

Read Novel Alpha Male

Alpha Male Chapter 9-Rafe

I tried not to stare at the clock on my office wall for the umpteenth time. With ten minutes to go to our date, I closed my laptop and stopped. Actually ceased working and didn't do anything but go through the night I planned for her. Fifteen minutes after she should have arrived, I began to toy with my phone. She'd never once been late, but maybe traffic across town had been tight. Maybe her kids hadn't settled for her. Maybe she wasn't coming.

I threw that last thought out the window. Willow traded texts with me all day to my greatest distraction, and I loved it. I scrolled through them, but nothing gave me any indication she intended to stand me up. Most had a playful tone ... no, something must have come up. I tapped my fingers on the underside of my desk and stared at the door, willing her to walk through it.

My fingers grazed the desk drawer that held the slim, black box. If things went well, I would offer her to be my submissive in our playtime hours. Her children formed part of her package deal, which meant I could maybe claim boyfriend status ... for now. One day, there would be a second black box in my desk drawer, a little smaller.

I checked the clock again.

Willow was thirty minutes late. I drilled my fingers into the desktop as the second hand made another full rotation and then sent off a message.

Are you safe? Getting worried for you. Don't stress if it's family stuff. I'll be here.

I almost added working, but that would be a lie.

The message sat there, unopened. I put my phone down and picked it up again. Finally, I hit call, but it went straight to her voicemail. Frustration rose in me, and I pushed it down. A message to know she was all right would be great. I shoved my phone into my back pocket and headed for the main floor. Maybe I could ply myself with alcohol and watch the door until she arrived. Then ... then I'd get on my knees and grovel for her to be mine.

I paused at the door to my office and inhaled a long, slow breath. Barging in on her walking down the back corridor would scare her, give her reason to run from me, and I couldn't bear for that to happen a second time.

The door opened into an empty corridor. I made it to the bar unaccosted by my pretty little quokka before Killian found me. His hand locked in a tight grip on my arm. "Room four. Have you got a key?" He stared at me with wild eyes, dragging me toward the stairs to the lower level.

"What?" I stared at him, my lip half curled. "What's got your panties all twisted up?"

"Willow. She arrived, and someone saw her go downstairs."

"What?"

"The keys for four are missing, and the camera is off in that room. It's locked, and we can't see a damn thing."

"What?"

"Did you plan a playdate with her down there tonight?" Killian's brown eyes begged me to say yes.

I shook my head. "I told her never to go down there again. Not with me or anything else. Not after—"

"Fvck."

"Are her things in the locker room?"

"I'll check." Killian raised his hands, palms out.

"Good." I turned toward the stairs and leapt the first few.

"What are you doing?"

I didn't bother to answer as I hit the ground in a few strides and charged straight for the door.

The lower-level rooms were lockable and soundproofed, but that didn't mean they were impenetrable. Every room contained cameras, and every door wasn't quite as sturdy as they appeared for exactly this sort of circumstance.

I put my shoulder down and hit the door at a run. It burst open and flew back. I stumbled into the room and stared into the horrific, mad mind of Martin Lansdown.

My little quokka lay spread-eagled on a small table, fully transformed. Every soft piece of flesh had been pinned by a needle. My fingers shook as I plucked the first free, making sure to start at one side and work in a circle. If I knew Martin's handiwork—and sickeningly, I did—he used a pressure point around the neck area to force the change in a shifter.

"Nice of you to burst in on our private moment." Martin spoke from behind me.

My blood ran cold at his calm tone. Everything about the man was wrong. I swiveled on my heel to face him. He had a serene air about him, and a small, secret smile graced his face, transforming him into something worse than ever.

He extended a hand with a sharp long enough to do permanent damage to my girl. "Why don't you do the next one?"

"You're mad," I snarled. Talons already in place, I swiped at him, knocking the needle from his hand and tearing his shirt to ribbons. "Killian!" The room might be soundproofed, but a wrecked door fixed that.

Bootsteps thundered toward us. Killian burst in much as I had a moment ago. His giant, log-sized arms wrapped around Martin's chest, squeezing the breath out of him.

Lansdown smiled politely as I glowered in his direction, then turned back to my work.

Killian knew to wait. We'd been through enough sh!t together over the years with clientele that I wanted the psychopath he held close by until I'd finished my work.

After that, the man was fair game.

I checked each spot, pressing my fingers over them with infinite care. Once Willow was freed of the remaining points around her tiny body, I tugged the last out.

Her tiny body shivered. I scooped her into my arms as her weight increased, gripping her legs in a gentle hold until she stared back at me with wide eyes. Mascara and makeup streaked her face.

“Jesus, Willow. Let’s get you upstairs.” I nodded to my two bouncers. The doormen towed Martin away, his face still glazed with some sort of insane glee. “Killian, secure him in your office. I’ll deal with him in a bit.”

Killian passed Lansdown to the security ’roos who frog marched him up the stairs ahead of us.

I shrugged out of my jacket one-armed, wrapping it around Willow’s shivering body. “Sweetheart?”

She looked up at me and opened her mouth. For a moment, nothing came out. She tried again. “I wanted to find you.”

“I’m here.” I held her too tight, needing her close.

“I know.”

“Come on. I’ll get you medical attention.”

“I’m sorry, Rafe. I forgot.” Her eyes widened, beseeching.

I frowned. “About what?”

“Not to come down here. I was so excited to see you that I got here early. And I forgot what you said and—” Tears streamed unchecked down her face.

I kissed her tenderly. She’d been down there with Lansdown for an hour? We were both lucky to have anything left to claim. “It’s fine. I should have banned the a*ssh0le the first time he broke my rules. Please, please be all right.”

Her eyelids fluttered shut, and my heart rate increased. I tapped her cheek, cupping it, and she opened her eyes.

“I love you.” Her soft words made it to my ears, but not my brain.

“I’m so sorry this happened on my— What?” I stared down at her and stopped walking.

“I love you, Rafe Astor. You’re perfect.”

“I— This isn’t how I meant for tonight to go.” I cleared my throat, but her face crumpled. I replayed the conversation in my head and cursed myself. Shit. “No, I mean I wanted to ask you to be my sub. Not that it matters now— oh, hell.” I made certain my k!ss was gentle and tried to push every emotion I felt for her into it. “Be my girlfriend. Please.”

I clung to her, let her tears wash at my panic, and felt like a kid asking his first crush out.

“You want me to be your sub?”

“Not after tonight.” I closed my mouth and my eyes. “I’m an idiot.”

“A bit,” she agreed. I opened my eyes to find her smiling up at me through her tears. “A pretty one, though. I love your talons.”

“You love me for my talons?”

“Maybe?” She pressed closer to me, tucking her body against mine. “I’d love to be your sub.”

I sat us on one of the ground-floor lounges before I fell, cradling her in my arms. “Even after what’s happened? That’s not something you need to decide now, or ever.” The collar stowed in my desk drawer could wait. Everything could wait while she healed.

“I’m sure, Rafe. He isn’t you. I trust you. And I’m hopelessly in love with you, which I don’t think I’ve felt for a very long time. Not—not in the sense of a relationship.”

I nodded. I’d gotten the impression that while she loved her late husband, she hadn’t been in love with him, but made it work for her children’s sake. In rare corners of the shifter community, I knew it happened. It didn’t mean I had to like it. I fell for this woman who gave every part of herself to the ones she loved, and I was determined to make myself worthy of her every day.

“Let’s park the sub thing for a new day. I want to accept that with my whole heart, but let’s make sure tonight’s trauma is—” I cleared my throat again. Words were not my forte tonight. “I love you too.”

“I’m glad.” Willow nestled against my chest, burrowing into me.

Lux passed over a pile of thick blankets I arranged around us, and I waited for the doctor with Willow cradled against my heart.