



Rejected Pretend Mate (Honeyville Firefighter Shifters #6)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: He rejected me and left our pack. Now I have to pretend to be his mate.

He's my brother's best friend and a womanizing firefighter.

He broke my heart, but when I'm getting threats, he suddenly gets all protective.

And he says a fake arranged marriage with him is the only way to keep me safe.

After he left me, I picked up the pieces of my heart and tried to move on.

Just like he did, judging by the many, many women who've slept in his bed since.

Yet, when my ex is stalking me, he tells me we must pretend to be arranged mates.

And when I don't want to, he wears me down until I give into him.

We get married in the town hall, and I feel his hot kiss on my lips.

I know only too well what a good kisser he is.

I know only too well how he'll make my body his again.

I'm so tired of resisting him, so exhausted from wanting him to claim my body as his.

When this is all over...will my firefighter mate claim me for real?

The firefighter shifters of Honeyville protect their town, chase their mates, and make babies until there is only one fire left: the eternal flame of love that heals even the most painful wounds

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I stared out the window, taking in the view of Honeyville. I wished I felt more secure taking it in like Riley. I always felt like a cold hand was wrapped around my neck, and I was waiting for something to happen. It was a constant feeling and was starting to get the better of me. I hardly slept, and when I did, I was plagued with nightmares.

My fingers tightened on the mug in my hands, and I swallowed. I chewed on my lower lip, a new habit I'd picked up. It came with the inability to sleep and the anxiety.

I glanced over my shoulder, checking the door to my apartment, making sure it was locked. Even though I knew I had locked it last night and checked it when I got up to make my coffee, I still felt the need to make sure it was bolted and that if someone wanted to get in, they wouldn't be able to enter.

"You're fixating," I tell myself, shaking my head. "You need to stop."

It was one of the reasons I moved out of Cayden and Riley's place. I didn't want them to figure out just how messed up Ivan had left me. If they knew, they would have wanted to help, but there wasn't anything they could do. I had to figure that out myself, and I needed time to.

And I knew they wanted the space. They would have housed me a lot longer than a month, but I could sense the sexual tension between them. They wanted to be together a lot more than they were, and I knew they would never kick me out. So, I took the chance.

So, when the apartment opened up down here, I snagged it. It was empty, and I didn't

have much furniture, but it was my own. The last time I had my own room was growing up, but even then, my mother decorated it. She had to add her own personal taste to everything. Nothing was ever really mine, including here.

The apartment was small but spacious. It had an open floor plan, so everything flowed together nicely. A small hallway led to the bathroom and the bedroom.

I had the fireplace going next to me and sighed as I looked down at my coffee. I rubbed my thumb over the rim. It was terrible coffee because I'd run out of creamer. But I was too damn lazy to go out. I held out as long as I could, not wanting to leave the apartment if I didn't need to.

It had snowed again last night, coating the balcony. I stared at it, taking in the thick white blanket that covered everything. I used to enjoy the snow, and now...well...I didn't feel anything. I hated Ivan a little more for that.

I looked down at my phone just as it rang. Riley was calling, and I smiled. She was the sunshine during all of this.

I pulled my phone up. "Hello?"

"You are awake? I was beginning to think that you were hibernating. I called you last night, but you didn't answer."

I didn't want to tell her I'd gone to bed extremely early last night and lay there for two hours before getting up this morning. I slept maybe five hours last night, unable to calm my mind.

"Well, you know me. Enjoying the new space to myself. I'm not listening to people moaning as they climax anymore."

Riley snorted. "Glad to see you still have your sarcasm with you. What were your plans today? And don't tell me you're staying home."

I looked around my space, taking in the emptiness. I knew I should probably do some shopping, but I wasn't motivated to do so. "I don't have any plans."

I should be making plans, looking for a job, and wanting to make the apartment look nice. I should go out and buy stuff that represents my taste. And I need groceries. But staying in knowing I'm safe sounded better.

"Well, I think since Cayden is going to be working late tonight, I thought we could have a movie night at yours. Popcorn and girl talk. We haven't done that in a while."

I glanced around my space towards the top of the fireplace. It was where a TV should sit, but I didn't have one. "You know I don't have a TV."

Riley was quiet for a moment. "Wait, still? You said you were going to go out and buy one a week ago. Why didn't you go out?"

I shrugged. "I've been busy."

"Doing what?" she asked.

I paused. If I told her I hadn't really left the apartment or done anything else, she'd worry, and she had enough on her plate. I didn't need her to worry about me when she was still pulling herself back together after Brad. "I was contemplating the size."

"Jesus, April, it's a TV. It's not like you were going out to buy bedding and redecorate. It's a TV. Just pick a TV and buy it."

I sighed. "I was going out to buy one. I'll have one by tonight."

"Great. And make sure you have popcorn."

I sighed, ended the call, and looked outside again. It looked cold, and now I had to embrace it. I had to get a TV, or else Riley was going to catch on that I wasn't really getting my life together.

I bundled up and made my way outside. My car was parked in the parking lot, coated in snow. I cleaned it off and let the car warm up as I did. I stared at my license plate, scowling at it. I needed to get it changed since I had officially left my old pack.

Cayden said he would take care of it, but he'd been busy with Riley's pregnancy and getting their apartment ready. They were contemplating moving because they wanted more space but weren't sure if now was the time. They wanted a couple of kids, so they would need to move at some point.

It seemed everyone was moving on while I was stuck in the past. I was stuck, unsure what to do with my life or how to move on. I had spent so long with Ivan and pleasing him that I didn't know how to change that. When did life become so complicated?

"Morning, April."

I jumped and turned to spot my neighbor, Livianna, standing on the sidewalk. She was a sweet old lady, nosey at times but harmless. I think she's just lonely and needs someone to talk to.

"Morning, Liv," I said, giving her a wave.

"You okay? You look a little off."

I shook it off, knowing better. If I were going to have issues, I would have them at

home, not in public. I shook my head, forcing a smile. "Nope, just dandy. You should head inside where it's warm."

Liv smiled. "I am. You stay warm out there." Liv turned, heading inside, and I felt the smile slip.

I turned, jumped into my car, and blasted the music up. I closed my eyes, letting the vibrations soak over me.

I headed to the furniture store, figuring I might as well look for some other things as well as a TV. I ended up finding a new mattress and some bedside tables. Everything would be delivered in a few days. I had thought of buying more but didn't. A small part of me even wondered if I really wanted to stay here.

I stopped and bought a TV with my groceries. I left the TV in the car, figuring that Cayden could bring it up for me when he came around.

I headed inside, tired and cold. I wanted to crawl into bed and sleep, but I knew better. It was only three in the afternoon, so I needed to stay away. Riley would be over in probably two hours, and Cayden would be home in about an hour.

I stepped off the elevator and paused when I noticed someone was standing in front of my door. I scowled, knowing not many people knew I lived there. Cayden and his friends knew, but none of them had just stopped by and certainly would hang around. If anything, they would have gone upstairs to Cayden's apartment.

I walked closer, and my body felt cold as I realized it was Ivan. He had his hands stuffed into his pocket, and his hair was a mess. He looked like shit, and as I got closer, I could smell the booze seeping out of him.

I wrinkled my nose, and his head popped up, his eyes on me. I stopped walking and

stood a foot away from him. The smell seemed to fill the hallway, and I wondered just how drunk he was. "What are you doing here?" I asked, tightening my grip on my groceries.

He scowled. "Why are you staying here?" His eyes couldn't stay on me, and his words were slurred.

"Because I live here now."

"You don't though. You know you belong back at home."

I shook my head. "No, I left the pack. And I already signed the divorce papers. There is no reason that you are here, Ivan. Please leave." I stepped towards my door, but Ivan did as well. I stiffened as his arm reached up, stopping me.

I suddenly couldn't breathe. I felt ice course through my body, and I stepped back.

His voice dripped low, and his nostrils flared. "I'm not leaving. We had a life together, April! You can't just decide that we're over and wipe your hands clean. You are still part of the pack, and if need be, I'll bring this to the alpha's attention and have him request you returned."

"You fucked another woman in our bed," I snarled back. "Don't you dare act like you're the victim here! You cheated on me! And you treated me like garbage. You acted like I was made to..." I didn't finish the sentence.

"You were made to be my wife," he growled at me. "You and I both know it."

I hated how he said it. I shook my head. "You need to leave. I said my peace."

"Oh yes, you said plenty. It's my turn to talk now." He stepped closer, and my back

hit the wall. One of the bags slammed into the wall, and suddenly, the hold I had was gone. The groceries tumbled, clattering loudly around us.

A memory of being pinned against the wall in the kitchen hit me. It was the night I left to come back here. I didn't even realize his hands grabbed my hair. My head hit the ground so hard that I saw stars. He was screaming, but I couldn't move.

I woke up in the hospital. My head pounded, and Ivan paced around the room. I remembered how my heart raced in fear when he realized I was awake.

And then the promises started.

I didn't mean it.

I'm sorry.

I made a mistake. Can't you forgive me?

I swear I'll never do this again.

Don't leave me.

It was the same thing. Ivan had a drinking problem and took it out on me. I couldn't remember the amount of times I'd tucked my tail and gone back. That was what I was supposed to do. I was raised to be a good wife and a doting mother. I was raised to take whatever Ivan gave me and never complain.

But that wasn't my life anymore. Everything fell apart the moment I caught him with another woman, and I realized I didn't have just to accept that life.

And I wasn't there anymore. I was here. I was safe, and Ivan couldn't hurt me. Right?

I took a deep breath in and curled my hands into fists. "You need to leave. We aren't back in our old town. You're in my brother's territory, and I'm warning you, you don't want to piss him off. So, get out. While I'm asking nicely."

Ivan's nostrils flared once more, and his eyes narrowed on me. I watched his jaw clench, and I knew he wanted to yell. He was seconds away from doing so.

And then I heard a door open. "April, you okay out here? I heard a noise."

Liv stood in her doorway, looking worried at me. Her eyes quickly jumped from me to Ivan and then back to me.

I looked away from Ivan and nodded my head at Liv. "I'm okay, Liv. Just dropped my groceries, is all."

Liv looked back at Ivan, her eyes narrowing slightly. "And he is?"

"Leaving," I said quickly, looking at Ivan. "He was leaving. Just stopped in to ask me a question, is all."

Ivan stared at me, and after a moment, he took a step back. "I'll be back."

"Don't," I said as he turned, heading down the hallway. I watched him walk away until he got onto the elevator, and then I exhaled.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Liv asked, and I looked back at her, nodding my head. I was fine. The last thing I needed was for Riley or Cayden to find out about what was happening. She was exactly the type of person to tell them.

"I'm fine." I reached down, grabbed my groceries, and unlocked my door. I hurried inside, feeling my legs give out as soon as I did.

I covered my mouth, feeling tears burn my eyes. I took a deep breath, feeling a panic attack taking hold of me.

I hated it. I hated how everything came rushing back and how my body tensed up. I wished I fought back. The old me would have fought back. But he'd changed me. He'd ruined me.

I started to cry, squeezing my eyes shut, wishing I could disappear. But I knew it wouldn't, and I worried I'd never be the old me again.

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I stretched my arms up and smirked, looking over at Cayden, who scowled with his arms crossed, shaking his head. "You cheated."

"I did not," I laughed, looking back at the TV and seeing the winning part on my side of the screen. That was the fifth game I won, making me the winner overall.

He tossed his controller aside and sighed. "Well, our shift is almost over, so it's a tie."

"I won five out of six games. I don't think it's a tie." I said as I grabbed my phone. "You're just a sore loser, is all."

"Oh, shut up," Cayden said, glancing at his phone. "You somehow cheated."

I snorted, pulling myself out of my hair. "I think I heard Ayden and Miles come in. Want me to punch you out?"

Cayden nodded, and I walked across the space and down the stairs toward our punch-in station. I grabbed my card, and Cayden punched both of us out for the day.

I spotted Miles tossing his jacket into his locker. "Hey, is it cold outside?"

Miles nodded, running a hand through his hair where he had some snow. "It's getting pretty cold out now. Is Ayden in yet?"

I shook my head. "Haven't seen him yet, but you guys are working tonight, right?"

Miles nodded and walked up the stairs. I rolled my neck as I followed him and found

Cayden now standing, shaking his head on the phone. He started to pace. His shoulders were tense as he walked, and his eyebrows were pushed together as if he were concerned. "What happened?"

I stiffened, watching his face look worried. He only ever looked that way when it was two about people. Riley or April.

Miles looked at me and then at Cayden. "Something happen?"

The space was silent for a moment longer before Cayden rubbed a hand over his face. "Okay, thank you, Livianna."

He ended the line and ran a hand over his face.

"Everything okay?" I asked as Miles took a seat on the couch.

He shook his head. "No, April's ex showed up, and I guess they were having a fight in the hallway of the apartment complex. Liv said it sounded pretty heated, and she's worried. He left, but she's worried he might come back."

"Did he hurt her?" Miles asked.

Cayden shook his head. "No, it was just yelling. She said it didn't look like April had been hit or touched."

I felt my stomach clench, and I wanted to make sure that April was okay. I'd been keeping my distance out of respect. She had just gotten out of a terrible relationship, had gotten divorced, and is Cayden's little sister.

Cayden ran a hand over his face, looking a little paler now. "I need to make sure she's okay. She likes to hide her feelings, and she's been doing it a lot lately. It's been

worrying the shit out of Riley and me. We're trying to give her distance because that seems to be what she wants, but at the same time, we want to make sure she doesn't plummet herself into a dark hole that she can't get out of."

"I'll come with," I said quickly. "I can help scan the grounds outside and make sure he's not hanging around."

I also wanted to see April. I hadn't seen her since she officially moved into Honeyville.

Cayden nodded. "Yeah, thanks. That would actually be really nice. We can take my truck."

We left the fire station and drove across town to the apartment complex where they all lived. It was a nice building with decent security. There were cameras, but they needed to be updated. I'm sure they might still have something on them, at least unless Ivan was smart and avoided them.

We took the elevator up, and I could see Cayden clenching and unclenching his jaw. His fingers curled into fists at his side, and he tapped his foot.

"She's okay," I said, hoping it would help. "If she wasn't, Liv would have been a little more urgent on the phone."

We all knew Liv. She'd moved into the apartment complex a couple of months ago. She was a sweet old lady who was a little lonely. She'd dropped off cookies at the fire station a few times.

She was a little nosey, but Cayden said he was grateful for it. At least someone could watch his sister when he wasn't around.

They stepped off the elevator and headed down the hallway. They stopped in front of the fourth door, and Cayden knocked.

My entire body tensed up, and as the door opened, I finally saw April after so many years. She looked good. Grown-up.

Her once blond hair was now pure black, cut short. Her brown eyes had a hardness rather than the softness I remembered. She was wearing grey sweatpants and a long-sleeved shirt. Her complexion was paler than I remembered, but it had been years since I'd seen her.

She looked at me for a split second, acknowledging me, before her eyes snapped to her brother. She scowled. "Did Liv call you? Jesus, I can't do anything without you finding out, can I?"

Cayden scowled at her. "Yeah, she called me because you didn't feel the need to tell me your ex-husband was loitering around. Is this the first time? Or has he done this before?"

April sighed, pulling some hair behind her ear. I noticed a row of earrings and a tattoo on her wrist. I couldn't make out what it was as she dropped her hand, crossing her arms.

"Nothing happened. I'm fine. He was just drunk and left. I doubt he's coming back."

"You should have called. I shouldn't be getting a call from Liv about this. Do you have any idea how dangerous this is? You could easily be requested to return back to the old pack if he decided to bring this up to his alpha."

April's lips formed a tight line. "Then maybe you should tell her to butt out of my business." But as soon as the words came out, she sighed. "I'm sorry, you're right. I

should have called. I was going to, but you were at work."

"And how long were you going to wait to tell me?"

I shrugged. "Riley was coming back later. I would have told her. She would have told you."

Cayden's jaw clenched, and I could see he was fuming. He was even more protective of Riley since she got pregnant. I could imagine the idea of Ivan going near Riley would send him spiraling.

I could tell Cayden wanted to speak with his sister alone, so I cleared my throat. "I'm going to go check the cameras and look around outside. I'll give you guys a second alone."

April looked at me. "Can you grab something out of my car? I bought a TV. Riley and I are supposed to do girls' night."

"You aren't doing girls night! Not here."

April glared at her brother. "You don't get to tell me what I can and can't do."

Cayden ran a hand over his face and glanced at me. I gave them a nod and headed for the elevator. I hadn't even stepped on before they started yelling.

"You should have called! You don't wait for my pregnant wife to come here to inform us that you are in danger! How irresponsible are you!?"

"Jesus Christ, Cayden! I told you I am fine."

I headed downstairs and scanned the lobby. I made sure that all the cameras were still

on and hadn't been tampered with. Everything looked good, so I went outside and checked the parking lot.

I didn't think he would stick around, but you never knew. I didn't think he would follow April here.

After making sure things looked good, I headed upstairs with the TV. I found the hallway clear, and they were both inside April's apartment. I set the TV down, taking in the bare space. The living room just had a couch near the fireplace. The walk-in kitchen was like Cayden's apartment, but she had a barstool instead of three.

"Nice place," I said as I shut the door.

April looked at me from the couch with a blanket over her lap. I suddenly felt like I'd been punched.

I suddenly remembered the last time we were together. She had her hair braided down her back, looking at me with a seductive expression. We were hanging in my bedroom, which consisted of the entire attic, which meant I had a large living room space.

"I beat you," she purred. "What do I get?"

It was another secret date—one of many. We spent as much time together as we could.

I walked closer, reaching up and cupping her face. "If your brother knew that you were sitting in his spot and beating me in this game, he'd probably lose his shit."

Her eyes twinkled with excitement. "What he doesn't know won't hurt him. Besides, he isn't here."

Our entire relationship had started as a joke. Her brother pissed her off, so she asked me to lunch. She'd done it in front of him just to get him riled up. And it bloomed from there. We'd gone to the movies, where we made out in the back. We went on runs, racing to see who was faster. We played video games, and when my folks were gone, we cooked.

It was just fun at first, just enjoying each other's time. But it grew. And when Cayden left, it shifted. We suddenly leaned on each other because a part was missing from both of us. I had lost my best friend, and she had lost her brother.

She stood up, smiling proudly. "What do I get for winning?" She tilted her head, waiting to see what I would do.

I wanted April badly to the point where sometimes it was almost painful to be around her. I had fallen for her and wanted to spend as much time with her as I could. A little pain wasn't going to stop me.

But I knew where this would all lead. We could only keep this hidden for so long before the pack figured out what was going on. And once they did, they were going to sink their claws into it.

April was young and rebelling. We were both rebelling and enjoying each other's company, but April wouldn't want what came next. The pack was traditional, and April was not a traditional girl. She wasn't the type to get married and pop out babies like it was her life's mission. She talked about her dreams and wanting to travel with Riley and explore. That wasn't on the pack's agenda.

That was our last night together, and I sometimes regretted it. I never told her what happened and wondered what would have happened if I had chosen differently.

` "You're staring." April said, snapping me back to reality. "And it's rude."

"Sorry, it's just been a while since I've last seen you, is all. I don't mean to stare."

April looked away, and Cayden sighed. "She's moody, excuse her."

April glared at Cayden. "I'm moody because you're acting like I'm five. Nothing happened. I can protect myself."

"And I think you're forgetting about what happened with Riley," he snapped at her.

April's mouth snapped shut. We all knew what happened to Riley and how she could have died in the fire. Cayden's overprotective was warranted.

"Ivan isn't that stupid. He's just dumb. Give him a little more time, and this will blow over."

"He sure sounds like an idiot," Cayden growled. "And I'm not comfortable with you being alone. Do you need to move back in with us?"

"I would rather marry some hobo than move back in with you guys."

"What if I married her?" I asked, the words popping out before I could even think about what I'd just said.

Cayden stared at me, and I threw my hands up. "Fake. It would be a fake marriage. I mean, I'm better than a hobo."

"Why would we do that?" April asked, her arms crossed. "What would you get out of it?"

"Because you would legally be this pack's problem then," I quickly added. "And extra protection. You wouldn't be alone at night, and while this all gets sorted out, you are

safe. Ivan might be sticking around because he thinks you might be able to be swayed, but if you're taken, word will travel, and he might stop." I knew it sounded crazy, but it wasn't stupid. It was actually pretty smart.

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I can't help but stare at Weslie. He had changed so much since our relationship when we were younger. His hair was longer, and he had a bit of a beard growing in. His hair was still ginger, and his brown eyes still held that softness to them. I used to stare into those eyes, feeling so safe.

Weslie stood in jeans and a short-sleeved firefighter shirt. His muscles bulged, and I could see a full arm tattoo on his left side. It was of a wolf howling at the moon. I was a little surprised by it, not thinking that he was the type to get a tattoo, but then again, I didn't think he was the type to just leave me without warning.

I hated how much I missed him suddenly. I hated how my heart skipped a beat and felt gooey inside. I was suddenly sixteen again, sneaking around to be with him.

I knew better than to think about those days. Because as nice as they were, he still left. He just disappeared one night and never returned. No call. No message. And I had to act like it didn't bother me because what we had wasn't real. If it had been, he would have told me he was leaving.

I just remember laying in bed staring at my ceiling, going over everything, questioning everything we had done together. I remembered all the times I cried on his shoulder, telling him how much I missed Cayden and how I was so lonely and afraid. I told him secrets, and without warning, he just disappeared, and I never heard from him again.

I wasn't going to lie and say I wasn't shocked to see him here. Why did Cayden never mention that he was working with Weslie at the fire station?

I quickly shook my head. I needed to focus. I couldn't be thinking about the past like this.

"That's not happening," I said, crossing my arms. "Not only that, but no one would believe it. I'm new to the town. I've only been here a month."

"You don't know that," Cayden said. "I've seen people get married a lot sooner than a month."

I looked at my brother, a little surprised at how quickly he agreed to the idea. Was he seriously thinking this was a good idea? "You want me to marry your best friend?"

"It's fake," Cayden said, crossing his arms. "Once this all blows over, you guys can go your separate ways."

I wanted to ask if he knew about Weslie and me in the past. How would he feel if he knew that Weslie and I had dated before and that I had fallen in love with him? Would he be willing to fake-marry me off?

I looked at Weslie, and seeing the straight face told me he hadn't. He didn't tell him about what we did, and he might never.

I didn't know what hurt worse. The fact that he left or the fact that he left and Cayden found him but never told me. He never mentioned that he was living in the same pack as Weslie and that they were perfectly happy avoiding the pack and doing whatever they wanted.

I was left alone, picking up the pieces of my broken heart. I cried myself to sleep because I had imagined a whole future with Weslie. I had envisioned a beautiful wedding, a few children, and a beautiful job. I had thought that Weslie wanted the same things I did, but I'd been wrong.

I rebelled even harder after Weslie left. I pierced my ears and got a few tattoos. I started smoking, quit smoking, and started up again and quit once more. I argued with my folks, but suddenly, everything was piling up so high, and I couldn't take it.

Then I met Ivan, and the pain was gone. Ivan....who was giving me whatever I wanted. If I wanted cigarettes, he bought them. If I wanted booze, he got it. If I wanted sex....well...he was more than happy. He looked so perfect to everyone, but I knew what lay underneath his smiles and his gentle eyes. But he was an escape, a freedom from everything else.

"I'm done with this conversation," I said, pulling myself up. I walked towards the kitchen. "I'm not doing a fake marriage because it's not needed. Ivan isn't a problem. He isn't like Riley's ex."

"You don't know that," Cayden growled, following after me. "And you can't just avoid the issue. He will likely come back, and you don't know how far he will go."

"You mean like you avoided the pack issues and just left?" I snapped at him. I thought I'd moved past that anger, but maybe I hadn't. Perhaps I was still mad he left me behind. Maybe I still hadn't forgiven him. Or perhaps I just wanted to throw it in his face and get him to stop.

Cayden's face softened. "April, you know why I left."

I turned and opened the fridge. I didn't know what I was looking for, but it was better than looking at my brother. "Riley is going to be here in a bit. So, could you two please leave? We're having girl's night." I looked at Cayden. "And you don't get a say about it. Riley is perfectly safe down here with me."

I started grabbing things and pulling them out. I turned, finding both of them staring at me. Cayden inhaled slowly. "April, please...just think about it. I'm worried about

your safety here."

"I'm fine," I said for what felt like the twentieth time. "Ivan is nothing I can't handle, so please, leave."

Cayden sighed. "Fine, but call me if anything happens. I'm just upstairs."

I nodded, glancing at Weslie. He looked hurt as he looked at me. I looked away, not wanting to think about my past and how I got here, how I got myself into such a shit show.

They both slipped out, and I heard the door shut behind them. I felt tears bloom and quickly shook them away. I could take care of myself. I've been doing it for years.

I was starting to set the TV up when my phone rang. I clicked it onto the speaker and stepped back, looking at my TV.

"Hey."

Riley spoke up, sounding worried. "Cayden just said that Ivan is here? Are you okay? Did anything happen? Did anything happen to you?"

I sighed, wanting to smack my brother. Of course, he would call and tell Riley. "I'm fine. Nothing happened. He just came to my apartment drunk, and he left."

"Don't tell me nothing happened. You know that's bull. You're practically shaking. I can hear it in your voice."

I stiffened. Shit. Of course, she could.

Riley sighed. "I understand you work through things your way, but don't push me

away when you need people. You need to start opening up. Why don't you join me and the other girls for some lunch or something? Get to know them and really start to settle yourself into this place. It's good to know the pack and have that protection. You're in a bit of a slump, April. Getting out might help you feel a little better."

I understood her point and thought about it. It would be a good idea to get to know the girls better. I'd spent some time with them, and they all seemed nice. I heard from Riley just how lovely they were all the time. And I was lonely.

"Okay," I said with a nod. "What time do you think you're going to get here? I have the popcorn, and I bought some wine. I know you can't have any, but I can." I looked around, trying to remember where I placed the remote. "We could order some food too if you don't just want popcorn. And once I find the remote, I can start looking for a show to watch."

"About that, one of the girls left early because she wasn't feeling well, so I needed to stay late. But let's have breakfast with the girls tomorrow. We can watch TV after breakfast and spend the entire day being lazy afterward."

I frowned, feeling my shoulders sink. But I didn't say anything. I couldn't make her feel bad that she was working late. She, unlike me, had a job and responsibilities.

"Okay, let's do that. I'll call you in the morning." I said, swinging onto the couch.

I ended the call and sighed, turning back to the TV. Even if Riley wasn't coming, I could at least enjoy the TV. There were some shows that I needed to get caught up on and movies I could watch.

I decided to make myself some noodles and sat down, flipping the TV on. I poured myself a glass of wine and sighed. I was flipped through, but nothing caught my attention, and I needed something to occupy my mind.

But I felt that hand clawing at me as I tried to relax. The worry that Ivan would come back and break down my door. I glanced back at the door, making sure I locked it.

My phone rang, and I jumped, nearly spilling the noodles all over the couch. I quickly caught the bowl and pulled my phone up. Maybe Riley got off earlier than she thought.

"Hello?"

"You enjoying your TV?"

My entire body stiffened, and I felt like a hand wrapped around my throat. I quickly pushed the noodles aside and got up. I circled around my apartment, feeling eyes on me. But I knew he wasn't in my apartment. There was no way he was in my apartment.

"Where are you?" I asked, knowing it was Ivan.

"You know that this situation between us should have been left private. You didn't need to involve your brother."

I turned to my patio, and I swallowed. I walked towards it and glanced down. Cars filled the parking lot, but I knew I was right. Ivan was down there, watching me.

"You and I are done, Ivan. I don't know how many times I need to say this. But we're over. I'll involve whoever I want if I feel that I'm unsafe. You need to go home."

"You think you're unsafe?" Ivan laughed, and it curled my stomach. I moved away from the door and back towards the couch. "You think a locked door is going to keep you safe, April? You should know me better by now."

"You're still drunk, aren't you?" I asked, running a hand over my face.

"Possible, it's the only way I can tolerate your ass."

I ground my teeth together and held back a growl. "Go home, Ivan. You have the divorce paperwork. Everything is already sent in. So, there is nothing linking you to me anymore."

"You see, this is where you're wrong. It's not that simple, April. There is the dividing of everything. Dividing of assets. Dividing of our accounts."

I threw my hands up, feeling we had already had this fight before. "I took what I wanted and left you practically everything! I took my car, which I paid for with my own money, and I took my family jewelry. I left you everything else. And the accountants are handling the money, so there is no reason for you to call me! So just fucking go home!"

I panted, wanting to punch a wall. I wanted to be free. I just wanted to move on and start over like Riley had been able to.

Ivan was quiet for a moment before his voice shifted. "Enjoy your TV, April. But I wouldn't get too comfortable because you and I both know you're going to screw this up and come crawling back to me like you always have. You think you can do this, but you can't."

The line ended, and I couldn't breathe. I stared at the TV, suddenly feeling I couldn't turn it on. I couldn't do anything. I turned, looking at the front door, making sure it was locked. I turned, walking towards the patio, and made sure the door was locked. I scanned the parking lot, but the feeling he was watching was gone.

I wrapped my arms around myself, tempted to call Cayden. But I didn't. I was safe.

Ivan couldn't touch me.

A shiver ran down my spine, and I remembered why I left. Because, in truth, Ivan was unsafe. He had hurt me before. He'd hurt me many times before. He'd choked me. He'd slapped me. Ivan was the type to stalk me.

I swallowed, knowing I wasn't going to sleep at all at night.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:07 am

"Hey, do you and Cayden want to run and grab breakfast for us?" Ayden stopped at the other edge of the kitchen island. He grabbed the coffee pot and poured himself a mug.

"Sure," I said, giving him a nod as I set my mug down.

"Why are we grabbing breakfast, though?" Cayden asked mid-yawn.

"I promised the guys I would have some when they arrived, and I forgot to grab something. The kids are a handful this morning, so I ran out of time."

"Ha," Cayden laughed as he pointed at me. "You have to run an errand."

"And because you laughed, you get to go with him."

I smirked smugly at Cayden. "Ha."

We headed outside and started down the street. Cayden sighed, rubbing at his neck.

"You look tired," I said as we stopped at the crosswalk. "You not getting enough sleep? Or have you been busy pleasing your woman?" I asked, elbowing him.

He snorted, rolling his eyes. "Oh, shut up. I just didn't sleep well last night. Riley worked late, and her feet bothered her. She was tossing most of the night and kept me up. Not to mention everything with April."

"You could have slept in the spare bedroom. You guys haven't changed it, have you?"

He shook his head. "If I did that, she would have felt worse than she already did. I didn't want her to feel worse. Besides, I would rather get no sleep lying with her than sleep without her. She helps calm my nerves."

I shook my head as the light turned green, and we started walking across the road. "So, you two are still happy as ever?" I asked.

Cayden nodded. "I love her. I don't think I've ever stopped loving her this way. She makes me happy and accepts me for me."

I wondered if I would ever have that. I couldn't remember the last time I felt like I wanted someone that badly. Any relationship I had was nothing special, and I didn't want to waste my time if the person wasn't right for me. I never really wanted anything serious besides when I was with April all those years ago and now that Cayden was married.

We headed down the sidewalk, turning to the left. A shiver ran down me from the wind, and I tightened my jacket. Winter was coming to an end, but man, was it still bitter out.

"We could have driven, you know," I muttered.

"Buck up, it's not that bad outside. It was just one block, and I didn't want to waste the gas."

I rolled my eyes, glancing around the street. My eyes froze as I spotted April at a table in the cafe across the street. She was wearing a pair of jeans and a deep red blouse. Her jacket was thrown over the chair, and her hair was half up in a bun.

Riley was sitting next to her in a light pink dress. Her belly was a little larger now with the pregnancy. The rest of the girls were sitting around them. Wendy was sitting

next to Laura, and they were looking at one of their phones. Gina and Ashley were nodding their heads at something Riley was saying. All of them were clutching mugs, and I figured they were waiting for their food.

"She did end up joining them for breakfast," Cayden said, breaking the silence. "I'm glad. I was worried she was going to bow out and stay home."

I looked away, glancing at him. I could see the worry in his eyes, and I couldn't imagine what he was thinking. Not only did he have a hard time protecting his wife, but then something happened with his sister. It was a lot to handle.

"How is she doing?" I glanced back at the girls, and I could see April was engaged in the conversation, but she was tense. I could see the way she was sitting and the way she was tapping her fingers on her knee. She was waiting for something to happen.

I ground my teeth together, wondering what exactly had happened in their relationship. What had Ivan done to her? I wanted all the details, and I knew I wasn't going to get them. I doubted even Cayden knew.

"She's doing okay, but she's not telling me much. She's even starting to hold things back from Riley, which has really rubbed her the wrong way. Riley is extremely worried about her."

I looked at him, a little surprised by that. Riley and April were closer than I'd ever seen people be.

"Why is that? I mean, why do you think she's keeping things from Riley?" I was trying not to sound too interested, but I wanted to know.

He shrugged, shaking his head. "I think she's afraid Riley will tell me. I mean, she would if it was serious. And this is. She's acting like this is nothing. Her ex is just

showing up here. I don't want a repeat of what happened with Brad."

I knew why it bothered him. Everything that happened with Brad was a lot to deal with. He had to restrain his wood floors to get the blood out, but even then, Riley made him get new furniture and a big ass rug. She said the space couldn't look the same.

"I just want her to be safe. I want her to have a comfortable life." He ran a hand over his face. "I even brought up her marrying you, and that was quickly stomped over again. She doesn't even want to consider it."

I snorted. "You think I'm just that good marriage material?"

Cayden rolled his eyes. "No. I just don't like the idea of him knowing where she's living. You weren't wrong when you said she would be safer."

My stomach twisted up slightly, but I held it down. "And what did she say?"

He sighed. "The same thing as last night. I'm fine. I'm not in danger. You need to just let it go."

We stopped in front of the bakery and stepped inside. The sudden smell of fresh bread was wonderful, and my mouth watered.

"And you don't think she can handle him?" I asked as we stopped in front of the counter.

"It's not about whether or not she can handle him. Riley said the same thing about her ex, and I had to restrain the wood in my apartment after that. Even if he isn't dangerous, I don't want to find out."

I wanted to say maybe he was a little paranoid, which was understandable considering everything, but I didn't know if that was fair.

"Morning, guys," a young man stopped at the counter, smiling at us. "You guys here to pick up the order that Ayden placed?"

Cayden nodded.

"Let me go grab it. It's in the back."

The guy walked away, and Cayden turned to me. "We both know how the pack is. Just because she divorced my brother doesn't mean shit. They are going to want her to come back just as much as Ivan does. She needs something to ground her here. She doesn't have a job. She doesn't even have a bank account here yet. She is legally not part of this pack. I'm concerned because they could formally request her return, and really, we couldn't refuse without it causing a major fallout.

"What about her apartment? Doesn't that count for something?"

"I had to cosign with her," he said, rubbing his eyes again. "They were worried she might just up and leave one day and lose money on renting her the apartment. Really, it's in my name."

I didn't know that.

"Has she thought of working? Has she applied anywhere?"

He shrugged. "I don't think she feels like this is her home. Anytime I ask, she says she's looking, but I don't know. I just don't know what to do at this point."

"Well, is there anything I can do to help?"

Cayden smirked. "Yeah, convince her to marry you."

Over the next couple of days, I tried to think of a way to convince April. But everything I thought of, I knew that Cayden had already mentioned to her. It was up to her to decide what she wanted to do.

I grabbed my jacket and threw it on, planning to go home and relax after a long day. But Cayden stopped me before I got outside.

"Hey, Weslie. Could you do me a favor? Miles is stuck at home for the next few hours before getting in. Can you stop and make sure Riley is doing okay? She wasn't feeling great this afternoon, and I just wanted someone to stop by."

"Sure." I nodded and headed out. I drove across town and headed up to their apartment. I knocked, wondering if April was downstairs in her apartment.

"Come in."

I opened the door and found April standing in the living room. I looked around, confused, not spotting Riley. "Is Riley not here?"

April nodded. "She's throwing up in the bathroom."

I frowned. "Did you guys need anything? Cayden said he was going to be working a little late."

April shook her head and rubbed her eyes. I stared, taking in her rather pale complexion. She had looked pale in general, but since I last saw her, she seemed sicker. She had dark circles under her eyes, and her hair was slightly messy. She was wearing sweatpants and an oversized sweater like she had the other day.

I wanted to ask if she was sick, but I knew she would only feel insulted.

"Do you know if she needs anything? I can go out and grab soup for her."

April shook her head. "No, she's got the flu. I don't think she's planning to eat. She said she just wanted to go to bed."

I looked past Riley to the kitchen, seeing a pile of dishes and a laundry basket on one of the stools. I knew Riley and Cayden were working a lot, and neither was home, so I'm sure they were falling behind on chores.

"Was she cleaning?"

Riley nodded, taking a few steps down the hallway toward the bathroom. "Yeah, we've got it under control. You can leave." She knocked on the bathroom door and pulled it open, stepping inside.

I frowned. I didn't want to leave. I knew that Cayden was going to get home late, and I had nothing better to do with my time. Besides, this was the perfect time to talk with April.

I slipped my shoes off and walked over toward the kitchen. I turned the water on and plugged the sink. As I poured the soap in, I heard footsteps coming back into the kitchen.

"What are you doing?"

"Cleaning dishes," I said, glancing back at April. She looked exhausted like she hadn't slept in a while. "Unless you want to switch, I'll hold Riley's hair back while she throws up."

She sighed, walking closer. "She's in bed now."

I turned the water off, tossing a few plates into the water. "You look tired. And the least I could do is help with some cleaning so Weslie doesn't have to when he gets home."

"Aren't you a good friend?"

I smirked, glancing over at her. "I'm trying to be as good as you are."

April sat down on one of the stools and sighed. "You don't have to stay if you have things to get to. I can do this. I have the time. I don't have a job after all."

I started at the first plate, scrubbing away the food. "I imagine you've been here most of the day helping her." I pulled the plate out and let it dry on the rack.

"Well, as you said, someone needs to hold her hair back."

I laughed, starting on the next plate. "Well, besides that, how was your day?"

"It was good. I walked around. Did some laundry. Watch some TV with Riley. I missed a lot of it because of all the trips to the bathroom, but all in all, it was a decent day."

"Sounds like you did a lot. Cayden and I spotted you guys out with the ladies having breakfast the other day. You seem to be settling well."

She shrugged. "I'm trying."

"Found any work yet?"

She shook her head. "No. Nothing has caught my attention."

"And have you thought about the fake marriage?"

April scowled. "No."

I pulled my hands up. "Really? Not even after seeing me clean these dishes?" I set another dish aside, starting on a pan. "I'm a catch, you know. I'm not just something pretty to look at."

She rolled her eyes. "It would be fake whether you were a catch or not. It wouldn't matter."

"True," I said, cleaning the pan and setting it aside. Shall I give you more good reasons to marry me? I keep a clean house. I like my space—I love my space, actually. I know how to cook and do laundry."

She smirked. "As much as that is all tempting, it isn't giving me any new reasons."

"You'd be safe," I said, starting on some silverware. "You wouldn't need to be worried about Ivan."

"While that may all be true, I'd be glued to you. Legally. I don't want that."

"But I'm a catch, ask anyone. It would be worth all of that."

She laughed and shook her head. But after a moment, she leaned back. "Fine, I'll think about it. But only because I don't want to hear more about why you're so great."

"Good call because I could go on for a while."

She snorted. I pulled another dish out, unplugging the water. "Did I also add that my apartment has an amazing view."

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I flipped the page of the newspaper and sighed. "Nothing. None of this seems like something I would be interested in." I said, glancing at Riley as she sat on the other end of the couch. She had a glass in one hand and a newspaper in her lap.

"Not even one?" Riley asked, flipping her newspaper over. "They had an opening for a bank teller at Blue Bank. Or a salesperson for the car dealership."

I started to laugh. "Could you honestly see me trying to sell a car? I think you're forgetting, but I can't remember brand names. They would fire me before I could even finish the first day."

Riley's lips curled up slightly, and she giggled. "It's hard to picture. But you never know. You might be good at it. You won't know until you try."

"Let me put it in your head for you." I set the newspaper down and faked a smile. "Hello, welcome to the dealership. What can I help you buy? A car? A truck? Or an SUV? I don't know any brand names, but they still hired me here."

"Okay, okay, so not either of those. How about the daycare? We could always use another set of hands."

I shook my head. "No, that's too...kidsy for me."

"You like kids, though," Riley said, giving me a whining face. "You're being too picky now."

"I like kids, but that doesn't mean I want to work around them."

Riley shook her head. "I'm sorry to say, but at this point, April, you just don't sound like you want to work. You've hardly looked, and I have yet to hear you actually going on an interview for one. I'm starting to worry you're in a rut and can't get out of it."

I didn't want to tell her I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Just a year ago, I was married, planning out birthday parties and cocktail hours. I was worried about when we were going to have babies and how we would decorate the rooms. I didn't love it, but it still felt like a purpose and direction. It was something.

Now, I was jobless, and if it weren't for my brother having sway in things, I would be homeless at this point. I was dipping hard into my savings and needed to figure something out. Riley wasn't wrong that I was in a rut and needed to get out of it.

I looked back at the newspaper and decided Riley was right. I needed to at least be serious about looking for a job. Even if I wasn't good at it right now, it was money. It was something to do.

"I'll stop at the bank and apply," I said. "I could be a bank teller."

"Yay." Riley cheered and pulled herself off the couch. "Which, speaking of, I need to stop by the fire station. We can swing by now." April walked towards the island, grabbing her purse. "And how about we stop for ice cream afterward?"

"Sure, why not."

Riley had a skip in her step as she moved, and I knew it was because of me. I wasn't blind to the worrying that she and Cayden did. I was trying to hide all my problems, but it seemed I wasn't doing a great job.

I needed to focus. I needed a job, and things would start to settle.

We arrived at the fire station, and the guys cleaned the fire truck in the garage. I watched as Cayden and Weslie scrubbed the truck down, and water sprayed everywhere. I swallowed, suddenly feeling a tug towards Weslie. I scowled, wishing my crush had died all those years ago, but it hadn't. It still simmered deep down, driving me nuts.

Riley whistled loudly, making the guys turn toward us. My eyes dropped on Weslie, whose shirt was soaking wet. I could see his defined muscles through the fabric, and my throat suddenly went dry as he turned, looking over at us.

I could see a tattoo on his left arm, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I tried not to stare and looked at Riley, who seemed unfazed.

"Turn the hose off," Cayden said, waving his hand at Weslie.

Weslie moved, turning the hose off. The water stopped coming, and silence filled the space. Riley smiled. "Thank you."

"What brings you two down here?" Cayden asked, grabbing a towel and rubbing his hands over it.

"We were just stopping in," Riley said. "We stopped at the bank to grab April an application, and we're going to grab some ice cream, but I needed to grab some paperwork from Cayden."

"Shit, I left it in the car," Cayden said, moving closer. "I thought we didn't need it until tomorrow anyway?"

"Hailey wants it by tonight if we want to make an offer."

I looked at Cayden and Riley, confused. "Offer? Hold on a second. I'm confused. Did I miss something?"

Riley looked at Cayden, who swallowed nervously. They were silent for a long moment before Cayden rubbed at the back of his neck. "Well.... we've been looking at houses, and we found one we really like."

I didn't know they were thinking of moving. I mean, I knew that they had mentioned it, but I figured this would be down in the future. They were planning on turning my old bedroom into a nursery. When did that change to them officially looking for a new place?

I looked at Riley, a little hurt, and she chewed on her lower lip. She didn't seem to know what to say. "We were going to tell you. This all happened really quickly."

I scowled. "When? The day that you guys found something? Were you going to tell me on moving day?"

She shook her head. "No! We've been looking. We just had some finalizing paperwork to drop off for the loan."

"But Cayden said you were making an offer. What about the apartment?"

"Well, we would move out, but this will take months. It took Lucas and Gina months to find their house, and we wanted more space. Even if we get the house, we still wouldn't be moving right away."

I frowned, realizing I would have no one around if they moved. I enjoyed having them upstairs. It comforted me knowing they were within arms reach if something were to happen.

A shiver ran down my spine as my mind traveled to Ivan. If they moved and he found me. God, what would happen? If he found me in the hallway, I wouldn't have anywhere to run. I would be stuck.

"April, this isn't happening overnight," Cayden said, snapping my attention back to them. "Our realtor said it takes a while, and we have a pretty big demand list. Even if our offer is accepted, it's just the first step."

Riley nodded her head. "Yeah. We have an extremely long list. New floors, a fireplace, and a big yard. Cayden wants a two-stall garage and..."

I forced a smile because this was good news for them. As much as it sucked, I wanted them to have the life they wanted. They had been so worried about me, and I didn't want to be the reason they held back from things.

"No, It's good news. I'm just shocked, is all." I looked past them towards Weslie, who stood just behind them. Had he known? When did he find out about this news?

"Well, I need the papers either way," Riley said. "I want to make a pitstop and get them to her."

"I'll go grab them." Cayden hurried out to his car, and Riley followed. I turned to Weslie. "Did you know?"

He shrugged. "Sorta. They had mentioned that they saw a nice house that was for sale. I just figured it meant they were thinking about it. I didn't know they were intending to buy something so soon. But it doesn't surprise me. Most of the guys did that when the girls got a little further along. It's part of wanting to set roots."

I turned, looking back, watching Riley stand by the car. Her bump was prominent, and when Cayden looked at her, he smiled ear to ear. They were so madly in love.

My stomach twisted up, knowing that I had complicated their life. They had opened their home to me, and Riley held me countless times when I cried. Within a month, they had helped try and get me a life. And I couldn't seem to figure the rest out.

"Do you think they will find a house pretty fast?"

"I don't know. It could take a while, or they might find something they fall in love with right away."

"Have you seen this one they are making an offer on?"

He shook his head. "Nope, I didn't even know about the offer until now. But I hope they get it. Babies require a lot of space."

Which means I would be alone. It curled my stomach slightly, and I suddenly felt like my life was slipping further apart. I thought I would have a little time to get things figured out with them upstairs.

The following morning, I sat working on a cup of coffee when there was a knock at the door. I stiffened up, feeling my mind travel to Ivan. But I knew his knock, which would have been much louder. My wolf would have also sensed his presence, and the hair on my body would have stood up.

I got off the couch and unlocked the door. I pulled it open, shocked to find it was Weslie. His hair was a tousled mess, and he looked like he was just going to work.

"Hey, what brings you here?" I leaned on the door frame and looked around the hallway, expecting my brother to be with him.

"Cayden's truck broke down. I'm giving him a ride, but he's not ready."

I scowled. "How do you know that he's not ready?"

Cayden smirked. "Riley is a few months pregnant, and they didn't answer when I knocked, so I'm guessing they are busy fucking."

I scrunched my nose up, not needing to imagine it. "Ew. Thank you for that mental image."

"I imagine that they still have about twenty minutes before he's going to be ready, so I thought I'd just hang out with you while I wait."

"I just made some coffee if you want some." I pulled the door further open, and Weslie stepped in. He took in my space, and I suddenly felt embarrassed.

"Excuse the emptiness. I haven't shopped much."

He raised an eyebrow at me as he looked around. "Haven't you been here almost two months now?"

I nodded. "Yeah, but still adjusting to being here. I imagine it took you a while when you got here."

He nodded as he took a seat at my island. "I did. But you figure things out eventually. I had your brother."

I had questions. Had he known my brother was here? Had he reached out looking to leave before he left? How long had he known before he decided to disappear? "Did you know you were coming here?"

"Yes and no. I knew I needed to go somewhere. It was honestly a blur, the travel down here. I don't remember much."

I frowned. Had he planned it? Had he known he was leaving the last night we hung out?

"How are you handling the news?" he asked, pulling my attention back to him.

I shrugged, having tried not to think about it. I'd been sleeping like shit because of the worry. It was starting to become an even bigger problem because I was scared. I was falling apart at the seams and trying everything to keep it together.

"April, have you thought about the offer? I don't want to overstep, but this isn't what normal looks like."

I looked at him, confused. "What?"

He waved a hand. "You aren't settling, and it looks like you haven't been sleeping. I imagine that it's not just us that are worried about Ivan. I think you're worried about him as well, and you're just putting a wall up."

I chewed on my cheek. "And you think a fake marriage will fix that?"

"Not all of it, but part of it."

I sighed because he was right. And I couldn't keep leaning on my brother and Riley to help me. "Fine. I'll marry you, but only because they are moving."

Later that night, we went to the courthouse. Cayden and Riley went with us. I sat nervous, bouncing my leg as we waited for the officiant to call us.

I glanced at Weslie, wondering if this was a good idea. I was second-guessing myself, but one look at my brother told me to just go with it. I could see the worry was weighing on him, and this was a way to stop that.

The door to the left of us opened, and I watched as an older man stepped out. “April and Weslie?”

“Here,” Weslie said as he pulled himself up. He looked at me, and I stood up and forced a smile.

We headed inside, and the man explained everything, but I wasn’t listening. I just wanted to get this over with so I could go home.

“All right, take each other's hand.”

Weslie turned to me and held his hands out. I placed mine in his and felt a spark travel up my body. My wolf purred at the contact, but I shoved it down.

“Repeat after me. I, Weslie Ryan William, take April Lyla Colton as my wife.”

Weslie looked at me, deep into my eyes, as he repeated the words. “I, Weslie Ryan William, take April Lyla Colton as my wife.”

“To have and to hold in sickness and health.”

“To have and to hold in sickness and health.”

“Through the good...and through the bad.”

As Weslie said those words, I felt my heart beating so quickly, and I bit hard on my cheek.

“Okay, April. Repeat after me. I, April Lyla Colton, take Weslie Ryan William as my husband.”

I swallowed and slowly repeated the word back. I glanced at Cayden, who didn't hold any emotions on his face.

"You may kiss the bride."

I stiffened, having forgotten that part. But if I refused, it would look weird.

Weslie stepped into my face, cupping my cheek as he leaned in. His lips pressed against mine gently, and I remembered just how badly I liked him. Weslie had always been a good kisser.

She leaned back, and Riley started clapping her hands, the only noise in the space.

"Congratulations," the man said. "May you guys have a long life together."

And then it hit me. If Weslie and I were married, we would have to hold this act up because it needed to look like I was moving on. We would need to act like a new, happily married couple.

My stomach dipped, and I suddenly felt sick.

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I rolled off the couch and sighed as my entire back ached from sleeping on it. I rubbed my eyes and looked outside the window, seeing the sun just coming up. The sky was filled with hues of pink and purple. I looked at my watch, seeing it was seven. I slept longer than I intended to.

"Morning," April spoke up from the hallway, and I turned my gaze to her. She was wearing her pajamas and holding a towel in her hands. She looked still half asleep as she leaned on the wall. "Do you mind if I shower first? I normally shower at this time since you are usually out of the house by now."

I shook my head, waving a hand at her. "No, go right ahead."

I could hear her footsteps receding down the hallway and the bathroom door shut. I looked around the living room and the few boxes of her clothes that April had brought with her. April didn't have a lot of stuff when she moved in, but she had plenty of clothes.

The move-in was quicker than I anticipated. I expected April to drag her feet about moving or at least complain more, but she didn't. She'd been willing. Which told me she had been worried about everything going on with Ivan. She would have dragged her feet if she hadn't thought it was a problem.

I lived in a one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment, so she had taken the bedroom. I wanted her to be more comfortable, and I was fine taking the couch. I didn't expect that this would be going on long anyway.

I rolled my neck and pulled myself up, heading into the large kitchen. It was a chef's

kitchen with lots of space and plenty of cabinets. I enjoyed it because I genuinely love cooking. If I hadn't been a firefighter, it was my backup plan.

I started my espresso and rubbed at my eyes. I tossed and turned a lot last night. I couldn't seem to turn my mind off since April moved in. It had only been a few days, but I was trying hard to accommodate her and give her space. But it was hard to do sometimes with how little space I had.

We ran into each other constantly, and I was trying to laugh most of it off. I tried to get out of the house early so she had her space in the morning, and when I got home, she often had dinner ready and let me have my own space.

My phone rang, and I glanced at it. It was Cayden. I'm sure he was calling to check in again in April, as he'd been doing almost every day. I answered it. "Hello?"

"Hey, how are things going?"

"We're doing fine," I said, pulling out the milk and creamer for April. I started another cup.

"Is she comfortable? You guys have been living together for a few days now."

I turned, grabbed a banana, and started to peel it. "As comfortable as she can be for someone new to the pack and freshly married after a divorce."

I could hear Cayden sigh. "You're not making me feel better about this. You think I love the idea of her having to be married to keep her here?"

"She's safe, Cayden. No one gets in or out of this apartment without me knowing. The rest will take time."

He sighed heavily. "I know. I just worry about her. I know she's going through a lot. I just don't want a repeat of what happened with Riley. She's my sister, Weslie. I screwed everything up the first time, and I don't want to this time."

"There won't be a repeat like what happened with Riley," I said, hearing my espresso machine beep. I turned, pushing the start button. "But you can't keep worrying about it like this. Your sister is going to catch on, and it won't help her feel safe if she knows you're worried."

I heard him sigh again. "I'm trying. But god, I feel like I'm failing her."

I leaned on the counter, looking back towards the hallway. I understood that feeling because it's how I felt.

"I get it," I ran a hand over my face. "I have to get ready for work. I'll have April call you when she gets out of the shower."

I ended the line and took a few sips of my drink before starting April's. I left it on the counter, made my way down to the hallway, and grabbed a towel for myself.

I heard the door to the bathroom open, and the smell of fresh flowers filled the space. My cock suddenly jerked, knowing the scent. "Bathroom is yours."

I turned around, watching April enter the bedroom. The towel was loose as it was wrapped around her, and I could see a tattoo across her back. My eyes widened, and she shut the door behind her before I could see it better. I swallowed, feeling the heat rise in the pit of my stomach.

Fuck.

I turned to the bathroom, stepped inside, and shut the door. The scent was stronger in

her, and my cock ached at it. It jerked to attention, and I shifted my feet as I hung my towel up.

April had her morning cleaning routine laid out on the large counter on the left side with her brush and her toothbrush. She kept the space clean, which I was grateful for.

The shower was a walk-in marble shower. I started taking my clothes off and flipped the water on. Her scent was ten times stronger in the shower.

I stepped under the jets, trying to push the thoughts aside, but the scent stuck around. It was the same as when she was younger. It filled my sheets and my clothes. I loved how her scent clung to everything when she left my room. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't jerked off to her scent.

She always smelled of fresh flowers and lemons. I remember wrapping my arms around her and inhaling the intoxicating scent. I used to miss it when I moved here. I'd lay in bed dreaming of that scent, wishing I had brought something with me that smelt like her.

I inhaled slowly, feeling my cock pulse. A shiver ran down my spine, and I placed a hand on the tile wall.

I thought of so many memories. Us gaming at the house, her sitting on my lap. I would hold her so close, feeling her relax in my arms. Her sunbathing by the pool, her legs sprayed out with her arms stretched out. She always had such a golden tan, and her skin seemed to sparkle in the sunlight. Her arms wrapped around me while she made out in my car, her grinding down on me. We never had sex, but we weren't entirely innocent.

I placed my hands on the wall and scowled. This was bad. Thinking about her this way was not going to help me. This was only going to make me want her more than I

already did. And that couldn't happen. That was all in the past, and it needed to stay there.

I took a deep breath in, but it didn't help. My mind continued to think about all the times I had her with me. I remembered how her mouth felt against mine and how she would travel her hands up my chest. Her nails would scrap against my skin softly before she would lean back and smile at me. God, that smile.

I reached a hand down, rubbing my fist softly down my cock. I held back a groan, not remembering the last time I had jerked off. I never needed to. I could get any girl I wanted.

I had a lineup of women I could have, but since April returned, I hadn't even glanced at one. A part of me suddenly couldn't even acknowledge them anymore. My eyes were glued to April.

I tightened my hold, rocking my fist up my cock again and gliding it down. I closed my eyes and thought of her.

My mind traveled to her walking down the hallway just a moment ago. It was a split second, but I saw plenty.

She had long legs, and on her left calf, she had a tattoo. They were smooth, and they lead up to her wonderfully formed ass. The towel gave little to the imagination. Her back was bare, giving me a view of a boutique of flowers. It was a beautiful tattoo made of black and white.

Her hair was soaking wet, water trailed onto the towel, and as she moved, her ass swayed.

I grunted, tightening my hold on my cock, sliding my hand in harder jerks. I groaned,

leaning against the wall.

I thought of her grinding on me in the car. She knew how to sway her hips and always did it with a vixen smile. We knew better than to go farther, but we certainly played with the line. April was young, and sometimes, I wondered if she did it without realizing it. We often teased each other, pushing our boundaries.

I imagined her taking her shirt off just before she got into her chair to sunbathe. The way she pulled at the fabric and pulled it over her head. The way she shimmed her skirt down over her ass, letting the skirt drop. April was a virgin, but she knew damn well what she was doing. And she would turn, bending over, giving me a perfect view of her ass.

I felt the sensation hit me like a rock, and I came hard. I ground my teeth together, panting as I leaned on the wall.

The room was foggy, and her scent still lingered around. I knew it was wrong, but I wanted her so badly. I looked down at my hand, knowing that this was all I would ever get—jerking myself off rather than sinking myself into her.

I quickly cleaned myself up and scrubbed at my hair. After that, I stepped out and found April wasn't in the bedroom. I wandered down the hallway towards the kitchen to see if she had left.

I found April standing in the kitchen in front of the fridge. My eyes automatically went to her outfit. She was wearing a short black dress that stopped just inches below her ass. The dress hitched up slightly, and I could see the outline of a thong.

Fuck. Me.

My wolf growled with want, and my cock suddenly jerked. I quickly tightened the

towel around my waist, praying it didn't rise. The last thing I needed was for her to see that, decide she wasn't comfortable here anymore, and move out.

I cleared my throat, and April stood back up quickly, fixing her dress by tugging it down slightly.

"Shit. Didn't see you there, sorry. Do you have any fruit?"

"We," I said, correcting her. While this was my house, it was hers as well now, and I wanted her to know that. "And no, we don't. I can get some after work."

She made a pouting expression and sighed. "Well, that sucks. Fruit goes well with eggs."

I glanced over to the pan, where she had some scrambled eggs made up.

"You didn't have to make breakfast."

"You made my coffee. It was only fair." She shut the fridge and turned back to the stove.

I gave her a soft smile. "I made you coffee because I was making my own."

"And I was making myself breakfast. Come sit."

I didn't think I could. My cock hurt now, and as she moved, my eyes went to her butt. Plenty of thoughts roamed my mind.

What would it feel like to sink into her? Would she be so tight that I'd never wanted to leave? Was April a moaner? Or did she whimper? What was her favorite position?

Suddenly my hand job didn't seem like it helped because my cock felt like it was going to pop. My cock jerked, and I moved, stepping out of her view. I tried to hide it a little better, but it was noticeable now. It was rock fucking hard again.

How the fuck was I going to survive this?

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I stared at Weslie, taking in his naked body and the way his hand was holding the towel in place, covering his lower half. I felt my mouth water at the sight of him, taking in his muscular build.

He moved, turning to the left, once more shifting his hand on the towel. Water dripped off his hair and trailed down his chest. I wanted to reach out and rub it in, but I curled my hands together.

Weslie had always been fit, but this was another level. He was no longer a teenage boy in shape but a full-grown man built to go into fires and save lives.

Focus April. You are just staying with him until this situation is resolved. You don't need to stare at him.

I decided to focus my attention on Weslie's sleeve tattoo. It was a pack of wolves that wrapped around his arm. The detailing was amazing. It was made in black and white, with shading. There were trees around the wolves, and the scene was outstanding.

He looked down at his arm and then up at me. "I started it when I moved here. It's all of the guys."

My eyebrows went up. "Really? Like all the guys at the fire station?"

He nodded. "Yeah." He pulled his hand up, pointing at each of the wolves. "Ayden, Owen, and Miles are in the front. Thomas, Cayden, and Lucas are in the back."

I stared at the tattoos, taking each of them in. "You didn't want to add yourself?"

He shook his head. "No need."

"It's beautiful," I said. "I didn't know you wanted tattoos."

"I wanted ones that had a good meaning behind them. I never had the need for them growing up. It wasn't until I was here that I wanted one."

"So, what changed?"

He gave me a half smile. "It was my second time out with them. There was a fire in an abandoned building. We didn't think it was serious until we discovered some kids were playing there. I'd watched the guys get into action before, but this was different. It hit all of us differently, and I realized I never wanted to do anything else. I was where I needed to be."

He turned and showed me his back tattoo, which was a compass with fire all around it. It was intricate, and the fire station logo was intertwined with the fire.

"Which is when I got this one."

My eyes stared at it, and I reached a hand up, running my fingers over one of the hands on the compass. "It's stunning."

He smiled. "Thank you. Though, I must say your back tattoo was pretty amazing. I only saw it briefly, but it looked like it had taken a while. Did it take a couple of sessions?"

I blushed and nodded my head. "Thank you. And yeah, it was about ten hours in total. The shading took the longest." I pulled my hand back, thinking of when I got the tattoo. It was my newest one.

I got it when my grandmother died two years ago. She had been a sweet woman. Her views on things were much like the packs, but she was open-minded and wanted me to be happy. She had a love for flowers and their meaning, so I ordered her boutique for her funeral and had it tattooed onto my back.

"When did you get yours?" he asked. "I never thought you'd be the type to get a tattoo, much less one that large."

I laughed. "I've always been rebellious. It started with piercing my ears and getting my belly button done. It then led to tattoos, which I found I enjoy. Actually, Ivan is the one that convinced me."

I thought of when Ivan took me to get my first tattoo. I got a small flower on my ankle. I loved it and loved him so much for paying for it. I had never thought I would end up here.

"Really? Ivan convinced you." His eyebrows went up on that.

I nodded. "Yeah, he convinced me to do a lot of things that I probably shouldn't have done. Like smoking."

His eyes widened. "You smoked?"

I nodded. "Yeah, started smoking and then stopped smoking. I then started again and stopped about a year ago. Riley said she was going to sign me up for some online program if I didn't."

He started to laugh. "I bet your folks enjoyed that. Your mother almost killed your brother when he had a friend's pack of cigars in his pants."

I snorted, remembering how angry they had gotten when they found me smoking.

That was nothing to how angry they were when they found out about my back tattoo. I was pretty sure my mother wanted to skin me alive.

It was unladylike. No man would want me when I was marked up like that. They didn't know that Ivan had opened me up to that world. I had wanted one but was too chicken shit to get one. He just nudged me.

"They were not impressed, and considering you know my folks pretty well, you can imagine how that all went down."

I watched as Weslie moved around on the island, looking uncomfortable. I frowned, wondering if it was my own doing. We were both trying to make this as comfortable as we could. But I had moved into his space so quickly without warning.

"Are you...going to get dressed?" I asked, waving a hand toward his towel. "Or do you normally walk around with a towel?"

He looked down at his towel and then back up at me. "Sorry. I was going to get dressed. I thought you had left. I didn't realize you were still out here."

I wanted to ask if he normally walked around naked, but I didn't. I could picture him as the type to hang around his apartment naked. He was high enough up that people couldn't see in.

I watched as he turned and headed back down the hallway. I turned my attention to the eggs. I started scooping them onto a plate. I slid the plate across the island for him.

I took a sip of my coffee and waited for Weslie to come back. Weslie came back wearing a pair of jeans and a deep red shirt. He took a seat at the island and looked at the eggs. His eyebrows went up as he turned the plate.

"I added salt and pepper for seasonings. I wasn't entirely sure how you liked your eggs."

He took a bite of the eggs and nodded his head. "They're good."

I scooped my eggs up and took a bite. I took a sip of my coffee and glanced outside the windows. I had to hand it to him. The apartment was nice. It wasn't large, but it was clean and updated. And the view—it was pretty breathtaking. I would buy the place just for that alone. It looked over the town, and when the sun went down, the town twinkled with life.

"Nice view, isn't it?" Weslie said, noticing I was staring. "I wasn't sure about the apartment since it is small, but that view was worth it."

"It is," I said, looking back at him. I took in his outfit, seeing he was dressed for work. "Are you going to be at work all day?"

"Yeah, and running to get groceries afterward. What about you? Got a busy day planned for yourself?"

I applied at the bank but haven't heard anything back. I was thinking of calling and seeing if they were interested in setting up an interview. I should look at other places to apply and really try to get a job. I needed one. I could watch only so much TV before I was sick of it.

I looked through the newspaper, but nothing piqued my interest.

"I don't know yet." I took a bit of my eggs and watched as he shifted in his chair. He looked uncomfortable again, and he had bags under his eyes. Had he not been sleeping well? I felt a little bad that I'd been taking the bed. We could share. I didn't mind sleeping on the couch.

"Have you not been sleeping well?" I asked, pointing to his eyes.

He shrugged, taking another bit of his eggs. "The couch isn't that comfortable. I really should have thought about that when I bought it."

I scowled, drumming my fingers on the counter. "Maybe we should be thinking about getting a bigger apartment. I can look while I'm home. Would give me something to do."

He paused and scowled at me. He looked a little insulted. "No."

"But why not? If we got a bigger place, you and I could have our own rooms. We could both have a bed."

He softly sighed, leaning back in his chair. "Because it needs to look like we're happily married, April. While yes, some married couples would look to move into a bigger place for children, we both know this has an end date. When this is over with Ivan, you'll return to your place. It wouldn't be worth it for me to be left with a big place."

I sighed, seeing his point. But I still felt bad. Something had to change. "Well, this isn't working. You look like you haven't been sleeping. We can switch up who has the bed, and I'll sleep on the couch some nights. You should be the one sleeping in the bed since you're the one working."

He shook his head. "It's fine, April. Just eat your eggs."

I tightened my grip on the fork, suddenly angry. I was just trying to figure out a way for us both to be getting decent sleep. Just because I came into his space didn't mean he needed to suffer.

"I'm just trying to help."

He ran a hand through his hair, taking the last of his eggs into his mouth. He swallowed and leaned back. "Everything is fine. Do you need me to help you look for a job?"

I ground my teeth together. Everything was not fine. It was written on his face. And now I felt like I was a burden.

"No."

I took his plate and mine and tossed them into the sink. I ground my teeth together painfully, not wanting to snap at him. It wasn't his fault my life was a mess.

"Are you sure? I don't mind helping you look."

I turned and crossed my arms, glaring at him. "Why? Do you think I can't find a job on my own? Do I need help with that as well?"

He frowned. "That's not what I'm saying, April. I'm just offering because I have connections. I can see who is looking for help, and asking around is all."

"I'm fine. Riley said she was going to help me anyway."

His shoulders sank, and he rubbed his face. "Okay, well...let me know if you need anything. I'm going to head to work."

He pulled himself off the stool and headed down the hallway. I turned around, gripping the counter tightly. Rage simmered in my belly, and I wanted to scream.

I took a deep breath in through my nose, feeling tears build up. I was angry because I

wanted to help, but he wasn't going to allow it.

"Hey, do you want to join me and the guys at the bar tonight?"

I turned and leaned over, looking down towards the door. Weslie stood pulling his jacket on.

"I don't know," I said, not really in the mood. I just wanted to curl into a ball and disappear at this point.

"Come on, we do have to get out and look like the newly happy couple," he said, smiling softly. "Word travels faster that way, and this problem is over sooner."

Right....because once Ivan is taken care of, we can go our separate ways, and I'm sure he wanted his bed back. The quicker word gets around, the quicker he gets rid of me.

I swallowed and nodded my head. "Sure, just text me where and when."

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"Do we want to share cars?" Ayden asked as he followed us down the stairs.

Cayden and I both looked at him, a little shocked. "You're going out with us?"

Ayden nodded. "Yeah, you think I'm missing out on a night of beer and pool? Think again."

"Aren't you on baby duty?" Cayden asked, a smirk pulled at his lips. "Isn't your wife gonna be a little pissed you're going out drinking."

Ayden glared at Cayden. "My wife and I have an understanding. How about your wife, Cayden? Does she know you are going out to a bar?"

He laughed. "Yeah, my wife knows where I'm going to be."

As we headed for the truck, I noticed Miles and Lucas playing rock, paper, scissors.

"What's up with that?" I asked.

Ayde snorted. "Well, I told them that only one of them could be drinking. A few of us still need to stay sober in case of an emergency. I'm guessing they couldn't decide who got to drink and who didn't."

"So, the loser has to stay sober?" I asked, watching the game go.

"That must be how they decided," Cayden chirped, pushing the button on his keys to start his truck. The noise made Miles jump, and he placed down the paper while

Lucas put down the scissors.

"Ha!" Lucas laughed, "Sorry, you're staying sober. Loser."

"That's not fair!" Miles turned, pointing at Cayden. "You couldn't have waited five seconds to let me win? You made me lose my concentration. God damn, Cayden!"

Ayden patted him on the back. "It's rock, paper, scissors. You don't need that much concentration."

Miles grumbled, sighing heavily. "It isn't every day that Cayden is celebrating a marriage. Come on, let me join in on the fun."

"Nope," Ayden shook his head. "One person has to stay sober, and you drew the unlucky straw."

We all headed into the two vehicles that were driving and headed to the local bar, Lucky Lue. As soon as we arrived, the space was packed with people already enjoying the end of their day. There was music playing loudly but not shaking the space.

The owner, Chad, waved at us from the bar. He was a middle-aged man who gave discounts to people who worked certain jobs. "Hey, you guys! It's great to see you all."

Ayden went for him, and I looked around the space for the girls. I knew that Riley and April were going to be here. We agreed to hang out at the bar and start making public appearances to confirm our quick marriage.

I quickly spotted April, Riley, and Laura standing at one of the pool tables. I headed over, wrapping an arm around April's shoulder. She jumped, looking at me confused,

but then her face shifted. I could see the forced smile as she spoke. "Took you guys long enough to get here. I can't believe we beat you."

"We ran behind on a few things," I explained, looking at Laura and Riley. "Evening ladies. You are all looking nice this evening."

"Still a lady's man, aren't ya? Where is my husband?" Laura asked, and I pointed to the bar. Ayden, Miles, and Thomas ordered food and drinks at the bar. Owen and Lucas were grabbing a large table for us all to sit at.

"Did you guys want to play?" I asked, pointing to the table. "Do I need to show you how to play?"

"We just finished," Riley chuckled. "We actually used to play this all the time growing up."

I almost forgot that April and Cayden had one growing up. We used to play on it as well before he left.

"I'm hungry," Riley said as she stretched her arms, heading over towards the table with Laura. I pulled my arm tighter, pulling April closer. "Sorry we were late," I said before letting go. "Hopefully, you guys weren't waiting too long."

April turned and gave me a side shrug. "It's fine. We were only here for one game. Do you want to play? I'm not good at this, just so you know."

"We can after eating," I offered. I was a little hungry, and my stomach was seconds away from growling.

She nodded, and we headed over to the table that the guys had grabbed. It was enough for all of us. Everyone was already seated, leaving space for April and me.

"Where is Wendy, Ashle, and Gina?" Laura asked as she leaned into Miles, sipping on a beer. She curled up close to him, and Miles draped an arm around her, holding her closer.

"Wendy and Ashley had some things they needed to get done. Wendy is putting together a charity fundraiser, and Ashley is helping her with it. I offered, but they said they would just watch the kids and focus on things."

"And Gina?"

"Uhhmm..." Lucas scratched his head. "She was visiting the doctor today."

Laura looked worried suddenly. "What for? Jesus, is something wrong? Do I need to call her?"

We had heard about their difficulty conceiving a baby. Lucas had said little about it, but we had heard about it from the girls. We knew that Gina was pregnant, but she was almost two months along now. But Lucas had explained they weren't getting excited just yet, in case.

Lucas sighed. "She's fine. She's just been having some serious acid reflux, and her weight gain has been pretty high, so she went to see the doctor. She informed us that we're expecting twins."

"Oh my god." The girls gasped in unison, and we all looked at them shocked.

"And, of course, Wendy and Ashley aren't here to hear about this," Laura said, shaking her head. "I need to message them! Oh my god! She's having twins! Lucas, you must be so thrilled!"

"That's exciting for you guys," I said, knowing it had been weighing on Lucas a little

more lately. I never saw the man wanting kids until he had mentioned the trouble they had been having.

And suddenly, the food was coming and being placed on the table. A large plate of fries and several plates of wings were placed down. Waters were placed in front of everyone besides the already passed beers.

"I think the fact that Weslie getting married is more of a shock, no offense," Miles quickly added as he grabbed a few wings, pulling them onto his plate. "I damn near choked when Cayden informed us."

I tensed up, glancing at him. "What? Why is that a shock?"

Miles simply shrugged. "It's just a shock, is all. You getting married. I don't think any of us ever thought that was going to happen. You're not the type to settle."

I snorted, waving a hand at all of them. "And what about all of you? You guys have dated plenty. I'm not the only one that's dated a lot of women."

"Yeah, but the women were aware of what they were getting into."

"Are you saying he's a handful?" April asked, forcing a smile. I could see the concern in her eyes, trying to act like it wasn't bothering her.

Cayden laughed at this. "You already knew that."

I glanced at Ayden, who didn't show any signs of knowing the truth. We had spoken to him about everything before. Cayden had been worried about what could happen since April wasn't making any moves to make herself part of the pack. Ayden agreed it was a smart move to keep it from the guys. Not that they couldn't hold a secret, but the fewer people who knew the truth, the better.

April leaned into me, batting her eyelashes as she did. "Well, I think I can handle it. I had to deal with Cayden for a long time. He's a handful."

I knew she was just saying the words, but my stomach flipped at them. I ran a hand down her back, hoping we looked like that loving couple everyone needed to see.

We continued to eat and chat. We spoke about the fundraiser that Wendy and Ashley were putting together. We talked about the kids and their upcoming birthdays. We laughed and enjoyed ourselves. Riley pulled herself up and sighed. "How about a game, April?"

"Yeah," April sprung up quicker than I expected, and my stomach dipped. I wondered if she wanted away from the table that bad. I watched her and Riley get a table and set the game up.

"So, how long have you known April again?" Lucas asked. "I'm still trying to understand. The math isn't mathing for me."

"What?" I looked at Lucas, confused. "We've known each other for years." I turned back to the guys. "I grew up with her. Jesus, I've known her as long as I've known Cayden."

"And you proposed marriage?" Miles asked. He looked at the girls and then back at us. "I mean, I see why. She's a catch."

Cayden glared at him. "Really? She's a catch? Did you forget you're married?"

"I said a catch," Miles quickly said. "I didn't say anything vulgar. And she is."

I grabbed my beer and took a long swig. I knew they wanted details and any other circumstance I could give them. But this was also Cayden's sister. There was a fine

line I had to walk.

I couldn't give too much information if I wanted to die, but I also had to share enough information. Otherwise, the guys weren't going to believe this. I was the type to share details.

"I'm not saying anything detailed," I said, pointing to Cayden. "He doesn't need to know the details."

Miles and Thomas laughed. "Then give us something. You guys got married! That's pretty big."

I went for an easy lie. "I've always had a crush on her, and we've been in touch. When you know, you know."

"Still hard to believe," Lucas said, taking a swig of his drink. "Because out of all of us, you've slept with more women than all of us put together."

I cringed because I couldn't deny that. I had been with a lot of women, but they were all aware I never wanted anything serious. It was just stress release.

I glanced back at April, knowing it wasn't the same for her. She was different. I would never jump in bed with her a few times and be done. I would always want more. I'd always wanted more from her. I wanted everything with April, and I always had.

She leaned over the table, hitting the eight ball. Laura and Riley were talking on the other side of the table and laughing about something.

I watched as a large man walked over to April. I saw the way his eyes scanned her. A smirk pulled at his lips. He stopped next to her, way too close to her. She pulled

herself back up, turning to him. He said something to her, and she softly smiled.

It curled up my insides. I'd seen plenty of guys look at April before, but this was something else.

"Weslie," Ayden growled in a low warning, but I shot up and marched across the bar towards them. "Aw fuck," I heard Ayden curse as I walked away.

"You look like you need a little help," the guy said, reaching for the pool cue. His fingers wrapped around April. I wanted to take the stick and shove it up his ass.

Rage filled me, and I stopped just behind April. I quickly grabbed her waist, yanking her back and wrapping my arms around her. I glared at the guy and smiled. "Hey, sweetie. How's your game going?"

The guy looked at me, taking a step back. He instantly knew he'd done wrong.

April looked stunned. "Nothing. I was just about to reset the game."

I glared at the guy, tightening my hold on April. "Can I help you?" I asked him.

The guy looked at April and then back at me. He shook his head. "Was just offering the gal how to play is all."

"Well, the gal," I growled. "Is married."

He quickly retreated, and April turned, glaring at me. I gave her a smile, feeling the heat between us. I leaned closer, pulling her against me. "Would you like me to show you how to play?"

She looked at me for a moment before she set the pool cue down. She swallowed,

shaking her head. "I need another drink."

She turned, breaking away from me, and walked to the bar. I sighed, watching her walk away, and I wondered if we would ever get past this messy faze.

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I was feeling plenty of emotions about everything. Irritated. Angry. Embarrassed. And horny.

The last thing I needed was Weslie acting like I was a prized possession when someone wanted to talk to me. But, of course, it's not the woman he has a problem with. It's the man, and it appears he's gonna start body-checking people pretty soon.

Or maybe it was how he acted and made it clear to every person in the bar that she was taken. And I knew that was the point.

I rubbed my eyes as I stood at the bar, waiting for a bartender to open up so I could make an order. I needed something harder than beer if I was going to get through tonight. I needed my mind numbed so I could make it through the night. Especially if I was going to hear more about how much of a tramp Weslie was.

I glanced at Riley and April, watching them look so happy with their spouses. I could see the love was strong between them, and it hurt. I knew that wasn't going to be me. This relationship with Weslie was fake, and eventually, we would split again.

And when that happened, I needed a plan. I needed to have something to do or find a passion somewhere. I needed to get my shit figured out before that happened.

"Are you really married to Weslie?" A woman next to me asked. She was sitting with two other ladies who were also looking curiously at me. They were beautiful, and the question made me tense.

I slowly nodded my head. "I am. Do you know him?"

"Damn," she said, looking at Weslie. I could see the want stirring in her eyes before she looked back at me. "Didn't think he would ever settle down. Wendy told us at our covent meeting yesterday."

I bite down on my cheek slightly.

"Congratulations," another one of the girls chirped. "He's a good one. I've heard just how good he is in bed. But I'm sure you probably already know that."

I stammered for words, unsure of what to say to that.

"I've heard he is just wonderful. You're a lucky girl." One of them winked, and my entire body tensed up.

I felt a hand fall on my shoulder. "You know, I think you and Weslie are going to be the talk of the town," Riley said with a giggle in her voice. "I keep hearing whispers about how cute you two look together."

I frowned, "I don't want to be the talk of the town." I knew that we needed to get the word out, but this was making me uncomfortable. I didn't need people telling me how much of a bang he was or smiling like they knew what he could do in bed.

Riley shrugged. "Better you than everyone talking about my almost kidnapping still I'll take this. I never thought anyone would let that go."

I needed liquor. I turned back to the bar and waved my hand. I just wanted to go home. I wanted this night to be over already.

I didn't want to mingle. I didn't want to hear about how much of a catch Weslie was. I was already aware of that. I had him at one point. And he left. I didn't need to know what he'd been doing afterward. I didn't need to know how he moved on while I fell

apart.

"What would you like?" the lady bartender paused in front of them. She had light blond hair that was braided down her back. She had a lip piercing and an eyebrow piercing. She was wearing dark makeup and deep red lipstick. She had on a cropped tank top, and her breasts almost plummeted out of it. I could tell she wasn't wearing a bra because her nipples were pushing against the fabric.

"A tall shot of rum, please," I said, tapping my fingers on the counter.

The gal raised a single eyebrow at me, not moving to make it. I looked down, reading her name. "Sandy? Did you hear me?"

She nodded and crossed her arms. "Yeah, I was just taking you in. Can't believe that Weslie is married to you. Congratulations. That must be exciting for you."

Though she said the words, they rubbed me the wrong way, and the way she was looking at me wasn't with shock but more disgust. I suddenly felt like I was somewhere I shouldn't be. And then I wondered if she had dated Weslie in the past. Only an old girlfriend would look at someone this way.

"Thanks," I said, looking over at Weslie, who was setting up a game with Miles.

"Tall shot of Rum," Sandy said, setting it down. I quickly took it and downed it, replacing the glass on the countertop.

I allowed the liquor to sink in, wishing it were magic to take all my problems away. I knew they wouldn't. But they would at least numb them for today.

"So, how did you guys meet?" Sandy asked, leaning onto the counter like there weren't ten other customers waiting for her.

"Long time ago," I said, and Riley snorted.

"She's Cayden sister, and Weslie is pretty much his best friend. We've all known each other since we were in our teens."

Sandy nodded her head, looking at Weslie. I could see something in her eyes, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

"How do you know him?" I asked, tapping my fingers on the counter. "Did you guys date?"

Sandy raised an eyebrow at me. Her lips stayed in a thin line, and she shook her head. "No, we didn't date." She looked away from me and towards a few other customers. "Well, we're busy tonight. Good luck with him." Sandy pushed off the counter and turned to another customer.

Riley looked at me. "She seems nice. She has the same sense of style you do."

I didn't agree. There was something there, and I didn't know what it was. I didn't believe her when she said she hadn't dated Weslie.

"Should we play some more?" She indicated back at the pool tables, and I nodded, wanting to get away from Sandy. We returned to the pool area, where Miles and Weslie were deep in their game.

"Look, it's your wife," Miles teased, waving an eyebrow at us. "Forever leashed together."

"Do you say those romantic words to your wife?" Weslie asked, "Because I'm sure Laura loves the wording you used."

Miles grinned. "What makes you think she doesn't have a kink for that? Maybe we have an entire sex dungeon you don't know about."

My mouth just hung open slightly, and Miles laughed as he bent over, hitting at one of the balls. Weslie walked closer, his arm brushed against mine, sending sparkles up my back.

"That's Miles. He has no filter, and it only gets worse when he's drinking."

"I haven't been drinking," Miles added. "Lucas gets to drink tonight. I had to stay sober."

Just then, Laura walked over. She stopped next to Miles and raised an eyebrow as she leaned onto him. "How is it going over here? Is Weslie kicking your ass?"

Weslie chuckled. "Kicking your husband's ass, learning about your sex dungeon. Like any other day."

Unlike me, Laura was not shocked. She looked at Miles and tilted her head. "About our sex, what?"

"They knew I was kidding," Miles said, waving a hand. "He's trying to make it seem like I was bad tonight."

"I didn't know if you were kidding." I quickly added. "For all I know, you have one."

Laura shook her head. "You know, they will never agree to double dating if you are constantly disturbing them, Miles. Could you act like an adult for just a little bit so we can appear normal?"

Miles leaned into her playfully, smirking at her. "But I thought you liked me this

way?" I looked away before they kissed. It would seem everyone was in love and unable to keep their hands off each other. Everyone but Weslie and me. The newlyweds.

I looked at Weslie, who wasn't even watching them. He was looking at the pool table, getting ready to hit a ball.

After a moment, Miles cleared his throat. "But seriously, you guys, congrats on the marriage. That's huge."

"Thanks," Weslie said, striking at a ball. It hit the corner, bouncing back. He pulled himself back up and leaned on the pool cue.

Laura smiled. "Would you guys ever consider going out? We always love having new people go with us for date night. Take away Miles's inability to keep his mouth shut, and we would have a good time."

"Sure," Weslie said. I wanted to glare at him but held myself together. That is what a married couple would do. And he said we needed to get out more. Agreeing to a double date was something we should do.

"We're not going to a sex place, right?" I asked jokingly.

Laura laughed, and Miles chuckled, looking at Weslie. "I see why you married her. She almost makes up for all the other women you went through."

It was like someone punched me in the gut. I swallowed, glancing at Weslie, wondering just how many it was. I'd heard it a few times already. Had he gone through an extremely high number of women? Should I be concerned?

Weslie noticed and scowled. "It wasn't that many women."

Miles laughed hard, holding onto his stomach. "Please! Over half of the bar you've slept with. Shall I start naming them all? And where you fucked them?"

I bit hard onto my cheek, and Laura quickly elbowed Miles. "Miles, read the room."

Quickly realizing what he said, he frowned. "Shit, sorry. I mean...it took him a while to get to you. We've all done it. I know that Lucas racked up a long ass list."

Laura sighed heavily. "Sweetie, go grab me something to drink. You've done the damage."

He didn't argue as he handed his pool stick to Laura and looked almost pleased to leave the conversation. Laura looked at me. "Sorry about him. Miles jokes a lot. He didn't mean anything by it."

I waved it off, acting like it didn't bother me, but it did. It bothered me a lot. Was I just another person for Weslie? Had he gotten bored of me like all the others and moved on? Was he still seeing people?

"I need some water," I said, looking at Weslie. "Can you go grab me a glass?"

"Sure." He handed me his pool stick and walked after where Miles was headed. Sandy at the bar was helping Miles, and as her eyes landed on Weslie, they seemed to light up. I knew I must have been seeing it wrong. The lighting was shit in here.

"Don't take Miles's words to heart. All the guys were horn dogs before they got married."

"It's fine," I said, forcing a smile. It was all fake, after all. It should be bothering me. So why was it?

I watched as Weslie leaned onto the counter and Sandy leaned onto it as well. She smiled happily at him as they spoke. She played with her hair, and her breasts were practically out on display for him.

My heart sank when I realized she was flirting with him. She patted his arm, laughing, and Weslie seemed oblivious to it.

What pissed me off was just a few minutes ago, she was congratulating me, and now she was flirting.

Laura looked where I was staring and frowned. "Oh, Sandy."

"You know her?" I asked, suddenly wanting to know what she knew.

She nodded. "One of his exes. I wouldn't worry about her, though."

"How do you know they dated? She told me they didn't."

"I wouldn't call it dating. Miles and I have come here a few times. Doesn't take a genius to figure out why they both disappear for half an hour."

Even as she said the words, they seemed serious. Sandy laughed, and as she leaned over, I could see the lust. She wanted him, and I didn't need to watch.

"I'm going to go get some air. I think my drinks are catching up to me." It was a lie, but it was one I could use. I needed to get out and get some air.

"You want me to come with you? Or I can grab Riley for you?"

"No," I said, shaking my head. "I'll be back." Another lie.

I turned, heading for the door. I didn't need to watch Weslie with Sandy. I didn't want to see all the other happy couples. And I didn't want to continue feeling this jealous anymore.

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"Oh please, you did not," Sandy waved her hands up, shaking her head. "Tell Miles he's full of shit. You did not do that."

I shrugged as Miles laughed. "I did, though. I scared the ever-living shit out of this man."

"Weslie," Sandy patted her hand on mine. "Tell him he's full of shit."

I pulled my hand back, glancing at Miles for a moment before looking back at her. "I wish to say he is, but he isn't."

I turned, looking over my shoulder toward where Laura and April had been, but April was no longer there. I stood up a little straighter, scanning the crowded room for her. I looked back at our table, but she wasn't there. Everyone else was still eating and chatting about.

Where the fuck did she go? She was there just a minute ago.

I then spotted back hair going out the back door, the door shutting behind her.

Fuck.

"Shit, sorry." I quickly placed money down for my soda. Not that I was going to be drinking it now. "Here, Miles. Have my drink."

Miles looked at me, confused. "Why? Where are you going in such a hurry? Sandy hasn't even made your drink yet."

"Looks like April is leaving. I'm thinking maybe too much drinking." It was a lie. Or maybe it wasn't, but I had a feeling it was something else. She had seemed off most of the night.

Sandy shook her head, clicking her tongue. "She should really watch that. Word travels fast around here. Wouldn't want people to think she's an alcoholic."

I ignored her words and turned, heading for the back door. I pushed it open, taking in the brisk dark air, and looked around. I had no idea if she had driven or not or what her plan was.

I quickly spotted her walking down the sidewalk. Her hair fluttered in the wind, and her hands were curled in fists. "April! Where are you going?"

She paused and glanced over her shoulder. I could see the anger in her eyes as they narrowed on me.

"What are you doing?" I asked as I started down the sidewalk towards her.

"I'm going home," she snapped, and I slowed my steps.

"Why? I thought we were having a good time."

She turned around, and I could see she was fuming. "A good night? You call this a good night?"

I stiffened suddenly, trying to think over everything that happened. Besides Miles bringing up my sexual history, I thought it had been going decent. She might have felt a little uncomfortable, but otherwise, I thought it was going well.

"If you're mad, just say that."

She crossed her arms. "I'm not mad. I'm disgusted. I'm supposed to walk around and be your wife when you have girls practically showing you their breasts while serving you."

I blinked, confused at her. "What are you talking about?"

She scuffed. "Oh please, Sandy was seconds away from jumping the counter and humping you. Don't try and hide it. I know you guys dated. Or fucked. Whatever you want to call it. Either way, you have history."

I frowned. I probably should have mentioned her before we went in, but I didn't know Sandy would be working. "Okay, yes. We have history, but that's over. That's been over for a long time."

She snorted and turned, continuing down the road. Her footsteps crunched on the snow, and I sighed heavily.

I threw my hands up. "April, what exactly is your plan here? You're gonna walk your drunk ass home?"

"I'm not drunk! I hardly had anything to drink. And anything is better than watching and waiting for the sex fest to begin. I heard about the bathroom."

"Jesus Christ! I wouldn't have done anything. And you know, I wasn't the only one that was getting hit on. Did you forget about the guy?"

She turned, throwing her hands up. "He was just offering to show me how to play. He wasn't swinging his dick at me."

"Jesus, if you honestly think that, then you should have no problem with Sandy."

Her shoulders sank, and her lips formed a thin line.

"First, it's offering to show you how to play, then yanking your pants down in the bathroom. I know all the moves, April."

Her eyes narrowed. "Well, you would know. Do they also have a condom dispenser in there? Because I hear you frequent the place."

It was like she'd slapped me, and it hurt a little. "I'm not arguing with you about this. Let's just go home."

"I'm walking."

"April, you're not. You wanna be pissy with me, fine, be pissy in the truck, but you aren't walking. Or did all that liquor numb your head and make you forget why we were doing this in the first place? I don't know where Ivan is, and I don't need him snatching you while you're drunk."

"For god sake, I'm not drunk!" she snapped back. "I had a fricken shot and a few sips of a beer."

"Which apparently is enough to irritate you."

She rolled her eyes but turned, marching toward my truck. I followed after her, starting it up, and headed home. Neither of us spoke the entire drive.

Once home, we headed up to the apartment. April threw her shoes off and marched down the hallway.

"A thank you would be nice."

She paused and turned back to me. "What?"

"I said, a thank you would be nice. Thanks for bringing me out. Thanks for opening up your home. Thanks for doing this."

Her eyes seemed to ignite in anger. "You want a thanks? Fine. Thanks for leaving me all those years ago and preparing me for this. Thanks for fucking all those women, so it would make it easier to dislike you. Thank you so much for not sticking your cock into another woman tonight. But who knows, maybe tomorrow I won't be as lucky. Everyone, including your close friends, brought up just how sexually active you've been."

I stared at her and suddenly realized that while she was angry, she was jealous and hurt.

"April, do you honestly think I left all those years ago because I wanted to? That you were just a notch on my post?"

She shrugged. "Sure feels like it. Looks like you moved on perfectly fine."

I scowled. "I didn't have a choice. We weren't fucking yet, but I knew once words got out, that was what they would want. And you were too young. I didn't leave because I wanted to. I left because it was the right choice."

I took a few steps toward her. "And if you're jealous, you say that. You don't get to throw my past in my face. Yes, I've slept with a lot of women, but they were all aware of the terms. We were never anything serious, and it was never going to be anything serious. It was sexual release. So yes, we fucked in bathrooms. We fucked in changing rooms, hotels, and cars. We, however, never fucked in my bed. I never brought them home, and they knew that. No promises were being made that we would be anything else. There was no agreement to change it in the future. It was just

sex. That was all."

Her face sank slightly at that. April had been the only person that came close to that. She'd been the only person I ever wanted in my bed.

"As for Sandy, she was just another. I don't see her or anyone else anymore. I haven't since you arrived here."

She took a few steps towards me. "Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"Do you see me putting up with anyone else's emotional rollercoaster right now? No. I'm here handling you and your behavioral ass."

We stared at each other, and my eyes went to her mouth. I thought of that kiss, that quick smooch for our fake wedding. And Jesus, I wanted more. I have always wanted more.

April took a step closer, her breast pressing against my chest. "Am I sexual release, Weslie? Or am I your wife?"

"You are my wife," I growled and pulled her in, kissing her. I expected her to pull away, but she didn't. April kissed me back with just as much need. She moaned as I reached down, cupping her ass and pressing her flat against me.

We fumbled back a few steps, and I pinned her against the wall. I broke the kiss, inhaling her scent. She smelt amazing, and my cock jerked at it.

"Oh, fuck me," she whimpered.

"That's a bad idea," I said, biting her neck.

"Please," she whined. "Please, just for tonight."

I wasn't going to fight her on that. If she was willing, I was taking it. I pinned her flat against the wall, deepening the kiss. I slid my tongue into her mouth, and her moan grew louder.

"Hands up," I growled, grabbing the hem of her shirt.

She pulled her hands up, and I yanked her blouse right over her head. I threw it aside and started unbuttoning her jeans. I yanked them down, kissing her stomach as I bent over.

I could hear her breath hitch as I placed my hands on her stomach. Her belly button was piercing, and the diamond twinkled in the low lights.

I pulled myself up, kissing her once more. I unclipped her bra, watching it fall on the ground. She pulled at my shirt, and I yanked it off.

We were moving down the hallway when I heard something fumble, but neither of us moved to fix it. I didn't care. I could have broken something, and it wasn't going to stop me.

She pulled at my zipper, and I quickly helped yank them off as we stepped into the bedroom. She was panting by the time we hit the bed.

I heard a rip and looked down, seeing I'd ripped her thong right off. Her eyes widened in shock a little, but her lips curled up slightly.

I kissed down her chest, cupping at her breast. I wanted to touch every part of her, but I wanted to fuck her even more. I'd waited years. I'd waited patiently to have her, and now that I was here, I couldn't contain myself.

My cock ached painfully, and April yanked at my boxers. My cock sprang free, and her eyes sparkled with delight. I knew we both wanted this.

"Do you know what I would love?" I asked, pinning her down on the bed.

She raised an eyebrow. "What's that?"

"Your lips wrapped around my cock," I reached a hand up, rubbing my thumb along her lower lip. "But I want to sink deep in you so much more."

She swallowed, and I kissed her roughly. She moaned, her hands grabbed at me, her nails running down my chest. I felt them dig deep, and I started to grind on her. My cock rubbed against her entrance finding her soaking wet.

"Oh god," she whined. "Yes...oh yes."

I kissed her, sliding into her with a slow thrust. I felt her tighten around me and her nails digging deeper into my shoulder. She felt wonderful.

I pinned her legs open, speeding up each thrust. I didn't want slow sex, and if she was in pain, she wasn't telling. "Oh, Weslie."

God, hearing her say my name made it ten times better. My cock hurt painfully, and I knew I was close. I wanted to drain myself into her.

We just started, but I couldn't slow us down. There were years of want-taking play.

"More," she panted. "Deeper."

I thrust deeper, being sure to grind down into her. I kissed her, feeling that tightness was building up.

I pulled April's hands, holding them above her head and pinning them there. I kissed her nipples and felt April tighten painfully around me. She cried out as she orgasmed, and I thrust deeply into her, feeling my own hit over me.

We both panted, and I rested my forehead against her chest. "Oh god," she whispered. "That was..."

Fucking wonderful. She felt like home. She tasted like heaven.

I pulled my head up and looked at her. Her eyes sparkled, and she raised her hand, running her fingers through my hair.

"That was a terrible idea."

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I stared at myself in the mirror, questioning if this deep red dress was appropriate for Family Day at the fire station. It stopped a few inches below my knee. It wasn't tight fitting, but it hugged my curves. I chewed on my lip, wondering if it was too sexy.

Since the fuck fest Weslie and I had a few days ago, we hadn't really seen or spoken to each other. I'd caught him at glances when he was leaving in the morning, but besides that, I hadn't. I didn't want to look like sex on a stick, but then again, I did.

The way he took me so quickly and how he didn't hold back was exactly what I wanted. I knew that I was horny, but I hadn't thought I was that badly wound up. I practically jumped him, accepting whatever he was giving. And he wasn't gentle either. Weslie fucked me like he'd wanted to for years.

I turned, checking my butt in the mirror. The dress was simple, with a heart neckline.

I took a deep breath, grabbed a pair of dangling earrings, and started putting them on. I paired them with a simple necklace and turned, looking around for my only pair of black heels. I had gone shopping for this, using it as an excuse to leave the house.

I kept myself as busy as possible, including finding a job. However, the job sort of just fell into my lap while I was out getting coffee at the cafe.

I had been waiting in line when a lady in front of me reached for her coffee and paused. I waited when she looked down, and wetness dripped down her legs onto the floor. A puddle quickly accumulated under her shoes.

"Oh my," I said, stepping back slightly. "Are you okay?" She turned, and it was clear

she was heavily pregnant.

"Oh no," she whimpered, looking in pain. She placed her hands on her stomach and inhaled slowly. "I'm not due for three more weeks. No, no, no, no."

I reached out, smiling at her. I'd seen plenty and heard plenty from around the pack and the girls to know it didn't matter. Babies came when they were ready.

"I think you need to go to the hospital. You're in labor."

She shook her head. "No, I have work. I can't be having my baby right now. I can't take maternity leave yet! We haven't found my replacement."

"I don't think you really have a choice," I countered as I looked around, but she had come in alone. "Do you have anyone to take you?"

She shook her head, and I watched tears fill her eyes. "My husband is in Nevada for a conference, and my sister is at work. This is just great. They're both going to miss the baby's delivery."

"I'll take you," I offered. It wasn't like I had anything to do, and this would keep me out of the house. I had watched so much TV that even my shows weren't entertaining me anymore.

She took a deep breath in and offered me a painful smile. "Are you sure? Don't you have work?"

I didn't want to say I wasn't working, but I didn't really have anything else I could say. So, I shook my head. "I'm new in Honeyville, and I'm still looking for something. But let's not worry about me; we need to get you to the hospital."

I ended up taking her to the hospital and staying with her for a while. Once I was getting ready to leave, a taller lady was by the check-in. "I'm looking for Deb! Deb Morre?" The lady shook her head. "She's my sister! She's in labor. Just came in. She has short hair. It kind of looks like someone took a butcher to it, but I won't tell her that. She is my assistant at the school. What room is she in?"

I paused and cleared my throat. "You must be Deb's sister. She's in room 212." I pointed to the door. "She's just getting looked at by the doctor at the moment, but she's in there. Just knock on the door. She was worried you weren't going to be here."

The lady looked me up and down, and I wondered if I looked bad. I was wearing sweatpants and a baggy sweater, which was the first thing I could find to get out of the apartment as quickly as possible.

"Thank you," she said, hurrying past me. I ended up leaving and shrugged the entire thing off by the afternoon. I didn't think about it, knowing it was just timing. But at three, my phone rang with a number I hadn't known.

I was just starting a load of laundry when I answered it. "Hello?"

"Hi, this is Rebecca. Is this April?"

I nodded, pushing the start on the washer. "It is. Do I know you?"

"Yeah, I'm the lady. This more you pointed to my sister's room. I didn't introduce myself earlier, and I normally do, but my head was everywhere. My little sister was having a baby, after all."

The morning clicked into place. "Oh yes, did that all turn out well?"

"It did, thank you for asking. Healthy baby boy. Which is actually why I'm calling.

My sister is going to be starting her maternity leave, and I'll be without an assistant at the school."

I paused. She wasn't offering me a job, was she? There was no way I could have impressed her this morning, wearing what I was wearing. I had looked at myself when I got home. I looked like a homeless person. She had good reason to look me over the way she did. But to offer me a job?

"Oh?"

"My sister had expressed you handled the situation extremely well, and when working in a school, that is important."

"I mean, yes, it is, but I think it's important to know more about a person before offering them a job. Especially when it's around kids. I wasn't exactly dressed to impress."

She started to laugh. "Oh, I know, which is why I asked Ayden about you. The Alpha is all-knowing, after all. He told me you're new to the pack but married and trustworthy. He gave the stamp of approval on you."

Ayden had said that? I was stunned because I didn't think he'd noticed me. I didn't expect to be. In our old pack, the Alpha hardly had time for you, let alone to care about you.

"Oh, well, that's a generous offer." I couldn't accept it, could I? I had just told Riley I didn't want to work around kids, but this sounded like more office work than being around students.

"I know it's short, but I will be without help for a while. Believe it or not, she helped more than I would like to admit. The thought of being without someone is going to

screw everything up. So, are you available?"

I shook my head, bringing me back to reality. I had accepted. I started the next day getting the lay of the school. The first few days were just Rebecca showing me around and getting the feel of the place. It was a big high school, so there was plenty to do.

I glanced at my phone, seeing the time. I had twenty minutes, which meant I needed to get going. Weslie was going to be there, and he would be waiting for me.

I nodded and decided the outfit would work. It had to. I had no other option.

I headed across town to the fire station. It seemed everyone was already there, and as I stepped inside on the lower level, Weslie stood leaning against the fire truck. My mouth watered at the sight of him. He was wearing jeans and a nice cream button-down shirt. His hair had been combed back slightly. He looked extremely sexy and cleaned up.

He noticed me and smiled. "You made it."

I thought the one night would have stifled my need, but it was like throwing gasoline onto a fire. I felt hot, hungry for him suddenly. My wolf purred with want, and I felt wet.

God damn it! I suddenly felt like I was a teenager again.

He pushed off the fire truck and took a few steps toward me. "Want me to take your coat?"

I started sliding it off and watched as his eyes scanned over me. It stirred my insides up, and I felt hot.

"You look nice."

"As do you." I handed him my jacket as we started up the stairs to the party's location.

"Thank you for coming," he added. "I know you probably wanted to just stay home."

"I didn't exactly have a choice," I said jokingly as we started up the stairs. I could see everyone already deep in conversation and eating food. The kids were running around and playing games. The space was filled with laughter, and you could feel the comfort.

"You had a choice," he said. "You didn't have to come if you truly didn't want to."

"We have to keep up appearances," I added, turning to him. "And we can't do that if I stay inside all the time. If we want to look like we can't keep our hands off each other and that we honestly did get married, we need to look the part."

Weslie reached out, and his hand cupped the back of my head. He stepped into my space, and my breath hitched. My eyes looked down at his mouth, which curled up slightly.

He chuckled. "Whatever do you mean? We're totally convincing people we're in love." He leaned closer, and his lips pressed against mine in a rough kiss that brought me back to our sex fest.

I clawed at his skin, and his hands roamed over my body, igniting fire where he touched. And each thrust inside me felt wonderful. I wanted him deeper and faster. I was begging him.

I sank into the kiss, feeling my breath was being taken away. We tumbled back, and

my back pressed against the railing.

"Would you two keep it together? " Someone spoke up, and Weslie broke the kiss. He smiled as he looked over his shoulder at the group. I felt my face grow a deep shade of red, embarrassed.

Of course, he kissed me. It was in front of everyone, so we would look in love and be unable to keep our hands off each other. It should make up for us ditching out the other night.

But a part of me wondered if there was more to it. What if he did it because he wanted me and not just to put a show on? After all, he had sex with me. Didn't that count for anything?

"Sorry," Weslie slid, sliding his hand down and wrapping his fingers around mine. "We haven't seen each other all day. I just couldn't help myself."

I scanned the group. The girls were grinning ear to ear, and the guys were laughing. I looked at my brother, but if he was unhappy, I didn't see it on his face. He knew we would have to be lovey-dovey to make this all look real.

Weslie looked back at me, smiling. "What else did you have in mind?"

I quickly tried to shake the kiss off and think about the conversation. "We need to go out in public more. People need to see us out and enjoying each other's company."

"You mean like the bar?"

I nodded my head. "Yeah. We could go out like that again."

"Do you want to go back to the bar?" He reached a hand up, moving some of my hair

behind my ear. "Because you seemed a little uncomfortable there."

I had been, but if we wanted this actually to work, we needed to try again. I needed to try better. I couldn't let my jealousy get the better of me.

This was all to keep me safe and finally move on from Ivan, but I hadn't been doing a good job at that.

"We can go back. As long as you promise not to be near her." While I trusted Weslie not to do anything, I didn't trust her. She seemed like the type to wiggle herself into a place she shouldn't be.

He leaned forward, pressing his forehead against mine. "Okay, dear." His words sent a chill down my spine, and I swallowed, trying to breathe. I could do this.

I smiled at him, and we turned, joining the rest of the group. I pushed everything aside and tried to enjoy myself.

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I glanced across the bar towards April. She was standing next to Riley ordering at the bar. Sandy wasn't working tonight, so it was one less issue to worry about. I was grateful because I didn't want a repeat of the other night playing over again.

"You're staring," Cayden nudged me in the ribs, and I quickly looked away back towards the group. It was just Cayden, Owen, Miles, and myself with the girls tonight. Ashley and Laura smiled at us.

"You really just can't keep your eyes off her, can you?" Ashley asked, leaning onto Owen. "It's so sweet. You really do love her."

"I remember those days," Laura said, looking at Miles, who looked offended. His jaw dropped open slightly as he stared at her.

"I still look at you like that." He wrapped his arm around Laura, pulling her close. "I think I'm blessed every morning. I get up and am grateful every time we go to bed."

Laura smiled ear to ear. He pulled a hand up, poking him on the nose. "I know. I just wanted to see the look in your eyes."

I glanced back at Riley and April. She was more relaxed tonight, which was good. I knew April enough to tell the difference between when she was forcing herself and when she was actually having a good time. I knew her fake smile, and tonight, her smile was real.

"You think she's getting settled now?" Owen asked, taking a swig out of his drink. "It's been almost two months now. I know the transition can be difficult sometimes."

I shrugged. "A little, but I think it's going to take longer to fully let herself think she's part of this place now. I know that it took me a while before I felt like I belonged here."

I glanced at her and saw how carefree she was looking tonight. I knew she used to be so much more when we were younger. She was down for anything and everything. She was adventurous and wild. And now.

I knew she double-checked the front door. I knew she tensed up when I arrived home and didn't announce myself. I saw how her eyes scanned a space when we went out or how she swallowed when she was nervous.

I hated how much she'd changed; I knew it was because of Ivan. Just saying his name made her go a little paler, and her shoulders tensed up. Her eyes bounced around, looking for him, and she looked utterly defeated. I hated it. I hated how much she changed, how different she was.

I curled my hands into fists, pissed we still hadn't found him. How was it that he could just pop in and pop out without us noticing him? Had we all become lacking? Or was he just that sneaky? I wanted to know where he was, but there was no sign of him. It was like he disappeared into thin air.

April and Riley turned, each holding two beers in their hands. April laughed, and her face lit up. My shoulder relaxed slightly as she spoke. She looked happy.

Ivan wasn't here, so I wasn't going to let the thought of him ruin tonight. She was having a good time, and I wanted it to continue that way. I wanted both of us to have a fun time.

"I got us beers," April said as she swung back into her seat. She leaned into me heavily, sighing as she did.

I glanced around the room, seeing that people were noticing us. I knew they always looked at our group in general when we went out because of everything we did for the town, but tonight, they were watching us—watching our relationship.

I knew that people would be looking, and we needed it. Once people saw us, word would start to travel, and Ivan would get the news. I had no idea how he was going to react, but hopefully, he would get that she was taken.

I wrapped an arm around her, tucking her even closer. I kissed the top of her head as I reached for my drink. I inhaled her scent, having missed it over the past few days. She's been leaving the house so early that her smell wasn't in the bathroom when I got up.

"So, April, how has working at the school been going? Is Rebecca nice? I hear she can be a hard ass sometimes."

April laughed, shaking her head. "No, she's actually pretty reasonable. She handles the students extremely well, and she's been pretty lenient with me, not knowing as much as the person in my position would need to. I'm really enjoying myself. Which kind of surprised me because I didn't think I was going to."

Laura tilted her head onto Miles's shoulder. "What are you going to do when she comes back? Is there any other position open there?"

April waved her hand, unsure. "We haven't gotten that far yet. I still have another ten weeks to figure that out. She had mentioned that the middle school principal might be looking for an assistant, but that's still in the air. The lady running it right now is still thinking about retirement."

Laura rolled her eyes. She ran her tongue over her teeth, shaking her head. "Oh, Jesus, she needs to retire. She is just a cranky old bitch."

Riley raised an eyebrow at this. "How would you know?"

Miles scratched behind his ear. A nervous laugh left him. "We had to pick Micheal up from school a couple of months ago because he got in trouble."

This was news. I felt my eyebrows raise at this. "What did he do? Micheal? We're talking about the same kid, right? The kid that knows more manners than your husband?"

Laura laughed, and Miles rolled his eyes. "low blow, man."

Laura patted Miles on the arm and looked at me. "Yeah, he punched a kid."

"Oh shit," Ashley said, looking stunned. "Like actually punched him?"

"Another kid was picking on him and Miles here," Laura glanced at him before looking back at us. "Told him to punch the kid if he continued. Because that's the style of parenting we are doing now."

Miles shrugged. "He deserved it. If he didn't want to get his ass beat, he shouldn't bully."

Laura turned to Miles. "We should not be teaching our son to punch people. He can't do that when he gets older."

Miles scowled. "Laura, he shoved Micheal into a locker. He deserved it. And he hasn't bothered him since. I think we can say a lesson was learned."

I shook my head. "So, you guys had to get him at school? And the assistant wasn't nice?"

Laura nodded. "Yeah, and the assistant was just a bitch. I mean full ass chewing my ass out."

"Wow," Ashley snorted. "You must really not like her to speak like that."

"She told me that I needed to do a better job at teaching my child what was right and wrong. Miles had to restrain me from punching her. Mind you, my son has never gotten in trouble. I would understand if this was his tenth time in the office, but it was his first. She clearly just an unhappy, cranky bitch that needs to retire."

Miles smirked. "And everyone thinks I'm the problem in this relationship." He pulled Laura close, kissing the top of her head.

Laura sighed. "Everything was fine. We spoke with the principal, but that assistant needs to be done. I've heard she's not nice, and kids hate her. You'd be a much better fit."

I glanced at April, who just looked shocked by the story. I pulled her closer, wrapping my fingers around hers. I was happy she was working and that she enjoyed her job. She was finding something else to do besides being at home.

"Comfortable?" I whispered to her.

She nodded, resting her head against my shoulder. "I am. It's nice and calm tonight." I felt her other hand reach up, rubbing down my chest. It sent a shiver down my spine, and I looked back towards the ground, trying to act like it didn't bother me.

"How is that fundraiser going with Wendy?" Riley asked Ashley.

"I need to move around," Cayden said, getting up and stretching his arms out.

"Game?" Owen asked as he got up. Cayden nodded, looking towards me. "Want in?"

I shook my head. "Maybe in a bit." I wanted to enjoy this closeness I had.

Cayden shrugged, and they moved over toward the dartboard in the back. April rested her hand on my thigh, and my cock jerked. I glanced at her, but she wasn't looking at me. She was talking with the girls like her hand wasn't just a few inches from my dick.

I knew tonight we were putting on a show, but if she wasn't careful, we were going to have a problem on our hands. When we had sex the other night, I knew emotions took over more than anything. I had wanted her so badly I didn't even think about the aftermath. And I just figured she was using it as tension release. We had been talking about it just seconds before we bounced each other's bones.

After a while, it was getting late, so we headed home. April sat in the passenger seat with her window rolled down, taking the wind. She looked happy.

"Did you have a good time?" I asked, tempted to take her hand.

She looked at me, nodding her head. "Yeah, I did. I think I drank a little more than I should have."

I glanced at her, confused, as I got to a stop sign. "You're not drunk, so why is that a problem?"

She shrugged. "It was with Ivan."

I ground my teeth together at his name.

She looked back outside the window. "He always said it wasn't ladylike to drink.

Would get so mad if I had a drink when we went out."

I pulled the truck forward, exhaling slowly. "There is nothing wrong with having a drink and enjoying yourself, April. I hope you know that."

She nodded. "I knew there were a lot of things that I did that were fine but unforgivable to the pack."

"Like what?"

She shrugged. "I wanted to go to college instead of pushing out babies like a machine. I wanted to work, but Ivan never wanted me to work full-time because his needs and the house required my attention. He was the breadwinner."

"The pack has always had that old mindset. I never understood it."

She snorted. "The pack has fucked up rules and regulations."

"You're not wrong about that. Why did you stay there for so long if you knew better?"

She shrugged again. "It just sort of fell that way. I married Ivan, and things slowly changed, more than I had expected. I thought I was happy because he got me away from my parents." She sighed. "That was until I found him fucking another woman in our bed."

I looked at her, shocked. "Wait, what?"

She nodded. "Yeah, mid-thrust, actually. It's a sight I'll never get out of my head." She scowled. "He said it was because I hadn't gotten pregnant yet, and the pack needed us to be parents."

I tried not to look shocked, but I couldn't help it. "And he's trying to get you back?"

She nodded. "I did everything for him, and I doubt another woman does things the way I do. It wasn't always bad. We got along well before..."

"Before what?"

"Work became stressful, and talk about kids."

I ground my teeth together.

"Did you ever get pregnant?" I knew it was a personal question, but I couldn't help but ask.

She shook her head. "No. We had thought I had once, but it was a false positive. Not even Riley knows about that.

"Why didn't you?"

"A guess a small part of me never wanted to...I didn't want to think about what would happen if I did.

I shook my head. "You guys weren't together that long."

"Ivan wasn't a fan of waiting. He was getting frustrated that I wasn't getting pregnant. Which led to me witnessing him filling a woman. He was impatient."

I parked the car, looking at her stunned. "Jesus Christ."

She shrugged. "It happens."

I scowled at her. "April, that is bullshit. What happened to you was unfair. You can feel hurt."

Her eyes softened slightly, and she smiled. "Thank you for that."

We got out of the truck and headed upstairs. April leaned onto me as we walked, and she stumbled slightly. As I unlocked the door, she leaned closer, her hands pulling at the top of my jeans.

"Do you want to do something for me?"

"Depends on what you're asking," I said, pushing the door open. The apartment was dark as she stepped inside.

"You wanna come to bed with me?" she asked, her fingers tugging at my zipper.

My body tensed up, and I grabbed her hand, stopping her. She frowned, looking hurt. I wanted nothing more than to sink myself into her, but April was not thinking straight. Us fucking before was a mistake, and I wouldn't let that happen again.

"April, you've been drinking. It's not a good idea."

She pulled her hand back, and I quickly cupped her face. "You need sleep."

She swallowed and nodded her head. "You're right."

I took her down the hallway, helping her into bed. I pulled her shoes off, and just as I was about to ask if she needed help getting dressed, she was out. Her chest rose and fell softly, and she looked peaceful.

I turned the light off and slipped back into the hall. I leaned against the door and

sighed heavily.

My heart hurt at all the information she told me. I hadn't realized how much she'd been carrying alone.

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I tried to adjust myself in my chair, but nothing seemed to help with the throbbing in my clit. I felt like I was fifteen again, unable to calm my damn hormones even though I masturbated. It was bad, and it came with a vengeance this time.

I looked back at the paperwork in front of me, trying to stay focused. It was hard, though. The silence gave my mind plenty of room to travel to last night and the night we slept together. We hadn't done anything last night, but I loved the way Weslie helped me up the stairs and how he was so gentle with me.

My mind went to the night we slept together. I kept hearing Weslie softly, grunting with each thrust, and how his lips traveled over my body.

"Fuck," I mumbled to myself, rubbing my eyes. This was bad. This was so damn bad. I couldn't have him occupying my mind like this.

I figured if we did it once, I would be able to move on, but my mind continued to replay that night over and over in my head. And I wanted him more. The need had grown from a small fire to a blazing one ready to ignore an entire house.

I leaned back, looking away from the paper, when a thought hit me. This was a new feeling for me. I had never had a want for sex like this when I was with Ivan. Sure, we slept together, but it was never like this. I didn't feel the urge to seek him out and jump his bones.

It took me a lot of self-control to calm down when Weslie walked into the kitchen this morning. I found myself staring at him more, imagining all the things I would love for him to do to me. It was a good thing I had work. I might have asked. I might

have done something.

Jesus, April. Get your head out of the gutter. You're at work.

I glanced at the time, seeing it was close to lunch, I had accomplished nothing. I needed to get my head on straight, but I needed to get moving around first. A walk around the school would help with that. Some fresh air, and when I got back to my desk, I would focus.

I got up and knocked on Rebecca's door. I pulled it open, finding her staring at some papers. Her eyes snapped up at me, and she raised an eyebrow.

"Hey, I'm going to go stretch my legs. Do you need anything? It's about lunchtime."

Rebecca shook her head. "No, I'm okay. I have to get through this budget report. Oh wait, are you going to stop by the teacher's lounge? I could use some snacks. I get the munchies when I work."

"I can grab something out of the vending machine on my way back. I'm gonna walk around and stretch my legs a little."

She shook her head. "No, it's Willow's birthday. They should have cupcakes. Just snag me one."

I waved her goodbye and headed out of the office into the hallway. The hallways were quiet, but you could hear the teachers talking even through all the shut doors.

I roamed, trying to keep my mind on other things. I tried to make a to-do list for when I got back: We have a meeting coming up, and I need to print the details. I need to move on to the budget for next year, which Rebecca wanted me to look over. The calendar needed a little updating since some of the teachers needed substitutes.

I walked down another hallway, finding the science wing of the high school. I could take the door outside and round the school. I continued down the hall until I could smell smoke. I paused, turned around, and scanned the space once more. I continued to sniff as I retraced my steps.

I knew it was pretty common in the science wing to smell different scents. The first day, Rebecca brought me down this hallway. It smelled of chemicals, and she explained that some of the classes were doing chemistry today.

But the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, and I knew something wasn't right. It was too strong of a scent to be nothing to be concerned about.

I paused in front of the door and peered into the classroom. I could see some students sitting at a desk, but I couldn't see a teacher. I grabbed the door and turned it, pulling it open.

The space that had been whispering went utterly silent. I scanned the room and frowned. "Where is your teacher?" I asked, not spotting one.

Before anyone answered, a large flame jumped up in the corner where a group of boys were sitting. They all stumbled backward out of their chairs as something on the table bloomed with flames.

The class erupted in screams, and the boys moved quickly, rushing towards the door. I quickly scanned the room for a fire extinguisher but could not find one.

"What do we do?" one of the kids asked.

"Everyone out," I yelled, pointing to the hallway. "And pull the fire alarm."

The students moved, rushing out of the room. I quickly found the fire extinguisher

and hurried over to the glass door. I yanked it open, pulling it free.

I turned back to the corner and found that whatever was on fire was only growing. It was snapping to the ceiling where the table was. Suddenly, the alarms blared and echoed loudly around me.

I quickly pulled the pin on the extinguisher and started to spray at it. My entire body shook, and the room felt hot, too hot. I sprayed, but the fire didn't go out. It just continued to snap, building even higher. The room grew hotter, and I took a few steps back.

"April!" Someone yelled my name, and I turned, spotting Rebecca in the doorway. "We need to leave."

"I can't put it out."

Rebecca hurried, grabbing my arm and pulling me back. "The boys used metal shavings. We need to leave now."

She pulled me backward, and we hurried into the hallway. We followed the hallway until we slipped out the back door and outside. The entire school was outside, and the students looked confused and worried. Teachers tried to contain their students, but the space was just a loud noise, and everyone was asking questions.

Rebecca sighed, rubbing her hands together nervously. "The firefighters are on their way. Everyone, if you could all just remain calm," she said.

My mind couldn't seem to catch up. "How did you know it was metal shavings?"

She looked at me and frowned. "One of the kids came frantically into my office. She told me that before you arrived, the boys were talking about using metal to start a

small fire. The teacher walked out of the classroom to go to the bathroom for a minute."

I scowled, "Why does that matter?"

"Metal doesn't get put out with water," Rebecca said, shaking her head. "This is not my first rodeo."

I didn't know what to say, but before I could even think about it, I heard the fire trucks coming down the road. I turned as one of them pulled in, the guys all jumping out quickly, moving into action.

My heart skipped a beat as I spotted Weslie. He looked hot in his outfit, and everything from earlier had returned to the surface.

Shit. Shit. Shit

Ayden hurried over towards us. He was all geared up and yanked his helmet off as he stopped in front of us. "What happened?"

Rebecca quickly explained the situation, and my eyes roamed over toward Weslie. He was helping the guys were pulling out the hose. But Ayden turned, making them stop. "Class D," he said before hurrying after them.

I watched in utter amazement as the guys hurried into the school. I chewed on my lower lip, waiting. I wasn't sure how long it was, but it seemed like time stopped. The kids became nervous, and Rebecca paced next to me. Everyone suddenly was on edge.

A few moments later, the doors opened, and Weslie and Miles stepped out. Weslie looked sweaty as he pulled his helmet off and ran a hand through his ginger hair.

I went running towards him, throwing my arms around him. Worry had built up so tightly in my belly that I didn't think it was ever going to unwind.

"April, what's wrong?" Weslie asked, pulling me back slightly.

Miles snorted. "She was worried about you, dumbass."

I nodded my head. "I was. Are you okay? I tried putting the fire out, but nothing seemed to work."

"It's out now," Weslie said, giving a soft smile. But he didn't pull me closer, and I wanted him to. He held me at arm's length, remaining professional.

"Can I speak with you for a moment?" I asked. Weslie nodded towards the truck, and we walked over, rounding it. I stepped into his space. "Why are you acting so off?"

He frowned. "I'm not acting off, April. I'm just working."

"And avoiding. Do you honestly think I wasn't worried about you?"

He reached out, rubbing his thumb over my cheek. "I enjoy you worrying, but I'm working. I have to remain focused."

He had ruined my focus all day, and I wanted to ruin his. I leaned closer and kissed him. I couldn't wait. I'd sat all day with need, and after seeing him working, it only made me that much worse.

Weslie growled, biting at my lower lip, pinning me hard against the fire truck. "Fuck, April."

He pressed his forehead against mine. "I'm working."

I frowned. He must not want me if he was trying to stop himself. I've heard plenty of stories from the girls about how they got their bones jumped even while the guys were working. It almost sounded like a competition between them all.

I leaned against him to apologize when I felt his cock was hard against my hip. I was a little shocked.

"You're hard," I whispered, staring at him. "Why aren't you just going to take me? Do you not want me?"

Weslie ground his teeth together, looking in pain. "You have no idea, April. But we are at a school with children."

I swallowed suddenly, remembering the situation, and I felt embarrassed. But I didn't care. I wanted him so badly. I could risk being caught.

"The truck is empty."

He made a sound in his throat and leaned closer. His cock pressed hard against me as he inhaled, his nose running over my neck. "I would enjoy doing that, but if I were to fuck in the truck, it wouldn't be for a quickie."

My face burned hot as he pulled back. "The guys are going to be out in just a few minutes, so keep it together. We can talk about this when I get home."

I suddenly felt a little hope for tonight. I swallowed and tried to pull myself together so I would not look hurt. Besides, it was only a few hours. I could last.

When I arrived home later, I paced. I couldn't remain calm as I waited for Weslie to come home. Was he going to give me what I wanted? Or was he going to talk about how this wasn't what we agreed upon? Was he going to explain that the one night was

a mistake and we shouldn't repeat it again?

Hundreds of questions filled my head, and I felt sick. I hated not knowing.

I heard the front door unlock, and I turned. Weslie stepped into the apartment, looking exhausted. I remained still, feeling my throat close as I waited for him to speak.

He spotted me and smiled. "Hey."

"Hi."

He shoved his hands into his pocket and smiled at me. "Why don't you go change into something nice."

I looked at him, confused. "Why?"

"I want to take you to dinner," he said with a shrug. "And I'm too tired to cook."

My heart fluttered, and I was stunned. I expected him to start talking right away. Does dinner mean it's good news? Or was it bad news? If I were good news, he would jump me now, wouldn't he? If he really wanted me, he wouldn't be waiting.

I scowled at myself. The old me wouldn't have cared. She wouldn't have thought so much into everything.

"April?" Weslie tilted his head. "You okay?"

I nodded my head, forcing a smile. "Yeah, I'll go change."

No matter what the news was, I needed to hear it.

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I rubbed at my eyes, exhausted from the long day. We had a meeting with a group from the city wanting to discuss changes to some business regulations. I had split the night shift with Lucas since he had something come up, so I only slept a couple of hours last night. Then there was the fire at the school. I was running off fumes at this point.

We were packing everything away, and I stretched as I stared at the garage ceiling. I was ready to go home, but I wasn't going to be sleeping. I knew April would be there waiting for me, and I didn't know how I would handle that.

I wanted to have sex again. It had been replaying in my head frequently, but I also didn't want to hear April say it was a mistake afterward. I had to think logically about this, even if April wasn't.

"Hey, you got a second?" Cayden stopped next to me, wiping a hand over his forehead.

I yanked off my boots and kicked them aside, grabbing my sneakers. "Sure, what's up?"

He took a seat on the bench. "I just wanted to thank you for all the help you've been doing with my sister. I haven't gotten around to thanking you for everything since I've been so busy with Riley lately."

I felt my stomach twist up because if he knew that his sister and I had fucked around last week, I doubt he would be thanking me right now.

"You don't have to thank me, Cayden."

He shook her head. "No, I do. Not everyone would have just offered to open up their home to someone. I know you know my sister and that we've been friends for years, but still. It's a big ask, and I'm grateful you're doing it. It's really helped Riley and my stress knowing that someone is watching after her."

I didn't know what to say to that. I felt my mind just stopped working. If only he knew the truth. If he knew everything that was going through my head, he'd be beating the shit out of me.

I swallowed. "Cayden, it was the right thing. You have a lot with Riley."

He ran a hand through his hair. "I know that, but still. How has she been doing? You think it's been helping?"

I nodded. "Yeah, she's been relaxing a little more each day, and since working, she's been a lot more perky. I think she's adjusting pretty well to living here."

He looked happy with that information. "That's good. I worry that she's never going to get comfortable here and just become unhappy. I know she's going through a lot, but I still want her to succeed in life."

"She's getting there, but it will take time." I wanted to tell him everything that April had told me, but I didn't. It was her decision to tell who she wanted. If she hadn't told Riley, she wouldn't have been ready to tell anyone else.

He rubbed a hand through his hair. "I for sure thought she was going to throw a fit when she found out Riley and I were planning to move."

I snorted. "Yeah, she wasn't excited about that, but I think she just wants you guys to

be happy."

"I know, and I want her to be happy. She's my sister, after all. I want only good things for her. But I also know that Riley can't keep living in our apartment. I see the way her eyes stop to stare at the flooring where Brad died."

My stomach twisted up, and I suddenly felt a little regret. I was supposed to be protecting and taking care of his sister. I was not supposed to be fucking her. I wasn't supposed to be imagining her in different positions and wondering what she tasted like.

I knew I needed to start handling things a little better. April was going through a lot, as was Cayden. I wondered if maybe avoiding April wasn't the best idea. I should be the person she needed to lean on and not for sex.

An idea sparked in my head. "What was the restaurant you guys all talk about again?"

"The one that's near the outskirts of town?"

I nodded. "Yeah, you guys all said it was nice, and after today, I think April might enjoy it. Besides, I'm too tired to cook dinner."

"It's Laleaves restaurant. They do have some pretty amazing food."

I thanked him and headed out for my truck. I wasn't sure what I was going to say to April, but I knew that I wanted us to have a good night and maybe have a conversation about what we were going to do moving forward.

We were in a gray area at this point. Neither seemed to be speaking about what they wanted, but we both seemed to want the same thing. Or at least that was what I was getting after today when she practically made me cum in my pants.

I glanced at April as she sat across the table. We got to the restaurant pretty quickly and seated in the back corner. The restaurant was filled with plants, giving the space a calm vibe.

"You look nice," I said, taking in her outfit. April had pulled on a short skirt with a cream blouse. The shirt dipped low, and her breasts looked perky in the outfit. I wasn't sure if she had put it on to get my attention, but she had it. My eyes kept dipping down.

She looked around the restaurant, her eyes taking in the low lights and waiters moving around with food. "It's a very nice restaurant. I didn't even know we had a place like this here."

I nodded, glancing around. The space was different than any other place I had been. "The guys all talked about it and said the girls love the food."

She chewed on her lower lip, her fingers tapping on her menu. I knew we had a lot to talk about, and I didn't know where to start. I just kept seeing her eyes when I pinned her against the fire truck. She looked at me with need, begging almost.

I cleared my throat. "I know that we have things to discuss....but I thought it would be nice to take you out."

She raised her eyebrows. "Can I ask why? Why now."

I shrugged. "Your brother and I were talking about everything, and I thought this would be a good way to get your mind off Ivan and everything going on. At least for a little while."

She looked shocked. "Oh..."

"We just want what's best for you, after all. I know you both have a lot on your plate."

The waiter came, and we both ordered. She ordered chicken pasta, and I ordered a burger and fries.

"How was work besides the fire," I asked, rubbing my hands on my pants.

She shrugged. "It was okay. Rebecca had to suspend some kids for a few weeks and talk with the parents. There was some swearing, for sure. It got a little heated, but everything turned out fine."

I could imagine so. I had heard what happened from Ayden, and if April hadn't shown up and cleared the kids out of the room, it would have been a lot worse.

"How are you feeling?" I asked, yawning as I did.

She shrugged. "I'm fine. You look tired, though. Did you not sleep well last night?"

I waved a hand. "Just a little, but it's fine. Work has been busy." I couldn't hold back the next yawn that came over me.

She frowned. "We didn't have to come out. We could have just ordered food in if you were that tired."

I shook my head. "No, I wanted to prove a point. Your brother brought up how well I was taking care of you, and I felt I'd been lacking the past week. We need to keep up appearances for this to be convincing, so I figured I should take you out. Today was scary for both of us."

Her face fell. "Oh..." She looked hurt, and I suddenly wondered if I'd said something

wrong. I thought this would be nice to do.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

She nodded, and when she smiled, I knew it was forced.

Our food was brought out, and our conversation continued. We talked about work and what each of us was doing. I thought the awkwardness from the beginning was gone.

After paying, we headed to the truck and started our drive back home. April leaned against the window. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Would you have asked me to stay if you weren't friends with my brother?"

I glanced at her and thought about it. I probably wouldn't have. I did it because I could see the desperation in her eyes and the worry in his. I wouldn't have just offered my space up to anyone.

"No, probably not."

She fell quiet for a moment when her voice dropped. "Do you want to end this? Do you want me to move back to my old apartment?"

"What?" I looked at her, shocked. "Why would you ask that? Where is that even coming from?"

She shrugged. "You hardly ate your dinner, and you've been yawning all night. You said the only reason we went out was pretty much to hold up appearances, which

sounds like it's been a hassle for you."

I scowled. "I'm just a little tired, April. I'm not asking for a separation."

"Well, it sure seems like you would like one. After all, you only agreed to any of this because you were trying to help my brother. You don't have to suffer if this isn't what you wanted."

I frowned, looking at her, shocked. While it was a part of the reason, it wasn't the entire reason.

"If you want to end this, just tell me." She sighed, leaning back in her seat. "I don't need you to walk around eggshells. I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

I stopped the car at the light and looked at her. "Do you really think I would have just opened up my home, my bed, to just anyone?"

"You said.."

"I wouldn't have offered it up to anyone because you're not just anyone, April! We have history. We were in a relationship before. You're not just anyone, and Jesus, I'm not just anyone to you. This may be fake for everyone else, but we both know there are real emotions involved. I'm doing this to keep you safe because I care."

She fell quiet.

I started the car forward again and took a breath in to calm myself. "Where is this even coming from?"

"You've been avoiding me...you took me out to a nice restaurant and yawned the entire night. You've got bags under your eyes and don't want to sleep with me. So, I

feel like I'm just a burden that you only took in because of my brother. Another girl you're tired of."

As I parked the truck, I looked at her and saw she meant every word.

"I offered up the bed, and you didn't want to do that. I make you breakfast, and you tell me that it's not needed. I just...I don't know what we're doing, Weslie."

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I could feel tears burning up, and I admitted my fears. It was only a matter of time before we would go our separate ways, and my heart would hurt again. I didn't want that. I was finally feeling normal and didn't want that to end.

My insides twisted up violently as he parked the truck. I knew what came next. He would admit how he was doing this to help my brother and that we should try to distance ourselves. He'd been trying to do it for a while now.

"April, you have no idea how much I want you. How hard it is each day to keep my hands to myself."

I looked at him, stunned. He had said those words before, but I thought he had just told them to make me feel better. He'd said things in front of the guys, and I knew it was because they were there.

"You...you don't mean that."

He reached a hand across, taking mine, and pulled it back. He placed my hand on his pants, and I could feel his cock was hard underneath his jeans. "Trust me, I mean it."

I stared at him, feeling the tears break free. He reached a hand up, wiping at my eyes. "Don't cry, April."

"I can't help it. I don't know where the fake stuff begins and where the real stuff starts. It's confusing."

He leaned forward, placing his forehead against mine. "I know, and I should have

said something sooner. It wasn't fair. But god, April. You are all I have ever wanted. I have never wanted anyone else like I've wanted you."

I swallowed, feeling my throat go dry.

"When I left all those years ago, I did it for you. I did it to keep you safe and let you have a childhood, even if it was only for a few years. And since you've been here, you have taken up so much of my mind and my time. The things that I've done to keep myself together."

He wiped my eyes, looking deep into my eyes. "I've had to jerk off countless times just to spend a little time with you because I want to ravish you. I want to bury myself so deep into you there is no part of Iven being there left."

My breath got caught in my throat.

"And I hate how this all happened, but I have you now and don't want to lose you. All of this has been real for me. And when you said you regretted sex, I was trying to keep my distance because I was already hanging on by a thread."

He pulled me into his lap directly on top of his dick. "You have been the only person I have wanted like this, April. I am constantly hard for you."

He placed his hand on my hip, grinding slightly against me. The friction was enough, and my breath hitched.

He reached a hand down, curling his fingers on my clit. It pulsed, and I grabbed his shirt. "This right here is what I want. I want you panting my name, begging for me to love you."

He pulled his hand back and kissed me. I leaned into it, wanting him too badly.

"Please," I whimpered.

Weslie pulled his hand back, and I rocked against him. I rode his fingers, feeling my stomach tighten up.

He kissed my collarbone, his fingers working like magic against my clit. And it hit me. The orgasm took over my body, and I moaned his name.

"This," he purred against my ear. "Is just one of the few things I have dreamed about, April. I want to fuck you in stalls and the truck. I want to lift your dress at the fire station and in the fire truck. I want to fuck you in front of Sandy and bring you home and fuck you again in the bed."

I stared at him, seeing the lust in his eyes. "And the bed...god, I want to die you down and keep you there for days. I want to have you crying my name, covering yourself all over the sheets, and then sleep in them so I smell you all night long."

Even as he said those words, I stared at the bags under his eyes. Weslie would do anything for me. And he was giving up good sleep to do so.

I cupped his face. "Can you do something for me tonight?"

He raises an eyebrow.

"Sleep in the bed. Actually, sleep. Just hold me and sleep."

He looked almost relieved by my words. "You don't want to have sex?"

I did. I wanted everything he described, but I could see he was exhausted. And he'd taken me to dinner instead of going to bed.

"I do," I said, kissing him. "But we can do that another night. You need sleep more than anything."

He held me close, pressing his forehead against my chest. "I am tired."

I ran my fingers through his hair. "I know."

We crawled out of his truck and headed to our apartment. Once inside, we made a beeline for the bedroom. Weslie stripped off his pants and shirt and climbed into the bed. I stripped down and crawled in next to him. I curled up in his arms, feeling his body press against mine.

The space was quiet, and within a few minutes, Weslie was out like a light. I ran a hand over his face, taking in his relaxed features. I knew that I loved him.

I curled close and closed my eyes.

I woke up to the sun hitting my face. I groaned and pulled a hand up, covering my eyes. I then pulled my eyes open, and I returned to myself last night. I slowly pulled my hand back, looked to my left, and found Weslie still asleep.

I stared at his face, taking in his sleeping form. He looked peaceful, and his chest rose and fell softly. I couldn't help but stare, taking him in.

I leaned closer and inhaled his scent. He smells like pine and cedar.

I wanted to stay in bed and just take it in, but I also knew I needed to get up. I needed to shower and start the day.

I glanced at the alarm clock next to the bed, taking in the time. It was just a little past seven.

I wiggled back, trying to break free from him. But as my legs slipped out and hit the floor, he yanked me back, pulling my back against his chest.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked in a sleepy voice. "Are you trying to sneak away?"

I smirked. "I was going to let you sleep. I didn't mean to sleep in. I figured I should shower, and then I could start breakfast for us."

"Or you could just stay in bed with me," he whispered, his lips pressed against my ear. It sent a shiver down my spine, and I inhaled slowly.

"We could, but I thought you were still sleeping. I hope I didn't wake you."

I could feel his lips press against my neck, his lips trailing down. "I was already awake. If you know what I mean." Weslie pulled me back, and my ass rubbed against his cock, which was hard.

My eyes widened. "Oh...I...I didn't realize you were awake."

He chuckled against my skin as his hand trailed over my hip towards my stomach. "Shall we continue where we were last night?"

I slowly turned and looked at him. I nodded my head. "Very much so."

He pulled me tightly against his chest, my breast tightly pulled in. He pressed his forehead against mine as he tugged my leg up and over his leg. I felt myself spread open as he trailed another hand over my stomach, going down.

My breath hitched, and he stared at me. "I want to see every reaction that comes. I want to see what part of your body really turns you on."

He tugged at my belly button piercing and twirled it in between his fingers.

He threw the blankets off us and flipped us. He kneeled between my legs and brought his lips down to mine. They were soft as they brushed mine, his tongue sliding over mine softly.

It was gentle and different from when we slept together before. Before, it was quick, and we were both racing to have an orgasm. We both wanted each other so badly that we didn't even try to enjoy it deeply.

His lips trailed down my neck and across my breast. I watched as he pulled his hands up, cupping my breast. He softly tugged on my nipples, and I moaned softly.

I watched Weslie's eyes light up, and a smirk pulled at his lips. "So, you enjoy having things tugged."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "No, I don't."

He snorted. "You enjoy having your piercing tugged and your nipples. Should I give your hair a tug and see if you moan like that?"

I felt embarrassed, and he leaned closer, pressing a kiss on my lips. "I enjoy hearing it."

His lips continued down, going over my stomach and my piercing. His hand trailed down, and his thumb slid over my clit.

I bit hard onto my lip to contain the moan, and he slid two fingers inside me. My moan slipped free, and it echoed around us.

"You are beautiful."

I felt hot all over and gripped the sheets tightly. I felt that build-up grow and panted, trying to catch my breath.

Weslie stroked his hand over his cock, and I stared at how hard he was. He pressed the tip into my entrance and slowly slid in. He filled me, and it felt good.

He pulled me up, hoisting me onto his lap, and he slid even deeper into me. "Rock your hips," he said, placing his hands on my hips.

I slowly rocked my hips back and forth, and he hit me exactly where I wanted it. I moaned, feeling that tight coil up in the pit of my stomach. His thumb continued to rub over my clit, and the rocking of my hips was perfect.

I came hard, and I felt Weslie pulse inside me. We both lay there for a moment, clinging onto each other.

I ran my fingers over his back, taking in his muscles and how they felt under my hands.

"You have soft skin," I said as I leaned back slightly.

"You do as well," he chuckled, his hands reaching up, cupping my face. "And you are stunning."

I blushed as he leaned forward and kissed me once more. "Do you still need to shower?"

I nodded.

He raised an eyebrow at me. "Want me to join you?"

I nodded as he pulled me closer, hoisting me out of the bed, and took us to the bathroom.

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I wanted to hold her all day, and I could since it was the weekend. April didn't seem in a hurry to leave me either. I inhaled her scent, enjoying that it covered the sheets even. I could lay in them for days.

"You're sniffing me," she said, turning herself towards me. "Why? Do I stink?"

I laughed as I pulled her tighter against me. "You smell nice," I said, taking another deep breath of her in. "It's a nice scent."

She chuckled softly and placed a hand on my chest. "You smell nice too. Like you've been hanging at the beach."

"Thanks," I said, feeling her breasts pressed against my chest, and I was half tempted to take her again even though I just had her. I would never get sick of April and all the noises she made during sex.

I didn't know what April wanted or what she thought about this relationship, but I knew I wanted her. I wanted her for real, and I wanted her forever. But I knew that this was going to take time, and having her for real was going to be a while.

April was still healing from her past and still needed to move through things. She was just getting back on her feet, and I didn't want to cause any issues or swipe the rug out from underneath her. I wanted to take the steps as slowly as she needed.

My wolf growled as she curled closer, turning towards me. She trailed her fingers down my chest. I felt that tug, the need to be closer, and my heart stopped and skipped a beat in a different way. It was like I had been waiting for this my entire life,

which brought up a question: Was she my mate?

Everyone always talked about the tug, about the urge to be near their mate. But I'd known April for so long. Why hadn't I felt it before? Or had I felt it but never realized what it was? Had I just never listened to my body before to recognize she was meant for me?

"You know what sounds really good?" she asked, running her hand on my neck, pulling my attention back to reality. "Pancakes. Oh, and bacon. Some crispy bacon and pancakes with syrup. And eggs!"

"That does sound good," I chirped back, deciding we needed to pull apart. I broke free from her and crawled out of bed, grabbing a pair of shorts.

"I'll get started."

"I'll come help you. I'm just going to shower first."

I pulled myself up and headed down the hallway towards the kitchen. I pulled everything out that we would need, cooked the griddle, and set it to warm. I was mixing the batter and pulling plates out when my phone buzzed.

I answered it, seeing it was Cayden. "Morning. You're up early."

"Weslie, what are you doing?" His voice sounded off, almost worried. I scowled, pausing as I grabbed the spatula out of the drawer.

"I'm at home. I'm cooking breakfast, and April is in the shower. Why, what's up? Your voice doesn't sound good."

"There's a problem at April's apartment."

My entire body tensed up, and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I blinked. "What do you mean there is a problem at her apartment?"

"We got a call about a smoke alarm going off in the building, so we headed down. When we arrived, we realized it was coming from April's apartment."

I ground my teeth together. "Shit! I will be there in ten minutes. Just let me figure something out."

"Okay, and.... don't tell my sister. I don't want her to know. This is the last thing she needs to know about after she's just starting to get settled."

I ended the line and gripped the counter tightly. I should be telling April. It was her apartment, after all. But she was just getting comfortable, just finding her footing. This would push her back, and she would start looking over her shoulders even more.

I can't tell her. At least not right now. I took a deep breath, pushed myself off the counter, and started the pancakes.

Ten minutes later, April came down the hallway with a skip in her step. I gave her a smile. "Hey, I just got a call from Ayden. I need to help him with something. I made you some breakfast."

She frowned. "Oh, you're not going to sit and eat with me?"

I shook my head, turning towards the front door. "No, he sounded a little frantic, so I told him I'd be over right away. I'm sure it's nothing serious, so I'll be back in a little bit."

"Okay, I'll see you later then?"

I nodded, slipped out of the apartment, and sighed. I hated lying to her, but this was better. We didn't know what had happened yet. Why panic about it when it could be something simple?

My mind instantly went to Ivan. He knew she was living there, and breaking in wouldn't be hard. The building didn't have high security. I couldn't prove anything, but a part of me knew.

I arrived at the apartment complex and hurried up to her floor. As soon as I arrived, police tape blocked the door. I hurried under it, slipping inside. I came to a halt, taking in her apartment.

April left the furniture here since we had no need for it. We hadn't exactly discussed what we wanted to do with it after everything, but we knew we were going to need to eventually. But I honestly thought this Ivan thing would have ended by now.

The space stunk of smoke, and burn marks could be seen when you looked down the hallway to the bedroom and bathroom.

"Hey," Ayden spoke up, and I turned to him. He stood with the sheriff, who he waved off as he walked over to me. "You didn't need to come down. We had it under control."

"I wanted to see what all happened. Besides, Cayden sounded off on the phone. Did you guys figure anything out?"

Cayden came out of the bedroom. "Fire started in the bedroom. It looks like someone stayed here last night. The bed was a mess."

My stomach curled up at that.

Ayden looked at me. "I'm guessing from the look neither of you have been."

I shook my head. "No, we've been staying at my place. Neither of us has even come down here since she moved in."

"What happened in the bedroom?" I asked, pointing towards the burn marks.

"Lighter fluid was poured on the floor and lit."

I ran a hand through my hair and sighed. If April had been staying here, what would have happened? I didn't even want to imagine what would have all happened.

"How did he get in?" I asked, knowing she had locked the door when she left. April was careful about that.

Cayden raised an eyebrow at me, and I scowled. "It was Ivan. He was here. I mean, who else would do this?"

Just then, Riley came into the space, her eyes wide. She covered her mouth as she looked around. "What the hell happened?"

"Fire," Cayden said simply. "And do not message my sister."

Riley crossed her arms, looking at Cayden, pissed. "What do you mean don't message her? This is her apartment, Cayden. She has a right to know about what's going on here."

Cayden shook his head. "No, it's under my name. This is my apartment, and she doesn't need to know what's going on."

Riley scowled at him, clearly irritated. "You can't be serious. Cayden, April has a

right to know about this. This is dangerous."

"I'm aware," he said, "Which is why we don't tell her. She already knows she's in danger, but this will only make her more uncomfortable after all her progress."

Riley narrowed her eyes, and her nostrils flared. "So, you want me to lie to her?"

"No," I said, shaking my head. "Just don't say anything to her. We don't know who did this. Once we know a little more, we can let her know."

Riley snorted, waving her hand at the mess. "Oh, come on! We know who did this."

"We don't have evidence," Cayden said, crossing his arms as he leaned against the wall. "Which means we can't do anything. We have to sit and wait."

Riley growled at him. "Yeah, that seems to be working really fucking well for you, Cayden." She turned, storming out of the apartment.

I glanced at Cayden, knowing there was more to that fight than what I was seeing. He sighed. "We had a fight earlier. There is a house we both really like that is up for sale, and she doesn't want to buy until April is better."

My eyebrows went up. "That could take a while."

He nodded his head. "That's what I told her. I said we can't put our lives on hold because she's sad and my sister is having a hard time. I could have probably said it in other words at the time. She started to cry, and plates were thrown, and then silence followed."

I frowned, realizing he was really worried. It was clearly affecting everything.

"You know I have your sister, don't you?" I said, thinking back to last night. "You said you were grateful for everything I was doing."

"I am," he said, "But this." He waved a hand at the space. "This...this was just below my home. It's affecting my entire family, not just my sister."

We both fell silent, and he sighed. "Ayden and I already spoke about this, but with no proof, there is nothing he can do. I wanted him to have a meeting with the alpha since April was more invested in the town now, but he said we needed evidence for it. And we don't. It's a sitting game at this point."

I scanned the apartment, feeling even more determined to protect April. I knew that Ivan was dangerous before and that he'd hurt her, but this was another level. If April had been here, she could have been injured in a way that couldn't be healed.

"So, what's the plan?" I asked. "Please tell me you thought of something."

He shook his head. "The cameras are down, so there is no footage of him. There are no witnesses. I was going to Viv, but she wasn't home. Whatever he is doing or where he is going, he's good at it." Cayden turned. "Just...keep her safe, Weslie. That's all I ask. I don't want to find her hurt or worse..."

"I am," I said. "And I will continue to. I have her, and she's not going anywhere."

"Thank you," Cayden ran a hand through his head. "At least I have that going for me. I don't have to worry about her being safe."

I left the apartment and felt rage on the drive home. I wanted to find him and snap his neck. But we had no idea where he was. Whenever we got a little information, it was wrong. No one seemed to see him in town, and I didn't understand how that could be.

When I returned to the apartment, April was sitting on the couch. She smiled as I entered. "Hey, can you help Cayden out?"

I nodded as I slipped my shoes off and walked over to her. "Yeah, we're good."

"What did he need help with?"

I thought of the burn marks on her floor, and I swallowed. "Just needed help moving some boxes and didn't want to ask Riley."

"Aren't you sweet. You want to watch this movie with me?" She pointed towards the TV.

I sat down on the couch and pulled her close into my lap. I felt her rest her forehead against my chest and inhaled her scent.

I would keep her safe even if my life depended on it. I kissed the top of her head, knowing she was my entire life now.

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"God, it's nice outside for early March," Wendy said as she leaned back, looking up at the sky. The wind blew, and her hair fluttered with it. I couldn't help but smile, wondering if I would ever be that carefree.

"Agreed," Ashley said, pulling her hair into a pony. She looked just as carefree as Wendy did. They looked so happy.

I glanced across the yard at the kids. Poppy, Ivy, and Zayden were sitting together, blowing bubbles and giggling in a group. Micheal had a motorized vehicle that he was moving around. He was a smart kid, just telling her moments ago how he built it with Miles.

"So, are you still enjoying your job?" Laura asked, placing her phone down as she reseated herself on the bench. "I heard about the fire and how you helped clear the kids out. Nicely done."

"I am," I said, nodding my head. "It's been really enjoyable, actually. Minus the fire, of course. I get along with the other staff, and I've been able to keep up with everything."

Now that I had been at the school for a little over a month, I found myself really enjoying the work. I enjoyed talking with the students and the teachers. I found myself looking forward to going back to work the next day.

Wendy leaned forward. "Have you heard more about what you're going to do when Deb gets back to work? The girls were telling me about the opening at the middle school."

I nodded my head. "I was told that the middle school opening was going to be next year. So, I applied, and Rebecca told me it looked pretty good."

"Oh my god, really?" Laura squealed. "The bitch is finally leaving? Oh, I could celebrate!"

I laughed, nodding my head. "She is. I'll have to figure out something else to do until then, but yeah. If they pick me, I'll be there next year. I'm pretty excited about it."

"That's great, congratulations," Wendy said, reaching across the table and giving my hands a squeeze. "It's nice to see you fitting in so well."

I blushed. The truth was, I felt like I was fitting in more. I was getting to know the students and their parents. I was learning more about Honeyville and how it became what it was. I heard more and more each day, which made me realize I never wanted to leave. This place was starting to feel like home.

The pack was ruled with softness and grace, yet Ayden was rough when he needed to be. And Wendy stood beside him with just as much confidence. But they got help from all the guys. They each pitched in where they were needed and did it without complaint.

I looked at Gina. "How are you feeling today?"

"Good," she said, rubbing her belly. "Extremely hormonal. I've been picking fights often, but nothing that Lucas doesn't handle." She smiled, looking down at her stomach. "I'm grateful. I can't wait to meet them."

I chuckled, and Riley snorted. "Same."

I looked over my shoulder toward the guys standing by the grill. Ayden was cooking

steaks while the guys were all standing around him. I looked at Weslie, taking in his clean look. He was wearing a pair of jeans and a loose white shirt. His hair was slightly curly from his shower.

My mind went back half an hour. He walked past me in the hallway, and my mouth watered at the sight of him. He had a six-pack, and water trailed down his chest toward his hairline. His jeans weren't fully buttoned, so I could see his boxers. It was imprinted in my mind.

I quickly shook my head.

"What do you think, April?"

I looked back at the girls and realized I hadn't been listening, and they asked a question. "What?"

Wendy smirked. "Was someone oggling their spouse?"

I felt my face grow hot. "No. I was just thinking about something."

"Liar," Ashley said with a laugh. "You were staring at him. I know that face. We all know that face. It's the face you make when you're thinking about sex."

My face grew red, and I quickly shook my head. "No, I was looking when the food was going to be done."

"Your face says otherwise," Riley laughed. "Don't deny it. We've all been there. I was thinking the same thing during the car ride."

I shook my head. "Oh god, Riley! I don't need that image in my head!"

Everyone started to laugh when Poppy walked over towards them. She had a ball in her hands as she looked up at us all with eager eyes. "Does anyone want to ball?"

"I will," I said, happily wanting to get away from the girls and their dirty minds. It wasn't that I didn't want to gush about things because I did. But we hadn't exactly figured out what we were. Weslie and I hadn't stated this was all real. There were real emotions, but what happened when this was all over?

It didn't help that I was falling. I wasn't supposed to. I knew Weslie's reputation, and when this was over, he would go back to it, wouldn't he? I frowned, hating how I was still doubting myself even after Weslie told me how he felt. I wanted to cling to that, but a part of me wouldn't let me. Deep down, I suspected it just wasn't that simple.

I walked over with Poppy and Ivy and kicked a ball around. It was refreshing to hear their soft giggles as they each ran around trying to kick the ball. I suddenly remembered how I had thought I would have several kids by now. Seeing how far my life had landed from that dream pulled at my heartstrings. I might never have kids.

"You guys mind if I join?" I looked over my shoulder to find Weslie watching us. Poppy beamed and kicked the ball towards him. Weslie kicked it back, and Poppy giggled. She ran to him, and Weslie hoisted her into the air and spun her.

"Me too! Me too!" Ivy said, running towards Weslie. She waved her hands as she ran towards him, wanting to be lifted up as well.

Weslie hosted Ivy into the air and spun her around a little before bringing her back down.

"So, did you girls end up having a good day when you went up to the cabin?" he asked, bending down to their level.

I looked confused as Poppy nodded her head. "We did! Do you want to see pictures? I flew! Mom was so proud."

"Cabin?" I looked at them all, confused. "What cabin?"

Weslie nodded his head. "Ayden has a cabin that they go to on occasion. We've all been up there a few times. It's pretty nice and reserved. We could go down there for a trip."

And he knew about their trip. "How did you know they went?" I asked.

"He babysits," Poppy said. "For date night."

This was news for me. I hadn't realized he was so close to the kids. I didn't even know he babysat, and suddenly, I felt like I should. I'd been living with him. How had I not noticed before?

He kicked the ball, and Poppy and Ivy ran for it. The wind blew, and I wrapped my arms around myself. As I stared at him, I wondered if I really knew him.

"You're really good with the kids," I said, "Even nice enough to babysit."

He nodded. "Well, we all kind of babysit for each other. Everyone goes on date nights and asks who can watch the kids. The numbers have gotten a little slimmer since everyone has gotten married."

It brought up a lot of questions. Did he want kids? He did well with them, but that didn't mean he wanted them. And if he didn't, wouldn't he have them by now?

"Have you ever thought of having that? Marriage and kids?" The question came out quickly, and I realized how it sounded. I swallowed suddenly, wishing I hadn't asked.

Weslie nodded his head. "Yeah, I did. I wanted all of it. The marriage and children. The house and the yard. I wanted the picket fence dream with the big house and the dog running around." He waved a hand around. "All of this. I had wanted it. But it seems that might not be the future for me."

I felt like someone had hit me in the gut. He had wanted it. Which meant he didn't anymore. I wondered when it had changed. When had he wanted the future? And who had he wanted it with? All questions I knew were too personal, and I had no right to them.

I swallowed, feeling like I could cry. I knew better than to get emotional. Weslie wasn't the tying down type. Everyone knew this, everyone but me, it seemed. And this was fake. When this was all over, he would go back to his life, the life he had enjoyed.

I quickly shook my head, looking back at Poppy and Ivy. I tossed the ball to them a few times and then back to Weslie. He tossed it a little further out, letting them run after it.

"Well, then it's a good thing this is all fake because I certainly don't fit the bill for that if you had wanted it."

Weslie looked at me and frowned. "What do you mean?"

I shrugged. "I want that. I want the kids and the marriage. I want the good days and the bad days. I want all of us. So, it's a good thing this is all fake." I waved a hand between us. "Because you don't. So, when this is over...you can get back to the future you want, and I can start searching for mine."

Weslie stepped closer to me, his voice dropping slightly. "April, I wanted all of that with you. I'd pictured it. The house, the kids, and the marriage. Only with you. No

one else but you. I've never had a relationship because I've always wanted you."

I swallowed, unsure if he meant it or not. Was this part of the fake marriage? Was everyone watching us? There was no way he meant those words. Maybe he saw the hurt in my eyes and wanted to make me feel better. But that only made it worse.

I suddenly felt like I needed space. I couldn't breathe because it felt like someone was choking me. If this was real, why couldn't we just be honest with one another?

"Excuse me," I said, turning and headed for the porch. Wendy had said we were allowed inside the house, and I was taking that chance. I needed a moment to collect myself.

"April," Weslie called my name, but I didn't stop. I headed up the stairs and slipped inside. I headed down the hallway towards the bathroom, just needing a moment to pull myself together.

I suddenly could hear Ivan. "You're not worthy of everything."

It was late Sunday night. My head was pounding, and I sniffled. We had just gotten back to the house, and he had thrown our China onto the ground. He'd flipped the couch and threw a vase at the window.

"All I asked was for you to have the baby! I haven't asked for much!"

I shook as I stood there, my lower lip quivering.

He walked closer to me, reaching a hand up, and grabbed my face. "You are fucking worthless! You are a waste of space!"

I squeezed my eyes shut, but I could still hear his words.

"You can't do anything right! You can't cook right, you can't clean right, and you sure as hell can't fuck right. And now you lost the baby! After everything I've done! All the hard work I have put into getting us this life, and you continue to fuck it up!"

I had told Ivan I was pregnant, but the test had been incorrect. I went to see my doctor, and she'd explained I had gotten a false positive, but Ivan had taken it to mean I'd lost the baby.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

"You're going to be if you don't make this up to me." His fingers let go, and he stormed off. But I could still hear his words repeating over and over in my head.

You're worthless—a waste of space.

And they still stuck with me. I felt tears build up, wishing I could move away from all that pain, but it traveled with me. I would never be able to believe anything anyone said because of him.

"He doesn't mean it," I whispered to myself. "Weslie was just being nice."

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I watched her walk away and frowned. Shit. I knew I said too much, and she was clearly hurt. But it was the truth. I had wanted all those things with her. I hadn't settled down with anyone because I refused to have that family with anyone else besides April. If I couldn't have that, I didn't want that future.

I glanced at the guys, spotting Cayden. He was laughing with the guys, not watching. No one was watching, and it was probably better that way. I didn't think April wanted anyone to overhear us talking.

I looked back at the house. She deserved to know the truth, and I wanted her to know so badly. I told her part of it the other day, but not everything. I didn't want to walk around like this anymore, acting like this was fake when it wasn't. I loved her with every fiber of my being and was tired of acting like she wasn't my entire world.

I hurried after her, shutting the sliding door as I stepped inside. I rounded the corner and found her standing in the hallway. She was leaning against the wall, wiping her eyes.

Fuck. I made her cry. God damn it.

"April." I stopped a foot away from her, wanting to pull her into my arms.

Her head snapped to me, and she quickly wiped her eyes even more. "I'm fine, honestly."

"I mean it."

She stilled and started to shake her head. "Weslie, stop. Please...when you say things like that, I can't tell if you're being serious or not. I don't know what's fake and what isn't."

"I'm not lying," I said, walking closer to her, stopping just in front of her now. "I mean it. I want to marry you and have children with you. I want all that with you, and it's only ever been you."

She cried, and tears started to spill freely. "Please stop. You don't mean it."

I reached out, cupping her face. "I do. I left the pack because I had to, but I have loved you since the very beginning. I fell so madly in love with you, April, and we were so young. And we lived in a pack that had the shittiest mentality. I didn't have a choice. I did what I thought was best. Considering everything that happened with your brother, I was thinking of taking you with me. I had brought it up to the Alpha, who promised me that you wouldn't marry until you were older. I didn't want to uproot your life."

She blinked, looking slightly confused. "What do you mean?"

I sighed. "April, I wanted to make things official all those years ago. But I also didn't want to rip your world apart even more than it already was. The pack..." I swallowed. "My folks were pressuring me into marriage, and it was either get married or leave the pack. It all just came to a head suddenly one night without warning."

She looked shocked.

"And I didn't want to force you into anything, I didn't want to do either. I saw what it had done to your brother and how hurt you were. I saw how it left you when your brother left. And I didn't want that, April. God, you have no idea how hard it was to make that decision. To leave you when I knew you were hurting already."

She swallowed, and I expected her to start yelling. I was waiting for it. I deserved it. She should scream at me and punch me for never telling her the truth.

"Then..." She shook her head. "But you... you've been with all of these women."

"For sexual release," I said. "I've been with a lot of women. Yes, but I have never wanted them like I have wanted you, April. I never imagined a future or children. I never imagined any of it with them. I have never loved any of them."

I watched her face drop, and I braced myself for her to hit me. I deserved it.

"You're an asshole," she snapped, her eyes narrowing at me, tears blooming once more. "Why would you tell me?! All those years ago, you should have told me! If you loved me, you would have."

"Because, it was..."

"I had a right to know," she growled at me. She shoved a hand on my chest. "You should have told me. If you really cared about me, you would have."

"April, you were sixteen! And we...god...our relationship was secret. We weren't sleeping together and bringing up that subject... How could I bring up that subject when you were so young?"

"We talked about everything," she snapped. "Everything, and yet you were afraid to bring that up? I could have gone with you!"

I frowned. "April, I was afraid. I was terrified! I figured if I did, I'd lose you. Any decision I made felt like the wrong decision. If I took you, I'd be responsible for you in every way possible when I couldn't even look after myself. I figured if you were there...you at least had a roof over your head, and the alpha promised you wouldn't

be forced into a relationship. You could go to college and travel. I didn't know what would happen if you were with me....for all I knew, I was throwing my own life away."

She went quiet for a moment, wiping at her eyes. I reached a hand up, cupping her face. "I'm sorry. I really am, but it was the right option. I did it for us. I didn't want you to end up hurt."

"But we lost all of that time," she whispered softly. "You left me, and I had to settle for someone else. Someone who didn't love me didn't care for me like you did. Maybe you saved yourself from pain but didn't save me, Weslie. You left me just like my brother in the hands of people that didn't care about me."

I felt guilt hit me hard, and I tightened my hold on her. "I'm sorry," I whispered, leaning my forehead against hers. "I'm sorry."

"If you had just told me," she repeated. "We could have figured something out. We could have left together."

I pressed her forehead against mine. "I thought I was doing what was best. I figured you would find someone that would treat you well. Or you would explore like you wanted and live out every dream you had."

She sniffled. "I loved you too, you know. I cried for weeks when you left. And I had to act like nothing was wrong because no one knew about us. My grades slipped, and I got depressed. I fell into Ivan's arms because I thought he cared about me. He found me at my lowest, and it wasn't because of you."

I stared into her eyes, and she stared back at me. I inhaled slowly. "You loved me? Do you not anymore?" I asked, afraid to hear her answer.

She remained silent for a moment, swallowing slowly and shaking her head. "No, I still love you. I never stopped loving you. No matter how hard I tried, even when I made vows and married Ivan, I still loved you and only you."

I felt like my heart stopped beating. She loved me—she still loved me—which meant there was no reason to act fake, no reason to hold back. If she loved me, I would accept her. I was going to keep her.

I kissed her softly, feeling her shake in my hands. I knew they were happy tears as she leaned back. "Weslie, we're in the hallway. Anyone can walk into the house and see us."

I grabbed the doorknob next to us. I was not sure where it led, but it was somewhere. I pulled it open, took her inside with me, and shut the door behind us.

It was a closet, and it was filled with coats, but I ignored them. I pulled her closer and kissed her once more. Her mouth pressed tightly against mine, her tongue sliding over mine. She tasted amazing, and I couldn't get enough of her.

She moaned softly as I pushed her against the wall, pulling her legs up and had her straddle me. I pinned her waist against mine, devouring her mouth.

"Oh god," she panted as I started to grind into her. My cock jerked to attention as her hands wrapped around my shoulders, holding onto me tightly. "This is a bad idea."

I nodded. "It's a terrible idea. This is Wendy and Ayden's house. It's their closet." I grabbed her chin, tilting her head up. "And if you want to stop, we stop."

She shook her head. "Don't stop."

"I love you," I said, kissing her deeply. I felt her bite onto my lower lip, and I

groaned, grinding hard against her.

She panted, and I pulled at her dress, hiking it up to her hips. I could see she was wearing a thong, the same shade as her dress. I smirked, sliding my hand over her, finding her soaking wet.

"Fuck, you're soaking wet."

"This is real. No more fakeness," she asked, a hand grabbing my face. "You mean everything you said."

I nodded, kissing her cheek. "I did bring you into my bed, April. Only you. No one else. Ever. That should tell you just how serious I am."

She kissed me back, her teeth raking over my lower lip. I held back a growl as I kissed her back just as hungrily as she was. I slid two fingers into her and pumped them. She softly moaned against my fingers, grinding into them.

She grabbed at my zipper, her hands just as frantic as mine were. She slid a hand underneath her fingers wrapped around my cock, which ached for her.

"Fuck, I want you," I growled, this time ripping her thong. I slid another finger into her, stretching her. Her head tilted back slightly, and her breath hitched up.

I felt my pants give and my cock jerk free. Her fingers slid up and down my cock tightly, and I inhaled sharply to keep myself from popping.

"Fuck," I said, pressing her forehead against mine. "That feels so fucking amazing. Do it again."

I rubbed my thumb over her clit, and April bit hard onto her lower lip.

"Don't stop," she panted, her nose pressing against mine. "Please. Oh, god, please."

"I don't think I could stop," I said, holding her higher. I moved, sliding into her, and felt her inhale sharply. I kissed her deeply, thrusting, never wanting to stop.

It was frantic. All you could hear was us breathing heavily, my cock sliding into April like it was meant for her, and after some ravishing, I came hard inside her. April tightened around me, and I put a hand over her mouth, and she cried out as an orgasm took over her body.

She leaned against me as we tried to catch our breath. I could see her smile as she leaned forward, kissing me softly. "I love you," she said.

I tugged her dress down and reached for my pants, pulling them back up. I zipped them up and chuckled at her. I pulled a hand up and cupped her face once more. "That was amazing."

She smiled back. "I agree." She leaned forward, rubbing her hand down my chest. "But I would do it again."

I leaned forward to kiss her when the door was suddenly thrown open. The light was blinding but not as much as the look of horror and rage fixed on Cayden's face.

I instantly knew this was bad. Both of our hair was a mess, and I'm sure I had lipstick smeared on my face. Not to count the way April was pulling at her dress, and my shirt was still half unbuttoned.

"What the fuck," Cayden growled low, his nostrils flared as he stared at us. His hands curled into fists, and his eye snapped from me to April, then back to me.

Fuck. There was no good way to explain this. No good way without him beating the

shit out of me. There was nothing I could say to make this better. I had fucked his sister in the closet.

I swallowed, searching for words, but nothing came. April seemed just as flabbergasted as I was as she frantically started to pull at her hair, running her fingers through it.

"What the fuck is going on here?" he repeated, but not because we didn't hear him the first time. He was giving me five seconds to explain before he lost complete control.

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I knew right away that Cayden was seconds away from exploding, and this looked bad—really bad. I had no idea how long he had been standing there, but I could imagine we weren't being quiet. Even if Weslie covered my mouth, noises echoed and went through walls.

I swallowed, feeling my entire face growing hot with embarrassment now. "Cayden, let me explain."

His eyes snapped back to Weslie, and his hands curled into fists. "Were you fucking my sister?"

I tried not to let the words bother me, but they did. Fucking made it sound like this wasn't something special. Like Weslie was just using me, but that wasn't what was happening. I knew he would see it that way, but I had to try.

"Cayden." I took a step towards him. "Take a breath. This isn't what it looks like."

Cayden quickly shoved me out of the way, pulled a hand up, and punched Weslie in the face. I screamed as the sound of bone on bone filled the air, "Cayden! Stop!"

"You fucking bastard!" Cayden erupted, grabbing Weslie's shirt and yanking him forward. Weslie pulled his hands up, trying to pull away, but his shirt wouldn't let him. "Are you fucking insane! I asked you to fucking protect my sister, you fucking prick! I said, protect her! I didn't say you could fuck with her emotions and fuck her!"

"Cayden, stop!" I screamed, reaching forward and pulling at his arm, trying to break them apart. "It's not like that! Cayden, stop! You're going to hurt him! Just calm

down, and let us explain!"

"Let go!" Weslie snapped, trying to break free, but it was no use. Cayden had his shirt fisted in his hand. I could see the look in my brother's eyes. He was out for blood now.

"You are supposed to be my best friend, and you do this to me! Are you fucking kidding me!"

"Cayden, stop," I pleaded now, imagining our voices were traveling outside. "Let go of him!"

I shove at Cayden, finally breaking them apart. I moved, standing in front of Cayden, making sure he couldn't charge as Weslie again. "It's not like that! So stop hurting him and fucking listen for a moment."

"Don't," Cayden growled at me. He pulled his hand up, pointing a finger. "Don't tell me what it is and what it isn't! I'm not fucking blind! You're fucking dress is all scrunched up, and he has your fucking lipstick on his face! So don't try and tell me that nothing happened in that closet."

Okay, so I couldn't say we were just talking in the closet, but he was taking this wrong. He was seeing it as Weslie taking advantage of me when, in truth, we both wanted what happened in that closet.

"I'm an adult," I said. "And I don't need you punching him."

"I will do whatever I have to do to keep you safe, April! You are still new to the pack, and I'm making sure you get yourself on steady feet!" He looked from me to Cayden. "And you're fucking dead!" Cayden pushed against me to get to Weslie.

"We're in a relationship!" I yelled, stepping back into Cayden's space. I placed my hands on the wall, not letting him get around me. I held my head high as I stared at him. "A relationship."

"It's a fake relationship!" Cayden yelled back. "The entire thing was fake, or have you forgotten about that? Have you forgotten that he's a womanizer and that he jumps around from woman to woman!? Or did he somehow convince you he hasn't done that since the moment he arrived here?"

"It's not like that," Weslie growled at Cayden. I could see the frustration on his face as he pushed against my back. "And you know that! You know damn well that we all have had a lot of relationships. You don't see me throwing that in your face when Riley gets angry at you."

"What I know is you were feeling my fucking sister up in a closet! That's what I know! And if you don't fucking get out of this house, I swear to god, Weslie. I'll fucking choke you to death!"

I went still for a moment, knowing my brother could. He'd killed Brad, and in his eyes, Weslie had crossed a line you shouldn't even touch.

"Cayden, stop!" I yelled at him, shoving at his chest. "Fucking stop! Stop it! Let me explain!"

"There is nothing to explain!" Cayden growled, looking at me. "You don't know what type of person he is! I do. I've been around him all these years."

But that wasn't true. I did not know what type of person Weslie was. I had fallen in love with him all those years ago, and he hadn't changed. He was sweet and caring, a bit sarcastic sometimes, but always there when I needed him.

I stood my ground. "I do know because we had a relationship in the past! We dated before and after you left."

Cayden froze, looking at me confused. "What?"

I sighed. The truth had to come out. "I know what type of person he is because we dated when we were younger for a while. So....this isn't new. We just...got back together."

I watched Cayden ground his jaw together, and his eyes quickly left me and went to Weslie. "Are you fucking kidding me!?" Cayden growled and shoved past me straight toward Weslie. Another punch was thrown, and they tumbled backward.

"Stop!" I screamed, trying again to break them apart, but Weslie was throwing punches back this time. The room echoed with them punching each other, and I didn't know how to stop them.

"Stop!" I screamed even louder. "Stop fighting! Please!"

The fight moved as they tumbled into the living room. Swear words were thrown, and both of them were screaming at each other. Weslie shoved Cayden, and Cayden pulled Weslie down with him. Over and over. I could hear their shirts being ripped, and blood started to drip onto the wood floor.

"I'll never fucking forgive you for this!" Cayden yelled, throwing another punch at Weslie.

They tumbled out of the house onto the porch. "Fuck you!" Weslie yelled, and everyone turned, looking at all of us. I could see the confusion in everyone's eyes, which quickly shifted into horror.

I watched Lucas and Miles quickly move, hurrying up the stairs to pull them apart. Miles grabbed Cayden, and Lucas grabbed Weslie, but they couldn't get them apart.

"Hey! Hey!" Miles started yelling over them. "Enough."

Weslie threw a punch, and Cayden tumbled backward, fumbling down the stairs. I screamed watching as he hit every stair until he landed on the grass. Riley screamed, pulling herself out of her chair as she ran to him.

"Oh my god!" I pulled a hand up quickly, covering my mouth.

Tears poured out as Weslie stood panted. Lucas stood in front of him, not letting him move forward. My brother stared back at him, ready to come back up the stairs and continue. He wiped his nose as Riley got to his arm. Miles started down the steps blocking his way. "That's enough, you two."

"What is going on?" Riley asked, looking directly at me.

Cayden laughed, waving a hand up at us. "What's going on is I found him in a closet with my sister."

"While that's not a sight you probably want to see, I don't see the problem," Miles said, crossing his arms. "I've seen things I don't want to see too, man, but that doesn't mean you hit people. They're married, after all."

"It's fake!" Cayden yelled, throwing his arms up. "Their entire relationship is fucking fake! It's not real! And horn dog over here couldn't keep his fucking hands to himself." Cayden looked at Weslie. "Did you fuck her up there? Did it make you feel like a man? Do you enjoy screwing her life up?"

"Enough!" Ayden's voice boomed over the yard, and everyone went silent. I

swallowed, looking at Ayden and Wendy. Ayden looked pissed, and Wendy looked uncomfortable. This entire situation was uncomfortable.

"You two pull yourselves together. You are important members of this pack, and you're not going to fucking fight like children! And certainly not in front of them!"

I quickly looked over to the kids, who each looked scared, clinging to a family member. I felt even worse. This was not something they should have seen.

"I want him gone," Cayden yelled. "He betrayed everything I fucking asked! He was supposed to protect my sister, not..."

"It's not like that, Cayden." I tried to speak up, but my voice came out scratchy. "Cayden, he cares about me. He..."

"He doesn't!" Cayden snarled. "You're just another fucking notch on his post! You really think he gives a shit about you?"

"No, she isn't!" Weslie yelled back. "I'll fucking hit you if you say that again."

"Enough!" Ayden yelled once more. "I said enough! This is my house, and you are done! You're not going to behave like animals!"

We all fell quiet once more. I took a deep breath, trying to stop the tears. I looked at Weslie as he wiped his busted lip. He had a cut on his forehead as well.

Ayden shook his head and pinched at his nose. "Clean yourselves up, and both of you in my office."

I took Weslie to the bathroom and cleaned his face. He had a black eye forming, and I tried not to cry about it. I frowned, and he wiped my face. "Don't cry." He kissed my

forehead as he slipped out into the hallway.

I waited in the living room with Riley while Ayden took them into his office. I could hear Ayden yelling at them, and I knew they were in deep shit. Riley paced while I sat in the chair.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked softly, turning to me for a moment.

I looked at her, seeing the hurt expression in her eyes. "Which part?" I asked. "The past where it was fake, or the part where I fell in love? Or the past relationship we had back in the old pack? Or did you want to talk about how he left me and I married Ivan? There is so much there, so I think you'll need to be specific."

Riley frowned, looking hurt, and I suddenly regretted the harsh words. It wasn't her fault everything was falling apart. It wasn't fair for me to take my frustration out on her. "When did you stop trusting me with the truth? When did you stop trusting me with your secrets?"

I blamed Ivan. I blamed the fear and the constant worry that this was all going to be over before I knew it. That this happiness was going to disappear and I'd never have it again.

And I blamed myself for letting myself fall this far. I should have known better. I should have left him.

I shrugged. "When did you stop telling me? You didn't tell me about the house. What other secrets don't I know?"

Riley remained silent because I wasn't the only one keeping secrets. We both were.

The drive home was quiet, and I stared out the window. I kept replaying everything

over and over in my head. I felt numb at this point, unsure of what was going to happen.

We parked, and Weslie leaned onto the steering wheel. I looked at him, feeling my stomach churn up. Was this the end? Had he decided crossing the line wasn't something he wanted to do?

"Do you want to end this? I...I understand if you do..."

Weslie didn't move, and I felt tears build up once more. I wiped at them, feeling my voice crack. "I understand if you want to rethink this all. I know how important my brother is to you."

He looked at me, and his eyes were so soft. He reached over and wiped my eyes. "I don't. I don't want to change anything."

"Are you just saying that because I'm crying?"

He gave me a soft smile, shaking his head. "No, but I don't want you to cry because I have a headache coming, and if you cry, it's going to make me feel worse than I already feel."

"Sorry," I whispered, wiping my eyes.

"Let's go upstairs," he said, squeezing my hand. "Please? I'm tired after that, and I just want to lay in bed with you."

I nodded, and we hopped out of the car. We headed upstairs, where we both stripped down and crawled into the bed. I sank against Weslie, allowing him to hold me tightly.

"I'm sorry," I whispered to him. "If I hadn't..."

"Don't," he said, sounding in pain. "Please....sweetie...this is on me. If I had just been honest from the start, we wouldn't have this problem."

"But..."

He pulled me tighter. "For now, just let me hold you."

I wanted to ask what we were going to do tomorrow, but I didn't. And if I was being honest, I didn't want to think about tomorrow. I just wanted to be in this moment. I closed my eyes and focused on his breathing. I inhaled his scent and allowed myself to drift off to sleep.

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I took a deep breath, opened the truck door, and stepped out. I swallowed, nervous, as I headed inside the apartment complex and onto the elevator.

I hadn't spoken to Cayden since the fight over a week ago. He had switched shifts, working opposite me, and we hadn't run into each other. I had thought of messaging him but wasn't afraid of another beating.

I knew he needed a little space to simmer down, and a week might not be enough, but I figured we were adults. Maybe he would understand if I explained better and told him just how much I loved April.

I understood him being protective, and considering my past, I got his worry, but this was different. April and I were nothing compared to my past relationships. I didn't even count them as relationships, really, because they were always about the sex part. I took them out for dinner or something, but only if they asked. I knew it sounded bad, but they were always aware. We always discussed it before we went forward. If they wanted something more serious, they left.

I heard the ding and the doors open. I rolled my shoulders back as I stepped off the elevator and headed down the hallway to the door. I swallowed as I pulled a hand up and knocked. My stomach twisted up as the hallway fell quiet.

The door was pulled open, and Riley stood in the doorway. She looked a little shocked when she saw me, and then her eyes narrowed. Her arms crossed, and she glared at me. It seemed she was still angry with me herself. "Yes?"

I cleared my throat. "Is Cayden here? I was hoping to speak with him."

She shook her head. "He isn't. He is out grabbing groceries."

I nodded, shoving my hands into my pocket. Shit. I didn't think I had the courage to come back. Maybe I could just hang around downstairs and wait. He wouldn't punch me and ruin his groceries, right?

"But I would like a word with you," she said, opening the door. "Since you're here."

I was tempted to say no, but I couldn't. Riley was April's best friend, and if she wanted to speak to me, so be it. I stepped inside, and Riley shut the door behind me.

The apartment was half packed up, and I was surprised. I hadn't heard anything about them moving so soon, but Cayden wasn't exactly talking to me. "Did you guys get the house?"

Riley nodded her head.

My eyes widened. "The one you guys were hurrying to get the loan for?"

She shook her head. "No, not that one. We found something else. We were going to share it at the party, but instead, you and Cayden decided to have a fight. The moment was ruined."

I cringed, feeling the anger in her words. I leaned on one leg and then the other, rubbing my hands in my pocket.

"I'm sorry. I didn't plan that to happen."

"You should be," she snapped, stopping at the island. She leaned onto her, her eyes narrowing. "You acted like children. You guys broke their door too outside and left a mess of shattered things inside. You ruined artwork that their kids made."

Now, I felt even worse. Ayden never mentioned that part. When he chewed us out in his office, he was putting us both on probation and if we couldn't get our act together, we were both looking at dismissals.

"In my defense, I didn't swing first. He got a few in before I even swung back."

"That doesn't make it better, Weslie! You shouldn't have done what you did."

I frowned, feeling my shoulder sag. "What do you want me to say, Riley?"

"I want you to think about everything. April is fragile. She is going through so much, and she doesn't need..." She paused, looking away from me. Her shoulder sagged. "She doesn't need to be the next person you sleep with and leave behind. She needs someone that is going to care for her and love her for the rest of her life."

I ground my teeth together. "Do you seriously think I'm that heartless? That I would jeopardize my friend and my family like that? All to get my dick wet?"

She frowned. "I don't know what you would do, but I have to protect April. She is my family." She placed her hand on her chest. "And she means the world to me, and the thought of you hurting her when she is already so broken..." I watched tears bloom in her eyes. "I can't help her....she won't let me...but I can do this. I can make sure that if this isn't real for you, you leave her."

I knew Riley was a more gentle person, but I also knew she could fuck a person up if she wanted to. That was if Cayden didn't get to me first.

"Do you doubt April's judgment?"

"No," she said, shaking her head.

"Then why are you doubting it now?"

"Because she is hurting!" Her voice pitched. "And I swear to god, Weslie. If you hurt her, if you make her cry, or break her heart, I will come for you."

I could see her worry and the pain of thinking I would hurt April.

"Riley, I love her."

She wiped her eyes and straightened herself. "Have you said that to every girl you slept with?"

I sighed. "Why do you think we slept together? Has she told you we did?"

She raised an eyebrow at me. "I know, April. And I could see the embarrassment on her face. I don't care about that part. I care about what happens next."

I walked closer to Riley and took a seat at the island. "April, I have never said those words to anyone. I have never been in a relationship besides your sister when we lived in the old pack."

She waved a hand. "April said that....but she never gave me the details."

My eyebrows went up. Cayden didn't tell her what I'd said? "He didn't tell you?"

She scowled. "We weren't exactly on talking terms since that night. I wanted to, but he goes out for a run and doesn't get back until late."

I frowned. "I'm sorry. I don't...I don't want this to get in your guy's relationship."

She snorted loudly. "Little late for that. Now explain."

I sighed. "Do you remember when ... God, you guys were probably fifteen. April asked me out in front of Cayden to piss him off. This was just before he left. A couple of months, maybe."

Her eyes widened. "Oh my god! You guys actually started to date!? I thought it was a joke!"

"It was a joke at first. I took her out because I thought it would be funny. And we got along really well. We started to text each other and hung out. And when Cayden left, she started to come and see me more."

She frowned. "Why didn't she ever tell me?"

"We never told anyone, and when it got more serious, things...changed."

She frowned. "You mean like what happened to Cayden? You didn't get a choice anymore..."

I nodded, not wanting to think about those days and the stress it gave me. "Yeah, my folks were asking about her and when I was going to settle down. Cayden was gone by this time, and at that point, I was trying to protect her, but...I couldn't protect her for me. So, I left."

She shook her head and sighed. "Jesus..."

"I love her, April. I have always loved her. Sure, I've been with a lot of women, but it isn't the same as April. She is all I have wanted, all I will ever want."

Riley watched me for a moment, seeming to analyze my words.

"Does she feel the same?"

I nodded. "I think so. Either way, I'm the luckiest bastard to walk this planet if she does after how I left her. I don't deserve her. I know that this is messy, but I don't care. She is the best thing that ever happened to me."

She sighed softly as she nodded her head. "I get it. Cayden says the same thing. That he also didn't deserve me, yet he got me. The world works in weird ways."

"You are taking this a lot better than Cayden did. I was expecting you to be screaming at me."

She snorted. "No, I know April. She seems...happier with you. Just as long as you keep your dick in your pants at outings, you'd be perfect."

I scowled. "Really?"

She laughed. "The guys said you were a horn dog that couldn't be satiated. And your closet act didn't help with that."

I waved a hand. "Jesus Christ, I'm not an animal. I do have a mind and everything."

She smirked. "Sorry. I couldn't help it."

She pushed off the counter and rounded the island, taking a seat next to me. "Promise me you'll take care of her. And that no matter what, you won't leave her."

I looked at Riley and gave her a smile. "I'll treat her like an angel she is. I don't plan on losing her."

She shook her head. "No, promise me you'll take better care of her. Tell me, even if you guys don't work out, you'll still be there. That you won't treat her any differently." She placed her hand on her stomach. "I want to be there, but I can't. Our

relationship has changed since I got married and pregnant. And if she won't tell me anything, I want to make sure she tells someone she has someone."

I could see the sorrow in her eyes.

"You're still her best friend."

She snorted, elbowing me in the side. "I will always be her best friend, but I'm not the person she runs to and tells her secrets. So, you have to promise me you'll be that person."

"What makes you think she isn't telling you secrets?"

She looked back at her stomach. "She didn't tell me you guys slept together. She didn't tell me about the past relationship you had."

I could understand that. If word got to Cayden, she would be scared of what would happen. "Well, maybe she was afraid you'd tell Cayden."

She shook her head. "No. That wouldn't matter. She would have told me. She told me she kissed my ex in high school, so there really isn't anything she would hold back unless she felt I didn't trust her."

"Do you trust her?"

She nodded. "Yeah, with my life." She sighed heavily, leaning forward, and pressed her forehead against the counter. "When did things become so messy? I miss when we were little, and the world wasn't so difficult."

"Somewhere around adolescence is when everyone decided we were adult enough to handle the truth. The world sucks."

She snorted, looking at me. "You're funny, Weslie." She pulled herself back up and knitted her fingers together. "And give Cayden time to adjust. Ever since he left the pack, he's felt guilt about everything. He felt responsible for everything that happened to me; the other day, he felt like he failed to protect April. I know he has a bit of anger right now, but it's at you. It's at himself."

"Do you honestly think I would just sleep with her? Does he honestly think that?"

She shook her head. "No...I know April, and she would never do that unless she really wanted to, and even as mad as Cayden is, I think he knew that you wouldn't cross that line unless you really cared about April."

"Doesn't feel like that," I said, rubbing my face. "I think he wants me dead."

"Give him time," she said, placing her hand on mine. "And don't break her heart."

"I won't."

She smiled. "Good, I'd hate to have to take you out when I'm starting to like you."

I laughed and felt a little better. I looked around the space. "You guys have a lot of stuff packed up. Are you guys ready for this move?"

She nodded. "I am. I'm nervous, but it will be good for us." She rubbed her hands over her stomach. "It's a step forward and in the right direction. We need this."

I watched as her eyes flicked over to the living room, and I could see the sorrow cross her face.

"I don't want to raise a child in this place. It's...tainted."

I squeezed her hand. "You guys will be amazing parents."

She smiled, leaning against my shoulder, and sighed. "I hope you and Cayden sort this out."

I patted her head, nodding in agreement.

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"Does this dress make me look fat?" Riley asked, turning around in the mirror and looking at me. I sat on her bed, crossed-legged, and scowled at her. I took in her outfit: a flowy pale blue skirt and a white blouse with ruffles on the shoulders. It looked good on her.

"You're pregnant, Riley."

She rolled her eyes and sighed, placing her hands on her hips. "Yeah, but I don't want to look fat. Do I look fat?"

I waved a hand at her. "You look pregnant."

She turned back to the mirror. A small smile pulled at her lips as she ran her hands over her stomach. She was five months pregnant now and just starting to show properly. I couldn't help but feel a little jealous. She had it all—the beautiful husband, the wonderful marriage, and now the baby.

I shook my head, trying to focus. "I thought you said you needed help with a few things. Isn't that why I drove over here in a hurry?"

She nodded. "I need help figuring out what to wear. We're having girl's night in a couple of days, and I want to look good. But I feel some of these outfits make me look chubby and not in the pregnant way."

I chewed on my lip, unsure if I wanted to go. Since the big screaming match and the blow-out that followed, I'd been avoiding everything. I didn't want to know what the girls thought of our fake relationship, and I really didn't want to know if the entire

town knew. I'd been trying to stay home and avoid as much as possible, but I knew I would eventually have to get back into things.

Riley turned back to me. "No one knows."

"Knows what?" I asked as I grabbed a pillow, leaning onto it.

She crossed her arms. "Your face is an open book. No one besides everyone at the party knows about you and Weslie's relationship. And really, the girls haven't said much."

I rubbed my hands together nervously. I hadn't known the girls that long, but the idea of this ruining my friendship with them worried me.

"It wasn't fake. I mean, it was fake at first." I ran my hands over my face and sighed. "It's complicated. It was fake in the beginning, but it's not anymore."

"I'm getting that vibe."

I dropped my hands. "But it isn't. It was so simple when it was just us. There is no need to impress each other. It's just easy. It's like...I've lived with him for twenty years already, and he knows what I like and don't like."

When did everything get so complicated? When did it become so messy?

"Did you mean what you said? Back at Ayden and Wendy's house?"

I thought of what I had said. Telling her the truth and asking when we stopped trusting each other.

"Which part?"

"That you love him. That you fell in love with him. That you've loved him all these years."

I felt tears bloom as I nodded my head. "I do. I did." I wiped my eyes. "I've loved him since we were teens. And I'm sorry I never told you. I should have."

Riley frowned, looking hurt. "Why didn't you tell me?"

I shrugged, looking around the room. "Because he left. What was the point? Why admit something when it was over."

"The point was you told me everything. I told you everything. Why not tell me about him."

"But we didn't," I corrected her. "You never told me about wanting to move or that you had a crush on my brother for years. We were both keeping secrets."

Her face dipped. She swallowed, chewing on her lower lip.

As angry as I was about all of that, I wasn't. If we were being honest, we all had secrets we didn't tell, even to someone we cared about. I had kept secrets, and so had she.

I reached a hand out, taking her hand, and squeezed it. "I'm not angry about it, April. But as close as we are, I think we even have secrets we don't tell each other. And that doesn't make our friendship terrible. I think it makes it better."

I watched tears break from her eyes, and she wiped them. "I feel like I've been a shitty friend since you got here. I've watched you fall apart, and I haven't been able to do anything."

I shook my head. "You haven't. You have been an amazing friend, Riley." She'd been there more than anyone else in my life had. She was more a sister than a friend. She knew my secrets, and she knew my fears. She had held my head while I cried countless times since being here, and she'd always stood by my side. And I, in turn, had done the same for her.

"We're growing up, and that's okay because it's not just us anymore." I nodded my head to her stomach. "Our little group is growing."

It had always been us against the world, and in the old pack, that mindset worked. It was how we survived, but it wasn't needed here. We could thrive and grow here, and we were.

Riley wiped her eyes and sniffled. "Do you think the guys have made up yet?"

I snorted, shaking my head. "No, from what I've gathered, they haven't spoken or seen each other since the fight."

Riley rolled her eyes, walking back into her bathroom and shutting the door. "I swear to god, men. It's been over two weeks now. They should have at least started to get over this. Or talked by now."

I couldn't help but laugh because it felt normal. I felt like myself, and I didn't think I would again.

"So, this house you guys bought...where is it?"

Riley came back out wearing her sweatpants and a baggy shirt. She smiled as she walked out. "It's beautiful. It's a house in one of the older parts of town. It's a little run-down but has so much character."

"Do you have pictures?"

She nodded, pulling her phone out. She showed me a large house with beautiful windows and a huge yard. It needed some work, but the bones of the house were good. The photos inside were filled with large rooms and a huge kitchen, all with natural wood floors and built-in bookcases. There were five bedrooms and an office. There was a dining room and a basement that they could do whatever they wanted.

"Wow."

"It needs a bit of work," Riley said, biting her lower lip. "But god.... it's stunning. And Cayden said he would start work immediately so we could move in by the time the baby is born."

"You're going to have it all," I chuckled. "The husband, the baby, the career, and the house."

She blushed. "You know, I never thought I would. It was always shoved down my throat, and I never really thought about whether I wanted it. It was just expected of me. But given the choice, I want it all. I just wanted it with Cayden."

I understood that. I thought I was going to be stuck with Ivan for the rest of my life. I remembered how I wanted to run at our wedding, but I could feel the weight bearing down on me. My mother gently told me it was just wedding jitters. My father told me he was a good man and that Ivan was going to be a wonderful husband and father.

I frowned. "I was terrified I would end up pregnant when I was with Ivan."

Riley froze, looking at me stunned. "What?"

I inhaled slowly, another secret I never told her. "I always wanted to tell you and

leave him, but I never did.”

She looked horrified as she stared at me. "Wh...wh...what? Why didn't you tell me?"

I had been so scared. I remembered wanting to tell her, the words bubbling up to tell her, but I never did. I always said to myself that things would get better, and if I told her, she would never understand when things got better.

"Because it was just easier to hold it in. It was easier to act like everything was fine.

Riley swallowed. "Why are you telling me now?"

I gave her a soft smile. "I'm telling you because I want you to know. You are a shining star of what I hope I will get one day."

Before Riley could respond, my phone rang. I glanced at it, and my stomach dipped when I saw Ivan's number.

"Don't answer that," she said, her eyes looking at the name on my screen.

I grabbed it, tempted to ignore it, but I couldn't. I needed to know if he knew about Weslie and me. Was he finally going back home?

I answered it, pulling it up to my ear. "Hello?"

"Do you miss me yet?" he spoke in a husky voice, his voice slightly off, and I wondered if he'd been drinking again.

I sighed. "No."

"Not even after the little gift I gave you?"

I stiffened. "What are you talking about?"

"Your apartment, beautiful little space. Nothing like our house, of course."

Riley's eyes widened as she listened in, and I frowned. "What about my apartment?"

"I set it on fire."

I frowned. Why hadn't I known that? Why hadn't anyone told me? But the look on Riley's face told me she knew, and I'm guessing the guys didn't want her to tell me.

I ground my teeth together, a little angry now. Why did everyone feel the need to hide everything from me? Like I was some broken doll.

I straightened my back. "Why did you do that?"

"To make a point, you belong with me, April."

I snorted. "I'm guessing you don't know I've remarried then."

He went quiet, too quiet for my liking. It was the silence before the storm.

"What?"

"I've remarried. I've already moved on and started a new job. I've become part of this pack, and you can do nothing to change that. The old pack will have to acknowledge the change, so I'm part of this pack now."

"Why would you do that?" he yelled.

"Because I'm not yours anymore," I snapped back, tightening my hold on the phone.

"So you need to go home and leave me alone."

"You're going to regret that, April. You and I both know you belong with me, and once I get my hands on you, I'm going to..." I ended the line before he could finish, and Riley's eyebrows went up.

"Damn, you grew some balls."

"I've always had them," I said with a smile. I just let Ivan change me, and I was done doing that. I was done living in the shadow where I had to tiptoe around.

"Are the guys at work?" I asked, pulling myself off the bed.

"I think so."

"Good. I'm tired of those two fighting."

Riley raised an eyebrow at me. "And you plan on changing that how?"

"I've known the guys for a long time, and they need to talk. They will be talking." I grabbed my purse and gave Riley a quick hug. "You looked good. Wear that dress."

I hurried out of the house, got to my car, and headed to the fire station. I found Ayden standing at the door talking with Miles. I still felt a little embarrassed about the other day, not to mention the fact that word got out about Weslie and me in his house's coat closet.

Ayden spotted me first and offered me a gentle smile. "Hey, April. Need something?"

"Are Cayden and Weslie here?"

He nodded. "They are not speaking to each other but working the same shift. So, I'd say it's progress."

Miles snorted. "Really? Because I wouldn't say that."

Ayden sighed, shaking his head. "Cayden is working on some paperwork in my office, and Weslie is in the kitchen."

"It's the closest they have gotten together all week."

Ayden smacked Miles on the back of his head. Miles rubbed his head and scowled. "What?"

"You know, sometimes I wanna call your wife and tell her to take you home."

"Oh, do you mind if I borrow an empty room for a moment?" I asked, pausing in front of Ayden.

"Sure, the board room is empty. Right door off the kitchen."

I smirked, walking past them and heading up the stairs to find Weslie on the large island. He was wearing his usual outfit, and his hair was slightly curled. I felt my stomach flip, taking him in and knowing just how important he was to me.

His eyes spotted me, and he looked at me, confused. "April, what are you doing here?"

I stopped at the edge of the island and placed my hands on the counter. "You have a moment to take a break?" I batted my eyes. "Please?"

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I stared at April, confused for a second. A ton of questions went through my head. Had something happened? Was she hurt? Had Ivan hurt her? "April, what are you doing here?"

She looked a little flushed as she stood there. She looked nice, wearing ripped jeans and a thin black jacket. She rubbed her hands together nervously as she walked toward me. "You have a moment to take a break?"

"For?"

She smirked, and I could see something was churning in her head. I instantly thought of the closet, and I knew better. She didn't come here for sex because her brother was here, and we weren't repeating the other day. But she also wouldn't come here unless it was important. So, something had to have happened.

"Yeah, what's wrong?" I walked towards her. "You know you could have just called me if it was something serious."

She raised her hand, making me pause as she pulled her phone out. She grabbed my hand and started pulling me down the hallway towards our boardroom. We never used it unless Ayden had meetings, but he normally did them in his office. The board room was filled with boxes and a large table that collected dust.

"Cayden, I have an emergency," she said into the phone, and I looked at her, confused.

"What are you doing?" I asked, gesturing my hands out. "What am I chopped meat?"

She hushed me, pulling her attention back to the phone. "No, I'm actually in the meeting room at your work. Ayden said I could wait in here."

I stared at her, utterly confused, when she ended the call and turned to me. She pointed to a chair and said, "Sit."

I sat suddenly turned on by her demands. She crossed her arms, tapping her foot against the ground. It was only a few moments before Cayden hurried in, looking pale. "What's wrong? What happened?? Are you hurt? Did someone hurt you?"

April pointed to another chair that sat across from me. "Sit."

Cayden looked at the chair and then looked at me. He looked just as confused as I was before he turned to April. "You said you had an emergency? What's the emergency?!"

"This," she waved her finger at the two of us, and her eyes narrowed as she continued to point. "This is the emergency. So, sit."

Cayden scuffed. He threw his hands up and ran them through his hair as he turned back to April. "April, you can't come into my work and say that you have an emergency and don't! I'm busy! I have shit I have to get done, and this..."

Her eyes narrowed on her brother as she placed her hands on the table and leaned forward slightly. At that moment, I'd never seen April look so put together, so confident. So terrifying. "Sit in the fucking chair, Cayden. I'm not asking again."

He sat, huffing as he did and crossing his arms. "I'm not talking to him," he said.

She half laughed as she leaned back and straightened herself up. "You're not talking at all, actually. I am. You're going to sit and listen."

I stared at her, amazed. She used to speak like this when we were younger, and I wondered what had happened to her and where that fire had gone. But it looked like it was back.

"First off, your both assholes."

"What?" I scowled, waving a hand. "What the hell did I do? I'm pretty sure I've been pretty nice."

She glared at me, and her nostrils flared. I snapped my mouth shut. "You both didn't tell me about my apartment and the fire that Ivan started."

Oh shit.

I glanced at Cayden, who glanced at me. We both knew she would find out, but I didn't realize it was now. And then I frowned. Who told her?

"How did you find out?" Cayden asked.

"That isn't important."

"No, it is," Cayden leaned forward, placing his elbows on the table. "Because you were with Riley, and if she ratted me out."

April pinched her eyes. "Ivan called me and told me what he did," she stated, tilting her head. "And you both should have told me. I should not have heard about it from my ex."

"He called you?" I asked, not realizing he was still doing that. "How often is he calling you!?"

"Why didn't you tell me he called you?" Cayden snapped angrily.

April slammed both her hands onto the table, and we both went silent. "He called! And I handled it because I'm not some broken doll that can't handle being told the truth. I shouldn't have heard it from him. I should have heard it from you guys! I understand that I've gone through a lot, and you think you're protecting me, but this isn't! Lying and keeping secrets from me isn't helping me!"

"The apartment is under my name, April."

"That doesn't matter," she snapped back at her brother. "You are supposed to tell me these things! What if I just decided to swing by and found it? What then? What if he had been there and you didn't warn me that he had entered the apartment?"

Cayden didn't respond.

She sighed. "And I am tired of you two fighting over what's best for me."

Cayden glared at me now, his jaw clenched together. I swallowed. I'd given him space, hoping it would help, but it seemed he'd only remained angry.

She sighed. "Cayden, I understand that this is a lot. I get that. But you don't get to be angry that I had someone to lean on while you were gone."

Her eyes flicked up to his sister. "How long have you guys been sleeping together? Back then? When you were sixteen? You were underage, April."

She shook her head. "We never slept together then, Cayden. It was comforting. You let soon after we started, and it was...something. I had someone to talk to. I had someone that understood what I was feeling."

I watched Cayden's face relax slightly.

"And he loves me," she quickly added. "And I love him. And you don't get to have a say in that. You fucked my best friend behind my back. So, you fucked up first."

He ran a hand over his face and sighed. "April..."

"He's my mate," she added.

I stared. I knew she was mine, but we'd never discussed it, never admitted to it, and here she was just announcing it to her brother. I suddenly wished I had first.

Cayden looked at me. Confusion and shock both mixed in his eyes. "Is that true?"

I nodded. "Yeah, it's true."

"When did you realize it?" he asked, his fingers tapping on the table. I wasn't sure who he was asking, but I felt I should answer. I leaned forward, placing my hands on the table.

"The mate part? That took a little longer, but I've always loved her, Cayden. She filled a part you left behind. And it was never anything inappropriate when we were younger. It was comforting to have someone that understood. It just grew from there."

Cayden inhaled slowly and looked back at his sister. "April, I'm just trying to keep you safe. I'm not trying to be the bad guy. I've screwed up enough and lost so much already. I can't imagine losing you again."

"And I love you for that," she said, her eyes softening. "But if you fucking keep another secret from me like this or try and get in the way of my happiness, I will hurt

you in return." April leaned forward, her eyes darkening. "And I swear to god, you'll regret it, Cayden. Be a brother. Not my father."

April turned on her heels and marched out. I could hear her echoing out of the kitchen until it fell silent. I was utterly impressed. I felt proud of her for standing up for what she wanted.

"Damn.... she's...a tough girl," I said, holding back a laugh.

Cayden sighed, rubbing his face again. He looked exhausted yet relieved. "She always has been."

I glanced at him, watching different emotions playing over his face. "She wasn't serious about hurting you, was she?"

He nodded, a smile cracked on his face. "Yeah, but not in the way you would think. April is the revenge type."

Cayden turned to me, his face a little calmer now. "You swear you never slept with her back in the old pack?"

I shook my head. "No. Your sister was too young for that. I told you why I came down."

"You didn't say it was because of my sister," he growled. "You said you weren't ready to settle down."

I scuffed. "And you would have murdered me if I told you I got with your sister while you were away. You would have lost your control like you did at the party."

He sighed. "I just want what's best for her, Weslie, and if you plan on being with her,

I need to know that you'll keep her safe."

I leaned forward. "Have I not done that the past few months?"

His shoulders dropped, and he nodded. "You have."

"Then trust me that I will continue to because your sister is the most important person to me. I love her, and I will always protect her. I will spend my life doing that."

I sighed and leaned back—an idea formed in my head. I didn't want this relationship. I wanted one better. Something more real, more concrete. "Can you cover for me?"

Cayden raised an eyebrow at me. "For what?"

"I have...an emergency."

Cayden scowled. "I might be okay with you being with my sister, but that doesn't mean I want to think about your dick going into her. If you're asking me to cover your shift so you can find my sister and sleep with her, I'll fucking punch you."

I shook my head and snorted. "I just...need to talk with her. No funny business." Well, if it happens, he doesn't need to know about it. But I also needed to stop at a few other places while I was out.

Cayden nodded and waved a hand. "Sure."

I swung out of my chair and headed out of the meeting room toward my truck. I pulled my phone up and looked for a decent jewelry store I would stop by. Then, I called my realtor.

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I was folding the blankets in the living room when the door opened. I looked at the clock, checking the time, seeing it was only three in the afternoon, which wasn't the normal time for Weslie. I grew nervous for a second, thinking it might be Ivan. But I knew I heard the door unlock, and Ivan was the type to pound on the door. Plus, he didn't have a key.

"You're home early," I said, folding the blanket in my hands. I tossed it onto the couch.

He nodded, walking towards me. "I had a few things I wanted to take care of, so I asked Cayden to fill in for me."

I raised an eyebrow at him. I had hoped my yelling would get them to talk, and I was a little proud that it had worked. "You two...are talking now?"

He nodded. "We're good. You yelling at us didn't really give us a choice."

I smirked because that had been the point. I didn't want them to continue to fight when there was no point. They were fighting over something so petty and meaningless when Cayden should have been happy I had found someone who loved me and treated me right. And he couldn't really be too angry about it being with his best friend when he was with mine.

"So, what did you end up doing?" I asked as I grabbed another blanket to fold it up.

Cayden walked over, stopping at the other edge of the couch. "I wanted to get you something." He dug into his jacket and pulled out a small red box. My hands froze

their movement as I stared at it.

I swallowed, suddenly at a loss for words. I'd seen a box that shape before, many times. actually. In movies and at shops when men got down and declared their love. I had one just like it, and I despised it.

But unlike before, I felt...giddy. My stomach plummeted, but I knew it was in a good way, like when you ride a rollercoaster. I felt my lungs unable to pull in the air, and tears built up.

He pulled the lid up and revealed a beautiful, simple ring. It was a simple silver band with a small diamond on the top. My mouth dropped.

"I know the ring is simple...but none of them looked like you. I know I could have purchased one with a larger diamond or a more intricate band, but they didn't feel like you."

"It's stunning...but why? I have a ring."

We both looked at the ring on my finger—the ring I went out and bought so I had something when people asked. Weslie had offered to go out with me, but I didn't want him to. I felt if we went together, it would feel so hurtful. I didn't want to have the ring and stare at it, knowing he'd purchased it for me.

He crouched down. "Because I wanted you to have the real thing because this is real. This isn't fake, and it's never been fake for me. I didn't get you a ring for the fake marriage, but I want you to have a nice ring for the real one. I want you to look down at this and know I bought this and that this is going to last."

I felt like my heart stopped beating, and I swallowed, trying to find words. "You...you didn't have to."

"I did because, April, I want this. I want this more than anything, and even when this stuff with Ivan is done, I still want you. I want the house and the kids. I want the good days and the bad days. I want the screaming matches and the sex fests. I want everything, and I want you to have a ring that represents that. That represents us."

Tears bloomed and broke free. I wiped at them as he walked over, reaching for my hand. "So, can I please replace this one?" His fingers wrapped around the other ring. "And give you the ring you deserve?"

I nodded my head, feeling the ring tug free. He pulled the other ring off, sliding it onto my finger. It fits perfectly.

I continued to wipe my eyes as I pulled my hand up, staring at the ring. Happy tears broke free, and I chuckled. "It is really beautiful."

"If you want something fancier, we can certainly go look. You don't have to keep it if you don't like it."

I shook my head. "No, everything about us has been so complex...I like thinking this is simple, that this part was easy."

He reached up, cupping my face. "This part was. Having you is the easiest decision I have ever made. Leaving you was the hardest, and I'm not doing it again."

I sniffled as he pulled me closer, wrapping his arms around me. He kissed my nose, pressing his forehead against mine.

"I want that to...all of this."

He kissed me. His lips were soft as he pulled me close and wrapped his arms around me. I leaned against him, enjoying this closeness. For the first time, I felt we were

finally being utterly honest, leaving nothing up in the air.

He pressed his forehead against mine, sighing softly. "You have no idea the power you have over me, April. How much strength it took to control myself."

I stared into his eyes, and he smirked. I reached a hand up, running my fingers over his lips. "Why do you say that?"

He chuckled. "Because when you were yelling at us, I wanted to strip you on the table and have you right there in front of your brother. The self-control I had to muster up."

I swallowed suddenly, feeling hot. I clenched my legs together, feeling the heat traveling down. I stared at his lips, suddenly wanting him.

"Well, no one is here now. There is nothing stopping you."

A twinkle sparkled in his eyes as he wrapped his arm around my ass, hoisting me up. I squealed as he moved us. He walked towards the island, placing my ass on the counter. He cupped my face, kissing me roughly as his tongue dove deep into my mouth, taking my breath away.

"Take off your shirt," he growled.

I did, breaking the kiss to pull it over my shoulder. I threw the shirt over his shoulder, not caring where it landed.

"And the bra."

I reached my hand around, unclipping the bra. I felt Weslie's hand travel up my thigh, his fingers softly grazing as they moved, and my heart raced.

"Spread your legs."

I did, feeling his fingers move higher until they were at the band of my underwear. Weslie yanked my skirt up as his lips traveled down. He softly kissed down my neck, and I knew he was leaving, hickies in his wake.

I couldn't breathe. I was panting, and he'd hardly done anything to me, but I knew it was the anticipation. It was the want.

His fingers grazed over my underwear, and I softly moaned. He yanked and ripped them. His finger slid over my folds, and I inhaled slowly, feeling his fingers slid over my clit.

"Your soaking..." he purred, smirking as his lips stopped on my left boob. My body bucked at the contact.

I couldn't find words as he slid two fingers deeply into me. His teeth grazed my nipple, and I moaned loudly. I heard it echo around us, but I wasn't embarrassed.

"My cock is painfully hard, April."

"Then fuck me," I whined, not realizing how badly I wanted him. How badly I wanted him deep in me. "You don't have to hold back...."

"No," he said, moving his lips to my right nipple, biting down softly. I moaned, wiggling on the counter as he thrust his fingers deeply into me.

"Please," I begged.

"No."

His lips traveled down my stomach, and I could see bite marks and hickeys where his mouth had been. I felt like I was on fire as his head traveled lower. I then remembered his words from the first time we were together. I want to taste you so badly.

He pulled his fingers free and looked up at me between his lashes. "Spread your legs wider, April."

I did, swallowing as I stared at him. I didn't want to admit this was the first time someone had wanted to go down on me. Ivan had once, and then complained about how dry I was, which was embarrassing. He never did it again, and I never asked.

Weslie hooked my legs and bent his head down. I felt nothing for a second before I felt his tongue swiped over me, his tongue quick as it flicked over my clit.

"Oh god," I moaned, my hands grabbing the counter, the feeling new.

Weslie didn't stop. His tongue continued to move perfectly, slowly increasing as he licked. His attention was directly on my clit. He slid two fingers back into me, and the speed and pressure was perfect.

"Don't stop," I begged, practically moving my hips with each of his thrusts. I expected Weslie to tell me to stay still, but he didn't. He moved with me.

I felt that build-up and started to grind harder, suddenly wanting it more than anything. His tongue felt like magic, and I didn't want it to stop.

Weslie growled, his teeth grazed my clit, and I cried out as my orgasm took over. I pulsed, feeling my entire body shake. I tumbled backward onto the counter, panting as I tried to catch my breath.

I heard Weslie chuckle as he pulled himself up, resting his hands on my knees. "You taste fucking amazing."

I smiled as I looked at him, feeling in love. Weslie continued to surprise me and do things to make me happy. I didn't ever think I would be this lucky.

"You're talented," I said.

He smirked, leaning forward, and kissed my stomach. "Sorry, I left marks."

I stared at myself, taking them in. I honestly didn't mind them. It was like he was marking me as his own.

"I don't mind, as long as I can return the favor."

He laughed, his eyes darkening. "If you bite me, April, you might regret it."

"Why is it a kink of yours?"

He shrugged. "Possible."

The idea made me giddy, and I smiled. I sat up and glanced down, seeing the bulge in his pants. I reached out, hooking my fingers on his pants. "Maybe I enjoy that as well."

I unzipped his pants, and his cock jerked free. I moved, jumping off the counter, and dropped to my knees. I ran my hand up and down his cock, my eyes glued to Weslie.

"April, you don't have to."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "So, you're allowed to eat me, but I'm not allowed to suck

you?"

He shook his head. "No, I'm saying you don't have to just because I did."

I reached a hand between my legs, feeling myself. Weslie's eyes watched me, and I felt his cock pulse slightly as he swallowed. I pulled my hand up, stroking him with my wetness.

"Fuck," he groaned, leaning onto the counter.

I leaned forward, licking his tip. I opened my mouth wide, sliding his cock over my tongue and into my mouth. I took him deep, all the way to his base. I felt Weslie's hand land on my head, his finger tight yet soft like he was trying to remain in control.

"Fuck," he growled. "April, fuck...shit..."

I popped off his cock and ran my fingers over it, staring at him. "What's wrong?"

"Fuck..." he panted, staring at me. "Jesus...I don't...I don't even have words."

I smirked. "You can move if you want. I know how to breathe through my nose." I leaned closer, biting on his hip for a moment. He gasped at the contact.

Before he could respond, I slid his cock back into my mouth. I didn't wait as I deep-throated him, feeling him hit the back of my throat.

"April," his fingers tightened on my head, his fingers shaking. "Jesus."

I twirled my tongue, and suddenly, Weslie's hips thrust with me. I felt tears bloom in my eyes as his cock hit the back of my throat harder. The control he had on himself was gone.

"Take it," he growled.

I did, happily accepting. After a few thrusts in, I felt him pulse, and I swallowed, popping off his dick.

He panted as he leaned onto the counter, trying to catch his breath. He stared at me in amazement.

"Did you enjoy that?" I asked, smirking.

He nodded. "I've gotten head, but nothing that good."

I didn't mean to look shocked, but I was. "Wait, what? Seriously??"

He nodded. "There aren't a lot of women out there that give good head, April. A lot of teeth but not ones that know how to bob and suck at the same time.

I stared at him, amazed.

I blushed as he stepped towards me. He reached a hand up. "I told you, I only ever wanted you."

I knew, but I'd never realize just how badly and I felt special.

Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:07 am

"Jesus, I'm beat. I can't wait to go home and crawl into bed."

I snorted, tossing the rag into the sink. "We cleaned the kitchen, Cayden. It isn't like Ayden asked us to run twenty miles. And I did most of the work."

"Feels the same if you don't sleep at night," he said, taking a seat on a chair. He leaned onto the counter, grabbed his soda, taking a drink of it.

"You guys still packing?" I asked as I opened the fridge and pulled out a water bottle.

He blew air out of his mouth with a shrug. "I have no idea. We were packing last night, and then Riley started crying, saying she didn't want to move. Then we packed again and then unpacked. And about an hour later, fucking because she was so excited to move."

I couldn't help but smirk. It would appear that Riley was having some strong emotions. "So, her emotions are pretty much all over the place with the hormones still?"

He nodded and rubbed his eyes. "Yeah. I've seen the other gal's pregnant, but she certainly has more mood swings than I was expecting. She will be perfectly fine one moment, and the next, she's crying about screwing something up."

"You don't remember Wendy's mood swings? She came in and told Ayden if he didn't fuck her in the office, she was going to start breaking some plates."

"What?" Cayden looked shocked. "How have I not heard about that? Where the hell

was I?"

"I honestly don't think she realized I was there. Everyone else was outside cleaning. But yeah, Wendy had some extreme mood swings."

He snorted. "Well, I'll take that in mind. I think Riley is just extra worried about April, which doesn't help."

I frowned. I had thought our conversation had helped with that, but maybe now. "She's still worried?"

He nodded. "She is. With us not knowing where Ivan is, she's been panicking more. She's worried something is going to happen, and I try calming her down, but she always brings up Brad and how that entire situation ended. I'm trying not to think about that as much, considering how you two have been doing, but it still bothers me. It bothers both of us."

I frowned, understanding why they would worry. I still remember the mess that their apartment looked like afterward and how out of it Riley was. I was honestly shocked they didn't move right away.

"That isn't going to happen with April." I didn't want to say it couldn't, but Riley was...rougher. She protects herself. And I wasn't saying Riley couldn't, but out of the two, April had a bite to go with her bark.

"I know what you mean," Cayden said, giving me a soft smile.

As alike as the girls were, it was clear that April was the protector of the two. April had the quick remarks and the sharper looks. Well, she had all that before. Besides, I hadn't seen it when she yelled at us the other day.

"How is she doing?" Cayden asked. "Since you got us in trouble."

I glared at him. "How the hell did I get us in trouble? You punched me first, if you remember correctly. Actually, several times before I hit back."

Cayden glared back. "You fucked her in the closet at Ayden's house. You seriously couldn't keep it in your pants until we got home?"

I leaned back slightly, raising an eyebrow at him. "Big talk for a man that was caught with his dick out at Mile's house."

Cayden scuffed. "That was four years ago when none of us were married. We were all horn dogs then. And it wasn't a closet. It was a bathroom, which normally people knock before stepping into."

I snorted, shaking my head because so much had changed since everyone was finding the person they loved. Our lives had all been turned upside down and for the better. I don't think any of us expected to be here four years ago.

"She's good?" he asked, looking worried.

I nodded. "She's doing great. She's been more herself since everything. I think she's finally feeling at home here."

He nodded and softly sighed. "Well, my days up. So I'm going home to my wife. Fingers crossed she's happy."

"Do you mind taking a trip with me first? I want to get your opinion on something."

"Sure."

We took my truck and drove across town towards the older part. There were a lot of old houses, and we drove past the one that Cayden and Riley were buying.

Cayden raised an eyebrow at me. "You wanted to drive and show me my future house?"

"No, smartass." I continued driving down the road, taking a left turn onto a gravel road. The road spiraled a little around trees until we got to a huge opening. The lot was 2 acres, with lots of trees and open space. There was a huge greenhouse that sat on the land, looking beautiful. It had a front porch and a beautiful landscape that went around the perimeter of the house.

Weslie's eyebrows rose as I parked. He stared, looking around and then back at me. "Nice lot. Big house."

"You think? Honestly? Don't lie to me."

He nodded. "No, seriously, looks nice."

We got out, and I watched as he walked around a little, looking at the grass and the view. Near the back of the lot, there was a river that traveled, and across was a huge meadow with a walking path.

I could still hear the realtor's words.

"Beautiful view and this old neighborhood is getting popular. People want the old houses and bring back the character they once had. There are a lot of families living around with children, and it's quiet. The house is mostly remodeled with three bedrooms and two bathrooms. A loft upstairs could be changed into another bedroom, but otherwise, it's been used for an extra living room."

"You buy it?" Weslie asked, stuffing his hands into his pocket.

I nodded.

"Are you trying to one-up me here?" He asked with a laugh as we walked closer to the house

I laughed. "Why? You think Riley is going to be jealous?"

He laughed again and nodded his head. "Yeah, considering the house we bought needs a lot of work, and this one looks like it's put together."

"It's a three-bedroom house. It was just recently remodeled. The wood floors were sanded and coated. The windows were all replaced, and the roof was redone. There are two bathrooms, and laundry is upstairs. The basement is unfinished, but there is lots of space to add to it. Plus a big loft."

"Jesus, how much did this cost you?"

I stuffed my hand into my pocket. "Four hundred thousand."

"Fuck!" Cayden turned to me. "You can afford that?"

"I had some money set aside." I'd been saving since I moved here. The apartment I had was pretty cheap, and I didn't have a lot of other expenses, so I put aside a lot of money. With the down payment, the house was in our price range.

"I had money set aside, too, but not that much!" Cayden shook his head, looking at the house.

"So, you think your sister is going to like this place?"

He nodded. "She's going to love it."

I pointed to the front door. "You want to see inside?"

He nodded, and we walked over, and I unlocked the front door. It opened into a large entryway with a spiral set of stairs and an open floor plan. There was a living room and dining room to the left of us and the kitchen next to it. The kitchen was a little outdated, but nothing paint wouldn't fix.

"Bedrooms are upstairs." I pointed to the stairs.

We headed up the stairs and looked at each room. The large windows flooded the space with light, making it feel warm. The laundry room was connected to the bathroom, and the master bedroom had a small patio to step out on.

"Fuck," Cayden said as we stepped outside. "The view..."

The view from the patio was of the town. The sun was just starting to set, so the sky was colored in hues of pink and blue.

"You did good," Cayden said as he looked at me. "She's going to love it. And if she doesn't, I'll gladly buy it for a discounted price."

I laughed. "I hope so. She said she wanted the house and the marriage. I know it seems like a lot, but it was too perfect to pass up."

Cayden fell quiet for a moment before he looked at me. "Why did you date her? Back in the old pack. She said it was a joke at first."

I nodded. "She asked me out when you pissed her off one night. It was a joke. And I did take her out for dinner. We ended up hanging out a few times. You left soon after,

and we continued to see each other. It filled the hole you left."

He frowned. "I have a lot of regrets."

I shook my head. "Cayden, we get it. I get it. I regret leaving her, too."

He took a deep breath in. "You treated her well?"

I nodded. "I did. We spent a lot of time playing games and talking. And sometimes we didn't talk at all. We just did whatever we wanted in silence."

He ran a hand through his hair.

"I regret not telling you, and mostly because I knew how you would react, but I don't regret spending time with your sister. I don't regret falling in love with her and wanting the best for her. I don't regret finding her. And I want to make up for leaving her. I did it to protect her, and I'm part of the reason she's in this mess to begin with."

"I am as well," Cayden said, walking over and leaning onto the railing. "I wish I had just told her why I left. I could have taken her with me."

I had thought the same thing myself when I left. Why don't you just take her with you? But I didn't think I would make it, let alone bring her with me. I wouldn't want to take her down with me if I failed.

"I want to give her the life she deserves, and she deserves this."

"I know...and I know you'll treat her right. While you might have been a guy that fucks everything that moves, you've always been respectful."

I scowled at him. "Yeah, I didn't tell Riley how much of a whore you were. Do you

really have to bring up how bad I was?"

He smirked. "Yeah."

I rolled my eyes, looking back at the view. I could see a future here, and I had thought that the second I stepped onto the lot.

"You'll make a perfect husband and brother-in-law," Cayden said.

I glanced at him. "Aren't I already your brother-in-law?"

He nodded. "Yeah, but this is for real. I know you won't be leaving here as soon as Ivan is out of the picture." He patted me on the back. "I'll have Riley pick me up. Call her. Let her know you have the house."

Cayden left, and I pulled my phone out, dialing her up. I smiled as I looked at the view, eager for her to show up. I wanted to see her reaction when she saw the house.

"Hey," April answered, "Where are you? I just got home."

"Out, I actually have a surprise for you. Can I send you the address of a place?"

"A surprise?" April laughed. "What is it?"

I smiled. "You'll have to come and find out."

She laughed, and I could hear rustling in the background. "I'd love to, but I was actually going out for dinner with the girls. Do you mind if we do this tomorrow?"

I nodded, knowing this could wait. The house was ours. I already bought it, so it didn't disappear overnight. I could bring her and watch her react as we pulled up.

"Yeah, that's fine. We can do this tomorrow. You have a good time with the girls, tell them all I say hi. Let me know if you need me to get you when you're done."

"Sounds good, I'll let you know."

I ended the line and took a deep breath, feeling at peace. I turned back, staring into the bedroom, and I could picture it. I could see us lying in a bed and the kids climbing in with us. I suddenly grew giddy about the future.

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I stared at myself in the mirror and smiled. I couldn't remember the last time I felt happy like this, excited about something—truly excited. We were having girls' night, and I couldn't wait. I knew they were going to have tons of questions since the screaming match the guys had, but I had answers. I didn't have to act or keep anything a secret this time around. I could just be honest.

I applied my lipstick, taking in my outfit. I was wearing ripped jeans and a black lacey top. I pulled my hair half up, at least keeping my bangs out of my face. The blouse rose at times, which showed in my belly button piercing.

It was an outfit I used to love but stopped wearing for various reasons. Ivan had hated when I showed my belly button off, but of course, he loved it when we were alone, and he'd aim for the damn thing.

But the girls and Weslie made me feel like I belonged and all my extra things were okay. He loved my tattoos and piercings and accepted me for who I was, and it was comforting.

I grabbed my shoes and headed down the hallway to leave. I slipped my shoes on and turned to grab my phone when someone knocked on the door.

"One second," I said, searching for my phone. I patted myself down and scowled. "Where the fuck did I leave it this time? I swear I had it just a moment ago."

I'd been scatterbrained the last few days. I wasn't sure if it was the nerves from Ivan or if it was just because I was feeling comfortable there.

"I just had it," I grumbled, trying to retrace my steps. I was on the phone with Riley in the bathroom and then on the phone with Weslie in the living room. I thought I had set it in my pocket or left it on the couch.

There was another knock, and I shrugged, giving up the search. I'll just have Riley call it, and it will ring. It would be a lot easier than me frantically ripping the apartment apart for it.

"Hey Riley, can you call my phone? I don't know where the hell I put it." I unlocked the door and swung it open wide. My heart stopped beating, and my eyes widened as I realized it wasn't Riley. It was Ivan.

My entire body stiffened as he stared at me angrily. I'd seen those eyes more than a few times and knew what he could do when he was this mad.

I'd been punched, shoved on the floor, and choked when he was angry. He'd slapped me and pinned me on the bed, telling me what a disgrace I was. I'd been shoved against walls and felt up when I refused to have sex. I had put up with a lot and endured so much.

There were a lot of things I'd pushed down and forgotten about because Weslie had made me feel so safe. Suddenly, it came, hitting me like a train. I could remember all the tears or the times I prayed it would be over. All the times, I covered up the bruises and acted like everything was okay.

I swallowed, trying to pick my words carefully. I felt my fingers tighten on the door and tried to remain calm. "What are you doing here, Ivan?" How the hell did he know I was here?

He didn't speak for a moment, his eyes traveling over me, and I knew he stopped on my piercing before he brought his eyes back up. "I see you still wear this outfit."

I wet my lips, nudging my foot slightly back to hold the door. If he tried pushing it further, it would stop. I had to make sure he couldn't get into the apartment.

I swallowed. "Ivan, you need to leave."

"You see, that's where you're wrong. You're my wife."

I shook my head. I felt like we had been going in circles. "No, I'm not. I'm not your wife. I'm married to someone else now."

Ivan took a step forward and grabbed my wrist. I tried to break free, but his fingers held. "You can run and hide, but you will never be free of me, April. Don't you get that?"

"Ivan, just stop," my voice quivered, and I suddenly wondered where my confidence went. Where did the woman who wouldn't allow anything bad to happen again go? Where did my ability to stick up for myself go?

I knew it was the years of ridicule and the years of beating me into submission that were here. Ivan knew what to say to hurt me, and he did it well. He'd mastered it. He knew what to say and how to say it to strike me where it hurt.

"No, because I still love you."

"No, you don't," I growled. "You never loved me. You wanted someone to control."

He shoved forward, and I stumbled backward, landing on my ass. I crawled back a few feet as he stood there. "You think he loves you? Please. He doesn't. He is just like everyone else."

"He does," I growled, growing angry. "He loves me more than you ever could. I was

just a thing to you, a person to do what you wanted. You didn't even treat me like a human."

Ivan took a few more steps into the apartment, and I pulled myself up, suddenly frantic. "You need to leave, Ivan! He will be home soon."

Ivan laughed. "Good, I'll kill him and drag your ass back where you belong."

I curled my hands into fists. I wasn't going back. I was part of this pack, and I wasn't leaving. I was married. I had a job and a place to live. There was nothing they could do to bring me back.

But I knew Ivan. He wanted something and wasn't going to give it to us until he got it. So, I did something I knew would make me sick, but it was my only shot. I had to play into this—at least get him out of the apartment.

I pulled myself up, and I took a step toward him. I felt my stomach flip as I reached up. I batted my eyelashes and puckered my lips. "Do you mean that? Would you kill for me?"

The sudden change caught Ivan off guard, and he stood still for a moment. I placed my hands on his chest, knowing exactly where to place them to get his attention. "You never said that before."

"I would," he said, placing his hands on my hips. "Now come home."

I wanted to vomit, hating the feel of his hands on me. But I needed to move him back towards the door. So, I stepped closer, running my hands down his chest. He stepped back with me. A smile tugged on his lips. "Are you finally coming to your senses? Going to come with me?"

I nodded. "As long as you promise your dick is only mine from now on."

I could see the fire burn in his eyes. "Why have you been resisting?"

I took another step forward, and we grew closer to the door. "I had to get you to see my point," I leaned closer, touching his lips. "You cheated, and I was hurt. I wanted you to understand how much you hurt me."

"And I apologized. You didn't have to run."

We stumbled to the doorway, and his face was so close. Too close. I hated where his hand sat, his fingers brushing against the top of my jeans.

"Come home," he asked softly. "Please. You have no idea how much I want you. How much I want to sink myself into you."

I pictured it. He'd pin me down onto the bed and fuck me. There was no romance, no foreplay, no workup. Half the time, I was dry, and he'd fuck me.

I forced a smile. "Okay."

He leaned in and kissed me. My inside twisted up, and I felt bile build up. I glanced at the door and grabbed it. I then pulled my hands up and shoved Ivan as hard as I could. He stumbled back out into the hall. It took him a second to realize what I'd done.

"Burn in hell, Ivan."

I slammed the door and quickly locked it. It was just a second later, and he started pounding on the door. "You fucking bitch! Unlock this door, April!"

I leaned on it, took a few deep breaths in, and quickly started wiping my mouth. I gagged, feeling my stomach curl up violently. I wanted to vomit all over the place and took a deep breath in through my nose.

"Unlock this door! God, damn it, April!"

I closed my eyes, wishing Weslie was here. I opened my eyes and quickly glanced around, searching for my phone. Still, I had no idea where I put it.

"You know what, April?" The pounding stopped. "You're going to regret this. You're going to regret all of this."

Silence fell, and I tried to calm my fast-beat heart. I pulled myself up, glancing at the door, and looked through the peephole. He was gone. I knew he was going to come back, so I turned and started running through the living room, searching for my phone. I threw the pillows and blankets off the couch. I yanked the cushions out and then turned towards the coffee table. I fanned through the drawers and then ran into the kitchen.

"Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!" I yelled, feeling tears build up. "Where the fuck is it?"

I ran by the front door when my feet froze at the smell. I sniffed again, and it was like a burning scent.

I turned to the front door and stared at it. The hairs on my body rose as I felt the heat. I walked towards the door and looked through the peephole. My eyes widened as smoke filled the space.

I tried to unlock the door and pull it open, but the door handle wouldn't move. I felt my stomach bottom out.

"No." I tried harder and harder, but the door wouldn't open. Tears started to break as the smoke seeped in through the bottom.

I moved, running towards the balcony, and started pulling at the door, but it wouldn't budge. I looked at the door and realized that the chair outside had fallen over, blocking the door from opening.

"No, no, no." I kicked at the door and shoved harder. Tears broke free.

I gave up on the door and moved to a window. I pounded on it and tried to move it, but the windows didn't budge. What scared me more was what they had the other day.

After Weslie and I fucked in the kitchen, I opened the windows and the patio to air the space out. And that was just a few days ago. There was no reason these wouldn't open now. I looked up and frowned, realizing they were locked, and I couldn't reach the top.

I started to cry as I tried another window. The apartment started to fill with smoke, and I coughed as I tried to find another way out.

I grabbed one of the stools and threw it at the window. The stool bounced off the window, and I felt dizzy. My vision blurred as I pulled the stool back up and hit it against the window. It cracked.

I pulled it up again, but the stool slipped through my fingers, and I tumbled to the ground. I grabbed at my throat, trying hard to bring air in.

My lungs felt like they were giving out. My body felt like it was on fire. I tried to pull myself back up, but my limbs wouldn't listen.

I stared across the living room when I spotted something shining under the

couch—my phone.

I felt hope. "I can...call."

I started to crawl towards my phone, and every muscle screamed as I did. My lungs hurt, and I began to wheeze as I moved. I was just a few inches from my phone when I grabbed it. I pulled the screen up and winced at it.

Black dots dotted my vision, and my fingers shook as I entered my pin.

Five. Two. Two... My fingers shook harder. I shook my head and tried to focus. I just needed to dial. That was all. I could do this.

Five. Two. Two. Five

My screen opened, and I could hardly see it. I clicked to dial when my body gave out. The phone slipped from my fingers, and everything went black.

Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:07 am

I locked the front door and turned, stepping off the porch. I hummed as I walked, eager to get home. I was just walking across the lawn when my phone vibrated in my pocket. I pulled my phone out and realized it was Ayden calling me.

It was only a little past six now. I knew it was likely not work-related, which worried me a little.

"Hello?" I said as I walked down the sidewalk towards my truck.

"Hey, we just got a call from your apartment complex. There's a fire, apparently. We are taking the fire truck over."

My heart stopped beating for a moment, and I worried about April. But I knew that she was out. When I called her, she had left over half an hour earlier. She was out with the girls and safe away from the fire.

"Well, shit. Okay, I'll head over there." I ran a hand through my hair. "Is it bad?" I asked.

"We don't know entirely what's going on. We will know more when we get there." I started my truck up and started down the road. I knew I was speeding a little as I drove, but I was worried. There were things in the apartment that were sentimental to me, and I didn't want anything to be lost.

But we lived up on the third floor, and depending on where the fire was would determine how bad things would be.

I took a deep breath. "It's fine. It's probably something minor." We had a lot of elderly people living in the building. It was probably just a small kitchen fire, but we had to investigate, even if it was something minor like that.

I stopped at a light, and my stomach flipped. But if it was something small, Ayden wouldn't have called me, would he? Unless my apartment was part of the fire.

I hit the gas and drove faster, flying across town until I pulled in front of the apartment. My eyes widened as I saw that the entire third floor was on fire. Windows were blown out, and smoke was pouring out of them.

The parking lot was filled with people and cars. I spotted the fire truck. The guys were already geared up, staring at the third floor. Police officers were running around, taping the place off. It was a disaster.

I parked and hurried out of the truck. I ran across the lawn towards the guys, and Ayden spotted me.

"What the fuck happened?" I asked, looking back at the building. It didn't look like it was any of the other floors besides the third.

Ayden sighed, looking stressed. "We don't know yet. We just got word that there was a fire. We didn't even realize how bad it was until we got here. The entire third floor is in flames."

I ran a hand through my hair, feeling my heart racing now. "Is the building cleared out?"

Ayden nodded. "Yeah, we think. We haven't gotten inside yet."

I watched as Miles and Lucas set up the hose. The others were talking, figuring out

the best tactic.

"Where is April?" Cayden asked, flipping his helmet up. He looked frantic as he stared at me.

"She's out with the girls," I said. "She called me about half an hour ago and said she was heading out."

Cayden looked confused and shook his head. "No, the girls are here." He pointed, and I spotted Riley standing near another vehicle, her eyes wide as she stared at the fire. My stomach dropped.

I shook my head. "No, she can't be inside. She was..." She was at the apartment when I called. But she had to have made it out, right? She was leaving half an hour ago.

I quickly scanned the crowd, searching for her short hair and pierced ears. But I didn't see her, and it scared the living shit out of me. And as I looked back up at the fire, I realized it had been burning for a while to become this big.

"Where is my sister!" Cayden snapped at me, shoving at my shoulder. "Where is she!? You said you were going to keep her safe!"

"I don't know!" I yelled back quickly, looking at the windows. One of the apartments was ours, and it was filled with smoke and fire. The chances of survival were slim.

I moved, hurrying onto the truck, and grabbed our extra gear. I yanked it on and zipped it up. Cayden ran his hands through his hair, freaking out. He paced, shaking his head frantically.

"You're telling me she's inside!?" he said, looking at me. He looked defeated, and all the color left his face.

Ayden grabbed Cayden by the front of his outfit. "Enough! Now is not the time to be yelling. We need to get inside! So, either get your head on straight or sit your ass down and stay out of the way!"

He quickly let go of Cayden and looked at me. "Are you prepared to be in there and make the right decisions!? If not, you stay down here as well."

I nodded, knowing I could. I would. If she was inside that building, I would bring her out.

Miles and Lucas went up the truck's ladder. Ayden, Thomas Owen, and I headed inside. As we entered the building, I tightened the helmet into place.

"Owen and Thomas, you guys clear out the second and first floors. Weslie and I are going to the third floor. I will intercom if we need you up on third."

We hit the stairs and started up them. I felt my heart race, and my mind was a disaster. She had to have been out of the apartment. She said she was going out. But why didn't I see her? She would have known to leave the apartment if a fire had started. Or at least to go onto the patio if she couldn't.

Owen and Thomas slipped out the door for the first floor while Ayden and I continued up the stairs.

"You okay?" Ayden asked.

"I feel like I want to vomit," I grumbled back, feeling my stomach twist up more with each step.

Ayden was silent for a moment but glanced at me. "I know the feeling."

I took a deep breath as we continued to climb, ignoring the pain in my legs and lungs.

When we finally reached the third floor, smoke completely filled the space. It was seeping into the stairwell, and Ayden grabbed the door.

"We move quickly."

I nodded.

He pulled the door open, and the apartment was dark. We could see the fire at the other end of the hallway. It had filled over half the space.

I looked at the apartment doors and found two of them were opening, meaning whoever was there got out. I looked at our apartment door, and my eyes zoned in on a large rock shoved under our door's handle.

"What the fuck is that?" I asked, stepping closer to the door.

I grabbed the rock and wiggled it free. I turned the handle and pushed the door open. Our apartment was filled with smoke, and the heat was starting to soak through my suit.

"Fuck, we need to move fast."

I scanned the hallway, and Ayden headed down it while I slipped into the kitchen and scanned the living room. And then I spotted her. She was lying on her stomach with her phone in her right hand. Her chest wasn't rising or falling.

"Ayden!" I screamed for him as I lurked forward, dropping onto the ground next to her. I turned her, growing frantic.

"April! April!" I shook her, taking in her pale expression and her closed eyes. She looked lifeless, and I couldn't breathe.

"April!" I screamed louder, feeling my voice crack as I placed two fingers on her neck.

"Does she have a pulse?" Ayden asked, stopping next to us.

I shook my head. "No!"

Ayden turned towards the balcony and unstrapped his ax. He took a swing, and the glass door shattered.

"Crane up here, now," Ayden said into the mic and turned back to me. "We need to move her." I picked her up and moved her over towards the door. I was careful of the glass as we got onto the balcony.

"I'll search the other apartments," Ayden said as Miles helped me get April onto the crane. I yanked my helmet off and climbed on. I leaned over, tilted her mouth open, and started CPR on her.

"Shit," Miles said as he brought the crane down. "She doesn't look good, Weslie."

"Shut up!" I yelled as I continued giving her mouth-to-mouth. "Breathe, April. Breathe! Just take a breath in, please."

We landed at the bottom, and everything was happening so fast. A couple of EMTs grabbed April and started hooking her up to machines. I ran my hands through my hair, staring at them.

She was pale, and the EMTs were talking so quickly that I could hardly keep up. I

just watched, feeling my life slip through my fingers.

"How long was she out for?" One of them asked as they did compressions on her.

"I don't know," I said. I didn't. She could have been out a few moments, I got off the phone, or she could have been out for a minute.

"You have to save her," I said, taking her hand. She was cold. "She... she's my everything. You have to bring her back!"

"April!" I could hear Riley yelling, and I turned, spotting her running towards me. I quickly stopped her before she could get in the way.

"What happened? Why was she still inside?!" Riley started to scream, trying to reach for April.

I didn't know the answer, but the rock told me someone was stopping her from getting out, and I knew it was Ivan. Meaning he knew where we were living.

Riley started to cry, clinging onto me. "She can't die! She's my best friend!"

I held Riley close and stared at April. She had to be okay. We still had too much to do, so much life to spend together. She hadn't seen the house yet. I hadn't seen her reaction to it. We still hadn't fucked in every inch of it and shared moments.

We were supposed to have children and grow old together. It couldn't all end now, not like this.

And suddenly, April gasped loudly for air. Her lungs rose, and her eyes flicked open slightly.

I suddenly felt like I could breathe again, and Riley's nail dug into my arm. "April," she cried, and her legs gave out.

Cayden rounded the group, his eyes on us. He walked over, his eyes zoning in on April. He paused next to us, and the color still hadn't returned to his face.

"She's okay," one of the EMTs said. "But we need to bring her in. She needs to be looked over. She's inhaled smoke. And while she will heal, smoke inhalation is serious."

Cayden grabbed her hand, tears in his eyes. "April, why didn't you leave the apartment?"

I walked over, grabbing his shoulder. "Not here," I said, looking at Riley. She needed him, and April likely didn't have the lung capacity to speak.

"We have room for one person to drive with us."

"I'll go," I said, handing Riley to him. I took April's hand, and her eyes snapped to me. She looked out of it and was afraid. I gave her hand a squeeze. "I have you. You're okay. Just focus on breathing."

She blinked, and I pulled her hand up, kissing it. "I have you."

The drive to the hospital was fast, and we were in a room within a few minutes. I held April's hand as they hooked her up to IVs and then had her get x-rays of her chest. April shook the entire time, and I kept her hand tightly in mine.

It was late, and the sun had set by the time the doctor came back with good news.

"She's okay. We want to do another X-ray before she leaves because of how much

smoke she inhaled. We want to make sure everything is clear."

I nodded and watched as April sank into her pillow. The doctor slipped back out, and I looked at her, pulling her hair back. The color had returned to her face, and she looked more like herself.

"You're okay," I whispered to her.

"I was so scared," she whispered back. "He locked me in there."

I knew it. I had thought it, but for her to say the words ignited a rage I didn't think was possible. I wanted to hunt him down and skin him alive. I wanted him dead, and I wanted to hear him scream until he died.

"I'm sorry," I said, pulling myself up and crawling onto the bed. I pulled her into my arms and inhaled her scent. "I'm sorry, April. I'll make this better."

I wasn't entirely sure how we were going to fix everything, but I knew something would have to change. And something would.

Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:07 am

I was nervous as we sat at the table. I didn't like the building we were in, but Weslie was holding my hand, which helped ease some of my nerves. The building felt cramped, and the lighting was too bright.

I glanced at Ayden, sitting in the chair next to us. He looked comfortable and confident, which was just one more reason he was Alpha. He wasn't scared of this place or of what was coming.

He explained the steps in detail and even apologized for any issues that might arise during the meeting. That comforted me until now.

"You okay, April?" Ayden glanced at me, softening his eyes. "You look a little sick."

I nodded. I wasn't, but I wasn't going to say that. My stomach twisted, but I knew we needed to do this. I had thought long and hard about what to do when leaving the hospital. I was scared and terrified of everything. I was scared that he would never stop and even more scared of what Weslie would do.

I knew my brother had killed Brad, and I didn't want that for Weslie. I knew people killed for the people they loved, but I didn't want that. I didn't want Weslie to have blood on his hands. It would follow him around for the rest of his life.

So, we were going a more mature route. I had asked Ayden if he would get in touch with my old pack and arrange a meeting. A meeting where we would discuss my rights and the problem with Ivan. And that Ivan needed to be there. Someone needed to get it through his head that I was no longer his.

I twisted the ring on my finger, staring at the door across from us.

"Deep breaths," Ayden said, his fingers tapping on the table. "Or you're going to pass out."

I took a deep breath in and leaned back in my chair. I offered him a soft smile. "I'm guessing you've done this before," I asked, tightening my hold on Weslie's hand.

Ayden smirked and nodded his head. "Many times. After a while, you get used to it."

I looked back at the door and swallowed. "Does it usually go well?"

Ayden shrugged. "It will, but there may be yelling and other information that will come to light. So, like I told you before, try to remain calm."

I scowled. "Other information? What does that mean? What information would they bring?"

"Yeah," Weslie nodded, wondering the same thing. "I don't know what that means. Is their divorce not finalized or something?"

Ayden shook his head. "No. Your divorce is final. I checked. But I'm just saying things could come up. Words will be said." Ayden looked at me. "Ivan will likely bring up embarrassing things to get you to agree to what he wants. So, just be prepared."

I frowned. "So you really have done this before."

He nodded. "Yeah, I've really done this before." Ayden rolled his shoulders. "This is not the first time I've had pushback when a new citizen moved here. I've had ex-husbands tell me how much of a whore their wives are, how they have vandalized

their homes, or that they would kill themselves because they couldn't live without them. I've seen everything you can think of."

I heard the doorknob turn, and my heart raced as the door was pulled open. I watched Tristan, our old alpha, Zavior, his beta, and Ivan enter the room. They were all dressed smartly and looked the part.

As they entered, the room suddenly felt crowded. They took seats across the table. Ivan sat directly across from me, looking smug.

"Glad you guys could join us," Ayden said, speaking clearly as he leaned forward, placing his elbows on the table. His entire demeanor shifted, and the sweet guy who was just speaking to me was gone. "And glad you brought Ivan."

"Why are we here?" Tristan asked, tilting his head. "I have other important things than to listen to someone complain."

I felt embarrassed, and Ayden tilted his head at Tristan. "Well, I take my citizen complaints seriously."

Tristan's jaw clenched, and I felt Weslie tighten his hold on my hand.

"We are here to discuss two things. First, we want to talk about April's official move from your pack to this one, as well as her rights and release of your pack since it appears you guys don't want to let her move."

Tristan looked at me for a split second before he looked at Weslie. He looked Weslie over for a moment before his eyes snapped to Ayden. "She is legally Ivan's wife."

"They are divorced," Ayden said, opening the folder we had filled with paperwork and evidence. We had made sure we had everything we needed.

"And she is legally married to Weslie now." He slid our marriage license across the table, including my divorce papers. "They have been married for some time now. She's got a job, and they just purchased a house. So, she is pretty settled into our pack now. There is no argument about that."

"This is bullshit!" Ivan growled, slamming his hands onto the table. "She's my wife!"

"She's not," Weslie snapped back at him. "She's mine. And don't think I won't punch you for leaving her in a burning building."

Ivan narrowed his eyes, and Ayden growled. "Watch yourself, pup. You're in my territory here, and I'm not above snapping necks to prove a point."

My eyes snapped to Ayden, and I didn't doubt his words for one moment. I'd heard how his relationship came to be and saw how he ran the pack. I didn't want to see what happened when he was disrespected.

"Hold your tongue," Zavior snapped at Ivan.

Ivan leaned back, his eyes growing angry. But he remained quiet.

Tristan sighed, looking irritated. "So, you've proven she is rightly yours. Is that all you wanted? Did you drag me out here for this?"

"If only," Ayden looked at Tristan. "I want you to do a better job watching your pups."

"I'm not a pup," Ivan growled.

"Only a pup would be stupid enough to come into another alpha's territory and set fire to several buildings."

Ivan snorted. "You can't prove that. You can't prove anything. Otherwise, you would have called the police."

Ayden slid a picture across the table. A picture that I had taken when Ivan broke into my apartment. It was pretty clear what he was doing as he unlocked my key and snuck inside. I knew right away that it was Liv's doorbell camera.

"I also have video recordings from the cameras. I think you forgot that Weslie had those in his building. We have video footage of you sneaking into their other apartment and jamming the doors. We also have a video of you watching April and stalking here."

I felt a shiver roll down my back, hating that he'd been watching me so closely. There were photos of him in the school parking lot and in front of several parking lots in various places I'd been.

I watched as Tristan and Zavior looked at the photos. Their faces remained calm, but I could see their eyes shifting. They looked disappointed. And embarrassed. Ayden had proof that Ivan was here, and he didn't have permission.

"I think this proves enough. Ivan has been coming into my territory for some time now and stalking one of my residents. He set fire to not only one of my buildings but two, injuring several of my residents and landing them in the hospital. Alpha to Alpha, we have a fucking problem here."

Ayden's voice shook the space, and Tristan's throat bobbed, telling me he was uncomfortable.

Tristan remained quiet for a second, and Ayden knitted his fingers together. "I don't know about you, but I would certainly apologize if one of my citizens had done such a thing."

Ivan exploded. "She's a whore! She was spreading her legs for him when we were hardly even split up! She's my wife! And no fucking paper is going to change that! We made vows! We made promises to each other!" Ivan reached across the table, grasping at my hand, but I quickly yanked it away.

Ayden swung up, his chair slammed, and hit the ground. Tristan swung up next quickly pulling his hands up, stopping Ayden.

"Take him outside," Tristan ordered, looking at Zavior, who quickly moved, grabbed Ivan, and pulled him to the door.

Ivan looked at me and continued to yell. "April! Stop this! Just come home! You know it's where you belong. You know we belong together!"

The door slammed shut, and I felt tears build up. Weslie placed his other hand over mine, giving them a squeeze. He leaned closer, his shoulders brushed against mine.

I tried to think of last night. When we arrived at the house, I was blown away by its beauty. I was starstruck, and he'd bought it for us—for our future.

We hardly had anything, but we had a blow-up mattress, and he'd made soft love to me, promising me that tomorrow would be okay, that we would get through all of this together, that Ivan was no longer going to be a problem, and that Ayden was going to handle everything. We just had to be there.

Ayden reseated himself, and Tristan looked at me. "April, I want to extend my apologies. You are legally part of this pack, and Ivan overstepped. We will be reprimanding him for everything."

Tristan looked at Ayden. "And I apologized for the buildings. Please fax me the paper with the bills. One of my men created this problem, so we will help clean it up."

Ayden seemed a step ahead and slid a paper to him. "This is the cost of everything so far. I will expect a check within a week. And next time, maybe keep a closer tab on your people."

Tristan looked at the bill and then back at Ayden. "That is unacceptable. This is outrageous."

Ayden placed his hands together. "No, what's outrageous is the fact I had a man stalking one of my women, and I haven't called the police. If you don't want them involved, you'll pay. And trust me, Tristan. I am not someone you want to make enemies with."

Tristan looked at me, then at Weslie. He looked at the rings on our fingers, and then he looked back at Ayden. He gave him a nod before he pulled himself up and slipped out of the room.

Tears broke free. I wiped at them, hating how emotional I was feeling.

Ayden turned to us. "You guys did good."

I didn't feel good. My stomach was in knots, and something told me it wasn't over. It bothered me. I should have felt over the moon about this, but I didn't. Maybe it was because I didn't know how Tristan was going to handle everything.

"Thank you, Ayden." I looked at him, grateful.

Ayden smiled. "Of course. If you have any other problem, you can let me know. I have the chief of police on speed dial."

We left a few minutes later. I leaned on Weslie as we walked, feeling anxious. "Do you think Tristan is going to watch him closely?"

I looked at Weslie, who gave me a look. "I want to say he will, but he didn't seem to care. He did look a little embarrassed."

Weslie kissed my forehead. "How about we stop and have lunch before we go home?"

I sank into her shoulder and smiled. This was a fresh start.

We rounded the corner of the building when Ivan stepped in our way. I froze, and Weslie pulled me back, yanking me behind him. I could see the sanity in Ivan's eyes was long gone, and he had that crazed look.

"You're going to regret this," Ivan growled, taking a few steps towards us.

"If you don't step back, Ivan. I can't promise your life." Weslie yelled back, his fingers tight on my arms.

I inhaled slowly, just wanting this to all be over.

Ivan lunged at us, and Weslie moved quickly. I stepped out of the way as he shifted, smacking into Ivan and knocking him a few feet back. Weslie growled in his wolf form, a light red and brown color that matched his original hair.

Everyone was happening so quickly. Ivan shifted and lunged back at Weslie. They were a mess of fur and teeth snapping at each other. I held my breath as blood spattered the gravel road.

God, please don't let anything happen to him.

I bit hard onto my lower lip and watched as Ivan shoved Weslie, who went rolling across the road. Ivan lunged after him, but Weslie quickly pulled himself up.

Ivan quickly got the upper hand and pinned Ivan. He pressed onto his throat, and I watched Ivan try to break free.

"Weslie, stop!" I yelled, watching as he pushed harder on the wolf's throat. "You can't kill him."

Weslie paused, and his eyes flicked at me. I was panting for air and shook my head. I had always been the harder-edged person who could withstand anything, but I couldn't stand this. I couldn't watch him kill someone.

"You can't kill him."

And he didn't. Weslie knocked Ivan unconscious.

Weslie shifted back into his human form, and I hurried over and threw my arms around him. I inhaled his scent and felt the relief I wanted.

I could hear the sirens of police arriving as Weslie kissed my forehead. "It's over. He's going to jail, April. He won't bother you anymore."

I cried, sobbing into his shoulder.

Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 4:07 am

I opened the door and stepped inside the house. I was instantly comforted as I spotted the pictures of April that I had hung on the wall. The chandelier sparkled in the sunlight, and a large palm tree stood in the corner.

I could see into the living room, where a huge L-shaped, blue couch sat with our TV across from it. There were more pictures and plants hanging in the air. The living room led into our dining room, with a huge oak table big enough to seat ten. A fresh bouquet of flowers was in a vase, and some candles were in the middle. More pictures of them hung, and I smiled at them.

I slid off my shoes. "April, you home?"

I walked down the small hallway and pushed the door open to the kitchen. It was one of the first projects we had managed since moving into the house. It didn't need a huge makeover, but it did need a little TLC. We'd bought a fridge, stove, and microwave, painted the cabinets, and ripped out the countertop, putting in a butcher block.

The space smelled wonderful, and April pulled herself up in front of the stove. "Hey, welcome home."

I stared at her, taking in her outfit. She wore a pair of jean shorts and a high tank top on her stomach, revealing her belly button piercing. I took in her hair, which had grown out and was now down to her shoulders.

A lot had changed for us since Ivan was locked up, but April had also changed. She's softened but still had her quick remarks.

I enjoyed seeing the change. We had lived in the house for a couple of months now, and she was comfortable and happy.

"How was work?" I asked, leaning onto the fridge as she opened the stove.

"It was really good." April had taken the job at the middle school, and she seemed to love it. She talked about how she and the principal were around the same age, so they got along well. They had already gone out for lunch a few times.

"How was work for you?" she asked as she slid a meatloaf into the oven and shut the door. She cleaned her hands on a rag and tossed it into the sink.

"It was good. We had a quiet day, which was nice."

She smiled as she reached for a glass of water. She took a sip, leaning back against the counter. "Well, dinner will be ready in an hour."

She walked over to the fridge and pulled out a salad. "I was talking to Wendy, and she was wondering if we would be able to watch Poppy and Zayden. They have to take a trip out and don't want to take the kids."

"I don't see why not. When are they leaving?"

She pulled a bowl out and dumped the salad into it. She started squeezing the salad dressing on it and stirred it in. "In a couple of days. It's their anniversary, and Ayden is taking her somewhere for the weekend. They were going to leave on Friday and come back on Sunday."

And no kids mean they were going to be fucking the entire time. I almost laughed at it. It seemed they were working on baby number three now.

"I don't see why not. Would be nice to have them here. We have all the space."

I looked outside, taking in the forest just a little past the river. We hadn't done a lot of exploring besides the house. We moved in and became so busy we hadn't explored the forest or the river. We hadn't even taken a walk out on the pathway yet.

"How long until dinner is done again?" I asked as I pulled a bottle of water out of the fridge.

"An hour or so, why?" April raised an eyebrow at me. "Did you have something in mind?"

"Do you want to go for a run?" I asked, nodding my head to our huge bay window. "We could go explore the forest while dinner cooks. We have the time, and we haven't gone at all. We could get a nice work-out."

Her eyes sparkled a little at the idea, and she smiled. "Can we race there?"

I smiled at her, remembering why I loved her so much. She never ceased to amaze me.

After she set a timer and we made sure everything else was ready for dinner, we headed outside. The wind was nice when you got outside, and the fresh air felt wonderful. It wasn't too hot or too cold today.

April started taking her shorts off, and my eyes watched her. She shimmed it down, her eyes peeking at me as she did. I took in her black panties and raised an eyebrow at her.

She placed her hands on her hips. "Are you going to stare, or are you going to strip?"

"I don't know, this is pretty entertaining to watch. Fuck the run."

She rolled her eyes. "Get undressed, Weslie."

I unbuttoned my jeans. April continued to strip, and when she was naked, she shifted into her wolf form. I had seen her wolf many times, but each time, I was amazed at her. She was a dark black wolf with long hair. She was small, but she had speed.

I shifted, and we both lined up. I could hear her giggling in my head, and I glanced at her.

"Shall we do a countdown?"

She nodded. "Three...two...one..."

We both took off. She bounded ahead of me, taking off across the yard towards the river. I ran after her, not intending to win. My favorite part of racing with April was watching her run.

I enjoyed watching her hair get tussled and the way she moved around, passing trees and branches at ease. I loved watching how quickly her feet were and when she turned.

She took off over the bridge, crossing the river. She didn't stop or look back as she hit the forest. I continued after her and watched as she ran into the forest, kicking up dust as she ran.

"I win," she chirped and turned. Her eyes sparkled as she stared at me as I entered the forest. It was quiet, with just the sound of the wind blowing the trees and birds chirping in the distance.

Once I caught up to her, we walked. I could see her eyes taking the space as we moved. Both of us hadn't been out here. The flowers were blooming, and you could hear animals chirping in the distance. It was peaceful.

"It's calming out here," she said, glancing at me. "It's beautiful."

"Isn't it? Lots of space and with the river near the house... it's a little slice of heaven. I still can't believe we got the house and all this."

She chuckled, and we stopped at a large tree. She shifted back into her human form before she sat down, a smile in her eyes. I shifted and stared at her. "You know, I've been thinking. We pretty much renovated everything upstairs. The laundry room and bathrooms are done. We should probably start working on the rooms up there. Deciding what we want to do with them."

I knew what she was hinting at. We hadn't exactly talked about the future, but we had mentioned it in the past. We both wanted kids but hadn't brought it up.

With the thought of Ivan on our minds, neither of us seemed comfortable with it. But he wasn't an issue now, so nothing was holding us back.

"You know the rooms would be perfect for kids. They seem to be the only missing part of this. We have the marriage, and we have the house. We have the land and the views."

She leaned back on the tree. "If I tell you how many I want, are you going to make fun of me?"

"Is it some insane number like eight or nine? Because I'm pretty sure that Wendy and Ayden are going to get up there soon themselves."

She laughed, shaking her head. "No. I'm not insane. I want three kids. That's it. I want them to have siblings so they aren't alone. I won't be aiming for anything crazy like Wendy and Ayden seem to be."

I walked close to her, and her eyes scanned over my naked form. "Well, if that's the case, we should probably get started. Everyone else seemed to be ahead of us. We need to catch up."

April sat cross-legged, leaving everything for me to see. She smirked at me as she uncrossed her legs, spreading them wide. "Out here in the forest? What if someone catches us?"

I nodded, walking close to her. "No one is around. And the only one I wouldn't want to see is your brother, and he's at work."

I leaned over, running my nose across her neck as she leaned back slightly. I listened as her breath hitched, and I slid a hand up her leg and between her legs, feeling how wet she was.

She softly moaned, and I bit hard onto her neck. Her moan grew louder, and her arms wrapped around me. Her nails dug into my skin.

I could taste blood, knowing I had broken the skin. I licked her neck, grabbed her legs, and spread her wider. I slid a second finger into her and inhaled her scent.

"Oh god, oh...god..." she softly moaned. "Oh please, I need you in me."

I hoisted her up, hooking my arms under her knees. I slid into her in one thrust, feeling her tighten around me. I quickly turned us, placing her on my hips, deepening her on me. April placed her hands on my chest, and I stared at her. I took in her curved hips and the belly button that dangled. I reached a hand up, rubbing it between my fingers.

I watched the diamond twinkle in the light. "Are you going to have to take this out when you get pregnant?"

She nodded. "Yeah, I will."

"Pity," I said, pulling my gaze up. I took in her breast and pulled my hands up, cupping them. "I'll miss it."

She smirked, scratching her nails down my chest. "I can always have it repierced later if you miss it that much."

I nodded my head. "Oh, please do."

She started to grind on me. I watched her swivel her hips, and I could feel myself hitting her deeper. She softly moaned, her head tilted back.

"I'm yours, April. Yours and no one else's."

She stared at me, and I raised her hand, pulling her head down and kissing her softly. Her mouth pressed against mine for a moment as I slid a hand down, rubbing a finger over her clit.

She moaned loudly, her forehead pressing against mine. "Right there."

I continued moving my finger as she liked. She kept grinding on me, my cock ached inside her. She felt like heaven, and I never wanted it to end.

"You're mine," she panted, her fingers rough against my neck. "Only mine."

"Only yours," I whispered.

I felt April tighten around me, and she cried out as an orgasm took over her. I grabbed her hips, bucking up into her, riding her orgasm higher, and my own hit me.

I didn't stop until I knew every drop had filled her, and only then did she sag against me. I held her close, running my finger through her hair and holding her against me.

She panted in my ear, and I looked across the forest. I could see our house on the horizon and its beauty. I could picture the future—the marriage and the kids. I could see them running across the lawn and near the river. I could see us living a beautiful

life here.

"I love you," she whispered, leaning back. She placed her hands on my face, her eyes filled with tears. "I love you more than you even know."

It was exactly how I felt about her. I reached a hand up, tugging some free hair behind her ear. "And I love you more."

THE END