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BEYOND THE MARIUS BROTHERS 1

ISAAC DRAGOS

## Beyond the Marius Brothers 1

### Isaac Dragos

Isaac Dragos has done a lot of things in his life that he's not proud of, but unbeknownst to most of the people in his life, he did it all because of a promise he couldn't break. With his father's sanity slipping further away every day, Isaac is afraid for the people who matter to him.

Seeking to find himself, Isaac sets out to run away from home and clear his head before deciding what to do next in life. Standing at the airport, deciding where to go, his mate walks right up to him. And when he finds out Rory, his gorgeous mate, has issues of his own, they decide to help each other heal their emotional wounds.

But does he deserve happiness after his past? And will Rory be able to help Isaac, or will his own issues cloud their mating?

**Genre:** Alternative (M/M or F/F), Shape-shifter, Vampires/Werewolves

**Length:** 35,457 words

**ISAAC DRAGOS**

***Beyond the Marius Brothers 1***

**Joyce Flynn**

**EROTIC ROMANCE  
MANLOVE**



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# DEDICATION

To Dr. Lane & everyone at the VRCC neurology department: Thank you for saving my pup, Marius. Thank you for dealing with the one in the morning panicked phone calls because I had no clue what I was doing. Thank you for the hugs, kind words, and comfort when I was alone and scared in a strange city and state trying to do what was best for him. Just thank you for everything. You have an *amazing* group of loving, caring, talented people there and you not only saved him but me from the heartbreak and devastation I would have gone through if I'd lost him. You gave me back my baby.

# ISAAC DRAGOS

## *Beyond the Marius Brothers 1*

JOYEE FLYNN

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### Chapter 1

“He is right there,” Noah said firmly as he pointed to Remus Marius. I watched in horror as Father slapped Noah across the face. *Mother fucker!*

“You lie!” Abraham screamed. “You’re not a fag! It’s bad enough you’re too pathetic to be a warrior. You can’t be a fruit, too! I should have killed you in your crib.”

Large hands grabbed my arms as I tried to launch forward at Father. I pulled, he tugged, and I spun around to hit him until I saw it was Dillon. Shock filled me as I realized he was keeping me from kicking our dad’s ass. Then I got pissed. How could Dillon be okay with Father treating Noah this way?

I got one good elbow into Dillon’s chin, turning to help Noah but only to be stopped by Gabriel Marius. He shoved me hard as Dillon pulled me, and this time I didn’t resist. I was clearly missing something if they were on the same side against me. Did they think I was going after Noah?

“I was going after Father, not Noah,” I growled as they pinned me to the wall. “I thought you were holding me back so I didn’t punch him. I wanted to keep him away from Noah.”



"I thought you were trying to hurt our little brother," Dillon answered, staring daggers at me. I felt my head snap as if he'd punched me. Is that what my brother really thought of me? I might not have been a fan of Noah being a fag, but he was still my brother, and Father had no right to hit him like that. Especially now after we found out that Noah hadn't been studying abroad like I'd thought.

"He's under my protection now, Abraham," Mr. Marius yelled as they walked out into the hall.

"Fuck that, he's my son," Father answered, his hands bunched into fists. "He's not going to mate to a fucking man! I don't give a shit what atrocities you let go on in your home, but in mine, mates aren't men."

*Is he high?* I asked myself as I stared at the man I'd always idolized. I knew I was never Father's favorite, not being the first born and all. But I grew up doing everything he'd always wanted for any scrap of affection he'd give me. I always thought I'd had it rough, but now everything was turned upside down with what I was learning. It seemed Noah had it the worst of us.

"Well, he's coming to my home," Mr. Marius yelled back, stepping closer to Father. "So Noah can claim his mate if he wants to. Even if he doesn't, he's under my protection now. If you don't fucking like it, take it up with the council."

"You son of a bitch," Abraham growled, taking a swing at Mr. Marius's head. Mr. Marius easily ducked it and landed a punch of his own on Abraham, knocking Father on his ass.

"Father," I growled, picking the man up off the ground. At this point I just wanted to get him out of there before he did more damage to our family. I wracked my brain for what to say that would make him leave. "We'll go to the council. There's nothing we can do about it now."

"Yeah, the two of you against nine is pretty bad odds." Dillon chuckled.

“Two? Nine? What are you talking about, Dillon?” Father asked, confused as I was. Then it hit me—Dillon thinks I agree with Father. I wanted to say something, anything to explain that I was just trying to defuse the situation. But like always, no one was paying attention to me, so instead I just pulled Father towards the door.

“You think I’m on your side, Father?” Dillon asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Of course you are,” he spat out, “you’re a Dragos.”

“So is Noah,” Dillon yelled back as I rolled my eyes. Great, now I’d be stuck cleaning up another one of their arguments and playing peacemaker. “Look at the way you’ve treated him! You told us that he was studying abroad. And all this fucking time you’ve confined him to the staff house. How could you? He’s your son. I’m ashamed to call you my father. I stand with the Marius family on this one. You lay one hand on Noah, so help me god, I will kill you myself. I swear on my honor, Father.”

*What has Dillon done?* I thought to myself as I closed my eyes, suddenly feeling very old and tired. I was so tired of this shit. Couldn’t we ever just interact without everyone flying off the handle? And what the fuck had Father been doing with Noah all these years? My head just hurt from it all. I wanted to get us out of there and think.

“You can’t do that,” Abraham replied, his face paling.

“I can and did, Father,” Dillon answered, stepping closer. “All of the people here bear witness to my oath. Why don’t you take a swing at me?” Dillon paused, making his point that Abraham wouldn’t try to fight Dillon. Abraham knew he would lose. “That’s what I thought, Father. You only hit those who can’t fight you. Isaac, take him home, get this piece of shit out of my sight.”

*I’m not your fucking errand boy, big brother,* I growled in my head, knowing nothing good would come of saying it aloud. We had a big enough mess to clean up without Dillon throwing more shit my way to handle. I stared at him for a moment with my mouth open

before dragging Father with me. Right then I wasn't sure who I was more pissed at, Dillon or Father.

"I'm so fucking tired of this bullshit," I mumbled as I still held on to Father's arm as we got to the car.

"What are you mumbling now, Isaac?" Father growled, finally seeming to notice I was even fucking there.

"Get in the goddamn car, and shut your fucking mouth before I run you over with it, *Father*," I ground out between my teeth. Climbing in the driver's seat, I tried not to smile at the shocked look on his face as he got in the car.

We drove home in silence, Father staring at me every so often as I let everything sink in. How could Dillon think I wanted to hurt Noah? I'd always done everything possible to keep the peace in the family since Mother had died. I ended up playing Switzerland so often between them I was exhausted.

"I'll fucking kill him," Father said as he slammed the car door after I put it in park in the drive. I stared at him as I got out as well. He met my eyes, and I felt cold. He'd really lost it. "One call and that pathetic excuse of a son and his fag, Marius, are dead."

"No," I whispered in horror. "He's your son!"

"Not anymore he's not," Father replied with a smile that could only be described as evil. Racing towards him, my brain went into overdrive as to how to save Noah and keep Father under wraps at the same time.

"I'll handle this," I growled, pissed that I was placed in the middle of this mess, yet again. "You fucking touch Noah, and you'll answer to me, Father. He might not be your son anymore, but he's my brother. I'm not going to let you kill him and start a war with the Marius family. I'll get you your revenge, but you will *not* kill him, or I will kill you. Are we crystal fucking clear?"

"Fine," Father grumbled as he pulled his arm away from me. "I'm just glad that you finally seem to have grown some balls and will do what's right for the honor of his family."

I watched as he stormed into the house, my heart breaking. What had I just agreed to? I didn't want to hurt Noah or anyone! Not knowing what else to do, I called Zane. He was my best friend, and if anyone would help me right now, it was him.

\* \* \* \*

"I can't do this, Zane," I whispered as we walked out to my SUV, my heart broken in a million pieces. "I can't hurt Noah like this. There's got to be another way."

"Isaac, his fangs will grow back," Zane said as he rubbed a hand over my shoulder in support. "You can't go to the Council because Abraham made a threat when he was upset. But you and I both know that he'll do what he says. I can't think of another thing to do."

"You know that they will get retribution on us, right?" I swallowed loudly, not wanting to pull my friend into this, but there was no way I'd do it if I was alone.

"They can't kill us." Zane shrugged as he walked around to the passenger's seat.

"I wish they would," I mumbled incoherently. I was so sick of all this shit and broken after everything that'd happened and had yet to happen that life just didn't seem worth living anymore.

"He's going to hate you, but he'll be alive, Isaac," Zane said softly as we drove over to the Marius house. I nodded as I tried to steel my features. It wouldn't work if Noah and everyone thought I was just doing this to save Noah's life. They *had* to think I was doing this on my own. The moment I stopped in front of the house, Zane hopped out and rang the bell.

I saw the butler answer the door out of the corner of my eye as I tried to fight off the panic attack that was rising up. All I wanted to do was leave, but I'd never forgive myself if Noah ended up dead because I didn't figure out a way to stop it. Moments later Zane was

opening the back door and tossing my baby brother in. As soon as Zane closed the door and was inside, I peeled out.

“What are you doing, Isaac?” Noah yelled from the backseat.

“Something that will teach your fag ass a lesson,” I snarled back, not actually angry with him. I was so pissed at myself for not having thought of another way to save Noah instead of what I was going to do. But rage was rage, and I used it to keep from crying. “But will keep your pathetic ass alive.”

“Keep me alive?” Noah asked. “What are you talking about?” He was doing his best to fight off Zane, who was trying to tie him up.

“Father wants you dead,” I answered, steeling myself as I stared straight ahead, so he didn’t see my tears. “As much as I think you’re a disgrace, little brother, I don’t want you dead. You just need to be taught a lesson. Maybe then you’ll get your head back on straight.”

“You asshole,” he started to say, but the gag in his mouth cut him off. I drove right back to the Dragos compound, knowing full well that this would be the first place they’d look for us. I just prayed that Remus figured that out and brought the doctor with him. I pulled at the old garage at the back of the property. I’d always liked to tinker around with cars, rebuilding them. It was like my private haven back here.

Noah braced himself as I threw the car in park and turned around. I stuck him with the needle fast, wishing I could say I was sorry.

“Get him out,” I said, getting out of the car. Zane dragged him out the door and none too gently threw Noah over his shoulder. Zane gave me a quick glance, letting me know my face was showing too much, and I tried to pull myself together.

“You humiliate us,” I said as I sat Noah down in a chair and tied him to it. “We’re going to humiliate you, little fag brother. We’re going to make you half a man, half a vampire.”

“You’ve completely lost your mind, Isaac,” Noah yelled. “Father’s warped and twisted your mind. Fate chose my mate for me. If fate doesn’t have a problem with me being gay, why should you?”

"Fate didn't choose a man for you," I said, gripping his chin tightly. "You and that fag, Remus, are lying so you can try and hide how sick you are by saying you're mates."

"You're wrong," Noah said, but that was all he got out.

I know, I thought as I shoved a metal extractor in Noah's mouth to keep it open. Noah tried to struggle again, probably having figured out what unspeakable act we were about to commit. Zane held him steady. Noah's eyes went wide as I walked toward him with a pair of pliers, and I had to look away. I couldn't do this and see the pain and hate for me in my brother's eyes.

Noah tried to scream for help, but it came out gurgled with the metal thing in his mouth. I gripped his left fang with the pliers and yanked before my brain could tell me to stop. I felt the first tear fall as I saw the intense pain on Noah's face. After he'd been kidnapped and suffered more than any person ever should, I was hurting him again.

I moved back in with the pliers, took hold of his right fang and jerked it out as I did the first one, just wanting it to be over. I took the metal thing out of his mouth, and Noah closed it. His gums were bleeding so badly, he was almost choking on his own blood. I prayed he would just black out until help arrived, and a few seconds later, he did.

"I'm going to fucking kill you," Remus screamed, racing at me.

*I hope you do*, I thought right as I felt his fist make contact with my face so hard that if I'd been human, my neck would have snapped. Zane and I didn't really fight back as they restrained us.

"You can't kill him," Victor said. "You know that. But I have an idea on how to get even."

"It's okay," Zane mouthed as I glanced at him as guilt washed over me for having him be a part of this. No matter what my best friend said, it wasn't okay... none of this was.

"What do you have in mind?" Remus asked. I should have been curious, but at this point I was so far into my own self-loathing and guilt, I didn't care.

“Virgil, get my tattoo equipment from the trunk of my car,” Victor said. “Stefan, call Riley and tell him what happened. We’ll be bringing Noah back home in a bit. He’s passed out, so he’s not in pain at least. Let’s get these boys naked and tied facedown.”

“Oh, shit, Victor’s got that look on his face,” Gabriel said.

“Whatever he comes up with,” Remus said, “it isn’t enough.”

“I know, brother,” Gabriel replied, putting his arm around Remus’ shoulder. “Victor will come up with the worst possible punishment for them that won’t get us in trouble later. You know him. He’s the meanest of all of us.”

“No one fucks with my brothers, or their mates,” Victor snarled. “Hopefully, Noah’s fangs will grow back, but the ink I have won’t ever come out. Even if they cut their skin off, the pattern will be in the muscle.”

“See what I mean?” Gabriel said.

They stripped us down, and we struggled out of instinct, not so much that we thought we didn’t deserve what we were getting. Victor began working as everyone else held us still. I realized Dillon had joined us at some point, staring at me with such hate in his eyes.

*Maybe if you weren’t so busy on your soapbox, you could have fucking helped me figure out another way.* I thought to myself, staring right back at him in anger. He was always so wrapped up in his fighting with Father, Dillon never saw who it was that cleaned up the mess and kept Father in line.

“Change of plans,” Victor shouted, and I could barely hear him over our screams. It wasn’t just that we were getting tattoos that were hitting bone. They were going all the way down to the muscle. “Gag these two assholes. Then call Riley and tell him to meet us at the hospital. We’re going to drop these boys off at the warrior compound. Tell Micah to bring his camera.”

*Shit,* I screamed in my head as I turned to look at Zane. They were supposed to give us retribution that I could hide from Father. Not publically humiliate us, which would set off Father even worse.

Rolling my eyes at how everything I'd done now was for nothing, I let my forehead drop back down on my workbench and tried to deal with the pain.

It seemed like hours had gone by, but I knew it was probably twenty minutes before everyone burst out laughing. I dreaded to know what Victor had done to us even though I knew we deserved worse.

"Now everyone will think you're gay, fucker," Victor hissed in my ear as he went to work on Zane. I felt the tears burn as they leaked out of my eyes as my best friend was screaming at pain. God, had I fucked this all up. I wanted to try and save Noah and made everything so much worse.

Next thing I knew, Gabriel and Damian grabbed my arms and dragged me out of the garage. I didn't fight it. I felt too defeated to do much besides try and keep up. They shoved me into the trunk first, Zane falling right on top of me as they closed the lid.

"I'm so sorry," I whispered to Zane. "All of this was for nothing, and now Father will see what they've done and go off the deep end. And they marked you, too, and all you were doing was trying to help me."

"It's okay, Isaac," Zane said as he tried to hug me. Instead, it put our bits and pieces right next to each other, and I gasped. Why was my best friend hard?

I didn't get a chance to ask as the car stopped and the trunk opened. Victor smiled down at me as Zane was dragged out by Gabriel and Stefan, while Victor and Damian pulled me out. As they basically carried us over to the front lawn, I finally got to see what the tattoo Zane had. In big letters *Fuck Me Here* with arrows pointing to his ass. I groaned as I realized I probably had the same.

They threw me on the ground and forced Zane to lie on top of me as they wrapped chains around us so we were lying chest to chest, arms wrapped around each other. We were the same height, so we were chest to chest, hips and cocks rubbing against each other. I realized my cock was hard, too, but from the adrenaline rush of



needing to fight. But I wasn't so sure that was Zane's reason. As if things couldn't get worse, I saw my father's car pull up.

"We have to get out of this," I said to Zane, trying to ignore that Micah was taking pictures of us struggling against each other. "My father just pulled up, and he'll kill them all when he sees this."

"I'm trying, okay?" Zane grumbled as he tried to pull away and then grunted in my ear. Zane mumbled something under his breath, and I couldn't be sure, but I swear he said, "This so wasn't how I wanted to be naked with you."

I felt myself go stiff. What the fuck? Was everyone just going to do everything they could to fuck with my head and turn my world upside down?

"What the fuck have you done to my son?" I heard my father shout, and I groaned loudly. This so wasn't helping anything as Zane and I basically just slid against each other.

"We tattooed him and chained him up," Remus answered calmly. "Zane helped in the kidnapping and abuse of my mate."

"Tattoos are permanent," Father snarled. "That's not the same as kidnapping."

"They drugged him and ripped out his fangs," Remus yelled. "I was going to cut off their dicks. Victor talked me into tattoos and public humiliation."

"Thank god, I'm kind of fond of my cock," Zane growled, and I have the overwhelming urge to laugh. Not so much because any of this was funny, quite the opposite. But if there was ever a time to laugh so I didn't give up and cry, it was now.

"What does the tattoo say?" Father asked. And I moaned, knowing the shit was really going to hit the fan. Zane froze and stared at me with questioning eyes, and I felt myself blush, not knowing what to say.

"Fuck me here," Remus answered.

"What!" Father roared. "You tattooed him with *fuck me here* on his lower back?"

“Yes, with arrows,” Remus replied. “They pulled his fangs out to teach him a lesson for being gay. I think it’s quite fitting.”

“Yeah, I gotta admit it’s pretty appropriate,” Zane grunted as we finally each got an arm free. We stared at each other as it sunk in as to what we had to do next to get out.

“I do, too,” Mr. Marius snickered. “I’ve witnessed the retribution as a member of the council. Are you satisfied, Remus?”

“Once the pictures are e-mailed to all the covens, I will be,” Remus replied.

“You can’t do that,” Father screamed in anger. “Just wait until I seek retribution for this.”

“Retribution for what?” Desmond snarled. “You can’t seek retribution for retribution, and you damn well know that, Abraham.”

“This punishment doesn’t fit the crime,” Abraham growled back. And we just rolled our eyes as we rolled to our sides. “You’ll see. I’m taking this to the council. This isn’t over, Desmond.”

“Hey, Remus,” Micah called out to them. “Isaac must like this. His dick is hard!”

“The fuck it is,” Abraham yelled, racing over.

“Great, now your father’s going to want me dead, too,” Zane grumbled as he slid his hand down my back to reach the lock.

“I won’t let him hurt you,” I replied, doing the same to him.

“Stop touching him!” my father screamed as he gestured wildly. “Are you both fucking queer, too?”

“Then help us,” I snarled up at him. He seemed to finally snap out of it and tore the chains off of us. By then, most of the people had dispersed, thankfully.

Zane and I followed after my irate father as he stormed back to the car. We got in the backseat, still completely naked as my father swore to seek retribution the whole way home. And I’d had it. As soon as the car stopped in our drive, I was out the door and grabbed my father.

“This is over. You will let this go,” I growled as I shoved him hard against the car. “I got you your fucking retribution. It’s over, Father. What they did was to Zane and me, and we accept it. Do not push this, or so help me god you will be standing up in front of the Council asking for it alone.”

I didn’t wait for his response. Zane and I walked back to the garage in defeat.

## Chapter 2

My father couldn't look at me after that. The only time he even acknowledged me was when we were screaming at each other. He wanted me to fight what had happened, and I still refused. He wanted to hire someone to kill Noah and Remus. Then I was threatening to kill him if he did. I waited for Dillon to finally come back home so he could help me get Father under control, but he never did.

I'd barely spoken to Zane after that. Partially from my guilt eating at me for having dragged him into this mess, but mostly because I was scared there was something else going on with him. I know it was completely chicken shit. I'd just had my fill of life-altering realizations that still left my head spinning.

"Get in the car," Father growled at me a week later as I was drinking coffee. I barely got a chance to set it down as he yanked on my arm and pulled me up. Stumbling after him—I wasn't of much use to anyone before I'd had my coffee—I wondered where we were going. At least I had dressed before going downstairs, though Father didn't seem to notice.

"Why are we here?" I asked about twenty minutes later when we pulled up through the gates of the Council's Compound. Father wouldn't answer or look at me as he parked the car. "You didn't!"

"Just shut up and support your family," Father hissed at me and stormed off. I raced after him in anger, wanting to throttle him, but once again we were in public.

"Noah and Dillon are my family, too," I sneered as I followed him into the courtroom. "I cannot believe you sprung this on me! I will not lie for you, Father."

“Fine, then just sit there like the useless piece of shit you are,” he growled quietly as he pointed to a chair. Turning my face away as if I’d been smacked, I sat down in defeat. I sat there in horror as the same thought kept smacking me in the face. This was the end of our family. There really would be no coming back from an appearance in front of the Council. I don’t know if I was more relieved that I didn’t have to get involved this time or overwhelmed with grief that I’d failed to keep everyone together.

“Dillon, Wanda. Good, you’re here,” Father said, walking over to them and ignoring everyone else. “We should be starting shortly. I need you both to sit over by Isaac.”

“We sitting by Noah, Father,” Dillon said, pulling Wanda behind him. “What led you to think we would be on your side of this bullshit?”

“Because you are my son,” his father growled, “and she is my employee. She will do what I tell her to, when I tell her to.”

“I quit,” Wanda said, peeking out around Dillon. “I only stayed working for a cruel employer like you to take care of Noah. Now that he’s free from you, I am staying with him.”

“Listen here, you little bitch,” Father hissed, and I started to tune out. The whole scene unfolded for me like something out of a horror movie. How could everyone have seen what Father really was, and I’d followed him around like a dog?

“Abraham Dragos,” a council member said loudly, snapping me back to the present. “The council is ready to hear your claims. This hearing is being held by the most sacred body of our kind. Let all who speak, speak only the truth. For speaking anything else to this council is to seek punishment from this body.”

“I, Abraham Dragos, hereby charge Desmond, Remus, and Victor Marius for false retribution against my son, Isaac Dragos,” his father said loudly. “I also charge Remus Marius for forced mating with my son, Noah Dragos.”

“What?” I gasped, eyes going wide as panic started to fill me. That crime was a death sentence if convicted. I never wanted to take Noah’s mate away. *No, no, no! This isn’t how it was supposed to happen. Father was supposed to let this go after what I did.*

Everything was a blur. I stared at the man I’d once idolized and saw nothing but a monster. Then I looked at the brother who’d ignored me growing up, why I never knew. And the other brother I’d failed to protect. My mother had to be rolling in her grave at how our family had turned out.

“My brother, Isaac Dragos, and his friend Zane,” Noah said, getting my attention. “Kidnapped me from the home of my mate, Remus Marius. They drugged me so that I couldn’t control my fangs, took me to the Dragos compound, and pulled out my fangs.”

He opened his mouth and showed every council member his still-swollen gums and the sores where his fangs should have been. Several glanced at me as they ignored my father, and I nodded at them, admitting full well what I did, to their surprise.

“Isaac explained to me that my father, Abraham Dragos, wanted me dead—” he continued only to be interrupted.

“That’s a lie,” his father shouted out. “They’ve drugged him and brainwashed him. Isaac took Noah for his own protection.”

“The hell I did,” I said, standing up, but no one was listening to me. I felt pathetic and useless. *Some Warrior I am. I can’t even get anyone to pay attention to me,*

“And pulling out my fangs, Father?” Noah asked. “What did that have to do with anything?”

“That, too, was for your own protection,” Abraham answered. “We knew there were too many Mariuses for us to keep you safe, so Isaac and I decided if your fangs were pulled, you couldn’t mate to Remus. You can’t be mated to a man, Noah. They drugged you and tricked you.”

“That’s a lie, Father,” he hissed. “Isaac told me he was punishing me for being gay, for smearing the glorious Dragos name. He said

you wanted to hire someone to kill me, but he thought if he punished me in such a way, you'd call off the hit."

"You don't know what you're talking about," his father scoffed. "Isaac drugged you so you wouldn't feel the pain. There's no way you could tell what was really going on."

I groaned, wanting to die even more. Pain meds, yeah, that would have been a good idea for my stupid fucking plan. How could I not have thought of that? I tuned out again, so lost in my own misery.

"Council members," Riley said loudly, and I shook my head to try and snap out of this nightmare. "I did give Noah painkillers upon his arrival to my hospital. I also had to place him on a breathing machine to keep him alive. Isaac and Dillon Dragos stumbled upon their brother while helping the survivors. I heard them both say they had no idea that Noah had been taken. That their father had told them Noah was studying abroad.

"Furthermore, when Abraham did arrive at the hospital, he ordered me to take Noah off the machines and give him no more aid." Riley paused as some of the council members gasped and whispered to each other before continuing. "He stated that if Noah was meant to live, he would have to prove he was strong enough to survive without aid. When I informed Abraham that I was licensed as a human doctor and thus held to their laws, Abraham told me that that was bullshit and that he didn't believe in healers, not to mention one who was a fag."

"Who was there at the time, Dr. Johnson?" a different council member asked.

"Myself, my mate, Micah Marius," Riley answered, looking like he was trying to remember. "Desmond, Elena, Remus, and Victor Marius, I know for sure. There was a lot of commotion that day. Unfortunately, my main focus was not on that conversation, but keeping alive twelve members of our race. Abraham, Dillon, and Isaac Dragos were there as well."

“Can all those who Dr. Johnson stated attest to this conversation?” the councilman asked.

“Yes,” I said, not willing to lie to the Council about what was going on. I wouldn’t be party to this any longer.

“You stupid shit,” Father growled as he grabbed my arm roughly. “You just agreed with them.”

“I’m telling the truth, so go fuck yourself,” I snarled, tearing my arm away from him.

“Alright, so we’ve confirmed Dr. Johnson’s statements,” the council decreed. “Abraham Dragos, were you aware that your son, Noah, was taken by the demons?”

“No, I had no knowledge that Noah was taken at that time,” Abraham answered calmly, lying through his teeth.

“That’s a lie,” Wanda said, standing.

“And your name, ma’am?” the councilman asked.

“Wanda Jennings, sir,” she answered, coming forward. “I informed Abraham Dragos myself that Noah was taken when he tried to escape the Dragos compound.”

“What do you mean, escape the compound? Please elaborate, Ms. Jennings,” another council member asked.

“Abraham Dragos forbid his son, Noah, to ever leave the estate,” Wanda informed them. “Since the day that boy was born, his father has not cared one ounce for him. Noah’s poor mother died during child birth. Abraham was devastated. He ignored the boy completely, blaming Noah for his mother’s death. I took it upon myself to care for Noah. His father just left him on the birthing table and walked away.

“Ever since then, Noah has lived at the staff house with the servants,” she continued as I just stared between Wanda and Father. She was a good woman. I knew she wouldn’t lie about this. “He stayed far away from his father, who hated his son even more when it was clear he would not be big enough to be a warrior. Noah had come up with a plan to finally escape the compound. The guards were told never to let him off the property. Unfortunately, Noah was captured



by the demons after getting off the property. I informed Abraham immediately.”

“What did Abraham Dragos do about it?” the councilman asked, disgust written all over his face.

“Nothing, sir,” Wanda replied, tearing up. “He ordered me and the entire staff never to say a word about it. Some of us tried to inform the warriors but were thwarted and reprimanded. His sons didn’t even know he was taken. Abraham would not discuss it. Furthermore, I can tell you Noah has never been abroad or studied anywhere but the staff house.”

“You son of a bitch,” I whispered, wanting to kill Father myself at that moment. I stared straight ahead, trying to get my rage under control until I heard the Councilman again a few moments later.

“What was the retribution?” the councilman retorted, smirking. I feel my face heat up as once again my shame was brought up.

“Victor Marius tattooed Isaac and Zane,” Noah said, trying not to laugh. “Since they saw it, as I did, as a gay hate crime, he tattooed their lower backs. He wrote *Fuck Me Here* with arrows pointing to their asses. They chained them together naked and left them on the front lawn of the warrior house for all to see.”

“At any point did Desmond Marius participate in this retribution?”

“No, sir,” Noah answered. “Victor did the tattooing. Dillon and my mate’s other brothers chained them and took them to the warrior compound. Remus was busy taking care of me, along with Dr. Johnson, who gave me something for the pain.”

“Did your father, Abraham Dragos, appear at any time?” the councilman asked.

“Yes, sir,” he smirked, “Abraham arrived once the retribution was done and Isaac and Zane were trying to undo the chains. He never asked if I was all right, didn’t even acknowledge me. He said Isaac’s punishment did not fit the crime, that tattoos are permanent.”

*It didn’t. I deserved so much worse,* I thought to myself as misery swarmed over me again.

“Remus informed him that so might be the removal of my fangs. We’re not sure they will grow back,” Noah sniffled, and I felt the knife I was already feeling twist in my heart. “My father screamed that he would seek retribution for what was done to my brother. Remus and Desmond informed him retribution can’t be sought for retribution, which is why we’re here today. After Abraham went over to release Isaac and Zane, we left. I have not seen or heard from him until today. We received the council summons last night.”

“Remus Marius, your brother performed the retribution on your behalf?”

“Yes, sir,” his mate answered. “I wanted to cut off both their dicks. My brother, Victor, said he had another idea in mind. Something that would publically humiliate them, without mutilating them like they did to my mate. Since I was seeing red with rage and was having trouble not murdering them both, I deferred to his judgment.”

“Noah Dragos, did Remus Marius force your mating?” the councilman asked, looking almost sickened at what was before him. “If you could, would you claim Remus Marius?”

“Remus did not force me,” Noah replied, his voice firm. “I asked to be claimed, and I would claim Remus in a second if I were able to.”

“That’s all we needed to hear.” The councilman looked around to the other council members, holding a silent discussion. “We will deliberate and come back with our finding.”

“Wait,” Father replied heatedly, “I’ve not had the chance to counter their lies.”

“We’ve heard enough of *your* lies, Abraham,” the councilman responded. “We all know that you think men shouldn’t be mated. You don’t hide that. You actively try to persuade others of it. I personally have been over to your home several times, and I’ve never met Noah. I’ve never heard you ever speak of him. I think we all know how you feel about him. We’re going to deliberate.”

They didn't give Father a chance to say anything else. The council members stood and walked out of the room, leaving everyone else to wait.

"This is your fault," Father sneered at me, smacking me across the face. I looked up at him with wide eyes and rage.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," I hissed as I got to my feet. "This is your fault. You've destroyed this family. I don't give a shit that Noah's gay. I pulled out his fangs to try and keep him alive, and then you went after Remus, you son of a bitch. They all hate me and for what? Nothing!"

"If you didn't agree with me, why didn't you have the balls to say anything?" Father replied, his lip curling up in disgust. And I didn't have an answer.

"Because I still had hope that there was a shred of the man I admired left in you," I whispered finally. "I should have just gone to Remus when you threatened to kill Noah. But I was still trying to keep this family together and not see you thrown in jail."

"They can't fucking touch me," Father scoffed. "You're pathetic, Isaac."

Just then, the back door opened, and the council filed back in. Everyone came to attention and took their designated spots.

"This council finds all claims false," one of the council members said, and I felt my knees almost give out in relief. "Furthermore, we find that Abraham Dragos must be removed from the council, given his false accusations."

My jaw dropped. I never expected anything like that to happen as I froze with shock. It's the only excuse I had for not realizing what Father was about to do. He lunged at Noah, and he barely had enough time to turn away, taking what would have been a definite killing blow to his back instead.

"You little shit, I should have killed you when I had the chance," Father snarled before Remus struck him in the face. That pushed him close enough to me, and I wrapped my hands around his throat.

“This ends now, or so help me, Father, I will end you right now,” I shouted in his face. I think he finally got that I wasn’t playing around as he went pale and stopped struggling. Keeping my grip on him firm, I saw them rush my baby brother out of there as he bled profusely.

“Abraham and Isaac Dragos,” the Councilman said after the chaos had calmed back down. “You are both banned from contacting Noah Dragos or to be within a hundred feet of him at anytime. We also find that Abraham Dragos pay reparations, in the amount of thirty million dollars.”

“What?” Father shouted as he started to struggle again. I tightened my grip, and he calmed back down.

“Understood, I will see that it’s done,” I said before pulling back my arm and punching Father in the face. He slumped over unconscious against the Council’s bench as I sighed in relief. I saw most of them staring at me in shock, and I shrugged. “Things aren’t always what they seem, and sometimes you do horrible things to prevent something even worse.”

\* \* \* \*

It was weeks before I’d finally given up on Dillon coming back home and went to track him down at the Warrior Compound. And by that time I was beyond pissed. He wouldn’t answer my calls to respond to my messages.

“Hey, asshole,” I growled as I stormed up to him. “Remember me? You’re fucking brother?”

“Not anymore,” he replied, halting me in my steps. “I’m done with both you and Father.”

“So I’ve got to clean up after everyone again,” I said, nodding as it sunk in. “Fine, I’ll just figure out how to handle our asshole father all on my own, again. Thanks. I appreciate your support.”

"You don't deserve shit after what you did to Noah," Dillon sneered as he got in my face.

"There's more to the story than you know, Dillon," Zane shouted as he jumped into the mix. I jumped in surprise. I'd been so busy avoiding him, I'd completely missed that he was there.

"Yeah, right, you're just like Abraham," Dillon said as he stormed out of the room. I felt myself go pale at the insult.

"You're not that bad," Zane said quietly as he grabbed my arms and shook me out of my stupor. "We need to talk, Isaac."

"No," I whispered, not meeting his eyes. "I just can't take anything else right now, Zane, okay? Please, just not yet. I'm still trying to keep my father chained down."

"Human!" someone yelled from another room, and I felt the adrenaline pumping as we raced to the front door.

"It's okay," Stefan shouted. "He's not alone. He's my mate."

"He?" I sneered as I stared at Stefan. What the fuck? Was everyone gay but me? Stefan and I used to be friends, and he never told me? "How mighty the great Marius family has fallen. Not only another fag for a son, but mated to a human. How disgraceful."

"You're such an asshole, Isaac," Stefan replied. "Nice way to greet your friend's mate. I appreciate the congratulations, but keep your bigoted opinions to yourself."

"Fuck you, Stefan," I said, knowing I was being completely irrational as I took my anger at Dillon out at him and moved closer. "You not only disgrace our race with your ways, you bring a lower being into this compound."

"Lower being," the small man said.

"Yes, lower being," I replied, focusing on him. I'd actually never met a human before, and I had to give it to the little guy. He had brass balls to be this bold in a room of vampires. "You're below us in the food chain, you pathetic human."

"At least I have better manners." He snickered. "Great show of how you're a higher being."

“How dare you talk to me like that!” I yelled.

“How dare you talk to me like that?” he yelled back.

“Pat, don’t bother,” Stefan started to say.

“Control your pet, Stefan,” I snarled, tired of everyone treating me like shit. I knew I deserved it right then, but fuck! I was so ready to explode that I couldn’t stop the rage in me. “Or I will.”

Pat broke away and walked right up to me. “I’m no one’s pet. Stefan doesn’t control me. He’s my mate. We’re equals.”

“Yeah, right,” I retorted, getting in his face. “You talk big, but as soon as I make a move, I won’t be fighting you. Stefan will be here to protect you.”

“I don’t need Stefan to protect me,” Patrick sneered. “You have to make this physical? Only way you can win at anything is beating up the other person? Go ahead, kick the crap out of me then. I’m still not going to let you treat me like shit.”

Before I could even reply, someone stuck something sharp in my neck. Damn! I wasn’t going to hurt the twerp. I was actually agreeing with him as he voiced how I was feeling.

“Yes, you do need Stefan to protect you,” Riley said as everything went dark.

I woke a while later on the couch in the game room, my head in Zane’s lap. Sitting up, I stared at him as everything hit me. I was fucking furious, and I all wanted to do was punch someone. Smelling the human again, I realized I’d found my target. I stood up and stormed towards the front doors.

“Oh good, you’re still here,” I sneered, wanting to pick a fight with Stefan.

“Just don’t, Isaac,” Stefan said, his tone ice.

“Don’t what, Stefan?” I taunted like an ass. “Play with your little human?”

“Just stop,” the human screamed, startling both of them. “All my life I’ve wanted a family. To have siblings, to have a father, and you’re what I fucking get?”

“What the fuck is he talking about?” I yelled, my face heating up with anger as my vision went red.

“Riley did some blood tests on Patrick,” Stefan calmly said. “He’s half vampire. So Riley compared it with all the vampires he has on record. You matched him. Patrick’s your half brother.”

“What!” I roared, shocked to my core. Of all my father’s sins, he’d never cheat on my mother. “How dare you smear the Dragos name by claiming this human fruit is related to us.”

“I’m not a Dragos,” Pat yelled back. “I’m a Hawk. I don’t want to be associated with you, or your family. You’re an asshole bigot, and your father abandoned me and my mother!”

“Liar!” I said, taking a step closer.

“It’s true, Isaac,” Riley said, coming up behind them with Micah. “I ran the test three times just to make sure. Patrick is your half brother.”

I felt the walls closing in around me as they walked out the front door. Everyone I thought I knew was gay, and my father had been with a human? Racing towards the back door, I got about five steps before I collapsed and threw up.

“Sometimes I don’t know why the fuck I love you,” Zane said before going right back inside. I closed my eyes as another wave of nausea hit me. Seriously? Did anyone else just want to kick me or dump more drama on my shoulders?

## Chapter 3

It had ended up that Riley and Stefan were right. Patrick was my half brother. After I left the Warrior Compound, I had gone home to confront my father. He didn't deny it, but at least I found out that it was after my mother's death. I just stood there and stared as he rambled about how he'd an itch that needed scratching, and who gave a shit about lower life forms like humans?

*My god, I am turning into him,* I thought as horror seeped into me. What had I done? Father didn't even like me, and I'd pushed away anyone who'd ever cared about me to keep this family together. Well, that and spewing a bunch of shit I wasn't even sure I believed myself in anger. I felt cold. And it wasn't the weather. It was a coldness that reached my soul.

The next day I went to the Council and asked to be sent out on any mission. I didn't care how dangerous or far away it was. The further away from my father the better. I needed distance. I needed time to think about what came next. After I got my orders, I gave the housekeeper and butler strict instructions to watch my father and to call me if anything came up. It was over a month later when I got the call and rushed home after my latest mission.

"There's my heir," Father sneered as I walked into his study. "I'm so grateful that you're the legacy I'm leaving the world."

"You killed whatever legacy you had when you treated your own son the way you treated Noah," I growled, no longer taking his abuse as I once had. And then his words hit me, and I felt my eyes go wide. "What did you do now, Father?"



“I just got the paperwork from Dillon a week ago.” He smirked, narrowing his eyes at me. “If you weren’t so busy traipsing around the country trying to find yourself, you’d know what was happening.”

“I was on a Council mission,” I ground out as I looked at the papers he held in his hand. “Why is Dillon sending you paperwork?”

“You’re fag brother is supposedly mated to twin Irish queers,” my father sneered as he took a seat in the chair behind his desk. “Dillon talked to our Council about transferring to Ireland and giving up his claim as heir. I didn’t know why until I did some investigating of my own. Instead of taking his rightful place here and accepting his inheritance, he’s choosing a couple of fruits. So I offered him a hefty sum of money to sign over his rights as my heir and to give up the Dragos name. He signed it. That makes you my heir.”

“I don’t want it,” I said as I stared between him and the papers in his hand. “How could you do that to your own goddamn son? What about unconditional love and family?”

“Oh, please, do you live in a fairy tale?” Father snickered at me as I let the news sink in. Dillon was mated to two men. He gave up his claim on the Dragos fortune and land for his mates. And now I was it, the last Dragos to take over. I shivered at his cold smile as he stared at me. “Loyalty is what matters. You should know that by now. It’s the only reason I’ve put up with you all these years. You’re like a loyal dog.”

“Fuck you,” I spat out and turned to storm out of the room.

“Wish I could have you bombed, too,” my father mumbled, probably thinking I couldn’t hear him, but I had.

My anger left me as I circled back and stood outside the door to his office. I listened intently as I heard my father pick up the phone and dial someone.

“It’s Dragos. Is it done?” he asked, listening for a response I couldn’t hear. “Yeah, I’ve got copies of everything here, and it looks fine. Just get it done. I want that whole family blown to bits now that he’s back from Greece.”

*Fuck*, I thought as I tried to rack my brain to fill in the gaps. I knew who he hated, but why would any of Marius family be in Greece?

“Fine, blow it Friday. I’ll be gone on business by then, so no one can try to blame me,” my father said after a pause. I heard a series of grunts of agreement and acknowledgement. “No, I keep the plans and whatnot until the job is done, and I’m in the clear. That way I know you won’t point the finger at me. Fine, bye.”

I snuck back down the hallway as he approached the door to leave his study. Once he was gone, I raced in there and saw with my own eyes what was going on. *Shit! Fuck! Goddamn him!* I thought in a panic. Without knowing what else to do, I grabbed the proof off of his desk and headed to the front door.

It wasn’t until I’d gotten in my SUV and was racing to the Marius house that I realized my mistake. Father could go back in his office and see the plans were gone and call back whomever and have them blow the place now. That thought alone had me pushing down the gas pedal. But what else was there for me to do? No one in that family would take a call from me, not after what I’d done to them.

I’m not sure I could get help from the Council in time either. Sending up a prayer that someone would listen to me, I pulled up to their front gate.

“I need to speak to Desmond. It’s an emergency,” I said into the speaker that the keypad had. “Please, I’m not fucking around here.”

“Mr. Dragos, you know you are not allowed on the premises per the Council mandate,” a man answered.

“Fine, then arrest me after,” I pleaded in desperation. “I need Desmond now. They’re in danger!”

“Please leave, Mr. Dragos. No one will come speak with you.”

“No, please don’t do this,” I gasped, pushing the button over and over again. It was a couple of moments with no answer when I realized I was going to end up watching them all die. *Fuck that!* Throwing my SUV into reverse, I backed up as far as I could. Then I

gunned it in neutral before switching to drive. I floored it and hoped it would be enough.

The air bags went off at the impact, and I fucking hurt, but at least I'd bent enough of the gate to get the front half of my SUV in. Opening the door, I grabbed my proof as I stumbled out of my vehicle. Trying to run as the shock from the impact wore off, I was almost to the front doors as they opened.

"Get out!" I shouted as Micah, Gabriel, and Stefan appeared in the door already having their hands shift into claws. I saw Desmond behind them, looking just as pissed off. "Please, get everyone out of the house. My father paid someone to blow it."

"What the fuck, Isaac?" Micah growled as he stepped forward and wrapped a claw around my throat. I didn't fight him, still trying to gasp for air. "What are you playing at now?"

"I'm not," I answered, not being able to say anything else from the lack of oxygen. I shook my hand with the proof. "Get everyone out."

"Let him go, Micah," Desmond ordered, and immediately he removed his hand. "So help me god, Isaac, if you're trying to hurt this family—"

"I'm not. I swear," I rambled as I thrust the proof in his hands. "I just got back from a mission and my father told me I was his heir, and Dillon was in Ireland. We fought, and I went to leave, but he mumbled something about wishing he could blow me up, too. I hid and listened to him talking on the phone. Someone saw you get back from Greece, and Father told them to blow the house on Friday while he'd be gone on business. The charges are already here!"

"I wasn't thinking straight. I grabbed the plans and drove straight here. If he goes back to his study and sees they're gone, he could call whomever he hired and have them set off the bomb. Please, you have to believe me! Get everyone out of the house. You can kill me later or do whatever. I deserve it. Just please, listen to me now."

“Gabriel, call the Council,” Desmond said after searching my eyes. “Micah, Stefan, sound the silent alarm and get everyone out.”

“Yes, father,” they said, and I slumped down to my knees in relief.

“Why, Isaac? Why come here and warn us?” Desmond asked as he knelt in front of me. “You know what could happen to you for telling us this. Why do you even care?”

“I only hurt Noah to try and stop my father from killing him,” I blubbered like a child, finally letting the floodgates open. “I didn’t know what else to do. It’s not like I had proof, and I was trying to keep my family together. I wasn’t seeing my father for who he really was, and he’s my father. I was pissed and upset at Dillon for thinking I agreed with Father when I didn’t and washing his hands of everything when I had to then clean up the mess. So I was an ass and took it out on Stefan and Patrick.

“I was trying to keep him under wraps on my own because he’s my father, and I didn’t want to put him in jail. But he’s nuts, Desmond. I think he’s mentally snapped, and I can’t just sit back and let everyone die because of him. I’m sorry, I’m so fucking sorry for everything.”

“Okay, Isaac, I believe you,” he said softly as he helped me stand. “Can you do something for me now?”

“Yes, anything,” I answered, nodding as the tears still fell. I saw Micah, Gabriel, Elena, and several members of the household staff race out the front door with keys in their hands.

“We’ll get everyone out and to the Council Compound,” Desmond said as seconds later cars and trucks started to pull up. “I need you to go back home and keep your father there until he can be taken into custody. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, but I wrecked my SUV getting in here,” I replied, feeling a little bad about their front gate. “And I’m sorry about that, but I didn’t know what else to do.”

“It’s fine, Isaac,” Desmond said firmly as he pointed to one of the smaller cars. “You take that car and go out the back gates, okay?”

“Okay,” I answered as I started to head that way, before turning around. “Please, I’m begging you. Will you let me know when my brothers are safe at the Compound?”

“Of course,” Desmond answered before going to one of the trucks. I raced to the car he pointed to and got inside. Throwing it in drive, I peeled out and headed towards the back gate. Several minutes later I was racing back home as I swiped my keycard at our gate. As soon as I had enough room to fit, I floored it and got to the front door. Without even shutting off the car after I’d thrown it in park, I leapt out and ran into the house.

“You stupid piece of shit,” Father screamed as I entered his study. He looked insane with rage, his eyes not even focusing on me. “What have you done?”

“The right thing, finally,” I yelled right back. “Enough is enough, Father! No one else gets hurt because of your insanity.”

“Just you,” he sneered as he leapt over the desk. It was then I saw he had his sword in hand. I dove out of the way just in time, rolling until I reached the fireplace. I knew there were more weapons on the side of the mantel. Grabbing a sword of my own, I dodged the blow he would have landed on my back if I hadn’t been fast enough.

“You’re really going to kill your own son after everything I’ve done?” I grunted, blocking another swipe he took at me. “Can you not see what you’ve done?”

“I’m fighting the betrayal of all my sons,” he growled as he swiped at me with his clawed hand.

“Stop this!” I screamed as he thrust his sword at me. “They’re already out of the house and on their way to the Council. It’s over, Father. Don’t make me hurt you!”

“Fuck that,” my father sneered as he swung his sword down from over head. I threw mine up to block it as he kept pushing. “I might go down for this, but you will die for your treachery.”

The fight got heated after that, his eyes looking even scarier with lack of sanity. It had to be at least twenty minutes later when I felt my strength start to give, and I knew we'd reached the point where it was either him or me. The other warriors wouldn't make it in time to stop this, and my father seemed to have limitless energy in his psychotic haze. Seeing my opening, I closed my eyes and swung horizontally.

Unfortunately, by closing my eyes in grief at what I was doing, I'd left myself open. My sword severed his head at the same time his plunged into my side. Gasping in pain, my eyes flew opened as I stared at my father's headless body crumple to the floor. I dropped my sword as his head rolled a few feet away, the insanity still on his open eyes. Reaching down, I grabbed the hilt of his sword and pulled it out of me.

I dropped to my knees as the sword fell from my hands. Staring at what I'd just done, I didn't seem to register anything else. I knew I was covered in blood, and my side was hurting badly, but I didn't care. Finally, I heard people running into the room. The other warriors from the Council had shown up. Looking up at them, I felt relieved I didn't have to stay there anymore.

"I had to," I whispered as a couple of them nodded and moved towards me. "He attacked me. I tried to get him to stop, but he was crazy."

"We know, Isaac," one of them said, and I couldn't think of his name right then. "We'll handle this. You need to get medical attention, okay?"

"No, it's already healing," I lied, hoping the wound killed me. The only reason I'd killed Father instead of just letting him kill me was I couldn't let him leave. After all my sins, I couldn't fail Desmond and that family after I swore to not let my father go. It had to end, but I wanted to die as well. "I'm going to my room if you don't need me."

"Okay, man," the same guy said as he helped me up. "We'll take care of this. And Desmond Marius said to let you know that everyone's safe."

“He can’t call in the bomb now. They just have to get it out by Friday,” I said slowly as everything seemed surreal. “He told the guy to blow it Friday. So they just need to find it.”

“Got it,” he replied, and I simply nodded. I walked past the faceless warriors, not giving a fuck who was there. Heading past some of the staff, I told them not to disturb me for any reason and to just go about their business. I heard someone talking, but I ignored them as I climbed up the stairs to my room.

Once there, I pulled off my clothes that had my father’s blood on them. Stepping into the bathroom, I turned the shower on full blast hot and got under it. I felt the burning of my skin and the pain from my wound as if it was really happening to someone else. I really don’t think I even showered. I might have just rinsed off for a while before shutting the shower off. Then I made my way to my bed and collapsed.

I lay there and processed everything, not even bothering to cover up or get dressed. Father was dead. I’d killed him. Dillon wasn’t a Dragos anymore, and he thought I was as bad as our father. I was the heir. Noah hated me as I’m sure Patrick did and with good reason. Zane and I hadn’t talked since the day I’d met Patrick.

I had no one. I’d been invisible most of my life. My father focused on Dillon and Dillon on him as they fought for as long as I could remember. Noah had ended up having it worse than me, and I’d added to that pain. But at least now he had Remus and the Marius family to love him. Same with Patrick. Dillon had his mates and new family. And I was alone. I’d tried to keep this family together as I’d promised Mother. But everything had gone so wrong, and I deserved death.

As I lay there waiting to die, to end the pain I felt from my crimes and the guilt I was plagued with, I realized something. I’d never been loved. No one had ever loved me. Not Father, or Dillon, and I barely knew Noah since I thought he was always off studying abroad. Patrick I’d really only met the one time. And even when Mother was

alive, she didn't care about me. So really, what was the fucking point of hanging on?

\* \* \* \*

"Isaac? Isaac, answer the fucking door," Zane shouted as he pounded on my bedroom door. I woke up hazy, cursing that I was still alive. Seconds later he broke down the door and stormed into the room. "I heard what happened, but this silence... Fuck! What have you done, Isaac?"

"I'm sorry, Zane. I'm so fucking sorry for everything," I whispered as he sat on the bed next to me. "I never meant to hurt you. You were the only person who ever cared for me, and I ruined that."

"You didn't ruin anything, Isaac," he said as he leaned down and kissed me. "I've always loved you, you dipshit. I was just upset."

"I've ruined everything," I replied, tears spilling from my eyes. "Please, just let me die, Zane. I can't live like this anymore. No one loves me, no one even likes me. My whole family hates me, and I just want the grief and guilt to stop."

"I love you, baby," Zane cried against my mouth as he pulled something out of his pocket. When I saw it was a cell phone I tried to smack it out of his hand. "I won't let you die, Isaac."

"It's what I deserve. I killed my own father." I gasped in pain as he put pressure on my side. "Please, Zane, just let me die."

"No!" he shouted before pushing some numbers on the phone as tears streamed down his cheeks.

I felt bad he was upset, but we weren't mates, and look at all the pain I'd brought into his life. He'd be so much better without me. I tried to push his hand away so I'd keep bleeding out, but it didn't work.

"I need help at the Dragos house. Isaac's dying," Zane said into the phone, and I heard Riley on the other line.



“What do you mean he’s dying? I don’t have time to play around, Zane!”

“He’s lying in a bed of blood, Riley!” Zane cried as he kept swatting my hand away as I tried to stop him from putting pressure on the wound. “I think Abraham stabbed him when they fought. He’s grey, man. He’s completely out of it, and I shit you not, I don’t think there’s any blood left in his body.”

“Can you move him?” Riley asked, and I stared at Zane, pleading with my eyes.

“Don’t, Zane,” I begged quietly. “I don’t want to be saved. Just let me die, please?”

“No, Isaac,” Zane whispered as he leaned over to kiss me again. I’m not sure how I felt about that. Glad someone cared? But my entire body was numb anyways. “They don’t all hate you, I swear. I explained a lot after they showed up at the Warrior Compound, baby. Please, you can’t die on me, not now.”

“You’ll find your mate and be happy, Zane,” I answered, feeling myself drift off, thrilled that this might really be it.

“Shit, Riley! Just fucking send help, I don’t know what to do,” Zane screamed as he tossed the phone onto the bed. I felt myself be moved as he pulled me into his lap as he kept pressure on my side. “Please, Isaac, don’t do this. Isaac, I need you. You’re my best friend. Please, baby, don’t leave me, okay? I know things have been bad, but they’ll get better now that Abraham’s gone.”

“No, now I just have something else to feel guilty about,” I replied as the darkness swarmed over me. The last thing I saw was Zane mouthing that he loved me, even if I’d not heard it.

## Chapter 4

Unfortunately, I woke up again when I was being carried out of the house and placed into the back of what looked like an ambulance, but I didn't think Riley had one of those. Then I woke again a little later in the clinic as Riley was trying to keep me alive. I fought them as much as I could, until someone restrained me. I'm sure I woke up several other times since everything seemed to be a haze.

"Isaac? I need you to wake up, Isaac," Riley said at some point, not that I had a clue when. And I saw him standing over me as I opened my eyes. "Can I take the restraints off now? Are you done being a douche?"

"Yes," I croaked out, completely lying through my teeth. I had every intention of trying to die again.

"He's lying. His eye twitches when he lies," Zane said as he moved to stand next to Riley. "Don't let him out of the restraints."

"Why won't you just let me die?" I cried softly as the tears fell. "Please, just let me go."

"Nope. I've worked too hard to keep you alive, Isaac," Riley bit out as he stared at me with hate in his eyes. "God only knows why though."

"Please, please, Zane," I begged as I stared at my friend. "Even Riley wants me dead, just look at him. Please just let me die. I can't do this anymore. I just can't."

"Yes, you can, Isaac," he said as he leaned over to kiss my cheek. "I don't care if Riley hates you, okay? I know who you really are, and I want you here. We'll explain to them after you're better, I promise. I've already talked to Desmond, and he knows the truth."

“I killed my own father,” I whispered as I tried to pull off the restraints. “I pulled out Noah’s fangs. I said horrible things to Patrick. And Dillon thinks I’m a mini Abraham. What the fuck is there to live for?”

“Me,” Zane demanded as he held me down by the shoulders. “I’ve never asked you for one thing in my fucking life, Isaac. I’m asking you now. Swear to me that you will stop trying to end your life. I’m begging you not to do this. And I know that if you make a promise, you will keep it.”

“Yeah, right,” Riley snickered.

“Shut the fuck up, Riley,” Zane snarled. “You don’t know everything. You have no idea what he’s been through. He saved your life by telling Desmond about the bomb.”

“And I saved his,” Riley shouted right back but then shut up. I glanced over to where Riley was looking, and there standing in the doorway was Desmond, Remus, Noah, Stefan, and Patrick.

“Do you really need any more reasons I should die, Zane?” I asked, nodding at them. “Enough is enough, okay?”

“No, Isaac, it’s not okay,” Desmond said firmly, and I turned my face away from them. I tried to bury my face into the pillow, but I couldn’t with the restraints. Instead, I basically shut down and tuned out. I just couldn’t handle anymore. Staring at the wall, I heard what was going on but couldn’t really answer or seem to care. “Zane talked to me, Isaac. And there’s more to the story than we thought.”

“He told me that you cried when you pulled my fangs out,” Noah said quietly as he walked in front of me. “That you didn’t want to do it, but that you were scared for me. Zane told us that you were trying to protect me that day in the hospital from Father, not the other way around. And you said all that shit when you took me because you thought if I knew why you were doing it, Father would have still come after me.”

I closed my eyes, not wanting to hear any more and trying to check out mentally.

“Please, Isaac? We don’t want you to die, okay?” Noah whispered, and I felt him kiss my cheek. I didn’t respond or say anything, knowing that I was dreaming. That or that I’d totally fucking cracked and was really in a padded room. But they wouldn’t stop talking to me. Finally I opened my eyes and looked at Zane.

“If I promise not to let myself die, will the hallucinations leave?” I asked, ignoring the gasps. “Will everyone get out of my head if I swear I won’t kill myself?”

“What hallucinations, Isaac?” Zane said as he leaned forward as he sat on the bed and cupped my cheek. “What are you seeing, buddy?”

“Noah’s here, and so is Patrick,” I answered, feeling annoyed. “There’s no way they’d give a shit if I died, okay?”

“Not if they were sane,” Riley mumbled.

“He’s really there,” I said firmly as I nodded towards the doc. “I swear I won’t kill myself, okay? Look, I’m not lying, my eye’s not twitching. Please, Zane. Just take off the cuffs and let me sleep so maybe everyone will get out of my head.”

“Okay, Isaac,” Zane said, his eyes spilling over with tears as he leaned over and unlocked the restraints. “But you made me a promise, okay? Don’t you dare break it.”

“I won’t.” I nodded, just wanting to sleep. “Just make them leave, please. I can’t take anymore in my head. It’s like torture to hear them when I know they’re not real.”

“I’ll make them leave,” he said against my lips before kissing me. “It’s just you and me. Everyone else will go home.”

“Thank you,” I sighed as I closed my eyes and pulled my hands to my chest now that I was free. Turning on my side, I snuggled into the pillow as Zane pulled the blanket up over me. It sucked that I knew I’d keep my promise to Zane, but it felt good that someone finally cared.

I woke to soft lips kissing my neck and a hard body lying against my back. Realizing it was Zane, I went to pull away as his hand traveled down my stomach.

“Please don’t,” I whispered, and his arms loosened around me. I rolled out of bed and stared down at my best friend. “I can’t do this, Zane.”

“Because you’re straight?” he asked me, eyeing over my hard-on. “I’m not so sure about that, Isaac.”

“No, yes, I don’t know,” I answered as I pulled on the sweats someone had left on the chair for me. “I don’t know what I am. And honestly, I want to, but for the wrong reasons. I want to be comforted and cared for, Zane. I want to be loved and forget everything else, but I can’t do that to you. Does that make sense? You’re the only person I have in my life that gives a shit about me, and I won’t use you.”

“Maybe you’re really not as big of a bastard as we all thought,” Riley said. I jumped in surprise and spun towards the doorway he was leaning against. I felt my cheeks heat up as I quickly pulled on a shirt as well. “And here I was thinking I’d been fed some bullshit about you.”

“Believe what you want, Riley.” I shrugged as I pulled on my sneakers. “I deserve it okay? Thank you for saving me, but I’d like to go now.”

“So what, you’re healed and mentally stable now?” Riley asked, raising an eyebrow at me. “You thought you were seeing things the other night when your brothers were trying to get you to want to live.”

“That was real?” I replied, my eyes going wide as I glanced back at Zane. “I wasn’t hallucinating?”

“No, Isaac, they were really here,” Zane answered softly. “You said you were seeing things.”

“I figured I had to be if Noah said he forgave me,” I said as I sat down on the chair. “Everything’s kind of fuzzy, but I remember promising you that I won’t try to kill myself or just let myself die.”

“Good,” Zane replied with a nod as he sat up. “Let’s get you home now that you’re better.”

“He can’t just leave because he promises to be good,” Riley said, throwing his hands up in the air.

“I won’t break my promise,” I replied, staring into Riley’s eyes. “I never break a promise or go back on my word.”

“It’s the truth, Riley. That’s how half of this shit started,” Zane said, taking a deep breath.

“Don’t, Zane,” I begged. “Please tell me you didn’t tell them.”

“I didn’t, but you need to, Isaac,” he replied, shaking his head. “It would explain a lot to everyone.”

“I just need some time, okay? I need to get out of here, away from here for a while and just think,” I said, looking back at Riley. “I won’t do anything, I swear. If things get worse, or I think I’ll break that promise, then I really am nuts. I’ll come back, and you can throw me in the padded room.”

“Fine, you can go,” Riley sighed as he moved out of the doorway as he handed me his card. “My cell number is on there, Isaac. Call me if things go wrong and you need help. Promise me.”

“You want me dead. Why would you help me anymore than you have?”

“Because if Desmond believes you, I’m willing to take a leap of faith,” Riley shrugged. “You’re still going to need to drink about three times your normal blood intake.”

“Thank you,” I whispered as I felt the waterworks wanting to start again. Instead of giving in, I walked from the room and out of the clinic as fast as I could. It was a little rough considering I’d almost been drained of blood and my side was bitching.

“Where will you go, Isaac?” Zane asked as he jogged after me. “Do you want company?”

“I want you to find your mate,” I answered softly, and we walked to his car in silence.

“What if I just want you?” he whispered as he hugged me from behind as I braced my hands on his car. Turning in his arms, I let my lips brush against his. “I love you, Isaac, you’re my best friend.”

“I love you, too, Zane,” I replied, cupping his cheek. “You’ve always been there for me, and as much as I want what you’re offering, it’s not right. Everything’s blurry to me right now, can you understand that? You deserve someone in your heart and bed that’s there for the right reasons, not because they have no one else in the world.”

“Ouch,” he said as he turned his face as if I’d smacked him.

“Hey, that wouldn’t be the only reason,” I whispered as I turned his face back to mine. “I feel something for you besides just being my best friend, Zane. I just don’t think it’s that kind of love, and I won’t fuck up your mating.”

“I don’t know if it’s that kind of love either, Isaac,” he said with tears in his eyes. “I don’t think I’m *in* love with you. I just know I love you and want to comfort you. You’re my best friend, and you need to be loved.”

“That’s not the right reason for us to be together either, Zane,” I replied, kissing him again. “And it will hit us some point down the line that it’s not enough, what we feel now is not enough. I can’t risk losing you as my best friend when I know that this isn’t what either of us needs.”

“Fine, you stupid idiot,” he said, hugging me tightly. “You’re still hot, and I still want to know what it feels like to bury my cock in your virgin ass.”

“How did I not know you were gay all this years?” I chuckled as I hugged him back. “And who say’s I’d be the bottom?”

“Half the fun is wrestling for who gets to be on top,” he said, winking at me as we broke apart. I laughed so hard it made me feel years younger and that I’d made the right decision. Zane deserved real love, and while I never wanted to point it out, his family was almost as fucked up as mine. I didn’t want us to be together because we didn’t have anyone else.

And while I was freaked out months ago that everyone around me was gay. Now after everything that had happened, I didn't seem to give a shit, even going so far as to kiss my best friend. It was as if killing my father released me from everything I'd once held on to and left me to find my own way. And how fucked up was that?

Zane had driven me home, leaving me in the car as he went inside and handled what I couldn't. He came back out an half an hour later with keys to my BMW, a suitcase of my stuff, and real clothes for me to put on. I got out of the car, stripped, and pulled on the new outfit that was okay for going out in public.

"Just don't fall off the face of the planet, okay?" Zane asked as he watched me change. "Don't leave me here freaking out that something's happened. You need time and want space. That's cool. I'll hold down the fort and keep everyone off of you. But you let me know what's going on every day, Isaac. Or I'll come find you and tie you down for the rest of your life to be my sex slave."

"Deal." I snickered as I grabbed my wallet and keys from him. "Will you do something else for me?"

"Anything," he answered with a smile, and I knew it was the truth. "You are leaving me in charge here."

"Can you get in touch with Dillon and tell him he's still heir?" I asked, knowing that Zane hated Dillon. "Please, Zane? He shouldn't have lost it for the reasons he did. And really, I don't want it."

"I'll call and talk to him about what's been happening if he's not being a dick," Zane said after a few moments. "But, let's wait until you get your head cleared up before you go giving away the keys to the castle. Fair enough?"

"Yeah, fair enough," I answered, hugging him quickly again before turning towards the main garage with my bag.

"This isn't good-bye, dickhead," he called out, and I had to roll my eyes.

"No, it's see you later," I answered as I opened the back door and threw my bag in. Then I got in the driver's side, turned it on, and



pulled out of the garage. I waved at him as I drove off, feeling free for the first time in my life. Abraham was gone, and while I needed to deal with that, for once I wanted to not handle anything. I wanted to just live.

\* \* \* \*

I'd caught a flight to New York, figuring I could fly anywhere I wanted to from there. As I looked over the possible destinations, I smelled something that had me sweating with fear.

"So where are you headed?" my mate asked as he moved to stand next to me.

"Don't really know," I answered, my voice quivering. "How about you?"

"Was going to catch a connecting flight to Italy," he replied slowly. "But now I'm just thinking we should go back your place and mate."

"I'm kind of running away from home," I said honestly with sigh. "I've never seen Italy though."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, but I think it would be better for you if you went on your own," I answered as I stared at the departing flights board. "I'm not a good person, and a lot of shit just hit the fan. That's why I'm running away for a while, because I'm a mess. I don't even think I know who I am, and that's not something anyone should be subjected to."

"I think you're nicer than you think you are if you just admitted all that to me," he said after a few moments. "I've got some soul-searching to do, too. I just got kicked out of my pack for being gay. So I have my own set of issues. And while I'm not sure that's something to bring into a new relationship between mates, I'd be an ass just to walk away from my mate. Don't you think?"

I thought about what he said for a few minutes, rolling it around in my head before I answered. "So Italy, huh?"

“Yeah, it sounded far enough away,” he answered softly, and I finally looked at him. I gasped in shock at how beautiful he was. I wasn’t talking cute or sexy, he was breathtaking. He stared at me as I eyed him over.

“You’re gorgeous,” I said finally as I drank him in. He couldn’t have been more than five-six to my six-six. Whereas I had light brown eyes and dark blond hair, my mate had white, not light blond, but white hair that was past his shoulders and bright blue eyes that made me think he saw a lot more than what was on the surface.

“I was thinking the same about you,” he replied, blushing. I thought it was so hot that I felt myself get hard. He lifted his nose and sniffed the air as his eyes went wide.

“Sorry,” I said, feeling my own face heat up.

“I’m not,” he whispered as he leaned over and placed his hand against my chest. “I love that you get hard from just looking at me.”

“Who wouldn’t?” I asked as I watched his pink tongue dart out and lick his plush lips that any woman would kill for. He was almost fragile looking with his slim figure, small hips and hands. His eyes darted around to see if anyone was close enough to hear us.

“Why are you so big for a vampire?”

“I’m a warrior,” I answered as I saw lust haze over his eyes. “What’s your name, little one?”

“Rory, Rory Young,” Rory replied as he searched my face. “Do you know what I am?”

“Shifter of some kind,” I answered honestly. He didn’t smell of wolf or any of the other shifters I’d ever met.

“I’m a white leopard,” he said, blushing again. “You should know that we go into heat with the lunar cycle.”

“Hence the white hair,” I replied, my hand shaking as I reached out to touch it. It was so soft that all I could think about was how it would feel against my naked body. “So Italy, right?”

“Really?” Rory whispered as he stared up at me with hopeful eyes. “You’re willing to try?”

"If you're willing to be patient with me, little one," I replied, leaning over to brush his lips with mine. It was a quick kiss, but we were both panting when we pulled apart. "I'm Isaac Dragos."

"I want to know everything about you, Isaac," he said, tilting his face up for another kiss. "But my flight leaves in half an hour, and I think we'd better get you a ticket."

"I agree," I replied, kissing him quickly again because I just couldn't pass up the chance. I moved my hand over his, entwining our fingers as I bent down to pick up my bag. "Your stuff already been loaded since it's a connecting flight?"

"Yeah, I just have this," he answered as he picked up a backpack. Before I'd even realized it, I took the bag from him and slung it over my shoulder. I took his hand as he smiled at me and blushed. We went over to the ticket counter. I bought my ticket and upgraded Rory's to first class. He started to protest, but I pouted as I gestured to my overly large body.

"You really wouldn't make me sit in a tiny coach seat for a fourteen hour flight, would you?"

"No, that would just be mean." He giggled as we headed to our gate. Rory's hand felt so soft and small compared to mine I was scared I was going to hurt him. As if sensing what I was feeling, he leaned over after we'd taken seats waiting for the call to board. "I'm a shifter, Isaac. I promise you I won't break."

"I'm sorry," I replied sheepishly as I stared into his bright blue eyes. "I'm not sure how to be with a man."

"I'm your first?" Rory asked, his eyes going wide. I nodded as I went to look at my lap, but his hand stopped me. "Does the idea of being mated to a man repulse you?"

"No, and I'm kind of surprised by that," I answered honestly as I scrunched my eyebrows up. "I thought I would be upset, but I'm not. I'm just really glad I found you."

"Well, that's a start," Rory purred as he nuzzled his head against my shoulder. I felt myself go rock hard in an instant. Sweet hell, my

mate was a cat, and his purring turned me on. That wasn't one I was expecting!

## Chapter 5

I was almost in love with my mate by the time we got to our hotel in Florence. We'd talked the entire flight, trading stories of how we ended up in that airport. I told him all my issues, what I'd done, and it had been almost easy talking with him. He didn't look at me like a monster or sit in judgment. All I saw was concern and understanding in his big, blue eyes.

In turn, Rory told me that his parents had been killed by hunters when he was a baby. His pack had raised him out of a sense of obligation, and lots of times he was moved from home to home when people got tired of taking care of someone else's kid. Rory had to deal with the fact he was gay and live in a pack that wouldn't accept that.

That was until he made the mistake of getting drunk at his twenty-first birthday, and when someone asked him what he wanted for his birthday, he blurted out, "A boyfriend." After that he'd been told to leave the pack. He sold his car, which was really his only possession, and hopped on a plane hoping to start a new life away from the pack that'd never loved him, much less liked him. It sucked, but we both really knew how the other felt in some ways.

My heart warmed when I realized that we were both tired but didn't want to stop learning about each other. When we stepped out of the cab, Rory's jaw just about hit the pavement as he stared at the five-star hotel I'd called to reserve a room before we got on the plane.

"Isaac, I mentioned the part where I'm poor, right?" he asked as I got the bags and paid the cab driver.

"I think we need to talk about this and get it out of the way," I answered softly as I stared down into his eyes that wouldn't quite

meet mine. “Let’s get our room, and then we can discuss this, okay? I don’t know about you, but I’m kind of wiped.”

“Okay,” Rory answered as he stared at his feet. I bent way down and kissed his cheek, which had him smiling. We’d checked in and gotten our room key in a few minutes before heading to the room. Once there, Rory opened the door as I brought in the bags. “Isaac, this is gorgeous.”

“It is,” I said as I stared at the huge suite with its own living room and balcony. I put the bags down by the bed before going over to the glass doors for the terrace, opening them wide as I stepped out there. Rory joined me, taking my hand in his as we just stared out at the glorious view. “I think Italy was a perfect choice, Rory.”

“Yeah, I think it was, Isaac,” he said as he moved between me and the railing. “I know you said we need to talk, and I get that. I do. But I’m also dying to touch you, and I wanted to know if sixteen hours after you meet your mate is long enough before you beg to have his cock in your ass?”

I blinked down at him several times as his words sunk into my brain. He let out a squeak as I picked him up so fast and carried him into the bedroom like a football. I tossed him on the bed, following down after him, careful so I didn’t crush him.

“So I take it you don’t think I’m some trashy slut?” Rory gasped, staring up at me as I moved between his legs. “Because I’m really not, Isaac, I swear. I’ve only been with two men.”

“Never again, Rory,” I growled as I leaned down. “You’ll never be with anyone else ever again, will you?”

“No, I’m not a cheater,” he answered as he stared up at me with wide eyes. “Are vampires particularly possessive, or is that just a ‘you’ thing?”

“Yeah, we’re incredibly possessive, territorial, not inclined to fuck around where our mates are concerned.”

“It’s kinda hot,” Rory admitted as his cheeks turned red again. “Cat shifters are incredibly affectionate, like our scent on our mates, and are very oral.”

“Are you saying this is what you want then?” I asked in a whisper, my heart skipping a beat as I held my breath, waiting for his answer.

“I’m yours if you want me, Isaac,” he said as he reached up and stroked his hand over my cheek. “I’ve never had so much fun in my life, and all we’ve really done is share our baggage with each other over a fourteen-hour flight.”

“Me either, baby,” I replied, turning my face in his hand so I kissed his palm. “I want you, but I’m also scared out of my mind, Rory. I’ve never been with a man, and I’ve hurt so many people. What if I do to you what I did to them?”

“Then I need to be patient with you,” Rory answered as a soft smile crossed his lips. “Will you promise to listen and talk with me if I come to you with something that upsets me?”

“I promise, and I never break a promise,” I said, nodding.

“Then let’s get naked and mate,” he replied, wiggling his eyebrows at me. I groaned at how much trouble I was in as I mashed my lips down to his. So far we’d only exchanged a few soft kisses, and this was very different. Rory moaned as he threw his arms around my neck, and I loved the feeling of my body over his.

“We’ll have more foreplay next time, but right now I feel like I’m going to explode.” I panted against his lips when we parted. He nodded and smiled as we both got off the bed to strip. I watched him get naked as I yanked off my clothes. He was even more breathtaking without clothes as he was with them.

“Isaac, you’re huge,” he gasped as he stared at my hard cock. “We’re going to have to stretch me out a lot for me to take that.”

“I won’t ever hurt you, Rory,” I said as I pulled his body against mine. “I get the basic idea of sex with a man, but you’re going to have to lead me through it.”

“Insert tab A into slot B, repeat often with increased frequency and force.” Rory winked at me, and I thought I would blow just from his sexy little wink. “I’ve got lube in my bag.”

“Get it before I die please,” I begged, and he froze.

“Can I ask something?” he whispered as he stared up at me. I had a feeling I knew what was coming and nodded. “Don’t joke about that after what you’ve just been through, please? I know you swore to your friend you wouldn’t kill yourself, but what happened scares me that you want to die.”

“It’s not so much I wanted to die, baby,” I replied as I rubbed my thumb over his lips and thought about how to phrase what I needed to say. “It was about wanting the pain, loneliness, and guilt to stop. Am I still going to have problems with what I’ve done? Yes, of course I will. But I don’t want to die, Rory, especially after now having found you.”

“You promise?”

“Yeah, I promise, baby,” I said, leaning over to kiss him again. He eyed me over before giving me a quick nod and going over to his bag. I groaned as I watched his firm ass as he bent over. Rory must have known what was on my mind because he wiggled it as he glanced over his shoulder at me. “Be nice, my little mate.”

“I plan on being very nice,” Rory purred as he sauntered over toward me with lube in his hand. I reached out to grab him, but he hopped back on the bed before I could. Growling, I knelt on the bed and stalked my mate as he purred, staring at me with wide eyes. “Are you sure you don’t need to see me shift first? I’m not sure if that’s something that’s done pre-mating.”

“I’d want you if you turned into a green elephant, baby,” I answered, seeing the insecure look in his eyes. “I think it’s hot that my mate is a purring kitty.”

“Never been called a kitty before.” He giggled and then moaned as I ran my hands up his legs. “Foreplay next time, right?”



“Right, and lots of it,” I answered as he squirted some slick on my fingers. I stared at him as his lips parted, his eyes going wide as I reached down and rubbed them over his tight hole. “Tell me if I hurt you, okay?”

“Just go one at a time and I’ll be fine,” he said as he moved his hands up my arms. “So many large muscles, it’s really hot, Isaac. But it’s the light brown eyes in contrast to the blond hair that I think is so sexy.”

“You think I’m sexy?”

“Oh, yeah, my big vampire warrior,” Rory moaned as I pushed in a finger slowly. I watched his face to see any signs of pain as I moved it around. All I saw was pleasure. When he opened up enough for me, I slid a second finger inside of him as he pulled his legs against his chest. “I just realized something.”

“What baby?”

“You know I’m going to have to be in you at some point and time to claim you, right?” he asked, fear written all over his face. “I mean, I’m fine with bottoming. But it’s how we claim our mates, and at least once on the full moon I’ll need to when I’m in heat.”

“I’m willing to do that to have you, Rory,” I whispered as I leaned over to claim his soft lips. “I can’t promise I’ll like it. But if that’s what you need, my mate, I’m more than willing.”

“Thank you, Isaac,” he said, his eyes filling up with tears. “I didn’t mean to not tell you that part yet. Honestly, I wasn’t really thinking.”

“I know, Rory.”

“So you’re okay with all of this?”

“I’m very okay with you taking me to claim me as yours,” I answered honestly with a smile. “I might like it. But I think it’s fitting that my mate be the only one who’s ever been in my ass, don’t you?”

As quick as the words left my mouth, Rory pulled away and was up against the headboard with his knees to his chest. I had no clue

what just happened, but he was shaking as he stared at me with such fear I could almost touch it.

“What did I say wrong?” I asked, completely baffled.

“You’re mad I’m not a virgin, aren’t you,” he said as tears filled his eyes. Playing back my words in my head, I wanted to kick myself. I let my head drop forward at the mess I’d made. “I’m sorry, Isaac. I didn’t know I’d ever find a mate or leave my pack—”

“Rory, stop,” I replied gently as I interrupted him and moved up the bed. “I’m not upset at all, baby. I’m not a virgin, not anywhere near being a virgin. I’ve been with hundreds of women over the centuries.”

Rory growled, his lip pulling up over his teeth as his canines extended. Seems I wasn’t the only one who could get possessive. I raised an eyebrow at him. His eyes went wide as he realized what he’d done. I pulled him into my arms as we laughed, and I rolled us over until he was back in our original position.

“I swear I didn’t mean it how it sounded,” I said against his lips. “I’m not upset that you’ve had sex. I only care that I will be the last person you ever have sex with.”

“I promise you that you will be, Isaac,” he replied as he pulled his legs back up. “I didn’t mean to freak out on you.”

“You didn’t.” I smiled as I pushed two fingers back into him. “We’ll learn this stuff about each other and how to read each other’s reactions as we go. I know I’ll make mistakes, but I need to trust you to call me on them. Otherwise, I won’t be the mate you deserve.”

“Will you mate me now?” Rory gasped as I scissored my fingers back and forth. I saw the longing and desperation in his eyes to belong to someone, the same as I felt.

“Are you sure, Rory?” I asked, pushing in a third finger. He smiled widely up at me and nodded furiously. My heart swelled at the trust I saw in his emotions. “I swear on my honor that I will always put your needs, wants, and desires before my own. I will take no

others from this moment and commit my immortal life to you alone, Rory.”

“Take me, gods, please take me,” he whimpered as he pulled his legs back farther. I groaned as I watched my hot little mate fold himself in half with his knees next to his ears. “I’m half cat, Isaac. I’m very flexible.”

“You’re just sex on a stick, baby.” I quickly pulled my fingers out of his now stretched hole and lined up my cock. Checking his face for any signs of changing his mind, I pushed forward when I saw none. I went slowly even though everything in me was screaming to slam home because it felt so good.

“So full,” Rory gasped as he reached up and grabbed on to my biceps. My mate wasn’t kidding about being flexible. His knees were by his ears, and he could still move his arms!

“I’m going to love you so much and forever,” I whispered in his ear after I bottomed out inside of him and leaned over.

“Yes, please.”

“Wrap your legs around me, baby.” He did as I asked, and I started slowly moving in and out of him. Holy fuck! This was worlds different from sex with a woman, and I loved it. I was in heaven, and I didn’t know if it was because I was making love to my mate, or because he was a man. Honestly? I didn’t really care. I was just glad that it was Rory.

“Be gentle with me, Isaac,” Rory said in my ear before nipping my lobe. I knew he didn’t mean physically and during sex. He meant with his heart.

“I’ll do my best, Rory.” I grunted as I started to take him harder. “I’ve been a fuckup all my life, but I don’t want to be with you. I swear I’ll always listen to you, so please just promise you’ll tell me when I mess up.”

“If you do the same with me,” he moaned as I thrust into him faster.

“Yes, I promise.” We didn’t say anything for a few moments, simply enjoying our first time together. I leaned up enough so I could stare into his bright blue eyes, getting lost in their depths. “Baby, I’m getting close. Are you ready to come with me?”

“Claim me, my mate,” he answered instead, tilting his neck submissively. I growled my approval, my fangs extending even further at the sight. Leaning over, I licked his neck a few times, getting a full-body shiver from Rory.

I struck fast, excited to claim him. Rory’s blood was just as much heaven as being inside of him was. He was like sweet cherry wine, and I knew I’d be forever addicted to my mate. As I drank him down, my body lit up like a flame. I’d had human and vampire blood before, but never shifter. Did they all taste this good, or was it just because he was my mate?

“Isaac,” Rory screamed as his body shuddered. Then I felt his seed fill the space between our bodies. But I kept drinking, completely addicted to his taste. I’m not sure how long I drank, ignoring that small voice in the back of my mind telling me I’d taken enough. “Isaac, I think you have to stop. I feel like I’m going to pass out, Isaac.”

“Shit,” I hissed, lifting my head as his words sunk in through my haze. Quickly, I licked my bite closed, and before I could say anything else, the full force of his blood hit me. I pounded into his sweet ass a few more times before roaring out my release.

*“Mine. Mine. He’s all mine, and someone will really love me now. I’m his mate. He can’t get rid of me no matter what now. Please let him love me!”*

“Baby, am I hearing you?” I panted as I came down from my orgasm. Moving so I could see his face, I swore at my selfish act. Rory looked so pale. I was worried I drank him almost dry. I quickly pulled out of him, my cock still rock hard for some reason, and lifted him into my arms. “Fuck, I’m so sorry, Rory. I didn’t mean to take so

much. You just tasted so fucking good it was like I couldn't focus on anything else."

"Shifter blood has a much bigger kick than vampire or human," he whispered, shivering in my arms. I raced us to the bathroom, turned on the shower, and held him as I warmed him up. When he seemed to be just fine, but weak from the blood loss, I took my time cleaning up my mate. I also realized that I'd not showered since the night I'd killed Abraham. Gross.

"How could I hear your thoughts in my head?" I asked as I shut off the water and then set him down on the counter as I grabbed towels.

"It's the mating bond between shifters," Rory answered, his eyes going wide in shock. "I didn't know it could work cross species. I've only heard of it when it was within the same type of shifter."

*"Can you hear me?"*

"Yes," he whispered, giving me a huge smile. "It means we're really mates and both accept our mating."

"I know I do." I lifted him back into my arms when we were dry and brought him back to the bed. First things first, I was going to feed my mate. After the amount of blood I drank, he needed fuel fast. "What would you like to eat?"

"I don't eat much, Isaac," Rory said, squirming on the bed before moving under the covers. "And you're still hard."

"I took too much blood from you, baby. We need to refuel you, and you are my main concern, always. My cock can wait. Now please tell me what you like to eat, Rory, or I'll just order the whole menu and feed you myself."

"Use that voice in bed," he purred, and I glanced up from the menu to see the lust in his eyes. I also noticed the tent in the sheet over him. Oh, yeah, that was going to help me focus on food. I cleared my throat and waved the menu. Rory sighed dramatically, but I caught the smirk on his face. "You took a lot of blood, so carbs would probably be best to refuel me. But I'm part cat. I like meat."

I scanned over the menu and saw they had lasagna with real Italian sausage. That would work. After I confirmed with Rory that he'd like that, I picked up the hotel phone.

"Hi, I'd like four lasagna meals," I said in the phone after room service picked up. As I specified everything we wanted, including which breads, drinks, and salads, Rory crawled over toward me. I just about swallowed my tongue as the sheet slid down, exposing his naked hot body. Sitting back against the headboard I was just finishing up when he licked the head of my cock. "Thirty minutes is fine, thank you."

I barely got the phone back in the cradle as he took my dick in his mouth, purring around it. My eyes were about to roll back into my head when I remembered he was weak from blood and shouldn't be playing.

"Baby, as much as I want this, you should be resting." I moaned, my body wanting what he was offering.

"I can lay here and lick just fine," he replied. As if to prove his point, he lay down in between my legs, his head on my thigh as he licked the base of my cock. "This isn't strenuous at all, and my mate is so hard for me."

"Because your blood is like lava in my veins." I shivered at the sensations his rougher-than-normal tongue gave me as I enjoyed the rush of energy from his blood.

"Shifter blood, especially from a mate, is almost like liquid Viagra and speed, Isaac. I thought you knew that?"

"No, no, I didn't," I gasped as he fondled my sac. "I was still down on blood myself from what happened a few days ago. But if I'd known that, I would have been more careful. I'm so sorry I hurt you like that, baby."

"I'm not hurt, just a little tired," he moaned before taking me back into his mouth. "And horny. God, I'm so fucking horny."

"Are you going into heat?"

“No.” Rory chuckled, glancing up at me. “I’m mated to a sex god warrior vampire. How could I not be horny? Being with you was the most intense experience of my life, Isaac.”

“Me, too,” I whispered, and it was the truth. “But you’re still making it hard for me to behave.”

“I plan on keeping you hard, too.” I got the pun seconds before he deep-throated me. It seemed when my mate wanted something, he wouldn’t be deterred. And right then, he wanted to give me head. How stupid would I be to say no? “Fuck, baby, your mouth is heaven. Almost as good as your sweet ass.”

He purred as he sucked me harder, his gaze never leaving mine. It didn’t take long for me to come, given his attentions. I cried out his name as I shot my load down his throat. Rory kept purring, swallowing everything I had to give him with a sparkle in his eyes. I had the best mate ever.

## Chapter 6

We were just finishing our meal, lunch in this time zone, when I knew it was time to talk. I thought about how I wanted to phrase everything, not wanting to upset Rory. But he was my mate, and I needed to be honest with him, or it was just sugarcoating a lie.

“What do you know about the way vampires live?”

“I know you guys drink blood but eat, too, and you don’t live in packs.” He shrugged after a moment of thought.

“Remember when I was telling you how I’m not the Dragos heir?” I waited until he nodded before continuing. “We’re one of the oldest lines in the Americas of vampires, Rory.”

“You’re totally rich, aren’t you?” He sighed and pulled his knees up to his chest. “Shouldn’t I be happy I landed a mate with money?”

“Change is difficult, so I think it’s understandable you’d be nervous.” I moved around the table and took the seat next to him. “But I didn’t want to keep this from you, and it was obviously an issue when I upgraded us, and you saw where we were staying. I know you didn’t want to eat because you thought room service would be more than you could afford.”

“Yeah,” he whispered, his cheeks heating up with embarrassment. “Can you not spend your money on me and us still be mated?”

“No,” I answered as I reached out to cup his cheek. “Plus, I’m your mate, Rory. I want to give you everything, and as my mate, half of everything I own by vampire laws is now yours.”

“B-But I don’t want it. I only want you.”



“And while I appreciate that’s how you feel, I hope you’ll become comfortable with the idea that we do have money, and you’ll never want for anything ever again.”

“How much money are we talking here?” he asked after a moment.

“A lot,” I replied, closing my eyes and sending up a silent prayer he didn’t freak out. “My father gave Dillon hundreds of millions just to buy him off, so he’d sign over his rights to being the Dragos heir, Rory. And that didn’t make a dent in the estate.”

“Fuck,” Rory whispered, his eyes going wide. “You have like servants and shit, don’t you?”

“Yeah, they have their own residence on the Dragos grounds.” I nodded, scared at his reaction but still hopeful since he’d not pulled away from my hand. “And that’s not the only house I own either.”

“Part of me wants to say awesome, and let’s go shopping since everything I own is in that one suitcase,” he admitted after a few minutes. “Part of me wants to demand that I pay my own way, so you don’t think I’m ever taking advantage of you. And part of me is just really confused by all of this. I’m an orphan. I’ve never had shit that wasn’t given to me out of pity and charity. I don’t want that anymore in my life. I’m twenty-one years old. I should be able to make a living.”

I thought about that for a while, stroking his cheek as he purred and rubbed his face in my hand. “What would you do for a job if you could? Keep in mind that you’re now mated to a very powerful vampire family, and there are security risks associated with that. So I’m sorry, but it couldn’t be something that had you sitting in an office or something. Plus, the Dragos compound is in rural Virginia.”

“I’d really like to get a college degree, but I’ve always wanted to be an editor,” he whispered, his cheeks heating up again. “I love to read and read anything I could get my hands on while I lived with the pack. But I always find mistakes. I’m really good at it actually. I always thought if I could have any job, I’d be an editor.”

“That’s something you could do from home.” I smiled widely at him as thoughts of introducing him to Noah once I mended that bridge sprang to mind. I could totally see them becoming fast friends. “How about this—you can get a degree from an online school, and after that we worry about the next step.”

“But then you’d still be paying for everything.” He shook his head and looked down at his lap. “No, Isaac, I won’t use you like that to get what I want.”

“I don’t see it as using me because I’m offering, and if you’re happy, I’m happy.” I thought for a moment, and the only idea I had, Rory might take as an insult. “I have an idea, but I don’t want you to get offended, okay?”

“Okay,” he said slowly, raising an eyebrow at me.

“Are you organized?”

“Yes, very much so to the point I’ve been called anal.” Rory chuckled and then froze. “You want me to run the house and estate, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I suck at that stuff,” I sighed. “I’m a warrior, baby. The idea of writing checks, paying bills, running a household, and upkeep on our houses makes me want to break out in hives.”

“So it’s not like I’d be your housewife, but it would be instead of you having to hire an estate manager?”

“Yes, exactly like that.” I nodded after thinking about it. “It’s not like you’d have to cook, clean, or do my ironing. We have housekeepers for that. But, like, I hate the interior of the main compound. I’ve always hated it. But I so don’t have the patience to work with contractors or decorators. And all the Dragos accounts need to be changed in our names and blah, blah, blah.”

“You’re a goofball.” Rory giggled and moved to straddle my lap. “But yes, I accept. I’d need your help at first, but I’m good with money. I used to help a few members of the pack do their taxes every year. I’m really organized, and it would be like I was earning my keep.”

“So you’re good with us being rich then?” I asked slowly, still not sure the subject was closed.

“It’s a start. I’ll feel like I’m giving, too, instead of just taking from you constantly.” He hugged me tightly as he rubbed his head on my shoulder. “I might get a little weirded out at times if you’re trying to spend too much money on me or the fact that I’ll be in charge of servants. But I feel that I can come to you when that happens.”

“Will you look at this trip as our honeymoon and allow me to spoil you?” I whispered in his ear as I tried to still his body against mine. I was still rock hard and had been trying my best to ignore it while we ate and then talked. Rory hadn’t been kidding, his blood was like Viagra. I kept having images flash in my head of different ways to fuck him ever since we’d left the bed. “I mean, this is way cheaper than a full wedding, though we could have one of those, too.”

“I don’t want a wedding. I think I’d just be depressed at how empty my side was.”

“Mine would be, too,” I sighed. “So we have each other, and that’s enough for me.”

“Me, too,” he purred and started to rub his head on the other shoulder.

“Are you marking me?” I asked as the realization sank in.

“Yeah, sorry, I didn’t realize it,” Rory said softly as he leaned back to glance at me. “You don’t smell as much like me after we showered, and my cat didn’t like that. But I wasn’t consciously doing it. It’s ingrained in shifters that our mates always smell like us.”

“Don’t apologize,” I replied, lifting his chin with my hand when he went to look away. I kissed him softly and moved his hips so my erection was pushing against his. “I liked it. I liked it a lot. I just wasn’t sure why you were doing it.”

“If this is our honeymoon, then we get to give each other gifts, right?” he asked, his eyes shining with mischief. I raised an eyebrow but nodded. “Now that we settled all the talking, there’s a gift I want.”

“What would that be, baby?” I chuckled as he slid off my lap. We were wearing the hotel robes, so when he moved, my cock was standing straight up, parting it. Rory didn’t say anything, instead taking my hand and leading me back to the bedroom. When he grabbed the lube but didn’t get on the bed, I was confused.

“I wanted this the second I saw this balcony,” Rory explained as he led me out onto the terrace.

“Rory, people can see us out here,” I said, completely shocked and hard as a rock at his suggestion. He gave me a hot little smirk as he poured lube on my fingers. “We can’t just get naked!”

“Who said anything about being naked?” He giggled and lifted the back of his robe enough as he leaned on the railing. “Only you can see me right now. And your massive cock can come out and play without anyone else seeing the rest of you.”

“But if someone looks up, they’ll still know what we’re doing.” Even as I tried to talk him out of it, I started rubbing my fingers over his hole. It was just too tempting to pass up.

“So what? We’re not going to get in trouble for public nudity.” He looked at me over his shoulder, sticking out that plump bottom lip in a sexy pout. “Please, my mate? I want this to be one of my honeymoon presents.”

“I think it’s a present for me,” I moaned as I pushed two fingers into his ass. “My sexy as fuck mate seducing me into kinky sex on the balcony of our hotel room. Yeah, I’d say that’s a hell of a mating gift for me.”

“I know, but I’ll enjoy it, too.” He winked at me over his shoulder.

“You tricked me, you little shit.” I chuckled as I slid in a third finger. Considering we’d just had sex an hour ago, he was already mostly stretched.

“Yes, but I’m your little shit now, Isaac,” Rory panted as he pushed back on my fingers. “And I want to please you. You can’t hide that huge hard-on from me, and it belongs to me since it’s mostly from my blood. I caused it. I should fix it for you then.”

“Such a considerate mate,” I growled before nipping his exposed shoulder where the robe had slipped off. “Are you ready to give me my present, Rory?”

“Yes, gods yes,” he hissed as he spread the cheeks of his ass for me. “My ass is always yours, Isaac. Take what you need from your mate.”

“But you want this, too, right?” I asked, his words sinking in as I pulled my fingers from him.

“I’m fucking begging for it,” he replied, rolling his eyes at me. But then he gave me a wink, and I knew he was just teasing me.

“I’ve never been in a relationship before, so this is all new to me.” Rory nodded and leaned over more, telling me without words to shut up and take him. I laughed quietly as I lined up my cock and pushed in. Suddenly, I wasn’t in the mood to be funny anymore. I wanted to pound into his sweet ass, so he felt me for days. “Fuck, I love that third leg you call a cock.”

“I’m so glad,” I groaned, thrusting the rest of the way in. “Grab onto the railing, baby. This is going to be hard and fast.”

“My favorite kind,” he purred and reached forward, doing what I’d asked. I pulled back out so that just the head of my dick was still inside of him before slamming back into him hard.

“You like this, baby?” I asked as I leaned over him. Rory nodded as he pushed back against me as hard as I was giving. I didn’t start slow. I pounded into his perfect ass from the get-go. Reaching down, I grabbed his cock and started stroking him in time with my thrusts. “What about this? Do you like it when I touch you when we make love?”

“Yes, yes, harder,” Rory begged. His robe slipped off his shoulder more, and I growled at the site of his exposed throat. Instead of sinking my fangs into him since I’d taken more than enough blood, I focused on the sensations of his tight ass.

“Are you going to let me buy you clothes and presents while we’re in Italy?”

“Fine, but I’m in charge in our bedroom,” he moaned, resting his head on my chest. I was surprised he could arch his back at that angle, but my mate was part cat after all. “If you’re going to be in command of most of our lives, I control our sex life.”

“I’m okay with that,” I grunted, the idea turning me on even more. I loved the idea of submitting to my hot mate’s desires. “I’m very okay with that, Rory. You’re the boss in our bedroom always.”

“Damn straight,” he purred. Fuck, that purring was hot! I covered his mouth with a sloppy kiss when I realized he was going to come. Rory yelled, but it was lost against my lips as his seed shot all over my hand and our balcony. The muscles in his ass clamped down on my cock so perfectly that I followed him right over. I buried my face into his robe and roared out my release, pumping more cum than I’d thought I’d have in my body into him.

“Being with you is so much better than any other sex I’ve ever had,” I panted. It might not have been the most romantic thing to say, but the sentiment was there, and I meant it as a compliment.

“Yeah, me, too,” he replied and then gasped. “You’re still hard. Take me again against the wall, Isaac.”

“You should rest after the blood loss, baby,” I said, trying to ignore my still raging hard-on. “And I couldn’t bear the thought of hurting your sweet ass by taking you three times in under two hours, my mate.”

“I know my limits,” Rory growled as he pulled away from me and spun in my arms. I stared down into his gorgeous eyes. “Besides, I’m the boss of our sex life. And I say you fuck me against that wall out here, and then I’m going to take you and claim you as mine.”

“Whatever my mate wants.” I chuckled and lifted him up in my arms. He smiled brightly at me, and I knew I was already wrapped around his little finger and would deny him nothing ever. Rory threw his arms around my neck while moving his legs over my hips. I turned us around and pushed him back against the wall by the door of our balcony.

“Fuck me like you mean it,” he said, and I heard the challenge loud and clear. I reached down and lined my cock back up with his hole. Thrusting up, I bottomed out inside of him in one shot. “This is so hot. My ass is overflowing with your seed already.”

“God, I’ll never tire of our sex life and your dirty little mouth,” I growled before mashing my mouth down to his. I fucked him so hard that if he wasn’t wearing the robe, I would have cut his back to shreds from the stone wall. And while I’d never been attracted to a man before really, I loved the feel of his dick rubbing in between our bodies. We were sweaty enough from the exertion of our previous sex where it moved easily against us.

“Please don’t ever,” he panted and stared into my eyes. I wanted nothing more than to wipe away that look of longing and worry.

“I won’t, baby, I swear I won’t.” I leaned closer to him, and Rory gasped, his eyes going wide before he cried out and threw back his head. Was I nailing his prostate? I knew that was something that was pleasurable to men during anal sex, but I was so new to all of this I had no clue where it was. “I’m already falling for you so hard, my love.”

“Me, too,” he whispered, his cheeks heating up. “I’ve never wanted someone to love me so much, and it scares me that you won’t.”

Part of me thought I already did, but it was too early to say anything. Instead, I kissed him again and tried to put all my feelings into that kiss. Rory moaned and opened his mouth for me, and I fucked his mouth with my tongue as my cock was doing the same with his ass. It took only minutes for us to both come again, crying out in each other’s mouths as we did.

I’d have to be very careful as to how much and when I drank his blood. I had no clue why I was reacting to it like this, but my mate didn’t seem to be complaining. In fact, he seemed as horny as I was from it. But then again, it could be that we’d just mated. Who knew? I

wasn't going to question it when it seemed to make both of us happy. I'm not that stupid.

\* \* \* \*

After Rory claimed me, my cock was finally spent. My mate never brought up the *fuck me here* tattoo, and I wasn't brave enough to ask if it bothered him. But I knew it would come up eventually. Until then I was worried it would be the elephant in the room when we made love.

We took another shower together, kissing and trading soft caresses the whole time. Every moment spent with Rory seemed to be better than the last one, and I knew I would never take him for granted. My mate was so full of life and the desire to not only be loved, but to love. I thought it so amazing that he could be that open with his feelings after everything he'd been through and how young he was.

My phone rang as we left the hotel to check out the sights, and I cringed when I saw the caller ID. Zane. I knew I was an ass for not having checked in, but I didn't know how he'd react to my finding Rory.

"Hey, Zane."

"What part of *don't fall off the planet* was confusing, Isaac? Fuck, man, you had me worried."

"I-I'm sorry... I, um, met someone... I mean, I got distracted... My mate was at the airport," I stuttered, having no clue how to say it. I ended up sitting down on a bench a block away from the hotel, Rory eyeing me over with concern as he sat next to me and took my hand in his smaller one.

"You found your mate?" Zane gasped and then cleared his throat. "That's great, buddy. What's she like?"

"He's a shifter," I whispered, my heart breaking for the pain I knew that statement would cause my best friend.



“Oh, it’s a he,” he replied just as softly.

“Zane, I’m so sorry. You know I still love you, you’re my only family.”

“I know. I’m glad you found your mate,” Zane answered with a snuffle. Fuck! “I-I need to go. I hope you guys have a nice trip.”

“Wait, Zane, please? You’ll find your mate, too, and they’ll make you so much happier than I ever could. Please don’t hide from me.”

“I won’t,” he whispered. “I’ll be here when you get back, okay? I just need some time to deal with this and my feelings. But does he know everything that’s just happened?”

“Yeah, we talked about all of it on the flight to Florence,” I answered. “He was at the airport looking to run away from home and do some soul searching, too. Rory had a ticket to Italy, and it sounded perfect to me.”

“Yes, that does sound good. I’ve already contacted the council to let them know that you’re on leave for bereavement after everything with Abraham. So you just have some fun and bring me back something cool, okay?”

“Of course,” I answered immediately. “We’ll be okay, right? I can’t lose you again, Zane.”

“You won’t. Have fun.” And with that, he hung up. I stared at the phone a moment before slipping it back in my pocket. Standing up, I started to walk towards the shops we were going to. I got several feet before I noticed two things. One, there was no longer a hand in mine. And two, Rory wasn’t with me.

“Rory?” I said loudly as I spun around, looking for him. My mate still sat on the same bench, looking as if someone had just run over his puppy. I raced back to him, kneeling down in front of him. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?” He snickered as he wiped away an errant tear. “My mate is in love with his best friend. And said friend is going to hate me for mating you. Everything is fucking fine.”

“Oh, Rory,” I gasped and then went to kiss him. He pulled away from me and went to stand, but I couldn’t leave this alone. I held him firmly with one hand as I moved his chin to look at me with my other hand. “I’m not in love with Zane. I swear to you I’m not. I love him, yes. But as a brother and best friend only even if I find him attractive. He’s been there for me when no one else has, and no matter how badly I’ve fucked up, he’s always been right beside me.”

“Sounds like being in love to me,” Rory growled and tried to pull away from me again.

“It’s not because it’s not the same as I feel about you, baby,” I said firmly. He froze and glanced back at my face. “I’m *in* love with you, Rory. I know it’s too soon, but I was thinking about it before you claimed me. I’d die inside if you ever left me or didn’t want me. I know I’d do anything to make you happy, and now that I found you, the idea of you not always being at my side makes my heart hurt.”

“That’s different than what you said about Zane,” he whispered, his eyes filling with hope.

“It is, and while it might not be the deepest love since we’ve known each other only twenty-four hours, it is love. And I know that I’ve completely fallen for you, Rory. Zane is my friend, that’s all. You are who I want to spend eternity with, whether you’re my mate or not, baby.”

“Thank the gods,” Rory squeaked out and launched himself into my arms. I almost fell back on my ass from the force of it. But I was able to turn us around and sit on the bench before that happened. “I’ve fallen in love with you, too, Isaac. I know that’s what I’m feeling already. And I was so scared I felt more for you than you did for me.”

“No, baby, we both fell together,” I soothed as I ran my fingers through his soft hair. “I’m worried about Zane, and I don’t want my happiness to hurt him. That being said, nothing will ever make me give you up, Rory. He’s a good guy, you’ll like him. He’s had about the same crap-tastic childhood we’ve had. Just give him some time to come around and everything will be okay.”

“Then no more sniffing or bad,” he said firmly after clearing his throat. “We’re on our honeymoon and just declared our love for each other. That means it’s time to shop.”

“Of course it does.” I chuckled as he moved off my lap. He held out his hand to me with a shy smile. I gladly accepted it, kissing it as I stood up. Rory purred at the gesture and melted against my body. God my mate was sexy! “We’re going to be just fine, my love.”

“Yeah, we really will.” He smiled brightly at me, and everything else in the world didn’t matter anymore. All the shit back home and hurt feelings couldn’t compare to my mate’s happiness or break through my own. I knew eventually we’d go home and deal with it all, but right then, it was just Rory and me. And I wasn’t going to waste a second of our honeymoon worrying about things to come.

## Chapter 7

The next day we went to do some more shopping after seeing lots of the main sights Florence had to offer. Rory really was a good influence on me. While I'd been focused on buying him everything he could ever need, he'd been worried about gifts for others. He had helped me pick out stunning gold necklaces with gemstones for the women on our staff at all the different houses in the Dragos estate. And then we picked out silk ties for the men.

He also indulged me. I'd totally gotten busted buying him even more clothes. And when he'd asked about them, I fibbed and said they were for me.

"Oh, yeah, because anything with a twenty-eight-inch waist would fit you," he had drawled. But he'd still let me have my way and bought them. It ended up we bought more than we could carry back to the hotel, so I set it up with the store to have it all delivered. Then I'd talked to the concierge, and he was going to ship it all back home.

We'd also decided to rent a car. We were going to pick it up tomorrow and check out Rome. Then we were going to see some of the ruins and head up towards Venice. Rory seemed giddy at the idea of seeing real Venetian glass and watch a glass blowing demonstration. So, of course, I immediately talked to the concierge and asked him to set it all up. I also made sure to give him a very generous tip for his help.

Today's shopping was about my brothers and Zane. Rory had said that no matter my relationship with them, it was rude to travel and not bring back gifts from our destinations. He also thought it would help mend fences that I cared enough to have thought of them.

“Noah’s a writer, right?” he asked me as we passed a bookstore. Florence was full of small, hidden treasures and shops where loads of goodies could be found.

“Yes, you guys would get along great I think.” I chuckled as he dragged me into the shop.

A half an hour later he’d found a few rare books and first editions in Italian and Latin. I had to give it to my little mate. He was not someone to be messed with. No matter that there was a language barrier or his small size, Rory haggled prices with the best of them.

“You’ll be perfect at handling the estate,” I said proudly as we walked out of the shop.

“How do you figure?” he asked me, staring at me as if I’d grown a second head.

“You just talked that man down thirty percent from his original pricing! We’re in a foreign country, but you’re still a force to be reckoned with, baby. You’ll be awesome and run a tight ship when we get home.”

“Thank you,” Rory replied softly as his cheeks heated up. “I just figured we’re spending so much of your money I should at least make sure we get the best price.”

“One day you’ll think of it as our money,” I whispered before leaning down to brush his lips with mine. My mate purred and leaned against me. Rory was insatiable! We’d made love all last night, and he seemed ready to go again.

“There is something else we need to talk about,” he informed me as we broke apart and led me over to another piazza.

“Oh? And what would that be?” Rory was quiet a moment as he took several pictures with the digital camera we’d purchased yesterday. Couldn’t go on a honeymoon and not document it.

“Well, we should make sure to get back home before the next full moon for one,” he said after a few moments. “And I need to know more about you being a warrior.” Rory glanced at me with wide eyes and started to ramble with nerves. “I’m not against it. I know it’s your

job and all and you were born into it, so I'm not asking that you stop it, of course. But I need to know more and the rules about it so that I'm not left alone when I go into heat because that can be painful for mated shifters, and I don't want to go through that without you there."

"It's okay," I replied gently as I covered his mouth with my hand. "You have every right as my mate to ask this."

"Really?" Rory asked as I moved my hand away. I gave him a nod, and we went back to checking out the sights.

"Most warriors take only more local missions after they mate, and some retire all together," I explained as he snapped more pictures. "Though that's more after their first child is born. The council is a good group of men and women, Rory. We elect them in, and then it's a life term. Since I'm the Dragos heir, it will actually be expected that I run for my father's seat."

"Is that what you want, though?"

"Not really, but I know I won't want to be away from you." I shrugged as I pulled him over to a gelato cart.

We'd both realized how much we loved Italian ice cream while we were here, and I swear we'd eaten so much of it that I was surprised there was any left in Florence. Once we had ours, we sat down at a bench away from the crowd and just took in the scenery.

"I think I'd like to become an instructor. I've worked with some of the newer warriors on missions before, and I really liked it. I was already thinking about talking to the Council about it before everything went down with Abraham. But now that I have a mate to come home to everyday, I think it would be a smart move."

"And you'd be happy doing that?" he asked and then shoved some more gelato into his mouth. I could tell this conversation made him nervous.

"Yes, I really do," I answered, leaning over to lick a drop from his mouth that he missed. "You make me happy, Rory. Yes, being a warrior is more a calling than a job, but you mean more to me already than it ever did. I don't want to retire. I have a lot more to give to my

people, and I think I'd feel bad if I didn't help keep them safe. So if it's okay with you, that's what I want to ask the Council to do when we get home."

"You're asking me?" Rory squeaked, his eyes going wide as he dropped his ice cream. I caught the small dish in time, but the spoon clanked to the ground. "Why does my opinion matter, Isaac?"

"Because you matter to me," I answered, staring into those blue eyes I loved. "We talked as partners about what you wanted out of life, and we decided together. Why would you think it would be any different when it came to decisions about my job?"

"Because you're old," he blurted out and then slapped a hand over his mouth.

"But you like old, right?" I growled, trying to make a joke out of his thoughtless comment. I didn't like the idea that he saw me as an old man or something. It actually hurt.

"That didn't come out right," Rory whispered as he moved our bags. Then he pushed my arms and slid on my lap before taking my face in his hands. "I mean you're a real adult, not some twenty-one-year-old like me. And yes, I like older when it's you. I just meant that I didn't realize I'd get a vote in this kind of thing when you've lived long enough to know what's best."

"So you don't think I'm some creepy old guy?" I asked softly, my heart hurting at the idea.

"Gods no, my mate," he purred and started to mark me with his scent. "I'm sorry I was an ass at the way I first said it. Sometimes I just blurt things out and assume people know what I mean. You're hot older, but you don't really even look more than thirty. And I really do believe that age is just a number. I just don't want to fuck up your life by voting on choices in our lives because I'm young and inexperienced."

"You've already shown me a bunch of stuff, too, baby." I smiled as he leaned back and looked at me with confusion. "I never knew you were supposed to get gifts for people when you traveled. I've

never haggled before and had no clue how to do it. There's lots we can learn from each other. But I wouldn't ask your opinion if I didn't respect it and want it. My job is something that affects both of us, so I think we both get to weigh in it."

"And I love you for feeling that way," Rory said brightly and then gave me a quick kiss. "If being a warrior instructor is something that will make you happy, then I say go with it. You'll be close to home always, and selfishly, I won't have to worry about you being in danger all the time. But I was being honest about when I go into heat. It's painful for a shifter if their mate's not around to take care of them."

"Well, then we got that settled." We finished our ice cream, mine with my spoon, while Rory used that talented tongue to tease me and lick his since he'd dropped his utensil. Then we started walking towards the Duomo before we picked a place for dinner. "What happens when you go into heat?"

"It only happens after a shifter is mated," he answered as I bought tickets for the tour. "Basically, I turn into an insatiable, horny, sex-crazed cat. I've also seen shifters go ape-shit when someone even touches their mate when in heat. I'll constantly want to mark you with my scent, and I'll be very possessive those three days."

"This is going to be fun," I said with a laugh as we climbed the stairs to get to the top of the Duomo. The steps got much steeper the higher we went. Even I was having trouble, as tall as I was, to climb them. Poor Rory had to lift his leg higher than his hips to step up. But once we got to the highest level and took in the amazing view of Florence, we both agreed it had been worth it.

We spent a quiet, romantic dinner together after that. Rory insisted we both try something we could only get in Italy, and his selections had been delicious. When we got back to the hotel later, we were both exhausted. Of course that didn't stop us from making love again. Then we fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms, and my life was finally perfect.



\* \* \* \*

The next day we checked out of the hotel, picked up our rental car, and headed to Rome. I swear Rory took enough pictures that I knew we'd have to get another memory card soon. But he was smiling the whole time, and I knew it was worth it. I'd do absolutely anything to make my amazing mate smile.

I'd also booked our flights home for the end of the week. As much as I didn't want to pop our bubble and get back to the real world, it had to be done. We were flying in overnight, so we'd get back to Virginia around noon the first day of the lunar cycle when Rory would go into heat that night. I'd thought it would be better to get in the day before, but my mate had begged me to give us as much time in Italy as possible.

So of course I'd caved.

After a few days in Rome, we toured some of the smaller towns and ruins on the way to Venice. And Venice... Well, it was Venice. It was everything people talked about and then some. We took a gondola ride the night we got there, snuggling against each other the whole time.

The next morning we toured St. Mark's Basilica and the square. And of course, then we did some more shopping. While Rome was known for its wood crafts, namely gorgeous music boxes, Venice was known for its glassware.

We'd picked up several music boxes and other presents while in Rome. Especially after I got a message from Zane that Riley and Micah had had their baby. I figured an Italian music box that played a lullaby was something any little girl would want.

And of course, I had lots of sex with my hot, insatiable mate. Rory was very much into kink and the possibility of getting caught. He'd dragged me under a remote bridge in one of the canals and begged me to take him right there. Who was I to say no?

Our last day there, we just relaxed. The rental car was already returned and while we'd checked out of our hotel room, they were holding our luggage until our flight. Most of our purchases we'd already shipped back home, but the ones we made yesterday and today we kept with us and packed them carefully in another suitcase we'd bought.

It was the perfect honeymoon with the perfect man. As the time turned late, we picked up our luggage and caught a ferry to the airport. I'd been scared that the world and our love would come crashing down around us as soon as we left Italy. I couldn't have been more wrong.

"Harder, Isaac, I want you deep in me," Rory panted as I pounded my cock in his ass in the small bathroom on the plane.

"Yes, baby," I growled softly, nipping his ear as I lifted him off the tiny counter and leaned him against the other wall. "I love your kinky ideas as much as I love you."

"Less talking, more fucking my ass," he whimpered with a smile. My mate looked completely debauched. His button-up shirt was hanging open, his jeans stuck on one ankle that he couldn't get off past his shoes, and his longer hair tousled. "I want to squirm the rest of the ride knowing your seed is in me."

"Oh, fuck, Rory," I groaned at the visual he was giving me. "Come for me, my mate, my husband."

"I love when you call me that," he purred and then buried his face in my neck and cried out as he came. We'd picked up simple gold wedding bands in Rome for each other, and while it wasn't an official ceremony, we knew we were married to each other. Rory was my everything, and while we were mates because of fate, we chose to be husband and husband.

"Rory!" I gasped, trying to be as quiet as possible as my orgasm swept over me. I pumped stream after stream of my seed into him, completely sated.

“You’re going to need to drink from me when we get home,” Rory panted after a few minutes when we’d mostly caught our breath. I gave him a questioning look as my cock slipped out of him and I lowered him to his feet. “It’s one of the reasons shifter blood has such a kick to it. So our mates, no matter what race, can keep up with us when we go into heat. I’ll need you hard and constantly ready for the seventy-two hours starting this evening.”

“Baby, I don’t need your blood to constantly be hard and wanting you.” I chuckled as we got dressed. Good to his word, Rory refused to let me clean up his hole wanting to keep my cum inside of him, and screw it if it leaked back out and left a wet spot on his jeans. My mate was sexy as all fuck!

We managed to get back to our seats without officially getting caught, though we got a knowing look from one of the flight attendants. She gave us a wink as we passed her in the aisle. Then we slept snuggled together for the rest of the flight.

After we landed and retrieved our bags, I led my mate to my car in the long term parking lot. Rory was quiet on the drive home, and I knew he was worried.

*“Everything will be fine, my mate,” I said in our mating link. “I love you so much, Rory. Anything else we can work out together. Nothing matters to me as much as you do, baby.”*

*“Thank you, Isaac,”* he whispered back in my mind. We didn’t say anything else for the ride, but I held on to his hand the entire time.

Rory sat up in his seat when we got closer to home. I saw him go pale when I pointed out the Warrior Compound, then the Council Headquarters. We also drove by the Marius house on the way to our home.

“And your house is as big as that?” Rory asked softly as he stared at the Marius house, turning to keep it in his line of sight after we passed it.

“Umm, I think it’s a little bigger actually,” I answered honestly. “I know our grounds are more extensive, and they don’t have a separate house for their staff.”

“Fuck, Isaac,” he gasped and squeezed my hand tighter. “I mean, I knew you were filthy rich, and we talked about you having servants and all of it. But seeing it with my own eyes is way more overwhelming than I thought it would be.”

“I’ll be with you the whole time, Rory.” I raised his hand and brushed my lips against it as the Dragos estate came into view. “This is ours.”

“Okay,” Rory squeaked out, his eyes about to pop out of his head. I let go of his hand to grab my keycard, swiping it and punching in the code for the gate. When it parted, I drove directly to the main entrance. Rory had enough on his plate. He didn’t need to see the twenty-car garage and everything inside of it right this moment.

“You’ll be just fine,” I assured him as we got out of the car. I walked around to his side of the car that was closer to the door and swept him up into my arms.

“What are you doing?” He giggled but still snuggled against my chest. “Are you carrying me across the threshold, my husband?”

“Yes, I am,” I purred like he did, my attempt was lame. The door opened as we reached it, and the main housekeeper was there to greet us.

“Welcome home, sir,” Hester said as she eyed over Rory. “And this must be your mate?”

“Yes, ma’am, I’m Rory Young,” he replied brightly and extended his hand.

“And just call me Isaac, Hester,” I added as they shook. “I’m not like Abraham, and I want this house to be laid back and comfortable. I’ve known you since I was a boy.”

“Nice to have you home, Isaac, and welcome, Rory. You have guests in your study waiting for you.”

“Oh, um, okay,” I said, completely confused. “Can you have everything in the car except the blue suitcase brought up to our room? I want that and the other packages that should have arrived already in the study please.” I figured Zane would be here, but I wasn’t sure who else made up my guests plural. Giving Rory a quick kiss, I lowered him to his feet as we reached my father’s study, but I guess it was my study now. “You’re going to love Zane.”

“I hope so,” Rory whispered quietly. He took a deep breath and gave me a nod that he was ready. I squeezed his hand and opened the door.

“Hey, Zane, I want you to meet Rory,” I said, smiling at my oldest friend. But then I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. Dillon. I gasped in shock and instinctively moved my mate behind me as I turned to face my older brother. “W-What are you doing here, Dillon?”

“So the mini Abraham finally graces us with his presence,” Dillon sneered, eyeing me over. “Done gallivanting all over the world and ready to be the heir now?”

“Don’t you *dare* talk about Isaac like that,” Rory growled fiercely as he moved out from behind me. I watched in shock as his hands turned into massive paws as his teeth extended to the point they barely fit in his mouth. “He doesn’t deserve that from you.”

“Who the fuck is this?” Dillon scoffed, glancing from Rory to me.

“I’m Isaac’s mate, Rory Young.”

“Oh this is just fucking awesome,” Dillon replied, barking out harsh laughter. “After all the shit you’ve pulled, you’re mated to a man!”

“That’s how you congratulate your brother on his mating?” Rory took a threatening step toward Dillon, and Zane’s eyes went wide. I seemed to still be frozen in shock because I was completely unable to move.

“Look, there’s a lot you don’t know, shifter,” Dillon growled, stepping in front of identical twins. Those had to be his mates, Shane

and Sean. Glad this is how we were meeting. “You don’t get a say in all of this. You just met Isaac, and you’re his mate, so of course you’re going to defend him. But you have no idea what he’s done to this family.”

“I know everything, including that you’re a dickhead,” Rory shot back as they growled at each other. After that, the room broke out into chaotic shouting and yelling. It was only then I noticed Desmond, Micah, Riley, Stefan, Patrick, Remus, and Noah were also there.

“Enough, enough of this. I can’t take anymore,” I said, but once again, no one was listening to me. I took two steps to my father’s solid oak desk, and with both hands, flung it at the fireplace as if tossing a box of tissues. Then I screamed louder than all of them combined. “I said *enough!*”

That seemed to get everyone’s attention *real* fast. They all went dead silent, freezing where they stood as several of them stared at what I’d done in shock.

“Isaac, I’m sorry,” Rory whispered as he moved towards me.

“You have nothing to be sorry for, baby.” I shook my head in disbelief that *he* was the one apologizing. “I’m sorry that this is what you walked into as you see your new home the first time.” I wrapped my arms around him, holding him against my chest as I nuzzled his neck. Then I lifted my gaze to Dillon, staring daggers at him. “I’ve told my mate everything. Don’t you dare talk to him like that, Dillon. I’m not putting up with your shit anymore.”

“My shit?” He snickered, rolling his eyes. “You’re the one who’s always hurting everyone. Then Abraham dies, and you’re nowhere to be found.”

“You didn’t tell him,” I gasped, glancing over at Zane.

“I barely got the words out that Abraham was dead, and he hung up on me.” Zane explained, shaking his head. “Next thing I know, it’s a few days later, and he shows up with everyone in tow. I had them park in the garage because I was worried you’d turn and run if you saw them all here.”

“So that’s all he knows? He doesn’t know the how or why afterwards?”

“I’m standing right here, Isaac,” Dillon said, but I ignored him. “But I know you tried to commit suicide from Noah. You were so distraught over the great Abraham Dragos’s demise that you were a chicken-shit asshole and tried to kill yourself.”

“You are such a douche,” Rory growled and went to lunge at him, but I held on to him tighter.

“I didn’t try to commit suicide, brother,” I said softly as I started to shake my head again. “I had a life threatening wound that I didn’t fight to live beyond. I thought I deserved to die for my crimes and gave up. Zane found me, Riley saved me, and I left for a while to get my head on straight. I met Rory at the airport, and we did some soul-searching together and mated.”

“I don’t care,” Dillon replied, crossing his arms over his chest. “After what you’ve done to Noah and Patrick, you don’t deserve a happy ending. And I’m not sorry you were so upset by Abraham’s death that you needed to ‘find yourself.’ I just want to know how the bastard died and what happens from here.”

“You want to know what happened to our father, my *brother*?” I asked, breaking into a hysterical laughter as I dropped to my knees as they gave out from the weight of this whole situation. I pointed to a few feet in front of the fireplace. “I killed him over there, beheaded him actually.” And then I changed direction to a few more feet away. “And his head rolled over there after he stabbed me with his sword because I closed my eyes when I did it.”

## Chapter 8

“You killed Abraham?” Dillon asked a few minutes later when my laughter finally died. He glanced at Desmond and then Zane. “Why didn’t anyone tell me this?”

“I only told Desmond.” Zane shrugged as he moved to kneel on the other side from me that Rory was on. He whispered in my ear as rubbed my back. “Are you okay?”

“No, no, I’m very much *not* okay. And this isn’t the time for this,” I said, my voice sounding distant even to my own ears. “This is the first time my mate is coming to his new home. He’s going into heat in a few hours, and we were going to sort through the gifts we got everyone.”

“I’m going to get Hester to make some refreshments, Isaac,” Rory whispered and kissed me gently. Rory and Zane helped me stand, and then my mate shot Dillon a look that had my blood run cold. “And then we’re all going to sit down and discuss this like adults. Otherwise, those of our guests who can’t behave will be leaving.”

“You don’t get to make that call,” Dillon growled. Before I could even answer, Rory shifted to half man, half white leopard and moved faster than I could even track.

“You might be some big, bad vampire, Dillon,” Rory snarled in my older brother’s face. “But I’m a shifter, I move faster than you can, I’m stronger than you, and I shift into a four-hundred-pound leopard that could slice off all your limbs before you blinked. So *don’t* fuck with me or hurt my mate, or I won’t be so polite to you.”

He shifted back, his clothes in tears as he spun on his heel and gave me a wink before leaving the room.



“Remind me never to piss off your mate.” Zane chuckled as we both stared at the door he’d just walked through.

“Yeah, me, too,” I said, my eyes wide in shock. “I’ve not seen him shift yet. I know he goes into heat during the lunar cycle, and he warned me that he’d be incredibly possessive and dominant over me surrounding that. But I had no idea he would jump in and defend me like this.”

“It’s what ya be doing for your mate.” One of Dillon’s mates chuckled as he took the five steps toward me. He smacked Dillon’s hand away when my brother tried to pull him back. “Shane O’Hagan and this be me twin, Sean O’Hagan. We be mated ta your brother.”

“Nice to meet you both,” I replied, shaking the smaller man’s hand. “Congratulations on your mating.” I glanced at Sean and gave him a soft smile and a nod. “I’m sorry this is how we’re meeting for the first time.”

“Like you give a shit,” Dillon grumbled. I dropped his mate’s hand and then went to sit next to Zane on one of the plush chairs across from the two sofas in the study. I’d always loved this furniture growing up, the deep green leather that felt like butter. When one set of furniture had been worn out, my father would order the exact same thing as replacements. But now, everything was different, and it just felt cold to me.

“Get off your righteous soapbox and listen to what’s really going on, Dillon. Otherwise there’s no point in you being here,” Zane said firmly, taking the chair next to me. “You want answers. Isaac’s got them. The Mariuses are here and not jumping all over him. Shouldn’t that tell you something? Like maybe you don’t know everything?”

“Don’t bother, Zane,” I whispered, shaking my head in defeat. “He made up his mind about me a long time ago. Nothing I say or do will ever change that, no matter what he learns now. Just ask what you want to know and leave me be.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Dillon sneered at me as he sat down on one of the sofas. His mates went to sit at a different one. My

brother glanced over at them in shock. "Why are you guys sitting there?"

"I not be sitting by me mate until ya start acting like me mate," Shane answered, shaking his head. "I never be seeing ya act like this, and we not be liking it." He gestured over to me with pity in his eyes. "This not be the evil devil's spawn ya be telling us about. Noah and Patrick aren't jumping all over him, so maybe ya should shut your trap and actually listen to the man."

"And then you'll come sit by me?" Dillon asked quietly, showing me a soft side of him I'd never seen before.

"Aye, we be loving on ya as soon as ya be acting like our mate again," Sean replied firmly.

"Okay, I'll listen, really listen, and not jump all over him," Dillon sighed and held his hands out to his mates. "But I think I need the support of the men I love to behave."

"Nice way to be twisting that one around, me mate." Shane giggled as they both moved to sit on either side of him. I smiled as both men snuggled up to Dillon, all of them holding hands. He might be dense and oblivious most of the time, especially where I was concerned. But my brother was a good man, and I was glad he was happy.

"What?" Dillon asked, snapping me out of my thoughts.

"I'm just glad you're happy," I answered quickly. Rory had perfect timing and walked through the door with a smaller serving cart. I watched his fluid movements as he asked what everyone wanted and then handed out the drinks. He set a platter of cookies and treats on the coffee table, along with some finger sandwiches. When he was done, he turned to me with a heartwarming smile. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Isaac," he said gently as he plopped down on my lap. "Not that I'm complaining, but why are you saying this now?"

"Because you jumped in to immediately defend me without even having to give it thought. No one's ever done that for me besides

Zane. You threatened to claw up Dillon without a thought that you'd be fighting his mates, too, because you didn't like what he was doing. And you went to go get drinks and snacks so everyone would have their mouths full and be less likely to just start shouting."

"You don't like it when everyone just screams, and you shut down," Rory replied with a purr, snuggling against my shoulder. "We won't get through this and resolve the issues in front of us if you shut down because people aren't calm."

"What's he talking about?" Dillon asked, his hand freezing in place as he went to take a drink of his pop. He glanced from Rory to me in confusion. "You don't shut down when people yell."

"Yeah, I do, Dillon," I sighed, realizing how little my brother really knew about me. "Think back to all the times over the centuries you and Father got into screaming matches... Did I ever join in? Or did I sit there like a deer in headlights?"

"You—" he started to answer but stopped. After a few moments of thinking he opened his mouth and then closed it again a few times. "You just sat there, but that's because you always agreed with Abraham."

"No, I didn't." I snickered as I hugged Rory tighter as if for support. "You two were so busy going at each other's throats that no one paid any attention to what I said. So I just stop talking and shut down when the shouting started somewhere along the way. Then you'd storm out, and Mother and I would calm Father down from doing something drastic. And after she died, I would. I did what I thought was best to try and keep us a family, but it didn't work."

"But you said things on your own that said otherwise," Stefan said as he leaned forward to rest his forearms on his thighs. "You jumped all over me for being a fag and Patrick being a lower life form."

"I was mad that you were gay and never told me," I replied, my cheeks heating up with embarrassment. "We used to be friends once, good friends, Stefan. And then one day, way before even Noah was born, you were just gone. You never even told me you were gay? I

mean, it was like a slap in the face that you never were my friend. But I acted like an asshole. I'm sorry about that."

I turned to Patrick then and continued. "And you were the first human I'd ever met. I'd heard for centuries that humans were lower life forms, and I'm sorry, I just spouted the same bullshit. But when you stood up to me like that, I thought I was wrong. Before I could even say anything, Riley knocked me out with that drug. I wasn't going to hurt you. I was taking out my hurt and anger with Stefan out on you. It was stupid, and I'm sorry for that, too."

"Why did you freak about me being your brother then?" he asked, eyeing me over.

"Because I didn't know that you were born after my mother died." I shrugged as Rory started purring and marking me with his scent. I knew he was doing it partially because it was so close to the time he'd be going into heat, but part of it was for me and to remind me that he was there. "For all of our father's faults, he'd never have cheated on his mate. I thought that's what you were trying to tell me, and I blew a gasket. Abraham admitted it to me and spouted some crap, and that's when I started taking Council missions far away."

"Why don't you just start at the beginning and see what questions they have after that," Rory said after a moment. It was then that I realized I'd never even introduced him to everyone.

"Sorry, baby, I'm such an ass."

"No you're not, but I do like your ass." He chuckled and kissed my neck. I pointed out who everyone was, giving Rory a chance to say hello and introduce himself. Then after a few deep breaths, I started from the beginning and told them everything. And the beginning to me was right before Mother had Noah.

"You and Abraham were at the Warrior Compound when Mother went into labor. I sent Wendy to let you guys know, but I think Mother already knew something was wrong because she made me swear on her soul and mine that I would do anything and everything to keep this family together after she was gone. I did the best I could,

I really did, but everything just got so fucked up always no matter what I did.”

I turned to look at Noah with tears in my eyes. “I know I owe you the biggest apology of all, but there’s one thing that bothers me most of all. I’m sorry I never thought to give you something for the pain. When Abraham lied and said that’s what we gave you, part of me died in grief that I’d been so stupid as to not think of that. I never wanted to hurt you. I really didn’t. I just wanted to keep you and Remus alive.”

“That’s what you’re apologizing for?” Remus asked, his mouth dropping open. “Why didn’t you just come to us?”

“Be honest with yourself, Remus,” Zane replied for me as he laid a hand on my arm. Rory started growling, and we both stared at him with wide eyes.

“Sorry, I’m way to close to going into heat for people to be touching you,” he answered in way of an apology, his eyes never leaving Zane’s hand. “You’re all mine, Isaac. And he has feelings for you besides just a friend. My leopard sees that as a threat to my place as your mate.”

“I love Isaac, Rory,” Zane whispered as he removed his hand. “But I was never in love with him. We talked about that. He’s my best friend and yeah, he’s hot, but I wanted us to be together so that he wouldn’t be alone. I was scared after I almost lost him, and I thought if he had someone, he’d stick around. He has you now, and I’m cool with that. I’m happy for you guys.”

“Okay, just don’t touch him when I’m going into heat.” Rory nodded after a moment, and Zane turned back to Remus.

“Would you have listened to us or believed a word we said if we showed up at the Marius compound and said that Abraham threatened your guys’ lives? Or would you have thought we were playing some game and in on the plot to kill Remus?”

“No, no, I wouldn’t have,” Remus said with a sigh and gestured for me to continue. And I did, filling them in on everything Rory and

Zane already knew. When I was finally done, everyone was quiet, except for my younger brothers who were sniffing. As the silence dragged on, I started to squirm.

"I think you're right about the interior of this house from what I've seen," Rory said suddenly. He glanced around the room, and I was forever grateful that he broke the silence. "This room has too many negative vibes. We should convert it into storage. You've got a massive house. There's bound to be another room we can make an office for us to share."

"I think that's a wonderful idea as long as you handle the design." I chuckled and kissed his neck. "I hate dealing with that shit. I just want to teach."

"Teach?" Desmond asked, speaking up for the first time. It wasn't lost on me that he had wiped tears from his eyes as well, but I didn't know what to say to that.

"I've talked it over with Rory, and given my mate has certain needs during the lunar cycle, I can't be sent away on missions during that time. But I've worked with new warriors before and really liked helping them and training them. I want to petition the Council to become an instructor. It would keep me close to my mate without retiring fully, which I don't want either."

"What about Abraham's Council seat?" Desmond asked, glancing over at Dillon. "You are the Dragos heir, and most run to be on the Council after their parent dies."

"I'm not the heir. Dillon is," I answered honestly, shaking my head. "I didn't even know what was going on until after it happened. I don't want it, any of it. I just want to help new warriors and be happy with my mate whom I love."

"You'd really give it all back to me?" Dillon asked as his eyes went wide.

"Yes, it's yours. Father was an asshole for doing what he did to you. All I'd want is for us to be able to still live here or my separate

inheritance so Rory and I could build a place of our own close enough to work at the Warrior Compound.”

“I’m glad I saved you,” Riley said out of nowhere. He blushed when all eyes turned to him at his outburst. “I just thought I should get that in somewhere. After knowing what I know now, I’m glad you didn’t die and we decided to come talk to you today.”

“Thanks, Riley,” I replied, blushing myself. “Congratulations on your baby. Rory helped me pick out a few gifts for your daughter while we were in Italy.”

“Oh yes, we should do presents now,” Rory exclaimed as he leapt off my lap. Just then there were loud voices outside of the study door. I stood to go see what was going on, but Rory snarled loudly and shifted to his full leopard form. Gasping in shock at how beautiful he was, I didn’t move as he paced in front of me as he stared at the door. Ready to attack whatever perceived threat that might be coming.

“How am I supposed to join them when there are boxes in front of the door?” a woman said loudly.

“It’s okay, Rory.” Desmond chuckled as he stood and went to the door. “It’s my mate, Elena. She probably got worried when we took so long and came to find us.”

*“There are two women and four men,”* Rory said through our mating link. *“Why would his mate come with so many people?”*

I told Desmond what Rory had said, and he raised an eyebrow in question. I explained our mating link, but before we got any farther, the door opened.

“Could someone help us undo this fort?” Elena Marius asked as she stuck her head in. “I’ve got Marian, Victor, Malachi, Brian, and Banning with me. We couldn’t wait any longer and decided to take a field trip.”

“Brian and Banning?” I asked.

“Aye, them be our brothers who came over with us to visit the Mariuses,” Shane said with a nod as they went to bring in the boxes.

"It's okay, baby, you can shift back," I whispered, kneeling down beside him as I pulled off my shirt. His clothes weren't just torn. They were scraps now, and while I figured nakedness was acceptable in shifter communities, it wasn't in vampire. "But you are the prettiest damn cat I've ever seen."

"Why is there a very large white leopard here?" Elena asked as she froze after having stepped into the study. "Is he trained?"

My mate growled loudly, flicking his tail about in agitation.

"Oh, dear lord, you're a shifter," she gasped and sniffed the air. "I do apologize. You startled me, and I wasn't paying attention."

Rory purred then and slowly went to her with his head down in a nonaggressive manner. I watched as Elena knelt down and started scratching him behind the ears.

"Mrs. Marius, I'd like you to meet my mate, Rory Young."

"Elena," she said, giving me a smile. "You're family after all, Isaac."

"You don't hate me?"

"It's amazing what a mother can see of another man when she's not blinded by rage and anger like these guys," Elena replied as he gestured with her head to everyone else.

"Ours!" two voices yelled, and I saw two blurs racing toward Zane.

"Holy shit," he had time to gasp out before he was knocked on his ass by a set of twins. They looked a lot like Shane and Sean, so I guessed that was Brian and Banning. It seemed my best friend just found his mates.

"We found our mate, Brian," one of them said, Banning, I assumed. He looked down at Zane with so much longing I felt my heart swell. "Ya be wanting us, me mate?"

"Oh, yeah," Zane moaned as Brian licked his neck.

"Why are they having this strong of reaction to him?" I asked, glancing from the scene before me to Dillon.



“Our Da’s be saying it have something to do with the fact that two of us have one mate,” Shane answered. “We be feeling our twins emotions as strong as our own. So while ya feel the pull to claim your mate, we feel our pull and our twin’s. I could barely see straight when I met your brother. I be jumping him and biting him before I even said hello.”

“Ya be having a room in this house?” Banning asked Zane as they all got to their feet. “Because if not, I think we be biting ya with everyone here.”

“I-I’m in one of the guest rooms,” Zane stuttered, glancing at me. I smiled widely at him and shooed them away.

“Go, go claim your mates and be happy.” I chuckled, loving the fact that I wouldn’t have to worry about him being alone when I was happy.

“Lead the way, me mate,” Brian purred and rubbed himself suggestively. Just as quickly as they entered, all three were racing out of the study. We all exchanged a look before bursting out laughing. Then I felt Rory’s cold nose against my hand with the shirt.

“This should be long enough to cover you,” I said gently as he took it between his teeth. I watched as he trotted behind one of the far couches with a chuckle.

“You love him,” Elena whispered as she came to hug me. “Congratulations on your mating, Isaac.”

“Thank you so much.”

“Now that I’m back in skin, let’s give out presents,” Rory said as he stood up with my shirt on. It was long enough to be a short dress on him, but it worked. “Sorry about the instant panic and shifting, but around the lunar cycle I’m overly protective and possessive of my mate.”

“I would love to study your DNA,” Riley replied as he looked over my mate with a doctor’s eye. “I’ve never been this close to a shifter before, much less looked at your genetic makeup.”

“Doc, you can have whatever you want from me after you saved my mate.” He chuckled as he gestured for everyone to sit down. I met him by the pile of boxes and gave him a quick kiss. “I love you, too, Isaac.”

“I know, but I’m not sure why.”

“You’re not the bad guy you think you are, Isaac,” Rory answered and walked away with one of the boxes from Rome. I stared after him with an open mouth. Did he know me so well already to see the truth, or was he just seeing what he wanted to see in me considering he was my mate?

“I think he’s right,” Dillon said softly as he grabbed a box to help me. Again, I stared at him with an open mouth in shock as well. My brother gave a graceful shrug. “It seems I assumed a lot over the years and wasn’t really paying attention. I’m sorry for that Isaac. Abraham’s dead, and I hope now we can all get to know each other and really be a family.”

“I’d like that,” I replied, bumping his shoulder as we went back to the sofas where everyone else had sat down.

“Oh and this is for your daughter, Carolyn,” Rory said to Riley and Micah as he handed over the music box. “We thought something that played a nice lullaby would be good for a baby.”

“Thank you, it’s gorgeous,” Micah replied with a smile as he ran his hands over it. “I’m really glad Isaac found you. None of us knew the shit he’s gone through all of these years, and he deserves some happiness.”

“I’ll do my best.” My mate’s cheeks heated up before he cleared his throat and kept handing out gifts. Noah let out a shout as he got the books we’d bought him. Everyone seemed thrilled at what we’d picked out.

“I’ll speak to the Council about your request,” Desmond said when everyone was done admiring their presents. “I hope you might reconsider about your father’s Council seat.”

The way it worked in the vampire world was that Abraham's death had left open the position. As his heir, the bid was mine. I could run for the seat or give it to someone else I thought would do the job. Then the Council announced the candidate and fielded any concerns about that person before voting on if that person would be a good fit for the Council.

"I don't think I'm the right person for the job." I shrugged as I ran my hands over Rory's arms. He felt warm to me, but I didn't think shifters could get sick.

"Oh! An open Council seat?" Elena asked, her eyes sparkling. "If that's truly what you want, to not run for it. Who would you give the bid to?"

"I don't know," I answered, glancing over at Dillon. "I kind of figured when I got home I'd settle things with Dillon, so he'd be the heir like he should."

"I don't want it, Isaac," he replied as he wrapped an arm around each of his mates. "I'm happy in Ireland with my men. We've got more than enough money, and I'm not willing to uproot our family to come back to the US and take over. No matter how it happened, I'm glad it did. I'm free of the constraints and expectations that come with being the Dragos heir. Besides, I'm an O'Hagan now. You should keep the estate. I think you'll do our family proud."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, we're sure," Dillon answered as his mates nodded.

"Would you want the bid?" I asked Elena, who smiled so widely I had my answer.

"We only have a few women on the East Coast Council, and I think the more we have on there, the more we can help get our world into the twenty-first century."

"It's all yours then." I chuckled as Rory started to squirm on my lap. I moved my hand to feel his forehead as I grabbed his hip to keep him still. "Are you sick, baby?"

“No, I’ve gone into heat,” Rory gasped and spun in my lap so fast I barely saw it. He started nuzzling my neck and marking me with his scent, my cock taking notice. “I think we need to politely ask our guests to leave or at least take me to your room before I end up riding you in front of an audience. I’ve been trying to control myself and stay distracted, but it’s almost nighttime, and I can’t hold back anymore.”

“Shit, baby, why didn’t you tell me?” I stood with him in my arms as I glanced from Desmond to Dillon with an apologetic smile. “I hope you all understand. My mate needs me.”

“Of course.” Desmond chuckled as everyone got to their feet. “Go take care of your mate. We can show ourselves out. I hope that you both might meet us at the Marius house Sunday for brunch after the lunar cycle.”

“I do love brunch,” Rory purred from my arms, rubbing his face over my nipple. “We’ll see you then.”

I was so turned on that I couldn’t form words right then. So instead, I gave everyone a smile and a half wave before racing out of there and up to our room. I wasn’t about to miss out on one second of my mate’s first time in heat. And I knew it was the perfect way to celebrate after having resolved so many issues since we’d gotten home. It truly was the start to a new life, and I had Rory to thank for that.

## Chapter 9

It didn't take long for me to get us up to my room and naked. I'd seen Rory horny before, but never like this. He was very much the one leading, all hands and lips as we fell into bed. I moaned and squirmed, overwhelmed with the superb sensations he was causing in my body.

"I fucking love this tat," he purred as he rolled me onto my stomach. "I know you hate how you got it and the meaning behind it. But to me, it's like my own personal invitation to love on you."

"I'm glad you told me that." I gasped when he sunk his teeth into my ass as he pushed in a lubed finger into my hole. Guess I was being the bottom first. "I was thinking of asking Riley if he could heal it since that's his gift."

"Oh, well, that makes sense if you want to," Rory replied softly. I could almost feel his sadness as if it was my own, and that's not what I wanted for our first time experiencing him going into heat.

"Nope, doesn't matter to me if you like it," I said brightly as I rolled over. He moved out of the way of my legs, keeping his fingers inside of me. Smiling up at him widely, I pulled my knees to my chest. "I think it's hot you see it as your invitation. My ass is all yours after all."

My mate purred loudly as he rubbed his scent on my shin as he pushed in a second finger. "So it's cool if you keep it? I mean, it won't depress you as a constant reminder?"

"No, I was worried about you seeing it as a constant reminder of my past crimes."

"I appreciate your concern like that, but I want to keep it. Maybe get Rory added to it." He chuckled. I groaned when his fingers rubbed over my sweet spot as he quickly stretched me out. "You're going to need to drink from me, too, Isaac. You've not taken blood in days."

"Are you sure?" My fangs extended all the way at just the mention of his liquid fire of blood. I'd become almost as addicted to it as my mate himself.

"Oh, yeah, I love when you bite me." Rory shivered as he said it, and I knew he was telling me the truth. Damn was my mate fucking hot.

"Okay, I'm stretched enough. Fuck me, baby," I begged, riding his fingers with everything I had. "I want my gorgeous leopard."

"Like I could say no to that." He snickered as he pulled his fingers out. I panted as he rubbed the rest of the slick on his fingers over his cock, ready for that delicious burn that was to come. He lined up with my hole and slowly pushed inside.

"Oh, yeah, give it to me good, baby," I groaned as Rory thrust forward hard. He leaned over me after he bottomed out and tilted his neck. I struck quick, getting a gasp from him when I sank my fangs in him. Every nerve in my body was on fire after my first sip. Suddenly, his thrusts weren't enough.

I rolled us over and started riding his cock for everything I was worth. Pulling back my fangs, I licked the wound closed after I'd taken enough. Rory gasped as I put my hands on either side of his head and stared into his eyes as I impaled myself on him hard and fast.

"Oh, fuck, Isaac! Ride me, my mate," Rory cried out. He bucked his hips up, meeting me thrust for thrust. We were in such a frenzy. It didn't take long for us to come. We cried out together as our orgasms overwhelmed us. I shot my load all over his chest as he filled my ass with his seed.

"You're still hard," I panted as I collapsed onto the side of him so as to now squish my mate. "I'm still hard."

“Welcome to being mated to a shifter in heat,” he said with a purr and snuggled up at my side as we caught our breath. “We’ll be going at it for the next few days with breaks here and there.”

“Remind me to talk to Hester later about having meals brought up on trays and left outside the door.”

“Hot and smart.” Rory licked my neck, and I shivered from it. “I’m glad we got all that settled today. I mean, it’s not completely healed, but it was like ripping off the Band-Aid, so now everyone can deal with it properly and move on.”

“You think so? I’m not as confident. I’ve come to truces with Dillon before.”

“Has he ever apologized before? I think you also need to keep in mind he seems to be different than you described now that he’s mated.”

“Yeah, that seems to change the Dragos men for the better,” I answered, wrapping my arms around him. “I know you make me want to be a better man, Rory. But you’re right. He’s never said he’s sorry to me. I really do hope this takes, and we can all start getting to know each other for real. It would be nice to get to know our family.”

“That does sound nice,” Rory whispered and buried his face in my neck as he moved to sprawl over me. “I’ve never had a real family before.”

“I did, but I don’t think they knew what that ever meant. Does that make sense?”

“In a way, I get it, but it’s hard to really understand since I didn’t go through it like you did.” We were silent a few minutes, trading gentle caresses as we were lost in our own thoughts. “You want me to be honest with you always, right?”

“Of course, baby,” I answered, tilting my head to give him a quick kiss. “What’s on your mind?”

“Your room is creepy,” he replied, glancing around the room. “I mean it looks like something out of a *Dracula* movie. Maybe we should add that to the list?”

“We can, but I thought about moving us into the master suite after everything in there gets packed up and moved into storages. I don’t want to see my father’s things, and the rest can be trashed. I know there are a few boxes of my mother’s stuff that I’m sure my brothers would like to go through as well though. I-I just don’t think I can handle going in there as it is.”

“I’ll take care of it as soon as the lunar cycle is over,” Rory said gently. “I’ll ask Hester to help me. She’ll know what was your mother’s or what we should store of your father’s. The rest I think we should donate. I might not like the décor of this house any more than you do, but just tossing it would be such a waste. I mean you have the best of everything here.”

“Yes, I do,” I whispered as I stared into his eyes. The fact that Rory would assign himself that task to help me had my heart swelling with love and pride. And taking the extra time to make sure the stuff we didn’t want might go to those less fortunate. “I don’t know what I ever did to deserve you, baby. But I will spend the rest of our lives making sure you know how much I love and cherish you.”

“I know you will, Isaac, and I feel just as blessed to have found you. You already always put me first, and I’ve never had that before. I like it, a lot.” He smiled widely at me as he reached for the lube. I watched as he poured some onto my cock before slicking up his fingers. Rory turned around so I had a great view of his ass and pretty pink hole. “I want you to just sit there and watch, my big mate.”

“Okay,” I panted as he pushed two fingers into himself. I shook with desire and restraint. I wanted nothing more than to jump him and fuck him into the bed. But I assumed my mate had something more loving planned, and I wanted that, too. Yeah, I was a greedy bastard.

“I’m going to make you the happiest vampire in history,” he said with a purr and then gasped as he pushed in a third finger. I watched, completely mesmerized by the show. “You’ll always feel loved and wanted, Isaac. And I’ll make more than sure that you’re always satisfied.”



“I believe you.” I moaned as he purred again and winked at me over his shoulder. “Do you want to ride me, my love?”

“Oh yeah, nice and slow this time.” Rory pulled his fingers out when he was stretched and then moved to straddle my hips. I held my cock at the base and stared at the sight of him slowly lowering himself onto me. When he was seated all the way, he wiped his hand on the sheets before moving them onto my chest. “Tell me you love me, Isaac.”

“I do, baby. God, do I love you with my whole heart and soul.” I swore to him as he slowly moved his hips. His bright blue eyes never left mine

“Tell me your deepest fantasy.” Rory’s eyelashes fluttered as he took me fully into him, and I knew he had my cock so it was rubbing over his sweet spot.

“I never had one until I met you,” I groaned as my words affected him. His ass muscles massaged my cock as he tightened them. “I want us to get one of those Kama Sutra books and test out just how flexible you are all over this house so it’s filled with good memories instead of the bad.”

“That’s a fantastic fantasy. One I will very much be glad to give you.”

“What’s yours, Rory?”

“Wrestling,” he panted as he picked up the pace. “I want to wrestle with you in a gym on those mats where we can get caught. And the winner fucks the loser until neither of us can walk.”

“Oh fuck, baby,” I moaned, and my cock twitched inside of him at the idea. “You really are the perfect mate for me!”

“Good, because you’re stuck with me forever since I’m keeping you.”

“I’m all yours, Rory.”

“I need more, Isaac,” he whimpered, and I knew just what he meant. I grabbed his hips and started thrusting up into him as I pulled him down to me. Rory threw back his head and cried out as he

covered his hands with mine. God, he was beautiful. There was no artist or picture that could ever catch the true breathtaking sight before me.

“Come for me, baby. Mark me with your seed,” I whispered. His leopard must have liked that because his head snapped up and gazed at me. I saw his pupils dilate as his teeth extended. “Hello, my leopard mate.”

“My cat loves you as much as I do,” he replied. Then he stiffened up seconds before screaming out my name as he came all over me. Neither of us ever even touched his cock, and it made me feel like a sex god that I could get that response from him.

“Rory,” I exclaimed as the scent of his cum hit my nose. My climax overwhelmed me as he was still riding his. I pumped everything I had into my sweet mate, loving the feeling of his hole being coated by my essence.

“Think you can handle three days or so a month of this?” Rory asked me with an impish grin as we both panted and tried to catch our breath.

“I’d love it every day.” I chuckled as I realized we were both still hard. “I know your blood is like liquid Viagra, but is that what being in heat feels like to you?”

“I don’t know,” he answered as he moved to lie next to me. We lay on our sides, facing each other and held hands as we gazed into each other’s eyes. “It’s not like I’m just horny. It’s like everything in me is screaming to own every inch of you. That you are mine, and I need to show you in every way if that makes any sense?”

“Yes, I feel the same way,” I whispered against his lips as I moved my hand to run over his naked hip. My mate shivered under my attention, and I knew we wouldn’t be taking a long break. “Promise you’ll never leave me, Rory. I wouldn’t survive not having you with me now that I’ve found you.”

“I promise, Isaac.” We smiled at each other, and I could see the wheels turning in his head. “Do you have a pool?”

“Yes, we put one in a decade or so ago.” I chuckled, loving how his mind worked. “We have an indoor and outdoor one and an indoor whirlpool.”

“Oh, we so need to check that out later,” he drawled, wiggling his eyebrows at me suggestively. “I love naked water sports. Or at least I like the idea of them, never done them.”

“How about we start with the shower,” I growled as I wrapped my arms around his waist. He let out a squeal as I moved us out of bed and threw him over my shoulder. “God, it’s hot to know my seed is still inside of you.”

“Use it as lube,” he purred, rubbing his hard cock against my shoulder. “I’m the boss in bed, remember? That means even if the sex isn’t *in* a bed. And I say fuck me in the shower against the tiled wall.”

“Whatever my mate wants,” I replied with glee. I plopped him down on the counter and then turned on the water. Before he could say anything, I moved back in between his legs and kissed him. Hell, it wasn’t just a kiss... I devoured his lips with everything I had. Rory submitted to me so wonderfully as I took control. When I knew the water was warm enough, I moved my hands under his ass and lifted him up.

“I fucking love how strong you are,” he gasped as he wrapped his limbs around my body. “Show me as you pound into my ass.”

“Holy shit, you’re insatiable.” I closed the shower door behind us and then moved us under the spray. As soon as his shoulders hit the tiles, I grabbed my cock and slammed home into his hole. “Perfect fit.”

“Yes, yes, we are,” Rory panted as he tightened his legs around my hips. “Now fuck me with all those firm muscles moving.”

Oh, did I ever! I pounded into his sweet ass, my lips never leaving his. Rory made the most delicious whimpers and noises in my mouth, spurring me on. Just as I was getting close, my mate threw back his head and yelled to the heavens as he came. I followed him right over, lust shooting through me when I realized my cum was leaking back

out of him because he was so full of it. We both seemed to be experiencing never ending orgasms as wave after wave kept hitting us.

*“Fuck me that was hot!”*

“I think I did just fuck you, baby. If you’re not sure, we could go again?”

“After we get clean.” He giggled as I pulled out of him. Three times and still neither of us lost our erections. Rory smiled knowingly as I lowered him to his feet. “You just can’t seem to get enough of me.”

“No I can’t,” I growled, dropping to my knees to lick his seed off of his stomach before the water washed it all away. When he was cum-free, he was shaking with desire again. “Hand me the soap, my love.”

Rory nodded, reaching for it blindly as he stared at me. Moments later it was thrust into my hand. I took my time getting him clean, starting with each foot that I placed on my thigh. After his feet were washed, I moved up his legs.

“Who knew a shower could be seduction?” I glanced up at his face. His eyes were filled with lust as he bit his lower lip. “I feel so cherished and special.”

“You are, Rory. You’re my entire world, baby.” I took extra time with his groin and ass, making sure to soap up my fingers before playing with his sweet hole. After he was clean there, I worked my way up his slim hips, flat stomach to his lithe chest.

“My turn,” he growled as soon as I was done with his arms and shoulders. He pushed me up against the glass, knelt behind me, and sank his teeth into my ass. “Maybe we should add *or bite* to this tattoo. I like the idea of being offered to fuck or bite your ass.”

“Okay,” I moaned, all the blood having had left my brain as his tongue licked my hole. I gasped as he added two fingers, and it was then that I realized he wasn’t stretching me out for sex. He was

fingering me and rubbing my prostate to get me off again. “Best mate ever.”

“Mh-hm,” he grunted, his tongue busy in my ass. I was so close a few minutes later, my forehead leaning against the glass as I groaned and panted. When Rory ran his finger nail over my small gland, I blew. I roared out his name as I shot streams of pearly white cum all over the glass. Lights started flashing behind my eyes as he kept up his attention on me.

My mate stood up and wrapped his arms around my waist, supporting my weight before I fell in a heap of spent goo. And still my hard-on was there.

“I take it you liked it?” Rory purred as he turned me around and rubbed against me.

“*Like* doesn’t quite cover what I felt,” I whispered, cupping his face with my hand. “That was unreal, baby.”

“I think your ass should always be on the menu for dinner.” I stared at him a moment before busting out laughing. What a little imp! We hugged each other and then finished showering.

As we stepped out and I shut off the water, Rory handed me a towel. I glanced at it and then him before rushing him and scooping him up into my arms. He let out a yelp as he wrapped his wet body around mine as I raced back into the bedroom.

“Didn’t want to dry off?” He giggled as I started pulling off the old sheets. It didn’t work while holding him, so I lowered him to his feet.

“I like the idea of you being wet and sliding all over my body.” I smirked at him over my shoulder as he let out a loud purr. Once I got the bedding off, I grabbed new linens and remade it.

“We’re just going to get them all dirty again in two seconds.” Rory chuckled and then flopped on the bed. I just about swallowed my tongue at the picture he made, all wet and spread out like a feast for me. His white blond hair spread out on the bed, giving him almost an ethereal look.

“Yeah, but my baby deserves clean sheets when he’s all clean,” I said gently as I crawled on the bed between his legs. “Especially after how many times he’s taken me to heaven today.”

“Then will you feed your mate? Something other than your ass? I’m getting hungry,” he asked, batting his eyelashes at me. I nodded, stunned by his teasing and beauty as I reached for the house phone. I explained briefly to Hester what the situation was, and she said she’d deliver meals and knock on the door when they were there. But she’d leave them outside the door and not interrupt. I needed to give that woman a raise.

“She said about a half an hour,” I told him after I’d hung up the phone and flopped on the bed next to him. I ran my fingers lightly over his thigh that he’d thrown over mine. “Whatever shall we do until then?”

“Think a half hour is enough time?”

“Depends on what we do.” I snickered. I moved my other arm, and Rory immediately moved his head on my shoulder as I kept caressing his thigh. “I think we should get a big garden tub for the master suite renovations. I like the idea of taking a nice soak with you in my arms and some private water sports.”

“Is there a fireplace in there?”

“Yes, it’s really pretty actually. Great stonework and gorgeous mantle.”

“We should keep that then, I think,” he said after a moment, reaching up and taking my hand in his. “And I like that the floors are all finished oak. Would you want carpet in our room?”

“Maybe just a throw rug,” I answered as I pulled his leg farther over mine. “I love you, Rory.”

“Because I want to keep the hardwood floors?”

“Well, that, too. It’s always important to appreciate fine things.” I chuckled and kissed his temple. “I meant for this. The sex is awesome between us. There’s no denying that. But right now I’m enjoying just lying here talking with you about our future as much as I do making

love to you. You're that amazing that no matter what we're doing, I love that it's with you."

"Me, too, Isaac," he whispered and rolled over so he was lying on top of me, staring down into my eyes. "And I love you, now and forever. We're a real, loving, married couple. Not some great sex and everything else sucks. This is real, and I know we're going to make it."

"Yeah, I know we are, too, baby." It was the truth. I loved Rory, and he loved me. And for the first time in my life, I wasn't just happy. Everything was perfect.

I'd found my mate, and he was more than I could ever have dreamed of. The people I loved no longer hated me, and we were working towards having real relationships. Desmond was going to talk to the Council about my becoming an instructor. And Abraham was gone. No matter how it happened, it was as if this weight I'd had on my shoulders since the day I made that promise was lifted. And I'd be damned if I was going to live in the past when I had the perfect man in my future.

# THE END

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joyee Flynn grew up in Chicago living in the same house all her life until she left for college. She loves to get lost in fantasy that only books could bring. Her wide interest in reading was reflected in her writings. Currently Joyee lives with her dog, Marius, named after a vampire from Ann Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* series. She dreams of one day living out in Montana, enough land to have a few horses, and find a couple of cowboys of her own.

A lover of men, Joyee's all about them in any form in her books. Vampire, werewolf, military, doesn't matter at all as long as they are hot, hard, and sex fiends!



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Ménage Amour ManLove: North American Dragon 1: *Dragon Mine*  
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Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 2: *Remus*  
Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 3: *Stefan*  
Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 4: *Victor*  
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