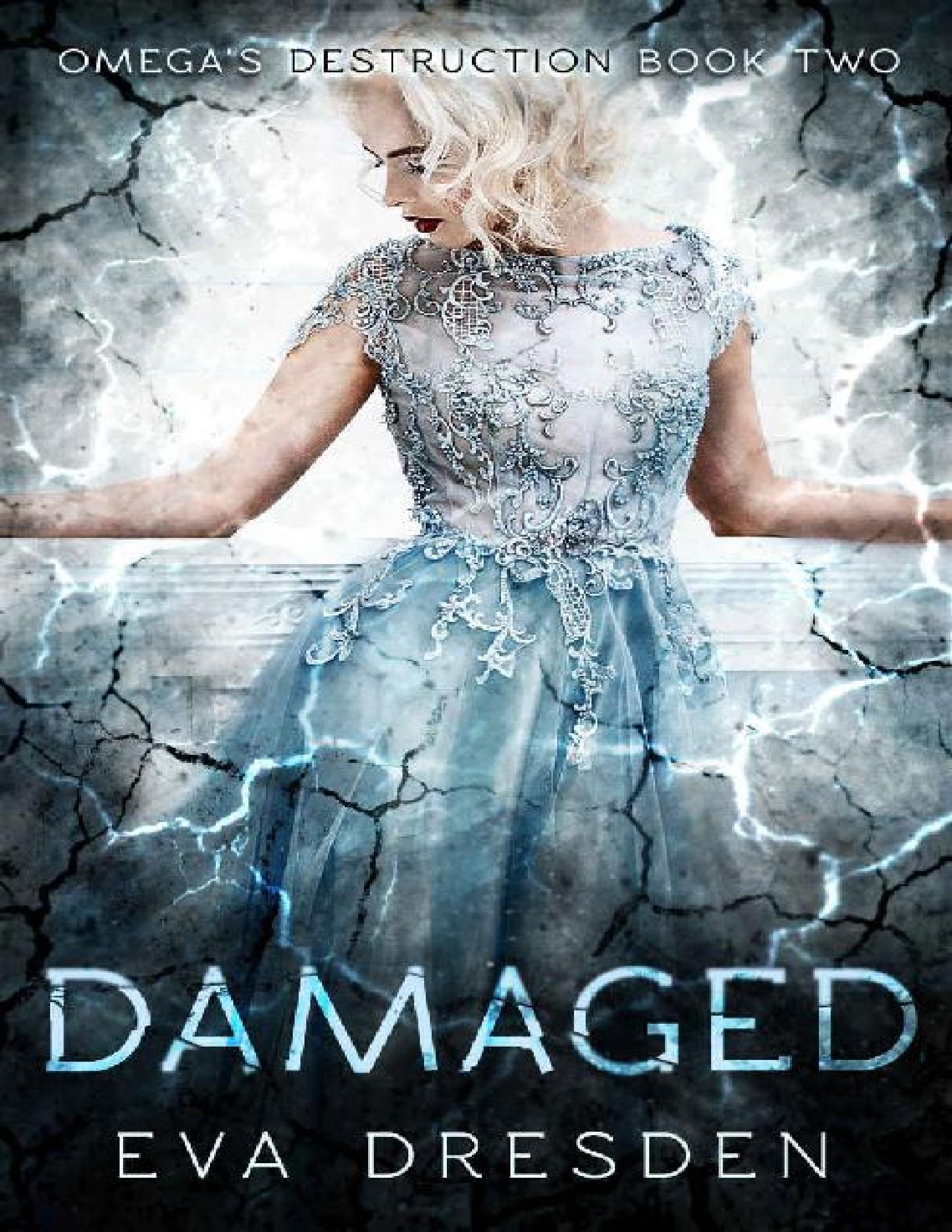


OMEGA'S DESTRUCTION BOOK TWO



DAMAGED

EVA DRESDEN

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Damaged

Omega's Destruction Book Two

By Eva Dresden

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Damaged - Omega's Destruction Book Two

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Cover Design by Eris Adderly

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For Sarah and all the late night sessions and snacks.

Nancy, for the early morning sprints.

And to everyone who hung on as Quinn was broken.

You're all amazing.

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Chapter 1

Catching the dark gaze of the Alpha behind her in the mirror, Quinn concentrated on relaxing her hands from the clenched fists at her sides. Firmer pressure met her stuttering inhale as his smooth palms, slick with lotion, moved over the roundness of her pregnant belly.

Two months she'd been with him. Eight weeks of learning his touch. Sixty-one days since he had forced her to accept his *most generous offer*.

Not that there had been any other option. After being stolen from the man who had forced his claim on her, after being raped more times than she would ever dare to count, there was no going back. Pale flesh marred by tight, pink lines and mottled red arcs that told too many tales of what had transpired ensured she would never be free of that taint.

Tobias Kahler, her mate, would sooner kill her on sight than take her back.

For that matter the Alpha coddling her, Lee Grimes, would kill her before he let her go. Not by his own hand, no. He had a pack of savage Alphas, each more dangerous than the next, to do his bidding. They would get their use of her long before they gave her the mercy of death.

Not that either man had ever wanted her in the first place.

A chill shuddered up her spine, skin prickling in the warm air of her room. The hollow ache in her chest bloomed, pulsing in ravaging crimson bursts as it swallowed her breath. Twisting in Lee's arms, she tucked her body close and nuzzled at his chest.

"Please, I... I need..." It was still too hard to ask for it. Easier when he slipped into her nest late at night, fresh from a shower where he'd washed away the blood and violence that clung to his skin. Even easier when he would gather her up, spreading her wide when he wanted. Much as he had done only a short time ago as the sun broke through the bleary gray clouds.

She shouldn't need it so soon, should have been quieted and sated for hours yet. The bleak anguish was always so close now. She clung to him and whined low in her throat.

“I told you I have business.” Hand heavy on her shoulder, he didn’t even apply pressure.

Quinn dropped in an awkward tangle to her knees, hands careful as she undid his belt and pants. He took pride in his appearance and did not appreciate it when she rumpled his clothes. Unzipping the fly, her small hand reached in to work his already hard cock into the daylight. Not wasting time, she covered his crown with her lips. Slow sucking and twirls of her tongue to pull his scent deep, the taste of him so hot it almost burned as it slipped down her throat and quieted the raging agony into a dull roar.

Only a thin ring of gray remained around blown pupils as she started to take him deeper. Swallowing the thin fluid leaking from his tip, a promise of what she wanted. What she needed. Brows drawn tight in a frown of concentration, she tried to do it just the way he liked. A gentle tap against her cheek jerked her focus up, meeting his satisfied gaze.

“Always look at me, pet.” It was a gentle admonishment, softened by his fingers carding through the length of her curls to pull her just a little closer.

Quinn struggled not to gag as he butted against the back of her throat, tapping against sensitive nerves as he sought entrance. He wouldn’t be satisfied with less. Swallowing hard, coughing only the once, she slid further down.

And then relinquished all control.

Gripping her knees to keep from grabbing hold of him, her head moved to the rhythm he set. Hand snarled in her hair, he bobbed her up and down his length. Quinn struggled to move her tongue, to suck down the fluids that threatened to spill over onto his expensive trousers.

Lee only liked it messy when they were in her nest, letting him scent the sheets and blankets. There he liked to remind everyone, including Quinn, who she belonged to now.

She fought for the small breaths he allowed before plunging deep into her throat. Strained to keep her watery gaze fixed on his despite the urge to cough and gag.

Up and down, faster now.

The taste of him was thick, heady. Quinn squirmed, fingers drifting before she remembered not to touch. It was his now, he'd said. She wasn't allowed to touch what was his. Slick perfumed the warm air around them in sugary waves, exciting the male above her. Rougher, he pushed her further down.

Then held her there.

Waited until she jostled, nails scraping over her legs as she tried to remain still. Throat convulsing as it tried to evict the thick cock lodged there.

With a guttural groan, Lee thrust forward until Quinn's nose was mashed against his knot in the musky darkness of his fly. Cock kicking in the tight confines of her ravaged throat, he released jet after jet of thick come, continuing to choke and strangle until Quinn listed to the side.

As soon as he pulled out of her throat, her lips clamped over him, sucking down his offering as he continued to spurt into her willing mouth. Groaning her pleasure, her satisfaction, she drank it down until there was nothing left but the final watery sprays against the roof of her mouth.

The roar subsided into a snarling murmur.

"Oh, very good, pet. Very good." Lee released her hair, stroking back the curls that now dangled well past her shoulders. Standing straight, he gave her a small nod to proceed.

She licked him clean, massaged the last swell of his knot to get the dregs of him onto her tongue. Tucking him away, righting his clothes, Quinn was always surprised how he looked as if he had done nothing while she came away looking as if he had used her hard.

"Be ready for dinner tonight," Lee said as he helped her up from the floor, all solicitous care and soft touches. "I want you to wear that blue dress you got last week."

"But it's..." Quinn trailed off as Lee raised a single dark eyebrow, sucking her lips in between her teeth before nodding. "Of course. The blue dress."

Lee's gaze held something far too close to a warning as he came closer. Quinn beamed, plastering on the smile and forcing it into her eyes as she presented her cheek. Waving her fingers at her white smeared lips she gave a self-conscious laugh.

“7:30, pet. Don’t be late,” Lee said, brushing his lips across the tear stained softness of her cheek.

“I won’t.”

As soon as Lee closed the door behind him, Quinn crumpled in on herself, grabbing hold of the vanity chair to keep upright. Lee was a man with rules harsher than any punishment Alton had ever doled out upon her flesh. Every interaction was ripe with overwhelming possibilities of Lee becoming dissatisfied, or worse, unhappy with her. The pressure to perform, to be the perfect Omega, was suffocating.

Taking one steady breath after another, she slowed her heart to something nearing calm and stumbled to the bed. Belly full of an evil man’s seed, she clambered onto the mattress to sit in the middle of her nest. It was a glorious construction. The finest, softest fabrics she’d ever touched were worked into gentle hills and valleys that welcomed her. She had arranged everything about it just to her liking, every fluffed pillow and plush blanket meant to comfort and soothe.

She hated it.

It wasn’t strewn with the well scented fabrics of her mate. The scent of the Alpha keeping her was flat and lifeless. There was no one to soothe her with his very presence, no one to calm the ache. There was only a man who terrified and coddled her.

It wasn’t that she didn’t understand. He’d been clear he had no designs on being her mate, with no intention of taking the claim scarring her shoulder. She had no desire to be tied to a man that could make her heart and lungs stammer to a halt with a simple look. He saw to her needs, kept her full of his knot and enough come to keep her sane. Whether or not she was repulsed and frightened by him, Lee silenced the misery.

It didn’t make it any easier late at night when she was alone. Desperate, howling cries ricocheting inside her skull, her heart wrenching, tearing, clawed to shreds by some unknown force. Shivering, aching and unable to find solace in any direction, she spent the long nights sobbing into her fine, fluffy pillows. No one was there to soothe away the tears or fuck her into oblivion.

Curling up on her side, Quinn dragged a heavy quilt over her head and burrowed.

At least not being his mate, Lee felt confident taking her out and showing her off. Fine restaurants and theaters, museums and galleries, he'd whisked her through the polite society of Highriver. No one had said a word about the rough texture of her speech, only made polite laughter when she let a choice epithet slip. No one commented on her pregnancy, as if her huge belly did not exist. None questioned that not even one of the marks scarring her belonged to the man whose arm she decorated.

Things hadn't been much different among the less genteel people Lee interacted with. There were no meetings in grungy warehouses or clandestine excursions into dank cellars for a man like him. A few of the faces changed, the venues a little less garish but no less opulent. Overall these men and women worked their crimes in the bright light of day. He didn't hide what he did from her, neither the gilded skyscraper where he owned a lucrative company nor the more illicit ventures.

He enjoyed having her watch him work.

His favorite was in the pristine white room in the basement of his extravagant home. After mingling among the glittering people, dressed in the fanciest clothes, he'd take her down to the echoing space and sit her aside in a chair that had no business being as comfortable as it was. Had her watch as he rolled up his sleeves, explaining in his calm, authoritative manner that he liked to handle these things, lest people forget who and what he was.

Made her watch him rip a screaming man into pieces, bit by bit, until there was little more than a vivid smear on the gore strewn floor.

Women were only a little different, but he let his men do part of that work. He'd snuggle Quinn as Ilya and Darryl or Maurice and Randy worked the wailing female over. Lee would massage Quinn's neck, fingers caressing over her belly as he asked her about her day. All the while the ghastly wet sounds of torn flesh and pain a cacophony in the background.

She soon learned just how much power Lee held, watching him interact with these people, seeing them all bow and scrape before him like a fucking king. It was easy to group Alton and Lee together, with their rules and expectations, the way they lorded their power over others. The way they used her, made their demands and expected her

to smile. It was wrong to do so, though, the two men were as different as night and day. Alton had his empire of trash, but he was nothing compared to Lee.

Lee Grimes didn't just run Highriver. He owned it and it owed him a debt. One he collected on as the mood suited him.

There was no denying there were benefits to this. Treated with a respect and reverence she'd never experienced before, people fell over themselves to see to her smallest needs. She'd been on more shopping trips in the last two months than she could remember being a part of her entire life. From baby furniture to lingerie, nothing was off limits. And she had gotten to pick her clothing. Granted it had been at fancy salons and boutiques that Lee approved of, but no one was playing dress up with her. Her yoga pants had upscale designer labels now, but she had several pairs to choose from.

She'd even picked out the ridiculous blue dress.

Strapless, with a sweetheart neckline and an empire waist, it strained against tits that had grown massive to her perturbed eye. The fluffy crinoline layers of the skirt that didn't even skim her knees allowed for the obscene bulge of her third trimester stomach. She had thought it dainty perfection when she tried it on, full of chocolate and strawberries and Lee's rumbling praise. It had been stupid.

Now she had to wear it.

Rubbing the heel of her palm against her chest as something burned and twisted, Quinn grumbled and dragged herself from her meandering thoughts. There was no reason to reflect on what had led to this point.

There was only this moment.

She could get through the next.

Crawling from the nest, she pulled on one of the beloved yoga pants, wriggling and hopping to drag the tight cotton up over her thighs. Hadler wanted her to gain another ten pounds, but at this rate she'd have to get a whole new wardrobe to accommodate it. Blowing a raspberry at her reflection, she threw on an oversized t-shirt and headed towards the door.

Breakfast would be good.

Except it wasn't.

Seated at the end of the long formal table with her eggs growing cold, Quinn sat between Darryl and Ilya, Maurice taking up position

near the head of the table. The ruined half of Darryl's face was turned aside, but the bitter blue eye that stared at her dared her to show an ounce of pity or disgust at what had befallen his gorgeous features. He liked the fear he inspired, liked to taste it on their skin. Ilya stared at her breasts though there wasn't much to see other than the deep curve of them beneath thick cotton. He had a thing for mothers, lactating in particular.

Maurice, by contrast, was the most controlled of them. He watched Quinn with an intensity that was unnerving but made no aggressive moves in her direction. He watched and waited. The blue-hued black of his skin pricked with vivid pink scars that trailed down his neck and peeked from the open collar of his shirt. An appropriated style, she'd once heard him boasting about his kills, each mark representing someone who had fallen to his knife.

Seeing the multitude of tight, rosy circles mottling his flesh was far more disturbing than Ilya and Darryl combined.

"You're not eating, *kroshka*," Ilya said, the grating rasp of his voice from the thick scar on his neck making Quinn grit her teeth. "It is not good for an expecting mother not to eat."

"Maybe a little clotted cream on your fancy toast?" Darryl smirked at his joke, flicking the edge of the organic whole-grain bread Lee made her eat, sending it spinning to the other side of her plate.

Swallowing back the acrid burn in the back of her throat, Quinn tore her eyes from Maurice's scarred neck and focused on her plate. There was no way she could eat now. If she just got up and left, they'd think they had won, and it would make life in this place even more difficult than it already was.

These males were unapologetic in their ferocity and remorseless in their violence, but they bowed down to Lee. They wouldn't touch what was his, wouldn't hurt her, but Quinn of all people knew you didn't have to be punched and kicked to break.

She was living proof and still trying to put all the shattered pieces of herself back together.

As if reading her thoughts out loud, the spinning of her tale cued a descending flock of twittering birds in designer dresses and plastic smiles. A swirling, graceful tumult of bright colors and tinkling laughter, the Beta females Lee had given her leave to associate with

simpered and cooed as Ilya and Darryl made themselves charming. They pulled chairs out, the women seated around Quinn as they focused their beady blank stares upon her.

“You’re not dressed, sweetheart! How are we supposed to go shopping if you’re in... that?” Lauren’s delicate nose scrunched in a way that Quinn was almost certain she practiced in a mirror. The peals of laughter that met the statement were elegant, refined.

Quinn hated that, too.

But Betas were all she could stand to be around for any length of time without Lee by her side. They were also the only ones he’d allow her to be seen with. A handpicked coterie of the choicest females Highriver had to offer, all with little to do and money to waste. They were her public escorts and saw her around the city without fail, making sure she was seen in the right places and didn’t do anything scandalous.

While she hadn’t been allowed to converse with anyone at Lee’s more unsavory meetings, Quinn was sure they’d be a damn sight easier to deal with than this lot. At least that was a danger she knew. These pretty females with their perfect hair and makeup were sly in ways Quinn hadn’t been taught. They hid razor-sharp teeth behind simpering smiles and a bat of their lashes could find a man dead.

They were also not breeding, which seemed to be a deciding factor for Lee. Some couldn’t after a life clawing their way to the top, others weren’t chosen for their wombs and had been cast aside for that duty. Highriver was hardly another planet, but it might as well be for the way these people worked. Then again, it wasn’t like Quinn had ever mingled above the poorest of circles back in Alderbrook. Maybe this was just the way it was done. Perhaps Kahler had been the freak of his class.

Quinn blamed the sudden somersault the baby performed for the rush of tears that burned the back of her eyes. Blinking them away, she turned her attention to the women around her.

“I’m not sure I feel up for shopping today.” Quinn made a tight smile of discomfort, hand coming to rest on her stomach. Quinn hated herself a little for the petty surge of victory at Lauren’s stiff smile.

“Oh, but Lee will miss you at lunch.” Cassandra leaned her chin on her palm. Sheer delight danced in her baby blues as she hummed a

feigned pout. “I suppose we could tell him you weren’t feeling up to it though.”

Picking up the forgotten toast and nibbling on the corner, Quinn bought a few moments to think. The dull, wringing ache in her chest was getting worse, something that was becoming all too frequent and familiar. Lee calmed that particular beast, quieted it at least for a time. It wasn’t unusual for him to schedule things with these women and not her, and it would get her away from the three Alphas still watching her.

Setting the toast aside, Quinn dabbed at the corner of her lips with the linen napkin and offered a sunny grin. “You know, on second thought, maybe a day of shopping is just what I need. I think I’m getting a case of the baby blues.”

Without waiting to see their reaction to the pointed barb, Quinn headed up to her room.

After several hours spent meandering through baby boutiques and riffling through exquisite dresses, Quinn was grateful when Lee plucked her from the twittering gaggle. With suave apologies and firm dismissal, he took Quinn to his office. There would be no lunch, only the rough fuck against his desk that she craved.

“What’s this?” Lee traced the margin of the raw red patch staining the skin over her sternum as Quinn peeled out of her satiny blouse and lacy bra. No one would dare come into the office, and he preferred her naked. She needed to feel the heat of him, the slide of sweat slick flesh.

“Heartburn,” Quinn murmured, distracted as she leaned in for a deeper breath of his scent. Heady and intoxicating, it teased her senses then punched low, a heated ripple of pleasure low in her belly. Virile male, dominant Alpha. Slick gathered between her lips, smearing her thighs as she caught the first whiff of his arousal.

He didn’t believe her, judging by the grunt he gave. He also wasn’t overcome with concern as Quinn wriggled her way out of the navy slacks she’d worn. Fingers quick, she got him out of his shirt and pants, setting them on the valet stand behind his desk with care. Palms skimming her curves, he twirled her around to sprawl over his desk.

Braced over a slew of papers strewn with complex columns of color-coded numbers, Quinn stifled a low moan as Lee took up

position behind her.

Smearing the head of his cock through her wet folds, he rumbled an appreciative growl. His fingers dug into her ass, spreading her wide as he eased his way in with deliberate thrusts. Teasing her, forcing her body to spread around the almost too much girth, he made her work for every inch.

By the time he was seated, Quinn was panting, covered in a fine sheen of sweat. Legs trembling, she whined as he began the slow drag out. Warm hands, unsullied by rough work, dug into her back as he drove forward at a steady pace intent on driving her into a frenzy. Soft touches accompanied the leisurely sway of his hips. Caressing fingers gliding over her back, shoulders, touching her belly with a gentleness that had sodden misery welling in her eyes.

It wasn't right. It would never be right. Bereft of everything but the feel and scent of a strong Alpha, she began to crumble.

Even as her cunt slicked his shaft until the wet squelch of his thrusts filled the room. Twitched and pulsed around his length. As she gave voice to stifled moans and low whimpers.

Quiet rumbles of pleasure sounded behind her. His hands careful as they cupped her breasts, fingers teasing the aching points. The slap of his hips meeting the rounded curve of her ass reverberated through the close air.

The first gasp twisted from her tortured lungs. Muscles fluttering around his length, squeezing his thickness. Lee growled deep in his chest and snapped his hips forward. Agony spilled from her eyes, spattering the papers beneath her just as the copious slick did her thighs. Little grunts shoved past her parted lips as he struck deep. Battering the very end of her with his thick crown.

Singeing threads of bliss wound down her thighs, the muscles of her calves in stark relief as she arched higher. Offering that much more. Pleading. Moan strangled in a sob, the first pulse of the impending fall shuddered through her frame.

She hated it.

Despised the man who leaned over her back to push the vibration of his growls into her. The way he shunted inside of her, the angle of his hips aligned to perfection. Hands sliding up from her breasts with a

final tweak to her sensitive nipples, he gripped her shoulders to jerk Quinn back into every violent thrust.

The torment centered in her chest ripped free. As heat and tension sizzled beneath her skin, it howled. A desolate sound, a thing pushed into madness. Confusion tried to rip her from the rising tide of pleasure sweeping her up, crackling across her synapses.

She thought for a moment she had made the sound, but Lee gave no indication anything was different. Only snarled and set his teeth against her throat when Quinn's hands stuttered over the gleaming desk, pushing at the violent unknown.

Rage fueled, insane, it filled her head. Her senses. Even as the Alpha wrenching her up, pinning her to his chest, drove her to the edge with hard, jerky thrusts.

Close enough she could taste it, Quinn slapped her hands to her mouth to silence the shrill scream as she unraveled. The shock of release was excruciating as it exploded under her skin. Pulsed through her veins with the hammering of her heart. Her pussy contracted, fluttering over the male as he slammed into her with a series of frenzied jerks before the knot was shoved in.

She was still screaming, eyes wide, unseeing. Squeezing the knot lodged inside of her, pulling every thick spurt of come from the Alpha filling her. Drawing it deep inside her body.

There on her tongue, the hint of chilis and chocolate and blood.

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Chapter 2

Shivering so hard her teeth rattled, Quinn huddled in the shadow of Lee's embrace. Legs spread wide over his thighs as he sat in a comfortable wingback, her hips groaning with the strain, she could not force words past the tremble of her lips.

Throat strangled with confusion, she wheezed. Panic surged, battering her heart into a trebling rhythm that countered all the Alpha's soothing touches. The sound that only she seemed to be able to hear was growing fainter with every creamy surge Lee shot in her, but the taste of another remained.

Dark, rich chocolate with the hint of chilis to make her lips and tongue tingle. A spicy scent she shouldn't have been able to discern.

Not until Lee grabbed her wrist, the delicate bones shifting and grinding, did she realize he was angry. Snarling her name, a bitter edge to his words as he demanded she look at him. Physical pain doing what his gentle rumbling could not, Quinn snapped from the tumultuous fog to blink over her shoulder at the infuriated Alpha.

"What have you done," Lee hissed, a jerky nod indicating her front.

Movement taking an age as her synapses realigned, neurons transmitting in slow motion, she looked down.

Her chest was a mess of weeping crimson. Garish against the cold pallor of her skin, the shallow cuts crisscrossed between her breasts. Her hand performed a lazy arc, fingers wiggling through the air as she inspected the bright red staining the fancy blue her nails had been painted.

"You're going to see Hadler." Stiff arms pulled her tight to his chest, bulging muscle pinning her arms to her sides. The resonance he offered was perfunctory, nothing warm in the deep breadth of the vibrations.

"He can't help me."

"What's wrong with you?"

It was more of a growl than real words, but Quinn understood. Folding away that part of herself, tucking it into the back of her mind, she gave a soft hum and snuggled back into Lee. Petting at his thighs where she could reach, she reassured.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, turning her head to lick the salt from his skin, gracing him with a complacent smile as she tasted him. “It’s just with the baby due soon...”

There was no need to finish the thought. Lee became doting, possessive. Protective. He might not want her, at least not to keep, but no Alpha could keep an Omega and not succumb to those instincts. No sane Alpha, anyhow. Hiding the revulsion that skittered up her spine by rocking her hips in tiny increments, she gave him a hopeful look over her shoulder.

“I have a meeting.” Gruff and impatient as his voice might have been, he wanted more as much as she needed it. As the knot shrank, their combined fluids flooding from her, he remained hard and thick inside of her.

Quinn quirked a single pale eyebrow as she wriggled her arms free. Swiping at the slick mess between her thighs, she brought her fingers up to her mouth. Brazen, she stuck three fingers in her mouth and groaned as she sucked the creamy fluid from them. Let him see her unabashed pleasure, how much she needed it. Lee growled low in his throat, eyes fixed on her fingers as she drew them out and pushed them back in at a slow crawl. His hands tightened over her hips, thumbs digging into the small of her back as he began to shift her weight. Forward, back. Quinn gasped, shoving her hand against her leaking pussy to gather more.

“Quick now, play with your clit, pet.”

As he raised and lowered her on his cock, setting a swift pace that would drive them both to the edge, Quinn stared at the bank of windows on the other side of the room. Making the appropriate noises, pussy fluttering and clenching as she abandoned it to do what it did best, she struggled to remember the exact flavor of a man she shouldn’t even be thinking about.

It was easy to replace the soft hands on her hips with ones that had been callused despite his wealth. To hear the perfect register of a purr, the licentious depth of a growl, in Lee’s rumblings. The scent of dark, smoky things was smothered under the memory of something decadent and rich and exhilarating.

Fingers dancing over her swollen clit, smearing thick fluids over plump flesh, it took almost no time at all for Quinn to reach the brink.

Back arched, one hand to her mouth to stifle her moans and shrieks, threads of pleasure drew everything tight.

Lee muffled a quiet roar against her shoulder, his teeth grazing scarred flesh.

Imagining someone altogether different, she came with him.

“You’ll go see Hadler,” Lee said as they dressed, having shared a quick shower in the bathroom off his office.

“I see him Thursday.” Trying to avoid the inevitable, she slipped an excited grin on her raw lips. “I get more pictures! Poor thing is going to have a stack of them before she’s even born.”

“You’ll see him tomorrow.”

Quinn slouched and sighed, nodding her acceptance of his decree. There was no use arguing. Concentrating on wriggling into her pants that were already becoming too tight, making a face at the squishy feeling of Lee’s come slipping from her, she wasn’t prepared when he grabbed her arm and whirled her towards him. Crashing against the bulky male, she stared up at him with wide eyes.

The aggression of his kiss had her mouth going slack before he invaded her with his tongue. Wide palms cupping her ass, lifting her to him, he dominated the exchange with ferocious determination. He forced his taste, his scent, deep into her and wasn’t satisfied until Quinn was a mewling bundle of softness in his embrace.

“I want you to go home and rest. You need to spend more time in your nest,” Lee whispered against her lips, refusing to break that contact as he set her down.

Dazed and somehow wanting more even now, Quinn gave a faint nod of agreement. Leaning into him, fingers smoothing over his crisp shirt, she hummed.

“Go on, pet. I’m late for my meeting as it is.”

A swat to her ass pulled her back into the moment. Lee moving to his desk left her cold. She tried not to frown and mutter but failed to hide the extent of her displeasure as Lee became all business.

“Go home, eat, rest. I’ll make the appointment with Hadler.”

He didn’t even look at her as she was dismissed. Sucking her lips in between her teeth, she finished dressing and tried to look halfway presentable. Everyone on the floor knew what they had done, no

matter how quiet Quinn was. The scent of slick was heavy and ripe in the office and there was no hiding that. Still...

Taking a steadyng breath, Quinn opened the door and headed out. She knew from experience the driver would be waiting in the lobby at the private elevator, the car idling just outside the main doors. She just had to make it that far.

If anyone stared at her disheveled hair, her rumpled clothes, or the growing wet spot between her thighs, Quinn ignored them. No one would say a word, would dare to snicker at the Omega being fucked in Lee's office like a cheap whore making a lunch call.

Lee owned the city, and she was his.

After making the driver stop for drive-through cheeseburgers and fries, shoving the whole lot into her mouth by the handful, Quinn returned to the sprawling bit of architecture Lee called a house. Expecting the other males to accost her as soon as she entered, it was a surprise to make it all the way to her room without seeing one of them. Stripping as soon as the door was closed and crawling naked into her nest, she groaned and stretched, doing a horrible job of working the various aches and knots from her back. Eventually she gave up, desperate not to think about someone else's hands, the way they had made her groan and purr no matter how upset or angry she'd been.

Checking that the alarm clock was set with plenty of time for her to get ready for dinner, she curled up on her side and pulled several blankets over her head to dim the bright afternoon light.

And burst into tears.

More exhausted than she had ever imagined, she fell asleep on a sob.

Swaddled in a thick robe, Quinn sat at her vanity attempting to primp. Making a grim face, she tried to tame her hair into some manner of respectability when Lee knocked on her door. Why he bothered to give her that illusion of privacy was something she didn't understand. It wasn't as if she could deny him.

"Come in."

"You're not dressed."

Quinn's shoulders rounded, a furtive glance to the fancy little clock on the vanity doing its damndest to reassure but failing. She had an

hour before he'd said to be ready, but it seemed he didn't think that was good enough.

"You said—"

"I could have been anyone."

So it wasn't that she was still getting ready. He'd never mentioned her state of dress before. Something wasn't right, but Quinn didn't know what. Setting the stack of pins aside, she stopped watching Lee in the mirror's reflection to give him her undivided attention as she turned. The source of his agitation wasn't clear, but he was being possessive. That was something she could work with.

"No one else would come to my room," Quinn said with a certainty she didn't feel. She was almost positive the other males who lived in this house wouldn't dare, but there were times, late at night, when their stomping brought them far too close to Quinn's door for comfort.

Lee's only response was a curl of his lips, a silent snarl that felt more dangerous than the action deserved. Rising from the low bench, Quinn took a cautious step towards him. Closing the distance between them, he seemed more aggressive the closer she came. Daring to reach up and set her palm against his chest, her body following close behind, she melded against him.

"No one would dare," Quinn whispered as she pressed every inch she could against unyielding flesh. The hot ash of his anger clogged the back of her throat, the scent of violence fresh on his skin.

Lee liked to play his games, liked to torture people. Never had he directed that attention onto her though. He'd coddle her, doting upon her with light touches and tender kisses as he worked his cruelties.

He had also never come to her room, her nest, smelling of it.

Uncertainty gnawing at her as Lee continued to stand stiff and unresponsive. Quinn aimed to resolve the problem the only way she knew how. An Alpha's aggression could be managed one of two ways, and sex and violence weren't so very far apart. Small fingers fumbling at the fly of his pants, Quinn started to go to her knees before him.

His growl punched down her spine, every vertebra locking up, frozen in terror. Controlled descent abandoned, she fell hard to her knees. The dull throb of pain didn't even register. Head low, hands braced against the plush carpet, she lowered herself in submission to that sound.

The growl deepened, brimming with violence and anger she didn't understand. There was nothing she had done to warrant this sudden turn, but she seemed to be the one that would suffer the brunt of it. Lowering herself further, kissing the floor, she groveled at the Alpha's feet. It still wasn't enough, his weight shifting, the muscles of his calves and thighs flexing.

"Please." The word came out a plaintive whine, stretched thin with her fear. Fingers scratching across the lush pile, she edged her hand towards his shoe. Didn't quite dare to mar the glossy surface of his shoe with her pinky.

And then he jerked her up, his hand locked around Quinn's arm. Dragged from the room, her cries sealed behind clenched teeth as stuttering tiptoes struggled alongside the furious male. Down the hall, the stairs, her robe loose and flapping as she struggled to hold it closed when others fell into step behind Lee.

Scalding tears slipped down Quinn's cheeks as she racked her brain for anything she could have done. Some imagined slight, some accidental mistake. Lee had been well pleased when she left him this afternoon. What had changed?

Body going limp, she threw her weight back as the simple door leading further downstairs loomed into view. Her heels skid across the tile, free hand reaching, fingers scrabbling at the simple wainscoting to grab hold. A litany of denials seeped from between her lips as she struggled to get free. Lee didn't use the room often, but she knew what lay beyond.

Lee's roar thundered through the short hall, echoing, an army of pain marching its way through her bones and shattering each one under the breadth of his fury. Hauled up until her shoulder lit up in brilliant strobing pain, he pulled her after him through the door. The drab cement steps leeched the very light from the space. It sucked the warmth from her body and forced her heart to still its hysterical rhythm.

Suspended from chains in the middle of the room was a bloody slab. It could have once been human, but surrounded by soggy rifts of gore, there was no way it was still living.

Quinn bit back the cry, not wanting to incite him further, as Lee tangled his fist in her hair, shoving her forward until her face was only

inches from the body's.

And then it groaned.

The scream ripped free from her throat. Her hands went to Lee's arm, scratching and clutching to loosen his hold so she could get away from the hideous image of a bright blue eye dangling from a pulpy thread. The raw, terrified sound refused to stop even when Lee gave her a single step of retreat, his unmoving bulk holding her there as his arms wrapped around her. In a mockery of affection, he set his chin on her crown and made her look.

"Enough!"

His voice, threaded with dominance, a heavy slap to her senses, cut the scream short with razor edged precision. Shivering against the wall of heat that made her frozen skin ache, Quinn huddled.

"Do you know him, pet?" Lee's voice was serene, casual, as if he'd asked her to pass the salt.

Words escaped her. They flew from her tongue in a watery spray of bile as she hunched over and threw up the little contents of her stomach. Before Quinn could even choke on another gag, he had her upright. Fist in her curls he kept her head pointed at the... thing hanging before them.

"Answer me, pet."

Tongue useless as it swelled in her mouth to choke off her air, Quinn gave a vehement shake of her head. Didn't even wince as the tangled snarls in his fingers ripped free of her scalp.

"Are you sure, pet?"

The studied calm in Lee's question made Quinn rethink her actions. There was something she was missing in her panic. Forcing a breath through her trembling lips into her burning lungs, she dragged her eyes up to what was left of the hanging man's face.

Trying to look past the damage, the pleading in the remaining bright blue eye, Quinn examined him. Confusion swelled, drowning her, and then recognition seared across her brain. A jagged crackling of synapses as memories aligned. She knew the line of the jaw, the sharpness of his cheekbone, the blue of that eye.

There was no explaining her response. Lips curled back over her teeth, Quinn screamed. Foot coming up as she threw her weight into Lee's solid presence, she kicked the Alpha dangling listless from the

chains. Dissatisfied with the pathetic whine, her small heel making so little impact among so much damage in the bloody mush of his groin, she reached to tear that unmarked eye out to join its twin.

“Easy, pet, easy,” Lee murmured as he pulled her back.

“Let me go,” Quinn screamed, making useless kicks at the hanging male as Lee dragged her away with ease.

“Enough, in a moment,” Lee said, no less imposing though his voice was softer and had lost the sharper edges of his anger. Bundling Quinn into his lap as he sat in the horrible, comfortable chair that was always present at these things, he tucked his chin on her shoulder. “Who is he to you, pet? He seems to know you. Quite well, in fact. Knew your scent the moment he came into my office. What was it he told you, Ilya?”

“Best pussy he ever had. Could not wait to have another go at it, hear her under him again.”

And then it made sense.

Quinn went limp in Lee’s arms, so abrupt in ceasing her struggling that he tightened his hold, thinking she was trying to get away. He squeezed until her ribs shrieked in complaint and her lungs couldn’t take in air. When a weak flutter of her hands against his thighs was all the resistance she offered, he relented.

“B-before,” Quinn said, choking on the word before she could spit it out.

“Explain.”

Quinn swayed where she sat, blood leaving her head in a roar so fast she felt she might be sick again. How was she supposed to tell him what he didn’t want to hear?

“Alton... his man... they bought...” Quinn’s stammering dissolved into incoherent babbling as she stabbed her outstretched palm at the line of her leg. The many bite wounds, the scratches and gashes that had scarred, all laid bare for everyone to see.

As if a switch had been flipped, Lee began to purr. Tucking her up against all his warmth and that sound, he petted and soothed. Not a trace of the violence he had displayed before, not a single ounce of anger in his touch. Quinn was pale, shivering in uncontrollable fits as he murmured wordless sounds of calm into her hair.

“Ah, my sweet little pet,” Lee crooned, one hand leaving its tight clutch on her side.

Quinn whimpered as a dark shadow fell over her back, cringing. Terrified this wasn’t over yet, that with the evidence of her past so clearly displayed Lee was now dissatisfied. Flawed skin was one thing. To have a male strutting through your territory proclaiming he knew her scent...

She had to swallow the scream, a pathetic whine escaping, as something was pressed into her slack palm. Chin angling down, she blinked away the flood of misery at a knife as long as her forearm. Lee closed her fingers around the handle, holding it steady when she would have thrown the thing away.

“He hurt what is mine,” Lee said, nuzzling the soft skin behind her ear and firming their combined grip on the knife. He eased her up from his lap to stand between spread thighs facing the suspended Alpha. One hand splayed across Quinn’s back, he began to push her ahead of him. Towards the grotesque thing dangling.

How was he even still alive?

“I can’t have that, pet.” Lee drew their joined arms up, brandishing the heavy knife so the blade caught the light. “And just this once, I’m going to let you help.”

Blubbering refusal, Quinn shuffled back. Crashed into his imposing bulk. Small fingers spasming over the hilt, trying to fling the horrible thing away, only to be crushed by Lee’s grip.

“Did you like what he did to you,” Lee asked in a low hiss, rooting her to the spot with little more than his palm settling on her shoulder. “Was that little fit of temper just a charade to appease the Alpha you’re fucking now?”

Quinn shook her head, tangled curls tumbling over her shoulders in a defeated sprawl. Still she refused to hold the knife, to close her hand around it even as Lee ground her fingers into the smooth black handle.

“My, but you are a better actress than I gave you credit for. It would hurt my pride to see I’ve been wrong all this time. To have denied my men for so long when that was what you needed.” Lee gave a humorless laugh, free hand wrenching her head back, ripping at her hair. Dark eyes flat, he stared at her as if she was nothing. Had never been anything at all. “Maybe then you would be satisfied, hm? Perhaps

then you wouldn't think of someone else when surrounded by so much male attention."

Pale brows crowded over the bridge of her nose as she looked up at him through muddled pools of horror. He knew. There was no space for a denial in the strident edge of his words, the way his fist twisted in her hair. He'd known before the nameless Alpha had even opened his stupid mouth.

Now here she was with few options.

Again.

"I need you," Quinn whispered on a strangled breath. Angling her body towards him, she grimaced at the strain on the arm he kept taut, the cruel angle of her neck. Pressing against him, uncaring of the way the robe splayed open, she curled her free arm around his hip.

"You need a hard cock. Lucky for you, they're in abundance around here."

Fresh tears spilled over the clumpy fringe of her lashes as she stared up at Lee. Lower lip trembling, she refused to look away. Met that cold stare and challenged it with a cascade of aching loneliness.

"I need you, and you're never there," Quinn said, words tangling in a hiccupping sob as she jostled free, shoving at the expanse of his chest. Real anger and hurt behind every slap of her small palm. "You said you would take care of me, that you'd give me everything I'd need."

"I've given you everything." Lee snarled, dark eyes narrowed, glaring, but showing something. The heat of anger seeped through all that cold. Infected his limbs as he yanked Quinn close.

She tried not to wretch when she felt his cock, hard and ready, shoving against her stomach. Turning the guttural noise into a sob, she fought him, tried to wrestle free.

"Except you," Quinn whined, collapsing into him, clinging to his shirt. Panting, sucking deep breaths of him into her lungs. Something snapped. Cracked under the strain and became all too real. She screamed wordless curses, punching at his wide shoulders and deep chest. Crawled up his body, frantic.

She needed him. She hated him.

It all exploded into a maelstrom of emotions she couldn't control. Inconsolable, she shrieked and clawed at the male as he pinned her

against him. Shouted obscenities, spit and tears spattering his face. Back slammed against the wall, the force of his low growl shuddered through her.

It etched its way through her bones. Shivered through soft, wet insides. Heat bloomed low in her belly as her heart twisted and writhed.

Minutes passed as he forced that endless rumble into her. Sapping her strength, her will, until Quinn could do little more than hang on before she melted through the very cracks. At last he gave her space to breathe. Choking on the first deep lungful she swallowed whole. He pet and purred, rubbing at her neck, her back. Lee settled in the chair once more and cradled her against him. The warmth of his palm smoothed over her tight belly before he pulled the robe closed.

"If that's what you need," Quinn mumbled against his neck, the smoky taste of him thick on her tongue, melding with the salt of her tears and the vile tang of horror. "I've never hurt anyone..."

"I'll show you," Lee said through the comforting purr.

He didn't force her ahead of him this time. Wrapped around him with her limbs locked tight, he took her the few long strides back to where the man hung. Ilya stooped, gathering up the knife from where it had clattered to the floor. Witness to it all, he presented the knife to Quinn as Lee set her down. Glacial blues held red-rimmed gray as Quinn's trembling hand took the hilt. Turned to face the suspended male, Quinn sputtered and slapped her free hand over her mouth to stop herself from gagging.

The eye dangling from his cheek had gone milky and pale. Dead where it hung against his cheek from knotted black strings.

She couldn't tell if he was unconscious or dead. One swift slap from Ilya solved the question as the man jerked and gave a thin scream of pain. The eye swung, slapped against his cheek with a spatter of gore.

"Like this, pet." Lee took her hand, adjusting her grip on the knife until he was pleased with it. He made a careful slash, the keen edge of the blade just whispering against cloth.

The desperate whine slipped out before she could hold it back.

He was going to make her do it on her own.

"Make me proud, pet," Lee whispered against her cheek before he stepped away, removing his heat and will.

Shivering hard enough her teeth chattered, Quinn took a messy, aimless swipe at the male. He flinched, but his body swung wide of her wavering precision.

"It cannot be allowed to remain unanswered," Ilya said, the rasping of his voice changed, thick with things Quinn didn't want to hear. "I will hold him for you."

Ilya took up position behind the unknown Alpha, jerking down against pinioned arms so Ilya's impressive weight held the male still. A jerky nod given, Quinn swallowed back the bile rising in her throat and made another quivering slash.

She'd never done this. Never wanted to hurt anyone, could never imagine doing something like this.

Yet as the bitter, hot spray of blood fanned across the frozen cement, something surged inside of her. It howled, demanded. Enraged and demented, it shrieked for release. She saw herself weak, beaten and bruised in a disgusting motel room. Saw him grinning as he mounted her again and again.

The next swift arc of the blade didn't quiver. It didn't falter as it slashed across his midsection.

Neither did the next.

Or the next.

Dozens, hundreds, thousands. There was no counting as vivid crimson stained her hands, the soft white of her robe, her soul. The male's small sounds of agony became thin wails and airless screams that burned through her veins. Etching their way through delicate tissue with every flash of the blade, it became an indelible brand as that single pale eye pleaded. Begged. Grew dark and fogged over.

As heavy arms rippling with muscle came around her, Quinn screamed, thought to lash out with her newfound rage and weapon. Both were taken away with an ease that left her staggering. Gripped to a purr that was so raw, edged with so much violence that it clawed and scratched at her spine, she went limp. Lee's nose was at her neck sucking down deep, panting breaths of her. Clutching hands guided her around in his embrace until she was spread around his hips, his throbbing length shoved deep.

His excitement was tangible. Smoke and ash, blood and pain. They sat heavy and rank on her tongue.

As he ascended the stairs two at a time, bouncing her on his stiff cock, Quinn stared in numbed desolation over his shoulder. The bitter, icy blue of Ilya's eyes caught her gaze and held it hostage. One corner of his lips ticked up, his eyes never leaving her until the walls swallowed her view.

In her room, Lee heeded the haggard tone of her wail, veering away from her nest for the exorbitant bathroom. Back slapping against frigid tile, wet with things she couldn't think of, she hung listless as he began to rut.

Through his growls and praise, she was ragdoll slack. Eyes vacant, she stared into an eternity where her soul would never be clean again. The knot swelled inside of her, locking them together, and she felt none of it. Everything was barren, dried up and dead. Even as he put her down and rinsed the horrible muck from her skin with tender hands, there was nothing. Stumbling from the shower, still dripping, she aimed for her nest. The double-edged sword of comfort and inadequacy.

"It's time to get ready, pet," Lee said, catching her hand and pulling her towards the vanity and the fresh robe waiting over his arm.

Mechanical, she sat. Let him fuss and dote as he helped her get ready. Still hard and leaking the thin, potent fluid of his excitement, he smeared it over her flesh in slow drags.

"The blue dress, pet."

Quinn managed to drag her eyes up from the bottom of the closet, the creeping edge of coherence shredding the already frayed threads of her sanity. A smile slipped into place, unbidden. A slow nod, a trill of her fingers over the muscled arm that held the door.

"The blue dress," Quinn whispered as she took it from the hanger.

Chapter 3

“Ah, sweetness.”

Quinn blinked her eyes open, a frown set on her face as she looked around the darkened room. It felt like she’d only just closed her eyes, but everything was in shades of shadow and darkness. A tumble of thoughts and questions banged around her bleary skull before one thing became clear.

Lee never called her that.

“Look at you. Heavy with the child growing inside of you.”

Squinting into the darkness, she skimmed over the bulky shadow more than once before it resolved into the shape of a man. Shuffling upright, she sat with the covers clutched to her chest to face the oncoming threat.

But she didn’t feel threatened.

“The child you stole from me.”

Denial a low moan, Quinn scrambled up the bed. Cowering against the tufted headboard, she held out a hand to stay the menace creeping ever closer. Full of hate, the dark green of his eyes caught the light and glinted in the moonlight.

“Yes, you did. You stole my child. Took her away before I could even see her face. And now...” The shadow of Tobias Kahler made a low sound, something between a growl and a laugh that slashed at Quinn. “Now you play house with another Alpha. You bathe my beautiful baby in blood and hate and his fucking come!”

He was on her so fast she didn’t even remember blinking. Hovering over her, pinning her to the luxurious mattress and the well scented nest, he invaded her senses. The gentle rasp of calluses on her wrists, the prickling stubble of his cheek against her breasts. Chocolate and chilis flooded her tongue as she gasped.

“Fuck, I want you so bad. Going to fuck you so good, my little bird.” Kahler groaned, nuzzling her chest, mouthing the side of one breast and then the other. His cock pushed against her thigh, leaving a smear that burned and made her pussy ache to be filled. Violence, anger, desire. It all melded together and slipped down her throat.

It was right.

“I’m going to fuck you, make you take all of me, little bird,” he mumbled against the taut peak of her nipple before he took it into his mouth. Sucking hard, the edge of his teeth pinching around it until she whined in real pain. Letting it go with a lewd pop, green eyes caught her, dancing with mischievous intent. “Going to make you scream my name.”

“Yes! Oh Gods, yes, please!”

Kahler slipped down between her legs, shoving her wide. Held trembling thighs down as his mouth dipped low.

“Mm, so wet. So sweet, pet.”

Quinn startled as rich brown stained dark green. Jerking away from the mouth pressed against her, a frantic hand fluttering over her pussy to block the path an unwanted tongue was already taking. Froze as dark brows crashed down, turning brown eyes black in shadow.

“T-too much. Sensitive,” Quinn said with a pained smile. Small hands carded through Lee’s hair, tipping his face up as she pulled him towards her mouth. Pressing the curve of her lips against his, she eased the frown from his face until he took control.

Ravaging her mouth with tongue and teeth. Laying claim. His palms circled her thighs, dragging her down to sprawl beneath him with one rough tug. There was no pretense, no gentleness as he shoved his cock inside of her.

Back bowing, Quinn whined and clawed at his back. Straining to take his length, the pulsing girth of him almost too much. Her insides mashed together, realigning to make space.

“So fucking good,” Lee groaned, words ending on a snarl as he drove his hips forward. Pounding too deep just to hear her scream. Grunting and growling above her, rutting her into the bed until Quinn was swallowed up in bulging limbs.

Teeth scraping across the shoulder unmarred by vicious scars, Quinn shrieked and bucked. Forced stretched muscles to squeeze his cock, distracting him from the bite that lingered too long against the bit of flesh between neck and shoulder. Small fingers tangling in his thick hair, she pulled his head back and took his lips. Kissing him with a ferocity that urged the Alpha to assert his dominance in other ways.

Rising to his knees, Lee pulled her up with him. Using gravity and her own weight to put more force into every hard thrust. Hands at her

hips, he moved her up and down his length with ease.

The wet smack of their bodies joining sent hot drifts of sweet slick and smoky musk to her senses. Head lolling, Quinn clung to him and undulated. Pleasure sizzled under her skin, crackling through her synapses as the long muscles of her thighs and arms drew tight. Tension coiling through her hips, the Alpha's hammering became the perfect ache.

"That's right, pet. Going to take my knot and fucking scream," Lee said on a low growl. One hand at her neck now, pulling her down hard as he shoved up into her.

"Yes," Quinn whined, trying to match the furious tempo as her legs began to tremble and seize. The first threads of bliss tangled up her spine, head thrown back to stare sightless at the jostling wall.

"Take it," Lee roared as he slammed her hips down into his. The faint swell flared, expanding to its full size in a matter of thundering heartbeats.

Quinn screamed. Not in pleasure, but in agony. So close, yet too far away, he shoved her over the edge. Pussy a wet mess of wringing contractions, her body gripped the knot like a fist. Milked the first thick surge into her, urging the second and the third. More shot from his jumping cock into her, filling her to the brim and more.

Quinn keened through it all, the forced orgasm too much. It twisted up her spine, wrenching it in cruel jerks as she shuddered through one compelled spasm after another. She was still twitching through the last painful throes as Lee fell back into the bed, leaving her sprawled across his chest. He rumbled a pleased sound at her pained whimper when the knot jerked and shifted.

Breaths sobbing, tears mingling with the sweat trickling down her face, Quinn lay on top of the beast as he continued to paw at her ass in languid strokes.

It had been three weeks since the incident in the basement. An uncomfortable visit to Dr. Hadler with Lee had confirmed Quinn's furious tirade. So close to the due date, without a mate, an Omega in her situation needed far more attention than usual. Add into that Quinn had been starved of attention early in the pregnancy, what had transpired before she'd been brought to Lee's home, and it was a formula for desperation. She had not envied the doctor as she'd been

bustled from the well-appointed clinic. Lee's anger at not having known something simmered in the air, turning it caustic and vile.

His presence was a weighty thing now. It permeated every inch of her room, her nest, even her skin. Lee wasn't her mate though. Wasn't the father of her child. The physical need he had to claim came from somewhere darker. The insistent desire to fuck her, to prove his strength and domination was roused from the basest needs. She was ripe with pheromones, a fecund Omega. He would prove his prowess now so that as soon as her body was ready, he would be the Alpha she chose during estrous.

Instincts always prevailed when given half a chance.

Sniffling, Quinn snuggled into the smoky salt of Lee's chest and hummed as he curled his thick arms around her. Blankets drifted over her back, the dark burrow she'd been favoring reconstructed from the mess he'd made of it all. She'd rouse and fix it once the knot abated.

That wasn't to say that Lee had stopped his doting and cossetting. He lavished her with all kinds of attention. He purred and soothed as he rubbed lotion into her skin, helped her shower when she couldn't bend far enough. Even gathered her up and let her sob when she couldn't fit into her favorite yoga pants any longer. There were quiet moments as he snuggled her in the nest.

It all just ended with him between her spread thighs. Her body wringing his knot, her faint whimpers and mewls muffled against his skin.

"I want a cheeseburger," Quinn said in a voice still thick and wet.

"Hadler says you need to eat better."

Angling her head, she set her chin in the coarse hair of Lee's chest. His eyes were closed, drifting in a pleasured haze as his cock continued to kick inside of her. Every position was uncomfortable for long, but having her huge stomach squashed between them was by far the worse. Sitting up, she made an experimental wriggle, but there was no moving off of him yet.

"I eat fine."

Lee's only response was to groan, pulling her hips down as he bucked up. The knot pulsed, more frothy come jetting inside of her.

Unsatisfied and restless, Quinn continued to squirm. Each move met with a quiet growl, a lift of his lips in a snarl, but otherwise Lee

basked in the replete glow as he continued to come.

“With bacon. And fries,” she muttered after several quiet moments had passed.

Eyes opening to slits, he stared at her before taking a slow breath that left him in a sigh. “Be quiet, pet.”

Gray gaze skittering away from the lurking chill hidden there, Quinn shrugged the covers around her shoulders and clasped them under her chin. Looking out the windows, she made a face at the heavy gray clouds. Winter wouldn’t let go, clinging to every day with ragged determination. The weatherman predicted more snow, adding to the thick frosty layers still blanketing the ground.

Chest heaving in a sigh, Quinn turned her attention back to the drowsing Alpha. With a tentative curl of her lips, fingers braced against his chest, she made a small circle with her hips. Hopeful, she hummed as the thick knot edged deeper, rubbing at the spot that could make her scream.

“Be still,” Lee snapped as the breadth of his palm connected with her thigh.

Quinn choked back the squeal of pain, splaying her fingers wide to not dig her nails into his flesh. Head hanging so that the tumble of curls hid her face, she mumbled strained apologies. Stiff and quiet, she waited until he was settled and lazy beneath her again before she dared to sit up. Bundled in the blankets that smelled of smoky darkness, she looked out the window once more.

Three weeks of various nightmares and daylight terrors visiting themselves upon her psyche, ripping her sanity apart one little piece at a time.

She dreamed of Kahler often now, in the thin hours between the darkest night and the paltry glow of dawn. Always some variation of what had raged through her sleep this morning. He was always so angry with her, blaming, accusing, but then he would climb on top of her. Groaning and growling his pleasure in her, how much he needed her. Missed her.

Stupid lies.

Trailing her fingers over the swell of her belly, Quinn hummed to soothe the somersaulting bundle of energy. She giggled when a fist or

heel punched her palm. Without thinking, she dragged Lee's hand from her hip, holding it over the spot the little acrobat was pummeling.

Quinn frowned as the baby went quiet.

"What are you doing?"

"She was kicking."

"Are you certain about that?"

Quinn made a noncommittal noise and released his wrist. Smiled as he slid his hand around to cup her ass. There were old wives' tales about an Omega without her mate. The baby rejected anyone not the father and wouldn't respond to another's touch. While the little gymnast that she had refused to name yet often showed off, she did seem to go quiet under Lee's hand. Even when he was being sweet, murmuring over her unborn child, the bundle remained still. Worrying at her lower lip, Quinn watched the first fat flakes tumble from the sky to disappear against the drifts of white beyond.

Her whimper was one of relief as the knot abated, letting her crawl off of Lee's heavy thighs to collapse into her nest. Back aching, knees throbbing, she groaned and stretched. With a parting slap to her ass, Lee climbed from the bed and shrugged into his robe. Without a backward glance, he left, heading to his room to shower and dress.

Curled on her side, Quinn pulled the blankets to her chin and stared out at the wintry blur of sky. She wasn't allowed to go outdoors anymore after her unauthorized shopping trip to a cheap strip mall off of the highway. Not that she much felt like stuffing her body into the thick layers needed for the cold just to waddle about like a lame duck.

Huffing and cursing, Quinn dragged herself out of the bed to stumble around the chilled room. Lee didn't like it warm when he slept, so the thermostat was set to freezing and she didn't light the little fireplace in the corner of her room since he came to her bed every night now. Teeth chattering, she muttered under her breath about males seeing to their own comfort as she searched for the thickest, baggiest sweats she had managed to find. Lee had been livid, pacing and roaring for an hour, but she still had the comfortable clothes she'd managed to find in the mall.

She swam in a sea of deep blue, hair a snarled mess wrapped into an unkempt bun before she plodded downstairs for something to eat. Hoping no one had finished off the giant bottle of hot sauce she had

begged for. Shouldering her way through the kitchen door, she stopped short at the sight of the Alphas lazing around the kitchen island.

“Hungry, *kroshka*?” Ilya smiled, tilting the pan of eggs that were seconds away from being perfect for Quinn to see.

“Yes!” She didn’t try to hide her hungry gaze, her disgruntled mood swept away as the fluffy yellow clouds made their way to a plate. She didn’t question how he always remembered how she liked her eggs. Didn’t balk as he shooed her out of the way to pluck the hot sauce from the top shelf of the large pantry.

“Sit, *kroshka*, sit,” Ilya said on a low rumble, pleased with himself as he brandished the butter knife to smear thick pats over golden toast.

“What the fuck, man? I thought that was for us?” Randy, red hair sticking up at odd angles and freckled face flushed, reached to snatch back a piece of toast.

The point of the knife came down in a swift arc, pinning Randy’s hand to the gleaming marble though it stopped short of puncturing flesh.

“That is for her now.” Ilya growled, eyes never leaving Randy as he placed the toast back on Quinn’s plate.

Knowing better than to argue the point, Quinn kept her eyes on her plate as she covered the eggs with a liberal amount of the thick red sauce. Andres might be Lee’s right hand in business affairs, but it was Ilya who saw that things were carried out in the physical sense. He dominated the other males in more than just size.

If he said the breakfast was hers, it was hers now.

Darryl chuckled and shrugged, leaning against the open refrigerator to peer at its contents. A frosty bottle of beer came out wrapped in his beefy palm, the top popping off and clattering to the counter. With a silent salute, he ambled out of the kitchen towards whatever it was they did when not on a job.

Randy grumbled, taking his hand back with care before he, too, left the kitchen. A final glare was sent over his shoulder at Ilya before he let the door swing shut behind him.

“Good, *da*?”

“They’re very good, thank you,” Quinn mumbled to the eggs, scooping up another precarious forkful before shoveling it into her mouth. The sweet burn of chilis reminded her of all the wrong things,

but the bigger she had gotten, the more she had craved the delicious tingle. Tears brimming along her lashes, she hid a sniffle under the pretense of nibbling at her toast.

“Your back?”

“What?”

“Your back, it aches, *da?*” Ilya gestured at her slumped shoulders, taking in the way she shifted and squirmed. At her wary look, he smiled wide, full of teeth and dangerous sincerity as he came around the counter.

“What are you doing?” Panic laced her voice as he took up the space behind her, warm and imposing as his shadow fell over her. Dwarfed under his size, she jostled and would have vaulted off the stool if his hands hadn’t held her to the chair.

“Calm, *kroshka*. It is only you and me. I will not tell.”

Before Quinn could fill her lungs with enough air to scream, his hands slipped down over the curve of her shoulders and dug into the knotted muscles of her lower back. Fingers kneading the snarled aches, he gave another delighted rumble when Quinn slumped.

Cheek meeting cool stone, Quinn held back the gratified moan that battered against the back of her teeth. Memories flooded her eyes, trickled over her lashes and stained her cheeks as she allowed the male to touch her. The deep, pinching pain was manipulated into something tolerable with each hard caress.

“You miss him.” Ilya’s mangled voice was a breath of coarse sandpaper. More statement than question, he didn’t give Quinn time to formulate an answer before he continued in the same hoarse whisper. “Omega needs her mate, needs the things only he can provide.”

Words sat thick and salty on Quinn’s tongue, burnt ash and razed dreams choking her as a little more of her soul leeched away. Closing off the world with a slow meeting of wet lashes, she pretended not to understand at all. For long minutes Ilya allowed her to play the game, plying her flesh and smoothing away the little aches and gnawing pains.

It wouldn’t last.

“You have pain through here,” Ilya asked, massaging the taut muscle of her sides. Fingers dipped low, into the cradle of her hips, under the heaviness of her belly. Under the taut elastic of her pants.

Callused fingers scoured bare flesh, the rhythmic clutch of his palms hugging her belly.

Tension snapping back into place in a whiplash of fear, Quinn sat up too fast. White knuckled grip clinging to the counter, she swayed as the world slipped sideways and nausea surged.

“Your child comes soon,” he went on, fingers continuing to trip over her skin though they no longer sought to ease away the strain. “The little pains, they grow stronger. Contractions. Soon they will be too great, and your little one will come.”

More startled by the fact he knew what the pinching aches were than that she’d been having them, Quinn peered over her shoulder at him. Brows scrunched over the bridge of her nose, bemused grays met bitter blue.

“Da, very soon.”

A thunder of sound, footsteps and voices, rumbled beyond the door. Ilya straightened her clothes and was around the corner of the island in a smooth series of movements that looked effortless.

Quinn wiped at her face and nose with her sleeve before ducking over her plate. The eggs were long since cold, but she set her trembling fork back to work. With her back to the door, she didn’t see who entered, or Lee’s pause, but she felt his regard like a searing brand along her back. Taking in the state of her, perhaps the curve of a wet cheek. Plodding on, Quinn ate her eggs and tried to pretend nothing was wrong as Randy, Maurice, and Andre ranged around the island.

Grunting his displeasure, Lee’s chest met her back. Plucking at her thick sleeve, he made some comment about money and image that she couldn’t bother to listen to. Peeking through her lashes at Ilya as he set about making coffee, she kept silent.

Soft under Lee’s possessive hands, she ate her cold eggs and toast as the males spoke to each other as if she wasn’t even there. Mergers, deals, and murders were discussed without constraint. It was all just noise, a deep undulating resonance of Alphas caustic with their aggression.

At some point she had become used to it, stomach no longer soured by the very scent of them too close while she tried to eat.

“Heard from a connection that Rippin’s on the run. Seems he pissed off the wrong guy and had to get out of town fast. No one can lay eyes

on him. Bastard is a ghost now.”

Quinn coughed, sputtering slimy eggs. Liquid fire seared its way up her sinuses, molten in her nose as she hunched over her plate. A swift smack between her shoulders sent a congealed yellow lump splattering over the counter.

“I’ll clean it up, I’m so sorry,” Quinn said, blubbering through a cascade of distraught sorrow that had no place in that moment. Too many dangerous eyes were fixed on her, weighing her response to Andres’ news.

Lee hauled her back into the chair when she tried to scramble down, pinning her against the counter with the breadth of his body. Under lying touches and deceptive purrs, he gave the impression of soothing as he caged her in.

“Worried about your friend?” Randy sneered with an ugly, vicious turn of his lips on a baby face.

“Maybe she misses him,” Maurice said, voice soft and rich, full of death and mayhem.

“Quiet.” Lee’s low command rippled through the room, a slap to the face to the males, but that had Quinn cowering. The stench of her fear was overwhelming. Turning the rich chestnut of his gaze down to her, a dark brow arched in question.

It took seconds for Quinn to make her decision and act. Falling into his chest, clinging to the crisp folds of his shirt, she began to babble. Fear of Alton, what had happened, her baby. It wasn’t a complete lie. If Alton was caught by Kahler, and she had no doubt it was him who drove Alton from his empire of trash, would he tell? Would he spew the information of where Quinn was?

Within moments she had made her awkward way into Lee’s arms, hugging his neck as she pressed her face into him and sucked down deep draughts of his scent as the half lie spiraled into true fear. If Kahler found her, found the baby...

“Oh, pet,” Lee crooned, lifting her from the stool altogether and cradling her to his chest. “That won’t happen. We’ll keep you safe, won’t we, gentlemen?”

The murmurs of agreement from the other males rose and fell in a wave that blistered her ears. But there, just at the edge of her field of view was Ilya. His pale eyes were eager, hungry.

Quinn shuddered and snuggled deeper into Lee's arms.

Once stripped and tucked back into the nest, Quinn was ordered to sleep more. With Lee's sooty heat engulfing her, she drifted off into fitful nightmares. Choking on the taste of decadent chocolate and delicious spice, she woke in smeared minutes that seeped back into dreams. Furious howls and unhinged roars faded into racking sobs and back again until Quinn wasn't sure what was real and what was imagined.

Childish laughter, intoxicating and contagious, followed her up from the last.

Squirming her way out from under the heavy pile of blankets, Quinn looked around at the empty room. Shadows were stretching their fingers across the floor, gathering up the corners in their embrace. There was no sign of Lee anywhere. Sniffling back unexpected tears, she settled into the pillows and tried to drift off again.

By the time the darkness swallowed the edges of the room, a static charge was itching under her skin. Restless and agitated, she climbed from the bed. Scrubbing the rank sweat from her skin and scouring her scalp didn't help. Stalking back into the room, she went around and turned on every gilded lamp. Examining the space bathed in a golden glow, her lip curled.

Nothing was right anymore.

Flowing into motion, she set about making it right.

Hours of back breaking labor later, she hissed and snarled at the heavy dresser in the nursery that refused to budge. It was wrong. It didn't belong there. There was no way she could move it.

She'd already rearranged what she could in her bedroom. The nest had been ripped apart, restructured into something far more pleasing. Fresh softness added in lofty layers, it would be scented the next time Lee came to her. Delicate furniture had been hauled stuttering over the floors, a wide berth given to the bed. Everything had been scrubbed clean.

However the nursery was far from satisfying. Boxes still cluttered the corners, unpacked items strewn atop their eventual homes. Toys littered a bright aqua rug, no order in the chaos of jumbled parts and pieces.

The dresser had to go to the other wall. Now.

Something demonic howled in her ears, scraping bloody claws against the soft tissue inside her chest while something outright evil twisted her back into mangled knots.

Screaming through clenched teeth, diminutive feet clad only in pink flesh stomped to the second story bannister. Carrying her anger in a tight wad to stifle the sounds only she could hear, she leaned over and snapped at the first male who dared to come into her sights.

“Where the fuck is Lee?”

Maurice crashed to a halt on the expanse of marble tile crossing the foyer. Craning his neck to look up at her, she saw the flash of bright white teeth between his full lips. Baring hers in response, she swung her attention to the sign of movement behind Maurice.

“Well, where the fuck is he?”

Darryl’s scarred face showed his confusion and a hint of surprise. The pale brow that remained whole slid down and nudged the thick bulge of a scar.

“He’s out, princess,” Randy called up to her. Sneering, he struck an indolent pose against the large table sporting decorative bare branches.

“What the fuck does out mean?” It came on a vicious growl, a rattle in her chest that reverberated through the open space and ricocheted back to challenge anyone who could hear it.

“Meeting at the office.” Darryl’s voice was far more cautious, scarred face slack as Quinn emitted another scream of frustration, hands clenched and yanking on twisted snarls of her hair.

“Call him.” Ilya was rushing the stairs, thundering towards her in a hulking rush. Shouting over his shoulder, his command roared through the foyer, “I said call him now.”

Forcing Quinn back toward the hallway leading to her bedroom with his broad shadow alone, he ignored her challenges and shrieks. Blocking the way forward, he kept her cornered with only her bedroom and the nursery to escape to.

Anger melted down her back, filthy water that left her a sodden heap. Collapsing to the floor in a jumble of awkward limbs, she began to sob. Trying to grip the twisting ache that had taken up residence in her lower back and clawed her sides and stomach.

“Shh, *kroshka*

“It’s not fucking right! He’s not here, and it’s not right!”

Hunkered down on his heels, the Alpha towered over her. Large hands patting at the air, he tried to soothe without uttering a single sound of true comfort or touching her.

“What’s not right?”

“Everything!”

“You must stop yelling. You agitate the others.”

“Fuck them,” Quinn snarled, hauling her weight up to her knees. Shoving her face close to his, spittle slapped his cheek as she screamed. The sound was ragged, as adrift as the one rattling around her skull. Virulent agony pulsed through her chest, doubling her over as unseen hands squeezed her middle and twisted.

“We sure would like that, princess.” Randy leaned against the wall, sniffing at the air. His smile was too sharp, pupils wide as he looked over her crumpled body with what could only be called glee.

“Does it hurt, little one,” Maurice asked as he came up behind Randy. Shoving his way past, he stood wide legged and aggressive just behind Ilya’s bulk.

Fear began to trickle in through the confusion of pain. Racing up her spine, icy streamers snapped across her flesh as she hunched and panted before the three males.

Now four.

Darryl chuckled, the sound as dark as a moonless night as he took up position beside Maurice. More bodies cast their shadows across the hall, hanging back but lingering as they waited to see what would come. She didn’t have names for all the faces turned to her, but she knew their intent as well as she knew her own hand.

Lee wasn’t here, and she had challenged them with her cursing and screaming, all the demands she’d thrown at them. As long as she’d remained meek and subservient, they’d acknowledged Lee’s claim over her, tenuous as it was. She had thought they wouldn’t dare hurt her, but that had been stupid and naïve.

They wouldn’t hurt her only so long as she played by the rules.

She’d gone and broken them all.

Gasping as another racking pain encircled her hips, she skittered back on unsteady legs. Hunched over her belly in a useless protective

gesture, one arm holding the wrenching pain close, she stared hard at the floor.

Then Ilya was there. Pinching her cheeks, jerking her chin up until terrified grays met apathetic blue. He gave a satisfied nod at whatever he saw in her face, but still he leaned down until the warm wash of his breath scattered over her face.

“Is that what you want, *kroshka*?”

Quinn’s head twitched in denial, unable to give the violent shake of her head she wanted with his cruel grip.

“You will behave now, *da*?”

Another twitch, this time to the affirmative, eyes widening as she saw bulky shadows drawing nearer. Quinn collapsed to the floor when Ilya took his hand away, choking back her low cries so as not to incite the violence simmering in the air to greater heights.

Ilya’s voice was too loud for the space as he ordered the others back downstairs. Pushing when needed, sending one male tumbling down the stairs when he didn’t turn away fast enough. Maurice squared off for a long moment before he, too, headed down the stairs in a lazy stroll as if he didn’t have a care in the world.

Turning back, Ilya watched with a predator’s gaze as Quinn lost the battle and whimpered, clawing at the plush runner as she sunk lower to the ground. Jerking his shoulders as if settling a weight, he took a slow breath and then let it out before approaching her again. Crouching, he stood just outside of arm’s reach.

“Show me what is not right, *kroshka*.”

It took Quinn several tries to get her feet under her. A handful more to get upright and slink into the nursery, a trembling hand pointing at the dresser that had acted as a catalyst.

Ilya had it moved to the other wall in seconds, not even breaking a sweat. The other furniture was rearranged in no time at all. He crouched and gathered up pieces of things alongside Quinn, sorting them out to their appropriate places. Waited through the random bouts of agony that knotted her spine and twisted through her hips without a word.

“Stop that,” Ilya snarled, hand out as if he would grab at her arm as she arranged stacks of clothing into their drawers. He stopped short of his mark, hand falling to slap against his thigh.

Quinn started at the sudden change in his demeanor. Back slapping against the wall, she wrapped her arms around her middle. It was then she felt the prickling ache from where she'd rubbed her chest raw. Looking down at the line of her chest laid bare by the vee of her shirt, she saw a smattering of brilliant crimson pinpricks.

"It hurts. I hear things." Lower lip trembling, she looked up at the male who was too big, too violent, just too... everything for this bright, happy space. Her words hadn't been much more than a whimper, but Ilya looked as if she'd hit him upside the head with a baseball bat. Something approaching concern filled the bitter blues that were forever merciless.

"Kroshka..."

"Why isn't she in the fucking nest," Lee bellowed as he raged into the room, shattering the fragile moment into shards of disarray.

"It was not yet time."

Quinn groaned, hand fumbling to grip the dresser when her knees went loose, threatening to drop her to the floor. Stronger than any of the others, the agony wrapped around her middle in taut cords. Drawing her body down on itself, twisting her back. A low cry slipped over her lips as it only got worse.

"Now is the time."

Snatching Quinn up into his arms, purr violent, Lee stripped the filthy sweats from her body before he'd even gotten her into her room.

It had taken hours. Through the last of the night, the full of the day, and well into dusk. Long enough for Hadler to be called in, his needles and poisons injected into her veins. An Omega in her nest, in labor, and in pain had meant no one could get near. Even Lee had been hard pressed to get close enough to soothe her through the worst of it. They'd had to pin her down. The memories were dream-vague, but she remembered fighting. Remembered Ilya's face swimming above her, Lee on the other side as Hadler tried to shove a syringe into her arm. More at her feet. She'd inflicted some pain on more than one of them.

It had hurt. She'd never known a pain like that, not even in the worst moments. Nothing could have begun to prepare her for it.

It had all been worth it. Every second.

Cooing and working pursed lips, the little blue-eyed wonder stared up at Quinn in the dim confines of their burrow. Expression one that seemed conflicted between surprise and distaste, she learned the outside world and whether she liked it.

Pressing her smile to the chunky roundness of a cheek, Quinn purred over her baby girl. Heart swelling as tiny hands sought and curled around her finger, it muffled the agonized sounds that continued unabated in her skull.

Lip lifting in a silent snarl, she curled over her daughter as the door to the room closed with a quiet click. Approaching footsteps came to a sudden halt, shuffling back.

“No further, doctor.”

What was Ilya doing in here? Or Hadler for that matter? Panic prickled up her back, seized her shoulders as she hunched over the tiny infant.

“I would rather not have a repeat performance, Hadler,” Lee said, tone unamused and bordering on irritated.

Had she struck out at him during all the chaos? She didn’t remember. Just flashing teeth and hands curled into claws, desperate to protect the tiny thing trying its damndest to get free of her. He couldn’t hold her responsible for that. Not in those moments of blind instinct. Petting the little girl’s chest, Quinn soothed them both. Hoping to feign sleep, she kept quiet as she listened to the males invading her space.

“How long?”

“There are many factors to consider and with—”

“How long,” Lee repeated, a serrated edge to his terse words.

“Feasibly? Two weeks, maybe three, depending on hormones and healing. Ideally, at least six months if not longer. At least long enough to wean the child.”

Lee grunted but gave no further response. More footsteps and then the door opening and closing again. When Ilya spoke, Quinn could only assume Hadler had been dismissed.

“You need to claim her.”

“Is that so?” Lee was nothing if not amused as he came to sit on the bed. His heat and scent permeated the heavy layers of fabric, stifling her and the baby.

“She is not like those blooded Omegas, *da*? She was not bred to accept this life. She will be a bad breeder for you.”

“I think she’d be very good at it. You saw her, how protective she was. She’d take good care of my offspring.”

“Too much,” Ilya said, frustration couching his words in thick drifts of rough accent. “Too much time spent keeping her sane, labor too hard, too long. Will only get worse. Every baby you put in her, could be her last. She will not handle miscarriage. You claim her, she gives you a dozen with joy.”

The layers of fabric were peeled away, the sudden draft and glaring lamplight making her baby pout and fuss. Purring over cottony tufts of hair, Quinn cradled her closer.

“What do you think, pet? Should I claim you?” Lee’s smile held too many teeth as he leaned over her, finger tracing the pudgy hills and valleys of the baby’s arm. The bastard had known all along she was awake.

“You said you wouldn’t take her away from me.” Somehow she managed not to clutch her daughter, to make it too obvious that she was challenging him outright.

Lee made a noncommittal sound, though he gave a small nod. The smile softened around the edges as her baby turned vivid blue eyes up to him, tracking his movements with clumsy concentration.

“That will be all, Ilya,” Lee said as he began stripping away his coat and shirt.

Eyes wide, Quinn stared and now she did clutch her baby. Didn’t even bother with the agitated male sulking his way out of her room. Curling her whole body around the tiny bundle, tension slipped under her skin and knotted through aching muscle.

“The people here,” Lee began as he stood to attend his belt and slacks. “They will call her mine. She’ll live and grow under the same protection that you do now, pet.” Kicking his pants away, he stood beside the bed in snug fitting boxer briefs. “Now, do you want her to think she’s yet another bastard who happened to tag along with the Omega I decided to keep? A burden I shoulder to keep my Omega pleased. Or shall she grow up thinking that she has two parents who adore her?”

Watching him stand there, impassive and cold, it was so damned hard to make the right decision. Every instinct screamed at her as she rolled toward the waiting evil, keeping her daughter tight to her chest. Hands unsure and trembling, she arranged the infant in a downy pocket of warmth before she dared to turn her gaze back to the male looming over them. His eyebrows ticked upwards, a gesture of impatience.

He was going to make her invite him in.

Reaching out, she shuffled the blankets and sheets. Roughshod and grating, it would have to do for the moment. Quinn couldn't bring herself to take her other arm away from the murmuring infant as she made room for the monster that held their lives as his.

His rumble of satisfaction crackled through her spine, up into her clenched jaw. Grinding her teeth as she settled in a stiff mockery of complacency, she managed not to flinch as he purred and stroked her arm, back, and cheek. A frantic hand fluttered over the baby's squirming body when he went to touch her. Twining his fingers with Quinn's, he set their joined hands on the baby's rotund belly.

"Hadler's waiting with the birth certificate. She'll be given my name and everything that goes along with that. But what shall we call our beautiful little girl, pet?"

"Elise." She said it without thinking, the name slipping off her tongue in a rush of heady warmth. Tears sprung to her eyes as she bowed over Elise's confused face, feathering kisses across the bridge of her nose.

"A fine name. Why don't you feed our Elise and then the two of you can get some much needed rest?"

It was a command if she'd ever heard one, no matter the questioning lilt. Quinn nodded, arranging bodies and pillows to suit them. Once Elise was tucked in the crook of her arm, nipple latched between working gums, Quinn looked up at him. Hungry, greedy, the deep brown of his eyes was fixed on her as a whole. Uncertainty plaguing her thoughts, she snuggled around her daughter and closed her eyes.

Chapter 4

“Cow goes moo,” Quinn said, wriggling the stuffed cow’s muzzle at Elise’s cheek and neck to make the smiling girl grin even harder. It had the desired effect, her mouth going wide with a gurgling coo and legs kicking.

Sprawled across the bed, an assortment of soft toys surrounded them among the heavy drifts of blankets arranged to accommodate their play. In the two months since her birth, Elise hadn’t been out of Quinn’s sight for a second. The nursery brimmed with everything they needed, but she always brought them back to the nest. Elise slept tucked close, Quinn’s hand on her back to reassure her even in sleep.

There were no memories of her mother, Marina, doing these things with Quinn at any point in her life. There had never been toys in the long line of dingy, worn apartments. No quiet moments where Marina held her when the darkness terrified or the world at large overwhelmed. It had been hard lessons in scraping by, of making it from one day to the next. Quinn could remember the sticky feel of black plastic against her skin as Marina led her out onto the fire escape of more than one ratty building to escape a landlord’s wrath. Weeks at a time where Quinn was left to fend for herself with a handful of crumpled bills.

“Who’s next? Mr. Frog? Yeah?” Gripping the frog plush’s head, Quinn had it bounce across Elise’s belly, tickling her. “Frog goes ribbit! Ribbit!”

She would never do that to Elise. There would be never be a moment where she would leave her daughter. Marina had taught her to survive, and Quinn had learned that lesson well. Things could always be worse, and no matter what she had to endure, it would always be worth it for the gum filled smile that Elise pointed at her.

Even now, Elise was the only thing that quieted the agonizing pain in her chest that sometimes engulfed her. Overwhelming, it ran jagged and fierce through her, scraping nerves raw and shattering the illusion of happiness for moments at a time. The nightmares had stopped, but they filled her waking moments until Elise would turn wide blue eyes

to her. And then it was just a muffled ache, held at bay until the next time the tiny girl slept.

“Oh, this is one of mama’s favorites. Cats go meow. Meow!”

Lee appeared in the dead of night to sleep with them but made himself scarce otherwise. He was strange now, an entity that belonged, yet didn’t. His actions were even stranger. Quinn had woken several times to Elise’s soft noises, finding Lee purring and quieting her fussing. A handful of times she had watched through eyes narrowed to slits, feigning sleep as he let the baby gnaw on his fingers and play with his expensive watch and rings.

“Ducks go quack, quack, quack!”

Acting the part of the doting Alpha parent, Quinn didn’t know what to do with the male. Instinct screamed at her to protect Elise from him, to keep her away from the malevolent violence that clung to the man’s very skin, his scent dark and bitter with it. Cold, hard reason saw her not interfering with those moments.

Uncertainty had her sick over it.

“Mama’s hungry, baby,” Quinn said as she set the duck aside and frowned at the crab toy Elise had managed to bring up to her mouth to gum. “You’re too little to eat that, and besides, mama doesn’t know what crabs sound like.”

Gathering Elise up in a bundle of cozy flannel along with the toy she refused to surrender, Quinn made her way down to the kitchen. One positive aspect of everything that had happened was that Lee kept most of the males out of the house. Before they had had free reign of the house, or at least the lower levels. Since Quinn’s actions, challenging some of the most violent males in his employment, there would be little peace between them. Even with Lee there, things had been too tense to allow it to continue.

Elise had been the deciding factor though. One glimpse of Maurice and the infant had begun to wail, refusing to be quieted as Lee escorted Quinn down to the car for an appointment with Hadler. Becoming so agitated he had gone back into the house once Quinn and Elise were in the dark sedan, Lee had returned with bloodied knuckles. He’d announced his edict as soon as they’d returned.

The one concession was Ilya. Quinn grimaced, hiding the taut line of her lips against Elise’s cheek as she spotted the male flipping

through a catalogue at the island counter. Lee wouldn't leave only lesser Alphas to guard his home and Omega. The bear of a man was the only one all three could tolerate.

Elise even seemed to like him a little.

"Ah, *kroshka*. I was wondering when you would venture out."

Ilya's smiles were tighter these days, a spring loaded trap waiting to trip when she least expected it. It made her even more leery of his teasing tone and fussing. Unable to outright refuse him, she let him herd her towards the island, Elise's vivid aqua and lime bouncer situated on the dark counter.

"You don't have to cook for me," Quinn said as she buckled Elise into the chair, double checking the straps before sliding the dangling toys back into place. The hollow rattles and cheery jingles started at once as Elise began to slap and kick at them.

"Is something to do."

"Still, you're not my—"

"Sit down, Quinn."

Ass met leather in a hurried rush, hard enough to send the wooden legs of the stool scuttling across the tiled floor. Ilya had never called her by her name. None of them had. It was something she was used to, done to make Omegas know their place. Less of a person, not even worthy of their given names.

It made it all the more surprising when she did hear it.

"What do you wish today?" Leaning against the opposite counter, Ilya's arms crossed over his burly chest as he stared.

"I was just going to make a sandwich," Quinn said, voice frail. Hands wringing over the knots in her stomach, she kept her eyes averted.

"That is not enough." Going to the refrigerator, Ilya began pulling out food and glass containers, arranging them on the counter beside him. Ignoring her now, he went to work with a skill and speed Quinn would never be able to match.

Having been dismissed for the moment, Quinn turned her attention to the gurgling Elise. It was too hard not to smile, watching chubby legs bounce and kick, her fists flailing in wild punches. Tickling fingers danced over a bit of bared tummy as Quinn hummed over her daughter.

Lost in a world composed of Elise's babbling and clumsy fumbling, Quinn didn't notice Ilya coming up behind her until his arm appeared at her side. The plate set before her was loaded with food, far more than she would eat on her own. Succulent chicken with an herbed crust, golden brown roasted vegetables, and lofty hills of rice decorated the large plate. It made her mouth water as she took a slow breath through her nose to gather all those delicious smells.

Far hungrier than she had thought, her stomach growled in anticipation.

"You like?" His voice was close, closer than it should have been. The large, scarred hand holding the edge of the counter was loose, belying a sense of relaxation.

It should have concerned her, but Elise was making giggle like sounds that distracted Quinn. Along with the food, she wasn't paying enough attention. Didn't notice when his other hand wrapped around the back of the stool until his fingers caressed her lower back before he pushed the seat in.

Then she was very much aware of the Alpha who was hovering over her, body a living shield and cage in one.

"The food looks wonderful," Quin murmured, picking her words with care. She had no idea what he was doing but found that she wasn't half as terrified as she should have been. Didn't understand why she wasn't a wreck of anxious tension.

Ilya sidled closer, his chest a warm wall that brushed against her arm. The warm scent of cinnamon overpowered even the delicious chicken, a sharp bite teasing her senses. Something smoky drifted just under it, not quite the bitter violence of Lee, more like the homey scent of wood smoke.

She almost leaned into it, head turning towards him to better take in his scent.

Then she heard it.

The purr was luscious, a decadent sensation that flowed across her skin. It shook loose all the pain, leaving only glorious numbness in its wake. Seeping into her flesh, her very bones, melting them like chocolate in the sun. The breadth of his palm skimmed over her spine, Quinn swaying towards that incredible sound.

Tears flooded her eyes, the comfort in all that warm thunder swallowing her up. Dragging her under a languid tide as she turned her face up to his. Trying to frown, to show that this wasn't right, Quinn could only gasp when Ilya ran his thumb over her lower lip.

"I always know what you like, *kroshka*." The tip of that digit slid across her teeth, prying her mouth open a little wider until the pad of his thumb could feel the soft velvet of her tongue. "You will remember that, *da*?"

Then he was on her other side, the purr changing pitch so fast it made her head spin. Elise's whimpering snapped her out of the fog, but when she turned to look he was poking at the buttons that made the seat bounce as if he hadn't shown her how to do it.

"What's this?" Lee stood just inside the doorway, brows high in immaculate question as he looked between Quinn and Ilya.

Understanding surged through her stomach, knotting the precious organ into a roiling mess as she split her attention between the two males.

"The baby, she cries," Ilya said, calm and smooth as any windless midnight. Pulling a frown, he tapped the button that made the rocker move, quieting Elise as she burbled at the toys dangling above her.

"You should know better than to hover over an Omega's child, Ilya." Mistaking her panic for worry over Elise, Lee came forward, crowding Ilya away from the counter. Ignoring Quinn's awkwardness as he leaned down to peck her cheek, he loomed until she turned back to her plate.

Mechanical, tasting none of it now, Quinn began to eat. One eye on Elise as she began to drift off with the slow rocking, Quinn was surprised when her fork scraped bare ceramic. Glancing at the plate, she saw it empty. She'd eaten it all.

"Good girl, pet. You haven't been eating enough of late," Lee said against her hair, a bare hint of a purr in his words.

As if he was ever there to see that. Quinn's meals were lone affairs. Ilya stood by as she ate then watched her go back to her nest, a silent sentry to her comings and goings.

"Isn't it time for her nap?"

"I have to feed her first."

"Let's get you two back upstairs then," Lee said, a flick of his fingers indicating Quinn should rise and gather her daughter.

It seemed he intended to escort her. Wondering if he wanted to watch her as he had that first night and if she could stand it, Quinn unbuckled Elise and tucked the drowsing infant into the crook of her arm. The oppressive weight of Lee's hand fell onto her shoulder.

Not until they were in the hall and he turned her towards the nursery did Quinn start to consider why Lee was there. His appearance just when Elise was due to nap was foreboding, a weight that pushed at her until the pressure slumped her spine.

Standing in the doorway to the nursery, he watched as she arranged Elise to be fed. The murky brown of his eyes were bright with avarice when Quinn worked her breast free. Not until Elise was busy nursing did he come closer, going down to one knee and forcing Quinn's legs to make room for him.

"Such a good mother, pet." Lee smoothed back the cotton tufts of Elise's hair, his gaze drifting away from her busy mouth to the swell of Quinn's breast.

He remained that way during the whole thing, stroking Elise's cheek and arm, lavishing attention on her. Even as his other hand gripped Quinn's leg, fingers digging into tender flesh. Caressing her inner thigh, though he stopped short of touching any higher. The discordance left her trembling, fitful hands hovering over Elise. Protective, seeking to reassure herself that Elise wasn't aware of what the Alpha was doing.

Demeanor patient, he rose with Quinn when Elise was finished, but turned her to the unused crib. Nudged her towards it when she didn't go at once and followed close at her heels as she shuffled her way forward. An agonizing death march, she lingered over Elise long enough for Lee to lean down, hands braced against the side of the crib.

"I paid good money for all of these monitors. She will be fine," he whispered against Quinn's ear. The rumble of it tried to work through her, to slip under the stiff-backed reticence and rattle it free.

It took an age for Quinn to settle Elise into the crib. What felt like hours passed before she could pull her hands away from the soft rise and fall of Elise's chest. She didn't want to leave her. Elise was safe only when in her arms, cuddled close and warm in the nest. The few

steps from her door and an endless stretch of possibilities were too much for one infant to be left alone with. Holding the edge of the crib, knuckles blanching white, Quinn became brittle when Lee's fingers curled over the shelf of her hip.

"Come now, pet." Free hand reaching over the crib, he turned on the fancy monitor that would beam an image of Elise in full color, complete with sound, to Quinn's bedroom across the hall. Pulled on her side and led Quinn to the doorway.

Knowing she shouldn't and helpless to stop, she dug her heels in and turned back. It felt too much like abandoning Elise, leaving her to survive all the dangers of this world alone. Just as her mother had done to Quinn more often than not. Peaceful and content, Elise slept on as if nothing at all was wrong in the world.

"Now."

Quinn gave a slow nod, refusing to take her eyes from the bundle that looked so alone in a room designed just for her. Surrounded by gadgets and luxury, she looked too small and fragile. Lower lip trembling, Quinn didn't resist when Lee urged her forward. There was no defiance as he guided her across the hall. Not until the door closed, locking them away, did the first tears slip over her lashes.

The pad of his thumb swiped at her cheek, his groan lewd as he sucked the taste of her sorrow off of his skin. There was no gentleness in his touch as he tugged her free of the simple clothes. Even as she stifled her low sobs, shoulders shaking with the raw sounds. No tenderness as he tossed her into the middle of the nest. He was undressed before Quinn could untangle her limbs, shoving her flat with a growl that was more menace than seduction.

"Spread," Lee husked against the back of her neck, knee heavy between her thighs as he forced her to open around him. To make room for the thick heat that nudged against her ass, leaving slimy, hot trails in its wake.

"Please," Quinn stammered, clutching at the drifts of her ruined nest. Legs opening so as not to incite his anger, she stared hard at the monitor that had never been turned on.

"You have more pressing concerns, pet." With a coarse growl, he fisted his length. Smeared his head through her folds, coating her with

the copious fluid that leaked from his tip. Palm splayed over her hips, he shoved into the hilt.

His roar of unadulterated victory drowned her thin wail. Face buried in the mattress, futile kicks did little to ease the agonizing stretch. Unprepared for any of it, Quinn clawed at the bed. Pulled herself away in frantic inches until he grabbed her hips and hauled her back into his next fierce thrust.

The slow drag of his exit was almost as painful as his inward rush. Fingers tight enough to bruise, he worked her back and forth, pulling and pushing to the brutal rhythm he set. One agonizing surge after another had him leaking more, slicking a passage too dry to give him the pleasure he sought.

Helpless grunts pushed from her lungs, Quinn held onto the luxurious blankets and grit her teeth. Tried to quiet her keens and wails as he drove too deep. Battering her still tender body, abusing it for his own needs. Lee didn't even make a pretense of any part of this being for her.

The knot was already swelling, growing as he forced her wider. Stretching her with every thrust to take the thick girth until she bit the blankets and screamed. Pummeled the bed and kicked, collapsing onto the mattress. Following her down, he shoved the knot deep inside of her and bellowed as the first burning wave of his release jettisoned into her. The searing shock wave rippled through aching flesh.

“Take it,” Lee snarled. Hunched over her back, he wrenched her head aside and barked in her face. “Take my knot!”

Unable to respond through the ragged sobs that tore from her throat, there was no way to appease the angered Alpha after she shook her head in confusion. She couldn't take it any deeper. He was wedged against her cervix, locked tight behind her pelvic bone, every thick surge a burning rush.

There were no more words. Lee growled deep in his chest, aggression rolling off of him in suffocating waves. Lips touched her back seconds before his teeth sunk deep. Dug in, sawing through flesh until blood flowed.

With a shattered scream, understanding came on the first twisted swell of shock. Vicious, demented memories roiling through her mind, every muscle locked tight before she convulsed through another tide of

agony. Too much like the moments Gerry had inflicted unbearable pain to give him what he wanted from an unwilling body.

Her cunt squeezed his knot in a vice like grip as she writhed, milking the next spray of come. Ushering it deep inside of her body as he made monstrous noises above her.

Not until gray edged her vision and she began to gag on her sobbing breaths did he relent. Knot still locked inside of her, binding them together, he collapsed on top of her. Crushed her for a too long moment before he rolled to his side, taking her with him and arranging her limbs to his satisfaction as she stared at the wall.

It wasn't long before the knot abated.

He began again, calling to her this time. Pressing his chest against hers as he shoved her into the mattress so she couldn't escape the sound. Until she was lost in it, unable to breathe anything but him and too thick air saturated with pheromones. Unable to feel anything but the insistent resonance that told her she had to please the Alpha. Had to take it and him.

She did, moaning and tangling her limbs around him.

He was only a little gentler. The next was not much better. The last was even worse.

Not until Quinn was limp and ragged, his cock lying sated against his thigh, did he rise. Gathering his clothes, he left the room without a backward glance.

He'd gotten what he'd come for.

With a force of will she hadn't been certain she had, Quinn dragged herself from the bed. Chest crumbling in on itself, heavy pulses of virulent crimson spread through her veins, infecting her limbs until she trembled and broke out in a cold sweat. Managing to stumble into the shower, she rinsed away the worst of the slime coating her, scrubbing away the tacky white crust from her bruised thighs.

She didn't even cry when she viewed the remnants of her nest. She was hollow, the miserable throb filling her up one corrosive surge at a time until she was sure her skin would fall away in frayed tatters. Going to the large closet, she pulled clean linens down and stacked them beside the bed. Within minutes, she restored order. Quinn pulled away the more offensive sheets and blankets to be laundered, the rest buried under the thickest, softest offerings.

He'd be angry if she removed it all, a protest to his presence and scenting of her nest. A quiet sniff was all she allowed herself before she pulled on a robe with shaking hands and headed to the nursery. Elise would quiet the raging turmoil, would soothe all her hurts.

Quinn snarled and flew across the room as she opened the nursery door, snatching the babbling Elise up from the floor. Tucking the startled baby against her chest, she backed away from the too large male that remained on his knees.

"I would never harm her, *kroshka*." Ilya sat back on his heels, hands splayed on his knees as if in surrender.

"Don't you ever fucking touch her," Quinn hissed, not stopping until she was wedged into the far corner.

"Her diaper needed changing and then she was not so tired. She likes the blocks."

"You do not come in here!"

"She likes me. She smiles at me."

"Ever!" Quinn slid down the wall towards the door, refusing to turn her back on the Alpha, her steps hurrying as he began to frown. She turned and would have ran when something dangerous sparked into existence in the frigid blue of his gaze if he hadn't caught her shoulder and pulled her back.

"He's claimed you?"

Emotions she couldn't begin to fathom worked across his rough features as Quinn stared at him, teeth bared and a threatening growl rattling through her chest.

"He only bit me. What? You pissed he might have gotten in before you got a chance at it?" Quinn jerked her shoulder hard, jostling Elise into a fit of squealing tears that helped nothing. "Why don't you just come for it during her next nap, or did you tell him about that one, too?"

Ilya's hand fell away, and Quinn's smile was a bitter, jagged thing that cut them both. She had become complacent with him, allowed him to invade her life in this lofty prison until she'd forgotten what he was. Lee's muscle, his right hand in all things needing a heavy fist.

And in watching one Omega, telling Lee of all her habits.

Turning on her heel, she stalked back to her bedroom. Slammed the door shut and tried not to burst into tears as she soothed Elise with

broken purrs.

She failed when the door swung open. Her first thought was that Lee was not finished with her, fearing his sudden return. The tears and pleas began at once, all of it tumbling out in a jumbled rush that grated her raw nerves and made the insistent agony pounding in her chest explode. The too much sensation, vision doubled and blurred, brought her to her knees. Blackness engulfed her, serrated and ugly as it tore through her with an intent she didn't understand.

Long seconds ticked by until she could see the mixture of horror and concern painted over Ilya's craggy face. He knelt inches away, holding her steady with a crushing grip on her shoulders.

By some miracle, Elise remained safe in her arms.

"Breathe, Quinn," Ilya said, the sandpaper texture of his voice all the worse as he pet at her with rough strokes. Wide palm smoothing back her hair, cupping her neck, squeezing her shoulder hard, it was as if he had to reassure himself she was still whole and there.

Slumping, the first breath was ragged, choking her with the cool sip of air.

She hadn't realized she had stopped.

Once she had calmed, Elise subsiding into her own wet snuffles, Ilya moved closer. Nuzzling her cheek and ignoring the way she stiffened, he purred. The sound was as ragged as her gasp when he wrapped an arm around her, bringing her hips flush. Free hand settling on Elise's belly, his fingers were soft as he quieted her.

"You do not need what he gives you to be happy. I would be good to you in all the ways that matter to you, *kroshka*."

"He'll kill me if he catches you."

"*Net*, he will not. You have too much value alive." Ilya grunted, a huff of caustic air against her neck before he whispered against her ear. "Be mine alone, and I will collect on a debt that is owed. No harm will ever come to you."

"Why do any of you even want me?"

"He wants you because you are Omega, *da*? Proven fertile, not tied to family, obligations. The blooded Omegas that would spread without so much as a pout, much comes with them."

"Why do you want me then?" Careful not to disturb Elise, Quinn pulled away. Shuffling back on her knees until she could look at Ilya

without having to crane her neck or be engulfed in his scent and heat. The downward twitch of her eyebrows brought his purring to an end.

“You are strong in ways they do not even guess at. I have watched since you were brought here. Have seen you do much, for her,” he said, nodding at Elise. “And for you, to stay alive.”

“So because I’ve proven that I’ll spread for any male that promises not to kill me anytime soon, for that you want me?”

Teeth flashing, the icy blue of his gaze fixed on Quinn’s. There was no growl, no true snarl, but he made his displeasure known in the clipped timbre of his voice. “You survive. You know how many Omegas last this long away from their mate?”

“Don’t.”

“They become weak, frail in days. Damaged in a matter of weeks.”

“Stop.”

“Pregnant?” Ilya barked a cruel laugh, grating and hoarse. “They are destroyed within a month. No use. Dead inside.”

“Please,” Quinn whined. Cuddling Elise closer, she backed away in an awkward scramble until her back met the bed. “Please stop!”

“And you. You come raped, beaten, swollen with child, and you stood proud against a pack of Alphas. *Da*, you spread for him. You keep alive, keep your *malyshka* alive.”

Following her, caging her against the frame with arms braced on either side of her hips, Ilya leaned down until they were level. A rumble emanated from his chest, a rockslide of intent that slipped roughshod down her spine. Heavy, rich, intoxicating.

“Beautiful for that alone, but the smell of you... Ah, *kroshka*.” Bending lower still, he pressed his lips against her ear, words a breath of a whisper. “Every night I fuck my fist thinking of you. Squeeze my knot so tight it hurts, just like I imagine you would.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you,” Quinn hissed pushing at his chest with ineffectual fingers until the male relented and fell back with an exaggerated huff and a wicked grin. Crawling up onto the bed, she tucked Elise into the nest, purr stilted and tight.

“She does not know the words we speak.”

“Go away.”

Ilya didn’t leave. He sat by the bed, mindful not to touch any of the careful arrangement of blankets and sheets. As Quinn curled around

her daughter in a protective circle, he watched with an intensity she didn't want. Tucking her cheek close to Elise's downy hair, she settled them for rest.

And then he began to purr. Loud and bold, it resonated through the room. Worked through her bones, swept away the stiffness and rattled a sigh loose from her lungs. No less effected, Elise yawned and gurgled before drifting off with a smile.

"Rest, *kroshka*."

"He'll be back."

"I will wake you."

Nodding, Quinn let her eyes slip shut, wondering when she had come to trust the brutality and violence that was Ilya.

Days bled into weeks, repeating much of the same.

Quinn made sure to turn the monitors on long before Lee was due to arrive, that Elise was settled and ready for sleep when his sleek black car pulled into the drive. She knew she couldn't repeat those first awful moments again.

It was easier to bend, to accept.

To adapt.

Lee was no more gentle with her than he had been the first time. As if with Elise's birth, he felt he no longer had to be careful of Quinn's far more delicate body. His calls were brief, not even enough to get her wet. Foreplay had become a thing of the past.

She solved that problem, too.

Saving the worst of the soiled sheets from his previous assaults, she buried her nose in the heady scent, sucking in deep breaths as she fingered her pussy until slick flowed and sheened her thighs. By the time he stalked into her bedroom, she was ready for him.

By day she leapt from loving mother to depraved whore without batting an eyelash. At night she cuddled her daughter close while the Alpha who became more eager with every passing week purred over them. It was a strange and razor sharp balance, but she managed it with a skill that surprised her. She knew how to play the part of the whore, to smile and present no matter how sickened she was by the thought of it. She'd been taught that lesson under Alton's thumb.

Learning to be a mother... that was by far the more difficult part. It was one she undertook with glee, finding new ways to love her daughter every day. Every smile, every delicate snore. Even if it did sometimes hurt thinking of a little boy who had laughed with the same unadulterated wonder at the world, who had clutched her just as close.

What she couldn't deal with was Ilya. His smiles and long looks, the way he had taken to playing with Elise every chance he was given. How he helped her tend the multitude of small wounds Lee riddled her body with and cooked her favorite meals.

Not once did he touch her in an inappropriate way. Didn't even call to her.

Instead he purred, petting her and coddling Elise when the agony in Quinn's chest tumbled free. Wiped the cold sweat from her face with soft cloths and held her hair when she became violently ill. She'd blacked out more than once.

Above all, though, he talked.

Whatever dam had broken that day, words flowed from him in a never ending river. Maybe it had even happened before that and she hadn't noticed it, but he was a wealth of knowledge and information that no one else had ever deigned to give her.

He told her about the people of Highriver and how their cruel games worked, what part each dynamic played. An Omega's role in it all was horrible. They weren't even pawns in the games these people played. They were snatched up or spirited off as soon as they presented their dynamic, swapped around and bred until they were dried up and useless. Males and females both. There were actual punishments for those rare Alphas who couldn't control themselves and mated one.

Every day brought some new bit of information, a new game, a new something to keep her attention. Ilya kept her occupied as much as he could and purred for her when his little distractions no longer held the gray wall of agony at bay.

Chapter 5

“You’re saying that, because of the claim, I’ll always...” Quinn stared out the window, blind to the bright summer day as her words drowned in horror, stealing her breath with the shock of icy finality.

“*Da*, always. But it is not so bad as that, is it?”

“You tell me I have to let an Alpha use me for the rest of my life because of what *he* did to me, and you say it’s not that bad?” Quinn tried to scoff, the sound thick and wet as she fought back tears.

Sitting in the nursery with Elise testing her strength to make wobbling pushups, Ilya guarding the door, Quinn couldn’t imagine a more surreal moment.

He had told her of mates and the bond, explained to her why it felt like her insides were being ripped apart. Why the dreams came, why Kahler invaded her senses when she was most vulnerable. Ilya said Kahler was searching for her. That he was coming closer to finding her. She’d refused to accept such bullshit, but now she wondered. Hadn’t it become so much worse when Kahler had found her with Alton?

Now with the mother of all injustices dumped into her lap, she was bereft. That Kahler’s actions would cause her to feel this for the rest of her life if she didn’t either stay with a man like Lee or let another Alpha claim her was beyond unfair. And not just any other Alpha, but a stronger one. One that could take that bond, make it his own.

Make Quinn his own.

Of course, Ilya thought he could be that man.

“He will be back soon,” Ilya said as he came into the nursery.

So much power and aggression descending into the sunny space should have terrified her, but it soothed the discordant jangle of her nerves. As Elise tumbled to her back, Quinn tickled her cheeks and watched the massive male hunker down to tease her daughter.

“You need to get ready.” He was careful not to look at her when he said it, crystalline gaze fixed on Elise while he straightened her onesie. Catching her kicking feet to pull tiny socks back up from where they dangled by her precious toes.

Quinn made a low noise of negation, pushing up to her knees and scooping Elise into her arms. She was close enough to Ilya to feel the searing heat of him, the warm scent of cinnamon and something strong that she couldn't name invading her as she stood a little closer.

Refusing to look at him, she went to the crib and settled Elise, humming over her as her eyes began to flutter and slip shut. When satisfied Elise was well on her way to true sleep, Quinn canted her chin at Ilya and made her way out of the nursery. Never taking her eyes from his as she led him, she felt her way out into the hall until her shoulders met the wall beside her door.

"What game are you playing at, *kroshka*?"

"You're so confident that Lee won't hurt me if I choose you. Why is that?"

"A debt, as I told you."

"What debt?"

"You don't know what you ask."

"Don't I? Tell me."

"Why are you doing this?" Ilya came closer, palms settling on the wall above Quinn's shoulders. He kept his body back, careful not to touch. Wary of putting his scent anywhere on her.

It only served to confirm her suspicions.

"I want to know."

"You do not."

"You don't know for certain, do you," Quinn asked, accusing as she tilted her head all the way back to keep his gaze as he loomed over her.

"I do."

The surge of aggression, of sheer rage, that slammed against her from those two simple words made her flinch. It clogged her throat with bitter ash and burning embers that she cowered from on instinct alone. Every nerve on high alert to the angry male that drifted closer.

"Stop," Quinn whispered as Ilya came ever closer, the wide breadth of his chest pinning her against the wall as he bent down. He no longer kept that margin of safety between them. The reverberating growl edged in crackling ice, so cold it burned its way down her spine as it plunged terror into her veins.

"You want to play games, *kroshka*? You should know the rules beforehand."

Before she could think of a response, Ilya had her up in the air. Pushed against the wall to feel the full depth of his continuing growl of constrained rage, he hooked her legs around his hips, cradling her ass in his large hands. Grinding her into the wall, shoving the heavy threat straining the fly of his pants against her.

Quinn's mouth opened on a scream that Ilya swallowed down with a low groan of need. Forcing his way in, devouring her with lips and tongue and teeth. One hand came to her chin when she tried to turn away, pinching the skin of her cheeks between her teeth as she tried to bite his violating tongue.

Then she was falling, stopping short of slamming into the floor as his strong arm shifted to her back with ease. Cradled her to him as Ilya shoved her legs closed so he could straddle them. His other hand free now, he groped at her breasts. Pinched and pulled at her nipples through the soft cotton of her top. All the while he assaulted her with a violent kiss that would not end.

When he pulled away to push his face against her neck, Quinn's breathy squeal was lost under his guttural moan. Eyes rolling in search of some imagined rescue or weapon, Quinn sobbed when she saw he'd brought her into her bedroom, the door closed and locked. Hunched over to mouth her chest, nipping at tender flesh, he made low sounds of pleasure.

Her scream was muffled by his palm when he began to rut against her.

It was only a handful of seconds before he became dissatisfied. Yanking at her shirt and the bra beneath, he shoved his face into her neck and snarled when her body jerked from the force of ripping fabric. Fisting the seam of her pants, he tore the stretchy cotton in one firm pull.

The back of his hand smacked against her thighs as the horrifying jingle of his belt cut through her muted shrieks and the sounds of flesh meeting from Quinn's fists pummeling at his head and shoulders. Ilya kept on as if he noticed none of it, teeth scraping against her neck. Settling his bulk over her, his cock smeared a slimy trail of need against her mound and stomach. Catching her wrists in one hand when she tried to claw at his face and pinning them above her head, Ilya took his palm from her mouth only to replace it with his mouth. Swallowing

her sounds of terror and rage, forcing her to take in the lewd cacophony of his pleasure.

Trying to bring her knees up into his balls bought violence of another kind. The call rumbling through his chest shot down her spine, wrapping around her hips and curling through her stomach. Heat bloomed through her chest as Ilya moved his whole body against her. Leaking more over the softness of her skin, pumping pheromones into the air, he rubbed his scent all over her.

The second she faltered, he redoubled his assault. The unceasing growl vibrated against her skin, through every raw nerve, confusing overwrought senses. Her hands pushed, then pulled, uncertain. Slick gathered in the plumping red folds of her pussy. Flesh slippery, enticing the male above her no matter the way her head whipped back and forth in denial against the floor. With his hands free, Ilya mounded the flesh of her breast, thumb and index rolling the taut peak, the rough calluses of his fingers scraping over the tender flesh.

“Ah, *kroshka. Krasivaya*,” Ilya said through the prolonged rumble, tucking his feet beneath her legs to keep them closed when she struggled to open to him. Licking at her lips, sucking at her tongue, he slapped his hips against hers, hard shaft jabbing at the soft skin of her stomach. A mockery of the actual act, he showed her the power and violence he could give her. “Even more beautiful than I imagined.”

“No, no, stop,” Quinn whined despite her fingers threading through his silvered hair. Pulling him back to her, she tasted the salt of her tears on his lips.

“Again. Tell me how much you want me to stop. Scream it for me.” Ilya snarled, wrenching her head aside to bare her shoulder to him. The sharp edge of his teeth found the smooth patch of skin between neck and shoulder opposite the mangled scar that Kahler had left her with. Dug in hard, but not enough to break the skin.

Quinn screamed, but not to deny him. Spine bowing, she pressed into his violent thrusts. Nails raking down his back, she bucked and writhed under the oppressive weight. Keened when his mouth released her shoulder. Strands of pale blonde hair sticking to damp cheeks, she bared her teeth.

With the quick grace that only an Alpha possessed, he moved his large body over her, straddling her ribs. Hands tangling in her hair, he

pulled her up to meet a quick snap of his hips. Plunged deep into her mouth and started down her throat while Quinn choked and slapped at his thighs. His angle was wrong, no matter that she struggled to take him. The pungent flavor of cinnamon and anise flooded over her tongue as he bathed her mouth with his excitement. His taste overloading her senses, drowning her in the rich musk of a dominant Alpha.

“Good, *kroshka*. Show me how much you want it.” Groaning, he forced more of his cock into her. “Choke on it.”

There were no rules to remember with Ilya, no hidden risks. The danger Ilya offered was clear, overt in its threat. Fingers clawing at the muscular slabs of his thighs, Quinn did just as he demanded. Coughing and sputtering as the thick shaft forced her throat to stretch around him, pupils blown, she succumbed to the primal euphoria. Swallowing around his pulsing cock, she was desperate to drink down more of the heady fluid he pumped into her burning throat.

The shrieking agony that clawed at her sternum and pulsed through her limbs in livid red washes quieted at once.

It was easier to submit to the male, to allow this to happen. If in return that pain ceased for just one blinding, silent moment, it was worth it to Quinn. Calmed in a way that she never found with Lee, she accepted Ilya with her mouth held open wide to the jerky snap of his hips. Licked his shaft as his hand shuttled up and down his length, urging more of that incredible taste to wash over her tongue.

Already the knot was swelling at his base, growing fat and hard as he jammed it against Quinn’s lips and bellowed a roar that shuddered through her bones. Squeezing his knot in a tight fist, the first thick offering shot straight down into her belly.

Quinn choked as it overflowed her mouth despite her working throat. Searing ribbons of milky fluid seeped down her cheeks, chin, bathing her in his come as Ilya continued to pump out more. It seemed it would never end, the next as heavy and thick as the last, before he pushed his white knuckled grip above the knot. Squeezing off the copious flow until it tapered into a thin trickle, he growled and grunted above Quinn, still working his cock between her spread lips into the well of white she tried to swallow down.

“That’s right, *kiska*. Drink that Alpha cream,” Ilya said with a groan as he pulled away. Rising to his feet, boots planted on either side of her hips, he towered above Quinn. Heat consumed his crystalline gaze as he took in the sight of her, still sputtering on his come.

Fingers halfway to her lips, Quinn realized what she was doing. What she had done. She found the weight of his palm pressing her flat when she tried to sit up, the hazy warmth of his need still infecting his gaze as he caught her eyes.

“He’ll be back soon. Go wash.” Picking her up from the floor as if her weight was nothing to him, he wrapped his fingers around her hips and pointed her to the bathroom. Tightening his grip until Quinn flinched, Ilya leaned down to whisper in her ear. “You do not wash your mouth, *da*? Taste me while he fucks you. Think of me while he leaves you wanting.”

Tongue a dead thing in her mouth, lying flat and useless, she waited until he gave her a small push towards the other room. Steps too quick, almost a run, she didn’t even care if she was exciting the male. Rushing into the shower, she cranked the taps on full. Quinn swallowed the cry of shock as the cold water needled her flushed skin and snatched up the soap.

There was no telling how much time had passed, how long he had fucked her throat before coming. Frantic, she scrubbed at her stomach and thighs, nails dragging across her skin to remove the trails of his slimy leavings.

What the fuck had she done?

Seeing the tremble in her hand as she mauled her breasts to rid them of the scent of Ilya’s lips, she tried to understand. All his gentle persuasion, the quiet moments and that damned purr of his, had culminated into more of the same treatment she’d suffered from Alphas. Thrown down, used, and left to deal with the aftermath alone. And now she had to somehow manage to face Lee knowing he would kill her, could hurt Elise, if he ever found out.

Tears mingled with the water, getting lost in the warming spray.

She had to get the scummy film from her tongue before she puked.

Turning on a reckless, soapy heel, she croaked a shriek.

Lee raised an eyebrow at the wide-eyed panic she faced him with, tossing his shirt aside with a careless flick of his wrist. The clear glass

panel parted to allow him entry, his presence taking up too much space. Too much air sucked out of the large cubicle with the aura of violence that forever surrounded him. Lungs working to pull in a full breath that would be nothing but a faint gasp, she tried to make her lips move, to utter the pleas that hung ripe on her tongue.

“Did I scare you, pet?” Lee smiled, arrogant and satisfied with the thought he inflicted fear upon the weak. Even her. He held the smirk as he reached down to cup her pussy. Whatever he had intended, his brows bounced once in surprise as he dipped a finger between the still plump folds. Smearing her slick around, he grazed her clit before pushing his finger in. Swirling the digit around, a low rumble worked its way through his chest as he felt how wet she was.

And she was wet. Slick flowed like a river down her thighs, mixing with the water to flood the enclosure with the sweet scent before spiraling down the drain. Horror flickered into existence as he leaned down, that smiling mouth coming towards her. She turned with palms braced against the cool tiles, whining low in her throat as she presented her ass to him. Quinn added what she hoped was an enticing wiggle when Lee paused for a too long moment.

“I need you inside me,” Quinn whispered with her forehead tight against the wall, praying he would only smell the delicate floral scent of her soap. “Please, Lee.”

Not until he had pulled her up, large hands supporting her spread thighs as he crushed her to the tile and pushed deep inside of her, did Quinn release the faltering breath she had been holding. She fought to keep her mouth shut tight as her moans excited Lee even further. Face to the wall, sandy lines of grout scoring her cheek, she arched her back and trilled for the Alpha as he moved his swollen cock in and out of her in an impatient rhythm.

Even when she came hard around his knot without Lee’s coercion, she bit down hard enough to draw blood from her tongue to keep the open-mouthed cry to herself. Swallowing the thin trickle of copper, she tasted cinnamon and anise.

Lee left her in the bathroom. A rough hand down her side a token gesture of praise before he abandoned her to clean up.

Shivering hard enough her teeth chattered, she went through the motions. Cleaning yet another man’s scent from her. Skin rubbed raw,

gums abraded from her toothbrush, she remained under the spray until her fingers pruned and the water began to turn icy.

Stumbling from the shower, she climbed into the first piece of clothing that came to hand. The surprise of not finding the items Ilya had ripped from her body didn't register under the shock of what had happened. All she could grasp in the shifting sands of her panicked mind was that Lee hadn't noticed. Quinn held that thought close as she peeked out into the hallway then scurried across the hall to collect Elise. Prayed to the Gods she was right as she carried her daughter to the nest, burying them under layers of blankets within the supple walls that offered little sanctuary.

Curled around Elise, purring and humming to keep her quiet, Quinn drifted into a foggy haze that was neither waking nor sleeping, but an odd jumble of sensations that lulled her mind into a sluggish state.

The shadows had lengthened, taking over the room beyond her burrow. Not quite full dark, the golden-reds of sunset limned the furniture and added a dusky warmth under the pile of blankets. Hours had passed, but once Quinn had Elise settled, she refused to emerge. No one had come to bother them, and so she hid. Not until she had fed Elise and watched her drift off into a deep slumber did Quinn's hunger demand attention. The vicious growl of her stomach insisted she find something.

Creeping from the bed so as not to wake Elise, Quinn tiptoed to the door. Stealth had become a second nature in this house, and so she made it all the way down the hall and to the stairs without notice. Seeing the light on in Lee's office, bare toes gripped the plush runner as she ground to a halt. Quinn thought long and hard about turning around and returning to the nest. She'd gone to bed hungry before.

She'd also been well fed for too long since then. The empty ache hovering beneath her bellybutton clenched, refusing to be ignored a moment longer.

With even more care, she began to pass through the thin beam of light stabbing through the darkness of the hall. The voices from inside pulled her up short before she'd taken that first silent step.

"What use is a broken Omega to you?" Ilya's voice was thick with his accent, showing irritation where his tactful words did not.

“She’s hardly broken,” Lee said, distracted as the shuffle of papers drifted out into the hall.

“She will be. Every day is harder.”

“Then perhaps you need to keep her more distracted.”

Quinn’s eyes went wide, lips parting as terror sluiced through her veins and froze her heart. He knew. Lee had known all along what Ilya was doing and he had not only allowed it but encouraged it. He sanctioned what Ilya had done to her.

“What more do you wish? I talk to her, teach her, feed her. I even keep the *malyshka* occupied.” Ilya made a low sound, a grating rattle of disgust. “I do all these things you now withhold from her. You want to claim her, why do you refuse it?”

“I do not now, nor have I ever had, an inclination to tie myself to some bitch. I’m not going to ruin my life because of some base instinct that’s yet to evolve out of our gene pool.” Papers slapped against the desk, a crack of sound that made Quinn flinch. “She’s unattached to any of the founding families, she has no loyalties with any of them. I do not owe them, and they’re all still sitting nice in my pocket. I’ll get the bloodline I need and a tight cunt to fuck. Couldn’t have asked for a better opportunity than when that idiot threw her in my lap.”

“Her Alpha is dangerous to him. Rippin would not have done so otherwise.”

“I am her Alpha,” Lee snarled. The stutter of wood had Quinn frowning until she heard the distinctive screech of the chair sliding back home. Now Lee paced, his shoes making an agitated staccato against the floor.

“No, my friend, you are not. You deny yourself the claim.” Wood creaked, and Quinn could imagine Ilya shifting his bulk in the sturdy chair facing Lee’s desk. “Let me do it for you.”

“And here we are again. Why are you so enamored of her?”

“She is strong. She bends, does not break.”

“And that’s all there is to it?”

“You know why that is important.”

“She’ll never be Agatha to you.”

“And she will never be the breeder you want. We both accept what we are given.” Ilya heaved a long sigh, the chair groaning under his

weight. “I will claim her during her next heat. You will breed her. We both get what we want.”

“You’re just going to let me breed your bitch?” Lee’s laugh was twisted, as if he enjoyed the prospect more than questioned it.

“We come to an agreement, *da?* It will not be the first time.”

Lee’s considering murmur sent Quinn’s panicked heart back into motion. Slamming against her ribs, she swore they would be able to hear it as she strained to listen over the rapid pounding in her ears.

“—the sooner the better,” Ilya was saying. “I do not wish to wait much longer.”

“Hadler says a few weeks.”

“So you did ask the doctor.”

“Yes, I asked,” Lee said, tone somewhere between amused and aggravated, as if he didn’t understand his own actions. “He also says I should wait until she weans the girl. Too damn impatient for that, even if it is only another month to be safe. I need one with my blood in her belly.”

“I will hire someone for the child.” Ilya rumbled a satisfied growl, the change in pitch and groan of wood having him standing up. “We induce her heat with birth control, and I will claim her. Then again immediately after so that you might you breed her. This will work.”

“I’ll get someone for the kid.”

“My mate should be—”

“The kid’s mine on paper. I plan on keeping her. Once she’s given me a spare, you can give her something else to fuss over.”

Hand gripping her mouth to silence her ragged breaths, Quinn backed away from the door with trembling care. When the rigid beam of light flickered as someone walked in front of the door inside the office, she turned and ran. Quiet as a mouse, she scurried back to her room. Dove under the blankets and woke Elise in the process, attempting to soothe them both with ragged purrs and broken hums that did nothing to calm them.

She would die before she let them take Elise and might very well have her way if she fought hard enough. That would leave Elise alone with these monsters though. The idea of her sweet baby under Lee’s care was enough to make her stomach churn and roil, threatening to send her running to the bathroom.

Muffling the wracking sobs into the thick bedding, she cuddled her daughter close and tried to find some way out. A way that didn't involve her dead, her daughter being raised by a murderer.

Nothing came.

There was no way to run from this place, not with Ilya watching her every waking moment and the other Alphas wandering the property. And even if she did, what was she supposed to do? There was nowhere for her to go, no one she could trust. An Omega alone and without suppressants was bad enough. One with a child? She'd be easy prey for any number of predators out there.

She'd been the most ridiculous sort of idiot to have trusted Ilya. She should have known better. Should have remembered it was him who had started in on her the moment Alton left her alone. If she had just fought him...

Those thoughts did not help her find any solutions. As the many ways she had fucked up and the multitude of mistakes she'd made added up to insurmountable levels in her mind, she cried until there were no more tears left. Trembled until even Elise drifted off again.

She closed her eyes and prayed for something to happen.

The warmth sliding up her thigh shocked her out of the daze, eyes flying open. She had only just closed them, but darkness shrouded her burrow. The plaintive keen slipped past her raw lips. Knees pulling up, Quinn tucked Elise against her body, curling around the sleeping infant.

Whether it was Lee returned for more or Ilya to finish what he had started, she couldn't do it. Not now that she knew what they planned for her. Unable to plaster the smile across her face, to soften under the male's touch, she wept and held her daughter close.

"Shh, little bird." His voice flowed over her senses, a comforting rumble that infected her mind, her limbs. It calmed the agony clawing under her ribs into a dull ache before erasing it altogether. Heat enveloped her back, sat snug along her spine and tucked in against her thighs. Rich and spicy, his scent suffused her as the weight of an arm curled over her side.

It was impossible. It was insane.

She soaked it in like a flower reaching for the sun.

It didn't matter that it was Kahler. Quinn didn't care that she hated him. The only thing of consequence was for just that briefest moment, she felt safe. She couldn't explain why she would feel that way. Why he, of all people, could engender that reaction. Warmth flowing through her, surrounding her, she let out a faltering sigh as her tears trickled to a stop.

"I have you, I'm here." Pressure along her neck, nudging aside the tangled length of her hair to kiss along the scarred breadth of her shoulder. The weight of his hand settled over her hip, the firm grip gentle and comforting. An anchor in the tempest of misery she found herself in.

"No, you don't." Voice little more than a hoarse croak, she curled into the pocket of absurd heat anyhow. Drowned herself in that decadent scent as she wrapped herself and Elise in the comforting embrace. "You're not real."

"I am, sweetness." As if to prove it, the smooth timbre tripped down Quinn's spine, resonated through her bones. Rich and full, loud enough to block everything else out, he purred for them. Even Elise murmured in her sleep, pouty lips stretching into a soft smile as she snuggled closer.

"You're not," Quinn whispered into the humid darkness. No matter that the bond was humming, gentle and sweet, where it always twisted in pain. She knew he wasn't there, that this was just one more step into the madness that infected her. The reason Ilya wanted to claim her soon. "You're not here and they're going to hurt her."

"I won't let them, sweetness." So confident, arrogant in his surety. The purr held the rough edge of a growl, a promise of violence against those who would harm what was his.

It didn't matter if she was just a thing to him. He'd keep Elise safe, his own flesh and blood. While not a good man, never a good mate to her, he wasn't Lee. He had never flaunted the death and chaos that Lee held so dear. "If what he said is true... If this is the bond and you can... Please come and save her. Don't let them raise her."

"You can't give up now, Quinn. Be strong for me, little bird."

"I'll die before I let them take her from me. Get here before she forgets who I was." Resigned, bereft, but certain of her decisions for

once in her life, Quinn brushed a kiss against Elise's soft curls and closed her eyes once more.

Tobias shot up from the chair with a vicious roar. Chest heaving, his eyes darted around the dim room in search of the source of the delectable sweetness that still clung to him. Lavender and spun sugar, he could taste Quinn on his lips even now. Not finding her as the hotel's strange furnishings came into focus, he bellowed his rage. The heavy chair he'd fallen into, exhausted and drained after days of endless searching, came under his hands to fly across the room.

The crack of shattering wood and the hiss of ripping cloth did nothing to appease his fury.

Her words that had been so clear in the dream were fading, the names and places she had whispered drifting into a murky fog that became more incoherent the harder he tried to recall them. She had been terrified, but that hadn't been new. No, the resolve and despair had been different. She was prepared for something terrible. Something she felt would end with a finality.

"Tobias!" Curtis rushed into the room then shoved his back against the wall. Hands raised and chin aside, he bared his throat to the threat of the angered Alpha who stalked towards him. Far quieter, bordering on hesitant, he continued. "They still can't find him, but we have new footage from the toll road and information about what direction he went. There are possible sightings, but... they're months old, but it could be her."

Tobias struggled to control his breathing, to make the low growl abate as he stared at his second. It took a long moment for the words to sink in.

They had information on that bastard Rippin and where he had taken Quinn.

"Where?"

"The footage shows the truck—"

"Where is she, Gods dammit!" A menacing step taken, clenched fists trembled at his sides as he tried to hold back the need to hit something.

“It’s only a chance, Tobias. It might not be—”

“Where,” Tobias roared in Curtis’ face, grabbing the rumpled white of his shirt and hauling him up. Slamming Curtis to the wall, Tobias snarled. “Tell me where she is!”

“Highriver,” Curtis said in a wheeze. Remaining slack in the Alpha’s violent grip, head down and aside, he sought to calm. “The sightings of a pregnant Omega matching her description were in Highriver.”

“How am I only hearing about this now?” Tobias dropped Curtis, stalking stride carrying him around the room. “That’s only a three, maybe four day drive from Alderbrook! How has no one mentioned this before?”

Curtis sputtered a cough, heaving a deep breath before he answered. “The Alpha in control there, a man named Lee Grimes, he keeps a tight rein on the people coming and going from the city. One of our operatives didn’t check in and then never returned. We think he was found out. Another was sent, and it’s taken him this long to get information out. It’s... it’s not good, Tobias.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“He said she’s under that Alpha’s control.” Curtis didn’t cringe as Tobias whirled on him, didn’t even flinch when the enraged Alpha came towards him and slammed a fist against the wall.

“Get Rey on the line,” Tobias ground out between clenched teeth, shoving his fist further into the wall so as not to choke Curtis. Wanting to silence the words that still hung heavy in the air between them, he stared hard at the cracks forming in the plaster. White dust mixed with his blood to seep down the wall in thick rivulets.

He’d demand a shipment. Rey could figure out how to get it to him in Highriver, because damned if Tobias would wait. He’d go ahead, take a fucking army of his men. He’d lay waste to the whole fucking city if he had to.

He’d make them all bleed.

“Sir, are you sure—”

“I said get Rey on the fucking line,” Tobias roared. And now he couldn’t hold himself back, hand wrapped around Curtis’ throat, lifting him from the ground until their eyes were level. The low growl in his

chest wouldn't stop, growing louder, rougher, with every breath. "Get him on the fucking phone!"

Curtis twitched his head in a nod of assent, his dark umber skin turning a bruise tinged purple before Tobias all but threw him towards the open door. Lesser Alphas and Betas milled beyond, agitated with Tobias' lack of control. He didn't give a damn, slamming the door on their wary eyes.

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Chapter 6

Eyes snapping open the moment he entered her room, Quinn remained frozen as she listened to the heavy footfalls coming closer to the bed. She didn't flinch when the thick duvet was pulled back to reveal the warm burrow she'd created. Turning bloodshot eyes up in the weak half-light of early morning, she regarded Lee with dispassionate grays.

The murky brown of his eyes narrowed as he took her in. Curled tight around Elise, face blotchy and tear stained, she no doubt looked a wreck. Kahler's voice was still ringing in her ears, his scent thick on her tongue. Even trying to tell herself it was just a dream, a hint of the insanity that awaited her, she found herself hoping that Ilya had told her some truths. That Kahler would hear her in those moments, would know somehow.

Would come get Elise and keep her safe.

The moments seemed to stretch, melding into hours that passed in the blink of an eye. They stared at each other, something passing between them that Quinn wasn't sure she understood. She didn't recoil when he climbed into the bed. Let him arrange her body to suit him, only fussing over Elise when she made sleepy sounds of protest.

Forcing her body to relax, concentrating on each muscle to ease it into stillness, she cuddled with the man who would hand her over to another. That planned on taking her daughter.

He'd promised her he wouldn't do that. Smiled through the lie as he assured her that Elise was hers alone. Cheek pressed against his chest, she breathed him in and remained quiet. She had no idea how much time passed like that. Her pressed against his side, Elise tucked between them. The light brightened, losing the misty quality of dawn and easing into true morning.

Her breasts began to ache, and Elise started to rouse. It was her cue to slide from the bed, out from under Lee's heavy arm, to pad on silent feet to the nursery with Elise in her arms. Once seated in the rocking chair after Elise's morning ritual, her daughter sucking in noisy fits, Quinn took her first true breath.

Staring out at the morning light coming through the large windows, she saw none of the beauty in the brilliant green of the trees or the bright blue sky. Hearing nothing of the singing birds, her thoughts went down darker paths.

She was going insane.

The pain, the black outs, the nightmares. They were all getting worse. The few minutes she felt whole were spent with Elise, but with Lee's increasing demands, those moments were becoming few and far between. Now he would hand her off to Ilya to be mated, a convenient breeder without any of the responsibilities. He would take away her daughter and any child of his after that.

And Ilya would allow it.

There was no question she would fight. It was inevitable she would lose. Two Alphas, intent on their demands, would not let one crazed Omega stop them. The only outcomes were that she would die, leaving Elise alone, or they would subdue her and go along with their plans anyhow. Neither was a future she wanted, but as had always seemed the case, she was at their mercy.

Shudder tripping down her spine as she thought of Lee's idea of mercy, she smoothed back the cottony fluff of hair from Elise's forehead. Pushed away the feeling of crackling ice in her belly to smile at the wide eyes staring back at her. Already Elise was looking like Kahler. The promise of the same evergreen gaze blossoming under the blue of infancy, the angle of her nose and brow so like what Quinn could imagine his was as a child.

Like it or not, Kahler would forever be imprinted on Elise.

Humming over Elise, petting her soft skin, Quinn began to think. She may have made the decision of what could very well be her final act, but there was time still. Time to execute some new plan that would alter the course of things.

"I'd do anything for you, sweetheart," Quinn whispered when Elise began to drift off, mouth going slack as sleep pulled at her. Doting on her until she dropped off into a deep sleep, Quinn took another slow breath before putting her into the crib.

She would do anything to save Elise.

Slipping back into the bedroom, she found Lee still drowsing in her bed. Something Ilya had said clicked into place, a plan unfolding to the

quickening thump of her heartbeat.

She could do this. She *would* do this.

Allowing herself one more moment to strangle her nerves down into something contained and bearable, she cocked her head and allowed her gaze to drift over his lounging form. Letting the slow admiration show on her features, Quinn put the hint of a smile on her lips as she walked closer to the bed. A sway in her hips, one perfected under the scrutiny of paying customers at Wicked, she came alongside him. Drawing the corner of her lower lip between her teeth, her attention flicked from the muddy brown of his hooded eyes to the body spread out before her.

Her touch was a question, fingertips gliding in a feathery caress up his leg. Splaying over his thigh to feel the thick muscles, palm skimming over his hip. Another furtive glance showed his brows drifting closer, the beginnings of a frown etching his features. Suspicious, wary of this new attention.

He had every right to be. Skepticism had no place in her plans though.

The fear was natural. Something he enjoyed in their mating. Allowing only a taste of it to taint the air around her was the difficult part. There was no reason for her to be terrified of him, and she couldn't let on that she was. Uncertainty painting the softness of her features she eased onto the bed. A careful hand outstretched, she straddled his thigh and placed her palm against his chest.

"What are you doing?"

The growl edging his voice was unexpected. He was not pleased with her and looking up through her lashes proved the frown had worked its way into a scowl. Fuck, but this was not going as she had hoped.

Instead of answering, she lowered herself onto him. Cautious, every nerve screaming, she laid her body out over him. Unable to stop her hand from trembling, she prayed to the Gods who had never once listened to her to hear her now, that Lee would only see it as her being nervous about seeking his attention. Still, she reached out and took his hand, a gentle tug urging it up. When he allowed his arm to be moved, she slipped it over her back. Pinned herself to him, the limb an anchor to keep her from running away.

Cheek to his chest, she nuzzled him. Inhaled long and deep, taking in his scent. Let it out in a low hum.

“I miss this,” she whispered against his skin, kissing him with each word. Pressing her mouth against him kept her from gagging. Adding a wriggle of her hips, feigning a move to get more comfortable, she slid her thigh against his cock.

“You saying I don’t fuck you enough?” His hand slipped down from her back, taking in the curve of her spine before he palmed her ass. Clenched the soft flesh hard enough to make her grimace as he ground her hips against him.

“I’m saying I miss this.” Straining to keep her voice quiet and body pliant, her fingers played over the bulging muscle of him. Closing her eyes, she licked her lips, tasting him. Swallowed it down with a throaty hum.

Then she acted.

Smaller, lighter, she could move when she wanted to. Legs drawn up, knees digging into the mattress, she straddled his hips. Slid her pussy against his lengthening cock as it wedged between them. A light scratch of her nails down his chest and beyond, digging in at his sides.

“I miss when you paid attention to me. You made me so fucking wet, it was like I was in heat.” Rolling her hips, grinding against him, she purred and let her head fall back. Breathed deep and thought of the dirtiest things she could imagine, ignoring the fact it all came to evergreen eyes and a rumbling growl that made her shiver. Folds growing wet, slick painting the throbbing flesh of his cock, it was all that mattered. “When you fucked me for hours and made me come over and over.”

Tipping her head forward, she saw hesitation in the excitement she’d incited. Refusing to give him a moment of contemplation, she moaned and rocked her hips faster, grinding harder. The smell of slick became thick, suffocating in its sweetness.

“I miss tasting you. I miss you filling me up with your come and staying inside me until you could do it all over again.” A stuttering cry ripped from her throat as Lee angled his hips on her forward thrust, her clit grinding against him. It’d been so long since she’d enjoyed this, had allowed herself to enjoy it. The shock of pleasure was a serrated bolt of electricity arcing up her spine. Bowed over his legs she let out a

shriek as his thumb delved between her spread lips, found the aching nub of her clit and rubbed it in tantalizing circles.

“What else do you miss, pet,” Lee asked on a deep rumble, voice edging into a growl thick with his need. His cock was hard, throbbing, leaking his excitement to smear over her folds and his belly.

“I miss,” Quinn trailed off into a needy groan as his thumb rasped over her aching clit, strumming over the hard bundle of nerves with a slow smile. He liked this, enjoying her daring as she demanded. Inhaling a faltering breath, she rambled on. “I miss you touching me. Showing me off. Showing them what was yours and belonged to no one else.”

Shit! She knew it was the wrong thing to say the second it slipped over her lips. Too much implied in the breathless syllables, knowledge that he would let another touch her now, when before that had not been the case. The simmering lust in his eyes cleared some, the deep brown no longer clouded with heat. In an attempt to distract, she purred low in her throat, leaning down to lick at his chest. Peering up at him through her lashes with a sly smile, she acted as if nothing was wrong.

“Because no one can fuck me as good as you can. No one fills me up like you do.” Trailing the tip of her tongue up his body to place open-mouthed kisses against his neck, Quinn worked her hips. Slid up just enough that his cock breached her so that she could shove back onto it on the next downward motion.

Not aroused enough by half to take him as fast and hard as she did, her moan turned into a strained cry. Body clenching in pained fits, she forced herself further down. Took him deep until she grunted as he punched against her cervix.

A groan stuttered over her lips as Lee pushed against her, driving that much deeper until she ached. Nails scratching at his sides she turned a faltering smile up to him. Pushing up to her knees, she let him slip part of the way out before she sat down hard, doing it all over again.

Clarity gone from his gaze, Lee stared up at her with an all-consuming lust. Large hands folding over her hips, he began to work her up and down his thick cock, bouncing her against his thighs as he used her body to bring him pleasure. Powering inside of her, heedless

of the friction, uncaring that she wasn't ready enough to take the violent pounding he insisted on.

That wasn't the plan. She needed him high on her scent, not just fucking her. She needed it to be like it had been in those first months. Whimpering, pitiful, her spine slumped as she went limp. Head turned aside, Quinn pushed her lower lip out into a delicate pout, refusing to look on the male so eager for her attention.

"Pet," Lee growled, lip lifting in a snarl he didn't bother to silence. Fingers digging into her hard enough to leave marks, he brought her down with enough force to make her squeal in pain.

Despite the way that single word crawled across her skin, making it prickle in a cold sweat, Quinn kept her eyes averted. Endured his grabbing paws with clenched teeth as he mauled at her waist and breasts. She just had to hold out. He'd cave. Every Alpha wanted that look, real or not.

He'd give in to her demands.

He had to.

Quinn screamed, terror sizzling through her veins as he flipped them over. Breath leaving her in a wheezing rush, she wondered if she'd gone too far, pushed him to an edge she hadn't known was imminent. She clutched at the mass of sheets and blankets when he grabbed her ankles and held them high and wide, straining the muscles until they burned. Making more room for his snapping hips, he growled and snarled, violent as he'd ever been.

"You're hurting me," Quinn stammered out, words ragged as he shoved the air from her lungs with each brutal thrust. When he angled her legs up even higher, folding her body under him so he could pound her into the mattress, she turned her teary gaze to the ceiling beyond.

Nothing had changed. He wasn't going to maim or kill her, but this wasn't anything close to the plan. She was just a limp doll for him to fuck. It had been a stupid idea, and she didn't understand why she'd thought it would work in the first place. He didn't have to need her ready and eager. Not to fuck her, not to breed her, not even to bite her.

Lee roared as he fell upon her, fists punching into the mattress on either side of her head hard enough to make Quinn bounce up into his body. Eyes rounded, mouth gaping, her focus snapped to see what new fresh hell was about to be visited upon her.

Then her prayers were answered.

“Gods damn it,” Lee muttered as he buried his nose against her neck, inhaling a ragged breath that he let out in a reverberating groan. Lips hot and wet against her cold skin, he branded her flesh with open-mouthed kisses.

Not able to believe the sudden change at first, Quinn remained docile under him. Not until she felt the first gentle rumblings of his call pressing against her chest, pushing through her body in fiery ribbons of pleasure. A low hum answered his louder offering. Fingers splayed, working out the cramping tension before her hands drifted to his shoulders. Smoothed over his damp skin before she sent her palms skimming over the bunched muscles of his back.

The call was louder now, pulsing through her body, infecting her with simmering heat. It knocked loose her fear, shuttling it into a quiet place to be examined later. Quinn purred and wriggled beneath him, nails dragging low across his back. Gasped as her nipples tightened, rasping against his chest with each breath.

“Mmm, yes. This,” Quinn whispered when Lee pulled back to see her face. Heavy lidded and smiling she brought her hands to his jaw, cupping it to pull him in for a kiss. Her tongue teased over his lips, eager as he opened to her. Dancing, playful, she enticed the Alpha pinning her under his bulk.

“Fuck,” Lee said through a low groan, drawing out the word as Quinn clenched around him.

Gasping as she angled her hips up, pushing against him, she let the call work its way through her. Surrendered to her basest instincts and ignored the smoky taste of his skin on her lips as she worked her mouth against his shoulder. She gave him a quiet whimper as he eased deeper, but not in pain. With each ragged breath of him, each rumble emanating from his chest, she lost a little more of herself. Slick flowed from her pussy, skin slippery as they writhed against each other.

The first thrust was decadent, the second divine. Quinn cried out, forcing her legs wider, muscles trembling as she made room for the Alpha. Whining as he withdrew, moaning as he returned, she urged him on.

It was so very different.

The wet slap of flesh meeting filled the room. The scent of slick and musk heavy in the air until all Quinn could breathe in was pleasure. Hands working in fitful bursts, she ran her palms over bunching muscle, pulled him into her. Showed her teeth when he huffed a low laugh. Dared to snarl when he rose to his knees. Lee's smile was lazy, edged with a violence she understood. Whining, she hooked her legs around his waist, bucking up into him, pumping herself full of his throbbing cock again and again until he growled low in his throat.

Grabbing her legs, he caught her ankles and held them high and wide. Pushed her back until she was folded over again, unable to move away from the heavy pounding of his hips, the brutal force of his cock slamming into her. It didn't hurt this time. Instead Quinn cried out, spine bowing as white hot bliss threaded through her veins, setting her blood on fire. Toes curling as the heat swam low in her belly, pooling in a roiling maelstrom.

"More, more," she pleaded, struggling to touch him, to taste him. Bringing the sweat slicked fingers of her hand to her lips after glancing the tightening muscles of his abdomen, she sucked the thin fluid down and moaned around the digits.

"Fuck, yes, pet," Lee groaned. Then he was over her again, heels perched on his shoulders to keep her angled just so. Swallowing her body with his, he shoved hard and deep with every forward lunge, giving her every inch of him. One hand shoving between them, the action almost clumsy and awkward, he thumbed her clit with rough strokes.

The sudden shock of pleasure pulled a scream from her throat. Quinn bucked and jostled at the too much sensation, his thumb crushing the swollen nub as he pushed her higher. The simmering heat suffused her, crawling under her skin with a staticky jolt. Feverish, sweat soaked hair sticking to her cheeks, Quinn's head thrashed against the bed in denial of the orgasm that barreled towards her with a force that promised to undo her.

"Come for me, pet," Lee husked against her cheek, falling into a growl as he hunched tighter over her. Tucking her body just that bit more, changing the angle a scant inch. Changing everything.

Every slow grind pushed him against her g-spot, the firm pressure blending with the almost painful pleasure from her clit.

It hit her before she expected it, a punch to the solar plexus that stole her scream before she could give it voice. Nerves snapping, synapses misfiring in the sudden rush of pleasure, Quinn shuddered and jumped under the assault. Body clenching, pussy working in wringing contractions, her nails scored his back. A plea to the Alpha to give her what she needed.

She didn't have to wait long.

Lee roared against her cheek as he slammed into her, shoving through her slick tightness in erratic thrusts until he hilted his cock inside of her. The knot swelled, another roar dragged from Lee as it forced Quinn to accommodate it, to accept it and all it promised. The first jettison's force was felt, the second and third so hot it was like a brand, searing her insides. Lee groaned on top of her, his lips working against her collar and shoulder, scraping his teeth against her neck as each heavy spurt filled her up.

Panting as her body clutched at the bloated knot, wringing it for every drop he could give her, Quinn struggled to think. To remember there was a plan. The next time Lee nipped at her flesh she purred and tilted her head aside. Licked at his sweat slicked arm and held him tighter.

It worked. Too well.

Lee's teeth clamped down on her shoulder, smooth skin caught between his jaws. Quinn stiffened, a squeal of surprise and fear mingling with his erratic breaths. Not daring to move more than that, she strained to catch sight of his face. To see if he was lost in the moment.

Murky brown eyes clouded with a primal need, he still held back. He also still held her shoulder, mouth clenching, driving his teeth deeper into the skin one millimeter at a time. Each pulse of his kicking cock, every contraction of her pussy around his knot, he bit down until Quinn wondered if he would stop.

Fear and uncertainty slipped through the haze of warmth. Trembling in the wake of an orgasm that should have left her sated for hours, she screamed at her mind to change gears, to take notice and fucking do something *now* while fighting to remain still.

Hands splaying over his back, she hummed, soothing and quiet as she touched him with careful pets. Tried to calm that vicious look in

his eyes as he stared back at her. Forcing her body to relax, to become pliant and offer no resistance took more effort than she was capable of, but somehow she managed to unlock her joints so she wasn't stiff and unyielding. There was no room for error, even the slightest misstep could be provocation enough for him to finish what he'd started.

It'd be a weak claim, since she wasn't in heat. Not enough to overpower Kahler's by any stretch. It would kill her or perhaps drive her insane. More so than she was already. Humming to him as she did to Elise, she ran her palms over his shoulders. When the tension began melting away from his back, she stroked his hair, smoothing it back. Letting her eyes drift shut, she pretended she was at utter peace.

Continuing to touch him with gentle passes, Quinn kept her breaths slow and even. Refused to balk when he made a low growl deep in his chest and didn't flinch when he ground the knot deeper. Instead she opened wider, accepting him without resistance. Through it all the quiet hum remained.

When his jaws parted, it took every ounce of her being not to spring from the bed. A faint shiver tickled down her spine, shoulders tensing for a breath before she let it out. Smooth. Controlled. The breadth of his tongue lapping over the warmth of his bite told her he'd broken skin, but not enough. There was no sense of him in the dark pit that raged inside of her now. The one that snarled and roared with an Alpha's fury. And now that she recognized it for what it was, now that Ilya had told her what that horrible sensation was, she could feel him. Could see Tobias in her mind's eye, destroying everything in his path.

Destroying her, maybe, but he'd protect his child. He'd keep Elise safe.

Lee's powerful arms jerked her from her thoughts as they wrapped around her. Hugging her to him so tight each breath was strained, he pressed his face to her neck and inhaled deep. Let the breath out in a satisfied purr as his cock continued to jump inside her pussy, filling her up.

They remained like that long after the knot abated. Lee scenting her as Quinn gave him her compliance and touch.

When Elise's mumbling cries filtered through the monitor, the bright screen showing her pouting face as she sat up in bed, Lee began

to retreat. Stiff as he unfolded his arms where they still held Quinn so tight.

“Lee,” Quinn murmured, carding her fingers through his hair as she put a questioning pout on her lips. Dampened the mother’s instinct demanding she go to her child as she turned his face to her.

His brows slipped down, shadowing his gaze as his eyes flicked from the monitor to her face. Unable to believe it, Quinn saw the uncertainty in his dark eyes the moment it came to fruition. Saw the war of emotions flitting through his gaze before he settled on a suspicious scowl.

“It’s not time for her to nurse yet.” Catching her lower lip between her teeth, she let it roll out. Slow, purposeful, the pinkened flesh ripe with promise. “Ilya can handle it.”

“You trust him with your child?”

“I trust him not to hurt what’s yours.”

It was the truth, and it was easy to use it as a lie. Made it easier to put the smile on her lips as Lee lowered himself over her, his long arm reaching out to silence the monitor before it wrapped around her once more.

His growl was rough as he pressed it against her neck. Quinn let it work through her whole body as Lee wrapped her up in him. Touching and being touched, it was learning the hills and valleys of a new lover. The scratch of nails, the rasp of his bristled cheek, there was no urgency in what they did. It was nothing at all like the first time he’d taken her all those months ago. He watched her every reaction, taking note of what made her hum and gasp.

The door being flung open had Lee tensed in seconds. Every muscle rigid, Quinn felt more than heard the growl vibrate through his chest as he turned to see the intrusion. A red faced Elise, cradled in Ilya’s arms, sucked on her pacifier with obvious discontent.

The moment stretched as Quinn turned her head to face them. Pinned under Lee, she gazed into icy blue eyes. Ilya returned her stare, nostrils flaring as he took in the scent of sex. She tipped her head back, angling her chin. Baring her shoulder, the bloom of a vivid purple-hued bruise surrounding crimson punctures staining the smoothness of her skin. Her attention flicked down to her sniffling baby in his arms

then back. A faint twitch of her eyebrows, she put every plea she could into that look.

Lee's growl built, thundering through the room. A challenge and warning both, it sent the other Alpha back into the hall. Ilya continued to stare, his gaze centered on the expanse of flesh Quinn had shown him. Eyes narrowing, he took another step back.

The door slamming was loud and final, cutting them off from the outside world.

"Where were we... ah, yes," Lee murmured as he lowered his lips to hers. Tongue teasing before it delved into her mouth. Tasting her.

Quinn hummed and closed her eyes, arms wrapping around the broadness of Lee's shoulders.

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Chapter 7

Days slipped by, Lee never leaving her side. As if she was in heat, he prowled over her body day and night. Tasting, touching, fucking. He demanded her attention and touch, reveling in them. Her only reprieve from him was when she nursed Elise and when he allowed her to eat on her own. Watching her every movement, it often devolved into him feeding her from his fingers, making her suck the digits clean. Sometimes he wouldn't even wait for her to finish before mounting her again.

Quinn's smile never faltered. She purred and hummed, touching the Alpha with reverence as she praised his prowess. Her cries and screams urged him to take her harder each time. The act was so complete she found herself losing the thread of the plan, coming hard around the utter perfection of his knot.

Relief swept through her when Lee announced he had to go to the office. She made the appropriate noises of soft petulance that she couldn't go, that she had to remain behind while he continued his awful reign of Highriver. Standing in the foyer dressed in nothing more than a thick robe that hung askew from Lee's latest fervent kiss and claiming hands, she waved him out the door.

She was still standing there when Ilya came down with Elise in his arms. Shoulders rounded, Quinn had slumped, hunched as if braced for a blow. Shivering in uncontrollable fits, the heel of her palm worked to grind away the reddened flesh of her chest. Though she heard him approach, expensive boots slapping against the tile, she didn't face Ilya until he thrust Elise towards her.

“She is changed. She needs to be fed.”

His voice was rough, the grating rasp of it worse than she had ever heard. Biting her bruised lip hard, she turned large, wet eyes up to him as she reached for Elise.

“Thank you.” Her voice wasn't much better. Hoarse, ragged, it showed the strain of the past days where she had spoken little and screamed much. A small sniff sent a fat tear slipping down her cheek as she gathered her daughter close, cradling Elise to her chest.

Ilya's grunt was the only reply as he turned to stalk away. Eyes trained on his retreating back, Quinn made another sniffle before she began the slow, weary trek back upstairs. Each step landing hard, she felt every second of her time with Lee. Exhausted, drained, she pressed her lips to Elise's hair and contemplated her next step.

Ensconced in the nursery after taking the time to put on real clothing for the first time in days, clear of the overwhelming scent of an Alpha in rut, clarity seeped into the fog that had been invading her. Now she could gather her thoughts and bolster her ragged determination. Take these few precious minutes to collect her strength.

It was all working and far better than Quinn had ever hoped it would. Lee was enamored of her now, downright obsessed if she was being honest. Even when she had been pregnant, the pheromones of a fertile Omega ripe on her skin, he hadn't been this eager. Not just to take her, but to *have* her. Her pleasure, her screams, her cries.

The problem was that each time his teeth came to her shoulder. Every time he bit down just a little harder, the threat real and terrifying.

Outside of a heat, she wouldn't last with the weak claim. She'd go more insane than she already was. The nightmares hadn't gotten better with Lee by her side, and more than once she had to feign faintness from lack of food or exhaustion for blacking out.

Everything was getting worse. She had to act. Soon.

She had to get Elise out of there.

Settling Elise against her chest, she gave her first true smile in what felt like forever. A possessive, protective hand swept down the soft cotton onesie as Quinn headed towards the door.

It was time to enact the second half of her plan.

Passing Ilya in the hallway leading downstairs, she averted her eyes and murmured a deferential greeting as she made her way past. She huddled tighter around Elise as she began the slow, mincing march back downstairs. Every jolt was met with a wince, a faint hiss as her shirt rubbed against the multiple scratches and small wounds littering her back. Feeling Ilya's gaze burning a hole in her back, taking in every reaction, she sensed more than heard him following. How such a large man could be so silent was eerie, but something she had grown

used to. He closed the distance between them by the time she reached the kitchen, his broad palm pushing the door open.

Close on her heels, he stood by, staring hard enough to make Quinn's skin crawl. After arranging Elise in the bouncer she was fast outgrowing and setting the thing to rocking, Quinn shuffled towards the refrigerator.

"What are you doing?"

Quinn didn't have to pretend when she crumpled, arms wrapping around her middle in a protective gesture at the growling rasp of Ilya's demand.

"I'm hungry."

"Sit," he barked, making Quinn and Elise jump, the latter beginning to sniffle and whine.

Quinn limped back to the counter, patting at Elise's stomach and giving her a strained smile as Ilya stalked and slammed around the large kitchen. Quieting her, Quinn watched the massive Alpha's movements. Noting the tension in his shoulders, the stiff way he held his body, she allowed the briefest moment of victory to buoy her before easing onto a stool.

The scent of searing meat filled the large kitchen, the mellow warmth of garlic and potatoes a comforting undernote. It was at odds with the flavor of an agitated Alpha, the scent of cinnamon so powerful it burned her throat. Watching Ilya as he worked, there was no missing that his actions did not help his turmoil.

It wasn't long before a plate was set down before her. Instead of the angry clatter of ceramic that she had expected, it was placed with the utmost care. The silverware didn't dare to make a ringing clamor as he set them beside the plate. Large hand gripping the edge of the dark stone, Ilya leaned over her and inhaled.

Quinn couldn't stop the flinch, but it appeared to be the reaction he was expecting. Ilya shoved off from the counter, boots stomping across the floor to carry him to the other side of the room. There he waited, scowl menacing as he crossed his arms over his chest and stared.

Keeping her focus down, eyeing the plate, Quinn pulled her lips between her teeth and rolled them out in slow contemplation. Piled high on the plate was an offering even an Alpha would have difficulty consuming all at once. The slab of meat was thick, dark, the charred

lines perfection. Clouds of lofty mashed potatoes hinted at butter and garlic worked into every silky fold. A stack of green beans she knew would be crisp tender, just the way she liked it, nestled in alongside grilled squash. All things he knew she liked. Everything she would devour. Allowing her hands to tremble, she picked up knife and fork and cut into the decadent meal.

Each movement methodical, Quinn ate. Working her way through every bite, furtive glances slipped up to the Alpha who remained motionless across the room. Unyielding, his gaze never faltered as he watched. It was a far cry from the indulgent way he pampered and cosseted her before in the long hours Lee wasn't there. Clashing with the ardent heat of his urgent assault before Lee had returned.

"Thank you," Quinn said, voice low enough she wasn't sure he would hear her.

"It is what I do, *da*?"

Another flinch, this time at the serrated growl underlining his tone. He was unhappy, angry. Even as the thought came to her, she could scent the underlying smoky violence, the hot ash taste of rage lying thick on her tongue. Quinn huddled a little further into herself, bowed over her plate as she shuffled food into her waiting mouth.

And then pressed on.

"Not just this. Everything. Elise..." Her gaze slid sideways, taking in her daughter's happy face. Tears sprang to her eyes, aching as she repeated in a water-logged voice, "Thank you."

Another grunt was his response. It was different from the previous one. Softer, warmer than the icy dismissal he had shown her so far. Unsure if she was being delusional, she turned her face up to meet that frigid stare. Saw the hard line of his lips soften, his brows still low, but no longer scowling. Concern painted his features as he watched her. Lower lip trembling, she let the tears overflow. Spilling down wan cheeks, clumping pale lashes, she gave him a bare taste of her misery.

Sniffling and dashing the heel of her palm across her face, she turned her gaze back to the plate. Knife and fork screeching against the dish as her hands shook, she blinked through the misty haze to clear her vision. What was meant to be just a sip of agony turned into a tidal wave of emotion she couldn't hold back. Sniffles turning into low sobs, she hunched over the setting. The tangled nest of her hair

dragging across food and counter unseen as raw, grating sounds ripped from her throat. She didn't even hear the silverware clatter against the stone and fall to the floor.

Choking on her misery, Quinn turned to fumble in blind urgency as Elise began to wail. Stammering ragged words of comfort that did nothing to calm her daughter, the darkness ripping through her began to consume her. Threatened to drag her down to a pitch black abyss she wouldn't be able to crawl back up from. Through the blurry weight of her tears, she saw Ilya's hands brush hers aside, his large palm covering Elise's tiny stomach. Soothing her daughter where she couldn't.

Smoldering and heavy, his other palm came to Quinn's shoulder. Rested there for a long moment before he squeezed, fingerings digging hard into the bites Lee had littered across her flesh. A whimpering whine tore from her lips as she turned and flung herself into the solid slab of his torso. Melded her body to his with her hands clinging to his back. The action pulled her shirt aside, baring her marked flesh to him. The red-purple kaleidoscope of horror and pain laid out before his hot gaze.

"Please, please, please," she wailed into his chest, clenching his shirt in her fists as she tried to come even closer. "Make it stop. Please!"

Ilya's answer was immediate. The deep, resounding purr washed through the kitchen, slamming into her from all sides as his arm went to her back. Hauling her up, he squeezed her to the point her ribs creaked in protest. Pushing the sound into her body, forcing it through muscle and bone. Other hand coming to a thigh, he hiked her leg up, encouraging Quinn to wrap her body around him.

She did.

Without hesitation, Quinn clung to the giant Alpha with all of her limbs, holding onto that sound and the comfort it brought as if her very life depended on it. And in a way it did. The darkness threatened, looming and angry, but the glorious reverberation working its way through her pushed it back.

One arm around her holding tight, the other went to Elise. Fingers gentle as he pet at the small girl, soothing her cries as he murmured to

them both. Unable to understand a word of it, all she knew was that it worked.

Cradled in Ilya's lap as he sat on the floor of the nursery, Quinn felt small in a way she hadn't since she was a child. It wasn't the physical difference in their sizes that made her feel that way. It was the exhaustion of too much crying, of being emotionally drained in a way that left her feeling defenseless. Vulnerable.

Trunk like arms on either side of her, his large hands cupped her folded knees in a gentle grip, held her against the resonating purr he had yet to stop. It confused everything, made it difficult to think. Slouched into all that warmth, deep in the protective circle of male flesh and bone, Quinn watched her baby girl scoot across the plush rug, squealing and babbling in a language only infants understood.

Things had not gone according to plan. At all. No part of this had been what she intended. Losing her shit, breaking down in front of him and needing his touch and purr had never been the goal. Yet the results were not without their merits. Ilya wouldn't stop touching her, had held her tight for the hours since her breakdown in the kitchen. Even as she had nursed Elise, his crystalline gaze averted as he sat beside the rocker, Ilya had his arm slung low across her hips.

Now they sat and watched Elise making circuits of the rug, toppling over and gurgling, having the time of her life.

A careful pass of his hands up her thighs preceded a deep sigh. Pausing as the first swell of her hips came under his thumbs, he dragged callused palms back down. Quinn roused from the dreamy state of her thoughts, forcing her spine from its slouch as her splayed fingers smoothed over the back of his hand. A touch of thanks, a caress of gratitude.

"He marks you."

That brought Quinn's spine straight, snapping to attention as she jolted forward. She would have been free of Ilya's grip had she not caught her heel in the hem of her too large shirt. Instead she found herself slammed back into his body, the air knocked from her lungs as his arms came around her. Squeezing, clenching, he held her immobile.

"You smell of sweet slick. Pleasure. Not as it was before. Why?"

“Ilya, please, don’t—”

“Why,” he snarled in her ear, lips close enough his bared teeth brushed against the delicate cartilage.

“I can’t... I can’t stop it.”

“You want him.”

“No!”

Her defiant shriek startled Elise, sending the baby toppling to her side in mid lurch. A tremulous wail began as she rolled to her back, legs and arms kicking. Fighting against Ilya’s grip, Quinn managed to work her way free, going to Elise and humming to her. Scooping up her struggling, angry daughter, Quinn patted and soothed the imagined hurt. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw him watching. There was nothing cold in his blue eyes now. They were hot, eager, and not for sex.

Turning back to Ilya, resting on her heels, she contemplated her next move for a single breath. Then shuffling forward on her knees, she shouldered her way back into his lap. Curling up against his chest with Elise tucked between them, she pulled his arm around them. Nuzzled his chest and gave a near silent purr until he resumed his deep, lengthy comfort. Elise settled into wet snuffles and quiet pouting before she, too, curled into Ilya. Clutching his shirt and her mother’s hand in a grip that refused to be broken, she mumbled a sleepy admonishment as her deep ocean eyes began to flutter shut.

“I don’t. No more now than I did when I came here,” Quinn said, speaking against his neck as she burrowed tighter. “I don’t know what I want, but not that.”

“You get wet for him. You enjoy it.”

“Fuck’s sake, Ilya. I came when those... in that awful place. I can’t help it!” Ending on a hiss, Quinn buried her face in his shoulder as fresh tears burned the back of her eyes. Shoving the nightmare vague memories away, she tipped her head back to stare at him, defiant and angry. “I’m an Omega without suppressants. What do you think happens when an Alpha gets it in his head he’s going to have me?”

His brows twitched down, meeting before he smoothed his expression back to something austere. She had seen it though, that momentary glimmer of distaste and hunger. He didn’t like that Lee had

marked her shoulder. Wanted it to be his teeth leaving those imprints on her skin.

"He touches me, purrs and growls at me, he went down on me for hours for Gods' sake! He's *never* done that before," Quinn pressed on in an angry whisper, putting all of her indignant rage into her eyes. "He fucking cuddles me after."

"Enough," Ilya said through an ominous growl, though he was quick to settle back into the purr when Elise grumbled.

"I didn't like what you did to me, either. It wasn't right, wasn't fair. He could have killed me if he'd tasted you on me."

"He wouldn't have hurt you."

"You don't know that!"

"*Da*, I do."

Tight lipped in her anger, she shoved at his shoulder. Daring him to retaliate when he met her narrow eyed gaze, she bared her teeth in a silent snarl.

"No, you do not. But I still liked that a hell of a lot more than what he's doing to me now."

Ilya's mouth opened, the flare of anger dying just as fast as it sprung to life in his eyes. Mouth closing hard enough Quinn heard the snap of his teeth, he stared. His eyes narrowed, and they watched each other in quiet deliberation.

He was the first to move. Head ducking down, he swallowed the two smaller bodies in his lap. Lips a breath away from Quinn's, he kept her gaze. "Do not challenge me, *kroshka*. I am not one to back down, *da*? Now tell me. What part did you like, mm?"

Quinn rolled her eyes, huffing out a sigh that scattered the taste of berries across their combined senses. Poking at his shoulder, she urged him back. Mouth slanting to the side, she gave another exasperated sigh when he refused to move.

"The taste of you possibly didn't make me gag. Maybe."

"Maybe?" The laughter that danced in his pale eyes was strange, intoxicating. It wasn't cruel, wasn't aimed to hurt. It was just him, being amused by her hemming response.

"You liked it. Tell me."

"It wasn't disgusting."

"Tell me, *kiska*."

“What does that mean?” She had an idea from the context he’d last used it, but she wanted to hear him say it. Allowing a fraction of warmth to enter her eyes, she slid the pads of her fingers across his stubbled jaw.

“Kitten,” he said, one corner of his mouth slipping up into a grin as he gripped her thigh and pulled her closer. Pushed her up his body so he wasn’t bent so far over, bringing her lips to his. “*Kiska* likes her cream, *da?*”

“Maybe—”

Whatever come back she might have said became lost under his kiss. His tongue didn’t invade, but teased along the seam of her lips, prying her open to his assault. The violation was sweet, heated, but not frightening. He kissed her with a purpose she understood. He was courting her senses, plying her with gentle demands. Not to say he wasn’t the same rough, determined Alpha he always had been, but where Lee offered violence that made her body scream, Ilya wanted her delicate moans and cries.

She gave them to him. It was an easy thing, melting into him, her free arm curling around his neck to hold him close. Her soft sounds of pleasure were muffled by his lips, his tongue, his low growl of satisfaction.

The kiss lingered, going on for long minutes until Ilya left her breathless. Eyes half mast, Quinn curled her fingers into his hair, giving it a playful tug as she bit her swollen lips.

“You need to wash.” And then they were moving. His bulk lifting from the floor with an ease that would shock Quinn no matter how many times she saw it. He cradled her and Elise close as he went to the crib. Let Quinn drag along his full height as he eased her down onto her feet.

Quinn made a face as she turned to the crib, settling Elise down among the cloud soft sheets. She hummed and smoothed back all that wispy pale hair before leaning down to kiss Elise’s forehead.

“Sleep well, baby girl. Mama loves you.” Turning with a sigh, Quinn strangled her scream when Ilya swept her up. Arms heavy bands under her ass, clamped around her thighs, he looked up at her. His eyes were hot, dangerous with something that she struggled to

grasp. That wasn't sex. It wasn't a need to feel his knot buried inside of her. It had little to do with the kiss they had shared.

Fuck. He really did think he could be her mate.

"You shower now," Ilya said as he started out of the nursery. Carrying her into her room, all the way into the bathroom, he refused to put her down. Letting her slide down his body again, he turned her to face the shower and let her fiddle with the knobs. Even then, he touched her arms, her hips, rubbing at her shoulders despite her faint hiss of pain.

Ilya's fingers worked under the hem of her shirt, bunching the loose fabric in his palms before he began sliding it up her body. Quinn kept her arms down, pinning the fabric in place with a distressed sound, one that was buried under his rich purr as soon as it began. Melting into that luscious noise, all of it echoing back at her, slamming into her body, Quinn was helpless to resist.

The shirt was lifted free from her slack arms. The waist of her pants pushed down over her hips, off her thighs, until they puddled at her feet. Naked before him, Quinn made another quiet sound and tried to hide behind thin arms that refused to cover anything near enough.

"No, *kiska*," Ilya murmured, his hands obscene in their gentleness as he pulled her hands away. Pushing her arms wide, he turned her to face him so he could look down at her body.

"Don't look," Quinn said, groaning as she tugged at the firm grip. She felt the awkwardness of shame rush through her, hot and sickening. Too often she saw her body, no matter how she tried not to. Even nursing her baby, it forced her to see the multitude of scars littering her body. Bites, deep scratches, a sordid tale spelled out in thin, puckered lines that gleamed.

Ilya gave a growl, the power of his anger a shot from a blast furnace as he moved in too fast for her to track. Then he was on the floor, kneeling before her. Fingers clamped around her hips to keep Quinn still as she tried to squirm away, his head dipped forward. Open, hot, wet, his mouth came to her breast. Careful not to leave a lasting mark, he sucked at the tender flesh. Let her feel the edge of his teeth as he worked his way across her exposed chest. Then his tongue came out, stiff and determined, tracing along a deep pink line that wandered from her belly up over her left breast.

“Beautiful, *kiska*. So beautiful,” Ilya whispered against her, arms sliding around to hold her closer. A low groan pressed against her sternum as he kissed and licked at the marred skin.

Uncomfortable in a way she wasn’t used to, Quinn’s tongue grew sharp. Speaking without thinking, she sneered as the ugly words tumbled out. “You’re just saying that because you’re fucking your fist instead of a cunt. Go get some pussy, Ilya. You’ll feel better.”

Cringing as his head came up, Quinn refused to meet his eyes. She slumped and braced for the anger coating the back of her throat as he came to his feet. She didn’t even whimper when he grabbed a fistful of her hair and dragged her forward. Didn’t make a single noise when her hand was crushed against his throbbing cock straining against the zipper of his pants.

“I tried, *kiska*. Many times,” he snarled against her cheek. Settling his mouth against one of Lee’s faint marks, he bit down. Let her feel the burning pinch before he released her, tongue sweeping up the line of her neck. “I couldn’t even knot them. Tight Omega pussy and I couldn’t come.”

Pulling her head back with a painful twist of her hair still caught in his fist, he put his face close. Growl ominous and threatening as he glared at her. He let her see the disgrace that caused him, the fury it had engendered. For a man like him, being able to fuck was important.

“And then,” he hissed, free hand grabbing her ass, hauling her up until she was spread wide around his hips and dangling. “Then I find a pair of plain white panties, *da*? Soft as a cloud, filled with a *kiska*’s cream. One stroke. One fucking stroke and I keep a knot for hours.”

Quinn couldn’t help it. The violence, the determined, painful need in his gaze, the way he held her against him was all too much.

Her pussy didn’t just grow wet, it flooded with slick. It poured from her to smear along his zipper, staining the front of his pants as she whined low in her throat and twitched her hips. A hint of friction against her clit and Quinn saw stars, a fiery wash of sparkling light exploding behind her eyes.

They groaned into each other’s mouths as he claimed her in another kiss. This one was not sweet. It was not gentle. Ilya thrust his tongue inside of her, showing Quinn what he wished to do. In that moment, she wasn’t sure she would stop him if he tried.

Not until his mouth worked its way down to her shoulder, both hands gripping her ass to rock her against the hard length of him, did some semblance of sense return.

"Ilya, no. Stop, please. Not like this, please." Quinn gasped as he nipped at her collarbone, whole body jolting at the sensation. "He'll be back soon."

"He owes me." Ilya growled, another rush of slick answering his call as he swung them around to face the wall. Pinning her against the flat surface so he could grind against all that wet heat, the damp fabric of his trousers rasping across her clit.

"Please, no!" It was a breathy whine, fingers tugging at his hair to pull his face away from her neck. "He can't hurt Elise, please."

That sobered him.

Ilya stepped back so fast Quinn would have fallen had he not caught her hips. Lowering her to the cold tiles, he stared at her through the steam collecting around them and nodded once. Swallowing hard, he turned on his heel and stalked towards the door.

"You need to eat before he comes back. Downstairs when you are done."

And with that he left.

Quinn took a shaky breath, holding on to the wall as she shuffled her way to the shower. That had been too close for comfort. She had never intended for either male to go this far so soon. Hadn't believed it would be possible. It was good, but dangerous.

Climbing under the hot spray, Quinn scrubbed and lathered, making sure there was no hint of Ilya's musk on her skin. It was interesting that mentioning Elise being harmed broke the spell. She'd been right all along. He wasn't so certain that Lee would forgive his transgressions if Quinn bent to his demands. They might plan and scheme over her body and womb behind closed doors, but Ilya was still Lee's man first and foremost. There would be punishments doled out if Ilya thought to touch what Lee still considered his.

With a wry twist of her lips, Quinn rinsed and climbed out. Males were all the same. Thinking with their cocks. Ilya may profess to want her as more than a warm body, and it might very well be true, but he risked her and her child for what would have been a momentary blip of

pleasure. Chafing her skin with a towel, she headed into the bedroom to dress.

After pulling on a new oversized shirt and yoga pants, Quinn made her way downstairs. Ilya was right. There was no question in her mind that Lee would drag her back into the bedroom as soon as he arrived, and if she intended to survive his attentions much longer, she needed a real meal.

Ducking her head, she scurried into the kitchen to find Ilya already at work preparing something else. She hated that the steak had been wasted, but it was cleared away long before she arrived, leaving the counter clean and sparkling. A quiet sigh slipping from her lips, she eased up onto her customary stool. Cupping her chin in her palms, elbows to the cool slab, she watched the Alpha at work. Let a smile pull at her lips when he glanced at her, eyes warming as she took in his muscled body.

Ilya grinned, smile lazy and hot, turning to come towards the counter. To her.

The kitchen door burst open, the heavy palm connected to it pushing it to slam hard against the wall. Lee stood in the doorway, legs wide, whole body tensed, as he took in the kitchen at a glance. Spotting Quinn, his lips lifted, the low growl rumbling through his chest as he came at her with a fury that made her scramble off the stool. Sending her chair clattering to the floor, Quinn shrieked when he snatched her up in mid step. Tossing her up onto the counter, he shoved Quinn's legs wide enough to make her hips groan as he stepped between them. Pushing his face to her neck, he inhaled long and deep, taking in her scent as his hands jerked her shirt out of his way.

Gripping her breast hard enough she knew there would be bruises, Lee called to her. Right there. Right in front of Ilya. Growled and rocked his leaking cock against her, smearing the potent fluids together to stain them both.

"Send the food up," Lee said, snapping the order out over Quinn's shoulder while gathering her to him. Shoving a hand down the back of her pants, he squeezed her ass and bounced her against him. "I'm starved."

The wild smile and the dangerous gleam in his eyes promised it wasn't for food. Clutching at Lee, she watched Ilya over his shoulder

as he carried her out. Her smile was small. Pained.

His scowl was as dark and dangerous as she had ever seen it.

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Chapter 8

Quinn laughed as Elise squealed and splashed water all over the place. Her shirt and jeans were already soaked as she bathed the squirming girl, drifts of soap decorating the tub and Quinn's hair where Elise had flung the fluffy bubbles with glee.

The low register of the purr snaked down her spine, a shiver rippling across her skin in a wash of goosebumps. Tipping her head back onto the male's shoulder, caged in his limbs as he pinned her against the side of the tub, Quinn arched a single brow as she gazed up at Ilya.

"You should do that more, *kiska*." His smile was soft, a near dreamy spread of his lips that did little to ease the harshness of his features.

Her noncommittal hum was met with a twitch of his eyebrows, a not quite frown. The heavy weight of his arm slipped around her hips, pulling Quinn snug against his front as he dropped his mouth to her shoulder. The sound he made was sheer decadence, soothing and blissful as it vibrated across her skin.

Keeping her heavy lidded gaze on Elise, Quinn gave Ilya what he wanted. A quiet chuckle that promised delight and contentment slipped past her lips as she leaned into him. Pushing her body against his, she snuggled into the overwhelming heat of him with a hum, breathing deep the mellow warmth of cinnamon tinted with the sharp bite of anise. When his hand at her hip flexed, moving to cup her thigh, Quinn rolled her shoulder to shrug him off so she could gather up Elise in a towel.

"He'll be back soon," she murmured while patting Elise dry, rubbing at pale, fluffy hair with gentle strokes until it stuck up at odd angles and Elise grinned.

"I told you, he called. He will be late." There was no mistaking the irritated growl that edged Ilya's rough voice. The hand at her hip tightened in a painful squeeze, pulling her back into his body.

"Not late enough. I'm not going to risk my daughter."

While slow to release her, he did it. Just as he always did when she mentioned Elise and the danger he was putting her in. Ilya let go and stood with ease before lifting Quinn straight up to her feet. It was

irritating how Alphas could haul her around, but she had to admit it was nice not having to struggle to her feet with a squirming baby in her arms.

"You could wean her," Ilya said, rasp as careful as it had ever been as he trailed behind Quinn towards the nursery. "You would go into heat again soon enough. I could claim you as my own."

"You want me to give up the *one* thing I can do for her? Do you have any idea how important it is to me? To her?" It was an argument that had played out before over the last several days. Quinn had lost none of her anger, words a vicious snarl each time she refuted the logic of his thoughts.

The long muscles of her back bunched with tension as she laid Elise on the changing table. Fussing over her daughter, she put a diaper on Elise with quick, deft movements. It still amazed her how easy it was to do these things now. It seemed like it was just yesterday Meghan had been fretting over Quinn ever getting it right with Adam.

"*Kiska*, shh. No, do not weep." He was behind her, body swallowing her up as he enfolded Quinn in his arms. His purr was loud, careless of who might overhear. Nuzzling her jaw, hand stroking her hair and shoulder, he held her until Quinn faded into sniffles and shrugged him off once again.

Scrubbing at her damp cheeks with the back of one hand, she continued to dress Elise. Thoughts of that other life, of a rescue that would never come, of the man responsible for all of this kept creeping back. She had to get a hold of herself, to keep her eyes trained on what lie ahead and in getting there. Getting Elise out of this hellhole safe. Growl mocking and playful when Elise refused to bend her knee to go into the one piece pajama, Quinn dipped down to blow a raspberry on the soft expanse of rounded baby belly.

They would get out of here. They had to.

Choosing to ignore Ilya for the moment, Quinn cooed and purred over her daughter. Snapping the pearly buttons up the front of the onesie, she couldn't help the laugh that tumbled free. Elise's pink cheeks swelled with a gummy smile, little fists bunching the soft fabric covered in blocky pastel dinosaurs. Snagging a kicking leg, Quinn pretended to bite a chubby thigh before scooping Elise up to put her in the crib.

“He scares me,” Quinn whispered while putting Elise down, petting her small chest to calm her. Letting her gaze drift up to the fanciful mobile, Quinn stared unseeing at the plush clouds and stars dangling from a crescent moon. “He bites harder every time. Talks about claiming me while he’s... He says awful things about what he’s going to do to me when I’m in heat again and—”

“Stop, *kiska*. Do not worry so.”

Sensing him coming closer, Quinn turned to face him. Arms outstretched and braced along the crib, she shielded Elise from him. Her lip lifted in a snarl, giving voice to a daring growl that was met with a sudden chill to match the frigid blue of Ilya’s eyes.

“It’s so easy for you to say that,” she hissed, feet sliding further apart, taking a stand against the Alpha who loomed over her from feet away. “It’s not your body he’s using. Not your mind he’s destroying. And she’s not your daughter!”

Ilya seemed to grow before her eyes, the breadth of his chest expanded as he breathed deep. Inches added to his impressive height as he lifted his chin, staring down his nose at her. The scent of cinnamon became hot, burning the back of her throat with the acrid taste as he descended upon her. Quinn didn’t even have time to gasp before Ilya snatched her up against his body, three quick strides carrying them out of the room. Leaving Elise drifting off into sleep as he closed the door with a resounding silence.

“Not another word,” Ilya growled in her ear when she would have cried out as his arm tightened. A band of iron at her back holding Quinn to his chest, he took them into her bedroom.

Then she was falling. Crashing to the floor with a stifled shriek of pain as her knees and elbows connected with the plush carpeting. Skin abraded red and raw, she tried to scramble away. His bulk followed her, his full weight slamming into her. Crushing her to the floor, he pushed his face hard against her neck and let loose a growl that was as insidious as it was obscene.

The call rattled down her spine, twisting its way through her bones. Every nerve coming alive, sensation sparked across her skin. Snarling, resisting the way her body wanted to arch and press against the hard bulge he ground against her ass, Quinn squirmed and kicked. Every

flinch and jostle was met with violence, in the call that grew louder and more intense, in the way he crushed her into the soft carpet.

With a final shudder of defeat as he licked a long line from shoulder to ear, Quinn went limp, gasping against the fluffy pile.

“Always you resist,” Ilya said through the growl, thighs wedging between her legs so he could rut against her. Groaned as he felt her copious slick penetrating his pants as it soaked through her jeans, his hands forcing their way under her ribs and up to maul her breasts with rough fingers. “You challenge, knowing you cannot win. Why, *kiska*?”

Quinn whined, the sound as needy and desperate as her pussy that clenched over air. Her hips bucked into his slow thrusts, urging him faster, demanding the roughness her body craved. Lee had done his job well. The near constant attention had her senses ready to explode, the merest hint of a virile Alpha enough to tumble her into an abyss of sensation. Yet she did resist Ilya when she could. She snarled, twisted, scratched, and kicked until he forced her to stillness.

All because he liked it. He enjoyed the chase, no matter how small it was. Loved the fight even more when he had to restrain her, demanding her submission. The gleam in his eye told her each time that it was the perfect game.

It wasn’t as if she could admit that to him though, so she lifted her lip in a snarl and dug her knees into the floor. Shoving her ass into him, she rolled her hips to stroke that thick bulge. Painted him with her slick, growl fading into a wanton moan as she dropped her head and shoulders. Presenting to the dominant male, arms stretched out before her to give her the leverage she needed to rock back into him.

The sound that vibrated through his chest was menacing, an ominous threat of what was to come. Then he was flipping her over, slamming her back to the floor before Quinn could even focus on the spinning room. Forcing her legs wide until her hips groaned in agony, he ground the throbbing ridge of his cock against her. Wedged the thick seam of fabric deep into her folds, pushing it up along her slit to torment the pulsing nub of flesh.

“This is how I will take you, *kiska*,” Ilya husked, burying his face back in her neck. Squeezing her breast and side in a painful grip to pull her into the powerful movement of his hips, he mimicked the act he

promised. “You will look upon me, praise my strength as I fuck you into oblivion.”

In seconds he had the waist of her pants in his fists. Tearing the fabric away, he shredded the soft cotton with ease. Flinging it aside, her shirt was next, a useless scrap of cloth when he was done. This wasn’t the same as last time. The raging heat in his eyes didn’t promise a quick face fuck. It threatened so much more than that, and as he leaned back on his heels to take in her naked body, a sliver of fear snaked down her spine. This had gone too far already, and she had no idea how to make her way back to safer ground. The grating rasp of his zipper once he gained his feet was somehow terrifying and exhilarating, sending Quinn’s heels skidding over the carpet as she tried to crawl away even as her gaze remained fixed on the object standing proud and hard from his gaping pants. One heavy boot planted against her thigh brought her to a stuttering halt, rough rubber sole digging into tender flesh as he pried her open. Forcing her leg to the floor, he bent to growl in her face.

“Spread,” he said, the rough timbre of his voice reverberating with the command. As if to further underscore the position she found herself in, he added a call that sent her reeling.

“Ilya, please.” It was a plaintive whine, the last of her will sifting through her fingers as she complied. Free leg easing away in a slow crawl, she spread herself wide for him. Bared everything as her cheeks flushed and slick dripped from her. The sweet scent flooded the room as her body pulsed and sent a fresh rush of her arousal trickling down the cleft of her ass.

“Spread!”

Flinching at the harsh bark that pounded into her skull demanding obedience, she pushed her legs wider until it felt she was little more than a wishbone ready to snap under the weight of his boot. Still it wasn’t enough, the sharp edge of his teeth bared. The fury in his expression was matched by the depth of his growl.

“Open that little cunt now!”

“Ilya... Please,” Quinn sobbed as her shoulders hunched with submission. He vibrated with an energy she didn’t trust, afraid to push him even that scant inch too far by not following his instruction. Fingers drifting down to pull back slick flesh, she swallowed another

ragged sound. Something between fear, anger, and desire twisted through her, pulsing low in her belly as her thighs clenched in reflex. The heat of arousal burned her fingers, her grip slipping with the proof of her excitement as she avoided meeting his eyes. The flush of shame swirling with need felt too hot, searing her cheeks and chest.

“Fuck yourself, *kiska*. Show me.”

A surreptitious glance showed her too much and yet not enough. He stood over her, chest heaving with his panting breaths, each exhalation a low growl. The thick length of his cock, throbbing and leaking his excitement, was caught tight in his fist, but he didn’t stroke it. Staring at her exposed pussy, the blistering intensity of his gaze centered on where her shaking hands pinched back pink flesh.

Uncertain of what he intended, the tension in his huge body set her on edge. She closed her eyes and turned her head aside, one small act of rebellion as she shoved a hand between her legs and sent her fingertips to make a jerky play over her clit. Her moan was ragged, hips twitching against the strain of being held so open.

“*Net!* Show me,” Ilya roared, his boots rasping against her calves as he shifted closer.

Perhaps it was her hoarse whine or the way her hips rose in offering, folds wet and rosy with desire as she presented it to him with a pleading moan. Whatever it was, the change was instantaneous.

Ilya groaned and fell to his knees between her spread thighs. Toppled forward until his mouth was flush with her, lips hungry as they sucked. His tongue made a wild and frenzied dance over every inch of exposed flesh, throat working to swallow down every drop of thick fluid that coated her folds. The wet heat of him closed over her clit, sucked hard before he slid the edge of his teeth over the tender flesh.

Quinn couldn’t catch her breath, couldn’t even cry out or moan at the shock of sensation he sent pummeling through her body. Large hands pinning her thighs to the floor, she jerked in helpless fits against the mouth ravaging her. The slick slide of him dancing over the throbbing bundle of nerves made her pull in a breath in a hiss, the plunge of his tongue deep inside of her clenching pussy knocking the air from her lungs in a desperate whoosh.

When he opened his mouth wide, encasing all of her with lips and teeth, laving her as he loosed a call that vibrated through all that wet flesh, her lungs stalled altogether.

He didn't stop.

Large hands gripping her ass, he hauled her up from the floor to seal his mouth over her. As if she was a feast, Ilya gorged himself on her airy cries and guttural moans, lapping up the spoils of his assault. Quinn couldn't concentrate on anything but the near painful pleasure that shot through her, wringing every ounce of sensation from her. His mouth moved too fast, too hard, too everything for her to do more than lie there and take it.

It built fast and hard, tensing the muscles of her legs. Not in waves, gentle or otherwise, but in jagged pulses that left her raw, aching. Belly taut as she writhed under him, shoulders pinned to the floor, Quinn cried out as her orgasm grew. It dragged her higher and higher. A teetering edge that promised agonizing bliss. Tongue plunging in and out, Ilya ground her clit under the pad of his thumb. Quinn sucked in a breath only to let it out in a shrill wail.

Heels pounding against his back, she came. Body jerking, shock waves tumbling through her, she came *hard*. Crashing through her in electrified bolts, it pounded her into the oblivion he promised. Left her nothing more than a shell of sensation that clawed at the carpet just to keep from rocketing away. Thighs squeezing his head, legs locked around him, Quinn screamed her release to the heavens and the Gods beyond.

It would not end. The moment she thought it would, the crackling pulses of energy sweeping through her would redouble their onslaught, wrecking her body, her mind. Her sounds became thin and wavering as her body spasmed again and again.

Even when Ilya pried her legs from around his neck, she was still coming. His breath whispering over her engorged folds making her jostle, writhing at the fresh charge that zipped up her spine. Pussy contracting over emptiness that should be filled, should be wringing a knot. Pulsing, filling her with thick, potent come from the Alpha denying her. The same Alpha who shoved her hips to the floor, splayed hand pinning her there.

The male that grabbed her hand and slapped it over her mound, making her scream again. Pain ricocheted through her, bouncing around her skull and morphing into something glorious as she bucked against her small palm.

“That’s it, *kiska*. Fuck it good. Show me what you want me to do to you.”

High on the scent of the Alpha kneeling between her legs, on the throbbing ache of pleasure between her legs, Quinn’s thoughts were incoherent at best. All she knew was that she needed something inside. Something to fill the agony of emptiness. Two, three, then four small fingers made their way inside, trying to obtain the stretch she knew he could give her. Pumping into her slick heat with wet squelching sounds that made the male’s nostrils flare as he scented the heated air.

“*Da*, that’s it. Harder,” Ilya said on a low growl that was felt more than heard. His large hand shuttled up and down his massive cock. Smearing the thick wetness that leaked from the glistening crown all over his shaft, he gripped it tighter. Turned the heavy length an angry red as he stroked faster.

Well beyond words, Quinn was reduced to helpless whines and whimpers. Her own hand wasn’t enough, no matter how she tried to stretch her slick walls, how deep she tried to push them. Writhing before the Alpha, her sole focus the frenetic motions of his hand and the throbbing flesh of his cock. Pushing her feet against his thighs, she thrust her hips up. Offering him what he wanted, begging him to take what they both needed.

Though he shuffled forward on his knees, he didn’t give in to the temptation she presented. Instead he jerked his cock hard, hand a blur as his shadow fell over her once again. Succumbing to the harsh growls and barked demands he uttered, urging her on, to show him what she wanted him to do, Quinn shrieked as her thighs began to tremble. Orgasm building, roiling through her veins, she held her hips high. Rocked against her useless hands in erratic bursts.

Pleasure arced through her limbs, drawing every muscle tight. Grinding the fingers of one hand against the swollen, aching nub of her clit sent a ragged moan clawing from her throat. Spine bowing, tension rattled through her body in twitches and hard jerks as it overwhelmed,

sucking her up into a maelstrom of sensation. Small fingers shoved deep, attempting to mimic the knot her body needed.

It was no use.

Sobbing her frustration as she bucked against her palm, her head thrashed against the soft carpet. It hung just out of reach, edge razor sharp. Pleasure and pain blurred, want and need twisting her insides.

Ilya snarled some expletive. Knocking her hand aside, he shoved his tongue deep inside her cunt. Fucked her with the slippery length as he growled and snarled words that held no meaning to her. All that mattered was the aggressive rumble against her flesh as she keened. Wet fingers gripping the carpet, she moved with him, matching the furious pace he set.

“More,” Quinn shrieked as she reached for him. Mindless in the primal need to be filled, to have the raw, scratching sensation of the denied orgasm stop, she became frenzied. Grunts animalistic as she clawed and pulled, snarling at the Alpha to fuck her into the ground, to stretch her pussy open with his knot as he was meant to.

Between one stammering heartbeat and the next, he shoved her away. Sent her crashing back to the floor with a menacing growl that made her pussy drip with a rush of fresh slick to entice. The slap of his weighty palm against her mound made her scream in anything but pain. His fingers shoved into her, stretching her wide around their girth. The heel of Ilya’s hand ground against her clit as he moved ever closer. Hand a blur over his cock, he urged her to fuck herself on his fingers, to take what she needed.

She did.

Quinn shrieked and cried out as pleasure tangled around her spine. Limbs stiff, back in a painful arch, the gnawing pain relented. Sweet bliss exploded through her as Ilya curled his fingers to rub that spot. Forced another thick finger inside of her as she used his hand, pistonning into her with relentless power as he drove her through the first body quaking spasm into the next. It seared through her veins, laying waste to everything in its path.

Just as she began to fall, plummeting back to the here and now, the first hot splash of thick fluid coated her belly. Another on her breasts. It warmed her flushed skin. The potent scent of cinnamon and anise invaded her senses as she screamed again. Pussy contracting around

the thick digits that speared her over and over, muscles wringing the swell of knuckles that did not erupt inside of her.

Her wail was defeated misery as more of the milky fluid spurt over her chest, coating her breasts. Desperate for more, she curled her fists into his shirt, trying to drag him nearer. Ilya bellowed, sliding up her body with ease. Pinned her to the floor and shoved his cock deep between her lips as another volley pumped from his pulsing balls.

Seconds ticked by as her small hands wrapped around his knot. Massaging the bloated section of his shaft, she twisted her fingers to mimic the wringing contracting of her pussy. Swallowed down another hot surge as her eyes rolled up behind heavy lids.

Perfect bliss.

His hand tangling in her hair brought her eyes open, lip curling as she set the edge of her teeth to his delicate flesh. The warmth of his come still bathed her tongue, forcing her throat to work in convulsive fits to swallow it all down.

“There is no time, *kiska*, as much as I want you to drain my balls dry,” Ilya murmured, a satisfied smile twisting his lips as he pried her jaw open with his fingers. Forced her to release him even as he continued to coat her mouth and chin. Once clear of her sharp teeth, he pushed her fingers higher and squeezed them around his shaft to slow the forceful spray into a dwindling trickle.

Quinn’s whining mewl burst into a squawk of surprise as Ilya lifted her. Putting her on her feet, he gave her ass one hard slap that sent her stumbling towards the bathroom. Indignant at being refused and then dismissed, she turned on her heel with a low growl on her lips.

“You must get clean. Lee will arrive soon.”

“For someone who says he wants me so damn bad, you’re awful eager to throw me back into his bed,” Quinn said on a vicious snarl.

Fear followed quick on the heels of her anger as Ilya charged. Clothes in disarray, hair tumbling around his face, hard cock waving before him, it was terrifying. But not so much as the glare of rage deep in his cold eyes as he barreled towards her. Before she could fall back a single step, his hand connected with her still throbbing pussy. Palm cupping her sex, two fingers slid inside. One large arm braced her shoulders as he lifted her. Legs dangling, gravity spearing her on those

thick digits, Quinn moaned, trying not to squirm from that precarious hold.

“This tight cunt? It is mine. It is my cock that this sweet pussy craves, that you want more than anything.” Hauling her to his chest, hands possessive as he moved them over her body, he smeared their combined scents on their bodies. He sucked in a deep breath at her neck and let it out on a savage growl. “We are getting closer. Soon, *kiska*. Soon I will fill you with everything my aching balls can give you.”

Another growl reverberated through his chest as he set Quinn on her feet, edging into a satisfied purr as he took her jaw in his hands. Cupping her face he lowered his lips to hers, tongue sweeping past all of her defenses as he assaulted her mouth. A passionate invasion that left Quinn wide eyed and gasping when he stood straight. His smile was a bitter slash as he gripped her hips, turning her in an abrupt about face before giving her a light shove towards the shower.

“Go. Clean.” Without another word he left, snagging her torn clothing on his way out.

Reality began to set in as the heat and scent of the excited Alpha seeped away. Scrambling into the shower, Quinn jerked the tap on with a thin shriek of shock as icy water pelted her back. Her skin turned a rosy pink in seconds as she scrubbed away the slick trails of Ilya’s come and her wetness.

This wasn’t part of the plan. To get Ilya excited, yes, but to lose herself so completely in his arms was not safe. Unable to understand how he could decimate her to a quivering puddle of need, Quinn sniffed back acrid tears and washed again.

It wasn’t fair or right how she became a slave to her instincts. How she reacted to an Alpha’s nearness and need without any control. The Gods were cruel, playing the ultimate joke on a dynamic seen as nothing but breeders and a good fuck.

She could still catch the hint of cinnamon and the sharp bite of anise when she rinsed a third time. Uttering a miserable groan, she snatched up a bottle and sniffed the contents. Pine and amber, smoky and intense, she wrinkled her nose in distaste and dumped a healthy portion onto a fluffy poof. Working Lee’s soap into a thick lather, she

scoured away at her body until she could smell nothing but the flat chemical scent of products.

Brushing her teeth with enough violence to taint the taste of berries with the flat iron of blood, Quinn seethed. Even now her pussy pulsed with need, slick gathering in her folds to trickle down her thighs before swirling with the pelting spray. Denied the knot her body craved, it would continue to torture her. Despite the ever present ache lurking behind her ribs, agonizing and cruel, her body didn't care who fucked her, so long as they did it well. A bitter laugh burbled past foamy lips before she spit the pink tinged bubbles at the drain. She was nothing but a needy cunt, the personification of what every male had ever called her.

"Something wrong, pet?" The shower door swung open, allowing Lee's bulk inside. His warmth overpowered even the scalding shower, pressing Quinn back against the tiles as he stalked her in the cramped space. His chin lifted, nostrils flaring. Canting his head, Lee eyed her with an impenetrable dark gaze. "You smell different, pet."

Swiping a wet palm over her lips to rid them of the last of her toothpaste, she blinked up at him. Sheer terror ripped through her veins as she tried to take an experimental sniff without Lee noticing. Clenching her teeth, wondering if she had failed to scrub away the last traces of Ilya, she watched Lee loom ever closer. Defeat was bitter on her tongue.

She wanted to rail at the male, to scream her discontent, to shout how none of this was okay. Taking a breath to calm the urge brought a rush of something altogether different. The groan that wrenched from her as a sudden ache gripped her belly had her clinging to him to remain upright. The swift twisting of pain in the cradle of her hips brought forth a rush of slick, a river of it coursing down her thighs.

Actions preceded thought as she scaled his large body, slippery flesh sliding under her clawing fingers and gripping legs as she sought to mount him. Need pulsed through her veins, a fiery brand that demanded to be soothed. Snarling as Lee's hands caught her thighs, Quinn bared her teeth and squirmed her way into position. Small hand gripping his already hard cock, she guided him to her entrance. Pounded her other fist against his chest when he wouldn't let her sink down onto his thick length.

Lee growled a warning, crushing Quinn's body between him and the tiles as he pushed his face into her neck. His long inhale cooled her skin, sending goosebumps prickling down her shoulders and arms before the warmth of his rich call resounded through her and the echoing room. It urged forth another heavy rush of wetness, bathing them both in the potent fluid laced with sweet pheromones before he shunted inside of her in one brutal thrust. Driving into the hilt each time, he pounded her against the wall without mercy.

She basked in his violence, trills and moans tangible things as they reverberated through the room. Searing bliss threaded through her limbs as he ground against her clit. Clinging to the Alpha who was intent on fucking her into the tiles, she succumbed to it. Licked at his salty flesh, growling and clawing to demand more. The wet slap of flesh punctuated with her guttural groans the bass to the cacophony of their fucking.

It was intense, brutal. Exactly what she needed.

The first tendrils slipping under her skin erupted into a shower of sizzling fireworks at the base of her skull. Every muscle drawn tight, she screamed into the beyond. Slick muscle contracted around his driving length, wringing the rigid shaft for what she needed. Dragged him roaring with her into a body shuddering release. The knot shoved home, fully formed before either expected it. Tearing delicate flesh, Quinn screamed again as the pain warped through her body into mind bending pleasure.

Lee ground his knot against that special spot, growling against her throat as he shoved a rough hand between her taut lips. Thumbing her clit with an abrasive thumb, ignoring her wails, he forced her to the edge before the first orgasm had even begun to fade.

Desperate muscles fluttering, she gouged Lee's shoulders. Threw her head back into the tiles and shrieked as he sent her plummeting into inky darkness.

The last thing Quinn knew before the void devoured her was the taste of smoke and violence carried on the coppery tang of Lee's blood.

Chapter 9

Quinn whimpered as she shifted, every muscle aching, whole body sore. The space between her legs was nothing more than throbbing agony. A multitude of bruises made themselves known as she tried to shove away from the mountain of heat that warned her with a growl to be still.

Huge hands caught her at the hips, pulling her back as the massive body beneath her arched up. Shoving his cock deeper, grinding the knot that still invaded her further inside the tight clench of muscles that had yet to release their hold.

Her whine was shrill and airy, pain surpassing any remnants of pleasure from the hazy orgasm she didn't quite remember. The long hours through the night where Lee had continued to mount her, call aggressive and demanding when she begged for sleep. Pacing with a sharp edge of impatience when he allowed her to see Elise for the barest moments, pulling her screaming child away at the first sign she was finished nursing.

Lee had smiled at her anger, laughed in the face of her protective rage. Then he had hauled Quinn back into the bedroom and threw her across the end of the bed. Fucking her from behind like an animal until she'd passed out only to be woken again when he arranged her spread out on the bed.

Now as she continued to twitch and groan, he rolled them over to pin her under his weight. Pushing her into the bed until she could do little more than wheeze and batter his sides with weak fists.

"Hush, pet," Lee said, voice little more than a rumble as he pressed his face into her neck. Scenting her, he breathed in deep over and again, growling with each exhale.

"Please... please, I can't." Quinn went limp, fading into the destroyed nest as he pushed her head aside.

"Fuck, but you smell so damn good." Lee groaned and ground his hips down into her, rocking his knot deeper behind her pelvic bone until Quinn keened. "You smell different, pet. So sweet, so... good."

Horror slid down her spine, tangling around delicate vertebrae. Skin prickling, goosebumps erupted over her flesh as she dug her nails into

Lee's sides. The sudden clench of her pussy around his hard length, around the still pulsing knot, made Lee groan as her body tried to expel the immovable object.

The rasping ghost of Ilya's words filtered through the numbing paralysis. He'd said soon, soon he would have her. Now Lee said she smelled sweeter, different. She remembered the twisting cramp that would have sent her to her knees if Lee hadn't been there. Quinn couldn't believe she had missed all the warning signs of an impending heat fast approaching. Then again, she hadn't had a natural heat in so long. Not since before she stumbled into Alton's bed a lifetime ago had she been without suppressants.

Swallowing hard to push back the rising tide of bile, Quinn sent shaking hands to pet at Lee's back. Hoping to soothe the fervor from his tone, to calm the bunching muscle that promised he wasn't anywhere near finished yet. She thought she was successful as he nuzzled and nipped along her jaw, purring in satisfaction while they remained locked together.

Until the bloated knot began to diminish, sending a flood of their combined fluids rushing to soak the bed. Then he began to move. Steady, unhurried strokes that buried him so deep she felt the full crown against her cervix. Little flinching pains that built on top of one another until her stomach clenched with the deep seated ache.

Trying to concentrate past the pain, past the wet heat of Lee's mouth working against her neck and jaw, Quinn stared at the ceiling. This couldn't be happening. Not now. Not when she was so close to getting the fuck out of this place. Teeth grinding, she arched to ease the growing agony pulsing through her hips.

"So good," Lee growled against her neck before his lips moved further south. The edge of his teeth scraping against her shoulder, he licked at her sweat sheened flesh. Massive body shuddering, his rhythm faltered. One violent slap of his hips became another until he had her spread wide, taking his violence. The slick shaft of his cock forced its way through her reticence, pummeling against the very end of her with every cruel drive forward.

The wet slap of flesh filled the room, Lee's growls and moans a counterpoint to her painful grunts. Hissing when his hand covered her full breast, fingers clutching in the malleable flesh, Quinn sucked in

deep breaths. Tried to lose herself in the Alpha's scent, the thick musk that pervaded every inch of air.

It was no use.

All she scented was his violence, the malice that forever tainted his skin. The insane urge that had taken her last night was nowhere to be found. Pussy wet out of instinct alone, she could do nothing more than take it. Petting at Lee's back to calm him brought a snarl and a vicious twist to her thigh, pushing the offended limb up to her shoulder so he could push deeper. Ignoring her keens and whines, Lee gripped her leg and held her open to his violation.

Not until he opened his mouth wide, sucking and lapping at the bit of flesh on her shoulder he had long been enamored with did an idea spring to life. A sudden flood of illumination filling her mind as pieces of the puzzle slapped together in time with each punishing thrust.

Whines turning plaintive, Quinn angled her head to bare her throat. Nails digging crimson half-moons in Lee's back, she rocked her hips in time with him. Forced abused muscles to clench around his throbbing shaft as she coiled her free leg around him. Opening herself to him in all the ways that mattered to the male. It was beyond dangerous. Stupid, even. If her timing was off by even a second, she'd be in a worse hell than she could ever imagine.

Quinn was rewarded for her deception in moments. The deep growl shuddered through her bones, rattling a sigh from her lungs as his teeth punched into flesh. Digging ever deeper, the first taste of her blood made him howl against her shoulder.

Just a little more and she would have him! The suddenness of the knot surprised her, Lee ramming it inside her aching passage, Quinn trying to squeeze it in a mockery of orgasm.

Each jerky lunge of her hips as she pulled him deeper caused Lee to bite harder. The sharp edge of his teeth slid through her flesh until Quinn screamed. Instinct told her to fight, to kick and punch at the larger male. Not just in fear, but to force him to prove himself, strong and dominant enough to take her. Shuddering, eyes squeezed shut, she made every muscle go limp. Fell back into the bed, boneless and unresisting as he growled and bit harder. Trying to rouse the Omega under him, Lee snapped his hips. Jostled the knot caught behind her pelvic bone to make her scream.

Remaining quiet and listless, Quinn counted the seconds by her trembling heartbeat. Waiting for him to squeeze his jaw shut, leaving her with an irreparable mark, she fought to keep the maelstrom of panic at bay. The smallest twitch would be seen as an invitation, a sigh acceptance. She prayed Lee wouldn't play his usual games and waited for his fingers to close over her throat.

Long minutes passed. The stuttering of her breath fanned across the broad shoulder blocking her view of the room beyond. His knot continued to pulse, sending torrents of thick come deep inside of her, but Lee remained as motionless as she was. Balancing on a razor edge, they each waited for the other to tip the scales. His growl was a mere vibration against her chest at first. A sound felt more than heard before it began growing in volume. Louder and louder until the Alpha parted his teeth and roared. Quinn didn't even flinch. Kept her eyes shut tight and jaw set as Lee continued to voice his rage above her.

Omegas might be a slave to their instincts, but Alphas weren't much better. There was no challenge in a docile claim, it lacked the necessary fuel to split an Omega's soul apart and tie it to theirs. While she had known something of that by sheer instinct, Ilya's lessons had taught her much. A hell of a lot more than anyone else had ever deigned to tell her about her dynamic. Things never even hinted at in polite society were now known, and she'd use every little morsel she could to her advantage.

Lee muttered something under his breath, lips a cruel slash as he pulled away. The knot, shrunken and oozing come, still caused an uncomfortable swell in his shaft.

Quinn allowed herself a flinch, lower lip maneuvering into a pout. Let him think she was cowed, docile as a lamb. Victory still sped through her veins in agonizing rushes as she forced her limbs to remain quiet and still. He'd suffer for a while yet before the knot abated, denied the tight clench of her orgasm wringing it. It was a petty revenge, but one she would take with unsurpassed glee.

Lee climbed off the bed, his mass shifting in tight, controlled movements. The acrid taste of his anger blanketed her as he snatched his robe from the hook. Leaving the room, the door slammed shut so hard she imagined the whole house shook.

She'd won.

Quinn released a shaky sigh, a mixture of relief and the rush of fear. Every muscle twitching, quivering with unspent emotions, she shot off the bed and dashed into the bathroom. If the Gods had ever loved her, he was done with her for now. Her plan could continue, and the other piece of the puzzle would be there all too soon. Facing the mirror, she had to quiet the roiling clench of her stomach as she saw the blood seeping down her reflection's shoulder and chest. Swallowing hard, she set trembling fingers to the bite.

There wasn't enough time to be squeamish.

It took longer than expected. She thought she might faint at one point. By the time she finished, the gruesome scene was almost too much. Weak and shaking, Quinn braced her hands against the cool granite countertop and took slow, deep breaths to calm the urge to vomit. Precious seconds lost to keep some handhold on her slipping sanity.

The door to the nursery clicked shut, the quiet sound echoing through her skull as Quinn looked at her reflection one more time. She avoided seeing anything but her eyes as she gave a firm nod of resolve. It was time.

Turning on her heel, she let the tears come. Blinding as they flooded over her lashes, tumbling down her cheeks to spatter her bare chest. Choking on a sob that wasn't at all difficult to produce, Quinn jerked the bedroom door open and flung herself into the massive male just outside of it.

Crying hard enough she couldn't draw a decent breath, Quinn scaled the breadth of his chest, clinging to his shoulders. Sobbed all the harder when his hands wrapped around her hips, hauling her the rest of the way up.

"*Kiska, shh, what—*" Ilya trailed off on a dangerous rumble. Arm a vice around her thighs, he pinned her to his chest, free hand pushing into her hair and jerking her head to the side. Baring the bite wound Quinn had worked at deepening with the sharp edge of her nails. The gory mess of her shoulder looked like a claiming mark without too close an inspection, and the hot ash taste of Ilya's anger sitting heavy on her tongue promised he wasn't concerned about taking too close of a look.

“What is this?”

“L-Lee,” Quinn choked out around the suffocating sobs, frantic fingers tugging, pulling at Ilya’s shirt. Actions desperate in a way that could lead down a multitude of paths, she hoped he only saw the lurking terror.

“He did this to you?”

“Told you! I told you!” Quinn screamed into the thick line of his neck, shuddering.

“Shh, *kiska*. It is all right. It will be all right.” Ilya tried to purr, the sound more snarl than comfort as he pushed Quinn against the wall. Forcing her to still, his fingers were downright hesitant to touch the smeared crimson staining her skin.

“It’s not!” She began to struggle then, letting the ever present agony holed up under her sternum free. Let it swallow her up as she scraped her nails over her chest, digging at the worming sensation lodged there as if she could pry it out with her fingers. Vision tunneling, Quinn thought she might have let it go too far.

Ilya brought her back to the moment, slamming her back against the wall with a purr so loud and deep, she would have been surprised if the whole house hadn’t heard it. There was comfort there, to be sure, but she needed him blinded by his passions, not trying to soothe her.

“No! No, it’s wrong, it’s all wrong,” Quinn keened as she shoved and kicked, squirming against the unrelenting bulk of him to be free. Baring her teeth in a snarl, she punched at his face, reaching for his eyes.

The briefest glimpse of chilling blue sent a ragged jolt of victory through her veins. Adrenaline pumping, it gave new strength to watery limbs as she fought.

Mad. He thought her totally insane. Perhaps even that Lee had broken her. Now she just needed Ilya to play the part she’d directed him to.

He didn’t make her wait long.

With an ease that might have been startling in other circumstances, Ilya turned the comforting purr to a vicious call. It demanded her body’s reaction, insisted on her compliance. Left her no room to breathe as he tumbled them to the floor. Keeping his chest flush to her, blocking clawing fingers and pushing the deep sound into her body,

Ilya maneuvered his hand between them. Trousers falling away, he stroked his cock once before slapping it against her mound. Knees driving between Quinn's thighs, he forced her open to slide his hard shaft between her lips. Pushing his face into her neck, he growled again and shoved his cock into her pussy, hilted in one agonizing thrust.

Quinn screamed as he settled inside of her. Massive palm covering her mouth, he muffled her sounds as he began to move. Working his hips in cruel, snapping jerks, the quiet calm Ilya always presented fell away.

"You will know who you belong to, *kiska*," Ilya husked, lips against her ear as he forced her wider, pushed deeper until his cock pounded against her cervix with every painful roll of his hips.

Quinn could only wail against Ilya's hand, eyes squeezing shut. Let images of Kahler flood her mind, of his rich call, the depth of his purrs that had never failed to leave her limp and compliant in his arms. Felt the rush of slick, the wet slap of flesh loud as Ilya's movements became smooth and slippery. She pictured dark green eyes, bright green flames that devoured her when she lay under him. Remembered the feel of calloused hands as they played her body with utter perfection.

Then it came. Rich, decadent, spicy and exhilarating. Chilies and chocolate flooded her tongue on the flat iron taste of blood. Not her own, the subtle smoky flavor of Ilya trying to invade her senses. Her teeth dug into his palm, tongue lapping at the thin trickle as she groaned and arched into his next brutal thrust.

Unadulterated bliss coursed through her veins as she pictured Kahler above her. Felt the coarseness of his stubbled cheek against her neck, rasping down to her chest. Too large hands enfolding her hips brought her into every forward drive, forcing more of that delicious thickness deep inside. Quinn shuddered and moaned under the violent assault, clinging to the male as she begged for more with every impatient twitch of her hips.

"You feel so good, Quinn," Ilya rumbled through the prolonged growl. Fingers clenching around her, he bruised pale flesh as he attacked her breasts with mouth and tongue. Scraping the edge of his

teeth over the taut points of her breasts, lapping in wild fits to make her moan again. “Made for my cock.”

Quinn snarled, baring her teeth at the much larger Alpha. He was ruining the image in her head with his talk, his scent not the one she craved. Shoving her fingers into his hair, she tugged hard. Made her need known when she keened as soon as his mouth closed over her breast. Sucking lips and sharp teeth drove her higher. He didn’t bite hard enough, didn’t push that edge of pain into her pleasure that she wanted.

Losing herself in the moment, in the instincts running wild for the one she imagined, Quinn began to struggle. Fought against the Alpha’s hold, growling and kicking. Bit his lips when he pressed them to hers. Screamed when he shoved too deep, too fast, crushing her with his full weight as he slammed into her.

“You will take it, *kiska*. You’ll take my cock like you were made to. You’ll squeeze my knot and milk it for every fucking drop,” Ilya said through a menacing growl. Grabbed her wrists with ease and pinned them above her head as his other arm wrapped around her hips. Hauling her up onto his thighs, keeping her imprisoned, forcing her to take every last inch of him.

Back arched, Quinn’s scream was raw, feral. Legs kicking, body jostling, it was difficult to tell if she was trying to get away or get more. It didn’t matter. He made her take it. Forced her to be still as he angled her just so, grinding the swollen crown against that special spot. Pushed the air from her lungs with each vicious thrust that bottomed out.

Pleasure slid up her spine, tangling around the vertebrae until only her shoulders scraped across the plush carpet. Desperate twitches of her hips urged the Alpha on, her low cries pleading as he swiveled his hips. Jagged, painful, she heard the perfect rumble deep in her soul. It pulsed from her chest in fiery surges, mingling with pleasure that washed through her with every forward lunge Ilya made.

Gasping between grunts and moans, Quinn’s head thrashed against the carpet. It built and built, a teetering maelstrom held back by the thinnest layer of control. She could smell him, feel his anger rattling in her chest. Eyes snapping open, she tried to focus on the blue eyed

menace above her, to suck in deep breaths of the incredible contradiction of Ilya's scent, but it was no use.

It was Kahler all around her. Inside her. He invaded every minuscule cell until all she knew was him. His rage fueled her pleasure, twisted and manic. Rocketing through her in an explosion of sensation. Quinn screamed, unseeing but for the vivid green of his eyes that seemed to swallow her whole. Took her in and mangled her senses. Destroyed everything that was her.

His roar pounded against her eardrums, deafening. Obscene in its anger, its desire, its broken need. She didn't even hear her scream as it joined in. The jolt of hips meeting, the aching rush of a thick cock demanding, pulsing, burrowing deep inside of her. Kahler's green, green eyes were all she knew.

The rhythmic contractions of her pussy drew the Alpha in. Squeezed the throbbing shaft until the male groaned. Fluttering around the heavy girth of him until each powerful stroke pummeled her insides. Utter perfection as white hot bliss crackled through her veins. Fireworks of sensation shimmering under her skin.

She soared.

The faint swell of the knot worked at her entrance. Forcing her wide, wider. Arm wrapped tight around her hips, Ilya pulled her onto his cock one last time and roared against her shoulder. The knot expanded. Filled her up to the point of pain. Sent her higher through the agonizing pleasure that crashed through her in ever jagged waves.

Vision fading to black, Quinn sobbed as the first pulse of white heat flooded her. Squeezing, a vice of slick flesh locked the male deep.

Quinn groaned as her eyes fluttered open. Pinned against the floor, the rug scraped against abraded flesh, a stabbing sensation that made her hiss. Ilya's growl was quiet, a gentle warning when she tried to shift. One she didn't heed soon enough.

A single faint wriggle brought agony. Long abused muscles, locked tight around the pulsing knot, refused to relax or give way. Quinn buried her whimper against Ilya's chest, shivering as the pain and shock slithered through her. It doused any heat that remained in her limbs. Turned languid muscle to stone as the massive male held her close. No matter that Omegas were designed to take the abuse of

Alphas, that they healed so much faster than their counterparts, she'd been through too much in too little time to feel anything but agony.

"Soon, Quinn. Be still." Ilya pressed his lips to her temple, offering a quiet purr to calm and soothe.

The grating rasp of his voice angered her. It was not the one she wanted. Chest a gaping hole of hate and fear and something she did not want to describe, she sobbed. The bitter cold of a dead night coursed through her veins, denying her the comfort offered. Left Quinn shivering in the bleak winter of her emotions.

Sniffling, she began crying all the harder. Cinnamon and anise assaulted her. It was gone. Whatever had happened during those insane moments was gone. All she could feel now was an emptiness that would never be filled.

"Shh, *kiska*," Ilya whispered through the purr. Arms wrapping somehow tighter around her much smaller form. Snuggling her close against all that heat and muscle.

"What have I done?" Voice as thin and pale as her soul, a full body shudder racked her.

"All will be well, *kiska*. Do not fear." Mistaking her emotional outburst for fear, of consequences yet to be doled out, Ilya purred all the louder. "You are mine now."

Quinn could only cry. Wept as the knot pulsed inside of her. Despair was slimy and invasive, crawling through her with malicious intent. Trying to remember the plan, her goal, of Elise sleeping just across the hall were the only things keeping her from tearing herself apart.

She would get out. She had to.

Groaning when Ilya eased his hips back, Quinn had to fight down the urge to shove him away. To not curl up in desolate misery as she let the agony still pouring from her chest destroy her. Come and slick pouring from her mistreated sex, she fell back into the floor as he disentangled their bodies.

"Come, Quinn. It is time now." Ilya held his hand out to help her, huffing in impatience when she just continued to lie there. Reached down and pulled her up when he got tired of waiting. Taking her to the bathroom, he was careful as he lifted Quinn onto the counter. Made sure the wet cloth was warm when he cleaned the smeared fluids from her thighs in gentle swipes.

“You are mine,” Ilya said once he had cleaned her up some. Tipping her chin up with his fingers, the crystalline gaze was determined and untroubled. “I will show you this.”

“I can’t, not again. Please,” Quinn stammered in a rapid fire rush. Lower lip trembling she tried to hide the swollen, reddened flesh between her legs behind ineffectual fingers.

“Not that, my little Quinn.” Though he smiled, his gaze still dipped down to what her hands tried to cover. “Now come.”

Ilya led her back into the bedroom, pulling clothes out of the closet. He dressed her like a doll, knocking her hands away when she tried to do it herself. There was a certain determination in the set of his jaw, the depths of his icy gaze, as he tended to her like a doting Alpha. He even began to purr when Quinn flinched from his hand raised to smooth her hair.

“Come, we will deal with this now.” He gave her no choice but to follow, large palm swallowing her hand as Ilya headed for the hall and tugged her along behind him.

“What are you going to do,” Quinn whispered, the shaky sound too loud in the quiet of the house.

“Take care of this once and for all.”

“What does that mean, Ilya?”

He didn’t respond, giving her arm a sharp tug to get her back into motion when Quinn stalled at the top of the stairs. Ilya kept leading the way, angling them towards Lee’s study. She did not want to go in there. Didn’t want to be in the room where they had thought to command her life and body as if she had no say. Her heart ached, twisting in the hollow space of her chest as the angry demon buried inside her veins continued to howl and roar.

She was distracted when Ilya pulled her into the room, didn’t notice him closing the door until Lee’s attention was centered on them. A single brow quirked, his smile was less than welcoming and too sure of itself. Something about it sent a warning bell clanging through her thoughts, but she couldn’t think. Couldn’t understand why he should look so smug just then.

“You bit her?” Ilya’s imposing bulk sidled closer to the desk, keeping Quinn close behind him as he neared Lee.

“What of it?” Lee leaned back in his heavy chair, the picture of Alpha arrogance as he steepled his fingers, tapping them against his chin. “She’s mine to do with as I wish, isn’t she?”

“Net,” Ilya said through a low rumble, arm snaking around Quinn’s hip to pull her flush. Burying her against his side, he tightened his hold. Shaking his head, he moved them even closer. “You need to stop damaging what is mine.”

Lee leaned forward, fingers splaying across the gleaming wood of the desk as he rose to his feet with a steady purposefulness that would have sent Quinn scrambling for the door, running for her life, had Ilya’s arm not locked in a vice around her. Keeping her right where she stood as Lee faced them with the muddy brown of his eyes narrowed.

“Is that so?”

“Da.” One simple word, delivered in a tone flat and devoid of inflection.

Quinn shuddered, trying to hide, squirming in Ilya’s hold but unwilling to draw too much attention. Why would he bring her this close to the other male? Tension crackled through the close air of the study, an edge of violence thrumming through the space. Attention split between the two, she tried to make herself hold still.

Lee stood to his full height, not as impressive as Ilya, but still dangerous. Powerful. His upper lip curled, baring his teeth for a moment before he leaned a hip against the desk. “Well then. What’re you going to do?”

Ilya made a low sound in his throat, a serrated grunt that sliced through Quinn’s resolve not to struggle too hard. She pushed against his side, working her away around to his back until his hand clamped down over her hip. Pulled her back where she would remain visible to them both.

“That so?” Lee acted as if nothing was wrong, his steps slow and sure as he came around the desk to lean back against the front edge. Facing the pair, he crossed his arms over his chest and stared. Let his slimy gaze slip over Quinn with detached interest. “What are you waiting for then? I’m getting tired of talking.”

“You should care more if she is whole and well,” Ilya said through a growl, his other hand coming up to cup the back of Quinn’s skull. Pushing her face into his chest, he wrapped her in his embrace.

Quinn shook her head, unable to understand what was going on. They should have been tearing each other apart by now. She should have had ample time to collect Elise and run from this horror while they ripped into each other in a struggle that would blind them to everything else.

“Maybe if you would quit your complaining and give her the full dose, we could get on with it. She’s a good fuck but playing this game has gotten tiring.”

“What?” Quinn’s breath left her in a rush, question lost in the hard exhalation. Not that either man paid her any attention. Eyes rounding, she strained against Ilya’s hand, trying in earnest to break free now.

“Perhaps if you had not decided to take out your anger on her last night, I could have,” Ilya snarled, hauling Quinn around until she stood in front of him. Clenched his fingers around her nape and pinned her there despite her struggling. “I had everything ready, but no, you decided to punish her for needing a higher dosage. Hadler told you it would take time.”

“What... What are you... Ilya!”

“Not three fucking weeks,” Lee said, the low register of his growl rattling through the air.

“No! No, please,” Quinn shrieked as Lee came closer, the heavy weight of his hands coming to the hem of her shirt. Choked on her scream when he bunched the fabric in his fists, ripping it away with ease. Ilya lifting her as Lee jerked the loose pants down, uncaring of how he bent and twisted her legs.

“Shh, *kiska*,” Ilya said through a purr, forcing calm into her limbs as he carried her towards the desk. Pushing her against the sharp edge until she was forced to bend over at the hips. “This is for your own good. You will see how it will be now, it will be clear. No more uncertainty, *da?*”

Words escaped her as she continued to shriek, legs kicking in useless fits. Ilya’s hand pinned her down, held her to the gleaming wood as the sound of shuffling clothing whispered under her panicked cries. Then Lee was there, hot and heavy behind her.

Ilya snarled something in Russian at the other Alpha, stretching her arms across the desk as he maneuvered to the other side. Lee responded in kind, kicking Quinn’s legs wide as he took up position

between them. Arms now taut across the desk, Ilya held her with one hand while he jerked at his clothing. Opened his trousers and let them fall as he leaned over her. His still wet shaft and hand appeared inches from her face, rubbing the throbbing length with rough strokes. He smeared glistening drops of his excitement across his fingers until they were coated.

Lee tangled his fist in her hair, pulling her head back until her mouth opened wide on a shrill cry. Allowing Ilya to push in, coating her tongue with his scent and taste, forcing her to swallow it down as he began to call to her. Hunching over her, working his fingers in and out of her mouth, he pressed his lips against her neck to let her feel the growl all the more. Lapped at her skin, murmuring words of encouragement as Lee shoved her hips back to the desk. The blunt crown of his cock pushed its way inside of her. Rough, cruel, Lee's hips slammed into her ass and crushed her against the desk.

"You couldn't wait two minutes," Ilya said through the resounding call, the edge of anger ruining his efforts to excite Quinn.

"Not for pussy this good," Lee grunted, withdrawing only to force her body to accept him in a swift lunge. Skin slapping together, the sound underlined by Quinn's helpless squeal of pain. "Sooner I get her pregnant, sooner you can play house."

"Shh, Quinn, it is all right. Just calm yourself," Ilya murmured as he crouched before her. Working his fingers into her mouth over and over, he fed her the thin fluid of his excitement. "You should not have played such a dangerous game. Now it will be made right. I'm here, my little one. When he is done, I will make it all better."

Sobbing around the fingers choking her, Quinn squeezed her eyes shut. Chest splitting open, cracking wide, she buried herself in the rage filled roar reverberating through her veins. Cried all the harder at the note of desperate fear that tainted it as her heart twisted.

Praying he would come, that he would save Elise, her tenuous grasp on her thoughts slipped. Plummeting into the inky blackness, she heard her shuddering moan as instincts finally won.

Tobias bolted from the bed, tearing at the sheets tangled around him. Ripping the fine cotton away, shredding it under clawed fingers, he roared into the darkness. Her screams were fading, her pleas and cries a faint whisper in time to his thundering heartbeat as he became more aware, more lucid in this waking nightmare.

Collapsing onto the side of the bed, Tobias rubbed his face with his palms, clenching his fingers in his hair as he set elbows to knees and stared at the dark carpet between his feet.

“Tobias, are you all right?” Curtis appeared in the gloom, careful to remain outside of the disoriented Alpha’s space, to give him room enough to not see a threat.

“I’ll be fine.” He hated the raw sound of his voice, despised that he was showing such weakness, but there was nothing for it. Something had happened. Something more than what had caused Quinn such distress before. She wasn’t sad, wasn’t angry. She was... desolate. Shattering in his mind’s eye, delicate glass sent in a glittery spray across rough cement.

Tobias sprung up from the bed again, stumbling forward as the bond twisted through his chest. Wrapped around his heart, crushing it in a miserable vice, it would have sent him to his knees as his vision grayed, blackness edging the simple room as he caught himself against the wall. He heard the violence of the roar as if from a long way off, marveling at the rage, the undertone of defeat encapsulated in that single drawn out sound.

A shuddering breath dragged into his burning lungs, delicate tissue starved. Sadness didn’t begin to describe the sensation clawing its way through him. The acid burn of utter defeat wormed through his veins, forcing him to lock his knees to remain upright. Her screams filled his mind, overflowing until he thought his head would explode. Didn’t even feel the drywall crumbling under his fists. Not even when his knuckles struck something solid, the wall support splintering, the crack of wood grinding through his teeth.

Her cries were cut short, silenced in a way that shocked him into stillness. As if someone had flipped a switch, she was gone from his mind, from the bond. His very soul shredded, wisps of smoke that fell like ash all around him as he waited for thundering heartbeats in utter silence. Hand stuck in the wall, he waited. Thankful for the flood of

desolate fear that rushed through him, if only to know she was still alive.

Broken, defeated, but not dead.

“Get everyone up and moving,” Tobias whispered, voice hoarse, strangled as he forced it past numb lips. He had to get her. Had to bring her home.

Not that it had been secure enough to stop her from being taken the first time.

“Get everyone here now,” he roared, whirling around to stalk towards Curtis, shoving the Beta out into the hall. Watching with detached disinterest as his faithful righthand slammed into the wall.

“Tobias, it’s three in the morning. Why don’t we wait until—”

“Do it now!”

“Yes, sir.” Movements cautious, voice stilted, Curtis peeled himself away from the wall and angled his steps towards the main room of the suite.

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Chapter 10

Quinn screamed, voice long gone hoarse and ragged, as she threw her weight against the door. Elise was wailing, a strange woman's voice seeping through the thick slab of wood that would not give under Quinn's hammering blows. She didn't feel the bruises, the cuts and scrapes, felt none of the agony that had gone on for hours and hours until Ilya had put her back in the room. Lee's smile was smug when he shut the door and the lock slammed home.

Then the woman had come. Her soft voice difficult to discern over the low rumble of Lee's replies. And it was him, of that she was certain. Elise began to cry.

"Quiet down!"

Quinn paused, falling against the door as she struggled to recognize the voice. It wasn't Lee or Ilya. Someone else stood outside her door. Between her and her shrieking baby. Gulping a ragged breath, Quinn began again. Hammering at the door with her fists, kicking and screaming, she demanded to be let out. Demanded her child.

She expected the door to come open, but their timing was so precise she had no chance to dodge the panel as it swung inward. Slamming into the door before being sent crashing back to the floor, Quinn's hoarse shriek as she scrambled back to her feet, leaping towards the door was cut short. Fist catching her in the stomach, Quinn doubled over in pain as the breath left her lungs in a violent surge. A mere glimpse of Elise, red faced and squalling in a woman's arms, was all she got before the nursery door closed hard over the scene.

And then Lee was there.

Filling up the hall, his shadow was bitter cold as it fell over Quinn where she was sent sprawling once more. Darryl smirked, closing the door behind Lee, his wink the last thing she saw before the door shut.

"You're being a nuisance, pet."

"Give me my daughter!" Struggling to her feet, Quinn wheezed as her lungs tried to suck in air that wouldn't come in anything more than a fragile sip. Strangling on the words that became a mangled wreck of syllables, she lurched towards the Alpha sneering down at her, gripping his shirt to remain upright.

“You’ll behave, pet, or even Ilya won’t be able to stop your punishment.” Lee’s hand went into her hair, gripping the strands in a loose fist. The casual slap of the back of his hand knocked her head aside, body spinning as she fell to her knees.

Mouth working, trying to breathe past the pain and the agony pulsing through her midsection, Quinn’s legs kicked weakly. The moment she gained her feet, he sent her down again, the other side of her face puffy and tight. Throbbing, aching, she dry heaved as his gleaming shoe connected between her thighs, shoving her across the floor until her back slammed into the wooden footboard hard enough to groan. Head cracking against the solid panes, Quinn listed sideways, only to be brought up short by his grip in her hair.

“I said behave, pet.” Leaning down, he took her chin in his free hand, squeezing her cheeks until the skin blanched and grew rosy to the imprint of his fingers. “If you ever want to see her again, you’ll be a good little bitch. When Hadler comes in here, you’re going to give him your arm and take the dose. One single peep out of you and I send her away. She’ll forget who you are, won’t even know anyone but the Beta is her mother. Understand me?”

Quinn whimpered as he jerked her head back and forth in a nod she had no control over. Pale strands ripped free, floating down around her, sticking to damp cheeks and the blood that spilled from her lips.

“Lee,” Ilya said, the beginnings of a warning in his tone as he came into the room with Hadler in tow. Elise’s shrieks followed them in before the door once again shut it away.

“If she damages herself, what good is she?” Lee released her, throwing her back into the footboard as he went to the vanity, leaning his bulk against the delicate piece.

“Beating her is the answer,” Ilya asked, scoffing as he crouched before Quinn. Clicking his tongue against his teeth, dismay painted his rough face as he gathered her up from the floor. Ignoring her weak struggles as he squeezed and held bruised flesh, heedless of the deep scratches scoring her. He sat in the ruin of her nest, keeping her pinned between his thighs and gestured the doctor forward.

“Some of those should be treated,” Hadler murmured. His detached gaze wouldn’t rise from the ravaged body before him, refusing to meet

Quinn's furious eyes. A syringe was produced from his bag, the milky fluid sloshing around the thin plastic tube.

Opening her mouth to scream at them all, Ilya's palm slapped down around the bottom half of her face. Forcing her to breathe through her clogged nose, thick fingers impeding even that. Quinn bucked, slapping at his hand, clawing at his wrist. The warning that thundered against her back was not feigned.

Suffocating in small degrees, Quinn threw her arm out towards Hadler. Waved it at him when he took his sweet time taking her forearm to steady it. The bite of the needle sliced up her arm, grinding through her shoulder before blistering agony was pushed into her veins.

There was no purr to comfort her through that initial shock as the chemicals worked their way into her bloodstream. No daze from the male's attention to get lost in as it corrupted her body. She felt it searing its way to her heart where it pumped in rapid time out to the rest of her limbs.

Not until Hadler stepped back, syringe held up to the light to prove its emptiness, did Ilya release her mouth. Let her gasp and choke as blood and mucus poured from her nose to spatter her chest and stomach. He had the gall to rub at her back when her stomach twisted, and she dry heaved over her thighs.

"How many more doses does she need?"

Shivering as her skin broke out in a cold sweat while her insides boiled, Quinn tried to blink away the film of tears. Shook her head hard to make sense of the melting, blurring visions around her. Hissed when rough hands scraped along her bruised arms, jostling against the sweltering mass behind her that burned where it touched.

"Two, maybe three. She was still nursing, it will take time for her to stop lactating and go into estrous."

"You said it would only be a few more doses before," Lee ground out as he stalked towards the shrinking Beta. Fisting Hadler's shirt, Lee hauled the doctor up to his toes, growling inches away from his face.

"I said... it would take... time." Gasping as he twisted in Lee's grip, Hadler began to turn an uncomfortable shade of bright red.

Quinn groaned as her stomach twisted, rolling in on itself. Curling up around the pain, she clawed at the iron bar of an arm that pinned her to the bed when she went to writhe. Skin itching, too tight as it flexed over taut muscle, she could only whimper as a shudder rattled down her spine.

“Shh, *kiska*. Let it happen.”

Ilya’s soothing purr was anything but, grating along her nerves. A piercing shriek preceded her fist connecting with his solid jaw when he tried to kiss her cheek, her cry turning to one of agony as delicate bone crunched and shifted in the cup of her palm.

Cradling her hand against her chest, Quinn whimpered and whined. Tried to squirm away from all the heat building behind her, to ignore the way her thighs slipped against each other as she muffled her screams in the ruined bedding.

“Shut her up.” Lee tossed Hadler away, unimportant refuse, as he came alongside the bed. Muddy eyes narrowing, his lips turned up into a cruel smirk as he watched Quinn thrash.

“The injections are purer than the pills,” Hadler said to the room in a croak, rubbing at his neck where the imprint of Lee’s knuckles bloomed an angry crimson. “It’ll still take a few doses for her body to adjust. It’s forced now, not natural.”

“An Omega in heat is the most natural thing there is,” Lee said, something satisfied, lewd and hot, in his tone as he canted his head to see the skin Quinn raked her nails over.

“Be that as it may, forcing her into a heat isn’t.”

“Are you questioning me, doctor?”

“N-No, sir.”

Quinn lost the thin thread of reality, bucking and kicking as the poison worked through her limbs. Everything ached, hurt in a bone deep agony. Scratching, mauling her flesh to get at the prickling pain that lingered far beneath the surface, a faint whine was all she could manage when Ilya buried her beneath his frame. Forced her arms and legs out, stretching her from the defensive huddle as he crushed her to the soft bedding that was horrible and wrong.

“Shh, *kiska*. I am here,” he whispered against her cheek. Nudging her head aside, he put his lips against her throat and offered the comforting sound without a hint of self-consciousness.

The purr grew louder, vibrating through her chest, shivering through her bones. It wasn't enough to drown out the sounds of flesh hitting flesh, of Hadler's shrill cry and Lee's rumbling voice. As the fire worked through her, Quinn cared less and less. Aware of the male above her more than the fact that others were there, she couldn't focus past anything else. Potent heat, cinnamon and the stinging bite of anise made up her world.

"Please, please, please," Quinn sobbed, not even sure what she was begging for.

"Shh. I will give you what you need, *kiska*."

She whined when his weight shifted. Cried out when his heat pulled away for the brief moment it took for him to arrange their bodies the way he wanted. Low growls and splitting flesh still echoed through the room as Ilya spread her wide. Forcing his throbbing cock into her, growling in unadulterated pleasure as eager, slick muscles clenched down around his invading shaft.

As Ilya lifted her, bouncing her up and down the full length of him while he demanded she come for him, Quinn saw the aftermath of the doctor's moment of dissent.

Darryl watched her with eyes that glowed with their bright hunger, the beautiful lines of his face as twisted as the heavy scars while he shunted inside of Hadler's ass. Fucking the Beta who couldn't scream for the rolls of gauze packed inside his mouth, Darryl sped up as Quinn's cries became airy, shrill. Dragging her down once more, Ilya buried his knot, making her scream.

Two Alphas roaring their release, Quinn managed to pass out as her pussy fluttered around the knot pulsing inside of her.

"Please," Quinn whined, desperate as she clung to Ilya's leg. Refusing to let him go, he'd dragged her halfway across the room before he'd stopped. Even his patience was wearing thin, but still she held on. "Please just let me see her."

"You did not eat. Did not build your nest." Ilya stared down at her, lips thinned as he watched her debase herself. Fingers tangling in her hair, he jerked her head back from where she pressed it to his thigh. Tried to push her away.

Swearing he'd have to rip her arms off before she unwrapped them, Quinn gripped his leg even tighter. It'd been a full day and night, and still they wouldn't let her see Elise. There would be no more nursing, no more snuggling her child in her nest. Not that there was a nest to take her to.

In her rage, Quinn had destroyed whatever she could get her hands on. They'd demanded she build a new one, but she'd refused. She needed Elise safe in her arms, not some fucking pile of fabric. No matter how the poison in her veins sang to do just that.

"Just let me see her, please!" Desperation sinking ever deeper, Quinn fumbled at his belt with one hand. Offered the little currency she could from where she kneeled at his feet. "Please, I'll do whatever you want. Just let me see my baby."

"I want you to act like my future mate," Ilya snarled. His growl thundered through the room, so much anger it sucked the air from the space as he lifted Quinn straight up, flinging her towards the bed with ease.

Bouncing across the mattress, Quinn screamed her rage. Hurled herself at the Alpha with fingers clawed as she tried to get past him to the door she knew was still locked, a vicious Alpha guarding the other side. But Elise was there, waiting for her, wanting her mother.

Muttering under his breath, Ilya grabbed her around the neck. Stopping her forward momentum with such an abrupt halt her legs went flying. Again she was lifted, large fingers strangling, before he slammed her back into the bed. Held her there as she scraped broken nails over his arm and wrist. Pale skin flushing an ugly red, Quinn struggled for a single sip of air. When none came, she fought all the harder. Bringing her legs up, she aimed for whatever she could reach.

"Be still!" His free hand covered her thighs, shoved them flat and held them there as he loomed over her. Leaning his weight onto her, strangling and bruising, he put his face close and growled. Let her see the full breadth of his anger until Quinn's struggles weakened, until her arms became limp and flopped against the bed.

"Now," Ilya said, the suddenness of his calm as terrifying as the way he continued to choke her. "You will build your nest. You will eat. Then, and only then, will I consider allowing you to see her. Am I understood?"

Vision tunneling, the black eating away the sight of stolid Alpha above her, Quinn slapped her hand against his thigh. Unable to nod for the fingers tight against her chin, she tried to put her agreement in every bone of her body.

It was still a long, horrifying moment before Ilya let her go. He stood back, wary, as Quinn rolled to her side to hack and cough. Fingers cradling the bruised flesh of her throat, she bobbed her head in a weak nod. Breath still rattling around in her throat, unable to even rise to her knees, she pushed and pulled at the filthy blankets surrounding her. Tried to ease them into some order that would appease the male.

"Net," Ilya roared, somehow more furious than when this whole scene had begun. In minutes he had the bed stripped, tumbling Quinn around the large mattress as he jerked sheets and blankets out from under her listless body. Dumping a stack of clean linens at the foot, he turned and stalked out without a backwards glance. The door slamming home sounded too final.

Quinn remade the nest, seeing none of it. Uncaring of the sloppy way she fumbled through it. Sheets slid around, blankets falling from the bed, pillows lost under the frame. Still, she made it, watching the door for it to open again. For her daughter to be brought to her, for one of them to snap and growl at her to dress so she could see Elise.

Hours passed with nothing.

She shoved the cold food into her mouth. Dry and gritty, it abraded the raw ruin of her throat as she choked down each bite. It could have been anything, the finest meal ever prepared, and she still wouldn't have tasted it.

More time passed, the sun trekking across the sky she could see from her window. Whining, she crawled across the floor, lowering herself as far as she could to slide the tray over to the door. Proving her compliance as the empty dishes rattled when the heavy wood slab thumped against the wall. Scurrying back to the shambles of her nest, she kneeled in the center of it. Breaths jerky, painful, she waited.

And waited.

It wasn't Ilya who opened the door when even the moon had hidden itself from Quinn's window. Not even Lee. Darryl and Maurice filled

the doorway. Flooded the room with the stench of violence, lust, and danger.

Quinn balked. Shoving her body up the bed as they came nearer, she huddled against the headboard as they closed in. Screamed as they grabbed hold of her arms and hauled her to the floor. Dragging her flailing body out of the room and into the hall, they paid no attention to her shrieks and efforts to break free. Their large hands crushed her biceps, bruising tender flesh. Hips and back rubbed raw from the carpet as she fought, Quinn found Ilya's name on her lips when Maurice lifted her against his chest as they reached the stairs. Crushing swollen, painful breasts with his arm, the Alpha laughed against her neck. Darryl bared his teeth, snatching up her legs. Slapped her thigh, raking his nails across pale skin when she continued to kick. Ignoring the trickle of blood that seeped from the small wounds, Quinn's ragged cries echoed through the large space as they carried her down the stairs.

"Hold still, bitch," Darryl said through a snarl, fingers digging into Quinn's legs as she squirmed.

Randy appeared at Quinn's side, bouncing on the balls of his toes as he followed alongside the trio. Near trembling in his excitement, he giggled and laughed, an insane child hopped up on too much candy as he pinched and squeezed at whatever bit of Quinn's flesh he could get his hands on as she twisted and jostled.

"Just get her downstairs," Maurice rumbled, the easy smirk on his lips full of terrifying intent.

Redoubling her efforts as they neared the door leading to the basement, Quinn's screams became shrill. Panic sluiced through her, lighting a fire in her veins as she fought against the two Alphas who kept her aloft as they trudged down the plain stairs.

Ilya stood to the side, stoic and cold. Didn't even twitch as Quinn's shrieks reverberated through the room. Her calls for his help, crying out his name, didn't even warrant a glance.

Lee was a different story. He followed with intense interest, murky gaze as bright as the whitewashed room while he watched Quinn struggle and flail. He laughed when the Alphas carrying her dropped her without ceremony onto the middle of the floor amid the boots and legs of so many others gathered there.

Quinn didn't spare the time to think. Hauling her battered body up to hands and knees, she started forward in a miserable crawl. Headed towards the one thing that might save her from what she feared would happen. Hating what it would mean, what it said about her, she shuffled along the slick tiles towards Ilya, hoping. Sob expelled in a guttural rush as someone kicked between her legs hard enough to send her sprawling, Quinn reached out with trembling fingers.

The wordless plea rejected, Ilya took a single step back to put his bulk against the wall. Well out of reach of hands that smeared blood from the multitude of bandages Hadler had applied to her damaged fingers after their joint punishments.

"He's not going to help you, pet," Lee said, voice a deceitful purr as he crouched beside her splayed hands. The shiny leather of his expensive loafer caught the light as it hovered in a precarious threat above her clawing hand. "You thought you could turn me and my best enforcer against each other for a bit of pussy. Thought to make him defy me just so you would take his knot."

Cringing against the floor, she still didn't give up. Quinn reached her hands out, fingertips digging into the smooth tile, trying to pull her body forward. Ilya wasn't Alton. He wasn't one to back down and let someone else take what was supposed to be his. He wouldn't betray her, not like that. Punishment she'd take, but not this. Not whatever the lurking bodies of too many men behind her meant.

"You weren't satisfied with what I was giving you, so..." Lee rolled his shoulders, the casual shrug at odds with the hard gleam in his brown eyes.

"Ilya, please," Quinn whined, scrabbling against the floor to get closer. If she could just touch him, she knew he'd fold, would argue with Lee over what was happening here. Had to believe it because the alternative would kill her.

Agony bloomed through her fingers, rippling down her arm and up into her shoulder. Small bones grinding against each other, muscles shrieking in protest, Quinn screamed as Lee applied his weight to the shoe now crushing her delicate fingers. Free hand tugging at the fine cloth of his trousers, scraping over the taut muscles of his calf, she wailed as her hand pulsed with brilliant crimson pain.

"So the boys here are going to give you what you need, little Omega," Lee said over her loud cries, twisting his foot back and forth as he ground her hand into the hard tile. Patted her head like an animal with a cruel slash of a smile. "Don't worry, they're not going to knot you. When they're finished with you, and everyone's had a turn with each of those tight little holes of yours, then Ilya's going to inject you again. Then, pet, and only then, while you're writhing on the floor, screaming in pain and need, I'll give you my knot."

Releasing her hand, Lee stood. He shoved Quinn onto her back with the toe of his pricey shoe so he could lean over and meet her horrified eyes. "And you're not going to just beg me for it, pet. You're going to thank me for how well I breed that cunt."

Craning her neck back, Quinn looked up at Ilya. The craggy lines of his features were set, crystalline gaze flat, dead as he stared back. A sob ripped from her throat, jagged and broken as she sent her uninjured hand out towards him in a final plea.

"Ilya don't let them do this. Not this, please!" Anything else she might have said was lost in a howl of panicked rage as hands wrapped around her thighs, her ankles, her arms. Spreading her open, forcing her flat to the floor.

The first growl was more cruelty than call, a mocking sound of what should be as something wet and blunt prodded at her dry sex. Bowing in a painful arch as the merciless thickness was shoved inside of her, Quinn kept her eyes locked on the massive Alpha who shouldn't be letting this happen to her. Saw the slow, lazy blinks that shuttered his gaze as he watched with disinterest.

The second thrust pushed her back into the hard tile, body sliding until the hands gripping her jerked her back. Pushed her into the next hard lunge so she choked on a thin wail of pain.

It was from this new angle that she saw what she should have expected. The thick bulge in Ilya's pants grew, throbbed against the soft material. A small stain appeared in the dark fabric, his cock leaking enough to soak through.

Biting her lips hard enough to taste blood, Quinn tried to muffle her cries. Didn't want to give them the pleasure of her agony as the one on top of her lifted her ass from the floor, pulling her into every vicious snap of his hips.

Before, it had been easy to succumb to the vile treatment. In the disgusting motel where Gerry had dumped her, where Alton's man had done so many horrible things before letting the group of Alphas loose on her. She'd been pregnant, abandoned by Kahler for too long. She'd needed an Alpha's touch, their call. Their fucking come. Now it was so different.

There was no care in the way they began to handle her. Large hands covering her swollen breasts, squeezing until she arched and whined. Pinching her nipples raw.

"Open up." The command was delivered on a snarl, the slimy trek of his crown smearing across her lips before someone else gripped her jaw and pried it open. Forced to take the full length in one harsh push, Quinn choked and gagged.

It only made the male above her groan and buck harder against her lips.

They didn't care when her stomach twisted and heaved. Paid no mind when she vomited thick bile around the cock plunging deep into her throat. Growls and snarls all around her, they bickered over who got what first.

Gathering the growing numbness around her as she grew wet enough to take the man between her legs, she forced her body to submit. Loosened stiff muscles that wanted to fight, to rage. All she could do was survive this. There would be no rescue, no escape.

Elise was somewhere in the walls of this house and Quinn would be damned if she did anything to endanger that. If it meant this, she'd take it.

"Fucking whore likes it. Look how wet she is," the man between her spread thighs ground out between clenched teeth, his rhythm growing faster, the slap of his hips meeting hers louder.

There were mutters of approval all around her. Nails scraped, fingers prodded and gripped too tight. Pain lurked, turbulent and blinding, just under the surface of the gray haze she tried to drown herself in. Bodies shuffled, rearranging her at their whim. Rolled to her stomach, Quinn was hauled back up to her knees. Warmth slid between her and the tiles, hard muscle replacing unrelenting stone.

Fingers ripped at her hair, pulling her head back in a painful arch. Slapped their cock against her face, smearing sticky fluid against her

eyes and nose. Bleary gaze staring through the burn, she looked up into Ilya's eyes.

So blue they were almost clear, she had trusted those eyes. Had believed his soft promises and gentle pets, the way he held her when the careening insanity of the bond left her limp and despairing. Tears flooded over her lashes as the cold, dead blue bored into her. Heartless, callous, he didn't care what they did. Hell, *liked* what they did to her.

She couldn't do it. Quinn tried to pull the haze back, to bury the anger, the betrayal, all of it under the fog of indifference. Nothing seemed to work. Clarity seeped in on misty drifts. Abused, used, nothing but another whore for another Alpha in a world she had no control over.

Something snapped within her. Shattered her mind leaving her with only one goal. Kill them all and get her daughter.

The sudden wrenching pain exploding from her chest caught her off guard. Brought everything into hyper focus so that the sheer agony of the multitude of small hurts coalesced into a scream that worked through her entire body.

Blind rage pumped through her veins, a roar that didn't belong to her pouring from between bloody lips as she bit at the thigh in front of her. Twisted and punched, fist landing with a strength she didn't know she had into the one beneath her. Her elbow went numb as she slammed it back into the nose of one behind her.

She felt nothing but that awful, grinding pain throbbing through her ribs. Cracking her chest wide, splitting her open. Elise was somewhere beyond the white walls, and she would get her daughter, keep her safe. Another Alpha went to put his arms around her, Quinn biting, clawing, ignoring the way her shoulder shifted uneasy in its socket as she reached back to gouge at eyes she couldn't see.

Blackness descended in layers, hovering over the awful bloody scene as she fought. Watched male after male come after her from a long way off within the fractured depths of her mind. Roared her victory when something soft and wet came away in her hand, crushing it in her small palm.

The loud bangs didn't register. Neither did the bursts of light exploding through the room. The loud thuds and pings, the rattle of

tumbling cement and stone, were faint echoes as she clawed her way through another male.

Elise. She had to get to Elise.

A bulk she knew too well slammed into her back, carrying her to the floor with his full weight crushing her into the stone. Words indiscernible under the chaos of her thoughts, she could only observe the rough rasp of sound against her cheek.

It took longer to get him off of her. Screaming, wrenching at hair and clothes with the same ferocity, she got a hold on his ear. Dug the shredded remains of her nails in deep and pulled hard. His roar would have deafened her if she could hear more than a trace of it as he rolled away.

Scrambling up to her feet, Quinn charged for the stairs. Arms eager for her baby, already outstretched for the comforting weight, she ran towards the roiling mass of darkness without pause.

“Quinn!”

It hit her hard enough to make her stumble back. A punch of sensation that somehow penetrated through the murderous haze. Centered beneath her sternum, clawing its way free, it pulsed, writhed, twisted in agonized ripples under her skin. Scratched over raw nerves and collapsed her synapses. An electric jolt that shorted out all comprehension.

Shock had her jaw falling open, gray eyes wide as they stared at the thing that wasn’t there. She’d done it. Finally insane, she’d gone mad enough to see him even while awake.

Then she was falling. Slipping to the bloody floor, drifting down into the large puddle that spread beneath her bare legs. Staining pale flesh, she shoved the ruin of her hand out to stop the forward momentum, only to slide across the slick floor.

“Quinn, hang on. Hold on for me,” Kahler shouted as he fell to his knees beside her. His shirt was off, the glorious planes of his muscled chest laid bare.

She hadn’t realized how hungry her eyes were for that sight. Pressure over her stomach had her chin tipping down, frowning at the tight bundle of white that was fast becoming garish red.

“You don’t look good in red,” Quinn said, dragging her head back to look at the illusion above her. The lines of worry, the hint of fear, it

all should have concerned her. But she couldn't rise again, couldn't get to Elise. She'd failed and now her sweet baby girl would never remember her mother. "You have to get her. Keep her safe."

"Quinn, look at me," Kahler yelled, pushing hard on the dripping cloth over her stomach as others rushed forward.

He shouldn't have been able to pull her up, to cradle her in his arms, yet he did. The decadent spice of him invaded her senses, soothing, calming in a way she hadn't felt in so long. Tears fell, too hot against her cold skin, as she turned her face into his chest and inhaled deep.

Lashes fluttering, she gave in.

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Chapter 11

Quinn lay in the hospital bed, half listening to the doctor and his many orders. There were too many words flowing from his mouth, complicated procedures that the cottony fluff wrapping her thoughts in downy confusion refused to make sense of.

She didn't understand the two large Alphas standing just outside the door, either. They weren't Lee's men, that much she tried to be sure of. They didn't hold the same rough edge his people seemed to have as a collective. Why she was still alive was a mystery, one that few people would even attempt to answer. All she knew was that she'd woken up in this pristine prison with no memory of how she'd gotten there, who had arranged it, and where the nice doctor was intending on sending her now.

No one had come to the stark room during the week she had been there except the scrub clad nurses and the doctors in their white coats. The males outside the door rotated on what might have been a schedule, but in her drugged state, she hadn't paid attention to it. Now she wished she had.

Chest aching, Quinn tried not to think of Elise somewhere out there without her. She'd fallen into bouts of hysterical sobbing that had made the doctors increase the sedation. Hating the way she was forced to slog through simple thoughts, she'd started keeping the outbursts to herself.

"Now, you're going to need to take it easy for quite some time. There's still a high risk for infection, so keep the bandages and wounds clean and take the antibiotics you've been prescribed. There will be instructions on your release paperwork on how to go about changing the bandage. We've used dissolvable sutures, so no baths."

The doctor droned on, more syllables crashing against Quinn's skull to bounce around. She nodded and made the right sounds, knowing that if she was going back to Lee it would all be over soon. If he was healing her, it was only so he could take the time to kill her with something slow and painful.

One blink and the doctor had disappeared, as had the nurses. The door stood open, giving her no privacy as she sat confused and lost in a

sea of starched white. She blinked again and the scene changed once more.

“Let me help you, ma’am,” a young Beta nurse said as he slung his arm around Quinn’s back. Helping her slide off the too tall bed and holding her up when her legs tried to fold, he all but carried her to the waiting wheelchair, depositing her in the tacky vinyl seat with a grin that he shouldn’t be giving an Omega.

The same man took control of the chair, wheeling her out of the room. Whistling without a care in the world, he murmured a low conversation to her back, one Quinn didn’t engage in. She could have begged for help, demanded the police, but the hope that Elise was still safe somewhere stopped her from even uttering a thanks as he draped a blanket over her legs when she began to shiver.

As they neared the lobby, something felt different. A sense of being off kilter, the world slipping sideways as it jerked on its axis. Sending her tumbling through the unknown blackness of the beyond. Unseen hands opened the doors, showing a vast lobby filled with squeaky chairs and fake wood. The rubber wheels of her chair hissed over the brittle linoleum as she was taken into the sun drenched room.

Standing in the middle of all that light, he looked imaginary. Limned in golden hues, the dark charcoal of his suit seemed to suck up the light, devouring it as he examined Quinn with that predatory gaze she knew so well. There was no escaping it or him.

“Elise?” It was all she could think to say, to ask, as her pulse came to a stuttering halt. Lungs refusing to fill as Kahler stared down at her, expression unreadable as he showed far more than she could understand in his dark green gaze.

“She’s at home. Safe.”

His words should have brought relief, but they somehow made her all the more wretched and twisted. Cruel fingers slipping through her, clenching over the throbbing ache in her midsection that came more alive with every pulse. A sleeping monster waiting for the fog to break.

“Mama!”

The childish squeal was filled with such joy, tears spilled over her cheeks at once. Distracted her from everything else as the knowledge that Elise was at least not in Lee’s hands any longer settled into her

bones. The ragged gasp hurt, crumpled her insides in a heavy fist, but she still smiled as Adam came stumbling towards her. Evading grabbing hands and dodging the legs surrounding him, his little body slammed into the side of the wheelchair before the nurse or Kahler could stop him.

“Mama! Mama,” Adam cried, cheeks puffed up in an exuberant grin, little hands grabbing at the cold metal as he tried to haul himself up.

“Adam.” Kahler’s voice was a whiplash of command, the single word heavy with the full throated growl.

It had Adam shrinking against Quinn’s legs, lower lip folding out into a pout as his big hazel eyes filled with tears. Her hands reached out for Adam, covering his back and pulling him close in a protective gesture. The throbbing ache in her stomach didn’t matter half as much as the automatic response to keep Adam safe. Miserable tears trickled down her face, guilt and shame at how she’d left him alone in smoky woods warring with the incredible joy that he remembered her, calling her his own.

“It’s all right, baby boy,” Quinn murmured, surprised she could find words let alone a breath. Fingers sifting through Adam’s wavy blond hair, she soothed the tremble from his lips. Catching his chin, she turned his face up to hers. “I’m just a little hurt, see? I can’t pick you up yet.”

“Control him.”

Kahler’s words made little sense until the man came forward. Dark hair and golden skin, he swooped down to pluck Adam up into his arms.

“Get the fuck away from him,” Quinn snarled, already halfway out of the chair before she doubled over in pain. Still she clutched Adam to her side, his watery yelp of fear ignored for the moment as she tried to put herself between his small body and the threat that had reared back in shock.

A comical mask of surprise slithered across the man’s features, eyes rounding in the too bright light before he glanced to Kahler.

“Where the fuck is Meghan? Why isn’t she here?” Baring her teeth at the nurse who tried to steady her swaying, she pulled Adam tighter.

Buried his whimpers and thick tears in the folds of the thin pants she'd somehow been dressed in.

"Sir, she needs to calm down. The sedation is wearing off, but we can't give her—"

"Sit down," Kahler said over the nurse, his hand covering Adam's shoulder. Hauling him away from Quinn's weakening grip to hand off to the male at Kahler's side.

The rigid demand folded Quinn's knees, ass meeting creaking vinyl with a hard thump. Teeth gritted against the scream that clawed at her throat, her gaze remained fixed on the sniffling Adam as the Beta picked him up. Would have shrieked her rage at the man's soft petting that settled Adam had Kahler not cupped her chin and forced her to meet his gaze once more.

"Behave yourself or I'll have them drug you again. You won't be in any state to handle our daughter until tomorrow."

Threat delivered on cold, dead tones, Tobias lifted a single brow. Waited for her jerky nod of compliance before he stepped back to allow the nurse to wheel her towards the exit and into the outside world. Breathing ragged through the pain, she couldn't taste the freedom of fresh air, couldn't take in the glorious sunshine, the sounds of life not muffled by thick panes of glass. Trying to remember the last time she'd been allowed outdoors, she could remember nothing since Elise's birth. Almost a year.

The quiet conversation behind her was buried under too much confusion and warring emotions, nerves raw and mangled from too much stimulation. She was with *him* again. Not evil, not like Lee, but a horrible fate all the same. Her daughter was safe, and the little boy she didn't know she'd needed so much was back in her life. Quinn swore to herself she would hold them both in her arms before the sun set.

Her surprised cry was little more than a gurgling exhale as she was lifted from the chair. Arms thrown around his neck as she dangled in his grasp, she didn't even register him climbing into the car until Kahler settled her across his lap. Tucking her tight against his chest with his arms wrapped in a possessive, anchoring circle around her, he pushed her head to his shoulder.

Adam and the Beta were nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Adam? Where did he take him?"

“He’s in the other car. Adam is safe.” There was no mistaking the smug pleasure in his rumbled words that she would fret over the child he had forced onto her. Tone admonishing, he continued, “You have much to make up to him. At least he didn’t remember his biological mother leaving him when he was given to you to care for. He’s been inconsolable during your time away.”

A collection of syllables shouldn’t have the ability to crush a person, to grind her soul into the gritty asphalt that hummed under the tires as the car pulled away. He had always had a knack for it, and in a way that all those months of physical torment under Lee’s hands had never even come close to.

Her time away, as if she had abandoned Adam. As if she had had any choice while that son of a bitch Gerry dragged her through the woods, threatening to kill the infant she’d come to love no matter what Kahler had wanted. While going insane from the same man’s absence when he was just a few doors down a hall. Ignoring her for a point of pride. Debasing her for his cruel punishment. Somehow it was worse than the blackouts and agonizing torture that cracked open her chest and ripped out her heart daily under Lee and Ilya’s hands.

Confusion tripped through her thoughts, muddling anything seeping through the fog. His hand pressed her cheek to his warm skin, and she then realized he’d opened his shirt. Distraught, worrying he’d demand something there was no way she could give, she sobbed. Choked on the scream that crushed her abdomen and lit up every pain receptor in her body in an explosive chain reaction.

“Quiet,” Kahler murmured against her crown. Hands smoothing over her back, he arranged her body against the steady rumble emanating from him. “It’s a long drive home. Rest now.”

Quinn was not proud in that moment.

Not of the way she clung to him and that glorious sound that blasted away the tension riddling her body. Hating herself for the way she sucked in his scent on ragged gasps, a drowned victim breathing in life. Broke a little more as the bond twisted deeper, humming in satisfaction at his nearness.

A contented sound she echoed as her eyes fluttered shut.

The house was so different and yet so much the same and it was somehow more disturbing for it. Having woken as Kahler eased his frame from the car, it was pain that had clouded her vision then. Whatever drugs they'd given her had worn off, and she needed more. Much more. She'd caught glimpses of the new home he'd built, seen the runners and furniture that mimicked the old, but it was all a hazy blur until several pills were pressed to her lips. The low purr and tender fingers massaging her throat forced them down when she wanted to choke on the bitter things.

That had been ages ago. Now she sat in the room she'd never thought she'd be in again.

His room.

Eyeing the rumpled folds and drifts of bedding surrounding her, Quinn's fingers twitched to put some order into the chaos of the misshapen nest he'd constructed around her. He'd tutted and reprimanded her when she'd last tried, promising more forced sleep if she attempted to get up again. Now she was a prisoner of her wounds, propped against the headboard and wide awake as the clock ticked over to two in the morning.

Kahler hadn't let her hold either of the children. His one concession had been Meghan presenting both infant and toddler to her from a safe distance. The words flew over Meghan's lips as she promised she would take care of Elise and Adam in addition to helping Quinn as she healed. It didn't change the concern in Meghan's gaze as she'd glanced at Kahler's back.

Not that Quinn could say a word about it.

The vague memories from the hospital had begun to filter in after she'd roused and was allowed something other than the muck they'd served her on plastic trays. It wasn't Ilya's borderline gourmet cooking, and it wasn't all of her favorites, but it was real and hot, and she'd devoured it. Then Kahler had had his version of a discussion with her. Which amounted to him telling her how it would be now.

The gunshot had scrambled her insides, torn up the one thing of value she had to him and society. He wouldn't allow that to be an unsurmountable obstruction though. The chances were so slim as to be infinitesimal, but they existed. They always existed with an Omega, even well into old age it was a risk. He had already been in contact

with fertility doctors, the horrible prognosis brought into question. When she had healed some, she would be expected to succumb to their poking and prodding, to treatments and examinations.

Kahler intended to induce a heat as soon as she was healthy enough to withstand one. The only reason he was waiting to renew his claim was he'd kill her otherwise.

She hadn't missed the fact she'd been dressed in clothes that left little of her skin bare. The many scars, both old and still forming were well covered. He couldn't stand to look at her, to see what had been done to her body. Only in the midst of her heat would he be able to ignore it all, to do what biology and instinct demanded.

That hadn't stopped him from remaining close by. He hadn't left her side since she'd opened her eyes, may have even been there the entire time she'd slept. His scent was thick on her clothes and in her hair that he kept touching. Expression bordering on reverent, he'd marveled at the thick fall of curls and twined the strands around his fingers as she sat morose when Meghan had taken Adam and Elise away.

Arms aching to hold her little ones, Quinn scrubbed her palms over her face instead of letting the tears free. She'd already cried once in front of him. A moment of weakness she would not be repeating if she could manage it.

"Open," Kahler said, holding the innocuous white pill to her lips, glass of water at the ready.

"Please, I—" Trying to speak had been a mistake, the pill popped in past her defenses as she'd tried to form the request. Bitter as the medicine flooding her tongue, she swallowed it dry. Gripping a pillow to her stomach, something supposed to help her move with less pain though it was still a slow agony, she worked her way down the bed and ignored the glass he held out to her. Ages later, flat on her back and panting as a cold sweat beaded on her forehead, she fought not to flinch as his face hovered above her.

"You need to rest." Unyielding and strange in the tenderness lurking in the darkness of his voice, he turned off the small lamp beside her head. His movements were muffled, the shuffle of clothes quiet in the near silence of the young day. The bed itself only let slip a muted sigh as he crawled beneath the blankets, the warmth of him blasting against her side.

Stranger still, he began to purr, heading off any tension that could twist her pain to further heights. The hesitant fingers that brushed down her arm, searching for some part of her not bundled in bandages, before coming to rest on top of her hand, sent her mind reeling. Whether from the drugs or his actions, she gripped the sheets in her free hand to keep from spinning off the face of the Earth and into the abyss.

“Sleep, Quinn. You’re safe.”

She wasn’t. Would never be again. She had little choice in the matter.

Cold hands closed over her ankles, sliding up her legs. The rasping texture of calloused palms tangled around her knees as she tried to turn, to squirm away from the forceful grip. The deep vibration of a snarl shuddered through her. Cruel and vicious, it tugged at her hair. Yanked it in thick clumps until she thought it would all rip free. Pain trickled across her scalp, but it was nothing to the violent crimson tempest centered in her belly.

“No, no, no,” Quinn whined as something heavy pushed her into softness. Thick and heavy, it slipped between her thighs and forced her open. Demanding she spread for yet more violence.

The sharp sting of a bite, the dull ache of bruises, they splintered through her body. Had her trembling, shaking in something far beyond terror. Lungs refusing to work, the ragged burn as her chest constricted pulsed through her veins.

She could feel every one of them. Each set of hands, mouths, of teeth. The rumble of a purr she knew couldn’t be his sent a jagged shock of horror down her spine all the same. Back bowing, she lurched. Tried to disengage from the suffocating pressure holding her down.

Painful in their clarity, so blue it made her ache, eyes drifted above her. Dangerous, calculating, they took in her fear and smiled.

“I’ll make you mine.” The hoarse whisper slithered into her ears, numbing everything in its wake. Fear locked every limb, paralyzed before the oncoming menace.

“No!” Screamed into the darkness, the last of her air fled past blue tinged lips as she denied those devilish eyes.

“You’re mine, Quinn.”

Choking on silent screams, she struggled against so many bodies. All of them with one purpose. To inflict as much pain as she could withstand. To take and take from her until there was nothing left. She fought, knowing it was useless. Struggled despite the growing weariness in her body. Strained through the murky cold, her goal clear.

She had to get to Elise, couldn’t fail her again.

The eerie, warm light exploded around her but left her blind. Unseeing, she scratched and bit at whatever came close enough. Kicked at what didn’t.

It had all been a too real dream. Kahler and his rescue, Elise and Adam safe. It was all a product of a broken mind and nothing more. Tasting cinnamon and anise in the back of her throat, Quinn railed against the bulky shadow pushing her down with an evil laugh.

“Quinn!”

Knowing she would die if she let him, that even the smallest moment of weakness would see her undone, she fought. Dragged in a choking breath to shriek her victory as something hot and wet spattered over her cheek. Darkness edged her vision, promising oblivion that she refused to succumb to.

“Gods damn it, Quinn, stop! Get the girl, Curtis.”

Hot breath fanning over her shoulder, the words tried to punch through the darkening haze. Tried to show her something different from the twisted smile that didn’t belong to the so blue eyes.

“Quinn, open your eyes, look.”

Snarled against her temple, she couldn’t refuse the demand. Lashes flying up, eyes wide, she saw the jagged lines on his shoulder first. Seeping blood, smeared crimson staining them both, the four distinct wounds matched the ache in her fingers. It held her horrified attention for all of a moment, before the wails of her baby girl filled the room.

“Elise,” Quinn screamed, voice raw, shattered. So much like those endless hours trapped in the room Lee made her prison, she was transported for a handful of quaking heartbeats. It renewed her fight against Kahler as he tried to hold her down without putting his weight on her.

“Calm. Down.” Straddling her thighs, holding her wrists tight to her shoulders, he kept her flat. Sitting back so he did not loom, Kahler

jerked his chin at someone beyond her field of vision.

Meghan's pallid face came first before she lifted an angry Elise. Cheeks pink, eyes wet and spilling thick tears, Elise made her opinion clear on the situation. Chubby fists reaching, she squirmed in Meghan's hands, trying to get to Quinn.

"Give her to me, please," Quinn begged around shattered sobs. Having already broken her promise to herself, tears streamed down her cheeks in an unending torrent of anguish. She held herself rigid as Kahler eased his weight from her legs and let go of her arms. Staring at Elise, she tried to calm the rising tide of dread that crackled through her chest lest Kahler decide to punish her for something so far beyond her control as nightmares.

A shudder rattled through her bones, the creeping chill banished only when Elise was settled on the bed beside her. Careful of all the bandages and miseries, Quinn snuggled Elise close, a splintered purr attempting to calm and soothe. Pale grays flicked aside, lip twitching to show the edge of her teeth as Meghan came near, perhaps to help arrange Elise, maybe to take her away. Taking in too many bodies filling the room, those who didn't belong near her child, the tension began to build. It vibrated through her chest, a low growl of warning as she tucked Elise closer.

"Out," Kahler said, voice calm and cold as ever, his gaze remaining fixed on Quinn. He stared at her as she fussed over Elise while people melted away, chin canting when she started to hum a lullaby to the still sniffing girl.

Reaching out, he caught Curtis' elbow and murmured something to the Beta. Quinn ignored it, concentrating on the slow untwisting of her insides as Elise cooed and babbled. Miserable smile ghosting over her lips, careful fingers eased Elise back when she began to grip and root at Quinn's shirt. Mouth working, she sought the known comfort.

"Was she still nursing?"

Though the question was soft and attempted not to intrude, it startled Quinn. Unable to believe she'd forgotten his presence, hadn't felt him come up beside her, she covered Elise with splayed palms. Protective, worried. Afraid. The smallest twitch of her head in negation was all the response Quinn could muster. She'd begun weaning Elise in the hopes of their daring escape, had been forced to

stop at Lee's command. The seeming endless time alone in the hospital.

Further proof of her irrelevance, unable to even provide that small thing for her own daughter. Heat suffused her cheeks, nose buried into the powdery sweet drifts of Elise's soft hair. Terrified he'd take her away again, would hand Elise over to Meghan, more tears slipped free of clumpy lashes.

Brows drifting together, Quinn watched from beneath lowered lashes as he made his way around the too large bed. Sliding back beneath the thin sheet, he rolled to his side with his head cradled on a palm. Rough fingers gentle, he smoothed the bunched cloth covering Elise's arm.

"She looks just like you," he whispered, touching the wispy curls of Elise's crown before he twisted a stray lock of Quinn's hair.

"She's yours." The words flew from trembling lips, a new terror trying to rear its monstrous head as adrenaline began to fade, leaving Quinn confused and slipping through the here and now in jerky fits.

"I know." The proud assurance in those two simple words was enough to smother the room with Alpha ego. Green gaze holding a wealth of things she couldn't understand, he brushed the hair back from Quinn's forehead to place a kiss there. "You need to rest."

Uncertain, twitchy in the backdraft of so much emotion in so little time, Quinn curled around the now drowsing Elise as best she could. Would have jumped clear off the bed when his hand caressed her arm before settling on Elise's back if not for the low throb of pain and the way her lashes seemed weighted.

"I'll leave the light on tonight."

Murmuring her assent, knowing the quiet bundle snuggled tight to her would do far more than any lamp left to light the darkness, Quinn let her eyes close.

Darkness swallowed her within seconds.

Chapter 12

“It’s time to wake up.”

Quinn’s nose scrunched, lip lifting in a silent snarl of complaint as she snuggled further into the pocket of warmth that smelled of babies and sweetness. Ignoring the spicy richness of him that was a bold undertone to it all, she ran a languid palm over Elise and Adam as they slept on.

“Your appointment is today,” Tobias said, insistent as his knuckles caressed her cheek. Pulling her from the deep fog of drugged sleep with the simple touch, he smiled when her lashes fluttered open to find him leaning over her.

Quinn blinked up at him, uncomprehending until the slow gears of her thoughts clicked and shifted into motion. Her checkup. The one where they determined the viability of the fertility treatments already outlined for the damage she’d withstood.

Smile widening, Kahler maneuvered Quinn from the bed as if it was those first days again and not going on three weeks. While she was far from healed, her small treks to the nursery to play with Elise and Adam were no longer endless journeys that left her panting and sweating. He still refused to allow her to take the stairs alone, carrying Quinn down when he insisted she rest in the sitting room connected to his office and for the meals she now shared with the entire household.

Not that there were many of them there. Besides Kahler and Quinn, there were two faces that appeared morning, noon, and night. Meghan helped Quinn with Adam and Elise, keeping the unbelievable mess the two could create to a minimum. The other was Curtis, who all too often had a sneering glance or a contemptuous glare for her.

It grated Quinn’s nerves raw.

And she couldn’t say a word against it. Omegas were expected to make their Alpha happy, in whatever ways were demanded of them. At least where his daughter was concerned, Kahler allowed Quinn her possessive behavior. He allowed both children to sleep in the shambles of a nest each night, his smiles indulgent.

“The kids—”

“Are going to the nursery,” Kahler said, cutting off her worry with a soft call to Meghan who was hovering near the closed door.

Strained smile on her face, Meghan swept inside the bedroom. Aiming for the bed to pluck the two children who remained dead to the world in the way only babies can be, she scurried back out of the door before Quinn could voice a protest.

“What are you doing?” The wary mistrust couldn’t be helped, not as he carried her towards the bathroom. Meghan had been the one to help her bathe and dress since her return, never him. Still given long-sleeved shirts and pants, it wasn’t difficult to connect the dots. That he continued to be repulsed by the thought of her bare body was obvious. While it was at odds with the way he fussed over her, insisting she remain within his sights at all times, she would be an idiot to think it anything more than the instinctual actions of a possessive Alpha. No matter how he purred to calm her or stroked her hair as she drifted off at night.

The way he held her when she still woke up from the nightmares.

“You need a bath.”

The statement hurt, more than it should have. It wasn’t as if she hadn’t showered, but between feeling as if she asked too much of Meghan and the pain that refused to abate no matter how many of the pills she choked down, it hadn’t been as often as she would have liked. Plummeting into the sticky fingers of wounded resentment, Quinn crumpled in on herself as he set her on the low bench. Doing her damndest not to let the host of memories of all the things he’d done to her there assail her, she let her brooding thoughts free. Better to be cold and bitter than to remember his touch, the way he made her cry out his name a lifetime ago.

Uncertainty had woven its way through her days, worse every dreaded morning as she woke beside him. Her use in his house, his world, came under question on a near constant basis. Despite his certainty the treatments would give him what he wanted, Quinn was just as sure they wouldn’t.

An Omega was only as valuable as her ability to reproduce.

Why he wasn’t spending his time and attention on some other female instead, Quinn didn’t understand. There was the chance he was slipping away and fucking another woman before he scrubbed her

scent from his body and roused Quinn from yet another drugged slumber. It didn't quite fit with his doting performance, but it wouldn't be the first time he had fooled her. Kahler might even just be keeping his attentions to another female at a minimum to maintain calm until Quinn was healed.

There was no ignoring the bond that hummed in her chest, the perfect chord of satisfaction that she was near her mate once more. Time didn't slip away any longer and there were no more desperate hours spent heaving over the toilet. No more pain ripping through her and leaving her exposed and raw. It was just as slimy and dishonest as it had ever been.

"Where are you, little bird," Kahler asked, quiet and contemplative. The way his eyes narrowed, brows pinched together, left no doubt he did not care for her lack of attention.

Knuckling one eye, Quinn didn't have to exaggerate the yawn that made her jaw crack and pop. Shoulder hitching in a shrug, she cast her bleary gaze to the steam billowing from the shower. The deep breath was slow, gathering her strength as she planted palms to the bench and began to hoist herself with care.

When his hands cupped under her arms, taking her weight to lift her, she shot upright with a jagged cry. The touch was unexpected, catching her off guard. Middle twisting, throbbing, her arm swung out to clamp down over the deep seated ache that burst forth from her careless movement.

"What the hell are you doing?" Despite the way he snarled the words against her hair, he pulled her close, already purring to wash away the quivering tension. Large hands held her, somehow gentle under their firm grip as he soothed away the pain.

Quinn's weak sounds were ushered away under the steady vibration. Not until deft fingers pinched and pulled at the thin fabric of her pants did she try to struggle against the forced calm. Rigid and disbelieving, she felt him work the waist down. The cloth slipped over her hips, whispering over her thighs and crumpling to the floor.

Swallowing hard against the torrent of words that slammed against the back of gritted teeth, the pleas and entreaties for him to stop, to leave her alone were held back by the thinnest string of control. Calloused fingertips caressed the swell of a hip, jerking as they

encountered the first divots left behind by unknown teeth. Feeling his chest expand in a deep breath, the force of the purr doubled. As if he needed to calm them both while his hands made quick work of her shirt, tugging it free.

Ripping off the band aid of everything that sheltered her from his view, she stood naked and shivering before him. The purr did not stop, not even as a quick double step back took away the sweltering heat of him. Still he poured that sound into the echoing room, a cautious tug on her hand aiming her towards the shower that waited.

Other than her cheek, it was the only part of her he was willing to touch. A quick glance as she turned sideways to avoid the full blast of the hot spray showed his gaze averted, green eyes pinned to the loose braid of her hair. Refusing to go past it to the marred expanse of her chest where pinkened rings and shimmering arcs branded her.

There was no reason for his obvious distaste to bother her, but it did. Quinn had never considered herself beautiful, not by the standards of the women she had seen every day throughout her life. Strippers, dancers, even prostitutes all held an allure she never would. Her mother, Marina, had forever been ripe fruit, dangling from the vine with lush curves and a delectable magnetism that Quinn could never hope to match. The fact he'd once found her desirable, hadn't been able to keep his hands off of her, had made her feel a little different. He'd never once said her breasts were too small, her hips too narrow. Even if it was only her dynamic that spurred him on.

Now even that wasn't enough to interest him. She was hideous enough to make him turn away.

The narrow point of her chin met her chest as she lowered her head, blinking away the scalding threat before it could tumble free. Understanding all of this in theory was much different from facing it in fact. Under the harsh lights that limned the tiles in dewy golden hues, she saw what he saw.

Damaged, if not broken, of no real use. Body a constant reminder of the others who had touched what was his. An Omega he'd tied himself to that no longer had purpose. Was it any wonder he was so eager for her to be healed? Never mind that she'd be put through the humiliation and torment of doctors prodding at her, validating that same failure.

Shoulders twitching under the weight of her thoughts, Quinn turned her back to him though she knew the view wasn't much better. At least then he wouldn't have to see the single tear that managed to slide over her lashes. Slow and cautious, she took up her soap and began to work it into a lather.

Her ragged gasp echoed through the stall when his hand closed over her hip, nudging her aside. Making room for him as he came into the once large space. Crowding her back into the corner, pinning her inside the glass enclosure with him. Shushing Quinn's quiet, desperate sounds despite the tension that riddled his every movement, he took the fluffy poof from her clenched hands. His eyes remained fixed on her hair, the curve of her cheek, the thick fringe of her lashes. They didn't stray lower.

Every instinct screamed at her to move away from the too large male. To seek refuge somewhere his overpowering presence wasn't suffocating her and the very real threat of the thick shaft growing firmer by the second couldn't reach her. The low hum of the bond writhing through her chest, promising her mate would keep her safe, couldn't convince her he wouldn't damage her beyond repair. He would destroy her as he did what he did best, subduing her with force and taking what he wanted from her.

Fear curdled her stomach and twisted down her spine, leaving her shivering and wide eyed. Unseeing stare caught on the gleam of metal from the shower door, she tried not to flinch. Failed in such a miserable fashion when she whimpered and shrank away from his hand as it came near, frothy with the light scent of lavender.

His purr rattled through his chest, half a growl of admonishment as he reached for her again. It turned into a snarl of warning when Quinn backed herself further into the corner, blatant in her refusal as she hugged her middle. Huddling into as small a target as she could make, she cowered before the Alpha who was becoming more annoyed and insistent by the second.

Shoved against the cold tiles, there was nowhere left for her to go when his rough fingers scoured her arm. No escape from the hand that pushed her flat to the wall and pinned her there as he continued to scrub at her, the soft knot of mesh fabric abrading her skin to a

prickling pink. He wielded the once gentle puff as if it could remove the tight lines of puckered flesh.

No more purrs were given to soothe and calm as she flinched and whined. Snarls and low growls replaced his once tempered response as she tried to retreat. When he reached her stomach where the tangle of sutures still knotted tender skin, his touch grew slow and careful but did not stop the way he crowded her further back. Body pressed along her side, the slow drag of his hand was matched by the throbbing shaft that slipped over her hip. Movements in concert, he kept her paralyzed with the soapy fist at her stomach as he rutted against the side of her ass.

“You are *mine*. My mate, my Omega. Mine.” The words weren’t much more than a dark growl pressed against her neck. The warmth of his tongue as he licked at her damp skin was a brand against the icy fear filling her.

She would have fallen when he shoved her under the water if he hadn’t kept her in a bruising grip. Actions violent, he raked his fingers through her sodden curls, yanking out the braid in one harsh pull. Fingertips grinding against her scalp, he scrubbed her hair clean while he forced her legs shut tight around him. Slow sways of his hips working his thick length between her clenched thighs, he growled in her face when she dared to whine low in her throat and try to scuttle back.

Not realizing the water was cut off until she was half dragged from the shower squeaky clean and miserable, Quinn balked when he pushed her to sit on the bench once more. Fluffy and warm, a massive towel was draped around her shoulders, but it did nothing to ease the block of ice settled low in her stomach. It couldn’t compete with the arctic chill that spread through her veins as he came to stand close.

“Please,” she stammered around the chatter of her teeth, not surprised when she was ignored but terrified all the same by the way he caught her chin. Fingers digging into her cheeks, prying her teeth apart, he nudged the swollen crown of his cock against her lips with a low sound that was as obscene as it was gratified.

Sliding in over her tongue and leaving the salty taste of him there, Kahler caught her between his palms to hold her still. Pumping his shaft in and out, he pulled short when she choked. It didn’t matter that

it was on the horrified terror pulsing through her, throbbing through her chest and constricting her air. He made a low sound that might have been a paltry attempt to soothe before he began to move again. Working just the head between her lips, he groaned above her.

Fear clawing at the back of her throat, she didn't even taste the decadent spice of him. There was no thrill slipping through her veins, warming her from the inside out. Remaining cold and unresponsive, she was still as he used her mouth. A warm, breathing thing for him to slake his needs on and nothing more. Unable to even look at the man, she kept her gaze straight ahead. Staring forward at the thin trail of hair decorating his abdomen as it blurred behind a shimmer of tears and too close proximity.

It wasn't long before his rhythm stuttered, hand closing over the back of her head as he moved in jerky thrusts. Feeling the shaft thicken, forcing her lips wider, Quinn managed to gather her reserves and force her eyes up. Sputtering on the first rich surge that coated her tongue and overflowed her lips, salty misery joined the pearlescent trails spilling down her face.

Head thrown back, he still refused to look at her. Blind hand wringing his knot, clenching and squeezing with near violent pulses of his fingers, he kept Quinn where he wanted and did not even deign to acknowledge her.

Restless shifting as she gathered the towel closer and refused to swallow the thick fluid he continued to pump into her open mouth was as much response as she was given. The desire to bite down, to sink her teeth into sensitive flesh was all encompassing, but the thought of what punishment he might carve out of her flesh for such an atrocity stayed her temper. It wasn't just her anymore.

Instead she waited him out, turning her head aside as soon as he released her. Wondering at the lack of her response and the way the bond jangled and grated, she worked the last of the thick creaminess from her lips and wiped her mouth on the ready towel. Shying away as he stooped with lungs working like bellows, Quinn slipped past him to the sink. Cold water cleansed his scent from her skin, hand rough as she scrubbed away the slick film. Wounded pride still had her huddling under the towel, covering as much of her nakedness as she could with the soiled cloth as she continued her morning rituals.

Coming up behind her and pinning her against the sink, Kahler leaned down to make wordless sounds of satisfaction against her hair. Pretending he did not feel the way her spine snapped rigid, goosebumps and fear prickling across her bare skin. Fingers brushing over her cheek, he dared to kiss her temple before reaching past her for his toothbrush.

Concentrating on every movement as she dressed in yet more pants and a long-sleeved shirt, the only concession to the heat of summer outdoors was the thin, smooth material of both. As she finished getting ready, Quinn was spared having to engage with him again. She kept quiet as he bustled around the room, his spirits high as he talked to the silent room of his expectation from today's appointment.

Forced into his arms when he swooped in to carry her down the stairs, Quinn suffered in silence as he nuzzled her neck and cheek. Somehow managed not to flinch when he licked at the tender skin under her jaw though Curtis and Meghan watched on. One disapproving, the other tense. Adam blew a stilted course around the pair, making sounds and words to form a new language as he made grand gestures with his arms that threatened to topple him over.

When Kahler deposited Quinn on her feet, she went to Meghan and Elise. Quinn cooed and hummed over Elise who tried to scowl when Quinn didn't pick her up. Meghan's quiet reassurances that Elise would be fine were a lilting background to the low rumble of Kahler's voice. Speaking to Curtis, it wasn't until Adam's giggling squeals took charge that Quinn started paying attention.

Gaze slipping sideways as she pet Elise's stomach to quiet her fussing, Quinn watched as Kahler lifted Adam high, letting him bounce into the air, before catching him. Bringing him down and bestowing a kiss on Adam's forehead before doing it all over again.

"It's all right, Miss Quinn," Meghan whispered, ever covert around the two males as she presented Elise to Quinn to kiss goodbye.

"You've scrubbed my ass for me, Meghan. Stop with the Miss shit," Quinn muttered, palm cradling the back of Elise's head to snuffle her neck and cheek, making the baby squeal in glee.

"Mama!"

There was no more time for quiet words between them as Kahler hefted Adam into his arms, bringing him in close to Quinn to say

goodbye. Neither male cared that the little boy was flailing in his excitement or that Adam was already reaching for her. Kahler didn't subdue Adam in the slightest.

Gritting her teeth, she gave Adam a smile she hoped wasn't as strained as it felt. Catching little feet, she leaned up on tiptoe, the strain of tender skin pulling wrenching her breath from her lungs in a rushing exhale. Her kiss was quick, the tip of his nose receiving the soft press of her lips. He didn't understand the way she stepped back, pushing his little hands away when he tried to grab at her shirt, to pull himself into her embrace.

Fat tears slid over his thick lashes when Quinn untangled his hands from where they caught in her hair. Discomfort pinching her face, she moved beyond his reach as his tears turned into cries and whimpers.

"What is wrong with you," Kahler muttered, bringing Adam into his chest. Cradling the softness of Adam's cheek against him, he purred for the distraught boy.

"I still can't hold him on my own." Words a bare whisper, Quinn huddled in over the raw ache in her stomach that had nothing to do with the gunshot.

"It's okay," Meghan said in a soothing hum as she came forward to scoop Adam into her arms. Kissing his wet cheeks, she gave Quinn a broad smile that was as sad as it was sweet. Juggling the two children, Meghan settled one on each hip before she turned to head up to the nursery.

Adam's sniffles faded, dissolving into a wet snorting laughter at something Meghan did at the top of the stairs.

"Come along. We'll be late." The snap of command joined his hand around Quinn's arm, pulling her towards the door.

Spine folding further, Quinn allowed herself to be moved around in ragdoll fashion, slumping into the backseat of the car when she was pushed inside.

This would not be a good day.

Quinn wished she had been wrong.

Hours later as she was once again put into a darkened black car, she melted into the seat. Attempting to vanish into the charcoal leather didn't stop the cloud of tension that boiled through the car, a tempest

that was a hairsbreadth away from losing all control. It centered around the Alpha who sat still and dangerous at her side.

As soon as the doctors had begun their poking and prodding, she'd known the news wouldn't be good. The thick lines that had appeared around their eyes as they smiled and suggested more tests to Kahler before giving any kind of prognosis was damning.

Somehow he had thought the results would be different, even after he stood beside the uncomfortable bed where Quinn had been stripped down to a useless gown. The slow state of healing around the many sutures still littering her abdomen had been grim. Blurry images on the ultrasound had been ominous.

She wasn't healing as she should be, inside and out. No matter his arguments or the way he had shouted and bellowed at the medical professionals that had scurried around her, there was no changing the outcome.

It'd be months before he could even consider seeking out the fertility doctors to fix her.

That's what he wanted. Wished to fix the broken Omega he found himself shackled to. Useless and hideous, unable to even care for the children he'd once deemed her worthy of.

Scrubbing the heel of her palm roughshod over her eye, Quinn turned her attention to the city speeding past the tinted window. It felt like it had been eons since she'd walked, free and proud, down those dirty streets. For every one of her struggles, they had been hers. She had made it through them all and now...

"I'll find different doctors."

The low growl vibrated through the car, shuddering through the too close air. Quinn pressed closer to the door, seeking to escape the violence tainting those simple words. Even the driver was not unaffected, some nameless, faceless lesser Alpha whose shoulders hunched before he fiddled with the onboard electronics littering the dash.

Resistance was the last thing on her mind when Kahler dragged her into his lap. Wrapped up in his arms, she forced her mind to calm, to shut out all the malevolent flashes of memory that tried to swallow her. Keeping her limbs slack, near lifeless as he pet at her back and hair. Perhaps she would have tried to find some comfort in the purr he

offered, the way he pulled her tight against him so she might feel it all the stronger, but she was too caught up in her fear.

Mistaking her anxiety for something altogether different, Kahler scrubbed his fingers against her scalp and pulled her face to his neck. Forced her to breathe in his scent as he murmured words of what he deemed hope into her hair.

The long drive back was almost unbearable.

Promising herself another shower and fixing the dreadful mess of the nest got her through the first half. The thought of cuddling her babies buoyed her through the last though she had to clench her jaw against a snarl when his hand fell to her hip. Caressing, seeking, he rocked her against the faint bulge that pressed against her backside.

At least he gave up as soon as he realized she was not responding. It was possible he thought she was too saddened by the news to participate, never mind the degradation of being demanded to perform in front of an audience.

When they arrived back at the house, Quinn bolted from the car as soon as the dark sedan came to a stop and Kahler released her. Scurrying across the crunching gravel, wanting even the sad excuse for a nest and the calming presence of her children, she kept her head down in the hope he would leave her alone now.

So intent on not engaging Kahler, she missed the sounds of footsteps around her. She screamed when a dark shadow appeared before her feet. Tripping backwards as all manner of thoughts of evil men and smoky violence sluiced through her mind, only the solid wall of Kahler's body kept her upright. Legs watery, she slid down his body until he caught her up in his arms. Cradling her against him, he snarled and barked at one of the dark suited guards who patrolled the premises now.

There was no comfort or safety in Kahler's arms. Smoke and ash were thick on the back of her throat as he postured in front of the guard. The one who continued to watch Quinn from the corner of a cold, calculating eye.

She wanted her nest. Her children. In a move that twisted her insides up into a ragged ball of pain, she slipped from Kahler's arms and crashed to the ground, catching herself before she planted her face into the rough gravel. Ignoring Kahler's hands, the vicious growl, she

sprinted inside the house. Quinn was across the foyer and halfway up the stairs before he had even managed to gain the entrance. Chest constricting as she felt his presence behind her, closing in, she ignored the way brilliant purple and blue throbbed at the edges of her vision, the ragged tearing sensation as sutures pulled and twisted with her running.

Feet sure and steady despite her straining breath and the cold sweat dripping into burning eyes, she went to the nursery. If she could just hold them, get them in her arms so she knew they were safe, perhaps it would calm the thundering stammer of her heart.

Bolting through the opened door, Quinn came to a slamming halt.

Sprawled on the floor with Adam, a woman lay on her stomach with legs kicking in the air, indolent as manicured fingers tickled and played, rich voice lilting and teasing as she read from a book to him. Meghan sat to the side, Elise bouncing on her knees.

As her thoughts jumbled, gears cramming and flying off their tracks, Quinn could only stare. Knowing her mouth was open, gaping in stupid surprise, she was helpless to stop it. Pale eyes wide, she watched on in rigid disbelief as Elise giggled and cooed at the stranger.

"I'm sorry, Miss Quinn," Meghan stammered out as she noticed them, a helpless wave at the toddler already clambering to his feet to greet his parents. "I just needed a little help with Adam. Anna's one of the maids, she's just leaving."

The room was saturated in the stench of another female. Her musty herbal scent flooding through Quinn's senses as the woman dared to put on a face of chagrin, sheepish with a charming blush as she pushed up to her knees. Looking the shy maiden in a lacy sundress of rosy pink, so much perfect skin laid bare. A glance behind showed Quinn Kahler's frame pushed into her back, already calming, purring as loud as he was able.

Words were falling from his lips, a veritable cascade of useless verbiage that cut and stung all the same. Words like trust. Love. *His* children. It was his eyes that Quinn paid attention to though, watching the flare of warmth that built to a steady flame in the depths of a twilit forest. He made it impossible not to see the way his gaze slid down this Anna's kneeling form, the perfect sacrifice on the altar of his lust.

Quinn didn't understand their cries, the scared screams and wails that slammed around the inside of her skull. Knowing only that they both reeked of other females, she didn't even feel the hard kicks of little feet to her middle. Ignored the wet warmth trickling down in itching rivulets, the sucking dampness of her shirt as she held her children close.

"Get out." Quinn was surprised her lips and tongue could still form words, even if they were mangled through her low, protective growls.

"Oh, sir, she's bleeding!" Ignoring Quinn, dark lashes fluttering as her golden skin turned sallow, Anna waved a helpless hand at the trio.

The scream of rage buried all other sounds in the bright little nursery when Anna stepped forward. Whether it was to leave as Quinn had demanded or not, she came closer. Edging into the perceived territory of an Omega who was fast unraveling. A thick scarlet haze throbbed through Quinn's head, tunneling her vision until all she could see was violence aimed at the woman who dared.

The next few moments were a blurry tangle. Arms like tree trunks, bands of iron in their power, caught and held Quinn. Somehow managing to hold on to the screeching babies until hurrying hands reached for them. Rough, strangling, massive paws kept Quinn pinned despite her screams and struggles. The too large body behind her ignored her kicking legs, stomping feet, even the head thrown back meeting something solid and hard.

Quinn lost what little control she had left to her when Elise was peeled from her clutching fingers after Adam was safe, tucked away in someone else's arms. Seeing the faint blue smudges marring their skin, she let go. Destroying the male holding her became the priority, damning him to the same hell she had lived for too long.

A blink of her eyes, and they weren't in the nursery anymore.

Held down to the bed, his weight crushing her into the mattress despite the injuries both old and new, Kahler held her head to his chest and poured his calming purr into her. Forced it down her throat by the bucketful until she shattered. Broken sounds of pain and misery filled the air around them.

Chapter 13

Quinn lost track of the hours that she lay there, pinned by the male as he ground out a purr that did anything but calm. His weight crushing her, straining the already tender and angry flesh of her wounds. The steady pinching throb of bruises bloomed on her wrists where he held them to the bed, more damage added to the laundry list of pains rattling around her chest.

Unconsciousness slipped over her in a warm wave. Sucking her under, it didn't offer any respite, instead parading a ceaseless show of horrors. From the time spent under Gerry's hands all the way to Ilya's deceitful lips, her dreams mashed their evil into a single terrifying source. A demon of epic proportions that hunted her through the dark paths of her thoughts, stalking her, waiting for her to fumble yet again.

She'd thought herself strong most of her life. If nothing else, she'd thought she was a survivor, but in that long stretch of darkness, the niggling doubts burst forward. Exploding through her mind's eye, declaring her the weak idiot she'd been all along. Every mistake she had ever made, every perceived failing, was magnified under a thousand lenses, glaring lights frying what little will she had left.

The scream that ricocheted around her skull was too loud, piercing in its shrill quality. Wondering if her ears could bleed from something never given voice, she was dragged kicking and screaming from the not so empty black.

She became aware in fitful stages. The tight itch of a fresh bandage covered her stomach, the faint burn of strained stitches growing hotter as her eyes fluttered open. The deep rumble against her side fanned warmth against her neck. The smooth slide of lips grated, rough sandpaper against her senses. Heavy fingers scrubbed at her scalp with a gentle, prickling pain that should have felt divine but instead made her want to claw at him.

"I knew you would be what I needed in a mate," Kahler murmured against the mangled scars he'd put on her shoulder. "That you would be the mother my children needed."

"I was a brood mare." Said on a breath that struggled to be a sigh, it was a raw croak. The sound of something damaged beyond repair, the

simple words cracked and bled from her throat.

Staring at the ceiling and miles beyond, she didn't have to pretend not to see him when he pulled back to stare down at her.

Kahler brushed a kiss against her cheek, murmuring against her cool skin, "You are my mate."

"Who can no longer give you what you want," she said, and the agony held in those words twisted through the air the same as the misery of her injuries. Shaky hand fluttering over her stomach, lips stretched taut, she breathed hard through her nose as the agony began to return in force.

He was gone and back before she could take comfort in her moment of peace. Pills pushed against her lips. She choked them down, greedy for the drugged bliss they would impart no matter what the darkness would hold or what her dreams taunted her with this time. He held the back of her head longer than was necessary, forcing sips of cool water down a desert parched throat.

Crouching beside the bed so he didn't loom, he brought their faces close. His hand smoothed back the matted mess of her hair before scrubbing at her scalp once more. She waited for him to shush her, to tell her to be quiet in all the little ways he sought to keep her silent, but they didn't come soon enough to stop the miserable well of anger. Or the fear that followed close on its heels.

"Why am I here," Quinn whined, curling around her middle as she struggled onto her side. Baring her teeth when he helped, turning her with ease, she pushed her face into the pillow to hide the tears that had been falling all along.

"You are my mate."

"That's not an answer!"

"It is answer enough."

"It's not enough," Quinn snarled, shoving at his arm to pull his hand from her hair. "Why am I here and not someone else? That cunt would fall all over herself to give you what you want!"

"Anna is a good worker, and—"

"Then bring her to your bed and leave me the fuck alone!"

Kahler rocked back on his heels, a single brow sliding up, eyes seeming to grow wide for a moment. Unable to believe he'd show her something as simple and unguarded as surprise, she didn't have to wait

long for his anger to surge forward. It found the perfect place to lay its heavy heat in her prone form. Fingers tightening in her hair, refusing to be knocked loose, he twisted the fistful of strands. Pulling her chin back until her raw misery was laid bare to him. Pushing his face close, he let her see his teeth, to feel the hot breath of his growl as it grinded from his chest.

“You are my mate and you will act like it,” Kahler said through the menacing sound. “Do you have any idea what I have done to get you back?”

That was something she didn’t know. No one would speak of that time, of what all had happened during the months she’d been under Lee’s control. Even Meghan would give her tight-lipped smiles, something filled with strain and more pain than the sweet Beta deserved to know. Brows pinching, she felt something too close to guilt slip over her skin in greasy tendrils before she shook it loose. It wasn’t her concern what he’d done.

It had been his choice, not hers. Just as it always was. To demand her obedience was just more of the same. Even Ilya had made that command.

“You got your daughter out of a monster’s clutches. I was a bonus, a thing to soothe your pride, don’t even pretend it was more than that.”

There was truth there, more than either of them could deny. He didn’t bother, instead rising, movements slow and fraught with tension that twisted through his back. He loomed and gave her the full breadth of his frustration as he seized her wrists. Fear rippled up her spine, too many memories stabbing into her with their vicious claws as she flinched and cringed.

Stomping down the useless emotions, she slapped the easy mask of contempt on her features. Sneered at him as he pushed her thighs apart even as her heart began to slam against the back of her ribs. He’d do more than hurt her if he tried to fuck her now. Already damaged, she’d be lucky to survive his mounting, let alone come out the other side intact.

“I didn’t know about Elise. I had hoped, prayed to the Gods, but it was anything but certain,” Kahler said through a growl as he climbed onto the bed and shoved her wide with his knees. He leaned down until their faces were a mere breath apart. “I destroyed a fucking Alpha, his

entire Gods damned territory for you. Do you have any idea what the repercussions could be for something like that? Ruined my connections and reputation with others. I put my business and life at risk to get you back and you dare to question me?”

Incredulity warred with terror, blood flowing hot and cold as it ripped her apart from the inside out. He'd ruined connections and relationships, killed an Alpha who had the audacity to keep the ravaged Omega dropped on his doorstep. All while countless hands and cocks forced their will on her, bruising, biting, breaking her into a thousand little pieces. Beaten bloody, scarred for the rest of her life, it meant nothing. It didn't matter compared to his being inconvenienced. Of course the endless time subjected to Lee's cruelties, large and small, held no comparison to having risked Kahler's reputation. Having to preen and purr for a man who would have been happy to rip her apart, piece by piece, as much as to fuck her for months was no feat to him. Dancing the razor sharp line between Ilya and Lee, staying somehow whole while Kahler's damned bond ripped her insides to shreds, it was all nothing. Keeping her daughter safe from that evil, willing to die for that purpose, and he didn't even have the grace to acknowledge it.

The man she had killed, swinging like a side of beef from a hook as she sliced him up like a Sunday roast while Lee and Ilya urged her on...

Quinn screamed. Flailing, kicking, she fought with everything she had left to tear at him. Flesh, clothes, she didn't care if she could just get free. Wriggling against him, trying to get away, she was going to hurt herself more and didn't care. Just so long as she was away from him. The male she was bound to, the one she would never be able to escape.

She hated him.

Taking a wrist in each hand, he forced her to still, pulling her arms taut and pinning them to her wide open thighs until she could do little more than thrash her head against the pillows. Held her there no matter how she bucked and railed, screaming her hatred in a string of curses that lit the air on fire between them. Doing no more damage to him than a warm breeze while she felt the now familiar stinging pull, the shredding ache of the stitches straining.

“Stop this! Damage yourself again and it’ll be months more of healing.”

“It won’t work! Whatever fucked up plan you have to make me your breeder, it’s not going to work. So just take that fucking cunt and leave me to my children. She’ll give you more, she’ll be the perfect fucking bitch for you! You won’t have to shove her in a room to forget about the mistake you’ve made.”

Kahler reared back, the edge of his teeth gleaming in the light before his snarl settled in a grim slash of his lips. Crushing her wrists together in one hand, the silky material of her pants was ripped down. Shredding as he tore the seams, baring her lower half in a series of jerky movements that were over before Quinn could do more than kick once at his grabbing hand. Then he was moving, shoving her legs wider apart as he shifted down the bed. Working his shoulders between her thighs as he transferred her wrists, one to each hand to push against her legs. Keeping her pinned, body immobile, Quinn screamed and fought for an inch of space that he took away as Kahler pushed her thighs flat to the mattress.

Unable to do more than twitch, the hot wash of his breath froze her lungs. Heart stuttering to a halt, her eyes flew wide as she tried to tip her head forward. Abused muscle refusing to hold her up, to let her see him there between her legs, all she knew was the wet slide of his tongue against desert dry flesh.

“I’ve been denied this for far too long and there aren’t little eyes and ears keeping me from it now.”

The acrid stench of her fear, the way her body trembled with it, was ignored as he began to feast on her. Lips and tongue moving in concert, he lapped at the folds of her pussy, mouthing the delicate pink of her. Lips closing over her clit, sucking hard on the soft nub, he thought to force it. A ragged breath shuddered into her lungs, filled with pain and thick with the wet sound of tears.

Once more she was to be violated. Yet again she’d be used for some male’s pleasure. It didn’t matter if he mounted her or not at this point. Defiled, unable to stop this fresh abuse, a sob caught in the back of her throat.

The first rumble of his call and she became unhinged.

The idea she'd be forced to endure it alone was too much, but to be made to respond was her breaking point. Nails scratching, she couldn't reach his face, his hands, so she tore at her own skin. Ripping vivid crimson lines that painted her cold skin in blistering rivulets until he crushed her fingers in his grip. Shrieking her denial, nothing she did would stop this now.

The deep vibration was pressed against her splayed lips, his mouth covering her whole as he sucked and licked in greedy abandon. The first thin trickle of slick to answer him was met with something more a roar of victory, drowning out her desolate cry.

Mouth working, he urged more of the thick lubricant from her body. Growling, calling, forcing her to shudder and buck, to respond as overwrought nerves succumbed despite her horror and hatred. Her shame. Fouled and twisted, it worked its way through her, damning her as the nub of flesh Kahler paid such dedicated attention to swelled under his tongue. As it throbbed and ached when he drifted lower, spearing her with that same slick stiffness.

A mess of syllables flowed from between lips she gnashed raw. Incoherent as she begged, pleaded, and was denied. Raw sounds, miserable and broken, turned airy as her lungs worked like bellows. Sucking air in panting draughts as he worked her body against her with an expertise she couldn't hold out against.

No matter the way her heart pummeled her ribs, breaths too fast, too shallow to give her a precious sip of oxygen. Her body wasn't under her control as the sudden rush of heat burst from between her thighs. Crawling up into her middle, pulsing through her limbs as the monster above her forced her to succumb.

Pleasure slid up her spine, crackling with icy dread. The call unceasing as he dragged her unwilling body right where he wanted it. The steady work of his tongue against flushed folds couldn't be ignored, ripened flesh straining for his touch. He sucked on her clit, pulling the pert nub between his teeth to nibble as his tongue worked it over in wild fits.

Forcing her higher. Shoving her before him up the rocky cliffside to where an oblivion she did not want awaited.

Tears flowed as thick as the sweet river between her thighs. Sobs ragged, they wrenched free of her chest as the bond hummed its

contentment. It pushed her to strain up against his mouth, hips rocking in time to the steady pull of his intense suction. Warm bliss threaded through her veins with jagged fingers, crawling under her skin, sparking violent sensation. Made her scream in denial as the first delicate flutter of her sex tried to pull his tongue deeper. Thrust a pleading note into the sound that it was not what it should have been.

It tore through her when it came. Erupting in a series of explosions behind her scrunched eyelids. Vivid crimson, brilliant purple, and sickly green, it twisted through her body as she bucked and writhed by centimeters under his assault. The sounds erupting from her throat were feral. Tones of agony, grief.

It shuddered through her in wave after wave. Crushing her under the weight of bliss as it went on and on. The pain in her stomach amplified with each rapid contraction, burning through the drugged haze like smoke. Bond worming its slimy way deeper, dragging the too much sensations out, it forced her higher as he continued to play her body.

Shattered under the violation, the fresh hell destroying what little was left to her as a broken hum of bliss stumbled over raw lips, Quinn could only stare in a daze as he released her. Rising to his knees, sucking at swollen lips, his hands worked below his waist. Fist a blur, the other squeezing over the thick bulge of the forming knot, Kahler fixed his gaze on the swollen red flesh that he'd used as the means of her destruction.

The angry red of his crown slipped through the honeyed sweetness of her slick, pressed against the empty ache of her before he moved on to play at her clit. Rolled smooth flesh together as Quinn jerked and spasmed.

One last violent call to make her shriek. Make her writhe and fist the sheets as she struggled to present him with what made his eyes come alive with blistering heat.

The first wet splatter against her sex made her groan. The second, third, and fourth were too much. Jangling her nerves, overwrought synapses refusing to fire as she keened and squirmed. Forced down with his knee on her thigh, held still as he painted her thighs and pussy with pearlescent fluid until even he was panting in ragged bursts above her, arm trembling as he held himself aloft.

Quinn struggled for breath as she stared far beyond the ceiling and the sky beyond. Looking deep into the darkness of an abyss.

In a strange symmetry, Kahler fell to the side, mimicking her pose. Hand catching hold of hers, he threaded their fingers together. Ignored her flinching, the quiet whine, and forced her to remain still when she would have slunk away.

Wanting nothing so much as to hide, to crawl into some dark corner and lick her wounds, she was kept prisoner on the bed. The sweat coating her body cooled and chilled, tear soaked strands of her hair plastered to cheeks and brow as she begged for whatever blackness beyond the sex drenched room to take her. Swallow her up, take her down whole.

The creeping chill of numbness seeped over her as Kahler rolled into her side. It banked the pooling heat that still thumped against her lungs. It didn't let her feel his fingers working their way through her hair, the feathering of kisses he showered her cheek with. There was nothing as he assaulted her lips with yet more, plunging inside of her, forcing her to open wide.

Hollow and yet still aching, she remained pliant under his touch as he purred and soothed. Murmuring words she couldn't decipher through the gloom.

As always, she was denied the simple luxury of escape.

Shame shot up her spine, twisting around it in an ever tightening spiral. Jagged, piercing, it tried to rip her apart. Squeezing her stomach, threatening to crush the delicate organ as the thick taste of bile coated the back of her throat. Shuddering as Kahler nuzzled the thin band of scarred tissue above her neckline, she wanted to weep in thanks and bitter anguish as he pulled a blanket over her legs. Hiding her away, covering the humiliation that clung to her legs in sticky smears.

Closing her eyes, she shut away the sight of him so near. It required far more effort to pretend she didn't feel his hand sliding low across the cradle of her hips, clutching the opposite side above the thin blanket. Shoulders so tense they ached with the brittle fragility of her composure, she felt him shift closer. Lips to her crown, he breathed in her scent, his purr a rattling discordance that clattered through her bones.

Entire eons passed behind the closed shutters of her eyes until his breathing grew deep and even. Lashes sliding wide, she took in the dim shadows. Swore to herself that whatever she imagined in the depths of malignant corners and the recesses of opened doors wasn't there.

With more care than she could remember ever having displayed, she eased out from under Kahler's weighty arm. Holding his wrist up between finger and thumb as if handling something foul, she worked her way free in what felt like hours.

Not until she stood beside the bed, quieting her panting and chattering teeth, did she dare look at the monster in blissful slumber. Hair in disarray against the pillow she'd abandoned, face serene with a faint smile on his lips. She wanted to scream. To bite and claw and kick.

She wanted to see his blood spill in a river that she could bathe in.

Muffling a jagged gasp with her palm when he twitched, the fine arch of his brows pinching for a stammering heartbeat, Quinn walked backwards with the mired crawl of a snail. Free hand feeling behind her for the chairs she knew were there, heart jammed high in her throat where it thundered and raced, she aimed for the door.

Trembling, icy fingers closed around the handle, turning it by minute degrees as pale grays remained fixed on the slumbering beast. Watching the steady rise and fall of his chest, the shadows crept closer. Seeking, evil claws of midnight curling around her limbs, paralyzing her, holding her in place just as the latch came free with a faint click.

"What's wrong," Kahler asked through a muddled vibration, equal measures of possession and protection.

He was off the bed before she could gasp, bedding flung aside as he stalked towards her with an intent that made Quinn's knees turn to water. Arm circling her, pulling her tight against his side, the near black of his gaze scrutinized the shadows before running along her body. Narrowing as they took in the pale sticks of her legs glowing in the dim light coming through the windows.

"I-I thought... baby..." Tongue fat and heavy, the words felt gritty as she stammered them out. Panic settled into her bones and made her tremble.

Quinn forced herself to swallow the shrill whine when he curled his body around her and pulled her away from the door. Trying not to stumble as he led her back to the bed, feet heavy as they ached to turn back, to run for some escape she was only imagining to begin with. Lifted with ease, he tucked her back into the bed and pulled the covers snug to her chin.

“I’ll get them.” His dark gaze raked over her again, pausing on the length of her legs once more before he traced their steps back to the door. Grabbing a robe from the closet door, he slung it around his shoulders and left.

“Fuck,” Quinn whispered to the darkness once the quiet padding of his footsteps faded far enough away.

“Is everything all right, sir?”

Tobias stopped outside of the nursery, shoulders tensing before he picked Curtis out of the gloomy shadows of the hallway. He hadn’t even realized the other man was there, caught unaware by Curtis’ presence. That shouldn’t have happened. Releasing a pent up breath in a sigh, Tobias leaned against the frame to peer at Curtis as he drew nearer. Worry creased the lines of Curtis’ face, etching deep into his umber skin, drawing his mouth into a grimace.

“Fine. She wants them.” A flick of his wrist sent fingers towards the closed door, indicating the two sleeping children. Letting the edge of his frustration show, he canted his chin at Curtis. “And why are you slinking around in the dark?”

“We have a shipment to get to David Vaughn tomorrow. I’ve been organizing the warehouse runs and drivers.”

There was no mistaking the rough edged aggravation and murky disgust of the situation in his tone. Promises had been made and now had to be seen to. So many obligated tithes to the Alphas whose territories he had invaded with a veritable army at his back. Upsetting the delicate balance of the lives they all led, one where the imaginary lines of social niceties were dependent on them all agreeing to pretend they existed in the first place. He’d been so consumed with Quinn that he’d forgotten all about them.

A mistake that could have cost him much more than a few crates of drugs and a handful of women if Curtis hadn't been there.

Swiping a hand over the rough stubble on his jaw, Tobias let loose another hard exhale. A quick nod of understanding handed over in something too close to defeat.

"Rey was able to find enough girls?"

"No, he wasn't," Curtis said, jacket straining over bulging muscle as he leaned on the wall opposite. Presenting a casual air with a form that was anything but, he stared hard at Tobias. "We had to call in favors from others. The new woman who took over Rippin's position, she took up most of the slack."

"A woman?" If there was a laugh there, it was dusty and atrophied. Locked away for too long. "Those idiots let a woman take them over?"

"She's an Alpha and appears to be settling in all right. She's been working at acquiring better quality for some time and has improved Rippin's stable. Willing to work with us more than Rippin ever was."

"You need to stop saying that name now."

"This endeavor is going to cost us much more than it already has, sir."

"I'm aware."

"Then I hope she makes it worth it," Curtis said, meeting the challenge that flared in Tobias' gaze. "It's no different than when she left."

"Much like you, she will see the error in her ways when I decide I've had enough. Goodnight, Curtis."

"Goodnight, sir."

Without another word, Tobias went into the nursery, plucking his slumbering children from their cribs. Quieting their murmured complaints, he took them back to his bedroom. Quinn remained wide eyed, listless until he settled the babies beside her. Only then did she react, flowing into motion that had to have hurt, pulling them close and curling around their warm little bodies.

Refusing to let out another sigh tonight, he tugged on a pair of shorts and tossed his robe over a chair. Sliding back into bed, he clenched his jaw and gripped her hip harder when she tried to cringe away.

She was his mate, and by the Gods, she would start acting like it.

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Chapter 14

Quinn pushed the small mounds of food around her plate, rearranging them for the umpteenth time. Deciding on a triangle pattern this time, she glanced at Elise and Adam. Both were covered in orange, somehow even managing to get it in their hair.

“Hold it the other way, sweetheart,” she murmured, letting her fork clatter to the porcelain as she righted his vivid green dinosaur spoon. “Might get some in your mouth that way.”

Adam’s cheeks puffed with a proud smile as he made even more of a mess smearing his food around the matching plate. He did, however, manage to get some of it into his mouth, and so she hummed and smiled her approval. Didn’t even care when Elise grabbed at her shirt and smeared it with what was supposed to be carrots and apples.

“He shouldn’t be eating Elise’s food.”

Shoulders crumpling, Quinn gave Adam’s soft hair one more loving caress before she sat back in her chair. Gaze fixed on her artful masterpiece of dismay and anxiety, she picked up her fork to roll the bright green peas around the dull white a bit more. She hated peas and Curtis knew it. She said nothing when they appeared on the plates set before her more often than not. Hunger had abated to something soft and constant, her stomach no longer growling its complaint when she spent the long hour she was forced to appear at this table to pretend they were some happy family.

“He won’t eat his if he doesn’t have some of hers, sir,” Meghan said, gliding into the conversation as if Kahler had spoken to her instead. “Just a bit of sibling rivalry.”

She did that often these days, trying to take the brunt of his agitation from Quinn. It wasn’t fair to the woman who already did so much for her, but Quinn was thankful all the same.

Learning that Meghan had no children had been a surprise. More than the fact she knew how to go through all the motions. The eldest of ten, Meghan had raised most of her siblings and still handed off most of her wages to support the youngest three. It was one reason Kahler had hired her in the first place, which hadn’t been so very long ago.

Contracted when Grace first started to show, she was to be a nanny for the other Beta. Kept on despite Grace's sudden departure in the hopes Adam would be found soon. Then remained when Quinn was brought here.

Even now when Quinn was healed enough to care for both children, Meghan took on the lion's share. She let Quinn sit and wallow in the suffocating depression, to collapse under the weight of the demands Kahler put upon her. There was no need to mask any of it in Meghan's presence. She'd seen Quinn at her worst before and now was no different. Her babies were happy to be held and rocked as Quinn laid her silent misery onto their little shoulders.

Every night was the same now. Kahler demanded she leave Adam and Elise safe in their cribs, marching her back to the bedroom where he could do as he wished to her. Careful of her injuries, he'd limited his touch. Using his mouth and hands, making her do the same. As she'd healed, that had changed. He might not take her with the same violence he once had, didn't demand as much from her, but it was still too much. Leaving her aching and sore only to repeat it again the next night.

Through it all, he still couldn't stand the sight of her naked. Took her in the dark, under the sheets. Leaving the ever present long shirts on her body though he was content to grope and pinch through the flimsy material. Showering with her daily now, he was quick to come in her mouth as she kneeled on the tiles, and just as quick to leave.

At first the creeping numbness had seen Quinn through the hours he spent satisfying himself with her body. It didn't help the horror and the humiliation, or the shame that sucked at her soul. A demonic vampire intent on leeching every last drop of her sense of self out.

Then came the tears. The ones she swore over and again not to let him see. They poured in rivers from red rimmed grays, cascading down pallid cheeks flushed with her shattered sobs.

It didn't stop him.

He purred and petted, waiting until exhaustion had seeped in. Lying in wait for that vulnerable moment between agony and unconsciousness.

Then he'd strike.

Turning her body against her every night, making her feel. Forcing her to listen to her own shrill cries as they echoed inside her skull. Battering her mind, her heart. The bond hummed during those frail minutes. Content, sated. Quinn hated herself all the more for voicing the dulcet tone before awareness returned in full force. Slamming into her with the weight of reality, crushing her under its heel.

A gasp clogged her throat, choking her as she shoved away from the table when a hand closed over her shoulder. Hot as a brand, the touch seeped through the mandatory long-sleeved shirt as it slipped down to encircle her arm. Toppling the chair, she crashed to the floor with a raw sound of fear. Jerking free, scrambling back in an awkward crawl, wide grays showed too much white as they jerked up to see the threat of a discontented Alpha.

Kahler's lip began to lift, shoulders tight as tension wound through his limbs. If he offered comfort, it was buried beneath the impatient growl. Any softness lost as he snatched at her arm, hauling her up from the ground.

The clamor had startled Adam and Elise, both of them crying. Reaching for her, Adam issued a litany of watery calls for her to pick him up. Turning to go to them, she was dragged backward in Kahler's wake. Left to stumble and trip behind him, he kept her upright with the crushing grip on her bicep no matter how she tugged and twisted.

There was no need to order Meghan to see to the precious little ones. Warm brown eyes brimming with unease, she was already rising, hushing them with quiet sounds of comfort. Moved to block their view of Quinn when Kahler jerked her up into his arms, crushing her against his chest to stop her frantic kicking and beating fists as he carried her upstairs to his room.

When her back met the mattress, she shot up to her feet. Faced off with the enraged Alpha whose chest rose and fell with the controlled breaths of a predator as he stalked towards her. Light and quick, she darted away, moving to put space between them. A dance she would lose, had lost a thousand times before, but never stopped.

"Let me go back." Words mangled in a fresh bout of tears, discordant with her sobbing breath, she was surprised when he answered.

"Meghan has it under control."

“They’re mine! Let me—” Cut off with a shriek that was equal parts fear and anger, he caught her around the hips. She hadn’t even noticed how close he’d come over the span of seconds, didn’t see when he’d gotten within range. Tossed back onto the bed into the tangled folds of the nest, his dark form climbed after her before she’d even stopped bouncing.

Quinn gave up.

There was little point. He’d take what she didn’t want to give. Would keep her longer if she fought harder. Purpose draining from her so fast it made her dizzy, the jagged memories of the time before Gerry had come to wreak his havoc on her swelled. The way Kahler had shoved her into position, mounting her rough and, most important, fast. She’d been docile then and he’d left her alone.

Turning over to her stomach, meek as the well trained bird he called her, she spread her thighs and tipped her hips up. Presenting to the menacing presence behind her, clenching the sheets in her hands so hard it hurt.

She had to bite down on the scream at his first touch. Swallowed back the wails and jammed down the primal urge to run when his knees slid in against her thighs. He was just another male. Just another cock. He’d use her, fuck her, might even hurt her, but he wouldn’t kill her.

That became her mantra as he shuffled their clothes away. In a strange turn, he pulled the loose pants all the way off, flinging them aside before working her shirt up her torso and over her head. Leaving her naked and bare in too many ways to count. She screamed that litany of words inside her head as skin met skin and the first threatening touch of his bare cock skimmed over dry lips. There was no stopping the panicked tremble or the way her breath sobbed in and out of her lungs. If her limbs were so rigid she was made of stone, it was only to withstand the onslaught that waited.

She’d survived so much. Had made it this far, and while never unscathed, her heart was still beating.

She could survive this, too. Had to. For Elise, for Adam.

“I can’t fucking do this,” Kahler snarled, the hands at her hips already flipping her over. Shoving Quinn over to her back in a tangle of arms and legs, he collapsed to the side and threw an arm over his

eyes. Scoffed at the ceiling and jerked a sheet over his hips, hiding what lay flaccid along his thigh.

Sniffling, trying to gain a real breath, Quinn crawled to the edge of the bed. Bloodshot gaze searching through the blurry haze, fumbling across the floor, she slunk off the bed as she spotted what she needed.

“I’ll put it back on,” Quinn stammered, shaking hands trying to right the shirt clutched so tight she could hear the strain of the seams. This wouldn’t end just because the sight of her disgusted him.

It was just delayed.

“Stop. Just... stop.” Kahler sighed and clenched his fists, the arm over his face squeezing tight before he appeared to force himself to relax. The hard breaths blasting between grinding teeth and the bitter taste of his anger told a different story.

A new fear grabbed hold, gnawing at her heart, ripping its way into her mind. As much as she had wanted him to leave her alone, to stop this insanity and take out his needs on someone else, that had been when he hadn’t found her so awful he couldn’t perform. He was a proud man, an Alpha through and through. There was no telling what he would do for the humiliation he perceived. She’d seen women cast out for less than that. He’d proven he had no qualms with getting rid of the mother of his child, of inserting someone else into the role.

Despite the efforts he claimed he’d gone to in order to get her back, she felt anything but secure.

The thought of losing Adam and Elise forced her into motion. Managing to crawl her way into the shirt, Quinn shoved her arms into the sleeves and made her way across the bed. Forced herself to kneel beside him only by concentrating on the quivering half-moons of her bent knees. The foreboding shadow of what lay beneath the sheet lingered at the edge of her vision, smeared by a tide of uncertainty and despair. A shaking hand sent over his hip, her fingers curled under the smooth fabric to pull it away. Unearthing the menacing sight that she was quick to blot out by bending low over him.

“Enough,” Kahler barked, sending much of the nest plummeting to the floor as he sat up with such violence. Sending her tumbling to the other side of the bed as he shoved her away.

Huddled on the corner of the bed, Quinn hugged knees to chest and shrunk into nothingness. Visions of being ripped away from her

children danced through her mind. Desolate, it abraded her emotions to the quick, left her something more than raw.

She felt his eyes on her, a brand that imprinted itself on her flesh and stripped it all away. Left her trembling and bloody before him. The bond writhed, ragged and insisting her submission in giving him what he wanted.

Except he didn't want what little he could take from her.

The hordes of doctors hadn't been able to fix her, just as she'd told him. Countless hours spent being poked with needles, swallowing their pills. Spread wide as they struggled to undo the damage. Even a surgery planned to try to displace the scarred tissue that deformed her.

A barren wasteland of an Omega. His *mated* Omega.

"Come here."

So quiet she thought she imagined it at first, it wasn't until the back of his hand skimmed across her toes that Quinn realized she hadn't. It was more the involuntary flinch that made her aware of reality, dragging her up from the mire of her spiraling thoughts. The touch came again, hesitant. A reluctant glance of smooth skin over her toes and no further.

Without even the hint of force, nothing grabbing, holding, Quinn dared to peek over the edge of her knees. Bleary eyes peering through clumped lashes, she stared at the Alpha whose expression was dark and forbidding. Brow furrowed, deep creases etched into the thin skin around his eyes as he watched her. The line of his mouth was grim, and it was her final undoing.

He'd send her away now. Force her to abandon her babies, to waste away somewhere far from them as he installed some new, fresh woman in her stead. Adam would forget her in time. Elise wouldn't remember her even sooner.

"Please, Gods, please don't," Quinn choked out. Unfolding from her defensive crouch and crawling to him, she lowered herself to her belly. Prostrated before him, she bared her neck and whined low in her throat. Words tumbled past numb lips, syllables crashing together as her tongue, fat with unshed tears, forced them out. "Please, I'll behave. I'll act the way you want. Bring them here, do whatever you want. I won't cause a fuss."

"Quinn, stop this."

“Please!” Angling lower to press her sodden cheek against his calves, she slipped her fingers around them. A beseeching touch as she promised a thousand things in a million different ways. The fact he’d used her name was a faint blip in the horror, not even enough to catch her attention. “I’m not Grace. I can’t... I won’t survive it. Please don’t take them away from me. I’ll do whatever you want.”

Kahler rocked back, blinking at her as if she’d struck him instead of swearing to be everything he’d demanded she be for him. Hand closing over her shoulder, he tried to pry her away. Spine bowed with the weight of her tears, she stayed hunched over his legs. Pleading in mangled sounds as she debased herself further.

His growl promised dark things, as did the taste of smoke and ash clogging her throat, but still she clung to him. Her sobs rattled in her chest as he shook her off, shoving her away as he stood to pace the room. Terse circuits made from the bed to the windows, he paid no attention to his state of dress. Shoulders working, fists clenching, he postured as he allowed his anger to build to a shimmering haze that filled the air.

Helpless, she watched. Waiting for the decree that would either send her to die or at least from the room. If she could just convince him that the kids needed her, maybe he would be satisfied.

It wasn’t unusual for an Alpha of his wealth and reputation to have more than one Omega under his roof. Not even taboo to be mated to more than a single female. She’d tend her little boy and girl and be the good little captive while he destroyed someone else.

Someone who didn’t fight him, who didn’t repulse him and would give him what he wanted.

“You think I’d take them?”

Quinn’s eyes shot to the floor to avoid that turbulent green gaze. Brows drifting down to meet over the bridge of her nose, she tried to find the trick in the question. Answer wrong, and that would be that. Could she say he’d done it before?

“Who do you think I am,” Kahler roared as he stalked towards her. Shoving her flat to the bed with a palm to her chest. Held her there with his weight as he crushed her into the mattress to lean over her. Pushing his face close, the vicious wash of his bellowing breath scalded.

Quinn's mouth worked in helpless confusion as she tried to find the right words, the ones that would see her out of this new threat. That would appease him.

She took too long.

Hand sliding up, the breadth of his palm cupped the delicate line of her throat. Fingers closing, he held tight as he brought his lips closer. Snarling, his words were almost lost in the rage filled sound. "You are my mate!"

Quinn wheezed as his fingers tightened, stifling her breath even further. Wide grays stared up in paralyzed horror, fists twisting into the sheets. Not daring to struggle, to claw at his arm as she saw the tempest of fury swirling in the depths of his dark eyes. His rage burned, pounding against her, making the air too thick.

"You aren't a strung out Beta whore who was more than happy to put my son in danger," Kahler hissed while his fingers clenched. Shifting closer still, the edge of his teeth raked her lips. "You are mine!"

Quinn slapped at the bed, heart thrumming in her ears as she strained for a single breath. The pungent taste of blistering chilies coated her tongue, but she couldn't fill her lungs past the choking grip. Unable to answer, unwilling to hit at the enraged Alpha, she pleaded with eyes gone hazy.

Releasing her so fast all the blood rushed from her head, Quinn tried to roll. To hack and cough as her lungs expanded too fast, too hard with that first ragged breath. Kahler kept her to her back. Settling his weight on top of her, pushing her into the mattress. Covered her with his heat and the acrid bite of his scent as he growled inches away from her face.

"I've destroyed so much for you. Ruined so many things." Fingers delving deep into her hair, twisting the strands in his fists, he forced her to meet his eyes. "I've given you everything. I have done everything to make you happy. I searched for you, brought you back home where you belong. Twice! Our daughter is here and safe. Adam is as much yours as Elise, and he adores you. I tried to be patient with you. I showed you the pleasure we share yet you insist on acting like a whipped dog."

Lungs working like bellows, relearning how to breathe, she didn't respond. Quinn couldn't believe the idiocy flowing from his lips, couched in that savage vibration that was nothing but anger, a promise of more pain.

"I am your mate! Your heart and soul are mine in this Gods damned bond," Kahler raged, lowering his face. Lips close enough to kiss, he snarled his tirade. "What more do you want from me?"

"A choice."

Quinn blinked hard, not believing she had whispered the words. Hadn't thought she had the spine to in that moment. There were two ways to appease an enraged Alpha. Sex and violence, so close, intertwined in their base needs. Yet she'd flung away years of hard earned knowledge and instinct for a moment, just to once say what she wanted.

Unwilling to close her eyes, to not meet head on whatever her indiscretion might buy her, she saw the second the decision was made. There, in the twilit darkness of his green eyes, the moment he resolved her fate was marked by their sudden widening. Blistering hot, pupils expanding, she tasted the burnt flavor of him over her tongue and waited for a swift end.

It made it all the more surprising when he cupped her face with brutal hands, the kiss he pressed against her lips distressing in its tenderness.

"From the moment I saw you moping about in that disgusting club, I knew you would be mine. Not just for Adam. You made my blood fucking sing, and I knew I wanted nothing else."

The tender words could not be aligned with the way he snarled, biting them out as if he cursed her with every breath. Gripping her face so hard it throbbed, she felt the tingle of bruised flesh beneath digging fingers as he forced her to keep his gaze. To look back at him as he brushed another whisper soft kiss against her slack lips.

"You wanted a breeder—"

"I wanted you, Gods damn it. Wanted the little Omega who kept her chin so damned high and proud. So fucking strong, it killed me not to take you that very second. The one who didn't sell herself like a cheap tramp. You, who didn't let just anyone touch her, I knew you would come apart in my arms and you would be mine."

“You took me to be your whore.”

“I took you to be my fucking mate!”

“I can’t give you what you want. Why won’t you leave me alone?”

The tears that had dried up in her confusion slipped free again, rushing over her lashes to trickle down her cheeks. “Get someone else, some bitch who will spread and pop out whole fucking litters for you.”

“I don’t want anyone but you,” Kahler bellowed, inches away.

“You can’t even look at me,” Quinn screamed back, the fragile strands of her composure snapping, sheared away under the force of her misery and his violence. “You rape me, every Gods damned night in this bed, but you won’t look at me! You don’t care what they did to me, how they fucking hurt me—”

“Oh, I want to look at you. I want to touch every inch of you, but each time I think of how I wasn’t there to protect you. How many times they hurt you and *I was not there*. I felt it, Quinn. Every Gods damned time they fucking touched you, I felt your pain. Your anger. I felt it when you fucking came. I felt... I felt you fall apart, and I thought I had lost you. I thought I would die with you, wanted to.”

His kiss was not gentle. It was an assault, silencing her low cries with lips and teeth and tongue. Invading her as he wrapped her up in his body, forcing her to mold to his heat and the hard planes of him. Crushed against the immovable force of him, she screamed. Let him swallow it down as she let out months of torment in a single ragged sound that held until her throat burned and her head spun.

She bit and clawed, raking her nails down his back. There was no satisfaction in the taste of his blood, the coppery scent of it drifting in the livid haze between them. Beating her fists against whatever she could reach, he took the minor blows, holding her tighter still. Kissing her even when she scored his lips with the edge of her teeth. Stroking her hair as she thrashed against him.

A festering wound split open, she purged it all. All the terror, the anger, the rage. Everything that had built up inside of her came out in a steady rush that threatened to destroy her under the crushing pressure. All of the pain laid bare, shoving it in the face of the man who swore he’d keep her safe and hadn’t. Damning him as much as herself for all that had happened, hating herself as much as she despised him.

He held her until she went limp, the sounds escaping her raw and hoarse. Rising, lifting her with him, Kahler took them to the bathroom. He held her tight as he ran the bath, cuddled her close as he sat in the too hot water with her wrapped around him. Touch far more gentle than it had ever been before, he washed away the sweat and blood from their bodies.

Purring the entire time, he washed away all that he could, even if he would never touch the murky darkness that stained deep into her soul.

Wrapped in a warmed towel, Kahler sat her on the bench. Quinn flinched as he came up behind her, trying to slide away when his fingers worked through her soaked hair. Shoulders rounding, she huddled as he made a gruff sound and came around to her front. Crouched before her, he purred harder, skimming his knuckles against her cold cheeks before he began to dry her hair with calm, slow motions.

A tug on her hand pulled her up, dragging her into motion as he led her back into the bedroom. Her feet pointed her towards the closet, the promise of the obligatory clothing not half as demeaning as it had been before this night.

Except he stopped her. Pulled her back against his front and pushed her towards the bed.

“Nest.”

Quinn was thankful when his heat left her, less so when he only disappeared into the closet to return with fresh bedding. Releasing a shuddery breath, she went through the motions. Her hands knew what to do, her mind didn’t need to be involved. Stopping short when he began to help, when he dared to drag away the old to be replaced, Quinn’s lip lifted as she scowled at the crumpled ball of sheets and blankets he manhandled like so much refuse.

“Nest.”

The growl of a command underscored the word, sending her hands back to work though her eyes kept straying towards him and where he stuffed the old linens into the hamper then pulled on a pair of shorts. He’d gotten rid of everything that reeked of her fear, his anger, his lust. Everything she arranged now was flat and lifeless.

When she’d positioned it all to her liking, he took her towel and urged her in. Tucking the blanket high up to her chin, he pressed a kiss

to her forehead.

Then left the room.

Imagination running rampant in her bewilderment, Quinn sat up and clutched the blanket to her chest. Worry about what it meant, what he was doing, what would happen gnawed on her thoughts, rats on a rotting bone. Clawed at the space in her chest that was infected by him and him alone.

His expression was troubled when he came through the door to find Quinn dressed and pacing in frantic circles. He looked at the bed then to her, a single brow sliding upwards as he closed the door and lifted the plate towards her.

“Don’t think I haven’t noticed,” Kahler said as he went to the low table and chairs by the windows. A crook of his finger beckoned her closer.

Shuffling over because she saw no way out of this, she raked her fingers through her hair one last time to smooth the disheveled mess of it. She couldn’t help the involuntary sigh as she collapsed onto the nearby chair. Peering at the offered plate, a single pale eyebrow quirked up to match his.

“You’re still not getting cheeseburgers in this house.” Kahler slid the plate closer, something of a smile tugging at the corner of his lips before it faded away. “Pizza, though...”

Chin dipping in a nod, Quinn sidled closer. Folding the large slice of pepperoni and mushroom in half, she brought it up to her mouth and willed herself to take a bite. Somehow managing the act of chewing and swallowing, she repeated it twice more before her stomach churned in vicious circles. Setting the food aside, she dragged her gaze up to meet his.

“What are you going to do to me?”

“I’m going to put you to bed after you’ve finished.”

“You know what I meant.”

“You are my mate, Quinn. It’s high time you realize that fact will not be changing.”

Chapter 15

Aside from a few questionable decisions in her life, Quinn had never been stupid enough to think that things would change after her tirade. So she wasn't surprised when things continued on as they were.

If Kahler was more careful of her, making sure not to come up behind her and that she saw him when he touched her, it made little difference. Making her look at him, to see him as he climbed on top of her made no change at all. He still forced her every night and most mornings. Turning her body against her, leaving her drowning in shame and disgust.

The Gods showed her a little of their favor when the tension between him and Curtis reached a boiling point and he began leaving the house to do whatever it was he did. The hours of the day that he was gone were spent hidden away in the nursery where Quinn tried to break through the crippling depression and the despair that infected every breath. At least enough to play with Adam and Elise, to be amazed at how they talked to each other in that way only the very young understand as if they were longtime friends.

It helped that the nursery was the one place Curtis did not dare to tread.

The Beta had always been aloof, but now he was downright cold. Every exchange full of sneering contempt, his glares filled her with a trepidation that left her skin crawling. He never did anything outright, a subtle hatred that she couldn't complain about. Not that she'd ever say anything to Kahler even if he did. She'd known he didn't like her, that he never cared for Kahler bringing home street trash. They both knew she didn't belong there. Neither knowing how to resolve the situation they found themselves mired in, they perfected a ritual of avoidance. A delicate dance where they strained to pretend the other did not exist.

The hardest times were the meals they were forced to share.

Disinterest continued to plague her, souring her stomach to the point that hunger became transient, a fleeting thing that was ushered away with a single thought. Kahler hadn't lied. He noticed and decided to do something about it. Dragging her into his lap right there in front of

everyone, he purred and coaxed her to force bite after bite. When even that failed to make her choke it down, his quiet growls and demands did. Telling her she had to think of Adam, of Elise, that she wasn't being a good mother by allowing this to continue.

As if she had any control over any of it.

The mind works in strange ways, and it was during moments like these that she found herself thinking of Ilya and his near gourmet skills. While she might try to concentrate on the way he'd always had something prepared, something she'd love and ready the moment she left her nest, it would devolve from there. The way he had touched her, purring and cuddling as he talked to her. Treating her like a human being for the first time in her life.

Had he ever cared about her or had it been a way to keep her compliant? Why that was the question and not how she could miss the man who not only allowed, but orchestrated, such gruesome things to happen to her Quinn didn't understand.

"Where do you go when you look like that, little bird," Kahler murmured against her ear, his fingers tightening over her hips to bring Quinn flush with his chest again.

Straightening from where she'd leaned her elbows on the table to contemplate the too sweet custard and berries, Quinn rolled a shoulder in a shrug. Deciding she could at least miss the Alpha's cooking, she set the heavy spoon aside and waited for Kahler to release her from the shackles of his hard grip. Stomach unsettled, she wasn't sure if it was the food or the man that made her sick. No amount of his coaxing would make her choke more of the cloying shit down.

Chin rising to take in the room and its final occupant, she caught Curtis' disapproving glare. That wouldn't make her eat it either.

"You need to eat more."

"I don't feel well." Restless shifting was met with an impatient sigh and the tightening of his hands before Kahler slid them around. Palms flat low on her abdomen, he nuzzled her neck. Disregarding the fact Curtis stood by with posture rigid as steel, full lips a narrow slash of distaste.

"All right, little bird."

Rising, taking her with him, he manhandled her with ease until Quinn was cradled against his chest. A distracted goodnight murmured

through her hair as Kahler headed for the stairs, already nipping and licking at the exposed skin he could reach. Fingers kneading at her thighs, her breast, he didn't care who saw.

"I really don't feel well," Quinn mumbled to the floor when he deposited her at the foot of the bed, seeking hands pulling at her clothes.

That had been another change, albeit a small one. In the mornings he started to drag out long dresses with wispy sleeves, airy blouses and flowy skirts. All things that didn't conceal every inch of her while still keeping her hidden away. He undressed her more often than not, though, skin to skin as he rutted her.

"The doctor said they might make you feel unwell for a bit," Kahler said after tossing the loose dress aside. Already turning to bring the evil white pills to press into her palm as he waited by with a glass of water fetched from the bathroom.

He never named them. Fertility drugs. Meant to be a gentler form of the injections, to increase her hormones over time so she would have a natural heat, the same poison that Ilya had been sneaking into her without her knowledge. The stupid man still wouldn't accept the fact she wouldn't be giving him any more children. Still insisted that she could be his breeder.

Never mind that she hated his touch, hated him, hated all of this complicated dance that decided her fate each day.

Ignoring the fact her body was ruined.

"Just do the shot and get it over with." Quinn swallowed the pills dry, the leaden weight of them grinding down her throat as she hurried past him to the bed. The uneasy prickling along her spine told her he watched. Unnerved by the attention, she threw herself into the bed, tugging at the blanket until it covered her to the chin.

"Oh, I think these are working just fine." One corner of his lips twitched, long strides bringing him alongside the bed where he deposited the glass on the table beside her. Making a great show of moving towards her, each action slow and obvious, he leaned down to card his fingers through her hair. A kiss placed on each of her cheeks. "But you still need to eat more."

Waiting for him to flick the light off, to climb in on top of her, Quinn clenched her fists in the sheets. Felt the delicate fibers stretch

and creak under the strain of her fear when he began to remove his clothes in unhurried movements. Always with the suits, three pieces and fresh off a press. Shoes that gleamed with a high polish.

A single blink and it was Lee standing before her, watching her as he loosened his tie. The predatory way his gaze worked over the hills and valleys of her hidden body as he unbuttoned the pristine shirt. Deep green replaced with earthy brown, golden brown substituting for rich black.

Shallow breaths pumping in and out between parted lips, Quinn gripped the sheets tighter. Twisted them up into her hands to feel the smooth glide of fresh cotton. There was no smoky violence here, no hot ash of anger. Just the rich spice of Kahler.

The thought didn't help.

Not when he loosened the belt and eased the slacks from his hips. Tossing it all aside to be cared for by someone less important than him. Standing proud and naked before her, the heaviness of his cock held it low despite its hardness.

Mistaking her staring for attention, the Alpha preened. Postured as he began the slow climb up onto the bed, letting her drink her fill of the nightmares swirling through her. Jagged ice flowing through her veins as he came ever closer, he didn't mark her fine trembling.

Lungs seizing as his hand glided up the length of her leg, ankle to thigh, all Quinn could do was stare. Swearing it wasn't him, that Lee was dead, shot down in that evil room made no difference.

"Quinn, sweetness, look at me."

No. No, he never called her by name, never gave a term of endearment, but it was still somehow that smoldering voice. The one that oozed into places it shouldn't. Black, malevolent, it ate away at her bones. Chewing her up.

"Look at me."

Unbidden, her gaze dragged up the length of him. A helpless sound escaping her as she paused for too long on the tumescence aimed at her, threatening to tear her apart.

"Quinn."

The command was impossible to ignore. Her eyes traveled up, leaving behind the terror that was known for a nameless one above.

“Look at me,” he husked, thumbs tracing her jaw before he caught her, holding her there so Quinn had no choice but to stare at his face. “See your Alpha, little bird. Me. No one else.”

Hiccupping a watery sob, the scalding edge of tears pulled her eyes tight. Refusing to close her eyes even as he inched closer, he became a hazy blur as he kissed her slack lips. A careful touch, he held her firm between powerful hands as he eased back to gauge her reaction.

It brought her back, the murky shades of brown fading into shadows and then nothing. Bringing Kahler into focus as he hovered over her. The indelible bonds that connected her to him slithered within her chest. Silken strands that encased her heart until Quinn could swear she felt two rhythms pounding against the back of her ribs. One slow and steady, the other a quavering staccato.

“Yes, Quinn, that’s it. See me, your Alpha, your mate,” Kahler said, his purr a near hum of satisfaction as he leaned in to take her lips again. A slow violation where he urged her mouth open, slipping inside to slide against her tongue in a playful tease.

Quinn felt it down to the marrow of her bones. A creeping tide that sucked at the tension running ragged through her shoulders, bleeding it out on a quiet sigh as she melted back into the disheveled bedding.

“That’s it, my sweet Quinn.” Lips trailing over her cheek, he dipped down to nuzzle at her neck. Inhaling hard against the soft patch of skin where her scent was strongest and letting it out in a low groan. Unadulterated need kept cloud soft and whisper quiet.

Recoiling from the hand skimming up her side, Quinn whined low in her throat. Fingers against his shoulder were a silent request. A plea to stop, to leave her alone just this once held in the subtle pressure against rippling muscle as he rubbed his chest against her.

“I need you, little bird. So damn bad. Always.”

The quiet sound she made was pure distress as he maneuvered her thighs apart, hands far too busy between them before one appeared before her. Fingers slipping in over her tongue, forcing the taste of him deep into her mouth, he growled. Called against the tender skin of her neck until Quinn gasped around the thick digits working in and out between her lips and pressed into the steady vibration.

“My mate.”

More was pushed into her mouth. A primal dance as he had her suck his fingers dry before he collected more of the clear fluid to feed to her. Again and again until Quinn was lost in his scent and sounds. Until she no longer shied from his hands, his mouth as he scattered wet kisses and gentle nips over her body.

Teasing her until Quinn was reaching for him, soft sounds tumbling over her lips as instincts won out against her denials. No matter that her mind screamed a litany of them as her body arched, offering her breasts to the hungry pull of lips and teeth.

“That’s it, little bird,” Kahler murmured against her skin between hard sucks to the malleable flesh. “You want this. Need this.”

Fingers threading through his hair, Quinn pulled him tight against her chest. Cooed and hummed her satisfaction as he scraped the edge of his teeth over taut peaks amid a scattering of torrid presses of his lips. Her heart shriveled a little more with each response, tears burning the backs of her eyes even as she rocked her hips against the hard planes of his stomach. Undulating her body to rub her scent into his skin as much as to take his in return.

Hand slipping between them, he played through the thick river of slick pouring from her cunt. Fingers splaying swollen lips wide, he searched out the aching nub of her clit. Rolled it under his thumb in quick, hard circles to make her voice a stuttering cry as she jerked up into the sudden stimulation. High pitched and breathless, her tormented keen suffused the air alongside the sucking wet sounds of his fingers plunging inside of her.

“You want me to fuck you. Make you mine all over again,” he said in a low growl before biting hard into the soft skin of her neck. Not letting go until Quinn jostled and whined, nails scraping down his back as he crushed the fine line between pleasure and pain.

Dying a little inside with each syllable that tripped over his lips, at the truth hidden in the darkest recesses of her soul, Quinn strained to silence him with her lips. Kissed him hard, tongue daring as it plunged inside his mouth. Tangling with him, a war of dominance played out with soft sounds of pleasure as each sought to have their way.

Quinn was winning, even if he didn’t realize it.

With nothing but the sounds of their sex echoing through the expansive room, silencing his words was victory enough.

Up until Kahler rose to his knees, shoving her legs wide around him. Too large hands raked through her hair, fisting the thick locks tight against her scalp as he angled her just so. Forced her to look up into his eyes with grays swallowed up by the blackness of her pupils as he smiled down at her.

“You want your Alpha’s cock, little bird?”

Quinn mewled as her hips rose on instinct. Presenting, offering the dominant male what he wanted.

“Say it, Quinn. Tell me you want your mate to fuck you. Tell me how bad you want it, sweetness.”

Jostling hard, impatient with his game, she reached for him. Gripping his hips, nails digging into the hard muscle beneath, she tried to pull him into her.

“Ah, ah. Say it, Quinn, or you don’t get that big, thick, Alpha cock you want so bad. Bad little mates don’t get their Alpha’s knot. Don’t get filled up with their hot come.” Bowing over her, Kahler licked at her lips, keeping her from surging up into a true kiss. Kept her docile beneath him with ease as he tormented her.

“Please!” Dragged out in a pathetic whine, she hated herself all the more for the shrill, lost note it carried.

“Say it,” he snarled, twisting the strands of her hair.

A wave of prickling sensation coursed over her scalp, delicate strands tearing free in his grip. Still she maintained the thin thread of resistance. Giving the bastard her whines, her moans. Spread wide, showing him the glistening pink of her pussy as she begged with wordless cries. Refusing to utter the words he wanted to hear.

Fist holding her to the bed by her curls, he slapped the swollen crown of his cock against her. Playing at her clit, rubbing the slick head in agonizing circles over the hard nub. Just as determined to not give in as he tormented her body. Eased inside, stretching her in inching thrusts before resuming his torturous play with the delicate bundle of nerves.

“Say it, sweetness. Just once,” Kahler said in a snarl, words carrying the sharp edge of irritation. Impatient with her defiance. “Say it once and I’ll fuck you until you can’t do anything more than scream my name. I’ll fill this pretty pussy with so much come, it’ll drip down your thighs for days.”

Quinn shuddered at the disgusting filth he growled against her lips, her neck. The garbled syllables groaned against her breasts. It made her somehow wetter, clenching over empty air as she scratched at his back, digging her nails into his skin. To force the Alpha to take what he was so desperate for.

“Tell me you want it, or I will fuck that pretty mouth instead. Pour all this come down your throat and leave you here. All alone and desperate for more.”

When she opened her mouth for his violent kiss but not to whisper the words he wanted to hear, Kahler growled. The creeping edge of chilies burned the back of her throat as he slapped her legs away, shoving her down into the bed to crawl up her body and straddle her ribs. Hands in her hair, he pulled her up to the leaking tip of his cock.

Quinn’s indignant rage was effervescent as she stared up at him. Pale gray shown in the thinnest of rings around endless black, she was wide eyed with incredulity. Showing the Alpha her teeth, a growl rattling loose from her chest, she challenged him. Dared him to put that oh, so vulnerable flesh into her mouth where she could take out her anger with relish.

“Last chance.” Bit out through a growl subterranean in its darkness, Kahler cradled the back of her head with one hand and smeared the potent fluid of his excitement over her lips and snapping teeth.

Forced her to taste him again.

It obliterated her anger in a single swallow. The bond writhed and shrieked in her chest, as insistent as the male above her. The painful ache between her thighs refused to be ignored, need twisting through her limbs until she shuddered and clung to the intense heat of him.

Losing a little more of herself, swollen lips parted. The wet, slick muscle of her tongue peeking out to lap at his cock. Groan becoming a low hum of satisfaction as she sucked the heady liquid down.

It was him. Her body knew him in those moments. Knew what he would do to her, what he’d give. There were no more unknowns as she swallowed him, chocolate and chilies warming her throat and belly.

“Have it your way, little bird.”

“Fuck me,” Quinn mumbled against his throbbing flesh, fingers scratching a delicate tease over the tensed muscles of his ass. “Fuck me, knot me. Fill me with your come.”

“What was that?”

“Please, fuck me,” Quinn whined, trailing off into a high pitched keen as she rubbed the length of him across her cheek. Nuzzled his base, licking at the tight sac beneath.

“Again.”

“Need it. Knot me. Fill me up. Please, please, fuck me!”

With the speed and grace of an Alpha in his prime, Kahler was back between her legs. Spreading her open, pushing inside before Quinn could do more than grab onto the sheets and whimper. Stretching her around his thickness, the call he gave was guttural. The decadent sound shivered through her bones, prickling her skin as Quinn arched into him. Taking him deeper as he ground their hips together and she wrapped her body around him.

There was nothing soft about their coming together. It was a clash of wills, even as she surrendered to her body’s demands. Biting, clawing, she shrieked and bucked beneath him as he slammed into her body again and again. The tight edge of pain he rode her against thrilling in its destruction of her sense of self.

Moans high and airy, she sucked the sweat from his skin. Taking in more of his heady scent as pleasure suffused her. Gripping her in its tight fist, crushing her against the implacable force that was him.

“Tell me you’re mine.”

“Shut up,” Quinn hissed, scoring her nails down to his ass, urging him to pound her into the bed. Digging her nails deep until the Alpha snarled and did as she wanted.

“Tell me you are mine,” he roared, punctuating each word with a powerful thrust, only his hands hauling her into the surging movement keeping her from being shoved up the bed. Gripping her swollen breast, nails digging into the soft flesh. The taut peak caught between his fingers twisted.

Biting down into his forearm, Quinn shrieked and spread wider. Tipping her hips up into the deep ache as his cock stretched her open. Pounding into her. Thighs trembling with the strain as she begged for more. Utter bliss shoving her before it. A precipice soaring ever higher as the base of his cock began to swell.

The slap of skin and their panting moans were the only sounds then. Arm snaking under her back, he lifted her hips. Wrenching her into his

violence, he licked and sucked at her breasts with savage growls as she cried out. Sunk his teeth deep.

Oblivion threaded through her veins, punching into her stomach as he shoved the air from her lungs in raw grunts. The wet sucking sounds of her cunt fluttering around driving flesh twisted through the slick slap of skin.

“Tell me!” Hauled up from the bed, he pulled her body down onto his cock. Bottoming out, grinding in. Caught and held her gaze as Quinn came apart.

“Yes!”

Pleasure crackled across her senses, blinding hot and jagged as it tore away. Ripping through her, dragging a scream from her raw throat. The shrill note held as she shattered under the vicious onslaught. Slamming home, the knot swelled. Locked behind her pelvic bone, he ground against her. Crushing her clit between them. Doubling the intensity, sucking waves pulling her under. Crashing into her, through her.

“I can already smell the change on your skin. You’ll have your heat soon,” he murmured against her hair after they had calmed.

His come still leaked from her, raw folds tender as he pulled her leg higher over his hip. Quinn tucked her face tighter against his chest, willing him to be quiet, praying he would just shut up. The words were said though, drifting through the air to taunt her with reality.

He was right. The bastard was right.

“Then, my little bird, I’m going to give you another baby.” With another yawn, Kahler settled back, nuzzling her crown as he pulled Quinn tighter. “Maybe a little boy this time.”

If he felt the way she froze, how her spine grinded as she straightened, he ignored it. Cradling her head to his chest, he purred until he drifted off.

Sated, he left her alone in the dark with her thoughts.

Hours passed, the moon’s pale glow a distant memory. The stars winking, cruel and uncaring, in the black velvet of the sky beyond the cold glass. He didn’t rouse when Quinn slipped free of his limbs and off the bed. Careful as she padded on silent feet to the closet, there was no other sound but his deep, even breaths in the dark room.

Pulling a shirt and pants from their shelves, she dressed in the old clothing. Pulled them on as a shield to keep her safe from his intent. Nervous hands ripping at the snarled tangles of her hair, she made the quiet trek to the bathroom. Standing in front of the mirror, she looked at the disheveled woman there, the one whose pupils were still too wide, lost in the thick scent of her Alpha. Her mate.

Stifling the hard sob that ripped free, Quinn snatched the thick towel from the bar beside her. She shoved the plush terry between her teeth, stuffing it into her mouth to muffle the ragged sounds as she sunk to the cold tiles of the corner.

She sat there until her legs went numb, bones creaking in protest. Until her mouth was dry and raw, the towel soaked through with her despair. Crawling to the sink, she levered herself up. Used the cold stone to prop herself up as she leaned in to splash her face with water. Stood there for ages more to watch the water swirling down the drain. A fitting image for the metaphor of her life.

Easing back into the bed, Quinn let her body go limp as Kahler pulled her to him. Groggy, he made a small perturbed sound when cloth met his seeking hand.

“Cold,” she whispered to the darkness beyond, even those shadows leaving her be for the moment as the Alpha at her back wrapped her up in his body. Suffocating her in too many ways to count.

“It will all be better soon, sweetness.”

It would never be right again.

“You will always be mine.”

Chapter 16

Quinn groaned as she came awake.

Heat suffused her limbs, a steady tide of blistering warmth that lapped at her skin and pushed her into the hazy space between awareness and dreams. It urged her to writhe, to bask in all that glorious pleasure.

Her gasp was quiet even in the dim light of early morning. Hips twitching towards the slick slide of pressure between her thighs, she exhaled on a breathy moan. Blinking hard to dispel the bleary edge of sleep, she sat up on her elbows to stare in plaintive dismay at the man nestled between her spread thighs.

It was then Quinn realized her clothes were gone. Not just that, but she was beyond wet, soaking Kahler's chin and the bedding with slick as her body responded. Falling back, Quinn bit her lip and stared at the ceiling. Hating herself for how he could do this to her. Forced into willing submission with his touch and growls.

"You taste incredible," he murmured against her swollen flesh. Tongue working through her folds he drew it in long, slow passes through her wetness. A teasing caress against the hard nub of her clit given before he nibbled at taut lips.

Quinn dragged in a breath, filling her lungs to painful capacity, and stared at the pure white of the ceiling. Closing her eyes wouldn't make it better. Too much became unknown, shadows and memories tangling their way through her until every touch was clawed fingers grabbing, the brush of skin the hard impact of a hand.

It had been so much easier before. The need for an Alpha to keep her and an unborn baby alive, she'd been able to withstand it all. Even after, with Elise so dependent on her, she'd been able to lay under Lee without the urge to cry. She'd even schemed and plotted while giving her body up to Lee and Ilya both.

Now it was nothing but horrors and terrors waiting to rip her to shreds.

All she could do was wait for instinct to drown her. For the primal urges that resided deep in the recesses of her mind to overwhelm her and let her surrender to what was happening.

“Give me your hand.”

Brows twitching, straining to scowl, Quinn threw her hand over her hip in a boneless flop. Tried not to flinch when he tangled his fingers in hers but failed all the same.

“Look at me.”

Quinn made disgruntled noises as she shoved a pillow beneath her head one handed, angling it up so she could see down the line of her body. To see him staring up at her from between her legs. Gaze drifting to the marks, the scars, thoughts unbidden shrieked their way in. A pileup of half formed visions slammed into her chest. The one who had bitten her hip so hard, as if he’d wanted to tear the flesh off. The other that lapped up the blood from where his fingers clawed her thigh. Alton’s fists landing blow after blow as he crushed her into the filthy carpet.

Kahler growled low in his throat and tightened his hold on her fingers, crushing the delicate bones as he demanded her attention. Kept her gaze as he lowered his mouth back to her cunt to feather kisses over reddened folds.

“You taste incredible,” he whispered with another slow lick, tongue rolling to savor her taste before swallowing it down.

“You already said that.” Skin tight and uncomfortable under the strain of watching, she twitched away when his chin dipped down again.

“It bears repeating.” A maybe smile flitted over his lips, gone before it ever appeared. His inhale was slow and deep, nose flush with the soft roundness of her slit.

Waiting for him to begin again, Quinn jumped, scrambling back on the bed when his lips pushed against one of the ugly streaks of puckered flesh marking her thigh. Squawked a protest when he dragged her back down to his waiting mouth to lick and nip at another jagged line.

“Stop!”

“Shh, little bird,” Kahler husked, trailing yet more kisses over her scarred flesh.

On and on, he lavished attention on those awful things. Continuing until she dug her heels into the bed to squirm away. Jerking at the hand still clenched in his, he shoved her thighs open around his shoulders.

Mouth descending, he covered her pussy. Lapped at the delicate folds with a groan that vibrated through her. Sucking at the tender nub of her clit hard, drawing a ragged cry of surprise from her lips.

As it became too much, pleasure threading through her veins and overwhelming her senses, he turned away. His mouth moved over her legs, her hips, even dragging her arm between her thighs to lick and suck at the tender skin of her wrist as Quinn ground her clit against the back of her hand seeking oblivion.

He pulled her back before she could get far.

Kahler worked his way up the bed, showering her with more attention. Muddling her thoughts as confusion and pleasure warred within.

“All over. You taste incredible,” Kahler said against her breast, teeth sinking into the malleable flesh before he groaned and sucked the taut peak between his lips. Tongue flicking wild over the hard nub as he pinched it with the sharp edge of his teeth, the reverberation of his lascivious growl shuddering through her bones.

Gaping in bewildered rapture, she had no defense when his mouth took hers. A violent assault of her senses, he plunged his tongue between her lips. The slick slide of wet flesh and the bite of sharp teeth made her moan. Brows scrunched tight, she gripped his shoulder, unsure if she was pulling him forward or trying to push him away.

Hovering in a state of panicked bliss, sucking in deep breaths of the excited male, Quinn tipped her hips up in offering. Knew her pupils were blown wide, drunk on the sensations. Prayed it would swallow her up as she felt the heated trail of his excitement smearing against her inner thigh.

They both groaned as he shuffled forward, the throbbing length of his cock sliding home in one smooth thrust. Still gripping her, he forced her eyes to his with his free hand as he began the long, slow drag back out. Hovered with just the swollen crown inside of her until Quinn made an impatient sound.

“You feel so damn good,” Kahler husked against her lips as he repeated the action. Hilting himself hard enough to jostle her, a true smile quirking his lips up when she whined for more. “So fucking beautiful. So tight, you grip my cock so good, sweetness. The Gods made your pussy for me.”

Quinn snarled, hating that he was still talking. Keeping her too aware to tumble into the oblivion of instinct. Wanting him to shut up, to do what he did best and just take what he wanted, she clawed at his back with her free hand. Bared her teeth at his growl, challenging him as he snapped his hips to drive his thickness deep inside of her.

Kahler's eyes narrowed and then the true torture began.

Languorous, he violated her senses, one after the other. Feeding her their combined fluids on his fingers as he fucked her with slow, agonizing thrusts. His mouth moving over every inch of flesh he could reach as he praised her in a hundred different ways, from the softness of her skin to the blush that reddened her cheeks. Refusing to give her the violence she needed to tip over into nothingness.

On and on, time slipped by until the sun was streaming through the windows and Quinn was screaming. Demanding that he finish it, that he fuck her, to give her what her body craved. Overwrought senses raw, she sobbed when he gave that first hard thrust.

Feral in her need as she drowned in instinct, she bit and scratched at the male moving above her. Urged him to slam his hips against hers, grinding against him to drive that painful fullness that much deeper. Her moans and cries tangled with the sound of sweat slick skin coming together, a ragged symphony directed by the Alpha who seemed intent on pushing so deep inside of her they were one.

Pleasure wound its way up her spine, suffusing her limbs with pulses of heat. Back arched high, she clung to him. Dragged higher into the maelstrom of sensation, she keened when he launched a delirious attack on the reddened peaks of her breasts. Heels digging into his flanks, she pulled him tight. Working her hips to grind her clit against the hard planes of him, she trilled and moaned.

Writhing against the too much sensation as the angry rasp of his stubble scored her neck, she bucked. Shrieked as he hammered against the very end of her. The utter perfection of the pleasurable pain sending her soaring higher. A devastating fall that called to her.

"Mine. My precious, sweet little bird. You are mine," he husked against her shoulder, mouthing the long line of scars that were his. "Always. Always been, always will be."

Quinn's mouth fell open on a silent scream as his teeth dug in. Shoved off the cliff of the impending plunge, her body seized. Every

limb locked tight as her pussy fluttered around the pulsing thickness of his cock. White hot and blinding it blazed through her. Crackling under her skin, a thousand incandescent explosions. An endless wave of sensation that crashed into her chest before howling through her veins.

Slick muscle contracted over the faint swell of the knot as he continued to pound through the tight clench. Roaring against her bloody shoulder, fingers shoved deep into her hair. Scoring her scalp as he pushed her open lips against his shoulder. Shoved in deep as the knot swelled, stretching her in a painful rush as the first wave of heady fluid bathed her insides.

Dragging the knot back, making her scream. Shoved home one last time.

Quinn's mouth clamped shut, taking his shoulder between her teeth. Digging in hard, deep, until the flat iron taste of blood mingled with the decadent flavor chocolate and chilies.

Bit deeper still as her chest cracked wide. Soul split asunder, her heart torn free from its moorings.

Quinn screamed. Screamed and screamed as everything exploded around her.

The world jerked, reality shifting, tilting, crashing. An endless, swirling vortex that tore her soul apart. Fluttering wisps whipped away by an unseen force, so much confetti in the wind.

Senses crashing together, piling up. Smashing, crumpling, becoming something other and new. Leaving her floundering in the darkness.

Still she screamed as he rocked the knot inside of her, purring against the fresh wound he lapped at, teeth still clenched tight.

Shock settled into her bones, the very marrow gone cold.

What had he done?

"Always, Quinn. Always."

"Stop."

It was unnerving. Impossible, horrible, ridiculous, but above all, unnerving. The way he knew. The way she knew he knew.

She could feel him there, a steady presence. Solid and hard in all the places she was soft. Mangling her insides, ripping it all to shreds with gleeful determination as he bounced Elise on his knee across the room.

Yet somehow he knew the second the terror started to build, the mounting grief overshadowing the unsettling presence lodged under her sternum. No longer a vague sense of him, but a crystal clear image. A vivid, technicolor sensation that pounded through her veins, soaking in heady waves through her bones. He'd call to her, distracting. Feeling his voice as if it vibrated through her lungs. Her heart stuttering along in its silken cage before slamming against her ribs in a bid to break free.

"Come here, she wants you."

"I-I can't." Quinn recoiled when he stood, coming closer. His heat emanated from *inside* of her. Every deep, calming breath filled her lungs as well as his, despite the way she panted in shallow panic. Her distraught whimper was brushed aside as he settled Elise into the ruined nest.

He wanted her to rebuild it. Wanted to bring the babies to her, to have them all clamber and snuggle there together, a family. Whole. She *knew* that. How the ever loving *fuck* could she know that?

"What have you done?"

"What needed to be done."

She wondered if this was what it had been like for him all this time, if he had been so aware of her every movement, every emotion. Her heart tried to slam to a halt only to be dragged along by his. A steadying thump that was too large, too heavy to be contained by the far more delicate bones of her chest.

Shaking her head, wonder and outrage simmered under her skin.

"They'll kill you," Quinn stammered out, flighty hands petting at Elise, soothing abraded nerves and agitating the crawling girl. "Kill me, them. Everyone."

"No one will ever hurt you again, little bird," Kahler said in soothing tones, purring as he sidled up to her. Wrapping her in an embrace she didn't flinch from. "It's not unheard of—"

"It's not normal! It's wrong." Jerking her shoulder hard to dislodge him, Quinn scrambled across the bed, out of his reach. Staring across the wide expanse of the mattress as she stood beside it, she shook her

head in hard jerks. “It’s wrong and perverse. It’s fucking sick! What you’ve done to me...”

Anger, sadness. Emotions that weren’t hers but swirling through hers. Deep eddies of confusion that ripped apart her thoughts. Devastating everything but the maelstrom of *other* that saturated her mind. Left her swaying, clinging to the bed to stay upright.

“You are mine in all ways now,” Kahler said as he swept a hand over Elise’s curls to calm her, distracting her from Quinn’s panic. “I fail to see the problem.”

“This isn’t done,” Quinn screamed. Feet stuttering along the floor, she backed away. Needing more space between them. An ocean, an abyss, some black hole to open up where she’d be safe from the silken worm that gouged out her insides with each breath until there was no more discerning him from her. Collapsing against the wall, sliding down until she could press her eyes hard against her knees, Quinn wished it would all just go away.

Intent pulsed through her veins, ferocious and determined, seconds before his hand tangled in her hair. Jerking her head back as he crouched before her, the sharp edge of his teeth bared in a silent snarl. Quinn pressed her spine to the wall, trying to merge with plaster and wood as he leaned close.

“You are mine and I will do whatever I damn well please with you.” His growl was quiet, a soft threat that didn’t disturb Elise as she toddled closer to her parents, babbling and grinning. “Now you will stop this at once. You will get up and fix our nest while I fetch our son.”

Already rising, she was unable to resist the command that battered her senses from every direction now. Quinn balked as she found herself at the bed, hands going through the motions before she could even think to lash out.

More disturbing was how good it felt.

Peace oozed through every tensed muscle, anxiety dripping away into grimy puddles. The simple pleasure of arranging her nest, the gurgling coos of her daughter a background to the rustle of sheets and blankets. The heady spice of Kahler wafting up, assaulting her, she found a small smile warming her lips as she smoothed and tucked the fabric just the way she wanted.

Uncertainty boiled under the surface, attempting to drown that creeping sunlit glow invading her.

Then he was there. Not just the memory of warmth but real heat against her back, his quiet sound of satisfaction thrilling down her spine. A hard inhale, the arch of her back pressing her into him as she accepted his touch. Felt it deep under her skin as fingers skimmed along her side with a throaty chuckle.

“Damn little eyes,” he murmured against her shoulder before kissing the edge of his marks where they peeked from the neckline of her shirt.

His claim. *His*.

Quinn shivered, panic twisting with the delicious sensation of melting against him.

The final touches made, she grinned. Laughed as Elise and Adam tumbled around the thick drifts as their Alpha doted on them. Mother and father tickling and purring to them, they basked in the comforting attention. All of them together at last. Happy, a family, safe in the nest she had built with her Alpha mate to protect them all.

A moment of clarity seeping in through the brilliant golden haze that fogged her thoughts, Quinn turned to him. Eyes wide, pupils contracted to terrified dots.

“What have you done?”

“Hush now, little bird,” Tobias said, his smile wide and holding an edge of heat that spoke of what would come soon, when little eyes and ears were no longer there. Brushing the back of his hand against her cheek, he pressed a gentle kiss against her lips. “All is as it should be now.”

They spent much of the day there, and it was only his insistence that made Quinn drag herself from the warmth of the nest to go downstairs to eat. She smiled at Meghan’s concerned looks, eager to help and fuss over Adam and Elise as they smeared food over their plates. Elise managing to get as much in her hair as in her mouth.

“Is... everything all right, Miss Quinn?” A bare whisper of a question, Meghan’s warm brown gaze flitted over the males where they bent their heads together to talk of unimportant things.

“Everything’s wonderful. Why wouldn’t it be?”

“You just seem—”

“You need to eat, little bird. They have to learn the right way to hold a spoon eventually.”

His voice was warm syrup, the first rays of dawn brightening the horizon. Wrinkling her nose with a lopsided grin, Quinn sat at his side. While the dreaded peas weren’t there, and what was offered were among things she often enjoyed, it all tasted wrong. Bitter, sweet, flavors that should not be coated her tongue and clung to the back of her throat.

“It will get better,” Tobias said, reassuring as his hand closed around her nape to work at the aching muscles there.

“All right.” Quinn ate it all without complaint, trusting he was right. He would know. He always knew. He was her Alpha, her mate.

She was his.

A glimmer of something dark, forbidding slithered up from some recess. It caught, taking hold of her. A bucket of icy water as her fork clattered to the table, plate shoved away to crash on the other side.

What was she doing? This wasn’t her.

Horrified gaze swinging to the soothing purr, Quinn shook her head in violent bursts. Denying the calm that tried to smother her. Scrambling away from the table, she knocked over her chair. Ran into the hutch filled with delicate crystal and fine bone china, their tinkling laugh mocking her as he rose and came towards her.

Screaming at her feet to run, for her legs to even move, Quinn stood silent and still as he swallowed her up in his arms. Going limp as he cradled her against his far larger body, listless as the steady vibration knocked her joints loose and left her swimming in the deep green of his hard gaze.

“An adjustment period is not uncommon,” he whispered and smoothed back her tangled curls.

“What have you done?”

Quinn couldn’t understand the question though it had come from her lips. Tried to grab hold of the lost note, to examine it for just a moment. It faded to ash, drifting away as he carried her back upstairs.

“I don’t feel good.” She didn’t. Even under all the confusion, the heat, his scent. Her stomach clenched, twisted. Angry.

“Shh, it’s all right. You need sleep.”

He didn't give her much of that. Waking Quinn as the dark shadows of night took over the room, he brought her awake with his lips and tongue. Hands roving, searching. Making her breathless with just a touch, wet with only his quiet words of praise.

For hours he took her. Making her scream and beg and moan. When she lay panting beneath him, the tight clench of her pussy holding his knot deep as he filled her with his come, a cold tendril slipped up her spine. Awareness surged, freezing her lungs before she sucked in a hard breath.

“Why?”

“Shh, sweetness.”

He held her as she came apart. Petting and soothing as she swung from delighted hums to racking sobs, each emotion more intense than the last until all Quinn could do was scream. Pleasure, pain, insanity.

Shattered into a thousand pieces, uncertain of what was him and what was her.

Destroyed by the man that smiled against her lips as she sobbed.

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Excerpt

Destroyed – Omega's Destruction Book 3

Huddled over the toilet, Quinn gagged. The steady rush of bile burned her sinuses, eyes watering as she choked. It seemed to take forever before her stomach grew as quiet as it ever did these days. Blind fingers fumbling, she grabbed hold of the handle and flushed her misery away, squeezing her eyes shut so as not to see it swirling down the drain.

Hauling her body up by handholds on nearby fixtures, she gained her feet. Weak as a newborn foal, she shuffled to the sink. Even the thought of her berry flavored toothpaste made her shudder and cringe, but if she had to taste those awful mashed potatoes a third time, she would vomit again on principle alone.

The general crud that had affected her since beginning the fertility treatments had gotten so much worse. Unable to hold food down for any length of time, she was miserable. It was obvious she wasn't pregnant yet, and the doctors had no answers for Tobias other than Quinn might be sensitive to the drugs.

It didn't stop him from giving them to her each day.

Quinn faced off with her reflection in the mirror, swearing she could see herself turning green as she reached for her toothbrush.

Frowning, she leaned closer and swiped at her chin. Bringing her fingers up, she stared at the dark brown flecks. What on earth had she eaten? Pulling a face of disgust, she turned the water on and washed her hands and face. Reaching for her toothbrush, she steeled herself for the pungent flavor.

She felt him. A surge of violence and intent pounded through her. Knocked her knees loose, making her cling to the cold stone to stay upright. Before the front door could even slam shut, she felt him storming through the house. Intent, purposeful.

Stalking his prey.

Stomach twisting, another violent cramp seized her middle. Turning towards the toilet again, Quinn's strangled shriek echoed back at her as she fell to her knees and crashed to the floor. A rush of slick wet her

thighs, soaking through her dress, filling the room with its candied sweetness.

“There’s my little bird.”

Head swinging around, she stared wide eyed at him as he stalked closer. Tie gone, his vest flapped open as he tugged at his shirt. Buttons popped free to clatter against the tile as he jerked it open.

“Something’s not right,” Quinn said in a rush, words slamming together in a single breath as she crawled away.

The call was too loud, too harsh. It clawed down her back, twisting her spine as she stammered out a panicked cry. There was no stopping the river of slick that poured out for him, enticing him.

“Wait! It’s not right, something’s wrong,” Quinn screamed, but he was already tearing at her clothes. Ripping the silky dress away to leave her naked on the tiles.

Pawing at her, pushing and pulling as his nails scraped over delicate skin, he got Quinn to her knees. Covered her back, shoving the reverberation of his growl against her neck.

Thick, heavy, he split her open as he buried his cock to the hilt in one painful thrust. His gratified moan snaring on her shriek of pain.

She wasn’t ready. There was no dulling of her senses, no lack of pain as he rutted her with violent slaps of his hips against her upturned ass. Her screams were nothing but agony.

“Mine,” he roared, dragging her up against him as he sat back.

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About Eva

Eva Dresden writes dark romance that lives up to its name with every turn of the page. Her heroines are tragic and strong, her heroes are anything but, and tearing characters apart to see what makes them really tick is a favored past time. Her cat is her staunchest supporter, provided there are treats involved.

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