



Rescued By My Mate

Author: *Luna Wilder*

Category: Romance, Paranormal

Description: He'll do whatever it takes to rescue his fated mate.

Mabel

I can't wait to get out of this freaking town.

My friend, Dillon, and I have been social pariahs pretty much our whole lives after an incident when we were kids and we're both ready to start over fresh somewhere new.

So, as soon as we turn eighteen, we hit the road.

Unfortunately for us, we don't make it very far.

Miles

When I get the call for the car accident, I'm expecting to find a routine scene.

What I don't expect is her.

My fated mate.

I've dreamed of this moment for years, and now I've found her, I won't let anything take her from me.

So, I pull her from the wreckage and rush her to the hospital, determined to protect her at all costs.

She'll be okay, but the real challenge lies ahead.

Now, I need to figure out how to tell my human mate we're destined to be together.

And do it without scaring her away in the process.

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ONE

Mabel

“It feels good, doesn’t it?” my best friend, Dillon, asks from the passenger seat.

“The hot air from the air conditioner?” I ask wryly.

She snorts. “No, that feels terrible. We shouldn’t even be running the AC. It’s cooler without it on.”

“The car turns off when it’s not on,” I remind her.

“Riding in style,” she jokes.

Now it’s my turn to laugh. “Feels good.”

“That’s not what I meant,” she corrects. “I mean, this feels good. Freedom. No more dealing with judgmental assholes. No more strange men. Just us and all the possibilities.”

“Yeah, it’s nice,” I say softly.

It is. Dillon and I have been outcasts for our whole lives. We lived in a town where everyone knew everyone, and we hated it.

The two of us didn’t have the best start in life. Dillon’s mom jumped from man to

man and was always more focused on her next date than her kid. It was just my dad and me. My mom died in labor with me. I could never figure out if my dad was a drunk and an addict before I was born or if that happened because he lost my mom. Either way, it doesn't matter. He was never home. We rarely had electricity or running water because he spent all his money on his vices.

Dillon and I met and became best friends in kindergarten. Our parents were always the last ones to pick us up, so we spent a lot of time together. Soon, we were inseparable. I could talk to her about my problems at home and not be judged. She would try to help, and I did the same for her.

We always dreamed of escaping our small town in Idaho, but we didn't start actively planning for it until we were thirteen. That was the Christmas my dad went on a bender and left for three weeks. He missed the holiday altogether, and he didn't pay the electrical bill. I was freezing in our small apartment, so I left to find somewhere warm. I ran into Dillon on my way to the library. Her mom kicked her out so she could entertain her new guy.

We tried the library, but they were closed. Everything was closed, and we were freezing, so I came up with the brilliant idea to break into an empty house. The plan worked for a few days, and Dillon and I were safe, warm, and fed.

Then, the owners of the house came home and caught us.

Instead of being sympathetic to the two scared girls huddled in their living room, they called the cops and pressed charges.

Dillon and I spent the night in juvie, and when we got out, the whole town looked at us differently. We weren't just less than because of our families—we were criminals. Everything got worse from there.

So, we started planning.

We both worked part-time jobs, took tutoring assignments, babysat, cut grass, anything we could do to make a few extra dollars. All the money was squirreled away, hidden from our parents until we were ready to leave.

That moment happened a few days ago. We were finally high school graduates, both eighteen, and it was time. So, we packed up my rusted-up beater and hit the road.

The plan is to travel down the coast to Los Angeles to find jobs and an apartment. We have eight months of expenses saved and tucked in our suitcases in the trunk.

Leaving town was surreal. It was scary but also so liberating. We can go anywhere we want. No one knows us. No one is judging us. We're free.

"Can we stop at the next town?" Dillon asks, squirming in her seat.

"Sure. It would be nice to get out and stretch my legs a bit."

"I wonder if we're close to the coast. Maybe we can see the water," she says, pulling out her old phone to look at the GPS.

"What's the next town called?"

Dillon studies the screen. "Um...looks like we have a choice between Red Fog or Twisted Oak."

"Great names," I joke.

"I know, right?" She laughs. "We're just past Red Fog, so driving to Twisted Oak would make sense."

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“Sounds good. Let me know when to turn.”

The car sputters, and I sigh as a puff of dust blows from the vents.

“Might be a good time to let the car cool off, too,” Dillon comments, and I nod.

“Yeah, we can get some gas and stuff too.”

We drive in silence for a few miles before the turn for Twisted Oak comes into view.

“If we turn here and continue for about four miles, we should pass a gas station,” Dillon says, setting her phone back in the cup holder.

“Got it.”

“We should figure out where we want to stop for the night soon, too,” she adds.

“I can drive for a few more hours if the car can handle it.”

“I can drive for a bit, too. Give you a break,” she offers.

“Sounds good.”

“I’ll cover gas. Let me just grab my purse.”

Dillon twists in her seat, and I take the turn toward town. I make it a few more feet before it happens.

A flash of gray fur darts in front of the car. I gasp, slamming on the brakes and swerving. I try to avoid the giant wolves on the road, but it's useless. I'm going too fast, and the tires are too bald. They skid across the gravel road.

"Mabel!" Dillon screams, reaching for me as the car runs off the road.

We skid into the ditch. I hear the crash of breaking glass, bending metal and Dillon screaming as we tear through the bushes, heading right for a patch of trees.

The car jerks and my head smacks the driver's side window. I wince, yelping as the pain radiates through my head. A gush of something warm spills from my forehead, and red liquid pours into my eyes.

Then everything goes dark.

TWO

Miles

"Don't you dare," Jensen warns me as my foot inches toward his chair.

I grin, but he doesn't so much as glance my way. His eyes are locked on the little basketball hoop on the back of the break room door. His tongue pokes out of the corner of his mouth as he throws the basketball. We watch as it hits the rim, bounces, and sinks into the net.

"Yes!" he cheers, turning to me with a victorious smirk.

"Lucky throw," I grumble.

"It's pure talent," he argues.

I roll my eyes. “Let’s go again.”

“All right.” He sighs. “Might as well. It’s not like there’s anything else to do.”

He’s right. We’re EMTs for Twisted Oak, which means there’s never much of anything for us to do. Almost everyone in town is a shifter, and they can all heal themselves for the most part. Which means Jensen and I spend a lot of our time on shift playing cards or basketball or watching TV.

“Maybe we’ll get a call soon,” I say.

He snorts. “Doubt it. I don’t think we should be hoping for that since it would mean someone was in trouble or the Red Fog Pack pulled another stunt.”

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“It’s been quiet the last few weeks. Maybe they’ve gotten the message to back off after the Alphas went for their last visit.”

“Maybe. I hope so. Although, I doubt they’ll give up that easily. I mean, they were willing to burn down houses. They sent their daughter to spy here. It seems weird that a few warnings from our Alphas would scare them off.”

“Our pack numbers are greater than theirs. Maybe they realized they couldn’t win.”

Jensen frowns. “Maybe.”

My wolf paws at me, and I sigh.

We can’t go for a run right now, I tell him. We’re on shift.

He growls, and I shake my head.

We’ll go for a run after work. I promise.

He paces inside me, but I ignore him and pick up the basketball.

Jensen and I grew up together. We were both orphaned when we were young and lived in the same group home. It was hard being the only two shifters there, so we became closer than most.

After we aged out of the home, we left and moved between a few packs until we found a good fit with the Twisted Oak Pack. We’ve lived here for the last two years

and have put down roots here. We have friends and connections here. The pack is great, and I trust the Alphas.

The only thing missing is our mates.

“Maybe we should take a vacation,” I suggest.

“And go where?” Jensen asks, stealing the ball from me.

“On a road trip. We can travel and see if we can find our fated mates.”

I see the longing on Jensen’s face. He wants what he used to have.

Jensen became an orphan when he was ten, and he remembers what it was like to have a family. I was a lot younger when I lost my parents, and I don’t remember them at all. That doesn’t stop me from yearning for my mate, though.

My wolf whines as he thinks about our mate.

“We could quit and bounce between packs or stations,” I suggest. “It’s not like they need us here.”

“They have recently. I don’t want to leave the guys here hanging.”

I know he’s right.

I steal the ball back from him before he can shoot it and toss it at the net, sinking it easily.

“One nothing,” I tell him.

As Jensen tries to get the ball back, the alarm blares.

We leap into action, racing to our ambulance. Harris and Logan, two of the firefighters, tug on their gear and head for the firetruck as we pull out of the station.

“Any info?” I ask over the radio as Jensen drives the ambulance out of the lot.

“Car accident. Out by the town line. 89thstreet,” says the dispatcher.

“On it.”

Jensen hits the gas, and we follow the cop car to the outskirts of town. I notice the flashing lights from Tucker’s police car before I see the wreckage of the accident. Jensen parks next to the front of the car, and we hop out. I grab my bag and head to the driver’s side door, crouching in the ditch to peer through the broken glass of the window.

“Both unresponsive,” Tucker tells us.

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“Doors are caved in,” Jensen says.

“Car must have rolled,” I agree, looking back at the skid marks on the road.

“Wonder what happened. It’s just the one car?” Jensen asks.

Tucker nods. “Yeah. No signs of damage or other tire marks on the road.”

I try the door, but it’s buckled and jammed shut.

“Any luck with your side?” I ask Jensen.

He shakes his head. “No.”

The driver stirs, her head lolling against the headrest.

“Stay still!” I call. “You’ve been in an accident. We’re here to help.”

The woman moans and shifts again.

I look over the hood of the car at Jensen. “We need to get in there.”

He nods grimly.

I grab the glass-breaking tool and smash the rear window. Jensen moves next to me, assessing the victims.

The driver shifts again.

That's when it happens.

Her scent.

MATE! My wolf howls, lunging inside me.

I strain to hold him back. Now is not the time.

"Mate," I growl at the same time as Jensen.

We both freeze, our eyes locking together.

What the hell is going on here?

THREE

Mabel

I wince as I crack one eye open.

"Stay still!" a male voice commands.

My throat is on fire. Every inch of me hurts, and I cry out as I lift my arm to brush my hair out of my face.

"Dillon?" I croak.

I try to turn my head to the right, but my neck hurts too much.

“We’re going to get you out,” the man tells me. “Just stay still.”

A moment later, the whir of a machine starts, and the terrible screech of metal bending fills the quiet air. Squinting, I see the jaws of life prying my door open.

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I startle as the door crashes open, looking into the eyes of the most handsome man I've ever seen.

Worried blue eyes meet mine. I swallow, but my throat is dry as a desert.

"You're going to be okay," he tells me.

His brown hair falls over his forehead as he moves to cut my seatbelt.

"Can you tell me what hurts?" he asks.

"Everything," I rasp.

"Yeah, I'm not surprised. Do you remember what happened? Do you remember hitting anything?"

"Wolves."

He freezes. "Wolves?"

I nod, wincing as the ache in my head intensifies.

He pulls on gloves and gently prods the sore spot on my forehead. "Try to stay still. You hit your head."

Tears prick my eyes. "Oh, God. I... Is Dillon okay?"

The man looks stricken. “Dillon? Is that your friend’s name?”

“Yes! Is she okay?”

“My partner is working on her. She’s in good hands.”

“I can’t lose her,” I whisper.

“You won’t,” he promises.

For some strange reason, I believe him.

The man is handsome, but there’s something else about him. His presence calms me and puts me at ease. I feel connected to him.

Must be because he saved me.

I try to move again to see Dillon, but the guy holds me in place.

“Stay still. I’m getting you out.”

An EMT wheels a stretcher over and puts a neck brace on me, carefully tightening it. His gentleness brings tears to my eyes. Guess it makes sense. I haven’t had much comfort or kindness in my life.

My handsome rescuer smiles reassuringly. “I’ll help you onto the stretcher. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“We’ll go slow. Just take it easy. Can you move your legs?”

“I think so.”

I slide one foot to the door and set it on the ground carefully.

“That’s it,” he encourages.

“Oh!” I shout as I twist, and a stabbing pain erupts in my side.

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“Easy, mate,” he says, grabbing my hips.

“My ribs,” I pant, trying to breathe through the pain.

“I’ve got you,” he says softly.

He gently lifts me out of the car and shifts me onto the stretcher. “Let me get the back. Are you comfortable?”

I lean back. “I think I’m as good as I’m going to get right now.”

He nods, his expression grim.

My eyes widen as he moves aside, and I see the wreckage of my car. My hands fly to my mouth. “Oh, my god!”

“Shh, I know it looks bad, but you’re okay. Dillon is going to be okay.”

“That car was everything,” I say, tears spilling onto my cheeks.

“We’ll get your things out of the car. I promise.”

I see Dillon as they lift her out of the car. Her eyes are closed, and panic slams into me. She’s unconscious.

“Why isn’t she waking up?” I ask, panicked.

“She will. We’re working on her,” the EMT assures me. “We need to get you to the hospital.”

He pushes my stretcher toward the ambulance, but my eyes remain locked on Dillon.

“She’ll be right next to you,” my rescuer reassures me, squeezing my hand. “What’s your name?”

“Mabel.”

“Nice to meet you, Mabel. I’m Miles.”

I nod, looking at Dillon as her stretcher is moved next to mine.

I automatically touch the throbbing area on my head, and a second later, blood trickles into my eyes.

“Shit!” I hiss.

“Easy. You opened the wound again,” Miles tells me.

I wince as he works to stop the bleeding.

“Ready?” another guy calls.

“Yeah, let’s go,” Miles says.

The ambulance doors close, and we head to the hospital.

We hit a few potholes, and I grimace as the pain in my ribs and head increases, making my vision fuzzy at the edges.

“Stay with me,” Miles urges, clutching my hand.

His glowing eyes are the last thing I remember before I pass out.

FOUR

Miles

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Jensen and I rattle off stats as soon as the ambulance bay doors open. The nurses and doctors help us wheel the stretchers in, and I split off from Jensen and his patient to stay with my mate.

“Single-vehicle accident. The patient is female with head trauma, cuts, and abrasions,” I tell the doctors.

The medical team moves Mabel from the stretcher to a hospital bed. I step to the side of the room and watch as they pull glass shards from her shoulder.

“She needs a full body CT scan,” the doctor instructs.

I trail after them as she’s wheeled her down the hall, pacing once I get to the door labeled staff only. My wolf growls at me. He hates not having our mate in our sights.

She’ll be okay, I tell him, trying to assure both of us.

It seems to take forever for her to come back out.

I pounce on the doctor as soon as I see him. “So?”

“She has a concussion, and she’s pretty banged up, but she’ll be okay.”

Relief slams into me, and I sag against the wall. A concussion and some bruises. Thank God that’s the extent of her injuries.

I hurry to catch up as they wheel her away.

“We gave her some pain medicine. She needs to stay awake,” the doctor adds as the nurses move Mabel to a bed.

“I’ll talk to her. Keep her occupied,” I assure him.

My wolf growls inside me. He’s on edge, which only increases my unease.

Mabel is groggy, but her eyes are open. She flinches as she shifts in the hospital bed.

I move closer to her side. “What hurts?”

“Everything,” she rasps.

The shoulder of her loose shirt slips to the side, and I wince when I see the thick line of bruises already forming across her chest and neck. It must be from the seatbelt. She’ll be black and blue for a while.

We could bite her and heal her faster, my wolf points out.

I grit my teeth. She’s human. If we bite her, she’ll freak out.

But she’s hurting, and we can help her.

Not yet! I snap before he can tempt me to do just that.

He growls and continues to pace inside me.

“The pain medicine will kick in soon,” I reassure her.

She nods and grimaces, her hand flying to her head. They’ve bandaged her cut, but I’m sure it’ll be tender for a few days.

Or we could bite her now, and she could skip all that, my wolf growls.

I ignore him.

“Where’s Dillon? Is she okay?” Mabel asks.

I swallow hard. “I’m not sure. They took her somewhere else. She probably needed a scan,” I say, trying to comfort her.

Her eyes widen in fear, telling me I’m not doing a very good job.

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“Was she awake?”

“I’m not sure.”

Mabel tries to sit up.

“Take it easy,” I warn, placing a gentle hand on her uninjured shoulder to stop her.

“I need to know that she’s okay. She’s family,” she says, her eyes filling with tears.

“I’ll find out, okay? I’ll ask about her.”

“Okay.” She nods, looking relieved.

I squeeze her hand before turning to leave the room in search of Dillon and Jensen.

The door opens before I reach it, and Jensen wheels Dillon into the room. She’s still unconscious, and she’s been bandaged up. But what catches my attention is the bite mark on her neck.

My eyes fly to Jensen’s, but he looks away, his gaze on his mate as the nurses get Dillon settled. I pull back the curtain in the middle of the room so my mate can see her friend.

As soon as we’re alone, I turn to Jensen and raise an eyebrow.

“She was dying,” he whispers. “I bit her to save her. I didn’t have a choice.”

My wolf snarls, jealous that our friend has claimed his mate.

“They’re humans,” I point out. “You’ll have to explain the bite mark to her. And everything else.”

“I know. I will. I just... I couldn’t lose her.”

I get it. I would’ve done the same thing in his position.

So do it, my wolf snarls.

It’s not the same. Our mate will be okay without our healing powers.

But is she going to stay with us and believe that we’re fated mates

I tense. I hope so. Even though Jensen bit Dillon, he has no guarantee she’ll stay with him.

He snorts but doesn’t argue. I look back at my mate. She’s staring at Dillon worriedly as I move back to her side.

I need to keep her awake.

And somehow, I need to figure out how to make our mate see that we’re meant to be.

FIVE

Mabel

I stare at Dillon for a long time. My eyes sting, and my head throbs, but I refuse to look away. I realize I was in shock at the accident site because it’s all hitting me now.

We almost died.

I almost lost Dillon, the only real family I have left.

Our car is totaled.

How much will the ambulance and the hospital bills cost?

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Where's our stuff?

"Oh, God," I hiccup, the tears I was trying to hold back finally spilling onto my cheeks.

"Hey, it's okay. You're okay. You're both okay," Miles says, rushing to my side.

"Everything is messed up now," I sob.

He wraps his arms around me gently. "It'll be all right. You're both alive."

"My car. Our stuff," I say through my tears.

"Your car was towed."

"It's totaled."

"I know." He sighs. "We'll get your things. We can find you a new car."

"It won't matter. We can't afford it. Our plan..." I trail off as I realize our plan of moving to Los Angeles just went up in smoke.

"We'll figure it out," Miles reassures me.

I look up at him and frown. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

"It's... a long story."

“What does that mean?”

“I just...I think you could use a friend right now.”

My frown deepens. “That’s not what you were going to say.”

He smiles wryly. “No, but you need to rest right now. I’ll explain later.”

“Why not now? I have nothing else to do,” I point out.

“I—”

The door opens, and I turn to see two policemen entering the room.

“Hey, is now a good time to ask a few questions?” one of the officers asks.

“Sure. Mabel, this is Crew and Tucker. They found your car and were the first on the scene,” Miles says, introducing me to the cops.

“Nice to meet you,” Crew says.

“You too.”

Tucker moves to stand at the foot of the bed. “Can you tell us what happened?”

“We were planning to stop in town for gas and to stretch our legs,” I start, swallowing as memories bombard me.

Miles takes my hand, offering his silent support. It helps more than he could know.

“Where were you coming from?” Tucker asks.

“Idaho.”

“Long way from home.”

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“It’s not our home,” I snap, harsher than intended.

I take a deep breath as Miles squeezes my hand. “I’m sorry. I...It’s not our home. We were leaving.”

“Then what happened?” Crew prompts.

“We were driving, and three wolves suddenly ran across the road in front of the car.”

Tucker frowns. “Three wolves? Are you sure?”

I nod.

“Which way were they going?” Crew asks.

“Um, north, I think. They appeared from our left.”

The men all share a dark look, and I wonder what that means. Before I can ask, Tucker asks, “what happened next?”

“I couldn’t stop. It’s my fault,” I say, fresh tears spilling onto my cheeks.

“It was an accident,” Miles says softly.

“Is Dillon going to be okay? Did we hit the wolves? I...It all happened so fast,” I murmur.

“It was just the two of you at the accident scene,” Crew assures me.

“And Dillon is going to be fine. She has a few internal injuries, so she’ll need to take it easy for a bit, but she’ll be okay.”

Tucker smiles. “We have enough for our report. We’ll let you rest.”

I nod. “Thanks.”

“Rest up,” Crew adds before they both leave the room.

I turn back to Miles. “You can leave, too. I’ll be okay.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

I study Jensen as he sits at Dillon’s bedside. He’s watching over her so intently, almost like he’s willing her to be all right. His intensity is odd, considering he only met her recently.

Maybe she was his first patient or the worst accident he’s been to.

Miles is still holding my hand. I should probably pull away, but it’s good to have him touching me. It’s been so long since someone was concerned about me and my well-being. The feelings he stirs in me are almost foreign.

“Where were you two headed?” Miles asks.

I blink. “Um, California. Los Angeles.”

“Yeah? What’s there?”

“Freedom,” I whisper.

His eyes narrow worriedly. “Freedom from what?”

“Everything.”

“What happened in Idaho?”

I look away from him. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

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“Okay. Tell me about Dillon.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to see you smile, and I have a feeling that will do it.”

He’s not wrong.

“She’s my family. It’s been the two of us for as long as I can remember.”

“I get that. Jensen and I are the same way.” He nods at the silent man beside Dillon.

“We’ve been working on this plan for our next chapter for a while. It was going great.”

“It’ll be all right.”

“Easy for you to say. We now need to find the money for an ambulance ride, hospital bills, another car, and anything else that was broken.”

“I can help with that.”

“Why would you do that?” I ask suspiciously.

“I want to help you.”

“Why?”

He grins. “Are you always this distrustful?”

“It’s easier that way.”

“Easier?”

“Can’t get hurt.”

We’re both silent for a moment, processing my words.

Miles shares a look with Jensen before he turns back to me. “You should be released soon.”

“What about Dillon?”

“She’ll probably have to stay for a few days.”

“Is there a hotel or something nearby?”

“Kind of, but it’s in rough shape. You can stay with me. My place is right around the corner.”

“You don’t have to do that,” I protest.

He waves me off. “I don’t mind. I’ll get you settled in once you’re released and take you to dinner.”

“Are you asking me out?” I ask in disbelief.

He gives me a sheepish grin. “Yeah. What do you say?”

“Do you hit on all your patients? That’s a weird technique.”

“Nope, just you.”

“Listen, I’m flattered, but we’re just passing through. We shouldn’t get attached to each other.”

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“Too late,” he mumbles, looking at Jensen and then back at me. “Listen, I have to tell you something.”

“Okay...”

“It’s that long story I mentioned earlier.”

I’m silent as he gathers his thoughts.

He clears his throat and looks me dead in the eye. “I’m a wolf shifter.”

I wait for him to explain what the hell that is, but he just stares at me.

“All right...”

“And we’re fated mates.”

“Uh-huh...”

“And you have no idea what I’m talking about, do you?”

“Not a clue.”

He sighs heavily and closes his eyes for a moment. “I’m a shifter. I can turn into a wolf.”

“Are you insane? Did you hit your head when you were rescuing me or something?”

“It’s the truth. We’re both shifters,” he says, nodding to Jensen.

“Right. Okay. Well?—”

“And we’re fated mates. We’re meant to be together. I knew it as soon as I scented you.”

“Oh, my god,” I groan.

“I can prove it,” he insists.

He pushes to his feet and pulls off his shirt.

“Whoa! What are you doing?”

“I have to.”

“Have to strip? Really? Is that a shifter rule or something?”

“I’ll tear my clothes otherwise.”

He pulls off his shirt and kicks off his boots. When he reaches for his pants, I look away. My eyes lock with Jensen’s.

“He’s telling the truth,” he says. “Watch.”

I take a deep breath before I turn back to Miles. He’s naked, but I refuse to look below his chin.

“Ready?”

“Um, sure?”

He nods, and then it happens.

He changes.

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One minute, Miles is standing before me, and the next, a giant wolf has taken his place.

“Holy shit!” I shout, wincing as I fall back in my hospital bed.

The giant wolf pads forward. I flinch, my mind flashing back to the accident and the wolves that ran in front of our car.

The wolf whines, nudging my hand.

I take a deep breath. “Okay, I believe you,” I whisper.

A moment later, Miles shifts again. He tugs his clothes back on and returns to my bedside. “So... how about that dinner?”

I gape at him, wondering what the hell I’m supposed to do now.

SIX

Miles

“I’ll getus something from the hospital cafeteria. They should still be open.”

I look to Jensen, and he nods, silently letting me know he’ll look out for Mabel while I’m gone.

I know Mabel is still processing now she knows about my wolf. That’s okay. I get it.

But I'm not letting her go. My wolf nods in agreement.

"Any allergies I should know about?"

"No."

I nod. "All right, I'll be right back."

Leaving the room, I walk down the hall to the elevator. I check my phone as I wait for the elevator to arrive, seeing a message from Harris. He and Logan drove the ambulance back to the station, and Logan dropped my car off before he went home. I text back a thanks and tuck my phone into my pocket.

I completely forgot about the ambulance. I was so focused on my mate and ensuring she was all right.

I know I have to work fast with Mabel. I have a feeling she'll be leaving town as soon as she and Dillon get the all-clear from the doctors. I can't let her leave town. Not without me, anyway.

Plus, the full moon is coming soon, my wolf adds.

I grab a bunch of sandwiches and snacks from the cafeteria and head back to my mate. When I step off the elevator, I see Jensen in the hall and jog over to him.

"Is something wrong?"

He shakes his head. "No, the doctor is examining your mate. I didn't think you'd want me to see your mate like that, so I gave them some privacy."

"Thanks, man."

“So...”

“So.”

“Things went better than I expected when you shifted.”

“She completely freaked out,” I remind him.

“Yeah. Maybe turning into a giant wolf after a car accident involving three giant wolves wasn’t the best idea.”

“Shit. Fuck, I didn’t mean to traumatize her. I only wanted to prove I wasn’t crazy or lying.”

“I know. I didn’t think about it either until I saw her face.”

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I lean against the wall next to him and sigh. “What now?”

“My mate’s meds are wearing off. Her body is healing, and she should wake in a few hours.”

I can tell Jensen is on edge to finally meet his mate and explain things to her.

“I better head in,” I tell him.

The doctor is finishing up as I enter the room. He smiles at me, and I take that as a good sign.

“I was just telling our patient that we’ll be discharging her soon. She needs to rest, and she’ll be sore for a bit, but she can heal in the comfort of her own bed instead of in the hospital,” he says.

“That’s great.”

Mabel nods, and her eyes cut to Dillon.

“What about her friend?” I ask before she can.

“She’ll be here for a few days at least. Her injuries were more extensive,” the doctor says before leaving the room.

I sit in my seat and dump the food and bottled water on the bedside table.

“I can’t leave without Dillon,” Mabel says as Jensen enters and sits next to his mate’s bed.

“She’s going to be okay,” I assure her. “You can stay at my place. It’s close by, so you can come back during the day for visiting hours.”

“I’m not sleeping with you.”

“I can take the couch.”

She huffs out a laugh. “I meant sex.”

My wolf whines, but I shush him.

“All right. You can still stay with me.”

She eyes me for a moment, and I try to look trustworthy. I don’t know what’s happened to my mate to make her so skittish and distrustful, but I want to fix it. I want to be someone she can trust.

Mabel nods. She grabs a club sandwich from the pile of food, tears open the wrapper, and takes a big bite.

I smile as I grab a sandwich for myself. “Do you have your car key? I can go grab your bags.”

“I...I don’t know where it is.”

“Cops probably took it. I’ll reach out to Tucker and Crew.”

She nods, looking worried.

“It’ll be okay. Worst case is I pry the trunk open.”

She nods again and takes another bite of her sandwich. “How long have you been an EMT?”

“A few years. We started right after we graduated from high school.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-three. How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

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“And you’re traveling by yourselves?”

“No family.”

She’s tense. Her family and old life are sore spots for her. My wolf growls, wanting to tear anyone who has ever hurt her apart.

“We don’t have any either.”

Her eyes soften. “At least you have each other.”

“Yeah, we have each other.” I glance at Jensen who nods. Turning back to my mate, I say, “We were in a group home together. When did you and Dillon meet?”

“Kindergarten. Our parents always picked us up late, so we hung out a lot. Turns out we had a lot in common and became fast friends.”

“I’m glad that you had someone and weren’t alone.”

“Me too.”

Mabel’s eyes fill with tears as she looks at her unconscious friend. I open my mouth to tell her everything will be okay, but a nurse bustles in with Mabel’s discharge paperwork and medicine.

“You need to sign a few pages, and you’ll be all set,” she tells us.

I gather the rest of the food as Mabel signs the paperwork.

Jensen nods his thanks as I pass the food to him. "I'm not leaving."

"I figured."

"All set," the nurse announces.

I help Mabel out of bed, and she leans on me as we shuffle toward the door.

"He gets to stay?" she asks, nodding at Jensen.

"He has to talk to her and fill out the paperwork once she wakes up," I lie.

Well, it's only a partial lie. We do have paperwork to fill out.

"I'll call you as soon as she wakes up," Jensen tells us.

Mabel relaxes beside me. "Okay."

I nod. "Good. Now, let's go home."

SEVEN

Mabel

"My car is over here," Miles says, indicating a modern SUV.

He unlocks it, and I freeze as I look at the passenger seat. I can't bring myself to get any closer. My heart races, beating out of control in my chest, and I feel like I'm going to pass out.

“Whoa! Easy, Mabel,” he soothes, wrapping his arms around me and blocking my view of the car.

“I can’t get in there,” I choke out.

He nods against the top of my head. “We don’t have to. I live right around the corner. We’ll walk.”

“Okay,” I whisper.

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He rubs my back, and I suck in a deep breath.

“That’s it. Another deep breath,” he coaches me.

I lean against him as I try to calm down. It takes a few minutes, but I’m soon feeling better. Or as good as I can feel at this moment.

“Come on. My place is only a few blocks this way.”

Miles wraps his arm around my shoulder and supports me as we walk down the sidewalk to his place.

“Here it is.”

I look up at the townhouse, taking in the small-town charm of the building.

“You own the whole thing?” I ask as we head up the stairs.

He unlocks the door. “Yeah. Jensen lives right next door,” he says, pointing to the townhouse to his left.

“It’s good he’s so close.”

“Yeah, it comes in handy. We can carpool to work, and it’s easy to hang out.”

We head inside, and I look around the tidy space.

“I’ll give you the tour before you shower and get some rest,” he says.

“Okay.”

“Kitchen, living room, and laundry room are here on the first floor.”

I look around for a moment before he takes my hand, and we head for the stairs.

“How many floors is it?”

“Three. This is floor two,” he says as we step off the last stair. “There’s another living space, a bathroom, and the main bedroom on this floor. The floor above has another bathroom and two bedrooms, but I use it mainly for storage.”

“Where am I staying?” I ask as I look up at the floor above us. My entire body hurts, and I’m not sure I can make it up another floor. Not with the way my head is pounding and how tired I feel.

“You can take my room. The guest rooms aren’t set up for anyone.”

“And you?”

“I’ll take the couch. Right here in case you need anything or Jensen calls.”

“I can take the couch,” I offer.

He shakes his head. “No, it’s fine. You’ll be more comfortable in the bed. I’ll need to check on you every hour. Make sure that you’re all right.”

My head protests as I nod.

“Come on. I’ll get you a change of clothes and help you turn on the shower.”

“Okay.”

His room smells so good, and I try to be discreet as I breathe in his masculine scent. It’s as if everything about this guy is designed to put me at ease. Like he’s exactly what I need, what I didn’t realize I was missing.

“Here you go,” Miles says as he passes me a shirt, sweatpants, and a pair of his boxers.

“Thanks.”

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“Let me get the shower going for you, and then I’ll give you some privacy.”

I follow him into the ensuite and watch as he leans over and turns on the shower, fiddling with the temperature.

“All good,” he says with a smile.

I wish he were mine.

“Thanks.”

I close the bathroom door behind him and lean against it. My head is killing me, and I’m not sure if it’s because of the accident or trying to wrap my head around him being my fated mate and a wolf shifter.

I strip carefully and step under the hot spray, sighing as it eases the tension in my muscles.

I know I should figure out what to do with Miles and all he’s told me, but I don’t have the mental bandwidth to do it right now. I’m too tired and worried about Dillon and what all this means for our savings and grand plan.

I smother a yawn and turn the water off. There’s only one towel hanging up, and I grab it and dry off. I pull on Miles’s borrowed clothes and laugh when I see how big they are on my petite frame.

Oh well. At least they’re comfortable.

I pad out to the bedroom and see Miles sitting on the edge of the bed.

“All set?”

I nod. “Yeah, thanks. Any word from Jensen?”

“No. He said the doctor just checked on her. The medicine is wearing off, and they expect her to wake up in a few hours. I’ll keep you posted, and you’ll know more as soon as I do.”

“Thank you,” I say softly. “For all of this. I don’t know what I would have done if?—”

“It’s my pleasure,” he cuts me off. “Now, let’s get you tucked in.”

He pulls back the covers and passes me a bottle of water with some pain pills. “You’ll need more in four hours. I’ll wake you up then.”

“I can set an alarm.”

He shakes his head. “Concussion protocol. I’ll wake you up.”

I take the pills from him, swallowing them down. I slip into bed and he tucks the sheets around me so tight that I’m not sure I’ll be able to move.

“All right. I’ll be back in a bit to check on you. Try to get some rest.”

Miles heads out of the room, leaving the door ajar. I see him getting settled on the couch and smother another yawn before my eyes drift shut.

It feels like I barely close my eyes before Miles shakes me awake.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

I crack an eye open to look at him. “You forgot already?”

He laughs. “Gotta make sure you’re all right, my mate. What’s your name?”

“Mabel Jones.”

“And what month is it, Mabel Jones?”

“June.”

“All right. Go back to sleep.”

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I nod and pass out again.

This routine repeats five more times through the night. By the time he wakes me up at seven, I answer him before he can ask me anything.

“I’m Mabel, and it’s June,” I grumble.

He laughs. It’s quickly becoming my favorite sound.

“Are you hungry, smartass?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Good. I made breakfast. You need to get up because Dillon is awake.”

I’m instantly alert. “Dillon?”

“Yeah. Jensen just called me.”

I throw the covers off and leap from the bed. Or I try to. My head spins, and Miles catches me.

“Easy there, mate.”

He wraps his arms around me and carries me downstairs.

“I can walk,” I tell him.

“All right. Here.” He passes me a tinfoil-wrapped breakfast sandwich.

I unwrap it as I shove my feet into my shoes, practically inhaling the burrito. Once I’m done, Miles passes me another.

“Thanks.”

“Of course.”

We walk in silence as I eat, and my heart rate picks up as the hospital comes into view.

“She’s okay, right? Jensen didn’t say anything had happened?”

“She’s fine. She’s awake and groggy, but she’s all right.”

“Good.” I sigh in relief.

We head inside and up to the second floor.

I make a beeline to her hospital room and burst inside. “Dillon!”

I shove Jensen out of the way and wrap my arms around her. We both burst into tears.

“I was so scared,” I sob.

“I’m so glad you’re okay,” she sniffles.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t see them in time.”

Dillon shakes her head. “It’s not your fault. I didn’t see them either. They came out of

nowhere.”

“But I was driving. I shouldn’t have swerved. I should’ve replaced the tires. I should?—”

“I would have done the same thing, Mabel. It’s not your fault. I don’t blame you.”

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“I do,” I whisper.

She looks at me with tear-stained cheeks. Her eyes dart behind me, and I turn to see Jensen and Miles hovering over us.

“Who are they?” she whispers.

“They’re the paramedics who saved us.”

Do I tell her about Miles being a shifter and us being fated mates? Oh, gosh! Miles told me that Jensen is a shifter, too.

I want to tell Dillon everything, but I know she’ll have questions I don’t have the answers to yet.

I turn to face Miles. “Could I get some water?”

He nods. “Be right back.”

“I’ll stay here,” Jensen says.

I give Miles a look.

“Come with me,” Miles says, practically dragging Jensen from the room.

“What’s with them?” Dillon asks.

I laugh. “They’re intense, right? But they’re good people.”

“Hmm.”

“So, how are you feeling? What did the doctors say?” I ask, changing the subject.

She sighs and tells me about her treatment so far. I do my best to listen, but all I can think about is Miles and what I’m supposed to do with what I know.

EIGHT

Miles

I’ve spent all day hovering over my mate. Luckily for Jensen and me, the guys at the firehouse covered our shift. It was easy enough since there were no calls today.

Jensen shifts next to me, and I glance over at him. His gaze is locked on his mate, Dillon, and she keeps giving him little glances. She looks at him like she’s trying to figure him out. He needs to tone it down if he wants to keep her.

Mabel yawns and I glance at the clock. We’ve been here all day. She must be worn out.

Take her home, my wolf orders me.

Soon.

“Visiting hours are ending,” a nurse informs us as she comes in to check on Dillon.

“We’ll be back in the morning,” I say, pulling Mabel into my side.

Dillon's eyebrows rise at my possessiveness, and I wonder what my mate has told her about me.

"I'll be back first thing in the morning," Mabel tells her friend. "Want me to bring you anything?"

"Maybe some food that didn't come from the cafeteria?" She laughs. "And some clothes. Hopefully, I can get out soon. Maybe tomorrow."

"You got it." Mabel squeezes Dillon's hand. "Is he coming?" she asks, nodding at Jensen as I lead her out of the room.

"No, he'll stay."

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“For that paperwork, huh?”

“Dillon may be his fated mate,” I admit.

“Hmm, so he’s a shifter, too. Wolf?”

“Yeah.”

“You know,” she says as we head out of the hospital, “Dillon seems fine, considering she was unconscious for quite a while. She’s in less pain than me. Looks better, too.”

“Jensen already bit her,” I tell her.

“Hebither?”

“She was dying,” I say gently.

Mabel freezes.

I rub her back soothingly. “Her injuries were bad. He bit her to save her.”

“How did that save her?”

“Shifters have special properties. We heal faster than humans. Our bite transfers some of the healing power to our mate.”

“What else do they get?”

“Besides a loving and doting mate?”

She nods.

“Their hearing is better. Eyesight, too.”

“Can she shift now?”

“No. You need the shifter gene for that.”

“Oh.”

We walk in silence for a block before I nudge her toward the police station.

“We should get your things.”

“Right. Tell me more. About shifters and fated mates and all of that.”

“Well, we only have and love one mate. We only ever sleep with that person.”

“So, you’re a...” She trails off.

“A virgin? Yeah. You’ll be my first and only. If you pick me,” I rush to add.

She better, my wolf growls as he paces inside me.

“Hmm.”

“What about you?” I ask. “Have you ever dated anyone?”

I relax as she barks out a laugh. Maybe I’ll be her first and only, too.

“No, I was too busy surviving for stuff like dates or crushes. Plus, everyone in my small town sucked, so even if I’d had the time, I wasn’t interested in any of them.”

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Good. She's all ours.

She might not choose us, I remind my wolf.

Oh, please. You can smell her arousal. She wants us.

"So, what about Dillon and Jensen? If he's already bitten her, what happens now?"

"They're linked now. He claimed her when he bit her. They'll both experience the mating heat on the full moon, but?—"

"The what?" she asks, cutting across me as we stop outside the police station.

"The mating heat. It happens every month on the night of the full moon."

"Okay... and what the hell is the mating heat?"

"It's an intense feeling. A pressure to mate."

"Mate..."

"To have sex."

"So, you only have sex on the night of the full moon?"

"No." I laugh. "But the urge to have sex is the strongest then to ensure we continue our bloodlines."

“Oh.”

I pause before my next words. “The full moon is tomorrow.”

“Oh,” she repeats, looking up at the moon, lost in thought.

I push her hair behind her ear. “I’ll grab your suitcases and stuff from the car. It’s probably better if you don’t see the wreckage.”

“Yeah. I’ll wait here.”

I hurry into the station and grab the keys from Tucker’s desk. The car was towed to the lot in the back—or what was left of it.

The trunk is bent and partially open. I wedge it the rest of the way open and grab the bags. I frown. There aren’t many. This is all they packed to start a new life thousands of miles away. I expected more.

I grab the few things from the backseat and throw the backpack straps over my shoulder. Collecting the suitcases and duffle bags, I wheel everything out front.

“Here,” Mabel says, rushing forward to help.

“Are you hungry?” I ask as we head to my place.

“Yeah, I could eat.”

“We can grab something from the diner in town, or I can make something.”

“Whatever’s easier for you is fine,” she says.

We cross the street, and I take the bags as we reach the front door. Mabel grabs the keys from me and unlocks it.

“Let’s see what we have here,” I say, dropping the bags inside the door and heading to the kitchen. I open the fridge and poke around. “There’s not much, but I could make sandwiches or eggs.”

“A sandwich is good.”

“BLT?”

“Perfect.”

I get to work on our dinner. Mabel sits at the kitchen counter and watches me.

Ask her!my wolf orders.

I know I have to. I need to know what she wants. Does she have feelings for me?
Could she in the future?

I don't have much time with her to show her that we're meant to be, so I need to make every second count.

“Mabel, I...”

Fuck this is scary.

“What do you want to do?” I blurt out.

“Um...eat? Take a shower and go to bed?”

“No, I mean, yeah, we can do that. I meant with us. With me.”

She seems caught off guard by the question. I watch as she licks her lips and gathers her thoughts.

“I, um...” She sighs. “Listen, I can't deny that I'm drawn to you.”

My hopes soar, and I smile.

“But,” she continues, deflating my hopes, “falling in love and settling here wasn’t the plan. We escaped one small town, and I don’t know if I can settle in another.”

“I can leave. I’ll go wherever you want.”

She hesitates, taking a shaky breath. “What happens if something changes and we break up?”

“That won’t happen. There is no breaking up for us.”

“How can you know that?”

“It’s how shifters and fated mates work. We’re destined to be together. I’m meant for you. No one will make you happier. No one will treat you better or love you more.”

“Love?” She looks at me in disbelief. “You just met me. You don’t know anything about me.”

I can smell it then.

Fear.

She’s scared to stray from her plan. She’s scared to trust me.

“It’s how it works for shifters. I know all this is new for you. It’ll take time. I can give you that. But you need to be willing to give me a chance.”

She settles back in her seat and swallows hard.

I finish our sandwiches and set hers down in front of her. “Water?”

She nods.

I pour us each a glass and grab her pain medicine.

“Thanks,” she says, swallowing a pill.

We eat in silence for a few minutes. I watch her, absorbing the play of emotions across her face. She’s thinking hard about what I said. I need to give her time to think it through and process everything.

My wolf isn't as patient.

Bite her!he snaps.

Not yet!

“So, if I say yes...” She leaves the sentence hanging

“Then it's forever. I'm all in. I'll do everything and anything to make you happy and keep you safe. I'll give you whatever you want.”

She stares at me wide-eyed, and I hold my breath as I wait to see what she'll say next.

“I, uh, I think I'm ready for bed.”

“Of course.”

She stands, and I grab her bags.

“Do you want me to wash any of your things? They might smell like the airbags,” I say before we head upstairs.

“Oh, don't worry tonight.”

“I can make a start.”

“Okay.”

“You can borrow one of my shirts to sleep in.”

“Thanks.”

I nod and set her bags by the laundry room. She heads upstairs, and I follow, grabbing her a change of clothes.

She turns to face me. “Night.”

“Night, Mabel. I’ll see you in the morning.”

I close the door slowly behind me and take a deep breath.

It feels promising. She’s interested.

My wolf sighs. The mating moon is tomorrow.

We’ll be ready, I promise him.

I hope.

NINE

Mabel

I can feel it as soon as I open my eyes in the morning. My entire body is awake, alive in a way it never has been before. Every nerve ending is firing.

I take a deep breath and try to clear my head as I sit up in bed. Miles’s scent is all around me, making my thoughts dirtier.

I want him.

I need him.

I'm...horny for the first time in my life.

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But do I want to be his mate? Miles is a good guy, and I don't want to hurt him. I need to be sure about him, about us, before I do anything.

I glance at the clock on the nightstand and curse when I see how late it is. I need to get ready to go to the hospital. I need to talk to Dillon about all of this. If anyone can help me figure this out, it's Dillon.

She might be feeling this, too. Her mate has already claimed her, I think as I climb out of bed.

My clothes are folded neatly on the dresser, and I smile as I think about Miles doing that for me. It must've taken him hours last night to do it all.

A knock sounds at the door, and Miles pokes his head in. I sense the shift in him as soon as our eyes meet. He's tense and on edge, but he's fighting the mating heat and his feelings to keep me calm and relaxed.

God, he's perfect.

I love him.

I blink at the thought.

"Did you want to head to the hospital soon?" he asks.

"Yeah. I just need to get dressed."

“Okay. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

He closes the door, and I hurry to dress and pull on my shoes. I jog down the stairs and smile as he passes me a bagel with cream cheese.

“I have Asiago cheese if you prefer.”

“This is good. Thanks.”

We head out, walking in silence. I rack my brain for a safe topic but come up empty. Every subject seems loaded.

We ride the elevator to the second floor when we get to the hospital.

“I’ll give you and Dillon some privacy,” Miles says as the elevator doors slide open.

“Okay, thanks.”

“Here. For Dillon,” he says, passing me another bagel.

I see Jensen pacing the hall as we approach Dillon’s room. “Is everything all right? Is Dillon okay?” I ask in a rush.

“She’s fine. Just...on edge.”

“Oh...OH!” I say when understanding dawns on me.

“We’ll stay out here,” Miles says.

I nod and head into the hospital room.

“Hey,” I greet Dillon.

She huffs. “Do you know?”

I freeze as my eyes meet hers. “Yeah. I wanted to talk to you about that.”

Her gown slides to the side as she sits up in bed, revealing the bite mark on her neck. She brushes over the mark and shivers. “He bit me.”

“Yeah, I can see that. Miles told me about it. He said it was the only way to save you.”

“And you believe that?” she asks angrily.

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I shrug. “Yeah. I... You were in rough shape, Dillon.” Tears pool in my eyes. “God, I thought I was going to lose you.”

“They’re paramedics,” she says, her tone slightly less pissed off. “They should be able to help.”

“It was bad, Dillon. You were so pale, so... lifeless.” Tears spill onto my cheeks.

Dillon reaches for me. “I’m okay.”

“Yeah, because of them!” I shout. “Jensen saved your life. He wouldn’t have bit you without talking to you, without letting you choose, if there was any other way.”

“We’ll never know that for sure.”

I shake my head. “I know it. I do.”

“What’s going on with you and Miles?” she asks, changing the subject.

“He’s my fated mate.”

“Okay.”

“Has Jensen told you about all this?”

She gives me a tense nod. “A bit. But I wasn’t very receptive.”

I laugh. “Yeah, it was a bit of a shock to me, too. When Miles shifted, I mean.”

Dillon smiles. “Shocking, right?”

“Like, mind-blowing, shocking. Unbelievable,” I whisper. “But it’s real.”

“It’s a lot to absorb.”

“I know.”

We’re silent for a minute before Dillon clears her throat.

“Is that for me?” She nods at the tinfoil-wrapped bagel.

“Oh, yeah. Here.”

She takes the bagel and unwraps it, taking a big bite. “So much better than the stuff here.”

“I bet.” I laugh.

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” I say honestly. “I can’t deny that I have...feelings for him.”

“So, you want to be with him?”

“Yeah,” I say, hearing the guilt in my voice.

“Then be with him.”

“But, what about our plan,” I argue.

Tears fill her eyes, but she smiles. “Plans change. They already have. I mean, getting into a car accident, being bitten by a wolf shifter, and dealing with all of this wasn’t part of the plan. But it happened, and we have to adjust and deal with it.”

Dillon reaches for my hand. “It’s okay. I just want what’s best for you. That’s all I’ve ever wanted. I want you to be happy and safe and loved. Miles clearly does all of that.”

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I take a shuddering breath. “It’s hard to trust that it will last.”

“I know. But, Mabel, the way he looks at you? That’s forever.”

I smile through my tears. “What will you do? I don’t want us to be apart. You’re my family.”

“And you’re mine. I’ll stay, at least for a while. I need to make some money to get a new car and pay all these bills.”

“What about Jensen?”

Her jaw clenches. “I don’t know. I can feel the mating heat, but I can’t get over what he did. I can’t wrap my head around any of this.”

“I get it. It takes time.” I squeeze her hand. “What do you think of Jensen? He’s cute, right?”

“He’s—”

“Hey,” Miles says as he enters the room.

Jensen is right behind him, and his eyes lock on Dillon. “Want to finish that sentence?”

“He’s a pain in my ass,” she says without missing a beat.

“Aww,” Crew says as he and Tucker walk into the room behind our mates.

“Hey, ladies,” Tucker says. “Are you okay with answering a few questions?”

“Sure. Is the case still ongoing?” I ask, confused. “I mean, I was at fault. No one else was involved in the accident.”

“It’s not that simple,” Crew tells us.

“We think that the wolves were from a neighboring pack,” Miles explains, moving to stand by my side, offering his support.

“Oh, my gosh. Did I hurt a wolf shifter?” I ask in a rush.

“It would be good if you did,” Jensen mutters.

Dillon glares at him. “Why is that?”

“Because the Red Fog Pack has been trying to start a war with us,” Tucker explains.

“Yeah, we think you prevented them from starting another fire or doing something even worse when you almost hit them,” Crew tells us.

I frown. “Fire?”

Miles wraps his arm around my shoulder. “They’ve been burning houses and causing trouble for a few months. They tried to send in a spy, but that didn’t work. They’ve grown more desperate since then.”

“So, it’s not safe here?” Dillon asks in alarm.

Her wide eyes meet mine, and we both swallow hard.

“You’ll always be safe with me,” Jensen assures her.

He reaches for her, but she swats his hand away.

“Can you describe the wolves at all?” Tucker asks.

“Did you see which way they ran? Did you see others nearby?” Crew adds.

“I... No, not really. It all happened so fast. One minute, we were driving, and the next, they were there.”

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“And there were three of them?” Tucker asks.

“Yeah.”

“No, four,” Dillon interjects. “There was one in the woods. I saw him before the others.”

“Okay, what was he doing?” Tucker asks.

Jensen moves closer, and Dillon lets him rest his hand on her shoulder this time.

“He was watching. It was like...he knew it was going to cause an accident. Like that was the plan,” she says, trailing off.

The men share a worried look.

Tucker clears his throat. “Can you describe the wolves?”

I shrug. “Big. Gray.”

“The one in the woods had yellow eyes. It was creepy,” Dillon says, shuddering at the memory.

Crew’s eyes narrow. “Yellow. You’re sure?”

Dillon nods.

“Okay, that’s helpful. Thanks, ladies,” Tucker says.

“Hope you’re feeling better,” Crew adds before they turn to leave.

“Fuck,” Jensen hisses.

Miles nods. “We’ll be right back.”

“We’ll be outside,” Jensen tells Dillon, who nods distractedly.

“You all right?” I ask once they’re gone.

“Yeah, I just...That wolf gave me the creeps.”

“He sounds like bad news.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t stay here,” she mumbles.

“Miles will keep us safe. We know better than most that bad people are everywhere.”

She nods, frowning as she remembers our past.

“So, what now?”

“Well, we have a few more hours left before visiting hours end. What do you want to do?” I ask.

“Get the hell out of this hospital.”

“I don’t know if I can do that, but I can get us some snacks, and we can watch TV. Maybe come up with a new plan.”

“Sounds good.”

The door opens, and Miles pokes his head in. “You guys all right?”

“Yeah, I was about to go for some snacks.”

“On it,” he says.

“I’ll stand guard,” Jensen tells us.

“Great,” Dillon deadpans.

He smiles at her, and she glares back. I bite back a smirk.

Oh, she has it bad for him, but she’s scared. Just like I was. But I have a feeling Jensen will prove himself to her like Miles did to me.

“Thanks,” I say, and the door closes behind him.

“That’s what you want?” Dillon asks.

I laugh. “I know. It’s great, right?”

She rolls her eyes, but I can tell she’s thinking it over.

We spend the afternoon talking and watching TV. The guys bring us snacks and drinks but leave us alone for the most part.

The doctor comes in to check on Dillon while Jensen hovers over his shoulder.

“She should be good to leave tomorrow,” he says with a satisfied smile.

“Thank god,” Dillon groans.

Jensen fluffs Dillon's pillows as the doctor heads out.

"They're fine," she snaps. "You and the damn pillows."

"I just want you to be comfortable."

She doesn't answer.

I look at Miles. "We should be going. They're about to kick us out."

"See you in the morning. You can spring me from this place," Dillon huffs.

I laugh. "For sure. We'll be back bright and early. Call me if you need anything."

"I will. Have fun," she says with a knowing look.

"You, too."

She blushes as her eyes cut to Jensen, watching him warily.

I tuck myself against Miles's side, and we head out.

"Want to grab a pizza?" he asks

"Sounds good."

"What do you like on yours?"

"Pepperoni."

"You got it." He orders the pizza as we walk.

I look up at the rising full moon and murmur, “I can feel it.”

He tenses against my side. “Me, too.”

“It’s a lot stronger than I expected.”

“Listen, Mabel, we don’t have to do anything. I know you need more time, and I’ll wait for you. Take as long as you need.”

“All I need right now is you,” I whisper.

His grip on my waist tightens. “Mate,” he growls.

I shiver. “Are we picking up the pizza?”

“Delivery.”

“Thank God,” I whisper before I throw myself into his arms.

We’re still a block from his place, but I don’t care. I can’t wait. I need to feel him against me. Miles must feel the same way because he catches me easily and takes off at a brisk jog.

I bounce in his arms, my body rubbing against his, and we both groan.

“You feel so good,” I whisper against his neck as I trail kisses down it.

“Mate,” he chokes out as I suck on his skin.

“Are you going to bite me?”

He snarls, slamming the key into the door and kicking it open.

The door slams shut behind us, and then he’s pressing me against it.

“I’m going to do a lot more than bite you,” he says darkly.

I grin. “Prove it.”

He growls in response, and then we’re moving again. He carries me up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I’m amazed at how strong he is. I mean, I’ve always been plus-size. It comes with living off chips and peanut butter sandwiches for most of my life. Miles doesn’t make me feel fat or chubby or any of the cruel things the bullies called me. He makes me feel beautiful, delicate, and cherished.

It’s foreign to me. Not that I’m complaining. It’s wonderful to finally experience it.

We head into the bedroom, and Miles sets me down next to the bed. He grips my hips and slides his hands up. I arch into his touch, and he groans as my breasts fill his hands.

“Oh, God,” I gasp.

He licks his lips. “You’re sure?”

I blink. “Huh?”

He smirks. “Are you sure you want this? Because if you don’t, that’s fine. I’ll wait for you.”

“No, I’m sure. I trust you. I’ve never felt this way about anyone. I never thought I would. I’m not grateful for the car accident, but I’m glad it brought us together.”

“Me, too.”

I smile at him, and he sucks in a shaky breath.

“Mabel, I... You’re all I’ve ever wanted. I won’t let you down. Ever.”

“I know,” I whisper.

“And I’ll make tonight good for you. I swear.”

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“I know you will, but I want it to be good for both of us. Our first time should be special.”

He looks nervous but excited.

I press my body against his. “Now, when do you bite me?”

“Soon. I need to get you ready for me first.”

“How?”

“Get naked,” he orders.

I reach for my shirt, the mating heat causing a fire in my veins as I tug it over my head and drop it to the floor. Miles groans, his eyes glowing in the dim light as he stares at me.

I push my yoga pants down and kick them aside.

“God, you’re gorgeous,” he whispers reverently.

“Far from it,” I snort.

His eyes darken and lock with mine. “Mabel, you’re perfect. Your curves? Fuck, they undo me.”

My cheeks heat as Miles rips his shirt off and tosses it aside. His hands drop to his

jeans, and he unbuttons them, pushing them down his thick thighs. His boxers go with them, and I gasp when I see his cock.

“Miles, I don’t think this is going to work,” I blurt.

“What?”

I point at his dick and then look at him with wide eyes. “That is not going to fit into any part of me.”

He grins. “Oh, it will.”

“Easy for you to say. You’re not the one who has to stretch to fit a freaking tree limb into her body.”

That has him full-on laughing as he pulls me into his arms. “It’s not that big,” he insists.

“It really is,” I mumble.

“We’re made for each other. It’ll fit. We’ll fit.”

He kisses me, his hands roaming over my body, and I relax as I get lost in him. He unhooks my bra, and it lands on the floor between us.

“Fuck,” he groans as he cups my breasts.

I moan as his fingers toy with my sensitive nipples, arching into his touch. “It feels so good.”

Miles dips his head and kisses my neck, then down my chest. He’s almost squatting,

and I laugh at the height difference.

“Here,” he says, pushing me onto the mattress.

I gasp as I bounce on the soft bed, and he grins as he comes down over me. Then his hands are back on my body, mapping my curves as his lips trail over my skin.

He sucks one of my nipples into his mouth, and I cry out at the heat of his tongue stroking me.

“Easy,” he mutters.

His weight presses me into the mattress, and I wish I’d taken my underwear off before we got in this position. I can feel his hard length, but not as much as I want or need to.

My hips rock against him, and I groan in frustration. It feels good, but it’s not enough.

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“More,” I beg as he releases my breasts.

Miles kisses down my body, and I spread my legs wider so he can fit between them. He grips my panties, tearing them easily. I gasp as he tosses the shreds aside and licks his lips, growling slightly as he spreads my pussy lips.

“So wet,” he murmurs as his thumb rubs over my clit.

“Miles!” I scream, my hips shooting off the bed.

“And so sensitive.” He chuckles.

“So needy!” I snap.

He doesn’t answer. Instead, he leans forward and buries his face in my center.

“Miles! Oh, God!” I choke out.

His tongue flicks, rolling over my clit and down to my snug opening. It dips inside slightly, and I push down, trying to take more of him.

“So greedy,” he says against my thigh.

“Miles, please!”

He buries his face in my pussy, and this time, he doesn’t stop. Not until I scream his name and come all over his face.

“Oh. My. God,” I pant.

He kisses my clit one more time and climbs up my body. “Ready?”

“Hmm,” I agree in a lust-filled daze.

His cock nudges my opening, and our eyes lock. We don’t say anything, but somehow, I know. It’s time.

I turn my head to the side, offering him my neck, and his eyes flash.

“Mate,” he growls.

I feel his lips against my neck and then the quick sting of his teeth as they sink into my flesh.

“Ah!” I cry out at the exact second he thrusts into me.

Full. So full.

That’s all I can feel. It’s like I can’t take a deep breath. He’s everywhere. In me, surrounding me, consuming me.

He licks over the bite mark, and I cry out again, this time in pleasure.

“That was...” I trail off, and he licks it again.

A baby orgasm rolls through me, and my thighs relax slightly around his hips. He licks the mark again, and I clench around him.

“Mate,” I whisper.

His eyes lock with mine, and we stare at each other as he starts to move inside me. Slow at first. He's letting me adjust to his size and the sensation of him inside me. It takes a few thrusts before the pain is gone. All that's left is pleasure and a feeling of completeness.

"Miles," I sigh as our bodies rock together.

My hips rise to meet each of his thrusts, and we cling to each other as we race toward our peaks.

"Mabel, God, you feel so good," he groans against my skin.

“I’m close,” I warn.

He growls and picks up his pace. Our eyes lock as the angle of his thrusts changes so his cock rubs my clit with each pass.

“Oh! Oh, oh, oh!” I shout as my whole body tenses.

I scream his name as I splinter. “Miles!”

His blue eyes flash in the light, and a second later, he comes deep inside me. He catches himself before he crushes me under him, and I suck in a sharp breath.

We’re both breathing hard, our bodies slick with sweat. I lick my lips as he pulls out of me slowly and falls on the bed next to me.

“Mate,” he growls.

I roll onto my side. “Now what?”

“Now, we eat.”

I laugh. “I forgot about the pizza.”

He grins. “It was delivered a while ago. It’s probably cold now.”

“Worth it.”

He grins. “So worth it.”

I’ve never been this happy before. It’s strange not to expect the worst to happen every minute but also wonderful.

I know that as long as Miles is a part of it, I’m going to like the new plan.

TEN

Miles

“I can warm it up,” I offer as I carry the pizza box into the bedroom.

“Nah, I don’t mind cold pizza,” Mabel says with a happy smile.

My wolf is curled up inside me, finally satisfied after claiming our mate. Biting and claiming her was everything I dreamed it would be. She’s my other half, and I finally feel whole now that she’s mine. Complete. At peace.

“What time is it?” Mabel asks as she grabs a slice and takes a big bite.

I lick my lips as she sits up, and the sheet drops to her waist. Fuck, her curves are every man's dream. And she’s all ours.

“Miles?”

I blink. “Oh, it’s, um, just after eleven.”

She nods and takes another bite. I climb back into bed and grab a slice of pizza. We eat in comfortable silence for a few minutes, both of us starving after all our activity.

My cock hardens as I think about our first time together. I glance at Mabel to see her watching me, her pupils dilating as we stare at each other.

Maybe she can smell our arousal, my wolf suggests.

Her arousal fills the air, and I breathe deeply. I can almost taste her sweet juices on my tongue.

I toss my pizza crust back in the box and reach for her. She giggles as I roll her under me and kiss her. My cock brushes against her swollen folds, and we both groan. Her hips buck against mine, and I hiss as her juices coat my rigid length.

“Are you sore, mate?”

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She shakes her head. “I need you,” she pleads.

I kiss her hard as I slam into her. I’m so on edge that this time is going to be hard and fast. I’ll make it up to her later. Luckily for me, Mabel doesn’t seem to mind the rough pace.

“You feel so good,” she cries as I hammer into her snug channel.

“Fuck, mate,” I groan.

Her pussy clamps around my cock, squeezing me so tightly, and my orgasm builds inside me.

Mabel’s tits bounce, the hardened peaks begging for my mouth. I lean down, wrapping my lips around one.

“Oh!” she shouts.

She’s so wet, so damn hot.

“I’m not going to last,” I tell her as I switch to her other breast.

“So close,” she pants.

Her hands cling to my shoulders, and her nails bite into my skin. I growl, loving that she’s leaving her mark on me. Her leg hooks around my waist, and we both moan as I sink even deeper inside her tight heat.

“Fuck,” I gasp, kissing her neck and licking over my bite mark.

“MILES!” she screams, and a second later, her juices flood my cock.

She comes all over me, and I grit her name as I follow her over the edge.

I come hard, my release spilling out between us. I suck in a deep breath as I roll to my side. She sighs happily, curling into my side, and I smile, kissing her forehead. We’re both breathing hard, and she draws circles across my chest as we catch our breath.

“Ugh, I need a shower,” Mabel murmurs.

I kiss her shoulder. “Want me to join you?”

“Uh-huh.” She smirks as she climbs out of bed.

I throw the covers off to follow her when my phone rings.

“Ignore it,” I tell Mabel.

She frowns. “What if it’s the hospital?”

I sigh and pick it up. “It’s Jensen.”

“Answer it,” she urges.

“Hello?” I answer the call. “Everything all right? Is Dillon okay?”

“She’s great,” he says.

I relax. “She’s fine,” I tell Mabel.

She smiles and heads to the bathroom. “I’ll get started.”

“What’s up?” I ask Jensen distractedly.

“Tucker just called.”

“For what? Did something else happen?”

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“Yeah. The Red Fog Pack. They broke into some houses and started another fire up on the north side. Then there was another car accident. Same road as our mates,” Jensen says, his tone hard.

“Shit.”

“Yeah.”

“Is the driver okay?” I ask.

“No. Died on the scene. It was Jimmy Michaels.”

My heart sinks. Jimmy was twenty and just returned home after graduating from boot camp. He was supposed to head to his first duty station in a few days.

“He was so young,” I whisper.

“I know. Crew had to tell the family. They’re a mess.”

“Understandably.”

“The Alphas are setting up stuff for his funeral. I volunteered us to bring over some food next Tuesday.”

“Good.”

“There’s a pack meeting in the morning. We have to go.”

“Our mates?—”

“Dillon is still in the hospital. They’ll be safe here together.”

My wolf growls, and I swallow hard. I know he’s right, but I don’t want my mate out of my sight. Not so soon after mating and not with the Red Fog Pack out there.

“They killed someone this time,” Jensen says. “That changes things. We won’t be going easy on them anymore. No more harsh warnings.”

“I know. This means war.”

I hear the shower turn off.

“I need to go.”

“Take care of your mate. I’ll see you in the morning. We can leave from the hospital together.”

“Sounds good.”

I hang up and toss my phone aside.

“Shit,” I growl, and my wolf snarls inside me.

He was so calm before the call, so happy to have our mate. Now he’s back to pacing. He’s more on edge than ever. We have our mate now. We can’t lose her. She can’t be in danger.

I nod in agreement.

Do we tell her about all this?

My wolf shakes his head. No, don't scare her. We'll handle the Red Fog Pack. We'll rip them apart. Nothing will hurt our mate.

The bathroom door opens, and I smile at Mabel as she moves to the bed. Her blonde hair is still damp and sticking to her bare shoulders.

"Sorry. Phone call took longer than expected."

"That's okay. You can join me next time."

“Feel better?”

“Much.”

“You smell good,” I say, nuzzling her neck.

“I’m all clean now and wide awake. What should we do next?” she whispers seductively.

I grin. “I think I have an idea.”

She smirks at me, wraps her arms around my neck, and pulls my mouth to hers. I put the threat of the other pack out of my mind as I get lost in my mate again.

ELEVEN

Mabel

“So?” I ask Dillon.

She groans. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Ah! You slept with Jensen! In the hospital?” I ask with a smirk.

“I just... I don’t know,” she groans. “It just happened.”

“Well, he had easy access with that hospital gown.”

“Mabel!” she shouts, blushing.

I laugh. “Was it good?”

“Yeah,” she mumbles.

“How good?”

“Well, I have nothing to compare it to, so...”

“So, it was really good. Should I tell Jensen he was the best you’ve ever had?”

“Don’t you dare.”

“Are you two together now?”

“No.”

“Why not? The guy worships you.”

“I can’t get over the fact that he didn’t give me a choice. With my mom’s boyfriends, I...” She trails off, but she doesn’t need to go on.

I know what she’s talking about. A few of her mom’s boyfriends tried to sneak into her room. She was so worried about them. Sex and consent became so important for her. It was something she stressed over because she had to.

Jensen might have bitten her to save her life, but he didn’t have her consent. It’s an impossible situation, so I hold my tongue.

“I support whatever you decide. I just... Maybe you should look at your medical

report once we leave here. It might shed some light on why he did it.”

“Maybe,” she agrees. “Now, tell me about you and your man.”

“Last night was perfect,” I sigh. “He’s perfect. He makes me feel so seen and cared for. He carries me around like I weigh nothing.”

She smiles at that, and I sigh happily.

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“I never thought that I would have this,” I admit.

“You deserve it.”

“So do you,” I tell her.

“All right, we finally have the papers ready. Sorry about the delay,” the nurse says as she bustles into the room.

I move out of her way, and Dillon signs the discharge papers.

“Okay, you’re all set. Here’s a copy of the instructions for your injuries. If you feel lightheaded, dizzy, or experience intense pain in your torso, come back immediately,” the nurse instructs.

“I will. Thanks.”

“Have a good day, sweetheart.” The nurse smiles at us before she heads out to grab the wheelchair.

I grab the change of clothes I brought and pass them to Dillon. She goes into the bathroom to change, and I gather her things in my backpack.

“All set?” I ask when she comes out.

She nods, and the nurse helps her into the wheelchair.

“I can walk,” Dillon insists.

“Hospital policy until we get you outside, dear,” the nurse tells her.

She grumbles but stays sitting until we reach the front doors.

“Take care,” the nurse says before heading back inside with the wheelchair.

“Did you drive?” Dillon asks.

“No. I haven’t been able to get back in a car since the accident,” I admit.

She wraps her arm around me. “I doubt I could right now either.”

“Miles’s townhouse is just down that way. Or did you want to go somewhere else?”

“I don’t want to cramp your guys’ place.”

“No, there’s room,” I promise. “Come on.”

We walk slowly and make it halfway to the townhouse when a black SUV skids to a stop next to us. The passenger door flies open, and Jensen frowns as he rushes to Dillon’s side.

“Told you to wait,” he scolds.

“I’m fine,” she says, brushing him off.

“Here.” Miles holds out the house keys for me. “I’ll go park.”

I smile and take the keys. “Dillon can stay with us, right?”

He nods, shooting Jensen a worried look. “Yeah, of course.”

“What? No. She can stay with me,” Jensen argues.

“I’d rather be with my friend.”

Jensen looks crushed. I look at Dillon, but she ignores him.

“Mate—”

“No!”

Jensen backs off.

I take her arm. “Come on. Let’s get you settled.”

We head up the front steps, and I unlock the door, letting Dillon in ahead of me. Jensen is right on her heels. I turn to see Miles parking and climbing out of the car.

“They’re both here,” I inform him.

He laughs. “I have a feeling we’ll have to kick him out later.”

“Good luck with that,” I whisper when I see Jensen’s determined expression.

“Um, guest rooms are upstairs,” I tell Dillon.

She nods and moves to the stairs. Jensen is her shadow, trailing after her. Miles and I share a look before following them up.

“Which room did you want her in?” I ask him.

“Um, whichever she wants. There’s not much in the guest room,” he warns me.

We head to the third floor, and Dillon enters the first room.

“This one is fine,” she says.

“We can get whatever you want for the room—” Miles starts

Jensen growls. “I have rooms next door.”

Dillon raises an eyebrow. “Good for you.”

“You can stay with me. I’ll take care of you.”

“I’m good here.”

Jensen sighs and nods. “I’ll be next door.”

“At your place?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “In that room.”

He points to the guest room next door, and I swallow a laugh.

“Oh, cool, they’re both staying,” Miles grumbles, and this time, I do laugh.

“Well, make yourselves at home. Do you need anything?” I ask Dillon.

She shakes her head. “Just a shower.”

“I’ll get you a towel,” Miles says.

I follow my man down to the second floor and into our room.

“So, is this the new plan?” he asks, laughing.

“I guess. Dillon and I can find our own place.”

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“No need. This is your home now. Your friend can stay as long as she wants.”

“And your friend?”

“I’ll kick him out if he makes you or Dillon uncomfortable,” he promises.

“I don’t want to make you choose between Jensen and me. I know how important he is to you.”

“You’re more important. You’re my family, my everything. And since Dillon is your family, that means she’s mine, too.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you, Mabel. Anything.”

“There’s something I have to tell you,” I say, stepping toward him.

“Are you okay? Your head?”

I smile. “It’s fine. It’s not about my head. It’s about my heart.”

His eyes drop to my chest.

“I love you, Miles. My mate.”

“Fuck, Mabel. I love you, too. So much. More than anything. More than I even

thought was possible.”

I smile, and he leans down, pressing his lips to mine.

The world fades.

His mouth is warm and familiar, but this kiss—it’s something new. Something deeper. Something that wraps around my heart and squeezes until I can’t tell where he ends and I begin. He cups my cheek, thumb brushing over my skin like he’s memorizing my shape all over again.

I slide my hands up his chest, gripping his shirt, needing to anchor myself to him as he kisses me like I’m the only thing that matters. Like this moment is everything.

He groans softly, the sound vibrating against my lips, and I melt into him, opening for him as his tongue sweeps against mine—slow and sure and claiming.

It’s not frantic. It’s not rushed.

It’s reverent.

Like he’s worshipping me with every brush of his lips, every breath between us.

When we finally pull apart, I’m breathless, heart pounding, eyes locked on his like he’s gravity and I’m still falling.

And maybe I am.

Maybe I’ll always be falling for him.

“Now we just need our friends to figure out their shit,” he murmurs.

I laugh. “Yeah. They might need some help with that.”

“Maybe a little,” I agree as we return to the third floor.

“It’ll work out,” he promises.

I have a feeling it will, too. This is the new plan. But I’m not about to tell Dillon that. I just hope she agrees to it, too.

TWELVE

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Miles

Five Years Later...

Five years.

I still can't believe it's been that long since I pulled Mabel from that wrecked car and knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that she was mine.

Now, I watch her from the kitchen window, barefoot in the grass, as she chases our eldest around the backyard. Her blonde hair is in a messy bun, and she's laughing, that soft, bright sound that still makes my chest ache in the best way. A toddler sits on her hip—our daughter—and the baby monitor clipped to her waistband hums with soft static from our youngest napping upstairs.

I don't know how I got so lucky.

She's everything. She's still fierce and funny, guarded sometimes—but damn, she's the best mom. Every part of her that was once cautious and hesitant to trust is now all-in. With me. With our family. With this life.

I still wake up some days and take a second to soak it in.

"Miles!" Jensen's voice booms as the back door opens. "You grilling or hiding in here like a coward?"

I snort. "I'm marinating."

He makes a face. “That better not be code for ‘forgetting.’”

“It’s not. I’m serious this time.”

He strides in, our son hot on his heels. Luca—our five-year-old, named after Mabel’s favorite character from some romance novel she made me read when she was pregnant—has his shirt half on and mud streaked up one cheek.

“Uncle Jensen made me fly!” he declares, beaming.

“Yeah?” I ruffle his hair, smearing the dirt even more. “That sounds dangerous.”

“It was awesome.”

“He only hit one bush,” Jensen adds with a shrug.

“Very reassuring.”

Mabel steps inside with our two-year-old, Indie, still perched on her hip. Indie thinks she runs the whole house—and let’s be honest, she kind of does. Her green eyes narrow like mine when she’s grumpy and sparkle like her mom’s when she’s happy. Right now, they’re sparkling.

“There’s dirt on the baby,” Mabel says without judgment, just amusement.

“That’s my fault,” Jensen offers.

“I assumed.”

“Hey!” Dillon’s voice echoes as the door to their side of the townhouse opens, and she steps through the shared gate between our yards. Her belly is round

again—pregnant with their second—and she’s holding a bag of cookies over her head as her daughter, Scout, tries to jump for them.

“Sugar bribes are a cruel and unusual punishment,” Mabel says, grinning as she kisses Dillon’s cheek in greeting.

“They’re pregnancy survival tools,” Dillon counters. “Besides, she’s Jensen’s daughter. If I don’t wear her out now, she’ll never sleep.”

“Fair.”

I lean against the counter, arms crossed, taking it all in. This house. My woman. These kids. Jensen and Dillon are in and out as if we all share one big, chaotic home. We kind of do.

When Mabel catches my eye, she gives me that soft, secret smile. The one that still undoes me. The one that reminds me this is real. She crosses the room, and I catch her around the waist, dropping a kiss on the top of her head as Indie tugs my beard.

“Hey, baby girl,” I murmur, and my daughter gives me a big, gap-toothed smile.

Mabel leans into me. “Did you ever think it’d be like this?”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:34 am

“No,” I admit. “But I prayed it would be.”

“You don’t pray,” she teases.

“I did then. Every second I had you in my arms and didn’t know if I’d get another chance.”

She goes quiet, resting her head on my shoulder.

“I love you, you know,” she says softly.

I tighten my grip around her. “I know. I love you, too. More now than I did then if that’s even possible.”

The back door opens again, and Luca barrels in. “Uncle Jensen’s lighting the grill on fire!”

“I said lighting the grill, not lighting it on fire,” Jensen shouts from outside.

Mabel groans, but she’s laughing again. I scoop up Indie as we follow our son into the yard. The sun is starting to dip low in the sky, bathing everything in gold.

This life... it’s chaos. It’s noise and kids and laughter and sometimes tears. But it’s also love. So much love.

I rescued my mate five years ago.

But the truth is, she saved me, too.