

Chapter 21

I loved kissing Ace. The way his mouth glided against mine, how his strong hands gripped my hair to tilt my head to the angle he wanted it... It made me forget the rest of the world.

Our mate bond was being fed, as was my suppressed heat. I had finally slept, and the nausea in my belly had calmed. Ace was taking care of my every need.

It felt wonderful.

Without removing his lips from mine, Ace's hands drifted down to the ties of my sweatpants, and he undid them carefully.

"Hips up," Ace grunted.

I did as he asked, raising them so that Ace could yank my pants past my hips and down my legs. I kicked them off, revealing my bare body, glistening with arousal for my mate.

Ace's groan bordered on animalistic as he gazed down at the space between my legs. "You're so fucking wet. Your slick is running down your thighs."

He kissed and licked my lower stomach, traveling down, down, down...

"Wait!" I grabbed Ace by his hair and forced him to stop before he reached the place where I wanted him the most.

Ace growled and looked up at me while continuing to nip at my inner thigh as if he couldn't help himself.

"Could Madoc come down and see what we're doing?"

Ace snarled, his fingers digging into either of my legs. "He'd better fucking not."

"But *could* he?" I pushed, my voice taking on a desperate high-pitched trill.

I needed him to answer the damn question so we could get on with it. The cramps in my lower stomach worsened, stealing my breath along with them, and there was a hot spear traveling up my spine.

"Don't worry, sweet thing." Ace dragged a long lick up my inner thigh. "I used the mind-link to send him away the second you perfumed. I'm the only one who gets to look at, smell, or taste you."

With that, Ace bent down and licked straight up my center. A scream caught in my throat, my vision wavering.

Holy shit, that single lick should not have felt that good. I was so wound up that it was only going to take me seconds to get off.

Ace sucked my nub into his mouth and hummed. My body bowed, responding with a stream of fluids. My mate licked it noisily, feasting on me, burying his face between my thighs like a man starved.

My eyes rolled back as he began alternating between gentle suction and rolling the tip of his tongue over me, side to side, teasing it with quick licks.

"Oh, god... A-Ace... Please, please... It's so good, Ace," I babbled, digging my fingers into his hair and rolling my hips against his face.

Ace pressed on my knees, opening me wide, leaving me on full display and vulnerable. He pushed two fingers knuckle-deep into my sopping, twitching body.

Instantly, my inner muscles grabbed at those digits, trying to draw them deeper, clamping around them again and again.

My orgasm racked through me so hard that I could do nothing other than brokenly scream Ace's name, my hips pumping wildly, demanding that I wring out every last second of the merciful relief.

My climax lasted for a long while—Ace made sure of that with his languid tongue movements and thrusting fingers.

Even after my muscles stopped clenching and my body slumped back against the mattress, Ace continued to lap at me, growling words of praise about how incredible I tasted and what a good omega I was.

"Ace," I whimpered, tugging on his hair. "Kiss me. Please."

Ace gave my body one last lingering lick before crawling up my body. He captured my mouth in a hungry, possessive kiss, and my mind went blissfully blank.

Satisfaction shuddered through me. I had slept through the night, fed the mate bond, and enjoyed one of the most powerful orgasms of my life. I couldn't remember the last time I had felt so at peace.

How could I have ever considered running from this? This was where I belonged. With Ace.

Speaking of Ace, I could feel his desire for me. He pressed his rock-hard cock against my stomach, gently dragging it up and down against the fabric of my sweatshirt while his tongue lapped at mine.

It suddenly didn't seem fair that I got to experience relief while he was made to suffer.

"Ace," I moaned into his mouth, "I...I need to tell you something."

"Hm?" Ace kissed down my chin and wrapped his lips around my mating gland. He sucked hard.

I dug my nails into his shoulders as the sparks of our bond flared my stomach with warmth. God, I had missed that feeling. I even missed my neck being covered in hickeys. "I'm on birth control."

Ace pulled back to study me, his expression wild. "You're on birth control?"

I slithered my arms around his neck. "My mom gave them to me so that when my real heat starts, you can claim me without worrying about getting me pregnant."

I tugged him down until his mouth was only a breath away from mine. "So that we don't have to use a condom when you fuck me now."

Ace's blue eyes flashed. His back muscles tensed dangerously beneath my hands. "Say 'fuck me' again."

Laughter bubbled from my chest. "I thought you didn't like it when I swear."

Ace licked along my chin. "My wolf thought you only swore when you were stressed or upset." He kissed the spot under my ear. "But now that he knows you swear out of passion too..."

He bit down softly on my earlobe, causing me to squirm. "Say it again."

"Fuck me, Ace," I begged, my voice breathy. "I need your cock inside of me. Please."

My mate lost it.

He slammed his mouth back down onto mine with bruising force, all the while cramming his hands under the bottom of my sweatshirt and shoving it upward to reveal my breasts.

One hand found my right breast and squeezed gently. His lips fell away, and his massive body traveled down my own until he reached my other breast. He circled the nipple with his tongue once, twice...

And then he stopped.

I whimpered, my eyes snapping open. Ace was still above me, but he was looking down at my chest with a frown on his face.

"What?" I asked. "Why'd you stop?"

"What's this?" Ace grabbed the tracker that lay between my breasts and lifted it for me to see.

Well, fuck. I had completely forgotten I was wearing that.

"Um..." I pulled myself up onto my elbows, my mind reeling with possible explanations I could give him that might prevent the impending explosion.

"Is this a tracker?" Ace turned it over in his hand, glaring in confusion.

I licked my suddenly dry lips. "Uh...yeah. My dad gave it to me."

Shit. I cringed. Me and my big mouth. *I shouldn't have said it was from Dad.*

"Why would he give you a tracker? I made sure a pack member was always watching you to keep you safe. You shouldn't need this."

"Well...um..."

"Doe," Ace spoke slowly, saying my name with an intensity that made me want to bear my neck to him in submission. *Stupid omega instincts.* "Why would you need a tracker?"

Swallowing, I carefully took the tracker out of his hand and pulled my sweatshirt back down so that he could no longer see it. Or get to it.

"That's, uh, part of the reason I came to talk to you. My dad has set me up with everything I might need if I decide I want to...get away for a while. A car, suppressants, cash... the whole nine yards."

"Get away for a while..." Ace repeated in a low, measured tone. "With me?"

My pulse raced violently against my neck. "Well, no, not exactly."

His irises were darkening quickly, and I swear his muscles grew larger. "So, you mean...run away?"

I sat up fully. *Here we go.* "Please don't freak out, Ace. After everything I've been through, is it any surprise that I might be considering escaping for a little while?"

Knowing the mood was ruined—*goddamn it!*—I quickly grabbed my discarded sweatpants and stood to pull them back over my legs.

Ace got to his feet as well. "It's not the *escaping* I'm worried about. You can go wherever the hell you want—so long as I know where you are and that you're safe and fucking protected."

"That's what the tracker's for!" I exclaimed as I finished tying the waistband of my pants. "If anything happened to me, it would send you my location. My dad thought of everything."

"Did your dad think about what would happen to you if Robert found you? Or if you went into fucking *heat*? What if I couldn't get to you in time? Fuck, Doe! What if something happened to you?"

Feeling slightly smothered by the dominance rolling off him, I took a few steps back. "I...I guess that's a chance I'm willing to take."

Ace's expression turned thunderous. His entire body was rippling with suppressed rage. "You're talking about this as if you've already made your mind up."

I hadn't. Not until that moment.

Not until he told me I couldn't.

"And what if I have?" I shot back. "Weren't you the one preaching about giving me back control an hour ago?"

"You said you forgave me." His powerful voice cracked. "You said you wanted me. *Loved* me."

His words made my throat burn.

"I do." I surged forward, placing my hands on either side of his face. "Ace, I love you so much. And I want to be with you. *I am* with you. You're my mate. Forever."

Ace wrapped his hands around my wrists and leaned down to press his forehead to mine. "Then why do you want to leave me?"

I was pretty sure my heart cracked into a million tiny pieces.

"It's not about you," I whispered. "The lock... I don't know who I am anymore. I need time to figure it out."

Ace shook his head. His hands slipped down to grip my waist and tug my body against his. "I need to know where you are, Doe. I need to be able to get to you if you're in trouble."

I let out a frustrated sigh. "Nothing bad is going to happen to me."

"You don't know that!" Ace snarled. "You're too fragile. Anyone could hurt you—"

"That's what I mean!" I tried to shove him away from me to no avail. "You've kept me so sheltered, I don't know what I'm capable of. I shouldn't be afraid to leave the house without you by my side—"

"So, *don't*. Let me take care of you. I'll protect you from anything or anyone who wants to hurt you."

I dropped my head onto his chest with a groan. He wasn't listening—or understanding.

"And I believe you. But that doesn't change anything. I need time to convince myself that...that..." I sighed. "That I'm not as weak as you make me feel."

Ace's face fell. He sucked in a harsh breath. "I make you feel weak?"

I blinked away the tears threatening to spill. "You're an alpha, and I'm a pathetic human omega. How could you not?"

"You are *not* pathetic. It has never been my intention to make you feel that way. I can do anything, Doe. Just *tell* me what I need to do, and I'll do it."

I shook my head. I wished there was another way to do this. I hated that I had to break his heart to gain my independence. "There's nothing you can do *but* let me go."

"No!" Ace snarled, his voice suddenly razor sharp. "I forbid you from running away."

I took a step back. Outrage prickled beneath my skin. "You *forbid* me?"

"Yes. I forbid you." He prowled toward me, forcing me to stumble back until I was pressed against the bars of the cell. He towered over me.

I knew what he was doing. He was trying to intimidate me. He wanted me to submit to him in the way omegas had been submitting to alphas for thousands of years.

And part of me was tempted to do just that.

"*Placate the alpha!*" the voice in my head screamed at me. "*Calm him! Do what he wants!*"

Yeah. No, thank you.

"You're not going anywhere without me. Do you understand me, Doe?"

My posture stiffened. I met his gaze head-on, not willing to back down, no matter how scary he got.

He flashed me his teeth. His features started to contort. "This isn't a fucking joke."

My expression remained the same. "I'm not laughing."

I ran my hands up his bare chest, savoring the feel of my mate's skin beneath my palms one more time.

Then I lifted myself onto my toes and pressed my lips to his. I let my kiss soothe him, waiting until his body relaxed against mine before speaking again.

"You know the saddest part of all of this?" I whispered against his mouth. "I really meant it when I said I forgave you."

Before he had a chance to react, I turned my body sideways and slipped through the bars of the cell.

"No! Doe!" Ace yelled. He tried to grab hold of a piece of clothing, but I stumbled back before he could reach me. He snarled and shook the bars. "Come back, Doe! Right fucking now!"

My chest felt like it was filled with broken glass, scraping and puncturing my lungs with every one of my broken breaths. "I—I love you," I whispered through my tears.

Ace made an anguished sound, his body beginning to bend and contort. "No! You're not leaving me, mate!"

I could hardly recognize his voice. It was deep, loud, and jarring.

"I have to protect you! I have to!"

Feeling like I was walking through hot tar, I pulled the key to Ace's cell from my pocket and gently set it down on the ground, just out of his reach. Then I turned and walked up the steps.

"Doe!" Ace howled behind me. "Come back! Come back here right now! Mate! Mate!"

I covered my ears and raced away, leaving my mate and half of my heart in that basement.