

Chapter Twenty

January 30th, 2021

“This is the dumbest idea I’ve ever had in my life,” Andy muttered to himself, looking in the mirror as he tried to make the tux look at least semi-respectable. “Marrying seven women at once. What the *fuck* am I thinking? I’ve never had a relationship last more than a couple of years.”

“One of the women you’re marrying *was* that relationship, though,” Phil said, helping Andy adjust the tuxedo. Phil had been Andy’s choice for best man, although it had been a difficult decision, and he’d relegated both Xander and Eric to groomsmen. “You should be fine. It’s not a big deal.”

The tuxedo didn’t have a tie – Andy’s one solitary demand regarding his attire, but was otherwise mostly a classic black wedding tux, with a crimson vest beneath it. He was fine getting married, but wearing a goddamn tie was a bridge too far. “Don’t most people wait until they’ve been dating a couple of years before they get married?”

“Sure,” Phil said, dusting Andy’s shoulders off. “In the before times. Back when the world wasn’t on fire running at a thousand miles an hour like it is these days. And, y’know, if it bothered you, you didn’t have to marry all seven at once. You could’ve spaced them out a bit.”

Andy sighed, shaking his head. “Then I’d have been establishing a priority amongst them, which isn’t a fair thing to do. None of them should feel like they’re more or less important than any of the others. It’s probably an impossible feat, but I’m going to spend as much of my life trying to do it as much as I can. So, when they said they all wanted one collective wedding day, I sort of breathed a sigh of relief, even if it meant I was running into marriage a little bit faster than I would’ve liked.”

“You know there’s *already* a kind of pecking order in your brides anyway, right?” Phil asked him, as if he found it odd that Andy had missed that.

Andy scowled at his friend, squinting a little. “How do you figure?”

“Ash physically got here first, and she’s one of the first having a child, so she’s basically right at the top. Niko’s next, and she’s also with child, but you and Fi had a long-standing relationship before she left and reentered your life, so they’re vying for second and third,” Phil told him. “Mo’s just happy to be here, so she doesn’t care where she fits, as long as Fiona’s happy. Piper’s competitive, so she’s pushing for higher placement. And Sarah just wants to be part of the conversation and Em wants to be part of Sarah’s conversation.”

“Christ, I hope they don’t think that’s *me* deciding placement *for* them.”

Phil chuckled. “I mean, I could be wrong. I’m *not*, but I suppose I *could* be. I have to entertain that option, as unpleasant as it may be.” He stopped and looked around the room in mock fright. “God, what an awful thought, me being wrong about something.”

“You’re right. That’s the worst possible thing that could happen here. Phil Marcos could be wrong.”

Phil grinned at him and tipped an imaginary hat. “Now you’re getting it. I’m glad you’ve learned how to properly rate my importance.”

Andy let out a defeated sigh. “Fuck, Phil, I’m just trying to keep everyone happy. Am I going about this all wrong?”

“I’d say Ash and Fi are the two titans on either side of you, with Niko as Ash’s right-hand woman and Moira as Fiona’s,” Phil told him. “Sarah and Em are a package deal, which means I think Piper’s more deeply attached to you than almost any of the others, because she doesn’t really have a team-up buddy. Which is probably fine, considering what she went through before

getting here. It's okay for her to be a little less sharing of her time with you. Although maybe you should take an eighth wife, just to have an even number, two on each side of you. How'd they settle on the order for the ceremony?"

"In order of arrival to the house, so, Ash, Niko, Piper, Sarah, Em, Fiona then Moira."

"Is that how they do everything?"

Andy snorted. "That's like the *only* thing they did that way. Most things they settle with a deck of cards, which is how they're settling the first dance order, who gets bedded as a married woman, and, perhaps most importantly, who's smashing cake into whose face."

"They're not all just smashing cake into your face?"

"And, what, leave me trying to smash seven pieces into seven brides?" Andy scoffed. "Fuck off, Phil. Even I'm not that crazy. I'd be running around all night long." He scowled in amusement. "And most of them can probably run a lot faster than me."

"You know, I think me and the other groomsmen wouldn't mind helping there," his friend said with a smirk. "We'd be great cake smashers."

"I have no doubts, Phil, but believe me, they're looking forward into smashing cake into each other's faces as much as they are mine." Andy looked down at his feet then looked back up, as if reminding himself of the one thing left to do. "How are we looking in terms of attendance?"

"Good lord, dude," Eric said to him from his place over at the doorway to the hallway. "You'd think you were the fucking pope being laid to rest, or a head of state. I think less people turned out for Ronald Reagan's funeral than are here for your wedding."

"So you're telling me it's really the full fifteen hundred people?"

"I'm telling you, it's definitely *more* than that," Eric laughed. "And it was smart that the reception area was basically decked out to handle two thousand, because I think you've probably *got* that, although I suspect a lot of them are just excess Team members. Good thing a bunch of them aren't going to partake of the catering, because there is no way we're gonna be able to feed all of them."

"Is it just people brought along a few extra members of their team along each, or—"

"Yeah, I think some of Sarah and Em's coworkers didn't think the 3-partner-max rule applied to them," Phil smirked. "Plus we forgot to take into account how many of the men were going to have security details. This place probably has its own private army around here right now. And in some cases, more members of the families turned up than expected. I think all of Aisling's living family is here, and that's a small invading force in its own right."

"I thought it would be bad form to run in here yelling 'The Irish are invading!' but if you want, I can go back out and come in again," Eric said with a smile. "Besides, the amount of celebrities here is far more entertaining."

Andy grinned, tilting his head to glance over at Eric. "I'm not going to want to stop partway on my walk down the aisle to get an autograph am I?"

"There's a few folks from 'Ocean's 11' here and I know you're a huge fan of that flick, so maybe, but you'll see them at the reception, so stopping for an autograph when you're walking in would be bad form," Eric said.

"Which ones?"

"Clooney. Pitt. Cheadle. I think a lot of the others were DuoHalo victims, or maybe they just didn't work with Sarah or Em. Damon's alive, but I don't think you sent him an invite, since I don't think Em or Sarah ever worked with him. Not sure though."

"Great. Just great. If it turns out my wedding day is remembered for the day I accidentally snubbed Matt Damon, I'm never going to hear the fucking end of it," Andy said,

shaking his head. “Can someone grab me a Coke?”

“Ice water for you,” Phil said, grabbing a thermos full of it, holding it out to him. “The last thing you fucking need is more caffeine running through your veins right now.”

Andy nodded, taking the bottle, flipping the top of it open so he could suck on the straw end of it. “Tala’s on her way, yeah? Once that’s here and in my hand, I think at least some of the nerves will pass. Hopefully anyway.”

“Nobody’s seen her,” Eric said from the doorway over his shoulder. “They’ve been searching for like an hour now.”

“What?!”

Lexi turned and peeked her head in with an eyeroll and a smirk. She was already classed up in a gorgeous dress, though she also had a pistol in a shoulder holster resting over the top of it. “He’s *fucking with you*, boss. Relax.” She lifted a walkie talkie up to her mouth. “Yojimbo to crew, who’s got eyes on Tala?”

“Niner Girl here,” Lauren’s voice said from the radio. “She’s on her way to you now. Should be there in just a minute or two.” Lauren had taken on the role of wedding planner, something she’d fallen into quite naturally, taking care of making sure all the parts and pieces were running the way they were supposed to. Someone had to quarterback the wedding on the day, and all the participants were far too nervous for that, so Lauren had stepped in and taken control, and nobody had felt confident enough to tell her no. She’d done an amazing job, much to everyone’s relief, and the day had, so far, gone without any major hiccups.

Sure enough, just a few moments later, Andy’s partner Tala Jordan came sprinting into the room. She was rocking a matching a dress very similar to Lexi’s but obvious a few sizes bigger to accommodate Tala’s more significant curves. In her hand, she had a blue box that couldn’t have been bigger than six inches on any side. “They’re here! They’re here! I had to do a couple of last-minute adjustments to Niko and Ash’s rings because their fingers have swollen a little bit due to the pregnancy. But you shouldn’t have any trouble with them now. We can resize them later if need be. They go from left to right, starting with Ash on the left, so just work your way down the line. Now I need to get back out there.” She handed Phil the box, gave Andy a kiss and headed back out of the room to rejoin the area.

“Don’t lose that,” Andy said to his friend, who laughed.

“Oh, I *know* better,” Phil said. “Linda’s standing right outside that door too, you know, and if I lost *your* rings, you think she wouldn’t be expecting retaliation come June when you’re best man for *our* wedding?”

“I’m not like that, no matter what Linda might think of me.”

“It’s less what she thinks of you and more what she thinks of me.”

“I’m still shocked Linda wanted to wait until summer for your wedding.”

“She’s much more patient than Ash and Niko are,” Phil told him, doing his last set of adjustments on his own tux. “And we wanted to watch yours, so we could see you get all the kinks out of the process before we did it. You’re like our test bed. A prototype wedding.” Phil laughed, patting Andy on the shoulder. “Of course, nobody in my house has a bun in the oven yet. They all wanted to wait a year or so after we’d gotten together, just to let things shake out, but you just couldn’t be bothered with that kind of thing, could you?”

Andy chuckled, scratching the side of his head. “I was told I had a low sperm count when I was younger, so I wasn’t expecting to really ever be a father,” he admitted. “You know, I think Fiona’s the only one I ever told about that. *Ever*. So when both Ash *and* Niko turned out to be pregnant, I was more than a little surprised, because I hadn’t gone through a regeneration at that

point.”

“Well, that you *know* of,” Phil told him, having moved over to give Andy a final once over. “The serum’s *always* repairing reproductive systems if it can help it. I mean, not *always* always, but like 90-95% of the time, and that’s not even a regeneration thing – that’s just the serum working as designed, like fighting off DuoHalo. You were probably back to a fully regular sperm count after your first time with Aisling, and you just didn’t even know it.”

“Jesus, Phil, you think that maybe that’s something you should, I dunno, *tell* people?”

Phil shrugged a little bit. “It was in the notes I gave to the President, and I even told Katie Couric when she interviewed me for the story, but they didn’t include it for air, so whoever decided to bury that personal factoid, it was somebody above my paygrade. Probably the President herself. A’ight, you’re good to go. I just want to tell you... good luck. And we’re all counting on you.” Phil patted Andy on the cheek, grinned and then turned to walk out the door before Andy could think of a snappy comeback or witty retort. In the end, Airplane! won out as the last word.

Andy stepped over towards the doorway, tapping Lexi on the shoulder. “The President didn’t come, did she? I mean, we sent her an invitation out of obligation, but if it turns out the Secret Service is here—”

“She’s not here, Andy.”

“Thank god.”

“She sent a pretty amazing wedding present, though.”

“Oh yeah? Dare I even ask?”

“She commissioned a one-of-a-kind Banksy portrait of you for you.”

“Now you’re fucking with me,” Andy laughed.

Lexi smirked, shaking her head. “I wish. Secret Service dropped it off personally this morning. Scared the shit out of me.”

“Fucking hell...” Andy said, stepping back into the room where he was basically alone. “Well, I guess at least we know Banksy’s still alive now.”

It was almost time to head over to the venue, so now that he was nearly by himself (except, of course, for Lexi, who wasn’t going to leave his side all day), he took out the box that he’d been gifted just a few hours earlier. He sat down on the bench and pulled off his dress shoes, setting them aside before opening the box, revealing the traditional moccasins contained within. He slipped one on then the other, before putting his dress shoes in the box, closing them inside. He’d promised Niko’s mother that he wouldn’t say anything about it in advance to anyone, and he intended to keep that promise.

Andy glanced at his phone, checking the time, seeing it was five minutes to 1 p.m., the designated start time for the wedding. After a few more minutes, he got the word he was supposed to head to the back of the venue, in preparation of his entrance. And then he heard the opening notes that marked the start of his entrance music, a guitar strum followed by a serious patch of guitar notes. The song was The Afghan Whigs’ “66.”

He walked down the pathway that felt so damn long, he thought it must’ve been a mile or so, although he knew it really wasn’t. It simply felt that way because the gathered crowd for the wedding was enormous. They’d had to take over the Alameda County Fairgrounds just south of Pleasanton to have a place large enough for them to accommodate the number of guests they had showing up. One building had been turned into the groom’s staging area, and a much larger nearby building had been turned into the brides’ staging area.

He did his absolute best not to look at anyone when he walked down the aisle, but when

he was almost there, he saw that one of the people seated on the aisles was George Clooney and his wife Amal, as well as four more gorgeous women who must have been other members of Team Clooney, smiling at Andy like he was just some other guy and this was any other of a dozen weddings he'd attended this year, and that couldn't help but make Andy smile a little more openly, putting him a little at ease.

'Thanks George. And thank God the weather turned out nice,' he thought to himself. 'Otherwise we were well and truly fucked.'

People had flown in from all around the world, most commercial through Oakland or San Jose, but all the private hangars over at Livermore Municipal Airport were also fully booked (as well as the ones over at Oakland airport), mostly with friends of Sarah or Emily, who had taken their own planes in for the event.

As he moved past hundreds of people, he tried to keep his pace quick and his strides wide, simply because the added number of people involved in the wedding meant that everything was going to take longer, and the last thing any of Team Rook wanted was a ceremony that ran several hours.

The soundtrack for each girl's entrance had taken longer for them to figure out than anything else involved in the wedding. They marched in the order they'd joined the family, so it was Aisling (The Pogues' "The Sunny Side of the Street"), Niko (Redbone's "Come And Get Your Love"), Piper (Better Than Ezra's "In The Blood"), Sarah (Mumford & Sons' "I Will Wait"), Emily (Coldplay's "Clocks"), Fiona (Patti Smith's "Because The Night") and Moira (Primal Scream's "Country Girl").

Each of his brides had walked down with one of the other members of Team Rook acting as her escort whenever the Father of the bride hadn't been alive, which was more often than anyone liked to admit. Ash, Piper and Fiona were escorted by their fathers, Niko by Hannah, Sarah by Jade, Emily by Maya and Moira by Asha.

Just getting everyone to the stage alone took close to half an hour, but Andy kept his nervous smile the entire time, and each bride was grinning from ear to ear. They'd all decided to forgo the veils, because when they'd mimed the process of him unveiling seven brides at their first rehearsal, one after another, it had looked so silly that nobody had been able to keep a straight face.

All the brides had chosen to wear white, but the styles of dresses were all over the map, from the more conservative (Fiona, Moira & Piper) to the more modern (Ash, Emily & Sarah) to a combination of both tribal and modern (Niko, whose dress had been made with the help of her mother). And, of course, both Ash and Niko's dresses had been made to accommodate their pregnancies, which were getting impossible to hide.

Niko had immediately started crying with a smile when she saw Andy wearing the traditional Lakota wedding moccasins, Ash having to help her dry her eyes a bit, as did Piper when she arrived, as Niko whispered to the others the significance of his change.

Andy hadn't been thrilled about the idea of there being a Catholic priest performing the ceremony, but had agreed to go along with it, mostly to smooth things over with Fiona's parents. The priest, Father O'Sullivan, was under strict instruction to keep the religious aspects as light as possible. He hadn't entirely adhered to that, but it had been kept in check enough to not set anyone off.

The priest's opening speech took about five minutes, dwelling on how God worked in mysterious ways, and pointing out that there was nothing against polygamy in the Bible, pointing out that many of the prominent figures in the Old Testament had more than one wife. Then he

transitioned to talking about how important the new family unit was to be moving forward, and how vital it was to find moments of joy when surrounded by so much death and loss. He talked about the importance of establishing permanence and how the new family unit may be different at first glance, but the same core tenets still held up even the new families – love, respect, trust and honor.

Father O’Sullivan also took a minute or two to talk about how he’d spent a bit of time with Andy and his brides and had found them almost like a group of people who had been living together for decades, not months. He said that he felt like they were all an incredible series of matches, and that when he left the venue, he was going to hope the next Team he would marry would be even half as attached to one another as Team Rook was.

After rambling on a bit more about God’s love for humanity, the priest finally moved on to the main ceremony at hand, much to everyone’s relief. They’d all chosen to write their own vows, but the rule was that every one of them (except Andy) had one minute for their vows. Andy would have up to seven, so he could have one minute for each of his partners. He said it was only fair that he be able to tell each of them how he loved them individually instead of collectively, but Andy had been smart enough to keep each individual one to 45 seconds, allowing him to have a minute or so at the beginning to address all seven of them as a group, and then another half a minute at the end, closing talking about them as a group again.

“We’re in this together, and I wouldn’t have it any other way,” had been his closing line.

He felt like he’d done a good job with the speech, because basically all his brides were bawling when he was done, but they were holding each other’s hands proudly and smiling from ear to ear.

Then came the presentations of the rings. Phil held the box for Andy, and Lauren held the box for all of Andy’s brides. Andy went down the line, one at a time, taking a ring from the box, placing on his bride’s finger, and saying, “With this ring, I do thee wed.” Then he would take the matching ring from his partner, place it back in the box and continue down the line.

Once he got to the end of the line, seven rings given and seven rings received, Andy took all seven rings out of the box and swapped them for the linked rings beneath the box’s pillow, dropping the seven rings there before covering them up.

It was a little bit of stage magic, but the illusion was important for the crowd, even if all his brides knew about it, to sell the sense of ritual. The seven rings he’d been handed one at a time were mostly for the ceremony and would be fused together correctly afterwards to function as a backup ring for him. The idea of a puzzle ring required all the bands to be interlinked, which was what Andy had wanted in the first place, but that meant he couldn’t be handed the bands one at a time, which the girls had all wanted. Tala had told him she could make duplicates that weren’t linked, so each woman could give him one during the ceremony. His brides all knew about the switch and had signed off on the idea.

He prayed like hell he’d practiced this enough to do it right on the first attempt as he held the interlocked rings in his hands. He slowly started to put them together, stacking and twisting them slightly, the tiniest of adjustments here and there, before all seven rings essentially snapped together to form one solid ring made up from the seven smaller ones. There had been several puzzle ring designs online, but Tala had insisted on making her own for the family, because it needed to be one that could be upgraded to include additional bands, just in case more members of the Team decided they wanted to move up to bride status. Tala’s design would accommodate up to a total of 12 bands, which would mean up to 5 more brides, although Andy thought that unlikely. And, more importantly, each individual band in Andy’s ring was completely unique and

tailored to the partner it represented, not just an identical ring in a slightly different shape. It made Andy's wedding ring something unlike anything anyone had ever seen before.

Andy had asked each of his brides if they wanted matching puzzle rings, but each of them decided they wanted unique rings for themselves, and so each of them had a wildly different design from each other. But as such, each had made sure that Tala had added as much of their own personality to their band of Andy's puzzle ring, so he never forgot which ring belonged to which wife. Of course, she'd also engraved each bride's name on the inside of each ring.

He relaxed and muscle memory took over, and he was able to get the rings to all interlock into one solid ring, which he slid onto his left hand.

"By the power vested in me by both God and the State of California, I now pronounce you man and wives. You may kiss your brides."

Starting with Moira working up, he kissed each of his wives one at a time, some of them wanting to keep it quick to keep him moving along, a few of them wanting to take their sweet time and show off to the audience, Ash as the final one making it abundantly clear to the audience that she was grabbing his ass through the tux.

"Ladies and gentlemen, may I be the first to present to you The Rooks!"

They'd spent the better part of an hour discussing that line and what it should be. The first thought was it should be "Team Rook," but then that discounted everyone who was in the Team who *wasn't* marrying Andy, which he couldn't abide by. The plural of "Mrs." turned out to be "Mesdames" but absolutely *nobody* had known that on their own. Even Andy, with his mammoth knowledge of the English language, had been forced to look that one up, and the word sounded weird rolling off his tongue. The end compromise was just to have everyone announced by the family name, since all of his brides had agreed they were going to take it in lieu of their own.

They marched out to the sounds of INXS' "Never Tear Us Apart" lost somewhere beneath the cheers of thousands of people.

It wasn't a long walk from the wedding area to the reception area – only a quick stroll to the other side of the fairgrounds, and the area where the party was set up had about a hundred tables set up, as nearly a hundred people had said they would attend the wedding but wouldn't be able to stay for the reception, so they had simply headed back to their cars and left. But a reception for close to two thousand people was no small event.

They made a stop along the way, however, where the wedding photographer stopped them to get a seemingly endless permutation of families for group photographs. The photographer wasn't trying to separate Andy from any of his partners, but each of his partners' family wanted to get a picture of them plus The Rooks, as well as one with the majority of Team Rook. (Lexi and Melody made it a point not to be in photos, just because they needed to keep security up.)

It felt like it took an hour, even if it was just half an hour or so to go through all the mixes, but Ash's family, Niko's mother, Piper's family, Sarah's family, Emily's mother, Fiona's family and Moira's sister each got a pair of photographs, one with The Rooks and one with Team Rook that *did* include Lexi and Melody, despite their grousing. He didn't even get a chance to say more than a few words to each grouping, as the photographer was trying to get all the group photos taken and then get The Rooks off to their wedding reception.

Rather than preplanned meals, the reception had a seemingly endless buffet, where a person could go, grab appetizers, have drinks, dance, and party. It was a very strange cross section of people from across the globe, but Andy was glad to see that people had taken getting Teamed Up seriously. And it was a nice chance to get a few minutes to say hello to people he

hadn't seen in quite a while, as well as a chance to be introduced to *everybody*.

He'd already briefly met all the families of the women he'd married, but he also got to meet the families of the women he was simply paired up with as well. A handful of them asked if he intended to marry those partners later, which would usually be deflected by the partner in question. Hannah's mother, for example, seemed extremely intent on making it clear that he should consider marrying her daughter sooner rather than later, something that seemed to embarrass Hannah plenty, although Hannah didn't object to the sentiment in any way, which Andy made a mental note of. Tala's mother was much the same way. Jade seemed especially pleased that her father, whom had yet to die despite her hopes, did not attempt to show up to the event. He hadn't been invited anyway.

Beyond that, he got to talk a bit in depth with members of the families who had flown in for the wedding, including all of Aisling's family, none of whom had been taken by DuoHalo, to Andy's amazement, until Ash pointed out to him that she had been given enough early warning about the severity of the virus to convince her family to take it deadly seriously and she had done so harshly enough that they'd all listened to her.

For most of the rest of the families, though, it felt like he was meeting *survivors*, each family only remnants of what it had been only a year or so earlier. Moira's parents were both dead, her mother long ago and her father right at the beginning of the epidemic. Em had lost both her father *and* her brother in the last year, back-to-back victims of DuoHalo in April. Sarah's brother had *almost* been a casualty to DuoHalo but had gotten partners only a few days before the disease would have killed him, and now he was back to his normal spry self, only the first of his seven partners in tow with him.

Andy heard the phrase "he would've *loved* you" so many times over the course of the next few hours, it nearly made him break down, but he knew that crying in grief at his own wedding would be a bad look, and so he stayed strong, although it grew harder and harder with each reminder of how many people had died over the last year, and how much his partners had lost before meeting up with him.

And when it felt like he was nearing his breaking point, that was when Sarah and Emily decided to cheer him up by giving him a whirlwind tour of celebrity, introducing him to a nearly endless cavalcade of famous people, although he definitely noticed that the group of them skewed more towards women than it did men, which was its own kind of weird reminder of the people they had lost over the last year.

Still, getting to meet George Clooney, Margot Robbie, Brad Pitt, Emma Stone, Scarlett Johansson, Ana De Armas, Jennifer Lopez, Ben Affleck, Kate Beckinsale, Don Cheadle, Sandra Bullock, Cate Blanchett, Anne Hathaway, Kate Winslet, Angelina Jolie, Charlize Theron, Jennifer Lawrence, Bree Larson, Emily Blunt, Ryan Reynolds, Blake Lively, Halle Berry *and* Helen Mirren within the span of half an hour made Andy feel like he was *way* more famous than he deserved to be.

Ewan McGregor and his wife Mary Elizabeth Winstead had also attended, but Andy was a little less shellshocked the second time around with them, especially since he'd had several Zoom calls with them since their first meeting, where they were asking very smart questions about the adaptation of his book that was going to start filming in only a few more months.

And, of course, Clooney had tried to prank Andy by starting their conversation by saying, "So what made you decide to not invite Matt Damon? He's *pissed* you know."

In between all of that, Andy had to do first dances with all his wives, individually before they decided to gang up on him, one final dance with the seven of them encircling him and him

in the center, trying to retain some amount of dignity. (“In Love With A Clown” by Fury In The Slaughterhouse for Piper, “The Sun Smells Too Loud” by Mogwai for Moira, “(Nothing But) Flowers” by Talking Heads for Fiona, “American Girls” by Counting Crows for Sarah, “Ghost” by Halsey for Niko, “You Belong To Me” by Taylor Swift for Emily and “All I Want Is You” by U2 for Aisling, with the group song being “All My Friends” by LCD Soundsystem.) He was certain the photographer got loads of pictures of that final dance, where he was surrounded by brides like piranhas as he tried to dance with seven women, each of whom kept playfully spinning him to focus on them. He hoped at least the photos would be funny because he was dizzy as fuck by the end of it.

After the dancing had died down a little bit, the wedded Rooks gathered everyone up for a toast, letting Phil stand up to make the traditional Best Man’s Speech, and Andy almost dreaded to see what kind of torrid stories he was going to drag up from Andy’s past, but was delighted by what he got.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I know it’s a bit of a tradition for the Best Man to drag the groom through the muck for the crowd’s entertainment, but honest to god, Andy’s one of the most noble sons of a bitch that I know,” Phil said with a smirk. “Maybe *that’s* his flaw – he always sees the best in people, always thinks the best of people, and always tries to *do* the best for as many people as he can. Our own personal Don Quixote. I’ve tried to help him a little bit here and there, especially while we’ve all been trying to survive during this weird pandemic, but all I’ve ever really done is open doors for him, and he’s the one who’s done everything that involved actually walking through said doors. So let me offer a bit of advice to his new brides – be open, be honest, be direct and, most of all, be *patient*. He’s always going to be following his heart before he thinks, and if something’s going wrong, *tell him*. Maybe his other flaw is his inability to see three or four steps ahead when it comes to complex and complicated people, so take care of him, and he’ll do everything he can to take care of you. I know that Niko and Lexi and Melody will do everything to make sure he’s not putting himself in harm’s way to keep one of his partners safe, because I *guarantee* you, that’s going to be his first instinct, and he’s going to have to get used to it like the rest of us, because Linda will tell you, I had to be horsewhipped into making my own self-preservation a number one priority.”

“Sit down and stop making a target of yourself, baby!” Linda shouted at him playfully. That got a good laugh before Phil continued.

“No, but, honestly, I can’t tell who’s luckier, Andy or all of the amazing women he’s had the good sense to marry, but I think Team Rook isn’t just one of the better Teams, I think they may well be the best of us. To Team Rook!”

“TO TEAM ROOK!”

Before he realized what was happening, Andy was ambushed and seven small slices of cake descended upon him like a strike of hornets. All the plans they had set about who was going to smash cake into whose faces seemed to have been abandoned as each of his giggling brides rubbed cake into some part of his bald head. It was one of the few times in his life that he was glad he shaved the thinning hair from his head, because it meant that the only hair he would have to wash cake from was his goatee and eyebrows.

And the entire room was laughing as Andy stood up, dusting cake off his face, shaking his head, smirking wryly. “Ladies and gentlemen,” Andy said, “my beloved brides. But you see here’s the thing—” As he was talking, suddenly each of his brides got a piece of cake smashed into their face (or in a few cases, two or three), as *all his other partners* had been warned that if he was attacked with cake smashes out of the blue, it should be their duty to defend his honor,

and so almost every other member of Team Rook had had their cake slices at the ready, and absolutely *none* of the brides had seen it coming. “—I came prepared!” he laughed. “I will not go caked quietly into the night!” He was pretty sure he saw Nicolette making sure each of his brides had been smashed with cake at *least* twice, because he thought he saw her a couple of times going after a different one of his brides each time.

The joy and laughter of several hundred people washed over him, and there was something kind and healing about that intensity. Each of his wives came by to kiss him, as they smooched their cake-smearing faces together one at a time, Ash grinning at him as she kissed him last. “You didn’t *trust* us, Mister Rook,” she whispered teasingly at him.

“Of course I trusted you, *Mrs. Rook*,” he said to her. “I trusted you to make sure everyone at the wedding was having a good time, and so I played my part accordingly.” He chuckled a little bit, pausing to run his fingertip along the shell of her ear, scooping out a bit of frosting. “Lauren took great delight in smashing the cake into you, didn’t she?”

“Never even saw her and Taylor sneaking up on me,” Ash smirked. “And when I was wiping that cake off my face, Nicolette gave me one final smash. So well played, my beloved husband.”

He felt a spark of delight run up his spine. “I’m never going to get tired of hearing that, am I?”

She leaned in close, whispering right into his ear. “If we weren’t in front of all these people, I’d take that hand of yours and show *you* how wet I got when you just called me Mrs. Rook.” She nipped at his earlobe for just a second, licking a bit of frosting off of it, to finish her tease before pulling away. “It’s good cake at least!” Ash shouted to the laughing crowd.

People were starting to take pieces of cake away from the seven-tiered wedding cake that had been prepared for the event, something Andy had thought was ridiculously too big, but turned out to be just about the right amount of wedding cake for their insanely large guest list.

When it came time for the brides to throw their bouquets, a few hundred women still gathered out in the center, most of whom were partnered but not married, as if to offer a subtle reminder to their own Team that marriage was on their minds, and when the seven bouquets went flying, the struggle to get ahold of them was serious.

As soon as that was done, however, Fiona pulled a chair over and made Andy sit down on it, as his brides each lifted one leg and placed it on his thighs, exposing a leg each, so that he could roll down the garter each one had prepared for him. He also realized that a couple of his brides had done it specifically so they could rub their foot against his crotch, or to make his hands slowly smooth along their stockinged legs.

It was also a moment when Andy realized why all his brides had been constantly wearing high socks for the last week. Somewhere along the way, they’d all snuck off and gotten a tattoo of a rook chess piece on their ankles, simple, black and elegant.

After they let Andy get off the chair, he tossed the garters in a ball over his back into the crowd of men, and to his amusement, Phil had stood with both arms in the air like a football referee calling a touchdown, and gotten one on each hand, which had Audrey giggling something fierce, although Andy also realized he could hear the sound of Lily laughing so hard she was struggling to breathe, and as a few of the men moved away, Andy could see that Ash’s kelly green garter (they’d each worn one of a different color) was resting atop of Eric’s head like an askew crown.

It was *fucking hilarious*.

A few minutes later, Andy was talking with Eric and Xander when he felt a hand slide

across his shoulder and down onto his chest as Piper moved to stand behind him, her tits resting against the back of his shoulders. “You know, *Mister Rook*, that you are insanely lucky that my parents are here, otherwise I would’ve had you bend me over a table and plow my pussy until my knees gave out, howling like a slut in heat, right here in front of all our guests, and I’m still not sure quite why I’m so horny right now that it’s fucking hard to think,” she whispered into his ear. “And it’s not just me. All the others are feeling the same way. You’d better keep your energy up, because you’re gonna have a long haul tonight, you best believe it.”

“Don’t worry, *Mrs. Rook*,” he told her, “I’ll do everything I can to keep up with all of you for as long as possible tonight.”

She whimpered a little bit into his ear. “You know, I think I damn near came when you called me that. Say it again.”

“Say *what* again?” he teased.

“Aaaaaannnddddyyy...” she whined.

“Don’t get your panties in a twist, *Mrs. Rook*; it’s only a few more hours before we’re heading out of here.”

“Oh, I can’t, Andy,” she giggled, turning his head to press her lips against his for a moment. “I’m not wearing any. Didn’t see the point.”

As Piper sashayed away from him, Andy could only grin. He hoped that she was kidding, but there was something about the way she’d said it that made him convinced she probably wasn’t. He noticed that Phil was coming over to him, an almost apologetic smile on his face. “The longer this goes on, the more I’m convinced I probably should’ve warned you not to do seven marriages all at once, but I don’t think you’d have listened to me if I had.”

“I don’t want any of them feeling more or less important than the other, Phil,” Andy told him. “You know that. I told you that earlier. Several times.”

“I do, but I also know of a handful of things that generally happen on wedding days for people like us,” Phil said with a smirk.

“What do you mean ‘people like us’?”

“People with large teams. There’s certain things that just... sort of... happen.”

“Like what?”

“Like *that*,” he said, gesturing over to the fact that Andy’s seven brides were basically in one long grind line on the dance floor, each with their ass in another bride’s crotch. “They’re all pretty worked up, aren’t they? Frisky, one might say?”

“Why do I have the feeling that you *know* they are already, Phil?”

“Because I *do* know they are already,” Phil laughed. “Look. Andy. I’m not going to spoil your wedding night for you but there are a handful of... ahem... oddities... that spring up as a result of the Quaranteam serum when people are at their emotional apexes. Wedding days, just after the birth of their first child, that sort of thing. Nothing permanent, nothing you really need to be worried about. Just a handful of surprises that may take you off guard.”

Andy scowled, wondering what sort of madness his friend had chosen to overlook in the pursuit of entertainment. “You could’ve warned me about all of this ahead of time, Phil.”

“Oh, sure, I *could*’ve,” Phil said, shaking his shoulders as he attempted to dance a little bit, “but where’s the fun in that?”

Andy rolled his eyes a little. “Nothing permanent, you say? That’s all I’m really concerned about. I don’t need to make another mistake like we did with Melody.”

“You did us a big favor with that, by the way,” Phil said, his tone moving out of joking mode for a moment. “Although we’ve got reports that the Russians actually know about that

encoding effect, and that they have incorporated it into their current version of the serum, so they can make people more loyal.”

“Jesus, tell me you’re fucking kidding, Phil.”

“Wish I was. It’ll be in the report I’ll provide to Oversight after you get back from your honeymoon.”

“This thing with me and the wives... it isn’t *that* bad is it?” Andy asked him. “It’s nothing permanent or seriously debilitating?”

“You’ll be fine in a few days’ time,” Phil said. “All of you. It’s mostly just... quirky. And it’s good to make sure there aren’t any hidden secrets left between you and your brides.”

“Secrets?” Andy asked him.

“It’ll all make sense in time, Andy.” Phil chuckles softly. “Have you figured out the whole pecking order your wives have yet?”

“I told you, Phil, I’m going to do everything I can to treat them equally.”

“How *you* treat them, sure, but how they treat each *other*...” Phil lifted his glass of bourbon to his lips, drinking deep from it. “We don’t really talk about this in any of our paperwork, but Teams are sort of like beehives in a way, if you think about it.”

“And I’m the Queen?”

Phil scoffed with a smile. “You *wish*. You’re the actual hive, bitch. But depending on how big a Team is, a few women within it will sort of self-identify as Queens, and they work together, rather than against each other. It’s about one in every five to seven partners, so you should probably have three or four.”

Andy nodded a bit. “Well, I can see two, maybe three of them.”

“Ash and Fi?” Phil asked.

“Yeah. Maybe Niko. Maybe Piper.”

“Oh yeah?” Phil said. “Piper’s growing a bit more controlling, a bit more aggressive?”

“Yeah, something like that. Much more of an active hand with the group than when she first arrived to the family, although I expect she spent a while dealing with the shock of it all.”

“Four Queens then,” Phil said with a nod. “Makes sense. You’re one of the bigger Teams we have on file, you know.”

“Not the biggest, I hope.”

Phil waved his hand with a laugh. “Nah, the biggest team clocks in just under thirty.”

Andy let out a slight whistle. “I think I’d go fucking crazy at that point. That’s too many women. *Way* too many women.”

“I think Team Gosher would agree with you,” Phil said, “but Isaac just couldn’t bring himself to say no to any woman who wanted to join his Team, so he let them all in. Plus he makes a nice clear upper limit cap to what we’ve learned a man can handle, because if we added anyone else in there, I think he’d probably break. He’s starting to consider asking us to reassign a few of them, but it’s super hard once they’re imprinted on you, y’know?”

“Why’s that?” Andy asked. “They could be reimprinted without too much of a challenge, right? You’ve got the Sergei Swerve, so what’s the problem?”

“That’s the thing, Andy. Think of it like gravity. The gravity pull of a Team is intense, so for a woman to have the want to *leave* that Team, the problems have got to be *massive*, to generate even more gravity, pulling them away from that Team. It’s like I told you before – small problems don’t mean anything and they’ll get glossed over. And Isaac Gosher’s a great guy and all the women chose him, so I don’t think any of them really *want* to leave his Team, so he’ll just have to manage with being exhausted all the time. Last time he came in for his checkup, he said

he was feeling less like a man and more like a milking machine. You're the same way, friend. Not the milking bit. Just the slightly overextended bit. All your partners are with you voluntarily. You had access to the reassignment serum before almost anyone else and you offered everyone in your Team the chance to get out if they wanted to. Multiple times. I know. Niko told Linda that she had to tell you to stop asking them if they wanted out of the Team, because after three times, it was starting to feel like maybe *you* wanted them out, not that you did. I know, I get it, you're looking out for their best interests."

"I don't want to be any woman's Covington, Phil. Or their McCallister."

"And that's why you're a good man at heart, Andy. And why all your partners love you so truly, madly, deeply."

"And yet, you still think they're keeping secrets from me. Or that I'm keeping secrets from them. I'm not sure which."

"Both," Phil said, patting Andy on the back. "But you'll get through it and get past it. And it's good to have total transparency with your family. Don't worry about it. It's probably secrets you didn't even know you were keeping."

"Jesus, like what?"

"Relax, Andy. Seriously. You're getting panicked over nothing."

"I've got seven brides who look like they're all looking to pin me to the bed and drain my balls dry, and you're telling me I'm getting panicked over nothing."

"After your fourth or fifth orgasm, they'll probably let you sleep. Maybe you'll even get off with just three."

Andy groaned. "You're killing me here, Phil."

"Don't worry," his friend assured him. "They know better than to harm you. I'm just saying it'll get a little wild, and that's okay. Just be cool and you'll be fine." Andy wanted to keep prying, but he knew that the look on Phil's face meant he wasn't going to give up anything else.

Xander glanced over and wandered close as Phil and Andy's conversation had wrapped up, giving Andy a big hug. "I always knew you and Fiona were going to get married, my guy."

"Yeah, well, that big gap in the middle sort of disagrees with you," Andy said to him.

"The world works in mysterious ways, buddy." Xander reached up and ran his fingertips behind Andy's ear, gathering up some remaining cake crumbs. "You've still got cake all over you, my dude," he laughed.

"I swear, I think there's still cake in my eardrums," Andy said with a grin.

"You're still glad you did it though, aren't you?" the gentle giant asked him.

"Of course I am. But someone should make sure *they* are," Andy said gesturing to his seven wives, most of whom seemed to be paired up and chatting with a cultural exchange between families.

"You're kidding, right?"

Andy smiled softly. "Probably."

"Those women love you, Andy. I mean *love* love you. I made them promise not to break your heart, so I should probably make you do the same."

Andy grinned, shrugging a little. "I'd die before I'd do that."

"Well, ya can't do that either," Xander laughed. "You need to take care of these women as much as they need to take care of you."

"That's the plan."

Xander looked around the reception, as did Andy, and they both noted that the crowd had

wilted slowly over the last few hours. “Maybe we should try and sneak you guys out of here, now that things are starting to die down a bit?”

“Let’s ask El Capitan,” Andy said with a chuckle, as he tried to make the most subtle gesture towards Lauren as he could without people noticing. “Boss lady, think it’s time we should make our escape? I’ve noticed there’s been a good amount of people making their goodbyes, and it’s bad form for the wedding party to hang around and have to clean up…”

Lauren looked at him as though he’d just handed her a gift. “YES,” she said, perhaps a little *too* emphatically for him. “Take your randy wives and get them the fuck out of here before they finally just tear you apart in front of all your guests.”

Andy’s eyebrow shot up. “They can’t be tha—”

“Andy,” Lauren said to him, taking both of his hands in hers. “ANDY. When I was congratulating all of them, Moira grabbed my ass and almost started dry humping me. And Niko was talking to me about they intended to make sure you couldn’t fucking walk tomorrow.”

“Well, I mean, we’re newlyweds an—”

“In front. Of her *mother*.”

“Oh. *Oh*,” Andy said. “That bad?”

“I think you’re about thirty minutes away from being the center of a reverse gangbang in the most expensive location shoot ever,” she giggled, but there was an edge to her tone that made it clear she wasn’t joking, and that she truly wanted them to evacuate as soon as possible. “Please. PLEASE. Take them and get the *fuck* out of here before they lose what little patience they have left.”

He nodded. If Lauren was worried, they were probably just a few minutes shy of a disaster. “Tell Melody to bring the limo over, and let’s start gathering them up.”

“They’re mostly together over talking with Clooney and his wife, who seem to be humoring them, as far as I can tell,” Xander said. “Although it looks like Piper and Emily are over talking with Em’s mother.”

“Alright,” Andy said. “I’ll grab those two, then circle over for the rest, then make a straight beeline for the limo, if Melody can be in place that quick.”

“I told her to doubletime it, so she gets it,” Lauren said.

Andy smiled, leaning in to give Lauren a huge kiss and hug. “Thanks again for organizing this. You’ve literally kept us all sane today. We can’t say thank you enough.”

Lauren’s eyes watered up, but she hugged Andy as tight as she could before pushing him away, shoving him over towards Em and Piper. “Love you too, ya idjit, now git!”

Lexi moved in to lean against his side protectively as they started to head across the field. “How much trouble am I in for, Lex?”

“You’ll get through it fine, chief.”

“Oh thank *fuck* he’s here,” Emily said almost at the top of her lungs as she immediately moved over to press her small body against Andy’s before Piper moved to lean against his other side, making him look like the middle option of a sizing chart. Andy was more than a little surprised Em was swearing in front of her mother, but the look on her mother’s face was almost aghast already, so Andy supposed this was just another nail in that coffin. “I was just telling mother here how worked up I am and how I was thinking about pulling you into a bathroom for a quick rutting.” She laughed nervously then leaned her head in close, whispering into Andy’s ear. “I can’t stop *talking*, Andrew,” she whimpered. “We need to get *out* of here.”

“Alexis was just telling me that we needed to get going so that we wouldn’t get swamped in the traffic too much,” Andy said, feeling Piper’s fingertips interlace with his as she squeezed

his hand firmly, almost thankfully. “I think everyone’s starting to get a little tired anyway, so we’re all going to head out, but it was lovely to meet you, Mrs. Stevens, and your new partner. I hope you won’t be a stranger and will come out to see us whenever you can.”

Em’s mom, a sort of mousy British housewife, gave him a sympathetic smile before moving to give him a hug. It had been no surprise to Andy that Emily’s mother was a schoolteacher of kids in Year Two, although he could see how much of a toll it had taken on the woman, who had lost both her husband and son, plus most of the children she’d taught over the last decade, all within the span of a year, and she was doing everything she could to see her daughter’s happiness as a beacon of light to show her the way out of that valley of sadness. “You have been simply lovely, Andrew, and thank you for taking such good care of my daughter. I will certainly be over to meet my grandchild, whenever that ends up happening, although from the way my daughter has been speaking tonight, I might think that might end up being rather soon,” Em’s mom said to her, an almost playful smile on her lips, which made Emily’s face turn as red as Sarah’s hair. “Love you darling.”

“Goodbye mother!” Em said, giving her mom one final huge hug, both women in tears before Em moved back to press against Andy once more like she was trying to hide beneath the protection of his arm. “I’m so mortified... I feel like I’m unable to stop talking...”

Piper nodded, her face mirroring Em’s a little. “Me too!”

“Almost home free,” Andy said, as they moved over to the rest of his brides, who were holding court with a number of the more well-known actors, who it seemed like George Clooney was entertaining with a tale.

“And I’d really just taken my shirt off because it was blazing hot at this party, and Sandra’s asking me if I’m actually just going to go for a swim at this dinner party that we’re at, so I told her yes, I’m going to just jump in.”

“Oh god, you’re actually telling this!” Sandra laughed.

“And she says to me, ‘I’ll jump in if you and my friend jump in too, because it’s too damn hot in this dress!’”

“I was *burning up!*”

“So the three of us hold hands and count 1, 2, 3!”

“And then I’m the only one who jumps!”

The whole crowd starts to laugh, as George Clooney holds his hands up in surrender. “It might be the only time I ever felt a little bit bad about a prank because I looked down at the pool, and poor Sandy’s dress is starting to literally disintegrate in the water. What were you, dressed in spun sugar that night?” he teased.

“Yes, George, I was wearing an entire dress made of cotton candy,” Sandra said, rolling her eyes. “No, you idiot.”

“Not to spoil the moment,” Andy said, finally sort of making his presence known, “but I’m afraid we really have to be heading out.” When Andy’s eyes met Sarah’s, he saw her mouth the words *‘thank you’* to him quite openly although no one else was looking at her to see. “But it has been a wonderful pleasure meeting all of you.”

As Andy moved to gather them all up, George Clooney shook his hand one final time and said quietly, “Make sure Sarah tells you about my offer. Good to meet you, Andy.”

When they started to walk away from the crowd and headed towards the limo which was waiting not too far away, Andy said to Sarah. “His offer?”

“He wants to play Dale Sexton’s dad in all the flashback stuff for the movie.”

“That’s not up to *me*,” Andy said, “but I can’t imagine the producers possibly saying no if

he's asking for a reasonable fee. I'll pass it up to them when I get a chance. Are *you* okay?"

"Yes, but no, but yes, if that makes any fucking sense, which I know it fucking doesn't," Sarah sighed, shaking her head, laughing a bit nervously. "I feel like any time anyone's asked me a question for like, the last fucking hour, I've basically just told them the fucking unvarnished truth! I'm an actress, Andy! I can't live with that level of total brutal fucking honesty!"

"Just relax, Sares," Andy laughed. "Phil was telling me earlier that the serum has a few weird side effects that spring up during moments of high emotional velocity, and they're all temporary. It's starting to seem like temporarily losing the ability to lie might be one of those things."

They were getting into the car one at a time when Sarah looked at him with pained frustration. "What if one of you asks me a question you don't really want the answer to and I fucking say it anyway? I'm scared about fucking everything up!"

"Sarah," Andy said to her, grabbing her by the shoulders. "There is absolutely nothing you can say that will make me stop loving you. Okay? What's the one thing you're most scared to tell me?"

"I thought 'The Trouble With Werebears' had such a lame ending, I wouldn't have read the third one if I hadn't already bought it," she said before slapping her hand over her mouth, looking like she was about to cry as Andy couldn't help but start to laugh.

"It was a bad book!" Andy said, laughing so hard it almost hurt. "Jesus, does everyone think I'm that fucking thin-skinned about it? I had to write it on an unreasonable deadline and everyone kept fucking hounding me and I half-assed the ending because I couldn't think of a better way to get out of it, okay? I, Andy Rook, wrote a bad thing! I'm over it, Sarah! I don't care! I still love you!"

She was crying a little, but the smile that spread over her lips as she kissed him turned into a feverish giggle as she got caught up in the high emotions that were running through them now before she pushed him into the back of the limo. "God, that makes me feel better," she said, sliding in after him, pulling the door shut, all the wives loaded in the back, Melody and Lexi up front. Linda had agreed to keep a couple of her girls stationed at Rook Manor for security while all of Andy's security detail stayed with him. "Now I want to ask all sorts of embarrassing questions of all of us," she said, rubbing her hands together. "Can you lie Andy?"

Andy scratched his chin and tried to tell a little lie he'd made early on last year, and instead he said, "The first time Aisling made me scrambled eggs in the morning, she burned them so bad I thought they were hashbrowns, but I had to lie and pretend they were great because I didn't want to hurt her feelings."

That made Ash start to giggle as she pointed a finger in Andy's direction. "*I knew it!* I *knew* I'd arsed those up so bad they were inedible!" She suddenly looked around the car and pointed at Piper. "Piper! How good is your superpower, really?"

It was Piper's turn to blush, but she finally looked at Ash and said, "Strong enough that I can tell you the most recent woman Andy fucked just from his scent alone, and that's after he's had three showers and put on a shitload of cologne."

Fiona scoffed with a smile. "We *all* know it was Nicolette yesterday morning. It's in the app."

That made Andy raise his hand to cover his mouth. "Oh shit, I forgot to log it."

"Andy!" Fi said in mock annoyance. "We all agreed you weren't going to fuck anyone between lunch yesterday and the wedding today."

"I didn't!" Andy laughed. "It was right before lunch and I got ambushed! I forgot to put it

in!”

“Who was it, Pipes?” Niko asked.

“Who do you think?” Piper giggled. “Hannah’s scent is still all over him.”

Sarah rolled her eyes but smiled. “The only thing bigger than that girl’s tits is her appetite for causing trouble.”

Niko glanced over, narrowed her eyes at Andy. “Who’s the best fuck in the Team, Andy?”

“There isn’t one,” he said before he could cover his own mouth, but when he heard the words escaping his mouth, he let himself keep talking. “Or you all are. On different days, I want different things when I’m in different moods. Sometimes I just want things soft and quiet. Sometimes I want them loud and dirty. So I’m lucky that all of my partners and wives all like different things, so I can honestly say nobody’s the best.”

The limo had left the Pleasanton area and was heading west, bound for a house they’d rented in Bodega Bay, up north of San Francisco, where they were going to stay for two days before flying out to Hawaii for six days for their proper honeymoon. It was about an hour and a half drive, so they had a bit of time in the car.

Piper smirked a little bit, glancing over at Andy. “Can’t lie, huh? None of us?”

“Probably not until tomorrow, I’m guessing,” he said.

“What were you *really* thinking when I came at you that night in Covington’s?”

Andy laughed, looking down, but he knew he wasn’t going to get out of answering the question. “I was hoping I was doing the right thing and that you’d be okay with it, but I was also terrified I wasn’t going to be able to get hard because you *reeked of shit*, and that was very distracting. And then when you didn’t go into imprinting mode after my first orgasm, I panicked and thought I’d done something wrong, and was *definitely* worried I couldn’t get hard *again*.”

That made Piper double over with laughter, as Niko tried to help the situation but somehow only ended up making it worse. “I mean, both he and I could see you were beautiful, Piper, but you smelled *so* bad I was afraid I was going to throw up, and I was worried you were going to get violent, because that would mean I would have to *touch* you.”

“Stop!” Piper shrieked in between giggles. “*Fuck* I wish I could remember that moment, just to see the look of shock on your fucking face, Andy.”

Fiona shifted and leaned her body against Andy’s a bit more. “I wish *I* could’ve seen the look on his face when he realized it was me and Mo who’d gotten in on that game that morning,” she cackled. “I bet he had eyes like dinner plates.”

“I slipped up a’ th’ end and talked a bit,” Moira admitted with a smirk, “so I reckon he figured it out then.”

“I did,” Andy admitted, “but I was no less shocked by it.”

“Are you going to want to marry anyone else in the Team, Andrew?” Emily asked him.

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “It’s more of if anyone else in the Team wants to marry *me*. I don’t want to spread myself too thin, but I also don’t want to disrespect the feelings of any woman who wants to have that kind of connection.”

“Hannah’s going to want to,” Ash said. “And you probably should marry her but maybe make her wait until she’s graduated from college.”

“I bet Jade’s going to want to as well,” Fiona said. “I know you can be blind to it sometimes, Andy, but you should see the way she looks at you when your attention is elsewhere. That girl’s in love with you, whether she’s admitted to herself or not yet.”

“Well, the ring design that Tala made for me can accommodate five more rings in it, so I’m thinking that serves as a nice cap for the number of eventual brides I’ll ever take,” Andy

said. "So that seems like it'll make sense. And I don't have to rush."

Ash leaned in to whisper into his ear, "You may also need to keep Melody in mind, too. It seems like she's fallen pretty hard for you."

Andy turned to glance at her in genuine surprise. "Really? I hadn't noticed."

"You never do, love," Ash teased. "You never do."

When they were driving through Novato, Sarah pointed out the window. "Isn't that over there where Sexton Manor is supposed to be?"

Andy nodded. "Yeah, I sort of picked a random location out, but that's about where I think it should be, over in those hills."

"I'll have to remember that when the director's showing us possible locations for the shoot, since I'm an executive producer on the film now too."

"Are you certain we can't have sex in the car, Andy?" Niko asked. "I know we all agreed on it, but it's *really* hard to fucking focus right now, and all I can think about is ripping your clothes off. I know the others feel the same way."

"We're only about half an hour out," Andy told them all, despite seeing them licking their lips and moving in a little bit closer. "Any other secrets I should know?"

"Yes," Em said suddenly, before all the other girls turned to smile at her.

"Go on, Em," Ash said kindly. "He's not going to be mad. I promise you."

Emily nodded a touch shyly before turning to look at Andy. "I've stopped taking my birth control, Andrew, because I want to have a baby. I want to have *your* baby. I've... I've been acting out the last few months because... well, because I've been jealous of Ash and Niko. Because I've always wanted to be a mother."

"Why didn't you say something, Em?"

"Because Andrew!" she said with a slightly frustrated laugh. "Because good little British girls aren't supposed to be the ones shouting 'Breed me, Daddy!' at the tops of their lungs! And I worried that Sarah would think I just wanted to do it so that I could do it before her, when I just... I truly want you and I to have a child together, Andrew, because I want to be a mother, but I also wanted to show you just how much I genuinely love you, and I cannot think of any way better to do that." She bit her bottom lip. "And if it's a boy, I want to name him after my late brother, if that's alright."

"Of course it's fine, Emily," Andy said to her, holding her as she started to cry again. "Whatever you want from me, you only ever have to ask. If you want us to start trying, then we can start trying."

"We'd all decided you were going to have Em first tonight, Andy," Ash said to him, "when she finally confessed that to us this morning. She was afraid we were all going to be mad, but we're all just happy for her."

The car finally moved up to drive to the oceanside manor they were going to be staying in for a few days, and as soon as the vehicle had stopped, the doors to the limo flung up and all Andy's brides started rushing into the house, leaving Andy behind alone in the car.

He got out of the car to see Melody making her way into the house as Lexi stood next to the car, waiting for him to go in with a big grin on her face.

"I'm not ready for this, am I?" he asked her.

"Probably not," Lexi admitted, patting him on the ass like a coach giving him an attaboy. "But you're gonna have a hell of a time with it anyway."

Andy moved to walk up towards the house, as Lexi started to bring the luggage up and into the house. He found the living room completely empty so he kept moving through the house

before he reached the bedroom and came across the loveliest sight in his life.

All of his brides had stripped down out of their wedding dresses but left only their white stockings and garter belts on, and hands interlocked, all staring at him with adoring eyes, each of them licking their lips, as if holding each other's hands was all that was keeping them from swarming over him in unison.

"Time for you to get to work, Mr. Rook," Emily said to him from her place in the center of the group, looking up at him expectantly.

"As long as *you're* ready, *Mrs. Rook.*"

The strangest thing happened when he said that out loud. He watched Emily's body start to shiver, and then that shiver started to expand outward, each of the girls in turns, as the sensation seemed to infect all the others.

"You'd better get fucking, Andy," Sarah said, as they pulled Emily back to lay her down on the center of the bed, each of them having a hand on Emily's naked body as they pulled her legs slowly apart, as Ash blew him a kiss.

Andy stripped out of his tux quickly, as they drew him onto the bed, practically yanking him onto the bed when he got close enough to touch, Piper on one end and Sarah on the other, the two biggest of his brides making sure he was nearly on top of Emily before either of them knew it.

He leaned down and gave Emily a soft tender kiss as the other girls all went "Awww" in unison before he pulled his lips back, looking down at her kind face. "Last chance to back out, Em," he told her with a sly grin.

"I believe I told you earlier that I would shout 'Breed me, Daddy!' if I thought that would be required to get you to cover the inside of my cunt with enough cum to get me pregnant with our child," she said at him with a sly grin, giggling when her words make his cock twitch and throb just a little bit more. "Now are you going to fuck me, Andrew, or am I going to have to pin *you* on your back and make you lie back and think of England while I'm fucking your ridiculous brain into pea soup?"

There was something so smug and joyous about his bride's grin that there was no chance he was going to be able to deny her what she wanted, so he lined the tip of his cock up and pushed it deep inside of her on that first thrust, something that made them both moan, and then the moans were almost echoed in a chorus around them.

"W-w-what's happening?" Niko asked a little breathily, her eyes a little glassy.

"I dunno," Ash purred, "but I *like* it. Get fucking, baby."

It was almost a Greek chorus or a parade of dirty whispers as Andy began to thrust his hips down and into Em's eager cunt in a slow rhythm that he began to slowly quicken almost immediately. He'd been given the luxury of nearly thirty-six hours without an orgasm, and it felt like his body was ready to unleash a volcano into his blushing bride's belly, but he refused to be hurried through his paces. His other brides weren't making it easy for him, though, as Sarah was whispering directly into one of his ears, Ash into the other, as Niko was fondling Emily's nipples as Fiona and Moira were taking turns churning his balls in their sack with their fingers.

The assault on nearly every one of his senses was overwhelming and despite his best efforts, he knew the impending tidal wave of an orgasm was inescapable, and no matter what he was trying to do to slow it, his brides were working twice as hard to make sure it hastened.

It was Em herself who finally pushed him over the top, though, as she leaned up and kissed him, her eyes holding his in a longing gaze, while she whispered to him. "Please, Andrew, breed me... cum so hard in my pussy that I cannot *help* but get pregnant... I love you so fucking

much... just cum inside me... I'm begging you... I fucking love you... I need that cum... it's going to make me cum so hard... I cannot wait, Andy... cum for me!"

His loss of control was, at that point, inevitable.

When he felt the orgasm hit him, it was nearly like a bolt of lightning, like all the releases he *should* have had during those thirty-six hours had been saved up and concentrated into one, and he was almost certain that the load of cum he unleashed into Emily's pussy was enough to overflow from her small body pinned beneath his.

But it was the reaction he got *back* that caught him by surprise.

Not only did Emily's body tense up in a deadlock as the orgasm hit her, *so did the bodies of all his other brides*.

It was as though his singular orgasm had set off a chain of ecstasy, and Emily's orgasm had linked to all his other brides, and they had shared that pinnacle of lust, as each of the seven of them fell onto their backs around Andy like some perverse flower of flesh, Andy atop of Emily's gasping body in the very center of it.

"Okay," he heard Sarah's voice say, "who just came about as hard as they did during their imprinting orgasm?"

Seven hands shot up around him, followed by an almost dazed collection of frantic giggles.

"Oh good," Ash said. "I'm glad that wasn't just me."

"Me too," Niko said.

"Let's do it again!" Fiona laughed.

"There's no way I have seven of those in me," Andy pleaded before he felt his face being turned, Ash's lips moving in to kiss his.

"Don't worry," she giggled. "After three or four of those, you'll have doled out somewhere between twenty to thirty orgasms, and I think that'll be enough for our wedding night."

A few minutes later, he felt like he'd recovered enough to get to the next in line, who was Piper. She'd pulled him up into a sitting position next to her so they could talk for a few minutes first, as she crossed her legs beneath her. "Can I tell you one last hidden secret Andy?"

"You can always tell me anything, Piper," Andy whispered to her, his hand stroking through her dark hair as they stared into each other's eyes, all the other brides still having gathered around them.

"I know you've been being kind and gentle and soft with me because of how you found me, but I'm healed now. I've recovered, and now that we're married, you need to know... you *should* be a lot *rougher* with me," she said with a wry smile. "I like seeing the strong side of you, so when you feel the urge to slap my ass, to pull my hair, even give me a little choke here and there... I'm not going to be mad in the slightest."

"Oh no?" Andy asked with a grin.

"No, husband of mine, I'll probably just tell you to come at me even harder," she said with a mischievous smirk. "We both know I could easily beat the shit out of you in a fight, so when I tell you to be *rough*, believe me, I don't think you'll ever go too far for me to be unhappy."

"Well then... Never let it be said I don't listen to feedback," he said. His hand lifted up and pushed her down onto her back with such speed, she clearly hadn't seen it coming, because she felt back into the waiting arms of Fiona and Moira,

"Oh my," Fi said with a Cheshire grin. "You've woken up The Beast. God help you,

love.”

Andy moved from his seated position up onto his knees before he grabbed Piper’s hips and flipped her over onto her belly, as Fiona and Moira started to caress the athlete’s shoulders a bit. When Piper moved up onto her hands and knees, Andy leaned forward, placed the base of his palm between her shoulder blades and shoved down hard. Piper could’ve easily stayed up if she wanted, but again, the quickness of Andy’s movements had caught her off guard, and her arms slid outward as her face flopped down onto the bed once more.

“I’d say it’s Piper’s turn to be the bitch in heat,” Sarah laughed, “except that I think just about all of us are sitting in estrogen puddles right now.”

Andy knee walked over to get in behind Piper before his hands reached down and pulled her knees wider apart, lowering her waistline down so that his cock was angled properly as he basically mounted her like they were in some jungle mating ritual, and slammed his dick right into his bride’s cunt, where upon she let out a feral roar, and all the other brides trembled a little bit.

Since Piper had told him to go at her hard, he did just that, both hands on her hips as he held her in place and tried to piston punch his cock in and out of her pussy like he was drilling through deep rock on the hunt for oil. Whereas Emily’s cunt was always tight, like a perfectly fitting velvet glove, Piper had enough vaginal control to make her walls contract and release around his shaft, timing her clenches with each time he tried to draw back, like her body was refusing to let his go.

His thrusts started fast and only got faster, started hard and only got harder, Fi and Mo each keeping a hand on one of Piper’s shoulders, not letting her even make the effort to lift her chest off the mattress. She was far more athletic than he was, so he could tell she was trying to push back into him without giving up the sensation of being completely under his control.

Andy knew he wasn’t going to last long at that sort of intensity, and so he decided to go for broke, as he reached forward and grabbed a fistful of Piper’s dark hair that she’d probably spent hours on earlier that day and yanked it back as his cock burrowed inside of her, his second orgasm of the night not as productive as the first in terms of volume, but the sheer firepower of it almost scared him, feeling like his whole body was on fire for just a moment.

The reactions from his brides were even stronger.

It was almost as though he had hit some kind of multiplier, and the orgasm he’d given to Piper wasn’t just replicated in each of his other partners – it was amplified. Piper’s orgasm was nearly ear splitting, and her body had clamped on his cock hard enough to make his toes curl, but those reactions weren’t half as loud as the choir of orgasms from the six other women surrounding the two of them, intense enough for Melody and Lexi to come rushing into the room to make sure that everyone was okay. They’d changed from their dresses into pants and t-shirts, but still had their weapons in shoulder holsters, as they pretty much always did these days.

“Jesus, boss, what the *fuck* was that?” Melody asked him.

“I’m... I’m not entirely sure, but it’s almost like... you know how if you see someone yawn, you’re likely to yawn yourself?” Andy sputtered, still more than winded. “It seems like they’re all having sympathetic orgasms, and they’re getting stronger.”

“How *much* stronger?” Lexi said, cautiously.

“Stronger than the imprinting orgasm, I think,” Fiona grumbled. “I think I can take one more, then I say we don’t fuck around with it anymore until things have gone back to normal. Ladies?”

The rest of them agreed, and it was decided Fiona could have the last go, as they laid

Andy on his back, the rest of his brides slowly crawling in to crowd around him, pressing against his sides any way they could fit, Em and Piper both pressed closest, as both of them were almost having trouble moving, they were still trembling so hard, although the smiles on their faces made it clear they weren't bothered by that fact, but in fact, savoring it.

"I think if I'm on top, Andy, maybe I can keep us all from short circuiting," she said, straddling his waist, grinning as she stroked his prick, licking her lips. "Because God knows we've got to tame this beast before any of us is getting any sleep tonight."

Andy laughed, shaking his head. "I can sleep with a hardon, m'love."

"Well, we can't," Niko giggled.

"Besides," Ash said, playing with a strand of her hair, "I wanna see how big this next one gets... Go get'em Fi."

Fiona moved to get settled, not yet sliding his dick inside of her, simply rubbing against it as she smiled down at him. "I figure if I'm on top, I can control the tempo a bit more, try and keep it from getting too far out of hand."

"I think it's a bit late for that," Andy teased.

"Oh Andy?" Fi said as she lifted her hips up. "I got off my birth control about a month ago too." She grinned down at him as her hips pushed her snatch down onto his cock, feeling her folds envelop him, her body having a big shiver as she did, which rippled out from her across all the other women gathered around. Andy wasn't sure, but he even thought he saw Lexi and Melody twitch a little bit. "We're gonna make sure this family grows in leaps and fucking bounds."

With Fi on top, she had total control of the tempo, or at least she should have, but it looked to Andy like she was quickly caught up in the moment, her eyes dropping closed like she was trying to focus hard on not fucking him too fast, but whatever resistance she was putting up, it seemed to snap quickly enough, because before he knew it, Fi was posting up and down on his cock like she was a jockey riding him in the Kentucky Derby, bouncing her ass into his lap again and again, a desperate garden of brides' arms and hands trying to paw at her, trying futilely to get her to slow down.

It was an inevitable moment, really.

When the orgasm hit both Fiona and Andy at the same moment, they were ground zero of a blast of ecstasy that travelled out in shockwaves that made each other bride cling to the two bodies in the center, one giant singular supernova of sexual energy that encompassed all their senses in an inescapable whiteout.

Andy wasn't sure how long it was before he came back into focus, but when he did, he noticed that all his brides were unconscious, their bodies slumped against his, each of them with a goofy, overly satiated grin on their faces, some of them even drooling onto his chest, arms and legs. Fi herself was practically splattered atop him, every inch of her feeling limp as Andy moved her just enough off to one side so that they weren't compressing each other.

He looked over to see both Lexi and Melody helping each other to their feet, and in the front of each of their pants were large wet spots, like the two had been caught up in the blast radius of the final moment and had triggered their own sympathetic orgasms, just by sheer force of will.

Once the two had stood up, Melody started laughing, a giggling fit that seemed so intense she was crying, before Lexi finally said something. "Yeah, I don't know what happened to us either," she muttered. "But madre de Dios, that was fucking strong..."

Melody grinned, reaching up to wipe sweat from her brow. "How the fuck is Andy going

to report all of *this* back to Phil?”

Lexi started laughing, shaking her head. “It’ll just be an SOS message. ‘Linked orgasms disabled wives. Stop. Trapped beneath mountain of flesh. Stop. Send help.’ You okay in there boss?”

Andy tried to speak but found he couldn’t get a word out, so he lifted his left arm just enough to be able to give them the thumbs up signal.

“Got it,” Lexi said, still giggling. “Night boss!”

They turned out the lights and within less than a minute, Andy passed out along with the rest of his brides.

His thumbs up hand dropped a few seconds after he did.