The new year was only fifteen minutes away when the mayor of Omaha was admitted to

The Sky’s the Limit. As host, Sky went to the entry to greet the latecomer to the New Year’s Eve party.

“Welcome,” he said with a cordial smile which hid dark and bitter things. Did McGrath have any idea Sky considered him his greatest enemy? Mayor McGrath handed his luxuriously warm overcoat to a fifteen-year-old girl who, until a month ago, had been picking up johns on the icy streets of Omaha. Mayor McGrath gave her a patronizing smile and a pinch on the ass as she took his coat. Though his wolf yearned to tear out the mayor’s throat, Sky maintained his friendly expression through years of practice.

“Tim, I’m glad you could stop in.” Sky shook the mayor’s hand and drew him into the reception room. “I’m sure you have several stops to make tonight.”

The mayor accepted a glass of champagne from a server. “Naturally, I want celebrate with as many of my people as possible, but I wouldn’t miss your party. Where better to ring in the New Year than at one of the fastest growing businesses in town? You’ve done a lot with the place in the past few years.”

Sky smoothed his sapphire blue silk tie with a self-satisfied smirk. At least, he hoped it looked self-satisfied instead of nauseated. “Thanks, Tim. We’re managing to turn a nice profit, as I’m sure you’ve noticed by our taxes.”

“Yes.”

Tim McGrath’s tone was distracted. His gaze was fixed on LaToya, the newest lady in the house. He waved her eagerly over. LaToya shot a pleading look at Sky. He nodded at her and she came over, reluctance showing in her stiff steps. Sky looped an arm over her shoulders and pulled her close to his side.

“This is LaToya James,” he said. “LaToya, say hello to Mayor McGrath.”

“H-h-hello,” she whispered.

“Hello, young lady. Aren’t you a pretty little thing. I want you to join me after midnight.”

Sky produced a smile intended to convey regret. “LaToya is new. She just turned eighteen on Christmas Eve. I’m not ready to share her yet.” Without giving the mayor a chance to respond, he brushed his lips over LaToya’s hair. “Help Mrs. Nord in the kitchen, baby, and send Aimee over to us.”

The mayor chuckled while he watched LaToya hurry away. “One of the perks of being the owner of a whorehouse is sampling the employees?”

Sky shrugged enigmatically. He’d named his house The Sky’s the Limit because he had limits. Some lines he would never cross, and wouldn’t allow anyone else to either.

“I heard you’re engaged to a girl back home.” McGrath sipped his champagne with a raised brow.

*And you’ve been married to a good woman for nearly thirty years*, Sky inwardly sneered. *Doesn’t stop you from humping any girl you can get your hands on*. He nodded at Aimee as she joined them. She was beautiful and young enough to interest McGrath, and fully aware what she could expect from the mayor. “Tim, this is Aimee Chambord. I don’t think you’ve met her before?”

The mayor smiled widely at Aimee’s gaping décolletage. “Why no, I don’t believe I’ve met Ms. Chambord. Can I get you a glass of champagne, my dear? Will you excuse us, Sky?”

Sky waved them off with hidden relief. He circulated through the large set of reception rooms, checking to see that the bouncers were alert and none of his ladies was being mistreated. He was an Alpha wolf, and the men and women who worked in this house were his Pack, to protect and provide for. And —his eyes went cold when they found McGrath— kill for.

He glanced at his reflection as he passed a mirror on the landing of the main staircase. His black hair was neatly cut, his black silk suit was expensively elegant, his tie the same vivid blue as his eyes. A wave of weary disgust passed over him. No one in the Clan would recognize him. Even he didn’t recognize himself some days. There were times he doubted his wolf approved of him.

Quill, his cousin and beta, joined him, handing him a glass of champagne. Ms. Julia, the lady who had saved them when they’d first come to Omaha years ago, came with him and stood between them at the fancy carved railing. The three of them looked down over the dozens of people coming together to watch the clock count down the last few minutes of the year 2069.

“I’m leaving in the spring,” Quill said quietly.

Sky knew the day was coming when Quill wouldn’t be able to bear the vice and intrigue of Omaha, but he flinched anyway. “I understand, but I’m going to miss you.”

“Come with me,” Quill urged.

Sky watched McGrath as the man sipped champagne from Aimee’s cleavage. “I can’t. I have to finish what I’ve started.”

Ms. Julia, aging but not stupid, patted his arm. “What about your fiancée, honey? You let everyone think the wrong thing, but you can’t fool me. You love that girl. Go get her and bring her home.”

Rose. The mate his wolf had chosen for him five years ago. Longing so deep and sharp it was painful cramped Sky’s belly. He wrapped one hand over the bannister to brace himself. He could almost feel her blond hair under his fingers, the trembling warmth of her mouth under his. “I can‘t bring her here.”

Ms. Julia pursed her lips. “No girl is going to wait forever, you know, not even for a handsome young devil like you.”

“She’ll wait.” Grim certainty rang in Sky’s voice. Taye would see to it. But, oh, God, how he wanted to see her.

Quill met his eyes over the top of Ms. Julia’s silvering head and Sky knew that Quill understood. The two of them, deprived of their mates for over five years, understood each other’s pain all too well.

“Five!” shouted the crowd. “Four! Three! Two! ONE! Happy New Year!”

As horns blared and confetti swirled, Sky lifted his glass. “To Rose,” he whispered, and drank.