



Rescued By the Wacky Weretiger

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Category: Romance, Paranormal

Description: She's on the run from an abusive ex-boyfriend. He's a comedienne weretiger in the club where she works. What do you get when you cross a lady-in-distress with a joke spewing monster? Why a romance that will knock your socks off, of course!

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CHAPTER ONE

Felicity

The comedy club buzzes with frenetic energy, laughter and chatter mingling in the dimly lit space. I stand just inside the entrance, gripping the strap of my bag like it's a lifeline. The sharp tang of alcohol and the faint smell of stale popcorn assault my senses, pulling me deeper into the reality of this place.

My heart races, each beat echoing the surrounding din. This job, this sanctuary of humor, it's a world away from the chaos I escaped. But tonight, it feels different—more alive, more intense. I can almost hear Raj's deep, rumbling laugh from the back, a sound that always cuts through the noise and finds me, grounding me in the present moment.

I take a deep breath, trying to calm the nerves that ripple through me. I know he'll be on stage soon, and the thought sends a thrill down my spine. I've seen him perform countless times, but each set feels like the first, his sharp wit and easy charm never failing to captivate me.

"First night?" A voice cuts through the noise, snapping me back to the present.

I turn to see a woman in her thirties with platinum blonde hair pulled into a high ponytail. Her bright red lipstick matches her shirt, emblazoned with the club's logo. She looks all business, her posture confident and assertive, but there's a softness in her eyes that makes me relax just a bit. She smiles warmly, and I feel a flicker of connection, a hint that maybe this place isn't as intimidating as it seems.

"Yeah," I nod, my voice almost drowned out by a burst of laughter from the main room.

"You'll be fine," she says, handing me an apron. "Name's Tina. Just follow my lead and you'll get the hang of it."

I tie the apron around my waist, feeling its weight settle like an anchor. "Thanks, Tina."

She offers a quick smile before diving back into the fray, weaving between tables with practiced ease. I watch her for a moment, taking mental notes. Her movements are fluid, like she's done this a thousand times, and I admire her confidence. Gathering my courage, I step forward, ready to follow her lead. The hum of conversation and laughter fills the air, and I remind myself to breathe. I can do this.

The room is alive with movement and noise, with glasses clinking, chairs scraping, comedians testing their material on stage. It's chaos, but there's an underlying rhythm to it. I focus on that rhythm, letting it guide me.

"Hey! Can we get another round over here?" A man waves from a table near the stage, his friends already half-drunk and boisterous.

"On it," I reply, moving toward them with a confidence I don't quite feel yet.

I juggle drink orders and dodge rowdy patrons, slowly finding my groove. It's hard work, but there's something satisfying about it. Each successful delivery feels like a small victory, a reminder that I can handle this chaotic environment. The adrenaline pumps through me, mingling with the laughter and chatter around me, giving me a sense of belonging I haven't felt in a long time.

Between orders, I steal glances at the stage where Raj—one of the club's regular

comedians—is performing. His humor is sharp and effortless, drawing laughter like a magnet. There's an undeniable charm about him that pulls at me despite my best efforts to remain guarded.

A loud crash from behind startles me, and I whirl around to see another server dropping a tray of glasses. My heart races as shards scatter across the floor. Tina, ever the unflappable one, swoops in to help her, unfazed by the mess. She flashes me a reassuring smile, and I can't help but admire her calmness under pressure.

"I can do this," I whisper to myself, tightening my grip on my tray. The sound of laughter and clinking glasses becomes a distant hum as I focus on steadying my breath.

With renewed determination, I step back into the chaos. The bar is a whirlwind of activity—servers weaving through the crowd, bartenders mixing drinks with flair, and patrons losing themselves in Raj's performance. I'm ready to face whatever the night throws at me, even if my heart still flutters every time I glance his way.

I hustle backstage, balancing a tray of drinks and trying to navigate the narrow corridor. My heart thumps in my chest, partly from the adrenaline of my first night and partly from the proximity to Raj's booming laughter echoing from the stage. I take a deep breath, reminding myself that I can handle this.

As I turn a corner, I collide with something solid. The tray tips, and in slow motion, the drinks fly off, crashing to the ground. My eyes widen in horror as liquid splashes up, drenching the front of Raj's shirt.

"Shit!" My voice comes out in a panicked squeak as I scramble to pick up the pieces. "I'm so sorry!" I can feel the heat rising to my cheeks, mortified by my clumsiness.

Raj looks down at his soaked shirt, then up at me with those warm brown eyes. His

expression shifts from surprise to something softer—amusement? He runs a hand through his black hair, now glistening slightly from the drink.

"No harm done," he says, his voice a deep rumble. He chuckles softly, a sound that somehow eases my anxiety and makes my heart race at the same time. "I've had worse things thrown at me on stage," he adds with a wink, his warm brown eyes twinkling with amusement.

I scramble to pick up the broken glass, my face burning with embarrassment. "I didn't see you there," I mumble, my voice barely above a whisper. My hands are shaking slightly as I gather the shards, trying to avoid his gaze.

"Guess I'm just too stealthy for my own good," he jokes, crouching down beside me to help pick up the pieces. His presence is overwhelming up close, his scent a woodsy cologne that is something uniquely him. The warmth of his body radiates towards me, making it even harder to concentrate on the task at hand.

I can't help but laugh despite myself. "Yeah, or maybe I'm just too clumsy for my own good," I quip, my voice lightening as I glance up at him. His warm brown eyes meet mine, and for a moment, the tension eases. The way he looks at me, with amusement and something deeper, makes my stomach flip.

His hand brushes mine as we both reach for the same shard of glass. The touch sends a jolt through me and I pull back quickly, nearly losing my balance. He steadies me with a firm grip on my arm.

"You okay?" His eyes search mine, concern flickering behind the humor. The warmth in his gaze makes my heart skip a beat, and I can't help but feel a strange comfort in his presence. It's like he's genuinely worried about me, and that thought tugs at something deep inside.

"Yeah," I breathe out, my voice shaky. "Just... not how I imagined meeting one of the club's headliners." I force a small laugh, trying to lighten the moment, but the intensity in his eyes holds me captive. His grip on my arm is firm yet gentle, and the warmth from his touch radiates through me, making me acutely aware of every point of contact.

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He grins, showing off dimples that make him even more strikingly handsome. "Well, you certainly know how to make an entrance." His voice is smooth, with a hint of amusement that makes my heart flutter. The way he looks at me, as if I'm the only person in the room, makes my heart pound erratically and I don't know if I like it or not. I can feel the intensity of his gaze, and it stirs something inside me.

I laugh again, this time more at ease despite my racing heart. "Great first impression, right?" My voice carries a playful tone, though I can feel the butterflies in my stomach. His grin widens, and I can't help but feel a strange comfort in his presence. It's as if his confidence is contagious, and for a moment, I forget all the reasons I should be wary.

"Unforgettable," he says, and there's something in his tone that makes me feel like he means it. His voice is low, almost reverent, and it makes my core clench.

We finish cleaning up the mess together, our movements oddly synchronized. When he stands up, he extends his hand to help me to my feet. His grip is firm yet gentle, and I notice how his touch lingers just a moment longer than necessary. It's reassuring, almost protective, and I find myself reluctant to let go.

"I'm Raj," he says once I'm on my feet again, his voice carrying a warmth that wraps around me like a comforting blanket.

"Felicity," I reply, my voice soft as I meet his gaze. My hand still tingles from his touch, a sensation that seems to seep into my very core. I can't help but wonder if he feels it too.

"I'll remember that," he says with a wink, his eyes twinkling with mischief, before turning back toward the stage. As he walks away, I can't help but watch the confident sway in his stride, feeling curiosity bubbling up inside me.

I watch him go, feeling both relief and excitement swirl inside me. Maybe this night won't be so bad after all. As Raj disappears into the crowd, I linger on the warmth of his hand in mine. My heart flutters, a sensation I haven't felt in a long time. For once, the shadows of my past seem a little less daunting, and the laughter from the stage a little more inviting.

CHAPTER TWO

Raj

I step out into the spotlight, the familiar hum of anticipation buzzing through the packed room. The stage lights are blinding, but I've grown used to them. They're part of the game, a necessary distraction. But tonight, there's something else gnawing at my focus. Or rather, someone.

Felicity. The new server who ran into me backstage, her drink spilling all over my shirt. Awkward? Sure. But it was also electric. There was something about her that snagged my attention and refused to let go.

"Hey folks, how's everyone doing tonight?" I start, my voice filling the room. The crowd responds with cheers and claps. I scan their faces but find my mind drifting back to Felicity.

I launch into my first joke, something about dating apps and how you can swipe left on someone and end up matching with their hotter sibling. The crowd laughs, but I'm half-committed. My hand still tingles from where I caught Felicity's arm to steady her. Her skin was so soft under my fingers.

"Y'know," I continue, leaning into the mic with a smirk, "people say New York is the city that never sleeps. But honestly, that's just 'cause everyone's too busy avoiding eye contact on the subway." The crowd chuckles, and I glimpse Felicity's smile from the corner of my eye. It's like a spark that ignites something primal in me, making my pulse quicken.

Laughter ripples through the audience again, but it feels distant, like background noise to the reel of the pretty waitress playing in my head. Her wary eyes, framed by dark lashes that fluttered as she apologized. Her hair falling over her shoulders in waves that seemed to shimmer even under the harsh backstage lights.

There's something about her that's... alluring. It's not just her beauty, though that's impossible to ignore, it's her mystery. She looks like she carries secrets in those eyes, deep and guarded, like there are layers to her waiting to be unraveled. The way she moves, the way she speaks, it all hints at a story she's not ready to share. And damn if I don't want to be the one she finally opens up to.

I dive into another bit about how no one actually likes kale; it's just a social experiment to see how far people will go for Instagram likes. They laugh again, but my thoughts keep circling back to Felicity.

What is it about her? Why can't I shake this feeling? I'm used to women flirting with me after shows or during meet-and-greets, but Felicity didn't even look at me twice after our collision.

She's different.

The protective side of me stirs—the animalistic instincts I've spent years learning to control want to know more about her. The weretiger in me senses something special about her, something worth guarding. It's not just her beauty or the mystery in her eyes; there's a vulnerability she tries to hide, a strength she doesn't realize she has.

As I wrap up another joke about trying and failing miserably at cooking during quarantine—"Turns out sourdough starters need more than just wishful thinking"—the applause is louder this time, but I'm only half-listening. My eyes keep drifting to Felicity, who's moving gracefully between tables, her long dark hair cascading over her shoulders. There's a tension in her posture that pulls at me, making it hard to focus on anything else. The crowd's laughter feels distant, almost muted, as my weretiger instincts sharpen, urging me to stay alert and keep an eye on her.

My set finishes strong, the crowd's laughter still echoing in my ears. But as I step off the stage and head back toward the bar area. There's an irresistible pull towards her, a magnetic force I can't ignore. I need to find out what makes her tick, what secrets lie behind those hazel eyes. If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to uncover the layers she hides beneath that guarded exterior.

I step off the stage, applause still ringing in my ears, and head straight for the bar. Felicity's there, setting down an empty tray, her eyes scanning the room like she's searching for escape routes. I lean against the bar, my eyes never leaving her.

"Hey," I say, my voice casual but laced with curiosity. "How'd your first shift go? Everything alright?"

She looks up, surprised to see me standing so close. "It was busy," she replies, her voice soft but steady. Those hazel eyes of hers dart around like they're checking for danger, a fleeting shadow of fear crossing them. I can't help but notice how her hands fidget with the edge of the tray, a nervous habit she probably doesn't even realize she has.

My instincts flare up, the weretiger within me sensing her unease. I lean in slightly, trying to offer a comforting presence without crowding her. "Busy's good, right? Means more tips," I say, my tone casual but my eyes searching hers for any sign of

what's really bothering her. "You handled it well. Most new servers drop more than one tray their first night," I joke, letting a chuckle escape.

I'm hoping to see that smile again, the one that lights up her entire face and makes her eyes sparkle.

She gives a small laugh, barely more than a breath. "Guess I'm just lucky."

I catch the hint of vulnerability in her voice, and it tugs at something deep inside me. My instincts roar softly, urging me to protect her, to keep her safe from whatever shadows linger in her past. "Luck's only part of it," I say, leaning in just a bit closer. "You've got skill, too. Don't sell yourself short."

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I tilt my head, watching her closely, taking in every nuance of her expression. "You don't strike me as someone who relies on luck," I say, my voice gentle but firm. I want her to understand that I see her strength, that I'm not just feeding her empty compliments.

Her eyes flicker with something, fear? Maybe recognition? She quickly looks away, and I can feel her retreating into herself. "I just try to stay out of trouble," she murmurs, her voice barely above a whisper.

I lean in closer, my eyes never leaving her face. "Trouble has a way of finding people who don't deserve it," I say, my tone serious now. "Trust me, I know." I can feel the weretiger within me stir, a low rumble of agreement resonating through my chest. "But that doesn't mean you have to face it alone."

She glances at me, curiosity mingling with caution in her gaze. "What do you mean by that?" Her voice is soft, almost hesitant, like she's testing the waters.

I shrug, keeping it light. "Let's just say life has thrown me a few curveballs."

She nods slowly, like she understands more than she's letting on. There's a vulnerability there that tugs at me. Her eyes, so bright yet shadowed, pull me in. I can sense the weight of her past, a past she's not ready to share. .

"Sometimes, it's not about staying out of trouble," I add, my voice softening. "It's about facing it head-on. You've got this air about you," I continue, leaning closer so only she can hear, catching a whiff of her subtle floral perfume. "Like you've been through a lot but came out stronger."

Her eyes widen slightly, and she takes a step back, clutching the tray like a shield. "I don't know about that," she murmurs, her voice barely above a whisper. There's a flicker of pain in her eyes, a shadow of something dark and haunting.

I can almost feel the weight of her past pressing down on her, and my protective instincts flare up. The tiger in me growls softly, urging me to reach out, to comfort her. But I hold back, not wanting to scare her off.

I let out a soft chuckle, trying to lighten the mood. "You don't give yourself enough credit, you know." It's like I can almost see the invisible scars etched into her soul, and every part of me wants to reach out despite my rule against dating humans. But this human, I can tell, she's different.

"Thanks," she says finally, her voice barely above a whisper.

We stand there in a silence thick with unspoken words. Her eyes flicker with a mix of gratitude and something else, something deeper. My weretiger senses pick up on it, a subtle shift in her demeanor.

I clear my throat. "Look, if you ever need someone to talk to or just someone to make you laugh, I'm around." I lean in slightly, my voice soft yet resolute. "I mean it, Felicity. You don't have to go through this alone."

Her eyes meet mine again, and this time there's something different in them with a flicker of trust, maybe? It's small but unmistakable. My weretiger instincts sense the shift, a subtle but significant change in her guarded demeanor.

"Thanks," she repeats, this time with a bit more conviction. Her voice has gained a touch of strength, a hint of resolve that wasn't there before.

I nod, pushing off from the bar with a deliberate ease. "Anytime, Felicity. Seriously."

My eyes linger on her for a moment longer, hoping she can feel the sincerity behind my words.

As I walk away, I can feel her eyes on my back, a silent plea for a connection that tugs at my instincts. Something deep within tells me this is just the beginning of whatever is brewing between us. There's a magnetic pull, an undeniable spark that promises more.

My senses prick with anticipation, every fiber of my being on high alert for the unfolding of something significant. This isn't just a passing moment. It's the start of something I don't think either of us can ignore. The animal within me is restless and eager, recognizing the connection between us. It's more than just attraction, but something more.

CHAPTER THREE

Felicity

The night hums with laughter and clinking glasses as I weave through the crowd, balancing a tray of cocktails. The low lights cast a cozy glow over the comedy club, making it feel almost safe. Almost. I glance over at Raj, who's in deep conversation with some regulars, his easy smile lighting up his face. He catches my eye and winks. A tiny flicker of warmth spreads through me.

But then the front door bangs open, and my heart drops into my stomach. It's him. Nathan. His tall, menacing frame fills the entrance, and the room's lively chatter seems to dull. His cold eyes scan the crowd with predatory precision until they land on me. I freeze, my breath catching, and the tray in my hands wobbles precariously, threatening to spill the cocktails.

"Felicity!" His voice slices through the chatter like a knife, freezing me in place.

My feet feel like they're glued to the spot, refusing to obey my frantic mind. Nathan strides over, pushing past patrons with a force that leaves them stumbling, his presence a dark wave crashing toward me. Every step he takes sucks the air from my lungs, the room seeming to close in around me. The crowd parts for him, their joyful conversations dying as they sense the menace radiating from him.

"You thought you could hide from me?" His hand clamps around my wrist, squeezing tight. I wince, feeling the familiar sting of his grip, a cruel reminder of why I ran. My heart pounds in my chest, and for a moment, the room blurs around me. Every instinct screams for me to pull away, but his hold is unyielding.

"Nathan, please," I whisper, my voice shaking, barely audible over the pounding in my ears.

Raj's laughter, once a comforting background melody, stops abruptly. In an instant, he's at my side, stepping between Nathan and me with a growl that seems almost inhuman. The air around him ripples with a primal energy, his warm brown eyes now flashing with a predatory intensity.

"Let her go." Raj's voice is low, dangerous, each word laced with a threat that makes my skin prickle.

Nathan sneers, tightening his grip. "This is none of your business."

Raj's jaw clenches, muscles taut under his skin. "It became my business the moment you touched her," he snarls, his fingers flexing as if resisting the urge to shift. The crowd, sensing the escalating tension, silently backs away, forming a wide circle around us.

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Raj's eyes flash something wild and fierce. For a moment, I see something almost animalistic in his gaze. His muscles tense, and I can feel the protective energy radiating off him. Even in this crowded club, it's like the world narrows down to just the three of us. I know Raj won't back down.

Nathan yanks harder on my wrist, pulling me closer to him. Pain shoots up my arm, and I gasp. "You think you can protect her? She belongs to me."

A chair scrapes against the floor as someone stands up nearby. The tension crackles in the air, thick and heavy. I can feel Raj's anger radiating like a physical force radiating next to me.

"Felicity doesn't belong to anyone," Raj says through gritted teeth, his voice low and dangerous.

Fear clutches at my chest as Nathan's fingers dig into my skin, the pressure unbearable. Memories flood back with nights of shouting, bruises hidden under long sleeves, the feeling of being utterly trapped.

I look at Raj, pleading silently for help, my eyes wide with desperation. His gaze locks onto mine, and I see the fierce determination there, the promise of protection. It's like he's channeling some primal energy, his weretiger instincts on high alert. For the first time in a long while, a spark of hope ignites within me.

He takes a step forward, fists clenched at his sides. "Last chance: let her go."

Nathan's grip falters just enough for me to yank free and stumble back into Raj's

solid chest. His arm wraps around me protectively, the warmth of his body grounding me. I can feel the tension radiating from him, his muscles coiled like a spring ready to snap. His eyes, now burning with a fierce intensity, never leave Nathan.

“Get out,” Raj commands, voice vibrating with an authority that leaves no room for argument. The primal energy in his tone reminds me of the weretiger lurking just beneath his skin.

Nathan hesitates for a second, his eyes flickering between Raj and me. I can still feel the ghost of his grip on my arm, a chilling reminder of what just happened.

I sag against Raj, relief flooding through me even as my heart continues to pound in my chest. His arm tightens around me, and I can sense his protective instincts are still on high alert. The warmth of his body is a stark contrast to the icy fear that had gripped me moments ago.

I lean against Raj, trying to steady my racing heart. His arm around me feels like a lifeline. Nathan’s imminent departure leaves a gaping silence in the club, and I can feel everyone’s eyes on us. The room holds its collective breath, waiting for what happens next.

Raj glances down at me, a small, reassuring smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Hey, are you okay?” His voice is gentle, but there’s an underlying tension I can’t ignore. His warm brown eyes search mine, and I can feel the unspoken promise of protection beneath his calm demeanor. The way he holds me, so strong and sure, makes the fear from moments ago seem like a distant memory.

I nod, even though my legs still feel like jelly. “I think so,” I whisper, my voice barely steady.

He turns back to the crowd, his demeanor shifting effortlessly from protective to

playful. “Well, folks,” he calls out, his voice carrying a hint of humor that seems to break the tension in the room. “That was a little more drama than you usually get with your drinks, huh?”

Laughter ripples through the crowd, hesitant at first but then growing stronger. Raj keeps talking, his tone light and easy.

“You know, it’s not every day you get free entertainment with your cocktails. We might have to start charging extra for that kind of show!”

The audience laughs louder this time, and I can feel the tension easing away. Raj’s hand remains on my shoulder, grounding me. His touch is warm and reassuring. I steal a glance up at him, marveling at how he can so seamlessly transition from being my steadfast protector to the charismatic comedian everyone adores. His ability to command the room, to make people feel at ease, is nothing short of magical.

As the laughter dies down, he gives my shoulder a gentle squeeze before stepping fully back into his role on stage. “Alright, let’s get back to the reason you all came here tonight—some good ol’ fashioned laughs!”

His voice is full of energy, and the crowd responds with enthusiastic applause. I can’t help but smile, feeling a sense of calm wash over me.

“Now,” he continues, looking over at Nathan with a raised eyebrow. “Let’s give our friend here a proper send-off.” He steps forward slightly, his body language relaxed but firm. “Buddy, how about we take this outside? No hard feelings, right?”

Nathan glares at him but doesn’t move. Raj leans in closer, his voice dropping just enough for those nearby to catch.

“Look, man, it’s clear you’ve had a rough night. Let’s not make it worse for everyone

here.” His tone remains friendly, but carries an unmistakable edge that makes my skin tingle.

Nathan hesitates, his eyes darting between Raj and me. Finally, he backs down, throwing one last venomous glare in my direction before turning and stalking toward the exit. I let out a breath I didn’t realize I was holding.

Raj follows him partway, his presence commanding attention. As Nathan reaches the door, Raj calls out, “And remember, folks! The only drama we really want here is on stage!” He winks at the audience, and they erupt into cheers and applause.

I can't help but feel grateful for Raj’s intervention. The way he handled Nathan with such effortless control fills me with admiration. It’s strange to feel thisway about someone I barely know, but there's something undeniably comforting about his presence.

With Nathan finally gone, Raj turns back to me, his expression softening. “You alright?” His voice is low now, meant only for me, the concern evident in his tone.

I nod again, this time with more certainty. “Yeah thanks to you,” I manage, my voice steadier.

His smile widens?, and he gently brushes a strand of hair from my face. The touch is tender, almost reverent. “Anytime,” he murmurs, his eyes locking onto mine, filled with unspoken promises and a depth that makes my heart flutter.

The club slowly returns to its normal buzz of conversation and laughter as Raj guides me over to a quieter corner by the bar. His hand never leaves my shoulder until we sit down, his touch grounding me in the present.

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“I’m sorry about all that,” I whisper, feeling a wave of embarrassment over the scene Nathan caused. My cheeks flush as I glance around, hoping no one else is paying attention.

Raj shakes his head dismissively, a small smile playing on his lips. “Don’t be sorry.” He leans in closer, his eyes warm and reassuring, their depth pulling me in. “You’re safe now.” His words are like a balm to my frayed nerves, and I can feel the sincerity in his voice.

And for the first time in a long while, I believe it might be true. Raj's presence, his unwavering support, and the way he looks at me with such protective intensity make my heart flutter. Maybe, just maybe, I can finally stop running from my past.

CHAPTER FOUR

Raj

I catch up with Felicity just outside the club. She’s trembling, her eyes darting around like a trapped animal. I can practically smell her fear. “Hey,” I call out softly, trying not to startle her. “Let me walk you home.”

She glances at me, gratitude and wariness in her hazel eyes. “I’ll be fine,” she murmurs, but the quiver in her voice betrays her. It's clear she doesn't believe her own words.

“No way.” I step closer, my tone leaving no room for argument. My protective instincts are kicking in, and there's no way I'm letting her walk alone. “That guy

could still be lurking around. It's not safe."

Her shoulders slump in defeat, and she nods. "Alright, thanks." She sounds exhausted, as if every bit of fight has just drained out of her.

I fall into step beside her, scanning the shadows for any sign of danger. My weretiger senses are on high alert, and I can't shake the feeling that something's off. As we walk, I keep my voice low and soothing. "You don't have to be scared, Felicity. I've got you."

We walk down the dimly lit street. The night air is cool, and every sound feels amplified in the silence between us. I fight the urge to reach out and hold her hand, to offer more comfort than my presence alone can give.

"So," I say, trying to break the tension, "you from around here?"

She shakes her head, her dark hair catching the faint streetlight. "No. Moved here a few months ago." Her voice is small but steady, a fragile strength underlying her words.

I sense she doesn't want to delve into her past, so I switch gears. "You did great tonight, handling all those orders on your first night. Not easy, especially with a crowd like that."

A faint smile tugs at her lips, a flicker of warmth in her hazel eyes. "Thanks. It's been a while since I felt useful."

"Hey," I stop and turn to face her, looking into those haunted eyes that seem to carry the weight of her past. "You're more than just useful. You're strong."

She blinks up at me, confusion clouding her features. "Strong?"

“Yeah,” I say, continuing to walk beside her, my voice dropping to a gentler tone. “Most people would have crumbled back there with that jerk causing a scene. You stood your ground, didn’t let him push you around.”

A moment of silence follows, the night air wrapping around us like a shroud, before she whispers, “I didn’t feel strong.”

“Well, you are.” The tiger inside me growls in agreement, my instincts roaring to protect this fragile yet fierce woman by my side. I reach out, my hand hovering just above her back, offering support without crowding her. “And I’ll be here to remind you of that whenever you forget.”

As we walk on, my senses are on high alert for any sign of trouble. Her ex isn’t going to get another chance to scare her tonight. The moonlight casts a silver sheen on the pavement, and every rustling leaf or distant car engine makes my muscles tense, ready to shift if necessary.

“Raj,” she says softly after a while, breaking the silence that had settled between us like a comforting blanket.

“Yeah?” I respond, my voice gentle but firm.

“Why are you being so nice to me?” Her eyes search mine, filled with vulnerability and confusion, seeking answers I’m not sure I can fully articulate. I can see the walls she’s built, the scars left by her past. My tiger growls softly within, sensing her need for protection and understanding.

I take a deep breath, battling the primal urge inside me that roars to claim and protect her as mine. The weretiger in me is restless, demanding I make her feel safe. “Because everyone deserves someone who’s got their back,” I say, my tone carrying the weight of an unspoken promise.

She looks away as her gaze drifts to the ground, but she doesn't pull back when our shoulders brush against each other. The contact is small but significant, a silent acceptance of the support I'm offering. My heart pounds in my chest, the beast inside me calming slightly at this small connection. I want to reach out, to hold her, to reassure her she's not alone anymore, but I know I need to go slow.

"Felicity," I murmur, my voice a soft growl, "you deserve to feel safe, to be happy." Her eyes flicker back to mine, and in that moment, I see a glimmer of hope. It's fragile, like a delicate flame in the wind, but it's there.

I can't fully explain the depth of my need to protect her, to be the one she can rely on. Maybe it's the weretiger instincts roaring inside me, or maybe it's just the way she looks at me with those bright hazel eyes that make me feel like I can be her shield. All I know is that I'm not letting her go. The beast within me growls in agreement, a primal vow to keep her safe, to let no harm come her way again.

The walk to her apartment fills with a calm silence now that some of the tension has melted away. I can sense her relaxing beside me, the tightness in her shoulders easing with every step. We don't need to fill the space with words; the quiet between us is comforting, almost as if we've known each other far longer than we actually have. When we finally reach her building, she stops at the entrance and turns to face me, her hazel eyes catching the soft glow of the streetlights.

I can see the vulnerability mixed with something else. Curiosity, maybe? Her eyes search mine, as if looking for answers she's not sure she wants to find.

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“Raj,” she starts, her voice soft, almost hesitant. There's a fragility to it that makes me want to reach out and hold her, to promise her safety with more than just words.

“Yeah?” I keep my tone light, not wanting to spook her. My tiger instincts stir, urging me to protect her, but I hold them back, knowing she needs to feel in control.

She steps closer, so close I can feel the warmth radiating from her like a gentle fire. Her hand reaches out, brushing against my arm. The contact sends a jolt through me, my weretiger instincts roaring to life, muscles tensing with the urge to protect and claim. I can almost hear the primal part of me growling in approval, urging me to lean into her touch, to let her know she's safe with me.

“Thank you,” she whispers, her voice soft and fragile, like she's afraid it might shatter. “For everything tonight.” Her words hang in the air between us, and I can feel the weight of all the unspoken fears and hopes she carries.

It's not just gratitude; it's a small crack in the wall she's built around herself. I want to reassure her, to tell her I've got her back.

It takes all my self-control not to close the gap between us, to not pull her into my arms and promise that I'll always be there for her. My weretiger instincts are thrumming, urging me to claim and protect her, but I hold back, knowing it's not the right time.

"Anytime," I manage to say, my voice coming out rougher than I intend, betraying the intensity of my feelings. I clear my throat, trying to regain my composure, but ? she affects me more than I care to admit.

She smiles then, a small but genuine smile that lights up her face and makes my heart skip a beat. It's the smile that could melt the iciest of hearts, and mine's already a puddle at her feet.

"Goodnight, Raj," she whispers, her voice carrying a note of vulnerability that tugs at my heartstrings, making me want to wrap her in my arms and never let go.

"Goodnight, Felicity," I reply, stepping back reluctantly, fighting the urge to follow her inside and ensure she's truly safe. My instincts roar within me, demanding I stay close to her, but I force myself to turn away, knowing she needs her space. As I walk away, I can still feel the warmth of her smile lingering in the cool night air. A promise of something more.

She lingers for a moment longer, her eyes locking with mine in a silent exchange that speaks volumes. There's something raw and unspoken between us, a connection that neither of us fully understands yet. After what feels like an eternity, she turns and unlocks her door. The sight of her slipping inside, the door closing with a soft click, leaves me standing there, trying to process the whirlwind of emotions.

The night air feels cooler without her warmth, an emptiness settling in as I miss her presence already. The beast within me paces restlessly, its primal instincts demanding I stay close to my mate. But for now, it's content knowing she's safe behind that door. It's a small victory, enough to keep my animal side in check.

I turn away reluctantly, heading to my place. Each step feels heavier, as if the distance between us is a physical weight pressing down on me. My mind swirls with thoughts of Felicity, her bright hazel eyes and the gentle curve of her smile haunting my every thought.

The scent of her lingers in the air, a tantalizing reminder of what could be mingling with the cool night breeze. It's almost enough to make me turn back to pound on her

door and beg for just a few more moments in her presence. But for now, I have to be content with the memory of her warmth and the hope that this night is just the beginning.

CHAPTER FIVE

Felicity

A week later, I find myself back at the comedy club, leaning against the bar with a tray in hand. Raj is on stage again, his presence magnetic. His jokes draw laughter from the crowd, and I can't help but join in, feeling the tension in my shoulders melt away. The way he commands the room is mesmerizing, almost as if he's weaving a spell over everyone with his humor.

Raj's eyes sweep across the audience, and for a moment, they lock onto mine. He winks, and I feel a blush creep up my cheeks. There's something about him that draws me in, an inexplicable pull that makes me feel both nervous and safe. It's like the room fades away, leaving just the two of us in a silent, electric connection.

He wraps up his set with a punchline that has the crowd roaring. As he steps off stage, our eyes meet again, and my heart races. I quickly turn away, busying myself by collecting empty glasses from a nearby table, but I can still feel the warmth of his gaze on me, lingering like a gentle touch.

"Enjoying the show?" His voice, warm and inviting, washes over me as he approaches, and I can feel my pulse quicken.

"Yeah, you're pretty funny," I reply, attempting to keep my tone casual, though the smile tugging at my lips betrays me. I hope he doesn't notice the slight tremor in my voice.

“Pretty funny? I'll take that as a compliment.” He grins, leaning against the bar beside me, his presence magnetic, pulling me in without effort.

I can't help but laugh again, the sound surprising even me. “Well, don't let it go to your head.” I meet his gaze, and for a moment, the noise of the club fades into the background. His eyes seem to flicker with something primal, something that makes my heart race even more.

“I won't,” he promises, though his eyes sparkle with mischief, a hint of something deeper lingering there. “You seem more relaxed tonight.”

“Maybe I am.” I shrug, trying to downplay the significance, but there's truth in my words. “It's been nice... having some normalcy for a change.”

He nods, a gentle understanding in his gaze that makes my heart flutter. “Good. You deserve that.” His words are simple, but they carry a weight that makes me feel seen in a way I haven't in a long time.

“Thanks,” I murmur, feeling a warmth spread through me. “It's not often I get to just... be myself.”

Raj's expression softens even more, and he leans in slightly, the proximity making my breath hitch. “You should get to be yourself all the time, Felicity. No one should take that away from you.”

His words resonate deeply, and I find myself drawn even closer. The club's noise fades further into the background, leaving just the two of us in this moment. The primal flicker in his eyes is back, and I can't help but wonder what secrets he's hiding.

A warmth spreads through me at his words, wrapping around my heart like a comforting blanket. For so long, I've been on edge, constantly looking over my

shoulder, every shadow a potential threat. But around Raj, things feel different. Safe.

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“You know,” he continues, his voice dropping to a more intimate tone, “I’ve been thinking about what happened last week.”

“Oh?” My heart skips a beat, anticipation mingling with anxiety.

“Yeah.” He leans in slightly, his presence magnetic. “I’m glad I was there to help. But more than that... I’m glad it gave us a chance to talk.”

His words hang in the air between us, heavy with unspoken meaning and possibilities. My mind races with conflicting thoughts of fear of getting hurt again, battling against a growing desire to trust him, to let him in.

“I appreciate it,” I finally say, my voice trembling slightly.

“Anytime.” He reaches out as if to touch my arm but stops himself short, his hand hovering inches away. “If you ever need anything...”

“I know.” And for the first time in a long time, I believe it. In that moment, his warm brown eyes seem to glow with a depth that hints at something more, something primal and protective.

His proximity makes my skin tingle, a gentle reminder of the power he holds within. I can sense the weretiger just beneath the surface, waiting, watching. It’s both exhilarating and terrifying. My gaze drops to his lips for a fraction of a second before I catch myself.

“What are you thinking?” he asks, his voice a low rumble. The sound is rich and

velvety, like dark chocolate melting in my mouth.

“Just how different things feel with you,” I admit, my cheeks flushing with a warmth I haven't felt in ages. “I'm not used to this.” My voice wavers slightly, betraying the vulnerability I'm trying so hard to hide.

“This?” He arches an eyebrow, a playful yet knowing smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. His eyes never leave mine, and the intensity of his gaze makes my heart race. The warmth in his expression contrasts with the wild energy I can sense just beneath his cool exterior.

“Feeling safe,” I whisper, my voice barely audible. “And wanting more.” The words hang between us, charged with an intensity that makes my pulse quicken. Raj's gaze softens, and for a moment, I swear I see a flicker of his weretiger in those warm brown eyes.

His eyes darken, the flicker of the tiger unmistakable now. “You deserve to feel safe,” he murmurs, his voice a low, comforting rumble. “And you deserve more. So much more.” His words wrap around me like a warm embrace, and I feel a surge of hope that maybe, just maybe, I can have the happiness I've been running from.

For a moment, we're lost in each other, the club's chaotic energy a distant memory. Here, in this bubble of connection, the world outside doesn't matter. What matters is the promise in his eyes and the warmth spreading through my chest, igniting hope where there was once only fear.

The rest of the night passes in a blur of laughter and conversations with patrons, but my thoughts keep drifting back to Raj. What is it about him? His charm? His kindness? Or something deeper?

Whatever it is, it scares me and excites me all at once. My heart races at the thought

of getting closer to him, yet apart of me wants to run and hide. The conflicting emotions are almost overwhelming. But maybe, just maybe, this time will be different.

The night wraps up, and I walk out of the club with Raj. The city feels quieter at this hour. Soft, comforting glow from the streetlights bathes the streets. We make our way to a nearby diner, a place with neon signs and checkered floors that promise greasy food and endless coffee.

Raj holds the door open for me, and I step inside, the bell above the door jingling. We slide into a booth near the window, and I glance around at the few other late-night diners.

“What’s your poison?” he asks, picking up the menu and scanning it with those warm brown eyes of his.

“Fries and a milkshake,” I reply without hesitation, feeling a bit of my tension melt away. “You?”

“Same here. Can’t beat a classic.” He smiles at me, and it feels like we’re sharing a secret, a little bubble of connection in the quiet hum of the diner.

The server takes our order and leaves us in a bubble of quiet. Raj leans back against the booth, his eyes studying me with that familiar intensity.

“You ever wonder how you ended up where you are?” he asks, breaking the silence that had settled between us.

“All the time,” I admit, my voice barely above a whisper. “Feels like I’ve been running for so long.”

“From him?” His tone is gentle yet firm, making my heart stutter in my chest.

“Yeah.” I take a deep breath, trying to steady the rush of memories clawing at me.

“He was controlling. Dangerous. Leaving was my only option.”

Raj’s eyes darken, his jaw clenching slightly. I can almost sense the weretiger within him bristling at the mere thought of my past. “I get that,” he says, a protective edge creeping into his voice. “Sometimes you have to fight to survive.”

“What about you?” I ask, eager to shift the focus away from my painful past. “What’s your story?”

He chuckles softly, the sound warm and comforting. “Oh, it’s not as dramatic as yours. Grew up here, always loved making people laugh. Comedy became my escape.”

“But?” I prod gently, sensing there’s more beneath his easy charm.

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He sighs, his shoulders slumping slightly. “But, it’s hard being on all the time. Everyone expects me to be this happy-go-lucky guy. It’s exhausting.”

I nod, understanding more than he knows. “I can see that,” I say softly. “It must be tough to always wear a mask.”

His eyes meet mine, intense and searching, filled with a vulnerability he rarely shows. “It is. But lately it feels like maybe I don’t have to with you.”

My heart skips a beat, and I feel a warmth spreading through me. “You don’t,” I whisper, the words carrying a promise I hope I can keep.

His words make my heart leap, and the walls I've built around my heart tremble, just a little. “Maybe you don’t,” I whisper, my voice tinged with fear and hope. Could I really let someone in again?

Raj reaches across the table, his strong, warm hand enveloping mine. The touch is grounding, reassuring. “Let’s figure it out together,” he says, his voice low and steady.

My pulse quickens, and for a moment, the world outside the small, dimly lit room fades away. It's just us, two souls seeking solace in each other. His presence, both human and something more, feels like a protective shield around me.

CHAPTER SIX

Raj

I sit across from Felicity at the diner, the hum of late-night conversations and the clatter of dishes surrounding us. Her laugh, soft and genuine, cuts through the noise. It's like a melody I never knew I needed.

"Do you always use humor as a defense mechanism?" she asks, a playful glint in her hazel eyes that makes my heart skip a beat.

I lean back in the booth, smirking. "Only when I'm trying to impress a pretty server." I watch her eyes sparkle with amusement, a hint of a smile tugging at her lips. The way she looks at me, curious and unguarded for a moment, makes my heart race. My weretiger instincts stir, urging me to protect her, to keep this laughter in her life.

Her cheeks flush, and she looks down at her coffee cup. The vulnerability in her expression tugs at something deep inside me. My weretiger side roars to protect her, to claim her as my own. But I shove it down. She's human. She doesn't need to know what lurks beneath my skin.

"Thanks again for, you know, the other night," she says, her voice barely above a whisper, almost as if she's afraid to give those memories power by speaking of them.

"No problem." I keep my tone light, trying to ease the tension I see building in her. "That guy was an asshole." I lean back in my chair, letting my eyes linger on her for a moment. "You deserved better than that."

She looks up, her hazel eyes meeting mine. "Still, I don't know what I would've done if you hadn't handled it."

I shrug, trying to keep it cool even though my weretiger instincts are practically purring with satisfaction. "You don't need to worry about him anymore. I've got your back."

Her eyes darken with a flash of fear that sends a protective surge through my veins, my weretiger instincts roaring to the surface. She quickly blinks it away, but I catch the tremor in her voice. “He was more than that. He was a monster.”

I reach across the table without thinking, my hand covering hers. The contact sends a jolt through me, like electricity, making my skin tingle. Her hand is small, fragile in mine, and I can feel her pulse quicken under my touch.

“I’m here now,” I say, my voice low and serious, trying to convey the depth of my promise. I lean in closer, my gaze locking onto hers, hoping she can feel the sincerity radiating from me. My inner weretiger growls softly.

She looks up at me, and for a moment, we’re locked in this silent understanding. My weretiger stirs again, sensing her need for safety, wanting to be the one who gives it to her.

I pull my hand back abruptly, breaking the connection, though the tingling sensation lingers. Forcing a grin, I try to lighten the mood. “So,” I say, leaning back slightly, “tell me something fun about you.”

She narrows her eyes playfully, a spark of amusement dancing in them. “Something fun? Like how I used to have a pet turtle named Speedy?”

I chuckle, the sound rumbling deep in my chest. “Speedy? That’s original.”

She laughs softly, the sound like music to my ears. “He wasn’t very fast,” she admits with a small smile, her shoulders relaxing a bit.

“Well, at least he had a sense of irony,” I tease, feeling the tension in the room ease. “I bet Speedy had some stories to tell.”

“Not really,” she says with a smirk. “Mostly he just ate lettuce and slept.”

I grin, enjoying this lighter side of her. “Sounds like the perfect pet. Low maintenance.”

“Yeah,” she says, her voice softening. “He was good company.”

I nod, feeling my tiger stir again, this time with approval. She’s opening up, even if it’s just a little. And right now, that’s enough.

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We fall into a simple conversation after that, talking about everything and nothing all at once. But in the back of my mind, I'm fighting a battle against myself. Every time she laughs or smiles, it gets harder to remember why getting involved with a human is a bad idea.

As we leave the diner and walk down the empty street, I stay close to her side, hyper-aware of every sound and shadow around us. My instincts scream at me to shift, to ensure her safety with every fiber of my being.

But I can't do that.

"Are you always this jumpy?" she teases lightly, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Just cautious," I reply, trying to keep my tone light but failing to mask the underlying tension.

She stops in front of her apartment building and turns to face me. "Well, thanks for dinner," she says, a soft smile playing on her lips.

"Anytime." The word comes out rougher than I intend, my voice betraying the struggle inside me to keep my instincts in check.

She steps closer, her gaze searching mine with an intensity that makes my heart race. "You're different," she says softly, almost as if she's speaking to herself.

"You have no idea." The words slip out before I can stop them, the truth hanging heavily in the air between us.

Her brows knit together in confusion, but she doesn't press further. Instead, she offers a gentle smile. "Goodnight, Raj."

"Goodnight," I respond, my voice softer now, filled with a promise to keep her safe, no matter what.

The next night, I watch as the club's neon lights flicker, casting a soft glow over the crowded room. I'm in the middle of my set, but I divide my attention. Felicity's moving through the tables, balancing a tray of drinks with that grace she has. I catch her eye, and she gives me a small smile that sends warmth flooding through me.

Then, I see him. Her ex. He's standing near the entrance, eyes locked on Felicity with a look that makes my blood run cold. The weretiger inside me stirs, sensing danger, ready to pounce.

I force myself to stay calm, wrapping up my set with a few quick jokes, though my eyes never leave him. Every instinct in me screams to protect her. The moment I step off stage, I make a beeline for Felicity. She's at the bar now, her back to him, completely unaware of the threat inching closer.

But I see him. And I won't let him get near her.

He grabs her arm roughly, spinning her around. Her tray crashes to the floor, glasses shattering, sending shards everywhere. The crowd gasps, heads turning to watch the commotion unfold.

"Get your hands off her," I growl, closing the distance between us in an instant, my body tensing with the need to protect her.

Her ex glares at me, his grip on her arm tightening, but he doesn't let go. "This is none of your business," he sneers, eyes filled with malice.

"It is now." My voice drops low, dangerous, a primal edge creeping into my tone. The weretiger inside me roars, muscles coiling, demanding to be unleashed.

Felicity's eyes widen in fear as she looks between us, her voice trembling. "Raj..."

I step closer, muscles tensing as the shift begins. "Let her go," I demand, my voice a low growl.

His grip tightens one last time before he shoves her aside and lunges at me. Instinct takes over. My vision sharpens, and I feel my body change. Bones shift, muscles expand. It's always painful but necessary. The weretiger inside me snarls, eager to protect what's mine.

The crowd gasps again as they witness the transformation. I'm fully shifted now as a weretiger standing between Felicity and her past.

He hesitates for a split second, eyes widening in disbelief, but then he swings at me with all his might. I dodge easily, my instincts sharper than ever, and swipe at him with claws extended. Blood splatters as I make contact, painting the ground with streaks of crimson. But he's relentless, driven by some twisted sense of purpose.

He lands a solid punch to my ribs, and pain flares through my side, a white-hot reminder of the stakes. It doesn't stop me and I can't let it stop me. Not when Felicity's safety is on the line. The weretiger inside me roars, demanding retribution, a primal urge to protect what's mine. I take a deep breath, muscles coiling, ready for the next move.

I tackle him to the ground, pinning him with my massive paws, the weight of my weretiger form making escape impossible. My growl rumbles through the club like thunder, echoing off the walls.

"Leave," I snarl through bared teeth, the words dripping with menace.

He struggles beneath me, thrashing and kicking, but my grip is unyielding. Finally, his eyes widen with terror, and he nods, a pathetic whimper escaping his lips. I release him, watching as he scrambles away, stumbling and tripping over his own feet before disappearing into the night. My weretiger instincts slowly recede, but the protective urge remains stronger than ever.

As he flees, I shift back into human form, collapsing to my knees from exhaustion and pain. Every muscle protests, and the adrenaline fades, leaving me raw and vulnerable. Felicity rushes to my side, her hands trembling as she touches my face, her hazel eyes wide with concern.

"Raj, you're hurt," she whispers, her voice cracking.

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"It's nothing," I say through gritted teeth, trying to sound convincing. But even I can hear the strain in my voice.

Her eyes bore into mine, filled with worry and something else, something that makes my chest tighten. She knows it's more than nothing, and for once, I'm at a loss for words. How do I reassure her when I'm not sure myself that everything will be okay? My protective instincts roar within me, but right now, all I can offer her is the truth in my gaze and the hope that it's enough.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Felicity

I can hardly believe my eyes. Raj stood before me, not entirely human, but something else entirely, something magnificent and terrifying. A weretiger. The realization crashes over me like a wave, but there's no fear, only awe. He protected me.

His transformation has faded, leaving him human again, crumpled on the floor. Blood seeps from a gash on his arm. I drop to my knees beside him, my hands trembling as I reach out.

"Raj, are you okay?" My voice quivers, shattering any semblance of calm I tried to maintain.

"Yeah," he grunts, attempting to push himself up. "Just a scratch."

"That's more than a scratch," I retort, pressing my hand firmly against the wound to

slow the bleeding. "We need to get you out of here."

He manages a faint, strained smile. "You're bossy when you're worried."

"Shut up and let me help you," I snap, my voice tinged with both frustration and fear. I hook my arm under his, struggling to lift him. He's heavier than he looks, but adrenaline gives me the strength I need.

We stumble toward the exit, every step a struggle. The club's dim lights flicker above us, casting eerie shadows on the walls. Raj's breath is ragged in my ear.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I ask between grunts of effort.

"Not exactly first-date material," he replies, wincing as we reach the door.

Outside, the cool night air hits us like a slap. I lead him to a nearby bench and ease him down.

"You shouldn't have done that," I say softly, my voice barely above a whisper.

"I had to," he whispers back, his breath hot against my cheek. "Couldn't let that asshole hurt you."

I tear off a piece of my apron, my hands shaking as I press it against his wound. "You're crazy," I murmur, trying to keep the panic out of my voice.

His eyes meet mine, warm despite the pain etched across his face. "Maybe," he replies with a hint of a smile, the kind that makes my heart skip a beat despite the dire situation. That smile is so Raj—charming and infuriatingly confident, even now. For a moment, the world narrows to just the two of us, and I almost forget the blood seeping through my makeshift bandage.

I can feel his heartbeat under my fingers, strong and steady despite everything. It's strange how this moment—so raw and real—feels more intimate than any touch or kiss I've ever known. The warmth of his skin against mine, the rhythmic thump that reassures me he's still here, fighting for me. It's as if his very essence is seeping into my soul, binding us together in a way words never could.

"You saved me," I say quietly, my voice barely more than a whisper.

"And I'd do it again," he answers without hesitation, his words firm and unwavering.

I shake my head, trying to process everything. The weretiger thing is shocking, sure, but what hits me harder is how much he cares—how much he's willing to risk for me. My mind races, replaying the events of the night. The way he leapt into danger without a second thought, the fierce protectiveness in his eyes. It's almost too much to take in.

"Why?" I ask, my voice trembling with the weight of the question.

His grip on my hand tightens, grounding me in the moment, his gaze never wavering from mine. "Because I care about you, Felicity."

The sincerity in his eyes makes my heart ache. For the first time in a long time, I feel a flicker of hope. Maybe, just maybe, I can trust again.

"Let's get you out of here," I finally say, breaking the silence that hangs between us.

"Felicity," he starts, his voice full of emotions I can't quite decipher, but I cut him off gently.

"We'll talk later," I insist, trying to keep my voice steady. "Right now, you need rest. You've done enough for today."

Raj leans heavily on me as I help him up, his weight solid and reassuring against my side. My apartment isn't far, but every step feels like a mile with him injured. His breathing is ragged, but he doesn't complain. The adrenaline that had fueled me moments ago begins to wane, leaving me shaking with the aftermath.

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“Hang in there,” I murmur, my voice steady despite the turmoil inside. “We’re almost there.” Each step feels heavier as I bear some of his weight, but the warmth of his body against mine keeps me grounded. I can feel his muscles tensing with every movement, a reminder of his strength even in this vulnerable state.

Each step he takes sends a ripple of tension through his body, and I can't help but marvel at the raw power just beneath his skin. It's hard to believe that someone so strong could be brought low, yet here he is, leaning on me. His resilience is palpable, giving me the determination to keep going despite my own exhaustion.

His arm tightens around my shoulders, and he grunts in acknowledgment. Each step feels like a lifetime, the quiet streets amplifying the sound of our footsteps. We stumble through the night, the weight of his injury pressing down on both of us. When we finally reach my building, I fumble with the keys, cursing under my breath at my trembling hands.

“Easy,” he says softly, his breath warm against my ear. His attempt at humor nearly pulls a smile out of me. Despite everything, he manages to be comforting, his presence a steady anchor in the chaos.

I manage to get the door open and we half-walk, half-stagger inside. The elevator ride up to my floor is a blur of tension and worry. Once inside my apartment, I guide him to the couch and ease him down gently.

“Stay here,” I instruct, heading to the bathroom to grab the first aid kit. My hands are still shaking as I rummage through the cabinet. When I return, Raj is leaning back with his eyes closed, his breathing shallow.

“Raj,” I say softly, touching his arm to get his attention. His eyes flutter open, revealing a flicker of relief. He offers me a weak smile, a hint of his usual charm breaking through the pain that's etched across his face.

“Thanks for this,” he mutters, his voice strained but sincere. The gratitude in his eyes is unmistakable, and it tugs at something deep inside me. I can see the effort it takes for him to stay composed, to keep that mask of nonchalance even now.

“Don’t thank me yet,” I reply, trying to keep my tone light despite the knot in my stomach. I focus on cleaning his wound; it’s deeper than I realized, but thankfully it’s stopped bleeding for now. The sight of it makes my hands tremble again, but I force myself to stay steady. He needs me to be strong right now.

He watches me work, wincing occasionally but staying mostly silent. His gaze is intense, making me hyper-aware of every move I make. The intimacy of tending to his wounds like this sends a strange thrill through me. I can feel the heat of his eyes on my skin, and it’s both comforting and nerve-wracking. Each time he flinches, I want to reach out and soothe him, but I also feel an electric connection growing between us. It’s as if this moment is peeling away the layers of our guarded hearts, exposing something raw and real.

“You’re good at this,” he comments after a while, his voice low and sincere. It draws me in, but I try to focus on the task at hand. His compliment feels too personal, too intimate, and it makes my cheeks warm. I glance up at him, catching the soft admiration in his eyes.

I shrug, focusing on bandaging him up properly. “You pick up a few things when you’ve been on your own for a while,” I reply, keeping my tone casual. My past isn't something I want to delve into right now, not when his wound needs my full attention.

He doesn't press for details, and I'm grateful for that. Raj always seems to know when to push and when to back off. Once I've finished patching him up as best as I can, I sit back on my heels and take a deep breath, trying to calm the adrenaline still coursing through my veins.

"How do you feel?" I ask quietly, my eyes searching for any sign of lingering pain. The dim light casts shadows across his face, and I can't help but notice the way his eyes soften as they meet mine. I wonder if he's aware of how much I care, how much I want to help him, despite the walls I've built around myself.

Raj shifts slightly and winces again, but he nods. "Better than before," he says, his voice a bit strained but reassuring. His warm brown eyes meet mine, and I can see the flicker of pain he's trying to hide. Despite that, there's a hint of his usual confidence, a silent promise that he's tougher than he looks. It makes me feel a little better, knowing that even when he's hurt, he's still the strong, resilient man I've come to rely on.

A wave of relief washes over me at his words, and I can't help the small smile that tugs at my lips. "Good," I respond softly, feeling a strange mix of pride and protectiveness. His resilience is something I admire deeply, and it stirs something within me. A fierce desire to shield him from any more pain. I want to be there for him, to offer the same strength and comfort he's given me.

His gaze locks onto mine, and for a moment, the world outside this room fades away. There's an unspoken understanding between us, a connection that goes beyond the physical. I can sense his weretiger side, the fierce protector lurking just beneath the surface, and it makes my heart race.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Raj

My body aches from the transformation, muscles still raw from the battle with Felicity's ex. I sit on her couch, feeling like a wounded animal. Felicity's gentle hands tend to my wounds, her touch soft but sure. I can't keep this from her anymore. She deserves to know the truth.

"Felicity," I begin, my voice rough and tired, every word a struggle against the pain coursing through my body. Her gentle touch is the only thing keeping me grounded.

Her hazel eyes, filled with concern and curiosity, lock onto mine. "What is it, Raj?" she asks softly, her fingers pausing on the bandage she's securing.

"I need to tell you something," I say, holding her gaze, knowing this moment could change everything. "About what you saw tonight." My heart pounds in my chest, the weight of my secret pressing down on me. "There's more to me than you know."

She nods, her hands never faltering in their gentle care. "Go on."

"I'm not, just a man," I admit, feeling the weight of the secret I've carried for so long. "I'm a weretiger. I can shift between human and weretiger forms."

Her hands pause for a heartbeat, then resume their soothing ministrations. "So that's why you transformed? To protect me?"

"Yes," I reply, relief and anxiety knotting in my chest. "I couldn't stand by and let him hurt you."

Her eyes soften, and she doesn't pull away. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I was afraid," I confess, the words tasting bitter on my tongue. "Afraid you'd be scared or reject me if you knew the truth."

She places a hand on my cheek, her touch warm and reassuring, grounding me in the moment. "Raj, you risked your life for me. Why would I reject you for that?"

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"You deserve someone normal," I murmur, my voice barely above a whisper, the vulnerability of the admission taking its toll.

"Normal is overrated," she says with a small, comforting smile. "And besides, I've never felt safer than when I'm with you."

I take a deep breath, my heart pounding less fiercely now but still aware of the enormity of my revelation. "I didn't want you to see me as a monster," I say, my voice trembling despite my best efforts to keep it steady. "I've kept this part of me hidden for so long, but with you... I couldn't anymore."

She leans in closer, her hazel eyes locking onto mine with unwavering intensity. "You're not a monster, Raj. That's what matters to me."

At that moment, I realize just how much I've come to care for her. My instincts scream to protect her, but my heart yearns for her trust and acceptance. "You're stronger than you know," I whisper, my gaze never leaving hers.

"And you're more human than you think," she replies softly, her smile radiating a warmth that chases away my lingering doubts.

For so long, I've hidden this part of myself, fearing rejection and isolation. But here she is, accepting me without hesitation, warmth radiating from her touch.

"Thank you," I manage to say, emotion thick in my throat. It's a simple phrase, but it carries the weight of my gratitude and relief.

She leans in closer, her bright hazel eyes locking onto mine, her face inches away. "No more secrets between us, okay?" Her voice is soft but firm, a promise and a plea wrapped in one.

"Okay," I agree, feeling a weight lift off my shoulders, and for the first time, I allow myself to hope that maybe, just maybe, this could work.

Her lips brush against mine in a tender kiss, sealing our newfound understanding. It's gentle yet electrifying, a quiet reassurance that we're in this together. At this moment, I'm not just a weretiger or a comedian; I'm hers, and she's mine.

And for the first time in years, I feel whole again. The beast inside me purrs contentedly, recognizing its mate.

Her lips are soft against mine, sweet and urgent. I can't hold back any longer. Overcome with emotion, I pull Felicity deeper into the kiss, my hands cradling her face as if she's the most precious thing in the world.

She responds eagerly, her fingers tangling in my hair, drawing me closer. The intensity between us ignites like wildfire, our breath mingling, our bodies pressing together. I feel the heat rising, my heart racing at how unafraid she is of my weretiger form. It's as if she sees me, all of me, and accepts every part.

With a low growl of need, I lift her effortlessly into my arms, the beast within me roaring with approval. She clings to me, her eyes filled with trust and desire. The connection between us is palpable, electric. As I carry her to the bedroom, I can feel her heartbeat syncing with mine, a rhythm that's both soothing and exhilarating.

Setting her down gently on the bed, I hover over her, drinking in the sight of her flushed cheeks and parted lips. The room is filled with the scent of her, intoxicating and inviting. Her gaze holds mine, unwavering, and in this moment, there's no doubt

in my mind—she's my mate, and I'll protect her with everything I am.

"Raj," she breathes out my name, her voice barely audible, yet it resonates within me, stirring a primal desire that courses through my veins. Her soft whisper is both a plea and a promise, awakening the beast within me, making it harder to hold back.

I capture her lips again, this time with an urgency that reflects my growing need for her. My hands wander, tracing the contours of her body, reveling in the softness that yields beneath my touch. She responds, arching towards me, her own hunger mirroring mine as her fingers tangle into my hair, pulling me closer.

Our clothes, once a necessary shield, now serve as an unwanted obstacle. We shed them hastily, driven by a mutual yearning to explore each other more intimately. Our hands explore the freshly revealed skin, our mouths searching and discovering. The connection between us crackles, each caress sending jolts of electricity coursing through my veins, each kiss igniting a flame that threatens to consume me.

"You're mine," I murmur against her skin, my voice rough with possession and tenderness, my weretiger instincts roaring in agreement.

"Yes," she whispers, her voice a sweet surrender that echoes in the room, as she entwines her legs around me, drawing me closer. Her trust and desire intertwine, weaving a spell around my heart, making it pound with a primal rhythm. My weretiger instincts roar in approval, urging me to claim her as mine, to protect her from all harm. But it's not just the beast within me that yearns for her, it's me, Raj, the man who's been captivated by her beauty, her strength, and her resilience.

I plunge into her in a single, fluid motion, both of us gasping as the incredible sensation envelops us. The world fades away until there's only us with every powerful thrust a testament to her importance, an unspoken pledge carved into each movement. The heat of our connection sears into my very being, making it

impossible to think of anything but her.

Our bodies synchronize in a frenzied yet gentle rhythm, a dance of desire and connection. Each caress, each ragged breath is a vow that we are no longer alone, that this bond between us is genuine and unyielding. The intensity of our union resonates through my weretiger instincts, roaring with satisfaction and fierce protectiveness. I feel my animal side urging me to protect, to cherish, to never let her go.

Her nails rake down my back, and I respond with a deep growl, my lips finding hers in a searing kiss. It's more than just physical; it's an affirmation of everything we are to each other. Every touch, every shared breath, pulls us closer, binding us in a way that transcends words.

Felicity's moan echoes my name, a sound that stokes the embers of desire burning within me. My weretiger instincts roar in approval, urging me to claim her as mine, but I hold back, focusing on giving her a pleasure that transcends the physical. Her fingers dig into my back, each scratch a testament to her passion, spurring me on as we surrender to the intensity of our connection. Our bodies entwine, we lose ourselves in each other, our hearts beating in sync as we dance on the edge of ecstasy.

Our bodies synchronize in a flawless rhythm, a dance of passion and urgency, each movement a desperate plea to be closer, even as we're entwined as one. We communicate in a language that transcends words, our desires and affections echoing in every touch, every caress. Her breath mingles with mine, creating a symphony of shared longing. Each stroke of her fingers, each press of her lips, speaks to me in ways that words never could. The room fades away, leaving only the heat between us, the raw, unfiltered connection that binds us together.

Our climax hits like a crescendo, a crash of ecstasy that leaves us both breathless, our bodies quivering in the aftermath. I collapse beside her, pulling Felicity into my embrace, our limbs still tangled together. Her head finds solace on my chest, and for

the first time in what feels like forever, a sense of tranquility washes over me, calming the restless beast within.

In this moment, nothing else exists but the woman beside me, the one who accepted all of me, the man and the beast, without an ounce of hesitation. Her fingers trace lazy patterns on my skin, and I feel an overwhelming sense of peace, a rare stillness that quiets the constant roar of my weretiger instincts. I kiss the top of her head, breathing in the scent of her hair, and I know that I would do anything to protect this connection, this fragile yet unbreakable bond we've forged.

CHAPTER NINE

Felicity

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The sunlight filters through the thin curtains of my bedroom, casting soft, warm patterns on the walls. Raj's steady breathing beside me is a comfort I didn't know I needed. My heart races and calms in an uneven rhythm as I study his peaceful face. The night before feels like a dream, one where a weretiger steps in to save me from my worst nightmare and stays to show me what real tenderness looks like.

I trace a finger along Raj's jawline, feeling the roughness of his stubble. It's surreal, this sense of security and connection. Yet, just beneath that surface lurks the ghost of Nathan. His voice still echoes in my mind, reminding me of the darkness I've known too well.

Raj shifts slightly, his eyes fluttering open. "Morning," he murmurs, voice husky with sleep.

"Morning," I reply, pulling my hand back quickly as if burned. The warmth of his skin lingers on my fingertips.

I try to shake off the lingering shadows of my past, focusing instead on the here and now. He stretches, a hint of his animalistic grace evident even in this simple movement. There's something primal and reassuring about the way he moves, a reminder that he's more than just a man.

"Did you sleep well?" he asks, his voice pulling me back from my thoughts.

"Yeah," I say, trying to infuse my voice with more confidence than I feel. "Better than I have in a long time."

His eyes soften, and he reaches out to brush a strand of hair away from my face. "Good. You deserve to feel safe."

His words strike a chord deep within me. It's not just about feeling safe, though. It's about feeling seen, understood. And Raj, with his easy charm and hidden depths, seems to get that.

"What's on your mind?" His warm brown eyes search mine, and I can tell he senses my turmoil.

I sit up, pulling the sheet around me. "Everything's happening so fast," I admit, looking away from him. "I'm not used to feeling... safe."

He props himself up on one elbow, concern etching lines into his handsome face. "I get it. You've been through hell."

"And you... you're so different," I continue, struggling to find the right words. "But I'm scared, Raj. What if?—"

He cuts me off gently. "I'm not Nathan." There's a fierceness in his voice that reassures me more than any tender promise could.

"I know," I whisper, glancing back at him. His sincerity hits me like a wave, eroding the walls I've built around my heart.

Raj reaches out, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. His touch is tender, yet there's an underlying strength that reminds me of his dual nature. "I'm not going anywhere."

I swallow hard, fear and hope churning in my stomach. "I want to believe that," I admit, my voice barely above a whisper.

"You can," he says firmly, his warm brown eyes locking onto mine. "We'll take it one day at a time. No rush. Just us." His words are a lifeline, pulling me from the depths of my anxiety.

The weight of his words sinks in, grounding me. It's crazy how sure I feel about him despite everything I've been through. But that fear—the fear of getting hurt again—is a stubborn shadow that won't let go easily.

"I want to trust this," I confess, my voice barely above a whisper.

"Then trust it," he replies firmly, his warm brown eyes locking onto mine. "Trust us. We'll figure it out together."

His confidence is intoxicating. It's like he's giving me permission to believe in something good for once. I lean into his touch, letting myself feel the warmth and solidity of him beside me. The steady rhythm of his heartbeat soothes the anxious fluttering in my chest.

"Okay," I say finally, feeling a small spark of hope ignite within me. It's a fragile thing, but it's there, flickering against the shadows of my past.

Raj pulls me closer, his arms a protective cocoon around me.

As I rest my head against his chest, I can't help but marvel at the strange twist of fate that brought us together. His weretiger instincts, his fierce protectiveness, promise a safety I've never known.

The steady rise and fall of his breathing lulls me into a sense of peace I've long forgotten. In his arms, the world feels less daunting, less filled with shadows. And maybe, just maybe, this is the beginning of something beautiful. A future where love triumphs over fear, where I can finally breathe.

The decision feels like a weight lifting off my shoulders, even as the gravity of it settles in my chest. I take a deep breath and look Raj in the eyes. Those warm brown eyes that have seen me at my most vulnerable, and still, here he is. Steady. Unwavering.

His gaze holds a promise, one that whispers of protection and unwavering support. It's as if his weretiger instincts sense my hesitation, urging me to trust, to believe in this bond that's forming between us. I can almost hear the silent pledge in his eyes: he won't let anything harm me.

"Raj," I start, feeling the tremor in my voice but pushing through it. "I don't want to run anymore."

His gaze locks onto mine, intense and focused. "What do you mean?" he asks, his voice low and steady, almost a growl. My instinct is to flinch, but I stand my ground.

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"I mean I'm tired of looking over my shoulder. Of being afraid. I want to face whatever comes, but I want a real chance with you," I say, my words gaining strength as I speak them. His eyes narrow slightly, and I can see the weretiger within him stirring, protective instincts flaring to life.

Raj's face softens, a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Are you sure?" His voice carries a gentle caution, but underneath it, I sense a surge of hope, a longing that matches my own.

"More sure than I've ever been about anything," I say, and to my surprise, it's true. The safety he gives me isn't just about physical protection—it's a balm for my heart, a shield for my spirit. For the first time in ages, I feel like I can breathe without the weight of my past crushing me.

Raj pulls me closer, his touch both gentle and firm, like he's afraid I'll slip away if he's not careful. "You don't know how much I've wanted to hear that," he murmurs, his voice a low rumble. His warm brown eyes search mine, and I see the vulnerability he's kept hidden behind his humor and confidence. It's like he's baring a piece of his soul to me, and I can't help but feel the same.

I lean into him, feeling the warmth of his body and the steady rhythm of his heartbeat. It's like finding a safe harbor after a stormy sea. "I know it's not going to be easy," I admit, my voice barely above a whisper. "But I think we can make it work. Together."

His fingers brush through my hair, and I can sense the feral intensity just beneath the surface, his weretiger instincts always ready to protect me. "We'll face it all," he

assures me, his voice a low, comforting rumble that wraps around me like a blanket. "I'll always be here for you, no matter what."

The sincerity in his words wraps around me like a promise, and for the first time, the future doesn't seem so daunting. It feels like something worth fighting for, something we can conquer together.

It's like finding the missing piece of a puzzle I've been struggling with for too long. "I do," I whisper back, my voice trembling with the weight of our shared hope.

For the first time in what feels like forever, I allow myself to fully relax. Being with Raj feels like coming home to a place I've never known but always needed. The warmth of his embrace seeps into every corner of my being, pushing out the cold shadows of my past. His scent, a mix of spice and something uniquely him, envelops me, grounding me in this moment.

I close my eyes, surrendering to the safety of his presence. "Thank you," I murmur, barely audible. "For everything." The words seem inadequate, but they are all I have to express the depth of my gratitude.

Raj pulls me even closer, his fingers tracing soothing patterns on my back. "We'll face it all," he repeats, his voice a low, comforting rumble that vibrates through me. "And we'll come out stronger."

In his arms, I feel a burgeoning strength, a resilience I never knew I had.

"I want this," I tell him again, my voice trembling slightly as I try to convey the depth of my feelings. "I want us."

Raj tilts my chin up, forcing our eyes to meet once more. His gaze is unwavering, filled with a fierce determination. "Then we'll make it work," he says, his voice low

but carrying an intensity that leaves no room for doubt. His words are a promise, solid and unbreakable, and for the first time in a long while, I feel a glimmer of hope blossoming within me.

A sense of peace washes over me—a peace I haven't felt in years. It's not just about escaping Nathan; it's about building something new with Raj. Something real and tangible, something that fills the void I didn't even know was there.

We sit there in silence for a while, just holding each other. The world outside fades away, leaving only the promise of what we can be together. His warmth seeps into me, grounding me in a way that feels both foreign and incredibly right.

For the first time in a long time, I'm not afraid of tomorrow. Instead, I find myself looking forward to it, excited about the endless possibilities that lie ahead with Raj by my side.

CHAPTER TEN

Raj

Planning this date feels like prepping for a performance, but this time, it's not just about getting laughs. It's about showing Felicity how much she means to me. My heart pounds, the weretiger in me restless and insistent. She's my mate; every instinct screams it.

I walk through the park, scoping out the perfect spot. It has to be special. I find a secluded area near a small pond, surrounded by cherry blossom trees. The petals fall gently, creating a soft pink carpet. It's serene, intimate—perfect for us.

Back at my apartment, I gather supplies. A blanket, a basket of her favorite snacks I've noticed she likes at the diner, and a small speaker for some background music.

The weretiger part of me demands perfection, an innate drive to ensure every detail speaks volumes about my feelings. I toss in a couple of candles for good measure, hoping to add that extra touch of romance.

As I double-check everything, my thoughts drift to Felicity. Her laughter, her guarded hazel eyes, the way she tucks a strand of dark hair behind her ear when she's nervous. She deserves this and she deserves to feel cherished and safe.

I can't wait to see her reaction.

When I pick her up from her place, her eyes widen at the sight of me holding the basket and blanket, a flicker of astonishment dancing in her hazel eyes. The surprise on her face is exactly what I hoped for, and it sends a thrill through me. Her guarded expression softens, just for a moment, and I can see the curiosity and tentative excitement beneath it.

"What's all this?" she asks, her voice tinged with wonder and hesitation. I grin, feeling my weretiger instincts purr with satisfaction.

"You'll see," I say, a playful tone in my voice. "Just trust me." My weretiger instincts buzz with anticipation, eager to see her reaction when she realizes how much thought I've put into this.

We walk hand in hand through the park, the warmth of her touch sending a thrill through me. The setting sun casts a golden hue over everything, making her hair look like it's glowing. My weretiger senses heighten as I lead her to our spot, eager to ensure everything is perfect. I spread out the blanket, arranging the basket and food meticulously, hoping she'll notice the effort.

She sits down and looks around, her eyes wide with wonder, taking in the serene beauty of the park. "This is beautiful," she says softly, her voice filled with genuine

awe.

I settle beside her, my heart racing as I watch her. “You deserve beautiful things,” I reply, my voice firm yet tender.

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She blushes and looks down at her hands, her vulnerability touching something deep within me. “No one’s ever done something like this for me,” she admits, her voice barely above a whisper.

I reach out and gently lift her chin so she meets my gaze, my thumb brushing against her soft skin. “Get used to it,” I say, my eyes locking onto hers, filled with a promise I intend to keep.

We share a meal under the stars, our laughter blending with the symphony of nature around us. Felicity opens up more than ever before, her voice animated as she recounts childhood dreams and favorite books. I can’t help but be mesmerized by her, the way her eyes light up with every story she shares.

After we finish eating, we lie back on the blanket, gazing up at the night sky dotted with countless stars. The cool night air wraps around us, but her warmth against my side is all I feel. An overwhelming urge to protect her always surges through me, a primal instinct I can’t ignore. My weretiger side purrs in contentment, resonating with the peace I find in her presence, as she nestles closer to me. Her head rests on my chest, and I can feel the steady rhythm of her breathing, matching the beat of my heart.

“Raj,” she whispers softly, turning to face me, her hazel eyes gleaming in the starlight.

“Yeah?” I murmur, my voice barely louder than the night breeze.

“I’m glad I met you.” Her words are simple but filled with so much emotion, it makes

my heart ache.

I smile, leaning in to kiss her forehead gently. "Me too."

At that moment, I know for sure that she's my mate. The bond is undeniable, and I'll do everything in my power to keep her safe and happy. As she nestles closer, I wrap my arm around her, pulling her tighter against me, vowing silently that nothing will ever hurt her again.

As we walk back to my place, the night air cool against our skin, there's an electricity between us that's impossible to ignore. Felicity's hand fits perfectly in mine, like it was meant to be there. The moonlight casts a gentle glow, making everything feel surreal.

Once inside my apartment, I close the door behind us and turn to her. She looks up at me, her eyes filled with desire and something deeper. Love. I see it clearly now.

I pull her into my arms, our lips meeting in a searing kiss. The world fades away as I lift her effortlessly, carrying her to my bedroom. Every step feels heavy with anticipation, the weretiger in me purring with approval. Her fingers tangle in my hair, and I can feel the rapid beat of her heart matching my own.

The scent of her, intoxicating and uniquely hers, fills my senses. My animal instincts sharpen, urging me to protect, to claim, to cherish. As I lay her gently on the bed, the moonlight streaming through the window casts a silver glow over her, making her look ethereal. I pause for a moment, just to take in the sight of her, my mate, my everything. With a soft growl of satisfaction, I lean down, capturing her lips once more, knowing that this is just the beginning of our forever.

Her lips part as she whispers my name, "Raj." The sound is a soft plea, her voice trembling with a need that mirrors my own. The desire in her eyes, the way they seem

to beg for my touch, it's intoxicating. It stokes the fire within me, the animalistic instincts that have been awakened by her presence.

I flash a reassuring grin, gently sweeping a loose strand of hair from her delicate face. Her hazel eyes lock onto mine, vulnerability flashing there that makes my heart swell. "I'm here, Felicity," I murmur, my voice barely above a whisper. My fingers linger on her cheek, feeling the warmth of her skin, and I can't help but add, "I'll always be here."

In a frenzy of longing, our clothes disappear, discarded in our haste. Our bodies entwine, driven by a primal hunger that's somehow both urgent and tender. I take my time exploring her, tracing the curves and valleys of her body with a slow, deliberate touch. My fingers dance across her skin, reveling in the goosebumps that rise in their wake, the way she quivers under my touch stoking the weretiger's fire within me.

Her fingernails bite into my back, a silent demand for more as her breaths come in short, desperate gasps. I tower above her, my body a harmonious blend of dominating power and tender strokes. Every muscle in my body is coiled, ready to pounce, yet I restrain myself, savoring each moment. My hand trails down her side, igniting a trail of fire in its wake, as I guide us both towards a fate that feels as though it's been etched into the cosmos.

Our bodies move in perfect harmony, as if we've done this a thousand times before. Every touch, each kiss, ignites a blaze that threatens to consume us. Her soft moans blend with my deep, guttural growls of satisfaction, as we find our rhythm in this primal dance of love. The weretiger within me stirs, reveling in the intimacy, the connection, the sheer intensity of our passion.

Her form sways in time with mine as I delve deeper, claiming her with a sense of ownership that's intertwined with tenderness. She mirrors my tempo, our tie fortifying with every fleeting moment. The weretiger within me rumbles its approval,

acknowledging the link that's taking shape between us.

At the peak of our connection, it feels like a volcano of unfiltered emotions detonates inside us, merging ecstasy and fervor in a way neither of us can fully restrain. We cling to each other, our bodies trembling in flawless unison as waves of delight cascade over us, leaving us gasping and fulfilled. Every shudder and moan from Felicity intensifies the moment, making it impossible to tell where I end, and she begins.

In the aftermath, we lay entwined on the bed, our chests heaving as we struggle to regain our composure. I pull her closer, my arms encircling her petite frame as an overwhelming sense of rightness envelops me, a feeling that I've never experienced before. Her warmth seeps into me, calming the beast within, the weretiger purring in satisfaction. Felicity is mine, and I am hers—there's no denying it now.

"You belong with me," I growl softly into her dark tresses, my voice gravelly with emotion. "And I'm not letting you slip away, not now, not ever."

Felicity lifts her head, her radiant hazel eyes meeting mine, a tender smile gracing her lips. "Always," she murmurs, her voice brimming with a tranquil conviction that sinks deep into my core, binding us together in a promise that transcends time.

In that moment, I know without a doubt—my instincts were right. She's truly my mate, the one I've been searching for all this time. My weretiger senses hum with the truth of it, a primal recognition that goes beyond words. The bond we share is undeniable, a connection that roots itself deep within my soul. I'll spend the rest of my life loving and protecting her, cherishing every moment we share. No force on earth could make me abandon this promise.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Felicity

Waking up in Raj's arms, I feel warmth and security wrapping around me like a soft blanket. His steady breath against my neck soothes me, each exhale chasing away remnants of my past fears. It's as if his presence is melting away the scars and leaving behind a peace I never thought I'd find. The comfort in his embrace is almost surreal, considering how guarded I've always been.

I snuggle closer, feeling the hard planes of his chest beneath my cheek. His heartbeat is a steady drum, syncing with mine. Early morning light filtering through the curtains, casting a gentle glow on our entwined bodies. The soft rays highlight his features, making him look almost ethereal, yet undeniably strong.

For a moment, I close my eyes and just breathe him in, the subtle scent of his skin mixed with a hint of something wild, something untamed. It reminds me of his secret, the part of him that's both terrifying and thrilling. I never imagined I'd feel this safe with someone, especially someone with such a dangerous edge.

But here I am, nestled against him, feeling more at home than I ever have.

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Raj stirs, his arms tightening around me, pulling me closer. "Morning," he murmurs, his voice rough with sleep.

"Morning," I reply, my fingers tracing lazy patterns on his skin, feeling the warmth and strength beneath my touch. The intimacy of this moment is almost surreal. Never did I imagine waking up next to someone could feel so right, so safe, like I finally found a place where I belong.

He shifts slightly to look at me, his warm brown eyes filled with an emotion that makes my heart skip a beat. "You okay?" he asks, his voice gentle yet carrying an undercurrent of concern.

"I am," I whisper, a soft smile playing on my lips. "For the first time in a long time, I really am." The truth of my words sinks in, bringing a sense of peace I hadn't felt in years.

His lips curl into a smile that sends a rush of warmth through me. "Good. You deserve it," he says, his tone firm, almost possessive, like he's making a vow.

"I do," I say, realizing the truth of those words as they leave my mouth. For years, I've let fear dictate my life, but lying here with Raj, that fear feels like a distant memory. His protective presence, his strength, and the wild, untamed part of him that he keeps hidden – it all makes me feel like I can finally breathe, like I can finally stop running.

Raj's fingers trail down my arm, sending tiny electric shocks across my skin. "You hungry?" he asks, his voice a low rumble that makes my heart flutter.

"A little," I admit, laughing softly at how normal this feels. It's almost surreal, like we've been doing this forever, sharing these quiet, intimate moments.

"Let's make breakfast," he suggests, his eyes sparkling with warmth. He presses a tender kiss to my forehead before reluctantly getting out of bed. The absence of his warmth makes me miss him instantly, but watching him move, so sure and graceful, I can't help but smile.

I watch him move around the room with a powerful grace that's distinctly him. My weretiger protector, always so confident and sure of himself. The thought brings a smile to my face as I get up, the cool air brushing against my skin. I pull on one of his shirts that hangs loosely on me, enveloping me in his scent and warmth. It's comforting, like a shield against the world.

Watching him, I feel a sense of peace I haven't felt in years. He's all confidence and power, effortlessly owning the space. As he starts gathering ingredients for breakfast, I can't help but admire the easy way he moves, like he's always ready to shift into his weretiger form at a moment's notice.

In the kitchen, we move together seamlessly with him chopping vegetables while I whisk eggs. It's domestic and simple, but there's an undercurrent of something deeper, almost primal, between us. The way he handles the knife, each precise cut, the flex of his muscles, reminds me of his weretiger nature.

As we sit down to eat, Raj reaches across the table and takes my hand in his. "Felicity," he begins, his eyes locking onto mine with an intensity that makes my heart flutter. His grip is firm yet tender, a perfect balance that makes me feel cherished and safe.

"Yeah?" I respond, my voice softer than I intended, almost a whisper.

"I'm really glad you're here," he says, his thumb gently stroking the back of my hand. I nearly melt at the warmth of his touch, and I can't help but notice the way his eyes soften, revealing a vulnerability he rarely shows.

I squeeze his hand gently, feeling the weight and warmth of his words settle in my heart. "Me too," I reply, a smile tugging at my lips. The simplicity of the moment, the honesty in his gaze, it all makes me feel like maybe, just maybe, I can let my guard down with him.

Raj's eyes bore into mine, and I can feel the weight of what he's about to say pressing down on my chest. He squeezes my hand, his grip firm yet gentle, and the warmth of his skin seeps into mine. "I know we haven't known each other long," he starts, his voice steady but tinged with a hint of vulnerability that makes my heart skip a beat, "but I can't ignore how I feel about you." His words hang in the air, heavy with unspoken promises and emotions that make my breath catch.

My heart skips a beat. "Raj..."

"No, let me finish," he insists, his thumb brushing over my knuckles. "I want you to know that I'll always protect you. No matter what comes our way."

His words wrap around me like a protective cloak, but I can't help the sliver of doubt that creeps in. "Raj, you've already done so much for me. But what if... what if I'm too much trouble?"

He leans forward, his eyes never leaving mine. "Felicity, you're not trouble. You're worth every bit of effort." His tone is so sincere it almost breaks my heart. "I've faced worse, trust me." There's a flicker of the weretiger in his gaze, a reminder of his dual nature, of the strength and ferocity beneath his calm exterior.

"But I'm scared," I admit, my voice trembling. "What if my past catches up with

me?"

"You're not alone anymore. I've got your back, always." He lifts my hand to his lips and places a tender kiss on my knuckles, making my breath hitch.

I can't help but smile. The warmth of his words and the promise in his eyes melting away some of my fears. "Thank you, Raj. I... I think I'm starting to believe that."

He gives me a small, reassuring smile. "Good. Because I'm not going anywhere."

He shakes his head, eyes never leaving mine. "You're not trouble, Felicity. You're worth every risk." His voice is full of conviction, leaving no room for doubt.

"You really mean that?" I ask, searching his face for any sign of hesitation.

"With everything in me," he vows, his tone unyielding. "I've spent years keeping people at arm's length because of what I am. But with you it's different." His eyes flash with a hint of his animalistic nature, a reminder of the weretiger lurking beneath his charming exterior.

I take a deep breath, letting his words sink in, feeling a sense of relief just admitting it out loud. "I've been running for so long," I confess, the weight of my past lifting slightly with each word.

"Then stop running," Raj says simply, like it's the easiest thing in the world. "Stay with me."

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The simplicity of his offer makes my heart swell, a glimmer of hope piercing through my doubts. "You make it sound so easy."

"It can be," he replies with a small smile, his confidence unwavering. "If we're together."

"I want that," I say before I can second-guess myself, my voice carrying an honesty that surprises even me. The thought of having someone to share my burdens with is both terrifying and exhilarating.

Raj's smile widens, and he brings my hand to his lips, pressing a tender kiss to my knuckles. "Then it's settled."

I laugh softly at his certainty, a warm, unfamiliar feeling blossoming in my chest. "You're something else."

"And you're everything," he counters smoothly, his eyes twinkling with affection. The intensity of his gaze makes my pulse quicken, and for once, I allow myself to believe that maybe, just maybe, I don't have to be scared alone anymore.

"I'll always love you," he promises, his voice low and filled with an emotion that wraps around me like a warm blanket on a cold night. The sincerity in his words seeps into my very soul, making me feel cherished in a way I never thought possible. His warm breath fans across my skin, and I close my eyes, letting the moment wash over me, savoring the rare sense of peace his presence brings.

"I believe you," I whisper back, my voice barely audible as I squeeze his hand tightly,

anchoring myself to this moment. It's like I'm grounding myself in the reality of his words, letting the fear and doubt slip away.

For once in my life, believing feels easy, almost natural. As I look into his warm brown eyes, I see a future that doesn't scare me. Instead, it fills me with hope and a sense of security I've never known.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Raj

Waking up with Felicity in my arms feels surreal. Her soft breath against my chest, the steady rise and fall of her body. It's a peace I haven't known in years. My life before her was a string of nights filled with laughter, but always ending alone. Now, there's warmth and connection that I didn't realize I craved.

Felicity has changed everything. Her presence has carved out a new part of me, one that's raw and unguarded. I used to think my charm and humor were enough to keep people at a safe distance, to keep me from getting hurt. But she saw through all that, saw the man beneath the jokes.

She's brought out a protectiveness in me I didn't know was so fierce. When her ex showed up again, my instincts flared like never before. It wasn't just about defending her because it was about protecting something precious to me. Shifting in front of her should've terrified me. She accepted every part of me without hesitation.

Her trust, her bravery is humbling. And it's made me want to be better, to be the man she deserves. Before Felicity, my world was black and white while performing at the club, laughing with strangers, keeping everyone at arm's length. Now, it's full of color and possibility because she's shown me what it means to really connect with someone.

I glance down at her sleeping face, peaceful and beautiful. She's been through hell but still found the strength to open up to me. She taught me that real strength isn't just about physical power or shifting into a weretiger to fend off threats. It's about vulnerability, about letting someone in even when it scares you.

I think back to our late-night dinner conversations where we peeled back the layers of our pasts like old paint on a wall. She trusted me with her story, and in return, I shared mine with my fears, my loneliness masked by humor. Each revelation pulled us closer together until our hearts beat as one.

Her love has done something incredible. It's made me feel human again in a way that no amount of applause or laughter ever could. She's given me a reason to fight for more than just survival or the next big joke on stage. It's something primal, almost raw, like the instinctual drive that makes me shift under a full moon, but this time, it's tethered to her.

Felicity stirs slightly in my arms, murmuring softly before settling back into sleep. At this moment, I realize how much she's become my anchor. With her, the gnawing loneliness that has haunted me for years is finally at bay. And as long as she's by my side, I know I'll never have to face another dark night alone again.

The sound of her soft breathing fills the room, and I can't help but marvel at how much my life has transformed. For the first time, I'm not just surviving—I'm living. The memories of countless performances, the faceless crowds, and the temporary highs all fade into the background.

They pale to the vibrant reality she's brought into my life. Every laugh we share, every touch, every whispered confession in the dead of night. It all feels so much more real, more meaningful.

I think about the animal inside me, the weretiger that's always been a part of who I

am. It used to be something I kept hidden, something I only let loose when I needed to protect myself. But with Felicity, it's different. She's shown me I don't have to hide any part of myself, that I can be both the man and the beast, and she'll love me all the same.

As the first light of dawn filters through the curtains, I tighten my hold on her, feeling a profound sense of gratitude. She's given me a gift I never thought I'd find acceptance. And with that acceptance comes a deeper understanding of what it means to be truly alive. Her presence grounds me, makes me feel like I can conquer anything.

I know there will be challenges ahead. Her ex won't disappear overnight, and my own past still lingers like a shadow, always threatening to resurface. But for the first time, I feel ready to face whatever comes our way. Together, we're stronger than anything that tries to tear us apart. I'll protect her with everything I have, both as a man and as the beast within.

She stirs slightly, her hazel eyes fluttering open, and she looks up at me with a sleepy smile. "Morning," she murmurs, her voice soft and husky.

"Morning, beautiful," I reply, brushing a strand of hair from her face. "Sleep well?"

"Better than I have in a long time," she says, snuggling closer. "With you, I feel safe."

Her words touch something deep inside me, awakening a primal urge to protect her. I tighten my arm around her, feeling the beast within me stir. "I'll always keep you safe," I promise, my voice low and earnest.

She sighs contentedly, tracing a finger along my collarbone. "I know you will," she whispers, trust shining in her eyes.

I'm realizing just how much she means to me. The challenges ahead, her ex, my own secrets. They don't seem as daunting when I think about facing them together. I nuzzle her hair, inhaling her scent. "We've got this, Felicity. Together, we're unstoppable."

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She smiles again, a flicker of hope brightening her hazel eyes. “Yeah, together,” she echoes, her voice filled with quiet determination. I can see the strength in her, the resolve that's I buried under layers of fear and doubt. It makes me want to protect her even more, to be the rock she needs. I gently kiss her forehead, feeling the beast within me purr with approval.

The comedy club buzzes with energy tonight as Felicity and I step onto the stage together. This place, once a backdrop for my solitary performances, now feels alive with shared purpose. The spotlight hits us, and I glance at her. Her eyes sparkle with excitement and nerves. It's a sight that makes my heart pound in a way no audience ever could.

"Ready to kill it?" I ask, squeezing her hand, feeling the warmth and reassurance in her grip.

She nods, a small smile playing on her lips. "Let's do this," she says, her voice carrying that playful challenge that I adore.

The crowd cheers as we begin our set. Felicity's laughter is infectious, mingling with mine in a harmony that feels so right. Our chemistry is undeniable, each joke landing perfectly because we're not just performing, we're living our truth.

“So, dating a weretiger has its perks,” Felicity starts, her voice steady but playful. “He never loses me in a crowd.”

The audience erupts in laughter, and I can't help but beam at her. Her courage to joke about our reality on stage? It's more than I could've ever hoped for. She's embracing

our world, our shared secret, with a boldness that makes me fall for her even harder.

“Yeah,” I jump in, grinning. “And she always has the best seat at the zoo.”

The laughter swells again, and we feed off it, bouncing off each other like we’ve been doing this for years. It’s electric, the way we connect—not just with each other but with everyone watching. The energy in the room is palpable, and I can feel my tiger instincts stirring, sensing the thrill of the hunt, the joy of the crowd.

As we continue, I steal glances at Felicity. Her confidence grows with every punchline, her smile lighting up the room. She’s come so far from the scared woman who first walked into this club. Now, she’s my partner in every sense of the word. Her strength and resilience shine through, and I couldn’t be prouder.

We end our set to thunderous applause. The crowd rises to their feet, and I pull Felicity into a hug, our faces close enough that I can feel her breath against my cheek, warm and reassuring.

“You were amazing,” I whisper, my voice thick with emotion, barely able to contain the pride swelling within me.

She laughs softly, her eyes twinkling with joy and disbelief. “We were amazing,” she counters, her smile widening.

I can’t help but feel a surge of protectiveness, my inner beast rumbling in agreement. This moment, this woman, everything feels right.

As we step off stage, the energy follows us like an echo. It’s a high unlike any other because it’s not just about the laughs or applause, it’s about sharing something real and raw with someone who means everything to me.

Backstage, I catch her hand again, pulling her close. “You ready for our new

adventure?" I ask, my voice low and filled with promise.

She looks up at me, eyes shining with unspoken promises. "More than ready."

In that moment, surrounded by the remnants of laughter and applause, I know we're not just starting a new chapter—we're writing an entirely new story together. And it's going to be one hell of a ride. My tiger senses tingle with anticipation, ready to protect and cherish her every step of the way.

We walk out of the club hand in hand, ready to face whatever comes next together. The cool night air hits us, a stark contrast to the warmth of the stage lights.

I glance at Felicity, her face radiant under the moonlight, and my heart swells. We've both been through so much, but standing here with her, I feel invincible. My inner beast stirs, sensing the challenges ahead, but also the undeniable promise of a future filled with love and laughter.

"Where to now?" she asks, her voice soft but filled with excitement.

"Anywhere you want," I reply, squeezing her hand. "As long as we're together."

Her smile is all the answer I need.