



Loose Id

HAYASHI'S *Hero*

A DAWN ENDEAVOR TITLE

MARIE HARTE

Dawn Endeavor 2:
Hayashi's Hero

Marie Harte



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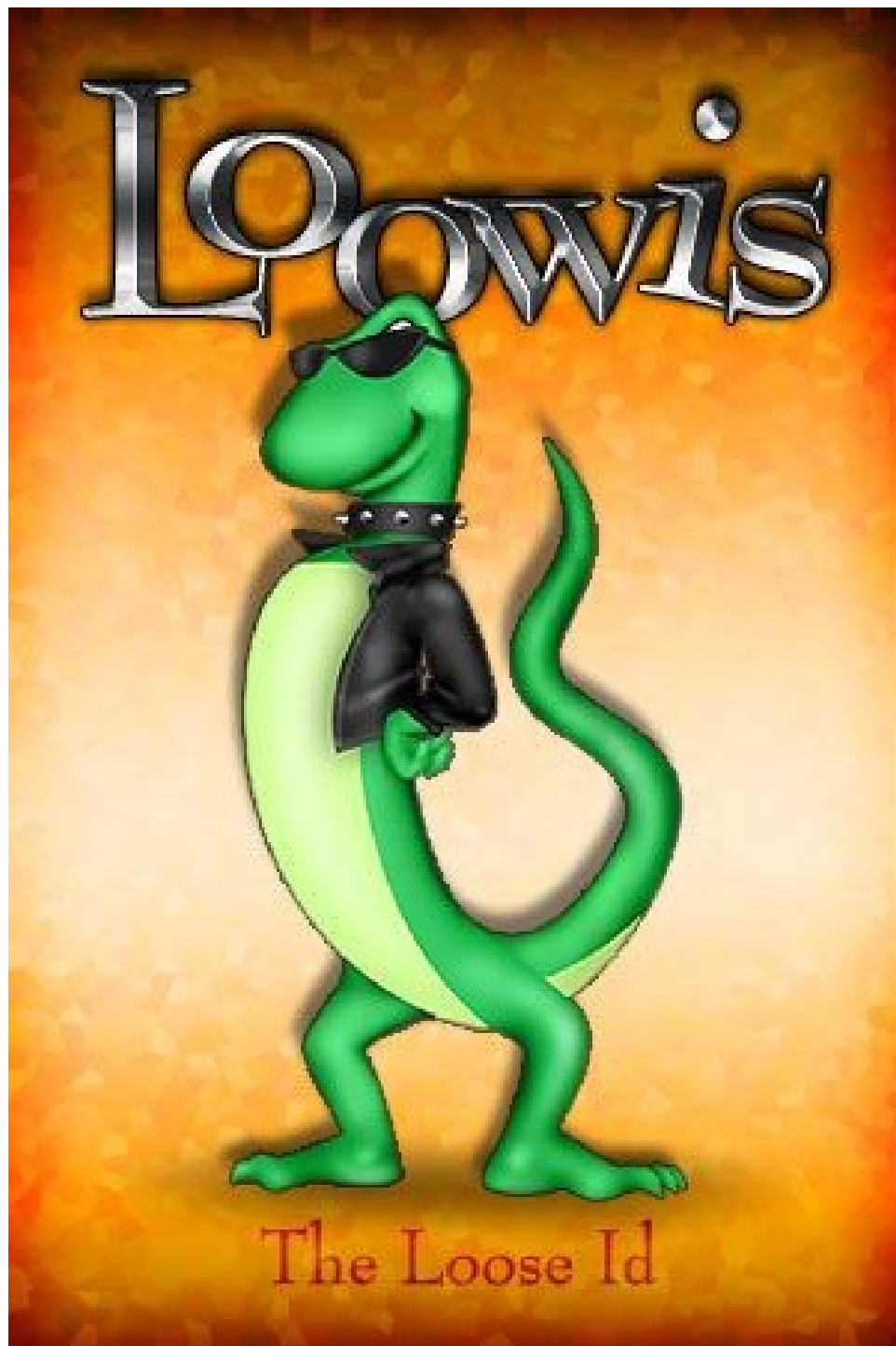
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Chapter One

Atlanta, Georgia

The wind whipped, bringing the chill of February much closer than was comfortable. The cracked tarmac of a lot once crowded with brand-new cars was now surrounded by rickety fences, two rusted, broken-down vehicles, and trash. The helpless air of decay complemented the derelict neighborhood where gunfire, screams, and crime often went unnoticed. Perfect for their activities tonight.

At six feet six, with skin as hard as steel and the added security of fangs, claws, and the endurance of a predator who never quit, Kisho Hayashi liked to think of himself as invincible. Though he knew better, he liked to mentally reinforce the idea that nothing could hurt him, not when he remained in control, focused, and so fucking angry, he could kill without conscience. Hell, he could see the goddamn future. He should have been all-powerful. But he wasn't.

He glared at the hated reminder of his recent failure, one of the dickheads who'd nearly beaten him to death a few months ago and who now threatened to shoot Jesse Fallon, his friend and fellow Circ. Kisho didn't have many friends, so those few he did have had his absolute loyalty. A sudden image of bright green eyes set inside a handsome face stole through him, a stranger's face more familiar than his own. He hurriedly blinked the image away.

Christ, just what he needed. Reminders of a tomorrow he didn't want to see. Sometimes he fucking hated seeing the future.

“Demônios,” the mercenary spat. Devils.

Kisho considered himself and his friends, conceding that the bastard was partly right. They weren't totally human. The experiment to turn them into Uncle Sam's fighting machines made them bigger, more powerful, and...different. The Dawn Endeavor team, of which he was a part, had better instincts, faster response times, and the ability to self-regenerate, even when in human

form. But when they transformed into their “beasts,” everything turned into weapons. Teeth became fangs, fingernails strengthened into unbreakable talons, and a simple punch could turn into a deathblow.

The mercenary tightened his finger on the trigger of the semiautomatic he held.

Trust Montaña to give his men decent hardware.

Colonel Ricardo Montaña, leader of a new group of subversives bent on destroying the U.S. Navy's new top secret project at the Pentagon, was a ghost who drifted throughout the States without so much as a whisper. They'd been looking for him ever since a mole in the organization had compromised their last mission.

Kisho narrowed his gaze at the assholes who'd started him on his predestined path to disaster. “Remember me? I took the swan dive off the Sunfield building.”

Curses and a scrambled attempt at escape. Their stink of sweat and fear like a drug he intended to savor. *Kill, destroy. Make them hurt the way we were hurt*, his beast—that other consciousness inside him—demanded. Considering the damage he'd undergone, it made perfect sense the animal instinct that ruled him when *changed* would expect retribution. Kisho more than understood the need for revenge. Unfortunately, the man the navy had shaped couldn't agree to base murder.

In the form of his beast, however, he intended to exact pain, suffering, and at least a *little* retribution for being left to die two months ago, thrown from a rooftop, then kicked and beaten until he nearly bled to death from internal injuries.

“Hey, dickhead, I asked if you remembered me.” Kisho growled at the mercenary sighting in on his teammate's forehead.

The laser sight swung to Kisho. His heightened senses enabled him to see the man's finger pull the trigger, and avoid the projectile with a second to spare. He kicked the gun to the side and watched as the semiautomatic continued to fire, taking out two unfriendlies before the gunman realized his mistake. Before the merc could swing back to Kisho, Fallon grabbed the hand holding the gun and broke it.

The gunman shrieked in pain, hurting Kisho's sensitive ears. He mentally replayed Franz Joseph Haydn's *Allegro con spirit*; the classical composition was both energizing and soothing in its orchestral perfection. He grabbed the asshole and broke the man's neck in synchronized

motion, just as he imagined the first movement's crescendo. A delightful scent of terror filled the air as Tersch, the team's resident Viking, corralled their fleeing opponents.

And there, the staccato of running feet like the rampage of violins. Music to my ears.

“Nope, get back into play, assholes. Hayashi's not done with you yet.” Frederik Gunnar Tersch grinned, showcasing sharp canines that shone under the bright February moon. More massive than the others, he looked like a veritable Viking god...if Viking gods had dallied with the beasts in the underworld.

Tersch clenched his massive fists and cracked his knuckles in the sudden silence.

The wind whirled through the outlying trees surrounding the rundown parking lot and energized their opponents enough that they cried out in terror once more. As if anyone in the surrounding slums would come to their aid.

The brisk breeze invigorated Kisho, and he smiled his pleasure as he tore through the enemy until only three remained.

“Remember to save one for Olivia,” Fallon reminded him. “The fuckers don't speak English, so I can't delve in and read any of them.”

Fallon, a telepath, used his mental abilities to aid the team. A vital resource when it came to intelligence, he was a limitless source of information—so long as their informant spoke the language. Luckily for them, his wife Olivia spoke native Portuguese, the language Montaña's mercs preferred. Olivia also happened to be an empath with the ability to sense truth, yet another asset the team used.

Kisho studied the remaining three men kneeling on the ground. “I'll give you a choice. Which one of you wants to remain conscious the longest?”

The men stared at him and one another, confused, terrified, and trying not to show it.

“Oh, that's right. You probably don't understand me,” Kisho said in all seriousness.

Tersch laughed. The men cringed.

Kisho focused on the tallest and most sadistic of the group, from what he remembered. “You kicked me when I was down. You're first.” In mere seconds he broke the bastard's knee, nose, and collarbone. He locked in next on the dickhead who'd spit on him, a big no-no. Kisho had had enough of that growing up. He didn't bother with fancy moves; he simply grabbed the

shorter male, crushed a few of his ribs, and squeezed his neck until he passed out. Much as he wanted to kill the enemy, Kisho was no murderer. He'd leave them for the admiral's team to clean up.

The last man was on his knees, pleading and weeping for mercy.

Kisho wasn't inclined to show him any. He raked his talons across the idiot's face, a reminder that forgiveness wouldn't be coming from his camp. "Let's give him to Olivia. Then Tersch can have him for sport."

Tersch grinned. Anything that implied violence was okay with him. "*Terrific*. Hayashi, buddy, have I told you lately how impressed I am with this new attitude of yours?" He *changed* back into his normal form, that of a giant blond with aggression issues. "It's like you're my new best friend."

Kisho snorted.

"No really." Tersch followed after him like a puppy while Fallon shook his head and dragged their newest informant away by his collar. The other two remained breathing but unmoving on the ground. "I know Jules thinks you've gone over the bend, but I believe in you, man."

"Thanks for the pep talk." Kisho sighed. "I'll call in for backup. But it doesn't look like there's any rush." Letting the men live who'd once nearly killed him went against the grain. His beast snarled, but *the man* remained in control. He made the call to Mrs. Sharpe, their secretive boss.

"Any problems?" The smooth, deep voice glided over him like silk.

"No. Two of them didn't cooperate. They're down and likely to stay down without some help." He heard moaning behind him and couldn't stop his beast's satisfied grin.

Tersch gave him a thumbs-up as he dragged the remaining men over to Fallon, who helped him tie them up to a telephone pole.

"I'm surprised at you, Kisho." Mrs. Sharpe chided him over the phone. "From Gunnar, I'd expect such brutality. Not from you."

He'd learned not to question how she knew so much about things she couldn't possibly know.

"I like to think I'm open to change," he deadpanned.

She sighed. He could imagine her stroking those antique pearls she always wore at her ears and around her throat. Against her dark skin, the pearls gleamed, but not as brightly as the intelligence in the older woman's discerning gaze. Mrs. Alicia Sharpe had been aptly named. She never missed a trick.

"I'll see you three back here tomorrow. The authorities will meet you there in half an hour." *Authorities* meaning Mrs. Sharpe's classified Naval Intelligence contacts. "Make sure your prisoners are all still alive, will you? Geoffrey likes to think if we play nice, the other team might as well."

"Yes, ma'am." Kisho snapped his cell phone closed and pocketed it.

Admiral Geoffrey London and Mrs. Sharpe shared some personal history Kisho really didn't want to know about. Once Dawn Endeavor's commander, Admiral London now headed a top secret experimental group working to develop psychic warfare. The Circe the U.S. Navy had once planned as a new wave for the future hadn't panned out. Of the hundred sailors who'd volunteered and undergone genetic experimentation, only Kisho and three fellow SEALs had survived with their sanity and their bodies intact.

He glanced at Tersch and questioned the word "sanity" as it pertained to the big berserker. "Hey, let Fallon know to *change* back. You know how the suits respond to claws and fangs."

"Like they've never seen monsters before," Tersch muttered, then left Kisho's side to find Fallon.

Kisho studied the arrogant giant he considered his best friend. When normal, Tersch stood six feet six and had blue eyes that could frost over in anger or glow like sapphires when he was aroused. Women who weren't put off by Tersch's massive size threw themselves at him. But it was Fallon who'd been the real stud—until he'd met and married Olivia.

Not as bad as Tersch, Fallon had at least taken to serial monogamy and tried to put some thought into whom he bedded instead of just sating his needs. The dark-haired, dark-eyed lothario could charm the pants off a saint, and his sense of humor gave the team a lightness it would have lacked otherwise. And speaking of team...

When Tersch returned, Kisho asked, "When's Jules getting here?"

Their illustrious squad leader remained a no-show. With an aura that screamed commanding, Julian Hawkins naturally assumed the role of leader wherever he went. Intense, thoughtful, and resourceful, the silver-eyed Circ never put his needs ahead of those of his men. That he hadn't shown made Kisho nervous.

Being Circ didn't entitle them to automatic protection against their enemies. Until a few months ago, Kisho never would have believed himself capable of being strong-armed, not when he could turn into a hybrid warrior with magnified senses and abilities. Yet he'd been tossed from a three-story building like a sack of potatoes, then tortured and left for dead, all to leave a message to his team.

"Jules? No idea. What are you waiting for? We *changed*. Get to it, Mr. Slow," Tersch prodded.

Kisho sighed. Like sliding through water, his thoughts bubbled until the man beneath the beast floated to the top. He focused his will and felt all of him begin to transition into another form. Bones and sinews rapidly shrunk. The incredible brawn once apparent in his darkened frame thinned to abundant muscle under his now almond-colored skin. The long hair that reached his waist when Circ now lay cropped over his ears and brushed the top of his neck, thick and soft, as opposed to the more coarse fibers when *changed*.

Thankful for the elastic-waist jeans that allowed for some cover when he transformed from man to beast, he caught the bag Fallon threw him and reached in for the rest of his clothes. In his human form once more, Kisho shivered in the bitter chill of February despite his thicker blood. He'd never liked the cold. Once he'd donned a cable-knit sweater, socks, and boots, he joined his companions inside their SUV.

Modified to accommodate men of their size, the extended cab had plenty of room between the backseat and the way backseat, which faced the rear of the car. The odd seating allowed them space to *change* on the move, if need be, and to face each other while they conferred over mission plans and the like.

As they waited, Kisho thought about the upcoming free weekend Mrs. Sharpe had been promising.

“Alicia had better be on the up and up,” Tersch muttered, as if reading his mind. “My luck, she’ll decide she wants to run more bullshit tests on me while the three of you and *Olivia*,” he added with a sneer when Fallon raised a brow, “fuck around in town.”

“You kiss your mother with that mouth?” Fallon joked.

Tersch flipped him the finger, but Kisho saw the bitterness in his gaze, knew the pain Tersch suffered, a pain his friend wanted to bury as badly as Kisho sought to avoid his own history.

Kisho punched him in the arm. “Admit, it, Tersch. Alicia Sharpe has a thing for you. I think Mrs. S. wants you, man. The sexual chemistry practically sizzles when you two are together.”

Fallon laughed out loud.

The pain in Tersch's gaze disappeared, as Kisho had meant it to. “You’re such an asshole. Now if Ava would get off her high horse and share some love, I wouldn’t say no. But Sharpe’s mouthy assistant is too busy bristling at every damned thing I do and say.”

Fallon blinked. “You pat her on the ass and call her ‘sweet cakes.’ You try to get her to do your laundry. You order her around like a servant. How do you think an independent woman like that is going to respond?”

“Servant, hmm. I’d rather she was my slave.”

Kisho and Fallon exchanged a glance.

“Um, Tersch, you do realize telling Ava you want her as a slave will big-time piss her off, right? She’ll not only cut off your balls, she’ll feed them to you for breakfast. And you can probably blame less of that on her skin color than that the woman was born aggressive,” Fallon said. “I married aggressive; I know what I’m talking about.”

Tersch flushed. “I meant *sexual* slave, you idiot. Anyone tries seriously fucking with Ava in any way answers to me,” he growled and seemed to grow as Kisho watched.

Pleased his friend wasn’t the insensitive lout he at times appeared, Kisho changed the subject. “Speaking of fucking with, why do you think Delancey chose Montaña to work with? An ex-navy captain and a South American drug lord running a company of Brazilian mercs? And just what the hell does Delancey have to do with all this?”

Fallon shrugged. “Who knows? I always thought he was a bit off, even when he was our captain. Good thing for us we had Jules to run interference.”

Jules had been their lieutenant back when they were active SEALs. Comrades in arms and the best of friends, the four of them were tighter than family. They had to be; their lives depended on each other to keep them sane and to provide surcease when the mating heats struck.

Kisho forced himself not to squirm and firmly shielded his thoughts from Fallon. Being a Circ certainly had its upside. He was stronger, faster, and more deadly than any normal man. When *changed*, his skin could repel small caliber rounds, his claws and fangs could do major damage, and he healed at a rapid rate. Even in a man's form, his flesh regenerated quickly. The animal that resided just beneath his skin had an uncanny instinct for survival. It often knew what Kisho needed before he did.

But along with those positives came the mating heat, a major pain in the ass. *Literally*. Once a month, and lately, more often than that, he and his fellow Circs experienced a driven need to procreate. So long as the sexual partner was a Circ, gender didn't matter. A raw means of survival, to perpetuate their own species—which wouldn't have been such a problem, except that few female Circs existed. A real bummer for his friends, but not such a problem for Kisho.

He'd always preferred men over women. The one time he'd tried fucking a female he hadn't enjoyed it. Frankly, the female form did nothing for him. Oh, he easily conceded Olivia's sensuality and Ava's incredible beauty, but sexually, they left him cold. His friends, on the other hand, made his temperature rise without even trying. And his natural attraction embarrassed him.

He knew his fellow Circs only engaged in sex with each other because they were driven to it. Not wanting to alienate the only people he considered family, Kisho didn't draw attention to himself. Though he thought by now they might suspect something, he refused to give them an opening to reject him. The navy's “don't ask, don't tell” policy continued, even though their official time in service had ended.

Jules and the others had accepted Circ bisexuality easier than he'd thought they might, but at the end of the day, they still sought females when hungry for human sex.

“Dude, I hate when you get all quiet.” Tersch grumbled and kicked at his feet. “You okay?”

Fallon answered for him. "He likes to think a lot, something you wouldn't know much about."

"Ass."

"It's always about my ass, isn't it?" Fallon said with a fake leer. "I know you want it, but don't beg, Frederik. It's pathetic."

Tersch grinned, showcasing sharp fangs. "Your demon wife isn't here to protect you, pretty boy. Watch what you say. I have no problem bending you over while you suck off my good buddy." He turned to Kisho, a bright glint in his sky blue eyes. "You in? It'll be tight, but we've done it before."

Shit. That damned mating heat again. Even Fallon looked affected, and Olivia normally satisfied his cravings.

The blare of a horn and the approach of bright lights outside saved him from answering. Kisho cleared his throat. "Our prisoners' escorts are here. I'll take care of the transfer."

He shot out of the SUV and slammed the door behind him, willing his erection, if not away, at least down enough not to be noticeable. Hopefully the shadows from the overhead streetlamp would hide the bulge in his jeans.

Stepping forward to the cuffed mercenaries chained to the telephone pole in the center of the barren parking lot, he saw the men shiver. Fallon had forgotten to give them blankets. Forgetful guy.

Three dark SUVs that screamed *government* stopped ten feet from the pole. Doors opened, and a dozen men in suits appeared and surrounded him. Not much of a threat, even with their bulky jackets that failed to mask the firearms he knew they carried.

"These them?" one bureaucrat asked. "They look cold. No blankets in this weather? They probably have hypothermia," he said with a frown and glanced at the running SUV.

Kisho tsked. "You know, we asked them if they wanted to share the vehicle with us, but for some reason, they preferred the outdoors." He flashed the civilian his teeth and saw the older man swallow. Amazing how a bit of fang could instill fear. And they weren't even halfway extended.

"Right. Ah, Miguel? Need your language skills, front and center."

Miguel shouldered his way past the others and started speaking in rapid Portuguese. At first, the prisoner didn't answer. Miguel didn't raise his voice, but whatever he said had the prisoner looking from him to Kisho. He started talking, a rapid spatter of words that didn't cease.

Happy to leave the bastards to someone else, Kisho slapped Miguel on the back. Miguel nearly fell over, and Kisho caught him before he toppled over the prisoners. "I can see they're in good hands. Make sure the conscious one gets back to Mrs. Sharpe. She wants one of our team members to take a crack at him." He watched them load the mercenaries in the van. "Best of luck, gentlemen." He nodded and walked toward his own SUV.

Before he reached the vehicle, he turned and watched the government vans pull away until their fading taillights winked out of sight.

Overhead, the moon disappeared behind a mass of clouds. The streetlight flickered and then died. The cold made the emptiness of the space feel like the lot where he'd fallen all those months ago. Except here shouts, backfiring cars, and occasional gunfire filled the night. Not the best section of town to frequent. Then again, the way he felt, he looked forward to a scuffle.

The faint, tempting scent of cedar and mint drifted through the partially open driver's window.

Hell. They wouldn't. Not here, not now. His entire body tensed, and his cock throbbed, hard in an instant.

He quickly opened the driver's side door to the SUV and started to enter. He froze at what he saw: Tersch and Fallon in the back. *Together.* Fallon had his head buried in Tersch's lap. Neither male wore pants.

Tersch groaned. "Fuck, that's it. I hate the mating heat sometimes, but not right now. Oh man, you're only getting better with practice. Olivia likes to watch you go down, doesn't she?"

Kisho couldn't move, caught in a lust so extreme, it hurt.

No question. The damned mating heat was back.

"Come on, Hayashi. Shut the door, man. You're letting all the hot air out," Tersch said on a gasp and buried his hands in Fallon's hair.

Swearing, wishing he didn't want this but wanting it more than his next breath, Kisho slammed the door shut and opened the passenger door instead, letting himself in. He closed and locked the door behind him, shucked out of his jeans, and positioned himself behind Fallon.

His beast rose to the fore, and Kisho thickened, the familiar oils of arousal secreting around his *changed* cockhead to make the taking easier. He consciously transformed all of himself back to normal, though it wasn't easy. He wanted to remain in control of himself for once.

He rubbed his body's natural lube up and down his cock and groaned when the scent of mint intensified. Apparently, deep throating Tersch was turning Fallon on, because his pheromones flooded the space. Not to be left out, Kisho gripped Fallon's hips, angled for penetration, and slowly pushed forward.

"Oh, yes," he hissed and threw back his head, taken with the incredible intimacy, the sense of belonging he felt every time he fucked one of his team. Fallon's tight ass gloved him, but careful not to ram too hard, Kisho inched inside until he fully seated himself.

Fallon groaned and gasped, letting go of Tersch. "Damn, Hayashi, you fully *changed* or what? Man, I am stuffed. Olivia is going to be pissed she missed this."

Kisho grunted and pulled out, then pushed back inside Fallon's warmth.

"Stop talking and suck," Tersch growled. "You know Hayashi's big when he's not *changed*. Big cock for a little man."

"Little, my ass. I'm only four inches shorter than you," Kisho growled back and started reaming Fallon harder, unable to help himself. His own arousal lingered, a subtle cinnamon that layered over the grunts and groans among them.

Tersch tilted his hips and arched, shuddering on a moan. "I'm coming hard. Swallow me. Oh yeah." He came, stirring Kisho to reach his end.

"Gonna fill you up," Kisho warned and tightened his hands on Fallon. "Just let me come, and I'll suck you off soon as I'm done." He loved feeling a warm cock in his mouth, and the idea of going down on Fallon only increased his arousal.

Fallon jerked, and Kisho shot hard, unloading the pent-up rage, hunger, and desire always riding him lately. An image of emerald green eyes filled his mind's eye as he climaxed, obliterating the good mood that settled over him.

Not about to lose it all, he finished and withdrew from Fallon, then shoved Fallon onto the seat next to Tersch. In seconds he engulfed Fallon's dripping cock and took him to the back of his throat.

“Shit, yes. That's it. More.” Fallon bucked up as Kisho licked the sweet spot under his glans. “Kisho, so damned good. Best blowjobs. Fuck, yeah,” he groaned and spent quickly, filling Kisho's mouth with warm cum.

The orgasm must have stirred Tersch again because before Kisho knew it, the big bastard had moved behind him. He felt something large and hard prodding his anus. He couldn't escape even if he'd wanted to, sandwiched in the confines of the SUV between two massive men. And he was no lightweight himself.

Stuffing him full, Tersch rocked him against Fallon, who hadn't finished coming if his hardening cock was anything to go by.

“Circ stamina makes everything better,” Tersch said on a breath. “That's it. Open for me, Kisho. Let me all the way in.”

The only time they'd call him by his first name. When they fucked. Together as one, closer than brothers. A part of each other. *Circ*.

Kisho took the sex and called it loving, needing there to be more. He didn't think again of the man with green eyes.

Much.

Chapter Two

They returned to the house the next day pleasantly sated. Kisho hadn't been sleeping well lately. He'd commandeered the backseat, and the orgasm he'd had before their eight-hour drive back to the mansion in North Carolina had given him a much-needed rest.

“Hey, Sleeping Beauty, we're here.” Tersch's gruff voice never failed to amuse him. Though the lumbering Viking liked to act like the bully on the block, he'd give his life to protect his team.

Kisho stretched. “Thanks, Blondie.”

Tersch hated the nickname only slightly less than Frederik—his real name and the moniker Fallon continually called him by, if only to irritate him. The giant swore and slammed out of the truck.

“Nice one.” Fallon grinned at him over the front seat before exiting the vehicle.

Kisho trailed after them inside, wondering how much time Mrs. Sharpe would give them before demanding a full account. And there she stood, just inside the foyer, waiting for them.

For a petite and deceptively slight-looking woman, Mrs. Sharpe commanded the Dawn Endeavor Circ team with the utmost authority. With skin the color of rich earth, intelligent amber eyes, expensive clothing that suited her petite frame to perfection, and a frosted sweep of black hair framing her elegant face, the woman could have passed for forty, though Kisho personally thought she neared the end of sixty.

As usual, ivory pearls stood out against her throat and earlobes, like a talisman of quality that only added to her imaginable worth. The woman remained a mystery even after four months of working with them. She had more than political power; she had psychic power as well. Of that he was certain. But what kind and how much, none of them knew.

Admiral London called her a troubleshooter. Kisho thought *troublemaker* made more sense. So far, she'd managed to take them off the meds keeping their mating heats in check. She

worked with them to expand their psychic abilities until their heads ached. And she continued to push them into doing jobs they didn't want to do, instead of going after Delancey with both barrels blazing.

"Kisho, Gunnar, Jesse." She nodded, calling them each by their given names, and smiled. "You made good time. I didn't expect you back until later today."

"Fallon was lovesick, so we took pity on him," Tersch said with a straight face.

Fallon frowned but didn't deny it. "Where's Olivia?"

"She didn't get much off the mercenary Miguel brought us. Miguel left with the merc right before you arrived. Olivia's currently with Jules and Ava, entertaining the newest member of our team."

Kisho and his friends froze.

"Excuse me?" Kisho asked, feeling not at all well. A psychic flare of change settled into his bones like a virus.

"We need all the help we can get tracking down Colonel Montaña. So I brought in a tracking expert. He knows Spanish and Portuguese—"

"Olivia speaks that."

She ignored Kisho's interruption. "And he knows how these men work, since he used to be a mercenary."

"A merc?" Fallon groaned.

"I said 'used to be,'" she corrected.

Tersch huffed. "Great, Alicia. Why not put out an ad in the paper and ask for guns for hire?"

A look from her and he glanced away, stiff and unyielding, until Ava entered the foyer.

Kisho found it interesting that Ava spent as much time not looking at Tersch as he spent staring at her, not that Kisho could blame him. Ava had the face of an angel and the body of a centerfold. She had to be the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. Light mocha skin, hazel eyes more green than brown, with a pert nose, high cheekbones, and thin brows that arched when she spied Tersch.

A hint of a smile played about her lips, and Kisho heard Tersch's low groan.

“And you call me lovesick,” Fallon muttered before leaving the group and yelling for his mate.

Not mate. Wife. Kisho reminded himself to think in human terms, not the way his beast did. The animal inside him sought a mate, but the man inside him preferred a partner.

Tersch took off after Ava, who said something about getting his laundry for him in a voice too sweet to be trusted.

“So much for a pleasant introduction to the entire team.” Mrs. Sharpe sighed and held out her hand. “Kisho, I can always count on you for manners.”

“Yes, ma'am.” Kisho thrived in the world of niceties and expected behavior drilled into him first by his father, then the navy. So unlike his formative years spent foraging in the slums of Okinawa. Burying the unwanted memory, he placed Mrs. Sharpe's thin hand in the crook of his elbow and walked with her to the open living room.

The mansion where they lived, courtesy of the government, boasted close to fourteen thousand square feet. Two floors, a gymnasium, pool, greenhouse, and an underground lab were just some of the amenities provided for them as a reward for the life-threatening missions they worked.

Kisho especially liked the open floor plan. The kitchen had more counter space than most restaurants. Melissa, their cook, often prepared their meals on the marble countertops and served their dishes either at the massive kitchen counter bordered on one side by stools—where they normally congregated to eat—or at the long oak table that could easily seat a dozen people.

Beyond the counter sat a spacious living room, complete with a sectional sofa, plush, high-backed leather chairs, and a wide-screen television and media center. Off the living area, the poker and pool tables completed the space's functionality as a place to relax. A fireplace bordered one end of the room, and at the other end a set of French doors led to the outside garden, where Kisho spent a good deal of his spare time meditating and trying to capture an inner peace that often eluded him.

Olivia and their new hire sat with their backs to Kisho and Mrs. Sharpe. Kisho couldn't see any more of the merc than a hint of dark hair just visible above the chair. Fallon, clearly irritated, stood with a scowl by Olivia's side. Jules sat across from them on the couch, his expression intent. When he caught sight of Kisho, his face lit up.

“*Finally*. What the hell took you so long?” Jules stood and crossed to greet him. “Fallon's being an ass. I could use the head of reason by my side.”

Mrs. Sharpe took her hand from Kisho and patted his shoulder. “So nicely mannered. You should teach Gunnar a few lessons.”

“No shit,” Jules muttered when she moved out of earshot.

Then again, Mrs. Sharpe saw and heard all. Who knew what the hell her limits were?

“Where were you?” Kisho asked.

“Busy entertaining our newest team member,” Jules muttered. “He's an asshole. I don't like him already.”

A snort of deep male laughter came from the individual next to Olivia. The one Kisho couldn't see but felt like a bad rash.

Spikes of anticipation filled him, and Kisho had a terrible feeling deep in the pit of his gut. “You know, I'm not feeling so good—”

Jules latched on to his arm. “Uh-uh. I gotta be here, you gotta be here. Come on. Might as well get it over with.” Jules pulled him around to face the *ex*-mercenary still seated in the chair.

Kisho started his inspection from the bottom and worked his way up, putting off the inevitable as long as he could. The merc crossed his huge feet at the ankles. He had long legs, a flat belly, and broad chest.

Kisho's heart raced, but he continued his scrutiny, past thickly muscled arms, visible under the rolled-up sleeves of a flannel shirt, until he found himself transfixed by familiar lips.

Full and firm, a muted red, and quirked with amusement. That quirk patronized, annoyed, and intrigued him to no end.

“Meet Morgan Reynolds. Reynolds, this is Kisho Hayashi, another member of Dawn Endeavor, and my demolitions man,” Jules said by way of introduction.

Kisho finally looked at the man's face. Bright green eyes blazed with a familiar hunger that made Kisho want to run. Simultaneously, images bombarded his senses.

Tersch, Jules, and Fallon sneered at him, rejecting him because of his association with Reynolds. Then another image. One of death, of agony. “You did this!” the man with green eyes

shouted, pointing at Kisho, who lay still on the ground. Next to him Jules bled out, dying slowly, painfully.

Over the years he'd had them, the visions constantly changed, but in each one they featured Morgan Reynolds. In recent months, however, the visions had changed in tone from sexy to deadly. Kisho's team turned on him, casting him out. A fate worse than death, in Kisho's opinion. But there was death too. In every damned vision he'd had since falling from the Sunfield building, he saw his own death, followed by Jules's death. And lastly, always, Morgan Reynolds's accusation, pointing at someone else. "It was you," he'd say again and again. No matter how Kisho died, that never changed.

Kisho's instinctive fear pushed him to curl his toes and stand tall. He glared down at the male until Reynolds stood. Then they stared at one another. To his surprise, Reynolds was huge. He stood an inch or two taller than Kisho himself.

Reynolds's smile faded. "Kisho, pleasure to meet you." He held out a hand.

To refuse to take it would be the soul of discourtesy.

Kisho thought a split second about refusing, shored his nerve, and reached out. The minute their hands made contact, something shifted inside him. A flare of recognition burst in Reynolds's green gaze, and his eyes darkened.

Kisho quickly withdrew his hand. "Reynolds."

"Call me Morgan." A deep voice, firm, yet filled with warmth.

Kisho didn't like him. He turned to Jules. "When are we debriefing?" Unfortunately, he glimpsed Olivia's curiosity directed his way. Terrific. With his luck, she read his unease as well as his attraction, and she'd no doubt share her findings with Fallon.

Mrs. Sharpe answered with a frown and glanced from him to Reynolds, as if warning him to behave. "Be at the conference room in an hour. Oh, and Kisho, would you mind showing Morgan around on your way upstairs?"

"I'm going outside." He'd intended to go upstairs and lie down in his room, to soothe his growing headache. Now he had a sudden need to see the garden.

"Perfect. You can show Morgan the evergreens before you go upstairs. His room is right next to yours."

Kisho clenched his jaw and glanced at Jules, who looked no happier at the announcement. What the hell was Mrs. Sharpe thinking, inviting a civilian to join their team? Olivia at least was Circ. She fit Fallon to a tee. But she didn't accompany them on missions, and she had no problems submitting to her mate and to Jules, their team leader. Kisho sensed this man would demand to be in charge and included. And that would cause some major problems.

He turned on his heel. "Come on," he growled but didn't look behind him to see if Reynolds followed. Because the way his day seemed to be progressing, he'd just found a new shadow, one he had a feeling would be hard to shake.

Morgan followed Kisho Hayashi, stunned and trying not to show it. The job offer from Alicia Sharpe came with strings, and he'd both expected and accepted that. But this...

He couldn't stop staring. Kisho kept some distance between them but didn't look back, thankfully missing Morgan's slack-jawed expression. As it was, the empath and mind reader in the living room had done their damndest to penetrate his shields. Hawkins had scrutinized him from head to toe for a good hour, hoping to read his aura. But none of them would see anything Morgan didn't want them to see.

Morgan assessed his new teammate. Alicia and her fucking stipulations. For once, the woman had what he needed, and instead of giving it to him for past services rendered, he had to play her game to win the prize. The old Morgan would have taken what he wanted. To hell with everyone and everything else. But he was trying to be a better man.

For those broad shoulders, long legs, and that tight ass in front of him, he'd have to be better. Do better.

Then Kisho turned around, and he lost his train of thought, drowning in that dark, fathomless gaze that sucked him deeper. The need to possess hit him hard, and Morgan almost tripped over an uneven flagstone.

"You okay?" Kisho asked, his deep voice gruff. Despite the man's displeasure with the situation, he vibrated with sexual tension. An added bonus and just one more reason for Morgan not to mess up his shot.

"Just fine." *I was so busy staring at your ass I tripped. No worries.* Morgan flashed him an arrogant grin that had annoyed so many others, and smothered a chuckle when Kisho tightened his lips in annoyance. "So what's it like, living in this big place and working for Mrs. Sharpe?"

Kisho shrugged. "It's a job."

"Not too many rules, I hope." He walked closer, testing to see how close Kisho would allow him.

When the handsome Asian growled low in his throat, Morgan pretended he hadn't heard him and stopped to look at the sculpted evergreens in the garden. His heart raced; he was so near what he'd been looking for for so long.

Kisho let out a breath. "Back off, Reynolds."

"Morgan."

"*Morgan.* Back the fuck up."

To Morgan's delight, Kisho neared him until they stood nose to nose. He could feel the heat bleeding through their clothes, could scent the subtle flavor of cinnamon on the air.

"I don't know who you are or why you're really here. This team is my family. So you try screwing with anyone, you'll answer to *me*." Kisho's threat sounded all the more impressive, delivered as it was in a quiet, controlled growl.

Morgan licked his lips, and Kisho's gaze fixated on the movement. "Easy, Kisho. I was hired by Mrs. Sharpe to assist you. Not to hurt anyone or make waves. I'm here to help. Anything you need, I'm your man." He leaned closer, so that his lips were nearly brushing Kisho's. To his delight, he had an inch or two on the man, and it gave him a heady feeling of dominance he wasn't sure he could continue to pull off when he and Kisho eventually tangled.

The idea he'd have to fight for what he wanted made his arousal almost unbearable.

Before he could blink, something sharp pricked his throat. A bead of blood trickled down his neck, the tickle of pain just one more tease he'd have to deal with.

"That's my left pinkie. So when I tell you I want some space, you'll give it to me, won't you?" Kisho whispered. His eyes flashed with a heat he tried to hide, but Morgan saw it all the same.

The stubborn male wanted to play. *Oh God, he is so damned perfect.* Morgan took a step back, away from Kisho's hand and the lethal nail extending from his finger. Captivated by the savagery in the still, gentle warrior, as Alicia liked to call him, Morgan took a deep breath, inhaled more of Kisho's spicy scent, and coughed to hide a groan.

"Sorry if I offended. Not my intent," Morgan rasped and shifted on his feet.

Kisho's gaze followed the motion. Only the slight flaring of his nostrils told Morgan he'd noticed Morgan's erection. "I don't know what you intend, *Morgan.*"

"Oh, I'll make sure to let you know." Morgan wanted nothing more than to ease his sudden, voracious need for the handsome male before him. Instead, he hid the truth behind a facade, the way he normally did. "Now, handsome, how about that tour I was promised?"

He wiped away the blood from his neck. The wound had closed seconds after Kisho had opened it. Morgan hoped he didn't notice the speedy healing.

Thankfully, Kisho looked away from him. It didn't take an empath to see his new friend was annoyed. And aroused.

"This is the garden. Come on. I'll show you the rest of the house."

They walked past a ton of rooms downstairs, but the ones that interested Morgan most were the gym and the backstairs that led to the wing where the Circs lived. They ascended to the second floor, where Kisho took him past the team's wing further down the hallway that opened to overlook the foyer. On the other side a bevy of rooms stood waiting.

"Our wing is private. This wing, where *you'll* be staying, is for guests."

Morgan didn't bother correcting him. Let Alicia set him straight.

"So are all of you bi?" he asked with a bluntness that took Kisho aback.

"*What?*"

"I'm familiar with Circs. I know the original project started way back, over thirty years ago. Dr. Elliot Pearl came up with an idea to create enhanced humans. The military jumped on the idea to start an army of super soldiers, except Pearl's formula didn't work the way it should have. Now there's a team up north, a bunch of Special Forces Marines who made it past the crazy stage of life. Project Dawn, right?"

Kisho didn't answer, sizing him up.

“And then there's you four. The Dawn Endeavor team. Prior SEALs with deadly skills, courtesy of the U.S. Navy, not to mention your own psychic twists. Pair that with the ability to transform into beasts with armored skin and lethal claws, and you're pretty intimidating. Only problem is you guys have mating heats that, left untreated, turn you into psychotic killers. History of the Circ in a nutshell, eh?”

“How do you know—”

“I've met Dr. Evan Dennis, the Circ expert in Jersey. Doc's a nice guy. His Circs are a bit aggressive, but I'd expected that. Kind of proprietary about their females, too.” Morgan shook his head. “I mean, I reached out to shake a hand and nearly had my head ripped off.” He rotated his neck. “No harm, no foul, I suppose. Doc's not only pleasant, but he's a smart guy. A lot easier to read than your Mrs. Sharpe, that's for sure. So are you or not?”

“Am I what?”

“Are you all bisexual?”

“What the fuck does that have to do with anything?”

Morgan liked Kisho's anger. His slightly slanted eyes narrowed, and his full lips firmed. So damned sexy. He wondered what those lips would look like wrapped around his cock. “Well, I know *you* like me. But will I have to be on guard around the others and Olivia? I get the feeling Fallon doesn't like to share.”

“I *don't* like you. And Fallon and Olivia are mated—married,” Kisho quickly corrected. “Since you seem to know everything about Circs, you know we do what we have to do to survive, not because we like it.”

The defensiveness in Kisho's voice tugged at him, because Morgan swore he detected a thread of shame. He brushed any sympathy aside. Nice wouldn't win him the prize. “But you do like it, don't you, *kitsu*?”

Kisho shoved him so hard, his head bounced against the wall. “What did you call me?”

Kitsu, an ancient Japanese word for fox and Morgan's special name for the perfect partner he'd been promised so many years ago. Satisfaction replaced the hint of doubt worrying him. Ah, so Kisho did know what their future held in store for them. One problem solved.

“Take your hands off me, little fox, before I put them where they really belong.”

Kisho stepped back in a rush. Then he took a hesitant step forward, as if he couldn't help himself. But Morgan didn't mistake the surge of panic in his dark brown eyes now black with anxiety.

Come on, my little kitsu. Look deeper. See me. Know me.

“Whoa! Hayashi, buddy, you okay?” Another giant joined them, this one blond, and ruined the moment.

Morgan wanted to gut him. Instead, he turned to him and raised an arrogant brow. “You must be Frederik. Nice to meet you.”

Tersch glanced at Kisho and growled at Morgan. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Nice mouth, Gunnar,” Ava's husky voice sounded from behind him. She peeked out around Tersch's large body and grinned. “Morgan! Hey baby! Nice to see you again.”

She threw herself into his arms, and Morgan hugged her back. Tersch's annoyance spoke volumes, and Morgan's grin widened.

“You just keep looking better and better,” he said, aware he spoke the truth. “Thanks for the tour, Kisho. Ava can finish for me. See you later, hmm?”

He took her under his arm and walked away, conscious of two Cirs burning holes into his back.

“They still looking?” he whispered.

“Oh yeah.” Ava wiggled closer, and Morgan swore he heard Tersch's teeth grind. Once out of sight of the others, however, Ava dragged him downstairs, past Mrs. Sharpe's grand study, and into a smaller room.

Organized without a speck of dust anywhere and with a contemporary design, the room felt like Ava. She threw herself into a chair and waved at him to do the same. “Nice to see you, cuz.”

He smiled. Though not related by blood, their families had been good friends for years. He didn't deny the association. “I haven't seen you in forever, but I see Alicia's still keeping you hopping.”

“No shit.” Ava sighed, then shook her head. “But don't change the subject. What the hell are you doing here?”

“*Mrs. Sharpe* hired me to work some leads. I'm here to find Captain William Delancey for your team. From what I gather, he's a traitor, a murderer, and he nearly killed your Cirs at one time or another, though no one can prove his involvement.”

She frowned, her sparkling eyes lit from within with an energy uniquely Ava. “Hold on. No one told me you'd be coming.”

“I'm sorry. Was I supposed to clear this with you? Or maybe Alicia should have asked you first?”

“Asshole.”

He chuckled. “So what's it like, living at Circ central?”

She sighed. “Trying. Alicia's a pain. She's gotten really bossy in her old age.” Ava grinned. “The guys are great. Not sure what you did to piss them all off, but since that's your usual M.O., I'm sure the death threats and fights will keep us hopping for days. Or however long you're here, which is how long, by the way?”

“Worried I'll try to steal your boyfriend?” he teased. He hadn't missed Tersch's proprietary manner with Ava, or the way she'd looked at him.

She flipped him the finger, and he laughed.

At that moment, Jules Hawkins poked his head in the door. Seeing Ava and Morgan together, he scowled. “Reynolds, I need a word.”

Morgan's humor faded as he spied yet another obstacle preventing him from what he'd come to claim. The team's possessive, aggressive leader would be a problem. Especially when he realized what Morgan really intended for one of his Cirs.

The minute Morgan stepped out the door, Jules pinned him to the wall. No mean feat, considering Morgan had as much weight on him as Jules. But he wasn't stupid enough not to realize the predator holding him could carve him up in seconds.

“I don't trust you, and I'm watching you. *Mrs. Sharpe* might want you here, but the Cirs belong to me. Fuck with them, and you'll wish you were dead. I promise you.”

Jules dropped him to the ground before Morgan realized his feet had been off it. He landed, breathing hard, and watched Hawkins disappear down the hall.

So much for the warm welcome he'd hoped for.

“Oh yeah. Making friends and influencing people all over the place.” Ava stood in the doorway and shook her head. “Come back in, and I’ll fill you in on our happy little family. Just promise me you won’t get killed before this mission is over. The last time you died, your mother nearly had a coronary. And she’s twice as bad as Alicia.”

Morgan winced. “You had to bring that up, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, I did.”

Morgan pushed away the memories of the blood, pain, and darkness he worked so hard to hold at bay. Darkness that faded whenever he envisioned his kitsu waiting for him. “Well, *cuz*, let’s talk about your new ‘family,’ then. Because I have a lot to do before my next death. And considering the trouble that circulates around this team, I’m sure it’ll be a real doozy.”

Ava sighed. “And the world just keeps getting crazier and crazier.”

Chapter Three

Three days later

"I don't see him. Oh, wait. There he is," Fallon murmured as he squinted.

The hour had passed two in the morning. The team sat at a picnic table on a small wooden deck overlooking the ocean. They watched through the darkness, across the waterway, studying the outer deck of a seedy bar. Under the light of a full moon, Morgan Reynolds finessed answers out of a smuggler wanted on several counts of robbery and extortion in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida.

From their distance, no one would think them able to see anything of importance in the seedy bar on the waterfront. Except Cirs could do what normal men couldn't. At this hour of night, sound intensified in the absence of so many people, sheltered inside from the biting wind. The roar of the ocean swelled around them, mirroring their frustration.

"Hard to miss him and that big mouth of his," Tersch muttered.

Jules quirked a smile. "Jealous of his apparent charm with Ava?"

"Of him? Yeah, right." Tersch huffed, but Kisho shared a wide smile with the others. "What are you shits laughing at?"

"Nothing." Kisho didn't want Tersch to feel bad, but honestly, the man wore his jealousy for the entire world to see. "I don't think you need to worry about Ava. I don't sense a huge attraction there."

Tersch gaped and sat up straight. "Are you kidding? I saw Reynolds come out of her room at *one in the morning*. What the hell do you think they're talking about that late?"

"Yeah, but have you smelled him on her?" Fallon asked.

"Well, no. Not yet." Tersch clenched his hand into a fist. "But when I do..."

Kisho rolled his eyes. "He's flirting with her to piss you off."

"It'd be just like Ava to encourage him," Jules offered, then asked, "What do you guys make of him?"

Fallon frowned. "It's only been a few days, but the women seem to love him. I can't read him, and Olivia said it's like there's a huge wall around his emotions. Doesn't bother her, though. Just adds to some stupid appeal she says he has." He snorted. "'Charming' isn't a psychic trait, nor is it a word I'd use with that dick."

"Amen," Tersch agreed.

Jules's lips flattened. "I can't read him either."

Kisho blinked. "No aura?"

"No, it's weird. Even Mrs. Sharpe projects, but it's like he's holding back."

"On purpose?" Kisho knew some people had shields, or so Jules had told him. Even Fallon couldn't read everyone, nor could Olivia, though their exceptions seemed few and far between.

Jules shook his head. "I don't know. I do know Mrs. Sharpe hired him."

Tersch frowned. "Keeping our distance isn't working. We need to get closer to the bastard and see what he's up to. Just because he might get us a few steps closer to Delancey doesn't mean he's golden."

Kisho nodded in agreement, focused on the scene half a mile away across the curved beach. Despite the dozens of criminals mingling around the seedy bar, Reynolds didn't look at all afraid or worried. In fact, he looked as if he fit in with the seedy element. Too bad the association didn't make him look any less attractive.

The sudden silence around Kisho suddenly penetrated. He glanced back to see his team looking at him. "What?"

"Reynolds seems to like you well enough." Jules raised a brow in question.

Kisho could feel his cheeks heat but refused to look away. "No, he doesn't."

Fallon nodded. "Yes, he does. He doesn't project, but his eyes don't lie. The big dude might have a thing for Ava, but he's definitely got a thing for you, too."

Not what Kisho needed to hear. It was hard enough to pretend an indifference to the man. "Big deal. So he's gay."

“You think he's gay?” Tersch sounded way too happy about the idea.

Jules sighed. “Just lead him on a little, Hayashi. Let him think you're okay with his attention. Find out what he's hiding.”

Kisho blinked. “Are you shitting me?” They wanted him to flirt, to sexually encourage a *man* for information?

Tersch surprised him. “Oh come on. We fuck each other all the time. I know he's not as fine as I am, but take one for the team, buddy.”

He didn't know what to say. Did they know he was gay? Was this his opening to come clean? Or were they hoping to simply use Reynolds's interest in Kisho for their gain and nothing more?

“I, ah...”

“I need to know what he's not telling us,” Jules said quietly. “Something's not right with him. For all we know, he's a part of this Delancey conspiracy.”

“I don't think—”

“Don't think. Just find out what he's hiding,” Jules encouraged and said nothing more.

Fallon nodded. But Tersch's mild acceptance of the idea capped it. There was something more to all this than a need for information.

“What the hell is going on?”

Before anyone answered, Tersch pointed at the bar. “Well, would you look at that?”

They were too far away to give Reynolds immediate help if his informant turned on him, but Reynolds had preferred they keep their distance. Now it looked like he might need them.

Two brawny men wearing sleeveless denim jackets—in the coldest month of the year—grabbed his arms. Reynolds's informant leaned closer and shoved a fist into his stomach.

To Kisho's surprise, Reynolds didn't flinch. He smiled that sexy grin that looked like a lethal dare. When Reynolds's informant brought his arm back for a second punch, Reynolds moved.

Like lightning, he knocked the men flanking him into each other and blocked the informant's punch. Then he kicked one thug down and punched the other in the face. Even at this distance, Kisho recognized a broken, bloody nose.

Reynolds grabbed his informant by the back of his neck and whispered something into his ear.

The team watched as the grubby asshole nodded as if his head were on strings and apologized profusely.

"I'll be damned. Your boy can fight," Fallon murmured.

"He's not my boy," Kisho snapped, but he couldn't help feeling pride that Morgan had held his own. And that made no sense. Morgan was nothing to him. So why did his beast purr at the thought of the man defeating those weaker than himself? *Not Morgan. Reynolds. Keep your distance.*

"Fucker can fight," Tersch offered. "I definitely think it's time we took a closer look at him. I don't like how close he's been getting to Ava and Olivia."

Jules nodded. "I want you to stick to him like glue, Hayashi."

"Why me?"

The look Jules gave him made him more than uncomfortable. "Just do it. Think of it as an order, if it makes you feel better."

"It doesn't."

Tersch chuckled. "Good to know I'm not the only one you're always screwing with, Jules."

Their conversation turned to Delancey while they waited for Reynolds—*Hell, now I'll have to call him Morgan*—to rejoin them.

Kisho caught Jules's gaze and noted that his eyes glinted with rage. The man had a major beef with their old commander. Kisho thought Jules had a personal stake in taking the man down, because Jules blamed himself for believing in his old boss. Kisho, Fallon, and Tersch had followed Jules's lead into the Circ experiment. Not because of Delancey, but because they believed in Jules. And they'd nearly been killed because of it.

Kisho couldn't count how many of his friends and fellow sailors had died, some from a toxic reaction to the Circe serum, others from the madness that inevitably encroached on the serum survivors, while others had turned into mutants—Circs that no longer resembled anything human and had the mental capacity of nothing more than savage beasts. There was still no understanding as to why Kisho and his team had made it. Nor could anyone adequately explain

why Circe's Recruits, who lived with Doc in Jersey, had come through happy and healthy. And now all the lucky bastards had mates, while the threesome had a kid and were close to giving birth to the second natural-born Circ in history. Mind-boggling.

He wondered what would become of him, if he'd ever find that same happiness the others had found. Watching Fallon with Olivia was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, Kisho couldn't be happier for Fallon. The man deserved a woman to love him, and Kisho had no doubt that Olivia loved her husband beyond words. But their closeness only emphasized how out of place Kisho was. He'd never find a woman to love him, because he didn't *want* a woman to love him. He wanted a partner, a male he could respect, love, and who would be his and his alone.

Kisho remembered the conversation as if they'd had it yesterday. *"Gays don't belong in the military, son. But that's not a problem for you, is it?"* The knowing, disapproving look in his dad's eyes had forced Kisho to answer with an untruth. At seventeen and needing to hold on to the acceptance he'd only just discovered with his newfound father, he hadn't thought twice. He'd lied, and continued to lie, to hold on to those he loved.

"Right?" Tersch punched his shoulder.

"Ow. What?"

"I said, that vision you told us about. Delancey was there at the lab in Brazil. You remember—the one they emptied before we could get there? So what else have you seen lately?"

Kisho rubbed his temple. "Not much. It's been murky. Mrs. Sharpe is pushing me to focus." But her efforts gave him nothing but headaches. Because every time he tried to see the future, Morgan Reynolds's annoying face popped up. As quickly as he'd spy Morgan, Kisho would shut down, not wanting to dwell on a future where his team would reject him before he'd die, alone, unhappy, and in a great deal of pain.

Jules frowned. "I hate to push, but we need to know as much about Delancey's involvement as we can. We know he's somehow tied to the group trying to take out Admiral London's new project." The psychic warriors who were to be the next step in warfare's evolution. "What you might not realize is that the project has found success in a few other not-so-friendly places. We don't get on board fast, we're screwed."

Kisho blinked. "How do you know?"

“Admiral London and I had a conversation the other day. The Chinese are already doing some impressive work, and the Russians aren't far behind. Strangely enough, South America has their own consortium. A handful of countries working together.”

Fallon frowned. “Why would they join forces? I mean, what are the odds Brazil is going to bow to Venezuela or Ecuador? Got to be one guy pulling those strings. Like Delancey, maybe?”

“So why does he choose a drug lord from Venezuela to run his 'army?’” Tersch grumbled. “Why not choose an in-house guy? At least someone who's native to Brazil, where the mercs seem to be coming from.”

“Venezuela borders Brazil, so it's likely he speaks the language. But we don't know enough about Montaña to guess at the connection. Maybe our new teammate can help answer,” Jules said, his expression grim. “If Reynolds can help fill in some of the blanks, he might not be such a waste of space.” The look he shot Kisho made Kisho groan.

“Okay, already. I'm in. I'll try to get the information you need so you can rip Delancey apart.” Their old commander, Captain William Delancey, had earned their trust, then betrayed them by throwing the team into the Circ project. The bastard had *known* the Circe serum wasn't stable, but he'd wanted only to further his political career and line his pockets with dirty money. Now the bastard worked with Colonel Ricardo Montaña, a wild card. The South American drug dealer had connections and the means to help Delancey avoid the team. Not only that, but Montaña and Delancey were in bed in some scheme to hurt Admiral London's newest project.

Like Jules, Kisho was pissed they'd trusted the wrong man. Admiral London had stuck by them through the worst of it, and Kisho and the others intended to help him out however they could. Finding and killing Delancey, as well as Montaña, would be a step in the right direction.

Kisho glanced at Jules. He had to force himself not to flinch at the feral smile Jules gave him.

“From his neck to his goddamn cock. I'm going to rip Delancey open and make him watch as he bleeds to death.”

“Bad time to visit?” Morgan's voice preceded him. He moved with surprisingly little noise for a man his size. So fluid, so graceful. Almost like a Circ.

Kisho narrowed his eyes. Could Morgan be Circ? Olivia had come to them as a civilian, but somehow, they still weren't sure how, she had Circ genetics. If Morgan were Circ, that would

certainly explain Kisho's intense attraction. How the man could move the way he did, and why thoughts of Morgan pleased his beast to no end.

No one spoke.

Morgan sighed. "I'll bite. What did I miss?"

Tersch gave Kisho an expectant look.

Fallon stared at him. *"Well? Use that charm that has anyone with breasts singing your praises. In your own way, you're as bad as Reynolds. Hell, Olivia wants me to neaten up our room and write her sonnets, to get in touch with my sensitive side. I figure you owe us poor slobs."*

Kisho coughed, embarrassed at all the attention.

Morgan didn't miss a trick and directed a frown at Fallon before turning back to Kisho. "What'd he say?"

Kisho answered, "We were talking about Delancey. So what did you find out from your good friend at the bar?"

"Well, I learned..."

Kisho didn't catch more than three words before Morgan settled those green eyes on him. Just like that, a brief glimpse of the past—or was it a dream?—filled his mind like a forecasting vision.

"Damn, what did they do to you?" Morgan growled as he leaned over Kisho lying on the scarred pavement of the Sunfield building's vacant lot. "Kitsu, you're going to die if you don't reach out. Come on, baby. Feel me." Strong arms lifted him and carried him into the building.

Kisho blacked out. He woke to straps holding him to a wobbly table.

"So you won't fall off and hurt yourself more," Morgan explained as he cinched down the ties. "Sorry, but this is going to hurt." He leaned closer, the green of his gaze mesmerizing. And then the pain...

"Delancey has eyes and ears all over the place. That's why you didn't catch Montaña in Bahia," Morgan was saying.

Jules growled, "We already knew that."

Morgan didn't take his gaze from Kisho. "But did you know Bill Delancey has a thing for redheads? From what I hear, he's been partying like he's about to deploy for a year. Bastard is playing fast and loose with a lot of cash, and he's attracted attention. Rumor has it a man who sounds an awful lot like Colonel Ricardo Montaña has been palling around with him. And Montaña has real specific tastes he likes to indulge in on the luxury yacht he's been sailing the last month. Before that, I couldn't tell you where they were."

"The ocean? I thought we'd covered that base. So the bastard has been hiding at sea?" Jules asked, his eyes bright.

Morgan nodded.

"How the hell did you get all that?" Kisho wanted to know.

"Yeah, considering our own government hasn't seen him for months. You've been here for three days and spent no more than half an hour with your contact. What the hell?" Jules added.

Morgan sat down next to Kisho and brushed against his thigh.

A jolt of energy shot straight to Kisho's cock, and he frowned at the satisfied smile Morgan gave him before Morgan returned his attention to Jules.

"I've had feelers out for Montaña since Mrs. Sharpe contacted me months ago. The key to finding Delancey is finding Montaña. To do that, you have to know what the colonel likes."

"You'd think our government would know that," Jules said.

"They do. Problem is, someone doesn't want *you* to know that."

Jules blinked. "Who?"

"Not sure. That, I haven't been able to learn yet." Morgan stretched and looked skyward, exposing a length of bronzed throat.

Kisho had the distinct urge to bite down and taste that golden flesh. His beast rumbled with hunger. "Where were you before this assignment?" he asked, suddenly wanting to know.

Where did Morgan come from? What was his family like? And what was that faint accent Kisho heard when he listened with all his senses?

Tersch gave him a subtle nod, as if to prod him closer. The seduction plan. If the Viking only knew the disaster that lay in that direction. Sleeping with Morgan would lead to a future

Kisho didn't want to come to pass. But lately, his hormones were trying to take control of the rational man in charge of his beast.

“Before this I was in South America. I was on another job. One you're not cleared to hear about.”

Jules snorted. “Oh yeah, I've used that line a time or two before. You know, Morgan, I have my reservations, but if this info pans out, I'll have to take back all the things I've said said about you.”

Morgan blinked. “All?”

“Well, maybe not all, but most.”

“At least you're calling me Morgan, and not dickhead, asshole, or fuckwad.”

“Fuckwad was mine.” Tersch beamed with pride.

Kisho shook his head. “It's a rite of passage. You come to the team, you prove yourself.”

“Hey, I've offered to prove myself, but you sensitive squids won't let me near your precious gym.” Morgan scoffed.

“Did he just call us sensitive?” Tersch growled.

“Did he just call us squids? SEALs, dickhead, not squids.” Fallon frowned. “And keep your distance from Oliva, while I'm at it.”

Kisho understood Fallon's problem. Morgan was *fine* with a capital *F*. Tall, dark, and handsome, with that bad-boy appeal that screamed danger, an aphrodisiac to most women—and Kisho as well. He'd been fighting it by keeping his distance, but just a few heartbeats away from Morgan made his body hum in a manner he'd never felt before.

Sex with men satisfied, to an extent. Sex with Circs enabled him to stave off that psychotic madness so many of his fellow friends had perished from. It provided a closeness he needed and a physical release from building tensions. But he had a feeling sex with Morgan would be unforgettable.

Kisho cleared his throat and rose, putting some distance between him and the tall drink of temptation. “Well, it's late, and I'm beat. Let's head home, and we can talk about it tomorrow.” He glanced at Morgan. “If you're so keen to get your ass handed to you, meet me in the gym tomorrow morning.”

Tersch chuckled. "Oh man, if I didn't hate mornings so much, I'd stop by to watch Hayashi kick your ass. Good luck." He snickered and left for the SUV.

Jules and Fallon followed him, grinning ear to ear.

"Good going. Remember, we need this," Fallon sent him.

I need this, Kisho thought. Sex doesn't have to lead to forever. I know better than most that happily ever after is a myth. Maybe if I sate this craving, it'll go away. But thinking about it didn't settle his nerves any.

Morgan followed him to the vehicle, so closely, Kisho could feel his body heat.

He glanced over his shoulder and froze. A spark of something wild lit Morgan's eyes, turning them black in the moonlight.

Morgan bumped into him, and he stopped Kisho from falling over by gripping his waist. Hard.

A noticeable erection pressed against Kisho's ass, and he fought for control. But he couldn't help the rumbled growl from his beast, wanting more.

"Sorry. My mistake," Morgan murmured. "I'll try not to be so clumsy tomorrow."

As if they had never touched, as if Kisho didn't know how long and hard the man was, Morgan stepped around him and joined the others.

After a few tense breaths fought fighting his beast for control, Kisho joined them.

The next day, he left his room early and nearly ran over Morgan, who stood waiting for him in the hall. To his dismay, Morgan smelled of soap and a musk that made his head spin, a subtle scent of citrus he wanted to inhale and never let go. The ex-merc wore shorts and a short-sleeved T-shirt and seemed impervious to the chill in the air.

Morgan looked him up and down and grinned. "You know, for a man who hates compliments, you really show off the whole package nicely."

His own "package" stirred at Morgan's nearness, and the jackass smiled even wider.

"Shut up and get your ass to the gym. You need a few lessons in manners."

"I can't wait." They walked past Morgan's room, which irritated Kisho to no end because it was right next to his.

Mrs. Sharpe refused to bend on that detail. Needless to say, her popularity with the team had hit an all-new low.

They reached the empty gym, and Kisho said a prayer of thanks. Dealing with Morgan at all had become harder to bear, mostly because in the man's presence, Kisho wanted nothing more than to sample those firm lips and touch that smooth skin. A shade darker than his own, Morgan's tan spoke of the outdoors and fresh living. Kisho instinctively sensed that the man hadn't gained so much muscle from a gym, but from a life spent protecting himself from danger and wreaking havoc on those who deserved it, a notion Kisho's beast liked very much.

Once inside the gymnasium, the men stretched out and studied each other. Kisho had less brawn and a few inches less height, but he had a Circ's strength and instinct to back him up. He'd seen Morgan's speed, but he wondered how the man would handle himself in a fight with a Circ.

"I'm looking forward to wiping the floor with you," Kisho growled, his mood lifting when Morgan smiled again.

"Bring it on, Kisho."

Another thing. The man refused to call him by his last name. Only the women around here called him Kisho, as did his friends sometimes when they engaged in the more carnal aspects of being Circ.

Morgan stood tall and whipped his shirt from his body, startling Kisho from his musings.

"What the hell are you doing?" Holy shit, Morgan was ripped. Corded abs, solid pecs, and biceps bigger than his own. The thought of dominating Morgan didn't intrigue him as much as the fantasy of being dominated *by* him. Hell. He was getting hard again.

Morgan licked his lips. "I want to get bare bones with you, that's all. Man-to-man. Come on, kitsu, bring it on."

Had he just called Kisho kitsu? Again? Before Kisho could second-guess, Morgan attacked.

His reflexes saved him, but only just. Surprised, Kisho balanced himself on the balls of his feet, his knees bent, ready. He met Morgan's next two advances, dodging and then striking out with a kick that rocked Morgan on his ass. Before Kisho could take advantage, Morgan was on his feet again.

Kisho raised a brow. "I'm trying to take it easy on you, because I know that handicap makes it difficult to fight back."

"Handicap?" Morgan questioned between breaths. He darted in and feinted left, striking to Kisho's right. His fist grazed Kisho's waist, and Kisho couldn't help being impressed.

"Your small brain."

Morgan laughed. "Yeah? Well, at least I'm not letting my hard-on distract me."

Kisho automatically looked down to see Morgan wasn't lying—the brawler had a large erection. He caught Morgan's fist aimed at his gut and spun the male around, so that Kisho's cock pressed against Morgan's fine ass. "Easy, Morgan. Or I'll think you don't like me."

Morgan groaned and rocked back. "If I didn't like you so much, I wouldn't be this close to coming in my damned shorts."

With incredible speed and flexibility, Morgan somehow managed to break out of Kisho's hold and reverse his position, so that they stood chest to chest.

Morgan shifted, and his cock grazed Kisho's.

Staring into green eyes that suddenly flashed from emerald to a darker, mossy green, Kisho was unprepared for Morgan's next move. The kiss took him by surprise, and he opened his mouth to protest.

That quickly, Morgan snaked his tongue inside, and the taste of raw male and sweet orange shot Kisho's libido into overdrive.

He couldn't think as Morgan took charge of the kiss. His beast settled happily under the aggressive male, not protesting in the least, which further put Kisho under Morgan's spell. The recognition that had sparked the first time they'd touched was nothing compared to the inferno of lust and need that swamped him now.

Morgan groaned and rocked against him, rubbing that massive erection against his own. Needs long denied rushed him, this mating act so different from the sexual desires he slaked with his teammates. This was so much more.

He drew Morgan's scent into his mouth, into his beast, and purred when Morgan ran his hands over his chest.

Morgan broke the kiss to growl, "You're cut. So fucking hot. Christ, I need you."

He yanked Kisho's T-shirt over his head and kissed him again before Kisho could think to protest. Worry about the future, about his control, about his plans to seduce the truth from Morgan—everything faded as sheer desire overwhelmed him.

To his shock, he trembled in Morgan's hold, confused, hungry, and so desperate to connect.

“Yeah, that's it, kitsu. Give me more,” Morgan whispered and licked his sensitive nipple.

When Morgan put his lips there and sucked on the hard nub, Kisho felt as if he'd split apart from the sheer ecstasy of his touch. A rush of precum dampened his shorts, and he ground against Morgan's cock.

“So hungry. Need you now,” Morgan muttered against his mouth. The large man slid down his body. Morgan yanked down his shorts, then took Kisho to the back of his throat.

Unable to do anything but react, Kisho fought the verge of *change* when Morgan cupped his sac and eased a finger near his hole.

The fire of desire overwhelmed him. A mixture of orange and cinnamon filled the air. Every breath he took tasted like Morgan. As he gripped Morgan's silky hair, he lost himself in the male's embrace.

Morgan slid his tongue around Kisho's shaft and sucked hard. His finger left Kisho's ass for a moment, then returned, slick and hot, and slid inside.

Fuck, he used his own cream to lube. God, I'm so close...

Morgan moaned and shoved his finger deeper. Prodding, pushing, until he grazed that sweet spot that sent Kisho reeling.

“Morgan, please. Yes,” he moaned, climbing too fast toward his end.

In response, Morgan rumbled his pleasure and sucked harder, thrusting his finger in and out with greater speed.

The feeling of belonging, the union of scent and touch and male, pushed Kisho over the edge. “*Morgan.*” He unloaded into Morgan's hot mouth on a groan. He came hard, shuddering as he emptied his seed.

Morgan swallowed, and Kisho felt a moment of dizziness as the unreality of the situation shook him. He was purring so loudly it couldn't be missed, but he wasn't finished. His beast

demanded he take what belonged to him. Light-headed, he pulled out of Morgan's mouth and sank to his knees.

The sight of Morgan licking his cum from his lips sent him into a frenzy. Kisho shoved Morgan to the floor mats beneath them and sliced his shorts from his body. The long, wet cock that met his gaze turned him on like nothing else.

Kisho devoured him.

"Oh, fuck. Kisho." Morgan moaned his name like a prayer.

Kisho sucked hard, fast, and licked the sweet precum from his lover's dick, purring all the while. He distantly heard Morgan cry out his name, felt the man tremble and clutch his shoulders with strong fingers, tight enough to bruise.

And then Morgan came, jetting into his mouth with such sweet, hot cum.

Kisho sucked him dry, laving his shaft and balls, nuzzling the musky scent as he captured Morgan's essence and strove to keep it deep inside him.

The taste of his mate forced his arousal to the fore again. Going on instinct, Kisho shoved off his shorts and levered himself to his knees, now completely naked as he straddled Morgan.

"So beautiful," Morgan rasped.

Kisho started jerking himself off, growing larger and thicker under Morgan's scrutiny. But Morgan wasn't content to watch. He caressed Kisho's belly, his balls, and rimmed his asshole. And all the while he whispered words of praise and need that soothed the beast preening for attention. When Morgan pushed Kisho's hand aside and gripped his cock, Kisho exploded into a second, harder orgasm.

He grunted and shot over Morgan's belly, white jets of seed marking his mate.

"Rub it in," Morgan said in a thick voice. *"All over me."*

"Mine," Kisho growled, his beast staking its claim.

"My kitsu..." Morgan murmured.

Kisho didn't hesitate. He leaned down and kissed Morgan, but the slight press of his fang over Morgan's lip drew blood. The taste of sweet copper told him what he'd already known.

Morgan Reynolds was his mate. His partner.

His future.

Reason returned, and Kisho groaned.

Morgan was all that, and more. Morgan was his doom.

Chapter Four

Morgan lay there, trying to regain his wits, as Kisho fumbled with his clothing. Agitated and fierce, like the beast that writhed beneath his skin, the Circ just begged for Morgan to say to hell with everything and claim him. But he had a plan and an agreement to keep, so he'd bide his time. He'd wait, if not with patience, at least with the surety he'd found what he'd been so long in searching.

Sighing with contentment, Morgan linked his hands behind his head and watched his lover shove his arms through his shirt. "Where are you going?"

Kisho glared down at him but said nothing.

Morgan could almost see the wheels of his kitsu's mind churning. Right now, Kisho had to be wondering what the hell to do. For years, Morgan had kept quiet tabs on the man. He was familiar with the way Kisho thought. Deliberate, decisive, straightforward: Kisho Hayashi dealt with life the way he wanted it dealt to him.

Growing up as an unwanted bastard on the streets of Okinawa had given him a hard shell, one that would be tough to crack. But Morgan lived for challenges. Hell, he'd been born to create friction, as his parents were fond of saying. Morgan always conquered obstacles in his path.

He had an innate gift for self-preservation. He should have died several times over during the course of his lifetime, but something—or *someone*—had always kept him tied to the here and now. He healed from mortal wounds. He never scarred and had never suffered from so much as a cold. Those closest to him, those people who were important to him, kept him grounded.

He knew there were some, like him, like his family, who were simply *more*. People like Fallon who could pull secrets from the mind, and Olivia who could read emotions. They could pose a danger to him if he let them. But Morgan refused to allow anything to threaten what he considered his. His family, his friends, his lover.

Nothing in his life had ever mattered as much as making sure he didn't lose Kisho.

"Aren't you going to get dressed?" Kisho asked in a quiet voice.

The quiet Morgan didn't mind. But the careful tone alerted him to pay attention. He deliberately stretched and rubbed his stomach, pleased to feel the sticky residue of Kisho's marker. "I'm basking in the afterglow. Gimme a minute."

Kisho frowned. "I need to..." He glanced toward the door, then back at Morgan, his gaze fixed to Morgan's hand on his belly. His dark eyes lit from within, and Morgan swore he saw an animal staring out at him.

So fucking sexy, that beast. Hearing Kisho purr while they'd blown each other had been heaven and hell, because it made Morgan hot and so hard, he hurt. He'd wanted to come while sucking off his lover, that huge cock that tasted like warm cherries in his mouth.

Kisho cleared his throat. "We're supposed to be fighting, not fucking. Tuck your hard-on away."

"*Morgan*. Tuck your hard-on away, *Morgan*. Say my name."

Kisho scowled. "I know your name."

"But you have a hard time saying it unless you're coming in my mouth," Morgan provoked. "What's wrong, baby? Afraid your boyfriends will see me and get jealous? Don't worry. I can handle them."

Anger crossed his face, and Morgan realized that in the short span of time he'd actually spent with Kisho, he'd never seen the Circ broadcast so many emotions. The stoic features of perfection looked even better creased in confusion or darkened in anger.

"They're not my boyfriends, *Morgan*. They're my friends, my brothers."

"Really? Kind of an incestuous relationship you have going on there."

Kisho jumped on top of him and wrapped a hand around his throat before Morgan could blink. Good Christ, the man could move.

"Watch your tone," Kisho growled, exposing a hint of fang.

He knew it wasn't smart, but Morgan couldn't help antagonizing him. Anything to shake up his lover's well-ordered world. He rasped, "Watch your tone, *Morgan*."

Kisho swore. To Morgan's surprise, Kisho removed his hand and mashed his mouth against Morgan's in a kiss that sparked instant heat. But as soon as the fire started, Kisho backed away, wiping a smear of blood from his lips as he stood.

Morgan licked the coppery taste from a cut on his mouth and contained a shudder. Damn, his kitsu could kiss. Even brutal, the connection between them flamed hotter than ever. The tent in Kisho's shorts and the answering arousal paining his own groin said what neither man would.

That the connection between them went deeper than normal lust.

Noise outside the gymnasium sounded, and Kisho froze.

The animation that had previously lit his face faded. Kisho's expression cleared, suddenly resembling a blank wall. "I need to talk to Mrs. Sharpe. I'll see you later." He left Morgan for the double doors and had just reached the exit when he added, "And stop calling me 'kitsu.'" He pushed through the doors and disappeared.

Morgan stared down at his overeager dick and wondered how the hell he got into these situations. The plan had been to seduce Kisho slowly. Some time alone, a few dinners, maybe some walks on the beach.

Instead, he'd lost his mind being so close to the object of his desire. Going down on his little fox—*big* misnomer there—had been the best thing in his life. Salty sweet, that cum addicted him like nothing else. It spoke of a need, of a hunger for Morgan that his lover couldn't hide, no matter how much he might want to.

This whole mission revolved around finding Colonel Montaña and Captain William Delancey, at least so far as the Circs were concerned. But Morgan had arrived on an altogether different agenda. He'd come to claim what Alicia had started when he'd turned sixteen. She'd given him that damned jade fox as a birthday present and changed his life forever.

The small memento from some forgotten trip abroad promised a love he'd kill to experience. So many years ago, yet he could still remember the feeling, when the instinct long dormant inside him had blossomed in seconds, telling him that the person who possessed the figurine's twin was *his*.

Growing up surrounded by a loving family made Morgan no stranger to affection. He recognized the close ties the Circs here had for each other. The annoyed yet protective way Ava

treated Alicia, the loving, sexual heat in Olivia's eyes for Fallon. All of it felt real, and he ached to feel it for one special person.

Except his lover seemed less than inclined to meet him halfway. A better man would try to soften Kisho's edges, to show him with tender loving, and time, that Morgan could be trusted to hold his heart.

But Morgan didn't have time.

Finding Kisho nearly dead two months ago still haunted him. Instinct had led him to seek out Alicia sooner than he'd intended. And thank God for that. He'd been born for that moment, to heal his future mate and tie them even tighter together. By sharing a breath with his other half, by sharing the very essence of what made him what he was in a kiss, he'd jumpstarted Kisho's own healing abilities.

But now what? He still had to find Montaña. Morgan didn't think of his skills as psychic, not like Alicia's Cirs. He couldn't predict the future, read minds, auras, or turn into a hulking killing machine. But his instincts never failed. Morgan simply followed the course set for him and didn't stray. Unfortunately, Kisho screwed with his reasoning.

He should have allowed the man some time before jumping him. Three days wasn't all that long to get acquainted. Still, their raw loving had soothed that ache building inside him. Despite Kisho's obvious upset, Morgan felt boneless, sated, and on the verge of falling asleep, naked as the day he was born.

"Oh man, I could have lived my entire life without seeing this," Tersch groaned from the doorway.

"Looks like we missed quite a party." Fallon grinned at the torn clothing by his side.

Morgan slowly stood and stretched. "Yeah, Olivia's a real devil in bed." Between one blink and the next, he dodged Fallon's fist. "Or so I've heard. How the hell would I know? I just thought I'd enjoy your gymnasium to the fullest."

Kisho was going to *love* knowing his buddies had caught Morgan naked, with his scent all over him. *Now how to use that to my advantage...*

Tersch loomed over him, his gaze considering. "Smells like someone fucked you over good."

Morgan wasn't fast enough to avoid Tersch, who suddenly gripped him by the throat and dangled him off the ground. Choking for real, Morgan clutched Tersch's thick arm.

"You screw with my boy, I'll tear your fucking head off." He dropped Morgan to the ground.

"Right. Got it." Morgan rubbed his throat, thinking it might be prudent to leave.

"Nicely done, Frederik." Fallon bent down to touch his toes, then stretched his hamstrings. He glanced at Tersch. "I'm going to lift some weights before we train."

"Good idea. We'll wait for Jules." Ice blue eyes turned back to Morgan. "Well, go ahead and find some clothes you can work out in. I'll see for myself whether you're as pathetic as you look."

Morgan had to concede that Tersch had a flare for insults. Then again, so did he. With a smile, he retorted, "Ava doesn't seem to mind me. And you don't look nearly as discerning as she is. Oh, *discerning* means 'choosy.'"

Fallon coughed to unsuccessfully smother a laugh when Tersch growled and took a step closer to Morgan.

"Prick."

"And I thought we were friends." Morgan walked to the door, unashamedly naked. He chalked up a lack of modesty to an unconventional upbringing and his comfort in this place, with these people, he was starting to think of as home. "I'll be right back. Try not to fantasize about my cock while I'm gone."

"Talk about annoying," he heard Tersch grumble before he left in search of clothing. He didn't encounter anyone on the way to his room. Once inside, he re-dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, minus the shoes, since the Circs didn't seem to wear them around the place. Before he left, he stroked the small figurine on his bed stand. A small jade fox, his own kitsu. A talisman foretelling his future, or so he hoped.

Kisho shook with need, fury, and panic that he couldn't contain his emotions. Tamping down the firestorm inside him took effort, but he had himself back under control while he sought the one person with all the answers. He found Mrs. Sharpe in her study, looking at her computer screen.

She glanced up with a hopeful smile when he entered. "How was your training this morning?"

Forcing himself not to blush took effort, but he mastered his embarrassment with an iron resolve. "Why is Morgan Reynolds really here?" he asked without preamble.

"Why do you think he's here?"

"Please, Mrs. Sharpe. Just answer the question."

The shrewd look in her eyes told him he wouldn't find the answers he wanted.

"You know why he's here, Kisho. You just won't accept it."

The damned woman couldn't possibly know the future he'd seen.

She sighed. "Kisho, as you like to tell us all, our future is not set in stone. You see glimpses of *possible* tomorrows. They don't always mean what you think they mean."

"Right." So the visions of him and Morgan getting it on, of his fellow Circes shunning him, of Kisho and then Jules dying, none of them were true? Then why did he see the same damned things every time he tried to look anymore?

"I know it's scary. You have an ability no one would truly want if they understood the repercussions of knowing. Is what you see set in stone, or a result of what you do to change things? The question is always there, but you can't live in fear of making a wrong step. Because Kisho, inaction is just as harmful as the wrong action." She paused. "When was the last time you had a vision?"

He shrugged. "Last week."

"We talked about this. You need to harness your ability. Seeing into the future will not only help us protect the admiral's new project, but it will alleviate your own problems. You have to open up and accept it."

"With all due respect, no, I don't." Kisho stared down at the smaller woman. Mrs. Sharpe could insist upon a lot of things, but forcing him to foresee events wasn't one of them.

"Stubborn. But I'd anticipated that. Very well, Kisho. Do as you see fit. When you're ready to accept yourself, come see me." She pushed her intercom and spoke into the microphone. "Ava? Please bring Olivia in here. Mr. Anderson is due for a call-in, and I need her for a moment."

Ava answered, "Sure thing, your mightiness. I'll track her down in a jiffy." She broke the connection.

"You're not going to tell me anything about Morgan, are you?" he asked, conscious he now used Morgan's first name without thinking about it. "*Call me Morgan.*"

"No. You want to know about him, concentrate and look into yourself for the answers. Better yet, ask him."

Pissed but not willing to blame Mrs. Sharpe for his own failings, Kisho nodded to her and left. He passed Jules on his way outside, not bothering to answer when his team leader called to him a second time. He needed to *change*, to run.

Venturing outside, Kisho removed his shirt and brought on the physical transformation his beast demanded. Sex with Morgan had sated some of his desires, but the animal inside needed more. Not wanting to dwell on anything but the here and now, Kisho grew into the powerful form of a predator at its most primal.

He licked his fangs and flexed his long fingers ending in claws. Then he took off into the woods behind the house and lost himself in the animal wanting to play.

* * *

On board a ten-million-dollar luxury yacht off the coast of Miami, William Delancey smiled up at the creatures dancing in front of him. Both redheads had fake tits, lips enhanced by collagen, and the tightest asses he'd ever seen. They shimmied their well-toned frames with limber grace. Manufactured beauty, yet another miracle science could provide. Such extraordinary specimens of sexuality at its prettiest. Too bad once he finished with them they'd go to sexuality at its basest, and that wasn't taking Montaña's sick desires into account.

The rogue Circe he kept for security purposes took a lot of maintenance. But with them in hand, he didn't worry about Hawkins and his fucking team every other second of the day. Being in the States bothered him. He wanted to remain at home, in his newly renovated mansion in Rio. But orders were orders, and his boss wanted him to be hands-on with this new delivery.

Unfortunately, manufacturing and moving their new wonder drug took longer than expected, despite the plan to make it on U.S. soil. "You'll see," Montaña had promised. "Making it here will expedite cost and time."

“Expedite, my ass,” Delancey muttered and injected himself with another dose of Montaña's special stuff. Since they'd improved the formula, it no longer put those who took it in a coma, nor did it kill. The shit worked better than Viagra and gave him the ability to jack off 24-7, which came in handy at his age. Hell, his business partner was better than a pharmacy. Montaña had something for every ailment under the sun. And this one would nullify the psychics Admiral London promised would be the new best thing in warfare.

Personally, Delancey didn't know what to think about Admiral London's knew psychic guinea pigs. Project Dawn had bombed, big-time. Maybe two percent of the Circs they'd created remained stable. Doc Dennis's men and his own team—*ex-team*. The rest turned psychotic in less than a year, even under their new controls. Sex and violence seemed to keep the rogues calm, at least for a time, but it always ended the same way. A frenzied rampage of murder and rape, followed by a bullet to the brain. Such a waste of a lucrative resource.

Delancey had known the project would tank after the first few test runs. But he was a man with aspirations. So what if a few of Uncle Sam's finest took a hit? Sacrifice was a part of duty, and Delancey stood to make a fortune farming rogue Circs to foreign governments.

Too bad moral dickheads like Hawkins had to stick their noses where they didn't belong. Along with everything else Delancey had been promised by that asshole in charge of the Circ project, the plan to kill Hawkins and the others had failed. The navy had turned their suspicious eyes on him. Thankfully, his contact had shielded him from the worst of it and directed him to another profitable scheme: new drugs that could instill instances of psychic ability in normal users while hurting actual psychics with inherent ability. Delancey smacked his lips. That was some seriously good shit, and it fucked up Admiral London's plans. A two-for-one. It should have been perfect.

Except this scheme involved South American mercenaries, oddball psychics, and Ricardo Montaña, a monster in human skin.

He glanced over his shoulder at the closed door and tried to ignore the screams Montaña never failed to produce out of his bedmates. “Pablo, turn up the music.”

Pablo nodded, and the techno beat amped through the speakers. The young mercenary/crewman returned to the bar but kept a watchful eye on the nubile women.

Annoyed by a present he was forced to deal with and a past he couldn't rectify, Delancey motioned to one of the dancers. Her tits didn't sway as she moved, so firm and round and *young*. A familiar hunger returned, and with it came a haze of something more. Ah, the wonder drug had finally taken effect.

“Come here and get me off, honey. I need to forget for a while.”

The woman crossed the distance, knelt between his legs, and serviced him like a pro while her friend continued to gyrate to the heavy beat. The music pulsed in time with his cock, and for a few minutes, Delancey lost himself in a desire that didn't last long enough.

The price of pleasure, he thought as he spurted into the woman's mouth. A vision of bright skies and calm seas filled his mind's eye. He jerked as the woman swallowed him, and he continued to come in a steady rush down her throat.

Green eyes glared at him, full of anger and hate. “You did this,” he said, and pointed to Kisho Hayashi, who lay bloody and unmoving on the ground.

“No, he did this.” Delancey aimed his pistol at Julian Hawkins. A monster stood in place of the man, a giant beast with dark skin, long gnarled hair, and blazing bright eyes.

“You're going to pay for that.” Hawkins raced for him and stretched out those claws. Delancey pulled the trigger, but it was too late.

As pain raked down his chest, he saw a pass of clouds overhead, majestic in an otherwise beautiful, final day...

“Let go, you perv!” The woman struggled in his grip as she tried to extricate herself from his hands entangled in her hair. “Holy shit, you're still coming?”

He grunted as he let her go and milked the rest of it from his shaft. The drugs produced a very interesting reaction in his body. The visions he could do without, but the prolonged orgasm was absolutely perfect.

“Sorry.” She flushed and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “You came a lot, and then there was so much. I thought you were, ah—” She paused.

He smiled. “Don't worry about it. Pablo will help you clean up downstairs.” Where a rogue Circ waited for her with impatience. He sucked in a breath when another rush filled his flaccid cock once more. The drum of his heartbeat raced, but he didn't care. Better to die of a sexually induced heart attack than at the hands of a fucking beast.

This made the tenth vision he'd had where he died at Hawkins's hands. At least this time, he'd taken out that asshole Hayashi. Another do-gooder with too much power for his own good. Delancey forced himself not to think about Fallon and that freak Tersch and shook himself free of the unnerving premonition.

Pablo led the woman from the room while the other chugged a beer and continued to dance. A beat of silence settled while the music changed artists. In the silence, muffled sobs and screams sounded through the door behind him. Then the blessed surge of rhythm and bass thumped through the walls of the yacht once more.

Outside, the sun in the sky made the ocean look more blue than green. A breeze flowed through an open window, pushing past the ship drifting aimlessly on the ocean.

Life didn't get much better than this.

Delancey gripped the base of his dick and waited for another swell of ecstasy. The dancer finished her beer and stared in fascination at his erection.

"Now, honey, for round two." Unlike her friend, this one smiled, took a shot of tequila, and joined him. She gave him the respite he needed with enthusiasm. Watching her head bob, he made a mental note to call Montaña's scientist friend. A vague plan formed. He'd work with the vision he'd just had, reshape it, retool it, and hopefully make some dough while getting Hawkins out of the way for good.

* * *

Morgan sat in his room reviewing his notes when a knock sounded at the door. Wishing for Kisho but knowing it would be anyone but him, he swallowed a sigh. "Come in."

Olivia Fallon walked through the door. Tall, sexy, and taken.

He smiled. "What can I do for you, Olivia?" He laced his words with an innuendo she couldn't miss.

She laughed. "Now why doesn't my mate like you, I wonder?"

Mate. Olivia had apparently taken to the Circ way of life, which reminded him that she, too, was Circ. He wondered what she looked like when *changed*.

Her blue-green eyes subtly narrowed on him, and he reinforced the shields around his mind. "Give it up. You're not going to see anything I don't want you to."

She huffed and crossed the room to sit in a stuffed chair in the corner.

Like the other rooms in this wing, Morgan's bedroom was more like a giant suite. He had his own bathroom with an expansive shower, a small area complete with a desk and two chairs, a large bed, several dressers, a reading chair, and a walk-in closet. Done in dark browns and blues, it had a masculine but tasteful flair. Definitely not designed by any of the Cirs in residence.

The one glance he'd had of his lover's room showed a tasteful, minimalistic design in natural colors: greens, browns, and tans.

"What are you hiding?" Olivia asked and tossed her long black hair off her shoulder.

She had looks, sexuality, and a graceful charm, made all the more appealing because she didn't seem to know it.

"I can't believe your mate would let you wander, even so innocently, into my room."

"He's out with the guys. I think they went for a beer or something."

So much for feeling like a part of the team. Despite Kisho's avoidance, Morgan's training with the other Cirs had gone well. Learning how they fought and showing them what he could do had taught them all not to underestimate each other. Whereas the Cirs possessed brute strength, Morgan had an uncanny ability to avoid most harm. His natural reflexes were as good as, if not better than the others, but he had a feeling Kisho would equal his speed.

Olivia continued to stare at him.

Talk about the perfect woman for Fallon. During their sparring match earlier, the telepath had done his damndest to pry into Morgan's mind. Both Mr. and Mrs. Fallon were more than tenacious. A pair of bulldogs that never quit.

He rolled his eyes. "All right. I'll bite. Why are you here?"

"Kisho hasn't gotten any information about Delancey from you, and I want to know what you're hiding."

"Am I supposed to reward you for your honesty?"

She grinned and charmed him without trying. "Yes."

"I'm not hiding anything from Kisho. From you—now, that's a different story."

"Why?"

"Because my emotions are my own," he said gently. "As are my thoughts. Your hard-headed mate doesn't seem to respect that."

She flushed. "I'm sorry. It's just that, well..." she broke off.

He followed her gaze to his little jade fox.

"That's not Kisho's is it?" she murmured, her brow furrowed in thought.

"No, it's mine. My kitsu." Possession colored his words, but he couldn't help it.

"What?"

"Kitsu in Japanese means fox."

Her eyes widened with understanding.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to put two and two together. Kisho had an identical figurine in his own room. He was also the son of a Japanese mother and Caucasian father. He had the best of both worlds, as far as Morgan was concerned. Handsome, controlled, so austere yet so sensitive beneath his cool front. Morgan wanted to touch him again, to feel Kisho's heartbeat under the palm of his hand.

"Oh, that's so nice." Olivia blinked rapidly. Her eyes had a teary sheen.

Morgan scowled. "What?"

"When you think of him really hard, your shields crack. You might want to work on that." She spoke as if psychic phenomena were normal. Then again, in her world, it probably was.

"I'm projecting, hmm?" In spite of his desire to keep his feelings private, he liked Olivia. He found he didn't mind her knowing how he felt about Kisho. Hell, he wanted everyone to know. But Alicia had warned him to take things slowly. Kisho, by his very nature, demanded a gentler approach.

Olivia smiled. "Actually, it's there in your eyes. When you look at that statue, and when you made the connection to Kisho, it's just..."

"Just there." Morgan snorted. "You're dangerous, you know that?"

She laughed. "More than you know. You mess with Kisho, I'll gut you. And don't think I can't." She held out her hand.

Morgan watched her arm thicken, darken, and literally grow before his eyes. Claws replaced the painted nails until only the tips remained blue. In a flash, she *changed* back.

"I'm impressed."

"But not scared. I don't need to read you to know that. Why aren't you more bugged about what I just showed you?"

"Like I told Kisho, I met Doc and his Cirs up North. McKinley, the big guy? He's a little scary. The others were pretty nice." He didn't bother hiding his smile. "They don't seem to like Tersch or Fallon much."

She shook her head. "I've been wanting to meet the women up there, but the timing hasn't been right. Mrs. Sharpe told me Kelly has a baby."

Kelly English, a female Circ, had two protective mates and a beautiful baby girl. Morgan had barely been allowed to breathe near the woman. "A toddler, actually, and a real handful."

"Oh." Olivia's expression turned dreamy.

"Good Lord. Babies on the brain. I should have realized. Are you pregnant?"

She flushed. "No." She sat up straighter and blinked. "Why? Do I look fat?"

"Not at all. Sexy, slender, and... Oh, hey there, Ava. What brings you around?"

Ava stood in the doorway wearing a frown. Her hand settled on her hip, and she tapped a long finger, just watching him. For such a tiny woman, she packed a hell of a lot of energy in that curvy body.

He knew that look. "What did I do now?"

"More like who you did." She flounced into the room and threw herself onto his bed. "It's just us girls now, so spill. What did you do to my poet?"

He glared. Just us girls? Was she including him?

Olivia muffled a laugh.

"You're a pain in my ass, you know that?" He flipped a finger at Ava, who gave it right back.

Her hazel eyes looked more green than brown in the light, and her full lips quirked into a smile. "So why is Kisho avoiding any mention of you? And why is Mrs. S. so determined to shove you two together?"

"Ava, look." Olivia pointed to his fox.

Ava turned to look, then swung her head around, her mouth open. “Are you kidding me? *That's* why you're here?”

He frowned. “What's so surprising about that?”

“But Kisho's so gentle. So kind and quiet.”

“And your point?”

Ava began laughing. “You're obnoxious.”

“That's not true.”

“You're bossy, you're a slob, and I thought you liked girls.”

Olivia stared at them in fascination.

Morgan scowled. “One, I'm commanding, not bossy. Two, I prefer casual to slob. And three, I *used* to like girls until I found out men had so much more to offer.”

Olivia smacked herself in the forehead. “Oh man, you two know each other. I *knew* there was something going on.”

“You can't say anything to anyone,” Ava warned.

“Come on. I'm not going to lie to Fallon. He knows everything I know.”

Morgan rubbed his chin. Perhaps he'd been going about this all wrong. Ava was pushy, but she got things done. He could accomplish more in half the time by using all his resources. Kisho trusted Olivia and Ava. If they backed Morgan, maybe his lover would too.

“It's okay, Ava. Olivia, what's said in this room needs to stay between us. And by us, I mean Ava, you, Fallon, and me. For Kisho's sake.”

Olivia glanced at the fox again. “For Kisho's sake. But you hurt him at all, and I'll—”

“I know. You'll gut me. Tersch will strangle me with my own intestines. Ava will nag me to death.”

“Ass.”

He grinned at Ava and blew her a kiss. “You two want to help Kisho?” He grew serious. “Tell me how to get through to the man I've come to claim.”

Chapter Five

Kisho shouldn't have gone out with the others, but he'd needed to get far away from Morgan. The unfamiliar bar had an upscale feel to it, a different place than the normal haunts they frequented, where feet stuck to the floor and the stale scents of vomit, sex, and cigarettes pervaded.

But Tersch had wanted to go somewhere different tonight, so Fallon drove them here, where he and Olivia had occasion to relax.

The green of a woman's ring winked at him, and Kisho immediately thought of Morgan. He sighed. He couldn't stop thinking about the jerk. Sex with the male wasn't enough, because Kisho wanted more. He couldn't stop tasting him, feeling the man's skin under his palms. He'd left him naked and spent in the gym, where the others had no doubt found him when they'd gone to exercise.

Jealousy flared, that his fellow Circes, his brothers, had spied what belonged to Kisho. *Mine*, his beast growled.

Fallon shot him a look, and Kisho fought to calm himself.

"Good thing you're driving, Hayashi," Tersch said with a slur. "Because I'm totally slopped."

"Slopped?" he asked, glad of the interruption and a little worried. Tersch rarely drank to this excess, but something had been bothering him lately. Despite his own troubles, Kisho recognized Tersch needed some help. "What's wrong? You never drink this much."

"Sometimes I do. When it gets so cold."

He didn't make much sense, and then Kisho realized the date. Every February twenty-seventh, since Kisho had known him, Tersch drank himself into oblivion.

His gaze softened, and Kisho patted his buddy on the back. "Ah man, I'm sorry, Tersch. You want another beer? On me?"

"S-s-sure, why the fuck not?" A sadness filled his blue eyes, and Kisho glanced at Fallon.

Fallon shook his head. "Come on, Gunnar. I think we should get you home."

Tersch cursed and swung a fist that Fallon easily ducked. "I don't need a fucking nursemaid." He stumbled and would have fallen off his barstool if Jules hadn't steadied him.

"Take him home, Fallon. I want to talk to Hayashi." Since Jules had arrived in his own vehicle after running some errands for Mrs. Sharpe, Kisho had no excuse not to stay.

"Don't wanna go," Tersch grumbled, and nearby patrons froze. The beast began to surface. Not good.

Fallon laughed. "You have to. Ava warned me to have you back no later than midnight." He lowered his voice. "And Olivia promised a treat if I brought you back at least a little sober."

A light sparked in Tersch's eyes.

"*Nice one, Fallon,*" Kisho projected as loudly as he could. He was never quite sure when Fallon could hear him, because Fallon often shielded himself.

"Poor guy. I hate to see him like this. Olivia will make it better. She'll draw his pain."

"Think she'll let me have a piece of that ass?" Tersch asked.

"You play the sympathy card, she'll probably blow you," Fallon murmured. In a louder voice, he added, "I love that woman. Now come on. Time to go home."

Tersch left without protest.

Leaving Kisho alone with Jules. *Damn. Here it comes.*

Jules sighed. "It's like I can read your mind. You don't want me grilling you, but I'm going to." After a moment, he continued. "Come on, man. You can't tell me you didn't think I'd want to know what the hell's between you and Morgan. I smelled you all over him." Jules took a swig from his bottle and paused. "I didn't mean you had to do him for the info."

Jules looked uncomfortable, and Kisho wanted to sink through the floor. This was why he'd never fully come out to the team. He wanted to be a part of them, not some "fag freak." He'd heard enough negativity growing up, and again in the navy from men who didn't know what he was. Such rampant homophobia had begun to taper off due to the gradual acceptance of gays, but the prejudice was still alive and kicking, in the military especially.

Jules and the others were men's men. Like his father had been. Strong alpha-types that women fell head over heels for. Jules stood a few inches taller than Kisho's six-two, had muscle tone a bodybuilder would envy, and an arresting face with eyes that glittered like diamonds. The total package of male beauty, integrity, and resolve made him a natural leader and friend anyone would be lucky to have.

"Dude, talk to me." Jules placed a hand over his, stilling the tapping fingers he hadn't realized he was drumming.

Before Kisho could respond, a pair of snickering drunks shoved into Jules. "Oh, look, the *boyfriends* are talking."

Making matters worse, the bartender behind them frowned and took a step closer. The brawny guy tending bar had been quiet but observant, and Kisho realized he would be the one to watch. The drunks he could easily handle, but the bartender probably had a bat or gun handy. Not a big deal, but he could do without the attention.

Thankfully, tonight wasn't all that crowded. The sooner he shut these two up, the sooner he could leave the bar, and hopefully, this discussion, aside.

"Look," he began.

Jules interrupted by removing his hand from Kisho's. He turned and punched the loudmouth in the face. The guy dropped like a stone, unconscious. "Anything else you pricks wanted to add? I'm all ears."

The other drunk stammered his apologies and dragged his friend away with the help of another guy.

The bartender approached, and Kisho prepared to take him on.

"Nice punch. Whatever you want, it's on the house. So what can I get you two?" The bartender waited and winked at Kisho.

"Nothing else for me or my friend. Not *boyfriend*, friend. But thanks."

The bartender withdrew a pen from his pocket and scribbled on a napkin. He pushed it at Kisho. "Call me," the big guy said before he moved to the other end of the bar.

Beyond humiliated, Kisho walked away as fast as he could manage without making it obvious. He left the place and looked around the parking lot for Jules's truck, his world

disintegrating around him. “*Not boyfriend, friend,*” Jules had said. God forbid anyone mistake Jules for being gay.

Jules swore behind him. “Dammit, hold on a minute.”

Kisho froze when Jules grabbed his arm and swung him around.

“What the hell's wrong with you? First Tersch, now you. I swear, if Fallon freaks on me too, I'm out of here.”

The word “freak” made Kisho cringe, but he cleared his throat and apologized. “Sorry. I just don't know what you want me to say.”

“I don't want you to say anything. I just want you to be okay.” Jules nodded to his truck, and they walked to it together. “I'm not sure what the hell is going on in that mind of yours, Hayashi. But I don't want you to do anything you don't want to with Morgan. I mean, yeah, we need to know as much as we can about Delancey. But you know, there are other ways to get it than screwing the guy. I never meant you had to actually go through with anything.”

Jules made it sound distasteful, and a measure of shame flooded Kisho.

“Stop it, right the fuck now.” Jules leaned close, suddenly angry. “Your aura is all over the place. I can't read emotions, but I can read pain. What the hell did Morgan do to you? I'll kill him, I swear it.”

Jules took a step away, and Kisho stopped him. “Wait. It's not what you think. I—” He took a deep breath. “I was with him. I pushed it; he didn't. It's okay.” It wasn't at all, but Kisho didn't like the look in Jules's eyes. He couldn't let his team leader hurt Morgan because he was too afraid to tell the truth. Yeah, Morgan had started it, but Kisho had been far from saying no.

“Ah, okay, then.” They got into the truck and sat in silence. “I'm not telling you what to do. I mean, I am, but... Fuck, I hate this touchy-feely bullshit. Bottom line is, you're mine. Every damned one of you Circs is under my protection, and I won't let anything happen to you, all right?” Jules's beast growled his affirmation, a rumble of warning, of acceptance.

Kisho stared straight ahead, afraid if he glanced at Jules, Jules would see him fighting to remain in control. Hell, his mother had died when he was two. His father had died just a few years after he'd found him. The only family Kisho had left were his team. They meant everything to him. He couldn't bear the thought of losing any of them. And Mrs. Sharpe wondered why he

didn't like to see into the future. A future where everyone that mattered to him turned on him? Where he died? Where Jules died? Christ.

"All right?" Jules asked again.

"Yeah," Kisho answered, his voice hoarse.

Jules started the truck. "Good. 'Nuff said. Now let's go home and try to weasel more info out of Mrs. Sharpe. That woman knows more than she's saying."

And Kisho would know more if he stopped being such a pussy and tried to *see* again. "I'll help, Jules. I'll find out where the bastard is hiding. I promise."

A glance at Jules showed him smiling. "I know you will, Hayashi. You never disappoint."

When Kisho arrived home, he walked into the kitchen to grab a quick snack and saw Ava, Morgan, and the Keisers—Melissa, their cook, and Jack, her husband and handyman—playing cards.

"Hey." Morgan acknowledged him but didn't look up from his cards.

"Later." Kisho left the group and went upstairs. He undressed and moved to his bed. And froze.

There, on the pillow, lay a white rose, devoid of thorns.

He flushed in confused pleasure but told himself Ava had left it. Or maybe Olivia. She could sense emotions. Maybe she'd sensed his troubles and sought to provide subtle comfort.

The next day he rose, dressed, and joined a much better-looking Tersch and Fallon on a fact-finding mission. They returned two days later with some leads on Delancey that Jules would find interesting. Exhausted from the trip down to New Orleans, then the Keys, Kisho wanted nothing more than to fall into bed. At least working their asses off to chase down word on Delancey hadn't given him much time to think about Morgan.

He paused at his bed, where another long-stemmed white rose lay across his pillow. He picked it up and waved the floral scent under his nose. But as he did, he caught a hint of orange—Morgan.

His beast perked at the smell, and the fragrance stayed with him as he fell asleep.

The rest of the week passed in a confusing blur. Each day, Morgan found some excuse to spend time with him. But the cagey bastard never made a move. The sexual tension between them increased, to the point where Kisho felt the itch to touch Morgan at every opportunity.

Morgan sat next to him and read a book while Kisho listened to classical music in the mansion's conservatory. When Kisho retired to his room to write in his journal, as he did most nights, Morgan made excuses to hang around: He wasn't tired. His bed didn't feel comfortable. Tersch annoyed him.

Idiot that he was, Kisho never refused Morgan. Most of the time they spent the hours not talking. While he should have been pumping Morgan for answers about Delancey, Kisho spent his time trying to control his beast and the crazy attraction he had for the brawny merc.

Who the hell could concentrate when two-hundred-plus pounds of prime male sat in the same damned room?

The obvious answer would be to fuck Morgan and get the need out of his system, but a strange fear held Kisho back.

Five days after their first “grappling” in the gym, Morgan knocked on Kisho's open door.

“Yes?”

Behind Morgan, he saw Tersch giving him a thumbs-up and nodding at Morgan. Then Jules dragged Tersch back into his own room and slammed the door shut.

Morgan shrugged. “Just thought I'd see what you're up to. I spent the day making new contacts and stirring up old ones. Something's bound to shake free sooner or later.”

Sitting at his desk, Kisho looked up at Morgan and closed his journal. He'd been stuck on a new word for “green” to describe Morgan's eyes. So far, he couldn't find anything better than emerald to do Morgan justice.

“What are you writing?” Morgan asked.

“Nothing.” Kisho shoved his journal into his desk drawer.

Morgan stepped inside and closed the door behind him without taking his eyes from Kisho. “You weren't at dinner tonight. And I haven't seen you at the gym much.”

“Wasn't hungry. And I've been busy.” Busy avoiding the man his team leader has asked him to cling to like glue. He flushed with shame, needing to prove, if not to himself, then at least to his friends he could be trusted to get the job done. “What about you?”

Morgan walked toward him, the glint in his eyes dangerously appealing. Danger, arrogance, and a dominant aggression filled his steps. Kisho could almost taste the hunger the man projected. Morgan stopped right next to his chair, his groin at eye level.

Kisho swallowed hard and forced himself to look up to meet Morgan's gaze.

“I've missed you, little fox.”

Kisho couldn't help looking down at Morgan's erection straining his jeans. Despite the blustery weather, inside the mansion, Morgan favored T-shirts that clung to his solid frame. He was built like a Circ caught mid-*change*. Strong, powerful, lethal.

“Wh-why do you call me that? I'm not little.”

Morgan smiled, and his lids shuttered his expression. “Not little at all.”

Kisho's cock shoved against the nylon of his shorts. He should have been embarrassed, but in the time since he and Morgan had pleased each other, he'd been unable to think of anything else. Hell, he'd come in his sheets twice after particularly hot dreams. Something about Morgan stirred his hormones all over the place.

He'd thought the mating heat had finished. Or maybe Olivia and Fallon were to blame for this constant sexual need. A newly mated Circ pair could be causing all this.

A loud bang followed by a groan from the other room distracted him.

“Your friends don't seem bothered about getting it on.”

Kisho swallowed loudly, wishing he had the nerve to get up and walk out. He needed relief from this pressing ache, but for the first time that he could recall, he didn't want his friends. He wanted no one but Morgan. “I told you before, Circs are different. We do what we have to.”

“So why aren't you over there with them right now?” Morgan whispered and stepped closer. “Why aren't you *changed* and raging with the others?”

“Why do you care?” He shifted in his seat and stifled a groan when his cock rubbed against his shorts. Shit, he could feel the wet spot growing.

Morgan's hands went to the snap of his jeans...right in front of Kisho's face. He unfastened them. The slow slide of the zipper sounded overloud in the sudden silence of the room. Kisho couldn't breathe as he watched Morgan shove his underwear down to showcase a mouthwatering cock.

Morgan held it in his hands and stroked the moisture beading at his slit over his crown. "I'm hard and wet. Want a taste? Or don't you want your little friends to know what you really need?" the bastard asked, lowering his voice so Tersch and Jules in the other room wouldn't hear.

Kisho struggled to break free from the mesmerizing sight of Morgan's arousal. "You need to go."

"Make me," Morgan dared and licked his lips.

Kisho's breath caught in his throat. "I can kick your ass from here to Canada, merc."

Morgan grinned. "Then do it. Or are you too scared to try?" He wiped his finger through his slit, then held it toward Kisho. To Kisho's shock, Morgan wiped the moisture over Kisho's lips.

Automatically licking it off, Kisho felt his beast roar at the male's conceit. But the damned creature refused to appear.

"Come on, baby. Suck me. You know you want to."

Never before had Kisho lost his ability to *change*, and the loss now scared the hell out of him, because he was glad of it. He didn't want to throw Morgan out. He wanted to please him, then take his pleasure in Morgan's own mouth.

"That's right. You're mine now. All mine, my little kitsu." Large hands reached for him, powerful hands dragging him closer to his destiny.

The familiar sense that he'd already seen this vision came to him, but then Kisho was beyond caring. He groaned and leaned forward, needing to taste. The minute he sucked Morgan's cock deep, everything within him settled.

"Oh yeah, baby. It's been so hard staying away from you." Morgan thrust his fingers through Kisho's hair to hold him tight. Then he began thrusting in his mouth, short bursts of need that drew Kisho into a frenzy.

The tease of cock and balls but nothing more made Kisho determined to suck all the reason from his mate. He used his tongue, the suction of his mouth, and his firm lips to pull Morgan into a glorious shout of ecstasy as he came hard down Kisho's throat. On the verge of coming himself, Kisho fought not to spill as he swallowed the thick cream over his tongue.

Unable to stop himself, Kisho eased his hand over his own cock.

"That's it, little fox. Bring yourself off. Let me watch you. Take your shorts down. Show me that rosy shaft. Yeah, and spread your legs." Morgan pulled back. He tucked himself back inside his jeans and refastened them. Then he stared down at Kisho, his expression one of need and affection.

Kisho couldn't resist. Though his beast wanted to fuck and be fucked, he wanted to play as well. Morgan commanded; he obeyed. The thought of doing whatever Morgan told him to do only increased his desire. Kisho pushed his shorts down, and his cock sprang up, wet and hard. His balls ached, especially when Morgan licked his lips again.

"Want to come in your mouth," Kisho muttered as he stroked himself, on edge and hard as hell.

"No. I want to watch. I want to see you spill, that milky white cum sliding down that long cock. Then I want to lick it up."

Kisho moved his hand faster and widened his legs, hungry for Morgan. Eager to please, though he should have stayed far away from the sin of temptation packaged around that handsome face.

"I love your spice. Cinnamon, my favorite," Morgan said on a sigh as he inhaled. He never took his gaze away from Kisho's rapidly moving hand. "Oh, yeah. That's it. You're wet, little fox. And so thick. You're going to feel so good inside me."

Kisho groaned, unable to keep his pleasure silent.

"So pretty. I wish I had the words to describe you, kitsu."

Hearing the special name pushed Kisho further.

"Come for me. Right now. Let me see how much you'll give me. How much I need to lap from that fucking hot cock."

Kisho groaned as he gripped himself and spewed. Morgan watched him as if mesmerized. And Kisho continued to come, his beast urging him to display himself to the fullest.

Morgan dropped to his knees and brought his mouth over Kisho, catching the fall of cum and drinking it down in greedy gulps. When Kisho finally ceased, Morgan gently laved Kisho with his tongue.

Then Morgan backed away and stood. After wiping his mouth, he leaned close and kissed Kisho hard.

“Write about that.” He winked, then turned and left before Kisho could gather his wits to speak.

The door closed solidly behind him.

Kisho stared at it, then down at his flaccid shaft. The incident seemed more a dream than reality, but the connection that continued to grow between them refused to go away.

“Morgan, what am I going to do with you?” He sighed and looked down at desk. It was then he noticed the white rose sitting where his journal had been moments earlier. No thorns. White. Sweet and rich.

And another of Kisho's inner walls came crumbling down.

He woke the next morning with the intention of confronting Morgan about the flowers and only the flowers. He entered the kitchen to find Jules once again missing. No sign of Morgan either.

Mrs. Sharpe sat with the rest of the team, minus Jack and Melissa, who were busy working on the grounds. “Kisho, come sit next to me. Fallon tells me you found Montaña's footprint yesterday.”

Kisho grabbed a plate and filled it up from the buffet laid out on the counter. He joined Mrs. Sharpe and the others at the long table. “I think I did. We traced the bills of some private docks to one of Montaña's lesser-used aliases. And no, I didn't *see* it. I happened on the coincidence after Fallon read some thug's mind.”

“The guy's in custody in New Orleans on attempted murder,” Fallon added. He leaned back and put an arm around Olivia's chair. “He tried to cut a deal with the state by sharing

information about one of Montaña's merces. He didn't tell the feds anything we didn't already know, but I dug through his thoughts and found the docks. I think the dock in Florida is where we should look next. Morgan mentioned Montaña's boat, and the coast of Miami is a logical place to search. I'm betting one of those places will get us closer, but we need to move now."

"Morgan and Jules are already down there." Mrs. Sharpe kept her eyes on Kisho, and her knowing look bugged the hell out of him. She said something else, but he couldn't hear her.

Morgan was gone. With Jules. They were alone. *Together.*

A rush of fury made him itch to *change*. He gripped his fork in a tight fist, no longer hungry for eggs and bacon but for violence.

"Kisho," Mrs. Sharpe snapped, "pay attention. I want you to focus for me after breakfast. I've tried to give you time, but we have important work to do."

He glanced around the table to see the others staring at him. He drew in a deep breath and told his beast to relax. *We belong to Jules. It's okay. No problem. Jules doesn't want Morgan that way.* After a heartbeat, his beast backed off before snarling, *He'd better not.*

Tersch smirked at him and mouthed, *Lucky you.* He wiggled his brows at Mrs. Sharpe, as if the woman couldn't see him from the corner of her eye.

Kisho saw her try to smother a smile.

"Gunnar, I want you to meet with me after Kisho's done. We have work to do downstairs." In the labs, she meant.

Tersch lost his smirk.

"Have fun, buddy," Kisho rasped, trying hard to stem the jealousy that continued to course through his veins.

He picked at his food during the rest of the meal and ignored Fallon's attempts to communicate mentally. He left for Mrs. Sharpe's office before Olivia could intercept him.

Once inside, he sat on her couch and clutched his head in his hands. *What the fuck is going on with me? Why should I care what Morgan does or doesn't do?*

Within his mind, his beast roared. *He's my mate. Mine!*

"Fuck off," Kisho warned through gritted teeth. He clamped down on the urge to shift just as Mrs. Sharpe arrived.

She smoothed down the light pink skirt of the suit she wore. The lighter color emphasized the richness of her dark skin. The pearls around her throat accented those at her ears and enhanced her femininity while contrasting against the power in her chocolate brown eyes. The older woman seethed with energy, and Kisho's beast withdrew under her withering stare.

"Much better." She huffed her approval and sat across from Kisho in a hard leather chair. "Now it's time you used that foresight for something more than fearful glimpses into your own future. I want you to close your eyes, breathe deep, and focus on Morgan."

"Huh?"

"We both know you have strong feelings for the man, be they positive or negative. Don't focus on the feelings, focus on Morgan. He's the one who found Delancey first. So use him to leapfrog to Delancey. Trust me. This will work. Push your personal feelings aside, Kisho." Her voice lowered. "I'm afraid that if we don't find your ex-captain soon, bad things will happen to the team. Bad for Gunnar, especially."

"Tersch?" He stared at her, wide-eyed. "I never saw him hurt. Jules and me, but not Tersch."

"Like I said before, the future changes all the time. It's fluid, Kisho. Now flow with it."

Kisho took a deep breath, prepared to look beyond his issues to help the team. He needed to do whatever it took to ensure his friends' protection.

He lay down on the couch, slowed his breathing, and allowed his mind to trace the familiar pattern that showed him a world and timeline beyond his own.

"That's it," he heard Mrs. Sharpe say. "Nice and easy. Flow with it, son. That's my boy."

She used the comforting words whenever he went under, and it soothed him, the way a small child felt comforted by his mother. He tried not to think of it in that light, but under the influence of her soft speech, he relaxed—protected, safe—and reached into the tendril of tomorrow.

Morgan's handsome face smiled back at him, warmth overflowing in those green eyes. The feel of his slick body surging against Kisho's excited him, but he forced the feeling aside. Because after the excitement the dread came, and he needed to look for Jules and Tersch, to help his friends escape death.

Kisho concentrated. Mrs. Sharpe's soothing voice blanketed him, and he looked deeper. Pressed closer. Something very near, very soon. And it was important...

Chapter Six

Morgan gritted his teeth and wondered again why he'd agreed to let Hawkins tag along. Jules was a pain in the ass, and not in a good way. The bastard tried to take charge of everything, and to a dominant male like Morgan, control meant everything.

"You know, I let you come along. I even let you drive this shitty boat. But I'm not letting you come aboard that cruiser with me. You'll scare my contact before I even get a good look at him."

"*I'll* scare him?" Jules had the nerve to grin, and a hint of fang peeked out.

"Asshole."

Jules chuckled. The cool breeze blowing by did nothing to wipe away his grin, but it made Morgan shiver.

"Believe it or not, I don't work for you." *That* wiped away the smirk. "I work for Mrs. Sharpe. Now, I found your boy Delancey."

"Great, he's in the Southeast. Maybe you could narrow it down some," Jules said with sarcasm.

"Maybe I could, if some dumbass squid wasn't breathing down my neck."

Jules gripped the steering wheel of the small boat they occupied.

Probably to keep from wrapping his hands around my neck.

Jules snarled, "When this is over, you and I are due for a long-ass talk."

"Sorry, handsome, I'm taken."

Before Jules could choke him, Morgan laughed his way out of the boat and jogged around the curve of land toward the nearly empty pier, where a large yacht named the *Emerald* floated. Out here in the middle of nowhere, near some asshole's private island, his contact had told him to come alone.

Morgan stopped at the edge of the yacht. A feeling of wrongness overcame him. But before he could pull back, a familiar face stepped out of the shadows and put a finger to his lips. He motioned hurriedly for Morgan to join him.

A glance up showed two swarthy men descending the stairwell to the upper level. They hadn't yet seen him, still engrossed in a heated conversation in thick Portuguese, Morgan's native tongue.

"He said Montaña killed Vicki. Why the hell would Tomas lie?" one of them said to the other.

"Shit, Francisco. I didn't want to tell you, but your sister is gone, man. Turned up a floater early this morning. Montaña hurt her bad."

"*I'll kill him!*" Francisco swore and began ranting threats and curses against his hated boss. Dissent was good, but Morgan wasn't exactly a welcome visitor. Sticking around to increase unrest wouldn't be wise.

He hurried to join his contact in the darkened interior of the cabin. Leather, teak, some Brazilian redwood inlaid in the glossy floor, glass tiles that probably cost a small fortune. All in all, an expensive boat, and one Tomas—his contact, a clever, talkative man Morgan had convinced to be his eyes and ears—shouldn't have been on. Tomas normally worked as his cousin's lackey.

And speaking of said cousin, Morgan whispered, "Where's Pablo?"

Tomas nodded for him to ease back. They entered a smaller room off the main cabin, and Tomas closed them in the bathroom. Handcrafted ceramic tiles lined the full shower and accented the dual sinks, made of gold-veined marble.

"Pablo is in trouble. Montaña and his American friend, Delancey, have been partying on a yacht for a week, and just yesterday, the Florida authorities found three dead women in the waters."

Morgan stilled. *Gotcha, you bastard.* "Where are they?"

"I don't know, exactly. Near Miami, I think. Pablo isn't answering my calls. When he found out one of the girls was Francisco's sister, he told. That's Francisco." Tomas pointed to the door, through which Morgan heard the deep voice of a seriously pissed-off brother.

Banging and clanging sounded, followed by the pounding of running footsteps. What the hell was Francisco doing?

“This boat is Colonel Montaña's. I think he come back for it in a week or two. But I have to find Pablo. Can you help me?”

Morgan nodded. “Yeah. Can you get me on board as a crew member?”

Tomas gave an emphatic shake of his head. “No. They kill me if they know I talked to you. I—”

A loud boom that rocked the boat cut Tomas short. Without thinking about it, Morgan dragged Tomas out of the bathroom and hurtled them both out the backdoor of the cabin toward an open veranda.

The world suddenly went black as Morgan slammed through the railing and through the air. Fire, the scent of burning flesh, and pain, the likes of which he'd felt too many times before, filled him from head to toe. And then he heard a familiar voice that eased his worry.

“I knew you'd come.”

He stared at Kisho in wonderment and confusion. “When the hell did you get here? Where's Tomas?” Morgan looked around but could see nothing but darkness. The light slowly filtered in, and he saw Kisho's bedroom. Two jade foxes sat next to each other on the nightstand, and Morgan sighed.

“Hell, I'm gone, aren't I?”

“Gone?” Kisho frowned. “What do you—”

“Never mind, kitsu. Now why don't you give me what you've been denying me for so very long?”

Darkness pulled him under, and then Morgan broke through to incredible pleasure. Warmth gloved him as he surged in and out of Kisho, finally joining with the man he'd been destined for.

“That's it, little fox. Give me what I need.”

Pain in Morgan's chest flared and receded, but he couldn't stop fucking his mate. So right, so perfectly right.

He groaned as the slow orgasm overtook him in a tidal wave of pleasure so strong, it literally hurt. Blackness descended once more, but this time, he couldn't breach the fog of heaviness around him.

"Fuck! Morgan, Jesus. Morgan, wake up."

He blinked up into water droplets. Jules, soaking wet, gazed down at him in horror and pushed down on his chest.

Morgan tried to stop him, to question what the hell Hawkins thought he was doing, but instead he coughed, spewing water. And then he was suddenly unable to breathe.

"Shit. Not now. Morgan, you are such a pain in my ass. Hold on, man. Kisho is gonna—"

* * *

"Hold him down. Don't let him go," Mrs. Sharpe directed Tersch, Ava, and Fallon as they tried to hold a bucking Kisho to the couch.

Kisho wanted to tell them not to bother, but he couldn't unclench his jaw.

"Olivia, hurry. Draw some of the pain."

Olivia touched him. He knew because he saw her from above, looking down on everyone in the study. Odd. One minute he'd been seeing into the future—or was that the present? Morgan on a boat, talking to some nervous guy, probably his contact. Then an explosion. Fire, bodies strewn everywhere. And there in the water, floating facedown, lay Morgan.

Jesus, oh no. Please no. Kisho darted back into himself, not sure how he did so. He writhed and jerked, trying to wake up, to tell them what to do and where to look. He could see it so clearly. Could see Ava and the others trying to help him, but at the same time, he could see Jules diving into the water to drag Morgan to safety. Pulling him into a boat, then to the shore where Morgan lay on a sandy bank, his beautiful skin burned. The gaping wound in his chest looked really, really bad. Blood flowed everywhere. Jules was yelling at Morgan.

Morgan didn't answer.

"I'm right here, kitsu. I'm okay."

But he wasn't, not if Kisho could see his ghostly image in Mrs. Sharpe's study, when by rights, Morgan's body lay several hundred miles away, wounded, on some deserted shore.

"I'm good, lover."

"Lover?"

Morgan laughed, then frowned and clutched his chest. "Jules has no bedside manner. Did you like my roses?"

The change in subject threw him. "What?"

"My roses. I know you like white. And I read your poem when you weren't around. The one about thorns and purity and love."

"Dick, that was private." He paused. "Did you like it?"

"I loved it." Morgan's sweet smile touched him, really touched him, and he felt shy all of the sudden. "I want to talk to you about it, but this really hurts. I need your help."

"What can I do?"

"I'm not sure." Morgan frowned. "But, I can feel them so close. I think... Ava and Alicia. I need you to reach out and grab them." His voice and image faded. "Hurry."

Kisho blinked and gasped as his breath and sight returned. His chest hurt like a bitch. But he did as Morgan had asked. He stopped moving. When Mrs. Sharpe and Ava let go of him, he latched on to their arms. He held tight, past the yells, past Tersch's bellow, and even past the fire of pain blazing through his chest.

Dimly aware when they toppled onto him, he heard Tersch's roar and Olivia's cry for help. Then Fallon was there, and everything went black.

* * *

Thirty-six hours later

Morgan groaned, aching all over. As he slowly rose to consciousness, he realized that though the healing process had alleviated much of his body aches, his head still throbbed. The nature of his ability, such as it was, pertained to energy, to connections. His strong bond to Kisho, despite the stubborn man's insistent denial, remained true, or Morgan would be dead right now.

He'd pulled at Kisho's energy to heal himself, but it hadn't been enough. His ties to Alicia and Ava had done the trick, apparently. Using his lover as a conduit was a clever guess on his part, if he did say so himself. But he had a feeling Alicia wouldn't be pleased.

He sniffed but didn't scent salt air or Jules nearby. Where the hell was he?

"Oh good, he's waking up." Ava's relief made him want to smile. Ava—he must have returned to North Carolina.

He scented Kisho close. When he brushed his hand against warm skin, he turned his head and opened his eyes.

Long, dark eyelashes fanned the shadows under Kisho's closed eyes. Asleep but otherwise healthy. Relief made Morgan light-headed for a moment. If anything had happened to Kisho, he didn't know what he'd do.

The scent of Ava's sweet perfume lingered, and she leaned over him to whisper, "I really am glad you're better. You scared the shit out of me."

He blinked up at her. "Sorry."

"Yeah. But if you ever pull a stunt like that again, I'll geld you myself," she hissed.

Not a fan of his energy tap. Great. He couldn't wait to see Alicia's reaction.

"Ava?" Tersch's deep voice. "Easy, baby."

"Stop calling me baby," she snapped and wobbled on her feet.

In seconds, Tersch scooped her into his strong arms.

Morgan glanced around him as the room came into better focus. Natural shades, minimalist prints on the walls, and small plants dotted every ledge and table. He was in Kisho's room. No wonder he felt so much better. The energy all around him comforted and eased the emptiness he'd waited a lifetime to fill.

An arm brushed his, and he turned back. "Kisho?" he rasped and fell into a coughing fit.

Someone pressed a glass against his lips, and he automatically swallowed the cool water.

"Thanks—" The rest of what he wanted to say stuck in his throat when he glanced up into the fury that darkened brown eyes to black. Oh hell. *Mrs. Sharpe* was thoroughly pissed.

"Don't you *ever* do that again!"

Okay, yeah, pulling energy without asking was tantamount to a psychic assault. But he hadn't intentionally yanked so much. He would have taken from Hawkins if the man had lesser shields. Desperate, he'd sought the one source closest to his heart. To his surprise, Morgan's attachment to Kisho apparently transcended space. Because he shouldn't have been able to pull

from such a distance, let alone tap into two more powerful psychics. A Hail Mary of a plan that actually worked.

He swallowed. "I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to, but the thought just came to me that you could help."

Tersch growled, "What the hell is he talking about? *He's* the one who made you two pass out?"

Mrs. Sharpe poked Morgan hard in the chest.

"Ow!"

"Oh, hush! You're already on the mend. By tomorrow, you won't even sport a bruise. I'm annoyed with you for stealing what you should have asked for."

"I said I'm sorry—"

"But I'm *angry* because you needlessly walked into a situation you knew to be wrong. What have I always told you about listening to your instincts? Stupid boy," she muttered and left, but not before smacking him again.

She blew by Olivia and Fallon, who entered on the heel of her wake.

"Thank God you're conscious." Fallon sighed. "Olivia's been bugging the hell out of me. Stubborn woman threatened to move into your room and keep watch. Kisho looks better, too." Fallon narrowed his stare at Kisho and flushed. *What the hell is that about?* "Ah, you know, Olivia, I think we need to talk to Mrs. Sharpe. In fact, I know Jules wants to meet with us. Tersch, you coming?"

"Soon as I tuck the beauty queen into bed."

Ava squirmed. "Ass. You're just taking advantage because I'm not at my best."

The smile Tersch gave her set the room ablaze. Lust and a healthy dose of affection actually made the big guy look friendly. A first for sure. "Hell yeah, I'm trying to take advantage. Getting into your pants has become an obsession."

Ava snorted, and her lips curled. "You're so full of it."

"I really am." He whispered something in her ear that had the others laughing and Olivia red-faced.

Ava sputtered. “You...my...oh! Frederik Gunnar Tersch, you take me back to my room and put me down! *Right now.*”

Tersch sighed and carried her toward the door. “So much for being not at your best. You're still the meanest woman I know.”

Somehow, “meanest” on Tersch's lips sounded like a compliment.

The pair left. Olivia moved forward and put her hand on Morgan's bare shoulder. A glance down his body showed him covered to the waist by a blanket. He had a feeling he wasn't wearing anything, and he had to concentrate on not thinking about Kisho so close to him. Fallon would kill him if he thought Morgan sported an erection for Olivia.

“You look much better.” Olivia smiled.

Morgan smiled back.

Fallon put his arm around his wife and tugged her away from Morgan, hugging her close. The dark look he shot Morgan was telling.

She continued, “I'm not sure what you did yesterday, but I know it was you. When Kisho stopped seizing, he grabbed on to Mrs. Sharpe and Ava, and I could literally feel you in the room with us. The energy jumping around the room was crazy.”

Fallon nodded. “Yeah. I read minds. That's it. But even I could feel so much power ripping from Ava and Mrs. S. into Kisho. That's wild, man. And let me tell you, when you just started regenerating in front of Jules, it freaked him the hell out.” Fallon glanced over his shoulder for his boss. “But don't tell him I said that.”

“Where is he, anyway?” Morgan asked. “I wanted to thank him for pulling my ass out of the water. It happened so fast. I was talking to Tomas, then *wham*. The boat blew.”

Fallon shook his head. “You're really lucky. Last I saw Jules, he was on the phone with Admiral London and Mr. Anderson. Anderson's a friend in DC, one of Mrs. Sharpe's cronies, supposedly.”

Olivia explained, “He means Mrs. Sharpe will neither confirm nor deny the closeness of their association. But she likes Ron.” Olivia paused and frowned at her husband. “Jesse, he told me to call him Ron. I'm not being 'forward.' Jeez.” Silence, then she glared. “Oh, shut up.” She turned back to Morgan. “I'll see you later. I'm suddenly in the mood for a run to get away from all this testosterone.”

She huffed and left.

Fallon shrugged. "She can say what she wants, but that Anderson guys rubs me the wrong way. The last time he visited I got a weird vibe. I don't like the way he looks at her."

"You don't like the way anyone looks at her," Morgan reminded him.

Fallon surprised him with a sheepish grin. "True. But hey, my woman, my right. I have to talk to Jules. Look after Kisho, okay? Oh, and just a warning. Tersch has some ugly thoughts you might want to watch out for. He wasn't too happy you juiced Ava to get better, and he's gonna nail your ass soon as you're walking."

Morgan groaned. "Tell him to get in line behind Mrs. Sharpe."

"Can do. And you know, since Mrs. Sharpe doesn't have anyone to speak up for her, I think I'll take a whack at you on her behalf. After Tersch, of course." Fallon grinned. "Get better soon. You're going to need all the help you can get." He left and closed the door behind him.

Morgan didn't much care about the threat of retribution. He deserved it; no matter that he hadn't intended to hurt anyone in his zealous pursuit of survival.

Kisho moaned and brushed a hand against Morgan's side. Morgan's body hardened in response. Every place the sheets touched set him ablaze. He couldn't wait any longer. Morgan turned on his side to see Kisho. He wore nothing but jeans and lay on top of the bed. Had Kisho put himself there, or had one of the others tossed the sick patients together? Why the blanket between them? Did the others—did Kisho—really think cotton could keep them apart?

Gently easing out from under the blanket, Morgan shifted his legs over the side of the mattress and took his time standing. The burns and breaks in his body had healed. Alicia was right when she said he wouldn't have a bruise or a scar by tomorrow.

Morgan never got sick, never hurt for long, and could heal himself from near-death under the right circumstances. Like having a psychic lover who also happened to be superhuman. The energy Kisho generated was mind-boggling, intense, and more than a little scary.

Morgan walked gingerly to Kisho's bathroom and took care of nature's call. As he showered, he wondered about his fierce attraction to his future mate. There was no denying Kisho's beauty. Smooth, pale skin. Silky dark hair that framed a face made for seduction. Those exotic eyes, so dark, slanted just enough to show Kisho's Asian ancestry. Firm lips, high

cheekbones, and that firm, square jaw. Christ, he didn't even need to start thinking about Kisho's incredible body. Those tight abs, that long, thick cock.

Morgan bit back a groan and ignored his raging hard-on. The time for distance had ended. He wanted Kisho, and his little fox wanted him just as badly. He knew it. Kisho knew it. Time to stop playing games. If anything, Morgan's brush with death had shown him that there might not be a next time. So why wait to share what he felt?

After finishing his shower, he dried off and left his towel behind. The cool air on his body should have cooled his ardor, but if anything, the contrast to his body heat encouraged his arousal. He rejoined Kisho and simply stared.

Big, but not as big as me, Morgan thought with satisfaction. As a Circ, Kisho would top him. But now, here, Morgan ruled. Always a dominant lover, he'd occasionally let himself be taken, if only to prepare himself for his kitsu. He wasn't sure how Kisho would want it, but Morgan promised himself not to disappoint.

Though he'd made love to men and women throughout the years, he preferred men. And he liked them big—not small, effeminate boys, but strong, strapping fighters.

“You are *so* my type,” he whispered and stroked a finger over Kisho's cheek.

Kisho didn't stir, but Morgan tired of waiting. He dug into the nightstand beside the bed and took out a tube of lube and a few condoms, items he'd found when he'd snooped a few days ago. Fuck, but he wanted to lube himself up and shove hard and fast into Kisho's tight ass. But he wouldn't take, not now. This first time would be all about giving. He knew what the Circs needed from their mates.

Morgan grinned, trying to imagine how Kisho would take the news that they had more in common than anyone knew. Kisho moaned in his sleep and slid his hand down to his crotch.

Amusement faded as passion took over. *Hell, he's sporting a big one. My pretty little fox isn't so little. He'd better be dreaming of me.*

Needing his lover naked, Morgan unbuttoned Kisho's jeans and slowly eased down the zipper, made tight because of his fat cock. He watched Kisho's face, waiting for him to awaken, but the sexy male didn't stir.

Morgan removed the pants and tossed them aside. *So perfect, and all mine.*

He lay on the bed on his side next to the handsome Circ. Then he ran a callous hand over Kisho's jaw, his throat, down to his nipples that stiffened with arousal. Morgan's mouth watered, and he leaned closer to take one nub in his mouth.

Kisho groaned, deep in his throat, and slowly blinked his eyes open.

"Morgan?" he whispered. "Am I still dreaming?"

Morgan grinned, latched on to a nipple, and sucked hard. *Good. He was dreaming of me.* A glance down Kisho's body showed a thick drop of cum pearling at the tip of his cockhead. So damned pretty.

Kisho shifted and placed a hand on Morgan's cheek. "Fuck. Oh man, Morgan. Touch me."

Morgan stroked his abdomen while he worked Kisho's nipples. The plane of his lover's chest and belly rippled with muscle. So strong, so firm. Morgan teased with his nails, scratching down Kisho's belly toward his cock, but never stopping to touch the enticing flesh.

His lover squirmed and pleaded in breathy moans, but he didn't deny their play. Morgan shifted closer and let go of Kisho's nipple. He stared down at slumberous brown eyes regarding him with sheer need.

Not sure who moved first, Morgan met Kisho's mouth and kissed with all the passion he had inside him. A dueling battle commenced, tongues and lips taunting for dominance while Morgan rubbed his chest against Kisho's. He remained half on, half off his lover, trying to remain in control. Morgan knew that once his cock touched any part of Kisho, he'd have a hard time stopping himself from mounting and fucking him.

A deep rumble vibrated in Kisho's chest. Not a purr, a challenging growl.

"Want to play?" Morgan murmured against the corner of Kisho's mouth.

"Yeah," Kisho breathed back and tried to muscle Morgan under him.

But Morgan wouldn't give him the upper hand. He shoved Kisho down and called on his own strength to pin Kisho's hands on either side of him. But the movement had unintended consequences. In doing so, Morgan blanketed Kisho's body, and the moment his cock rubbed against Kisho's, he lost it.

"Fuck, oh fuck." He kissed Kisho with a desperation Kisho returned. They rubbed against each other, humping as each strained to release. Morgan pressed harder, forcing Kisho to spread

his legs as he tried to angle for penetration. It barely dawned on him to lube up, that dry, he might hurt his lover. And then reason returned when Kisho whispered his name, a plea to end their torment.

The sudden slack under him broke through the hunger.

Kisho closed his eyes and turned his head, baring his throat. Another conscious gesture of submission.

“You're mine. Say it.” Morgan hurried to grab the lube, but as he straddled Kisho, the Circ surprised him by taking charge.

“Yours, hmm?” Kisho gripped Morgan's waist and pulled him closer. “Give me a taste to remind me.” He stared at Morgan's cock and licked his lips.

The bunch of muscle in his biceps enthralled Morgan. The lust in his eyes, in his voice, and scent, captivated him. “Yeah, a taste. But don't make me come. I want to do that inside you.”

Kisho grunted and glanced to the table, then frowned. “No condoms.”

“You sure?” Morgan asked, trying to unscrew the tube of lube in his hands. But he couldn't stop shaking. He'd wanted this for so long. To finally have his fox, to join in perfect union with another.

“I said no condom. I want that seed inside me.” Kisho bared his fangs.

“God, I love it when you turn wild. I'm so close to coming,” Morgan groaned. “No condoms. Fuck, kitsu. I'm not going to last.”

And then Kisho yanked him the rest of the way closer, until Morgan's cock touched his lips. He swallowed Morgan's dick whole and sucked harder and harder, swirling his tongue around Morgan's shaft for that special surprise at the end.

Morgan thrust in and out, not able to let Kisho do all the work. He fucked his lover's mouth, watching himself disappear inside his lover. *His mate.*

“My kitsu, I've been waiting so long for this.” Morgan would be damned if he'd cry. He was no pussy, but he'd never seen anything more beautiful—more right—than Kisho accepting all of him. His climax pressed close, but he held on. “Let go. Let me come inside you.”

Kisho sucked harder and cupped his balls.

Morgan gasped as Kisho licked his slit. He grabbed a fistful of Kisho's hair and pulled until Kisho let him go. But the extreme suction made him tremble with the need to come.

"Lubed you up some," Kisho said and licked at his elongated fangs. "Now fuck me."

Morgan quickly slid a mass of lube over himself, needing to be slick, fast. He wouldn't chance hurting Kisho for the world. "You giving me orders? I don't think so. *I'm* in charge now. You and your beast belong to *me*." Morgan instinctively tamped down on Kisho's energy, cutting off Kisho's ability to *change*. The beast remained, but dormant.

Kisho's cock grew harder, and he bucked under Morgan. "Oh, fuck. That's hot. Get in me, now. Oh yeah. Gonna come all over you," he rasped.

Morgan nudged Kisho's legs wider so he could position himself for penetration. Once seated at the entrance he sought, he grabbed Kisho's wrists and held him down.

Then he pushed slowly into that tight hole until he breached the snug passage.

Kisho moaned and stared into Morgan's eyes.

They didn't look away from each other as Morgan seated himself all the way inside his lover. "Kitsu, my little fox. Finally mine. All mine."

Kisho lifted his chin and gasped as Morgan began thrusting, long, deep pushes that touched the very deepest part of his Circ.

"Oh fuck. Yes, yes," Kisho moaned and shuddered under him. A splash of wetness hit his belly, but Morgan didn't stop.

"That's it, kitsu. Mark me. Let everyone know I belong to you."

Kisho's beast let out a pleased growl. "Yeah, *mine*." He continued to spend, his seed coating both their bodies.

As much as Morgan wanted to prolong this ecstasy, he couldn't hold on. He quickened his pace, ramming into his mate. The furious climax overtook him, showering sparks of pleasure all over his body, mind, and soul.

"Yes, baby, oh yeah. Take all of it," he moaned as he climaxed, releasing inside Kisho.

Kisho's eyes blazed, full of life, full of pleasure. The remaining barriers holding them apart crashed around them, and a new, powerful sense of togetherness brought Morgan to such rapture, he had to blink away tears of profound relief.

When he regained his senses, Morgan lay on his back. He must have passed out, because Kisho lay next to him and washed him off with a damp, soapy cloth. His lover smelled like lemon soap, clean, tasty. And hard again, Morgan noted with sleepy satisfaction.

“You share my energy,” Kisho said.

“Your body, your cum. All of you. Fuck me, you are amazing. Your ass is perfect, the way I knew it'd be.”

Kisho's shy smile entranced him. “You're not so bad yourself.”

“Kitsu, I—”

Kisho blinked, and a guarded expression stopped Morgan from confessing his love. *You're pushing too soon. Stop it. Ease him into it, or you'll lose him.*

“Why do you call me that?”

“I want to answer you. I really do.” Morgan sucked in a breath when the cleansing rub over his cock turned into a sensual massage. “But, I...” He panted as Kisho teased him.

“You're really big. I mean, you're tall and built. But your dick is huge. Stretched me out real good, Morgan.” Kisho's soft voice mesmerized. “You like my mouth?”

“Oh yeah.” Morgan couldn't believe he was hard again. “You're incredible, you know that?”

Kisho ran his tongue over his lips. “What about my ass? You like my ass?”

“Shit yeah. Kitsu, please. I want you with me this time. Together. But if you keep doing that—*fuck*.” Morgan arched up when Kisho tugged hard on his balls.

The bite of pain shocked the hell out of him because it felt so damned good.

“I want to see you in clamps,” Kisho whispered and kissed his chest. He continued to fondle Morgan, no longer cupping his sac but now stroking his shaft. “Such pretty nipples, Morgan. Ever had them pinched? Bit? Ever had someone bite you while you come?”

Morgan shook his head, unable to speak as Kisho yanked his dick up and down, harder and harder. His precum made a decent lube, but the jerky motions of Kisho's large fist started to hurt, and once again his desire increased.

“What are you doing to me?” he breathed.

"I want answers. But I find I don't want them as much as I want to see you hurting while you come. It's the most amazing thing."

"Shit. You're a pain junkie? My gentle kitsu?" Morgan gasped as Kisho licked his nipple, then pierced it with his fang. Kisho's hand tightened around his cock at the same time, and the added pressure seized him with white, scorching pleasure. "*Kitsu, yes, yes.*"

A stream of cum jetted into the air. Morgan moaned and spewed, then came harder when Kisho swallowed the remainder of his orgasm.

Grinding into his lover's face, Morgan shook until he was bone-dry. But he didn't have time to relax because Kisho rose above him and shoved his hot, pulsing cock between Morgan's lips.

"I'm in charge now, aren't I, mate?" Kisho's beast stared out at him through slit pupils. A partial *change*, and one that made Morgan hungry to taste the beast.

He answered by taking Kisho to the back of his throat. Squeezing Kisho's balls, the way Kisho had just done to him, Morgan gave his mate back the painful pleasure he seemed to need. Kisho fucked his mouth with short, sharp bursts, his uneven, raspy breaths growing shorter as he neared his own climax.

"Yes, swallow me, mate. Take my cum. Eat me." He moaned and slammed once more into Morgan's mouth before climaxing.

Morgan swallowed a mouthful and more of Kisho, not wanting their bliss to end. Each pulse, each taste of his mate, sated another hunger, one he hadn't realized he'd had. On some level, Morgan was changing. He knew it, could feel it, and didn't care. Nothing mattered but his fox. And now that the hunt was over, he intended to indulge for as long as he could.

Kisho pulled out and slithered back down Morgan's body, lying on top. "I'm going to fuck you, too. Until there's not one part of your body that doesn't belong to me," he growled, sounding and looking more inhuman with each passing second.

"Let me see all of you."

Kisho stared at him with eyes that glowed. The pupils subtly elongated, now slit like those of a cat, a giant predator too sated to kill, but one who no doubt intended to play with his prey. "You sure?"

“Trust me. I want to see what's mine.” Morgan threw a hint of mean into his voice, needing Kisho's beast to recognize that just because Kisho was bigger, he wasn't necessarily badder.

Kisho moved off Morgan and lay down next to him. Morgan turned on his side to watch, intrigued and excited as the beast rose to take command.

Using the energy swirling between the two of them, and feeling high on the sweet scent of orange and cinnamon that filled the room, Morgan unconsciously pulled a tendril of energy from Kisho and wrapped it around himself, more than content with the feeling of belonging.

Kisho trembled. “I don't know what you did, but my beast loved it. Do it again.” As Kisho's skin darkened, his body elongated, and his muscle mass grew. Morgan stole another band of energy and hugged it tight.

A loud purr vibrated next to him, and Morgan stared into the face of the inhuman creature he'd fallen in love with.

“Fuck, you're so hot when you're raw. I love your beast, kitsu.” *I love you.* Morgan kissed Kisho's larger mouth and licked at his fangs. Then he leaned closer and shoved his throat at Kisho's mouth. “Come on. Taste. You know you want to.”

The purring grew louder. Kisho opened his mouth and nuzzled Morgan's throat. The danger of having the beast so close, so near to doing him harm if he barely tried, turned Morgan on yet again.

“Hmm, tasty,” Kisho rasped. He nipped at Morgan's throat, but Morgan barely felt the sting, his attention once again drawn to his unbelievable recuperative powers.

“I'm hard again,” he said in amazement. Even for him, this was unusual.

“Like a Circ.” Kisho sucked at his throat and lapped the small wound closed with his tongue. “God, you taste so good. You're mine now. And that should be bad. But I can't think of why at the moment.”

Kisho suddenly sat up and pulled Morgan with him, caging him in his hold from front to back. He forced Morgan's legs wide and lifted him higher, positioning Morgan's ass against the tip of something hard. A large erection prodded Morgan's puckered hole. “You like pain. I can smell it. And I can see it.” Kisho kissed his neck and leaned over his shoulder, fixating on his cock. “How fast do you heal?” Kisho shifted his hips, and Morgan felt something hot and wide tease his anus.

“Hell. I knew this was coming.”

“Oh yeah. Coming. I like the sound of that. Open up, lover. Because it's time my beast had some fun too.”

Morgan wanted to protest, but he instinctively knew Kisho, though seemingly too large to accommodate, would fit. He had to accept all of his mate. And he would.

What he hadn't counted on was how he'd make it happen.

Chapter Seven

Kisho didn't know what to say. His beast hadn't stopped purring since he'd come hard into Morgan's tight ass the first time. Hours later, he still couldn't believe it.

"You're Circ." He continued to spend, in awe at this marathon sex he shouldn't possibly be having. With the team, he had sex as a beast and could go for a long time, until they sated the mating heat.

But he and Morgan had been fucking as beasts for *hours* without a break. Ever since Morgan had subtly *changed* into a weird kind of human-Circ hybrid, Kisho's arousal had been off the charts. Morgan had grown taller, more muscular, and slightly darker. But his eyes didn't change, nor did he grow fangs or claws. All of him had simply been more. And his strength matched that of a Circ's, measure for measure.

Kisho's dick ached as he finished jetting into Morgan's ass. Taking turns on top had at least evened the playing field, but Kisho acknowledged he liked Morgan in charge better than being in charge.

"Oh, man," Morgan breathed as he shook out the last few drops from his shaft and rubbed them over Kisho's belly. "I think we're okay now. I hope," he muttered. "Is this normal for you guys?"

"No. I don't know what the hell that was." Kisho ran a hand through his hair and watched as Morgan slowly *changed* back to normal. As he did, Kisho *changed* with him, his beast finally sated. "For that matter, I don't know what the hell you are. You say you're not Circ, but you are. You call me kitsu, and I've seen you in my dreams for years." And how it never ended well. "I need answers."

"I need answers, *mate*," Morgan said with a smile.

Kisho smiled back without meaning to. "Anyone ever tell you you're obnoxious?"

"All the time." Morgan lifted himself off Kisho and headed to the shower.

Kisho joined him. They didn't speak as they cleaned up. But even the soap couldn't mask their combined scent.

Morgan sighed and rinsed the shampoo from his hair. "Your scent goes straight to my head, you know?" He slicked back the water from his hair and stepped closer to Kisho.

He stood taller and had broader shoulders. When he backed Kisho to the wall, Kisho stared into his eyes, aware of a deep sense of belonging that should have scared him. After all, Morgan featured in every one of his visions involving his own death. But he couldn't find the desire to move away.

Morgan slowly leaned closer until they were a breath apart. "You ran, kitsu, but you couldn't hide. I came for you, and I finally have what's mine."

The words sounded familiar, but Kisho couldn't think because Morgan kissed him. Different from the other touches they'd shared, Morgan's mouth comforted, soothed, loved. Kisho didn't know how to handle the softness and tried to move away, but Morgan wouldn't let him.

"Shh, it's okay. I just want to hold you." Morgan gathered him in his arms, as if Kisho were precious, and just...held him.

An odd, unnamed emotion caught in Kisho's chest.

Morgan stroked his back and his hair and murmured words of praise and affection as he kissed his cheeks. "That's it. Ease into it, baby. Trust me. I have you."

The shields holding anything and everything at a distance began to dissolve as if they'd never existed. Kisho tried to remain firm, but he sagged in Morgan's arms. Before he knew it, he was leaning against the man. Unlike before, nothing sexual clouded their embrace. Only caring and a genuine warmth between Kisho and the man he feared he could seriously come to love.

Morgan reached to turn off the shower. He grabbed a towel and dried off. Then he dried Kisho, who was too exhausted to move. Leading Kisho by the arm, Morgan brought him back to the bed and tucked him under the blankets.

"I'm not a kid."

"Trust me, I know. I'd never do to a kid what you and I did in this very bed," Morgan chided. "Now let go. I have you, baby. Just sleep. You need it. I promise I'll keep you safe."

An odd choice of words, considering four tough-ass Circs, a psychic Mrs. Sharpe, and an ex-government agent/handyman guarded the house.

But when Morgan donned a pair of sweatpants and slid in next to him, Kisho fell promptly asleep.

A gray-brown owl flew overhead in a dark sky layered with moonlight. Under the owl along a path in the forest, a fox ran, the cool wind breezing through his thick fur like fingers. The fox yipped and played, and the owl spotted a second fox with him, one slightly larger and redder. The pair disappeared into the forest, and the owl narrowed in on a field mouse just ahead.

Before he could swoop down on his prey, a hawk flew out of nowhere and intercepted his meal. The sky brightened, night turning to day in an instant. The owl vanished, and the hawk landed in the back garden of the Circ estate, where he dropped the mouse. It scurried away, hiding in the shadows of the building.

Where the winter garden should have been, an exotic jungle of bright flowers and lush plants overwhelmed the rock-bordered bed. A feeling of peace and healing surrounded the hawk, and he gradually changed shape from bird to beast to man. Jules stood staring into a bright blue flower, his aura a visible glow around him.

And then Captain William Delancey appeared and laughed. "I'll win in the end. You'll see. You can't keep me down, Hawkins. None of you can."

Fallon, Tersch, Olivia, and Kisho boxed the captain in, watching as he decayed where he stood, the blood leeching out of his body and falling into pools that contaminated the very ground.

"Don't touch it!" Morgan shouted from behind Kisho.

Everyone turned to see him fighting through a dark fog to reach Kisho. Jules yelled, but when Kisho looked back, Delancey and Jules had vanished. At the base of the blue flower sat a box. Kisho picked it up and looked through a small hole, where he saw Jules, impossibly small, lying still, caught in the dark.

A roar sounded, the noise of mutants and rogue Circs surrounding them. As they changed into their beasts, Kisho realized Morgan was no longer anywhere to be seen. Frantic to find his mate, he tore through the forests, homing in on the mutants shrieking at something he couldn't

see. The scent of blood filled the air, the coppery taste offensive as it shattered the peaceful existence of his garden.

A garden that no longer brightened the house but crumbled with rot and a repugnant stench Kisho knew all too well. The smell of death, so close, so strong.

“Kitsu! I need you!”

Kisho bolted upright in bed and reined in the beast clawing to get out. A glance around showed him alone. The quiet in the room bothered him, and he hurried out of bed. After a quick shower to wipe away the sweat of his nightmare, he dressed and left his room in search of answers.

He wanted to talk to Mrs. Sharpe about his dream that had been anything but normal. Not a vision, but nothing so simple as his subconscious easing into REM sleep either. So very strange. Kisho saw the future. Not interpretations of it, but the actual future. This dream had been more like a fantasy, a shaman's vision filled with portents and imagery he couldn't decipher.

And Morgan, that crafty, sexy bastard, had avoided his questions once again. Incredible sex followed by such comfort, such utter tranquility. Kisho hadn't felt such care in years, not since his father had first found him decades ago. It had taken time and patience, but Master Chief Petty Officer Paul Leads had eventually taught his son to trust and believe in himself. Losing his father after joining the navy had hurt, but Kisho had his SEAL brothers to see him through, and then his Circ family to help him through the tough transition from man to beast.

Morgan turned everything upside down.

How the hell did he know to call me kitsu? Only Kisho's maternal grandmother had called him that, what felt like a lifetime ago. Before his grandfather had thrown him to the streets, she'd told Kisho that his mate would one day find him. She'd pressed the fox figurine into his hands, and with tears in her eyes, prayed that her kitsu would be safe.

Morgan had the exact same figurine. A companion piece to the one Kisho held. And Morgan called him kitsu. No coincidence, not since Kisho had been dreaming about a man with haunting green eyes, a domineering sensuality, and knowledge of his nickname. For years he'd had visions of Morgan, but lately, they'd been all consuming.

Kisho hadn't known if he'd been dreaming or not when Morgan had rescued him from Montaña's men three months ago. And he still wasn't sure how or if Morgan had healed him.

Hell, I don't know how he healed himself from that bomb blast, or how he turned half-Circ either. Morgan's holding out on me.

Surprisingly, Kisho's beast didn't much care. So much sex had mellowed the damned creature, forcing Kisho to rely on his human instincts.

He stalked through the mansion and found Morgan in Mrs. Sharpe's office.

She smiled when she saw him. "Good. Kisho, I was just going to send Morgan up to find you. I wanted to talk to you about what happened the other day."

Morgan turned and winked. "Hey, Kisho. You look much better."

"Yes, well rested." Mrs. Sharpe glanced up as the others filed inside her study and sat. Jules, Tersch, Olivia, and Fallon soon filled the room, making the large study look small.

"Bout time," Tersch muttered to Kisho. "Talk about lazing in bed. Damn, son. You put Fallon to shame."

Fallon scowled. "I'm not lazy. I'm married."

"Thanks," Olivia said wryly. "Good to know I'm the reason for your sloth."

"We're all glad to see you looking better, Kisho," Jules added. "And Morgan, you look a lot better than the last time I saw you."

Morgan nodded. "Thanks. I feel better. Sorry for freaking you out when I healed. Had no idea what would happen, but I had to try."

"I wasn't 'freaked,' just a bit surprised." Jules slid an irritated glance at Fallon, who slid lower in his seat, using Olivia to shield him.

"*Your buddy has a big mouth,*" Fallon sent to Kisho. "*I told Morgan not to say anything.*"

Kisho glared at Morgan, who conveniently turned back to Mrs. Sharpe.

She shuffled a few folders then put them down on her desk and looked around the room. "I'm pleased you're all here. We need to discuss a few things. First, I—"

Ava rushed into the room. "You were going to start without me?" From her rapid breathing, Kisho figured she'd run through the halls. She ignored Tersch and pulled up a chair next to Morgan.

"I have a few questions of my own," Jules growled, his attention on Morgan.

Kisho leaned against the wall and crossed his arms over his chest. Lover or no lover, Kisho wanted to hear what the hell Morgan was hiding.

"You might as well tell them all at once," Mrs. Sharpe suggested. "I've noticed a tendency in Circs to become slightly more agitated when in a small, enclosed space. Elevated aggression."

Morgan nodded. "Yeah, that's what Doc said."

"Reynolds," Tersch warned. "Jules asked you a question."

Kisho wasn't going to interfere. Or so he told himself. But he stepped closer to Morgan, ready to intercede if Tersch tried to take him to the ground.

Morgan stood and joined Kisho against the wall to face everyone. "Go ahead and ask your questions."

"What are you?" Kisho asked first.

Morgan looked at him, really looked at him, and answered, "I'm a man. Not a Circ, not some war machine sent by the government to spy on you, or a mercenary hired by Montaña to kill you. So let's put that to bed right now. I'm psychic. That's got to be obvious by now." He glanced across the room. "Even to you, Frederik."

Tersch tried to leap from his chair, but Jules's quick grab kept him seated.

Jules growled, "Without all the obnoxious commentary, Morgan. Just spit it out. You're psychic. When you spontaneously healed right in front of me, I figured you weren't your average mercenary. So what's your deal?"

"I was born this way."

"You were born a moron?" Ava asked with a snicker.

Morgan frowned at her before continuing, "My family has a long history of psychic ability. A lot like you Circs."

"That's true," Mrs. Sharpe agreed. "The natural instinct all humans have for self-preservation is exaggerated with the Circe serum. Intuition has been argued for years to be a kind of psychic phenomena."

Morgan nodded. "Right. But seeing the future, reading auras, emotions, and minds isn't normal, even for Circs. The guys up North don't do any of that. They turn into beasts and fight bad guys. Period."

“That's true,” Olivia said, thoughtful. She turned to Fallon, defensive. “Well, he's right. Even for Circs, you guys aren't exactly normal.”

“Not 'you guys.' *Us*. That's you too, honey. *Mate*.”

“So what, exactly, do you do?” Tersch asked. “You healed yourself, but it took Kisho, Mrs. Sharpe, and Ava to feed you the energy. You some kind of vampire or what?”

All eyes shifted to Morgan.

“I deal with energy in weird ways. I don't know how exactly to describe it.” Morgan ran a hand through his hair, and Kisho tried very hard not to stare at the bunch of muscle in his arms and chest under his body-hugging T-shirt. “I don't get hurt. If I do, I heal right away. I don't consciously do it; at least, I hadn't until two days ago. I normally just absorb the energy around me and use it, the way you breathe. It's an unconscious response to need.”

“You're half-Circ,” Kisho accused, wanting Morgan to stop screwing around and tell the team.

“Actually, I'm not.” Morgan sounded apologetic. “I'm different, yeah. But I've never had the Circe serum, and my family was never exposed to it. We're just a different breed of people, I guess you could say.”

“Different, my ass.” Jules straightened beside Tersch and looked at Mrs. Sharpe. “You specifically chose Morgan to join us. You knew all about him before he arrived. What aren't you telling us? And why does he seem to have so much insight into Montaña?”

Mrs. Sharpe squared her shoulders. “Jules, I don't tell you half of what I know, simply because you need to focus on specifics, not the bigger picture.”

“That's bullshit,” Jules answered. “Admiral London kept me in the loop.”

“Did he?” Mrs. Sharpe asked quietly.

Kisho saw that Jules's patience had neared its end and intervened to prevent a showdown. “Hold on. Morgan still has a few things to explain. Like how he turned Circ.” Once again, his lover had managed to avoid answering the question.

“You said that before. He's Circ?” Tersch rose and sniffed. “He doesn't smell Circ.” His eyes narrowed. “He smells like you.”

Kisho flushed.

Morgan rubbed the back of his neck and muttered, "I borrowed your energy, Kisho."

Jules shook his head. "But you didn't turn Circ after you took Kisho's energy to heal."

"Yeah, but I also took energy from Mrs. Sharpe and Ava. I didn't think too much about it. I just told Kisho what to do, and he did it."

"But how did you tell him?" Fallon asked. "You said you're not a telepath."

"He's not," Mrs. Sharpe answered. "His energy had parted from his body after the blast. He used his tie to Kisho to heal himself. Those self-preservation instincts he was talking about? He used them to live."

"What do you mean, 'parted from his body'?" Olivia frowned. "Like he was dead?"

Ava swore. "Yeah. Mr. Moron—I mean, Morgan—dies a lot. He's a real pain when it comes to burial arrangements. You're never quite sure when it's time."

Everyone stopped and stared at Morgan in shock.

"Is she serious?" Jules asked.

Tersch growled, "Just how the hell does Ava know so much about you, Reynolds?"

The others groused over the confusing information. Kisho wasn't satisfied either. He'd seen his lover turn Circ, had felt the larger, expansive body. Hell, Morgan had satisfied his beast, and only a Circ could do that. Why was Morgan lying? He leaned closer and asked again, through the noise building as his team began arguing with each other, Mrs. Sharpe, and Ava.

Morgan whispered back, "I turned Circ when you were inside me. During sex. That's the difference. Your energy then was your beast, and I shared it to complete you. I'm yours, remember?"

Kisho hadn't considered that, and it made a weird kind of sense. If Morgan really did manipulate energy, then he'd tapped into Kisho's beast during sex. No wonder he'd been able to handle the rougher stuff.

"I'm not Circ, not really. Actually, you're a lot more like me than you know." Morgan finished, confusing Kisho once more.

A loud whistle quieted the cacophony around them. "That's better." Ava turned to her boss. "Mrs. S.? The floor's all yours."

“Thank you, dear. Gentlemen and ladies, let me clarify something. This is *my* meeting, and you'll remember to keep quiet unless asked to speak.” The wave of power that slapped at them all had Kisho shrinking back and Morgan swearing under his breath and holding his head.

“Yeah, sure. Got it,” Morgan rasped, and the others agreed.

“Now. One, Morgan is psychic. Two, he's on our side. Three, yes, he can die and somehow revive himself, but he doesn't know how many lives he has, so putting himself needlessly in harm's way is a stupid risk.” The look she sent Morgan made Kisho glad she hadn't directed it at him. “Four, we know where Delancey is now. He's definitely with Montaña. The incident at the dock that blew up involved several of Montaña's unhappy employees. They were more than willing to share what they knew.”

Jules smiled, an alarming grin that said Delancey was a walking dead man.

“And five, Kisho has something he needs to share with me. I'd like the rest of you to file out while Kisho stays behind. Jules, take the others and Morgan and go train. My time with Kisho shouldn't take long. Then you can plan to take out Montaña and Delancey for good. Once you have a strategy in place, we'll meet to go over details.”

“Right.” Ava grabbed Olivia and dragged her to her feet. “Come on, Olivia. I have coordinates, but we need your intelligence system to coordinate everything.”

Olivia leaned down to kiss Fallon. “See you later.” She left with Ava.

Kisho looked from Morgan to his team. “Don't kill him,” he warned Tersch.

“I won't. I promise. We're just going to train some more. Right, Jules?”

“Right.” Jules gripped Morgan's arm and pulled him to the door. He said to Kisho, “Come to the gym when you're through. We'll occupy Morgan while we're waiting.”

Morgan groaned in protest and soon disappeared with the others.

Kisho's beast gave a soft growl of displeasure because not only had Morgan gone with other males, but he'd left, period.

Mrs. Sharpe smiled knowingly. “You seem much better now. Funny how Circs settle once they've bonded with another, hmm?”

He really wished the woman would turn off that insight. It was alarming how much she seemed to know and how little they actually knew about her.

Kisho didn't answer her, not sure how he felt about a mate. On the one hand, it gave him real joy, and on another, real dread. He didn't look forward to explaining Morgan to the guys, and thought if he avoided it long enough, an answer would appear. Maybe he could explain his new "boyfriend" as a result of Circ hormones. That might work. Not his fault he was attracted to a guy. Not as if Kisho actively sought males for sex. Except that he did. Christ. Tersch would have a field day with his "fruitiness."

"Kisho?" Mrs. Sharpe pulled his attention. "Tell me about your dream."

Yeah, best to deal with what he could handle at the moment. "It wasn't a vision, but it was more than a dream." He described it in detail. "I can't help thinking Jules is still in danger. And the fact that the danger took place here, in our home, worries me."

She frowned. "Me too. The two foxes have to be you and Morgan. The owl? I'm not sure. The hawk would be Jules, of course. But the flowers? The light? More exotic jungle, hmm? Everything we've been dealing with concerning Delancey lately has a connection to that laboratory in Brazil. I have a feeling we might have missed it."

"How? When we got there, everything was gone. We checked over the place thoroughly. Trust me; nothing was there but dead scientists and useless trash."

The look in her eye disturbed him. A dot of red flared in the center of her pupil before it disappeared as if it had never been. But Kisho had seen it. What the hell did that mean?

"What if the lab we found the first time wasn't the lab at all, but an annex? A place designed to mislead us?"

"But I *saw* it, and I saw Delancey there."

"I believe you did."

"I don't understand." Kisho was starting to get a headache.

"Kisho, look for me. *See* the laboratory again. Focus, the way you know you can."

"Right now?"

"Yes, right now."

He didn't want to deal with this, but he wanted answers to these never-ending questions. Mrs. Sharpe wanted him to look into the future, so he'd try to get something.

He sat down on the floor, crossed his legs, and peered inward. Taking himself to the calm center from which everything appeared, he tried to focus. But he saw nothing but Morgan. Frustrated because he couldn't think without his mate's face in his mind's eye, he tried to go *through* Morgan.

When he did, he touched the magic. The pleasure, the sheer belonging he'd felt while in Morgan's arms. Their time in the shower and in bed, together, touching. Two individuals, one heart.

And that simply, everything else faded. He sat in his psychic center and concentrated on William Delancey. For the first time ever, the object of his search immediately appeared.

He looked older, tired, and worried.

William Delancey faced a man Kisho had tried like hell to see before but never could. Colonel Ricardo Montaña was a large man. Brutish and evil looking, with a scar along his cheek, a thick mustache, and dark eyes that gleamed with sick satisfaction as they watched several men dump bodies into the ocean.

"They served their purpose, and your monsters have fed, no?"

Delancey snarled, "We're stuck at sea for another week, under orders to keep a low profile until the boss says otherwise. Great going, Ricardo. You killed them, but my rogues aren't done. We'll need more men, women, whatever the fuck you can come up with, or those things in the hold will tear through everything to feed their hunger."

"A hunger we know well, don't we, my friend?" Montaña laughed and crudely grabbed his own crotch. "The whores, they swallow much, eh? The drug is good. Gives the man much power in mind and body."

"And some fucked-up headaches." Delancey rubbed his forehead, his once-dark hair now fully gray. "I saw them again, Ricardo. The Circs were here, on board the yacht. I shot Hayashi and the other one, but Hawkins killed me again. Tersch and Fallon I couldn't see. But I died. It's always Hawkins."

Ricardo stroked his thick mustache. "This one intrigues me. Nothing stops him. I like that very much. And the other one. This Reynolds. My men know of him. He's a problem, William. One that needs to be taken care of."

"I thought you were going to take care of Hayashi. Fuck, you threw him off a goddamn roof! But instead of dying, he survived and killed more of our men last week. Just a few days ago, the navy tried to get them to talk. If they'd known anything, we'd be hanging from a rope."

"Which is why I tell the peons nada." Montaña smiled. Nothing seemed to bother him, and the animated spark to his gaze looked and felt unnatural. "We continue to manufacture the product here, but it won't last. We need more of the flower."

Delancey shrugged. "So ship some more in."

Montaña's smile faded. "We can't, not now. The heat is everywhere. We need to take a break, let the authorities have a few of our criminal friends to satisfy their thirst for justice. Then we bring over more of the flower. Jefe doesn't mind. In fact, he agrees. By early April, we'll be set for a broader distribution. Oh, and Chung Hee Park wants in."

"The North Koreans? I thought we were dealing with no-names and a few third world countries."

"Not anymore. Not now that we know the formula really works and the repercussions of a traumatic death no longer worry us."

"True. I've just had some bad headaches, but nothing worse than an erection that won't quit."

"Yes, that little item was my idea. Nothing like coming into knowledge while coming, eh?"

Delancey snorted. "So you talked to the big boss. What did he say? Did he mention me?"

The vision started to fade.

"No, but I finally met him in person. You won't believe who we've been working for all this time."

"Who, Ricardo? Is it—" Outside noise made it hard to hear him.

Ricardo smiled and fingered the scar along his cheek. "No. It's actually..."

Kisho swore as he roused before he gleaned anything else.

"Well?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"They've perfected the formula."

She sighed. "I was afraid of that. Now we not only have to fight criminals from other countries, but psychic terrorists as well. We need to eliminate the lab concocting the drug."

“They're making the stuff here, on U.S. soil,” Kisho said, thinking fast. “But they need a flower from their lab in Brazil. You're right. We missed the main lab the first time. We need to go back. I'll look again and see if I can find—”

“No. Not yet. First we find and eliminate Delancey and Montaña. Then we work on the rest. Trust me, I'll make Delancey share every bit of information he knows.”

He had no doubt she could. “I also heard them talk about a boss. They're clearly working for someone else, a shadow Montaña recently saw. But before I could find out who it was, the vision left me.”

She nodded. “You're not meant to know yet. Like I keep reminding you, the future isn't written in stone. Some things have to unfold as they are. And those you can't see.”

He'd often thought the same. Kisho rolled his neck, feeling uncomfortably stiff. “Man, that hurts.”

“You've been deep for two hours. Of course you're stiff.”

“Two hours?” He started. “I've never had a vision that long.” A few minutes, half an hour at most. What the hell? *Two hours?*

Her satisfaction should have bothered him, because there was something in her smile that agitated his beast. “But now that you've mated, you'll find information flows when you need it. You'll have an easier time accessing your abilities, Kisho. Just accept Morgan, and everything will work out as it's meant to.”

Shit. Morgan. He'd been alone with the team for two hours. Kisho could only pray he hadn't pissed off the entire team. Fallon would play nice, because Olivia liked Morgan. And Jules would keep Tersch in line.

If he wanted to.

Chapter Eight

“The problem isn't me. It's you pricks,” Morgan pointed out again, not caring in the slightest how upset the Circs were. He wiped his lips and spat the blood welling from a cut inside his mouth.

He'd dodged their verbal inquisitions for over an hour while shielding himself from an impressive psychic assault as Fallon and Jules tried to peer into his mind and soul. Then they'd added some physical “training” to further weaken his shields. Dealing with Tersch's brawn and Hawkin's and Fallon's brains was a major hassle. But humor conceded he acknowledge how well the Circs worked together as a team.

“You know, this just isn't getting old. I thought I'd get tired of pounding him. But I'm not.” Tersch grinned and rubbed his knuckles. “Check it out. Fucker's mouth is healing as we speak.”

“And you wonder why no one likes you,” Morgan muttered.

“I want to know why Kisho thinks of you as his.” Jules's quiet voice settled over the group and stopped Tersch's raised fist. “Like you belong to him.”

Fallon and Jules exchanged a long look. *Damned telepath.*

“Just say out loud whatever the hell you're thinking. Freak,” he added to annoy Fallon.

It worked. Fallon bared his teeth, long-ass incisors that should have threatened Morgan, except seeing them made him think of Kisho and Kisho's beast.

“Yep, he keeps flashing to thoughts of Kisho.” Fallon nodded to his teammates. “Tersch, you owe me.”

“Fuck, no.” Tersch glared and dived at Morgan again.

Except this time, Morgan was through playing. These men meant something to Kisho. He knew that. It was vital they accept him. Taking their crap had gotten him nowhere. He dodged Tersch's clumsy attack and spun around with a swift kick to Tersch's gut.

He didn't move the man back but a few inches, but he'd landed a blow. Tersch's gaze narrowed. "Finally. Started to think you were a real pussy. Good to know I'm not wrong."

Morgan bared his own teeth in a smile that didn't match his eyes. "I didn't know the word 'think' was in your vocabulary."

Tersch growled. "You know, I didn't like you the minute I laid eyes on you, and I don't like you now. This is for Ava." He lashed out so quickly, Morgan could do nothing but take the blow.

He jerked back as what felt like a cement truck lifted him off his feet. He landed on his ass, his cheek throbbing as he slowly healed. But he knew he deserved that.

"And this is for Alicia," Tersch followed and tried to kick him in the groin.

Morgan moved to save his dick and ended up with a solid blow to his hip. "*Shit*. Ease off. I apologized for that."

"But I still don't know how you did it." Fallon leaned close and tugged Morgan's head up by his hair. "I don't trust you, Morgan. Too many secrets, and you're way too obsessed over Kisho."

Morgan saw Jules's eyes narrow.

Fallon continued, "Olivia swears you're jonesing for him. How do we know you're not using him for some other reason?"

"What exactly does Olivia know?" Tersch asked.

Fallon let him go and straightened.

"Yeah, Fallon. What exactly does Olivia know?" Jules asked as well, a whisper of meanness lacing his words.

Fallon flinched. *Good. Let them turn on each other and leave me alone.* Morgan rubbed his jaw and tried not to moan. He slowly rolled to his knees.

Jules yanked him to his feet and shoved him at Tersch, who locked an arm around his neck and refused to let him go.

"Fallon," Jules warned and bared his teeth. He walked right up into Fallon's space, a clear show of dominance that seemed to daunt the easygoing Circ.

"Shit. Okay, okay. Easy." Fallon held up his hands and backed away. "Olivia thinks Morgan is in love with Kisho."

“So? Olivia wants all of us to mate. Not gonna happen,” Tersch said through gritted teeth and tightened his arm around Morgan's neck.

Fallon shook his head. “Yeah, but there's more. Remember when we found Kisho at the Sunfield building? He was broken and bruised, should have died?”

The three of them quieted, and Morgan felt a surge of rage, recalling what Montaña's men had tried to do to his lover.

“Morgan saved him. Kisho kept seeing green eyes, watched Morgan lift him from the ground and take him into the building. That's who put Kisho on that table and saved him. And man, sometimes when we're deep in the mating heat, Kisho has these visions of green eyes. Big-time lust, man.” Fallon's cheeks flushed.

Everyone stared at Morgan.

“What?”

“None of us have green eyes.” Jules didn't speak with the same bite he'd had before. “So Kisho mated you, hmm?”

“*What?*” Tersch squeezed so hard, Morgan feared he'd break his neck.

Jules snorted. “Tersch, let him go. Hell, Morgan, I told Kisho to find out what you were up to, but I never thought he'd whore for the answers.”

The minute Tersch gave him the space, Morgan dived at Jules and took him to the floor in one smooth glide. He nailed Jules twice before the others dragged him back.

“Shit,” Fallon gasped.

Morgan fought like a man possessed. It was all Fallon and Tersch could do to hold on to him. “Kisho did *nothing* wrong, asshole. And if you even try saying—”

Jules held up a hand as he rose. “Enough. Nice tackle. I knew you were a lot more lethal than you'd shown us.”

Morgan blinked, not sure about Jules's calm.

“Tersch, Fallon, let him go.”

“But Jules, he messed with Kisho. He hit you!” Tersch tightened his grip.

"I said let him go." The rumble of authority made both Circs release Morgan and step back. "Morgan, my team is tight, a cohesive unit. But you're not a part of us. You want my Kisho, hmm?"

Morgan couldn't help himself. "He's not yours. He's mine."

The gym was so silent that only the echo of their breaths could be heard.

"What's that?" Jules asked.

Morgan didn't want to alienate the team, but he had to make them understand. "Kisho is mine. He's always been mine."

"Explain the fox," Fallon said.

"What fox?" Tersch asked.

Morgan didn't want to answer any more questions. He wanted Kisho. "He means the jade fox in Kisho's bedroom, the one that matches mine. My aunt gave me that years ago, when I was just a kid. She told me to hold on to it, that when I found my kitsu, I'd know. And I found him."

"Huh?" Tersch stared from Morgan to the others, clearly confused.

Fallon nodded. "Guys, that small figurine in Kisho's room, the one Tersch makes fun of? Kisho's grandmother gave him that. Told him to hold on to it, that when he found its match, he'd know."

"How do you know that?" Morgan didn't like the idea Kisho would have shared something so personal with Fallon.

Tersch frowned. "Yeah, how do you know? Because Kisho never says shit about his family."

"Because they treated him like crap." Fallon sighed. "Look, I didn't want to betray a confidence. And I never meant to look into Kisho's head, but sometimes he doesn't shield so well. I couldn't help it," he said to Morgan in apology.

Jules growled, "Explain."

"Kisho's dad met and fell in love with his mom in Japan, where she lived. Except his mom came from a very conservative family. So when an American sailor knocked up his daughter, Kisho's grandfather forced her to hide her pregnancy and break off with her lover. Kisho's dad didn't even know about Kisho until he was sixteen."

Morgan's heart broke anew for his lover. He didn't like hearing the truth from Fallon, but since Kisho had yet to share, he'd take whatever he could get. Just how much more did Fallon know?

Fallon continued. "Kisho spent a few years with his mom's family. She died when he was two. His grandmother tried, but the grandfather was a real SOB. Kicked Kisho out when he was still a kid. Our buddy spent his childhood in the streets learning to fend for himself."

"Shit." Tersch blinked, stunned. "That royally sucks."

"Yeah." Fallon blew out a breath. "Look, don't tell Kisho I told you. He's really private, and I don't want him to think I was prying, when I wasn't."

Jules nodded, his gaze glued to Morgan's face. "Finish it, Fallon. Tell us the rest."

"Yeah, ah, well, so Kisho's dad finally returned on his last tour of duty to Japan. I'm not sure about details, but somehow, his dad found him and brought him home. Raised him right, loved him, and all that. Kisho eventually joined the navy, and the rest is history."

Everyone remained silent.

Morgan couldn't stand it any longer. He wanted Kisho. He turned to go, but Jules stopped him.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To get my mate."

"Mate? I thought you weren't Circ."

He didn't like Jules's probing. "Back off."

Jules took a step closer. "He's mine, Morgan. You want him, you have to go through me."

Morgan growled, "Fine." He didn't back down or look away from the danger growing in Jules's energy. The large man grew steadily larger, tearing through his shirt as he changed into a huge beast.

Morgan didn't care. For Kisho, he'd go through hell. And he knew he had something to prove if he hoped for a future with his lover.

"You smell like him," Jules said.

"He's mine."

"Not until I say he is."

“This is friggin' bizarre.” Tercsh shook his head. “Who knew Kisho would go for a dude?”

“We all did, dumbass.” Fallon snorted.

Morgan didn't answer, but he turned when he caught the scent of orange spice in the air.

“Here it comes,” Tersch muttered. “Kisho,” he said in a louder voice. “Where you been, buddy?”

Kisho growled. Morgan didn't dare take his eyes from Jules, not able to ignore the threat a heartbeat from ripping his head from his body. And then Kisho pushed himself between them, in all his *changed*, beastly glory. His skin a shade darker, hair down to the small of his back, and those large hands ending in claws showcased the predator normally buried in his lover.

“What's this about claiming Morgan? Your new mate, Kisho?” Jules rumbled, the threat clear in his tone.

Morgan didn't intend to let Kisho fight his battles, but Fallon pulled him back.

“Get off me.”

“No.” Fallon *changed* in an instant, growing several inches taller than Morgan. “Kisho has to do this.”

Morgan wanted to argue, but intuition forced him to remain silent.

“Is he yours, Kisho?” Jules asked.

When Kisho failed to respond, Morgan frowned.

“Is he yours?” Jules asked again, sounding angry.

Kisho glanced behind him and met Morgan's gaze.

The absolute lack of emotion bothered him. That wall of silence normally shielded Kisho's emotions from the world, hiding what bothered him.

“Kisho? What's wrong?” And why the hell was Hawkins angry? Was he jealous? Because that was just too damned bad.

Fallon released him and walked toward his teammate. “Kisho? Don't, man.”

Morgan wished like hell he knew what Kisho was thinking, because the worry on Fallon's face alarmed him.

Tersch took a step forward, concern etched into his own *changed* features. “Hayashi? You don't look so good. Dude, you okay?”

“No, I'm not okay. I did what Jules told me to, and now I'm a pariah. Shit, Jules. You told me to fuck him. I did. We know more now than we did before. What's the goddamn problem?”

Morgan couldn't speak. Kisho couldn't mean it. They'd shared more than bodies, but spirits as well. “Kitsu, what—”

“What? We fucked, big deal. I do it with them all the time. Circ hormones, nothing more. Don't read anything into it.” The cold voice ripped at his heart.

Floored, Morgan didn't know what to say. Sure, he'd rushed Kisho, but he'd been sure they shared something deeper than just sex. He loved this man, this beast before him, with everything he had. Apparently, Kisho didn't feel the same. From the look on his face, he never would.

But that incredible intimacy, their shared spirits. Had it all been a lie, something that Morgan wanted so blindly, he'd ignored the truth in front of him?

Morgan blanked all expression from his face, wounded and determined not to show it. But how could he have been so wrong about his kitsu? As he stood there looking at a cold stranger, a part of him shriveled and died.

Before he did or said something he'd regret, he turned and left the gym. No one stopped him.

And he kept right on walking

Kisho's heart raced as he fought his beast's instinct to go after his mate and stop him.

When he glanced up, it was to see his team staring at him in concern, except for Fallon, who glared at him in anger.

“What?”

Tersch frowned. “You really fucked Morgan because Jules told you to? Come on, man. I'm not buying it.”

Jules crossed his arms over his chest and didn't speak.

The disappointment on his face looked all too familiar. The dreams. It had all come true. Kisho was a step closer to being rejected from the only people in the world he could call family. It was his childhood all over again.

Fallon ripped into him. "You're an asshole, Hayashi. And I never thought I'd say that to you. To Tersch or even Jules, yeah, but not you."

"Hey," Tersch growled.

"Man, Morgan is in love with you. The guy put Ava and Olivia to work learning everything he could about you. He left you flowers, saved your ass, and nearly got himself killed to get us information. Hell, the only reason he's even down here is to claim you."

Stunned, Kisho didn't know what to think. Fallon was pissed because Kisho had rejected Morgan? Or because he'd finally understood Kisho was gay? The others looked equally disappointed, and Kisho inwardly staggered to realize the truth was finally all out there in the open. Soon the past would join the present, and the family he'd craved his whole life would vanish in a puff of smoke.

"I guess you did know more than you were telling us, hmm?" Jules said in a quiet voice to Fallon, who blanched.

"Ah, well, maybe. Shit. Okay, Jules. I didn't say anything about Morgan's intentions because I promised Olivia I wouldn't. You know how touchy Hayashi is about coming out of the closet, like that's any big secret, and—"

"*What?*" Kisho hadn't just heard that, had he?

Jules snorted. "Kisho, did you really think we didn't know? Hell, Fallon saw you with a guy when we were still active SEALs. You never went out of your way to swing with women. We all knew."

Tersch swore. "I didn't. Well, I wondered, but I wasn't sure." He didn't say anything else, and then he grinned. "But I guess that explains why he gives such good head."

Kisho didn't know what to say. He'd expected aversion, derision, rejection. Not humor, and especially not from Tersch. "But you make jokes all the time. You're uncomfortable about having sex in our normal forms."

"So what? According to all you pansies, I'm insensitive. Hell, Fallon's worse than you are. Nancy-boy is thinking of playing house with Olivia. White picket fence, babies, domestic bliss, and all that shit. Pussy whipped."

Kisho's eyes widened. He turned an accusatory stare on Jules, still not ready to hope that nothing had changed. "You were disgusted I'd had sex with Morgan. You wouldn't look at me."

Jules's blinked. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"In that bar, when Tersch left with Fallon, drunk off his ass, and that bartender passed me his number. You were mortified the bartender thought you might be gay."

Jules frowned. "Now hold on a minute. First, I was never embarrassed or uncomfortable. I was upset with myself for ordering you to go after Morgan for info. I knew you didn't want to, and we don't need to prostitute ourselves, period. Shit. Okay, so maybe I was a little weirded out when you said you and Morgan had been together. He rubs me the wrong way. He's too—"

"Dominant," Fallon inserted. "Aggressive."

"Bossy," Tersch added. "A lot like you, Jules."

Jules glared at them before turning back to Kisho. "The only reason I told the bartender you and I weren't a couple was so he'd feel free to give you his number. He'd been eyeing you all night. I didn't want to stand in your way if you wanted to get lucky."

Kisho stared, speechless.

Jules gentled his voice. "For the record, I could give a shit you're gay. In case it's escaped your notice, we've all taken it up the ass and liked it. Being Circ means we're different. Gay, straight, bi. Who gives a crap? Hell, we change into something not quite human. We have more to worry about than sexuality."

"Ah, now I get it." Fallon nodded. "Sorry, Hayashi, but you're broadcasting big-time." He tapped his forehead. "This whole thing is about acceptance. You're a private guy. We get that. But you don't have to be on guard with us, not the way you used to be."

Kisho didn't want them to know what his life had once been like, but he could see on their faces that they knew. "Fuck."

"It doesn't matter what you did before we met you, who you were, where you came from," Fallon said, and Kisho felt, more than saw, Tersch tense. It didn't escape him they all had things in their pasts they wished they could forget. "Kisho, you are who you are. We're family, man. And if you found someone who makes you happy, you have to listen up."

"What does your beast say?" Jules asked.

Kisho felt like a complete mess. He didn't do drama, nor did he put himself out there as much as he was doing now. "He's mine." Kisho cleared his throat and said again, "Morgan's mine." *My mate.*

Jules surprised him again by nodding. "He wouldn't look away from me. Defended you when he thought I'd insulted you. He knocked Tersch on his ass."

"He did not. He knocked you on yours, though." Tersch promptly shut up when Jules growled.

Hell. Guilt rode Kisho hard. He and Morgan had shared so much in so little time. Had he killed their relationship before it could get started? "Morgan did that?"

Jules sighed. "Yeah, the asshole couldn't have cared less that three *changed* Circs challenged him to man up. He was prepared to go to the wall for you. Claimed you were his and everything."

Fallon shook his head. "And then you told Jules you fucked Morgan because he *ordered* you to. Nice going."

Tersch slung an arm around Kisho's shoulders. "Dude, you have some serious groveling to do. You're good with poetry, but you might want to talk to Fallon about how to make up to your mate. He pisses Olivia off a good four or five times a day, but she puts up with him."

Kisho groaned. He'd really screwed up with Morgan. And as happy as he was that his friends would stand by him, that they accepted him for who he was, his beast fretted about his mate.

"Jules? What about you?" he had to ask. "You okay with Morgan being a part of us?"

"Seems like he's already been a part of you."

Tersch snickered, and Fallon choked on a laugh.

Jules added, "But he and I are going to have to come to an agreement. If he stays, he needs to know what being a part of the team means."

Kisho swallowed hard, trying to stifle his beast's possessive insistence that Morgan belonged to him and him alone.

"It'll get easier," Fallon acknowledged. "I had a hard time sharing Olivia at first, but now she's a part of the team. We only play with others when *she* wants to. It'll be the same with Morgan."

Jules nodded. "That's the way we're made. I'm alpha, for better or worse. I can accept Morgan as yours, but my beast needs to acknowledge him as mine, too. And he needs to know there's a pecking order," Jules ended with a snort.

Jules would need to fuck Morgan into submission, the way he'd done the others. Kisho understood, but he didn't like it. "Well, this may all be moot if I can't get him to forgive me."

Tersch pointed to Fallon. "And there's your answer, my friend. The king of 'I'm sorry.'"

"Dick."

"You wish." Tersch turned to Kisho with a grin. "Oh, my bad. Am I not supposed to make any more dick jokes in front of the gay dude? Am I being insensitive again?"

"At least you're consistent." Kisho shook his head, but inside, he wanted to shout with joy. Everyone knew the truth, and none of them cared. Nothing had changed, except he had one more hurdle to overcome before he could find a future of happiness. Now to find Morgan and put his mate to rights.

"He's not here?" Kisho stared at Mrs. Sharpe in shock.

"I'm really surprised at you, Kisho." She shook her head. "If you knew all that boy has done for you. And to treat him like that. How could you?"

Kisho blinked away his guilt and cleared his throat.

"Morgan offered to reconnoiter our situation down in Florida. In a few hours, he should be in place to give us a live feed on Delancey."

Kisho itched to find Morgan, but he wondered if that was best. Maybe Morgan needed space. Maybe he hadn't meant what he'd said about claiming Kisho. Maybe he'd changed his mind.

"Kisho Hayashi, you are sorely trying my last nerve." Mrs. Sharpe stood and rounded her desk to join him. The petite woman came up to his breastbone. But she poked him in the chest with a finger made of iron. "Morgan is seriously hurting, and I don't put it past him to be more

reckless than he needs to be. You go get him and bring him back in one piece.” When he didn't move, she added in a loud voice, “*Now.*”

Chapter Nine

Morgan stared down at the city without seeing it. If hearts could break, his had a definite tear in it. He'd never gone down without a fight and wouldn't now, but dammit all. How the hell could his kitsu have turned on him like that? Make him feel like nothing in the span of a single denial?

Deliberately making a mockery of what they'd shared hurt. Did Kisho think it would put him in better stead with his friends? The Circs were Kisho's life, Morgan knew. But they didn't seem to mind Morgan all that much. While Kisho had spent the better part of the week avoiding him, the others had done their damndest to share important things about Kisho's life, as if giving Morgan a subtle okay to pursue his kitsu.

Fallon told him stories upon stories about Kisho. Jules was always there in the gym, testing Morgan, pushing him to be better, to move faster. He'd seemed impressed when Morgan kept up.

It wasn't easy dealing with Circs, but Morgan thought he'd done all right. He'd even calmed Ava a few times after her flare-ups with Tersch, for which the giant seemed grateful, though he'd yet to say thank you. He'd watched Morgan like a hawk, but he hadn't crowded him.

None of the Circs really bothered him, come to think of it. They'd given him space to hang around Kisho. And offered him tidbits of Kisho's likes and dislikes, whether they knew it or not.

Olivia had mentioned Kisho's love of white roses.

Morgan overheard Jules and Fallon talking about Kisho's penchant for writing poetry and reading while the rest of them played cards or billiards.

Tersch complained about Kisho's "stupid classical crap that any idiot with half a brain would find annoying." Then he'd pointed to several of Kisho's CDs lying near the stereo, showing Kisho's taste for Vivaldi, Haydn, Mendelssohn, and Mozart.

Ava, bless her, had run interference with Alicia, distracting the older woman by stirring up fights with Tersch and inventing computer problems Morgan knew she could have dealt with on her own. Leaving him more alone time with Kisho.

All that, only to have his mate reject him in front of those he considered family.

Morgan rubbed his chest, as if the metaphorical notion of a broken heart applied.

One step forward last night, a huge step back today. Terrific. If that weren't disheartening enough, he'd found Delancey and Montaña. Another reason for him to no longer be of any need to Kisho or his friends.

Morgan sighed. If he'd had his own beast, he'd be tearing through walls right now. Instead, he wanted to punch something. Or someone. He took a seat on the edge of the bed and stared at both monitors. One was mounted to the wall; the other was a portable television he'd brought with him.

From here, he watched Delancey and Montaña party with whores and drug dealers. Two of Morgan's more trusted contacts followed the dealers, while his ace in the hole planted the listening devices that pegged Delancey's agenda for the next week.

If Alicia wanted to tag the bastard, she'd need to move fast.

Morgan thought about doing the guy himself, because from what he'd seen and heard, Delancey was responsible for a lot of bad stuff. He didn't know as much about Montaña, nor could Morgan figure out why Delancey's boss kept him around. From what he'd seen, Delancey did little more than fuck, drink, and do drugs. The weird shit he kept injecting gave him hard-ons and visions, not exactly what Morgan had expected.

From what Alicia had described, the "wonder drug" Montaña was peddling turned users catatonic. Sure, they'd see things and relay the information. Then they'd go into seizures, lose consciousness, and eventually die. According to Morgan's insider, Delancey's drug was the new and improved version of the one Alicia wanted. Which meant she was in for a surprise, because it worked, and men would pay a helluva lot to get a psychic woody that wouldn't quit.

The image made him chuckle, the first laugh he'd had all day.

As quickly as the smile appeared, it vanished. Morgan stared at the small fox figurine he'd brought with him, unable to bear parting from it.

His cell phone rang, but he ignored it. Alicia again, by the ringtone, pestering him to come home, no doubt. He didn't need her lectures, or her "I told you sos." Yeah, so she'd told him to go slow with Kisho. But who could blame him for not being able to resist such a gorgeous, thoughtful, sensitive soul? So what that he and his lover didn't know each other that well? They had a connection, a psychic link that went far beyond the physical. And that was to say nothing of the fireworks that shot between them body to body.

Morgan grimaced at the hard-on that continued to bother him at thoughts of his stubborn lover. How the hell could Kisho be so smart, so sophisticated in his tastes, and not want *him*?

"Shit. Women throw themselves at me. Men line up to get fucked. And my little fox pretends we're nothing?" Morgan swore under his breath again and planned all the devious ways he'd take his bad mood out on his lover's hide.

A hard butt fuck, some chains, a flogger. Maybe a ball gag and some leathers thrown into the mix, especially considering what he knew about Kisho's liking for pleasured pain.

Morgan stretched and yawned, then glanced at the clock. No wonder he was tired. He'd been on the go for twenty-four hours, unable to sleep after bonding to Kisho. *Bonding, is that what we really did?* Depression hit him hard, and he knew he needed to recharge. If anything unexpected happened, his sources would call. He had a special ringtone for his inside man, as well as his trusted contacts on the water. And with Delancey's boat only a few miles off the coast, its location tracked by a device affixed to the ship's voyage data recorder, it wouldn't take much to catch him.

Morgan stripped down to his underwear and climbed into bed. His dreams, as he'd expected, revolved around Kisho.

Hours later, he awakened to movement in the room. Pretending sleep, he waited until he felt his intruder close. Then he sprang. Out of bed, he knocked into a large body, and they both fell to the floor. They wrestled around until the scent of cinnamon filled the air. He froze.

"Kisho?"

"Yeah, let go of my throat," Kisho wheezed and tugged at Morgan's forearm.

Morgan released him and rolled again, so that Kisho lay beneath him. "What the hell are you doing here?" he asked more harshly than he'd intended.

"Mrs. Sharpe was worried you'd do something stupid."

Shoving off him and leaping to his feet, Morgan swore. He ran a hand through his hair and blinked when the lights suddenly blinded him.

Kisho took advantage and knocked him to the bed, where the Circ straddled him and pinned his hands above him. "Sorry, Morgan. I'm here to make sure you don't hurt yourself."

Morgan laughed, but he wasn't amused. "That's rich."

"He's not kidding," a deeper voice added from the shadows. Julian Hawkins stepped forward, his hands on his hips, and shook his head. "I'm surprised at you, Morgan. You seemed a lot quicker the other day in the gym."

"Fuck off, Hawkins." Morgan didn't like Hawkins invading his space with Kisho so near.

"Nice setup." Hawkins leaned in for a closer look at the monitors. "So you really have Delancey on camera, hmm? That cocksucker. And I don't mean that as a compliment."

Morgan would have laughed if he hadn't been so confused. "What's going on? Why are you here?"

Hawkins exchanged a glance with Kisho. "Tell him, Kisho. Explain exactly why we're here. And don't be shy." To Morgan's shock, Jules Hawkins started taking off his clothes.

And then firm lips covered his, and Morgan lost all train of thought. His kitsu's mouth caressed, his tongue invaded, and heat blistered Morgan's control to nothing. Hunger took over, consuming him as his lover made slow, sweet love to his mouth. Everything but Kisho faded, and he arched up to rub his dick against the hard cock against him.

"Mm, you taste so good," Kisho murmured against his throat. Then he nipped and licked a spot of blood. As he did, he tightened his grip around Morgan's wrists, his strength a thing of beauty.

Morgan gasped, the erotic pain so good.

"Didn't think I'd say it, but that's sexy." Hawkins stood to the side of the bed, naked, aroused, and *changed*. "Now tell him, Kisho. Before I seriously lose it. You've been driving the rest of us crazy with this damned extended heat. Yeah, it's you two, not Fallon and Olivia."

Kisho flushed and gave Morgan a quick kiss. In a movement too fast to track, Kisho and Hawkins switched places. The familiar scent of cinnamon was taken over by a musky vanilla.

Unfamiliar yet sexy, Hawkins captivated with his huge body. He licked his fangs and rubbed his massive cock over Morgan's belly. "Nice abs," he growled and leaned close to sniff at Morgan's neck. "Oh yeah. You smell like my Kisho."

"*My* Kisho," Morgan automatically corrected.

Hawkins opened his mouth and closed it over the pinprick at Morgan's throat. A raspy tongue licked before Hawkins lifted his head in puzzlement. "No more blood? No wound?"

"I heal fast." Morgan shifted and groaned when he rubbed against Jules. "Now would you get off? Kisho?"

Morgan tried to look around Hawkins, but Jules moved with him. "Something we need to get straight, Morgan. Kisho says you belong to him. But he belongs to *me*. If you want him, you have to prove it."

Morgan's heart raced. Kisho had admitted they belonged together? "Prove it how?"

Hawkins smiled and released one of Morgan's wrists. He waited, as if daring Morgan to try to flee, but Morgan didn't move.

Until Hawkins closed one large hand over his dick. Even through Morgan's underwear, he felt the heat of Hawkins's touch. "I fuck you into submission. And won't that be interesting to see, hmm?" Jules practically purred. "Kisho, come here and do your thing."

Morgan shook, hard, aching, and confused. He wanted Kisho, but his body responded to Hawkins. And he didn't like it.

"It's okay, baby," Kisho said. He moved around Hawkins and stroked Morgan's hair.

Just hearing Kisho call him "baby" stilled his rebellion. Having his lover's hands on him helped calm his agitation as well. "Kitsu?"

"Do it like you did before. Pull my energy so you get bigger." Kisho licked his fangs and glanced at Jules on top of him. "The team alpha needs to dominate the team, Morgan. You take me, you take the rest of it."

Morgan understood, but he wasn't sure he could do it. Though his body responded, ever since he and Kisho had bonded, he hadn't been able to tolerate thoughts of anyone else sexually. "You want me to fuck him?"

"No," Kisho growled. "*I need* you to fuck him. Acceptance. By Jules. For me."

Hawkins ground over Morgan, rubbing his slick cock against Morgan's belly. His scent literally made Morgan's mouth water. "*I'm* doing the fucking. You two just do what I tell you, and this will work out just fine."

Morgan squirmed, and Jules tightened his grip.

"That's nice," he hissed. "You're making me really fucking hard, Morgan. So either grow a bit bigger, or I'm going to ream your fine ass the way it is. You said you heal fast, right?" Jules grinned down at him; then his smile faded. "You do want Kisho, right?"

"Yes," Morgan answered, not needing to think.

"Good." Jules's unease disappeared. "Now grow. I want to see this."

Morgan glanced at Kisho, saw his fox nod, and sighed. "Okay. Kiss me, Kisho. Open yourself."

Kisho knelt by his side and kissed him, the fall of his thick black hair draping over Morgan's chest like a silken blanket.

In seconds, his lover's energy filled him, and he began to stretch. Like before, he grew taller, stronger, more dense. But his center remained the same. His heart belonged to his kitsu.

"Shit. I didn't believe it. I mean, I did, but feeling and seeing him are two different things," Jules rasped. He spread his knees on either side of Morgan's hips. "Hold on, Morgan. I need to take these off you."

Before Morgan could ask what he meant, Jules sliced through the sides of Morgan's underwear. Kisho removed them, and Jules lowered himself once more, his balls resting right over Morgan's.

"Oh, damn. You feel good." Jules turned to Kisho. "Come here."

When Kisho did, Jules kissed him. And to Morgan's astonishment, the scents of cinnamon, vanilla, and orange mixed. He grew harder and slicker, his newly changed body emitting pheromones and oils to facilitate sex.

Jules's rock-solid body began moving over Morgan, sliding over his cock in ways that took Morgan's breath away.

"Mmm," Jules moaned and kissed Kisho's neck. "I want to see you fuck his mouth, Kisho. Come on. Let's bend him over and slake the lust. Let the need flow, and use it."

“Wait,” Morgan said on a breath as the pair of them tried to manage him. “Hold on. Jules, why don't you—”

Jules growled and yanked Morgan up by his hair. “You don't order anyone around, not now. I'm in charge. You submit to me, the way your mate submits to me.” He shoved Morgan back to the bed and motioned for Kisho, who'd slid off the bed and stood on the floor, to come closer. When Kisho did, Jules kissed him hard and grabbed his dick, stroking with a hard, punishing grip.

“Please, Morgan. I want...you...to...belong...to me.” Kisho panted as Jules pleased him while studying Morgan.

“Watch him come. All over my hand,” Jules ordered.

In moments Kisho shot hard, his thick cum making the sexual energy around all three of them potent.

“Fuck. That's so hot.” Morgan leaned close to Kisho and licked him clean, making his lover groan and squirm, still caught in Jules's hand. Morgan licked over that hand, and a sense of ease turned his vague hostility into a pleasurable need.

“That's it. Suck his cum off. Get all of it.” Jules purred, the rumble reminiscent of Kisho's contentment.

Kisho continued to stare down at him, his eyes wide, his breathing fast, as he combed his fingers through Morgan's hair. “So pretty. So mine.”

Morgan nodded. He took Jules's finger in his mouth and sucked harder.

“Nice,” Jules's murmured. “Oh yeah. I'm really hard right now. And I need to spend inside you. Right up that tight ass.”

Kisho nodded, flushed and growing erect as he watched Morgan work Jules's finger.

More than ready to come, Morgan slowly positioned himself at the edge of the bed and presented Jules with his ass. Kisho growled his assent, and before Morgan knew it, Jules slid inside him, filling him with a hot, thick cock.

Kisho didn't leave them alone to watch. Instead, he stood close by, his hard dick in hand. Jules nudged Morgan forward, surging so deep, they both groaned. Then Morgan had Kisho's dick right in front of him. He opened wide and took that hard, thick shaft in his mouth.

Sandwiched between the Circs, he nearly lost his mind when Jules grew larger inside him. He swallowed another mouthful of Kisho's seed, the sex and belonging forging stronger ties than he could have imagined.

Jules groaned and shuddered, and Morgan felt a rush of hot liquid sliding down his ass and thighs. The scent of Jules seeped into him, tying him to the larger male on a level beyond the physical. The bond snapped him in place, finally allowing Morgan fully into Kisho's world. Thrilled to have overcome yet another obstacle keeping him from his lover, Morgan grew even more excited.

His groin throbbed, his cock hard and aching, and still without relief.

"Stay there," Kisho growled. "Don't move."

Morgan wanted to argue, to show his mate who was in charge, but Jules started moving again. Except this time, the bastard hit that sweet spot inside him, and he groaned.

"Up," Jules urged, and pulled Morgan upright, off his hands. They knelt together, still joined, but at an awkward angle. Yet now Kisho could access Morgan's erection. And *access* it he did. While Jules continued to pump inside him, Kisho took Morgan to the back of his throat.

The dual sensation of taking and being taken washed over him in a huge wave of pleasure. Morgan shouted and came hard. He literally throbbed as he exploded, jetting into Kisho's mouth. Jules scratched his hips and stilled, coming as well.

The scent of Circ seed and man and pheromones filled the air. But nothing could mask the overwhelming rightness Morgan experienced, the intense belonging to something more.

"Oh man, you two are lethal," Jules said with a moan and withdrew from Morgan's body. "I have the room next door. The one you thought you rented," he said to Morgan. "Why don't you two use it while I clean up and keep an eye on Delancey."

"You don't need to watch them." Morgan coughed to clear the hoarseness from his voice. "I have informants on speed dial, watching up close."

"Good. Don't want to lose the fucker before I personally watch the life leave his eyes."

Jules in a mad was scary. But Morgan didn't have time to worry. Kisho lifted him in his arms, and Morgan realized he'd shrunk back into his normal six-four frame.

"I've got you, mate," Kisho whispered and kissed him. The most perfect, if surreal, moment of his life.

Morgan hadn't been carried in anyone's arms like this since he was a small child.

They walked through the adjoining door into the room that Morgan had paid for to ensure it remained empty. Two large duffel bags sat on the floor beside the king-size bed. Trust Jules to flout security.

Kisho walked him into the large bathroom. "Glad you paid for the nicer rooms. The shower's still going to be tight but manageable." He set Morgan down on his feet and started the shower. As he did so, he *changed* back into his man's form. "Wait. I'll be right back."

Morgan leaned against the wall, worn out, but too stunned by tonight's events to know what to say.

Kisho returned after a moment, and they both entered the shower. Kisho wouldn't let him lift a finger. He washed him, dried him, and then led him back out to the large bed. Kisho joined him in bed, and they lay on their sides, studying each other.

The quiet words Kisho spoke, as much as the loving expression on his face, transfixed him. "When I was two, my mother died. The loving daughter of a tyrant simply faded away, lost because she'd been forbidden my father, the man she loved."

Morgan didn't speak, his heart breaking all over again for Kisho's loss.

"I never understood why my grandfather hated me so much. It wasn't until a few years later, when he kicked me out of the house because I was a 'half-breed bastard,' that I knew. I was five and had no place to go."

"Five?" Morgan stared, stunned. "So young."

"My grandmother tried to help. She found a shelter for me when friends refused to help, scared of my grandfather. And she helped me to understand that at least my mother had loved me. To be honest, I never expected to know my father. No one talked about him. Then one day, he was just there. He found me living on the streets. I was sixteen when he brought me home to America."

"Shit, Kisho. How did you live? What did you do?"

Kisho frowned. "I remember the scorn, the jeers, the hatred in my grandfather's eyes whenever he'd see me on a street corner. But the day-to-day details are now just a blur. I was smart, even then. I knew who to watch out for, who to trust. And I loved books. I lost myself in the volumes of text a very kind woman loaned me. I had flashes of foresight when I hit puberty, and it helped reinforce the notion that education would be my key to escape."

"What about your dad?"

"My father never knew he'd gotten my mother pregnant. My grandfather made her stop seeing him. The Hayashi family turned my dad away whenever he'd visit, until he stopped trying to see her and was transferred back to the States. Not until years later, when his mother told him to look, did he find me. My grandmother had visions, same as I do. I get the psychic crap from my dad's side of the family."

Morgan ran his hand over Kisho's chest, marveling at the inner strength there. "Your abilities from your father, your name from your mother?"

"I kept Hayashi just to piss off my grandfather, so he couldn't pretend I didn't exist." Kisho sighed. "My dad was a good man. He'd have taken me with him if he'd known about me. It always hurt him that I'd spent my childhood on the streets. Paul Leads was a Master Chief in the U.S. Navy, a fair man, but one that didn't tolerate failure or differences well."

"Funny, coming from a guy with a psychic background." Morgan couldn't help it. He had to kiss Kisho again, to convince himself that what they shared was not a dream, but real.

They parted from the kiss, and Kisho ran a hand over Morgan's shoulder. "Yeah, funny." Kisho grew silent. "Morgan, I want you to know. When I told the others you were nothing to me, it wasn't true. You were never just a fuck. I love you."

Morgan's heart stuttered. He'd hoped for affection, for at least a hint of trust while they built their relationship stronger. He hadn't thought to hear those incredibly moving three words. He didn't speak, afraid to ruin the moment.

"I've been taught, for so long, that different is wrong. First it was for being half white. Then it was for being gay. Christ, my dad would have had a coronary if he knew his only son was a, and I quote, 'fucking pole smoker.'"

"A damned good pole smoker," Morgan teased in a gentle voice, and Kisho chuckled.

"I could never tell him the truth. I couldn't chance that he'd kick me out, and I didn't want to lose him, too. And then I joined the navy. Don't ask, don't tell."

"Yeah, but the guys—"

"Are my family. We fuck each other, I know. It seems stupid to be weird about being gay with them. But it's the Circ stuff that makes us do it. The other guys are straight. And I was afraid..."

"That if you came out, they'd turn you away?"

"I feel like an idiot. But yeah."

Morgan stroked Kisho's cheeks and lips. "Baby, I won't turn you away."

"Fallon called me an asshole for the way I treated you. Said you loved me." There was a question there.

"What do you think?" Morgan felt tears under his fingers, and he wiped them away. "Kitsu?"

"I think any man who would take on three Circs, who would accept a pole-smoking monster, and who read my poetry and said he liked it, I think that man might love me."

"Don't forget the roses."

Kisho smiled, and the sight of that joy made Morgan's entire world feel right.

Morgan tugged Kisho closer and rolled onto his back, pulling Kisho on top of him. "No might about it. I love you, baby. I love the sensitive poet, the man who listens to Mozart, the kick-ass SEAL, and the sexy-as-hell beast under your skin. I've been waiting for you since I was sixteen years old." He kissed Kisho tenderly, sharing the love he felt inside. "Ever since Alicia gave me that figurine, I knew you belonged to me."

Kisho froze. "Wait a minute. You said your aunt gave you that."

Morgan groaned. "You have to swear this to silence."

"I swear."

"She is going to shit a brick if she knows I told you." He looked into Kisho's eyes and groaned again. "Fuck. She probably already knows. Well, Alicia, she's kind of an aunt several times removed. We may not look much alike, but she's family."

Kisho's beautiful eyes widened. "Are you kidding?"

“No. My family is really powerful when it comes to the psychic stuff. Alicia has always been on the fringe of normal anyway. But her abilities are seriously scary. She gave me that damned fox when I turned sixteen, and she told me it had a twin. Then she left.” Lost in thought, Morgan stroked Kisho's back. “I knew as soon as I held it that whoever owned that twin belonged to me. Can't explain it. I just knew.”

Kisho gave him a look.

“What?”

“My grandmother called it her little kitsu, what she used to call me. She said the jade fox belonged to my mother and had brought her great luck. That my father wasn't the curse my grandfather called him, not if he'd given my mother such a fine son.” He paused. “Hell, she might have been a bit psychic herself, because she told me to find its mate. But maybe she meant I'd find *my* mate.” Kisho smiled at the memory. “I've been dreaming about you for years. You saved me when I was pushed from that building.”

Morgan tightened his hold. “Yeah. Scared the shit out of me to find you like that.”

“How did you find me?”

“Had a feeling. My gift is pretty selfish, kitsu. It's all about making my life better. Whatever I want, I usually seem to get without a lot of effort. I was a real prick for a lot of years.”

“No,” Kisho teased.

“Yeah. Came from life coming too easily. Then I had a visit from Alicia a few years after she gave me that fox. She showed me a picture of you. And I knew. I had to clean myself up, become a man you could be proud of. I became a better fighter, a mercenary with ties to places you could use.”

“Are you telling me you became a mercenary so you could one day help *me*?”

“Yeah, but it taught me a lot, too. Right and wrong are pretty much shades of gray. Delancey's bad. Montaña's bad. But so is a government that tries to kill its own. If I'd known the hell you were in at Pearson Labs, I'd have come for you sooner. But Alicia never told me about that. Said it wasn't my time to find you.”

“Wait. Are you saying she knew about us Circs back then? How long has she known?”

Morgan silently cursed. “Kisho, do me a favor. Pretend I never said anything about Mrs. Sharpe, that I'm not related to her at all, and that you know nothing.”

“But—”

“The only thing you need to know is that I love you. I'm going to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Kisho relaxed. “Really?”

“Really.” Morgan stroked his lover's face. “And as soon as this operation ends, I'm going to show you how to properly beg forgiveness after breaking your mate's heart. Letting your team leader fuck me up the ass is *not* how you say you're sorry.”

Kisho snickered, and the sound sent waves of happiness through Morgan. “Yeah, but you weren't sorry when you came down my throat, were you?”

“You're going to need a lot of discipline in the future. I can tell.”

Kisho kissed him. “Morgan, are you really okay with everything? We're mated. For me, there's no going back.”

“I know that.”

“I don't want anyone else the way I want you. But sometimes, the mating heat, it makes it—”

“Kitsu, I understand. We'll take it one step at a time. You're Circ, and by nature of being yours, I kind of am too. I can satisfy the need, baby.”

“You do. You really do.”

“This is still so new. I don't know if I like sharing you. It won't be easy watching you with anyone else, but I know Circs are different. Hell, I just took it from you and Jules. I'll adjust. Just give me some time to have you all to myself, okay?”

Kisho agreed. “I don't want to share you either. I was jealous when Jules touched you, and then it felt right. Your bonding to Jules changed our dynamic. You belong now. Sex among the team increases our ties. Our beasts need it.”

“So do I need to get with the other guys to—”

“No,” Kisho growled. He cleared his throat. “Um, no. Olivia bonded with the others but not with me. Yet my beast knows she's one of us. Jules is the glue that holds us together. So long as he accepts you, the others will. Probably.”

“Tersch.” Morgan didn't need to be a mind reader to know that another problem would be convincing the Viking he belonged.

“He might be an issue. But we can handle him.”

“We. I like that. Well, just so long as I don't have to take it from the Viking. I have a feeling he's a real pain in the ass.”

Kisho started laughing. “Spot-on description. And you really don't want to get on Ava's bad side.”

“Does she have a good one?” Morgan joked and joined in his kitsu's mirth.

They didn't stop laughing for a long time.

Chapter Ten

“Hey, ladies, let's go.”

Jules's gruff voice through the door made Kisho groan. Reality intruded.

He and Morgan had spent the last two hours loving and talking. So much about his mate he hadn't known. Morgan's family intrigued him, especially since Morgan insisted that Kisho would understand everything when he met them. Morgan refused to go into detail about their similarities just yet. According to him, Mrs. Sharpe would indeed kill him if he spilled all the beans so soon.

It just made Kisho that much more curious. He wanted to meet the enigmatic Reynolds family. So many strong psychics in one bloodline. It startled him to realize Morgan was every bit as powerful as he was, but in a different way.

Good mate. Strong. Potent.

His beast was in love with Morgan as much as *Kisho* was in love with Morgan.

“Don't get your panties in a twist, *Mary*. We'll be right there,” Morgan yelled back. He muttered to Kisho, “Asshole better not try any of that power-play crap. He's not my boss.”

“Morgan.” Kisho sighed. Well, he knew it would take more than words to soothe the inevitable tensions between two men used to being in charge. Though he was no pushover, Kisho had no problems taking orders. Especially if they came from Morgan. *In bed.*

“Damn. That is really temping.” Morgan gripped Kisho's erection and squeezed. “But if I take you the way I want to, we'll never leave this room. Besides, I can't have you waving an ass filled with my cum at Jules. He might be too distracted to work if he scents the two of us too strongly.”

Kisho moaned and pressed into Morgan's palm. “Come on. A quick one won't hurt.”

Morgan shook his head, a teasing glint in his dark green eyes. "You sorely need discipline." He let go and left the bed. "I can't wait till we get home. I have some toys in my closet you're going to love."

Kisho's cock throbbed at the thought. "Jerk." Morgan's laughter made him grin.

Half an hour later, they joined Jules in the next room.

"About damned time. Hell, after all the noise I heard, I'm amazed you two can walk straight."

Kisho flushed, and Jules laughed.

"Leave him alone, Hawkins." Morgan grinned. "He's adjusting to that open door in his closet."

"Talk about the proverbial elephant in the room. Kisho, how could we not know you were gay? You never fucked women."

Kisho frowned. "I like my privacy."

Morgan snorted. "Yeah, but come on. Guys know things. And since you Circs seem like a pack of dogs, all over each other all the time, they would have noticed."

"Thanks, I think," Jules said. "And call me Jules. You want to dick around with Tersch's mind, call him whatever you want. Me, you call Jules."

"Whatever."

"Now tell me what the hell is going on." Jules pointed to one of the monitors. "There's been a lot of activity down there today. They pulled the damn yacht in, right there at the tip of Biscayne by the national park. Delancey is up in arms about some asshole named Pablo."

Morgan tensed. "Pablo Ribeiro?" When Jules nodded, he swore. "Pablo is my inside source. There's no way they could know about him."

"Well, he did something Delancey's having a hissy over. Look."

Morgan and Kisho watched as a dark-haired man, tied to a chair, sat under a vicious tongue-lashing from a large, brutal-looking man dressed in khakis.

"That's Montaña. See the scar? The sadist is a real problem." Morgan scowled. "I have to help Pablo. We need to move now. The minute they learn Pablo's not really working for them, we lose them."

“Fuck. Grab the shit, Hayashi. Let's go.”

Kisho raced back to the other room and grabbed both duffels. He tossed one to Jules. “What do you plan to do?”

Morgan added, “The yacht has a dozen armed men on board. Mercs with training, not to mention the other dozen or so crewmen. I don't know what experience they have. And then there are the rogue Circs and rumored mutants in the belowdecks.”

“Not a problem,” Jules said. “Most of the crew is gone. Delancey got rid of all but two of them an hour ago, when they stopped by land to grab a handful of women. I counted seven guards. Not sure how many rogues they might have, but I saw three of them and what could have been the mutants, caged and carried off the yacht, get off when the women boarded.”

“A little too inviting,” Morgan murmured.

“What?”

Kisho hefted the duffel over his shoulder and faced his mate. “What are you saying?”

“I'm saying this doesn't feel right.”

Jules shrugged. “We're not going to get a better chance at this. I want Delancey dead.”

“Jules,” Kisho cautioned. “Mrs. Sharpe wants Delancey alive for questioning.”

Jules snorted. “She can have Montaña. Delancey's a dead man. He just doesn't know it yet.”

Kisho wondered if he should tell Jules that Delancey did know it. The last vision he'd had had shown Delancey in the grip of a prophetic dream of his own death—at Jules's hands. But if Kisho told, would he affect the outcome in a negative way? Would he help end Delancey's life or further complicate the mess? Either way, he needed to come to a decision, fast.

“Hey, oh great leader,” Morgan drawled, sarcasm evident in his tone. “The last time I ignored a bad feeling, I was nearly blown up. You sure you want to just barge in there beating your chest because you're a tough-ass Circ with a grudge against your old commander?”

Jules glared. “Asshole. Okay. Fine then. What do you suggest?”

Morgan glanced from the monitor to Jules, then Kisho.

“Whoa. You're really bright right now.” Jules blinked.

“You can see his aura?” Kisho wanted to know.

“Yeah. Guess his shields are down. A lot of purple.”

Which Kisho knew was the color of love. He wanted to purr with satisfaction.

“And some bright white. Your boy is glowing, which usually signifies using a lot of psychic energy. But what the fuck is he doing?”

“I'm thinking,” Morgan answered in a huff. “So if you'd kindly shut your big mouth, maybe I... Oh yeah. That might work.”

“What?” Jules and Kisho asked at the same time.

“Well, if we combine what I know about Montaña with what I know about you two, there's a chance we can slip on board, save Pablo, and grab your ex-captain. You willing to hear me out?” he asked Jules, a challenge in his gaze.

“I'm always open to suggestion, Morgan. But I make the final call.”

Morgan nodded. “Okay. So we try it this way...”

Jules wondered for the fifth time since leaving the hotel if he'd lost his fucking mind. Morgan wanted them to dart on and off the yacht without anyone knowing. Then Hayashi had added that Delancey *knew* Jules planned to kill him. The fucker could foretell his own damned future, thanks to that stupid drug. Great. Now how the hell were they going to get to Delancey if he already knew everything?

He really didn't like this whole prognostication thing.

But he did like Morgan. Much as the asshole irritated him, he'd fit in nicely with the team. Jules could feel it. And he made Hayashi happy. The two of them projected the same neon purple auras, so full of that rich love Fallon and Olivia shared. Which made it vital Jules not risk Morgan's sorry ass while grabbing Delancey.

Morgan leaned close and whispered, “Is he going to blow up the boat?”

“Yeah, now shut up,” Jules growled.

They watched Hayashi steer the small johnboat closer to the yacht. As anticipated, the sound of the motor cut through the quiet of the early morning dark and drew the attention of four gunmen.

“I only see four. The other three must be inside,” Morgan stated.

Morgan's other contacts managed to confirm the number of mercenaries on board. To Jules's surprise, Montaña and a few more of his men had also departed the ship. Which left Delancey, seven mercs, and two crew members on board.

It seemed obvious Delancey was waiting for him. He'd hate to disappoint his captain.

"Right. Follow me." Jules *changed*; then he and Morgan crept along the woodline and sneaked across an exposed stretch of ground for the yacht. Instead of walking up the gangplank, though, they entered the water a short distance from the ship and swam around to the back of the boat, away from Hayashi.

"Wait for it," Jules rumbled and flexed his claws.

The minute the johnboat blew, Jules jabbed his claws into the side of the yacht and pulled his way up. He landed on the empty deck, quickly tied a rope to the rail, and tossed it over the side. According to the plan, he would then wait for Morgan, and they'd move together to wipe through the mercs to get to Pablo and Delancey.

Jules called on his ancillary ability, the one that enabled him to camouflage his skin. It felt like a warm tingle all over his body. The technical jargon Doc had thrown at him involved Jules's skin cells, negative light refraction, and a bunch of other crap that gave him a headache. Jules knew how to blend into the woodwork, but he didn't know how he knew. He'd never heard of any other Circ with a talent to go invisible, and he'd never shown the labs what he could do, worried they'd cut him up to see how the ability worked. The only drawback to using his gift was that invisibility sucked a lot of energy, so he didn't call on it often. But to get to Delancey, he'd use every weapon at his disposal.

Jules pulled in his energy and concentrated. When the familiar fizzing warmth covered him from head to toe, including the pants he wore, he quickly used a nearby towel to mask the water running over the deck. Then he tossed the towel out of sight and eased his way inside the yacht. Two mercs hid behind the bar. He disabled them both, quickly and quietly. He sniffed the air but didn't catch the scent of any rogues near.

Continuing through the first floor and down into the hold, he found all the rooms but one empty. The stench of rot and wrongness pervaded. Apparently Delancey hadn't taken all the mutants off the ship earlier, if he'd even done so at all. Jules left the creature in there and quickly ascended to the upper deck before it began screaming, having caught his scent.

He listened close but didn't hear Morgan or Hayashi. So far so good.

Studying the first deck again, he looked around. The four mercs who'd rushed to Hayashi earlier lay dead, their throats ripped out. Hayashi's work. A fifth man lay to the side, a clean cut across his neck. That one smelled like Morgan.

Jules stilled and cocked his head, listening. Where the hell were the guys?

A muffled thump sounded above him. Jules knew there was a second floor, but he hadn't seen any stairs. He moved swiftly through the first floor again but found nothing but two bedrooms, a master bath, a smaller bath, and a large living space.

Studying the living area, he bypassed the glossy woods, the bar, and the hallway. A hidden stairway still had to be accessible. *There*. By the wall, he saw the energy from a Circ handprint on the floor-to-ceiling mirror, which no doubt concealed the door.

He pressed it, and it slid open, revealing a carpeted stairway. *Fuck*. He smelled blood.

Sensing the danger, Jules continued to hold on to his invisibility and climbed, careful to remain silent.

Before he reached the top, he stopped.

He scented Morgan, dammit. Morgan, who was supposed to remain downstairs until either he or Hayashi grabbed Pablo. It figured Morgan wouldn't listen.

"Come on out, Hawkins. I know you're there." William Delancey still sounded like an arrogant dickhead.

Jules entered the space and slowly walked to the left, keeping close to the wall. Delancey looked ten times worse than he sounded. His hair, which had once been black threaded with gray, now was completely gray. The pallor of his skin complemented the sickly tone of his aura. The gun he held in his hand didn't tremble, however, as it pointed not at Morgan, but at an unconscious Hayashi on the floor.

Pablo sat bound and gagged in the chair, apparently unconscious. Two women lay dead beside him, while three rogue Circs stood with their arms crossed, their claws at the ready. Jules swore to himself, angered he hadn't scented them. Hell, he still couldn't smell them, which made little sense.

“Come now, Hawkins. If you don't soon show yourself, I'll feed Hayashi to my beast down below. He's hungry for a body to fuck and eat, maybe even at the same time.”

The rogues grinned.

“I knew you'd make fast work of the mercenaries we hired. But you didn't think I'd really leave myself unprotected, did you?” Delancey sneered, his conceit a reminder that the man had one glaring flaw. His ego.

Jules considered the others. No way in hell he'd let anything happen to Morgan or Hayashi. Morgan crouched over his mate, his eyes flat, blood soaking through the shoulder of his shirt. And there, another patch on his ribs, where the coppery smell was stronger.

Creeping toward them, Jules watched the rogues follow his movements and knew the bastards could smell him. Quickly darting behind Morgan, he sneaked a wicked-looking blade into the back of Morgan's waistband. He felt Morgan tense, but the big man didn't let on anything had happened. Good.

Hurrying away to draw attention to the opposite side of the room, away from his team, Jules shifted his energy and became visible once more.

Delancey's surprised grin aggravated the piss out of him. “Well, hell. That I'd never expected. Invisibility from the prodigal son.”

“Bill. It's been a while.” The look of disdain he gave his ex-commander erased the grin from the asshole's face. “I see you have new toys to play with. They any good?” He shot a thumb in the direction of the rogues.

“Why don't we let them loose and find out?”

Morgan wanted to swear at Jules and his overeager need for violence. But Kisho was down, hurt, and Morgan didn't know how much longer either of them had.

Pablo was dead. The poor guy had been alive just long enough to tempt Morgan closer. But as soon as Delancey shot Kisho and had his rogues grab Morgan, he'd injected Pablo with some really bad shit. Pablo had seized before dying in what looked like agony. Though Morgan felt for the guy, Pablo was a mercenary, one who'd sided with Morgan only after he saw how Delancey treated the women he brought on board. At least he'd gone out with a fight.

The way Morgan intended to.

Concentrating on anything but his mate lying so still beside him enabled Morgan to function. Because all he could think about right now was plunging a knife into Delancey as fast as he could. It had taken three rogues and a needle filled with some crap to put Kisho down, but down he'd gone, and hard.

Morgan could only hope Jules remained vigilant. A touch of whatever had been in that syringe, designed to penetrate Circ skin, couldn't be good.

Jules engaged the rogues all at once, diverting Delancey's attention, but not the gun trained on the back of Kisho's head. Morgan swore, pleased when Delancey shifted the gun to center on him.

Willing to chance it if only to disarm the bastard, Morgan clutched his ribs, groaned, and fell back. He grabbed the hilt of the knife behind him and clutched it tight, pretending he'd fallen on his hand.

Delancey didn't look at him, his interest clearly on Jules. "Invisibility. What a gold mine."

"You did this," Morgan hissed and nodded at Kisho. *Wake up, kitsu. Come on, baby. I could really use your help about now.*

Delancey's hand holding the gun wavered a bit. "No, *he* did this. Jules Hawkins is responsible for everything wrong that's happened. You want to blame someone for Hayashi's impending death, blame him." Delancey's show of agitation was enough for Morgan.

He darted away from Kisho and threw the knife, hitting Delancey right in the chest. A shot went off while Delancey swore and then dropped the gun.

Morgan reached for it, ignoring the new pain in his thigh where Delancey's bullet had grazed him. He rolled for the gun and brought it up just as one of the rogues left Jules and reached him. He pulled the trigger right against the rogue's forehead.

Instead of the mess of blood and brain matter Morgan might have expected, the bullet tore through the rogue's forehead but didn't exit his brain. Shocked the Circ might still be a threat, he breathed a sigh of relief when the light faded from the rogue's eyes and he toppled to the ground.

Jules finished taking care of the other two rogues, leaving one mortally wounded, the other dead.

Morgan rushed back to Kisho and gently turned him over. His lover didn't look near death, but Morgan had no idea what the rogues had injected him with. When he sent his energy searching, however, Kisho blinked and grinned up at him, his beastly form healing the small bruises on his body as Morgan watched.

"Thank God." He reached for Kisho's hand and squeezed tight.

Before he could rest easy, an inhuman roar shook the boat. Shit. How many more surprises did Delancey have in store for them?

"Assholes," Delancey rasped and pulled the knife out of his ribs. Dark blood welled from the wound, and he tried to stifle it by pressing hard. In his other hand he held up a small remote control and threw it at Jules. "Now my monster is free to play, out of his cage at last. I can tell you he's hungry for blood. Did you really think I didn't know you were coming?" Delancey coughed up blood, but the hatred in his gaze burned bright.

"Did you really think we'd come unprepared?" Jules retorted, the flash of his fangs and the fury on his face more menacing than a dozen mutants. "You lied to us, you used us, and we trusted you."

"Grow up, Hawkins. Idealism is for the innocent and the untried. The Circ project was dead in the water way before Pearl tried to bring it to life. Super soldiers? Please. What government would sanction monsters doing their dirty work? Too much risk that the American people might find out and protest. But the government's loss is my gain.

"Now everyone can use expendable soldiers to fight their battles and win their wars. Rogue Circs that don't last, the perfect weapon. A lot like today's military. Hell, Hawkins. Every sailor has a shelf life." Blood smothered Delancey's grin. "I'll survive this. But you won't."

"Bet me." Jules flashed his claws, but instead of finishing Delancey, he grabbed Kisho and pulled him to his feet. Then he helped hold Morgan upright. When Morgan wavered, Jules propped him up on one side while Kisho held him on the other.

The mutant's raging screams grew louder as it trudged up the stairs.

Delancey's shrill, maniacal laughter made the skin on the back of Morgan's neck crawl. "You're going to die, and I'm going to watch."

Morgan flinched at the sight of the creature that stepped through the doorway. The thing didn't even look human. From what he knew of mutant Circs, they were once men turned into

Circes by the Circe serum. But they mutated from rogue status into something far worse when they didn't get the mates or hormones needed to sate their growing hungers. Some rogues turned faster than others, while others simply manifested themselves straight from the second evolution of the serum.

This mutant had jet-black skin. Its knee joints were reversed, and its spine curved into a literal S. Long fingers that had melded together gave it a three-clawed appearance. When it opened its mouth to hiss a warning, two rows of sharp teeth filled its misshapen lower jaw. A forked tongue flicked at them, and it stared through bloodred eyes without pupils. Morgan didn't see ears, just small holes where they should have been. It was devoid of hair, and its genitalia, if that's what that mess at the juncture of its legs could be called, was monstrously large and *spiked*.

"Good Christ," he muttered and blinked, alarmed to feel dizzy.

"Shit, Hayashi. He's losing blood. We need to go," Jules said.

"Kill them!" Delancey pointed at the Circes.

But the mutant didn't move. It looked at Delancey with evil intent.

"The thing you never understood, *Bill*," Kisho explained, "is that underneath all the monstrous bone and blood, beneath the hunger and the need, is a man. He's gone, but some part of him remembers what he was, and what *you* did. We all knew you were the one to blame when the Circ project went south. And we never forgot."

To Morgan's shock, the thing looked like it understood. It turned its attention from them to Delancey and smacked its hideous lips in hunger.

"Have at it." Jules chuckled. "You should have asked me to kill you. Because what it's going to put you through will be worse than anything you can imagine."

"No, wait." Delancey's eyes widened, and he shook his head, screaming at the mutant to stop moving when it slowly dragged itself closer. "You can't do this to me! Wait! You're the one, Hawkins. It was always you who killed me! I never saw this!"

Jules and Kisho walked Morgan out of the way of the mutant and down the stairs.

Morgan heard Delancey's terrified cry and the creature's grunts of satisfaction.

"Hell. You think it's fucking him or eating him?" he asked, his tongue thick in his mouth.

"I hope both," Jules answered.

Kisho stopped them and looked hard at Morgan. “Shit. Come on, Morgan. You're okay. Jules?”

“Oh man. He's going green. Kisho, take him off the boat and hurry. You planted the explosives all over the yacht, right?”

Kisho nodded, or at least, Morgan thought he did. Everything started to turn hazy. Alicia would be so pissed if she knew he'd ignored his instincts again.

“No, she'll be okay. You'll be okay, baby,” Kisho said.

“Reading my mind?”

“You said that out loud. Trust me. She'll understand when she knows you might have ignored your instincts, but you trusted your mate.”

Morgan wanted to grin, but Kisho lifted him in his arms. The pain sucked his breath away.

Jules hurried with them to the gangplank. “I'll do one more sweep. Get him to the van, wait two minutes, then blow this fucking boat sky high.”

Morgan passed out.

When he came to, he lay sprawled over Kisho in the back of the large van they'd rented. Kisho's hand was on his chest. Up front, Jules drove.

They hit another bump, and Morgan moaned. “What happened?”

“The yacht blew up. Delancey's gone. The rogue and all the bodies on board are toast.”

Morgan tried to make sense of it, but his body's healing slowed his mental processes. “I feel warm.”

Kisho leaned down, kissed him, then swept Morgan's hair off his forehead. “You were pretty out of it, but I managed to convince you to tap me for energy, and Jules let down his guard to lend you whatever else you needed. You've been healing at a really fast rate.”

Morgan ran an unsteady hand over his stomach and shoulder. No more pain, only a tingling sensation. His thigh felt fine as well. “Thanks, baby.”

Jules groaned. “None of this 'baby' talk. I get enough of this shit from Fallon and Olivia. No love talk and no goo-goo eyes. But hey, if you want to fuck again once you're better, let me know. I'm in for some three-way action.”

Kisho looked serious. “I don't know, Jules. I need some alone time with my new mate. But if you wouldn't mind bending over for *us*, Morgan and I will think about it.”

“Bend over, my ass.” Jules snorted.

“That's the idea.”

Jules glanced over his shoulder in shock and quickly turned back to the road. “Holy shit, Hayashi! Was that a joke? And you're smiling? What the hell can I expect next? Tersch and Ava holding hands?”

Morgan laughed, his strength returning as he held tight to Kisho.

His lover stilled for a minute, his energy suddenly tight, apart from Morgan. An odd surge of power surrounded his lover before Kisho relaxed and the comforting feel of his psychic warmth returned. “No, Jules. You have something even better in store for you. I promise.”

Chapter Eleven

Kisho stood arm in arm with Morgan while the others hashed it out with Jules. As he'd expected, Tersch and Fallon hadn't liked being left behind while their teammates dealt with Captain William Delancey. To say that Mrs. Sharpe wasn't pleased would be putting it mildly.

"Julian Hawkins," she said with bite, and the others quieted.

They stood in the kitchen around a bountiful breakfast Melissa had put together, before the canny woman had made a quick exit at first sight of Mrs. Sharpe's clear annoyance. Her husband Jack was nowhere to be found. Smart guy.

Kisho couldn't stop smiling. The others kept glancing at him in alarm, not used to seeing him so visibly happy, but he didn't care. He had his team, his mate, and his future to look forward to. Nothing could be better. Especially since Mrs. Sharpe wasn't angry at him so much as enraged at Jules.

"Mrs. Sharpe, come on. We had to do something. Did you want to chance losing Delancey?" Morgan said.

"And you. I should smack you silly." The normally unflappable woman was on a tear.

Even Ava seemed transfixed by Mrs. Sharpe's rage.

"I promised your mother to keep you safe. Do you think I would have given you that fox if I'd known how brainless you'd become? Becoming a mercenary? Learning to live with the criminal element? If that wasn't bad enough, you've become as stupid and bloodthirsty as the rest of these idiots are turning out to be."

Tersch grinned, showing sharp teeth as he bit into an apple. "Now that's a bit harsh, don't you think, Alicia? Stupid, really?" he said around a mouthful of food.

She glared at him, and Kisho saw those odd points of red light again in her pupils. No wonder he felt so at ease with her now. Knowing she and Morgan shared a family connection, that she was a big part of the reason he now had his mate, made him like her all the more.

He stepped between her and Tersch and gave her a huge hug, lifting her feet from the floor. “Thank you,” he whispered and kissed her on the cheek before setting her back down.

“Kisho.” She flushed and patted her hair but didn’t yell at him. “You’re welcome, dear.” She shot Tersch another glare before sitting down at the table. She accepted the full plate Ava handed her, then turned her attention to Jules. “But don’t think you’re off the hook. Your actions were irresponsible, illogical, contrary to the mission—”

Olivia interrupted with a quick smile. “Delancey’s dead and out of the way. One down, one to go. Don’t worry, Mrs. S., I’m sure Morgan can help find Montaña and his boss. With all his contacts and that data drive he managed to filch from Pablo’s storage locker, I’m sure we’ll have new leads to follow. Then we can put an end to this nonsense and start making babies, right Jesse?”

Fallon choked on the eggs he was eating. But Kisho didn’t miss the humor in Olivia’s gaze or the satisfied expression on Mrs. Sharpe’s face. Crafty woman. Then again, she’d have to be, coming from a family that gave birth to men like Morgan.

Kisho sat next to his mate. “I love you,” he said in a low voice and kissed him, in full view of everyone.

Ava had yet to take her gaze from Tersch, who studiously avoided looking up from his own plate, but the others beamed.

“Hell. Purple seems to be the new color around here,” Jules said with a grumble. But he winked at Kisho. “Now if we could only find Tersch a date...”

Tersch looked up from his plate. “*What?*”

Everyone laughed, even Ava, who had a decidedly naughty look in her eyes.

Breakfast progressed into a pleasant meal, and Kisho had a sudden urge to write about green eyes, purple flowers, and the bloom of a white, blinding love. He clasped Morgan’s hand under the table and squeezed.

Morgan squeezed back and leaned close to whisper, “I love you, kitsu. But don’t even try weaseling out of the punishment I have in mind for you later tonight.”

Kisho smiled. “I wouldn’t dream of it.”

* * *

Two days later

“The loss was unavoidable.” Colonel Ricardo Montaña toyed with his mustache and smiled at the article in the *Miami Herald*. The accidental explosion of a luxury yacht off the Cape Florida State Park had lit the early morning sky, leaving no survivors. Little of the wreckage remained. Whatever the Cirs had used to blow the boat had done the job.

Over the speaker, a grunt of frustration sounded. Montaña didn't particularly care. Now that he knew who he worked for, the great mystery and weight of concern had been lifted. He could break the bastard in half with one hand tied behind his back. Montaña had been buying and selling political shits like him for years.

“I don't like the publicity.”

“What publicity? They traced the yacht back to one that was stolen a year ago from an impound lot. Besides, jefe, none of the bodies were recovered. I had a team see to that, personally, just to make sure.” Not that there had been anything to recover. Even the mutant had burned, the carcass they'd found caught in a tree nothing but ash and slime, the rot of decay sloughed off with the rest of its skin in a blaze that had burned hot and fast.

“Fine. I don't want to discuss it anymore.”

Pussy.

The voice continued. “The lab is having problems obtaining the specimen we need. Even if they could ship it without alerting the government, they have nothing to ship. The flowers are suddenly scarce, which makes completing the drug's production a real problem.”

“So we continue to work from Brazil. We pull the assets here, which are spreading us thin, and return to the jungle to find more of the damned flower, since the ones we've tried to grow seem to miss that special property we need. Making this all happen Stateside was never my intention. Delancey said you wanted it that way so we could—”

“I wanted it that way? Hell no. You told me he said it needed to happen here, because of a fault at the Brazilian laboratory.”

“Hmm. I think maybe he was playing us both. There is no problem at the labs at home that I'm aware of.”

“That bastard. I'm glad he's dead. Ricardo, I want to keep this far away from me. I'd rather we kept the operation going in South America. I can mediate shipping concerns into the U.S., but that's as close as I want to be to the actual operation.”

Montaña smiled. Delancey had wanted to sit comfortably in Brazil while *he* took all the risks. A little lie to convince his boss they needed to be in the States had confirmed what Montaña thought. He'd not only learned who he now worked for, but he'd seen how much influence his boss actually had; and it was a lot, surprisingly enough.

Still, he preferred Bahia as well. Americans were so fat and happy. Too greedy, the lot of them. And the women. He sneered. Skinny whores with nothing to them. He'd broken more than he could count on both hands in the short time he'd been working over here.

“Then if you don't mind, I'm going to go back home. I know some people who can help us get what we need.” He glanced from the speaker to a small video monitor, enthralled with the picture there. He'd replayed the footage over and over since receiving it days ago. “I also have an idea of how to further exploit the rogue assets already at our disposal.”

“Do it. I want results, Colonel. I don't care what you do to get them, as long as you stay under the radar.”

“Understood. And the project?”

The man laughed. “My psychics are turning out perfectly. They have more problems than the Cires did, they just don't know it yet. But with that drug the lab's making, *we'll* control the feed of psychic warfare. Money talks. My friend, we're going to make millions on this, from *everyone*. My government included.” He was still chuckling when he terminated the connection.

But Montaña couldn't take his gaze from the screen. He replayed it yet again, watched as Julian Hawkins turned himself fucking invisible. The powerful Circ could go *sight unseen*.

People would pay huge money for that kind of ability, and Montaña didn't plan on sharing that with some fuck in Washington DC. Not one other Circ in the Project Dawn or Dawn Endeavor series had displayed invisibility traits. The notes he'd read from the founder of the Circe serum, the deceased Dr. Elliot Pearl, told him less than nothing. Pearl had never documented that he'd turned Hawkins into an invisible warrior, nor had any other Circ ever manifested the ability to hide in plain sight.

But Montaña had connections his boss could only dream about, real scientists vetted in the drug industry, geniuses without degrees, but those who understood basic DNA and brain chemistry better than anyone.

He might be a thug, a lowlife drug lord, and a self-appointed military commander, according to some, but Montaña had been born with the intellect and ambition to do great things.

He made a new phone call through a secure line. When the familiar voice answered, he unconsciously relaxed, feeling at home again as he chatted in a mixture of bastardized Portuguese and Spanish. “My friend, I have great news. You said Delancey sold you a new specimen you could work with?”

His friend chortled. “Tried to undercut you, so I promised him the moon while he gave me a ton of facts and files we're going to need. This Circ looks perfect for what we intended. Really spectacular, according to his history.”

“Here's an added bonus: the one he sold you has an incredible ability we need to exploit. Keep it quiet though. I don't want anyone else to know until we perfect it for use in our Circs and us as well.”

The eager voice on the other line agreed. “Whatever you say. When can we have him? I can't wait to start. I've also had some major breakthroughs on that other project I was telling you about. Sheridan Keyes's work is a go.”

Montaña ignored the wash of arousal that spread through him at mention of *her*. “I need to work out a few more problems Delancey's death has caused, but I think I can hand you Julian Hawkins within a few months.”

“The sooner the better. And remember, I need him unharmed. I have to have a workable, viable subject, or the results won't be worth shit.”

“I understand. Until later, then.”

“Call me when you have him.” The man disconnected the call.

Montaña smiled, fully aroused, anticipating his next coup. Not only would he deliver Hawkins into his partner's arms, but he'd finally take the woman he'd been lusting after for years. Enough waiting. He was ready to have a family and settle down. And as he'd come to realize, he could have what he wanted and still play on the side. Nothing was outside his ever-increasing limits anymore.

Now, how to make it all come together without alerting his current boss. Because a new world order *was* just around the corner. But that DC asshole wouldn't be leading it.

Colonel Ricardo Montaña would.

THE END

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Marie Harte

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic, but especially all things romance. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling. Twenty-three years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers.