He should have had them bombed while they slept. Dr. Reed climbed the set of carpeted stairs to the fourth floor of the apartment building, ruminating on his mistakes. Impact would have wiped out the last of that treacherous genealogical branch and done away with it entirely. Instead, they'd lived. And now he was here to meet with an enemy he'd rather see dead. Treachery, Dr. Reed knew, wasn't genetic, but it was nurtured. No matter how deep his forgiveness ran, no matter how many times he told himself that it was an isolated incident, he couldn't internalize the belief that the Tilden family were anything more than sniveling, two-faced, selfish bastards who cared more about their bottom line than the safety of billions of souls. So it was that he climbed the steps one stair at a time, the soles of his black leather shoes scuffing against the threadbare rug as he went. For each step Dr. Reed took, his temper flared. What were Vincent and Isadora thinking? What had gone through their heads to make them believe that selling his proudest accomplishment would be a good idea when doing so would jeopardize all of humanity? Not even Eric would stoop so low, and he was one of them.

Frustration pulsed in his temple, and Dr. Reed pinched at the bridge of his nose right between the eyes to try to chase some of it away. Red tape and paperwork and incompetence prevented him from acting as he wanted, but it didn't mean that he had to stand by idly as a single family threatened everything he'd worked so hard to achieve. No Tilden was going to steal his thunder.
He'd come too far to lose it now. Bryce and Liam were going to be stopped before they had a chance to duck under the radar and disappear. The fourth floor of the apartment was as shoddy as any of the other floors. Down the hall, one of the overhead lights flickered and fought for life. A little further down, another was burned out completely and had yet to be changed. That there were lights at all was surprising, and a little alarming. Artificial lights were forbidden after sunset in an effort to divert bomber planes. The hallway stretched to either side, four doors to the left, and four to the right, divided between the two walls. According to the documents Dr. Reed had secured, he was looking for room 402. It wasn’t hard to find. A plastic placard with the numbers 402 painted in acrylic was screwed to the first door to his left. The right side of the 2 had begun to rub off, the paint not set properly. Dr. Reed waited, listening for the footsteps that followed him at a distance to draw closer, before he made for the door and rapped upon its thick wood. From inside, not all that far from the door, he heard the groan of worn springs as weight shifted. Footsteps followed, and someone approached the door to answer it. Dr. Reed took a step back, straightened his posture, and did his best to swallow his disdain. He might have wanted the last remaining Tildens dead, but it didn’t mean that he would be impolite. The footsteps came to a stop in front of the door, and there was a second of silence where the soul on the other side glanced through the peephole to see who’d come knocking. Then, a chain slid out of place and a lock clicked and disengaged. The door swung open. Vincent himself might as well have been standing there before him. Dr. Reed pinched his lips together, taken aback, as he looked the young man over from head to foot. The dark, messy hair atop his head was as unruly as Vincent’s had been. Murky eyes, caught somewhere between brown and green, gazed at him with the same kind of uncertain curiosity that Vincent wore when confronted with the unexpected. He had the same build, the same resting posture, and the same lips. But his nose, as masculine as it was, was modified from Isadora’s. There was no doubt that the young man who stood before him was a Tilden. The question was, which one was he? “Hello,” Dr. Reed said stiffly. “Uh, hi?” the young man replied. He had to be in his early twenties—his face still had the roundness of youth. He clutched the doorway with one hand, casual, but effectively barring the way in. He wasn’t much of a physical specimen, but then again, neither was Reed. “Can I help you?” The injustice Dr. Reed had felt and the rage he’d harbored had stolen away his script. Dr. Reed blinked hard, well aware that he was fumbling, and well aware that the more bizarre he acted, the more likely he was to make a scene. “Yes,” he said at last. What he’d planned to say was gone—he was going to have to ad-lib it. “All right,” Tilden said, hesitant. “So? What is it?” “I was acquainted with your parents,” Dr. Reed said at last. Tilden’s lips tightened and his eyes grew distant and downturned. The pain was still fresh. Dr. Reed intended to capitalize upon it. “I wanted to come to offer my condolences personally, since I was unable to attend the funeral.” “Yeah. Thanks.” The easiness had slipped from Tilden’s voice, and he didn’t lift his gaze to catch Dr. Reed’s eye. “I guess these days, no one is safe, are they?” “Quite correct.” The apartment beyond the door frame was sparse. Dr. Reed glimpsed an old futon in what looked to be a living room filled with mismatched furniture. He guessed it was what Tilden had been sitting on before he came to the door. Newspaper pages were strewn about it, some passages marked up with yellow highlighter. “I was quite close with your mother and father, and they always spoke so fondly of you and your brother. I’m disappointed we’re meeting under such circumstances.” Dr. Reed coughed, hoping it didn’t give him away. “Which of the twins are you?” Tilden looked up, but the discomfort had not faded from his face. “Liam,” he said. “Is your brother home, Liam?” Liam furrowed his brow, frown edging on suspicious. “Who did you say you are again?” “Henry,” Dr. Reed said. For as treacherous as Vincent and Isadora had been, he doubted that they would have ever spoken about him outside the laboratories, much less by his first name. Liam wouldn’t have a clue who he was. “Old college friend of both of your parents.” “Right.” Liam didn’t look any less suspicious. His hand remained clamped on the doorway, a little less casually now than it had been before. “Bryce isn’t here, sorry. I’ll tell him that you stopped by to offer your condolences, Henry.” “A pity.” It truly was. He’d have much preferred to have all of this over with at once. Having both twins in the same place would have made his life much easier. “I suppose it can’t be helped.” Eric?“ Dr. Reed raised his tone expectantly, and he was not disappointed. Footsteps, heavy and fast, thudded up the stairs upon his command. “What the fuck?” Liam gasped
under his breath. He took a step back from the doorway and scrambled to grab onto the door to
swing it closed, but Eric was far too fast. Right as Liam swung the door shut, Eric reached out and
captured its side in his fist. Liam, with a startled yelp, attempted to use his bodyweight to push it
closed, but Eric held it in place with one arm. The door did not so much as tremble. With a cluck of
his tongue and a shake of his head, Dr. Reed watched the struggle. There was no way that Liam
would ever win. Not only had Eric been a fine specimen of a soldier before his capture, but he was
now the prime example of what Project Alpha/Omega had to offer. No mortal man was going to
best his strength. “Get the fuck out!” Liam cried, voice strained as he struggled to overpower a
man easily ten times stronger than he was. It was like watching a caterpillar try to take on an
alligator. “I’m going to call the cops!” “The police won’t help you now,” Dr. Reed said. “Eric, please
open the door and detain him.” “Detain me?” Liam squawked. He pressed harder against the
doors, grunting from his exertion. Eric, bored, wrested the door open in its entirety, sending Liam
flying back. Liam stumbled to catch his footing, and as he did, Eric abandoned his post and stalked
toward him. Dr. Reed, cognizant that someone may choose to walk down the hall at any time,
strolled into the apartment and closed the door behind him. What was about to happen was a
private matter, and he didn’t need any extra eyes peeping in and getting involved in matters far
beyond their comprehension. “What the fuck is going on? Who are you?!” Feet still not quite right
beneath him, Liam stumbled backward and into the living room until his thighs hit the back of the
futon. He fell back on his ass with a gasp, and on the way down, Eric caught him by the wrist and
held him firm. With a choked cry, Liam thrashed and fought, but it was no use. Dr. Reed knew that
Eric would not be bested. “I told you already,” Dr. Reed replied as he strolled from the doorway
and into the cramped living room. Eric yanked Liam off of the couch, spun him around, and
grabbed his other wrist so that both of Liam’s arms were pinned behind his back. Liam winced and
struggled, but he did not otherwise complain. “But most people, yourself included, would do best
by calling me Dr. Reed.” “What do you want from me?” Liam demanded, eyes narrowing and
locking on the doctor’s as he drew closer. Dr. Reed found himself impressed. It took courage to
face down an unknown threat, especially one with such power as Dr. Reed possessed. “It’s not so
much what I want from you, because what I want will never happen, unfortunately.” Liam’s death
was off the table—it would be too suspicious. The higher ups were already breathing down his
neck, monitoring all of the little things that Dr. Reed no longer cared for. “It’s what you owe me,
through heredity.” Liam scowled and glowered, jaw set and body primed for an attack Eric would
never allow to happen. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” “Even if that’s true,” and Dr. Reed
had no reason to believe that it was, “you’ll learn soon enough. You and your brother both.” “I
swear to god I will call the cops and have you arrested,” Liam snarled. In the face of adversity, he
was feisty. It must have been a trait inherited from Isadora—Vincent had the backbone of a slug.
Whoever it had come from, Dr. Reed was quickly growing tired of it. With a sigh, he nudged his
lenses a little further up his nose and pinched at the bridge to relieve some of the pressure
behind his eyes. The twins were little more than teenagers, and Liam had the composure to prove
it. “The police will not help you, Liam. No one will help you. Your parents have risked national
security and betrayed this country and have been dealt with accordingly. In all the right circles,
your name is blackened. No one will willingly associate with a traitor. The police won’t do you any
good.” The accusation shut him up and made him still, and Dr. Reed watched as Liam attempted to
process what he’d been told. Brows knit low, expression tight, he navigated the information with
the grace and intuition of a squirrel. It looked like Liam hadn’t inherited any of his parents’
brilliance. “What?” “Your mother and father were working for the trioka, Liam,” Dr. Reed
announced. “The two of them thought that they could sell my secrets to the enemy. They thought
wrong.” “What secrets?” The longer he went on, the more strained and panicked Liam sounded.
Eric’s grip did not falter. “The secrets to winning this war,” Dr. Reed said, terse. “And now, you and
your brother are going to help me make sure that those secrets are explored in full and give us the
best shot possible at coming out victorious. The Tilden family owes me a debt, Liam, and I intend
to make you pay it.” In that moment, despite his evident discomfort and fear, something stoic
flashed through Liam’s eyes. Eric lifted his gaze and caught Dr. Reed’s eye, and Dr. Reed dared to
glance back. The unspoken passed between them. As it did, Liam spoke. “Listen,” he said uneasily,
“I'm not going to tell you that I understand what's happening, because I don't. My mom and dad worked for a pharmaceutical company. I don't understand how you think they'd be involved with the war at all, let alone on the wrong side of it, but,” steel flashed through his eyes and he set his face in determination, “if you're going to take whatever problems you had with them up with me and Bryce, if you're going to make us pay back their debts or whatever, leave Bryce out of this. He's still in school and he's got a future ahead of him. He doesn't need any of this bullshit bogging him down, okay? So tell me what I need to do and I'll do it, as long as it means that he's not caught up in any of this.” Eyes narrowed and lips set, hair wild with sleep and wearing a pair of loose sweatpants and an old graphic t-shirt, Liam wasn't exactly the most intimidating specimen. Dr. Reed looked him over thoughtfully, considering the alternative. With both twins knowledgeable about the project, the results could very easily be skewed. Keeping one twin ignorant might serve a greater purpose. Liam could be a control group of sorts. And, beyond that, there was value in having a mole. Dr. Reed allowed himself to smile. “Well then, I suppose we can reach an agreement.” He pinched the hinge of the left arm of his glasses and lifted them from his face. “Tell me, Liam, what do you know of Project Alpha?”

Chapter One

Liam

“Look at all of them waiting to be fucked,” Kerscher whispered into Liam’s ear. They were seated on the wooden benches along the wall of the auditorium at Omega Academy. Overhead, protected by balcony seating, were the Omega recruits that Kerscher was talking about. Liam lifted his head to survey them. “Some of them aren’t wearing blockers. You smell that? I want to tear into that and make it mine. I don’t even care if it makes me gay.” The problem was, Liam did smell it. Each Omega signature was similar, but none were identical. Blockers did their part to eliminate that scent, but some of the Omegas either hadn't applied enough, or had forgotten to apply any at all. It was a good thing that a story separated them, because otherwise every Alpha recruit would be all over them. Even himself. Briefly, Liam wondered if any of the scents he picked up on belonged to his twin brother, Bryce. The thought made him drop his gaze from the bodies overhead, and Liam focused instead on the stage before him, its wooden floors gleaming from a fresh round of polish. A tingling, pricking sensation spread through his chest and tightened his lungs—he recognized it well. Guilt. Somewhere up there, facing a lifetime of submission at the hands of a brute like Kerscher, sat the brother he'd betrayed. There was no escaping the realities of war. For five years, the United States had been losing territory to the enemy, and without a drastic change, Liam recognized that there would be no hope for survival. Project Alpha, America's most secret military project to date, was that drastic change. It was their last shot. And it was Liam's biggest fuck-up. “My brother's up there,” Liam muttered, and Kerscher laughed and punched him in the shoulder. “Maybe I'll fuck him,” he goaded with a smirk. “He got your good looks, Tilden? He older or younger than you? Doesn't matter, I guess, as long as he smells like sex.” The chill that ran down Liam's spine stole what enjoyment he received from the scent of Omega overhead. He folded his arms across his chest, stared at a single point on the stage, and willed this all to be over. Every step he'd taken along the way had been a blunder, but the biggest blunder of all was made clear to him the moment Kerscher ran his mouth only to laugh it off like the lives of the Omegas overhead were jokes. It should have been Liam up there, worrying about scent blockers and learning tactical procedures. Bryce had done nothing to deserve the kind of treatment he was destined to receive. Bryce didn't ask to be an Omega. Liam had asked for him. “Shut up, Kerscher.” “Make me. You can't tell me that you don't feel the same way, Tilden. Maybe not about your brother, but about the rest of them? They're like walking aphrodisiacs.” Kerscher leaned in closer and elbowed Liam in the side, not looking to jostle him too badly. “Tell me that if one of them got down here and stood in front of you that you wouldn't take advantage of him. Go on. I'm waiting.” Liam couldn't. As much as he tried to fight it, and as badly as he didn't want to admit it, the smell of Omega was tantalizing. More than anything, he wanted to find a way up to those isolated balcony seats, find one of the Omega recruits not wearing blockers, and let instinct take over. The visit to Omega Academy the specialists had promised would be a fantastic 'exercise in discipline' was leaving Liam feeling less a master of his own will and more like a feral beast by the second. And worst of all, his brother was up there, potentially adding to the scent that made him feel restless and starved for sex. In six months, that scent would give Bryce the edge on the battlefield when he manipulated it
to control his assigned Alpha unit, but it would also mean that he had to give himself body and soul to an asshole like Derek Kerscher, who cared less about what Bryce could offer to their combat team and more about how tight he’d feel around his dick. Bryce didn’t deserve it. Not in the least. “See? I told you,” Kerscher jeered. “Goody two-shoes Tilden has a sex drive like any of us hot-blooded Alpha males. Good on you, Tilden.” Kerscher slapped him across the back. “Maybe one day your balls’ll drop far enough that you’ll be able to say it out loud.” Liam didn’t want to think about it. The lights dimmed to signal the start of the ceremony, and Liam sank onto his bench seat and folded in on himself. Specialist Turner, one of the instructors at Alpha Academy, joined an Omega specialist to introduce the upcoming events, but Liam zoned out as they talked. All of it had come on so fast, and he’d handled it so poorly. If Bryce were in his shoes, he would have done a better job at handling the fallout—but it wasn’t Bryce that Dr. Reed had cornered in the wake of the Tilden parents’ death. Liam bit down on the inside of his lip and corrected himself. No. His parents hadn’t only died—they’d been murdered. And now here he was at Omega Academy, dutifully serving the man who had ordered them executed. The pairing ceremony happening on the stage was the first of its kind. Soldiers whose genes had been modified with Alpha or Omega mutations were trained into warriors befitting of their talents. Alpha recruits were trained in brute strength, weaponry, and firearms, and graduated to become Alpha units after six months of intensive drills. Omega recruits received training geared toward their sharper intellects and agile bodies. Faster and more intuitive than their Alpha counterparts, they were trained in matters of tactics and evasion, but part of their duties involved taming the ferocious instinct all Alphas harbored to some degree. And they did it with their bodies and the scents they produced. The first time he’d heard of it, listening to Dr. Reed go on about the project in the dingy apartment near the university he shared with Bryce, Liam had been appalled. And when Dr. Reed had asked him which mutation he would prefer, Liam hadn’t hesitated before he answered. No one wanted to be used in the way that Alphas used Omegas. What Liam hadn’t been counting on was that his selection had doomed Bryce to the very fate Liam rejected. One by one, Omega units were brought out onto the stage and presented to the Alpha units like trophies. Each coupling followed the same formula, very few deviating far from the course. The Omega emerged and stood alone on the stage. The Alpha paired to him left the wing and picked up on his unadulterated scent. The Alpha stalked, sprinted, or dragged the Omega down. And then, as the Omega cried out or gasped or remained steadfast, the Alpha sank his teeth into him to kickstart something Dr. Reed had called ‘the connection.’ The bite, Dr. Reed had told him, was instinctual. Alphas used it to claim their Omega mates in order to forge a bond. It was the first step toward building a successful unit, and once it happened, it seemed as though the Omega became more receptive to the Alpha’s touch. Even Omegas who’d screamed and run when their Alpha darted across the stage to pin them fell to its influence. Once the terror had passed and the bite was over, some couples even kissed. Touched. Groped. Liam didn’t want to see it, and didn’t want to think about what it meant for his and Bryce’s future, but he had no choice but to keep an eye on the events unfolding before him. Dr. Reed had tasked him with keeping track of each coupling to see if any of them deviated from the norm. The longer the ceremony went on, the harder it became to do his job justice. Some of the Omega units screamed. Some cried out in agony. Others, far feebler than their Alpha counterparts, put up a fight until they were overpowered and claimed, regardless of their wishes. And in the end, each successfully paired couple rose up, and the Alpha directed the Omega to an empty spot on one of the ground floor benches so that they could continue to bond. It sickened him. This was the secret to winning the war? The ceremony couldn’t end soon enough. The full extent of the injection isn’t understood, Dr. Reed had warned him soon after Liam had settled into Alpha Academy. What I need you to do is to keep an eye out for abnormalities, especially when Alphas and Omegas are allowed to share close proximity with one another. What we understand about the genetics of Alphas and Omegas might only scratch the surface of what there is to know. I need you to be my eyes at the pairing ceremony while I’m stuck at Alpha Academy. There was plenty abnormal about what was going on, but none of it was anything Dr. Reed would want to hear about. He’d made it clear that he wasn’t interested in suffering through any of Liam’s moral hang ups, and if Liam were to approach him to tell him that it wasn’t normal to have Alphas prey upon their Omega counterparts as they screamed and fought
and shrieled, all he’d receive would be a furrowed brow and pursed lips and a quick reminder that war necessitated discomfort. How was he going to live with himself when it was Bryce being offered up like meat, and when it was Bryce pinned down to the floor and bitten into until he bled? If Liam had known that he was sentencing his brother to a lifetime of unwilling servitude, he would have taken the Omega mutation himself. He would have given Bryce the better life. But no one knew that the mutation wasn’t random, and if Liam let it slip, he knew that Bryce would never forgive him. The only family he had left—the one person he cared about more than anything in the world—would feel like he’d betrayed him. And maybe, Liam thought bitterly, he had. He could have fought harder to save Bryce. He could have refused Dr. Reed’s instructions and stood in defiance. Instead, he’d bowed his head and gone along with everything the doctor had said. It was Liam who’d stolen Bryce’s application to military PR, Liam who’d laid out the newspapers advertising the project, and Liam who’d put his foot down in the recruitment office and agreed to enlist when it was obvious Bryce was having second thoughts. All because Dr. Reed had told him to. It wasn’t until the last Alpha and Omega pairing was introduced that Liam found reason to break from his thoughts and look back up to focus on what was unraveling before him. An Omega Unit, willowy and blond, smug and prepared to meet his fate, stood proud and ready in his gray uniform. It wasn’t often that an Omega looked so well equipped to face his Alpha, and Liam eyed him from where he sat, trying to make sense of what was happening. Hadn’t that Omega seen what had happened to his peers? He was about to be mowed down by a man he could never hope to overpower. But when the Alpha emerged from the wing to complete the ceremony, overpowering the Omega he shared the stage with looked to be the last of his priorities. If Liam’s nose didn’t know better, he would have thought that the tall, russet haired man wasn’t an Alpha at all. He certainly wasn’t acting like one. Was that what Dr. Reed meant about abnormalities? Trying not to act too interested, Liam watched the event as it unfolded. The Alpha’s chin was lifted, his eyes sweeping the balcony as though looking for an Omega other than the one presented to him. Liam leaned forward, squinting, trying to see where he was looking, but the darkness left him blind. He could smell the lingering scent of Omega from up above, too, even though the scents had begun to fade through an application of scent blockers. What didn’t fade was the unchecked scent of the Omega who stood not even fifteen feet from where the Alpha unit hesitated. Something was going on here. Had Dr. Reed planned this just to make sure he was paying attention? The Alpha unit walked forward, casually, until he stood in front of his Omega partner. The Omega stretched his neck out, a clear invitation. Liam’s instincts begged him to rush forward and claim him, and he felt Kerscher lean forward beside him, body going tense as the display went on. All of the Alpha recruits were on edge, hooked by the scent of so many Omegas and eager to make one of them their own. What little self-control they’d learned since starting at Alpha Academy was put to the test. But artificial pheromones were shit compared to the real deal, and even Liam felt on edge as he watched. Nothing happened. A dull murmur rose up as his peers began to whisper between themselves. This wasn’t just some slight abnormality—this was a substantial deviation from the course. “So what? Are you going to bite me, Henley? I’m waiting.” The Omega’s voice was clear, and his words were loaded with challenge. Liam had no clue what was unfolding before him, but he watched, rapt, as the crowds stirred further. “Henley!” one of the specialists called. Overhead, Liam heard the shuffling of feet. The Omega recruits were being asked to leave abruptly. Even the specialists knew that something odd was going on, and it was clear that they didn’t want their sweet, submissive new recruits to get the wrong idea about what waited for them in six months’ time. The lights came back on. The Omega unit left unclaimed on the stage grabbed Henley by the arm and started to pull him off. The paired Alpha units and their Omega partners followed as the pair made their way out through the side doors. Beside Liam, Kerscher stretched and groaned his way through a yawn before standing. “What a ceremony. What do you think about that, Tilden? I don’t know about you, but it made me feel pretty damn motivated to stick to training so that we get paired on time. Six months until I’ve got my own pleasure slave? Sign me up. This war stuff isn’t all that bad.” Liam didn’t reply, and even if he could have, he knew that it would have been pointless. No matter what he said, Kerscher wasn’t interested in listening. He was set in his ways and wasn’t about to change his mind for anything. “Whatever. You’re acting real
weird lately, you know that? I thought you were chill the first time I met you.” Kerscher pushed past him, bumping into Liam’s shoulder harder than he had to on his way out. Other Alpha recruits followed, and it wasn’t long before all of the Alpha units and recruits had abandoned the auditorium to emerge on Omega Academy’s grounds. The buses that had brought them there waited to drive them back to their own academy. Liam needed to get in touch with Dr. Reed to let him know what had happened. Alpha recruits clustered on the grounds of Omega Academy, waiting for a head count to make sure they were all accounted for. It was going to be a long drive back, but Liam understood the importance behind what had just happened. On the surface, it provided inspiration to the upcoming Alpha recruits who would one day be claiming their own Omegas. Beneath that, in ways that Liam only partially understood, it was a way to run testing on the first successful batch of Alphas and Omegas. Dr. Reed was checking for something, although he’d been tight lipped as to what that something was. But if Liam pieced together anything from what he’d just seen and what he’d been ordered to look for, it was that Dr. Reed was looking for flaws in his units. What better way to find defective subjects than to bring them all together to see how they ticked? Lost in his thoughts, Liam lingered by the outskirts of the group of Alpha recruits, close to the crumbling stone walls of the academy. The building was ancient and beautiful—the type of place Liam thought must have once been used as a convent—but had suffered and been abandoned since the war. The wall he stood closest to had been bombed, and huge slabs of stone lay embedded in the ground around it. Some of the wall had been repaired, but the rest of it was covered shoddily. Paired with the tall, dark pines that surrounded the place, the academy’s chilling, broken beauty was nothing short of surreal. “Liam!” Liam turned his head and squinted, but it took a few more seconds before he caught sight of Bryce, who crouched behind one of the slabs of fallen stone by the academy walls. With a frantic sweep of his hand, he invited Liam to come join him. What was he doing? Liam’s eyes widened, but even as fear that his brother might get caught rushed through his veins and spiked his pulse, his heart softened. Bryce. Since the two of them had enlisted and split apart to their separate academies, Liam hadn’t seen or heard from him. They’d never been apart for so long before. Liam looked over his shoulder to make sure the Alpha specialists supervising the recruits hadn’t taken notice of him, then meandered over to Bryce as casually as he could so as not to attract any unwanted attention. As soon as he’d made it behind the slab of stone, Bryce swept him up tight into his arms and hugged him close. Liam closed his eyes and hugged him back, just as firm, but the scent that clung to Bryce’s clothes was doing troublesome things to him. “Hey, you’re… You should stop hugging me,” he said before dropping his arms and pushing Bryce a few feet back. Bryce stumbled, and Liam frowned. In just a week apart he was already a lot stronger than he’d been before, and he hadn’t thought to check his strength around his Omega twin. “You guys smell. Thank god you don’t smell too strong, but the rest of them… No can do. If it was any other Omega hugging me like that, things wouldn’t have ended well.” “Oh,” Bryce muttered sheepishly. He rubbed at his neck, eyes downcast for a moment in a sign of submission that Liam recognized, but that he wasn’t used to seeing. Bryce had always been the more assertive twin, and all things considered, should have been the one to receive the Alpha mutation. Liam had stolen his birthright from him, and Bryce had no clue that he’d done it. Uncomfortable, Liam dropped his gaze, too. Bryce didn’t stay quiet for long. “Right. Listen. I need to ask you a favor.” Now that was more like the brother he knew. In that moment, both of them shirking their duties, Bryce casually asking for a favor that Liam knew was bound to get him in trouble, he couldn’t help but grin. The injection could change their bodies, but it couldn’t change their souls. “As good as it is to see you, I figured that you wouldn’t be risking disciplinary action just to say hi. What’s up?” “This is going to sound crazy, and I know that I’m asking for shit by even bringing it up, but I need to change places with you. Whatever trouble you get into if we get found out, I’ll take the blame. Whatever you want in return, I’ll do it. I need to do this.” Out of all the things Bryce could have asked, Liam wasn’t expecting that. He paused. What was his brother up to? Or, more importantly, what were the others at Omega Academy up to that would make Bryce want to leave it so soon after enlisting? “Bry, what’s happened here that you need to get out this bad? Are they treating you all right?” “It’s not anything that has to do with here,” Bryce promised. “I need to get into Alpha Academy so that I can try to meet someone.” The world slowed for a fraction
of a second as Liam’s brain worked over Bryce’s words. The easygoing atmosphere between them hardened and thickened, and he had to resist wrapping his arms around himself as a chill ran down his spine that warned him of just how much trouble Bryce was looking to get into. There was nothing to suggest that Bryce was involved in what had happened with the Alpha at the pairing ceremony—but that didn’t stop Liam from worrying that he was. For all Liam knew, it might have been a complete coincidence. But why else would Bryce be so desperate? Liam had seen how the Alpha had lifted his head and searched the balcony for an Omega recruit neither of them could see, and he knew that the same Alpha had refused to bite the Omega unit given to him. The thought that Bryce might have been the one he was looking for was distressing. Liam had done everything in his power since the day Dr. Reed had invaded their apartment to keep Bryce safe from their parent’s legacy. But if his genes were defective, then what? Dr. Reed wouldn’t treat him with much kindness, Liam was sure. What kind of suffering would Bryce go through as the doctor investigated what had gone wrong? Liam didn’t want to think about it. “What?” Liam frowned. “Meet someone? What are you talking about?” Bryce’s features softened. The murky green depths of his eyes set their sights on Liam, and in them, Liam saw something that troubled him deeply. It wasn’t the glint of mischief Bryce so typically wore, nor the sly, playful glint of someone about to pull off a victimless heist. If Liam didn’t know any better, he’d have said it was love. “When Alpha Unit Henley stepped onto the stage to be paired with his Omega, I felt something,” Bryce shared, tone kept low for privacy and warmed with bizarre affection that made Liam uncomfortable. “It was this deep rooted thing that coiled in my gut and flowered in my lungs and snaked through my brain until all I could think and see and feel was him. And I wanted him, Liam. I wanted to be with him. To touch him. To have him touch me. I feel like if I don’t meet him, I’m going to go crazy.” Neither of them had dated much before the war, and since the bombings started, dating was off the table entirely, but Bryce had always professed to be straight. And Liam knew it well, because each time Bryce lamented his relationship status, he’d tell Liam not to feel too down, because one day after the war was over they’d both find a girl to settle down with. Only Liam had never wanted a girl. He would never be Bryce’s version of normal, but he’d never had the heart to tell his brother as much. They were identical in so many other ways that a difference like that struck Liam as divisive, and he valued Bryce’s companionship more than anyone else’s. But here Bryce was, not only begging Liam to switch places so that he could meet a man, but begging him to switch places so he could meet the defective Alpha that had actively been searching for an Omega recruit. Behavior like that wasn’t normal of an Omega, and Dr. Reed had ordered Liam to keep an eye out for anything unusual happening at the pairing ceremony. None of what Bryce was telling him was good news. “We need to be together. And you know I’m not just saying that. I wouldn’t ever say that about a guy. It’s just… It’s something with Henley. I need to find out what it is.” What was he supposed to say? The last thing Liam wanted was for Bryce to wander into danger and inadvertently discover everything Liam had been hiding from him. In Bryce’s world, their circumstances were unfortunate, bordering on tragic, but they were simple. There were no conflicting stories that ran through his head on repeat in the middle of the night, keeping him awake to stare at the imperfections in the ceiling to wonder what if. But if he didn’t share the truth with Bryce, how else was Liam supposed to explain why he didn’t want Bryce to break away from the norm to chase a man who Dr. Reed would want to get his hands on to study? And if Bryce did go despite Liam’s warnings, how long would it be before Dr. Reed would decide to sink his claws into him to see why he was acting so strangely? How long would it be before Bryce was laid out on a table, flayed open, while the doctor poked and prodded and made observations as to what had gone so wrong? Liam had no doubt that he would do it. Dr. Reed had made it very clear that he had no love for the Tilden family. Liam had been serving beneath him for months now, reporting in to see the doctor and do his bidding when he told Bryce he was putting in hours at the smelting plant, and all the while he’d been suffering Dr. Reed’s abuse. If Dr. Reed had a reason to hurt Bryce, Liam knew that he would. The emptiness of Liam’s mind petrified him. When every thought he had led to panic instead of a solution, how was he supposed to keep Bryce safe? He could only stall. “Henley… Was he the last one, right at the end? The one who got paired with his Omega unit but who wouldn’t lay any kind of claims on him? Specialist Turner was pissed.” “That’s him.” Bryce
nodded, but didn’t take the bait. He continued to fight for his goal. Nervous sweat broke out on Liam's forehead. “I need to get to him, and the only way I'm going to do that is if I trade places with you. He's getting shipped back to Alpha Academy, and then he's going to be deployed, right? So it's the only way I'm going to get a shot at meeting him. Please, Liam. I need your help.” “No. No, it was wrong. Liam scratched at the side of his neck, skin tingling as his heart raced with apprehension. How could he keep Bryce from doing this? Bryce had always been so headstrong. “Liam!” “But Henley is a unit matched to a unit. We're just recruits, Bryce. We don't compare,” Liam blurted out. Arguing with Bryce only ever made him more determined, and he knew that he'd made a mistake in doing it, but he could see no other work-around. “He's going to be shipped off to war in a few days, and we're definitely not ready for that. War, I mean. You can't go to war, Bryce. Not right now.” “That's why I need to get to him as soon as I can.” The way Bryce set his jaw and clenched his fists told Liam that he wasn't going to budge on the issue. “If we don't trade places, I'll never have another chance to see him again and get whatever this thing I'm feeling out of me. It's like nothing I've felt before, and if I don't get it fixed, I think it's going to ruin me for good. The solution is to meet Henley. If I don’t, it's going to eat me alive. I don't need to go off to war, or anything like that. All I need is a chance to meet him, and maybe it'll go away all on its own, and I can go back to normal. I can't stand feeling like this. I need to figure out how to make it stop.” Liam allowed silence to stretch between them. Bryce's gaze bore into him. Time was running short—Liam knew that it wouldn't be long before one of the specialists realized he was missing. If he had had time to think things through, he was confident that he could have found a way to make Bryce stay without risking his secrets and Bryce's safety. But as it was, there was nothing Liam could think to do but shake his head and lift his hand to undo the first button of his shirt. Bryce beamed at him like he'd just announced they'd won the lottery. He had no idea what kind of trouble he was setting himself up for. “You owe me big time,” Liam muttered as he stripped from his coat, tie, and shirt and handed them over to Bryce to receive his in exchange. “Both of us could get discharged for this, and then what happens? Our lives belong to the military because of the change in our genes. They'll probably lock us up or kill us or something if we're caught.” Liam had a sinking feeling that whatever Dr. Reed would do to Bryce if he caught wind that he was displaying abnormalities would be worse than that, but he didn’t say it aloud. Bryce always had a way of getting out of trouble unscathed, and until Liam came up with a plan to get him out of the frying pan, he was going to count on his brother's dumb luck to keep him safe. “We won't get caught,” Bryce promised. He shed his shirt and jacket and handed them off to Liam, who started to dress himself as his feeling of dread grew. “You're going to be me, and I'm going to be you, and I'll make it back as soon as I'm free of this thing. And if something does go wrong, I'll convince them that this was all my doing. I promise. You're the best, Liam.” “No, he was far from it. If Bryce knew the truth, he'd be singing a different tune.” Liam finished buttoning his shirt back up. “And you better damn well be the best at making sure you're not caught, or it doesn't matter how good I am.” Bryce was stripped down to his boxers, and Liam wasn't all that far behind. They traded pants. Liam shot Bryce a hard look. “You get in, you get out, and you get back here like you're poisoned and running out of time to grab the antidote. You got it?” “Got it.” They dressed quickly, and when they were done, Bryce looked every bit the Alpha in Liam's midnight blue uniform. They were indistinguishable apart from smell, but with the blockers on, Bryce didn't smell like anything. No Alpha recruit was going to notice that he didn't smell like Alpha. Unlike Omegas, they didn't often depend on their noses to help them navigate through trouble—that was what fists were for. In the few days they'd be apart, as long as Bryce could continue to mask his scent and stay out of trouble, he'd be safe. “You have no idea how much this means to me, Liam. I promise that after this, whatever you want, I'll make it work. Doesn't matter when or where.” “Right.” Nervous, Liam did up the last button of Bryce's jacket and slid his hand down the front to smooth the wrinkles. Bryce pulled him in for a quick hug and then darted back. It didn't matter. The smell of Omega clung to Bryce's clothes, not his person, and now Liam was wearing it. With a wayward glance around the slab of stone, Bryce huffed a little sigh and nodded his head. “I've gotta go.” “Wait!” If they were going to do this, they were going to do it right. Liam grabbed him by the shoulder and held him in place. “Bry, you need to be careful when you go back. The Alphas I train with? Some of
them are all right, but some of them are bad news. And I don’t say that lightly. You need to make sure you keep to yourself, keep your temper in check, and don’t go pushing buttons that shouldn’t be pushed. Okay?” At last, Bryce clued into the severity of the situation. His eyes darkened and he nodded reluctantly, but he did not back down. “I got it. Your room number is 216 and your roommate is Jaime Sullivan. Watch out for Specialist Jones.” “Yours is 220. Roommate Derek Kerscher. Watch out for him.” This was it. They’d been reunited for no more than five minutes, and already it was time to part ways. This time, maybe forever. Liam’s heart grew heavy, and he tugged Bryce into one last, tight hug. It was a goodbye. “Take care, brother,” he murmured as Bryce wiggled free of his grasp and approached the hunk of stone to steal back toward the rest of the group. “Stay safe,” Bryce whispered in return. And then he was gone. Liam let out a deep breath, wondered again at his incredible ability to dig himself into a hole in order to thing things through and come up with a plan that would keep Bryce’s strange behavior from Dr. Reed. It wasn’t long before he found himself standing in front of room 216. There was a key in Bryce’s back pocket—the same pocket in which Liam kept his. He used it to open the bedroom door. As it turned out, Liam wouldn’t have to worry about Bryce’s abnormalities for long. Standing by the bathroom door, dressed in nothing but a towel, was a young man with blond hair and a lithe build who stillled Liam’s heart and stirred his cock all in the same second. And when he breathed in to try to talk to him, the young man’s scent hit him square in the gut and wrenched open a void in the center of his chest that was bleak and hopeless and begging to be filled. It was clear to Liam that there was only one man who could fill it—Jaime Sullivan.

Chapter Two

Jaime

It started with a single breath. The air was thick with scents, but one rose and grew bolder until it was all Jaime could focus on. It shot from the back of his throat into his stomach like a stone, and from there it leeched through him and seized him from the inside out. It crept through his veins, wound around his muscle, and slid against his bones until the friction grew so tight and frantic, it felt like fire lit inside of him. The flames licked just beneath his skin and crept up his neck and down his groin to leave him sweating. The smoke poached his brain and left his thoughts jumbled and narrow in scope. All that Jaime knew was that he needed the fire to get out, but he had no idea how to go about doing it. The inferno consumed Jaime in full before he so much as settled into his seat. And to make matters worse, the bold scent spread from where it sat heavy in his stomach to web through his balls and harden his shaft, and no matter what Jaime did to try to stop it, he couldn’t calm the erection that began to stir beneath his slacks. Jaime hadn’t been an Omega for long, but he’d been studious enough during his lessons to know that what he was feeling wasn’t normal. Instinctively, his body recognized the scent that burned through him and left him scorched in its wake—it was the scent of an Alpha. But Jaime hadn’t heard any of the specialists say that Omegas were susceptible to the scent of an Alpha. Likewise, it didn’t look like any of the Omega recruits seated around him were succumbing to any of the twisted pain that singed Jaime’s veins and blackened his muscle. So why was he sinking into his seat and crossing his legs as arousal flushed through him? Because you’re a disgrace. An abomination. The words hit him hard and were impossible to ignore. Jaime winced and tried to sit still, doing his best to shake his thoughts loose, but they rattled around his head and wouldn’t leave him be. Maybe it was the truth. Maybe all of this was happening because he wanted it to happen—because he refused to shut down the part of his brain that was excited that one day he’d have an Alpha who’d call Jaime his own. Maybe it was all his fault. Another thought itched at the back of Jaime’s mind, trying to draw his attention from his discomfort and arousal and disgust in himself. It wasn’t all Alphas that were making him feel this way, the thought told him. Jaime was too addled to understand why that was so important. All that mattered was that he was hotter than he’d ever been in his life, both literally and figuratively. He needed to find out a way to make the fire stop. The scent was like amber. Thick in his nostrils, it weighed down the air around him and left Jaime struggling to fill his lungs, as though he were trying to breathe deeply on a humid day. The more he smelled it, the more nuanced it became. Woodsmoke and earth joined the amber, but with them came qualities Jaime couldn’t describe as smells, only as feelings. It smelled like strength, security, and power. It smelled like sex. And when Jaime closed his eyes and tried to forget how it made him feel, it only
came on stronger. Crossing his legs and fidgeting on his seat wouldn’t stop him from feeling this way. This wasn’t the type of arousal he could wish away. If he didn’t pleasure himself soon, he knew that he was going to be sick. He knew it. And even though the thought of pleasing himself was repulsive at the best of times, right now he needed his own touch more than anything. Thoughts, as fleeting and frantic as a school of skittish fish, urged him to push aside his desires and approach what he was feeling rationally. There was no way a feeling like this was normal. It had to be a sudden onset of illness. A fever. Elevated body temperatures were confusing his nervous system and sending the wrong signals through his body, and that was why he found himself so suddenly horny. That had to be it. Right? But his body, roasted by the flames inside, said otherwise. It begged him to give in to impulse and to weave his way casually from the balcony and down to the ground floor to pick his way amongst the crowd of Alphas until he found the one who was doing this to him. And once that Alpha was found, it urged Jaime to sink down onto his lap, to straddle his hips, and to give himself willingly, no matter how many people were watching. Jaime’s cheeks flushed. He knew what his body wanted was shameful. It didn't stop him from wanting to do it. Lost to his internal struggle, Jaime didn’t notice the pairing ceremony draw to a close. Distantly, he heard some of the specialists barking at his peers to vacate the area, and Jaime was only too happy to oblige. By then his cheeks were flushed and warm. A cold sweat had broken out beneath his chin and jaw and down his neck, and when he stood, he realized that it went further than that. Slick sweat had accumulated south of his belt, and now slipped down his thighs in dangerous quantities. He was worried that it had soaked through his pants, and there would be nothing more mortifying than that. He needed to get out fast. Jaime’s knees trembled as he climbed to his feet, and he righted his balance on the back of the wooden auditorium chair before he stumbled. His roommate, Bryce, was clinging to the balcony and staring down at the stage below as though he were witnessing a murder. Jaime approached and squeezed Bryce's shoulder to try to get his attention, but Bryce didn’t so much as turn his head. Jaime hazarded a look over the balcony to find one Alpha and Omega pairing still on center stage, but he found he couldn’t focus on them for long. His gaze swept to the other Alphas lined up on the benches below before he got a hold of himself and focused on Bryce again. “Bryce, they want us to leave. C'mon, let's go.” The overhead lights brightened, and other Omega recruits filed out of the balcony to return to their rooms and settle in for the night. Bryce didn’t say a word. He kept his gaze on the scene below, oblivious to his surroundings. The discomfort in Jaime’s soul and the disgusting dampness between his legs didn't allow Jaime to linger, so he dropped his hand from Bryce's shoulder and turned away. It was probably better if he got back to their room first, anyway. He needed a long, cold shower, and the emptier the room was, the better. The pattering of the shower spray on the tile might not be the only thing making noise. Cheeks burning at the thought, Jaime slipped amongst his peers and made for the exit. It would be a miracle if sweat hadn’t soaked through his pants. He’d never been a particularly sweaty individual, but then again, he’d never been an Omega before, either. The injection had changed him, given him sharper instincts and new urges, so what was to say it couldn’t make him sweat and burn, too? Or maybe, a dark thought whispered through the chaos of his mind, he was having a late reaction to the serum that was manifesting at last. Maybe none of this was normal. Maybe he was going to die. Jaime picked up the pace. He wove between recruits dressed in the same gray uniform he wore, nothing more than another face in the crowd. Right now, getting back to the room he shared with Bryce was more important than any embarrassment he might suffer from sweating through the back of his pants. If he was going to die, he wanted to do it in private. The attention that would come from collapsing in public was too mortifying, and Jaime didn't want to be gawked at in his last moments. All he wanted was to cool off, chase away his arousal, and suffer his fate alone.

War has forced Liam Tilden to become someone he’s not; and his secrets threaten to tear what’s left of his family apart.
Blackmailed into enlisting in secret military operation Project Alpha, Liam's life is no longer his own. All that keeps him going is knowing that his compliance keeps his twin brother safe from the truth.

But when Liam meets Omega soldier Jaime Sullivan and feels the instant bond between them, protecting his brother is not enough. He must keep Jaime safe from the dangers lurking beneath Project Alpha's surface, no matter the cost.

**Project Alpha is the last chance Jaime Sullivan has to change who he is.**

Outcast by his family after being dragged out of the closet, Jaime turns to Project Alpha with the hopes it will erase his past. But when gorgeous Alpha soldier Liam Tilden takes him to bed and gets him pregnant, there's no escaping the truth;

He'll never be who his family wants him to be.

**Merging two broken pasts doesn't always equal a perfect future.**

The enemy is at their doorstep, and with a new life on the way, there's a lot to lose. But the biggest obstacle Jaime and Liam face might not be the war; but the secrets they keep from each other.

*Omega Rising* is the second book in the *Project Alpha/Omega* series, and contains strong language, dark themes, MPreg, no cheating, and a definitive HEA. Readers sensitive to topics such as violence should exercise caution while reading.

Relevant Books

[ DOWNLOAD ] - Online The Equen Queen (Quentaris - Quest of the Lost City Book 2) pdf


[ DOWNLOAD ] - Download Free My Tour of Wessex free pdf

[ DOWNLOAD ] - Download book WJEC EDUQAS GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition free epub

[ DOWNLOAD ] - Book Ireland and the Isle of Man (1903) pdf