



Fearless Bond (Bears of Beauville #1)

Author: *Roe Horvat*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Calvin

When my ex kicks me out of the car in the middle of nowhere, I'd rather freeze than wait for him to come back. I hike through the snowy forest, aiming for a tiny mountain town I know nothing about. I'm losing my strength when a guy on a four-wheeler finds me, wraps me in a parka, and brings me to his home. He's huge and scary-looking, but the longer he lets me stay, the more I like him. Under his grumpy facade, Barclay Black is a teddy bear.

Barclay

Bear shifters don't hibernate, but sometimes I wish we could. The upcoming winter has made me cranky. I come off a bit harsh when I find a human stumbling through the forest, because who goes hiking in the snow without proper gear? The poor omega isn't a tourist, though. Calvin needs a place to stay and someone to protect him, and before I can question myself, he has me wrapped around his little finger. I keep telling myself that he's vulnerable and too young for me... until I realize he wants me, too.

Total Pages (Source): 23

1

CALVIN

I only ever got an anxiety attack when there was no actual danger.

Right now, alone in the mountains with the temperature below freezing, I was afraid but not panicking—and that made all the difference. Chances were, I'd make it. I could still breathe, walk, and think, which were privileges I would never take for granted.

Before my phone died, I'd found my location on the map. A small town called Beauville stretched six miles east of where I stood. If I followed the contour line and never went downhill or uphill, I would get there. Eventually. I couldn't walk along the road. Damian would come back for me, spot me, and drag me into his car.

"You're making the biggest mistake of your life, Calvin. Who will date a mentally ill omega, huh? You're going to regret this."

"I'm not changing my mind."

"Who'll take care of you?"

"You haven't been taking care of me, Damian. You've been ordering me around."

"You think you can make it without me? You're nothing without me! Sick in the head, worthless, frigid piece of shit."

I trudged through the forest in the thickening snowfall, doing my best to head in the right direction. Six miles wasn't far as long as I didn't get lost.

My thin jacket and sneakers were useless in this weather. I had to keep moving so I wouldn't get too cold. The wind howled and trees creaked above me, but the forest shielded me from the worst of it. The two inches of fresh snow on the ground were good for one thing—they stopped the night from turning pitch black. But my ankles got wet, and my toes were starting to feel numb. How long would it take for frostbite to cause permanent damage?

Don't think about that. Keep walking.

Head down, I hiked forward, stumbling over rocks and fallen branches that hid in the snow. I fell a couple of times but scrambled up quickly. My hands burned from the thawing snow, so I tucked them into my sleeves. For once, I was grateful that, because of my ridiculous size, I had trouble finding clothes that fit. My long sleeves might save my fingers from falling off.

Six miles. I ran that distance on a treadmill three times a week. I could do this.

Okay, maybe six miles in this terrain would be a different challenge. How far had I gone already? I couldn't see any lights ahead and didn't know what time it was.

I was so fucking tired. And thirsty.

Don't eat the snow.

I didn't remember when or where I'd read that advice, didn't even remember why people weren't supposed to do it, but I knew I shouldn't.

Just keep walking.

My foot got caught in something, and the next second, I was face down in what might have been blueberry bushes. My sneaker slid off my foot. I sat on the ground, wetness seeping through my jeans and underwear, and quickly brushed off my sock before wrangling the shoe back on. I could barely feel my toes anymore.

For a moment, I sat unmoving, my chest heaving. I wanted to curl up and sleep.

That's how you die. Get up.

Get. Up. Calvin!

"Get up!" I said out loud and stood.

That was when I saw it.

A dark silhouette against the snowy forest—big head, round ears, thick middle.

A bear.

It stood on its hind legs, staring right at me.

I stared back. Freezing to death didn't seem so bad compared to being mauled and torn apart.

How tall was the animal? Ten feet? More? It looked like it could swallow me whole and still have some room left for dessert.

I couldn't distinguish its color in the dark, but black bears weren't this big.

A grizzly then.

Just my luck.

And I'd made it this far. It was unfair.

I closed my eyes and blew out what would be my last breath.

This is it.

Except nothing happened. A thump and a few stomps, and then only the wind whooshing.

I squinted into the darkness.

The animal was gone.

"Okay. Okay. I'm not dead yet."

Shuddering, I resumed my hike, trying not to think about what the prickling pain in my legs might mean. The adrenaline from the wildlife encounter could fuel my muscles for a while, so I marched on. My thoughts swirled in a maelstrom of images and fragmented memories. I grabbed one and replayed it in my head. It was a nice memory... or more of a fantasy. It had started the grand change that led me here.

A few days ago, I'd dreamed about being pregnant. My stomach was round and pretty, and I petted it with wonder. I was going to have a baby, but not with Damian. There was someone else; some unknown alpha stood behind me. I didn't know his name, but I felt like I knew him. His warm hands rested on my shoulders, and I was happy.

Then I'd woken up and realized it had only been a dream. I'd started crying. Already dressed for work, Damian had rolled his eyes. He'd been dismissive about what he

called my “episodes,” treating me like a nuisance when I got anxious. Sometimes, I couldn’t help but agree with him. When I couldn’t keep my shit together like normal people, I was a burden, right?

But that day, when he threw the package of my prescription meds on the bed and left without a word, I got angry. I was furious like never before, and it helped better than any pills my father or Damian had ever stuffed down my throat. My tears dried, but my anger stayed with me like a protective shield.

What if the child I’d dreamed about had been Damian’s? I imagined having a family with him, being dependent on his love and kindness. What kindness? Had he ever loved me? I hadn’t told Damian about the dream—he’d have laughed at me. But when I sat in the car with him, about to spend the weekend with him, I couldn’t pretend anymore. I told him that I wasn’t happy and that we were too different.

His reaction confirmed what I’d already known. I was better off without him.

You’re about to freeze to death. Do you still think you’re better off?

I let out a startled, breathless laugh. Yep, I’d rather freeze to death right here than spend the rest of my life dying inside next to Damian Hart.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:09 pm

2

BARCLAY

It was like he'd dropped from the sky.

Since the wind was howling and he'd been coming from the west, I didn't smell or hear him until I saw him. Probably a lost hiker.

And what in the name of the devil was he wearing? Wet and shivering, he wouldn't make it in the forest for much longer. The guy was dressed like he'd been headed for a stroll around a mall. It was a miracle that humans didn't go extinct thousands of years ago with all their inane entitlement.

I'd miss poker night again, but I couldn't let the stupid tourist freeze to death. I got on all fours and ran home. After I'd shifted and put on my gear, I grabbed an extra parka and a helmet for the man. A snowmobile would have been faster, but the snow was fresh and too thin. Besides, I hadn't yet used the thing this season, so it needed some maintenance. I hopped on the four-wheeler.

The snowfall was getting heavier. I circled around where I'd first spotted the human and found his footprints in the snow. He couldn't have gone far. He was headed vaguely in the direction of the town, but I couldn't track him exactly since the four-wheeler couldn't pass through where the trees grew too close to each other. I zigzagged through the forest, catching up with him slower than I'd hoped. Yeah, poker night was shot.

Then I caught his scent. The trace was distorted in the wind, but it was definitely a human omega, and he smelled incredibly good. I couldn't compare the fragrance to anything, but it felt familiar all the same. Like some fruit or flower I'd known as a kid and hadn't smelled since. My mouth watered, and my chest felt warm.

Who was the sweet-smelling fool?

It took a few more minutes, but I found him.

His hair was wet, his jeans soaked, and his thin jacket covered with snow. He was staggering between the trees like a drunk.

I cut the engine.

“Hey! Wait!”

He paused and looked back. His little face was scrunched up with fear and exhaustion.

I waved, climbed off the four-wheeler, and walked toward him on the uneven ground... and he began to run away. What had happened to him that he was more scared of a human alpha than a grizzly bear?

“For fuck's sake, stop! You'll freeze to death.”

Stupid fucking humans. He tumbled into the snow but still tried to crawl away from me. In a few strides, I stood above him.

“Will you just stop it?”

Shivering, he gaped at me as I offered him my hand. His lips were almost white.

“You don’t want to die, do you? Up. C’mon.”

He opened his mouth and closed it, then he took my offered hand and let himself be pulled up. He was barely holding it together. A pang of pity hit me when I met his terrified gaze. I sighed. He couldn’t be more than twenty—a small omega, weak and alone. No wonder he was scared of me.

I tried to soften my tone. “Name’s Barclay Black. I live on the edge of Beauville, that way. I’ll get you to my place and call a doctor, yeah?”

That was when his knees gave out under him.

One more hour and he really could have died out here. Hopefully, he didn’t have any severe frostbite since it was just a few degrees below freezing.

I scooped him up and carried him to the four-wheeler, where I wrapped him in the parka. He reached only to my shoulders. His scent, even weak, was distracting, making me swallow compulsively.

“Here. Take these.” I pulled off my thick gloves and offered them to him, but he didn’t take them.

“Your... h-h-hands will f-f-freeze,” he stammered.

“I got extra, see?” I pulled my thin liners out of my jacket pocket and showed him.

Except I had to help him put the gloves on because he was shaking so much he nearly dropped them.

“What’s your name?”

“Ca-Calvin.”

“Okay, Calvin. Can you hold on to me while we ride?”

He eyed the four-wheeler and looked at me helplessly. His chin trembled.

“You know what...” I lifted him and put him in front of me instead of on the back. He was pocket-sized and light as a feather. I could easily manipulate the handlebars with him between my thighs and arms. Then I grabbed the straps I normally used to tie bags to the saddle and tied him to my chest.

“Not too tight?”

He shook his head. He had stopped trembling, but that wasn’t necessarily good.

“It’ll be five minutes tops.”

I knew this forest like the back of my hand. I drove fast but avoided the biggest bumps so I wouldn’t jostle him too much. By the time I got home, he seemed to be asleep, his head lolling on his shoulders.

That was definitely not a good sign.

I parked in front of my front door and carried him inside, kicking the door shut behind me. The living room was the warmest place in the house. I laid him on the lounge chair by the fireplace, pulled out my phone, and called Hunter. Speaker on, I set the phone on the coffee table. It let out three long ringing tones while I searched for the fluffiest blanket.

Pick up, dammit!

“Barclay? What now? Don’t tell me you’ll be late. Run here in fur with your undies in your muzzle, I don’t care. You promised...”

“No time for that now. You’re on speaker,” I warned before he got even more riled up. “I found a freezing human in the forest and got him home on the four-wheeler. He’s exhausted and cold as hell. What do I do?”

It took my cousin a couple of seconds to reply. “Shivering?”

“Not anymore. He’s pale and sleepy.”

“Get him out of any wet clothes. Remove shoes, socks, and gloves. Everything that’s damp must be off. I’ll be there in ten.”

I set the fleece blanket aside and crouched by Calvin. After removing his jacket, I took his shoes, jeans, and socks off. He looked like he was trying to help but moved slowly and clumsily.

His light-blue boxer briefs had wet patches on them.

“We need to take these off,” I said. “They’re wet from the snow.”

He blinked, confused.

So I covered his middle and hips with the blanket and reached underneath it.

“Not looking,” I said as I grabbed the waistband and dragged them off.

Calvin gawked at me, bleary-eyed and afraid.

“Hunter, you there?” I called in the direction of the phone.

“Yes.” I heard Hunter start his car.

“What next? Rubbing with dry towels?”

“No. Just cover him with a blanket. You have to warm his chest and neck. Don’t try to heat his limbs first. Got any heating pads?”

“No.”

“Barclay, how can you not have basic equipment? You’ve lived here for a decade!”

“I don’t get cold.” And it wasn’t like I got human guests or spent my days prowling the woods for lost omegas.

“Do you have an empty plastic bottle? A large one. Fill it with hot water and wrap it in a towel.”

“Ah. Clever.” I put a pillow under Calvin’s head and ran to the laundry room. I found an empty bottle of detergent and filled it from the tap.

When I got back, Calvin’s eyes were closed.

“Tingles,” he mumbled.

“What?” Hunter said loudly over the sound of his engine.

“Hands and feet,” Calvin murmured. He didn’t open his eyes, and his cheeks were still frighteningly pale.

“Barclay?” Hunter said. “I didn’t hear him. What did he say?”

“He said his hands and feet tingle.”

“Good. He’s warming up. Give him the bottle so it warms his chest.”

I looked at the tiny omega in my lounge chair and at the big bottle of warm water. Then I helped Calvin lie on his side and put the bottle in his lap so he spooned it. He hugged it with a sigh. I adjusted the fleece blanket over him.

“He’s got the bottle, and I wrapped him in a blanket. I’ll start the fire.”

“Give him something to drink. Tepid water with sugar or honey. I’ll be with you in ten minutes. Visibility is shit.”

“I got honey.”

“Is he allergic?”

“Calvin, are you allergic to honey?”

“No, I’m good.”

“Okay, ending the call now,” Hunter said. “I’ll be right with you.”

I found a straw, the proverbial last one, at the bottom of my cutlery drawer. I heated some water in the kettle and dissolved two spoonfuls of honey in it. When I came back into the living room with a mug in my hand, Calvin was asleep.

I shook his shoulder.

“Hey, wake up. You have to drink this. Then I’ll let you sleep.”

“Huh?”

“Drink. It’s just water with honey.”

I put the straw to his lips, and he drank without opening his eyes. He gulped down almost everything.

“I called a doctor. He’s on the way. You’ll be fine.”

He didn’t reply, but his breathing was normal, and it looked like some color was returning to his cheeks. He had a smooth, boyish face, freckles on his nose, and plush lips. He was pretty. Too young for you, you creep.

I let him be and sorted the wood for the fireplace.

By the time Hunter arrived, the fire was roaring, and Calvin was sleeping like a log. My cousin toed off his boots in the hall and rushed toward the living room.

“He’s in there?”

“Yeah. He’s asleep.”

Hunter dropped his messenger bag on the floor by the lounge chair and rooted inside until he found a thermometer. He checked Calvin’s temperature and pulse, then scrutinized his hands and the skin on his feet.

“You got to him in time. He’ll be fine tomorrow. What was he doing in the forest anyway?”

“No idea. I’ll have to ask him when he wakes up. I found him on the eastern side of Red Creek Valley. You know, where the pines grow all bent in the same direction?”

At first, I thought he was a hiker who'd gotten lost, but he was miles away from any trails."

"That part of the forest looks like it's been altered by aliens. Did he tell you anything?"

"Just his name. It's Calvin. He was so drained he seemed barely conscious."

"Well, he's lucky to be alive." Hunter pulled the blanket back up to Calvin's neck and stood. "I guess you're not coming tonight."

I chuckled helplessly. "Not gonna leave him here alone."

"Yeah. Keep an eye on him. If he develops any symptoms like nausea, dizziness, or confusion, call me immediately. Tiredness is to be expected."

"Got it."

"When he wakes up, get some food into him, but slowly. Loads of liquids."

"Okay."

The tiny pale omega under my blanket seemed almost translucent. So little and frail. Yep, he looked like he needed to be fed.

Hunter slapped my shoulder.

"I'm going."

"Sure. Thanks, man."

“Yeah. Yeah. You’ve ruined poker night yet again.” He was already zipping up his jacket.

“Technically, Calvin here ruined the poker night.”

Hunter just shot me a glare.

After I’d said goodbye to my cousin, I sat in my living room and stared at Calvin.

His scent slowly filled the room. It must have weakened when he was all frozen, but now it was gathering strength. I leaned closer and sniffed.

Fuck me.

He smelled like a damned candy store... where they made candy out of omega slick. That was fucking distracting.

His pale lashes were long and feathery, his dirty-blond hair tousled... I should stop staring at him. He wasn’t my type. The guys I usually hooked up with were older and much sturdier. What was I even doing thinking of hooking up? The poor omega could have died.

“What am I going to do with you, huh?”

The sleeping boy exhaled softly, and his eyelids quivered.

I tore myself away from him and went to put his clothes in the washer.

3

CALVIN

I must have died. It was the only explanation.

A glimmering white forest spread out in front of me, sprinkled with rainbow diamonds. A fairytale land. It looked freezing, but I was cozy and warm, cuddled on a soft bed under a fluffy blanket. My eyes watered from the crystalline beauty. I blinked, then refocused. The magical landscape was behind glass.

That makes sense.

The air smelled of fresh wood and something I couldn't identify, a complex scent that made me breathe deeply to get more of it. It warmed me on the inside. I glanced around. Floor-to-ceiling glass walls and pale wooden paneling. A glowing fireplace with a neat pile of birch logs next to it. A cream-colored shag carpet.

A bottle of laundry detergent? It lay on the floor right in front of me. And I wasn't lying on a bed but on some sort of chaise.

Maybe I wasn't dead after all.

I inhaled more of the strange scent. God, it smelled good. What was it? It made me feel all warm and cozy. A pleasant sensation bloomed in my stomach. Closing my eyes, I breathed deeply, savoring the serene moment.

I didn't know where I was. Shouldn't I be more concerned?

Footsteps sounded from somewhere in the house, and I sat up.

Oh.

I had my hoodie on, but I was naked from the waist down underneath the blanket. My heartbeat picked up as I raked my brain for memories from last night.

The frozen ground had been slippery under my sneakers. I'd tried to look for stars to determine direction, but the night had been overcast. It had started snowing. Trees, trees, trees everywhere. Strange, crooked trees, all bent in the same direction as if some invisible force leaned on them.

I'd seen a bear. It had stood on its hind legs, a ten-foot-tall beast. I'd fallen on my butt into the snow, convinced I'd die. But the bear hadn't attacked me. It had simply run off. Then I'd been so damned tired and sleepy. I'd kept telling myself I had to keep going. Just keep going. Keep going. Keep going.

The alpha on the four-wheeler had turned up.

I remembered him .

He had looked terrifying. I'd been more afraid of him than of that damned bear. A hulking figure, four times my size, in chunky boots and an orange ski jacket. But then he'd given me gloves, dry and warm from his big hands. My fingers had prickled in them.

Why was I naked? Did the man do something to me?

Was I sore? Any dry smears of bodily fluids? Bruising?

I peeked under the blanket.

Nothing.

I felt fine.

Then he walked into the room, and I almost fell off the chaise.

“You’re awake.” The alpha’s whiskey voice reverberated through my bones. His dark beard was thick and short, his eyes were a rich brown color, and his eyebrows were bushy with harsh creases between them. A tuft of curly hair peeked out from the V of his flannel shirt. The red-checkered fabric looked like it would rip as it strained to contain his arms and shoulders. He was massive—built like a tank—with bulging pecs, a rounded but firm belly, and thick thighs in faded jeans.

I scrambled backward, clutching the blanket to my body.

He was holding my clothes, with my socks and underwear neatly folded on top of my pants. Eyeing me warily, he sighed.

“I’m not going to hurt you, Calvin,” he said, looking annoyed. “I washed and dried your things. I figured you’d want to get dressed when you woke up.”

He placed the pile on the coffee table and took a step back.

“How are you feeling?”

“Okay,” I managed through the lump in my throat.

Wrinkling his nose as if he smelled something bad, he glanced around the room. Then he glared at me, shuffling backward. Was he angry at me? I expected some

reprimand, an accusation, but instead he said, “Do you eat eggs?”

I was hungry. Still stunned, I nodded.

“The bathroom’s over there, down the hall to the left.” He pointed to a dark hallway behind him. “There are clean towels on the vanity.”

Wow. That was one formidable scowl. I shuddered. And he had a body like those alphas who competed in throwing boulders and pulling trucks up hills—he could snap me between two fingers.

But he’d also brought my clothes, clean and folded, and offered me breakfast. He seemed hesitant to come anywhere near me, which was a good thing.

“Okay, then.” He gave a stiff nod and was about to turn away.

“What’s your name?” I piped up, surprised my voice worked.

He frowned, but his brown eyes flashed with a hint of warmth. “Barclay Black. I told you last night, but I guess you were busy staying alive.”

I let out a startled half-laugh. My memories from yesterday were muddled.

With an awkward nod, he walked out of the room.

I’m alone with a giant, scary alpha mountain man.

I eyed my clothes, then the tidy living room. It was spatial but cozy, with colorful pillows on the sprawling sofa flanked by a couple of comfy-looking armchairs. Bookshelves covered one entire wall all the way to the ceiling. A wooden step stool stood nearby.

The scary mountain man read books. It was irrational, but the presence of books calmed me—as if a guy who read couldn't be a murderous psychopath. I should check what kind of books he had. What if they were all thrillers and gore?

The nice scent I'd noticed earlier intensified, making me feel all warm. I realized I wasn't afraid. Not really. A part of my brain insisted I should be, but the rest of me was calm.

I shook my head at myself and reached for my clothes. First and foremost, I needed to pee. Then I'd deal with the next problem. I slipped into my underwear and went to find the bathroom.

"Sit," the alpha said when I walked into the kitchen fifteen minutes later. He didn't seem happy with my impromptu visit, and I couldn't blame him.

I lowered myself into a chair, and he dumped a mug in front of me.

"You do drink coffee, don't you?"

"I do. Thank you." I shouldn't because it made my anxiety worse, but one cup a day was fine. Besides, strange as it was, I didn't feel anxious at all. My head was clear. Actually, I had felt pretty stable ever since I decided to break up with Damian. Well, aside from almost perishing in the snowfall last night—but that had been an objective crisis, not a meaningless freakout.

The man grunted and turned to the stove, where he was heating a pan. I eyed the black drink. It smelled like it could be used as rocket fuel.

"Um. Do you have milk?"

Without answering, he opened the fridge and placed a carton on the table.

“Thanks.”

“Hmpf” was his reply.

He wasn't the least bit pleased with me, but curiously, Barclay's consistent grumpiness made me relax around him. People had been nice to me before and then turned out to be abusive psychos. At least this guy was honest.

An alpha who didn't want me here was unlikely to take advantage, right?

“I'm sorry to be such an inconvenience. You didn't have to...”

“Sure. Should have left you to freeze to death, huh?” he muttered. “The eggs will be over-easy.”

“That's great. Thanks.”

He cracked a few eggs into the pan and popped four pieces of bread into a toaster.

Over the coffee and food, I could still smell the other scent. Was it him? It was what I'd been smelling all over the house—pine, wood, smoke, only a hint of alpha musk, and something else I had no words for. It was pleasant, distracting, and it made me... Huh. I straightened in my chair, pulling in more of the perfume. Ooh. A little more. Mm-hmm, that was nice .

Barclay smelled lovely. Like a blanket by a fireplace, cuddles, and...

“Next time you go for a hike, wear proper shoes.” He stood with his back to me, poking at the eggs with a spatula. “And charging your phone is considered smart.”

For some reason, his reprimands made me smile. I poured milk into my mug and took

a gulp. Lord, that was strong.

“I wasn’t hiking. I had an argument with my ex, so he kicked me out of the car and left me by the roadside.”

Barclay’s shoulders stiffened. “He did what?”

“I didn’t want him to come back for me. I found Beauville on the map before my phone died and went through the forest.”

He turned slowly, eyeing me up and down. “This ex. Was he violent?”

“Not physically.” I hated the shame that came with my admission. He’d never been violent, so why had I let him have so much power over me? Why had I always been afraid of him? What if it had just been in my head? A few times, I’d wished Damian would hit me. It was stupid, but I imagined that if he had, everyone would know he was the bad guy. Including me.

“He left you in the mountains in a snowstorm,” Barclay said slowly as if making sure he’d heard me correctly. “That’s fucking heinous.”

“I think he was trying to teach me a lesson.”

“What kind of lesson? That he’s a dick and you should stay away from him?”

It wasn’t funny, not in the least, but I laughed anyway. To hear someone else say that, yes, Damian was a jerk, and maybe everything wasn’t my fault... it made me nearly giddy with relief.

I had every reason to be freaking out right now. And still nothing. Heart rate normal, breathing easy—the scent! No headache, no tension in my back and neck, my hands

steady. Had I finally figured out a cure for my anxiety issues? The near-death experience could be difficult to replicate. But staying away from Damian? That seemed to help immensely.

Barclay put a plate with two eggs and toast in front of me. He laid a tray with butter and cheese in the middle of the table and sat down opposite. I watched him spread butter over his toast and lay a thick slice of cheese on top. He didn't seem scary anymore. Just really really big. And hairy. His forearms were covered with fur.

Then my stomach growled, so I focused on my food. Hunger without constant underlying nausea was a welcome novelty. It had been a while since I'd been just plain hungry and felt like I could eat more than a few nibbles at a time. Toast had never tasted this good.

After polishing off his plate, Barclay laid his fork aside. "Do you have someone who could pick you up?"

I wasn't even halfway through my portion. I chewed quickly so I could answer.

"Your parents? Other family?" he pressed.

"I... no."

"No?"

"If I tell my father, he will only send my ex for me. He was very much in favor of my relationship with Damian."

"The asshole endangered your life. That should be enough to convince any reasonable parent that you're better off without him."

How to explain years of family toxicity to a stranger? “My father won’t believe me.”

Barclay straightened in his chair. “That’s fucked up.”

I snickered. Yeah, that explanation would do nicely. “I guess. I have a friend I can call, but he’s on the West Coast now and works late. He usually sleeps until lunch. I should wait a few hours before I call him. Is there a hotel in Beauville?” Not that I had any money on me, but my friend Laure would help me with that.

“There’s a B&B. The guy who runs it is a friend of mine, but I think they’re full this week. A wedding or something.”

“Oh. Um. And someplace else? In a neighboring town perhaps?”

Barclay let out a snort. Did he ever smile? “What neighboring town? It would take me at least two hours to drive you to Green Peaks in this weather. That is, if they don’t close the pass. You’re staying here.”

“I would hate to be a bother.”

“As long as I don’t have to run around the forest looking for your frozen ass, we’re good.”

“I’ll talk to Laure, my friend, and I’ll be out of your hair as soon as possible.”

For some reason, his eyes got sad. “You’ve had it rough. No rush.” He cleared his throat and gestured to my plate. “You done eating?”

“Yes. Thank you so much.”

He collected the plates and growled at me when I offered to help with the cleanup.

An honest-to-goodness, beastly growl as if he were a cranky old dog and I'd tugged on his tail. I sat down and nursed my coffee, trying to purge any tail-tugging thoughts from my mind.

Barclay closed the dishwasher and glanced at me. "I'm going out. Make yourself at home. Have more coffee. You can take a shower or whatever..." He waved his arm awkwardly. "If you steal anything, I'll hunt you down."

Was he joking? I couldn't tell. I let out a weak chuckle. "Okay. I'll try to resist then."

He smiled a little bit. Or... his beard moved. I wasn't sure if it had been a real smile. One last grunt, and he was gone. After some rustling from the hallway, the door clicked shut.

I exhaled. The empty kitchen looked vaguely ominous in the silence, but the scents in Barclay's home calmed me. Was it really him who smelled like this? So nice. He'd been kind to me and respectful—not with his words but with his actions. He'd opened his home to me and hadn't pushed me to reveal more than I had. He just took me at my word, which was something I wasn't used to from the alphas in my life.

Pity he was such a grouch.

4

BARCLAY

Fuck my life .

I had to leave. I had to run the fuck away. I dropped my clothes in the shed, shifted, and sneaked out into the forest. The cute tiny omega smelled like sex on legs. I had to cleanse my lungs and clear my head.

He was more than twenty years my junior—which wouldn't mean all that much in bear years, but still. He was also vulnerable and looked like I'd break him if I breathed on him too hard. I had no business being attracted to the boy. And I wasn't! Sure, he was pretty to look at, like a picture in a magazine, but I liked men with more meat on their bones. It was just his damned scent that messed with my brain. Pulling in gulps of fresh air, I tried to get rid of the rich smell lingering in my airways.

Early in the morning, the snow had stopped falling. The freezing forest glittered in the sun, and snowflakes drifted from high branches in the soft breeze. It was going to be a beautiful day.

The snow stuck to my fur, and I couldn't resist rolling around. A chill seeped through my thick coat, refreshing, and as I shook off, sending chunks of snow flying, my mood brightened.

I barely knew why, but my paws carried me back to Red Creek and to those parts of the forest where I'd found Calvin. He could have died out here. The pristine, glittery

landscape looked innocent. Come evening, the wind would get stronger, and the mountain would turn into a deathly trap again. But by then, somebody would pick Calvin up, and that would be the end of this adventure. I should be looking forward to that. I preferred having my home to myself, but Calvin was so frail and defenseless. If it weren't for the scent, I wouldn't even mind him staying longer. He looked like he needed a break. What if he got back to the city and his ex harassed him again?

Why oh why did I feel responsible for an omega I barely knew?

Staying hidden behind the snow-covered bushes, I ran along the highway until I reached the crossing where the narrow, winding road to Beauville began. Something tickled my instinct. A premonition? I didn't believe in those, but I did trust my bear. Lifting my nose in the air, I sniffed. Gasoline, tires, frozen asphalt, and weak trails of the distinct city stench the vehicles carried with them. And people.

The highway wasn't busy—only a few cars a minute rumbled by. None of them slowed down enough to even notice the frosted wooden sign with the arrow pointing to Beauville. The few tourists who visited our town during the summer were enough of a disturbance, and we didn't want more. The bears of Beauville liked staying inconspicuous.

The hair on my back stood to attention as I kept sniffing, but nothing happened. Huh . Maybe I should go back. I'd take the shorter way through the forest, along the creek, and over the frozen marshes. I wasn't keen to face my guest so soon, but leaving him alone for hours didn't feel right either.

I was about to turn around when a car on the highway slowed down, blinking to the left. I didn't recognize the license plate, and none of the locals would be as stupid as to drive a low, sleek sedan around the mountain. Something told me this wasn't just a tourist.

The bear growled. Danger .

I took off toward town, the shortest way. How would I find out who was in the car that had my senses on the highest alert? I couldn't barge onto the main street in fur in the middle of the day. Granted, many in Beauville were shifters, and those who were human knew about us. That didn't mean they liked it when we prowled the streets with claws out. Strolling around naked wasn't an option either.

The cliff above the old chapel provided a good enough view of the square. I ran up there and watched the town below. The black sedan was parked in front of the grocer. Where was the driver?

I waited, and after a minute, a tall alpha emerged from the grocery store. Long coat, polished shoes, leather gloves, no hat. He was a city man at first sight, and one could sense his entitlement for miles, even though I couldn't distinguish his features at such a distance. He walked past the parked car and toward Jordy's pub. He tried the door and found it locked. Jordy wouldn't open until late in the afternoon. The stranger looked around and continued down the middle of the sidewalk like he owned the street. Next, he walked into the tourist office under the town hall.

I waited.

After a minute, the man exited the town hall building and looked from left to right. Then he crossed the street toward someone on the other side. With the school's overhanging roof in my line of sight, I could only see the legs of the person he was talking to.

Calvin said his abusive ex might come after him. Now, a stranger in an expensive car had appeared in town and begun snooping around. It didn't take a genius to figure this out.

Taking the shortest way home, I crossed the street at the edge of town, just by the carved sign that said Welcome to Beauville . I was about to run past the B&B and straight through the forest—if Monty had out-of-town guests who got spooked by a large bear, tough. I didn't care.

“Hey, Barclay!” Monty stood on the driveway to the B&B, leaning on a shovel. Dressed in a puffy red parka, he blocked the entire road with the sheer bulk of his body. “What the hell are you doing downtown in fur?”

I snorted out a breath, letting him know I wasn't in the mood for his chatter. He stepped aside to let me pass but followed me.

“C'mon, what are you up to?”

Actually, I should talk to him, but not like this.

I threw my head to the side, nodding in the direction of the town square.

“Is this about that black car? Do you know who that is? He drove like a grandpa. I mean, the road wasn't properly plowed yet, but he's not from the mountains, that's for sure.”

Ignoring him, I stomped down the driveway. I'd need to explain later.

Monty sped up by my side. “You're acting weird, Barclay. Shift and talk.”

Sure. I'll just hang around buck-ass naked in the snow and chat with you. That wouldn't be weird at all.

Scrunching up my nose, I glared at him.

“Always such a grump. Loosen up.”

Then the fucker reached out and scratched my ear. I roared at him, teeth bared and spittle flying.

Of course, Monty just laughed. “Man, you’re touchy. People might think you’re an actual grizzly bear.”

With one last growl, I took off past the B&B’s garage and into the forest.

“Nice talking to you!” Monty called after me, chuckling.

I ran back home and shifted in the shed. Then I dragged my clothes on and dialed Hunter. He must have been between patients because he picked up immediately.

“What now?” he barked.

“Hi, Hunter. Um. The omega I found yesterday.”

“How is he?” Hunter’s voice brightened.

“He’s great. He’s fine. Listen. Did you tell anyone about him?”

“No. Why?”

“There’s someone downtown, an alpha from the city. Looks like a posh, entitled jackass. He arrived in a black sedan. I think he might be looking for Calvin.”

My cousin sighed. “What did you get yourself into, Barclay?”

“It has nothing to do with me. But Calvin says his ex was abusive. He kicked him out

of the car yesterday.”

“Who kicked out whom?”

“The ex. Pay attention! Calvin’s ex got angry at Calvin, dropped him by the roadside before the crossing to Beauville, and drove off. That’s why the boy almost froze to death. Now, said ex might be the man sniffing around right outside your office. But Calvin doesn’t want to be found.”

“Well, hell. Wait a second.” I heard a rustling. “I can see the car from my window. It’s parked on the main square, but there’s nobody around.”

“Yeah. I saw the guy by the tourist office and the grocer. He might be waiting until Jordy opens.”

Hunter blew out a breath. “Fuck. Jordy.”

“What?”

“I told Jordy. At the pub yesterday. I told him you weren’t coming to poker night because you’d found a frozen human in the forest and were nursing him back to health. Monty was there too. We might have exchanged a few jokes about you. Sorry.”

“Jordy won’t tell anyone anything, especially not a city slicker with an attitude. And I’ll message Monty to keep his mouth shut as well.”

“The pub was half full. Someone else might have overheard.”

Through the open shed door, I gazed at the pristine, snowy road leading to my house. “I should prepare for a visitor then.”

“Not sure, but it’s possible. Should I call Chickie?”

“Nah. I’ll call the sheriff myself, but I think I need to talk to Calvin first.”

“Okay. I’ll let you know if I overhear something.”

“Thanks.”

I ended the call and shot Monty a short message.

Me: If that guy from the city asks around, you know nothing.

Monty: Who is he? And what do I know I’m not supposed to know?

Me: I’ll explain later.

Monty: You’re no fun.

Well, nobody said I was.

With the phone in my pocket, I walked into the yard and took a few deep breaths. In my human form, my sense of smell was weaker but sensitive enough for me to smell Calvin in my home. Even the faint waft made me hyperaware of my dick, thankfully soft in my pants. For now.

I’d better prepare for the onslaught and keep myself in check. The boy would run for the hills if he knew how he affected me.

CALVIN

Barclay had left right after breakfast, and I was worried about being alone in his home. I kept reminding myself that nobody knew where I was and that Barclay would be back soon. Miraculously, it worked.

The man was most confusing. I needed a break from him anyway.

I stood in the living room, staring at the snowy forest behind the glass wall. I shouldn't have drunk the coffee. My stomach felt strange—not nauseous, just weird. Like a lightness in my core and restlessness in my muscles. Considering what had happened to me, I should be exhausted and ready to take a nap. Instead, I was bursting with energy.

Maybe a shower was a good idea.

His nice scent lingered in the hall. Without thinking, I paused to breathe it in. Yum .

When I stood in the shower, hot water cascading down my body, I could still taste the scent on my tongue. My underbelly tightened. I washed myself as I always did, except when I ran my hand through my crease, tingles spread in my groin. My cock hardened in my soapy hand.

That was awkward.

I could turn the water to cold.

Or...

My entire relationship with Damian had me dry as dust. He blamed my lack of libido on my anxiety issues. Even though I found him attractive in theory, I'd never gotten aroused by his closeness. Maybe it had been my anxiety. Or maybe it had been Damian's horrible personality that I'd seen glimpses of from the start but made myself ignore. For what? To please my father?

Not even being alone in a stranger's home made me as distressed as the prospect of spending a "romantic" weekend with Damian.

I'd gotten away from him, and now my libido was back.

The wave of arousal was overwhelming and invigorating. What had Damian said? Sick in the head, worthless, frigid piece of shit.

Well, fuck you, Damian, and your plastic gym body.

There wasn't anything wrong with me or my sex drive. It was him who'd been wrong for me.

But I should stop thinking about him if I wanted to get myself off. The memory of Damian's long, slim erection nearing my face had me cringing. He always used heavily perfumed aftershave and shower gel...

Do not think about him!

The water warmed my shoulders and back, pouring over my ass. I spread my legs wider and let the warmth flow through my crease. Tightening my grip on my cock, I

closed my eyes. I needed something to purge Damian from my head.

The only other alpha that came to mind was... Barclay.

My brain conjured the image of the scary mountain man with his immense torso and huge hands. Long fingers.

How would it feel to be touched by a man like that?

Older, mature, gruff, and just a tad animalistic. The scent. I could bury my face between his bulging pecs and breathe it in while he fingered my ass.

Thick, strong fingers. He'd reach my sweet spot easily and stretch me.

How big was his cock?

If it was in proportion with the rest of him, I'd never get it in. I imagined it was thick and veiny, rearing from a dark nest of pubic hair, a bead of precum at the slit, big heavy balls hanging low... He could rub his big dick between my ass cheeks.

"You're so tiny, omega. We'll do it like this, hm? I don't want to hurt you."

"Stretch me out."

"Yeah? Should I work you open? Just the tip. I'll come inside you."

"Stretch me out. Uh-huh. Please."

I slapped the water shut and pushed two fingers into my hole. I groaned with a happy realization. I was so wet .

Damian had always used lube with me. It chafed anyway.

Now? I was cramming three fingers up my slippery butt and moaning like a shameless slut. And all the while, I was smiling.

Hello, masturbation. I missed you so much.

The Barclay from my fantasy was stroking his huge dick, telling me he'd go slow. That he'd fuck me shallowly and carefully until I learned to take him whole.

“Get on your knees. I'll teach you how to take a real alpha cock.”

And I came.

The orgasm took me by surprise. No buildup, no almost there, please, please, oh please, almost ... It just washed over me and hugged me from head to toe.

Fuck, that was nice.

I fluttered my fingers to prolong my pleasure. So very very nice.

Screw you, Damian.

I'm not frigid. My libido isn't dead. I just needed to get away from you, you nasty piece of rat turd.

My cock was still hard. I let out a long, satisfied groan as I slowly pulled my fingers out and stroked my twitching cock up and down.

The main door slammed, and I jumped.

Shit .

Did Barclay hear me?

Hopefully not.

I rinsed the bodily fluids off and dried myself. My good mood persisted.

When I met a scowling Barclay in the hallway, I smiled at him, and he grunted in response. He really was just a big grumpy teddy bear, wasn't he?

“Hi! Thanks for letting me use the shower.”

“Um. Sure.” He sniffed and wiped a hand down his face. “Listen. We'd better sit down.”

“Oh?”

I followed him to the living room.

“Is something the matter? I mean, aside from me nearly freezing to death and occupying your home.”

The corner of his mouth lifted in an almost smile. “Aside from that.”

I sat on the chaise I'd slept on, and he sank onto the sofa. The sturdy piece of furniture groaned under his weight.

“There's a guy nosing around Beauville. I'm not sure who he is, but it occurred to me he might be looking for you.”

A chill ran down my spine. I knew this would happen. Of course Damian was looking for me. The giddy feeling from just a minute ago evaporated, and my chest constricted. I was about to freak out in three, two, one...

“He’s got a black sedan and a long dark coat. Expensive clothes. Bleach-blond hair sleeked back. Rings any bell?”

“That’s Damian.” I focused on my breathing. Slow. Slow. I stared at Barclay’s chest as it rose and fell, trying to match the rhythm. I wasn’t going back, no way.

But Damian would find me here, drag me to the car, and drive me home to my father.

“Hey, Calvin. Look at me.”

I’m not going back. I’m not going back. No way. No!

“Calvin!”

My eyes flew open. Barclay crouched on the carpet in front of me, gazing into my eyes.

“You forgot to breathe.”

His shoulders lifted, and I inhaled with him. A powerful waft of his scent permeated my lungs, and his warm hands rubbed my shoulders.

“He doesn’t know you’re here, and even if he finds out, he will have to get through me first.”

Big brown eyes, warm but intense. Bushy eyebrows frowning. He had long black lashes and specks of gold in his irises.

Barclay had beautiful eyes, and they were staring right into my head.

“That’s it. Breathe.”

I liked his voice too. The rumble felt almost like a touch.

Another calming breath. And another. My heartbeat was slowing down already. The nausea disappeared as fast as it had come.

I was getting better, wasn’t I? Normally, it would take me hours to recover from one of my freakouts, yet my head was clearing up already. How was that possible?

Damian was in town, but he didn’t know about me staying here. Barclay said he’d help me, and I knew he would.

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

His brown eyes flashed with gold. “Why the fuck are you apologizing, huh?”

I snorted at his outraged tone. “Force of habit?”

Barclay shook his head. He dropped his arms, and I missed his touch. My shoulders felt chilly without his big paws on them.

“He doesn’t know I’m here?”

“No. But he’s asking around town, so we have to be careful.”

“Okay.”

Tilting his head to the side, Barclay observed me with unnerving intensity. Like a

doctor checking a patient. Then he narrowed his beautiful eyes. “That Damian. He’s a nasty fucker, isn’t he?”

I couldn’t help it, I laughed. It sounded broken. “I should call Laure.”

“Your friend? The one who can help?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Should I give you some privacy?”

He wasn’t leaving again, was he? “But… don’t go far.”

“I’ll be in the kitchen.” He gave me the tiniest smile and a nod.

“Thank you.”

“Yeah.”

Barclay stood and walked away. I stared after him, dazed. Did that just happen? All I had to do was inhale his scent and look into his eyes, and all my symptoms vanished with a poof. Was he some kind of hypnotist? A wizard?

But I couldn’t think about that now. I would only start questioning myself and head back into panic mode. I had to get hold of Laure.

First, I deleted twenty-seven missed calls from my father. Miraculously, my fingers were steady. Then I messaged him.

Me: I’m well. Damian is looking for me, but I don’t want to see him. The relationship is over.

Father: Call me now.

Me: I need time for myself. I'm safe, but I won't be picking up any calls.

Father: I'm blocking your cards unless you call me immediately.

Me: Then block them.

I'd left my wallet in the car anyway. My stomach protested, but I was determined now. I was not going back. I wouldn't repeat the same mistakes.

I quickly went into my settings and blocked both Damian and my father from contacting me.

Then I called Laure.

It took a few tries, but with my friend, one just had to keep calling. After a few minutes, he called me back.

"Hi, Laure."

"Calvin! What's the emergency?" Laure's world-famous bright voice chimed into the phone.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to make you worry. I just needed to get hold of you."

"Hey, I get it. It's me who's lousy at staying in touch."

"You're busy."

"Not now, I'm not. Where are you? What's up?"

“I’m in the mountains, a place called Beauville.”

“Yeah? Did Damian finally take you on a decent vacay?”

“No. I’m by myself.”

Laure’s tone dropped. “What’s going on?”

“I broke up with him.”

“Hallelujah!” His loud cry made me pull my phone away from my head. “I need a fist to bump. Wow. Sorry. Erm. Are you... okay?”

I was still tense from the exchange with my father, but Laure’s outburst made me grin. “I am now. I made the mistake of telling him in the car. He got livid. He stopped in the middle of nowhere and told me to get out. So I did. It was dark and snowing, but I didn’t want to stay on the highway because then he’d just come back for me. I found a town on the map on my phone and hiked through the forest. A local guy on a four-wheeler spotted me, and I’m at his place now.”

No need for Laure to know about me almost freezing to death. He’d have a fit.

“Rewind for a bit. Did Damian leave you alone by the roadside in the mountains? At night? While it was snowing?”

Oops. He might have a fit anyway.

“I’m pretty sure he made a U-turn after a few minutes and went back for me, assuming I’d be properly humbled.”

“But he didn’t find you.”

“Nope.”

“Damn. I didn’t expect that. I mean, from him, I expect just about any shitty thing imaginable, but I didn’t think you’d leave.”

“I’m sorry I never listened to you. You had been trying to warn me for weeks. You were right all along.”

“I get it, Cal. It didn’t help that your dad was singing his praises. But yay! I’m so happy you broke up with him. I’m proud of you, man!”

“Damian is a manipulative, egotistical piece of trash.” That felt nice saying out loud.

Laure let out a surprised chuckle. “Yeah, he is. Go, Calvin.”

“Thanks for not giving up on me.”

“Never, Cal. Love you like a brother. Anyway. I’ll send someone to pick you up and give you a ride to the city.”

I braced myself. The next part would be difficult to explain. “I can’t go home now. Father will be on Damian’s side, and if I tell him I’m never marrying Damian, he’ll claim it’s just my anxiety talking. But I’m okay. Never been better. Only the thought of going back to the city and facing them... I can’t, Laure. I’ll break down, and they’ll send me to a psych ward. I can’t go back.”

“Then you’ll stay at my place.”

“Damian will look for me there.”

“Let him try. My security will call the police on him if he trespasses.”

It was crystal clear in my head, but how to explain it to my friend? “Laure, listen, I can’t go back to the city. Ever since I decided to break up with Damian, I’ve been feeling better and better. It’ll all fall apart if I go back. I can’t. I need a break and time to put myself together before I can face any of them.”

Laure was quiet for a moment, then he hummed thoughtfully. “How about I come and get you?”

“You’re on tour!”

“I have a gig tomorrow and one more two days after that, then ten days off. Today, I’ll send someone to keep an eye on you. A bodyguard. On Sunday, I’ll come and get you. We’ll figure it out, okay? Is there a hotel in town where you can wait for me?”

“You don’t have to send anyone. I’m safe here.” I hoped Barclay would let me stay for a few days.

“With a stranger? How is that safer than a hotel?”

“Look, under normal circumstances, I would be hyperventilating right now. And I’m not. I’m not entirely sure why, but I feel fine around Barclay.”

“You’re not making much sense, Cal.”

“I’m a nervous wreck on the best day, right? Well, not around him. He’s safe. I can feel it. He looks scary, but he’s nice. Besides, he could have hurt me ten times over already if he wanted to.”

“Do you have your meds?”

“No.”

“Cal...”

“I feel fine. I really do. As long as I stay here, I’m safe. But just the thought of leaving here and going back to the city makes me nauseous.”

Laure sighed. “I’m sending a bodyguard.”

“Don’t. I’ll wait for you here. It’s just a few days.”

“Can I talk to the dude?”

I glanced in the direction of the kitchen. I did find grumpy Barclay extraordinarily safe, but I couldn’t see him sounding reassuring to Laure. “That would be weird.”

“If you don’t let me talk to him, I’m sending a rescue party. Your choice.”

Shit .

“I’ll call you back.”

“You have ten minutes.”

I sighed and shuffled to the kitchen. Barclay was heating something in a pot on the stove. For the umpteenth time, it hit me how huge he was. The roomy kitchen looked like a doll house around him.

He glanced up when I entered. “How did it go?”

“My friend, Laurel, he’s worried about me. He’ll pick me up in three or four days because he can’t come earlier.”

Barclay frowned. "You can stay here until he comes. It's not like I don't have enough space."

"Thank you. I was hoping I could stay with you. Laure wants to send his people to keep an eye on me."

"Why? If your ex appears, the entire town has my back. Tell your friend not to send anyone."

"Um. He doesn't... He doesn't trust my judgment."

Barclay raised his eyebrows as he wiped his hands on a kitchen towel.

"That's not nice of him," he stated, his expression stony. He folded his beefy arms across his chest, and his pecs bulged. He was a freaking beast. Um. I shouldn't stare at him like this.

I needed to explain. Hopefully, Barclay wouldn't think I was crazy.

"Laure means well. See, I have these attacks, and they can get really bad. Like a while ago? They start like that, like I can't breathe. But they can get worse. Much worse. Sometimes... often... I need help. Medication, calming exercises, someone to look after me. Laure makes me feel safe, but he's busy. He has concerts and travels a lot..."

"You mean Laurel... Riley? The Laurel Riley?" Barclay whistled.

"Yes, but that's beside the point. He worries about me. He says he wants to talk to you, or he'll send a rescue party to come get me."

"And you don't want that to happen."

“Too many people. Strangers. I’d rather wait here with you if that’s okay. I feel calm here. I haven’t been anxious at all, not until you said you saw Damian in town. And even then, I calmed down quickly...” God, I was inviting myself into this man’s home. But he’d already said I could stay. “I can pay you.”

Barclay snorted at the mention of money, then jerked his chin to the phone in my hand. “Call Mr. Riley, and I’ll talk to him.”

“Thank you.”

He watched as I fumbled with my phone until I found Laure in my recent contacts. This time, he picked up immediately.

“Yeah?”

“Laure, Barclay says you can talk to him.”

“Good. Give him to me.”

I handed the phone to Barclay who put it to his ear.

“Hello, Mr. Riley. Great pleasure. Uh-huh.” And he winked at me. I was stunned by that little wink. As if dark stormy clouds broke apart for a second and a ray of sunlight made it through. Then Barclay frowned again and began pacing. “I’m aware. Calvin explained it to me.” A pause. “He can stay in my guest room. If he goes to a hotel or the B&B in town, they can find him... Yes. Exactly... I understand. I do. I would be worried as well... No. Not at all... You have people working for you, right? Security and PR, assistants, and all that circus. How about I send you a copy of my ID, and you have someone run a background check?” I stared at Barclay with my mouth gaping. He would do that for me? “I understand. Yes. I’ll do that. Thank you, Mr. Riley. Have a nice day.”

Then he handed the phone back to me.

“You don’t have to do a background check on Barclay,” I told Laure. Barclay just shrugged and turned back to the stove.

“But since he so kindly offered, I will,” Laure said. “Watch out for red flags, okay? I won’t always be able to pick up my phone, but I’ll send you the number of my chief of security. He’ll answer anytime, okay? Day or night.”

“Thank you, Laure.”

“I’ll see you in three days.”

“See you.”

I ended the call. Barclay stirred something in the pot and turned the burner off. Then he gave me a look so morose it almost made me laugh.

“You’re not a vegetarian or something, are you?”

“I eat everything. I’m mildly allergic to strawberries, but that’s it.”

He nodded to himself and gestured to the kitchen table. “Sit.”

The grumpy teddy bear was back, but I was starting to like him.

6

BARCLAY

“I don’t think I can eat more.”

I glanced at Calvin’s plate. He’d only had one small portion of soup and a piece of toast. With his five-foot-nothing frame and skinny shoulders, he looked like a gust of wind could blow him away.

“You should.”

He smiled sheepishly. “Sorry. It’s really good. It’s just that my stomach feels a little weird.”

“Stress?”

“No. Not that. I’m good.”

He needed to eat more. A tiny, frail thing like him could bear more meat on his bones. But why did I care? He wasn’t my problem. At least, after a few days, he wouldn’t be anymore.

“So. Um. You live here alone?” he asked, fiddling with his sleeve.

“Yeah.”

“And... you’re from Beauville?”

“Moved here from the city ten years ago.”

I stood and picked up the plates. A part of me wanted to get away from him again. He smelled so damned good I was having trouble controlling myself around him. I could pop a boner any moment. It made me feel like a perv. He wasn’t even my type!

He had freckles on his nose, pale ones, barely noticeable. His full upper lip was out of balance, one corner of his mouth in a small smirk all the time. It looked so sexy and mature on his boyish face; it was doing my head in. Maybe he was my type a little bit. His lips were gorgeous.

I should get the hell away so I wouldn’t do something inappropriate. But I couldn’t leave him alone. The bear in me wanted to hover.

He’s small and weak and in danger. I need to protect him.

Which was legit.

No, I didn’t want to leave. I realized I’d been quiet for a long time, holding a stack of dirty dishes in my hands, while Calvin observed me with an amused expression. I cleared my throat and asked him the first thing that popped into my head.

“How do you even know Laurel Riley?”

Calvin shrugged. “We went to high school together. I was younger, and Laure took me under his wing when some assholes from his year ganged up on me at the cafeteria. He was my hero since day one. My father wasn’t happy about the friendship because the Rileys were only middle class, but since he barely had time to speak two words to me most days, I got away with it. He traveled for business a lot,

and our majordomo liked Laure, so Laure and I spent the summers by our pool or gaming in my room.”

“You had a majordomo growing up?”

“Filippo still works for us. He’s only sixty.”

How rich was Calvin’s family? I stacked the dishes into the dishwasher, my mind reeling.

“Then Laure dropped out of college during freshman year to pursue his music career,” Calvin continued, “and Father threatened to block my cards if I kept seeing him. He does that a lot. Money is his main motivator, so he believes it’s like that for everyone. When Laure became world-famous a few months later, Father deemed him a valuable connection again.”

“You’re still in college?”

“Finished a few months ago. Got my degree and everything.”

“Yeah? That’s impressive. It couldn’t have been easy with your anxiety thing.”

Calvin gave me a self-deprecating smile. “Studying is the one thing that calms me down. I enjoyed college. For once, I had real challenges to deal with, and I could feel good about accomplishing something. Heh, I sound like a total nerd, don’t I?”

Or like one hell of a tough little guy. “What’s your degree in?”

“Early childhood education. I love small kids. Love their directness, creativity, the innocent honesty... And you can make so much difference before they start school.” He shrugged. “I wanted to be a daycare teacher.”

“Why the past tense? You have the credentials, so why not do it?”

“My father paid for my education because he found childcare an appropriate line of study for an omega soon to be married. But he didn’t want me to work. Especially not in something so... pedestrian.” He looked down at his hands. Was he ashamed? How was his father being a major douchebag Calvin’s fault? “I was supposed to become a stay-at-home dad and a docile house-husband for someone like Damian.”

I started the program on the dishwasher, punching the button harder than necessary. “This Damian. Who is he?”

“He studies corporate law as a postgrad, has a trust fund and parents in business and politics. His older brother is a renowned plastic surgeon. Damian owns a two-story apartment in the city, a yacht, and a summer residence on the beach. If Father could pull off a two-hundred-guest wedding that fast, he’d marry me off to Damian tomorrow. He has a corner office at the company headquarters waiting for his perfect future son-in-law.”

The bitter tone in Calvin’s voice made me sad. “Right. Precious Damian sounds like a real catch.”

“He’s arrogant, controlling, and selfish. I’m ashamed it took me so long to break up with him.”

“He probably didn’t behave like that when he was trying to get your attention.” I knew that type from my stint at the bank in the city.

“No. It was all flowers, dinners, and Sundays on the yacht. He held my hand, gazing at me dotingly as I babbled about my child psychology courses. He kept telling me what an amazing teacher and parent I’d be one day. But as soon as he thought I was a sure thing, he stopped pretending. I should have seen it from the start. They say you

should judge a man by how he treats the people he doesn't care about. He'd always been horrible to the staff. Filippo hated him."

Calvin played with his coffee mug, watching the liquid swirl around. He looked small and defeated.

"What will you do when you get back?"

He sighed, and as he exhaled, he managed to look even smaller. My heart ached at the sight. "Stand my ground, I guess. I'm scared, but Laure will help me. And I need a therapist. Someone outside of my father's contact network. I don't want to take the meds anymore. They make me exhausted."

Oh boy . This was getting better and better. "What meds?"

"When I turned eighteen, my father got someone to prescribe medication for me. The attacks didn't disappear, so they increased the dose. I barely remember some days. Time moved like syrup. I don't want to take the pills anymore."

"Is there other stuff that helps?"

Smirking, Calvin stared into his mug. "Being away from my father and Damian and being in mortal danger. I wasn't anxious when I was staggering through a freezing forest. Just plain scared."

"And now?"

He looked up. His soft smile hit me right in the solar plexus. Lord, those lips were pretty. "I'm great. Thank you for letting me stay. It's like I can breathe freely for the first time in years."

“Um. Sure. No problem.” I felt my cheeks heat. It seemed I’d regressed to a fumbling teen. “The mountain air is good. Helps with all kinds of stuff. Yeah. So...”

The sound of a truck outside saved me from Calvin’s scrutiny.

He startled, spilling a few drops of coffee on the table. “What’s that?”

“It’s just a delivery. My wood.”

“Your... wood?”

“Yeah. Stay put. I’ll help them unload and be back in a minute.”

In the hall, I hopped into my boots and rushed outside.

CALVIN

His wood ?

The front door banged, and voices sounded outside. I crept to the kitchen window and peeked into the snow-covered yard. A large truck stood parked outside, its tires equipped with snow chains. The short, round driver was dressed in a thick winter coat and a furry hat. Barclay walked up casually, wearing only his faded T-shirt with a checkered flannel over it, and reached out to shake the man's hand. Wasn't he cold? Together, they opened the back of the truck.

The other guy lit a cigarette and pulled out his phone while Barclay began unloading the contents and carrying them into a large barn-like building adjacent to the chalet.

It was indeed wood—large chunks of it in various shapes. There were trunks with and without bark, stumps with roots sticking out, thick planks with holes in them, and crooked branches. Some were cracked or otherwise damaged. And Barclay carried all of it in his bare arms. How he could even lift some of those pieces was beyond me. That man had the strength of a demigod.

The muscles on his arms... oh Lord. He barely broke a sweat. When he heaved a long, bark-covered log onto his shoulder, a whimper escaped me. I stared at his broad back, then at his round jean-clad ass.

I swallowed hard. My stomach was in flutters, and my underwear felt damp.

This was... unprecedented.

Had I just gotten aroused watching a man unload a truck?

Snickering, I covered my mouth with my hand. The nigger of embarrassment wasn't enough to make me look away. I enjoyed the show until the end, when Barclay pushed the heavy doors to the barn closed, his boots digging into the snow.

I'd never seen anything more alpha in my life. I was hard and wet.

When Barclay came up to say goodbye to the driver, I spun around and rushed to the bathroom to splash cold water on my face.

Inappropriate erection under control, I returned to the kitchen.

Barclay was washing his hands in the sink... huge, strong, capable hands with thick, long fingers...

Oh my.

What was wrong with me?

"Sorry about that. I forgot the delivery was supposed to come today."

"You're going to chop that up for firewood?" I said hopefully. Visuals of Barclay chopping wood, shirtless, flooded my head. Based on what peeked out from under the T-shirt, he had plenty of dark chest hair. Those big pecs covered with soft fur must feel like heaven to cozy up to.

"What? No!" His outraged tone made me look up. Did he catch me drooling over his body? He was frowning at me.

Except now I found even his scowling hot.

Suddenly I found everything about him hot.

What the hell was happening?

Who was this new me?

“What? No?” I echoed.

“Those are prime oak pieces. I’ll check the humidity and put them to dry. Some might be good for the shop already.”

“The shop?”

“My woodshop.”

“I’m sorry. I’m not following.”

Barclay wiped his hands on a kitchen towel and threw it over his shoulder. “I have a woodworking shop.” He jabbed a thumb in the direction of the large barn outside.

“Like for furniture and stuff?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you make furniture from that? It looked damaged.”

“Of course you can.” He gestured to the kitchen table. I hadn’t paid much attention to it before, but now I looked properly. The thick top was puzzled together from five irregular pieces of wood with varying colors and textures. It looked costly, like

something from an interior design store my father wouldn't sneer at.

"You made that?"

"Most of the furniture in here is my own work."

I glanced around with new interest. "Even the chairs?"

"Sure. The cabinet doors were here when I bought the place, just like the built-in wardrobes in the hall and in my bedroom. The rest is mine."

I ran a hand over the back of a chair. The wood had a beautiful structure with reddish circles and dark, sealed cracks. The polished surface felt like satin against my hand.

"That's incredible. It must have taken hundreds of hours."

Barclay shrugged. "Been doing it for years. I use scrap wood, trees that were killed by storms and lightning or charred in forest fires, and whatever local folks give me."

"Do you make a living from it?"

He offered me a smirk. "I don't have a pool or a majordomo, but I do okay."

"I guess you have no use for a pool up here anyway." I pointed at the window. It was snowing again. "But a hot tub would be nice."

"I'll keep that in mind next time I sell a big piece to one of the hotels in Green Peaks."

He was smiling at me, appearing not nearly as grumpy as he had before. His brown eyes twinkled with golden light. The silence stretched, and I didn't know what to say.

Every question in my head felt either too personal or sexually inappropriate.

“Anyway,” Barclay began, rocking on his heels. I waited for him to continue talking, but he didn’t.

“I’ve been keeping you from work,” I finally said, proud I’d found a neutral sentence.

“Oh. That’s fine.”

“I can...” I gestured to the guest bedroom awkwardly.

“Um. I’ll be in the shed.” He waved around. “Just... do whatever you want to do. Like at home. I don’t have a TV, but there are books and stuff. Or... no stuff. Just books. Yeah.” He grimaced, then spun around and stomped off.

“Thanks!” I called after him.

I did look at the books. Not because I was keen to read—I doubted I could focus—but I was nosy. While Barclay worked in the shed, I went through his library and inspected every piece of furniture in his home except in his bedroom. I didn’t dare to snoop around in there. The scent near that door had my stomach fluttering.

Barclay returned to heat up a defrosted casserole for dinner, ate mostly in silence, and returned to his shed. It felt like he was avoiding me. But I was probably just taking personally something that had nothing to do with me. He had an actual job, and I’d been monopolizing his time. I tried to focus on reading, but I got caught up in thoughts of Barclay reading the same book. I imagined what he’d say if I asked him about it. Except he didn’t come back. Through the kitchen window, I saw the light coming from his shop.

At eleven, I gave up waiting for him. I lay in bed, head full of images of Barclay in

various stages of undress carrying large chunks of wood. I really wanted to see him without a shirt.

The door clicked, and the sound of his steps passed by my door as he walked down the hall. He entered the bathroom, and the soft hum of the shower breached the silence. He was naked two doors away from me.

Hell, I wanted to see his cock. He must be big everywhere.

My balls throbbed, and my hole relaxed. I ended up shoving my hand down my pajama bottoms. My orgasm crested fast, short and unsatisfying. With two fingers up my hole, I tried to wring more pleasure out, but I felt empty and tired. I stroked my outer ring, smearing slick around. I should go wash up.

I must have fallen asleep before I managed to do that. When I woke up, it was still dark, and the fingers on my right hand were coated with dry slick. Parched, I sat up and fumbled to find a light switch. The lamp blinded me for a second before my eyes adjusted. The water glass I'd left on the nightstand was half empty. I chugged the contents and set it back. Why was I sweating so much? It wasn't that hot in here, was it? I stretched my arms above my head and yawned. Was I getting sick? But I didn't have a sore throat, not even a headache. There was just this restlessness and a dull ache around my middle.

I rolled to the side, about to stand up, and froze. Warm liquid smeared between my ass cheeks. Loads of slick. It felt oily, thicker than ever. Without thinking, I reached back into my crease. My hole was open, the ring twitching at the touch. The sensation was electric. Shuddering, I moaned, and more slippery fluid poured onto my fingers.

What the hell? I needed a shower.

I scrambled up and braced myself on the wall. My knees shook under me, and all the

slick trickled down my thighs.

Sweet, merciful heaven, was I going into heat? That wasn't possible. I had four months left!

Stumbling toward the door, I managed to open it.

The smell. It was thicker out here. Like a puppet on a string, I went after it.

It was Barclay. The big, grumpy alpha with muscles like boulders and the most enticing scent in the world.

I had to find Barclay.

BARCLAY

I woke up with a start. Calvin . I sat up on the bed and listened, but the house was quiet. There was no danger. My guest was safe in his bedroom, probably fast asleep, and I was being paranoid—in my dreams.

Groaning, I fell back on the bed, the mattress bouncing. Why did I have to be so worried about the boy? Yeah, he was adorable and smelled like a luxury dessert, but in a few days, his friend would pick him up and he'd be gone. I shouldn't be all tied up in knots because of him. I'd stayed away, avoiding his tantalizing scent by hiding in the shed. Even so, I'd had to jerk off furiously twice before I fell asleep.

Calvin was leaving. When he did, I should start dating again. I'd let myself become complacent, and now I was beginning to feel lonely. The chance that I would stumble upon my mate here in Beauville was nil, so maybe I should ask Hunter to give me some pointers. He was on all these dating apps and drove to cities to meet people. I could go with him one day.

It was a decent plan: one, no perving on Calvin; two, date new people; three, find a mate. Good. Now I should be able to sleep.

Except the fated mate thing was such a hassle. You needed to find the perfect fit, and shifter mates didn't grow on trees. Hunter had been looking for years, and still no luck. I remembered the disappointment all too well. You liked a guy, went out, maybe even fucked, hoping things would fall into place... and nothing. It used to

make me feel like an ass, like I was using those guys, even though everything was always perfectly consensual. In the end, just fucking omegas who chased shifters for kicks became the easiest thing. At least nobody got his hopes up and ended up heartbroken.

What if I tried finding someone like Calvin? He was so damn cute; it was doing my head in. He was too young but also surprisingly smart for his age. Levelheaded. And sweet... Would an omega like him give an old grouch a chance?

When I closed my eyes, I could see him on the insides of my eyelids as if I had taken a photo with my mind. Those pretty, plush lips, his innocent gaze, his thin, elegant hands... He had a nice ass too. A perfect palmful. He was so tiny I could lift him with one arm. Hold him up, move him around... How much of my dick would he be able to take? Fuck, that was a total turn-on. It had never occurred to me before, but the idea of fucking a much smaller guy was arousing as hell.

Ugh. I was such a creep. Poor Calvin. If he only knew I'd jerked off to fantasies of him naked in my lap.

I rolled to my side and squeezed my eyes shut, determined to sleep without touching my stupid dick again. If I had to count sheep, so be it. I imagined a low fence crossing a meadow and a fluffy ewe trotting toward it. Hop. One. Another ewe, white like a cloud. Hop. Two... Was Calvin sleeping well? Maybe he was tossing and turning like me. Think about sheep. White, cuddly sheep. Three. Four. A skinny little lamb. Five.

This was ludicrous. I rolled onto my back, groaning. Why was my dick plumping up again? I was supposed to be counting sheep!

Then I heard a noise. Dainty feet padded the hardwood floor, and panting breaths came from the hallway. He just needs to pee, or maybe he's getting a glass of water.

Let him be.

I strained to listen. Why was he breathing so hard?

A soft whimper came through my closed bedroom door.

Something wasn't right.

I hopped off the bed, opened the door, and hit the light switch in the hallway.

Calvin stood by the closed bathroom door, supporting himself with one arm on the wall and panting as if he'd sprinted circles around the house. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes glistening, and his mouth parted. He blinked at the bright light.

"Are you okay?"

Wide eyes pinned on me, he made a staggering step forward. He didn't say anything.

"Calvin, are you sick?" I tried again.

"I don't know." He sounded strained.

Another step. Did his scent get even stronger? I stopped breathing, but I'd need oxygen eventually.

He looked out of it. Was he a sleepwalker? What was the advice? Should I wake him up or not?

"Calvin?"

He pulled in a ragged breath and let out a small moan. His knees folded under him.

I grabbed him just in time. He fell forward, his face landing in the pelt between my pecs, and groaned. His fingers, surprisingly strong, dug into my sides. He panted against my skin, shaking.

“Does your stomach hurt? Your head?”

Oh damn, the scent!

He rubbed his face against the hair on my chest. Then I remembered what he’d said about his anxiety.

“Are you having an attack?”

“No,” he mumbled. “It’s the smell.”

Huh? It was his scent that made everything so difficult. What did he mean?

Another pained moan.

Then I breathed in, straight from his hair.

Fuck .

Arousal. Frenzied, heated omega arousal. I could taste it on my tongue. My cock grew hard and pressed into Calvin’s belly in a way he must have noticed.

Before I could pull away, Calvin was sliding down my front, wet lips and tongue leaving a trail toward my groin. He buried his nose at the base of my cock, inhaling through the cotton of my pajama pants.

“Please.” His needy whine made my dick twitch.

I stood frozen. I couldn't conjure a single thought in my head. His scent filled my lungs, and I gulped more of it on instinct.

It was indescribable.

Shaking, Calvin frantically tugged on the strings until he managed to untie my pajama pants. They pooled around my ankles. I stood there like an oaf, naked and unmoving.

I was drugged by that damned scent.

Calvin's adorable little face, wearing an expression of raw hunger next to my rearing dick, was the single most beautiful thing I'd ever seen.

He leaned closer and licked the underside of my erection, where the deflated knot sat. A growl escaped me, and I grabbed a fistful of Calvin's hair. I should push him away.

I couldn't.

He began licking me, hands running along my sides and over my ass cheeks, clumsy and greedy. The noises he made... like an animal. A needy animal in heat.

Heat . Sudden and intense. It took over his body and mind. And I couldn't resist his scent. Nothing could tear me away from him now.

But that meant...

His mouth enveloped my cockhead, and I lost my train of thought.

The sensations were heavenly. His dainty hands, his warm mouth and soft tongue, everything so tiny and fragile and... Aah! The sight of him on his knees, his big doe

eyes pleading, and his lips stretching around my dick...

The bear growled. I want him. Small, weak. He needs me, and I'll protect him.

Calvin sucked hard, pulling my precum out of me, both hands on my erection. He swallowed and sucked even harder. The need to hold him in place and fuck his face made me let go of his hair. The last thing I wanted was to push him. But, God, I'd never needed anyone so acutely as I needed him right now.

When he moved away, a string of saliva connecting his lips to my cockhead, I swore like a sailor. My aching dick bobbed in the air, and I clenched my fists, my fingers itching where the claws could grow out.

Before I could beg Calvin to let me come on his face, he crawled around and sank onto his elbows. The pajama pants I'd loaned him tangled around his ankles. His bare ass in the air, crease and thighs glistening with wetness, he curved his back and rocked toward me.

"Please."

The mating pose. Blatant. He was begging for it.

His tiny pucker was covered with slick, a small dark hole in the center where he was loose and ready. A lovely young omega offered me his body while his scent burned in my lungs.

He's in heat. He needs me.

Calvin swayed, moaning and pushing his ass higher. His wrinkled rim twitched, and a thin trickle of fresh liquid escaped down his taint. Like a hungry, drooling mouth.

The alpha in me took over. I knelt behind him and grabbed his hips with greedy hands. My cock looked enormous against his ass. At least I had enough sense to go slow. The first kiss of my cockhead against his wet rim made us both moan.

His opening stretched around my girth, the heat of his body enveloping me. As I stroked his skin, my hands covered his entire ass. I could hold his hips, and my thumbs would touch his rim. The bear in me liked that he was so small. His hole widened into a big circle, his rim taut and pale. The slippery warmth tightened around me, and my cock jerked. Holy hell . Calvin's ass squeezed me, then loosened, luring me in. One more inch. Sweet heaven...

I could have worried I'd hurt him, but when he cried out, it wasn't from pain.

"Deeper!"

I retreated and sank back in, making Calvin groan happily. All that slick covered my cock, and it was dangerously easy to glide in and out of his perfect hole. Palming his ass cheeks, I spread them out wider and tested pushing more. His rim tightened again, his ass all but sucking my dick. His moans got guttural.

"Mm-hmm. Aah. Aaah!"

He came! His ass clamped around me, barely half of my dick in him, and he shouted with his orgasm, his voice bouncing off the walls. My jaw clenched, I kept moving, my gaze pinned on where the slick bubbled out between us, glazing my length. I was so big for him; his ass lips seemed to prolapse on every retreat.

This was wrong.

Then why did it feel better than anything I'd ever experienced in my entire life?

And Calvin pushed back, meeting my fucks.

“Please. More. I need more.”

My knot itched. Could I go deep enough to knot him?

He’s tiny. Young and sweet. Tight. I can’t hurt him.

I’d never fucked a virgin, and I knew Calvin wasn’t one, but my brain went there anyway. Nobody had ever stretched him so wide or filled him so deep, and he liked it. He wanted more. His hole was milking my dick, pulling it in. I would imprint myself on him, mark him, change him on the inside, breed him ...

“Calvin. You’re amazing.”

“Fuck me. Keep going.”

Would he even be able to take me outside of heat? I doubted it. But right now, he was oozing slick, and his insides softened around me, welcoming me further into his body with each thrust. I could smell his cum.

“You’re in heat.”

“Uh-huh. I know.”

“I need to knot you.”

“More. More!”

The pressure around my dick was out of this world. His inner muscles squeezed me on every retreat. How did I even fit into his lithe body?

“Yes! Aah! Yes!” Damn, he was loud.

Another climax. He was getting hoarse.

I was barely holding back.

“I feel you. Oh God! Barclay, I can feel you.”

I sure as hell hoped he could feel me. He had eight inches of a fat bear dick up his ass and one more waiting to go in.

Then I noticed he was stroking his belly with one hand. Slowing down my thrusts, I reached around him.

“I can feel you,” he repeated, sounding frantic.

I bumped into his hand, then laced our fingers together. On the next thrust, I realized what he’d meant.

His soft belly moved with my thrusts. A distinct bulge grew under our hands. I paused, shocked to my core.

Calvin moved his hand over the firm swell, groaning.

“I’m so full. Ooh! Full of you.”

My hips moved of their own volition, and the bulge got bigger.

“Fucking hell, Calvin! I can’t hurt you. Can’t...”

He pressed our hands against his stomach, and I felt it in my dick.

“Not hurt.” He gasped for a breath. “Don’t stop. Gonna come again. Fuck me!”

Gritting my teeth, I ached to thrust harder. To the root . I had to hand over the control to him, or I’d hurt him.

I grabbed him around his torso and sat on the floor with him in my lap. My head thudded against the wall behind us. All the demons in hell, we were having heat sex in my hallway!

I’d thought he’d slow down, but no. Arching back, Calvin impaled himself and screamed . Both hands on his bulging stomach, he bounced on my dick. He was going to hurt himself, dammit!

But he didn’t. Another orgasm tore through him, and he sat down, taking me whole. My cockhead reached his belly button from the inside, distorting his stomach, and he was yelling with ecstasy.

He wanted it. He was made to take my dick.

I couldn’t hold back anymore. I locked my arms around him and held him in place. My knot began to swell.

Calvin stroked his stomach as drawn-out whines and guttural groans spilled from his mouth. Mindless, he rocked in my lap, his inner muscles working my knot, sucking the cum out of me.

I spilled in waves many times. I lost myself, and the hot oven of Calvin’s insides was the only thing that remained real.

When I could think again, Calvin was a wet rag in my embrace, his head lolling and limbs heavy. He moaned softly every time my cock jerked with another load. His

belly looked swollen, full of my knot and cum. When I stroked it, I could feel myself through the layers of tissue. It looked so violent but felt so good, and Calvin seemed ecstatic.

Supporting his head on my arm, I cuddled him to my chest. His pants lay in a heap next to us. I arranged them over his lower body so he wouldn't get cold.

I rubbed my palm over his rounded belly. Somewhere there was his womb. Just a sprout, squashed by my dick, the gate closed...

Not for long. I'll fuck it open. I'll put a cub in his belly and keep him.

Whoa!

Where did that come from?

Now that the thought had occurred to me, I could think about little else. My knot tingled all over. I moved my palm over Calvin's distorted stomach.

There. That must be the spot. His heat will continue, get stronger, and I'll impregnate him. God, I want that. I need it.

When I imagined breeding Calvin, my enlarged dick throbbed inside him.

The reason was right in front of my nose. His scent in my nose. His womb under my palm, waiting for my seed. The way he craved my cock, how he begged me... It made perfect sense.

My proximity sent him into a sudden heat. We would both crave breeding because he was my mate. The one.

Calvin is my fated mate.

Torn between bewilderment and sheer happiness, I tightened my arms around my newfound treasure and breathed in his remarkable scent.

How lucky was I? I'd found him! God, he was lovely. The most perfect little omega with a sharp mind and a kind heart. And so fucking sexy. I'd get to breed this impeccable being. He'd be mine. All mine to love and keep.

"Sweetheart, are you okay?" I murmured into his ear.

He didn't reply. He was already asleep.

I lay still so I wouldn't jostle him. When the knot deflated, I carried him to bed, wiped his ass and thighs with a warm towel, and wrapped myself around him.

I lay awake for the rest of the night, but I didn't mind at all. Watching my Calvin and holding him, I was too happy to fall asleep.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:09 pm

9

CALVIN

I was naked, lying on something soft but damp. A towel?

A delicious scent surrounded me, numbing my mind. I tried to think around it, but it was difficult.

I was warm and happy... and wet. The dampness under me was coming from my ass. Liquid was trickling out of me.

But it didn't bother me.

I remembered this horrible empty feeling, a torturous ache in my middle, but now I was content. Had that been a nightmare?

Slowly, I blinked awake.

Dark eyes, frowning eyebrows, a thick, scruffy beard.

Barclay was staring at me, his face inches away from mine. His hand cupped my jaw, thumb stroking my cheek and the corner of my mouth.

“Hi.”

The memories came rushing back.

I'd been a total slut. I'd waved my ass at him and begged him until he fucked me on the floor just outside his bedroom door. I pleaded with him to come inside me.

I cringed, my heart pounding against my ribs. Scrambling away, I took the comforter with me, trying to cover myself. What must he think of me?

"It's okay. Shh. It's okay. You're in heat, Calvin. But it's okay."

Heat.

My face burned with a fierce blush.

I remembered the need. I accosted him in the hallway and went down on him without asking. I all but attacked his cock. Big, beautiful cock. When I had it in my mouth, fat and hard and warm, I couldn't bear the emptiness any longer.

Then he'd filled me, and it had been so good. Insanely good.

His huge dick looked scary, but when he pushed it inside me, my body sucked it in. And I'd been so happy when we came together.

The memory of my distorted stomach, full of his knot, made me shiver.

It was a nice shiver, though.

Energy pulsed in my veins.

The scary mountain man had knotted me. He'd spilled his cum in me and soothed the horrendous ache. When I fell asleep in his lap, full of him, I'd been delirious with happiness. I recalled I'd stroked my stomach, thinking of his seed and what it could mean...

“Am I pregnant?” was what came out of my mouth.

Barclay smiled softly. “Unlikely. I knotted you but didn’t breed you.”

“Oh.”

He’d been deep. He’d filled me to the brim. Surely that meant... But he hadn’t breached the mouth to my womb.

I put my hand on my belly. Empty.

Was I disappointed? That couldn’t be right.

Carefully, like approaching a wild deer, Barclay took my hand in his.

“How do you feel?”

I assessed my body. I felt okay. Maybe aroused? Maybe he could let me suck his cock? I wanted to touch it again. Just to make sure it was real. How would his cum taste?

I was going crazy.

My libido had always been a sluggish, unreliable thing, but now it bounced all over the place.

“Calvin? Are you okay?”

I couldn’t ask him to offer me his cock to suck again. That would be nuts.

“I’m hungry,” I blurted. It was true.

Barclay chuckled. Then he leaned closer and pressed the sweetest kiss on my nose.

“I’ll make you pancakes. Do you like pancakes?”

I nodded.

He was so handsome. When he rolled off the bed, I tried to get a glimpse of his groin.

There .

Even soft, his cock looked plump and heavy. I stopped myself from reaching for it, but barely. Barclay dragged a pair of pajama pants up his strong, hairy legs.

“You can use the shower if you want.”

That was probably a good idea.

The water washed away the scent of sex. My mind cleared, and shame niggled at me as I rinsed my crease and felt around my swollen rim. I’d sucked and ridden his cock like a nympho. It made my belly bulge, which should have hurt like hell, but it only made me come my brains out. The things I’d said... I braced myself for a breakdown. This was usually how it began—me feeling stupid or guilty or ashamed.

But it didn’t come.

Flummoxed by my own relative calm, I dried myself and put on a hoodie and sweats Barclay had lent me. As I dressed, I noticed a wobbly feeling in my legs and hips. My muscles were so relaxed that I couldn’t use them properly.

When I walked, I had to move slowly, like a drunk. It was most definitely a heat, an intense one. At least it explained my sluttiness.

Blushing and fiddling with the hem of the oversized hoodie, I met Barclay in the kitchen.

He eyed me up and down and cleared his throat. “Coffee?”

“I’m sorry.”

“What for?”

“I...”

He raised his eyebrows, waiting for me to get it out.

“It’s your scent... It’s making me... Ugh. I’m not normally like this.”

“You’re in heat. It’s okay. Your scent is affecting me too.”

“I apologize for attacking you like that last night.”

The corner of his mouth lifted in an adorable, soft half-smile. Wow . He was gorgeous when he smiled. I stared at him dreamily, my head empty. Why did I have to wait for another heat wave before he fucked me again? “You didn’t attack me, Calvin. We had heat sex together, and it was amazing. I hope you enjoyed it too. It seemed like you did.”

I bit my lip and managed a jerky nod. I didn’t know this man at all. How come I wanted to throw myself into his arms and cling to him with all my might?

He rested the whisk on the edge of the mixing bowl and stepped closer. When he opened his arms, I swayed forward on instinct.

Then he gave me the warmest, coziest bear hug. The pelt on his chest smelled like paradise. I inhaled, sparks going off in my mind. He stroked my back and kissed the top of my head.

I didn't want to let go. I only wanted more of him. My mouth flooded with saliva, and my stomach clenched with hunger.

"Please, let me suck you. I need it."

He let out a soft groan. "Whatever you want, sweetheart."

The shame became just a dull noise in the back of my mind as I got to my knees and freed his cock.

Heavy and huge. Incredible. He hardened in my hands, bulging head peeking from the foreskin. I licked his slit.

The taste!

Then I felt him on the back of my tongue, my lips stretched and jaw aching, and the frantic need abated, turning into a low hum of arousal and contentment.

I stroked him with both hands, listening to his rumbling groans. So thick. The corners of my mouth felt like they would split, but I only wanted to take him deeper.

When I gagged, pleasure spilled around my middle. Tears leaked from the corners of my eyes, but I sucked harder.

"Oh, Calvin..."

He made a growly, sexy noise, and creamy liquid filled my mouth. Holy hell! That

was delicious. I swallowed just in time for another mouthful. So much cum. And more. Yes... I hummed happily when he spurted again.

The taste of his cum soothed my need. I gulped it down, all of it, and suckled on his cockhead, teasing a few last drops from his slit. There. That was what I needed. His cum was in my belly now, and I was content. I realized I was smiling, rubbing my lips and cheek against his erection.

He tugged me up and cupped my face with his large, calloused hands. His eyes shone with gold when he leaned closer.

A kiss.

We hadn't done that yet.

He'd knotted me, and I'd sucked him off, but this was the first time we'd kissed.

I could still taste his cum. Wouldn't he mind that...? Oh . He coaxed my lips apart and thrust his tongue into my mouth... Mmm . He moved his hands down my body, and my wobbly knees got even weaker. I wasn't worried, not at all. He held me; he was in me and all around me, and I could let go. If my legs gave up, he'd hold me steady. I got lost in the kiss, in the warmth and sensual dance of his tongue around mine. When he moved away, I felt as if I woke up from a dream.

A lovely, enchanting dream.

I'd never imagined that a simple kiss could feel like that. Right then, I couldn't remember any other kiss I'd ever received. Barclay had erased them all.

"You're amazing," he murmured against my mouth. His soft beard caressed my face.

Was I ashamed? Not enough to regret anything.

“I need to feed you now,” he rasped and squeezed my ass cheeks.

My stomach felt pleasantly full already. Full of cum. Mmm. “Second course?”

He guffawed, and I grinned back.

Who was this new me? I asked a man for sex, blew him, ate his cum, and loved it. I joked about it as if I were experienced and confident, which I most definitely wasn't. I was a wreck on my best days; just not around Barclay, it seemed.

He held my gaze, his brown eyes tender. “Calvin,” he murmured.

“Yes?” Wow, I was eager to please this man.

“We should talk, okay?”

Oh . “Um. I guess.” Or we could have more sex. But I didn't say that. The heat must have impaired my thinking. Yes, we should talk. We'd just met, and he'd knotted me. “Can we eat first? And coffee. I can't seem to think.”

His forehead creased with worry. I didn't like that. I lifted my hand and brushed my fingers along the lines above his eyebrows.

“Food first,” he agreed. “But then we must talk.”

“Sure.”

The peck on my nose was the cutest thing ever.

I liked Barclay. I liked him a lot.

He stepped away and pressed a button on the coffee machine. I realized my hand was under my hoodie, and I was stroking my belly absentmindedly. His cum was in there.

Good.

It had been a solid plan. Coffee and food, then talk. Barclay even opened the kitchen window for half a minute to get some fresh air in, even though it was freezing outside. We needed that to be able to think.

Except I ate two pancakes, took two gulps of coffee, and felt hot all over. I downed the glass of water Barclay had given me.

Still too hot. “Can we open the window again?” I asked.

Barclay stood but froze, staring at me.

A gush of liquid pooled under my ass. Thick, warm slick. A gallon of it.

Then my insides clenched tight, and I groaned.

“Calvin?”

“Another.”

“What?”

“A heat wave.”

I wanted to get to Barclay, but I couldn’t walk. I slid off the chair and onto the floor.

On my knees, I looked up at him just as another cramp squeezed my middle.

“We need to talk, dammit,” Barclay muttered as scooped me up. He carried me in his arms, his lips against my temple. I clutched his neck. I was so empty! The slick kept leaking out of me.

“I have so much to tell you.”

“Can’t. Need you.”

As soon as my back touched the mattress, I began pulling on my clothes. I needed them off. The noises I made were terribly animalistic, but I didn’t care.

Barclay was already naked. His big cock pointed right at me. It swayed as he knelt on the bed.

I grabbed my legs under my knees and lifted my hips, folding myself in half.

“Fuck me. I need it deep.”

“God almighty. Look at you. Your hole... Fuck!”

He bent over, and his lips closed around my pucker. His soft tongue slid inside me.

It was too little, too gentle. But his groan sent vibrations through my torso.

He sucked and gulped.

“Sweet like honey.”

Then he was on me, surrounding me from all sides, all bulging muscles and soft,

thick body hair. His cockhead pressed against my hole, and my body yielded even as a part of me doubted it was possible.

Finally, the stretch. Fullness. Deeper. And deeper. My organs were pushed aside to make space for him.

When his cockhead nestled in my belly, I found relief. The orgasm spilled from my center, a slow wave of the sweetest, most exquisite pleasure, and I cried out victoriously.

He cradled my head in his hands, and his lips pressed against mine. I opened my mouth and sucked his tongue in. Could I get more of him?

His cockhead was making love to my closed womb, feeding my never-ending climax, and I imagined him breaching that barrier.

I wanted that.

His cum. All the way in my womb.

He'd get me pregnant! I shouldn't want that!

And yet...

Get me pregnant .

My brain seemed to wrap itself all around that idea. My womb was closed, but Barclay's cock would fuck that barrier open. He'd stretch that hidden opening, make space for himself, and reach all the way into my womb. He'd come, yelling my name, and his seed would flood my insides, fill me to the brim, seep into me, take root...

I need my womb to open. I need his cum in there.

I pushed with my ass, straining to meet his thrusts. His cockhead was right there, hitting that spot. Again. Again. Again.

Oh please, fuck me open!

Barclay sped up, growling, and my orgasm grew tenfold. My head emptied out except for that one urge...

Come in me. Need your cum.

I need it deeper. Fuck me open.

Come in me.

Breed me.

Breed me.

Breed me!

Then his knot grew, and the world exploded with colors.

My post-orgasmic fog cleared. I had no idea how much time had passed, but I was still full of Barclay's knot, my stretched hole tingling in the most delightful way ever. I lay on his chest, straddling his lap, his furry pec like a pillow under my head.

It occurred to me I could make myself come again with his cockhead somewhere in my core, but I couldn't move a muscle. My arms and legs weighed a ton each.

Barclay stroked my back and ass. I was in love with those enormous, rough hands.

“How are you, sleepyhead?”

I hummed. I was in heaven. “Good.”

He ran his fingers through my spread crease and along my rim. Mmm. I was stuffed like a freaking turkey. Did he breed me?

I bore down, my muscles protesting. A twinge in my womb made me groan.

Barclay hugged me tight.

“Shh. It’s okay. You need to rest.”

“Did you breed me?” I whispered.

“No. You’re okay. It’s okay.”

It wasn’t. I’d wanted him to do it. Now I would have to wait until the next wave. I clenched my ass around the huge hardness and sighed. He felt so nice in me and all around me. Soon, another wave would come, he’d breed me, and then I’d feel even better.

A weak voice from some hidden corner of my mind protested the notion, but as I breathed in the delicious scent from Barclay’s chest, it quieted.

He’d brought me so much pleasure already. If I got him even deeper, got his cum into my womb, it would be paradise. I just knew.

“It boggles my mind,” he whispered. “How are you doing it? You’re so little. So

fragile. But then I put my dick inside you and..." He blew out a heavy breath, his chest moving under me. "Fuck, Calvin. You're incredible. You feel so good around my knot."

"It's amazing," I mumbled. "Want to stay like this forever."

Maybe he didn't have to pull out. We could wait like this for another heat wave, and then he'd just push into my womb and breed me.

I'd be pregnant with this man's child. That should be scary. I shouldn't want that.

Except I did. With every cell of my being.

He pressed a kiss to my hair and lingered. His hot breath warmed my scalp.

"My sweetheart."

He let the endearment hang in the air. I wondered if he wanted to say something more, but I was too sleepy to ask.

Questions could wait.

BARCLAY

It took ages for the knot to go down. Not that I was complaining, but the longer I waited to tell Calvin the truth about myself, the bigger mess the situation could become. As soon as our bodies were separated, I carried him into the shower. I washed him, dressed him in those sweats and my hoodie that made him look even tinier and unbearably cute, and brought him to the kitchen. He seemed to like it when I carted him around like a parcel. He gave me these sweet little kisses into my beard and clung to my neck. Who was I to deny him? He was my mate. My forever omega. I would carry him in my arms all day, any day he wanted.

But first, he needed to know the truth.

Look, Calvin, I know we've just met, but you're my fated mate because, well, bear shifter stuff. Have I mentioned I change into a bear for funsies? So, how about we keep fucking until I impregnate you? Then we'll have five to seven kids, and you'll stay here with me until we die. Sounds good?

Yep. He'd freak out. He had said he felt calm around me, but there was no way he'd take this news lightly. I prepared myself for the worst, but I couldn't postpone it.

I sat him on the kitchen chair and got him a glass of water. Then I pulled the other chair close so I could hold his hand on the table.

"There's something important I need to tell you."

He frowned at me warily. “Okay.”

There was no way around it. I just had to spit it out. “Before I found you in the forest, you met a bear.”

Calvin blinked, looking confused. “I didn’t tell you that story, did I?”

“That bear was me. That’s how I knew where to find you.”

A few seconds passed, during which I managed to come up with five different catastrophic scenarios about him running away from me in terror or calmly leaving in disgust. People held all kinds of superstitions about us, and my experience said you never knew where you stood with a guy until you told him. But Calvin didn’t remove his hand from under my palm.

“You’re a shifter.”

I nodded. “Yes. Many here in Beauville are.”

His eyebrows scrunched up in a thoughtful frown as he studied me.

Now I had to get out the other part.

“See, your heat came quickly, and you said things about my scent... so, um, there’s a possibility, depending on where you are in your cycle... I mean, you might feel it already... or not. I... I think I feel it.”

“I wasn’t supposed to go into heat for another four months.” He sounded calm, almost detached. Was that a good or a bad thing?

“I think... I believe...” I couldn’t even say it.

Groaning in frustration, I stood and pushed the chair aside. I knelt in front of him and reached for his hands. He was still frowning but let me hold them.

“You’re my mate, Calvin. My fated.”

He opened his mouth. Closed it.

“Your heat is my fault. My scent caused it.”

I could hear his sprinting heartbeat. Was that fear? He didn’t seem afraid. He licked his lips almost sensually as he stared at me.

Eons went by as I knelt there, gazing at the little omega who threw my life upside down. He had a journey in front of him, and no matter how much I wanted to give him the world, there were some things I couldn’t help him with. He needed to feel and understand the bond between us, and I had to be patient until he did.

“Will you get me pregnant?” was his next question. His voice sounded remarkably steady.

Slow breath .

I hung my head. “That’s how things often go.” Yeah, any second now, he’d freak out on me.

“Because contraceptives don’t work on shifter mates,” he said. He must be shocked. That was why he sounded so calm.

“They do, but shifter mates don’t usually want them. Not the first time around. The urge is too strong.”

I heard him swallow. “I feel it.”

He did? My eyes prickled with tears as I laid my head on his thighs. “I’m so sorry, Calvin. I’ll keep you safe, I swear.”

“I didn’t think I’d have a kid at twenty-one.”

Twenty-five years my junior. Oh Lord. Fate was a real joker sometimes.

“But I want it,” Calvin blurted, making me lift my face from his lap. “I know it’s irrational, but I need it. I want to get pregnant. I thought of it during the heat wave. Imagined it. It was like my whole body ached for it.”

I was the luckiest fool in the entire wide world. I stroked his thighs through those too-large sweats, lost in his adorable face. He had impeccable plush lips. I needed to kiss him more often. His cheeks glowed with a healthy pink color. My mate in heat, ready to breed.

He was perfect.

“My heat... it feels different from my first. Stronger.”

“Yeah. It’s like that for shifter mates. It’ll pass when...” I swallowed.

“When you breed me,” he finished for me, gazing at me fearlessly.

“Calvin, I know this is sudden. We’ve just met. But bears, we’re loyal. Once we find the right person, it’s for life.” I paused, wondering if I was going too far, but his eyes shone as they held mine. “I’ll do everything I can to make you happy.”

His pupils flared at my promise, and a shiver went through him.

Then he whispered, “Some people say becoming a shifter’s mate is immense luck.”

And some say it’s a curse. But I didn’t tell him that. I kissed his dainty hands instead. Hugging his hips, I laid my head back on his lap. He stroked my hair. It felt too easy, too good to be true, but Calvin’s heartbeat sounded strong and steady.

I held him until I heard his stomach growl. He looked uncomfortable on the kitchen chair, so I brought him to bed and served him brunch on a tray. He polished off the plate and fell asleep the second he put the fork down.

When I finished cleaning up the kitchen, I called Hunter.

“I spoke to Jordy and Monty,” he said. “That city slicker was indeed asking around about an omega called Calvin, but the guys didn’t tell him anything.”

“Is he still in town?”

“No. The car’s gone. He was trying to find accommodation, but Monty told him the B&B was full. He must have driven to Green Peaks to find a hotel.”

“Good. The further away from here, the better.”

“He’ll come back.”

“Then we’ll deal with him.”

“And how’s Calvin?” Hunter asked in his good-doctor voice.

I swallowed, my throat suddenly thick. I wanted to go back to bed and hold my mate. I wanted to watch him sleep and make love to him when he woke up. “He’s great. He’s fine. All good.”

“What’s going on? You sound weird.”

Should I tell Hunter already? He would find out sooner or later. “He’s in heat.”

“What?”

“Calvin is my fated. He went into heat one day after we met.”

The phone was silent for a long moment. “That’s fast.”

“Yeah. It’s a strong bond, I think.”

Hunter’s exhale crackled in the phone. “You hide out here for a decade, determined not to put a foot outside of Beauville, hating on everyone and everything. Then you find your fated mate wandering through the forest behind your house. And only one day? You’re kidding me. You can marry him tomorrow, you fucker.”

“It’s like poker, man. I’ve got more luck than sense.”

“I hate you.”

I shouldn’t have laughed. For years, Hunter had been going on all these trips and cruises, driving for miles to meet omegas, and still no luck. Men were all over him like he was catnip—or a hot alpha doctor, as it were—but none of them turned out to be the one. I did shit all, reconciled to being alone, and Calvin stumbled right into my arms.

“It’s not fair, I agree,” I said. “But he’s mine now.”

“You’d better fucking take care of that boy. He seems lovely.”

“He’s an angel. I should go. He could wake up at any moment.”

“Yeah, yeah. Hurry up and have all that heat sex, you asshole,” Hunter grumbled.

“Oh, I will do that. Many times.”

“You know what? It’ll be me laughing when you’re elbows deep in baby puke.”

I blinked, and it hit me like a ton of bricks. Chances were really high that nine months from now, I would be a father. “Shit.”

Hunter chuckled. “When the heat is over, tell Calvin he can make an appointment with me for a test and an ultrasound. Good luck.”

My cousin ended the call, leaving me standing there, reeling. I did know I’d breed Calvin. He wanted it, needed it even. Once a human omega bonded with a bear, his hormones went haywire and the powerful heat wouldn’t end until he was knocked up. And Calvin’s had started even faster than what was usual for newly mated couples.

So, yeah, in a few days, Calvin would be pregnant. I just hadn’t thought as far as to imagine an actual baby. A little boy, mine and his, growing to become a person.

Oh hell.

I dropped the phone onto the kitchen table and hurried to the bedroom.

Calvin slept on his side, huddled under the duvet, his eyelids pale and cheeks pink. His soft, plump lips were parted.

The most beautiful omega in the entire wide world.

I took off my T-shirt and, trying not to jostle him, I climbed onto the bed next to him. My mate snuffled in his sleep and threw an arm over my chest. He pressed his face to my shoulder.

He slept like that, nestled to my side, and I breathed him in, trying to get some rest.

CALVIN

I'd heard about bonds. Everyone had. Instant fairytale love, everlasting... But for people, they were rare. And with shifters mostly keeping to themselves, many staying in hiding, it wasn't something you encountered often in real life. I'd heard the stories since I was a kid but didn't personally know anyone who'd bonded with a shifter.

It explained so much. Why I felt so calm and even happy with Barclay from the first day. With only a few inhalations of his scent, all my worries miraculously disappeared.

Another incredible thing was my physical need. Barclay's pheromones were aggravating my heat by the minute. My belly looked swollen. My womb must be growing and sinking lower. I was slick even between waves, and my nipples were super sensitive. Even my pecs looked bigger.

Yeah, I was mated to a bear shifter, and my body was swiftly changing for its new purpose.

If you had told me a few weeks ago that I'd be getting pregnant at twenty years old and giving birth at twenty-one, I'd have been like hell to the no. I loved kids and wanted to have a family. But I'd always thought that for that, I would have to pull myself together. My anxiety had always made me feel weak—something Father and Damian used against me whenever they could.

With Barclay, I felt healthy, my body and my mind. I was ready. I could do it. I could have my own family.

With a strange alpha.

But Barclay wasn't a stranger. He was my mate, and I was getting to know him.

We had time to kill between waves but couldn't go anywhere. When I woke up from my nap, Barclay offered to show me what he was working on, and I eagerly agreed.

I sat on a desk in the grand palace he called the "shed," my feet dangling as I nursed a mug of peppermint tea with honey. The building was nearly the same size as the chalet, with a garage to fit a truck, a room to dry the wood where the temperature and humidity had to be regulated, another for storage, and the woodshop itself with a high ceiling and specialized lighting.

Barclay was bent over a ten-foot-long half of an oak trunk with a long hollow running along the middle. He was scraping away what looked like rotten pieces from the inside.

"See, the cavity is caused by fungi. Even with a hollow trunk, the tree can live for decades, but slowly, the main branches start to die, and it's time to let go."

"Did you cut it down yourself?"

"No. This one is from a guy who runs a big woodshop in Green Peaks. He sends me stuff he'd normally put into the chipper. People around here know me and call when they have something they think I'd like, so I don't have to hunt for material anymore."

"And what are you going to do with it?"

“Monty and Jordy have been bugging me about a dining table for the B&B.”

“Monty and Jordy?”

“Montgomery Wolf owns the Beauville B&B and the only pub in town. Jordy, or Orson Jordan, is the guy who runs the pub for him.”

“Are they your friends?”

“Yeah, I guess. They’re shifters too. We play poker and help each other out. Anyway. Monty saw some video online with a cracked wood filled with blue resin, and now he wants a table that looks like a lagoon.”

“It could be pretty.”

Barclay wrinkled his nose. “Nah. I don’t want to hide the wood under a bunch of resin. I’ll clean it, even out the edges, polish the top, and then I’ll put glass on it. Leave it natural.”

“That’ll be one huge piece of glass. How will you even get it here without breaking it?”

“It won’t cover the entire table. With dining tables, you want to be able to feel the wood under your hands. The hollow is seventeen inches where it’s widest and four feet long. I’ll make an indentation along the edges and cut a piece of glass to fit the shape.”

I could see it. It would look amazing.

The shop was filled with all kinds of machines and gadgets, including some complicated pulley mechanisms and hooks hanging from the ceiling. I expected

Barclay would use something like that to move the large pieces of wood he worked on.

Then I gaped when he walked to the end of the oak trunk, grabbed it with his bare hands, and lifted it. He rotated the trunk a fraction and set it back without even a grunt.

Bear shifter strength.

That piece must have weighed a ton, and Barclay manipulated it as easily as if it were a cardboard cutout. The only thing betraying his exertion was the tightening muscles of his arms. He wore a threadbare gray T-shirt with a faded logo of an eighties rock band, and it stretched over his torso, hiding nothing.

All that raw power... and this man was bound to me for the rest of my life. He would use that incredible strength to protect me . The knowledge was intoxicating.

Barclay reached into the hollow with some kind of metal brush, and his shoulders and biceps bunched up. The sinews on his forearms rippled. Then he crouched, inspecting the underside of the would-be table, and I was amazed by the durability of the seams of his jeans over his powerful thighs.

And his chest... I couldn't wait to put my face between his pecs again. Barclay had a sizable, furry stomach, but it was firm, not hanging over but jutting out the same way his pecs did. His torso looked like he could walk through walls without a scratch, leaving just Barclay-shaped holes behind him.

When he stood again, he caught my gaze.

“Aren't you bored?”

“Nuh-uh.” No way. I’d never been less bored in my life. Could I ask him to take his shirt off?

I want to see what’s mine.

Since when was I a greedy, possessive horndog? I mentally shook myself.

“How do you decide on designs?” I asked, happy to come up with a neutral question. “Do you work with a designer or do everything yourself?”

He scratched his neck, reached for a different tool, and began chipping away on something at the base of the trunk. “I ask the wood. It knows what it wants to be.”

That made me chuckle. “You talk to wood? Is that a bear thing?”

“Oh, I wish! But every piece I get is different. I look at it, at its strengths and imperfections, and it turns into a chair in my head or into a cabinet. When this trunk landed here, it told me it was the tabletop for Monty’s party room at the B&B.”

“Witchery,” I joked.

Barclay snorted. “As long as it works, I don’t question it.”

He reached for something on a shelf, and his T-shirt rode up, revealing his furry stomach. The pelt thickened into the happiest of trails, and my gaze inevitably landed on the bulge in his jeans.

Then he began smoothing something out, rubbing back and forth, and back and forth, his body rocking in a very suggestive way. I swallowed thickly. All those muscles stretching and hardening...

“Ooh.” Shit . I moaned out loud.

Barclay paused and threw me a confused look. “Come again?”

“Um. Nothing.”

“You’re blushing.”

“It’s warm in here.”

“It’s not.”

Barclay stood and folded his thick arms over his chest. That was not helping my situation. He looked like a damned gladiator.

I licked my lips.

“Eyes up here.”

I blinked up.

“Another heat wave?” he asked.

Shaking my head, I crossed my legs. My blush must have been visible from space.

Barclay put the tool aside and walked around the would-be table. He hugged me around my waist and sniffed the crook of my neck. With his warm body pressed against mine, I sagged with relief. My legs fell open, and he nestled between them.

“It’s not a heat wave,” he murmured, kissing my neck. His beard tickled my skin, and I bucked against him. “But you’re hard, sweetheart.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Do you want me to do something about it?”

“Can you? Even between waves?”

He stepped away, and I felt bereft. But then he set me on the floor and turned me around in a single smooth move. He tugged my jeans down my thighs and spread my ass cheeks. With a soft hum, he ran his nose through my crease. I loved the scrape of his beard on my skin. He kissed my hole, just a chaste press of lips, and I cried out as if he'd shoved his dick into me.

“Shh. I'll make you feel good. Patience.”

He began licking over my pucker. Firm presses of his tongue and teasing swipes, over and over. It was maddening and so amazing I lost control of the sounds I made. Until Barclay, nobody had ever done this to me.

My cries and whimpers must be audible outside.

“You don't have... any close neighbors? Oh God!”

He swirled his tongue around my relaxed rim. “Nope.”

With that, he pushed his tongue inside me.

I melted. Low groans spilled out my throat, and I came and came, my hole clenching, while Barclay ate me out like he'd been starving for me. He didn't stop, not until I started twitching from overstimulation. He soothed me with slow kisses to my hole and cleaned me up with tender licks.

Then he pulled my jeans back up, lifted me, and sat me back on the bench. After wiping his beard with his T-shirt, he kissed my forehead and went back to scrubbing the inside of the oak.

Dazed, I watched the play of his muscles and wondered how soon I could have this man's cum in my womb.

He'd turned me into an animal, but I considered it a gift.

I'd never felt more alive.

BARCLAY

Never in my life had I slept with someone in my arms. Sure, I had hookups stay over who didn't have the energy to move after a hard fuck. But when they wanted to cuddle, I couldn't relax.

With Calvin plastered to my side, one arm and leg thrown over me, his head on my pec, his button nose in my chest hair, I closed my eyes with a grin on my face.

My little mate was so sweet and endearing, and I was lucky to have found him. He could have died in that forest, so close to my home. Thinking about that, I wanted to unalive his ex in the most painful way imaginable.

I took a deep breath, filling my lungs with Calvin's scent, and forced my murderous urges to the back of my mind. I had a mate now, and we were going to start a family. Killing someone would be counterproductive.

Calvin snuffled in his sleep, the cutest little sound, and I smiled. He was naked, all that velvety skin against mine, soft and supple. I stroked his ass cheeks and up and down his back, slowly and carefully—I didn't want to disturb him. But he slept like a log.

I drifted off at some point too, but I woke up before dawn. Calvin lay on his side, curled up to me. I smelled the heat wave before he even stirred. Breathing in the intoxicating scent of his heat, I gathered him into my arms. On a soft moan, he buried

his face between my pecs, nuzzling my chest hair.

“Mm-hmm. Barclay?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

“I want to have sex.”

“Sure, sleepyhead. Do you want to wake up first?”

“No... just put your cock in me.”

“You’re adorable.”

“Don’t laugh. I need it.”

Turning on my back, I took him with me, spreading his thighs so he straddled my waist. I bent my legs, and my hard cock nestled between his ass cheeks. He reached for it without hesitation and aimed the head at his pucker. With his eyes still closed, he began rocking, working himself open. When my cockhead popped inside, we both groaned.

“Yesss. So thick.”

With a contented sigh, he lay over me and kissed my nipple. His hole was much looser than yesterday, the slick overflowing. I lifted my hips, fucking into him, while he squirmed and rubbed his erection on my stomach.

“Gonna come already,” he mumbled. “You’re so thick...”

My knot ached. I needed to get deeper inside him. I grabbed his ass cheeks and

bucked up. Calvin cried out, his hole clenching on my dick.

I loved how easily I could make him come.

The orgasm made him all mellow and heavy. Moaning, he tried to fuck himself but seemed too weak to sit up and ride me. He whined with frustration.

“Barclay. Fuck me. Please.”

Holding him by his ass cheeks, I flipped us and thrust into him. His slippery flesh hugged my dick, sending bliss up my spine.

Calvin’s joyous cry bounced off the walls.

I gave him long fucks, root to tip, watching his smooth belly bulge with my dick. The sight didn’t worry me anymore. In fact, it made me burn with possessive lust. I took over his little body, fucked him so good; he had to be feeling me everywhere , and he loved it. He begged for more.

Calvin grabbed his legs under his knees, trying to lift his tail end, so I circled his tiny waist with my hands and pulled him onto my cock with more force. My cockhead was driving right into the swollen gate to his womb. I needed to claim my mate, make him mine for good, but the soft bundle of flesh was in the way. Snarling, I aimed at it, willing it to give way and let me in. It was clenched shut. I was squashing Calvin’s womb on each thrust, but the opening remained sealed.

Calvin all but sobbed.

“Please, Barclay. Breed me. Please.”

“I will, love. I promise.”

“Please. Please.”

He was so wet, the slick bubbled out, his hole squelching. I couldn’t fuck him harder than this. I’d break him.

“Oh God. I’m coming. Breed me!”

“You need to open up, love. Let me in. C’mon.”

“Want you... want you... get me pregnant. Your cum. In my womb. Ooh. Gawd! I’m... Aaah!”

He shivered and convulsed with climax after climax. His face glistened with sweat, and his eyes flashed white before he squeezed them shut. Long, guttural groans tore out of his mouth. Then he mumbled something incoherent and groaned again.

I aimed at the same spot, over and over, determined to work my way inside his core. I could see him on the back of my eyelids when I squeezed my eyes shut. Big round belly, swollen pecs full of milk, taut nipples. The orgasmic cries he made turned into something else in my head. He was pushing to give birth to my child.

I opened my eyes to gaze at my mate. He was staring back at me, mouth open, pupils blown, his expression entranced.

“I want!” he wailed.

But I couldn’t do it. He wasn’t ready yet.

Calvin’s insides began clenching harder and harder, squeezing my dick like a pair of fists, and my control broke. The knot burst with tingles, and I bucked into my mate as it grew. I let out a helpless shout.

Calvin screamed with the knotting.

“Breed me!”

My poor darling. I pushed as deep as I could, my cum flooding his hole in pulses. It leaked out around my girth while his hole spasmed. Shuddering with pleasure, I felt powerless.

“Breed me, please...”

I couldn't give him what he begged for. Not yet. I kissed him instead. Licking into his mouth, I held him to me and rutted against his ass, making my knot move inside him.

It calmed him. He began humming into the kiss, and his breathing slowed.

“I'll do it, love,” I murmured against his lips. “Don't you worry about a thing. With every wave, we're closer. I'll put a baby into your belly. You just have to keep coming for me.”

He moaned, his insides squeezing me anew.

“You're tight like a virgin, with your womb so tiny and young, so shy. But I'll fuck you until it opens for me. Wave after wave. You'll get all nice and soft for my dick, your womb ripe for my cum.”

“Your knot. Feels so good.”

I fucked him as much as the knot allowed, and Calvin kept moaning.

“It doesn't stop.”

“What, love?”

“Coming.”

“Good. That’s good. I’ll fuck you with my knot, stretch you out.”

“Want you to breed me.”

“I’ll give you everything, my darling mate. Anything you want. I’ll breed you with every heat. I’ll put a dozen babies into your belly.”

“Don’t stop. Keep fucking me.”

For long minutes, I thrust into him, just an inch back and forth. Ever so slowly, his inner muscles stopped spasming, and his flesh softened around me. His ass felt so supple I wondered if I could pull my swollen knot out and fuck him with it for real. But I didn’t want to put any more strain on him.

While his frustration hurt me, the resistance of his young body excited me too. I’d have to work to get my prize. I’d have to give him more pleasure and tease his shy womb until it bloomed and let me in. All bear shifter mates got pregnant during their first heat with their alpha. It was just a question of time.

“Barclay?” Calvin whispered, his lips barely moving.

“I’m here. Inside you.”

He giggled sleepily. “I know that . Why can’t you get all the way in?”

“You’re young. Your womb’s just ripening. It might take a few more tries.”

“Ugh. I want it now.”

I laughed, and the vibration it sent through our joined bodies made Calvin hum.

“Do you like being knotted?” I asked.

“Mm-hmm. It’s the best.”

“See, the longer it takes us to breed, the longer your heat will be. Then I can fuck and knot you many times.”

His lips curved into a happy smile. “Okay.”

“I’ll turn us so you can lie on me and rest, okay?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Hold on.”

Careful not to crush his leg, I rolled onto my back with him in my lap. The movement set him off again, and he came one last time, rocking on my knot before he slumped over me, breathless. I petted him, stroked his back, and massaged his spread ass cheeks until his breathing settled.

Falling asleep, he murmured my name.

I savored the slippery warmth of his body around my swollen cock. A few days ago, I was alone. Now I had a mate in my bed, horny for my knot and eager to carry my cub.

I was so in love.

CALVIN

Barclay fed me breakfast again. Or maybe brunch? I didn't know what time it was and didn't care. I sat on his lap while he drank his coffee. I loved cuddling up to his immense chest.

Then I got horny feeling his bulge under my ass, and as I began squirming, he noticed. Grinning smugly, he carried me to the living room, undressed me, and proceeded to eat me out until I came all over myself. He held a glass of water to my lips, then wiped me off with a wet towel. My eyes were already closing.

"This is ridiculous," I mumbled. "I'm either hungry, horny, or sleepy."

Barclay chuckled as he spread a blanket over me. My limbs felt heavy as if I'd spent the morning at a gym.

There was something important I wanted to say. What was it? God, I was already half asleep. "You need to breed me. Soon. I really want it. Really."

Barclay kissed my temple, and his beard tickled my cheek. It made me smile.

"Soon. Now rest."

If I said anything else, I didn't remember. I passed out cold.

It was one of those naps that made you wake up feeling like you were in a different century. I blinked awake, surrounded by pillows and blankets on the living room sofa. I felt sluggish but cozy. It was snowing again, the fluff piling up behind the glass wall. The sky looked dark, making me wonder if it was early morning or evening.

A large fire crackled in the fireplace. Barclay must have been in here several times, taking care of it. He was nowhere to be seen, but I heard his steps and clanking noises from the kitchen. He was making me food again. Smiling, I rubbed my belly lazily, then paused with my palm under my belly button. I cupped the sizable pouch there. Nice. I looked pregnant already. My belly was swollen with heat, and when I moved my hand higher up and brushed my nipple, a sweet current ran through my chest. My pecs were bigger too. I palmed them under the blanket.

How come I had never slept naked before? This was so comfy. The fluffy blankets surrounded me like a nest. Without a single worry on my mind, I stroked my pecs and pinched my nipples.

“Mmm.”

I tugged the fabric aside and looked down at myself. I loved how curvy I was becoming. It was just the heat, I knew, but once I was pregnant, it would be for real. Even my nipples seemed bigger and darker. My cock was half hard, tingling. Closing my eyes, I ran a hand over my ass. I was wet and loose inside like never before. I turned to my side before sneaking a hand between my ass cheeks.

Barclay could walk in whenever, but I couldn't resist.

The slick covering my pucker was thick like honey. I pushed a finger into my hole, only to the first knuckle, and moaned out loud.

My insides were slippery and so supple. When I tugged, my hole stretched like a soft

rubber band. Two fingers. So easy. Three. I tried opening myself wider by spreading my fingers.

“Ooh.”

Damn. That felt good.

In a mere couple of days, my body had changed completely. I was so ready.

That word Barclay had used. Ripe .

I was ripe.

Why did that feel so damned sexy? I pumped my fingers in and out, not caring about the slick smearing on the blanket under me. We could put it in the wash later.

My hole was big and pliant, ready to take my mate’s knot.

Could Barclay finally breed me?

Ripe . Oh yes. I could sense it. This was it. My body was ready to breed. I palmed my belly and shoved my fingers as deep as I could. The empty ache in my womb didn’t bother me. It was a promise—like looking at the dessert menu, knowing I could have everything on it.

I fluttered my fingers, marveling at the satiny feel of my flesh.

“Let me do that for you.”

Barclay’s voice made me stiffen. I didn’t open my eyes.

“Caught you with your hand in the cookie jar?” he said with a smile in his voice.

A warm hand closed around my wrist and gently tugged. He pulled my fingers out of my hole and brought my hand to his lips. He licked my fingers one by one, then grabbed my hips. As easily as if I were a doll, he positioned me on my knees with my upper body resting on the thick cushions of the backrest. My arms hung over the edge of the sofa. I was wonderfully mellow.

Barclay licked through my crease. “I think dinner can wait, huh?”

I moaned happily when he tongued my soft hole.

“Damn, Calvin. You’re wide open, aren’t you?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Your body is changing for me. A big, open hole for my cock.”

He kept licking and added fingers. I couldn’t tell how many. When he moved them around, I realized he was using both hands. He stretched me open and licked.

His warm breath reached into me.

“I can’t smell a heatwave yet, sweetheart. You need to tell me if you’re uncomfortable.”

“It’s nice. Keep going.”

He did something with his fingers, rotated them, and pleasure simmered around my hole. I groaned.

“Yeah? You like me opening your ass? I got four fingers up your hole.”

I began pushing back, fucking myself on his hands. Barclay pulled on my rim, working me open wider and wider, and it felt so damned good. My brain was bathing in mindless joy.

“Fuck, six fingers. Three from each hand. I could fist you right now.”

It sounded scary. But, God, I loved the sensations.

If he stretched me wider and prepared me, then he could surely reach even deeper. He could work my body open and breed my womb.

“Aaah. Barclay. Feels so good. Want you... to open me up.”

Seriously. This was heaven. When warmth spread around my middle, I cried out with happiness. My heat wave was coming. Yes!

“You’re so fucking wet.”

“Fuck me...”

“Just one more minute.”

I rocked back on his hands. The emptiness in my womb was getting worse. “I feel it already. Fuck me!”

Barclay chuckled. “Demanding little thing.”

The sofa cushions shifted under me.

He kept tugging on my rim as he worked his cockhead into me.

“Only shallow at first, okay?” he murmured. “Nice and slow. Like this.”

Oh my God. How much could I take? My ass was freaking yawning.

Warmth pooled in my underbelly, coiling into a ball of energy.

My womb. It burned and itched, right in the middle of my body where I couldn't do anything about it.

“Fuck me!” I pleaded. “Breed me, Barclay. Please! I'm ripe!”

The last word turned into a desperate cry.

If I didn't get him deeper, it would hurt. The itching was already getting unbearable.

Barclay growled like the beast he was. He withdrew his fingers and pushed in with his cock. My body yielded, making room for him, and he bottomed out inside me.

We both groaned when his balls brushed mine.

His cockhead kissed the mouth to my womb, but this time, it felt different. There was no resistance.

“I'm ready,” I gasped. “I am. I feel it.”

“My sweetheart.” Barclay's voice cracked. He hugged me around my torso and rocked.

Just a tiny little push.

That was all it took. My body all but swallowed his cock. Something in me began pulsating, and his crown surged into the clenching bundle of flesh. I could feel him so distinctly, thick and firm, all the way in my core, and it was the single most delicious, most satisfying sensation in the entire world.

I clung to his arms, where they were wrapped around me, and shuddered through wave after wave of pleasure.

“I’ll love you forever, Calvin.”

Oh yes. Love. It bloomed in my heart, this glorious feeling of utter surrender. I could feel the bond like vines ensnarling my body and soul, even penetrating my insides, growing through my stomach, my heart, and into my womb. Except I wasn’t tied down. I was flying.

“I love you.”

Barclay responded with a sigh and a long kiss to my temple.

He held still with his lips on my skin. Was he shivering? I couldn’t be sure with the havoc inside my own body.

I wanted his cum. He was all the way in, his cockhead caressing the walls of my womb. What was he waiting for?

“Breed me, Barclay. Please, breed me now.”

With a pained groan, he rocked us again, and the surge of ecstasy blinded me. Yelling my lungs out, I pushed back. I needed him to stay.

On instinct, I put my hand over my belly. There he was. A firm bulge pushed against

my hand. I was impaled on his dick, and it felt marvelous.

Stroking my distorted stomach, I jutted my ass out, making him move inside me.

He roared.

My sob bounced off the walls when he withdrew. But he thrust back in, and an orgasmic wave flared into my limbs. One more thrust, his cockhead moving through the channel in my core, sending me into the stratosphere...

I crashed back into my body in time for the most satisfying climax of my life. There was no underlying cramping or ache, no tension, no shaking or shuddering. The pleasure spilled into my womb, immediately soothing the burn, and seeped through the tissue, spreading through my inner organs and my muscles until it settled in my bones.

Barclay's knot grew in me, his cock lurched, and balmy liquid filled my womb. My heart. My soul.

I was smiling wide and humming.

My beastly mate rutted against me, clutching me in his arms, his muted growls vibrating through my body.

He filled me with pulse after pulse of his cum.

His lips brushed my temple. "Calvin... sweet... my sweet..." He petted my body with his rough hands, and I reached back to stroke his shoulders and neck.

Strangely enough, with all the chaos my nervous system was experiencing, my head was clear.

There was no going back from this point. The inevitability of what happened to us should have terrified me, but I was happy.

“It’s amazing, Barclay. So amazing.”

Another roar, another pulse of cum. He squeezed me tight, and his hips jerked.

“Fuck. Calvin...”

He sounded desperate, and I wanted to soothe him.

“I love this so much. Love you breeding me.”

Groaning, Barclay thrust again. He found a slow rhythm, fucking me with his knot. His cockhead stroked the sensitive walls of my womb, stirring the creamy cum in there, and my pleasure simmered. He kept coming in pulses, adding more seed into me until his thrusts slowed down. His legs began to tremble.

With a moan, he picked me up and sat with me in his lap. I hadn’t even realized he’d been standing with his legs bent all this time as he fucked me over the sofa. Fucked and bred me.

I wriggled in his lap and glanced down.

Well, damn.

My stomach looked like an inflated balloon. The position probably enhanced it as I leaned back with my legs astride Barclay’s lap with his swollen cock in me, but still.

I stroked it with both hands, and Barclay caressed my forearms until his fingers slid over mine.

We didn't say anything. We kept petting my bulging belly until much later, when his knot went down. He pulled out of me, and I shuddered with an echo of pleasure when the channel to my womb clenched tight, keeping his cum safe inside me. There was barely any liquid leaving my body as he retreated, and my stomach remained swollen. Petting it, I felt drugged with joy.

We did it. He had forever left his mark on me. It was there in my womb, creamy and warm, so distinct, it blew my mind. The cum sloshing against the walls of my womb seemed to caress my soul every time I moved. A part of my brain was still bathing in orgasms when I focused on the feeling.

Barclay carried me to the shower. He set the water temperature and knelt at my feet. He kissed below my belly button with his eyes closed as the water streamed over us.

The bond between us seemed so clear. Unbreakable. I hugged his head to me. My Barclay. My alpha .

I was pregnant with his child.

14

BARCLAY

Calvin looked gorgeous.

His pecs had filled out, his nipples like ripe raspberries. He liked it when I suckled on them. And his stomach. Damn.

After I'd bred him, it remained swollen. Full of my cum. He got aroused when I kissed him there this morning, and I ended up licking him to orgasm. Then he stroked me, aiming my cock at his belly, telling me how much he loved me breeding him. He seemed so happy when I came on his skin.

"Now I have your cum both inside my belly and all over it."

We showered, and after breakfast, we rested in the living room. Calvin picked a book from my shelf, but I didn't even open mine. He was all I could think about.

I could still smell the heat on him, weaker, but there. Wasn't it supposed to stop? I'd bred my little mate thoroughly. All the sex we'd had over the past few days had exhausted him, and he needed to recover now. I was nervous about it, so I shot a message to Hunter.

Me: Shouldn't the heat stop after breeding?

I turned the sound off so it wouldn't disturb Calvin when Hunter replied. It took him

only a minute.

Hunter: He could have one or two mild heat waves even after.

Me: Should I be more careful now? I mean, can we still have breeding sex?

Hunter: You can. Do what you feel like doing, and leave me alone.

Me: Sorry. And thanks. He's really amazing, you know. He's making me a better person already.

Hunter: I'm trying to be happy for you, but don't push it.

Hunter: If Calvin needs anything, health advice, a sympathetic ear, or a break from you, send him to me.

Hunter: Tell him not to worry about recovery. He's barely going to have any symptoms.

I smiled at the chain of messages.

"Hunter says the recovery will be mild," I told Calvin.

My mate was snuggled to my side on the sofa, reading a fantasy novel he'd found on my bookshelf. "Mm-hmm."

"You're not listening."

"Sorry! Gimme a sec."

I waited until he finished and set a bookmark between the pages.

“The tension!” He sighed. “It’s so well written.”

“I’ll let you read again in a bit.”

He looked up at me. Was it the bond, or did he get even more beautiful? He’s pregnant with my cub. My heart did a somersault every time I thought of that.

“You were saying?” he asked, smiling.

“Hunter messaged. Your recovery will be mild. You don’t have to worry about it.”

“Oh. That’s fantastic. Last time, I was climbing the walls for days. Is Hunter the doctor who visited me the night you found me?”

“Yes, that’s him.”

“I don’t even remember him. I should thank him.”

“You were out of it. I’m sure he understands. He keeps offering help if you need anything. He doesn’t think I deserve so much luck.”

“We are both lucky,” he whispered and craned his neck to kiss me into my beard.

I bent my head to kiss his soft lips. Then I couldn’t resist the lure of his stomach. I sneaked my hand under his T-shirt and caressed the round shape.

“Will the heat stop now?” Calvin murmured against my lips. “Because I wouldn’t mind repeating some of the things we’ve done, even though I’m pregnant already.”

He’s pregnant. Already. God! I stroked his belly, mesmerized.

“Hunter writes that it’ll fade out slowly. You could still have one or two more heat waves.”

Calvin bit his lip, petting my hand where I rested it on his stomach. “The fullness in there feels great.”

“Yeah?”

“Uh-huh. I’m wondering... can we do it again?”

I stroked over his womb and nuzzled the crook of his neck. “Do you want me to keep breeding you, my omega?”

He groaned softly, squirming under my touches.

“I’ll come inside you again, and we’ll make this belly even bigger, hm?”

“I want to be full of your cum.” His breathless plea made me hard as a rock in my jeans. I lifted Calvin onto my lap, and he straddled me, pressing down on my hard bulge.

“We need to wait for a heat wave,” I said, even as I bucked up to meet him.

Calvin dragged his T-shirt over his head, then reached for mine. Together, we pulled it off, and he rocked slowly, palming my pecs.

“It’s not going to take long,” he said. “I’m already getting wet.”

“Then take these off.”

He slid off to shove his sweats and underwear down his legs. Wearing only warm

winter socks, too big on his dainty feet, he opened my jeans and pulled my cock out. Then he snuggled to my chest, pressing his stomach to my rearing erection.

It made me growl. He did it again with undisguised intent. He rubbed his impregnated belly against my dick, moaning shamelessly.

“You bred me so good.”

“Soon, I’ll be in there again. All the way.”

“I love having sex with you.”

“Might be the heat.”

“Or maybe it’s you. I love how big you are everywhere.” He stroked along my shoulders and down my arms. “And the way you smell gets me horny even between waves.” Nuzzling between my pecs, he hummed. Then he caressed my erection between us. “So huge. It should be scary, but it’s not. It’s magnificent.”

He was driving me crazy. I palmed his ass cheeks to make him move. With a groan, he humped my erection, pressing his belly against it.

“It makes me so hot, Barclay. That you’ve been in me.”

He curved his spine, pushed out his stomach, and stroked my cock against it. My precum smeared his skin.

“Fuck, Barclay,” he moaned, staring at my cockhead where he cradled it to his middle. “I’m pregnant.” He let out another moan as he rubbed his stomach on me. “It makes me so wet to think about it. To say it out loud.”

“Your heat wave is coming, love. I can smell it.”

“You got me pregnant. You came into my womb and knocked me up.” His voice got breathy as the heat wave slowly took over.

“Yes, I did. And I’ll give you more cum, little one. I’ll fill you up.”

“I want to ride you.”

Rubbing my fingers through his crease, I tested how ready he was. He was leaking.

His moans grew louder as he kept thrusting with his stomach. I imagined him doing the same one day soon with a big round belly and groaned. Yeah, I’d be into that.

Calvin rose on his knees and grabbed my cock, lining it up. “I’m ready. I want it so much.”

“Take whatever you need, sweetheart.”

He sank down, wriggling and pushing lower. Then he braced himself with his hands on my shoulders and lifted his feet onto the sofa cushions. Crouching above me, he took me into the warmth of his body to the hilt and cried out.

His womb opened on the first thrust.

I bucked, shuddering with pleasure. Pure ecstasy. The mouth to his womb engulfed my cockhead and began squeezing me with rhythmical spasms. Calvin didn’t even move. He just squirmed and bore down. Head thrown back, he seemed to be coming harder than ever. His hard cock jerked between us, spraying my chest with pearly drops of omega seed.

We sat still while his hole and womb milked my length like a pair of slippery fists and a hot, sucking mouth. Calvin cried out victoriously when my knot began to swell. Surge after surge, my orgasm grew in intensity, and with every blast of pleasure, more cum poured out of me and into my mate's open womb.

We didn't fuck. Not really. Our bodies slotted together, and nature did what it needed to do. Calvin's body sucked the cum out of me, taking what it wanted, leaving me changed forever.

I ran my hands along his sides, memorizing the blissful expression on his face. I'd read somewhere forever ago that breeding your mate wasn't like any sex. That the experience was completely other. Finally, I understood what that meant. Even as we were immersed in pleasure, it wasn't the driving force making me dig my fingers into Calvin's ass cheeks and push my hips up to get even further into him, to breed him better... It was ownership. The animal in me claimed its mate, absolutely and irrevocably.

After a while, Calvin slumped in my arms. I rocked him on my knot, adding a few more drops of seed, and he moaned softly. His womb was still pulsating, even as he seemed to be falling asleep.

We rested joined, currents of pleasure running back and forth between us.

When my knot went down, I gently lifted Calvin off me and cradled him to my chest. His stomach was indeed bigger now, and he stroked it, smiling sleepily.

"I love this. How it feels in me."

"And I love you. I'm in love with you."

Eyes glassy, he blinked up at me. "I think I'm going to love you a lot, Barclay."

I kissed him, insistent, until he was panting against my lips.

15

CALVIN

Being pregnant was great. I decided I wanted one kid after another so I could be in this state of utter happiness nine months out of every year.

The heat had stopped, but I had no recovery symptoms at all. I wasn't even sore. In fact, I still felt low-key horny. Every time I remembered how Barclay's cock had speared me through and through and how his cum had surged into my womb, I got all hot and bothered again. Actually, just putting my hand on my lower belly could get me aroused. New life was already growing in me. Why was that so hot? And Barclay's cum remained inside me. Most of it would seep out little by little, blended with my slick... but it was still in there now, making my stomach look bloated. I loved that.

I adored cuddling up to Barclay, knowing his cum was in me. I felt claimed and protected.

And so, when I received a concerned message from Laure, it didn't faze me one bit.

Laurel: Barclay Black is a damned shifter, Cal. Call me immediately.

Not wanting Barclay to overhear if Laure got rude, I took my jacket and went out onto the porch. Barclay had cleared the snow from it so I could stand there in my sneakers without getting wet. I called Laure back.

“Calvin! You must move. My people did the background check on Barclay Black. He’s a bear shifter.”

“I know. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to freak you out.”

“Well, now I’m freaking out. He could be dangerous. I’m sending my guys…”

“That’s prejudice. Besides, I’m not going anywhere without him. I’m pregnant.”

“What?”

“Barclay is indeed a bear shifter, and I’m his fated mate. I went into heat the second night I was here, and we had breeding sex together. I’m 99 percent sure I’m pregnant. And he’s not dangerous at all. Not to me, anyway. He’s been taking care of me and protecting me.”

I waited for my friend to process the information.

“You got yourself knocked up by a bear,” Laure finally said.

“I’m staying with Barclay. We’ll live together here.”

“You just met him!” Laure yelled.

“You know it’s like that with shifters. The bond is instant.”

“Oh my fucking God. You escape one controlling alphahole and let another impregnate you mere days later. What the fuck, Calvin?”

“Don’t call him an alphahole,” I protested. “He’s a good man.”

“How can you know that? You’ve been with him for a few days, most of which you’ve spent bouncing on his dick.”

I snickered. That was true.

“It’s not funny!”

“I know you worry. But it’s okay, I promise. I like Barclay. I’m falling in love with him.”

“I’m coming to get you.”

“No, Laure. You can’t. I want to be with him.”

“I need to check that beast out for myself. If I find a single red flag, I’m kidnapping you.”

“Laure!”

“Besides, your father is looking for you all over the mountains.”

Shit .

“Your Barclay had better have some backup because Damian is with him, and they’re determined to drag you back to the city.”

My stomach turned. “Do they know about me staying in Beauville?”

“Maybe. If not, it’s just a question of time before they find out.”

Suddenly, I got painfully reminded of my anxiety issues. I was about to fall apart.

“I’m coming, Calvin. I’ll be there tomorrow.”

“But Barclay…”

Laure had already hung up.

Breathe .

Crushing pressure constricted my chest. I stumbled, grabbing the railing on the porch. The trees blurred. Blood thundered in my ears.

I hated these attacks. Hated them. Oh God, what if it could hurt the baby?

“Barclay!”

My voice broke. His name came out as a mere whine.

I fell to my knees. I couldn’t inhale. I’d pass out.

Before Barclay found me, I’d pass out and drown in my own vomit. The baby needed me to keep it together, dammit! I was so weak. Such a failure. How could I be a father?

The next second, the door flew open, and I was scooped up in a warm embrace.

“Calvin, sweetheart. I’m here, it’s okay. I’m here.”

Finally, air. Suffused with Barclay’s scent. I breathed against his shirt, clutching the fabric in my fists.

He sat on the porch swing and rocked us, cradling me in his lap like a child. The

panic stopped immediately, and as I inhaled and exhaled, counting my breaths, the physical symptoms disappeared after a mere minute.

I lifted my head.

“It’s like magic.”

Barclay cupped my cheek. “What, my love?”

“Your scent. I can’t panic when you’re with me.”

“Let’s go back inside before you get cold.”

He kissed the top of my head and carried me into the living room. I loved it when he carried me.

“Can you tell me what happened to make you so scared?” he asked when we were cuddled up on the sofa.

“I talked to Laure. My father and Damian are coming for me.”

He clenched his jaw. “Let them find us. I’ll sort it out with them for good.”

“They could be dangerous, Barclay.”

He smirked, but his eyebrows remained scrunched up together. He looked sinister when he did that. “More dangerous than me?”

“In a different way. They have money and connections.”

“We’re mates, Calvin. As a shifter’s fated, you’re protected by law. They can’t lay a

pinkie on you unless they want to spend the night in jail.”

I wanted to believe it. That my father wouldn't want to hurt his own grandchild. That once Damian found out that I was mated to a bear shifter, he'd leave me be.

Except I knew them both too well. Damian Hart had never given up easily. And my father would never change a course of action unless he thought it was his own genius idea.

“We'll have to confront them sooner or later,” Barclay said. He stroked my hair with tender fingers, searching my face with his kind eyes. “We need to tell your father that you're with me.”

“It seems so easy now when I'm in your lap. I'm not scared when I'm with you. But as soon as you go a few yards away from me, I lose it. I'm weak.”

Barclay glared. “You're most definitely not. What you did, breaking up with Damian and walking away, was brave as hell. And how you fought to stay alive in the freezing forest... You're much stronger than you think, my sweetheart. But I'll be here to protect you when you feel weak and afraid. Always.”

I laid my head on Barclay's round shoulder. “I don't want to see them at all. I want them to disappear.”

“Once we've dealt with them, it'll be just you and me.”

Forever .

I would live here with Barclay for the rest of my life.

The forest behind the glass wall was completely white, with snow sticking to the tree

trunks on one side. The birches were covered in sparkly fluff all the way to the thinnest top branches. I tried to imagine it green in the spring or dark with rain in the fall. Maybe I was still hazy and hungover after my breakdown, but it seemed like the most beautiful place in the entire world. I'd never even seen the actual town, but in my head, Beauville was a quaint and cozy cluster of log cabins, with just one local grocer, a pub, and one church tower sticking above the low roofs. Everybody knew everybody, and they were nice to each other because the mountains taught them they needed to help each other to survive... I needed to see the town for myself, but I had already decided I would love it.

"How does it look in the summer?" I asked.

Barclay hummed, combing his fingers through my hair. "Lovely. The forest is full of blueberries. I'll make you a pie when they're ripe. And there's nothing quite like a meadow in bloom. We'll hike above the tree line, and I'll show you Beauville from above. We'll pick mushrooms and go fishing."

I smiled. The picture he painted seemed like a dream. I saw myself walking over a blooming meadow, holding Barclay's hand. I carried a basket full of berries, and of course, my stomach was round with Barclay's baby. The sun shone from a clear blue sky, and the mountain peaks rose around us in quiet glory.

A scary thought smacked me in the face. If I were to live here, I'd need to find a job.

"Barclay, is there a daycare in Beauville?"

"Sure. It's tiny but growing."

"Do you know the manager?"

"Phil runs it. I wouldn't call him a manager exactly. He's more like everybody's

uncle. His alpha is our sheriff. What? Are you already worrying about where our little one will go? He's not even peanut-sized yet. I think we've got time before we entrust anyone with him."

"I didn't mean that. But do you think they'll be hiring anytime soon? I could do an internship there and... I don't know. I only have nine months, right? But..."

My heartrate picked up a little. What if Barclay wanted me to stay at home? He stared at me with concern. God . With me being pregnant and mated through some of that inexplicable shifter magic, he had power over me. First Father, then Damian... now Barclay.

The power Barclay wielded was much greater. He held my life in his hands.

"Will you let me work?" I blurted. My cheeks heated.

Barclay's smile looked sad. "You never have to ask if I will let you do something, Calvin. You can do whatever makes you happy, and I'll support you with everything I have because I love you." He petted my cheek, his eyes warm and kind. "But one step at a time, okay?"

Could I be so lucky? Could I be safe and protected but have more freedom than ever?

"Okay. One step at a time." I'd get rid of Father and Damian, then I'd have a baby, and then... I grinned. "I'm pregnant."

Chuckling, Barclay hugged me to him. "You most definitely are."

"I like it."

"Good."

We looked at each other, both of us smiling. We'd be a family. In comparison, everything else felt insignificant.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:09 pm

16

CALVIN

When we were putting away the dishes after dinner, Barclay paused with a towel over his shoulder, gazing at me inquiringly.

“You’ve been cooped up in here for days. Now that the heat is over, I was wondering...”

“Yes?” I prompted.

“How about we go to the pub tonight? You can meet my friends.” He grimaced as if he was already reconsidering the suggestion.

I blinked with surprise. “Um. Are you sure? You don’t look sure.”

Barclay’s chest expanded, and he gave me a grim nod. “I’m sure.”

“Why do you look like you’re steeling yourself?”

He snorted out a short laugh. “They can be a lot to take sometimes, but they’re good people. Except for Monty. He’s a pain in the ass.”

I frowned. “We don’t have to...”

“I’m kidding. Mostly. I want you to meet them, and they’ll be nice to you, don’t

worry. They'll only give me shit, not you." He winked, making me grin.

"I'd love to see the town and the people. But..." I didn't have to finish. Barclay hugged me around my shoulders.

"I thought about that. The pass to Green Peaks is closed because of the weather, and the road won't be cleared until morning. And even if your father appears out of thin air, you'll be as safe as ever at the pub. Nobody will dare to come close to you with Monty and Jordy looming behind us."

It sounded tempting. Then I looked down at my borrowed, cinched-up sweats and deflated. "Barclay, I have nothing to wear."

"It's just a local pub, sweetheart. Your jeans are clean and dry. You can take my parka over your jacket, and we'll ride the snowmobile. It's barely five minutes from here."

Meeting new people could make me anxious as hell, but not with Barclay at my side. I was even cautiously optimistic about the plan.

"Let's go out."

Half an hour later, we zoomed through the forest toward the flickering lights ahead. The trees opened, but I didn't see much as I was hunched behind Barclay with a helmet on my head. We rode up to a cleared parking lot and stopped on the edge next to a group of other snowmobiles. Barclay pulled my helmet off, and the world around me brightened.

Beauville looked exactly as I'd imagined. Log cabins huddled together, their roofs covered with snow blankets and lined with icicles. Only a few buildings were taller than one story, and even those were built in the rough lodge style. Squat cottages

dotted the steep slopes surrounding the town, illuminated by yellow porch lights. The mountains hugged Beauville from all sides, their silhouettes silver in the moonlight against the inky sky.

“It looks like a Christmas postcard,” I breathed.

Barclay chuckled. “I guess. Just wait until they put up the decorations next week. Our mayor goes full-on Santa’s Village.”

He pointed out the town hall, the school, the grocery store, and the road leading to the B&B on the forest’s edge. Then he pointed at the door behind us. The wooden sign dangling on iron chains simply said Pub .

“Ready?”

I squared my shoulders. “To meet a bunch of bear shifters? Not really.”

“They don’t bite.” Barclay grinned, flashing his teeth, and I laughed.

I entered the pub tucked under Barclay’s arm and did a double take.

A few seemingly human patrons sat at tables and idled by the bar, but I barely noticed them. A group of alphas dominated the space, all of them huge like Barclay. The guy leaning on the bar closest to us seemed even bigger—as tall as Barclay but wider in the shoulders with legs and arms like tree trunks. When he moved toward us, he filled my entire field of vision. I tilted my head back to look into his face, and my mouth fell open.

“Mr. Grump is here!” he exclaimed, his voice like thunder.

The man flashed two rows of white teeth, the canines just a bit bigger than what

seemed normal, and moved closer, his ginormous paw outstretched in front of him.

“Montgomery Wolf, at your service, dear sir. You can call me Monty.”

He engulfed my hand in his and squeezed firmly but carefully enough not to crush my fingers.

“You must be Calvin. It’s a great pleasure to meet you. Welcome to Beauville.”

He radiated so much warmth I couldn’t help but grin up at him.

“Thank you.”

“My goodness, you’re sweet. Are there more of you wandering about in the woods? Should I go look?”

Barclay growled next to me, but Monty chuckled breezily. If he laughed any harder, he might cause an earthquake.

“You’ll have a difficult time of it with Mr. Grump here, but fear not. We have your back.”

“He’s not that bad,” I piped up.

Another man approached from the side, smaller than Barclay, but still three times my size.

“Now that he has you, he’s not. You probably don’t remember me.” He offered me his hand too. His skin was smooth compared to Barclay’s and Monty’s coarse palms.

“Hunter Black.”

“You’re the doctor. I haven’t had the opportunity to thank you.”

Hunter waved dismissively. “Just doing my job. Come and have a drink with us.” He gestured to the bar.

“I can’t drink alcohol,” I said.

Monty guffawed and slapped Barclay’s shoulder. “Damn right, he can’t!”

Barclay gave Monty a withering look and tugged me closer.

I probably shouldn’t start explaining to them that I wasn’t yet twenty-one and hadn’t even considered the pregnancy angle. I kept my mouth shut, but my cheeks heated anyway.

Another alpha, obviously a bear too, stood behind the bar, watching us avidly. He was leaner than the others, but not by much. His black T-shirt hugged his wide torso and mighty arms, which were covered with colorful tattoos of green leaves, flowers, and bugs. He had black tunnels in his earlobes and a thick ring in his nose like a bull. With those black eyebrows, he looked the scariest, but then he gave me a sweet grin.

“That’s Jordy,” Barclay said, nudging me forward.

“Hi, Calvin. Nice to meet you in person. We’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Fair warning—bears gossip,” Barclay hissed into my ear. “A lot.”

The door opened, and a waft of cold air washed over us from behind.

“Chickie!” Monty exclaimed. “Just on time.”

Barclay and I turned to the newcomer.

This alpha was older than the others, his bushy beard streaked with white, making him look like Santa's younger, buff brother. He was in full sheriff's uniform, the oversized kind. He had to go sideways to walk through the door.

"Chickie?" I whispered. Who in the hell nicknamed this man Chickie ?

"Hawke Klondike," the sheriff said gruffly, taking off his glove to shake my hand.

"Good evening, sir."

The older alpha's lips twitched with a small smile. "No need for formalities, Calvin. You're a part of this family now."

"Thank you." I was about to call him sir again but swallowed it at the last moment.

"Let's sit down. I believe we have some issues on our hands."

I never would have expected to feel comfortable in a room with five monstrous alphas, but I was as chill as I'd ever been. We sat with Monty, Hunter, and Hawke—no way was I calling him Chickie, not even in my head. I snuggled to Barclay's side, and Jordy poured the beers.

Hawke went straight to business.

"Barclay told me what your ex did. You could sue him, you know."

I glanced around at the grim faces. "I'd rather avoid that. It would just prolong the whole thing."

Hawke nodded in acknowledgment. “Your call. He’s been asking around, and now I hear two men are looking for you. They didn’t report you missing, though.”

“I told my father that I’m safe and want them to leave me be, but he’s not used to hearing no from me.”

Even Monty’s expression darkened. Jordy set the beers on the table and handed me my glass of juice. He stayed looming above us with his arms crossed over his chest as Hawke continued. “I see. Because word has spread already, and the good people in town have been happily sharing the story about how Barclay found an omega in the forest around Red Creek.”

Barclay groaned, shaking his head.

“That’s our fault,” Monty said, looking sheepish. “We were making fun of Barclay here at the bar, and folks must have heard us.”

“I can’t be hiding out here forever.” I surprised myself with my bravery, but it was true. What would I gain by cowering behind Barclay for another week or two?

Out of all the worries and questions in my mind, one thought prevailed. I wanted this over with. As soon as possible. If these men could help me, if I had Barclay by my side, I could get rid of the ghosts from my past for good.

Hawke raised one eyebrow. “Are they going to cause trouble? This ex and your father?”

“Not in the way you might mean. They won’t get into a fistfight or anything like that. Their threats are more about money and lawyers.”

“But you’re afraid of them finding you. You must have good reasons for that.”

My stomach clenched, but it didn't feel like the usual fear, more like a memory of it. A habit—which I needed to break.

“They never stooped to physical violence. But I used to be dependent on them, and up until recently, I thought I'd have to face them alone.”

Barclay kissed my temple and squeezed where he held me around my back.

“I'm not sure how far they'll go to get me to return with them,” I admitted. “But they can't do anything to me, can they? Not really.”

Monty smirked. “I'd like to see them try.”

I turned to Barclay. “The more I think about it, the more I believe you were right. I need to face them and tell them to leave me alone for good. I could message the address to my father tomorrow morning.”

Barclay made a surprised sound. “You sure?”

Was I sure? Not really, but I didn't see many other options. “It's better than waiting around, not knowing when they might accost us.”

I thought of how many more breakdowns I could go through before my father suddenly stood on my porch. What if I knew for sure when he was coming? Then I could handle it. With Barclay at my side, I could handle anything.

“How about I happen to visit you when they arrive?” Hawke said. “I could stand by and observe.”

“Maybe we can all come visit,” Jordy said ominously.

I let out a nervous chuckle. “It’s not an invasion, you know.”

“We’re small-town people, dear Calvin.” Monty lifted his beer glass and took a gulp. He wiped his beard with the back of his hand. “We impose on our neighbors and gossip. Sometimes, we carry various pieces of equipment with us too. In case we need to chop trees and shovel snow on the way to said neighbors.”

“And sometimes we punch strangers in the face if they mess with one of ours,” Jordy added.

Hawke glowered. “Orson Jordan, I’ve put you in jail once, and I’ll happily do it again.”

Smirking, Jordy shrugged and returned to the bar. There was a story hidden in there. I’d have to ask Barclay about it later.

“So, what time are we coming?” Monty urged. He looked excited.

I could see it in my head. Hawke in his uniform with the gun holster showing, Monty leaning on a shovel, Hunter with an axe, and Jordy... Jordy would hold a chainsaw in his hands. They would stand lined up in Barclay’s yard, scarier than the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. I covered my mouth with my hand, torn between terror and laughter.

“The roads should be clear by morning,” Barclay said. “If you message your father at eight and they leave immediately, they could arrive around ten.”

Hunter checked his phone. “I have a patient in the morning, but I’ll come at quarter to ten.”

“Jordy and I will be there,” Monty confirmed.

Barclay then cleverly redirected the talk to Beauville and its residents. As if with a press of a button, Monty started telling me all kinds of stories about the town—when and how it was founded, about the gold rush times, and how it almost got abandoned before the bear shifters discovered it a century ago.

“The word spread about a place in the mountains, far away from the nearest human city, where you could get a fixer-upper cabin dirt-cheap. Twenty bear families moved in over the first few years, and more followed later.”

“How did you manage to keep it secret from the tourists?” I asked.

“It’s not secret, but try to get accommodation here,” Hunter said.

Monty waggled his eyebrows. “I got six rooms only, and I rent them out when I want to whom I want.”

Barclay leaned in conspiratorially. “The last time we had developers looking around for new hotel sites, Frey chased them out of town in bearskin.”

“What? Who’s Frey?”

“Our mayor,” Monty said proudly. “And he didn’t exactly chase them. He told them nobody in town would sell them a single acre and then ensured they had a few chilling wildlife encounters during their stay.”

“He only had to do that because you let those fuckers sleep at the B&B,” Hunter muttered.

Monty threw his hands in the air. “They lied to me when they booked! Said they were visiting a cousin on his birthday. Am I to check every guest’s family tree?”

Hawke shrugged. “It wouldn’t hurt.”

I might have been clumsy about it, but I asked Hawke about his mate, Phil, and the daycare. Hawke got the sweetest smile on his otherwise frowny face as he told me about it. I learned that Phil took over the daycare twenty years ago and that they’d gone from only nine kids to more than twenty now, half of them shifters. The daycare was at the edge of the forest where the bears had built a wooden playground and even regulated a part of the creek where the kids could splash around in the summer.

Barclay nudged me under the table and said, “Calvin has a degree in early childhood development.”

I blushed.

“You do? Have you considered working as a daycare teacher?”

My cheeks burning, I stammered, “Yes. Um. I’ve always wanted to do that, but I... um...”

Hawke patted my shoulder. “You have to meet Phil. He’s been searching for new people all over the mountains. This year, we’ve had thirteen babies born in Beauville, more families are moving in, and with the locals bringing their mates, the daycare and school will burst at the seams.”

Overwhelmed, I managed to thank him and tell him that, yes, I’d love to meet Phil and that I hoped I could help.

Barclay looked smug as he lifted his beer to his lips.

17

CALVIN

I got cold on the snowmobile ride back, and Barclay made it his mission to warm me up. We were camped out on the thick carpet in front of the burning fire, Barclay leaning against the sofa with me settled between his thighs. He played with my hair. It amazed me how gentle he could be with those strong, calloused hands.

“You don’t have to do it,” he murmured. I knew what he meant. “There’s no rush.”

“I want to.”

“It makes you anxious.”

“A little. It would make me more anxious if we postponed it.”

Barclay grunted, and the sound reminded me of how morose he was the first day I was here. It made me smile.

“Monty is right. You are grumpy.”

“Sorry.”

“I like it.”

“How can you like me being an ass?”

I shrugged. “It’s cute.”

“Cute?” he cried with mock outrage. “Me hating most people is cute?”

“You don’t hate people. You want them to leave you alone. Most of the time, I want the same. I like kids, but I could do without the majority of adults. I wish I had the face and size to pull off being grumpy.”

“You’re too adorable for that.” He looped his arms around me and kissed my nape.

“Mmm. And you’re a great cuddler for such a grouch.”

The flames danced and flickered, the sight better than any movie. Between the fire and Barclay’s furnace of a body, I was toasty warm already.

“You said you lived in the city before. What did you even do there? You didn’t have a woodshop there, did you?”

“Hm. I guess you still don’t know much about me. I keep forgetting that. Let’s see... I grew up in Green Peaks. Moved to the city for college. Worked at a bank and hated it.”

“A bank?” That didn’t sound like Barclay at all.

“Yeah. I was a credit analyst. Business, not private.”

I flipped around, gazing at him with shock. “You? You assessed bank loans?”

He grimaced.

“Oh my God, Barclay. You worked in the business district and wore a suit and tie. I

can't believe that."

"You'd better do. It was how I could afford this place. I endured it for nine years and saved enough to fuck off to the mountains for good. Best decision of my life."

"That's kind of amazing."

He smiled softly and kissed my nose. "I agree. Especially now."

"I'm going to need some time to process this. Could you wear a suit and tie for me one day? I'd like to see that."

"Nope. Donated all that shit. I'm proud to say I don't own a single suit jacket anymore."

I grinned at that. "Good for you."

"Are you warm enough?"

"Uh-huh." I nuzzled his throat.

"We should go to bed. It's late."

"Or we could stay here for a bit longer." He smelled amazing, like always, and before I could stop myself, I opened my mouth over the soft skin just under his beard.

His chest rumbled with a sigh, and he slid one hand to my thigh.

"Barclay... I'm too warm."

He pulled back and looked at me. I tried to bat my eyelashes and look coy. It made

him chuckle, but it worked. He reached for the hem of my T-shirt and pulled it over my head.

“Better?”

“A little bit.”

With another chuckle, he began kissing down my throat. Slowly, he lowered me onto the carpet and undid the button on my jeans. He wrapped his lips around my nipple. The sensation made me moan. A current of pleasure shot from my pec straight to my hole, and liquid heat pooled in my core.

“Will you fuck me?” I breathed.

Instead of answering, he moved his lips to my other nipple. I arched on the floor, pushing my chest up. My nipples were so sensitive; it felt incredible. When Barclay wrapped his hand around my cock, I cried out. Slick smeared between my ass cheeks.

“Fuck me, please.”

Barclay tugged my jeans halfway down my thighs and swallowed my cock to the root. I grabbed fistfuls of his hair. He sucked hard before pulling off with a slurp.

“You’re not in heat anymore, sweetheart. We need to be careful.”

Screw careful. I wanted him in me.

He took my jeans and underwear off. Slowly, he folded my legs to my chest. He raked his gaze all over me, then stared at my hole.

“You’re still swollen. All puffy and slick.”

Then he bent down and licked my rim.

The coals in the fireplace glowed, flames slowly getting smaller. The image blurred as I peered at it, slow, syrupy pleasure spreading through my lower body. Holding my ass cheeks spread out, Barclay began licking into me. My eyes drifted shut.

With firm licks and sensual kisses, he made love to me. He stroked my cock and pushed his tongue deeper. When I spilled onto my stomach, he licked my cum off my skin and went back to kissing my open hole.

One finger, then maybe two. I couldn't tell exactly. He pulled them apart, stretching me open.

I groaned. "I love when you do that."

"You're pregnant. You need it."

"Fuck me, Barclay. I need that ." How many times would I have to ask?

He removed his fingers, making me look up.

Finally, he rose on his knees, his fat cock sticking out from his open jeans. He got up to remove the pants, and as he stood above me, all naked, raw want slashed through me. This would be the first time we made love outside heat.

He stroked his cock, looking down at me. I took in the wall of muscles, the dark body hair, the width of his shoulders, and the predatory fire in his eyes. The most magnificent alpha of them all, and he was mine.

"Please!" I couldn't help myself. I pulled my legs closer to my chest, offering him my hole without a speck of shame.

“Shh. I got you.”

Barclay lowered his glorious body, caging me in. His cockhead nudged my rim. Oh yes. Please. Please!

“Fuck!” His low curse tickled my neck, and he grazed my ear with his teeth.

The stretch was inconceivable and absolutely blissful. My muscles loosened, my rim yielding to the pressure, and his thick cock inched inside me. The fullness took my breath away.

“Oh, Calvin.” Barclay let out a strangled moan. “Stop me if it’s... too much.”

“It’s not. It’s perfect.”

He dragged his lips up and down the side of my face. I turned my head for a kiss, and he nipped my upper lip. “You’re so fucking tight, sweetheart,” he whispered.

One more inch. A wave of tingles spread through my guts.

“Love it,” I moaned against his parted lips.

He moved back and forth carefully and the friction... As if he’d hit a button inside me, my pleasure flared out.

“God, yes!”

“Yeah?”

“More!”

He kissed me. His tongue tangled with mine, and he fucked me shallowly, stretching my hole to capacity. On each thrust, the sweet feeling got stronger. I sneaked my hand over my ass cheek, feeling around my rim and grabbing his cock where it slid in and out. It was all slippery with my slick. Lord, I was leaking like a faucet.

It felt like only half of his cock, but my hole was already tingling with an approaching orgasm.

Rising above me, Barclay moved his hands on the back of my thighs and looked down.

“Fucking hell, Calvin.”

His hips jerked, and he went deeper. Whether it was intentional or whether he was just as overwhelmed as me, it didn’t matter. The movement must have nudged the mouth to my womb, and I burst into sheer ecstasy.

With loud wails, I came and came, my insides fluttering around Barclay’s cock. Bless him, he didn’t stop. He fucked me steadily with the same depth and strength, prolonging my climax until I was twitching with it.

Then he pulled out and spread my legs. I shuddered from the sudden emptiness.

“Barclay?”

It took a mere twist of his hand over his cockhead.

Splatters of cum rained onto my stomach and chest. Barclay roared, burning eyes pinned on my body. He milked his cock until the last drop fell into my belly button, then he smeared the cum over my skin.

“Wanted to come all over your knocked-up belly,” he told me breathlessly.

Oh yes .

I helped him to lather me with his cum as if it were lotion.

We showered together, and I got sleepy under the warm water. Barclay dried me and carried me to bed.

“Why am I so tired?”

“Your heat just ended, you’re pregnant, and you’ve been through a lot. Besides, it’s nearly eleven.”

“Will you hold me?”

“Always.”

Wrapped in my mate’s strong embrace, I didn’t think about tomorrow. I slept soundly for the entire night.

18

BARCLAY

Calvin put the phone aside and looked out of the window. His cheeks were paler than usual.

“Do you want more tea, sweetheart?”

He shook his head. “No. Thank you.”

“Water? Juice?”

“I’m good.”

He reached for the phone, glanced at the screen, and put it back.

“It’s only been a minute since you last checked,” I said.

“I know.” My mate flashed me an irritated look. “I thought Father might reply.”

“He could already be on the way.”

Calvin blew out a breath and gazed out of the kitchen window again.

I stood and stretched my back. “How about a distraction?”

“You don’t even let me do the dishes.”

“You did them last night.”

“Whatever. Stop hovering. I’m fine.”

“You look like you’re about to start climbing the walls.”

He huffed.

I stretched out my hand. “We have at least two hours. You’re not going to sit here all that time, staring at the driveway. Come on.”

Reluctantly, he grabbed my hand and let me pull him up.

“What do you want to do?” he asked.

“Come. I’ll show you.”

I led him to the master bedroom and opened the closet. I gestured at the nearly empty rod. “See? I barely have any clothes that need hanging. So I was thinking. I could add a couple of shelves, and it would be your half.”

“Okay.” I checked his reaction, but Calvin’s face looked blank.

It was making me nervous. I gestured to the bed. “We can move the king away from the window and make space for another nightstand. You need a nightstand on your side. I’ll make you one to match mine.”

Calvin looked around, saying nothing.

“Could you send for your things?” I pressed. “I mean, you look cute wrapped in my hoodies, don’t get me wrong. But I figure you’ll be more comfortable having your own stuff. Your family butler. Could he help you with that?”

“Sure. I can message Filippo now.”

I kissed the top of his head. “I want you to like it here. It’s your home too. You need to tell me what you want, where, and how, and I’ll make it happen.”

Calvin’s innocent eyes gleamed up at me. “What if I wanted to live in the city?”

Well, shit. Could I do that? But what about the shop... and being unable to shift and run whenever? The noise. The people.

Calvin kept staring at me, a furrow between his eyebrows. My mate, already pregnant with my cub, trusted me to care for him. His comfort was the most important thing in the world.

“We’ll make it work.” I searched for better words. “We can... alternate.” Damn. That’d be a hassle. I’d need to close the shop. “And... I can, uh... I’m sure I can...”

“Barclay, stop.” My mate smiled and stretched on his tiptoes to kiss my cheek. “I don’t want to live there. I want to be here with you.”

“You do?”

“Yes.”

“Then why...?”

He looked sheepish. “Sorry. You seemed so sure of yourself, I couldn’t resist rattling

you a bit.”

“That wasn’t nice, Calvin.”

His lips twitched. “You wanted to distract me. I thought it would be funny to see you sweat.”

I swooped down and grabbed him by his ass. He yelped and squirmed as I lifted him to me and pushed him against the closet door. Growling, I grazed his neck with my teeth. Calvin giggled.

“What’s funny now, omega?”

“Your beard. It tickles!”

So I opened my mouth and bit down on the tendons in the crook of his neck and shoulder. Calvin groaned.

“Nothing’s funny,” he breathed. “You’re a big, scary grizzly bear.”

I continued to nibble on his skin and rocked into him. Squeezing his ass cheeks, I felt his cock grow hard against my belly.

“You like being manhandled by a big, scary bear?”

“Uh-huh.”

He moaned when I teased his open crease through his sweats. I lifted one knee, supporting his weight against the closet door, and sneaked one hand down the back of his pants. I found his pucker, soft and wet, and slid a finger inside him.

Calvin wrapped his arms around my neck and hid his face in my chest. “We shouldn’t... not now...” Except he sounded like he wanted me to keep going.

“We have time.”

I crooked my finger, searching for his gland. He stopped protesting. When I switched to two fingers, he cried out happily, his hole releasing a fresh load of slick.

“Want to suck you. Want your cock in my mouth.”

Who was I to deny him?

With my fingers in him, I carried him to bed. I only pulled them out when I was lying down with Calvin on top of me.

“Turn around, your sweet ass in my face.”

He scrambled around while I dragged his sweats off his legs. Then he attacked my fly. Within seconds, his mouth was wrapped around my cockhead, and his groans of pleasure sent tendrils of bliss to my balls.

He spread his legs wide, straddling me, and his ass cheeks were open, his hole right there. A beautiful, blooming bud, leaking nectar down his smooth taint to his tight sack. He had the perfect omega ass, pink and hairless, so youthful it looked virginal. Except I’d stretched it out, and now it was plush like a mouth puckered for a kiss. I traced the puffy rim with a fingertip, and it clenched under my touch. So responsive.

“I’m a lucky bastard,” I muttered.

Calvin hummed around my cock and took me deeper into his throat. He massaged my length and balls as he sucked hard.

I lifted my shoulders from the bed, trying to reach his pucker with my mouth. With our height difference, it was a challenge, but when I supported his hips for a better angle, I could kiss him right there. It made him groan and suck harder.

My tongue in his hole and his mouth around my dick... it was heaven. When I fisted his cock, he came after a few licks, shivering and gagging on my cockhead.

He let go to catch his breath, but he didn't stop stroking me.

I plonked on the bed and put my fingers into his opening. He liked that . He pushed, meeting my hands, so I gave him three fingers, two from my right and one from my left hand, and pulled his rim open. Crying out with pleasure, he rocked on my fingers, then went back to sucking my cock.

Yep, Calvin was thoroughly distracted. I bet he hadn't thought about his father or his ex for a second since I had him against the closet door.

“God, you're horny, my little mate. Think you can take four?”

Calvin groaned, then gagged again.

I worked another finger in and pulled, opening him up so I could see his flesh and the dark hole leading into the depths of his body. It was lewd and glorious. His reaction was the best, though. Whenever I stretched him a little more, he strained to meet me.

One day soon, I'd be able to fist him.

“It's because you're pregnant, sweetheart. You need me to take care of this horny hole, make it big so you can push out a baby with it.”

Upon hearing that, Calvin swooped down my cock. His throat constricted, but he

stayed there, not breathing. I moved my fingers, stretching him wide while pumping into him, and he shuddered.

His cock jerked, and a fresh load of his cum sprinkled my chest and stomach.

I lost it. With a warning shout, I succumbed to the onslaught of pleasure. Calvin gagged but swallowed right after. He milked my cock with his hands and sucked on the head, drinking down everything I gave him.

On instinct, I dug my fingers into my mate's guts. His hole pulsed, slick running down my hands, filthy smacking noises coming from where I thrust with my fingers.

Somehow, we made it back to the real world. Calvin let my cock slide out of his mouth and collapsed on top of me, smearing his cum around. He rested his face on my thigh, his nose by the base of my softening dick.

I withdrew my fingers and stroked his stretched rim, massaging it so it would close.

"That was epic," he murmured.

"Happy?"

"Mm-hmm. Very."

"You seem to like stretching."

"Oh yeah. When I felt the strain down there, in my inner muscles, it tingled everywhere. Then it all loosened, and it was such a relief. I want to do that again."

"Definitely. I could try fucking you with my cock but leave in a couple of fingers too."

“Stop, or you’ll get me horny again.”

Chuckling, I patted his ass cheek. “We should shower.”

Just like that, he tensed.

“Damn, I really got distracted.” He pushed himself up on his hands. “What’s the time?”

“It’s okay, sweetheart. It’s only been one hour.”

He blew out a heavy breath. “Shower. And I guess I could change into my jeans.”

“Whatever you want.”

In the shower, I massaged his shoulders under the spray of warm water, but he was restless.

“What can I do?” I asked as he was drying himself with a towel, his eyes staring unseeingly at the closed bathroom door.

“Nothing. This is fine. Peachy, in fact. I should be hyperventilating right now, but I’m just vaguely tense. I even forgot about it as soon as I had your fingers in my ass.”

I chuckled. “I could put them back in.”

He laughed. “Somehow, the thought of talking to my father with your fingers up my butt doesn’t appeal.”

I reached for his ass, but he dodged me. “You said you wanted my fingers up your butt.”

Calvin swatted at my arm with the towel. “I love them there. When we’re alone.”

“We’re still alone now.” I wagged my eyebrows, and he snorted.

“As soon as today’s visitors leave the property, you can put them back in. All four of them. Hell, we can try five.”

“We will.”

I took the towel from him and hung it on the rack. I was proud of myself for making him laugh even when he was stressed.

I hugged him to me and kissed him. Calvin weaved his fingers into my beard. When he broke the kiss, he met my gaze with a serious expression on his face.

“You’re amazing, Barclay. You’re the first man in my life to ever make me feel happy and safe. Thank you.”

Oh damn. My eyes burned.

“I love you, Calvin,” I rasped.

“Whatever happens today, whatever they say, I’m yours forever.”

I cupped his nape and pulled him in for another kiss. His tongue touched mine, and he let out a soft moan. I sneaked a hand between us to pet his belly. Forever was about right.

We went to the bedroom to dress, then to the kitchen. I made myself a sandwich, but Calvin claimed he wasn’t hungry. I suggested at least a banana, and he relented. He was back to his nervous fidgeting.

“They won’t be here for at least half an hour,” I said. “It’s impossible to drive faster than that, and they couldn’t have been staying anywhere other than Green Peaks. There’s nothing but hunting cabins between Beauville and Green Peaks.”

Calvin heaved a sigh. He grabbed the banana peel and stood to throw it into the trash. Then he paused by the counter and closed his eyes.

“I’m not panicking,” he said. “It’s okay.”

“I know you’re not.”

I hugged him from behind and felt him sag against me.

“I want them gone from my life.”

“Soon.”

“After this mess is over, I want to spend a full day in bed, naked with you.”

“Oh yes.”

“And then we’ll go to town and celebrate with your friends.”

“We will.”

“Good. Okay.”

“You’re so brave, Calvin. You’ve got this.”

I could deal with his father and ex myself. Calvin could hide behind me, and I’d send them where the sun didn’t shine with no return ticket. But I understood why Calvin

needed to do it himself.

“I’ll be right by your side. And if things go crazy, we have all the bears of Beauville standing up for us.”

He turned in my arms and buried his face between my pecs.

Just then, tires crunched on the snow outside. Calvin straightened in my arms, his entire form vibrating.

I looked through the kitchen window into the yard.

What the hell? How did they get here so fast?

“Does your father travel with an armed security team?”

“What?” Calvin squeaked.

He hurried to the window, and we both watched as three men in black winter coats and dark sunglasses exited the luxury SUV that had just arrived. They surveyed their surroundings, then one of them opened the back passenger door.

A lanky man in tight leather pants and heavy combat boots stepped out of the vehicle. He wore a black woolen hat with the hood of his jacket pulled up over it. Large, mirrored aviator glasses obscured most of his face.

Calvin gasped next to me. “Shit. That’s Laure.”

Oh. I’d entirely forgotten about Laurel Riley.

BARCLAY

Calvin went to the hallway to put on his shoes and jacket. I followed him out.

Having the illustrious Laurel Riley in my yard was intimidating, his security entourage notwithstanding. I should have invited him in and offered him something to drink, but he was surely one of those folks who drank oat milk with their coffee. My fridge had never seen stuff like that.

I hovered in the background as Calvin walked up to Laurel, who took off his sunglasses, and they hugged. For a moment, it all looked friendly until Laurel glared at me over Calvin's shoulder.

"That's him?" he asked in a low, menacing tone.

Calvin stepped out of the embrace and gestured to me. "This is Barclay, my mate."

My chest puffed up at the sure way Calvin introduced me. I offered my hand to Laurel, who reluctantly took it while his security team bored holes in my body.

"He certainly does look like a bear."

"Be nice," Calvin warned.

But it became obvious Laurel hadn't come here to be nice. He put his hands on his

hips, scanning Calvin up and down. “You’re really preggo? Did you do a test?”

“Yes, I really am.”

“You don’t have to stay with him just because of that, you know. You have options.”

“I know,” Calvin said with more patience than I’d ever have. “As I told you before, I want to be with Barclay.”

Laurel gestured to me without looking. “You know nothing about this dude, Cal!”

“I know enough. He’s shown me more love and kindness in a few days than my father has in my entire life.”

I hated to see my mate upset, but I wouldn’t interrupt him. I put my arm around him instead, trying to show him I was there if he needed me. Calvin grabbed my hand where it rested on his waist and squeezed.

Laurel shot daggers at me. “Don’t get excited, bear man,” he hissed. “That’s a low bar to pass.”

Calvin let out an incredulous laugh. “Stop being mean to him.”

“What am I supposed to do? My best friend ever finally breaks up with his piece-of-shit alpha, only to get impregnated by a grizzly shifter. You’d be worried too if it were me!”

“We’re bonded, Laure. I’m really really happy with Barclay. I’m in love with him.”

“It’s been days.”

“Yes. In the shifter world, that’s enough. I know in my bones that I belong with Barclay. Can you trust me just this one time?”

He’d struck a nerve because Laurel huffed and looked at his boots. He kicked a lump of snow.

“I can’t believe you’re just going to move to the mountains for good.”

Oh. Of course, Laurel felt like he was losing a friend. I hadn’t considered that angle before.

Calvin sighed and stepped forward to put his hand on Laurel’s shoulder.

“It doesn’t change anything between you and me. You’re on tour all the time anyway. But you can come visit me here, and once things with Father are in order, I’ll come to see you...”

“You’ll have a baby in nine months, Cal.”

“Babies can travel too.”

Laurel gave Calvin a long, frowning look. Then he grimaced and threw his hands in the air. “I didn’t expect this. That’s all.”

“Nobody did. But you always say you want me to be happy.”

Shaking his head, Laurel shifted from foot to foot. It looked like he’d run out of arguments.

“You gonna invite me in, or what?” he asked me. “It’s cold out here.”

“Sure. Welcome, Mr. Riley. Come on up. Do you drink coffee?”

Before I could blab about my lack of oat milk, an engine roaring made Laurel and his team spin around. The alphas spread out, and one of them immediately stepped in front of Laurel.

Two snowmobiles burst into my yard, creating a wall between us and our guests.

The cavalry had arrived.

Monty was the first to step off his machine and stand before the main guy. Jordy stayed behind, straddling his snowmobile. The bodyguard sneaked his hand under his jacket in a telltale move. He was ready to pull out his gun.

This could go wrong really fast.

“You don’t mess with one of ours!” Monty roared, undeterred.

Wide-eyed, Calvin stared as the other two alphas from Laurel’s security team grabbed Laurel and ushered him toward the car.

“Monty, stop!” I called. “That’s not...”

Before I could finish, a third snowmobile came from behind my shed and skidded to a halt behind Monty. At the sight of the sheriff’s uniform, the security team hesitated. The leader thankfully retracted his hand.

“Which one is the ex?” Monty asked over the rumble of the engine.

“Nobody! Monty, back off!” I yelled. I would have dragged him back by his parka, but I wasn’t leaving Calvin’s side with armed strangers around. On instinct, I angled

my body to shield my pregnant mate.

“Hey, that’s Laurel Riley!” Jordy exclaimed.

Monty stiffened. “What?” He craned his head to look at Laurel. “Oh my God!” His face split into a maniacal grin. “That’s him!” He turned to us, confused. “You dated Laurel Riley?”

Calvin spluttered. “Oh my God.”

“They have guns, you asshole!” I shouted. “Back the fuck off! None of these people is Calvin’s ex.”

Monty looked at me, then at the bodyguards and Laurel. He finally took a few steps back and waved at Laurel with a big smile on his scruffy face. “Such a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Riley. I’m a great fan.”

My mate burst out laughing, then slapped a hand over his mouth.

Chickie had climbed off his snowmobile. His fingers, too, hovered over his gun holster. This encounter would be much easier if nobody had weapons on them.

“What’s going on?” Chickie asked.

“Hello, Hawke, sorry for the confusion,” Calvin said, his voice shaky. “Laurel is a friend of mine. He’s only visiting.”

Chickie glanced around the scene. “And these guys?” He pointed at the bodyguards.

“My security team,” Laurel said, disentangling himself from the grip of his alphas. He straightened out his jacket with a huff, and the men stepped back.

“I see,” Chickie said. “I would appreciate it if you kept your hands off your weapons, gentlemen, and didn’t linger in our town. Nobody in Beauville carries handguns aside from me. I like it that way.”

“No problem, sir.” Laurel eagerly nodded. “Guys, wait for me in the car.”

Glaring at Monty, the main alpha turned to the vehicle, and the other two followed. Monty fluttered his fingers at them and smiled sheepishly at Laurel, who gave him a tense, totally fake grin back.

When another SUV came down my driveway, I couldn’t hold back my groan. “What now?”

Luckily, it was only Hunter. He climbed out and took us all in.

“What did I miss?”

“It’s Laurel Riley,” Monty whisper-shouted, gesturing to Laurel with both hands.

Hunter scrunched up his eyebrows. “Who?”

Laurel threw his hands in the air. “How many of you are coming? It’s like Fat Bear Week here.”

Monty patted his stomach. “I could eat some salmon.”

Chuckling, Calvin hid his face in my chest, so I looped my arms around him and kissed the top of his head. Today was getting better and better.

We attempted a round of polite introductions that culminated when Hunter finally recognized Laurel and went beet red. We were about to usher everyone into the

house, but a black sedan came down the driveway, tires sliding on the packed snow. It stopped a few yards behind Hunter's SUV with one wheel trapped in the snowbank. When the driver tried to get it moving again, the wheels spun, sinking deeper. The car was stuck.

Two men got out, and Calvin tensed next to me.

These were the visitors we'd been expecting.

"Uh-oh," Laurel muttered. "How did they find you?"

"I told them to come," Calvin replied under his breath.

"Shit."

The two alphas walked up, the younger one slipping on the way. He regained his balance and slowly staggered forward with his arms spread out. In the polished dress shoes he was wearing, he could face-plant anytime. It was the same man I'd seen snooping around town. Blond hair slicked back, fake tan, clean-shaven stony face. Damian.

The older man was taller, his thin body wrapped in a long woolen coat. He wore winter boots and approached us steadily, head held high. He looked friendly enough, with quick dark eyes and a civil, careful smile. That was until he opened his mouth, and a commanding, superior tone came out.

"Calvin. What on earth is going on here?"

"Hello, Father."

Our friends reshuffled behind us, with Monty and Jordy flanking us. Calvin's father

looked from one side to the other. His expression tensed. He was afraid but hid it well.

“Who are these people?”

“You know Laurel.”

“Hello, Mr. Mason,” Laurel called brightly.

“This is Monty, Jordy, Hunter, and Sheriff Hawke Klondike. They are from Beauville.”

With his mouth pinched, Calvin’s father stared at me. I refused to let go of Calvin.

“And this is Barclay Black, my mate. Barclay, meet my father, Edvard Mason.”

I could hear the creek bubbling in the distance in the subsequent silence.

“Your... mate?”

“Yes. Barclay and I are together.”

“I’m glad to meet you, Mr. Mason.” It wasn’t a complete lie. I was glad he was here. Hopefully, after today, Calvin could have some peace.

Damian, who had finally made it into my yard, looked shocked, mouth hanging open. Edvard Mason’s expression didn’t change one bit. His gaze flashed to mine for only a split second, then refocused on his son. He had an impressive poker face.

“Come to the car, Calvin,” he finally said. “We are leaving now.”

Monty scoffed next to me. “That toy car’s not going anywhere,” he muttered.

“I’m not coming with you,” Calvin said. “That’s what I wanted to tell you. I’m moving to Beauville. I’ll live with Barclay from now on.”

Sneering angrily, Damian moved forward, but Mr. Mason stopped him with an outstretched arm. He glanced at me.

“Calvin probably didn’t tell you this, but he’s mentally ill. He’s not equipped to make important decisions. He needs to return to the city where we can take care of him.”

My chest heated up with rage. “He’s your...”

Calvin squeezed my arm. “I got this.”

I looked down at him, and he gave me a small smile. His eyes glittered, and he was pale, but he seemed calm as ever.

“I’m fine, Barclay,” he told me quietly. “Let me deal with this.”

I let out a heavy breath. “Okay.”

He seemed to brace himself, then exhaled slowly.

“My anxiety doesn’t make me incompetent, Dad, which you well know. The only reason I wanted to see you was to tell you in person that I’m moving here for good. Beauville is my home now. I think I will be much happier here. I wanted you to meet Barclay so you’d know I was safe.”

“A town crawling with bear shifters is not safe. But I’m not wasting more time arguing about this. You have no choice in this matter. I decide what’s best for you.”

Chickie cleared his throat. “Mr. Mason, Calvin here is an adult.”

Edvard Mason’s lips curved into a pleasant smile as he looked at Chickie. “Sheriff Klondike, was it? Good that you’re here. See, my son is unstable, and I’m his legal guardian.”

“Then you must have documents confirming that.”

His smile widened. “I don’t have them with me.”

“Dad,” Calvin said loudly. “Lying to law enforcement is not a good idea.”

I could feel him shivering, but his tone spoke more of anger than fear. I ran my hand up and down his back. I was so damned proud of him. I wanted nothing more than to hoist him into my arms and carry him away from here, but he’d asked me to let him deal with his father alone, so I stood my ground and held my mouth shut.

“Mr. Mason, let me...” Damian began, but Mason gave him a withering glare.

“Shut up,” he spat before facing Calvin again. His nostrils flared. “Come. Now . Or I swear you’re not getting a single dime from me. Everything you think you own, I’ll take it away like this.” He snapped his fingers.

Calvin didn’t seem affected by the threat. “Those things don’t mean as much to me as you think they do. I didn’t want it to come this far, but you’re not listening to me, and you’re giving me no choice. We can say goodbye now, and you’ll leave knowing I’m healthy and happy.” He paused. “Or I’ll ask Sheriff Klondike to escort you out of town and put a restraining order on Damian and you.”

“Do you think I’ll leave you in the middle of nowhere with complete strangers, knowing you’re unwell? You’re out of your mind!”

Edvard Mason got red in the face as his voice rose. But Calvin spoke louder, interrupting him.

“I’m very well. I’ve never been better. In fact, as soon as I was far enough away from Damian and you, I wasn’t anxious anymore. But you don’t care about my well-being. You only want to control me. It suited you when I was feeling like shit, when I was at my weakest, because you could make me do whatever you wanted. Not anymore, Dad. I’m done. I’m finished with Damian, and I’m done with your bullshit. I’ll be making my own decisions from now on, including where I live, with whom, and about the healthcare I need.”

I could tell from his father’s shocked face that Calvin had never spoken like that to him before.

“You are coming with me!” he roared.

“No,” Calvin replied. “And by the way, I’m pregnant with Barclay’s baby. Good luck digging your car out of the snow.”

With that, Calvin slipped from under my arm and marched toward the house. I hurried after him.

20

CALVIN

My heart was pounding like crazy, but it didn't feel like fear. I was strangely excited. Really angry too, but mostly excited.

In the kitchen, I faced Barclay, who gazed at me with concern.

I grinned up at him. "That went well."

Barclay shook his head incredulously. "Um. If you say so."

"I mean, he was horrible. But I think he got the message."

Barclay's eyebrows flew up. "You expressed yourself crystal clear. It might take him a while to process."

He hugged me, and I stretched on my tiptoes to kiss him.

"You were on fire out there," he murmured against my lips.

"I've never seen him so mad."

"Serves him right." He smiled, and I could tell he was proud of me. And wasn't that the best feeling in the world?

After a commotion in the hallway, four bears and a Laurel spilled into the kitchen.

Monty slapped my shoulder, sending me forward a few inches.

“You’re a tough little cookie, Calvin. Epic showdown.”

Laure glanced outside through the kitchen window and laughed. “Damian fell on his face. They’re not leaving anytime soon. The car’s stuck.”

“That thing isn’t going anywhere without help,” Jordy said. “Is your father familiar with winter tires and snow chains?”

I snickered. “Not sure.”

“Should we pull them out?”

“Later,” Monty said. “Let them sweat for a bit.”

I glanced at Hawke, who just shrugged.

“Seems like my guys took pity on them,” Laure said from the window. “They’re trying to push them out.”

I walked up to have a look, only to see the sedan skid and slide into a pile of snow on the other side of the road. One of Laure’s bodyguards jumped out of the way at the last second.

Hunter squinted through the window. “Oh damn. Now I can’t get out either. They’re blocking the road.”

“You in a hurry?” Jordy asked. “I can move them out of the way for you.” His tone

and expression suggested that his method of “moving” wouldn’t be conventional, and Hawke might protest.

“I’m good for a while,” Hunter said, patting Jordy’s back.

“Can I get some coffee?” Laurel asked. “I’m freezing.”

Barclay tensed. “Um. Of course. I do have coffee, but I’m out of oat milk.”

My friend grimaced. “Oat milk? Eww. Just black, thanks.”

Visibly relaxing, Barclay gave Laure a wide smile. “Coming up. Anyone else want tea or coffee?”

The bears announced their preferences, crowding the coffee machine. Monty’s voice was the loudest. “Do you have those three-color chocolate chip cookies? Where are you buying those?”

“Let’s go start the fire,” I told Laure when he’d gotten his coffee. I tugged him toward the living room.

By the fireplace, Laure sat on the floor and watched me as I peeled stripes of dry bark off a birch log. I piled the thinner logs on top of the pieces of birch bark and lit the fire. It crackled to life, the logs quickly catching from the burning bark. I balanced one thick log on top.

My friend huffed. “I wouldn’t know how to do that.”

“Barclay showed me. It’s easy. Birch bark is a great natural fire starter.”

Leaning back on his hands, Laure gazed at the fire as it engulfed the wood, flames

reaching higher.

“You’re really determined to stay with him.”

“Yes. Really.”

He sighed, then glanced through the glass walls to the snowy forest. “It’s a nice place, I guess.”

“Barclay built most of the furniture himself. He’s a woodworker.”

“He left his banker days behind. I read that in the background report.”

“You didn’t have to invade his privacy like that.”

“One, he told me to. And two, I’ve learned the hard way not to trust anyone.”

“Will you finally trust me?”

Maybe it was a low blow from me. Laure winced, but then he sat up and threw an arm around my shoulders. “I’m sorry, Cal. I should have listened to you. But I was so shocked.”

“I’ll admit, my track record with boyfriends isn’t the best.”

Laure chuckled. “Neither is mine. But it seems like you’ll be fine now.”

“Barclay’s amazing. I love him.”

“Yeah. Well. He’s hot. I’ll give you that. All of them are kinda hot. I didn’t think I would dig the whole hairy and beefy thing, but maybe I wouldn’t kick a couple of

bear shifters out of my bed if I happened to find them there.”

The image of Laure flanked by a shirtless Monty and Jordy flashed in my head, but I chased it away. It weirded me out. “Don’t let Monty hear you, or you’ll never get rid of him.”

“See, if he shut up for a second, I’d be all over him. But he never closes his mouth, does he?”

Now we could laugh at the earlier standoff with Monty and Jordy in the yard. I’d missed Laure. Warming our feet in front of the fireplace, just chatting, I got reminded of those easy summers a long time ago, before adulthood came and took our innocence.

My father and Damian were still outside, but I wasn’t bothered by their presence anymore. I was done with them both.

After half an hour, Barclay poked his head in to say that he, Monty, and Jordy were going to dig my father’s sedan out of the snowbank.

Laure wanted to watch. I added a couple of logs to the fire so it wouldn’t die and reluctantly followed him back to the kitchen. Hawke and Hunter sat at the table with coffee mugs and a half-eaten plate of cookies. They stood and joined us at the window.

Except Barclay and his friends were nowhere to be seen. The yard was empty. Down the driveway, Laure’s bodyguards shoveled snow around the trapped sedan while my father oversaw them with a phone to his ear. I could see Damian’s silhouette in the back of the car. The lazy coward he was, he wasn’t even bothering to pretend to help. The reminder stung. Why had I ever let that man near me?

Before I could spiral down the familiar rabbit hole of self-deprecation, Laure sucked in a startled breath next to me.

“What the fuck?!”

I gaped as three bears sauntered into the yard from behind Barclay’s shed.

They were massive, humungous, unnaturally huge. Giant furry monsters from a different world where the laws of physics didn’t apply.

The one in the front was grayish-brown, and even down on all fours, he was as tall as a horse. I didn’t know how, but I knew it was Barclay. It was in the way he moved. He turned his head and must have spotted me in the window because he seemed to smile. His muzzle opened into a sinister grin, and his tongue lolled out.

Monty must have been the bigger light-brown bear to Barclay’s left. Jordy, with black fur and leaner than the other two but no less imposing, stayed a few steps behind.

“Holy fucking shit, Cal,” Laure breathed.

“I know,” I piped up.

I was stunned but not afraid. They were fascinating.

Laure’s alphas backed off into deep snow away from the road and stood there, faces pale and mouths open. The leader let go of the shovel.

My father froze. His phone slipped from his hand, landing among lumps of snow at his feet.

Barclay walked up to him. He lifted one paw in a way that made my stomach clench for a second. But he merely nudged my father to the side.

Father scrambled to retrieve his phone and joined Laure's security team, who were up to their knees in the snow among the trees.

The three bears surrounded the sedan, put their front paws underneath, and lifted it from the snowbank as if it were a cardboard cutout, not a three-thousand-pound car. They set the car neatly in the middle of the road.

Damian flailed inside. I would have enjoyed listening to him shriek with terror, but if he made a noise, we weren't able to hear him.

My father came to life, scrambling toward the driver's door. He jumped in and started the engine, seemingly eager to leave as soon as possible.

Except Barclay blocked the road.

He rose on his hind legs, the sheer mass of his body dwarfing the vehicle.

And then he snarled.

His enormous canines showing, spit flying, he let out a booming roar that vibrated through the ground and shook the damned house.

"Don't do anything stupid, Barclay," Hawke muttered behind me. I'd forgotten about him and Hunter.

But Barclay was done with his display. He got back on all fours and casually strolled around the car and back to the yard.

“Fuck me...” Laure whispered next to me. “I think that was a clear message, wasn’t it?”

“I think so too,” I agreed in a shaky voice. “My father might think twice before coming here uninvited again.”

“High chance Damian pissed himself in the back seat.”

I laughed at that. If it was evil of me, so be it. He deserved far worse.

Still in fur, Barclay tilted his big round head toward me and winked before all three bears disappeared from view.

My father’s sedan moved, carefully inching away. He drove ridiculously slowly, but soon enough, the twin red lights were gone.

Laure shook himself. He put his hands in his pockets and rocked on his heels. “Can I see them shift?”

“They don’t do it with clothes on, Mr. Riley,” Hunter said.

Laure grinned excitedly, waggling his eyebrows at me.

“Ask Monty,” I told him. “I’m sure he’d eagerly let you watch him get naked.”

Hunter and Hawke laughed as my friend grimaced.

The three bears returned after a while—they were human, dressed, and presentable, with Laure’s security team in tow. I met Barclay in the hallway, and he hugged me, placing a long kiss on my forehead.

“They’re gone,” Monty announced as he stomped his boots, spreading chunks of snow on the tiles. “But Mr. Riley’s men could use a break.”

Barclay threw a rag at him. “Dude. You’re flooding my house.”

Monty looked like he was about to protest, but then he noticed me standing by Barclay’s side and smiled apologetically. He crouched and wiped the floor.

Jordy showed Laure’s bodyguards to the kitchen and refilled the coffee machine. Hunter excused himself, heading back to work, and Hawke left soon after.

We settled in the living room, the sofa groaning under the weight of three bear shifters. Barclay pulled me into his lap, and Laure put his feet up on the chaise. Soon, Jordy began hinting that he and Monty should also leave, but Monty blatantly ignored him, instead gazing starry-eyed at Laure.

“I should go,” Laure said.

“Where are you staying?”

“Not sure. There’s a large town two hours away, isn’t it? Green Peaks?”

“You and your team are welcome to stay over,” Barclay offered. “I only have one guestroom, but we can unfold the sofa...”

“Mr. Riley, allow me,” Monty interrupted. “I have a B&B here in town. I’d be happy to offer you a complimentary suite for the night.”

Jordy gave Monty an incredulous look. “A suite ?” he hissed.

Laure squinted at them suspiciously, but Monty was undeterred. “Top floor. The

bathroom is newly renovated. And I have a couple of twin rooms ready for your team.”

Barclay raised his eyebrows at him. “Weren’t you fully booked?”

Monty’s smile was unapologetic. “Depends on who asks.”

Laure seemed to consider his options, looking from Monty to Barclay and back. Then he glanced at me. “I think you and Barclay will appreciate some time alone. My guys and I can stay overnight at the B&B. Is there somewhere we could get a decent dinner?”

I assured Laure that Jordy’s pub was nice, and Jordy promised to reserve a corner booth where Laure would be least likely to be spotted and harassed by any random fans.

“On that note,” Jordy said, “I’m opening in a couple of hours. Monty, let’s go.”

Monty shook Laure’s hand for an unnecessarily long time and repeated his invitation to come to the B&B. Finally, Jordy was able to drag him away. The rumble of snowmobiles from outside rose and quieted as they rode off.

We agreed that I’d meet Laure the next day and said our goodbyes. With four-wheel drive and winter tires, Laure and his bodyguards were able to navigate Barclay’s driveway without any mishap.

Standing in the kitchen window, I watched the car leave. When I turned around, Barclay stood right behind me. His eyes were bright with something akin to mischief.

“What are we...” The rest of my sentence became a squeal as he scooped me into his arms and kissed me.

Finally, Barclay and I were alone.

He set my butt on the kitchen counter and stepped between my thighs. His soft beard caressed my cheeks. Burrowing his hands under my hoodie, he hummed into the kiss.

It began to sink in.

I'd done it. I'd told my father and Damian everything and hadn't broken down. My father knew, and he'd left. Neither he nor Damian had any power over me. I belonged with Barclay, and I was going to have a baby.

Barclay petted my stomach under the hoodie and smiled against my lips.

"How are you, my love?"

"I'm great."

"And what do you want for lunch?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid I'm not much of a cook. We always had staff."

"You don't have to be. I happen to like cooking. But if you want, we can make something together, and you can learn."

"Okay."

"Let's defrost some soup now, then we can hop on the snowmobile and go grocery shopping. We can make a proper dinner together to celebrate."

"That sounds lovely."

He brushed my nose with his.

Gazing at his smiling face, I wondered how the whole shifting thing worked. I raked my fingers through his beard and studied the fine lines around his eyes. He looked so very human.

“Will you let me see you in fur again one day?”

Barclay shrugged. “Sure. I can do it now.”

“You can? Right now?”

“Yeah. Why not?”

I opened my mouth and closed it.

“Let me just pull the soup out of the freezer, and we’ll go to the living room.”

Barclay dumped the contents of a plastic container into a lidded pot and set the burner on a timer.

“Come on.”

I followed him to the living room, where he stripped without ceremony.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Y-yes,” I stammered. I hadn’t expected him to be so casual about it. But then again, for him, this was everyday life.

The transformation was much faster than I would have thought possible. He quite

literally burst into a giant ball of fur. He plonked down on his butt as he grew, filling the space until I was staring at a grizzly bear sitting on the living room rug with his clawed paws in his lap.

God, he was a beast. Even sitting down, he was much taller than me. His fur looked shiny and soft, not matted like the bears I'd seen at a zoo in the city when I was younger.

His big brown eyes looked a little needy. He raised his paws and made a come-here gesture.

My heart pounding, I approached him carefully. I was about to pat his arm when he grabbed me and pulled me into his lap.

Oh wow. He was so warm and fluffy. I combed my fingers through the pelt on his chest and arms, and he lowered his head, poking my hand with his nose.

“You’re asking for scratches like a puppy,” I said.

I couldn’t tell if the rumbling sound he made was a laugh or a growl. I stroked his cheeks and the short, velvety fur on his muzzle.

I’m petting a humongous grizzly.

Except he wasn’t scary at all.

“You’re magnificent.”

He licked the side of my face, and I spluttered out a laugh.

“Hey!”

Another rumbling sound reverberated through his chest and into me.

“See, this will be great if I ever get cold again. But it’s impractical when I want to have a conversation with you.”

Without letting go of me, the bear shrunk, fur disappearing under my fingers, only thick body hair left. Barclay, naked and very much human, held me in his lap.

The transformation made me dizzy.

“Better?”

His eyes twinkled, and he was grinning at me.

Instead of replying, I kissed him.

He was naked, all those muscles and planes of warm skin under my hands... Then his cock grew hard under my ass. I tore my hoodie off before I slid onto the floor and began licking it.

Knowing how powerful and magical he was must have triggered something primal in me. I was ravenous for him.

I was about to mouth his cockhead when the timer beeped in the kitchen.

“Damn,” Barclay muttered. He gently tugged me away.

I pouted as he dragged his underwear back on, covering his erection.

“You haven’t eaten anything since breakfast,” he told me sternly. “Which was just a piece of toast and a banana.”

“I was about to have a treat,” I protested.

Barclay’s lips twitched. “You can have it after lunch. I need to feed you better now that there’s two of you.”

With the promise of sex after lunch, I relented. I was indeed hungry.

Barclay looked happy when I polished off the plate and asked for a second helping. Then he looked even happier when I knelt on the kitchen floor and sucked him off.

BARCLAY

Yesterday, we'd gone grocery shopping and made burgers with smashed, oven-baked potatoes. I watched Calvin closely. I was worried the stress would come out somehow, but he seemed content. He slept for the entire night, clinging to me in the cutest way.

I'd promised him a day naked in bed, and I wasn't going to disappoint him. When he woke up, I brought him breakfast on a tray, wearing only an apron. It made him laugh so hard he had tears in his eyes, and I was ridiculously proud of myself. I let him use the bathroom in private, but as soon as he came back to the bedroom, all bare skin and flushed cheeks, I was all over him.

After I'd rimmed him through two screaming orgasms, he took a nap. I had nothing better to do than watch him sleep. He stirred after a while, and with a playful smile on his face, he reached under the blanket for my cock. He began stroking me to hardness.

"You're insatiable," I told him.

"Do you mind?" he asked sleepily.

"Not at all. Keep going."

Calvin tore the blanket off me. Suddenly, he didn't look sleepy at all. He straddled

my hips and thrust against me, stroking us both together. Seeing the difference between his little pink cock and my rearing dick made me hot all over. Protective instincts battled with possessive lust inside me, and I dug my fingers into his hips.

“Ride me, c’mon. Fuck yourself on my dick.”

He grinned, his tongue peeking out. Then he rose on his knees and lined up my cockhead with his opening.

Holding my gaze, he began sinking lower and lower. I groaned as his slippery flesh slid down my shaft.

“You’re all soft inside. Feels incredible.”

Calvin moaned, lips curved up in a joyous smile. “It’s so easy. You fit right in.”

I kneaded his ass cheeks, savoring the tendrils of pleasure spreading from my cock to my balls. He rolled his hips and circled them, then he leaned back, bracing himself on my thighs. We both stared at how his belly protruded as he moved his pelvis up and down sinuously.

“Fuck, Barclay. That’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Seeing my dick make your tummy bulge? Oh yeah. And this is beautiful too.” I fisted his cock as I said that and milked it in time with his thrusts. Calvin threw his head back.

“I’ll come. Oh, Barclay. I’m coming so hard. Yes!”

I couldn’t hold it either. I bucked into him, and Calvin bounced on top of me, sobbing with pleasure. His clenching hole around my cock was absolute heaven. Calvin’s

body seemed to grip me with love and gratitude, and I felt like the king of the universe, watching my mate come undone on my cock.

“Give me your cum. Give it to me!”

His face was a picture of ecstasy when I thrust up, filling him with everything I had.

After his climax abated, Calvin slowed down but didn't stop. With languorous thrusts, he kept fucking himself, humming contentedly. I scooped his cum from my stomach and licked my fingers. Most of it had got stuck in my chest hair, but I didn't mind. I loved smelling of his pleasure. I'd shower later.

Calvin peered at me with heavy-lidded eyes and licked his lips. “Barclay.”

“Yes, love?”

“I think I'm still loose after the heat... I like that.”

“I like it too. You take my dick in your tiny ass like it's nothing.”

“Can you do that thing with your fingers?”

“What thing?”

He lifted his leg and climbed off me. My softening dick flopped out. Bending over, he stuck his ass up in the air.

“Can you put your fingers in me and stretch me?”

I scrambled to sit behind him. “Oh yeah.”

His ass was full of my cum and so slippery it squelched when I worked my fingers in. I used four and widened his rim.

Calvin moaned and sank onto his elbows.

“It feels so good.”

I rotated my fingers, stroking his inner walls. “Your body is changing with the pregnancy.”

“Try more. Oh... Oh God, yes.”

A dark hole opened between my fingers when I pulled. Calvin groaned from deep within.

“Fuck, sweetheart, I could put my fist in you.”

The idea must have made him as excited as I was. He cried out and rocked back, trying to fuck himself on my hand. “Aah! Do it! Please.”

He was pregnant, sure, but was it too soon? He’d had my knot in him only a few days ago, and the pregnancy hormones would make him flexible. It could work. “We’ll try, and if it gets too tight, we’ll stop.”

Calvin nodded, rubbing his face against the pillow. “Please!”

Using only one hand, I tucked my thumb into my palm and pushed my fingers inside him. It was easy until his rim reached my knuckles. Despite the resistance, Calvin urged me on with groans of pleasure.

“Want you... in me... your hand. All of it. God, that’s good. Stretch me.”

I pumped, rotated my hand, and added one finger from my left hand. When I tugged, his opening widened, and he cried out. His ass was all but yawning.

Holy shit. It could work.

I grabbed his cock and stroked it while I pushed with my hand in and out. Calvin's slick and the abundance of my cum eased the way, wetting my hand.

"Do it!" he cried, his voice guttural. "Put your hand in me. Do it."

How was it even possible? Calvin was so small and slim. But after a few thrusts, his rim slid past my knuckles. His flesh engulfed my hand, and his hole sucked me in. The ring of muscle tightened around my wrist.

"Oh God! God!"

I didn't dare to move, but he began rocking back and forth, fucking himself on my hand. His ass fluttered around me, and his cock spat drops of cum onto the covers.

His groans grew louder. He lay with his upper body on the bed and panted.

"Fuck me with your fist," he demanded.

I pumped carefully, and he shouted.

"Yes! Barclay! Fuck me with it! Fuck me!"

Holy hell. My arm sticking out of his ass... Damn. I withdrew almost to the knuckles and sank back in. Again. And once more.

Calvin made animalistic sounds of raw joy.

His rim gave way on the next thrust, allowing me to pull out entirely and slide back in. The smacking sound his hole made... My dick was hard and throbbing as if I hadn't come only a few minutes ago.

“Again!” Calvin shrieked.

It was insanely wrong and the hottest thing in the world.

I gave him seven full thrusts with my fist, and with each, he yelled so loudly the windowpanes seemed to shake. His inner muscles began clenching, and I felt the mouth to his womb against my fingers. I found the center of the soft bump and pressed my middle finger against it. It pulsed. Calvin mewled into the pillow, his hole squeezing my hand. Amid his seizure-like orgasm, I took my hand out and replaced it with my cock.

Seeing my wet, glistening hand on his pale ass, the line of slick past my wrist... I'd been in his body in so many ways.

The bear in me growled greedily.

“You're all mine. Knocked up and mine.”

“Want it... hard...”

He seemed delirious already, but I couldn't help myself either. I wanted to rail him so hard his teeth rattled. I grabbed his hips, staining his skin with smears of slick and seed, and fucked him relentlessly, my old cum frothing out of his hole.

Calvin's knees slid apart, and he ended up flat on the bed. I followed, buried in him.

“Breed me,” he gasped. “Stuff me full.”

“You’re knocked up already. Been in there. All the way.”

“Give me more cum. Love your cum.”

My orgasm went on and on. My balls almost hurt toward the end. I rocked into him with slow thrusts, both of us shivering with aftershocks.

“I’m yours, Barclay,” Calvin murmured, panting for breath. “Pregnant with your baby. You can fuck me and fist my hole every day. When I give birth, you’ll breed me again. I want to have your cum in me all the time, want to be pregnant all the time...”

I rolled us to the side so I could stay inside him without crushing him. He pushed his ass out to keep me in. I put my hand on his belly, palming the bulge, and kissed his ear.

“Don’t worry,” I whispered. “I’ll take care of you, my horny animal. I’ll keep you well-fucked and knocked up.”

My little mate purred, the sound like distilled lust, and wriggled on my cock.

“Damn, Barclay. The pregnancy is such a turn-on.”

“I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

He chuckled, then moaned when I gently thrust with my still-hard cock, poking at his womb.

“We’re going to have fun fucking as your belly grows.”

Calvin sighed dreamily and stroked my hand where it rested over his belly.

When my softening dick slipped out, I took a look at his hole. It gaped, drooling cum along his crease. I wasn't in a hurry to clean him up. I loved seeing him like this—thoroughly fucked and claimed.

Calvin seemed to be falling asleep. I spooned him, and he snuggled closer.

“Your fingers. In me,” he mumbled.

I slid two back inside him, and he hummed. “Want you in me all the time.”

“I am. You're carrying my cub.”

“I love being pregnant.”

He fell asleep shortly after saying that, with my fingers in his loosened hole.

Calvin pushed the empty plate away and drank what was left in his water glass. He was wearing my hoodie and nothing else. Knowing he was bare-assed underneath it made me giddy. Easy access.

“I spent half of the day napping,” he said as he put the glass down. “Am I changing into a bear too? Will I be sleeping until spring?”

“Bear shifters don't hibernate, as you well know. But you've been through a lot, sweetheart.”

“It doesn't feel like it. I'm not tired. Just really, really mellow.”

“That's good.”

He held my gaze, a small smile adorning his pretty lips.

“Is there something on your mind?”

He bit his lip and stood. Without replying, he rounded the table and climbed into my lap. Wrapping his arms around my neck and tucking his face under my jaw, he sighed.

“That’s better.”

I was grinning like a fool. I couldn’t help it. I stroked his bare thighs and hip, marveling at the softness.

“If you don’t want to nap anymore, what would you like to do for the rest of the day, my love?”

Calvin pressed a soft kiss just under my beard. “Cuddle, make love, and cuddle some more.”

“Mmm. Sounds like paradise.”

“You’ve turned me into a sex addict.”

“I’m proud of myself for that. It’s my greatest accomplishment.”

He giggled. “Being horny all the time definitely beats being anxious.”

The reminder made me pause. I put a finger under his chin and lifted his face. His luminous eyes gazed up at me with guileless trust.

I was composing the right question in my mind when he spoke.

“I’m great, Barclay. You don’t have to worry.”

“I need you to be happy, love.”

He gave me a small smile. “I know. This bond thing is kinda amazing, isn’t it? It’s not that I can read your thoughts, but I can feel them. Nobody has ever cared about me as much as you do.”

As I cradled him in my arms, the wave of tenderness nearly flattened me. I couldn’t speak through the lump in my throat.

Calvin caressed my jaw, fingers weaving through the short strands of my beard.

“I don’t know how I’ll feel when I’m away from you. I’ll have to work on that. But for now, let’s just enjoy this, okay?” He tugged on my beard, pulling me down for a kiss.

So sweet and gentle, so pretty, and all mine.

“I’m in love with you, Barclay,” he whispered. “I’m so happy I’m flying inside.”

I recaptured his lips and deepened the kiss. With one hand on his ass and the other cupping his head, I kissed him until he was breathless.

A short beep from his phone made him stiffen, but then he looked at the screen and smiled.

“It’s just Laure. He’s asking if I’ll be putting on clothes today.”

“Oh, sorry. I forgot. You were supposed to meet him today.”

Calvin looked conflicted. “I want to see him before he leaves, but...”

My mate had hinted that he was scared to be away from me, and I didn't want to let him out of my sight either. "How about I come with you? We go to Jordy's, but I stay by the bar. That way, you get to spend time with Laure alone without being alone."

"We'll have to put on clothes, though."

"Then we'll just have to do one more naked day tomorrow."

He chuckled softly, then rested his head on my shoulder with a sigh. "Thank you, Barclay."

Jordy eyed me knowingly as I sat at the bar, nursing one beer while Calvin and Laure chatted in a corner booth. I got a little bored waiting, but my mate looked so happy I didn't mind. My only issue was I struggled to not stare at him like a stalker as he laughed with his friend.

When we got back from town, we took a bath together, I massaged his back, and then we rested in the living room. He told me stories from his college days and asked about my long-lost banking career.

The clouds broke up, and the sun peeked out, bathing the forest in an orange haze before it sank behind the horizon.

We made love in front of the fireplace while the colors of the sunset flooded the room around us. Calvin lay on his back with his legs spread wide open, taking me into his body, moaning, begging, and thanking me. I went slow, savoring every thrust, and I watched his face as he grew ecstatic with pleasure.

I'd never seen anything more beautiful than the expression of my pregnant mate orgasming for me. When his peak washed over him, he reopened his eyes and smiled.

“I love you, Barclay. Love you.”

I came inside him on a roar, overwhelmed, my entire body jerking, his soft declaration echoing in my mind. When I rolled off him so I wouldn't crush him, he slid down my body and proceeded to lick my dick all over until it was clean.

22

CALVIN

Two weeks pregnant

“It’s positive,” Hunter said as he returned to the office. “But that’s no surprise, right?”

Barclay grinned at me.

I grinned back. “It’s great to be certain.”

I hadn’t doubted my pregnancy—the changes in my body had been distinct and immediate—but it was still nice to have it confirmed by an objective source.

“Your bloodwork looks good, but I’ll send a sample to the lab for more tests. It’s all standard procedure, so no worries. We can book the ultrasound for week ten.”

“Um. Is it necessary?” Barclay asked. “There aren’t any risks, are there?”

“Not really. It’s a shifter baby. He’ll be fine. But maybe you’d like to know beforehand if he has a little brother or two.”

I almost choked on my tongue. “Triplets?”

Barclay went a little pale.

“Calm down, both of you. Twins and triplets are more common with shifters, but only slightly. Three in one hundred for people, six in one hundred for shifters. Unless it runs in the family, the chances are low.”

I glanced at my mate. “Does it run in your family?”

“No.” He looked just as relieved as me.

We were looking forward to becoming parents, sure, but having more than one kid right away seemed rather overwhelming.

Hunter rubbed his hands together as he looked from me to Barclay and back. “That’s it. Congratulations.”

Barclay hugged me around my shoulders and kissed my temple.

“Um, Hunter. Can I ask you a few questions about something else?” I looked at Barclay. “Is it okay if you wait for me?”

He sighed and nodded. We’d talked about it, and while I could sense he was a little sullen having to leave me alone, he understood.

After squeezing my shoulder reassuringly, he went to wait for me at Jordy’s.

Hunter leaned back in his chair and raised his eyebrows.

“Has he been mean to you?”

I could tell he was joking. I let out a nervous laugh. “Not at all. It’s about my anxiety. I didn’t want to make him worry.”

“He worries anyway.”

“I know he does. But I’m working on my independence. I have things I need to learn to do alone and not break down.”

“How can I help you, Calvin?”

I fiddled with the hem of my sweater. I barely knew why I was nervous talking about it with Hunter. He was a doctor. While he didn’t have a specialty in psychiatry or anything like that, he would understand. I didn’t have to be ashamed. Yet I still was—reason one hundred and one why I had to work on myself.

“I feel good now. Really great. But I was a complete mess before I met Barclay.”

The switch was subtle, but Hunter went into full professional mode. It was intimidating but reassuring too.

“Meeting your mate and bonding with him can have a transformative effect on your health,” he said. “Sadly, it isn’t a miracle cure.”

“Exactly. Barclay and I have done everything together during the past few weeks, but I don’t know how I’ll cope once I’m away from him. I want to work. Phil says that I can start at the daycare whenever I’m ready, and I’m excited about it but terrified too. What if I get anxious at work and mess up? And I want to be able to take care of the baby by myself when Barclay’s out and about. Hell, I want to go and visit Laurel in the city. Or go shopping alone. I should be able to do all those things.”

“Bonded mates rarely leave each other’s side, especially when the bond is fresh. And you had a rough start. It’s natural that you feel most secure when Barclay is near.”

“But with my history, there’s more to it. I’m scared that if I’m away from him, I’ll

fall apart completely.”

Hunter nodded. “You’re afraid that you’ll be afraid.”

“I know! It’s ridiculous.”

“It’s common for people with anxiety to feel like that. Barclay isn’t here now. Are you afraid?”

I pointed at the window facing the main street. “He’s at Jordy’s. I just saw him walk in. And I feel safe with you.”

“Fair enough. Let’s go back to before you met Barclay. When did you start experiencing this kind of fear?”

“I don’t exactly remember. It snuck up on me after Laure moved away for college. I think I was seventeen.”

“Did you ever go to therapy?”

“No. Only one time, when I had a bad panic attack at school, I ended up talking to the nurse, and he booked counseling for me, but my father didn’t want me to go.”

“Why?”

“He said chitchat never solved anything or something along those lines. He told me my problem was that I was spoiled and should focus on my studies.”

“He’s a real charmer.”

“Yeah. He isn’t the most sensitive parent.”

“It’s plausible that his parenting could have negatively affected your overall mental health.”

I snorted at the way Hunter formulated the sentence. “My father contributed to me becoming a nervous wreck, yes.”

He gave me a sad smile. “What happened after high school?”

“He got a doctor to prescribe me medication that I was supposed to take when I was overstressed or afraid. I didn’t like taking it because it made me dizzy and tired while I could still feel all the fears churning inside me. But at least I could sleep.”

Hunter narrowed his eyes. “That doesn’t sound right. Did you bring the prescription with you?”

“I have it on my phone.”

“Can I have a look?”

I logged into the pharmacy app and clicked on the link. The screen showed the meds I’d gotten and their dosage. I handed the device to Hunter.

He glowered at the screen. “Who prescribed this to you?”

“I’ve never met the man. It might have been one of my father’s friends from the tennis club.”

“This is way too strong, Calvin.”

“I know that now. I only took the pills when it got bad and stopped entirely a month ago. They weren’t helping anyway.”

“Don’t take them. Especially not now when you’re pregnant.” Shaking his head disbelievingly, he gave me my phone back.

“Hunter, um, am I being naive here? Like, how realistic is it that I’ll ever be completely fine?”

He folded his hands on the table, his soft gaze full of kindness. “It might go up and down, but it doesn’t mean you can’t live a fulfilling life. When did you start feeling better? The moment you met Barclay? You broke up with your ex before that, didn’t you?”

“Um. Yes. Damian treated me like shit, and I finally had enough. I was furious with him. That helped. I wasn’t anxious when I was mad at him. And I wasn’t panicking when I was trying not to freeze to death.”

“I know too little about you to be sure, but it sounds to me like your anxiety could be largely connected to your former life situation and the pressure your father put on you. If you feel like you need medication, I suggest a low dose of antidepressants that you take long-term. I could prescribe you something that will be safe during your pregnancy. But with the main stressors in your life being removed, you might not need medication at all. First and foremost, you should consider therapy. Find out what triggers your fears.”

“Aside from one attack, I’ve been doing great since I’ve been with Barclay. So, yeah, I think I’m okay without meds for now. But could you recommend a therapist for me? I can’t travel far, but maybe I could do it online. I shouldn’t need to be glued to Barclay twenty-four-seven to keep it together.”

Hunter smiled. “He doesn’t mind.”

I grinned back. “No. But still.”

“I know someone who could be a good fit for you. He’s an omega, a shifter’s mate too, and has his practice in Green Peaks. You could alternate between visits in person and video calls.”

“That would be awesome.”

“I’ll email you his contact details. And if you need anything else, you know where to find me.”

“Thank you.”

“Look, I’m no expert. But I think you should try doing the things you want to do and see what happens. Have a backup plan in case you get unwell.” He reached over the desk and patted my hand. “But I’ve seen with my own eyes how fearless you can be, Calvin. I’m not worried about your future.”

I left Hunter’s office in a great mood. And hungry. I was always hungry these days. At Jordy’s, Barclay sat hunched over the bar, nursing a beer, but his face brightened when he saw me.

I stretched on my tiptoes to hug and kiss him.

“Everything okay?” he asked.

“Great. Hunter recommended me a therapist. No meds for now.”

“Okay.” He studied my face.

“Stop worrying. I’m just hungry.”

At that, he smiled. “Good. Let’s have dinner. Jordy, what’s this week’s special?”

Jordy pointed to the sign behind him. “Spareribs.”

“I’m in. Calvin?”

“Cheeseburger with caramelized onion and sweet potato fries. And the non-alcoholic ginger beer I had last time?”

Barclay patted my ass and hummed with satisfaction. “That’s my boy.” He liked it when I ate a lot. It must have been instinct telling him he needed to feed his omega. I didn’t protest—it was cute. Besides, I was pregnant with a shifter and having wild monkey sex with him on a daily basis. I did need to increase my calorie intake.

We sat in a corner booth, and after a while, Monty joined us. He threw a couple of good-natured jokes at Barclay, but then he turned to me and asked question after question about Laure. It seemed my friend had left a lasting impression.

Then Hawke came to sit with us, followed by Hunter, who’d closed the office for the day, and I was once again surrounded by a bunch of bear shifter alphas. I didn’t mind at all. Snuggled to Barclay’s side, I munched on my fries and listened to their stories and friendly ribbing.

I was so content that when my phone buzzed and I saw my father’s caller ID on the screen, it didn’t even elevate my heartbeat. I’d unblocked his number a few days ago, just in case, but I hadn’t expected him to reach out anytime soon. Curious, I decided to accept his call.

“I’ll take it outside,” I told Barclay, who stood to let me out of the booth.

I grabbed my parka and answered. “Hi. Just a second, I need to go outside. It’s noisy here.”

In front of the pub, I shrugged into my parka before putting the phone to my ear.
“Sorry for that. I’m listening.”

The phone was quiet, but I could hear his breathing. “Dad?”

“Hello, Calvin.” He sounded strangely unsure.

“Hi,” I repeated.

“Um. Where are you?”

“In Beauville. Where else would I be?”

“Hm.”

“What do you need, Dad?”

Another moment of silence followed. That was very uncharacteristic of my father. His phone calls were usually a barrage of instructions or a rapid-fire interrogation.

“You haven’t changed your mind.”

“No. I’m bonded to Barclay. People don’t just change their minds about their fated mates.”

“What you said before. About… being pregnant. Is that true?”

“See, strange as it is, I’ve never lied to you. Ever. People lie to their parents all the time, but I never did. Maybe I should have. Maybe some things would have been easier if I had learned to lie.”

His sigh crackled in the phone. “Are you pregnant or not?”

“Yes, I am. I was at a doctor today. It’s early days, but most definitely pregnant.” I couldn’t dampen the excitement in my voice. “And I’m about to start a new job at the daycare here in Beauville.”

“So you’re keeping the child.”

“Of course.”

“You’ll be earning pocket change as a daycare teacher.”

“Barclay and I will have enough to get by.”

This time, I let the silence stretch. If he ever decided to make amends for his behavior, I wouldn’t go out of my way to help him. I didn’t owe him anything.

“I won’t be employing Damian at the company.”

That made me pause. “Why?”

“He was understandably upset by the turn of events.” The accusation was clear in my father’s tone. I’d made his precious Damian upset. Well, tough . “But he should have handled his emotions in a dignified way. Instead, the day after we returned from the mountains, he caused a scene at the office. He made quite the spectacle of himself.”

I could only imagine. If Damian lost his temper in front of my father, the consequences must have been dire.

“Are you feeling well?” He sounded so disgruntled; it made me smile.

“I’m very well, thank you. I’m happy.”

“I have to go now. Have a good evening.” The brisk, abrupt goodbye was more like him.

“You too.”

“Yes. Um. Good night.”

And he ended the call.

For a while, I remained outside, just staring at the lights dotting the slopes of Beauville. It was starting to snow. A few fluffy flakes drifted toward the ground gently like feathers through the still air. Covered with a white blanket, the town looked like a winter wonderland. This was now my home—I couldn’t stop marveling at that.

I hadn’t been the least bit nervous talking to my father, and he must have noticed the change. Was that why he had acted so weird? Maybe one day, we could have a decent relationship after all. He would never be a loving parent—he didn’t have it in him. But I would settle for polite acceptance.

When I returned to the pub, Barclay gazed at me questioningly. I assured him that I’d explain everything later. I didn’t have to fake my laughs and pretend everything was fine. While I had no idea what was going on in my father’s head, the phone call reassured me about one thing: I was healing already.

23

CALVIN

Ten weeks pregnant

“Barclay, you’re crushing my hand.”

“Oh, sorry.”

We stared at the fuzzy gray image as it moved and morphed. I couldn’t see anything until Hunter pointed at a small, darker shape in the center.

“There he is.”

“That’s him?” Barclay asked, leaning closer to the screen.

“Yes.”

“Only one baby, right?”

Hunter chuckled. “Yes, there’s only one.”

My mate let out a relieved sigh. “He’s so pretty.”

I almost laughed, but I wasn’t supposed to move. “Barclay, um, you can barely see anything in there.”

He frowned. “Sure I can. Look, that’s his leg.”

“Don’t touch the screen,” Hunter grumbled.

Barclay threw him an icy glare. “Can you at least print the picture?”

“I can.”

Hunter took a few photos from the ultrasound and handed them to Barclay in an envelope. Barclay carefully tucked them into the inner pocket of his jacket.

“Do you want me to email them to you?” Hunter asked me.

“Thank you. That would be great.”

After we left Hunter’s office, Barclay gave me a ride to the daycare. Phil knew I’d be late today and why. It was my second week there, and I was loving it.

I’d been uneasy about starting work and had come equipped with a list of strategies from my therapist: recognize symptoms, challenge negative thoughts, find an anchor, breathe and relax your muscles, repeat your mantra, plus, as a last resort, call Barclay. I’d practiced the exercises and knew them by heart, but I’d written them on a cheat sheet anyway because I’d been sure that once I started freaking out, I’d forget them all. I almost had freaked out at the door to the daycare. But then Phil had ushered me in, and the kids had provided more than enough distractions. Once in the middle of it all, I’d forgotten all my reasons to worry. Now I was looking forward to going to work every day.

Barclay took his helmet off so he could kiss me goodbye.

“I’ll pick you up at half past four.”

“Quarter to five?”

He made an exaggerated sad face, and I giggled. “It’s just fifteen minutes! Today is art class, and I need to help Phil clean up.”

“Okay. What do you want for dinner?”

I mentally flipped through the growing menu of things I craved these days. “Pizza? I haven’t had pizza in ages. With cherry tomatoes and… pepperoni. Lots of cheese.”

Barclay grinned widely. “As long as you’re fine with store-bought dough, you got it.”

“Awesome.”

He gave me one more peck on the cheek and drove off.

My phone buzzed, so I paused in the daycare parking lot and pulled it out. Hunter had emailed me the pictures from the ultrasound.

I flipped through them, smiling. Then I picked one and sent it to my father.

He’d been calling once a week. Our conversations had been stilted at best, but he hadn’t threatened or lectured me, so I considered it major progress.

He replied in a few seconds.

Father: Congratulations. I’m looking forward to meeting my grandson.

Four months pregnant

I draped myself over the edge of the mattress with my feet up. My rounded belly and full pecs looked more pronounced when I rested on my elbows. Listening to the

shower, imagining Barclay all wet, I was hard already. I reached between my spread legs, stroked myself, and tickled the underside of my cock. I was so horny it wasn't funny. Good thing Barclay was just as insatiable as me.

The door to the bedroom opened, and he paused. Leaning on the doorframe, he shook his head.

"If you could see yourself."

"What? How do I look?" I let go of my cock and brushed my hand over the curve of my stomach before cupping my left pec.

"Like a fucking siren."

His cock grew and hardened in front of my eyes, and I licked my lips at the breathtaking sight. He charged at me then crouched by the bed, leaning over me.

"You look like you need to get fisted and fucked and fisted again."

I groaned, my head falling back, when he sucked my cock into his mouth. He circled my rim with his fingers and began burrowing inside. The pregnancy made me so flexible that I could take whatever he gave me and be grateful for it.

I loved the moment when my rim was stretched impossibly wide around his knuckles, but I was still hollow inside. Then my body gave up its resistance, letting him in, and his bulky hand surged into me. My inner muscles squeezed around it with relief.

"Oh fuck yes!"

A few pumps, his fingers prodding the mouth to my womb, and I was coming. Barclay milked my gland from the inside and sucked my cum out of my cock as if it were a straw.

Then he scowled down at me, his face nearly feral.

“We’re going to play a game.”

I panted. The orgasm was still making me tingle. His entire fist was up my gut. What game?

“You’re going to push my hand out. Like a good little papa when he gives birth.”

He rotated his hand when he said that, spreading his fingers a little, and I cried out. I was so fucking full.

“Now push, sweetheart. Show me.”

Why was that so hot?

On a moan and a grunt, I bore down, trying to expel his hand with my inner muscles. But he pressed back. The sensation was indescribable. I bowed on the bed, yelling.

“Again. C’mon. Push.”

I did, and he pulled to help me but paused where I was stretched the widest, my rim holding on to his knuckles.

“Fuck, Calvin. Your ass right now.”

I whimpered.

He thrust back in, and a small orgasm ricocheted through my insides. My rim clamped around his wrist, and his fingers brushed my womb.

“Yes!” I yelled, getting hoarse.

“You want to come some more, love?”

“Uh-huh.”

“There you go. Anything you want.”

He pumped with his hand, fucking the mouth to my womb with his fingers, and I lost it. I mewled and whined, pinching my sensitive nipples, coming in waves.

He stilled his hand and ordered me to push again. This time, he pulled all the way out. He admired my stretched hole, then he placed a soft kiss on my yawning opening.

“Do you still want your big hole fucked, or do you need a break?”

“Fuck me. Always.”

“Damn. I’m so lucky. You never say no to me. My omega always wants my dick.”

He flipped me easily, bending me over the edge of the mattress.

Then he sank fluidly into me, to the root on the first thrust.

“I love your dick,” I managed before he thrust hard, and I lost the capacity to speak.

Lifting my upper body, Barclay cupped my belly with one hand and put the other over my nipples.

“You’re gorgeous, Calvin. Your sweet tits, that belly, the way your ass has filled out. You take my breath away.”

He sped up his thrusts, and I grappled the covers to hold myself in place. His cock stroked my insides at the best possible angle, and I moaned louder and louder.

“So beautiful,” he rasped. “All knocked up.”

His hips stuttered, and he plunged into me, setting me off just as his cock jerked against the mouth to my womb.

I slumped over the bed, my nerve endings buzzing. Barclay pulled his cock out and sat on the floor next to me. Then he slowly but insistently pushed his entire hand back inside me. He stroked the stretched walls of my ass, pumping steadily.

My hole made the most filthy, slurping sounds in the quiet room.

“Tell me when you want me to stop,” he whispered. He rained soft kisses on my hips and ass cheek. Such a contrast to the invasion in my hole.

“A little longer.”

“You’ll be so well prepared. The baby will just slide out of you.”

“Can’t help it. Love the fullness so much.”

“Good. Because I love doing it for you. Makes me so hot to see my hand disappear up your ass.”

Slowly, the tingles abated, and I felt mellow all over.

“I’m good now,” I told Barclay, and he carefully eased his hand out. Then he carried me to the shower.

He soaped me up, lingering on my belly as always.

“I got the right piece,” he said. “It’s walnut, dry and ready. The texture is great. The delivery is coming on Thursday.”

Barclay was determined to build a crib himself, and he'd been searching for the right material for weeks.

"That's great news. Are you spending the weekend in the shed, then?"

"No. I want to spend quality time with my mate."

"But maybe I could be with you in the shed for a bit? I like watching you work."

Barclay hugged me to his wet body and squeezed my ass cheeks. "You like it when I bend you over the bench."

I smiled. "That too."

He grazed my ear with his teeth and rasped, "You're so horny."

"Mm-hmm. For you, always."

Eight months pregnant

Twelve to two was nap time at the daycare, but Toby was almost four now. He was the oldest in his group and woke up from his nap early. Sometimes, he didn't sleep at all. He was a calm and thoughtful kid, though, easily entertained with building or coloring. Today, he climbed into my lap and put both hands on my stomach.

"Why are you fat?" he asked with a serious frown.

"It's not just me. There's a baby in there."

"Uncle Phil said that the baby is in your tummy."

"Yes."

“How did it get there?”

“He grows from a tiny little peanut until he’s big, strong, and ready to be born.”

“When?”

“In a month or so. Soon.”

He eyed my stomach again. “Are you making fun of me?”

Poor little Toby. Growing up with three older brothers hadn’t been easy.

“I promise you I’m not lying. We have a book about how babies are born. Let me find it, and I’ll show you.”

He sat on my lap and rubbed his palm on my stomach absentmindedly as I showed him the pictures in the children’s book. It was simplified but accurate, with drawings of the growing fetus in an omega’s womb.

Toby inspected the picture of a baby in the third trimester. “But how does he eat?”

“Good question. He doesn’t eat with his mouth yet. He gets all he needs from his papa’s body. Through this tube here, see?”

“And he pees and poos in there?”

I bit back a chuckle. “He does. But it’s a different kind of pee and poo.”

“Not smelly?”

“No. Not smelly.”

He gave my stomach a suspicious look. “I don’t want a baby to poo in me.”

“It’s not as bad as it sounds.”

Toby looked unconvinced. “Uncle Phil says you’ll be away.”

“Only for a short while, after the baby is born. Then I’ll come back and bring him with me.”

The promise of live proof seemed to satisfy Toby, and he returned to his coloring.

In the afternoon, I took a walk home. Barclay still offered to drive me daily, but I liked the narrow winding path that led through the forest to our house. June had been dry and sunny, and the blueberries would soon be ripe.

The sun warmed my back, and I took off my jacket and tied it around my hips under my huge belly. Of course it kept slipping, so I gave up and threw it over my shoulder.

After a few minutes, I heard stomps behind me. I knew who that was.

“I told you I didn’t need a ride,” I said when the bear caught up with me, trampling the grass along the trail.

He gave me puppy-dog eyes and sniffed at my belly.

“I’m not tired. I want to walk. It’s a beautiful day.”

The bear gave a low growl and poked my arm with his nose.

I paused. “What?”

He waddled in front of me and lay on the ground, stretching his front paws in front of

him.

“I’m getting too heavy for this, Barclay.”

The huge animal stared beseechingly at me.

I shook my head but relented. I climbed onto his back and held on to the long fur on his neck as he carefully rose and began walking. Except he didn’t follow the path home. Instead, he carried me through the blueberry bushes into the thickening forest. I could hear the bubbling creek in front of us.

“What are you up to?”

Of course, he didn’t reply.

He brought me to the creek where the trees opened. Large boulders lay strewn along the sunny bank, the water creating small waterfalls as it rushed toward the valley below, where the birches, with their bright green canopy, created almost a tunnel around it. It was a lovely place, away from any trails, with no hint of civilization anywhere near us. Barclay lowered himself so I could climb off. Looking at the stunning scenery, I stretched my back.

“Are we having a picnic?”

A low purring and hissing announced Barclay’s transformation. Two human arms wrapped around my belly from behind.

“I didn’t bring any food,” my mate said.

I leaned back against his naked body with a sigh. “That’s okay. I’m not hungry yet.”

Leaving a trail of kisses down the side of my throat, he burrowed his hands under my

oversized T-shirt.

“I just thought I could make love to my mate here in the sun.”

“Excellent idea.”

He tugged my pants down my legs, and I sat astride his hips, leaning with my back against his chest. He helped me move, supporting my thighs, and I rocked on his cock, stroking my stomach. Two orgasms later, I got too mellow to ride him anymore.

On my hands and knees, my pregnant stomach weighing me down, I could come the hardest, and Barclay knew that. He thrust into me relentlessly, telling me how much he loved my body, how he couldn't wait to taste my milk, and how he'd fuck me hard until he made me go into labor. It felt a little dirty and absolutely marvelous.

Nine months pregnant

Hunter had assured me that a home birth was perfectly safe for a shifter mate. He would be on call, ten minutes away if needed, and Barclay knew what to do.

Ten days before the due date, I said goodbye to the kids at the daycare. Barclay would be with me twenty-four-seven until our baby was born. We had nothing adventurous planned except for short walks in the forest near our home and car trips for groceries. And we would make love. A lot.

I was fascinated by how much sex my pregnant body craved. I loved sucking Barclay off, eating his cum, then taking his fist into my hole. We did that almost every day. Riding him was nearly impossible for me—with how big I was, I could merely sit on his cock and rock back and forth, but the pressure on the mouth to my womb was heavenly.

Six days before the due date, Barclay fucked me on my knees before the fireplace. It had been raining all day, so we'd lit it even though it was the middle of the summer.

Bending over me and supporting my stomach, he thrust deep, and a searing pleasure spread from the sealed gate to my womb. The climax made it throb. It felt incredibly satisfying in a strange, new way, and I strained to keep him there. The pleasure came in waves, tightening my core. When he pulled out only halfway, I keened with frustration.

"Stay deep! I need you... Deep!"

"I got you, love."

He gave me small thrusts, nestled in me to the hilt, and I shivered with climax after climax. Tension chased relief, crested, only to dissolve into pleasure again.

And then... the mouth to my womb gave way.

A wave of sheer ecstasy crashed over me, and I shouted so loud, I must have scared Barclay.

"Calvin? Calvin!"

He pulled out on a gush of liquid.

"I think my water broke," I managed before a contraction stole my breath.

Then it went fast. Really fast. I'd heard all these stories about omegas going through labor for twenty-four hours or even longer.

Not me.

My contractions must have started while we were having sex; I just hadn't realized because the tensing only made me come harder.

Barclay wanted to carry me to the bedroom where everything was prepared—supplies, towels, and blankets neatly folded in the closet—but I couldn't move. The second contraction came right after the first.

I remained on all fours, my need to push too strong already.

"He's coming, Barclay."

"But..."

"He's coming now!" I wailed on the next contraction. I had to push. Had to.

Barclay swore. I felt his hands on my ass.

"You're... you're... giving birth."

"Yes!" I shrieked. "Bring the stuff!"

His stomps echoed through the house. I clawed at the carpet and went through two more contractions before he returned.

He spread out the blankets and towels under me. When the next cramp hit, he hugged me from behind and lifted my torso. I bore down, my pain suffused with pleasure.

"It should help to elevate your upper body," Barclay said.

"I know. I remember."

Then I had to push again.

“It wasn’t supposed to be so fast,” I complained.

“You’re doing great. We’re ready.”

“Fuck!”

He had to let go of me to look at how dilated I was, and I swore at him some more. Luckily, he had the brilliant idea to bring the chaise and set it in front of me so I could hold on to it and lean on it with my upper chest.

The contractions came faster, but the pushing brought me relief.

“I can see him!” Barclay’s voice broke.

Ray Mason Black was born at four in the afternoon and weighed six pounds.

He looked at us with his strangely alert eyes, his expression a little judgmental. He seemed unsure if this new situation was better or worse.

Barclay wrapped him in a fluffy towel, and I settled with him on the sofa before I offered him my nipple. He latched on after a few tries. Frowning, he kept staring at me as I nursed him.

“He’s so clever,” Barclay said. “Look at him. He knows exactly what’s going on.”

“It’s instinct, Barclay. He’s twenty minutes old.”

He cupped Ray’s little head in his big paw. “See that crease between his eyebrows? You have the same when you’re thinking hard about something.”

“Maybe.”

Soon, Ray closed his eyes, and the crease smoothed out.

Barclay didn't move, staring at our baby with what looked like consternation.

"Barclay," I said after a few minutes.

"Hm?"

"I'm hungry."

"Oh! I'm so sorry." He pressed a kiss to my temple. "Are you comfortable? Do you need another blanket?"

"I'm good."

"Okay, I'll go bring you something to eat. Stay put."

"Not going anywhere."

He stood, looked at us, blinked rapidly, then crouched in front of us. With one hand on my cheek and the other on our baby's back, he kissed my nose.

"You're amazing, Calvin. I'm in absolute awe of you."

I grinned. I was proud of myself too.

THE END