



Delivered to My Fury (Mail-Order Matings #19)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: When my best friends first saw me, they almost killed me. One of them was a bear, the other a wolf, and I was a big, green monster in their eyes.

Instead, we bonded over a campfire and they shared their dinner. I had been kicked out of my horde for their new rules over forced matings. My new friends were rogues —shifters who had left their clan and pack over a split in leadership. We decided that night to travel together. Protect each other.

We three rogues formed our own pack —our own fury.

The only thing missing was a mate.

Finding a female who would want to mate with a group of rebels proved impossible.

Which was why we turned to the Mail-Order Matings app.

Delivered to My Fury is the latest in the super sweet with building heat Mail-Order Matings Series. Delivered to My Fury features a bear, a wolf, and a “big green monster,” living in harmony but also missing love. Can they find a female who will accept them with all their differences? And all her heart?. Of course, Mazzy promises a happy ever after. If you like true mates, Fate taking a hand, adorable babies, and a mixed mating from two very different paranormal worlds, one-click Delivered to My Fury today.

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Opal

My last assistant had to be let go.

HR allowed me to give her and the others glowing letters of recommendation, but with the current research climate, they weren't likely to find anything similar. That grant had been a sure thing, or so my supervisor and I thought. With our lab's reputation, we got just about all the grants we applied for—until now. Over the past month, one proposal after another was turned down. Not because we weren't worthy or our work wasn't helpful. They didn't quite say that. But the money faucet was turned off cold. To the point that money already promised would not be forthcoming.

I sat on my stool and considered what to do with the rest of the afternoon. I knew some other researchers who were managing their own funding, but outside of things like test tubes, cotton swabs, and alcohol, most of what I needed was just too expensive for my salary to cover. There were a few things I could do, but with the project likely to shut down soon, why stretch the day out?

I stood up, looked over the ruins of the last five years of my life, and unbuttoned my lab coat. On the way to the car, I texted Ceci, my bestie, and asked her to meet me at the local pub for some beer and bar snacks.

She showed up, of course, but the wary look in her eyes showed she knew I had lured her there for more than pleasant conversation. "What's going on?" She set her bag on the table and sat down. "What are we eating?"

"I got the lumberjack plate."

Her jaw dropped. “This has to be bad.” The plate held wings, mozzarella sticks, and about six other things, all deep fried. We only got that when the world was collapsing around one of us. “Tell me all about it. Did you order drinks?”

Our server, Joanne, arrived then with our tall glasses, the sudsy head threatening to slide down the sides. “Your food will be right along.” She eyed us. “You ladies have a death wish? That fried stuff is pretty toxic.”

“It’s an emergency,” Ceci told her. “Some people eat ice cream; we go for the hard stuff.” My friend didn’t even know what I was upset about, but her loyalty spilled over like beer foam.

“I hear you.” Joanne nodded soberly. “I’m a sex-on-the-beach girl, myself.” She left us to ourselves then, leaving a wave of sympathy behind her. She didn’t know the problem either, but sometimes women had to stick together.

“Okay, so talk.” Ceci lifted her glass and blew the suds to one side before taking a sip. “Ahh. That is good.”

I tried it as well and found it light but with a pleasant body. The golden color also appealed. “Yeah, it is. Almost makes me feel better.”

“Judging by the fact you’re not in your lab this early in the afternoon, I’m going to say it’s a work-related issue.” Ceci turned her glass around and around, watching the bubbles instead of me. She was one of those people who knew how to give someone the space to speak without feeling like they were under a microscope.

“Funding is all dried up.” I swallowed around the lump threatening to close off my throat. “Everything is stopped.”

Ceci was also a scientist and would know what that meant. Unlike me, however, she

worked for a cosmetic company, helping to develop new mascaras and blushers and other such products. Her job, no matter the political or financial climate, would go on. “Have you been let go?” she asked. “Because you know we have a space ready for you tomorrow.”

We had gone to university together and gotten our PhD’s the same year, but while I went into the public sector, doing mostly government-sponsored research related to health, my friend accepted the lucrative contract to work with beauty. I didn’t judge her for it. It was honest work, but I’d grown up in a town with some serious ailments connected to chemicals dumped into the river. I had nothing against mascara, but I always swore it was either health or maybe something in food and beverages for me.

“Nah, I think I might take up moonshining.” Joking...sort of.

“Opal, isn’t that done by old bearded men like we’ve seen on that TV show? In big pots in the woods or something?” Lord love her, for a scientist, her research on the topic was not very good. Of course, she’d probably never wanted to be a moonshiner.

“I don’t think there are any rules about women not being allowed to do it. I just need to move into the woods.”

Our food came then, and Joanne caught the end of the conversation. “My boyfriend makes shine but not in the woods. He does it in the garage.” Her voice dropped. “It’s not something we tell many people, but you’ve been coming here a long time and I have overheard enough to know you aren’t revenuers.”

“Could he use an intern?” Maybe it was time for a career change.

She giggled. “I am in charge of flavor profiles, and he does most of the rest. No job openings. Why? Are you out of work? No wonder you ordered the fried death plate.”

Put that way, it sounded less appealing. Fortunately, it smelled delicious. “No, but I might be before long. You are not going to sell much if you call your food death.”

Joanne shrugged. “Gotta be honest. It never seems to stop anyone from ordering it.” A man at another table called her over, and she left with a promise to bring more beer in a few minutes.

“You ladies alone?” The voice came from behind me, and I closed my eyes for a moment, praying for strength.

“No...we are here together.” I hoped he’d stop then, but of course he didn’t.

“Two women? Lucky I have a big bed. Lots of room. Of course, if you’d rather just the two of you, I like to watch.”

My elbow shot back so hard and fast, I hadn’t realized I was going to do it until the loud “Oof!” followed the crack .

Ceci’s jaw dropped so far I thought it might fall off. But then her eyes lit up. “Oh no. You accidentally bumped someone with your trick elbow.”

“My trick...oh right.” I turned around slowly, a little nervous to see what that crack had resulted in. The victim held a napkin stained with red over his nose. I’d never gotten violent before, no matter how someone behaved. He really had caught me on the wrong day. “Oh my goodness, are you hurt? I have an old injury that acts up sometimes and makes my elbow jerk.”

His eyes held suspicion, but he shook his head. “Accidents happen.”

“So”—I flexed my arm a little—“you were saying? Before my arm was naughty?”

He pushed back his chair and stood up, backing away, his beer belly straining his belt's integrity. "Not a thing. You ladies have a nice evening."

"We'll do that. You had better get some ice on that nose." I turned away without waiting for an answer, picking up a chicken wing. "Did we get some ranch for these?"

We ate in silence for a few minutes, the pub customers suspiciously quiet too, then the conversations picked back up. I suspected some of them were about us. Finally, I wiped my fingers on a napkin and sat back. "I hate men. The people who pulled my grant were all men, too. I'm so sick of males being in charge of my life. Let's swear off icky boys, now."

Ceci flushed. "Umm...did I mention I've met someone?"

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Zyon

There was a lot to be said for working for ourselves. My friends and I had met working on a construction site a decade ago, but none of us saw that as our future. We left our groups to avoid being forced to do things that did not suit us, to live a way enforced by others.

My horde was all about arranged matings. Nobody was allowed to wait and see if there was a fated mate out there somewhere. In fact, before my first birthday, my parents had signed a contract with another horde for me to mate with their daughter when we reached our majority. We did meet...and while I was willing to at least get to know one another before saying yes or no, Belinda was not.

She had found her fated and was frantic to mate with him, but her family was having none of it. The only way she could be free was if I called it off.

So I did.

And while working on a building job site was not our dream job, it paid the bills and enabled us to save up for the down payment on our home and the startup of our brewery. We had a good life, the three of us, since throwing our lots in together.

I sat down in front of a test flight of some of our new products. They ran the gamut from a stout verging on German Schwarzbier to a pale lager that reminded me of summer fields of grain, and I sipped each one, seeking the notes that would make them a step above any others in the region. Our area was blessed with many microbreweries and other small professional brewers like us. They all had their own

styles and flavors, and we'd sampled their products on more than one occasion.

I felt like we did well, but we'd been trying for a long time to brew a signature beer. Something that anyone who tasted would recognize right away. I'd had my hopes up for the black beer. It really wasn't common on this continent, and no matter how well we executed it, not enough people actually bought it or even tried it without skepticism to make it a good choice. A shame because it was my favorite.

But I thought we might be close with the lager. It had a smoothness that we'd gotten numerous compliments on and even one TikToker had sung our praises, leading to some good sales. The visitors to the tasting room almost never left without making a purchase.

Heading into the office, I grabbed my tablet and brought up some of the spreadsheets to see the precise numbers that might help me to make decisions. We considered ourselves artisans, so technically we wanted to make things that we liked and gave us pleasure. But we also incurred a fair number of bills every month and having gone rogue, none of us had access to any pack funds or inheritance from our families.

We had to earn our living, and if we wanted it to be via the brewery and not working for someone else, our decision had to be fiscally sound.

I grabbed a bottle of sparkling water from the office mini fridge. Not that I wouldn't have enjoyed a beer, and it took a whole lot to get me even a little drunk, but when I was working on numbers, I made it a policy to avoid anything with alcohol. I wasn't the best bookkeeper, not a math fan, so I needed all my faculties about me to work with numbers. As we tried to devise our signature brew, something that might be a wider release, we needed to see precisely what we were selling and in what numbers. Mabel our bookkeeper did all this hard work for us so we could simply open this program and understand all about our business success and failure from a financial viewpoint.

It should be so easy...

But as I found the page with the data on which of our products sold more, when, how, and the profit margin on each, the numbers swam before my eyes. Rows and columns, positives and negatives...

How did anyone make sense of them?

We'd been working on this project for some time, looking to make a leap, and it didn't feel like we were getting anywhere by just trying things and tasting them ourselves then getting feedback from visitors. The skills I brought to the business were about making the beverages, but if we wanted to grow, we needed to learn more.

Sure, they might say something was good when they sampled it, but what mattered for our bottom line was what they took home with them. What they bought again and again. Closing my eyes, I shut out the screen for a long moment, taking deep breaths and letting them out slowly. Maybe I didn't learn calculus or deep-space algebra or whatever the heck it was that made someone a mathematician. Mabel had shown me how to read these, and it wasn't her fault that my brain began playing the theme from Jeopardy as soon as she started pointing at things on the spreadsheet.

She said it was basic math. Addition, subtraction, a little multiplication and division. Nothing past fifth grade. Why would she lie?

She wouldn't.

I took a few more breaths, in and out, and opened my eyes. This time, the numbers stayed in place. Selecting one of our best-loved lagers, I clicked on it and did my best to study the new sheet that came up. It was not nearly as overwhelming because it was only one kind. I grabbed a legal pad from the desk drawer and prepared to make

notes. Just the basics. How much did we sell last year in dollars and cases? The year before? What was the net profit?

Okay. I could understand that. Now to try another one...on the page, written by my own hand, the whole thing looked manageable.

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Opal

I'd gone through my regular morning. Getting dressed for work and having coffee—even showing up on time.

But once I was inside my lab, the whole place seemed empty and cold.

The hope for my work and making a difference in the world had been jerked out from under me without warning.

Sure, I could go through the motions and keep my head down, praying that something changed in the hearts of careless men, but that would be a waste of time and energy.

Before lunchtime, I walked out. Nothing had been done. I hadn't even fired up my laptop. What was the point now?

I took myself to lunch, needing vegetables and nothing close to fried after the monstrosity Ceci and I wolfed down the day before. My stomach had been a wreck all night, but thankfully it was a distraction from my world being turned upside down. While I was in the middle of consuming a salad the size of a basketball, Ceci called me.

“Hello?”

“Hi, what are you up to?” I could hear the clicking and typing in the background. She was at work. In her lab.

Lucky.

“You know I told you that I met someone. He and I were talking last night, and I thought...well, I-I would like you to meet him.”

Ceci didn't get nervous, especially around me. We told each other everything. She certainly didn't stutter over a request. “Ah, so you're more serious than you let on. You need bestie approval.”

She snickered. “I need to know if there are red flags that I'm too infatuated to notice.”

My turn to laugh. “Ceci, you are a red-flag detector in the flesh. If there were any, you would know it. But I'm happy to give a second opinion. When?”

“Tonight.”

We met at the restaurant that night.

Derek did all the right things. He pulled the chair out for her. He was kind to the waitress.

Five minutes into the dinner, I knew this was more than dating. My best friend was in love. She didn't care that sometimes he became a wolf and he was already calling her mate.

“Tell me more about that word you keep calling her. Mate?” I asked before stabbing a piece of chicken.

Derek had sky-blue eyes and dak-brown hair. Once in a while, I swore the blue flashed with silver but I dared not ask about it. Sure, I was curious, but I never wanted to be rude, especially if Ceci and Derek worked out and they got married one

day. He would be in my life for a long time.

“Mating is different for us. I think humans equate the word with girlfriend or partner, even wife, but the word means so much more to me—to us. A mate is the one person the Goddess made for me. We are soul mates. Fated mates. Now that I’ve found Ceci, there is no one else on the planet that could replace her. She’s it for me. It goes beyond some marriage certificate or vows stated in front of a preacher or priest. Ceci is my life now.”

Okay, my best friend acted like this was someone she was seeing, but Derek was talking about a lifetime commitment.

Good thing I didn’t ask about the eyes.

“Really? And you already know that? I thought there had only been a couple of dates.”

Ceci kicked me under the table. “Opal!”

“What? I’m the best friend. I get to ask questions. That’s why I’m here, right?”

Derek chuckled and turned to Ceci. “She’s right. I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m glad you have a friend like this. The answer is yes. I knew Ceci was my mate at first sight. Actually, if you want to know the truth, it was mate at first scent.”

“Scent?” I asked. Now, I needed to know. The passion he had for my friend oozed out of his tone.

Suddenly, I realized how lonely my life had become.

The world was moving forward, and I was anchored in place.

“Yes. Shifters have a heightened sense of smell and our mates smell like home to us.”

Ceci sighed, looking up at him while he spoke.

Goddess, I wanted that. Someone to look at me the way these two looked at each other. I took dessert to go since after a while, I didn't exist anymore. They were whispering things and sharing kisses. They needed privacy. Their happiness brought me joy. Ceci deserved someone amazing.

Still, after hearing Derek go on about mates, I needed to know more.

Sure, shifters existed and most people knew one or more, but I didn't know a lot about them other than what I'd heard tonight.

Once I got home, I couldn't help myself. I was a researcher at heart and would get lost in deep dives of subjects.

I'd never looked into shifters much, so all of it was new information. There were sites against shifters. Some pro shifters. History. Lore. Pictures. Videos. Some real and some obviously fake.

I had to admit, the lion shifters were awfully sexy. Honestly, all of them were.

While I read about all kinds of shifters and how they differed from skinwalkers, I ate my oversized slice of triple chocolate cake with a side of bourbon because why not. I'd lost my funding. I had no job. My best friend was out living her best life and finding the love of her life with some hunky wolf shifter.

And here I was...reading shifter lore.

Like that was going to bring a sexy lion to my front door, begging to bed me.

Maybe that was it. Maybe I just needed to get laid.

It had been a while.

“Ugh!” I slapped my computer closed and carried my refilled glass to bed. Instead of flipping on the TV, I got on my phone, and the algorithm magic had done its job. My feeds were full of shifters and hotness.

I’d almost given up on the night when a video of some shifters and monsters came up.

Searching for a mate? Look no further than the Mail-Order Matings app.

An app?

For dating shifters?

I needed more bourbon.

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Shay

“Again?” I opened the fridge and pulled out the steaks from the local butcher. We lived in a mixed community of shifters, monsters, and humans, and our shifter butcher was the best. Three inch-thick New York strips were our go-to dinner when we got home in time to make dinner.

“Yes. These are part of my mouth. They are inside my gums. It’s like me coming up to you and asking if I can touch one of your fangs. It’s gross. I don’t know where her hands have been. No. You know what? It doesn’t matter. Rude. Uncalled for. Boundary crossing. Personal space invading. You don’t touch an orc’s tusks. Period.” Zygon went on and on, finally fading into a mumble.

A human female had come into the bar and started flirting with Zygon, our orc friend and fury mate. She’d also asked to touch his tusks. A big no-no. And he had a great point.

“You should’ve asked if you could stick your green finger in her mouth,” Eero laughed, taking out the grill tools from their designated drawer.

“What? No.” He softened. “She was human. Perhaps she didn’t understand the magnitude of what she was asking.”

The orc was all bark and no bite. He wouldn’t hurt a fly. He was simply particular about his body—nothing out of the ordinary. Some humans still treated him like a sideshow freak, something they could touch and pet as though he were an animal and not humanlike at all.

Sometimes, Eero thought he was more humanlike than we were.

“Maybe she was flirting?” I asked. “It wouldn’t be the first time. Women are drawn to the green skin and the flowing hair.”

Zyon whirled around, knife in his hand and growled. “There’s no point. You know that. I don’t date.”

He wasn’t. I would bet my bear paws he’d die a virgin before fooling around with a female that wasn’t his fated mate. Orcs were apparently rigid in those rules. That was why he’d left his former horde. They were trying to force single orcs to mate outside of Fate, for the good of the group—or so they said.

“I do, but that doesn’t stop them from wanting you.” Eero and I weren’t squeaky clean like Zyon was. We had dated in our youth but, once we knew we would share a mate with the orc, we stopped casually dating. We’d searched and searched for a female but had come up empty.

“They can’t have all this green deliciousness. Only my mate can. Our mate. Fuck. I need a beer.”

Shay dug into the fridge and pulled out IPAs for himself and me and a porter ale for the orc.

Good thing we made these for a living. Otherwise, we’d go broke.

We laughed while preparing dinner in our cabin. We lived modestly, only spending real money on food, beer, and reinvesting the rest in our business. Eero and I had some business skills from the pack, but Zyon’s knowledge of ale-making from his horde was the key to our success.

He made flavors and varieties that all shifters and monsters loved.

“Any ideas about the cream ale? I tasted the latest batch, and it’s still not quite there. It wants to be.” Eero had impeccable taste buds and, out of the three of us, he was the best with the humans. He could sell them a case of our beer even if they weren’t drinkers.

“I’m messing with the formula more tomorrow. I want the best variety when we propose our products to that human grocery store chain. They only carry the best. We have to have something that humans can’t get anywhere else.”

We all agreed, of course. We would always run the brewery, but manufacturing on a bigger scale would give us financial security.

We’d always sought that stability and a home for ourselves and a mate. Life goals. But sometimes, especially the last year or so, I was convinced the other two members of my fury had given up on a mate altogether. We lived in a small town and had seen every female here, even in neighboring towns when they came into the tasting room. Some people passed through. Tourists to the area. Visitors. Social media creators coming to taste our beer.

Our mate wasn’t among them.

Even I was beginning to lose hope.

Zyon sat back, patting his stomach. The orc could put down some steaks and beer. Before meeting him, I thought shifters were the biggest eaters. He put us all under the table.

Eero finished off his dinner and began picking up the plates while I drained the rest of my beer, wondering if we were shooting too high.

Maybe we should just be happy with the success we'd found and find a way to save more for a bigger house.

Be grateful for what we had.

My bear wasn't satisfied and wouldn't be until we found our mate, but I had no idea on how to find her. We had to make a living. It wasn't like I could pack up and go on a mate hunt like in the old days.

Fate would have to work her magic.

"I'm gonna go in and work," I announced after everything was cleaned up.

"Again?" Eero asked, wiping his hands on a dish towel. "Give it a rest, Shay. We can go for a run. It's been too long since I let my wolf out."

I stood there, halfway between the back door and the front. One way was back to work, and the other would let my bear expend some of the energy I barely contained. Each had its advantages. We didn't think of only ourselves. We were a fury.

"A run. And then I might still go in. I want that cream ale the best it can be."

Zyon started up the stairs. His big feet dwarfed them. We thought it was funny when we first walked in. "I'll go with you. You're right. We have to have it perfect. We can do this. It will only take a few more tweaks."

Eero and I ran for a few hours and when we came back, Zyon was ready. He'd showered and changed into jeans and a sweatshirt. He'd baked brownies, and there was a fresh pot of coffee. Part of me knew he worked so hard to ease some of the frustration of not having a mate, and he couldn't go run in the woods like we could.

“I’m on my way,” I said after a quick shower. “Let’s do this.”

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Opal

I never drank much hard liquor, choosing beer or occasionally wine when out with friends.

For good reason.

It made me foolish. At least that was my excuse for “the incident” in college. Grad school, to be specific. Having entered university at fifteen, I was always younger than everyone else and socially behind them in matters of things like dating and drinking. Ceci took me under her wing and tried to help me navigate the difficulties of those years. She was three years older than me and more in tune with everyone else and eager to show me what I’d missed by being a nerdy teenager when everyone else was rapidly becoming young adults.

To celebrate my twenty-first birthday, we went to a local watering hole frequented by our fellow students. Looking around, I had my doubts that everyone present was actually old enough to be there, but what business was it of mine, really? I was more concerned by the fact that my friend had just announced to all present that it was my very first day as a drinker, and they all wanted to buy me a shot.

The bartender lined them up in front of me, a row of small, innocent-enough looking glasses, all waiting for me to drink them down. And first, Ceci then other friends who were present followed by the rest of the patrons sang “Happy Birthday.” After she drifted away to speak to someone, the others around me launched into a chorus of “Drink. Drink. Drink.”

I'd never come with them before because watching others drink hadn't appealed, and technically it was a twenty-one-and-over establishment, so this was all so new to me. They had one of those weird doorways where you couldn't see inside because of a curtain hanging to block the view from the sidewalk. So, I'll admit, I had been curious. Sitting at home while everyone was out having a great time made me want to share in the fun. Sure, they seemed a little stupid when they got back to the house I shared with several other students, and they sure didn't look great the next morning, but from the stories they told, most of the time was just fantastic.

Walking in the door, I'd gotten a little woozy at the fumes, and my common sense was shouting at me to leave. But no matter how intelligent I was purported to be, no matter how young I'd have my PhD...I was still twenty-one and wanted to be part of the group. Being younger than everyone finally shouldn't matter.

If I had drunk all those shots, I'd have ended up in the hospital...or maybe dead of alcohol poisoning. At least I knew enough to understand that. But the four I did manage to down were enough to have me leaving with a man I'd never met before. A stranger who tossed me a few lines and took me to his hotel room. But at least it wasn't with a killer, as Ceci reminded me when I made my walk of shame up the front steps of our home the next day.

"What were you thinking?" she demanded, dragging me inside and into the bathroom where she stood me in front of the mirror. "Are you all right? Why were you crying?" I would have denied it, but the tear streaks down my cheeks. "Someone said you left with a guy, but nobody knew who he was. You could have been killed. Did he hurt you? Is that why you cried?"

"No." It wasn't that at all. He was probably fine—not that I had any experience to compare it to. "He didn't do anything wrong."

"Did he at least give you a ride?" She'd seen me walking up the steps but probably

not coming down the block. Of course, I couldn't be sure, so opted for honest, even if it made me look worse than I was.

"No. I snuck out before he woke up."

Ceci soaked a washcloth under the faucet and passed it to me. "Can you explain the tears, then? Regret? Because we've all made mistakes, and it's okay."

I couldn't even tell her. Scrubbing at the mascara streaks on my cheeks, I used the cloth to hide as much of my face as possible when I said, "Probably more hungover than anything. It's fine. I don't have to see him again...right?"

"I am so sorry I stepped outside to talk to Jenny. She had a bad breakup and...well, that's not important now. You didn't drink all those shots?" Her wide eyes met mine in the mirror. "Not sensible, Opal."

"No, I didn't. But more than I should have. I feel like crap." Laying the washcloth over the side of the sink, I puffed out a breath. "I'm going to bed."

Which I did. And nobody—except the guy who was must have woken to find my blood on his sheets—ever knew I lost my virginity to a stranger instead of as I'd always planned to someone I loved.

That was the last time I got that drunk. From that day forward, it was beer and wine only, and not a ridiculous amount of those. The bourbon I was downing on this night years later had only been in the house because I watched a video about making vanilla extract and thought it would be a nice holiday gift for my friends. Thought it might be a funny quirky gift from a chemist. But after imbibing more of it than was good for me, I found myself online and filling out the questionnaire for the Mail-Order Matings app. I had nothing else going on. Maybe I should marry a lion.

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Eero

Zyon and Shay decided to come in late, mostly because they were often at the brewery until dawn. When I got up to make the morning coffee, they were coming in the front door.

My wolf valued his sleep and I did as well. I was one grumpy son of a you know what if I didn't clock my eight hours. But for the other sixteen hours of the day, I worked as hard as possible.

Our brewery was gaining more interest each day. Zyon did most of the brewing and Shay worked on flavors and bottling, but I was in charge of schmoozing the customers and trying to get us more contracts and handling the social media side of things.

I stopped outside the tasting room just before noon, putting my best smile on. There was a group of women on a girls' trip on the other side of the door. I could hear them giggling—scent their vanilla-and-sugar human scents.

If they left with a good impression and a case in their hands, then I would consider it a job well done.

“Good morning, ladies. Welcome to the Furious Brewery and Tavern tasting room.”

They all said hello, and some clapped a little.

I set up the tavern and the tasting room as well with soft music from another time. I

kept the lights low, and the wall sconces that resembled real oil lamps were flickering, giving the place a golden glow. I'd learned early on that atmosphere was a big part of the sell.

We filled these group tastings on a regular basis, but I treated each one like a major event. A few weeks before, we were approached by a buyer for a small chain of local grocery stores, but her first visit was to a tasting party with her friends.

We never knew who would walk through those doors at any given minute.

"Do you like the berries and cream?" I asked, walking over to a group of girls. Two of them were taking pictures of the glass under the light from a sconce and another one was talking about a date she had that weekend.

"Yes. It's like dessert." The redhead with the date looked up from her phone. "Can I buy this by the case? Is there a limit?"

Oh yeah. They loved it.

"There's a limit of five cases on those specialty brews. We want everyone to be able to take a case home if they wish."

"That's good. I'm going to have some in the fridge for my date. He's a shifter."

I never gave my animal away to strangers. Didn't know why. Most shifters boasted about their animals, but a guy had to keep some things private. "Is that right?" I asked. "Well, I'll bet he would love this brew. Maybe some of the stout."

"Oh, the stout? Can I taste that as well?"

We walked over to another table where the stout and IPAs were untouched. Females

tended to go for the sweeter options which was why we really wanted to get that cream ale right. “Here it is. It’s got a richer mouthfeel. Notes of caramel, coffee, vanilla, and bourbon. Try it.”

She took one sip and moaned. “Oh, that’s good. I might take a case of this for myself.”

I went from table to table, asking people what they thought and getting their general opinion.

While they were drinking and having a good time, there was a central topic of conversation. I wasn’t trying to eavesdrop. My shifter hearing picked their words up easily.

All of them were talking about an app for shifters and humans to date.

The Mail-Order Matings app.

Intriguing. Since we were surrounded by nature and other small towns like ours, it was hard to find our mate. From what I overheard, there were people all over the country and the world on this app, all trying to date or find their mates. One female in the tasting said she found her reverse harem on the app. All shifter males in her harem.

“It’s not just for shifters, either. I found a yummy minotaur in there. Something about the horns does it for me,” another said, with a little shiver.

Okay, that answered that question. We wouldn’t leave Zyon out no matter what. He might be an orc and we shifters, but he was our brother and our packmate. Perhaps this app would help us find the right female for all of us.

When we first decided to travel together to find a place to settle, we called ourselves a pack, but that didn't quite fit.

So, one day, we decided, we were a fury.

Unique. Like no other pack.

Now all we needed was a mate to complete us.

Mabel came in to handle their purchases while I went for the handcart and took care of loading their cars. A tasting a success. We sold out of several of our flavors. We even moved a dozen T-shirts with our logo on them and some koozies and key chains. That was what sold beer. Word of mouth and seeing our logo everywhere.

That and big contracts with big stores.

One day, we would land it; I had a gut feeling.

The other thing I had a gut feeling about was that app.

"That was successful," Mabel said as I walked into the office.

"It was. Did we make out like bandits?" I asked, using her phrase.

"You did. Excellent day already, and the tavern hasn't even opened yet."

I leaned on the wall between our offices and hers. "What do you think about dating apps, Mabel?"

She snorted. "Dating apps. Mating apps. I've heard of them, but if you want an old lady's opinion...I think it's too good to be true. Sounds like it to me. Get on your

phone and find the mate of your dreams? Come on. What's the catch?"

At least she was honest.

"Maybe you're right. Maybe it's all a bunch of hokum."

"Hey, that's my word. Then again, kids these days do things differently. It might be fun. Checking out all the females looking for a shifter or two, or two shifters and a monster."

Mabel was like family and knew our circumstance. She'd once had a reverse harem herself.

"Something to think about," I murmured, going into my office.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Opal

The next morning when I woke up with my head pounding and my eyes burning, I regretted my little return to bourbon.

The hangover sucked. At least I hadn't slept with any strangers.

I'd had dreams all night of running from lions and bears and wolves and then, out of nowhere, they shifted into the hottest men I'd ever seen.

My brain flooded me with memories while I showered and brushed my teeth. Shit. I'd signed up for that app. The one that promised that anyone could find their mate through their service. The one that showed humans with monsters. Monsters with shifters. Shifters with humans and more shifters.

There were so many available pairings, the bourbon wasn't the only thing that made me dizzy.

I remembered giggling at the vast and yet extremely personal questions. Did I prefer a specific kind of shifter? Did I want more than one partner? A harem? There were even options for nannies, mates for practical purposes, breeders, and, to my surprise...orcs and gargoyles and even a unicorn shifter.

The thing was, I didn't have a preference. No, I didn't want to be anyone's breeder or nanny, but beyond that, all I wanted was to be loved and cherished. I deserved that.

Did I click the box for a reverse harem?

I thought so.

Ugh, the whole thing was hazy.

I went to the kitchen where I indulged in a protein-heavy breakfast, hoping that, plus some electrolytes and coffee, would pull me from the hangover and make this throbbing between my temples go away.

By the time I'd cleaned up the kitchen and put on some laundry, I'd decided to get off the app. I didn't even know if I wanted a shifter for a mate. I'd given up on finding the right guy and married science years ago.

The only thing I wanted was love and commitment and trust. What form that came in, I honestly didn't care.

I plucked my phone from the charger. My thumb hovered over the app, intending to press it until it wiggled and delete it.

And I almost did. Until I saw how many notifications were at the top of the screen. Another one popped up as I deliberated.

I had a match?

Already?

Goddess, I hoped I didn't use a selfie from the night before. That would've been a hot mess.

"Well, I should at least see who was a match. That couldn't hurt." I spoke out loud even though I was alone in my home. I sat at the table with some hot tea and scrolled through my options.

What I saw shocked the hell out of me.

Here I was about to give up on this app, and I had more than five matches already. An eagle shifter. A wolf shifter. Two bear shifters. And a demon?

When I reached the bottom of the list, there was a notification on the app saying the algorithm was still finding matches for me. To give it more time to generate mates.

What? There would be more?

Hell, I hadn't even thought I would get one.

I clicked through the profiles and, while each one was sexy and gorgeous, they simply didn't call to me.

Sitting there, I weighed my options. I could delete the app and forget it ever happened and wonder what-if, or I could keep the app and maybe, just maybe, someone would catch my attention.

The way Derek looked at Ceci and spoke about her so lovingly? Yeah, I wanted that more than anything. I wanted someone to care about in return as well.

I left the app on my phone and headed to the lab. I had a month or so of funding left, if I used it only for absolute necessities and I wouldn't let it go to waste. I'd stewed in my own pity long enough.

Once at the lab, I poured myself into work the best I could with the end looming.

Perhaps it was time for a change in my life and not just a job. What if I found a mate or three or seven and they were perfect but lived in a paradise I'd dreamed of all my life. There would be no way I would have them move here with my future on shaky

ground.

A little after dark, I hung up my lab coat and went home, treating myself to some Chinese food on the way.

Ceci texted me a few times that day, saying Derek enjoyed our dinner and wanted to do it again soon.

I replied that I'd joined an app for finding a shifter and she called, squealing, excited that I was trying to find someone.

Planted on the couch, I ate my pineapple chicken and allowed myself to dream. If my life were different, what would I change?

In the current climate, grants were going to be nearly impossible to get, it seemed, making my stable, dull life way less stable.

Maybe it was time for a change. What would be important to me? A reliable income. I could get that from Ceci's company...but it still didn't appeal.

Someone to come home to would be nicer.

I scrolled the app, looking at options. There were many more matches than that morning.

Three of them were orcs.

Huh.

Of course, seeing an orc as a match sent me on a spiral of research, but this time without the accompaniment of alcohol.

I went to bed that night, encouraging the changes in my life instead of fighting them.

Change was inevitable.

Change with some hot shifters or an orc was more than welcome.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Zyon

There was a new coffee shop in town. They sold the overpriced, sugar-filled coffees everyone loved. I'd gotten up early and went to get everyone a cup and some breakfast. Mabel loved it when we treated her on Fridays, and I wanted to continue the tradition.

When I walked in, to my surprise, no one blinked an eye, or, worse, yelped or screamed.

It still happened from time to time, which was why my brothers, my wolf and bear brothers, did most of the big-box-store shopping and trips to the city. There were fewer scared humans that way.

I had hope for the future. Hope where orcs could go about their business like anyone else, minus the stares and gaping mouths, but I'd also accepted that future might be beyond my lifetime.

Juggling the coffees and full bags of pastries in my arms, I pushed open the back door of the brewery. The smell of hops, honey, and caramel instantly reached my nose. Those were the familiar scents of the business we'd busted our asses to build but also, there were traces of what was once my home. The orcs in my horde were longtime ale makers.

"I brought fancy coffee and a variety of bagels with more cream cheese than legal," I announced.

Mabel looked up from her desk. “What’s the occasion?”

Raising one eyebrow, I noticed she was on her phone instead of working. She always got everything done, so I had no problem, but that was different. “Since when do I have to have an occasion to spoil you for breakfast.”

Cackling, she got up and squeezed my biceps. “I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, if I was thirty years older, I’d be begging you for a lot more than coffee.”

“Goddess, are you two flirting again?” Eero walked in the back door and grabbed a coffee and the entire bag of bagels and pastries. “I thought you were on the app now, Mabel.”

“I am. I only took a break for the treats.” She winked at me. “Only half talking about the coffee.”

I shook my head, set the coffees down on the breakroom counter, and took out a bagel stuffed with eggs, cheese, and bacon. Double bacon. “What app are we talking about?” I asked, taking a huge bite.

“That Mail-Order Mating App. The one those girls were talking about the other day. You get on and get matched with shifters, monsters, all kinds of sexy hunks.”

I was kind of sorry I asked.

Eero sat beside her. “Let me see.”

While we ate breakfast, they clicked on pictures and profiles. Mabel oohed and ahed on some pictures. Whooped at others. And some were too nasty to show, according to her.

“You already had a mate,” I said to her.

“Who says there’s only one mate for you? Fate knows I’m a lonely old woman. She knows I need a hottie warming my bed.”

“What in the hell did I walk in on?” Shay asked, stumbling in. He wasn’t a morning guy most of the time, but today, he looked like he rolled straight out of bed and into our brewery.

“Mabel is man shopping,” I answered.

“Is that right? On that app?”

“You know about it too?”

“Yep. Ooh. Bagels.”

Mabel went back to work, and we eventually made it to the lab where there was plenty of work to do. I had to admit, my mind wasn’t on ale or anything close to it, though. “Do you think we can find our mate through that app?” I boomed. “Sorry about that. But do you?”

Sometimes when I got excited about stuff, my voice became loud.

“I’ve been thinking about it too,” Shay said, putting down what he was working on and taking off his safety glasses.

“Same,” Eero answered.

“Is it legit? Have we really researched it beyond what Mabel says?”

Shay nodded. “I’ve been looking at it since those females mentioned it the other day. There are all kinds of questions, and there are plenty of females on there looking for a harem.”

“Even a ‘harem’ like us?” I had to ask the question. We weren’t your typical pack.

“Yeah. Even like us.”

“What’s there to lose?” Shay got on his phone and showed me he’d already downloaded the app but hadn’t made an account.

“Nothing,” Eero was quick to answer. “We lose nothing but we stand to gain everything.”

I nodded. “Everything, being a mate.”

“Our mate would be our everything,” Shay said. “Let’s sign up.”

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Opal

I stared at my phone over my second cup of coffee. For a thing that didn't speak or move, it certainly was enticing me to pick it up.

For the third day in a row, I had matches. Not one or two either. I had a dozen or so every morning.

Mostly packs or groups of shifters wanting a mate. They were all gorgeous, and their profiles said all the right things. I'd clicked on some of them, perusing the pictures to see if anything sparked inside me, but nothing had.

Selfishly, I craved that spark. We humans didn't have the mating instinct hit us in the center of our chests like I understood shifters did or smell our mates like monsters, but that didn't mean I wouldn't feel something in the presence, even the online presence of my person. They did call it chemistry, after all.

I tried to have some degree of restraint this morning, but it was failing miserably.

I'd done some work in the lab. This cut-off-funding deal was no good. I was using each paper towel and cotton swab as though it were the last in existence. I couldn't spend a single dime on those things anymore. Even the blinds were open so I could turn some of the lights off to save on electricity.

My life's passion was now a lesson in misery. And waiting impatiently.

And dealing with men who had control over other's lives. Ugh. Maybe I shouldn't

look at my phone. Those muscles and carved jawlines were probably a cover for all the selfishness and meanness that lay within.

Although Derek didn't seem to have a mean bone in his body.

Ceci didn't think so.

"Fine. Let's see what matches I have today." I pulled off my gloves and sighed, tossing them into the trash with regret. There was a time I didn't fret over those little things. Oh, right, that was last week.

Phone in hand, I scrolled through the matches and accidentally clicked on the last profile that came up.

It was a fury? His name was Shay. He was a bear shifter. I thought bears and wolves were part of dens or packs, but this one said he was a part of a fury. What in the heck was a fury?

I clicked on his pictures, dismissing the definition of his group. His chocolate-brown eyes called to me. Sure, he was hot and built. Had a smile that probably called puppies from far and wide, but there was something about his eyes.

They looked kind and sincere?

Ugh, I was losing it.

His account was linked to two others. I'd seen it before. When a match was connected with a pack, then every account was linked.

The other person in the fury was a wolf shifter. Not as built as the bear shifter. Where Shay looked like he'd never turned down a cookie in his life, Eero, on the other hand,

the wolf shifter, was lean. His eyes were blue, gray-blue, from what I could tell.

There was one more account linked and while I'd been exposed to a lot of different species of paranormal people through this app, I gasped when I saw Zyon.

It wasn't the green skin.

Nor the tusks. Or his pointed ears.

Gosh, all of them had piercing eyes. I put a hand to my chest, feeling a stir inside me.

I dove deep into their profiles.

They owned a brewery. That discovery led me to searching for their brewery online. They had incredible reviews, and there were even social media videos. One woman said she would never drink another kind of ale in her life.

That was one hell of a recommendation.

"That doesn't look like research, babe." Ceci came into the lab, laughing.

"It is." I handed her my phone once she crossed the room. "Shouldn't you be at work?"

"It's lunchtime...we had a date remember?"

Where did the morning go?

But Ceci was looking over my shoulder. "This is the app? These guys are hot. Did you match with them?"

I nodded. “What’s a fury?”

She shrugged one shoulder. “I don’t know, but I haven’t seen you blush in a while, Opal.”

I lifted a hand to my burning cheek. “They’re gorgeous. What can I say?”

Ceci plopped on the stool across from me. “How do you tell them you like them? Do you have to accept the match or something?”

I hadn’t gotten that far. “I think so. I don’t know what to do. I mean, joining the app was one thing, but following through? I mean, do I even want to be in a reverse harem? What do you call the woman in a reverse harem anyway?” I threw my hands up, overwhelmed by what I was feeling. It was one thing to fantasize about multiple men being with you, but making that a reality?

“It’s called a pivot according to the romance novels.”

A pivot. Huh. “Most women complain about one husband and I’m entertaining the thought of messaging three? What am I thinking? Am I doing this because I’m upset about losing my funding and not knowing what’s coming next?”

Ceci sighed. “Opal. I know you. You wouldn’t do that to yourself or others. Maybe this is a pivotal point in your life. Have you considered that?”

I snorted. “Nice pun. I have, actually. I thought with the loss of the grant and finding this app, well, maybe it’s time for a change.”

“Listen, messaging them doesn’t mean you’re going to be married tomorrow. You’re reaching out and having a conversation. What’s that going to hurt?”

She wasn't wrong. In fact, she was absolutely right. I got on this app to find love and partnership. Seeing Shay and Eero, and Zyon gave me that spark in my chest, the one I'd been hoping for.

Life was waiting for me on the other side of fear and procrastination.

"I'm messaging them right now."

Ceci danced in her seat while I typed out the message and hit send. Now, I waited.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Shay

When we were in the brewing room, we left our phones in the office. There were too many moving parts, and accidents could happen. I'd had a dream one night about dropping my phone into some precious ale and when I told the others, we agreed on the no-phone rule.

It hadn't been an issue until the Mail-Order Matings app. Now, it was a real problem.

"Did you see anyone last night?" I asked my fury mates. Even though I'd been fighting against talking about it all morning, it was pointless.

"I saw some, but my wolf wasn't calling out for any of them." Eero relied heavily on his wolf. More than I did my bear. Probably not a good thing, but sometimes I thought my bear was silly. If he had his way, we'd do nothing but hunt for a mate. That didn't really pay the bills. It was a catch-22. If we stopped everything and hunted for a mate, we wouldn't be able to provide for her, but if all we did was work, then we were missing out on a whole facet of life that included love and the bond our animals longed for.

"Zyon?" I asked, since he hadn't looked up from the glass after tasting a batch.

"It needs something, but I can't put my finger on it. It's driving me to madness."

I snorted. Zyon pretended like he was all business, but he craved a mate just like the rest of us. Maybe more. Orcs at his age were already mated and had orclings on the way and toddling around their homes.

Sometimes, I feared being in our fury was holding him back. He said not, but I suspected.

Still, he chose us. We chose each other.

“I meant on the app.”

“Oh. Yes and no.”

“Explain.” Eero moved around the room, shaking his head at our friend. Sometimes getting information out of him when he was in a work zone was like pulling teeth.

Zyon stopped and looked at us. His lip was a bit curled between his tusks. “I see lots of beautiful, smart, kind women, but no one is speaking to me. I don’t mean with words. I would feel something if she was my mate, our mate, but now I’m questioning if that happens over the internet? With just a picture to go on? Then I get frustrated and put my phone down.”

Laughing, I ticked my chin at Eero. “You asked him to explain. And I’m wondering the same thing too, Zy. But so many others have found their mates on the app.”

“That’s true. Maybe we haven’t found the right person yet.”

Eero looked at me, his eyes darkened. “And maybe our fated mate isn’t on the app at all.”

A knock on the door startled us, which was hard to do. Mabel stuck her head in. “I can’t concentrate with all your phones blowing up. I know you’re on the app, but I can’t think straight. Do something about it, please.”

We chuckled and went to get our phones. They were, in fact, blowing up with

notifications. Some were texts, others emails, but a lot of them were from the app.

“We have a ton of matches,” Eero said, wide-eyed.

“Why are you so shocked?” I laughed. “We are strong, fierce shifters who own our own successful business.”

He nailed me with a stare. “Yeah, the females are knocking down the doors. Hey...look at this one.”

We gathered around him and his phone to see a woman. She was a match and her name, Opal, sounded like a song in my heart.

“She’s stunning,” Zion said. Never heard that word come out of my friend.

“She is,” I agreed. “She sent us a message. Hello. Saw we were a match and wanted to reach out. I’m human. Hope that’s okay. I look forward to speaking with you. ”

Eero stepped back, cheeks pale. “Is it a joke?” he whispered.

“A joke?” I asked. “What are you talking about?”

“We’re not exactly your run-of-the-mill pack, Shay. I...is it just me, or does this seem too easy?”

“Yes.” Zion put the phone down. “And no. When Fate decides things, it’s easy—smooth even. Sure, there are some bumps, but no one else has contacted us. Doesn’t your heart flutter, looking at her?”

Eero nodded. “It does. Should we message her back? I never even considered the steps after being matched with someone. My wolf likes her too.”

“As does my bear.”

I picked up my phone and went through her profile before we decided what to do next. We found out Opal was a researcher, a chemist. She had pictures of herself with a lab coat on as well as other photos. Long blonde hair and gorgeous golden eyes... My bear and I were captivated in the best way possible.

“She’s smart, obviously,” I said.

“Beautiful, obviously.” Eero had gotten back on his phone, and his coloring had returned.

“Stunning,” Zyon agreed.

“You said that already, Zy. I...should we look at other matches?”

Eero stepped forward. “No. My wolf wants her. There’s no reason for me to look anywhere else. When you know, you know, right?”

“Even if she’s human.” I wouldn’t be a friend if I didn’t try to play devil’s advocate. This was our life and our hearts we were talking about.

“I don’t care if she’s a donkey shifter. Let’s message her.”

“What do we say?” Zyon asked.

I took a moment to gather my thoughts. “We tell her it’s nice to meet her. We’d love to get to know her better.”

As soon as we sent the message, peace covered my heart.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Opal

Lucky I had given up on the vanilla extract idea and poured the rest of the bourbon down the drain. In this situation, where I was in danger of losing my livelihood and unlikely to find another position outside the cosmetic industry—or Goddess forbid big pharma—I might just get silly enough to drink more if it were in my house.

Every decade or so was often enough to make that mistake. Although, at this point, I didn't think I could call what I did a mistake. That bottle of bourbon was the very definition of liquid courage. Since the time I slept with that stranger, someone I never saw again, I had not touched the stuff...or a man.

Oh, of course I shook hands and hugged friends. I'd even gone on dates, but not one of those evenings had ended with me in any bed but my own. Alone. I wanted everything or nothing, and until everything showed up, work was my everything.

The app had been a drunken gaffe that was rapidly morphing into something better. The false courage was long since gone, and only my own tiny store of bravery allowed me to send a message to the reverse harem who caught my interest.

Blatant lie. Ceci was also instrumental. She had felt guilty all these years for stepping away the night I ended up in that hotel room with a man who had zero reason to think I was a virgin. Not that she knew either, but I always thought she suspected but didn't want to make me feel any worse. It wasn't as if I'd had a reputation for lots of dating. But if this thing worked out, she could get over her guilt.

After I sent the message, Ceci and I went out for lunch, but I couldn't eat a thing. I

pushed salad around while staring at my phone on the table next to my plate. “They aren’t going to answer,” I said. What would three such good-looking guys want with ordinary old me?

“If they don’t, they are fools,” asserted my loyal friend, “and don’t deserve you. Let me see your phone.” She held out her hand, and I picked it up and passed it over. “You said you got more possibilities, right?”

“A few.” I was pouting. Here I went and put myself out there only to be ignored. “You can look.”

“I will.” While I sipped iced tea and mulled my future as a lonely single spinster former scientist, Ceci swiped her way through all the possibles I’d received, clucking, tscking, and occasionally gasping. “What was wrong with the three panthers?”

They had a picture of them in their cat form, as well, and there was not a thing wrong with the thick glossy fur, and their blue eyes were gorgeous. The hair color and eyes carried through into their human forms. Of all those who had messaged me, they were the best looking. “I know, beautiful, right? But, I just don’t want them.”

“They’re all brothers,” she mused. “Maybe you don’t like the idea of dating people who are related to each other?”

“Maybe.” But I didn’t think that was it. The three I’d sent word to were the only ones who I could see myself with. “But if they aren’t interested, I guess I’ll just delete the app and consider what to do with my life.” I reached for the phone to do just that, but she tugged it back.

“Give them a few minutes. They might be busy. You know, working or something.”

“All three of them are too busy to reply?” I scoffed then grabbed the phone. “No, I

am just going to—”

The notification chime had me dropping the device as if I’d never heard it before.

“Do you think it’s them?” I whispered, as if they could hear me.

“I don’t know.” Ceci picked up her bison burger and took a big bite. She chewed and swallowed, taking her sweet time before saying, “There’s only one way to find out.”

“To find...oh!” I studied the phone in my hand for a moment before swiping to get into the notifications. It was indeed a reply from the trio, although presumably just typed by Eero, who was the wolf shifter. “They were glad to hear from me.” I set the phone down and picked up my fork, feeling much better. “They have such a great Greek salad here.”

But Ceci was staring at me as if I’d lost my mind.

“What?”

“That’s it? You send a message, they answer, and you’re done?”

“I’m not...what? Oh my Goddess.” The fork dropped to the plate with a clank and I picked up the phone again. “I’m not used to this.”

“Well, who is? I mean, probably there are lots of people who meet people on dating sites, but it’s all new to us.”

“You?”

“I’m living vicariously through you.” She took another bite of burger and chewed.

“You have a real boyfriend you’ve actually met in person,” I reminded her. “And he’s super nice.”

“Yes he is. Now...type!”

They had thanked me for my message and said a few other nice things, so I replied in kind. Nice to meet you. Thank you so much for your reply. Let nobody see I was anything but erudite. In any event, it was the start of an afternoon of back-and-forth and starting to get to know one another. Best day in a while for me. I still wasn’t sure what they saw in me, but I was glad they were interested enough to chat. And eventually, I found a little more of that courage and suggested I pay them a visit.

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Eero

Nothing was done the rest of the day. Instead of working on the new recipes and getting ready for customers, we spent our hours in a group chat with Opal.

There were no lulls in conversation. We went back and forth as though we'd known each other for years. She said she had lost a grant for her work and so was in limbo, work wise.

My wolf howled inside me, wanting a lot more from our interactions than an online conversation.

We were getting ready for the tavern to open when she messaged asking, How about I come visit you three?

"Did she dump you already?" Mabel said, coming into the office to put some mail on my desk.

"What? No. She...she asked if she could come visit us."

Zyon and Shay barreled into the office a few seconds later. "Did you see the message? Did you see it?" Shay blurted out.

"I saw it. I...what do we do?"

Mabel hadn't left yet. "I'm gonna tell you one thing. If you three are intending to have a female visit your house, the first thing you need to do is clean that pigsty. Last

time I stopped by there, I thought I'd stepped into a frat house, and that's not a compliment."

She had come over one time to deliver some time-sensitive paperwork when we were in the middle of a brainstorming session. We were also busy working with a new distributor and hadn't had time to do much.

It was, of course, the worst our house had ever been. She came in and cleaned up everything, fussing and complaining the whole time.

"We don't usually keep our home that way. And you shamed us enough that night for a lifetime." Zyon was clearly still grumpy about it.

"So you're saying if this female was outside the front door of your den right now and wanted to come in, you would have no qualms about that?"

Silence all around. Sometimes it was the loudest answer.

"Fine," I grumbled. "We need to do some tidying up but that's normal, right?"

Mabel raised one gray eyebrow and scoffed. "Not at my house or at my desk. Nor in my bookkeeping."

"Okay, okay." Shay patted her on the back. "Point taken. We have to clean up before she comes. Did we even decide for sure that she's coming?"

"Why would we say no?" Zyon was fully invested. I could feel it through our brotherly bond. "She's all the things we wanted and... She's coming, right? You two feel it too."

Mabel chose that time to bow out of the conversation and go back to her pristine

office.

“I feel something for her,” I insisted. “There’s no better way to get to know someone than to have them at your house, in our den, right? Are we on the same page?”

Shay leaned on the doorframe. “Mabel’s right. We do need to take a day and clean up and get the guest room ready.”

“Wait a damned minute. We have to ask her first. Is she serious? When will she come? How long does she want to stay? Worst-case scenario, she lives a few hours away, and we have to leave now and bust our asses like the Goddess is coming to visit.”

Zyon got on his phone. “I’m asking her in the group chat.”

He did.

And we waited.

And waited.

And no answers came.

Silence filled the room. “Wait.” Shay stared at his phone, so I did the same. “She’s typing. See the three little dots.”

Yes. I’m serious. I would like to come visit and see where this thing leads. Unless you three don’t agree? Do we need more time on here to chat?

I looked up at the others. “I don’t need more time to chat on here. I want to see her and scent her and know how she takes her steak and what kind of pajamas she wears.

There's only so much you can get to know someone over chat. Tell me I'm not the only one."

Zyon huffed out through his nose. "If I had my way, we would be in a car or on a plane on our way to get her already. Shay?"

The bear shook his head. At first, I thought he was going to say no. If he did, it would be goodbye to Opal. We'd made a pact long ago over that campfire in the middle of the woods while we were all running from powers that be that had done us wrong. We would be a fury together, and that meant we would all share the same mate.

It had to be unanimous.

"My bear wants Opal. As much as I was skeptical about the app, I believe she is our mate. I know she's human and it may take some time for her to realize it, but it would be great to have her here. To know for sure."

"Message her back. Tell her we want her to come." Zyon's seriousness comforted me. He was picky about who came into our den.

Picky about everyone but our mate, I guessed.

We would love to have you at our home. It would be a great way to get to know one another better. Please let us know when you can get here.

It was settled. Opal would come here. We would finally get to meet our mate after so many years of trying to find her. I was nervous about what she would think of us in person, but if Fate had a hand in it, and I hoped she did, she would love us as much as a part of me already did.

"I need to go run," I announced and made my way to the back door. The frenetic

energy inside me was more anxious and excited than nervous but, either way, I had to expend some of it before she got here.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Opal

And they accepted my suggestion. By the time I offered to come visit, I was back on my stool at the lab, wasting time, but so what? It wasn't as if I had a lot I even could do without supplies, but I did fuss with some reporting on my laptop while sending messages back and forth. The three of them were truly engaging, giving me a little background about their friendship, their business, and the area where they lived. It sounded really beautiful there, with nearby woods where the bear and wolf could run, and even Zyon the orc enjoyed rambling. Which was great for me because I worried about being the only one who couldn't run gracefully under the trees.

But I could walk with Zyon...or the others if they didn't want to move too fast. Or were in human form.

I had so many questions, but I didn't want to ask too many right now; it would be soon enough to do so later if the conversation continued. But it did! I didn't often have long conversations with people I didn't know well, but I was struck by how comfortable I felt with them. Sure, it was via the app messenger, so not the same as face-to-face, but with every response from any of them, I felt more comfortable and more anxious to share all about myself.

I had a lot of saved-up vacation and not a lot of things to do around here. I had been planning to walk around and see if any of the currently empty labs had things I could finagle, but why? By the time I got more funding, if I ever did, I'd have to start at the beginning again on my current project, or close enough to count as such. So...

I sent a message to my supervisor requesting a couple of weeks off—not that I

planned to stay with the guys that long, but it would give me some time to look around for any active research that I might be able to join.

I got the okay to start my vacation the next day.

It looks like I'm about half a day's drive from you. How's day after tomorrow?

Great! from Eero.

Fine! Shay added.

See you then! This last from Zyon.

And so the die was cast, and I had a date to meet the reverse harem of which I might be a pivot. And then it occurred to me that if so, if they liked me and I liked them, I might be staying there. A little research into shifters showed that to be the case. Once they met their mate, they just seemed to pick up and begin life together. I wasn't sure how to think about that, but I planned to play it by ear.

After sticking around long enough to get paid for the full day, I headed home to pack. I hadn't had a real vacation since I'd been working here, and what did one pack for a trip like this?

Ceci, help!

On my way.

My bestie arrived with a satin-lined box of the cosmetics her company put out, a selection of their facial products, and her big curling iron. I loved that thing. She used it to make her hair look salon perfect every time. It might or might not do the same for my less silky locks, but I was excited to play with it.

Ceci also had an overnight bag because her plan was to help me up until the moment I got on the road. I was so nervous already and grateful for both her help and the distraction. We went to the store for road snacks, watched movies, ordered pizza, and giggled about men and what they were like. She offered all sorts of relationship advice, which, since she had just begun her first relationship that looked like it might last, I took with a grain of salt.

But it was fun to have men to talk about, for once. Usually my girlfriends would all be gossiping about their latest boyfriends while I sat silent, but as the two of us read all the messages coming in on my phone, I felt like I fit in for the first time in my life.

It was nice.

She helped me go through my closet and figure out what to pack before we crawled into bed with popcorn for more movies and fell asleep. Could I be forgiven for feeling a bit like it was a hen party without a whole lot of hens?

It felt like one.

And then it was morning and time to get ready and go.

I hadn't even had time to be anxious after she got there. If things turned out with the guys, I'd hate being so far from my best friend. I'd have to be awfully sure it was the right thing to do.

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Zyon

She's coming.

And we only had a day to get ready. This was going to take some planning. Until Mabel commented on our housekeeping, I hadn't thought much about it and, to be fair, she had seen us at our worst. For the most part, we kept the place hygienic and generally picked up. But sometimes when work-related matters conspired to take all of our time and attention, things had to be let go. We had considered hiring a housekeeper but honestly didn't love the idea of a stranger in our home, even if one was willing to clean after two shifters and a monster.

It wasn't going to be too bad now. We all agreed to that. A full day to prepare was more than generous.

But we arrived at home and opened the door, stepped inside, and looked around...

"Were we vandalized while we were at work?" Eero muttered.

"It's going to take more than a day," I agreed. "When did we last clean the bathrooms? The kitchen?"

We trooped into the kitchen together. "Has anyone washed this floor in the past month or two?"

"And that's a lot of dishes considering we don't eat at home much," Shay said. "Let's load them in the dishwasher."

Which of course was full...of dirty dishes.

“I think we can assume the bathrooms need work, too,” I announced. “And if she’s going to get here early afternoon, day after tomorrow, we’ll need to start now.”

We ordered pizza for dinner, since our local place always brought paper plates and napkins, and sat down to make a plan.

“For sure, one of us has to go to work tomorrow,” Eero said. “We have two group tastings and the brewery itself to deal with.” The bar was staffed, but we always took care of the tasting room ourselves. People seemed to love meeting the brewers, and with Mabel to handle any money matters there, it was covered. “Who wants to volunteer?”

Silence.

At any other time, we would have done just about anything to be at work rather than cleaning, but this was for our mate. Meaning, toilet scrubbing took on a whole new meaning.

“Nobody?” I asked. “Guess we draw straws, then. Anyone seen the broom lately?”

We did rock paper scissors. Which could be done three ways, although some people might disagree.

Shay lost. He was going to help us tonight then head off in the morning to be our point man at the brewery.

The pizzas arrived at that point, and we devoured them before stuffing the boxes and other debris in a large green trash bag and setting out to make our house fit for our mate to see. If she showed up now, we all agreed, she’d probably run screaming,

thinking we were just looking for a female to clean up after a bunch of messy males.

And that couldn't be further from the truth. If she liked us enough to stay, and if she was indeed our mate as the wolf and bear believed, we would be glad to make sure our home was worthy of her. It would give all three of us pleasure to make sure she never had to pick up anything heavier than her coffee cup. Certainly nothing like the heap of hoodies that had fallen from the hooks just inside the front door. I bundled them up and carried them to the washer, on the theory that anything that had laid on the floor for I had no idea how long was at the very best dusty.

Shay, because he was not going to be home tomorrow and wanted to for sure do his share, insisted on tackling the bathrooms. While I went from room to room gathering more hoodies and loose socks and other laundry that by rights belonged in everyone's hampers, Eero worked on the living room.

The washer and dryer ran late into the night, and were going again in the morning. And after Shay headed to work, Eero and I cleaned the kitchen from ceiling to floor and everything in between. It would not do for our mate to find something unidentifiable in the refrigerator or make popcorn in a microwave with coffee rings on the spinning glass plate. We checked the dates on everything in the pantry and tossed anything expired. Best-by dates were not a big deal to us, but for our mate? We'd never forgive ourselves if she got sick on expired tuna. The walls needed washing and the ceiling fan was fuzzy.

Then we went to work on the guest room, even changing out the bedding for new we ordered same day on Amazon. By the time Shay came home at nearly ten p.m., we were ready to go to the store and restock our refrigerator and pantry.

It took forever, as we guessed what she liked to eat and made our selections accordingly.

“Do you think she likes lobster?” Shay paused by the tank and studied the occupants. “Don’t all females like that?”

“Maybe, but if she doesn’t, we’ll have a live lobster hanging around the house. Can you return them?” I asked. We’d never bought one to cook before.

“Doubt it.” Eero rolled the cart on through the seafood department then into meats before he came to a halt. “We probably should have asked her what she likes.”

I glanced at my phone. “It’s almost midnight.” We often shopped late; I got less-weird looks from the nighttime shoppers. “She said she’s getting an early start in the morning, so it’s probably not a good idea to message her now.”

In the end, we bought food we liked—lots of proteins like steak and ground beef—and added in more fruits and vegetables and a whole selection of sweetened, flavored coffee creamers. And a bouquet of flowers for her room. Then we went home to rest.

Opal

Somehow, all the confidence and elation of getting ready to go evaporated as soon as Ceci disappeared from my rearview mirror. She stayed with me all that time, even helping me load the car and giving me a huge hug before I climbed behind the wheel. Then she stood in the street, waving and smiling until I came to the stop sign two blocks down. My friend had indeed more than made up for the night she left me alone in the bar all those years ago. Honestly, I never held it against her anyway. She was entitled to speak to people besides me, and I hadn't asked her to stay close. We had other friends there, too, and she had every reason to believe I was safe. The bar was almost entirely patronized by students and others from the neighborhood, most of whom I knew from stores and restaurants and other businesses. It was just a fluke that a traveler happened in and hit on the innocent in the room.

By the time I got on the highway, I was questioning not only my decision to make this trip but most of the others I'd made in life. Why was I so stubborn about not going to work at the cosmetics lab. Big pharma I'd never work for, but smaller research labs were an option. If they had funding—ours certainly did not.

When I neared the first exit ramp, I almost got off to call Ceci and see if that position was still open. I liked mascara and lipstick just fine, even if I didn't use them often. No need to be a snob. There was a lot to be said for things that made life a little better for people. Maybe I could find a company where my research would contribute to pleasure.

And then I remembered how sweet the three guys were. They were expecting me, and the trip had been entirely my idea. How would it be if I canceled after they'd taken

time off from their work to spend with me? Why that would be...churlish. A good word I saw in the historical romances I enjoyed but almost never had the opportunity to use.

No. I steered on past the exit, ideas for “pleasurable” uses of my skills. For an almost virgin, my mind certainly went to naughty places. I’d fallen asleep watching TV one night on the couch and woke to an infomercial selling lubes and creams and various other sex-related substances. This of course led to several hours of research into what those things did, why they were good, who might need them...

Surely the companies who sold those things had research going on. If makeup had funding, it stood to reason sex would. Something to consider after I finished up with my visit to the reverse harem. The fury. I liked that term better. Despite understanding that a woman with several lovers or mates was a pivot who had a “reverse harem,” the term “fury” suited these three better. They certainly had that effect on me.

Whenever they sent a message, my insides churned in reaction. Before bringing it to the screen, I was wondering what they would say, thinking of how I might reply, wanting to know every detail of their lives. Were they early birds? Did they stay up late and watch movies? Did one or all of them have a sweet tooth?

But I didn’t want to ask all those things in typed words. Not even in a video call, which was why I hadn’t suggested one. I wanted to be in the same place with them when I asked. Let them ask me in return about my likes and dislikes, preferences and what made me shudder in distaste. Shifters and maybe even monsters like an orc counted on being fated mates to make everything good, but humans like me were geared to spending months and even years together before deciding to get married.

I drove for a couple of hours before stopping for a potty break and cold drink at a root beer stand. It looked a hundred years old, and the drink was delicious. Made right

there in the back room, according to the sign above the counter, and my short conversation with the owner was as refreshing as the beverage. We chatted for a while about the weather and such before I asked about the stand.

“My granddaddy built this place with his own hands,” she said. “All he had was a little money and his granddaddy’s recipes.”

“It’s so good.” I sat at the counter on a high stool, legs swinging below me like when I was a little girl at the drugstore. “I’d never have thought you could make a living just selling root beer, though.”

We were the only two people here that I knew of, but a pickup truck turned off the highway and pulled around back. I heard voices and something heavy clunking into the back of the truck. My new friend looked worried for a second then smiled. “Great-Great-Granddaddy had more than one recipe.

“And you also sell wholesale,” I said. “By the barrel?”

“Umm...well, the jar.”

“Can I buy some?” It would be a good present for my guys. Homemade root beer. Who wouldn’t like that?

“Well, sure.” She winked. “I wondered what made a lady like you stop here. Give me a minute.”

She went in back and returned with a cardboard box. “How many would you like?”

“Oh, I guess the case. You have a great product here.”

“We’re very proud of it.” She took my debit card and swiped it then carried the box

out to my car and put it in the trunk. “You drive safe and thank whoever referred you to us.”

She was back inside before I could tell her I just saw their stand and needed to pee. Shrugging, I climbed into the car and drove on down the highway, pleased to have a gift. It was always good manners to bring something to your hosts.

I went back to thinking about what direction my career could take. I loved the idea of something pleasurable being the outcome of my work. For all my not wanting to do pharma or cosmetics, most of the research we did at my current employment was related to product improvement in other industrial applications. We tried to make products less toxic, for the most part.

But why not go into the pleasure fields? Opal’s Extra-Slippery Lube had a nice ring to it. Would you want your lube extra slippery? It would help if I had the slightest clue.

I made one more stop for an iced tea about a half hour from my destination because all my root beer stash would be warm from sitting in the back seat and I was parched. Back in the car, I got a message asking me to come to the brewery instead of the house. They had all needed to go in to work and hoped I wouldn’t mind. Mind? No way! I was tickled to have the chance to see their business and told them I’d be there soon. They gave me the address to plug into my GPS.

Pulling up in back as instructed, I turned off the engine just as the rear door opened and out came three faces I’d recognize anywhere. My heart rate kicked up, palms got moist, and I thought I might faint.

Oh, this was a very bad idea...or the best one ever.

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Shay

Opal was here. Sure, she wasn't in our home yet, but she was here at the brewery, our second home.

"Hi," I said, not at all like I wanted to. I couldn't help it. I was in awe of her beauty. The pictures she had on her profile did her zero justice. Her long blonde hair was golden in the fading sunlight. She stepped out of the car, and the three of us stopped in our tracks.

The wind picked up as it did when day bowed out to the evening and carried her scent toward us. There was nothing like it in the world. I inhaled deeply, taking in the smell of sunshine, spring flowers, and lavender. I'd never thought of sunshine as a scent but there it was, lighting up my life.

"Hi, Shay." Her gaze ticked to the others. Oh yeah, there were other people around. I'd forgotten for a second. "Hi, Zyon and Eero. It's nice to finally meet you in person."

"It's nice to meet you." Eero approached her first. Zyon and I gave a low, rumbling growl, but we both remembered that he wasn't a rival alpha male. He was part of our fury.

Part of her harem.

We would always be animals deep down inside.

I tried again. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Opal. Welcome to the Furious Brewery and Tavern.”

“Ah, the infamous place you three spend all your time. It’s fantastic. Right off the highway. I stopped in another town over to grab an iced tea on the way and I saw some of your brew in the beverage case. I feel like I’m meeting celebrities.”

She was chatty and my bear was eating up every word. I loved it.

“We are no celebrities.”

Gosh, the four of us were a bumbling mess. If someone passed by, they might think we were teenagers blushing and stuttering over a first date. But Opal was no date. She was our mate. One hit of her scent, and I knew.

“Sorry to make you go out of your way.” Zyon finally regained his composure enough to speak. “Come inside. We made a late lunch for all of us. It’s very nice to meet you. I’m Zyon.”

I snorted. Our big, bad, green friend was in no way immune to our mate either.

“Thank you so much. I’m starving.”

My bear roared inside in pleasure and honor. She was hungry and we were prepared to feed our mate. Right here in our place of business. Our den for all intents and purposes.

“Come in, please. We have a table set for you.”

We made a quick introduction to Mabel who was manning the tasting room for the afternoon. The tavern wasn’t open yet, so we would have a peaceful afternoon to get

to know Opal.

“Take a seat. We’ll bring the food out.” Eero pulled the chair out for her while I lit a few candles in the center of the table. We questioned the candles, considering that it was too romantic and also early in the day but decided it was fine. The low lighting in the tavern was conducive to candlelight. We’d done that with a lot of details. Fussed over everything to the point where I questioned my own existence.

We brought the roasted chicken and vegetables out. Zyon had made a garlic-and-cheddar focaccia, and Eero baked a banana upside-down cake. Mabel scoffed at us, saying she was surprised we had cooked.

I wasn’t. We cooked because it was our mate.

Feeding her was part of the deal. A deal I looked forward to wholeheartedly.

“Everything looks and smells incredible,” she said, blushing. How I wanted to reach out and touch her perfect pinked cheeks. “But I was hoping to sample some of your beer as well.”

All three of the males at the table groaned at the same time. Eero went so far as to knock his palm against his forehead. “You have to forgive us, Opal,” he said, getting up. “We have apparently lost our wits since meeting you. I’m going to serve you a bit of everything, if that’s all right. I’d love to see what your favorites are.”

Opal smiled and nodded. Zyon and I filled the plates, and Opal took a piece of focaccia and put it in her mouth. I was glad she wasn’t one of those females who was shy about eating. We were not in the least. “Oh, this is so good. Which chef do I need to thank for the meal?”

“We all cooked something.”

She nodded. “Thank you all, then.”

Eero came back in a short time later with a sampling of all our finest brews. We walked her through each one, explaining the flavors and undertones.

She didn’t choose a favorite, but she seemed to like them all.

I’d dreamed about this. About our female, our mate, coming here where we could enjoy a meal together. When we built the tavern kitchen, we’d dreamed of such a time.

No one was talking. I had to do something. “How was your drive?” I asked.

“Pretty good. I nibbled on snacks because there’s no point in having a road trip without snacks. Oh, and I stopped for drinks a couple of times.”

Zyon watched her. He was an observant one. He picked up on people’s nuances. Eero was the shyest of us but not around Opal. We talked about her work and what a shame it was for someone to pull the rug right out from her. No notice. Nothing. Just take away a person’s work without batting an eye. She wanted to know about how we met and how we decided to become a pack.

While we spoke, the tavern had opened, and the background noise got louder by the second.

“How about you follow us home, and we can get you settled in?” I asked.

“That sounds great. I’m a little tired.”

My bear settled in my chest. Our mate was coming to our den.

Once she was there, her scent permeating everything, there was no way we were ever going to let her go.

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Opal

They offered to drive my car to their home the second I mentioned being tired. “Would you like one of us to drive so you can relax?”

I started to protest, my usual reaction to men taking charge, but then I realized that this was not that. Not pushy, not insisting as if I was a woman who needed to be driven by superior men, just a kindness. And not only was I exhausted, but they knew the way. So, I went with gracious and grateful. “Yes, thank you. I would appreciate that.”

Eero drove while the others rode in a pickup with the Furious logo on the door, and when we got to their home, they carried my bags from the back seat and right up to a nice bedroom with a bouquet of rainbow-hued flowers on the dresser. They showed me around the room a little, opening the door to the attached bath.

“This is it. If you need anything, please let us know,” Shay said before they filed out, leaving me in the peaceful room alone.

That was the last I heard of the three men who had captured my heart with, well, everything about them. They were hardworking. Dedicated. All of them smart. Their house was clean but lived in.

The bedroom they let me stay in was sparse to say the least. There was a dresser, one nightstand, and a king-sized bed. The linens were new, as were the towels folded on a rack in the attached bathroom.

I hoped they didn't go to a lot of trouble for me. Too tired to do more, I changed to a nightie, brushed my teeth, and slid between the crisp, cool sheets. Sleep came quickly, with no dreams I could remember.

The next morning, I woke up early. While I showered and brushed my teeth, I thought about the night before. They were kind and the food fantastic, but maybe I had been rash and thrown myself into their lives too soon. After all, they had been gracious about it, but it had been my idea to come. They might have felt like they couldn't say no.

I got dressed in a pair of jeans and a soft, denim-blue sweater and went downstairs. There was only one way to find out if I'd come here by mistake or not.

Face them.

Before I reached the end of the hallway, I smelled bacon, eggs, and the warm bready scent of biscuits. These men ate well. If this worked out, and I hoped it did, I would eat like a queen for the rest of my life.

I peeked into the kitchen. "Good morning."

All three of them were moving around a nice kitchen. There were butcher block countertops, and the cabinets were painted a mossy green. Shay stood flipping bacon and sausages on the island stovetop.

I pressed my hand against the hallway wall, steadying my melty knees. They were all beyond gorgeous, but in what seemed like their natural element, they called to me. It was more than lust. A point inside my chest was magnetized to all of them.

Eero looked up first, flashing me a toothy grin. When he did that, he looked like his other half, or so I suspected. "Good morning, Opal. How did you sleep?"

Shay and Zyon stopped what they were doing. All eyes were on me. “I slept well. Thank you. Better than I thought I would. Usually I have trouble sleeping in a new place, but I was fine.”

Zyon came over and wrapped his arm around my shoulder. “We’re glad you were comfortable. Hope you’re hungry.”

“I am.”

They were dressed for work like yesterday. Casual. In jeans in varying shades and black polo shirts on with the brewery logo over their hearts. Even dressed for a regular work day, they were droolworthy.

While we ate, they talked about appointments and things that needed to be done. They worked like a perfectly oiled machine, bouncing ideas off each other. They even shared a digital calendar.

Zyon rubbed the back of his neck. “Opal, we were thinking...we hate to leave you alone in our house while we’re gone.”

“Oh”—I waved my hands in front of me—“it’s fine. I’ll find something to do. It sounds like all of you have a packed day. I brought my laptop. I can take care of some emails or something.”

They shared a look. I hoped that one day I knew them well enough to be able to read those wordless conversations. “One of us can stay with you,” Eero offered.

“No, no, no. Then that person is a day behind on work, and it just snowballs from there. Trust me. I’ll be fine. Unless...you’re worried I’ll uncover all your shifter and orc secrets.”

Zyon cracked up. “We have no secrets. But if you want to know more about orcs and shifters, all you have to do is ask, female. We’d tell you anything.”

“So, you three go to work, and I’ll see you tonight. You probably work late though, right? It’s the weekend. I’m sure the tavern is busy.”

Another look between them.

“She’s right,” Shay said, scrubbing his hand down his face. I had to admit, I wasn’t fine with not seeing them very much. I came here to get to know them.

They cleared away the breakfast makings, and Zyon filled the dishwasher and turned it on. It made him three times as sexy. I watched their bodies as they moved around each other like bumper cars that never did crash.

Their smiles had faded, though. Shay’s eyebrows were bunched. Eero’s mouth was downturned.

“I have an idea,” I blurted. Either I was about to make a fool of myself, or they would agree to my proposition.

“Do tell,” Eero said.

“How about I go with you? Someone can maybe give me a tour and I can watch you work? I’ll stay out of the way, I promise.” Time to admit the truth and take a chance on humiliation. “I really don’t want to wait until tonight to see you again.”

The last statement stopped everyone in their tracks.

“We don’t want to wait all day to see you either. Even if we did, we’d be distracted. A beautiful woman waiting for us at home? Trust me. Nothing would get done.” Shay

knew how to flirt.

“I’ll grab my bag. I only got to see the tavern and a glance at the kitchen when we came in and went out last night. I want to see where the magic is made.”

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:00 am

Eero

The brewery never looked so good to me as it did when we gave our mate a tour. We were trying not to call her that until we knew for sure she was going to stay, but what else could we say? Or think? My wolf had her pegged as our mate from the first glimpse of her profile. And Shay's bear? I could hear him grumbling from here, wanting to get her back to his den, no doubt, and get her mated and marked.

Where shifters were much faster than humans to recognize their mates, our animals did it at lightning speed. I wasn't even sure how, but I'd never heard anyone say their animal had made a mistake in recognizing a mate. Oh, it didn't mean said mate was a nice person or would give them a perfect life. People were people no matter what kind. But in our case, Fate had bestowed a golden gift. Even in the few hours we'd spent together, I recognized qualities I'd always dreamed of in a mate.

She was sweet, a little shy, very intelligent, and had a dry sense of humor that caught me off guard more than once. Beautiful? Yes...but that was a bonus. I was old enough to know what was inside mattered far more. Still, I couldn't dismiss what my eyes showed me, nor would I want to.

We rarely allowed anyone into the production area because we didn't want to contaminate anything, but when I sorted through the white coats on the rack, trying to find one for her, I remembered the few distributors and others who had been in. We kept a variety of sizes, just for those occasions, but I couldn't find one small enough. "Sorry, Opal. We require a coat to go in, but you're going to swim in any of these."

She grinned, showing white teeth and a dimple in one cheek that melted my heart.

“That’s all right. I’ve been in a lot of labs over the years and usually had to bring my own coat or have one altered. It’s amazing how often they only stock the larger sizes.” Then she flushed. “I mean...I don’t mean you did anything wrong. You are all big men.”

“Here.” I held up the smallest one we had—a men’s large. “Let me help you put it on. We’ll order one for you in your size.”

“Don’t go to any trouble.” She adjusted the shoulders and shrugged. “You’re doing so much for me already.”

I wanted to squeeze her so hard, to kiss all over her face, and tell her we would do so much more just for the pleasure of her smile, but I didn’t want to freak her out by being so effusive. As a trio, we were already a lot. “Well, then, if you’re ready, this is the production area where we brew our beers and over there in the corner is the lab area, or the closest we have to one.”

She followed as we showed her each tank and barrel and our various processes, but I could see her gaze go over and over toward the area I had identified as the lab. Zyon, who had grown up learning a very traditional method of ale brewing, was explaining the changes we had made to modernize the brewery. And make it so our product was legal to sell in a human-dominated world.

She drifted toward the corner and looked at the high stool and counter where Zyon primarily, but all of us at some time, worked on flavors and other components of our brews. “This”—she patted the stool—“is where the magic happens.”

We looked at one another, puzzled, and back at her. Sure, we worked things out there, but where the hops and malted barley, yeast and water, changed from their individual forms into beer and ale and stout and porter... Nobody came in and asked for a handful of hops. But as she stroked the counter, I caught the yearning in her eyes and

wondered if...had Fate given us even more than we knew?

“I’m glad you like our little lab.” Shay moved closer to her. “It’s not like what you’re used to, but then we’re not chemists like you.”

“No, but from what I tasted last night, you make a damn fine beer. Oh!” She clapped a hand to her cheek. “I forgot. I brought you a present. It’s in the car.”

“I didn’t see anything else in the back seat,” Shay said. “What did we miss?”

“It’s in the trunk, but it can wait until we get home. It’s nothing big, just something I picked up along the road that I hoped you’d like.”

I heard the others suck in a breath at how she said the word home. She probably didn’t mean anything by it, but try to tell my wolf that.

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Opal

Their operation was nice. Super clean, which was important when brewing or fermenting. Anytime you transformed something, you didn't want to let in other elements that could spoil it. And a brewery like this one would be subject to various authorities who would be looking for dirt in a corner, insect infestation, or spills of any kind.

They were very busy in both the production area and the tasting room, so I tried to stay out of their way and observe. Just like breakfast this morning, they worked together in synchrony. In and out of the various areas, answering questions from tavern staff who were arriving to start their shifts.

For a couple of hours, I sat on the stool in their "lab," but when they all disappeared into other parts of the building, I drifted out and found myself in the tasting room.

Mabel, who I'd met the day before, was handling a sale of a keg while Shay sat at a small table with two ladies who were giggling and flirting and doing everything but strip naked and throw themselves over his lap. Heat rose up in my face, and my hands flexed fingers curling into fists. How dare they?

I was starting to shake when I felt a gentle hand on my arm. "Go over there," Mabel said, "before you explode."

"Does this happen often?" All three of them were handsome, even if one was not traditionally so. I happened to find Zyon hot in a different way. Did women throw themselves at him and Eero as well?

“Just about every day. The thing is, they don’t usually even seem to notice.”

“Yeah, well I noticed.” Sucking in a breath, I ground my teeth. “And I’m not having it.”

“Then go.” She gave me a little push. “I hate women who behave like that without the least encouragement.”

“Bitches,” I growled low and marched over to the table. But halfway there, I slowed my steps and my breathing. This was their business, and if I punched their customers every time they got flirty or otherwise bugged me, I was not helping. Instead, I forced my lips to stretch into a bright smile and continued on with a light step. Arriving at Shay’s table, I leaned down and kissed the top of his head. “Hello, dear. I’ll take over here. You’re wanted in production.”

I had less than a clue of what to do, but Shay shot me a grateful look and stood, planting a soft kiss on my lips as he did. “Thanks, honey. The ladies were about to order a case of the spring brew. Mabel will write it up when they are ready.”

His sweet peck stole my breath, but I sucked in enough to say, “Very good. I’ll just hang out while they finish enjoying their samples.”

Shay fled into the back room, but I saw him wink at Mabel who gave him a thumbs-up as he passed her.

“So, where are you from?” I asked the pair. “Is this your first visit to us?”

“He’s your husband?”

I shrugged. “Oh, you know how it is with men. So eager.” I giggled. “But we’ll be married in June. He just wouldn’t take no for an answer. We are still working out

some of the details of the honeymoon.” I tucked my left hand under the table to avoid questions about engagement rings.

“Now, the spring brew is your final choice? I see you have the berry there, too. Very popular this time of year.”

I changed the subject and soon had them talking about themselves, the trip they were on, and they left with three cases of beer, two free T-shirts, and bright smiles on their faces. I returned to the counter where Mabel still stood, having run their cards and had one of the tavern people bring out the order to their car instead of one of the fury.

“Those two will just latch on to anyone,” she muttered, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Do you think it’s okay that I gave them the shirts?” I asked. “I probably should have asked permission.”

“You’re fine. It made them happy and you upsold them from one case to three. I thought you were a scientist who spent all her time in a laboratory shut away from the public.”

“I am. I never even sold Girl Scout cookies. I was too shy.”

“Well, looks like when it matters, you’re not as shy as you think.”

“Yeah...but am I going to have to chase them off every day?”

She shook her head. “Let’s hope not.”

It wasn’t until I went back into the production area and saw the fury working together over a tank that I remembered I didn’t live here. I was visiting, and I had only known them in person a day. What was I thinking?

Shay looked up just then and caught my eye. He said something to the others in a low voice, and they nodded and continued their conversation. What did this mean? He didn't think I was being pushy like those women, did he?

No. He understood I was trying to help.

Right?

Maybe?

I was so in over my head with this whole situation.

But a few moments later, Shay called me over and asked me a question related to basic chemistry, and I was spouting information, relieved to be able to help with something I did understand. Even while standing so close to three males who made me dizzy just being in their presence.

Zyon

We headed for home just after six, much earlier than usual, but we wanted to spend some alone time with Opal. Hard to believe she had just arrived the day before. She fit into the brewery like she was born to it. Mabel told Eero and me what happened in the tasting room, how she'd gone in there and "chased those women off Shay" while also selling them a big order.

Seemed she liked us, or him at least. When we pulled into the driveway, she snapped her fingers. "I don't want to forget your present." She dug in her purse. "It's in my car."

"That's right." I reached for her keys. "I'll get it and bring it in, Opal."

She beamed at me. "Thank you, Zyon. I think it might be a little heavy."

After retrieving the box, I carried it into the house and met everyone in the kitchen. Shay was getting some steaks ready for the grill, Eero was peeling potatoes, and Opal was making a tossed green salad. Just seeing them like this together made me so happy, I wanted to shout my joy to the Goddess in gratitude. And of course Fate.

"Oh, there you are." Opal dried her hands on a dish towel tucked into her waistband and came over to me. "I stopped at this little roadside stand where the nicest lady told me all about her ancestors' recipes. I was so thirsty and sat and had a drink for a little bit then I ended up buying a case of it. It was so good." She opened the box and took out a jar. "See. It's...wait. Why is it clear?"

Shay and Eero joined us, pulling out more jars and holding them up to the light. “What did you think you bought?”

“Root beer that her grandfather used to make. She said they had recipes older than that in the family, too. But it looks like she just sold me water.”

Eero twisted the cap off the quart mason jar and took a sniff. “This isn’t water.” He lifted the jar to his lips and sipped. “Nope. Try it, guys.”

Shay took a gulp and choked. I was more cautious, but a little drink told me all I needed to know. “Opal, how much did she charge you for a full case of root beer moonshine?”

Her jaw dropped and she ran for her purse and rummaged inside. “I don’t know. Her price for the root beer was so reasonable I didn’t ask, just gave her my card. Oh no!” She held up the piece of paper and shook her head. “It was not water prices or root beer prices.”

Eero glanced at it. “No, but fair for moonshine. And it’s very good with that hint of root beer flavor. Thank you for our gift. Have some.”

“Oh no.” Opal backed away, waving her hands. “Hard liquor gets me in trouble every time, and you three are already enough of a temptation stone-cold sober.”

I took that as the compliment she likely intended, but I set the jar down nonetheless. “Good to know. But you’re fine with beer?”

“Or wine, yes. I just need to avoid the hard stuff. That’s so funny. As I think of it now, she seemed to change when I asked about buying a case. And when I left, she mentioned thanking the person who referred me.”

“Ah.” Shay shook his head. “I wondered how you even got her to sell it to you. Moonshiners are careful about avoiding law enforcement. Somehow she got the impression you were sent by another customer. She’ll probably ask every one of them and maybe worry a little.”

“I hope not.” Opal sank into a chair at the table. “She was very nice and sold me what she thought I wanted for what you guys say is a fair price.”

She looked so distressed I didn’t have the heart to tease her. Besides, it was a great gift. Unlike her, we didn’t have to avoid alcohol. Shifters and monsters didn’t get drunk easily and this was a fine drink.

We got back to cooking, and a half hour later were seated at the picnic table on the back patio. It was a little early in the year for a cookout but warm enough nonetheless. Opal seemed to enjoy everything we’d made, and her salad was much nicer than what we usually threw together. As they said on the food channels, her knife cuts were excellent. And she’d gone to the trouble to cut up all the veggies, making it interesting as well.

“What a pretty sunset,” she said. “I usually spend so much time inside I don’t get to see them.”

“We work a lot, too,” Eero commiserated, “but our animals need to be let out from time to time to run. So, thanks to them, we get to be in nature at least a few times a week.”

“That sounds so nice.” She scooped up a final bite of mashed potatoes and pushed her plate away. “Sometime, you’ll have to show me.” Lifting her gaze to all of us, she flushed. “I mean, if you want to. I don’t mean to be pushy.”

“There’s nothing we’d rather do,” Shay said. “Let’s get all this cleaned up and, if you

still want us to, we'll shift and let you meet our animals."

"There's some pie for dessert," I informed them all. "If you want."

"Opal?" Eero asked. "Pie?"

"Instead of meeting a wolf and a bear?" I arched one brow. "If you were me, which would you choose to have first?"

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Opal

They were so calm, moving the dishes to the kitchen and getting them loaded in the dishwasher. There were no leftovers and I suspected that was more often than not the case. This morning, the only things that went back in the fridge were butter and jam. Not even a single biscuit from the mountain on the platter when we began to eat.

The pie was on the counter, and I didn't know where it had come from, but it didn't matter. It would still be there when we came back inside. If that was how it worked. "Are we going back outside, or do you shift in here?"

Eero and Shay blinked at me, looking confused. Zyon just laughed.

"What's so funny?" I didn't think I asked any kind of crazy question.

Shay looked a little flushed to me. "We always shift outside."

"Okay. Any particular reason?"

"No." Eero looked at Shay. "Is there?"

"I think it's because pack mothers don't want their teen wolves or bears tearing up the house," Shay admitted. "Adolescent shifters can be a little rambunctious."

"Hard on the furniture." I giggled. "But no reason now, right?"

"Habit," Eero said, "I suppose."

“Then let’s go outside because I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.” I set a final fork in the dishwasher and closed it. “And because I’m dying to get a look at your fluffy fur.”

“Hey!” Shay followed me out the door. “I’m not fluffy.”

“Well that remains to be seen.” I hardly recognized my own voice, almost as flirty as those two tasting-room bimbos. I sat down at the table and folded my hands on it. “I’m ready.”

Zyon stood behind me, his body warming me even without actually touching. It was getting cooler out here, and I wondered if he did it on purpose.

Shay and Eero took up positions on the grass outside of the patio and before I had a chance to draw a breath, they began to strip off their clothes. I was thrown at first then realized that of course they would. How else could they shift without destroying everything they wore?

The clothing bills would be astronomical.

But those thoughts flew out of my mind when they stood there completely naked and even more incredible looking than they were in clothes. I always joked that I never wanted to go to a nude beach because most people looked better with their clothes on. They proved the exception to the rule. Zyon bent and said, warm breath caressing my ear, “That’s just the first part of the show.”

My gasp left him chuckling.

But then the two began to shift. I don’t know what I thought would happen, but my imagination had fallen short. Their edges blurred then shimmered and during a single blink, they grew fur and changed from hot men to stunning wild animals. Not that

they were doing anything wild. No, rather, they were standing there, barely moving, merely magnificent.

“Go ahead, Opal.” Zyon took my hand and helped me to my feet, my knees too wobbly to do it on my own. “You can touch them.”

“But they are a bear and a wolf,” I breathed. I’d read the fairy tales. I knew what they could do. “Are they going to bite me?”

He chuckled and looped an arm around my waist. “Not in these forms, and never without your permission.”

I didn’t know where to go with that.

But I wanted to touch them so badly I didn’t think I’d survive if I didn’t. “I’m okay.” I stepped forward and reached for Shay’s bear. His long fur was not as soft as I thought it would be, but it was so thick and lush. He stayed very still while I moved my hands over him, learning his shape, feeling the muscles that made up his big form. Stopping in front of him, I met the bear’s gaze and could see the intelligence there. Was it the bear’s or Shay’s or both? I might never know and it didn’t matter especially. They were both in there, and I wanted the bear to understand how much I cared for them. And for the wolf. I petted Eero’s wolf with both hands, while saying, “You re both magnificent. Thank you for allowing me to meet you.”

It felt like a long time but was probably only a few minutes before I stepped back to allow them to resume their other bodies. Naked. Gorgeous bodies.

When they did, they dressed quickly and we all went inside to eat pie. With ice cream. Best day of my life so far.

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Opal

When the last crumb of pie had disappeared into a wolf shifter who informed me shifting always made him hungry, I yawned. “It’s been a wonderful day, but I’m so tired I can barely keep my eyes open. Would you be offended if I went to bed?”

Shay stood up and collected our plates. “Why would we be offended? We’ve all had a long day, and if you want to come to the brewery again, we have to get up early.”

“Of course I want to come.” I started for the doorway, waving the other two back to sit. “You don’t have to come with me. I know the way.” And I wasn’t sure what might happen if they were with me when we got to the bedroom. Every time they were close, I got lightheaded, and I didn’t want to rush something that might be really special if we took our time. They might be shifters, but I was still a human and had a different pace.

I had two weeks off work, time to get to know one another and be sure if we wanted to take things to the next level. As I undressed and prepared for bed, I had to admit that the fury hadn’t exactly made any real moves on me. Either they were letting me take my time, or they weren’t as interested as they might have been.

But they were being so nice, didn’t even taunt me for buying moonshine without knowing what it cost or even what it was. I climbed into bed and pulled the sheets up to my chin and closed my eyes. Tomorrow, I would go with them to the brewery and see what I could do to be helpful. For that, I’d need rest.

Two hours later, I was no closer to sleep, and in fact was feeling lonely. Which made

no sense since I'd been sleeping alone all of my life, but there it was. I hadn't charged my eReader, but I had noticed some interesting-looking volumes on the living room bookshelves. Normally I read for a bit before falling asleep, so maybe that would trick my brain into feeling comfortable enough to let go. I got up and glanced down at my sleepwear. I had brought a few things, but tonight wore a long T-shirt with Bigfoot on the front. Even if one of the guys wasn't asleep, I should feel comfortable enough in this to pass them in the hallway.

I left the bed and headed for the stairs. When I reached the bottom, I saw a light glowing in the kitchen and heard the sound of laughter. Without a second thought, I turned in that direction, drawn to their warmth and the deep voices talking about I didn't even care what, just wanted to be part of things.

"Hi?" I hesitated in the doorway. "Is this a private conversation, or can I join?"

"Of course you're welcome." Shay jumped up and pulled out the empty chair next to his. "We were all having a sip of the moonshine you brought us." He pointed to the shot glasses laid out along the table. "I know you don't drink the stuff, but can I get you something?"

"Maybe just a glass of water?" I sat down and looked at the bottle of moonshine. "Doesn't look like you've had a lot."

"No." Eero held up his half-full glass. "We aren't trying to get drunk here, just enjoying the flavor."

"I'm so glad I accidentally got you a good gift." I accepted the glass of water and wrapped my hand around it.

"Couldn't you sleep?" Zyon asked, studying me with concern. "Did you need another blanket or anything?"

I swallowed hard. “You are all going to think I’m a wimp.”

“No we’re not. Why would we think that?”

“Because I got lonely up there. I’ve never slept with anyone”—even that one night, I didn’t sleep, just lay awake until it was light enough to walk home—“but I want...I want to sleep with all of you. See what I mean about being a wimp? Maybe it’s because I’m in a different place.”

“Have you ever wanted someone to sleep with you when you’ve been on vacation or traveling for work?” Eero asked.

“No.”

“Then maybe it’s because we’re your mates and you’re not happy when we’re not together?”

“But you were all down here having fun without me. Oh, maybe you don’t feel like you’re my mates.”

“Opal,” Zyon said, “you are our mate. We are yours when you are ready for us. If you ever are. We were just down here talking because we are waiting for you.”

“You all really think I’m your mate?” My voice was tiny, but it came from my soul. “With everything that means to you and to me. After knowing me such a short time?”

“Of course. We’ve known that since we first spoke to you. Now, if you’re lonely, do you want us to come up and sleep in the same bed with you?” he asked.

“With no other expectations,” Shay added. “Just being together and holding you.”

My eyes filled with tears, emotions I hadn't acknowledged seeping up from deep inside me. "Is it possible I have been lonely for you my whole life?"

"Let's go upstairs and get some rest." Eero took my hand and brought it to his lips. "Then none of us has to be lonely again."

"That's the best offer I've ever had." They closed in around me and guided me out of the kitchen and toward the stairs. "Just sleeping?"

"Just whatever you want." Shay took my other hand and rubbed the back of it against his cheek. "Whenever you want."

When we got upstairs, they all stripped down to their undershorts and joined me in the big bed. It didn't feel crowded at all, even though they thoroughly filled it. Cozy, warm, and I kissed each of them good night, once then twice, and then couldn't stop myself from touching them. Arms. Shoulders. Chests. Stroking Zygon's soft fur and feeling his tusks. Kissing them all again.

Finally Shay groaned and said, "If we're going to just sleep, we'd better get to it. We're not only human, but we are all male."

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Shay

“What if I don’t want to just sleep?” Opal asked.

We’d held back since she got here, not rushing our mate, letting her figure out for herself if she wanted to be with us, but lying here together while she touched and petted and patted us, kissed us...she definitely was sending a message. One we needed to get clarified before things got out of control. “What are you saying, Opal?”

“That I want everything. I’ve only ever been with one person once, and that was a mistake that I used to avoid anyone else ever since. But I know I want you, all of you.”

“And you want to stay here with us, to make a life together because when we mate you, we want to mark you as well. We want you forever.”

She lay back and held out her arms. “That’s exactly how long I want all of you. I don’t know how it happened so fast, how you made me able to get past the past, but you have. And now I want to hurry into the future and see what it has to offer. I’ve been stuck—or maybe I was just waiting for you.”

Until now, we’d been lying pretty quiet and letting her have the reins, but now that she’d handed them to us, there was no holding back. I kissed her before letting my lips trail down her throat and begin an exploration I planned to spend the rest of my life enjoying. Her skin was satin under my lips, her moans and cries of pleasure the only music I would ever need to hear. I was vaguely aware of the rest of the fury also there, also kissing and caressing our mate, but it was as if I was alone with her at the

same time, just loving on her and doing my best to make her feel how much I cared.

I slid down to the foot of the bed and lifted her legs, parting them and burying my face between them. She cried out, digging her fingers into my scalp and shuddering. Lapping at the pearl, I sought to bring her to her first orgasm of the night, and I didn't have long to wait. No sooner had I inserted one finger in her very tight channel than she shrieked and arched her back, coming in my mouth.

Rising on my knees, I glanced at the others who both nodded before fitting my head into her and driving in deep, but slow. If she hadn't said she'd been with one other person once, I'd have said she was a virgin. And, as far as we were concerned, we all were because only with a mate was it true lovemaking.

I pumped in and pulled almost all the way out, slowly at first then faster and faster, her body seeming to draw me in and try to hold me there, the suction incredible, muscles rippling over my driving cock until I could no longer keep from pouring my cum into her. I held there, bending over her to sink my fangs into the side of her throat. My mouth filled with the taste of copper before I lapped at the wound to close it then eased out and made room for Eero.

Each of us in turn filled her body and marked her throat or shoulder. My wolf friend was fast start to finish, while Zyon and I continued to caress our mate, sucking her breasts and kissing her lips.

When Eero joined me at her side, the orc took his place. He kissed her belly and planted another one on her mound then paused to gaze fondly down at her. Our friend was in love, which worked out since so were both of us. Fate must have been in a very kind mood when she planned this mating. I never wanted to stop touching and caressing Opal. It was going to be a challenge at work to keep the PDA to minimum. Shifters would understand, but we had many humans coming in for our beer, and they could be quite stuffy sometimes.

When she wore all three of our marks and lay with her eyes half closed, we each took one more kiss before managing to find a way to lie so each of us was touching her with at least one hand. If I could figure out how to do it, I'd make sure I never was without that physical connection again. But even without it, I'd always know when she came into a room, always be able to sense her mood and if she needed me for anything. And that was far better than most people could ever expect.

I woke a couple of times during the night to see her with either Eero or Zyon, and a third time just to cuddle with Opal. Our mate and the light of our lives.

Opal

The day after the night of my life, I woke up to bright sunlight streaming into the bedroom. I reached out but found myself alone again. Not fair, boys. Grabbing up my bathrobe, I pulled it over my shoulders and shuffled downstairs, following the scent of bacon and eggs. Breakfast every morning around here, and if nights were going to be like the last one, I'd need the calories.

"Morning." I found all of them already showered and ready to go to the brewery. "Were you going to just leave me here?" It was pathetic, but I felt quite vulnerable today. "Aren't we all going to the brewery?"

"Absolutely, mate." Shay got up and poured me a cup of coffee while Eero filled a plate with bacon, eggs, and fried potatoes. "We were just waiting for you to get up at your leisure. We thought you'd earned some rest."

I sighed and sat on Zyon's lap, resting my head on his shoulder. "I don't think I slept more than an hour all night. I had a bedful of lusty mates keeping me awake."

If I hadn't giggled, they might have felt guilty. But I didn't want them to. I did allow my orc mate to feed me a few bites before finishing myself and rushing off to the shower. I sent my mates off to the brewery to start the day, promising to drive myself over in my own car in just a little while. I made it as quick as possible, missing them the whole time. I couldn't wipe the smile off my face.

But when I walked into the brewery, I saw them all reading a note, and none of them were smiling. "What's wrong?"

Eero held the paper out to me and I read it with both dismay and happiness. Mabel had met her dreamboat on the app and taken off. She didn't know when or if she'd be back. They were all so upset, I said, "I don't have a lot of office experience but I can learn if you want me to help." And that was how I became a full-time employee at the tavern. Rather, an owner because they put me right into the business and after I struggled with the books for a while, they realized that my knowledge and experience suited me for product development.

Every day was wonderful. Especially after we hired a bookkeeper and I was able to work in my new lab and the tasting room all the time. No more flirty ladies hitting on my men. If any tried, I was there in a trice, calling them mate and adding in a little more PDA. It was heaven all day and double heaven at night with a fury like mine.

I was thrilled to be their loving pivot.

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Opal

Zyon and I had worked into the wee hours of the night on a new dark ale that had notes of root beer and ginger all in one. We thought it would go over well with the root-beer-and-ginger beer crowd.

Working no longer felt like work when I was with my three mates.

And also, yummy beer.

There was no one to take our funding away. The harder we worked on recipes, the more customers we got. We had skin in the game, and I loved every single second of it.

“Good morning,” Eero said, wrapping his arms around me while I brushed my teeth.

“Good morning,” I said around a toothbrush. Even though the words were mumbled, he smiled at me over my shoulder.

“You worked late. I missed you.” He turned to place several kisses along the column of my neck.

“I missed you, too, but we had to get that formula right before we took the day off.”

He chuckled. “Working until dawn on the day of your mating ceremony. Tsk, tsk, mate.”

We didn't have to have any kind of ceremony. They were my mates and I was theirs. We didn't need any kind of show for that, but my mates wanted it. They'd invited some of their old packmates and rage mates, but we weren't sure who would show up.

That didn't matter either. We would be there, and Mabel had come back to officiate.

What I was really looking forward to was the week-long vacation we'd booked for our honeymoon—a remote cabin in the woods with lots of snow.

It would be freezing up there, but I had three mates to keep me warm.

People came into the tavern all the time and lately asked if we were going to start a family. We had no plans to. At least, anytime soon. We were fulfilled with each other and our jobs for the time being.

Zyon was eager to have children, but we decided as a fury that we would delay it until I was ready.

When the time came, I would know.

We would know.

My mates went ahead to the tavern where Mabel and our other friends were decorating. I put on my dress, which was not white, not even cream.

It was red.

Not because of any tradition.

But because I looked damned fine in red.

Our bags were packed and I got to the tavern right on time to say forever to my mates.