



Bunny Be Mine (Heat, Prey, Love #9)

Author: *Katy Manz*

Category: Fantasy

Description: Can love save them both?

As a prey shifter, Arleyis is used to being chased by the wolves around town. They would love nothing more than to capture a sweet rabbit and steal his heat. That's why he's always made sure to be far away from others when his heat is due. Too bad, nature decided to change the timeline without notice.

Fen didn't realize how different he had become once he left his small town for a big city. Being back home and seeing what his old friends do for fun leave a sour taste in his mouth. Especially when the prey his friends are hunting smells so good- smells like his.

Once Fen gets Arley in his arms he knows he will do anything to keep him safe- to claim him as his. . Arley knows there's only one Wolf that he can trust- and he will follow him anywhere. Even if that means leaving the place he's always called home.

Bunny Be Mine is a low angst, omegaverse, mpreg story with a adorable prey shifter who is in need of saving, the predator shifter who will do anything to keep his bunny safe, a few wolves who need to be set right, and adorable babies that will change lives.

Total Pages (Source): 16

Chapter One

Fen

“Coming home to Painesville after spending the last four years out in Chicago is like entering a whole new world.” I spared a quick glance at the old run-down pharmacy on the corner of Main Street and Pine Lane. I noticed a group of young teens standing just outside the building, goofing around. It was easy to replace them in my mind as me and my old buddies instead. I sighed at the old memory of hanging out with Marcus, Karl, and the gang. But times were different now. I was no longer that young man, and this town was no longer the same warm, welcoming place I used to feel at peace in. “It’s like being thrown into a time machine but no longer fitting in. I swear, Neal, things haven’t changed much since I’ve been gone.”

“Is that a good thing or bad?” My roommate chuckled. “Seriously, dude, it’s only for a few days during our break and just to make sure your parents are okay. You’ll be back here before you can even settle in there. Take a deep breath, call an old friend to catch up on some gossip, and spend time with your parents. Hell, I have an even better idea—go to a bar and hook up with a sexy omega. It’s been way too long, man. You need the release.” Did I? I wasn’t one that hooked up like Neal did. Yes, I was waiting on my mate, but I wasn’t a saint either; my hand worked just fine. I hadn’t felt that need in a while and focusing on classes kept me occupied.

I turned down the road that led away from Main Street and toward my parents’ cabin. They lived a couple of miles down a nearly unpaved trail that led deep into the woods, like most of the town’s pack did. “How would you know?”

“We live in the same house, remember?” I could imagine Neal leaning back in his chair, smirking.

“But you aren’t always around.” He was often too busy hooking up himself. “There could have been—”

“Oh, my dear Fen.” Neal chuckled. “We both know I would have known about the lack of stress in your life if you had been easing the tension somehow.”

“Shut up,” I growled playfully, aware that Neal was only messing with me. “I’m not that bad.”

“You snapped at me the other morning because I left the refrigerator door open—”

“Yeah, because—”

“I was only turning around to place the food on the counter and would have turned right back to close it. We are talking seconds here, Fen. Not even minutes but seconds.” Neal wasn’t wrong, I did overreact; it was happening more frequently unfortunately.

“Fine. I have been a bit stressed out lately.” I had a deadline for my next book and my school schedule was fully packed for the next couple of semesters. A bit stressed out was an understatement and we both knew it. Yet the more I tried to destress, the more stressed I became. I was clawing at my skin to get out, yet nothing changed.

“So, you should go and get laid.” Neal persisted as if he knew all and could see all. “You need to unwind, and that’s the best way to do that. Find a cute little omega or a horny beta and bang out all your tension. Or, I’m not gonna judge, maybe another alpha is more your type.” I could see the shrug of indifference even through the phone; that was how well I knew my roommate.

“Neal... Stop.” I shook my head. My roommate was always trying to get me to unwind through sex. That may be the way that he relaxed, but until I met my mate, it was just not something I wanted to indulge in. Our mate will be worth the wait. My wolf agreed.

“Fine. But when you get back, we are going to some yoga sessions or a Reiki studio.” Neal chuckled, his jovial mood back. “Whatever will help you balance out life, work, and school. Because you need to ground yourself before you wreck yourself.”

“What are you even talking about? Wreck myself? Who talks like that?” I shook my head. My roommate had an interesting way with words, for sure, and I was the author who created fictional worlds.

“Me, so get over it.” Neal did have a unique use of words that may not have worked for others. “Anyway. Call me tomorrow and tell me all about the town gossip. God, I miss small-town life.” Neal sighed, heavy with envy. He didn’t need gossip. He had enough on campus to keep him satisfied.

“Whatever. You should have come with me, then; you know you are always welcome to visit my parents.” I shifted my car into park and turned off the engine. “Look, I’m outside my parents’ house now, so I’m letting you go.”

“Cool. Tell them I said hi and can’t wait until they come up for graduation. We still need to check out that new restaurant by the university,” Neal reminded me.

“I’ll tell them. Call you tomorrow.”

Hanging up the phone, I closed my eyes and rolled my shoulders. I counted to three and exhaled. Shook out my fingers—

Stop procrastinating and just go talk to them. My wolf growled, intruding on my

dithering.

Fine. I pouted, though, I wasn't ready.

Getting out of the car, I mentally prepared myself for this visit home. Not because I didn't love my parents, because I did, but because of the town they lived in, namely the pack we were a part of.

Before I left town, everything they did in the pack seemed to make sense. The hierarchy of shifter-kind, with the predators being superior to the prey. It was all just accepted in my mind as how things were.

I left home for Chicago and found myself in a larger pool. University life, with all the other shifters, humans, and others mingling and building relationships, showed me a new way of thinking. I realized how backward and wrong my birth pack was. It didn't sit right with me or my wolf; not that I could change it.

"Honey, is that you?" My mom Tricia's petite form came out of the house as I walked up the steps. "What are you doing here?"

"Yeah, Mom. It's me." I gathered my mom in my arms, treasuring the immediate sense of comfort her presence provided. "Didn't you get my message? I came to make sure that you and Dad were okay. When you told me about his sickness, I decided to make sure everything was okay down here. Dad never gets sick."

"Oh, everything's fine." Mom kissed my cheek and stepped back, brushing off my concern. "I'm glad that you came. It's been too long."

"I know. I'm sorry about that." I shrugged. I had nothing else to offer. University had sucked me in, keeping me busy. So did writing. "It's just I had a lot of stuff going on."

“I know, dear.” Mom laid her delicate hand on my shoulder. “You are doing so well in the city.”

“I’m trying hard to make a life out there. Maybe convince you to come stay with me there.” I took in the small cabin in need of repairs, making a mental note to help my father replace the broken wooden planks on the porch. “It’s hard coming back here after being in the city. Things are so much bigger there. I feel like I fit in there.”

“Your dad and I know that. That’s why we usually come to visit you instead.” Mom offered me a small smile. “Why don’t you call up Marcus and catch up with your old friends while you’re out here?”

“Maybe. I haven’t seen them since I left. I tried to keep in touch, but life got in the way. And they usually only wanted to talk about the same old things.” I sighed, not certain if I really wanted to contact Marcus at all. “I needed a change, but they seemed to stay the same.”

“Well, if you go out with them tonight, you can see how the pack has changed since you’ve been gone.” That was awfully cryptic, yet my mom didn’t say more.

“Changed? How has it changed?” A lot of the outward appearance seemed the same, but I had a feeling my mom was speaking about something else and that made me anxious.

“Things just aren’t the same within the pack.” My mom shook her head and grabbed one of the bags I had brought with me, leading me into the house. “Ever since the old alpha passed and his son is trying to take over the pack, things have just been different.”

An uneasy feeling flooded my body, my wolf sensing that there was some kind of meaning hidden in my mom’s words. I’d kill anyone if they dared harm my parents.

“Are they mistreating you?”

Mom shook her head and laid a hand gently on my arm. “No, it’s not that. There is just a weird feeling in the pack. The older members remember things being a lot better. Now that the younger kids are trying to take over, they have different ideas than we’re used to.”

“No one is hurting you, though, right? It’s just the way things feel that’s bothering you?” I know it wouldn’t be my place, but I’d do what I could to convince my parents to leave this place and move closer to me if that were the case.

“There’s no physical or verbal abuse against us or anyone we know personally, no.” Mom opened the door and I followed her into the house. Memories flitted through my mind as I stepped over the threshold. “It just doesn’t feel like we belong here any longer. I don’t know, perhaps your father and I will be leaving the pack soon.”

“Leaving the pack?” I sat down at the kitchen table as my mother began to prepare us some tea. “Where would you go? You want to join me in the city?” Maybe it would be easier to convince them to leave than I thought.

“I don’t know.” My mom turned on the kettle and got the tea bags ready. “Do you have room for us in Chicago?”

“You know I’ll always have room for you.” And if I had to, I would.

“I know.” Mom came to the table, leaning down to place a kiss on my forehead like she always did. “Don’t worry about that right now. We can discuss it later. Maybe we are just afraid of change.”

“Maybe.” I took a cookie from the jar in the middle of the table. “I think I will call Marcus and meet up with some of the pack while I’m out here. I can see if I sense any

trouble brewing.”

“That would be great, Fen. Just be careful.”

“I will, Mom.”

My father, Daniel, walked through the door just as the tea kettle sounded. “Oh, good. I was just thinking that a cup of tea would hit the spot. And look, our son has finally decided to visit. Everything okay, Fen?”

“Oh, yeah. Everything is fine.” I stood and hugged my father. “I just thought I’d come by for the weekend and make sure everything’s good with you both.”

“Well, everything is great here, but I’m glad that you came.” A coughing fit took over my father.

It was strange to see my dad sick. I hadn’t ever seen my dad ill a day in my life but now, he was hacking into a handkerchief and sounding like a crying seal. “Dad, have you seen the healer? Or one of the doctors in town? Shifters don’t tend to get sick. We need to find out what’s wrong.” Worry bubbled up inside me; something wasn’t right.

“It’s just a cough, Fen.” Dad put away the handkerchief once the episode was over and joined me at the kitchen table. “I did get checked out and no one has any idea why I have this cough, but all my lab work and tests came back normal. I am trying a remedy from the healer since the human doctors also didn’t have any idea what was afflicting me.”

“You need to come to the city.” I reached out and grabbed his hand. “They are the best in the country at the hospital near campus. The pack there ensures they only get the top in the field to work there. Please promise if the remedy doesn’t work, you will

come visit me on campus and get it checked out.”

“I promise.” Dad squeezed my hand before letting go and taking the cup of tea my mom had placed before him. “Now, tell me more about what’s going on with you.”

As I spoke with my parents, I let my eyes roam around the kitchen, and memories assaulted me once more. Only good ones.

My mom bandaged my arm after I’d fallen out of the tree.

My dad taught me how to play catch in the yard.

Family dinners, Sunday morning breakfast, and then watching cartoons.

I missed being here with my parents, but I also knew two things that were very important.

First, Chicago was where I truly belonged. And second, the longer I was in this area, the stronger I could sense that the aura felt different.

And my wolf agreed.

“So, who’s taken over the pack?” I asked my father after we had caught up on how things were going in my classes. I was curious if a change in leadership was the issue. “I haven’t gotten any emails or notifications that there was a change, but I know that Alpha Conrad passed away a few months ago. Has Marcus taken over?”

“We are still under the transitional rule of the elder council until final judgment can be made if Marcus is fit to become alpha or another wolf. Until about two years ago, the boy never even acted like he wanted to oversee pack matters, but now he suddenly wants to seize all control. We need to ensure what’s best for the pack,

though, and the elders are not convinced Marcus is the best choice.”

“Yeah, Marcus never wanted to be alpha. He was glad when the pack decided that we would follow a different path than other packs and would not follow family bloodlines in naming the next alpha. But you said his attitude has changed since high school?” I didn’t know how I felt about that information, knowing one day he might be in charge.

“Recently, he’s been making major claims that he’s supposed to be the alpha since it was his father who ruled the pack. He is arguing with the elders and trying to convince the rest of the pack to elect him as alpha and dismiss the council.” Dad shook his head. “It doesn’t feel right. I don’t trust him.”

“I am going to give him a call while I’m out here and meet up with him and the rest of the crew. I can test out his attitude toward things and see if I can find out what exactly he plans for this pack.” I stood and placed my empty cup in the sink. “I’ll let you guys know if I get the same uneasy feeling or if maybe it’s just anxiety over changes.”

“Just be safe.” My mom refilled my father’s teacup with more of the special remedy from the pack healer, Gladys. “There have been some rumors that they aren’t the same sweet boys we used to have over for dinner every Wednesday night after football practice.”

“I’m sure I’ll find that they are the same group of idiots that played pranks on the elders in our senior year of high school. They were harmless really. Just goof-offs. Let’s try not to worry. I’ll hang out with them and let you know what I think after. For now. Let’s just enjoy catching up and plan for your next visit to campus. Neal told me to tell you he can’t wait to spoil you two and take you for dinner at the new joint that just opened.”

“You should have brought him with you.” Mom laughed, her smile reaching her eyes, lighting up her entire being. “You know we adore him as if he were our own son. He’s always welcome.”

“I know. But he had a hot date tonight with a red-headed omega from our marketing class. He said he couldn’t pass up the chance.” I shook my head. Neal was something else. “He’s gonna run out of dates soon though. I think he’s dated most of the available omegas on campus already. Soon he will need to branch out to the neighboring suburbs.”

“Is he still searching for his fated mate? Doesn’t he think sleeping around will ruin his chances if he really does find him?” Mom shook her head, that motherly disappointment clear as day. “When he’s found his mate, his past might cause a problem.”

“He lost his sense of smell and wolf a few years ago when he cheated on a witch/wolf hybrid. She cursed him.” I still couldn’t believe my friend had such horrible luck. “A psychic told him he would only get them both back when he finds his true mate. But without his ability to scent his mate or his wolf to confirm a connection, he is just blindly trying to find his mate by sleeping with every omega he meets and hoping that if he sleeps with his true mate, the curse will break.”

“Maybe this date will be the one.” Mom shrugged with a wink. “You never know. Mates tend to sneak up on you when you least expect it.”

They really do.

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Chapter Two

Arley

“How are you doing today, Arley?” Elder Mitchell greeted me as he entered the town’s bakery where I worked. I had been working behind the counter since my sixteenth birthday and owed it to my employers for keeping me housed, clothed, and fed after my parents passed away. “Do you have any more of those delicious fruit muffins left? Or did they sell out again?”

I took the last remaining blueberry-lemon muffin out from its hiding spot behind the counter and handed it to my father’s oldest friend. “Here you go. I knew you would be around this afternoon, so I saved one just for you.”

“Thanks, kiddo.” Elder Mitchell handed me a ten-dollar bill and took his first bite of the treat. “You are way too nice to me. If the other customers knew you stashed this away for me, there may have been a riot.”

“You were my father’s best friend.” I wanted to shrug but refrained; it was no hardship to be grateful. “Of course, I will make sure to have your favorites available. Just let me know when you’re stopping by and I will prepare one just for you.” My parents passed away two years ago, but I was still close to their friends. The pack members, Elder Mitchell and Doctor Elliot, would always have my back. They swore to my parents that I would be treated as one of their own children. For that reason, they were second dads to me and I made sure to keep their favorite snacks on hand as a sign of my appreciation and affection.

“I promised your parents I wouldn’t ever let anything bad happen to you.” He pointed a half-eaten muffin at me instead of a finger. “I meant that. I heard some rumors recently though that I may be failing at my job. Are Marcus and the boys still giving you trouble? I spoke with them about cornering you last week. They said they’d apologize.” Elder Mitchell finished his muffin and took a sip of the tea I had placed on the counter for him. “Did they stop by?” His expression told me he already knew the answer.

We both know they won’t give up that easily. Marcus has it in for us for some reason and he’s going to keep bothering us until he gets what he wants. My bunny wasn’t wrong about him not giving up.

I’ll never give it up to him. Him and his wolf both disgust me. I just had to find another way to get Marcus to leave me alone. I just didn’t think there was enough evidence to get the council to step in fully yet.

“Not yet.” Thank the goddess, I was hoping they wouldn’t. “Don’t worry about it though, no harm was done. They just scared me because it was dark and they were drunk. I’m sure they won’t do it again.”

“They better not.” Elder Mitchell emptied his cup and disposed of his mess in the trash can next to the counter. “Let me know right away if they do anything again. They can’t get away with this and need to understand that actions like that will not see Marcus claiming the spot of alpha. The pack doesn’t need to be ruled by bullies. They need to remember that just because they are predator shifters, they are not to torment the prey shifters we share this land with.”

“I’m not one of the pack though.” The wolves in the area had their pack, but the rest of us shifters were in groups too small to form any clans or dens. In other areas, the pack may have opened its membership to shifters of all kinds, but here in Painesville, the pack only allowed wolves to join. Maybe if the council stayed in charge, they

could change that though. “Perhaps one day the pack could open its doors to all shifters though.”

“You aren’t in the pack, that’s right. But you are part of our town and deserve respect and kindness like everyone else. And perhaps you are correct that it’s time for the elder council to vote on letting all local shifters join the pack and become a hybrid pack, like those in the city.” Elder Mitchell coughed, the sound a deep bark.

“Thank you, Elder Mitchell.” I placed a hand on his arm and offered a bit of calmness through my touch. My omega gift of grounding others could help ease his symptoms temporarily. “Are you okay? Shifters don’t usually get sick and that cough sounds bad.”

“Don’t worry about me. Doc said I’ll be just fine. There seems to be a shifter-inclusive virus going around. The best doctors in the area are looking into it. Most of us older folks seem to have caught it. But I bet in a week or two we will all be back to normal.” Elder Mitchell looked at his phone. “Isn’t it time to close up? Why don’t you come over for dinner tonight? My mate, Stanley, is cooking my favorite dinner tonight, steak, candied sweet potatoes, and cheesy broccoli. Can I tell him to add one more to the dinner table?”

“Thank you for the invitation, but I’m a bit tired tonight. Let’s have dinner another time when we are both feeling 100 percent?” I checked the time and saw that he was right. It was indeed almost time for me to lock up the bakery for the day. “I’m just going to clean up for the day and head home.”

“Alright, Arley. Let’s plan for dinner next week. I’ll check at home with Stanley and let you know tomorrow which day works best for his schedule and hopefully then you can make it.” Elder Mitchell winked and opened the door, sniffing the air. Probably searching for signs of trouble. “Be safe tonight walking home. Call me if you need anything.”

“Will do.” Walking over to the door, I flipped the sign over, telling customers the bakery was officially closed and began my nighttime cleanup procedures.

I was a bit sad when I locked up the storefront half an hour later. My parents’ friends were the best, but seeing them always brought a small amount of pain. They made me realize how much I missed my family.

“Arley.” Marcus’ gravelly voice surprised me as he gripped my arm. I twirled around to find him and his two friends, Kris and Harley. “Where are you going, my sweet whittle bunny?”

I rolled my eyes at the annoying men in front of me. I struggled to break free from Marcus’ grip but it proved fruitless. Sighing, I answered his question. “Home. Now if you will move out of my way, I can get going.”

“Nah, I would rather you spend a bit of time with me tonight.” Marcus leaned in closer and took a deep sniff at the juncture of my neck and shoulder, licking it. “You smell delicious tonight. I wonder if you taste just as sweet.” I held back the gag and bile threatening to surface. The chills skittering across my flesh was bad enough.

I called on my ancestors to give me a bit of extra strength and pushed away from him. “I have to go. Just leave me alone.” I started walking down the block, praying he’d leave me alone. However, I didn’t run. Running meant he’d chase. At times, I wished I was fast enough to run far away from him.

Marcus growled and grabbed my arm, pulling me back into his body. His grip pinched, and had I not been a shifter, I would have been bruised for days. “I didn’t say you could leave. You need to give it to me, Arley, give me what I want. You are no match for me. You should be lucky I want to give you this pity fuck. Now take my cock and be thankful a poor little prey shifter like you is allowed to be filled by an alpha wolf like me.”

I spit in his face and prepared myself to be slapped by him for the offense. Like last time. But just like that time before, my resistance was worth it. Maybe I should have vomited on him. He would never be the one to breach my barriers. I would fight to the bitter end. Marcus grabbed me back to his chest and I hated that I flinched, but I was prepared to fight.

“He said leave him alone.” The town’s most respected physician, Doctor Elliot, stepped out of his medical office building next door to the bakery. He was an older gentleman but stood at six foot six and was an opposing figure. He was also on the elder council of the pack and now a witness to the abuse of power that Marcus and his group were partaking in. At this rate, Marcus would be showing the elders and the rest of the pack his true colors all by himself and I wouldn’t need to even testify. “Let Arley go, Marcus.”

Marcus’ iron-clad grip on my shoulders released, and I dropped to the ground from the force. I quickly pushed myself up and away from him, my heart beating erratically in my chest. “Thanks, Doctor Elliot. I’ll be heading home now.”

“You go on, Arley. I’ll make sure these three don’t follow.” Doctor Elliot let out a troublesome wheezing sound and wiped his nose in a handkerchief. “I may have this strange wolf-cold right now, but I can still kick some ass.”

“We weren’t doing anything, right, Arley?” Marcus called after me, Doc blocking him from pursuing me.

Overcome with bold confidence because backup had arrived, I raised a hand in the air, middle finger proudly displayed as I walked steadily down the block, head held high.

I heard the doc laugh and a low growl from Marcus. But I didn’t care.

I was saved.

For now.

I needed to shift.

The insidious itch started in my core and crawled up my waist and into my chest, soon spreading across my shoulders and flushing my face. My legs ached, heavy with the need to transform into that of my animal. The desire to let my rabbit free into the air. I'd been attempting to put this off for as long as I could, to stay inside my warded cabin and not tempt danger. But I could no longer hold off.

Undressing and folding my clothes, I laid them on the entry table in my hallway for quick access once I returned. Facing the door, I unlatched the triple-lock mechanism that my father had always insisted we engage, a mix of mundane security with the special magical wards my mother had bespelled upon our property. Now that they were gone, I continued the tradition of mixing magic with non-magical means to make sure the predators of the world didn't take advantage of any sign of weakness in me.

I had checked my calendar earlier this week and was positive my heat was not due until a week from now. I was always reliable, never late and never early. So this couldn't be related to my heat. I should be fine to venture out into the woods for a quick shift. Besides, from the few bits of rumor I had heard from a few other prey omegas in the area, the wolves had only hunted those they could scent were close to their time of need, using the lust the heat induced in the prey to take advantage of those they perceived as lesser.

My rabbit was confused by the actions of the local pack. Why do they want to fuck us

if we are not worthy of dating or even befriending any other time?

Because they are horrible beasts who want anything they can get. I had discussed this with my animal before. While my animal waited for a mate, he still couldn't seem to comprehend why no one wanted him.

Why aren't the elders doing anything about Marcus and his friends, then?

Both my rabbit and I had no solid answers on that one. I am sure the pack was working on a solution, but I didn't feel confident they were working quickly enough.

But what if the rumors are true and they don't only hunt to take pleasure in our bodies, but to devour us fully afterward? My animal was torn between wanting to take his fur form and wanting to stay safely at home. If it wasn't for the itch to shift, I would be half inclined to agree with him.

I shook my head, not allowing what my rabbit suggested to take real shape in my mind. No. There is no proof that has happened.

Yet. But you have seen Marcus and heard the jokes the others make. Do you really think they aren't capable of such violence?

Stop. We cannot hide from them forever. I am in heat, so we will be fine. I stretched my limbs as I left my house and entered my backyard, quickly crossing into the tree line.

There weren't many non-shifters around us in this town, so we didn't feel the need to hide who or what we were. The benefit of being in a smaller town governed and secured by shifters was that we didn't think twice about shifting anywhere on our properties. I knew there were other areas in the country where shifters had to be more careful, not because humans didn't know about us but because they still freaked out

and had most of the nation's power. Although that was slowly shifting as well, and I knew one day there would be more balance for us all.

I allowed my body to relax once I found a nice spot in the woods. My senses tuned in to the area and, aware of only real animal life around me, I was the only shifter near. I closed my eyes and allowed the shift. The energy radiated through my body, beginning at my toes and flowing up until my entire being felt the tingle of the magic that allowed us to transform from human to rabbit.

Opening my eyes, I saw the world through my rabbit's perception. I took a moment to adjust to the dichromatic vision, my world now a mix of blue, dull-yellow, and grayish-green hues. I loved how I could see the world differently in this form, and felt a tad sorry that non-shifting humans couldn't shift and experience the world in more than one way.

Now it was time to play.

Jumping over a fallen tree trunk, I decided to venture a bit deeper into the woods and find some plants I could forage. I wouldn't roam too close to the rest of the town and risk running into the wolf pack nearby, but I also wouldn't allow their presence to keep me in too tiny of a box. This was my land, and my family had been here as long as any of those wolves' families. Just because nature deemed them stronger and better hunters didn't mean they possessed all this land and everything that dwelled on it.

They would never possess me.

Although Marcus had tried. Even going as far as pretending to be legitimately interested in me for more than just a quick roll beneath the sheets.

I was a fool to have ever let him into my life. I had once considered him a friend and spent some time hanging out with him. Then his father had died and his true colors

began to show. His friendship with me turned into an obsession to control and dominate me.

I told you. At least we never let him mate us.

I would rather die.

Don't say that. They are on the hunt tonight.

I caught the scent of the pack just before my bunny spoke. The hairs on my back spiked and my adrenaline rose. It was time to run.

I shifted back to my human form. It would be hard to outrun the wolves in any form if they shifted. But as long as they stayed in their two-legged forms, at least I had a chance to escape them. My rabbit would be captured within moments. I would only shift back if I needed to hide in a small space. There were places my human form just couldn't fit into.

Rustling from the trees on my left had me heading right. I needed to get back to my cabin. I couldn't let any of these men capture me. Who knew what they were capable of? And if it was Marcus, no one would be around this time to save me.

"Ah. It looks like we are in for a good night, boys." I heard one of Marcus' cousins shout out to the others as I dashed through the forest. "Let's go hunting."

I was so fucked.

And not in a good way.

Goddess, save me.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 4:27 am

Chapter Three

Fen

How the fuck did I let these fools convince me into coming out here tonight? I looked around at the group of men I'd planned to hang out with tonight and felt disgust rise in my throat. My stomach churned and I felt an ick cover my skin.

Because you are a dumbass who easily conforms and agrees so that peace is kept.

I rolled my eyes at my wolf. He was always telling me I gave in too easily to peer pressure. A people pleaser, he called me. But was it really that bad to want to fit in and not make waves, especially when my parents still lived in the town with these guys? I didn't want to give them any ammunition to terrorize my family.

I had called Marcus as soon as I settled in at my parents' house and had lunch. He seemed surprised but excited to reconnect with me. After all, from diapers to high school graduation, Marcus and I had been inseparable. Born on the same day in the pack, our mothers had decided to have playdates together and a friendship bloomed. But as we grew older, I realized we had less in common and our friendship was more out of a lack of choices in friends than in true understanding of one another as individuals. Once I got away from town and met so many more shifters in college, my old life just seemed to lose its luster, and I found that I didn't need to hold on to forced friendships.

Yet, here I was tonight, trying to reconnect with that old life to see if my parents were still safe here in Painesville. And it was becoming crystal clear how much had

changed.

“Hey, Fen.” Marcus smacked me on my back and handed me a cold bottle of locally bottled beer. “Are you ready to get some prey tonight?”

“When did you guys start doing these hunting games?” I took off the silver twist cap and took a long swig of Wolf Mountain Brew. I fought back my gag at the taste, wondering why this bottle tasted differently than what I’d remembered. “I don’t recall these hunting excursions occurring before I left for college.”

“A lot of things have changed, man.” Marcus chuckled and his friends joined in, some smirks shared among them. “We are not little pups any longer, and it’s time we showed our dominance.”

Looks like the rumors are right, and these idiots really did change for the worse. That’s what had me worried.

“And how exactly are you doing that?” I needed to find out all I could. Maybe they were just playing games with some local shifters. Still, the asshole moves were but something the pack should quickly nip in the bud.

“By hunting them and showing them who rules this area.” Marcus slapped me on the back, laughing and eyeing my bottle. “Don’t worry, nobody dies. We just rough some of them up and have a good time with a few others. Especially if we find ones close to their heat. Those are the best. Delicious.” I felt my stomach roll at his insinuation. Why had no one stopped him yet? “Finish up your beer and let’s start the night right.”

The guys around him cheered, and my stomach dropped. That same icky feeling of dread filling the pit of my stomach returned. This really was bad. And now I was stuck with these fools. And I was really getting annoyed with all the back pounding these jerks seemed to like to do.

At least with me here, I could help save some poor prey shifter from dealing with these guys.

“I’m cool, man. I don’t really drink these anymore.” I placed my bottle down on the ground.

Marcus picked up the bottle and handed it to his buddy. “What? Did the city life ruin your taste buds?”

More like teach me what a good brew tastes like.

“Must have, I guess.” I shrugged, biting my tongue to not insult the local brewery. Even if the beer I just tried tasted like piss water. I felt like brushing my teeth for an hour after that one swig.

“Now, let’s get the night started, shall we?” Marcus stripped and let out a howl. “Let’s shift and sniff out our targets for the night.”

“Hey, guys.” I looked around at everyone undressing and getting revved up on bad energy. All my instincts warned me that only bad things were going to happen if these men got their way. Part of me wanted to leave and have no part of this situation. But another part of me knew I had to stick around and try to help any poor victims that may land in Marcus’ path. Fuck. Can I stop this? “Why don’t we drop the hunt idea for the night and just go hit up the bar. Get drunk and find a willing hookup. We don’t need to do shit like hunting down prey to prove ourselves as dominant alphas. Come on, let’s just go.”

“We aren’t going anywhere, Fen. Except for farther into these woods to find a special bunny.” Marcus’ cousin Kevin, high-fived the idiot next to him, Robert. “Right, Marcus? Arley was smelling ripe this afternoon.”

“If he doesn’t stay in his cabin all weekend, this seems to be the perfect time to catch him and show him why no one rejects me or ignores me.” Marcus shook his head; an evil sneer curled his lips. “That’s enough talking. It’s time to shift and sniff out what’s waiting out here for us tonight.”

These men were not the same as the boys I had fun running around with in my teens and childhood. Dad was right. Something had changed and turned Marcus and these fools into shifters I didn’t ever want to associate with again. But I needed as much info and evidence as I could get tonight. These men had to be stopped before even more trouble was stirred. But how deep did this go?

Fine. Let’s just shift and run with them. If we sense any prey shifters out, we’ll help them get away to safety. Then tomorrow we can tell Mom and Dad the truth and bear witness of these activities in front of the elder council before I leave for school again.

I agreed with my wolf and decided to just try to stay two steps ahead of them if I could.

Before shifting, Marcus raised his fist and addressed the whole group. As always, split into three groups, some shifted; some stayed human. “We should be able to hunt in either form so no one loses out on the fun. First group to capture prey wins the night’s game. Bring them back here so we can all share in the spoils.”

These guys were making me physically ill. I had to find a way to stop them.

I followed Marcus’ group but as soon as I had a chance, I ran a bit ahead. I needed to sniff out any poor shifters stuck in the middle of this trap tonight. I wouldn’t allow anyone to be a victim.

Coming upon the area where woods met lake, I discovered the most enticing scent.

The sweet smell of warm freshly baked chocolate brownies met my nose and filled my soul with warmth. In one instant, my whole life changed. I knew what this meant. I had been waiting to experience this my whole life. Everything I ever wanted, needed, and craved was right in front of me—in the form of an adorable white bunny.

My wolf howled. The sound of triumph and celebration.

Our mate. We have finally found him. Protect him, Bond him. Claim him!

Just as I was about to step forward and pick up our tiny mate, the energy around us changed and then before my eyes, he shifted into the most breathtakingly beautiful man. A short, clean cut of light-brown hair, mesmerizing eyes the color of chocolate, and a body that was made for sinning. And he was all mine.

There was definitely no way Marcus and his goons were going to lay a hand on this man. Fuck finding more evidence or digging deeper; I only had one priority now. To protect my mate and get us both to safety. Even if it meant killing Marcus and his friends.

No one better dare touch my mate.

Arley

I ran in the woods for what felt like hours, evading the men who were out to capture me as part of their sadistic Friday night game. Every time I made it close to my house, I was chased in the opposite direction. I needed to get past these men. But my options were getting fewer and fewer.

I had shifted back into my rabbit form to find a better hiding spot when I heard the hunters getting closer.

If I couldn't get away from them, then maybe I needed to find the tiniest hole to burrow in and speak a small hiding spell to mask my scent from the predators on my trail. The magic I could wield wasn't very long-lasting, but perhaps it was enough to trick this group into giving up on me. But once I saw my fated mate, I had shifted back to human. And now I stood frozen in the middle of a forest. There was a pack of wolves hunting me—intent on either eating me or fucking me, depending on which of them caught me first. Yet, I couldn't move.

The tantalizing scent of freshly cut roses and spearmint hit my nose, filling me with a sense of comfort and home. All I ever craved was standing before me. I had finally found the one person who I was made for. My mate.

He stepped closer to me and lifted a rough hand to the side of my face. I shut my eyes and enjoyed the gentle touch. The preliminary connection of our bond had snapped into place the moment our eyes had met, and I could feel the energy flow between us. Electrifying and strong, I could detect a few of his emotions and knew that he could feel my own. I had read about the mating bond, had heard about it from friends, and I had envied the magical connection that I'd imagined fated mates to share. But nothing compared to the reality of it. All the research, all the fairy tales, all the dreaming—none of it prepared me for the overpowering effect the initial realization of the bond would have on my whole being. This man might be a stranger, but he was already the most precious thing in my life. I would love him until the day I died and would lay down my life for him if danger ever came upon us. He was my one and my only. He was my true mate.

And we are being hunted. Move before you get us killed or raped.

My bunny was right. We couldn't just stand here out in the open waiting to be caught.

Laughter and crunching leaves to the right alerted me to the wolves moving closer. Not all of them shifted right away, preferring to hunt with their human senses and

then attack after the shift.

Now it was time for us both to run.

As long as he wasn't with Marcus and his friends, that was. Staring into my mate's eyes, I searched for any trace of deception when I asked him my questions.

"Are you with them? Are you a part of Marcus' group of assholes?" I was hopeful he would deny it. Please, Fate, do not prove you paired me with someone who thinks hunting prey shifters is a fun nighttime activity.

"No. I'm not one of them. I must be truthful though, they are the ones who brought me here, but I'm not a part of whatever games they are playing right now. I just felt a need to stay and help anyone who wound up in the sight of their crosshairs tonight." He closed his eyes and took a deep sniff of the air. "They are getting very close to finding us though. We better find somewhere safe to hide from them. Once I am sure they won't get us, then I can explain it all to you. Do you live close by?" His words sounded sincere, and I really hoped they were since this was my mate and all.

"Fine. Come on." Taking a large leap of faith in our fragile mate bond, I grabbed his large warm hand and pulled him with me, dashing in the direction of my house. "I'm Arley by the way. And you better not be a creep like your friends. I promise if you are, I will sneak up on you while you are asleep and rip your balls off."

"Duly noted. Never piss off my mate." My mate had a sense of humor it seemed. "But do you really believe fate would match you with a creep? That would be pretty bitchy. Unless you did something that would call upon karma to pay you a visit." He chuckled as we ran, toward safety and home. "And the name is Fen, by the way."

The sound of my mate's amusement sent a spark of lust through my body. Fuck, I needed to get us to my house pronto. My ass was aching to be filled with Fen's cock.

My heat was here and ready to make me into a horny slut for him.

“Fine. I’ll trust you because I don’t think fate would be so cruel. Just stick with me and we can get to safety in my cabin. They won’t dare to break in. At least they never have before.” And I’m sure my locks and protection wards from the local witch’s coven would keep us from harm. I hoped as I never had to test it before.

“When did they start doing shit like this? I used to know them well but not in recent years. They’ve changed so much. They are like animals instead of men. We aren’t supposed to let our wolves lead and dismiss morals and societal rules.” Fen panted as we got closer to safety. “Have they hurt you before?”

“Not in any substantial way.” I got to my door and unlocked it, pulling my mate inside and securing it. “Marcus just likes to screw with me a bit in town, suggesting that he wouldn’t mind taking my heat and proving to me that he’s more powerful than anyone else. So far, I’ve felt more fear than pain from any encounter with him.”

“He’s never succeeded though?” Fen grabbed my shoulders and pushed me up against the wall with gentle force. “Tell me. Has any of them ever dared take what’s mine? Do I need to kill any of those men?” His wolf was close to the surface the way his eyes flashed and his lips lifted in a snarl. Yet I didn’t feel any fear of him.

“No, alpha. He’s never touched me in any sort of intimate way. Although he has tried. But I always fought him off. I was waiting for my mate. You will be my first.” My breath was coming out fast, but I wasn’t sure if I was going breathless from the running we just did or from the heat that was coursing through my body. Fuck, even this show of dominance was turning me on, and that sort of display usually fills me with disgust not desire.

“And, you, my dear omega, will be my first...” Fen stared at my mouth and his own lips tilted up at the sides. He looked so fucking sexy. “And we will be each other’s

only.”

“Yes. Your touch will be the only one my body will ever know. And my touch will be the only one your body will ever crave. From this day out, we belong to only one another.” I leaned in and licked the side of his neck, savoring the salty taste of his skin and wanting even more. My hand slid between us and my fingers curled around his hard length. I felt the slick gathering at my hole, ready to take him deep inside. “Now shut up and fuck me, mate.”

Our mouths collided and I felt my body melt into his, before coming back to life and rubbing against his hard lines. I chased a release but knew I would need more. I would need him buried balls deep in my ass and his teeth breaking the skin of my neck. I needed his cock in my hole and his mark on my mating gland. And I needed it now.

Thank the goddess we were already naked.

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Chapter Four

Fen

As Arley's heat rose, the delicious chocolatey aroma of my mate tantalized my senses. I was torn between wanting to just wrap him up in my arms and breathe in his decadent scent or throw him on the next soft surface and ravage his bare body. I made my choice the moment he closed the cabin door, latching all of the triple locks before turning back to me and devouring me with his gaze. I wanted to be consumed by him and for him to be fully lost in me and what my body could provide him. Complete and utter ecstasy.

I would have to ask later why he had three heavy-duty locks on the door though.

"Come here." My voice was deep and growly, my wolf pushing forward to give his demand to our mate. "Let me taste you. I bet you taste better than candy."

Arley physically trembled at the sound, but the slow slide of his lips up and the way he sank into my embrace encouraged me that it was a tremor of excitement and not of fear. And the burst in his scent punctuated that as a fact. "Yes, please, my alpha. Take a taste."

Capturing his mouth for another kiss, my wolf howled at the contact, and the energy of our souls merged and mixed, beginning the unbreakable connection. The claim that was to come would seal the bond. A tiny whimper escaped Arley's mouth and the sound sent a tingle straight down to my dick. I wasn't the type of shifter who wanted to hunt and hurt others, but the needy noises coming from my omega called to the

need within me to dominate and claim what was mine. But only in the bedroom.

Speaking of which...

I broke our kiss, just for the moment. I needed to know something important. "Where's your bed? I want to take you somewhere soft the first time. We can fuck up against the wall another time."

"Keep that promise. Follow me." Arley grabbed my hand and led me through his tiny but tidy living room and down a darkened, narrow hallway. We passed a few closed doors before stopping at the last one on the left. Twisting the knob, Arley pulled me into the room.

I let him. Not liking the loss of control, my wolf grumbled, For now.

Come on, it's kinda hot. I confessed to my wolf. I don't mind him taking the lead once in a while as long as he's being satisfied and we are the one fulfilling his fantasies.

His silence answered me better than his words ever could. He knew I spoke the truth. Our mate was on fire.

But another part of me got harder with Arley's actions. The sign that he, too, was impatient to get me into his bed.

Once inside the bedroom, Arley dropped to the ground and took my cock to the back of his throat. Fuck. He had no gag reflex. All thoughts fled my mind as I stared down at my beautiful mate's mouth full of my length.

Sucking and licking, he showed my thickness the love it craved, his hands grasping the base and working in tandem with his mouth to bring me just to the edge. I buried

my hands in his hair and gently guided him to take me in deeper.

“Holy fuck, baby. You keep that up and I will come before getting to bury myself in that gorgeous ass of yours.” And I needed to be in that hole. It felt like I would combust if I didn’t get inside my mate soon.

Popping off my cock, Arley looked at me from beneath thick lashes. “You can come in my mouth first, please. I need to taste your thick cum shooting down my throat.” His sultry voice and seductive words nearly had me coming alone.

Without waiting for an answer, my mate continued working my length with his hands and mouth, doubling his efforts to pull me over the edge.

Closing my eyes and letting myself get lost in the sensation of his warm mouth on me, I let myself rise to the peak and fall over the ledge, spilling my seed into Arley’s waiting mouth.

“Mmm. Just as good as I thought it’d be.” Arley licked a few stray drops from around his lips and slowly rose from the floor. “Now, we can lie down together on the bed.”

Grasping my hand, Arley pulled me away from the wall he had pushed me against before going down on me. I had no energy to do anything but follow his lead.

If my mate could make me feel this incredible with only his mouth, what will I feel like after I bury my cock deep within his ass?

I needed to find out. I had to find out. Now.

With a gentle push to my chest from Arley, I fell onto the soft mattress covered in black silken sheets. Before I could move higher on the bed, my mate straddled my lap and met my lips in a passionate kiss. Small nips, begging to be let in so our tongues

could mingle. Opening up to his silent plea, I tasted myself on his tongue and felt the rumble deep in my chest. My wolf was proud; our taste was on our mate.

My reawakening cock was nestled between Arley's ass cheeks, begging to be allowed entry. Arley groaned a bit and rolled his hips, his slick coating me so I would be ready to breach his hole. "Work my hole open, alpha. Fill me with your fingers and then give me what I truly crave."

Lifting him slightly off me and laying him down beside me on the sheets, I shifted and covered him with my body, lining our cocks up and allowing them to rub together for a bit. "I will." My wolf pushing at the surface brought a rough tone to my voice. "But we are doing this on my terms, now."

Again, a slight tremor shook Arley's body as he grabbed the back of my head and brought my mouth to his.

I let him lead us for a moment before I placed a hand on his cheek and pulled away. "I'm taking control now, little one. Let your alpha bring you to your climax."

Another slow smile, and he put his arms up above his head, clasped together like he had them tied. "My body is yours, Fen. Do anything you desire. Lick it, suck it, fuck it, make me feel our touch for days. But please just do it now. Don't make me wait any longer."

This man was going to make me come again before I even got a chance to be inside him.

Deciding I needed a taste of my mate, like he had of me, I slipped down his body until I was kneeling on the floor, between his legs, my face even with his cock. "Now it's my turn."

“Please.” Arley gazed down at me, eyes glassy with his heat.

Taking him into my mouth, I got my first taste of Arley, and he was divine. Perfect.

“Ahh.” I watched Arley close his eyes and his body bowed. “That feels so good. Don’t stop.”

I vowed to make him feel this level of pleasure or higher every single day for the rest of our lives. Lifting my head a moment to talk, I told him what was on my mind. “I want to eat you for breakfast every day until we grow old and can no longer get onto the floor. Then I will find a different way to get down here between our spread legs and feast on you like a starving man.”

“Please.” Arley opened his eyes and glared at me. I could feel the desire radiating off him with his heat. Our fated mate bond wasn’t solidified yet, but already strong enough that I could feel some of his emotions. Right now, he was growing more frustrated. “Less talking and more stuffing my cock to the back of your throat.”

“Yes, omega.” I couldn’t let my omega suffer, could I? Getting back to my task of driving my mate to the point of release, I lost myself in my mission, pleasantly surprised by the first squirt of his cum in my mouth and then needily swallowing it all down like it was ambrosia. I licked around the base of his cock, and up each side, fully cleaning it of any juices he’d spilt. “Delicious.”

“Thank you.” Arley winked and grasped a handful of my hair, pulling me up his body.

I followed his demand because I wanted what I was sure he did. To give him a bit of his taste through a kiss.

Our lips met, and our tongues dueled, swapping the hint of his essence around. I felt

my cock twitch as Arley moaned into my mouth.

“Fuck me, alpha. Now, before I go insane with need.” The scent of his heat expanded and filled my being, calling to my wolf to bury myself deep within him. Mate him. Mark him. Claim him.

Without another word, I reached down and found his hole. My body lay between his spread thighs, knees bent and pelvis angled to allow my touch. I entered him with one finger, his entrance dripping with slick and easy to stretch. Before long, I had all four fingers inside him, and he was begging for more.

I pushed his legs higher, to get a better angle and lined my cock up to his hole, sliding in slowly to allow for any adjustment he may need.

I met his eyes and felt the pull of our bond, the invisible string holding my soul to his. This man was mine and always would be. How was I so blessed? Arley was everything I ever wanted and needed, and now he was all mine.

I held his gaze as I thrust into him, his hands gripping firmly onto my biceps, then snaking down my body until he was gripping my ass and pulling me closer to him.

“I need you, Fen. I need you so badly.”

“You’ve got me, Arley. All of me.”

Lost in our connection and the amazing tingling sensation that spread through me as our energies merged and our bond strengthened, I felt the tingle of my fangs break the surface of my gums. My wolf was urging me to lay claim to our mate.

“Do you want this, Arley?” I needed to be sure I wasn’t forcing this permanence onto him. Once our bond was complete, I would never be able to let him go. The fated

bond would eternally link us. “Are you sure you’re ready to be fully mine? To complete our bond?”

“Claim me, Fen. Make me completely yours.” Arley leaned up and kissed my lips. “Seal the bond.”

With those words ringing in my head, I sank my canines into the area where his neck met shoulder, placing my mark on his mating gland and setting in motion the final steps of the mating process. I lifted my head away and my back bowed as I released deep within his ass, sending my seed to search out its home in hopes of creating a life. I didn’t care if we got pregnant immediately or if fate made us wait. What I did care about was that this man was now mine, forever.

I threw back my head and howled. Allowing my wolf his cry of victory. Then I felt Arley’s answering bite. He’d leaned up and sank his teeth into my flesh, leaving his mark for all to see.

Our bond was complete.

We were one and forever would be.

Arley

The heat consumed me whole. My body, soul, and mind. It made my desires for my mate unquenched. No matter how many times I had him inside my body, flooding me with his seed, I craved more. I was drowning in my need for him. And I could feel through our bond that the need was not one-sided. He was just as desperate to feel me wrapped around his length as I was to be filled by him.

But what was even better? The aftermath of each climax, where my alpha just held me in my arms and we shared our favorite memories from childhood, guilty pleasure

movies, and even a few icks we shared. This man truly was amazing, and I felt a blast of excitement rush through me every time I learned a new fact about him.

“Seriously.” Fen shivered, emphasizing his distaste for the idea. “I cannot stand it when those ads show the computer playing the game, but it keeps avoiding the best moves or making stupid mistakes. It drives me insane.”

“Me too.” I shook my head, just the thought of the ads making my skin get tight and my aggravation grow. “They frustrate me so much that I will refuse to download the app just out of pure spite that they made me watch that ad for thirty seconds.”

“See, you get me.” Fen kissed my forehead, sending a feeling of affection through our bond. “Now tell me something you love.”

“Well, if I had to create an afternoon filled with my favorites, this is what I’d do. First, I’d grab my favorite snacks—homemade tortilla chips and salsa. And some sort of sweet, preferably s’mores. Then, I would build a little hiding space in my living room. Gather all the pillows, cushions, and blankets I possess, and build a little cozy nest.” I laced our fingers together, loving the connection between any part of our bodies. “And finally, I would allow myself to get lost in one of my favorite books, a paranormal romance, or if the mood hit, an apocalyptic thriller.”

“And those sorts of books are your favorite?” Fen shifted his position. “I would have pegged you for a fantasy or romance reader, honestly.”

“Well, I will admit that 95 percent of my pleasure reading is romance. Give me a happily ever after every time, and I will binge-read the author’s backlist. Add shifters or vampires? I am going to sign up to that author’s newsletter and stalk their social media accounts so I don’t miss future releases.” I drew circles with my finger on my mate’s chest as we lay in bed. “But the other 5 percent are post-apocalyptic fiction. Give me some zombies, cyber-attacks, alien attacks, or anything else that brings

about the end of the world as the characters knew it. And I will cuddle up and read all weekend long.”

Fen’s chest rose and fell as we spoke, and I treasured each moment of getting to know my mate. But soon the heat rose again, and I needed to make my needs known. I loved learning about my mate, so I waited until my body was so consumed by my heat that I could no longer think of anything else but the feel of his skin on mine and his energy merging with mine as we mated.

Crawling on top of Fen, I captured his lips as he was mid-sentence. I didn’t care about his secrets at the moment; I would bond with him over that later. What I needed from him in that instant was his hard, thick, long cock filling me and pumping his cum deep inside my needy hole.

Lining myself up to hover over his thick hard cock, I stared my mate in the eyes. “It’s time for another round, alpha. Are you going to give me what I need? Or do I need to just take it from you?”

Thrusting up so that my welcoming entrance engulfed his length, Fen leaned in and kissed my lips with passion. His tongue invaded my mouth, and the sweet taste of mint came with it. Goddess, I loved his taste. I could live off him for the rest of my life and be satisfied.

Fen broke away for a minute and growled, the sound echoing through my body and making me slicker. A thrill of desire surged through my veins. “I’ll give you what you need, little omega. I’ll give you everything.”

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Chapter Five

Arley

“Come out, whittle bunny. I promise we won’t bite.” Awful laughter followed the sing-song words. “Well, not much.”

“Why won’t they leave?” Closing the small gap in my living room curtains, I turned and faced Fen. “What are we going to do?”

“They can still smell your heat. It’s only been a day since it started, so they can still sense it.” Fen pulled me into his body. They must have gone back to get the cars and drove here this morning. I really was hoping they would just give up. “Don’t worry, I won’t let them get to you.”

“What are we gonna do?” I burrowed my head into his chest, loving the way I felt in his arms. “We can’t just hide here indefinitely in the cabin.”

“That is exactly what we can do.” Fen kissed the top of my head. “Not indefinitely but for the next couple of days until your heat clears. We’re just gonna sit out here and wait them out.”

“Hopefully they will give up. But what if they don’t? I never saw Marcus and the others as quitters. What if they stay out there the whole time? What if they find a way in what if—”

Fen grabbed my chin and lifted it so we were eye to eye. “I will not let anything

happen to you. Baby, you are mine. No one else is going to touch you.” The vehemence in his voice assuaged my panic for the moment.

Growls from outside grew louder and more violent. Some of the shifters with Marcus transformed into their wolves and spread out, surrounding my cabin.

“We know you’re in there, whittle bunny. Come on out,” Marcus taunted. The malevolence in his tone made me want to run and hide. “And if that traitor wolf is still in there with you, we’re gonna get to him too. You hear me, Fen. I’m going to rip your throat out for touching what should have been mine.”

“Well, I guess they know I’m in here too.” Fen laughed and hugged me closer. “Oh well. I’m not letting them near my mate.”

“Isn’t there anything we can do?” I grabbed my phone and pulled up my contacts. “There has to be someone we can call. Maybe the elders? They don’t know about this and what he’s doing. I’m positive of it.”

“I don’t think they do either. I’m going to call my dad. He will know who we should call to help get them away from us.” Fen dialed his father’s number and put the phone to his ear. “Dad. Marcus is causing trouble for my mate and I—”

“Mate. When did you find your mate?” I heard Fen’s father’s excitement over the line.

“It’s a long story, and I will tell you and Mom about it all later. Right now, though, we need your help. I’m over at Arley’s cabin on the north side of the woods. He’s in heat—”

“I know Arley.” Fen’s father was one of the regulars at the bakery. “Do you need me to bring you two some food. I know heats can make it hard to leave the house and if

you don't have enough groceries, I can go grab a few things for you and leave it at the front door."

"No. Dad." Fen's lips tipped up into a smile. "That's really appreciated but right now, we actually need help in a different way. Marcus and his guys scented him and they are now surrounding the cabin trying to take him away from me and threatening me."

"What? That's insane. What sort of men have those boys grown up to be? I need to inform the council right away. Give me a few minutes and I will get help right out to you."

"Thanks, Dad. Love you." Disconnecting the call, Fen placed his phone down on the table and gathered me back into his arms. "My father said he will handle it."

The ruckus outside continued, but luckily, no attempts to get inside the cabin were made. After several minutes, a few more vehicles surrounded the cabin, and some elders that we were familiar with stepped out, including Elders Mitchell and Edwards.

"I really hope they can get Marcus and his men to leave and stay away from us." Fen shook his head. "The council needs to finally do something if this is how Marcus and them are behaving. Maybe this will finally be enough proof."

"I trust the elders." I laid my head on Fen's shoulder as we peeked out the window at the action. His presence was soothing, even if the scene outside was stressful. "They were friends with my parents and have watched over me my whole life. I know them well and believe they are decent men who will handle the situation for us."

"I forgot that your parents interacted with the pack so much," Fen said. "Most of the non-wolf shifters didn't come around as often. I remember you and your parents though."

“You remember me?” I remembered him too. Although I never expected this, I hadn’t seen him in years. Since we can’t scent our mate until we turn eighteen, I never imagined he’d be my mate. Even if I did have a crush on him. Fate worked in mysterious ways.

“Of course I remember you.” Fen lifted my chin up so our eyes met. “Are you blushing?” His lips curved up into a small grin. His eyes crinkling at the sides, love shining through them. I could stare into his eyes and get lost.

“Shut up.” I hid my face in his chest; the heat infusing my cheeks was too much to bear. “Let’s just eavesdrop on what the elders are saying to Marcus.” I turned my head slightly, still staying nestled in the warm embrace of my mate.

“Marcus.” Elder Mitchell approached the group harassing us. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Elder Mitchell.” Marcus greeted the man with most likely a charming sneer on his face. It was one I had seen numerous times before as he tried to save face. “We were just visiting an old friend.”

“That’s not what this looks like, young man.” Elder Edwards joined his fellow elders to surround Marcus. “We have been alerted to this disturbance and are here to find out what gave you the impression you have any right to harass anyone in our town.”

“Elders, that is not what is happening here.” Marcus gestured to the house and then his friends. I could almost feel the lying venom from my safe spot in my mate’s arms. It was disturbing to think of Marcus getting away with any of this. “We just wanted to make sure the area was secure for Fen and Arley. There have been rumors that there are shifters running wild in the woods and attacking omegas in heat. We couldn’t let Arley fall victim to such a crime. When we found out our old friend Fen was with him, we decided to check out the boundaries of Arley’s property to ensure

no one could interrupt the couple while they were indisposed.”

Due to our shifter hearing and our location by the window, we could overhear almost everything said. It helped that they had raised their voices. While not every word could be heard, most could. Especially the louder statements from the elders.

“We are not going to let you do this inside our pack.” Elder Edwards poked his finger in Marcus’ chest. “You may think that you guys are running the pack, but we are still in charge. You’re just a tiny little boy trying to run a pack, and you are failing.”

“I deserve to be alpha.” Marcus growled, his face transforming into the monster he really was. “This pack was run by my father until he died, I should have inherited his rule.”

“That’s not how this pack does things, and you know it.” Elder Mitchell shook his head. “You have not been elected alpha and we do not rule by bloodlines here. We do what’s best for the whole pack. And by the activities you have been participating in, you are currently not showing the qualities it takes to be an alpha.”

“That’s bullshit.” Marcus pushed Elder Mitchell. “The title should be mine. I am the strongest alpha and can lead this pack to greatness.”

With the mounting anger seeping off these alphas, I was glad to have my mate inside safely watching the action from this window.

“You sound like a child playing pretend king. Lead this pack to greatness,” Elder Edwards mocked. “We are the exact kind of pack we need to be. We don’t need to grow into some super pack or gain power. We just need to protect our members and live decent lives. As for electing an alpha—we find the strongest of the pack, we make sure he is the best for the whole pack, and we hold a vote for the pack and council to elect him as alpha.”

“But.” Elder Mitchell looked around at the other elders and then Marcus and his friends. “Whoever becomes our alpha works together with the elders to run the pack. He does not rule alone.”

Elder Edwards gestured toward Marcus. “You are not our alpha, and even if you were our alpha, you are not working with the elders, and therefore you would be terminated from your position.”

“What?” Marcus shouted. “I think you all have this wrong. We were only trying to help some friends. I am more than willing to work with the elders. Just elect me alpha and you will see I am the right choice to lead us.”

“Enough.” Elder Anderson stepped up from behind the gathering crowd. The most respected of all elders, he tended to hold more weight with his words than any other in the pack. When he spoke, everyone knew to listen. “We are all going to leave this area at once. Let Arley and Fen be.”

“Yes, Elder Anderson.” Marcus nodded and snapped his fingers so that the rest of his friends would follow his lead. “We will no longer disrupt the lovely couple. Come on, guys, let’s head into Davensport and hit the club there. I heard they are having Omega Night and the place should be full of...potential mates.”

“And, Marcus.” Elder Anderson placed a hand on the retreating shifter’s shoulder. “You and your men are to meet the elder council tomorrow night at the pack meeting house. We have things to discuss.”

“We’ll be there.” Marcus entered his car and drove off, his friends all abandoning the area as well.

“We will be leaving as well.” Elder Andrews ordered the elders still remaining. “Congratulations, Fen and Arley. Let us know if that group gives you any more

trouble.”

Relief swam through me as the elders pulled away and Fen and I were alone once more. That was not how I wanted to start my mating, but I guess it was done and over with now. I leaned up and kissed my mate. The sweet pleasure released from that one touch gave me an invigorating boost. “I know this won’t be the last of them, but I am glad that it has ended for now and rather peacefully.”

“Me too.” Fen led me back to the couch and we sat down. “Come sit with me. Maybe we can watch a movie.”

“That was scary, but I feel better now.” I grabbed the television remote and flipped through the offerings. Fen waited a moment before adjusting me right next to him. “But a movie sounds like the perfect solution to relax after that.”

Fen’s phone rang and he answered it on speaker. “Hello.”

“Hello, Fen, it’s Elder Anderson. I didn’t want to disrupt you two while Arley is in heat. But I wanted to let you know that we will handle Marcus and his men. We have been building up a bit of a case and tomorrow, we will be going over all the evidence and holding a meeting. Some of the elders don’t want to give up on him completely, but I have them all willing to show him that we will not accept his current behaviors. If they bother you again, call me right away. Just know that I am aware of the sort of man Marcus has become and I will not let him destroy this pack or harm this town’s residents.”

“Thank you, Elder Anderson.” Disconnecting the call, Fen settled onto the couch. “Let’s watch something stupid and fun. Nothing too serious.”

“I know the perfect one.” I selected one of my favorite cult classics and relaxed in my mate’s arms. Another round of heat would start soon but until then, I just wanted to

cuddle and forget about the drama with Marcus.

Maybe we should move to the city with Fen, my rabbit pondered. They still have places to shift in the city. And we would get away from those wolves.

Shhh... less thinking. Just enjoy our mate. We can figure out our future later, I told my rabbit. Just enjoy the moment.

Fen

“What are you doing, Marcus? I thought we told you to leave us alone.” I seethed when I found my ex-friend waiting outside of the corner store for me and Arley after our shopping trip. “He’s my mate. Stop stalking him.” What would it take to get Marcus to understand? He obviously didn’t agree or approve of mates in the same manner as the rest of the town. Why did they have to put up with him?

“He is not good enough to be anything to a wolf but a fuck.” Marcus licked his lips and grabbed his crotch, making him look like the biggest moron on the planet. “Or a snack.”

“Fuck off, Marcus.” Arley rolled his eyes yet shifted closer to me. “Just go away.”

We pushed past Marcus and got to my car, my wolf on alert. The whole while, I was aware that Marcus’ goons were watching and waiting for a cue to start up trouble. I wouldn’t let them. I had to get my mate to safety. Permanently. I’d do whatever it took to keep Arley safe. One would think growing up in a pack, they would know what an alpha would do for a mate.

“Leave them alone, Marcus.” Elder Edwards exited the store behind us, witnessing the confrontation. “For someone who is trying to prove he deserves to rule this pack, you sure aren’t acting like a leader.”

“I was just asking Fen how long he’s in town for. We need to catch up more. The other night ended way too soon.” Marcus gestured, as if he were seriously trying to be apologetic and sincere. Was he joking? I felt like I was in the twilight zone listening to him do a one-eighty. “I was going to offer to take good care of Arley here when Fen needs to head back to college.”

“Quit the bullshitting, Marcus. I know you...” Elder Edwards’ words broke off in a coughing fit.

“Are you okay?” Arley went to his side and tried to soothe him with gentle pats to the back. “Why is everyone getting sick all of a sudden?” My mate’s worried eyes glanced at me, as if asking me to make everything better. I’d try, for my mate, I’d try.

“Maybe it’s something the older generation is doing?” Marcus smirked. If I didn’t know any better, I almost would have guessed Marcus had something to do with the sickness going around. But how? “That’s why us younger men need to take over the pack.” Did he not hear himself? Yes, the younger generation needed to step up, but not how Marcus intended.

“Then maybe you should start proving you are worthy of that.” I rolled my eyes and turned to Elder Edwards who was finally done coughing. “It was nice to see you again, Elder Edwards.”

“You too, Fen. Take good care of Arley and tell your folks I said hi. I hope to see them at the next council meeting.”

“Will do.” Taking Arley’s hand, I led him back to the car. One way, I’d get my mate ensconced in the vehicle and to safety. My wolf was clawing at me to hurry up. It wasn’t like I could control idiots.

Once in the car and headed to Arley’s cabin, I reached over and grabbed his hand. “I

think you need to move to the city with me. Get away from Marcus and the others. I know you have your cabin, but...”

“I can sell it,” he agreed rather quickly. Arley twisted in his seat to look at me. His face was paler than normal, but to be expected with another confrontation from Marcus. “Or keep it as a vacation home when we visit your parents. But I already decided I was going to Chicago with you.”

“You did?” Shock rolled through me. My heart leapt for joy. I thought for sure this would end up in a fight. Not that I wasn’t ecstatic, I was. I just wanted my mate to be happy. “Are you sure?”

“I thought hard about it last night but honestly, I was ready the moment I realized my mate wasn’t local.” Arley raised our conjoined palms and kissed my knuckles. My heart skipped a beat at the love shining through his eyes. I could feel it through our bond too; my wolf wanted to roll in it, soak it up. “I love my cabin, but everything here reminds me of what I lost. It’s time to live for what’s to come. You, me, and whatever our future holds. I know for you, that’s in the city. So my choice was clear.”

“You are amazing, Arley. You know that, right?” I pulled the car over on the side of the road. My desire to kiss my mate wouldn’t wait. My heart was near to bursting with love for my mate. I had hit the jackpot. “I promise to make every day even more proof you are making the right choice by being with me.” That was an easy vow I could make. One I would make and prove a hundred times over.

“I know you will.” Arley wrapped his arms around my neck and crawled over the middle console to straddle my lap, a sexy mischievous grin on his face. “The car is off. The road is empty. Why don’t we take a moment to show me just how right I am?”

“I love how your mind works.” I smiled and accepted my mate’s kiss.

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Chapter Six

Arley

T all gray structures surrounded me, a cacophony of horns and passing chatter, and the occasional brush of a stranger's arms as we passed on the busy sidewalks introduced me to my new home. I loved it.

Not necessarily the sensory overload of it all but the fact that I was no longer under the constant attention of Marcus, Lenny, Jerry, and the rest of those guys. I was a small fish in a bigger pond and could melt into the crowd. Plus, I had Fen.

I glanced beside me at my sexy mate as we walked through the city from the parking garage to the downtown campus of his university. A wave of affection crashed into me. I felt truly blessed by the goddess and fate to be given this man as my one true mate. When he looked at me, I could feel just how much he adored me. It had been a while since I felt so loved and I'd never felt quite this way. The tales they tell of fated mates and the overwhelming love that bond brings proved truer than I had imagined.

"How are you enjoying your first trip into the city?" Fen held my hand as we walked along the bustling streets at a sure but steady pace, even as everyone rushed by us. "I know it can be overwhelming, especially initially. It took me a few weeks to get use to the smells and noise but once I did, I fell in love. And we are still close enough to farms and wooded areas that we can still shift a few times a week if we like."

"Honestly?" I gestured around us, my heart lighter than it had been in weeks. "This is all amazing. I see how some shifters can have a hard time coping with the situation.

But for some reason, my rabbit and I agree that this place is awesome.”

“That’s exactly how my wolf reacted the first time I walked onto campus.” Fen laughed, eyes crinkling at the edges. My mate would age well, not that I wanted to think about time passing by so soon, though. Not yet, even as the hustle and bustle of the city passed us by in the blink of an eye. “I think that even though shifters experience sensory input differently than humans, that doesn’t mean it’s a negative thing to live in such a busy area. Some people avoid sensory overload, while others crave more input. I think we might just be the type that can handle the blazing lights, thunderous sounds, and standout odors.”

“I agree.” I loved the new life I found myself in. I couldn’t wait to explore more of it. Whether it was new to me or because of my mate, I was excited. Who knew what the future held, but as long as I had Fen, that’s all that mattered. “Can you take me to the lakeside campus? I was looking at some of the classes the school offered and most of the ones I would take seem to take place on that campus and not downtown.”

“You were looking at the classes?” Fen stopped in the middle of the street, oblivious to the crowd parting around them. “Is that what you want to do? Go back to school?”

I yanked my mate to the little outdoor patio on the side of the street. The scents coming from it triggered hunger as well as the need for a bit of privacy. “Let’s grab something to eat here and we can talk about what I looked up.”

“Sounds like a plan to me.” Fen led me to the hostess stand and we were soon being shown to a table.

“This is a fancy place.” I rose my brows when I looked at the prices on the menu. I’d have to remember to research places to eat that were more affordable and not just follow my stomach. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize that when I suggested eating here. Why don’t we just get something small here for the experience of it then grab some

cheaper food when we get closer to the house?" I really hoped I wouldn't offend Fen, but he seemed to already be a step ahead of me.

"No need, babe." Fen picked up his menu and nodded toward it, a sly grin on his lips. At least he wasn't offended like I feared. "I'm able to afford eating here occasionally. Order whatever appeals to you. Trust me. It's fine."

"Are you sure?" I checked the prices again. I felt like my rabbit was running circles in my head about to faint. "You are a college student and I know your parents aren't rich. How can you afford this?" Not that I questioned my mate's authenticity, but something wasn't adding up.

"I have a lot to fill you in about and I will. But for now, just trust me and order the food that calls to you, okay?" Fen reached for my hand across the table, his eyes pleading with me to understand. "I can tell you that the crab cakes are out of this world."

"Okay, I will choose to believe you when you say it's all good." I perused the menu and decided on my meal; they all sounded mouthwatering. "I am going to try the chicken linguine in Vodka sauce. You?"

"I'm going to go with the filet mignon and lobster dish, with a side of potato and zucchini. If you want, we can even share." Fen closed his menu and placed it at the end of the table.

"Hey now. If you want some of my delicious food, you will need to pay up." I closed my own menu and placed it on top of his.

"And what would you like in return, besides half of my plate?" Fen folded his hands and leaned in, cocking a brow.

“Well, a kiss of course. I need my desserts first, you know.” I let the right corner of my mouth raise up and switched my focus from his eyes to his mouth. My mate’s kisses were addictive, and I could easily survive off them alone. Maybe, as I ignored my stomach growl.

“That can be arranged.” Fen smiled and leaned over, pressing his lips to my own in a brief yet passionate kiss. I guess being in the city now, I’d have to learn to take small kisses anytime I could. “Now let’s order.”

Fen

“So.” Arley sat across from me at the restaurant table. I knew I needed to feed him, and I wanted to treat him to the best food in the area...but at this moment, I really wanted to kiss those delicious lips. I needed to remember my manners and that we were in the city. I couldn’t just cart him off down an alley to the forest and have my way with him, no matter how good that plan sounded. “I’ve been thinking about what I should do. You’ll be going to class every day, but so far, I have just sat around the apartment, not doing much. I think it’s time that I contribute to the household income and plan for my future. It’s not fair that you and the other roommates pay for everything and I just live off your kindness.”

“You are not living off my kindness.” I reached across the table and grabbed Arley’s hand. I needed him to understand, even if I felt slightly abrasive, he would think otherwise. “You are my mate. It fills me with pride to take good care of you.” It wasn’t only an alpha’s job, but I wanted to take care of Arley. I enjoyed it.

“But I want to help.” Arley shifted in his seat, evidently feeling uncomfortable, which was not what I wanted at all. Mates should be able to talk to each other about anything. “I want to do more than lie on the couch all day and watch short video dramas on my phone.”

“I know, babe.” I had to see it from his side of the relationship as well. They were a team. A partnership. Working together to create a future for themselves. “You don’t have to work, though, I do make enough money to support us both.” I let go of my hand and pulled out my phone, pulling up the campus classifieds. “But if you do want to get a job, there are a few places right on campus that are hiring. You can also start classes. The new semester begins in a week and there’s still time to sign up.”

“Can we afford that?” Arley cocked his head and furrowed his brows. I could see the wheels whirling in his mind, and I needed to put him at ease.

“Yeah, babe. We can.” I took back my phone and pulled up my banking app. “This is my bank account. As you can see, we have plenty in savings and more than enough in my checking account. You can take classes starting next week and we will be fine. Or if you want to take more time to adjust to the area before signing up, you can do that to. Nothing has to be done right away.”

“Fen, how do you have so much money?”

“I don’t tell many people about this, but I am an independently published author.” It was a tad scary stating that out loud, even if most of my friends knew. “I was quite lucky to have found a level of success on my first series. My readers love to support me by sharing my books on their social media accounts and when I hit the right algorithm, the sales soar. Combine that with knowing how to invest and budget, and I was able to set myself up for a comfortable life. I may not be the biggest author in my genre, but I have found my readers and know what works for me. I know my lane and stay in it for the majority of my books, but even when I swerve a bit, I usually hit the best-seller lists. I know what my readers expect and I deliver. And I love what I do, so it’s easy to keep up the momentum.”

“The more things I find out about you, the more I realize how incredible you are.” Arley’s lips tipped up at the corners and he winked. “That brain of yours, your talent

and motivation. It all kinda turns me on.”

“Sweetie, you are the one that is truly incredible.” I leaned over the table and kissed my mate. His soft lips against mine almost had me forgetting where we were. “Every single thing about you is incredible in my eyes. The way you look, the way you talk, the way you smell. Everything.”

“You like the way I smell, huh?” Arley’s dimple flashed as he smiled.

“I do.” I bit my lip and stared at his mouth. “I really fucking do. And so does my wolf.

“Well.” Arley gestured to the back area where the bathrooms were located. “How about you and your wolf show me just how much you love the way I smell.”

“I think I can do that.” I stood and held out my hand for my mate. “But we aren’t doing it in these bathrooms. Let’s go home and I will treasure every inch of your body in our large king-sized bed.”

Half an hour later, I carried my mate into our bedroom and dropped him on our bed, gently even as he bounced. Then I slowly undressed as I watched him do the same.

Climbing up onto the bed after him, I hovered above his body. He looked so good on my bed.

“Hey wait.” Arley held me back with a hand to my chest. “Is anyone else home?”

“No.” I leaned down and nipped his neck then leaned back up on my elbows. “No one else is here. They are all at work and won’t be here for a few more hours.”

“Well, then.” Arley pulled me down until our lips were barely touching. “Show me

how much you love how I smell.”

“How about I show you how much I love how you taste first?” I slid down my mate’s body until I was eye level with his long beautiful cock.

“My body is yours to do as you please, my alpha.” Arley squirmed a bit, biting his lip. A move that drove me wild. “Just please don’t make me wait.”

“As you wish, my omega.”

Licking his length from base to tip, I savored the salty goodness of Arley’s skin, with a sweet scent of chocolate invading my nose. His scent and taste mingling, causing my own cock to twitch in anticipation. Part of me loved dragging it out, edging him until he begged me to fill his tight little hole with my seed. But not today. Today, I needed to make my mate come fast and hard.

Gripping the base of his cock with one hand and cradling his balls with the other, I took his full length into my mouth and began my ministrations. I knew my mate’s body like I knew my own. The secrets to his pleasure were burned into my soul. And I had every intention to use my knowledge in bringing him to the peak of pleasure and then follow him into release. I worked his cock, my dick getting harder and aching to be inside him.

“Oh fuck, Fen. I’m going to come. Fuck me, alpha. I need you,” he begged and panted, his body squirming and twitching with pleasure.

I popped off his dick and moved up his body, kissing his mouth once I was able. “I need you too.”

Adjusting our positions so I could get better access to his hole, I slid into his welcoming heat. Our thrusts were hurried and frantic. I was chasing my climax as I

knew he was. Our mating bond heightening our joining by allowing each of us to feel the other's pleasure and emotions. Soon we came together, and the sound of my mate crying out my name was music to my ears. I wanted to capture the sound and listen to it forever, and I could with him in my bed every night.

Falling to the side of my mate and gathering him into my arms, I held him close. "I think it's time for a nap."

Chapter Seven

Arley

Walking around campus, I couldn't help but feel a little overwhelmed by everything occurring around me. The mixture of scents from the other shifters, humans, vehicles, and the city combined into a soup of sensory overload. I think I even caught a scent of a vampire, which were rare in the rural areas I was used to dwelling in. So many new experiences awaited me and I couldn't help but feel excited for my new journey in life. City shifters really were living a different experience than small-town folks. With so many strange scents and noises, this definitely wasn't like my small hometown.

What surprised me the most about my reaction to this shift in my surroundings was the thrill of excitement that ran through my body. It was exhilarating. I always thought that I was meant to stay in our small town of Painesville and just live a quiet life, but being out here now, I knew that was never meant to be my fate.

Things in the city were different, but I felt as if it was a natural flow of being for me. I still needed to explore more of the city and get settled into the rhythm of life in Chicago, but the more I experienced the city, the more confident I became in my place there. I was exactly where I was meant to be. Before my parents passed away, I was taking classes at the local community college in the town next to where I lived. I had planned to live a simple life and find a mate who would work in the town with me. But that wasn't what I was made for. I may not have had a chance to learn this about myself. But life had a way of leading us to the best path for us to take forward.

I couldn't wait to start classes at the university. I had always dreamt of becoming something more than just a baker or a salesclerk. This was my chance to explore what I could be. I yearned to get my head back into the books and deepen my knowledge, expand my view of the world. And I owed it to fate and Fen, my mate.

Fen's roommates had been wonderful to me as well. It was like gaining siblings I never knew I wanted or needed. They were kind and hilarious. Just the other day, the six of us went to dinner at a new brewery and enjoyed watching a local band perform. Afterward, we all hung out in the living room playing board games and watching gamer reactor videos. I never had this sort of friendship growing up but I wish I did. I loved these new friends, especially Neal with his sense of humor and kind heart. If only I knew more omegas and could help him find his own mate.

It was funny how life had a way of changing your plans. It boggled my mind how so much had changed in such a small amount of time. I was settling into city life, preparing to better my future for myself and my mate. I didn't have the stress or worry of Marcus and his crew. Didn't have to look over my shoulder. It was freeing to be in a giant concrete village. They definitely did things differently in the city.

"You ready for game night, Arley?" Dean walked into the living room from the kitchen, carrying a bowl of popcorn covered in chocolate and caramel. "Did we decide on which games we were going to play today?"

"I'm ready to kick your ass." I rose a brow at my roommate. "And did we settle on video games or board games for the night?"

"I think we decided on video games tonight." Neal placed a few bottles of soda and water in the middle of the coffee table. "I already turned on the system, found all the controllers, and put out the selection of games we can choose from."

"Will the six of us all be able to play?" I wasn't extremely familiar with current video

games. I didn't know how many players were possible. "Or will we need to take turns? Or work in teams?"

"There are a few multiplayer games that allow six players." Tori sifted through the games on the table. "I think we should play this one. We all get to play and it's fairly easy for newbies to learn the rules and moves."

"Ah." Victor clapped his hands in excitement. "That's my favorite."

"Of course it is." Tori rolled her eyes, a half grin showing on her face. "That's because you win most of the time."

"We all still have fun trying to beat him though." Neal put down some chips and salsa next to the popcorn and sodas. "And maybe this time, there will be a new winner."

"Yeah." Dean patted me on the back. "I believe in you, Arley. You will be the new champion. Or at least a good luck charm for one of us."

"Give me a controller." I held my hand out and waited for someone to fulfil my request. "Are we going to do this or what?"

"Here you go, love." Fen placed a gray-and-white controller in my hand and sat down next to me. "You're on my team."

"Teams?" Neal plopped down on the other side of me on the couch. "We aren't playing individually?"

"Yeah, teams." Dean sat in the chair on the left of the couch. "Three against three. The team with the most collective wins gets to have a whole week off the chore list."

"Hell yeah," Tori shouted and plopped down onto the floor. "I'm on Dean and

Victor's team. Neal, you can join the newlyweds."

"Fine by me." Neal high-fived me and Fen. "Let the best team win."

"I can't wait for a whole week of being off the chore list," Tori mused. "What shall I do with all my free time?"

"Well, I'm not sure what you will have free once you three divvy up our chores, but I think Neal, Fen, and I may just end up catching up on some fun while we celebrate our win."

"Pretty cocky, aren't you?" Dean nodded, hunkering down in a ready-to-rumble state, as if leaning forward would make him a better player. "Okay, let's just see who the best team is, shall we?"

Several hours and five game plays later, we had our answer.

It was going to be a fantastic chore-free week for Neal, Fen and me. I had no idea what we were going to do with our week, but it was going to be spectacular.

I love game nights.

Fen

I loved seeing my mate and my friends connect. It was like we were a tiny little pack. Whether it was over game night, movie night, studying together, or sharing a meal...the six of us blended together in a way I always imagined a pack would. We would eventually join the campus pack, and I hoped that other members would feel as much of a family as we did now.

"How are your classes going, Arley?" Neal asked around the breakfast table,

munching loudly, his spoon clanking his bowl. “I heard Professor Gordon is pretty tough.”

“He seems to be strict in the rules but fair.” Arley lathered his toasted blueberry bagel with strawberry cream cheese. “I finally understand statistics, thanks to his class.”

“Psychology statistics or the regular mathematics one?” Tori poured a glass of orange juice and joined us at the table. “I made the mistake of taking both courses in the same semester and failed each one. I thought it would be simple and the same sort of information. I was wrong. Never again.”

“It’s the psychology one.” Arley took a sip of his coffee and placed his mug down next to mine. “I needed to take it for my major. I decided to take a math class next semester instead of taking one along with statistics.”

“Good plan.” Neal nodded. “I took some fun electives the year I took statistics. There was a jazz class that helped keep me sane. I could just dance out the stress every week with some cute omegas.” That man had a one-track mind; no wonder he got into trouble with the witch.

“Of course there had to be omegas involved.” Dean rolled his eyes, obviously thinking the same thing I had been. “Do you ever do anything that doesn’t involve an omega?”

Neal cocked his head and squinted his eyes. “You know what? I can’t think of anything.”

“Doesn’t that bother you?” Arley snuck a piece of bacon off my plate. “Like maybe you need to do some things that are done just for fun and not in search of finding your mate?”

“Maybe one day.” Neal stole a sausage off Victor’s plate, his bowl empty. “But right now, I need to head off to the library. I promised an omega to be his study partner for the biology test we have tomorrow. See you all tonight.”

“What are the rest of you doing?” Arley looked around the table. “I was hoping we could go shift today. My rabbit has been feeling anxious lately and I thought a few hours in my fur would help ease him.”

“That sounds like fun.” I gripped his hand and leaned in and kissed him, loving the taste of bacon mixing with his own personal taste. “What about you guys? Wanna come with?”

“Sure, I could use a little time in my owl form.” Tori stood and took her dirty dishes to the sink. “It’s been a few weeks and I know what you mean about feeling anxious. I would love to spread my wings a bit.”

“What about you two?” Arley looked at Dean and Victor. “Want to join in on the fun?”

“I can’t today.” Victor stood and drained his mug of coffee before taking it to the sink. “I will join next time though. Today, I promised to meet my brother out by the lake and help him plan his proposal. I’d rather be shifting but a promise is a promise.”

“I’ll tag along with you guys.” Dean cleared off the rest of the table and washed his hands. “My bear needs a good jaunt in the woods honestly.”

“Good. Then let’s head over to the shifting territory Patrick said was safest.” Tori stretched and then went to the door and put on her shoes. “The last time I tried to shift off the territory didn’t go so well.”

“Did someone bother you?” Arley went to our roommate and put a hand on her

shoulder. It made me proud how much he cared for our friends. Even if they weren't our friends, I knew Arley would act the same. "Tell us if anyone dares bother you. We won't let it slide."

"Thanks, you guys. I'll let you know if it happens again." Tori opened the door. "Are we ready to go?"

"Yup." I grabbed my backpack and headed out. "I got my pack and am good to go."

Dean and Arley followed us out and locked up the door to the house. The territory's shifting grounds weren't far from home, so we could walk there instead of driving and trying to find parking. It only took about fifteen minutes to get to our destination.

Undressing, we put our clothes in the backpack and stored it by a tree. No one would dare steal another shifter's clothes, so we didn't have to worry about that. I just couldn't wait to shift into my wolf and to see Arley's bunny again. He was such an adorable creature in either form.

I relaxed and let my body transform into my wolf, just as the rest of my group did the same. Within moments, my wolf was surrounded by a brown bear, barn owl, and an adorable white rabbit. It was time to have some fun.

Bopping Arley in the butt with my snout, I pranced around him once I had his attention. His cute bunny nose twitching, hopefully taking in the mate scent I carried.

Tori flew off into the trees, and Dean wandered off with another den of bears we knew from class. That left me alone with my mate. One of my favorite ways of being, honestly.

Through the mate bond, I sent him an image of us curled up underneath the trees, napping. Soon we made that our reality and the day turned into one of the best I had.

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Chapter Eight

Fen

Honey. He smells like sweet honey.

Huh? What was my wolf trying to tell me? Could he be any more cryptic?

Smell our mate. He smells like honey.

My wolf wouldn't drop it, over and over. He'd been on my case all morning. Demanding I sniff my omega. Hinting that there was something different about his scent and that I needed to figure out what.

But I couldn't just walk up to Arley and nuzzle his neck in the middle of campus. I mean, I could but I wouldn't. Although the shifters would get it, the humans would not. So I had to wait until the right time presented itself.

But my wolf wouldn't stop complaining that I was ignoring him. I swear I loved my beast, but he could be really annoying some days.

It was in the elevator heading to our afternoon philosophy class that we had together when I was finally able to understand what had my wolf so excited. And increased my own joy.

My little mate's scent was different—sweeter. Although the chocolatey deliciousness was already sweet, I could finally detect the undertone of honey that my wolf had

been hinting at. That meant one thing.

Arley was pregnant. I was going to be a father. I wanted to climb the Sears Tower and shout it to the heavens.

“What on earth are you doing?” Arley pushed back into me, his ass rubbing against my thickening cock, the crook of his neck arching closer to me. His movements sent pleasurable sensations skittering along my spine. “I thought you got enough of me this morning before we left for school. Don’t you think we should wait until we are back home for this?”

I licked the tempting skin and allowed myself to savor the moment. Soon we would reach our floor and must face other people. Why were they taking classes again?

You could force stop the elevator. Hit that big red button and take our mate right here. Claim our mate.

I told my wolf he was not helpful. No matter how much the idea appealed to me.

“Arley, baby.” I kissed the area beneath his ear and wrapped my arms around him, my hands resting lightly on his still-flat belly. “Have you noticed anything different in your body or scent lately? Feeling bloated or having any weird cravings?”

“No, why?” Arley covered my hands with his own, his voice husky with need, then changing. “Wait. Did you say bloated? Are you calling me fat, Fen?”

“No, baby. Not fat at all. But your scent has slightly changed.” I turned him in my arms, wanting to see his face when he realized why his scent changed. “It’s sweeter.”

Bright eyes stared up at me, I could sense through our connection a mixture of hope, fear, and excitement growing. “Sweeter? But then that would mean—”

“Yes, Arley.” I let my lips curl up and pushed a bit of my happiness through our energetic bond so he had no doubts on how I felt about the situation. “You’re pregnant.”

“What? No.” Arley’s face had gone pale white and he clutched my arm like a lifeline. “You truly think so? But we just met. And I just started school again. And...” Panic tried to latch on and I knew I needed to stop it.

“Sshhh. Wait.” I placed a finger on his plump lips. His eyes were wild with worry. “Stop stressing out. That’s not good for you or the baby. Let’s take everything moment by moment, step by step, thing by thing. Okay?”

“Okay.” Arley closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Okay, so what do we do first?”

“First...” I took Arley’s cheeks in my palms, his eyes were so expressive. The window to his soul. “We finish out our day and head home. A nice, warm meal will be good for us. Then we can settle on the couch or the bed and discuss this fantastic turn of events.” I really hoped my mate had faith in me, in us. That we would work everything out as it came to us.

Another exhale from Arley’s features settled into a mask of calm. It was a good thing I could feel that he was calm and not just pretending. “That sounds like a plan. Do we have supplies for muffins? I’ve missed having access to baked goods for a while now.” He grinned cheekily at me.

“Whatever you want.” I pressed a kiss on my mate’s lips and savored the sweetness. “We’ve got this, babe.”

“How am I expected to go to class after finding this out?” Arley pouted. “Can we skip the afternoon classes? Just this once?”

“I think we should.” I pressed the button on the elevator to return to the first floor. “Let’s head home and make those muffins. Then we can cuddle on the couch and discuss what our next steps should be.”

“We really should visit the doctor.” Arley laid his head on my chest. “We need to make sure everything is okay.”

“I am sure everything is just fine, but we will go to the medical center tomorrow. The doctor visit can wait a day.” I held my mate close, a swarm of emotions trailing through our mate bond between the two of us. “For now, we concentrate on feeding you and relaxing. Tomorrow, we go to the doctor.”

“Are you sure?” Arley asked, his voice soft and low.

“No. I’m not sure.” I kissed his nose, hoping the touch would calm him. “But I think we should just relax first before rushing to the doctor. Take a moment to settle into the idea that we are about to become parents. And figure out how we are going to tell everyone.”

“Will your parents be mad?” Arley looked up at me, meeting my eyes. “Will they care that you haven’t finished school yet and that we just met?”

“They are going to be overjoyed, Arley. Trust me. Mom and Dad will probably try to move out here now that there’s a baby coming. Don’t say I didn’t warn you. Get ready to be spoiled by them. As the papa to their grandbaby, I bet they will now love you more than they even love me.”

“God, I wish my parents were here, Fen. They would have loved to be grandparents.”

“I know, baby.” I squeezed him a bit harder and let go just as the elevator doors opened. “Now let’s head home. I can’t wait to eat your muffins.”

“You know”—Arley winked and led me out of the elevator, already in a better mood—“I think there is a better treat I would rather eat. Come on, alpha. Your omega has plans for the rest of our night.”

Arley

“Um...Excuse me?” Anxiety bubbled in my stomach. I had to have heard the doctor incorrectly. “Can you repeat that, Doctor Adams?” The past couple of days had been a whirlwind of activity. After their home-cooked meal together, Fen suggested calling the doctor to set up an appointment. Which was great and all. Except for the information I was trying to process just then. I couldn’t have heard the nice doctor correctly. We weren’t ready for that kind of news.

“I know it can be quite a shock.” Doctor Adams turned the ultrasound monitor so it was fully facing me, pointing out one of the several blobs on the screen. Several blobs, yes, my anxiety was climbing higher. “They all are developing well and measuring exactly where they need to be for a three-week gestation.”

“Wait.” He did not just say that, did he? I reached back into my memories for something important my omega parent told me before he passed. “My papa told me that rabbit shifters only have a twenty-eight-to-thirty-five-day gestational period. But those guys look too small to be born so soon. Will they be okay?” As if I didn’t have enough on my anxiety plate. Was the count off? Was there something else wrong?

Doctor Adams chuckled, and that noise did not settle my nerves. “Since your mate is a wolf shifter, which usually has a sixty-two-day gestation, you are looking at a bit longer than a typical rabbit. But it will still only be around forty-five days. They will be growing much faster in the last half of your pregnancy, but you also must consider that multiples tend to have lower birth weights than singletons.” There was a mention of several blobs again. I was only going to worry about one thing at a time. Not the fact that there were several blobs floating around in my tummy. “We will need to

monitor you twice a week until birth in order to ensure that they continue to grow evenly and healthily.”

I turned and looked at my mate, hoping his grounding preservation would lend itself to me as well. Fen didn't look like much help as his mouth was slack and his eyes huge. Apparently I was the only one who had mini freak-out sessions internally. I reached out and brushed the top of his hand. “Fen?” His hand jerked under mine, yet he didn't move hardly at all. “Are you okay?” I knew that was a redundant question to ask, but it was my only thought at that moment. Were they going to be okay?

Shaking his head, Fen readjusted his focus and stared at me, a slow upturn of his lips transforming his face. “I've never been happier.” His eyes shone with love as I was flooded with it through our bond. He wasn't worried or anxious as I was; he was shocked. In a good way. I heaved in a deep breath and let my anxiety go for now, although I knew it would be back with so many blobs on the screen.

“Well, that's the kind of thing we love to hear on these occasions.” Doctor Adams swiped the ultrasound wand around a few more times and typed in a few notes. “Do you two have any questions for me? I know it's a shock and the office does have on-call doctors and nurses available twenty-four seven to address any concerns, but if you have anything you want to ask now, I'm here to provide the answers.”

I knew I'd have several questions, but the only thing I wanted to do just then was head home and bask in the comfort and love of my mate's arms. “Can we get any pictures?” I motioned to the monitor. Doctor Adams happily agreed and printed a few, after highlighting separate blobs on the screen. Several blobs. How was that even possible? It looked like I was going to have a talk with my wolf mate about knocking me up with a litter. That mate of mine might be rich, but six babies? How in the world were we going to handle that many at once? I looked over at my mate, the pure joy written all over his face. It wouldn't matter if it was one or twelve— please don't let it ever be twelve —I knew we would make it work.

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Chapter Nine

Fen

“I found Arley sitting at the kitchen table at three a.m., crying.” Neal sat down next to me in physics class and unpacked his notebook and pen. “I didn’t know if I should talk to him or not, so I just backed out of the room and went back to bed.”

“You did?” I hadn’t even noticed he’d left the bed. What kind of a mate did that make me? “He didn’t say anything this morning, just went to class at eight a.m.” I felt horrible not knowing that my mate was struggling. After coming home from the doctor’s office yesterday, we cooked another meal together, baked some cookies, and snuggled in bed until we passed out from exertion. Was that too much on my mate? I thought we were both excited. Yet how could I even compare what I was feeling when my mate was the one carrying our extra load on top of classes and all the changes that had been happening. I should have made certain Arley was perfectly happy before we split for classes. Why didn’t I pick up on it?

“What’s going on?” Neal asked in a hushed voice, leaning in conspiratorially.

We hadn’t talked about not telling anyone, and Neal would find out soon enough; they already knew Arley was pregnant, just not the surprise number that went with it. Was he breaking any rules by telling first? “We found out that we are having more than one baby.”

“Twins? That’s awesome.” Neal sounded a bit envious, and I knew one day he’d find his mate.

“Times that by three.” Oh, just saying it out loud made me a little queasy. No wonder Arley was struggling. Any normal omega would. That was a lot of extras to add to a family all at once.

“Wait. What?” His eyes bugged out of his head, brows disappearing into his hairline, jaw slacked, mouth hanging open as if he didn’t hear when I knew very well he had.

“Yep. We are having a little squad of babies, Neal.” My own little squad of babies. I hoped they were all like Arley. It would be so cute to have mini Arley’s running around.

“Yeah, I would be crying at the kitchen table at three a.m. too.” Neal shifted in his seat suddenly nervous. “You aren’t leaving the house, right?” The urgency in Neal’s voice had me doing a double take.

“Oh, ah, no.” I shook my head. “We were hoping you guys would be okay with us staying for a while.” At least, that had been a little bit of the plan. The house was close enough to classes, and it made sense. While they could afford something by themselves, they weren’t ready yet.

“Of course we are, man. There is plenty of room.” Neal tilted his head. A smirk on his face, he did a little shimmy of his shoulders. “Maybe we will study up on noise proofing the rooms though.”

I slapped his arm. Sure he was joking.

He has a point though.

“I’m going to go find my mate after class and get him to talk to me.” I couldn’t let him stress out alone. We were a team. I had to make sure he was okay with everything that was going on, and if there was a way for me to assist in any regards,

then I needed to find out how and make it happen. “The news we received is massive, but he needs to remember there’s nothing we can’t handle as long as we tackle it together.”

“Good man.” Neal nodded, sending him a wink that was not salacious in any form. “Now be quiet and start taking notes. Professor Newton is giving us the evil eye and I can’t afford one of her jinxes.”

Luckily class went by quickly and I was able to find Arley before his afternoon classes began. It was nice that we were on the same campus, making catching up for a snack or lunch easier on both of us and our animals.

“You know we are going to be okay, right?” I found Arley outside of his statistics class and wrapped my arms around him without giving him any chance to refute his advances. “I don’t like hearing you were crying alone in the kitchen last night. You should have woken me.”

“Which one tattled?” He pouted, arms crossed instead of around my waist. I wanted Arley to lean into me, to accept my warmth.

“Which one?” I guess I know which one I will be able to trust to tell me anything. It helped in the long run, but it wasn’t something I wanted to deal with constantly.

“Yeah. Neal or Dean?” Arley pulled away and narrowed his eyes; his stubborn streak was getting the better of him. But he came back willingly when I pulled him back into my arms. “They both saw me but then twisted around and pretended it never happened. I was hoping that would be it, but apparently one can’t keep their mouth shut.”

“Well I am glad Neal told me.” I pulled Arley’s stiff body closer and he let me, even if it took a few moments wrapped in my hug for him to relax. “Why didn’t you want

me to know?" I asked quietly, resting my cheek atop his head.

"It's not that," he sighed. "I just didn't want anyone to know." He sounded like a petulant kid just then, but I was smart enough to keep my mouth shut on that aspect. I liked my balls right where they were. "I just keep crying. I blame hormones. If I tell you every time they get the better of me, eventually you will not take me seriously when I really do need you." I ignored the shaft of pain that went straight through my heart.

"I will always take you seriously, babe. Always." I had no idea how to get Arley to understand that, but one day I would. "You are my mate. If you can't come to me, and we can't communicate, then I've let you down."

"No." Arley clung tighter to me. "It's not that at all. You haven't failed."

"You haven't either." I squeezed Arley tighter. "But believe me, I will always be there for you. There's no need to believe I'd think you'd cry wolf over nothing. No matter what it is, tell me." Arley nodded into my chest, mumbling something. "What was that?"

"I'm hungry."

My job was never done, and that was more than okay with me. I had my mate safely in my arms; I just needed to feed him before his next set of classes. It wasn't good to sit through a lecture on an empty stomach. Not that I would ever let Arley go hungry.

Kissing the top of his head, I turned us toward one of the cafeterias on campus and took care of my mate.

Arley

“Hey. Why don’t you stop and talk to me?” The tall jackal shifter continued to walk after me, even after I sped up and crossed the street.

Don’t answer him. It will only encourage him.

My rabbit and I had experience with this. Back home, we would have to ignore a man several times a month just going to the store or heading to work. Not that I ever expected to have that experience here on campus.

I was a fool to believe it would be different here.

No. It is different. Back home, there would be a few of them this week. And they would have already manhandled you. This guy is just following us. It’s better here. But assholes will be everywhere. No truer words had ever been said, but I hated the fact it was true.

Continuing to walk away from the jackal, I had made it almost to my next class before I felt a hard tug on my backpack that made me stumble.

“I said I wanted to talk.” The jackal now stood before me. Tall and imposing, I felt a tiny trickle of fear enter my system. But I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction.

“I have a class to get to. Now get out of my way.” I attempted to pass him but he gripped my forearm.

“That’s not the way to talk to an alpha, sweetie.” The jackal sneered in my face. That anxiety was back, and had I been anywhere else, I could have run for it. But I didn’t know what to do.

“And that’s not the way to speak to another man’s mate.” Fen appeared out of nowhere like an avenging angel, prying the other man’s hand off me and pulled me

behind him. “If you walk away now, we can pretend nothing happened. I’m sure the campus pack isn’t tolerant of such behavior.”

“I was talking to him, man.” The hackle made a play at grabbing me again, but another large hand reached out and stopped him before he made contact.

“Goddess, Henry. He even gave you a chance to escape. I was willing to let it go just this once if you had taken his offer.” Patrick, one of Fen’s friends and campus pack leaders, shook his head and tsked. That was another amazing aspect of city life and shifter life on campus. Not only did everyone—for the most part—get along, but everyone mingled. Prey, predator, human. And the fact the campus had its own security? Why didn’t I call for Fen sooner? “Now we need to go through the whole process with you and the council instead. You really should have listened and chosen more wisely.”

“Patrick, man.” Henry lowered his gaze but continued to speak, his entire demeanor changing in an instant. “I’m sorry. I won’t do it again. Let’s just let this go.”

“Now, see. If you had just walked away when Fen offered you the chance, I would have allowed you to prove you’d do better going forward.” Patrick snapped his fingers and two other shifters came and took Henry by the arms. “Sadly you didn’t stop, and now you are going to make us all absent for the rest of the afternoon. And I hate missing philosophy.”

“Seriously?” I wouldn’t have picked that as his favorite class. Then again, I guess it made him good at reading people and situations.

“What can I say? I like to think. Take care, you guys, I’ll handle this one.” Patrick flashed a cheeky smile and led the group away.

“Well that wasn’t what I was hoping for this afternoon.” I closed my eyes and hung

my head. “Now I want a blueberry muffin and hot chai, instead of an hour-long lecture on world religions.”

“Then ditch your next class.” Fen rubbed his hands up and down my biceps. I soaked up his comforting scent. It was just what I needed. “If the professor says anything next class, tell him your babies needed food.”

“I really didn’t want to miss any classes.” I was not whining. I was still on edge and crashing. I definitely needed some food. As much as I didn’t want to miss class, I knew taking care of our babies was top priority. I’d never do anything to jeopardize them.

“Well if you want to go to class, go on. But if you want to go get a treat and go home with your hot and sexy mate, I promise you’ll have a better time reducing stress.” Fen winked, knowing me too well.

Smiling, I grabbed my mate’s hand; it was a no-brainer on choice. “Fine, but you have to throw in a forum too.”

“Deal.” Fen pulled me forward and we headed toward the café on campus. “I promise you won’t regret your decision.” I never did when I was with my mate.

Chapter Ten

Fen

“Hey, Dad, What’s up? Are you and Mom okay?” It was strange to get a phone call from my father first thing in the morning on a Wednesday. A sharp stab of fear attacked my chest at the thought that he would deliver bad news.

“Oh, no. Everything is fine with us, Fen.” My father chuckled. “I’m sorry for causing any alarm. I just wanted to let you know that you may see some trouble headed your way.”

“What do you mean?” An icky heaviness covered my skin, my intuition telling me Dad had bad news to share. My wolf began to pace, thinking the worst was to happen.

“Those idiots from the pack. Marcus and his group of followers.” My father swore under his breath. “They think that you and Arley need to pay for leaving town without permission. They told the elders that they are too soft for leadership roles and that they will set things right again within this pack. They think forcing Arley back home will be the key to demanding the respect they deserve.”

“I thought the elders were going to sort out this mess and deal with Marcus and his gang of thugs.” I shook my head, disappointed in how the pack handled the situation. Disappointed in Marcus in general. “What happened?”

“They did have a meeting between Marcus and the elders. It was volatile.” My dad

growled. “They roughed up a few of the elders since this wolf virus has weakened us older wolves.”

“What?” I stood from my chair, alarmed at the thought of anyone getting hurt. “Is everyone okay? And when will the doctors or healer solve the mystery of everyone getting sick?”

“Don’t worry, kiddo. Everyone is fine. They just got restrained by Marcus’ men,” Dad said. “As for the virus. They are still running tests and trying to figure it out. They have decided to start testing our water source and anything else that all members use. A small fraction of the younger pups are getting sick too.”

“I don’t know what worries me more. The pack’s politics or everyone getting sick?” I absently wondered if the two were connected; not the elders, per say, but Marcus. But that was my author brain spinning tales.

“For me, it’s the pack. I swear this pack and town are circling the drain. Your mother and I are one foot out of here at this point.” I couldn’t blame them; so much had changed since I left home.

“Well, if you need to, come out here and we will make it work. Maybe get a small house in one of the suburbs or something since the city will be a bit steep.” I looked over at my sleeping mate. Arley looked so peaceful sleeping curled around my pillow. “Do you really think we need to worry, Dad?”

“I do.” He sighed, and I wondered if there was more to it. “Those kids are too full of themselves and some conflated concept of predatory shifters being better than all others.”

“Fuck.” He was right, as much as I wanted him to be wrong. I leaned over and kissed Arley’s shoulder when he rolled over to continue to sleep. “Alright, I’ll keep an eye

out. Thanks for the heads-up.”

“Of course. Let us know if they do show up. And be safe. We love you both.”

“Love you too.” I hung up the phone and lay back down, pulling Arley back into my arms. The scent and feel of my mate settled my nervous wolf. He was ready to attack at any shadow. I just hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

“Everything okay?” my mate mumbled. He did a little shift in my arms as he snuggled closer. “It sounded like there might be drama.” My mate was always perceptive. The best mate ever, and I knew I would do whatever it took to keep him safe.

“Marcus and his legion of fools all decided that you and I overstepped pack rules by leaving town without permission. They are on a mission to find us and demand retribution.” I knew I sounded sarcastic and hateful, but it pissed me off and made me worry. I kissed my mate’s neck, pulling him closer, not that there was any room to spare between them. “Promise me you won’t go anywhere alone, all right? Not until this shit passes and they move on to something else. Like training the next generation of wolves to ignore knowledge and only speak into the echo chamber of ideocracy.” Which honestly scared the crap out of me. What if our children ran into Marcus’ idiots one day? I shuddered at the thought.

“I’m so glad I don’t live there anymore. It wasn’t so bad when we were younger and my parents were still alive. But it seemed like in the last few years everything shifted. For the worst.” I hated that Arley struggled when he should have been safe.

“Exactly. It was always kind of there in the shadows, I think. But something shifted while I was out here for school. When I returned home for break and saw how different Marcus and the others had become, I knew I could never live there again.” I shivered at the thought. Thank goodness I found Arley when I did and we moved. I’d

be in a constant battle of panic if Arley had stayed behind. “I’m glad I was able to talk you into moving out here with me.”

“It didn’t take much. I mean, I miss my little house but honestly, I wasn’t feeling safe out there any longer.” Arley shivered and I clenched my arms. “Not with Marcus making a play at taking over the pack leadership. Any shifter who wasn’t a bear or wolf, or some other dominant hunter, was in his line of vision for take down. They were just a bunch of bullies.”

I sighed as I rolled to my back, taking Arley with me. He grunted and giggled at the sudden movement. “I just wish we had answers to why the shifters in the pack are getting sick suddenly. My parents were never sick; you know shifters hardly are. But now there is this virus hitting the whole pack. My dad just told me it’s hitting the kids now.”

“That is worrisome.” Arley leaned his head on my shoulder, his body doing a cute shimmy as he continued to get comfortable on my hard chest. “Do you think maybe someone is behind it? I know some witches can do sickness spells. Maybe we should ask the campus pack or medical center if they have ideas on what could cause this amongst the shifters.”

“That’s not a bad idea. I was having my own second thoughts on it, but that could just be my imagination.” I pulled Arley closer up my chest, his lips ripe for the taking. I was finally feeling hopeful that I might help my dad. “I’ll talk to the campus pack later this week. Patrick can introduce me to the council here and maybe we can come up with some answers.” With a plan in place, I seized Arley’s lips and rolled us before we had to leave for morning classes.

“Hi, Patrick.” I sat outside the campus café with one of my classmates and leaders in

the campus pack. My leg bounced under the table as my wolf paced. I knew what I had to do, but the idea of having issues and not being able to help made me antsy. “I’m glad you were able to meet up with me today.”

“You know I’m addicted to coffee.” Patrick laughed, tilting his coffee cup in thanks. “Offer to buy me my favorite latte and I’ll make room in my schedule. Besides, we’re friends and you said you had a question for the pack.”

“I was hoping maybe you or the elders of your pack can help me and my birth pack.” I picked up my mocha and savored the assault of flavor that hit my mouth. I let it soothe my frayed nerves for a moment before I steeled myself for what needed to be done.

“I can’t make any promises but I can hear you out and see.” Patrick drank his latte, listening intently. “What exactly is the problem?”

“My birth pack is experiencing an issue currently.” I placed my mocha on the table and pushed away my empty plate. “There seems to be a wolf virus affecting the members.”

“Shifters hardly get sick.”

“Exactly. That’s why we are worried. It started with the eldest of the pack and now is hitting the youngest members.” I leaned in, resting on my elbows. “None of the local doctors or healers know what the issue is.”

“And you are hoping maybe my pack has some experience with a virus like this. Or inspiration on what it could be?” Patrick pulled out his cell. “Let me call two of my friends and have them meet us. They are experts in wolf viruses—both medically and magically.”

“Magically?” Just as I worried.

“If it’s mysterious, then there may be a magical element involved. Either causing it directly or masking the truth from anyone researching it.” Patrick nodded. “We have some witches from the greatest covens attending the university. I can speak with them and perhaps a couple can take a small trip to your hometown and scope out the area for traces of energy left behind by a spell. If they find anything, they may be able to unweave it.”

“And what if it’s an actual virus? Do the doctors here know much about that?” If I can get their assistance, my dad can get better.

“I just texted my friends and they will be here in ten minutes.” Patrick put his phone on the table. “But I can also send one or two of our best doctors to Painesville and have them work with your local doctor and healer to pinpoint the illness.”

“That would be amazing. Thank you.”

Ten minutes later, Patrick’s friends joined us at the café. Skye was a witch I knew from my chemistry class last semester, and Damian was a dragon that worked in the campus medical center. The energy of both felt warm and welcoming and my hope expanded even more.

“Thank you for joining us.” Patrick stood and hugged the newcomers. “My friend Fen has an issue in his birth pack and he’s hoping we can shed some light on. A medical mystery afflicting the pack.”

“And something is telling you there may be a magical interference as well?” Skye sat down with iced coffee in hand. I remembered that she hardly ever didn’t have one with her.

“My intuition is blaring,” Patrick confirmed. “I was thinking perhaps we can have a couple pack and given members go visit and see if we can be of any assistance.”

“We can definitely plan a trip.” Rayne looked at Damian and then back to Patrick. “If there’s magic involved, I’ll be able to sense it and work to unravel the web. And either way, Damian should be able to work with the members of the pack and relieve symptoms and research the ailments.”

“With my background in magic, I may be able to figure out the medical cause even if a spell is interfering.” Damian typed something into his phone. “I just requested some time off work. We’ll go home, pack for about a week, and leave tonight. Just text me the information.”

“That’s it.” I shook my head, unable to believe this was going so quickly and easily. “You are just dropping everything and going to help?” It was hard to believe, but I wasn’t going to dissuade them either. Not when my parents and my home pack could benefit. I just had no idea how to repay them.

“Well, Patrick is requesting our assistance and we are loyal to his leadership in the pack.” Skye handed me her phone. “Add your contact information and anyone who we should connect with once we arrive in your hometown. If they can send us any records to look over, things they have tried or dismissed as a cause already, we can read up on it while on the way. I think we might take Jeremy and Kim with us as well. They also have experience in situations like this and together, we can get to the root cause and help rectify it.”

“I really appreciate this.” I stood and offered a hand to Damian and Skye. I could never show my gratitude enough; a handshake seemed inadequate. “My father is one of the members stricken by this and I’ve been worried. Knowing there may be answers soon settles my anxiety a bit.”

Chapter Eleven

Arley

“Y ou promised me you would wait until I got out of class,” Fen growled over the phone. Such a growly mate, my rabbit chittered in my head. “Why aren’t you waiting in the hallway for me? Where are you?”

“I wanted to grab us some chai from the campus café. I’m only on the south side of campus. Relax.” I shifted my backpack from my left to right shoulder, wishing I had opted for the double-strap kind and not this single. The load of the books and travel was beginning to weigh down on me. “I’ll be there in five minutes, and we can walk back to the house. There are a bunch of students around me, I’ll be fine.”

“Don’t underestimate those guys. They will find a way if they want to get you alone. Walk straight here and follow the main path, no shortcuts. Those have too many places they could be hiding to attack from.” Fen grunted, and I could imagine his facial expression in my mind’s eye. “And if you aren’t here in five minutes, I’m heading your way. Scratch that; I am on my way. We will meet in the middle, and I’ll be able to prove to my wolf you are safe sooner. He’s pushing hard, wanting to get out and come save you. He’s convinced you and the pups are in danger.” My mate sure was growly. But I should have been more considerate.

“No danger here, babe. But feel free to meet me. I’m getting kinda tired and am going to sit on the bench outside Growley Hall. My feet hurt and...” I put a hand on my stomach. “How am I so big already? I swear we just found out they are in there, and I am already showing like they are about to be here.”

“That’s because they are about to be here, Arley.” Fen chuckled, his mood changing to positive. That was good for now. I understood my mate’s worry. “I think we both keep forgetting that the days are counting down and we don’t have the nine months of the humans but instead a measly six weeks from conception to birth...and most of that has already passed by the time we found out. We only have two weeks left.”

“Fuck, Fen. How do we only have days to prepare?” I hadn’t realized how little time we had left. I wasn’t ready.

“Don’t worry, babe. We’ve got this. The house is big enough and we have got a bit of time. Maybe I should call my parents up and convince them to move up here.”

“Let’s discuss that later. I’m...”

“Oh, look. What do we have here? A lone little bunny without any protector? What kind of mate do you have that he leaves you alone, Arley?” “Marcus.” I couldn’t help but roll my eyes, even as a slight shiver ran down my spine; but of course the damn man had a knack for showing up unannounced and unwelcomed. And go figure that they’d showed up the one time I didn’t wait for Fen. He will never let me live this down, nor will my rabbit. “What are you doing here?”

“We came to bring you back home.” Marcus stood before me, glaring at my belly with a snare on his lips. “Looks like we are just in time. Need to make sure those pups grow up with the right mindset. Not poisoned by this big-city trash thought.”

“I’m almost there.” Fen panted into the phone. “Don’t let them take you anywhere.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t,” I spoke into my phone, ignoring the group in front of me.

Marcus narrowed his eyes. “Who are you talking to?”

“My mate.” I held my head up high, showing no fear. Predators like Marcus fed on their prey’s emotions, and I refused to let him know how afraid I truly was.

“Oh good, he can watch us take you, powerless to stop us.”

“Are these guys bothering you?” A few of the guys from the university football team now approached our group, surrounding me in a protective formation. I recognized a few of them from my philosophy class and smiled. They were lions and dragons, and together ruled over the campus as if it was their clan or den. Perhaps it was, I’d have to ask Fen to verify if this was officially their lands we were allowed to be on. Either way, if anyone could put a wolf in his place, it would be these two types of shifters.

“Mind your own business, guys. Arley here belongs in our territory.” Marcus waved his hand and smirked. The idiot. “We just came to bring him back home.”

“He already is home.” Patrick Galligar inserted himself in the space between Marcus and me. “I think you guys need to get back in your truck and head to where you belong.”

“I don’t think so. We aren’t leaving,” Marcus snarled, as if the man had any other expression.

“Oh, but you are.” Patrick nodded at his two best friends, Samuel and James. “Why don’t you guys have the team show these...gentleman...to their car and make sure they know their way out of the city?”

“Let’s go.” The larger shifters I was thankful I had built a friendship within class the last few weeks, took the arms of my small-town bullies and led them off into the direction of the parking lots.

“You okay, Arley?” Patrick sat down and put a hand on my shoulder. “Is Fen on his

way?”

I opened my mouth to speak but was silenced when my frenzied mate dropped down to his knees in front of me and pulled me into his arms.

“Oh, thank the goddess.” Fen kissed me and then turned his head to face Patrick. “Thanks, man. I saw your guys draggin’ them away and knew I didn’t need to worry about dealing with them and could focus on making sure my mate was okay.”

“Anytime, man.” Patrick shrugged as if what he did was nothing. It was huge, at least for me. “I can’t stand idiots like that. Thinking they can do whatever they want just because nature deems them a predator.”

“Thanks.” I smiled at the intimidatingly large but sweet giant. “It’s nice to know that I had backup.”

“Of course you do, Arley.” Patrick winked. “We are all family here on campus. Regards of your shifter species. Hell, even the humans and witches are under our protection. No small-town small-minded fools will get to you. Not on our watch.”

It felt good to know we were creating that out here on campus. I liked knowing that my support system expanded out from Fen, his family, and our roommates. “Thanks.”

“Why don’t I walk you two home? I know you can handle them, Fen, but I think you should focus on Arley and those babes right now. Let me be on the lookout and get you two safe.”

“I appreciate it, brother.” Fen held out a hand, and the two shifters shook. “Let’s get back to the house. You can let me know what your friends did to Marcus and his boys later. I hope they heed the warning and leave us alone.”

“I can almost guarantee they won’t,” Patrick chuckled as he stood, and we began to walk toward our house. “I’ve met their kind before. They might need a bit of a larger push to finally run home with their tails between their legs. I hope we didn’t make a bigger mess for you. Just wanted to make sure Arley was all right.”

“They are the ones making a mess.” Fen shook his head. “Arley and I left town and don’t plan on returning. My parents even said that they will visit us instead of us ever needing to step foot in that town again. Marcus just doesn’t know when to stop.”

“Well, if they show up again, call us. We will help you punctuate your message to leave you alone.”

Fen

“They got away. Sorry.” Patrick shook his head. “We chased them through campus but lost them once we hit the city streets. We tried tracking their scents but the cars diluted it. There was just too much traffic.”

“It’s okay, man.” I slapped my friend on the back. “We appreciate all your help. Hopefully we scared them enough that they ran back home to their backlands.” Although I had my reservations about Marcus’ intelligence. Didn’t he understand no meant no? “I doubt it though. I can’t believe this is the third day this week they have shown up on campus and bothered my mate.”

“Well, we are here to help. Between all of us on the team and you, we can keep Arley protected. Let us know any times you can’t walk him to class or back home and one of us will be there to make sure no one messes with him.” Patrick’s dragon made himself known in the roughening and deepening of his voice. “I know you aren’t officially part of my clan, but I will still ensure the safety of all shifters on my lands.”

“Thanks, man.” I really felt Patrick’s sincerity; it eased a part of my heart that had

been on edge with the entire Marcus ordeal. “I think we are ready to be part of the campus pack. Clan, pack, dens whatever you all use for the mixed shifter collection we have here.”

“I think we use all thousand terms interchangeably. But officially the council uses pack.”

“So you have an elder council and then an alpha?”

“We have the elder council, but also we have three alphas that represent different types of shifters that sit on the pack council with the elders.” Patrick described the setup of his pack. It was impressive. I knew a little bit about it but had been focused on my classes and being so close to graduating now that I hadn’t dug deeper. For all they were doing for me and Arley, I’d have to see if I could help them any. “As we grow, we can add more. But all decisions go through the council ultimately. Although the alphas do have authority to act justly and quickly if a situation arises and there’s no time to wait for a council vote to take action.”

“I like that structure, honestly.” I nodded, sounded too good to be true, but I had witnessed it in action. They ran their pack the way a pack should be run. “My old pack was attempting that but Marcus doesn’t want to give up claim to the alpha seat.”

“Marcus needs to be brought to heel.” Patrick sneered, a wisp of smoke leaving his nostrils. “He doesn’t deserve the title of alpha and I really hope your old pack realizes that and sticks with the council.”

“That’s what we are hoping as well. We may not live there still but we grew up there, have ties to the land. We don’t want to see the area destroyed by Marcus’ antics.” It would be more than just my parents that would suffer, and that just didn’t sit right with me and my wolf.

“And the guys he runs with are idiots. I bet if he went down, they would soon fall as well. Maybe I should dig a bit deeper for you guys and make a friendly call to a fellow pack about the things their potential leader has been up to.”

“You could try. I plan to call as well. Maybe once the council sees that Marcus really is no good, they will put an end to his bullshit.” That was all I could do for now. With my mate safe from Marcus for a third time now, I still felt apprehensive. Like it wasn’t the last time we’d run into Marcus. That thought alone had my wolf’s hackles rising. “Have your friends found anything yet about the virus that is plaguing the pack? Maybe Marcus is involved in some way?”

“They did find that there was magic involved and they are attempting to unweave the spell to see the situation more clearly. They were able to treat some of the members and they feel better, but without knowing the source of the issue, the virus will just keep recurring and spreading.” Patrick confirmed what I had suspected. There was someone behind this mysterious cough. “Don’t worry though, my friends are working on it and have been advised to bring in the Shifter Council if they have no progress over the next week.”

“I really appreciate this, Patrick. I am grateful for everything you have done for me, Arley, and for my parents and our old pack.”

“Like I said, Fen, we protect everyone who is on our land or is connected to our friends. We will find out what is wrong and we will help rectify it. No one deserves to be threatened and no shifter deserves to be kept ill. We will fix this.”

“I am going to get going. Arley needs rest.” I placed a hand on Arley’s round belly and felt a bit of movement. Our pups had gotten a bit of adrenaline when their papa was in danger. Hopefully they were settling down now and would be okay.

“Take care of your mate and pups.” Patrick slapped me on the back and placed a hand

on Arley's shoulder, transferring some of his alpha calming power to him and the babies. "I hope that helps bring them peace. Let me know if you need any more help."

Walking away from Patrick, I did worry about what was going on in my hometown and where Marcus and his men had gone, but there was one priority I had to focus on. Regardless of what was to come, I needed to get my mate home and fed. He was all that mattered.

Chapter Twelve

Arley

Everywhere I looked, I expected to see Marcus or one of his friends. Jumping at every slight noise, excessively checking locks on the house, and starting to get a headache from the stress. I didn't want to even leave the house for the last few days. It was driving me insane and I couldn't figure out how to deal with it. On top of all my extra hormones, I knew it couldn't be good for the babies or myself; yet, all the extra stress wasn't going anywhere.

"How's it going trying to convince the dean to let you switch to virtual classes?" Fen's hands kneaded my shoulders. He'd been trying to help me relax all week. Sexy times with my mate only relaxed me for so long, even if I craved them.

"Not great." I closed my eyes and let myself relax into his touch. I could get lost in his touch alone. A simple hug, or a loving caress; his touch made everything better. "They don't like switching midsemester. But if I can get all my professors to sign off on it, Dean Anderson said she'll approve it."

"So all you need to do is get the signatures?" Fen turned me around to face him. "We can do this. Let me help."

"Thanks, babe." I leaned in and kissed him, addictive as always. "I really don't want to walk around campus right now. The bigger I get with these pups, the harder it is to navigate classes. I just hope they see my reasoning and agree."

“They will. Trust me, okay?” Fen stared into my eyes and I hoped that he saw my love shining through.

“I do.” I caught myself switching my gaze between his hypnotizing eyes and his tempting mouth.

“Come to class with me tomorrow. We can get all the signatures and hand it into the dean after.” Fen placed his hand on my cheek. “I won’t let anything happen to you or to our babies.”

“I know.” I turned my head and kissed his palm.

“Let’s go shift.” Fen ran a finger down my cheek. “The doctor said it’s still safe and that it may calm your anxiety. Wanna give it a try?”

“Yeah.” I pulled away a bit but didn’t end contact with my mate’s body. “As long as you’re with me. My rabbit wants me to shift. I know I will still worry afterward, but I think connecting with nature and my animal may help.”

Heading out onto the campus, Fen led me to the wooded area the students used to shift. Secluded enough not to cause drama with the humans and connected to a private lake, the land here was perfect for all of us to allow our beasts free. Strict pack laws made sure that there was harmony among all types of shifters in the area, so prey shifters like myself need not worry about predators taking advantage of us during weakened moments like mid-shift. Fen had taken me here several times since we arrived, and I still felt a magical welcome when entering the boundaries of the area.

“Ready to change!” Fen placed our backpacks by a tree and started to undress. “We can leave everything here and come back for it after.”

“Let’s do this.” I shrugged out of my shirt and undid my pants, no time like waiting. I could feel my rabbit just below the surface. I needed this more than anything at that moment. “Thank you for bringing me here. I needed this.”

“Anything for you.” I could feel Fen’s sincerity, his determination. Even if I was a bit of a pain at times, thanks hormones , Fen was always there doing anything for me.

Once undressed, I closed my eyes and let the shift take over, losing myself in the sensory assault of the transformation.

Opening my eyes, the world looked different but beautiful, and having my mate nearby eased any lingering fear that I’d be attacked. I was able to just be my animal for a bit and let this part of me heal my soul.

When a wolf’s snout bopped me from behind, I gave in to the invite to play with my mate. Together in these forms, we defied the expectations to be the hunter and the hunted and instead Fen played my protector as I hopped around and felt the grass beneath my furry paws.

After about two hours, hunger made me shift back. “I could have eaten as my rabbit but I really want some street tacos instead.”

“As you wish.” Fen had shifted back as well and now stood handing me my backpack and clothes. “My favorite truck usually parks a few blocks away; let’s satisfy that craving.”

“You are too good to me.” I leaned up and pecked his cheek. “I’m sorry I got so panicked. The shift has helped though. Thanks for suggesting it.”

“Anytime.” Fen took my hand in his and guided us toward the neighborhood that housed the best food trucks in the city. “Let’s feed you and then head home?”

Warmth from my mate's love flooded me through our mate bond. For the moment, life was perfect. "Yeah. Let's go."

Fen

"I can't believe how good these are." Arley finished the last bite of his taco and wiped his mouth. I loved how enthusiastically Arley enjoyed food. It gave me warm feelings knowing I was taking care of my mate, my pregnant mate. "Can we get dessert now?"

"Of course we can." With my hand on his back, I led my mate over to the food truck that served the best frozen treats in the Midwest.

"Look what we have here." Marcus' growl set my hair on end and I turned to face the man I once called a friend. Why did he have to pop up like a zit? No matter how many times you popped it, it just kept coming back.

"What are you doing here, Marcus?" I let my wolf out just enough to have his power flash in my eyes. I couldn't let Marcus think he had dominance over me in either form. I would make him pay for lingering and terrifying my mate. I was just man enough, and alpha enough, to do it the correct way.

"We are here to bring our little bunny here back home. He belongs with us." Marcus and his friends now surrounded us. Several other students stood nearby but so far were only onlookers. I hoped it stayed that way and no one got hurt.

"Marcus. I thought we talked about this." I shook my head, fully exasperated with this man. This entire situation was fucked up. "Arley doesn't belong to you or to the pack. We are together, and we both belong here now. Go home before you start even more trouble than you already have." How dense was he?

“We aren’t leaving without Arley. What we say is ours, is ours.” Marcus grabbed my mate’s arm and tugged. “Now come home.”

“He’s not going anywhere with you.” Patrick placed his hand on Marcus’ shoulder. Damn man was lucky I had seen Patrick come up behind him. It wouldn’t have done any good to shift in public, but I would have if I had to protect my mate.

Marcus let go of Arley’s arm, and I pulled my mate behind me in protection. “Marcus, just leave.”

Marcus scoffed and looked around at his guys. “There are more of us than the three of you. What are you going to do about it if we refuse to leave?”

“We already warned you once, and you ignored us. This time, it’s not going to go as easily for you all I’m afraid.” Patrick snapped his fingers. Samuel, James, and a few other large shifters from the campus pack approached the group. “It was never just the three of us against you.” At that moment, I was thankful for my friends; they were there for us, through thick and thin, and always had our backs. I hoped to one day repay the favor.

“Bring it.” Marcus growled and shifted into his wolf. He never was one to think the situation out before acting on his instincts. Point proven as he snapped his jaws at Patrick.

Tonight may teach him a lesson, at least I hoped.

At the first sign of Marcus’ decision to shift, Patrick also transformed into his beast. Compared to Marcus’ wolf, Patrick was the clear winner in any battle for dominance.

It didn’t take long for the campus pack to bring down my old packmates. In the wake were blood and broken bones. This lesson was going to leave its scars. I just hoped

the lessons lasted longer than it took to heal.

“That’s enough.” Patrick had shifted and was now putting on new clothes his beta Alex had prepared, his original clothes torn when he shifted. “Let’s get these men to the medical center and treated. Then send them home for good.”

The drive to the hospital was quiet. I never wanted Marcus and the others to get roughed up, but they’d left the campus pack without a choice. Sometimes, there was only one way to deal with idiots, and it was to deal with them in a way they’d understand. For this group, it was by showing them how weak they truly were.

“Wait here while I go in and speak with Marcus. I don’t want him near you again.” I kissed Arley and pulled away. I felt I had to speak to Marcus one last time. I felt nothing but pity toward the man. “I’ll be right back, stay here with Neal.”

“I’ll keep him safe.” Neal placed his arm around my mate, a move that may trigger anger in some men but made me happy that our friends loved me and my mate enough to show affection and support. “I’m going to go take him to the car and wait for you in the parking lot.”

I nodded, agreeing that was the best plan of action. Turning from them, I was called into my oldest friend’s room.

“What are you doing here?” Marcus looked up as I entered. “Didn’t your friends do enough?”

“Things like this don’t fly in the city, Marcus.” I stood by the chair next to his hospital bed; it looked like Marcus hadn’t learned a thing. “When you and the others are healed, you’d better heed this advice. Go home. Since I know you won’t change and see why what you did is wrong, I won’t hold my breath that you will start respecting others. But go be the big fish in that little pond...out here, you are just

another tiny minnow that will get swallowed by sharks.”

Leaving the room before he had the chance to respond, I was confident that this time he might listen.

“Hey, Fen.” Patrick came up to me in the hospital hallway, walking with me as I entered the waiting room. “Do you have a minute?”

“Sure.” I sat on one of the chairs in the hospital waiting area. “What’s up?”

“I just heard back from Skye.” Patrick joined me at the chairs by the windows. “The spell was successfully unraveled and the doctors were able to see the cause of the virus and are attempting to reverse any issues that have been caused.”

“Do they know who was behind it all.” I had so many questions I wanted answers to. “What was causing everyone to get sick?”

“They are still patching everything together and I was told not to give too many details yet until the Shifter Council arrives at your old pack and takes everyone into custody who was involved, but I think we both know who is on top of the suspect list.”

“I still can’t believe how much he’s changed since I knew him in high school, hell since birth.” I rested my head on my hands, elbows on my knees. “But I am glad it’s all finally catching up to him.”

“Me too.” Patrick stood and I followed his lead. “Like I said, Fen. I would make sure we found out what was going on and fix this. Now go meet up with Arley and head home. You both need to rest.”

“Thanks, man. See you later.” I left Patrick standing outside the hospital and headed

toward the lot where we had parked.

The weight on my chest had been lifted. My old pack was getting the help they needed. Now, I needed to focus on my mate.

Chapter Thirteen

Arley

“I got the email from the dean and my advisor this morning. It’s official. I have been switched over to the virtual path as of this week. Since all my teachers offer the classes I’m enrolled in virtual format, they are allowing me to just start them up midsemester. I won’t have to wait until the fall and retake my classes. I can finish them all now even while taking care of the babies.” I cocked my head. Excitement and worry warred within me. But wasn’t that the saying? If it worried you, you were making the right decision? “Is it weird I’ll miss going to class though? Most pregnant omegas would be thrilled to not have to leave the house.” I had gotten so used to going, the thrill of being in the city and campus still new, that I knew I’d miss certain aspects of class. It was a new adventure for me and it was fun.

“I would miss it, too, I think. But I do agree this is the best plan of action.” Fen looked down at his phone, reading the text he’d just received. “My parents asked if they could stay with us for a while so they don’t need to deal with the pack’s drama. They don’t feel welcome in town any longer. They are putting their house on the market and want to permanently move up here. But it will take a bit to sell and then find somewhere else to go.”

“If the others in the house don’t mind, we do have the room next to us for your parents to stay in.” I pointed out. “They can turn that room into an in-law suite and not worry about finding their own place.”

“I thought we were making that the nursery?” Fen frowned, his brows furrowing

deeply as if I told him no more sex, which just made me chuckle. “I just painted it that light-green color, with the baby-blue accent wall. I’m not sure they will like that color.”

“I think we can make that work with your parents’ style.” I kissed my mate’s chin; he was always so considerate, the best mate ever. “And besides, I think we both know I am not leaving our babies in a room alone for a while. They can stay there for now. We will figure out what comes later when we need to.”

“I love you.” Fen rubbed my shoulders. “Thanks for letting them come out here.”

“I love them. Plus, without my own parents around, they are the only other family I got besides you and these pups.” I relaxed into my mate’s touch. He gave the most amazing massages. “And this way, our kids have their grandparents close by.”

“And I know they will be begging for time alone with the babies. So that means we will have time alone to ourselves. You know what that means.”

“I have an idea, but why don’t you tell me.”

“It means”—Fen leaned in and licked my neck the way that sent tingles straight to my dick—“we will actually get sleep.”

A chortle slipped out of my throat and I smacked him. “That’s not where you had my mind going.”

“Oh yeah? Where were your thoughts headed, my mate?” Fen smirked at me and I licked my lips. There was something about the way he teased me that turned me on and had me losing my mind to lust.

“Here, let me show you.” I could be seductive. I was a sexy man in need of his sexy

mate. It was probably the hormones talking at this point, but I was going to show my mate just what I meant.

Twisting around, I straddled Fen's lap, thankful we were already sitting on our bed. Leaning in, I stole a kiss from his lips and then trailed a few more down his chest and lower to his bare chest. My mate should walk around shirtless more often.

"Goddess, that feels so good." Fen breathed out, his hands trailing down my back, my sides, and finally gripping the globes of my ass and squeezing, pulling me closer to his body as I lost myself on his delectable chest. Our hard cocks glided against one another, creating the right amount of friction to push me forward in my efforts to bring us both to climax. I wanted the euphoria it would bring me so bad, yet I needed my mate in all ways.

"I need to feel you inside me." I licked his neck, sucking on the skin I had left my mating mark on. The contact sending shivers through our bond and igniting a more powerful need within us. I could feel his desires through our link and they matched mine in intensity.

I slipped off the bed in one fluid motion, snagging Fen's jeans in the process. Unfastening them quickly, his hard cock sprang forth and I took a moment to stare in wonder.

Leaning forward, I engulfed the head of his engorged cock and hummed my delight. But it wasn't enough. I needed more.

Two, three full sucks, I took Fen down my throat before I pulled off and stood before him, actively stripping my clothes. "Take me, alpha. I need you."

Fen's eyes were wild with passion as he growled low in his throat and twisted his arms around my naked body.

The air whooshed around me as Fen spun and tossed me up the bed, following swiftly. He walked over on his knees, pushing my legs apart as he hooked over me. I could feel his body heat as if it were my own.

“Please.” Not that I needed to beg as I felt his cock breach my hole. I moaned, neck arching back as Fen ducked his head to nibble, suck, and lick at my mating mark.

Before we even really got started, I was cresting my orgasm, letting the pleasure flow through my veins. This was what I needed.

When I floated back down, the edge taken off, I spied Fen’s feral look and shit-eating grin staring at me.

“Ready for more?”

I was. I so was. Fen owned my body, our pleasure entwining, growing higher. In and out, he stroked harder and deeper before I felt him stutter. He was close.

“Bite me, my mate. Claim me, alpha,” I yelled, my walls gripping him tight. When Fen’s teeth struck, I screamed. A gush of liquid coated my insides and my chest. It was beautiful. It was everything. He was mine.

As we lay there breathing hard, chests sticking together, I felt at one with my mate. Everything would work out how it was supposed to be as long as I had Fen.

Fen

We’d talked to our roommates to ensure they were okay with my parents’ arrival. Of course, they all agreed that it was for the best and that we would make do with the space we had. It wasn’t that our

house was too small to fit everybody in. We just were used to our space as it was, so adding two more people would take a little adjustment. I had already spent time looking at different houses in case we had to move once the kids were here. My friends were great and all, but they didn't sign up for two o'clock feeding cries. Until then though, we would all be living under the same roof.

"Mom, Dad, I'm so glad that you guys could come out here and stay with us." I kissed my parents' cheeks and grabbed their bags. "I know it's a little bit tight right now in space, but there's enough room for everyone."

"Thank you, Fen." My father followed me down the hall to the bedroom Arley and I had prepared. "We just couldn't deal with the information that was coming through to us in the pack. Everyone agrees with the decision to make those younger shifters pay for what they were doing, especially after finding out they had been secretly poisoning all the elder members of the pack with wolfsbane in hopes of taking over by force once we were all too weak to fight back. But it's still a little awkward with their families around."

Mom placed her purse on the bedside table and took off her light jacket. "It was just better for us to leave.

Plus, with the babies coming, we'll be here to help you guys. I really can't wait to be called grandma."

Arley walked farther into the room and wrapped my mom in his arms. "I am so glad to have you guys here. With my own parents not around, it'll be nice to have my kids grow up with grandparents."

"And I'm just glad their plans were revealed. I can't believe they had gotten some of their men into the local brewery and added the wolfsbane to the bottles. And then added it to the local soda bottling plant as well. They were targeting the whole pack."

I placed all my parents' bags on the floor near the dresser. "The doctor said the effects of the wolfsbane will disappear completely?" I still couldn't fully comprehend how and why someone would do that to others. It was cruel, and the thought of losing my wolf? Even worse.

"Mostly." Dad shrugged as if he was in full acceptance of the situation. Maybe one day, I could be the same but not yet. "There will be some permanent issues for some, depending on how strong our wolves are. They were only poisoning the alphas and we are all hearty and powerful. The doses were small enough that our wolves were fighting it off for the most part and leaving us only with those cold-like symptoms. The doctors all agree that if the dose had been higher, it would have been terminal."

"And the witches that helped cover up the traces so that the doctors couldn't tell it was wolfsbane?" I still couldn't believe Marcus had gone as far as seducing a coven of witches into helping him in his plans. "How are they being dealt with?"

"Since the Global Shifter Council was called and is taking over the investigations and punishments," Dad explained, "they will be putting Marcus and his men on trial but will also be handling the coven. Their connection to the great packs, covens, and clans allows them jurisdiction over all paranormal now. They will decide if the coven can be redeemed or face permanent disbandment."

"That sounds fair." Relief coursed through me that it was no longer just an issue for my birth pack to carry. "I've only heard good things about the council and how they keep all paranormal kind in check."

Enough of the talk about the old pack; it was time to start over. For all of us.

"Mom. Dad. We cleaned out a bedroom for you. It has its own private bathroom so you won't need to be roaming around the hallways at night. And there is a section that would be perfect to add a mini refrigerator and a microwave if you would like." I

gestured toward the area I thought would fit the said appliances. “No rush though. The kitchen is communal and we are all welcome to use it and whatever food is there. We come together weekly to make a shopping list and throw cash into the pot for groceries we all can use. Nothing is off-limits unless there is a tag on it. And that is usually only if one of us has to follow a specific diet. I just thought it would be nice to have the option. I know I hate having to go all the way to the kitchen for a midnight snack.”

“This is perfect, son.” My father patted my back, after placing his bags on the floor. “I’m sure we will feel comfortable in here.”

“Feel free to make this your own little space, not just a room in a house.” Arley hugged my mom. “We are so happy you are here.”

“You sure you don’t mind?” My mother looked around at the beautifully decorated room, everything a perfect match to my parents’ style. “You really didn’t have to go through this much trouble for us.”

“Oh no, it wasn’t a big deal. And we definitely don’t mind having you. Our roommates are also fully on board with the idea. I think they miss their own parents and so the thought of having you here made them excited.” Arley grabbed a hold of my mother’s hands. “Like a real home.”

“And we also have a little kitchen-like setup in our own room,” I pointed out. “Complete with an ice machine and popcorn maker for our cozy movie nights in bed.”

“Honey.” Arley flushed red and hit my shoulder. “They don’t need to hear about our movie nights in bed.”

“What?” I shook my head and gave a cheeky grin. “I only said we watch movies and

have snacks in bed, you are the one blushing and acting scandalized.”

“Shut up.” Arley tucked his chin to his chest, his face growing redder. He scooted closer to the door. “I’m going to go use the washroom. I’ll be back.”

“We’ll wait for you before we go for lunch.” I faced my parents. “I was thinking we could take you to our favorite little café down the block. They have delicious croissant sandwiches and their iced tea is something else. You will love it.”

We continued talking about our lunch plans until Arley returned.

“Have you talked to the doctor? Is everything okay with the babies?” Mother asked and placed a hand on Arley’s stomach. “I can’t wait to be called grandma.”

“And grandpa,” Dad chimed in. “These babies are going to be super spoiled, just so you two know.”

“I’d rather have them bathed in love than in spoils.” Arley shrugged. “But I guess you can spoil them extra in honor of my parents too.”

“I know you wish they were here, dear.” Mom hugged my mate. “But they are looking in on you from beyond. I believe that.”

“Me too.” Arley hugged my mom back. “Thank you for reminding me of that though.”

“Are you having any cravings?” Dad pointed at my mom. “She always wanted pineapple. Couldn’t get enough.”

“Well, Arley is like that with ice. He always wants a cup of ice with him.” I pointed to the cup in my mate’s hand. “See. He has one right now.”

“Craving ice during pregnancy can be a sign of something called pica. I remember reading about that in a parenting magazine once. Have you spoken with your doctor about that?” Mom pulled Arley to the chairs in the corner of the room and they both sat down. “There could also be other reasons like anemia or an iron deficiency.”

“All my labs came back normal,” Arley reassured my mom. “The doctor said that he didn’t think anything was wrong. Honestly, I just think of it as a refreshing little treat. Someone in this house likes it so hot all the time and I need the ice to cool down.”

“Who is turning up the heat?” I hadn’t noticed a change. “Maybe we should call a house meeting about it?”

“Don’t worry, babe.” Arley laid a hand on my arm as I stepped closer to him. “Tori says she has been getting a bit cold lately. If no one else is complaining, I’ll just deal with it and stick with my ice eating. I’m content to stay this way.”

“Well, if there is anything else we can help with, let us know,” Dad said. “We are here to assist you in your pregnancy and when the babies arrive. Don’t be afraid to ask.”

After all,” Mom added in, “it takes a village to raise a baby. Or should I say pack? That’s what we said in my day, anyway.”

“I think that is a fantastic mindset to have. Parenting shouldn’t be a solo adventure. Support is needed. The more love a baby is shown, the better. Maybe that is what goes wrong with shifters like Marcus. Did his parents not allow others to help raise him?” Arley shrugged. “Maybe the pack wasn’t paying the right kind of attention to what was happening.”

“That could be true,” Mom agreed. “In the last few years, the elders of the pack did kind of stop paying attention to what the younger generation was doing. They thought

they were wise enough to figure life out on their own. I know there are several pack members who now wish they had paid more attention. There were rumors of the behaviors the younger members were partaking in, but no action was taken quick enough in my eyes. I think some elders were afraid to admit the truth. Luckily now they have proof and help in figuring it out, thanks to Patrick and his pack.”

“Marcus and his friends used threats to get what they want and keep their victims silent.” Arley took some ice from his cup and chewed. “I’m just glad that the truth has been revealed now and the pack can move forward.”

“Us too.” Dad sat on the edge of the bed. “Even though we won’t be there any longer, I still want our friends to have a healthy pack life.”

“I think they will now that Marcus and his friends are dealt with.” I was hopeful the pack could rebuild now that the trash was taken care of.

“So, what do we all think of joining the pack here on campus?” Arley put his cup down and stood, wrapping himself in my arms. “Patrick has invited us to become members of the all-inclusive pack, and I think it might be the best move for us all.”

“I do like the idea of it being a mix of different shifter types. I always thought the old pack’s ideas of separation were outdated and needed to be changed.” Mom nodded. “I am all for joining a welcoming pack like the one here.”

“I think you are going to love it here, Mom and Dad. It’s like a family.” I smiled at my parents and mate. “It feels like home.”

Chapter Fourteen

Arley

“Fen, I think it’s time to head to the hospital.” My mother-in-law laughed at the look of shock on my face as I stood by the kitchen table, wide-eyed and mouth agape. “Your babies are about to make their appearance, it seems.”

“What? Right now?” Fen popped his head out of the pantry, cereal box in hand. “Are you sure?”

“No, next week. Of course I mean now.” Mom came and helped me sit back down. At that moment, I couldn’t remember how to move on my own merit. “Go grab the to-go bag from the hall closet and tell your father to warm up the car. We will drive you two there. You can sit in the back with Arley and remind him to breathe through each contraction. It really does help.”

Oh right. Breathe. I knew I was forgetting to do something.

My rabbit rolled his eyes and continued to try to remind me that we weren’t the first omega to give birth and wouldn’t be the last.

We will make it through this.

As Fen ran around, doing the things his mom pointed out needed to be done, I just closed my eyes and tried not to scream.

How were six babies coming out of me? Why did I think this was a good idea? Is it too late to change my mind?

“Yes, Arley.” Mom chuffed and rubbed my back. “It’s too late to turn back now. Breathe.”

Did I speak out loud?

“Yeah, honey.” Fen crouched in front of me and grasped my hands. “You are thinking out loud again and we can hear all those thoughts. And no, I don’t think I would appreciate you pulling on my sack every three minutes so I know the level of pain you are in. But if you really think that will help...”

“Son, shut up.” Dad came in through the garage. “Trust me, this is the one time he might take you up on it and it’s not worth it. Even that wouldn’t show you the level of their pain. Instead of taking the sacrifice, why don’t you help your omega up and we can all get into the car. It’s warmed up and ready to go.”

“Thank the goddess.”

The ride to the hospital was uneventful, at least I thought it was. Between painful contractions and predelivery panic, time swirled past me in a blur. Voices were dulled, lights were dimmed, all my senses were focused on getting through the labor and preparing myself to birth six babies within the next few hours. I guess my body was moving on autopilot because I honestly didn’t recall anything that happened between leaving the house and my obstetrician arriving at my bedside.

Doctor Williams entered the room, smiling and bouncing. I hated him at that moment. No one should be so cheerful when I was about to die from the pain of this labor.

“Can you turn the sunshine down a few notches, Doc?” Fen sat at my side and held

my hand. The emotions flowing from me into him through our mate bond had to be overwhelming. My mate looked exhausted. “I think my mate is about to commit murder if he sees your megawatt smile for one more second.”

“Oh, sorry.” Doctor Williams shrugged. “I just get so excited still when we bring new life into the world, I forget how uncomfortable the omegas are in the process.”

“Uncomfortable? Uncomfortable is when you sit on an old couch and can feel the springs. Uncomfortable is when you ate too much and feel bloated. I’m not uncomfortable, Doc. I’m in pain, soul-wrenching, joy-killing pain, and you have three seconds to stop smiling and start helping me, or I swear to god I am going to blow.”

“Let’s check you, then and get this started.” Doctor Williams approached my bedside and I nearly kicked him.

Doctor Williams performed his exam and we waited for his observations. I needed to be done with this already.

“Are they ready to come out, Doctor?” Fen looked at the doctor pleadingly.

“The omega line has begun to open and everything seems to be progressing as expected.” Doctor Williams pointed toward the opening located at the bottom of my abdomen where our children would soon emerge. “For now, I can offer meds for the pain and just keep monitoring.”

“So the babies should be here soon?” I ran a hand over my huge belly. A small part of me realizing I would kind of miss this feeling of being able to feel my children growing inside me.

“Every birth is different so we can’t tell if it will be within the next hour or the next twenty-four.” Doctor Williams filled out some forms in my medical file. “Would you

like something for the pain?”

“Oh goddess, yes.” I nearly screamed as another contraction tore through my body.

“Please, Doctor. Now.”

Finally, sweet relief coursed through me as the medical staff provided me with pain medication safe for laboring omegas.

“I read that it is sometimes easier for shifters to transform into their animal for the birthing process, so is that something Arley should try?” Fen had done a lot of research in the last few weeks of my pregnancy. He promised he wanted me to have the best experience possible.

“Sometimes that is the best choice.” Doctor Williams checked my omega line again.

“But in Arley’s case, he is already too far along in the process, not all the babies are shifted into bunny form, and there are multiple pups, not just kits. So in this instant, it is best to remain in his human form. Safer for papa and babies.”

“So we just keep laboring like this?” Fen rubbed my shoulders but I shrugged him off.

“We?” I twisted to look at the foolish man I usually call mate. “Since when are you popping a kid out of your body? Do you feel like you are being ripped apart from the inside?”

“Um.” Fen’s face paled a bit the longer I glared at him.

“No. You aren’t laboring like this. I am.” I turned back around and tried to get back into a comfortable position. Something almost impossible in my current condition.

“Now, go grab me a cup of that chewy ice I like while I work on bringing these babies into the world, okay?”

“Yes, my love.” Fen left the room, hopefully to grab the requested cubes. The nurses’ station had a machine that put out the perfect kind.

“Do you think it will be much longer?” I looked up at Doctor Williams and gave a hopeful lift of my brow. “Maybe we can hurry up the process.”

“I understand the desire to speed it up, but the available options for speeding up the process are not safe for your situation.” Doctor Williams placed a comforting hand on mine. “But you’re progressing nicely and I think there may be babies entering the world very soon.”

“Really?” Hope started to seep back in with his words. “I just can’t wait to meet them.”

“They will be here before you know it.” Doctor Williams patted my hand. “I need to go check on a few other patients. The nurses will remain with you and will come and get me as soon as it’s time for the babies to make their grand entrance. You are doing great, Papa. And remember, your mating connection allows you to share the pain with your mate. Give him a bit of a taste of the labor after that comment earlier. He wants to claim the labor, let him feel what it’s really like.”

“You, dear doctor, are amazing. I never would have thought about that.” I felt a bit excited to let Fen experience my labor. “I think this is about to be fun.”

“I’m back, my love.” Fen walked in with two cups of ice. “I got two of them just in case. Is there anything else I can do to help?”

“Actually there is.” I let a slow smile form on my lips. “Come here.”

“Why does that smile scare me?” Fen slowly approached and grabbed my hand. “Is everything okay?”

“Oh, everything is great.” I gripped his hand tighter and concentrated on our bond, sending a portion of my experience to him through the link.”

“Holy Fuck. What is that?” Fen gripped his stomach with his free hand, nearly doubling over. “Oh goddess, am I dying?”

“Oh, don’t overreact now.” I tilted my head and enjoyed the lessening of my own pain. “I just thought you could take a turn on our labor. Aren’t our contractions a bitch?”

“That’s okay, Arley. Send it to me, that’s what mates are for.” Fen panted through gritted teeth. “But my respect for birth givers just tripled.”

“As it should have.” I chuckled. “Now let’s eat that ice.”

Several hours passed, but at least my pains were lessened by sharing them through the mate bond. Once it was time for delivery, things progressed much more quickly. Soon, we were relaxing in the hospital’s family suite bonding as a family with six brand-new babies. Life was never more wonderful than it was in the moment.

“Are we sure on the names we picked?” Fen held Lily and Kiki, as he rocked his body side to side near the window. “I can fill out the birth certificate applications if we are confident on our choices.”

“Yes. I adore each name we decided on.” I looked down at Simon and Maddie and couldn’t believe how perfect they each were. “We can send out the paperwork now if it’s done.”

“It is.” Dad sat in the corner chair holding little Danny in his arms. “I made sure everything was filled out and it’s on the desk over there.”

“You did amazing, Arley.” Mom admired little JoJo in her arms as she stood beside my bed. “Thank you for making me a grandmother. These are the most precious babies I have ever seen.”

“I think we are all biased.” I laughed. “But I agree. Our babies are amazing.”

Fen

Lying in bed with Arley in my arms, I couldn’t help but fight sleep. I didn’t want to waste treasuring any moment I had with my mate or our children. Sleep was overrated.

Arley snored softly, his head resting on my chest and his left leg thrown over my hips. He needed the rest, giving birth a week ago and taking care of six tiny pups was exhausting, even if he did have my parents and myself here to help. There was something about the carrier parent that young pups craved, so many times they preferred Arley over anyone else. Luckily, the babies were quick to learn how to sleep through the night. I was sure we would end up paying for that gift from fate when they were teens and keeping us up all night with other worries.

Our babies were safely asleep in the crib in the corner of the room. I was glad we decided to keep them in our room for the first year instead of making them sleep in their own separate nursery. It made it easier for the few times one would wake. And I knew it eased Arley’s postpartum anxieties. I had a feeling if we did put the children in their own room, I’d end up sleeping in here alone.

“What are you thinking about so hard?” Arley startled me. I didn’t even realize his snoring had ceased.

“I’m sorry, did I wake you?” I ran a finger down the side of his face. “You need your sleep.”

“So do you, Daddy.” Arley grinned. “So tell me, what’s on your mind keeping you awake.”

“It’s nothing bad.” I leaned in and pecked his lips, lingering just a second. “I was just wondering how I got so lucky to get a mate like you, and six healthy pups and kits. And maybe stress a bit about finding a new house.”

“Remember Neal and everyone else who lives here said no rush on that last one,” Arley reminded me.

“That’s true, but it’s still in my list of things to do soon.” I reached over and grabbed my phone from the nightstand. “Can I just show you three of the ones I like most? Maybe if I feel one step closer in choosing, I’ll be able to get actual rest.”

“Doubt it but it’s worth a shot.” Arley sat up straighter. “Let me see whatcha got.”

“Here, let me get them ready for you.” Pulling up the listings of the three houses I had added to my favorites, I handed Arley my phone. “These are the three that stood out to me. They offer the space we need, while allowing for growth in the future.”

“This one looks super impressive. Look at that yard. And are those pillars on the porch. God, I love pillars in construction.” Arley clicked on the first option. “What made you decide on this one?”

“Besides the pillars that I know are one of your favorite features? There is a separate in-law house in the backyard by the pool so that Mom and Dad have their own space but are still close by and can help when needed.” I listed all the features that I thought would benefit our family. “And it is close to campus, so we will be close to most of the pack.”

“I am not crazy about having a pool when we have littles.” Arley pointed out that the

pool was not secured. “There are no safety measures for children, so we would have to add things if we went with this option.”

“Okay, I can make notes of that. What do you think of the next one?” I really couldn’t wait for him to see that one. I kind of thought it would be his favorite. “I think the backyard is perfect for the kids to play in.”

“That lawn in front is beautiful. And the back is spectacular, like a shifter child’s dream come true.” Arley clicked on the images. “Is the swing set part of the deal? And how much land exactly is that?”

“Enough that we could still add an additional house in the back if we don’t want Mom and Dad in the main house with us.” I pointed to the details on the page listing the number of rooms and anchorage. “And did you see the basement.”

“This one is truly wonderful. And the basement could be a playroom for the kids for rainy days. I can almost envision it.”

“It’s amazing, right?”

“It is. But let me look at this third one. I have a feeling about it.” Arley selected the final listing and gasped. “Oh, Fen, this is it. This is the one I want.”

“Are you sure?” I really thought I’d get this reaction from the middle option, not last.

“There are so many signs that point to this being the one for us, Fen. It’s located on Fate’s Way Boulevard. Its door and mailbox are painted teal which is our favorite color. It has a guesthouse in the back but also a ton of space in the main house. I look at this yard, and I see our kids playing during the day and you and I cuddling on this swing on the back porch at night, or in the gazebo with the fire pit. This is the one.”

“Are you sure?” The more he talked about it, his face lit up with excitement, I knew the answer.

“Yes, Fen. We found our home.”

Chapter Fifteen

Arley

“Come on, babies, let’s get you all dressed and ready,” I sing-songed to our sextuplets. “Today is a big day for Daddy. Today is the day he gets his degree and graduates from the university. And we are all going to go and cheer him on. Isn’t that exciting?”

Six adorable babies lay in front of me babbling back at me and waving their feet and arms. I doubted they had any idea what I was saying but I would talk to them, nonetheless.

“Need some help in here.” Mom came into the nursery of our new home and picked up KiKi. “Dad and I can get the babies ready. Why don’t you go and take your shower and get yourself dressed?”

“Yeah, we have the kids. Go get ready.” Dad walked in and picked up JoJo. “We have two hours before the graduation starts. If we all work together, we can get there on time and watch our Fen walk down that aisle and become the first in our family to graduate college.”

“You two must be so proud.” I smiled at my in-laws as I finished changing Lily’s diaper. I didn’t feel jealous at all that my in-laws were nabbing my precious babies. But they were right. I needed to shower and the reprieve would be nice. “He is excited to finally have his degree.”

“We have always been proud.” Mom changed KiKi into an adorable outfit we picked out just for the day. “My daddy is graduating” written brightly on the onesie. “Even before he published his first novel, he made us proud. But with everything he does, it just grows deeper and deeper. He is amazing.”

Warmth filled my chest thinking of all the accomplishments Fen had made in his life and I knew there was much more to come. “As long as you two are sure you have the babies, I’ll go get ready.”

Rushing out the room before I got caught up in taking care of the babies, I trusted my in-laws to get that job done. I was aware that if I didn’t take the chance right away to go take time for myself, I could easily lose myself in being just a papa. Not that it wasn’t who I was, but I was more than Papa, and taking care of myself meant taking care of them better.

Quickly undressing and climbing into the shower, I let the water run down my body. The rivets of water felt good on my skin, and I mentally envisioned each one taking the stressors of daily life off and away from me, escaping through the drain and taking it all away with it. Feeling refreshed, I exited the shower and towel dried my body and hair, taking this time to mentally think over the logistics of taking six infants to a graduation ceremony. If it wasn’t so important for my mate to have his children there to witness his big day, I probably would have gotten babysitters. At least I had his parents to help me. We can each handle two children. And if worse comes to worse, Neal’s parents said they would be sitting nearby and could help out if needed. They were a part of our village after all.

Dressed and ready, I checked in to see how Mom and Dad were doing with the sextuplets. And found chaos.

“Arley dear, we are so sorry.” Mom handed me Simon and went back to comforting a hysterical Danny. They all just started crying at once. We fed them, changed them,

but nothing seems to help.”

“It’s okay. I think I know the issue.” I stared down into the big brown eyes of my child and he settled right away. His brothers and sisters soon followed in their quieting. “This is why it’s been so hard to get anything done lately. The moment I’m in another room for longer than five minutes, they start screaming.

“Do they do that for Fen as well?” Dad placed a now-silent Lily in the crib and then also placed JoJo down next to her. “Or is it just with us?”

“It’s with anyone who isn’t me.” I sat on the rocking chair in the corner of the room. “I read this is something that can happen sometime within their first year. They’re getting used to their surroundings and latch on to one parent or caregiver for security. The doctor said they will outgrow it. Just try to limit how long I leave them for now while they settle into their pack bonds and their animals’ instincts learn who they can trust.”

“Are we almost ready to go at least?” I looked at my six children and found them all dressed and content. My kids and I seemed ready to leave the house for the day. “Do either of you need to still get ready?”

“We got dressed before coming to help you and there were no accidents with the babies so we are still good.” Mom held up her large bag in one hand and the equally huge diaper bag in the other, sparing me a wink. “I packed a change of clothes for each of us in one bag and then made sure we had all the baby essentials packed in their bag as well. We should be good for a few hours.”

“I love those ready-to-feed bottles for times like this. No need for a cooler and it takes up little space in the bag.” I knew some omegas managed to chest feed their babies but my milk never let down, and so I had to provide for the children through formula. Fed is best after all. While I was a little disheartened, I figured my body

knew best after all with six mouths to feed. “Let’s get going before we are late. I want to make sure we are seated and settled before the ceremony begins.”

An hour and some baby juggling later, we sat in the stadium watching Fen cross the stage and receive his degree. Neal’s parents and brother sat beside us, and the six of us each held a baby. I smiled at the sight of the sextuplets in their onesies claiming their father as a graduate, but the adorable bears they all held that stated “Our uncles are graduating too!” were a hit with the families surrounding us. I knew Neal and Dean would get teary-eyed when they saw them, even if they would try to hide it behind jokes. Those two were wrapped around the babies’ fingers. It would be fun one day to witness them having their own children.

“Fen Masterson.” The dean called my mate’s name and I took pictures as he greeted the professors on stage and returned to his seat on the main floor of the stadium. And then Dean and Neal also received their diploma when it was their turn. The crowd held all applause until the last name was called and then the cheers broke out. Luckily it was the final moments of the ceremony, so when the children loudly voiced their displeasure with the crowd’s reaction, we were able to pack up and leave before the others began their exit.

“Come on, the guys said they will meet us over at the house for the party.” Dad led us through the crowd and out of the stadium. “I’ll start up the barbeque as soon as we get home and we can get the kids settled and ready to congratulate their daddy and uncles.”

Hanging out with friends and family in honor of Fen, Dean, and Neal was the recipe for a wonderful night. The graduates were ecstatic that I had put together the festivities and made sure that everything ran smoothly. Our party went into the night, the sextuplets eventually falling asleep in the portable crib inside the gazebo.

“Thank you, my love, for throwing together this party.” Fen danced with me when

most of the others had left and Mom and Dad took the babies for the night. “I had a great time with everyone. It made the day even more amazing.”

“Anything for you, Fen. You deserve the world.”

“You are my world, Arley. You and our kids. You are everything.”

Fen

“I don’t know if this scene is working.” I closed my laptop and rested my eye; the feeling of defeat hung over me. “It seems like the more I try to force it, the worse it becomes.” I never had this much trouble with a manuscript. I didn’t know what my issue was.

“I know your writing and I can’t believe that chapter is as bad as you are making it out to be. I bet it’s brilliant.” Arley sat on the edge of my desk and handed me a glass of wine. “Here, have some of this and try again.”

“Thanks, baby.” I took the wine from his hand and took a sip. “Delicious. Is this the merlot we got after my graduation from Neal’s parents?”

“It is.” Arley took a sip from his own glass and set it down on the coaster next to my laptop. “Now, tell me about this scene and what has you so worried.”

“Fine. Maybe you can see the key to moving forward, because I sure can’t. It’s right here.” I flipped open my laptop and reloaded my manuscript, turning the screen to face my mate. “I get to this one scene and then my mind freezes up. I just stare at the screen.”

“Let me read it.” Arley sat down on my lap and read what I had written. His subtle shifts teasing my cock, as it lay nestled between his clothed cheeks. Part of me

wondering if he was aware of the effect he was having on me. “This sounds really good, baby. But I do have a few suggestions.”

“Oh yeah.” I closed my eyes and lost myself in the feel of him rubbing his bubble ass over my thickening cock. “What do you suggest, my love?”

“So your two main characters are a boss and his secretary, right?” Arley arched his back and the sight of it had my mind thinking about how prettily he arched when I was taking him from behind. “Well it’s obvious they want to fuck, but they haven’t yet. Why not?”

“Because.” My breathing was getting heavier and thoughts were starting to get heavier to put together in a way that made sense, yet I still tried. “It’s against company policy and they don’t want to break the rules.”

“Sometimes rules need to be busted.” Arley leaned back and twisted his head so he could kiss me. Then he fell forward again.

“So how would you fix this?” I leaned up and licked the back of his neck. “Tell me what you think they should do.”

“I think you need to have main character one seduce main character two right there at the desk.” Arley leaned forward and starting typing words into my document, but I didn’t care, as long as he didn’t stop grinding on me. “I think that they need to have a hot-and-heavy dry-rutting session.”

“Oh yeah.” I pushed the desk chair back but held tightly onto my mate so he came with. “Why don’t you show me instead of tell me?”

“As you wish.”

After showing me exactly what he thought my characters should be doing and leaving me breathless and thoroughly satisfied, Arley lay naked against me on the floor of my home office. The baby monitor nearby but blessedly silent still. It didn't matter how many times we had sex, every single time seemed to be more intense and more satisfying than the last. I wondered if it would always feel like this.

"Did that help you finish the scene?" Arley drew lazy circles on my chest, a slight smile playing at his lips. "I could always show you again." I chuckled at the flirtation in his voice; my mate was insatiable.

"I know exactly what to write for that scene now, baby. And it's all thanks to you and that marvelous ass of yours." I kissed the top of his head and pulled him even closer into my body. Our hearts beat as one, a heavy staccato against our ribs; it was strange and calming to feel his heart race along with mine. "But feel free to show me any more ideas you may have about future scenes. You know I usually don't only have one sex scene in a book. So I need a lot of inspiration." Can't blame a man for trying, if my mate took the hint.

"Well, you did moan out something about me being your perfect muse so I guess that's my job now." Arley clicked my nipple with his tongue, his breath sending a chill over my sweaty skin. "Maybe I need to set up my office in the next room so you can keep me close. You can come in anytime and ask for another demonstration. What do you think?"

"I think that you are a very sexy mate and I am a very lucky alpha to have you." That was the understatement of a century; I was the luckiest alpha alive.

"That's a good answer and I think I agree with you. You are very lucky to have me," he said cheekily, a sly grin on his face, eyes twinkling in merriment.

"Arley, what about you? Are you lucky to have me?" I glided my hand down his back

and cupped his ass.

“Of course, baby. I’m the luckiest.” It wasn’t until the next day that I got to my manuscript, but I didn’t have a roadblock any longer.

Arley

“P apa.” JoJo ran full force into the back of my legs while I stood in front of the kitchen sink washing dishes. “Lily said I smell like I’m decaying. Tell her to stop it. I don’t think I can control my anger any longer if she keeps it up.”

Dropping the wet yellow sponge into the empty sink, I turned and took in the sight before me. JoJo was covered in mud and grass, while his sister was standing in the doorway, holding her nose close and her face scrunched up in disgust. Her brand-new light-pink dress splotted with her brother’s mess.

“Papa. Maddie and I were having a picnic and JoJo and KiKi came over and threw mud balls at us. They got my pretty new dress all dirty.” Lily lifted the skirt of her dress and twirled around before she faced us again, put her fists on her hips, and huffed. “They need to be punished. I’m going to go tell Daddy.”

“Well, you are already telling me so we can wait to tell Daddy until he gets home from work. Go get your brothers and sisters, we are having a family meeting in five minutes in the living room. So everyone must meet me in there. Okay?”

“If it’s a family meeting, Daddy should be there, too.” JoJo stomped his foot and glared at me. “He’s family too.”

“He is, and you’re right.” I learned long ago to pick my battles with the six of them. And JoJo had a strong desire to always include his father in any discussions we had. I didn’t have the energy to fight him on this. I just hoped Fen wasn’t still busy with his meetings. “I’ll call him while you two go gather the troops.”

“Should we get Gramma and Grandpa too?” Lily cocked her head and her lips twisted up. She was testing me but I would let it slide this time.

“Of course.” I patted them both on the head and kissed their cheeks. “Go get everyone and wait for me on the couch.”

The two of them ran off to get everyone, and I chuckled to myself as I dialed my mate’s number. He was going to love this one.

“Hey, babe. Everything Okay?” Fen’s low tone sent exciting shivers down my spine and I adjusted myself. Even after seven years together, he could light me up with one single mundane word. I honestly was surprised we hadn’t had a second pregnancy with the way he turned me on almost constantly.

“We are having a family meeting in a few minutes and JoJo demands you partake in the drama.” I made my way into the living room and sat down on our brown leather couch. No one else was in the room yet.

“What did they do now?” Fen chuckled, the noise making me smile. “Frogs in the underwear drawer, or did one of them replace the tea set with action figures again?”

“No, neither of those, although they were good guesses.” I shook my head and sighed. The kids always had some chaotic mess I got to share with my mate. “Today was throwing mud balls during a picnic.”

“Well, they did say they missed the snow.” Fen reminded me that the kids had asked when winter would be coming back. Then when it did, they would ask when the pool could be opened again.

“True. But did they have to do this the day I am waiting for my final grades?” I shifted my weight on the couch so I was sitting up against the back cushion and I tilted my head back so I was staring at the ceiling. I had to dust the fans, it seemed.

“I’m stressed enough. And it seems like every time I turn around, I find a new chore to do or a new fire to put out.”

“Well, at least the fires are all metaphorical. Right?” Fen waited for my laugh but I didn’t feel like giving one, so he continued speaking. “I know, sweetie, but we both know you nailed those exams and will get to graduate next month. You’ve got this. Want me to play the mean parent today?”

“Can you? I mean, neither of us are really mean. But can you be the one to give them their consequences. I think JoJo and KiKi need to do laundry.” I thought about other chores that they could realistically help with. “And maybe spend some time in the garden, making sure that the vegetables and fruits are growing.”

“Sounds fair,” Fen agreed. “Any of the others? Do you think any of them need consequences?”

“Not based on what I heard so far. But you know things always come out during discussions, so add to the plan if needed. Those were the only two Lily pointed out.”

“Lily too?”

“No, she was just chasing JoJo as far as I can tell.” Honestly, I was surprised that she didn’t

retaliate in some way. Usually I would have to discipline all the kids involved because they would try to get even.

“Really?” Fen knew that it was strange for Lily to not act out too. “She didn’t punch him this time?”

“Not that I heard.” I closed my eyes and rubbed my temples, a headache starting to sneak its way in. I had no time for headaches.

“See, they are learning.” Fen chuckled. “Maybe these meetings will start becoming less and less.”

“Maybe. But I doubt it. Or if they do, they will only start back up again once they all hit puberty. Footsteps sounded from the hallway. “They’re coming, I’ll put you on speaker.”

“We got this.”

Hitting the speaker icon, I placed my cell on the coffee table as the first of our little pack ran in.

“JoJo said we are having a meeting.” Our most serious boy, Simon, sat down next to me. He sounded exhausted for a seven-year-old, even adding a sigh. “What did they do now?”

“We’ll cover that when everyone gets here.” I hugged him closer. There was something about holding Simon that helped my head feel better. I wouldn’t be surprised if he had a touch of healing magic.

“Okay, Papa.” Taking out his notebook, Simon started working out a math problem. While his brothers and sisters liked playing outside, my little Si loved staying indoors and learning. “I’ll just finish my homework while we wait.”

“Homework?” I was puzzled at his statement. “You’re on summer break. How do you have homework?”

“I assigned it to myself.” Si answered another question. “I can’t let myself forget how to solve these equations.”

“You are already ahead, Si. Don’t forget to have fun, too. Okay?” I reminded him. “Maybe you can go play some board games after the family meeting.”

“Okay, Papa.” Si smiled at me. “As long as you play too.”

“Deal.” I kissed Simon on the top of his head.

“Papa?” Danny poked his head in from around the corner. “Am I in trouble?”

“Not that I know of.” I patted the seat beside me. “Were you with JoJo and Kiki?”

“No. I was taking a nap in the bushes.” Danny sat and laid his head on my lap. “Then Lily told me I had to come here for a family meeting. Why are we having a meeting?”

“I’ll let Daddy answer questions today.” I ran my hands through Danny’s hair, his eyes falling closed.

“Let’s wait until everyone gets here, okay, buddy.” Fen was amused. After all these years, I could read his emotions by the tone he used and the wording.

“Don’t fret, Danny-boy. We are all here now.” Grandma Tricia walked in with the rest of the squad and winked at my smallest boy. “We’ll get this session over with quick as can be, then you can go back out to nap with the flowers.”

Danny’s face lit up at the prospect of catching more z’s. I had asked the pediatrician about how often the boy slept, worried that he was missing some vitamins or was sick. But all tests came back normal and the doctor was not alarmed. He informed us that some young shifters tended to sleep more and that since it had been a characteristic of our son since birth, and all examinations proved Danny to be a healthy little boy, happy and growing properly, it was just something that his body needed. He also warned that there may be a time when things switched up and he would need less. Once the doctor laid our fears to rest, we decided just to let him follow his body’s natural rhythm. We homeschooled all six kids, so we could work with all their various schedules. Although, I had to admit that most of them flowed together in a harmonious fashion with ours, so it all felt easy to go with the flow.

“So now that we are all here, can we get to the meat of the matter?” Grandpa Daniel gestured toward the back patio. “I was about to grill up some steaks for lunch and want to get that started before it rains again.”

“Steaks?” Fen loved steaks, so of course his interest was piqued now. “I sure hope someone comes and drops me off some lunch.”

“If you let us get this meeting over quickly, I’ll make sure one of us does.” Daniel laughed and tickled JoJo who was sitting on his lap, still covered in mud. KiKi leaned against his side, just as dirty. “I hear that these two stinkers have some things to confess.”

“We’re sorry.” Kiki peeked out from her hiding place beside her grandfather. “We just wanted to play a game like we did before.”

“That was with snow and everyone knew we were having a snowball fight.” I pointed out the difference between the snowball fight and today’s stunt. “Today, it seems Lily and Maddie were minding their own business and you made a mess where they didn’t want one. Am I wrong with that information?”

“No, Papa.” Kiki, hung her head, a pout on her lips. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Fen said, taking over the conversation like we had planned and laying out all the consequences for the children’s actions. “But I think you need to go clean up the mess you and JoJo made and make sure that Lily and Maddie know that you won’t do it again.”

“Okay, Daddy.” JoJo and KiKi nodded their heads, speaking in unison.

“Now, all of you go on and get that cleanup started. Go ahead and start your chores for the day and I will see you after my meeting with my publishers, okay?”

“Okay, Daddy,” the kids all chorused and ran off, my in-laws following in their wake.

“Don’t forget you promised to play a board game with me after all my chores are completed, Papa?” Simon climbed off the couch and ran after his brothers and sisters.

“I won’t forget,” I called after my son.

“That went well. I expected either more pushback on the chores or to find out there was more to the story.” Fen’s voice came out from the speaker reminding me he was still on the line.

“I know exactly what you mean. It seemed too easy honestly. I’ll keep my eye on them the rest of the afternoon to make sure they follow through.” I took the call off speaker and held it to my ear. “How’s the meeting going?”

“As expected.” Fen had been confident this morning that it would go well; it was me who had been worked up into a nervous wreck. “They want another three books to the series and I also heard that there’s interest in turning The Omegas of Mountain Ridge Pack into a TV series.”

“What?” Overwhelming excitement for my mate had me standing up at the news. I may have even given a little leap and fist pump at the news. This was something we both always wanted for his career. “That’s been your dream for the last four years.”

“Well, it’s been one of my dreams.” Fen’s voice lowered and the sound shot directly to my cock. “There is still that other one that I’ve been trying to talk you into, mate. Another baby would make my year.”

“Well, perhaps when you come home tonight, we can see about making that one come true too.” I couldn’t help but smile as I teased my mate just before disconnecting the call. “See you soon.”

Fen

“I can’t believe you bribed your parents into taking the kids to the waterpark hotel for the weekend.” Arley trailed his hand down my bare chest as we lay in bed. “You must have really wanted to have some alone time with me.”

“Hey, you are the one who teased me by saying we could try for another baby.” I captured his hand in mine and brought it to my lips. “You can’t blame me for making sure we’d have no disruptions. Trying for number seven when numbers one through six keep interrupting didn’t seem like the more productive of weekends.”

“Are you sure that Mom and Dad will be okay with the littles for that long alone. They are a handful even when the four of us are present.” Arley laid his head on my shoulder. “Maybe we should have gone too.”

“That would have defeated the purpose.” I shook my head and kissed the top of Arley’s head. “We needed to be alone to make more babies, remember?”

“Yeah, but...” Arley nibbled his bottom lip, a telltale sign he was nervous about our hoodlums causing my parents problems.

“Shh. Don’t worry. I asked Neal, Dean, Victor, and Tori to go along with them.” I was glad I had our old roommates join my parents and the boys. It should ease Arley’s fears. “Now there will be one adult for every child.”

“Well, sort of.” Arley scoffed, shrugging. “You did say Dean and Victor, right?”

“Hey listen, I know they can get in trouble sometimes, but I swear they are responsible members of the pack. They will look out for our pups just like they were their own.”

“I know. I was just playing around.” Arley leaned up and kissed me. “But are you

sure Neal will watch the kids? He might find an omega he hasn't slept with yet."

"Don't worry. He promised he wouldn't try to break his hex while watching the kids." I felt sorry for my friend. All these years and still no closer to finding his fated mate.

"Good." Arley sighed. "I hope he finds him soon. He is so good with the kids and he deserves to have a family of his own."

"I know." I squeezed my mate closer. I couldn't imagine going so long without this connection. I wanted my best friend to find the same. "Maybe this year will bring him closer."

"We can hope so." Arley smiled at me. "Listen, Fen, I love you. Thank you for planning this out and making sure I had no reason to fear."

"You are welcome." I kissed my mate again, this time lingering a bit longer at his lips. "How about we get back to trying for another pup, or perhaps a little kit?"

"We definitely could go for a few more rounds, alpha." Arley trailed his hand back down my chest and wrapped his fingers around my length. "But we don't need to keep trying for another baby."

"But you promised." I really wanted more mini-Arleys running around. "Why are you changing your mind now?"

"Oh, babe. I'm not." Arley placed a quick peck to my mouth and placed my hand on his flat stomach. "But we don't need to try."

I flipped Arley onto his back and crawled over him, trapping him between my arms. "You're serious? We are having another baby."

“No, alpha.” Arley raised a hand between us and showed me his fingers. “We are having two.”