't jump. I can tell it's Eli because his scent is so strong, even through the door. I honestly don't know if ultimas just have stronger scents... or if I'm getting better at noticing things I never noticed before.

Maybe both.

"Hi," I say, opening the door and revealing him standing there with a bunch of lilacs for me.

He smiles, his gaze sweeping over me like he's drinking me in. "I brought you some flowers," he says, then holds them out to me.

"Oh, they're beautiful," I say, smiling. "And they smell so good."

Luckily, the servants had brought over a few empty vases...

since the guys keep bringing me flowers.

I pick one of them, fill it up, and put the flowers in the water, then set them on my desk.

Stepping back, I smile at them. I like seeing fresh flowers in my room.

More than that, I love the little things my men do to show me they care about me.

“They’re really lovely,” I tell him.

He moves to stand behind me and wraps himself around me, his big body like a warm blanket. “Lovely flowers for a lovely lady.”

I laugh. “I’m not that lovely.”

“You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen in my life.”

I turn around, and his hands go to my waist. Staring up at him with wide eyes, my gaze slides over his bright white hair to his brilliant hazel eyes. My breath hitches, and it’s suddenly really hard to breathe.

He leans down, brushing his lips against mine. He’s watching me, waiting for my reaction, but I’m not sure which one to give him to get him to kiss me more.

I must do the right thing, because he kisses me again, this time more deeply. His hard lips press into mine, stealing my breath. I put a hand on his shoulder, pulling him closer, and the big man lets me, slanting his mouth over mine and taking my lips harder and harder.

My lips part. His tongue slides inside, and a shiver rolls down my spine. Our tongues tangle together, and he groans, pulling me closer, close enough to feel his erection.

I let my hand wander down his chest, to his stomach, where I linger for a minute, feeling the tightly corded muscles. Then, hesitantly, I slide my hand inch by inch lower.

He breaks our kiss, taking a step back, breaking the contact between us. Running a shaking hand through his hair, he releases a ragged breath. “Faye... you’re hurt.”



It's weird, I don't really care. "So?"

His hazel eyes burn into mine. "You're hurt."

I bite my bottom lip, wanting to tell him that I need him, that I want to see what it feels like to have him inside of me, but the words won't slip past my lips.

"Shall we take a walk together? Maybe have lunch in my room?" he asks, sounding a bit calmer.

A walk is the last thing I want right now. "Okay."

I take his arm and we walk together through the castle, until we reach a side of the building I wasn't aware even existed.

Eli smiles at me as we climb a twisting staircase, then emerge on a long walkway on the exterior of the building.

It's beautiful. It's a little chilly, but it shows the whole countryside and a sky full of fluffy clouds.

"Are you cold?" he asks.

I shake my head.

He removes his jacket, putting it on my shoulders, and I'm instantly surrounded by both his scent and his warmth. "Thank you."

"Is the walk too much for you? Do you want to rest?"

I shake my head. "I'm okay."

“So tough,” he tells me, his gaze holding mine. “Do you want to shift for just a little while? The healers have said it’s time, and it could help with your lesser injuries.”

“Shifting actually sounds perfect.” I roll my shoulders. Just thinking about being in my wolf-form makes me happy.

He shifts in front of me, and then I shift.

Within seconds, my body feels even better, like some of the aches and pains have vanished.

I stare at the big white wolf near me, and he watches me with gentle eyes.

Unable to help myself, I start running along the outside of the castle.

Then he’s there running along beside me.

I can tell it takes him no effort at all to keep up with me, but he matches my pace, happiness radiating off of him. Pushing myself, I run ahead of him and around the corner of the castle, then I stop, whirling around. As he rounds the corner, I leap out at him, and we tumble around together.

It’s shocking that nothing he does hurts. He’s so much larger than me, but as we play, all of it is simply fun. He lets me tackle him to the ground. He rolls around with me, and it makes me feel big and strong in the silliest way.

Finally, he says, You ready for lunch?

My stomach growls. Ready.

We shift back and stand together. Again, he offers me his arm, and I take it, feeling

alive and happy in a way that's hard to describe. My dress tangles around my legs from the breeze, and I lean in closer to his warm body.

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

He nods.

“Why were you naked the first time we met?”

He smiles. “I often go naked before I go wolf. It makes me feel closer to nature.”

I laugh. Eli is kind of funny.

“I’ve never been to this part of the castle before,” I say, smiling up at him.

“I’d hope not.” He laughs. “It’s a special area away from all the people in The Selection, reserved for ultimas.”

That makes my heart lodge in my throat. It’s another reminder of the fact that Eli is rare, and so much more powerful than me.

It makes me self-conscious, makes me wonder why he would ever choose me as his mate.

I mean, not that it’s a choice, but I know for a fact he could reject me, if he wanted to.

When we walk into his room, it’s clear that the ultimas get better treatment in all ways.

His windows—many of them floor-to-ceiling—overlook the lake.

His room, or rooms, rather, are interconnected.

There's a water feature that leads into a massive, steaming tub that already has various flowers floating within it.

I would give anything to relax in it, but my mouth waters when I see the lunch table set out for us on the balcony.

Little sandwiches, quiches, and macrons.

We go out to the balcony and Eli helps me into my seat, then sits down across from me and pours a drink into my wine glass before pouring himself one too. And I don't need to ask—I already know the wine is expensive and of the best quality. Everything that ultimas have is like that.

“You know,” he says, after taking a sip, his pretty eyes meeting mine. “When I imagined finding my mate, I had pictured having her all to myself. But I am coming around to the others.”

“They are a strange mix of personalities,” I say and laugh, then take a small sip of my wine.

It's delicious, fruity and floral. I never thought much about wine, but I'm beginning to realize I really like it.

Part of me doesn't want to get used to it, just in case all of this falls away like a dream in the morning, while another part of me says to just enjoy it. That this is part of my new life.

“I've found that I like all your mates, in different ways, and I see a value in them,” he says, swirling his glass and looking thoughtful.

“A value?” I ask, a little confused as servants begin coming out, setting down even more food on our table.

“There are times I may have to travel, to manage my estate,” Eli continues. “It’s unfortunate, but it’s just the way it is when you have many businesses and many properties. It’s good to know that with your mates you won’t be lonely.”

My pulse picks up. A picture of my life starts to form in my mind, but it’s incomplete.

All I ever imagined was going back to my cabin.

I’d started to picture a life with Ezra and Cayson, but then everything started moving so fast. Maverick and Xander claimed me.

Kurt’s attack. Eli’s appearance. But maybe it’s time to think about the future with all these new factors.

All these new men .

“If we end up together,” I say, heart in my throat, “what would that look like?”

“ If ?” Eli laughs, shaking his head and setting his glass down on the table.

“Not if , darling. You’re mine. You belong to me.

You’re my mate, and I wouldn’t let you go for all the wealth and power in the world.

I realize that we’re still getting to know each other, and that you’ve had a lot of trauma, but my wolf chose you.

There will never be another woman for me. ”

“Right,” I say, looking down, unsure how to feel.

The servants finish putting everything down. Eli looks at them. “You’re dismissed.”

They nod and disappear back inside.

He reaches over and takes my hand. “I promise this is a good thing, okay? I’m going to make you feel like the most loved, cherished woman in the world.”

That might not be so bad. “And our life would be... at your manor? With the others?”

“As an ultima,” Eli says, squeezing my hand gently, “I’m tied to no one pack, which means I have no qualms with Cayson and Ezra running their respective packs as they see fit.

Meaning, we could mainly live on or near their lands.

I wouldn’t even be opposed to building a new manor there.

Something more to your taste.” He smiles, then continues.

“I will only be there to oversee and occasionally step in, if I feel it’s necessary.

As I said, I do need to travel sometimes.

Sometimes for the sake of my own estate, sometimes to help resolve conflict and maintain the peace amongst the wolf packs, but otherwise, I plan to be home with you and our children.

It is important to me to be present as a father. ”

“Children?” I ask, raising my eyes to his.

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That's something I haven't thought much about.

I've never seen myself as a mother. Probably because I've never seen myself as a wife or partner.

But when I picture a little one running around with Eli's shock of white hair, Cayson's smile, Ezra's logic, Xander's quiet intelligence, or Maverick's sense of humor, I can't say I don't like the idea.

"Of course we'll have children." Eli laughs, giving me a bemused smirk. "We will have many, many children together, Faye. It's only natural—and I want to have a big, happy family. I have the resources to support an infinite number of children, so why not fill our homes with laughter?"

I nod, trying to process that.

He sits a little straighter, his smile falling away. "I'm doing that thing I do again... being an ultima, saying how things will be without asking. Sorry, love. What I should've asked is if you want to have children."

The question calms something inside of me that I didn't even know was tense. "I think I do. I like the idea of it, but I'm still getting to know all of you. It's a lot to process."

"That's understandable. There's no rush." He flashes me a smile. "Even though I'd love to have lots of kids."



“Oh, good,” I say, heart skipping in my chest. Lots of kids. The idea still feels foreign to me, the idea of being a mother, and, all at once, I’m worried that I would make a terrible maternal figure. “I—well, did you have many siblings growing up?”

“No, just me,” Eli says, shaking his head.

“My father was an ultima, my mother an omega. I grew up mostly on Pack Iris lands, on my mother’s lands.

My father stepped in to run things, when necessary, but otherwise, our focus was on our estate and holdings.

I spent a lot of time traveling between different packs with my father, to learn the ways of the ultimas. ”

“Wow,” I say, picturing all the incredible places he must have seen. “I would like to travel some. I’ve only ever seen the mountains and here.”

He smiles, and his smile is breathtaking. “You are from Pack Ivory, correct?”

“Yes,” I say, clearing my throat and smiling as Eli dishes out food onto our plates. It smells delicious, and I take a small bite, nearly groaning as the meat melts in my mouth. “But I can’t say I’m that attached to my pack.”

He tilts his head, looking curious. “Why not?”

“Well...” I take a deep breath. It’s gotten easier and easier, sharing myself with my mates, but there is still the sting of the past when I have to explain it. “My parents died when I was very young.”

He looks troubled. “I’m so sorry for your loss, that can’t have been easy.”

I give an awkward smile. “One good thing about them dying when I was young is that I don’t really remember them, as sad as that might sound to say.”

“It makes complete sense,” he reassures me. “And then you at least had your brother, Miles, for a little while, right?”

“Yes,” I say, trying not to let the sadness take me over. “Until Kurt killed him in front of me. All to show off for his other alpha friends, to show them that Kurt could kill Miles.”

He already knew. The guys had told him, so that he was aware of what he was dealing with when he went to the ultimas, but I wonder how much of the story he knew. There were things only I could say.

“I see,” Eli says, his jaw ticking, his grasp on his fork tightening as he looks out, over the view from the balcony. “And what was he like, if you don’t mind me asking?”

What was he like? He was wonderful. That’s the simple truth of it all. Otherwise, losing him wouldn’t have hurt so bad.

“We were best friends,” I say quietly. “He was like my mom and my dad all rolled into one. Taught me how to hunt, how to forage, how to laugh and play. He was my whole world.”

His expression is gentle. “He sounds like a good man.”

“He was.”

“What do you miss the most about him?” he asks, taking a bite of his food.

I wrap my arms around myself. “I think... the way he made me feel. With him, I was

safe. With him, the world wasn't this big, scary place. But then when he was gone, I was just scared all the time."

His gaze holds mine. "Well, I hope we can make you feel that way. If we can't, we've failed as your mates."

My words are easy to say. "I think all of you make me feel that way, but it still feels so fragile. Like I could lose you at any moment."

His eyes say a thousand things that his words don't. "You can never lose me. I'm in this thing for forever."

Forever. I never really thought of anything as being forever. Not love. Not life. Nothing.

"So, everything is pretty much sorted," I say, feeling relieved.

Eli tenses a little.

"What?" I ask.

"Nothing," he says.

But there's something. "Eli?"

He sighs. "We still have to...well...we have to deal with Kurt and Dexter. As much as I want that to all be behind me, Dexter is coming to meet with the council. Once they hear your testimony, and mine, it won't matter what he says. Still, it must be done."

"Right," I say, trying not to let the reminder bring me down.

Eli and I continue talking. He keeps the conversation lighter, asking about my interests, my favorite color, the foods I like to eat, etc. And, strangely, he really does seem interested in everything I have to say. I don't know if I've ever felt so important before.

We finish our meals and thank the servants, who suddenly appear. They clear our plates away then leave his room completely, giving us a little privacy to enjoy just being together. Which is strange. I never really thought about what it was like to just be with another person.

When the sun starts to fall lower in the sky, Eli clears his throat. "We should get you resting before dinner," he says, standing and leading me inside. When we cross the threshold, he starts, reaching out and touching my sleeve. "I almost forgot to ask—how are your wounds healing?"

"Oh," I say, blinking, having completely forgotten about them.

The pain is mostly gone, leaving behind aches and bruises. I tug on the sleeve of my dress, revealing the wound from where Kurt bit my shoulder.

Eli's gaze turns stormy.

"I should have gotten to you sooner," he says, his voice low.

"Without you," I say, looking up at him and placing a hand on his chest, "I would not be here right now."

"Still," he grumbles.

"The ones on my stomach are healing nicely too," I say, hoping this might brighten his mood.

I grab the skirts of my dress and haul them up, holding them with one hand.

I'm still wearing the tight black shorts underneath from the dressing game this morning, but Eli's eyes widen when I expose my legs and stomach.

"See?" I say, voice a little strained when I see his eyes go dark, tracking my fingers as I graze over the scars and bruises near my belly button and hip.

"Oh, Faye," he says, sinking to his knees. My heart doubles in size, surely beating loud enough for everyone in the castle to hear, as he leans forward and presses his lips to my stomach.

An ultima. Kneeling before me. Kissing my stomach.

He continues kissing my stomach, trailing up and up, then hesitating as my heart races. "You're still injured."

"Yes," I whisper, breathless.

"But healing."

"Yes."

He presses his forehead to my stomach, breathing deeply. "I never want to hurt you."

"You won't," I tell him, stroking his hair.

He looks up at me. "You can't imagine how good you smell. I'm trying to stay in control here, but my control is slipping in a way it never has before."

I feel flushed. "Why do you have to stay in control?"

His eyes darken. “Faye, do you know what you’re saying?”

I hesitate, then nod.

His hands slide over my skin, and eventually, he takes the dress from me, pulling it up over my head.

It falls to the floor beside us, and then he rises to his feet.

His massive frame towering over my much smaller one.

He slants his lips over mine, one of his hands coming to the small of my back, the other resting gently on my hip.

We kiss slowly, unhurriedly, and it leaves my head spinning. There’s just something about Eli—a sense that he’s always in control, that he knows exactly what he’s doing—and it makes me feel weirdly safe with him.

His hands move, running up and down my sides. Over my little shorts. Over the straps of my bra. He seems like he wants to touch all of me, but doesn’t know where to start.

Unable to help myself, I grab the hem of his shirt and pull it off, causing us to break our kiss, then my hands go to his chest and run over his muscles, while he watches me with dark eyes. “You’re so... big,” I murmur.

I feel the shudder that moves through his body.

Continuing to touch him, I watch as he holds himself perfectly still, letting my fingers drag along the hard muscles on his chest and then his stomach. Touching such a big man like this makes me feel strangely in control. It’s something I surprisingly enjoy.

Hesitating, I undo the button on his pants and pull down his zipper. Eli remains completely still as I pull his pants down, help him kick his shoes off, and toss the pants across the floor. I kneel and look up, seeing that his briefs are tented by an enormous erection.

A shiver rolls down my spine. If the other men barely fit inside of me, how is it going to work with Eli? Surely he's too big for any woman.

"Eli?" I whisper.

"Yes?" he asks, his voice husky.

"Are we going to... fit together?"

His chuckle is low and rolls over me, making my nipples hard. "We were made for each other. We'll fit, but today you'll lead the way. We won't do anything you don't want to do."

I lick my lips, staring at his erection. "Do ultimas usually let their omegas lead the way?"

He cups my chin. "We decide how things work between us, no one else."

His words make me feel calmer. Even safer.

I hook my fingers into his boxers and slowly pull them down until he pops free. Just the sight of him makes my mouth water, but I feel hesitant.

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*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

“I’m not very experienced,” I admit. “I was a virgin until The Selection. Until Cayson and Ezra.”

“And have the men been good to you? Have they shown you how good sex can feel?”

My cheeks feel hot, but I nod. “Yes. They’ve done a good job.”

“Good.” He pulls me to my feet and holds my gaze as he undoes my bra, then removes it, his eyes drinking in the sight of my breasts as he does so. “Absolutely perfect,” he whispers, then reaches out and cups my breasts before pinching one of my nipples.

I jump a little.

He continues cupping my breasts, seeming to feel their weight in his palms, then uses his thumbs to circle my nipples.

I’m breathing hard when he squeezes them, alternating between pinching them lightly and rolling them with his thumbs.

Again, he seems unhurried, like this is the only thing in this world that he has to do.

He leans in closer, so close that the space between us seems to vanish. Our lips meet gently at first, tentative and slow, exploring each other with that same unhurried pace. But soon our kiss deepens as our lips come together harder and harder. There’s desperation in the movement.



The world seems to blur around me. His hands sweep over my face, my cheeks, my jaw, down my neck, across my shoulders, and then back to my breasts. Every touch is slow and exploratory, like he wants to remember this moment forever.

I open my lips to take a breath, and his tongue sweeps inside. A jolt of pleasure moves through me, and I tangle my tongue with his, surprised by how gentle and yet commanding this big ultima can be.

At last, our kiss breaks, and we stare at each other. There's shock on his face for a moment, before his expression changes to one of pure wonder. My body trembles, and I wait, wondering what he'll do next.

My legs start to tremble as pleasure spreads through me, all the way down to my toes. "Eli," I whimper.

His gaze moves to my face, and then his hands release my breasts. With quick movements, he reaches for my shorts and underwear and pulls them down, letting them drop around my ankles. Before I can say a word, he picks me up and carries me to the bed, depositing me on the edge of it.

My head is spinning when he kneels on the floor between my legs and presses his lips to my core.

I gasp, grasping his hair. He groans and starts to lick and suck, making my already spinning head feel light.

He works me like someone who licks pussies every day of his life, for a sea of very pleased women.

I start out lightly grasping his hair, but then I start to hold on tighter, to guide him more as he makes me wetter and wetter. Pleasure sparks through my body, through

my limbs, making me feel alive. Making me feel like I'm charged with electricity.

Rocking against him turns into grinding against his face until at last my orgasm hits, and I go crashing through space, every nerve alive with pleasure. Every inch of me rides the waves of my release like I've never felt anything better in my life.

I'm still panting and arching when he pulls away from my pussy and sits on the edge of the bed next to me. Without a word, he puts me in his lap, his massive erection pressing into my wet core. Then he lays back on the bed.

"Do whatever you want to me, sweet mate."

Breathing hard, head still spinning, it takes me a minute to process what he's saying, what he's doing, but then a little thrill moves through me. This big man, this big ultima, he's letting me have all the power? All the control?

I don't think I've ever felt like this before.

It starts with me just rubbing against him, watching his hands curl into fists and his breathing go ragged.

But as I watch him struggle with what I'm doing, I shift, taking the head of his cock inside me.

The fit is tight, almost impossibly so, but I want him to be right. I want us to be made for each other.

Gripping his shoulders, I press him inch by inch inside of me, stopping often to allow my body to adjust. He's tense beneath me, eyes squeezed closed, fists clenched. I can tell how much it's costing him to exercise control with me, and I appreciate it.

I continue sinking down on top of him until I finally take his entire length, and then, I'm breathing hard. It feels good. Like I'm full in a way I've only felt with my mates. I'm stretching around him to accommodate his size in a way that feels unnatural, but nice at the same time.

We stay like that for a long time, until my muscles start to unclench, and then I try pulling out, shocked by how slick my body is, even when trying to take something so big. I come down on him and gasp at the feeling.

"Fucking hell," he groans under me, then tangles his hands in his hair, looking like he's about to come undone.

Which is oddly hot.

Feeling more confident, I pull back out again, then slam him back into me. His hands tug at his hair, and his muscles seem to tighten even more.

I watch him as I fuck him. I watch the man trying not to touch me, trying not to move, trying not to come. And it's so fucking sexy. I just keep getting wetter at the sight of him. Being in control, focusing on what feels good, using him like my very own sex toy—it's erotic.

And I'm doing it. Me.

Pressure starts to build inside of me. It's a feeling that's wonderful and torture all at once, but at least now I know what it means.

I ride him harder and faster, harder and faster, until the feeling inside of me comes to its boiling point, and then I explode, my orgasm hitting so hard that I see stars.

I keep working myself against him as I ride the waves of my orgasm, pleasure

screaming through every inch of my body.

Every nerve is alive and on fire. And then he grasps my hips, holding me against him, and I feel him come inside of me, his hot seed spilling into my core, coating my channel, and sliding down his cock.

His scent comes next, intense. Him and sex, all rolled into one.

Collapsing on top of him, breathing hard, I stroke my hand down his chest. I never would've expected this experience from a big ultima. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this.

He kisses the top of my head. "Are you okay? Was that too much for you?"

I shake my head. "It was perfect."

"You're perfect," he growls, making me shiver. "Still, I should've had more control. You're injured."

I look up at him. "I actually think that's exactly what I needed."

He smiles. "My omega."

I hold his gaze. "My ultima."

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Maverick

The castle is huge, and tonight, the dining room is full of alphas and omegas, all chatting and laughing and drinking.

The atmosphere is light and easy, which is much needed after all we've been through lately.

We're all seated in the dining room waiting for Faye with the exception of Ezra—Eli at the head of the table, Xander and Cayson sitting on either side of him, and me beside Cayson.

Cayson and Eli are chatting, but I'm quiet. Waiting.

Maybe we're still not used to this—to being part of something.

Sometimes we seem to blend in with the others, and sometimes there's still a feeling that we're on the outside of something we've never been a part of, and probably don't properly understand.

At least, I feel with time all of this will feel more natural. When we're settled with our Faye.

Everyone at our table falls quiet when Faye steps into the room, walking quickly, with Ezra guiding her to the table.

She's wearing the dress we designed. It's black and shimmery on the bottom, goes

down to her knees, has simple sleeves, and has a high neckline.

The seamstress clearly took some liberties—tucking it in and cleaning up some of the lines—but it's gorgeous.

No, it's not gorgeous, Faye is gorgeous.

She steals my breath. Sucks the air out of the room.

As she comes toward us, I can sense the tension that spreads through the men. It's a tension filled with wanting, with need, with love. With an awareness that this woman is the most important thing in our world.

All of the women in this room are dressed to impress—but she's the most beautiful by far.

How any other omega at The Selection thought they had a chance next to her is beyond me.

I swallow, hard, my breath catching in my throat.

Xander leaps to his feet and pulls out a chair for her, and I curse internally, wishing I'd had the foresight to get up first so I could have been the one to do it.

“Good evening, Faye,” Eli drawls, and we all glance at each other.

We all knew Eli had had sex with her today the moment he came to the table, which we tried to ignore.

Sporting hard-ons with our woman not around to do anything about it is pretty damn miserable.

But it's even worse now, because we can smell Eli on her and an overwhelming scent of her arousal.

She's blushing furiously, but there's no jealousy at the table.

There's enough of her to go around, and we're all eager to share now that she seems like she's able to have sex again.

"Good evening," she says, tipping her head. Her hair falls over her shoulders, and I want to brush it away for her, but can't reach her.

We all chat and laugh together as the food comes out.

As always, The Selection pulls out all the stops, bringing out lobster and steak, rich butter with garlic and herbs, potatoes and roasted vegetables in a huge spread.

Faye eats her fill, and we all make sure her cup is never empty, handing her things so she doesn't have to reach.

"I can butter my own bread," she says with a laugh when Cayson insists on doing it for her.

"Nonsense," Eli says, waving his hand. "Let us handle it."

Faye rolls her eyes, but there's something pleased in her expression. It makes my chest loosen to see it. As annoying as we might be, she's happy with us. We're making our omega, our mate, happy, just the way she should be. It makes me feel like I'm glowing with pride.

When dinner is finished and some alphas start moving to the dance floor with the omegas, I stand first, holding out my hand to Faye. When she looks up at me, her

cheeks flushed and her eyes shining, I want to pick her up, hold her close to my chest.

But instead, I just clear my throat.

“May I have this dance?” I ask, giving her what I hope is a charming grin.

“Oh, man,” Cayson says, crossing his arm. “I should have thought of that.”

“That’s alright,” Eli says, clapping his hand on Cayson’s shoulder. “We have all night to dance with our girl. We can finish our drinks while Maverick takes her to the floor.”

I’m already pulling Faye to her feet, drawing her out to the dance floor, her small hand warm and soft in mine. A perfect fit to my much larger hands. To me, it’s a symbol. A reminder that my much smaller mate will always need my protection.

She rubs her fingers along mine. “Your hands are so rough.”

I’m embarrassed. She’s right. “Sorry.”

She smiles. “Don’t be sorry. It just makes me think that I could moisturize them for you.”

“That would be nice,” I say, trying to keep the arousal from my voice as I pull her into my arms on the dance floor.

I wonder if there will ever come a time that having her close like this doesn’t make my skin flush, my body ready to take her at any moment. Surely, she’ll start to grow tired of me if I’m constantly approaching her with a hard-on like a horny teenage boy. I’m sure Eli has more control than that.



“My thought is that while there are lots of ways you guys seem to be able to take care of me, I want to be able to take care of you too.”

My lips quirk up. “You know, you’ll have lots of ways of taking care of us.”

“Oh?” she asks.

“Well, the obvious way of course...” I say.

She looks confused.

I pull her a little closer. “In bed, sweet Faye.”

Her cheeks turn red. “Of course.”

“But you’re also the sweetness in our lives. The gentleness.”

She again looks surprised. “But how is that useful?”

My gaze holds her. “We’re all big, tough men. We need someone who cares about the roughness of our hands, or whether we’ve had a bad day. We need someone to hold when we’re feeling lost, who will keep us grounded.”

“And you think I can do that?” She sounds happy.

I kiss her lips lightly. “I know you can. You’re an amazing mate.”

She laughs a little. “You guys seem to have figured out all kinds of things about me, but I’m still figuring all of you out.”

My little one has trust issues, rightfully so. “Ask me some questions. Anything. I

want you to feel like you know me.”

She seems to take a minute to think. “How do you know how to dance?” she asks, raising an eyebrow at me. “You’re pretty good.”

“Am I?” I say, laughing and bumping my elbow against hers.

It’s nice, to have her so close, to be dancing through the ballroom together, speaking quietly in the space between us.

“Remember, I had the whole human experience thing. I went to a lot of dances in high school. My school’s, and others, too.

I had a lot of friends at some really fancy places, and we had to do this kind of ballroom dancing, sometimes. ”

“Wow,” Faye says, lowering her head and looking at me through her lashes. “I didn’t realize I was in the presence of an expert.”

“If you think this is good,” I say, hearing how low my voice is, “you should see my club dancing.”

“Club dancing?”

“Yeah, well, I kept dancing in college, but that was when we would go out to the clubs.”

“How is club dancing different?”

Warmth spreads through my chest, and I drop her hand, watching her eyes go wide as I move my hips closer to hers.

We step to the side so we don't interrupt the flow of the dancing around us, and I circle around her, drunk on the sound of her laugh as I grab her hips, rolling mine and practically grinding on her.

My heart jumps to my throat when I can smell her arousal, even though she's protesting what I'm doing.

"Gods, oh my gods—Maverick, you have to stop," she says, her voice overtaken with giggles, as she tugs on my hand and brings me back to her front, positioning me for the dance again.

I'm still smiling, the grin on my face stupidly big, as we rejoin the proper dance. The song ends, and the band transitions into a more modern slow song. Faye steps closer to me and drops her head against my chest.

I have to breathe through the intense feelings in my chest, looking away from her for a moment to give myself a rest. If every day feels like this, I just might make up for how boring it could be sometimes, living amongst the humans.

Just one look at Faye is like a shot of dopamine directly into my veins.

"What did you go to college for?"

"Business," I say gruffly. I clear my throat—I know business is not the most impressive thing to study. Others at college—especially those in medical or legal tracks—would laugh when they heard I was a business major.

My man, one of my friends had said, seriously, switch to law. You have the brains for it.

But what they didn't understand was that I was in business school for a reason—I

wanted to build something for myself.

“Why did you choose business?” she asks, her words soft. “It sounds hard.”

I almost let out a laugh, but I don’t. That was not the sentiment on the college campus.

“Well,” I say, clearing my throat. I’m not usually so open, but with Faye, it’s like everything just comes tumbling out of me.

“Growing up with only my family, without a true pack—I just wanted to build something for myself. I thought having the tools to start and grow a business would be good for that.”

“That makes sense,” Faye says, her jaw rubbing against my chest as she talks. Without thinking about it, I run a hand over her hair.

“But that’s not the plan anymore,” I say. “Now, the plan has totally changed.”

“Why’s that?”

Bewildered, I pull her shoulders away from my chest, looking down into her face.

“Faye?” I laugh. “Because I have you. I have my pack and my family. I don’t need to build a business. I just need to help build whatever our family needs.”

“Oh,” she says, and I see something undecipherable pass over her face. I would give anything to know what she’s thinking.

“Ezra and I have been talking,” I say, meeting her eyes steadily.

“And I think I’m going to be his right-hand man.

In operations and governing for his pack.

Xander might be more involved with Cayson—he needs something a little more firm.

But I think I can integrate some things from business school into running the pack.

Did you know Ezra and his father still keep track of everything on paper?

A good database and automated system for inventory would free up so much time for them. ”

“Wow,” Faye says, admiration glinting in her eyes. “You’re really smart, aren’t you?”

I can’t help it—I lean down and kiss her. She leans into me immediately, her body softening like warm taffy, molding to me. Her hands press into my back, and even though I know there are people all around, my body urges me to take her, here and now.

Then, something bristles over the back of my neck and I pull away from her, looking over her shoulder. There’s an older man standing in the doorway, his eyes set intently on Faye.

Immediately, I reposition us so she’s slightly behind me, and I hear Faye ask what’s wrong. My entire body has gone from warm affection to stiff protectiveness in an instant, and I have no idea why, but I know deep down that that man is a threat to my mate.

Even though I’ll be damned if he ever gets near her.

Faye

In an instant, the other alphas are at my side. Ezra, Cayson, and Xander are just as stiff and on-edge as Maverick. I don't understand what's wrong. One minute Maverick and I were having a wonderful time, and the next, this was happening.

Could it be Kurt?

I push the thought aside. The men had been keeping tabs on his progress. He still can't walk. I highly doubt he'd be pushed here in a wheelchair, to let everyone see what Eli had done to him. He has too much pride for that.

I have to get on my tiptoes to see over Maverick's shoulder.

Standing in the doorway is an older man, his sharp eyes staring right at me.

I feel a shock of cool fear run through me.

An instant later, a stronger feeling runs through me, an urge to lift my head higher without realizing why.

The men next to me seem to stand up straighter too, and it dawns on me.

Eli is walking toward the man in the doorway, his power growing stronger and stronger. All around us, alphas and omegas stop dancing, the omegas falling to their knees, the alphas going still, some kneeling, some bowing their heads.

Standing on my tiptoes, I see the older man standing in the doorway, fallen to his knees, bowing the lowest of everyone in the room, even more than some of the omegas. As Eli's powers become more potent, everyone in the room falls to their knees, paralyzed by it.

My alphas and I are the only ones left on our feet, besides Eli. It's distracting. It's overwhelming. What could possibly get Eli to act this way?

"Dexter," Eli says, not a question, but a statement.

Everything clicks. All at once—I see the resemblance.

The wide, square jaw. The nose that's too big.

The eyes that are too sucken and close together.

The arrogant look. This man is Kurt's father.

I must have sensed it instinctively, which is why that fear ran through me when he first appeared in the room.

I shudder again, swallowing and trying not to be afraid.

I have my men with me. Nothing can hurt me.

"I thought you were a smart man," Eli finally says, clearly enjoying having Dexter on his knees like this. "Surely, you know that you're not welcome here. Or anywhere."

"Eli," someone says, and I see Brock appear in the doorway as well, his hand reaching out for Eli, but stopping when Eli pins him with a sharp look. "Stop this."

Eli rolls his neck and takes a step back, and a collective sigh rolls through the room, people straightening up and helping omegas up from the floor. Everyone is riveted on the scene in front of us. It's not every day that you get to see ultimas facing off.

"I'm here to get justice for my son," Dexter spits, his voice choked, and I wonder just how much power Eli was throwing at him.

Could he choke him without ever touching him?

"Justice," Eli laughs, shaking his head like he's never heard anything so ridiculous in his life. "The justice in this instance would be your son's death, Dexter."

"You're not thinking, Eli," Dexter says. He turns his head and says, "Likely because you've been influenced by that little whore," under his breath, but even I can hear him clearly.

Eli moves faster than any shifter I've seen in my life, and Dexter's face is caved in, his nose exploded in a burst of crimson. I close my eyes, cringing away from the violence, a shock of fear moving through me, and Cayson puts an arm around me.

I can't help it. The sound of Dexter's bones breaking reminds me of when it was my bones cracking. Eli advances, preparing to hit Dexter again, but Brock steps between the two of them, protecting Dexter from the onslaught that's coming.

So many emotions swirl inside me. Pride that Eli is mine. Fear for what's happening. A sickening nausea in my gut from the trauma of it all.

"Control yourself!" Brock says loudly, and Eli turns on his heel, holding his hands up.

Everyone is already looking at him, but he pauses for a moment, letting his gaze



sweep over the room. His eyes land on me and gentle for a moment, before he continues looking at the gathered omegas and alphas.

“Kurt of Pack Obsidian is a monster,” Eli says, projecting his voice loud and crisp over the group.

Nobody murmurs. It hardly seems like anyone dares to breathe.

“He is responsible for several murders, one of which occurred on these very grounds. He attempted to kill my mate, Faye. This is the kind of alpha who uses his strength and control over omegas to his own twisted pleasure. Every rumor you have heard about this alpha is true.”

Again, Eli stops to let the room think, and a shiver runs over my body at the look on his face.

Ice, lethality.

“My question to you is this—do you truly want your council to allow this man to continue running around amongst you? Do you care for your omega? Because if you do, it’s imperative that you know it could be her next.

If she tries to go for a stroll, or is in her room alone, Kurt may find her.

With him alive, no female will ever be truly safe.

Is that how your omega should live? In constant fear? ”

The alphas filling the ballroom all puff their chests, growing a bit taller, looking around at one another. I watch as several of them gather around their omegas, like my men have done with me. The omegas look terrified, their eyes wide, their faces

stricken.

“That’s enough !” Brock says, and Eli gives him a chilly look. Quieter, Brock says, “The council is handling this matter privately. There is no need to make it so public, or to cause a panic.”

“We must make it public when the council fails us!” Ezra says, and though he’s standing in front of me, I can practically see the look on his face. Determined, angry. My heart skips when Brock shifts his gaze to us, taking a step in Ezra’s direction.

Before he can get far, Eli steps in front of him. Everyone around us starts to bow slightly again as the two ultimas stare each other down. It’s strange—I’ve never imagined what it’d be like to have two ultimas fight, but I picture it now. It would be... bloody. And violent.

After a moment, Brock clears his throat, shakes his head, and steps back. Which is a shock to me. Did he just back down to Eli?

Again, I wonder about the hierarchy between the ultimas. They’re all above us, but are some of them above each other? I truly don’t know.

“Dexter,” Brock says as he turns to leave, “come with me. And stay the fuck out of the ballroom, and anywhere Faye might be, from now on.”

Dexter turns to Eli, his voice thick and wet through the blood flowing down his face and the back of his throat. “You’ll pay for hitting me,” he says, little droplets of blood flying.

Eli steps aside, looking at him with disgust. “Don’t tempt me to do it again,” he says, but without anger, and instead almost like Dexter is a pest Eli simply has to eradicate from his home.

Dexter's hands are covered with blood from his attempts to stem the bleeding, and he tries to speak again but coughs instead. Then he turns and runs into the hallway as he loudly chokes on his own blood, leaving all of us staring after him.

Literally, the man everyone is so terrified of, just left. Backed down to Eli. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, but it all makes sense. Dexter might be a powerful alpha in the eyes of all the packs, but Eli is an ultima. There is no comparison.

"Holy shit," Cayson breathes, the moment he's gone. "That was better than TV."

He's not wrong. But I hope this show of defiance doesn't come back to smack us in the ass.

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*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

“Hey,” Ezra says, handing me a cool cloth. “Here, put this against your forehead.”

I swallow thickly and accept it, pressing it to my forehead, which actually does feel hot.

The moment Dexter left the ballroom, a wave of exhaustion rolled through me, immediately followed by panic.

My knees crumbled. Xander caught me in his arms, and the next thing I knew, I was on my bed, Ezra and Cayson gazing down at me.

“I’m sorry,” I tell them, feeling weak and silly.

Ezra lifts a brow. “Faye, you’ve been through a lot. You have nothing to be sorry about.”

“Besides,” Cayson says, grinning. “I kind of wanted to pass out when I saw that old asshole too.”

I laugh.

They sit down on each side of me on the bed, and I let my head fall onto Cayson’s shoulder. So much has happened these past few days, it’s nice to just have it be the three of us for a minute.

“Where are the others?” I ask.

“They’re getting some things sorted in regards to Dexter and Kurt,” Ezra explains, and I take his hand, holding it on my leg.

My thoughts start churning, thinking about Maverick and I dancing.

He’d talked about our future, a future that included Ezra and Cayson.

The thing is, the three of us haven’t really discussed things since we came up with this whole fake relationship idea.

I feel like something has changed between us, but I’m not sure.

Sitting here with them, I realize that I’m trying to form my own picture for our futures, but I don’t have all the information.

I don’t know one hundred percent for certain that Cayson and Ezra have changed their minds about not wanting an omega, and the idea pains me.

A future without them in it just doesn’t sound complete.

I feel like they care about me, but maybe not enough to give up their omega-free lives.

“Try the back of your neck,” Ezra says, gently taking the cloth and pressing it to my neck.

Already, I’m much calmer than I was before.

Cayson is tracing lazy circles over my thigh, seeming relaxed, his blond hair falling

over his forehead just enough that I'm tempted to sweep his hair back.

Ezra sits more rigidly, his bright blue eyes moving over the room slowly, but there's an air of calm about him that I breathe in like a warm breeze.

"Thank you," I say, hearing how small my voice is. "I—I want to say something."

Ezra turns to me, and Cayson lifts his head up, meeting my eyes, something cloudy in his. I lower mine, looking instead at my hand, where I'm holding the cloth. This needs to be said, so why does it feel like I shouldn't be saying anything at all?

"I wanted to thank the two of you for everything. I mean, it's a sticky situation we're in, and I know it's not going to be easy to back out of it now that there are so many people involved.

Especially Eli. But—I just want you to know that if you want to, I'll still honor our initial agreement.

We never said, we never agreed, for things to change.

And I can talk to Maverick and Xander, deal with that—I just?—"

"Faye," Cayson says, his voice uncharacteristically serious. "About that."

I lift my eyes, finally, my heart thudding too hard in my chest. It feels like it's rocking my entire body.

Of course, I feel bad for getting them involved in this, but I also feel a sense of loss, looking at the two of them.

I'm sorry that they have to deal with the situation, but I'm also prematurely grieving

their loss.

At the thought of us going our separate ways after this, living out the rest of my life without goofy Cayson or intelligent, caring Ezra, my chest twists painfully.

“Faye,” Ezra says, squeezing my hand.

Cayson pulls the towel out of my hand and takes the other one. “Faye,” he says, voice serious. “We’ve discussed this in length, and we’re both in agreement. We’re your mates. If you’ll have us.”

Are they just saying that because they feel sorry for me? “No, it’s okay—we don’t have to keep up the act?”

“It’s not an act,” Ezra says, shaking his head, and when I meet his eyes, I can see that he’s serious.

“It’s—well, not anymore. Not ever actually.

I think Cayson and I were both in denial about it, but you are our mate, Faye.

We felt it the first moment we met you. We’re completely head-over-heels in love with you.”

I stare at him, my breath caught in my throat. Does he mean that?

When I glance at Cayson, he flashes a smile. “All that talk about not wanting an omega, and we had one the whole time.”

“Oh,” I say, letting out a laugh. When Cayson squeezes my hand, I turn and look at him and see on his face that he’s serious, too. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Ezra laughs.

I shrug, feeling flustered. “Okay.”

Ezra’s eyes sweep over my face. “Does that mean you feel the same? You’ll have us?”

Will I have them? What a silly, insane question.

“Of course,” I say quietly, letting out an embarrassed laugh at the tear that runs down my cheek. “That’s—that’s what I want.”

“Then, it’s settled,” Ezra says, grinning wildly.

Cayson squeezes my hand. “We’re not going anywhere. We’re your mates, and we’re going to have an amazing future together.”

I start to picture my future again, and stop. There’s still so much to figure out. So much I don’t know.

“And the other guys?” I ask, clearing my throat and looking between the two of them. “How do you feel about them?”

They exchange a look, and I hold my breath. If they don’t like them, if they don’t want to share me with them, what will I even do? I can’t give up any of them. They’re like pieces of my heart.

“They all love you,” Ezra says quietly, “which already shows they have good taste.”

“And we all like the same whiskey,” Cayson says, laughing a bit, before saying, “Seriously though, we like them. We’ve already started planning our places in our



new family. It seriously feels like we were meant to find each other.”

“That’s—” I say, and when I can’t get the words out, I just tip my chin up to Cayson.

He gets the message immediately, leaning down and giving me a soft kiss that makes me feel incredibly loved. After kissing him, I turn and do the same to Ezra, who leans down, slipping his fingers into my hair and kissing me so tenderly I think I might cry.

There’s a quick knock at the door, and Ezra opens the door. Eli, Maverick, and Xander walk in, and Ezra returns to his place beside me. The three men are the complete antithesis to Cayson, Ezra, and me, looking tense and upset. Eli, in particular, has a look that could kill on his face.

“Dexter and Kurt are meeting with the council right now,” Eli says, gritting his teeth.

Instantly, I feel sick. Why are they meeting with them right now? This can’t be good.

“The official meeting isn’t for days,” Xander grunts.

“So we think they’re doing something shady,” Maverick finishes, grabbing Cayson’s ball from the table and bouncing it a few times. “I thought he was up to something because Dexter also brought a bunch of burly alphas from their pack.”

“He’s basically asking for a fight,” Eli says, his sharp eyes connecting with each of the guys. “But we can handle whatever those assholes have planned for us.”

Without meaning to, I let out a tiny little hiccupping sob, and Ezra pulls me into his lap, wrapping his arms around me.

I hate that this is happening. I hate that these men have to go through this because of the history between Kurt and me. There’s a voice in the back of my head telling me

that they would be much better off with a different omega. One without so much baggage.

“I can tell what you’re thinking, Faye,” Eli says, taking my hand as they all crowd around me.

Each of them is touching me in some way, whether with a hand in my hair, on my arm, or in my hand.

“And you’d better stop. Everything that’s happening is on Kurt and Dexter—they’re the ones doing this.

You’ve faced hurt and fear at their hands for too long.

It stops now. Trust us to end this, once and for all. ”

I nod through the tears. I can’t say anything, but it doesn’t matter. My men don’t leave until I can breathe again, peppering me with kisses and kind words. They ensure Eli’s guard is at the door and is aware of the situation, almost making me believe that I might actually be okay.

But the devil and his son have come for me, and I have a feeling they’re not just going to walk away without their pound of flesh.

Faye

I turn in the mirror, looking at myself in the sun dress I'm wearing.

It's light and pretty, with yellow flowers.

Maverick said he had a surprise for all of us—probably to distract us from the big meeting with the jerks—but wouldn't give me much instruction on what to wear besides casual is fine .

It's strange. I'm excited for whatever we're going to do.

Normally, I don't like surprises, but I guess it's different when you feel safe.

And my men make me feel safe. And loved.

When there's a knock at the door, my heart jumps, a reaction I absolutely hate. I wonder if there will ever come a day when I don't think Kurt will be on the other side of my door, but I force myself to cross the room. I catch his scent a moment before I see him.

Maverick. Maverick with his wild auburn hair and his bright green eyes. Maverick with his laugh that always makes me want to laugh, and his wicked sense of humor.

I have such great mates.

“Hi,” I say, opening the door and squealing with surprise when he steps forward,

wrapping his arms around me, lifting me off my feet, and spinning me.

“You look good enough to eat,” he murmurs, before setting me down, and it makes a flush of warmth run through my body.

Even though he’s the one who looks good. He’s got on a white button-up shirt and dark slacks. The clothes fit him perfectly, showing off every muscle in his perfectly toned body.

“Thanks,” I say, and in a moment of boldness, after taking in his broad chest and the sideways grin on his face, say, “You, too.”

He looks pleased, his eyes darting to the bed for a moment. He bites his bottom lip and shakes his head, as though he’s banishing thoughts from his head. “You’re going to need to stop saying things like that. I have a plan that doesn’t include you being on your back, at least not yet.”

My face feels hot. “How often exactly do you think about sex?”

He leans in. “With you? All the time.” Placing his hand on the small of my back, he turns, leading me out of the room while I try to hide the embarrassment on my face.

The rest of the guys are waiting at the end of the hall, and I watch as they turn, one-by-one, their eyes lighting up when they see me. It’s a special kind of intimacy, to be wanted like this. So clearly and openly, without pretense.

“What’s your big plan?” I ask, when we join the rest of the guys.

“You’ll just have to be patient,” Maverick says, flicking the tip of my nose gently, his eyes full of merriment. “It’s a surprise .”

I roll my eyes, but laugh when Cayson and Xander appear on either side of me, each taking a hand. Ezra offers me a piggyback ride if I get tired, grinning wickedly. Eli follows behind the group like he needs to make sure none of us wander off.

Maverick leads us away from the castle and along the winding paths into the woods.

We pass other alphas and omegas, and the guys wave to some of them.

When we see Addilyn sitting on a blanket with some other omegas, she mouths so jealous to me, which makes me laugh.

We both know she's not jealous. She has her two hotties to worry about.

"Seriously, man," Ezra says, when we're swallowed by the forest. "Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise," Maverick says, his eyes dancing with glee as he looks back at us.

"Did you find another dead rabbit? Because if you took us all the way out here for a dead rabbit—" Xander begins, and Maverick shoots him a look.

"That was one time," he mutters. "And that rabbit had the same color fur as Eli's hair. It was cool!"

Ezra gives me a look, and I laugh.

"Oh, I know what we're doing—we're going to hold a ritual out here," Cayson says, motioning to Ezra's crotch. "A lasting spell. To ensure that all of us can keep up with Faye."

I blush. "That's absolutely not it!"

“I know, Maverick wants to find another bear,” Ezra says, a teasing note to his words.

“Bear?” Eli asks, glancing between us.

Ezra nods. “Cayson decided to pet a bear cub while we were all picking berries. We were attacked by a very angry mama bear.”

“But the cub was so cute!” Cayson argues.

“That was fun,” Maverick says, turning around and walking backwards as he looks at us. “But that’s not the surprise. Come on, let’s all shift, and I’ll take you there.”

Shifting does sound nice. I haven’t been in my wolf form since before I was with Eli outside the castle, and that was only for a little while. Shifters need to be in touch with their wolf side. Otherwise, we get restless.

I glance at the others, watching as their bodies change, shifting into their wolf forms. I follow suit, feeling my body changing until I’m done.

After shifting, the size difference between us is even more obvious.

The guys are big, probably double my size, but it’s Eli that really shocks me.

Technically, I saw Eli’s wolf form the day he saved me from Kurt, but I was so out of it that I hardly had the space to see him and really register it. I wasn’t actually looking at him, then.

But I’m looking at him now. We all are.

He’s massive. Probably four times my size. I feel like a little pup next to him.

Whoa, Ezra says.

Ultimas can be a bit of a shock if you haven't seen them in wolf form before, Eli explains.

It seems like we all pause for a moment to take him in—this towering, hulking white wolf next to us—then, Cayson takes off down the path.

Guys! A butterfly! His voice is a squeal of excitement.

Xander follows after him, and we all snap out of it, racing down the path after the two men.

Maverick leads us along, occasionally stopping to wrestle and jump with the others.

When I start to fall behind, panting as we climb up the hill, the guys circle back around to me, laughing and nipping at me, encouraging me.

Eli plods along, almost looking bored, even as the other guys are breathing hard and I'm practically gasping for air. There's still some residual pain in my ribs, but I don't tell them that. I can handle it, and the last thing I want to do is put a damper on all the fun.

Besides, it's fun watching them. Ezra's wolf is mostly black, but his face is white, and the fur around the white is gray.

He makes a pretty wolf. Cayson's wolf is as golden as his hair, and only slightly smaller than Ezra, which I'm sure he hates.

Maverick's wolf has red fur so brilliant that I can't say I've ever seen another wolf that looks like him before, and Xander's wolf is a black color so dark that it's almost

blue.

They're all such different wolves, but beautiful in their own ways.

A rabbit! Cayson shouts through our connection

Once again, Cayson takes off, and this time, Ezra and Xander both follow him, each of them trying to get to the rabbit first. Maverick, Eli, and I stay on the path.

Now that it's leveled out a bit, it's not so bad.

My breathing comes easier, and a cool breeze moves through the trees, sliding through my fur and cooling me down.

That feels good , Eli says, his hazel eyes meeting mine.

A shiver runs down my back. There's just something about the way my men look at me sometimes. It leaves me feeling like I can't catch my breath, like my heart is racing too quickly.

This way! Maverick says, desperately trying to keep the other alphas on the right path. Guys, come on! We're so close to the surprise.

Once the other three rejoin us, it only takes a few more minutes until the woods open up in front of us, falling away and revealing a clearing with a bubbling hot spring.

It's both warm and cool in this area—from the heat from the spring and the chill in the air—and impossibly beautiful.

On the other end of the clearing, there's a waterfall tumbling into the river, but the stones and grass around us give way to steaming pools of glassy water.



“Wow,” Ezra says, and I realize he’s shifted back beside me. “This place is really beautiful.”

We all shift back to our human forms, gasping in awe. I watch Cayson get to his knees and trail his hand through the water. The movement makes me itch to slip into the water myself.

“Feels good,” he says. “Just the right temperature.”

“This is certainly a good surprise,” Eli says, grinning. “But I’m assuming nobody thought to bring bathing suits?”

“No,” Maverick says, grinning wickedly. “I thought we could skinny dip.”

All eyes turn to me, and I feel my cheeks go bright red.

Oh boy. Am I ready to skinny dip in front of all of them? I mean, I guess I’ve slept with them, so why not...?

Faye

The guys go along with Maverick's idea instantly, shirking their clothes and leaving them stranded on the rocks, while I stand completely still, processing what's happening.

Up until these men, I'd never been naked in front of anyone but my family.

Somehow, just stripping down here feels a lot different than being naked in my bed together.

"What's wrong?" Maverick asks, appearing in front of me, completely naked.

It's hard to explain what I'm feeling. While I'm comfortable with him—and all of them—it feels like a lot, all at once, to be seeing them all without their clothes and dripping wet.

It's like my system can't handle all the input.

I can't handle the idea of them naked, or that I'll be getting naked with them.

"Nothing," I squeak, and his eyes dart over me, assessing me.

"You don't want to skinny dip?" He sounds a little disappointed, but not upset.

I can see the other guys watching us, and I swallow, meeting their eyes. The alphas come closer to me. Eli hangs back, watching, and it takes work not to let my eyes

drift down to below their hips, where I know there's too much to take in at once.

"No—yes, I mean?—"

"Maybe Faye just needs some help getting out of her dress?" Ezra says, his hot breath blowing out over the back of my neck as he steps closer.

I suck in a breath, feeling my nipples go tight. That's not what I wanted, but it might be what I need if I have any hope of getting undressed in front of them.

"Is that okay, Faye?" Xander asks, his hand skating up my arm, sending shivers down to my wrist.

Unable to talk, I just nod, more shivers following the others as Xander slides one strap down my left shoulder, while Ezra unties my dress at the back and Maverick slides the other strap down.

The sensations are so whisper-light, and yet, somehow, they have my core melting with a liquid kind of heat. To have them touching me all at once, the tension in the air building palpably, feeling the want radiating from their bodies, bathing me in admiration and need... it's incredible.

Then, out of nowhere, a huge wave of water splashes over all of us. I gasp, completely drenched, and Cayson emerges from a nearby hot spring, pushing his hair out of his face and laughing.

"Whoops," he says, clearly not sorry at all.

Distracted, the guys turn away from me, chasing after Cayson as he desperately tries to swim away from them and their attempts to splash him back. I watch them, my chest warming with affection for them all, when I feel a presence next to me.

“These boys struggle to finish what they’ve started, don’t they?” Eli says, his voice dangerously low.

His fingers land on my skin, and my entire body re-ignites with need. Slowly, he slips my sodden dress off, letting it fall to the rocks below. Then, with the world’s most certain fingers, he takes off my bra and underwear, dropping them in the pile with my dress.

When he takes my hand, I follow him back to a different pool of water. He pulls me in and settles me on his lap. The others must smell my arousal stronger, now, because they all seem to turn at the same time, abandoning their splashing and joining Eli and me in our pool.

“So, we got you naked?” Maverick says, grinning.

“I got her naked,” Eli tells him, lifting a brow.

I shift on his lap and suddenly find his erection pointing against my ass. Gasping in surprise, I move on his lap, but Eli pulls me right back.

“What’s wrong?” Ezra asks.

“Amazed by our beauty?” Cayson questions, wiggling his eyebrows.

“She’s uncomfortable,” Xander says, and I want to sink beneath the water to hide my face.

“Why is she uncomfortable?” Maverick asks, looking confused.

Eli reaches up and cups my breasts. “Because she can feel my cock.”

All eyes are on me.

I blush. “I wasn’t expecting it.”

“You weren’t expecting us to be hard?” Ezra asks in disbelief. “You’re naked. Of course we’re going to be hard.”

“I was hard when I saw you in the hall,” Maverick says, sounding nonchalant.

“I got a chubster watching you walk through the woods,” Cayson offers, grinning.

Xander shifts in the water. “I think I might always be hard around you.”

I laugh, mortified. “You guys aren’t really that... horny.”

Ezra rubs a thumb down my jaw. “Honey, you know it’s been awhile since we...

well, since we had you, right? We’ve been waiting for you to heal.

But then you walked in smelling like Eli, and it kind of got us all wondering if you were healed enough for sex.

” Then he rushes out, “Not that there’s any pressure. We’ll wait as long as you want.”

Eli begins to stroke my nipples under the water, and I shift again, that rod of his poking me, making his interest clear.

“I—I do think I’m ready for sex. I’m just a little nervous. There’s five of you.” I look up at them. “ Five . I mean, where does everything even... go?”

Eli chuckles and the low sound has goosebumps forming on my skin. “We can show

you, beautiful. It's not actually that complicated. Every time we're together, we can try different things. Try to please you in different ways. Would you like that?"

His fingers pinch my nipples and a moan slips from my lips. "Yes."

"If we're not going to have sex soon, I just need to go take care of something," Maverick says, his words rushed. "I don't think I can handle listening to her moan like that again."

"You guys want to have sex?" I ask.

Every single one of them nods their heads.

"But we're in public!"

Cayson laughs. "Jelly Bean, we can absolutely do it in public. No one's going to come up here. No one is going to see us."

"But there's no bed," I say, glancing around.

Cayson gives me a smoldering look. "Just trust us, okay?"

"Okay," I say, and I can practically hear all their dicks hardening.

Eli continues to touch me as he says, "But I think as exciting as our mate is, we should all intend to come in her pussy. If we want babies soon, the more of our seed we can give her the better."

To my shock, all the men seem to like that idea, but I'm just trying to figure out how the hell that will work. I've only got one pussy, and there's five of them. The math isn't mathing.

Eli kisses my shoulder. “I also don’t think I should go in her ass. I think she needs to work up to that, given my size.”

“He’s not wrong,” Cayson mutters, since they’d all gotten a good look at his enormous pecker when we went skinny dipping.

Eli turns me around in his lap, so that I’m straddling him. Our eyes lock, and he kisses me long and hard before pulling back. He moves us so that he’s sitting on the soft shore, then, holding my eye contact, pushes slowly inside of me. I dig my nails into his back, gasping in air.

Ezra comes up behind me and reaches between us. His fingers find my clit, and he begins to slowly stroke me. The sensation makes me calm. It makes me stop thinking about the massive erection inside of me. I jump a little every time he rubs my clit, feeling my body relaxing.

My eyes flutter closed, and I feel Ezra’s erection against my ass. The knowledge almost makes me open my eyes again, but I’m too busy enjoying Ezra’s hands on me. Enjoying Eli sinking deeper and deeper into me.

“There, beautiful,” Eli murmurs. “You’ve taken all of me.”

I shudder and shift, feeling like he’s filling every inch of me.

But then Ezra slides a finger into my ass, and I tense again, shocking as sparks of pleasure awaken in my body.

Eli doesn’t move as Ezra works my ass, slowly adding more and more fingers to the first until I feel like I’m going to burst.

Maverick, Cayson, and Xander all gather around us. Their hands reach out, and they

grasp my breasts. They touch me where Ezra had been, making my clit throb. I swear to the gods, Xander has magic hands. For as quiet as he is, he knows just where to touch me to make me feel like I'm losing my mind.

Suddenly, Ezra pulls his fingers out of my ass, and I whimper, missing the feeling of being so full. But I don't have long to wait before he presses his cock into my ass, easing into me as slowly as Eli eased into my pussy.

I continue to dig my nails into Eli, feeling every inch of Ezra's enormous length.

When he reaches his hilt, we're all breathing fast. I lean back, allowing Maverick and Cayson better access to my breasts, and then lean down, sucking on them with abandon, moving from one cock to another, taking them deeply into my mouth, before switching again.

All of it makes me feel like I'm losing my mind.

I start to work myself against the cocks inside me, unable to pull in a deep breath, feeling like every nerve in my body is being touched.

Xander pinches my clit lightly, and I moan, my head spinning.

"Remember," Eli grits out, "we want your cum in her pussy."

And then Eli and Ezra start to work their cocks inside of me. If I was standing, my shaking knees would've crumbled. The sensation makes me feel like the whole world is falling down around me, and I don't even care, because it feels that good.

My orgasm hits. I scream, needing to release the pressure inside of me. It feels like a balloon that's suddenly popped. My muscles clench and release on the cocks inside of me, milking them for their seed.



Eli cries out my name, and I feel him explode inside of me.

He keeps pumping, and his warm cum makes me even hotter.

When he finishes, without a word, he pulls out of me.

Ezra pulls out too, and they spin me around.

As I'm braced against Eli, Ezra leans me back, lifting one of my legs, and fucking my pussy as hard as he can.

Another orgasm explodes, sending tremors through my body.

Ezra comes with a groan, and his scent explodes over me.

Ezra barely has time to pull out when Xander pushes inside me. His movements are desperate, one hand gripping my leg, the other on my belly. He doesn't stop pumping until I say his name, wracked by another orgasm that makes my toes curl.

My head is still spinning when Cayson slips inside of me. He lifts both my legs, pressing them high over my head. The position switches my angle, and as he pumps into me, I feel myself squirting as another orgasm moves through me. This one leaves my vision black as I feel his hot cum inside of me.

Cayson releases me, and Maverick takes over. I almost tell them to stop, that I can't imagine having another orgasm, but that big cock of his knows just what to do, and I'm screaming his name as I come flying over the edge. As I return to earth, I feel him coming inside of me with a guttural sound.

Then I lay, panting, wondering what the hell just happened.

“Is that normal?” I sputter. “Five fucking orgasms?”

Eli chuckles behind me. “For you, it will be.”

Holy shit. What have I gotten myself into?

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

X ander

If the heavens are real, I think Maverick has brought us to them.

Exhausted and flooded with happy hormones, we all drift in the water, floating on our backs, breathing together and occasionally murmuring to one another.

My defenses are down in a way they haven't been for years, and all because of my new pack.

Of course, I've always been able to protect myself, but with Eli and the others here, it's different.

Together, we are strong.

The sun is lowering in the sky, casting shadows over the hot springs and cooling the air, which makes the hot water feel even more delicious.

Faye's hair is spread out in the water, floating, like she's a mermaid.

Every once in a while, I reach out and touch it, running my fingers through it in the water.

I think if we're in the heavens, Faye must be our angel, our goddess, our divine entity.

"It's good that we're relaxing," Ezra says.

The rest of us murmur our agreement, and I wonder if there's something in the air here that's making us all so cool and calm or if it's just the effect you get from being around your family.

Family .

The word hits me in the chest, just as Cayson speaks up, his voice slightly breaking us out of that dreamy fog. "Why is it good we're relaxing?"

"Oh," Ezra says, his voice coming back to himself as well, becoming a little more solid. "Just—well, you know. The official hearing is in two days with the council, since they've now met with them too and have both sides of the story."

No, no, no , I think, as I feel everyone tense around me. The wonderful, warm, soft moment is gone as we all start to remember recent events and what we'll be facing at the meeting. It was never going to last forever, but I wanted the weightless feeling to last a bit longer than it did.

"Right," Faye says, sitting up, water sloshing off of her, her hair slicked down to her head.

She's still beautiful, but I was enchanted by how her hair was floating in the water.

I want to ask her to lie back down, but the moment has already passed.

She wrings her hands together and focuses her gaze somewhere in the forest. "I can't believe they're going to go easy on Kurt, even after he took two lives.

How can they just disregard that? Life is precious.

Murderers shouldn't just be let free like that, roaming around to hurt more people. "

Murders. Going free.

My entire body goes cold, rigid, my throat closing up. I accidentally get some of the water in my mouth when I breathe, again, and it catches in my throat, making me cough violently. Maverick moves to my side, hitting my back until my airway is clear.

“Thanks,” I choke, and he nods, his eyes meeting mine.

“What’s wrong?” Faye asks, coming to my side and setting a hand on my shoulder. When her eyes meet mine, I know I have to tell her the truth.

I’d tried not to think about it. Tried not to wonder what my mate would think when she knew the truth. I should’ve told her a long time ago, but I’d buried my past so deep inside of me that I’d forgotten for a moment that the ghosts from my past will never truly be gone.

This isn’t real until she knows. Until she accepts me. All of me.

“I—” I swallow and watch as the other guys look away from us, giving me a moment to tell my truth. Ezra, Cayson, and Eli are clearly listening, but Maverick already knows what I’m going to tell her. “Faye, there’s something I need to tell you.”

“What is it? Do you want to talk alone?” she asks, her hands raising, gripping mine. I hold onto them, hoping she doesn’t let go when I tell her the truth.

“No, we’re a family. I can say this here.” I take a deep breath. “You know how I was—I was kicked out of my pack.”

“Yes,” she says, running a thumb over the side of my hand. I look down at her hand, so small and delicate in mine, and swallow.

Please let her take this well. Please don't let her turn away from me. I can't handle it if she denies me.

"I was—well, I want to be honest with you. It was because I—I—I took a life."

The air seems to freeze around us. Faye's chest goes still, her eyes widening.

After a moment, as though her brain has processed this information, she rips her hands away from me, stumbling back in the water.

She almost falls, and I reach for her, but she catches herself, jerking away from my touch.

It stings. Even if I know I deserve it.

"What?" she says, her breath coming quickly now, her eyes darting to the others.  
"What? Is this a joke?"

I open my mouth to say something, but it's like my brain has been replaced with a rock. I squeeze my eyes shut, wishing I was as eloquent as Maverick or Ezra. Or even fucking Cayson.

When they want them, the words come. When I need them, they abandon me.

Faye turns on her heel, sprinting as fast as she can away from me, out of the water, stumbling over to her dress. Everything about her movements screams that she wants to be anywhere but near me. Which hurts. I'm still the same man. Can't she see that?

"Faye, you need to give him a chance to explain," Eli says, but she ignores him, her hands shaking as she pulls her now-dry dress over her shoulders.

“Faye!” Ezra repeats, swimming toward her, getting ready to leave the water.

A moment later, she’s running, swallowed by the woods. Our perfect evening has been ruined by the truth of who I am and what I did.

I know I deserve it. And if she never forgives me, I’ll understand it.

“Go,” Maverick says, pushing my shoulder. “This is your chance. You need to tell her the truth.”

The rest of the guys nod at me—they don’t even know the truth, and yet, here they are, still trusting me. I half expected Cayson or Ezra to leap to their feet and warn me away from our mate, but they’re just staring back at me. Waiting. Giving me a chance to fix this.

Through our shared bond, they know I’m a good man. They still trust me with her. It’s a good feeling, even though I feel awful about Faye being afraid of me.

I turn and take off after her, heart thumping. I grab my pants as I go, yanking them up over my legs. My mind is working, trying to come up with the right thing to say. I know this is one of the most important things I’ll ever say in my life. If I don’t do this right, I could lose her forever.

Maybe no matter what I’ll lose her forever.

“Faye,” I say, voice low when I see her leaning against a tree, shoulders shaking.

“Don’t touch me,” she says, not turning around. “Right now every instinct inside of me is screaming to flee or fight as everything that happened to my brother flies through my head on repeat, and I don’t even know how to separate what Kurt did to him with what you did.”

I wince, but I understand why she feels that way. “I won’t touch you,” I say, putting my hands up, though she can’t see me do it. “I would never touch you if you didn’t want me to.”

She’s breathing hard. “Why did you follow me? What do you have to say?”

I still don’t know what to say, but I know saying nothing is the worst thing I can do, so I just open my mouth and start speaking. “Faye, I—the person I killed was my best friend.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” she asks, turning, her voice cracking on the last word.

Her skin is pale. Her expression is crushed.

“This whole time you’ve been seeing what I’ve been dealing with with Kurt.

You’ve seen how losing my brother hurt me.

And you’ve said nothing. Just held in this terrible secret. Why? I just don’t understand.”

I take a breath, terrified that I’m not going to get it out. “Please—” I say. “Please, just—just let me tell you. If you’re still mad, if you hate me, that’s fine. But please just let me explain.”

I watch her face, see her eyes travel, taking me in, and when she gives a small, curt nod, I almost crumble with relief. This is something. A chance to fix this.

“The man I killed,” I admit, pressing my lips together so I don’t cry, “he was—like I said—he was my best friend. I was the best man at his wedding. He found his mate so



young, and they were beautiful together. But—but she was troubled. She didn't think she deserved to have good things, and she—she?—”

The memories are flooding back, and it's getting harder and harder to keep my voice level. I can't stop thinking about Clara, and how scared she was, and how she was screaming, and how nobody was stepping in.

According to ancient pack laws, Draven had a right to take her life. Even though in his normal state he was a patient, kind, wonderful man who would never think of doing such a thing.

But I couldn't stand watching an alpha hurt an omega like that. Especially knowing he was crazed—out of his mind.

“She cheated on him,” I finally manage to choke out, looking away from Faye when her eyes widen.

Cheating on a mate is practically unheard of—it can be painful to even attempt.

“And when he found out—he wasn't himself.

He went rabid. He was beating her in front of everyone. It was—he was going to kill her.”

I take a breath, trying not to relive it, but it comes flooding back anyway. His eyes, bloodshot, wild, so unlike himself that I almost thought he was possessed. I had heard stories of what would happen if your mate died or betrayed you, but I didn't believe them. Not until that moment.

“It wasn't him,” I choke out, shaking my head, hating that tears are appearing in my eyes, even after all this time.

“It wasn’t him. He would have wanted me to stop him.

He loved Clara more than anything in the world.

I tried to just stop him, to not seriously injure him, but he was out of his mind.

Soon, it turned into a fight for my life.

I didn’t want to hurt him, but I did. And he died from his injuries.

I nearly died too.” I take a shuddering breath.

“Because of the old laws about—well, basically that it was his right to kill her—the pack elders cast me out. But I know he would have wanted me to stop him. If he’d regained control of himself and realized he’d killed her, he would have taken his own life immediately after.

And—well, two weeks later, Clara realized she was pregnant.

And it was his. He would’ve been glad she survived. Glad his child survived.”

Blinking away tears, I take another deep breath. I watch Faye’s expression, wondering what she’s thinking.

“I know taking a life is wrong,” I say, pushing the words out. “But if I could think of a different way to protect Clara, you have to know that I would have. I would have, Faye.”

I’d have done anything not to kill my best friend.

And I’d do anything now to not lose my mate, the woman I love more than anything

in the world. Even though I might deserve it.

Faye

I feel horrible. When Xander said he'd killed someone, I'd had a kneejerk reaction, a vision of Xander killing my brother, and I'd forgotten for a minute that this man, my mate, would never just kill someone. He's not that kind of man.

I don't make Xander wait. I step forward and into his arms immediately. He lets out a choked half-sob, and his arms tighten around me. He buries his face into the crook of my neck, and I rub my hand over his back, whispering to him.

"I understand. I do. I'm so, so sorry! I wasn't thinking. I know you'd never do anything horrible. It was about my own trauma, not you, even though that's not an excuse."

It's comforting to me that even this big, even this strong, Xander is still capable of feeling.

He's crushed about the death of his best friend, like any man, any shifter, any alpha should be.

If death means nothing to us, if we push away that grief and don't allow ourselves to feel it, do we really value those we've lost at all?

Xander killed because he had to. Not because he wanted to.

"It's okay, Xander," I say, holding him as his body shakes against mine.

As soon as he started talking, telling me about what happened, I recognized the look on his face, because I've felt it before.

The return to something you'd rather not think about.

The way it feels when your brain hijacks you and yanks you back to the past, making you relive things you would rather never think about again.

The way I've been haunted by my brother's murder since the day it happened.

"I'm sorry for not telling you sooner," Xander says, his voice muffled by my neck.

"You have nothing to feel sorry for. I'm sorry for not trusting you enough to give you a chance to explain.

" I hold him closer, breathing in his scent.

It dawns on me that if he was a terrible murderer, like Kurt, I never would have felt the mating bond with him.

Deep down, I know he's a good shifter, a good alpha.

"I love you," I say, taking a deep breath as he pulls away. "And I trust you."

His face relaxes, and I realize that since I met him, he's been carrying this in his body, constantly tense from the weight of this secret.

I'm glad it's finally relieved. He may have done something unintentionally bad, but unlike Kurt, he did it for the right reasons and has dealt with the consequences of his actions.

“But no more secrets,” I say.

His eyes widen. “No more secrets.”

I smile. We kiss, then hold each other for a long minute. I listen as his heartbeat calms and his arms around me relax. Then we part, taking each other's hands.

When we walk back to the hot springs together, the others are just finishing getting their clothes back on. All eyes go to us, and I see relief in all their eyes.

“Well,” Eli says, clapping his hands. “Does anyone else have some secrets they want to share with the class? This is the time to reveal them.”

Xander blushes, and I look around the group, heart skipping in my chest. If anyone else says they're a murderer, I don't know what I'll do. One secret was enough for today.

When Cayson raises his hand, tentatively, my mouth drops open.

“I'm not a very good alpha,” he says, voice quiet. “I'm not a responsible leader. I've left my dad to handle the pack in my absence, which is what he would prefer, but that's no excuse.”

Eli folds his arms in front of his chest, looking serious. “Well, that's done now isn't it?”

“What?” Cayson looks confused.

“You have an omega now,” Eli says, crossing the group and putting his arm around me.

“That means it’s time to be a good alpha.

For her sake, for all of our sakes, and for the sake of your people.

You’ll be the head alpha of your pack one day.

You can hardly do the job properly if you’ve never learned to do it. ”

Cayson nods, serious for a rare moment, before saluting Eli.

Eli rolls his eyes, but I can tell by looking at Cayson that he is taking this seriously, in his own way.

But that’s not a surprise to me. I’ve sensed for some time that he wants to be the leader his pack needs, he’s just been scared to stand up against his father.

“Our number one priority is Faye,” Eli says, his gaze shifting between them. “She doesn’t deserve to be startled or frightened by any more information. So, one last time, does anyone have anything to share?”

Heads shake all around.

Eli smiles. “Good. Keeping her happy, healthy, and cared for—that’s what we’re here for. We put her first now in all things. Cayson, that means stepping up. Everyone else, that means before you do anything, you think about Faye, first. Can we all do that?”

Ezra nods once, firmly, and the rest of them all nod together. Cayson gives a thumbs-up. Again, I get a pure shock of joy to my system, and I wonder if everyone else just walks around feeling this happy all the time. Or am I just that lucky?

Once again, I can't stop thinking about how I arrived at The Selection desperately hoping not to take a single mate, and now, here I am with four of them, and an ultimate as the massive cherry on top.

With his arm still around my shoulder, Eli turns.

"Maverick," he says, "lead us home."

We all shift into our wolf forms once more, and this time, we're all relaxed and spent heading back to the castle. We chase little critters around, play, and howl, even though there's no moon in sight. It feels like we're truly our own pack, and I don't mind it one bit.

I'm in the middle of pouncing on Cayson when Eli lets out a warning growl. The sound ruffles my fur, making it stand up along my back. All of us freeze, and the energy in the air changes to one of caution.

What is it? What's wrong? I ask.

The alphas and betas stalk closer to me, surrounding me from every angle, while Eli moves forward, still growling low in his throat, an unspoken threat to whatever might dare to harm me.

Move forward carefully, he sends. We're being watched.



Faye

I sit on the edge of my bed, rubbing lotion onto my legs.

The guys were tense the whole way back down to the castle, up until the moment they delivered me at my door early this morning.

It was like they truly thought that someone, or something, was going to spring out at us at any moment, even though none of us saw anything.

I'm not saying that Eli was wrong about someone being out there, but maybe it wasn't someone who wished us harm.

"Someone should stay with her," Ezra had said, his voice low, but looking at all of them, I just wanted a moment alone. I wanted to feel normal again, happy like I had been right as we left the hot springs.

"Go," I'd said, putting a hand on Ezra's chest and pushing him back. "I'll change and meet you for breakfast."

Eli had shook his head. "Xander, you stand with the guard and watch her room. From now on, Faye is never alone. The guard simply isn't good enough. We're going to look around outside and see if we can find the culprit who was watching us."

"Does it really matter?" I ask.

His gaze grows intense. "We need to know if Dexter or Kurt is planning something

before the council meeting, since they met privately yesterday. It gave them plenty of time to come up with a way to hurt us and protect themselves.”

I sigh, just wanting to be done with all of this. “Okay, if you think it’s necessary.”

“It’s necessary,” Cayson says, but then kisses my cheek lightly. “Don’t worry, I’m sure we’re just being over protective.”

With that, they were off. I watch as Xander moves to stand beside the solemn guard outside my room. So far, there had been three different guards paid to watch me in rotation. All big men, who looked capable of doing some bad things. Even still, I felt better having Xander outside my door.

Unable to help myself, I cross the hallway and plant a kiss on his lips. He smiles down at me, and my heart squeezes. He truly looks at me like there’s no one else in the world. Like I’m his whole world. And it makes me feel unstoppable.

He’s a good egg, that one. I feel a twinge of guilt for not trusting him and embrace it, knowing I deserve to feel guilty.

Going back to my room, I decided to take a shower to get the smell of the hot springs out of my hair, thinking it’d make me feel better.

Which brings me back to where I am now, lotioning my legs until they’re baby soft.

I finish with my legs and stand, trying to decide what to wear for lunch with the guys. But I’m instantly tapping my foot.

There’s just something hanging in the air, like I’m sitting on the edge of a cliff, staring over the bottom, unable to see what’s down there.

Like I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop.

I pace through my room, hands in my hair, a towel wrapped around me, trying to breathe my way through the feeling.

Everything is fine.

Of course, there's the hearing with Kurt and Dexter in tomorrow, but there's nothing I can do about that right now. I'll just have to face it when it comes. As for now, I'm just in my room. Safe. With a guard and Xander outside, and my men all around.

Breathing deeply, I wish Addilyn was here with me to help me get ready, but she's not, so I just focus on putting an outfit together.

I find a pair of high-waisted jean shorts and a red polka-dot halter top.

It's a vintage look, and it's cute. Separating my hair, I braid it loosely, then put on a red headband, pinning it in with a few hair pins I borrowed from Addilyn.

I finish the look off with red lipstick.

When I admire myself in the mirror, I like what I see. Maybe I actually have learned something from Addilyn, after all. I've changed, inside and out.

Outside I hear some strange sounds. A commotion. I tense, but the sounds disappear into silence. Whatever it was, it's gone now. But I'm sure Xander will knock and tell me what happened.

Relief courses through me when there's a knock at the door, and I realize my thoughts have turned into reality.

Unlocking the door, I throw it open, smiling. “Hey, I was?—”

But it’s not the guys standing outside the door. Of course it’s not—it’s Dexter and his men, and Xander and the guard are lying unconscious on the ground. He doesn’t hesitate before punching me square in the nose.

Blood is acrid in my mouth when I wake up, and it makes me instantly nauseas.

I can feel grass against my cheek and smell several alphas around me, their boots stomping the ground, their voices low and deep.

Even though my head spins and I’m afraid I’m about to throw up, fear rises inside of me.

No omega should ever be left alone, surrounded by alphas.

I should never be left alone with Dexter and his men.

I’m in trouble.

Panic sweeps through me. Dexter and Kurt are insane. Their men are known for being bloodthirsty and ruthless. Whatever they took me for, it can’t be good.

I bet they don’t want me to talk at the council meeting.

The thought makes every muscle in my body freeze.

Without me, is there even a case against Kurt?

Yes, but he wouldn’t receive the full punishment.

All they can prove is what Eli saw, that Kurt was rough with me, and that won't come with any major punishment because Eli can't prove he was trying to kill me without my testimony.

All they need to do is get rid of me and Kurt will be saved from death or being thrown out of his pack.

But getting rid of me won't be hard with these odds. Hell, they didn't need half this many men to take down the likes of me. Just one of them would do.

I try to listen to them, to hang on to what they're saying, but my brain is still scrambled, a persistent throbbing rolling through from my nose to my brain. I wonder if this is what Dexter felt like when Eli punched him. Maybe. Maybe worse, because he's an ultima.

As my body gains more awareness, I realize my hands are behind my back, metal digging into the wrist. They have me handcuffed. I'm gagged, my tongue pressed to the back of my mouth, and I have to breathe carefully to keep from vomiting. Tentatively, I open my eyes, but see nothing. I'm blindfolded.

Every cell in my body urges me to writhe, to scream, to try and get someone's attention. But I know Kurt, which means I probably know enough about Dexter. There's no way I'm anywhere near the castle. Nobody is going to hear me screaming.

I have to stay calm and figure out how to save myself.

When I roll my head to the side, I can feel one of the hair pins holding in my hair band, and I rock my head a bit, wincing as it digs in, but I feel the hair pin slip out, remaining on the rock when I lift my head slightly.

A moment later, light blares into my eyes when the blindfold is ripped away, and it

feels like my retinas wither inside my eyeballs.

I suck in a surprised breath, and when my sight adjusts, Dexter is leaning down, grinning at me.

There's a tiny white band-aid on his nose, which is bruised, but other than that, he looks fine.

Alphas usually heal pretty fast. I still have bruises on my stomach from his son.

“Well, good morning, Sleeping Beauty,” he hisses, grabbing the back of my top and pulling me into a sitting position.

While he stares at my face, I feel around with my fingers behind my back, trying and failing to grab the hair pin, desperately hoping he doesn't notice what I'm doing. “Don't you look nice and pretty today?”

He leans down, taking his thumb and swiping it over my lips around the gag, rough enough that it burns. He pulls his thumb back, looking at the red there and shaking his head, laughing cruelly.

“Look at this, boys, she's wearing red. At least she knows she's a whore.”

I expect the familiar shame and fear to come crashing in, to overwhelm me, but I am so tired of feeling that way. Especially when I know it's not true. Back at the castle, there are five men who want me. Who cherish me. Who are willing to go to the ends of the earth for me.

Including an ultima who is going to kill Dexter when he finds out about this.

Without meaning to, I let out a laugh, but it's muffled by the gag. Dexter raises an

eyebrow, then pulls the gag out, even though I kind of wish he hadn't. I kind of wished I'd held the laugh back, because laughing at him seems like a quick way to die.

"Just so you know," he says, "nobody is going to be able to hear you screaming out here."

I feel the laughter rolling through my body, and when I look at Dexter through my tears, they're tears of amusement. Even though it makes no sense. Even though I've tapped into a part of myself I don't even understand.

Am I having a breakdown? I might be having a breakdown, but something about this whole situation is funny. There's something about picturing what will happen when my men find out that this idiot took me.

"What the fuck?" Dexter says, eyes nervously roaming over my face. "Are you crazy or something?"

Unable to help myself, I say, "I'm not the crazy one," still shaking with laughter.

This covers the movement behind me, and I'm finally able to grab the hair pin on the rock between my fingers and drop it into my palm.

"You really thought you would be able to kidnap an ultima's mate and get away with it? The mate to five powerful men?"

Dexter's eyes go hard, and he releases the back of my shirt, throwing me to the ground again.

I cough a little when I hit the ground, but I'm still laughing, because everything is so clear to me now.

Where this man and his alphas fall in the food chain.

No matter what happens to me, I know what's going to happen to Dexter.

Eli, and my men, are going to rip him limb from limb, leaving his body parts for the buzzards.

When Dexter takes a step away from me, my eyes land on Kurt, and I stop laughing.

He looks on the brink of death, still, after more than a week has passed since Eli saved me from him.

His entire body looks like an over-ripe berry, riddled with bandages and stitching, and one of his eyes is bulging so far out of his head it looks like it might pop out at any moment.

An alpha with tawny skin and yellow hair stands next to him, holding him up.

"Gods," I whisper, averting my gaze.

"That's right," Dexter says, crossing his arms, fury in his expression. "Everything that's happened to my son is because of you . You've been after him for years, trying to pin the death of your worthless brother on Kurt. Trying to sully his good name."

I give him a look.

Dexter raises a brow. "What?"

"If you know your son half as well as you think you do, you should know he killed my brother. And you should know he killed him for no fucking reason."



Dexter's hands drop into fists. "Are you still carrying on with that bullshit?" He turns to his son. "Tell her. Tell her you didn't kill her brother."

Kurt glances away from his father. He looks at the ground. Silence stretches between us.

"See?" I challenge, trying to get the pin into the lock.

Dexter's expression changes from shocked to a strangely smug one. "If he killed your brother, I'm sure he had his reasons."

"Ask him his reasons," I say, not backing down.

"Kurt..." Dexter begins.

His son makes a wheezing sound. "Johnny and Ralph were there, and they didn't think I could kill someone with just my boot. They said I wasn't strong enough."

"See?" I remark, finally getting the pin in the lock and moving it around, trying to unlock my cuffs. "No reason."

Again, his dad's face shifts from shock to acceptance. "His strength was challenged as an alpha. He had no choice. You, as a weak omega, couldn't possibly understand that, but your brother's life was a small price to pay for my son's honor."

I shake my head in disbelief. "Is that why he's the way he is? You make excuses for him, no matter what he does?"

He slaps me hard across the face, probably because he didn't want to kill me with a blow, but it still leaves my head spinning. "Watch your mouth, you filthy whore."

I roll my head and spit out blood. “What do you want, Dexter? What is all of this?”

Dexter draws himself up taller. “Today marks the last time you will screw with my son’s life.

This will be the last time you share air together, and the last time you hurt him.

” He stares at me, waiting for me to say something, but I just stare back, needing him to say it.

“Without your lies, and your testimony, the council will only be able to prove Kurt got a little rough with you, because that’s all Eli saw, and we both know that’ll only come with a slap on the wrist. So, it’s simple.

We get rid of you. We kill you and hide your body so well that no one will ever find it again.

No one will ever have proof that we were involved in your death, no matter how much your men might suspect it. ”

Again, Dexter leans down close to me, and I can smell his rancid breath, the liquor dancing on his tongue. When his eyes meet mine, they’re murderous. There’s no question about whether this is right. No hesitation. No one to reason with. Just a man hellbent on taking my life.

He stands up straighter and jerks his head toward Kurt.

“Because of what you’ve done to him, I’m giving Kurt the chance to end this, once and for all.

The council may not like things to be fair, and your ultima may think he has the

power to do anything, but it's not true.

Clearly," he says, holding his arms out and laughing, "it's not. Where's your ultima now, little girl?"

I stare up at him, unblinking.

"This is over ," Dexter says, taking a step back and shaking his head when I don't respond. " Over. "

And, somehow, Kurt has the strength to smile.

"But first," Dexter says, pulling a knife out of his boot and giving it to his son, "we're going to have a little fun."

Cayson

The four of us walk down the hall of the castle, clumped together as we start up the stairs.

We'd done a full perimeter check outside and had found nothing—absolutely nothing—that might threaten our Faye, so we were feeling pretty good, discussing nonsense and laughing together. Like a weird family.

All because of Faye.

“What if we went bear hunting ? I bet if we bag one of those big boys, we could keep people fed for weeks!”

I know that to the others, this comes out as wishful, fantastical thinking, but the truth is that I'm thinking about my pack.

I'm thinking about how I can keep them fed and happy once we return home.

I'd been inching closer and closer to the realization for weeks, but when Eli said it, I felt, all at once, that it was true.

It's time for me to grow up. To put my mate first. To put my pack first. To be the alpha and the shifter that everyone needs me to be.

So, maybe hunting bears isn't the best idea I've ever had, but we did a pretty good job when we went after that bear in the forest with Faye. And we hadn't even had Eli

with us then. Bear hunting wasn't out of the question for a group as big and strong as ours.

"Your head is bigger than your ass," Maverick says, throwing an ancient insult at me, loosely translated.

I stare at him when he turns back around. He may have lived with the humans, but the guy is smart. He has "real shifter" written all over him.

"Are you saying you like my ass?" I ask sweetly, batting my eyes at Maverick, who flips me off over his shoulder.

My pace picks up as we get closer to Faye's room.

We're headed to pick Faye up for breakfast, and I can't wait to be close to her again.

To breathe in her scent. It feels like the mating bond between us only grows stronger every day, and I wonder if the bond will just keep getting stronger.

The idea is hard to imagine. I already want to shrink her down and put her in my pocket, so I can carry her with me all day.

"Is this what we're in for? This mating bond sure does come with a lot of extras I'd rather go without." Eli grumbles, as we're about to round the corner to Faye's room. "The two of you?—"

When he stops, halting in the middle of the hallway, his hand in the air, the rest of us still immediately, going on high alert. When Eli senses something is wrong, it means we're moments away from feeling it ourselves.

"Smell that?" Eli asks, and we all glance at one another. We don't smell it

yet—ultimas are known for having far superior senses of smell. Eli moves down the hallway, a low growl rumbling from his throat. My heart pounds.

Not again.

On the ground, the guard is lying, completely out cold. Xander is beside him, blinking as if newly conscious. He tries to sit up, then falls back down.

I rush to his side and kneel down, helping him to sit up.

“It’s Dexter,” Xander breathes, and my blood goes cold.

I smell it—Dexter’s scent, lingering at the doorway to Faye’s room. Mingled with it is the sweet scent of Faye and the metallic scent of blood. Fuck. How did this happen?

Ezra and Eli disappear into her room, while Maverick and I help Xander up. It takes him a minute to be able to stand solidly on his feet, but then he does. A chilling look comes over his face.

“They were so fast. I didn’t even have time to react before I was out cold. I’m sorry. I should’ve done better. I should’ve—”

“It’s okay,” I tell him quickly. “But do you have any idea where they took her? Any idea at all?”

He winces, and I hate how dilated his pupils are. My boy has a serious concussion. “No idea.”

Ezra and Eli are back out of the room in an instant.

“There aren’t any clues where she went,” Ezra says, panic in his face.

“Unfortunately for them, no matter how careful they were, an ultima will be able to smell them out,” Eli says, a darkness to his words that screams of the pain he intends to inflict on Dexter and his men once we reach them.

Eli is moving down the hallway quickly, following his scent, and we rush after him, watching as he tracks the scent away from her door. If Dexter was there, there’s no telling what might be happening to Faye at this moment.

But it won’t be good, that’s for damn sure.

I cross my fingers behind my back—something I used to do as a kid, a habit that resurfaces every once in a while, when I’m stressed—and think. Maybe Dexter was outside her door while we were gone. Maybe the blood smell was just Faye making a mistake while shaving.

Maybe she’s just visiting Addilyn, or wandering the castle grounds.

But we all know, deep down, that isn’t true.

We follow Eli’s nose to miles outside of the castle grounds in our wolf forms. I have never seen a wolf track something the way Eli does.

He barely has to touch his nose to the ground, and he knows where he’s going.

His feet are flying beneath him, and it takes everything in us to keep up with him, with Xander trailing at the end.

Suddenly, he stops. She’s just up ahead.

How many shifters are there? Ezra asks.

He sniffs for a moment, then says, At least a dozen of them.

Eli shifts back, so we follow suit. He stays low and begins to army crawl forward, and we do the same behind him. My heart pounds loudly in my chest, and I pray that whatever we see at the top of that hill, Faye is alive and unharmed.

When we crest the hill and look through the trees, we freeze.

There they are. A whole group of big, ugly fuckers.

It must be a Pack Obsidian thing. We can just see Faye on the ground, wearing a cute little red top, her hands behind her back.

A tiny omega in a pack of alphas, handcuffed and lying on the ground.

Rage like nothing I've ever felt before floods through me, but when I surge forward, Eli holds out a hand to stop me.

"We have to make a plan," he says, and when his eyes meet mine, I nod, sucking in a breath.

"I'll go for Dexter. He's the strongest. Ezra, do you think you can handle Kurt?"

Not that he's in fighting form right now, moreso because he's a slippery fucker we don't want to leave alive. "

"Yes," Ezra says, like a soldier entering the field.

I straighten up, glancing at the others, who all look like it's taking everything in them



not to bolt across the field toward our mate. Our mate who is weak, vulnerable, and in trouble. A woman we have all sworn to protect with our very souls.

“Okay,” Eli says, voice tense. “I get Dexter, Ezra takes Kurt. Can the rest of you handle ten alphas on your own?”

“In my sleep,” Xander says, and when I glance over at the big guy, I can see he means it. I can almost imagine him taking on ten alphas, alone.

Down below, we see Kurt standing over Faye, looking weak. A flash of silver shines in his hand, and we collectively seem to freeze in time as he slashes out at her. Her cry of shock and pain echoes through the woods. But at least she was able to cry.

Eli’s eyes flash black. “Let’s go,” he says, wasting no more time and shifting as he turns, lifting his foot from the ground as a human and returning to it with a massive white paw. The rest of us follow after him.

“... give it to her again. Deeper this time. ” I hear Dexter say, but the next breath is knocked from his body when Eli slams into him with all the force he has.

Dexter shifts immediately, as do the other alphas, all except his son, and I see Ezra whiz past me, headed for Kurt. Ezra instantly gets his teeth into the arm holding the knife near Faye, and Kurt screams and drops it, falling helplessly back on the ground.

Faye, our beautiful mate, smiles, and says, “I knew you’d come!” There’s not a drop of fear in her voice.

The rest of us square up with the ten remaining alphas. Xander is a powerhouse, a tank, practically indestructible, so Maverick and I dart around, letting him draw most of the attention while we hit them where it hurts, while their backs are turned.

I get my jaws clamped around a wolf's legs, biting my teeth into the tendons, ripping them out, and watching as he crumples to the dirt, whining and yelping at the pain, unable to get back to his feet.

Wolves don't usually fight like this with each other.

They play fight. They fight to send a message. But not for true damage.

Not like we're fighting right now.

Xander gets his jaw around one alpha's back —locking in and picking him up from the ground before hurling him to the side like some kind of wolf of legend.

Even as big as Xander is, Eli is bigger, and I can hear him absolutely tearing Dexter apart on the other side of the clearing, while the wolf whimpers.

Then I see Ezra skid to a stop beside me, and I realize two more wolves have appeared from the woods, trying to keep him from reaching Kurt. Probably because the bastard can't handle more than a stiff breeze right now. I shift my body, covering Ezra as he gets to his feet.

Fuckers came out of nowhere, he mutters.

Together, we turn and fight them off, snapping and clawing at them until we have them on their backs, defenseless, and then we make sure our blows will take them out of the fight. They might be strong alphas, but we're stronger. And we're fighting for our mate.

There is no greater motivation.

Wolves go for Faye, and Ezra stands between them and her. He's splattered in blood,

looking like a guardian of hell. Kurt lays beside her, trembling like an omega surrounded by alphas. He's finally frightened the same way he's left so many others frightened due to his own actions.

Eli and I return to Maverick and Xander, joining in the fight against the remaining alphas. We're practically rabid. Biting, clawing, growling. The wolves start to run from us, but we don't let them. Every man responsible for taking our Faye will be lucky to ever walk again.

Dexter's voice comes through our minds. Stop, enough, we fold.

Eli's growl cuts through the air. We'll show you the same mercy you showed our mate.

Protect my son! Dexter roars his command.

More wolves head for Faye and Kurt, and Ezra springs away from them, heading for the wolves, cutting them off from Kurt and Faye.

Dexter's shrieking whimpers cut through the air. If it were anyone else, I might feel sorry for him. In this case, I don't. I honestly hope Dexter gets his throat ripped out.

Then the terrible sound stops, and Dexter goes silent. Near me, Ezra throws a wolf off his back and pounces on his attacker, tearing and biting until the wolf stops moving. I knock a wolf onto the ground, and one quick bite has him bleeding and whining.

Looking up, I see that we've all handled our wolves. That this fight is finally finished.

Where's Faye ? Eli asks, trotting toward us, his white fur drenched in blood.

I turn my head, swiveling to try and get a look at her. I expect to see her there, still on

the ground, but she's gone, a set of drag marks where she used to be.

My stomach churns, and my words come out shaking with rage and fear. She's gone.

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Faye

I'm kicking and fighting as hard as I can against Kurt, having grown tired of screaming for help, knowing my men couldn't hear me over the fight.

Luckily, my struggling makes it so Kurt keeps dropping me and cursing under his breath.

Apparently, his adrenaline still isn't enough to overcome his injuries.

His entire body is clumsy, and he's clearly still in pain.

If it weren't for these handcuffs, I think even I could take him in this condition.

Hopefully I won't be in them for long.

Kurt drops me for a moment, trying to regain his breath.

I use it as an opportunity to continue picking the lock on my handcuffs.

I close my eyes, remembering when my brother spent weeks teaching me how to pick locks using the old chest in our basement.

I know the skills are inside me. I just have to tap into them.

"Why would I ever need to know this?" I'd asked, groaning when he put the pick into my hand again, his glasses slipping down his nose from sweat. It was the middle of

the summer, and he had me in the basement, which was, admittedly, a little cooler than it was upstairs.

“You never know when you’re going to need to pick a lock,” he’d said, using one finger to push his glasses up again, his hair falling into his face.

It was too long—I’d told him that—but he didn’t listen.

I’d said he either needed to cut it or tie it back, but he was too preoccupied to do anything but pace and think.

It was only in hindsight that I realized why he was so worried all the time. He knew that I was a weak omega, what the world could be like for me. And maybe he had a feeling that I would need to pick a lock someday.

Now, I feel the hair pin catch in the lock and let out a sigh of relief as the handcuffs loosen. I’m free. I did it. Kurt leans over me, sweat and blood running down his face where some of his stitches came loose.

If anyone thought he was handsome before—which I certainly didn’t—he looks like a monster now, his face grotesque and badly misshapen. I have to believe that pure evil is the only thing driving him now, because there’s nothing else left.

He grabs me by the hair and continues dragging me, while I try to keep pretending I’m in the handcuffs, even though it hurts. I’m waiting for the right opportunity to get free of him, once and for all.

“Stop—struggling—” he says through gritted teeth as I continue to kick and fight and make his life as difficult as possible.

“Yeah, how wrong of me to make this hard for you,” I say, breathing hard, sneering

at him.

I don't know where my bravery comes from. Where my attitude comes from. But I prefer it to the crying mess I usually am with Kurt.

"Fuck you, Faye," he says, the words coming out sharp and vicious between his teeth.

"You're my mate . All you had to do was stand down and let it happen, but you couldn't do that, could you?"

You had to report me about what happened with your brother!

You had to report me about that girl in the woods!

That wasn't my fault! It was her fault, but you don't care about that, do you?

You just want to hurt me. You've had it out for me since day one, and I'm sick and fucking tired of it.

You know, according to the old laws, alphas can do what they want with omegas.

I'm so tired of everyone acting like we're not all the same.

Like we don't all have violence within us. "

He stops, breathing hard, and when I look, I see nothing but sky to our right. When he reaches for me again, I bring my hands around, shoving his legs and letting out a scream that holds years and years of pent-up anger. But he braces himself, not falling the way I wanted.

"You are not my mate," I shout, leaping to my feet, coming at him with everything I

have.

I hit him. I kick him. Every blow moves him further away from me. Closer to the edge of the cliff. That's it. Almost there. I kick him hard in the stomach, thinking that's the blow that will finally do it, then turn to run back to my men.

Surprising me, he gets behind me and gets his arm around my throat. Having seen a bandage on his shoulder, I reach back and dig my hand into it, and he lets out a whining, wounded sound, shrinking away.

“You bitch! ”

I spring back from him, and he hurls himself at me. We tumble to the ground. He gets a hand around one of my braids and pulls so hard I see stars. I gasp for air, then bring my head up, knocking my forehead against his nose, hard.

Crying out, he rolls away from me, near the cliff's edge, and gets to his feet faster than I can get to mine. My wrist is stinging and there's a pulsing pain in my stomach where old bruises are protesting the abuse they're receiving now.

Just as I'm about to stand, Kurt catches me on the side of my head, sending me to the ground. It feels like the sky shifts and the earth comes up to meet me, but I know that I'm falling.

I taste dirt.

Kurt walks over to me, using what effort he has left to lift his foot up over my head.

In an instant, I realize I'm seeing what my brother saw before his death. Kurt is going to bring his foot down on my neck and kill me the same way he killed my brother.



The same way he killed that omega in the woods.

He's going to keep taking lives, and he's going to keep getting away with it.

Sucking in a deep breath, I jerk, rolling to the side at the last moment. I turn and sweep out the leg Kurt still has planted on the ground. Time seems to move in slow motion. He holds his hands out as if to catch himself on the ground.

But there is no ground behind him. Only open air.

When he realizes this, he lets out a wounded gasp, twisting in the air, grasping for purchase on anything— anything—but there's nothing. I sit up quickly, my eyes connecting with his as he's suspended in midair over the side of the cliff.

He looks like a little boy. Alone. Afraid.

Despite myself, and despite everything that's happened, everything he's done for me, I reach for him, my fingertips floating past his in the air, never having a chance of connecting.

I hear a shout behind me, somewhere, and hear the collective stomping footsteps of five men as I watch Kurt tumble back, one of his feet hitting the side of the cliff and sending him flipping, end over end.

I rise to my feet and look down the deep ravine. When my gaze hits the bottom, I look away, only catching a glimpse of the empty eyes and still chest.

Eli falls to his knees beside me, gathering me in his arms and pulling my body back, away from the cliff's edge.

"It's okay," he says, and I realize I'm sobbing loudly, gasping for breath.

Time had slowed down impossibly around me, but now it feels like it snaps into place all at once, rushing in like I've been plunged into ice cold water.

I'm having a panic attack, and Eli holds me, the others falling to their knees around us, circling me, holding me, letting me ride the waves of terror until it finally sinks in.

"It's over," Eli says, and I realize that it's exactly what Dexter said to me earlier. Except now, there's probably no more Dexter, and there's definitely no more Kurt.

"It's over," I repeat, some of the terror subsiding. "It's over, it's over, it's over."

Eli presses his lips to my forehead, and we all huddle together, close. This time, Kurt didn't get to kill. He didn't get to break someone I love.

And, this time, my family is here to take me home.

Faye

“Are you sure you don’t want to take a break first?” Eli asks, worry in his voice.

“No,” I say, stomping through the castle.

“Maybe take a shower? Eat?” Maverick says in that same concerned tone.

“No.” This ends now.

I throw open the council room doors, and Lance, Brock, and Hector glance up, their faces full of shock. Instantly, their ultimate power washes over me, but it’s like the wind blowing through my hair, not a commanding presence. Their gazes roam over our bloodied bodies, and horror washes over them.

I slam one bloody hand on their table, and all eyes snap to me.

“You’ll be happy to learn that your complete incompetence led to Dexter, Kurt, and his alphas kidnapping me.

Apparently, their plan was to kill me so I couldn’t testify tomorrow.

They believed that then Kurt would get off scot-free.

Let’s not pretend that plan probably would have worked because if there wasn’t a neon sign pointing to them as my attackers and a video personally taken by one of you three, my death wouldn’t have been attributed to them, and I wouldn’t have

gotten justice. ”

“Hold on—” Hector begins.

“I’m not done,” I say, my voice just below shouting.

“The three of you are going to issue a public statement, making it clear that Kurt killed my brother, making it clear he killed Serra, and making it clear he and Dexter tried to kill me. Regardless of the consequences that may come from Pack Obsidian, you will tell the truth about what happened, because all of us deserve what little justice you can offer us after all you’ve done. ”

It’s Lance who speaks this time. “Done,” he says, his tone almost impressed.

“And moving forward, you will treat omegas with the fucking respect they deserve. Being an omega doesn’t mean our opinions, values, and needs don’t matter.

We birth you self-absorbed, know-it-all ultimas and alphas.

You need us just as much as we need you, and you’re going to act like it.

And if you don’t, I will use the collective power of my mates to start a fucking revolution with the omegas.

See how fast you alphas and ultimas stay smug when the omegas reject you . ”

“Eli?” Brock says, sounding shocked.

Eli sets a hand on my shoulder. “I’ll be proud to back my mate up on any revolution she might create, and will also willingly take one of your places on the council if you fail to do your jobs again.”

“Faye is right,” Lance says without hesitation, looking at the other two ultimas. “Things need to change. What happened with Kurt can never happen again. The council can never be too afraid of an alpha to do what needs to be done.”

Brock leans back in his chair, studying me, but I have no idea what he’s thinking. “Agreed.”

Hector huffs.

Eli smiles. “Actually, I know of another ultima who would be glad to take someone’s place on the council. Maybe someone too afraid of the alphas to do his job.”

Hector’s mouth drops open, and he clears his throat. “Well, the omega has made several... important points. I, for one, am not a man opposed to change.”

“Good,” I say, leaning away from them.

Looking at my men, I see five stunned faces. Five faces filled with pride and wonder.

“Now,” I tell them, “let’s go find a shower that can handle six people. We need to clean up and then start seeing what injuries might need to be tended to by the healers.”

“Agreed, my queen,” Cayson says with a little bow.

I turn and head out the door. I walk away from every drop of pain Kurt and his father ever gave me, from the disappointment and helplessness the council made me feel. I’m heading on to a new and better life, with my five men by my side.

And a warm shower. Which, you know, isn’t the worst ending to this story.

## Page 30

*Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 1:54 pm*

Eight months later...

Faye

I thought the horrors of my life had passed when Kurt fell down the side of that cliff, but I was wrong. I didn't know that the worst thing to ever happen to me was yet to come, the universe aligning to spite me in my weakest moment.

How am I going to handle this?

A sob rips through me, tears already streaming down my cheeks, and I hear the familiar beats of several pairs of feet heading in my direction.

Their frantic steps in the face of my tears are as familiar as the feeling of their arms wrapped around my body.

But this time, there's nothing my mates can do.

Everything is ruined. My life is over.

"Faye?" Cayson asks, his voice panicked as he rushes into the room.

The others are right behind him. Eli's presence in the room is larger than life. Ezra presses the back of his hand to my head. Maverick looks out the window, as though the threat might be out there. Everyone is on high alert for whatever might be upsetting me.

But no, it's here. In our home.

My gaze sweeps the three massive beds that we'd had pressed together in Eli's manor to accommodate our big group.

Around the beds, the room is filled with pillows that smell like my alphas, and silvery lupines—my favorite flowers—which Eli had planted in our garden and the boys brought me fresh each day.

Candles cover every surface, and soft blankets lie in every direction.

There are also photos. Lots of them. Of my brother and my grandparents.

But also lots of me and my men. Smiling on the Eiffel Tower.

Being silly at Stonehenge. The men all drunk in a boat in Italy.

My favorites though are probably the ones in Ezra and Cayson's packs, helping the towns, playing with the children.

I especially love the one of Cayson's dad glowering at him in the back. That one always makes me laugh.

My men have helped to create the perfect nest for me. A place I feel safe. A place I feel happy.

At least, normally.

"What's wrong, darling?" Xander asks, his hand coming to mine. Since moving in here, he's been opening up more and more, finding his words.

"It's—" I say, choked by my grief. It's huge, immovable, sitting on my chest.

“There’s nothing we can do.”

“What is it?” Eli says, stepping forward, his eyes moving to my belly. “Is it the babies?”

I shake my head, my hand coming to my belly, feeling the lives inside me, nearly ready to come out. I open my mouth to tell them what’s wrong, but every time I think about it, I start to cry again.

“It’s okay,” I say, holding up my hands. I can hardly keep my eyes open. “It’s okay, I’ll just?—”

I’m being dramatic. This is silly. But something about my hormones and these babies makes everything seem really important.

“Faye, darling,” Eli says, putting his hands on my jaw and lifting my face, looking into my eyes. “Breathe. Please, tell us what hurt you so we can destroy it.”

I feel stupid before I even say it. “The pancakes the kitchen made,” I whimper, and he turns, his eyes going immediately to the plate of pancakes beside my bedside table.

“Oh, no,” Cayson says, and I can tell he already knows what’s wrong. The two of us share an insatiable sweet tooth, but the other men look at each other inquisitively.

“The...pancakes?” Ezra asks, raising an eyebrow. I see Xander’s hand twitch, like he might knock them from the table, and the thought makes me giggle.

All of them relax a bit.

“What’s wrong with the pancakes?” Maverick asks, lifting them up. “Did someone put something in them?”



“No, it’s the opposite problem,” I say, still laughing and crying at the same time. If pregnancy hormones from one baby are bad, twins have to be worse. “They’re missing?—”

“Whipped cream, sprinkles, syrup, chocolate chips,” Cayson says, counting out the toppings on his fingers, “blueberries, chopped strawberries, candied walnuts?—”

I nod tearfully as he lists them off, adding, through a hiccup, “Butter—scotch syrup—” I cut myself off with a laugh, shaking my head, “Sorry—I know this is silly. It’s the pregnancy hormones?—”

“It is not silly,” Ezra says, taking the pancakes from Maverick and stepping toward the door. “If you need whipped cream, the twins needs whipped cream?—”

“ And sprinkles, and maple syrup—” Cayson says, following after him.

“ Hey !” Maverick says, turning. “ I was going to get that stuff!”

“No, I can get it,” Xander says. “I know the kitchen staff well.”

“Guys,” Eli says, and they all turn, Ezra and Cayson still fighting over the plate. “Why don’t we just let the kitchen know Faye would like a new plate of pancakes, with all those toppings?”

They all stare at him for a second.

“Okay,” Ezra says, “no—that’s a good idea. That way they’re warm, and the butter melts?—”

“ I was going to suggest that,” Maverick says. “Actually?—”

A servant steps into the room. Xander gives her a dark look, shows her the pancakes,

and lists off what they need on them. Her eyes go wider with each word, and then she bobs her head and takes off with the terrible pancakes.

“Here,” Cayson says, pushing past the others and pulling up the blanket at my feet. “Let me rub your feet while we wait on the pancakes.”

I giggle when he touches my foot, then Ezra is at my side, fluffing my pillows. Xander gets me an extra blanket while Maverick drops essential oils onto my wrist. When I let out a laugh, Eli takes my hand, laughing softly with me.

“What’s so funny?” he asks, and I realize I’m no longer sobbing, no longer sure that the worst thing in the world has happened to me. I hate how big the feelings get, but I love that my mates are always here to take care of me and keep them at bay.

“It’s just—” I say, still laughing, watching as they all turn to me, eyes wide.

“You’re supposed to be these big, tough guys,” I keep giggling between each word, “Alphas, ferals, and an ultima,” I laugh, looking to each man, watching their smiles turn from large and goofy to soft and melting, “and yet, here you are. Not so big and tough, after all.”

“Well—” Ezra says, holding up a hand.

Cayson cuts him off, laughing and bumping a shoulder into his. “Remember the onesie?”

“I was not?—”

“He saw a onesie that said Daddy’s little girl and he almost started crying in the middle of the store!”

Ezra tries to cuff him over the back of the head, but Cayson dances away, still

cackling loudly. I laugh, watching them, and Eli squeezes my hand. When I look at him, his eyes are on Cayson and Ezra, and he's smiling.

"I was not crying! I was—I told you, I had allergies! The pollen count is high this season!"

"I think I'm going to start calling you onesie , would you like that?"

Ezra and Cayson launch into a wrestling match, with Maverick and Xander making silent bets at the end of my bed. Outside, the sun is stretching over the horizon. My heart beats, steady and full in my chest.

"Excuse me?" someone says, and we all look to the doorway to see Addilyn, looking bewildered. Her belly is just starting to show, and since she's only carrying one baby, she's not on bed rest, like me. "I was just stopping by, and one of the cooks told me to bring this in?"

Joy rushes through me, and I'm so happy to see her that I immediately burst into tears again. Addilyn jumps and drops the pancakes, Ezra and Cayson immediately come to my side, and Maverick is already calling down to the kitchen for another plate while Xander tries to scrape the mess off the floor.

Eli laughs quietly, steadily, squeezing my hand.

I'm laughing and crying and Addilyn is laughing too, apologizing and asking what's going on, and I realize this is the happiest I've ever been. I'm here with my best friend and my mates, and I can't wait to bring their children into this happy, joyful, sprinkle-filled world.