

Chapter Six

Ava

Two weeks later. . .

As I watch my pee fill the little window on the plastic stick, my heart drops to my knees. Two pink lines appear in the window — one dark, almost reddish, and another a fainter pink.

Fuck. This can't be right.

Two lines . . . two lines . . .

I thrust my hand into the wastebasket by the toilet and fish out the brightly colored box. There's nothing on the back except some bold text promising to tell me I'm pregnant six days earlier than my missed period.

That's completely useless to me, considering I was supposed to start my period two days before.

"Where are the fucking directions?" I grumble in desperation, fishing through the trash until I manage to locate the crumpled piece of paper.

Two lines mean you're pregnant. But what about one dark line and one fainter line? I need to Google that next, because I can't be pregnant.

Yes, I was a little drunk the night that Garrett took my virginity, but I distinctly remember him pulling out.

My mind flashes back to high-school health class. The prematurely gray, pot-bellied gym teacher had always given me the creeps, and after he wriggled a condom down over a banana in front of my entire tenth-grade class, I think I blacked out.

I totally missed his discussion about the shadier methods of birth control, and yet I remember Blowjob Becky saying that you could get pregnant from precum.

Was she right?

Up until my night with Garrett, I'd never had sex, so I'd never had any reason to research whether that was true.

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

Grabbing the other test off the bathroom sink, I pull off the cap and try to summon the urge to pee as hot tears well up in my eyes.

I can't be pregnant. I only have this sublet until September, at which time I'm supposed to be embarking upon the trip of a lifetime. I have enough money saved for my trip — even without the last two weeks of pay from my coffeeshop gig.

The day after my tryst with Garrett, I called in sick and never went back.

Part of me was afraid he'd track me down and persuade me to stay in Aspen. The other part was afraid he wouldn't — that I was just another lay.

And now . . . Now I might be carrying his baby.

The thought brings a surge of hot bile to my throat, and I hurriedly swallow it down.

I can't be pregnant. I'm twenty-four years old. Unmarried, without a steady job.

I can't take care of a baby and support myself at the same time. And yet the thought of crawling back to Garrett after what I did is more than I can stand.

He probably doesn't even remember my name. I'm just some girl he met at a coffee shop — some girl he knew would be gone by the end of the season.

I don't know much about Garrett, but I know he comes from money. I looked him and his family up after the butler let his full name slip.

Garrett's father, Lester Von Horton, is the owner and CEO of the Von Horton Oil Group, a private corporation estimated to be worth billions. I'm sure Garrett has been groomed since the day he was born to take over the family business.

Guys like that don't raise babies with girls like me. Guys like that pay for you to have an abortion and go the fuck away.

And yet, even as I dismiss Garrett as a possibility, my heart aches for him. I can still hear the sound of his laugh and see the way his blue eyes crinkled as he threw his head back. I can still feel the light touch of his fingertips as he entered me — hear him telling me that I was his.

Tears run down my cheeks as I remember the feeling of him wrapped around me. I've never felt so safe. So loved.

Garrett might have taken my virginity, but he left something else behind — this sense that only he can make me whole. That only he can make me that happy again.

Dragging in a shaky breath, I scrub the tears from my cheeks and pull myself up off the toilet. There's no point in replaying those moments or considering what might have been.

No one is coming to save me from this — especially not Garrett Von Horton.



GARRETT

The ice cubes clink together at the bottom of my glass, and I stare bleary-eyed into the highball to find it annoyingly empty. Again.

They really need to invent a more efficient way to get blackout drunk in a hurry.

“Barkeep!” I holler, my voice coming out raspy and slurred as my vision wavers.

Hugo, who’s worked at The Ponderosa since I was a kid, shuffles over to refill my glass.

As payback for my brother’s fucking ambush, I stole a bottle of Anders’s nicest bourbon. I’m drinking it like it’s nine-dollar hard cider, not hundred-year-old liquor.

“Thanks, old man,” I slur as Hugo gamely refills my glass. The Ponderosa is an exclusive club for billionaires, and the lounge is practically empty at this time of night.

I just received a call from the third private investigator I hired to find Ava, telling me he’d hit a dead end. He said he’d keep going for another ten grand, but considering it took him four days to link Ava’s PO box to an apartment in Alma, I’m not overly confident in his abilities.

I went to look for her myself the day after we slept together, but the owner of the coffeeshop said my girl had called in sick that morning.

For two weeks, I sat at the café like a creepy stalker, but she never turned up. I questioned her coworkers and even a few regulars, but no one had seen Ava since Friday.

The coffeeshop owner finally gave me Ava’s address, but the leasing office at her apartment said they’d never heard of her. The apartment number she’d given her boss was registered to a couple who were backpacking through Europe. The leasing office said they’d probably sublet their apartment to Ava without going through the proper channels.

I hired the first PI because I was worried that something might have happened to her. He learned that her phone was registered to a PO box, which he traced to that cheap apartment twenty-five minutes from Breckenridge. That place hadn’t heard of Ava, either.

I called her phone over and over until I got a generic message that the number was no longer in service. That should have told me everything I needed to know, but I didn't stop looking.

Forty grand and three PIs later, and I still don't know where she is. A saner man would take that as a sign that she doesn't want to be found, but I'm not a sane man.

The slam of the front door momentarily distracts me from my misery, and my wolf's hackles go up. I recognize that scent.

Dimitri Lazos strides into the lounge as though he owns the place. His dark hair is mussed as though he's been running his hands through it, and his dress shirt is untucked.

Dimitri is what I like to call a crypto baby. He started this cryptocurrency exchange platform straight out of college, which ballooned into a company with a market cap of nearly a hundred billion dollars.

As I study him, Dimitri's golden eyes snap onto me, narrowing into a glare.

Lazily, I hold his gaze — mostly because I'm drunk. The Ponderosa demands a certain amount of decorum, but my wolf's been a wreck since Ava disappeared, and he's aching for a fight.

Dimitri is alpha of the Mount Lincoln pack. He's never challenged me directly, but tonight I feel like being a dick, so I don't back down.

To my immense shock, Dimitri drops his gaze and throws himself into the chair next to mine. "Don't fuck with me, Von Horton. I'm not in the mood."

"What's with you?" I growl, annoyed that he won't take the bait and give me the distraction I so desperately need.

Dimitri just shakes his head and lets it fall back against the top of the chair.

"Hugo!" I call. "Get my friend a drink, would you?"

Okay, so Dimitri and I aren't friends, but what can I say? Misery loves company. Plus, I'm feeling extra-generous since it's my dickhead brother's bourbon.

Hugo reappears with another glass, and Dimitri takes it with a grateful nod. He tips it back for a taste, but then he just keeps going and downs the entire thing in six heavy chugs.

I stare at him with a mixture of admiration and alarm as he sets the glass on the table. It's the sort of low-class behavior you don't see here — especially not from the likes of Dimitri. New money always tries harder than old money.

"Okay, now you have got to tell me what the hell is going on with you."

Dimitri is silent for a long moment. Then he rubs his eyes and shakes his head. “I was kicked out of my house.”

I raise my eyebrows. “By whom? The FBI? The IRS? The FTC?”

If Dimitri’s assets are being seized, maybe I should go short his stock.

“My maid.”

I let out a violent snort, which causes me to inhale some bourbon in the process. “Your maid?”

Dimitri nods but doesn’t elaborate.

“I do hope she keeps a clean house,” I chuckle.

Dimitri doesn’t answer me.

There’s a long pause, and then he asks, “Why are you here drinking yourself to death, then?”

I grit my teeth as I take another swig of my drink. Dimitri is the last person I want to confide in. I’m certainly not going to tell him that my fated mate is gone and doesn’t want to be found.

“Same reason,” I reply tartly, suddenly wishing I hadn’t struck up the conversation in the first place.

Rival alphas can be friendly, but they can never be friends. One is always plotting how to one-up or kill the other. My wolf refuses to show weakness in front of Dimitri.

“You’re so full of shit,” he mutters, holding up his glass so Hugo can refill it.

“Times must be tough,” I observe, thinking how much of a shit his company’s stock has taken in recent months. “You lose your ass on this latest dip?”

Dimitri doesn’t reply. I’m not sure he even heard me. He’s too busy staring into his drink, looking totally lost.

“You know, I used to think all this shit mattered,” he mumbles, looking up with glassy eyes. “Money. Stock prices. Shareholders.” He shakes his head. “But it’s all just noise, you know?”

He tilts the glass back and takes another hearty swig. And for the first time since I’ve known him, I really see Dimitri.

“I know what you mean,” I rasp.

And I do. I’ve never been one of those high-and-mighty types who thinks that money is the root of all evil. Anyone who says money can’t buy happiness hasn’t slept on twenty-four-

hundred-dollar sheets. I've always enjoyed having money and the cachet that comes with being a Von Horton.

But ever since I met Ava, I've realized that I've been living my life in a glorified Barbie Dreamhouse. Everything is pretty, but my friends are plastic — the problems made-up.

She was the one thing in my life that was real — the only thing that actually mattered.

The nice cars, the second, third, and fourth homes, the private jet, the privilege . . . I'd give it all up for just one more night with her— one more night with my mate.