

Chapter Six

Dimitri

Jules has disappeared when I come upstairs, but I hear the water running in her suite. All the blood rushes to my cock as I imagine her lithe body sinking into the hot bath water — her supple breasts floating just beneath the surface as the water teases those full, pouty lips.

If I concentrate, I can still feel the softness of her pussy pressed against my thigh — her nipples hard as pebbles against my bare chest.

With all the times she's visited my dreams in the week she's been here, it took every ounce of my self-control not to lock my arms around her waist, flip us over, and plunge my cock deep inside her. I wonder if all that wetness between her legs was from the bath or if she had the sudden urge to rub up against me on the floor.

Fuck.

I shouldn't even be *having* these thoughts. Jules is my employee, and she's living under my roof. Any sort of intimacy between us would be wildly inappropriate, which is why I've been trying to keep my distance.

I can't even be in the same room as Jules when she's cleaning. Seeing her splayed on her knees with that perfect ass in the air is more temptation than my wolf can take. Hell, she doesn't even have to be on her knees. Everything that woman does is erotic, and I've come to realize that I don't want Jules to be my housekeeper. I want her to be *mine*.

My wolf wants me to claim Jules as my own, which is as ridiculous as it is impossible. Jules is human, and I've never wanted a mate. I've never had the urge to shackle myself to another person — human or shifter.

And yet every time I'm around her, my wolf rises to the surface. It's the reason I took an eight-mile run through the snow tonight — to try to banish these thoughts from my mind.

That's all fucked now. I couldn't even look Jules in the eye after I saw her naked. I was afraid she'd see the raw burning desire in my gaze — the depth of my need for her. I was terrified she'd realize I have no interest in a housekeeper. I only want *her*.

I wonder if she ever thinks of me.

It's a stupid, self-centered thought, and I shove it aside as soon as it occurs to me. I turn the shower on as hot as it will go and let the steaming water pound my back until I can't feel anything but tingles.

Fisting the base of my erection, I remember what her soft curves felt like pressed against me and imagine how soft she must be on the inside. I pump my hand up and down my shaft, brushing my fingers under the rim of my head and imagining it's Jules teasing me with her mouth.

I picture those big brown eyes looking up at me from under dark lashes and imagine running my hands through that thick mane of curls.

I call to mind the delicate pink of her nipples — water sluicing off her body and gliding between those full round breasts.

My balls pull up tight to my body as I think of that pretty little cunt of hers and the way her ass clenched as she turned away from me.

I squeeze my eyes shut as the orgasm explodes out of me, warm cum sliding down my hand and onto the shower floor.

I was in trouble before I saw Jules naked. Now I'm totally fucked.



I still can't get Jules out of my head the following morning — not even as I fight my way through Denver rush-hour traffic. Crawling down the highway through the gridlock makes my skin itch with the urge to shift, but I have an important meeting today. I can't afford to lose control.

I pound a bag of jerky in the car to sate my wolf's appetite and leave my car with the valet. As I make my way up to the fifth floor of my building, all heads turn in my direction, and several people stare openly.

I shouldn't be surprised. I've hardly set foot in the office in the last few months. But it's all I can do to keep from growling at the squirrely young developers who keep sneaking glances at me in the elevator.

By the time I flop down at the board-room table, I'm exhausted from keeping my wolf in check. He's clawing at my insides, restless and irritable after being trapped in a car for the last three and a half hours.

My animal has always rebelled against being confined to the city. The noise, the people, and the strange smells always put him on edge, but I've never been this close to losing control.

I know it's because I've become so isolated — and because I haven't been shifting as often as I should. I thought that having Jules around all the time would help, but wolves need the camaraderie of a pack, and being near Jules without being able to have her has only put him *more* on-edge.

"All right," Stacy huffs without preamble, striding into the room and slapping the latest numbers onto the table in front of me. "I think the news cycle has moved on to Elon Musk's latest travesty, so maybe we can actually find a way to dig ourselves out of this pit."

Stacy is my head of public relations and one of those no-nonsense media types that I've come to appreciate. When you're CEO and a billionaire, people bend over backwards to kiss your ass. They tend to only tell you what they think you want to hear, which is extremely ineffective.

Stacy doesn't sugarcoat things. I'm not sure the woman even knows how. But I trust in her brutal honesty, which is the only reason I've kept her around.

"If we can post some decent numbers in Q2, I think we'll see share prices recover."

"We don't have that long," I growl. "We have lost investor confidence, and any time I get in front of the press, I only make things worse."

"Well, that we can agree on," Stacy mutters.

Like I said, the woman doesn't sugarcoat things.

"So what's your plan?"

"I'm glad you asked." Stacy takes a seat at the table and presses the tips of her fingers together. "*Tech Today* is hosting the gala dinner for this year's 40 Under 40 list at The Stalwart in Aspen. You need to attend that gala, and you need to bring a date."

I raise my eyebrows. "*Excuse me?*"

"You know, a date." Stacy looks at me like I'm some moronic intern — not CEO of the whole damned company. "A woman, man, or nonbinary individual of your choosing whose company you can tolerate for the span of one evening."

“By that definition, I should just bring Beckett.”

“You know what I mean,” Stacy groans. “I’m just asking that you show up with some eye candy, have a drink, and be reasonably civil to the press. Smile pretty for their pictures, and give vague, optimistic answers to anything they ask.”

I roll my eyes. Stacy knows as well as I do that putting me in front of the press is like putting my wolf in front of a box of baby bunnies. Disastrous.

“What’s the significance of this gala dinner?” I ask. “Who cares if I make the stupid 40 Under 40 list? And why would I bring a date — apart from the fact that misery loves company?”

“It’s not about the *list*, Dimitri. A number of top financial analysts and investors will be there, including Ian Gray.”

“*Ian Gray*?” I snarl, my hackles rising. “As in that pompous ass-clown who gives financial advice in twenty-second snippets on social media?”

“That pompous ass-clown is one of the top personal finance influencers in the world,” says Stacy. “He has an audience of nearly a hundred million followers.”

I narrow my eyes. “Your point?”

“My point is that when this man talks, people listen. And lately, he has not had good things to say about you or this company. We need to change that.”

I let out a tired sigh. I fucking hate the games that come along with running a Fortune 500 company. “And how do you suggest I do that?”

Stacy glances over at her underlings, who’ve been so quiet I’d almost forgotten they were here. They seem to take the hint. The three of them hurriedly gather up their papers and hustle out of the room.

“Wow,” I say. “This *must* be serious.”

“Look, Dimitri. I’m not going to bullshit you. There are a lot of people both inside and outside this company who think that you should step down.”

At those words, my wolf snarls. Disloyalty has been a trigger for me ever since Rhys’s betrayal, and it fucking infuriates my wolf. I open my mouth to demand names, but Stacy holds up a hand. “Before you jump down my throat, let me just say that I am not one of them. I believe in everything you’re trying to accomplish here, but you need to make some changes.”

“Like what?” I growl. “Kissing Ian Gray’s ass?”

“Yes.” She lets out an impatient huff. “Ever since you ordered the layoffs and retreated to your castle in Aspen —”

“Not a castle.”

“— people see you as this erratic recluse who has no business leading this company. When stock prices took a shit, you lost the public’s trust. And investors don’t want to stake their fortunes on a volatile hermit.”

I give her a deadpan look. “And appearing at this ridiculous function with a woman on my arm is somehow going to ingratiate me with investors?”

“Seeing you out in public enjoying the company of another human being would go a long way toward improving your image,” says Stacy. “At the very least, it would help you seem like a normal fucking person and less like a wild card.”

Except that I’m not a normal fucking person. I’m an alpha wolf who’s shut himself off from his pack. My every waking moment is a battle for self-control, and I can’t concentrate on *anything* other than the beautiful woman sleeping in the room down the hall from mine.

Stacy must see the resistance written all over my face, because she lets out a heavy sigh and straightens the stack of papers in front of her. “I’m just offering my advice, Dimitri. You can take it or leave it.”