

chapter ten

MY HANDS OVER Shavone's, I tighten my hoodie around her. She needs to keep it on — cover that beautiful, tempting ass of hers.

I indicate the dartboard with a nod. "Are you an ace at that, too?"

She shakes her head. "No. I've never played darts before."

"Hallelujah." I throw my head back. "Maybe I can win a portion of my pride back." I run my hands up her waist and around to her back. "Will you let me teach you?"

Yes, kitten, that was an innuendo. I want to teach you a lot of things.

The increase in feminine pheromone and blushing smile means she got my drift. Fuck. My dick twitches. I don't know how much more of her I can take.

"Okay," she says, eyes on my mouth.

I lick my lips. *You want some of this?*

Dilated eyes say yes just before they glance away.

"Sir?" She calls across the bar and once she has the old man's attention, motions that the pool table is all his. He waves his thanks.

Touching her back, I usher her to the dartboard.

"I love this song." She rocks her shoulders.

There's music? I pause to listen. Sade softly sings something about giving the kiss of life.

"You like this old shit?" I tease her, pulling the darts from the board.

"Hey." She giggles. "Yes. I like soul — old and new." She throws out that bottom lip, again. "Don't make fun of me."



“Never, kitten. You have excellent taste in music.”

The broad grin that spreads across her sweet face wraps another string around my heart. And her swaying hips? Those put another quart of blood in my dick.

She is something. Beautiful and sweet and sensual. I wonder how she’ll react when she finds out I’m lying to her just as Nash is. And she’ll find out. No doubt. She’s digging in the right place. She’ll be angry. I have no doubt about that either. That we’re doing this to keep her out of the clutches of the hunters won’t make a bit of difference. How strange to feel remorse before the fact. The only chance I’ll have is to get under her skin and fast.

“Why the sad look?” She asks me.

I affect an exaggerated shocked expression. “You gotta ask, lady who handed me my ass in pool?”

“Sorry.” She exaggerates a giggle into her hand. She isn’t sorry at all. “Well, now you can trounce me.”

Fuck. Was that a euphemism, kitten?

“At darts,” she quickly adds.

“I wouldn’t be very gallant, using your word, if I did that.”

“No, you wouldn’t.” She gives me her coquettish smile.

“You think batting those lashes at me will save you?” I laugh.

“A girl can hope.”

“You showed no mercy. I show no mercy.” I grin. “That’s the way the game works.”

I move behind her, and, with a hand at her hip, begin to murmur the rules into her ear. Jesus. Her scent. I inhale a lung full of it.

“This” — I toe a length of tape on the floor — “is the throw line. You cannot step over it when you throw.”

“What about my arm?”

“Good question.” I playfully squeeze her bicep, again. “Yes, your buffed arm can cross it.”

I feel her smile. “I prefer the word ‘toned’.”

“Kitten, you are so toned.” I nuzzle her hair. “Now, stop distracting me.”

She giggles and I grin. This is fun. She’s fun.

The rest of the rules, what there are of them, are fairly simple. I run through them quickly. “Let’s do a few practice throws.” I motion her aside and, when she’s safely out of the way, throw my darts. One lands dead center of the bull’s-eye and the other two in the interior ring, quarter inch from the bull’s-eye.

She laughs. “This is going to be bad.”

“Aw, c’mon. Positive thinking.” I move out of the way and bow for her to take my place at the line.

Lifting her chin, she shakes her hair out of the way and narrows her eyes at the board in concentration.

Hot and sexy, smart and sharp. No man can resist that. Sorry, Nash. I glance over at him. His eyes pierce me with an anger he normally saves for enemies and rival packs. Cherie grins at me.

Shavone’s first throw lands on the board, but in the number ring. No score. The second lands in the fat single score ring and the third misses the board completely.

The music clicks over to a sexy strong drumbeat that Shavone seems to like, too. I walk to the board to extract our darts. Ah, it’s John Mayer. I almost laugh out loud at the lyrics. I’m not the man I used to be either, John.

Shavone smiles at me as I walk back to her. Rocking her hips, she sings along to the music.

“Not bad.” I hand her her darts. “You’ve got pretty good form for a newbie. Can I show you a better way?”

She nods enthusiastically. “Yes, please.”



I lay my darts on a nearby table.

“Let’s work on your stance, first.”

Stop writhing that body, kitten.

“Okay.” She stands still.

Taking my sweet ass time and with a caressing touch, I position her body — feet there, hips like this, shoulders like that, hands like this. I’m disappointed when I’m done arranging her.

She looks up at me through her lashes, a flirty smile on her lips. I stifle a growl.

Moving back behind her, I drag my hand down her arm to her hand. “Holding the dart is an art,” I whisper in her ear — trying hard not to imagine her soft hand gripping my dick. “Two fingers forward on the stem, like this.” I manipulate her slender fingers. “And your thumb here near the back of the dart.”

Understanding, she nods. Her brow furrowed, she concentrates so hard.

“You want to extend your arm, pointing the tip of the dart where you’d like it to stick.” Placing my cheek directly on her temple, my hand over hers, I raise the dart in front of her face. “Stare down the tip and bring the dart straight back in front of your face,” I say. “Don’t hold it here, by your ear. You can’t see where it’s going if it’s beside your head.” I let go of her hand and hold her at the waist. “Do it now, but don’t throw it yet.”

While she lines up the dart, I dip my nose into her hair and inhale deeply — not caring if she hears it. My voice is thick when I speak again. “We’ll do a couple of practice movements. Don’t let go of the dart, though.”

“Okay,” she says softly.

My left hand glides from her hip to ribs while my right hand wraps around hers and the dart.

My wolf wants you so bad.

I try to keep my swollen dick off her, but, damn, I just want to press into her. “You want to release here.” I extend her arm, but not completely. “The follow through when you throw a dart is forward extension.” I do short pumps with our hands. “Not down.”

“Makes sense.” She nods.

Dipping my nose in her hair once more, I drop both my hands and step aside, hiding my boner the best I can. “Okay, try.” Fuck. That sounded needy as hell. I smile. I don’t care.

She narrows her sparkling eyes at me. “Is your over-the-top flirting to put me off my game?”

Slowly, I shake my head. “This heat has nothing to do with darts,” I murmur.

“Oh,” she mouths. She licks then sucks her bottom lip into her mouth.

Her kicked up essence slams my senses. I close my eyes. Fuck me. When I open to look at her, she’s still staring at me. “Darts, Shavone.”

We’ll play bed games later.

Shaking her head, she turns her attention back to the board.

With a deep breath, she practices her throw. On a movement forward, she releases the dart. It goes almost nowhere. Half way to the board, it falls from the air and drops to the floor.

She laughs at herself. “Okay, that was weak. I was concentrating on when to let go.”

“Try, again.” I smile and study her profile — nose, lips, tits, oh and that ass. She’s perfect.



This time she puts some force behind the dart and makes a solid hit an inch from the bull's-eye. Her jaw drops open with joy. Pleased with herself, she grins triumphantly at me.

"Excellent." I nod, proud of her.

Pulling her shoulders back, she lines up the third and final dart. She stares down the sharp tip to the red dot on the board. With a perfect throw, she sticks it into the bull's-eye. She squeals like a child and does a little dance, unbelievably happy about hitting a tiny red dot.

Cherie and Nash clap for her. Using my hoodie as a skirt, she curtsies.

"You're a quick study." I grin, walking to stand next to her.

"You're an excellent teacher." She smiles and quickly hugs me, planting a sweet kiss on my cheek.

"Mmmm," I murmur, loving her affectionate nature. "Move away, kitten."

She does and I toe the throw line.

"You know to be fair, you should have to stand back farther," she says.

"What?" I chuckle and scowl. "Why?"

"Your arm is much longer than mine. That puts your release — oh, I don't know — five or six inches closer." She bites her lip. The twinkle in her eye says she's fucking with me.

I'm calling her bluff. "Let's see. Come here." I wave her over. We put our arms side by side. Sure enough, the tip of her fingers just graze my wrists.

She smiles up at me. "See."

I scowl with sound effects. "Is it my fault you're a tiny thing?"

She raises an eyebrow in challenge.

“Fine, my lady.” I bow and take a giant step back. “Happy?”

“You’re still going to kick my ass,” she laughs.

“I really like the sound of your laugh.” I grin. “But kicking is not what I’d like to do to your ass.” I waggle my eyebrows.

Her jaw drops. “Oh, I never.”

“You should. You’d like it.” I chuckle at her shocked expression. “Step aside, Shavone.”

Once she moves, I quickly plant one dart in the red bull’s-eye, one in the green outer bull and one in a triple twenty. I pull our darts and hand her hers.

We play one game — which I win by a landslide even standing farther back. We’re about to start another when Cherie appears at Shav’s side.

“Hey, we’re going,” Cherie says.

I turn and glance from her to Nash behind her.

“Oh?” Shavone sets her darts down. “I’ll go with you. I need to get started packing anyway.”

“I’ll be fine,” Cherie grins. “I badgered Nash into driving me back to Jesse’s.” Suddenly, I like this girl.

Though Nash leaving me and Shav alone was part of the plan, I didn’t think he’d follow through after I attached to her.

An alpha glare in his narrowed eyes, he sends me an unspoken message that I get loud and clear. Fuck him. It’s his fault Shavone isn’t mated to him. He pussyfooted around — how he was able to control himself, I’ll never know. I won’t — I can’t. I’m going for it now. *Now*.

“I’ll make sure Shavone gets home safe.”

She shakes her head. “I live a block away. I walked here. I can walk home.”



Nash rubs the back of his head, ruffling his hair. That's his about to go wolf signal. A nasty growl for me, his eyes soften when he looks at Shavone. "It's dark now, baby. You let Ben take care of you."

Oh, I'll take care of her alright. I try to hide my grin.

My cousin purses his lips, his eyes go from me to Shavone and back to me. "You know what I meant. Safe being the operative word, Ben."

I laugh. "I won't do anything to her that she doesn't want me to do."

Nash narrows his eyes at me. Grabbing my collar, he pulls me aside for a private discussion. "Listen up, asshole," he growls low. "This is about getting her to move into the mansion. That's it."

"Fuck you." I cock my head. "You know I can't help how my wolf feels about her." The irate pain in his eyes is sad — fuck, I pity the idiot. Nevertheless, I can't turn this off. "I'm sorry, cuz. I didn't plan this. But I'll be goddamn if I walk away." I stare at Shavone. I'd mow down my own cousin for her. I'd mow down *anyone* for her.

"I'm not rolling over and going away, either," he snarls. "You want a fight, you got one." He lets go of my shirt with a little shove.

"Is everything okay?" Shavone's gaze flits between Nash and me.

"Fine." Nash grumbles and brushes past her.

What a prick. He doesn't even see the hurt in her eyes, and she has no clue why he's being such an ass.

chapter eleven

IT'S A NICE COLORADO summer night. But even with Ben's hoodie around my waist, I'm cold. Watching Nash drive away with Cherie, I rub the goose bumps on my arms. Maybe it isn't the temperature that's making me shiver. Nash is constantly angry with me. I hate that.

"Here." Ben stops me. He unties the sleeves from around my waist and helps me put the hoodie on the correct way.

My fingertips barely reach below the elbow of the sleeves and the hem touches my calves. "Thank you, Sir Benjamin." I flop the sleeves at him.

He bows deeply. "At your service, my lady."

I smile.

"Which direction is your place?"

"A block that way." I point west.

"Only a block? We'll walk then. I'll come back for my car." Ben digs inside the left sleeve for my hand and clasps it with his right. "Are you warm enough?"

"Uh, huh," I murmur with a nod.

We stroll at a leisurely pace, both of us quiet. Every so often, Ben gently squeezes my hand or lightly caresses my knuckles with his thumb.

"You didn't do anything wrong."

"What?"

"With Nash. He's just being an asshole."

I snort. "He's been an asshole for years."

Ben laughs. "He's an idiot, too."

I don't know what he means by that. Ben nods to himself, and says no more.



Before I know it, we're approaching my tiny cottage. There's a for sale sign out front with a bold red 'sold' sticker placed diagonally over it.

"Are you moving?" Ben indicates the sign.

"Whether I want to or not." I grimace. "The new owners want to live in it themselves. I came back from a long weekend in the Springs to an eviction notice in my mailbox."

"That sucks," he says and I nod in agreement.

We step onto the wide porch and stand in front of my door.

"Thank you for walking me home, Ben." I smile and lean in to plant a chaste kiss on the corner of his chin.

He reacts, lowering his head to make mouth to mouth contact. Before I know it, his hard body pushes me against the door. Simultaneously, both his hands cradle either side of my head, his fingers tangling in my hair.

Growling, he licks my lips and gently grips the bottom one between his teeth, lightly pulling. I gasp at the erotic sensation. His tongue takes advantage of the opening, expertly plunging into my mouth — exploring, tasting, demanding.

Oh god, this man can kiss and, I allow myself to react, my tongue tentatively dancing with his. He groans and one of his hands slides to my behind pulling me against his obvious arousal.

I break the kiss. Panting for oxygen, I rest my head back on the door. Wow.

"Mmmmm," he growls, both hands caress my buttocks. His lips move to my clavicle, then up my throat to my chin and jaw, nibbling his way to my earlobe that he gently takes between his teeth. The sensation resonates *there*. I moan.

"Oh, kitten, your purr is such a sexy sound." He lightly nips where shoulder and neck meet. "I want to taste all of

you, Shavone. Invite me in.” His eyes sparkle with desire as he lowers his lips to mine, again.

I turn my head, certain that I won't have the willpower to resist another scorching kiss like that. He kisses along my jaw and throat.

“Ben, I don't do one-night stands,” I breathe.

“Excellent. Let's make it several nights, many, many nights. We can stay in bed for a week.” He nibbles on my other earlobe.

Geez. Vacillating between willpower and desire is exhausting.

“Mmmmm,” I murmur. “You should stop doing that.”

He chuckles against my throat. “I don't think so.”

I grip his hair and pull his mouth away from my skin. “I can't.” I look into his hooded eyes. “I don't normally send mixed signals. I'm sorry.”

“Shh.” He grazes my lips with his. “Don't be sorry. I understand. I like the wicked four S combination of your personality.”

“Four S?”

“Uh, huh. Sweet yet smart, sexy yet shy.”

I frown. “Shy? I don't think I'm shy.”

“Yeah. Maybe it's gun-shy I'm thinking of.” He grazes his nose along mine. “Doesn't matter. I like it. I like you.”

“I like you, too, Ben.” I laugh.

He grins. “I got that loud and clear, Miss Shavone.”

Ben nuzzles behind my ear, kisses my neck and shoulder. “I want to see you again. Tomorrow.”

I shake my head.

“You don't want to see me again? Why not?” Ben lifts his head and pins me with his eyes.

Oh. There's that self-doubt, again.



“No, no. I do want to see you again. It’s just — it can’t be tomorrow.” I sigh. “I’ve only got a few weeks to find a new place and move. Doing so on my budget will likely take all my time and focus.”

That’s the truth. I’m a closeted witch. Roommates are out of the question. However, I want to live as close to campus as possible. With what I want to spend on rent, that’ll be a challenge.

“I know the perfect place.” A secret smile spreads across Ben’s face. It’s contagious, making me smile, too.

“Why do I get the feeling that it’s in your bed?”

“Hmmm.” He presses his lips together in thought. “Not a bad idea. You’d like my bed, trust me.” He nuzzles my throat, again.

“I’d bet on it, too.”

“Stop.” He pulls my pelvis against him. “When you say shit like that, my dick gets even harder.”

I blush.

“See. You are shy.” He chuckles. “Not my bed, no, but it is a perfect little place for you not too far from here.”

“Oh?” Now he’s got my attention. “How far?”

“Three or four miles.”

“That’s doable. I can ride my bike to class on nice days.”

“Yep.” He nods once deeply. “It’s straight down University Boulevard in Cherry Hills.”

I laugh. Is he for real? “I can’t afford Cherry Hills.”

“This place you can. Your portion of the property would be small and very cheap. Kiss me good night and I’ll give you the details.”

“But I already kissed you good night.”

“Again,” he smiles, running his nose along mine. “Kiss me again, Shavone.”

“That’s extortion,” I tease.

“Uh, huh,” he murmurs and slides his mouth back on mine and I don’t stop him.

This kiss is gentler, tender. No grinding or pushing. Just a sweet getting to know you play of tongues. The first kiss went straight to lust. This one, while arousing in its own way, touches me somewhere in my chest.

Oh. This is nice.

The hair at the nape of his neck is soft twirled in my fingers. I kiss him back.

I feel him getting aroused, again, but he pulls away before I make him back off.

“Oh, kitten,” he says, kissing my cheek. “You taste like heaven. Smell like an angel.” He nuzzles my hair, again. “I’m so glad you kiss on the first date.”

“Oh my. This wasn’t even a date. You haven’t even bought me dinner.” I playfully cover my forehead with the back of my hand. “Oh my. I’m a floozy.” I faux faint.

He chuckles. “Not even close, my lady.” Getting a more serious look, he caresses my cheek with his fingertips.

“What?” I smile at him, take in his boyish grin.

He shakes his head. I continue to look at him, expectantly, waiting for him to say what’s on his mind.

“It’s been quite a night.” His grin broadens. “You’re totally unexpected, Shavone.”

I raise an eyebrow. What an odd way to put it.

“I’m glad Nash dragged me out for a beer.”

“He had to drag you? You don’t like going out?” Sounds like Nash had to coerce Ben to help him wreck my date with Tomas.

“I used to like it. When I was younger.”

I laugh. “Oh, you’re so old now.”

He chuckles.

“How old are you?” I ask.



“Twenty-nine.”

Same age as Nash.

“How old are you, Shavone?”

“I just turned twenty-two.” I draw the discussion back to him. “So, why don’t you like going out anymore?”

Ben sighs deeply. “It’s depressing. Watching desperate people desperately trying to hook up with even more desperate people.”

“Nothing wrong with that. Connection is what we all want and need, deep down.”

“I know, Dr. Gentil,” he teases me, “but club people are an interesting breed.”

That’s odd. A club owner who hates the club scene?

“Don’t some people just go out to listen to music and dance?” I ask.

“Some clubs, maybe.” He shrugs, playing with a lock of my hair.

He rests his big hand on the crook of my shoulder. His fingers caresses the nape of my neck, his thumb does the same to my chin. “What about you? Do you like going out?”

“I prefer concerts, live music rather than DJ type clubs. But,” I sigh. “I don’t do either very often right now, being a broke under grad and all.”

“What? No line of rich college boys to use and abuse?” Ben smirks.

Consciously, I know he’s joking. Even so, I react, push at his chest to make him move away. Ever since Dillon, I’ve been accused of being a gold digger. Typically remarks like that don’t offended me. It cuts tonight, though. Wasn’t I going to use Tomas?

Shit.

With an uncomfortable look on his face, Ben steps back. “I didn’t mean” — he shoves his hands in his pockets,

frowns — “you’re beautiful. I can’t imagine why they don’t” — his voice trails off when he sees me fumble for the zipper on his giant hoodie. “I’m sorry,” he murmurs.

“No, I’m sorry.” I soften my expression and my voice. “I get what you meant.” I unzip the jacket.

“Forgive me, my lady.” He grips both sides of the hoodie preventing me from taking it off. “I screwed that up.”

That uncertain expression flickers lightning fast across his eyes. For a split second, he looks so vulnerable. Wow. This is strange.

“Screwed up what? Kissing?” I grin playfully at him. “Your kissing skills are excellent.”

“Yeah?”

I nod.

Gripping the hoodie, he pulls me closer, presses his lips to my forehead. “Don’t mind my stupid mouth. I’m not used to girls like you.”

“Girls like me?” I cock my head to the side in a signal for him to explain.

“Sweet.” Softly, he caresses my cheek with his knuckles. “Classy. Smart. One of those beautiful, untouchable girls.” He frowns. “Hell, you might even be a virgin for all I know.”

I laugh. “I’m not. I have had sex. Sorry to burst your bubble.”

Ben jerks his head back in mock disbelief. “You mean some idiot had his claws in you and let you get away?”

Unbidden, tears come to my eyes.

“Well, fuck. First I make you mad and then I make you cry.” He strokes my hair.

I smile through a snuffle. “Not your fault. My, ah” — I breathe deep through a familiar ache — “my high school boyfriend became a Marine. He was killed in Afghanistan.”



“Oh, Shavone.” Ben hugs me. “God, I’m so sorry. I forgot about Monbeau.”

“You knew him?”

“I knew of him, being a French wolf.”

“Oh.” I nod.

Pulling back a little, Ben cups my jaw and studies my face, concern on his.

“I know. I should be over his death a little more by now.” I shake my head, truly feeling stupid for still mourning Dillon with such intensity after two years. Today has been crazy. Either my hormones or the last day of the Dark Moon is messing with my emotions.

“Says who?” Ben strokes my cheek with his thumb. “Trust me. Every guy who’s been over there dreams of having a sweetheart like you miss them.”

I try to smile. “You think?”

“I know. And I’d bet the last dime I had that you were the best thing in his life.”

He’s killing me. Ben the romantic. Who would’ve guessed it?

With a chaste kiss on my cheek, Ben releases me and takes the key from my hand. “Be ready at eight o’clock tomorrow morning.”

He unlocks my door.

“For what?”

“Breakfast and then I make good on my promise to show you the place in Cherry Hills.” He turns the door knob, pushes the door in. Flicking on the light, he steps in, takes a look around my small front room. “All clear.” He steps back out. “In you go.”

I step inside. In the few seconds it takes for me to turn around, he’s already off the porch, walking away backwards.

“Better lock it. My wolf might get the upper hand.” He grins.

Like a lock could keep out a wolf. “Oh, wait. Your hoodie.” I slide it off a shoulder.

“Sleep in it and give it back later.”

Oh.

He grins broader and turns to walk briskly back to the bar.