

Chapter 1

Harlow

I race upstairs to shower and change. I use the back stairwell, not wanting another run-in with Elaine. As I shower, I can hear shouting downstairs. Thane is losing his mind at someone. I have a sneaking suspicion it is Raidon. Or maybe Elaine. Regardless, I take my time, dreading the moment I have to go downstairs and face her. I hope Thane meant what he said that he will get rid of her if she becomes too much. I do not feel like arguing with that woman or my mates.

Grabbing the hair dryer, I quickly dry my hair before pulling it into a bun. I hope they aren't expecting a prim, proper Omega because I look quite the opposite in my purple pajamas with tiny wolves and my rainbow socks, choosing comfort over looks. If I have to endure this woman, I am doing it comfortably.

The arguing has stopped by the time I make my way downstairs. I head toward the kitchen, for once preferring Thane's presence over everyone else's. He is muttering angrily under his breath about Raidon. I step next to him, and he nudges me.

"Are you okay with this? Because if you aren't, I have no problem throwing them out," he tells me.

"It's ne. As long as she doesn't overstep. If you guys can ensure she keeps her distance, I can stomach this for an hour or two." I take a big breath and get my game face on, as best as I can.

Thane uses his Calling to help me relax, kissing the top of my head, "Just say the word, and I'll make them leave."

Thane and I set the table. I can hear Elaine's voice as Raidon tries to pull her back from coming into the dining room to help.

"Mom! Let Thane and Harlow handle it. Let her get used to the idea of you being here."

Elaine begins to protest to the point of insistence. "Sweetheart, it's no trouble at all. I still know how to be an Omega, you know, just —"

Raidon cuts her off, "Mom, I said no. Leave them be. She has been through enough, don't you think?"

I can tell he nally makes her back down after he says that. I don't know what she thinks coming in to help will accomplish. She has helped enough, as far as I am concerned. Especially her help in trying to get me killed or put in rotation. Just thinking about it makes my blood boil. Thane puts his hand on my hip, sensing the shift in my mood. When I look up to meet his eyes, he motions to my hand, which is holding a fork. Well, it was a fork. Now it is just a bent piece of metal that used to be a fork. I blink, not realizing I am taking my frustration out on the cutlery.

Thane grips my hand, prying the fork from between my ngertips and holding it up. "Hmm, maybe I should give you a spoon?" he chuckles, pocketing the mangled fork. I purse my lips and continue to set the table.

When we nish setting the table, I look around, debating where to sit. Thane nods to the head of the table, where he usually sits, and I tell him so. "But that is where you always sit."

He shrugs. At least it will be the furthest from everyone, and I will feel better knowing I won't be next to Raidon's parents.

"Oh, the napkins," I tell Thane, quickly ducking back into the kitchen as everyone starts coming in from the living room. I ignore them and move to grab the napkins from the third drawer, where he also keeps the tea towels. Grabbing the silky, off-white fabric, I shut the drawer and turn, only to run right into Elaine's open arms. I freeze as she hugs me, my heart nearly leaping out of my chest, not just from the unwelcome hug, but also because I did not hear her come up behind me.

I stand there awkwardly, frozen to the spot as she moves to hold me at arm's length. Her face is beaming as she smiles, rubbing my arms, and her eyes move to my huge, round belly.

"I am so excited and glad we are nally past everything," she says, running her hands over my belly.

My hands grip the napkins, strangling the fabric to prevent me from strangling her. Her hands touch and fuss over my belly as she gushes excitedly. It only makes me more mad. She's acting like she didn't order Thane to kill me just a few weeks ago.

Arms wrap around me from the side, and Rhen's familiar scent cloaks me as he tugs me to him, just as Raidon scolds his mother.

"Mom! What did I say?" he snaps, and Elaine jumps.

"I am just saying hello. I'm not —" She stops as Rhen tucks me closer to him. His scent slows the racing of my heart, and he presses his lips to my temple.

"Elaine, remember your place. You, of all people, should know better," Rhen adds, letting me escape from under his arm as I move to the dining room. Leon stands in my way, talking to Raidon's father. I stop, almost running into the man's back, while he explains something with some very enthusiastic hand gestures.

The man is tall, roughly the same height as Raidon, though his features are surprisingly softer. I half-expected him to have the same brooding features that Raidon has, yet his smile is gentle, and his eyes crinkle around the edges as he looks down at me.

"You must be Harlow. Raidon told me about you. My name is Charles," he says, holding out his hand to me. I stare at it before hesitantly placing my hand in his. His hand engulfs mine. The man has huge hands, yet his grip is gentle. Arguing breaks out behind us in the kitchen. Charles peers behind me and sighs.

"She is a stubborn woman, who won't take no for an answer. Excuse me. I best go sort this out before she goes on a rampage and takes a shoe off," he says, moving passed me.

"A shoe?" I mutter, watching him go.

"Yeah. You know you need to run when she takes a slipper off. Tough old cookie, but she isn't so bad once you get to know her," Leon tells me. I look at him, and he chuckles.

"You'll see. She's eccentric and a little kooky, but her heart is in the right place."

"Unless you get on her bad side," I mumble.

"I'm not defending her. I'm just saying; Omegas are ruled by emotion and instinct. She was extremely close with Hana. It's no excuse, but I know she is deeply sorry. She just isn't very good at communicating that," Leon tells me, reaching his arm around my waist. His nger strokes the side of my belly as he pushes me toward the dining room table.

I hear some rm words from Charles and Elaine's apologetic reply. Turning my attention back to the dining table, I notice Thane is watching me. I hand him the napkins, and he grips my ngers, staring at me and not letting go.

"One word," he says, and I nod just as Elaine comes in with Charles. She stops when she sees me, looking at her husband.

"I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable, Harlow, and I'm also sorry about everything else that has happened. Please know that I am not usually such a sour old grape," she tells me.

"Unless she removes a slipper," Leon whispers next to my ear.

"Oh, you little —" Elaine growls at him as Leon waggles his eyebrows at me. Elaine stops when her husband clears his throat and pulls a chair out for her. Elaine may appear to be the bossy one, but it is clear who rules the roost in their house. Charles nods for her to take the seat.

She does, and Leon nudges me toward mine, right next to her. Everyone starts heading to their usual places at the table when Thane speaks.

"Low," he growls, making my head snap up as Rhen moves behind me to pull out my chair. Thane nods to his chair. I can see my mates' shock as I move toward it. Thane nudges Rhen to move down one from his usual spot, making him sit next to Leon.

I swallow, feeling everyone's eyes on me. I'm shocked at Thane giving me his spot when he sits there religiously. I also feel smug satisfaction when Elaine goes to move before her husband grips her hand. Elaine sighs.

"Raidon, be a dear and go fetch the gift bag from the living room," she says through gritted teeth while giving her husband a tight smile.

He lets her hand go, and Raidon quickly rushes off. He comes back with a huge pink bag and sets it on the table's edge next to his father, who then places it on the oor next to him.

"Let her eat rst. You can show her afterward," Charles tells his wife, who seems to almost pout at the suggestion.