



An Alpha for Rylan (Shelter Falls #1)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: After the charming billionaire and I successfully play matchmaker, he asks me to be his fake fiancée. Saying yes might be the biggest slip-up of my life, but what are friends for?

Weston Calloway is the last man I imagined meeting after one of my boring breakups. But there he was, in a dive bar, drinking cheap whiskey, looking like my next favorite mistake. Instead of hooking up, we become secret friends.

When his jealous ex stirs up unnecessary drama, Weston asks me to go public with our friendship, but things quickly escalate and we lose control of the situation. Now, we're roommates, and I'm wearing a diamond ring that he slipped on my finger.

This game may be fun, but we agreed to one unbreakable rule—no falling in love.

Easy, right? It should be.

The Friend Situation is a billionaire, fake dating rom-com with a happily ever after! It's a stand-alone with open-door scenes.

Included: a rich AF, respectful hero who falls first and hard but isn't afraid to call his bestie mine.

Total Pages (Source): 9

CHAPTER 1

ZEKE

"Come on, Dad. I can't keep filling in for you like this. You've got to actually get some sleep at night. You're an adult too you know," I grumble at the man sitting in the recliner shoveling sugary cereal into his mouth.

Dad doesn't say a word to me. He's too focused on the cartoons on the screen. It's been this way for the last few weeks. Ever since his prognosis worsened, he's sunk deeper and deeper into regression.

No longer is he the sixty-five-year-old CEO of Medina Manufacturing, our family company. He's simply Mikey, the five-year-old version of himself who loves to play with race cars and watch early morning cartoons.

It's frustrating on so many levels. Most of it stems from the sadness I feel knowing it won't be much longer until he forgets who I am completely. He's already mistaken me for his brother more than once. My uncle passed nearly thirty years ago, but my dad can't remember that with his memory failing him.

Leaving him to watch his shows, I make my way into the kitchen to dial his doctor. It rings twice before the receptionist picks up. I explain who I am, then I'm immediately transferred to the doctor.

Being a Medina in Shelter Falls can be a good thing sometimes. Others, not so much.

"Zeke! How can I help you this morning?" Dr. Carver says, his voice that same cheery tone as always.

I sigh as I rub my jaw. "It's getting worse, Doc. I don't know what to do anymore. He's not getting up to go to work and I've had to send him to his room more than once after he threw a temper tantrum this week."

"That's to be expected, Zeke. His mind is floating between past and present. You won't know which he's in until he reacts to you."

"I get that. I really do. But what the hell am I supposed to do about the company? He was going to retire in a few more years, then leave it to me. Now I'm being thrown into the deep in without a life vest."

The doctor made a soothing sound. "But you do know how to swim, Zeke. If anyone is capable of doing this job, it's you. I've watched you shadow him for years. You're more than ready for this role. You just need to believe in yourself a little more."

This entire conversation feels like a therapy session. And maybe it is. Maybe I need to find a therapist who can be on call since it's clear I'm struggling to adjust to all the things going on in my life.

"Thanks, Doc," I tell him genuinely. "I've got to go."

"You CAN do this Zeke. I believe in you." With his kind words ringing in my head, I hang up the phone and go back into the living room.

My dad sits there, his bowl of cereal forgotten on the side table as he remains entranced by the screen. He's wrapped the blanket around him like a cape and were this any other scenario I might think it cute. Instead, it pains my heart to see such a strong, vibrant man changing right before my eyes.

A knock at the door pulls me from watching him. I already know it's Osvaldo before I answer.

"Thanks for coming, man," I tell him as we exchange hugs after I swing the door open.

He shakes his head. "No problem, Zeke. You know this is what I trained for. Just because I took some time off for a bit doesn't mean anything is different."

"Where Johnathan? Already dropped him off?" I probe asking about his ten-year-old son.

Osvaldo nods his head as a smile graces his lips. "Yeah, I did. The school has an early morning program available, thank goodness. You wouldn't believe how hard it is to entertain a kid who gets bored every two seconds."

I turn to face my dad before replying, "I think I'm learning."

My childhood friend throws his arm over my shoulder. He squeezes me tightly, then turns me to face him. His hands move to my shoulders before he speaks.

"You listen to me, Zeke Medina. This is merely a new adventure you're going on. Mikey and I are going to have a great time today. There is nothing to worry about. I'll even take him with me to pick up Johnathan later, so you don't have to worry about rushing home. Deal?"

I shake my head at him. "You're too good to us. Thanks for all you do, Osvaldo. I would be lost without you."

"Right back at you. Who was there to help me through childbirth and raising a kid? I was clueless of what to do. You and the others truly got me back on my feet and I can

never repay that type of kindness. Besides, your dad was always one of my favorite adults. Now I get to spoil him back for all the times he took care of me."

My laughter roars through the room as I remember all the times my dad did indeed spoil all us kids. There were four of us in my core friend group: Me, Osvaldo, Treyton, and Ezra. Dad treated us all the same, and my friends loved it. Especially since a couple of them didn't have the best home lives.

"I've got to get to the office. Please don't hesitate to call me if you need something," I tell Osvaldo as I grab dad's old briefcase and head out the door.

He waves me away. "Won't need you unless I want a snack on your way home. Go have a good day. I've got this."

I drive away from the house wondering if I'll ever truly feel normal again. Life has changed so much since dad first started showing signs of being sick. Back then I still worked for the company, but I was more into the marketing side of things. I wasn't quite ready to take on the whole company, so I worked my way through all the parts and pieces to make sure I knew how it worked.

According to the original plan, I still had years - YEARS - before I'd take the helm. Now I was doing it out of necessity.

Just a few months ago I'd accidentally double listed a work position on the site. I'd blamed it on a glitch, but me and the I.T. guy Emil both knew it was more a user error than anything.

How could I be trusted with the entire company? My family's legacy lives in those walls. Generation after generation has worked there, and I'm three breakdowns away from losing it all.

I push the negative thoughts away as I park in the spot reserved for the CEO and head inside. Jasmine, the front desk clerk, greets me with a smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Medina."

"Morning, Jasmine. What's on the schedule today?" While also handling the front desk, she also helps me balance my calendar. I gave her a raise the moment she stepped in to help me in this capacity and I'm thankful for every cent spent.

She flips through the planner on her desk. "Nothing too wild today. You have a new hire starting. Your marketing replacement. Other than that, there are some contracts on your desk and then meetings with department heads."

"Thank you, Jasmine. It's probably best I get started then." I tap her desk twice, then take off for my father's office - my office. God, that's going to take getting used to.

Pushing inside, I find it looking just the way I left it yesterday. Clean and orderly are what keeps me sane, which is why my office looks more like a shrine than something someone uses to work from daily.

I sit in the chair, take a deep breath, and then dive into my day. Email after email, call after call, I push through the tug in my gut that tells me this isn't right. It's the same voice pleading with me to cure my father and set things back to right.

Instead of letting that get the best of me, I focus on making Medina Manufacturing the best it can be. While we're a well-known entity around the world, there has always been room for more growth. My family's philosophy has always been that we'll continue to grow until we can reach every Omega in need of our services.

Omega scent blockers and Omega scent enhancers are the focal point of the company. They provide the biggest income, and they are our most morally invested product.

Providing Omegas the help they need it when they need it most has been our goal. It's why we focus so much on the marketing aspect of the company, as I'd learned with my work in that department over the last year.

There were countries and people out there who had no idea scent blocking was available. For Omegas in rough cities or who were considered as items to be bought and sold, hiding scents could be the thing that saved them from a horrible fate.

The shrill ringing of my phone pulls me from my thoughts of the business's vision. "This is Zeke."

"Hey, Mr. Medina. Your applicant for the marketing position is here." Her voice has an edge to it, almost like she's unsure if she should have called.

"Please walk them up. I'll be ready when you arrive." She agrees, then we hang up.

I clear off the papers on my desk to make it more presentable. While I might love a clean area more than most, I rarely kept it that way while deep in the focus of the day. That's why I always had to end my day with making sure everything was just in its place for the next morning.

I'd just barely finished when Jasmine knocks on the door. "Come in," I call out.

She pushes her way inside, a cautious smile on her features. "Here's your appointment. Call me if you need anything else, sir."

When she moves away, I catch my first glimpse of the person she's brought with her. He is tall and lithe with dark brown hair he's combed back into a neat style. His clothes are a plain button up shirt and jeans.

While he doesn't look anything like I might have dressed, I couldn't disqualify him on

looks alone. I walk around my desk as I extend my hand.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Zeke Medina. Thank you for coming in..." I trail off realizing I don't know his name. I was supposed to look before he arrived, but I hadn't had a chance to. His file was right there on my desk. If only I'd taken the time to read it, then I could look less like a fool.

The young man smiles over at me as he steps forward. His hand engulfs mine. I barely hear him tell me his name. My mind is too focused on one this.

Omega. Mine.

Things just got a whole lot more complicated.

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CHAPTER 2

RYLAN

"I've got this," I tell myself as I look in the front hallway mirror of my tiny garage apartment. This place is a rental I found while looking for job listings last week. It came cheap and that was what sold me the most.

Honestly, I didn't care where I got to stay so long as it was in Shelter Falls or one of the neighboring towns. The idea of a commute made me sick, but I would do it if I could get a job at Medina Manufacturing.

I've been obsessed with the company since I was a kid. They are one of the world's largest suppliers of supplements for Omegas like me. From keeping us protected in times we needed it most, to allowing us to share our fragrance in abundance with our desired mate, they had something for everyone.

When I was younger, I simply enjoyed the company for the products they had. As I've gotten older, I see there is so much more there. It's a legacy, a foundation, to which amazing things are happening.

I've always known I wanted to be a part of the company and today I'm finally getting my chance. If only I can make my feet move so I could walk out the door to make it to my interview.

The job listed is for a marketing role. As a business major in college, I had my fair share of marketing projects to tackle. I have no doubt I'm fit enough for the role. And

if I'm not, then I'll keep applying until something sticks.

I've saved enough money over the last two years of college to support myself for a time. Thanks to several scholarships, I managed to make it out of school with zero debt. That means every penny I earned during school and over summer breaks went to keeping me fed, keeping a roof over my head, and into savings. Now my savings is what I'll use to live until I can land a role at the manufacturing plant.

I run my hands over my simple clothes once more before taking off. With this being a small town, I didn't want to overdo it in the appearance department. If you go in wearing a suit while everyone else is in overalls, it can give a bad impression. The opposite is true, though you can always feign not knowing the dress code is more formal. Or so I've found in the past anyway. Hopefully today is the same.

At the plant, I park my old station wagon in the back and march my way inside. Each stride I take feels more and more like I'm about to encounter the next level of my life. It feels like some big change is coming. Hopefully it's a job offer. That's what I'm aiming for anyway.

A pretty young woman sits behind the front desk. She greets me with a smile. "Hi, how can I help you?"

"Hello. My name is Rylan Mack. I'm here for an interview."

Her eyes widen slightly at my words, letting me know she's aware of what role I'm here for. She might even know what my chances are for getting the job.

I don't dare ask her, of course. That would be rude. Besides, I don't get a chance to say anything before she's picking up a phone on her desk and calling to someone else somewhere in this massive place.

"Hey Mr. Medina. Your applicant for the marketing position is here." She listens to the man on the other end of the line for a moment, then she quickly hangs up the phone and smiles at me. "I'll take you to him now."

I nod my head, then try to keep pace with her through the building. Even in heels, she's got speed on her side.

We go through a set of double doors set not far from the entrance. A brief hall greets us with a set of stairs at the end. I climb them behind her, careful to hang on to the rail. Some might say it looks silly, but I'm a safety-first kind of guy.

At the top of the stairs, I have to pause to take in the beauty of the plant. There's glass on both sides giving me an unobstructed view of the production areas of the factory. People in protective gear move around as they measure out different ingredients and drop them into the tubs. It's all so precise, so fascinating. It's hard to look away.

"Mr. Mack, if you please?" I turn to give the woman at the end of the hall an embarrassed smile.

"So sorry. I'm just rather excited to be here."

She nods at me once, then turns to the door. At her knock, a deep voice calls out, "Come in."

For some reason, the sound of it has my heart racing. I want to say it's the actual idea of working here, but it feels like more.

The woman opens the door. "Here's your appointment. Call me if you need anything else, sir."

With that barely there introduction, she leaves me in an open doorway staring at one

of the most handsome men I've ever met. His full head of hair is thick and wavy, the edges graying just slightly in the way I've always found irresistible. His body is hidden by the desk he sits at, but I can see he's in a suit.

Dangit. Now I almost wish I'd worn the suit.

As I berate myself for not guessing correctly, the man moves from behind his desk to approach me. I catch a whiff of scent. Omega.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Zeke Medina. Thank you for coming in - "

"Rylan. Rylan Mack. It's an honor to meet you Mr. Medina. Your family has been great for Omegas like me and I'm excited for the chance to work here."

I feel slightly awkward after pouring my heart out. It's even more so intense with the way the man holding my hand has yet to let go of mine.

"Umm, Mr. Medina. You ok?"

My words have the desired effect of pulling him out of his trance. "I'm sorry about that," he says as he drops my hand. "I don't know where my head is today."

"That's fine." I say the words softly as I ponder over why losing his touch feels so wrong.

Mr. Medina moves back around the desk, taking to his seat. He waves at an empty chair across from the desk. "Please. Have a seat."

I ease myself into the chair as I will the nervous energy inside to calm down. Placing my hands on my lap, I watch the man across from me for signs of what will happen next.

He opens a folder on his desk and begins to read whatever is on it. From my angle it looks much like my resume. I'm hopeful there's enough there to convince him to give me a shot.

"Everything here looks good. You're a qualified candidate for the role and your experience lends to the position. Why don't you tell me why you think you're a good fit?" He steeples his fingers over his chin making his pointer finger of one hand press into his bottom lip.

I take a deep breath to focus my thoughts before answering. "Well, like I said before, I'm a huge fan of the company. The product you produce are of the highest qualities. I've been a customer for years and have loved everything I've used. There's also a legacy here that I'd be honored to be a part of. It's hard to find companies of your scale that are still family owned these days."

Mr. Medina smiles softly at me. "You're very right. Not many people we've worked with do things the way we do anymore. It's all big corporations and such now."

"Exactly! Not to mention the charitable work you do for the community and surrounding areas. It's all anonymous I know, but I put two and two together over the years. There's no other way things in Shelter Falls would be at the level they are without the Medina family and its business."

The man across from me stares with his jaw slack. I've clearly shocked him from my obsessive rambling.

I bite my bottom lip to control myself from saying anything else. I don't want to lose the opportunity to work here because he thinks I'm a stalker.

"You do seem to know your Medina information. I'd like to start you working as soon as possible. There is a ninety-day trial period in which you have the opportunity to

leave or for us to let you go. My gut says we won't need to worry about that, so let's just get you going. When can you begin?"

"Does it make me seem desperate if I say now?" I asked bashfully.

He chuckles loudly, causing me to blush. "That's not bad at all. In fact, I think it works quite well in both of our favors. Let me escort you to the marketing team so I can introduce you to everyone. Today will be mostly about filling out paperwork and watching the team's dynamics. Tomorrow you can step in to evaluate where we're at and where you think we should be. Sound good?"

"Absolutely! I'm ready, boss." He winces at the title. "Boss no good? Maybe I could call you Chief or something?"

My joke falls flat as he eyes change. Gone is the laughter from before. Now he's focused, his gaze assessing me like a predator to its prey.

"You can call me Zeke just fine. Come now, Rylan. Let's get you settled."

I stand when he does, then I follow him out the door of his office. We take a left and move down a hallway I hadn't noticed before. It leads us deeper into the factory office space. I see people spread about working at computers and answering calls.

"This is the main area for the admin staff. You'll have a space in here, though as management you'll have your own office as well." He tells me this as we move through the open area at a quick pace.

Around another curve we come to an area with a sign hanging up that says, "Marketing Matters." I grin at it, appreciative of the fact I'll likely never get lost with something so clearly marking the way.

Three people move about the space, their voices speaking over one another as they shift designs over a large, canvased tabletop. "This is the team you'll be working with," Zeke says. Everyone looks up at the sound, their faces breaking into grins.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in," a man with curly blond hair says as he steps forward to hug Zeke. An irrational bubble of jealousy hits me, making my fists tighten at my side.

Zeke laughs as he pushes the other man back. "Enough out of you, Ezra. I've been around. You know what's going on."

"Yeah, I do. Doesn't mean it's not weird to not see you around this place." Blondie turns to me then. "I'm Ezra as this guy just said. He and I are longtime friends, so if you see me giving him crap just know it's because I'm aware of all his deepest, darkest secrets. It's my superpower."

I can't help but to laugh at the way he says it all. He's going to be a fun character to work with, that much is clear.

"Nice to meet you, Ezra. I'm Rylan Mack." We shake hands, then I'm introduced to the others. First is a young woman with long black hair named Maeve Brookside. The other is another man, except he's got copper red hair that's cut short to his head. His name is, ironically, Copper.

"It's good to have a fresh face on the team," Maeve tells me. "I know you'll technically be our boss, but Shelter Falls is not like most places."

Copper laughs. "Yeah, and Medina Manufacturing isn't either. We're a different breed."

I turn to look at Zeke who still stands beside me, a grin on his face as we watch

everything take place. A different breed indeed, I think to myself as I fight the urge to rub against my new boss.

What the hell is going on with me? Another Omega shouldn't be having this big of an effect on me. I feel two seconds away from losing my cool when Zeke steps back quickly and takes off back the way we came. I watch him leave with a mix of relief and frustration.

I don't know if I want him to come back so I can climb him like a tree or if I never want to see him again lest I make a fool of myself.

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CHAPTER 3

ZEKE

I feel like a teenage Alpha all over again. Having my Omega close by but being unable to touch him has me damn near losing my mind.

There's something I have to do first before I can talk to Rylan. I know the scents of the factory masked my Alpha scent for him. It's a good thing they did too, because if he even remotely reacts the way I have then we're going to have to find a private place fast. That or we'll have to deal with Riggs giving us tickets for indecent exposure.

I rush through the office to the human resources area. With us being a small company, there's less a department and more a single person handling this area.

Knocking on Irene's door, I don't wait for an answer before stepping in. I see she's on a call, but she begs off of it the moment she sees my face.

"Zeke? What's wrong? Is it your dad?" She asks cautiously.

I shake my head quickly. "Nothing like that. It's not bad news. Well, not necessarily. That depends all on what you tell me."

She leans back in here chair, her eyes looking me up and down. "You're not making any sense. What can I help you with?"

"I need to know the policy on fraternization with coworkers." Her eyebrows shoot up her forehead.

"I'm guessing you've found yourself an Omega then. It wouldn't happen to be the cutie Jasmine talked about. The one interviewing for the marketing job."

Nodding my head, I sink into the empty chair across from her desk. I let all pretense of professionalism fall away. This woman watched me grow up, so she knows how I am. She knows I'm beside myself over the arrival of Rylan, even though she's yet to meet him.

Plus, Jasmine's gossiping only solidifies it. Small companies make for easy communication, both the work and personal kind.

Irene pulls out a giant binder of papers. She flips through it, her eyes focused ahead like a woman on a mission.

I wait for her to find whatever it is she's looking for as I focus on not thinking about Rylan down the hall. If I let my mind wander to him, I'll be helpless to stop myself from going back to claim him. I'd hate to ruin his first day with my animalistic instincts.

"Ah ha! There it is. I knew the notes were in here."

"You found something?" I ask as I lean forward in my chair to try to catch a peek at the paperwork.

Irene nods, a wide smile on her face. "According to our manual, fraternization is looked down upon except in the cases of fated mates. Did you recognize him by scent or was it looks that had you foaming at the mouth?"

I roll my eyes at her teasing tone. "Scent. It was like the first whiff of it had my inner beast screaming out to claim him."

She fans her face, then closes the binder and tucks it away. I wait for her to finish since I know she likely has more wisdom to impart on me. My mother passed away when I was young, and though I felt her loss, Irene was quick to step in to help my dad along the way. She's kissed wounds and hugged me when I needed congratulations for a job well done.

Irene is family. That's why it's always a bit of a tossup what kind of advice she'll bestow on me.

"This definitely sounds like a fated mates situation. I suggest you think about the best way to approach him. He has no idea, does he?"

"Not yet, though I'm sure working with Ezra might give him a clue. I know he saw my expression before I rushed away a few minutes ago."

She shakes her head. "Heavens help us then. That boy can't keep a secret to save his life. As an Omega, I will say that it was nice to be able to ease into getting to know my husband. Back then there were rules to courting and we used suppressants to help keep us from going into a heat/rut combo. You'll need to practice the same level of patience with your Omega, especially since the pull is only one sided."

"Yeah. I don't know how that will work either. I mean, my scent is masked nearly all the time given my work here in the factory." Shelter Falls was considered a haven for many because we hid Alphas and Omegas in plain sight. The chemicals we used for our products weren't harmful, but they were durable. It was our intention, though no one ever thought the scent would affect the entire town.

Irene stares at me for several long minutes before she starts laughing. I roll my eyes

at her antics as I wait to see what has her so tickled. It could be anything from a random memory of my childhood to something I said.

"You Alphas are so clueless," she says as she wipes a tear from her eye. "The scents will be masked while out and about, but there is one particular period of time in which it's not."

"Showers. Dammit why didn't I remember that." An Alpha is always strongest in scent after being clean. Same for Omegas. It's why so many often showered together before sex. The act of revealing one's scent with your partner is said to be highly erotic.

"I'm glad I didn't have to spell it out any further. Now then, while I've enjoyed this little showcase, I have to get back to work. My boss is a real stickler." She winks at me as I stand to leave.

"Thanks for the advice, though I'm still not sure how I can make it work. How do I get him around me after a shower?"

Irene shrugs as she moves papers around her desk. "I can't give you all the answers. Get creative. I'm sure you'll find a way."

I leave her office with a mixed range of emotions. I'm happy to have a semi-solution for my scent being masked, however, I have no clue how to be around Rylan fresh out the shower. It's not like I can demand he come to my house right when I'm getting out of the shower. That wouldn't work. This isn't some cheesy romantic comedy like Ezra watches.

I'll have to come up with something. My Omega is here, and it won't be long before the need to claim him wins out.

* * *

After work I head straight home. I manage to get out at a decent time, so I grab a few pizzas from Don's Pizza Shop before heading to my dad's house. The moment we knew my dad was sick I moved back home, giving up the bachelor lifestyle I'd been sporting to take care of him. Not that the lifestyle I led was much fun. Sitting alone at night eating boring food while I watched whatever sports I could find wasn't the best time.

"I'm home," I call out as I shift the food around and close the door. "I've got pizza."

"Pizza!" Two little voices cry out from the living room.

I round the corner to find Johnathan and my dad sitting at the coffee table playing with coloring books. Both turn to me the second I walk in, offering me bright smiles.

"Uncle Z!" Johnathan rushes over to hug me, his gangly body wrapping me in a too tight hug. I squeeze him back with my free arm, then hand off the pizzas to Osvaldo as he approaches.

"I'll go plate up some food," he tells me before taking off again.

He knows this is always the hard part for me. It's the moment I see my dad after a long day to find out if he remembers me or if I'm my uncle.

"Zeke?" Dad asks cautiously, his face scrunching in confusion.

"Hey, dad. How are you?"

He looks over at Johnathan who does a great job of pretending this is totally normal. Osvaldo is raising a genius, I swear it.

When no one makes a big deal of things he shrugs. "It's as good as can be. Today's a decent day. I've had fun at least, even if it all feels a bit fuzzy."

"Understandable. The doctors said that might happen from time to time. I grabbed pizza on my way." As I say the words, Osvaldo rounds the corner balancing four plates. "Speak of the devil."

"PEPPERONI!" Johnathan launches himself at his father and snatches up a plate. I laugh at the horror my friend wears so openly as his son turns into a pizza monster. Osvaldo's emotions have always been easy to read, which is why our group has protected him at all costs. He's the sweetheart of us four. We'll be damned if we let someone hurt him.

Dad and I laugh as Johnathan digs into his slice. We take our time eating and talking as a family. It's a weird dynamic, but it's what works for us.

Now I wonder how Rylan will feel about it though. Will he be ok with my dad's condition? Will he judge us and say it's too much work?

Heavens, I hope not. While I'd love to have my Omega, I don't know if I could just give up on dad like that. Not when he's been my rock all my life.

"What are you thinking about so hard over there?" Osvaldo asks me when the two of us head into the kitchen to do dishes. The others stay to watch tv before bath time starts up.

I shake my head. "It's been an interesting day."

"Oh, yeah. How so?"

"I met my Omega."

Osvaldo freezes. Water slides over the plate in his hand as the sink continues to run, yet my friend is frozen solid.

"Your Omega? They're here! Why didn't you bring them home? Or you could have gone with them? I wouldn't mind staying overnight for something like that. This is a huge deal Zeke!"

I laugh at how excited he is for me even as nervous energy moves through me. "It may or may not be. He didn't recognize me."

"From the scents at the factory. You knew that was possible. We've talked about it before."

"Yeah, I know. It was just hard to watch in real time. Hypotheticals are always easier to navigate than the real thing," I tell him.

I'm brought back to the memory of my dad in the doctor's office right at his diagnosis. They told him he would slowly degenerate in memories until the only reality he knew was one many years in the past. That hypothetical was tough to hear at the time, and it's even tougher to deal with now that his memory gets worse each year.

"Don't get discouraged, Zeke. You're going to win over this Omega. I know it. Tell me about him. What's his name?" Osvaldo bumps his shoulder into mine as if to encourage me to speak.

"He's amazing. Handsome and polite. I read his resume, which was a perfect fit for the job by the way. It felt good seeing how far he's come to get here. I can't wait for him to tell me all about what life was like for him growing up."

My friend chuckles as he loads the last item into the dishwasher. "You're already smitten. I love this new side of you. And I'm sure your Omega will too. Just be

patient with him. He's likely already nervous about the new job. Add in the fact that you, his boss, is now his Alpha and it's a cause for concern on his end."

"Nothing about our relationship would affect his job though. I wouldn't dare do something like that."

"Oh, I know it. Hell, all of Shelter Falls knows it. But he doesn't. So give him time. And whatever I can do to help, I will. I'm sure the others will too."

Yeah, I knew they would. Our group was close like that. We'd always been there for one another. I had no doubt they'd help me through claiming my Omega too.

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CHAPTER 4

RYLAN

Everyone at Medina Manufacturing was so nice. I couldn't believe I'd landed such an amazing job. From the moment I stepped through the doors it felt like I was where I needed to be.

Now if only I could get over the stupid crush I had on my boss, then I'd be fine.

My first week of work is spent mostly trying to analyze what the team had been working on prior to my arrival. The company wants to start a new campaign in the spring and now is the time to get all the details ironed out.

"I really think we need more jewel tones in this ad. You're trying to reach Omegas, people who are known for wanting the best of things. We're hoarders by nature. Nesting is just one sign of it. Going for dainty, even though it's springtime, would be a bad call," I tell the team as I sip a cup of tea.

I'd become addicted to the stuff ever since Ezra shared a sip of his drink with me my second day here. I now start every day with a cup of tea and a heavy dose of what I'm calling 'Boss Watching' in my head. It's the time period where I get to work super early and wait in my car to watch people come in. Or namely, one person.

Zeke Medina.

The man is everything I could want in an Alpha. If only... there's no pull there. Not a

scent drawn one anyway. My body wants him. That much I could tell from the first handshake. But I need to know for sure that the Alpha I join with is the one I'm meant to be with.

I can't say for a fact that Zeke is the one. I'd love for him to be. Life isn't fair like that though.

"I see what you mean, Ry. It's just hard for me to picture this all coming together the way you're suggesting." Ezra leans over the desk, his gaze sweeping over the layout.

Maeve and Copper are out grabbing lunch while we rehash the plan again. Neither Ezra nor I want to give up our idea. It's like two opposing sides who just won't budge.

Taking a risk, I reach my free hand up to grab a piece of the design. "May I?"

Ezra nods as he takes a step back. "Be my guest. I'd love to see what you do. It's just not there for me."

With that encouraging word I get to work. My tea goes to the table full of plastic container samples and my mind runs free. I move piece after piece until I feel the design is perfect. Then I bring in more color options to show the layers in which this production could go in.

The choices are bold. Bolder than Medina has ever done, I'm sure. But I truly think it could be the thing that helps expand the company in a new way.

"This is..."

"Magnificent," a voice I instantly recognize calls out from the doorway. I turn to find Zeke standing there like a sentry at the gate. He steps further into the room, his gaze locked on mine rather than the design.

Ezra chuckles while leaning over the desktop. "Magnificent is definitely a better word than I could have come up with. I feel there is so much happening here that I can't take it all in. But like, in a good way."

My head swivels to look at Ezra to avoid staring at Zeke any longer. He's too potent, too tempting, for me to keep watching.

"You really think so? I tried to make it new and different while still sticking to the Medina brand." I rub my hands down my jeans, needing to get the sweat off them. Sharing ideas like this always made me nervous. It doesn't help with Zeke being here.

"If you won't believe me, then believe the boss. What do you say Zeke?" Ezra steps back to give the other man room to step forward.

I watch as he looks over the setup closely. He takes his time going over every piece inch by inch, as if he's trying to uncover the thought process I had to come up with the design. Good luck with that. I don't know how I do it either. It's like my mind sees the colors and shapes, then it just shuffles them around for me.

"This is one of the best layouts I've seen in a long time. No offense, Ezra."

Ezra laughs sharply. "None taken. I have to agree."

"This is just the first thing you've worked on?" he asks. I nod in response. "Then I can't wait to see what you come up with next. Ezra, help him expand this across the Spring line. I want a full workup by the end of the month. Then we can get ahead for the shoots and packaging changes we'll need to make."

"Got it, boss. Anything else?"

"Nope. We're good. See you both later." Zeke makes another hasty exit right as

Maeve and Copper return loaded down with food.

"What's up with him?" Maeve asks while Copper shoves a fry in his mouth.

I shake my head at the two as I turn back to the design. "Don't ask me. He and Ezra are the friends here."

Ezra leans on the table, which draws my attention up to him. He's giving me a look that tells me he might realize I have a crush on his friend. I really hope he doesn't bring it up, especially in front of the others.

Thankfully he chooses to let me keep my secrets. "He's fine. The man is trying to juggle about a million things, and it's got to be a lot. Plus, we've got a basketball game later with the kids at the rec center. We volunteer on Thursday nights there."

"The rec center? I still don't know what all this town has," I admit to the trio.

Copper nods in understanding. "Totally makes sense. I've lived here my whole life and still find out new things from time to time."

"As for tonight, if you're up for it, come by the center around six thirty. It's near the main part of town, except instead of heading to the post office, you'll turn away from it and take Magnolia St. until it dead ends. Can't miss it."

I nod at Ezra. "Magnolia street, got it." I don't know why I'm so intrigued, but I can't let go of the vision of Zeke helping little kids play basketball. It's enough to make me risk getting turned around just to see it in person."

"Now then, let's show these two the magic you made while they were away," Ezra says as he points towards the design on the table.

* * *

After work, I go home to eat dinner and decide if I'm really going to go through with it. Will I truly show up at the rec center just because Ezra says I should?

It feels too good to be true. Like maybe it's a joke or something.

After nearly an hour of debating it, I decide that going won't hurt. If nothing else, then Ezra will be there, and I can chat with him. Who knows? Maybe I'll even make a new friend or two. It's not like I've been going out or anything since the move. I've been too focused on the job itself to do much else.

The drive to the center is easy enough. I follow the directions from Ezra and soon enough I'm pulling up outside. The parking lot is pretty full, so I pick a spot off to the side and check the time. Six-thirty on the dot.

Knowing what awaits me, I push down the nervousness I feel to go inside. The minute I step through the door, a grin pulls across my face. Children of all ages are running around, some on the basketball court, others up and down the sidelines. It's a big open space with bleacher style seating beside the court. I see stations set up with activities for some really small kids, and there's even what looks to be a nursery.

My Omega senses tingle at the thought of one day bringing my own kids here. I shouldn't be thinking such things, but it's been harder and harder to control since Mr. Hot as Sin, aka my boss Zeke Medina, showed up in my life.

"First time?" A voice asks me as I stand a few steps from the entrance.

I turn to see a face I'd recognize anywhere. Michael Medina. Father to Zeke and the previous CEO of Medina Manufacturing.

"It is. How could you tell?" I try to keep the nervousness from my tone. I'm inadvertently meeting Zeke's dad for the first time. It kind of feels like a really big deal.

The older man laughs at me as he claps a hand on my shoulder. "Because I looked the same way the first time I stepped through the door, only I was about a third your height. Been coming ever since and even convinced my boy to help out from time to time."

"Sounds like a great family legacy," I tell him.

He smiles at me, his cheeks rounding completely in a way that sends joy radiating through me as well. "It truly is. I'm thankful he'll have those memories of me, even when I don't."

The words leave me confused. I'm not sure what he meant by that, but it doesn't sound good.

"Michael! There you are. We've been looking for you. You know you can't wander off." An Omega and an almost exact replica of him stand side by side, their hands on their hips as they face off the man beside me.

He snorts a laugh, then loops his arm through mine. "I was just trying to be a good person by welcoming our newest victim. I mean, newest volunteer."

"Oh no! I'm not good with sports. Or really anything athletic. I'm just here because Ezra suggested I come by. He said I would have a good time."

"You know Ezra?" the Omega across from me asks.

I nod. "I do. He and I work together. My name is Rylan. So sorry. I don't know where

my manners are."

"Rylan? Oh! Oh my gosh. This is going to be epic. So nice to meet you. I'm Osvaldo, but you can call me Oz or Ozzy if you like. I know it's a mouthful. This is my son, Johnathan. And I see you've already met my friend Michael."

"I have. He's been a delight," I say around a laugh as I pat the hand holding my arm.

"Let's get seated. I need a hot dog and some popcorn to make it through this thing. You want something, kiddo?" At first I think Michael is asking Johnathon, the young boy. It's not until I turn to see them all looking at me that I realize I'm the one he's waiting for.

I shake my head quickly as my free hand pats my stomach. "None for me. I ate before I came. I didn't know there would be concessions. Ezra didn't tell me much about what all went on here."

"Bet he didn't," Ozzy mumbles as he leads us to some seats. I have a feeling there's more to this entire situation than I know about. I can't quite figure out what it could be though.

No sooner than we're seated do Ozzy and Johnathon head off to get the food. I'm left in the stands with Michael watching the little kids finish warmups. As my eyes move across the court I get my first glimpse of Zeke. It's enough that I nearly gasp aloud.

Gone is the serious businessman in a suit. He's in nothing more than basketball shorts and a hoodie. As I watch, he bends down to speak to a little boy who can't be more than five or six years old. He tells him to do something, then watches as the boy tries it out. I'm guessing he gets it right because Zeke is cheering and hugging the kid afterwards.

Crap. He couldn't just be handsome. No, he had to be good with kids too. How do I resist that?

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CHAPTER 5

ZEKE

Tonight's game goes well. The kids I coach at the Rec Center are a handful, but I can't think of anything else I'd rather do on Thursday nights. They keep me young, while also feeding my need to one day have kids of my own. Until I can convince Rylan I'm the right Alpha for him, I have to be patient.

Since I practiced with the kids before the game, I decide to take a shower. It's not that I smell horrible, but a full day of work and hours of game play have me wanting to start fresh, even if only to go home to go to bed.

When I exit the locker room area with my bag over my shoulder, I'm brought to a halt at the group waiting for me. Normally it's dad, Oz, and Johnathan hanging around. Tonight, they've added Rylan to the mix, and I'm not sure how I'm going to deal.

Having him available to me at work is one thing, but him being in my personal life when I can't claim him yet... well, it sucks. Big time.

"Hey there! This is an interesting surprise," I say with a forced smile.

Johnathan steps forward to hug me. "Great work tonight, Uncle Z!"

"Thanks, kiddo. Means a lot coming from a former player." One of the reasons I got into this in the first place was to help watch Johnathan for Oz during the week. I couldn't stand us sitting in front of the tv on my nights so we would usually end up

here at the center. The minute we discovered the basketball leagues, both Johnathan and I were hooked. We've been coming ever since, even though he is long ago stopped playing.

"Back up Johnathan. Let's let Zeke tell everyone hello," Oz calls out.

I chuckle as I approach the rest of the group. My nerves are at an all-time high, but I try to hide it with a grin. "Hey everyone," I tease with a wink at Johnathan.

"Proud of you, son." Dad claps a hand on my shoulder before pulling me into a quick hug.

From there I'm only left with Rylan. My newest employee waves with a shy sort of smile.

"Hi, Zeke. Um, I don't know much about basketball, but the kids appeared to have fun, so that's good." He rushes to speak, which makes me chuckle. Not at him, of course. It's more that I'm amused by how cute he's being.

"Thanks. I appreciate everyone coming. I didn't know you'd be here tonight," I admit.

He shrugs. "I was invited by Ezra. He had to leave partway through the game though."

"Ah, ok. That makes total sense then. Got to love Ezra's meddling."

Rylan looks puzzled, though he doesn't say anything. I move closer to the group so I can take over care of dad and let the others go home.

I halt when I hear a sharp intake of breath. My gaze turns to Rylan, who is now staring at me with wide eyes.

"Alpha," he whispers reverently.

The beast within me slams forward. "Omega."

"Um, maybe Papa Medina should stay with us tonight. What do you say, Johnathan? Sleepover with Mikey?"

I don't hear the response given, nor do I move when Oz approaches me to whisper that he'll take Dad home with him. Nothing else matters outside of Rylan and the desire building in his gaze.

"How? How did I not know before? How is this possible?" He rushes question after question out, like he's desperate to reason away our feelings.

Moving closer into his space, I stand close enough for all doubt to leave him. His pupils dilate as his jaw drops slightly. That's it, little Omega. Scent me.

"I don't know how or why any of this happened. The scent blockers at the factory mask all the Alpha scents around you and heighten the Omegas. It's why you could never tell. I just took a shower, so I'm back to my normal smell now."

"Which is why I noticed it," he finishes for me.

I nod. "Exactly. I've known since that first handshake who you were?"

He tilts his head in a subconscious show of submission. "But I'd given you my name already. What do you mean?"

I'm unable to resist crowding him further. The noise arounds us becomes a muted hum as all my focus goes to him.

"I meant I've known you were mine since then."

The sigh he gives me completes something deep in my soul. It's like the truth settles over him, granting me the peace I've been searching for since the moment he came into my life.

"Can I take you home with me? We don't have to do anything if you're not ready." I make sure he sees the honesty of my words. He need not worry that I'll take advantage of him.

"And what if I am ready?"

I don't answer him. Instead, I take his hand and lead him out to my car. There's no time for words. Not when he's just given me the green light to take this further.

* * *

By the time we pull up to my father's house, I'm on edge in a way I've never felt. My body is hot all over and I want nothing more than to yank Rylan into my lap so I can steal his mouth in hot kisses while our bodies rub together.

While the former is a great idea, I have better plans. Ones that aren't dependent on the small amount of space a car gives us.

"Come with me, Omega," I tell him, my voice thick with lust.

He nods as he climbs from the car to follow me inside. I get us through the front door and to my bedroom in seconds. Once we're tucked away in the private space, I turn to face him.

Much like me, his breathing is rapid and his expression curious. He looks like he's

ready for anything I'm ready to give.

Thank fuck.

Not wanting to waste any more time, I step forward and wrap my arms around him. He melts in my hold, then looks up at me with the most open expression yet. He's giving me the submission I'd hoped for. He's asking me to lead us without words and I'm more than happy to take charge.

My lips come down on his in a heated kiss. I start slow to gauge how he feels about the connection. Things go well up until the moment he nibbles at my bottom lip. I groan, which causes him to pull back.

"Sorry," he squeaks.

I tug him even closer. "Don't be sorry. Your kisses are addictive, and I like the idea of you playing with me. I want more though. Will you give me that, my Omega?"

He nods quickly as his hands trail over my chest. "Yes, Alpha. Every bit of me is yours to take. You don't have to ask."

His words break the last of my resistance. I take his mouth in a passionate kiss, tangling my tongue with his as I push him towards the bed. I need him horizontal. Now.

We ease onto the bed together, our lips only breaking long enough for me to make sure he lands safely. Our bodies rub together, fanning the flames of my desire and making the most delectable noises come from my Omega's lips when he pulls back for air.

"Tell me what you want, Rylan. Use your words."

He's already told me I could have every bit of him, but that's not enough. I want to hear him say it. I need to know he's craving the way our bodies will align as much as I am.

For a moment I worry he won't. He goes still under me, his body tight with tension.

"Please... fuck me, Alpha. I need you inside of me," he whimpers.

"Yes. That's it, my Omega. Now I can give you what you need." His body loses some of the tension it held as I reach back to take my shirt off. I have to step off the bed to take my pants, which gives Rylan the chance to strip his own clothes.

I've never seen him move so fast. The man I've seen in around the office is always relaxed and steady.

Not this Rylan. No, he's all speed and passion. There's even a wild look to his eyes, as if he's crazed for me like I am him.

By the time I'm fully naked, he's only just reaching to pull his underwear free. I grip the edges, tugging quickly to reveal his beautiful cock. He's not massive in size, but there's enough there to fill my fist up. I take the initiative of seeing him bare and wrap my hand around him. Each stroke I give shows me more and more of his wild side.

His hands search for purchase on the sheets as his eyes roll back in his head. "Yes! Yes, yes, yes... oh please!"

I pull back before he can come, since I don't want this to be over too quickly. He whines as he gives me a death glare of sorts.

"I can't have you coming before I'm inside of you, Omega. I won't risk it." He nods his agreement, even as his body writhes restlessly beneath me.

Slick pours from him, giving me plenty of lube as I push two fingers inside him. His wanton moan has my dick throbbing. He doesn't complain or seem to be in pain after a few strokes in and out, so I add a third finger. This time I catch the slight wince he gives before he settles back into a comfortable haze.

Once I know he's ready enough and he's on the edge of coming, I pull my fingers free. "No!" he shouts, his arm reaching forward to stop me. "Please!"

"I'm going to give you something better than my fingers. Trust me to take care of you, Omega."

He nods as he settles back in the bed, but I can see the apprehension in his gaze. He's worn out from all of this and he's more desperate for a release than anything.

I line my cock at his entrance, then slowly push forward. His body tightens around me, almost like it can't decide between drawing me in or pushing me away.

"Relax, Rylan. This will feel right once I'm all the way inside." I keep my eyes locked on his, hopeful that it will relieve some of his anxiousness.

Inch by inch, I work my way into my Omega. It's everything I've ever wanted and more. My body is alive with need, and the person who appeases it has given me all of himself. The connection couldn't be more perfect.

"You feel amazing," Rylan whispers, awe filling his tone.

"As do you. I'm going to make it even better. Hold tight. Your Alpha needs to place his claim."

With that, I pull back and thrust into his warm, tight hole. He's mine. All mine.

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CHAPTER 6

RYLAN

"Your Alpha needs to place his claim."

Oh. My. Word.

This man is ruining me. How can I ever recuperate from this experience? Because that's exactly what sex with Zeke Medina is.

An experience unlike anything else.

The more he takes, the more I want to give. My body feels alive for the first time, and I don't want this feeling to ever leave me. I've become addicted with just one hit.

"More! Please!" I beg and plead with him to give me more.

Zeke accepts my challenge by increasing not just his speed, but also the force of his thrusts. I'm being fucked hard when I feel the tingles of my orgasm sweep through me. It's a rushing wind of desire that sweeps through me, cresting quickly and leaving me a trembling mess in its wake.

"That's it. You fucking take it so well. That's my Omega. So perfect. All mine."

I don't know how much of what Zeke is saying is true given the intense pleasure rolling through us at the mate bond connection. That's the only thing to explain what

just happened. We scented one another, completing the bond and unifying us as mates.

My Alpha continues to take advantage of my fluid state. He bends me and molds me until I'm just right, my legs raised, and my back arched to give him the best position. I feel his cock swell just as he warns me, "I'm about to come."

The next few minutes are flashes of intense euphoria as his cock slips all the way inside me and settles to give his knot room to grow. And grow it does! The bulbous part of him fills me up, locking us together as he releases deep inside me.

I wonder if I'll get pregnant right away or if it will take time. Some couples live in a constant state of fertility, while others find it harder. I've never cared much about it before since I hadn't found my mate, but now I'm curious to know how things will progress. I can picture little dark haired mini-Zeke's rushing around in tiny suits chasing their dad to demand he come to board meetings.

The vision has me laughing, to which Zeke asks, "What's so funny?"

I grin up at him as I allow all the affection I'm feeling to shine through. "I was just thinking of the future."

"Oh. Was I in it?" I nod. "Then it sounds perfect to me."

* * *

It takes a while for the knot to go down, and by the time it does I'm utterly exhausted and wishing the games were on Friday so we could sleep in tomorrow. When I mention it to Zeke he laughs.

"We've always done Thursday since Fridays are usually date nights or family nights

for most people. It's easier to coordinate and convince people to come out if you don't interfere with their routines."

"That makes sense," I agree around a yawn. "Tell me more about yourself, Mr. Medina."

He smiles down at me. I'm currently wrapped around him like he's a body pillow. Since he's showing no signs of discomfort, I don't intend to let go anytime soon.

"You know most of it already. I work for the company. The end goal has always been CEO. It came quicker than I intended, but it's been a good experience to learn as I go. I help with the basketball team and occasionally spend my time volunteering at the shelter. They prefer Omegas to work there though, so it's not a place I go to often."

"Do you think they'd mind if I helped out? It would be nice to find a way to give back to the community. Basketball isn't really my thing though." I grin at him. "There is zero athleticism here."

He runs his hand down my spine as he takes me in. "I don't know about that. Your stamina earlier was pretty good."

"That's different," I reply, a blush tinting my cheeks. "Besides, there's not a sex sport I could compete in. Not that I'd want to anyway. What were we talking about anyway? I think I've lost the plot."

My Alpha shakes with laughter. "You might have. No sex sports for you, mister. Not unless it's with me and in private. I refuse to share you."

I warm at the possessiveness in his tone. I've never wanted to be someone's property, yet every time I picture Zeke claiming me as his I get all mushy inside.

"Let's sleep. Tomorrow will be a busy day, I'm sure."

* * *

It's not until I'm at work that I realize what Zeke meant by busy. He hadn't indicated work would be the thing to keep us occupied. It was more the gossip and interrogation from coworkers that had me always the focus of someone's attention.

"Let the man breath, people. He's going to be here for a while so just wait it out," Ezra eventually says with a huff to get the crowd to disperse.

As soon as they are out of hearing range he looks over to me with a smirk. I shake my head at him then mouth Lunch? at him. He nods quickly, then pulls out his phone.

Ignoring the morning interruptions, I focus back on the Spring line. Things are coming together more and more each day. I love seeing my idea develop, and having a supportive team to work with is literally the dream.

"Did we get any of the new container samples in?" I ask Maeve as I review the inventory sent.

She shakes her head. "Not all of it. There's still that one company you wanted to work with that hasn't responded. I don't know if they're on vacation or what, but the guy just never replied."

I pull up the email to see which one she means. My groan is audible once I recognize the name. It's the company I was most hopeful to work with. They have a unique portable design that would give us yet another avenue to pursue for the Omega line here at Medina Manufacturing.

"Let me see if I can find anything else out. Maybe they'd be willing to sell the design

blueprint and we could make it ourselves," I tell her.

"Sounds good to me. If anyone can convince them, it's you. And if they tell you know, just tell Zeke. I'm sure he'll go all big bad Alpha on them until they agree." She snickers at her joke even as I roll my eyes.

An hour later Ezra comes over to pull me away from a debate with Copper about color schemes. "Enough from you two. We've got a lunch to get to."

"Bring us something back on your way. We'll hold down the fort." Ezra salutes Copper's demand as he leads me through the building and out to his car. We drive the few blocks over to the diner and grab a lucky seat at the window.

Taking a look around town, I'm amazed at how much Shelter Falls feels like home. My old life is nothing but a distant memory now. I'm not sure if it's the people, the area itself, or the fact that my mate is here that has me feeling content.

"Beautiful, right? I've always loved it here. Something about the small town just does it for me," Ezra teases.

Before I can reply, the waitress comes over. I order the lunch special, fried fish and fries, while Ezra orders soup and a salad. It all sounds delicious, and I pledge to come out more often for meals. Hopefully I can convince my Alpha to join me too. He works so much that I don't know if he actually gets to enjoy himself outside of the basketball nights. And even then, that's still kind of work.

"What are you thinking about over there? You're awfully quiet?"

I shake my head at Ezra. "I was just thinking of Zeke. Does he ever just enjoy himself? Like go and have fun that's not work related?"

The man across from me turns to look out the window, his gaze unfocused. "He used to. Now he spends most of his time taking care of other people."

"But who takes care of him?" I ask.

Ezra turns from the window to smile at me. "I was hoping that person would be you. Listen, I didn't bring you to lunch to gossip or to cause trouble. Zeke is my friend and has been for ages. He might technically be my boss at the factory, but when you've known someone as long as we have it's hard to change the dynamic."

"Ok. I get that. Then why'd you ask me to lunch?"

"Because I need to know if you're all in this with him. He's your mate. I knew it that first day and you walking in this morning smelling like him only confirmed it. But like with Zeke isn't always rainbows and sunshine. He does have responsibilities that make it harder for him to connect like other relationships might."

I don't understand what Ezra is hinting at, but I nod anyway to let him know I'm in. "There's nothing he can tell me that will change my mind. I've always loved the Medina brand and knew I wanted to work there. That was the entire reason I came to Shelter Falls was to get a job with them. The fact that my mate works there is a bonus. And honestly, I don't know of anything that would change my mind about the man I've come to know. He's a walking green flag."

Ezra barks out a laugh. "Yeah, I could see how you'd say that. I've seen him go through too much to not get his happy ending, hence this lunch. I'm glad he found you Rylan. I think you're just the kind of Omega he needs."

"I hope to be," I admit just as our food arrives.

We eat our lunch with ease as Ezra tells me more about the town. He gives some

backstories about the diner and the surrounding stores as well. It feels like I've gone to one of those storybook times at a library by the time we're done. So many stories, and yet, that's only the beginning. I know there are more people to meet around town and more things for me to learn as I get settled in.

"Let's get you back to the office. I'm sure your Alpha will be looking for you soon," Ezra says as he grabs the to-go order for the others and pays the bill. I tried to fight him, but he told me he had to pay since it was his idea.

We get to his car and as I buckle up I hear my phone chime. Looking down at it, I see a text from Zeke.

Zeke: Where are you, Omega? I need to feel you.

Rylan: I'm on my way back from lunch.

Zeke: Great. Come straight to my office when you get here. I might not be able to knot you, but I need a taste. Won't make it to the end of the day.

I shiver at the way his words light me up. I'm more than ready to get back to the factory, not just for my work but also because of him. My Alpha needs me, and I won't dare make him wait.

CHAPTER 7

ZEKE

Today is the day. I'm going to introduce Rylan to my dad as my mate.

I wake up feeling invigorated at the thought. It's one thing to claim him for myself. Sharing him with my family is another. I can't wait to see how dad reacts to him.

He's been having more bad days than good lately. Sometimes it's only flashes of moments where he recognizes me. Then, in an instant, it's gone, and he thinks I'm his brother Tracy again.

"You're really going to do it?" Oz asks when he arrives to watch dad for the day.

I nod. "Yep. It's time. I've been with Rylan for two weeks now and there's no signs of us stopping. Plus, I kind of want to move him in here. It feels soon, but..."

"Hey, you don't have to justify it to me. I've seen mates meet on the street and move in the next day. It's not all that odd given our biology. The longer you're apart, the harder it is for you to get stuff done. Right?"

"You're right." I wonder for a moment if it was like that for him and Johnathan's father. He never talks about that time in his life, and since it was while he was away from Shelter Falls for school we have no way of knowing who he was.

"Damn right, I'm right. And don't you forget it." He winks at me as he moves past me

to go make breakfast.

I take a chance at peeking in on dad before I leave. He's usually up by now, which has me a tad bit worried.

"Dad? You ok in here?"

Through the crack in his door, I can see the light is on. Pushing it open a little further, I'm surprised to see him sitting in bed. His gaze faces the wall where pictures are hanging up. Some are memories he recalls with ease and others are things he sometimes has to question more than once for them to make sense. I keep patient through it all because I know none of it is his fault. The changes in his mind aren't something he can control.

When he turns to me, I see tears tracking down his cheeks. "She's gone, isn't she?"

It's only then I notice the photo frame in his hand. It's a family photo from when I was five or six. Dad, Mom, and I are all standing in front of the world's largest rubber band ball. Mom always thought random things like that were cool, so we'd take a couple of weeks off in the summer to drive around to find as many oddities as we could. We'd take pictures, then reminisce over them weeks later.

She died when I was in high school, and it nearly tore my dad apart. Some days he remembers her alive and well. But others, days like today, he struggles with the memory. It's as fresh for him as the day we lost her. I hate it. More than anything I want to take his pain away, so he doesn't ever have to feel it again.

"I'm sorry, dad," is all I can say as I approach the bed to hug him. He accepts my hold with open arms.

Together we remember the woman she was and the impact she had on us. We didn't

get her for long enough, but I'm thankful for every second. She wouldn't have handled dad losing his memory well. It would have hurt them both if he'd forgotten her time and time again.

When his tears have dried up, he turns to me with a weak smile and says, "Don't let me keep you, Zeke. I know you've got a lot more to do than sit around with a sad old man all day."

"Hey, now! I quite enjoy spending time with that old man - sad or happy." Oz stands in the doorway, his hands on his hips.

Dad chuckles. "Good to see you're just as feisty as ever Osvaldo. Is that bacon I smell?"

"Sure is. If you two are better now, then we can all go eat. And don't tell me you don't have time now, Zeke. I already called Jasmine to tell her you'd need an extra couple of hours to come in." His gaze tells me he also told Rylan, which is good since I'd gotten so caught up in dad's pain that I didn't think to text him I'd be late.

"Let's get going then. It's not every day I get to eat with two of my favorite men." Dad pushes me away so he can climb from the bed.

I laugh as I follow Oz from the door. "It holds less meaning when you tell the others the same thing, dad. You love to play favorites, but you really have four. Don't lie."

"Who said I was lying? I simply said two of my favorites, not that it was limited to you jokers." He sticks his tongue out at me once we reach the kitchen. Oz outdid himself, as usual. There's food piled high and my stomach grumbles in response.

"Dig in. It's going to be a busy day."

I do as he says, then wonder if now is the best time to bring Rylan around or not. With dad mourning his own mate, would seeing mine only make things worse?

* * *

At the office, my mood barely brightens. I'm swarmed with thoughts of how it would go if I invited Rylan to have dinner with us. Will he judge the situation? Will he be a trigger for dad? There's so much unknown that I feel like planning in this state is foolish.

And yet, I know if I don't just get it over with, I run the risk of it being an issue later on. I'm already falling in love with my mate. He bewitched me from day one. Every second I gain in his presence is a gift that I cherish. I want more of them. Really, I want them all.

I want to wake up with him, to go to work with him, and to return home with him.

"Are you ok?" Rylan asks me when I drag him to my office for lunch. Ezra kept giving me strange looks each time I passed by their department. I know how weird it is for me to hover, but the pacing helped me think and now I feel like I know the best course of action.

"I am and I'm not. I need to talk to you about something. Please keep an open mind and listen to the end. Can you do that for me?" I plead.

My mate nods quickly, his eyes wide with confusion. "Yes, Alpha. I can do that."

I sit in my desk chair, then pull him down to my lap. Once we're both settled I explain everything to him.

"Since I was in high school it's just been me and my dad. My mother passed away,

leaving us kind of floating around without knowing what to do. Dad focused on the company, while I went to school to prepare to take over one day. I was working in the various departments around here when I started noticing dad would forget something important. It started as little things like where his keys were. But then it grew. Now, there are some days where he has no clue who I am or what year it is. His Timer's Disease is progressing rapidly enough I have to have Oz stay with him during the day."

Rylan's eyes fill with tears. "I'm so sorry you've both had to go through this. It must be terrifying."

I nod as I pull him closer. He's a comfort to me, even as I discuss the horrible parts.

"The disease will one day steal it all. He'll have to be told his own name and where he is. That is, of course, if he lives that long. The statistics don't look all that good, but there are treatments on the horizon. We'll have to wait to see if any of them work."

Even as I say it, I can hear the doubt in my own voice. The things I've seen to help with TD usually cause problems of their own. None of it would be easy.

"I hope they find it and your dad can be around for many, many memory filled years to come."

"Thank you, Omega. That means a lot to me. I'm sure you're wondering why I brought this up." He nods, so I continue. "I'm mentioning it today because I'd like to invite you to dinner at my place tonight. Dad would stick around this time, which would give you a chance to see him in action. I'd also like you to consider moving in with me if tonight goes as well as I hope."

He shakes his head as he grips my shoulders. "Tonight, could go good or bad and I'd still choose to stay with you. I want to be yours all the time, Alpha. Besides, the one

time I met your dad, he was a blast. I can only imagine what he does when his memory changes, but I can assure you that first meeting will hold true no matter what."

I kiss him then, my heart so full from his understanding. Fate knew I needed someone like Rylan to support me. I've never felt so blessed as I do with him in my lap telling me he wants forever with me.

"Let's get back to work then. The sooner we're done, the sooner we can get home." He hops off my lap at the news, then kisses me quickly before rushing from my office.

* * *

We manage to finish the workday a little earlier than planned. Rylan was so eager to come see dad that he motivated the office to wrap up projects quickly. Everyone agreed once we finished the day, and with my promise to pay for the full shift, they headed out early for us to close up. The streets of Shelter Falls will be busy tonight since they gained an extra two hours of freedom.

"Here we are," I tell him once we're parked and heading to the door.

I slide the key in the lock, then let us inside. It's quiet for a moment before a loud roar tears through the space. Rylan giggles since the sound is clearly human. When we turn the corner, we find the living room is a disaster of blankets and toys. It looks like someone made a fort, but it's seen better days.

"What in the world is going on here?" I call out since I can't see anyone else in the room.

Like some kind of choreographed comedy sketch, Osvaldo, Johnathan, and my dad

all pop out from the back of the fort. Their eyes widen as they take us in, then they stand to their full height.

"Oh, umm..." Johnathan starts.

"We were just," Dad continues.

Osvaldo, always in dad-mode, simply shakes his head. "You're home early. We were just finishing up our game of Safari, then we were going to put it all to rights. Sorry, Zeke."

I laugh at them while I slip off my suit jacket. "Sorry? For what? This looks like fun. You in, Rylan?"

My mate laughs as he leaves his bag by the door too. "I want to play. How does it work?"

We crawl under the makeshift fort to find the other three waiting patiently for us. They smile and begin to tell us the point of the game. Before I know it there's more roaring and giggles going on than ever before. It's a memory I intend to keep and lock away forever. And I know that even if I lose them one day, I'll have the feeling for now.

The future is uncertain. That much I do know. It's living in the present that keeps us going. It reminds us how precious life can be and why we should be thankful for every second with those we love.

During a particularly cozy moment where Rylan and I find ourselves hiding in the same spot, I take the initiative to live in the moment. I lean forward so only he can hear me, and I whisper, "I love you Rylan Mack."

My Omega gasps. The sound echoes through the room, drawing the attention of Johnathan, the current predator of the game. I laugh at how my confession might mean my doom in this silly game. Still, I wouldn't change a thing. He needs to know and waiting would only make it worse.

"I love you too, Zeke Medina."

He leans forward to kiss me. The second our lips press together, I forget the game completely. I get lost in Rylan and only Rylan.

"Ew, Dad! They're kissing. I can't win if they'd doing all that."

Oz and Dad both burst into laughter, the game concluded now that their hiding spots are revealed. Rylan laughs too, breaking our kiss as he takes in the scene around us. I can honestly say there's no place I'd rather be. Even if we lost the game, we won at love. That's what really matters.

CHAPTER 8

RYLAN

It's finished. Holy shit, it's really finished.

I whip my head up from where I'd been staring at the desk to see who else realizes. Maeve and Copper are both still focused on the spreadsheet, but Ezra is looking at me with a silly grin. I laugh, then cover my face as emotions overwhelm me.

"Congratulations on your first completed season with Medina. You crushed it mini boss," Ezra teases.

For some reason that makes me even more emotional. Two months at this company and I sometimes still get overwhelmed with it all. I'm literally living my dream life, yet all of it feels fragile. It feels like at any given moment the universe could decide to take it all away. I don't want that. Not now, not ever.

"Oh wow," Maeve says. "I didn't realize we were wrapped up."

It makes sense that she wouldn't know since I'd put her and Copper in research mode for the next season. They are supposed to find what our customers want next so we can continue to be on the cutting edge of it all. We'll still have to present ideas to Zeke to make sure they fit the company's goals of expansion, but it's a starting place.

Meanwhile, Ezra and I have been working on the final touches of everything for the Spring line. I've found he and I tend to work best at catching the last of the tiny errors

that slip through. He has an eye for detail that's unparalleled in my experience. He could easily be management, though I get the sense that's not something he wants. I might have to ask Zeke about it. Keeping him here is great for the team, but I'd hate to hold him back if he wants more.

Ezra pulls my hands down from my face. "Be proud of your work. This is going to be amazing when it releases."

I nod as I look over the designs one more time. It doesn't feel real, and yet, I can see it all laid out before me. Months of hard work come to fruition.

Zeke chooses that exact moment to waltz in the room. "How's it going today?"

We all go quiet, then Copper grins and points my way. "Someone just finished the last review of the Spring Line."

"Did you?! Oh, that's wonderful. Where is it? I want to see." He moves forward as if to look and for some reason I throw myself in his path.

"Ummmm, maybe not yet?" I look up at him, worried I might be out of line. Instead of anger, I find him grinning down at me.

He pulls me into a hug. "There's no need to be nervous. I wouldn't have hired you if I didn't think you'd do a good job. Now, let me at it."

Of course, he ends up loving it. He tells me it's the best design he's seen in ages, and he congratulates the entire team for a job well done. We end the day on a high note, all of us glad to be done with the project before the upcoming holiday weekend. Now instead of worrying about the timelines of everything, we can all relax for the extended weekend.

* * *

"We've got to get going or we'll be late," Zeke says from the living room.

I yell in reply, "I'm coming. I swear it."

We would have been out the door ages ago if I could just pick what to wear. Or rather, if what I picked would fit. Since I'm no longer on a super tight budget, I'm finally eating like a grown man should. It's great to have three meals a day, but all of my clothes are starting to either be too tight or they don't fit at all.

"Ugh!" I throw the latest pair of pants on the floor. It sits with the others as I debate what to do. It's at that moment that Zeke comes to our bedroom.

Yes, our shared bedroom. Because you can bet your ass I moved in when he asked me to. There's no place I'd rather be than with my Alpha.

Zeke takes in my disheveled state and visibly fights to hold his laugh back. "Um, baby... you actually have to put the pants on. You can't just summon them onto your body or do whatever it is you're doing."

"I know that," I say with an eye roll. "It's just that none of them fit."

"That's an easy fix. I think we're only a couple of sizes apart and I've got some shorts with an elastic waist. It will be comfy and still stay on you."

"Really?" A wave of happiness rolls through me. If my problem can be fixed this easily, then I'll be overjoyed. We're supposed to be meeting his friends for dinner at one of the other guy's houses and I know I've already put us behind schedule.

My Alpha moves past me to go to the dresser across the room. He shuffles some

clothes around in a drawer, then lifts a pair of shorts in the air. "Ah-ha! Found them."

When I slip them up over my underwear, they fit like a glove. I'm finally comfortable in something for the first time in days. This new discovery is going to mean a shopping trip is in my near future. And elastic waistbands are going to be a must. How have I lived all these years without them in my life.

"Ready now?"

I nod to Zeke. "Yes, Alpha. Let's get going."

We grab Dad from his room to bring him out to the car with us. I'd asked him early on what to call him, and he insisted he would only answer me as Dad, not Michael or Mr. Medina.

He's in good spirits today, his memory holding strong. I've been working with him to do some brain exercises along with some physical movement. It won't cure his Timer's, but my research suggests it might slow the progression down some. It could give us all a bit more of the one thing we need most - time.

"I can't wait to see you boys all together again. It's been a while since we've had a get together like this," Dad says from the front seat.

Zeke nods as he looks at me in the rearview mirror. "It has. We've all been so busy. Plus, I see two out of three of them damn near every day. It's Treyton who tends to stray far from home and keep himself busy."

It's my understanding Trey has had a run of bad luck lately that's made him feel the need to seclude himself. He's told Zeke it's so he doesn't bring the mood down. I get the sense that it's more than that.

Today, we're ambushing his home for a picnic/barbecue party. If we're being technical about it, he does know we're coming. He just doesn't know this is really an intervention.

"I hope this doesn't give him a bad impression of me or anything. Won't it be weird that this is the first time I'm meeting him?" I ask the further we get from home. My mind is telling me to flee. It wants me to go back home to snuggle into my nest of pillows so I can avoid the world.

"There's nothing to worry about. Trey should have known this was coming. We don't let him go long without a visit. He needs us to ground him and vice versa."

"The fearless four! I swear it was like you boys couldn't help but to get into trouble when you were younger," Dad says. "Someone was always with a cut or scrape on them. The worst were the broken bones."

It feels surreal to think of Zeke in such a way. I've only ever known him to be all man. And yet, I can kind of see how he would be a daredevil of a kid. He wouldn't want anyone telling him or his friends what to do, and they'd all likely think themselves invincible. While I might not have had such a childhood - hello, book nerd here - I can remember several kids where I grew up being that way.

"We're here," Zeke says, pulling my mind from those memories and back to the present.

The house we're parked at is on the outskirts of town. There's a massive sign that boasts a veterinary service and animal boarding shelter. I wonder how he can board animals if he's always traveling like Zeke said, but I don't dare ask. I'm too nervous and I'd hate to come off offensive.

As I climb from the vehicle, I'm pulled into a bear hug by Ezra. "So glad you two

finally decided to make it out."

"Someone was having wardrobe issues," Dad says nonchalantly as he strides to the front door dragging the cooler of food. He sure can move quick when he wants to.

"Traitor!" I shout after him before turning to a smirking Ezra. "Yes, I had some issues. It's all good now. I just need to not eat so much, and I'll be fine."

He loops his arm through mine to guide me inside. I look around for Zeke only to find him and Ozzy in a heated conversation.

"Those two are fine. Sometimes they push each other's buttons. Zeke wants to help with Johnathan and such out of a misplaced sense of responsibility. And Oz thinks it's wrong to take from his best friend because he's too proud. All of it's really fucked up, which is why I just have a savings account of money ready for whenever they need it. The day will come, and when it does I can just whip out the cash - no argument needed."

I laugh at the sincerity in his tone. He speaks as if it's not (what I'd guess to be) thousands of dollars he's so casually talking about.

"I'm glad they have you guys then. It's good to have a support team when you need it most."

We walk through the large open home that looks more like a barn before coming out the other side. There we find the others all settled around an outdoor patio table.

"You must be Rylan. I'm Treyton, but most of these fools call me Trey." The only person I don't know comes to greet me, hand extended.

I shake his hand in a friendly manner, my body aware he's another Alpha like Ezra

and Zeke so I don't dare squeeze too tight. I don't think I could anyway since I'm too busy taking in the man himself. His deep brown skin is a strong contrast to my pale complexion. I'm fascinated by the comparison as we sit down to join everyone.

It's then I take in the group as a whole. They are all so different, yet you can see the bond they share. Even Johnathan who is the spitting image of Ozzy, seems to fit in with these grown men so well.

My nerves die down at the realization. At least they do until Trey speaks.

"If you'd had just told me what type of party this was, then I wouldn't have felt so bad," he directs at Zeke. "Congratulations, man."

We all look at Trey like he's got a third eyeball. Zeke is the one who finally speaks up. "Congratulations? What are you talking about? We're here because your behind is never in town and you've been avoiding us. What did you think this was?"

Trey's eyes go wide as he looks over at me. "Oh, um. I thought you knew."

Zeke leans forward. "Knew what?"

The rest of us watch them go back and forth like we're watching some type of ping pong match or something. It's confusing as hell, but I'm too invested to care.

"I don't know if now is the time. Maybe we should wait until - "

Ezra slaps a hand on the table as he grins. "Don't leave us hanging bro. What is the congratulations for? Is it about the Spring line? I didn't think Zeke kept you up to date on that stuff."

"That's because I don't. So why don't you tell us Trey what it is you know that we

don't." There's something about the way my Alpha speaks now that send shivers down my spine. I fight to control my body's response. Producing slick right now will not help the situation, especially when the others in the room could possibly smell it.

Treyton scrubs his hands over his face as he sighs. Then he leans forward and gives me a sad sort of look. "First I have to apologize. I made an assumption and now I feel like an asshole. Sorry, Johnathan."

"No worries, Uncle T. My dad says worse when he thinks I'm not listening," the little man replies.

Ozzy gasps, a look of shock filling his features. "Johnathan! I do not."

"Um, yeah you do. You just go onto the back porch to do it. But my room is like, right there, so I hear it anyway. No big deal." He shrugs as he goes back to working the Rubik's cube in his hand.

"Back to the point," Zeke urges.

Trey nods, then continues explaining his point. "I was congratulating you on Rylan's pregnancy. It's early stages, but I could smell it in his scent. There's an undertone there you don't get until you're with child."

"I'm pregnant?" I ask the group, my eyes wide.

"Is he going to cry, Dad? I can't tell," Johnathan whispers loudly.

Ozzy whispers back, "If he does, then I might too. You know I'm a sympathy crier."

"For Pete's sake, let's not start the waterworks. Yes, he said you're preggo Rylan. Congratulations, indeed. Zeke, I think you should go hug your Omega. Dad, let's go

grab some beers for the non-preggo peeps." Ezra jumps from his seat to grab Dad's hand to lead him inside.

Them leaving snaps Zeke from his trance, which has him leaping from his seat to come around to me. "My Omega is pregnant with my baby. What a wonderful day?"

It's only then the tears start. But they aren't from sadness or fear.

No, these are actually happy tears. I could never have pictured my life going like this, but now that I'm here, it feels like a dream come true.

"We're going to have a baby," I say to my Alpha.

He cups my cheeks in his hands as his gaze holds mine. "We are. You've given me the greatest gift there is. First, your love and now a baby for us. I love you so much, Rylan."

I don't answer him. I can't with the way I'm choking up. So, I do the next best thing. I kiss him to show just how much I love him as well.

Dad and Ezra return with the beers, along with two water bottles for Johnathan and me. We lift our drinks in the air as Trey toasts us, "To family!"

The group shouts, "To family!"

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ZEKE

"Yes, Alpha! Please! Right there! Umph!" Rylan groans as I bury my cock in his tight hole. His body squeezes me like it's fighting to hold me inside and I chuckle at the thought. What I wouldn't give to live buried inside him all the time.

Fuck. The thought has my cock surging with desire.

I pull back, then thrust forward a little harder. It's not so powerful as to send him flying over the back of the couch, but it's enough to have him panting and begging for release.

"You'll come when I say so, my beautiful little Omega. So fucking sexy carrying our baby. Walking around the office all day teasing me, making me want you even though I was stuck in meetings, unable to touch you."

There was a glass back wall in the conference room that looked out toward the walkway between office spaces. I can't tell you how many times I looked up today to find Rylan walking past. It was like he knew every time my eyes would stray, and he'd be there just in time. It drove me mad.

Which is why I now have him bent over the couch as I teach him a lesson about the effects of teasing an Alpha. I don't think he's feeling all that punished though. From the sultry sounds pouring from his lips, I'd say he enjoys knowing he got under my skin.

Little minx.

"I'm so close. Please. Give me more, Alpha!"

I don't hesitate in following his demands. I might be the Alpha in genetic makeup, but my pregnant Omega calls the shots when it comes to how hard and how fast he wants to be taken. There is nothing I wouldn't do for him or to him to give him the pleasure he deserves.

My own orgasm rushes forward. I can feel it holding on desperately, as if all I need is one more push to get me over the edge.

Sure enough, that push comes the moment my Omega comes. His hole locks me in a vice grip, dragging my release forward, slamming me into a state of ecstasy. My knot swells and Rylan whimpers as it slips inside of him.

"Oh god. You feel so good. I'm stuffed full," he says with a drowsy sort of giggle.

I regret not getting him to bed when I feel his muscles start to relax. He's nearly dead weight in my hold, the exhaustion of the day having stolen his energy. Add to it the pounding I just gave him, and he's done for. My little cum drunk Omega needs to rest.

Moving as easily as I can, I lift him up and inch us around the edge of the couch. It's a slow process. I'm literally talking baby shuffling steps to prevent any pain or discomfort to my Omega.

Once we're fully around the space, I ease us onto the couch. Rylan remains in my lap given the way my knot locked us together. He sinks back into me, his eyes closed as soft snores leave his lips.

He's the cutest fucking thing ever.

I rub a hand over his stomach as I take in the swell of our baby. Our baby. The one

we created together.

While it wasn't necessarily the plan, I can't ever say I'm upset about the way it worked out. The past four months have only brought us closer. And soon, he'll be mine in name also. A wedding, a baby, and a family better than I could have ever asked for. I'm thankful for every bit and I can't wait to see what comes next.

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