



The Omega Trials, Part Two

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Three alphas. One omega. Five deadly trials.

When I was first given to the Cerulean pack like a bartered object, I had one goal and one goal only: escape.

While trapped together in the clutches of the dark and dangerous secret society, these vicious men, once my captors, have become my protectors.

But in a world where lies and secrets are more abundant than truths, I can't let my guard down.

It's no secret the once-exiled Ceruleans are the least-favored pack competing in the Trials. But we have something that none of the others have: each other.

This book must be read after Part I, as it is a continuous story that can't be read out of order.

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Chapter 1

Vigilance

Ecker

“Where is my mate?” Bishop roars, and I watch Titus’s face morph from surprised to pissed at the mention of Sinclair.

He shoves Bishop back and almost cocks his arm for a punch but holds himself back, choosing words instead. “No idea. She’s your bitch after all.”

With adrenaline and concern for our omega coursing through me, his disrespect is the last straw. Unfortunately, Bishop beats me to it, slugging him in the jaw. Titus straightens right back, his chin dipped and eyes glowing. His nostrils flare as he tries to control the rut.

He opens his mouth, but Bishop, who is seething like a bull, stops him. “Think real hard about whatever you’re about to say. Don’t make me knock you the fuck out.”

I growl in agreement, the sound shaking the knot in my chest.

Titus rolls his eyes with a fed-up huff. “She probably did what she’s been threatening to do since we got here—”

“She wouldn’t—”

“She would!” he yells. Bishop rocks on his heels, pressing his mouth into a tight line of restraint as Titus continues. “You have no idea who she really is.” His voice shakes, and maybe I’m projecting, but it sounds like hurt.

“There’s blood , Titus.” Bishop throws his arms toward the bedroom. My stomach drops at the reminder, making me want to fall to my knees while at the same time, this nervous energy makes me feel antsy and anxious just standing here.

We should be out there, looking for her.

“I bet she left on purpose. She’s as two-faced and conniving as those gold-masked bastards.” He scoffs. “Go figure, she’s a fucking Azurite .”

My blood boils as I realize how convoluted this situation is, how many different enemies there could be, what games they’re all playing. My alpha nature burns to find the person responsible, needing to find them. Who’s to blame? Who can I punish?

In the absence of any answers, I snap, turning my rage on Bishop. “You’re her mate. You should have protected her!” He looks at me in shock right before I charge at him, wrapping my hands around his waist and tackling him to the ground.

It feels good to explode like this, too good. My mind is nothing but a red haze as I snatch Bishop’s collar, lifting his head off the floor and balling my fist.

“What the hell are you talking about? I was with you. She’s your omega too,” Bishop responds, injury and guilt lacing his tone. He doesn’t even fight back.

My heart beats against my ribs because I know he’s right, but it doesn’t help this harrowing feeling.

Where . Is . She?

I push Bishop back down and don't resist when Titus pulls me off him. I don't actually want to hurt B. I don't. But where is she? It feels like my lungs are collapsing.

"Jesus, do you fucking get it now?" Titus curses once Bishop is back on his feet. "This is exactly what she wanted, to tear us apart." He looks at us with the disappointed face of a father, angry at our actions but still wanting to help.

"No, no." Bishop shakes his head. "Not anymore."

Titus scoffs loudly. "Not anymore? Since when, last night? She called me, you know. From your phone." He points at me, and I knit my brows in confusion. I never gave Sinclair my phone.

"She called you about what? What did she say?" Bishop asks frantically, knowing the answers might help us find her.

Titus's lip curls. "She didn't say shit . It was a video call right before Ecker came back with the lube. She propped the phone up and had it pointed right at the bed. She wanted me to know just how deep she's got her claws in you two. And now this ?"

Bishop and I stare back at him, processing this information, and he waves his hands like a goddamn flight attendant. "She's playing you!"

"Maybe it was an accident—" Bishop begins.

"It wasn't a fucking accident! Just like the blood and smashed lamp isn't an accident. Jesus Christ, get your head out of her pussy," he hollers. His palms open and close on top of his head, like he wants to tug at his hair, but it's too short to grab.

I replay moments from last night, trying to figure out what he saw. How long did he

watch?

Did he see her choke on Bishop while I fingered her ass? Did he hear her beg to be stretched on my cock? Or the way she came like a trembling slut when I took her tight, little hole?

Does he know how fucking beautiful she is when she's stuffed full of cock in both holes, her weeping pussy all red and swollen? A possessive growl builds in my throat. That was for us, Bishop and me.

He hasn't earned the right to see her like that .

The thought is like a slap across the face.

It's not us against him—it's us against them . The Echelon.

I'm trying to shake this protective division in my head when the sound of loud static crackles. It immediately grabs all of our attention as we look at each other like we used to, like a team. Us against them .

“ Aspiring Alphas of the Echelon .” A deep voice fills the common room. My eyes jump around, searching for the source of the sound. “ As many of you have noticed by now , your omegas have been taken .”

Heart racing, I run up to a small painting in an oval frame. It never caught my attention before, but now I notice the different texture of the canvas, more like cloth or tight mesh. I rip it off the wall and sure enough, an intercom speaker is built in.

The next time the voice speaks, I'm so close I can feel the vibrations as it booms loudly. “ Welcome to your next Trial .”

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Chapter 2

The Hunt

Ecker

A nger rushes the air, engulfing the three of us. It thrums, and finally it's not directed at each other but trained instead on the people who deserve it, like a sniper's sight.

I reach for the speaker, wanting to rip it from the wall, crush it to smithereens, but Bishop stops me. "We need to hear the rest to get her back." Always the diplomat .

" To pass the Vigilance Trial , you must repossess your omega ."

Repossess . Like a fucking car or goddamn piece of property. I can't help but snarl, my lip curling and the rut tingling my senses.

" Vigilance is not only about preventing misfortune but also being able to adapt and find a resolution before misfortune turns to tragedy . To put this to the test , the thieves are not to harm the omegas ."

Thieves. Not kidnappers or abductors but thieves . Because, to them, omegas aren't people but property. My stomach roils. Not supposed to harm her? Then why is Sinclair's blood staining the carpet?

" You have twenty minutes until that order expires and they are given free rein to do as they wish ."

“Jesus Christ,” Titus scoffs in disgust.

I don’t trust their rules, not for a second. It only makes me more desperate to find her, to hold her, to count her limbs and toes and make sure that every perfect piece of her is returned to me whole.

“ Do not squander this time Your clock starts now .”

I’m surprised when Titus is the first one to move toward the door. “Grab a knife if you have it and let’s go,” he says while starting a timer on his phone.

Neither Bishop nor I took the switchblades we usually carry with us on our run and quickly dash to grab them.

Before we leave, another message is delivered through the intercom. This time I recognize the Cyan Elder’s slimy voice. “If your omega has been claimed, do not be comforted by your protective bond. These thieves are all undesignated males so they will not be stopped.” He cackles vulgarly, and the connection cuts with a final, static buzz.

He didn’t need to finish that sentence. We all know what will happen.

We march down the hallway with quick steps. Steps I can hardly hear over the hammering of my heart. The thought of those men’s hands on her makes me murderous, but the idea of them inside her . . . I can’t even fathom what I’d do. The gruesome images and possibilities are like dynamite inside me. I finally allow the rut to flood my system, and with it all my senses heighten, including my sense of smell.

I’m able to inhale and catch her distinctive vanilla and citrus blossom scent. Picking up her warm trail is like a salve to my burning chest. The soothing effects don’t last long. I pick up on another scent, something sharp and acrid with a hint of bitterness.

Her fear .

It burns the back of my throat like acid, and soon, it's all I can smell. Until we follow it outside and it disappears.

The light was fading on our run, but now the sky is inky and the faint flicker of stars are beginning to appear. Goddamn, we really are searching in the dark.

Frustrated, I turn to Bishop. "Can you feel anything through the bond? Where do we go?"

His eyes squeeze shut like he's concentrating really hard, his nose scrunching.

"Jesus, you look like you're about to shit yourself," Titus says.

"Shut the fuck up, Titty ." I huff and punch him in the shoulder. He grunts and scowls back.

"This way." Bishop's eyes fly open, now fully gold. A look of intense determination settles on his face. I feel cut off at the knees not being able to sense her the way he can as her mate, like a piece of me I didn't even know existed has been ripped away.

Once we have her back, I know what I'll do to make myself whole. But first we need to find her, make sure she's whole, then, and only then, can I worry about myself.

Titus and I follow Bishop as he runs toward a dense tree line that stretches from the north end of the Estate to the lake. I look over my shoulder at the sound of shouting and see the Cobalts running across the lawn. One of them is carrying a broken table leg.

As we enter the cool shade of the forest, my body buzzes. I don't know if it's

adrenaline or nerves or maybe, just maybe , it's her. Bond or no bond.

“Shit ,” Bishop curses and drags his hand across a tree trunk. When he brings it to his nose, his face contorts with ire. “More blood. It's hers,” he adds with a growl.

My teeth grind together. I didn't have much faith in their harm-free grace period to begin with, but now there's none. We need to get to her, and fast . “Where is she, B? I have a feeling we have a lot less than twenty minutes.”

He doesn't have to close his eyes this time. Intuitively, he knows and immediately carves a path through the trees with us right behind him.

The sunlight seems to be fading quickly. Has more time passed than I realized, or are we just getting deeper into the woods? Sinclair must be scared right now. As the light dwindles, is more and more fear setting in?

At least she knows we'll come for her. Always.

She has to know that, right?

A sharp scream slices through the air. 1 We freeze for half a second before Bishop yells her name and we barrel toward the sound at twice the speed. I feel like I can hear the ticking of a bomb in my mind.

Tick , tick , tick—

It's immediately silenced when I catch her scent again in the wind and know we will get to her in time. She's so close.

When I spot her white hair like a bright light through the leaves, my heart leaps. At least she's standing. Her abductors are harder to make out in their all-black outfits,

but I can count at least four of them. A growl builds in my chest.

Four of them. Four men have had their hands on her. Four .

They hear us coming and quickly spin around in defense. The moonlight catches the metallic sheen of the knives in their hands. The image of the blades dripping in their blood flashes in my mind as we descend on them like a pack of wolves.

One of them runs toward Titus, who rips off a low branch and skewers the charging man on the broken, jagged end. Sinclair screams as the point juts through his back and another male grabs her. He tugs her back, wrapping one hand around her mouth, and her beautiful blue eyes widen. Bishop roars when the abductor brings his knife to her throat, her handcuffed wrists in front of her.

My bloodthirst rages so strong that I don't even take out my switchblade. I need to feel the warmth of their spilled blood on my bare hands.

Everything is happening so fast, it would be a blur without the rut. But I'm so hyperaware and in tune with every movement, every sensation, that I move with clear precision. Titus fights with one man while Bishop goes to Sinclair, and I turn my attention to the poor fucker in front of me.

Behind his black balaclava, fear flashes in his eyes and it looks like he's moving his lips. He better be saying his final prayers because he's about to meet his maker. In an unconfident crouch, he pedals backward.

He lifts his knife as I stalk forward. He must realize there's nowhere he can run when a cold smile paints my face, so he lunges at me.

I grab his wrist, forcefully twisting it so he drops the knife. Then I pull his arm out and down, driving my knee up until his forearm snaps like a two-by-four. His howl

rattles my eardrums, but I love it.

Pretty white bone breaks through his skin. He wobbles and his eyelids flutter like he's going to pass out. A small silver key falls from his other fist.

“Not yet, asshole,” I say while holding him upright by his splintered arm. Forcing his injury to his throat, I stab him in the carotid with his own radius or ulna—I don't know which. I'm a hooker not a fucking doctor.

I groan at the release the slick feel of his blood brings. A delicious chill runs down my spine that, paired with Sinclair's scent, makes my cock harden. I swipe up the key the man dropped and go to where she stands, trembling in shock in an oversized shirt.

Her eyes are wide with a thousand-yard stare as she slowly holds out her shackled wrists.

Dirt and dried blood streaks her face. It takes all of my rut-addled mind's focus to not clasp it between my hands and kiss her until neither of us can breathe. But somewhere in the rational recesses of my mind, I know that's not what she needs right now. By the way she's hyperventilating and the wired look in her eyes, I know she needs to be uncuffed.

Bishop is still grappling with the man that grabbed her, and Titus is busy ripping every dead man's mask off—I don't know what or who he's looking for, but it doesn't matter right now.

I want to hold her. I want to hold her so goddamn tight.

She flinches when I lightly touch her hand, breath still harried and heavy. So instead of wrapping her in my arms, I focus on freeing her. Adrenaline makes my hand shake as I fit the small key into the lock of the metal handcuffs.

As soon as the unlocked cuffs fall to the ground with a clink, she takes off sprinting.

I feel absolutely sucker punched as I watch, frozen, as her bare feet fly across the forest floor.

We saved her and she's running from us?

"What the fuck?" Bishop says without any harshness, just disbelief.

Titus scoffs. "Fucking typical. Hope you weren't expecting a thank you." He rolls a corpse over with a kick of his foot like it's a pebble on the ground.

"No," is all I can manage to say.

No, this isn't how it's supposed to go.

No .

I run after her because doesn't she know she's mine? Doesn't she know I'm hers?

I run because I can't breathe without her, and I can't let her go again.

And I run because every alpha instinct is fucking screaming at me to chase .

The thrill of the hunt gives me the strongest second wind. My entire body hums like a tightly strung bow in anticipation of catching her, pinning her, having her beneath me with my cock buried deep inside her.

I doubt she knows where she's going. Does she even care? Surely she knows that I will chase her wherever she goes.

My blood pumps heavier when she looks back over her shoulder, wild wisps of hair fluttering across her face. Our eyes meet and my chest rumbles when I see the gold in hers. And I realize she's not running to get away from me. She's running to get caught by me.

She loves the hunt as much as I do. She can't help it; it's her nature. And who am I to deny her what she needs?

An icy laugh spills from my lips and I call out, "Run all you want, Omega, but nothing and no one will be able to keep me from you again. And once I catch you, I'll claim you to make sure of it."

Her steps stutter, and she shouts back, "Fuck no!" A primal sort of anger ignites inside of me.

How dare she deny me what's mine, what's ours .

Bishop catches up with me. "Are you gonna bite her?"

"I don't need your permission," I snarl. It's true. I already have all the permission I need. I haven't fucked her pussy out of respect for him, not because I can't.

"She's my mate!" He shoves me from the side.

I throw his hands off me. "And our omega."

As we stand off, she keeps putting more and more distance between us, making me antsy to a volatile extent. "Yeah, but not if she doesn't want it." He must have heard Sinclair's response.

We've only been still for five seconds, but the rut feels like it's rattling my bones

with the need to chase after her. “It’s not up to her,” I growl.

He lunges, but Titus pulls him back. “He’s right. She’s ours. He needs to do this on his own, Bish.”

Bishop looks torn as his gaze jumps between Sinclair’s fleeting form and me. His jaw clenches and unclenches before he says, “You make sure she’s okay, alright? Bring our girl back whole.”

There’s a solemn sacredness in his words. His approval and trust.

“I will.” I nod earnestly.

He seems reluctant, but Titus pats him on the shoulder. “Come on, man, let’s go.”

Their footsteps fade as I focus all my senses on Sinclair, now a hundred yards away. This distance excites the animalistic part of me, as it knows it will only make me savor the hunt and my prize all the more.

My mouth waters as I take off, a foreign aching sensation pricking at my gums. My body is preparing to claim her. My muscles light up, surging with strength as I quickly close the distance to less than ten feet.

I can smell her fear on the wind. But now, unlike earlier, it’s sweet. And fucking addicting.

As she feels me closing in, she tries to speed up. Her arms pump harder, and I hear her heart beat faster.

Finally, I reach out and grab her. My hand wraps around her wrist, and I swing her around and into my chest. I clamp my arms around her, and she pushes against my

chest with both hands, twisting and yelling.

“Haven’t you learned the more you fight, the harder I get?” I chuckle darkly, and she huffs in aggravation.

I force us back until her shoulders hit a trunk and I pin both wrists above her head. She’s fuming, breathing heavily, and a harsh scowl knits her brows. I lean forward and her breath stutters when I almost graze her cheek with the tip of my nose. I pull back and she looks temporarily stunned.

Clasping both of her wrists in one hand, I trail my thumb up her jaw and down her throat. My gaze narrows on the jump of her pulse, and I tongue my canines. She juts her chin defiantly.

“Don’t you fucking dare bite me.” Even as she snarls, the scent of her arousal fills my lungs. My dirty little omega can’t help herself.

“Oh, you’ll change your tune soon enough, baby girl,” I taunt. “Just wait until I’m stretching your tight pussy— oof! ” She knees me in the crotch. Instinctively, I release her as I double over.

She shoves me and breaks away at a run. I smile despite the pain when I swear I hear her fucking laugh . I suck down a gulp of air before returning to the chase and hollering, “Trust me, I’ll be putting my mark on you sooner or later.”

It’s as much a promise as it is a threat.

Now that I’m done with these cat and mouse games, it takes me a matter of seconds to catch her and pin her back to the ground.

I inhale her scent hungrily, like it will somehow sate this burning need. But I know

there's only one thing that truly will.

“Do you have any idea how useless I felt? I lost your scent, then you were just gone . If it wasn't for Bishop, we wouldn't have found you in time.” It hurts to admit. “I would have given anything to be able to feel you through the bond.”

Her glare softens at the anguish behind my growl, and I cup her face between my palms. My heart skips a beat as I close my eyes and lower my mouth. My lips brush against hers and a sweet and soft feeling washes over me.

This . This is what I need.

“Ow!” I rear back when she bites me. “ Jesus fuck ,” I hiss, tasting copper.

I wipe blood from my bottom lip with my thumb, and she weasels out from under me.

I huff then vow as she scrambles onto her feet, “Just for that, I'm going to make you beg. For my mark, for my mercy, for every bit of pleasure I'll wring from your body.”

She takes a few wobbly steps back, panting and eyes wild as I slowly stand. “I was going to make it sweet for you, but now I'm going to make it hurt.”

She narrows her eyes in challenge but still doesn't turn around to run. She's finally realized there's nowhere for her to go. Because I'll catch her, now or later doesn't matter.

I won't stop until she's mine.

I stalk closer. “I will bite you and once I do, you'll take my knot. I don't care if it rips you in two.” Her lips part on a lusty, sharp inhale. I try not to smirk as I continue. She

so clearly loves the hunt as much as I do. “You can fight me the entire time if you want. It won’t change a damn thing.”

She stops moving backward when I get within arm’s reach of her. Her knees and palms are now dirty from crawling on the ground. She looks beautifully feral, untamed.

“So why don’t you make it easy for yourself and present,” I say with a mocking drawl.

She clenches her jaw and scrutinizes me as if trying to determine whether I’m bluffing. I help her out. “I’m deathly serious, Sinclair.”

With one last, sharp glare and curl of her lip, she turns around and lowers onto all fours. Smug satisfaction fills me as she arches her back, and I settle into a kneel behind her. My stomach bottoms out as she hikes the long shirt up over her ass. I lick my lips, seeing she’s not wearing anything underneath, her pussy already dripping with slick.

Mindlessly, I reach between her parted knees and drag my fingers through the wetness lining her inner thigh. “You really are a filthy whore,” I breathe in admiration. I pull down my shorts, letting my cock bob free. “Spreading yourself right here in the dirt, ready to get fucked like an animal in the forest.”

I grip my cock, wetting it with her slick. My head rushes, the rut like a strong, mind-numbing high now that I’m so close to fucking her . . . “ Fuck! ” My mind snaps into focus when she kicks back and slams her heel into my chin, making me bite down hard on my tongue.

She hurriedly crawls forward, and I snarl, “ You nasty , fucking slut .” Red-hot rage pumps through me, aggression rut blooming and merging with my lustful one.

“You’re gonna get what’s fucking coming to you.”

I catch her almost instantly, grabbing her ankle and tugging her through the dirt. I pin her flat on her stomach with my body and grind her face into the ground. She wheezes a dry, sinister laugh.

“Is this what you needed, hm?” I growl right next to her ear and her eyelids flutter. “Needed to be chased down and fucked senseless as a reminder that no matter what happens, you’ll always be ours?”

I have her completely powerless, and yet a dazed, lusty look still paints her face. I scoff. “You’re one fucked-up omega.”

My hips and hard cock press against her ass, and she says breathlessly, “ Yes , Alpha . . . ”

I can hear how deep in heat she is by her voice. It’s husky and needy and— fuck , I can’t help but grind my pelvis against her ass.

“ Don’t move ,” I alpha growl, and her whimpering and squirming under me stops immediately. She lies still while I reach between us and slot my dick at her wet entrance. My whole body shudders.

“Fuck, I’ve wanted to take you like this since Titus fucked your virgin pussy bloody. You already know I think about it all the damn time.”

I suck in a deep inhale as I push just the tip inside.

“Think about how wet and silky you’d be. How your pussy would feel gripping my cock as you come. But most of all, I think about . . .” I slowly sheathe myself in her pussy with a long, gruff groan. “About . . . you . . . this . . . fuck . . . how I was made

to be yours.”

Now that I have her subdued, I move, relaxed and unhurried. I make my thrusts as short as possible, so that I still get some friction without ever leaving her tight heaven.

I place my palms on the back of her waist and push myself up. “God, I just want to fuck you into the ground,” I muse out loud but think about her soft flesh grating against the dirt.

So instead, I lift her hips. We’re both on our knees now, her chest to the ground. As she’s still under my command, I can move her like a doll. I drag my hips back, withdrawing almost all the way.

“You can move your mouth but nothing else,” I permit then thrust brutally into her.

“ Oh , fuck! ” she cries, and I snap my hips again, plunging into her while also tugging her ass back.

“You feel that? You feel how good we are together?” I say as I wrap one arm under her and begin to rub her clit.

“ Ohmygod . . . , ” she mewls as one word. “ Yes , yes . ”

I clench my jaw with another punch of my hips, then ask through gritted teeth, “Do you get it now? Do you understand that you’re mine and I’m all . Fucking . Yours ?”

“Mm-hmm,” she moans, her brows pinching together, and she bites her lip.

“If I let you go, will you stay, or do I have to keep you like this until I claim you?” There’s no hiding the wanting in my tone, the true and hearty ache for her trust.

“I’ll stay.”

Her two sure words hit me like a wave.

“Okay, you can move.” I break the command and instantly get a flash of fleeting fear when she pushes onto her palms.

“Fuck me, Ecker,” she begs, hot and desperate, and the fear evaporates as she doesn’t try to get away but instead just rocks back into me harder.

“Oh, fuck, baby girl.” I groan when she clenches around me and meets me thrust for thrust.

“Oh, please, please ,” she whines for more, and I slap her ass, leaving a beautiful mark. She yelps and I spank her again on the same red spot. “Ow, fuck .” She hisses, and I smirk.

“I told you I’d make it hurt.” Then, I circle her clit with slick fingers, making her sigh heavily and hang her head with a moan. “But I’ll make you feel good too.”

“ Shit , Ecker, I’m gonna com — ” She mewls, her abs twitching.

“Fuck yeah, show me how a desperate slut like you makes a mess of my cock,” I grind out, fighting to hold back my own orgasm as her pussy begins to squeeze and flutter around me.

She keens, thighs clenching and body shaking. A moan gets caught in her throat as she topples over the edge, coming hard for me, her mouth falling open on a silent gasp.

“ Jesus—fucking—Christ ,” I spit as her cunt milks me. My balls draw tight and my

hips flex. “I’m about to come.” It’s a strain to talk. “If you want my knot, you know what to do.”

A few loaded breaths and heavy thrusts pass, and my stomach begins to sink despite the cresting pleasure. If she doesn’t say anything, I could still bite her, but the idea of forcing an unwanted bond on her feels wrong.

I exhale through my teeth, every muscle in my body preparing for release.

“Bite me, Ecker.”

My hips stutter. “What?”

“I want you to claim me. Please. Fucking bite me, then knot—”

I pull out, flip her over, and am plunging back inside her within a single second. My heart races as I hover over her, and she rolls her head to the side, exposing her neck. My nerve endings spark with electricity the moment my lips lightly brush her delicate skin. I pause here to savor this beautiful moment, but she must mistake it for hesitancy because she arches up into me and begs, “I fucking need you, please .”

I sink my teeth into her corded muscle. It feels like the earth quakes.

Intense, mystifying rapture consumes me in a sudden burst, and I feel like I could fly. My cock thickens inside her, and when I feel her pleasure and desperation through the newly minted bond as I stretch her even further, I can hardly breathe.

“ So good . . . ,” she says on the sweetest, drawn-out moan. The sound rolls over my skin like divine chills.

Suddenly, her eyes—a dazzling gold—and her mouth fly open. “ Your knot . . . Oh

my god .”

Before my knot locks in place, I roll off her and onto my back. “Get on top, baby girl. Sit on my cock and take what’s yours. I want to watch your perfect pussy stretch around my knot.”

She straddles me and tugs her shirt off in a flash. Seeing her naked body makes my brain short-circuit. She’s a fucking vision. My mate .

I’m in a stupor of awe until she presses my tip against her entrance, and pleasure rocks through me. Just the lightest feel of her pussy dripping for me is almost as intense as a full orgasm.

“Shit, baby,” I sputter. “If you don’t put me inside you right now . . .” A throaty groan is pulled from me as she sinks down.

Her chest blooms with a pink that crawls up her throat to the bite marks now on either side of her neck. She rolls her head back and rocks her pelvis forward to rub her clit against me.

“ Yesss ,” she moans greedily and grinds harder, more feverishly. Her eyelids are half-mast, and a continuous, hungry whimper keeps spilling from her lips.

I could watch her take and take and take from me all. Fucking. Day. “Use me, Omega.”

My knot continues to expand, and she mewls. “You feel. So. Fucking. Good, Alpha.” The sound of her taking her pleasure from me makes me lightheaded. She chants a combination of sharp moans and sweet, little, oh , oh , ohs .

She comes with a loud gasp, falling forward as she plants her palms on my chest and

takes my knot.

“God damn .” My knot inflating and filling her is a deep and throbbing pressure. And when it locks into place, the release takes my breath away. I come harder than I ever have before. I can’t help but wrap my arms around Sinclair and squeeze her tight to my chest as my cock pulses again and again.

“You take me so fucking well. Such a good fucking girl for your mate.” I rumble into her ear and can feel her smile into my neck before pressing a soft kiss to my heated skin.

I brush my hand over her hair, pulling it back from her sweaty temples to fall down her back. The feel of her pleased shudder makes me warm with contentment. I repeat the motion as we bask in our new bond. It seems to soothe her as much as me.

Feeling her safe in my arms is like fitting a missing puzzle piece into place. But feeling her in my bond, in my heart, is like nothing was ever missing to begin with. I’m whole, as if I were never broken.

Brushing her hair off her shoulder, I run my fingers over the scar on her neck and ask, not for the first time, “Who did this to you?”

She chuckles then says with a hint of attitude, “You know, it would be easy to figure out if you really wanted to.”

“Always the brat.” I laugh and nip her shoulder. She squeals then nuzzles back into me. I sigh into her hair, looking up at the stars that break through the tree canopy, and can’t imagine ever letting her go.

1. “Formaldehyde Footsteps” — Houndrel

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 3

The Silent Things

Titus

It's not that I want to stay up half the night. It's just that I can't fall asleep until I know they're back safe.

It doesn't help that for half that time, Bishop has been pacing in the common room. Just watching him is about to make me crawl out of my damn skin.

"I don't know how much more I or these ancient ass floors can take," I grumble after nearly an hour.

Instead of stopping, he asks, "You think he's really gonna do it?"

"I don't know, man, can't really think at all with you buzzing around like a fucking gnat—"

"I think I'll know if he does." Completely ignoring me, he continues, "Right? Like through the bond—I'd know, right?"

He barely notices when I push off the couch with a tired sigh. "I'm going to bed."

There, I listen to him pace, sit down, stand back up, pace some more, sit down, stand up, rinse and repeat for another hour until finally I hear his bedroom door shut. It's

two hours after that that our wing's front door opens.

Pattering footsteps and a poorly stifled giggle bounce outside my bedroom door. Ecker and Sinclair stumble inside, sounding like they're drunk. Something sharp twists in my gut when I listen to the sound of a body hitting a wall, then a falling frame.

“Ecker . . .” Sinclair hisses his name in a chiding yet teasing whisper.

“I can't wait—I need to fuck you again. Being inside you is fucking addicting, baby girl.”

“Ah .” She gasps as I hear her back slam against the wall again.

That's when I throw both pillows over my head and tug my comforter all the way up. And that's where I stay until the morning, when my door is thrown open.

It bounces off the wall with a loud bang, and I emerge from my huddle, disgruntled.

“I can't stand it.” Bishop has burst into my room and looks just as harried as the night before. A muffled moan carries through the walls. He grabs his head and groans. “I can't fucking stand it.”

“What do you mean you don't like listening to your brother rail our omega while she screams for him to give it to her harder?” The sarcasm in my voice couldn't be thicker.

He balks. “We were not nearly that bad.”

“No.” If I didn't just wake up, I would probably punch him. “You were worse .”

He shakes his head adamantly. “No fucking way . . . Okay, maybe . But that doesn’t make this any fucking easier.”

“Dude, just go join them. She’s your mate too.” As much as it pains me to say, it’s true.

“Nah.” He shakes his head. “You were right—he needs to do this alone. Bonding isn’t exactly a family affair.”

Yeah, I shocked myself with that one too.

Sinclair’s disappearance being one of her schemes was a hill I was willing to die on. But, I guess once we found out what really happened, it was hard to still make her the villain. At least, in this one situation.

I could sense Ecker’s panic. It was like a broken power line, sparking and skittering, untethered and dangerous. I knew once we found her that he not only needed her to be okay, but he needed her to be his . It was the only thing that was going to pull him back from the edge.

And I love my brother more than I hate her.

Bishop looks up at the ceiling and sighs. “It fucking sucks though.” No shit .

I hold back my retort and swing my legs off the side of the bed to rifle through a pile of clothes on the ground. Finding a pair of decently clean workout shorts, I get up and say to him, “C’mon, let’s go to the gym. Promise you’ll feel better after punching me in the face a few times.”

He huffs a weak laugh. “Yeah, let’s do it. Those guys died way too quickly last night. Let me go change real quick.” He heads out.

“Oh, hey,” I hear him say awkwardly from the common room.

I freeze without realizing until the tug of my lungs forces me to break my held breath. Her soft voice floats into my room, and I curse my body’s reaction. “I was wondering when you were going to come join us.”

“Y-You want me?” he stutters. I quickly shove the envy down and tell myself his stumbling response is embarrassing.

“Of course, I want you.” I can picture the way she’s probably swaying slightly, her hands clasped coyly behind her back as she looks up at him with those azure pools dancing with gold.

I shove my feet into my shoes and throw my wallet and phone into my pocket. I know where this is going. And it’s not to the gym with Bishop.

I don’t mean to slam my bedroom door as I exit but can’t help it when I see what she’s wearing. Or not wearing. “Jesus Christ,” I scoff, doing a terrible job at hiding the gruff sound of lust in my tone.

She crosses her arms tighter over her bare chest, and her stomach tenses above a pair of Ecker’s boxers rolled at the waist a few times. She tries to reverse her automatic reaction of bashfulness and drops her arms, forcing her shoulders back. “It’s nothing you haven’t seen before, sugar tits.”

I try to ignore her but can’t keep my eyes from roving over her body. Her nipples pebble, and Bishop adjusts his junk with a low, barely there growl. The sort of unconscious sound I would probably make if I knew this arrogant display of hers was going to lead anywhere other than insufferable blue balls.

“Um, by the way . . .” She shifts on her feet like she can’t decide if she wants to step

forward or not. “Thanks,” she says quickly, like she’s playing hot potato with the word.

I lift my brow in surprise. When she opened her mouth, a thank you was the last thing I expected.

“You know, for saving my ass.” I can tell it’s hard for her to look me in the eyes, but she tries nonetheless, a shocking amount of sincerity in hers when she says again, “Thank you.”

“It was a Trial,” I say gruffly. “I didn’t do it for you.”

She quickly erases the hurt that flashes on her face, and I curse myself.

Goddammit , why am I like this?

“I’m going into town,” I say brusquely without looking at either of them as I swallow down this shitty feeling and leave.

I have the Echelon driver drop me off at a gym downtown. Inside, I head straight for the locker rooms and climb out the back window. I don’t want their errand boy knowing where I’m really going and reporting back to the Elders.

Or worse, to Sinclair. I shiver at the uncomfortable thought.

I enjoy the short walk to my final destination, even if it is cutting through trash alleys and grungy side streets. Just being off the Estate and out from under the Echelon’s watchful eyes feels refreshing, relaxing almost.

Though, it’s likely they have eyes on this decrepit building. So, I sneak inside as soon as I arrive, making a mental note to figure out another way in for future visits.

I go directly to Simon Grinwald's apartment. Standing in the hallway, I can hear the television playing inside. I knock one time before saying fuck it and kicking in the door.

"Whoa! What the hell?" Grinwald jumps up from his La-Z-Boy and reaches for the side table covered in Cheetos dust and water rings next to him.

"Don't even think about it," I warn, walking inside. "I'll break your fucking arm before your finger ever gets near the trigger."

His hand hovers in front of the side table drawer. "You want a demonstration? Go ahead, let's see who's quicker," I goad him, blatantly hoping he tries and I have an excuse to get my hands a little bloody. Sparring with Bishop really would have been nice this morning.

Instead, I'm in this fucker's apartment that smells like boiled eggs and sheets that haven't been washed in months.

"I noticed you haven't dealt with our problem." I step closer, and he inches back.

"It's barely been twenty-four hours," he stammers.

"No, Simon, it's been forty-two, and I gave you forty-eight." My hands ball into fists and aggression races under my skin. It's ridiculously difficult to not give in to the urge to knock him on his ass, but I don't trust myself not to kill him if I start.

And killing him won't solve anything.

Instead, I turn around the way I came and step over the wooden debris from the broken door. I pause on my way out to let him know, "You owe me a finger for every hour past that."

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 4

My Cock, Your Honor

Sinclair

“Did you do what I asked?” Ecker asks when I walk out of my bedroom to where he, Titus, and Bishop are waiting in the common room.

He gives me a wolfish smirk that makes me want to sink to my knees. If I thought my omega nature was strong after bonding with Bishop, it’s grown tenfold since bonding with Ecker. Everything he—or Bishop for that matter—does makes me want to crawl at their feet and promise to be a good girl.

“Yes.” I nod. His eyes drop, hooded, to where I’m toying with the hem of my skirt.

The urge to please them is so powerful, it constantly makes me feel lightheaded, like I’m stuck on the verge of passing out until they give me their approval or praise. I’m constantly chasing the high of that first full breath.

I hate it.

But I also love it.

On paper, the idea of submitting and constantly seeking assurance makes me want to gag. But in reality, it’s so deeply gratifying that I can’t help but revel in it. It’s not just the act of submission. It’s the security that comes with it, the sense of belonging

and comfort, knowing no matter what, I have two people who will always have my back. Even if they were once the people I'd least suspect.

I'm not saying I forgive her or even fully understand her decisions, but I am starting to see why giving into her nature was so appealing to my mo—Celia.

“Good,” Ecker murmurs into my hair as he pulls me into his side with an arm slung around my waist. Even such a simple, mediocre word as good when whispered in his lush, husky tone makes me melt.

“Everyone ready now?” Titus grumbles like we made him wait for hours, not minutes.

“Yeah, let's go,” Bishop says, and the four of us file out of our common room.

The lust drunkenness didn't last nearly as long this time as it did the first time, which is probably why I can pick up on the edge of unease shifting through the boys. All we know is that we were called to the Elders' council room, but not why. There's been no more surprise nobilities or graffiti stints. I can tell not knowing what we're walking into has them tense. Even Ecker seems unsettled, drumming his fingers on my hip as we walk through the halls.

When we arrive, there's a servant waiting outside the large double doors to let us in.

As we walk in, there's only one Elder in a wolf mask, and he looks me over questioningly.

“There are only three chairs,” Bishop points out about our side of the long table with a firm tone, clearly unhappy with the implication.

Which is confirmed when the Elder says, “Right. Well, typically omegas don't attend

these kinds of meetings.”

Ecker steps up to the table but pointedly doesn't pull out a chair. “You asked for the pack.”

“Correct,” Cobalt says with a slight sneer. “I suppose she can stand.” His lip twitches in amusement. “Or kneel.”

At the beginning of the Trials, I would have been validated by his inference that omegas aren't members, but property of the pack.

Now, I'm just offended.

After everything they put us omegas through, we have damn sure earned our spot. And it's not kneeling on the fucking floor . . . unless it's to please my alpha, not this random bastard.

“It's fine. I'll stand.” Ecker pushes off the table.

The Elder tenses. “The Council has invited you to sit at their table. I suggest you don't ignore the gesture,” he says tersely.

After a few heavy beats, he leaves through another door, saying, “I'll let the others know you're ready.”

“Fuck that,” Ecker scoffs as he pulls out a chair. “No omega of mine is going to be standing while we sit.”

Along with Bishop and Titus, he takes a seat and opens his arm out toward me. “Sit.”

“On your lap?”

“Best seat in the house, baby.” He winks, and I can practically hear Titus roll his eyes as he roughly pulls out his chair. 1

I perch lightly on his knees while Bishop takes a seat on the other side. The two of them start talking. About what, I have no idea because Ecker wraps both arms around my waist and tugs me back until I’m flush with his chest.

Heat drops in my stomach and my legs press together under my skirt. His lips feather against the shell of my ear as he whispers incredibly quietly, “Now be a good girl and don’t make a sound.”

My heart skips a beat. “Eck— ”

“I said, not a sound.” He pinches my thigh sharply in reprimand, and I close my mouth. “Atta girl. Didn’t I tell you that if you were mine, I would be taking you any chance I got?” His soft murmurs feel like fine silk against my skin. My thighs slicken at that alone. “No matter who’s around or where we are . . . ?”

He discreetly pulls my skirt out from under me, and I grip the chair’s arms, exhilarated but still nervous as hell. I feel him fluff the back of my skirt over his lap and thighs then swallow in anticipation at the sound of him carefully undoing his belt.

My stomach is full of crashing waves as I try to subtly hold myself up above his lap while he frees his cock under the cover of my skirt. A delicious ache builds in my core at the first feel of his silken skin against my bare pussy.

When Ecker told me to wear a skirt with no panties for the meeting, I thought it was just for the illicit thrill of knowing that I wasn’t wearing anything.

I don’t know why I’m surprised this is the real reason. Ecker is nothing if not bold.

I squirm as he uses a hand on my hip to guide me back and forth on this hard length. Suddenly, Titus turns our way, and I freeze. He looks us up and down with a suspicious scowl, then he returns to his conversation with Bishop.

“I bet he can smell you dripping all over my cock,” Ecker whispers crudely in my ear, and chills run down my spine.

“The Elders will scent me too,” I hiss so quietly it’s barely audible.

“Maybe, but they will never guess that our bratty-mouthed omega is really just a submissive little cock warmer. It won’t even cross their minds that anyone would dare.” I whimper, unconvinced, and he tightens his grip on my hips to lift them up. “Now, bite your tongue and sit on my cock.”

As I slowly lower myself to sink down on him, I hold my breath and struggle to keep my eyes open and face casual. I dig my teeth into my lip at the exquisite stretch, lust, and heat spreading through my veins.

I feel rather than hear his rough groan. His hot breath on my neck grows heavier.

“That’s it, let me feel every inch of that tight pussy.” He’s not as quiet this time and both Titus and Bishop whip toward us.

“Are you—”

“No fucking way—” they exclaim at the same time and are both cut off by the back door opening. The first member of the Council steps in.

“Look down if you can’t hold back your heat,” Ecker whispers, hushed but hurried, before the rest file in. “But if you can, I promise I’ll make it worthwhile.”

“Stop . Talking ,” I whisper-yell as quietly as possible. The sound of his low, smokey voice is an aphrodisiac of its own.

Three Elders join the table opposite us. There is no Cerulean Elder of course, but a Beryll Elder is also noticeably missing. It seems no one else is coming because the Azurite begins. “The Echelon has a long history of intelligence gathering. Our ability to uncover secrets, reveal deceits, and illuminate darkness is one of our greatest strengths and, in turn, greatest weapons.”

Ecker clenches his glutes, making me bounce ever so slightly in his lap. My hands fly to the table and the smallest gasp escapes me. A vein in Titus’s neck pops and he brings his hand to his temple like he’s trying to block his view of us.

Azurite flashes his flinty gaze over us, and I hold my breath. His expression is unreadable under the stag mask, and my heart races as I wait to be scolded. Ecker must sense my tension. His hands on my hips, he soothingly strokes my sides with his thumbs, wordlessly willing me to relax.

When the Elder speaks again, I feel like I can see a lingering suspicion in his eyes. Maybe it’s just in my head. “For the Intelligence Trial, each pack is given a target to gather sensitive information on that can be used as leverage. This leverage is vital to our subsistence as an organization and to keep a firm hold on our power.”

“It is traditionally an external ally or enemy.” The Cobalt Elder takes over. “However, for reasons we cannot disclose, we are breaking tradition, and your target is the current Trial’s Beryll pack.”

Titus and Bishop both perk up, leaning forward at this momentous news.

“You want us to spy on fellow nobles?” Bishop asks incredulously. I can tell in his voice he thinks this is a trap.

“Not spy. Gather intelligence,” the Cobalt Elder says pointedly.

Titus sounds unimpressed. “Dig up dirt, that’s what you’re saying?”

“ Ordering ,” Azurite snipes. “This is not a request. It is a Trial, and the value of the information you provide will determine whether or not you succeed.”

“Are you looking for something in particular?” Ecker asks. He sounds totally focused on the conversation, but his hand snakes under my skirt. I try to avoid obviously sucking in my breath when his palm runs over my thigh and his fingers delve between them.

“There is endless information in the world. What differentiates those who succeed is knowing how to filter it, identifying what is important, and then capitalizing on it.” No one speaks after the Azurite’s cryptic nonanswer.

I’m wondering if we’re about to be dismissed when Ecker’s fingertips ever so lightly trace over the slick pearling over my lips. The gentle caress makes desire twist viciously inside me, wanting more.

My eyes feel dry and hot as I resist the heat wanting to invade my bloodstream. I look down in case I fail. Which I may be closer to than I realize because Bishop growls, and I feel the tie of our bond crackle. It’s like the zap of a cattle prod. Sharp, painful, but undoubtedly pushing me toward one direction.

It’s the weirdest sensation, not only feeling my arousal build within my own body, but also being able to feel it from another person’s perspective. It’s like sinking with a life jacket on.

He tries to cover the low growl by clearing his throat and asking, “Is there anything else we need to know?”

“Just that under no circumstances can anyone discover your target. Especially as it’s an inside pack, utmost discretion must be maintained at all times.”

As if mocking the very definition of discretion, Ecker presses two fingers between my folds. I fight the urge to fall forward as he makes contact with my clit, his fingers sliding down either side. I feel my pussy clench at the stimulation, and a soft punch of hot air hits the back of my neck.

I’m wound so tight, so hypersensitive as I resist going into heat, it’s to the point of discomfort. The light puff of his breath feels like an electrifying caress, painful yet soothing. I grip the arms of the chair, feeling dizzy and lightheaded. My blood thrums in my ears. I can feel the pulse on my neck, thumping with each heartbeat, ticking like a bomb. My skin pricks with sweat.

The first Elder stands. “We look forward to your first report in a week’s time.”

Thank fucking God . This is almost over .

Bishop and Titus both move to rise and panic jumps in my chest—Ecker can’t stand right now; I can’t stand right now. A quick look passes between them, and Titus gives an almost indiscernible nod before rising on his own.

“We appreciate your trust in assigning us this Trial.” Titus’s voice is bland and diplomatic as he outstretches his long arm across the wide table to shake the Azurite’s hand.

Bishop’s gaze flick to mine from where he’s still seated. With hooded, nearly glowing eyes, he subtly dips his chin, and I realize now what conspired between the two of them. In a matter of seconds, they silently agreed Titus alone would stand. This allowed us to maintain expectations of respect for the Elders, while not singling out Ecker and me for remaining sitting.

It's these small moments with unspoken words and silent conversations that remind me how intrinsically linked these men are. A pang of emotion strikes me. It's too convoluted to be encapsulated by a single word. Part of it is longing, wondering if even being bonded mates, I will ever get as close to these men as they are to each other. Another part feels similar to regret, but perhaps more wistful, for trying to cause a rift in something so sacred. Even finding joy in that divide.

My morose musing manages to temporarily distract me from my invading heat, but the moment the back door slams shut after the last Elder leaves, it comes rushing back.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Titus shouts, nostrils flaring.

Bishop throws his hand in our direction and whines to Titus. "There is no way we were that fucking bad!"

"Guys . . ." I whimper, turning feverish as I finally allow myself to be consumed by the heat. Bishop's eyes, full of concern, flash to mine, and I gasp at the sharp pang of emotion I feel through our bond. "I think I'm going to be sick."

I shiver with body aches, and the softness in Bishop's eyes hardens as he turns them on Ecker. "See, you goddamn idiot! You made her sick, forcing her to resist going into heat for so long—"

"Shh, baby girl." Ecker ignores Bishop's reprimand. He stands up, keeping a firm grip on my waist so that I stay in the cradle of his hips the entire time. "I know how to make it better. I'll take all your pain away until it's nothing but pleasure."

"Please . . .," I beg as I place my palms on the table and arch my back. The flu-like feeling slips away with his first thrust, radiant warmth taking its place. "Yes, yes, more."

“This is all you needed, huh?” he whispers softly and sweetly, but punches into me in a way that is anything but soft and sweet. “To get fucked good and hard by your mate. This is what you were squirming so desperately on my cock for.”

He bites off a gritty moan and I feel the sound cascade down my back like falling sand. The hairs on the back of my neck rise, and I plead breathlessly, “Mates. I need to get fucked by my mates .”

Bishop’s voice is strained. “I’m here, Sin—”

Titus’s hand flies out to stop him, slapping him in the chest. “ Not in the council room.”

Bishop growls. “But—”

“There’s a closet outside. You have five minutes to do what you need to do to get her through this heat, but don’t even think about knotting her,” Titus orders, his tone a mix of jealousy, annoyance, and sacrifice.

Before he even finishes speaking, Ecker has already pulled out and swept me up in his arms. It’s a quick blur as he swiftly leaves the council room behind Bishop, who holds open the door to a dark closet across the hall.

“Five minutes,” Titus reminds us coldly as he takes up a lookout position, dragging his palm over his cock and adjusting his pants with a heavy, testing breath. Before he shuts the three of us in, I meet his steely yet burning eyes and hear his gruff voice grind out, “And try not to scream so fucking loud.”

1. “The Look - Two Inch Punch’s Shook Shook Remix” — Metromony, Two Inch Punch

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Chapter 5

Five to Seven Minutes

Bishop

My eyes quickly adjust to the dark closet. Shelves line the walls like a pantry, but there's barely anything on them. A few cardboard boxes, some cleaning supplies, and a broom propped against one shelf. 1

Quite frankly, I couldn't give a shit what's in here when my omega is going out of her mind with lust. It would only take five minutes to get back to our wing, but she needs us now . And I intend to give her everything she needs.

My muscles relax with a pleasurable ripple as I give into the rut, the pain of resisting it fading away. As my knot slowly begins to swell, I can't think clearly—well, I can, but only about one thing: her .

“Let's take care of our mate,” Ecker says, depositing Sinclair against my chest. She circles my neck with her arms and waist with her legs. She burns in my hold, her skin a thousand degrees.

“Fuck, it really feels like she has a fever.” Worry chills my rut, my thoughts going from hazy and hot to clear and concerned. I brush her hair off her sweaty forehead, lifting her head from my shoulder. She shudders, and I get flashes of gold as her eyelids flutter, like she's on the verge of losing consciousness.

“Shit, Sin, are you okay?” I ask as guilt fills my stomach. I was so fucking focused on getting my dick wet that I didn’t realize my mate is suffering to the point of illness.

“I’m—” I cup her cheek and her mouth falls open, eyes closing with a gasp. She seems to press into my palm and breathes, “ So fucking good.”

“Y-You’re not sick?”

“Dude, did you really think I had her sitting on my cock for my own pleasure?” Ecker scoffs, taking out his dick and maneuvering his pants down in the tight space.

“Uh . . . yeah . . .” Confusion replaces concern as I glare at his boner. I’m not letting that thing anywhere near her—

“I may have pushed it a little longer than I should have, but the more she resisted going into heat, the stronger it would be when she finally let it in.”

“But she flinched when I touched her.”

“Because it felt good ,” Ecker snarks.

“ Enough . . . talking . . . ,” Sinclair pleads softly between heavy breaths.

She reaches behind her to wrap her fist around Ecker’s length. He steps closer as she lazily strokes it, his gaze rich and golden. He brushes her hair off her neck, and she rolls her head to the side with a soft moan.

“Every little touch is amplified, isn’t it? Every little touch, tiny shocks of pleasure,” he murmurs against her throat, lips just barely dusting her skin, and I can see goose bumps rise.

“ Mm-hmm. ” She hums then turns her brilliant golden eyes up to mine. “I need you too, B.”

“Whatever you need. Lock your legs for me.” I hike her higher up my waist, and she clings to me so I can free my hands to undo my pants. While I do this, Ecker drags his fingers through her slick, then he slides them farther, to her back hole.

Once my hard cock is free, I palm her ass with both hands, hoisting her up to take me. I freeze when she lightly takes my face between her hands. I’m stunned to find something almost sorrowful in her eyes.

“Whatever I need . ” She repeats my words then asks meekly, “But do you need me too?”

“Fuck, Sin.” I exhale, hurting from seeing her uncertain about my feelings for her. I’ve been so clinical that I’ve made her feel like a duty, when that couldn’t be further from the truth. She’s finally let her guard down, allowed herself to be soft and vulnerable, and I can’t let her think that was a mistake. “Before I couldn’t breathe around you. Now, you’re my air.”

I lightly press my lips to her forehead and feel her affection for me flow through the bond. It sinks into my bones. It’s different from desire or lust or need. It’s pure and soft.

Since she and Ecker bonded, there’s been times when I felt forgotten about or like the runner up. Today’s meeting was one of those moments.

But I realize now, it’s not about choosing him or me. She can want us both, even more than she did before. Because even with Ecker hard and ready to fuck her until every cell in her body is sated, she still wants me— us . Because I can give her something he never can: myself.

“So please,” I ask in a desperate, husky whisper, “will you let me breathe?”

Her forehead crinkles and she nods in short, eager bobs, swallowing deeply.

“Okay, Romeo, we only got five minutes. You can romance her all you want once we’re out of this closet.” Ecker hurries it along, continuing to wet his cock and her ass with the slick coating her inner thighs. “I don’t even need to prep you, do I? Not with the way you’ve been dripping on my cock all morning and your heat making your body so relaxed and ready.” She mewls eagerly.

“I’m gonna put you on my cock now, Omega, and my brother is going to fill your ass. You’re going to take us both because that’s what we all need.”

“Please, I feel so empty,” she begs, unlocking her ankles behind me so that I can hook my arms under her knees as she slides down my dick. Her mouth falls open and her eyes darken to a deep gold. The lust in our bond pulses as she sinks deeper into heat, intensifying my rut.

As her wet, hot pussy sheathes me, I groan. “This pussy belongs to your alphas, doesn’t it?” I growl with a flare of possessiveness.

Her cunt isn’t just for me anymore, but it doesn’t feel any less mine. Doesn’t make me want to bury myself to the hilt again and again any less. Doesn’t make the desire to pump her so full of my cum that she’ll be leaking me for days any less.

“Every breath . . .” Ecker grips her hip with one hand and lines up his dick with the other. “. . . and every hole . . .” He pushes into her ass, and she gasps, raptured. “. . . belongs to us .”

She arches her back to wrap one arm around Ecker’s neck. He dips his head to suck a bruise into her porcelain skin, right above my claiming bite. Our marks look so good

next to each other on her neck. Like she was always meant to be not just mine, but ours .

Looking at them makes me feral. I want to claim her all over again, cover every inch of her skin with my teeth. I settle for digging my fingers into her hips and bouncing her forcefully up and down my length. My jaw grinds every time my swelling knot hits her pussy but never sinks inside.

God , I'm dying to knot her, plug her with my cum.

But I can't . Anger is quick to flare.

She's my mate — I punch my hips up as I shove her down even more forcefully on my cock— I should be able to knot her whenever I want—

Fuck—no . I can't think about that. Not when rut rages through me and the visceral need to fulfill my deepest alpha cravings burns hot inside me.

It will drive me mad.

I force my thoughts from what I can't have to what I can: my omega.

Right here, right now, with my brother. And fuck if it still doesn't feel like every .
Goddamn . Thing .

Her pussy tightens with every inch Ecker buries in her ass. I feel his strokes against my own cock.

He is a ruthless lover, growling and nipping her flesh. He bites down on her shoulder as he punches into her with a tortured look on his face. She cries out, and I slam my mouth down on hers to swallow the sound, remembering Titus's parting words.

My head swims as I lose myself in our kiss. I'm swept away in every taste and swipe of her tongue, like I'd truly never need air again if she never stopped kissing me like this. I'm pulled further out from shore when she flings her arms around my neck, clawing my shoulders, tugging on my bun.

It's a frantic, frenzied sort of energy that builds with every one of her rough touches. It skitters across my skin and courses through our bond.

"Two minutes." There's a knock on the door at Titus's gruff voice.

"Shit," I curse. I'm not even close to having gotten my fill.

"We don't need to finish. We can't knot her anyway." Ecker speaks through heavy breaths, never breaking his brutal rhythm. "Just give it to her hard and make her come."

Her eyes fly to mine with a worried look in them. "But—"

"Don't worry, I'll give you my knot once we get back to the wing," I assure her, and the crease between her brows relaxes. I love how she craves my knot filling her, the way I crave her scent filling my lungs, for every breath to be a reminder of who she is and who she belongs to.

"Rub your clit, baby girl," Ecker coaches in a tender contrast to the way he fists her hair, tugging her head back. He laves her neck with his tongue, making her breath shake when he passes over his bite, and adds coarsely, "You're gonna come nice and hard for us. Leave us desperate for more. Then, when we get back to our wing, we'll draw out that hunger and take our time."

"Yes, yesss ." She moans, her fingers moving hurriedly between us, as she works herself higher and higher.

Her pussy clenches so strongly that the pleasure nearly knocks me off my feet. “Goddd ,” I sputter with a groan, stumbling back with Ecker’s next thrust.

My back hits the shelf and something clatters loudly to the ground. The metal shelves creak and smack against the wall each time he slams inside her.

It’s nothing but background noise.

Ecker taunts her some more. “You’ll be writhing and begging by the time we finally give you our cocks again. And we’ll be equally desperate to pin you down and breed you.”

“ Please ,” she begs, and a spark of harried desire ignites in the bond, her omega nature alighting at his words.

And my alpha nature aching to fulfill it.

“You want that?” My voice is grizzly, so drenched with the rut that I sound like a beast. “You want to be our little breeding whore?” Her pussy answers me with a greedy clench.

“ Oh my god .” She gasps as if startled by her own desire.

Ecker’s hand clamps around her throat. “That’s not an answer, Omega,” he growls.

“Yes, yes, please.” She sounds so desperate, so pitifully sweet.

“What if we want to tie you down and take turns filling you until your cunt is red and swollen, used and dripping?”

She doesn’t answer him, speechless and wracked with pleasure. Her body trembles.

Her teeth sink into her lip. Her nails bite into my shoulder. Her scent claws at my senses.

She's so close. I can't resist deepening the fantasy we're creating. "Or maybe I'll feed you my cum while Ecker knots your pussy. You'll take every drop like a good little cum slut then thank your alphas for taking such good care of you."

"Oh—fuck, fuck, fuck ," she cries, and Ecker quickly wraps his hand around her mouth with a grunt as she clenches hard around us.

She comes, her pussy quivering, and I want so fucking bad to stay inside her, to feel every pulse until my cock throbs, to push my knot in until it locks us blissfully together.

I can tell Ecker is feeling the same pain as his head falls onto her shoulder and he pants raggedly.

We give her a minute to catch her breath. Then it's fucking torture pulling out. My arms feel heavy, definitively locked around her. I can't bring myself to let her go from my grasp too.

Ecker gets his pants back up then looks at us, having not moved a muscle. He sighs understandingly. So when I swing both her legs up to cradle her, he pulls my pants up my legs for me.

He forces my stiff dick into my waistband, and I groan roughly. "Sorry, dude. I'm in the same boat," he says, grabbing his crotch and shaking his legs, trying to get comfortable with a hard-on and jeans.

"Let's get fucking out of here," I grumble, and he gets the door.

Sinclair tucks her face into my chest as we face the bright light of the hallway. I give in to the urge to run my hand over her soft hair as she does, and it helps soothe the grating feel of my unsatisfied rut.

Titus is standing with his arms crossed and the same scowl he had when we went in. He grinds his jaw and adjusts himself in his pants. “That was seven minutes.”

Ecker barks a laugh then gives him a cocky wink. “Seven minutes in heaven, baby.”

1. “I’m God” by Clams Casino, Imogen Heap

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 6

Riot

Sinclair

G oing into this week's brotherhood night feels different from last time. Not only because I'm sober, but I don't have the same itching burn for retribution in my veins. Last event, I was so lust-drunk that I could chase nothing but my own desires, consequences be damned.

And one of those desires was making Titus Cerulean hurt .

Now, as I sit on Bishop's lap, secure and protected, I can't help but feel a little . . . I don't know. It's not exactly that I feel sorry for Titus, but I feel something other than raging hatred.

He rebuffed my thanks after the Vigilance Trial, but it felt forced. Like the hostility was no longer there, like he was flippant because that's how he thinks he needs to be. Then yesterday, he was the one that offered to guard the closet when I was reeling from the meeting.

A lewd but thoughtful gesture.

It's weird. I don't get it. How can I feel anything even remotely close to forgiveness, let alone gratitude, after everything he's done?

I take in his profile as he scrutinizes something across the room. His forehead is fretted in focus and the muscle at the back of his jaw is tight and strong. His body's ever-present tension is still visible under his nice suit, though at first glance, he might seem at ease.

In one smooth, confident move, he flicks the button on his suit jacket open and rocks forward to rest his elbows on his knees. My stomach flips as I imagine all that heated focus on me .

As if sensing my inner squirming, his eyes slice suddenly to mine. I freeze, unable to tear my gaze away or even to pretend I haven't been staring at him. My throat swallows a dry knot as he sits back and sharpens his glare.

“What?” he demands suspiciously. Bishop's hand on my thigh tightens protectively.

“You look good tonight, Titty.” I can't help but say it with a teasing tone, though I mean it genuinely. He looks unjustly good in a suit. Handsome, but still intimidating and fierce. Nothing can completely hide the dangerous predator he is.

For a second, the tension in his face drops and he looks almost sweet. The same way I'd imagine a tiger right before it bites your head off.

It doesn't last long, as if he were simply caught off guard by my compliment. His untrusting scowl quickly returns.

“Dude, you need to learn to chill out—you're gonna give yourself an aneurysm,” Ecker says, returning from getting drinks, pushing one into Titus's hand.

He holds up the glass tumbler of amber liquid. “I asked for beer.”

“They weren't serving any,” Ecker replies, making Titus groan. “Think of it as

concentrated beer,” he adds with a side smile before setting his drink down and turning toward me.

Hunger darkens his features. He roughly clasps my chin and tilts my face up to land a searing kiss on my lips.

There’s nothing timid about it. He kisses me like he has everything and nothing to prove.

I belong to him and he belongs to me. Yet, the reckless abandon with which he kisses makes everyone in the room disappear, and I know this moment is for no one else but us.

He pulls away with a smirk, and I rock back into Bishop, breathless. He drags his hand away, until a single finger tilts my chin up.

He makes a small, satisfied sound and murmurs, “My girl.”

“Jesus Christ, can we get through one event without any fucking.” Titus scoffs and takes a heavy sip, slumping down in his chair.

My cheeks heat. “It was just a kiss.”

He side-eyes me, unconvinced and unamused. “Yeah, and yesterday was just a meeting.”

Bishop sits up straighter, jostling me in his lap. “I hear you. It won’t happen, promise,” he says, all while I feel him growing harder.

“Speak for yourself—” Ecker begins but quickly stops and holds his hands up in surrender when Bishop and Titus shoot him warning glares. “Fine. Does this extend

to cock-warming too or . . .”

“ Yes! ” Bishop, Titus, and I yell at the same time.

He looks at me with mock offense. “Not you too?”

“It’s a miracle we didn’t get caught yesterday. Let’s not push our luck.” I laugh as he flops down into the third seat in the trio of armchairs, defeated.

Then, a small smirk tugs on his lips, and I’m already rolling my eyes when he says, “But maybe there’s another closet nearby.”

He still has the split lip from the night he chased me and I bit him. He flicks his gaze to Bishop’s hand resting on my bare thigh and lazily runs his tongue over the cut as if he’s hoping to find a taste of me left. The idea that he might has my pussy slickening and my arousal perfuming the air.

“ Omega . . . , ” Titus growls under his breath, and I squeeze my thighs together.

“I can’t help it,” I hiss back.

“I, for one, love the way you smell,” Bishop whispers.

His hand moves the most minuscule amount up the slit in my dress and his lips dust the shell of my ear as he speaks. “Love the way your pussy is always so wet and needy.” I shiver. He continues, “Love that you’re always ready and eager for your alphas’ cocks, no matter where we are or who we’re around. Your body is always begging for us.”

“ Bish , ” I whine quietly, pleading with him to stop torturing me. Yet, I can’t help but squirm in his lap, aching to feel his hard cock against me. A rough, throaty sound

escapes him, and I feel a zing of electricity through our bond. Desire, lust, wanting .

I jump up. “I, uh, I think I do want a drink after all.”

Ecker moves to stand up. “I’ll come with you—”

I fling my hand out. “No .”

He chuckles and sits back down. “Suit yourself, mate .” The way he drawls that last word makes my blood heat.

“ Jesus , get it together,” I mutter to myself under my breath as I walk away, blushing.

As I step up to the bar, the man to my left turns in my direction. He looks me up and down with a sleazy grin and props his elbow on the bartop.

I recognize him as Stefan, one of the Cyan alphas. Gross.

As I wait for the bartender, I do my best to ignore him, but he’s as easy to ignore as a buzzing mosquito, twirling the toothpick from a martini between his teeth. How something so small can be so irritating . . .

I finally snap. “ Can I help you ?”

“I was wondering—”

“Noble gentlemen and omegas,” a booming voice interrupts, and everyone’s attention spins to a podium across the room.

The boisterous space falls silent in a way that sends eerie chills prickling the back of

my neck.

The Azurite Elder stands poised and sharp in a classic tuxedo behind the microphone. With all eyes on him, he reaches into his coat pocket and withdraws an envelope. “For you, ma’am?” the male servant behind the bar asks, making me jump. Stefan notices and snickers with an amused sneer, and oh , how I wish I could just slap him.

I reel in my temper and quickly place my order, grabbing the drink as soon as the bartender slides it my way and hurrying back to my pack.

The Azurite at the podium has made such a show of slowly opening the envelope that by the time I reach the guys, he’s only just now unfurling the letter inside.

I shove the beer bottle in my hand at Titus and slip back into Bishop’s lap. “Ecker was being a twat.” He takes it with a confused look and his eyes jump between me and the drink with caution.

Frustrated and on edge from the interaction at the bar, I grab it and take a big swig before handing it back.

“See, not poisoned.” I huff.

Ecker laughs, and Bishop wraps an arm around my waist with a soft chuckle against my neck. Titus frowns but takes a pull nonetheless as the Azurite resumes his announcement. “It is my honor to announce the results of the Vigilance Trial.”

Bishop shifts me in his lap as he sits up straighter to listen. I cover his hand on my stomach with my own, that ominous chill returning.

“In fifth place, for one point is the Cobalt pack, Alphas Emmett, Elias, Theodore.” A small smattering of applause follows. “In fourth place, securing three points, is the

Cyan pack, Alphas Yves, Eric, and Stefan.”

Ecker visibly relaxes now that we’ve at least made it to the top three. Titus, on the other hand, still has a death grip on the bottle neck, and I bet if I listened super closely, I would hear his teeth crack. Man needs to learn to chill.

Though, I can’t deny the anxiety roiling in my own stomach, and I don’t even know what we’re fighting for. I thought passing the Trials was all that mattered. I didn’t realize there were winners and losers within that too.

The Berylls come in third, and my nerves turn to uneasy excitement. I may not know what we’re winning, but still my heart thumps. I squeeze Bishop’s hand.

“In second place, earning a total of eight points, is Pack Cerulean, Alphas Titus, Bishop, and Ecker.”

There’s no applause. No Elders or family are present to celebrate us. The quiet rings hollow and is only amplified by Ecker’s halfhearted whoop. I resist the temptation to avert my gaze and instead hold my chin high, making eye contact with Paisley. She smiles weakly and brings her hands together, nudging her alpha to clap along with her.

It’s still faint compared to what the other packs received, but soon, the room joins in and even Titus loses some of the tension taut in his shoulders. I shoot Paisley a warm smile and hope she can feel my gratitude from across the room. I may not have family here, but I do have friends, and that’s something I never expected to be able to say.

“And last, but certainly not least, I am proud to announce the winning pack, awarded a total of fifteen points: the Azurites. Alphas William, Sebastian, Archibald, and Preston.” Roaring cheers erupt after the Elder’s final announcement, and I’m not even

a little discouraged by the difference in volume.

I swivel to press my lips to Bishop's hot cheek and feel him sigh at the brush of a touch, butterflies in my stomach and in our bond. I slide off his lap and slip into Ecker's.

His affection is a warm wave over me as he graciously pulls me tighter. I palm his cheek with one hand and push my fingers with the other into his soft hair. He smiles up at me like a puppy, and I feel my cheeks turning pink.

"I'm proud of you," I admit almost bashfully before giving in to the burning desire to kiss him. His skilled mouth consumes me with even the lightest pressure, his tongue gently parting the seam of my lips.

I tangle my fingers deeper into his hair. I could just melt into him—

"I suppose congratulations are in order." Yves's snobby voice is worse than nails on a chalkboard, dousing the moment with ice water.

"What do you want, Cyan?" Ecker growls, clearly annoyed at the interruption, his erection already digging into my bottom.

"Like I said, to congratulate you three." None of us respond, knowing there's a punch line coming. "Though, I'm surprised you fought so hard to get that gutter rat back." Aaand there it is .

Bishop's on his feet in less than a second, and I hold Ecker back with a hand on his arm, his grip on the chair whitening.

"You want to say that again?" Bishop snarls in a clear threat, and I get a small thrill when Yves can't help but flinch back the smallest bit.

“I’m just saying, seemed like a good opportunity.”

“Yeah? A good opportunity for what?” Titus slowly stands, flexing the inches he has on the tallest Cyan alpha.

Stefan swallows then says with a forced laugh, “Oh, you know.” I can see regret and the desire to backpedal wheel in his eyes.

“No. I don’t.” Titus’s cold, flat voice feels like the sharpening of a blade, the readying to fight. “Why don’t you spell it out for me?”

“Having someone else take out the trash for you,” Yves spits out.

Bishop steps up, shoulder to shoulder with Titus, and flicks his chin at Merigold standing behind them. I notice the bruise on her cheekbone and slightly swollen eye when she tries to cover it with her long hair. “At least we can keep our omega safe.”

“A bad protector and a sore loser.” I feign a mocking wince and tsk. “Not a good look, Yves.”

He snarls in response. “If you were my omega—”

“But she isn’t, is she?” Ecker cuts him off with a taunting drawl. “She’s ours,” he says in a velvety purr, then lasciviously drags his tongue over Bishop’s claiming mark on my neck, making my eyelids grow heavy and my stomach sink with want.

I resist the urge to shut everyone out and fall into his heated touch, giving Yves one last sickly sweet smile. “I’d rather be gutter trash than your omega any day.”

The need for retaliation flares in his eyes and his jaw ticks, but one of his fellow alphas grabs his shoulder. “They’re not worth ruining the night over.” He urges him

back.

Reluctantly, Yves allows his brother to turn him around. I catch a flitting smirk on Titus's face as they walk away, and he sits back down.

"Having fun, Titty?" I ask coyly, leaning back into Ecker's chest. His partial smile quickly fades as he looks up at me. "You seem to be enjoying yourself more than last time."

"Yeah," he says, just as dry and flat as usual. "It's a fucking riot."

Then he lifts the empty beer bottle and pretends to take a swig to cover the undeniable crack of a smile on his lips.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 7

Spilling Blood

Ecker

Bishop and I stumbled upon the old blacksmith shop on a run. Tucked behind the decommissioned horse stables on the Estate, the forge was full of the junk when we found it. But I've spent the last few days clearing out broken lawn equipment, wood pallets, and various other garbage. I gathered firewood by stealing from the piles in the Estate's many salons and dens that no one uses.

Now, the shop is back to its former glory with glowing coals in the forge fire, anvils dusted off, and a row of hammers and tongs neatly lined up and ready for use.

Hell, I even swept the damn thing—anything for my girl.

Who, right now, is standing outside the barn doors of the shop with a blindfold on.

"Is that smoke?" she asks, her nose wiggling as she tries to suss out our location. "Is something on fire? Is it supposed to be on fire?"

I chuckle. "If I answered your questions, it wouldn't be a surprise."

As soon as I slide the doors open, chains begin jingling along with the sound of muffled grunts. While devilish excitement zings through me, Sinclair's back goes rigid.

“Ecker . . . ,” she says warily as I skip across the floor to stand by her present in the middle of the shop.

I position myself next to it. “Okay, you can take the blindfold off now.” Chains clink more vigorously, and I am positively giddy as her hands go to remove it. 1

The fabric falls away and her icy-blue eyes draw wide as confusion passes over her features, slowly morphing into realization

“Is that . . . How . . . What is this?” she stutters in disbelief as she takes in the bound and gagged man hanging from the rafter, his arms stretched above his head and his feet just barely touching the floor.

The corner of my mouth curls. “You said that if I really wanted to, it wouldn’t be hard to find out who gave you that scar. Well . . .” I walk up to her and brush a lock of hair behind her ear, letting my hand trail down to ghost across the burn on her neck. Her lips part as she looks up at me through her lashes. “I wanted to. And now, he’s yours to do with whatever you want.”

She’s silent for a moment, her face blank. There’s a flicker of fierce determination in her eyes, and then a slight but sinister smile spreads on her lips. “And what if I want to kill him?”

I match her smirk and tug her by the hips into me before wrapping my hand around the nape of her neck for a bruising, breathless kiss.

A heady mix of lust and bloodthirst tingles at my senses. I scent the man’s blood from the minor injuries he got getting here. The way it mingles with her flood of arousal from our kiss is intoxicating. Something feral and unchained pulses through our bond.

I bite her lip, giving it a tug as I pull away. When I speak, my voice is husky and thick. “Then you better make it slow and painful.”

Sinclair

“Hi, Vincent.” 2

I can’t hide the sick joy in my voice at seeing my former trafficker hanging like a pig on a meat hook. He yells something from behind the dirty rag shoved in his mouth, and the garbled sound is music to my ears.

My blood rushes as I look around the old building and consider all my options. The forge fire is strong and hot. I eye the smoldering coals. It would be fitting. To burn him. Brand him.

I wonder how his screams would sound, how his burned skin would smell. Would he cry, beg for mercy? Piss himself? God, I hope so.

Horseshoes are stacked on a peg above a workbench. Next to them on the wall hangs a bridle, and my pulse jumps. I’ll treat him the way he treated me and too many others: like an animal.

I look down at my mangled finger and the ring stuck on it. I knew the moment I saw Vincent for the first time that he would take everything from me if he could. I broke my own finger so there was at least one thing he couldn’t take.

It’s funny how life works that way, the world constantly trying to break you down, to take and take until you have nothing left for them to steal.

It’s so rare that someone in my position ever has the chance to be the taker.

I won't waste it. For myself and every other woman he broke down at the Doll House who never had a chance to stand on the other side.

I grab the bridle from the wall, feeling even more vindicated when I realize the metal bit has jagged edges like a dull serrated knife.

Ecker forces Vincent's head back so he has to look at me. My alpha has a dopey, pleased smile on his face . . . like a cat presenting his human with a dead rat.

He notices the bridle in my hands and grins wickedly.

Before he pulls out Vincent's gag, he warns, "Say one disrespectful word to or about my mate and I'll cut your tongue out." Vincent's watery eyes widen with scared acknowledgment, and Ecker adds, "Which would be quite a shame because I strive to give my omega everything she wants and without a tongue, she wouldn't be able to use that bit she looks so excited to try."

Vincent bobs his head in pathetically eager nods while the rag is removed from his mouth. Spit dribbles from the corners and he asks despondently, "What are you going to do to me?"

Despite my pounding heart and racing adrenaline, I feel nothing but peace and calm when I look into his evil eyes and offer a single promise. "Only what is fair."

I wipe my sweaty brow with the back of my hand and exhale heavily, the hammer in my other hand hanging at the end of my limp and tired arm 3 . "I didn't realize how much it would take to get a nail through a foot."

Ecker massages my sore shoulder. "Aww, I told you I'd help ya, baby girl."

I meet his eyes. "Just because it's hard doesn't mean I can't do it."

He smirks proudly and looks down at the nasty pool of blood by Vincent's feet. "You're one vicious woman, Sinclair Cerulean."

My heart flutters at the sound of our names together.

Vincent whimpers through the jagged horse bit cutting into his tongue as his toes drag where they hang on the floor. I can't imagine the pain from even that minuscule pressure. What, with horseshoes nailed into his soles and all. The tips of the nails protrude through the tops of his feet.

The adoring heat in Ecker's gaze makes my thoughts cloudy. I'm sure most of it is from the aggression rut he's been fighting since I picked up the hammer. I can feel it tug on our bond like a fish at the end of a hook.

There's also something about Ecker's twisted offering that makes my thighs slicken. Maybe it's my omega nature preening at the ultimate show of protection.

He's not just slaying my monsters. He's handing me the sword to slay my own.

"Well, what's next?" Ecker asks as if we're on a shopping trip. What store do you want to hit next, honey?

I consider his question to the sound of crackling coals. My fingers go to my neck and feel the gnarled skin there. I wet my bottom lip then say decisively, "I promised to be fair."

I return to the workbench and search through the things until I find a rusty dagger. Using a pair of tongs, I set the blade on the hot coals in the forge. I take it out once it's as orange and blazing as the collar that gave me my scar.

When I face him, Vincent's eyes are droopy. His face is tear and sweat streaked and

blood spills down his chin from his cut-up tongue. I eye him up and down with derision. 4

“You really are a pathetic creature.”

“Pleath . . . have . . . merthy . . . ,” he pleads weakly around the bit.

“Out of all the things you deserve, mercy isn’t one of them.” I huff a dry and cold laugh. “You’re not only pathetic but a fool if you thought otherwise.”

Then I drag the heated, flat edge of the blade from one side of his neck to the other.

His throaty screams are a symphony to the rush of blood in my ears. The gruesome scent of burning flesh a tidal wave of retribution.

He writhes on the dangling chains. The taste of vengeance coats my tongue. I thirst for more, for finality.

I hear myself speak as if an outside observer. “Now, you’ll never forget who owns you.”

I don’t realize I’ve slit his throat until I feel the hot spray of blood on my face. He jerks wildly and I blink, unmoving, as more splatters onto me. Everything around me feels quiet and hollow except for the sound of his gurgling last breaths.

For some reason, when I look down, I’m surprised to see the bloody knife in my own hand.

“Sin.” Ecker’s voice sounds like I’m underwater. “Sinclair.”

His hand on my shoulder spins me around and rips me above the surface.

He places both hands on my upper arms as if ready to shake me from a trance. “Are you okay?” Concern drenches his tone.

The bloody knife falls from my hand. My chest swells with another deep breath, the last wave of calm before I throw my arms around his neck and my lips collide with his.

It’s a pyretic kiss, incinerating all reservations and igniting our bond.

I forget about breathing as I knit my fingers into his hair and tug him even closer. I don’t need air when I have him.

He growls against my mouth, and all the lust and aggression he’d been holding back rushes in. It makes me pull on his hair and bite down hard on his lip. I want to tear him apart. I want him to tear me apart. I want . . . I want . . . I just want .

I want so fiercely, it makes every cell come alive.

But I know it’s more than just the high of the rut and heat I’m riding. It’s knowing, experiencing, enacting justice for once in my life.

Killing Vincent was so much more than tit for tat. It wasn’t just revenge or to reclaim power, control. It was healing something I’d long thought permanently broken.

I hiss as Ecker fists my hair and tugs my head back. My heavy breaths saw in and out as I look up at him, burning. My stomach drops as I watch his tongue flick out and lick blood from his lip. I don’t know if it’s his blood or Vincent’s. Either way, it makes me hungry in the most primal way.

“If I thought you couldn’t be more beautiful before, it’s only because I hadn’t seen you soaked in blood and vengeance.”

The soul-deep desire in his gaze is incendiary. I feel like I could burst into flames.

My stomach knots with desire, yearning, something I might even consider love if I stopped to think about it.

Unapologetically greedy, I demand of him, “Ruin me .”

My next breath is knocked out of me as my back hits the hard floor, Ecker’s lithe hips wedged between my thighs, my skirt flipped up.

He possesses my mouth as he rocks his pelvis against mine. I push into him and mewl for more. The wet blood underneath me only makes it feel more raw. Dirty and base.

I want to lose myself in the mess of it all, the chaos of him, and the fire between us.

My hands gracelessly tug at his belt and waistband, and he bites on my earlobe, the sharp shock of pain striking me deep in my core.

“Take it out,” he mutters roughly into my ear. “So I can properly wreck you.”

My hands rush to push down his pants and wrap around his silken skin. My mouth waters at the feel of him so thick and hard for me. His fingers roughly shove my panties aside and plunge inside of me, making me arch my back and scream.

“So fucking wet, Sinclair.” He groans hungrily. “I’m not surprised. Of course, a little torture would leave a bloodthirsty thing like you dripping.”

I continue to stroke his length as he pumps two fingers in and out of my pussy. My mouth falls open when he curls them inside me. I instinctively buck into the pleasure. We meet each other’s golden stares with heavy pants. He drops his head to kiss my slackened jaw and withdraws his fingers. I position his tip at my entrance.

“You’re the perfect match for us. You know that? No other omega here would beg to get fucked in the pool of a dead man’s blood,” he says as he slams inside me. His words are like the sharp snap of a rubber band.

My hand finds the handle of the knife on the floor and tightens around it. I press the tip to his neck, right under his jaw. A bead of crimson wells where his pulse thrums. “Do not speak of other omegas when your cock is inside me.”

He chuckles devilishly. “Got a taste of blood and already want more?”

His eyes flicker with flames, and he wrenches the knife out of my hand in a split second, flinging it behind him. Next thing I know, his palms are wrapped tightly around my throat. His elbows lock as he pistons into me. His fingers squeeze and my head rushes.

“Now that you know what it’s like to take a life, how does it feel knowing I hold yours in my hands?”

It’s a struggle to breathe, let alone speak, but I immediately know the answer. “Powerful.”

Because as strong as he is, as easily as he could overtake me and end my life in the blink of an eye, I know he won’t. And that’s why I hold the power.

He releases his grip and cradles the back of my head as he presses his forehead against mine and thrusts ruthlessly into me. He grits his teeth and mutters, “You’re stronger than any of us, Sinclair.”

His words melt over me as I gulp for air. My heart pounds. His body, his strength are everything I need and more. The pleasure isn’t a smooth rising tide, but a rocky, crashing wave. Every punch of his hips adds to the storm.

“Ecker . . .” I moan and cup his face. “Fuck, fuck —fuck! ”

His voice is gruff and hot. “That’s it, Omega. Give it to me. Break for me.”

I throw my head back and his palms flatten on the floor. His teeth bite into his lower lip as he fights to keep the rhythm while my pussy clenches.

The tendons of his neck flex and his forehead scrunches. He’s so painfully beautiful.

It strikes me deep in the chest as my climax crests.

“Keep milking me . . . Keep. Fucking —fuckk .” He groans coarsely. His hips snap forward as he buries himself deep inside me and comes with a sputtering curse and full body shiver.

1. Play “Little Girl Gone” by CHINCHILLA through ornamental breaks until next song suggestion
2. Continue playing “Little Girl Gone” by CHINCHILLA
3. Continue playing “Little Girl Gone” by CHINCHILLA
4. “I Am the Fire” by Ghost Monroe

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Chapter 8

That's Hot

Bishop

The distinctive smell of rubber mats always takes me back to the time my brothers and I lived in a crappy one-bedroom apartment before we got the warehouse. It was shortly after our parents died, and we were just starting to get into alpha fighting rings. We couldn't afford much furniture, so we filled the small living room, wall to wall, with old foam rubber mats a martial arts studio was getting rid of during a remodel.

When we weren't laid up with broken ribs or arms—we broke a lot of bones in those early days—we were on the mat, practicing and sparring with each other. Even though we were mourning our parents and barely scraping by, scared to get any legitimate job that would put us on the government's radar, I look back at those times with fondness.

Sure, we lost more fights than we won. We dined and dashed more than a few times just to have something to eat. I got thrown out of several casinos and knocked around by security, not having yet mastered how to count cards without detection. We slept on mattresses on the floor, two twins crammed together that barely fit the three of us young, growing alphas.

Every loss, every victory, every long night and tired morning. We got through it together.

So, while grappling with Sinclair on the mat at the Estate's gym feels totally different, there's still something sweet and nostalgic about getting to create new rubber-scented memories with her. Not only is the old natatorium, with its mosaic tiling and expensive equipment, worlds apart from our sparse apartment, but the feel of Sinclair's soft and lissome body twisting with mine has my heart racing for completely different reasons than when I'm wrestling with my brothers.

We've been working on getting out from under a mount where I have her straddled above the hips. With the right technique, it won't matter that I'm bigger and stronger. She'll be able to get out from under me.

We've been going at it for a while, and she's breathing hard, cheeks pink and sweaty, as she blocks my strikes. Ecker is on his hands and knees next to us on the mat, coaching her through capturing my arm on my next punch.

I move to strike with my right, and she parries, shooting her arm out and clasping her hands behind my head, effectively trapping my arm. Using her legs and hips, she breaks down my base and rolls me onto my back with her in mount, the insides of her thighs squeezing my waist.

"Ah-ha!" Her face above me lights up as if she's surprised she actually did it.

"Nice work," Ecker cheers, standing up and clapping.

It must be my alpha nature because while I'm damn proud of her and love seeing how her eyes sparkle with a sense of accomplishment, I can't help but lock my ankles around her waist and roll her right back over.

"Damn it." She exhales and relaxes against the mat, not even trying to get out this time.

“Couldn’t help myself. There’s no prettier sight than my mate pinned under me and out of breath,” I tease.

Her lips quirk in a smile. “And here I was thinking you liked me on top.”

I chuckle and run a hand up her sternum to lightly collar her throat. The movement makes a light tingle of sparks dance through the bond. My stomach rolls with desire. I lean forward to whisper against her lips, “Only when you’re riding my cock, Omega.”

“If you two start fucking on the mat, don’t expect me to guard the door. I’m joining.” Ecker laughs. I know he’s joking—this time—but the idea of tearing her clothes off and fucking her here with him makes my balls tight and skin hot.

Sinclair rolls her eyes playfully then focuses back on me. “Okay, but what’s the point of rolling you over if it just puts you in position to roll me back over? Why not try to get out some other way?”

“There are other ways to do it, sure, but the main issue just now is that you weren’t expecting it. Tomorrow, we’ll show you how to break that closed guard position.”

“That’s when you have your legs locked around my torso?” she asks, and I nod.

I feel a sense of pride in her eagerness to learn and her work ethic. She doesn’t need to do any of this—she has us to protect her. But I do love being able to teach her what I know and watch her grow and improve.

I turn to Ecker. “You know what, why don’t we just show you? Then we’ll be done for the day.”

I gesture to the mat with my head, and Ecker scoffs with a cocky grin. “Nah, you want me down there, you have to get me down.”

It takes a few moves, but I get him there eventually. Once on his back, he wraps his legs around my waist, locking his ankles behind me. He's quick and strong, sitting up with a hip bump sweep to throw me onto my back and straddle me around the hips.

I exhale a punch of air when my back hits the mat. Ecker looms over me, his sharp eyes sparkling with a hint of gold. "Boo."

Like electricity through a circuit board, Ecker's tingling aggression rut makes a heat spark through Sinclair which then strikes me with a zing of lust and desire through the bond.

Ecker's palms pin my bare shoulders, and Sinclair says breathily, "You guys look good together."

"You might be the horniest of us all," Ecker turns his head to the side to say to Sinclair with a laugh.

My mate's admiration makes the alpha in me glow with pride and desire to show off. I take advantage of the moment. While he's looking away, unexpected, I throw an elbow at Ecker's head, knocking him off balance.

We continue to grapple, each landing a few blows and fighting our way out of the other's submission holds. If Sinclair weren't here, sparring with each other probably wouldn't trigger an aggression rut, but with her sweet scent in the air and desire pulsing through the bond, it has us both gnashing our teeth and fighting for dominance.

Finally, I get him into a chokehold he can't break that has him tapping out. I stand up and offer my hand to pull him to his feet as well.

"That was good, bro." Ecker pulls me in for a hug and clap on the back. Our

sweating, shirtless torsos glide against each other, and I feel Sinclair's heady gaze on us.

When we pull apart, I'm not surprised to see her eyes dancing with gold. I chuckle. "You really are insatiable, Omega."

She cocks her head with a smirk. "Are you complaining?"

"Certainly not," I say.

"Let's go shower," Ecker adds, throwing his arm over her shoulders and tugging her close.

The changing rooms are nothing special, probably not having been updated since they were first built to accompany the now-filled indoor pool. There are long benches down a few aisles of lockers and a wall of showers at the end.

Sinclair is still buzzing as I turn on the water and Ecker peels off her shirt teasingly slowly. With the energy I can feel coursing through the bond, I wouldn't be surprised if she started bouncing up and down, as if she were hopped up on caffeine and cocaine.

My alpha instincts are to soothe, to protect her from whatever this new feeling is, but I remind myself that she's safe, that nothing's wrong. I want to let her explore every part of being ours. Even if it's unfamiliar, it's what makes us, us.

Ecker must be picking up on it too because, while sliding her leggings off, he asks her, "What do you need, baby girl?" 1

Her fingers tremble as she reaches for his waistband. "I-I don't know . . . but I know I want you." She meaningfully looks between Ecker and me, so we know "you" means

both of us.

“I’m still getting used to feeling your aggression ruts through the bond. It triggers my heat, of course, but I still get these hints or flashes of your alpha natures. It’s like . . .” Her brows pinch as she looks for the word. “It’s like I want to tear something apart, but also want to be torn apart.”

I realize she’s trying to describe the contrasting omega and alpha urges she can now feel through our bonds. Somehow, I intuitively know what she needs to soothe the war inside her.

That’s what being a good alpha is after all, predicting my omega’s needs and then going above and beyond to meet them.

I step out of my shorts and approach her with my cock heavy between my legs. “I’m going to force your submission, Sinclair.”

I wrap my hand around the nape of her neck and pull us into the stream of hot water. She gasps when I tug her head back to look up at me.

“You can fight me. Let all that anger and energy out. But you will submit for me. I’ll be as brutal as you need. I’ll fuck you hard and mercilessly and remind you of an omega’s place.”

Her face hardens with a scowl, but the idea of being forced to submit makes her arousal perfume the steam. When I see the fight amid the gold in her eyes, I know I was right.

I want to always be able to give her what she needs, even when—especially when—she doesn’t have the words to ask herself.

Ecker steps naked into the shower and gives her ponytail a harsh yank. He's so rough, her back bows and her knees buckle. Both his hands spread wide on the back of her head, and she struggles uselessly against his attempts to push her to the shower tiles.

As her knees hit the floor, she huffs and glares up at me. I watch water drops gather on her eyelashes and slide down her breasts. Ecker keeps his grip on her head. I stroke her cheek, my fingers caressing her jaw and my thumb tugging her bottom lip down as I go.

“You can give me your mouth or I can take it. Either way, I'm gonna pound your tight, little throat until I'm feeding you my cum.”

She clamps her lips tighter together and tries to shake off my touch. When Ecker's hold keeps that from happening, she attempts to push my hand away.

Instead, I catch her wrist. “That was a mistake, little mate.”

She tries to pry my grip off with her other hand, and though I could overpower her with little effort, I don't do it right away. She fights to pull her hand back as I bring it closer and closer to my throbbing cock.

As soon as her palm grazes my skin, her fight wanes and her eyelids flutter, heavy with lust. I trap her hand around my cock and force her to stroke me up and down. “Good girl, now just open those pretty lips for me.”

That reignites her indignation, and she spits at me, hitting my lower abs. It quickly washes off, and although her message was clear, she emphasizes it by growling, “No.”

Ecker releases one hand to slap her tit, hard. She yelps, as much in shock as in pain, I'm sure. Red instantly spreads on her pale skin. “That wasn't very nice, Omega,” he

chastises. “It doesn’t make us want to be very nice either.”

I can tell his condescending tone rankles, her glare sharpening. That will only make what I’m about to do even more maddening.

And she’s going to love it.

Without warning, I pinch her nostrils shut. Her eyes widen as I cut off her only air supply with her mouth stubbornly closed.

Ecker crouches down behind her to whisper tauntingly in her ear, “You know what he’ll do the moment you open your mouth to breathe, don’t you?” Defiantly, she shakes her head.

“Or continue to be a brat and I won’t have a problem letting you pass out then waking you up with my cock down your throat,” I add.

God, her hand gliding up and down my shaft under my tight grip feels too fucking good, stoking my encroaching rut and crumbling my restraint.

I grind my jaw tight as I try to wait her out, but the sight of her on her knees in front of me with my brother’s hands controllingly in her hair and water sluicing down every perfect slope of her body makes it nearly impossible.

I’m about to give in and just pry her lips apart when she breaks and opens her mouth on a desperate gasp for air.

Ecker’s right there, shoving her head my way at the same time I thrust my hips forward. I let go of her nose and hand and stuff my cock into her mouth. A garbled cry of protest reverberates around my length.

Her hands fly to my thighs as I'm just as brutal as I promised. Even with the water from the shower, I can still tell when her eyes water with tears as I hit the back of her throat.

"Take it. Fucking take it," I growl coarsely, already fighting off my orgasm.

Keeping one hand tightly fisting her ponytail, Ecker moves to her side and pushes his hand between her thighs. He groans, pleased. "Fighting really does get you wet."

She moans as he drags his fingers over her pussy.

"So fucking soaked . . . just begging to be used," he drawls tauntingly, plunging his hand deeper, her knees spreading for him.

Her hips buck as he sinks two fingers inside her, and the desperate keen she makes around my cock has me fully slipping into rut. I growl, my senses flaring to life, my skin electrifying, every sensation bigger, stronger. The sounds of her gagging grow louder as I pound harder, deeper.

Ecker keeps fucking her with his fingers while he pushes her head up and down my cock, pleasuring both of us.

Sinclair's hands ball into fists on my thighs as a muffled whine comes from deep in her throat. "That's it, come on my fingers," Ecker encourages, his voice growing deeper with rut.

Her legs squeeze around his wrist, and I pull my cock out of her mouth just in time to hear her shatter with a cry. "Oh, f-f-fuck!"

Unhurried, Ecker gently withdraws his fingers and rises to his feet to stand next to me. She looks up at us with swollen, parted lips, heavy breaths, and glowing eyes.

She's so fucking beautiful.

"You did good, but you have two mates to please," I say, reaching for Ecker's hard cock. My fingers wrap around his length, and he lets me guide it toward Sinclair.

Worn down to only her omega nature and submissive desires, she opens her mouth wide and sticks out her tongue. Ecker groans as I tease both of them, slowly dragging the head of his cock back and forth on her outstretched tongue.

Her eyes flick down to the movement, and she lets out a small whimper, her eyebrows knitting as if the sound surprised her. I feel her heat spike through the bond.

"Do you like the way my hand looks wrapped around his big cock?"

She bobs her head in a nod, and I slip the tip of his dick into her mouth. She closes around him with a satisfied hum. She doesn't take all of him, so there's room for my hand to make small, short strokes.

I've never touched any of my brothers like this, but I'm surprised by how natural it feels. It could be the rut, but I feel shockingly clearheaded. Her pleasure is my top priority, and I can smell her getting wetter and hotter the more I touch him.

Ecker doesn't seem to mind either, rocking his hips to glide his cock through my fist to her mouth. "Fuuck." He releases a throaty groan and rolls his head back. "That's so good."

I take in the lean lines of his body, his neck tilted back and abs flexed. He looks like a spoiled prince as he stretches his arms and folds them behind his head, unabashedly reveling in both of our touches.

Sinclair rubs her thighs together and blinks away the water streaming down her face.

I feel her urgency for more through the bond, like getting only a taste of Ecker is driving her crazy.

Ecker must pick up on it too. “If you want more of my cock, he’ll have to let go.” It’s not said as a warning or threat, more as a question, as if asking how much further she wants to see us go.

Her eyes bounce indecisively between our faces and his cock, so he offers, “You like the look of his hand so much? What if it were my tongue?”

My stomach bursts into flames at the idea, knowing it will drive her wild. How crazy can we make her?

Ecker sends me a heated glance, then gives the slightest nod toward a shower bench against one wall. I’m not surprised that I understand exactly what he’s thinking, what he’s proposing.

In wordless agreement, I scoop Sinclair up and carry her quickly to the bench. Sitting down, I flip her in my lap so her back is to my chest. I grip the underside of her thighs and lower her onto my cock, her knees spread wide.

“Oh, god—” She mewls at the sudden fullness.

I buck into her tight and dripping pussy, giving her every fucking inch, and groan languidly. “Fucking hell . . .”

Before kneeling between my thighs, Ecker cups her chin for a quick but deep kiss that leaves her breathless.

“Fuck, you look so good taking his cock, baby girl.” With a devious glint in his eyes, he looks up at us, his palms dragging across her inner thighs. “Do you want me to

lick your pussy until you're coming on it?"

"Yes, please." She moans.

"Look who remembered their manners." I drag my nose up her cheek, then whisper in her ear, "Don't forget to say thank you."

Ecker is now holding up her leg, so when she tries to turn her head to look at me, I can grab her chin. Angling her face down to where Ecker has flicked out his tongue and leans forward, I order, "Now, watch."

I feel her swallow as his tongue makes contact with the base of my knot. She clenches around me as she watches what I feel.

Warm pleasure drips through me as he gives a long, gratuitous lick up my length, making me sputter softly. "Shit, E . . ."

Heat spreads through my limbs as I hold her still and gently thrust up into her slick heaven. At the same time, Ecker drags his tongue through her pussy.

"Yesss." She sighs with pleasure.

Soon, there's nothing but the sound of the shower, our slapping flesh, and delirious moans. Ecker eats her pussy until her legs are shaking. He continues to lick the underside of my cock when he gets a chance. I find myself waiting with eager and hot anticipation for the next one.

I groan a bitten-out question, dying to know, "Can you taste her on me?"

"Yeah, and you guys taste even better than you look," he rasps before spreading her lips open with one hand to suck on her clit.

“Oh my god.” She gasps as he pushes two fingers with his other hand into her tight and overfilled pussy. She squirms in my grip, her back arching.

I feel his knuckles rub against my cock inside her. It feels right, filling her like this, with both of us. It makes me want to swap out his fingers for his cock. The thought is so fucking hot, I can’t stop myself from squeezing her thighs and roughly shoving her down, chasing my release.

I bite her shoulder as I come with a groan.

“Ohmygod, ohmygod,” she chants, and her thighs fight to clamp shut, but I don’t let her. “Oh. My. God!” she screams, and hot liquid soaks my cock and squirts out of her as Ecker quickly removes his fingers.

Now, that was fucking hot.

“Goddamn, baby girl.” Ecker exhales with adoration. “I can’t wait to make you squirt like that every damn night.”

She releases a heavy breath and slumps into my chest. She’s so sated and happy, and there’s no denying I feel equally blissed out. If this unexpected experiment leads to results like this every time, I’m all in.

“I don’t know if I could handle that every night,” she says with a soft chuckle.

Ecker licks his her cum from his lips and laughs. “Oh, that wasn’t a question.”

1. “I want it all – sped up” by Omido, Mandrazo, Rick Jansen

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Chapter 9

Ugly Bitch

Sinclair

“ I think getting these was the best decision I’ve ever made,” I say and kick off the dock to make my chocolate-doughnut-inspired inner tube spin. The lake water under me is cool and refreshing, while the sunshine warms my limbs and face.

I’ve never cherished the subtle touch of the sun like I do now. After my time at the Doll House, each warm breeze and streak of soft light carries a beauty it didn’t before.

Lively color has returned to my skin after months in that dark, dank place. I even saw a few faint freckles dusting my cheekbones in the mirror this morning.

A fate worse than death is starting to feel more like a breath of new life.

“Were you still at the brotherhood night when everything happened with the Cobalt omega?” Paisley asks, floating on a blow up raft that looks like a slice of key lime pie, her light-brown skin glowing even warmer under the sun.

“No, I don’t think so. What happened?”

“One of their Elders touched her and had an alpha aversion, and because he’s an old fart”—she huffs with clear disgust—“it was like he had a goddamn heart attack. Fell

on the floor wheezing, clutching his chest, the whole bit.”

“Did he not know she was bonded?” I ask, and my fingers automatically go to my own claiming bites, tracing the slightly raised, scarred skin.

“No, he did ,” she adds dramatically, “but apparently, it’s their family’s tradition to give blanket permission to all Cobalt Elders.” I make a grossed out face and she nods. “It gets worse though. Once he was done getting fussed over, he demanded she apologize for disrespecting him.”

“ She? ” I balk. “Why was it her fault?”

“Because isn’t it always the omega’s fault?” she says cynically, and I wonder if behind closed doors, Paisley and her alphas aren’t the happy, fated mates they seem to be. She trails her fingertips through the water wistfully and continues, “It was awful. You could tell her mate did not want to give permission, but by then, the entire brotherhood was watching.”

“So he gave it,” I finish. It’s not even a question. It’s just the way things are in this world.

“Yeah, I grabbed my boys once the Elder told her to make it up to him on her knees. We left. We weren’t going to watch that.” There’s rust in Paisley’s usually polished voice. My own stomach churns.

I recall my first days here when the Cyan Elder demanded I be punished for my own show of disrespect. The humiliation I felt was ten times worse than the slap of Titus’s palm. But a slap, I can take. It’s a split second of embarrassment, and at least I could stand proud in how I took it with a brave face.

But to get on my knees for some old man in front of everyone?

It wasn't even her own actions that got her there.

A fate worse than death . . .

Could that still be true? Maybe here in this place, the warmth of the sun is just disguising the heat of hell.

“Ladiesss ,” an obnoxiously saccharine voice sing-songs.

“Oh god, what does she want?” Paisley grumbles as we both sit up in our floats to see Merigold flitting over to us in a cotton-candy-pink skirt.

The heels of her stilettos sink into the grass as she works her way over to us. She exhales dramatically when she reaches the dock. “Whew, these are not the shoes for this.” Her ensuing fake laugh is cloying.

“How can we help you, Merigold?” Paisley seems to have no patience for the Cyan omega's usual antics today.

Her shoes clack on the wooden dock as she walks to the edge where we're floating. “A bunch of us are going into town for manis and pedis and wanted to see if you two are interested in coming.”

The friendly invitation immediately sets off alarm bells in my head.

“Who is us? ” I ask.

“The other Trial omegas—poor Angel has been in such a mood since the brotherhood night.”

I assume Angel is the Cobalt omega and subtly look to Paisley, who confirms with a

small nod.

“Well, anyway.” Merigold flaps her hand. “We’re leaving in ten if you’re coming.”

Her uncharacteristic niceness is still making me uneasy, so I let Paisley answer first as I try to read the situation.

“Not today. Thanks for the invite though,” Paisley says with obligatory politeness, but there’s nothing friendly or grateful in her tone.

Merigold turns to me. “Sinclair?”

“I’m good.”

“Are you sure? I bet your alphas would appreciate it if you put in a little effort. You’re not living in some ramshackle whorehouse anymore. It’s okay to actually care about how you look.”

I laugh, my unease evaporating. “Ah, there she is. That’s the Merigold I know.” I look her in the eyes, and she glares back. “Have fun though, maybe they can do something about your personality too.”

I push off the dock and spin away in my tube. I hear Paisley laugh as I close my eyes and smile.

“Whatever, I was just trying to be nice.” Merigold huffs, and I listen to her heels stomp away.

I ask Paisley to bring my cup of water before she floats out to meet me, then I return to my peace.

I'd rather be ugly than a bitch.

"I think I might call it a day," I tell Paisley, picking up my water cup and disappointed to find it empty. My stomach cramps and gurgles as I sit up to paddle to the dock. "I'm not feeling too great."

"What's wrong?" she asks, sliding down to the edge of her raft to kick her way back.

"Eh, it's just a stomachache." I blow it off, but I actually feel a little queasy.

When I climb out of the water, a spell of lightheadedness comes over me. I stagger, almost falling over.

"Whoa, are you okay?" Paisley asks, concerned, hurrying up the dock ladder.

I steady myself. "Yeah, just a head rush. I haven't eaten much today."

She doesn't look convinced, but there's nothing wrong with me. It was probably just too much sun on an empty stomach.

I bend over to pick up my towel and try to hide the grimace from a wave of nausea as I stand back up. "I'm probably a little dehydrated, that's all."

"Okay, you head back, and I'll handle tying these up." She nods toward the floats.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, go on and let your alphas take care of you." She gives me a wink and an encouraging smile, but for some reason, the thought of Bishop and Ecker fussing over me makes my stomach churn even more.

“Yeah, okay.” I try to keep the distaste in my mouth from seeping into my voice and throw on my sundress over my suit.

The walk across the lawns feels twice as long as it did this morning. My stomach is still unsettled, but I don’t get any more lightheadedness, which is promising. I’ll take a nap when I get back, and by the time I wake up for dinner, I’m sure I’ll be feeling fine.

Stepping into the cool building of the Estate is a breath of fresh air, making me even more convinced it was just a touch of heat exhaustion. I curse this giant ass place and its winding hallways. I just want to be in bed already.

I cut through a drawing room that leads to a back staircase. Penelope has shown me all the shortcuts, and the doors to this room are always propped open. I’m halfway across the room when the sound of the doors closing startles me.

Three figures loom in front of the now closed doors.

A cold, mocking voice fills the room.

“ Where are your alphas now? ”

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Chapter 10

Tipsy Tales

Sinclair

My heart pounds as the three Cyan alphas stalk farther into the room like prowling hyenas. I resist the urge to walk back with their advance. I don't want to get backed into a corner. But other than that, I have no fucking idea what to do.

Do I run? Do I scream? Do I fight?

"I don't think your alphas will be so fucking arrogant once we return you to them all bloody and battered." Yves's voice is the definition of heartless. No, not heartless. Because he has a heart, it's just pure evil. I can hear the sick glee in his tone, his heart's desire for pain and payback.

My fear abates when I realize none of them have any weapons. No bats, no knives, no belts. All they have is their fists, and they can't touch me.

If this charade was meant to scare me, then this realization means they've already failed.

"Go ahead, maybe you'll have a heart attack like that Cobalt piece of shit," I taunt, standing taller.

Eric, the second tallest after Yves, laughs and there's something about it that sends

cold shivers down my spine. Like there's something they know that I don't.

Could they have somehow tricked Bishop or Ecker into giving permission? Is that even possible?

My mind races as they close in on me, cruel, anticipatory smiles painting their faces.

Maybe it is time I try to run. If I can get to the stairwell, I can lock the door behind me. Cautiously, I take a few steps back as they get closer.

It's only a few yards away now. I think I can make it. I try not to give away my plan as I take one more backward step before spinning around and bolting to the door. Adrenaline rushes through me and my hand flies to the door knob. I expect to feel them on top of me any second, but I don't even hear them move.

I know why the second I wrench the handle and it doesn't budge.

"Damn it," I curse as I try the knob again and again even though it's clearly locked. "Fuck!" I slam my palm on the stupid door.

If running isn't an option anymore, I guess that means it's time to fight.

I turn around with as much confidence and false bravado I can muster. "Three on one, really? Surely you're not scared of little ol' me."

"You won't be so smart once I knock your teeth in, bitch." Stefan is the first to swing. I duck just in time, and his fist creates a fissure in the wood behind me.

I know it was just luck. I never stood a chance.

Two sets of hands grab me by the arms and thrust my back up against the door. Yves

pushes up the sleeves of his white dress shirt.

“Oh, how I’m going to enjoy this.” He snickers right before sucker punching me in the gut.

I wheeze, the wind completely knocked out of me. I don’t have time to even wonder how all three are able to touch me pain free before another powerful blow throws me back into the hard wood.

I look up into his hate-filled eyes, scrambling for the right thing to say when all I want to do is double over in pain. I just need to buy myself some time until my mates come for me.

They must know something is wrong through the bond. I can’t feel them, but that’s probably just the adrenaline, narrowing my focus to this moment in order to survive.

“Don’t have much to say now, hmm?” Yves sounds so damn smug. I spit in his face; it’s practically an instinct.

He doesn’t even wipe it off before punching me squarely in the jaw. My brain rattles in my skull and the room fills with floating black spots. I taste copper on my tongue.

In an attempt to stop the room from spinning, I close my eyes. I don’t see the next hit coming. My cheekbone erupts with pain, and I can feel my eye instantly begin swelling. Bloody spit drips down my chin as I hang my head, fighting to remain conscious.

“What the fuck is happening?” A shout bellows from across the room. My eyes strain to see who it came from.

“This doesn’t concern you, Beryll,” Yves snarls, hardly sparing a glance over his

shoulder.

I can barely hold my head straight and struggle to focus on Griffin and the two other Beryll alphas standing in the doorway.

“That wasn’t my question,” Griffin snaps back.

The others keep their grips on my arms while Yves turns around with an indignant huff. “Interhouse relations.”

“ Oh my god .” Paisley gasps as she steps into the doorway too; she must have been a few paces behind, just now catching up. “Get off her!”

She storms into the room, but Griffin pulls her back and orders, “Stay here.”

She looks pissed but doesn’t move except to cross her arms. It must have been an alpha growl.

“Okay, Yves, you’ve had your fun, now give it up.” Griffin’s always reminded me of a golden retriever, but as he stalks toward us with a tucked chin and glowering stare, I see the true alpha underneath. All these men have potential to be monsters.

“You’re not worth getting blood on my shirt for,” Yves scoffs and flicks his chin at the two men still holding me.

As soon as they let me go, I fold over, my palms catching myself on my thighs. It’s all I can do to stay on my feet and not crumple to the floor. I listen to them leave then hear fast, light steps rush to me.

“Jesus, Sinclair. Are you alright?” Paisley’s hand lightly rests on my back, like she’s worried she’ll hurt me.

“Fan-fucking-tastic.” I begin to chuckle, but my ribs scream and it turns into more of a wheezing groan.

Her arm wraps around my waist and she helps me stand up straight. “How can I help? What do you need?”

“A drink.”

“Thank you, Twelve,” Paisley says as her attendant holds out a silver tray with an ice pack wrapped in a towel, two small pills, and a cup of water.

We’re back in the Beryll’s wing, sitting on Paisley’s bed. Well, I think it’s her bedroom, but it’s clear everyone sleeps here. There are sports drinks on the bedside table, boxing gloves lying next to a gym bag by the door, and various men’s clothes strewn about the floor. But her dresses are the only thing in the closet and her makeup is set on top of the dresser.

She offers me the pills and water, explaining, “Super low dose alpha hormones to speed up the healing—it will feel like it didn’t even happen tomorrow.”

Grateful, I take them then she passes the ice to me, and I hold it on my swollen eye. The guys are going to throw a fit when they find out. But I still don’t get how it was even possible.

“How were they able to touch me? Especially now that Ecker and I are bonded too. I’d expect the alpha aversion to be stronger.” I rub my sore jaw after talking.

“They must have slipped you a suppressant.” Paisley explains, “If your omega nature is suppressed, then so is your bond and any alpha aversion.”

“But how— Merigold .” I realize and groan. “What a cunt.”

“She must have dropped it in your cup at the dock. That’s probably why you felt sick.”

“And why I can’t feel my mates—oh shit, do they know where I am?”

Twelve returns with two glasses full of deep red wine on the tray. Paisley plucks one off and hands it to me, saying, “Of course, Noah told them. But I figured if you’re suppressed, you might want some time apart.”

I take a sip of the rich wine. “Why?”

“Once I had to be suppressed for a medical thing and it was really weird and kind of scary to be near Griffin and not feel anything .”

I remember right before the attack, when I thought I was just sick, and imagining Bishop and Ecker all over me made me feel even worse. They don’t feel like my comfort zone right now.

Do I still feel like theirs?

Even with the weird, unnatural feeling of being suppressed, I still want to see them. They may not be the same comfort zone, but they’re still the closest thing to it.

But they probably don’t want to see me. After all, without our alpha-omega connection, is there anything left between us?

I want to believe there is, but I’m scared to face the reality that maybe there isn’t.

“You can just leave the bottle.” Paisley giggles and swipes the wine bottle from Twelve after she comes to refill our glasses for a third time.

Paisley's hand sways slightly as she tops off my drink, then she takes a chug right from the bottle.

"Wait, actually, can you hold this?" She pushes the wine back into Twelve's hands then throws her head over to gather her long, shiny black hair. She twists it up in a loose bun on top of her head and exhales. "Man, wine always makes me overheat. Okay." She grabs the bottle again and gives me a mock serious face. "Now, tell me everything. What's it like to be with the bad boys of the Echelon?"

Twelve scuttles out of the room as I laugh at her description. "The bad boys?"

"Yeah! Exiled underdogs clawing their way back." She says it like it's a line from a movie poster.

"Well, I don't know anything different." I shrug.

"Oh, c'mon." She claps her hand on my knee and wiggles her brows. "I want all the juicy details."

"Okay, okay." I laugh. I'm rusty at this kind of girl talk. "Bishop is like a white knight—he's thoughtful, protective, respectful . . ." I blush and debate whether or not to say what I'm thinking. The wine must be making me loose-lipped because I add with a giggle, "Except for when I don't want him to be so respectful."

She leans forward with drunken curiosity and a prying smile. "And Ecker? You two are bonded now, right?"

"We are—or we were? Will the bond return once the suppressant is out of my system?" The thought of coming back to no bond hurts more than I expect it to.

"Oh, definitely." She waves her hand. "It will be like nothing happened. And what

about their parents? Do they ever talk about them?”

“Um . . .” I’m a bit taken aback by her abrupt change of subject, then feel sort of guilty when I realize I have no clue what happened to their parents.

Paisley begins to ask another question then groans. “I can’t do this.” She covers her face with her hand like she’s ashamed.

“Can’t do what?” I feel like I missed part of the conversation.

“I really shouldn’t be telling you this, but I just can’t .” She leans forward over her crossed legs and continues in a whisper, “I’m supposed to be getting dirt on your pack. For the Intelligence Trial.”

“What?” I rear back.

She sits back and hangs her head. “I know, I’m so sorry. I didn’t want to but—”

“No, I’m not mad at you,” I quickly clarify, and she looks at me with confusion. I point to myself then her. “ We are supposed to be getting dirt on you . But they said—”

“That they never assign other packs as targets for the Intelligence Trial.” She finishes my sentence, sobering.

“Which is apparently bullshit.” I can’t say I’m surprised. It wouldn’t be the first time the Echelon lied.

My stomach sinks as a thought occurs to me. “Wait, did you guys set this all up with the Cyans? The suppressants, the attack.”

She clutches her hand to her heart. “God, no! I swear.” I believe her. She’s already been honest when she shouldn’t have.

She continues guiltily, “But after we found you, we did think it would be a good opportunity to get you away from your alphas and hopefully spill something you shouldn’t.”

This information doesn’t feel like as much of a sucker punch as I’d have thought. We’re all just pawns in the Echelon’s games. I can’t blame Paisley when I might have done the same.

“Noah didn’t tell my alphas I’m here, did he?” Her grimace tells me all I need to know.

My mates must be losing their shit right now .

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Chapter 11

Impostor

Bishop

2 hours earlier

Once some time passed since we'd bonded, I stopped noticing Sinclair's feelings. Unless she was experiencing a really strong emotion, it was more of a background noise in the bond that I could tune into when I wanted, but otherwise wasn't blaringly obvious.

Until it disappears. Then, the sudden silence is deafening.

I stop the soccer ball under my foot and don't move. Even when Maverick, one of the Beryll alphas, shoulder checks me and kicks the ball out from under my sole, I don't move.

I find Ecker on the field, and he has the same confused and concerned look on his face that I probably do.

"I can't feel her," he says, a hint of panic in his voice.

"Me either." My own voice is calm, hiding the rising tide of concern inside me.

I try to think through what I felt before this, but I wasn't really paying attention. I

could tell she was safe, having fun even. I felt her contentment through the bond. There was maybe a hint of annoyance, but nothing that told me she was in danger, and it quickly passed.

The game has stopped and Griffin jogs up to me. “What’s wrong?”

“The bond, it’s gone.”

“What do you mean gone?” Titus asks, stepping into the circle now forming.

“Dude, something’s wrong.” Ecker anxiously shoves his fingers through his sweaty hair.

“It’s okay.” Griffin claps a supportive hand on his shoulder, but Ecker shakes it off and starts pacing. “Let’s go down to the lake and check on them.”

We’ve been playing soccer for the past hour while our omegas went to the lake. Suddenly, unwanted images of Sinclair’s body floating lifeless in the water fill my mind. My throat tightens as I picture her drowning, caught on something indistinguishable at the bottom of the murky lake.

There has to be some other explanation for why the bond disappeared. If she was seriously hurt, I would have felt her fear before it went dark.

There has to be another explanation. There just has to.

I don’t know when I started running, but I come to a halt at the sight of the empty floats tied to the dock. No sign of Sinclair or Paisley.

Ecker turns to the Beryll alpha and presses, “Are you sure they were here?”

Griffin nods his head definitively. “Positive. I can scent Paisley. She was definitely here and not long ago.”

I close my eyes and try to focus on the scents carried in the light breeze coming off the lake. The worried knot in my chest doubles in size when I can’t catch a single hint of my mate.

Titus takes in the scene. “Their towels and clothes aren’t here, so they must have left. They didn’t just disappear on the lake.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Ecker nods his head frantically. “Yeah, they probably just headed back. Sinclair can’t handle that much sun. Did she bring sunscreen? Does she even have sunscreen? We need to get her some sunscreen. Yeah, I’ll get her some. A hat too. Yeah, that will be good. Good.”

He talks in a frantic stream of consciousness that makes Titus look even more concerned than before. I don’t think he’s ever been too worried about our omega, but he doesn’t like what he’s seeing with Ecker. Neither do I.

Losing her during the Vigilance Trial was really hard on him. I’m sure this feels like bad déjà vu. His bond is fresher than mine, so everything is still heightened. The good and the bad. And right now, he’s feeling a lot of bad.

“This can’t be happening again. This can’t be happening again.” He shakes his head and stomps from one side of the dock to the other.

Titus naturally falls into the levelheaded leadership role. “Let’s return to our wings and see if they’re there. Then we’ll meet outside the dining hall and report back.”

It’s getting harder and harder to keep calm, but we don’t need two of us freaking out. Sinclair wasn’t in our wing, and it didn’t seem like she had returned from the lake at

any point either.

“This is stupid. Let’s just go there ourselves,” Ecker insists as we wait outside the dining hall as agreed upon.

“Chill, they’ll be here any second,” Titus says, and I can’t tell if he is concerned or just annoyed. He likes to act annoyed by anything having to do with our omega. But I know he never stops caring about the pack, and that includes Sinclair now.

All of us look down the hall at the sound of approaching feet. My heart lodges in my throat as I wait for the Berylls to turn the corner. Griffin comes into view, and he doesn’t have an immediate look of concern on his face, but I still find it hard to breathe.

Especially when he opens his mouth. “Paisley’s alone in our wing. Sinclair told her she was going back to yours.”

“I wanna talk to her.” Ecker lunges forward, and both Noah and Maverick step up to stop him.

“You will not go harassing our omega. She told us all she knows.” Griffin’s tone leaves no room for argument. “But we will wait with you until she comes back or will help you look. Paisley suggested the garden. She said Sinclair likes to go there sometimes, right?”

I recognize the protective streak in his offer. He’ll do all he can to help as long as it doesn’t involve dragging his mate further into this.

I would do the same. Sinclair and my brothers will always come first.

“She can’t just be gone. She can’t .” Ecker is spiraling and quickly. “This can’t be

happening again.”

Titus catches it too. He gestures to me and Noah. “Okay, you two head back to our wing, and the rest of us will split up and search the Estate.”

We all nod in agreement, but when I turn to leave, Ecker grabs my arm. “You’re just gonna sit on your ass and wait? We all need to be out there looking for her.”

Defensiveness sparks in my chest. It’s quick to ignite with all the stress and I wrench him off me. Insult has me forcing his wrist farther back than necessary to simply remove his hand, and he fights a grimace, seething through the pain.

“Do not ever question my commitment to our mate.” My words tumble like rocks from my twisted throat. “Someone should be there if she comes back, and if Titus decides that person is me, then so be it.”

He pulls his hand away and scoffs. “Whatever, I’m not wasting time arguing about this.”

Then he storms away.

It feels wrong to be playing Mario Kart while everyone else is out there searching.

Noah brought his laptop and controllers with him, and I figured the distraction wouldn’t hurt while we waited. It doesn’t change the fact that one of us should be here if— when— she comes back.

Every slight sound and creak has my eyes jumping to the door. My heart is going to bruise from all the times it’s jumped into my throat.

I fight the urge to look the next time I think I hear something outside in the hall. But

then the doorknob jiggles and I leap to my feet, not caring that the controller falls haphazardly from my hand.

My heart rams against my ribcage as the door opens and I immediately see Sinclair's shock of silver hair.

"Fuck," I exhale in relief and step toward her. I freeze as her full body comes into view and I see the red, swollen marks on her face and the purpling bruises shaped like fingers around her biceps.

"Noah," she says calmly. "You should go now."

My feet can't seem to move. It's her, but it's also not her. And it's not just the bruises and swelling making her look different. She feels different. Or rather, I can't feel her at all.

I was sure the bond connecting us would return when I saw her again, but the more I look at her, the less I'm certain. It almost feels like an impostor is standing in front of me.

Could this be another Echelon trick?

As Noah gathers his things, I ask, "What happened?"

She ignores my question. "Where's Ecker and Titus?"

"Out looking for you." Our exchange is mechanical and superficial.

"Call them. Tell them to come back, and I'll explain it to all of you."

Ecker bounces up from the armchair for what feels like the hundredth time. He's been

unable to sit still for more than thirty seconds. His nervous, wired energy has not settled at all since Sinclair returned.

He shakes his head and throws his hands in the air. “I still don’t understand why you didn’t come to us right away.” Aggravation and hurt lace his tone.

Sinclair sighs. I can tell she’s trying to be patient, having gone over everything several times now. “I thought you knew where I was. And Paisley made it sound like you guys wouldn’t even want to be around me.”

“Yeah, well, that wasn’t her decision to make. And she’s a backstabbing cunt—”

“Hey!” she shouts at him, standing up. “It wasn’t her fault, and she was honest—”

“Hardly,” he scoffs.

“She was honest when it mattered. And we’re all in this fucked-up shit together, so get off your high horse.” She falls back onto the couch and crosses her arms. The little patience she had left is apparently gone by the dirty look she gives Ecker.

Titus waves his arms in a calming motion. “Maybe we should all just go to bed. In our own rooms.”

“I’m not tired,” Ecker and Sinclair say in tandem, then throw each other annoyed scowls.

Ecker rolls his eyes and adds with a fake chipper tone, “Maybe we should break down the Cyans’ door and kill them in their sleep.”

“No,” Titus says without hesitation. “We’re not making any moves while you’re like this. You’re too worked up.” Ecker tries to say something, but Titus cuts him off.

“They will get what’s coming, but we have to be smart.”

“I am so sick of this place,” Ecker yells. “And I’m sick of you and I’m sick of you and I’m sick of—” he spits while pointing at Titus, then me, but can’t finish his sentence when he gets to Sinclair. 1

He releases one more incensed growl while storming to his room and slams the door behind him.

Fed up and tired, as if having spent the day herding toddlers, Titus groans and rubs his hand over his face. “I’m going to bed too. It’s been a fucking night.”

Then he closes himself in his bedroom.

Sinclair and I sit next to each other quietly on the couch. She looks down at her hands in her lap, picking her nails. I let my knee fall to the side to lightly bump against her thigh in a testing brush.

There are no sparks or crackling of electricity like I’m used to, but there are small fluttering sensations deep in my stomach.

“You’re not tired?” I ask almost awkwardly.

She still has an unsure look on her face but shakes her head. So I stand up and grab a quilt off the back of the couch.

“Come with me. I have an idea.” I offer my hand, and she hesitantly slides hers into mine, a bit of hope beginning to replace the doubt on her face.

When I pull her to her feet, she looks me in the eyes, and something flips in my stomach again.

I may not feel our bond, but I sure as fuck feel these butterflies.

1. Play “Beautiful Things” by Benson Boone through next chapter

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Chapter 12

Alpha-Omega

Bishop

I spread a quilt out on the grass next to a large oak tree. 1 Its sprawling canopy hides us in the dark, but we can still look out and see the stars.

Stilted and awkward, I hold my hand out toward the blanket. “Go ahead.”

“Thanks,” Sinclair says softly.

She looks almost nervous as she sits down, tucking her knees under her dress. She still has her swimsuit on, the straps of her bikini top showing through the neckline. I join her, sitting a weird distance apart.

It feels like the time she took me down to the dungeon to first claim her. We were practically strangers, that often felt like enemies, and yet we committed ourselves to each other in the most intimate way.

Are we still strangers? Without her omega nature and our mate bond, is what we have even real?

It’s real for me. But is it for her?

Does she even like me?

The thought is a dagger in my gut. She wanted me to claim her for protection first and foremost. I'm not under any disillusion on how we started. I guess I thought we had become more— are more.

But the way she's acting, like she's scared of her own shadow, uncomfortable around me . . . it makes me doubt myself, my feelings.

All I want to do is push the hair out of her face and kiss each bruise and bump with the promise to never let that happen again. But my mouth is dry and wordless as all these thoughts run through my head.

With or without the bond, she's still mine to protect, to hold. And that's all I want to do.

To my surprise, she's the first one to speak. "What happened to your parents?"

Her question is the last thing I expected, and her face is lined with an unreadable emotion. It's not quite pity and not quite curiosity. Maybe somewhere between genuine interest and guilt for asking.

I'm not sure why she's asking now, but I will tell her everything. There are only two other living people who know that full story, and I want her to be the third.

And maybe with it, we can build a new bond, one where we aren't just an alpha and an omega.

When I first start telling her our story, I fix my gaze on the sky, counting shooting stars and connecting constellations. I need to focus on something far away to be able to talk about something so close. Even though our parents were taken by the Echelon and killed in an "accident" a decade ago, the wound it caused is as fresh as if it happened yesterday.

It is uncomfortable, and my throat constricts around my words more than a few times. But the more raw and vulnerable I feel, the less I need the stars and the more I need her.

Somewhere along the way, she spun on the blanket to face me and my hand found her knee. 2 As I speak, my thumb traces circles on her skin, the connection all I need and purely human.

She doesn't say anything until I finish talking. There's obviously more; how could I condense a lifetime of memories into one night?

I find I'm nervous waiting for her to speak. Did she finally see that we all have more damage than could possibly be fixed? Does she think less of me now that she knows my many scars and few triumphs? Will she question how I can ever keep her safe when I couldn't keep my own mother safe?

She looks at me and her eyes remind me of the moon, silvery and bright. I swallow dryly, waiting.

"You have a lot more of your mom in you than your father."

She states it so simply, like it's a fact. She must not have been listening.

I remove my hand from her leg and rub the back of my neck. "You don't know that."

She gets that same stubborn, brave look in her eyes, the one I've seen so many times. Its fire is a familiar and comforting burn. "You may not see it, but I do."

I can't help but laugh because some part of me is relieved more by her signature willfulness than the words themselves.

She crosses her arms obstinately. “Believe me or don’t, but it’s true.”

I tongue my molars at her cocky response, and before I know it, my hand cups her cheek and my fingers thread into her hair. Without thinking, I tilt her face up as I dip down.

I stop myself. My breath hitches right before our noses meet. I can feel the soft feathering of hers on my lips. Her cheek warms under my palm. My heart feels like a bass drum in my chest.

“Can I kiss you?” I breathe quietly, pleadingly. I feel her swallow where my pinky rests along her jaw and my lungs freeze.

“Do you want to?” she answers in an equally soft tone, though so full of doubt that it pains me.

My lungs release. “So fucking bad.”

I say it with my whole damn heart, and I hope she can hear it. But just in case, I cover her mouth with mine and kiss her with everything I have, so if she can’t, at least she can feel it.

I clutch her face with both hands and deepen the kiss, teasing the seam of her lips with my tongue, holding back as much as I can. She relaxes and yields to me, letting me in, and fuck . . .

“You still taste like mine,” I whisper against her lips.

As if that were all she needed to hear, the hands resting in her lap dive to my waist, and she pulls herself closer to me. I wrap one arm around her back while my mouth remembers what it’s like to get lost in her.

Her palms slide down my sides and her fingers dip under my shirt. They're cold and the chill is like a live wire. Or maybe that's just what it's like being touched by her. Her hands roam up my ribs, and those butterflies batter to break free.

My shirt rides up, and I let her pull it over my head before laying her on her back. My body hovers above her, and there's no doubt in my mind this is how it's meant to be: me and her, breathless and together.

I lower my head and press my lips to her rising and falling chest, kissing a path along the loose neckline of her dress. She arches into me, and I continue down her sternum and belly over her dress while pushing it up her legs.

My fingers hook in the ties of her bikini bottoms, and she stills.

"I think I'm still supp—"

I stop her. "That doesn't change a damn thing. I want you, Sin. You."

She bites her lip, and maybe it's a trick of the moonlight, but it looks like her eyes get misty. "Me?"

I sit up to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. "Yes, you. As long as you'll have me."

"I want to—I want you, but . . ." She swallows, her lips quirking. ". . . what if I can't?"

I fight a smile. "Your omega nature may be suppressed, but I'm still an alpha. I can smell how wet your pussy is for me."

She bashfully looks away, and I tilt her chin back to meet my gaze. "So, I'll ask again: do you want me? Because I sure as fuck want you, just as you are."

She gives me these small, excited nods, fighting back a smile, then pulls my face to hers and kisses me like she's never wanted anything more.

I feel at home between her palms; bond or no bond, she's where I'm meant to be.

My hand travels down her body and slips inside her bikini bottoms. She mewls softly into my mouth as I slide two fingers between her folds. The wetness waiting for me pulls a hungry groan from my chest, making her bite my lip with a tug.

I drag my fingers up and down her slit and either side of her clit. I can feel her breathing deepen.

“ Bishop ,” she pleads.

I think my name on her lips, dripping with desire, is a sound I will never get over hearing.

“Let me show you how badly I want you.”

She groans in protest as I pull my hand away to slide my body down hers and settle my shoulders between her legs, pushing her knees out. I trail my fingertips lightly over her thighs and untie the strings of her bikini. Cupping her ass in my hands, I pull the swimsuit out from under her and toss it on the blanket.

She gives a small gasp as I drag my nose up the crease between her thigh and pussy. The sound sends goose bumps down my back. “You're so fucking perfect, Sin.” I trail my nose up the other side and revel in the way her legs twitch.

She begs, “ Please . . . ”

I press my tongue against her core, and she moans with relief, yet somehow the sound

is still fraught with anticipation. “Is this what you want? Your pretty pussy licked until you’re a soaking, trembling mess, so desperate for my cock it won’t matter that it has a knot?”

“ Yes ,” she mewls. “I want your knot—”

“Shh.” I kiss her writhing hips. “I’m not gonna risk hurting you.”

She pushes onto her elbows and tries to close her legs. “But—”

“This isn’t a discussion. Now, lie back and let me worship you.”

She flops back with a stubborn sigh that quickly turns into a sharp cry when I sink two fingers into her cunt. I savor her taste, savor the slickness under my tongue and the clutching noises she makes every time I stroke her just right.

As intoxicating as being with her in rut is, being in this moment, clearheaded, is equally addicting. There isn’t blinding passion and ferocious desire, but there’s something just as powerful: bare, raw connection between souls, not just biology.

She’s my girl before she’s my omega, and I don’t ever want to lose that.

“Bishop—oh god, that feels so . . . good .” She bucks into my mouth, and I palm her ass cheeks, clutching her to me and letting her ride my tongue just like Ecker taught me. I moan into her heated flesh, encouraging her to use me unapologetically.

“Fuck, fuck!” Her thighs quake and her back arches. Her fingers knit in my hair, clawing and pulling as she shatters on my tongue.

Her cries cease, and she exhales heartily. I’m tempted to stay right where I am and wring another orgasm from her. And another and another, until her body’s so

exhausted she will fall asleep in my arms.

She looks down at me with a sly smile, and I already know that isn't going to happen.

“You have that look,” I accuse teasingly.

“What look?” She purses her lips and mischief flares in her eyes.

I grin and slide up her body, kissing her uninjured temple, then brush my lips against hers and whisper tauntingly, “Like you can't wait to ruin all my plans.”

Proving my point, her hand winds between us and palms my cock over my shorts.

“If you get to want me just as I am, why can't I want you too?” She lifts up to kiss the corner of my mouth then up my jaw, her hand lightly— torturously —gliding over my bulge.

“Because— fuhh . . . ” My brain goes blank the second her hand slips into my waistband and strokes my hard cock with nothing in between us.

My hips instinctively push into her touch, and my jaw clenches with poor restraint. I can't help but groan when her thumb circles my tip, spreading pre-cum over my crown.

“You were saying?” she teases, and I bury my face in her neck as she continues to work her fist up and down my throbbing length.

“What if I hurt you?” I grind out through gritted teeth, fighting the urge to sink them into her soft skin just to make her lightest touches bearable.

But when she tries to push down my shorts, I don't stop her.

No, I help her, shoving them down my legs like they're on fire.

She rocks her hips up and guides my cock over the slit of her sloppy pussy. "Look how wet you made me." Her breath catches on a sharp inhale as she grinds her clit against me. "Just like you promised."

Now it's my turn to stutter. "But—"

"Do you want me to beg, Bishop?" she asks boldly, turning my face to look her in the eyes. They're just as beautiful icy blue as they are striking gold. "Because I will."

"No," I say decidedly, sliding the head of my cock inside her pussy. "You don't need to beg when you make me fold so damn easily."

She doesn't have time to say anything smart in response because I thrust home, burying myself as deep as she'll take me.

"Fuck, Sin," I growl in a desperate, husky rumble. "This . . . this . . ." I rock my hips back then punch forward again. "This is still fucking everything."

"More . . . More please, more ." She clutches my back, her fingers digging into my shoulders, and her legs wrap around my waist.

I couldn't deny her if I wanted, fucking her into the blanket as if there's some way to get closer, deeper, more one than we already are. I take each thrust slow but sure, working my cock into her pussy.

She moans each time I bottom out. I make sure my knot, not inflated but still pronounced, grinds against her clit with each stroke until her inner walls are fluttering around me. The sensation is my final straw, crippling pleasure tightening my groin and balls.

“Fuck, I’m gonna come.” I groan harshly. “Tell me you want me to come inside you.”

“Bishop, please .” Her hips pitch forward, and she cries, “Please, come with me, in me, just . . . please .”

A tide of heated bliss wracks through me and into her as she clenches my cock while moaning my name.

It’s euphoria.

And it’s real.

Without a fucking shadow of a doubt, this— what we have —is real.

1. Continue playing “Beautiful Things” by Benson Boone
2. Continue playing “Beautiful Things” by Benson Boone

Chapter 13

Needy

Sinclair

Bishop carries me home on his back. I shiver, and he insists I wrap the quilt around myself, which ends up meaning I wrap it around both of us. It reminds me of being a kid pretending to be an adult by stacking on friends' shoulders and wearing a long coat.

When we enter our common room, I nearly jump off him. I expected Titus and Ecker to be exactly where we left them: alone in their rooms. Instead, two figures greet us in the shadowy, dark room.

Greeted is a bit of an overstatement. Both men are passed out, slumped in an armchair and on the couch. Ecker is shirtless, in nothing but a pair of boxers, while Titus still wears the clothes he played soccer in earlier.

"Did they wait up for us?" I ask Bishop once we're in his room.

He laughs. The sound is husky, warm, and so comforting it makes me want to curl up against him again. I want to freeze time on that blanket under the oak tree.

"Well, I think that was their intention." He grins while stripping out of his clothes and climbing under the covers of his bed.

When he holds them open for me, I crawl in next to him. “I thought they were mad at me.”

“Oh, pissed ,” he agrees with a playful tone. “But I don’t think any of us are capable of staying mad at you for long—or at least, we’ll still want to make sure you get home safe, even if we won’t talk to you when you do.”

I’m not sure if I’m comforted or saddened by his words. I’ve purposefully hurt them in the past, but this isn’t like that. This time, I was the one hurt, and still they’re mad at me ?

He pulls me into his chest and kisses the top of my head. “Don’t worry about it tonight, just let me hold you.”

When I wake up the next morning, I’m still tangled in his long limbs, cocooned in his body heat. Before I even open my eyes, my senses pick up on his woodsy, leather, and bergamot scent. It warms me to my bones and makes something stir in my stomach.

I drag my palm over his chest and the feel of his skin burns my palm, my thighs squeezing together. My omega nature is back, and goddamn, he feels so good.

Just the feel of his hard body, soft skin, and beating heart has my mind growing hazy. The more I recall the night before, the more I’m especailly overcome by the sense of intimate connection I feel with him. Gratitude for the way he showed me he cared, me , not his omega or his mate.

But now that my nature is back, my insides are squirming with the desire to show him— as his mate —just how grateful I am.

I can tell he’s still asleep by his breathing, so I carefully slink down his body. The

sheets are already pulled down to his hips, and I don't have to go far under the covers as I hover above his legs. Testing, I faintly trail my hands up his thighs. His cock, already half hard, twitches.

My stomach dips with excited nerves as I lightly wrap my hand around the velvety thickness, my thighs slickening at just the feel. My mouth waters, and heat pools between my legs.

With butterflies in my stomach, I dip forward and drag my tongue up the underside of his shaft. My pussy flutters when I can taste myself on him from last night. It makes me burn with the desire to return the favor, double all the pleasure he gave me.

I swirl my tongue over his thick head, and he stirs. His legs shift and a soft puff of air leaves his lips. Giddiness lights up my spine as I try to tease him as long as I can without waking him. When he finally does, I want him to be on a knife's edge, strung taut and desperate. 2

As I slide my mouth down his length, I feel his cock thicken. The deeper I take him, the more ragged his exhales become.

"Ah, there's my naughty, little mate." I glance up at his coarse morning voice, and he looks down at me with one eye cracked open and a slight smirk on his lips.

I can't help but smile, withdrawing to return his crooked grin and lazily swirling my tongue over his tip. I indulge myself in decadently pleasing him, watching his face twist and scrunch with pleasure, dragging my palms up and down his abs to feel them contract and tense.

It's a high having this formidable alpha weak at my touch.

He gathers my hair in his hands, but strands keep falling down. I don't mind, but he

seems to. Taking the hair tie from his hair, he gently collects mine and wraps the band around it.

“I don’t want anything in the way of this view,” he says at the end of a husky groan. “You’re so beautiful, and the way those sweet lips look wrapped around my cock—Fuuckk . . . choke on it again, Omega. Yeah, just like that .”

He seems to lose his train of thought as I gag around his head, taking him to the back of my throat again and again. His head digs back into the pillow and a deep, raw moan spills from his chest.

“You’re doing so good, Sin. Now relax for me, baby, and let me fuck your throat.” He grabs the bun he put my hair in to keep my head at the same height then digs his heels into the mattress to thrust up.

He looks down at me with hooded, glowing eyes and bucks his hips up again and again. I feel his slowly building rut trickle down the bond. I ache to rub my thighs together but can’t with how I’m straddling his legs.

“Look at you, getting all hot and wet deep throating your alpha, letting me use you like a fuck doll.” His filthy words only make it worse, and I whimper with both frustration and desire.

He lets out a gravelly chuckle and bounces his right knee. “Why don’t you slide over and ride my leg? I know you want to. You’re always such a desperate little thing.”

I look up at him with eagerness, and he nods then slides my mouth off his dick. As I scoot over to straddle just one leg, he slightly lifts his knee. I rock my pelvis forward to drag my pussy along his thigh, wetting it. Heat rushes through me as I find the right angle to rub my clit through my own arousal.

I moan with relief and pleasure, my skin lighting up and my mouth watering to take him again.

As I do, he groans. “That’s it, grind that needy pussy on me and suck me off, like the greedy little whore you are.”

I slip into heat at the overwhelming sensations, the maddening desire pulsing between my thighs along with the fiery need to wring every ounce of pleasure from my alpha.

I find myself grinding harder with deep, purposeful movements, chasing an almost intangible high while hungrily bobbing up and down his cock, choking on his tip and swirling my tongue anytime I get the chance. Spit drips down my chin, and my slick coats his thigh.

I want nothing more than to use him until I’m trembling and feel his salty release on my tongue. It’s a delirious kind of hunger. Fighting for two different pleasures, my own and his.

When my orgasm begins to build, I can’t stop myself from mewling around his length. He groans at the feel and knits his fingers deeper into my hair.

“Fuck, I’m going to paint your throat if you keep it up,” he grinds out.

“ Mm-hmm ,” I mumble, sliding faster up and down as the pressure in my core tightens, my thighs and abs tensing.

“You want me to spill on your tongue while you come for me?” His voice is so gruff, I know he’s holding on by a thread.

I moan again in encouragement, and he grips the sides of my head, holding me still while he pumps his hips furiously once then twice, then he’s coming with a rough,

sputtering curse.

The feel of his hot seed spurting onto my tongue sends me over the edge, and I spiral into bliss, squeezing his thigh with my legs as if that will somehow keep me from shattering into a million tiny pieces.

His hands fall away from my head as he looks up at the ceiling, panting. Once I'm no longer shaking, I slide off his cock and sit up slowly.

His eyes flash toward me, half-mast and sated. "Don't swallow." I hold out my tongue to show him I haven't. He smiles out of the corner of his mouth then hooks two fingers toward me. "Come here and give it to me."

A weighty ball of lust drops into my stomach at his request. I feel dirty and delicious as I climb up the side of his body, his cum still pooled on my tongue. When I reach the pillows, he rolls toward me and takes my cheek in his palm. Pulling me to him, he presses our mouths together and parts his lips for me.

I push his release from my tongue onto his. As he takes it, he moans into my mouth and licks the rest from my lips before pulling away.

Then he gently pushes me onto my back and slides down my body, spreading my knees to settle in between my thighs. My breath hitches as he picks up my hips and presses his mouth to my pussy. I feel him spit into my cunt, then he's pushing his cum into me with his finger.

"Mmm , that's where it belongs." He hums into my heated flesh.

Then, he looks up with a lazy grin. "Welcome back, Omega."

1. "Stargazing" by Myles Smith

2. “Earned It” by The Weeknd

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 14

Sir

Titus

Seventeen nods again, and Ecker shoves me in the shoulder. “Jesus, if you keep asking if she’s got it, she’ll forget by the time you finally let her leave.” Her eyes flick to the ground as red colors her pale cheeks.

“That was the last time,” I grumble back, then give her a parting nod. “Go on then.”

It’s an important message. I didn’t want our conflict resolution proposal to the Cyans written out. With our luck, it would be intercepted, and god knows what would happen instead of the Cyans getting what they rightfully deserve.

So, while Bishop and Sinclair are sleeping off whatever the fuck they did last night, I had Seventeen memorize a message for the Cyan pack.

Going after our omega when she was alone was a bitch-ass move. They might not have self-respect or honor, but we do, and we’re going to settle this bullshit the right way: beating in their pretentious-as-fuck faces in an even fight.

Tomorrow, we will settle the score.

“I still don’t understand what’s not fair about jumping them. They jumped her. Why can’t we do the same?” The anger and injustice in Ecker’s voice hasn’t gotten any

lighter since last night.

This situation with Sinclair is eating him up. It takes a lot to hurt him. He can let almost anything roll off his back with a laugh and wink, so when something does get through his cracks, he doesn't know how to handle it.

When Bishop is hurt, he turns it inward. He claws and picks at the wounds on his heart and stirs up old hate and beliefs. And me?

I can't remember a time when I wasn't hurting, for one reason or responsibility or another. I've learned to live with the pain.

I know I'm far from a fucking ray of sunshine, but at least I can keep my shit together . . . most of the time.

But Ecker . . . I watch him grip the back of the armchair until his fingers rip into the leather. He keeps staring daggers at Bishop's closed bedroom door. It's like he's waiting for these feelings to pass without ever having to actually face them.

Even I know, as fucked-up as I am, that that's not how these things work.

"Just go talk to her," I stress.

He presses his lips into a firm line and shakes his head. "No, it's her turn to apologize."

"You say that like you've already apologized to her—"

"I have nothing to apologize for!" he erupts then storms off to his room, slamming the door again like a hormonal wreck of a goddamn teenager.

I look between their two closed rooms and sigh, knowing this shit show is going to fall on me to fix.

I pinch the bridge of my nose and groan internally.

Fine .

I'll go to the gym and if, when I return, these three numb nuts still haven't figured their shit out, I'll do something about it.

When I get back, I hear Bishop's deep groans as soon as I walk up to his door.

"Nope," I scoff and turn right back around.

I'll give them until I'm out of the shower, and then , I don't care if he's balls deep in omega pussy or not, we're going to fix this shit.

I stand under the scalding stream of water way longer than necessary. I know I'm stalling, even though it's futile. It's not like things are going to magically resolve themselves if I turn a five-minute shower into a ten-minute one.

As I towel off, I try to tell myself that as unpleasant as this arbitrating will be, if things go unresolved, living with the three of them will be even more unpleasant.

After getting dressed, I go straight to Bishop's room. I don't even knock—there's no part of Sinclair I haven't seen, and I've seen Bishop's cock more times than I can count.

I throw the door open and barge in. Both of them bolt up in bed. Sinclair clutches the sheets to her bare chest like she gives a fuck about modesty, as if the sounds of her getting fucked around the damn clock haven't been the soundtrack to my last few

weeks.

Picking her dress off the floor, I throw it at her. “You two need to get your asses out of bed and smooth things over with your other mate—or did you forget about him?”

Sinclair immediately gets a look of defensiveness, but by Bishop’s calm face, I know he gets it.

“I didn’t do anything wro—”

Bishop cuts her off. “Whether you did or didn’t doesn’t matter. What matters is he’s hurt, and when Ecker’s hurt—”

“He loses his shit,” I finish for him.

I can see pushback in her face. She doesn’t like backing down—for anything. Like us, I’m sure she’s been fighting her whole life, conditioned to make everything a battle. But Bishop squeezes her thigh over the comforter, and she swallows down her resistance.

“Okay, but what am I supposed to apologize for if I didn’t do anything wrong?”

“Well first, you gotta stop saying you didn’t do anything wrong—”

“I was attacked!” She roughly yanks the dress over her head and jumps out of bed. “Me.” She thrusts a finger at herself.

She stomps toward me, and I notice that her injuries from yesterday look a week old rather than just a day.

“But of course, to you, I’m always the villain. I get the shit beat out of me—which I

don't even blame you guys for, by the way, even though I probably should—and somehow, I'm still the bad guy?" She shoves her finger in my chest, and my muscles spasm with pain, making me jump back and clutch my heart.

"Sorry," she huffs, only half apologetic.

I look at Bishop, and he just shrugs. Fuck me , I'm really gonna have to do this all on my own .

"Listen, I'm sorry you got hurt. I really am." Her face flickers with surprise at my genuine tone. "And don't think for a second that we aren't going to make those preppy bitches pay for ever laying a hand on you, but right now, it's not about them. It's not even about me or him." I point to myself then Bishop. "It's about Ecker and you .

"The Vigilance Trial nearly broke him, and then he thought he lost you again. God knows why, but that boy loves you—" Bishop growls in warning. I ignore him and continue, "He was ready to walk through fire to get you back, so then to find out that you were drinking Champagne while he was torturing himself over losing you . . . it was a big fucking slap in the face."

She's quiet but has a thoughtful look on her face, like she's really taking in what I'm saying. Then she responds, "It wasn't like that."

"And I'm sure he knows that, but knowing something and feeling it are two very different things, Sin." It's Bishop who speaks now. "Especially with E. He's faked his feelings, made a living making people feel things that weren't real for so long, that sometimes he doesn't know how to handle his genuine emotions."

She tilts her head at him like she's trying but failing to understand his meaning, so I simplify it. "Look, neither of us are saying you're in the wrong, but you are the only

one who can smooth this over because he's hanging on by a thread, and you're what he needs to hold on."

"Okay." She nods decisively then walks right past me and out of the room.

Bishop pulls on some pants while I trail behind her. She knocks on Ecker's door. 1

"What?" he says gruffly from the other side.

I quirk my lips at the fact that, like me, she doesn't say anything, just opens the door. Before going in, she glances over her shoulder at me with a barely imperceptible nod. Somehow, I know she is telling me to follow her inside. My stomach rocks with uncertain feelings. Nerves, because is this a trick? Another Opulence situation where she just wants to torture me.

But also a surprise, small rush of joy, maybe even pride, because is she trusting me to have her back? My alpha nature is soothed by that prospect.

Ecker slides off the foot of his bed as if he were just sitting there, waiting, thinking, pining . He's dressed in jeans and a tee, and his boots hit the ground with a soft thud. He runs a hand through his hair with a warning sigh.

"I think you should leave." He levels Sinclair with a darkened stare. "I am not in a good place right now, and I don't want to hurt you."

"Ecker—" she begins.

"I'm warning you, Sinclair—"

"Just shut up and listen, would you?" She cuts him off and returns his determined gaze. She really hates backing down. Maybe that's a good thing for once.

He crosses his arms and lifts his brows for her to continue.

“I am sorry I scared you, and I’m sorry it felt like you lost me. But I never left you, you never lost me, and if you need a reminder of that, then that’s what I’m here for.”

“A reminder of what?” He cocks his head, his gaze reading every inch of her face.

“That I’m yours, Ecker.” She steps up to him. I expect her to reach out for him—maybe slap him even, you never know with her—but instead, she lowers to her knees. “I never have and never will stop being yours.”

She clasps her hands behind her back, and his head lulls back. His jaw grinds as he looks down at her and his nostrils flare. The emotion between them is so palpable, I wouldn’t be surprised if it started sparking into visual form like fireworks.

I feel like a voyeur, but at the same time, I feel like they both need me here. Something, someone, outside of their bond to make sure their egos don’t get the best of them. To make sure that things move forward, not backward.

Quietly, I move to the corner of the room to sit in a reading chair. With Sinclair’s back to me, I watch Ecker tilt her chin up. He turns her head side to side as if inspecting a gift.

“So, you want to remind me that you’re mine?” His tone is even and restrained.

She nods, and he quickly clasps her chin, stilling her head. It’s a small dominating move, but knowing the rush of control and exhilaration it would give me makes heat slide down my spine.

“I think the best way for that to happen is for you to do everything I say.” His tone is curt, but I can hear the yearning seeping into it.

“Yes,” she breathes, and he narrows his eyes as if expecting something more. I’m not sure what it could be, but she must because she adds assuredly, “Yes, sir.”

A cold smile tugs the corner of his mouth. “What polite words for such a dirty whore.”

My stomach rocks as his words create a sharp spike in the scent of Sinclair’s arousal and the hands behind her back fidget.

“Does calling you a dirty whore make you wet, Omega?” he drawls with a hint of mockery.

“Yes, sir,” she admits softly. The top of her ass moves like she’s rubbing her thighs together.

“And what if I fuck your throat? I wonder how wet that will make you.” She doesn’t answer his rhetorical question, but I can hear her sharp intake of breath.

He reaches for his belt and unbuckles it. He doesn’t say a word as he slowly pulls the leather through the loops of his jeans.

I wish I could see her face right now. Are her eyes wide and scared or hooded and glassy? Are they dazzling with gold yet, or still just as cold and blue as ice?

“Take your dress off,” he orders. She obeys without protest, pulling it over her head and tossing it on the floor beside her.

With nothing underneath, she’s left completely nude. The fair skin of her back is capped with a hint of pink on her shoulders from the sun yesterday. My cock hardens as my eyes trace the delicate line of her spine to the crease between her cheeks resting on her feet.

Submitting on her knees, she makes a sinful offering.

I sink deeper into the chair, lust clawing at my senses, as he wraps his belt around her neck. He puts the tongue of the buckle through the last hole so that it sits like a collar around her throat but won't slide any tighter.

Her hands move from behind her back for his waist, but he tuts with a sharp tug on the belt. "I didn't tell you to move your hands." She quickly clasps them behind her again. "Or are you just so desperate for cock that you aren't willing to do exactly as I say?"

"No, sir."

"Good. Now, tongue out and wait for me to give you what you want."

I hear the faint wet sounds of her opening her mouth and sticking out her tongue, but I can't see it. Unconsciously, I exhale heavily in frustration, and Ecker's eyes jump to me as if he forgot I was still here.

He quickly returns his attention back to Sinclair and begins undoing his pants. When he takes his cock out, it's just as hard as mine. His jaw shifts, grinds back and forth, as he gives himself a few stilted strokes.

He's trying to resist giving in so soon. I'm sure he wants nothing more than to plunge deep inside her wet and waiting mouth, but Ecker will torture himself as much as he tortures her.

He's all about the art of the tease.

His breathing deepens, and his teeth notch into his bottom lip as he continues to jerk himself above her outstretched tongue. Her hips wiggle again, and her perfume

thickens.

My skin feels hot and itchy as I imagine his view. Her pretty pink tongue glistening right below his cock, his hand sliding up and down. I bet he can feel the heat from it and is just building up the hunger before he gets to envelop himself in it.

Finally, he takes his hand from his cock and puts it on the back of her head before pushing his hips forward and sinking inside her mouth.

“ Mine . . . ” He exhales huskily, and his eyes flutter closed, the muscles of his neck flexing.

He pushes her farther down his length and a throaty groan leaves him as she gags. As if paralyzed with pleasure, he doesn't move, keeping her there choking on his cock while he revels in the hot feel of her mouth surrounding every inch.

Suddenly, he yanks her head back. She gets in one big gasp for air before he's shoving her back on his cock. This time, he doesn't go slow. He fists her hair and pistons his hips. One of his hands remains on the belt, keeping it taut. Her fingers whiten behind her back as she clutches them tighter and tighter.

“This is what it's like to be mine, Omega,” he grinds out. “Savage, out of control . . . desperate .”

She moans hungrily despite the assault, and heat sinks into my stomach.

“You make me so fucking crazy.” He pants between thrusts.

Sweat drips down my back and my chest feels like an inferno as I watch the silky strands of her hair knit between his fists and listen to the wet, choking sounds she makes. It makes me fucking crazy.

“When I feed you my cum, you’re gonna swallow. All of it. You hear me, you dirty fucking slut?” She moans and nods as best as she can.

Blush crawls up his throat and he sputters, “F-F- Fuck! ” He drops the belt and both hands clutch her head as he hits the deepest part of her throat and comes.

When he pulls her off, she’s breathing heavily. Not only can I hear it, but I can tell by the rise and fall of her shoulders.

“Show me you can follow instructions,” he says, and she must stick out her empty tongue because he pats her cheek and mutters, pleased, “That’s a good girl.”

His eyes are still green, and I don’t know how he’s resisting going into rut. I’m having a hard enough time of it just sitting in this fucking chair.

“Let’s see how wet choking on cock made our little slut.”

My chest soars at the use of “ our ,” and I don’t even try to fight it. It feels too good.

“Show me,” Ecker orders.

She finally unclasps her hands and slips one between her thighs. When she withdraws it, I can’t help but move to the side to see.

She holds up two fingers, shiny with slick, and my stomach drops with need, my tongue thirsting for a taste.

Ecker’s smirk is devious as he tells her to make them even wetter. My hands ball into fists as I watch her arm move back and forth and hear the wet sounds of her fingers in her pussy.

“You promised to do everything I said,” he reminds her when she takes them out again, a wickedness flashes in his eyes.

“I did. And I will.” Desire is prominent in her voice, but there’s still a hint of trepidation.

“Yes, you will,” he says in a chilling tone, then he sits on the bed and stretches out one booted foot. “I want you to finger your ass and polish my boot.”

Quietly, confused, she asks, “What—”

“‘Yes, sir’ is the only thing I want to hear out of your mouth,” he interrupts curtly, then emphasizes with a pointed look at her then his shoe. “Polish my boot.”

There’s a weighted moment while she processes, and then she says breathily, “Yes , sir .”

He picks back up the dangling end of the belt then leisurely— arrogantly— leans back to rest the other hand on the mattress.

Heat crawls up my chest and neck as she spreads her knees and scoots forward to hover over his leather boot. My body feels like it’s overheating and my lungs burn, flames streaking in my veins.

She rolls her pelvis forward to drag her dripping cunt over the toe of his boot. I will my heart to stop pounding so damn loud so I can hear the soft, breathy moans she makes as she rocks tentatively back and forth. But it’s a damn near impossible task when she leans forward even more so that she can slide her slick-coated fingers behind her.

“Jesus . . . ” I can’t help but exhale as they disappear into her ass.

She moans softly and wiggles back, testing. At first, her movements are slightly awkward as she tries to acclimate to the new sensations and position. But after a few moments, she seems to slip into the pleasure of it and rolls her hips in seamless tandem with her fingers.

She grinds unabashedly for more, mewls and whimpers spilling uninhibited. It's a beautiful, wild sight.

And the more she arches her back, the more of her glistening pussy I can see. Her lips are puffy and pink, pearled with arousal. Her scent has filled the room, invaded my lungs, my goddamn bloodstream.

I swear I can taste her on the back of my tongue. The salty, musky, and fucking divine flavor like a ghost here to torture me. Seeing and tasting something I can't touch. My body is burning up.

Maybe I am in hell.

But I don't think hell is supposed to feel this good.

"Such a dirty little thing," Ecker muses, pulling me from my tortured spiral. "Only a whore would get off on someone's shoe. And while finger fucking your own ass, no less." He chuckles with dark delight.

He tugs on the belt to make her look up at him. "You really would do anything I asked, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, sir." There's desperation in her voice.

"Then make yourself come on my boot."

She removes her fingers from her back hole and leans forward onto both palms, so she can grind harder and more accurately into the leather. Her throaty moans become harried, and she rocks more intently.

I watch a bead of sweat drip down her spine and the slope of her back with the fiercest urge to lick it up.

“Oh, god, oh, god . . .” She gasps. “Oh, fuck, fuck . . . fuck— ” she cries and trembles. Her thighs shake as she comes and bears down on his foot.

The sound and scent of her orgasm must have been too much for even Ecker’s superior control. He rips her to her feet before throwing her on the bed and growls, “Mine .”

His eyes meet mine. They’re burning gold.

1. “Why Don’t You” by Thorgan

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 15

To Be Yours

Titus

Ecker rips his boots off and steps out of his jeans, peeling his shirt off. 1 He's fully undressed in a matter of seconds, and he climbs onto the bed, sitting on the edge. Sinclair's still in the process of sitting up when he grabs her around the waist and flings her onto his lap, facing out—facing me .

“I need to be buried in this needy cunt right fucking now. This pussy is mine.” He growls like an animal, unleashed by the rut.

She's out of breath and disoriented from being thrown around, but still manages to wrap her arm around his neck and guide his cock, hard and solid again, to her entrance.

“Put me inside you,” he snarls and nips her neck.

I squirm in my chair. Before, I was the audience, now I feel like part of the show. Ripples of desire course down my back, and my cock aches in the confines of my pants.

Sinclair's blazing, metallic eyes meet mine as she sinks down on Ecker. I swallow thickly and tug on the neck of my shirt.

I can't look away from the captivating hold she has on me. I can tell how deep he is by the way her lips part on a silent gasp and her brows pinch together. My breath saws in and out. I don't even know how I'm still breathing.

"Can he stroke himself?" Sinclair pants in a deliciously needy tone as she rides up and down Ecker's length. It's only her question that makes me realize I've been palming my crotch like a desperate, fucking sap. "Look how badly he wants to be you." Her words float out to me and land softly.

There's something in the way she speaks that tells me this is different from when she video called me at Opulence. I can't put my finger on it, but there's no malice. It's like she wants me to be a part of this.

My jaw pulses, and my hand tightens around my painful bulge.

"Look how he's rubbing his cock. I bet he's imagining it buried deep inside me like yours." Her head rolls to the side to look earnestly at Ecker and she asks again, "Can he stroke himself, Alpha?"

Ecker's heavy-lidded gaze flicks to mine. "Do it." His voice is hoarse and gravelly, deep in rut.

I free my cock and fist the throbbing length, an equally coarse sound reverberating from deep in my chest. "Fuck . . ."

My heated flesh skitters with pleasure, and I grind my teeth as I slip into a subdued rut. I try to push the violent thirst that usually dominates my ruts aside and focus on the gratifying feeling of being . . . wanted . . . ?

Is that what I am?

Sinclair's lusty gaze drops to my hand sliding up and down my cock. I can't help but slow down, watching the way she wets her lip and swallows hungrily. I swirl my thumb over my tip beaded with pre-cum, and her breath hitches.

Fuck , I think "wanted" is right .

Ecker bounces her in his lap, and my eyes catch on his fingertips digging into her hips. A wave of jealousy hits me as I imagine the bruises he'll leave, the evidence of his claim. An envious growl escapes me without my consent, making him smirk.

"You hear that, baby girl? He wishes it were his hands marking you." One of said hands slides up her stomach and over her breasts to unhook the belt around her neck. "You don't need this when you have me." He pulls it away then collars her throat with his fingers. She pushes into his palm with a begging whimper.

He gives me an understanding look, which takes the sting out of his next words. "He wishes he were me, so he could have what's mine ."

She squeaks a gasp as he tugs her back by the throat roughly and moves his other hand to play with her clit. "God, brother, you should feel how much her pussy loves when she's choked. Greedy little thing." He chuckles darkly and rubs her clit harder. "It turns her into such a fucking slut, like she's trying to milk all my cum from me so I'll breed her like a whore."

The alpha inside me roars at the thought of claiming her so permanently like that—fucking my baby into her and leaving her dripping with my cum. I stroke my cock more furiously.

"Isn't that right?" he taunts into her ear. "You're nothing but a desperate cum slut."

"Yes, sir." She moans through a constricted throat.

“Such a greedy little whore.” He pants gruffly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Only good for carrying our babies.”

She mewls higher. “ Yes , sir .”

The desperation in her voice is like an electric current over my skin, as if I can feel her moans like finger strokes, making goose bumps rise on my arms.

I make the mistake of looking down where his cock thrusts in and out of her. The sight of his veiny shaft absolutely soaked with her lust sets me on fucking fire.

I look up and make eye contact with her, sending me over the edge. My abs and thighs tense as my orgasm hits me like a truck.

“Jesus—fuck— fuck .” I bite out a gritted curse as every ounce of pleasure in my body concentrates in my balls. Hot cum shoots all over my hand and shirt, our locked gazes never breaking. I melt into the chair, completely exhausted and sated, as waves of sensation roll through me.

Ecker

Titus’s guttural roar as he comes makes Sinclair shudder and her cunt quivers around me. 2 I feel her pulse hammer under my palm, her throat and chest flushed and hot to the touch.

“You like watching him come undone? You enjoy seeing what you do to all of us?” I whisper roughly in her ear then suck on the lobe. She gives me short, sharp nods with a whimpering moan. I feel the dynamic shift between her and Titus, and I’m so

fucking glad he was here for this.

She has this hold, this power over us that strips us down to our basest forms. Saying it's because she's mine feels incomplete, insufficient.

"That's because we're yours," I say, almost pained, so filled with emotion it hurts, pushing at the confines of my body.

I grab her by the hips and toss her onto the mattress behind me. She falls back on the pillows, and I crawl over her. "I wholly belong to you, Sinclair. You own every piece of me, every part of my soul. It's all yours."

I feel so overwhelmed with the truth of my declaration that hot tears burn my eyes. I can't breathe until my lips are on hers. I draw myself to her, melting into our kiss while she reaches between us to guide my cock to her pussy.

"I know, I know," she breathes out, choked up, scooching lower to tilt her hips up and wrap her legs around my waist, giving me perfect access. "You're mine — " She gasps as I punch my hips and thrust inside her.

Her hands thread into the back of my hair, and she clutches me tight as I pound into her, giving myself over to her more and more with every snap of my hips.

Words are swallowed up by emotion as we communicate with only our bodies.

I fuck her like the gift she is, slow but hard, appreciating every inch, every second.

It's in this moment that I realize how hopelessly I need her. Why this reassurance means so much after thinking I'd lost her again.

It's not just clarity she's giving me, but devotion, commitment. I know now that we

are so deeply ingrained in each other, we could never separate without carving ourselves apart.

Whether she's physically with me or not, she will always be with me .

Because she's mine and I'm all . Fucking . Hers .

"I think I love you," she whispers so quietly I almost miss it. But I don't.

"I know I love you, so come with me, baby girl. Please, please , make me whole," I plead as I'm on the verge of being consumed by rapture.

"Yes, yes." She arches into me, and I bury myself deeper. "I want to feel your cum inside me. It belongs with me, to me, every part of you."

Her body tightens around me, and a desperate keen spills from her lips. My own release crashes into me.

"I'm yours, I'm yours, I'm yours," I chant as I bury my face into her neck and come hard inside of her.

I feel her walls clench my pulsing cock, and spurt after spurt of seed fills her as my knot swells.

"Oh god . . . " She moans heedlessly. "Your knot . . . I can't stop coming . . ."

She trembles in my arms as my knot locks into place, finally allowing her orgasm to recede. Exhaling heartily, she relaxes into the mattress.

I pull us onto our sides where we stay tightly wrapped together, breathing heavily and sated, washed with afterglows.

At some point, Titus must have left because when I glance over, the chair is empty.

I'm glad he was here. I feel like we all needed this.

We're more than just a pack, we're family, and Sinclair is all of ours. Sure, in different ways, but still ours.

Which is why it meant so much that they came together to pull me back from the edge.

I know I was spiraling and full of misplaced anger. But I was such a wreck and didn't know how to handle it. I couldn't just make a crude joke and laugh it off with a wink like my usual MO.

In fact, before Sin and Titus came in, I was about to go to whatever shitty dive bar was still open this morning and pick a fight with the washed-up drunks from last night. Something, anything, to relieve or outright replace the terrible feeling of uselessness that was eating me up.

I was so furious with the Cyans and felt like no one was as rightfully mad as I was. All I wanted to do was tear them limb from limb, but I couldn't. Because we had a plan, and I didn't want to fuck that up.

So instead, I just stewed and stewed and made Sinclair unjustly the scapegoat.

"Thank you," I murmur into her hair. She wraps her legs tighter around my waist and nuzzles into my chest.

Sometime later, we slowly wake up, still entwined but my knot has deflated. 3 She mumbles sleepily as I pull out and roll onto my back. She snuggles up to my side and rests her head on my shoulder, her fingers gently trailing across my bare chest.

I sweep her hair off her neck and feel her scar. The burned skin always gives me a mix of emotions. Anger for one, but also pride and awe at her strength. Especially after watching her kill Vincent. Even without knowing the full story, I've never been prouder of someone.

Which makes me realize, it's about fucking time I learned it. "How did you end up at the Doll House?"

She tells me about everything. Her mom, the debt, the Doll House, the collar and brand. When she's done, I press a tender but deep kiss to her forehead, feeling so much respect and admiration for the woman in my arms.

I realize with amazement and a light chuckle what impresses me the most. "And after all that, you still had enough fight in you to give us hell from day one."

She huffs a small, wistful laugh. "I don't know how to live if I'm not fighting."

That makes me sit up and cup her face. I pour myself into her sky-blue stare. "You'll learn then. Let us take up that fight for you."

She worries her lip between her teeth and clears her throat like it's suddenly clogged with emotion. "Why?" Her voice is quiet, touched, but full of questions, like she still doesn't understand that she isn't alone any longer.

I tuck a lock of hair behind her ear and make sure she can hear the sincerity in my voice. "That's what it means to belong to someone. Your battles belong to them too."

1. Continue playing "Why Don't You" by Thorgan

2. "Be Your Love" by Bishop Briggs

3. Continue playing “Be Your Love” by Bishop Briggs

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:31 am

Chapter 16

Titus Cerulean is a Hoot

Sinclair

The best view is through a low gap in the hedge, so I'm on my hands and knees on the damp grass looking through it. My alphas are inside the flower garden on the other side. I watch them wait for the Cyans with a fluttering heartbeat.

As if reading my mind, Paisley, crouched next to me, asks in a hushed tone, "Are you nervous?"

"It's not so much nerves as anticipation."

She laughs louder than probably intended and claps her hand to her mouth then whispers, "Yeah, I bet you can't wait to see them beat the shit out of those assholes."

"Do you think they'll cry?" I joke, and she giggles.

"God, I hope so—oh my god, is that them?" She bolts to her feet and points into the distance.

At least four men walk in our direction across the vast lawn. I jump up too, and we scurry around the corner of the hedge so they don't see us. It's not that we aren't allowed to be here, but my guys wanted me to stay out of sight.

“Is an Elder with them?” I hear Ecker ask.

“Looks like it.” Titus grunts.

I press my cheek against the roughly shorn leaves to get a look inside the garden. Blue flowers bloom in every quadrant and in the center. The golden animal heads poised on columns like busts gleam in the sun.

Titus’s shoulders are unusually loose. He’s clearly more comfortable preparing to get in a bloody fight than he is in the suit and tie required at the brotherhood nights. Bishop scans the garden like a hawk, as if he’s constantly analyzing and strategizing behind those hazel eyes. And Ecker bounces on the balls of his feet like a kid waiting in line for a roller coaster. He looks way too excited for this.

They couldn’t be more different, but they still share so many of the same traits. The earned confidence with which they hold themselves, the strength they emanate. And the slight air about them that makes you think they might just be completely unhinged.

Unhinged and mine, I think fondly, and both Ecker and Bishop’s heads turn right toward where I’m standing. Bishop tongues his cheek, and Ecker smirks slightly. They must have felt me admiring them, and I feel an equally smitten rush come through our bond.

Titus’s mocking tone gets my attention. “Aww, had to go running to Daddy, didn’t you, Yves?”

I spot the Cyan alphas and Elder entering through the other side of the hedge. Exhilaration races as I hurry back to my original peephole. Paisley follows right next to me.

“You’re not as discreet as you think you are, Cerulean,” the Cyan Elder answers.

Yves’s lip curls and he looks like he’s holding back a mouthful of retorts, biting his tongue in front of his Elder—or hiding behind him.

He’s so goddamn pathetic , I scream internally. Ecker subtly glances my way with a small snort. He must have sensed my annoyance. Bishop nudges him, and he returns his focus to the pack in front of them, fixing his smirk into a scowl.

Titus holds his hands out. “Well, now that everyone’s here, can we get to it?”

Ecker and Bishop fall into fight ready stances on either side of him.

“No. There will be no more of this ridiculous infighting.”

“They attacked our omega!” Ecker shouts and lunges forward. Bishop’s quick to fling his arm out to hold him back.

The Elder lifts his chin. His stork mask looks particularly garish with the sun streaking down the long beak. “You should have protected your omega better,” he says coldly, but you can hear the mocking delight behind it.

Bishop surprises me when he snaps and barks loudly, all composure gone. “Are you fucking serious?”

The smug sneer on every single Cyan alphas’ face makes my blood boil. Paisley squeezes my shoulder as I seethe silently.

“Fine, then just Yves and me,” Titus offers. “One fair fight between pack leaders and we’ll put all this to bed once and for all.”

“No infighting of any kind, between any alphas or packs,” the Elder reiterates.

“This is bullshit.” Ecker shakes his head with a scoff.

“This is final . And just so we’re clear, Miss Sinclair, would you please come out with the Beryll omega?” My stomach drops at the Elder’s demand.

Paisley gives me a nervous look, and I try to reassure her with a confident nod as we stand up.

We walk around the perimeter of the hedge and into the garden. I don’t hide my glare as I pass the Cyans and go stand by my alphas, making sure that Paisley is tucked behind all of us. Ecker slings his arm around my shoulders, and Bishop flanks my other side.

“I hope it was made abundantly clear the day of your ceremony,” the Elder begins. “But in case you’ve forgotten, let me remind you the cost of disobeying the Echelon is paid by your family .” His frigid, evil eyes find mine as he stresses that final word. My heart freezes as my blood instantly chills at his impeccably clear implication. “This is your only warning. After that, consequences will be swift and sure.”

A jagged lump catches in my throat, and I can’t say anything, do anything but nod weakly. My mind is filled with the horrific images of the woman’s tortured body that was hung like a flag our first day here. The burns and cuts that littered her corpse and the agonizing, heart-breaking screams of the male prisoner she was killed to punish.

“Well, I’m glad we could have this conversation.” He chuckles heartlessly. “Now, do enjoy this beautiful, sunny day.” And with that, he turns on his heels and waltzes away, waving his hand for the Cyan alphas to follow.

I’m left feeling like I was doused with ice water. Even Ecker’s warm body holding

me feels cold and sterile.

Bishop tries to comfort me. “They’re just trying to scare you—”

I interrupt him with the only thought that matters. “Can we go see her? Right now? Please.”

It feels surreal pulling up to my old apartment building in a town car owned by the Echelon with my three noble alphas.

Seeing the dilapidated siding, trash-strewn parking lot, and barred windows makes me question the reality I’ve been living in. One with a personal attendant, hired drivers, castle-like estates, and sprawling, manicured lawns.

Nerves eat up my insides. What will I say to her? How will I explain these men or where I’ve been? For all she knows, I’ve followed my mother’s footsteps, strung out on Lust Dust and working on my back to earn money for a man.

As soon as the car comes to a stop, I reach for the door handle, deciding stalling will only make things worse. Titus beats me to it, and I quickly withdraw my hand so I don’t hurt him.

“So, um . . .” He clears his throat awkwardly. “If she asks how Mr. Barnes is, just go with it.”

“What?” I ask, bewildered.

“Uh, Mr. Barnes is your, uh . . . employer.” Titus seems embarrassed as he looks at me through one cracked eye, face scrunched.

“Bro, what the hell are you talking about?” Ecker questions, and I’m comforted he’s

as equally confused as I am.

“Okay, I sorta checked in on her a while back.”

“Who? My grandma? ” I ask in disbelief.

“Yeah.” He tries to roll his eyes like it’s not a big deal. “It was after the Cyans hinted about something happening to her if they didn’t get answers on who you really were.”

“I thought you went to Opulence?” Bishop leans forward in his seat.

“I did. After.”

My mind is going a mile a minute trying to make sense of this. Nothing is adding up.

“So who’s this Barnes?”

“Well, I needed to explain who I was and where you were, and I didn’t quite feel like saying I was a pimp so.” He trails off as if we should be able to piece it together from there.

We all look at him, dumbfounded. He acts all exasperated that he has to spell it out. “So , I told her your debt had been bought by a wealthy widower to serve as a nanny for his kids. I’m his valet.” He shrugs.

“And who are we supposed to be?” Ecker questions, still sounding just as befuddled as before.

“I don’t know,” Titus scoffs. “His pool boys or some shit.”

“ Nice .” Ecker nods proudly with a chuckle. “I always thought I’d make a hot ass pool boy.”

My hand hovers above the door. I don't know if I've ever knocked on this door. I've always had keys, as it was our home, not just hers. My chest squeezes. My home was always wherever she was.

I swallow past the lump in my throat and rap my knuckles on the wood. My heart races as we wait, and I pull up the neck of the hoodie I'm wearing to make sure my burn is covered. Luckily, the ice and alpha hormones I got right after the attack took most of the swelling down, and some strategically placed makeup by Penelope takes care of the light bruising.

I hear the familiar shuffle of her slippers on the other side of the door and emotion wells in my chest.

"I'm comin', I'm comin'," she hollers. My vision gets misty at the sound of her voice.

"I can't do this." I gasp, but Ecker stops me from turning around.

"You got this, baby girl." He rubs my shoulder, and my heart trips as we listen to the lock disengaging.

My grandmother's warm, greeting face shifts to confusion, then her eyes jump wide with realization.

"Oh, my Sinny girl!" She squeals and pulls me across the threshold into a tight bear hug.

I can't stop the tears that spill in droves at her warm embrace and nostalgic scent. The pilled fabric of her house dress rubs against my cheek, smelling of potpourri and fresh biscuits. She holds me firm and coos, "Shh, shh now. It's alright, baby. We're alright."

When I find the strength to pull away, I sniffle and laugh at the same time. “I just missed you a lot, I guess.”

“Oh, how I missed you too, my love.” She pats my cheek tenderly then turns to the men, placing a hand on Titus’s shoulder. “And Mr. Crocker, it’s so good to see you again. I’m sure you’re laughing all the time with this guy around.”

I feel like I’m in some parallel universe as I flatly agree, “Yeah, he’s a real hoot.”

My grandma outstretches her arms, and now I’m positive this is some alternate reality because Titus warmly accepts her hug with a smile — a smile!

She gives his shoulder a knowing nudge when they let go. “Did you get a chance to take that new elevator, huh? Grinwald, that useless rat, finally did something for once.” She chuckles then bustles toward the kitchen, waving us over. “Now, sit, sit—I’ll put on some tea.”

I’m still frozen to the spot she pulled me into. Overwhelmed, confused, but so fucking happy I think my chest might actually split open.

Bishop takes my hand and whispers, “I like her.”

“Yeah.” My voice cracks, and he pauses to wipe the tear at the corner of my eye with his knuckle. “She’s pretty great.”

While we’re still by the door, I ask quietly, “Why didn’t Titus say anything before?”

He smiles softly. “It’s in the silent things that Titus shows his love.”

Then he gently pulls me toward our family, old and new.

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Chapter 17

Loyalty

Titus

The moment Seventeen tells us we've been called to the Great Hall, I know another Trial is about to take place.

I keep catching Sinclair giving me these long, inquisitive, thoughtful looks, like she's trying to reconcile the man I've let her see with the man who'd check on her grandma.

Now is no different. We're the last pack to arrive at the Great Hall, and she's surveying me from the corner of her eye. I wonder if she's figured out the elevator getting fixed was me too. Pretending I don't notice, I look down at the polished marble floors.

I remember how my blood looked pooled on the glossy surface after being lashed, how slippery it became, and an uneasy feeling sinks into my stomach.

The packs are standing in distinct clusters, but Paisley immediately waves Sinclair over to her alphas and her.

My hackles rise when I see the Beryll alphas after everything they put us through, whether intentional or not. Well, they did intentionally lie about Sinclair's whereabouts so they could gather information to lord over us for the Intelligence

Trial. But I can tell Paisley's friendship means a lot to Sinclair.

I'm not saying I trust her completely, but I won't discount the value a friend can play in a place like this. Especially for Sinclair; she has— had no allies before us. At least me my brothers and I always had each other.

“Do you know anything?” Sinclair whispers, gesturing with a nod toward the Cyan and Azurite Elder standing in the front.

“Only that it's a Trial,” Paisley responds quietly. “There's only Loyalty and Fortitude left.”

I make eye contact with Bishop and Ecker, and we share an unspoken word of solidarity. Whatever it is, we will get through it together.

“Noble alphas and omegas,” the Azurite Elder begins. “I'd like to first congratulate you on making it this far in the Trials. You have all succeeded in proving your Courage and Vigilance. Now it is time for you to prove your Loyalty.”

“A long speech on the virtue of loyalty is not necessary, for it is one of the innate principles all great alphas are born with,” the Cyan Elder continues. “It is our nature to band together, to form packs, families, but that does not mean it is always easy.”

I crack my knuckles as I consider our Intelligence Trial assignment. How loyal is it to spy on our own members? Or to lie about it being a one-time break from tradition when we now know the Berylls were assigned to us? It makes me wonder if all the other packs were told the same thing, fed a crock of shit.

I know the Echelon is full of two-faced hypocrites, but somehow I'm still surprised every time they show it.

Or maybe I'm amazed at how blatant their double standards and backward morals are. Yesterday was the most shocking example: the Cyans getting away with drugging and brutally attacking our omega without consequences or retaliation.

"By now, all of the omegas have been mated to one or more alpha within the Trial packs. The resulting alpha aversion is quite severe among nobles. A fact we were reminded of at the last brotherhood night." The Cyan Elder doesn't even try to be subtle as he cuts his gaze under his mask to the Cobalt pack.

I was sickened, but unfortunately not surprised, when I heard what happened at the brotherhood night with the Cobalt omega after we left.

The Cobalt omega puts on a brave face, lifting her chin stoically, but pain weighs down her features. Sinclair, on the other hand, doesn't bother hiding her feelings on the situation with the most repulsed look on hers.

Though I may not always agree with her methods, the girl has a fiery passion for justice that is admirable.

"If courage and fortitude, intelligence and vigilance are the bricks that make up our foundation, loyalty is the mortar," Azurite projects as if giving a campaign speech, polished and strong.

"To test your loyalty, we will ask one thing of each of you." 1 My heart pounds as he draws out the final instructions. Ecker and Bishop are tense and ready next to me, Sinclair tucked protectively between them. "Give us permission."

The doors under the balcony open, and more Elders in gold masks and black cloaks like for the ceremony come out. Two Elders from the four families create an imposing row behind the Azurites and Cyans.

My stomach churns at the insinuation of all ten of them lined up, only to be confirmed when the Cyan says, “All of us.”

“Jesus Christ . . .” I exhale, and similar hushed sentiments of shock murmur through the packs.

Sinclair turns to Bishop, genuine horror in her eyes. He shakes his head assuredly. “Not a fucking chance.”

“Will the aspiring Cyan alphas please step forward with your omega,” Azurite summons.

Yves and the other two move to the front to face the Elders. Merigold trails slightly behind. Eric grabs her arm and drags her in front of them, and her eyes fall to the floor and there’s a nervous shake to her hands.

“Yves and Eric Cyan, as the bonded mates of this omega, do you grant us permission and unconditional access to enjoy the pleasures of your omega?”

“I’m gonna be sick,” Sinclair hisses under her breath. If it wasn’t such a vast room, it would probably be audible in the dead silence.

Yves rolls his shoulders back and sniffs before saying without hesitation, “We do.”

A collective gasp leaves the crowd, and waves of aggression and protectiveness emit from the other alphas.

“Very well then.” The Cyan Elder holds out his hand to Merigold with a lecherous grin curving under the golden beak. “Come with me, dearie.”

This is utter insanity .

My blood heats and my pulse thrums, adrenaline already pouring into my bloodstream.

Merigold takes the Elder's hand and hesitantly lets him pull her away from her alphas, her mates .

“How can they do that?” Ecker balks as Merigold looks over her shoulder at them, fear and heartache in her eyes. None of her alphas move a muscle.

Merigold and the ten masked Elders disappear into the room under the balcony.

Twenty minutes later, the sound of the opening door instantly silences the hushed clusters of conversations that broke out since they went in. 2

The Cyan Elder walks out, straightening his tie, while the Azurite smooths his tucked in shirt. He and the Cyan are the only two not in black cloaks, and I'm sure the fact they waited to make these adjustments until they were in full view was wholly intentional. It's these subtle shows of power that the Echelon is so good at wielding. Small but constant reminders to make sure you never forget whose heel you are under.

Merigold is next to walk out. My stomach sinks upon seeing her state. Her normally high and tight ponytail is loose with strands falling out. The left strap of her dress is frayed and barely staying together. Mascara streaks from her eyes, and a fresh red handprint lights up her cheek.

She walks to her alphas with her shoulders curled in and rubbing her wrist. Angry red stripes wrap around her wrist and ankles where they must have held her down, already turning to bruises in some places.

Yves tries to wrap his arm around her shoulders when they step back to join the rest

of the packs, but she pushes him away and rubs her teary eyes.

“This is so fucked,” I scoff in disbelief.

And then our names are called.

Every one of us goes rigid with tension as we slowly make our way to the front. I don’t know what’s going to happen when Bishop and Ecker refuse to give permission, because there’s no way in hell they ever would.

Maybe they will give us lashes or some other painful form of humiliation in reprimand. No matter how bad the consequences are, it will be a hundred times more sufferable than turning Sinclair over to these wretched men.

“Bishop and Ecker Cerulean, as the bonded mates of this omega, do you grant us permission and unconditional access to enjoy the pleasures of your omega?” The Azurite presents the same request.

“Hell no,” Ecker spits, and Sinclair audibly exhales. Though I’m sure she never expected anything different, her relief is still palpable.

“You understand your Loyalty Trial’s success is dependent on your answer to this request?”

“We do,” Bishop says stoically. “Out of profound and undying loyalty to our omega, we knowingly refuse to grant permission.”

My heartbeat pounds in my ears as I work to think of another way out of this that doesn’t put Sinclair on the chopping block but keeps us from completely failing the Trial.

There's only one thing that comes to mind, and when the Azurite and Cyan whisper something to each other, I know our time is running out to make a move.

So, I step in front of Sinclair and drop to my knees.

1. "Start a War" by Klergy, Valerie Broussard through end of chapter
2. Continue playing "Start a War" by Klergy, Valerie Broussard through to next chapter

Chapter 18

True Loyalty

Sinclair

My heart hasn't stopped racing since Merigold went into that room. I am sickened and horrified, but at the same time, my heart breaks for my alphas. They've risked everything, fought their whole lives to make it to these Trials. They put their lives on the line, Bishop almost losing his, to get this far . . . so maybe it's time I make an equally devastating sacrifice.

I'm about to say something when Titus steps in front of me. I'm shocked when he drops to his knees. Bishop and Ecker's fretted faces tell me they're just as surprised as I am.

"Our omega is off-limits. Their mate bond sacred," he says with unquestionable authority. "But if you're so desperate to get your shriveled-up dicks wet, then use me." He holds his arms out, then slaps a palm to his chest. "You want to test our loyalty? Then I will give you my body out of true loyalty."

My breath catches in my throat, his pronouncement knocking the wind out of me.

"So will I," Ecker says vehemently and kneels beside Titus. Bishop follows right behind him.

My stomach swoops. I don't know what to do. What if the Elders accept?

“They can’t fail us all.” I hear Griffin’s voice behind me and am stunned when he, Noah, and Maverick join my alphas on their knees.

I’m dumbstruck as one by one, the Cobalt and Azurite alphas add to the line of kneeling men willing to put themselves on the line for their mates. The other omegas and I are left standing together, exchanging the same look of astonishment and pride.

“This is pathetic,” Yves scoffs, and I whip around to face him.

“No, you’re pathetic.” I close the distance between us, remembering the way Titus jumped back when I accidentally poked him in the chest the other day.

Yves stands his ground with a glare as Eric and Stefan flank him more closely. I scoff internally, They really love three on one .

“Ten men,” I say and thrust my finger into his chest. He howls and stumbles back. “Ten men ,” I repeat with a snarl, tempted to give him another shove, this time with both hands.

I glance at Merigold as she hoists her torn strap up her shoulder. I hate her. I truly do. But in this moment, I can’t find anything but sympathy for her.

Making eye contact with Yves again, I sneer. “Even pathetic is a generous word.”

“Yeah.” Merigold speaks up, pushing her shoulders back and glaring fiercely at her alphas. “You fucking cunts ,” she spits before storming away with the signature flip of her ponytail and clickety-clack of her heels, nose back high in the air.

Penelope and Twelve help Paisley and me scrounge together some old gas lanterns and hang them from the trees over the dock for our impromptu “Sticking it to the Elders” party.

Griffin was right. Once all the alphas took to their knees, the Elders were faced with two choices. Either they fail every pack but the Cyans and lose an entire generation of Echelon members or they spin it.

They chose to spin it, claiming the request for permission was actually a test of their loyalty to their pack all along, not to the Echelon as it was presented.

Everyone saw right through it. We all knew that was not their original intention, but we beat them at their own fucked-up game.

“How much beer do you think we can sneak out of the kitchen?” Paisley gives her attendant a conspiratorial smile.

“We can acquire anything you’d like, ma’am. If we don’t already have it, I can send a driver into town as well.”

“Ooo .” Paisley claps her hands together. “What if we do margaritas?”

“We can certainly do that.” Twelve bites back a smile before heading off with a polite nod.

By the time everyone else arrives, the last of the sunset has faded behind the tree line, and the dock is illuminated by the fun and nostalgic light from hanging lanterns. We have a small bar station set up for margaritas and palomas, and Penelope recruited the bartender from the brotherhood night. There are a few floats available, but with the sun down, no one is going in the water, myself included. Even though I wore a bikini under my clothes just in case.

Instead, we congregate on the dock, drinks in hand, with good-spirited music playing from speakers. It’s almost like we’re a regular group of twentysomething-year-olds enjoying a chill lakeside party.

“You did good, baby girl.” Ecker comes up beside me and hooks his arm around my neck. He grabs the side of my face and pulls me toward him for a drunken kiss. Warmth floods my body at the immediate reaction I feel from him through the bond. Being able to feel someone else’s desire for you is such a heady, intoxicating feeling.

I taste lime and tequila on his lips. When we pull apart, I tease him. “Where’s my drink?”

“You want one?” His eyebrows raise in question, even though his eyes themselves are half-mast and lust-filled. I nod and he winks. “I’ll be right back.”

He comes back with the entire bottle. He holds it up and flicks his chin at me. “Open.”

“No.” I laugh.

“Fine, then we’ll do it my way.” He smirks devilishly then takes a big swig straight from the bottle before fisting the back of my hair and yanking my neck back. The movement makes my lips part, and he further opens my mouth with a thumb on my chin.

Heat pools in my belly as his wicked eyes meet mine and tequila spills from his lips into mouth. Once I swallow, he lifts my head back up and dips down to whisper against my lips, “Next time, that will be one of my brothers’ cum after I lick it from your dripping cunt.”

My cheeks burn, and he must be able to see it even in the dim light because he laughs warmly. “God, I love making you blush. It’s so fucking hot when I can see exactly how much I affect you.”

I shove him playfully in the chest, and Titus and Bishop join us.

“So, we were talking with Griffin and Noah, and we realized we may be able to switch up the outcome of the Intelligence Trial like we did today,” Bishop says.

Titus adds, “Yeah, you know how they acted like giving us the Berylls as a target was this big exception?”

“They gave that same spiel to the Berylls about us, didn’t they?” I ask, unsurprised.

“Yep.” Bishop nods. “What if the whole point of the Intelligence Trial was never to gather information on outsiders. What if it’s always been about digging up dirt to keep us in line? Think about it, what better way to keep the rank and file from acting out or rising up than to be able to blackmail them from the start?”

“Damn .” Ecker exhales, impressed. “That actually makes a shit ton of sense.”

I nod in agreement. “So, what’s the alternative plan?”

“We get dirt on the Elders instead,” Titus says then snatches the tequila from Ecker and waterfalls a pour into his mouth. My eyes catch on his veiny hands wrapped around the bottle neck and the sharp, square angle of his jaw as he tilts his head back.

Has he always been this beautiful?

Of course he has, except his shitty personality has always shown through. But after visiting my grandma, I’m beginning to wonder how much of that was all an act.

Ecker’s smokey chuckle pulls me from my thoughts. “Careful, Ti, Sinclair’s lookin’ a bit jealous of that bottle.”

“Oh, shut up,” I scoff and lightly slap his shoulder.

Bishop laughs, but Titus's face goes hard as stone. I can't tell if he's covering or is actually repulsed by that notion. And I don't know how to feel if it's the latter.

"Anyway." He clears his throat. "I was gonna try to hit up Opulence again tonight. It's Friday, so most of the girls will be there."

"That's a good idea," I quickly throw out, eager to take this change in subject.

Titus quickly looks down at his feet then back up to me. "You wanna come?"

"Me?" I can't help my instinctive tone of shock.

"Yeah, or not." His jaw ticks, and he swallows. "I was just thinking that they might share things with another omega they wouldn't with me. But whatever."

He tries to brush it off, and I find myself quick to clarify I'm not disinterested. "No, I want to. I just wasn't expecting an invite is all. When are we going?"

"Now?" he poses.

"Yeah, okay," I quickly agree, not caring to change out of my suit or trying to disguise the hint of excitement in my voice.

He shoves his hands into his pockets and gives me a nod. And maybe I'm imagining it, but I'm pretty sure he bites back a smile too.

I go to give Bishop a hug goodbye, and Ecker jeers at Titus. "Who knows, maybe you'll get lucky and be able to fuck something other than your fist tonight."

Trilling a buoyant laugh, I lean in to kiss Ecker next, my palms flattening on his chest. Right before our lips meet, I say, "Don't be a dick."

Then I push him hard with both hands to send him tumbling off the dock and into the cold water. He yells as he falls backward, making a loud splash.

I turn to Titus and lift a brow in question. “Ready?”

He sucks on his teeth and nods, and this time, I’m positive I’m not imagining the smile he’s fighting back.

1. Continue playing “Start a War” by Klergy, Valerie Broussard until ornamental break

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Chapter 19

Tease

Titus

Majestic spots me in the downstairs lounge of Opulence as soon as she leaves the VIP room she was in with a john. 1 She waves, her long, jeweled nails sparkling in the purple light. Excitement bubbles in my chest, giddiness even. No doubt she's going to try to climb into my lap, maybe even make the same offer as last time. I lean back in my chair and spread my knees while making eye contact with her so she knows the invitation is open.

Her hips sway as she strides across the floor in high heels, her shoulders tall and proud. She's truly mastered the art of seduction. It's not over-the-top or try-hard. It's a smooth, sexy kind of confidence that draws you in, making people ready to crawl on their hands and knees just to be near her, let alone with her.

But that's not why I'm lighting up with eagerness.

Sinclair is sitting on a velvet settee with another working girl. They've been talking animatedly for at least half an hour. I hope she's getting some good information, but I'm antsy for other reasons.

I crave her attention like a drug, and I need a fix.

Especially after she seemed almost excited about coming with me tonight . . .

“I knew you’d be back,” Majestic taunts as she gets closer. I force my gaze to stay on her even though all I want to do is see if Sinclair is looking.

I blatantly trail my eyes down her lingerie-clad body, which makes her wet her bottom lip, and smile. I don’t feel even a little bad for leading her on. I’ve done much worse for far less.

She bends over, popping her ass out, and puts her hands on the back of my chair. I tongue my molars with the hint of a cocky smirk when she leans in face-to-face.

“You don’t know why I came,” I counter.

Her eyes drop to my lap, and she looks back up at me through her lashes. “But I know why you’ll stay.”

“Hmm,” I say with a flirty sense of doubt, encouraging her to try to prove her point.

One of her arms slinks around my neck as she drops into my lap. I don’t hear what she says because I’m counting down in my head.

Five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . I finally allow myself to glance toward Sinclair.

My stomach swoops as I find her intently watching my interaction with Majestic. Her face is cold, but her eyes are simmering. We lock gazes, then I slide my hand from the armrest onto Majestic’s thigh. Sinclair clocks the movement, and I catch the slightest twitch of her lip, as if fighting back a sneer.

My pulse picks up when Sinclair’s eyes narrow and her jaw ticks as Majestic leans in close to whisper something in my ear before trailing her lips down my neck.

Every little reaction is a hit, making me crave more and more, needing something

stronger, harder .

I get exactly that when Majestic drags her hand across my chest and down my abs. Sinclair shoots to her feet and storms down the hall.

The alpha in me ignites. There are few things an alpha loves more than hunting down pretty prey.

“Sorry, Maj, you were wrong about tonight.” I pick her up and deposit her in my seat when I stand up to leave.

“You goddamn tease,” she scoffs playfully.

I head across the room, and she calls after me, “I hope she’s worth it.”

She definitely is .

It’s easy for me to follow Sinclair’s scent, even with the dozens of conflicting ones. My heartbeat steadily increases the deeper into the dark hallway I go. I’d be worried about losing sight of her in a place like this, but I know she can handle herself. Opulence is a picnic after the Doll House.

My skin starts tingling when I know I’m closing in. The curtain to the VIP room she must have dipped into is still slightly swaying.

Hand clutching the curtain, my heartbeat thunders wildly as I slowly pull it back. Her vivid blue eyes are the first thing I see. Even with the red glow from the lights in the room, they stand out like a laser sight locking onto a target.

Breathtaking.

Heart-stopping.

She's standing in front of a dance pole set directly into the floor. Behind her there's a V-shaped upholstered bench built into the corner of mirrored walls.

I step inside. "Omega."

"Alpha." She tries to drawl the word in the same bored tone she usually does, but instead it comes out sounding breathy, almost a question.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think you were jealous." I take a step toward her in the center of the room.

She lifts her chin. "Good thing you know better."

Another step.

"Hmm," I muse, unconvinced, with another foot forward. She backs up into the pole.

Even though there's less than two feet between us, I still take another step. Her breath hitches, spine flattening along the pole.

She has to tilt her head back as I peer down at her. Her tongue flicks out to brush along her bottom lip as she watches me swallow deeply, full of hunger. My body hums being this close to her, so close to having her.

As if thinking the same thing, she reminds me of a fact I couldn't possibly forget. "You can't touch me." Her voice is a mix of desire and relief, light and husky at the same time.

My gaze blazes a path from her eyes to her breasts and back up. Cocking my head to

the side, I admit, “Oh, there are so many things I want to do to you other than just touch.”

Her lips part and heat sinks into her gaze, like she wants to descend into hell with me.

It feels like time slows down as I raise my hand and carefully brush her hair off her shoulder, being cautious not to touch her skin.

She sucks in a breath.

My own lungs seize.

My fingers itch to wrap the silky strands in my fist, to pull her neck back and lick a path up the column of her neck. My body burns for so much more than this featherlight touch.

She could bring me to ashes.

Giving in, I twist a lock around two of my fingers and—

The vibrations of the phone in my pocket shatter the spell. I clear my throat and step back as if just realizing where I am and pick up the call.

“Hey.” My voice is gruff and thick.

Bishop’s on the other line. His direct tone immediately puts me on guard. “Yo, I don’t know what’s going on, but security personnel are swarming this place.”

“What do you mean?” At the stress in my voice, Sinclair gives me a worried look.

“ I don’t know ,” Bishop says, agitated, and I know it’s not at me, but the situation.

“They won’t tell us anything, just—just stay there, okay?”

“Yeah, okay,” I say without hesitation.

“I’ll let you know as soon as we know anything,” he promises, then hangs up.

Immediately, Sinclair asks, “What’s wrong?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know, but we’re not going home.”

“There’s only one bed,” Sinclair says when we walk into the staff room.

“Yep,” I say flatly, feeling all sorts of off-balance after Bishop’s call interrupted us right before . . . Right before what ?

What would have happened? What even could happen? Nothing. I still don’t have permission to touch her, and that wasn’t going to magically change.

Sinclair seems equally thrown off. She can’t look me in the eye, and now this comment about the bed.

“Is there not a room with two beds?” She almost sounds a little panicked.

“It’s a brothel, not a hotel. I doubt they have much use for separate beds,” I snip.

“Yeah. Right.” She sighs and sits on the corner of the mattress.

I flop down in a chair opposite her. “If it wasn’t the weekend, there would probably be another staff room open.”

“Hmm,” she hums in acknowledgment, followed by awkward silence.

I'm not one to have a problem with silence, never the first one to break it, but for some reason, right now, it's making me want to crawl out of my skin. So, I say the first idiotic that pops into my head.

“You know, I was in this very room when you video called me from Ecker's phone.”

“Oh?” She looks at me from the corner of her eyes, like she feels guilty but is trying to play it cool.

“Yeah, I was sitting right where you are.”

Her cheeks pinken, and I know I'm either going to love or hate whatever she says next.

1. “One Of The Girls” (with JENNIE, Lily-Rose Depp) by The Weeknd, JENNIE, Lily-Rose Depp

Chapter 20

What Did You Do?

Sinclair

“What did you do?” The question slips out and instantly my cheeks warm even more.

He leans back and leisurely stretches his arms over the back of the U-shaped chair, a devious glint in his eyes. “You’re blushing, Omega. What do you think I did?”

“I don’t know.” I hate how faint my voice is, how unsure I sound.

It only makes him more arrogant. “Well, you must have had some idea what I’d do when you called me. So, tell me . . .” His tongue dusts across his bottom lip. “What do you think I did while I watched your tight little ass get stretched and that smart mouth take a rough fucking?”

I swallow at his crude but accurate description. “Took a cold shower?”

He scoffs a dry laugh. “That would have been the smart thing to do.”

I bite my cheek. “Hung up?”

“Another thing I should have done.” He tongues his molars and drums on the armrest like he’s having fun with this little guessing game. “But no.”

My lips quirk. “Threw your phone across the room?”

He looks down and shakes his head with another scoff. “That came later.”

“Later?” My throat goes dry.

With his chin still dipped, his gaze jumps up to mine like pools of dark ink with an emotion as intangible as smoke. “Yeah, later.” He slowly lifts his chin as he speaks. “After I fucked my fist cursing your name.”

My mouth falls open with a sudden strike of hunger. It’s all I can do to get out a one-word question. “How?”

His brows knit together, head canting to the side. “How what?” I know he’s feigning ignorance just to get me to say the words.

“How did you fuck your fist?” For some reason, saying those brutish words out loud was easier than my slow and tedious questioning. Feeling a rush of confidence, I push a little harder. “Will you show me?”

He turns his head to the side and drags his thumb across his lips with a deep breath as if in consideration. When he turns back to me, there’s a ring of gold around his smokey irises.

“A trade for a trade,” he offers.

My heart thumps against my chest. I know I’m playing with fire. I reach behind my neck and pull on the strings of my bikini top . . . I just can’t bring myself to care if I get burned.

I unclasp the back next, then slip the entire thing out from under my loose tank.

Titus's eyes sink to a new level of darkness as he tracks the stringy top. I hold it out in my hand and then release it, letting it drop to the floor.

I lift my brow with a small flick of my chin, silently telling him your turn .

"I tried to fight it at first," he starts, reaching for the hem of his tee shirt. "I was burning up. Hurting ." He emphasizes the word with a pointed look to make sure I know it had nothing to do with physical pain, but the ache that can only come from wanting something you can't have so bad it tears at the fibers of your being.

He strips his shirt over his head, then gives me a nod. My turn .

I stand up and unbutton my denim shorts, careful when I peel them off not to take my bikini bottom with them. Once I kick them off, I sit back on the bed and cross my legs, the subtle pressure making pleasure zip through me.

Titus's hands are already on his jeans, and they ball into fists around the waistband when he scents the resulting spike in my perfume.

"Uncross your legs," he says hoarsely.

I immediately do it, not even questioning him a little, my omega nature taking over.

He doesn't stand up to take off his pants, just lifts up his hips and slides them down his legs. My pussy feels hot and slick as I take in the hard cock tenting his briefs, desire sinking low in my belly.

He rubs over the bulge with unhurried, shameless strokes. "I was this close to hanging up, but then you looked right into the camera while taking both their cocks, and I fucking snapped."

My breathing deepens, and my mouth waters as he teases the waistband of his briefs. He gives me an expectant look, and I know if I want more, I'll have to give more.

I scoot back on the bed to sit against the headboard. I can't look away from the gold encroaching his eyes as I shimmy out of my suit bottoms. He hungrily licks his lips when I draw my knees up, but I pull the hem of my top between my legs so he can't see anything.

He groans coarsely. "That's not fair."

I can't help but smirk. "When have we ever played fair, Titus?"

He tilts his head as if to say *touché* and pushes down the elastic, taking out his cock.

My heart trips over itself at the sight of his thick, veiny length and glistening red tip. Heat burns up my cheeks and chest, and I feel myself on the verge of going into heat.

"Fuck . . ." I don't realize I've said anything until I hear his throaty chuckle.

"Now, get rid of that fucking top," he orders in a low, rumbling growl. His already deep voice gets huskier the more the rut seeps into his veins.

My stomach is a mess of butterflies and somersaults as I lift the shirt over my head. My nipples are already tight and pebbled, and his eyes immediately drop to them with a deep exhale.

I crumble the tank into a ball and hold it between my thighs. He sucks on his teeth with a tsk and shake of his head, his thumb rubbing over the wet tip of his cock. "Trade for a trade, Omega."

"It's not my fault you have no more clothes left to barter." My lips tease into a half

smile.

“Then ask me a question instead,” he counters.

“Who was the girl downstairs?” It’s the first thing that comes to mind, and it makes a knowing smirk tug on his lips, as if I just admitted he was right and I was in fact jealous.

“Majestic. I used to work security here, and she and I used to . . .” He bobs his head for me to fill in the blanks. “From time to time.”

For some reason, that fact sinks like a block of lead in my stomach. A sour taste on the back of my tongue, I ask, “Did you sleep with her last time you were here?”

“That’s more than one question,” he says tauntingly. I don’t mean to, but I narrow my eyes, and he adds, “No, I didn’t.”

“Oh,” is all I can say, conflicted about the weird sense of relief I feel. Especially given what I did last time he was here, I have no right.

“Wasn’t for a lack of trying on her part though.” He doesn’t say this with any cockiness, instead as if he wants me to know purely for my own reassurance.

I tuck my unjustified envy aside and instead focus on the present. Titus’s forearms flex as he languidly strokes his length. One look in his burning gaze and I know he doesn’t want anyone else but me.

With a thrumming pulse, I toss my shirt and widen my knees to show him my pussy.

“Did she try to get with you before or after you ‘snapped?’” I ask.

“Before.”

My hand slides down my body and dips between the lips of my pussy. I glide over my clit and a small moan slips out. This makes him punch his hips up to thrust into his fist. The way his thighs tighten and his jaw clenches as he does makes me even wetter and my clit throbs.

He stands up and steps out of his pants as he slowly walks to the foot of the bed in strong, confident steps. He keeps stroking his cock, and my lungs squeeze as he puts one knee on the mattress.

For a few shared breaths, we pleasure ourselves while watching each other's eyes transform to solid gold. He doesn't move any farther onto the bed, like he's waiting for an invitation.

“What would you have done if she came in after?” I don't stop my ministrations as I talk, making my question raspy.

His voice is equally saturated in a haze of lust. “I would have bent her over this bed, shoved her face into the mattress, and kicked her feet apart.” His eyes flick to my feet, so I move them farther apart, spreading my knees wider and wider.

As I do this, he climbs onto the bed. He sits back on his heels and continues to jerk off, his hooded gaze lost between my thighs. His laser-focused attention is both overwhelming and not enough.

I want more, but I can't have more. All we have is this hypothetical fantasy. So, I ask, “And then . . . ?”

“I'd make her present and use her for what she's good for,” he says crudely.

“Which is?”

“Riding her hard while pretending she’s you.” He inches forward and looks down on my heaving chest like a starved man given a feast he can’t eat. “Or at least, I would have tried, but I wouldn’t have been able to go through with it. There’s no amount of pretending that could ever be good enough. No one could ever be the same as you.”

“Me?” I’m breathless, holding back moans. His nostrils flare, and he nods solemnly.

His forehead frets, and he swallows before admitting, “No matter how hard I fought it, you were all I wanted.”

I worry my lip with my teeth and fight past the fear of being vulnerable. I slip my hand lower and sink two fingers into my pussy. “I still remember how you felt inside me.”

His eyes close briefly, and his throat bobs. He opens them again with a heavy exhale and look of dedication. As he scoots forward again, I widen my legs even more so he can fit between my thighs without touching me. His knees make a V so he can slide them on either side of my ass, again getting as close as he can without actually touching.

“This cunt always knew who it belonged to,” he says, staring down at where he strokes his cock right over my pussy, as if in a daze.

“Just look how wet you are imagining your hand is my cock.” His jaw is slack as he takes harried, stilted breaths.

“Fuck, Alpha,” I mewl, and he immediately growls, eyes snapping up to mine.

“Careful calling me that or I won’t care how bad the pain is and fuck you raw.”

“Okay,” I mutter between gasps as I thrust my fingers in and out.

“Good.” His voice is even more strained, like he’s really fighting the urge to say fuck it and bury himself inside me. “Now, tell me, what do you remember?”

“I remember how it felt to take every inch . . . the way you stretched my pussy . . . pounded into me like you owned me.” My pleasure winds higher and higher with the combination of the memories, the vision that is his chiseled body above me, and my fingers work me harder and harder. “God, you fucked me so . . . so permanently . Does that make sense?” I ask with a gasp.

“Yeah. Yeah, it does.” He groans desperately. “I know I hurt you, but I made you feel good too, didn’t I? If I didn’t, you wouldn’t be soaking your thighs right now, would you?”

I shake my head, memories of pain and pleasure so intensely intertwined.

“One day soon, I’m gonna have you again . . . on your knees, on your back, legs spread or thrown over my shoulders . . . I’ll have you begging for my cock like a good fucking omega, but I won’t give it to you until I make you come on my tongue again and again.”

He talks in a heated, tortured stream of consciousness, showing me inside his twisted but devoted mind. “I’ll teach you to ride me just how I like, and I’ll make you scream, scream so loud my brother has to gag you with his cock—god, you’re so fucking gorgeous with tears streaming down your face and all your holes filled. Fuck , I’m gonna come . . . ” He clenches his teeth together and his abs ripple.

“Fuck— fuck— if I can’t come in you, can I come on you, all over this perfect pussy? Paint you with my cum like you’re really. Fucking. Mine?” he growls.

I nod deliriously as pleasure spikes in my core, and I pump my fingers against my G-spot. “Please, please, Alpha,” I whine.

“ F-Fuck ,” he sputters then grinds out, thick and gruff, “ Mine ,” as he comes all over my pussy and stomach.

“ Oh god— ” I cry as my orgasm crests and crashes into me. I squeeze my eyes shut and dig my head back into the pillow and shatter.

When I open my eyes, Titus is sitting back on his heels between my legs, his chest rising and falling on heavy breaths.

In a sated, blissed-out haze, I drag my fingers through his cum as I sit up and then slip them into my mouth. My eyelids flutter as I suck them clean, the taste of our combined pleasure a heady drug.

“God . . .” He exhales roughly. “You’re going to be the death of me, Omega.”

I wipe the corners of my mouth with a smirk. “Good thing you’re hard to kill.”

1. “Drip Off” by Austin Giorgio

Titus

I don't know how I managed to fall asleep, but once I did, I slept harder than I have in months. I might have thought last night was a dream if I couldn't smell Sinclair still coated in my cum on the other side of this pillow wall.

I stretch my arms above my head and yawn wide. I think this might be one of my more peaceful mornings in months, but then my phone rings, the clunky vibrations rattling on the bedside table.

I answer groggily, fighting another yawn. "Yes?"

"You need to get to the apartments right now—don't use the Echelon's driver—"

"Whoa, whoa, slow down." I sit up and try to process Ecker's frantic sentences.

"Listen, dude, you need to go. Now . I'm telling you, you have to check on Sin's grandma—"

"What . Happened? " I demand aggressively to break through his nonstop stream.

"It's those fucking Cyans!" He shouts loud enough that Sinclair stirs next to me, gently rousing from sleep. "One of them was missing. That's what all the fuss was about last night. They just found his body and—"

" Shit ," I curse, immediately knowing it won't matter we were nowhere near the Estate last night.

“Yeah, it’s bad. Real bad,” Ecker continues. “You just need to go, okay? Take Sinclair with you. Make sure they’re safe.”

“I understand,” I say solemnly, feeling the weight of the potential consequences crashing down on me.

I look over at Sinclair rubbing her eyes and stretching her legs. Make sure they’re safe .

They . Sinclair and her grandma.

Right now, I know with certainty only one of them is and that scares the fucking shit out of me.

Forgetting about the newly fixed elevator, Sinclair races up the stairwell of her old apartment. 1 She must be running off pure adrenaline because she doesn’t slow down or take a break all three flights.

When we reach her grandma’s floor, she sprints down the hall, shouting, “ Ma! Ma! ”

The apartment door has been kicked open, splinters of smashed doorjamb strewn all over the entryway. My heart sinks, as I know what this means.

“No, no, no.” Sinclair never stops running until she sees her grandma. She crashes onto the kitchen floor by her bleeding body.

“Oh my god, no, no, wake up! It’s me. I’m here.” She wails, and my chest rips apart when I hear her sobs. “Oh god, please, no, please.”

Her grandma is lying on the kitchen floor, red blooming across her stomach where a bullet hole is torn through her house dress, marring the pink stripes and little white flowers. Blood pools under her, and a bloody rag is clutched in her hand by her side

like she was using it to hold pressure but lost the strength to do so.

Sinclair places her hands on her grandma's stomach, then panics and cups her face instead, gently shaking her head. "Come on, Mama, come on, wake up, please."

Her words become incoherent as her body is wracked with sobs. She hiccups between prayers and pleads.

I am paralyzed.

I've killed people and almost been killed. I've brought my brothers back from the brink of death, and I've seen people die right in front of me. But right now, I'm utterly paralyzed, not knowing what to do to stop Sinclair's heart from breaking beyond repair.

I can't think, so I just do.

Falling to the floor beside her, I wrap my arms around her shaking body. Agony rips through my muscles and inconceivable pain consumes every cell in my body, but I don't let go.

She slumps back into me, her hands falling away from her grandma's face, leaving behind streaks of blood on her weathered cheeks, and I don't let go.

She screams and screams, harrowing, heart-wrenching screams. And I don't let go.

I don't let go.

I won't let go.

I'll take all the pain in the world if there's even the slightest chance it will take some of hers away.

I rock her back and forth, pressing my lips against the top of her head, unable to say anything because my teeth are chattering so bad from the pain. My body feels like it's being ripped apart, limbs torn from their sockets and sliced through the bone, yet she feels so small and fragile in my arms.

And I don't let go.

Even when it feels like I'm being set on fire, I don't let go. I hold her tighter because maybe, just maybe, if I'm strong enough, I'll get her to the other side in one piece.

And then . . . I think my agonized delirium must be leading to delusion, making me see things. I don't believe my eyes until Sinclair gasps too.

“Was that—did she—is she breathing ?” Jolting forward and out of my arms, Sinclair feels for a pulse and screams in shock. “Titus, Titus! She has a pulse!”

“Okay, okay.” I try to think clearly, still reeling from touching her. “We need to call an ambulance.” I dig through my pockets for my phone, my hand shaking from residual pain.

A sound like snapping twigs makes both of us whip our heads toward the door. The first thing I can make out over the dining table is a shock of bright white hair.

Sinclair beats me to her feet, standing up only to stumble back, bumping into her grandmother as if whoever is there has made her completely forget where she is.

She sucks in a ragged, shaky breath like she can't remember how to breathe. Her eyebrows knit together and her mouth opens, but nothing comes out. She releases an equally uneven exhale, then stutters, “ M-M - Mom? ”

To be continued . . .