



Snatched Up by the Cartel: Wolf Shifter MM MPreg Romance

Author: *Michael Levi*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Rylan can't believe he's going to prison.

After everything he's done, his brother betrayed him. The prison is a terrifying place, and he knows he will be targeted. With his baby face and skinny frame, he stands out like a sore thumb. To make matters worse, he's been paired with another inmate, Mateo. Their initial interaction is anything but friendly. Yet, there's an undeniable allure to the tattooed, muscular Latin gangster. Despite his fears, Rylan can't stop the spicy dreams he has about the older shifter.

Mateo couldn't care less about Rylan.

To him, Rylan is weak and bound to get bullied. Mateo feels no responsibility for his new cellmate. However, when other prisoners start ganging up on Rylan, Mateo feels compelled to intervene. He can't let the guards think he's the one roughing up his cellmate. That's when the dreams start—intimate, vivid dreams about the younger shifter. Mateo knows what this means: he may have just found his forever mate. The problem is, they're both incarcerated. How can they think about forming a family when they don't even have privacy?

Total Pages (Source): 11

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Rylan

The bus jostled and jolted as it made its way towards the prison, the bright sunlight streaming through the windows. I peered out, my eyes squinting against the glare. An eerie silence enveloped the vehicle, broken only by the muted conversations of a few prisoners seated behind me. The seat beneath me was worn and uncomfortable, adding to my mounting discomfort. My hands were bound by handcuffs, an unnecessary precaution, I thought, as I had no intention of attempting an escape. I knew better than to try something foolish.

I took a deep breath, my hands trembling slightly, drawing the attention of one of the guards. His gaze was filled with contempt, his disdain for me and the other prisoners palpable. As we neared our destination, the imposing prison complex loomed into view, a stark reminder of my betrayal. My best friend, my brother, had turned his back on me, his self-preservation taking precedence over our bond. It was a bitter pill to swallow, a lesson in the harsh reality that I was alone.

Fear gripped me as I contemplated my future within those walls. The other prisoners, tall, muscular, and intimidating, were a stark contrast to my slight and timid frame. I knew I would stand out, and not in a positive light. Taking another steadying breath, I tried to steel myself for what lay ahead.

Before long, we arrived at the prison. I was roughly ushered off the bus by one of the guards, my shoulders sagging under the weight of my apprehension. I considered shooting him a hateful glance but thought better of it. There was no point in antagonizing those who held my fate in their hands. Instead, I joined the line of prisoners, moving forward with trepidation.

Then, out of nowhere, I felt a hand grab my ass. Instinctively, I tensed, but I knew better than to react. The man behind me, his body a canvas of tattoos and scars, was a formidable presence. I was acutely aware of my powerlessness in that moment.

As the line progressed, we were separated, and I found myself wondering what would come next.

I stood trembling as the guards finished stripping me of my clothes, my skinny frame left vulnerable and exposed.

I thought many things were going to happen here, but I didn't think they were going to remove my clothes. I knew that I would have to wear an orange jumpsuit, but removing my clothes in front of everybody? Leaving me completely exposed and feeling so bad about everything? That I didn't think was going to happen.

The cold, harsh fluorescent lights of the prison bathroom gleamed off the pale, scarred skin that I tried so hard to keep hidden.

I loathed it intensely. Wishing I had tanned before arriving here was a passing irritation, albeit minor. In contrast to the challenges I faced, it paled significantly. In essence, it was inconsequential.

My black hair, usually carefully styled, now hung in disarray around my face, partially shielding my brown eyes from the leering gazes of the men around me.

I knew why they were looking at me. It was because I was different. I was probably the closest to a woman they had seen in a long time.

This was it. I was once a free Omega and now was at the mercy of the inmates and guards of Blackrock Prison. And all because of him.

I didn't think I would ever hate him as much as I did now. My blood boiled just thinking about the betrayal. Once I was out of here — and I was sure I would — he would feel my wrath.

"Look at this pretty little thing." One of the guards, a burly man with a scar across his cheek, stepped forward, running his eyes over my body with a disgusting smirk. "Bet you ain't used to being without your clothes, are ya, boy?"

I wasn't, but I also wasn't thinking about that. I was thinking how much I hated him. Did I think that prison guards were good? No, but I also wasn't prepared to be humiliated like this.

I bit my lip, refusing to give him the satisfaction of a response. I knew better than to anger them; my trial had made that clear. The judge's words still rang in my ears: "Rylan Nightfang, you have been found guilty of the crime of treason against the pack. Your punishment is to serve a term of twenty years in Blackrock Prison." Twenty years. My heart sank at the thought of spending that much time in this hellish place.

That was why I promised myself I would get out of here one way or another. I was going to try to prove my innocence, but if it didn't work, I would try to do something else.

"Come on, pretty boy." Another guard, slightly less intimidating but no less cruel, grabbed my arm, his grip tight and painful. "Time to meet your new cellmate. Hopefully, he'll teach you some manners."

At least they gave me the orange jumpsuit, but it was barely enough. It didn't really make me feel covered. It was too big for me. It was probably made for the big, burly prisoners in the prison. Yet another reason why I was going to stick out here like a sore thumb.

I stumbled as the guard dragged me out of the bathroom, the rough concrete walls of the prison a stark contrast to the luxurious life I once knew.

I had everything. It was good. I had luxury and so much money available. I could only think that my brother betrayed me so he could have everything I had. It had to be that. I couldn't think of another reason why he betrayed me.

My mind raced as I tried to push down the panic rising within me. I thought of my family, my pack, and the life I had lost.

I couldn't stop thinking about how much I was going to suffer in this prison. It was notorious for being the worst in the entire state. Nobody wanted to make this place better. They all thought it was good enough the way it was.

All of this was happening because of Adrian. My former best friend, my brother, had set me up, framed me for a crime I didn't commit, and now I was paying the price.

I wanted to kill him with my bare hands. If he were right in front of me, I wouldn't be able to stop myself. My body was shaking just thinking about how much I wanted to do that.

The guard halted in front of a heavy metal door, the small window set into it offering a glimpse of a shadowy figure within. My heart hammered in my chest as I wondered what kind of inmate I would be sharing my space with.

I didn't want to share space with anyone, but it wasn't up to me. I just hoped he wasn't going to kill me. I knew that someone like him could probably sniff out weakness, and I had a lot of it.

He was probably another wolf, I presumed, as Blackrock was a specialized prison for shifters. Because I was a shifter as well, I was taken here. There were prisons for

humans. I wished I was in one of those, even though I would stick out even more.

Without a moment's pause, the guard unlocked the door and forcefully ushered me into the cramped cell, the metallic click of the lock reverberating through the confined space. He showed no concern for my autonomy, merely focused on executing his duty, which currently entailed confining me within these walls.

The figure within stood, and my breath caught in my throat. He was doing push-ups before, but after realizing he had a cellmate, he stopped doing that. He wanted to know who was going to be rooming with him.

This moment was so tense I just wanted the floor to open up and swallow me whole.

My cellmate was massive, towering over me with muscles that strained against his orange prison jumpsuit. I immediately thought they should make him bigger clothes.

Tattoos snaked up his neck and disappeared beneath the fabric, suggesting a body adorned with ink. Though I had no reason to pry, I found myself pondering the significance of each mark. Yet, knowing he would never divulge their meanings, dwelling on them seemed futile.

His hair, a deep brown, was cropped close to his head, and intense brown eyes assessed me from beneath thick eyebrows. Just from looking at him, I could tell he was an alpha. And, I was an omega. We shouldn't have been paired together. There were so many horrible things he could do to me just because I was what I was.

"Well, well. What do we have here?" A deep, gravelly voice rumbled from him, sending a shiver down my spine. I couldn't place his accent, but it had a hint of a Mexican lilt to it.

He was probably from Mexico and a member of a cartel. This couldn't be worse. I

knew my cellmate was probably going to be a member of a gang, but a cartel mobster? That I didn't think was going to happen. He was much more dangerous than I thought he was going to be.

I cautiously took a step back, my heart racing in my chest. Sweat was already beading on my skin, the urge to shower overwhelming despite the impossibility of it. I was acutely aware that now wasn't the time for such luxuries.

I knew nothing of this wolf, and my instincts screamed at me to be cautious. Should I say something? Should I remain silent? The only thing I knew was that everything I did had to be considered at least a few times beforehand. Otherwise, I might endanger myself.

"I-I'm Rylan," I stammered, my eyes flicking around the cell, taking in the two narrow beds, a small table, and a few meager possessions.

There wasn't much. There wasn't even enough space for the two of us. He occupied so much space. He needed his own cell, no denying it.

The wolf smirked, and I noticed the hint of a dimple on his cheek. Just as I thought, he didn't only now that he was the one in charge here, but he also found me funny. It was yet another reason for him to bully me.

"Mateo," he introduced himself.

He didn't say it, but I quickly noticed the famous Solstice tattoo around his neck. That already told me a lot about him and it wasn't anything good.

I swallowed, my throat dry. "I'm Rylan," I repeated, my voice barely above a whisper. I knew the Solstice name; everyone did. Mateo was a member of the notorious Nightshade Wolves cartel, a pack known for their brutal tactics and illegal

dealings. Fear prickled at my skin as I realized the company I now kept.

Things were definitely getting worse. Not only was he a gangster and a member of a cartel, but he was also with the Nightshade Wolves. I had heard so much about them. I had to be even more careful around him.

"And the rest of your name?" he inquired, his gaze penetrating mine. Did he really want to delve into that as well? It felt as though he were scrutinizing me, assessing my entirety.

"Nightfang," I answered, even though I didn't want to. I realized that the less he knew about me, the better.

"Nightfang, huh?" Mateo raised an eyebrow, his expression unreadable. "That name carries some weight 'round here."

I flinched, knowing the truth of his words. My pack, the Nightfangs, held a certain amount of power and influence, but it was all built on a foundation of lies and corruption. Lies that I had helped perpetuate until Adrian had turned on me.

Everything about my family was built on lies. Maybe that was the reason why Adrian betrayed me. I was trying to change it, trying to do something better, but I couldn't.

"It wasn't me," I blurted out, my eyes pleading with him to understand. "I didn't do what they said I did."

I didn't know why I said that. It wasn't like he accused me. On top of that, I didn't think it was going to change anything. If anything, it was only going to make everything worse.

To my surprise, Mateo chuckled, a deep sound that seemed to fill the small cell. The

weight of his presence was undeniable. Even if he were somewhere else and the place was bigger, I would still only be looking at him because he stood out in a good way. Everybody was afraid of him.

"Innocent, huh? They all say that." His eyes glinted with a hint of humor, but only because he found me so funny. I wished I wasn't. I was out of my element. I couldn't even do anything to change his mind about me. Even if there were something I could do, it wouldn't work.

"I am," I insisted, my voice stronger this time. "Adrian set me up. He was my best friend and brother. I would have done anything for him, and he knew it." My voice cracked as I thought of the betrayal, the pain still fresh.

The only other reason why the betrayal happened was because I trusted him so much. I should've done something. I should have realized it was going to happen. When I noticed something was amiss, it was already too late.

Mateo's gaze softened, and he took a step forward, closing the distance between us. I took a few steps back. The first thing I thought he was going to do was hurt me. Right on my first day here, my cellmate was going to hurt me. It couldn't get much worse than that.

"I know all about family, about the things we do for them." His voice was quiet, almost gentle, and I sensed there was a story there, one that perhaps mirrored my own.

And yet, he wasn't going to tell me anything. He didn't have a reason to do that.

I nodded, my eyes downcast as I struggled to keep the tears at bay. "He used me," I whispered. "And now I'm paying the price."

And I didn't think Mateo believed me. Why would he believe me, anyway? There was no reason he should. Not without evidence, anyway.

"Seems like you're paying for more than just your own crimes." Mateo accused and I dared to meet his gaze again. It was probably the bravest thing I was going to do in a while.

"It's the way of the world, little omega." He took another step closer, his presence overwhelming in the confined space. "And it's also the reason why you're here with me."

I anticipated a different response from him, but instead, he simply turned away and resumed his push-ups. As I stood there, observing him, my body trembling and my mind racing, I realized there was much to contemplate, and none of it seemed good.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Mateo

The moon cast an eerie silver light through the small window of our cell, rousing me from my fitful sleep. I groaned slightly. I didn't want to wake up. Waking up in the middle of the night always sucked.

I shifted on the narrow bed, my body tense and my mind alert. This bed was horrible. This prison should be closed just because of that. This was no way for someone to sleep.

Something had disturbed my slumber, a sound that didn't belong in the quiet of the night. I had been living here for a long time, so I was used to quietness. I was used to not having a cellmate.

I turned my head, my eyes adjusting to the dim light, and saw Rylan tossing and turning on his bed, his face contorted in distress. The omega was having a nightmare.

I sighed inwardly, a mix of annoyance and something akin to pity stirring within me. I hated showing weakness, and Rylan was the epitome of weakness.

Everything about him showed his weakness. He couldn't help it. He was completely out of his element.

But there he was, huddled under the thin blanket, his breath coming in short gasps as he dreamed of whatever horrors haunted him. I couldn't help but feel a slight twinge of sympathy for the kid. He was new to this place, and the weight of his sentence was no doubt crushing him.

But I didn't feel a lot of pity for him. It really was only a little. Because he was a Nightfang, he did a lot of bad things. Everybody here hated him. Thanks to the way he was, I didn't think he was going to survive here for much longer.

I sat up, the metal frame of the bed creaking in protest. The moonlight illuminated the cell, casting shadows that danced across the walls, adding to the atmosphere.

Never again in my life would complain about my previous accommodations. They were so much better than what I had here.

I ran a hand through my hair, the stubble on my scalp a constant reminder of my captivity. The prison was no place for sentiment, and yet here I was, contemplating checking on my cellmate.

What was causing this feeling? His family was shit, and it was likely he wasn't any different. Like father, like son—they say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. And, in my experience, that was usually true.

With a huff, I swung my legs over the side of the bed and stood up, my bare feet padding softly against the cold concrete floor. I hoped I wasn't going to regret this.

I crossed the small space between our beds and shook Rylan's shoulder. He was warm — warmer than he should be. Did he have a fever? This was making me think he had.

"Hey, kid. Wake up." My voice was rough, my usual gravelly tone softened slightly by the hour. He was much younger than me and I could tell that just by looking at him, so I couldn't help but call him a kid sometimes.

Rylan jolted awake, his eyes wide and fearful as he took in his surroundings. He was suffering in his nightmare and now he was afraid of me. I could see it in his eyes.

For a moment, he looked confused, disoriented, before recognition dawned, and he seemed to remember where he was. I imagined that, for a moment, he thought he wasn't in this prison anymore.

"W-what?" He stammered.

"You were having a nightmare," I said, my tone matter-of-fact. "You wanna tell me what it was about?" I asked, though I knew he wouldn't — or couldn't — answer. I didn't think he was going to feel comfortable telling me about it. He was the kind of person who kept his feelings and thoughts to himself. That was something we had in common.

Rylan averted his gaze, his eyes darting around the cell as if searching for an escape. He knew there was none, but he still couldn't help but wish it was different. If there was an escape, I would have already used it.

"I-I don't remember," he lied, his voice shaking. I could smell the fear rolling off him, his heart racing as he tried to collect himself. He was also sweaty. Whatever his nightmare was about, it was probably one of the nastiest he had in a long while.

I narrowed my eyes, studying him. "You sure about that?" I prodded, knowing full well he was lying. Sometimes, people forgot about their nightmares or dreams as soon as they woke up, but in his case, I didn't think that happened.

I could sense the truth in the way his scent changed, the way his eyes flickered with a mix of emotions: fear, shame, and something else I couldn't quite pinpoint. Maybe it was anxiety.

Instead of answering, Rylan turned away, pulling the blanket up to his chin as if it could shield him from the world, or as if it could make me disappear. I was still right here, though.

I saw his shoulders shake, and I realized he was silently crying, his body racked with quiet sobs. Damn, the kid was a mess. He was going through a lot, but weren't we all? He wasn't as special as he thought he was.

I huffed again and turned away, returning to my bed. "Forget it," I muttered. "Go back to sleep." I didn't have the energy or the inclination to deal with his tears. Prison was no place for softness, and I had my own demons to battle.

My plate was full. I couldn't and didn't want to worry about what other people were feeling. Whatever was tormenting him, he could deal with it by himself.

I lay back down, my back to Rylan, and pulled my own blanket up. I didn't even want to remember he was my cellmate. Maybe this was also a nightmare and, tomorrow morning, I was going to wake up with him nowhere in sight.

The moonlight still cast long shadows on the wall, and I found myself staring at them, my mind wandering to my own past, to the nightmares that haunted me. I pushed the thoughts away; there was no room for weakness, not here, not now.

To be honest, there was never any space for weakness. The moment I showed any sort of fragility was the moment I knew I would die.

The silence stretched between us, the only sound being Rylan's quiet sniffles as he tried to stifle his tears. What a pathetic little cunt he was. He couldn't even cry without making noises.

I closed my eyes, willing sleep to take me back, to offer me a temporary escape from this hell. Still, it wasn't going to be easy. Sometimes, sleeping was difficult.

In the darkness, my mind wandered despite my efforts to keep it at bay. I thought of my own arrival at Blackrock, the fear and anger that had consumed me. I'd been a

young wolf then, full of fire and ready to take on the world. I had already spent too much time here. When would I get out? I didn't know.

This place had a way of breaking you, of stripping away your dignity and your sense of self. Not that I had any, to be honest. When I came here, I was already on the path to becoming the person I was.

A soft sniffle pulled me from my thoughts, and I glanced over my shoulder at Rylan. He lay curled up, his back to me, his body still shaking with the aftermath of his tears. I felt a pang of something in my chest, an unfamiliar sensation that I quickly dismissed.

It couldn't be anything. Maybe, before all this, I could feel pity for other people, but after realizing it didn't help me and it actually only jeopardized me, I got rid of it.

With a grunt, I rolled over, turning my back to him once more. "Get some sleep, kid," I grunted. "Tomorrow's another day in this hellhole."

And I wasn't going to say that again. He better do it as, otherwise, he would hate even more how weak he was.

The silence that followed was heavy. He finally stopped crying so much. The truth was, I couldn't sleep as long as he was making so much noise.

I knew Rylan was still awake, his mind likely racing with thoughts of his own. But we both knew better than to speak of such things. In a place like Blackrock, you kept your head down, your secrets close, and your emotions in check.

If he didn't know that yet, he soon would.

Eventually, the steady rhythm of Rylan's breathing told me he had fallen back asleep.

I chuckled slightly. Despite being so hurt, he managed to fall asleep. In the meantime, here I was, still mostly awake.

I lay there, listening to the sound, my eyes fixed on the shadows dancing across the walls. It had rained recently, leaving puddles on the ground behind the walls. That was the reason why there were so many dancing shadows tonight.

Tomorrow was another day, another battle to be fought. But for now, in the quiet of the night, I was just trying to sleep. Otherwise, tomorrow morning, if I was sleep-deprived, I wouldn't function well at all.

As I drifted off, my mind lingered on Rylan's fragile form, his silent tears a stark contrast to the harsh world we inhabited.

As much as I didn't want to admit it, part of me wanted to protect him, even though it didn't make sense. Why would I protect a Nightfang, anyway?

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Rylan

The harsh clang of the cell door startled me from my daze, the sound reverberating through the confines of our small space. I was kind of hoping I was going to find out this wasn't happening, but it was. No denying it. It was happening for real.

I looked up, my heart sinking as I realized it was time for the daily shower ritual. Mateo had warned me about this, the dreaded moment when we were herded like cattle to the communal bathrooms, forced to strip down and endure the mocking gazes of our fellow prisoners.

I thought that everything here was already humiliating enough, but there was this. And, to make everything even worse, it felt like it was only the tip of the iceberg.

With a heavy sigh, I stood up, my eyes darting to Mateo. He sat on his bed, his expression unreadable, but I sensed his awareness of my discomfort. "I'll be back," I mumbled.

He merely nodded, his eyes fixed on me for a brief moment before returning to the book he was reading. He didn't care about me. I didn't know why I even said what I did.

As for the book he was reading, it was the only possession he had, and he seemed to cherish it. I wondered what it was about, but I didn't dare ask. I feared him so much I couldn't even bring myself to glance at the cover.

Steeling myself, I followed the other inmates out of the cell, my heart pounding in my

chest and my body perspiring. The prison hallway loomed ahead, the concrete walls oppressive and foreboding. It was even worse than my cell.

The guards flanked us on either side, their gazes cold and indifferent to our plight. They looked at us as if we were cockroaches.

As we neared the bathroom, my steps faltered and I felt I was going to fall to the floor. The sounds of laughter and catcalls echoed from within, sending a chill down my spine. I knew what awaited me, and my skin prickled with embarrassment.

I never took a shower with somebody else before, so with this being my first time, I knew it was going to be embarrassing. I knew I was going to feel like killing myself.

The guards ushered us inside, their eyes scanning the room for any signs of dissent. They didn't care about what we were feeling. They just wanted to do their jobs. If I were one of them, I would also hate it.

The bathroom was a large, open space, the walls lined with showerheads. In the center stood a cluster of inmates, their eyes alight with anticipation as they spotted the new arrival. And, of course, I was talking about me. I was the only one different here.

I felt their gazes on me like a physical touch, their stares assessing, judging. It was as though they could eat me alive just by staring at me.

My skin crawled with goosebumps as I imagined their eyes raking over my body, my form so different from theirs. I was skinny, my frame slight and unassuming, a stark contrast to the muscular, hardened criminals around me.

Even if I closed my eyes and pretended that nothing of this was happening, it wouldn't work. It was impossible to deny reality.

With a nudge from one of the guards, I stepped forward, my heart hammering in my chest. I had spent too much time frozen in the same place. The guard had grown tired of it.

I knew the routine. We were to strip down, shower, and change into clean prison garb. A humiliating process, designed to strip away any sense of dignity we had left.

Even though this was my first time doing it, I knew the process. It was far from a secret.

My fingers fumbled as I tried to remove my jumpsuit, my hands trembling. I could feel their eyes on me, taking in my every move. I wanted to shrink into myself, to disappear from their leering gazes.

They were watching me and making sure they didn't miss a single thing about me. It felt like they wanted to do more than just look at me. I was trying everything so they didn't beat me up. It seemed that wasn't going to work.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" A deep voice, mocking me, cut through the room. I recognized it as belonging to Vance, one of the more formidable inmates. Mateo had kind of told me about him, so I knew who he was. I wished I didn't, but in this environment, it was better to know everybody, even though most of them were nasty.

He stood at the forefront of the group, his arms crossed over his broad chest. "Looks like we got ourselves a little omega."

And, of course, just by looking at me, they knew I was an omega.

Laughter erupted from the group, their eyes gleaming with cruel amusement. I bit my lip, my cheeks burning with shame. I wanted to run, to hide, but there was nowhere to

go. I also wanted to punch all of them until they were not breathing anymore, but I knew I couldn't do that.

With shaking fingers, I finished undoing the buttons and let the jumpsuit slide from my shoulders. It was relieving, to say the least.

I stood there, my body bare, feeling utterly exposed. I hunched my shoulders, trying to cover myself, but it was futile. There wasn't anything I could do. I was exposed and they could look at every part of me.

The thought of doing this every day made me feel like killing myself.

Their gazes devoured me, their eyes taking in every inch of my form. I knew I was different, but they had no right to be staring so much at me. They couldn't touch me. The guards were looking at what was happening. The inmates wouldn't try something so stupid.

"Look at those ribs, boys. I bet he ain't eaten a decent meal in his life!" Vance's voice boomed, and the laughter grew louder. I felt my face flush, my eyes stinging with the threat of tears.

They didn't know anything about me. I was rich before coming here. I was accustomed to the best food possible in the world.

"Leave him be." The deep, gravelly voice of Mateo cut through the room, a surprising reprieve from the torment. Wait, what? What was he doing here? He wasn't supposed to be in the shower room. At least, going by what he told me, he wasn't going to shower today.

I glanced over to see him standing at the entrance, his eyes fixed on Vance with a warning glare. A fight could erupt between the two despite the guards being here.

Vance smirked, his eyes narrowing. "Looks like someone's taken a shine to the new boy. You sure you wanna protect him, Solstice? He don't look like he can take much." His words were laced with innuendo, suggesting something more between Mateo and me. I wondered what it was, but couldn't say anything about it.

I wasn't going to draw more attention to myself than I already was.

Mateo's jaw clenched, his eyes flashing with a dangerous light. "Back off, Vance. He's off-limits." There was an underlying threat in his tone, one that the other inmates seemed to recognize. Vance may have been a force to be reckoned with, but Mateo held his own brand of power.

What was more surprising about this was that Mateo was defending me. I thought he didn't care about me, so why was he doing this? It didn't make any sense. We weren't fated mates. If we were, I would have already started to feel something strong for him. I didn't.

With a dismissive snort, Vance turned his attention back to me. Of course he wanted to say something else to me. I became his most recent obsession and he couldn't stop thinking about me.

"Have it your way, Solstice. But the rest of us sure as hell ain't gonna hold back." He signaled to the others, and they closed in, their eyes gleaming with malicious intent.

The guards had to do something! Otherwise, there really was going to be a fight and somebody could die. They might even kill me.

I took an instinctive step back, my heart pounding. I was trapped, surrounded by a circle of inmates, their faces twisted with cruel smiles. I didn't have anywhere to run.

I felt their hands reach for me, rough and calloused, grabbing at my arms, my

shoulders. What the fuck? What were they doing? This wasn't allowed. It shouldn't be happening.

"Let's see what we got here, boys." Vance's hand snaked out, his fingers gripping my chin, forcing me to meet his gaze. His eyes bored into mine, cold and calculating. "A pretty little omega, all for us to play with."

Somebody had to do something. Either Mateo or the guards. At the moment, it felt more like Mateo was the one who was going to save me. The guards didn't appear to be interested in doing their job.

I tried to pull away, but their hands held me firm. I felt their fingers trailing over my skin, their touches unwanted, invasive. They touched every part of me they could. It was an abhorrent experience. It made my skin crawl.

My breath quickened, my heart racing as panic gripped me. I wanted to shout, to plead for them to stop, but my voice failed me. I was used to speaking so much in front of several audiences, and yet, here I was, incapable of pronouncing a single word

Rough hands pushed me forward, toward the showerheads. They knew what they wanted to do. They wanted to keep using me and touching me. They were going to make this experience even worse than it was already going to be.

The spray of water hit my skin, soaking me instantly. I sputtered, my eyes stinging from the onslaught. It was cold, oh so cold. It was horrible. I wanted to be anywhere but here.

I wanted to cover myself, to hide my nakedness, but their hands held me firm, on display for their amusement. And even though only a few seconds passed since this started, it felt more like it was an eternity.

Laughter filled the room, their voices echoing off the walls. I felt even more vulnerable, exposed, as their eyes devoured me, their touches violating my personal space. Their hands roamed, their fingers gripping, pinching, their laughter ringing in my ears.

"That's enough!" Mateo's voice boomed, cutting through the room once more. I felt his presence behind me, his aura commanding attention.

Relief washed over me. Finally, someone was doing something. I wished somebody was recording this so I could show everyone outside of here what was happening. The guards couldn't leave this place unpunished.

The hands fell away as the inmates turned to face him, their faces twisted with annoyance at the interruption. Annoyance was the only thing they were feeling. They couldn't care less about any possible repercussions. They knew there was going to be none.

Vance scowled, his eyes narrowing. "This ain't your business, Solstice. Back off."

Mateo advanced, his tall frame filling the space. Out of all the people who could protect me in a similar situation, he was at the bottom of the list. Again, I couldn't help but reaffirm he didn't care about me at all.

"I made it my business," he growled. "Now back the hell off." There was an underlying threat in his tone, one that Vance seemed to recognize.

Was it going to be enough? The next seconds were going to be very defining.

With a snarl, Vance stepped forward, his fists clenched. "You asking for a fight, Solstice? 'Cause I'm happy to oblige."

My heart raced. The last thing I wanted was a fight. I didn't want anybody to fight because of me. And worse, it felt like the guards were just waiting for the fight to break out. Then, they would intervene and come out of it looking like heroes.

Mateo stood his ground, his eyes hard as stone. "Try me," he challenged. I liked his attitude. He was the kind of person who didn't take shit from anybody.

For a moment, the two alpha wolves faced off, their stares intense, the tension thick enough to cut with a knife. Anything could happen here. Really, anything.

Then, Vance smirked, his eyes flicking to me. "Another time, Solstice. For now, we'll let the pretty boy go."

I scowled slightly. I hated it when people called me "boy." I was an adult now and should be treated as such.

With that, they stepped back, their hands falling away. I stood there, shaking, the spray of water washing away the remnants of their touches. And yet, I knew that, no matter how much I stayed here, it wouldn't be enough to wash away how it felt when their hands were touching me.

I wanted to collapse, to curl up and hide from their cruel gazes. I wanted to yank myself out of my body. Maybe, if I could do that, I could have some peace and not hate myself so much.

Mateo stepped forward, his eyes fixed on me. "You okay?" He asked, his tone softer than I'd ever heard it. I didn't know he could sound so gentle, especially towards me.

I nodded, unable to speak, my throat tight with unshed tears. I wanted to thank him, to express my gratitude for his intervention, but the words stuck in my throat.

There was just too much going on between us. I didn't feel comfortable enough around him. I didn't know if feeling such a thing was even possible. Given what I knew, it probably wasn't.

Without another word, Mateo turned and strode from the room, his departure leaving an eerie silence in his wake. After all, it seemed he didn't come here to take a shower. He might have been passing by and noticed what was happening. That was when he decided to help me. I chuckled slightly. It was more like he saved me. If it weren't for him, I probably wouldn't be alive.

The other inmates exchanged glances, their earlier amusement gone, replaced by a sense of unease. Tension escalated when Mateo was here. The resolution could have ended much worse than the way it did. We all knew that.

I stood there, alone, the spray of water the only sound in the room. The shower was supposed to be helping me through this, but it wasn't doing much. It was like it didn't exist.

I wanted to melt into the shadows, to escape the memories of what had just transpired. And yet, no matter how much I tried, I couldn't do that.

I felt dirty, violated, my skin crawling with the memory of their touches. I wanted to rip my skin off my body and burn it.

With shaking fingers, I reached for the soap, my hands scrubbing at my skin, trying to erase the feeling of their hands on me. At the same time, I couldn't stop asking myself what the point of doing this even was.

I wanted to wash away the shame, the humiliation, but I knew it would linger, a constant reminder of my place in this hellish prison.

Everything had taken a turn for the worse. Each encounter with Vance would now be tainted by what happened, and the likelihood of a repeat, particularly in Mateo's absence, was high.

As I finished showering, the other inmates kept their distance, their earlier bravado gone. I sensed their wariness, their respect for Mateo's warning. As much as I didn't want it to be true, I was his protégé. Even if he didn't protect me ever again, everyone would remember what just happened and would immediately think twice before approaching me.

I hated all of them, Mateo included. I didn't think there was a single person in this prison I didn't hate. I even hated myself for not being stronger.

I dressed in the clean prison garb provided, my movements mechanical, my mind elsewhere. My only relief was that the shower was over and I wasn't naked anymore. Still, coming here to take a shower was something that would have to happen every day for the next years. I'd better get used to it.

I felt numb, my emotions a tangled mess. Other than hatred and pain, I couldn't feel anything else. I couldn't even feel my own body.

I wanted to cry, to release the torrent of feelings swirling within me, but I bit my lip, holding it in. I knew better than to show even more weakness than I had already shown. The more weakness I showed, the more those people would abuse me.

As I left the bathroom, my eyes darted around, half-expecting to see Mateo, but he was nowhere to be found. As much as I didn't want to admit it, he was the only one who could keep me safe. He showed he cared about me, even if only slightly, so it was better than what the other inmates thought about me.

A part of me wanted to seek him out, to offer my thanks, but another part of me knew

better. Plus, it wasn't like he did what he did to be thanked. He didn't expect that from anybody.

Gratitude was a complicated emotion in a place like this, and I wasn't ready to face whatever lay between us. And it was always going to be like that. The only thing we knew for certain here and were accustomed to was our mutual hatred.

With heavy steps, I returned to the cell, my heart heavy. I knew I should be grateful for Mateo's intervention, but instead, I felt confused, my emotions a tangled mess. Could I ever feel different about what happened? Was that even possible? I had no idea.

Why had he helped me? What did he want from me? So many questions and no answer. I knew it was going to remain like that for a long time at least, if not forever.

As I entered the cell, I found Mateo sitting on his bed, his eyes fixed on me. I couldn't help but wonder what he was thinking, but his face was unreadable.

I halted, my breath catching in my throat. His gaze was intense. It felt as though his eyes could see my soul.

"You okay?" He asked, his voice low. And, somehow, his question was more surprising than his helping me in the shower room.

I nodded, unable to speak, the events of the shower still fresh in my mind. Nodding was the best thing I could do. I wished I could do something else, but I couldn't. I felt like I wasn't really in my own body.

He studied me for a moment longer, then returned his attention to his book, his signal that the conversation was over. As with many things he did, he didn't have to say anything. His behavior was more than enough.

I stood there, unsure of what to say or do. Maybe there was nothing to be said. Maybe remaining silent was the best thing I could do.

I wanted to express my gratitude, but the words stuck in my throat. Maybe one day I would be brave enough to do that, but that day was not today.

With a heavy sigh, I turned away, my heart heavy. I knew I owed him, but I didn't know how to repay him. Plus, I didn't know if he even expected to be repaid. Maybe he didn't. Or maybe he did and would tell me what he wanted me to do for him.

The dynamics of our "relationship" (could it even be called that?) were complicated, and I felt ill-equipped to navigate them.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Mateo

I knew it was a matter of time before Vance made his move. The tension had been building ever since I intervened during Rylan's shower, and now, it was about to reach a boiling point. He wasn't the kind of person to accept defeat willingly. If anything, he doubled down on his hatred, always planning to enact revenge.

I hoped Rylan would stay out of it; he'd been through enough already. I hated him in the beginning because of his family's dealings, but the more time I spent with him, the more I realized he was very different from his father.

I was in the prison yard during our hour of recreation. The sun glared down, offering little relief from the oppressive atmosphere. No matter where we were and what we were doing, the prison always sucked so much.

Inmates milled about, some lifting makeshift weights, others huddled in groups, their eyes scanning the yard with bored disinterest. But, some of them, were looking at me. I knew they were thinking about me. I knew they wanted to hurt me.

I felt their gazes on me as I crossed the yard, my steps purposeful. I kept a wary eye on Vance, spotting him by the chain-link fence, surrounded by his lackeys. He was never alone, different from me. He was always with other inmates so they were stronger. I just wasn't very sociable.

I knew a confrontation was inevitable, but I wasn't about to back down. I never did, no matter the odds. Backing down would be like asking them to beat me to a pulp.

As I passed by, Vance called out. "Well, if it isn't the self-appointed protector." His eyes gleamed with malicious intent. "You sure you wanna mess with us, Solstice? You know how this place works."

I halted, my hands clenching into fists at my sides. His threat wasn't going to change anything. It wasn't going to make me back down.

"I made it clear the other day," I growled. "Stay away from Rylan."

I knew that repeating myself wouldn't change anything, but it was the only resource I had at the moment. The instance he tried to start a fight with me, then things would change.

Vance smirked, his eyes narrowing. "Or what? You think you can take us all on?"

I didn't know if I could. Probably not, but I wouldn't back down anyway.

He signaled to his crew, and they closed in, their faces set with determination. The guards, as usual, couldn't care less about what was going to happen.

I glanced around, noting the other inmates had formed a circle, eager for the entertainment. Prison thrived on violence, and a fight between rival gangs was sure to be a spectacle.

However, this time, it wasn't going to be much of a fight between two gangs. It was going to be me against them.

I took a step back, assessing the situation. They had me surrounded, cutting off any potential escape routes. They had probably planned for this way before I showed up. Vance was like that. Even though he didn't appear to be much of a thinker, his plans were always good.

I knew I could take a few of them down, but the odds were stacked against me. I still didn't fear anyone, obviously. I had been in worse situations.

"Back off, Vance," I warned, my voice steady despite the unease swirling in my gut. Did I think he was going to change his mind? No. He wasn't going to.

He laughed, a cruel, mirthless sound. "Or what? You and your little omega think you're above us?" He spat the word "omega" like a curse.

I didn't know why he felt that way about omegas. They were part of our society. Wasn't he looking for his omega just like I was? He should be.

Anyway, those things didn't matter. Whatever Vance wanted to do with his life didn't change what I thought about him. He was still pathetic and laughable.

I saw red. My hands curled into tighter fists, my body coiling, ready to strike. I was already prepared for the fight that was going to happen.

"You touch one hair on his head, and I'll make you regret it," I snarled. I didn't think I would ever feel so protective of my cellmate, but here I was. Things changed, to say the least.

Vance's eyes glittered with challenge. "Oh, we plan to touch a lot more than that." His lackeys chuckled, their eyes threatening. They were not going to back down at all.

Before I could react, they rushed me, their fists swinging. I didn't have much time to react. I dodged the first few blows, landing a punch of my own, feeling the satisfying crunch of my knuckles connecting with flesh. Fighting was exciting, even though every time it happened, I didn't know if I was going to come out of it alive.

They kept coming, their numbers overwhelming. I knew there were a lot of them, but right now, it felt like there were so many more.

I fought with everything I had, my body a blur of motion as I struck out, aiming for vulnerable spots, trying to disable as many as I could. I landed a few extra punches, but I needed many more.

But they kept coming, their blows landing, my body absorbing the impact. And I kept thinking about Rylan. The thought was the only thing making me go on with this. Thinking about him being alone without me gave me slight anxiety.

I felt a rib crack under the force of a particularly brutal punch, and my vision blurred momentarily. Oh, fuck. I knew this was going to happen and I was powerless to stop it.

I spat out a mouthful of blood, my lips curling in a snarl. "You'll pay for that," I growled. It wasn't an empty promise. They would surely pay for it.

Vance laughed, his eyes wild. "You're the one who's gonna pay, Solstice. And your little omega friend too."

The mention of Rylan ignited a surge of anger within me, revitalizing my determination. Despite his constant presence in my thoughts, hearing Vance say his name filled me with a sense of empowerment, as if I could conquer anything.

I lashed out, taking down two of Vance's crew with a well-placed kick and a vicious elbow. Both didn't expect that to happen.

But they kept on coming, their numbers slowly wearing me down. Fucking hell. It felt like this could go on forever or until I succumbed to exhaustion.

I felt a blow to the back of my head, and my vision swam. I stumbled, my knees buckling. My body was weak and wasn't responding anymore to my instructions.

They took advantage, raining down punches, their boots connecting with my ribs, my face. I knew, in that moment, that it was over. And yet, I wasn't going to give up. I would only stop when I was dead.

I tried to fight back, but my body was failing me, the pain overwhelming. I grunted, ignoring it. It was almost too much, but I could withstand it.

Through the haze of pain, I heard the guards' whistles, their shouts to break it up. But they didn't intervene, their inaction confirming what I already knew. Vance had paid them off, ensuring their indifference to my fate.

To be honest, for the most part, it wasn't even necessary to pay them off. Most guards here already hated me. Chances were, the guards around the perimeter hated me so much they would rather kill me themselves.

With the last of my strength, I lashed out, taking down one more of Vance's crew before my legs gave out, and I collapsed to the ground. I gave everything I could and it wasn't enough.

I felt a boot connect with my side, and then darkness consumed me. And my last thought was Rylan. I worried about him, something I thought would never happen.

I came to slowly, my body throbbing with pain. I tried to open my eyes, but the light seared my retinas, forcing me to squeeze them shut again. I groaned, my throat raw, my mouth tasting of copper.

What happened? I thought I was going to die after they knocked me unconscious.

"Easy now." A soft voice, coming from someone who sounded concerned, reached my ears. "You took quite a beating."

I recognized the voice, and my eyes flickered open, adjusting to the dim light of our cell. I could never mistake his voice for somebody else's. It could only be him.

Rylan stood over me, his eyes wide, his face pale. "What... happened?" My voice was little more than a rasp, my throat dry and scratchy.

Even though I couldn't say it for sure, it appeared it had already been hours since I last saw the sunlight.

"They... they ambushed you," he said, his voice shaking. "The guards finally broke it up, but they took their time. I think Vance paid them off."

He thinks? I thought, finding his words amusing. It was pretty evident that they were paid off.

Then, I nodded, wincing as the movement sent spikes of pain through my head. "Figured as much," I muttered. "How bad is it?"

Rylan bit his lip, his eyes flicking over me. He looked concerned, something I was certain he would never think about me. I thought he hated me. The incident in the shower room had really changed everything between us.

"Bad," he said softly. "You have a few broken ribs, a possible concussion, and numerous cuts and bruises. You lost a lot of blood."

That motherfucker was going to pay for what he did. I would never rest easy until he did.

I tried to sit up, but a wave of dizziness washed over me, forcing me back down. It was my blood pressure, most likely. My body just couldn't handle the current state it was in.

"Damn," I muttered. "Guess I put up more of a fight than I thought."

For Rylan, I was beginning to think I could do anything. Strange feeling. I never thought I would feel something similar for anyone. I wondered what was happening.

Rylan chuckled. This was a moment of pure bonding when we felt more connected to each other than we ever did before.

"You shouldn't have fought at all," Rylan said, worry in his voice. "You could've been killed."

I met his gaze, seeing the concern etched on his face. I didn't think he was going to be concerned for my well-being. So much changed between us.

"I couldn't let them get away with what they did to you," I said, my voice rough. "They needed to be taught a lesson."

And the thing was, I would do it all over again. There was nothing that could stop me from doing that, if it were possible.

Rylan's eyes softened, and he reached out, his hand hovering over my injured ribs before dropping back to his side. "Thank you," he whispered. "For standing up for me. I know it's not your responsibility."

I grunted, the movement sending a lance of pain through my side. It kind of was my responsibility because he was my cellmate and I couldn't let anything bad happen to him. If anything bad were to happen to him, I would be the one doing it.

"Don't thank me yet," I said, my voice strained. "I may have messed up. Vance won't let this go."

I knew he would, which was why I had to be prepared. Anything could happen again. He could show up right at this moment to finish the job.

A shadow passed over Rylan's face, his eyes darkening. "What do you mean?"

He knew what I meant, but I was still going to explain it to him. I owed him as much.

I swallowed, my throat dry. "He's not done with you, or me," I said, my voice hoarse. "He'll come after us both, probably sooner rather than later."

Rylan's eyes widened, and he bit his lip, his gaze dropping to the floor. He was worried, but he didn't need to be. I would stand between him and Vance no matter what happened.

"What are we going to do?" He asked, his voice small.

I wanted to offer him reassurance, but the truth was, I had no idea. Vance had the guards in his pocket, and his crew outnumbered us. We were cornered, and the realization settled in my gut like a stone.

I supposed I should've tried to make more friends, but it wasn't really something I did. Everywhere I was, every place I went, I never tried to befriend people.

Rylan must have sensed my defeat because he turned away, his shoulders sagging. Fucking hell, I thought. Now isn't the time to be weak.

"I'll do what I can to help you heal," he said softly. "I was a nurse before... before all this."

I nodded, grateful for his efforts, even though I knew it wouldn't be enough. I was also surprised he was a nurse. I thought he'd only been a businessman his entire life.

"Thanks," I rasped, my eyes drifting closed as exhaustion pulled me back into the darkness. I was so tired. I wished I could sleep, but even if I wasn't worried about Rylan's well-being, I still wouldn't be able to doze off, considering that Vance was still out to get me.

I drifted in and out of consciousness, my body succumbing to the pain and my battered state. For what Vance did, he was going to pay, no denying it.

Rylan tended to my wounds as best he could, cleaning my cuts, binding my ribs, and doing his best to ease my suffering. Despite our rocky initial encounter, he was still caring for me. Who would've thought this would happen one day? I certainly would have laughed if somebody had told me such a thing.

I could see the worry in his eyes, the knowledge that it might not be enough. Don't worry, pretty little omega. You are doing your best and it should be enough.

Hours blurred together, a haze of pain and feverish dreams. I woke occasionally to the sound of Rylan's voice, his soft whispers urging me to drink, to take my medication. I didn't even know he had medicine with him. I thought he didn't have anything.

He was full of surprises, it seemed.

His touch was gentle, his hands skilled as he changed my bandages, his brown eyes filled with concern. And even though there was no place for me to be thinking this, I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like if he was using his hands to touch my cock. I knew he would like it.

Through my hazy state, I felt a sense of peace, an odd calm amidst the chaos of my injuries. I groaned slightly, wishing the pain would fade away. But it wasn't going to be so easy. It wasn't going anywhere at the moment.

Rylan's presence soothed me, his quiet strength a balm to my battered body and soul. I would probably be dead right now without him.

No matter how much he was helping me, the undercurrent of danger remained, a constant reminder that our respite was fleeting. As long as we were in this prison, we would always be in danger.

After what appeared to be six hours later, I woke to the sound of raised voices. My eyes flickered open, my vision blurry but adjusting to see Rylan arguing with one of the guards.

He had some backbone in him, it appeared. I never thought I would see that day that would happen. It surprised me so much that I felt pride. Rylan might have learned a few things from me.

"You have to help him!" Rylan's voice was laced with desperation. "He needs proper medical attention!"

It wasn't even needed to be said. Just by looking at me, one could tell that I needed a doctor, or maybe several.

The guard, a burly man with a scar across his cheek, shook his head, his expression indifferent. I knew who he was. He wasn't friendly towards me. To be honest, he probably hated me so much he wanted to kill me himself.

"Not my problem," he said callously. "He brought it on himself."

"But he'll die if he doesn't get help!" Rylan's voice cracked, his eyes pleading. "And if somebody dies here, it will be on you."

He had a point. It was a very good one. The guard didn't like me, but he didn't want more trouble than he already had, and my death would add a lot more to the pile.

The guard sighed, his gaze flicking to me with a hint of reluctance. "Fine," he relented. "But only because you asked, Nightfang. You've got a way with words."

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Rylan

Something began to happen after Mateo was saved. I was relieved. He was saved because of me. Without him, I didn't know what would have happened. Probably not anything good. I didn't think I would ever feel this way about him, but here I was and this was what I thought about him. I actually couldn't imagine my life without him. I chuckled just thinking about that. So much had changed.

I began to have dreams about me and him. They started not long after Mateo's fight with Vance. Something was connected to it, but I didn't know what it was. Not to mention, it didn't matter what it was. What mattered was that I was having those dreams and it could only mean one thing — something that made me equally terrified and excited at the same time.

The dreams were vivid, haunting my sleep and lingering in my mind long after I woke. Every time I woke up, I felt like I had just finished running a marathon. And, I also had to lie to Mateo about them. I didn't want him asking me questions regarding what I was dreaming about.

In those dreams, Mateo and I were different, free from the confines of the prison walls. It was crazy and unbelievable. After spending so much time in the prison, I actually couldn't imagine myself living anywhere else. I knew I'd had a job and hobbies before all this, but they might as well have happened in another life and I was reborn into the person I was today.

Mateo and I ran through forests, our wolf forms graceful and powerful, the moon guiding our path. We could be ourselves. We could be anything we wanted. We could

transform and be the wolves we were.

In one particular dream, we stood atop a cliff, the wind ruffling our fur. The view was spectacular. I could keep looking at it for the rest of my life.

Mateo turned to me, his golden eyes glowing in the moonlight. "We are meant to be, Rylan," he said, his voice deep and rumbling. "You are my fated mate."

I shivered as his words resonated within me, stirring something deep in my soul. Somehow, as much as I didn't think it was possible, I knew he was right. There had to be a reason why we were put together in the prison.

"I know," I whispered, my own eyes reflecting the moon's silvery light. "You are mine as well."

I was different in the dream. I felt like I knew everything and wasn't uncertain about anything. I know he was my fated mate and I was happy we were together. But it was just a dream and not reality.

He stepped closer, his presence overwhelming, yet comforting. Some things about him never changed. I felt the same way in real life.

"Then let us be what we are meant to be," he said, his voice a low purr. "Let us embrace our bond."

I wanted him to say the same thing in real life, but he never would. He saved me and recently was becoming more friendly towards me, but it still didn't mean anything. When we were out of here, he wouldn't seek me out.

I felt a pull, an irresistible force drawing me to him. I shouldn't be feeling this and yet, here it was. It was a weird feeling, but my body welcomed it.

Our bodies moved as one, our muzzles touching gently, our tails entwined. I had always imagined that happening. It was something I had always wanted to do.

A rush of warmth spread through me, a sense of completion, as if a missing piece of my soul had finally been found. Could it really be? Could it really be that he was the one meant to be with me for the rest of my life?

The dream ended there, leaving me awake, my heart pounding, my skin tingling with the memory of Mateo's touch. I lay in the darkness of our cell, my eyes fixed on his sleeping form.

This time, differently from before, I woke up happy I was still here. I was fearful it was all nothing more than a nightmare. It wasn't. I was here and he was with me.

Mateo stirred, a soft grunt escaping his lips, and I wondered if he, too, was haunted by dreams of us. If he were, it would explain everything. My suspicion would be confirmed.

As the days turned into weeks, the dreams persisted, each one more vivid than the last. I was glad they didn't stop. If they had, it would mean he wasn't my fated mate. I didn't know what I would do if that had happened.

In our dreams, we spent so much time together, our connection growing stronger with each passing night. We hunted together, played, and simply existed as the wolves we were meant to be.

Our lives were so much better. We didn't have to worry about anything. The only thing we thought about was what we were going to do next time we had sex.

During the day, Mateo and I rarely spoke of the dreams. We didn't know much about what the other was going through. Despite spending so much time together, we didn't

have much intimacy.

What was happening was kind of like an unspoken agreement — we acknowledged what we were going through was something we were still figuring out.

We went about our routine, our interactions marked by a newfound tension, a subtle awareness of the bond that existed between us.

It was not welcomed. It was very simple why it was like that. We didn't want to feel even more tense about each other. It just wasn't fair.

One afternoon, as we sat in our usual spot in the prison yard, Mateo turned to me, his eyes intense. "The dreams," he said, his voice low. "They're not just dreams, are they?"

I shook my head, my heart pounding in my chest. My body began to sweat. I didn't expect him to start talking about that. I thought we would keep ignoring our dreams until they stopped happening. But, it wasn't going to happen that way. Not anymore.

"No," I whispered. "They're real. They feel real, at least."

I knew I would have to admit that one day. It was happening today, apparently. This felt like another dream. It didn't feel real and yet, it was.

Mateo nodded, his eyes never leaving mine. It was as though he was looking right into my soul. Maybe he really was. Maybe it was his special power.

"They're more than real," he said, his voice rough. "They are telling us what we really feel about each other."

I swallowed, my throat dry. I knew he was telling me the truth. I kind of just didn't

want the change. I knew it was going to be significant.

"I know," I said, my voice barely above a breath. "And I know that's exactly what's happening."

He searched my eyes as if seeking confirmation. And, he found it. It actually wasn't hard to find it. It was pretty much written all over my face.

"We're fated, you and I," he said, his voice soft but steady.

I knew what he was thinking. He was thinking it was impossible, that it shouldn't be happening. It challenged so much about what he knew.

After hearing his words, I nodded, my eyes dropping to the ground, unable to meet his intense gaze. He couldn't even blink. That was how much all of this affected him.

"I know," I murmured. "It scares me." I took a deep breath in, considering my next words. "I didn't want to say that, but it's exactly how I feel about it."

He reached out, his hand closing around my wrist, his touch sending a shiver through me. Who would've ever thought he could be gentle? He was a beast of a man, muscles on top of muscles, and so big that his body challenged reality itself.

He chuckled and I knew he was going to say something that was going to resonate with me. "It scares me too," he admitted. "But it's what we have between us and we can't change it."

I looked up, meeting his gaze, and saw a mixture of emotions swirling in the depths of his eyes: fear, uncertainty, and something else I couldn't quite name.

Who could have ever thought he could look exposed? If somebody had told me

before he was going to be behaving this way with me, I wouldn't have believed him.

"What do we do?" I asked, my voice shaking.

It was a very good question. I didn't know what we were going to do. I was hoping he was going to guide me and illuminate me.

He squeezed my wrist, his thumb brushing against my skin and I noticed, again, how calloused his hand was. "We accept it," he said, his voice firm. "If there's something I learned after spending so much time with you, it's that I want to spend more time with you. Nothing wrong with that. And I know you feel the same way. Why keep lying about it? Why keep pretending it's not happening?"

I wanted to argue, to deny the inevitability of our connection. But deep down, I knew he was right.

It was crazy how we were going from hating each other to doing something that meant we were going to spend the rest of our lives together. It was a lot to take in. It made my head feel dizzy.

And I knew this was right. Our dreams were more than just fantasies; they were a reflection of the soul-deep connection that existed between us.

The moment hung between us, thick with anticipation. I felt Mateo's gaze on me, his eyes burning with a fierce intensity. My heart hammered in my chest, my breath coming in short, rapid gasps. I knew what was about to happen, and yet, I was utterly unprepared for it.

He closed the distance between us, his steps slow and deliberate. I felt his presence, his warmth, as he stood mere inches away. I could sense his hesitation, his own internal struggle as he grappled with the enormity of what this moment meant.

Our eyes met, holding each other captive, conveying a thousand unspoken words. I saw the desire in his gaze, the same longing that burned within me. My lips parted slightly, my breath catching as I awaited his next move.

And then, ever so slowly, he leaned in. I felt his breath mingle with mine, his lips hovering just a hair's breadth away. My heart stuttered, my entire body thrumming with anticipation.

Our lips touched, softly at first, like a whisper, a question asked and answered in the same breath. It was gentle, tentative, as if we were both afraid to fully embrace the intensity of what we felt.

But as the moment stretched on, something shifted. The kiss deepened, our lips pressing together more firmly, our mouths molding to one another. I felt the soft caress of his tongue against mine, a silent invitation that I eagerly accepted.

The kiss ignited a fire within me, a rush of desire that spread through my veins like wildfire.

Later, we went about our routine, our interactions marked by a newfound awareness of what lay between us. There was still so much to be resolved between us, but for now, we were at peace we accepted this new reality.

The fragile peace we had found was about to be shattered, though. I knew something bad was going to happen. I had this gut feeling that something was going to challenge us, but I didn't fear it. I was prepared for whatever it was going to be.

It was Vance. He and his crew ambushed me in the hallway, their faces twisted with malicious intent. Even after Mateo made it pretty clear he was protecting me, they still didn't give up on me. They had an obsession with me.

"Thought you could get away with that little display in the yard, did you?" Vance sneered, his eyes cold. "Well, we're here to remind you of your place, omega."

I tried to back away, my heart pounding, but they had me cornered. They thought this through, no denying it. If Mateo didn't show up, they were going to beat me up and possibly kill me.

I felt their hands grab me, rough and calloused, their touches invasive. I remembered their touches when we were in the shower room that time, sometime after I was put in prison. It was abhorrent.

I struggled, but they were too strong, their numbers overwhelming. There were so many of them. It felt like they were everywhere.

"Let him go!" Mateo's voice boomed, cutting through the hallway. Relief washed over me. Especially after confirming we were fated mates, he was always around. Just like so many times before, he was going to protect me.

He stood at the end of the hall, his body tense, his eyes flashing with anger. He wanted to kill all of them. If they didn't put up a fight, that's exactly what would happen, and I would be overjoyed.

Vance smirked, his gaze flicking to Mateo. "Looks like your little omega's in trouble again, Solstice. You sure you wanna keep protecting him?"

He didn't even have to answer that question. Of course that was exactly what he was going to do. There was no denying it.

He advanced, his steps purposeful. "Back off, Vance. I won't warn you again."

But given what happened last time they brawled, Vance wasn't going to fear what

Mateo might do. If worse came to worst, I would step up and get involved in the fight.

Vance laughed, a cruel, mirthless sound. "Or what? You'll beat me up? You're in no shape for a fight, Solstice. Looks like your little omega's on his own."

But that wasn't true. Mateo was actually in much better shape than Vance gave him credit for. He was strong. Even though he wasn't at 100%, he could still beat up most people in prison. He could still take on several inmates at the same time.

I struggled against their hold, my heart pounding. I wished I could do something, but I was so weak. I hated myself for being that way.

"Stop!" I shouted, my voice cracking. "Please, just leave him alone!"

It kind of happened without me thinking about it at least a couple times. I was so worried for Mateo. I didn't want him to get hurt. I knew he was going to be okay, but... I still couldn't help but feel concerned.

Vance's eyes narrowed, his gaze flicking between us. "Oh, so now you're begging for him, omega? How pathetic."

I felt a surge of anger, a protective instinct rising within me. How dare he! Just because I was worried for my alpha, it didn't mean it was pathetic. If anything, it showed my strength.

"He's my mate," I said, the words tumbling out before I could stop them. "My fated mate."

Vance stilled, his eyes widening in surprise. He thought there were so many things going on between me and Mateo, but he never considered the possibility of me

having found the person who was going to be with me for the rest of my life. It surprised him. It shocked him, to say the least.

He turned to Mateo, a mixture of emotions flashing across his face. "Is this true, Solstice? You and this omega?"

There was something very truthful about my statement and yet, he still couldn't believe it. Not without Mateo's confirmation, he couldn't.

Mateo stood tall, his eyes fixed on me. "It's true," he said, his voice steady. "He's mine, and you will never touch him again."

For a moment, Vance said nothing, his eyes darting between us. I thought he was still going to try to hurt me, but then, he laughed, a bitter sound coming out of his mouth. "Well, well. Looks like I underestimated you both. A fated pair, huh? Guess that explains your obsession with the little omega."

It actually explained a lot more than that, but I didn't say anything. The less I said right now, the better it was.

Mateo took a step forward, his body coiled, ready to strike. "You'll pay for what you did to him," he growled. "And I won't stop until you're begging for mercy."

Despite that only increasing the danger between us, I liked it. He was overprotective of me and that was something I had always wanted from someone I was dating.

Vance's crew shifted, their eyes darting between us, uncertainty flashing in their gazes. He didn't know what he should do. When he saw me, he thought he was going to finish what he started, but after finding out that Mateo and I were meant to be together, his plans changed.

He held up a hand, signaling for them to stand down. Wait, what? I didn't think he was going to do that at all. I was so shocked it was like the world around us didn't exist anymore.

"Fine," he said, sounding annoyed. "You two are more trouble than you're worth. Consider this a truce."

My eyes widened. I thought he didn't even know what the word "truce" meant.

With that, he turned and walked away, his crew following suit. It didn't matter what he did. Those people were always going to be with him.

I stood there, shaking, Mateo's protective presence at my side. He had already closed the distance between us. He knew I felt vulnerable after Vance threatened me, so he was right here, right by my side, making sure I felt better, and I did.

I also felt a rush of emotions: happiness, gratitude, and something more—a sense of connection to the alpha wolf at my side. I realized not too long ago that because we admitted we were meant to be together, he always completed me. He always made me feel that, no matter where we were, we would always be happy.

Without a word, Mateo pulled me into his arms, his embrace possessive and comforting all at once. I felt his bodily warmth and it was so good. He made me breathe easier.

I continued willingly, my body molding against his, our bond strengthening with each passing moment. And his arms around my body gave me everything else I needed.

I felt his lips descend on mine, his kiss gentle yet passionate. It wasn't our first kiss. Far from it, but it was different because we had just resolved something that had been bothering us so much. Vance wasn't a problem anymore.

The guards intervened, their whistles piercing the moment. I knew something was going to stop us. Nothing could be perfect in this prison. As long as we were here, we would never be able to do the things we wanted. We had to get out.

"None of that!" One of them shouted, his face twisted in disgust. Jeez, was he jealous? "No fraternizing between inmates!"

I chuckled. Mateo and I had been doing so much more than just fraternizing.

The guards pulled us apart, their hands rough as they separated us. They didn't have to be like that with us. They only had to ask.

Still, I felt a pang of loss as Mateo's lips left mine, the connection between us severed abruptly. I knew we were going to be kissing each other very soon, but I still didn't want this to happen.

"You two will be spending some time in solitary," the guard said, his tone cold. "Maybe that'll teach you to keep your hands to yourselves."

Wait, what? This shouldn't be happening. We were only kissing and not doing anything more egregious. What the fuck? This was so weird.

We were marched down the hallway, our eyes locked, and there was so much we wanted to say to each other. I felt a sense of dread as I realized what awaited us: solitary confinement, separated from each other, our bond strained by the distance.

This was not fair! I didn't think I would have to do this, but it was time to put a desperate plan into motion. It might not work, but it was better than nothing. Otherwise, Mateo and I would remain separated.

It was all or nothing at this point. Anything for my alpha.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Mateo

I stood in my cell, looking out, sitting on the bed, and seeing that nothing was happening outside of my cell. I didn't think there was going to be anything happening, but I was still surprised. I thought that there were going to be at least a few people passing by my cell, but nothing was going on. Absolutely nothing. I was alone in my cell.

I thought about Rylan. He had spent so much time with me only to be separated from me. Still, even though we were so far from each other, we could feel each other. I could still feel as though he was touching me right now, even though he wasn't.

I knew that whatever he was doing, he was still thinking about me. Perhaps that was the reason why I felt as if he were right here with me.

The prison guards thought they could keep us separated, but it was never going to be so easy.

Looking up and focusing on the ceiling, I still thought of him and could picture him in front of me.

With me still thinking about that, a prison guard showed up. He appeared in front of my cell. I could barely see through the small window in the door, but I still knew his eyes were looking at me through it. He held a key in his hand.

The dirty smile on his face told me everything. I had always known that everyone hated me, but the way he was looking at me... It was pretty obvious he wanted to see

me hurt.

Despite everything, he wasn't really getting what he wanted. No matter how broad his smile was, I could tell he wasn't happy. He wasn't seeing what he wanted.

He would rather see me crying and being desperate, but that wasn't what I was doing. I was anything but desperate. I knew there was hope and, for me, Rylan would do anything.

Some people might have said it was telepathy, but it wasn't. I knew he was cooking up something and when it was done, he would save me. I had done the saving before and now he was going to do the same for me.

That was one of the reasons I knew he was my fated mate.

"Quite the predicament you've landed yourself in, Solstice," he said, a smirk playing at his lips. Of course he came here to mock me. Despite everything, he still wanted his little fun with me. "Your little omega won't be too happy about this, will he?"

I glared at him, my hands clenching into fists at my sides. My omega wasn't happy about this, but it wasn't about him. Don't involve him in this.

"You have no idea what you're dealing with," I growled. "Touch him, and you'll regret it." And he could tell I was being serious about it. No matter how much he wanted to think he didn't fear me, he still did.

The guard laughed, the sound echoing in my ears. "Oh, I know exactly what you are, Solstice. A pair of fated wolves, bound by some cosmic force. It's almost... romantic." His tone was laced with sarcasm, his eyes gleaming with malicious amusement.

He knew it was true. He knew it happened, but he still cared little about it. He knew he would never feel something similar.

I took a menacing step forward, my eyes narrowing. "You touch a hair on his head, and I'll rip your throat out," I snarled. Considering everything at stake, I wasn't afraid of the possible consequences resulting from that. "You have no idea what I would feel for him."

I really thought I would never say something like that about anyone, much less my cellmate.

The guard's smirk faltered, a hint of uncertainty flashing in his eyes. He didn't think I was going to feel so angry. He couldn't even start to grasp what I felt for Rylan.

"Well, well. Someone's protective," he said, recovering his composure. And yet, as much as he tried to show me he didn't care, I knew it wasn't what was really going on. "But it won't matter soon. You'll both be out of here and then what?"

My heart stuttered at his words. And then what? We would live out our lives. That was what would happen. It was that simple.

"What do you mean, "out of here"?" I immediately asked, my voice sharp. His answer confused me. "You're not planning something, are you?"

If he was planning something, he would regret it soon.

The guard's eyes glinted with a mixture of amusement and something else — a hint of fear. As much as he tried it, he couldn't shake it off.

"Not me," he said, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "But let's just say, someone wants you both out. Seems your little omega has some powerful

connections.”

My mind raced, trying to make sense of his words. Wait, what happened? I knew that Rylan was important, but did he really manage to pull that off? I didn’t think he would ever be able to do such a thing.

My thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of another guard, his face stern, his eyes hard. Something vital was about to ensue and I wanted to know exactly what it was.

”Solstice, you’re being released,” he said, his tone clipped. I could tell he didn’t want to be doing this. ”Get your things and come with me.”

The first guard sputtered, clearly caught off guard. ”What? But I thought—” And here I thought I was the one most surprised by this turn of events.

The second guard cut him off with a sharp glance. ”Not your concern,” he said, his voice cold. ”Just do your job and let us handle this.”

The first guard scowled, his eyes narrowing. He didn’t want to let it go. He wanted to make sure his buddy wasn’t hallucinating or something of the sort.

”Fine,” he muttered. ”But mark my words, this isn’t over. Solstice, you haven’t heard the last of me.”

I ignored his threat, my mind reeling from the news of my release. For me, that was the most important thing. The guard threatening me didn’t matter.

I gathered my meager possessions, my heart pounding with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation. I didn’t think I was going to be released so soon. It felt like this wasn’t happening at all.

And what awaited me on the outside? And what of Rylan? Was he truly responsible for this turn of events? I had to find out. I had to ask him everything gnawing at my mind.

As I stepped out of the cell, my eyes scanned the hallway, searching for a familiar face. I was hoping to find Rylan somewhere, but I didn't see him.

The second guard gestured for me to follow, his expression impassive. He just wanted to get this over with and nothing more. I could almost feel for him.

We navigated the prison's corridors, my heart hammering in my chest with each step that took me further from Rylan.

This was it. My final minutes in this prison. I could hardly believe this turn of events. And, it seemed, all because of Rylan.

Finally, we reached the main entrance, the heavy metal doors looming before us. I had seen this part of the prison before, when I was put here, and it happened so quickly I didn't remember much.

The guard halted, his hand on the door. "Here," he said, his voice devoid of emotion. "You're free to go."

I hesitated, my eyes narrowing. I had to ask about Rylan. I knew he was waiting for me somewhere.

"What about Rylan?" I asked, my voice tight. Truth be told, I didn't even know if the guard remembered his name and who he was. It was a shot in the dark. "Is he being released too?"

Without him being released, I wouldn't go anywhere. Everyone here knew that.

The guard's eyes flickered, a hint of something — regret, perhaps? — flashing in their depths. Could it be that he had lied? Could it be that Rylan hadn't been released after all? Worry gnawed at me.

"He's already been taken care of," he said, his tone final. "Now go."

I wanted to demand more answers, to understand what was really going on, but something in the guard's demeanor warned me against it.

It didn't help that he wasn't clear in his answer, either. I didn't know what to make of it. He could have meant anything.

With a final glance back at the prison's imposing walls, I stepped out into the blinding sunlight, my heart pounding with a mixture of anticipation and unease.

Who could have thought I was going to be feeling this way about being released? Nobody could ever have convinced me I was going to be feeling this way about it.

And there, standing just beyond the prison gates, was Rylan. My heart skipped a beat. I had really thought he wasn't going to be anywhere around here. I thought he was still in his solitary cell, feeling more desperate with each passing second.

His eyes widened at the sight of me, his face lighting up with a mixture of relief and joy. Just like me, he didn't know it was going to work. He didn't know, until now, he was going to see me again.

He rushed forward, his steps faltering as he reached me, his arms wrapping around my waist, his head burying in my chest. I thought he was going to trip and fall over. Thankfully, that didn't happen. I would have done anything to prevent it, anyway.

I held him, my arms coming around him instinctively, my heart swelling with

emotions I couldn't begin to name. I was thinking about so many things and most of them were good.

"You did it," I murmured, my lips brushing his hair. "You got us out."

He pulled back, his eyes shining with unshed tears. And, he was surprised I knew. I could tell that just by looking at his eyes.

"I had help," he said softly, his voice thick with emotion. "It doesn't matter now. We're free, Mateo. That's all that matters."

I searched his eyes, seeing the truth in them. Whatever he had done, whoever had helped him, it was a risk, a gamble that had paid off. But I knew Rylan, and I sensed there was more to the story, something he wasn't telling me.

I couldn't help but wonder what it was. Would he tell me? Did it matter at the moment? Yeah, it kind of did, but I also didn't want to sour the moment with questions about that.

I wanted to press him for answers, to understand the full extent of what he had done. But in that moment, seeing the relief and joy on his face, I really couldn't bring myself to ruin it. So, I simply nodded, my hands cupping his cheeks, and I kissed him, pouring all the gratitude and emotion I couldn't put into words into that kiss.

As much as part of me was begging me not to do that, I still couldn't do it, so I ignored it. I wasn't one to worry about something all the time and it wasn't going to be different now.

Rylan kissed me back, his arms tightening around me, his body pressing against mine. It was pretty obvious what he was telling me. He was telling me we were going to be together for a long time and I welcomed it.

Our kiss was filled with relief, joy, and something more — a promise of what awaited us beyond those prison walls. I was already forming so many plans.

We pulled apart, our gazes locked, our breaths coming in short gasps. That was hot. Oh, so hot. I could have kept on doing it for hours on end.

”Take me home,” Rylan whispered, his eyes shining with a mixture of desire and something more. ”My home. Tonight, we’re going to sleep well.”

I nodded, my hands still cupping his cheeks. First time going to see his home and I was excited, to say the least. What did it look like? I could only wonder — for now.

”Your wish is my command, little omega,” I said, my voice low and rough. I wanted to take him to his home as soon as possible, to claim him, and make him mine. Those things were all going to happen now.

And so, we went there. Rylan’s penthouse apartment was a far cry from the stark prison cell I had just left behind. Even though it was only a few hours after I left that place for good, it already felt as though all those things happened in another life.

The spacious living area was bathed in soft, natural light, the furnishings elegant and comfortable. It was such a cozy place. I could imagine myself spending hours here, not doing anything worthwhile, just enjoying myself.

My eyes widened as I took in the luxurious surroundings, a stark contrast to the harsh reality of prison life. I felt so much lighter being here. I knew that having a lot of money was good, but I didn’t think it could be so much so. I wished I had saved up more money before I was locked up.

Rylan led me further inside, his hand in mine, his touch warm and arousing. I knew what he was thinking and I was thinking the same thing.

"This is it," he said softly, his eyes flicking to me, gauging my reaction. "Home."

I nodded, my gaze taking in the opulence around me. Indeed, this was home. It was the best place for both of us.

It was a world away from the life I knew, a world of wealth and privilege that was foreign to me. When I was actively working for the cartel, I didn't have as much luxury as what I was seeing.

But in that moment, all I could think about was claiming what was mine. I could only think about Rylan, and I knew he could only think about me as well. We were two halves of the same shared love.

I turned to him, my eyes burning with intensity. "You," I said, my voice rough. "You are mine. Now and forever."

He shivered at my words, his eyes darkening with desire. He didn't feel hesitant about going on with this. He really wanted it as much as I did. "Yours," he whispered, his lips parting as he breathed the word.

And, God, the way he said it was so sexy. I wanted him to say it again, over and over. I wanted him to keep saying it until I was tired of hearing it.

I crushed my lips to his, my arms tightening around him, my need for him overwhelming. I pressed his body against mine as tightly as possible. I didn't want to stop doing that for anything.

Our kisses were hungry, desperate, as if we were starving for each other. And, we might as well have been feeling that way. We actually didn't spend so much time away from each other, but it had still been enough to hurt us.

I backed him against a wall, my hands roaming his body, mapping every curve, every dip and hollow. His skin was soft and his body was ready for my touch.

Rylan's hands were just as eager, tugging at my shirt, his lips trailing down my neck, his teeth nipping at the sensitive skin there. He wanted all of me without anything being in the way. I certainly felt the same way.

I groaned, my hands fumbling with the buttons of his shirt, needing to feel his skin against mine. I was desperate. I could barely wait.

The fabric slid away, baring his chest, his skin smooth and pale. He was so pretty, especially in this place. He was already an eye candy when we were in prison, but here... Here his beauty was but potentialized.

I leaned down, my lips tasting the salty sweetness of his skin, my tongue tracing patterns that made him shiver. He pressed his body against mine, needing more of me.

Rylan's hands slid down my back, his fingers deftly undoing my pants. I felt them moving, exploring every part of me. His desperation showed.

I stepped back, kicking my pants away, my eyes never leaving his. I glanced at my pants and thought I would never wear them again.

I wanted to savor Rylan, to explore every inch of his body, but the need burning within me demanded more. And, I didn't even know if it was possible to have more. There was only so much of him I could have.

I lifted the omega, my hands under his knees and shoulders, and carried him to the nearby bedroom. I could actually do what I was going to do anywhere. It didn't have to be his bedroom. I only took him there because it was the closest to us.

The room was bathed in soft, golden light, the bed large and inviting. It was such a good place for us. It was perfect. It was like it had been made for us.

I laid him down, my body covering his, our gazes locked, our breaths coming in short gasps. He could only see me. He didn't even dare to glance at the sides of us. What was happening out of our bubble didn't matter.

I kissed him, my hands roaming his body, my touch possessive, claiming every inch of him as mine. It was different this time, and it was possibly like that thanks to us being in such a cozy place.

Rylan arched beneath me, his hands tangling in my hair, his legs wrapping around my waist, pulling me closer. He knew what he wanted and couldn't let go of it.

I wanted to take my time, to explore every inch of his body, but the need was too great. I thought I was going to do this slowly, but I couldn't.

I broke away from his lips, my mouth trailing down his neck, my teeth nipping at the sensitive skin there, earning a soft moan from him, and it stayed with me.

"Please," he whispered, his hands threading through my hair. "I love you so much." And those words were like music to my ears.

They sent a jolt through me, a confirmation of the bond that demanded completion. I wanted to give him pleasure, to see him unravel beneath my touch. I was already imagining that happening, and I knew he was thinking the same thing.

My hands slid down his body, my fingers ghosting over his erection, earning a sharp intake of breath from him. His body was so warm and he was sweating a lot.

I wanted to taste him, to feel him on my tongue. And, there was no time to waste and

no reason to do so. Thinking that, I kissed a path down his chest, my lips and tongue leaving a wet trail as I went. Rylan arched his back, his hands gripping the bedsheets, his breath coming in short, sharp gasps. He groaned a lot under my touch, needing more of me.

I took him into my mouth, my tongue swirling, my lips tight around him. He tasted so good. I didn't want to stop what I was doing no matter what happened.

Rylan cried out, his hips bucking off the bed, his hands tangling in my hair, guiding me. I was dictating what should happen, but he also had his input and it was welcomed.

I hollowed my cheeks, sucking hard, wanting to draw out his pleasure, to hear him cry out my name. And, it was working. He was on the verge of doing that.

It didn't take long for him to reach his peak, his body tensing, his hands tightening in my hair as he cried out my name, his come spilling down my throat. I savored the taste of him, my wolf reveling in how this moment was unraveling.

And, I also swallowed down everything. I didn't want to waste a single drop.

I kissed my way back up his body, my lips claiming his once more. Rylan's taste still lingered on my tongue, our kiss passionate and deep. He didn't mind the extra spice. If anything, he enjoyed the kiss even more than if it was happening without it.

I wanted to mark him forever as mine even more than he already was, to leave an indelible sign that proclaimed him as my mate.

I broke away, my eyes burning with intensity as I gazed down at him. He had difficulty breathing, his chest heaving.

"You have just one thing to say and you know what it is," I growled, my voice rough. "Say it."

He met my gaze, his eyes dark and hazy with desire. "I'm yours, Mateo," he whispered, his voice thick with need. "Always and forever."

Ah, those were the words I wanted him to say and he said them without even thinking twice about it. It was exactly what he was thinking this entire time.

His words sent a rush of possessiveness through me, my wolf stirring within. I growled, feeling possessive and my hands roaming over his body. He squirmed underneath my touch, letting me do anything I wanted.

There was only one way to go on with this, only one way to mark him as mine forever. Without doing it, this wouldn't feel complete.

I positioned myself between his legs, my hands gripping his thighs, spreading him open for me. Rylan's eyes widened, a mixture of anticipation and nervousness flashing in their depths.

"Relax, little omega," I murmured, my voice low and soothing. "I'll take care of you."

He didn't need to worry about what I was going to do. I was going to take care of him just like I was supposed to. If there was something he should be certain about, it was that I would always keep him protected.

He nodded, his hands gripping the bedsheets as I lined myself up with his entrance. He spread himself for me willingly and accepted me without hesitancy.

With a slow, steady pressure, I pushed inside, feeling the resistance give way as I

sank into him, our bodies joining as one. He was warm and tight, just as I had imagined he was.

Rylan gasped, his back arching off the bed, his fingers digging into my arms. I knew I was big, but I didn't think his reaction was going to be like that. I liked it.

I stilled, giving him a moment to adjust to my size, his body stretching to accommodate me. He opened himself up as much as possible for me and it was barely enough.

"You okay?" I asked, my voice rough, my body throbbing with the need to move. I would only go on if he said he was okay. Otherwise, I would try something different.

He nodded, his eyes fluttering open, his gaze locking with mine. "Go on," he whispered, his voice hoarse. "Please." And, given the look on his face, he didn't have to tell me twice.

So, I did as he asked, pulling out slowly before thrusting back in, setting a steady rhythm. At the start, I was careful, but I quickly gained confidence in what I was doing. The next time we did this, I would already know how fast and hard I could thrust inside him.

Rylan moaned, his legs wrapping around my waist, his body moving with mine, our skin slapping together with each thrust. My hands roamed over his body, his skin shining with sweat.

I leaned down, my lips capturing his in a passionate kiss, our tongues tangling as our bodies moved in perfect sync. Rylan's hands roamed my back, his nails scratching lightly, sending shivers down my spine. He could keep his hands there for as long as he wanted and I wouldn't mind it.

The pace quickened, our breaths coming in short, sharp gasps, our bodies slick with sweat as we moved together, our bond strengthening with each thrust. He thrust back against me, matching my movements. I didn't know it could feel so good.

Rylan's fingers tightened in my hair, his hips still meeting my thrusts even though he was having difficulty doing it, his body arching off the bed as he approached his climax.

"That's it, little omega," I growled, my voice rough. "Come for me." And I knew I didn't have to say it again.

His body tightened around me, his release coating my stomach as he cried out my name, his eyes shining with a mixture of pleasure and something more — the depth of our bond reflected in his gaze.

I thrust into him a few more times, approaching my climax, my wolf howling within me, demanding that I knot him — and he didn't need to worry. Of course I was going to do it.

With a final, deep thrust, I spilled myself into him, our bodies joined in the most strengthening way, our bond sealed with the exchange. After it was over, we knew that nothing could ever separate us more than ever before.

I collapsed onto him, my body spent, my heart pounding in my chest. His chest heaved and his body was slick with his sweat.

Rylan's arms tightened around me, his lips brushing my hair, his breath warm against my skin. He didn't want me to go anywhere and I wasn't going to. I didn't have any reason to do that.

"Mateo," he whispered, his voice soft and content. "We're finally together."

I nuzzled into his neck, my arms tightening around him. "Together," I murmured, my voice rough with emotion. "Nothing can tear us apart now. That word means so much to me."

We lay entwined, our breaths evening out, our hearts slowing to a steady rhythm. Despite the rocky start when we met each other, we were at peace with our lives.

The love between us pulsed, a warm, comforting presence that soothed my battered soul. I exhaled loudly, pushing out any remnants of tension in me.

As the reality of our newly acquired freedom and our completed bond sank in, I felt an even greater sense of peace wash over me. Here, in Rylan's arms, I was finally home.

I was thinking it didn't matter where we were. Of course, it was better to be in his penthouse, but as long as we were wrapped around each other's arms, we would always feel we were home.

We must have dozed off because I woke to the soft glow of sunset filtering through the bedroom window. God, how many hours passed? Probably too many. I felt like I made up for all the time I couldn't sleep well in my cell.

Rylan stirred beside me, his eyes fluttering open, a soft smile curving his lips as he took in my presence. He probably realized, yet again, that it wasn't all a dream and that this was happening for real.

"Hey," he murmured, his voice soft and sleepy.

I brushed a stray lock of hair from his eyes, my fingers lingering on his cheek. "Hey yourself," I said. "How are you feeling?"

He stretched, his body molding against mine, a contented sigh escaping his lips. He moved against me, putting his arm around me and pulling me closer to him.

"Better than I have in a long time," he said softly, his eyes searching mine. "Safe. Loved. And, most importantly, with you."

My heart clenched at his words, a smile gracing my lips. "You're stuck with me now, little omega," I said, my voice gentle, and of course, also joking. "Whether you like it or not."

He smiled, his eyes shining with a mixture of love and something more — a hint of the future we would build together. He also chuckled after hearing what I said.

"Forever," he whispered, his fingers tracing patterns on my chest. I could tell he was already imagining what our life was going to be like. I was also wondering the same thing, and I had a feeling it was going to be good. Just a feeling, though? No, it was more like I just knew it was going to be.

I kissed Rylan softly, my lips lingering on his. He kissed back, his lips moist and warm, just like I liked them.

"Forever," I agreed. "Now, what do you say we order some food? I'm starving." My stomach rumbled.

He laughed, the sound warm and joyful. "I could eat," he said. "And then maybe we can talk about our future. Our family."

It wasn't too early to talk about that. If anything, now was the right time.

And I smiled, my heart warming after hearing him say that. "As many children as you want, little omega," I said. "We'll build a life together, away from all this."

I was thinking we should move out of the city and go somewhere we could have all the privacy we wanted. If we had a small house far away from civilization, it would be perfect.

He nodded, his eyes clouding over for a moment before he shook his head, clearing the sudden darkness that had passed through them. Did he just think something he didn't want to share with me? No, it couldn't be that.

"Anything," he said. "I want it all with you."

I kissed him softly, my lips lingering on his, and then I smiled. "And you shall have it," I promised. "We'll make it happen, no matter what."

And that, of course, was a promise.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Rylan

The sun had set, casting a warm glow over the city skyline as Mateo and I enjoyed a quiet dinner on the penthouse balcony. The moment was peaceful and cozy. Almost every day was always like this.

The soft glow of candlelight illuminated our faces, the meal a simple yet intimate affair. He glanced at me and winked. He knew exactly what I was thinking, as I knew what he was.

It had been months since our release from prison, and the memory of those dark days had begun to fade, replaced by the warmth and comfort of our newly acquired freedom and the bond we shared.

Welcome every time I thought about it, pain flared in me. It came at a cost. I didn't want it to be like that, but it still happened that way.

Mateo reached across the table, his hand covering mine, his thumb brushing my skin gently. He was so caring to me. I was the most precious person in the world to him.

"You're quiet tonight," he said, his deep voice laced with concern. "Something on your mind, little omega?"

I offered him a soft smile, my heart warming at his tenderness. Truth be told, I didn't want to think about what I was, much less talk about it.

"Just thinking about how far we've come," I said softly, my eyes reflecting the

dancing flames of the candles. I hated I was lying, but it was for the best. "It feels like a lifetime ago that we were in that wretched prison."

Mateo's eyes darkened, a shadow passing over his features as he, too, remembered those harsh days. As much as he was better built for that kind of environment, he would rather not be there ever again. Understandable.

"It feels like a lifetime," he agreed, his voice rough. "And yet, here we are, free and together. As long as we are careful, something like that will never happen again."

I nodded, my thumb tracing patterns on the back of his hand. I could do this all day.

"I'm grateful every day," I whispered, my eyes locking with his. "For you, for our love, and for the life we're building."

He squeezed my hand, his gaze intense. "Our love will withstand any storm, little omega," he said. "Nothing can tear us apart now."

I knew he was telling me exactly what he thought and I was aware he was probably right, but I still wished I could fully believe in his words.

Later, as we finished our dinner and retired to the living room, a sense of unease settled in my chest, a weight that I couldn't quite shake. I hated it.

As if summoned by my troubled thoughts, a figure stepped out of the shadows, his presence filling the room with an air of danger and intrigue. I froze on the spot. Who was that person?

Mateo tensed beside me, his body going still, his eyes narrowing as he recognized the man. It was clear he was someone he knew. The question was: who was he exactly?

"Javier," Mateo said, his voice low and dangerous. "What are you doing here?"

And even though he didn't say it exactly, I was beginning to think I already knew who he was. He was someone we shouldn't mess up with.

Javier, a former associate of Mateo's from his cartel days, smirked, his eyes flicking between us. Whatever he was thinking, it was obvious he wasn't afraid of us.

"Solstice," he growled. "I see you've found yourself a pretty little omega."

This was probably the first time he was seeing me. I said "probably" while imagining he might have been spying on me for a long time.

Mateo's grip on my hand tightened, his body coiling, ready to face any threat this man might pose. His first instinct was to protect me, just like when we were in prison.

"What do you want, Javier?" He growled, his eyes flashing with warning. He wasn't kidding when he said he would do anything to protect me. "You know I want nothing more to do with the cartel."

And yet, he also knew it was never going to be easy. Once you were in the cartel, you either died or you killed all of them. There was no solution between those two options.

Javier's smirk widened, his eyes gleaming with a mixture of amusement and something darker — a hint of the life Mateo had left behind. He was a hardened foe. He was ready to strike against us at any moment.

"I have a proposition for you, Solstice. A chance to get back in the game."

Mateo's jaw clenched, his eyes hardening. Javier was doing that, but he already knew

the answer he was going to get. He was only doing what he was as a formality.

"I told you, Javier, I'm out. I'm not going back to that life."

Javier's gaze flicked to me, his eyes narrowing as he took in my presence. I took a step back. I didn't want him to focus on me.

"Oh, I see," he said, mocking both of us. "You've gone soft, Solstice. Love will do that to a man."

Javier had never felt loved by anyone. That was the real reason why he said what he did.

Mateo's grip on my hand tightened further, his body tense, his eyes flashing with anger. "Get out, Javier," he snarled. "Before I forget our friendship and put a bullet between your eyes."

Javier held up his hands in a placating gesture, his eyes hardening. It was obvious he didn't take his threats seriously. He was cocky.

"Fine, fine. I'll go. But think about my offer, Solstice. The cartel always has a place for a man with your skills." With a final, mocking glance in my direction, he turned and disappeared back into the shadows.

The silence that followed was heavy, the air thick with unspoken words and the weight of Mateo's past. Relief washed over me. Seriously? That was it? I thought they were going to brawl.

I turned to Mateo, my eyes searching his face, seeing the turmoil reflected in his golden gaze. He ran his hand through his hair, looking tense and anxious. I was feeling the same way.

"I'm sorry you had to see that," he said, his voice rough. "Javier was a friend once, but I made my choice. I left that life behind, and I don't intend to go back."

I nodded, my hand squeezing his, offering what comfort I could. I understood why he didn't want to talk about his past, but I would still prefer to be prepared for eventualities like the one we just dealt with.

"I know," I said softly. "And I'm proud of you for leaving that life. It couldn't have been easy." It really, really hadn't been. It was, after all, before moving in with me, the only thing he knew.

He offered me a small smile, his eyes softening. "It wasn't," he admitted. "But you gave me the strength to walk away. I would do it all over again for you, little omega."

My heart swelled at his words, the depth of his love and devotion wrapping around me like a warm blanket. Even after all this time, he still called me "little omega". It was cute and endearing.

"I know," I whispered, leaning forward to press a soft kiss to his lips. "And I love you for it."

He kissed me back, his arms tightening around me, his touch a source of comfort and safety. He washed away the terrible feelings that were beginning to surge within me. He could do that like nobody else.

But as we pulled apart, the weight of what had just transpired lingered, a reminder that Mateo's past was never far behind. Would we ever be safe? I knew we probably wouldn't.

The next few days were tense, the air between us heavy with words we didn't want to say and the knowledge that we needed to address the elephant in the room. We kept

thinking about it, but for the most part, we ignored the possibility of bringing it up in a conversation.

Mateo's encounter with Javier had brought to light the sacrifices he had made for our future, and I knew it was time to confront the truth. After all, we were planning on having babies and I wanted to make sure that our environment was going to be safe for them.

One evening, as we sat curled up on the couch, the soft glow of the fireplace casting a warm ambiance, I took a deep breath and turned to face him. I really, really didn't want to talk about this, but it couldn't be ignored anymore.

"We need to talk," I said softly, my eyes searching his. My heart was hammering in my chest. I didn't think I had ever felt so nervous before in my life.

He nodded, his eyes narrowing, knowing that this conversation wouldn't be an easy one. "I know," he said, his voice steady. "I've been waiting for this."

He was already waiting? Regardless, I took a steadying breath, my heart still pounding in my chest. It felt like no matter how much I tried to control it, it wasn't going to be enough.

The weight of the secret I carried had grown heavier with each passing day, threatening to crush me under the burden of my own deception. That was the real reason why I was doing this.

I knew I had to tell Mateo the truth about how I'd gotten us out of prison, but the words stuck in my throat, my fear of his reaction keeping me silent.

"Rylan," he said, noticing how troubled I looked. "Something's been troubling you. I can see it in your eyes. Whatever it is, you can tell me."

I took a steady breath, my heart pounding in my chest. "It's about how we got out of prison," I began, my voice shaking slightly. "I know you've been wondering, and I—"

Mateo held up a hand, his eyes flashing with a mixture of hurt and anger. I already knew I wasn't going to like his next words.

"You know I've been thinking about that?" He interrupted, his voice tight. It was obvious he didn't like this as much as I did. "You've kept me in the dark, Rylan. You've kept secrets from me."

I flinched, his words striking me like a physical blow. I knew he was right, but I was still trying to rationalize my decisions. Maybe he was right. Maybe I should've told him about what I did before.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, my eyes dropping to the table. "I never meant to keep secrets. I just—" I didn't know if there was anything I could say that could change his mind. Maybe there wasn't.

"You just what?" Mateo demanded, his voice rising. "You put us both in danger, whatever deal you made. I trusted you, Rylan. I thought we were equals."

Deal? He already knew that much? I thought he didn't know about that part.

Tears pricked at the corners of my eyes as I felt the depth of his hurt. It hurt me as much as it did him.

"We are equals," I said softly. "And I trust you, Mateo. It's myself I don't trust." And I didn't think I had said something truer about myself in a long time.

His eyes narrowed, confusion clouding his gaze. "What do you mean?"

I took a shaky breath, steeling myself to reveal the truth. My body trembled. It felt like my right hand had a life of its own.

"You're right. I really made a deal to get us out," I confessed. "I used my connections, my family's influence, to secure our release. But it came at a cost." And just thinking about it tightened my heart.

Mateo's eyes widened, his jaw clenching as he processed my words. "What cost?" He asked, his voice low and dangerous. I wished he hadn't asked me about that, but the cat was out of the bag. "What did you give them, Rylan?"

I bit my lip, my eyes filling with tears as I remembered the weight of my decision. I wished I could say I hadn't given anything, but it wasn't true.

"Everything," I whispered, my voice shaking. "Our freedom came with a price, Mateo. A price I'm afraid we'll have to pay." The clock was ticking. I knew that the more time passed, the closer we got to the moment we would have to pay the price.

He stood abruptly, his chair scraping against the floor, his eyes burning with a mixture of anger and hurt. I could feel his anger exuding from his body. That was how much he felt betrayed by me.

"Damn it, Rylan," He growled, his voice tight. "What have you done?"

I had difficulty finding the right words. My mouth opened and closed several times, and my hand clenched.

I stood as well, my hands reaching out to him, pleading for understanding. "I did what I had to," I said, my voice shaking. "I couldn't bear the thought of losing you, of being separated by bars and distance. I made a choice, for us."

The truth was, if I could go back, I would still make the same decision every time. I couldn't imagine a different outcome. What could be different was me telling him about what happened sooner.

Mateo stepped back, his eyes flashing with pain and betrayal. I wished I could touch him, hold him, but he was too far away from me.

"You made a choice for both of us?" He asked, his voice laced with accusation. "You didn't even consult me, Rylan. You went behind my back." He took a deep breath and I knew that his next words were going to hurt me more than the last ones. "To be honest, I'm mostly pissed off by the fact you didn't tell me about what happened sooner. I brushed it off in the beginning, but now... Now I want to know everything."

I shook my head, my eyes pleading with him to understand. I was going to tell him everything. He just needed to be patient with me. It was going to take time.

"I was afraid," I whispered. "Afraid of losing you, of losing us, and afraid of what your opinion would be. I made a desperate choice, but I'd do it again in a heartbeat if it meant having you by my side." There was a moment of pause. "And, I would have told you sooner."

He ran a hand through his hair, his eyes closing for a moment as he grappled with his emotions. He was pondering what he should do. I just hoped that he was going to stay with me.

"You should have trusted me," he said softly, his voice pained. "You should have told me everything sooner. I would have understood."

I nodded, my eyes stinging with tears. "I know," I whispered, my voice thick with regret. "And I'm sorry. I was scared, scared of losing you, of losing our future. I kept ignoring what I had to do. I love you so much and there is nothing that can change

that.” Another moment of pause. ”The truth is, I would always do anything for you.”

He searched my eyes, his gaze intense, searching for the truth in my words. With luck, he was going to find what he was looking for.

”Anything?” He asked, his voice rough. ”Even if it means putting us in danger?”

I shook my head immediately. ”No, of course not. I will always do what needs to be done to keep us protected and together,” I whispered, my voice breaking. ”And please, understand that I never wanted to hurt you, Mateo. I only wanted to protect what we have. I really feared that saying what I did would make you hate me.”

He was silent for a long moment, his eyes never leaving mine, his breath coming in short, sharp bursts. Tension was high. I could only wonder what he was thinking.

Finally, he nodded, his shoulders sagging as he let out a heavy breath. ”I understand,” he said softly. ”But it doesn”t make it hurt any less, Rylan. You should have told me everything sooner. It”s about trust.”

I took a step towards him, my hands reaching for his, my eyes pleading for his forgiveness. ”I know,” I whispered, my voice still shaking. The worst was over, but I still wasn”t in the clear. ”And I”m sorry. Please, forgive me, Mateo. I love you, and I can”t bear the thought of losing you.” I really couldn”t. The mere possibility of that happening tightened my heart.

He stood there, his eyes still searching mine, the conflict within him clear. Finally, he sighed, his hands reaching out to grasp mine, his thumbs brushing away the tears that escaped. That fact alone washed away most of my worries.

”I forgive you, little omega,” he said softly, his voice rough with emotion. ”But we need to face the truth. Whatever deal you made, it”s coming back to bite us. We need

to prepare.”

I nodded, my heart heavy with the knowledge that my actions had put us both in danger. I was aware that my friend, who I had betrayed, would hurt me. He hated me for what I did. That was part of the price I had to pay, after all.

”I know,” I whispered. ”And I”ll do everything in my power to keep us safe, Mateo. Whatever comes our way, we”ll face it together.”

He pulled me into his arms, his embrace a source of comfort and strength. ”Together,” he agreed, his voice steady. ”We”ll face whatever comes together.”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Mateo

The sun cast a warm glow over the city as Rylan and I stood on the sidewalk, our eyes fixed on the penthouse that had become the most important place for us. Or so I thought. The events of the past few hours had shaken me to my core, leaving me questioning everything I thought I knew about Rylan, about us.

It shouldn't be happening this way. We had so many good memories in there. I couldn't even imagine ourselves living somewhere else.

"I can't believe it's gone," Rylan whispered, his eyes wide, his hand resting protectively on his swollen belly. It reminded me of how fucked up this was. His former friend didn't give a shit about the baby. "This was our home."

"Was" was the keyword in his phrase. It wasn't anymore. We couldn't go up there anymore.

I clenched my jaw, my eyes narrowing as I took in the scene before us. I wished I could do something, but I was powerless.

The penthouse, once a symbol of our freedom and new life together, now stood as a reminder of the consequences of Rylan's actions. As much as I knew he'd meant well, I couldn't shake off the thought that this could all be happening differently if he hadn't been so rash.

"It's my fault," he continued. "I should've told you, Mateo. I should've trusted you with the truth." And, he was right. At least, about that, he was 100% right. He should

have told me everything from the start.

What happened was that he betrayed his friend and, because of that, he used his influence to take the penthouse away from us. It was petty, but it was what it was. In the end, he just wanted revenge for what Rylan did.

I blamed that asshole, but not as much as I wished I was going to. The thing I hated the most about him was that he didn't even care about the baby in Rylan's belly.

It turned out that that guy wasn't Rylan's friend after all.

I turned to Rylan, my eyes burning with anger and hurt. "You should've," I growled, my voice tight. "But you chose to keep secrets, to betray my trust." I would have done something, anything. It might not have changed the outcome, but it would still have been better than what we were going through.

Rylan flinched, his eyes filling with tears. He stepped back, putting some distance between me and him. He could feel my anger simmering beneath the surface.

"I know," he whispered, his hand coming up to wipe away the tears that escaped. "And I'm sorry. I was afraid, afraid you wouldn't understand, that you'd leave me." He took a deep breath. "It was just like before. I was so afraid of your reaction."

I took a step back, my hands balling into fists at my sides. "You were right," I said. "I don't understand, Rylan. How could you do this? How could you put us, our baby, in danger?" I shook my head. "And, it really isn't like this is the first time. Just like you said, it happened before."

He took a step towards me, his eyes pleading. That was surprising. Did he really think he could change how I felt about it just with his words? I didn't think it was possible.

"I never meant to put us in danger," he said. "I only wanted to protect what we have, to give our baby a future."

I shook my head, my heart hardening against the man I had once loved. It was still there, kind of, but it wasn't the same thing anymore. I didn't think it could ever be the same again. I knew my life would not be complete without him, so I couldn't exactly give up on him without consequences, but I was still wondering if it was worth pursuing this relationship I had with him. I was pondering if I shouldn't just give up and leave.

One moment, we had the penthouse and everything was great. I wasn't even thinking about what he did to get us out of prison and that he'd betrayed his only friend. Then, the next moment, his former friend came here with the police and several lawyers to take it all away from us. It made me feel desperate, just like the day before I joined the cartel.

"You put us all at risk," I said, my voice cold. "And now, we're left with nothing."

He reached for me, his eyes desperate. "We still have each other," he said softly, his hand brushing my arm. He said that as if it was the thing that most mattered. It wasn't. "We can start over, find another place, away from all this."

I pulled away, my heart too wounded to accept his touch. I shook my head. How could he think something like that and that it was okay? It wasn't. "How, Rylan?" I asked, my voice harsh. "With what money? We don't have anything else and it's your fault."

He flinched, his eyes filling with fresh tears. It hurt me when I said that, but it had to be said. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to forgive myself. I promised myself that telling the truth was always better than lying, no matter the circumstances.

"I know," he whispered, his voice breaking. "And I'm sorry. I'll do whatever I can to make it right, Mateo. Please, just give me a chance to make it up to you."

I turned away, unable to bear the sight of his tears, the depth of his betrayal. I ran my hand through my hair. I couldn't believe he was asking me to give him one more chance. It wasn't going to be so easy.

"You had your chance," I said, my voice rough. It hurt my heart when I said that, but I couldn't imagine a different outcome. "And you chose to keep secrets, to lie to me yet again. I can't trust you, Rylan. Not anymore."

He took a step towards me, his eyes pleading. I knew he was going to make this more difficult than it already was, so I was prepared, not that it was going to help me much.

"Please, Mateo," he whispered. "Don't do this. Our baby needs us, needs a family. Please, let's not throw away what we have."

I shook my head, my heart aching as I looked at the man I had once loved, now a stranger to me. My baby was important to me, as was him, but I didn't know for how much longer I could go on with the way things were.

"You threw it away, Rylan," I said softly. He blinked a few times. He couldn't believe this turn of events. "The moment you chose to betray my trust yet again, you shattered what we had."

He stood there, his eyes wide, his breath coming in short gasps as he processed the finality of my words. It was over. I still loved him — and because he was my fated mate, I didn't think it was something that would ever change — but for now, everything was over between us.

"Please, Mateo," he whispered, tears welling up his eyes. "Don't leave me. I need

you.”

I turned away, my heart too broken to offer him any comfort. And then, I took a deep breath in. I really wished I could continue to be with him no matter what, but I couldn’t. I wouldn’t feel right doing such a thing.

”You should’ve thought of that before,” I said. ”I can’t do this, not now. I need time to clear my head, to figure out what the hell we’re going to do.”

That was saying the least. There were actually a lot more things for me to do. I had no idea where I would start, but I was going to figure something out.

With that, I walked away, my steps heavy, my heart aching with each step that took me further from Rylan. To be honest, at the moment, I didn’t even know where I was going exactly. Just... away.

I knew I was leaving him vulnerable, alone, but I couldn’t bring myself to stay, to offer him any false hope. Otherwise, the first thing he would think was that there was still a chance for us, but there wasn’t.

Our relationship was fractured, perhaps beyond repair, and I needed time to grieve, to process the depth of his betrayal. Maybe, just maybe, I could forgive him for what he did, but I wasn’t holding my breath for it.

As I made my way through the city streets, my mind raced, trying to make sense of the mess we were in. I knew Rylan had made a deal, but the full extent of it was only now becoming clear. He should have told me everything.

I could remember everything he had told me when shit hit the fan.

”Yes, I did what I did. I sold the information to those people. I had to. It was the only

way to get us out of prison.”

And I knew he was right, that we couldn’t get out of prison if he hadn’t done that, but he betrayed his friend and the latter couldn’t let it go.

He came for us, for Rylan. He took the penthouse from us as punishment for Rylan’s betrayal. Did he really think his friend would forgive him?

I ended up at a run-down apartment building, a far cry from the luxurious penthouse we had once called home. It wasn’t the best for me, but for now, it was going to do. Plus, I had lived in worse conditions. I hadn’t become soft after living in the penthouse.

It was one of the few places I could think of where we might find temporary shelter, but it was a dangerous place, filled with addicts and criminals.

So, despite my better judgment, I called Rylan to come here. It didn’t mean we were still together. I only invited him to come because of the baby and the fact that they both needed a roof over their heads.

I climbed the stairs, my heart heavy as I imagined bringing our baby into such an environment. I knew it wasn’t a permanent solution, but it was all I could think of at the moment.

I knew that soon I would have a better solution for where we should live, but for now, we were going to have to put up with all the negative things that came with living here.

I knocked on the door of my friend’s apartment, my eyes scanning the hallway, hoping Rylan wasn’t far behind. Despite his pleas, he understood he shouldn’t be too close to me. It wouldn’t be good for both of us.

The door opened, revealing a man with hollow cheeks and bloodshot eyes. He also was someone I didn't want near my baby, but he was my only solution at the moment.

"Mateo," he said. "What are you doing here?"

He looked like a mess, almost like a drug addict. I knew he had tried to clean himself up, but he hadn't gotten very far. I couldn't blame him; most of it wasn't his fault.

I stepped into the dimly lit apartment, the air thick with the smell of smoke and something else — the sickly sweet scent of drugs. What a terrible place this was. It made my stomach churn.

"I need a place to stay," I said softly, my eyes taking in the squalid conditions. The more I looked around, the more I felt just how much I needed to get out of here as soon as possible. "Just for a few days, until I can figure something out."

That was my hope, anyway, but I had no idea if it was really only going to be a few days. It could end up being more.

My friend nodded, his eyes understanding. "Stay as long as you need," he said. "But be careful, Mateo. This place ain't no good for a baby."

I nodded, my eyes scanning the room, my heart heavy as I imagined Rylan and our unborn child in such an environment.

My friend didn't have to do this, but he still was. He had a good heart, no denying it. His only problem was that he was living in this place. Hopefully, it wasn't going to become my problem as well.

"I know," I whispered, hiding my grief. "But it's all I've got for now."

He understood me, nodding. He actually wished he could do more, but it was impossible. He couldn't do anything more than this. He was as broke as I was.

As the days turned into weeks, the reality of our situation settled over me like a heavy blanket. Rylan and I kept our distance, our interactions strained and filled with words we didn't want to say to each other. We knew that if we voiced them, our relationship would be broken beyond repair.

The weight of his betrayal hung between us, a constant reminder of the chasm that now existed where love and trust had once resided. Could it be filled with the last two things again? I had no idea. The more I thought about that, the more impossible it seemed.

One afternoon, as I sat in the dimly lit apartment, my eyes heavy with exhaustion, Rylan approached, his steps tentative. "Mateo," he said softly, his eyes filled with unshed tears. "Please, let's talk. We can't keep avoiding each other. Our baby deserves better."

I sighed, my shoulders sagging under the weight of my grief and anger. I really didn't want to talk about anything, but I knew he was right. Avoiding the problem wasn't going to make it less tormenting.

"What is there to say, Rylan?" I asked. It was a very good question. What was there to say? I didn't think there was anything to be said. "You betrayed my trust and put our baby in danger. What more is there to discuss?"

I didn't think I could have made it simpler than that. It was because of him we were living in this place. It wasn't good for us and the baby. He knew it was his fault.

Still, it wasn't going to stop Rylan. He took a step forward, his hands reaching for mine. He was going to try to do something, but I didn't think it was going to work.

"I know," he whispered, his voice shaking. "And I'm sorry. I made a mistake, a terrible one, but please, Mateo, let's not throw away what we have. Our baby needs us, needs a family."

I pulled my hands away, my heart too wounded to accept his touch. Shaking my head, I couldn't help but think how wrong he was. The baby needed me and I was going to be there for him, but I wasn't going to say I forgave Rylan. At the moment, I didn't think I could say that, and my mind would probably never change about it.

"You threw it all away, Rylan," I said softly. "The moment you chose to betray my trust, you shattered our family."

His eyes widened, his breath catching in his throat as he processed the finality of my words. He knew I was right, which was the reason he was having difficulty finding the right thing to say.

"Please, Mateo," he whispered, his voice breaking. "I don't know what I can say to change your mind, but please... Try to stay with me for our little one. You don't need to stay for me."

I stood, my eyes never leaving his, my heart aching as I delivered the final blow. I wished I could stay for our little one, but it wasn't so simple. The more time I spent near Rylan, the more I hated him and myself.

I knew what I had to say next was going to hurt him a lot, but it still needed to be said. He needed to face the cold reality around us.

"No, Rylan. It really is over between us. No matter what you say, you can't change my mind. It's that simple. "

He took a few steps backward, his eyes widening. I knew he wasn't taking this well,

but he shouldn't be surprised. Time wasn't going to heal my wounds. He must have thought that, just because we were living together, we were lovers again, but we weren't.

"No," he whispered. "When are you going to realize that what you're doing hurts you as much as it hurts me?"

I shook my head again. It felt like everything was repeating itself. I had to get out of here. Rylan and our little one would be okay. I didn't have to worry; my friend would keep them safe and fed.

With that, I walked away, my steps heavy and my heart aching with each step that took me further from Rylan. This time, I really had no idea where I was going. As long as I was away from the person who betrayed me, I supposed I would be okay.

Still, I had to figure out something, and most importantly, I had to discover how I really felt about us.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Mateo

I thought I could stay away, that the pain of Rylan's betrayal would be enough to keep me from returning to him. But as the days turned into a week, my heart ached with his absence, and the weight of my own mistakes bore down on me. How could I have thought that staying away from him was okay? I couldn't even recognize myself.

I realized that despite it all, I still loved him, that our bond was stronger than my anger and hurt. After all, we were meant to be together. That was the reason why we were having those dreams.

I found myself drawn back to Sebastian's apartment, my eyes searching for Rylan, my heart yearning to be near him, even if he didn't know it. I kept my distance, my presence a shadow in the background, but I couldn't stay away.

He couldn't know. After all, what would I say if he knew? I had no idea. This entire time, I was battling against myself, trying to figure out what I would say when we met again.

I worried about Rylan, about our unborn child. What if he went into labor without me? What if he needed my help, my protection? Those things couldn't happen without me around.

The thought of him facing those dangers alone tore at my heart, and I knew I had to make things right, for him, for our baby. But, how? I didn't know.

The words stuck in my throat, my pride and hurt warring with my love for him. Those things had always been weaknesses of mine. I had no idea if I could get rid of them now.

I wanted to apologize, to tell him that I still loved him, that I wanted us to be a family, but the words eluded me, trapped behind the wall of my own stubbornness.

I hated myself so much for feeling that way, but at the same time, I was powerless to stop it.

Tonight, as I stood in the shadows of Sebastian's apartment, my eyes fixed on Rylan's swollen belly, I knew I had to act, to put aside my own hurt and do what was best for them.

No matter what, this time, it was going to be different. I was going to figure out something.

However, there was something that required my attention more than anything else, and it was the appearance of someone I thought I would never see again. After so much time, he showed up again. Vance.

Vance's sudden appearance, his menacing presence filling the small apartment, jolted me into action. I saw the fear in Rylan's eyes, heard the desperation in his voice as he insisted he didn't know where I was. It all happened so quickly. I didn't even have time to react before they were already face-to-face.

Vance's words made my blood boil. "You're lying, omega," he snarled, his eyes narrowing. "Mates always know where the other is. Where is he or I'll take you away, and your pup will never know his father."

I snarled. That motherfucker was going to get what was coming to him. I was going

to make sure of it. He was going to feel what it was like to be hunted by me.

Rylan's eyes widened, his breath catching in his throat as he processed the threat. Before he could respond, Sebastian stepped forward, his eyes flashing with anger. "Get out of here," he said, his voice steady. "You're not welcome here."

I was surprised by Sebastian's reaction. I thought he would never stand up against a bully. But, there he was. He was doing more than that. He was protecting my beloved.

Vance smirked, his eyes narrowing dangerously. "Or what, asshole? You'll throw me out? You're no match for me."

I knew he wasn't, which was why I had to move quickly. I had to go there before it was too late, and I was already moving. I was dashing forward.

With a swift movement, Vance punched Sebastian in the stomach, sending him crumpling to the ground, unconscious. I snarled again. He was going to pay so much for what he was doing.

Rylan cried out, his eyes widening in fear as he realized the true danger they were in. But he didn't need to worry. I was already getting there. I was climbing the outside of the apartment building as fast as I could.

"Now," Vance said, his eyes narrowing on Rylan. "Where is he?"

I saw the fear in Rylan's eyes, the desperation as he searched for an answer that wouldn't result in more violence. I was moving as fast as I could, but it still felt like it wasn't fast enough.

Only a few more seconds and... Finally. Here I was.

"He's right here," I growled, my voice deep and dangerous. I wanted to punch Vance's face until he was begging for forgiveness, which I wasn't going to give him. "And you'll never touch him again, Vance. Not while I'm breathing."

Vance's eyes widened in surprise, his gaze flicking between Rylan and me. He came here looking for me, but he didn't think I was around. We had always been enemies, we had always hated each other, so this was a long time coming.

"Solstice," he snarled. His fur was already beginning to show. He was already transforming and getting himself ready for the fight we were going to start. "I should've known you were around. You never cease to surprise me in a bad way."

I shifted, my body transforming into my wolf form, my fur bristling with aggression. I felt like I was finally letting it all out. This entire time, I didn't realize how much I was itching for a fight.

"You should've stayed in prison," I snarled, my eyes fixed on Vance. And after saying that, I couldn't help but wonder how he got out of there. I thought he was going to stay a lot longer. I supposed we all had our ways. "But now, you'll pay for what you did to Rylan, to us."

It wasn't just about the now, after all. It was about the abuse against Rylan when we were still in prison. For all that, he was going to pay.

Vance shifted as well, his body transforming into a massive black wolf, his eyes glowing with malicious intent. "Oh, I'll pay, all right," he growled. "With your blood."

He also thought this was a long time coming. He had always wanted to fight with me without anyone getting in the way or anything stopping us. Finally, we were going to make that real.

With a fierce growl, he lunged at me, his teeth bared, his claws extended. I dodged, my body agile, and countered with a swift strike to his flank, my claws slicing through his fur.

He howled in pain, spinning and lunging at me again. Our bodies collided, a blur of fur and muscle as we rolled across the floor, our teeth snapping, our claws slicing. The apartment shook with the force of our battle, the air thick with the scent of blood and fur.

Rylan stayed away, of course. He also dragged Sebastian away from the fight. He understood exactly what I was thinking. He knew I just wanted to fight Vance in an environment where I didn't have to worry about anything.

Vance and I circled each other, our eyes locked, our breath coming in short, sharp pants. He lunged again, his jaws snapping at my throat, but I was faster, dodging and countering with a strike to his muzzle, my claws raking across his face.

He howled in pain, his eyes flashing with anger. And as for me, I felt triumph surging in me. I was close to finishing him off.

"You'll pay for that, Solstice," he threatened. "You and your omega will suffer."

I bared my teeth, a low growl rumbling in my chest. He could make out the threats he wanted, but it wasn't going to change anything. If anything, it only showed he knew he was losing.

"Never," I declared. "You'll never touch what's mine."

With a fierce growl, I lunged, my jaws closing around his throat, my claws digging into his fur. I felt his body go limp beneath me, his eyes widening in surprise as he realized his defeat.

Finally. At long last. The moment I had always wanted to see was unraveling right before me, and I was the catalyst behind it.

"Mateo," Rylan's voice cut through the apartment. "Stop, please. Don't kill him."

I hesitated, my jaws still clamped around Vance's throat, my eyes locking with Rylan's. I wanted to do it. I couldn't understand why Rylan was begging for his life. It didn't make sense. Vance threatened to kill him and our little one. He didn't deserve to continue living.

And I saw the fear in Rylan's eyes, the desperation, and I knew I had to let Vance go. It wasn't what I wanted, but for my omega, I would do anything, including that.

With a growl of frustration, I released him, my body shifting back to human form, my eyes never leaving Vance. I couldn't take any chances. He could try anything. He was a slimy bastard.

Vance staggered to his feet, his hand reaching for his throat, his eyes narrowing. What happened here, he would never forget it. That was my real victory.

"This isn't over, Solstice," he threatened. "You and your omega will pay."

With that, he turned and stalked out of the apartment, his men following close behind. They were here, watching everything. They didn't get in the way because they knew they would be mutilated by me.

I stood there, my body tense, my eyes fixed on the door, my heart pounding with the knowledge that Vance would be back, that our troubles were far from over. And yet, I knew that the next time it happened, I would win again. I knew that for certain because I had my omega.

I turned to Rylan, my eyes softening as I took in the sight of him, his swollen belly, the fear still lingering in his eyes. Despite his decision to keep Vance alive, I didn't hate him. I couldn't anymore. "Are you okay?" I asked softly. "Did he hurt you?"

He shook his head, his eyes filling with tears. He looked so afraid and vulnerable. He needed me now more than ever before.

"I'm fine," he whispered, his hand coming up to wipe away the tears that escaped. "But Sebastian—"

I nodded, my eyes flicking to the unconscious form of our friend. He wasn't even thinking about Vance. He was mostly thinking about the person who had been helping us so much recently. Rylan really had a heart of gold, no denying it.

"I'll call an ambulance," I said softly. "He'll be okay." I knew he was going to be. Sebastian was tough.

Rylan nodded, his eyes never leaving mine, his breath coming in short gasps as he processed the events of the past few minutes. It was going to take some time until he was back to his normal self. And until we left this place for good, he wouldn't be the person I knew he was.

"Thank you," he whispered, his voice shaking. "For saving me, for protecting us."

I took a step towards him, my hands reaching for his. He didn't need to thank me. I did the bare minimum. I wished I could've done more.

"I'm sorry, Rylan," I said softly. "For the way I treated you, for not trusting you. I was wrong, and I'm sorry."

I was panting. I had always wondered what it would be like when I said those words.

I didn't even know it was going to be those words exactly. But, it happened. It was something I had to do.

He searched my eyes, his breath catching in his throat as he processed the sincerity of my words. "I'm sorry too," he whispered. "For keeping secrets, for not trusting you with the truth. Can you ever forgive me, Mateo?"

I took his hands in mine, my thumbs brushing away the tears that escaped. Of course I was going to forgive him. It was the easiest thing I could do.

"I already have," I said softly. "And I want us to be together, to build a life for our baby. Please, Rylan, give me another chance."

He nodded, his eyes shining with tears he didn't want to let out. That was easier than I thought it was going to be. I thought he would never want me by his side again.

"I want that too," he whispered. "I love you, Mateo. I always have."

I pulled him into my arms, my body surrounding his, our bond strengthening with each passing moment. "I love you too," I whispered, my lips brushing his hair. "And I promise, no matter what happens, I'm here to stay."

We stood there, our arms wrapped around each other, our hearts beating as one, our love stronger than ever. He pressed himself against me more. He wanted every part of my body.

I knew we had a long road ahead, that Vance would be back, but in that moment, with Rylan in my arms, I felt a sense of peace, a certainty that no matter what came our way, we could beat it.

As we waited for the ambulance to arrive, Rylan sat on my lap, his back resting

against my chest, my arms wrapped protectively around him. He trusted me again. Today was a turning point in our lives.

My hand roamed his swollen belly, my touch gentle as I felt our baby kick, a reminder of the life we had created together. Soon, very soon, he would be with us.

"I love you, Mateo," Rylan whispered, his eyes gleaming with tears. "I always have, and I always will."

I pressed a soft kiss to his temple, my lips lingering on his skin. Then, I breathed in his scent. It was just as I remembered it. I didn't think I could ever forget it.

"And I love you," I whispered. "No matter what happens, I'm here to stay. Our baby will know his parents' love, no matter what."

He leaned back, his eyes searching mine, his hand coming up to cup my cheek. His touch was gentle and warm. He made me feel like never before. We were the only ones who knew how much I missed this.

"Promise me," he whispered, his voice shaking. "Promise me that, no matter what, you are going to stay with me."

I kissed his cheek again. "Sure, my love. Don't worry about it. I can promise you that. In fact, I'm already doing so. I'm going to stay with you. I will never make the same mistake again."

He leaned against me, letting out all the air that was in his lungs. "It feels so good to hear those things coming from you. I can really trust you again and you can trust me."

I brushed a stray lock of his hair to the side. "I trust you. I know that, from now on, you are always going to tell me everything."

Rylan breathed loudly again. "I know. I'll always tell you everything."

And, in that instant, we knew our lives from that moment on were going to be much easier.

Rylan's Epilogue

10 years later...

Ten years had passed since the turbulent events that had brought Mateo and me together. Our lives had transformed, molded by the trials we had faced and the love that had grown between us. It had been a lot, yes, but it was all well worth it. There were some things I would change, but I would definitely go through it all just to stay with Mateo.

As I sat on the couch next to him, our fingers entwined, I felt a sense of peace, a contentment that came from the life we had built together. He made me feel happy just by being next to me. His effect on me was something I couldn't live without.

The news played softly in the background, the anchor's voice drawing my attention. "...in other news, a notorious criminal, Vance Blackwood, has been arrested for the murder of a store owner. Blackwood, known for his involvement in various criminal activities, will finally face justice. He is expected to serve a minimum of twenty years in prison for his crimes."

I felt Mateo's hand tighten around mine, his eyes fixed on the screen. Just like me, he didn't think we were going to hear about Vance right now. It had been so long since his attack on Sebastian. We thought he had disappeared.

"Finally," Mateo murmured. "He couldn't hide from justice forever. It took a lot of time, but the police finally found him, and only because he committed another crime."

I nodded, my eyes never leaving the screen as the anchor continued. I was enjoying the news report as much as Mateo was. We were both reveling in it.

"Blackwood has evaded capture for years, his criminal activities spanning decades. But today, he will face the consequences of his actions."

And, I supposed that just like the news anchor, we were hoping he wouldn't get out of prison again. This time, he had to stay locked up for the rest of his life.

The anchor's words sent a chill down my spine. I didn't want to remember my time in prison. The things I went through there made my stomach churn.

"I'm glad he's finally behind bars," I murmured, my eyes searching Mateo's face, seeing the relief reflected in his golden gaze.

He squeezed my hand, his thumb brushing my skin gently. "Me too, little omega," he said softly. "He got what he deserved."

I leaned into him, my head resting on his shoulder, my eyes closing as I savored the warmth of his embrace. It was so relieving to know that Vance couldn't hurt us anymore.

"We have so much ahead of us," I whispered. "We have to focus on that and nothing else."

He pressed a soft kiss to my temple, his lips lingering on my skin. His touch was warm and inviting. If he didn't stop, I wouldn't end with the kiss. I would continue.

"Our son doesn't have to know what we went through," he said softly. "He's going to grow up in a much better place."

I smiled, my heart warming at the thought of our son, the light that had entered our lives and changed us forever. I didn't think I could be even happier than I was, but then he came.

"He's our greatest achievement," I whispered, my eyes shining. "He's a little bit of both of us and the reason why I'm so proud of myself. He looks just like me."

"No, he looks more like me," Mateo said jokingly, giving my shoulder a playful bump with his right hand.

His hand then tightened around mine, his thumb brushing my skin gently. "I feel so happy thinking about our future, little omega," he said softly. "And nothing will tear us apart again."

I nodded, my eyes closing as I savored the warmth of his embrace, the safety of the life we had built. I knew he was right. I would never make the same mistakes again.

"Nothing," I whispered. "Really, absolutely nothing."

As the news anchor moved on to the next story, I reached for the remote, turning off the TV and immersing us in the warm glow of the fireplace. It was good to know what happened to Vance, but now I didn't want to keep thinking about it.

Our son, Lucas, stirred in his sleep, his small form shuffling under the covers. Something was wrong. I could already tell it.

"Daddy, I can't sleep," he whispered, his small voice cutting through the quiet of the room. Oh, cute thing. Couldn't sleep? Don't worry, little one. Daddy is gonna fix that.

Mateo and I exchanged a soft smile, our eyes filled with love for our son. "Come

here, little one," Mateo said softly, his voice gentle. "Let's see if we can help you fall back asleep."

As usual, he was a good daddy. There was no denying that he was the right one to help our son.

Lucas padded into the living room, his small form clad in his favorite dinosaur pajamas, his eyes heavy with sleep. He was always so cute. "I'm scared, Daddy," he whispered, his small hand reaching for Mateo's.

He didn't need to be scared. With Mateo as his daddy, he was always going to be protected. Any time he needed him, he was going to be there.

Mateo took his hand, his large palm engulfing Lucas's tiny one. "What are you scared of, buddy?" He asked softly, his eyes kind.

Lucas bit his lip, his eyes darting to me, seeking reassurance. I nodded. Whatever he was thinking, he could voice it.

"Monsters," he whispered, his voice shaking. "I keep seeing monsters in my dreams."

I smiled softly, my heart aching at the innocence of our son. "There are no monsters here, Lucas," I said softly, my voice gentle. "Daddy and I will keep you safe, always."

As long as we were around, there was no space for monsters.

Lucas nodded, his small hand tightening around Mateo's. My husband's eyes gleamed with love. "Promise?" He asked, his voice shaking.

Mateo pressed a soft kiss to his son's forehead. The little one seemed to get calmer

after the kiss. As usual, he only needed some reassurance. Nothing big.

"I promise," he said softly. "Daddy will always protect you."

"And I will as well. You can count on me."

Lucas's eyes widened, his small hand reaching up to touch the scar on Mateo's cheek, a remnant of the life he had left behind. We didn't think about that much anymore. It was something that happened a long time ago.

"You protect me, Daddy?" He asked, his hand trembling slightly. Despite the reassurance, he was still slightly shaky after imagining monsters.

Mateo nodded, his eyes softening as he looked at our son. "Always, Lucas," he said softly. "I'll always protect you, no matter what."

"You can count on him. He has always protected me and kept me safe. It's the reason I'm here."

Lucas smiled, his small hand tightening around Mateo's, his eyes shining with the trust that only a child could offer. I tousled his hair with my hand.

"Okay, Daddy," he whispered. "I'll try to sleep now."

We guided him back to his bedroom. He went there without a fuss. He was very obedient and after some reassurance, he always did what we wanted.

We tucked him back into bed, his small form snuggling into the covers, his eyes closing as he drifted back to sleep.

"Good night, little one. Happy dreams. Dream about us."

He smiled and said, "I will. I promise."

I stood there, my eyes never leaving his small form, my heart swelling with love and gratitude for the life we had built.

Mateo's arms wrapped around me from behind, his large frame engulfing mine. I felt his body compared to mine and, as always, he was so much bigger.

"He's our greatest achievement," he whispered, his lips brushing my hair. "He looks so much like you and me."

I leaned into him, my eyes closing as I savored the warmth of his embrace, the safety of the life we had created together. I melted in his hug, enjoying the moment for everything it represented. Not everyone was as lucky as I was.

"Our future is bright, Mateo," I whispered. "I keep thinking about everything we can do together and it's all so good."

He pressed a soft kiss to my temple, his lips lingering on my skin. "We have a family that will always protect and support each other," he said softly, echoing my thoughts.

I nodded, my eyes closing as I savored the warmth of his embrace, the peace that had settled over our lives.

"I know and thank you for saying that. It always feels different when you say it."

As Lucas's soft snores filled the room, I leaned into Mateo, my head resting on his shoulder, my eyes closing as I savored the warmth of our family, the love that had brought us together and kept us strong.

He was the only one who could make me let down my guard.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:32 am

Mateo's Epilogue

12 years later...

Our son's graduation party was in full swing, the backyard of our home filled with family and friends, their laughter and conversations creating a warm, festive atmosphere.

We planned everything and didn't leave out a single detail. As far as I was concerned, everything was going according to plan.

It had been years since Rylan and I had faced such a crowd, and as I scanned the familiar faces, a sense of contentment washed over me. Everybody came. I didn't think I had so many people willing to come here.

Our son, Lucas, stood tall and proud in his graduation gown, his eyes shining with excitement as he chatted with his friends. The more I looked at him, the more I realized he reminded me of me when I was young.

I felt a surge of pride, my heart swelling with love for the young man he had become. He took up after me.

As I turned to refill my drink, my eyes landed on a familiar figure, his presence unexpected. Ethan, Rylan's old friend, stood by the edge of the crowd, his wheelchair a stark contrast to the lively atmosphere.

He was here? I asked myself, feeling slightly surprised. We didn't invite him. He

must have come without an invitation. Since we didn't have anyone checking if people were invited, it must have been easy for him to "sneak" into the party, even though it wasn't exactly a secret. He just walked right in.

I felt Rylan stiffen beside me, his hand tightening around mine as he, too, spotted Ethan. I thought he hadn't and I would have to tell him about my little discovery. One fewer thing for me to worry about.

I knew the sight of him brought back memories, the hurt and betrayal Rylan had endured at the hands of his once-close friend. But I remembered that it had also been his fault. His hands were tied back then. He hadn't had much of a choice.

I squeezed Rylan's hand, my eyes never leaving Ethan's frail form. In his wheelchair, he didn't look like the person Rylan had shown me on his phone. And, yeah, he had many photos together with the guy.

"Go to him," I whispered, my voice soft but insistent. "You should talk to him. I know he probably wants to talk to you. Why else is here?"

Rylan hesitated, his eyes filled with a mixture of emotions. I was already aware it was going to be difficult, which was why I was planning everything else I was going to say.

"I don't know, Mateo," he said meekly. "It's been years and he probably doesn't remember all the shit that happened between us."

I turned to him, my eyes shining with determination. "It doesn't matter if he remembers," I said softly, my hand tightening around his. "What matters is that you do, and today is your chance to close a chapter that has remained open for too long."

Rylan bit his lip, his eyes darting between Ethan and me. He didn't want to do it, but for me, he would do anything. "Are you sure?" He asked softly, his voice shaking

slightly. "It might be awkward, and I don't want to ruin Lucas's special day."

I cupped his cheek, my thumb brushing away a stray lock of hair that had fallen across his face. "I'm sure, little omega. There is nothing you can do that can ruin this moment," I said softly, my voice steady. "And Lucas will understand. But, I don't think you need to worry. Lucas is busy with other things."

Rylan searched my eyes, his breath coming in short gasps as he grappled with his emotions. He was probably wondering if there was some way to convince me to drop the subject, but there wasn't. My mind was set on making him do it.

Finally, he nodded, his eyes shining with unshed tears. "Okay," he whispered. "I'll try, for Lucas, for us."

Good. He didn't need much convincing in the end.

With a deep breath, he approached Ethan, his steps hesitant, his eyes never leaving the man who had once been his closest friend. Emotions swirled in his mind. There was a lot to unpack.

Ethan's eyes widened at the sight of Rylan, his frail form straightening in his wheelchair. What was he thinking was going to happen? Did he think Rylan wouldn't notice he was here?

"Rylan," he whispered. "I never thought I'd see you again." Probably the understatement of the century.

Rylan's breath caught in his throat, his eyes searching Ethan's face, seeing the years that had passed, the toll they had taken.

He probably thought he could come here and figure out what to say, but when it actually happened, all his plans vanished.

"I never thought I'd see you either," he whispered. "But here we are." He really looked so much different from his former self.

Ethan nodded, his eyes never leaving Rylan's. "Here we are," he murmured. "And I have something to say, something I should've said a long time ago."

What was that? I couldn't help but wonder.

Rylan's breath hitched, his eyes widening as he realized the significance of the moment. So much was going to be defined now.

"Me too," he whispered, his voice trembling. "I'm sorry about everything that happened. I should have thought better about what I was going to do. I was foolish and rash."

Ethan's eyes were coated with tears, his frail hands tightening on the wheels of his chair. "I know," he murmured. "And I'm sorry, Rylan. I know I overdid it when I took the penthouse."

Rylan's eyes softened, his breath coming in short gasps as he processed Ethan's words. He never thought he would say the things he did.

"I know," he said. "And I'm sorry too. I shouldn't have gone behind your back and sold those company files. I know it hurt you. Maybe I should have asked you to help me." Rylan took a deep breath in. "I didn't think you would help me."

Ethan nodded, his eyes never leaving Rylan's. "Can you ever forgive me, Rylan? I had my reasons, but I still left you without a roof over your head. You and your son could have died because of me," he whispered. "Maybe I don't deserve it, but please, let's put the past behind us. For old times' sake."

Rylan searched Ethan's eyes, seeing the sincerity reflected in their depths. Just like

me, Rylan never believed that Ethan would feel any guilt over what happened. We both assumed he always thought he was right and did the right thing.

"I don't think I should be saying this because you only did what you did thanks to my foolishness, but I still forgive you, Ethan," he whispered. "And I'd like to think we can be friends again. I mean, if we can't, that's understandable. "

Ethan's eyes widened, his breath catching in his throat as he processed Rylan's words. There was still so much to unpack, but for now, that was good. It went better than I thought it was going to.

"Thank you," he said. "Maybe we can be friends again. We'll have to wait and see"

Rylan took a step forward, his hand reaching out to squeeze Ethan's shoulder gently. It was a lot of progress. I didn't think I was going to be seeing what I was.

"And Rylan," Ethan said softly. "I want you to have the penthouse back. It can be yours again, and I want you to enjoy it. You and your family deserve it."

Rylan shook his head, his eyes filling with fresh tears. "No, Ethan," he argued. "It's yours. I don't deserve it after what I did to you. I ruined our company."

Ethan hesitated, his eyes never leaving Rylan's. Finally, the latter nodded, his eyes shining with gratitude. "Thank you," he whispered. "It means more than I can say."

Did I just really hear that right? We were going to have the penthouse back? I couldn't believe it.

As the graduation ceremony began, Rylan and Ethan joined the crowd, their conversation a backdrop to the celebrations. I stood by Rylan's side, my hand in his, our fingers entwined as we watched our son receive his diploma, his face shining with pride and excitement. It was all happening in our backyard.

The day held one more surprise as, upon returning home, Rylan and I decided to throw an impromptu party, our way of celebrating Lucas's achievement and the closure we had found with Ethan.

We had planned everything, but not that one thing. Rylan enjoyed having everything under control, but sometimes, he could also appreciate the beauty of something unexpected occurring.

The night was filled with laughter, music, and dancing, as the backyard of our home transformed into a festive haven. To be honest, I should say that it looked nothing like our backyard.

Rylan and I danced under the stars, our bodies moving in sync, our eyes never leaving each other's. Even after all this time, we were so much in love we couldn't even remember that there was an entire world around us.

As the party died down and our guests bid us farewell, Rylan and I retired to our bedroom, our steps heavy, our eyes shining with the excitement of the day's events.

Even though we didn't say it explicitly, we were planning on doing one more thing we didn't plan to do.

I pulled Rylan into my arms, my body surrounding his, my hands roaming his familiar form. He gasped, not thinking that I was going to be exerting so much strength. And, to be honest, there was still a lot more where that came from.

"Today was perfect," I whispered, my lips brushing his hair. "Our son graduated, and you and Ethan can be friends again. It's a day to celebrate in the wildest way you can imagine."

Rylan nodded with a big smirk. "It's a day I'll never forget," he whispered, echoing my thoughts. "Everything we wanted to do, we did. It all went perfectly."

I pressed a soft kiss to his lips, my hands tightening around him. He ground back against me, needing more of my body.

"It really showed how much we love each other," I purred. "And tonight, I want to celebrate that with you in the best way possible, little omega."

Rylan's eyes widened, a soft blush staining his cheeks as he understood what I meant — and it really couldn't be different from what he was already assuming. "I love you too, Mateo," he whispered. "And tonight, I'm yours, completely. Do whatever you want to do to me."

Whatever I wanted to do? He didn't need to say it twice.

With gentle hands, I undressed him, my lips trailing down his neck, my teeth nipping at the sensitive skin there, earning a soft moan from him.

Despite us both having aged over these twenty-two years, our desire for each other remained the same. It was as strong as it was before.

I wanted to take my time, to explore every inch of his body, but the need burning within me demanded more. I kissed a path down his chest, my tongue swirling around his nipples, earning a sharp intake of breath from him.

He pushed himself against me, his hands roaming my body. He wanted to explore as much of me as possible.

"Please, Mateo," he whispered, his hands tangling in my hair, his body arching into mine. "I need you inside me. Now."

How naughty he was. I growled, my hands tightening on his hips, my teeth nipping at the soft skin of his inner thighs, my tongue teasing, tasting. Rylan cried out, his legs wrapping around my waist, his body offering himself to me, his trust in me absolute.

He couldn't get pregnant again, but that wasn't why we were doing this. We were doing it because we loved each other so much.

With a gentle touch, I entered him, my body claiming his, our bond strengthening with each thrust. Rylan cried out, his hands tightening in my hair, his body moving with mine, our skin slick with sweat as we moved together, our breaths coming in short, sharp gasps.

I could feel his hands exploring my muscles, kneading, massaging, and doing everything else he was allowed to do. He was so desperate to have more of me.

The pace quickened, our hearts pounding in unison, and our eyes locked. We were both panting so much.

"Mateo," Rylan whispered, his voice shaking, his body arching off the bed, his release coating my stomach. He was unable to last another second. To be honest, I was surprised he lasted as much as he did.

I growled, my body tightening, my release spilling into him, our bodies joined like so many times before, but it was still different.

We lay entwined, our breaths evening out, our hearts slowing to a steady rhythm. I held him tight, my arms pressing against him slightly, my lips brushing his hair, my voice echoing everything I was thinking. "I love you, little omega."

"And I love you too, my big alpha."

He groaned slightly, chuckling. "I know you do."

End of Book 1