



# Danger of Love (Omega Sanctuary #3)

**Author:** *Shea Balik*

**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** In a world where Alphas ruled, Leandro Makri, an Omega, detested them. Years of forced servitude to his Alpha brothers taught him the brutalities of such dominance, stripping him of his rights and dignity. Escaping with his friends threw him into a world just as callous, but his will remained unbroken.

Weston Boyd was a man with a penchant for order amid the mayhem. His path crossed with a group of defiant Omegas transforming an abandoned town into a refuge. The Omegas spirit of rebellion intrigued Weston, for he had never viewed them as the submissive class others perceived them to be.

Sanctuary, their budding haven, needed resources desperately. When a quest for supplies brings together the fiery Leandro and the methodical Weston, sparks fly. They find themselves battling feelings they thought they had no room for. But how long were they willing to suppress the inevitable? Could they resist the pull of an emotion as powerful as love?

**Total Pages (Source):** 21

## CHAPTER 1

Birds chirped merrily as they flew from limb to limb. The sun shone brightly, illuminating them all as they stood there. A few furry friends, like squirrels, bunnies, and deer with their fawns, had been seen.

The warm breeze that blew across his body held a promise for the future. Considering the circumstances, that seemed...well, odd. Off. The exact opposite of what Leandro was experiencing at that moment. Then again, the entire scene seemed to have been to mock them. Taunting Leandro.

The tears rolling down his cheeks were a testament to that. Yet, nothing at that moment could have stopped those tears—not even the strong arms he would have loved to have wrapped around his body, comforting him.

No.

He shouldn't think those thoughts, especially in that moment. Yet...

He body shuddered as he dragged in a breath to try to stem the emotions roiling through him. Not that it helped. He wasn't even certain the strong arms of the Alpha he'd been doing his best to ignore would have helped.

In all, they were burying four of their own that day. Two had died during the attack before anything could have been done to save them. The other two had died of complications a couple of days later.

It should have been raining as they stared at the graves before them. Zuko, one of Leandro's best friends, was dead. The caskets that had been painstakingly made for him and the other three by two woodworkers who called Sanctuary home had made them to give them a proper burial instead of just having their bodies tossed into the ground.

They were gone. Struck down while defending the town and its people they had all come to love. Yet, the sun shone brightly, as if mocking their demise and the tears that the townspeople, friends of the men who were being carefully lowered into the ground. They had all fought side by side for each other.

It had seemed like an insurmountable task when Leandro and his nine best friends—all Omegas—had planned this journey to find a place where they could be relatively safe from Alphas, who felt they had the right to do whatever they wanted to Omegas. That included rape, kidnapping, and selling them.

It had taken time for them to find a place where they could settle and rebuild some of the infrastructure of the town. That was especially true since they were leaving what the American Government deemed a safe zone, which was anywhere east of the Mississippi River. They'd known traveling west was a tremendous gamble since none of them had ever ventured beyond the mighty river and they had no idea what they might find there.

But they were determined it had to be safer than where they'd lived. A place the government deemed safe was nothing more than sanctioned freedom for alphas to do anything they wanted to Omegas. It all came to a head when one of their group, Halston, who had been the only son of a very wealthy family, was being threatened.

After Halston's parents died, he'd inherited a ton of money. Money that an Alpha wanted for himself. That Alpha petitioned the courts to become Halston's Alpha, claiming no Omega could take care of themselves. When the courts sided with the

Alpha Leandro, and his friends took off for a town they'd found from another Omega they'd met, whose only stipulation of getting them there on a refurbished riverboat was to take him with them.

The task was daunting, especially since they had no clue what they were getting into. The Omega manning the riverboat, Damon, had been the only one to see the land west of the Mississippi River and only from the waterways he and his father had traveled.

What they hadn't expected was to find others, like themselves and Alphas, who thought like Leandro and his friends had - that everyone deserved to be treated with kindness, equality, and, most importantly, respect. They had not only been on the side of the Omegas, but they'd been willing to band together and turn Sanctuary into a true town.

And what happened?

Zuko and three others died to defend their new way of life. They currently lived west of the Mississippi in a town that they'd been slowly rebuilding with a smattering of Alphas, who seemed intent on helping—although Leandro was still holding judgment on that—as well as nearly two hundred Omegas, who'd Leandro's group of friends had somehow saved from being sold to the highest bidder.

It was...in a word, morbid. No. Not just that, but maybe...surreal, inspiring and hopeful. Between arriving in Sanctuary, freeing other Omegas, gaining the help of a small group of Alphas, and finally fighting off an attack by other Alphas who'd been intent on capturing the Omegas again to sell and Leandro honestly wasn't certain what to believe any longer.

Unable to stay at the gravesite once they'd paid their respects, he'd made his way to the playground they'd fixed behind an old elementary school - which they'd partially

rebuilt to teach all the children that had not only been brought to Sanctuary but were being born there. But instead of watching the kids playing, Leandro was side eyeing the one Alpha he was becoming fascinated with. Weston was working at the local jail a short distance away, shoring up security where they had some prisoners from the recent attack.

As far as Leandro was concerned, those alphas should be dead. But Weston and a few others—sadly including some town's Omegas—felt they might learn where other Omegas were being held to sell to other Alphas. Leandro didn't hold out much hope. What he knew of Alphas in general is they thought they were better than everyone else and the laws didn't pertain to them. Even when confronted by other alphas.

And that, right there, was what held Leandro's attention when it came to Weston. The man had saved a boatful of the town's Omegas, as well as others whom they freed from two of the camps where Alphas held them to be transported to the east of the river to be sold. That was what he expected from an Alpha. Yet, Weston had risked his life to help the Omegas get back to Sanctuary safely.

Not only that, but he'd joined in the fight when the town had been attacked. Had nearly gotten himself killed on more than one occasion during the battle. But he honestly, more importantly, never acted as if he was better than an Omega. Hell, he'd often willingly listened to an Omega instruct him on how to do things.

Like rebuilding the jail. It had needed a lot of work and Weston had accepted direction from those Omegas who knew what they were doing to make the jail functional. Leandro didn't even know an Alpha who would do that. They usually insisted they knew more than any Omega ever could.

The only place Weston stepped up to lead was in battle. But it had made sense considering that more Omegas weren't allowed to fight. It was one of the reasons they'd only lost four instead of dozens more.

That said, Leandro still wasn't positive he could trust the Alpha. Was he attracted to Weston? Definitely, but it was a long way from being drawn to the man to doing anything about it.

For that matter, he did not know if Weston had any feelings for Leandro at all. There were times he caught the Alpha watching him, but there could be a million reasons that could have happened.

No. It was best if Leandro kept his distance. The last thing he needed was to have feelings for an alpha. He just feared that it might already be too late for that.

### CHAPTER 2

For far too long, Weston's world had been about survival. He would have liked to have said things were different, but he would be lying. There hadn't been a moment when he hadn't been alert and ready to defend himself or his friends. He might have been an Alpha, but no one was truly safe, especially west of the Mississippi River.

It was a lawless world, where only the ruthless survived, and not always, even then. Ambushes while one slept were something that happened all the time, especially for those who dared to stand up for what was just. He'd learned that the hard way when he'd watched his father and brother get slaughtered for defending an Omega that several Alphas were raping.

His father had forced him to hide and not come out as he'd only been fourteen and no match for the group of Alphas they were confronting. It shamed him to admit he'd been scared. No. Terrified. He hadn't left his hiding spot for two days until hunger and thirst had gotten the best of him. Even then, he'd carefully extracted himself under the cover of darkness and ran all the way back to their small home.

Their neighbors had taken him in, who believed in helping Omegas and Alphas when they were in the right. Both the Alpha and his Omega mate had trained him to survive. By the time he'd turned eighteen, he could use every weapon ever made and camouflage himself when necessary. Their key lesson had been when to get involved and when to realize there was nothing he could do. It had been a hard pill to swallow each time he'd had to watch the atrocities done to Omegas, but they'd explained that his dying wouldn't help that Omega or any future Omegas he might save.

Sure, those he'd defined as friends had changed through the years, but he'd learned since childhood to trust his instincts to know who he could trust and those he couldn't. Mostly. Okay, so it had taken time for him to have been able to judge a person's character based on nothing more than a momentary meeting.

Which was why, when he'd once again seen an Omega friend, Gulliver, that he'd known for years, he'd been willing to risk not just his own life but those of the few friends he depended on. He'd been willing to help keep them safe on the dock and get them the supplies they needed. It hadn't been easy.

It was why, when he'd overheard Alphas planning to go after a boatful of Omegas, he almost hadn't gotten involved. He knew a few Alphas who would be willing to help, but they would be hopelessly outnumbered. But there had been something nagging at him to help however he could.

Finding fuel for a boat he and his friends owned took longer than expected as it was a much sought-after commodity, but they were determined to do something. When their risky plan of ramming the Alpha boat with their own had worked, the Omegas offered to take them back to their home, a place called Sanctuary.

The moment he'd stepped onto the dock, Westland had known he'd found his home. The only problem? It wouldn't be easy to defend. The town wasn't huge, some of its infrastructure wasn't exactly 'in town.' Like the hydroelectric plant. It was a huge structure that spanned the river nearly ten miles away. With only their feet and a few horses to get around, it would mean leaving it defenseless to attack. At least with their current number of residents.

Maybe if they could recruit more people they would have a chance, but they would need the bulk of the townspeople to defend not only the town but the farm that supplied most of the food for Sanctuary because without food, they had no chance of survival. Electricity was nice, but most people who lived in the west went without.



It also meant altering the jail he'd help rebuild with padlocks in case the electricity ever went out. The last thing they needed was for the Alphas they'd captured who were trying to harm the town and the Omegas who lived there to get free.

With it being such hot work to solder the locks on the doors, he'd set up a place outside for him to work. Yeah, it would take him longer since he could only attach it to the door, but it would be cooler. Plus, the last thing he wanted was to be in the jail with a bunch of locked up Alphas he was more than tempted to kill for the destruction they'd caused.

Taking a break, he set down his tools and reached for his reusable water bottle. Taking a long drink, he looked out over the open area between the jail and school, where Leandro was currently sitting on a bench at the playground where a bunch of kids were playing.

There were always at least four people guarding the playground in order to get the children to safety if the town was under attack. That didn't even include the parents or guardians who were there monitoring their kids as they played.

It gutted him to know even the young ones weren't safe from harm. If anything, they were even more at risk of being taken by an unscrupulous Alpha.

Watching the beautiful Omega with the light blue eyes that reminded him of the sky on a day like today, Weston could tell by his hunched shoulders and the tension radiating off his body, Leandro was upset. Not that he could blame him. The Omega just buried one of his best friends. That couldn't have been easy.

His vibe was warning others away, but Weston couldn't help but make his way across the expanse to check on him. He'd wanted to say something earlier at the gravesite, but Leandro had basically bolted the moment the service was over.

He longed to at least be friends, but Leandro had given him the cold shoulder since almost the moment he'd arrived in Sanctuary. Considering most Alphas weren't actually trustworthy, it made sense, but it hadn't made it any easier when Weston's arms itched to hold the slight Omega and keep him safe.

The closer he got, the easier it was to see those light blue eyes darken as Leandro glared at him. He knew the Omega was pretty much warning him to 'fuck off', but Weston couldn't deny the urge to try to comfort him.

"I'm really sorry about Zuko," he said as he stood in front of Leandro. Then he sat down even though he hadn't been invited to. "I know he was one of your best friends. Is there anything you need?"

"No."

That was it. No thanks. No tears. No emotion.

Then again, he witnessed Leandro's tears as they buried Zuko. It was possible he was all cried out for now.

He placed a hand on one of Leandro's stiff shoulders. "If there's anything you need, night or day, just let me know. I'm here if you want to talk, cry, or yell."

The short, light brown hair blew slightly in the breeze, but Leandro ignored it as he turned to Weston with such hatred in his eyes that it nearly bowled Weston over.

When he'd first laid eyes on Leandro, he'd pined to hold the prickly man. But he'd been there for a couple of months now, and so far, he hadn't been greeted with anything remotely like warmth. When it had to do with getting the town ready, whether it'd been from attack or providing more infrastructure to provide more housing for new residents, expanding the rooms that could be used for the hospital or

the school, Leandro would speak to him. Just not anything else.

Nothing personal. Not even how much Leandro seemed to stay away from anything kid-related. He might have been willing to guard the playground or even the school, but Weston never saw him willingly interact with the children. There was zero doubt in Weston's mind that there was a story there.

Unfortunately, he doubted he'd ever hear it despite his attempts to spend time with Leandro. The problem was, since meeting him, the often cold and distant man was the only Omega Weston had ever been attracted to.

As hard as he'd tried to form a relationship with Leandro, something that could have possibly turned into love, it hadn't been given a modicum of a chance. Hell, for all he knew, love didn't even exist.

What if what Ford and Lowen had, or Coleson and Renzo claimed to have, wasn't real? Maybe it was just their choice to be together.

Which meant what for him and Leandro?

### CHAPTER 3

Never once had Leandro ever believed he would find an Alpha he respected enough to want to be around. At least not in his old life. Having had to be his three Alpha brothers' slave had beat out the notion that there were actually good Alphas in the world. Although, if he were honest, the same could have been said about Omegas if his only examples had been the men his brothers had brought into their homes to provide them with children.

And yes, his brothers had more than one Omega each. Hell, one of them had four, and they all produced more than one kid each. At the home of Aizen, his oldest brother, he had four Omegas and ten kids. Talk about grueling. Not only had Leandro had to clean their houses—the Omegas living with his brothers had not once bothered to pick up after themselves—but he'd often been forced to care for his nephews, who had all been taught to treat Leandro like he had no feelings.

It hadn't even mattered that some were alphas, and some were Omegas. Nor had their Omega parents treated him as if Leandro had feelings at all.

Thank fuck for his friends, or Leandro might have given up on humanity. That said, it made him wonder a couple of weeks after that initial attack if he'd been wrong to judge all Alphas, especially as several more had moved to Sanctuary to help them.

Sure, there were far more Omegas they'd found as they'd continued to traverse the rivers for trading routes, but, like Renzo—who had proven himself by saving many lives—Alphas like Weston were also doing their part.

What Leandro didn't know was, did it make him an asshole for judging all Alphas the same? Even as he thought that while once more watching Weston work tirelessly to help their community, Leandro knew damn well the answer to that question. The real problem was, could he ever get past his anxiety and give Weston a chance?

Leandro didn't think it was possible. Not when his fears were so deeply ingrained within him. Hell, if it weren't for his childhood friends, he most likely would have hated all people. His brothers' Omegas hadn't treated him any better than their alphas. At times, their demands were far worse.

Then again, they had not only been east of the Mississippi River, but had not technically held captive. He only made the caveat because he'd seen for himself the cages and shackles some Omegas were forced to endure.

Leandro shivered as the images of what he'd seen or been told about came to mind. The things Ford had described when he went to one port on the east side of the Mississippi River, where Omegas were not only chained but put in cages stacked on top of each other, had been terrifying enough. But to have heard some of their stories had his gut clenching.

Yet, despite some of their horrendous conditions, there had been Alphas who had helped them escape. That was where Leandro struggled the most. Shouldn't that one fact be enough proof to show him that not all alphas were the same?

The biggest question, though, was whether Weston was one of those few alphas who could be trusted.

Even as that thought went through his head while he once more watched Weston tirelessly work to secure their jail, Leandro knew the answer. The problem was accepting it enough for him to talk to the man.

Bulging muscles strained under the weight of one of the iron doors as Weston brought it back inside the jail after soldering one side of a latch that would hold a large key lock. Thank fuck Leandro didn't have to watch the playground or the school that day. Not that he hated kids, but after years of babysitting and cleaning up after his nephews, Leandro did not want to talk to kids.

This time, he was standing guard in front of their 'store'. It really was more like a farmer's market as it was outdoors during the day and tented up at night, but it worked for their growing town. At some point, Coleson, their newly elected mayor—as well as one of Leandro's best friends—would need to provide a building as a more permanent solution, but they'd made do.

It was one of their many challenges when coming to their newfound home. Not all buildings had survived being left alone for nearly a hundred years. As they'd scavenged several towns nearby, it had been the same. Those structures that had housed pertinent goods rarely still stood.

It was as if, when the populace fled east, they'd run through any business that held something of value for them to take. Even the hospital—that still mostly stood—had a lot of damage. They were still doing their best to rebuild it. Thank fuck a good portion of it still stood standing, or they'd have had to build a glorified tent to perform medical treatment.

Even with a portion of the building still intact, they'd had to scavenge more than a hundred miles west and north to find medical supplies to treat their wounded. But they'd made it work. Mostly.

But the attack on their town had severely depleted their supplies. Discussions had begun about doing more foraging. The biggest question was whether they should do it by river or caravan.

They had four trucks in working order, but not much gas. Two of their three riverboats were functional, but again, without fuel, it would be a challenge to get far. Plus, going along the river led to more issues as settlements and trading posts—which both tended to be run by Alphas—congregated there.

Thanks to Lowen's farm, they could use horses, which he raised to save on fuel. Ford's modifications to the four trucks to use solar power instead of gas would help, but there was no real good way to predict the weather. It would only take a few days of clouds and rain to force them to a standstill with solar power.

Plus, when using trucks, they could easily stock them with supplies, but if they came upon encampments of caged Omegas, it would be extremely difficult to get them to safety when they needed the room to transport those supplies. But Ford and several others had been working tirelessly to provide more vehicles, because they all knew that though it might have been easier to traverse the west by water, Alphas looking to kidnap and sell Omegas to the east used that mode of transportation as well.

An hour later, he was seated in the town's community room with over two dozen others to discuss that exact topic. He wasn't sure what was worse, figuring out logistics, or that Weston was sitting right next to him.

Nope. That answer was simple as he breathed in Weston's musky scent. He smelled of sweat, earth, and—oddly enough—flowers. It was almost as if he'd run through a field of flowers before coming to the meeting, despite Leandro having watched him for the last two hours working on welding those manual locks to the doors of the jail cells.

There should have been no way Weston could smell so damn good under those conditions, yet he did.

"I realize this will take a lot longer, but considering each time we use the rivers,

Alphas find us, it might be more prudent to use the trucks Ford has fixed and retrofitted with solar power.” Weston’s deep voice, especially so close to him, sent a shiver of desire through Leandro.

“Can we spare those that will need to go for that amount of time?” One of Leandro’s friends who’d helped build Sanctuary spoke up. “Plus, our medical supplies are critically low after that last attack. If we’re hit again, I’m afraid we won’t have enough to help the injured.”

Maxon was a nurse—which in their world was one of the few jobs an Omega could pursue—and knew their supplies better than anyone else. Even the doctors rarely understood how much was needed. Then again, that was considered a nurse’s job, not something the Alpha world would ask an Alpha doctor to concern himself with.

“We probably don’t have the time for a group to head out that long,” Coleson, their newly elected mayor, admitted. “But I also agree with Weston on this one. Each time we’ve used the waterways, we’ve been chased or attacked.”

That was likely because alphas used them to transport their Omega captives across the Mississippi River.

“Plus, we marked on the map which towns we went to the last time we did this. It will make the trip a bit faster to either go in another direction completely or just skip those towns and head farther west before we search.” Oxley, one of the Alphas who had helped save them on the river with Weston, pointed out.

“Just know,” Lowen told them. “The further west you go, the harder the terrain will be. It might be nearly impossible to get trucks through.”

Since Lowen had lived working on his family farm just outside of Sanctuary, he knew the area the best. He’d set up trading routes with people hundreds of miles



away, but over the last few years, it had gotten harder and harder to traverse. Since Lowen took a horse or two, he'd been able to, but some families he met up with were having more difficulty as they took wagons.

Thanks to Ford, Sanctuary was one of the few places west of the Mississippi River to have working vehicles.

"I think that is our best solution. We're too easily seen on the rivers to risk it." Coleson looked at each person as he scanned the room to see if they were all in agreement. When no one disagreed, he gave a nod. "Let's decide how many are going."

"The smaller the group, the less chance we'll be seen," Westland pointed out.

"On the other hand," Maxon said. "We'll be limited in bringing supplies back, plus a bigger group would mean being able to split up to cover more territory."

Both were good points. Yet, what surprised him, even though by now it shouldn't, was that Westland nodded at Maxon's point as if agreeing with him instead of arguing that he had no clue what he was talking about like most Alphas Leandro had known back home would have done. Well, that or ignore him altogether, as if he hadn't even spoken.

"It would be a huge gamble to send out a larger force when we don't know if other alphas know about our location," Joah reminded them. Then again, if there was anyone who could find the negative in any situation, it was Joah. Leandro loved him as much as his other friends, but he had a way of being the biggest pessimist Leandro had ever known.

If Joah had his way, they'd all still live in Indianapolis and still be under the thumb of the Alphas there. The thing was, it wasn't as if Joah hadn't wanted to make the

journey, but no matter what the suggestion, he would find a reason they shouldn't do it.

Coleson once more looked at everyone as if getting a read on the room. His friend had a knack for knowing what people were thinking without having said a word. When he was done, he gave a nod. "Let's figure out how many we need to send in order to split up if needed." Then he turned to Ford. "Are all four vehicles ready to go?"

Ford grinned. "Of course. And lucky for you, I have a fifth nearly done, so we'll have something for the town to use if necessary."

How Leandro found himself seated in one of those trucks sitting next to Weston, who was currently driving, he would never know.

### CHAPTER 4

The moment it had been decided they would send what basically amounted to two teams, Westland volunteered himself and Leandro. He did not know if spending time with Leandro searching for supplies would draw them closer together or not, but he was damn sure going to try.

“I can’t believe you said I should come,” Leandro finally said after driving for four very bumpy hours at a snail’s pace.

It had taken them two days to plan their route and load up as many weapons and ammunition as they thought they would need. Then, they gathered tents, sleeping bags—as it was still cold at night—and food and water stashed with each person in case anyone got separated.

After that, horses from Lowen and Ford’s farm were brought to town, and with a lot of maneuvering on Weston’s part, he got him and Leandro in a truck together. In all that time, Leandro hadn’t said one word about basically being coerced into going on the trip.

“I admit Coleson has us all beat with being organized and knowing exactly what the town needs for supplies other than the medical. Although, I suspect he knows that too, thanks to Maxon keeping him informed.” If the Alphas of the world knew an Omega ran Sanctuary, they would never believe it.

“True,” Leandro agreed. “And I get that because Coleson’s pregnant he shouldn’t be on this trip, but that doesn’t explain why you volunteered me.”

Even though they had only covered about fifty miles, the horses needed a break, so they all came to a stop. Turning in his seat, Weston pushed back a lock of hair that had fallen over Leandro's forehead and said, "Coleson might be the most organized of the town, but don't think I haven't seen how observant you are. You notice everything and everyone."

It was something Weston had been in awe of as he'd watched over Leandro. "You're often bringing people water and sandwiches because you see them wearing down. You also are the one to have suggested shoring up the school because the kids needed a place to learn, as well as fixing the playground to give them a chance to burn off energy."

Leandro rolled his eyes. "That's just because they were constantly getting in my way and I figured it was the best solution to that problem."

Weston couldn't help but chuckle at Leandro's self-deprecating words. It was something else he'd noticed. Leandro never took credit for anything he'd done. "No, my sweet, ferocious kitten, we both know that isn't true. You've done so much to help the others in Sanctuary, and I'm not about to let you think no one has noticed you doing it."

Pink flared over Leandro's cheeks and his light blue eyes sparkled as if pleased with the praise. That was something Weston was more than happy to give him every single day for the rest of their lives if Leandro would allow him to.

"Now, why don't we get out, eat lunch, and stretch our legs for a bit before we head out again?" Weston suggested.

Together, they opened their doors. Weston had hoped Leandro would sit near him while they ate, but he clearly had needed some space as he sat next to Maxon, who had been riding in another of the trucks.

Their heads were close together as they whispered to one another, effectively shutting anyone else out of joining in with their conversation. Weston's heart ached a little at the move, but he also knew it was going to take time to woo Leandro, and he was more than willing to put in the work and wait until the prickly man was ready for more.

Three full days of pushing as hard as they'd dared, which had been little as the route had indeed become more treacherous, they'd reached the first town they planned to scavenge. Based on the amount of buildings that were falling down, Weston doubted they'd find much.

The group was still together, so they managed to get through what used to be Mitchell, South Dakota, in twenty minutes, with nothing to show for it. Before they left Sanctuary, it had been decided that they would all travel together through South Dakota before splitting off. One group would head west and north, while the other would start off heading south and west, but they would all keep in the northern states.

The reason had been because Lowen hadn't been that far north. They hoped it would mean not all the towns had been picked over. Whether or not it was true they did not know, but considering their other options, it was their greatest chance of success.

"Since we've stopped, and it's only an hour before lunch, we should probably eat now before getting started." Technically, Oxley was right, but Weston wasn't comfortable eating completely out in the open as they were in the middle of what used to be a town square.

"Shouldn't we find a place a little more...sheltered?" Leandro suggested as kindly as possible. Once more, having noticed a key point. They were too out in the open to remain safe if Alphas were somewhere close by to hear them.

It was one thing to take a chance searching for supplies, but it wasn't worth risking

their safety to eat. “I agree with Leandro. It isn’t worth it. The horses have rested and I say we eat a granola bar while heading to the next town. When we get to a location that has more coverage, we’ll stop.”

Only a few grumbled about being hungry, but most of their group quickly got on their horses or in the trucks and were ready to head out in a few minutes.

What he hadn’t expected was for Leandro to put a hand on his arm after they’d finished their granola bars and say, “Thanks for supporting me back there. It means a lot to me.”

Flipping his hand over, Weston caught Leandro’s and entwined their fingers before pulling their hands up to kiss the back of Leandro’s hand. “It wasn’t just for you. I mean, I have your back, but you were right about it not being safe. That’s why I defended what you said.”

His heart soared when he rested their hands back down on the console, but Leandro didn’t pull away. Weston was not about to break their moment by saying anything. He never really knew what to say to Leandro that might piss him off. So, instead, he kept quiet and just drove while holding Leandro’s hand, enjoying their time together.

Well, that and silently hoping this was the start of a new phase of their relationship. He knew it was too soon to think this would change things, but he also couldn’t help himself. He’d been waiting months for Leandro to even slightly thaw toward him.

All too soon, they came to a small campground that provided enough protection to hear anyone coming toward them. It would also help them hide behind trees and bushes in case anyone shot at them. For each Omega, there was an Alpha. They would stick together, hoping that if other Alphas confronted them, it would be easier to fend them off and less likely for an Omega to be taken.

Not that he was saying an Omega couldn't defend himself, but with an Alpha around, other Alphas might hold back, giving the pair time to get away.

He pulled in first, and the others followed behind him. They parked in varying directions in case they needed a quick getaway. It gave them better odds of escaping if they came under attack. Since they were most likely the only ones with vehicles, it would take a lot to surround them enough to block them completely in.

### CHAPTER 5

After six days and finding very little in the way of supplies, they split their search party into two and went in different directions. Leandro was still riding with Weston, and instead of dreading spending time with him, he found himself enjoying every moment of it. For some reason, that helped lessen the fear of not having as many people to help keep them safe.

In all, they had six people per group. Besides himself and Weston, the other truck had Griggs, another Alpha, and Basel, an Omega that had been saved shortly before the attack. On the horses were Oxley, an Alpha, and Kelce, who not only was an Omega but was taught to be a great fighter by his family before he'd been captured.

In all, it was a great team to have watching each other's backs. Leandro just hoped it would be enough, and they'd all make it back. On top of that, he prayed they would find supplies that would get Sanctuary through another attack.

They needed more than medical supplies. Food was good, thanks to Lowen, but they were short of building materials, solar panels, and even clothing or materials to make their own clothes.

Leandro and his friends had left with most of their things. Unfortunately, the Omegas that came to them often didn't even have any clothes on them since they were often used for sex. Even working around the clock, they couldn't fix enough housing for everyone, forcing people to double or sometimes even quadruple up in a room.

The situation may seem bleak, yet despite how difficult it was to help so many, they



all pulled together like a real community. Each person doing their part. Sanctuary gave them hope for a future. One free of oppression and the fear of being kidnapped and sold as a slave.

“Do you think we’re ever going to find any supplies?” he asked Weston hoping to hear a positive response.

As they had been doing for the past few days, Weston reached for his hand and entwined their fingers before bringing them up to kiss the back of Leandro’s hand. “I believe we’ll find so much, not even four trucks will carry it all.”

Even though he damn well knew Weston was just saying that to make him feel better, Leandro somehow did. Even worse, he couldn’t stop smiling at Weston as if he held the power to heal the pain and hurt Leandro had harbored since childhood when his Alpha father made it clear he was less than nothing.

His Omega father tried to make up for how he was treated by his Alpha father and three Alpha brothers, but there was little he could do. Even if he spent extra time with Leandro, or taught him to cook, or even gave him small gifts that were supposed to have been for him, all of it got wiped away the moment his father or brothers came home and started berating him.

Who was he kidding? Leandro hadn’t been the only one who was made to feel inferior. His Omega dad had been treated the same way.

It had taught him that as an Omega, he would never be treated any other way. Until Weston. The thing was, that concept was so ingrained in him he still wasn’t entirely certain he could trust Weston. Yet, he had hope.

“I mean it,” Leandro insisted. “Are we really going to find anything? We’ve been out here for six days, and the few things we’ve found aren’t exactly that helpful.”

Weston shrugged. “I was with the last group to scavenge for things we needed, and it seemed hopeless then, too. Then one day, we came upon a town that had not everything we needed but a lot. It was the omen that gave us the momentum to keep searching.”

Leandro had heard that story and he had to admit, Weston was right. The group had nearly been ready to quit when they found a veterinarian's office that had been completely skipped. Some supplies weren't exactly the same, but since the world went to hell, doctors and nurses had learned to use whatever they had on hand.

Leandro felt his hand being squeezed tighter. “The biggest obstacle is to overcome feeling defeated when not finding supplies. We must never give up.” Weston was right.

If only it were that easy.

“I know you said we needed faith. We would find something. But neither team has, and it has now been twelve days.” If the roads weren't so hazardous to travel, causing them to barely move or risk either popping another tire-they were running low on extras-or one of the horses getting seriously injured.

They communicated briefly through walkie-talkies that Ford had plugged into the trucks so they wouldn't need batteries. Using them was risky when it was possible a group of Alphas might intercept them, but they kept their conversations very brief and coded.

They only confirmed they were still on target with where they were supposed to be each morning and if they'd found anything. The only other time they were to use them was if they were under attack or if they found a large enough stash of goods that the other team was needed. Since they'd separated, they only had spoken in the mornings.

On the one hand, that was good, since it meant no one was after them. On the other hand, it meant no one had found anything.

They had just entered northern Idaho, while the other group was already traversing mid to southern Idaho. Since going north would lead Leandro's group into Canada, something they weren't willing to risk as they did not know where their population was centered, they headed a bit south until they hit the town of Sandpoint, Idaho. It hadn't been a big town based on how many buildings it had, but according to Kelce, sometimes that was a good thing as they were skipped for bigger places by those fleeing the east.

Especially when it was surrounded by a lake and mountains. It would be somewhere you had to know about and was far enough off the main interstate that one wouldn't deviate to it for a chance of finding anything useful. That said, anyone who had been living in the area would know and probably would have taken all they could.

"I think we might have found our town." Weston even sounded happy when he said it. Leandro was still a bit skeptical until Weston pointed to the town down the mountain range they were currently on. "Only a few buildings are damaged, which probably means hordes of people didn't tear it apart trying to get what they could."

Leandro felt his heart speed up as his eyes were glued to the scene below them. When Weston pulled off the road onto a service road, Leandro shouted at him, "What are you doing? We need to check it out."

"It's also almost nightfall and the last thing we need to do is get stuck in that town overnight when we do not know what we're getting into." Weston was right, but it was so close, and Leandro needed to know if they'd finally found what they'd been looking for.

Grabbing Weston's arm in a steely grip, Leandro pleaded with him. "But we have to

find out. There may be nothing there, which would mean we've wasted two hours sitting up here when we could keep going."

"Look." Weston cupped Leandro's cheeks with both hands. "I'll go with Kelce to scope out the place on horseback, but it would be suicide for all to go down there. For all we know, the reason it's so intact is that people live down there."

Shaking his head, Leandro opened his mouth to argue, but Weston placed his index finger over Leandro's lips, stopping him. "I get it. I do. But we have to be smart about this. Even if we're willing to risk our lives, us dying would mean Sanctuary will not only be down fighters, but they won't get the supplies they desperately need."

Closing his eyes, Leandro willed the tears that threatened to fall from doing so as he nodded.

"Morning will be here soon enough," Weston reminded him. "Then we'll go down, assuming Kelce and I don't see any trouble. Got it?"

As much as he hated it, Leandro nodded. "Fine," he mumbled against Weston's finger.

Then he flung open his door and slammed it shut in anger. He could hear Weston sigh as he got out of the car quietly to meet up with the others and tell them the plan.

Fifteen minutes later, Weston and Kelce, armed with weapons, a few granola bars, and some water, headed down the mountain through the trees on horses. The rest of them quickly set up camp. It was far colder up in the mountains, but a fire would be too risky, so they had to settle for huddling in their sleeping bags while they ate jerky, fruit, and raw vegetables. That had been their diet for most meals.

It wasn't exactly ideal, but it was better than possibly alerting any alphas nearby with the light from a fire or the smell of smoke.

Anxiously waiting, Leandro kept his eyes on the trail the horses had left for any sign of Weston or Kelce. He might have wanted to head down right away, but the thought of something happening to Weston had knots growing rapidly in his stomach, causing him to throw up the little he'd gotten down after they'd left.

For the first time in his life, Leandro silently pleaded with God, for he honestly wasn't certain what he would do without the Alpha who had broken through all his walls.

### CHAPTER 6

Both Kelce and Weston knew better than to speak as they made their way down the mountain. Their truck may have been seen as they'd crested the mountain, and hunters might already be heading up to check them out. The only good news was because they ran on solar power, they made zero noise, well, except for the tires crunching over debris in the road. Still, he had hope they hadn't been noticed, but it was always better to be safe than sorry.

Using hand signals as they were about a half mile from the town, they split up, hobbled the horses, and made their way on foot the rest of the way into town. Based on the emptiness of the streets, it was safe to assume if there were people living there it wasn't a whole town's worth.

That didn't mean if there was someone living there, they weren't as ruthless as most alphas they'd encountered living out west. As if they'd been working together for years, Weston already knew Kelce was at the far west end of the town, while he entered the eastern side.

Methodically, they would check out every building one by one, until they were certain there would be no surprises. It was something that had already concerned them both when they'd been making their way down the mountain. It was too...well, intact.

There had been few places that had so many buildings standing. Even Sanctuary had a lot of repairs that had been done to make it somewhat livable. They still didn't have enough housing because too many of the structures were unsafe. It was one of their

top priorities, but they just didn't have enough manpower or materials to make too many changes too quickly. Yet, the town of Sandpoint had more than half of its buildings looking almost brand new. Sure, there were a few loose boards on some porches, and paint jobs were warranted, although finding paint would be a stretch this far west.

It screamed that someone had been living there. The question was, were they still there? Keeping as close to the shadows as possible, Weston made his way west, doing his best to not miss any of the buildings.

The good news was he'd gone into three veterinarian offices that were still completely stocked. This meant that if there were people around, there either weren't many, or they did not know animal medical supplies could treat themselves. Or, and he had to admit, he really hoped it wasn't the case. Whoever was staying in Sandpoint didn't give a shit about keeping anyone healthy.

He had just reached the buildings surrounding the center of town when he heard it. The click of a gun cocking. It wasn't from behind him and it was faint enough that he didn't believe it was aimed at him. That didn't mean Kelce wasn't the target.

They had both cleared their side of the town and made the center at the same time. But somehow, Kelce had been seen or heard. That wasn't good.

Keeping behind a slightly overgrown hedge, he did his best to get the lay of the land. If he could figure out where Kelce was, or whoever held the gun, there was a chance he could help. Otherwise, he feared Kelce, at the very least, would get injured.

First, he checked to the west, where Kelce would have been coming from, but he saw nothing, not even a shadow. Slowly, his gaze moved southeast until he saw it, a door slightly ajar. That had to be where one of them was holed up.

Still trying to find where the other one was positioned, he sat very still, keeping his breath soft and even. His heart slowed, and each movement was incremental so as not to draw attention to himself. His eyes moved the most of all his body to keep any other shifting to a minimum.

He had no idea how long he sat there, but he would guess it was at least ten minutes when he heard it. A slight scuff of a shoe and creak of a board on the inside of the house he was partially shielded by.

The question? Was it one person in there, or more?

Barely moving, he slowly made his way inch by inch until he was plastered to the side of the building. Then, as quickly as possible, he made his way down the side of the house, staying low so as not to be seen by the first-floor windows. He went toward the back of the house.

Peering quickly to the back, he felt himself sigh in relief when he didn't see anyone standing guard. Not that it would mean someone wasn't watching, but if they'd been in the tree line, they most likely would have seen him behind the hedges. That left the possibility of someone at one or more of the ten windows that lined the back of the enormous house.

Once more, he crouched low and made his way to what looked like a utility door of some kind. Popping up quickly, he scanned the room in a second before squatting back down. Inside was what appeared to be a mud room. Considering some of the mountains heading into town appeared to have been old ski slopes, it would have made sense for the door to open into a place to take off one's wet and possibly muddy gear.

The good news, he had seen no one inside. The bad news, there was no way to know if the door was booby-trapped. Not willing to risk it, he kept going along the back



until he got to the last window, where he found what used to be a laundry room.

He'd often seen washers and dryers since no one bothered taking them as they didn't work without some type of electricity, which wasn't exactly something many of them had in the West. Even Sanctuary had tried to get none of the ones still around working, as it tended to use too much power. Ford may have gotten the hydroelectric mostly up and running, but they still had a long way to go to get the entire town with power.

Using his knife, he slid the old-fashioned lock open and slowly, so as not to cause any undo noise, opened it. If only it were as easy as it sounded. With each inch he managed to raise, there was at least one creak or squeak.

There was no way whoever was inside would not hear him coming. Sure enough, he heard a floorboard creak as someone made their way toward him.

Deciding to change tactics, he bent down and raced back to the backdoor. Trying the knob, just as he heard a shout from the cracked window, he found it locked. Not that it would stop him from getting in, but it didn't leave him much time as he heard the pounding footsteps headed his way.

Just when he was about ready to pop the lock with his knife, Kelce ran from the side of the house and shouted. "Hurry. There are more."

Spinning on his heel, Weston didn't waste a second to race to where he'd left his horse, while Kelce did the same. Raised voices followed them, but the moment they were riding up the mountain, they quickly outdistanced them. The problem? Now that someone knew they were there, would they manage to not only avoid them but find the supplies they so desperately needed?

### CHAPTER 7

“There’s got to be something wrong or they would have been back by now.” Yeah, Leandro might have been panicking a bit, but those knots in his stomach were growing by the second. He had a really bad feeling about what was happening in that town, and everything within him was telling him they needed to get the hell out of there.

“You’re just nervous because Weston is down there.” Oxley had a point, but it didn’t discount the need to flee.

“I think we need to load the truck back up,” Leandro told them. “If I’m wrong, it won’t take us long to unload it all again.” It might be a pain in the ass, but it wasn’t as if they had much but tents and sleeping bags. “But if I’m right, it might be the few minutes we need to get away before we’re surrounded.”

This time, no one argued; they just started tossing everything into the trucks. By the time they had everything put away, they all stood there staring intently down the mountain as if by watching something would happen. But just like trying to get water to boil, it wasn’t working.

“Maybe we should start the vehicles,” Oxley suggested.

He had only just gotten behind the wheel, with Griggs in the other truck, when the pounding hooves of horses headed their way. “Get in the truck,” he yelled to Basel, who was already running for the passenger door of the second truck.

By the time they'd slammed their doors, Weston and Kelce broke through the tree line. Weston came right up to Leandro's window while Kelce was at Oxley's. As soon as his window was down, Weston told them their plan. "Take the truck up over the mountain. A service road to a watch tower was about a mile from there. Kelce and I will meet you there."

He was about to take off, but Leandro grabbed his calf to stop him. "What are you two going to do?" He may have phrased it as a question, but it was a demand because there was no way he was about to let Weston get himself killed.

"Since you're going north, Kelce and I will split up and head east and west to draw them away." Even as Weston spoke, Leandro was shaking his head, as he was not about to let them get away with their crazy plan.

Yet, even he knew it would be nearly impossible to stop them. If there was one thing he'd learned about the two men, they were as stubborn as they come.

Before he could protest, Weston covered his hand with his own. "Look, we don't even know if they can follow us. We searched almost every single building, and there were no horses. Several boats along the lake could get them out of Sandpoint fairly easily. If we can hole up for a day or two, I imagine they will leave instead of risking us finding out whatever they are up to."

It made sense. It really did. But it didn't make it any easier to accept. What Leandro knew was that if someone was coming after them, they had little time.

Nodding, he squeezed Weston's calf. "Fine. But you better meet us completely intact, you understand me?"

Weston grinned down at him. "I will, kitten. I swear it."

He was gone before Leandro could tell him to stop calling him that. He was no kitten. He'd struggled for years to get where he was now, and he was damn well not about to let anyone belittle his progress with taking care of himself and not allowing anyone to bully him around as his family had.

Sighing when he realized there was very little he could say to Weston at the moment, he glanced over at Oxley. "Go."

They went as quickly as they darted between the debris and deep potholes. Thankfully, they made good time and were turning off the service road. When they got to the watchtower, Basel quickly climbed the stairs and kept watch over them all. With his vantage point, they should be able to see if the enemy was coming. The only real question was whether Basel would have the time it would take to get back down the stairs.

But they needed to cover their backs until Weston and Kelce returned to them. "We need to set up patrols while still communicating with each other. It will help with Basel watching over us, but it won't be foolproof."

Unfortunately, without the walkie-talkies hooked into the trucks, they didn't work. And they couldn't just yell to each other without giving out their positions.

"Bird calls," Oxley said randomly. Griggs grinned and nodded so, apparently, it was only Leandro who had no clue what that was supposed to mean.

"We used to learn how to whistle like certain birds to let others know if we were safe, in trouble, or in position," Griggs told Leandro.

That was great, but he had no clue how to do that. "Uhm, I don't want to put a damper on the idea, but I can't whistle."

“I guess that’s out,” Oxley muttered. “Since you’re the only one who can’t communicate, we’ll have to rotate, so you are always in eyesight of one of us.”

By far, it wasn’t ideal, but hopefully, they wouldn’t have to do it for long. “Fine. But at the first sign of trouble, we have to get out of there.” He stared at each of them for several moments. “Promise.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement.

When they both nodded, Leandro gave them a nod and said, “Good. Let’s get in position.”

As they surrounded the tower and two vehicles in order to protect them, they started making their rounds, scanning every inch of the woods and listening for anyone approaching. Thirty minutes later, they were still doing the same thing. His nerves weren’t as on edge as they had been when Weston and Kelce were down the mountain. That said, they were still razor sharp for him to completely lose it.

A bird sang from somewhere west of them, which was the direction he’d seen Weston head earlier. Briggs stilled about fifty feet from where Leandro was standing. He was staring hard into the trees and foliage before giving his own answering whistle.

Minutes later, Weston was walking the horse toward them. His eyes never wavered once they landed on Leandro. There was worry and heat in his eyes that caused a shiver to race up and down Leandro’s spine.

“Anyone heard from Kelce?” Weston asked, without once looking away from Leandro.

“No,” Oxley told him. “Did you see anyone following you out there, or even headed our way?”

Handing the reins to Oakley, Weston kept walking until he was standing before Leandro. Without saying another word, one of those muscular arms wrapped around Leandro's waist, while Weston's other hand cupped Leandro's cheek. Leandro hadn't even hesitate to meet those firm lips when his head dipped down.

The kiss started gentle, and that made his heart melt, but when Leandro's lips parted, Weston took total advantage and deepened it until all Leandro knew was the Alpha holding him as if Leandro mattered. Pushing closer until their bodies were practically fused together, Leandro wanted so much more than just a kiss. For the first time in his life, he wanted it all.

An Alpha to call his own. Love, romance, intimacy, and an all-consuming need to be as close to another person as possible. How was any of that even possible? He had no clue, but Leandro had to admit he was having a hard time coming up with a reason it wasn't a good idea.

In fact, all Leandro could do was burrow even closer and sink into the kiss with everything he had.

### CHAPTER 8

From the moment Weston realized there was someone with a gun in town, every part of him wanted nothing more than to go to Leandro and hold him until he was certain his Omega was safe. Stupid? Definitely. He knew better than to even momentarily believe Leandro couldn't protect himself.

Yet, that wasn't exactly the reason he'd felt the urge to wrap his Omega up. It was because he was falling for Leandro and just wanted to do everything in his power to keep him safe. That he was an Omega was irrelevant to Weston. Not that Leandro would ever trust that to have been true. He was far too stubborn.

But the moment Weston laid eyes on Leandro, there was no stopping him from holding the man who currently owned his heart. When those soft lips clung to his in a kiss that had his toes curling, Weston was certain he'd died and gone to heaven.

For a moment, he'd honestly thought he was exactly where he wanted to be for the rest of his life. In some ways, it was. That was until he heard it. The cry of a hawk, their signal for trouble. His entire body froze for a millisecond before he broke the kiss and pushed Leandro toward the truck.

"Load up," he called out softly enough that only a few of them would hear it, and not anyone in the surrounding woods.

Griggs was already running for his truck while Oxley got on the horse. It was faint, but he could hear Basel's footfalls as he raced down the steps of the watchtower. Grabbing Leandro's hand, Weston yanked him forward to their own truck.

Just as they shut the doors, they heard the hawk call from Kelce's direction three times. That meant there was no time to wait. They had to get the hell out of there.

Weston had got his window down just as Basel threw open his own door and jumped into the other truck next to Griggs. "Separate. One horse with each vehicle. We'll travel for a full day before meeting up."

Both trucks were thrown into gear, and they were off. They didn't worry about debris but still had to do their best to maneuver around potholes or risk getting stuck. Still, they were at least a mile down the road before he saw Kelce emerge onto the road. Ever the tactician and hunter, he didn't follow their convoy.

Instead, Kelce raced across the road and headed west, hoping to lead the enemy away from them. Weston hated putting one of their own in that kind of danger, but until they knew what was happening, there had been little any of them could do.

"Watch the road for me," he barked out a little too aggressively, but Leandro didn't argue as Weston watched the rearview mirror. Not only was he checking to see if anyone was following them, but he also wanted to get an idea of how many were pursuing Kelce.

Neither was good. Five broke off to chase after them, although based on how they were riding their horses into the ground, they wouldn't last long. Then again, neither would Kelce if they'd been chasing him for a long time. After that, he counted approximately ten others who continued after Kelce.

No matter how they looked at it, the scenario wasn't in their favor. Griggs had already peeled off toward the northeast while they were headed northwest.

"If we go too far north, we'll end up in Canada," Leandro reminded him.



Weston knew that, but at that point, they had to get as far from the other ten attackers as possible. Opening his window, he signaled to Oxley that they had the enemy on their tail. Not that it was necessary since less than thirty seconds later, shots were fired in their direction.

It was a waste of bullets since they weren't close enough to hit them, but in Weston's fbook, it was a win because it would mean they might run out of bullets at some point—not that he planned on letting it get that far.

The moment they turned down another deeply rutted road where their pursuers couldn't see them, Oxley took off south through the woods. He would do his best to pick them off when they made the turn while hiding amongst the trees, which would have been easier if it hadn't been so late in the year and many of them were completely bare.

Oxley's only real advantage was the pine that grew heavily in the area. But they needed to help. "I need you to crawl in the back seat of the truck, open the window enough to get your rifle through, and shoot anyone who comes close enough to hit."

Leandro once more didn't argue. He scrambled into the backseat and grabbed the long-range rifle and a box of ammo they had on the floor. He most likely wouldn't need more yet, as there were only five of them, and the odds were some of them followed Griggs and Basel.

Of the six of them on this trip, Kelce was the best shot with a handgun and their best hunter and survivalist. The man had a knack for living out in the woods that would rival just about anyone Weston had ever met. But Basel was their number one long-range shooter. The man could hit a squirrel through the woods at five hundred yards. Whoever was stupid enough to follow them was toast even if they didn't know it yet.

Leandro, on the other hand, was...well, okay. He did fairly well at a hundred yards,

but the target rarely moved. They would mostly have to depend on Oxley.

Even though they agreed to radio silence, it was obvious Griggs had seen what Weston had in the review mirror and knew they needed to help Kelce before he got killed or captured. “Targets dead” were the two words that came over the walkie-talkie. “Back to base.” This meant they would head toward Weston’s group to come up with a game plan to find and help Kelce.

As much as he didn’t want to keep communicating, Weston needed them to find a safe place to regroup. Hitting the button on the walkie-talkie, he said, “Hidey hole.”

The enemy would have no idea what any of it meant, he hoped, but he knew Griggs would. Search the maps they had and find them a place to stop.

Three shots echoed behind them. Knowing Oxley, at least two, if not all, three shots killed. The man wasn’t as good as Basel and Kelce, but he was damn good with any weapon.

His ears rang when Leandro suddenly fired. “I don’t think he’s dead, but he fell off the horse,” Leandro shouted over his shoulder since there was no point in keeping quiet with gunfire going off.

“Oxley will make certain he’s dead before joining us.” He hoped. For all he knew, one of the three shots from earlier had gotten Oxley. They would have to slow down and possibly turn around to find out. He would leave none of them behind if they could be saved.

“Oxley has him. He’s tying him up,” Leandro called out.

That was Weston’s cue to stop and back the hell up. If they could get information about who lived in Sandpoint, they needed to interrogate the guy.

Two minutes later, they were idling just in front of Oxley and the man he had hogtied who was screaming at them about gutting them and all sorts of fun torture. Not wanting to listen to it, Weston did something he wasn't exactly proud of, but figured the guy deserved it for coming after them; he kicked him in the nuts.

Other than the painful scream it elicited, it had shut him the fuck up.

“Ouch. I mean, I know he had it coming, but damn Wes, was it necessary to go there?” Oxley joked as he cupped his groin protectively.

Leandro, on the other hand, had his knife out and at the man's throat. Tiny amounts of blood were seeping down the guy's neck as Leandro dug the edge of the blade deeper. “You have one chance to tell us how many are down there.”

The idiot spat at Leandro and told him, “I don't take orders from Omegas.”

Faster than he thought Leandro could move, the knife went from his neck to the man's groin, the pointy side cutting through the material of his jeans. Based on the blood that now soaked the clothing and the insolent Alpha's blood-curdling scream, he dug that knife in fairly deeply.

“I warned you,” Leandro sneered. “You know, I've never been captured by Alpha assholes like you, but I've heard the stories from those who have. The torture you felt was your right to inflict.”

After that initial taunt, Leandro's voice had become calm and matter-of-fact, which considering what he was saying was scarier than fuck. Both Weston and Oxley had taken a step back and were covering their groins as if afraid Leandro would only see Alphas and attack them, too.

“Now you're my prisoner, and I plan to let you experience all the fun you were

having while mutilating and raping those Omegas.” In some ways, Weston wanted to pull Leandro back and talk some sense into him. Yet, knowing what men like this guy had done to others, he was willing to let it play out.

Was that wrong? His moral compass said it was. But the side of him who’d watched for years the heinous crimes men like this guy had inflicted, he couldn’t deny there was a huge part of him that wanted to see him suffer.

“Now, for every insult, this knife goes deeper,” Leandro warned by digging in just a bit more. “Based on the angle of the blade, too many insults and you will lose your dick and balls very quickly. What kind of Alpha will you be then?” Another taunt, which admittedly was quite effective, as the man started babbling.

“There is thirty of us, but only twenty are currently there,” he rushed to say, moaning the whole time. “Ten went with a shipment of Omegas down the river to the next camp.”

“How many men came after us?” Leandro demanded more than he asked.

“Ten.” The Alpha was crying and doing his best not to scream as he panted through the pain since Leandro refused to remove his knife.

“Does that mean there are only ten there now?” his Omega asked.

“Yes,” the Alpha groaned out.

“Where are they?” Weston asked. “I didn’t see anyone.”

“They’re in a bomb shelter in the basement of the town hall.” Each word was stilted, as the man was in too much pain to easily speak. “There is no way to communicate with them. They don’t even know we left.”

Weston could spot a lie when he saw one, and he considered saying something, but he figured it wouldn't really matter. As strong as Leandro was at the moment, he feared his Omega would break down once this was over. Leandro might be brave and willing to do what had to be done, but his Omega was far sweeter than he pretended to be.

The scream that came from the Alpha reminded him not to underestimate Leandro. "You know a lie is like an insult. It will only make this knife go deeper."

"Sorry...sorry...I just..." The Alpha was openly sobbing at that point. "All the cameras in town are broadcast to the bunker. They were the ones who saw your men sneaking around."

Leandro pulled his knife free, which caused another scream as blood now poured over the man's groin, stomach, and thighs. Then he turned to Weston and looked right into his eyes for a moment. Just as Weston had thought, grief clouded those light blue eyes, turning them almost gray.

Then he walked to the truck and got in. Weston glanced at Oxley, who gave him a nod before Weston slid behind the steering wheel and took off. They didn't hear a gunshot, but Oxley wasn't one to waste a bullet when his knife would do just fine. The point was that the Alpha was dead, and they had the information they needed.

If only it would be that simple to get Leandro through the guilt that would plague him.

### CHAPTER 9

“I’m sorry.” Basel sat next to Leandro on the fallen log he’d found. When a blanket was wrapped around both, Leandro barely felt it, as the cold outside was nothing compared to what he felt inside. “I know that couldn’t have been easy, especially since you haven’t been through what we have.”

“Does it matter?” Leandro wasn’t certain why Basel thought it would have been any easier if he’d gone through the same hell the other Omega had. “Would you have been able to do what I did?”

“Yes. Not only that, but I have.” Basel’s words meant little since he knew the Omega had killed, but from afar.

“I’m not talking about with a gun where you don’t even have to get close to the guy.” Leandro wasn’t certain anyone would understand what he felt he’d had to do. The question was, had it been necessary?

“Neither did I.” Basel’s words surprised him enough that Leandro turned his head to look at the other Omega, who had become a fairly good friend since they’d started this trip.

“What?” he asked, dumbfounded.

Basel huffed a bit as if he was preparing himself to tell Leandro something he hadn’t wanted to talk about. Putting a hand on the other Omega’s arm, Leandro said, “If you don’t want to talk about it, you don’t have to. It really is none of my business.”

But Basel shook his head and blew out a calming breath. “No. I think you need to hear this, and maybe I need to talk about it as well.”

They sat there for another minute before Basel’s voice, pitched low as if not wanting to chance anyone else hearing him, started speaking. “When you all rescued me, that had been my third time being captured by Alphas, who thought I was nothing more than property.”

He chuckled darkly. “Hell, most of them didn’t even think that highly of me.”

Then he shook his head as if clearing it. “My fathers had gotten sick when I was sixteen. A year later, they were both dead. My Alpha brother, who was a year younger than me, sold me so he would have enough to eat for the year while he found somewhere he could live since he wasn’t strong enough to live off the land.

“The thing was, I wasn’t even mad at him,” Basel admitted. “Don’t get me wrong, I wasn’t happy either, but he had always been too lazy to learn the lessons my fathers tried to teach him about hunting, farming, and anything else required to live out west.”

Leandro noticed Basel’s hands were clenched into fists, but didn’t mention it.

“The thing was, I had. If we’d worked together, we might have made it, but my brother wanted what other alphas he’d met had. A place to call home, respect, and admiration. It was something he’d never gotten since the Alphas, whom he’d tried to sell me to, recognized just how weak he was and killed him instead of paying him.”

Talk about karma.

“Before they had gotten me back to their camp, I had killed the three of the Alphas transporting me. They were quick and clean kills,” Basel admitted. “Don’t get me

wrong, I had used a knife I'd grabbed when one of the Alphas had raped me. He didn't get the chance before I'd stabbed him in the carotid, and he bled out."

Admittedly, that was close, but it wasn't the same as torturing someone for information.

"The other two were dead before they even knew what had happened." Basel wasn't exactly smiling, but he seemed pleased with himself. "The second time I was taken I was living on my own in a small cabin in the middle of nowhere. An Alpha must have seen me hunting and followed me back to my cabin."

Shit. Leandro could only imagine how terrifying it would have been to realize he'd gotten away once and was about to be taken for the second time.

"He only brought one other Alpha with him, which was probably a good thing since they caught me completely by surprise." Basel shivered, as if the thought of what could have happened was terrifying. "I barely got out the back before they could catch me. I made my way around back to the front and surprised them, which made it easy to kill the first one."

"What about the second Alpha?" Leandro asked.

"I captured him and hogtied him just like..." He looked back in the direction where Leandro had tortured the Alpha who had chased them. "I needed to know if there were others after me. Someone else they had told about my location, and as far as I was concerned, there was only one way to accomplish that."

"Oh." Leandro wasn't exactly happy about what Basel had gone through, but he had to admit, it was nice to know someone knew what it was like.

"Guys, we have a plan," Weston called out from where he, Oxley, and Griggs had



been discussing the best way to help Kelce. “You ready to hear it?”

As far as Leandro was concerned, he was more than ready to get his mind off what he’d done. If he was lucky, he would not have to think about any of it for a time. “We’re ready,” he answered for both him and Basel.

Of course, that was before he heard their insane plan.

“Are you kidding me?” he asked. “We don’t even know where Kelce is. How is any of this supposed to work?”

“The bird whistles,” Oxley told him. “We have about twenty that tell different information. One of them is to let Kelce know to come in our direction.”

It still seemed like an enormous risk. “What happens if he’s too far away to hear you? For all we know, he’s much further west than we are. How are we going to know where to set up?”

Weston moved his head from side to side a bit as he contemplated the question. “I admit we have no accurate way of knowing. But, especially since we’d been aggressively coming up with various plans for just about every scenario. When we came out here, we discussed various plans since the odds of coming across Alphas looking to attack us were inevitable.”

Leandro crossed his arms and glared at the highhandedness of the Alpha. That they had done all of this behind Leandro’s back was the exact reason he’d known he couldn’t trust Weston. Not really.

Sure, he might have wanted to and even attempted to believe he might be able to, but that was all it was—just a fantasy—nothing more, nothing less.

Wisely, the other three men not only took several steps back but then turned on their heels and walked away to give them privacy. The guilt on Weston's face told him the Alpha damn well knew what he'd done wrong.

"Look," Weston said with a hand outstretched, as if he were trying to calm a skittish animal. "I get it. We...I should have told you. But..." He let out a sigh and took several steps toward Leandro until he could reach out and take Leandro's hands.

"Look, I'm sorry, okay?" But Weston's words weren't helping in the slightest.

"No. Not okay." Leandro yanked his hands out of Weston's and took several steps back. "Once again, you felt I'm the weak Omega who can't handle anything."

"No," Weston practically shouted, although kept it from being too loud since they did not know who else might be around. "I've never once considered you weak. Hell, you're one of the strongest people I know."

"Bullshit." Leandro wasn't about to be placated, not when Weston's actions showed that wasn't even remotely true.

"It isn't bullshit," Weston bit out. "Do I think you're strong? Fuck yes. But that doesn't mean I don't want to protect you." When Leandro opened his mouth to protest, Weston placed his index finger over his lips. "Wait. It has nothing to do with you being an Omega. It has to do with you being mine. I love you, and I would do anything in this world to keep you safe."

Was his heart melting into a pile of goo?

### CHAPTER 10

Weston prayed with every fiber of his being that Leandro would see the truth of his words. Omega or Alpha, Weston truly hadn't cared. He just wanted to keep Leandro safe. It was all that mattered to him. Nor had he thought that being an Omega or an Alpha necessarily gave Leandro an advantage.

He tried not to physically wince at that thought. It pained him to admit, but even he damn well knew that wasn't entirely true. Not because one was weaker or stronger than the other, but because their society treated each one differently. As an Omega, the Alphas would have felt it their right to do as they pleased to Leandro. It wasn't right, but it was still how things worked.

As far as Weston knew, other than Sanctuary, nowhere else on earth gave a damn that it was wrong to treat anyone as if they didn't matter. It had been one of the main reasons he'd joined Sanctuary. Weston had preferred to live in a place where everyone was treated equally.

"We need to head out if we hope to catch up to Kelce," Oxley called out softly enough to be heard by them but not so loud that if one of their attackers was nearby would hear. "He could be in trouble."

As much as Weston wished to continue his conversation with Leandro, Oxley was right. They owed Kelce for drawing the enemy away from them. It had allowed them to regroup and come up with a plan. It wasn't exactly a great one, but with some amount of luck, they hopefully could defeat whoever had been chasing Kelce and head into town to collect what supplies they could.

If they were really lucky, they'd also be able to free those Omegas that were still being held. That might be a bit trickier, since they were behind a steel door, but they would do what they could to help them.

Weston held out his hand to Leandro. "Ready?"

Butterflies flapped around madly in his stomach when the Omega placed his hand in Weston's, smiled, and said, "Ready."

They piled into the trucks with Oxley on horseback and headed back down the mountain. This time, they'd taken a much more difficult route, which jolted their bodies with every dip and crevice they were forced to go over.

It wasn't helpful that they had to weave amongst the trees, but eventually, they'd made it more than halfway to Kelce's last known location. Well, if he had gone straight west and hadn't veered north or south.

Fairly quickly, they could collect enough pine boughs to cover each truck. Oxley was going to continue on horseback while the rest of them walked. They spread out and searched for any trace of Kelce or his pursuers.

Ten minutes later, Basel found hoof prints, and they knew they had found the direction Kelce and the others had taken. Not wasting any time, they followed.

"I told you we'd corner him," a malicious voice chuckled twenty minutes later. "He has nowhere else to run."

"About damn time," another sinister voice said. "Those other Omegas barely put up a fight any longer. Maybe this one will give us a challenge when we fuck him."

Weston wanted to punch the assholes already. He seriously hated how guys like that

gave the rest of Alphas a bad name. But before he could even curl his fingers into a fist, two knives flew through the air. By the time they'd stuck into the back of the Alphas' necks, severing their spinal cords, Oxley had already pulled out three more and sent them flying to the nearest Alphas, killing them instantly.

"Holy..." Leandro muttered. "If I hadn't seen that with my own eyes, I'm not sure I would have believed anyone could kill five people in less than thirty seconds with no one having a clue."

Out of the ten that were surrounding the rocky outcropping, which they assumed was where Kelce was hiding out—five had dropped to the ground without the others having any clue it had happened. The others most likely would have been dead as well, but Oxley must have run out of knives since he was holding his gun.

Not about to let him give away their position, or allow those in town to know what was happening by shooting that gun, Weston threw two of his knives. He couldn't help the satisfaction he felt when they'd found their mark, dropping two of the other five.

Briggs downed another, with Basel dropping one not even a second later. It was then that the last Alpha realized all his buddies were dead. "Wait," he yelled. "I didn't want to be part of this. I was forced."

The thing about trying to lie, especially west of the Mississippi River, the odds weren't good. Those that lived there could spot a lie without even trying and that guy wasn't even trying. It was as if he thought just saying the words was enough to save his life. He was wrong.

Leandro strode right up to the man, who was sneering at the fact that Leandro was an Omega and stabbed him in the heart without saying a word. If there hadn't been four guns pointed at him, the Alpha most likely would have put up a fight.

“Kelce,” Leandro called out.

Weston and Briggs chuckled when Kelce climbed down a tree a hundred feet north of where they were. Those Alphas hadn’t stood a chance. Then again, Weston had learned months ago that Kelce wasn’t about to let anyone, especially Alphas, get the best of him.

“Come on,” Leandro said as he started returning to where they’d stashed the trucks. “We have supplies to pick up and Omegas to free.”

Weston wasn’t entirely certain they’d manage that last part, but they would do everything they could to make it happen. As for the supplies, that would still be tricky, but he and the others were determined to bring them back to Sanctuary.

“Are we sure this is the best plan?” Weston wasn’t entirely certain their plan would work. It all depended on how many cameras the enemy had and where they were located.

He held Leandro’s hand as they watched the first veterinarian clinic near the edge of town. None of them had seen any cameras, but that didn’t mean there weren’t any.

“Hey,” Leandro squeezed his hand a little tighter to get his full attention. “There are no guarantees, but Sanctuary depends on us to bring them supplies. We’ve already been gone far too long. As much as it pains me to admit, we all know, eventually, another attack will be coming. We need to get back there before that happens.”

Weston knew that. But it hadn’t made what they were about to do any more straightforward. The other unit had reported an hour earlier that they had found and loaded building supplies and some things Ford had asked for to help with shoring up their solar energy and their hydroelectric plant.

They would still need more, but their vehicles were loaded down. Another trip would be in their future, but what they'd found would go a long way to helping the expanding needs of the town. The only thing they hadn't seen were medical supplies.

Something Weston's team had discovered, assuming they could get it loaded onto their trucks. And that right there was the problem. To do that, they had to risk being discovered and possibly attacked.

"You found three on this side of town, and Kelce discovered two on the west side." It was something they'd discussed several times in the last twelve hours. They had to do everything in their power to load it all into their trucks. It would have been better if they'd had at least one more vehicle because five offices filled with medical equipment would be tricky to fit into only two trucks.

Plus, having more eyes on potential threats would have been nice.

"What about the Omegas?" he murmured in case those Alphas in the safe room were listening.

Even if they loaded everything up, there would be no way they could also transport any Omegas still in that safe room back to Sanctuary. There were some horses they'd found thanks to an Alpha they'd interrogated before killing him. But if any of those Omegas were hurt, there would be no way for them to ride easily.

Light blue eyes stared right at Weston. "All we can do is try. There're no guarantees. If we free them but we can't get them far, then we'll find them somewhere safe to hole up until we can come back. Got it?"

Weston nodded before leaning in for a quick kiss. "I love you, kitten. No matter what happens, know that."

Leandro gave him a ghost of a smile, as if he knew their odds weren't great to make it out alive. "I love you too."

The walkie-talkie in their truck squawked briefly, telling them it was time. Weston, Leandro, and Basel moved as a unit to the first clinic under the cover of darkness. The risk was huge, but they had to do it if they hoped to help their friends in Sanctuary.



### CHAPTER 11

Fear was a living, breathing thing within Leandro as they made their way into the first veterinarian clinic on the east side of town. Even though getting the medical supplies was necessary, it didn't make it easier to gather, considering they might be attacked at any moment.

Just because they hadn't seen cameras on them didn't mean they weren't there. Worse, based on what the Alpha said, who they'd interrogated before he'd succumbed to his injuries, the safe room's exits were more than one. It was the only reason they'd decided against posting someone to watch it.

It might have been a mistake, but if the Alpha had been telling the truth, it would have been wiser to use each person to load up the supplies and get the hell out of there than waste a pair of eyes on an entrance when there may be more than one.

"How are we going to get the Omegas out?" he asked Weston as they loaded box after box of medication onto the truck. It had been decided that medicine was more imperative than bandages. Once they had all the ketamine, ointments, and anything else that could have been used to heal any injuries, they would load up on stitches and bandages.

If they were really lucky, they would empty the first office and move on to the second one before the night was over. Actually, they were hoping they would get through two of the offices. They wanted to finish with all five clinics within two nights.

What they still were questionable about was how to get the Omegas out. Or, and this

was a big one, how to transport them. There were about a dozen horses, once they had known where to look, but were any of them able to ride?

From what he'd seen and heard of from the Omegas they'd taken in, it wasn't likely. It wasn't as if those who were captured to sell were treated well. If anything, they were often beaten to keep them from trying to get away.

Weston wrapped his arms around Leandro and held him close for several moments. "I don't know, but we will find a way to help them."

Even though Weston couldn't technically give him the answer he wanted, it was enough for Leandro. He knew with that promise that Weston wouldn't stop until he freed those Omegas, which was good enough for Leandro.

Even though he had no reason for blindly trusting an Alpha with Weston, Leandro had. It made no sense to him, yet it was how Leandro felt. Then again, part of it had been because Weston never lied to him. It was possible there was no way to actually free those Omegas, but there was zero doubt if Weston could find a way, he would. That might not be a guarantee, but it was something he could depend on.

"Thank you." It was only two words, but he meant them with his entire being.

They had just finished loading the medicines and were working on all the bandages and sutures. "We need to come up with a way to get them out of there."

The six of them had talked about it, but the Alpha they had interrogated warned them about other outlets from the safe room. He hadn't actually told him where those entrances were. To find them wouldn't be easy, but Leandro was determined to free them.

What would that mean? He had no clue, yet Leandro damn well knew he would find

a way. Hopefully. No. He would. No matter what it took.

“Come on, kitten, let’s get the rest of the supplies loaded so we can get to the second clinic.” Weston hugged Leandro a bit harder for a moment before heading back through the back door of the clinic.

As much as Leandro wanted to hold on to Weston as the lifeline he was becoming to be to him, he knew they needed to finish. The sooner the better. Following Weston, Leandro carried out the last of the boxes of bandages.

“Are we ready to head to the next clinic?” he asked as he put the boxes into the bed of the truck.

Weston nodded. “Yes, but because we’re heading closer to the center of town, we need to keep our eyes open.”

As if Leandro hadn’t known that from childhood. There was never a time when he wasn’t aware of all that was going on around him. If not, he would have been dead. His brothers may have loved him to cook, clean, and babysit, but he also was well aware they hated him enough to kill him if it wouldn’t inconvenience them.

“When are we going to come up with a plan for the Omegas?” Leandro hated asking, but he also knew there was no way he was going to be okay, just hoping they would help keep them safe. “Just hoping we are going to actually try to free them.”

Weston reached across the seat and took Leandro’s hand. “Promise. We are.”

Even though he trusted Weston, there were still questions. What Leandro wasn’t certain was whether they were due to not knowing Weston well enough or that he was an Alpha. He had no clue, although, admittedly, he trusted Weston far more than any other Alpha. But Leandro’s need to free any Omegas that were still being held

wasn't something he could let go of.

There had been too many who'd come to Sanctuary that had needed help, including him. Without his friends, Leandro wouldn't have survived. Sometimes he'd wanted nothing more than to curl up and die. Thanks to Sanctuary, he had found life where he felt complete. Where he belonged.

He would not deny anyone else that opportunity. As far as he was concerned, all Omegas had the right to live free of oppression.

A large, warm hand took hold of him after they'd climbed into the truck. "I get you grew up in a family who didn't treat you fairly and find it difficult to trust Alphas, but I swear to you I will never lie to you."

In the past Leandro never would have believed Weston, but when Weston uttered those words, there was no doubt he trusted the Alpha completely. Even more, he knew, deep inside, that Weston would never betray Leandro.

Never once had Leandro known a kind Alpha, yet with Weston, that was exactly who he was. The thing was, Leandro still did not know when he'd trusted Weston, but somehow he had.

"How are we going to get to them?" he asked Weston. If there were several ways in and out of the safe room, how were they supposed to get to the Omegas before the Alphas escaped with them?

"Honestly?" Weston asked. "I have no idea. What I do know is we will not give up without trying to find them."

That was something Leandro knew he could believe. Weston was a man of his word. If he claimed to find a way to free the Omegas, he would do everything in his power

to do exactly that.

### CHAPTER 12

It wasn't often that Weston made a promise he damn well knew might be impossible to keep. That he had done so to Leandro only made it that much worse. He'd never had to try to open a safe room, nor was he entirely certain how they worked.

From what he'd understood, they needed a power source, and there was no electricity in Sandpoint. So how in the hell could they seal the doors to keep anyone from getting in or out?

He wished he'd been able to speak with Ford, as he was their most mechanically inclined person at Sanctuary. Hell, never in his life had Weston met anyone who could do what Ford did. Without the Omega, he feared he'd end up disappointing Leandro, and that was something Weston was loath to do.

Pulling up behind the second clinic, he glanced up to the roof, where Basel was stationed to watch their backs. He had three rifles with him and moved without ever being seen. He only showed himself enough to signal that they were in the clear.

Picking the lock of the back door, hoping it would give them more cover than going in the front door, they all entered the fairly large office. There were locked cabinets that were easy to break into where the medicines were kept. Weston started carting out the boxes to the back of the truck while Leandro went to the storage closet for the bandages, gauze, medical tape, and anything else they could scavenge.

They were mostly done when he heard Basel give the bird call to alert them there was movement. Whoever it was, wasn't close yet, but they'd need to hurry in case they'd

been discovered.

Two minutes later, the whistle of a cardinal was heard, giving them the all-clear. Either whoever had been outside went back in, or they were headed for Oxley's group. Hopefully, Kelce was watching their back if that was the case.

"We need to hurry," he told Leandro as he went back inside for the last four boxes of medicines and syringes.

Leandro nodded. "There are at least ten more boxes of gauze, tubing, and saline."

"I got these four, and then I'll come to help you." They really needed to check the rest of the clinic as well, but they might not have time. The last thing he wanted was to be surprised by whoever was in that safe room.

Not knowing where all the exits were, it was entirely possible an Alpha would come up upon them without them even knowing it. Basel was good, but even he couldn't see if someone was underground.

Less than ten minutes later, he was loading the last of the boxes from the storage closet while Leandro searched the rest of the clinic. He had just gotten the tarp secured over their haul when Leandro, pale as a ghost, came running out the back just as the sound of a hawk above them sounded the alarm.

"There are two Alphas that came out of the building across the street," Leandro hissed out quietly as they both jumped into the truck. The vehicle was silent as Weston put it in gear and headed further west to the last clinic they were going to raid, and it made their getaway easier.

They also had to turn a corner to get to the backside of the third place, hiding them as the Alphas circled the building that they'd just been in. But when they pulled up to

the last of the clinics, Basel let out a different call since he hadn't wanted to give away their position with the louder screech of a hawk.

"We can't stop," he told Leandro. "They must be searching for us."

"But we have to get those supplies," Leandro argued. But even as he'd said the words, Leandro was shaking his head, knowing it would be a bad idea. "What if we hunt down the Alphas? Then we can come back to clear out the rest?"

That sounded like a good idea to Weston. He just wasn't entirely certain how they were going to do that when they didn't know the position of all the Alphas. He looked up to Basel, who held up four fingers before pointing two toward the last clinic and two right in front of the building they were currently behind.

Fuck. That wasn't good.

He had zero doubt between Basel and himself they'd be able to shoot and kill the four men. The problem? It might bring the others, as the guns would be very loud.

Before he knew it, Basel had shimmed down a pipe on the outside of the building. "Knives," was all he said. Then he was off, racing for the last clinic they'd vacated.

Pulling out two knives, he handed them to Leandro. His Omega wasn't exactly the greatest at hand-to-hand combat, but he'd been learning fast, and Weston wasn't about to leave him defenseless.

He pointed for Leandro to stay behind him as he pulled out two more knives and silently made his way along the side of the building. He hadn't gotten even halfway down it when the first Alpha appeared, clearly trying to get the jump on Weston and Leandro.



Weston didn't even hesitate as he let one knife fly and pulled out another less than a second after it left his hand. The Alpha cried out, but the blade hit its mark right through his chest over his heart. Racing toward him, he pulled the knife free and checked his pulse. Dead.

Then he quickly glanced around the edge of the building, but the front was completely empty, which meant the other Alpha had gone the other direction. Turning on his heel, he made certain to do his best to cover Leandro in case the other guy got the drop on them as he quietly made his way to the back of the building.

Weston feared he'd have been too far away to accurately throw a knife before the other Alpha rounded the corner. Apparently, he had no reason to be concerned. Instead of ensuring the site was secure first, he'd lifted one corner of the tarp and was looking into the back of the truck to see what was in there.

He hadn't even known anyone was behind him before Weston stood and slit his throat. Blood spurted, but he'd been ready and pulled the man away from the truck so nothing would get on their supplies. He dropped the guy onto the ground just as Basel ran back toward them.

"Let me get back in position to see if there is anyone else coming," the Omega told them even as he climbed back up the pipe to the roof.

If the Alpha they had captured was right, ten others were guarding the Omegas they held. That meant there were now six. Weston liked their odds, especially if Oxley's team had taken anyone out as well.

That didn't mean they were out of the woods yet, but they just might survive, get the supplies, and free the Omegas who were being held to be sold. When Basel gave the all-clear, Weston made quick work of picking the lock on the back door.

He held it open for Leandro and said, “Let’s get to work before more of those assholes show up.”

They would need to contact Oxley, but Weston wanted to load all the supplies in case the enemy had a way of listening in. Walkie-talkies weren’t exactly secure, but they were all they had.

Just like before, Weston took the medicine cabinet, and Leandro raided the supply closet. They hadn’t even loaded half of it when all hell broke loose, as apparently one entrance to the safe room had been in the clinic's basement.

Gunfire erupted from inside as Weston was putting boxes in the truck. His heart stopped as he heard Leandro’s pained cry. Fuck.

Not bothering to alert Basel, since it was hard to miss hearing the guns going off, Weston raced inside with his own gun already in his hand. If they harmed his Omega, Weston planned on making them pay by taking them apart piece by piece. With that thought in mind, he had a knife in his left hand with the blade tucked into his sleeve, making it impossible to see, especially since there was zero doubt whoever was in there would concentrate more on the gun he held.

Skidding to stop, he felt his breathing all but stop as his heart dropped into his stomach, for there on the floor lay Leandro, blood pooling out from underneath him. The only good news was it wasn’t a huge amount, but that could be because he was already dead and so his heart was no longer pumping.

He glared at the three Alphas that stood there with their weapons now trained on Weston. “For your sake, he better not be dead.”

All three smirked at him, as if they weren’t at all worried about his implied threat. “I think you’re missing the fact that there are three of us and only one of you.”

“Wrong asshole.” Even as Weston said the words, a bullet tore through the Alpha stupid enough to think he had the upper hand, spraying blood out over his friends before he thudded sightlessly to the ground.

Basel’s gun was already on the second Alpha, and he too soon joined his friend. When the third guy tried to dive out of the way, Weston shot him right through the forehead, as he was close enough to easily make that shot.

He completely ignored the bodies as he dropped to pull Leandro into his arms and check for a pulse. He became lightheaded when he felt the steady beat beneath his fingers.

“Fuck, that hurt,” Leandro hoarsely cried out. “I can’t believe that asshole shot me in the leg.”

Laying his Omega back on the ground, Weston sliced through Leandro’s pant leg so he could look at the damage. He’d never been so relieved to see that it was a through and through. Since he wasn’t gushing blood, he assumed no major arteries were hit. Leandro would just need time to heal. Well, a few stitches. Good thing they were in a fully stocked veterinary clinic.

While he’d been checking Leandro’s wound, Basel had moved the Alphas to the basement door and placed them in front of it hoping to stop anyone else from surprising them. “I’m going to contact Oxley and the others and see if they’re done loading up so they can come help.” He eyed the wound. “I know some basics and can probably stitch him, but we really need to consider bringing someone with a medical background from now on.”

Weston completely agreed.

### CHAPTER 13

“Fuck,” Leandro yelled. “Are you trying to kill me or help me?” he asked of Basel, who was in the process of stitching up the hole in his leg.

Basel rolled his eyes. “Stop being such a drama queen, you big baby.”

“Hey,” he cried out as the needle went into his skin for what had to have been the hundredth time. Yeah, he knew he was exaggerating, but it fucking hurt. “You try being shot and see how you feel.”

Basel let out a sigh of what could only have been called disgust. “I have been shot. Six times so far. You don’t live out west with Alphas trying to kidnap you without being in danger. Twice my father had to dig the bullet out. Talk about pain. That was like torture.”

Grumbling that no one seemed to give a damn he was in pain, Leandro whined. “We are surrounded by pain killers. Is there a reason you couldn’t have given me something before you started?”

Weston, who had been holding his hand through the whole thing, reminded him, “Because we aren’t out of danger yet and the last thing I want is for you to be either too loopy or knocked out to defend yourself.”

He got it, he really did, but there should have been something he could have taken to help numb things. Having a needle jabbed into him repeatedly was almost worse than being shot.

“Fine. But as soon as we find somewhere safe to hole up, I want my ass knocked out, got it?” he told them both.

Weston bit his lip as if he were trying not to smile. Basel, on the other hand, didn't bother as he laughed at Leandro. “You knew the entire trip was dangerous. I'm afraid until we're safely back home you're shit out of luck.”

That wasn't what Leandro wanted to hear. He just wanted to get the hell out of that stupid town and head home. “Did you find the Omegas?” He sure as hell hoped so, because there was no way he was walking around to try to find them.

“Oxley and Kelce did,” Weston told him. “Some are in terrible shape. I'm not sure how we're going to get them home when there is no room in the bed of either truck. We're going to have to be creative.”

“I suppose it was too much to ask that they have transportation.” The fact was, a car or truck was the only easy way to get them out of there without them having to exert energy. “It will be a tight fit, but we can get five in the cab of each truck and if we put them on top of the tarps to protect the supplies, we should be able to get them home without causing them too much more pain.” He hoped.

Weston shook his head. “Our truck is filled beyond the bed of the truck. The tarp being tied down tightly is the only way to keep the supplies from falling out. And yes, we should be able to fit five people, possibly six in the cab of the trucks, but there ended up being twenty Omegas plus all of us.”

He hated the thought of it, but if it meant helping those poor Omegas, Leandro would do it. “I could ride behind Oxley or Kelce on their horse. That would give them another spot in the truck.”

Basel laughed hysterically. “Are you fucking kidding me? You can't stop crying and

yelling as I just stitched you. There is no way you would last on the back of a horse.”

He was most likely right, but Leandro wasn't about to leave any of the Omegas behind.

“Actually,” Oxley said, as he came through the open back door. “We found a wagon with four horses. I'm guessing they belonged to the Alphas when they weren't able to transport Omegas along the river. It's not in great shape, but hopefully, it will do the trick.”

Relieved they could bring the Omegas to Sanctuary, Leandro sat up with Weston's help. “Good. Then let's load everyone up. The sooner we get out of here, the less likely we'll run into the Alphas who have gone to sell...” He couldn't say it. It was just too much to think about when he was already weak from getting shot.

Weston stood up, then bent down and lifted him into his arms. “I agree. We need to get the hell out of here.” Then he turned to Kelce, who had been helping to calm the Omegas they'd found. “Are the ones most injured well enough to transport?”

Kelce tilted his hand back and forth. “They definitely could use more rest and not a strenuous trip, but if it gets them away from being taken again, I think they would rather chance to get out of here.”

“We found pallets of bottled water and some food in the safe room. We loaded as much as we could into the wagon and the trucks to keep them fed and hydrated.” That was the best news Griggs could have given them.

Those Omegas were already weak as the Alphas had barely fed them in order to stop them from possibly running away. Fifteen minutes later, they had everyone who needed to lie down because they literally couldn't keep themselves upright in the wagon's bed with blankets they'd pilfered from some homes around them.

Everyone else got into the trucks and they were off. Each minute that ticked by was both a relief and nerve-wracking. They had no clue when the Alphas might come back. As they weren't able to move quickly with the massive potholes along the road, it seemed as if they would never get far enough away to be relatively safe.

They were all on edge as they made their way up the mountain. Leandro breathed a small sigh of relief once they'd crested the hill, but they were far from safe. The night would soon be upon them. It would be risky, but they were going to push on. With the lights of the two trucks, they put the wagon in between the vehicles to help them see the road.

But to try to stay somewhat safe from debris and holes, they moved even slower. It wouldn't help if they wrecked.

By the next night, they were all exhausted, especially Weston, Griggs, Oxley, Basel, and Kelce, who were either driving a truck, the wagon, or riding the horses. They all needed a break. Leandro just wished they had put more distance between them and Sandpoint.

They found a service road to pull off the main road. They drove at least a mile into the woods. Kelce and Oxley had gone back to do their best to cover their tracks, while the rest of them set up tents and bedding. Those who had been riding in the wagon slept there, but the rest of them doubled and tripled up in the tents they'd brought.

Leandro wasn't entirely certain how, but somehow he found himself in a tent with Weston, curled up in the man's strong arms. Not long ago, he would have demanded to move to another tent with Omegas, but after all they'd been through, he craved the feeling of the Alpha wrapped around him, keeping him safe and warm.

"I was so scared when I heard that gun go off," Weston whispered as his lips brushed

Leandro's. "I thought for certain I'd lost you when I saw you on the ground with blood seeping from your body."

Leandro, who'd had his back to Weston's chest, turned to face him. "I was scared, too. I know I haven't exactly given you much of a chance since we met, but after getting to know you, I..." He had no idea how to say what he was feeling. A part of him was terrified to admit it, but even more, he had never really felt this way about anyone and was having a difficult time finding the words to describe it.

Lips brushed his lightly in a barely-there kiss. "I love you, kitten. I know you probably don't feel the same way, and I know you may never feel it. I will never push you to love me back, but I wanted you to know."

Leandro's heart sped up, and he swore butterflies were flapping wildly in his stomach as he gazed into those gray eyes that had a way of making him feel safe and cared for. "It's not that I don't have feelings, but I don't even know what love is. My Omega dad had tried to show me affection, but most of the time, it got one of us beaten or ridiculed, so we learned to never say it or even show it. Hell, until we moved to Sanctuary and Ford found Lowen and Coleson found Renzo, I was positive the emotion didn't exist."

"I know, kitten." Weston gave him another barely-there kiss that was more about affection than anything else. "I mean, I don't understand how anyone could treat their family like that, but I get that you went through hell growing up. I just hope you will let me stay in your life in whatever manner you're comfortable with because I would be sad to not get to spend time with you."

Tears he hadn't expected sprang into Leandro's eyes when he thought about not being around Weston. "I would be sad, too," he admitted.

With his head tucked under Weston's chin, they fell asleep in each other's arms with



smiles on their faces.

### CHAPTER 14

It had taken a week for them to meet up with the other team. They had found a lot of parts that Ford needed, as well as some tools and building supplies that were still in good shape. Not that it was that difficult to get building materials when they just had to find a home or two in good enough shape to tear down, but there were some things like nails, screws, and bags of concrete that had also been needed.

During that time, Leandro had stuck to Weston's side like glue, and he admitted to himself just how much he craved the way his Omega seemed to gravitate toward him constantly. The only time that wasn't the case was when Leandro checked on the Omegas they rescued.

It hadn't been surprising that they were skittish of the Alphas after all they'd been through. Hell, Weston was surprised they had willingly come with them after being treated as nothing more than slaves to be used and abused however the Alphas had wanted.

Then again, considering how weak and malnourished they were, striking out on their own would only get them recaptured or possibly killed. It was by silent agreement that none of the Alphas would go near them. Basel had taken over driving the wagon to keep them as calm as possible. Oxley made certain to keep as close to them as possible without scaring them, but he was in charge of protecting the wagon in case of an attack.

The two groups pushed as hard as they could to get back to Sanctuary as quickly as they could. They were relatively certain they were safe from the Alphas at Sandpoint,

but that didn't mean there weren't others that might find them. It meant long days of driving. They started each morning just as dawn lit the sky and usually kept going until it became impossible to see the road without their lights on.

Exhaustion was a living, breathing thing for all of them, and they were almost giddy when they spotted the signs for home. Weston could finally take a real breath as a group of riders rode out from town to greet them. The escort was an added relief, especially since it would still take several more hours to arrive.

“Do you think we really got away from those Alphas at Sandpoint?” Leandro asked, tension still straining his voice as he glanced behind them.

As much as Weston would like to reassure him, the fact was, with two loaded-down trucks and a wagon, there was no way for them to hide their tracks, especially since most of the roadways were more dirt than asphalt. And once the two groups had met up, there was zero doubt they would have been easy to follow.

“I hope so.” Weston reached over and entwined their fingers reassuringly. “Based on what the Alpha we had captured told us, there hadn't been that many who'd left. Even if they tracked us, there's no way they could ever hope to attack us and win.”

That much, at least, was the truth.

“What if they gather more Alphas?” Leandro had a good point. Even though it was more often than not a world where it was every man for himself, Sanctuary had a lot of Omegas. Just like they had once before, Alphas would be tempted to band together to capture as many who lived there as possible.

“I honestly don't know,” Weston admitted. “We've already been through it once and came out the other side. Yes, we lost people, and that sucked, but I believe we will make it through again if they come after us.”

Leandro gave a nod but then stared out the window for a while. It wasn't hard to tell his mind was working on the problem of another battle and how to keep everyone safe. It was why Weston wasn't surprised that after thirty minutes, Leandro turned to him again.

"We need a better alarm and defenses. Let's face it, we were lucky last time." His Omega wasn't wrong. They'd been damned lucky.

The fact was, the Alphas had thought they'd stream roll over a town that was mostly made up of Omegas. That had been their biggest downfall because most of the Omegas who lived in Sanctuary had spent their whole lives west of the Mississippi River and knew how to survive. That also meant they knew how to shoot a gun, use a knife, and come up with a strategy for the best way to defeat the enemy.

"How, exactly, are we supposed to do that?" Weston asked. "As far as an alarm to give us warning, the only way to accomplish that would be to send people several miles out to scout the area, but that would put them at risk."

Leandro let out a little huff of frustration. "I know that, but without some sort of warning, we might not see them coming until it's too late."

He had a point, but Weston didn't have a solution. "We need to set up a meeting to come up with some way of not putting people at risk by sending them out to scout, yet watch for anyone planning on doing the town harm."

That said, he didn't think any of them would be any good without some much needed rest. "But first, we need a couple of days to recover. You might be mending quickly, but I would feel better if Renzo or Maxon looked at your leg. And let's face it, we're tired and drained. We need a few good meals, some sleep, and hopefully an actual bed to sleep in."

Leandro smiled at him and nodded. “Yeah, you’re right. But I will talk to Coleson and Ford about setting something up in a couple of days.”

Weston brought Leandro’s hand to his mouth and kissed the back of it. “Sounds like a plan, my love.”

A soft blush crept up Leandro’s neck and into his cheeks at the endearment. Weston would never tire of telling his Omega how much he loved him. Nor would he tire of seeing that sweet pink stain suffice his face.

They arrived just as darkness fell, but the lights from several street lamps helped them to see without issue. Plus, they had fixed their roads, so there were no deep ruts they had to avoid.

“Leandro. Weston, good to see you,” Coleson called out when they stopped before the medical clinic. The other team had gone to Ford’s shop to unload.

“Hey, Coleson.” Leandro might be on the mend, but he was still having difficulty moving around, especially when he’d been sitting for a long period, so Weston quickly got out and went around to help him out.

“What happened?” Coleson exclaimed. “Are you hurt?”

“Shot, actually,” Leandro deadpanned.

The moment Maxon and Renzo heard that, they switched from grabbing boxes from the back of the truck to ushering Leandro into the hospital and putting him on a gurney.

“Guys, I appreciate the concern, but there are a bunch of Omegas we rescued that need medical attention too. We did our best to get them enough food and water, but

they were severely malnourished.”

“I’ve got Leandro,” Renzo told Maxon. “Since they are probably traumatized, why don’t you head up and set them up for triage? We’ll see what we can do to help them.”

Maxon turned on his heel and headed back outside while Weston helped Renzo push the gurney into an exam room. When Renzo got out a pair of scissors after hearing Leandro had been shot in the leg, he was stopped when the Omega put a hand on his arm. “Look, Doc, I appreciate you wanting to get to the injury, but it happened two weeks ago, and I already lost one pair of pants to it. I would prefer we not cut up another pair.”

Weston, who was used to helping Leandro undress to check the wound and change the dressing, automatically started taking off his pants. He hadn’t missed the way Renzo’s eyebrows practically rose high enough to touch his hairline at the move, but he wasn’t about to apologize for helping his Omega.

“How is he?” Ford raced into the room, clearly having heard from one of the others and ran all the way from his workshop.

Leandro rolled his eyes, but it was Weston who answered since he’d noticed his Omega got a bit snarky when he was fussed over too much. “He’s fine. I promise. It happened two weeks ago, and Basel stitched him up. He’s doing better walking, but after sitting in the truck all day, he’s a bit stiff, which makes it more difficult to get around until things loosen up.”

“Thank fuck,” Ford breathed out as he practically sagged against the gurney in relief. “What happened and where did all those Omegas come from?”

“Fucking Alphas were basically starving them to keep them from being able to run

and then selling them,” Leandro spat out in disgust. “Which is another problem. There is a chance the remaining Alphas might follow us. We’re going to need to come up with a plan in case they do.”

“How many?” Coleson asked as he walked in at that moment.

“We can’t be certain,” Weston admitted. “We captured an Alpha, who told us a group went down the river to sell off some of their Omegas. He told us ten Alphas went but we do not know if he was telling the truth. Plus, if they are like the last group of Alphas that came after us, once they see how big our town is, they most likely would try to find reinforcements.”

“Which will give us time to come up with a strategy.” Coleson headed back out the door, but not before calling over his shoulder at them. “You all look like shit. I want everyone who went to rest for a few days, and then we’ll regroup and figure out how to handle whatever is headed our way.”

“Your wound looks fine, but I need to remove the stitches,” Renzo told Leandro. “Then you and Weston can get a hot meal and sleep.” Renzo pointed at both of them. “Coleson’s right. You are to relax and do nothing for forty-eight hours, got it?”

When Leandro opened his mouth to clearly argue, Weston clamped a hand over it and said, “We’ll do as recommended.”

There was no way he was going to give up the chance to hold Leandro on a nice, soft bed for the next two days. He just hoped his Omega agreed to continue sleeping with him.

### CHAPTER 15

Leandro glared at Weston for daring to speak for him. Okay, yes, they definitely needed to rest, but two days seemed excessive. Then again, he had to admit he was bone tired. Like he could hardly keep his eyes open exhausted. If it hadn't been for his stomach growling like a rabid dog, he probably would have skipped eating and headed right for bed.

Worse, the thought of not sleeping in Weston's arms left an ache deep inside him, and he didn't want to contemplate what it meant. So, instead of fighting about it, he went with Weston to the man's house.

They kept the meal simple as they worked together to make some spaghetti. It wasn't the fanciest fare, but it was filling, something they both needed, which was proven when they'd each had two large helpings. But by the time they'd cleaned the kitchen and washed the dishes, Leandro was positive he was about to fall over on his feet.

He was just too damn tired to keep his eyes open for a moment longer. When Weston took his hand and led them up the stairs, Leandro followed and did his best to ignore the slight thrill that went through him at the simple touch.

He was feeling it more and more each time they came in contact with each other. All they were doing was holding hands for goodness' sake and yet a shiver went through him, landing in his groin, causing his dick to twitch in interest. Never in his life had that happened.

Don't get him wrong, he'd given himself plenty of orgasms in his life, but he'd never



had his body react to another in that manner. They both went into the bathroom, taking turns brushing their teeth using the toilet. After a month on the road, especially once Leandro had been injured, it wasn't as if they hadn't seen each other naked plenty of times.

And with both of them as exhausted as they were, Leandro wasn't the least bit concerned that something would happen between them at that point. His dick might have twitched at Weston's touch, but there was no way either of them could do anything about it when they were both practically asleep already.

Weston pulled back the covers, and they both climbed in. Once they were settled with Leandro as the little spoon, the Alpha covered them both back up and they sank onto the mattress with a contented sigh. "Good night, kitten," Weston said groggily as he gently kissed Leandro's temple, as he had every night they'd started sharing a bed.

"Night," Leandro barely got out as sleep took him under while safely tucked in Weston's arms, snug and warm.

Leandro had no clue how long they'd slept, as his eyes blinked several times against the brightness of the sun coming through the windows. They really should have thought to close the curtains, but neither of their brains had been working when they went to bed.

Snuggling closer to Weston's heat, Leandro considered trying to go back to sleep when he felt it. A hard cock pressed between them. He should have been repulsed and scrambled out of bed, but he wasn't. If anything, he was intrigued.

Wiggling his body to try to press even closer, and that's when he felt it. Slick was dripping out of Leandro's ass. He was in heat. Was his reaction to Weston's hard dick because of that, or was he really wanting the Alpha after getting to know him the past month?

He didn't know, and he had to admit to being afraid to think about it too hard. Before he could decide what he should do, he felt Weston's body stiffen behind him even as he let out a moan of desire.

"Fuck, kitten, you smell divine." Firm lips placed several kisses behind Leandro's ear and down his neck before making their way up again until they brushed the shell of his ear. "But if you don't want this, you need to tell me now so I can leave before neither one of us can stop."

That was the biggest question of all. Did he want this or was it just hormones dictating the needs of his body?

When he pressed back against that hard cock again, Weston flipped Leandro over until they were facing each other. "As much as I want nothing more than to sink into your body and make love to you over and over again, I need you to use your words, love."

Leandro shook his head a couple of times as his throat constricted, making it impossible to speak. So, when those gray eyes saddened as they looked right at him before Weston rolled to get out of bed, Leandro somehow found the strength to speak.

"Wait." His hand was holding onto Weston's forearm, stopping him from leaving. "It's not that I don't want this. It's just I don't know..." Fuck, why did he have such a difficult time voicing his thoughts? It hadn't been a problem for him since coming to Sanctuary, but suddenly it was as if the words just wouldn't come out.

"Okay, what do you know?" Weston asked. "Are you attracted to me?"

"Fuck yes," he breathed out, as if he just couldn't hold it in any longer. That surprised him. Not so much that he finally had expressed himself, but how strong the emotions

for this Alpha actually were. “I’ve never once felt any kind of physical or emotional reaction to another man,” Leandro told him honestly.

It was as if once the dam had broken he couldn’t hold back any longer. “I don’t know if my hormones are pushing me into accepting all these feelings I have for you, but for the first time in my life, I want to find out. Yeah, I might regret it later, I can’t even deny that, but after watching Ford and Lowen or Coleson and Renzo, I actually want to know how it feels to be someone’s entire world.”

There was a huge part of him that couldn’t believe he was actually saying any of it. Yet, he was tired of denying the emotions he felt for this man...this Alpha. “That said, we both know I’m stubborn, pig-headed, and determined to live life on my terms. I’m never going to be easy to love, but I’m hoping want to see if we can have the type of relationship where we can trust each other above all others.”

It was almost as if he were having an out-of-body experience as he heard himself be open and vulnerable in a way he’d never been before. Not even with his friends. Leandro had a fear of trusting anyone, but with Weston, he truly wanted to try.

Surging up onto his knees, Leandro scooted until he was sitting on the Alpha’s lap. He pressed their mouths together in a consuming kiss that left them both breathless, yet he could see Weston was still holding back. “Please give us a chance.”

Those gray eyes stared into his as if Weston were reading his very soul before he gave a curt nod and pulled Leandro closer for another searing kiss. His toes curled as he pressed as close to that hard body as possible.

One arm wrapped around his waist like a band of steel, while the other hand went to the back of Leandro’s head to position him so Weston could deepen the kiss. Need poured through him as their cocks rubbed together through their underwear and more slick poured out of Leandro’s ass as his body prepared for the Alpha to claim.

A growl rumbled from deep within Weston's chest and suddenly Leandro found himself on his back with the large Alpha pinning him to the mattress. "Mine," Weston demanded as he claimed his lips once again, and for the first time in his entire life, Leandro found he wanted to belong to an Alpha.

Oh, he knew out of bed he'd continue to assert his own dominance over his life causing the two of them to butt heads, but in the Alpha's arms as they rutted against one another, Leandro was happy to have been right where he was. Nor was he ever planning on leaving.

### CHAPTER 16

Weston had believed he would never convince Leandro he loved him as he deserved. He knew he was most likely making a mistake by going too fast with the prickly Omega, but after being offered his very dreams on a silver platter, he couldn't find the strength to walk away.

His need for his Omega was all-consuming and Weston wanted nothing more than to dive headfirst into whatever relationship he could get with Leandro. That said, he feared he would end up driving Leandro away by giving into his baser needs, but try as he might, in that moment, Weston just hadn't cared.

Every cell in his body was craving his Omega. He needed Leandro more than his next breath and Weston planned on proving to his sweet, yet feisty Omega that they needed each other to make their lives complete. He just hoped Leandro wouldn't run the first chance he got because he had no doubt, the Omega's heat was driving him to admit to things he never would have before.

His hands roamed over all that creamy skin that he'd had the honor of touching. It had amazed him when he'd helped change the dressing on his leg to realize Leandro had very little to nothing over his body. Even after four weeks on the road, he hadn't grown any actual beard. There had been some hair on his face, but it grew in patches instead of one cohesive beard.

It made him silky smooth, and Weston had become addicted each time he'd helped Leandro not only with the bullet wound but also when he'd needed help to change clothes because his leg had hurt too much. He was certain he could become addicted

to running his fingers over all that smooth skin.

And damn, but the scent of his slick as his body prepared itself for Weston had infused into his nose and lungs, causing Weston's cock to throb painfully as the need to claim the Omega was all he could think about. And his taste had Weston's mouth watering for even more, as he devoured that luscious mouth before moving down his neck, inhaling each inch of him to imprint his aroma until he would know his Omega anywhere.

Needy little whines poured from Leandro as Weston continued down his body, nipping at his nipples before soothing the sting with his tongue. When he got down to that slim, leaking prick, he glanced up to find Leandro's eyes closed as he writhed on the bed while his hips thrust up as if encouraging him to suck on his hard length.

Not one to disappoint, he held down his Omega's hips, lapped over his slit, gathering up each bead of fluid that was dripping from it. Salty and sweet, just like Leandro. His Omega was perfect as he sucked him down to the root.

Loving the shout of pleasure, he had been ready for Leandro's seed to flood his mouth as he savored every single drop. They hadn't talked about it, but Weston had assumed Leandro had been a virgin since he had claimed several times he'd never been attracted to anyone before.

That first blow job tended to be overwhelming, and he'd known Leandro wouldn't have lasted long. But that was fine with Weston. It just meant he could continue to stroke that slim body and get his Omega worked up all over again.

Once he'd cleaned that softening dick, Weston had wasted no time moving further south. He wanted to taste Leandro's essence, and he planned to make a feast of him. He hadn't skipped on a millimeter of that delectable body as he took each ball into his mouth before moving onto his taint and lifting those hips high into the air to get his

first view of Leandro's pink pucker.

Damn, that was a pretty sight which his cock agreed with as it leaked like a sieve in anticipation of being buried deep inside Leandro's body until no one, not even his Omega, could deny who he belonged to.

Lying flat on the mattress, he leaned over and inhaled that sweet scent that was all Leandro. Then he buried his face into the crease and licked a strip along his hole, lapping up the slick that was still pouring from his Omega's body. It was sheer heaven, although he imagined being deep inside of him would feel even better.

"Oh fucking hell," Leandro cried out even as he pushed his hips down as he worked to get as close to Weston's mouth as possible.

More than happy to pleasure his Omega, Weston gave him exactly what he wanted as he pushed, licked, and nipped the ring around his hole first before spearing his tongue as deep as it would go. When Leandro was pleading with him for more, Weston slid a finger inside alongside his tongue to further open him up.

The good thing about Omegas, the slick they produced not only eased the way for their Alpha's cock, but it helps to loosen the muscles. Because this was his kitten's first time, Weston was intent on making certain he was as ready as for his length as possible.

The last thing he wanted was to cause Leandro any pain, and Weston wasn't exactly a small guy.

Fingers threaded through his hair, tugging on the strands to get his attention as Leandro cried out, "Please Weston. I need you."

It was the sweetest sound he'd ever heard. Surging up that slim body, he kissed his

Omega deeply as he placed the head of his dick at Leandro's entrance. "I've got you, love," he promised as he stared down at the most enticing sight he'd ever seen.

The blue of those eyes had nearly disappeared behind blown pupils while Leandro's head thrashed back and forth as he was going out of his mind. Hands gripped the sheets beneath them even as that lithe body arched up as if Leandro was determined to get Weston inside of him.

Erotic didn't even begin to describe Leandro like that. It was a look he planned to elicit as often as possible while he drove his Omega to new heights with each coupling.

Pushing against the ring of muscles, they both sighed when Weston breached that tight hole. Heat, unlike anything he'd ever known, surrounded Weston's length, squeezing him with Leandro's tightness. It was everything and more than he'd ever hoped to experience with this amazing man who had captured Weston's heart so easily.

Everything from his prickliness to his independence as he insisted he could take care of himself, to his sweet and caring nature—even if he had a hard time admitting that about himself—drew Weston to him. He'd been helpless but to love Leandro deep in his soul.

He knew they would still have a long and bumpy road ahead of them, as Leandro would most likely fight against the feelings he had for Weston, but it would be worth it to have his Omega by his side. He wanted his kitten to be his heart and soul. It wasn't about controlling Leandro or thinking he could tell him what he could or couldn't do. Weston loved that his Omega would scratch, claw, and bite to prove he was worthy of standing on his own two feet.

No. He just wanted Leandro to want to be with Weston, just as much as he wanted to



be with his Omega. There was zero doubt in Weston's mind they belonged to each other.

Their bodies moved as if they'd been doing this for years instead of it having been the first time. Feeling his orgasm coming, Weston bent down to kiss his sweet Omega in a searing kiss that amplified their feelings at that moment as he thrust deep into the body that had been made just for him.

"Come for me, Leandro," he called out as Weston's movements sped up while he chased his own release.

A cry echoed around the room as Leandro held onto Weston's biceps as if he needed his Alpha to ground him to the earth. Two thrusts later, Weston froze, his cock as deep as it would go inside his Omega.

His seed spilled into his love's body, filling him up even as Leandro still came between their bodies, coating their abdomens and chests with fluid.

Sweat beaded up along their bodies as they breathed heavily while trying to come down from such a powerful release. If this was what sex was like with Leandro, Weston feared they'd never leave the bedroom again.

### CHAPTER 17

Heat draped against his back. A warm weight was pressed over his waist, trailing across the front of his body all the way to his left over his heart. Leandro did not know what was causing it, but he honestly wasn't certain he cared at that moment. Even though he was relatively warm, he could still feel the coolness of the room.

What was odder was the smile he wore and the happiness that suffused him. It was as if bubbles were forming deep inside of him, pushing upward so they could break free of his mouth with laughter.

For the life of him, he had no clue why he felt this way, until a memory of firm lips on his in a kiss that was pure love. Traces of sensation from strong, calloused hands trailed over his body, eliciting every ounce of pleasure from him before teeth, tongue, and mouth followed that same path, sending him higher and higher until Leandro was shaking with lust. Begging for relief from the onslaught even as he wanted more.

His heat had ravaged his body, only to be quenched with Weston's touch. He'd never known sex could be that all-consuming. Nor had he ever imagined an Alpha would take the time to worship his body. No, not just an Alpha, but Weston.

Slowly, so as not to wake him, Leandro turned around to face the man he was falling for. Maybe. Honestly, he hadn't been kidding when he'd told Weston he had no idea what love was or if he could feel it. All he knew was that if he could, it would be Weston he'd fall in love with.

Memorizing each of his facial features until they were completely committed to

memory, Leandro decided it was time he was the bold one. Lifting the blanket just enough for him to scoot down his Alpha's body, he didn't stop until he was even with Weston's dick. The one that had given him so much pleasure. It was time to return the favor.

He may not know what he was doing, but he remembered when Weston had licked and sucked on his cock. He might not be perfect, but Leandro hoped Weston would appreciate the effort.

Leaning in, he breathed in his Alpha's delicious, musky scent. Damn, he could become addicted. Then he stuck out his tongue and lapped over his slit.

He felt Weston's dick twitch and lengthen as he continued to lick from the tip to the base. By the time he'd done that several times, his cock was hard and long. Now that he had seen it up close, Leandro did not know how it had fit inside his body. It didn't seem possible for something that long and thick not to have torn him apart.

Opening his mouth, he put his lips around the glans, testing to see how it would feel and taste. It was a bit awkward on his jaw, but he definitely could get used to giving his Alpha as much pleasure as he'd received when Weston had done it to him. That was especially true when he heard his Alpha gasp in pleasure.

Obviously, someone was now awake. Not that it mattered. Leandro wasn't about to be deterred from making Weston come in his mouth as hard as Leandro had.

Muffled moans were easily heard through the blanket as he slowly took more of that thick length into his mouth. It wasn't until it hit his throat that he felt himself gag and pulled back. Unable to get more of that delicious cock in his mouth, Leandro tried the next best thing and wrapped a hand around the base, then continued to suck.

Hands threaded through the strands of his hair as if Weston desperately needed to

hold on to him. Encouraged by his Alpha's response, he continued to bob up and down, meeting his hand with each stroke.

His jaw ached, but Leandro wasn't about to let go of his prize. He wanted to feel Weston flood his mouth as hard as Leandro had for his Alpha's.

The thick cock throbbed. "Kitten," Weston cried out in warning.

Not pulling off, he welcomed the jets of fluid that coated his tongue and mouth, swallowing every single drop.

He rested his forehead against Weston's thigh as his Alpha sucked in several breaths to get his body back under control. It only took about a minute before strong hands gripped him under his shoulders to pull Leandro up to meet those firm lips in a heated kiss.

"Not that I'm ever going to complain about having your mouth on any part of my body, but what was that for?" Weston asked him as they turned on their sides to stare at one another.

"I wanted to thank you for taking care of me last night," Leandro told him. It had meant the world to him, especially since Weston had been willing to walk away if that was what Leandro had wanted.

One of Weston's eyebrows arched up. "Just last night?"

Leandro frowned. "Yeah, you know, while I was in heat."

That had Weston grinning like a loon. "Love, you were in heat for three days, not one night. I swear, you were insatiable. I barely had time to run downstairs to get water and food. After that first night, the guys would leave trays at our door."

Leandro couldn't stop the groan of dismay that the other Alphas living there heard him. Hiding his face in the crook of Weston's neck, he mumbled, "I'm never going to leave this room and face them again."

That had Weston chuckling again, and he stroked up and down his back in comfort. "I have to say, I wouldn't mind that, but I don't think you'd last long cooped up in the room."

He might have been right, but it wasn't helping Leandro's embarrassment in the slightest.

"I promise you, kitten, I'll protect you from too much teasing," Weston vowed. "But I also know them and there's no way they won't say something."

"That isn't helping," he grumbled as he swatted Weston's chest lightly.

"The best thing to do is just own it," Weston told him. "Sure, they may tease, but they only do it because they count you as a friend."

That might be true, but Leandro also knew there was no way he was going to stop from blushing. "Fine, but do you think we can do that another day?"

Weston grinned at him before taking his mouth in a kiss that had Leandro's toes curling and his dick hardening. "I think I have a way to make you forget they are even here."

Fortunately for Leandro, Weston was really, really good at making him forget anyone else existed.

### CHAPTER 18

If he wasn't so damn happy to have Leandro by his side, leaning against Weston, he was fairly certain he would have had it with the ridiculous meeting to discuss both defenses and the ability to watch for potential invaders. Each idea was more ridiculous than the previous one. Although he had to admit, one of the first suggestions for defenses had been to get rid of all Alphas, since they posed the biggest threat.

The Alphas in the room had taken offense since they'd been working tirelessly helping to shore up buildings, help plant and harvest crops at Lowen's farm, as well as teach the Omegas to defend themselves if they had come under attack. Of course, when that was mentioned, several of the Omegas claimed the Alphas only brought that up in order to threaten the Omegas of Sanctuary to keep them in line.

From there, it went downhill, especially when Coleson insisted they move on to ideas for watching for the Alphas headed their way. One Omega said every single person should spend eight hours a day with the eyesight of another person and surround the town. When Weston brought up that it wasn't workable if they planned on continuing to keep the buildings of Sanctuary intact, he was told his opinion shouldn't matter since he was an Alpha and the town was built for Omegas.

Arguments broke out mostly between Omegas as the Alphas, mostly, decided it would be better to stay out of it. Finally, Coleson gave a shrill whistle and ended the meeting, since it was obvious nothing would come of it. The following day, Coleson called another meeting, but this time with just those who started Sanctuary: Lowen, who had lived there his whole life, Weston, Oxley, and Renzo.

“It is obvious something has to be done to change things,” Coleson announced after they’d arrived and the doors were shut and locked.

“And not just about defending Sanctuary, either,” Ford muttered.

Coleson and the group who turned Sanctuary into a refuge all nodded their agreement. “It’s obvious there are quite a few Omegas who don’t trust the Alphas who live here.”

Weston opened his mouth to object, but Leandro, who was standing up front with Coleson and Ford, lifted his hand to stop him. “We know it has nothing to do with any of you. You’ve proven yourselves and we appreciate the sacrifices you’ve made to do it. But it doesn’t change the fact that we have to get the others onboard or we’re going to have a mutiny on our hands.”

“What exactly do you propose we do?” Oxley asked. “We’ve busted our asses every single day to keep this town not only running and safe but to keep rebuilding to provide anyone else who comes here for protection.”

It wasn’t as if they could magically wave a wand to get everyone to like them. Weston had assumed if they helped around town and worked just as hard, if not at times harder, as everyone else, the Omegas would realize they could be trusted. Clearly, he’d been wrong.

“We think we should have a celebration of sorts,” Coleson suggested. “It has been some time since we’ve had one, and it is time we honor everything you’ve done to help, including making that long trek for supplies and saving and bringing back those Omegas who had been imprisoned.”

As great as that sounded, Weston doubted it would work. Too many Omegas only thought the worst of them, and he doubted that would change with a party to celebrate

them. If anything, he was fairly certain, it would only make things worse.

But none of the Alphas spoke up, so it was decided that in two weeks, they would do their best to come together and unify as a community.

“As for securing the perimeter,” Ford announced. “I may have come up with a solution, but I’m going to need every mechanically inclined person to help.”

“What exactly would it entail?” Weston asked, especially since he wasn’t exactly great in that area. Brute strength, certainly. Even building and welding, he knew enough to get by. But putting together machines? Yeah, nope. Not happening. The most he had offered was to help Ford move some of the larger metal pieces when he was working to fix another generator at the hydroelectric dam.

Ford pressed his lips together as if trying to hold back a laugh. “Let’s just say you are definitely not the right fit for the job. Since there are still cells in the jail that need locks put on them, I suggest you work on that. Although, eventually, we’ll need to dig ditches to run electric lines, but that won’t be until I can see if we can get everything else in working order.”

Relieved as he’d gotten used to welding the metal together to make the doors of the cells strong enough to keep all prisoners in. Nodding, he listened as Ford told him his plan to gather all the electronic field cameras and something called a GoPro and get them working. He found it fascinating that before the world changed, people used small cameras for security. He had to admit if Ford could get them to work, it would drastically help them know if the enemy was coming.

“That leaves defenses,” Coleson reminded them. “We still don’t have a solid solution, so I want everyone to think about what we can do to stop anyone from getting too close to town easily.”



That would be harder than it seemed. Weston had been traveling for years and seen everything from brick walls, timber walls and fences, but when people were desperate, they were far easier to either climb or destroy than one might think.

Plus, none of them were quick to build. The chain fence was likely the quickest, but that required finding enough fencing to make it happen. In their travels to find other supplies, Weston had seen little of the material.

They would have to come up with another way if they had any hope of at least slowing the enemy down if they came for Sanctuary.

“You ready?” Leandro said as he sat right on Weston’s lap like he’d always belonged there. As far as he was concerned, it was exactly where his Omega was meant to be.

“Where are we going? I thought Coleson wanted me to work on the jail doors today.” It had been what he’d been told that morning when assignments were being handed out before the meeting had been called.

His entire world lit up when Leandro gave him a dazzling smile. “You are, but I thought we could take a break for lunch.”

Weston frowned as he glanced over at the few sandwiches that were still left from the lunch Coleson had brought it. “But we already ate.”

Leandro shrugged. “Yeah, but that was a working lunch. Don’t you think we deserve a little downtime before we get back to work?” Then he leaned in and kissed Weston. “I wonder how we should spend our time?” he asked as he nibbled on Weston’s jaw and made his way to bite down lightly on his earlobe.

Not one to give up the chance for some alone time with his Omega, Weston stood up with his arms around Leandro, who wrapped his legs around Weston’s waist while he

continued to kiss, lick and nibble down his neck.

“You know we have little time.” Weston was working hard to get a lock on each jail door in case they ever needed all of them. He feared it wouldn’t be long before the Alphas came for them. Whether it was the ones from Sandpoint, or others from the ports along one of the rivers who’d heard about them, he did not know, but he wanted to be ready for when they came because he damn well knew they would.

“Leandro leaned back enough to look at Weston. Those blue eyes sparkled with mischief. “Since I’m horny as fuck, I don’t think we’ll need much time, Alpha.”

Refusing to disappoint his Omega, Weston picked up his pace, not stopping until he kicked his bedroom door shut behind them and tossed Leandro onto the mattress. “Get undressed,” he demanded, even as he quickly stripped his own clothes off.

It was crazy to him that ever since Leandro went through his heat, it was as if he just accepted that they were meant to be together and jumped into a relationship with both feet. Weston had to admit, he was one lucky Alpha.

### CHAPTER 19

“Do we have all the food out?” Leandro’s gaze moved over the entire space as they were about to open the doors for the party. It had been too cold to hold it outdoors, so they’d had it in a banquet room in Town Hall. It wasn’t ideal as the room wasn’t meant to hold so many people, but they were determined to make it work.

To do that, they opened a smaller room next to the banquet for the food. They also placed some tables along the hallway in case anyone wanted to sit down and eat, especially the kids, who would have a much harder time holding a plate.

But they also made it easy to eat foods, so those who wanted to mill about and talk could. There was everything from small meatballs on toothpicks to finger sandwiches, charcuterie trays, bacon-wrapped scallops, shrimp and chicken fingers, and French fries for kids. There were several other dishes, but the theme was basically finger foods, although all were speared with toothpicks, so no one had to get their hands greasy.

“Yes.” Coleson’s tone was a mix of frustration and amusement since this had been about the twentieth time Leandro had asked. “And before you ask, the lemonade, punch, iced tea, and water are all also out there. Stop stressing.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” Leandro grumbled. “Everyone has to love Renzo since there are only two doctors in town, while Weston has been dealing with hostile glares and downright insults on a nearly daily basis.”

It sucked that the Alphas of Sanctuary were being treated like the lowest form of

scum, despite working tirelessly to get the town ready for a possible attack. All the while, they were also doing all they could to keep reinforcing buildings so people would have a place of their own if they so choose.

Considering Weston and Leandro were living with Oxley, Griggs, and Raman in a cramped three-bedroom house. It wouldn't have been so terrible, but Leandro was quite vocal during sex and the others felt it was their duty to tease him mercilessly about it.

He wanted to live with Weston with no one else around, especially after he'd woken up the past two days running for the bathroom. He'd never wanted children, like ever. Yet, somehow, the thought of Weston's child growing inside of him was...well exciting. He was practically giddy, which made it difficult to keep his condition from his Alpha, who seemed to always know what Leandro was thinking.

Tomorrow, he had an appointment with Maxon for a pregnancy test. He knew it was probably stupid, but he wanted to be certain before saying anything to Weston. There was no point in getting both of their hopes up if he was wrong.

The party was to start at one and last until nightfall, so people could safely get home. They might have streetlamps but they only kept a few lit since they didn't exactly want to advertise to any Alpha in the vicinity they were there.

By three, it was obvious things were just as strained as he'd feared they would be. Not only had about a third of the Omegas not shown up but there were quite a few who were rude and hostile toward the Alphas. It was bad enough that several of the Alphas left instead of putting up with the Omegas who'd not made bones about not wanting them around.

"Everyone," Coleson called out, but most ignored him. Not willing to put up with their behavior, Leandro stood next to his friend and let out a shrill whistle that

couldn't be ignored.

Once all eyes were on them, Coleson blew out a breath before getting to the heart of the matter. "You know, I do not know what most of the Omegas in this room have gone through. Don't get me wrong, I've heard each of your stories, but I've never known what it was like to be kidnapped, caged, and sold as if I wasn't a human being."

Several of the Omegas murmured heatedly.

"Shut the fuck up, all of you," Leandro yelled. "I get you've had a hard life. I even get that you were traumatized by Alphas out there." Then he pointed to the Alphas in the room. "Yet, none of these men have done anything to you but help. They are partially responsible for getting you out of impossible situations. For bringing you to Sanctuary. This place isn't perfect, but it's better than any other place out there. And these Alphas have done everything in their power to make this place as safe as possible."

"Yet," Coleson added. "We still have a long way to go. But we, including these Alphas, are doing everything in our power to keep you safe and protected. Does that mean we're free from someone coming after us? No. But what I know is they've proven they will fight to the death for us."

"When we decided to find a place like Sanctuary, it was to bring as many Omegas as we could find here in order to build a better world," Ford told them as he joined Leandro and Coleson at the front of the room. "But you are turning it into a world that is like where you came from. You have become those Alphas you hate so much by treating those who are only trying to help as the enemy."

All three of them stared into the eyes of as many in the room as they could before Coleson continued. "It is for this reason you have a choice to make. Either you

welcome everyone deemed safe with open arms or we ask that you leave. You have one week to decide.”

All three of them made their way to the back of the room and out the door, their Alphas following closely behind them.

The decision to do what they had done hadn't been easy, but none of them were okay with anyone being bullied, and that was exactly what was happening to the Alphas of Sanctuary.

They hadn't made it more than twenty-feet from the building when they heard a whoosh. All six spun around as horror filled them when they saw the flames surrounding the building, with more than half the town trapped inside.

With complete disregard to their own safety, Weston and Lowen dashed back into the building, the flames blocking them from view the moment they'd made it through the door. Leandro's heart was in his throat at the thought of losing the man he loved and just as soon as Weston was safely at home, he planned to tell his Alpha just how much he loved him.

But first, they had to get them out of there.

“Hoses,” Coleson yelled as he ran to the fire station where he'd gotten one of the firetrucks in working order since Leandro and the others had left on their trip further west.

Thankfully, it was a truck with its own water tank because they hadn't had time to make the fire hydrants operational yet. But they'd barely pulled up to the Town Hall when gunfire broke out all around them.

Alphas poured in from the surrounding woods. There was no way they were going to

not get shot and try to put out the flames at the same time. Then, as if someone had answered their prayers, those who hadn't attended the party came rushing out of their homes with guns raised and shot back at the Alphas.

It didn't exactly turn the tide on the attack, but it had forced the Alphas back enough for Leandro, Coleson, Ford, and Renzo to start the water and hold the hose on the door, hoping that if they could put out enough of the flames, some of those inside would get out. Their only saving grace was that the building was made of brick, and the fire had been started on the outside.

If they were really lucky, not too many of the inferno would get inside, giving people time to get out. They heard glass breaking as people broke windows and jumped through them to get to safety. Guns were handed out to fight back the Alphas as the four of them worked to get the blaze under control.

Oxley dove through the window with Griggs, Kelce, and Basel. Oxley, Kelce, and Basel raced over to Leandro and Coleson. "Where are they?" they called out above the crackling of the fire.

"The only ones we saw were north of town," Leandro called out. "The same direction we used to come back to Sanctuary."

The three men took off running, each circling around buildings and disappearing into the trees. Griggs, in the meantime, stayed outside the window as Weston handed him Omega after Omega to get them out of there.

It was awe-inspiring to watch as the flames continued to get too close to Griggs. Leandro knew he was being burned in order to help others. Moving one hose to where the Alpha worked, they rained water down on him hoping to keep him safe.

That the Alphas were helping those same Omegas who had been condemning them

for who they were was inspirational. Then again, knowing the men, Leandro wasn't the least bit surprised. Time and time again, they had proved themselves to put others first, just as they were doing at that moment.

He could only hope this would prove once and for all these men, these Alphas, could be trusted. If not, Leandro would kick each and every Omega out of Sanctuary who still thought of them as the enemy.

It took just over twenty minutes to get everyone out. Way too many, including Weston and Griggs, had to go to the hospital to be treated for burns or smoke inhalation. Thankfully, several Omegas who had been there when Weston and Griggs had not only helped save the boat Sanctuary was using to bring Omegas to safety but were also there for the attack that had happened a short time later encouraged them to take a break and go check on their Alphas.

Running for the hospital, Leandro didn't stop until he was in the triage area where Maxon had pointed to a room. His heart sank as tears flowed down his face when he saw Weston covered in gauze.

"He's not as bad as Griggs, but it will still take time for him to heal and he'll most likely have some scarring," Renzo told him even as he worked on another patient. "I gave him a sedative to help with the pain, but he should wake up in the next hour or so."

Leandro gently picked up his hand and lightly kissed the gauze covering it. "I love you, Alpha. Please be okay. I need you too much to lose you." And he meant every single word.

In the end, ten people succumbed to smoke inhalation and died. It hadn't helped that five of them had still been recovering from being imprisoned in Sandpoint. Of the other five, two had been Alphas. They'd been new to the community but had worked



hard to keep the town safe. The other three had gotten in the wrong place at the wrong time and hadn't been able to get to the windows or doors in time.

Sanctuary was in mourning and more determined than ever to get those cameras working, so something like that could never happen again. Their only saving grace had been that the Alphas from Sandpoint hadn't tried to find reinforcements. They'd been greedy when they realized just how many Omegas lived in Sanctuary and had been determined to capture them all for themselves.

Admittedly, with what had been fifteen Alphas, they'd done plenty of damage, but they'd all died for their effort. It had taken Oxley, Basel, and Kelce four days of hunting them down, but they'd found every single one of them and killed them, leaving their bodies where they dropped to rot.

Once the dead had been buried, Leandro had thought the matter of Alphas living in Sanctuary was over, especially since two had died and three were still in the hospital, struggling to recover from both burns and smoke inhalation. Those Alphas that had only had minor injuries had not only dug the graves of those who'd given their lives but had worked tirelessly to pick up the slack of anyone who hadn't been able to go back to work.

They had ten other Alphas that had made Sanctuary their home: Raman, Hap, Maelor, Balik, Milenko, Shabon, Nebro, Leyon, Riza, and Ottar. Some of them had helped to put out the fire with garden hoses, others had been helping to evacuate but fortunately only ended up with minor injuries and some of them had been rushing the worst cases to the hospital. They had all pitched in and since that day; they worked sixteen to twenty hours a day each to do their best to get as much work done as they could while the others recovered.

That should have been enough, right?

Wrong.

There were still those who were grumbling and complaining that the Alphas hadn't saved the townsfolk like had been promised. Which was why, the day after the funerals, Coleson had called a mandatory meeting. Unless the doctor gave permission for someone not to be there because they were incapacitated after the fire, each person either showed, or was told to leave Sanctuary by the end of the day. No exceptions.

It pained Leandro to do it, but they were wheeling Weston and Griggs to confront the town. Leandro and his friends would also stand front and center, making certain everyone knew exactly where they stood when it came to living in Sanctuary.

As they stood there in the meeting hall, packed in like sardines, twenty men they trusted went from building to building to ensure no one tried to cheat and not show up. They found six who hadn't had either of the doctors' permission to skip.

Those six were escorted in and brought up front to stand before Leandro and his friends. Fear mixed with weariness was in their eyes.

Coleson held up his hand, and this time, a hush fell over the room as if no one dared to speak. Smart. Because with how enraged Leandro and Ford were that their Alphas had risked their lives in that fire and people were still talking shit about them, they were both ready to shoot and ask questions later.

"It has been brought to our attention that you were hiding in your rooms instead of attending this meeting. Care to tell me why?" Coleson asked.

"Clearly, even though we were promised the Alphas in town would keep us safe, that didn't happen. You lied, so why should we have to listen to you?" Jovo, an Omega they'd brought back from Sandpoint, announced loudly.

When Leandro started to take a step forward, Weston grabbed his hand from the gurney he was lying on to stop him. He had promised not to get involved right away since his emotions were all over the place, and he was worrying himself sick over his Alpha, but it was nearly impossible not to.

“I resent that remark.” Kelce, who had been in the front of the spectators, stepped forward, got right in Jovo’s face, and pointed a finger at him as if he were about to stab him with it. “I’ve worked side by side with my family to keep all of us safe. You claiming we need Alphas to do that for us is insulting.”

“And weren’t you one of the ones who wanted the Alphas gone?” Halston asked him. “Exactly how many Omegas do you think would have died if they hadn’t been here to help? If I remember right, you went running from the building the moment Weston and Griggs pulled you out. Let me guess, you went to hide instead of helping others.” Sarcasm dripped from his voice as Halston spoke, already knowing the answer.

When Jovo opened his mouth to speak, Coleson stopped him by saying, “The only way this community works is if we help each other, not by running to save ourselves. We buried ten men yesterday, two of whom were Alphas who had stayed behind to get as many people out as possible. Exactly how many people had you saved?”

Jovo’s entire face flamed red at the reprimand, but he wisely kept his mouth shut after that, not that it would help him. The rules had been very clear.

“As mayor of Sanctuary and one of its founding fathers, I banish each of you.” Gasps were heard throughout the room at Coleson’s declaration.

They weren’t kidding about not allowing anyone to bully anyone else, even if that was an Omega picking on an Alpha. Once the six were removed from the room in order to pack their things and taken off Sanctuary property, Coleson addressed the rest of room.

“Typically, we wouldn’t condone asking the injured to do this, but Weston and Griggs offered to make the sacrifice so you could see what they went through to help save those stuck in the Town Hall.” Coleson nodded to Renzo and Leandro, who had insisted he be the one to help Weston.

Gasps, cries of despair, and sobs could be heard when the gauze was removed from them both to show just how much damage had been done to their bodies by staying to assist those inside to get out to safety. “They will heal somewhat, but they will always bear the scars of their sacrifice.” Coleson shook his head at those he was addressing. “I know most of you trust the Alphas in Sanctuary, but I’m here today with the other co-founders to inform you that if we hear one bad word about these men, you will be given thirty minutes to pack your things before you will be forcibly removed from Sanctuary.”

His gaze bore down on everyone in the room. “Are we clear?”

The nine friends held hands in solidarity. In this, they were in total agreement.

### CHAPTER 20

It hurt Weston's heart and soul to discover thirty people had voluntarily left Sanctuary, claiming no Alpha could be trusted. It felt as if he'd let Leandro and Sanctuary down somehow. That he was only just barely able to get out of bed hadn't helped.

He should have been out there helping not only to run the lines for the electricity to the cameras that were being set up around Sanctuary but also working toward finding a better solution to defend the town if it was attacked. Yet, no one had come up with a good solution, including him.

Add to it that Leandro had been acting...well different and Weston felt like a complete and total failure. Not only was he being evasive, but Weston had noticed his Omega barely ate any longer. He claimed his stomach was always in knots with worry.

Even though those pretty blue eyes were constantly filled with anxiety and fear, something about the words hadn't quite rung true. Admittedly, Weston had been in too much pain and sleeping a lot as his body healed to have paid enough attention to what had been happening around him, but once he'd been on the mend, he picked up on every nuance of Leandro's emotions and physical reactions to not have noticed something was very wrong.

It caused him to worry that there was more to Weston's condition than his Omega and doctor were telling him and that was going to stop as soon as Leandro woke up from the gurney he'd been given in order to stay close to Weston's side without

injuring his burns further.

He wanted his Omega in his arm once again, damn it, and no matter what it took, he planned on making that happen even if he had to force Leandro and Renzo to remain in his room until they told him the truth. He was done being lied to. If something was worse than they had told him, he needed to know so he could deal with it.

“Good morning, Weston,” Renzo said softly when he walked into the room so as not to wake Leandro. He grabbed the chart off the end of the bed and scanned the latest bloodwork and vital signs before putting it back and coming around to the side of his bed to start his own quick exam.

As much as the dark circles under his Omega’s eyes told him he desperately needed sleep, Weston wasn’t about to waste the opportunity to get to the bottom of whatever was happening. “Leandro,” he called out, rousing his sweet kitten, who tried to burrow further under the covers and ignore whatever was attempting to wake him.

“Leandro,” Weston said even louder.

Renzo placed a hand on Weston’s arm to silently gain his attention when Leandro frowned, as if something was buzzing around him like a pest. “I think we should let Leandro get some more sleep. He really could use it.”

Renzo’s words put Weston even more on edge than when he thought their odd behavior had been about him. If it had to do with Leandro, there was no way he was going to ignore it by burying his head in the sand.

He pinned the doctor with his gaze. “What’s wrong with Leandro?” he demanded.

His voice had a hard edge and was loud enough that Leandro sat straight up and glanced at them with worry. He was off the bed in an instant to stand next to Weston.

Automatically, he reached for his Alpha's hand, which helped to calm Weston somewhat as he entwined their fingers.

"Are you okay?" Leandro looked worried between Weston and Renzo. "Are you having a setback? Renzo didn't think it would happen, but he had said it was a possibility. Do I need to get you anything? Maybe some water?" Then those terrified eyes settled on Renzo. "Does he need more painkillers?"

Renzo shook his head, but before he could speak, Weston confronted them both. "What is going on?" His gaze held his Omega's as he spoke. "You've been acting nervous and scared while hardly eating. There are dark circles under your eyes and you refuse to talk to me about anything but the town and my needs."

When he felt Leandro try to pull away, he held onto his hand even tighter. "I thought you were both hiding something about my prognosis from me, but then Renzo mentioned how much you needed your sleep. Did you get hurt in the fire? Are you hiding your injuries from me?"

As he said the words, the hurt was evident in his voice. Admittedly, he'd been too out of it to know much of what had been going on that first week, but it had been four weeks, and he was supposed to be released to go home that day, which meant he was well enough for Leandro to tell him the truth.

"I think I deserve to know what is happening to the love of my life." Was that petulance in his tone? He wasn't exactly proud of it, but Weston knew it had been there. The thing was, he knew he'd need to be strong for his Omega. The last thing Leandro needed from him was for Weston to basically make him feel guilty for hiding something from him.

Leandro glanced over at Renzo and jerked his head toward the door. "Can you leave us alone?"

Renzo nodded and started toward the door.

“Wait a damn minute,” Weston insisted. “No one is going anywhere until I have answers.”

Renzo grinned. “The only one I can give you is that you are cleared to go home. No working, but otherwise, you should be fine for...” The doctor’s gaze went back to Leandro with a sly smirk on his face. “Well, let’s just say nothing too strenuous, but otherwise, you’re good to go for all other activities.”

Why in the hell had it sounded as if the doctor was recommending sex? He gasped as he looked Leandro up and down. “Oh, love. Are you in heat? Do we need to go home so I can help you through it?”

Red flushed every inch of Leandro’s face as he said, “Actually, it’s kind of the opposite.”

The opposite? What the hell was that even supposed to mean? He waited as patiently as he could, but it must have shown in his expression he was going to lose his cool if he didn’t get some answers soon.

Leandro sat on the side of Weston’s gurney and leaned over to give him a sweet, albeit nervous, kiss. “First, I want you to know I love you. I honestly didn’t think I would ever know those feelings in my life, but the moment you ran back into that burning building there was no doubt in my mind. My entire being rebelled against the possibility of losing you, and I was determined to tell you the moment you made it out safely.”

Weston’s heart soared, but he was somewhat confused. “Then why didn’t you?”

Damn if his still red face didn’t get even redder, which Weston hadn’t thought



possible. “I did,” Leandro told him. “I just didn’t want the first time you heard happen when you were drugged and might not remember, so I only told you when you were sleeping. Then I was too nervous to tell you when you were more clearheaded.”

That was something Weston could believe. His sweet Omega tended to shy away from things pertaining to the heart. “Is that what has had you so on...Wait, no, there has to be more to it. Why haven’t you been able to eat? And why are there times you are so pale it looks as if you’re about to collapse?”

Weston lifted his hand and traced the dark circles under his Omega’s eyes with his thumb. “And why are these here?”

Leandro mumbled something, but for the life of him, Weston couldn’t understand what he’d said. “Love, I need you to talk to me.”

Blowing out a long, hard breath, Leandro blurted out, “Because I’m pregnant. We’re pregnant. At first, I was excited, but the more I sat here by your bedside, the more I couldn’t help but wonder if you even wanted...”

Weston didn’t let him finish as he sat up and slammed their lips together, pouring all of his love and happiness into it. When he pulled back as they both needed air, he got out with no small amount of amazement. “We’re going to be dads? Really? I can’t wait to hold our little one. To show him what love is and for us to teach him what it is to be a true man and treat people with fairness and kindness.”

Tears were trailing down Leandro’s cheeks. “You’re really happy?” he asked, as if still uncertain. “You’re aren’t just saying that because you think it’s what I want to hear?”

Weston kissed him hard. “You are the love of my life, Leandro. It would be my honor

and greatest joy for us to have a baby.”

He got his first genuine smile from his Omega since waking up, and it was full of happiness and mischief. “Then maybe you should get dressed so we can go home and celebrate.”

Weston kissed those sweet lips once again before hopping out of bed. “That sounds like the perfect idea, Omega mine.”

And celebrate they did, for days.

### EPILOGUE

“Stop touching me when I know you must think I’m grotesquely fat.” Leandro was in no mood to be placated. He was over being pregnant. Way over it.

But instead of leaving him alone, Weston wrapped his arms around Leandro’s waist, which only because he had really long arms, went all the way around his humongous abdomen. Those lips that had a way of working magic on Leandro’s body brushed against the shell of his ear when Weston whispered, “You are the sexiest man alive and if this is how you look rounded with my child, I plan to keep you pregnant as often as possible.”

Leandro whirled on him with his finger pointed right at him, lost his balance and would have fallen if Weston hadn’t been ready and held him steady until he could once more remain upright. “Don’t you dare laugh,” he accused when he saw Weston press his lips together tightly to stop from even grinning.

Now that he was once again standing on his own, Leandro threw up his hands and wailed. “I haven’t seen my feet or my dick in so long I don’t remember what they even look like.”

There went that damn twitch of Weston’s lips again, causing Leandro to glare at him. The last time Weston grinned at Leandro’s theatrics, he’d been forced to sleep on the couch—sort of. Unfortunately, in the middle of the night, the baby had kicked the back of his spine, and Leandro had been compelled to call him back to their bed for a back massage.

“I get you are uncomfortable...”

Leandro cut Weston off by screeching, “Uncomfortable? Is that what you’re calling it? Because I call it hell. Between the swollen ankles, needing to get up—which I can’t even do by myself any longer—to go to the bathroom because this kid has taken up permanent residence on my bladder and losing my balance more often than not, which means you have to stay by my side all the damn time or I would fall over, I would say I was in fucking hell, wouldn’t you?”

Those stupid gray eyes he used to love so much were sparkling with laughter, even if Weston kept from smiling. “I thought you didn’t want us swearing around the baby?” his good-for-nothing Alpha asked.

That earned Weston another glare. “Fuck off.”

“Now kitten...”

“No,” he told Weston in no uncertain terms. “You do not get to tell me what I can or can’t do in front of the baby.”

“But you were the one telling Griggs off just four days ago not to use foul language when you and the baby were close enough to hear him,” Weston reminded him.

Leandro did his best to stomp his foot, but since he could barely lift it to walk it hadn’t made the impact he’d hoped for. “That was when the baby was due that day. Now that he’s decided to keep torturing me, all bets are off.”

Weston once again pulled Leandro into his arms and as much as he hated to admit it, he needed his Alpha’s comfort. When one large hand splayed over his extended abdomen, there was instantly a kick as if the baby were greeting his father.

“See?” The joy in Weston’s voice was easily heard. “He’s letting us know he can’t

wait to meet us.”

“No,” Leandro bit out. “He’s letting you know he can’t wait to meet you. When I put my hand there, he either kicks me in the ribs, the bladder, or my fucking spine.”

Suddenly, Leandro felt pee pour down his legs. “Great,” he exclaimed. “Now I’ve just peed myself. Anything else this kid plans to do to humiliate me?”

This time, Weston did chuckle, but only for a second before he scooped Leandro into his arms, cradling him securely against his chest. “Actually, kitten, that was your water breaking. It’s time to go to the hospital and greet our son.”

Leandro stopped breathing for a moment as the ramifications of what was happening descended on him. “We’re having our baby?” he asked, still certain he hadn’t heard that right.

“Yes, love. We are most definitely having our baby.” Weston kissed his temple as he strode down the street to the hospital. It had taken several months, but with the town pulling together to make it happen, he and Weston had moved into their own house right near the center of town.

“Are we even ready?” he asked. “Is the crib up? The changing table? Did we get all the clothes washed and put away?” He already knew the answers, but Leandro had needed his Alpha’s reassurance.

Just like Weston always did, he gave it without raising an eyebrow even though he knew Leandro already knew. “We checked just yesterday, love. Everything is ready for our sweet son to come home.”

He burrowed closer to Weston’s body, loving the way his Alpha always seemed to know exactly what Leandro needed. “But we haven’t decided on a name yet,” he cried out in despair. “How can we let our baby be born without a name?”

“We agreed we wanted to meet him first before saddling him with a name that might not be right for him,” Weston reminded him.

Oh, right.

Minutes later, he was placed on a gurney and wheeled into the labor and delivery room, with Weston never letting go of his hand. To that day Leandro did not know how he’d gotten so lucky, not only to have met Weston, but that his Alpha had never given up on him.

He wasn’t certain he’d deserved someone like Weston, especially after everything he’d put the Alpha through, but he would always be grateful to belong to him.

“Wow, you’re already fully dilated,” Renzo announced when he checked Leandro. “Are you certain you didn’t feel any contractions?”

Leandro shook his head, and he blew out a breath. Since his water broke, they’d been coming hard and fast, so he would know if he’d felt any earlier. “Just some back pain,” he got out between the pain.

That had both Renzo and Maxon, who were also in the delivery room sighing. “Don’t you remember we warned you some people’s contractions manifest as back pain?” Maxon said in frustration as they got everything ready.

Through clenched teeth, as he fought the pain, Leandro glared at one of his best friends. “What the fuck difference does it make now? Just get him out of me.”

Weston lifted Leandro’s head and shoulders to slide in behind him. “It’s okay, kitten. It’s almost over. Then we’ll get to hold our precious angel in our arms where he belongs.”

Even though there was a part of Leandro that was irritated by Weston’s cheery

attitude, he had to admit he couldn't wait to meet their child.

"Okay, Leandro, it's time to push," Renzo told him.

Three pushes later, they heard a wail as their child entered the world. Once it was over, Leandro found it easier to smile and be happy. But he had to admit, it was feeling their baby in his arms that had him grinning as joy filled him from the tips of his toes to the top of his head.

"He's so beautiful," Weston said as he traced a finger along one chubby cheek even while still holding Leandro in his arms.

Right then and there, Leandro decided it was the one place on earth that he always wanted to be. He, his Alpha, and Tor. Nothing could be sweeter.