



# Rory

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**Category:** Romance, M-m Romance, Paranormal

**Description:** When Rory moves up the mountain to live with the wolfpack he's been supplying with food and necessities for years, he's feeling a little... bereft. His dragon friends have disappeared, and his brothers don't need him at their trading post. He tries to find a purpose, helping anyone who needs it inside the pack. And then an injured wolf he's never seen before limps into his life, shot by either a poacher or a rival pack, and Rory knows he's something special. Fen is wounded in his heart as well as his body, on the run from wolves who broke up his small pack, and shot by an unseen enemy. When he limps into Rory's life, he's just trying to survive, but he knows he's been given something special in Rory. He has a mate. Too bad he's just a carpenter and not a growly warrior who can protect Rory from all the stuff that's about to come down on the Uinta mountain pack. Can Fen and Rory make it work when the pack is at risk?

**Total Pages (Source):** 53

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

## Chapter

### One

Rory Calhoun was...itchy.

Not bored, necessarily. He had a lot to do. Shipments to distribute from his uncles and shit. Kids to watch when the omega wolves needed a babysitter and some adult time with their mates.

He loved it. He really did. He wasn't lonely like he had been down at the little outpost where he'd grown up. The pack had taken him in. But he was still...restless.

His feet itched, so he started walking, needing to maybe go to the stream and wander along the banks.

The children were roaming now that summer was in full swing, coming home filthy and exhausted, snarling up their suppers, taking their baths, and collapsing. There was way less in the way of weaving, knitting, and crocheting.

Canning. All the ladies and many of the male omegas were canning, and while Rory knew the basics of all that, he was just in the way, really. He would deliver some of the canned goods down to the trading post to sell at some point, but they only needed so many people chopping veg...

So he was on his own for a hot minute, and he was loving it.

Seriously. Just loving it.

Even if he was restless.

God, he was such a dork.

He grabbed a couple of flat rocks to skip, because that had always been one of his favorite things when the water levels were down in the summer.

A low growl had him tilting his head, his nostrils flaring. “Who’s there?”

He heard the sound again, and he tried to decide whether to crouch down at the stream level or try to fade into the woods. His heart pounded, and sweat gathered on his skin.

He couldn’t take a wolf. He knew it. He was just a guy.

Rory took a deep breath. “Hey. I’m not here to trespass or anything. I can move along. Seriously. I’m one of Keegan and Jameson’s pack.”

A huge silvery-gray wolf stepped out of the brush on the other side of the creek, padding forward, head down, teeth bared.

Oh, shit. Shit. Don’t run, he told himself. That just makes you prey. How many times had Zeke told him that. Hopefully, that crazy dragon had the right of it, even if he was across some damn mythical veil now.

“Hey, I don’t want trouble.” The wolf’s markings were unfamiliar, his coloring not like the reddish tones of most of the pack...

Then Rory saw the bloody wound on the wolf’s left shoulder.

“Oh no! Oh, honey. Let me get you help.” He grabbed his phone, not even hesitating.

A sharp bark made him almost drop the phone.

“I swear. I’m just getting someone here who can help. I suck at medical shit.”

The wolf waded into the water, coming ever closer, and he wondered for a crazy moment if this was one of the wolves Jameson had banished a while back. Like a bad-guy wolf.

He glanced into bright blue eyes. No.

No, he didn’t believe that was the case.

“No attacking. I’m going to get you help. I’m a good guy. I have a pack—I mean, they let me in. You know I’m not a wolf...”

He texted Jameson.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Jameson wasn't much of a texter, but he was a man of action.

The wolf padded right up to him, then that nose hit his crotch, the wolf sniffing deeply.

Oh, oops. His eyes went wide. "Uh. No biting, man. I'm friend, not foe. Or food. I doubt I smell like food, though. I have some water in my pack, maybe an oatmeal cookie?"

The big guy panted, his blood leaking down to stain the ground.

Right. Wounded. "I have an extra shirt in my bag. Let me get it, and I can at least get the bleeding slowed down." Rory made a show of moving his hands slowly. "I promise. Just a shirt."

The big wolf eased to sitting and then kind of...keeled over on his good side. And he sure wasn't asking for belly rubs.

"Oh, sweet wolf. I'm so sorry. Let's get the bleeding slowed and then we'll get the healers. Niall is amazing, and so are Linda and Lacey..." He just kept jabbering as he got the shirt out and gingerly tried to cover the wound.

A soft sound came out of the wolf. In a less alpha-looking specimen, he would have said it was a whine.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. Someone is coming..."

The sound of Jameson's truck rattled to him, and he gave a sigh of relief.

"Jameson! Over here! It looks bad." And he didn't want this one to be hurt.

"Coming." Jameson squealed to a stop as close as he could without wrecking the truck. "I had to bring the truck because we won't all fit in the side by side. Let me see."

"I don't know him, but he's—" Gorgeous. "—needing our help."

"He's not familiar to me either, and he doesn't smell like pack or like the banished. They shot him, I would guess."

One big paw came up, resting on Rory's leg.

He jumped a little, but he thought he got it. Don't leave me, that paw said. I trust you.

"I'm right here. I won't go anywhere, I promise. I told you, this is a good place."

The panting got more and more shallow, and Jameson gave him a grim look. "He's going into shock. I need to lift him. Make sure he doesn't bite me."

"Okay. We're going somewhere we can get help now. I'm with you." Rory rubbed those crazy cool ears. "This is going to hurt, but I won't leave you. I promise. You found me."

The words just poured out of him, like they were what he was supposed to say.

That low sound came to him again, and he winced. God, that hurt his soul. He hated that this wolf was in pain.

“You sit with him and keep him as still as you can,” Jameson said, settling the injured wolf on blankets in the back of the truck. “This is bouncy.”

“I’ll stay with him.” He offered the big wolf a smile. “Help is coming. Or we’re going to help. You know what I mean.”

That big paw pressed against him again, the wolf’s eyes closed now, the blood still sluggishly seeping out from under his shirt bandage.

“You’re going to be all right. I’m here.” He slowly stroked the soft ruff. “You’re fine.”

The paw got heavy on his arm.

“No. Stay with me, okay? I need you to look at me. Please.” Please don’t die, he thought.

Not...dying. Just so tired.

Oh, honey. You can rest. I just want you to be all right. If it wasn’t real, answering couldn’t hurt anything, and if he heard the wolf, then it would help.

They’re a good pack?

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Amazing. They took me in, and they didn't have to.

I trust you. And with that, the wolf went limp.

"Hurry, Jameson! He's passed out."

"Good. I don't have to be so careful! Hold on."

"I'm on it." He held onto the truck with one hand and the wolf with his other. He didn't want them falling out. They came to a stop not much later at the village, people pouring out of cabins.

Rory refused to leave the wolf. He'd made a promise, and he would keep it. So he stuck close as Jameson carried the wolf to the healer's hut, his legs giving out so he flopped down next to the pallet they laid the wolf on.

"Can you help him?"

"Of course we can. He's weak, but the wound is clean, still." One of the healers swatted at him. "Have faith."

"I want to. He's just hurting really bad." And it made him want to bawl. He wished he had some sort of magical healing ability, but he was just a dude who hauled shit up and down the mountain.

He was a fairly reasonable babysitter and a half-fine cook too, but it wasn't anything that fixed anything.



“Then sit with him and evince your will to the universe, Rory. Tell him he has to recover.”

“I can do that.”Don’t give up, pretty wolf. You’ve come so far. Please. Don’t give up. It would...it would break my heart.

No...breaking you.That mental voice was thready. Faint. But there. And...amused?

No. No breaking me, please.He didn’t need that. He was finally feeling like there was somewhere he could be.

I’m—I’m here.That fluffy tail moved just slightly.

You’re beautiful. I’m Rory. Rory Calhoun. What’s your name?

Fen. My name is Fen.The mental voice seemed a little stronger, as if Rory gave him something to focus on.

“His name is Fen.”I’m so glad to meet you. Honest.

“Good. That’s good.” The healer gave him an odd glance but kept working on Fen’s shoulder. “Stay with us, Fen.”

Yeah, no leaving. I want to get to know you. You’re safe now, remember?

I am? You promise? They shot me.

Not anyone from this pack. I swear.And if they had, Jameson and Keegan would bite them.You’re safe. I’ll protect you.

Thank you, Rory Calhoun. I’m so tired.

“There we go. The bullet is out, and I think he’ll heal up fine. He needs to stay shifted for a bit so he heals faster, but this was less invasive than I thought.”

“I’ll stay with him.” He’d promised he would.

“You’re a good egg, Rory. I’m going to go steep some herbs to put in some water for him. That will help him heal.”

“I’ll be right here to help, fair?”

“Fair enough.”

Rory... Hurts.

I’m so sorry. The bullet’s out, though. I...He stroked the soft fur, wishing with all he was that his wolf would be okay.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Thank you. Am I allowed to sleep now?

“Can he sleep if he’s able? We don’t need to keep him awake?”

“He needs his rest. Sleep is the best thing for him.”

Sleep, Fen. Sleep now. I’ll keep watch.

Rory. That was a bare mental whisper, and then he felt Fen turn off like a light.

Chapter

Two

Fen woke up to a roaring headache, pain in his shoulder, and a huge rumbling in his belly. It had been...well, he had no idea how long it had been since that last rabbit.

And then someone had shot him.

He’d thought he was high enough on the mountain that there would be no pack. That he could find a place to rest. To stop running for a bit.

But then he’d been running for his life again.

He’d known right away that Rory wasn’t part of the pack who had tried to kill him. He’d been so scared but so kind.

So willing to help.

And then Fen had heard him in his head.

His mate.

He'd found his mate, and he was going to die. He'd been so aggravated.

Now, though, he thought he might live. If he could just get some water. His tongue felt like it could choke him.

"I have it right here. There's a bottle and a bowl. What would you rather have?"

Bowl. The man inside him wanted to say bottle, but he knew it would never work when he couldn't sit up.

"No problem." He could smell the water, and Rory's hands were gentle and kind as they helped him lap up a drink.

Thank you. He laid his head back down, the pain making him pant. Note to self, he thought. Don't get shot.

"Can I do anything? I hate having you hurt."

Sit with me. I need to feel you. I'm cold.

"Yeah. It's cold up here at night, even in the summer."

Where am I? He had no idea. He could be anywhere from Wyoming to Utah to Colorado.

Utah. Uinta mountains. We're up there.

I did think I was high enough not to run into a pack.

Rory snorted. There were dragons. It was a thing.

Fen blinked, trying to make Rory come into focus. Dragons?

Yep. A bunch of them. I was one of their friends.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

What happened to them? He was going to need to pee soon.

They went away. They just disappeared. Like poof.

That set him back on his heels. Is there some sort of portal here? Am I in danger of...poofing? He'd seen too many magical things to doubt Rory's story, and his new...friend sounded sad that his dragons were gone.

No. All the wolves are fine. And me too. The dragons are the ones that left. That's it.

Hmm. He took a deep breath, testing the wound to see how bad it hurt now that he was awake. Okay. Whoa.

"Hey. Hey, easy. No hurting you, okay? That's not cool." Those warm hands eased him back down.

His tail thumped, because Rory's voice and touch made him happy. Calmed him.

"That's right, sweet wolf. That's so much better. Just relax."

He went as boneless as he could, trying to let the herbs the healer had given him before do their job. He just needed to rest, and he would heal so much faster.

"How's he doing?" someone asked, and Rory kept petting.

"He's hurting, but he woke up and drank. That's good, right?"

“That’s very good. Can you still hear him?”

“I can. He’s amazing. I’m very fond.”

“That’s wonderful, Rory!” Whoever Rory was talking to was a little...not condescending. Maybe more motherly.

She’s nice. She’s one of the healers.

Okay. You deserve respect, Rory.

She’s an elder to me. Very kind. Remember, I’m a guest here. I’m human, not a wolf. I just wanted to be with the pack.

Not a wolf? Huh. That was—well. He wasn’t going to disabuse Rory of his notion.

I’m sorry. I wish I was something...special.

You are. So stop that right now. The urge to shift so he could talk to Rory as a man was huge, but his body simply refused.

All right. I mean, we’re talking together, aren’t we? That’s special. He could totally live with that.

It is. You hear me. And it had been so long since his whole family had—Goddess. He needed to cut that right off.

I do. I’m not going anywhere. I’m right here.

Thank you. Rory was too good to be true, but he was going to try very hard to hang onto him. Fen knew that already.

Fen understood how important having a mate was. He knew it, bone-deep. His parents had been so happy, and so had his brother and Hailey...

Fen? Fen, are you all right?The soft petting happened again.

I am. Sorry. Sorry, I was hurting a moment.That was the truth, even if he wasn't talking about the physical pain.

I'm sorry. That sucks. How can I help? Can I help?

Just stay here with me. I'll be asleep again soon. More water?He was so thirsty.

Of course. There's plenty. Rory offered him another drink. So gentle with him.



## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He drank, then leaned his head on Rory's leg. The warmth and scent of Rory was like nothing else.

"Rest, sweet wolf. I'm going to stay right here for you, okay?"

Okay, Rory. I'll be better soon. I swear. He wanted to be able to look Rory in the eye as a man.

I hope so. You deserve to feel better. No one wants to be hurting.

No. He'd been shot. Goddess, that was so strange. Someone had wanted to hurt him just for putting his paw on the ground. His family, their tiny pack, had been all about helping others.

This pack felt warm and welcoming as well. Like a true family. A safe space.

He would love to explore it, but he also needed to be able to shift to talk to the alphas. He'd been next in line in his pack to be alpha, and he didn't want to step on toes.

He knew that someone with power had visited him, maybe more than one, but he'd only been vaguely aware.

Jameson has been checking on you.

That's the alpha?

One of them. They run the pack together. They're brothers.

Two alphas?How odd. He liked the idea, actually. It kept one wolf from getting power hungry.

Yes, two alphas. Jameson and Keegan.

That's amazing.It was. And for a pack to accept it? Even more amazing.

It is. They took over from a brutal alpha, and the pack is so much healthier now.

Good.His eyelids drooped, his body trying to force him to rest.

Yes. Sleep, sweet wolf. I'm keeping watch. I promise you.

You can sleep with me if you need to.He trusted that he would wake now if something happened. He was that much better.

Okay. If I have to, I'll just settle here with you. Fair?

Totally fair. I love having you with me.He lay on something padded. Hopefully that would be enough for Rory.

Rory settled next to him, spooning him. His mate was solid, warm against his spine. He let his eyes close all the way, the heat relaxing him.

Chapter

Three

Rory went to shower, because he was offending himself, and he grabbed a handful of turkey sandwiches on his way back to the healers.

Hopefully, Fen would want a bite.

He'd woken up with Fen in a deep, healing sleep, and the big wolf hadn't stirred when he'd left. So he felt okay about taking a little break.

He'd cleaned himself up, and goddess, didn't that feel better?

Jameson came walking up to him. "How's the new one?"

"Good. He's good. I think the pain is better. He's sleeping now; that's why I decided to take a shower."

Jameson gave him a little bit of a strange look. "You sure took to him quick."

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“I guess?” He shrugged. “I was when we found him.” It was more than that, and Rory knew it, but he wasn’t sure how to explain it, so he didn’t bother. He wasn’t a wolf. But then he never heard anybody in his head like that. Only Fen.

“I suppose.” Jameson gave him another long stare. “Still. It’s interesting. Has he said anything to you about where he’s from?”

Rory shook his head. “Nope, we haven’t really talked about that.” There seemed to be a deep pain there, and Rory wasn’t gonna even start to ask about it until after Fen was feeling more like himself. It didn’t seem fair. “He was pleased that there were two alphas, that you two were running everything together. Surprised but pleased.”

Jameson shrugged one shoulder. “It works for us. It doesn’t work for everyone. But I like it.”

“Yeah.” It hadn’t worked for the people who had shot Fen. That was why they had been banished.

“I need to talk to him as soon as I can,” Jameson said as if reading his mind. “If the others are taking shots at wolves they think are ours, we need to do something about it.”

“Totally. I’m right there with you. You know whatever I can do to help.” Rory just wanted to be allowed to stay. He’d never been so happy. Now he kind of understood how Gareth felt when he went up to the dragons. Well, except for the fact that Gareth actually was a dragon. That complicated matters a little bit. Him. Rory was just a dude.

A good dude, a decent dude, and he loved this pack as much as any of the wolves except for possibly Jameson and Keegan.

But still just a dude.

That was okay. People needed dudes. Not everybody could be special. Some people just had to be normal worker bees. And that was what he was. A happily normal worker dude who lived with werewolves. In the mountains because the dragons left. So normal.

Jameson gave him a knowing look. “There’s a lot to you that you don’t acknowledge, Rory. And I’m happy to have you in the pack.”

He stood there and blinked. Was he seriously that obvious? Probably. “I just want to fit in, you know? I’ve never been happier, and there’s something about Fen. Something I don’t even know how to explain.”

“The healers say you can hear him, mentally.”

Rory nodded. “I can. Just as clear as I’m hearing you right now, you know?”

Jameson nodded, but his eyebrows lowered in a worried frown. “You do know that humans don’t hear wolves like that, don’t you?”

“I do, but... I can. I mean, I can hear him. He’s a good wolf, sad, because something terrible happened to his family. I don’t know what, but I know he’s really hurt.” Rory shook his head. “And then he got shot!”

“He did.” Jameson’s mouth flattened into a hard line again. “That’s unacceptable. I’m looking forward to being able to talk to him.”

“I want that too. It’ll be so much easier once he can shift. I know that he’s hurting less than before, so hopefully soon.” He had no idea how much better things had to be before he could shift back from a wolf.

“Can you take me to meet him? Introduce him?”

“Of course. I mean, you’ve been out to see him.”

“But I want a real introduction. He trusts you.”

“I hope so.” Rory sure wanted him to. The fact was, it was like this weird kind of ache. He just didn’t understand how on earth he could want this so badly and not even know what this was.

It was like he craved just being with Fen. He wanted to sit there and stroke Fen’s ears and muzzle. Rest with him, stay with him.

It just didn’t make any sense. And even worse, Rory didn’t care. As much as he liked things to make sense, he simply didn’t care.

He wanted this to be right, natural, but he had this sneaking suspicion that if Jameson told him he couldn’t see Fen anymore? If Jamison said this wasn’t a thing, this wasn’t possible...

He had this weird conviction that if he had to choose, he’d choose Fen.

“You’re worrying again,” Jameson said, one hand landing on his shoulder. “Don’t worry. You’re okay.”

Rory felt his cheeks going hot. “How did you know?”

Jameson shrugged. “I’m the alpha. It’s my job.”

“I guess so, yeah.” He chewed his lower lip. “I just don’t want to screw up. I mean, I’ve always been the youngest, you know? The one who just did what he was told. You all make me feel needed.”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“You are. I’m beginning to understand that absolutely everything happens for a reason.”

Jameson stared into him, and Rory kind of felt caught—not in a bad way, not like trapped, but as if he had to stay there.

Stand there and absorb what Jameson was telling him.

“I thought Gareth was a wolf. We found out that there are half fae, half wolves. We’ve had three humans? Four? That ended up being dragons. If I’ve learned anything, it’s that I don’t know anything. And that I’m learning every day. That magic is way beyond anything I can control. You’re pack, I know it. Fen knows it. Keegan knows that you belong here. The rest of it is petty details.”

His mouth dropped open, but he couldn’t deny it. Something in him warmed to the whole idea, even if he didn’t believe it.

“Then I’ll be pack. You know that I want to be here with you, with all of you.” With him. He wanted to be here with Fen.

“Should we go see if he’s awake? Speaking of Fen?” he asked.

“Absolutely. If he’s not up to visitors or resting, then we’ll leave him alone. But if he’s up, maybe at least we can make an introduction.”

They headed across the courtyard, and not for the first time, Rory was so happy to see how this little group of wolves had managed to make a real home for themselves.



There were children having lessons. There was a tiny farmer's market set up for trade. There were classes going—fighting, knitting, music.

The weavers were starting to fill one of the common areas, tracking in with armfuls of wool and linen so that they could create clothes, blankets, things to sell to the outside, but also just for them.

They were creating beauty just for them, and Rory was pleased to have been a part of all this for so long.

The healing center slash clinic slash makeshift hospital was in a separate building in a quiet part of the packland. Much smaller than a gathering place, there were only four rooms to the entire place really—the main room, one exam room, and two little rooms for people who needed more long-term care.

“Ah, Rory,” one of the healers said. “Did you get something to eat?”

“I cleaned up,” he said, smiling. “Is he awake?” He hoped so. Fen was getting better, but Rory wanted him well.

Nita smiled at him. “He seems to be, yes. He drank, he ate quite heartily, he used the bathroom, and then he crashed again. He's good, I think. I believe that he's turned a corner.”

That was what Rory needed to hear. “Can I go see him? I want to introduce him to the alpha.”

“Of course.” She smiled, waved her hand toward the room Fen had been staying in.

“Thank you, Nita. I appreciate it.”

Jameson nodded. “Bright blessings, dear one.”

“And to you, Alpha.”

They had two healers in the pack—one elder, one young.

And then there was Nita.

Rory wasn’t exactly sure what Nita did, but she was always there. She was always friendly, and she always made him feel as if he was welcome, as if he was helping.

She was one of those women that you couldn’t tell if she was twenty or she was seventy. Her face was unlined, but her eyes seemed to hold the wisdom of ages. When she touched him, her hands felt callused like they’d been working for decades.

Of course he’d never ask.

Rory was fully aware that there were things you never asked a woman.

One, how old she was, and two, if she was pregnant.

Also, he never congratulated any omega on being pregnant unless it was confirmed by their mate. He’d gotten his ears boxed once for that, and had learned exactly what that old phrase meant.

Fen was awake when they went in, awake and human, wrapped up in blankets, and Rory shivered, gaze exploring every inch.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Fen.” He smiled. “You’re up.”

“Mostly.” Fen’s voice sounded rough, hushed. “You okay?”

“I am. I wanted to introduce you to one of the alphas. Jameson. Jameson, this is Fen.” He’s gorgeous.

You’re biased.

Rory grinned. Maybe a little.

“Pleased to finally meet you, Fen. I’m glad you’re healing.”

Fen inclined his head. “Thank you, Alpha.”

“Jameson, please. We’re only formal when it’s necessary. Can you tell me what happened to you?”

“My pack was small,” Fen said. “Just my family. Once they were...gone, I was a lone wolf, so I’ve been traveling, looking for a place where another pack wouldn’t drive me out.” When Jameson nodded, Fen went on. “I thought I would be safe up at the tree line, but that was where I got shot.”

Jameson growled. “I swear to the moon, those wolves are assholes, the lot of them.”

“I think they’re not doing well, Jameson,” Fen said. “They’re ragged, and they look hungry.”

“Hungry? They were well provided for when they left.”

“The children I saw looked gaunt. In fact, that was how I got shot. I was going to offer to hunt for them. I assumed they were a small family alone.”

“Okay. I’ll go look for them, find out what’s happening. No one starves on pack land.”

“Don’t get shot,” Fen said wryly, making Rory snort.

“That won’t happen. I’ll bring reinforcements.”

“Good.” Fen nodded again, but he was starting to sag.

“I’ll leave you to Rory’s TLC, my friend. But welcome to the pack.”

“I’ll take care, I swear.” Rory went to grab a glass of water for Fen. Poor, worried wolf.

Poor, worried, sexy man.

Are you all right? Fen asked him.

“Yes. Yes, of course.” Turned on, which was probably not appropriate. Fen was thin, pale, but so beautiful.

“Good. Thank you for all your help, Rory. I know you didn’t have to.”

“I didn’t, but I sort of did.” I wanted to be with you. Can you still hear me?

I can. Fen reached for his hand, and he moved close, twining their fingers together.

I can hear you too. I—He really liked Fen, unreasonably so.

Fen smiled, his eyes very blue. “I like you too, Rory.”

“Do you...do you need anything? Is there anything I can do for you? At all?”

“Come sit with me? They’re bringing some soup.”

“I would love you. To. I would love to.”

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Fen's smile was slow and happy. "Mmm. Well, good. We can share."

"Soup's easy. Are the clothes okay? Did you have anything stashed somewhere that I ought to go and fetch?" Hopefully, no one would shoot him. No one seemed to find him a threat at all.

"No. I—I was traveling light." Fen chuckled. "I kind of left everything."

"I'm sorry. I brought all of my things with me, so if you need anything..."

"Thank you." Fen squeezed his hand. "You've been so kind to me. I—you're amazing." That gaze warmed, making his heart beat fast.

"How could I not be?" Fen had been hurting, and there was something about him—something wonderful.

"So tell me about the pack?" Fen tugged him over to sit closer.

"I'm not sure what to say. It's thriving now, but it didn't used to be. It all was different before Jameson and Keegan took over. The pack attacked the dragons, even. It was wild, stressful. And then? Slowly everything started to change. The dragons started having others come in and the babies started happening. And then when Jameson and Keegan challenged the alpha here and won together, it was sort of like, you know, when there's a terrible storm, and suddenly the sun comes out."

He grinned, thinking how many supply runs he'd made then. "Everything changed. And of course there's always some people who believe, even though the former alpha

was evil, that anything that wasn't exactly like he was was evil. Strongly inferior. He was a violent, ugly man. But then there were still those who followed him. Who believed his bullshit. Who believed that anything different from them was bad and that moving forward was wrong. That the only way to rule was by, you know, an iron fist and power and fear."

Rory shook his head. "I don't understand it. I'm never going to understand it. I don't get how they're still so damn mad. But they are and I can't change that."

Fen nodded, pondering that. "My family pack was small for the same reason. Our pack was mostly a mix of brown and gray. Like your average gray wolf. But my people had this silver coat. And my two sisters were white. So they drove us out."

"Where are they? We can go get them. I'll go get them if you want." Anything to ease Fen's pain.

"What are left moved off north toward Alaska. Closer to where there are others, you know, like us. Me."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I don't know what to say. I mean, there's even a half fae and half wolf here. They let me stay here, and I'm not a wolf at all. We have other white wolves, even. Our shaman, for example. Niall's amazing and dear. His mate, Loyal, in fact. He's Keegan and Jameson's brother. So there's this tiny little pack up in between where the dragons lived and here. It's the shaman and a handful of others. And then all the babies. They come down and visit a lot, especially the little ones. They love their uncles Key and James."

Fen shook his head, smiled. "This is a magical place."

"It really is. Genuinely, I... I just can't imagine not being here. Not now that I got to come and stay. I mean, I suppose..." He shrugged, letting his words trail off, because

what was he going to say?

He supposed at some point, there wasn't going to be a place for him anymore.

He didn't really think so. After all, Keegan and Jameson cared for him. He had a little cabin and kept it clean. He contributed. He wasn't taking up more resources than he was bringing in. He wasn't going to be any more alone and isolated here than he was at home.

Every so often, he wondered where the dragons had gone. If they were dead or if they'd just gone to some magical place that wasn't here.

He desperately wanted to know. He wanted to know if little Sebby was okay. The young dragon had been so proud of his "larparcas", as he called alpacas, that he'd chosen for Gareth.

And his little chickens, that boy was mad for his chickens.

Surely they weren't just dead. Surely that amazing energy hadn't just been erased like it had never existed.

"What's wrong?" Fen grabbed his hand. "Are you all right?"

He nodded, even though it was a lie. "I'm just... I was just thinking. Memories."

Memories and worries and hopes. He had to believe that Seb, Penny, Stella, and Kiefer with his little books... He had to believe that they were all okay.

He swallowed hard. "I get a little choked up about the dragons," he explained.

"They just disappeared?"



“Yes. They call it crossing the veil, but I always thought that meant they died.”

“No one has ever heard anything from them?”

“Niall, he’s the shaman, swears that there will be contact—letters, that sort of thing. Not yet though.” Not yet.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Well, maybe it takes time for letters to come from another dimension.” Fen was teasing, but not meanly, he thought.

“Maybe...you know, maybe...it does.” He hadn’t thought about it too terribly hard.

What the hell did he know about magic? About dimensions...

It stunned him, how much he didn’t know about...the things he didn’t know about.

“It doesn’t matter. I can’t change anything that happened there.” Rory shrugged, then straightened, refusing to make himself small. “I can make things better for you though. I know I can. I think I can smell the food coming.” Rory concentrated, breathed deep, his nostrils working. “Yep, I can totally smell your lunch.”

“Our lunch,” Fen corrected. “What do you think it is?”

“Lamb stew with tomatoes, carrots, and potatoes.” Then he sniffed again. “Oh, and there’s cornbread with cheese. Possibly green chilies, but just a hint of them.”

He could barely smell the fruitiness of it.

Fen smiled at him, watching him with glowing eyes. “Amazing nose, mate.”

“My brothers always said so.”

Whoa. Mate.

Was that mate as in ‘Oh, good on you, mate’ or mate the way that Jameson said mate or Keegan said mate. Those were two totally different things.

I meant it like I meant it, mate.

His body went hot, his fingers and toes tingling. He couldn’t be a wolf’s mate. Could he? He was just...a guy. A human.

“Sweet Fen, then you have to know. I’m not a wolf. I don’t want to lead you on. I’m just a person, a human.” Just a boring, normal, nonmagical human.

Fen tilted his head again. And then the door opened, Nita hurrying in. “I have brought stew and cornbread. Oh, Fen! I’m so glad to see you up and around. Do you feel better?”

“I do, thank you. I think—I think I feel much better.” Fen’s smile was warm, and it started a fire deep inside him. “Thank you for taking such good care of me.”

“I think Rory took care of you more than I did, but you’re more than welcome.” She nodded at him, smiled. “I’m going to get you some clothes that will make you feel even more comfortable. And then? If you feel up to it. We’ll find you a place here in the pack somewhere where you can really start to recover.”

Oh no. No, not somewhere. Not for his Fen. “He can stay with me until he finds something that he would rather have. I have an extra room in my house.”

He had been honored to build a big house, because he did so much trading for the pack. So it seemed only fair to share his space, to use the room that he was blessed with, not to mention that was all he wanted to do anyway. “If Fen is happy with that, of course.”

“Excellent. Then we have a plan. Let me find you some shoes, some soft comfy clothes. While you have lunch, you think about whether you feel like you can start moving around.”

“Excellent. When can I go to Rory’s?” Fen asked.

Nita smiled at him. “You can go after lunch and getting dressed. Or if you think that you need to just stay here, that’s also an option. Always. Now, let me get you some clothes.” She bustled out just as quickly as she bustled in.

“I wasn’t trying to pressure you, but I just... I want you with me. I want to be with you.”

“Of course, I’ll come, mate.”

There was that word again.

What on earth was he going to do about it?

Chapter

Four

Fed and clothed, Fen unfolded from the pallet he’d been on for days and stood, his legs as shaky as a newborn foal’s. He took a deep breath, then took a step, his shoulder aching, but not badly.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

And he stumbled.

Rory caught him, laughing with him. “Whoops. You okay?”

“Yes. Just adjusting to two legs instead of four.” Fen chuckled. “It’s been a while.”

“Do you want to hold onto me? I can help.” Rory’s face was right there.

“I’ll lean if you don’t mind. So do you have a cabin like this one?”

“It’s nice. Comfortable. I love it.”

“It’s very... I like this village. It seems like a mix of old and new, and everyone has a place.” Fen really appreciated that.

“Yes. It’s a huge family. A great huge family.” Rory smiled at him like he knew a secret. “So I live on the other side of the gardens. I like it there because you get to see the flowers in the springtime, and there’s plenty of places for the kids to play when I’m babysitting.”

“Do you care for the cubs often?” Fen could see that. It made sense. Rory was a nurturer.

“I’ll do whatever the pack needs, really. I think my official job is trading. I take things down to my brother’s house, trade them for other things that the pack needs, get the best deal for them. But I love the kids.” Rory shrugged and shook his head. “I don’t mind cooking. Don’t mind chopping wood. Whatever it takes to make this

whole thing work, you know? We're kind of a family, like I said."

Fen thought that maybe Rory missed his brothers a little bit. "Do you get to go see your brothers often?"

"About once a month, less in the wintertime than in the summer. Pretty much once a month." There was a happy warmth in Rory's face, and it pleased Fen to see.

"Are they far?"

"Forty-five minutes in good weather, a couple hours in bad. These days, I have a setup with the sled where I can go down anytime, no matter what the snow levels are."

He didn't like the idea of his mate going somewhere in bad weather alone, brother or not.

"Do your brothers ever come here?"

They finally were at the gardens, and he was grateful when Rory stopped at the bench and let him sit.

He loved that Rory never even asked if he was all right, he just knew Fen needed to sit.

"They don't come often, but they do come." Rory sat with him, legs crossed at the ankle. "It's beautiful out here, isn't it? You see that cabin over there? The one with the red roof, that's mine."

It was a big home. Obviously loved with rose bushes planted all around the outside, obviously trying to catch hold and thrive.

He panted, trying to catch his breath. “It’s very pretty.” More than he’d ever seen, really. He and his family had lived in a one-room cabin. They’d spent a lot of time shifted to wolf form, living largely outside. Just to save space.

“I love it. It’s the first house that I’ve ever had on my own. We built it and it’s perfect. It’s not huge or anything, but it’s got three bedrooms. It’s got a bathroom with a tub. The kitchen is sweet, and it has an amazing stone fireplace.” Rory sounded so proud, as if this was what he’d always craved. “I’m still decorating, so it’s a little bare, but I did get curtains, and the weavers made me the most beautiful rugs—they’re all the colors of the rainbow. My brothers brought me furniture too, so we don’t have to sit on the floor. Come on in.”

The front porch had a painted bench on it with fabric cushions. Next to it sat a little table to put your drink on. It was so domestic and normal and—incredibly unlike anything that Fen had ever really known. For a moment, he didn’t even want to go in. His heart was pounding, and he was more than a little dizzy. It felt as if this was a trap.

“Fen, are you okay?” Rory held the door open, watching him.

“Fine.”

“Do you need some help getting up the last step?” Rory came toward him, and he backed away, almost losing his balance, the blood rushing in his ears.

“No! No, I’m fine!” He didn’t want Rory to touch him.

Rory frowned for a second, then the expression eased. “We could stay out here, if you want. I don’t mind. It’s a beautiful day.”

“Are you sure you don’t mind? I just want to enjoy the sunshine.” And to calm down.

He knew it wasn't reasonable. He knew that, but it didn't change his body's reaction.

Rory nodded. "Sure, sure." He cleared his throat. "Do you want a drink? I have some goat's milk in the cooler. I have water. I can make you tea or coffee. Either one. I can bring it out, and you can just have a sit."



*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Umm, tea sounds great. I would love some tea.”

“All right, we’ll have a sit. There are blankets in the little press right there, if you want one. If you get chilly, because you know, fall.” Rory disappeared into the house, leaving the door open.

And Fen went to sit, opening the little box outside, grabbing a warm, plaid blanket to put over his lap. The bench was steady, comfortable, and he was already beginning to relax.

From here, he could watch the pack, see how people moved, flowed from task to task.

The kids were running and playing outside the mostly spent garden. Hiding in the grasses. Gathering up nuts and berries and leftover stalks. Stones. It was sweet.

There were wolves sweeping and knitting, cleaning out the community garden for the winter and chatting, all while watching the cubs.

He took another breath, then another. It was ridiculous, because Rory would never hurt him, but—But he just had no idea what to do.

“Here’s your tea.” Rory’s voice was so soft and gentle, stroking over his soul like a balm. “It’s all right, don’t stress it.”

“What?” Had it shown? Had he hurt his mate’s feelings? He didn’t want that. Not at all.

“You’ve had a lot of changes really, really fast. You’ve been hurt. You don’t know me from Job. It’s all right to be nervous.” Rory paused, lips pursing. “I mean, I don’t know you either. You could eat me.”

Fen stared at Rory for a second, utterly shocked. Then that weird tension popped like a pin in a balloon, the chuckles bubbling out of him.

Rory’s smile just grew, and Fen was reminded of the Cheshire Cat. “Uh-huh. Big teeth. Chomp.”

“Sweetheart, if I was going to eat you, don’t you think I would have done it when I was a wolf and hurting? Hungry.”

“Maybe you hadn’t thought of it yet. Maybe you were just so overtaken by my beauty...”

Fen looked Rory over. Hewasbeautiful—shaggy and redheaded. Not tall and lean, but short and stocky, strong, with a ready smile, and the brightest, greenest eyes. His mate was stunning. “Okay, maybe that was it.”

“I know, right? I amgorgeous.” Rory pointed to the bench. “Can I come and sit? There’s room for two, but I don’t want to crowd you.”

“You belong here next to me.” Fen wanted to be clear about that part.

“All right.” Rory came and sat, and Fen finally took his tea. He half expected them to be in precious china teacups, but no. The mugs were heavy, thick pottery, painted in wild colors. They made him smile. “I like your pottery.”

“Me too. I’m way less likely to break it. I can be a little bit like a bull in a china shop.”

“You? Never!” He wasn’t even being sarcastic. Rory seemed somehow delicate to him, in the oddest way.

“Oh please. Me. Always.” Rory’s laugh rang out. “I want the children to be able to come in—fuzzy or not—and not worry about knocking things over or accidents or toothmarks.”

“That’s perfectly reasonable.” Fen took another deep breath. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For losing it like that.”

“Instinct. No one wants to be caught in a new place alone. I understand.”

“Yes. I—Times have been hard a lot recently.” He trusted Rory, he did. But his wolf brain said danger.

“So, we’ll leave the door open. We’ll breathe and drink tea. We’ll be fine.” As if it was just that simple.

“Okay. Thank you, mate. It’s not you. Never you.” It was being banished. Living hardscrabble. Having the family split, leaving, dying. Getting shot.

“I’m not worried.” Rory chuckled softly. “I’m sorry that you lost your people. Was...did something happen? I mean—” He rolled his eyes at himself. “Of course something happened, and if you don’t want to talk about it, if it’s too much, then you should just not talk about it, right? Not until you’re ready because I don’t want you to feel like you have to talk about things if you don’t want to talk about things—” Rory stopped. “Am I babbling?”

“You might be babbling.” It made him smile, though. How could it not? There was an honest care that Rory just offered him freely.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Sorry. I don’t mean to run on.”

“I said it’s all right. Can we try to go inside now?” Fen asked. “I’ll tell you all about it, but I’m not ready to share with the whole village.”

“Of course. I’ll go in and leave the door open. You come when you’re comfortable.”

“Thank you.” He sat there for a few more minutes, feeling like a newborn foal. Goddess, he needed to get up off his ass and go see Rory’s house.

He could hear Rory in the house, turning on some music, moving around, and they were normal, easy sounds.

They blended in with the noises that the pups made as they played, the barely audible chatting as the pack went about their business and the birdsong that floated through the air.

He felt himself begin to relax, to breathe into a chest that didn’t feel as tight as it had a few moments ago.

Then he smelled it.

Bread.

He could smell bread and cheese and butter. Rory was making sandwiches. He inhaled deep. Oh, yeah. Rory was making grilled cheese sandwiches.

He loved grilled cheese sandwiches.

Fen made himself move, one foot in front of the other. It wasn't so hard now to walk across the planks of the porch and peek into the door.

The cabin was open, light and airy, windows letting the sunlight pour in. What he saw was simple but cozy, warm, all wood and well used furniture.

There were pillows and blankets on the sofa, and piles of rugs for pups, for him, for them.

It was a pretty house. And it felt—not okay, not easy—but doable.

Doable to walk into the great big open space and head toward the pass-through of the little kitchen, where Rory was cooking and singing with the radio. Barstools sat at the pass-through, ready to perch on, right there. Not to mention a big glass of milk waited for him.

“Hey, you made it in. Welcome.” That was the warmest smile and so pleased. “I was feeling peaked, so I thought I'd make some sandwiches. I made enough for you. I hope that's all right.”

“That's perfect. I love cheese sandwiches.” He breathed deep, the food smells making his belly snarl. He chuckled, and so did Rory. “Sorry.”

“Nope. No apologies. I'm tickled.” Rory winked at him. “That means this doesn't smell like hell.”

“Nope. It smells amazing. Thank you for letting me come into your home, Rory.” He needed to get that formality out of the way. It was old-school, but it was how he was raised. As an alpha wolf rising in the pack, he'd never taken his status for granted.

Ever.

“Of course, you’re welcome here. When you’re ready, I’ll give you the tour. It’s pretty simple, but I really like it. I think it’s nice. Cozy, lots of light. You know, the good things?” Rory shrugged, puttering around the little kitchen with ease. It was lovely to see.

“There are lots of good places to curl up and sleep, watch the moon.” That was one of Fen’s favorite pastimes, curling up in a blanket and watching their Mother Moon shine. It was a blessing.

Rory nodded. “Exactly. That’s why it was designed this way, so that I can stargaze. You can have your sandwich, and then I’ll—Well, I’m sure you’re tired, and I have a little guest bedroom. I didn’t—I thought you’d be comfortable there.” I hoped you could come and be in my bed. I would curl up with you and rest. Hold you. I just don’t want you to be scared.

Such a sweet mate, to be worried about him, but he wasn’t scared. Not of holding Rory.

Perhaps about losing his mate now that he’d found one, sure, but never of holding his Rory. “I would gladly go to your bed with you and save the other room for guests.”

He wanted to be more than a guest.

Rory smiled at him, and the expression just transformed the beautiful face into something that was sheer happiness.

Fen decided then and there to do everything he could to keep that expression on his mate’s face as many times as possible.

“Well, good. My bed’s plenty big enough for the two of us, and I have lots and lots of fuzzy comforters and big pillows. It’s like a little nest.”

And Rory thought he wasn’t a wolf. There was no way.



*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Two halves of a grilled cheese sandwich were placed in front of him, distracting his attention from his mate to something a bit more immediate and primal. He couldn't make love to Rory until he was healed. He couldn't heal if he didn't eat. This was delicious, so he ate.

Rory scarfed down his sandwich as well, then, once they were done, led them back into a room that was almost totally bed. The blankets and pillows were piled high, and Rory was right. It was a lovely nest for a pair of wolves.

"Come on, let's snuggle." Rory took off his shoes and turned on a radio, the tinny sounds of music filling the air and making it even cozier. "Curtains open or shut?"

"Shut? That way it can be dark enough to really nap." And no curious onlookers could see in.

"I can do that." The heavy curtains made the room feel cozy and warm, and Rory slipped under the covers and held one side open, welcoming him into this most personal den. "This is gonna be so much more comfortable than the bed in the clinic. This bed is crazy soft, like feathers."

Fen crawled down into the bed, groaning softly as his bones hit the mattress. Rory didn't lie. It was like floating on a cloud. The pillows and blankets smelled of his mate, and even better, best of all, Rory was right there, snuggling up close and giving him the contact he so desperately craved.

"This is all right?" Rory asked.

“This is better than all right.” He couldn’t keep his eyes open. “Forgive me, mate. I’m so tired.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not fussed with it. Sleep.”

And sleep he did.

## Chapter

### Five

Rory slipped away from Fen, who was pretty much eating and sleeping right now, and headed out to corral the kids he was watching today. A bunch of the omegas were making soap, and the kids needed to not be anywhere near the fires and the huge kettles...

“Hey, little monsters!” Rory called. “Here I am!”

“Uncle Rory!” Six little ones came to jump around him as if he were a Maypole.

“Oh, I’ve missed you guys.” He let them dance around him, not bothering to move, just standing until everyone had calmed down. Then he moved and simply sat with them, two cubs crawling into his lap while the others plopped down close.

“Where have you been? Where have you been, Uncle Rory?” little Hannah asked, her eyes as big as saucers.

“Did you hear that a new wolf came into the pack? That he’d been hurt?” Rory asked, and all of the little cubs nodded.

“He’s big!”

“And white.”

“Someone shot him with a gun!”

“Someone did. It was sad.” Rory offered them all a sympathetic smile. “Well, I’ve been helping him get better. I’m the one who found him, and so I’ve been taking care of him as best I can, helping the healers, and then he’s come to stay at my house with me.”

“Papa says you have a mate,” Elsa announced.

“Does he now?” Rory wasn’t going to admit or deny it. He wasn’t sure if a human could have a mate.

He didn’t see why not, and it didn’t matter because he wasn’t walking away from Fen. He couldn’t. There was something amazing about the man, and he didn’t understand it all, but the fact was, he didn’t want to.

No matter how much teasing from his brothers he got. He was not pretending to be a wolf. He was making a life here, and he couldn’t deny that.

“What’s wrong?” one of the older cubs asked. “What’s the matter, Uncle Rory? You look sad.”

“I’m not. I’ve never been happier.” And that was not a lie. Fen was home, happy, resting. “What should we do today?” It was absolutely time to change the subject. “Should we go gather leaves or maybe look for interesting flowers?”

“Sticks. We should find all the sticks.” Wolf cubs were fascinated by sticks.

“Okay, but no chewing, huh? Sticks can get...stuck.” He chomped his teeth, and the

children all giggled. “Shall we go to the kitchens and see if they have any treats to take with us?”

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Oh! I hope there are tarts.”

“I want hand pies.”

They all called out what their favorites were.

Cookies, meringues, peanut butter sandwiches, chocolate drops—they were all about the sweet and full of energy.

He grinned, and they all trooped along to see what there was to eat. And there was such a plethora that everyone was happy. And quiet for a moment.

He took a deep breath and ate his bear claw, trying his damndest to focus on the kids and not the wolf in his bed.

His focus kept drifting, and he felt...itchy. Like he had to scratch his arms itchy.

“Are you all right, Rory?” John, who was a good friend to him, was there, patting his youngest on the back. John was Keegan’s mate, and he’d thought he was human for years.

“Hmmm? I am.” Okay, he needed to stop making his skin raw. “Just a little itchy.”

“Itchy? Did you get into something?” John studied him closely.

“I don’t think so...” His chest hurt some too. Maybe he was coming down with something.

“You look like you’re not feeling well, man. Do you need to see the healers? I can watch the kiddos.”

“No. No, I need to see Fen, I think.” Maybe he was wrong, but that was the way he felt...drawn.

“Well then, you should go.” John didn’t sound amused. He also didn’t sound particularly worried. “Trust me on this. Every so often, you really need this. You should follow your instincts.”

Rory’s cheeks heated. “Yeah, but I’m not a, you know...”

John rolled his eyes like thrown dice. “I don’t know anything. Trust me, these days. I don’t know anything. I have a family and a mate, and I’m very happy, but don’t ask me because everything that I ever thought I knew, I didn’t know. It’s a thing.”

John did make him chuckle. Rory guessed that finding out all of a sudden that one, you were a werewolf, and two, you were able to get pregnant was just a lot for a dude to process.

Especially one who hadn’t been raised in the universe that he’d been.

At least Rory knew about omegas and alphas and dragons and werewolves and fae.

“Are you sure you have the kids? I know it’s a lot.”

“Go. See. Fen.”

“Right on, going to see Fen.” He didn’t ask again. He just grabbed a couple of more bear claws and ran out the door.

He heard John going, “No, no, no, come on, kids, we’re going to go in here, and it’s going to be time to draw.”

He didn’t care. He just ran across the courtyard and then through the harvested garden to his mate. He needed to see Fen. He needed to see him now.

It wasn’t like there was something wrong. He felt that. He somehow understood that Fen was fine. He just needed to see him. Touch him.

Maybe pretend like they were going to lick each other a little bit.

He chuckled. Not yet. Fen was still recovering. But they could eat pastry together. That was a fine and wonderful thing.

Fen was standing on the front porch, staring at him, eyes seeming to glow, to beg him to jump into his arms and hold on.

“I brought you a bear claw...” He held out the pastry, shocked to see his hand shaking.

“Oh. Thank you.” Fen grabbed Rory by the wrist and dragged him inside, then took the pastry and set it on the entry table.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“I—hello, Fen. I need?—”

So very badly.

“Shhh.” Fen hauled him up against that wide chest, and then Fen’s mouth came down on top of his, lips warm and firm and so good. It felt like heaven, and something that was dangling inside him clicked back into place.

He groaned, his fingers tangling in Fen’s long hair as he held on tight.

The kiss made his blood heat and his cock rise, and Rory moaned, then broke for air, stroking Fen’s cheek. “Are you healed enough to?—”

“Just don’t make me do push-ups,” Fen said with a slow grin.

“No way. You can lie back and let me do the work.” He started dancing Fen back toward the big couch. He would let Fen stretch out, and then he would start at his head and work down with hands and mouth.

He wanted to touch and taste every bit of Fen’s body, and it was deep need.

Deep.

But being pressed against Fen like he was made the itch stop, and it made the pain in his chest ease.

He pushed gently on Fen’s uninjured shoulder, letting him fall back on the couch.



Then he started tugging at the soft clothes Fen wore.

“Are you comfortable?” He thought it was only fair to ask.

“I am, love. Never fear that.” Fen curled up to let him tug off the shirt, then lifted up to let Rory take off his pants. Then he put a hand on Rory’s chest when Rory would have come down on top of him. “I want to see you too.”

“Oh.” Rory blinked, then smiled. “Sure. I got caught up.” He wasn’t ashamed of his body, though he wasn’t stunning like Fen. But he worked hard, and that gave him lean muscles and a flat belly...

He yanked off his shirt, then wiggled out of his pants, his dick springing up like a jack-in-the-box.

“Look at you, sweet.” Fen stroked his shoulder, then his chest, fingers tweaking one of his nipples. “So pretty. And you smell so good.”

“You—I don’t hurt anymore.”

“Good. Neither do I.”

Rory had to chuckle. That seemed to make perfect sense to his wolf. “All right then. Let’s make each other fly.”

“Mmmm. Yes. Please.” Fen winked up at him, those bright blue eyes twinkling for him. Fen bracketed his hips with those big hands, pulling him up so Fen’s big cock rubbed against his belly.

His mouth went dry, and he glanced down, noting how much...bigger Fen was than him. Which wasn’t humiliating like it might have been. It was more...amazing.

Wonderful.

He rocked, his hips rolling, his breath already coming fast. “You’re sure I’m not hurting you?”

Fen reached up and across to touch his shoulder with his opposite hand. “Look, sweet. I’m already healing. I just needed to rest and eat, two things I did little of before I met you.”

“And then you got shot.”

“And then I got shot,” Fen agreed. “Kiss me, Rory.”

Rory nodded, bending to press his mouth to Fen’s again. He jumped when Fen’s tongue touched his, and his ass clenched, need shooting through him.

“I can smell you, love. So hot and musky. So perfect.”

“I—We can’t be mates, Fen. You know that, right?”

A little smile played about Fen’s mouth. “No?”

“No. I mean, I’m human.”

“You keep saying that. But you don’t smell human. You can hear me in your head. You itch when we’re too far apart. And you’re wet for me.” Fen pressed one long finger against his back entrance.

He’d asked questions, of course, and had heard rumors and whispers, but he’d never had a discussion about the complications and specifics of sex with werewolves. “Is this normal, right?”

He wanted it to be right.

“More than. I’m going to make you feel so good.” Fen’s touch continued, the steady rocking connection that was building this fire inside the pit of his belly he didn’t know what to do with. Sex had never felt like this. Never. This was heaven. Please don’t stop.

Don’t worry, I’m not going to stop. I want to make love to you. Bring us together. “Tell me you want it too.”

“More than anything.” He needed that more than anything in the history of things. And there had been a long history of things.

“Good.” Fen’s smile was downright wicked, an expression he’d not seen on that dear face yet, and his whole body heated even more.

Fen opened him up, two fingers inside him now, moving back and forth, and he

arched, a long moan coming from him. Yes. This was so damn perfect.

He wanted to roar.

He wanted to beg.

His entire body shuddered with all the things he needed right now.

Right this very second.

His world was spinning, and he couldn't quite catch his breath.

"Help me. I need more. I need something."

He felt like a virgin, which was ridiculous, but he did. This was more than he had ever?—

He'd never known his nerves could feel so much.

That his heart could be so loud in his ears and Fen could smell so good. Did he smell that way to Fen?

"Better. Better, you smell necessary." That growl echoed in his very bones.

"Yes. Necessary." He panted, rocking his hips back against that huge hand, feeling the scrape of his nerves as Fen touched him. Then Fen was lifting him, pulling him up and over, then fitting that broad cockhead to his hole.

"Going to knot you, love."

"Anything. Please. Anything." He'd never needed like this, and he intended to have it

now.

Fen pushed inside him, and Rory's thighs clenched, drawing his knees up, exposing himself wider.

That amazing prick filled him and filled him and filled him until he swore when he swallowed he could feel the tip on the back of his throat.

“Oh my God. So good.”

Fen's eyes flashed. “You're so tight. You all right?”

“Better than. Don't stop, please, please.” He thought for a second there was nothing but wolf in Fen's eyes, and it was so?—

The moon.

He could see the moon in Fen's eyes.

Rory could feel their bodies moving together, hear the sounds of them slapping together.

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

But his brain, his soul, was caught there, staring into Fen's eyes, watching the moon.

Fen laughed, the sound utterly exultant. "Oh, sweet. You feel like home."

"Fen."

"Feel me, love. Feel my knot swell."

"I do. I can—" Rory bore down, letting Fen in deeper, letting them join together harder.

Suddenly something unbearably huge pushed into him, his body snapping around the base of Fen's cock.

"My knot, sweet. So ready for you. So hot." Fen growled the words, pushing up into him.

His body squeezed, milking Fen's prick. "Please. Touch me."

"Anything, sweet." Fen's hands skated over his skin, leaving heat in their wake. Those clever fingers worked over him, pinching his nipples, tugging at his cock.

He arched and groaned, his eyes rolling back in his head. "Fuck..."

Fen chuckled, the sound warm, happy, and sexual. "You're stuck well and good now, love. I can feel it so deep."

“Uh-huh. I need to come, Fen...” Or he was going to scream.

“I know, love. I can feel you shaking.” Fen rolled up, abs rippling, and bit him, right at the base of his throat. Marking him.

He growled back, his body bowing, his ass clenching down on Fen’s knot. Rory shot hard, his shout ringing in the cabin, his body on fire.

Fen grimaced, his hands landing on Rory’s hips again as he drove deep, thrusting one, two, three more times before he groaned, filling Rory deep with his seed.

He slumped onto Fen’s chest, shifting to one side as he did, so he didn’t hit the mostly healed wound. They were still locked together by the knot. “Damn.”

“Mmmm.” Fen smiled for him, blinking slow. “That was perfect.”

“You’re perfect.” He felt so much better.

“I think if you go to watch the kids, I should come with you. Just for the time being.” Fen couldn’t seem to stop grinning at him.

He snorted softly. “Shut up. Aren’t we supposed to be all after-glowy?”

“I am. I’m very afterglow. In fact, that is why I think we need to stay close to each other. Mate bond.”

“Mate bond? Can it really be?”

Fen stroked his back, fingers gentle, trailing along the knobs of his spine. “I think so, yes. I’ve never heard of a human getting wet like an omega, Rory. Tell me about your family?”

“I have lots of brothers. My family has been working for the dragons for over a century.”

“All men.”

“Every one.”

“Hmmm.” Fen tilted his head. “And they worked for the dragons?”

“Yes. And now they supply the wolves.” His brothers were supply experts, and they needed to keep on top of a lot of moving parts.

“But you didn’t stay with them?”

“No.” He chewed his lower lip. “I was restless. I miss the dragons. And I knew I could help out here. So I came up. It felt so good, I asked to come and stay.”



## Page 20

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“I’m very glad you did.” Fen kissed his neck.

“Me too. I don’t know what’s going on, but it’s so good.”

“It is.” Fen drew a blanket off the back of the couch and tucked it around them. “Stay with me?”

“Mmmhmm. But if John calls for help...”

“By then we should be able to disengage.”

He hooted. “Well, right now, we’re pretty stuck.”

“I know.” Fen winked. “I like it.” Then he yawned, a jaw-cracking sound.

“Mmm. Nap?”

“Yes.” Fen hugged Rory close, and they both closed their eyes.

He was asleep in moments.

Chapter

Six

Fen followed Rory as he went to deliver wool to the weaver and spinners, food to the elderly pack members, and toys to a family who had just had a new baby and thus had

a bunch of jealous older siblings.

Rory was a wonderful giver. So kind. And so driven to help people. He truly missed the dragons that had been his calling, Fen thought.

He wanted to just tuck Rory away with him and love him and let him know he wasn't alone in a crowd anymore.

But he also wanted Rory to have his place in this pack. So he stayed close, but once they were at the big house, where Rory had joined John in order to make cookies, he found a spot where he could watch and waited for the alphas, Jameson and Keegan.

"Ah, Fen. All healed?" Jameson came to sit across from him, smiling.

"Mostly, yes. I still have a bit of stiffness, but you have fine healers."

"We do. And Rory comes from healer stock as well."

He raised an eyebrow. "That stands to reason. He's very invested in caring for others."

Jameson's lips curved in more of a wry grin. "Are you saying we overwork him?"

"I'm not. I'm saying he's a wolf and my mate, and I have questions."

Jameson chuckled. "I imagine so. It's a fine line we've had to walk with him."

Fen blinked. "Explain."

"Well, Rory smells like pack. But until you came along, he never even came close to presenting as a wolf. You heard him. He fully believes he's merely human."

“What about the others? His brothers?” Fen had heard him talk about them. It seemed like an entire pack full of brothers. Surely if one was a wolf, then the others ought to be.

“Like I said, until you, Rory smelled like pack but that was it. We’ve always had a good relationship with the Calhouns.”

Keegan, who had joined them, handing him a cup of coffee, shook his head. “I don’t know what the details are, of course. I mean, it’s possible that their mother stepped out with a wolf once. But over and over and over? It just doesn’t seem to make any sense.”

Fen pondered that. “One has to assume that the bloodline is buried, and then once you activate it, once the mate bond has been made obvious? That is when the wolf comes to the fore.”

“It’s how it worked with the dragons.” Jameson admitted, scratching his chin. “The first...well goodness, all four of the first dragon mates that came believed they were purely human. Only Gareth, who’s Zeke’s dragon mate didn’t. He was raised here in the pack.”

Fen blinked. “Pardon me?”

That didn’t make any sense. A wolf would know if their child wasn’t a wolf. The scent had to be different, if it was a dragon. How did that even happen?

“It’s a long story, but suffice it to say that Gareth was ill-used by the old alpha and his adopted family. I hope that they’re very happy now, wherever they are.” A hint of loss crossed Jameson’s face.

“I wish I had been able to see a dragon.” Fen had seen selkies before, and a mermaid once as he ran along the beach. It had very large teeth and scared him, badly. He would like to say that it was only because he had been a little pup, but the fact was, had he seen it again?

Fen would still have the good sense to be scared.

Keegan shook his head. “Do they matter, the whys?”

Fen tilted his head, pondering that question. It seemed to be an important one, but it was also an incredibly easy one to answer. “No. No, it doesn’t matter at all. He’s my mate, and I intend to keep him.” He lifted his chin, holding the alphas’ gazes, one after the other. “So then the question is, am I welcome in your pack? And if so, what should you have me do? Because I will not leave him, and he is happy here.”

Fen knew that as well as he knew anything. Rory had a house, friends, a life here. Fen had been alone and lost, there was no pack for him to return to, and the life of a solitary wolf was at best a challenge.

“You are welcome here,” Jameson said. “It is always good to have another strong male to help. And as far as how you contribute, what do you do?”

“I was a carver by trade.”

“A carver?” Keegan sounded surprised.

“Yes. I work with wood. I make big things and small things, but I have lost all of my tools. I will have to do something else until I can replace them.”

Keegan shook his head. “Nonsense. If you are part of the pack, and you need something to do your job, the pack provides. Tell Rory what you need. That’s his job, or if he cannot get it, then I will get you what you need. Having another woodworker would be a great blessing. Furniture. Do you do furniture?”

“I make furniture beautiful. I’m not a carpenter. I can make furniture, in necessity, but what I do is I make it beautiful.” He could also make bowls, spoons, toys. Working with wood gave him great joy.

Keegan and Jameson looked at one another. “We need to get you together with Timothy. Timothy is our woodworker. He has a workshop. Perhaps you two could collaborate.”

Fen nodded. “Of course.”

Whatever it was he needed to do, he would do it. Fen was eager to become part of the pack, to show Rory that he would also be a good provider. He would be the wolf that Rory needed him to be.

“If it’s all right with you, we’ll have him stop by at Rory’s?—”

Keegan nudged Jameson.

“Right. At your house.”

He blinked at the words, letting them fill him. “Of course, of course. Perhaps he could come for a beer.”

Surely Rory wouldn’t mind that. They could even sit out on the front porch and talk if they needed to.

“Who are we having a beer with?” Rory bounced up, cookies in hand. He passed out cookies to everyone and then sat. “So who are we having a beer with?”

“Your mate was telling us that he was a carver. We thought that perhaps he and Timothy could work together on projects. Collaborate.”

Rory nodded, eyes lit with a pleasure Fen could feel. “Oh, I can totally see that. Timothy is such a sweetheart—a very kind man. And why doesn’t he come to supper? We can have stew and bread. It doesn’t have to be fancy. And also, do you need tools? I can totally get you some tools. I’m making a big order.”

Jameson blinked at him. “You are?”

“I am. I have some things at the house, at the old house, that I can trade, but I need to get my mate clothes and shoes. Books. Tools, obviously, things that he can use to make himself happy, to make this a home for him.”

Fen was honored. His mate was good to him.

“If there’s anything that you guys need, just let me know. I’m going to have them bring a truck,” Rory said.

“Then we should absolutely discuss our Yule situation before the snows come.”  
Jameson chuckled. “We have lots of kids to make happy now.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

For the first time in he didn't remember how long, he got excited.

About the idea of having Yule together with a pack with children, with his mate.

This was a dream—an odd, amazing dream.

He leaned back. Just listening to Rory and the alphas plan and plot. This was his life. This was going to be his life.

He wished his sister had been here to see it.

### Chapter

### Seven

“What the hell are you talking about?” Rory's brother Liam did not sound amused.

“I've mated with one of the wolves.” There wasn't any easy way to put this. Maybe he wasn't a wolf. Nobody was saying he was a wolf. Well, okay, Fen was saying that he was a wolf.

But he wasn't saying that. He was just saying that he was staying, which everybody down at the trading post knew. He'd built himself his own home. And he had settled in and...mated.

“You do know that's impossible?” Liam asked. “You're human.”



“Don’t start. Are you going to help me bring the stuff to the pack or not?” Rory wasn’t gonna argue about this. Not with his brothers, not with the alphas, not with anybody. Fen and he were together.

Rory needed to get Fen his tools. Hell, Fen needed a coat, clothes, shoes. Things. His mate needed things. A hairbrush of his own. His own pillow. Books. Wood to carve interesting things out of.

Timothy had come to the house and had supper, and he and Fen had hit it off immediately. The huge, rough woodworker with the ready smile had immediately taken to his mate. It was a joyous thing to see.

“Of course I’m going to help. Just because you’ve lost your mind doesn’t mean that I’m going to slack on my job.” His brother clapped him on the shoulder. “Look, if you want to go native, go native. I don’t mind. You’re happy up there. You make it easy, and it helps with communication. I can’t wait to meet him.”

Liam’s words went a long way to relaxing the tension inside of him. “Thank you, I needed someone to understand.”

“Oh, I didn’t say I understood. I absolutely do not get what you’re talking about. And I do not care to know about anything intimate between you and anyone. Human, dragon, wolven, male, female—I don’t care. You are my little brother, and I don’t want to know. Fair?”

“Yeah.” He could go with that. He didn’t wanna know anything about Liam’s...whatever either. “Sweet.”

“So tell me what you need, bro.” Liam sat with him, and they started making lists.

“So, you need all this by Yule?”

Rory nodded. “I need the basic foodstuffs ASAP, and then the baking materials at least a week before. And the bedding, clothes, and personal items I need with the food. Fen came with nothing, not even a pack. He was in wolf form and on the run.”

“That sucks, Rory. It really does.”

Rory nodded, his shoulders creeping up around his ears when he thought about Fen’s life before he’d been shot. “And then the banished pack shot him.”

Liam’s lips pressed into a hard line. “You sure it was them and not a hunter or something?”

“I’m pretty sure. He says he was up by the tree line. Where the dragons used to—”  
Rory sighed. “It’s so weird, huh?”

“That they’re gone?” Liam nodded. “Yeah. I mean, the pack is great, but I miss those guys. It’s a weird hole in time, you know?”

“I do.” He grinned, though. “I just hope, wherever they are, that they can fly.”

“Yes. I believe that they can. I have to.” Liam shook his head and sighed. “I used to feel special, like you know...like they wanted us. They needed us. Not any other humans, just us. Now I feel lost. It sort of sucks.”

Rory nodded, a little shocked that his brother would be so honest with him, but he got it. Before, they’d been these very important people who negotiated things between werewolves and dragons. Rory didn’t feel like he wasn’t important, but he did feel like they’d lost something huge with the dragons going away. “Niall says that everything’s going to be fine. That the dragons are great.”

“I never see him. Loyal, yes, but not Niall.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“He comes to the pack.” Rory didn’t mention the fact that Niall was capable of appearing to the pack without actually showing up. Or that Niall was in touch with the fae or that he was in touch with the dragons, for that matter. Because that seemed like something that his brother didn’t need to know. The seer was sacred to them, and all of them, and most specifically Loyal, was going to protect him with all their power.

“I’m thinking about going up to the dragons’ compound,” Liam said. “I want to see what’s up there. I’m going to see what I can find. I’m curious.”

Rory tilted his head. “Aren’t you worried?”

“Nope, if there’s somebody living up there, I want to know. If the other wolf pack is living up there, I need to know who they are. This is our land too, and I want to know who’s on it and whether or not they’re good or not.”

Rory stared at his brother, more than a little concerned. “You know you can’t find a wolf pack, right? Not even a small one.”

What did Liam hope to see up there? Was he going to try to discover a way through to the dragons? Was that safe? Possible? Smart?

“We don’t fight; we negotiate.” There was something just a little hard in Liam’s eyes, a little cold. Not mean, just chilly.

“You shouldn’t go alone.”

“Do you wanna come with me?” The question didn’t surprise him at all, but...okay.

Did he? Did he really want to go up there and see the dragon home empty? Or worse as if it had just gone, like they’d never even been here, like it had all been some weird dream. Did he want to go up and explore? Did he want to fight with other wolves?

He knew he smelled like pack now. And they would know. And even if he wasn’t a werewolf, they would be able to smell Fen on him.

“I—”

“You don’t have to. I understand. It’s a lot to ask. I just want to see if things have changed from the last time we were up there. After all, it’s more our land than anyone’s. We’ve spent the most time up there. We’ve outfitted the place, not the wolves. Only the alphas and Gareth have ever even been up there.” Liam blew out a hard breath. “They don’t have a claim to the land.”

“Neither do we. Do we?”

Why did Liam even care? Why did they have to talk about it? Couldn’t they just ignore it? Couldn’t it just stay a shrine to a magic that had left the earth and wasn’t coming back?

“I just don’t know, Rory.” Liam sighed and shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“Well, if you’re determined to go, I’ll go with you.” He would. And maybe Fen would, too. He was alpha-y, right? He’d gottenshot, but that was because he hadn’t expected anyone to be up there.

“Thanks, brother,” Liam said, grinning finally, and it went all the way to his eyes, thawing out their expression.

“You know I won’t leave you hanging.” Not that any of the others would. In fact, if Liam mentioned it, he would bet his brother Dean would come up too. At least that way, he’d get to introduce some of his family to Fen.

He scratched his chest, the tightness there and the itchy skin starting to make it harder to breathe.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Liam stared at him. “Did you get into poison ivy or something?”

“No.” He found himself growling, rumbling deep in his chest. “It just itches.”

“Don’t growl at me. I was just asking.” Liam was simply staring at him like he’d grown a new head.

He blinked at his brother, more than a little confused. “It’s like it’s wrong, like something terrible is happening.”

“Why don’t you come in and lie down?” Liam suggested. “Have a sleep just for you know, ten or twenty minutes. No big deal. Then, you can get on the road. I’d feel more comfortable with you driving after that.”

Liam smelled funny, as if he needed a bath or something. Rory panted softly, his mouth so dry, his tongue sticking to the roof.

“Maybe, maybe that’s a good idea,” he admitted, and Liam nodded.

“Yeah, yeah, man, you wouldn’t want to crash on the way up there. That would be a pain in the ass.” Liam walked him back into the house, offering him one of the guest rooms. “Just lay your head down for two shakes. Uh, I’m sure everything’s gonna be great.”

The bed was warm, and it smelled fine, so he curled up in the blankets, growling a little bit. This would work. He was safe here. It wasn't home, but it was close. He was so exhausted. He would have a wee rest, then he needed his mate.

After a nap, just a little nap.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He heard the door lock as it closed, but he didn't even have the energy to look up.

Chapter

Eight

Something was wrong.

Fen didn't know what it was, but he knew something was wrong, and he knew it had to do with his mate. The problem was, he wasn't exactly sure where his mate was.

He knew Rory was at the Calhouns' place, but what that meant was kind of, at best, vague. At worst, it was a complete mystery.

"What's going on, man?" Timothy asked after Fen had broken his third piece of pine and snapped one of his finer blades.

Fen shook his head, slamming the piece of wood on the worktable, the snap incredibly satisfying. "Something is wrong with my mate."

Timothy tilted his head. "Okay. What are you feeling?"

Fen was super glad his new friend hadn't just told him he was nuts. "I don't know. I can just feel this...it hurts right here." He rubbed his sternum. "And it's like a dozen bees in the back of my head. Angry ones."

"Crap." Timothy took off his safety glasses. "Where is he?"

“I have no idea. He went to his brothers to get supplies, I think. He said he had a big load to pick up.” It seemed as if that was hours ago, but it was maybe...three? He hadn’t even had a break for lunch yet.

“Well, let’s go find the alphas. They’ll know exactly when he left. Can you hear him?” Timothy put a hand on his arm, steering him out of the shop.

Oh. Goddess, that was still so new...

Rory? Love, can you hear me?

He got no answer.

Timothy tilted his head. “Well, let’s go talk to Jameson. He’ll know what to do.”

Timothy was nothing if not all about the alphas, and so young and eager to please.

Still it wasn’t the worst idea in history. Jameson and Keegan would know where the Calhouns were, at least.

“I’m probably being ridiculous.” Fen started putting his tools away, though, and nodding because there was something wrong. Even if he was being ridiculous, he knew his mate needed him.

They headed out of the workshop, not running but worried, and Fen was shocked to see Jameson striding toward him with a serious expression on his face.

“What’s wrong?” He’d known something was off. He could feel it in his soul.

“What’s the matter with Rory?”

Jameson waved Timothy off and his friend melted away like frost. “Well, we got a



little bit of a problem. I'm going to need you to come with me, Fen."

His wolf tried to rush to the fore, his body shuddering with the need to shift.

"Hey. Hey, I need you to keep it together, man. Your mate needs you."

"All right, I can do that. Just tell me what's wrong. Is he all right?" That was the most important part.

"He is. He's finally shifted. He's fuzzy and locked in one of the Calhoun's guest rooms because he was a little stressed, and they didn't know what else to do. They didn't want him to hurt anybody or himself."

"Oh." Well, that was...oh dear.

How wonderful.

Fen chuckled. "That's—I'm sorry I missed his first shift, but I'm so pleased for him. Can I go to him?"

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Yeah. Liam is on his way up, and he’ll take you back down. That’s one of Rory’s brothers. He’s a good guy, so just trust him to get you down the mountain a ways.”

Fen walked with Jameson to the center of the village. “Can you tell me about where his brothers live? I hate going into civilization blind.”

Jameson snorted. “Civilization is sort of a strong word. They have a trading post. It’s at this bend in the river, and it’s pretty much where the human roads turn away from this side of the mountain. They’ve owned that land for ages, and they keep us safe from anyone who might want to build out this way. They’re surrounded by national forest and reserves, too.”

“Perfect.” That meant he could bring Rory back home on foot if he could handle it physically. Take him on his first run.

“So I guess this means that the mating bond is going well.”

Fen’s cheeks heated, but he nodded. “Very well, thank you, alpha.”

In fact, most everything seemed to be going well. Except that Rory was having trouble with the shifting.

Even that was more trouble with the believing that he could shift, that his wolf was more than spiritual.

Also, his mate was just determined that he had more things. It bothered Rory so much that he’d lost his home and things that were precious to him.

That, of course, made Fen adore Rory even more, but he did wish that his sweet lover would just relax and enjoy the mating process and the whole situation they were building together.

“Good. Good. I mean, all of a sudden, his wolf has popped out, so you’ve made more progress in a month or so than we’ve made in years.” Jameson gave him a glinting grin and clapped him on the back. “If you need help with him and his wolf, talk to Keegan. His mate, John, thought he was human when he came to us too.”

“Yes. Rory told me about that. He seems to have settled.”

“John?” Jameson’s smile went fond. “He did. But it was hard going to begin with.”

“I’ll keep it in mind.” He settled in to wait, nodding when Jameson left and Tate, one of the alpha’s seconds came to wait with him. He supposed someone wanted to introduce him to Rory’s brother to make things easier.

It didn’t take long before an old truck came trundling up filled with supplies. A handsome man who was the spitting image of Rory hopped out, eyes just a little wide.

“Liam,” Tate started, standing to meet the man. Fen stood as well, brushing wood chips off his pants.

He wasn’t in any condition to meet Rory’s family. None at all.

“Hey. Hey, I guess you know I called Jameson? I have a bunch of stuff in the back of the truck. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know if I should load it now, unload it up here, just take it back down and then take it back up. I just didn’t know what to do.” The man’s eyes were wild, wide, and worried. “My brother—he’s turned into a wolf, and he is in the bed in my guest room, locked in, and I need to know what the fuck to

do about it. I do not approve. What if he hurts himself?”

Someone was worried, but for Rory, not about Rory, and it made Fen smile. This was a brother, and Rory was loved.

“No problem. It won’t take us ten seconds to unload everything,” Tate said. “And then you can head back down there, and Fen won’t need anything when he’s on his way back with the Rory. They’ll run.”

“Run. Okay, well. So you’re Fen. You’re the one—” Liam pierced him with a glare. “This is all your fault.” Then about the time he was sure Liam was going to beat him to death, the man held out one hand. “I’m Liam. I’m Rory’s brother. I don’t approve of all of this nonsense. I need your help. I also think ninety percent of this stuff is for you.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Fen shook and grinned. “And I’m sure, on your list, there’s even more.”

Fen, Tate, and a few others unpacked. They could all stay in the common area until Rory got there and divvied it out however it needed to be divided.

He was chafing at the delay by the time they were done, but it heartened him to see Liam was too. He jerked his head at Fen. “Time to go.”

“Yes, please.” He slid into the truck, a weird feeling of unreality passing through him. Had it been that long since he’d ridden in a vehicle? He supposed it had. He almost offered to just shift and run along behind it.

They rode in silence for a while, then Liam glanced at him. “So Rory says you got shot?”

“I did. I was trying to avoid the pack... I could smell it, so I went high, up toward the tree line. And—” He shrugged. “I never saw it coming.”

“I’m surprised you weren’t drawn to the healer halfway between where you were shot and the pack. Niall is very strong.”

He blinked. “I just followed my gut. I suppose I was looking for my mate.”

“I guess, yeah.” Liam sighed. “No offense, man, but this is weird.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Not to him, it wasn't.

"I'm sorry that it's uncomfortable, but I do swear to care for your brother and to be a good father."

"You have children?" Liam's eyes went wide. "Rory didn't say that."

"Not yet." But he would. He had no doubt. He and Rory would have beautiful, amazing babies, and they would thrive.

"So you think—That's weird too." Liam laughed. "I mean, that Rory would be a...what do they call them? An omega?"

He grinned a little. "Yes, exactly. And he is."

"I don't want to know." Liam held one hand up off the wheel as they bounced down the dirt track.

"I will spare you then." Fen reached out with his mind, trying to find the thread of Rory's thoughts.

Where are you? I was going to wake up but...Fen could tell there was a fuzziness to the thoughts. Yes, they seemed stronger, more powerful, but they weren't as focused.

Oh, sweet mate. You're all right, Fen sent. Shh...rest for a bit longer. You're about to have a nice run, and you'll need your energy.

Fen intended to run hard, to luxuriate in his mate.

Running. That was a satisfied thought. Mate? You're... I can feel you coming to me.

Yes, yes, mate. Just rest. I'll be there in a minute. I'm on my way.

He hoped it wouldn't be much longer. Fen thought he could feel Rory yawn and stretch, and he had to smile. He couldn't wait to see his mate. Would he be dark? Would he be white? Would he be gray? Small. Huge. The options were myriad, and he wanted to know right now.

"Dude, dude, can you not shift in my car? I would not be a happy camper. I just washed everything." Liam did not sound amused. In fact, he sounded a touch stressed out. "I've had as much wolf excitement today as any human being deserves to have. Ever. Are we clear? No fuzziness."

"You're no fun," he dared to tease. "I promise to be good." At least until he got to Rory. After that, all bets were off.

"So how do you want this to work?" Liam asked. "Do you want us to just open the door and let you in? You want us to shut you in with him? You want us to try and lead him out?"

Fen pondered that a second. It shouldn't honestly be too difficult, should it? "Is there a way for you to leave a path outside? Then you could go behind a shut door and just let me lead him out. It would be so much easier if I can shift first and help him leave the house. Once we're in the open, we're golden. But I do want to be able to get him outside."

"Thank you. That won't be a problem. Will he know us?"

“I don’t see any reason why not. He’s not a monster after all. He’s just fuzzy. I mean, he’s probably a little confused. And the nose—the thing is, is that the first time you shift, it’s going to be overwhelming, all the odors. You can smell so much better, right? And so that’s gonna be the biggest thing; he’s going to be distracted and confused. But he knows about werewolves. He understands what we’re like, what we are, how we function. He’s been living among us so…” Everything should be fine.

“Okay. Okay, cool.” Liam drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. “I mean, he didn’t hurt anyone when he went all fuzzed, so yeah. I need to meet with him about going up to the dragon home, but that can wait until—you know.”

“I’ll go with you. But that might have to wait a few days.” He gave Liam a wink as they pulled onto a paved road, and the trading post came into sight, the bend in the river shining in the sun.

It was a good place. He could tell by the look of it. By the…scent.

“Here we go,” Liam said as he pulled in and parked.

The trading post was long and low and surrounded by the trees, the lights in the windows making it seem warm and welcoming. One day, he would love to explore it with his mate.

“Thank you. If you don’t mind, you could go in and just sort of have everybody else go get in a room with closed doors and open up the door for Rory? I’m going to take my clothes off out here and shift. I don’t have a whole lot of them and I’d hate to ruin them, especially my boots.” Clothes didn’t grow on trees, not even for his Rory.

“Ohh, I understand. No reason to ruin what you don’t have to, right?” Liam nodded to him. “Give me five minutes and then come in.”



“Just open the door with the front door when you’re ready for me, because I’ll be ready for you.” He shifted easily, so it shouldn’t be a problem to be ready to meet his mate.

Liam went inside, and he began to strip down carefully, keeping his mental voice slow and easy. He didn’t want to wake his mate up yet. He folded all of his clothes up neatly into a little package, which he left on the seat for Liam to bring up in a few days. And then he shifted, letting himself go wolfy. His wounded arm felt strong, and his shoulder did too. As soon as Liam opened the door, he hurried in, calling for his mate.

Rory, Rory, Rory, Rory.

## Page 27

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Fen? Mate, love? Is it you? Oh, his mate woke quickly, the touch of that mind like a drug.

He followed his nose down the hall, and as soon as he found the door that held his mate, he nosed it open and saw his mate sitting there.

He stared, stunned. His mate was a mottled red, with a lovely white muzzle, long, slender legs, and amazing ears. He could imagine his mate running so quickly, moving through the trees like a streak of lightning.

So beautiful.

Oh, they were going to make beautiful babies.

His mate stood, staring down at him, from on top of the mattress, and then bowed deep, his muzzle resting on the mattress. Hello. Mate, mate, it is you.

He nodded. It is me. Come, mate, let's run. Let's run as fast as we can.

As Rory hopped down, he found himself panting, almost unbearably excited.

His muzzle rubbed against Rory's, and a burst of pure happiness hit him, making him bark.

Rory barked back at him, and they turned as one, running out the series of open doors in a flash. He knew the way back now, too, and he followed the trail of Liam's truck back up the hill, turning onto the dirt track. He led Rory away from "civilization" as

quickly as he could, not wanting to take a chance on being seen by a random hiker or some such.

Humans took such a dim view of wolves. They loved to look at them in zoos, but not in the wild.

They ran, and Rory soon passed him, tail like a flag, a moving target for him to keep up with. To nip at teasingly.

Oh, he was so in love.

Rory was as quick as he had imagined and intensely curious. He ran in bursts, then would stop to hunt, exploring every sound, every sniff, every fallen leaf. It was at once adorable and exhausting.

Rory chased the rabbits. He dug a mole. He disturbed the birds. Then he snapped up a grasshopper, which made him foam a little bit and gag. Then he immediately went and ate a beetle.

Finally, Fen just plopped down in a little spot of grass, snuggled in, and watched. He didn't begrudge Rory this first shift, the pure rush and joy of it, but he was going to save his shoulder, his energy, in case he had to do something to wear Rory out so that he could shift back into his human form later.

Is it always like this?

Fen chewed a burr out of his tail. Always. If there's food and water and good rest, being a wolf is amazing. You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Me? What about you? It's like I've never seen you before. Rory's tongue lolled out. You glow.

Do I?He didn't mind that, not one bit.

You do. The moon is making you shine.Rory's head tilted, those huge ears twitching.Something's coming.

Are they? Who?He felt the presence too, but Rory needed to learn this. To experience his wolf.

Don't know. Rory sniffed again, inhaling deep.I do know. I know that smell.

As Rory danced in anticipation, Jameson and Keegan appeared as wolves, the alphas staring at them both.

To his surprise, Rory bowed again, tail just wagging.

Jameson and Keegan took that as their due, and they came to Rory, rubbing muzzles with him, welcoming him as pack.

That squeezed Fen's heart, because it was so amazing to watch.

Shocking him, Rory then brought Jameson and Keegan to him, and he stood, shaking out his fur from nose to tail. He didn't bow deep like Rory. He had been an alpha of sorts in his own right. But he did acknowledge them as his pack alphas now. He wanted to stay here.

To be with Rory.

Jameson touched noses with him, cold and wet and surprising, and he chuffed, his tail wagging of its own accord.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

This is good, right? Please tell me this is all right because I've never done this before and I'm a little bit nervous. Rory was damn near vibrating beside him.

Be at ease, mate, you're amazing. You did perfectly.

Perfectly is good. I like that.

Was I ever that young? Jameson rolled his eyes, then nudged Rory with his head just a little hard. Rory went stumbling back, then came rushing back to jump and play. It was an amazing thing to see alphas playing. Letting their inner wolf be joyous and open instead of closed up and stern.

He was lucky to have found this pack, and he knew it. But he also knew there were some wolves out there close by, and they were not kind. It bothered him deep in the wound on his shoulder.

That was for another day though. Today was for Rory.

Today was for the first shift and the beautiful, fuzzy laughing wolf that had come to stay.

His mate.

Today was for celebrating his mate.

Rory came rushing up to him, running so fast that he was a blur, and Fen braced himself for impact, but just before they slammed together, his mate leapt, soaring

over the top of him. He whipped around to give chase.

Fen felt the alphas' approval wrap around him like a hug, and he knew he'd done right. They could worry another day.

Today was for Rory now.

## Chapter

### Nine

Rory woke up all naked and not hairy. Which, these days, on any given day, was a good thing. He was having a bit of trouble with not wolfing out whenever he got emotional.

And goddess, he was super emotional all the damn time. He was sure it was because everything was a little overwhelming now that his wolf senses were one hundred percent awakened.

He grinned at John as his friend met him in the kitchen of the big alpha house, where he was icing cookies with a batch of tween wolf kids. "Hey."

"Hey. You got a little fuzzy ear there, man," John told him.

"Oh." He batted at it, glad that the kids hadn't started teasing him.

"Hey, you're not nearly as bad as I was."

"No?" Rory remembered vaguely that John'd had a really hard time when he started shifting, so much so that he'd been locked away. "I just feel so damn emotional all the time."

“Well, it can do that, the whole wolf thing.”

“Sure.” Rory shrugged, mixing up more pink icing. “I mean, I’ve read all about shifting rage and all that. But I’m never mad.” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “And I keep bursting into tears.”

John frowned at him, head tilting. “Is something wrong? I mean, are you sad?”

“No!” Rory chuckled, then looked at the mangled icing bag in his hand. “No. I’m happier than I’ve ever been. But all I can do is shift and cry and be really damn horny.”

“Oh. Uh...is it possible that you’re with child?”

“With what?”

“Preggers, man.” John grabbed a cookie, dunking it immediately in his cup of coffee.

God, that smelled like bitter death. “No. No, I don’t think so. No way.”

“No? I mean, you guys have been together long enough. Does he knot you?”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He glanced around, his cheeks on fire. “Well...yes...”

John glanced at the kids. “And do you get wet for him?”

“Um. Yes.”

“You’re probably pregnant. I’ll have the midwife come talk to you.”

“I—”

“It’s no shame. We all know how babies are made.”

His cheeks heated painfully. “I just never expected to have any. Like personally cook them.”

“Um, hello. I was a macho PI.” John snorted.

“Are you sure? Macho?” he teased.

“Well, I was damn manly.” John winked. “Beau was really the big alpha one.”

“Yes. Beau was a hoot. He gave Zeke a run for his money.” Could he be pregnant? Surely not.

“Well, like I said, I’ll send one of the midwives. It will make you feel better to know.” John snorted. “Hormones can make you feel like you’re nuts.”



“Yeah? I guess... I guess that would be okay. I won’t worry Fen, though.”

“Okay, cool?” John looked at his face, then set his coffee aside. “Sorry. I’ll just not have the rest of that.”

“Oh. No. No, sorry. I’m just...” Going to toss cookies if he wasn’t careful. “I need a glass of water.”

“You got it.” John brought him a cold glass of water two seconds later. “Bess? Can you sub in here? Let’s go outside and get you some air.”

“Oh, goddess...please. I’m sorry, I just...” He was going to hurl.

“It’s okay. You’re okay. Sip your water, it’s totally cool.” John led him outside and into the crisp autumn air.

Rory held his glass like it was a lifeline, as if when he let go of it the world would fall apart. It may well be the only thing holding him together.

“Listen, I know this has to be scary. I mean, I was in your shoes, and I didn’t even know werewolves existed, right? Much less omegas and alphas and men getting pregnant. I thought everybody was crazy. Women being able to get people pregnant? Hello there, I thought it was like some mass hallucination. And then of course, you know. I lived it twice.”

“Did you hate it?”

John shrugged for him. “I admit, I wasn’t the best pregnant person on earth. I love the kids. That part is cool. I wasn’t happy being pregnant. I wasn’t glowing, but everybody’s different. I would do it again to get my babies. They’re worth it. Nine months of bullshit, but it’s nothing when you hold them. Okay, it’s still something.”

John rolled his eyes, so dramatic. “It, yeah, okay, it’s still something, but worth it. And regardless, there’s nothing to freak out about.”

“I think I’m going to freak out a little bit anyway.”

“Oh, I think you’re already freaking out a little bit. But what I’m saying is breathe. It’s gonna be okay.”

“Okay. Right. What if Fen doesn’t want babies? How am I even doing this?”

John shook his head. “Man, I don’t know. I... We just don’t know. I mean, maybe this is the universe’s way of making sure that guys get mates. Maybe it’s magic. Maybe it’s genetics. All I know is it is what it is.”

“Yeah.” And he didn’t hate it. He didn’t hate being a wolf. It was kind of cool actually, and he adored Fen. It was just all very new and moving very, very fast.

And what did that mean for his brothers? If he knew one thing, it was that they all had the same mom and dad. His folks had been in love. Like super-duper, for real in love. So they all had the same genetics.

Did that mean his brothers were going to end up finding mates and getting preggers? That thought was hilarious. Dean? Pregnant?

Or maybe Dean was more an alpha, and that was why he was holding the whole family together.

Fuck. It boggled the mind.

Keegan walked over to them, having a radar for his mate. “Hey. You two okay?”

“Rory got a little overheated in the kitchen, is all.” John lifted his face for a kiss. He got it, too, a lingering press of mouths that was not gross or overly hot, but it still made him a little guilty watching it.

Love? Are you well?

He smiled at Fen’s voice. He tried to avoid peeking in on Fen at work. Distracting him could cause injuries. I’m fine. Just hot.

Hot. He felt Fen’s concern deepened. It’s chilly out there. I’m coming to see you. Just let me put my tools away.

Oh, I’m all right, I just...He just had to go see a midwife to see if he was pregnant, and then, if he was pregnant, tell Fen that he was pregnant because he didn’t even begin to know how to do that. “Hey, you, I’m having a baby, and I hope that you’re cool with that. I don’t know why you wouldn’t be cool with that, but what if you’re not cool with that?”

I’ll be right there.

“Rory, man, are you all right?” Keegan asked.

“I’m fine. Fen’s on his way. I—I guess he wanted to see me.” And now he was going

to have to figure out what the hell to do.

Lying to Fen was hard, even if it was just a lie of omission.

John gave him a warm, amused little look, and Rory considered just biting him. “You’re getting whiskery again, buddy. Hold it together.”

“Oh, damn it.”

This was the last thing he needed right now, to just wolf out when he really needed to talk to his mate.

“All right, listen to me. Deep breaths, man. In and out. You’ve got this.” The alpha’s voice was soothing and helped, surprisingly, to keep him stable and unfuzzy.

Defuzzy.

The great antifuzzy.

Whatever.

The important part was that he didn’t wolf out and was heading toward calm, at least until Fen came up at him. At a dead run.

“Mate, mate, are you well?”

He nodded and shook his head, nodded again.

Keegan chuckled. “Well, that was clear.”

Fen gave Keegan a look, but he grabbed his hands. “What can I do?”

“Why don’t you guys walk over to see Missus Lonia?” John suggested.

Keegan’s eyebrows flew up, but Fen had no idea who that was, so he blinked. “Is she a healer?”

“Of sorts,” Rory murmured, glaring at John.

He just chuckled. “She can help, yes.”

“Well, then, come on, love,” Fen told him, tugging his hands.

He rolled his eyes at John but took Fen’s left hand in his right and led him off across the village.

“So, um...” How to explain this? “This healer person lady that we’re going to go see. Um. She’s kind of a specialist.”

## Page 31

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Fen tilted his head. “Well, she’s a healer.”

“Of sorts.”

“John said that. What’s going on?” Fen paid way too close attention.

Oh, goddess help him, he was going to puke. “She’s a midwife, okay? Like a midwife.”

“Midwife.” Fen stopped.

Stared at him.

And just kept staring at him.

“Okay. Did you not want to do this? We don’t have to do this. You could just not do this. I’m sure that there’s a way not to do this. We can just go home and close the door and go to bed for the winter. Do wolves hibernate? I wouldn’t mind hibernating.”

Fen just kept staring. Okay, that was creepy.

Like seriously one hundred percent all the way fucking creepy. “Look, if you don’t want to have a baby... I mean, I don’t even know if I’m pregnant, but—and I didn’t even, I didn’t know that that was a thing for me. I’m—I didn’t know, and I have enough to deal with without you being mad. You’re not allowed to be mad at me.” He was going to throw this glass of water right at Fen and hit his mate right in his staring

face, possibly break his nose.

Also, why did he still have a glass of water?

Fen tilted his head. “No wonder you can’t keep your wolf put together.”

“What? What did you just say to me?”

“I just meant?—”

“That wasn’t very nice.” He was trying really hard to learn how to do this. He had never done this before. No one had even told him that he was supposed to know how to do this. And now this person who had probably gotten him pregnant—well, Fen had definitely got him pregnant, assuming he was pregnant, which he might not even be pregnant, but it was totally Fen’s fault, along with this whole werewolf thing. He was pretty sure that was Fen’s fault too. “That really wasn’t very nice.”

“Rory.” Fen grabbed him, turning him to face him. “That’s not what I meant! I just said the first thing that popped into my head. I only mean that not only did you just start to shift, now you have all these hormones.”

“But you don’t look happy.” He wanted to shake Fen. Hard.

“Well, you look like you want to run.” Fen’s smile lit up the whole day. “You’re pregnant!”

“Maybe? John sure thinks so.”

“Love. I—Wow.” Fen howled, grabbing him and swinging him around, which made everyone stare at them.

Well, that was better than not happy, he guessed.

It's okay then?

Oh, mate. More than. This is a miracle. We have a home. I contribute to the pack. There's going to be a baby now. This is a miracle. More than I ever dared pray for.

I sure hope so.

With his luck, it was just some sort of weird psychic hiccup or something; he didn't know. If he was honest, he didn't know a lot about anything right now except that he wanted to just puke a lot and cry all the time.

They got to the healers' building, and there was the midwife, standing there, smiling at him. "Thought you'd be coming by soon, dear one."

"How did you know? What could I possibly have done? I swear I haven't done anything weird or pregnant."

"Be at ease, Rory. It's my job to know. I promise you, it's all right. It's normal to be worried. You have your alpha here. He'll protect you, care for you. All of us will care for you as you have cared for us for so long."

He began to sob at her words, the mixture of worry and fear and joy so intertwined inside of him he couldn't separate the strands.

Fen held him, vocalizing gently, the sounds soothing him down to his core. "All will be well, mate. All will be well."



*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He wasn't sure that all was going to be well. "What am I gonna tell my family?"

"That they're going to be uncles, of course."

"It can't just be that easy."

"Of course it can," she said. "You're a wolf. This is natural. Let yourself relax. You have to use a lot of energy to grow a whole baby."

"But my brothers?—"

"Will be happy for us. Liam and Dean are coming up next week," Fen said. "We'll start by telling them."

Rory sniffed, feeling so...hormonal. Dammit, he'd always been just a guy. And now he was a pregnant omega wolf!

"My pregnant omega wolf," Fen said tenderly, petting his back. "I do love you so."

"Aw, babe, I love you too. I'm just so wigged."

"There is no need for you to be. We'll work through all this together. I will take the rest of the day off, and we can just spend it quietly with each other."

"Do you need to, like, have me pee on a stick or something?"

Fen's eyebrows damn near hit his hairline, and Lonia just chuckled. "No, dear. We

can smell it.”

“Does it stink? Do I stink?” He stared at his mate in a panic. “Fen, do I stink?”

“You do not stink,” Fen assured him.

Lonia shook her head. “It’s my gift, silly wolf. Take him home and get him some rest, possibly a cookie.”

Rory wanted to scream and stomp his feet and say he didn’t want a cookie, except that he did want a cookie and he did want to go home, and so it seemed silly to throw a fit about something that he just wanted to do right now.

In fact, doing it right now seemed like a great fucking plan.

Fen beamed. “Yes ma’am, I would be happy to. We have cookies.”

“I’ll have someone drop dinner off. We could just leave it outside the door and that way you don’t have to cook.” He opened his mouth to argue, and she stared him down. “We don’t mind. You would do it for us.”

He would. “I do.” He had.

“Go home, be with your mate. All will be well. You have my word, all is well.”

He didn’t know about that, but he did know Fen had his arm and was slowly but surely leading them home, the constant soft rejoicing ringing in his head.

My mate is having our baby.

Chapter

Ten

Fen grinned at Liam and Dean, who had rattled up the mountain in their old truck, bringing all manner of supplies and toys and more. They were good men, good pack members. And he was about to give them some amazing news.

Well, he hoped it was as amazing to them as it was to him. Rory had been having a terrible time this morning with his belly, and he'd asked Fen to talk to his brothers alone.

He chuckled. Rory was a little freaked out. Still. But he was singing to himself again now, his smiles coming more and more regularly, his worry less evident. And he was popping out fuzzy parts less and less, shifting mainly when Fen did and running, gently, with him.

His love for Rory grew every day, and it stunned him.

"Where's Rory?" Liam was the most suspicious of all the brothers, but also the most adventurous. It made Fen wonder if those qualities came together. "Let's see if I can guess. Is he too fuzzy to come see us? It's not like we haven't seen him fuzzy. We were there for the original fuzz."

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“He’s fine. He just wanted me to speak to you. He’s having a bit of a belly thing.”

“Oh, that sucks. There’s some mint tea somewhere in here. Possibly. If not mint tea, there’s at least some dried mint in here. Again, possibly. I don’t know. We brought a bunch of stuff.” Dean seemed less concerned. “We brought a pretty big haul though. You know, now we have to keep getting up here before the snows start, making it harder and harder. Once that happens, we come up once every two weeks with the snowcat.”

“Much appreciated.” He gave Dean what felt like an insipid smile. Supplying really wasn’t in his purview, but he supposed these men were his family now, so he sort of had to be interested, or pretend to be. Honestly, he wanted to work with wood, enjoy his mate, and periodically play cards with Timothy and a few of his other new friends in the pack. “Rory and I have some news.”

Liam blinked at him. “Are you getting married?”

“Pardon?”

“You know, like, hitched. Are you going to have a big wedding? Do wolves have big weddings? If you do, are they done fuzzy with fancy collars?” Liam looked at Dean, who shrugged.

“How the hell would I know? I mean, I’ve never seen a wolf wedding.”

Liam tilted his head. “Isn’t that a song?”

Fen was beginning to think that he was completely and totally lost, and maybe this was a terrible idea. Surely, Rory would have done a better job than this. These men spoke a different language than he was used to.

“We’re already mated. That’s enough.”

The moon had brought them together. Everyone knew that they lived in the same home. They were having a baby. How much more proof of their love would anyone need?

“Oh. That’s cool. We’re glad he’s happy.” Liam offered him a grin, and Dean nodded.

“What’s the news then?”

He couldn’t have hidden his happy smile for love or money. “We’re pregnant.”

Liam blinked. Dean’s mouth fell open. They stared at him as if he’d grown two heads.

“Who’s pregnant?”

“Rory and I are going to have a baby,” Fen said.

They still stared at him. Finally, Liam asked, “Who’s having the baby?”

“Rory is.” He tried not to grin. Fen supposed that if they had all thought they were solely human, then this would be a shock to them.

Just as it had been to Rory at first.

“But—”

Dean elbowed Liam in the ribs. “Congratulations, man. That’s awesome. Right, Liam?”

“Well, I mean...the baby part is cool.” Liam’s eyes were gigantic, completely panicked. “He’s going to be okay, though? I mean, all weirdness aside, this isn’t dangerous or anything, right? That’s my brother. I’m not going to let anybody hurt him, not even my niece and nephew.”

Fen’s heart melted. “It is perfectly normal. He’s been to the midwife, and the pregnancy is progressing beautifully. He has morning sickness. He can’t smell coffee without throwing up. He cries a lot. But the midwife says that’s normal. He’s really worried you guys are going to be angry at him.”

Liam frowned. “That’s stupid. Why would we be angry at him? He didn’t get pregnant alone. If we were gonna be angry, we would be angry at you.”

Dean chuckled. “That’s right, you knocked up our baby brother. That’s just rude. That requires us thinking about our baby brother having sex. Well, that’s nasty. So, you’re in big trouble, mister.”

“Yep, big trouble. You have to help us unload the truck.” Liam smiled, the expression wolfish. “And then we have to see Rory. We need to see him. He’s our brother, and I gotta know what you need for the baby.”

Dean’s eyes went wide. “So, are you going to be able to tell if it’s a boy or girl, or do you have to wait? When’s he going to have the baby? Where are you going to put the baby? There are so many questions.”

“Right. Like is he going to have a puppy?” For a moment, Liam seemed utterly

horrified.

Dean rolled his eyes. “Seriously? We saw when John had the puppies—babies! Babies. When John had the babies. They were baby shaped, not puppy shaped.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Oh, Goddess help him. He was going to kick Rory's butt for making him do this. He supposed he ought to be grateful that it was only Dean and Liam today. From what Rory had told him, he had an indeterminate amount of brothers. Far too many for one family.

And Fen was going to have to meet them all.

"We'll know before the birth if it's a boy or girl," he said, grabbing a box of foodstuff out of the truck. "And where else would we put the baby but with us? Rory—we—have a house, you know."

Liam nodded. "Sure. We helped frame it out. He wanted a little cabin, but for some reason, Jameson and Keegan told him to go bigger."

"The alphas are very smart, intuitive." He liked them both very much. They weren't friends per se, but they were kind to him, welcoming him and allowing him to make his own way in the pack.

He was much more an artisan than he was an enforcer or guardian, so they ran in separate circles. But Jameson and Keegan were very kind, giving, and Rory seemed to have a very close relationship with their families, which helped cement his place in the pack.

It was so helpful to have such a smart and connected mate, even if it worried him sometimes how easy it had been for him to integrate into this new family, this new world.



“They’re something else,” Liam admitted with a wide grin. “Good men. We like them.”

They got to work unloading in earnest, and soon everyone in the pack was bringing things back and forth.

They sent bespoke furniture and hand-dyed woven fabric down to be traded, while the Calhouns had brought food, gifts for Yule, necessities, as well as a lovely tool chest for him along with a whole new set of tools.

“What is this for?” he asked, and Liam shrugged.

“Rory wanted you to have it, so here it is.”

“I will put it in the wood shop. We can all share it.” Fen’s cheeks burned. Rory embarrassed him by all this spoiling, but honored him as well.

“Now can we see our brother?”

He rolled his eyes. “I suppose so.” Mate, your brothers want to see you. They’re not angry.

I didn’t think they were angry, I just thought they’d be wigged.

Well, they’re a little, what do you call it, wigged. A little.

Okay, bring them to the house. I’ve got some cider warming on the stove. I’ll ladle up everyone a glass, and then they can leave.

Whatever you say, mate. He smiled at his new family. “He says come on. He’s got cider waiting at the house.”

“Well, go him, look at him deciding that we’re not the enemy.” Fen thought Dean sounded a little hurt.

“You’re not the enemy, he’s just very hormonal.” And if the brothers upset him. Fen might bite them both on the butt.

“Be nice, D,” Liam said. “Rory is still trying to figure all this out too. Right, Fen?”

“Very much so. It’s all new to everyone.” Fen chuckled. “Even me. I didn’t expect to find a pack, let alone a mate and one who thought he was human at that. So now we all have much to learn.”

Dean paused, staring at him a moment, then nodded. “That’s fair enough.”

“Lead the way, man. I wanna see my brother.” Liam didn’t actually wait for him to lead the way, which was fine because Liam knew where he was going.

“It’s going to be nice in the summer when everything is growing on your porch. It’s one of my favorite parts of Rory’s house. Your house. Y’all’s house.” Dean was obviously trying to make conversation. “The pack planted sunflowers all around the outside, that was really neat.”

“Rory said that he liked to watch things grow. And the children. He likes to watch the children. I like to watch the children too.” Goddess, this was excruciating.

“Are you excited about becoming a dad?” Liam asked.

Fen nodded, swallowing hard. “I never dared to dream that I was going to have a child of my own. I’m very pleased. I—I cannot wait.”

“That’s cool, man.” Dean clapped him on the back. “Don’t worry; you’ll get to know

us.”

## Page 35

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“I know. I will.” He chuckled, but then they were inside, and Rory came to see what was going on, only looking a tiny bit green around the gills. “Hey, guys.”

“Hey.” Dean grabbed Rory to hug him. “Congratulations, bro.”

“Thank you.” Rory smiled, but he looked tired.

“They just wanted to see you, love. Then we’ll head up to the top of the mountain.” He wanted Rory to rest. His poor mate was pale and a little sweaty.

“Of course. I’m not upset.” Rory’s eyes widened, and he bolted for the bathroom.

“Oh, man. Should we wait outside?” Liam looked a little green now too. Apparently, he didn’t do well with hearing Rory be sick.

“We’ll go out.” Dean winked at him, not at all worried, it seemed. Dean was a solid citizen, he thought. Liam a little more...flighty, if a Calhoun could be called flighty.

He supposed they all had their personalities just like any pack did.

He missed his pack so much just then that it almost doubled him over.

Fen went to look in on Rory, knowing stress made his morning sickness so much worse. “Love? Are you doing okay?”

“Mmmph.” Rory just knelt in front of the toilet, his body shaking.

“Shhh.” Fen squatted behind him, stroking his back. “It’s okay. Do you want me to tell your brothers to go without me?”

“No.” Rory leaned back, then hugged on Fen. “No. No, I want you to go with them. If that other pack is up there, they might need you. As a wolf, I mean.”

“Of course, love. Let’s get you to bed.”

“Oh, I just need to?—”

“Bed. Crackers. That lemon-lime soda they brought. Now, please.” He lifted Rory into his arms as he rose.

Rory laughed, the sound breathless. “You should at least let me rinse.”

“Okay.” He set his mate down, allowing him to freshen up. Then Fen lifted him again.

Rory hooted. “I love how strong you are.”

“I wish I was truly an alpha sometimes.” But he wasn’t. Oh, he was, as far as knots and growly protectiveness were concerned. But not when it came to leading a pack. Maybe if he were, his family would still be alive.

“You’re sad all of a sudden.” Rory touched his cheek as he lowered his mate to the bed.

“No, I’m fine. Do I need to send someone to sit with you?”

“Of course not.” Rory smacked his chest now. “I’m queasy, not really ill. Go on. If you need help, though, put me on blast.”

“I will. I promise.” He took a kiss, since Rory had cleaned up and he could. Then he stroked Rory’s hair back from his face. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Go on.”

So he headed out to the four-wheelers with Rory’s brothers.

“Is he all right?” Liam asked. “I mean, seriously, that was...whoa.”

“He’s fine. I swear. He just got up too early. He needed to just chill.” Had they never seen a pregnant person? Ever? Fen decided just to change the subject. “So what are we hoping to find up here in the compound? I thought that dragons were gone.”

“They are. I just, I want to check out the house. I want to see what’s there. I’m... I just need to go up there.” Liam rolled his eyes. “I don’t know. I guess maybe I just want to see for myself.”

“Fair enough.” Fen understood curiosity. He also understood exploring all the edges of one’s territory.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Do you know if you were up there when you got shot?” Dean asked. “We have a rifle with us, but I would prefer a no-shooting day.”

“I think we all prefer those days,” Liam said, dry as dust.

“Shut up, brother.” Dean rolled his eyes.

Fen’s shoulders tightened, the wound throbbing like Dean’s question opened it again.

“I... I don’t know exactly where I was because I’d just been running. Traveling.”

Dean tilted his head. “So...obviously you’re not from anywhere near here.”

Liam’s eyes went wide. “Like, are you on the run? Are you a fugitive? If you are, I mean, we’re cool with it, I’m cool with it, but you need to tell Rory if you are a fugitive. If you are, what are you going to do about it?”

Dean looked at Liam with the long-suffering gaze of someone who had dealt with these questions for many years. “Liam, shut up. Let the man speak.”

“Thank you.” He guessed he should thank them.

“You’re welcome. Now. Are you on the run?”

“No. Well, not exactly.” He sighed. Love, can you listen in? Rory needed to hear this.

I’m right here. Resting. Nothing else to do but hear you.

His heart swelled at Rory seeing him and hearing him. “My family and our extended family were banished. The pack was taking a very anti-human stance. Killing their meat animals. Attacking them if they came on our territory. It made us a target for the human hunters. So my family, and many of our cousins and friends, protested.”

Oh love. I’m so sorry. Rory’s sorrow bled through, mingling with his own.

“So... So you made your own pack? I mean, is that what happened?” Liam had turned to look at him from the front seat.

“I suppose?” He jostled and bounced on the back seat of the truck. “That’s what we wanted to happen. My sister and her mate and my parents came with me, while most of the others headed far north. Because, you know, white Arctic wolves, right?”

Dean nodded once. “Well, that makes sense.”

“I was trying to make it so. They wanted me to be the pack alpha and...” He shook his head.

The fact was, he wasn’t an alpha. Not like that. He wasn’t interested in leading people. He wasn’t interested in leading anything. He wanted a family and a home and a workshop. He didn’t want a pack of his own, and he wasn’t sure if he was supposed to be ashamed of that or not.

Was he supposed to just want to constantly climb the ladder, to fight to be in control? Because he didn’t, he liked his rung.

“You don’t have to tell us,” Liam said, but Rory was listening, and he did have to tell his mate.

“My sister’s mate. His family came. I was out hunting, trying to find food because it



was the dead of winter. They killed them all. All of them. And I wasn't even there to protect them. I?—”

He didn't even have an answer to that, more to say. He was what he was supposed to have been there. He had to find food. He had lost everyone.

Oh, my sweet love. You haven't lost everyone. I'm here and your child is here and we love you. Please, sweet. This wasn't your fault. This was their fault. They killed your family. They were the murderers, not you.

“Jesus, that sucks, man.” Dean's voice was serious as a heart attack. “You don't have to be ashamed. You were out trying to provide while someone was a murderous asshole—I can't even imagine. That stinks. Are they still around?”

The words eased him, Dean's, of course, but Rory's easy acceptance was a balm. “I don't know. I—I went a little crazy, I think. I walked out and ran, not out of fear, just out of...”

Liam nodded. “Pain. Pain, that's enough to make you crazy. I hear you.”

I should have been there. My sister was the sweetest wolf you'd ever meet. Gentle and kind.

What was her name?

Samantha.

Well. I wish I could have met Samantha. I'm sorry that I never got to. You have a home now, and we intend to keep you.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He had to smile. I love you too, mate.

Liam waved his hand toward the windshield. “So this here, this part of the trail, this belongs to Niall and Loyal. They’re the pack leaders of this territory.”

That sounded familiar. “Niall. That’s the name of the shaman?”

“Yes. I guess.” Dean shrugged. “I don’t really get out of the house much.”

“Luddite.” Liam rolled his eyes. “Yes, so. Niall is the shaman. He’s pretty new. Neat guy, really cool. So is Loyal. Actually, Loyal’s Keegan and Jameson’s brother. The pack wasn’t big enough for three alphas, so Loyal is up here, packing away. If you ever need anything though, you can stop here and they’ll know you’re pack. There’s lots of babies.”

“Oh, one day I’ll have to have Rory introduce me.” It was important to meet the pack shaman. Shamans could be difficult. Not in personality. Just—seeing what they saw meant it was hard to be part of the pack. They had to hold themselves apart.

“You want to meet them?” Liam asked. “I mean, you haven’t yet, right?”

“I haven’t. I am happy to if we have time, or I can have Rory introduce me.”

“Sure. Why not?” Liam swerved down the trail, revving his ATV engine a little. He had a feeling the conversation had made Liam wickedly uncomfortable.

He’s not good at emotional stuff, love.

Fen chuckled.Neither am I.

But he wants to do right by everyone. Let him take you to Niall's. That way he can see if they need anything.

Fair enough, my love. Are you doing all right?

Sleepy.Rory's mental voice was slowing. My stomach feels better. I love you.

I adore you. Rest. I'll go meet this Niall and tell them about our good news.

Thank you, love. I will do that.He watched curiously as they went along the trail to Niall and Loyal's...home? Outpost?

It was actually quite lovely. Rustic, yes, but well maintained and obviously a series of homes. The plants were dying back, but the houses were decorated with swags of dried herbs, flowers, and ribbons. It was breathtaking.

As soon as they pulled up, a couple of males came out, waving at them, their expressions welcoming and warm.

“That's Loyal and Niall. Come on. I'll introduce you.”

As soon as they stepped from the truck, shots rang out from the trees.

Chapter

Eleven

They're shooting at us!

Rory sat straight up in bed, his heartbeat speeding so fast he could barely stand it. What? Who? Where? I'm coming.

He got a flash of Niall's house, and then nothing, Fen snapping. You will not come here.

Watch me. He stood up and ran, his bare feet slamming through the fields. "Help! Help! I need help!"

The pack began to gather, Jameson finding him first. "What? What's the matter?"

"Liam and Dean took Rory up the mountain. They got to Loyal's. Someone's shooting at all of them. We have to help!"

Jameson's eyes flashed a gold fire. "I'll run. Tell Keegan and he can come with reinforcements." Jameson shifted and took off like a streak of red and gold, his wolf massive.

We're coming, mate! Jameson is on his way.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

You are not coming up here! Fen sounded distracted now, and he fretted, catching Keegan as he came running out.

“Someone is at Loyal’s house, taking shots at them!”

“I’ll take some of the men.”

“Wait! I want to go.”

“Rory, no. I know Fen is with your brothers, but I am not putting another pack member in danger.”

He glared daggers. “You mean an omega pack member.”

“I mean a pregnant pack member!” Keegan roared. “You will stay here!”

He wanted to roar, to say no, but he couldn’t.

He was rooted to the spot.

Maybe that was what all the others meant about alpha command. Hell, he could barely get his head to move so he could nod. “I’ll stay here.”

Keegan gave him a curt nod, and he was off, Brent and Bernard tearing off with him. The seconds would support the alphas as needed. Other big males began herding the pack in the village into the big meeting hall, Rory included.

“But I need to...”

“Alpha said you stay.” He was rushed inside.

Fen? Fen, they won’t let me come.

Good.

Are they still shooting at you?

Not right now. Loyal took off. We’re making sure Niall and the children and omegas are inside. Your brothers and I are fine. One of the ATVs is toast.

He chuckled. Fen loved that expression, which he’d learned from Rory.

I love you. Please. Be safe. I really, really love you.

I’ll be fine. Fen did sound less worried. But that wasn’t going to stop him from fretting until his mate was back with him.

Or at least out of the line of fire.

“Can you hear Fen?” John asked, coming to sit next to him.

“I can. Do you need me to tell him something?” Like Keegan and Jameson were coming?

“I just need to make sure everyone is okay.” But he could see the worry around John’s eyes and mouth. He clearly wanted to make sure that Keegan wasn’t rushing into an ambush.

“He says the shooting has stopped.”Right, love?

Yes. It’s—well, I won’t say it’s fine but looks like things will be okay. I’ll probably be running home rather than riding.

“He says one of the ATVs is pretty dead.”

“Oh, man. That sucks. They just bought both of those.” John smiled a little, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“He’ll be fine, John.” But he understood. It was one thing for Fen to be shot while way up by the tree line. It was another entirely for someone to be at the alphas’ brother’s pack, shooting up the landscape.

“I know. I tell myself that too. But every time Keegan has to go out and deal with these...assholes, I want to—” John’s daughter Litha came over, sliding into her father’s lap.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Don’t be sad, Da.”

“I’m not, munchkin. I’m worried, but I trust your dad to be careful.”

“He’s okay.” She leaned on John, and Rory’s heart melted a bit.

Was this what being a parent was like? He couldn’t wait to share it with Fen now. He put a hand on his belly, so happy to think about that. And so worried about Fen.

“No worry, Rory. Fen is okay too.”

“My little seer,” John said. “She does seem to know things.”

“I’m glad. It eases my mind.”

Alpha Jameson just showed up, Fen told him. I imagine the shooting is totally over for the day.

I imagine so, love. Jameson had a fearsome, if fair, reputation. He did not suffer fools, but he was never one to be cruel or abuse his power. Keegan was more good cop, funny and friendly. Until he shouted like he had today...

“Okay, that just wasn’t nice. Not any of it was fair.” He was going to talk to Fen very seriously about this whole being told what he could and couldn’t do.

“No, I see.” John chuckled at him. “So apparently back in the day, this whole, you know, alpha voice command thing. The old alpha used it all the time on everybody,



just randomly. It's only supposed to be for emergencies."

His temper flared, and his cheeks began to burn. "I was having an emergency. The emergency was that my mate is getting shot at!"

"Yeah, I get that, but it's sort of like this." John shook his head at him, rolled his eyes. "If you were up there, endangering yourself and your baby, Fen would've freaked out. They would have had to deal with a freaking out Fen, and with shooters and making sure that you and the baby were safe."

"You... I mean, I understand, but it's still not fair." Now Rory was beginning to feel like John was humoring the lunatic.

Lucien, Jameson's half-fae, half-wolf mate with all the little ones, turned to stare at him, nostrils flaring. "No, it's not. I really don't think that being fair was in their heads. At least not right now, you know? People they grew up with are shooting at Loyal. That's what's on their minds. What's on their minds is keeping people from being hurt like Fen was hurt. So, I'm sorry if what you wanted wasn't their number one priority."

Well, damn it.

Rory blew out a hard breath. "I'm sorry. I just want to help."

"I know." Lucien came to them, putting a hand on his shoulder. "You think I'm not going nuts wondering what could happen to them? The fact is, this whole wolf thing is what it is. We each have our place in the pack, whether or not we like it. We have lots of other roles too, but your main job right this second is protecting that baby. Because nobody else can do that but you."

"You know, if you don't stop being so damn logical and shit, we're all going to stop

being friends.” He included John and Lucien both in his mock scowl.

Lucien grinned. “In that case, I don’t know about you, but I need a cookie.”

John nodded, enthusiastically. “And a beer.”

“I’d take a cookie and a milkshake. Why don’t we have more milkshakes? Seriously, there’s a lack of milkshakes in this pack.” Please, Fen. I love you. Be safe.

He was willing to give here. John and Lucien needed that. So did he.

Fen peeked out from where he’d been crouching by one of the ATVs. The one with the steaming engine and flat tires.

That? Had been entirely too close.

“Fen? You okay?” Keegan came to give him a hand up. He’d roared into the clearing with four other men, and Jameson had come howling in before that in wolf form. The shooting had stopped immediately, and he had a feeling the shooters had fled.

Hard.

He brushed dirt off his...everything. “I think so. Liam? Dean?” He looked around for his new family members. “Dean! Are you hit?”

Dean blinked, looking down at his arm. “A scratch maybe.”

“Dammit. Let’s get you inside.” Keegan helped Dean up. “Here, put pressure on the wound. Niall! Incoming.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“On it.” A wolf as white as he was came in, nodded to him, and grinned. “I’m Niall. I’m so pleased to meet Rory’s mate. I hear congratulations are in order. Honestly, I wish we could have better circumstances. Luann, dearest, can you bring me my first aid kit?”

This was the shaman. He seemed oddly familiar, in a soul-deep sort of way, and as they looked at one another time seemed to shimmer, Fen’s wolf surging to the surface and begging to be released.

“What clan are you from?” Fen asked, and Niall shrugged.

“I don’t know. We can talk about it, but let me deal with this first.”

Luann came in with four little ones carrying a big wicker box with them. “Sorry, the kids wanted to help.”

Niall’s eyes went wide. “Oh, that’s very nice. Now, why don’t we take them in the other room, so that I can kind of evaluate the situation, and when kisses are needed to help with the boo-boos, we’ll call them.”

“Papa, I am not a baby. I don’t give kisses for boo-boos. I’m here to help.”

Oh dear. That was a very definite little one.

“Sorry, Isabella, I know that you are old enough to help. In fact, would you like to play nurse for me?”

She straightened up, her chin lifting. “Of course. Who’s hurt?”

Niall smiled at her, head tilting. “Use your nose, child. Do you smell it? The copper penny smell? That’s blood. That’s the one who’s hurt.”

The advice was offered over, not in a sarcastic manner, but gently, and the young girl sniffed before heading straight for Dean. “Let’s get that shirt off so that Papa can see.”

Fen fought his smile as Niall and the little one worked on Dean. It was more than a scratch, but not a bullet hole. It needed care though—it already seemed angry.

Fen was fascinated by Niall. He wanted to know where the shaman was from, or where his people came from. He looked as if he could be Fen’s cousin, and that was exciting. Everyone in his old pack assumed that they were the only Arctic wolves that had made it down this far.

But obviously not.

Obviously, there was a reason that Jameson and Keegan hadn’t decided that he must leave. They were used to seeing a white wolf about.

“Is he going to be okay, do you think?” Liam asked.

And Fen nodded. “Yes, yes. Keep it clean, keep it covered. He’ll be fine. There’ll be a scar.”

Liam shrugged. “Scars are just stories. He’s going to milk this one for weeks.”

Dean was pale, sweating, and maybe not ready to brag just yet.

Fen shook off his need to know about Niall for now. “Is anyone else hit? Can I help the alphas in any way?” he asked.

“I think they want everyone to stay inside for now. While they search the perimeter.”

“Of course.” He felt...more than useless. He should be more alpha. He’d lost his family because of it.

Niall looked at him calmly over Dean’s arm. “You are who you are, Fen. And that is who you are needed to be. Do not doubt the goddess.”

“I don’t, but I’m trying so hard...”

“Your mate knows. So does your pack.”

“I—thank you.” Staring into Niall’s eyes left him feeling...calm. Like he could breathe finally.

Are you okay, love? Is everyone all right?

Rory had a sixth sense for him.

I am. Dean took a little graze to the arm, but everyone is okay, and Niall is going to heal him right up, I’m sure. He’s...amazing. And I think he might be pack. He kept that thought to himself, he hoped.

## Page 41

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Oh no! Come home as soon as you can.

I will, love. We're just waiting for the alphas to tell us we can go.

"This really pisses me off," Liam snapped. "I wanted to get up to the old dragon home."

Niall glanced at him as he wound the bandage around Dean's arm. "Why?"

"I don't know." Liam blew out a sigh. "Something is telling me to get up there."

"Hmm." Niall didn't say anything else, but when Loyal came back inside, pulling on his shirt, Niall waved him down. "Liam wanted to go up to the old dragon home."

"Yeah?" Loyal raised an eyebrow. "They're gone."

"What?"

"The dragons. They're gone."

Liam nodded. "I know that. But I have this itch to get up there."

"Not today, Liam."

"But—"

"No. Not today. If you still want to go once we clear it and make sure no one wants to

shoot you, I'll take you up next week."

Liam sighed. "That'll work. I know it's selfish, but it's poking at my brain."

"Then we'll go. I live with this one. I don't ignore stuff when it itches."

"Thanks, Loyal." Liam glanced at his brother. "I need to get Dean home, anyway."

Fen nodded as well. "Rory is ready to see all of us and make sure we're all good too."

"Oh, I bet he's freaked out," Liam said.

"He is. He was going to try to come up."

Loyal chuckled. "I bet one of my brothers put a stop to that."

"Keegan."

"Good. He needs to be safe."

"I know." He worried about how Rory just threw himself into danger like it was nothing. He wanted his mate to be careful. Not just for the baby, but for him, for them.

"He's kind of impulsive," Dean said, his tone a little breathless as Niall finished binding his wound.

"He is. But he's a good egg," Liam put in.

"I adore him," Fen said.

That's good, love.

Eavesdropper.

Can you come home?

I'll be down the mountain in a few.



## Page 42

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He heard Jameson and Keegan coming in, so he thought it must be safe now.

It was time to go home to his mate.

Chapter

Twelve

Rory was a little tired of Fen treating him like glass.

He knew he shouldn't have tried to run up the mountain when someone had been shooting at Loyal's compound, but his brain hadn't been engaged. Just his heart. That was his mate and his brothers up there, and he'd wanted to help.

But Fen seemed to think that was a reason to not let Rory out of his sight. He'd been keeping Rory busy when he was not at work, and when he was, he got John or Lucien to keep Rory busy with the kids and other omegas.

He was starting to chafe under the constraints. Maybe he would go down and visit Dean and see how he was healing up.

"Hello, love."

He jumped about a mile. Oh, his thoughts had conjured Fen right up.

"Hello." He smiled when Fen walked into their kitchen, raising his face for a kiss.

"You're home early."

“I decided to just do a half day.” Fen could keep whatever hours he wanted. It wasn’t like he had a 9-5 job. So that was nice. He guessed.

Fen’s smile slipped a little. “Are you mad at me, love?”

He thought about just brushing it off, but then he decided that wasn’t fair. And wasn’t he always bitching if stuff wasn’t fair. So he blew out a breath.

“I’m frustrated, Fen.”

Fen frowned. “What about?”

“Ever since you went up to Loyal’s, you’ve been very protective. That’s lovely. I know you worry. But I’m not an idiot. I can look after myself.”

Fen was still frowning. “Your brother got shot. So did I.”

“I know. And that’s awful. But just taking food to some of the poor or elderly families isn’t going to put me in harm’s way. And every time I try to go farther than the alpha’s house, someone stops me.” He sighed softly. “I feel like you think I’m not very strong, and I used to go up and deal with the dragons all alone, you know?”

He was useful and smart and...basically happy. He resented having to live like he was in a glass bubble.

“I’m sorry, love.” Fen sighed, taking his hand and leading him to the kitchen table, where they sat, Fen still holding his hand over the table. “It’s—” Fen stopped, taking a deep breath.

“You can tell me, Fen. Talk to me.”

“I just worry so damn much.” Fen shrugged. “My whole extended family was killed off, and as soon as I got here, I got shot. It’s not you I don’t believe in. It’s me. I think I must be cursed.”

He pursed his lips. “What did Niall tell you?”

“Not to question the goddess. But it’s hard not to, Rory.”

“I think the good things are supposed to be hard.” And even if that was just a platitude, if it worked on Fen and his...worry, then Rory would take it. “You can’t keep taking responsibility for every shitty thing that happens. You’re not that powerful. You had a spate of crappy luck, but you’ve had some good luck too. You found your mate, we’re having a baby, you have a home, you have a job you like, you’ve really good friends. You have a new pack. You have good things in your life. Maybe if you focused on enjoying them rather than losing them, you’d feel better. Or you could just continue to be a grump about the whole thing and be terrified that something bad was going to happen again. It’s up to you.”

Fen arched his brow. “I see.”

“Do you? Good? It’s good for you to see. We’re never going to have our first baby again ever. This is it. This is our only first pregnancy ever. It would be better if you enjoyed it with me.”

Fen rolled his eyes, but he did grin, so Rory would take that as a win. “I made the baby its first toy.”

“You did. What is it?”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Fen held out a beautiful set of large wooden chains, everyone smooth as glass and stained in rainbow colors. Large enough for a baby to hold, but still so very light, it was amazing—toy and art all at once.

“It’s beautiful.”

“It was made out of a single log. I thought it would be like a puzzle, something fun. They can’t hurt themselves with it. It’s not long enough to do anything dangerous. I just thought it would be a neat thing for the baby to shake and hold. Next, I’m going to make him a carved mouse.”

Him.

Rory wondered if Fen had heard himself. “Mouse? Are you part cat that you’re making your son a pet mouse?”

“I thought I’d make him a whole little menagerie of them, you know? Whatever the—” Fen stopped and tilted his head. “My son.”

Rory nodded. “I think so. That’s what my heart says. Your son.”

The soft hiccup inside him grew stronger. He’d been feeling tiny motions for days now, but this? This wasn’t a flutter.

He grabbed Fen’s hand and placed it on his belly. “Your son.”

Then the baby kicked hard, right in the center of Fen’s palm.

Fen's eyes widened, his lips parting with shock. Those blue eyes were so beautiful. And Fen pressed that hand to Rory's belly, clearly feeling what he was feeling.

"Rory. That baby."

"He's moving. I know. Amazing, huh?"

"More than amazing." Fen laughed, the sound young, free, and so happy. Then he grabbed Rory and hugged him with fierce strength. "Our baby is moving."

"See? Good things, babe." Rory chuckled. "Now, am I allowed to leave the house?"

"Of course you are. I'm sorry if I've been an overprotective ass. I just—I need you safe. You're everything good." Fen stroked his hair, still holding him so close.

"Sure."

Fen offered him a warm smile. "Can we have lunch before we go out of the cabin and do things? Uh. Maybe I could feel the baby kick some more?"

"I think that sounds amazing. You know what I want?"

Fen's eyes lit up. "No, Tell me."

"I want a milkshake. There are no milkshakes here and..." He'd been craving for days.

Fen's head tilted. "What is a milkshake?"

"You don't know what a milkshake is?" Rory blinked. That was a travesty. "Oh my God. It's milk and ice cream whipped together into a thick drink and then there's

whipped cream and a cherry on top.” He licked his lips. “There’s chocolate ones and strawberry ones and vanilla ones and pineapple ones, and banana ones and caramel ones and peanut butter ones and...”

Fen stopped him right there. “There’s peanut butter ice cream?”

“Yes.” Of course there is.

“I would try peanut butter ice cream with milk and a drink.”

Okay, that was it. Rory was getting an ice cream maker and a blender delivered today.

He might not have Amazon, but he had brothers.

And he wasn’t asking for the world, right? These were basics.

Maybe he should get them to bring milk and peanut butter ice cream and an ice cream maker.

Oh, and blenders.

Of course, when these got really popular in the pack, it would be necessary to have more than a single little ice cream maker. They'd have to have a big ice cream maker, and the freezer to keep the ice cream in because?—

“Mate, are you still here?”

He blinked at his lover. His belly rumbled. “I’m...yes. Can you make hamburgers? Do you know how? I’ve got to make an order with my brothers. Can you make hamburgers now? Like right now?”

Fen offered him a fond, amused little smile that might have aggravated him if he weren’t so damn busy. “Yes, mate, whatever you ask.”

He beamed and nodded. “Oh, you’re very good at that. Keep it up. I totally approve.”

He grabbed the SAT phone, dialing his brothers’ house. “Hey, Liam. Okay, so let’s talk freezers.”

Chapter

Thirteen

Fen closed the bedroom door before he tiptoed down to the kitchen to pull the ice cream out of the freezer to soften. It was freezing cold outside. He could have just put the crock out in the snow. That was February in the Uintas. But he also knew that at

about four a.m., which was in about an hour, Rory would awaken and want a milkshake.

The ice cream this time was peanut butter and banana swirl. The more pregnant Rory got, the more bizarre his flavor choices became. He would also put some french fries in the air fryer.

They had added an extra three solar panels just to run all their small appliances. He and Rory liked to cook and eat.

Rory really liked to eat right now. It was adorable. He was not a small omega, and eating for him and the baby required an enormous amount of food.

He poured milk into the blender, then a little caramel syrup. He was learning all sorts of combinations of goodness.

He had never known how happy—truly happy—he could be. He ran with the pack. He created beautiful things with wood. He had his mate, and their son was growing. He even was becoming friends with the pack shaman.

They both felt as if they were related.

It was fascinating.

They couldn't trace anything for certain, but Niall was...like a cousin. Quickly becoming like a brother.

Fen had also met all of Rory's brothers now. He thought. There were so many of them. It was hard to know...

“Love?” Rory came down too, wrapped in a fluffy robe, fuzzy slippers on his feet.



“I was about to make you a milkshake.”

“Were you? How friendly.” Rory grinned at him, coming to sit at the kitchen table.

“It’s nice and warm.”

“I got the fire going again.” He beamed at Rory. “I wanted us to be able to sit in front of the fire and have our milkshakes and not be cold.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet.” Rory smiled for him. “That will keep me from fretting about the dishes.”

“It will. I can do them before we go back to bed.” They had been taking their milkshakes up with them to bed and snuggling, but then Rory did fuss about the dishes and try to sneak back into the kitchen to wash them.

So he was going to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. They could snuggle on the couch.

“You’re very good to me. What can I do to help?” Rory was always right there, wanting to make his life easier.

“Get the blankets for the couch? I’ll make the milkshakes and bring them in.” He would dig out some cookies too. He loved a peanut-butter-banana milkshake with oatmeal raisin cookies.

Rory always told him he was a freak for that.

He grinned, watching as Rory went to the living room. Then he scooped ice cream and blended it into a creamy milkshake with the milk and caramel. It smelled like heaven.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He put spoons in the glasses, then took them out to meet Rory on the floor in front of the couch, the nest of pillows and blankets in front of the fire he'd stirred back into life so inviting.

Fen loved his life. There had been no more shootings, and Niall assured him all was well with the upper pack. He'd learned to snowmobile, and he was learning from Rory's brothers how to drive the snowcat.

He knew Rory sometimes chafed at being so careful, but they'd come to a compromise about that too. Rory went all over to take supplies to the more remote family, as long as Lucien or John and one of the big males went with him.

Watching the kids was harder now for Rory because he was having a difficult time lifting the little ones, so he was contributing in a dozen other ways.

He was so amazing.

Fen kissed Rory's cheek when he sat next to him, and he handed over one milkshake, and then pulled the covers up over them.

"Mmm. Thank you, love. This is perfect."

"It is, isn't it?" He let Rory lean on him. "You know I adore you."

"I do." Rory chuckled. "You even learned to play video games with me."

"You enjoy them so."

“I do.”

Fen had not learned to like the more violent games that some of Rory’s brothers liked, the ones about stealing cars and assassins. But he loved the silly ones, the ones with haunted hotels and racetracks and jumping over lots of things.

The cooperative ones were best, the ones where he and Rory had to work together.

He had also spent a lot of time, at Jameson and Keegan’s suggestion, learning about Rory’s likes and dislikes. Macaroni and cheese was one of his favorite foods. His favorite color was forest green.

His favorite band was called Imagine Dragons.

Why would Rory have to imagine dragons when he’d seen them?

Fen didn’t think he’d heard enough commercial music to have a favorite artist. His pack’d had a record player and lots of old records, but nothing newer than 1965, he thought.

“So, what are we going to talk about tonight, love?” Rory asked him. They made a habit, in these wee hours, of discussing all manner of things.

“Oh, I was thinking about baby names.” They still hadn’t settled on one. They wanted something easy, but not boring. Meaningful, but not weird.

It was a surprisingly difficult challenge, to be honest.

Leo? Bart? Ernest? Silas? Trent?

“Trent isn’t bad,” Rory said. “And there’s not one in my family already. No Barts or

Ernests.”

He chuckled. “No? What about old family names?”

“Oh God. You’ve seen how many brothers I have. We’ve re-used all of them. What about yours?”

“Oh, sweet, there are some truly terrible names in my family. Impossible to pronounce.” No, he didn’t want to saddle their little boy with one of those.

“Well, we’ll try Trent out for the next couple of days. If we hate it, we move on.”

“Fair enough,” Fen said. He loved how they were easily working through things like this. He did not like being at odds with Rory. After the shooting, they had both been so worried and stressed, as Rory called it, that they hadn’t listened to each other.

Now he felt as if they had that down pat.

“Mmm. This is really good. Did you put caramel in it?”

“I did.” He grinned. “You didn’t eat much supper, so I thought you needed the calories.”

## Page 46

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“I just needed the milkshake.” Rory patted his belly. “Little Trent is very specific.”  
Rory paused, then wrinkled his nose. “No. No Trent.”

“Okay. Yeah.” It sounded way too...old.

“There’s always Travis. Or Trey.” Rory closed his eyes and pursed his lips. “Truck.  
Train. Travel. Trundle.”

Fen tilted his head. “What are you doing?”

“Thinking of ‘tr’ words. I figured if I did have a word that starts with tr that was  
really good, then we could come up with a name that was close.”

He rolled his eyes. “Now you’re being silly, mate.”

“Umm, I am. What’s your point?” Rory narrowed his eyes, and Fen knew that look.

He held up his hands. “No, no point. None. What do you think about Alexander?”

“Oh, I like Xander. Used to watch Buffy once upon a time. Did you ever watch that  
show on TV?”

He shook his head. “We didn’t really have television. It wasn’t my thing, I mean. I  
grew up in a wolf pack.”

“Yeah, I grew up on DVDs, but you know... It wasn’t a wolf pack.”

Fen had to chuckle. “Well, you know, wolf packs are superior.”

“I know, right? I can’t imagine raising our baby anywhere else but here.” Rory sounded so utterly satisfied.

But was he? Did Rory regret not finding a stronger mate, one that had bigger ambitions?

“Do you ever wonder? Does it bother you that I’m not an alpha in the same way as Keegan and Jameson?”

Rory frowned at him. “No. I don’t want Jameson or Keegan. I want you. I love you. I love the way that you smell like wood chips when you come home from work. I love how safe and happy I feel with you. Love how much fun we have in our house. I love how you make me milkshakes in the middle of the night. You’re mine, and I’m yours. I think I’ll keep you.”

His mate honored him, made him feel tall. Proud. “Thank you, mate.”

“Any time, stud. Any time at all.”

“Stud.” Fen hooted. “I love it. I feel unstudly.” He kissed Rory’s neck. “But I love you and would protect you with my life.”

“Trout.”

“Alexander.”

“Trinie.”

“Alexander.”

“Trevor?” Rory said, fighting a smile for all he was worth.

“Xander,” Fen returned. “We agreed already.” He winked.

“Mmm.” Rory just leaned back against him and smiled, and he knew this was going to be something they teased about right up until Rory was giving birth.

But their son was going to be Alexander.

Chapter

Fourteen

Rory hummed, rolling out cookie dough. He had decided to make decorated cookies for the equinox. He’d learned how to do the fancy flooded ones from YouTube videos.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

He had delivered a bunch of baskets with Lucien this morning, played with the kids, had a wee nap, and now he was...cookie-ing.

“Man, I went full-on omega, didn’t I?” He snorted, thinking how he used to drive a snowcat to take supplies to dragons.

As if he’d conjured up the sound, a snowmobile roared up outside. He blinked, because no one had called up on the SAT phone to say they were coming.

A knock sounded minutes later, and he covered his dough before going to let...

“Liam. Hey! What’s up?”

“I just wanted to bring you some stuff.” Liam’s face was red from the cold, and he looked a little guilty, truth be told.

“Oh, okay. Come on in. Want coffee or hot chocolate?”

“Sure. I’ll take a coffee please. How you feeling? You’re all swollen.”

“Don’t make me hurt you, man. I will totally hurt you.” He looked like he’d swallowed a basketball, and the baby was wildly active. All the time. It was crazy.

“Snows are lasting late this year, huh?”

“I know. April is right around the corner. It’s nuts. Cookies smell good.”

“They are good. What are you doing up here? I mean, I love to see you, and I’m not



worried about that, but. It's just usually not...you're not usually up here this much."

"Can I tell you something?"

"You can tell me anything."

Liam's cheeks went dark under the shaggy beard he wore in the winter. "I keep dreaming about going up the mountain. Seriously, I keep dreaming about going up to see the dragons. I mean, I really wanna go. I want to go up there and see what's what."

"Well, the snow is really deep, and it's not real stable right now, but you know, I mean the melt's gonna happen in a few weeks."

Liam nodded. "I know, I know. I got up as far as Loyal and Niall's last time. They stopped me from going any farther but..." He shook his head. "I just have this feeling."

"Well, Niall of all people should understand that."

"Yeah." Liam sat with him, coffee in hand. "So, things are going good for you?"

"They are." He grinned. "I love Fen. We're having a baby. He finally stopped worrying I'm going to get shot. Now, once the run-off happens, and everyone is able to move about better, who knows what he'll do..."

"How much longer can you possibly have? You're the size of the house."

Rory put up his dukes, playing. "I'm going to throw you out the house and put you down a well."

Liam cracked up. “Okay, this is pretty fun. Can I see the nursery?”

“Sure.” Rory led him up the stairs to one of the guest rooms that they’d redone for the baby. “We painted it blue, which is so like...normal, but it was the color that we had.”

“It’s pretty. No one will care.” Liam wandered around, admiring the amazing crib, the cradle, the rocker that Fen had created. “Have you settled on Alexander for a name?”

“Yes, my Fen thought that was perfect. He heard me say it, and it hasn’t changed since.” He would be aggravated, but he was so charmed...

“Alexander is a fine name; it won’t hurt anything. I still think you should name him after me.” Liam fluttered those long eyelashes at him, and Rory could see real worry and exhaustion in his eyes.

“Would you like to stay here? Or I could have Jameson see if Niall needs help up there. But honestly, I mean—you can stay with me...”

“I don’t wanna stay with anybody, Rory. I mean, maybe I’ll try to go up and check on Loyal and Niall and see what they need. It’s just a thing. I can’t quite get around it. I want to...”

Rory understood, sort of, and he absolutely understood needing to come up here to the pack, but there weren’t any single wolves in Loyal’s pack.

Not any. They tended to take in couples that were leaving the bigger pack, looking for more space. All of the single wolves there were children.

## Page 48

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Liam shrugged. “Thanks for the coffee, bro. I’ll holler on my way back down so you know I’m safe.”

“Okay.” He hugged Liam, the action impulsive but necessary. His brother needed to know he was loved.

“Thanks, Rory.” Liam hugged him back a little gingerly, he thought, in deference to his belly. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

“Okay. Be careful. And please don’t go all the way up until the thaw.”

“Niall and Loyal won’t let me. You know that seer has radar.”

“I do. He’s wild.” Rory chuckled. “I never thought anyone could be as scary as Adrienne...” He referred to Niall’s predecessor as the pack shaman. She had been so fierce and wonderful.

“But he’s making his own name, huh?”

“He and Loyal are becoming legend, man.” Liam let him walk him outside. “Thanks for letting me vent.”

“No problem.” He watched Liam hop back on the sled. “Be careful!”

“I will.” Liam waved and roared off.

Love? Are you okay? Fen always seemed to know when he was worried.

Liam just keeps looking up the mountain.

Ah.Fen seemed to understand exactly what he meant.He's restless. Spring is almost here. Then Jameson and Keegan will take him up.

I hope so. I know it's weighing on him. I just don't know what it is he wants.

Neither does he, love. Do you want me to go keep an eye on him?

No. No, Niall will stop him if he tries to go too far.That much he believed.

Do you want me to come home?

Do you mind? I'm making cookies. You can help me ice them.

I'll be there in half an hour.

I'll see you soon.

Rory grinned. He loved that. He loved that Fen took the time to clean and store his tools before he came home. But that he was willing to just come home in the middle of the day to be with Rory. He was the most amazing mate.

Fen arrived just as he popped the first sheet of cut cookies into the oven, and Fen came up behind him as he stood in front of the stove, hand on his lower back. "Hello, love."

"Mmm. Hello. Are you going to help me?"

"Put me to work." Fen rubbed his back for him. "How are you feeling?"

“Sore. A little stressed about Liam.” He leaned into Fen’s hands.

“He’ll figure it out.”

“Mmmhmm. I just don’t want him to get shot.”

Fen rumbled, then kissed his neck. “Neither do I, love. It’s not fun.”

“So I hear. Can I sit on my stool while you cut the next batch? I’ll roll them.”

“Yes. I want you to rest a little.” Fen dropped a kiss on his mouth.

## Page 49

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Thank you, love.” He rolled out the second batch, then sat with his cocoa while Fen cut out cookies that looked like spring flowers and raindrops.

“These are cute,” Fen said.

“Thanks. I got the cutters from Laurie. Her mate makes them. He had a metal bender.”

“That is good to know.” Fen took the cookies out of the oven when the timer dinged, then put the next sheet in. He plowed through cookies for half an hour, then set them all up to cool. “Do we have a plan for supper today?”

“Not yet.” He hadn’t gone farther than the cookies.

“Well, we have an invitation, so no cooking for you. Should we go nap?”

“Timothy invited us?” At Fen’s nod, he smiled. “A nap sounds great. We’ll be up in plenty of time for supper.”

They turned off the oven, and arms wrapped around each other, they headed upstairs.

Rory would worry about Liam later. Right now, his mate was home, and he got to snuggle.

That was better than worrying.

Chapter

Fifteen

Fen planed a board that he was shaping to put on the front of a drawer for a chest of drawers. Mrs. Wootan needed a new one for her bedroom, the old one having dry rotted and collapsed right before the run-off started.

Bless her, she had come to him and Timothy in tears. The old one had been hers since she was a girl. They were trying to recreate it as carefully as possible.

He blew the dust off the board, then checked the measurements to make sure it was the same at both ends and the middle.

“Perfect.”

“Looks good, Fen.” Timothy clapped him on the back. “Nice job. We can start dovetails tomorrow.”

John sauntered into the shop right about then, and immediately sneezed.

“Hey, John,” Timothy said, raising his eyebrows. “Did you need something?”

“I needed to come commission a dollhouse for Litha’s birthday. She was so taken with the train you made for William...”

“Sure. You just tell us what you want.”

“Now? Or do I need to set a meeting?”

“Now is fine.”

“Cool.” John glanced at Fen. “You might want to go home for lunch, though.”

His heart started to pound. “Is Rory okay?” Fen began packing his tools.

“He’s cleaning the storage room.”

“What?” Fen paused, blinking. “Why on earth is he doing that?”

“Well, everything else has been cleaned. Twice.” John wagged his own eyebrows.

Timothy laughed, clapping him on the back. “That means he’s nesting, man. You’re about to go through first-time labor with your mate.”

“I am?” His breath whooshed out of him. “I have to go.”



## Page 50

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“You absolutely do. Lonia is available when you need her. She said she may stop by this evening, if you haven’t called.” John was beaming at him. “Now go. Shoo.”

His mate was having a baby. His mate. His.

Rory was having his baby.

Fen hurried across the way, grunting softly as people greeted him.

But no one seemed too worried that he was being rude. In fact, everyone was smiling at him, nodding, wishing him congratulations and good luck.

All Fen could think was, his mate was having a baby.

Soon.

Maybe not right now, maybe not even tonight, but...but soon.

They were having a baby.

Apparently, the storage building room had been adequately cleaned by the time he arrived home, and it took him a moment to discover where his love had disappeared to.

“Rory?”

“Up here. In the baby’s room.”

Oh, excellent. Already upstairs meant closer to the bedroom. They had prepared the bed to be a whelping area as they'd come closer to the birth, and Fen liked the fact that Rory was close, in case the baby fell out or something.

He found Rory resorting baby things in the nursery. He was sitting on the floor, tears in his eyes, folding and unfolding, packing the little dresser and unpacking it, almost frantically.

“Mate, what’s wrong?”

“I just need to make this right. It’s just wrong. Everything is wrong. It’s not quite right. I want to make sure we have enough. What if we don’t have enough for Alexander? We need to have enough for Alexander.” There was a barely hidden panic in Rory’s voice that tore at his heart.

He looked around the room, which was equipped beautifully. He shook his head, but he didn’t argue. He’d been told about nesting by...well, every alpha with children in the pack. Apparently, the rules were quite firm.

One did not interfere. One did not tease. One helped whenever possible, and most importantly? One never argued.

“Would you like some help?”

Rory looked up at him with grateful eyes. “Oh, would you? I would love that. It seems like a lot, and my back hurts quite a bit.”

“Oh, sweet. I bet the floor is hard under your butt. Let’s finish this up, and then, if you’d like, maybe we should go sit somewhere more comfortable. We could sort things from the sofa or the bed. And then maybe your back wouldn’t hurt so much.” Although he knew that wasn’t why Rory’s back was hurting. He could almost see it

the way that that sweet belly was hardening and easing rhythmically.

“I think. I think I might be in labor a little bit,” Rory admitted. “Although I’m not quite sure how you can be in a little bit of labor...”

Fen nodded, going for gently surprised. “Do you think so?”

This was going to be very much easier if Rory knew what was going on, and he admitted it.

“I do.” Rory sniffled. “I’m a little scared. What if I don’t do it right?”

“If something happens, the midwife is right here.” They finished folding up the clothes, and he stood carefully, easing Rory up.

“I think that I’d like to go sit in our room. I don’t think I want to do the stairs.”

“All right. I think that’s fine. We have clean sheets. But anywhere you want.”

He helped Rory to their room. Then he went to the window to lean out, calling to a passing omega. “Can you tell the midwife that we’ve started?”

The young man’s face split into a grin. “I will!” He ran off.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

Fen went back to Rory, who was just sitting on the bed, still crying. “What can I do to help, love? I could rub your back?” He wanted to help, but not make Rory mad by saying the wrong thing. He’d heard all the tales.

“Are you excited?”

Fen didn’t even know how to answer that question. Was he excited? He was over the moon and terrified. He was overjoyed and panicked, and he’d never felt so many emotions all at the same time. “I wish my sister was here. She would love this.”

“I think she would, but—” Rory shrugged, tears coming to his eyes again. “Then I have to believe that she is somehow. That somehow she knows, and that she’s with us.” Suddenly, Rory’s eyes went wide. “My brothers, you have to call my brothers!”

“Goddess. I do.” Liam and Dean and the others would skin him alive if this happened without their knowledge. “I’ll get your phone. Do you want to talk to them?”

His mate looked uncomfortable, his lips were tight, fingers clenched. “No, no, I love them, but not now. Just tell them that the baby’s coming, that all is well, and you’ll call when it gets here. When he gets here. When our son arrives.”

“Okay. No problem. I’ll call when the midwife comes. Until then, I think I’d like to stay with you, if you don’t mind.”

“This is all your fault.” Rory managed a wink. “Of course I don’t mind. You should have to be here for every single gross moment.”

Fen chuckled softly. "I will be here for every single gross moment. You do know I would take all of the hurt away if I could."

"Alexander will be worth it. I have no doubt a few hours of pain for a lifetime of knowing that we have a son is worth it."

"Yes. One that's not named Trent."

"I'm gonna name him Trent."

"Will not." Fen did love making Rory laugh.

The midwife knocked on the door downstairs and then entered. "Hello, it's Lonia."

"Come on in," he called back. "We're up here."

"Has his water broken?"

He shook his head. "Not yet."

"I'm right here, you know. I'm not deaf and I'm not unconscious. You can ask me."  
Rory's growl was impressive.

"And obviously he's in labor."

"Yes." Fen chuckled. "I just wanted you to check in."

Rory smiled at Lonia. "I imagine we have a while yet before you need to stick around."

"Well, let me have a look at your birthline, please? It'll help me judge."

“It’s a little tender.”

“That’s fine. Please, Rory.”

Rory lifted his shirt and pulled down his bulging slacks, and Fen and Lonia gasped, his hand going to his mouth.

The birthline was open, the baby still in his sac and coming out.

“What? What’s wrong?”

Lonia smiled at him, winked. “Nothing. The baby’s on his way. Fen, we need some of those clean towels. Right. Now.”

He took off at a dead run.

Towels. Clean towels. And he would bet she sent him back for hot water, so he raced down and put the full kettle on before high-tailing it back up.

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Towels,” he said, skidding to a halt in the bedroom.

The baby was half in Lonia’s hands, Rory still standing.

“Excellent. Put them over here and support your mate, please?”

“Yes, of course.” He laid down the towels and moved immediately to slip in behind Rory, holding him. “I’ve got you, love.”

“I know.” Rory panted. “I feel you. Love you.”

“I love you too.” He kissed the back of Rory’s neck. That was his son floating in there.”

“One more easy push, Rory. You’re almost done.” She chuckled softly. “Please don’t tell John how this is going, sweetheart. He might pop you in the nose.”

Rory gave a barking laugh, and Alexander popped out, the amniotic sac staying whole for about another second before it popped over the towels.

“They say that’s a blessed birth. Congratulations.”

Alexander took his first breath and began to cry.

Oh. Fen fell in love at that moment, tears stinging his eyes at the sound of his son’s howl. “Rory. He’s beautiful. You did so well.”

Rory laughed, the sound a little damp with tears. “I’m glad you came home. I might have just sat here forever.”

“No. No, you would have known.” He wasn’t about to let his mate put himself down. He’d just had a baby! That was a miracle of nature.

“I’m still glad you were here.”

“What can I do, Lonia? To help now?”

“Well, we need to get everything all cleaned up, we need to cut the cord, and I’ll seal up the birthline as best as I can. I miss the dragons for that,” she teased.

“He’ll be able to take a few days to rest. As long as he needs.”

“This was a gentle birth. He’s a natural. Can you help lay him down so I can hand him the baby?”

“Of course.” He helped get Rory more flat, and he watched as he took the baby, smiling down at little Xander—not Trent.

He smiled, cutting the cord when Lonia indicated, then helping to clean up his mate. Once Rory was comfortable, he grabbed Rory’s phone to call his family.

“Hey, Ror.”

“It’s Fen, Liam. The baby is here!”

“Already? Are you serious? What the hell?” Liam sounded as shocked as he felt, and then Xander started to cry. “Is that him? My nephew?”



“It is. I was going to call and tell you to come up, and bam.” He turned away for a moment. “I think he was in labor for a while and didn’t tell me.”

“Little fucker. That’s insane. We’ll gather up goodies and be up in the morning. He deserves one evening of rest and bonding.”

“Thank you, Liam. We’ll see you then.” He hung up, then went right back to his mate and their baby. “Your brothers will be up in the morning.”

Rory nodded, eyelids drooping. “I can handle that. I just want to rest with you.”

“He should be sealed up well,” Lonia said. “Did you want me to sit downstairs for a bit, just to make sure all is well?”

“Do you mind?” It had all just happened so fast. Fen would love to have her there in case something happened.

“Not at all.”

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:16 am*

“Help yourself to anything in the kitchen, lady,” Rory muttered.

“I will.” She chuckled, then left them alone.

“He’s beautiful.” Rory stroked Alexander’s little back. “He’s here, my love.”

“I know. And I am—Oh, Rory, I have never been happier. I wish my family could meet him, but like we said, they’ll be looking out for him.” Fen kissed Rory’s forehead gently.

“Always, mate. You heard Lonia. He’s had an auspicious birth. I didn’t even know he was coming.”

“Well, I’m excited that it was so easy.” He’d been so worried. And now he was relieved as hell.

Rory chuckled. “I cried a lot.”

“You did, but your hormones were crazy.”

Alexander wriggled, lips moving gently.

“He was worth it. Absolutely.”

“He is. I love you both so much. Thank you, Rory.”

“I love you too. I’m so sleepy.”

“I’ll hold you both while you sleep.” He could have a nap tomorrow while Rory’s brothers came. “And I’ll feed him soon as well.”

“Lonia will bring up a bottle...” Rory dozed right off, and he chuckled, settling them all more comfortably. This was his family now. This wonderful omega and their baby.

And Fen was never letting them go.

## Epilogue

“What do you think?” Rory asked his brothers. Four of them had come up this time, and the others would come up next time.

Liam grinned down at Xander. “I think he looks like a monkey.”

“Don’t make me beat you, brother.” Fen’s growl was—mostly—playful. “He’s perfect.”

“He is.” Liam picked Xander up, confident and careful. “A perfect little monkey.”

Dean snort-chuckled. “He’s going to brain you, man.”

“Not while I’m holding his baby.” Liam winked at Rory.

Rory cracked up. He felt like his body was his again, like he could breathe and not have heartburn and he could think. It was amazing.

Dean moved next to Liam to stare down at Xander. “He is kind of...old mannish.”

“He is a wise baby.” Fen stole Xander back. “My wise, sweet, unappreciated pup.”

“He’s wonderful,” Gage said, his smile taking them all in. Rory had been so pleased to see him, because he spent most of his time down at the trading post.

“Thank you, brother.” Rory watched Fen with Xander, his heart so full. “Still shocked that I’m a wolf?”

“A little bit, yes. I’m waiting for Liam to turn into a dragon, personally.”

Liam scoffed. “Just because I need to get up there…”

“It calls to you. Next week.” That was Jameson, who had stepped into the house after a brief knock.

He walked over to Fen, who showed his son, easy, unafraid. “Alpha. Your new pack member.”

“He’s perfect.” Jameson stroked Xander’s cheek. “Welcome home, little one. You have our protection. Forever.”

Tears sprung to Rory’s eyes, and he could see the same mirrored on Fen’s face. The love for each other. The love for the pack. The gratitude to be where they were.

“Thank you, alpha,” Fen said. “You honor us.”

“I love to welcome new pack members.” Jameson grinned at his brothers. “All of them.”

Rory swore, for a second, his brothers’ eyes flashed gold.