

Chapter Eleven

Garrett

The lights are on downstairs when I come bursting through the front door. Ava's sweet vanilla scent lingers in the hallway, but it doesn't put my wolf at ease.

I walk into the living room, and my gaze snags on the oversized wine glass sitting on the floor. A splash of fine Argentinian Malbec hovers over the white carpet, almost like a silent "fuck you" to the world.

Something isn't right.

I inhale deeply and recoil at the stench of my sister's obnoxious floral perfume. The whole house reeks of the stuff. I've gotten used to it over the years, but the scent is stronger than it should be, unless Hyacinthe was just here.

Unease thrums in my chest as I take the stairs two at a time and burst through the door to my room. The bed is still unmade, but Ava is nowhere in sight.

Shit.

My wolf rises to the surface, frantic and ferocious. I'm possessed by a feral rage as I storm down the hallway to my sister's room and kick the door wide open.

"Where — is she?" I growl at Hyacinthe.

My sister is hunched on her four-poster king bed, painting her toenails a shade of blood red. Five or six pill bottles are crowded around an open wine bottle on her nightstand, a few of them lying on their sides like fallen soldiers.

She looks up hazily as I walk in, and her mouth stretches in a cruel smile. "Well, good evening, brother. You could knock next time. I might have been indecent."

"There's nothing decent about you, Cinthy," I say, using my boyhood nickname for her since I know it grates on her nerves.

Her eyes scrunch in a hateful expression, and my hands ball into fists. "Tell me where she is."

Hyacinthe emits a breathy laugh, and her smile widens to reveal sharp white canines. I'm sure she can smell my desperation, but I'm also oozing fury.

“On her way home, I expect,” my sister says with a careless shrug.

“Why would she be on her way home?” I rumble. I’m so angry I can barely see straight, and my wolf is snapping at his leash. “What — did you — do?”

“I didn’t do anything, brother,” says Hyacinthe in that infuriating high-and-mighty tone of hers. “Your little whore interrupted me while I was reading in the living room. She seemed so . . . infatuated with you.” Hyacinthe’s nostrils flare in disgust. “I felt sorry for the poor thing.” She shrugs. “I may have shared a little of your past — just so she knew what she was getting herself into.”

My sister’s overpowering perfume drifts into my airways, setting off a dull throb in my temples. I want to strangle Hyacinthe and then let my wolf out so he can tear her limb from limb.

I don’t care that she’s family. I don’t care that my father would disown me. My sister is a demonic bitch who deserves to die a painful death.

In two strides, I’m across the room. Hyacinthe can’t weigh more than a hundred pounds soaking wet, and I have shifter strength on my side. My hand closes around her throat, and I slam her against the wall.

I see the terror in her eyes a second before her face starts to turn an ugly reddish-purple.

“Where is she?” I yell, causing my sister to wince.

I ease up on her throat just a bit, and she claws desperately at my hand. “I don’t — know,” she rasps, her voice low and broken, and I’m satisfied that I’ve crushed her windpipe.

Hyacinthe looks up at me, her eyes the same liquid silver as my own when I’m on the verge of the change. I tighten my grip on her once again, keeping her pinned to the wall.

“How did she leave?” I hiss. “She didn’t have a car.”

My sister doesn’t answer. She’s too busy struggling to break my hold as alarm bells go off in her head. She isn’t getting enough oxygen, and she’s on the verge of passing out.

I can’t let that happen.

I release my sister, and she slides down the wall, landing on all fours as she heaves to fill her lungs. I give her a moment to collect herself, but when she looks up with that familiar defiant expression, something inside me snaps.

“Hyacinthe,” I growl, throwing the alpha command into my voice to force my sister to answer. “What did you do to Ava?”

“N-nothing,” she rasps, clutching her throat. She drags in an unsteady breath, bent double as she tries to fill her lungs. “I asked Robert — to take her. I thought you’d be grateful that I cleaned up your mess.”

At those words, cold unbridled terror seeps into my stomach, and my wolf snarls inside me. “What do you mean —”

But I already know.

Robert has worked for our family since he was a teenager. He’s been in love with my sister for as long as I can remember, and he’d do anything for her.

Panic rises in my chest, making it hard to draw a full breath.

Here’s the thing about owning an oil empire: You don’t get to be a multibillion-dollar corporation without doing some pretty awful shit. The trick to surviving as long as my family has is to never get your hands dirty.

That’s why my family employs people like Robert.

A furious howl rips through me as I grab my sister’s wine bottle off the night stand and hurl it against the wall. It hits her vanity mirror in a spray of red, and the glass shatters in a million pieces.

“I’ll deal with you later,” I spit, staring down at my sister in disgust.

There’s no time to deliver her punishment now. Robert has Ava.

If he’s harmed one hair on my beloved’s head, I’ll fucking kill him and my sister.

I don’t bother moving at normal human speed as I fly down the stairs and into the garage. I can’t take the Roadster for this. I need something fast.

I jump into the front seat of the Bugatti and push to start the ignition. I barely remember to raise the garage door before throwing the car in reverse and sliding out onto the road.

I bring the phone to my ear as I press down on the gas. Robert’s cell goes straight to voicemail.

“Fuck!”

I figured Hyacinthe would have told him not to take my call, but I’d hoped I was wrong. Alpha command doesn’t always work perfectly over the phone, but it would’ve worked on a spineless leech like Robert.

By shifter or human standards, Robert is a beta. His singular value to the Von Horton clan is his willingness to do the unthinkable and keep his mouth shut.

I start praying to every known entity as I dial Ava's number, blowing through a two-way stop without even bothering to check for traffic.

By some miracle, my mate picks up, and I feel my heart soar with relief.

"Ava!"

She's alive.

"Hey," she says, her tone upbeat if a bit shifty, as if there's something she doesn't want to tell me. "I'm sorry I left. But I spoke to your sister, and I really think we need to talk."

My heart thuds against my ribs. What the fuck did Hyacinthe tell her? I can't think about that now.

"It's okay, angel. I just need you to listen. Robert is going to kill you."

"What?"

I know my sister's puppet is picking up every word with his super shifter hearing, which means I don't have much time.

"Where are you?"

"W-we're passing Larimer Square," Ava stammers, sounding terrified and confused.

"Going which direction?"

"Uh . . ." My mate hesitates, and I say another prayer that my girl has some sense of direction.

"North, I think."

"Okay," I huff, trying not to panic as I fly around the corner, speeding up as another car comes flying through the intersection.

The driver swerves and honks angrily, but I'm already gone. My mind is racing as I try to picture the route that Robert would take — the roads and hazards that would present the best opportunity to kill Ava and make it look like an accident.

"W-what did you mean before?" Ava stammers, smartly not saying the words out loud.

I open my mouth, but then it hits me — the Speer Boulevard Bridge. Situated over the South Platte River, the bridge is a major roadway spanning eight lanes of traffic.

I know what Robert has planned.

“Shit,” I whisper. “I’m coming, angel. Put the phone on speaker.”

Mercifully, Ava does as she’s told, and my voice trembles with the force of my alpha command. “Robert, turn the car around and —”

There’s a click before I can finish that sentence, and I know he probably snatched the phone away from Ava and flung it out the window.

“Fuck!” I yell, pounding the steering wheel as I merge onto I-25 and press the pedal to the floor. I fly around cars going ninety miles an hour and earn several honks from angry motorists on their early-morning commute.

My wolf whines and claws at my insides. If Robert allowed Ava to answer my call, he must think I’m already too late.

The urge to shift overwhelms me as I speed through traffic. I tilt my head to the side to crack my neck, trying to ignore the uncontrollable urge to shed my human skin.

“Not helping,” I mutter to my wolf, who’s trying desperately to take over.

Normally, my beast and I operate like two beings who share one mind — one purpose. But with our mate in mortal peril, my wolf seems to have lost it.

It’s just as well. When I get my hands on Robert, I’ll succumb to the beast within and let him do his worst.

Robert might be my sister’s puppet, but he isn’t suicidal. He’s a shifter with supernatural healing abilities, while Ava is a fragile human. Robert could walk away from just about any car wreck unscathed. Ava wouldn’t be so lucky.

When I finally reach the bridge, my heart stops beating.

The acrid stench of smoke and burned rubber fills my airways. I can see Robert’s tire marks and the section of crumbled concrete where he flew off the edge of the bridge.

There are few cars on the bridge this early in the morning, but I know it’s only a matter of time before someone calls in the wreck.

Throwing the car into reverse, I speed backwards around a conversion van and pull off the side of the road. I abandon the Bugatti and sprint down the embankment, not bothering to keep my shifter speed in check.

Robert’s car is lying upside down on the gravel, the front end crushed from the impact of where it careened into the concrete barricade and flew off the side of the bridge. The scent

of gasoline burns my nostrils, and I spring toward the back passenger side, my wolf howling for our mate.

Broken glass litters the ground like diamonds, but it's still too dark to see if Ava is alive. Gripping her door with both hands, I rip the thing clean off its hinges and toss it into the dirt.

A low female groan rumbles from the vehicle, and relief surges through me.

Getting down on all fours, I see her. She was wearing her seatbelt, thank god. It's the only reason she's still alive. She's hanging limply from the nylon straps, and I rip the seatbelt apart with my bare hands and catch Ava before she hits the ground.

"Garrett," she rasps. "He just —"

"Shh," I whisper, setting her on the ground and frantically searching her body for wounds. The irony tang of blood sticks to my tongue, and my eyes snap to the side of Ava's head, where she has a bloody gash.

Anger pangs in my chest at the sight of the wound, but it's nothing a human doctor can't fix.

Then my gaze goes to her belly.

"Is the baby —" I break off, too terrified to put my fear into words.

"I-I don't know," Ava stammers. Her face looks pale in the orange-y glow of the street lamps, and I dip my head down to press an ear to her belly.

Instantly, I hear the loud rush of blood, which sounds sort of like a washing machine. Her stomach gurgles as it digests her food, but then I hear something else — the rapid flutter of the baby's heartbeat.

"She's alive," I breathe, awestruck at hearing my pup's heartbeat for the very first time. My own blood is coursing through the young one's veins as it grows inside my mate. It's like looking through a keyhole and seeing the entire universe contained within.

"How do you —"

But Ava never gets a chance to finish her question. I catch a flash of movement out of the corner of my eye just as a huge silver wolf bounds over the wrecked car.

Robert.

I roll out of his path and land on my feet, ripping off my shirt as the change overtakes me. My wolf growls in delight as my nails lengthen into claws and my body transforms into a living weapon.

Ava's scream rends the air a second before Robert tackles me mid-shift, sinking his fangs into my neck. A human cry rips from my throat as blood spurts from the wound, but my body is quickly being remade.

Fire laps at my flesh as I skid over gravel. It's fucking agony on my newborn skin, but I know it will soon be over.

I slash at Robert, and he jerks back as claws rake across his muzzle. I feel my wound already beginning to heal as fur covers my body.

Bounding up on four legs, I throw myself at Robert. All the terror and rage I felt on the drive here rise to the surface, distilled into the animal impulse to rip this motherfucker's throat out so he can never harm my mate again.

Blood coats the inside of my mouth as my fangs sink through Robert's thick fur. I shake him as easily as a dog would shake a dead rabbit, tossing him to the side and sending him crashing into a metal lamp post.

There's a nasty thung as his body makes contact, denting the steel post. I can still see his chest rising and falling, but I know he's badly hurt.

A low growl rumbles up my throat as I stalk over to where he lays. The silver wolf whines and tries to move his legs, but his spine is broken.

In the animal world, there's no such thing as mercy. There's only kill or be killed.

If it had been anyone else, my human half might have been able to override my wolf and spare Robert's life, but the bastard tried to kill my mate and my unborn child.

He doesn't deserve to live.

In one swift motion, I clamp my jaws around his neck and rip his throat out with my teeth. I keep my furry body between Ava and the silver wolf, but I know she sees the spurt of blood as it splatters the nearby pavement.

Robert goes still as blood pours from the wound, staining the gravel red.

Once I'm finished, the killing energy drains out of me at once, leaving only concern for my mate.

I turn to face Ava, who's cowering by the car, staring at me with terror in her eyes.