

## Prelude

*When you are bound by a fealty, an oath is pledged that cannot be severed lest you bear a fatal consequence.*

~ R a e ~

**Thirty years ago seems like** a lifetime. In reality, it is merely a blink in time.

I was barely a woman of thirteen years when my mother, Jenna, sat with me on my bed, the room surrounding us adorned with innocence, joy, and love.

This was not the first time she told me the story of her youth. Each time the words flowed from her lips, I was enchanted. The scent of her still clung to my mind—sweet lemon peel on a bed of fragrant orange blossoms. Her dark mahogany hair spilled sweetly around my arm as she held me close and spoke of her beloved Tishar, a high knight of the Carador realm, a place inhabited by Faeries and other magical beings.

“He was magnificent,” she said, her green eyes sparkling like emerald gems in the sunlight. “Fae males are so different than those you find here,” she sadly added.

“You loved him?” I asked, my voice soft and innocent—a child not yet stained by the cruelty of men.

“Yes,” she answered. “I loved him very much. But,” she sighed, “he had a mission to fulfill. Our kind, the Fae, were dwindling. Fewer and fewer children were being conceived. Something had to be done.”

“So he called upon the Spirians, children of the Angels,” I said, having heard this story before. No matter how many times she told it, I never grew tired of hearing the tale.

“Yes,” she said, tugging me closer. “He did. Five of the strongest Spirian leaders were gifted with Tishar’s most precious treasures. Four of my slave sisters and I were sent to be with the Spirian males in hopes of strengthening our race.”

“Then the bad Spirians came,” I said.

My mother’s beautiful eyes grew dull with the memory. “The Shadows,” she said with spite. “They killed the good Spirian males and their children. They took me and my slave sisters, but they didn’t know about the fealty Tishar had formed between himself and the five Spirian males.”

“Is the fealty magic?” I asked her, not really knowing what a fealty was at the time.

“Yes,” she said. “Tishar wanted to ensure our safety. Anyone who caused us physical harm would die a short but painful death.” The distance in her voice alarmed me.

I shrank back a little.

Sensing my discomfort, she pulled me against her, squeezing my shoulders for reassurance. “Unfortunately,” she continued, a hardness in her tone, “the Shadows have their ways of causing us pain without causing physical harm.”

She turned me to face her; determination and alarming seriousness hardened her expression. “Hide your gifts, Raeiza. Never use them or let others see them. Keep your thoughts and feelings deep in your soul.” She shook me to emphasize her plea.

“I promise, Mim,” I whimpered, tears stinging my eyes.

She held me close, embedding that promise like a stain that would never wash out.

## Chapter 1

~ R a e ~

**Few things compare to the** beauty of Edinburgh, Scotland in late May. I typically enjoyed my bike ride home, but tonight, I was late. It was 9:00 p.m., a scant hour before my shift at Malones Pub.

I rode my bike down Lygon Road, past the elaborately landscaped mansions. The Linden trees were blooming early this year; their sweet fragrance welcomed me home as I turned right onto our cobblestone drive.

In the absence of moonlight, our home resembled Dracula's castle with its dark stone walls and dimly lit windows covered in heavy drapes. Short wrought-iron fences guarded the landscape like dark, immovable soldiers. Everything was perfectly in order, just like the man who owned it—my father, Drake Tomei, Shadow leader of Europe and the bane of my existence.

I parked my bike against the stone wall and ran toward the front door. It opened before I could reach the handle. My father's looming figure filled the wide frame. He was a handsome man with peppered hair that he wore short and combed back. As usual, not a strand of it was out of place.

"Good, God, Raeiza; I was worried sick," he said in a thick London accent. His eyes widened as they scanned me from head to toe. I was littered with blood and straw. "What happened to you?"

My father was the only person who called me by that name. I preferred Rae, but he refused to acknowledge that simple request. I gently brushed past him, in a hurry to take my shower and prepare for work. "A mare gave birth. The foal was breech," I called over my shoulder.

I winced as his strong hand gripped my arm and spun me around. "You will look at me as we speak," he emphasized. He stood a good foot above me. His gray eyes peering into mine. "Look at yourself," he said. "You look like a commoner." He turned his head, obviously not appreciating the aroma I emitted. "I gave you a perfectly fine auto and yet you insist on riding that monstrosity on two wheels."

"Father, please, I'm late for work."

"I don't like you working," he reminded me. "There is no need for it." He closed his eyes and shook his head as if summoning patience. "Honestly, Raeiza; you will be mated by the end of this year. Bennet will not permit this foolishness."

My stomach sank at the thought of leaving Scotland to live with my appointed mate in New York City. Bennet Graves was an investment broker. His idea of paradise was the penthouse suite on the top of a high rise. Not much need for a horse vet out there, I imagined.

"I'm finishing my degree, Father."

He shook me. "Why?"

I despised the way he made my spirit cower. It took everything I had to keep respect in my voice when I answered. "Because, dear Father, you taught me to finish what I started."

Unable to deny that fact, he released me. "Get cleaned up. You smell like a fish pond."

I started up the staircase that curved like a swan's wing up to the second floor. The highly-polished rosewood and brass trim always seemed impossibly bright in this house of anger and resentment.

"Raeiza," he called.

I turned to face him. "Yes, Father."

"Bennet is coming to see you next Thursday. He will be staying for dinner. I expect you to be here."

My stomach felt as if I had swallowed molten lead. I nodded to him.

He raised his chin up a notch, studying me with those cold gray eyes. He expected an answer—a verbal answer.

"I will be here, Father."

It took a moment for him to release me from his stare—a look that could pin and restrain me as fast and hard as iron shackles.

I turned and continued ascending the stairs.

When I reached my room, decorated in white and pale blue, the tears began to flow. I had stood up to my father once long ago; it ended badly for me and resulted in having my mother banned.

He was a cruel and powerful man—a business investor with a heart of cold steel. He handled his acquisitions with the same bitter affection he bestowed upon his family. His charm, money, and absolute power were his only assets, aside from his attractive physique that never failed to lure available females who never stayed long.

Born and raised in London's high society, I was taught that a proper Shadow female obeyed or suffered consequences. I was passed between my father's acquaintances like a rare, expensive toy. When my mother couldn't stand his abuse of me any longer, she was banned from our immediate clan and sent to a more common clan where she would spend the rest of her days. Two years later, she had died—or so we were told.

Deep down, I knew she was alive—I could feel her, or at least I thought I could. I was her only child, something that seemed to irritate my father, seeing it was the male in a union who determined when his female became pregnant. Picking up her picture from my dresser, I noticed that she looked

like me, only older and with shorter hair. Her pale eyes seemed sad as they stared back at me. The picture blurred behind my tears. Things were so different now that she was gone.

I set the picture down, pulled my clothes off over my head and tossed them into the bin. My jeans came next. Everything would have to be soaked. Our servant, Olivia, was a gem at getting stains out and keeping everything impressively clean. She had been our caretaker for as long as I could remember.

Padding my way into the bathroom, I pulled the tie from my hair and shook it out. Long, thick waves of chestnut hair spilled over my shoulders and down my back. Bits of straw floated to the floor.

Like my mother, I had gray-green eyes that looked too pale to be paired with dark hair. I had been pretty once. Now, I purposely avoided makeup and attractive hair styles. I wanted to be anonymous. No matter how hard I tried, though, my efforts never seemed to detract the clan males' attention. They hovered around me like hungry sharks, waiting to be fed.

The shower faucet squeaked with objection as I turned the polished brass handles for a mix of hot and cold. Steam lifted and began filling the large space with inviting humidity. A hot shower was exactly what I needed now. Anything to take my mind off Bennet's upcoming visit.

I stepped into the open space and allowed the five shower heads to saturate my body with heat. Closing my eyes, I buried my head beneath the heavy spray and imagined it was a waterfall in the midst of a lush forest—far away from high society and arranged unions with men who only wanted another precious possession.

The last time I had met Bennet Graves, I was just barely a woman of twenty years. I'd changed since then and wondered whether Bennet would even want me any longer. He needed a gifted, high status female to bear his children. As far as anyone knew, I had no gifts like most Spirian females my age, and I did my best to hide my status behind a simple physique built more for athletic activities than filling out expensive gowns.

Scrubbing my hair with jasmine-scented shampoo, I tried to imagine the ugliest thing to wear during our dinner together. Surely once he saw how homely I could be, he would change his mind about our union.

My father's inevitable riposte to my blatant act of defiance shattered that plan into shards certain to leave me bleeding. I had best play nice and entertain the man who would soon be my mate.

I shuddered as the suds ran down my body and into the drain, mirroring my hopes and wishes.

In thirty minutes, I was dressed in a pale blue sweater and faded jeans. My hair was tied into a braid, still quite damp. When I opened my door, I heard the dulcet sounds of a piano solo coming from the study where my father was no doubt enjoying a snifter of cognac.

Quietly, I made my way down the stairs, praying my steps would go unnoticed. The last thing I wanted was another bout with my father. He would certainly comment on my damp hair.

I opened the front door and slipped outside before closing it softly behind me. So far so good, I thought.

My bike protested with a groan as I kicked the stand up and pushed it onto the drive. In two minutes, I would be free.

## Chapter 2

~ R a e ~

**The three kilometer ride to** Malones Irish Pub helped clear my head. I was horribly late, though, and Danny, my boss, would have my head on a platter by the end of my shift, I was certain.

I locked my bike to the pipes that ran up the backside of the brick building. Entering the employee's door, I made a beeline to the private lounge to dump my things and don my apron.

"Nice of ye t'make it in." Danny's gruff voice sounded across the room. His thick Irish accent offered a comforting charm.

I turned to face him, tying the apron around my waist. "Sorry, Danny. We had an emergency at the farm."

He growled, his battered face looking far more fierce than the man who bore it. "Jane's in a fit, out there. I suggest ye take up a shield before facin' 'er."

The scar that ran from the tip of his left brow curved down his face to the crease of his lip. He proudly boasted of it as a trophy from his last boxing match with the infamous Samson O'Malley. Other than that, Danny was a handsome old man with dark eyes as warm as the summer air.

"Thanks for the warning," I said, grabbing a bag of chocolate-covered coffee beans from my locker. Jane would need to be consoled, I was sure. Nothing worked better than her favorite treat.

I walked into the bar to find an unruly crowd giving Jane a run in or two. She held her own like the stoic Irish lass that she was. Her red hair was twisted into a knot at the back of her head. She looked haggard and beat.

Hearing one man's order for gin and tonic, I flipped a highball glass in my hand and filled it with ice.

Jane turned to face me, her pale blue eyes loaded with daggers. "Here already?" she said, sounding more Scottish than Irish.

"Sorry," I said, pushing the bag of chocolate coffee beans into her hand. "I had an emergency at the farm."

She smiled at the gift I had given her. "Apology accepted."

"Hey," the burly man yelled. "Hows 'bout me drink?"

I topped the glass with tonic water and slid the concoction before him.

The man at the end of the bar caught my attention. His name was Seth Dunning, my intriguing distraction who made biochemistry far more tolerable. He was a regular here and quite popular with the ladies. The stories that floated around about him only served to pique my interest to higher levels. Definitely a player, but not a man looking for a solid relationship. Knowing that made him safe, unobtainable, and comfortable at a distance. But he hardly noticed me.

Part of me felt relieved while another part of me craved to have just one of his smiles aimed in my direction. Fat chance of that, however.

Jane nudged me. "Get his order. Go on." She nudged me harder.

I walked to the end of the bar. Seth's attention was on a redhead with long curls that brushed the tip of her accentuated backside as she took a seat beside him.

I cleared my throat, hoping to draw his golden eyes to me, instead. "Can I get you something to drink?"

He turned to face me, then focused again on the female to his right. “What are you drinking?” he asked her.

“Manny’s,” she said, her voice seductive and smooth. I wanted to reach out and strangle that delicate neck of hers.

Seth returned his attention to me. “One Manny’s and a glass of your house Malbec, please.” His American accent seemed so out of place here, yet it was soothing.

I left to fill his order, wondering whether he even knew who I was. He had to have known I was Spirian, one of his own kind yet he seemed more attracted to humans—a real rarity in this pub. Most of the clientele were Spirians. It was a popular hangout for our kind. Humans found the overbearing hum that radiated from us uncomfortable and typically avoided the place. Some humans, however, were drawn to our kind, especially the females.

Seth looked up at me as I lowered the drinks to the counter. He could melt butter in the dead of winter with those eyes, I thought, feeling a flush of heat redden my cheeks.

“Thank you, Rae,” he said.

I nodded and scurried away.

Jane rolled her eyes at me. “Do ye know any other lines than, ‘Can I get ye somethin’ t’ drink?’”

I brushed past her to fill another order of Guinness.

“Thanks, darlin’,” my customer said, flashing a stained smile.

I nodded and walked away to update his tab. When I turned around again, I noticed Seth leading the redhead toward the dance floor. A slow ballad began to play. He commanded the female with such confidence that it made me yearn to take her place.

Jane leaned down to speak in my ear. “He’s really somethin’ to look at, yes?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

At 6’4”, his muscular frame, dark hair, and alluring shadow of a beard made him downright delicious. Add a good dose of manners and intelligence, and you had a man who made most women weep.

“Take that man and make ’m yours,” Jane said.



“No,” I simply said, turning to fill another order. That was impossible. I was promised to a male who would have me by the end of this year. The best I could hope for with Seth was one evening. Going by the rumors, that was all he gave to any female lucky enough to snag his interest.

“Rae,” a familiar voice called. I turned to see Edmond and two of his friends. He was the son of my father’s security man, Jacob.

“Edmond,” I said. “What can I get you?”

“M’ boys and I are looking for a bit of company tonight,” he said, looking me up and down like a vulture sizing up its next meal.

“I’m not available,” I said, feeling a familiar pit in my gut.

He reached out and grabbed my wrist, wringing it painfully. I fought back my reaction, not wanting to offer him any satisfaction.

He growled. “Then make yourself available.”

“Is there a problem here?” Seth asked, reclaiming his seat.

Edmond eyed the man, obviously taking in Seth’s size. In comparison, Edmond looked like a toothpick.

“Just havin’ a conversation with the lady.”

Seth looked down at Edmond’s hand gripping my wrist. I did not want a fight; nor did I want Seth getting involved. Using the skills my brother had taught me, I twisted my arm up and broke away from Edmond’s grip.

“I am working, Edmond,” I said. “Please leave.”

I motioned for Steve, our bouncer, who promptly came to assist. He was an ex-Navy SEAL from the States and a good man. He was one of the few men here who didn’t emphasize the rumored fact that I was an ice queen.

“You heard the lady,” said Steve. “It’s time you and your boys leave.”

Edmond jerked his arm away from Steve, keeping his reddish-brown eyes fixed on me. “Later, Rae,” he promised.

I shook against the chills that trembled up my spine. This would not end well for me. When my father heard of it, there would be hell to pay and my credit was dry. With shaking hands, I wiped the bar and lifted Seth’s empty glass from the counter.

“Hey,” he said. “Are you okay?”

I nodded.

He smiled. “That was quite the move. Who taught it to you?”

“My brother—half-brother,” I corrected. “He’s an Aikido master.”

“I like him already.”

I turned the empty glass in my hand. “Um, would you like another?”

He studied me thoughtfully, the way he studied the writing board when Professor Ewig explained the mysteries of man. My face heated.

His smile deepened, nearly undoing me. “I’d love one.”

Another man, a regular, sat beside him. “Don’t waste yer time,” he mumbled. “Ye can’t tame that ice queen.”

I winced, nearly spilling the glass that was horribly over-filled.

“How ’bout a beer for me?” the man asked.

I cast him a stare that was nearly as frigid as the stigma that dubbed me. “Yeah, how ‘bout one,” I mocked him, matching his common slum accent.

“See what I mean?”

Seth stood and walked away from the man without a reply, taking his glass of wine with him. The redhead he had been dancing with joined him at a table. My chest felt as if it were being squeezed by an unseeable force.

## Chapter 3

~ R a e ~

**Finally, it was 2 a.m.** My shift was over and I was beat. I pulled the lock from my bike and stowed it under my saddle. The short ride home always offered time to sort my thoughts. I needed to clear my head. I took a deep breath. The cold, foggy air felt good against my skin.

Across the parking lot, Seth's voice caught my attention. He was talking with the redhead he'd been dancing with, probably arranging where to meet for the night.

Forget about it, I told myself. He's out of my league and far beyond my reach. I turned my bike around and rode in the opposite direction. As I reached the end of the alley, a man stepped in my path.

"Hello, Rae."

It was Edmond, and five of his buddies. My heart pounded, its pulse thumping in my neck. When I tried riding past, Edmond grabbed my handlebars and flung me to the ground.

My left arm fell first as pain tore through my skin. Edmond reached down and hauled me up from the ground.

"Let's talk about your attitude tonight, Rae," he growled, shaking me till my teeth rattled.

I stomped down on his instep, hammer-fisted him in the groin, and then swung my arm up to back-fist his face before twisting myself free.

Two of his buddies grabbed me from behind. Edmond recovered far too quickly and pounded my face with his fist. My head buzzed and my vision blurred. Another hit sent me to the ground.

"Hey!" I heard a voice shout.

One of the blokes kicked me in the leg as I tried to stand. Pain shot through my hip as I collapsed back to the ground.

"Stay out o' this," said Edmond.

Seth stepped into the light. He was surrounded by Edmond's friends.

I looked around for anything I could use as a weapon, anticipating a bloody battle. Edmond was an aggressive man, so I wouldn't put it past him to cause serious injury when invoked. Seth was dangerously outnumbered. Did he even know how to fight?

In the next moment, I would have my answer.

Edmond moved in first, followed by two others. Seth quickly evaded their blows before flipping them to the ground. In a blink, he was surrounded but holding his own. Moving like the dancer he was, he managed just barely to keep away from the men's grasps.

One of the men picked up a bent metal post. I stood and tackled him against the wall. He swung the post at my head. I fell back into the trash cans, cutting my hand.

Another man ran up the alley toward the commotion. He was short but stout. Yelling like a banshee in the midst of death, he pulled two men off Seth as if they weighed next to nothing.

I watched the two men fight, downing Edmond and his blokes with quick, easy moves. One man pulled out a knife and sliced the short man's leg. He wailed, yanked the knife from the man's hand, and then landed a blow to his head that rendered him unconscious.

Seth downed three men before going after Edmond. A sharp blow to his temple sent him crumbling to the ground. Seth ended the fight with a rib-crushing kick to Edmond's stomach.

The six men rolled on the pavement, groaning and bleeding.

"Come on," Seth said, pulling my bike up. "Follow me."

The shorter man, who stood barely an inch above my 5'2" height, and I hurried to catch up. He was limping badly from the wound on his leg. My own body felt as if it had endured an encounter with a fast moving truck. My head was still a bit fuzzy.

Shorty had black hair clipped close to his head, and eyes to match. In the street light, he had an aboriginal appeal. His strong, short fingers gripped my arm.

"You all right?"

I nodded. "Just a bit dizzy is all."

Seth led us down the street, past Malones toward the Quartermile development. He turned onto a long cobblestone drive leading into a complex that resembled an Old World castle of dark stone and massive turrets on all four corners.

He punched in a series of numbers on the keypad and the black iron gate clicked open. Shorty and I followed him in.

Seth leaned my bike against the wall next to a wide oak door that led into an impressively large flat.

He flipped a switch and the entire space lit up.

"Wow," Shorty said. "You live here?"

Seth merely looked at him with indifference before gathering towels, a bowl filled with water, and a black leather bag.

"Sit," he said, pointing to the glass kitchen table surrounded by four black leather chairs. The place smelled of sandalwood and clove, like the man who lived here.

The flat was simple, yet elegant in every way. Hard oak floors and cherrywood cabinets. The countertops were pale green and made of a material that looked like granite but felt warm to the touch.

Rosewood furniture added a bit of color. An oak staircase wound up to the second floor, its rosewood banister polished to a shine.

Seth grabbed my arm and hauled me back to the dining area.

“Sit,” he repeated.

The hard line in his jaw told me he was not a man to fence with at the moment. He looked at my face with no emotion, and then at my arm and bleeding hand.

“Take off your sweater,” he ordered, his voice clipped and stern.

“You don’t have to do this,” I said. “I’m fine, re—” I winced as he dabbed at my face with a warm washcloth.

“That was the man who came onto you at the pub?” he asked, his golden eyes meeting mine. “Who is he to you?”

I winced again. “His name is Edmond. His father works for my father.”

“And the others?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know them.”

“I could use somethin’ t’drink, mate,” Shorty voiced, his leg propped up on a chair. His New Zealand accent was thick and unrefined. I assumed he had grown up outside the cities.

Seth looked at him, and then back at me. “Looks like we all could.”

He stood, graceful and showing no pain. His lithe body seemed flawless, not even a bruise on his face. I watched as he pulled a bottle of single vintage brandy from an over-hanging cabinet along with three glasses. His black turtleneck sweater was misshapen in some places where he had been grabbed. Only a smidgen of blood marred his jeans where he had brushed up against Shorty.

Amber liquid filled three snifters. He carried them over with ease and placed them down before us.

Shorty downed his in one gulp before slamming the glass down on the table.

Seth shook his head in disgust; then he rose and fetched the bottle from the counter. He poured Shorty another drink.

This time, it was savored.

Seth sipped his brandy, studying the two of us. I could only imagine what was going through his mind as he wondered what the hell he had gotten himself into.

Shorty extended his hand across the table. "I'm Nathaniel Dronel," he said. "Call me Nate."

Seth refused the hand and simply nodded. "I am Seth, and this is Raeiza Tomei."

"Rae," I corrected. "Call me, Rae."

A slight smile curled the corners of Seth's mouth. It was a beautiful mouth, full lips and corners that had a natural upward curl to them.

Seth continued with the painful task of cleaning my wounds. When he got to my hand, he frowned.

"This will need stitches."

"Just bandage it up; I'll be fine."

He opened his bag and pulled out a small suture kit. He then retrieved a needle and a bottle of clear liquid. I watched as he sucked the liquid into the syringe.

"This will sting a bit."

"Aren't you only a third-year med student?" I asked, questioning his skills of minor surgery.

"Yes," he replied.

My hand grew numb as he opened the suture kit with confidence and grace.

"They don't teach minor surgery to third-year med students," I said.

"My uncle taught me."

My brow peaked.

"And, I graduate this year," he added.

"You're on a six-year program."

Nate cleared his throat. "He's in the accelerated program."

Seth glanced over at him. "I don't remember seeing you around. Are you a student?"

Nate laughed. "You have a photographic memory and yet you don't remember the bloke who has sat two seats back from you for the past two years?"

Seth frowned.

"You have a photographic memory?" I asked.

“Among other gifts,” Nate replied.

Seth sutured the final stitch, ending it in a neat double knot. His work was fine, as if he had practiced cosmetic surgery for many years. He covered the wound with a white bandage, holding it in place with tape.

“There,” he said. “Keep it dry and clean.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” I said, teasingly.

“Your turn,” he said to Nate. “Off with the pants.”

“I don’t typically down m’pants on the first date,” said Nate, struggling to a stance.

“I find that hard to believe,” I countered, averting my eyes.

“Thank you for the privacy, miss,” he said. “I am a bit shy y’know.”

“Sit,” Seth growled, “before you fall.”

The gash in Nate’s leg oozed with blood. The muscle had been cut across his quads but not completely through.

“Doesn’t look too bad,” I said, peering over Seth’s shoulder.

“Hand me the dissolvable suture kit in that bag,” he said, pointing to the black bag on the floor.

I readied the kit as Seth prepared the injection to numb the area. He offered no warning before piercing the skin.

Nate pressed back against the chair. “Jeezus,” he groaned. “Are you stickin’ me with fire?” He downed the last of his brandy.

Seth poured him another. “I need to clean this out.”

I jumped up and filled another bowl with clean water. Seth was digging through his bag.

“What do you need?” I asked.

“A syringe to push water through.”

I found one and handed it to him. I then retrieved a small bottle of hydrogen peroxide and placed it before him.

His smile was genuine. “You make a pretty good assistant.”

“Only pretty good?”

“Do you mind concentratin’,” Nate groaned. “Are you cleanin’ the bloody thing with sandpaper?”

“Don’t be such a baby,” Seth said. “We’re almost done.”

When he syringed the hydrogen peroxide into the wound, Nate ground his teeth and pressed further back into the chair until it groaned in protest. “Criminy. I don’t think that shot is workin’.”

“I don’t have enough to numb it completely. It will have to do,” said Seth.

After gloving up, I readied the needle and thread before handing it to him. With great precision, he sutured the muscle together. As he was finishing up, I prepared the external suture kit.

Nate was shaking by the time Seth tied the last knot, fashioned a white bandage similar to mine and said, “That should do it.”

With trembling hands, Nate brought the brandy to his lips. “Thanks, mate.”

Seth ran upstairs, taking two steps at a time. He returned with a pair of sweats in his hand and tossed them to Nate. “Put those on.”