



Dancing for His Omega

(Omegas of Oliver Creek #12)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Dancing was my life. But when my dance and life partner chose another over me, the fire died.

Planning never to dance again, I searched high and low for a place to start over, finally settling on the small, charming town of Oliver Creek. Home of many shifters and away from the dance company and the city where there was a chance I would run into my ex-mate and his new love.

Heart still broken, I intended to heal while there. Forget all about Jacob. Oliver Creek had a counselor in town who was touted as one of the best. Before I arrived, I already had an appointment.

On my way home from a session, tears still drying on my face, I decide to pay a visit to the local chocolatier, knowing the sweet goodness would help my healing. Chocolate can cure anything. Once I set foot inside and my eyes lock with the owner's, all my plans to stay single and heal crash around me.

But how can I give my mate my heart, when it is still in pieces?

Dancing for His Omega is the latest in the Omegas of Oliver Creek mpreg series by Lorelei M. Hart. It is a super-sweet with knotty heat mm shifter mpreg romance featuring an omega wolf whose chocolate skills are famous for miles around and an alpha bear whose dancing heart has been shattered nearly beyond repair, friends from other stories of the Omegas of Oliver Creek, an adorable baby or two, and a guaranteed happily ever after. If you like your mpreg against all odds, your happily ever afters complete with a bundle of joy, and your mpreg with heart, Dancing for His Omega is the book for you. While each book in the Omegas of Oliver Creek series is set in the same world, they can each be read as standalones.

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Edwin

Approaching the welcome sign for Oliver Creek, I pressed the button on my steering wheel, turning down the volume on the screaming metal music I'd chosen for the trip.

Any other music reminded me of dance, and, worse, Jacob.

He'd packed his things and left me almost six months before, but the ache in my chest hadn't ceased for a second.

I didn't even like heavy metal. It was the only music I could find that I hadn't ever danced to.

I let out a long sigh of relief. Sitting this long was starting to feel uncomfortable, and I was ready, beyond ready, for this change in my life.

Downsizing from the large mid-century modern home had been hard, but Jacob forced the biggest downsize on me in breaking things off.

I felt lighter now. Once he was gone, a spotlight shone on everything I'd ignored in the name of love.

Not that I was perfect. I wasn't. Not by a long shot.

I caught myself smiling in the side mirror as I turned off Main Street and onto Creekside Drive where my new apartment would be. It was above someone's garage, but the person seemed very nice over the phone and waived my deposit since I was

moving cross-country.

All the reviews raved about the locals and how walking through town was like stepping into a lovely greeting card.

The houses were all painted in bright colors, not like those cookie-cutter tan and off-white monstrosities that had become the latest fad. The whole neutral palette had never spoken to me.

Life was made to be colorful.

My map app led me right to the same house in the pictures and the garage to the side, where I would be living until I figured my life out. I only had so much in my savings to last me, but I had been frugal before Jacob. At least I had the knowledge to be that way again.

Car parked in the driveway, I got out and an older man emerged from the side door of the pale-blue house. Flowers hung from baskets at every corner and he even had some window baskets bursting with flowers, though I suspected some of them were fake. Still, they were pretty.

“Edwin?” he greeted with a smile. Between my new landlord and the sign, I felt at home already.

“Yes. Granger?”

He nodded and came over to give me a very rigid handshake. A veteran’s hat declaring what years he served sat on top of his salt-and-pepper hair. “I’m glad you found the place.”

“It was a long drive, but it was easy to find. Thank you. Should I park here, or is there

somewhere else?”

“You’re fine. I don’t drive anymore, so I gave my truck to my grandson. He comes to pick me up when I want to go to the market in the next town. Sometimes I don’t even need to go. I just want to see him so I make up a list.”

That sounded about right. Kids were busy, but grandparents always wanted to see more of them.

“Okay. Just let me know if you need me to move it.”

The older man reached into the pocket over his heart and withdrew a key and a remote control. “It’s for the garage, and you can park there or use it for storage if you like. Doesn’t look like you have much though.”

“I don’t.” I scratched the back of my head. I wasn’t ashamed of not having much, but I probably seemed like I’d never lived on my own before.

Jacob had insisted I get rid of my thrift store furniture. Of course, once he moved out, he only left me a recliner and a blow-up mattress.

I gave him too much of myself and didn’t keep enough for me.

Oh well. Lesson definitely learned.

Granger gave me a tour of the apartment. It was fully furnished and he’d even bought a new mattress because he said having someone sleep on the same one as a previous tenant gave him the ick. I appreciated the gesture. That gave me the ick as well. The place was a studio. There was a three-quarter bathroom, meaning no tub, but it would have to do. I didn’t take many baths anyway.

There were some things I would have to buy. The kitchen held only a small pan and a few cooking utensils, and I needed some supplies because while the place was not bad, there was dust and no one cleaned my living space like I did.

“Thank you for waiving the deposit. I really appreciate it.”

Granger clapped me on the shoulder. “It’s no problem. Oliver Creek is expanding, and I want to help. I’d never live in another place after being here.”

Speaking of here. “There doesn’t happen to be a dance studio nearby, is there?”

My landlord ticked his head sideways. “You know. There used to be. I would pass and see kids dancing through the windows sometimes.”

Maybe there was another way I could do what I loved?

“It closed down a few years ago. Someone should reopen it, considering all the new kids around here. It would be a good thing.”

Granger left, and I plopped down on the sofa. It wasn’t much, but it was mine, or I rented it at least. No one could take this away from me or decide to swipe the tablecloth out from under me.

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Micah

Oliver Creek was everything the friend who suggested I move here promised and more. Just a few years back, it had been one of those towns where the young people were all moving away, and the businesses on Main Street and elsewhere were being shuttered. But a few creative and talented restaurateurs had started a renaissance that I was privileged to be a part of. One of those first places was a peanut-butter-sandwich venue of all things. With an owner whose mate was horribly allergic to peanuts.

Somehow they made it work. In fact, everyone I knew here in Oliver Creek had an extraordinary mating story that made me regret the fact that Fate had shown no signs of blessing me with someone to be my own.

And that was fine, really. My dream had always been to own a chocolate shop where I could use my love of the craft to create extraordinary treats. And not to blow my own horn, but I'd been featured on a national magazine cover a couple of months before and even invited to compete on television in one of those game shows on a cooking network. Unfortunately, I had to turn that offer down because I couldn't afford to shut down the shop for the length of time that would take. I did agree to judge occasionally, an honor my friends in the chocolatiers guild insisted must be accepted.

I wrapped my apron around my waist and tied it securely, ready for an afternoon of making some new recipes inspired by an event I attended recently. Chocolate-covered rose petals and other edible flowers had me wondering whether I could do whole bouquets and if my customers would like them. I also had a pared-down version in

mind that would be more convenient for the visitors to town who would have a hard time traveling with a big bouquet of delicate bittersweet blooms.

In fact, that would be a good name for them...I made a note on the giant dry-erase board I kept in the kitchen just for ideas. When tempering chocolate, I couldn't stop to make extensive notes or do research, but I could write a word or two and avoid forgetting these flashes of brilliance altogether. Sometimes they didn't pan out at all, but I hated the idea of missing out on something that could be a big seller or just a delicious one. Something that could have won me a prize in a chocolate series, if I'd been willing to take one on.

As if the network overheard me thinking about them, the phone rang and, of course, it was the producer who had recruited me for the judging gig.

"Micah, it's Sidara, how are you?"

I pulled up a stool and sat down. Unless a customer came in, I'd be on the phone for a while. I had the impression that people in the TV world would be rushing through things like calls, but Sidara always seemed to have time to catch up. Because of that, we knew far more about each other than a strictly business relationship should involve.

But, the day she walked up to my booth at ChocolateArama, she'd decided we were best friends. And who was I to argue with someone who liked me? I mean, obvious I had argued, since I had refused to be in a competition, but so far as the friendship?

That, I was good with.

"I'm fine, Sidara, just busy. You?" I always hoped that saying I was busy would make the call a reasonable length. Not that that had worked so far. Maybe I could convince her that our friendship was text level.

“Oh, you know. Same. I wanted to get with you because the network has a new series that’s right up your alley. It begins in about a month. You in? We can hang out while you’re in town, maybe go to some restaurants.”

“Um, I’d love to see you, of course, b—”

“Excellent. I will message you all the details, and we’ll get your accommodations set. I’d invite you to stay with me”—see? Besties—“but my place is being remodeled, and I’m not even staying there.”

“Sidara, it’s just that...”

“I know it’s short notice, but it’s just eight days to film the series, and then you’re free and the pay isn’t bad. So, I’ll see you then?”

She always disconnected without saying goodbye, maybe part of the impossible-to-argue-with aspect of her persona.

Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad. I could make a lot of chocolate ahead and leave my part-time counter person in charge. Possibly even close early those days, putting a cute sign on the door that said something like See you on the network! Back after filming. Or something better, but that was the general idea.

So, I would be on TV. A glance at my figure showed I looked less like a TV host and more like a chocolate fanboy, but could be worse.

So much worse.

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Edwin

After a few days in Oliver Creek, I'd gotten settled in my tiny apartment, which was easy because I didn't have much. The great thing about Granger's place above his garage was that not only was it fully furnished, but there were also plates and silverware and other useful items. I wasn't much of a chef, but I had to cook for myself until I found some kind of job.

I needed to buy a new set of sheets and a comforter, which I ordered online.

With all those things settled, I had my first counseling appointment. I was told the office was right next to the healer's, but that didn't really help me since I hadn't had the time to get the lay of the land with all the unpacking and such.

Granger waved at me through the window over the sink as I walked down the driveway. I had my map app running on my phone because, sure, it was silly in this small town, but the last thing I wanted to do was arrive late.

Oliver Creek was such a cute place. The more I walked the streets, the happier I was about my decision.

What I wasn't happy about was going to the counseling session to talk about me and Jacob. Starting over with a therapist would be hard since telling the story always ripped me open but as my former counselor said, the only way to the other side of emotions was trudging right through them.

"Good morning." The receptionist smiled at me. "You must be Edwin. You're right

on time.”

“How do you know my name?”

“Oh. Shay only takes three patients a day, so unless you were four hours early, then you’re Edwin. Plus, it’s a small town, and I know the other patients.”

Ah. Right. So different from the city.

“Thank you. Is there anything I need to fill out? I didn’t get a link for the paperwork.”

“We’re just getting those digital things up and running. For now, would you mind filling out this paperwork? Old school? With a pen?” He handed me a clipboard.

I couldn’t even remember the last time I’d used a pen and a piece of paper.

I’d just filled in the last line and signed and dated when a man in his fifties arrived. He had a sweater vest of all things and glasses that sat low on his nose. Readers for sure. “Good morning, Edwin. I was on the phone with my mate. Sorry about that. Please, come in.”

Before following him, I handed the clipboard back to the receptionist.

We walked to his office. There was only one other door, and it was marked restroom.

“Sit down. I’ve already gone over the notes from your other counselor. And welcome to Oliver Creek. How are you feeling about your new start? Being in a new place?”

I took a long breath and held it a few seconds before letting it go. Another actionable device recommended by my previous therapist. “I feel like it’s a new start, but my mind is clinging to what happened before. I didn’t know a breakup could cause so

much pain. It wasn't my first relationship, but things just happened so fast."

Shay, no last name, set the folder aside. "Sometimes when there's been no closure, it makes it hard to move on. Do you truly think you were in love with Jacob? Was he your mate? I saw no note about that."

He knew my partner's name so, yeah, he'd read or at least skimmed the notes. Reassuring? Maybe.

"He wasn't my fated mate. I knew that from the beginning. The relationship moved fast. I think a big part of it was that he was my dancing partner. We were always cast as the lovers, and we filled those roles on and off the stage. Then he started taking classes somewhere else. Said he needed a break from ballet. Not uncommon. Everyone needs something to spice things up once in a while. Except, he spiced up more than his dancing skills."

"He cheated on you?"

The conversation went on and on, and thankfully I felt no judgment from Shay. He listened well and asked questions I hadn't thought to ask myself, and the other therapist hadn't either.

He challenged me to get to know myself better. To grow my self-worth, and his advice wasn't simply words. He wanted me to journal about new things I learned—ways that I loved myself.

I told him it was hard to do. His answer was that I had to pick my hard—continue the way I was or learn to take a new path.

At that moment, I knew without a doubt I had chosen not only this town but my new therapist well.

The last thing I needed was someone to coddle me. The session went well. I had things to work on and was glad for it.

On my way home, I stopped at the local bakery and bought a larger-than-life cinnamon roll and a hot coffee. It had been a long time since I allowed myself such a big treat, but after the intense session with Shay, I deserved it.

On my way out of the bakery, I noticed a poster on the community cork board. A spring festival was coming up soon, next month in fact.

They needed talent.

Huh.

If I still danced, I would participate. It actually sounded like fun. When I was little, I would dance in the local parades, and Easter was one of my favorites.

If only...

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Micah

I was buried in flowers.

With the spring festival coming up, my earlier ideas about chocolate bouquets had gone from an amusing inspiration to pure obsession. Who knew all the ways I could represent the rebirth of nature in my art.

Ever since I was a cub, I'd loved spring. Unlike natural bears, shifters didn't hibernate, but we did slow down in winter, stay indoors more, and spend time with our den, our families. Everything was more relaxed, and we tended to drift through the season. Most of the people I knew were good with that, but I'd always grown restless and, according to my omega dad, generally driven the adults batty by the time the temperatures were rising again. And I'd counted the minutes until the flowers bloomed and grass grew green again, the trees leafed out.

Here in Oliver Creek, we didn't have the deep snow, hard freezes, and unending cloudy skies of the northern place I was raised. But we still had cool winters, and it was only in the past couple of weeks that I traded my coat for a light jacket. In my fur, I was comfortable enough, but even Oliver Creek didn't encourage bears on Main Street. And how hard would it be to make delicate candies with paws and claws?

Very.

I moved out of the kitchen into the front of the house and surveyed the display cases. As I'd suspected, the spring-themed items were selling best, the hand-shaped tulips completely sold out. I'd have to make more or risk disappointing my customers. The

roses were nearly gone as well. I'd wrapped long skewers in green paper to make stems and created a rainbow array of blooms that had drawn in the tourists by the dozen. Red, yellow, pink, lavender, and some with more than one color to mimic some of my favorites in nature. The out-of-town visitors often ended up taking the stemless "petals" that came in a box and were much easier to travel with, but locals were keeping me busy refilling the vase displays. Next year, I would offer some for Valentine's Day as well.

And I'd been playing with some four-leaf clovers I thought might be popular for St. Patrick's Day. Of course, these sorts of items were not my main focus. My sales, both online and in-store, were largely the truffles and other classic types of chocolate work I'd learned in Paris, but in a town where tourism brought in so many dollars, the colorful and fun items drew people off the street and earned me many online orders after they returned home.

Even this early in spring, the sidewalks were busy with people both local and outsiders, many carrying bags from successful shopping stops. In winter, although business was slower, so was the foot traffic, and that was a nice respite. Not as good for the bottom line but the one aspect of that season that I had learned appreciate. My fellow business owners and people who lived in the area were more likely to stop by for long conversations when they did not have lines of customers checking out or filling every table at their restaurants.

One of my favorite aspects of the town's growth was the food truck area. Every type of cuisine not represented in a brick-and-mortar location seemed to be represented there. Not a single chain or franchise, however, was. One thing the town council and the chamber of commerce were in full agreement on was their distaste for a big corporate presence. If someone wanted a chain-burger, they would have to drive out onto the highway and at least twenty miles. So far, nobody had ever indicated their interest in doing so. Why, when what we had was so much better.

My phone buzzed, and I swiped the screen to find a notification of a delivery about to arrive. My molds! While I was enjoying all the precision handwork of the flowers I had been doing, with the spring festival approaching, I was going to need a whole lot more candy than I could come up with. Also, I would be able to set a lower price point this way.

Plus...they would be darned cute.

Returning to the kitchen, I opened the back door just as a delivery truck rolled up. What I was planning to do would probably shock my old mentor in Paris, but a successful shop in my marketplace required flexibility. And since I would be doing a lot of hand painting in the molds, there would still be a level of artistry I could be proud of.

I accepted the box and carried it back up front with me since my employee was in college classes today and I didn't like to leave the front unattended for too long. I could see the whole place from the kitchen, and shoplifting was not a big problem here, but having a friendly person in place made passersby and window-shoppers more likely to come in and make a purchase.

Opening a box of new candy supplies was always like Christmas morning, and I piled the paper cushioning on the counter as I lifted out each mold. Flowers, bunnies, butterflies, chicks, baby ducks... I probably shouldn't have placed the order while enjoying a bottle of local wine, but which one would I not have chosen? They were each amazing in their own right, and my mind raced with decorating and display ideas.

The bell rang, announcing a customer, and I glanced up to see who entered. He was a slight man with golden eyes and hair to match. Well, more of a tawny shade, but the light outside caught blond strands and made them shine. He moved so gracefully he seemed to dance across the store.

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Edwin

Shay allowed me to collect myself after my second session. At first, I would have a few sessions a week and I thought after the first one, things might be fairly simple.

Boy, was I wrong.

“You can stay in my office for as long as you need,” he said, walking out. “Today was hard, but I think we discovered some things.”

We had. I no longer mourned Jacob and what we had. I realized that some of the things I cherished were blips of time, time where I thought I was the center of his world. The truth was, he had someone else, almost the entire time we were together.

I didn’t miss him. I didn’t miss the way I had to beg for his attention or ask him to put his phone down during dinners.

The way his eyes didn’t meet mine, even in the middle of rehearsals, often those where we pretended to be in love.

“Thank you.” I did linger a few minutes, wiping away my tears and catching my breath.

The real question of the day, from Dr. Shay himself, was why I stayed so long when Jacob was providing me the bare minimum. Why I poured my heart out for another and never into myself.

Hard things to think about, much less figure out in one hour.

And here I doubted how good a small-town therapist would be. Shame on me.

I bid goodbye to the receptionist and walked out, reveling in the sun on my face. People passed by. Some gave me a tight-lipped smile. I was standing in front of the mental health clinic. They could probably see my tear-stained face or my puffy eyes. Ugh, the makeup artist at the theater always complained about those if I'd cried in the week before a show.

I was a messy crier. Today was no exception.

My tummy rumbled. I wasn't hungry for lunch, though I'd missed it. Probably just looking for something to soothe me emotionally. I knew all about that. I'd once been a chubby child. I ate my feelings when my parents fought, which was loud and often. They argued more than they got along. But dance had saved me, not only helping me with my health but giving me an out—an escape from my home life.

Today, I deserved a treat, and there was a place I'd been wanting to visit. A chocolatier. Chocolate Dreams was the talk of the town. The owner apparently made art and bouquets for all kinds of occasions. The flavors and shapes and sizes varied with whatever the owner felt like making. I'd heard one man, a fox shifter, moan out loud at what he said was the best passion-fruit-filled chocolate he'd had in his life.

I didn't even know passion-fruit-filled chocolate was a thing. But if it made him moan like that, it had to be good.

The best thing about Oliver Creek was that everything was only a few blocks away. The general store. The bakery. The restaurants, and that didn't even count the food trucks filling the air with all kinds of delectable smells. The dragon's breath smokehouse truck was near the top of my list, right under this chocolatier.

As I approached, I saw a sign stating their business hours. Damn it. It was almost closing time now. Maybe I could slip in and get a few things before they closed. I opened the glass door, hearing the ting of a bell above me and instantly assaulted by the smells of vanilla, chocolate, hazelnut, and all things sugar.

I noticed a man at the counter, a stack of metal sheet pans in his hands. When he looked up with the most breathtaking eyes I'd ever seen, my whole world stopped.

He dropped the entire stack of metal...whatever they were. They crashed to the floor with a loud noise that had me cringing.

"Oh. Shit. Sorry." I rushed over to help him pick up the items and realized they weren't pans. They were chocolate molds. Shells, pyramids, roses, bunnies, and even some bears.

He squatted down as well. My bear forced me to inhale deeply, and that's when I knew.

This man. Goddess, I didn't even know his name. He was my mate.

Mine.

The notion and the power of what my bear told me had me fumbling, and I fell back, right on my ass.

He smelled like all the finest chocolate in the world melted together into one hell of a fine man. Short hair. Beautiful eyes and, as he chuckled at me falling backward, I noticed his dimples.

I joined in to his laughter.

It had been too long since I heard myself express any kind of happiness.

“Are you okay?” I finally choked out, accepting his hand to rise. His grip was firm and warm and everything good.

“I am. I was about to ask you the same thing.”

“Let me help you.”

We picked up all the molds. “I like the bears best. Those are cute.”

The omega blushed. Up close, he had a smattering of freckles on his nose. “I like them, too. I like bears a lot. My name is Micah. I haven’t seen you in here before.”

“I’m Edwin,” I answered.

“It’s very nice to meet you, Edwin. I was about to close, but I could stay open a few more minutes.”

“You would? I would really appreciate it. It’s been a day.”

Micah nodded. His smell intensified as he moved around me. “Shall I give you the tour? I bet I can figure out the cure for your bad day.”

He already had.

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Micah

Edwin—such a nice name—helped me pick up the molds. I had to wash them anyway, but I still checked each over for dents that could cause the intricate shapes to turn out flawed product. “I am not usually so clumsy,” I said, once I was sure they were not damaged. “They all seem fine, though.”

The alpha nodded. “I’m sorry I startled you when I came in.”

“The bell did announce you, but I guess I was focused on these. They’re brand new, and I was daydreaming about how I was going to use them.” Also...my wolf had been focused on our omega, but I wasn’t ready to blurt that out.

He frowned, adorably. “Don’t you just pour melted chocolate in them? Maybe insert a stick?”

Judge not, for he knows not what he says. Also, he’s cute. “No. I mean, I suppose you could, but that’s not what I plan to do.” I bit my lip before the nearly inevitable explanation of selecting just the right chocolates and tempering them perfectly. Details he probably wouldn’t even manage to stay awake through. Painting tinted white chocolate into all the little bends and divots to create an art piece out of each before then pouring in the main part to create little candies. “Actually, I hadn’t had lollipops in mind, but that is an option, and I think those might be a hit for spring festival.”

“You already have those long-stemmed roses,” he pointed out. “Didn’t you mold those?”

“No. They took quite a bit of work, and I need items that people can pick up without a big occasion.” I needed to order lollipop sticks and see if I could make these molds work. I probably needed different ones. “Since you’ve inspired me, you must now select some candy for your genius.”

“I couldn’t.” The alpha blinked fast, and I noted how reddened those golden eyes were, puffy and swollen, and his cheeks had some faint marks that could be interpreted as tear tracks. Not going to fly with me, not at all. “But thank you. I will pay.”

“Next time.” I waved toward the shop in general. “But I insist you choose whatever you like, on me. If you feel like you need to do more, tell your friends if you like them.”

“My friends are across the country. Do you sell online?”

“You bet!” I led him toward the main display case. “Now, I see you as a dark-chocolate man. Am I right?”

“Honestly, I’ve never turned down any kind of chocolate, but dark...with that faint bitterness...” His sigh would have made me want him even if I didn’t already. So. Much. “But how did you know?”

“It’s a talent. No, seriously, you’ve been eyeing everything dark in the store. I also love all things chocolate, but to me, the high-percentage versions taste more like chocolate if that makes sense?”

“It totally does. Also, you’re making me wonder how transparent I am in general.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it. It’s a good thing, for the most part, to be honest in your feelings and reactions. Or at least I think that it is.” Stepping behind the counter, I

prepared to treat myself to watching this alpha try my candy for the first time. It was a passion of mine in general with any new customer, but with this alpha bear? With my wolf crying mate from deep inside me? “Will you allow me to suggest some things for you to try?”

His nose was inches from the glass. Just far enough to keep his breath from fogging it up. “Yes, please.”

“Are there any candy flavors you don’t like or are allergic to? Fillings? Nuts? Anything at all?”

“No, not that I’ve ever tried, although I don’t think I’d like squid in them.”

“Agreed. I have no squid truffles currently for sale.”

“Do you ever?”

“No. But I suppose I could try. Oh, except you said you would not like them.” Thank goodness. If I had a squid-chocolate fan for a mate, I’d wonder what Fate was trying to tell me.

“I did see some chocolate-covered tentacles online once,” he said. “That’s what made me think of it.”

“Well, it may be great, but I don’t think it’s my lane.” I kept mini truffles under the refrigerated display, ready to offer customers who weren’t sure what they would like to buy, so I pulled the drawer out and considered the options. “Close your eyes.”

He gave me a funny look before doing it. It was only to taste candy, and I hadn’t thought I was asking for a lot of trust, but maybe for him it was?

“I promise I won’t play any tricks on you. Ready to try the first one?”

Eyes squeezed tight shut, he nodded and opened his mouth.

“Okay, you have to tell me what kind you think it is.” I set the mini on his tongue, way too aware of how firm and rosy his lips were around my fingers. “Enjoy.”

Edwin closed his lips and chewed. “Mmmm.” His eyes opened wide. “That was a caramel crunch with a light sprinkle of salt on top? Dark-chocolate shell?”

“You were born to be a taster. I might have to hire you on. Are you available?”

“I haven’t started looking for work here, yet, but I have a feeling my waistline could not survive the job. That was the best piece of candy I’ve ever eaten.”

“You haven’t tried anything yet.” For the next half hour or so, he tried the various samples and gave his opinion. He wasn’t 100 percent correct, but he was closer than I would expect someone without an educated palate to manage. In fact, he did better than I’d seen people who were supposed experts manage at a tasting.

Finally, he held up a hand and refused any more. “I can’t. I’ll explode or possibly start running around the room like a hamster in a wheel.”

“You know sugar doesn’t work quite like that, right?”

He shrugged. “Either way, I think I need a rest. Thank you so much for this, though. I haven’t had an afternoon this fun in years. Maybe ever.”

“Can I give you a tour of the town?” I said quickly, in case he wanted to leave. He hadn’t gotten his free candy yet, besides the samples, but I was afraid he’d feel like he had a week’s supply. “And then we can get a bit to eat at one of the food trucks or

cafes?”

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Edwin

I must've changed clothes a thousand times, which was impressive since I'd donated half my wardrobe to a local thrift store before I made the move away from the city. Micah was giving me a tour of Oliver Creek and grabbing a bite to eat, not taking me to a fancy dinner.

It wasn't a date.

I kept telling myself that, but my bear had other ideas. He knew as soon as the omega's scent hit me that he was mine. My mate. My fated. There was nothing else he wanted to do but to see Micah.

My human mind had other ideas. Sure, I trusted my bear, but I also knew how lonely we were and so starved for connection. Real connection. Even though I'd recently ended a relationship, or Jacob ended it, I was hungry for affection and love. Connection. Even lying next to him, I'd been lonely. Craving something he didn't give me but clearly was giving another. My brain shuffled through thoughts of doubt. Perhaps my bear calling out mate was simply to try and save me from my mourning.

Except all the signs were there. Instant attraction. His all-encompassing scent. The way my body responded to his nearness. All of that pointed to a bond, but I couldn't trust that—not yet.

I paused before putting on my shoes and socks. Shay had said something about self-trust, and I realized I really did have an issue with it.

I didn't even trust my bear to tell me when he'd met his mate. Deciding to go anyway and see what Fate showed me, I put on my shoes and headed in the direction of the park. There was a metal sculpture in the middle and since it was early spring, the flowers planted lovingly around the perimeter were starting to bud under the loving sun. Park benches sat along the edge and in my walks, I'd seen some people having lunch there and, one night, I even saw a couple having a romantic encounter, whispering and sharing kisses.

I wished I had that.

When I arrived at the park, I didn't see Micah immediately. I strolled around, looking at the playground area. There were some children laughing on the swings and slides. Something tugged at my insides. A need. I'd always wanted a family. If I were ever blessed with children, at least I knew how not to treat them. That went for my mate as well. My parents had given me the example of what not to do.

In my mind, I pictured Micah's belly swollen with a child. He would be even more gorgeous expecting our little one. I could teach our cub to dance.

"It's lovely, isn't it?" Micah's voice startled me, and I pressed my hand to my chest.

For a split second, I thought maybe he could read my mind.

"What is?" I asked, whirling around to face him.

"The park. It's really beautiful in spring."

I nodded. "It is. Thank you for offering to give me the tour."

"You're welcome." His cheeks turned rosy, making him doubly attractive. "Shall we?"

We walked side by side and he showed me everything. The coffeehouse. The bakery. The peanut-butter-and-jelly shop, which I insisted we go in. I bought myself some fancy cashew butter and some blackberry jam. Micah pointed out all kinds of places to eat as we walked. He told me about the local website and how it was updated on the events and things happening all the time. For a small town, there was always something happening—or right around the corner.

“There’s the general store and the small market if you need milk or eggs or bread, but I usually go to the big-box store in the next town for major shopping.

My fingers tingled as we took a turn onto the next street, wanting to thread my fingers with his. The desire to touch him was so overpowering that I’d nearly pressed him against the nearest building and kissed him at least a dozen times.

But the whole Jacob thing still hummed in the back of my mind. Could I trust again? Even though I’d known Jacob longer, Micah betraying me would be a blow I might not ever recover from. To have a fated mate, or a probable mate, cheat on me would be devastating. There wouldn’t be enough therapists on the planet to help put me back together.

“What is that building?” I asked, pointing to an abandoned brick shop of some sort.

“Oh, I heard that used to be a dance studio.”

My heart beat frantically.

“I think the owner and teacher moved away with their mate,” he went on. “I’m not sure about the person’s story, but it did used to be a dance studio. Come on. Let’s go look.”

Micah grabbed my hand, and we crossed the street. His skin was soft and a touch

calloused. The contact had my bear reeling inside of me, begging me to do more than hold hands. Demanding beast.

He didn't let go, even as we stood in front of the darkened building. The sun was setting, but we could see through the windows just fine. "It is a dance studio," I whispered.

"Yeah. It would be great if someone could open it again."

"I'm a dancer. I used to teach as well."

Micah pulled back from the window. "You did?"

I nodded. "I did. I've been into it since I was a kid then, after a lot of hard work, became a principal dancer in a company in the city. It was kind of my life. Well, that and my...boyfriend at the time."

"That sounds incredible. May I ask what happened?"

I sucked in a breath. This was the moment I had anticipated. Someone was going to ask about what I did and where I came from. If there was anyone in this town, other than Shay, that I wanted to confess to, it was Micah.

If he was my mate, the least I could do was tell him the truth. "My dance partner and boyfriend. He cheated on me. Broke up with me and told the company he didn't want to dance with me anymore. He moved to another company and was going to sell his home where I lived. Dancing didn't feel right anymore and I needed to find another place to stay, so I decided on a fresh start."

There it was. The truth. The gist of it anyway. I rubbed a fist on my chest as though I'd opened up a hole there I could never close again.

“That’s horrible, Edwin. I’m sorry you had to go through that. No one deserves that kind of treatment.”

“Yeah.”

Micah took a step closer. If he hugged me, I would fall apart, and the last thing I wanted to be in front of my omega was weak and fragile.

He deserved a strong, capable alpha.

“I...I have to go. I’m sorry about dinner. I...good night.”

And like a coward, I fled the scene, tucking my tail between my legs.

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Micah

I wanted to follow him.

One moment, we were walking the town, and I was showing Edwin everything. All the restaurants, the shops. I'd been here long enough that I had anecdotes about most of the owners and their mates and, in many cases, their young. Oliver Creek's business community was tight knit and we were all working together to help the town grow and thrive.

As we strolled, I was forced to recognize just how short a time most of the businesses had been open. Being part of the day-to-day workings, it seemed normal to me, but Edwin marveled at my explanations.

"And the farms and vineyards I passed on the way into town? They look like they've been here for decades."

"I think some of them were, but most had lost their caretakers or fallen into disrepair," I told him. "Oliver Creek was no different than many small communities in the nation. Young people were bored and unhappy with the lack of opportunities, so they left for the cities."

"That's so sad," he said. "I've always lived in a city, but the country life sounded so nice. I just didn't see how I could achieve my goals as a dancer in them."

"See the problem? It was the same for most of them. There was nothing to draw in visitors and infuse the businesses with cash, so what had been a thriving town a half

century ago was dying. There are still old-timers here who can tell you all about it, and they are very glad to do so.”

I met him at the park where he was watching the playground with an air of soft longing that made me wonder if he wanted a family as much as I did. I hoped so. If my wolf was right—and when wasn’t he as he often reminded me—then Edwin was our mate.

The evening was going really well, I believed. We were talking about Oliver Creek and some of the different events coming up. I’d never felt so comfortable yet so aware of anyone. His smile warmed me to my toes, and I wanted the evening to go on forever. His steps were so elegant, almost as if they didn’t really touch the ground.

I was just about to suggest we head over to the food trucks and have some dinner when we came to the abandoned dance studio. And his relaxed demeanor changed. First, he seemed eager, peering through the window and mentioning his background as a dancer. And he could teach. I thought maybe he was considering reopening the school.

And then I asked him about what happened with that life, expecting a simple explanation. Dancers didn’t do that job forever. From what little I knew, it was incredibly taxing work. He might have gotten tired. Maybe he’d had an injury or something.

But no, it was so much worse than any of that.

Edwin told me what happened to him without holding back, as if he thought I had the right to know, as if also realizing we were mates. I was so touched, but before I could say more than something about him being poorly treated, everything about the night had changed.

He stammered an apology and took off at a speed my chocolate-tasting body could never keep up with. As if someone had lit a fuse under him. I wanted to run after him, find out what I did wrong. Were my words just the most egregious thing he'd heard?

I couldn't figure it out.

But at least I knew the streets were safe here, that it was too small a town to get lost in and he would find his way home.

And he hadn't had dinner. I would have liked to pick something up and deliver it myself, but if I had done something that upset him, I couldn't do that. So, instead, I continued on to the food truck area and got in line at Dragon's Breath. Of all the trucks, they always had the longest line, but it was worth the wait. When I got to the window, I placed an order and asked if they had any way to deliver it.

"Hey, Zyran, there's a guy here who wants delivery." The young dragon who had taken my order sounded a little sarcastic, but when his boss came to the window, a broad smile broke out on his face.

"Micah! Good to see you. How is the chocolate business? I was gonna stop by later in the week and pick something up for Nash's birthday."

"Please do, and if there's anything special you'd like for your mate, let me know. How are he and Natalie doing?"

"They're fine, but Nat is running her daddies ragged."

"No shock." Their little girl was the cutest dragon in town, eyes sparkling with adorable mischief at all times. "You know I'm available to babysit most evenings. Maybe Nash would like an evening out for his birthday."

“You sure? I know you’re putting in the hours. You’re as busy as we are.”

“Nothing I like better than an evening of Go Fish and explaining why I can’t breathe fire.” I glanced over my shoulder. “Shoot, I’m holding up your business. Listen, if you have any way to do a delivery, I’d be in your debt.”

“If you watch our darling girl for a couple of hours on my omega’s birthday, we’ll call it more than even. I’ll send Flash there. He’s new in town and way too proud of his fire. Why do you need a delivery? You’re right here.”

“Long story.” My cheeks warmed at the memory and Zyran grinned.

“You can fill me in when I come by the shop. This is going to be juicy.”

He got the info from me. Edwin had told me he lived in an apartment above a garage and mentioned his landlord by name, so I knew just where to send him. “Granger’s rental.” Then I accepted the free burnt-ends sandwich Zyran forced on me and headed for home.

I had to be gentle with this alpha. He’d been hurt and already shown me more trust than I might have in his position. He was my mate and worth waiting for.

No matter how hard it seemed.

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Edwin

I did one thing very well aside from dancing—avoiding. Over the last few days, I'd managed to traverse every back alley and roundabout way to my destinations.

Whatever kept me from passing in front of the chocolatier's shop.

Not because Micah had done anything wrong. Quite the opposite. Not only had he listened to me but, that night, he'd sent dinner to my house. The most delicious smoked chicken sandwich along with sweet potato fries and a smoked cream cheese dip. It was like he'd read my mind about the Dragon's Breath food truck.

It was delicious, of course. Everything I'd eaten in Oliver Creek was.

Especially the chocolates.

It had been hard to eat them since the taste, the smell, it all reminded me of Micah.

"Edwin?" Shay said, sitting in his chair. The sun filtered into his office since I had a late appointment today.

"Yeah. Sorry. I went somewhere else."

"Not good when you're paying for an hour. Want to share what captured your thoughts?"

"A mistake I made a few days ago. I'm not sure I can undo it either."

Shay scribbled something down. “Do you want to? Undo it?”

“Yes. Desperately.”

“Talk me through it. I bet there’s a way to work it out.”

“I met someone.”

Shay lifted one of his eyebrows in question. “Who? Here in town or online? I hear a lot of people are meeting their mates online nowadays.”

“Not online. In person. Here. It’s Micah. The chocolatier.”

Shay sat back. “I love that place. Keeps my mate in great spirits. I bought him a custom box for his birthday last month. And you like Micah?”

“I do. I did. No, I do. A strange thing happened when I met him.”

“Which was...”

“My bear told me he was my mate.”

“Has that happened before, Edwin? Did it happen with Jacob?”

I laughed out loud. Maybe I’d hit a turning point. The thought of Jacob being my mate was comical to say the least. Interesting. “No. It never happened with Jacob. My bear... I hate to admit this, but my bear wasn’t all that fond of Jacob.”

“And he very much likes Micah.”

“He practically burst out of me trying to get to him. He hasn’t been pleased that I

haven't gone to see him and apologize.”

Shay scooted forward in his chair and then recrossed his legs. “What makes you think you have something to apologize for?”

“Because I do. We had plans to go on a tour of the town and then have dinner. That was until we saw the old dance studio.”

“Ah. Did that trigger you?”

“A lot. I told him everything. It was the most embarrassing emotional vomit session. I told him about dancing and Jacob and all of it.”

“What was Micah's reaction? Did he do or say something to make you think that bothered him?”

“No. That's the thing. He just stood there and listened.”

Shay cocked his head. “So what is there to apologize for, Edwin?”

“Because after I said all those things, I got embarrassed and felt ashamed. I told him I didn't want to go to dinner and then I ran away like a coward. To make things worse, Micah sent dinner to my house that night. He was so kind and understanding and nonjudgmental, and I'm treating him as though he did something wrong. He's my mate. What am I going to do?”

By the end of my spiel, I was crying—hard. Hurting my mate was the most painful thing in the world. Worse than quitting my career. Worse than hearing the bad news from Jacob. The pain was excruciating.

“I think that's your good news, Edwin. He's your mate. The one Fate chose for you.

That means, he's sure to accept your apology, but you must go over there and say the words. Have you seen him since?"

I groaned and swiped my wet cheeks. "I've been walking the outskirts of the town and avoiding his shop and all of Main Street since. Goddess, now that I say it out loud, it makes me sound like the biggest baby."

"It doesn't. More like you've been hurt before and are slow to trust. What did we talk about with being so hard on yourself. We're all human—or half human. These emotions we have are normal and part of the human experience."

"So you think he would accept my apology."

Shay shrugged. Not the answer I wanted. "That, I can't say. I can't see the future. But I can say that apologizing when you've done something wrong is the first step. I'll bet he's as upset as you are."

"Okay. I'm going over there." I jumped up.

"Our session is only halfway done."

"Oh. It doesn't matter. I have a mate to say sorry to."

"I'll only charge you half." Shay chuckled. "I'm already eager to hear what happened when you come in for your next session. Go on. Find your mate."

I rushed out of the office and straight for Micah's store, hoping and praying to whatever god or goddess who would listen, for him to stay open just a few minutes later than usual.

And for him to listen to my apology.

I opened the door and was instantly comforted by his lingering scent. “Micah?” I called out as my heart attempted to beat right out of my chest.

“I’m here,” he replied, wiping his hands on a towel tucked into his apron as he emerged from the back. “Oh, Edwin. I didn’t expect you. I’m about to close, but I can put together an order before I do.”

“I’m not here for the chocolate,” I said, breathless. Damn, a few months of not dancing, and already I was winded.

“What are you here for, alpha?”

He called me alpha. That had to be a good sign.

“I came to apologize for the other night. I canceled our dinner and ran off like an idiot. I felt so seen and raw after telling you what happened to me, and I was embarrassed. Ashamed. Humiliated. But you didn’t deserve that. I’m so sorry, Micah. Please accept my apology. I’ll understand if you don’t want to see me after this, but I hope you do because these last few days thinking about you and not being able to see you has been heartbreaking.”

“Oh, Edwin,” he said, coming over to stand right in front of me. His fingertips grazed mine. “There’s nothing to forgive.”

Micah

I'm so sorry, Micah. Please accept my apology. I'll understand if you don't want to see me after this, but I hope you do because these last few days thinking about you and not being able to see you has been heartbreaking.

I had been waiting to hear back from him, but it took a couple of days before I realized we'd never exchanged phone numbers. So, even if he'd wanted to text me and say thanks for the food or drop dead or anything...he couldn't.

He could have come by the shop, though, and for a day or so, every time the bell rang when I was in the kitchen, I jumped. But soon enough, I recognized the likelihood that he was choosing not to visit. I must have done something to upset him, but I just couldn't think what. And since he knew where to find me, my tracking him down at his home to ask felt stalkerish.

No, I would just have to trust that if he was indeed my fated, he would want to come to me and talk it out. I'd have to be patient. Which, had I been asked, I would have said was one of my better qualities. Before I met my mate.

I'd never been happier to see anyone or more surprised to receive an apology. But he hadn't done anything wrong, and it was very important to me that he know that. I moved closer to him and brushed his hand with mine. "Oh, Edwin," I said. "There's nothing to forgive."

He brought his other hand up and cupped my cheek. "Omega, you're too kind. But I'm so glad you aren't angry with me. But I hope that doesn't mean we can't kiss and

make up.”

“Let’s avoid interruptions.” I reached behind me and twisted the lock, turned the sign to closed. “Now we can.”

We’d only touched hands once or twice so far, although my imagination had gone far beyond such simple contact. When he enfolded me in his arms, I learned how limited my imagination was. My life had been ordinary as far as shifters went. I’d dated and even had some short relationships, but none of them had been more than fast-fading crushes. I had thought I’d never have a mate, but from the moment he walked into my store the first time, my wolf was fully aware that he was our other half.

“You really aren’t upset at me?” he asked, stroking my back. “Not even a little?”

“I thought it was me.” I rested my head on his shoulder, breathing in his scent, his warmth, his presence. “I’ve been trying to figure out what I said that drove you away so fast.”

“And then you still sent me dinner from Dragon’s Breath.” He kissed my temple. “It was delicious, and I wanted to call and thank you, but I didn’t have your number.”

“You could have come by, wait...you did.”

He held me tighter. “But it should have been sooner. If it means anything, I ran out of a counseling appointment when I realized I couldn’t do without you for even another half hour.”

“Are you paying for the whole time? Maybe you should go back.” I didn’t even know why I said that because if he did, I’d have to go with him. How would that be? Couples counseling before we mated.

“No, that’s the funny thing. He is giving me a discount for today.”

“I didn’t think they ever did that.” Rubbing my cheek on his shirt, I tried to imprint myself on him or him on me. I wasn’t sure. It didn’t matter. “He must really approve of what you came to do.”

“You know they can’t flat-out tell a client what to do, but he did help me come to the decision. And then of course the discount.” He stepped back and studied me. “You did nothing wrong. I think when I told you the whole thing about Jacob and the mess I’d ended up in, I shocked myself.

“Then imagine how I felt when your gift arrived? Omega, you are one of a kind.”

His palm on my cheek raised my heart rate and had my knees wobbling. And when his lips descended on mine, only the hand he clamped on my hip kept me upright. We stood there right in the middle of the chocolate shop, kissing like teenagers and uncaring if a crowd formed outside. Mostly. I opened one eye and peeked over his shoulder, but nobody seemed to have noticed. I would have thought the heat coming off us in waves would draw attention.

When we finally paused for breath, I wanted to do it all over again and again, but I wanted more. “Alpha, would you come to my house for dinner? I’ll cook.”

“I’d love to come.”

“Me too...”

Edwin

I didn't dare bring dessert to Micah's house for our first date, but I did run by the florist and then to PB&J for a loaf of fresh bread.

My tummy swirled with anticipation. It had been a long time since I went on a first date. I clutched the flowers in my hand and realized that this would probably be my last first date. At least, that's what I dreamed of. Once Micah's lips touched mine, everything in me shattered. Jacob might as well have been a fever dream.

I wanted Micah to be my last first date. My last first kiss. I wanted him for as long as I lived and beyond.

Raising my fist, I knocked on his door. He lived in the cutest mint-green house. A wind chime hung from the top of his porch and the metal pieces looked like shapes of chocolate. His shutters were light brown and I realized, standing there, that his house was mint chocolate chip.

Micah opened the door and all my trepidation whooshed out of me. I was here with my mate. Nothing else mattered.

"Hi," he said as a blush crept up his neck and into his cheeks. He had changed into jeans and a plain navy shirt, and the casual clothes suited him well.

"Hi, yourself. I brought these for you." I held up the flowers and held my breath. This was weird. This man was fated for me, meant for us to be mated for life, but I had no clue what kind of flowers he liked. I would learn, I supposed.

“They are beautiful. Thank you.” Accepting the tulips, he moved to the side. “Please, come in.”

If I expected some kind of dig about not sticking around for dinner last time—in fact, running away from him and the very idea—it never came. Micah was so sweet and kind—accepting me and all my mess.

“Thank you. I brought bread. If it doesn’t suit the meal, it’s fine, but I don’t make a habit of going to someone’s home without a gift.”

He smiled. “That’s a good rule but I hope I’m not just someone. Come on into the kitchen. Dinner is almost ready.”

We walked through his living room, which looked like a picture taken from Pinterest. Plush couch cushions. Throw blankets laid over the backs of chairs. Books on shelves. Soft lighting. A serene place if there ever was one.

“You have a lovely home. And no, you are not just someone.”

Micah’s kitchen made me gasp. And not just because of the tall, frosted chocolate layer cake on the counter. Everything was organized and in its place, pots and pans hanging on a pegboard just like Julia Child’s. I only knew that because of the movie about her. My mate stirred something in a pot and then tasted it with a spoon he got out of the drawer. He glided around, retrieving things and checking pots as though he were born in a kitchen. He danced in his kitchen. A fluidity and ease many dancers never achieved on the stage.

My mate was incredible.

“You’re making me nervous, staring at me, Edwin.”

“I’m admiring you. There’s a difference. The way you move around, it’s...I can’t help myself. I didn’t realize there would be dinner and a show.”

He chuckled and took some pans from the oven. “It makes me nervous, but I love your eyes on me. My animal loves it too.”

“What are we eating tonight?”

After that, the conversation never had a lull. We sat down to an incredible meal of roasted chicken thighs and risotto. My bread went with the meal perfectly.

“Have you ever been mated?” I asked. Most of the conversation we’d had thus far had been about me. I wanted to get to know my mate.

“I haven’t.” He leaned back and wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin. “I dated some in high school but after that, I was focused on learning my craft. At some point, I knew that if I believed in Fate, which I did, that my mate would stumble into my life. Or...as the case may be, he would walk into my chocolate shop making me drop everything.”

Chuckling together, I reached over the table and took his hand in mine. Every time I touched this man, my entire body flared to life. My bear chuffed inside me. He told me this was my mate and was upset I had to have proof. I was silly to him. Better late than never.

“Have you lived here long?”

Micah furrowed his brow. “Not too long. But I made chocolates from home for a while before opening up a shop.”

We talked more about how he came here. He’d moved to this small town after

hearing social media buzz about the small town with a huge foodie following. Said he felt the urge to move here, in his chest. “Now I know why Oliver Creek called to me. My business is flourishing, and I’ve met my mate. Fate has a plan. If I wasn’t a believer before, I certainly am now.”

“Should we have dessert?” I asked, not wanting another course other than the man across from me.

His chest moved in and out with shallow breaths. “Are we talking about the chocolate cake or something else?”

I leaned back and tugged on his hand, bringing him to straddle my hips. “I’m not talking about cake.”

“Are you sure? I know you’re still hurting from Jacob.”

“Don’t,” I said, gripping his hips. “He has no part in this. I swear. I’ve wanted you from the first second I saw you. This is about you and me. I know what I want and who I need. It’s you, Micah. It’s always been you.”

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Micah

“Are you sure?” I didn’t want my mate to rush into anything if he still needed time. “We have the rest of our lives. If you need more time to move past, well, the past, we can go slow. I don’t have any expectations at all of how this should go.”

“That’s very sweet, omega, but I don’t need time. I wouldn’t have thought it possible, but you’re my fated mate, and meeting you pushed me out of the hole I’d dug myself into.”

“Then would you like to see the rest of the house?”

He placed his hands at my waist and lifted me to my feet. “Can we start in your bedroom?”

“I’m very glad I made my bed this morning.” Actually, although I had done that, I’d also changed the sheets before he came over. I hadn’t known for sure we’d end up between them, but just in case we did, I wanted them daisy fresh for our very first time together.

“I’m not.” He nuzzled the base of my throat. “I wouldn’t mind seeing your bedding all rumpled from my omega sleeping in it.”

Whew. This alpha really knew what to say to get an omega going. I opened the bedroom door and stepped inside. The hallway light shone on the bed, almost like one of the lights over my chocolate displays, and I loved that.

This would be our first time together, and for shifter mates, who were traditionally longer-lived than humans, the first of many lovemaking sessions over our years together. That sounded both wonderful and terrifying. What if I wasn't good? If he was disappointed in me? I stood by the bed, mind racing with the kind of thoughts I'd never had before.

But then, I'd never been at such an important point of my life.

"Omega, where are you?" The alpha came up behind me and pulled me against him. "You seem like you're far away."

"I'm having a little performance anxiety," I admitted. "All of a sudden, I'm afraid that you'll be disappointed in me. I've never been anyone's mate before."

He chuckled, his breath warm against my ear. "And I have?"

"But you're wonderful."

He turned me in his arms and began to unbutton my shirt. "Omega, I'm thanking Fate every minute for you. You've already brought me out of a dark place, and now we're about to make love for the first time."

"And that's the pressure."

"No." He kissed my forehead, my cheeks, and my lips. "That's the beauty." My shirt came down over my shoulders and he eased it off my arms. "We're suited perfectly. And I can't wait to have you naked on that very nicely made bed."

"I changed the sheets," I admitted as he helped me out of all of my clothes and laid me back. "I was hoping..."

“And here we are.” He stood over me, stripping away his garments with efficiency, and then there he was, naked, beautiful, and with the limbs of the dancer he was. Muscular, but not bulky. “What do you think?”

“You steal my breath.” I held out my arms. “Please don’t make me wait for you any longer.”

The gown was so deep, I thought his bear might break through, but it was the man who lay beside me and trailed a finger over my torso. “How do you eat chocolate all day and look like this?”

I laughed. “Because I don’t. I love it, but I only taste sparingly for quality control every day. Then I have one piece of any kind I like as a treat at the end of the evening. Or, tonight, I had planned on a slice of cake.”

“We can devour that later, after I devour you.”

I shuddered, as he slid down the bed and onto his knees on the floor. Tugging me to the edge, he proceeded to do just as he’d promised, taking me into his mouth and sucking me deep, his tongue circling the head and stroking my shaft. His head bobbed as he took me into his mouth over and over. I lifted my hips, wanting more, wanting him inside me, wanting everything. “Alpha, if you keep that up, I’m going to...to...”

He lifted his face, golden eyes burning, and that was it. I came and he drank me down, finally lifting off and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “You taste so good, omega.”

I was breathing hard, reaching for him with grabby hands. “Please, I want you inside me. Now.”

He licked his lips, another reminder of what he’d just been doing, and then he rose

and grasped my thighs, lifting them to my chest. “No more waiting, omega.”

Edwin plunged into me, gliding through the slick and into the depths of my body. He stretched me, bigger than anyone I’d been with before, but the slight pain did not diminish the pleasure, the fullness, the friction as he drove into me again and again. I grabbed the comforter on either side of me, digging my fingers in and holding on for the ride.

In and out, faster and faster, deeper, into the center of my being before he called out my name and poured his hot cum into me. His knot swelled, holding us together in the intimacy of fated mates. He gathered me close. Sank his teeth into the side of my throat.

Marked me as his.

Edwin

I pulled the covers back over my head, trying to shade myself from the incoming sunlight. Cuddling next to Micah, I heard him groan and mumble something about a bear. It was me. I was the bear. My animal felt the tug on our connection. Just the thought of my mate dreaming about me had me on cloud nine.

In seconds, Micah went back into a deep sleep. I felt my cheeks pull up in a smile, remembering the night before. We'd made love several times. First time was fast, needy, desperate. The second and all the rest were slow, careful, savoring every moment with each other.

I had so much to learn about my mate and his habits, but after the night we had, I felt like our souls were tied.

Never ever did I want to let him go.

Instead of waking him up, I slipped from the bed and took a quick shower in his guest bathroom. I walked into the kitchen. We'd emerged from the bedroom sometime in the middle of the night and eaten slices of his chocolate cake, sitting naked at his table. He didn't want to return to bed before putting everything away and putting his kitchen to bed as he called it.

I stalled. The last thing I wanted to do was mess up his kitchen, but I was hungry and knew he would be too. Plus, I wanted to make breakfast for my mate. I wanted to give him everything, but I would start with toast and scrambled eggs.

I whipped eggs and shredded cheese to put on top. Next, I made a simple fruit bowl and toasted slices of the bread I'd brought last night and buttered it. I didn't see a tray so, once everything was done, I went to the bedroom and heard the shower. Steam billowed into the space and I stepped in to enjoy the view. I leaned against the counter with my arms folded over my chest. Goddess, my omega was stunning, especially when naked.

Micah turned as though he heard my thoughts and swiped at the steamy glass, making a window to see me. "Good morning," he called out.

"Good morning."

He opened the shower door a bit. "Want to join me?"

A growl ripped from my throat at the thought. "I've got breakfast waiting for you."

"Hmm, I am starving. Two seconds."

He finished washing up and I watched, not ashamed one bit. I went to his dresser and picked out boxers and shorts.

"Thank you, Edwin. You didn't have to do that."

"Ah, mate, it's the least of what I want to do for you and to you."

Micah's cock strained against his boxers he'd just put on. "Eating first and coffee. Then you can do to me whatever you want, alpha."

"Sounds like the best day ever." My heart skipped a beat and not because of the male who it now beat for. "Micah, it's late. Do you...am I keeping you from your shop?"

He laughed and shook his head. “No. I’m closed today. That’s why all of this turned out perfectly. Best day off I’ve had in a while. Usually, I spend the day doing laundry and binging bad reality TV.” He came over to kiss my chest and then lay his head on it. “This is so much better.”

“Let’s go eat before it gets cold.”

We ate everything I’d cooked and then, after coffee, we had more of the chocolate cake. Who said dessert was only for after dinner. Not me. In fact, breakfast dessert might be my new favorite thing.

“Do you have plans today? I didn’t think to ask. A counseling session?”

“I don’t have plans except being here with you. Laundry and other things can wait.”

Micah nodded. “Let’s get this kitchen cleaned up. I can’t stand to have it a mess. A quirk of mine if you haven’t noticed.”

“I noticed, omega. There are worse quirks to have. I imagine you cooked up some amazing things in here.”

“I would love to make you something special for lunch, alpha. There’s nothing I love more than cooking for people I care about.”

“You care about me?” I asked, hugging him from behind. My chin rested on his shoulder as he washed up the dishes.

“I do.” He turned in my arms. “I’ve been waiting so long for you, Edwin. So damned long, I thought you’d never arrive.”

“You know, I was waiting for you too. Didn’t even know how much finding my mate

would complete me. Restore things that were broken. I feel so at home here with you.”

We kissed for a few moments, whispering loving things to each other before Micah insisted on finishing up the cleaning. I cooked; he cleaned. That’s what he said. We moved to the couch where we watched a few movies and had some snacks, when halfway through our second movie I realized something.

I hadn’t thought about Jacob with the exception of Micah mentioning counseling. Not one other time. There had been a period where he consumed my every waking thought, but now...that time of my life was only a whisper.

A mate was truly a miracle.

I shifted slightly on the couch to face my mate, taking in his handsome face as he watched something funny on TV. His laugh was a balm, soothing all the places that once ached.

“What?” he said. “You’re staring again.”

“You said you didn’t mind. I could look at you forever.”

“I don’t, but it makes me want to do all kinds of things that aren’t watching a movie.”

“You read my mind.”

Micah

Over the next few weeks, we spent as much time together as possible. I was busy getting ready for the spring festival attendees, but we had dinner together just about every night, and Edwin even helped me a little in the shop, wrapping the molded chocolates. He had a skill with making things look nice—just one more quality I loved about my alpha.

One day, he stopped by the shop in the middle of the afternoon. “Would you go with me to look at the old dance studio? I have an appointment with a Realtor.”

Surprised, I untied my apron and hung it on its hook. “Absolutely. Let’s go.”

“Are you sure? I hate to take you away from the shop, and I was going to go alone, but then I thought...”

“Rocco is here to mind the register.” The counter man was currently rearranging some of the front window display. He loved doing that. “And it’s pretty quiet.” Of course, even if I had nobody to watch the store, I’d be going. I was so excited that Edwin was making a move. He’d been going back and forth on the subject, considered trying another career but always circled back to the work he loved.

I’d tried to be encouraging without being pushy. Not because he was the alpha and should be in charge. He never acted like the boss in our relationship, although he had a strong, protective side that made me feel good and safe and cared for.

What omega ever had such an alpha? Absolutely perfect for me. Fate knew her

business.

I followed Edwin out into the beautiful spring day. Baskets of flowers hung from the lampposts all along Main Street, contributing their colors and scents to the afternoon, and as we headed for the dance studio, I hoped that Fate would have a hand in my alpha's decision.

He had a dancer's soul, and it was so unfair for his former omega to have shut that part of him down. Even though we were doing well together, he was still hesitant in so many aspects of his life, and he deserved to have it all.

The Realtor was waiting in front of the studio, dressed up like I'd never seen anyone in Oliver Creek. An actual suit. As we approached, he extended his hand kind of between us, clearly not sure who was his customer. I let Edwin take the last steps ahead of me, clarifying who he was meeting. "Right on time," he said, shaking my alpha's hand. "I just got into town about fifteen minutes ago. There was a semi jackknifed on the highway. Didn't seem to be any injuries, but traffic was tied up for miles."

That explained the suit. He was not a local. As he unlocked the brick building's door, he explained that he represented the out-of-town owner. "Mr. Stevens would prefer to sell the building, but he is also willing to entertain a rental for the right client."

"I see." Edwin followed him inside, me on his heels. "I am considering a space for a dance studio, and since this had already had that function, it seemed like a good possibility but only as a rental. At least, for now."

He introduced himself to me as well at that point and stepped back. "How about if you two go through the space and look it over then we can talk further? I do have another client who will be visiting later in the week, so if you want it, you probably shouldn't waste any time."

Edwin looked worried, but as soon as the door closed behind the Realtor, I walked him to the back of the big room where we wouldn't be heard. "Alpha, look at the dust in here. It has not only been empty for quite some time, they didn't even bother to clean it. If they thought they had someone ready to buy, I think they'd have swept the floor."

"So you don't think there is another client?"

"Oh, there might be, but something tells me there's no rush. Take your time and look it over then consider what you want to offer."

"I can't buy it. It would take all my life savings." He trailed a finger over the ballet barre along the back wall. "What if the other person wants to do that?"

I could buy it... But I knew he wouldn't let me. Not yet. "If they do, then it wasn't meant to be, and we'll find another place for you to set up a studio. There are still a few storefronts that haven't been redone yet, and I'm sure we can get a good one."

"I like this one, but the rental price the Realtor mentioned on the phone was a little higher than I'd hoped for. And if I did cave and buy...what would I live on while the business got started?"

"Why don't you just move in with me?" I heard the words come out of my mouth in the least romantic way possible. Damn. I had been thinking about it since his first night in my home, but I hadn't planned to ask like this. Serve me right if he turned me down and never spoke to me again.

Edwin

Living together. So soon? Yes. My bear wanted nothing more but for some reason, the thought of moving in with Micah felt rushed and, honestly, I was overwhelmed.

And here I thought I was cured and healed of all my previous hangups. Far from it, it seemed.

“I need to think about it,” I replied.

Instantly my mate’s expression turned from a warm smile to one he gave people he saw in the park but didn’t know personally. “Yeah. Of course. Hey, how about we go on a run? I have the rest of the day off, and I’m eager to meet your bear.”

“I’m sorry. I never meant to hurt you, Micah. I just need some time to think about it. It feels right but I’m shaky about it. It’s not you.”

Micah put his hand on my arm. “It’s okay. We will take this at your pace. If you’re not ready, you’re not ready. Even if you decide not to move in with me, you and I are still solid. We’re mates no matter what, Edwin.”

Then why did my chest ache so badly?

My bear wanted to get out and show him our other form. He also wanted to show off for his mate. Going on a run would buy me some time to think about what Micah offered. Me moving in and a chance to start my own studio.

“Let’s go for that run. Please.”

We drove out to a field on the outskirts of town where Micah said shifters roamed when they didn’t have room to in town or at their home. On the wind was the scent of hundreds of animals. Most had been here recently, but some had lingering smells from long ago.

“Go on then, alpha. Let me see my big bear.”

My beast heard the call of his mate and, as soon as the last inch of clothing was stripped from my body, my bear emerged with a loud roar. Micah stepped back. His eyes widened. He crouched low and ducked his head in submission.

We walked over to him and nudged his shoulder with our muzzle. He didn’t have to bare his neck or any other act of submitting. He was our mate. Our equal. The perfect complement.

“Hi there, big guy. Look at you.” My omega got up and stood before us. My bear saw nothing but beauty in our mate as did I. He got closer and rubbed his fur on Micah’s legs, marking him in his own way. “Edwin, your bear is so beautiful. Majestic. I’ve never seen a bear up close before.”

My bear rolled over on his belly. He didn’t want our mate to feel any hint of a threat from us. I chuffed and wiggled my body, needing his skin against me.

“You want belly rubs? I see how it is. That’s fine. I’ll rub your belly any time you want. I’ll tell you some things while you’re a bear and can’t really answer me.”

Micah sat next to me and moved his palm over my belly. “I’m in love with you, Edwin. I know things are hard right now, and you’ve got some issues to overcome but I’m here for you. I’m always here and I always will be. There is no one else for

me and you're never getting rid of me. I'm gonna shift now. My wolf is desperate to play with our mate."

My mate shifted, and his wolf was more beautiful than all others in existence. We played and ran together all afternoon until we were both exhausted and calm. We shifted back and put our clothes back on but stayed quiet. I had done a lot of thinking while we were in our animal forms.

I was scared, sure. My trauma with Jacob had scarred me, but Micah and his love were fixing all of that. Life lay on the other side of fear. Shay had said that or maybe the therapist before. Didn't matter. It was still true. My whole life changed the moment I met Micah, and I wasn't willing to go back. Ever.

The only way was through.

"I changed my mind," I said and hung my head, ashamed it had taken me so long to give him the answer.

"About what?" His voice cracked. "About me?"

"What? No. Never. As we ran, our bond got even stronger, and I realized my stupid hangups were just that—stupid. There's no reason in the world I shouldn't move in with you. I want to be there when you go to sleep and when you wake up. Every morning. Every night. Every moment I can be with you, I want to. Can I move in with you, omega? I don't need time to think anymore."

He nodded with a smile. I wrapped him up in my embrace and whirled him around in an act of pure bliss.

"Are you sure? A few hours ago you needed to think about it."

“I’m so sure, Micah. I’m so damned sure. And there’s something else. I want a family with you. When is up to you but I want it. I want everything with you.”

We rode home and spent the night at his place. We whispered our plans to the night like prayers. I would move in as soon as possible, and Granger would be able to rent my apartment again. Micah would help me with the business aspect of starting my studio, and he was sure the studio would be packed with kids wanting to learn, maybe even some adults.

I had hope again, and it was all due to my omega.

Micah

The spring festival was approaching rapidly, and with the influx of tourists who were coming not just for that but because of the beauty of our town and the warming weather, I was having trouble getting enough stock together. As soon as I made it, I sold it, and that was not something I wanted to complain about, of course, but I was getting pretty worn out trying to keep up.

“We’re all out of the rose petals,” Rocco said, leaning through the doorway to the back. “And almost all the little bears. The other animals are going too, but not as fast.”

“Thanks.” I noted on the whiteboard what we needed and continued tempering chocolate. It was a long list, actually, with these items just the latest. I’d be up most of the night at this rate. But it wasn’t too long until the festival, and afterward, I could shut the shop for a day and sleep the clock around. At the thought, my eyelids grew heavy, so I went to the coffeepot and poured another mug. My stomach was churning from all the caffeine, but I wasn’t about to use anything stronger—those energy drinks really made me jittery—so coffee it was. “I’ll have some more truffles in about an hour then I have some custom orders to do.”

Rocco was actually learning to dip and do some other simple things in the kitchen, so when Edwin came in to help at the register, I brought Rocco back to help me. As we worked, I could hear all the activity from the front, people coming in and making purchases, laughing as my mate charmed them within an inch of their lives. Everyone loved him. It was also a good way for him to meet people. Among the visitors to town, there were locals who came in to buy candy, and I was glad to hear him getting

to know the neighbors.

But then, after about an hour, I heard my mate's voice change, and my wolf was on instant alert. I stopped working the truffle filling on the marble counter and strode to the front, my omega's instincts telling me that my mate needed my help and now.

But when I got there, all I saw was a young man who I had seen around town, along with his fathers. He was holding up his phone and trying to show Edwin a video he evidently had no interest in viewing. I'd never seen my mate look so pale and although he wasn't saying much, he was clearly upset.

"This is you, isn't it?" the boy was saying. "I found it online after I heard someone say you were a dancer. Why aren't you doing it anymore?"

"I-I don't...that is, I am helping out in the shop right now. That was in another place, and it's not what I do now."

"But you have to be in the talent show at the spring festival. Nobody is as good as you." The boy seemed very insistent, and his fathers were shopping and paying very little attention.

I wanted to step in, but my alpha had his pride. Also, if videos of his dancing were that easy to find, others would do the same. I hated that it was upsetting him, but he had to learn how to get past it, or he'd just end up being miserable.

Other customers were coming in, and one of us had to help them because Rocco was working hard on dipping candies. I tried to signal Edwin to come and do it, but he was too caught up in whatever video he was finding so upsetting. After helping a few people, I caved and called Rocco up, hoping that wouldn't result in wasted chocolate. Then I went over and joined my mate. I needed to see the video.

When I looked, what I saw made me wonder if I even knew my mate. Sure, he was graceful all the time, but when dancing? I had a momentary regret that I had zero dancing talent and could not sweep across the floor with him like the other man in the video did. They were beautiful together, their steps matching as if they'd been dancing together all their lives.

And I knew who that had to be. Jacob, the man who looked so loving in the performance, but who was also a two-timing cheater. Was I jealous? No, or maybe just a little, but it wasn't anything happening presently. My mate was mine and had not indicated any desire to get back with his ex. I trusted that.

I just didn't want him to be so upset.

Edwin

How? Why?

“Mate.” Micah put his hand on my shoulder instantly breaking my trance.

“I...I didn’t know there were videos. Of me. Of us.” I stared at the screen and then moved my gaze to my mate. Even though I was mated to him now, there was a twinge of guilt or maybe shame for Micah seeing him and me.

Wrapped in a warm embrace. Kissing. Swaying together in a dance of love.

“It was acting. I’m sorry.” I turned to my mate.

“It’s okay. It was in the past. Thanks for showing us, James.”

“But are you going to dance at the spring festival? Everyone wants to see a real dancer. I’ve only seen one in videos or on TV.”

“James,” one of his fathers admonished. “Mr. Edwin will dance if he wants to. It’s none of your business.” The older man turned to me. “Sorry. He gets so passionate about dancing. Please excuse us.”

They left the chocolate shop with only the few things they’d picked up.

My heart pounded inside my chest, feeling like at any second, it would thrash its way out through my ribs. It was one thing to tell my mate about my past, but to see me

and another male that way.

The memories of the past came flooding back. The way I'd thought I was in love with Jacob, back before I really knew what real love was. My devotion to him, putting my own needs aside to make sure his dreams came true.

"I need some air," I murmured, stumbling out of the shop and pushing open the back door. I heard Micah tell Rocco to take over, and soon he was outside with me.

"Edwin, talk to me. You're scaring me."

"I'm sorry you had to see that."

"I'm not."

My mate always surprised me with his calm, his shelter in the storm way of being exactly what I needed, but this was beyond everything. "Doesn't it bother you? Seeing your mate with another?"

"No. All I saw was my mate dancing. You are so talented, Edwin. To see you move your body like that. So graceful. So powerful. The discipline and hard work it must've taken you to get to that point. Mate, you amaze me."

"I was dancing with Jacob in that video, Micah. Doesn't that make you...mad?"

"No. That was before me. All I saw was you. But I have one question since you reacted the way you did. Do you still have feelings for him, or is this all because of how I might react?"

"It's because I don't want to upset you."

He nodded but looked into the distance. “Are you sure?”

“Micah, listen to me.” I gripped his shoulders gently and turned him to face me. “I have no more feelings for Jacob. There’s only you in my heart, omega.”

He nodded, reaching out to encircle my waist with his arms. He pressed his face against my chest and sighed. “I have a confession.”

“What is it? You can tell me anything.”

“I was a little jealous. You two looked so in love.”

I kissed the top of his head. “I thought I was. That was before you taught me what real love was. Now I know it was infatuation and settling for someone who didn’t deserve me. I’m so glad for that heartbreak, though, because it led me to you. There’s no reason for you to be jealous. It was another life for me and, from what he said, it meant nothing to him. He was acting the whole time we were together, just as we had on stage.”

He sighed. “You should really give me a private dance sometime.”

“Baby, I can. Anytime you want. How about this? The first dance at the studio will be only for you.”

“I love that. What about the spring festival? I bet there are other kids like James who aspire to be creators and dancers and artists. You might inspire them like you do me.”

“I inspire you?” I asked, pulling back so I could look into his eyes.

“Haven’t you noticed how many different bear-shaped chocolates I’ve been making lately?”

“I have. I thought it was for the spring equinox. Part of the celebration of the animals coming out of hibernation.”

He chuckled. “Well, there’s that too, but bears are my favorite now.”

“I’ll do it if you are there.”

He smiled. “I will be there with spring chocolates galore.”

“Then I’ll do it with you in my heart. I’ll be dancing for my omega up there on stage.” I was filled with a new excitement. “I have to choose a song. And practice.”

Micah beamed up at me. With him as my mate, I could fly. Not really, but my heart soared anyway. “Can I help?”

“Of course. You’re the inspiration. Help me choose over dinner?”

Nodding, he hugged me once more before we went inside. We closed up that night and picked out a song we both loved. I would practice more than I’d ever practiced before. I wouldn’t be dancing for the masses at the spring festival. I would be dancing for my mate. As though he were the only person in this town.

Micah

I didn't know when it happened, exactly, but sometime in the first weeks of our relationship, all that humping like bunnies in springtime had a result I hadn't expected so soon. But there was no doubt of it, the symptoms exactly like I remembered my omega dad when he was carrying my much-younger brother. Their "surprise" late-in-life cub.

But before I told my alpha, who I knew wanted a family one day, I wanted to be 100 percent sure of the whole thing. And that meant taking a test. I'd had a false alarm once before, while studying in Paris, and at that time, it had not been at all what I wanted to have happen. I'd bought into the only a mate can get an omega pregnant thing that so many of my schoolmates had spouted. Of course, I knew now that was nonsense. Only a mate could make me happy I was pregnant...that much was true.

That first time, I hadn't been pregnant at all, but it scared me enough to consult a healer who pointed out that I was working two jobs and studying day and night to be able to achieve my goals. That, she pointed out, had thrown my system completely off, and I wasn't the first omega to have such a thing happen.

And right at the moment, I was working my butt off getting ready for the spring festival. Even with Edwin's help, it was a lot, and there was an outside chance that I was once again just having a reaction to that overwork.

But unlike last time, if I wasn't pregnant, I knew I'd be so sad. Could I even get pregnant? I didn't know for sure. Which was probably why I put off buying the test for a couple of weeks. I wanted the possibility, even if it wasn't a reality.

Of course, I could only go on like that for so long. Edwin had already asked me why I wasn't into certain strong-smelling foods. He was eventually going to ask questions, and I wanted to have accurate answers.

So, one afternoon when there was a lull in customers, I stepped out and darted down the block to the little pharmacy slash soda fountain where I could buy a pregnancy test. Of course, in a town this size, I was taking a chance that someone would see me and tell my alpha before I had the chance to. Not the proprietors, of course. But any other customer. It was such a friendly place that Edwin already knew nearly as many people as I did—people who would love to congratulate him on something he didn't know about yet. And I could hardly holler out to everyone in the store, Nobody tell Edwin you saw me buying this, okay?

I had walked into that pharmacy at least a dozen times where I was the only customer in there, but that day? There were at least six people I knew, browsing the three aisles of first aid, personal care, and OTC drugs. They were bumping into each other. And at the soda fountain sat the vineyard owners sharing a huge banana split.

I considered going back to my shop and coming back later, but it had taken most of my courage to get here to start with, and I just wanted it done. No more guessing and hoping. So I browsed along with the rest of them, lingering while a few left and a few more came in. Quinn and Aster finished their ice cream and left, giving me a wave as they went. I stayed so long, the pharmacist came over and asked me if he could help me with anything. It had been at least a half hour, and business showed no signs of slowing down, so I gave up, pulled a pregnancy test off the shelf, and handed it to him, trying to convey the secrecy element with my eyes.

He nodded. "I will get this rung up behind the counter for you." Obviously I wasn't the first secret pregnancy test he'd ever sold. Possibly someone else in the store saw, but I was going right back to the shop and take the test. If it was positive, I'd tell Edwin as soon as he got back from a trip to the escrow office in the next town where

he was filling out yet more paperwork for his studio purchase.

But when I arrived back at the shop, paper bag in hand, my mate was already there, stocking shelves. He came over and kissed me. “I got back and you were gone. Rocco said you went down the street somewhere?” He was eyeing what I held.

“Oh yeah. I just had to pick something up real quick.” I tucked the bag close to my side, as if that would make it less noticeable.

“Really? What?” When had my alpha gotten so inquisitive?

“Uh, nothing important.” My attempts at subterfuge were failing.

“Oh, now I have to know.” He made a grab at the bag. “Is it a surprise for me?”

Damnation! At this point, all I could do was admit it or cause a scene. Fate seemed to have a hand in things again.

“Come with me in the back, and I’ll show you.”

“All right. But I’m very curious now.”

In the kitchen, I handed him the bag. “Just so you know, nothing’s for sure, I just have suspicion that—”

“Gods, you’re pregnant!” he shouted loud enough for the whole town to hear. “That’s great!”

“Shhh!” There was no privacy in all of Oliver Creek. “I told you, I don’t know. I just want to check and rule it out if I’m not.”

His demeanor changed, glee replaced with somberness. “Are you not feeling well? We should get you to the healer right away or a midwife.”

“Alpha?” I laid a hand on his chest. “Calm down. I don’t feel bad. But I had a false alarm years ago, and I didn’t want to tell you until I was sure. Now, I have to go pee on a stick.”

“I’m coming with you.”

“I really think I can do this part alone.” Not that we were prudes or anything. We didn’t worry about who was in the bathroom when, but I didn’t want him staring while I peed on a stick. Ick. “Promise I’ll be right out. And we can wait the couple of minutes together, okay?”

He agreed, reluctantly, and I went in and did my thing then left the stick on the sink. “Now, we wait.”

A short time never felt so long...but finally the timer Edwin set on his phone went off and we tiptoed into the bathroom together to check. I wasn’t sure why we tiptoed, but we did.

“What does it say?” he whispered.

I held it up and looked at it closely. Checked the package to make sure I was interpreting it correctly. “It says I am.”

This time, his cheer could probably be heard at the big-box store. But this time, I could join in.

Edwin

I was in awe of Oliver Creek before. It was everything a person could want from a small-town atmosphere. The clean streets. The pristine lampposts. The warm residents. The variety of shops and food.

But as Micah and I set up his display and table for the spring festival, this perfect place blew me away. There was no shortage of pastel colors everywhere. The town square had streamers and every animal represented. Bunting hung between light posts flapped in the light breeze. The sun shone onto each and every person.

What a perfect spring day.

“Where do you want these?” I asked, holding up two baskets. One was for a child and the other for an adult. Micah was holding a giveaway for them. All they had to do was write their names on a piece of paper and put it into the large plastic egg he’d bought. The baskets were bursting with all of his chocolates, of course but also some hand-painted ceramic eggs and Easter bread. The adult one had some jams from the peanut-butter-and-jelly shop, and the kid one had a few toys in it. Micah painted the eggs himself and they were extra special. He even did some extras for our table at home.

“Over there in the corner,” he said. I could tell how tired he was. The first trimester was worse in a lot of ways, including the constant lack of energy and nausea. My omega had a good bit of both.

“Why don’t you sit down for a moment, omega? You’ve been working so hard.”

“I have to get the rest set up and then I’ll sit. I promise. Tonight, I’m going to sleep like the dead, I can guarantee you that.” He came over and laced his fingers through mine. “Are you nervous?”

I let out a giggle, telling him the answer. “You have no idea, but nerves are normal. Hopefully I’ll be able to channel it right into the dance.”

“You’re going to be great. James came in yesterday with his report card and showed me another one of your videos.”

Micah had set up a system where kids could bring in their report cards for chocolate. One chocolate for an A. One chocolate for two Bs and so on. The candy was shaped as apples and books and was just about the cutest thing in the world. He came up with the most amazing ideas. The other food trucks and shops in town got involved as well, and now the parents said their kids were studying harder, trying to get all the report card treats from around the town. Like a good-grade scavenger hunt.

As Micah finished up his display and covered everything up, the mayor delivered his announcements. My dance was right after that. Shoot. I’d managed my time unwisely, trying to help my mate.

“I’ve got to go get dressed and get up there.”

Micah chuckled. “It’s okay. The mayor is long-winded.”

I zoned out through the rest of the speech, and soon, the music began to play. I took the stage. My insides shook even though I’d practiced and knew the steps by heart.

When I looked out on the crowd and saw Micah, everything clicked into place.

And I danced. Danced my heart out. Not because I was being paid to or to impress

my partner to no end. No, today, I danced for myself and for my mate and for the babe inside him. I danced for the joy of dancing, maybe for the first time.

Once the song ended, I remained in the last pose and then bowed. The crowd clapped and cheered, but all I could see was Micah, tears streaming down his face.

Smiling. I didn't pack the theater or bring in company donors. There were no sold-out tickets or career riding on my performance.

There was only Micah and his heart-melting smile.

Once the dance was over, I changed and helped Micah with his chocolate stand. I all but forced him to sit down while I took the money and processed the sales digitally. By the time the festival was over, we'd given away the baskets and sold out of nearly everything.

What a day.

"I can pack this all up myself. Please, keep resting," I said as Micah got up and began shuffling things into boxes.

"I can help. I'm okay. I promise." I saw him look over my shoulder. "Can we help you? We don't have a lot left."

"I'm here to speak to Edwin."

I whirled around to see an older man with a cane. I hadn't seen him around town before. "I'm Edwin."

"Yes, I know. I saw your performance. It was beautiful. Oh, I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm Connor. I am the owner of the dance studio. I heard you made an offer."

“I did. Thanks for coming to talk to me.”

He nodded and gave both of us a soft smile. “I wanted to do more than talk, actually. I came over here with something on my heart. I’m not doing anything with the studio, and you’re the first person who has shown interest who doesn’t want to bulldoze it to the ground.”

“I would never do that. I want to teach dance. All kinds of dance. There are kids in town who need and want a creative outlet like that.”

Connor sighed. “I believe you. Here’s the thing. I don’t need the money from the sale, and I want it to be used for its intended purpose, like you said. After seeing you dance up there with such passion...I want to gift you the studio.”

I gripped the edge of one of the tables to stop myself from stumbling. “Gift it to me?”

“Yes. Teach the ones hungry to learn. This way, you can do that without having bills over your head. You can keep the costs low enough for everyone in town to be able to come. It will do my soul good to see it up and running again.”

“Are you sure?” I asked, not believing how abundantly Fate had blessed me. “I can’t thank you enough.”

“Never been so sure of anything in my life. Come to see me this week and we’ll get everything signed over. Congratulations, Edwin. You’re the owner of a dance studio.” Connor walked away whistling.

I turned to Micah. “Did you hear that?”

“I did. I can’t believe it. Did that just happen?”

Micah

From the moment he was gifted the studio, Edwin was like a man possessed. With the festival over, I could get by without him in the shop, and he took that time to work on getting his ready. Without the big mortgage he had expected to take on, he could use his savings for improvements to the building.

I had assumed that the place was nearly ready to open, with just some cleaning up to do, but closer inspection revealed that more repairs were needed and also Edwin wanted to upgrade. He was having the floors sanded and refinished, delighted to find that they were hardwood and could take the treatment. The painting he was doing himself, but the plumbing in the bathroom needed work, and also, he was putting in a whole new lighting system. It was still much cheaper than the mortgage would have been, and he'd have a beautiful facility when he was done, but for now, it was taking all his time and a good bit of his money.

And I was all for it, only wishing I could be more help. Unfortunately, a lot that was going on was not recommended for a pregnant omega to be exposed to, according to the internet. Chemicals in paint and the floor coating and I didn't even know what could cause damage early in pregnancy. Even though shifters were safe from most human diseases, we could still have problems due to toxins in our environments. I wasn't even thrilled with my alpha being around it all.

I still wasn't 100 percent, but as the pregnancy progressed, my symptoms had begun to ease a bit. Also, it probably didn't hurt that I wasn't working as hard. I made a personal vow not to do that again, at least until after the baby came.

And finally the toxic parts of the studio were completed, and I made a plan for a surprise date with my alpha. I left work early and prepared a special picnic to take over and share with Edwin. In some months, there would be a baby in our lives, and I was very excited about that but also aware that would limit the time we had together as just the two of us.

“Anyone here?” I called as I came in the back door, expecting to find my mate in his office there. But there was no sign of him, and I set the basket down by the door and walked down the hall toward the main studio area. Every part of the place looked so nice. The last time I’d been in here had been before any work was done, and the improvements were huge. The hallway had been so dingy, the floor dull and stained. Amazing what paint and a little toxic floor finish could do. I continued on, following strains of music, and came to the double doorway where I stopped.

“Oh, alpha,” I murmured. My mate was dancing, all alone on the big, shiny floor. He wore only tight black tights that ended at his ankles, even his long, elegant feet bare, and he took my breath away. Sometimes it was hard to believe he was mine. And even though I wasn’t very far along in my pregnancy, I already felt a little bloated and soon would be whale-sized.

While he would continue to be lithe and athletic and...

“Mate!” He pirouetted over to me and took my hands. “Dance with me.”

“I can’t,” I protested, pulling back. “I have two left feet.”

“You do not.” He tugged me to the middle of the floor. “I watch how you move as you cook or temper chocolate or straighten up the kitchen, and it’s pure magic. You have a grace in the everyday that I envy. Now, dance with your alpha.”

“I guess I have no choice but to obey,” I sighed. “But when I crush your toes, you’ll

regret it.”

He set one hand on my waist and arranged me to please him then made a few steps. I stumbled after him, almost managing the toe crushing while I tried to avoid it. Then he stopped.

“See? I warned you.” I tried to pull away, but he held me fast.

“Just relax and go with the flow. Wait.” He moved over to the sound system and changed the music to something slower and sensual then returned and took me in his arms again. “Now, let me lead, okay? Pushy omega.”

“I thought you like that about me.”

“Not on the dance floor.”

“Okay, it’s your damage.”

“Just try.”

And we set off again, but this time, he murmured sweet things to me, distracting me from my own klutziness until suddenly we were moving smoothly around the edge of the room. He guided me, romanced me, and made me feel like the graceful creature he claimed I was. Any wonder I loved him so?

We had our picnic much later because one thing led to another led to a whole different kind of romance. Less graceful but even more pleasurable.

Edwin

The healer came out and greeted us personally. Every time I thought I was used to this small town, something else reminded me that I was still a city man down deep. You were lucky in a city clinic to hear if they called your name over the loudspeaker. Either that, or they simply texted you.

“Micah, Edwin, I’m Quinn. Please, follow me.”

We followed him through the most comforting, homey clinic. The furnishings were like someone’s living room, except for the paper-topped bed in the middle. Had to keep things hygienic, after all.

“I see you’re here for a prenatal checkup. When did you take the pregnancy test?”

We told him the date. He tapped some things into a tablet and pulled out an open-back gown.

“Are you having any symptoms?”

Micah nodded. “Nausea, mostly in the morning and late at night. The lack of energy was getting better, but then we read about not having coffee during pregnancy so now I’m back to no energy.”

The way he whined and looked so grumpy while he spoke, made Quinn and I both crack up. Micah loved one thing next to me and chocolate, and it was coffee.

“Make sure you’re getting plenty of hydration and I understand. It’s hard to live without coffee. Try taking some naps through the day if you can, even if it’s ten minutes or so. I had one patient who owned a business like you do, and he put a small cot in the back office and would take tiny power naps.”

“I think that would be a great idea,” I said.

“Me too.”

“Anything else? Any other concerns before we listen to your baby’s heartbeat?”

We both gasped. “We can do that? Today?”

“Of course, Micah. It’s too early for an ultrasound, but we listen to the heartbeat fairly early. I’m going to step out. Take off all your clothes except your underwear. Keep those on. And the open part of the gown goes in the front so we can look at everything. Be right back.”

Micah got undressed and put the gown on, and Quinn came back right on time.

“All right, let’s listen to your baby.” He slathered Micah’s belly with some bluish gel, put a wand on it, and moved it around. At first, my stomach sank, thinking he couldn’t find it. After Micah told me about his previous false alarm, I was afraid the test had been wrong, but then a whooshing sound filled the room.

“It’s so fast,” Micah whispered.

“It’s normal for a baby’s heartbeat. Sounds healthy for sure. Strong little cub you have in there.”

He did some more measuring and jotted some more things into the tablet.

“Sometimes it’s tricky when one father is one kind of shifter and the other is something different. With a wolf and a bear, the gestation time is usually about seven to eight months, so I think you have about six months left.”

“What else can we do to ensure the baby and Micah are the healthiest they can be?” I asked. I wasn’t taking any chances with the health of either our baby or my omega.

“Eat well. Whole foods. I’m going to give you some prenatal vitamins as you leave. While those things are important, I personally think that a happy omega is the healthiest omega. This is a time of peace and calm. Micah’s emotional health translates directly to the baby. Routine. Good nutrition. Plenty of rest. Those are the basics. And the most important thing is... if you have a gut feeling that something is amiss or wrong with you or the baby”—he touched Micah’s hand—“you come in and see me. My cell number will be on your packet as you leave. A lot of complications and problems are prevented when the omega listens to his animal and his instincts.”

All good advice.

“Thank you,” I answered. Quinn left and came back with a small bag with vitamins, his card, and several other items for Micah and the new baby. There was even a book on pregnancy included.

Again, the small-town charm was kicking in hard.

“How about some lunch?” I asked as we got into the car.

“That sounds good. The nausea has settled for the day, I think. We should get something healthy, though. I’m taking this growing-a-baby thing seriously.”

I took his hand across the console. “I know you are. How about a smoked chicken plate? Lots of protein and we can get one of their loaded sweet potatoes.”

“Oh my goddess, Edwin. You are in love with the dragon’s food truck. I knew it. I thought it would be a while before you loved another, but a food truck? The betrayal.” He pressed his hand to his chest and laughed. The other hand cradled his belly which had already begun to expand in the most lovely way.

That’s when it really hit me. We were laughing and excited about our baby. We both had goals and dreams and supported each other fully.

We were a family. Everything I’d dreamed of as a boy and a young man was right here in this car.

“What is it?” Micah asked.

“I love you, mate. Not for what you do but for who you are. I love you every day more than the last. I didn’t think that was possible.”

“Oh, Edwin. I love you too.” His laughing had turned to tears welling in his eyes.

“Let’s go get you and our baby fed. I want to get you to bed.”

Micah nodded. “I could use a nap.”

My hand slid to his thigh. “Oh, omega. I didn’t say anything about a nap.”

Micah

Months later, our dancing had ended as I approached the end of my pregnancy. My center of gravity was just too off for me to manage it, but we could dance again as soon as our baby was born. For now, I was trying to embrace my hugeness as the blessing it was. Quinn said I had gained just the perfect amount of weight, even though to me it felt like a lot.

I was still working, although I had arranged for a friend from my training years to come in for a few months after the baby was born. Rocco was a good dipper and had learned a bit more, but he wasn't strong enough as a chocolatier to do the complicated work. In fact, he had signed up for a course that he would begin soon in techniques that would really make him a stronger employee in the shop. We could always get more counter help. In fact, I had a few people lined up to interview for that this afternoon. Between my old classmate and Rocco, they could manage the kitchen on my paternity leave.

"Mate, are you ready to go?" I asked. Edwin was going to drive me to the shop. It was too far for me to waddle, and my bump made driving uncomfortable. All of which made me grumpy. "I need to get there for those interviews."

"On my way." He appeared in the kitchen doorway, keys in hand. "Can't Rocco handle those?"

"No way. He's not ready for that kind of responsibility yet. But it's not like it's strenuous or anything."

“Whatever you say.” He took my arm, but I shrugged him off and headed for the car on my own.

“I can still walk, more or less.” Sometimes less. And if it got icy, I wasn’t allowed to attempt it. “But thanks for driving me.”

“I need to run by the studio anyway and see if the new barres got installed. But I’m very glad to take you anywhere you need to go. You’re doing all the hard work growing our baby. I wish you’d let me help you more.”

I plopped into the seat and finagled the belt into place. “Another inch and I’ll need an extender. Can you get those for car seat belts?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure. But I think you’ve got more room than that. You’re not nearly as big as you think. Just perfect.”

I growled and turned to look out the window. “Why don’t you drop me off and then go to the studio?”

“Oh, well I already made the turn, and I won’t be a minute. Is that okay?”

What could I say? Turn immediately back? I was being unreasonable enough without adding that. “It’s fine.”

He parked in front and got out. “Come with me.”

“Nah. I’ll just stay in the car.” I settled back and pulled out my phone. “You go ahead.”

“But I want you to see the new barres.”

“You do?”

“You’ve been here with me every step of the way. I love getting your input.” He came around and opened my door. “Come and see my barres.”

I rolled my eyes. “Okay, but I won’t know if they are right or wrong.”

“That’s all right. I just like having you with me.”

What omega could resist that kind of talk? Especially when they’d been grumpy all day and their alpha still wanted their company.

He took my hand and we walked up to the door. “We’re here.”

I glanced at him. “Of course we are. Isn’t that the whole point?”

Suddenly the door opened and a chorus of voices cried out, “Surprise!”

We were swept inside on a tide of friends who were all chatting excitedly and wanted to show me everything they had set up for our baby shower. Streamers everywhere, flowers and a huge table groaning with food. Cakes and pies and sandwiches from PB&J and smoked food from Dragon’s Breath. So much, I didn’t know what to look at first. And a mountain of presents.

I couldn’t help it and burst into tears. Where else could I find friends like this? All the other merchants had contributed their very best dishes for a party to celebrate our little baby’s upcoming arrival. I buried my face in Edwin’s shirt until the tears stopped and I could properly thank them all for their kindness and reassure them that I was truly surprised.

They seated me at the front of the studio in a big chair with an ottoman for my

swollen feet. We played every silly party game ever devised for a baby shower while people brought me more and more food. And I had to at least taste it all so I didn't hurt anyone's feelings.

Then we had to open the gifts. "I was thinking we needed to buy a lot," I told Edwin as I unwrapped the very car seat we'd been admiring. "But now, I don't think we'll need anything but the crib."

"Don't speak so fast." He pointed to where someone was wheeling in a suspiciously crib-shaped package. "They really love you here."

"And you. Even if you knew about it, this party is for all three of us." I placed his hand on my belly where our child was kicking madly away. "Oh no. I had those interviews this afternoon."

He chuckled. "We rescheduled them for tomorrow. Today is about cake and gifts and friends."

"And love," I told him, accepting another package from Quinn who was there as a friend more than a healer. "It's really all about love."

Edwin

“The baby is coming,” Micah said, coming from the back bedroom. He had his hands braced on his back and wasn’t walking right. His baggy pants, his favorite pair, were soaked from his groin down.

“Did your water break?” I asked, almost dropping the dish I was drying.

“No, I peed on myself. Yes. My water broke. Oh goddess, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be so snarky. I’m sorry.”

I chuckled but got my ass into gear. We’d prepped and planned for this. “Do you want a shower?” I rushed over to let him lean on me.

“I should, but I don’t want to. No, wait, yes, I want to. Shower then...oh, we have to call Quinn.”

My cell was already ringing as I walked Micah to the shower. He washed up quickly, and Quinn said he’d be right over.

“He is on his way. In the meantime, I need to get set up.” We’d decided on a birthing tub for our home birth. When Quinn walked in, the tub was filled with warm water and my omega was pacing the floor. He was trying hard to keep his noises of pain to a minimum, even though I’d encouraged him to scream. A baby was about to come out of him. I’d be yelling at the top of my lungs if I were him.

“How are we progressing?” Quinn walked to the sink to wash his hands.

“The contractions are...” I checked my watch and, for the first time, Micah cried out and braced his hands on the back of the couch. “They are now two minutes apart.”

“Micah, I’d like you to get undressed so I can check your dilation.”

I helped Micah out of his pants and onto the floor where I’d set up a plush pad next to the tub. I held his hand as he lay on his back and Quinn put on a pair of gloves to examine him.

“Is everything okay?” Micah asked after a few seconds.

“Yes. You’re almost fully dilated. It’s going to be any minute now.”

Micah lost all the color in his face.

“Sweetheart, you’re okay. Your animal knows what to do. You can do this.”

“I can?” he asked.

I leaned down to kiss him and put my hand over his belly. “You absolutely can. You’re the strongest omega I know. You saved me.”

“Okay.” He laughed. “But only because you said so.”

After that, everything was a blur. Micah walked some more which brought on more contractions. His silent pain endurance faded away, and soon he was grunting, groaning, and cursing at every strike of discomfort.

Which was absolutely normal and fine, and with the baby coming soon, I helped him into the tub.

Quinn leaned over the edge to check things and locked eyes with Micah. “It’s pushing time. Let’s meet your baby.”

I watched in rapture as my mate and the man who owned my heart pushed, strained, and contorted his body, pushing our baby into the world. His warrior cries filled our house, and I’d never been prouder to be his mate.

“There’s the head. One or two big pushes. Everything you’ve got,” Quinn coached him with rock-solid calm.

My omega stared at me. For a split second, I saw his fear. I had to do something. Say something. “Micah, you have this. One or two more and we meet our son or daughter. They’re ready to come into this world. You can do this. You are the most capable man I know. Hold my hands. Squeeze as hard as you have to.”

“I can do this,” he whispered.

“Yes. You can.”

And he did. Two more pushes, and our son was born with a full head of wavy hair and Micah’s bright eyes. I stayed with Micah as Quinn cleaned the baby up, counting all the fingers and toes. In seconds, our son was placed on Micah’s chest.

All crying ceased. He was at home there, skin to skin with his daddy.

“He’s beautiful,” Micah said. Tears of joy ran down his face and mine. Even Quinn’s.

“He is. What are you going to name him?” I asked.

“Avery, I think. You liked that name, didn’t you?”

“I do. He looks like an Avery.”

I took our son while Quinn helped Micah deliver the afterbirth and get out of the tub. I wrapped Avery up, and Quinn settled my omega in the bed. He was beyond exhausted but trying to stay awake for the baby.

“It’s okay. Rest, my love. I’ve got him. You couldn’t have done a better job.”

“Thanks. We made a beautiful son.” His words faded out as he did.

Quinn took care of the tub and the cleanup while I rocked our baby and held Micah’s hand. My life had turned out absolutely perfect. I didn’t see any of this coming but I wouldn’t change a thing.

“I love you,” I whispered to my son. “Daddy loves you too. We’re so glad you’re here.”

Micah

Avery was tucked in his stroller, a warm blanket keeping his little hands and feet warm on the night of the grand opening. It had been a much longer haul than either my mate or I anticipated getting to this point, but as I sat at the registration table, speaking with all alpha and omega parents about their little ones and their dancing dreams, every bit of the work and money and worry was worth it.

Anything technical, of course, I referred to my mate or his assistants. Two dancers from his old troupe had joined him in the project, having had enough of the big city and wanting a better life. At first, he hadn't been in touch with any of them, embarrassed and hurt by what Jacob did to him, but as his heart healed, he reached out only to find that nobody thought he was a fool or anything negative at all. His ex had bombed at his new group, unable to summon the magic they had created together. In fact, Edwin had been invited by several troupes to join, but he graciously told them he'd moved on.

Just like for the baby shower, the local restaurateurs had provided all sorts of delicious food for Edwin's celebration, refusing any payment at all. So, all their little ones got a discount for their dance lessons. We just didn't tell them for fear of causing offense.

My mate was in his element, talking to all his new students and their families. He wanted to set up an some events as well as giving lessons where he could invite guest performers to come and share their talents with the local students to raise funds for charity. So many plans. I'd never seen him so alive, and I blessed Fate for bringing us together and allowing me to be part of his life.

I'd have sworn I was happy before we met. But now? I had learned the true meaning of joy and fulfilment with my beloved mate and our son who, as if he heard me thinking about him burst into desperate cries of hunger.

"You'll be fine, little man." I unfastened him from his seat and relinquished my place at the registration table to one of Edwin's assistants. Carrying Avery over to a chair in a quiet corner, I settled in to nurse and continue to enjoy the grand opening. It was a truly beautiful night, cold but clear, perfect for being indoors in the warm studio. A group of little children gathered along the wall near me, holding on to the barre and pretending to do dance moves. "As soon as you're walking, Avery, you can take dance lessons. I bet you'll be as graceful as your alpha father. He responded with greedy snorts, and I laughed. Maybe he'd take after me, who nobody but my mate had ever called graceful.

And it didn't matter. As long as he was happy and healthy, we would support any of his choices for his own life.

"How's our son?" While I'd been talking to the baby, my mate had approached. "Are you getting all filled up, little guy?"

I looked from one to the other, so filled with love my vision blurred with happy tears. One spilled out, and Edwin reached over and used his thumb to swipe it away. He opened his lips to speak, but a little girl ran between us and tripped. He helped her up, gently, and smiled at her before sending her on her way.

He was going to be as amazing a girl dad as he was with our little boy. It was too soon, but as soon as the healer permitted, we were going to try for our next. I could imagine a whole stage filled with little dancers born from our mating. "I love you, alpha."

"Omega mine, you are the music to my dance."

How did he always know just what to say?