

Chapter 52

"I think I might die if I don't," he dramatically groans. "Who is she?"

My jaw tightens, "That's my wife."

"Your wife?" Theo and Jax gasp, "Her?"

Aeliana throws her head back laughing and puts her shades on top of her head, and someone gasps, not sure who but they gasp. "Oh, she looks familiar!" Jax slaps my thigh. "Is...isn't that the girl whose picture you hang above your bed and on the wall?"

"Sure is," Rowan says, his voice a little too chirpy for me. He is enjoying this. Everyone under this umbrella, including me just lusted over Aeliana.

"I see it now," Theo nods, her tone lower now, almost like he is disappointed. "I couldn't recognise her because I wasn't looking at her face."

Jax slaps my back, "Congratulations, you fucking win yet again, Vale."

"Your wife is unbelievably hot," Tristan winces, "I mean that in every respectful way. She grew into that big hair."

Suddenly everyone remembers her, they're comparing her to the pictures I stared at every morning when I opened my eyes, and right before bed too. I couldn't care less, my brain seems to drown them out. That was a different time, and this—fuck. I can barely focus.

The longer I look at her, the stronger the urge to drag her upstairs, pin her to the nearest wall and fuck her until she's screaming my



name so loud the whole pack knows who she belongs to. I want to mark her a second, third, fourth, and hundredth time just to prove she is mine.

No.

My thoughts are erratic, unstable. I shoot up from my seat and crown the lawn in long urgent strides. I'd better end this before I act on impulse.

"Put some clothes on," I say, my words harsh, commanding, everything she hates.

Aeliana pauses, "Excuse you?"

"People are staring, do you not have anything decent?" I ask, my voice panicked, but the anger and command overshadow that. "Even the pups are getting an eyeful of you, they shouldn't even be looking at you like that."

"I am wearing a bikini," she scoffs, "Danielle is too. So is your girlfriend, and every damn woman in the pool, so why do you have a problem with me and my bathing suit?"

"It's different, Aeliana. You don't see anyone else looking at—"

Her eyes sweep me up and down, "The answer is no. I like my bikini so it stays on, unless you want me to take it off and go skinny dipping right now. How would that look for your image?"

"Aeliana," I grit through my teeth, trying to sound warm and calm. "Go back inside and change your clothes."



Her arms cross over her chest, her gaze, expectant and challenging. "Or else what?"

Something inside me snaps.

One second, I'm looking at those fiery eyes and the next, I'm tripping her into the pool. She helps, when she hits the water. The backyard goes dead silent and I stare into the pool, waiting for her to emerge with anger and profanity that could make a sailor gasp but it doesn't come.

Nothing does.

She fights the water for a few seconds and then her body sinks. My heart jumps right into my throat when I realise what's happening. The thought that I might have pushed her to her death just as I jump into the pool, shoes on, and fully clothed.

I quickly cut through the water, reaching for her, panic clawing up my spine praying to every God out there that she isn't hurt, that she—

I feel hands on my shoulders, soft gentle yet steady hands. I look down at her and she laughs, swimming away from me. I take her in, the wet hair, water streaming down her face and a mischievous glint in her eyes prove to me she's okay, I didn't hurt her.

I don't think I've known relief until now, my heart remains pounding while she laughs her lungs out.

"You idiot," she laughs, lazily kicking her feet to stay afloat. "You really thought I'd drown in like five feet of water?"

I pause.



I had not considered how shallow the water was. When I saw her sinking all I could think of was saving her, and now I look like a complete utter idiot. Swimming with my fucking clothes on. I want to be mad at her for it, but her laughter simmers and erases every reason why I should be angry at her trick.