

Chapter Two

Natalia

All day long it's been a struggle to keep the grin off my face. With my hands soaked in the sudsy water, washing the dishes from dinner tonight, I gaze at my reaction in the kitchen window. I don't even recognize the girl looking back at me. My fingers press at the two haggard marks at the column of my neck, and my eyes utter closed at the memory.

This is what you do to me, Nat. This all you.

Fuck. I'm glowing.

There's nothing on earth that could dull my shine right now.

"You look like a little pig grinning at the window like that."

Instantly, my smile falls.

Abigail walks into the kitchen, holding onto a single glass mug. Her lip pulls up in a sneer as she drops it right into the pile of dishes I just washed. "Oops," She shrugs a shoulder, "You missed one."

I grind my teeth, refusing to get into it with her today. Every bout with Abigail always left me frustrated and drained. Scues with her were worse than the torment I faced from the entire pack packed into one. I have no idea why she's always affected me so much. Maybe it's because she's the closest thing I've ever had to a sister and yet she sees no fault in treating me like trailer trash.

Yes, maybe that.

Ever since my parents died, when I was less than a year old, Abigail's parents took me in, to raise and care for me. At least I assume that's how things were meant to be. But instead, they treat me like I'm no more than a slave. Like I'm lucky they give me a roof over my head and clothes over my body. Which I am, to be honest.

But I yearn for their affection.

I envy the way they worship their daughter. And I wanted just half of those kind of emotions felt for me. It's nothing I've ever got to experience in all my nineteen years.

Well, besides Cardan.

The thought of him brings the smile right back to my face.

"Dirty grins and it's not even a full moon." Abigail chides. Then she snaps her fingers, like she's just gotten the most perfect thought, "I have just the thing." She reaches for the mug she dropped earlier, sinking it into the soapy and water and lling it halfway. Then she lifts the glass up, proceeding to dump all the contents over my head. I let out a broken gasp as the cold water seeps into my hair and over my clothes.

"There!" She laughs, "All better." The sound of glass clattering to the oor rings in my ears. She leans down, bringing her mouth close as she whispers, "Don't forget to clean that up Nat the Rat." Then she shoves past me as she walks away.

I breath in and out through my nose.

Nothing is worth it today. Nothing else matters today.

I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm happy.

The doorbell rings.

"Natalia, get the door." Aunt Jesinia calls from the living room. I shove away from the sink, drying off my face with a towel as I make my way to the front door.

My heart stalls in my chest as I pull it open.

"Cardan."

He grins at me, his pearly white teeth on full display as he holds up a bouquet of red roses. Darting a glance behind me, I step out of the house, shutting the door closed as my voice drops to a whisper, "What the hell are you doing here?"

His smile thins around the edges, his gaze dropping to his hand, "I got you owers".

"I can see that, Cardan," I say, ignoring the butterflies as they take ight, "But you know better than to show up at my house like this."

"What can they do?" His grin turns cocky, "I'm the Prince of this pack."

I frown at him, "Of course they can't do anything. To you at least."

Instantly, he's sobered up.

"Sorry, fuck." He runs a hand through his dark hair, "You're right, I didn't think of that."

A beat of silence passes.

"The owers are beautiful." I tell him.

His smile returns, full force."You like them?"

"Yea-"

"Who's at the door?" Abigail calls.

I freeze, my eyes locked on Cardan's as I notice him do the exact same. His nostrils are. Slowly, his gaze moves to the door behind me, Abigail's footsteps drawing closer.

"Who is that?" His voice comes out strained.

My brows pull together at the sudden change in his demeanor, "Cardan, are you alright?"

"Who is that?" He growls.

My entire body draws back in shock, just as the door pulls open. Abigail freezes with her hand on the doorknob, her gaze instantly drawn to Cardan's. The next few seconds happen like a tragic motion picture. Cardan takes a step forward, shoving past me as he stares at Abigail, his eyes completely focused on hers.

"Cardan?" I whisper. A ball of panic forms in my belly. "What is-"

"Mate." He growls.

And my entire world comes crashing down all around me.

Mate?

Abigail is his mate?

I shake my head, "No..."

His arm lifts, reaching for her on mere instinct as she watches him with rapt fascination but he hesitates, his gaze sliding to mine.

"No," I breathe, backing away from him.

He looks tortured.

It's nothing compared to how I feel on the inside. I'm devastated. His eyes drop to the fresh mark at the side of my neck. Tears burn the back of my eyes as I watch him, "You promised, Cardan."

He shakes his head slowly, like he's in pain.

"You promised!" I cry, hating the desperation swelling inside me, "Cardan..."

He looks away from me. And somehow, I just know.

"I'll never forgive you." I say, "If you do this Cardan, I'll never forgive you for it."

His jaw tightens, steeling his resolve. The next words out of his mouth shatter my heart in a way this cruel world never did. "I'm sorry, Natalia."

And then he reaches for her, pulling her into his arms. I don't miss the devious grin she shares with me over his shoulder.

No.

No.

Rushing over the side of the patio, I heave over the panel, losing the contents of my stomach.