



Baking for His Omega

(Omegas of Oliver Creek #13)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: In the short time since I moved to Oliver Creek, I haven't met a lot of single omegas. But the town is growing quickly, and I hold a hope that perhaps Fate will send my mate to me one day. But in the meantime, I was willing to take what joy I could from my new business, a bakery started by someone else who had left town to join family many miles away. Things were going well, but I had to watch my pennies if I wanted to keep growing. And that meant making most of my own deliveries.

Smash cakes are one of my favorite things to bake. I always create a cake for the parents and their party guests, too, but presenting the first cake to a new person, often the first pastry of any kind, held a special significance. I juggle the two boxes in order to ring the bell of a home at the edge of town, and who should open it but my mate. My omega. My fated.

But when he opens it wider, I see the little boy clinging to his leg. My mate belongs to another. It may not be his fated, but they have a family nonetheless. Maybe it's time to move away and avoid seeing this sweet, beautiful omega with another man.

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Gideon

Ever since I bought Bearly Baked—or, as it used to be called Pastry Heaven—my days began before dawn and flew by until before I knew it, the sun had set, our doors were closed, and it was time to go home to sleep for a while. Not nearly enough, but I didn't mind. I'd always known that a baker's life, any small business person's really, would be hard work and long hours at first, but it was worth everything to have this opportunity. Oliver Creek was a foodie haven, and when I finished pastry school and researched good locations to open a bakery, it was on my short list of desirable spots.

The PBJ place, I learned on my first visit to town, supplied a good deal of bread to local restaurants, and Pastry Heaven picked up most of the rest of the baking needs of this town and its visitors. Meaning, I'd have to look elsewhere to live my dreams. The owners of both businesses were cordial and had so many nice things to say about the town, it was even harder to drive away.

But no sooner had I returned home to consider my next stop than I got a message from the owner of Pastry Heaven, with whom I had exchanged numbers on the off chance he might have an idea where I should look next.

Still interested in Oliver Creek?

Yes. Of course. But unless the town has grown, there's no room for me.

He had to go home and take care of his dad who had been in a serious accident. I offered to fill in for him while he was gone, but he couldn't predict how long it might be, and whether he'd even be able to return at all.

A rattle pulled me out of the memory and into the present of my beautiful bakery and the vanilla-scented pastry cream I was cooking for a special-order cake that would be picked up the next morning.

“Chef, we’re almost out of blackberry muffins.” My counter girl, Anisette, poked her head into the kitchen. “Will there be more today?”

“I hadn’t planned on it. Do you think we should?” I hadn’t realized they would be such a big hit.

“Well, they went pretty fast, and I just thought...maybe...” Dang, I was trying to encourage her.

“Very good idea. Did anyone say what they liked about them? Maybe it’s something we can apply to the other muffins.”

“The crumble on top,” she said. “I had a few people say how much they loved that.”

“Excellent.” I high-fived her. “That was your idea. I bet it would be good on some others too.”

Her smile was everything. This nineteen-year-old had been through more than most people in a lifetime, and this shop and the little apartment upstairs that I told her came with the job were the first security she’d seen in a long time. “Strawberry maybe?”

“Why don’t we hold off on more muffins today because we have plenty to do before closing, and then tomorrow we’ll try the strawberry or maybe peach something else. Honestly, it doesn’t make me mad that we ran out. If people ask, tell them we have another special tomorrow that we want to surprise them all with. Why don’t you do one of your posters for the front window that we can put up in the morning.”

My counter girl, who wanted to learn to bake, skipped back to the front to help the customers and make her sign, and I answered the phone.

“Bearly Baking, what can we tempt you with today?” I answered.

“Oh my gods, you’re still there.”

This was a stronger reaction than the typical customer call. “We’re open for another couple of hours if you want to come for anything. We are out of the blackberry muffins however.”

“I need a smash cake for a baby’s birthday. It’s his very first one, and he isn’t going to have anything because his...well, someone else was supposed to bring it.”

“Of course.” I picked up the tablet from the counter, prepared to fill out the order form in the app. “What day do you need the cake for?”

“I need it in three hours. Everyone will be here, and if he doesn’t have a smash cake, it’s bad luck.”

“Today?” We didn’t take orders this late for the same day, usually not the same day at all. Someone was counting on him for an important responsibility, but there wasn’t time. “I’m not sure...”

“Please, I’m at my wit’s end. I’ll be so grateful.”

How could I say no?

“What flavor would you like?” I’d have to rush and deliver it myself because it wouldn’t be ready until after closing, but smash cakes were my favorite thing to do and I always included a full-size for the adults as well. Lucky I hadn’t decided to do

any more muffins. Between the cake I was working on now and the order I just took, I'd have my hands full.

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Kelly

First birthdays only come once.

Wyatt's first birthday party was probably the smallest known to man, but I was determined to make memories, even if the party was only for us and the few people I'd met since moving to Oliver Creek a few months ago. Mostly from a daddy playdate in town once a week we'd gone to several times. So, Wyatt would have some kids to play with at his celebration.

Judson, my ex, bailed on us at the last minute. Even though I wanted Wyatt to have his bio daddy there, I was relieved to see the text.

Judson already moved on. Friends had spotted him hanging out with some omegas in the city, and one sent me a picture of him dancing in a club only two days after we'd broken up. He'd probably moved on even before I decided to leave.

He'd love-bombed me in the beginning. Lavished me with extravagant gifts. Talked about me being his fated mate after our second date, although I didn't feel the same. Judson was my chosen life partner, but no more.

My deer never recognized Judson as our fated and wasn't particularly happy to have him around. I'd accepted that I might not ever meet my mate and was at peace with that fact.

I should've listened to my deer, but my Wyatt. He was worth going through all of this. I'd do it all again to have him in my life.

Keeping things simple for the party, I hung some dark-and-light-blue streamers in the dining area and on his high chair. Also a few balloons I'd blown up myself, no helium for us. It wasn't much, but I wanted pictures of everything.

Plus, I was on a budget.

When Judson canceled, he'd also bailed on the one thing he was supposed to do for his son's first birthday: be in charge of cake. In a panic, I called Bearly Baked, the bakery I'd walked past many times but never gone in because I knew I'd go overboard. The place smelled incredible. The man who answered, probably based on the freaked-out tone of my voice, had gone to the trouble of making me a smash cake for him at the last minute. I could've gotten a few cupcakes from the grocery store, but this was a special occasion for a very special boy. Oliver Creek got better by the second.

A sting of anger zipped through me at the thought of my ex not coming. Not for me but for Wyatt. One day, when I showed my boy the pictures of his first birthday, would he ask where his other father was? Would he wonder why Judson didn't feature in his life at all? He hadn't even seen Wyatt since he was eight months old, missed so many firsts. I'd texted him a video of Wyatt's first steps.

He sent back a thumbs-up. Luckily my phone didn't break when it hit the wall. I couldn't afford to replace it.

Sometimes it seemed like yesterday when I started hoarding my money to leave, but on days like this, it felt like years ago. This party was sparse by Pinterest and social media standards, but I had to make every penny count. We were subsisting on my dwindling savings. I would have to get a job soon. I'd been looking everywhere, but there didn't seem to be anything to fit what I needed. Plus, I would need daycare for Wyatt, even though that was the last place I wanted to put him. Next thing I knew, I would be getting updates on one of those security cameras from a virtual stranger. I'd

ask the playdate daddies for recommendations.

I shook off the negative thoughts. Things wouldn't be perfect, but at least I wouldn't be settling for the bare minimum when Wyatt and I deserved more.

Everything was ready, except me. Wyatt was stirring in the other room. He usually took some time after waking up before he called for me. His little Dada was one of the best sounds in the world.

I was still in my pajamas from the night before, since I'd spent a lot of time getting bits of yellow and white goop from every surface after a scrambled egg incident at breakfast. Glancing at my watch, I recognized showering would not be happening quite yet and ran to the bedroom to dress. I had barely fastened a pair of jeans and gotten a T-shirt over my head when the doorbell rang.

"Coming," I yelled, just as my son went from self-soothing to wanting his dada. I stopped in his room and got him out of his crib. Before answering the door, I called out to the person again and put Wyatt down on his play mat.

I swung the door open and gasped. Here I was, in my plainest clothes. I hoped there were no traces of scrambled eggs in my unwashed hair. I hadn't shaved.

In front of me stood the handsomest man I'd ever seen.

He held a pale-blue box and my next breath.

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Gideon

The smash cake and the one for the adults at the party were my favorite things to bake. As I prepared the batter, I always thought of the little person who would be celebrating their very first birthday with their family.

So much promise. They could grow up to be anyone or anything. And their family, their moms or dads, would be there to watch and share in the adventure. I tried not to be envious of that and just enjoy my small part of the whole thing.

Which I usually managed just fine. Fate had not seen fit to give me a mate, but my life was pretty good with my business and friends, and I tried to remember to be grateful for those things. But I still hoped one day to bake a smash cake for a little one of my own.

Shrugging, I began the cake ordered by the panicked customer. He'd given me a color theme but hadn't actually said what flavor, so I went with my standby of a vanilla bean cake with a vanilla pastry cream filling. The little ones often preferred less strong tastes, and some hadn't even had chocolate by their first birthday, so vanilla bean was a go-to choice.

After blending sugar and butter until light and fluffy, I scraped the seeds of a full vanilla bean into the mixture. Dry ingredients and sour cream or buttermilk were added in thirds of each until I had a fluffy delicious-scented batter ready to put in three nine-inch round pans and the small one for the smash cake.

Usually I was doing one thing after another so quickly, I didn't get to take the time to

enjoy it, but with everything else for the day completed and the doors locked, I was able to put extra time and care into the decorations for the smash cake and the larger one as well.

Boxing the cakes, I locked the door behind me and headed out to make the delivery on my way home. It wasn't far out of my way, fortunately, and I'd soon be home having dinner.

The address I'd been given was in a section of town where people often landed when moving here with little money. Our reputation as a thriving town with new businesses opening all the time and job opportunities had brought in not just tourists and investors but people who looking for a new life, and many ended up here, at least at the beginning. A far cry from a city slum, it was still not fancy, mostly small apartments and older homes that could use some work.

I parked in front of the building and carried the cake box up to the door, where I rang the bell. No answer, and I didn't hear any sounds of a party or even a television inside. After a moment, I rang again, I had agreed to take payment when I arrived, so the thought that maybe the order was a prank did cross my mind before someone called, "Coming," from inside the house.

I shifted the cake in my hands and waited another minute at least before the door started to open and the scent of fresh, sweet peaches filled my nostrils. The man who answered wore jeans and a T-shirt, but his feet were bare and he had a case of bedhead that surprised me at this time in the afternoon. But his scruffiness just added to his appeal, and my bear surged up from where he lounged deep within me to announce, Mate .

Everything I'd suppressed about my hopes of finding my other half surged to the forefront. He had been here in my town all along, and I'd just not happened to run into him yet. Fate really knew what she was doing.

“Thank you so much for baking the cake and bringing it here. I know it was above and beyond the call of duty.”

“Hi.” I’d never been the most eloquent of bears, but this was sad even for me. When a person met their mate, they should have something to say that they could remember all their life. “I didn’t mind.”

Ugh! Yeah, words just flowed from me.

“No, it was a lot of trouble to go to at the last minute, and I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it.”

“Really, it’s fine. My good deed for the day.”

His smile lit up his whole face, making him even more attractive if that was possible. “Let me get my wallet.” He disappeared inside and then came back. “Cash is okay?”

“Perfect. I don’t have a card swiper with me.” And usually I would have insisted on a card on the phone for such a special request—if I even granted it.

He counted out the bills, not leaving many in the wallet, and handed them to me. “Oh, and I want to give you a tip.”

“No tip for me.” I wasn’t taking the last of his money.

“Are you sure? It doesn’t seem fair.”

“I’m the owner and baker of the shop.”

“Even so, you went to a lot of trouble.” He still held his wallet as if he was going to insist, but I shook my head.

“Positive.”

“Well, thank you. I will tell everyone at the party about the kindness you did for Wyatt. Most of my guests are daddy playdate friends, so they will for sure need birthday cakes at some point.”

A cloud of peach scent and bear excitement was clouding my brain and hiding something I needed to remember. “We always appreciate the business. Listen, after you help with the—”

“Dada!”

My focus left the omega’s face and dropped to find a little child clinging to his leg. “Oh, this must be Wyatt.” And what I should have remembered. I was here to bring a cake for a child’s birthday party. In the fog of meeting the omega, I hadn’t even considered that he’d be one of the fathers. “Happy Birthday.”

I made my escape as quickly as possible before I could make a fool of myself. For a minute there, I thought I saw a happy future, but now...now, I saw only what I could never have.

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Kelly

The man who saved me from a disaster told me he was not only the baker of the cakes but the owner of Bearly Baked. He'd made the delivery himself because I'd placed the order so late; it was completed after hours. He also mentioned he'd only agreed to the order because I sounded so frantic on the phone. He wasn't wrong. I had been distraught thinking Wyatt wouldn't have a proper cake for this birthday.

"Happy Birthday, Wyatt," he said to my son as the toddler clung to me.

"How did you know his name?"

"It's on the cake. Wyatt and the number one, right?"

I nodded. My heart was beating out of my chest, and my deer was bouncing inside me. He liked this alpha. And boy, was he an alpha. Built like a brick wall. His gray shirt with the logo of his bakery stretched across his chest. The logo was cute as could be. A bear with an apron on and flour on his fur, holding a cake. The apron had the same logo on it, and the bear on that logo had one on as well, until it was too small to make out details.

The alpha had a chiseled jaw and thick lips that beckoned me. Goddess, I might have been fawning over someone else's mate. Although, there wasn't an omega's scent on him. Only the enticing smells of vanilla, sugar, and chocolate.

"Kelly? Is the cake right?"

I looked down at the cake and nodded. “Yes. Thank you.”

“It’s my pleasure.” Without another word, the alpha left. I stared after him but soon, Wyatt began to fuss. He was a fiery, energetic deer. Judson was a deer as well, so there was no question of his species.

I bet the alpha baker was a big, strong bear. He smelled like one. Looked like one in his human form as well.

I went inside and put Wyatt down, trying not to let the cake fall in the process. I put them down on the kitchen counter and opened the box. It was perfect. A pale-blue cake. Wyatt’s name in darker-blue frosting. Some sprinkles in the shape of stars all around. This would be enough to feed everyone, I hoped. My budget didn’t allow for a lot more.

“Look at this, Wyatt,” I called to my son. “This is your cake!”

We would have our little party after dinner, so I put the cake in the fridge and straightened the living room. Again. “Come on, you. Let’s go outside so you can get some of that energy out.”

When searching for a house here in Oliver Creek, I made sure to rent one with a big backyard so Wyatt could play. I’d picked up some toys from the local thrift store. A slide. A sandbox. That and a few balls for throwing, and he was in heaven. Kids didn’t need a ton of stuff, I’d found. Good thing because I couldn’t afford a ton.

While Wyatt chased a ball, I thought about the alpha who had showed up at my door. I did a quick search on my phone and found the owner was named Gideon. That name fit him.

Gideon was tall and strong. Goddess, I could only imagine what it must feel like to be

enveloped in his arms. It had been so long since I'd been held. He looked like the cuddling type.

For an instant, I planned a trip into the bakery for no reason other than to catch a glimpse of him again, but I let out a groan. No. I had to focus on Wyatt and getting a job and all the things that went along with raising my son. I didn't have the time or luxury of getting distracted.

Gideon would be the best distraction for anyone.

"Come on, Wyatt. Let's get cleaned up and have a party! What do you think?"

Wyatt didn't give two shits. It made me laugh. All this getting ready and streamers and balloons and a special cake, and my tyke couldn't care less. He didn't know it was his birthday. We could've snuggled in with a good dinner and some books tonight, and he wouldn't have been able to tell the difference.

The party was really for me, but also, one day, he might wonder if we celebrated. I didn't want to let him down, even in the future.

I gave Wyatt a bath and fed him a snack of cheese and turkey, so I didn't feel completely awful with all the sugar I was about to give him. Also, since he was in his high chair, I had a chance to clean up and get the last-minute things ready. I had bought cute little hats, but I doubted any of the kids would wear them. My phone was fully charged for pictures and video.

I still had to hang the pinata outside. That was more for the older kids. I laughed, thinking about my little son with a big bat in his hands.

A birthday-themed cloth covered my table, and the juice boxes were chilled and ready. Little kid birthday parties were more for show than anything else. The kids

didn't care. They just wanted to play and have cake.

I didn't blame them. Sounded like a good time to me as well.

The guests would arrive soon. "Oh, the candles." I pulled out the one candle and realized I had a cake but not the smash cake.

He must've forgotten.

Oh, well. I would give Wyatt a piece of the large cake and call it a day. The baker had done enough.

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Gideon

I pulled into my driveway, confused, distraught, and beyond planning anything further than going into the house and drinking myself to sleep. I rarely touched alcohol, and shifters, particularly of the bear variety, had to imbibe quite a lot to feel anything, so I only hoped I had enough in the back of my kitchen cabinet to make it happen.

Usually, those bottles were used as flavorings for baking experiments, so they were mostly liquors and such, but I would make do and worry about the likely hangover from all that sweet alcohol tomorrow.

Surely finding out my mate had already chosen another was worth a pity party.

I turned to grab my hoodie from the back seat, and my gaze lit on a small blue box. Oh, hell no! I can't go back there and meet the male who stole my life.

They'd probably already cut the cake anyway, and it was too late for the smash cake. So, why was I putting the car in gear and backing out of the driveway? I pulled over to the curb to send a text to the omega and let him know I was on the way then realized he'd called on the shop landline, so his number wasn't in my cell.

It was, however, on the order taped to the top of the smash cake box. I typed, Just found the smash cake in my back seat. So sorry for the inconvenience, but I'll be there in a few minutes. He'd probably tell me not to bother, or that it was too late, but I had a duty to complete. They could always freeze the cake for a night when they wanted a special dessert if they didn't use it for the party.

I was driving again when a notification chime came, but I didn't want to take the time to pull over and check it. A red light offered the opportunity.

As I'd suspected, it said, Please don't go to any more trouble. The one you already brought was more than enough.

I didn't reply. Nor did I look too closely at why I really wanted to do this. Even if it hurt, I wanted to see my fated one more time. In this town, it was likely it would be more than once. And that would really be a problem.

Parking in the same spot I left not long before, I reached over the seat for the small cake box and tried to slow my heartbeat. And quiet my bear. We were going to see our mate for the second time, but that meant nothing since he belonged to someone else. Fated mates took precedence to chosen—if they were found first. I couldn't ever ask him to leave Wyatt's father. That little guy deserved the love and attention and secure home his two dads were providing for him. No, they didn't live in a fancy house, but what I saw past him as we stood in the doorway was a decent place with lots of cheerful decorations celebrating their son's very first birthday.

If I was going to be decent, I'd hand off the box as quickly as possible and run for it, never to return. Hopefully, he'd never come into the shop and I wouldn't run into him anywhere else in town. I could do my shopping elsewhere.

I rang the bell, and this time, the door opened much faster.

My omega—not my omega—stood there in front of me, wearing a friendly smile and a different set of clothing. Still casual, these jeans fitted him in a way I shouldn't be noticing, and the pale-blue polo was almost the same color as his eyes and my cake box. “You really didn't have to do this.”

“Oh, I did. Not only for you, but if I didn't deliver it, what would I do with a cake

that says Wyatt and has a number one on it? What are the odds I'd get another order like that before morning?"

"Not good?" he guessed.

"Nonexistent, I think." I tried not to stare at him, but I was drinking in a memory I'd have to consult whenever I was sad or lonely in the future. Fate had indeed given me a mate, even if that mate had chosen someone else before I found them. He wouldn't be the first to make that mistake. "I-I hope I'm not too late with this for the festivities." I could hear chattering of both adults and toddlers in the background, and see people moving around in the dining room off the living room. "I know it's a very important cake."

"It is that," he said. "But if you hadn't come, we'd have made do with the other one. My family didn't even do smash cakes, we just had a piece of cake to make a mess with. Judson, Wyatt's other dad, wanted to do that."

"I see. And you wanted to keep up that tradition for Wyatt."

"I guess. I'm not sure, but it suddenly seemed very important to have for him. And also, I had no cake at all because...well, it fell through."

"I guess I'd better just give this to you and let you get back to your guests. Tell Wyatt happy birthday again from me, and I hope he enjoys smashing the cake."

He wrinkled his nose, looking even more adorable. "Yeah, not looking forward to cleaning it up, but he'll have fun."

"Absolutely." I'd already stood here about four times longer than planned, and I was keeping this polite omega from his mate and others at the party. "I guess I'll go, then. Goodbye."

“Goodbye.” Kelly took the box from me, and I started to turn away but then he said,
“If you don’t have other plans, why not come in for the party?”

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Kelly

“Are you sure? I just came to bring the cake.”

Gideon was standing there while our guests chatted in the background. His green eyes flitted behind me. The party was in full swing. It would be rude not to invite him to stay. After all, he’d made the cakes last minute and came back to deliver the smash cake. A second trip deserved an invite, at the very least.

“I’m absolutely sure,” I said, nudging Wyatt higher up my hip. “Please, come in. It’s a small party but you are welcome.”

He looked at me and then Wyatt. “It’s been a while since I was invited to a party,” he said, almost grumpy. Goddess, grumpy was cute on him.

“You can’t say that anymore. Come on in.”

My modest furniture was fine with us. I wondered what he thought of it. With a successful and thriving bakery, he lived in a big house with fine things inside.

I really needed to find out if he was mated.

Then again, I didn’t.

This was hard.

“Everyone, you might already know Gideon, the baker who saved the day. Gideon

these are all of our new friends.”

Gideon waved but seemed a bit shy. Maybe he took a few minutes to warm up. I did that myself sometimes.

Several people walked up to him and began talking about his bakery and the cake. The smell of it filled the room with vanilla and sugar.

He smelled like a cake, and I wanted to eat him up.

No. Shit. No. I had to focus.

He smells so good because we belong to him. He’s our alpha. Make him stay.

“Should we go outside and let the kids play?” I asked everyone. There were only about ten people, including me and Gideon and Wyatt, but everyone was chatting and having a good time so far. One of my new friends was wearing one of the pointy hats that his son put on his head.

Dad life was silly sometimes.

“That’s so cute,” someone said.

“What is?” I asked. My thoughts were preoccupied with the bear who stayed on my flank. When I moved, he moved. When I walked, he walked. He was trying to stay near me, and I had to admit, I wasn’t sad about it. My deer was flipping out over his nearness.

“The pinata!” I hadn’t had time to put it up in the tree yet. It was in the shape of a car, and I’d filled it with treats the day before when Wyatt was napping.

“Oh, yeah. It is.”

“May I ask you something?” Gideon said. His voice dipped low, and my mind ran wild wondering what question couldn’t be asked louder. Wyatt got down to play with the other kids.

“Ask away.”

His green eyes met mine, entrancing me. His mouth moved, but I had no clue what words were coming out. Damn it. This man had me in a haze.

“What?” I asked, laughing.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I...it’s been a long day and you have really nice eyes.”

Gideon’s cheeks flushed. “Thank you. So do you. I asked you where Wyatt’s other father was, if that’s not too intrusive.”

It wasn’t. Everyone here knew about Judson. Some had asked; others, I’d offered up the information knowing they were wondering. At playdates, we could talk to other adults, sometimes our only chance all week.

“No. Not at all. He and I split up. Almost six months ago.”

Gideon nodded. “And he’s not coming today?”

I shook my head. Was he scoping things out? Wondering if I was single the way I was about him? “He’s not. He was invited but canceled at the last minute. And was supposed to bring the cake. No matter our situation, Wyatt needs to know his other

father, but he isn't coming."

"He's missing out. On you and Wyatt."

My turn to blush. "Thanks."

We stood side by side watching the kids play. All the parents talked to each other and Gideon joined in. He said he had lots of brothers and sisters so he knew a thing about taking care of little ones.

"How about I get that pinata strung up?" he asked, lightly touching my shoulder.

"That would be so nice. We have to hang it low for them."

He winked at me. Winked. My knees wobbled and my tummy tightened. "Of course."

Once the pinata was strung up, the parents helped with the swinging of the bat for the kids' safety and everyone else's. I'd picked up one of those little plastic bats, but it wasn't strong enough to make a dent.

"Mind if I help them out?" Quinn asked.

"Not at all. Rip it open," I replied.

Quinn opened the bottom of the pinata, and candy went everywhere. I'd provided cute bags to pick it up with, and the kids giggled while finding the candy strewn all over the yard.

Wyatt could've cared less.

Instead, he was tugging at Gideon's pant leg and pumping his fists open and shut. He

wanted Gideon to hold him, and I held my breath watching the scene unfold.

“Here, I’ll get him,” I said, not wanting to assume Gideon wanted to hold him.

“I’ve got him.” Gideon crouched down and lifted Wyatt up, and my heart turned to goo. Wyatt wrapped his arms around Gideon’s neck and laid his head on his shoulder. It had been a long day, and my fawn was already tired. We hadn’t even gotten to the smash cake yet.

If Judson hadn’t ruined me and my trust in alphas, I would’ve fallen for Gideon on the spot. I was afraid a small part of me already had. My deer wanted this male for his own.

I broke myself free of the building magic, rebelling against it. This wasn’t the right time, and I wasn’t in the headspace for this.

“Who’s up for cake?” I asked.

Everyone went inside, and Gideon walked over to me. “Did I make you upset? Picking him up?”

“No. Not at all.”

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Gideon

When the party ended, I stayed behind and helped clean up. Kelly looked so tired, I couldn't bear to see him have to do it all himself. Even a group the size of this one, especially with toddlers, managed to create a mess that could make a brave man cower in fear.

"Everyone had such a nice time, don't you think?" Kelly asked as he brought more sippy cups and silverware into the kitchen where I was buried up to my elbows in suds.

"Yes, and I overheard more than one dad saying so. Also, the fact that by the time they left, nearly all the kids were crashed out from fun."

"Even the birthday boy." He laughed. "Wyatt was one of the first to go down. Thank you so much for helping to make his birthday such a special day."

"I didn't do much," I protested. "It was fun to get to attend the party I made the cakes for once."

"And all the cleanup?"

He had no dishwasher, but I didn't mind handwashing at all. Once everything made its way in, I washed and he dried and put away. It was a nice, calm task to do together. "Part of the service." I dried my hands on a dish towel. "Okay, what's next?"

“I can finish.” He slid a tray into an upper cabinet then tried to stifle a yawn.
“Really.”

“So I see. How about I go run the vacuum and you wipe the counters?”

Like that, we moved from one job to the next, going over the events of the evening and generally having a pleasant conversation like— dare I even think it —an old married couple. My bear was humming inside me, content for the moment for this time spent with his mate. Even though he of course wanted more, he’d do anything just to be in his presence.

Wyatt was tucked into his crib, all the blue buttercream washed from his skin and hair. I was careful to use natural colorings as much as possible, in the case of blue; this involved things like blue spirulina and freeze-dried powdered blueberries. Natural, yes. Good-tasting, for sure. Stainproof...not at all. I’d found that used carefully, they didn’t take over the flavor of things like a good natural vanilla, as well.

What could have been a chore flew by all too fast, and then it was time for me to go home because staying any longer would have been rude. Kelly said the baby’s daddy and he were not together, but it wasn’t clear that it was final. Was he over the guy? Did he feel the attraction I did? Did his deer also cry mate for me?

Time to go.

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Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

The day after the party, I woke with Gideon on my mind. He'd been so kind the day before. Not only had he delivered that star-of-the-show cake to my door personally, but he'd stayed. He held my son, put up the pinata. He cleaned up beside me as though my house were his.

He hung out while I bathed Wyatt for the third time that day and put him to bed.

He listened as if he was actually interested in what I had to say.

It had been a long time since someone took such care with me. If ever.

I wanted to see him again. It wouldn't be weird for me to go into his shop for a treat. People did that all the time. It didn't mean I was scoping him out or trying to see him again, which I was.

Damn it, this was hard. On one hand, I shouldn't be looking or pursuing any kind of romantic relationship. I was still cold and scarred inside by Judson. It hadn't been that long since we split up. I had Wyatt as my priority.

I had to put him first.

Still, I wanted to do something to thank the big bear for all his help, and the only way I could think of doing that was by giving him some business.

After I fed Wyatt breakfast and we went to the park for a while, I made my way to the

bakery. My stomach fluttered with nerves as I approached the place and giggled to myself. This felt like I was going to see my crush.

Not crush. Mate. For life. Our alpha.

That wasn't the only thing my deer was communicating. He'd sent me visions of Gideon that were anything but PG. He had it bad. My deer didn't understand my hang-ups about it. In his mind, Gideon was our fated mate, and everything I had in my mind against it was petty details that could be worked out.

He thought the bear would be the perfect second father to our fawn. Someone to care for us—protect us. Give us all the love and time we'd needed from Judson but never received.

I stopped just shy of the shop's windows to get control of myself. In the reflection of the glass from the adjacent shop, I could see myself blushing and smiling like a fool. I didn't want to walk in and greet Gideon that way.

I didn't want him to get the wrong idea.

And yet, I really wanted to be right smack dab in the middle of that bad idea.

Ugh. I had to stop thinking that way.

“Wyatt, do you want a treat? I bet they have bear claws. Those are my favorite.” The irony wasn't lost on me.

We walked in and got in line. The place was busy with customers. The clean, crisp atmosphere was inviting. Pristine, but not in a cold way. Inviting. I wanted to pull up a chair and enjoy my treat here.

And, of course, before the pastries and cakes, my eyes landed on the man behind the counter. Gideon was certainly in his element. His apron was the absolute end of me. This was where he belonged. In this niche. Telling people the delicious details of his treats. Selling them with his smile and his zeal over his pastries. The woman at the counter was ready to hand over all her money. She was swooning.

I stayed in line, patiently waiting my turn. The bear was so focused on each customer that he didn't even realize I was there until I was face-to-face with him.

"Hi," I said. Yep, the blush was back.

"Kelly, it's good to see you again. What can I get for you?"

I was the last in line and everyone else had gone out, happy, with their treats in hand.

"I was hoping there were some bear claws? What else do you recommend?"

"One second." Gideon rushed to the back and returned with a tray of bear claws. "I had just put the icing and almonds on these before the rush. They are still warm."

"That's great. Thank you."

He nodded. "I have a peach cobbler danish too. It's a new item today. Would you like to try one?"

"It's new?" I asked.

"Yes. I was inspired this morning." He pulled out a danish from the case. It had baked, fresh peaches on top and a sprinkling of cinnamon and crystal sugar. "Here. On the house. I'd love to hear what you think about it."

Wyatt was in his stroller and, while I took a bite of the danish, Gideon came around

and crouched in front of my fawn and spoke to him and me.

“Oh, it’s delicious, Gideon,” I said, moaning. Goddess, how embarrassing.

“I’m so pleased you like it. What about Wyatt? What would he like?”

I scanned the case. I wanted to get Wyatt something, but he hit his threshold of sugar for the month the day before. “I don’t know.”

“How about a fruit cup? I make them up daily in case someone wants a healthier choice. There are some cubes of angel food cake, but that’s it.”

“That would be great but...” I hated this part. I should be able to provide a small treat for my child. “I am on a bit of a budget.”

Gideon rose up to his full height. “It’s on the house. I’m glad you two came. How about we sit together and enjoy a break?”

“Are you sure? There might be another rush.”

“I’m sure.”

We sat at a table, and Gideon brought over another danish for himself and my bear claw, along with a fruit cup and spoon for Wyatt. “Thank you. And thank you for all your help yesterday.”

“You’re welcome. I’m happy you came today. I was actually planning on calling you tonight.”

That took me by surprise. My heart fluttered. “You were?”

“Yes. But since you’re here, I can ask you in person. Would you like to go out on a date with me, omega?”

Omega. The word fell from his mouth like warm honey. Sweet. Inviting. Dangerously sexy.

I said nothing for a moment. I wanted to say yes, and my deer was already celebrating inside me.

No. I couldn’t be hurt again. And I wouldn’t bring another male into my life who would bond with Wyatt only to leave us again.

“I can’t,” I said and got up so fast I knocked the chair over and almost fell down.

Gideon shot out of his chair and caught my arm, stopping me from making an even bigger idiot of myself. “I see,” he said, and my heart broke. He sounded so disappointed.

“I have to go.”

Wyatt and I were out of there in seconds, and almost instantly the regret sank in. I told myself the decision was the right one for me and my son but, that night, as I lay awake in bed, alone, I wondered if that was true.

Gideon

Why did I have to be so pushy?

We were having a nice conversation, and he was enjoying my pastries, and I had to go and ruin everything. After leaving his home the night before, I couldn't get Kelly out of my mind. A bear waited his whole life to meet his mate, and I'd never done anything harder than walk away after helping him clean up after the party.

His scent, the brightness of ripe summer peaches, remained in my nose, bringing forth an image of his face every time I closed my eyes. He'd been so lively, leading the games and handing out slices of cake. All the children loved him, but especially Wyatt who watched him with such adoration. He'd mentioned wanting the other father to be part of the little guy's life, but did that mean that he would welcome him back into his own?

Or was he never entirely out? Couples had trouble and broke up and still, especially where children were involved, they managed to find a way to get back together. From his reaction to my invitation, either he wanted to try to make that work, or he wasn't interested in me like that.

My bear was so sure he was our mate, and I shared that feeling, but did that mean Kelly would feel the same? Could one person think they were fated and the other completely disagree?

I finally fell asleep sometime after midnight, but I woke up a couple of hours later with an idea for a danish I hadn't made before.

There was nothing for it but to get right down to the bakery and start the day's baking. I wasn't likely to get any more sleep now. Plus, I was excited about the danish. At the start of summer, everyone was looking for flavors that mirrored the season. In fact, I'd just gotten a case of peaches from one of the orchards outside of town the day before and had been trying to decide what to make with them. I would do a fresh peach pie, of course, with mountains of fluffy whipped cream, and turnovers. Muffins with that crumbly topping that Anisette said everyone liked so much.

And peach danish. It was practically a festival of the fruit. I could even get her to make a sign for the window. I had spent the predawn hours baking so many peach pastries and desserts, the bakery had the scent of my mate, which was less soothing than I might have anticipated. Rather, it kept him in the forefront of my mind.

By the time Anisette arrived, I had the racks filled with at least double what I usually baked in a day. "Are we expecting a crowd?" she asked, filling her mug from the coffee urn. "It smells incredible in here. Like summertime."

"That's exactly what I was going for. I'm glad you think I achieved it." At least, if I never had a mate, I could enjoy my work. "Before you fill the cases out front, maybe you could make a sign letting people know we are featuring peaches today? I have overdone things a bit."

Anisette leaned close to the danish and sniffed. "The danish smells heavenly."

"Please take one and let me know if you like it. If it's good, we can probably continue to serve it for a month or so until peaches start to go out of season."

"All right!" Anisette picked up one of the pastries and set it on a small plate. "Ohhh, it's still warm." She carried the plate and her mug to the kitchen island and climbed up on a stool. "It's going to be a big hit."

“You haven’t even had a bite yet,” I protested.

“That’s true.” She opened her mouth and took a big bite. Chewed. Swallowed. Stayed silent.

“Anisette?” Nerves made my voice twitch. “Aren’t you going to tell me what you think?”

“No because it will go to your head.” She took another bite and groaned. Enough said.

By opening time, my assistant had filled the cases nearly to bursting, and there were a half dozen people waiting for us to open, and I was grateful to have finished all the baking early. My help was needed at the front counter. Which we refilled over and over again.

And then I learned something. The peach scent currently hanging in the air, as fragrant and delicious as it might be, had nothing on the inspiration. Because when Kelly entered with Wyatt, his scent was three times as nice.

He ordered a bear claw, but I wanted him to try the danish he’d inspired—not that I could tell him so—and to give Wyatt one of my little fruit cups. They were always made from what was fresh in season, if possible, so today’s included strawberries, blackberries, and some luscious chunks of peach. They also had just a few cubes of angel food cake, and people watching their diet and/or their sugar intake loved them.

I was so excited to see him that I allowed my emotions to take over and before I knew it, I’d let my guard down and asked Kelly on a date. I knew better—I’d warned myself not to do something like that unless he showed a sign that he might welcome my advances.

Which he had not. He'd merely stopped by to thank me again and buy pastry.

But...I did it anyway, and he was out of the shop like a shot, not even giving me a chance to apologize for overstepping.

I didn't know how I made it through the day, kicking myself over and over until I got home. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer and picked up the phone. He wasn't interested in me as a mate, but he did need a friend.

And I could put my own desires aside and be just that.

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

In that sacred space between awake and sleep, my ringing phone jolted me up to sitting. No one called this late, except maybe my parents and only in an emergency. We didn't have a close relationship. I doubted they even knew how old Wyatt was.

I picked up my phone and saw the number I'd saved in my contacts. Bearly Baked. It was late, so why was Gideon calling me at this hour?

"Hello?" I asked, realizing my voice was groggy.

"I'm so sorry, Kelly. Did I wake you?"

I cleared my throat. "No. I was almost asleep though. Is something wrong?"

"No. I couldn't go to sleep without talking to you."

I leaned against the headboard, wishing the circumstances were different. If I was a different omega. If I hadn't been hurt before.

"Okay. Talk."

He chuckled low and deep. I closed my eyes, imagining he was next to me. That laugh would certainly make my body come to life. His lips would graze mine. It would be the beginning of a night of lovemaking and bliss.

"I wanted to apologize for being so forward today. I realize you're just out of a

relationship and you've got Wyatt to think about. That was wrong of me."

"No," I protested almost before he ended his sentence. "I was flattered. I really was. But yes, I have Wyatt to think about."

"That's why I have another proposition."

"Go on."

Another chuckle. This time lower and even sexier. "How about a friendship? I really like being around you and Wyatt, and I could use a friend."

"You can never have too many in my opinion."

Gideon sighed. "I think that's true as well. Thank you for giving me a chance. So, friend, how about lunch this week? There are so many fantastic places to eat in Oliver Creek. I have this Saturday off. Would that be good for you?"

"Can I bring Wyatt?" I asked. I couldn't afford a sitter, and the daily drop-off rate for the daycare center was a bit much.

"Please do. He's always welcome as far as I'm concerned."

"I would love to, then. Meet you at the bakery at noon?"

"Sounds perfect. Good night, Kelly."

"Good night, Gideon."

I hung up the phone, but there was no way in hell I could sleep after that conversation. It somehow made my deer fall even deeper for the alpha. I'd turned him

down for a date but he still wanted to hang out with me as a friend and with Wyatt?

He couldn't be more endearing if he tried.

I got out of bed and made myself a cup of tea. I hoped Gideon was able to sleep tonight. Running the bakery and then making cakes must've been hard work. Running a business was hard work.

And this hardworking, sexy, handsome man was making time for me. As a friend, of course, but the gesture and the meaning behind it struck me right in my heart.

I would have a hard time not falling in love with him, but I would try.

Tea in hand, I went to the living room and tackled the pile of laundry waiting for me. It was a chore, but I loved folding the little shorts and shirts my son wore. I would have to go to the thrift store in town soon. He was growing like a fertilized weed, and the T-shirts were becoming crop tops by the day.

After the folding was tackled, I cleaned up, trying to rid myself of the chains of overthinking. I checked my bank account.

Goddess, I needed to find a job and quickly. I had enough for us to make it on meager means for about three to four more months, but that was it. I had nothing else to fall back on.

Something would come up, I told myself. It had to.

I could ask Judson for child support, but he would string the whole thing with a legal mess and trouble and threats. He loved to threaten me. Keep me scared. Because scared equaled control, and my ex mate loved nothing more than to be in control.

I'd rather work two jobs than to ask him for a dime.

Despite the two cups of sleepy tea, I was wide awake. I tried a hot shower but as I lay in bed, the only thing I could think of were my troubles and Gideon. He was one of the troubles.

I couldn't let my heart get broken again. I was still picking up some of the pieces from Judson.

Gideon wouldn't break my heart; I was sure of it. He was so kind and observant. He saw that I didn't want to give Wyatt more sugar. He picked up on little cues no one else would ever notice.

Even so, there was a speck of doubt inside me.

I had to figure out my life before I involved anyone else.

My deer didn't like the idea of keeping Gideon as a friend, but he was also happy I didn't dismiss him altogether. This way, we would get to spend time with him.

This way, my heart wasn't on the line.

I groaned, rolling over to bury my face in the pillow.

Who was I kidding? I wanted Gideon. A part of me needed him in my life.

Damn this human mind of mine. Debating. Changing opinions. Flipping from one thing to another.

If only I could let my deer take the lead and lean in to Gideon. Let him ease all the doubts I had and take up the life I deserved. Happy. With a fated mate.

If only.

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

The morning of our date, not a date, Wyatt had a playdate at the library. My son loved books and had never really taken to TV and I was glad for it. The library days were his favorite. Some of the other kids walked around and did their own thing while the story was read aloud, but my fawn sat still, staring, in awe.

“Got any plans today?” one of the other dads asked me.

“I have lunch with a friend. The PBJ place?”

“That place is great. Has Wyatt had peanut butter before?”

I nodded. “He has. Our healer advised me to give him some pretty early right there in his office. And then I give him some about twice a week. All good. How about your cub?”

We got into a conversation about allergies and shifters. Of course, the shifter part was in hushed tones because there were humans present. A lot of humans in Oliver Creek knew about shifters, but in my experience, you could never be too careful.

“So who is the friend? Is that too nosey?” he asked.

“Not at all. It’s Gideon. He owns Bearly Baked?”

Jason groaned. “That place is sinful, and I’m happily and well mated, but Gideon...” He fanned himself. “That man is sex on a stick. I’m surprised he is still single.”

Jason didn't mean anything by it, but a bit of jealousy rose up in me. My shifter animal wasn't an angry one—not a predator. Still, I was upset.

Jason put his hand on mine. "I meant no offense. You said he was a friend."

"He is."

My newest pal smiled. "Are you sure? That's not the reaction of a friend. Maybe I should mind my own business."

I sighed. "No, you're right. There's a part of me that knows he won't stay in that space forever."

"Ah. And your...other half, your deer?"

Laughing, I shook my head. Jason was very insightful. "Pretty much the same thing you said about Gideon but more."

"They are very loud when it comes to mates and Fate, aren't they? That's the thing about Fate though. Once she speaks, there's no shutting her up."

"That's true."

Storytime was soon over and I had only two hours before our date/not date.

I had gone online to look at the restaurant's menu. They had every kind of nut butter, jam and jelly, and baked breads. There were so many options, I thought I might lean on Gideon's opinion to choose.

Wyatt went down for an early nap and, while I liked to keep him on schedule, this time it was welcomed. It gave me time to shower and select an outfit.

I wanted to look nice but also, this was a friendly date.

Oh, man, I had it bad. I was constantly in opposition to what my animal insisted on, and being in conflict with his beast was the last thing a shifter needed. He demanded Gideon. I wanted to be healed before I even thought about another alpha in my life.

I finally decided on a pair of navy shorts and a navy-and-white striped button-down shirt. I rolled up the sleeves. Not too casual. Not too dressed up.

Instead of sitting and waiting for the time to leave, I walked around the house picking up toys, trying to focus on the task at hand instead of on Gideon. His charm. His sexy smile. The way everything he baked was perfect.

Then I decided to wallow in the thoughts instead of denying them. What kind of alpha Gideon would be. I would bet he didn't have to be asked for the bare minimum. He seemed like someone who loved affection and didn't mind a little PDA. Judson didn't want to hold hands or kiss in public. He said those things were for behind closed doors.

Also, behind closed doors was where he demeaned me and was downright nasty and mean. His touch rarely held any affection—especially toward the end.

Gideon would never behave like that.

Goddess, maybe he was mine. The PBJ place was about four blocks into town and the walk would be good for the both of us, but we would stop by the bakery to pick up our date/non-date first. Despite the friendship agreement, my stomach was buzzing with excitement.

Wyatt liked Gideon too. He'd gone to him at the party, wanting to be held.

I would bet his embrace was as warm as his personality.

With Wyatt in his stroller, we walked out into the glaring spring sunshine. Along the way to the bakery, we were greeted by everyone we passed with a smile or a simple wave. That was Oliver Creek, I'd soon found. Everyone was nice. A place right out of a painting. When we turned the corner and were only a block away from the bakery, I saw Gideon step outside. He checked his watch and then glanced down the block in my direction.

I stopped in my tracks.

My whole body flared to life, and even Wyatt let out a giggle of glee.

I could call this friendship, but the truth was, I was already hooked on the baking bear.

Gideon

I was veering into a broken heart. No question that trying to be friends with the omega Fate destined to be my mate would be a greater challenge than any I'd ever faced. My previous business life, selling everything and going to pastry school then opening this bakery were child's play in comparison.

The party had gone pretty well. Very well, actually, with Kelly making sure all his guests had a great time from the dads to the little ones, and all the chaos and fun had kept me on track to help out without thinking too much about anything but pinatas and upside-down paper plates getting frosting on the rug. Considering the house was small, it had a respectable-size backyard, allowing the children to run around and have a great time.

Once everyone was gone, the voice of my bear was loud and clear. He was ready to declare ourselves and bring our omega and his fawn to our house to live that night. I knew shifters who met their fated and started their life instantly like that. But they generally were not subject to the complications of my omega. If the alpha father wanted to come back into their life, would he allow it? He'd made the fact that he wanted his son to have access to him as well.

Friendship might not be an easy path, but it was the only one not marked with Road Closed signs, at least for now. And as an alpha, my job was to put my omega's needs and those of his fawn before mine. He'd said no in quite a dramatic way to my request for a date, and therefore I had to accept his decision.

I'd never considered that I might meet my mate and be the alpha who helped them

without being their mate. I'd have had a hard time believing it. But here I stood.

"Everything should be done," I told Anisette, going over my list of items for the day, "and, of course, you can take special orders, but not for today."

"We never take same-day orders," she said, eyeing me curiously. "Except for that one the other day. We aren't changing our policy, are we?"

"No." What chaos that would be. "But there may be other exceptions. Hopefully not many."

"Gotcha." She sprayed the vinegar and water solution with a few drops of dishwashing soap on the top of the glass display case and wiped it clean of fingerprints and crumbs. "No worries, boss. Enjoy your afternoon off."

"I will." I peeked out the door, but my—the —omega was nowhere in sight. "Let me know if you get any particular requests."

"The peach day was huge. I think people are liking items made from fresh summer fruits."

"Agreed." I looked again. Nothing. Was it possible he'd change his mind and not come? "I'll check with some of the farmers and see what's coming in."

"Mm-hmm." She disappeared into the kitchen with her spray bottle and rag. "Aren't you leaving?"

"In a minute. I'm waiting for a friend to go to lunch."

She returned and took up her place behind the case. "That's good. You don't socialize enough. Maybe it's time you found someone to date?"

I gave the young one my fiercest frown. “For all you know, I have a date with someone different every night of the week.”

“Do you?”

“No,” I blurted before clamping my lips closed.

“There’s an app for that, you know.”

I stepped outside and spotted Kelly pushing Wyatt in his stroller. Just in time. “I’m out of here. The subject of my personal life is officially closed.”

Before she said anything else, I started off down the sidewalk, my steps light as I closed the distance between me, the sexy omega, and the giggling toddler who held his arms out to me.

“Hi, Gideon,” Kelly said as I bent down to boop Wyatt’s cute little nose. “I hope we’re not late.”

“I don’t think so. I didn’t look at the clock when I came out. Ready for lunch?”

We strolled off down the street toward the PBJ place. Most of the town was walking distance from my bakery, including this fun sandwich shop. “I hope you like this place. We can go somewhere else if you’d rather.”

“Oh no.” Kelly flashed me a grin that lit up his blue eyes like the ocean in sunlight. “I looked up their menu, and my only problem is going to be choosing which sandwich to order. It’s amazing how they can make a whole restaurant around nut butters and specialty breads and jams.”

“It’s more of a challenge than you realize. Tanner set it up before he met Godric, his

mate, and they came very close to closing it.”

“Why is that?” Kelly turned the corner, the stroller wheels squeaking a little on the sidewalk. “It has incredible reviews online.”

“The quality was never at issue.” I held the door open, and Kelly pushed Wyatt in.

“Gideon, are you telling tales out of school about us?” The man who approached was tall with a scruff covering his jaw. He held out a hand to me and then looked at Kelly. “I don’t think I’ve seen you in here before. I’m Tanner.”

Kelly also shook his hand. “It’s my first time, but I’m really excited to be here. Gideon just said you almost closed once, though?”

“Ah, yes. He’s referring to my mate’s allergies. They are very serious, but we found a way to make it work. I see you have a little guy. Is he all right around nuts?”

“Absolutely. At least all the ones he’s tried. Thank you for asking. It must have been difficult for you and your mate.”

“True. But we’re good. We have some items that are very popular with the younger crowd to suggest as well.” Tanner led us toward a table on the patio. “You’ll want to sit outdoors on such a beautiful day.”

Soon we were sipping iced fruit juice and waiting for our meals. Friendship wasn’t so bad after all.

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

Gideon and I spent the lunch date talking about everything. Parents. Families. His eyes shimmered when he talked about working for himself and making his own hours and decisions after some years of working for someone else.

He had a dream job as far as I was concerned. Baking goodies all day. Making people smile. Watching as they enjoyed your baked goods. Seeing a father's face as they see their child's birthday cake. Making anniversaries and retirements and every occasion special with just the right cakes and cupcakes.

He positively glowed talking about it.

Unfortunately for me, that only made him ten times more attractive.

My resolve to stay his friend and focus on my son and my son alone had crumbled a bit over my blackberry jam and cashew butter on a croissant.

Wyatt had some of their almond butter protein balls and somehow managed to get more into his mouth than on his hands. A small miracle for this daddy.

My heart sank as I realized that we'd been at the restaurant for over two hours. It was time to end the date, but all I wanted was to invite Gideon home with me and see where things went.

We parted ways at the bakery where, despite it being his afternoon off, he wanted to check in on some things. Small business owners rarely got a break, he'd said.

Wyatt and I took advantage of the park and then walked home. It was when I went home and gave Wyatt a bath that I heard a noise from the kitchen. The water pressure in the bath was low as well.

“You’re getting a quickie shower tonight, little one. I think something’s going on with the water.”

With Wyatt dried off and in jammies, I walked around with him on my hip to find the origin of the noise. And when I entered the kitchen, I nearly slipped and busted both our butts on the puddle on the floor. I busied Wyatt with a snack in his high chair while I looked under the sink and found one of our pipes had burst. Water was everywhere. Why hadn’t I checked sooner?

“I don’t have money for a plumber. A bucket!” I put a mop bucket under the pipe, but it was only a temporary fix for a problem that would only get bigger if I didn’t take care of it.

I was standing there, towels all over the floor, when Gideon popped into my mind. I would bet anything he knew exactly what to do.

“Kelly?” Gideon answered. “I didn’t expect for you to call so soon. But I’m glad you did. I had a nice time today.”

“Me too, and I wish I was calling about that, but I have a broken pipe in my kitchen and I don’t know what to do.” I hated admitting what a failure I was. “I don’t have the money for a plumber.”

“I’ll be there in five minutes.”

“But…”

“But what? That’s why you called me, right? I have some experience with plumbing. Let me help you, omega. I don’t mind.”

I sighed, melted by his calling me omega and relieved beyond words by his offer. “Okay. Thank you.”

Wyatt kicked his legs while I tried to get most of the water from the floor. I was mopping my heart out when Gideon knocked on the door. I opened it to see him with a toolbox in his hands.

He frowned at my wet pants. “You’re okay? You didn’t slip and fall, did you? Wyatt?”

The fact that he asked about me and my son? Yeah, I was a goner.

“We’re okay. Thank you for coming.”

Gideon went right to work after tickling Wyatt’s feet a little bit. In no time, he’d swapped out the pipe, and we spent the next hour cleaning up and getting everything dry.

“You keep some pipes in your toolbox?” I laughed.

“No, but I put some in there from the bakery. I keep some on hand just in case. Plumbing issues will ruin a lot of things fast.”

“Well, thank you. We really appreciate it. I really appreciate you.”

Gideon rubbed the back of his neck. “Careful, Kelly, or I might say something not safe for friend zone. Helping you is something I would set aside everything else for.”

“Be careful yourself. Would you let me thank you with a bite to eat? I was planning on breakfast for dinner. Wyatt was about to go down for the night. He’s off his schedule today, and he just had a snack, so he is filled up.”

“That sounds really good. Do you want to put him to bed and I’ll wait here?”

I nodded. “He goes to sleep on his own, so I’ll be back in just a second.”

When I got Wyatt out of his high chair, he reached for Gideon again. Gideon rubbed his back a little and told him good night. That seemed to be enough for him, and soon I was putting him in his crib for the night.

Now to make dinner for my alpha. The alpha. Gideon. My friend.

This was harder than it seemed.

It only took about twenty minutes to whip up pancakes, eggs, and sausage as well as a quick blueberry compote. We sat across from each other and dug in. Gideon must’ve been hungry.

Perhaps I’d interrupted his dinner.

“I hope I didn’t keep you from anything you had planned tonight,” I said.

“Not at all. I usually read a bit before going to bed so I can be up before the sun. Kind of a boring bear, huh?”

I shrugged. “Not at all. You work so hard during the day.”

“I try.”

We finished the meal and washed dishes side by side. He washed and I dried, just like after the party, even though I protested him doing anything at all. We continued talking into the night until I realized what time it was. “I’ve kept you up so late. I’m sorry.”

Gideon yawned and stretched his built arms over his head. “That’s okay, but I’m dead on my feet. I’ve still got to walk home.”

“How about you crash on the couch?” The question burst from my mouth before I could stop it. I was certain my deer had something to do with it.

“That would be great. Are you sure?”

I nodded. “I’m sure. Let me get you some blankets.”

Gideon

My bear still wanted this little family safely in our den, but he was glad to be close to our omega—just a few yards away. Kelly piled pillows at one end of the couch and spread two blankets over the rest. “I should get you sheets,” he said, spinning on a heel to head back to the bedroom.

I grabbed for his arm, bringing him to a halt. “I don’t need anything more. You’ve already made me a nice bed, and now you need to go to yours. You’ve had a busy day.”

He chuckled. “That’s what I say to Wyatt, but you’re right. I need to thank you again for helping me with the pipe. It was above and beyond the call of friendship.”

I cleared my throat, wanting to say things I had promised myself and him I would not. “It was no trouble. I can show you how to do it, but it’s mostly a matter of having the right tools. And since those are also expensive, until you have them, consider me at your service.”

He blinked suspiciously shiny eyes. “You’re far too nice. And I’ll try not to bother you too much.”

“As if you could.” I squeezed his arm then released it. “Good night, omega.”

“Good night, alpha.” He went in the bedroom and closed the door then opened it a few inches.

He had a monitor so he could hear Wyatt. I liked to think he left the door open to be closer to me. Even if I was kidding myself, it made me feel cozy, and my bear liked the idea that we slept between him and the front door, the scary outside world.

He was a protective fella my bear.

I expected to lie awake, curled up on the shorter-than-optimum sofa, but it had been a long day for me, too, so no sooner did my head hit the pillow than my eyes fluttered closed and I drifted off to sleep.

A banging on the door woke me from a dream of a possible future with my fated mate, a future where we lived together with Wyatt and another little one in bliss. And to say I was displeased at that dream being shattered was an understatement.

Kicking off the blankets, I marched barefooted to the door and yanked it open. “Do you have any idea what time it is?” I demanded. Not that I knew the hour, but the sun was barely kissing the horizon, meaning, in baker’s time, it was late instead of early. But there was no reason for my omega, my friend to be disturbed. Or Wyatt. They both needed their rest.

“Who the hell are you?” The male at the door was burly for a deer shifter, but I had no need to ask him the question in return. Or to tell him my name or status.

“If you are here to see Kelly, please return at a reasonable hour, and preferably after receiving an invitation.”

I moved to close the door, but he put a foot out, and the only way I could shut it was by crushing his bones. It sounded good to my bear but was likely to cause Kelly more trouble in the long run, so I opened it again and stared at him. “Did you want to leave a message?”

“I want to come in and speak to my omega.”

“Pardon?” Nothing Kelly had said gave me the impression he had the right to call him that. “Your omega? I was told you have been separated for six months.”

“How is that your business? Where is my son?” What a ridiculous question—where should Wyatt be in the early morning hours but in bed.

“Also, you’re suddenly very concerned about them when you couldn’t even be bothered to show up for your son’s birthday party. His first birthday. So, instead you show up now, at an inappropriate time.” I leaned in and sniffed him. “And reeking of alcohol. Why would you think that’s all right?”

“I have a right to see my child.” He huffed and puffed and tried to look bigger than he was, tougher, but I wasn’t buying it. And I’d be damned if he’d show up drunk and get anywhere near the fawn.

“Yes, you do. When you are sober and when you are expected. Like...the party would have been nice.” I moved forward, pushing him out onto the porch and followed, shutting the door firmly behind us. I kept him going until he stood on the walkway. “I understand you haven’t seen Wyatt in months. Is that true?”

“What of it? I’ve been busy...and my new omega doesn’t want me hanging out over here.”

“Huh. You are choosing someone else over Wyatt, then.”

“It’s not like that. My omega is pregnant, too, and I don’t have time to...” He put his hands on his hips leaning in to me, but I didn’t back off. “They don’t like me coming here.”

How pathetic. “Judson, I can’t fix this for you, but you’re missing out on a great kid. I hope you’ll be able to resolve it, but let me reiterate. If you want to see your son, call first, and show up sober. And for the gods’ sake, work it out with your new family because the one you left doesn’t deserve to be caught up in your new mess.”

Kelly came out then, arms crossed on his chest and stood on the top step, making him taller than his former alpha. “Judson, go and fix your life. I can’t handle raising Wyatt and dealing with you in this state.”

The alpha deer’s mouth moved for a good moment before he said, “Maybe I just won’t come back.”

“That’s up to you. But right this minute, I’m going in and make sure you haven’t awakened my son. Goodbye.”

“You really don’t care?”

“Not at all.” Kelly went back inside, and his former alpha stared at the door.

“You never told me who you are,” he said.

“No, I didn’t.”

Let him think what he wanted because it was none of his business. If he ever reached a place where he could play an active role in his son’s life, then Kelly would decide what that might be. I hoped that he would be a better mate and father to his new family than he had been to the first one.

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

I'm on a date with the sexiest bear in town. And he smells like cake. Mouthwatering. Irresistible. Magnetic.

"I resisted everything about you, but here we are, going on a date."

Gideon chuckled and laved his fingers through mine. I gasped at the impact of the skin-on-skin contact. "Isn't this better than pretending we only wanted to be friends?"

I shook my head. This bear, my bear never minced words. "So much better."

We arrived at a fancy restaurant near the edge of town. I'd heard they served wine made by a tiger shifter, but I had to see for myself. When Gideon suggested this place, I jumped at the chance. Jason and his mate were babysitting my Wyatt for the night. It was the first time I'd ever hired a babysitter, but a first date with my mate was a good reason for a night out without my son.

We were seated at an intimate table lit by a candle inside a glass lantern. While we waited for our wine, Gideon moved his chair closer and took my hand in his again. "When did you know?" he asked. "When did you first know that I was yours?"

My blush couldn't be contained. "When you showed up at my house with the cake. The first cake."

He smiled, flashing deep dimples I hadn't noticed before. He was full of surprises in the best way possible. "That was the moment for me as well. Then I walked off like a

dufus and forgot the smash cake. I was lovestruck from the beginning, sweet deer.”

“I’m sorry I took so long.”

“Don’t be. I know now that you had to see the end of some things before you were ready to be with me. For the record, I would’ve waited a decade, even a century, for you.”

“Thank you for waiting for me. I feel so much freer now that everything is done and settled. He had such a hold on me.”

Gideon nodded. We ordered our food and, when it arrived, well, it almost rivaled the scent of my mate. This was dinner, but I was more than sure he was my dessert.

“Bad people often do. And you will always have some tie to him because of Wyatt, but he will be out of our lives as much as possible from now on. I don’t know half of what he did to you and I invite you to share those things with me as time goes on, but I would never treat you that way, Kelly. I would never betray you or treat you as anything but the most precious gift of my life. You are everything to me. I hope you know that.”

“I don’t think he’ll be around at all.” I nodded. “You’re making me cry over my steak.”

My mate chuckled. “Let’s not do that. Let’s talk about the future. About us.”

“That sounds good.”

That night, we talked about everything. Gideon wanted kids. Of course he did. His nurturing nature screamed future papa in the making. He also hinted at Wyatt and I moving in with him. He’d bought a bigger house when he moved to Oliver Creek in

hopes of one day having a family.

I told him about wanting to find a job, and while Gideon was certain he could provide for our family, I never wanted to be financially dependent on another person. He respected that.

“How about we get out of here. I have an idea.”

“That sounds...intriguing.”

Gideon rubbed his thumb across my cheek. “Sweet omega, it’s not what you think, but my bear is dying to see your beautiful deer. We need them on board as well.”

“You want to run?” I asked on our way to his truck.

“I do. Let our animals bond a little?”

I absolutely agreed.

My alpha took us out to a field beyond the county line and assured me that no one else would be there. He wasn’t shy about taking off his clothes but was a gentleman and turned so I could take mine off, but I swore I saw him peek over his shoulder. Naughty alpha.

“Me first?” I asked.

“Yes, please.”

I let go and my deer took over our shared consciousness. He was more than ready to preen in front of his alpha, showing off his fur and bushy tail.

“Look at you. Come over here and see your alpha, sweet one.”

We walked over to him and waited. He ran his fingertips through our thick but short fur and whispered all kinds of loving compliments.

“Time for my bear. Don’t be afraid. He’s big, but remember, we would never hurt you. Not in a million years.”

My deer stepped back so he could complete his transformation and boy, he wasn’t joking about the size part. Gideon’s bear was huge. Brown, almost-amber fur. A huge mouth and sharp teeth. Equally sharp claws. Hind legs as big as my whole body.

Run with me, omega. Let’s let these two fall in love.

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Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Gideon

Our shifting together was the final piece of the puzzle. My bear was head over heels in love with the omega and his deer, romping along next to the graceful creature for a good hour before we returned to where we started and shifted back. This time, I didn't hide my observation of Kelly's naked form. He was nothing like a bear, lean, with long limbs and a trim waist, the human version of his elegant deer.

I reached out, running a finger down his chest to his groin. "Will you come home with me?"

"I can't stay all night," he replied.

"Understood. Would you rather we go to your house? Relieve the sitter then...see where the night takes us?" I wanted this male more than anything, and if he was willing to let me hold him in my arms, I didn't care where it was. As long as he was comfortable.

"No," he said slowly. "I think for this first time together we'd better go to yours. I might be loud."

He looked so aggrieved, telling me he might rattle the chandeliers or something, that I was flattered but also did not want to waste a single moment of our time together. The sitter wouldn't wait all night. Or they might, but if so, they would charge the moon. And Kelly wasn't going to allow me to pay for it.

"Come on." I bent to gather my clothes and put them on. "I have some snacks at

home, and I'm always starving after a run."

"That's not the hunger I want to satisfy tonight," he said, buttoning up his shirt. "That is, if you want...if you are ready to mate me?"

His scent bloomed, making the air around us smell like a peach orchard. I could barely draw enough breath to reply, but he was waiting and looking so vulnerable. "I'm more than ready." Reaching out, I took his hand and drew him toward where the car was parked. "Let me show you how much I want you."

The only reason I kept to the speed limit was because my bear did not want to take any chances with my mate's safety, but it seemed to take forever to get to my home. I parked in the driveway and came around to open his door and help him out. He melted into my arms, face tilted up for a kiss, which I was more than happy to give him.

But I was also aware of our time limits and my intense desire, so as soon as we parted for breath, I guided him up to the porch and inside the house. From that moment, however, there was no more restraint on either of our parts. We undressed one another with speed and slightly sloppy efficiency on our way through the living room and up the stairs. Our clothes would have to be gathered in the morning because I was not going to take the time to do it now. His skin was coarse satin under my questing hands, his hips firm, his cock sparring with mine. My bedroom was, fortunately, the first door at the top of the stairs, and I guided him inside, kissing and caressing him the whole way to the bed. I pressed him down onto the mattress and followed, kneeling between his legs and looking up his body to take in his dreamy-eyed expression before closing my fist around his shaft to bring his cock to my lips. "You look so handsome, omega. I don't know why Fate or the Goddess or both decided I deserve you, but I'm going to do everything in my power to make it so."

He whimpered when I licked the crystal drop of precum from his head before closing

my lips around it. “Alpha, so good.” He buried his fingers in my hair, clinging to the short strands. “Oh yes, you deserve me, but do I deserve you?”

My mouth was too full to say anything, but I redoubled my efforts to prove to him how high he stood in my esteem, head bobbing up and down, lips and tongue working the mushroom cap with its flare. Faster and faster, I sucked him in, until he was shaking and crying out my name then spurting his cum down my throat.

I rose to my feet, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand. He watched me, raising his knees to his chest and exposing his needy hole to my cock. I reached between us, gliding a finger through his slick. So much slick. I fitted my cock to the ring of muscles and gave a push, watching his reactions as I pulled back and pushed in again. He was tight, but the copious slick made it possible for me to thrust past and inside him, pausing to allow him to adjust before driving onward, my eyes fluttering closed with the sheer pleasure of his sheath gloving me.

Kelly murmured words I could barely make out in my head fog, but they were sweet sounding and breathless, mirroring my own feelings. And then my balls tightened, too soon, but there was no holding back. I spurted into his hot, tight hole, my knot swelling almost instantly.

With my knees wobbling and my heart hammering, I eased down onto the bed, holding him tight. He let his head fall to the side, and I didn’t need another invitation to sink my teeth into his flesh and mark my omega as mine.

We held one another long after my knot subsided, but not nearly long enough because he had a babysitter waiting. We were in the car far too soon, but while I drove, he placed a hand on my arm. “Alpha, would you like to stay at my place?”

“Sleep over?” I flicked a glance at him. “On the couch?”

“Never again,” he said. “My mate sleeps in my bed.”

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

Scrambled eggs was Wyatt's choice of breakfast nine times out of ten, but as I cracked the eggs into the pan swirled with butter, my stomach turned, and I had to breathe through my mouth to get the cooking done.

What was wrong with me? I made him eggs nearly every morning. There was nothing different about this one.

I ignored this, as well as the almost-persistent nausea I'd been feeling of late, and pulled the bacon and a sweet potato from the oven. I didn't like feeding Wyatt all the processed foods for kids from the grocery store. I much preferred him to have whole foods. He was only little once.

Gideon had spent the night as he did most nights, but he had to wake up at an ungodly hour and get to the bakery. There were graduations and tons of weddings and matings during this time of year, so cakes were his focus for the next month or so. He was taking orders from all over now, and someone drove five hours for one of his wedding cakes.

I was mated to a baking genius.

I had put Wyatt's food on the high chair and placed him inside when my phone rang.

"Hey," I said, knowing it was my mate. He called every morning to check on me, even though he'd seen me only hours before. He never left the house without telling me goodbye and kissing me like he might never see me again.

“Good morning, omega. Is everything okay?”

“Yes, why?”

He grumbled, and I could hear his footsteps. He was going to the back of the bakery for privacy. He did that. “My bear felt something off. I’ve been meaning to speak to you about it, but I felt it again this morning. Like I was sick to my stomach.”

Oh boy. Maybe this was more than a little bug.

“I have been nauseated. And this morning while I was making Wyatt’s breakfast, the smell of it made me sick.”

“You have been sleeping a lot more,” he mentioned.

“I have. Do you think I’m sick?” I reached for the oatmeal to make myself some breakfast, but as soon as I thought about it, I put it back down. Nothing seemed good right now.

“I have an idea. I’m going to come home really quick. Sit tight.”

He ended the call, and I wondered what was on his mind. I settled for some granola and milk, but after the first bite, I knew it was a mistake.

Gideon came in with something in his hand but put it behind his back. “I think I know what’s going on with you, omega.”

“Is it the flu?”

He barely hid his smile. “Come sit with me.”

We sat at the kitchen table, and Wyatt insisted on a hug from Gideon. “What do you think?” I asked.

“We have been together and mated for three months. We haven’t used protection. We haven’t been able to keep our hands off each other...”

“You don’t think?”

“I do think.”

“But Wyatt is only fifteen months old.”

He wrapped me up in a hold. “I know. I know it’s sooner than we planned, but let’s find out if you are pregnant before we get excited or nervous or whatever we will be.”

Gideon encouraged a long, deep breath before I went into the bathroom and peed on the stick after reading the directions. I wanted him with me, but Wyatt was still having breakfast. Plus, my fawn always knew when I was upset and mirrored me. He didn’t need any more upset days after Judson. Our home would be one of joy and peace and sweetness. At least, most of the time.

With the test on the counter, I set a quick timer on my phone and went back to the kitchen rather than pace the hallway like a lunatic.

“Well?” Gideon said.

“Two minutes,” I answered and then glanced down at my phone. “One minute twenty-four seconds.”

I gauged his response. Would he be happy if I was pregnant? Did he want to be a father this soon?

A toddler and a newborn were going to be a lot of work.

Wyatt was a handful on his own.

Oh, Goddess, this one might be a bear. A rambunctious, growly little bear.

Maybe he would look like Gideon.

My phone buzzed in my hand, and I jumped. Our eyes met, and I rushed to the bathroom. I held my breath the entire way.

“Oh,” I said.

Gideon came down the hallway with Wyatt in his arms. “Omega mine?”

I turned around, test in hand, tears streaming down my face. “It’s positive. I’m pregnant.”

Gideon made a move to hug me but then pulled back a bit. “Are you upset? What tears are those?”

I laughed. “I didn’t expect this and didn’t want to get pregnant so soon, but I’m happy. I’m thrilled to be carrying your cub. Are you happy?”

Gideon wrapped me up in his beefy arms and squished both Wyatt and me. “I’m the happiest bear alive. This is second in my life to meeting you, Kelly.”

My big bear was going to be a papa.

Gideon

I had been staying at Kelly's house nearly every night before we learned he was carrying my child, and every night since, but we needed a more permanent solution. A conversation needed to be had because it was ridiculous for us to continue to maintain two different houses. And I happened to know my omega's savings were running thin.

So, one morning, toward the end of his first trimester, I broached the subject over coffee. Decaf for him. "Omega, I think it's time we moved in together."

He crinkled his forehead, studying me in confusion. "Aren't we already living together? I don't think you've been home for a week."

"I have, actually, but just for fresh clothes. But that's not the point. Exactly. What I want to propose is that we decide which of our homes to make our permanent residence. Together."

It had been easier to just stay at his home until now, with all of Wyatt's things there. But that didn't mean we couldn't make a change. As long as he was comfortable with the idea.

"Where do you want to live, alpha?" he asked. "Are you okay being here?"

"Yes, I am, but there are some advantages to my place. For one, I own it, so there's no landlord."

“That’s a good thing.”

“And for another, it’s bigger, and we have that large room on the second floor that would make a perfect playroom for Wyatt and his little brother or sister.”

“But I can’t afford such a fancy house.” He studied the floor in front of him. “And you do so much for me already, how can I ask you to let me move into your nice house.”

“Omega, what is this all about? We spend all our free time together, you and me and Wyatt. Why are you suddenly acting like you don’t belong in my neighborhood?”

“Look around you. You never say anything, but you don’t belong here. Can I possibly belong in your neighborhood?”

“My bear doesn’t like you talking that way about his omega. You belong anywhere you want to be. And my neighborhood isn’t that much fancier than this one, and if anyone ever says anything to you that hurts your feelings, they are going to have one large growly bear to deal with.” I reached out and drew him into a big hug. “Now, that said, if you prefer this house, I’ll sell the other one and make an offer on it. I just want us to own our home if possible, and I want it to be one that you like. It’s up to you, omega. Which house? Or shall we buy a third?”

He giggled. “I’d have to be crazy not to want to upgrade from this place to yours. Wyatt is going to love his new playroom.”

We had an appointment with Healer Quinn that afternoon, and it was a special one because we were going to get a look at the baby. As I drove along, I tried to avoid bumps because my omega had already drunk a lot of water in preparation for the ultrasound. So far, every visit had gone well, but I was always nervous, wanting to make sure my omega and the baby were having no areas of concern. And Wyatt

loved the healer as long as he wasn't proffering shots.

"Welcome!" Quinn ushered us into his examining room. "Did you drink all the water I suggested?"

"Yes," Kelly confirmed. "It's all I can do to hold it in. Can you look now?"

Quinn held up a bottle. "I need you to try to drink a bit more, okay? And then we'll get out the equipment and see if we can't get a look at your baby. How have you been feeling?"

"Pretty good," Kelly said, opening the bottle and eyeing the contents suspiciously. "Is this water?"

"Yes," Quinn told him. "We're just topping you off."

After managing about half the bottle, Kelly allowed me to help him onto the table and lay back. His belly stood straight up, the cutest thing ever, or at least that's what I thought until the doppler revealed the outline of our child. We couldn't get enough of the images, watching them move around and having Quinn point out the little legs and arms and showing us where the head was. And then came the question. "Do you want to know the sex?"

We did...unfortunately, our little tadpole was reluctant to give the healer an angle where he could see enough to determine whether we were having a little boy or girl.

We'd just have to wait to be surprised.

Kelly's blood pressure was great, his weight was textbook, and Wyatt behaved through the entire visit like a champ. We ended up going for burgers and shakes before heading home again, celebrating the baby and the baby daddy's good health.

After that, it was time to plan our move. Kelly didn't have a lot of furniture; he'd left his former mate with most of what they'd built together, so we'd be able to move everything with one rental trailer. My omega's rent was on a month-to-month basis, and we decided to have it all out by the first of the month, which was coming up soon.

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Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:00 am

Kelly

Trying to handle a boisterous toddler and find a job was a task in itself. Oliver Creek didn't have anything for me in terms of a job. I was nearly seven months pregnant now, and while some of my energy had come back from the first trimester, now that we were in the home stretch, I was feeling low on energy most of the time.

Gideon and I decided to put Wyatt in daycare two days a week. It gave me some time to rest and search for a job, and Gideon would sometimes come home and have lunch with me. Plus, Wyatt got to interact with other kids and different kinds of shifters. It was a good thing all around. I worried for the first few weeks, but there were video cameras inside the rooms, and I could pop onto the internet and see him anytime I wanted to.

Finding a job was a problem. I wanted something fun, and yes, that was a privilege since Gideon took care of us so well, but I had the time and opportunity to find a job that suited me and didn't make me feel like I was chained to the computer. I saw one place where workers put their mouses on a moving object while they went to the bathroom so their bosses saw they were working.

That wasn't the job for me.

Especially since I peed every thirty minutes lately.

I got up from the desk, aggravated about doing nothing to contribute to the household and decided to go ahead and make our lunch. Gideon was coming home today. He was always so excited to see me even though he'd woken up with me and we lived

together now. He never left in the mornings without a kiss and he always said good night.

The little things counted, sometimes more than the big ones.

I put together some pasta with veggies and roasted some chicken for Gideon and had just finished up when he came in the door. The smile on his face, well, he was beaming with joy over something.

“Hi,” I said, laughing as he hugged me and then leaned down to kiss my stomach.

“Hello, yourself.”

“What’s the smile about?” I asked. “Good things at the bakery?”

“I think so but let’s eat first. I have something exciting to talk to you about.”

We ate our lunch, but I didn’t eat my fill. His exciting news was making me a touch anxious. “Okay. Tell me. I can’t wait any longer.”

He chuckled. “Impatient omega.” He wiped his mouth and put the napkin on the table. “I have been thinking about expanding my business to take online orders. Taking orders over the phone and relying on texted pictures of reference is not only outdated, but it’s cutting into my baking time. The other day, I almost burned three full trays of croissants because I was on the phone listening to a customer give me a laundry list of details he wanted on his wedding cake.”

“That sounds like a good idea. I’ve heard how your phone rings off the hook.”

He nodded. “With that in mind, I have someone to build the website and get everything in order, but I need help on the ground. I need someone to schedule things.

Keep the online orders straight. Print out the reference pictures and specifications for each job. You know I'm bad with computers, mate."

I did. He could do the basic things but other than email and social media, he simply wasn't interested. I wouldn't be either if I could bake mouthwatering goodies.

"So you need an assistant," I said. "That would certainly help."

He stared at me as a new smile formed on his face. "Kelly, if you want to, and don't feel any pressure, but would you be that for me? Be my assistant? I'll pay you the same as I would pay anyone else."

"Gideon, I'd love to, but I'm about to give birth."

He nodded. "I know. It's going to take time to get everything going. The website done. Things integrated. We projected everything will be up and running in four to five months. Do you think you would be ready to work then? Everything is online. You could stay home with our young and still work. I'll pick up the files from home." He paused. "I just wanted to help you. If you don't want to..."

"I do," I answered. I started to cry because happy and pregnancy hormones. "I really do. Please tell me you didn't work all of this out for me."

Gideon shook his head and pulled me into his lap. He said it broke his heart when I cried. "I have been thinking about this for a while. Maybe a year or two. You gave me the inspiration and the drive. I'd do anything for you."

He would've. I believed my alpha would turn the world over for me without question.

"I guess I'm your assistant, then," I said. "I might need to take some online classes to learn a few things."

“That’s good. Take all the classes you need. But, right now, I need dessert.”

“I didn’t make anything,” I giggled, already knowing where this was going.

“I’m talking about you.”

Gideon

The pregnancy that seemed to take so much time and go so slowly had somehow sped up while my back was turned. Kelly was waddling around the house whining about not being able to see his shoes—or his pecker. I tried everything to cheer him up, but he was sure nobody had ever been as big or misshapen as he was.

It was time for a change of pace. The only way I'd been getting him out of the house was to healer appointments; he didn't even want to go out to eat anymore. But I hoped that for the event I had in mind, he'd go along with my plans.

"It's a surprise," I informed my reluctant mate. "And I am not taking no for an answer."

"But I don't need to be out in public as big as I am," he grouched. "I look like I ate a beach ball."

"You look like the deer who is going to give birth to our beautiful baby in just a couple of weeks." I held the door open for him to exit the house first. "And I'm proud to be seen with you. Anytime and anyplace."

Kelly went past me and walked toward the car. "Okay, but you'll be sorry. I am not the trim deer you fell in love with anymore. How much do you think skin can stretch anyway."

"Get in." I unlocked the car with the key fob and helped him settle in the seat. He was having trouble with that on his own now, and he'd already stopped driving when the

steering wheel started to dig into his belly. “And I don’t want to hear any more grouching about the trip. It’s a beautiful day out with blue skies and the occasional puffy white cloud floating by.” Although it was the cool portion of the year now, we still got some nice temperatures sometimes, and it felt good to have the sun warming my cheeks.

And to have a big surprise lined up for my mate. It was a longer drive than he’d taken in a while, with our destination a few towns over. They were hosting a show of sorts featuring all sorts of pregnancy and baby equipment. Furniture, clothing, just about anything you could think of. I hoped that the clientele, most of whom were likely pregnant, would make my mate recognize the fact that all pregnant omegas were larger in the middle than before they started to grow their baby.

The event was also an opportunity to pick out some of the many items we would need for our coming child. As the time had sped by, we’d put off buying furniture and such, thinking we’d have plenty of opportunities. And now, with the baby due so soon, we were about to get boxed into a corner.

Wyatt was still in his crib, but we agreed that it was time for him to move into a toddler bed, and I hoped to find one of those here, too. We no sooner pulled into the parking lot when I heard Kelly gasp. “Is this the daddy show? The one with all the baby stuff?”

“What gave it away?” I teased.

“You mean aside from the giant illuminated sign over the gate?” He giggled, the first time I’d heard that in a while. “They sell everything there, and I don’t have my list.” He’d made it up shortly after moving into our home, and it was pretty complete.

“Check your phone.” I leaned back in the seat, watching him scroll. “Find it?”

“Yes, I did. You thought of everything, mate.” He squeezed my arm before releasing it so I could get out and come around to help him climb out of the car. I did this out of courtesy, from the beginning, but of late, it had become necessary. His center of gravity had shifted, and getting up from anything but a firm chair was no longer an option without help.

I’d paid for VIP parking, so the walk to the convention center where the event was being held wasn’t too bad, and once we entered the building, Kelly’s slow pace increased. It was a baby and toddler wonderland with lots of things for the pregnant omega daddies as well, and my mate flitted from one booth to the next, admiring everything. I didn’t even know he could flit at this stage, but we hadn’t been in the building for five minutes before I knew I’d made the right decision bringing him here. Kelly clutched his phone, checking items off his list after consulting with me on each.

Of course I agreed. My goal for the nursery was to make it a place my mate loved. To make him happy. And even though it was costing us a whole lot of money, it was worth every cent. What he picked out was all adorable and in good taste, but it wasn’t until we reached the paternity clothing area that he really brightened up.

“I shouldn’t buy anything because the baby will be here so soon...” He hummed as he lifted various shirts with cute sayings. “But maybe a couple of these?”

“As many as you want, mate. You need to be comfortable and these are very good quality.”

“I could save them for the next time...if there is one.” Looking up at me from under his lashes, he asked, “Do you think there will be?”

“If the Goddess wills it, and if you would like it,” I replied, amazed that with all the discomfort, he was ready to talk about a third child.

Suddenly, he paused, holding up a shirt with a picture of two daddies cradling a little baby between them. No saying at all, just love. “I like this one.” He leaned in closer to me. “Have you noticed a lot of the other pregnant daddies are way bigger than me?”

“No because I never notice anyone but you, omega mine.”

He kissed me on the cheek. “Right answer.”

Kelly

I woke up to a burning tightness in my lower back. Nothing new since I had a bear cub in my belly, but this time, there was something more powerful about it. Shrugging it off, I went to the bathroom and got ready for the morning. I could already smell French toast. My mate always cooked me breakfast when he wasn't on a tight deadline.

"Good morning," I said, side-hugging him. About the only way I could hug him with this beach ball in front of me.

"Good morning, mate. Strawberry cream cheese French toast on the way."

"Gideon, I'm never going to lose this baby weight with you around."

My bear chuckled. "So? Who cares. I'll love you no matter what size you are. More for me to love."

"I'm going to get Wyatt. I hear him talking to himself already."

Gideon laughed. He had become the second father to Wyatt that anyone would have dreamed of, and my son loved him. He'd even called Gideon "Papa" a few times lately. Gideon didn't encourage it but said he wanted the relationship to flow at Wyatt's pace. He would be happy to be his papa forever, even if he was never called the name. "He was chattering away with his teddy bear earlier. He seemed happy, so I let him be."

I went into Wyatt's room and sure enough, he was talking to himself and his bear and maybe the sun the way he stared out his window.

"That's a lot of talk for a Saturday morning, sweet fawn. Is there news I missed?"

Hardly any of what he said was understandable, but he knew what he was saying, and there was a lot of it. I reached into the crib to get him and gasped. I pulled Wyatt to my chest and looked down.

A puddle was beneath me.

"Kelly?" Gideon came in.

"I think...I think my water just broke," I said.

Gideon, steady as a mountain, nodded. "I think you're right. Let's get you two out of here. We'll get this cleaned up and I'll call Quinn. Everything is going to be okay."

Gideon, calm as could be, got Wyatt into his high chair for breakfast while I showered and changed. I overheard him calling Quinn.

This was it.

Our cub was on the way.

"Quinn is coming over. He wants to check you out."

I stopped in my tracks and gripped the doorframe. "That's good because I'm in labor. These contractions are...oooh. That's a big one."

Gideon rushed over and helped me to the couch. Wyatt was still eating away, but my

little one turned to me, and I swore he sometimes knew what was happening to me. Our bond was solid. “We need to take Wyatt somewhere. Daycare is closed,” I said, already practicing my breaths.

“It might be a while before you give birth. Are you sure?”

I gripped Gideon’s hand. “I’m sure. This baby is coming before our son finishes his breakfast. Maybe Atlas can come sit with Quinn?”

We hadn’t planned for this. We’d set up a sitter for when I went into labor, but he wasn’t available this weekend. I had been sure I would be pregnant longer.

That was Fate for me. Always surprising me.

Gideon put in another call to Quinn and the healer had thought ahead. He was already bringing Atlas to help.

Oliver Creek had some of the kindest people on the planet.

“I need to get to the bedroom.”

Gideon, with Wyatt on his hip, managed to help me to the bedroom where I laid out everything I needed on the floor. I’d tried other positions with Wyatt, but I knew that on my hands and knees was where my deer wanted me. In these situations, it was always better to do as our animals asked. They knew best after all.

Quinn and Atlas arrived in minutes, but all I could focus on was my pain and the birth of our cub. I could hear my mate telling me all the encouraging things, but my deer was in control.

Three big, powerful pushes later, and I heard the first cries of our cub.

“Are they okay?” I asked, exhausted from the tips of my toes to the top of my head.

“She. She’s perfect, omega mine. She’s absolutely stunning.”

I birthed the placenta and then turned over with Quinn’s help and leaned my back against the wall. Our beautiful daughter was placed on my chest and just as I’d hoped, she had Gideon’s nose and his captivating eyes.

“You did so well,” Gideon said, kissing my forehead. “What will you name her?”

I sighed. “How about Mia?” I asked my mate. Tears streamed down his face, and I could feel his overpowering joy and pride through our bond.

“Mia is perfect. Just like you.”

Gideon

Two children were certainly more work than one, especially now that the second child, our little Mia, was also on her feet and running wild at every opportunity. Wyatt had been such a mellow child, by comparison. Still was, but he'd spoiled us, and Mia's energy level was through the roof.

I wondered how she'd be with her new siblings. Twins this time, and Kelly was glowing. These babies were cooperative at the ultrasound, and so we knew we were getting one of each, allowing us to use the clothing from Wyatt and Mia, but we'd probably end up with lots of new things anyway. How could we resist?

Children had been off my radar for a long time. I'd thought the Goddess and Fate had passed me by, but it turned out, they were just waiting for my omega to be ready for me. The bakery was thriving, my omega really enjoying working on the website and other online tasks as backup, but I wasn't sure how that would go once the twins arrived.

We'd take it a day at a time. That's how we'd gotten this far, and it was working out for us.

I watched my family playing in the backyard. A swing set, ball pit, and a splash pad were making this summer day fun for the kids and entertaining for me. This bear was a settled family man who loved everything about being one.

And a devoted mate. I carried a lemonade to Kelly who sat under an umbrella on a lounge chair, his hands resting on his belly. He didn't mind being big this time. After

all, he was growing two babies. And looking damn good doing it. I brushed a kiss on his lips and sat on the edge of his seat.

“I wonder what these two will be like,” he mused.

“Wonderful, if they are like their omega daddy,” I said. “The best of the best.”