

## Chapter Eleven

### Dimitri

*I'm a fucking idiot.*

That's the refrain that rings in my head as I stare down at the glass of hundred-year-old bourbon glistening in the low light of the Ponderosa lounge. I killed the first glass as though it was two-buck chuck, but I can't bring myself to drink the second — can't bring myself to numb the pain from the gaping hole in my chest.

I don't deserve the sweet respite of oblivion.

I deserve to feel *all* of this, I think as I flex and straighten my injured palm. The cuts from the shattered glass have already begun to heal — one of the perks of being a shifter — but I never fished out the remaining shards, which are now embedded in my palm.

Every movement is pain. Every movement is penance.

All I want is to rewind to those perfect moments in the courtyard with Jules and tape over the rest of the evening.

Fuck Ian Gray.

Fuck them all.

I should have skipped the stupid dinner altogether and taken Jules straight back to my place. Then I could have dragged her upstairs, peeled off that gorgeous red dress, and spent the rest of the evening worshipping her lithe little body.

Instead, I probably ruined everything.

The worst part is that Jules is right. Ian Gray and the type of men who attend those functions are completely detached from reality, and I'm no better. My people make charitable donations on my behalf, and I never even see the money.

I'm rich and entitled and everything she hates. That's what hurts the most.

A low growl rumbles up my throat. My skin itches with the urge to shift, but I won't let my wolf take control. To shift would be to escape from all this — to get some temporary relief from the soul-deep pain of knowing that I just cost myself the one person I might have actually been able to love.

Not that it matters.

Jules could *never* love me. At least, not all of me. Even if she could see past my failures, there's no way she could accept the other half.

The wolf. The monster. The beast that rages inside me every hour of every day. The beast that longs to sink his fangs into her flesh and claim her body and soul.

My mate.

My mate.

My mate.

Slowly, that refrain seeps into my consciousness, overpowering my own self-loathing. Maybe it's the booze, or maybe I'm just so tired that the logical part of my brain has decided to call it quits. Whatever the reason, I suddenly have this deep sense of knowing that pervades every cell in my body.

Jules is my fated mate.

*That's* why my wolf rises to the surface every time she's around — why I have this insane urge to mark her as my own.

Jules belongs to me.

The low-ball glass slips from my fingers as the realization hits me, soaking the carpet in hundred-year-old bourbon. I grew up hearing about shifters and their fated mates, but I always thought it was some kind of fairy tale.

I've never actually known another shifter to find his one true mate. Most of us mate the way mortals marry — for love or for money.

I thought that I was falling for Jules, but this is so much more than that. Jules and I are soul-bonded, and trying to leave her is the surest way to send my wolf over the fucking edge.

*Go to her*, he growls in my head. And for once, I listen.

"Sorry, Hugo," I mutter as the old man appears to clean up the mess I've made.

"Not at all, sir."

"Please. Let me." I move like a drunk man as I take the rag from the lounge manager and sop up the booze I spilled. Hugo probably thinks I've lost my mind, but I've never felt more clear.

I leave The Ponderosa with a sense of purpose I've never experienced in my life. I fly around each curve at a breakneck pace, hoping and praying Jules hasn't left by the time I get back.

Lights are on inside when I pull through the gate, and I let out a breath of relief when I see Jules's van half buried in a snow drift.

I burst into the house through the side door, my wolf rising to the surface. I no longer feel that nagging urge to shift, but I'm more animal than man as I storm down the hallway, searching desperately for my mate.

Jules isn't downstairs, but her scent is everywhere — teasing me from every corner. I take the stairs two at a time and thunder into her room without bothering to knock.

It's empty.

Confusion and desperation claw at my insides. It's almost midnight. She should be in bed. She certainly shouldn't be *cleaning* at this hour.

I throw open each door that I come to, finally reaching my own bedroom. Jules's scent is stronger in here, and I close my eyes as I drink it in.

I hope to hell she's in a forgiving mood, because my need for her is too great to ignore. A new urgency overtakes me as I whip around the corner, jerking to a stop in the bathroom doorway.

Jules is no longer in her evening gown. She's bent over scrubbing the marble floor, her feet splayed in a pair of strappy nude heels. She's naked except for a ruffled peach thong and matching mesh bra.

My jaw drops at the sight of her perfect round ass as she leans forward with a sponge in hand, thrusting her hips back in invitation.

She looks over her shoulder at the sound of my footsteps, blinking up at me with warm brown eyes. Her expression is a mixture of satisfaction and anger that I long to fuck right out of her.

"What are you —" I begin, the miles of exposed golden skin short-circuiting my ability to form full sentences.

"Cleaning," says Jules, casually dunking her sponge in a bucket of soapy water and sliding forward so that her knees fan out, opening her at the perfect angle to —

"Cleaning," I repeat dumbly. "In *that*?" I gesture wordlessly at the transparent ruffles skimming the swell of her perfect ass.

"Is that a problem, Mr. Lazos?" she asks in a fake-innocent tone, blinking up at me from under her lashes.

I'm completely lost for words as she pushes herself up to face me, moving onto her palms first and then rising to her knees. The mesh bra she's wearing has see-through cups that put

her breasts on full display. I have a perfect view of her rosy pink nipples, but I force my gaze back to her face.

Jules quirks an eyebrow. “After all, I’m just your *employee*, right?”

There’s an unmistakable challenge in her expression, and the alpha in me roars to life.

I’m no longer Dimitri the man. I am all wolf as I reach out and grip Jules lightly by the throat. “You’re fired,” I croak, swallowing to wet my parched throat.

Jules’s mouth opens in a little “O” of surprise, and my gaze drops to those delectable lips, which I’ve imagined in so many depraved scenarios that it should be illegal.

With one hand still cupping her throat, I tug her gently to her feet. Jules watches me with a guarded expression, but I detect arousal, not fear, in those deep-brown eyes.

“I never want to see you on your knees again, unless it’s with my cock in your mouth.”

Jules sucks in a breath of surprise, and I smell the sweet musk of feminine arousal. I lean in closer and tilt her head back, running my nose along the tender line of her throat as I drink in her scent.

Jules lets out a soft shudder of pleasure that makes my cock jump in my pants.

“What would I find if I touched you right now?” I whisper, my breath tickling that sensitive spot on her neck and causing her whole body to tremble. “Are you wet for me, Jules? Or did you put on this little outfit just to punish me?”

“Is it working?” she rasps, her eyes not leaving mine once as I trace my thumb down her throat to the indent between her collarbones.

“Answer the question, Julianna,” I growl.

She narrows her eyes in a glare, and I can scent just how much she wants me — and how much she hates me. I vow to change the latter. “Can’t it be both?”

“No.” My voice doesn’t sound like my own as I trail my hand between her breasts, over her stomach, and finally down to her soft mound to touch her through her panties.

Jules inhales sharply. They’re completely soaked.

“Either you want me, or you *don’t*.”

There’s a long pause as Jules stares at me, and I can tell she doesn’t want to say the words. Fine. Two can play at this game.

With the lightest touch possible, I begin to stroke her delicate folds with the backs of my fingers, the pad of my thumb. Her body trembles beneath my hand, and when I move half an inch up to find her most sensitive spot, Jules lets out a low groan and leans into my touch.

I swallow, holding fast to my shreds of control as I wait for Jules's answer. My wolf is snapping at his leash, and I feel as though I might fucking die if I don't devour her now.

"I want you," she croaks, her voice strained with her own need.

There's so much I still have to tell her, but right now, that's all I need to hear.

Cupping the back of her neck with my hand, I cant her head to one side and lay claim to her mouth. Jules's lips part, and I thrust into her mouth, stroking her sharp little tongue with my own.

Jules leans in, pressing her breasts against me, and the contrast of her hard little nipples and soft, warm curves makes my whole body come alive.

Gripping her waist, I turn her around and smash her against the bathroom wall. I yank down the straps of her bra so her breasts spring free of the infuriating see-through mesh.

Palming one in my right hand, I suck her other nipple into my mouth until I pull another moan from my mate. She smells like cinnamon and lavender soap and sweet feminine musk.

I take my time dragging my tongue over the tantalizing pink center of her breast, running my hands up and down her ribs. I've been dying to explore every one of her curves since the day she appeared on my doorstep.

Kissing a trail along the curve of her breast and down her stomach, I finally drop to my knees. Gripping her hips, I press a reverent kiss to the soft crease of her pussy and tear her panties off with a loud rip of fabric.

Jules lets out a gasp of surprise as I stare in awe at her glistening folds.

"So sexy," I murmur, trailing a finger down her seam until I pull another little shudder from Jules. I take my time stroking her along her center, watching in fascination as her juices coat my finger.

Her thighs start to tremble as I draw closer to that sensitive bundle of nerves. I can't wait any longer. I need to taste her.

Gently parting her folds with my fingers, I lick a trail up her center. Jules shakes harder as I flick my tongue under the hood of her clit before delving back to lap up her cream.

Jules spears her hands through my hair, tugging on the strands in a way that sets my nerve endings on fire. She widens her stance to give me better access, and I hitch one leg over my shoulder to open her up even more.

Another bead of cream blooms from her core, and I circle the delicate flesh of her entrance. I know that once I've claimed her with my mouth, I won't be able to stop until I've taken her with my cock. And yet I can't seem to pull myself away.

I flick my tongue into her channel, and Jules's whole body spasms. I stroke my hand along her hip, gripping her perfect ass. Jules starts to move against my greedy mouth, grinding into my stubble for more friction.

*Fuck.* This woman doesn't know that she's playing with fire. I'm a raging inferno.

Digging my nails into her ass, I move back up to her swollen nub. I lave my tongue roughly over her clit, and Jules bites back a moan. I slip a finger inside her. She is so fucking *wet*.

I start to move my finger in and out, experimentally stretching her walls. Jules grinds down on my digit with a groan, her pussy clenching hard.

Growling against her, I add another finger, and a loud moan sends all the blood surging straight to my cock. I look up and nearly come all over myself when I see Jules cupping her gorgeous breasts, flicking her thumbs over her nipples as she drives herself toward the edge.

*Jesus.* This woman will be the death of me.

Ramming my fingers inside her, I draw a sharp gasp from those swollen pink lips. Jules's arousal drips down my fingers, and she starts to ride my hand.

"That's it, baby," I growl. "Come for me like a good girl."

A sharp cry tears from her lips as another gush of cream spills out. I feel it when Jules comes apart — her pussy spasming as she collapses against the bathroom wall, hands still clutching her tits.

I continue to pump my fingers in and out, watching the creases slowly fade from her brow. I rise to my feet, cradling her knee against my hip and lifting the weight off her other foot.

Jules's eyes are hooded as she wraps herself around my waist, pressing her slick core into my abdomen as I carry her into my bedroom and lay her out on the bed.

I fall over her, catching my weight on my arms, and claim her mouth with my own. Jules groans and runs her tongue along my upper lip, licking her juices off my mouth. My balls throb at the thought that my dirty little minx likes the taste of her own sweetness.

Her fingers fumble over the buttons of my dress shirt, and she finally gets so impatient that she rips it open — sending buttons skittering all over the room.

Grinning against her mouth, I slip out of my destroyed shirt, and Jules rolls onto her knees.

I pull back a little so I can watch her face as she studies every inch of me. Her touch is soft, almost reverent, as she traces the planes of my chest.

I hiss as her fingers trail down my abs, stopping when she reaches my belt. I'm not going to last long if she gets her hands on me, and I want to be inside of her.

Then a wicked idea occurs to me, and my wolf rumbles his approval. Jules is busy trying to undo my belt, but I gently encircle her wrist with my fingers and pull them away from my cock.

“Not yet,” I growl, my voice full of gravel.

Jules's eyes flash with impatience and desire, and my grin stretches wider. My girl is hungry for my cock. My beast preens at the thought.

“Lie back,” I murmur, keeping my voice measured so the alpha command does not come through. Alphas have the ability to influence shifters *and* humans, and I want everything to be her choice.

Jules squints one eye at me in suspicion, naked apart from those sinful heels. “Aren't you forgetting something?” she asks. “Or are you planning to fuck me with your mind?”

“Something like that,” I rumble, my cock twitching at the very thought of what I'm about to suggest.

Confusion knits her brow again, and it takes me a moment to summon the words without making them an outright command.

“Lie back on the bed and touch yourself. Show me how you like to come.”